Overcoming Dichotomies

Edited by
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JONATHAN PATER,
and MARTIJN STOUTJESDIJK

Mohr Siebeck

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Parables, Fables, and Similes
in the Graeco-Roman World

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and Martijn Stoutjesdijk

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations for primary sources, journals, series, reference works, and databases generally follow the SBL Handbook of Style (2nd ed.).[1] The following additions or variations should be noted.

A. Rabbinic Sources

I. Tractates of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and the Talmudim

Avod. Zar.	Avodah Zarah
Avot	Avot
B. Bat.	Bava Batra
B. Mets.	Bava Metsia
B. Qam.	Bava Qamma
Ber.	Berakhot
Git.	Gittin
Hor.	Horayot
Hul.	Hullin
Makhsh.	Makhshirin
Moed Qat.	Moed Qatan
Nid.	Niddah
Peah	Peah
Pesah.	Pesahim
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
Shab.	Shabbat
Sukkah	Sukkah
Taan.	Taanit

II. Other Rabbinic Writings

Avot R. Nath.	Avot de Rabbi Nathan
Mekh. R. Ishm.	Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael
Mekh. R. Shim. Yoh.	Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai
Pesiq. Rav Kah.	Pesiqta de Rav Kahana
Sifra	Sifra
Sifre Deut.	Sifre Deuteronomy
Sifre Num.	Sifre Numbers
Tanh.	Tanhuma
Tanna Eli.	Tanna de-vei Eliyahu

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[1] B. J. Collins, B. Buller, and J. F. Kutsko, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

B. Greek and Latin Sources

Aesop, *Prov.*	Aesop, *Proverbia*
Aphthonius, *Fab.*	Aphthonius, *Fabulae*
Aphthonius, *Prog.*	Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata*
Arnobius, *Ad. nat.*	Arnobius, *Adversus nationes*
Babrius, *Fab.*	Babrius, *Fabulae Aesopeae*
Callimachus, *Iam.*	Callimachus, *Iambi*
Cassius Dio, *Hist. rom.*	Cassius Dio, *Historiae romanae*
Catullus, *Carm.*	Catullus, *Carmina*
Claudian, *Pros.*	Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae*
Conon, *Narr.*	Conon, *Narrationes*
Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.*	Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*
Epictetus, *Disc.*	Epictetus, *Discourses* (Gk. *Diatribai*, Lat. *Dissertationes*)
Hermogenes, *Prog.*	Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata*
Hist. mon. Aeg.	Historia monachorum in Aegypto
Hyginus, *Fab.*	Hyginus, *Fabulae*
John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.*	John of Sardis, *Commentarium in Aphthonii progymnasmata*
Julian, *Or.*	Julian, *Orationes*
Justin, *Ep. hist.*	Justin, *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi*
Livy, *Urbe cond.*	Livy, *Ab urbe condita*
Lucan, *Bell. civ.*	Lucan, *Bellum civile*
Lucian, *Dion.*	Lucian, *Dionysius*
Martial, *Epigr.*	Martial, *Epigrammata*
Martial, *Spec.*	Martial, *Liber spectaculorum*
Maximus Tyrius, *Diss.*	Maximus Tyrius, *Dissertationes*
Nicolaus, *Prog.*	Nicolaus, *Progymnasmata*
Ovid, *Trist.*	Ovid, *Tristia*
Palladius, *Hist. Laus.*	Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*
Phaedrus, *App.*	Phaedrus, *Appendix Perrotina*
Phaedrus, *Fab.*	Phaedrus, *Fabulae Aesopiae*
Plato, *Cri.*	Plato, *Crito*
Plato, *Meno*	Plato, *Meno*
Polybius, *Hist.*	Polybius, *Historiae*
Propertius, *Eleg.*	Propertius, *Elegiae*
Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibl.*	Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*
Ps.-Aristides, *Rhet.*	Ps.-Aristides, *Rhetorica (Περὶ τοῦ ἀφελοῦς λόγου)*
Ps.-Clementines, *Hom.*	Ps.-Clementines, *Homiliae*
Ps.-Vergil, *Ciris*	Ps.-Vergil, *Ciris*
Ptolemaeus, *Diff.*	Ptolemaeus, *De differentia vocabulorum*
Rhet. Her.	Rhetorica ad Herennium
Silius Italicus, *Pun.*	Silius Italicus, *Punica*
Statius, *Ach.*	Statius, *Achilleis*
Statius, *Sil.*	Statius, *Silvae*
Statius, *Theb.*	Statius, *Thebais*
Suda, *Lex.*	Suda, *Lexicon*

Theon, *Prog.*   Theon, *Progymnasmata*
Valerius Flaccus, *Argon.* Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*
Vit. Aes.   Vita Aesopi

C. Other Primary Sources

Erasmus, *Cop.*   Erasmus, *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*
Simplicius, *In Epict.* Simplicius, *Commentarius in Enchiridion Epicteti*

D. Journals, Series, Reference Works, and Collections

AFLFUN   *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Napoli*
AGRL   Aspects of Greek and Roman Life
AJEC   Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
ANR   *Antike Naturwissenschaft und ihre Rezeption*
ANSup   Ancient Narrative Supplementum
ANT   Antico e Nuovo Testamento
AS   *Ancient Society*
ASNSP   *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*
AWDU   Aristoteles Werke in Deutscher Übersetzung
BA   *Beiträge zur Alterumskunde*
BCG   Biblioteca Clásica Gredos
BMCR   *Bryan Mawr Classical Review*
BNS   Byzantine and Neohellenic Studies
BThST   Biblisch-Theologische Studien
Chambry   Chambry, É. *Aesopi Fabulae*. 2 vols. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1925–1926. Repr. Chambry, É. *Ésope fables: Texte établi et traduit*. 2nd ed. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1927.
CJH   *Canadian Journal of History*
CLR   Cognitive Linguistics Research
CM   Classica Monacensia
CS   Collana Scientifica
CSS   Cistercian Studies Series
EKP   Einführung Klassische Philologie
FFC   Folklore Fellows Communication
FJB   *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*
FGrH   *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Edited by Felix Jacoby. Leiden: Brill, 1954–1964
GCJCWE   *Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*
GGM   *Greater Good Magazine* (online)
Gibbs   Gibbs, L. *Aesop's Fables: A New Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

GKK	Grundlagen der Kommunikation und Kognition (Foundations of Communication and Cognition)
HA	Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft
INT	Intersections
JAF	*Journal of American Folklore*
JAH	*Journal of Ancient History*
JASN	*Journal of American Society of Nephrology*
Jastrow	Jastrow, M. *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature.* Leipzig: Drugulin; London: Luzac; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1903.
JewSt	*Jewish Studies: Forum of the World Union of Jewish Studies*
JC	Judaism in Context
JCAS	*Journal of Critical Animal Studies*
JFR	*Journal of Folklore Research*
JGAR	*Journal of Gospels and Acts Research*
JSHS	*Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*
JSIJ	*Jewish Studies Internet Journal* (online)
JSJF	*Jerusalem Studies of Jewish Folklore*
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
LCS	Library of Classical Studies
LJLE	Library of Jewish Laws and Ethics
LSCP	*Leipziger Studien zur Classischen Philologie*
MedSec	*Medicina nei Secoli: Arte e Scienza*
MHUC	Monographs of the Hebrew Union College
MnemSup	Mnemosyne Supplements
MVB	Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik
MYBY	*Mechkarei Yerushalayim befolklor Yehudi*
NC	*Narrative Culture*
OSCLGT	Oxford Studies of Classical Literature and Gender Theory
OTr	*Oral Tradition*
PA	*Philosophie Antique*
Perry	Perry, B. E. *Babrius and Phaedrus*: *Fables.* LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.
PhilS	Philologus Supplement
PNA	*Patristica Nordica Annuaria*
PSV	Phoenix Supplementary Volumes
RA	Revealing Antiquity
RdM	Die Religionen der Menschheit
RG	Rhetores Graeci
RhM	*Rheinisches Museum fur Philologie*
RIF	*Revista de Investigaciones Folclóricas*
RIGI	*Rivista Indo-Greco-Italica di Filologia, Lingua, Antichità*
RMet	*The Review of Metaphysics*
RRE	*Religion in the Roman Empire*
RSECW	Routledge Studies in the Early Christian World
RUB	Reclams Universal-Bibliothek
SAP	Studien zur Antiken Philosophie

SAPERE	Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia
SBEC	Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity
SBLSS	SBL Symposium Series
SBPC	Studies in Book and Print Culture
SCCB	Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible
SCS	Septuagint Commentary Series
SeL	Storia e Letteratura
SF	*Studia Fennica*
SG	*Studium Generale*
SHAW	Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften
SHJ	Studies in Hellenistic Judaism
SJud	Studies in Judaism
SKP	Studien zur Klassischen Philologie
SLA	*Studies in Late Antiquity*
SPFBU	*Sborník Prací Filosofické Fakulty Brnenské University*
ST	Sammlung Tusculum
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity)
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TC	Trends in Classics
UKS / SUCH	Universal und Kulturhistorische Studien/Studies in Universal and Cultural History
VEE	*Verbum et Ecclesia*
WD	*Wort und Dienst*
WGRW	Writings from the Greco-Roman World
WS	*Wiener Studien*

Beyond the Parable-Fable Dichotomy

An Introduction to the Volume

Albertina Oegema and Martijn Stoutjesdijk

A. A Problem in Need of an Interdisciplinary Approach

In 1990 Mary Ann Beavis wrote: "In view of the recent revival of interest in the Greco-Roman rhetorical character of early Christian literature, a reexamination of the relevance of the fable for parable interpretation is due."[1] Thirty years later, Beavis's words still hold truth. While some progress has been made in this field,[2] a thorough examination of the parable in light of the related Graeco-Roman literary genres of fables and similes – all genres that make use of narrative analogy – is still lacking. More specifically, a truly interdisciplinary investigation of these genres in relation to each other is missing. Too often, New Testament and rabbinic scholars write about sources outside their own fields, without bringing scholars of these fields themselves into the conversation. Similarly, classical scholars writing on fables hardly engage with the parables and fables found in early Jewish, New Testament, and rabbinic sources, despite the interesting questions this would raise about the circulation and reception of fables among peoples with different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

The editors of this volume, all of whom are involved in a research project on the comparative study of rabbinic and Synoptic parables,[3] sought to repair this shortcoming by organizing a symposium on parables and fables in Graeco-Roman antiquity in Utrecht, The Netherlands, on the 13th of March 2018. During this one-day symposium a selection of respected scholars from different, but neighbouring fields – Classics, New Testament studies, rabbinic studies – exchanged examples of (and questions about) fables, parables, and similes in

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[1] M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 475.

[2] See the article "Parables in the New Testament and Rabbinic Literature between Simile and Fable: A *status quaestionis*" by Jonathan Pater in this volume. Special mention should be made here of the recent monograph by Justin David Strong, *The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: A New Foundation for the Study of Parables*, SCCB 5 (Paderborn: Brill | Schöningh, 2021).

[3] All three editors were PhD candidates in the NWO-funded research project "Parables and the Partings of the Ways," project no. 360-25-140, led by Eric Ottenheijm (Utrecht University), Marcel Poorthuis (Tilburg University), and Annette Merz (Protestant Theological University Amsterdam/Groningen), and with Lieve Teugels (Protestant Theological University Amsterdam/Groningen) as postdoctoral researcher.

various ancient sources. Over the course of the day, the following questions were addressed: With which texts from Greek and Roman literature can early Christian and rabbinic parables be compared? How does the composition of fables and similes and their rhetorical use in Graeco-Roman philosophical, oratory, and literary sources relate to parable-telling in ancient Jewish and early Christian contexts? What similarities and differences can be found? How did the Graeco-Roman tradition of fables and similes influence the development of the genre of parable in the Jewish context? And, finally, how can the understanding of these groups of texts be improved by comparing them with one another? If anything, the tentative answers to these questions made clear that there is much to gain from a more systematic and comprehensive approach towards parables and fables within their shared ancient Mediterranean context. Moreover, it convincingly showed that the boundaries between these and other genres are rather fluid and should be considered from a transcultural perspective.

The present volume aims to address the questions described above in greater depth. In this volume, sixteen articles are jointly presented in which a plethora of genres, methods, sources, and fields of study appear. Four themes persistently (re)surface in these contributions. The first of those themes is the *genre* of the parables and fables, for which the authors in the present volume often consult Greek and Roman rhetorical sources, but also base themselves on modern theories of folklore studies and metaphor theory. The second theme is the *content* of parables and fables; many scholars have exhausted themselves in showing that elements (characters, motifs, and narrative patterns) from the parables also occur in the fables and vice versa. Thirdly, the *function and social setting* of parables and fables are recurrently the subject of debate, often – but not always – with the assumption that these genres are examples of *Vulgärethik*, popular moral story telling. The fourth and final theme is the *transmission and textualization* of the parables and fables, which addresses, for example, the embedding of these short stories in larger textual wholes and the question of whether parables and fables also existed independently, perhaps in collections. In the final part of this introduction, these four themes will be used to analyze and categorize the contributions to the present volume. Before this, however, we offer a short introduction to the articles.

B. Presenting the Volume

The present volume consists of sixteen contributions. It begins with an introductory article in which Jonathan Pater, on the basis of selected studies within the fields of New Testament and rabbinic studies, outlines the state of scholarship on the relationship between the genres of parables and fables. While New Testament scholarship often dismisses Graeco-Roman fables as material for comparison

with parables, scholars of rabbinic literature do relate the occurrence of fables to their study of parables. Pater argues that relevant approaches in rabbinic studies, such as folklore studies, may be helpful to open up the discussion in New Testament scholarship. Introducing the common focus on genre, contents, function and social setting, and transmission and textualization in the parable-fable discussion, Pater's article provides a valuable overview of the topic at hand.

The remaining fifteen contributions are divided into four sections: Greek and Roman Literature, Early Jewish and Rabbinic Literature, New Testament and Early Christian Literature, and Diachronic Perspectives. They will be discussed successively.

The section "Greek and Roman Literature" opens with an article on the place and function of fables and fable composition in the progymnasmata. In antiquity, these progymnasmata consisted of a sequence of exercises constituting the earliest formal phase within the Greek system of teaching rhetoric. In this contribution, Jeremy Lefkowitz challenges the common scholarly assumption that the fables had a central place in these progymnasmata because of their putative moral content. Rather, on the basis of texts describing the progymnasmata, Lefkowitz argues that the fables were valued because of their simplicity of style and their status as fiction claiming to represent truth. Connecting the simplicity of fable style to the discourse of *apheleia* ("plain style") in post-Aristotelian rhetorical theory and during the Second Sophistic, Lefkowitz argues that the progymnasmatic exercises in fable composition helped the student to develop skills relevant for mastering the art of "simple" expression.

In the next contribution, Gerard Boter focuses on the contents of Epictetus's examples and similes in relation to their function within his philosophical teaching. In light of David Flusser's comparative discussion of New Testament and rabbinic parables and Epictetus's similes, Boter raises the important question of how Epictetus, in his philosophical lectures, made use of similes and related strategies. In his study, Boter follows the categorization of exempla and similes in ancient literary theory on rhetoric and discusses Epictetus's use of similes and exempla (both historical and mythological) extensively. This detailed discussion leads to his conclusion that, despite the considerable differences between rabbinic and New Testament parables and Epictetus's similes and examples with regard to form and content, the function of both groups of sources is comparable: "they serve to illustrate the issue at stake and at the same time they want to persuade."

Subsequently, Annemarie Ambühl examines a fascinating group of animal similes in Roman imperial epic. These similes with mute animals are recognized by Quintilian as a specific category of similes in distinction from animal fables. Focusing on similes featuring lionesses, tigresses, and their cubs in Statius's *Thebais*, Ambühl thoroughly explores these similes on intra-, inter-, and contextual levels. She demonstrates how these similes represent the troubled re-

lationships within Oedipus's family at Thebes and establish a meta-narrative of parental love. Ambühl also positions these similes in the context of ancient discourses on lionesses and tigresses and of cultural practices of tiger hunting in the Roman amphitheater. Yet, with regard to the political context in which emperor Domitian was compared to a beast, Ambühl is careful not to superimpose modern subversive readings on Statius's animal similes.

Ambühl's contribution on epic similes with mute animals creates a bridge with the final contribution on the neglected fable tradition of Babrius. Ruben Zimmermann embarks upon an intertextual reading of the Babrian fables and the New Testament parables. Looking at the aspects of genre, the role of animals, and the role of the divine in these texts, Zimmermann questions the common black-and-white distinction between parables and fables. First, he shows that parables and fables were closely related in ancient rhetorical reflections. They also share various literary criteria, even if realism and contextuality are more distinguishing of parables than of fables. Secondly, he makes clear that the presence or anthropomorphization of animals cannot be regarded as an exclusive characteristic of the Babrian fables over against New Testament parables. The same is true for the presence or absence of religion in both groups of sources. In his conclusion, Zimmermann argues that the "former black-and-white picture must be replaced with the art of more colorful readings of fables and parables when read in light of one another."

The section "Early Jewish and Rabbinic Literature" combines contributions on rabbinic literature with two studies that bring neglected early Jewish material to the fore. It starts with an article on Philo's use of parables and fables. Adopting the definition of fable offered by Theon ("a μῦθός is a fictitious story imaging truth"), Sean Adams discusses Philo's use of ancient fable/parable terminology in depth. In this discussion, Adams pays explicit attention to Philo's educational background, arguing that the place of fables in the progymnasmata will have familiarized Philo with Greek fables. A few possible echoes of fables and his explicit engagement with two Greek fables in *Conf.* 4–14 are reflective of this background. Adams's detailed examination of the latter passage highlights Philo's attempt to differentiate biblical stories from Greek fables and myths and their associated idea of fiction.

In the next contribution, Stephen Llewelyn and Lydia Gore-Jones take as their starting point the parable of the Forest and the Sea in 4 Ezra (4:13–17). Aiming to demonstrate the added value of Cognitive Blending Theory (CBT) in providing a better understanding of how parables work as narrated metaphors, the two authors meticulously describe how 4 Ezra's parable offers a human-scale analogy to the far more abstract and diffuse concept of divine incomprehensibility. Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave (*Resp.* 514a–520a) is adduced for comparative purposes. While it has several points in common with 4 Ezra's

parable, Llewelyn and Gore-Jones point to a challenging difference in function: Plato needs to take recourse to myth and allegory because it is impossible, in his view, to express what the intelligible realm *is*. In 4 Ezra, the parable casts serious doubt upon the human worthiness to access divine knowledge and the human capability to comprehend it.

The subsequent contribution, written by Lieve Teugels, problematizes the scholarly distinction between the genres of Greek fables and rabbinic parables. Her focus is on a story pattern that she encounters in both classical Greek fables, in their Christian reception, and in the rabbinic parables: "a character encounters an obstacle, often an animal, overcomes it, and ends up with the next obstacle." Challenging the common distinction between parables and fables along the lines of "no animals" or "only animals," Teugels shows that animals do appear in a number of rabbinic parables, even as main characters, while many Aesopic fables feature humans instead of animals. In addition, Teugels emphasizes that the fable's epimythium is "remarkably similar" in form and function to the nimshal of rabbinic parables. She concludes her article with a praise of the rabbinic genius, which often succeeded in producing an "exquisite blend and twist of classical content and rabbinic application."

Galit Hasan-Rokem's rich study brings in the point of view of folk narrative scholarship. Characteristic of this approach is its sensibility for the interaction between oral and written modes of texts, as well as between performance and text. Criticizing a too static division of genres, Hasan-Rokem proposes to use Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance to address the fluid boundaries between the neighbouring genres of proverb, fable, and parable. The term ecotype (von Sydow/Honko) is deemed helpful by Hasan-Rokem to understand how international tale types are locally, culturally, and ethnically adapted – especially by minorities and marginalized groups. Finally, Hasan-Rokem draws attention to the way parables may have brought aesthetic pleasure to the rabbis and may sometimes have provided a movement towards the unattainable.

The final contribution to this section, written by Lorena Miralles Maciá, continues to study rabbinic parables from a folklore studies perspective. She uncovers four folktale motifs within the parables, similes, and stories in Lev. Rab. 4 and diligently traces them back to fables and other folktale narratives: (1) the cooperation between a lame man and a blind man guarding a king's orchard; (2) the bodily members and the soul; (3) the sheep with a hurt limb; and (4) the man on a ship boring a hole beneath his place. Understanding "fable" as one of the categories of "folktale" genres in rabbinic literature, Miralles Maciá argues that these folktale motifs underwent a process of judaization, before becoming "mashalized fables" (Johnston) in the rabbinic corpus. While she argues that, in distinction from rabbinic parables, narrative fables can exist free from context or epimythium, Miralles Maciá also emphasizes that in the concrete construction of a text, the margins between both genres are blurred. Her conclusion states

that "for the rabbis, the plasticity of the fable motifs was an anchor point to retell, recreate and echo the stories by means of different narratological devices (parable, comparison or even a simple narrative), and to inspire new stories introducing unexpected features."

The third section "New Testament and Early Christian Literature" focuses not only on New Testament parables, but also on parables and parable-like stories in later early Christian sources. The section opens with Catherine Hezser's in-depth study of the motif of finding a treasure. Hezser explores this motif in some parables in the Gospels of Matthew and Thomas, in several rabbinic parables and stories, and in ancient fables. She connects her discussion of these texts to a study of social reality. Archaeological records prove that the hiding and burial of valuables in the ground was a common practice in antiquity, while legal debates on the rightful owner of forgotten and/or lost property are widely attested. While Christian, rabbinic, and Graeco-Roman texts all take up the motif of finding a treasure, Hezser shows that they do so in a myriad of ways, expressing different theological and ethical ideas. As Hezser concludes, whatever their application, all these stories play with a hope that "[e]specially members of the lower strata of society" would have had, namely to find valuables from unidentifiable owners.

Subsequently, Justin David Strong addresses the relationship between parables and fables on the level of genre. He advances the challenging proposition that parables were recognized as fables by the ancient Gospel audience. With the parables of the Judge and the Widow (Luke 18:1–8) and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14) as his case studies, Strong demonstrates that the Gospel authors employed the framing devices of fables: the promythium and the epimythium. Strong provides a detailed overview of the types of these promythia and epimythia, including their stylistic forms. On the basis of these overviews, Strong argues that the aforementioned parables are preceded by a narrativized form of the promythium, while the applications of these and other parables agree with the forms and subject matter of epimythia of fables.

The third contribution turns to the social setting of New Testament parables. In a thought-provoking comparative study of New Testament parables, Aesopic fables, and Epictetus's writings, Mary Ann Beavis studies these sources from a servile point of view and compares them to North American slave biographies. If (former) slaves were involved as authors, collectors, or (target) audiences of these texts, is it then – Beavis wonders – possible to unearth "traces of servile experience" in them? She shows that, while neither the freedman Epictetus nor the supposed slave Aesop (and the freedman Phaedrus, his anthologist) call for the end of slavery, they may have shown sympathy for and have included insights of slave experiences in their writings. Jesus's slave parables, in contrast, "consistently take the perspective of the *kyrios*" as their starting point. Even if a number of Jesus's parables do contain slaves, they uncritically reflect, according

to Beavis, the perspective of slaveholders to the detriment of slaves, at least as they are crystallized in the Gospels.

In the next article, Konrad Schwarz contextualizes the Gospel of Thomas within ancient literature, especially the Aesopic fable tradition. Observing the diverse ways in which terms like fable and parable were used in antiquity, Schwarz follows Rüdiger Zymner in delineating a spectrum of parabolic or parable-like genres (similitude, parable, fable, and allegory). After showing that important textual witnesses of both Babrius's fables and the Gospel of Thomas shared the same Egyptian provenance (Oxyrhynchus) and possibly similar reading practices, Schwarz discusses the parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8) and the similitude of the Dog in the Cattle Trough (Gos. Thom. 102) in depth. He carefully traces shared motifs and diction in these parables and in the Gospel of Matthew, the Aesopic tradition, Graeco-Roman sources, and early Christian literature. Given the great and growing popularity of the Aesopic tradition in Roman education, Schwarz posits that the Gospel of Thomas might have been influenced by this tradition. However, this influence did not extend to the explanations of the parables in the Gospel of Thomas, which are, contrary to the fables, often missing. Schwarz explains this phenomenon with reference to the Gospel's prologue, which urges its readers to "find the meaning of these words" so that they "will not taste death."

The final article in this section, written by Ingvild Gilhus, takes as its point of departure the Apophthegmata Patrum. The Apophthegmata Patrum are collections of sayings on the ascetic and monastic life that are attributed to Christian monastics who lived in fourth and fifth-century Egypt. These collections contain a number of animal stories, of which some are called parables (παραβολή). Gilhus divides those stories into two types: example stories and similes. In the example stories animals behave in anthropomorphized ways, while the similes show (mostly) normal behavior of animals. While the stories have their own particular focus and are adapted to their particular Egyptian zoological and cultural context, similar tales can be found in the Aesopic fables and the Babylonian Talmud. In her analysis of animal stories and similes, Gilhus states that these texts serve to illustrate the monks' control over their environment, as well as an idealization of the ascetic life.

The final section "Diachronic Perspectives" consists of one, almost encyclopedic article by Peter Tomson. Crossing several disciplinary boundaries, Tomson tries to reconstruct the origin of the fable and the parable and to sketch their developments through the centuries. First, on the basis of the popularity of the fables of Ahiqar (composed probably in the seventh or sixth century BCE in northern Syria), Tomson argues that the Greek fable was influenced by oriental elements. Ahiqar's Aramaic sayings and classical Greek fables, in turn, exerted influence on the Hebrew Bible, for example in the biblical proverbs. Whereas the He-

brew term *mashal* was initially used for fables, proverbs, and parables, Tomson demonstrates how it later became increasingly associated with one subtype, the midrashic parable. Because of its attachment to biblical texts and values, Tomson suggests, these midrashic parables were able to "travel less lightly" than fables, which were "shareware, everyone's possession." Despite the rise of the midrashic parable in Judaism, Tomson shows that fables were not forgotten; in rabbinic literature and the New Testament references to fables or sometimes complete fables can be retrieved. In the end, Tomson argues, fables were so popular as a form of "low" traditions, because they are caricatures of our human lives: "This is how common people survive and get along: thanks to humour and wisdom."

C. Central Themes

The preceding overview of contributions demonstrates the extent to which ancient literary sources are replete with narrative analogy. If one casts one's scholarly nets further than the conventional focus on New Testament parables, rabbinic parables, and Aesopic fables, interesting similes, exempla, and fable- and parable-like texts can be discovered in other early Jewish, early Christian, and classical sources as well. This wide dispersion of narrative analogy raises compelling questions about the mutual relationship between these literary forms. How should these genres be defined? How can the circulation of themes, motifs, or entire parables/fables be explained? In which social settings did these genres originate and how were they transmitted and textualized in particular sources? Despite the diversity of methods, sources, and disciplinary backgrounds, the contributions in the present volume continually circle around these themes and questions. The final section of this introduction brings the diverse threads of these articles together with the help of the four themes discerned by Jonathan Pater in the first contribution of this volume.

A first important observation pertains to the issue of genre. Instead of defining parables, fables, exempla, and similes as independent genres with distinguishing literary characteristics, the contributors of the present volume repeatedly point to the fluid boundaries between them. Thus, Boter takes his starting point in ancient literary theory on rhetoric in which exempla, similes, and fables were categorized as affiliated genres. He draws attention to the way Epictetus's exempla and similes and New Testament and rabbinic parables functioned to persuade the audience of a particular idea, in agreement with the function of persuasion attributed to exempla and similes in ancient rhetoric. From a different perspective, Strong abandons the distinction between parables and fables altogether. On the basis of the shared use of pro- and epimythia, he argues that parables were regarded as fables in antiquity. This focus on form is supplemented by a focus on content in the contributions of Ambühl, Zimmermann, Teugels,

and Gilhus. They question, directly or indirectly, the presence of animals (anthropomorphized or non-anthropomorphized) as a distinguishing feature of fables over against parables and similes. Moreover, Zimmermann shows that religious themes occur in both parables and fables. Finally, modern theoretical perspectives can be adduced. Hasan-Rokem and Miralles Maciá employ a folklore studies perspective to highlight the fluid boundaries between parables and fables, while Llewelyn and Gore-Jones use Cognitive Blending Theory to explain the similar mental operations underlying the creation of new insights in a parable in 4 Ezra and Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Different approaches and perspectives are therefore used to arrive at a similar conclusion regarding the fluid boundaries of these genres.

In addition, the articles in the present volume make clear that there seems to have existed a shared pool of story motives, narrative patterns, and characters in antiquity from which composers of several genres could draw their inspiration. Multiple authors in the present volume discuss the shared use of similar themes and motifs in parables and fables. Some explore the circulation and adaptation of one specific motif in multiple sources in depth, as Teugels and Hezser respectively do with the motifs of "a character encounters an obstacle, often an animal, overcomes it, and ends up with the next obstacle" and of finding a treasure in a field. Other authors demonstrate how early Jewish authors (Adams), rabbinic sources (Hasan-Rokem and Miralles Maciá), and early Christian sources (Gilhus and Schwarz) take up multiple folk narrative elements, Aesopic motifs or entire fables, and mythic stories. Tomson, in turn, discusses how the fable as a genre crosses ethnic, cultural, and religious borders in the ancient Near Eastern context. The circulation of these shared motifs, narrative patterns, and entire fables across the ancient Mediterranean and the ancient Near East points to the necessity for present-day scholars to examine parables, fables, and similes across disciplinary boundaries.

This shared oral and/or written repertoire of motifs, narrative patterns, and stories also raises questions about the transmission and textualization of these elements in specific sources. Hasan-Rokem employs the concept of "ecotype" to refer to a locally, culturally, and ethnically adapted form of an international tale type, which often has a function in expressing ethnic identities, especially of minorities and marginalized groups. Without using the term, many of the aforementioned contributions illustrate how a particular fable or folktale element is ecotypically adopted and adapted in particular Jewish or Christian sources, within their cultural, religious, ethnic, or even environmental contexts. Yet, Adams's contribution on Philo of Alexandria makes clear that this cultural negotiation may also consist in dissociation and detachment. When Philo refers to two Greek fables in *Conf.* 4–14, he distances them from biblical stories, arguing that the latter are both true *and* reveal deeper truth. Instead of ecotypically adapting a particular tale type, it seems that Philo uses the fable here as a means to express –

or even apologetically defend – his Jewish identity over against a cultural "other." The present volume also contains various other impetuses for examining the textualization of parables, fables, and similes in literary works, notably Ambühl's intratextual examination of similes as structural, integrated elements in Statius's *Thebais* and Schwarz' discussion of the shared reading practices of Babrius's collection of fables and the Gospel of Thomas.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the contributions in the present volume presume various social-performative settings for these parables and fables. Lefkowitz and Adams attribute the use of fables to the progymnasmatic training students received in developing their rhetorical skills, while Boter considers the persuasive and didactic function of Epictetus's exempla and similes in light of ancient literary theory on rhetoric. This is a very different context from the one assumed by Beavis, given that she attempts to unearth "traces of servile experience" in Epictetus's similes, Aesopic fables, and New Testament parables. Her analysis takes as its starting point the fact (or, in the case of New Testament parables, assumption) that slaves and freedmen were involved in the production and reception of these texts as their authors, collectors, and audiences. While her contribution points to parables and fables as the product of "low" traditions, the context of ancient rhetoric and ancient rhetorical training makes clear that fables, exempla, and similes are also employed in "high" traditions. Taken together, the articles in the present volume call to rethink and to transcend the dichotomy between high and low traditions (see also Tomson). Such reconsideration of the "folk" is already taking place in folklore studies as well (see Hasan-Rokem). It seems that the power of parables and fables consisted in the fact that they appealed to multiple groups of people, of diverse socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

D. Overcoming Dichotomies

We are confident that the present volume will contribute to the interdisciplinary study of parables, fables, exempla, similes, and other forms of narrative analogy in ancient sources of different social, cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. By bringing together contributions from a range of scholarly fields and on a range of Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian sources, the volume aims not only to overcome the dichotomy between parables and fables in New Testament and rabbinic parable research, but also the disciplinary divides among Classicists, New Testament scholars, and Jewish studies scholars in this field of research. The contributions in the present volume highlight the fluid boundaries between the different forms of narrative analogy on the level of genre, the circulation of themes and motifs, and social setting and function. Such fluidity warrants an inclusive study of parables, fables, exempla, and similes across a range of

sources in order to gain a better insight into the character and function of these genres. At the same time, as the present volume has shown with regard to the textualization of these sources, a broad comparative study may provide a clearer picture of the distinct identities that are expressed in the adoption and adaption of these genres in a given literary work. By overcoming traditional scholarly divides, knowledge and expertise on these sources can be shared across disciplines. The present volume contains the first fruits of such an interdisciplinary collaboration. Hopefully, more will follow in the future.

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Parables in the New Testament and
Rabbinic Literature between Simile and Fable

A *status quaestionis*

Jonathan Pater

The comparative study of the parables in rabbinic Jewish and early Christian sources raises questions about the social and historical setting of the genre in relation to the broader cultural context of the ancient world. In many sources from antiquity, comparisons or analogies, often in the form of short narratives, are used to tell a larger story, to develop an argument, to demonstrate a moral lesson, or to have a humorous effect. Nevertheless, the question as to how the parables attributed to Jesus and the rabbis relate to the similar forms of simile and fable in Graeco-Roman sources has received relatively little attention. Classical scholars, likewise, pay little attention to Jewish and Christian parables when discussing the genres of Greek and Roman narrative and rhetoric.

In this article, I present an overview of the history of research on this issue focusing on the discussion of (1) genre, (2) content, (3) function and social setting, and (4) transmission and textualization in the work of a selection of scholars.[1] The article is divided into two parts. In the first part (part A) the main contributions to the debate on parable, simile, and fable from the perspective of New Testament studies are discussed. A considerable section of this part is devoted to the work of Adolf Jülicher that has had a major influence on discussions about the relation of parables to other genres, like fables, in New Testament studies (section I). After providing an overview of contributions on the comparative study of parables and fables since Jülicher (section II), the article sketches some recent trends in scholarship on this issue (section III). In the second part (part B) the focus shifts to the debate on parables, similes, and fables in rabbinic studies. This part is divided in two subsections that discuss different approaches to the study of rabbinic literature, namely folklore studies (section I) and literary

[1] Other early Christian and Jewish sources also contain parables, but scholarship on these sources will not be discussed here due to space limitations. Subsequent study of parables in the context of Graeco-Roman forms should include these sources as well, as is already done in several contributions to this volume.

studies (section II). The article concludes with a brief summary of the state of the question suggesting which issues are relevant for further study.

A. Parable, Simile, and Fable
in the Study of the New Testament

In the past century, many scholars were skeptical about the usefulness of comparing the New Testament parables to the forms of Graeco-Roman literature and rhetoric, especially to the classical fable. The genre of parables was instead defined in reference to the gospels alone, often with the implication that Jesus's parables were unique in form. This perspective was probably expressed most clearly by Joachim Jeremias, who argued that the parables of Jesus were something entirely new and that discussing them in terms of Graeco-Roman genre classifications is to impose on the parables a law foreign to them. The parables are, rather, to be understood in light of the mashal in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature that includes a wide range of forms.[2] Likewise, Ruben Zimmermann, in several recent publications, argues that the categories of Graeco-Roman rhetoric are too diverse to be useful for a definition of the parable genre, instead arguing for a definition based on modern categories.[3]

In addition, the dismissive attitude towards fables is mostly based on generalizations about the genre that create a rather arbitrary distinction with parables. Fables are said to be non-realistic stories, especially when they are thought to contain only talking animals, dealing with non-religious issues. Parables on the other hand are argued to be a specifically Jewish genre of realistic short narratives with a religious message.[4] Notwithstanding the general reticence to identify or compare the parables attributed to Jesus with fables or other forms of Graeco-

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[2] See J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 8th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 8, 16.

[3] See R. Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 105–150. Cf. R. Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables and Ancient Rhetoric: The Contributions of Aristotle and Quintilian to the Form Criticism of the Parables," and R. Zimmermann, "Parabeln – sonst nichts! Gattungsbestimmung jenseits der Klassifikation in 'Bildwort,' 'Gleichnis,' 'Parabel,' und 'Beispielerzählung,'" in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann, 2nd ed., WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 238–258, 409–419.

[4] See for example M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977), 13; B. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 21; R. Zimmermann, "Fable III: New Testament," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. D. C. Allison et al., 30 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–), 8:650; and G. Theißen and A. Merz, *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 300–303, who not only argue that the main difference between parables and fables is that the latter are populated with talking plants and animals, but that those stories in the ancient fable collections without anthropomorphized plants and animals should in fact be categorized as parables or apophthegms.

Roman rhetoric, this has been the focus of the work of several New Testament scholars, beginning with the work of Adolf Jülicher.

I. Adolf Jülicher: Parables between Similes and Fables

Modern research of the parables can arguably be said to have begun with the seminal work of Adolf Jülicher in his *magnum opus Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*.[5] Jülicher famously rejected the allegorical interpretation of the parables of Jesus that had been dominant in the previous nineteen centuries, by arguing that the parables are similes, a form he sharply distinguished from metaphor and allegory by referring to the rhetorical works of Aristotle and Cicero.[6] After having established that all parables are similes or comparisons, Jülicher goes on to distinguish between three subcategories of the parables (παραβολαί), namely the "Gleichnis," the "Parabel/Fabel," and the "Beispielerzälung." He defines "Gleichnisse" as similes in which one sentence ("Satz") is explicated by juxtaposition with another sentence, while "Parabeln/Fabeln" are similes that have been expanded into past-tense narratives ("Gleichniserzählungen"). The "Beispielerzählung" does not give an example from the realm of everyday life, but an example from the higher religious-ethical sphere of the general moral lesson it seeks to convey. However, all three types of parables are told for a religious-ethical purpose to advance the cause of the kingdom of heaven.[7]

For this subclassification of the genre of parables, Jülicher explicitly refers to categories from Aristotle's rhetorical theory.[8] In his *Rhetorica*, Aristotle discusses three genres of rhetoric based on the context of the speech, namely de-

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[5] A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1910; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976).

[6] Jülicher identifies the fight against allegorical interpretation as one of the central issues of his work, see Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:50, 243. According to him, a simile is a complete sentence or thought placing two elements side by side with a single point of comparison (*tertium comparationis*) characterized by clarity. Metaphor on the other hand is a form of indirect speech referring to something else than is literally stated, because it consists of a word that must be substituted by the reader for another word. Thus, metaphors are the building blocks of allegory, see Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:38, 42, 52–58, 117, referring to Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.4, 1406b20–1407a15 and Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 94; *Att.* 2.20.3.

[7] Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:49 distinguishes between "Gleichnisse, Fabeln, Beispielerzählungen." These subcategories are discussed respectively at 1:69–92, 92–111, and 112–117. The first subcategory is also called "eigentliche Gleichnisse" and the second "Parabeln im engeren Sinne," see 1:92, 101, 117. As a fourth type of figurative speech, Jülicher mentions the παροιμίαι in the Gospel of John, which he classifies as allegories and therefore cannot accept as authentic speech of Jesus. In his view, the Gospel of John does contain some texts that can be classified as "Gleichnisse," see Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:44–45, 115–118. See further R. Zimmermann, "Are There Parables in John? It Is Time to Revisit the Question," *JSHJ* 9 (2011): 243–276.

[8] For a nuanced discussion of Jülicher's reception of Aristotle's work on rhetoric and metaphor, see S. Alkier, "Die 'Gleichnisreden Jesu' als 'Meisterwerke volkstümlicher Beredtsamkeit': Beobachtungen zur Aristoteles-Rezeption Adolf Jülichers," in *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*

liberative, forensic, and epideictic (*Rhet.* 1.3, 1358a35–1358b7). After discussing the peculiarities of these genres and various means of persuasion, Aristotle turns to those means of persuasion that are common to all three genres (*Rhet.* 2.18, 1391b27–29). Among these, he distinguishes between enthymeme (ἐνθύμημα) and example (παράδειγμα) (*Rhet.* 2.20, 1393a21–31). The category of examples is further subdivided in historical and invented examples. The latter category can be further divided in comparison (παραβολή) and fable (λόγος). Jülicher relates this subclassification of invented examples to his own subclassification of the parables of Jesus. He connects his first subcategory "Gleichnisse" to Aristotle's category παραβολή that is exemplified by a Socratic simile, and his second subcategory "Parabel" to Aristotle's category of fable, arguing that the majority of the narrative parables of Jesus are in fact fables, like the examples of Aesop and Stesichoros mentioned by Aristotle.[9]

The identification of the narrative parables ("Parabeln") with fables is central to Jülicher's non-allegorical reading of these texts. In his comparison of these forms, he points out similarities with regard to form, structure, context, and transmission, referring to a range of sources in his reconstruction of the history of the form.[10] Like the parable, the fable is comprised of two parts related to different realms of experience connected by a single point of comparison.[11] Discussing the examples from Aristotle, Jülicher mentions in passing that the formula οὕτω καὶ ὑμεῖς, used for introducing the application of the fable of Stesichoros, is also found in several New Testament parables.[12] Based on these examples, he further argues that both the parables and fables are means of persuasion intended to have an impact on the hearers by influencing their knowledge, emotions, and will. In order to accomplish this, the fable, like the parable, narrates a particular case and appeals to common sense to identify the similarity with a present situation. Influenced by Lessing, Jülicher suggests that fables achieve this effect through their direct appeal, clarity, and the vividness of the narrative that precludes the

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1899–1999: Beiträge zum Dialog mit Adolf Jülicher, ed. U. Mell, BZNW 103 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 39–74.

[9] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:94, 98, 100, 104, 113. Jülicher argues that the "Beispielerzählungen" are also a means of persuasion, but does not relate them to the categories of Aristotle, see J. T. Tucker, *Example Stories: Perspectives on Four Parables in the Gospel of Luke*, JSNTSup 162 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 71–144, 275–395.

[10] Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu,* refers to fables in Hesiod (1:99), Aristophanes (1:99), Herodotus (1:99), Aristotle (1:94–95, 98, 103, 106–107, 115, 186 ascribed to Stesichoros and Aesop), Livy (1:99 ascribed to Menenius Agrippa), Phaedrus (1:100–101, 163, 186–187) whom he holds in low regard, and Babrius (1:97, 168, 186–187, 200). He also refers in general to fables of Aesop (1:24, 103, 115, 156). He further refers to fables in the Hebrew Bible (1:99, 164 Jotham in Judg 9 and Joas in 2 Kgs 14:9), Josephus (1:186), and the influence of Greek fables on rabbinic parables (1:168). The main focus of Jülicher's discussion is on Greek and Roman literature, although he was, like many of his time, acquainted with Indian fables as well, but he denies any influence on the parables of Jesus (1:99, 103, 173–182).

[11] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:95–96, 98.

[12] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:94.

hearer from doubting its truth.[13] Because fables are meant to persuade their hearers they communicate a clear, unequivocal message. Similarly, the parables as told by Jesus, like the fables, were not enigmatic allegories, but simple, clear, and transparent comparisons. Jesus was an exemplary storyteller of these "masterpieces of popular eloquence."[14]

The fables underwent a similar process of misinterpretation as the parables, according to Jülicher. Originally the fable was an oral genre spoken in a specific context in which its meaning was immediately clear. It subsequently developed from a rhetorical to a poetic genre, the purpose of which was not to persuade, but to entertain by the story itself. Here, Jülicher points out similarities between the transmission process of the fables and the parables of Jesus. He discusses similar changes in the way the narrative part, or image side ("Bildhälfte") of both parables and fables, was altered or expanded, but more importantly, in both cases, the narratives were later supplemented with an application expressing a general moral truth or wisdom saying, that is often a clear misinterpretation of the narrative.[15]

When dealing with objections against the identification of parables with fables, Jülicher argues against the rejection of this identification on theological grounds. He especially objects to the argument that fables contain only speaking, thinking animals with a free will and are therefore inferior to the parables with their realistic narratives that do not cross the line of what is possible. In reaction, Jülicher points out that fable and animal fable are not one and the same. In fact, "es gibt genug Fabeln, in denen Tiere gar nicht oder doch nur, wie in Jesu Parabeln Schweine, Hunde, Schafe, in einer ihrer Natur entsprechenden Rolle auftreten."[16] Nevertheless, Jülicher himself still hesitates to completely identify these genres with each other, which appears to be no less theologically motivated. If there is any difference between the parable and fable, he argues, then it is that the parables of Jesus are always serious and noble, while the fables often deteriorate into the comic, the burlesque, and the vulgar. The parables in the gospels are

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[13] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:96–97. Although Jülicher refers to ancient rhetoric, and specifically to Aristotle, for his classification of the parables, it has been pointed out that both his rejection of metaphor and his reference to fables are more indebted to the German aesthetic tradition, and especially to the works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Gottfried Herder, see H.-J. Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, NTAbh 13 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 8–10 and H. G. Klemm, "Die Gleichnisauslegung Ad. Jülichers im Bannkreis der Fabeltheorie Lessings," *ZNW* 60 (1969): 153–174.

[14] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:23–24, 71–75, 94–95, 182.

[15] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:98–100, 184–188. Jülicher's view that the epimythium is clearly a secondary feature of the fable seems to be at odds with his emphasis on the fundamental twofold structure of the genre, but is based on the notion that the fable was originally a rhetorical form spoken for and in a specific situation to which it referred. The idea that the parables of Jesus are in essence an oral, rhetorical form is central to Jülicher's parable theory, see Alkier, "Die 'Gleichnisreden Jesu'," 48–51, 54, 61–62, 71–72.

[16] Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:100.

aimed at matters of religious and ethical life that are illustrated by similar situations in the lower areas of life, while fables are entirely aimed at the conditions of earthly and social life. It is because of this difference that Jülicher refrains from using the term fable for the parables, and instead calls them "'Parabeln' im engeren Sinne."[17]

II. Main Contributions since Jülicher

Although Jülicher's work has been enormously influential in parable scholarship for over a century, his use of Graeco-Roman rhetoric and fables to contextualize the parables received very little following in subsequent research.[18] Many scholars after Jülicher adopted his genre classification, but disregarded his identification of the narrative parables as fables.[19] Several scholars have, however, followed his example. The contributions of these scholars will be briefly discussed here.

Reinhard Dithmar: Parables as Fables

The German theologian and literary scholar Reinhard Dithmar has written several studies on both parables and fables. Dithmar's understanding of parable and fable is clearly influenced by the work of Adolf Jülicher. According to Dithmar, parable, fable, and simile all belong to the same form of figurative speech ("bildliche Rede") based on comparison ("gleichnishafte Rede"). Parable, fable, and simile share the characteristic feature that they are composed of two parts, namely an image ("Bildhälfte," *comparatum*) and an application ("Sachhälfte," *comparandum*), with a single point of comparison.[20] It is this characteristic feature that connects Homeric similes, Aesopic fables, and the parables of Jesus. Although it is possible to distinguish between these forms based on secondary criteria, Dithmar argues that there is no fundamental or universally applicable difference between parable and fable.[21] In his book on the fable, Dithmar further discusses the characteristics of the genre, namely its brevity and pithy character,

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[17] See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:101, cf. 1:40–41, 117–118, 153–156 where Jülicher cautions against excessive praise for the uniqueness of Jesus's parables based on a misunderstanding of parables as a poetic form. According to Jülicher, it was not the form of the parable that was unique to Jesus, since analogous forms are found in other literatures, but the content related to the kingdom of God.

[18] See D. Dormeyer, *Das Neue Testament im Rahmen der antiken Literaturgeschichte: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 142–143.

[19] See Zimmermann, "Parabeln – sonst nichts!," 383–392.

[20] See R. Dithmar, *Fabeln, Parabeln, und Gleichnisse* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995), 11 and R. Dithmar, *Die Fabel: Geschichte, Struktur, Didaktik*, 8th ed. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997), 9–10, 81–98. A selection from the work of Adolf Jülicher is included in R. Dithmar, *Texte zur Theorie der Fabeln, Parabeln und Gleichnisse* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1982), 197–202.

[21] Dithmar, *Die Fabel*, 97–98.

the structure of the narratives, the application (epimythium), its critical outlook that provokes or agitates, and its didactic function. He emphasizes: "Die Fabel als Tierfabel zu verstehen, bedeutet eine unstatthafte Verengung; den die Vergleichssphäre, der Bildteil der Fabel, umfaßt die ganze belebte und unbelebte Natur, die Menschen- und Götterwelt."[22]

David Flusser: Parables and Fables as Popular Instruction

The work of David Flusser forms an important contribution to the comparative study of early Christian and rabbinic parables. However, his book *Die rabbinische Gleichnisse und die Gleichniserzähler Jesus* is mainly focused on the parables of Jesus. In this book, Flusser discusses many important issues, but his most relevant contribution to the present topic is related to the issues of genre, function, and social setting of the parables. Flusser's definition and classification of parables is strongly influenced by Jülicher, but is integrated into a historical reconstruction of the development of the Jewish parable that includes the rabbinic material. According to Flusser, the Jewish parable originated in the oral context of popular circles of Palestinian Judaism, namely the Pharisaic-rabbinic movement and the early Jesus movement.[23] Since the Jewish parable has close affinities with Hellenistic popular philosophy as represented by the similes of stoic philosophers like Cleanthes and Epictetus and the fables of the Aesopic tradition, Flusser presents the parable, fable, and simile as closely related genres that share a similar social context and function. These genres belong in the sphere of popular morality ("Vulgärethik") and are aimed at legitimizing prevailing norms.[24]

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[22] Dithmar, *Die Fabel*, 110.

[23] Flusser's distinction between "Vergleichungen" or "Gleichnissspruche," "eigentliche, entwickelten Gleichnisse" or "Gleichniserzählungen," and "Exempla" shows the influence of Jülicher. Contrary to Jülicher, he argues for the originality of allegorical elements based on widely shared imagery. Flusser identifies several rabbinic traditions with parabolic sayings ("Gleichnissprüche") similar to stoic similes as an early stage of the Pharisaic-rabbinic parable tradition. He argues that the narrative parables ("Gleichniserzählungen") in the gospels and later rabbinic traditions that are similar to Aesopic fables represent a later development. In addition, the original free oral form of the narrative parable developed into a later midrashic form as an exegetical illustration. According to Flusser, this parable tradition is unique to popular circles of Palestinian Judaism, since it is not found in the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, or the texts from the Judaean desert. The fact that similar parabolic images are found in writings of Hellenistic Jewish writers, like Philo, would support the hypothesis that the early Jewish parable developed from Hellenistic popular philosophy. Flusser's historical reconstruction is based on his hypothetical dating of rabbinic traditions. See D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 17–29, 32–35, 51–57, 83, 104–105, 119–158, 162. Cf. D. Flusser, "Aesop's Miser and the Parable of the Talents," in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 9–25.

[24] See Flusser, *Die rabbinische Gleichnisse*, 17, 21, 59–61, 155–156, 161–173. According to Flusser, the main theme of the parables is "die religiöse Deutung des menschlichen Lebens, des Handelns des Menschen vor Gott," but this is not far removed from the moral teaching of the

Discussing the characteristics of the genre, Flusser further argues that the parables, as oral short narrative forms ("Kleinerzählungen") similar to folktale, riddle, and fable, are characterized by a number of more or less fixed structural elements and motifs.[25] The main themes and motifs of the parables taken from everyday life, especially manual labour and banquets, give an initial impression of realism. However, although the narratives seem to mirror everyday life, they contain small but significant anomalies and immoral elements that have an alienating effect on the hearer increasing the persuasive effect of the parables and distinguishing them from fables.[26] Flusser's discussion of the similarities of parable, fable, and folktale and his inclusion of a folklore perspective are very illuminating. The folklore perspective has been influential in approaches to rabbinic parables, as can be seen in the present volume, but less so with regard to the parables of Jesus.

Klaus Berger: Parables and Fables in Ancient Rhetoric

In his very extensive and well-sourced article "Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament," Klaus Berger laments the fact that most scholars only look to the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature as the background for the parables in the New Testament, while their relation to literature from the Hellenistic world has almost entirely been neglected. According to Berger, the parables should be read in the context of Hellenistic rhetoric as a form of *narratio*, or narrative exposition intended to persuade, characterized by clarity, conciseness, and credibility.[27] The Greek term παραβολή, and its Latin equivalent *similitudo*, can refer to a range of forms that are classified by Berger as example, parable, fictional story, and allegory. In this classification, parable refers to a comparison based on general observation of what is typical in human life or the natural world. The closest parallel to the "parable" category are the similes of Epictetus. The fables offer the closest analogy to Berger's category of "fictional stories," which he defines as comparisons narrating unique, one-time occurrences.[28]

Greek philosophical parabolic images about "der Mensch, seine Problematik und sein Ende" that sometimes even include a symbolic representation for a deity.

[25] E. g. the preference for a specific number of characters, binary oppositions, and the simplicity and conciseness of the narratives without superfluous narrative adornments, see Flusser, *Die rabbinische Gleichnisse*, 31–62, 163–165, 284–318.

[26] On the pseudorealistic and paradoxical character of the parables, see Flusser, *Die rabbinische Gleichnisse*, 31–42, 59–61. Cf. the discussion of Klaus Berger and Wolfgang Harnisch below. On the picaresque and the immoral hero in the parables, see T. Schramm and K. Löwenstein, *Unmoralische Helden: Anstössige Gleichnisse Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) who do not refer to Aesopic fables.

[27] See K. Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament," *ANRW* 25.2:1111–1116 referring to Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.31–65.

[28] Fables, like those attributed to Aesop, are not only stories about (talking) animals, but in fact also include "Menschen, Götter und Halbgötter oder auch Naturwesen (Tiere, Pflanzen, leblose Gegenstände)" as characters. Berger offers a separate discussion of example

Focusing on these parallels, Berger points out several similarities in form and content between the narrative parables and fables, including similar introductions, characters, imagery, and final sayings offering a moralizing summary of the story.[29]

Besides these similarities, Berger also points out differences between parable and fable. He first mentions the eschatological orientation of the parables in the context of Jesus's religious instruction. However, he argues that this should not be overemphasized as a distinctive characteristic, since the difference between religion and morality is fluid. The most striking difference, according to Berger, is the fact that the parables often present exaggerated, paradoxical, or even immoral situations, but he does not offer a discussion of the fables from this perspective.[30]

Finally, Berger further contextualizes the fables, and thus the parables, in the broader literary context of the Graeco-Roman world by pointing at their relation to chreia and progymnasmata. The form of the fable was mediated to authors of the New Testament through Hellenistic school education. The progymnasmata provided these authors with elementary knowledge of various Hellenistic literary forms, including the composition and variation of fables.[31] Although Berger does not discuss this further, educational context and influence of the progymnasmata has become topical in recent research on the parables, as will be shown below.[32]

Wolfgang Harnisch: Dramatic Plot and Characters in Parables and Fables

In his book *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu: Eine hermeneutische Einführung*, Wolfgang Harnisch refers to classical rhetoric and fables to understand the parables of Jesus. His main contribution is his discussion of the content and characters of the parables, but he also deals with their social location as popular, folkloristic narratives. At the beginning of the book, in a chapter on the narrative characteristics of the parables of Jesus, Harnisch immediately turns his attention to the Aesopic fables. Referring to the work of Lessing, he argues that parables, like fables, do not evoke an image, but tell a story. The definition of the fable as a narrated order of events or actions in a sequence of scenes culminating in a dramatic resolution, can be applied directly to the parables in the New Testament. Harnisch emphasizes the dramatic and linear development of the plot in, mostly

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(παράδειγμα/*exemplum*) and fable (αἶνος), see Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," *ANRW* 25.2:1074–1075, 1116, 1145–1148.

[29] See Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," *ANRW* 25.2:1116–1120.

[30] See Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," *ANRW* 25.2:1120, arguing that these features place the parables closer to the *novella*. It is interesting to see that according to Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:101 these features are characteristic of the fables and not of the parables.

[31] See Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," *ANRW* 25.2:1117–1118, 1296–1298.

[32] See the contribution of Jeremy Lefkowitz in this volume.

three, sequentially ordered acts, often containing a contrast, culminating in a final scene that can contain a dialogue evaluating the preceding events or that breaks off without a final resolution. Other shared characteristics are: repetition, exaggeration, unrealistic and estranging elements, irony, ambiguity or double meaning, brevity or conciseness of the narrative, lack of narrative ornamentation, emphasis on the final scene, and a preference for two or three, often contrasting, flat characters that are subordinate to the message of the story.[33] All of these characteristics follow the "Gesetzen der epischen Volksdichtung."[34]

With regard to the plot and characters, Harnisch refers to Klaus Doderer's approach to the fables in terms of stage drama. Parables and fables often contain unrealistic combinations of characters who would normally not come into contact with each other. The characters in these narratives have no specific characteristics, emotions, or motives, apart from those relevant to the plot or message, and characterization only takes place through situational setting or dialogue.[35] However, Harnisch suggests that there is a slight difference between parables and fables. The difference is not that parables deal with human characters, since these also figure in fables. It is that, according to Harnisch, the characters in fables show no development and are merely puppets for the interests of the fable teller, whereas the characters in the parables are more rounded. Nevertheless, the parables also contain typical and caricatural descriptions of protagonists.[36] Harnisch argues that the relations between the characters and the situations depicted in the parables and fables communicate a form of negative ethics aimed at survival in an immoral world and a utopian hope as protest against the harsh present reality.[37] His observations relate to the social location of the genres speaking to persons of certain means without actual power, but this perspective is not pursued by Harnisch.

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[33] See W. Harnisch, *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu: Eine hermeneutische Einführung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 15–41 and 99–100, where Harnisch argues that fables cannot be distinguished from parables based on the supposed lack of comic or fantastic elements in the latter, but that both forms are characterized by their "eigentümliche poetische Sphäre der erzählten Welt und die ihr entsprechende Distanz zur Realität."

[34] Harnisch, *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu*, 24–25, 30, 37, 40.

[35] See Harnisch, *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu,* 24, 35. The preeminence of dialogue and (inner) monologue is also one of the characteristics shared by parable and fable, according to Harnisch.

[36] See Harnisch, *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu*, 20–26, 29–35.

[37] See Harnisch, *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu*, 100–105. Cf. Theißen and Merz, *Der historische Jesus*, 302 arguing that fables propagate a utilitarian and defensive moral common to the lower classes, while the parables propagate a morality of risk-taking in accordance with the will of God.

Mary Ann Beavis: Moral Applications of Parables and Fables

One of the few contributions from the English speaking world is an article titled "Parable and Fable" by Mary Ann Beavis.[38] Against the stereotypical view of fables as being mere animal stories with prudential lessons, Beavis argues that the New Testament parables closely resemble those fables narrating human activities or relations between humans and gods. Referring to ancient and modern definitions, Beavis defines parables and fables as realistic, brief, invented narratives that shed light on aspects of human experience and behaviour, dealing with religious or ethical themes, and often containing elements of extravagance or reversal.[39] The similarity between parables and fables can be explained from their common ancient Near Eastern origins and the spread and influence of Greek education in the Hellenistic and Roman period that would have provided many people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Jews and early Christians, with firsthand knowledge of Aesopic fables given their position among the elementary exercises (progymnasmata). The writers of the Synoptic Gospels, who almost certainly received some form of Greek elementary education, would therefore have been familiar with the methods of composition and interpretation of fables, further shaping the parables in their tradition after the likeness of the fable, a process Beavis refers to as "fabulization."[40]

The similarities between parable and fable are specifically explored by Beavis with regard to their moral applications. The morals of the fables in the form of promythia and epimythia are very similar to those of the parables. In both cases, these morals are secondary additions that do not necessarily correspond well with the narratives to which they are attached. Beavis especially points to similarities between the use of promythia in Luke's parables and Phaedrus's fables, arguing that the practice of appending applications to the parables is "very much in keeping with the Graeco-Roman method of interpreting fables."[41] One interesting issue with regard to these applications is the question as to what extent the ethical and the religious would have been separate categories at the time, since

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[38] See also the references to Aesopic fables in M. A. Beavis, "Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–8)," *JBL* 111 (1992): 37–54. She has revisited the topic of slaves in parables and fables in her contribution to the present volume.

[39] See M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 478–481.

[40] See Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 478, 483, 494. Beavis describes "fabulization" as a broader process of influence of Greek culture on the "Semitic meshalim" in the Hellenistic period. She argues that Jesus himself may have already been influenced by Graeco-Roman popular literature in shaping and telling his parables.

[41] Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 482–483, 490–491. Referring to ancient Graeco-Roman rhetoric, Beavis argues that a multiplicity of meanings can be attached to a parable or fable, because they were intended to be integrated into various larger literary compositions. She also suggests that the same parable can be read as a comparison (*similitudo*) and at the same time as an illustration (*exemplum*).

these categories are often used to distinguish parables from fables. According to Beavis, fables do not only have applications with a moral or ethical point, but can also convey religious truths, especially the fables about humans and gods. However, the moral and religious tone of the parables is different, and religious or supernatural elements are usually lacking from their narratives.[42] Reflecting on the implications for the interpretation of the parables, Beavis argues that the similarity to Aesopic fables suggests a specific function and context for the parables. Ancient hearers and readers would have expected the parables, like the fables, to communicate a relatively mundane moral application. The fact that Quintilian, for example, mentions that fables are especially well suited to persuade the simple-minded and uneducated (*Inst.* 5.11.19), is used by Beavis to argue against "excessively complex and sophisticated approaches to interpretation" that "may misrepresent the impact of the parables on their first hearers."[43]

François Vouga: Transmission and Textualization

One final contribution on reading the parables in the context of Graeco-Roman literature, is the work of the Swiss New Testament scholar François Vouga. In several publications Vouga has compared parables with fables. Although he does not argue for a direct literary or historical dependency, he does see a close affinity between the two genres.[44] Vouga's work is distinctive for its focus on the transmission and textualization of the parables of Jesus. He argues that there are significant similarities in the transformation from oral to literary tradition between the Aesopic fables and the parables of Jesus. According to Vouga this process is reflected for example in the prologues to the five books of Phaedrus's collection that explicitly thematizes the relation between the Aesopic tradition and the creative work of the author in presenting it in poetic form. Although

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[42] Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 477, 480–481.

[43] See Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 477, 496–497. Beavis's comments are directed against various contemporary, often theologically motivated, readings of the parables as world-shattering experiences to the hearers. Cf. M. A. Beavis, "The Power of Jesus' Parables: Were They Polemical or Irenic?," *JSNT* 82 (2001): 3–30.

[44] See F. Vouga, "Die Parabeln Jesu and die Fabeln Äsops: Ein Beitrag zur Gleichnisforschung und zur Problematik der Literalisierung der Erzählungen der Jesus-Tradition," *WD* 26 (2001): 149–155, 160–161; F. Vouga, "Formgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu den Gleichnissen und zu den Fabeln der Jesus-Tradition auf dem Hintergrund der hellenistischen Literaturgeschichte," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift for Frans Neirynck*, ed. F. van Segroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. van Belle, and J. Verheyden, BETL 100 (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 176–178; and F. Vouga, "Zur form- und redaktionsgeschichtlichen Definition der Gattungen: Gleichnis, Parabel/Fabel, Beispielerzählungen," in *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu 1899–1999: Beiträge zum Dialog mit Adolf Jülicher*, ed. U. Mell, BZNW 103 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 77. Vouga makes a distinction between "Gleichnisse" that are comparable to the similes used in the diatribes of Bion and Epictetus, and "Parabeln" that are closely related to the fable. Parables and fables belong to the literary forms of Hellenistic moral philosophy as short literary narratives characterized by brevity, fictionality, and didactic-moralistic function. Their central theme is individual human existence in the present with the goal to admonish to change one's attitude to life.

he does discuss the difference with the gospels, where such explicit reflection is lacking, or rather focusing on the supposed secretive nature of Jesus's parables, Vouga does not flesh out the form of earlier stages of the Aesopic tradition and possible differences in the process of textualization.[45] Although Vouga's discussion is limited to general observations on the role of the central figures of Aesop and Jesus with respect to both traditions, the significance of the character of the storyteller for the formation and interpretation of the traditions associated with them is a topic that warrants further research.[46] Vouga's articles provide almost exclusively examples from the New Testament parables, without offering an in-depth analysis of the process of fable composition and their literary formation.[47]

III. Recent Trends and Contributions

The previous paragraph discussed the most extensive and original contributions to parable scholarship that interacted with Graeco-Roman similes and fables. Others scholars have also referred to fables and other forms in their work, but these could not all be discussed here.[48] Because of the work of these scholars, a

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[45] See Vouga, "Formgeschichtliche Überlegungen," 179–186 and Vouga, "Die Parabeln Jesu," 152–155.

[46] See Vouga, "Die Parabeln Jesu," 151, 153 and Vouga, "Formgeschichtliche Überlegungen," 185–186.

[47] See Vouga, "Formgeschichtliche Überlegungen," 179, 184–185. The compositional techniques of parables and fables are not compared beyond the notion of brevity (*brevitas*). Vouga gives only two examples of fables with human characters, namely the fable of Two Travellers Finding an Axe (Perry 67) and the Middle-Aged Man with Two Mistresses (Babrius, *Fab.* 22 and Phaedrus, *Fab.* 2.2).

[48] Other relevant contributions are, e. g., R. Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe*, FRLANT 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 35–42 on similarities in form and imagery between the comparisons and analogies of the stoic-cynic diatribe, especially of Epictetus and Plutarch, and the parables of Jesus; F. Hauck, "παραβολή," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 5:741–759 referring to similes in a range of ancient sources; K.-G. Eckart, "Plutarch und seine Gleichnisse," *ThViat* 11 (1966–1972): 59–80 discussing Plutarch's treatise on the married life *Coniugalia praecepta* (138a–146a) as relevant comparative material to the New Testament parables; L. Schottroff, "Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn," *ZTK* 68 (1971): 27–52 referring to Quintilian's *Declamationes* as comparative context for the parables; J. D. Crossan, "Hidden Treasure Parables in Late Antiquity," *Society of Biblical Literature 1976 Seminar Papers*, ed. G. MacRae, SBLSP 10 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 359–379 comparing treasure parables from a range of sources, including Aesopic fables; L. C. McGaughy, "Pagan Hellenistic Literature: The Babrian Fables," *Society of Biblical Literature 1977 Seminar Papers*, ed. P. J. Achtemeier, SBLSP 11 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 205–214 referring to the fables as the closest parallels to the parables in Graeco-Roman literature; E. Rau, *Reden in Vollmacht: Hintergrund, Form und Anliegen der Gleichnisse Jesu*, FRLANT 149 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), including Graeco-Roman rhetoric and fables in his discussion of the parables; B. Heiniger, *Metaphorik, Erzählstruktur und Szenisch-Dramatische Gestaltung in den Sondergutgleichnissen bei Lukas*, NTAbh 24 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991), discussing the monologue in parables from the Lukan *Sondergut* referring to fable, novella, and comedy; and M. Ernst, "Hellenistische Analogien zu

significant number of publications and standard reference works in the field of New Testament studies now contain (brief) discussions of similes and fables in relation to the parables.[49] Although others remain skeptical, in general there appears to be more openness towards such comparisons. The renewed interest coincides with several recent trends in research focusing on the broader tradition about Aesop, the progymnasmata, and the education of the New Testament authors, and even a complete identification of parable and fable. These trends will be briefly discussed here.

In the past two decades, the broader Aesopic tradition has been studied more closely in relation to the New Testament. Scholars have drawn parallels between the form of the Vita Aesopi, or Aesop Romance, and the genre of the gospels as descriptions of the life, death, and teaching of a charismatic protagonist, including parallels between specific episodes in the careers of Aesop and Jesus and the similarities in their preferred mode of teaching in short stories.[50] Although these similarities can perhaps best be explained from a shared cultural context, the attribution of the parables or fables to a specific storyteller or fabulist is a relevant interface between these texts. In the tradition associated with him, the different portrayals of Aesop as a fabulist are related to the ways his fables were understood. The same holds true for the character of Jesus in the gospels, who offers a unique context for the interpretation of the parables. For example, both are presented as telling stories in relation to themselves.[51] Other scholars have

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ntl. Gleichnissen: Eine Sammlung von Vergleichstexten sowie Thesen über die sich aus der parabolischen Redeweise ergebenden gesellschafts-politischen Konsequenzen," in *Ein Gott, Eine Offenbarung: Beiträge zur biblische Exegese, Theologie und Spiritualität: Festschrift für Notker Füglister*, ed. F. V. Reiterer (Wurzburg: Echter, 1991), 461–480.

[49] See for example the brief discussion of the Graeco-Roman literary context, including ancient rhetoric and fables, in R. Zimmermann, "Die Gleichnisse Jesu: Eine Leseanleitung zum Kompendium," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al., 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 7–8, 20–21. In the discussion of individual parables in this work, Graeco-Roman sources are also included. Here the references to Epictetus are more numerous than to Aesopic fables.

[50] See R. I. Pervo, "A Nihilist Fabula: Introducing the Life of Aesop," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. R. F. Hock, J. B. Chance, and J. Perkins, SBLSS 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 77–120; W. Shiner, "Creating Plot in Episodic Narratives: The Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. R. F. Hock, J. B. Chance, and J. Perkins, SBLSS 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 155–176; S. S. Elliott, "Witless in Your Own Cause: Divine Plots and Fractured Characters in the Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark," *R&T* 12 (2006): 397–418; L. M. Wills, "The Aesopic Tradition," in *The Historical Jesus in Context*, ed. A.-J. Levine, D. C. Allison, and J. D. Crossan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 222–237; D. F. Watson, "The 'Life of Aesop' and the Gospel of Mark: Two Ancient Approaches to Elite Values," *JBL* 129 (2010): 699–716; M. Andreassi, "The Life of Aesop and the Gospels: Literary Motifs and Narrative Mechanisms," in *Holy Men and Charlatans in the Ancient Novel*, ed. S. Panayotakis, G. Schmeling, and M. Paschalis, ANSup 19 (Eelde: Barkhuis, 2015), 151–166; M. Froelich and T. E. Phillips, "Throw the Blasphemer off a Cliff: Luke 4.16–30 in Light of the Life of Aesop," *NTS* 65 (2019): 21–32.

[51] Vouga, "Formgeschichtliche Überlegungen," 185–186 already mentions several fables in which Aesop figures as a character, but his example of the parable of the Wicked Tenants

explored the way the New Testament authors interact specifically with the Grae-co-Roman fable tradition. In a brief overview article, Michael Wojciechowski has surveyed several possible points of contact, including shorter sayings and motifs in the Jesus tradition and the Pauline letters.[52] In a recent article, Steve Reece discusses several instances where the author of the Gospel of Luke tapped into "the rich tradition of Aesopic fables and proverbs that were widely known throughout the ancient Mediterranean world in the first century CE," arguing that through the spread of Greek culture this tradition had deeply influenced the cultural milieu of early Christianity and Judaism.[53]

The discussion about the extent of the familiarity of the New Testament authors with the Aesopic tradition is related to the recent scholarly interest in the ancient educational context of early Christianity. Several scholars have looked at the progymnasmata, or preliminary rhetorical exercises, to discuss the compositional techniques and level of education of the New Testament writers.[54] Specific parallels have been drawn between the treatment of the fables in the progymnasmata and the compositions of parables in the New Testament. In a recent monograph, Mikeal C. Parsons and Michael Wade Martin, have explored the influence of elementary Greek composition on the New Testament, devoting an entire chapter to fables in relation to the parables. Parsons and Wade describe the fable exercises in the progymnasmata as generally consisting of two parts, the first discussing the characteristics of the genre, and the second containing a number of exercises for its manipulation. Starting with the first, they point out how Aelius Theon's definition of the fable as a "fictitious story/statement that gives an image of truth" can be applied to parables as well. Very relevant is the fact that the ancient theorists discussed the issue of animal and human characters in relation to the realism of the fables.[55] Parsons and Wade

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(Mark 12:1–12; Matt 21:33–46; Luke 20:9–19; Gos. Thom. 65–66) is closer to the fables Aesop tells to the Samians and Delphians (Vit. Aes. G 96–98, 132–142).

[52] See M. Wojciechowski, "Aesopic Tradition in the New Testament," *JGRChJ* 5 (2008): 99–109. On the relation between the Pauline body imagery in 1 Cor 12:12–30 and the fable of the Members and the Belly attributed to Menenius Agrippa, see D. Lynwood Smith, "Why Paul's Fabulous Body Is Missing Its Belly: The Rhetorical Subversion of Menenius Agrippa's Fable in 1 Corinthians 12.12–30," *JSNT* 41 (2018): 143–160.

[53] See S. Reece, "'Aesop', 'Q' and 'Luke,'" *NTS* 62 (2016): 357–377. Cf. the discussion in W. A. Ross, "'Ὦ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ': Luke, Aesop, and Reading Scripture," *NovT* 58 (2016): 369–379.

[54] Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," 1117–1118 already referred to the progymnasmata. Cf. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 477. Scholars associated with the SBL section on Rhetoric in the New Testament also made important contributions, especially with regard to the chreia as a form in which parables can be integrated, see B. L. Mack and V. K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1989), 1–68, 143–160. See also the contribution by Jeremy Lefkowitz in the present volume.

[55] See, for example, the distinction between rational fables with only human characters, ethical fables with irrational animals, and mixed fables in Aphthonius, *Prog.* 21. Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.11.1–26 and the discussion in Dormeyer, *Das Neue Testament*, 143–146.

point out that Jesus mostly tells fables of the rational, realistic type, which may explain why they are consistently referenced with the term παραβολή, instead of λόγος. Many of the exercises to manipulate the fable can be identified in the New Testament parables and can help explain the existence of different versions of the same parable. From this evidence, Parsons and Wade conclude that the parables of Jesus belong to the genre of the fable and should be read as fables.[56]

All of these more recent publications show greater openness to understanding the parables in light of the fable tradition, or even as fables themselves. In his recent dissertation, Justin David Strong undertakes a complete revision of parable scholarship from the perspective of the ancient fable.[57] Strong argues for an identification of the parable genre as fables. Although he argues in line with the original insight of Adolf Jülicher, Strong draws on an extensive knowledge of modern fable scholarship to offer a renewed discussion of genre terminology. Moreover, he remedies one of the shortcomings of earlier comparative readings by offering an in-depth analysis of several Lukan parables from the perspective of the fables, pointing out not only thematic similarities, but also showing similarities in narrative structure, compositional techniques, and framing devices.[58] The result is a convincing reading of several Lukan parables in light of ancient fable composition. Based on shared compositional features, Strong even goes so far as to argue that Luke's source for the parables was an independent collection similar in form to ancient fable collections. Although his dissertation focuses on the Gospel of Luke, Strong suggests various avenues for future research into parables in all three Synoptic Gospels, including the unresolved issue of the relation of parables to shorter comparisons or similitudes.

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[56] See M. C. Parsons and M. W. Martin, *Ancient Rhetoric and the New Testament: The Influence of Elementary Greek Composition* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 45–70. Cf. M. C. Parsons, "Luke and the Progymnasmata: A Preliminary Investigation into the Preliminary Exercises," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele, SBLSS 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 43–63; and M. R. Hauge, "Fabulous Parables: The Storytelling Tradition in the Synoptic Gospels," in *Ancient Education and Early Christianity*, ed. M. R. Hauge and A. W. Pitts (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 89–105. See also J. J. Stigall, "The Progymnasmata and Characterization in Luke's Parables: The Parable of the Rich Fool as a Test Case," *PRSt* 39 (2012): 349–360 discussing the rhetorical device of personification (*prosopopoeia*) from the perspective of the progymnasmata, cf. the reference to *prosopopoeia* in Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:100. For the relation between the progymnasmata and level of education, see S. A. Adams, "Luke and the Progymnasmata: Rhetorical Handbooks, Rhetorical Sophistication and Genre Selection," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele, SBLSS 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 137–154.

[57] See J. D. Strong, "The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Their Form, Origins, and Implications" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2019); a thoroughly revised and significantly expanded version is now published as *The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: A New Foundation for the Study of Parables*, SCCB 5 (Paderborn: Brill|Schöningh, 2021).

[58] See also his contribution on the promythium and epimythium in the present volume.

IV. Summary

The work of Adolf Jülicher has been enormously influential in scholarship on the New Testament parables. In its scholarly reception, the contextualization of the parables among the forms of Graeco-Roman rhetoric has, however, received relatively little attention. The present overview suggests that this context should be a focus of future study of the parables. Although the scholars discussed here all focus on different aspects of the relation between the New Testament parables and Graeco-Roman fables and similes, they agree that these are not fundamentally different genres. Here the difference in terminology and the relation between narrative and non-narrative forms of comparisons are issues for further study. Several scholars, like David Flusser and Wolfgang Harnisch, have described the similarities in form and content of these genres, focusing on narrative structure, characters, and motifs. Others, like François Vouga, have focused on the processes of tradition and textualization. The similarities between these forms is related to a common origin in ancient Near Eastern fables and to a shared Hellenistic context of popular philosophical and ethical instruction. In line with this context, scholars like Mary Ann Beavis have pointed out that many of the parables communicate relatively straightforward religious-ethical messages. The focus on Graeco-Roman rhetoric not only offers plausible explanations of various features of the parables, it also suggests several new areas of research, specifically into the person of the ancient storyteller and his context, the rhetorical exercises for composition of short narrative forms, and the detailed study of the fable tradition beyond similarities in motifs. In the final section of this article, these issues will return as part of the *status quaestionis*. The contextualization of the parables in a broader Graeco-Roman literary context does not exclude the comparative study of parables in Jewish literature.[59] In fact, scholars of rabbinic literature have made various valuable contributions to the study of the parables and their relation to fables. These contributions will be discussed in the following section.

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[59] See, for example, E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, "Parables in Changing Contexts: A Preliminary *status quaestionis*," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1–11.

B. Parable, Simile, and Fable
in the Study of Rabbinic Literature

In the field of New Testament studies, it has often been argued that the parables of Jesus are to be studied in light of the meshalim from the Hebrew Bible or rabbinic literature, because of the close similarities in form and content. Some scholars explicitly reject the comparison to Graeco-Roman similes and fables, arguing the parables are a specifically Jewish form unique to these sources. However, these sources did not develop in a cultural vacuum. The Hebrew Bible contains various shorter sayings and longer narratives, some explicitly labelled as meshalim, that are closely related to the genre of the fable as part of the cultural context of the ancient Near East.[60] Likewise, early and rabbinic Jewish literature developed in a world strongly influenced by Hellenistic and Roman culture. Although relatively little attention has been paid to parables and related genres in early postbiblical Jewish literature, these sources contain various texts that can be classified as such.[61] With regard to rabbinic literature, the study of fables and their relation to parables is firmly established. Early studies of rabbinic parables appeared simultaneously with and in reaction to the work of Adolf Jülicher.[62]

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[60] On mashal in the Hebrew Bible, see K. Schöpflin, "משל – ein eigentümlicher Begriff der hebräischen Literatur," *BZ* 46 (2002): 1–24 and J. Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On fable in the Hebrew Bible, see K. J. Cathcart, "The Trees, the Beasts and the Birds: Fables, Parables and Allegories in the Old Testament," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 212–221 and A. M. Vater Solomon, "Fable," in *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, ed. G. W. Coats, JSOTSup 35 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 114–125. On the fable in the ancient Near East, see F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 287–366 and K. Akimoto, "Ante-Aesopica: Fable Traditions of the Ancient Near East" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2010). On the possible interaction between texts in the Hebrew Bible and Greek fables, see Z. Margulies, "Aesop and Jotham's Parable of the Trees (Judges 9:8–15)," *VT* 69 (2019): 81–94 and E. Ruprecht, *Die Jothamfabel und außerisraelitische Parallelen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

[61] The most complete overview of this material is offered by K. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 42–46. Snodgrass does not refer to the work of Philo and Josephus. Josephus's work not only contains various similes with well-known imagery, but also interacts with the ancient fable tradition. See for example the fable told by Tiberius (*A. J.* 18.174–175) that is similar to a fable found in Aristotle's *Rhetorica* (2.20, 1393b22–1394a1) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), cf. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1:186–187. On parables in Philo, see M. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, TSAJ 86 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 210–246. Philo had a thoroughly Hellenistic education and also had knowledge of the Aesopic tradition, see the contribution by Sean Adams in the present volume.

[62] See P. Bloch, "Studien zur Aggadah (Fortsetzung)," *MGWJ* 35 (1886): 165–187; I. Ziegler, *Die Königsgleichnisse des Midrasch beleuchtet durch die römische Kaiserzeit* (Breslau: Schottlaender, 1903); P. Fiebig, *Altjüdische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904); P. Fiebig, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu im Lichte der rabbinischen Gleichnisse*

At the same time, other scholars published studies dealing with the occurrence of fables in rabbinic literature.[63] In the following paragraphs, several recent contributions to the discussion of the genres of parable and fable in rabbinic literature will be discussed.[64] The focus will be on the two perspectives from which the relation between the genres of rabbinic parable and fable are studied, namely folklore studies (part I) and literary studies (part II). These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive and are often combined by scholars. David Flusser, whose work was already discussed above, and who influenced several other scholars working on rabbinic parables, is a prominent example of this. The multidisciplinary perspective of the study of rabbinic parables could prove to be very relevant to scholarship on New Testament parables, as well as a valuable addition to classical scholarship on fables and related forms.

I. Folklore Studies

Since rabbinic literature contains a significant number of fables known from the Aesopic tradition that are introduced in the same way as parables, various studies are devoted specifically to the fable in rabbinic literature. Several of these studies come from the field of folklore studies. Folklore studies is a broad field drawing from various methods and approaches and studying a range of phenomena like music, dance, festivals, and narratives. It is this diversity that makes folklore a difficult phenomenon to grasp, especially when it comes to literary sources from antiquity. One of the main issues here is the question how literary sources produced by relatively elite circles represent folklore. With regard to rabbinic literature this has led to different positions that often use folklore as a trope to narrate the history of the rabbinic movement.[65] Nevertheless, approaching parables and fables as folk narratives has proven to be very fruitful. Although many other contributions could be mentioned here, only the contributions of Haim Schwarzbaum, Dov Noy, Dan Ben-Amos, and Eli Yassif will be briefly reviewed.

des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters: Ein Beitrag zum Streit um die "Christusmythe" und eine Widerlegung der Gleichnistheorie Jülichers (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1912).

[63] See J. Landsberger, *Die Fabeln des Sophos: Syrisches Original des griechischen Fabeln des Syntipas* (Posen: Louis Merzbach, 1859); J. Jacobs, *The Fables of Aesop*, vol. 1, *History of the Aesopic Fable* (London: David Nutt, 1889); and S. Back, "Die Fabel in Talmud und Midrasch," *MGWJ* 24 (1875): 540–555; 25 (1876): 27–38, 126–138, 195–204, 267–275, 493–504; 29 (1880): 24–34, 68–78, 102–114, 225–230, 267–274, 374–378, 417–421; 30 (1881): 124–130, 260–267, 406–412, 453–458; 32 (1883): 317–330, 521–527, 563–569; 33 (1884): 23–33, 34–35, 114–125, 255–267.

[64] For a broad overview of the history of scholarship on rabbinic parables, see L. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot: An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai*, TSAJ 176 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 20–64.

[65] See D. Stein, "Let the 'People' Go? The 'Folk' and Their 'Lore' as Tropes in the Reconstruction of Rabbinic Culture," *Prooftexts* 29 (2009): 204–241.

Haim Schwarzbaum: Recognizing Common Motifs

One of the central figures in modern Israeli folklore scholarship was Haim Schwarzbaum. Although his contribution to the field of folklore studies is, like any of the authors discussed here, much more extensive, he also published several studies on fables. His major study on the fox fables of the medieval rabbinic scholar Berechiah ha-Nakdan offers a theoretical discussion on fables as well as a commentary on individual fables from a folkloristic perspective including many references to both ancient and modern fables. Schwarzbaum defines a fable as "a fictitious tale told for the purpose of communicating a certain idea, or truth of some kind, metaphorically … through the transparent analogy of actions of gods, heroes, men, animals, and even inanimate objects often furnished by the fabulist with human traits and emotions."[66] Fables are used for didactic and illustrative purposes in different contexts ranging from political oratory to homiletic exegesis. Contrary to animal tales, fables are told for an ulterior purpose and are not limited to stories about plants or animals.[67]

In several other publications, Schwarzbaum deals specifically with fables in classical rabbinic literature.[68] He focuses on commonalities in tale types and motifs between Aesopic and rabbinic fables, which allows for the inclusion of a very broad range of sources for comparison.[69] Schwarzbaum does not reflect on the formal characteristics of genre or the use of the term *meshalim* in rabbinic literature, but consistently uses the terms "fable" or "midrashic fable." He argues that the origin of the biblical and rabbinic fable material, as well as that from the Aesopic tradition, is located in the ancient Near East. The many references to fables of Aesop in rabbinic literature not only show that the rabbis were well versed in the Aesopic tradition, according to Schwarzbaum, but he also argues that several rabbinic stories are directly dependent on the fable collection of Phaedrus.[70] However, the process of borrowing from the Aesopic tradition is not mechanical, but a creative incorporation evidenced by "the particular diction

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[66] H. Schwarzbaum, *The* mishle shuʿalim *(Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), i.

[67] See Schwarzbaum, *Mishle shuʿalim*, v.

[68] See H. Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities of Some Aesopic Fables," in *IV International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research in Athens (1.9–6.9 1964): Lectures and Reports*, ed. G. A. Megas (Athens: International Society for Folk-Narrative Research, 1965), 466–483. See also H. Schwarzbaum, "*Mishle esopos umishle hazal* [The Parables of Aesop and the Parables of the Sages]," *Maḥanayim* 112 (1967): 112–117 (Hebrew).

[69] See for example the discussion of the narrative pattern of the person who cannot escape his destiny in Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities," 467–471. For the use of this pattern in the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, see the contribution by Lieve Teugels in the present volume.

[70] See Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities," 471–472.

employed by the Rabbis, and of the characteristic epimythia pointing out some truth of an ethical, moral or even eschatological and religious nature."[71]

Dov Noy: International Tale Types and Jewish Ecotypes

The importance of the work of Dov Noy for scholarship on Jewish folklore can hardly be overstated. Noy wrote his doctoral thesis under the supervision of American folklorist Stith Thompson at Indiana University. In his thesis, Noy created a motif index of rabbinic literature from a comparative perspective as a supplement to Thompson's international motif index, leading to the inclusion of Jewish variants in the second edition.[72] Subsequently, Noy also published more specifically on tale types of animal stories following the Aarne-Thompson tale type index.[73] This study deals with animal stories and some fables from a broad folkloristic perspective.

In later work on animal folktales of rabbinic literature, Noy further developed the method of folkloristic study. In an article on the "Animal Languages" tale type (AT 670), Noy uses the theoretical concept of ecotypes developed by Carl von Sydow to discuss the form of animal folktales specific to rabbinic literature. The notion of ecotype (or "oicotype") refers to local, ethnic tale-variations of universal tale-types.[74] Noy suggests, in response to the discussion in the field of folklore studies at that time, that there are in fact laws that govern the formation process of such ecotypes. Discussing the transformation of international tale types into Jewish contexts, Noy identifies two kinds of changes, namely (1) "minor ethnic and local substitutes" and (2) "major deviations and re-workings of the narrative structures and plots."[75] The first category of minor changes concerns mostly the substitution of the realia in a story with "judaized" realia. The second category includes more drastic changes to the narratives that can be further divided into three more specific subcategories, namely changes made to the beginning and the end of the story, connections created between the beginning or ending of the story and the biblical text and its traditional interpretation, and external linguistic clues relating the story to the cultural world of the audience.[76] Noy's article deals

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[71] Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities," 472.

[72] See D. Noy (Neuman), "Motif Index to the Talmudic-Midrashic Literature" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1954).

[73] See D. Noy, *Tale Types and Motifs of Animal Tales* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1960 [Hebrew]) and D. Noy, *The Jewish Animal Tale of Oral Tradition*, IFAPS 29 (Haifa: Haifa Municipality and Ethnological Museum and Folklore Archives, 1976 [Hebrew]).

[74] See D. Noy, "The Jewish Version of the 'Animal Languages' Folktale (AT 670) – A Typological-Structural Study," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, ScrHier 22 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1971), 171. Cf. G. Hasan-Rokem, "Ecotypes: Theory of the Lived and Narrated Experience," *NC* 3 (2016): 111 who is a student of Noy and defines ecotype as "a variation in an international type (usually a tale-type) specific to an area or a group."

[75] Noy, "Jewish Version," 173.

[76] See Noy, "Jewish Version," 173–178.

broadly with different genres of narratives belonging to the same tale type, but it does not include parables. Nevertheless, these different dimensions of change can be identified in the parables, for example in the inclusion of fable material in rabbinic sources in relation to biblical texts. The concept of ecotype can thus be helpful in studying the relation between parables and fables in Jewish, Christian, and Graeco-Roman sources.[77]

Dan Ben-Amos: Context and Genre beyond Comparative Folkloristics

Perhaps more than any of the authors discussed here, Ben-Amos has dealt with the theoretical issues of folklore studies. His contributions on context, genre, and the interplay between orality and literacy are especially relevant to the study of parables. With regard to parables and fables, Ben-Amos's work began with his dissertation *Narrative Forms in the Haggadah*, that focuses on providing a structural definition of several oral folklore genres. Ben-Amos subsumes the fable in Jewish literature under the larger literary category of the mashal that includes a diversity of forms that are all based on analogy. He notes that the term fable as understood in ancient Graeco-Roman sources presents a similar situation, as it was not subdivided into strict genres, and concludes that "both the fable and the mashal are methodological concepts and are not terms employed within Greek or Jewish culture to designate narrative genres."[78] Another complicating factor in defining these forms is that they developed over time. Ben-Amos rejects definitions of the fable based on the actors (only animals), their characterization (representing abstract qualities), or the purpose of the narrative (didactic, moralistic, or satiric), instead offering a structural definition based on the sequences of actions (motifemes) constituting a narrative structure (plot). In this approach a rabbinic mashal is a fable if it is based on a number of specific motifemes that can vary in degree of narrative development.[79] Fables in rabbinic literature are almost always introduced in a specific performative context, including an attribution to a named storyteller. From these texts it becomes clear that the rabbis used fables in "their public sermons, exegetical deliberations and social interactions" following "a well-established Greek rhetorical tradition" and reflecting "the image of the sage and the rhetor in the world of Hellenistic Judaism."[80]

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[77] See the contribution by Galit Hasan-Rokem in the present volume.

[78] D. Ben-Amos, "Narrative Forms in the Haggadah: Structural Analysis" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1967), 142, cf. 139–141. See also D. Ben-Amos, "Generic Distinctions in the Aggadah," in *Studies in Jewish Folklore*, ed. F. Talmage (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1980), 45–71.

[79] See Ben-Amos, "Narrative Forms," 142–158.

[80] Ben-Amos, "Narrative Forms," 136–137, cf. 149 where he states that "the fable was mainly employed by the educated rabbis rather than the lower class folk." Most fables and parables originated as literary forms, see D. Ben-Amos, "The Hebrew Folktale: A Review Essay," *JewSt* 35 (1995): 54.

In later studies, Ben-Amos has problematized the concept of genre itself in terms of ethnic variation and historical development. In these studies, the English terms parable and fable are used interchangeably.[81] An important contribution is the notion of "ethnic genre" referring to the fact that cultures have a specific vocabulary to refer to similar forms that are difficult to grasp in universal analytical categories. In fact, mashal is considered by Ben-Amos to be such an ethnic genre term. The concept of ethnic genre opens up the possibility to understand the rabbinic משל, the New Testament παραβολή, and the Aesopic λόγος, as related ethnic genres that do not necessarily overlap in every respect. Ben-Amos further points out that "each ethnic folklore genre has its thematic, symbolic, and rhetorical range and its appropriate time and place for delivery."[82] The concept of ethnic genre fits with Ben-Amos's definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups." Folklore is not defined by its medium of transmission in tradition, but by its performance in specific social contexts.[83] The centrality of context shifts the focus of folklore study from explaining folk narratives through the comparative method of documenting variants characteristic for different communities and cultural context, to a focus on interpreting the significance of these narrative variants in their direct literary and broader social and ideological contexts.[84]

Eli Yassif: The Historical and Literary Context of Folk Traditions

The final contribution discussed here, is the work of Eli Yassif on the history of the Jewish folk tale. Yassif also emphasizes the social function and significance of folk narratives in their historical, cultural, and literary contexts. In agreement with Dan Ben-Amos, he considers folk narratives as "communicative acts, which are created and presented mainly in public and private performances."[85] They can therefore be located in various social contexts from everyday public life to scholarly rabbinic circles and their interactions as seen through the lens of rabbinic literature following established patterns of variation and transformation.[86]

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[81] See Ben-Amos, "Hebrew Folktale," 38–40. Cf. D. Ben-Amos, "Jewish Folk Literature," *OTr* 14 (1999): 162–166.

[82] D. Ben-Amos, *Folklore Concepts: Histories and Critiques* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), xix, 40–63. Cf. A. Shuman and G. Hasan-Rokem, "The Poetics of Folklore," in *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. R. F. Bendix and G. Hasan-Rokem (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 55–74.

[83] See Ben-Amos, *Folklore Concepts*, 23–39.

[84] See Ben-Amos, *Folklore Concepts*, 140–154.

[85] E. Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature in Late Antiquity," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4, *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. S. T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 722.

[86] See Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature," 721–725 and E. Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1–7. Cf. the work of G. Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford: Stanford

In his *magnum opus* titled *The Hebrew Folktale*, Yassif discusses various types of folk narratives in different historical periods, including the fable and parable. He defines the fable as "a story that takes place in the world of animals, plants, or inanimate objects, told in the past tense but applied to the present by virtue of the epimythium."[87] Yassif makes a distinction between "folk fables" that, given their origin in folk tradition, adhere to the epic laws of folk narrative and "literary fables" that are customarily devised to serve a rhetorical purpose in a specific context. He uses the same distinction to differentiate between parables and fables in rabbinic literature, although both are referred to with the term *mashal*. Parable, or "exemplary mashal," is defined by Yassif as a literary-rhetorical form based on analogy using familiar and realistic imagery to elucidate a complex idea put forward by the text. It generally lacks a literary plot and is not intended to function as a story independently from its literary context. Fable, on the other hand, is defined by Yassif as "narrative mashal" with an independent origin in folk tradition as evidenced mainly by "multiple existence." However, he admits that it is often difficult to tell these forms apart.[88] Not only are there various texts combining the formal literary characteristic of the parable with stylistic elements and motifs characteristic of folklore, but the issue is further complicated by the fact that, according to Yassif's definition of folklore, those stories, parables, and proverbs created in the social context of rabbinic scholarly circles can also be considered folk creations.[89] Nevertheless, Yassif's discussion of the relation to the Graeco-Roman fable tradition and his attention to the significance of motifs and variations in reference to the function of texts is very relevant.[90]

II. Literary Studies

Parables in rabbinic literature have also been studied from a literary perspective as a distinct and distinctive literary form used in midrashic literature.[91] Several

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University Press, 2000). Hasan-Rokem's work will not be discussed separately here, but see her contribution in the present volume.

[87]   Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 23.

[88]   See Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 191–209. Cf. Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature," 734–741. Yassif identifies the proverb as another subcategory of meshalim, pointing out that proverbs are often a summary of the ethical lesson of a fable in which the plot is encapsulated in a single sentence.

[89]   See Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature," 722.

[90]   See for example the analysis of the fable of the Fox and the Fish (b. Ber. 61b) in E. Yassif, "Storytelling and Meaning: Theory and Practice of Narrative Variants in Religious Texts," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception*, ed. A. Houtman, T. Kadari, M. Poorthuis, and V. Tohar, JCP 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 6–20.

[91]   On literary approaches to rabbinic literature, see J. Levinson, "Literary Approaches to Midrash," in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. C. Bakhos, JSJSup 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 189–226 and C. Hezser, "Classical Rabbinic Literature," in *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. M. Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 115–140. See also C. Hezser, "Form-Criticism of Rabbinic Literature," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. R. Bieringer, F. García Martínez, D. Pollefeyt, and P. J. Tomson, JSJSup 136 (Leiden:

scholars have discussed the literary origins and characteristics of this form in relation to the forms of Graeco-Roman rhetoric and literature. The work of David Flusser has already been discussed in reference to the New Testament. Here a brief overview of several other important contributions will be provided.

Arnold Goldberg: The Fable Subordinated to the Form Mashal

With his form-analytical method, the German scholar Arnold Goldberg developed a way to describe the particularities of rabbinic literature by identifying and describing the recurring linguistic and structural patterns in these texts. One of the forms that can be identified by comparing and contrasting the formal aspects of a large number of sample texts from rabbinic literature, is the mashal.[92] The form mashal is subordinate to what Goldberg calls the "form midrash," or "midrash sentence," which is a functional form that relates a statement (*dictum*) to a biblical text (*lemma*) by means of a hermeneutical operation on this text.[93] The mashal as a form is one of the possible hermeneutical operations as part of the form midrash. The main function of the mashal in rabbinic literature is thus hermeneutic, as a tool for the exegesis of the biblical text.[94] The form-analytical approach yields a very specific description of the form mashal that is uniquely fitted to rabbinic midrash. It makes the comparison with similar literary forms in other sources, like the New Testament parables or Graeco-Roman fables, superfluous. Although these texts may be similar with regard to motifs and narrative structure, they are essentially different forms because of the difference in historical and literary context.[95]

Goldberg proposes a rather complex distinction between these different forms based on the role of the audience.[96] According to Goldberg, a fable involves its hearers by inviting them to adopt a new way of thinking. The fable can therefore hardly be distinguished from the rhetorical parable ("rhetorische Gleichnis") that also actively involves its hearers in its interpretation since it is situated in an oral context as part of a conversation. An example is the fox fable told by R. Akiva (b. Ber. 61b). In contrast, the exegetical parable ("schriftaus-

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Brill, 2010), 97–110. For an extensive and nuanced discussion of the literary approaches to rabbinic parables, see further Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 20–64, which also includes a discussion of the work of Yonah Fraenkel and Daniel Boyarin. Although these scholars have made important contributions to the literary study of rabbinic parables, they will not be discussed here, since they do not reflect extensively on the relation between parables and Graeco-Roman similes and fables.

[92] See A. Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung: Gesammelte Studien II*, ed. M. Schlüter and P. Schäfer, TSAJ 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 84–93.

[93] See Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte*, 112–119, 199–229.

[94] On the function and structural elements of the exegetical mashal ("schriftauslegende Gleichnis"), see Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte*, 145–166.

[95] See Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte*, 135–136.

[96] See Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte*, 135–140.

legende Gleichnis"), does not involve the hearer in the interpretation of the story, but explicitly provides an application or interpretation. Now, fables also occur as an independent form in rabbinic literature, but this is relatively uncommon. When they do occur, they are mostly subordinated to the form of the exegetical parable.[97] One example is the parable of the Two Dogs and the Wolf (Sifre Num. 157). Goldberg agrees with Schwarzbaum that the narrative part is "eine rezipierte Fabel." However, the fable merely forms the content of the narrative, losing its original rhetorical function and becoming entirely subordinate to the exegetical function of the parable. The fact that it is a fable is thus irrelevant for the form and understanding of the text.[98] For Goldberg the fable is nearly identical to the rhetorical parable, but essentially different from the exegetical parable in rabbinic literature, although it can be used as part of it. Here the paradox occurs that in Goldberg's approach parable and fable can be the same, while still being essentially different.

Clemens Thoma and Simon Lauer: Parables as Religious Narratives with Multiple Influences

Another important contribution to the study of rabbinic parables was made by Clemens Thoma and Simon Lauer. Influenced by the work of David Flusser, Thoma and Lauer set out to produce an annotated edition of the rabbinic parables, focusing on late midrashic collections. In the introduction to the first volume of their series *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, they discuss the literary characteristics, content, and prehistory of the parables. Parable is defined as "eine einfache, profane, fiktionale, nicht autonome Erzählung, die ein ganzheitliches Metapherngefüge bildet."[99] Parables are structured by specific idioms and analogy. The metaphoric imagery of the parables is made up of "populäre, einfache, vom damaligen Kultur- und Zivilisationsbereich stammende Bilder, Gegenstände und Motive."[100] Plot and characters of parables serve the ex-

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[97] Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte*, 140–141. The distinction between rhetorical and exegetical is rather artificial, as Goldberg himself appears to acknowledge when he states that "alle Gleichnisse rhetorisch sind" and that "auch die meisten rhetorischen Gleichnisse Schrift auslegen." The main difference is that the "schriftauslegende Gleichnis" is only found in a literary context subordinated to the form midrash without any possibility of reconstructing an original historical context in which it would have been performed. Nevertheless, the main distinction between "Gleichnis" and "Parabel/Fabel" is that the latter category is essentially rhetorical, even if only known from literary sources.

[98] Goldberg, *Rabbinische Gleichnisse*, 140, 150, 152. On the parable of the Two Dogs and the Wolf (Sifre Num. 157), see L. Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables: A *contradictio in terminis*," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 129–148.

[99] C. Thoma and S. Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen,* vol. 1, *Pesiqta deRav Kahana (Pesk): Einleitung, Übersetzung, Parallelen, Kommentar, Texte*, JudChr 10 (Bern: Lang, 1986), 16.

[100] Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:45, cf. 19–42.

planation of the oral and written Torah, creating a connection to the experience and understanding of the present hearers.[101] One of the characteristic elements of the parable ("Gleichnis"), distinguishing it from the simile ("Vergleich"), is the *chiddush*, or disclosure, which opens up dimensions of religious meaning that one would otherwise have overlooked in a text.[102] In other words, parables are intended for the "allgemeinen religiösen, liturgischen oder halachischen Unterweisung jüdischer Gemeinschaften."[103]

With regard to the literary prehistory of the parable form, Thoma and Lauer discuss the influence of the Hebrew Bible, as well as of the Hellenistic context. The term *mashal* in the Hebrew Bible refers in general to an element of comparison or similarity and only provided the rabbis with a general model, but not with the specific fully developed form of the parable.[104] Thoma and Lauer agree with David Flusser that popular Hellenistic philosophy played an important role in the emergence of the rabbinic parable. Based on a discussion of relevant material from Cleanthes and Epictetus, they argue that especially the stoic-cynic diatribe and its examples appealed to Jewish scholars and preachers as a method to capture the attention of their audience and provoke reflection.[105] Other influences can be found among the fables, which Thoma and Lauer consistently call "Tierfabel," and even Homeric similes. They point out that the definition of the fable given by Aelius Theon can be applied to the rabbinic parables as well. Both genres were originally rhetorical forms performed orally by teachers and preachers.[106] However, the difference in form and content suggests that the rabbinic parable did not develop directly from Hellenistic narrative and didactic forms, but were distinctive Jewish creations shaped by biblical, oriental, Hellenistic, and even gnostic influences, as well as simple observations of everyday life.[107]

David Stern: The Rhetorical Function of the Mashal

A different approach to the study of rabbinic parables is proposed by David Stern from the perspective of rhetorical criticism.[108] According to Stern, parables were originally a rhetorical form performed orally in a specific context.[109] In contrast

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[101] See Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:16–17, 43.

[102] See Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:17–18, 21–22.

[103] Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:17.

[104] Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:15–16, 43–46.

[105] Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:46–50. On Epictetus, see the contribution by Gerard Boter in the present volume.

[106] Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:50. Only a few examples of fables are found in the discussion of individual parables, see 1:64, 175, 282–286.

[107] Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 1:49–51.

[108] See D. Stern, "Rhetoric and Midrash: The Case of the Mashal," *Prooftexts* 1 (1981): 262.

[109] See D. Stern, "The Rabbinic Parable and the Narrative of Interpretation," in *The Midrashic Imagination*, ed. M. Fishbane (Albany: SUNY, 1992), 78–80, 84. The oral setting of

to the approaches discussed above, Stern therefore begins with a discussion of
the occasion for the telling of parables as presented in a number of well-known
stories from rabbinic literature about rabbis telling meshalim. In these cases,
telling parables was a means of expressing opinions that could not be stated
openly. Parables could also be told as an apology, in praise of someone, or in
response to polemical challenges, as is often the case with Jesus in the gospels.
But parables were used most frequently in the context of sermons in the syn-
agogue, or in the study of Torah in the rabbinic academy.[110] According to Stern,
the primary purpose of the rabbinic mashal, like that of midrash as a whole, is
to serve as an ideological medium for impressing the truth and validity of the
rabbinic worldview or ideology upon its audience, while at the same time its
seemingly straightforward didactic narrative form and its exegetical context ob-
scure its ideological purpose. The parables are therefore always rhetorical, even
when used in a literary context for the purpose of exegesis.[111]

The discussion of the rhetorical occasion of the mashal is connected to
reflections on terminology and genre in the broader context of Graeco-Roman
rhetoric and literature. Some meshalim in rabbinic literature are closer in form
to (extended) similes, but the vast majority have a narrative form and rhetorical
function similar to the fable.[112] Characteristic of all of these forms is that they
are fictitious, which distinguishes the mashal from non-parabolic narrative
forms in rabbinic literature.[113] Stern further explores the connection of parable
and fable, referring to several examples of meshalim about animals that closely
resemble Aesopic fables.[114] The Hebrew term *mashal*, expressing notions of
likeness and similarity, can refer to both parables and fables, as narratives that
"draw a connection between the fictional situations they recount and a concrete
one at hand," with the distinctive characteristic of the fable being that it uses
anthropomorphic animals to portray human behavior. These types of narratives
are not unique to rabbinic literature. Stern sees a direct analogy to the literary
form of the *ainos* in archaic Greek literature, which refers to various types of
narratives, including fables like those of Archilochus and Aesop. He defines *ainoi*

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the mashal is discussed by Stern in relation to the oral formation of epic poetry and folktales,
see D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 1991), 34–37 and Stern, "Rhetoric and Midrash," 268.

[110] See Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 4–7, 46–47.

[111] See Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 67–68, 102. Cf. L. Teugels. "Between Hermeneutic
and Rhetoric: The Parable of the Slave Who Buys a Rotten Fish in Exegetical and Homiletical
Midrashim," in *Hebrew Texts in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Surroundings*, ed. K. Spronk and
E. Van Staalduine-Sulman, SSN 69 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 50–64.

[112] See Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 10, 298. Cf. D. Stern, "The Rabbinic Parable: From
Rhetoric to Poetics," *Society of Biblical Literature 1986 Seminar Papers*, ed. K. H. Richards,
SBLSP 25 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 635.

[113] See Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 13–16, 237–246, 300 where he also discusses other forms
of non-parabolic narratives in rabbinic literature. Cf. Stern, "Narrative of Interpretation," 79–80.

[114] See Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 7.

as "allusive narratives told for an ulterior purpose" and applies the same definition to the mashal.[115] The Greek tradition can be further traced back to the ancient Near Eastern tradition of wisdom literature, specifically the Babylonian and Sumerian "Streitfabel," which is also reflected in the Hebrew Bible. It is in the Hebrew Bible, according to Stern, that the first full-fledged parabolic narratives with human characters are found. Nevertheless, there are only a few parables and fables preserved in Jewish literature before late antiquity.[116]

Stern rejects the view of David Flusser that the form was introduced into Palestinian Jewish literature through the influence of popular Graeco-Roman philosophy, as well as the view expressed by some New Testament scholars that the form originated with Jesus. Stern himself explains the lack of parables in early Jewish literature from the social status of the literary form. Parables and fables were "types of popular literature that were delivered orally in sermons or in public contexts," while most "postbiblical Jewish literature is far more 'highbrow', aimed at a very literate audience," suggesting that "Jewish scribes in Late Antiquity did not consider the mashal to be a literary form worthy of being recorded and preserved for posterity," perhaps even due to the popularity of the form among common people. The fact that the gospels are among the very few literary sources for "popular Jewish preaching in Late Antiquity," may explain why the parables appear to be unique to these texts.[117] In conclusion, although the rabbinic mashal is closely related to the Graeco-Roman fable, for Stern it remains a distinctive Jewish form.

III. Summary

The overview provided here is obviously not exhaustive, since many relevant contributions, often combining the approaches from folklore and literary studies, could not be discussed.[118] However, as this brief overview suggests, and the

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[115] See Stern, "Rhetoric in Midrash," 262–263. See also Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 5–6, 51 and Stern, "Rabbinic Parable," 83. Both forms actively involve their hearers and are at home in traditional cultures that still possess oral literary traditions.

[116] See Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 186 referring to the Conflict between the Forest and the Sea (4 Ezra 4:13), the Lion and the Cub (LAB 47:3–8), and several short fables in the Aramaic text of Ahiqar. See for the Forest and the Sea the contributions by Stephen Llewelyn and Lydia Gore-Jones and on Ahiqar the contribution of Peter Tomson in the present volume.

[117] Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 187.

[118] See for example also R. Johnston, "Parabolic Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim" (PhD diss., The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1977), 172–177, 523–524, 620–621; D. Daube, *Ancient Hebrew Fables* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); A. M. Singer, "Animals in Rabbinic Teaching: The Fable" (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979); S. Friedman, "The Talmudic Proverb in Its Cultural Setting," *JSIJ* 2 (2003): 25–82 (Hebrew); L. Miralles Maciá, "The Fable of 'the Middle-Aged Man with Two Wives': From the Aesopian Motif to the Babylonian Talmud Version in b. B. Qam. 60b," *JSJ* 39 (2008): 267–281; and T. Ilan, "A Fable on Two Mosquitoes from the Babylonian Talmud: Observations on Genre and Gender," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity,*

various contributions in this volume show more broadly, it is a false dichotomy to argue that parables are a strictly Jewish genre to be distinguished from the forms used in Hellenistic and Roman sources, especially the fable. Perhaps this is illustrated most clearly by the fact that the Aesopic fables can be used within the literary framework of the rabbinic parable. Although several scholars discussed here do not distinguish between parable and fable, others have introduced a distinction based on the specific criteria of rhetorical function or folkloristic origins. However, both of these criteria appear to make a rather artificial distinction between parable and fable. From the perspective of literary criticism, parable and fable can be defined in similar terms as metaphorical narratives with a rhetorical function. Nevertheless, scholars like Arnold Goldberg, Clemens Thoma, Simon Lauer, and David Stern emphasize that the rabbinic parables are still somehow distinctive Jewish creations. The focus of folklore studies on common narrative patterns and motifs can help explain why proverbs, parables, similes, and fables in various sources from the ancient world appear so similar. These commonalities suggest that a shared cultural repository of folklore was available to a wide range of people for different uses, without suggesting any direct literary dependence. Yet, although it adds a helpful perspective on the composition and cultural context of rabbinic parables, these types and motifs are often expressed in relatively general formulations related to the application or moral of the story, which obscures any idiosyncratic features.[119] The question how the shared cultural repository became uniquely expressed in the form of Jewish parables, as well as what this implies about the social context of these forms, is explored by Dov Noy, Dan Ben-Amos, and Eli Yassif with the concepts of ecotype and ethnic genre. Here the issue of the social location of the form in the interaction between non-elites and elites warrants further study in relation to the literary perspective on rhetorical forms. Scholarship on rabbinic literature offers useful approaches to integrate the study of parables and fables in a range of sources, by highlighting similarities in forms and motifs, while also explaining elements unique to specifically Jewish (or Christian) contexts.

Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 149–159. In a recent article, Lieve Teugels has offered a definition of rabbinic meshalim that seeks to encompass both early Christian and rabbinic parables, as well as Graeco-Roman fables and similes, focusing on formal criteria, see Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables," 129–148.

[119] See A. Dundes, "The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique," *JFR* 34 (1997): 195–202 and Ben-Amos, *Folklore Concepts*, 110–139.

C. Parable, Simile, and Fable: The *status quaestionis*

In conclusion, it is possible to identify a number of issues that are relevant to the study of parables in the New Testament and rabbinic literature and that warrant further study. The different issues discussed in the scholarly literature surveyed in this article can be grouped under the headings of genre, content, function and social setting, and transmission and textualization. Additionally, several avenues for further research that appear to be promising can be identified. One important issue that has only been introduced in passing, is to open up the conversation with classical scholarship on the Graeco-Roman fable, as is done in the present volume. With this in mind some references to classical studies will be added here.

One of the main points of discussion is the definition of the parable genre. Because the terms παραβολή and מָשָׁל refer to a range of forms in ancient sources, it has proven difficult to include these forms in a single definition. In fact, the problem with the ancient terminology for the fable is similar, with a variety of terms referring to a range of forms.[120] Another important issue is the relation to shorter, non-narrative forms of comparisons, including similes and proverbs. It would be useful to revisit the ancient rhetorical tradition to understand the varied use of the terms for these forms, not only in the major rhetorical handbooks, but also in progymnasmata and grammatical treatises.[121] Although it is true that ancient rhetorical sources do not offer a coherent terminology for genre, this does not mean that these forms cannot be compared to each other. Study of ancient rhetorical sources will not provide a coherent genre definition, but is important to gain a functional understanding of how people in antiquity understood the form, purpose, and composition of these genres. The concept of ethnic genre can be helpful in this discussion. It would also be useful to pay more attention to the historical development of these related forms, including for example their use in other early Jewish and Christian sources, and the adaptation to specific cultural contexts. Finally, the discussion could be broadened to include comparison to other short narrative genres, like the riddle and the joke.[122]

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[120] See B. E. Perry, "Fable," *SG* 12 (1959): 17–37 and B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), xix–xxxiv.

[121] On the Greek and Latin terminology for comparisons, see M. H. McCall, *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Simile and Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). Scholars of the parables will recognize much in the extensive discussion of ancient and modern genre theory of the fable in G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature*, MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3–115. On the relation between fable and proverb, see the contributions in P. Carnes, ed., *Proverbia in fabula: Essays on the Relationship of the Proverb and the Fable* (Bern: Lang, 1988).

[122] See M. Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 185–209 and S. West, "Philogelos: An Anti-

In the history of research, the problem of genre has often been related to the issue of content. In particular, the absence or presence of talking animals has been considered a decisive criterion to distinguish between parables and fables. Although the occurrence of gods and talking plants or animals is less frequent in early Christian and Jewish parables compared to Graeco-Roman fables, it should not be made into the main genre distinction over against the many similarities between these texts. Various scholars, especially from the field of folklore studies, have pointed out these similarities in motifs, characters, and narrative structure. It would also be useful to study the differences in relation to the cultural and literary context of these different forms. It seems that the concept ecotype can be useful for describing and understanding both similarities and differences in content.

The similarities in motifs and themes also suggest that these different genres could have had similar functions and shared a similar social setting. Many scholars agree that these forms had an illustrative, instructive, or persuasive function and expressed a popular morality that reflects the social context and uncertainties of a lower or middle class.[123] Although the purpose of the parables in early Christian and Jewish sources has been limited by some scholars to religious instruction and the practice of exegesis, it is questionable that religion, philosophy, and ethics can be separated in that manner in the ancient world. Moreover, as scholars like David Stern have shown, the practice of exegesis can also serve the purpose of ideological communication. Scholarship on religion, ethics, and popular morality in relation to the fables should be brought into conversation with research on Jewish and Christian parables.[124] Finally, the issue of the social setting of these genres is related to the problem of the complex relation between forms of popular or folk traditions and the literature of the elite. It seems that further study of these interactions could be useful to gain a better understanding of the function of these genres. Reflection on the social setting of the groups behind Jewish and Christian parables should be part of their inter-

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Intellectual Joke-Book," in *Greek Laughter and Tears: Antiquity and After*, ed. M. Alexiou and D. Cairns (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 104–121.

[123] Scholars have related the social location of these forms to the morality expressed by them and their place in the educational curriculum. The idea that fables appeal to lower classes and can be used to conceal the truth in order not to offend those in power is attested in both ancient sources and modern theory, see van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 3–78. However, the popular idea that fables merely reflect the perspective of the lower classes is one-sided. As the product of different social groups, the fables present a variety of ideological positions, see N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 16–17.

[124] See C. Zafiropoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: The Augustana Collection*, MnemSup 216 (Leiden: Brill, 2001); T. Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and T. Morgan, "Divine-Human Relations in the Aesopic Corpus," *JAH* 1 (2013): 3–26. At the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Charlotte Haußmann is currently working on a dissertation on this topic titled "Die Etho-Poietik narrativ-bildlicher Miniaturtexte: Die Mythiamben des Babrios und die Parabeln des Neuen Testaments."

pretation. Again it would be profitable to interact with contemporary classical scholarship on the fables.[125]

Finally, the issue of textual formation and transmission has received relatively little attention in the literature reviewed here. Nevertheless, several scholars have suggested that there could be interesting similarities when the textual traditions and variations of these different genres and the transformation from one form to another is studied further. The issues discussed in relation to the work of François Vouga should be addressed, by studying the different forms of similar fables or their use of similar applications, as well as their relation to literary sources or a possible oral tradition. The study of the progymnasmata has provided insight into the literary formation of fables, relevant to the parables as well. Justin David Strong has proposed that fables and parables are embedded in similar literary frameworks and that connections between fables in ancient literary collections can also be found among the parables. Finally, it is relevant to reflect on how the cultural and literary construction of the person of the fable or parable teller could have influenced the formation and form of a specific tradition.[126]

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[125] On the interaction between low or non-elite and high or elite culture with regard to the fable, see the recent studies by L. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) and S. Forsdyke, *Slaves Tell Tales: And Other Episodes in the Politics of Popular Culture in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[126] In a recent dissertation, Kristin Mann has argued that the literary character of the fabulist in the Vita Aesopi, as well as in the collections of Phaedrus, Babrius, and Avianus, provides a context for interpretation of the multivalent stories that are attributed to him. See K. L. Mann, "The Fabulist in the Fable Book" (PhD diss., University of California, 2015).

453–458; 32 (1883): 317–330, 521–527, 563–569; 33 (1884): 23–33, 34–35, 114–125, 255–267.

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Greek and Roman Literature

Fabulous Style

Learning to Compose Fables in the Progymnasmata

Jeremy B. Lefkowitz

Aesopic fables were among the first narratives encountered by students in the rhetorical schools of the Greco-Roman world.[1] While it is common to attribute the fable's place in early education to its putative moral content and associations with children,[2] our evidence tends not to appeal to ethics or morality as justification for the fable's position in the curriculum.[3] Indeed, moral content appears to have been of relatively little importance in students' work with fable-composition in elementary education, as reflected in texts that describe the *progymnasmata* (Gk. προγυμνάσματα; Lat. *prae-exercitamina*), a sequence of exercises that constitute the earliest formal phase within the Greek system of teaching rhetoric.[4] If the sage advice and wisdom often attributed to Aesopic

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[1] See K. J. Freeman, *Schools of Hellas* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 96, who concludes that fables were a fixture in Greek elementary schools of the fourth and third centuries BCE. Indeed, the use of fables in Greek and Latin classrooms continued whenever and wherever both languages were studied in antiquity, through the Middle Ages, until well into the nineteenth century; cf. C. A. Gibson, "Better Living through Prose Composition? Moral and Compositional Pedagogy in Ancient Greek and Roman Progymnasmata," *Rhetorica* 32 (2014): 3–4. As B. Fisher, "A History of the Use of Aesop's Fables as a School Text from the Classical Era through the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1987), has shown in her study of Aesop as a school text, it is only relatively recently that fable has fallen out of the mainstream of classical studies. It seems that fables enjoy curricular success in periods when there is an emphasis on the acquisition of reading and composition skills as ends in themselves, while they fall out of favour when the primary criterion behind curricular design is the perceived literary-historical value of the selected texts; cf. J. B. Lefkowitz, "Review of *Aesop's Fables in Latin: Ancient Wit and Wisdom from the Animal Kingdom*, by L. Gibbs," *BMCR* 12.24 (2009), http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009-12-24.html.

[2] Cf., e. g., D. L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 209, who claims that with regard to the fable's use in early education "the emphasis was on the general moral idea illustrated rather than on the story for its own sake."

[3] See G. A. Kennedy, ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2003), xi. Fisher, "Aesop's Fables," demonstrates that moral content was not the primary rationale for the fable's place in the curriculum, nor were they perceived as having a larger role in teaching good conduct than any other literature in the curriculum. Studying two millennia of the practically uninterrupted use of fables in education, Fisher concludes that, from a pedagogical point of view, teachers have always been as much, if not more, concerned to teach reading and composition through fables as they were morality.

[4] The progymnasmata can be described as "elementary school" texts, but the phrase is mis-

fables were not emphasized in these exercises, then what was it about the fable that earned it a primary position in ancient education? What did future orators learn from composing fables? This article analyzes the progymnasmatic fable exercises in order to gain a clearer sense of the fable's place in ancient education, with a focus on two salient features of Aesopic fable that appear to have been especially valued in the progymnasmata: (1) the simplicity of fable style and (2) the fable's status as fiction that claims to represent truth.[5]

Before turning to the progymnasmata texts and their particular interest in Aesopic fable, let us consider earlier evidence provided by two brief notices, one in Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1394a) and another in Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.9.2–3). Although Aristotle does not mention preliminary exercises in the *Rhetorica*, he does discuss fable along with other forms that later appear among the exercises, including maxim (γνώμη), narrative (διήγημα), encomium (ἐγκώμιον), and others (see below).[6] At *Rhet.* 1394a, Aristotle compares fable to historical exemplum in his discussion of the use of παραδείγματα ("examples") in speeches, describing two types of example: one that consists in relating things that have actually happened (τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγενόμενα) and another that requires invention (τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν); the latter are divided into comparisons (παραβολαί) and fables (λόγοι), "such as those of Aesop and the Libyan ones" (λόγοι οἷον οἱ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυκοί) (*Rhet.* 1393a).[7] Aristotle goes on to claim that historical exempla

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leading to the extent that it suggests a connection to what Anglophones call "elementary" or "primary" school. Scholars generally agree that the progymnasmata were assigned by Greek grammarians to students well after they had learned to read and write and were continued in rhetorical schools as written exercises even after declamation had begun. Thus it is also agreed that the prefix προ- in *pro-gymnasmata* refers specifically to these exercises as being *preliminary* above all to the practice of declamation. We should thus probably imagine teenagers rather than young children as the target audience of these exercises, in any case before they have undertaken other formal training in rhetoric. The term *progymnasmata* first appears in chapter 28 (*Rhet. Alex.* 1436a25) of the handbook known as the *Rhetoric for Alexander*, probably written by Anaximenes of Lampsacus in the third quarter of the fourth century BCE and preserved with the works of Aristotle; see Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xi.

  [5] I do not intend to suggest that moral and stylistic rhetorical training are mutually exclusive. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any educational experience that is not implicated in the transmission of value systems beyond what is explicitly acknowledged as such; moreover, in the context of deliberative rhetoric, any rhetorical use of fable would theoretically be aimed at persuading others to pursue good and avoid bad decisions; cf. D. Hawhee, *Rhetoric in Tooth and Claw: Animals, Language, Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 81, and Gibson "Better Living," 3–4, 7, *et passim*. My point in this paper is to note the explicit emphases in our evidence and to question some assumptions regarding the fable's place in rhetorical education.

  [6] See Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xi.

  [7] Aristotle notes the close association here between fable and comparison (παραβολαί) as forms of fiction; cf. G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature*, MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 78, 113–114. But the connection between the two forms does not appear to have been of interest to the writers of the progymnasmata, where comparison is virtually ignored and the fable is included as the only explicitly fictional material.

are more persuasive than such λόγοι, but in passing he notes the following virtue of fable-composition:

> εἰσὶ δ' οἱ λόγοι δημηγορικοί, καὶ ἔχουσιν ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο, ὅτι πράγματα μὲν εὑρεῖν <u>ὅμοια</u> γεγενημένα χαλεπόν, λόγους δὲ <u>ῥᾷον</u>· ποιῆσαι γὰρ δεῖ ὥσπερ καὶ παραβολάς, ἄν τις δύνηται τὸ <u>ὅμοιον</u> ὁρᾶν, ὅπερ <u>ῥᾷόν</u> ἐστιν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας.

> Fables are suitable for public speaking, and they have this advantage: while it is difficult to find similar things that have actually happened in the past, it is easy to invent fables; for they must be made up, like comparisons, if someone is to be capable of comprehending the analogy, which is easy if one studies philosophy.[8]
> (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1394a)

In classifying fable as fiction, that is, as a λόγος that is invented (τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν, *Rhet.* 1393a; εὑρεῖν, *Rhet.* 1394a) and distinct from "things that actually happened" (τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγενομένα), Aristotle claims that an advantage (ἀγαθὸν) of fables is that they are easy (ῥᾷον) to invent and easy (ῥᾷον) to understand. Analogy or "likeness" (ὅμοια, τὸ ὅμοιον) plays a role in both invention and comprehension: on the one hand, it is relatively easy to invent (εὑρεῖν) a fable that is similar (ὅμοια) to one's current situation (as compared to finding a relevant historical *exemplum*); on the other hand, a fable must be composed in such a way that makes it easy for the addressee to comprehend the likeness (τὸ ὅμοιον) and its relevance to their present reality.[9] According to Aristotle, then, a successfully composed fable is a particular kind of fiction that, drawing on experience with philosophy (ἐκ φιλοσοφίας), furnishes a clear analogy to real life.[10]

Quintilian, in the context of discussing the earliest stages of oratorical education,[11] gives us our first extant attempt at a rationale for working with fables early on:

> *Igitur Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt, narrare sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente, deinde eandem gracilitatem stilo exigere condiscant: versus primo solvere, mox mutatis verbis interpretari, tum paraphrasi audacius vertere, qua et breviare quaedam et exornare salvo modo poetae sensu permittitur.*

> The pupils should learn to paraphrase Aesop's fables, the natural successors of the stories of the nursery, in simple and restrained language; and subsequently to set

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[8] Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[9] See the excellent recent discussion of "likeness" in fable exercises in Hawhee, *Rhetoric*, 76–77.

[10] Given the apparent ease of fable-composition and fable-comprehension, it is perhaps surprising that Aristotle indicates some experience with philosophy as a prerequisite. But it is important to note that the simplicity and easiness associated with the fable in rhetorical or literary contexts will nonetheless have involved elite, highly-educated authors deliberately crafting the fable to be prosaic and simple in accordance with expectations and generic norms; cf. J. B. Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. G. L. Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2–3.

[11] Cf. *quaedam dicendi primordia quibus aetatis nondum rhetorem capientis instituant* (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.1).

down this paraphrase in writing with the same simplicity of style: they should begin by analysing each verse, then give its meaning in different language, and finally proceed to a freer paraphrase in which they will be permitted now to abridge and now to embellish the original, so far as this may be done without losing the poet's meaning.[12] (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.2–3)

Quintilian positions fable early in the curriculum first by noting a connection to "stories of the nursery" (*fabulis nutricularum*; cf. *anilibus fabulis* at *Inst.* 1.8.19), a phrase that implies fables are appropriate for young learners both because they are familiar and because they are fictional (cf. also *versus* and *poetae*).[13] But the primary value of fable here is as an epitome of the simple style (*sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente*; *eandem gracilitatem stilo*), presumably also marked in "stories of the nursery," which the student should preserve in fable-paraphrasing (*narrare*) and fable-writing (*exigere condiscant*). Both Aristotle and Quintilian, then, note the importance of simplicity in fable-composition and draw attention to fable's status as fiction that communicates a clear meaning, even when the fictional narrative has been invented by the speaker or freely adapted (*paraphrasi audacius vertere*; cf. *exornare salvo modo poetae sensu permittitur*).

A. The Place of Fable in the Curriculum

In their reflections on the fable genre and their detailed descriptions of fable exercises, the progymnasmata reinforce Aristotle and Quintilian's emphasis on style and fictionality. Indeed, the exercises in *abbreviatio* (*breviare*) and *amplificatio* (*exornare*) to which Quintilian alludes are precisely the kind of work we encounter in the progymnasmata. While there was no single model governing the rhetorical curriculum in the imperial period,[14] scholars generally agree that the progymnasmata were assigned by grammarians to students relatively soon after they learned to read and write and were continued in schools after declamation had begun.[15] The sections on fable in each of our sources for the progymnasmata begin with definitions and brief histories of the genre before moving on to describe a sequence of fable-composition and manipulation exercises, which included practice in narration (ἀπαγγέλλειν), the declining of forms (κλίνειν), weaving fable into larger narratives (συμπλέκειν αὐτὸν διηγήματι), expanding

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[12] Text and translation from D. A. Russell, ed. and trans., *Quintilian: The Orator's Education*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 208.

[13] For further discussion of the phrase *fabulis nutricularum*, see especially M. Nøjgaard, *La fable antique*, vols. 1–2 (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1964–1967), 1:548.

[14] See R. J. Penella, "The Progymnasmata and Progymnasmatic Theory in Imperial Greek Education," in *A Companion to Ancient Education*, ed. W. Martin-Bloomer (Malden, MA: Wiley & Sons, 2015), 160–162. See also the helpful overview in Gibson, "Better Living," 3–4.

[15] See above note 4.

(ἐπεκτείνειν) and condensing (συστέλλειν) them, adding explanatory messages (ἐπιλέγειν αὐτῷ τινὰ λόγον), and confirming (ἀνασκευάζειν) and refuting (κατασκευάζειν) the substance of their arguments.[16]

Some of the fable exercises are quite rudimentary and mechanical, while others involve a fair amount of creativity. For example, when students are asked to "decline" (κλίνειν), that is, to change the grammatical case of some words in the fable, this is primarily a matter of drawing on one's knowledge of the accusative case to change a passage from direct to indirect statement. When, however, they are asked to expand (ἐπεκτείνειν) and condense (συστέλλειν) fables, there are more options and choices to be made. Hermogenes helpfully provides some discussion and an example in his treatment of expansion:

χρὴ δὲ αὐτοὺς ποτὲ μὲν ἐκτείνειν, ποτὲ δὲ συστέλλειν. πῶς δ᾽ ἂν τοῦτο γένοιτο; εἰ νῦν μὲν αὐτὸν ψιλὸν λέγοιμεν κατὰ ἀφήγησιν, νῦν δὲ λόγους πλάττοιμεν τῶν δεδομένων προσώπων· οἷον, ἵνα σοι καὶ ἐπὶ παραδείγματος γένηται φανερόν, "οἱ πίθηκοι συνελθόντες ἐβουλεύοντο περὶ τοῦ χρῆναι πόλιν οἰκίζειν· καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς, ἤμελλον ἅπτεσθαι τοῦ ἔργου. γέρων οὖν πίθηκος ἐπέσχεν αὐτοὺς εἰπών, ὅτι ῥᾷον ἁλώσονται περιβόλων ἐντὸς ἀποληφθέντες." οὕτως ἂν συντέμοις. εἰ δὲ ἐκτείνειν βούλοιο, ταύτῃ πρόαγε. "οἱ πίθηκοι συνελθόντες ἐβουλεύοντο περὶ πόλεως οἰκισμοῦ. καὶ δή τις παρελθὼν ἐδημηγόρησεν, ὅτι χρὴ καὶ αὐτοὺς πόλιν ἔχειν· ὁρᾶτε γάρ, φησίν, ὡς εὐδαίμονες διὰ τοῦτο οἱ ἄνθρωποι· καὶ οἶκον ἔχει ἕκαστος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς ἐκκλησίαν οἱ σύμπαντες καὶ εἰς θέατρον ἀναβαίνοντες τέρπουσι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν θεάμασί τε καὶ ἀκούσμασι παντοδαμοῖσ᾽, καὶ οὕτω πρόαγε διατρίβων καὶ λέγων, ὅτι καὶ τὸ ψήφισμα ἐγέγραπτο, καὶ λόγον πλάττε καὶ παρὰ τοῦ γέροντος πιθήκου. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ταύτῃ.

Sometimes fables need to be expanded, sometimes to be compressed. How would this be done? If we sometimes recount the fable in a bare narrative, at other times invent speeches for the given characters; thus, to make it clear to you by an example, The apes gathered to deliberate about the need to found a city. Since it seemed best to do so, they were about to begin work. An old ape restrained them, saying that they will be more easily caught if hemmed in by walls. This is how you tell a fable concisely, but if you wanted to expand it, proceed as follows: The apes gathered to deliberate about building a city. One stepped forward and delivered a speech to the effect that they had need of a city: 'For you see,' he says, 'how happy men are by living in a city. Each of them has his house, and by coming together to an assembly and a theater all collectively delight their minds with all sorts of sights and sounds,' and continue in this way,

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[16] The best preserved texts are those ascribed to Theon (first century CE), Ps.-Hermogenes (second century), Aphthonius (fourth century), and Nicolaus (fifth century). These four treatises have been translated into English with introductions and notes in Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*. For a concise introduction to the Progymnasmata texts, see Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, ix. The Greek texts consulted for this article are: M. Patillon and G. Bolognesi, eds. and trans., *Aelius Théon: Progymnasmata* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997); M. Patillon, ed. and trans., *Corpus Rhetoricum* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008) [for Ps.-Hermogenes and Aphthonius]; J. Felton, ed., *Nicolai Progymnasmata* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913); C. Walz, ed., *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Cottae, 1832). On the sources and predecessors of the earliest surviving Progymnasmata texts, see G. Reichel, *Quaestiones progymnasticae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909), 22–30; Patillon and Bolognesi, *Aelius Théon*, esp. cxx–cxxiv and 113–120.

dwelling on each point and saying that the decree was passed; then fashion a speech also for the old ape. So much for this.[17]
(Hermogenes, *Prog.* 2–3)

As this example shows, making fables longer or shorter required preserving the conciseness of expression that is central to the genre, even when the total number of words may fluctuate as a result of adding or subtracting details or speeches.

In addition to fable (μῦθος),[18] the subjects covered in the progymnasmata include narration (διήγημα), chreia (χρεία), maxim (γνώμη), refutation (ἀνασκευή), confirmation (κατασκευή), commonplace (τόπος), encomion (ἐγκώμιον), invective (ψόγος), comparison (σύγκρισις), characterization (ἠθοποιία), ekphrasis (ἔκφρασις), thesis (θέσις), and law (νόμος). Fable consistently appears early in the surviving accounts of these preliminary exercises, usually positioned as the first but sometimes as the second exercise in the curriculum.[19] In comparison with their discussions of the related forms of chreia (χρεία) and maxim (γνώμη), both of which also appear early in the sequence of exercises, the progymnasmata relatively ignore the ethical content of fables. Reflecting on the reason the chreia exercises sometimes come before fable in the sequence, Nicolaus writes (Nicolaus, *Prog.* 17.16–20) that some position chreia before both fable and narrative because the young need to know first how to avoid evil and pursue good. In citing the opinion that the moral teachings of the chreia are more appropriate for young learners, Nicolaus echoes Theon, who claims that the chreia teaches "good character (ἦθος) while we are being exercised in the moral sayings of the wise (τῶν σοφῶν)" (Theon, *Prog.* 60). Later, at *Prog.* 96–97, Theon will rate the moral value of the maxim (γνώμη) even higher, noting that sometimes the chreia is a pleasantry not useful for life, while the maxim (γνώμη) is always about something useful for life (ἔτι δὲ τῷ χαριεντίζεσθαι τὴν χρείαν ἐνίοτε μηδὲν ἔχουσαν βιωφελές, τὴν δὲ γνώμην ἀεὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ χρησίμων εἶναι).

This contrasts sharply with the treatment of fable, where there is no explicit association with goodness or wisdom.[20] We might expect such ideas to surface above all in those exercises that involve the pithy messages attached to fables,[21]

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[17] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 74–75.

[18] The progymnasmata conventionally use both μῦθος and λόγος to refer to Aesopic fable; for full discussion of these polysemic words in the context of ancient fable terminology, see especially van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 79–111.

[19] Fable is the second exercise in Theon (coming after chreia), but is placed first in Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus. On variations in the order of exercises in the progymnasmata, see Gibson, "Better Living," 3; Penella, "Progymnasmata," 82–83; and Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xiii.

[20] But the progymnasmata do recognize the essential utility of fable, in the form of the advice or warning that is built into its basic structure, as Theon (*Prog.* 73–74) notes, explaining that "the reason fable is sometimes called *ainos* is that it provides advice (παραίνεσις), since the whole point of fable is to give some kind of useful advice."

[21] None of the terms carry the ethical connotations of English "moral," but cf. van Dijk,

called "morals" in English and denoted in Greek by terms that prefix a preposition to a word for "story" (either λόγος or μῦθος), as, e. g., ἐπιμύθιον, προμύθιον, ἐπίλογος, παραμυθία, περιμύθιον.[22] But the progymnasmatic exercises that teach students how to draw out the moral of the fable further demonstrate a lack of explicit interest in ethical content, insisting that morals are as adaptable as the fables themselves. At Theon, there is an expressed arbitrariness in the relationship of fable to message:

> γένοιντο δ' ἂν καὶ ἑνὸς μύθου πλείονες ἐπίλογοι, ἐξ ἑκάστου τῶν ἐν τῷ μύθῳ πραγμάτων τὰς ἀφορμὰς ἡμῶν λαμβανόντων, καὶ ἀνάπαλιν ἑνὸς ἐπιλόγου πάμπολλοι μῦθοι ἀπεικασμένοι αὐτῷ. τὴν γὰρ τοῦ ἐπιλόγου δύναμιν ἁπλῆν προτείναντες προστάξομεν τοῖς νέοις μῦθόν τινα πλάσαι τῷ προτεθέντι πράγματι οἰκεῖον· προχείρως δὲ τοῦτο ποιεῖν δυνήσονται πολλῶν ἐμπλησθέντες μύθων, τοὺς μὲν ἐκ τῶν παλαιῶν συγγραμμάτων ἀνειληφότες, τοὺς δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ μόνον ἀκούσαντες, τοὺς δὲ καὶ παρ' ἑαυτῶν ἀναπλάσαντες.

> There can be several conclusions for one fable when we take a start from the contents of the fable, and conversely one conclusion when many fables reflect it. After proposing the simple meaning of the conclusion, we shall assign the young to imagine a fable suitable to the material at hand. They will be able to do this readily when their minds have been filled with many fables, having taken some from ancient writings, having only heard others, and having invented some by themselves.[23]
> (Theon, *Prog.* 75–76)

If the student becomes familiar with many fables, they will be able to match any message to any fable by drawing on their knowledge of fables read, heard, and invented. According to Theon, this can be done easily enough (προχείρως), although not because the student is expected to draw directly on ethical principles or popular morality; rather, what makes this easy is the student's familiarity with models of the genre. Thus, while fable "morals" or messages will always presumably contain some form of advice or warning, it is surprising – given the readiness with which they associate chreia and maxim with "goodness" and "wisdom" – that the writers of progymnasmata texts did not approach the composition of "morals" as having anything to do with morality.

Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi, 35, who notes the use of *moralitas* and *moralisatio* in connection with fables in Erasmus, *Cop.* 2 (256 Knott).

[22] The word *epimythium* (ἐπιμύθιον), introduced in the Aphthonian progymnasmata, eventually became the standard term for "morals" in their familiar position after the narrative. Writing a few centuries before Aphthonius, Theon described "morals" as "gnomic statements that fit the story" (ἐοικότα τινὰ γνωμικὸν αὐτῷ λόγον). See B. E. Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fable," *TAPA* 93 (1962): 336–337; Nøjgaard, *Fable*, 1:122–128; S. Jedrkiewicz, *Sapere e paradosso nell'antichità: Esopo e la favola* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1989), 290–294; van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 82–88; C. A. Zafiropoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: The Augustana Collection*, MnemSup 216 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3 f.; J. B. Lefkowitz, "Innovation and Artistry in Phaedrus' *Morals*," *Mnemosyne* 70 (2017): 417–435; see also J. D. Strong, "How to Interpret Parables in Light of the Fable: Lessons from the Promythium and Epimythium" in this volume.

[23] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 26.

Following Quintilian, the progymnasmata explain fable's position early in the curriculum by pointing to the simplicity of the genre and its status as a form of fiction similar to poetry:

ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ ἐν ⟨ταῖς⟩ τελείαις ὑποθέσεσι δυσχερὲς φεύγοντες εὗρον τὴν τῶν προγυμνασμάτων χρείαν οἱ ταῦτα διατάξαντες, οὕτω καὶ τούτων τὸν μῦθον προέταξαν ὡς φύσει τε ὄντα ἀφελῆ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἁπλούστερον καὶ ὡς συγγενείᾳ τινὶ χρώμενον πρὸς τὰ ποιήματα, ἀφ᾽ ὧν μεταβαίνοντας τοὺς νέους ἐπὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν οὐκ ἀθρόως ἔδει ξένοις τε καὶ μηδαμῶς συήθεσιν ἐντυγχάνειν. περὶ τούτου οὖν πρῶτον λεκτέον.

Just as by avoiding what is difficult in complete hypotheses those who arranged these things invented the use of *progymnasmata*, so they put the fable first among them as being naturally plain and simpler than the others and as having some relationship to poems. In their transition from poems to rhetoric, students should not all at once encounter things that are strange and unusual to them. Let us speak first, therefore, about fable.[24]

(Nicolaus, *Prog.* 5–6)

Theon further develops the association of fable and poetry, noting the origin of fable among poets and claiming that fables are called "Aesopic" in the same way poetic meters are often named for the poets who used them, such as "Aristophanic," "Sapphic," and "Alcaic" (Theon, *Prog.* 73). It is worth noting that, in keeping with the general lack of interest in morality in fable exercises, this flexible view of the adjective "Aesopic" reflects the progymnasmata's avoidance of romantic ideas about a sage or enslaved Aesop as the source of the fable's wisdom.

Following Theon, the progymnasmata treatises offer remarkably sophisticated and worry-free accounts of how the name "Aesop" came to be associated with so much and such diverse material in antiquity. For Theon, there are structural and stylistic elements that make all of this material essentially cohere as a genre:

μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν, εἰδέναι δὲ χρή, ὅτι μὴ περὶ παντὸς μύθου τὰ νῦν ἡ σκέψις ἐστίν, ἀλλ᾽ οἷς μετὰ τὴν ἔκθεσιν ἐπιλέγομεν τὸν λόγον, ὅτου εἰκών ἐστιν· ἔσθ᾽ ὅτε μέντοι τὸν λόγον εἰπόντες ἐπεισφέρομεν τοὺς μύθους. καλοῦνται δὲ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυστικοὶ ἢ Συβαριτικοί τε καὶ Φρύγιοι καὶ Κιλίκιοι καὶ Καρικοὶ Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ Κύπριοι· τούτων δὲ πάντων μία ἐστὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορά, τὸ προσκείμενον αὐτῶν ἑκάστου ἴδιον γένος, οἷον Αἴσωπος εἶπεν, ἢ Λίβυς ἀνήρ, ἢ Συβαρίτης, ἢ Κυπρία γυνή, καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων· ἐὰν δὲ μηδεμία ὑπάρχη προσθήκη σημαίνουσα τὸ γένος, κοινοτέρως τὸν τοιοῦτον Αἰσώπειον καλοῦμεν. οἱ δὲ λέγοντες τοὺς μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζῴοις συγκειμένους τοιούσδε εἶναι, τοὺς δὲ ἐπ᾽ ἀνθρώποις τοιούσδε, τοὺς μὲν ἀδυνάτους τοιούσδε, τοὺς δὲ δυνατῶν ἐχομένους τοιούσδε, εὐήθως μοι ὑπολαμβάνειν δοκοῦσιν· ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τοῖς προειρημένοις εἰσὶν ἅπασαι αἱ ἰδέαι.

A fable is a made-up story giving an image of truth, but it must be understood that the present discussion does not concern every type of fable but only those that add an

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[24] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 133.

explanation of the fable's representation of truth after the telling of the story (as well as those that put the explanation before the fables). Fables can be called "Aesopic" and "Libyan" and "Sybaritic" and "Phrygian" and "Cilician" and "Carian," "Egyptian," and "Cyprian." But among all these there is really only one difference, and that is that the particular genre is made clear in the beginning, by starting with "Aesop said" or "a Libyan man said," or "a Sybarite" or "a Cyprian woman" and the same way for the others. If there is nothing in the beginning specifying the genre of fable, then we commonly call such fables "Aesopic." But those who differentiate among the genres and argue that some involve speechless animals, others humans, or that some touch on the impossible, others on the possible – all such people seem to me to be wasting their time. For each of these particular sub-types in fact appears in each of these so-called genres.
(Theon, *Prog.* 72–73)

Used above in Theon's analogy to poetic meters, the adjectival form "Aesopic" appears here among a list of place-names, as though it referred to a type of identity and not one historical person, possessing a kind of appropriative, archiving force. It follows that the label "Aesopic" was deployed sometimes by default, simply because there was no good reason to call a story by any other name. As far as the progymnasmata are concerned, a fable is a fable, irrespective of its specific ascription, whether it is something invented, heard, or encountered in ancient poets and prose authors.[25]

B. Playing with Fiction and Truth

But one vital difference between fictional literature in general, and Aesopic fable in particular, is the fable teller's claim that the fiction is a representation of some kind of truth. And this, it seems, is where we find a deeper dimension of the fable's value to the larger project of rhetorical training. By working with material that is obviously fictional, progymnasmatic fable exercises aimed to teach young students how to write plausibly and persuasively even when working with material that is ψευδής.[26] Progymnasmata writers occasionally described this work with fictional fables as having an almost mystical value (τὸ μέγα τῆς ῥητορικῆς

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[25] In addition to Homer, Hesiod, and Archilochus (cf. Hermogenes, *Prog.* 1), the progymnasmata recommend models of the genre found in Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.141); Philistus (*FGrH* 556 F6); Theopompus's *Philippica* (*FGrH* 115 F127; cf. Babrius, *Fab.* 70); Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.7.13–14) (cf. Theon, *Prog.* 66). Given the focus on making students masters of fable style, it is worth noting that the progymnasmata make no mention of Greek prose fable collections, such as the one ascribed to Demetrius of Phalerum at Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 5.80, which were likely in circulation at the time. On Demetrius of Phalerum, cf. especially Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum."

[26] I translate ψευδής above and throughout as "fictitious" because there is an explicit contrast with the truth and in the context of story-telling "fictitious" seems more accurate and appropriate than "false" or "lying"; when it comes to plausibility, however, there is also undoubtedly a dimension of "falseness" that must be avoided.

μυστήριον),[27] which was able to "bring the minds of the young into harmony" (διότι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ῥυθμίζειν δύναται)[28] and "contained the seeds of the whole art of rhetoric" (ὁ μῦθος ὡς σπέρματά τινα τῆς πάσης τέχνης ἐμπεριειληφώς).[29] As it happens, fable is the only explicitly fictional (ψευδής) form included in the progymnasmata exercises, a label it receives in Theon's elegant and influential definition (see above).[30] While the genre's (deceptively) straightforward management of fiction to truth (ἀλήθειαν) – described with reference to "representation" or "likeness" (εἰκονίζων) – makes the fable an ideal basis for challenging and suitable exercises early in the curriculum, Theon's elegant definition of fable and refreshingly untroubled attitude toward the boundaries and origins of the genre conceal certain complexities, especially the difficulties packed into the oxymoronic partnering of fictitious speech (λόγος ψευδής) and truth (ἀλήθειαν).[31]

The slightly expanded definition in Nicolaus focuses attention on this relationship by claiming that the representation of truth depends on the plausibility of the fiction:

> μῦθος τοίνυν ἐστὶ λόγος ψευδὴς τῷ πιθανῶς συγκεῖσθαι εἰκονίζων τὴν ἀλήθειαν. λόγος μὲν ψευδής, ἐπειδὴ ὁμολογουμένως ἐκ ψεύδους σύγκειται· εἰκονίζων δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἂν ἐργάσαιτο τὸ ἑαυτοῦ, μὴ ἔχων τινὰ πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς ὁμοιότητα. γένοιτο δὲ ἂν πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς ὅμοιος ἐκ τοῦ πιθανοῦ τοῦ περὶ τὴν πλάσιν.

> Fable, then, is fictitious speech, representing truth by being persuasively composed. The speech is fictitious since it is admittedly made up of falsehoods, but it represents the truth since it would not accomplish its purpose if it did not have some similarity to the truth. It becomes like truth from the credibility of the invention.
> (Nicolaus, *Prog.* 6)

The implicit challenge in the expression εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν is brought out here more explicitly;[32] not only is it expected that the fable will make some gesture toward reality in the attached pro- or epimythium, but the invented tale must also itself be composed in a way that is "similar to the truth" (πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς ὅμοιος), which means it must be composed in such a way that is internally coherent and plausible.

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[27] John of Sardis, *In. Aphth. prog.* 11.

[28] Hermogenes, *Prog.* 1; cf. Hawhee, *Rhetoric*, 83 f.

[29] John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.* 11.

[30] Theon's definition became the standard and remains influential; cf. N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 19–20.

[31] Later writers would find the need to defend the appropriateness of working with fiction in rhetorical education; cf. esp. the commentary attributed to John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.* 13–14.

[32] On the network of terms related to εἰκονίζω in Greek rhetorical theory, see T. A. Schmitz, "Plausibility in the Greek Orators," *AJP* 121 (2000): 47–77, esp. 51; and Hawhee, *Rhetoric*, 82–87.

Leaving aside the pro- or epimythium, which must make clear the meaning of the fictional tale, i. e., the way in which it bears on "truth," discussions of plausibility in fable composition acknowledge two distinct modes of establishing plausibility within the fabulous narrative itself: one mode appeals to knowledge of the observable, natural world, and another that refers to acquired familiarity with the conventions of fictional fables. For a fable to be both fictional and convey a message that is relevant or applicable to the real world, it must first, according to Hermogenes, at least, accurately depict the stereotypical associations of each animal character.

> ψευδῆ μὲν αὐτὸν ἀξιοῦσιν εἶναι, πάντως δὲ χρήσιμον πρός τι τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ· ἔτι δὲ καὶ πιθανὸν εἶναι βούλονται. πῶς δ᾽ ἂν γένοιτο πιθανός; ἂν τὰ προσήκοντα πράγματα τοῖς προσώποις ἀποδιδῶμεν. οἷον περὶ κάλλους τις ἀγωνίζεται; ταὼς οὗτος ὑποκείσθω. δεῖ τινι σοφόν τι περιτεθῆναι; ἀλώπηξ ἐνταῦθα. μιμουμένους τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα; ἐνταῦθα οἱ πίθηκοι.

> They think it right for it to be fictitious, but in all cases to be useful for some aspect of life. In addition, they want it to be plausible. How would it become plausible? If we attribute appropriate things to the characters. For example, someone is arguing about beauty; let him be represented as a peacock. Cleverness needs to be attributed to someone; here a fox is appropriate. For imitators of the actions of human beings, choose apes.
> (Hermogenes, *Prog.* 2)

This view of plausibility resonates with the discourse of "likeness" and "plausibility" in the Greek rhetorical tradition. Fables have to represent animal characters appropriately, where "appropriate" (τὰ προσήκοντα πράγματα) refers to things that correspond to expectations and assumptions about the way *fictional* animals behave and look. As T. A. Schmitz has shown, citing Anaximenes, ancient rhetorical theory accommodated a view of plausibility that was not necessarily grounded in truth or reality, where *eikos* means simply "an attentiveness to the public's assumptions rather than an objective reality inherent in certain facts."[33] By the same token, the implausible would fall short of meeting the public's expectations and assumptions, even when it comes to what one expects of invented animal fables.[34]

While Hermogenes's view of plausibility makes reference to a kind of internal logic or credibility based on familiarity with the unrealistic (yet coherent) conventions of fable-telling, authors of the progymnasmata also viewed fable composition as somehow connected to the realistic, material world of nature. As Nicolaus writes in his discussion of credibility, fable composition:

> ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἴρηται, ὅτι δεῖ πιθανῶς συγκεῖσθαι τὸν μῦθον, πόθεν ἂν γένοιτο πιθανὸς σκοπητέον. πολλαχόθεν δὲ τοῦτο· ἐκ τόπων, περὶ οὓς τὰ ὑποκείμενα ⟨τῷ λόγῳ⟩

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[33] Schmitz, "Plausibility," 48.
[34] Cf. Theon, *Prog.* 76–77.

ζῷα διατρίβειν εἴωθεν· ⟨ἐκ καιρῶν, ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθαι φιλεῖ·⟩ ἐκ λόγων τῶν τῇ φύσει ⟨ἑκάστου⟩ ἁρμοζόντων· ἐκ πραγμάτων, ἃ μὴ ὑπερβαίνει τὴν ἑκάστου ποιότητα, ἵνα μὴ λέγωμεν, ὅτι ὁ μῦς περὶ βασιλείας τῶν ζῴων ἐβουλεύετο ἢ ὅτι ὁ λέων ἐζωγρήθη ὑπὸ τυροῦ [καὶ] κνίσης, κἂν λόγους τινὰς δεήσῃ περιθεῖναι, [καὶ] ἵνα ἡ μὲν ἀλώπηξ ποικίλα φθέγγηται, τὰ δὲ πρόβατα εὐήθη καὶ μεστὰ ἀνοίας· τοιαύτη γάρ τις ἡ ἑκατέρων φύσις· καὶ ἵνα ὁ μὲν ἀετὸς ἁρπακτικὸς καὶ νεβρῶν καὶ ἀρνίων εἰσάγηται, ὁ δὲ κολοιὸς μηδὲν τοιοῦτον μηδὲ ἐννοῶν. εἰ δὲ ἄρα ποτὲ γένοιτο χρεία τοῦ καὶ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν τι συμπλάσαι, δεῖ τοῦτο προοικονομῆσαι καὶ παρασχεῖν αὐτῷ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ μύθου διάνοιαν· οἷον εἰ διαλέγοιτο τὰ πρόβατα πρὸς τοὺς λύκους φιλικῶς, προοικονομῆσαι δεῖ τὴν φιλίαν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα.

Since it has been said that a fable should be composed so as to be credible, we should consider how it may become credible. Many things can contribute to this: mention of places where the creatures imagined in the fable are accustomed to pass their time; from the occasions on which they are wont to show themselves; from words that harmonize with the nature of each; from actions which do not surpass the kind of thing each does – so we do not say that a mouse gave advice about the kingdom of the animals or that a lion was captured by the savor of cheese – and if there is need to attribute some words to them, if we make the fox speak subtle things and the sheep naïve and simple-minded things; for such is the nature of each; and so that the eagle is introduced as rapacious for fawns and lambs, and the jackdaw does not so much as think of anything like that. If there should ever be need to invent something contrary to nature, one should set the scene for this first and should connect the moral of the fable with it; for example, if the sheep were being described as having a friendly talk with the wolves, first you should set the scene for this friendship and anything else of that sort.[35]
(Nicolaus, *Prog.* 7)

In Nicolaus's account the lines between fictionalized animals and real ones are blurred, as terms for "nature" are applied to fiction and to the natural world at one and the same time. It seems that the content of fables must conform not only with the kinds of things people associate with each fable animal; the fictionalized animal speech and behavior must also cohere to some extent with what can actually be observed in nature. In mapping out the importance of "plausibility" in successful fable composition, the progymnasmata writers do not differentiate between the two categories of what twentieth-century literary theorists would label as "natural" and "cultural" *vraisemblance*, where "natural" correspondence to reality is based on universal truths observable in nature while the "cultural" is that which is accepted as plausible irrespective of the realities of the material world.[36] While fables are anthropomorphizing in their projection of human behaviors and thoughts onto animals, the fact that the animals are familiar species and not fantastic or mythological beasts means that a certain amount of attention must also be paid to the kinds of things real animals do in the real world.

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[35] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 134.
[36] Cf. Schmitz, "Plausibility," 59–61; J. D. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 140.

C. Fable and the Simple Style

While ideas about real animal habitats and behaviors are relevant in progymnasmatic fable exercises, it is primarily by dealing with the stereotyped animals of fable that students gain experience matching style and ideas to character types. Of course, knowing what different types of people are likely to do or what is fitting for them to do is of great importance in ancient rhetorical theory generally.[37] The simplicity of fable becomes implicated in these discussions of plausibility in striking ways. On the one hand, the ability to convey an accurate picture of circumstantial details, whether these may pertain to the fictional or natural world, is important to *enargeia*, a highly valued dimension of the "simple style" (Gk. ἀφελεῖα) in post-Aristotelian rhetorical and poetical theory.[38] On the other hand, the progymnasmata claim that, in order for fables to be persuasive and plausible, there must be a certain purity and simplicity in their style. But if language and style constitute the primary substance and significance of fable in the rhetorical-educational curriculum – and, by extension, if fable is a fundamental part of the orator's training in expression and stylistics – then what, exactly, is fable style? What does it mean, in practice, to tell fables with *gracilitas*, as Quintilian prescribes? How does the language, the *sermo* of fable, achieve and preserve its purity?

Nicolaus answers these questions by recommending a fable style that is "simple" (ἁπλουστέραν) and not contrived (ἀνεπιβούλευτον), devoid of all forcefulness and periodic expression (δεινότητος ἁπάσης καὶ περιοδικῆς ἀπαγγελίας ἀπηλλαγμένην), in order that the advice is clear (τὸ βούλημα εἶναι σαφὲς), and what is said (by the speakers in the fable) does not seem more elevated than their supposed character (τῶν ὑποκειμένων προσώπων), especially when the fable consists of actions and speeches by irrational animals (ἄλογα ζῷα). The simple style Nicolaus describes is likened to that used in ordinary conversation (τῆς ἐν τῇ συνηθείᾳ ὁμιλίας).[39] The key terms in Nicolaus's account of fable style and similar terminology used with reference to fable elsewhere in the progymnasmata overlap with contemporary notions of the so-called plain style or *apheleia* in prose writing, established and highly valued in post-Aristotelian rhetorical theory and during the Second Sophistic.[40] The progymnasmata provide further

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[37] N. Worman, *The Cast of Character: Style in Greek Literature* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002), 7.

[38] Schmitz, "Plausibility," 65; on *enargeia*, see G. Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," *RhM* 124 (1981): 297–311.

[39] Nicolaus, *Prog.* 11.

[40] Our most important sources for descriptions of *aphelic* composition are Hermogenes's *On Types of Style* (Περὶ Ἰδεῶν) and the second book of Ps.-Aristides's *Rhetorica* (Περὶ τοῦ ἀφελοῦς λόγου). See also the excellent discussion of *aphelic* writing in Xenophon of Ephesus in K. De Temmerman, *Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 118–151.

links of fable style to the discourse of *apheleia* by describing it as "rather simple and natural" (ἀπλουστέραν τὴν ἑρμηνείαν εἶναι δεῖ καὶ προσφυῆ, Theon, *Prog.* 74); "artless and clear" (ἀκατάσκευόν τε καὶ σαφῆ, Theon, *Prog.* 74); "avoiding the use of periods and to be close to sweetness" (τὴν δὲ ἀπαγγελίαν βούλονται περιόδων ἀλλοτρίαν εἶναι γλυκύτητος ἐγγύς, Hermogenes, *Prog.* 3–4); and using a pure "Attic lexicon" (John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.* 8). Progymnasmatic descriptions of appropriate and persuasive fable style often also refer to nature, animal behavior, and the notion that speechless animals would, when given the power of speech, only manage to achieve a certain level of elevation in their expression (cf. Nicolaus, *Prog.* 11 above). Thus, while style is clearly an acquired, cultural phenomenon (similar to knowledge of the stereotyped behaviors of fabulous animals), there are repeated hints, both in the progymnasmata and in earlier rhetorical treatments of fable, that fable style was conceived of as close to nature itself, implying that ideas about the natural world and real animals may have aided students in figuring out how to write clearly and simply in these fable exercises.[41]

It is reasonable to conclude that these experiments with made-up stories about nature and animals in the opening of the progymnasmata were also implicated in the construction of what it meant to express oneself simply and clearly beyond fable-composition. That is, the exercises in fable composition in the progymnasmata can be understood as developing skills that would be vital to mastering the broader network of dimensions of "simple" expression. In the ancient theorizing of *apheleia* we can identify a number of points of contact with characteristics of fable-composition, including (but not limited to) the following features: the use of animals and animal imagery (Hermogenes, Περὶ Ἰδεῶν 325–326); similarity to oral discourse (Hermogenes, Περὶ Ἰδεῶν 323); brevity (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 31); rusticity (Hermogenes, Περὶ Ἰδεῶν 573); commonness (Demetrius, *Eloc.* 111); nature (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 35); folk wisdom and proverbial elements (Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 81); and metonymical characterization (Ps.-Aristides, *Rhet.* 2.34), according to which attention to behaviors (τὰ ἰδιώματα … τῶν προσώπων), context (τοὺς καιρούς), and circumstances (τὰς περιστάσεις) is preferred to explicit description of character.[42] The exercises in fable composition in the progymnasmata thus develop skills that would be vital to mastering the art of "simple" expression and its broader network of associations.

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[41] For a discussion of ways in which Greek and Roman thoughts about real animals figured in Aesopic fables, see Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," 1–23; see also Hawhee, *Rhetoric,* 70–88.

[42] De Temmerman, *Crafting Characters*, 132.

D. Fable Style in Aphthonius

We can reasonably expect prose authors and poets working in diverse genres to have been influenced by their progymnasmatic training, irrespective of whether or not they display an affinity for forms such as fable, maxim, and chreia in their works.[43] When it comes to authors of our extant ancient fable collections, however, scholars have historically overstated the role of the rhetorical schoolroom; this, in turn, has contributed to a general lack of attention to the literary and stylistic dimensions of fable collections.[44] Thus, while it is demonstrably not the case that all surviving fable collections in Greek and Latin are direct products of rhetorical-school training, we do have a number of well-preserved collections that meet the stylistic demands established in the progymnasmata.

One such collection, ascribed to Aphthonius, a rhetorician of the fourth or fifth century, is notable for its close adherence to progymnasmatic fable-writing aesthetics. The Aphthonian corpus includes both a progymnasmata and a collection of forty fables in Greek prose.[45] The fables stand as a model of *aphelic* writing: the style is characterized by brevity; antitheses and parallelisms; avoidance of complex periods; rare use of indirect speech; and by the commonness of the vocabulary.[46] By way of conclusion, we will turn to three fables by Aphthonius: Aphth. 2 (Perry 399), 17 (Perry 351), and 24 (Perry 289), in order to observe elements of fabulous style in action.

In the first fable, a man is about to kill his goose to make a meal, but, unable to see clearly in the dark, he grabs his swan instead and almost kills it:

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[43] See Gibson, "Better Living," 103–104; cf. Theon, *Prog.* 70: "Now I have included these remarks, not thinking that all are useful to beginners, but in order that we may know that training in exercises is absolutely useful not only to those who are going to practice rhetoric but also if one wishes to undertake the function of poets or historians or any other writers. These things are, as it were, the foundation of every kind (*idea*) of discourse, and depending on how one instills them in the mind of the young, necessarily the results make themselves felt in the same way later" (trans. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 13).

[44] In such moments, the word "schoolroom" implies lack of artistry and literary quality. Theories about the rhetorical origin of the fable genre and, more specifically, of our extant fable collections, have been disproven over the past several decades; see the discussion in F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, trans. L. A. Ray, ed. F. Rodríguez Adrados and G. J. van Dijk, 3 vols., MnemSup 201, 207, 236 (Leiden: Brill, 1999–2003), 1:128 f.

[45] Aphthonius's collection of fables is published in A. Hausrath, H. Haas, and H. Hunger, eds., *Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum*, vol. 1, *Fabulae Aesopicae soluta oratione conscriptae*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1959–1970), 2:133–151. The rhetoricians Libanius, Themistius, and Julianus also include fables among their writings; see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:128–129. Although he does not discuss style *per se*, G. J. van Dijk, "The Rhetorical Fable Collection of Aphthonius and the Relation between Theory and Practice," *Reinardus* 23 (2010–2011): 186–204, offers a valuable overview of the contents of Aphthonius's collection and its relation to prior fable tradition.

[46] See Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:130; Nøjgaard, *Fable*, 2:483; and Sbordone, "Recensioni retoriche delle favole esopiane," *RIGI* 16 (1932): 35–68, esp. 58.

μῦθος τοῦ χηνὸς καὶ τοῦ κύκνου τοὺς νέους εἰς λόγους παρακαλῶν. ἀνὴρ εὐπορῶν χῆνά τε ἅμα καὶ κύκνον ἄμφω τρέφειν ἐβούλετο. ἔτρεφε δὲ οὐκ ἐφ᾽ ὁμοίοις βουλεύμασι· τὸν μὲν γὰρ ᾠδῆς, τὸν δὲ τραπέζης ἐκέκτητο χάριν. ὡς δὲ ἔδει τὸν χῆνα ἀποθανεῖν ἐφ᾽ οἷς ἐτρέφετο, νὺξ μὲν ἦν, καὶ διαγινώσκειν ὁ καιρὸς οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ἑκάτερον, ὁ κύκνος δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ χηνὸς ἀπαχθεὶς ᾠδῇ σημαίνει τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν τελευτὴν διαφεύγει τῷ μέλει. ἡ μουσικὴ τελευτῆς ἀναβολὴν ἀπεργάζεται.

A story about a goose and a swan, exhorting young people to study. A wealthy man wanted to raise a goose and a swan together but for different purposes: the swan was for singing and the goose was for eating. The time came for the goose to meet his appointed fate and have his throat cut. Yet the darkness of nighttime prevented the man from knowing which bird was which. As a result, he grabbed the swan instead of the goose. The swan then declared his true nature by bursting into a swan-song, and thus narrowly escaped from death. The fable shows that music is so powerful that it can even avert death.[47]
(Aphth. 2 [Perry 399])

We can observe a number of features of the simple fable style: short sentences with paratactic syntax (note the exclusive use of infinitives and the indicative mood); parallelism and contrast (ἅμα … οὐκ ἐφ᾽ ὁμοίοις; μὲν … δὲ; μὲν … δὲ); prosaic vocabulary, with repetition (e. g., τρέφειν, ἔτρεφε, ἐτρέφετο; ᾠδῆς, ᾠδῇ; τελευτὴν, τελευτῆς). In addition, plausibility and realism appear to be well managed in this fictional context, as there is nothing unusual or unexplained in the narrative.[48]

As is typical throughout the collection, Aphthonius here includes both a promythium and an epimythium (each refers to "learning," εἰς λόγους … ἡ μουσικὴ), perhaps in order to demonstrate how best to manage both.[49] The promythium simply states the subject of the fable (μῦθος) and what advice it offers (παρακαλῶν, i. e., what it "urges" or "exhorts"), while the epimythium typically contains some more generalized, gnomic sentiment, usually introduced by οὕτως ("and so" or "thus"). But, in keeping with the somewhat freewheeling attitude toward "morals" proscribed in the progymnasmata, there is a discernible arbitrariness in these particular pro- and epimythia. On the one hand, the promythium claims the story urges young people to work, that is, to attend to their studies (εἰς λόγους). But it is not entirely clear that the swan in the fable has studied anything at all; indeed, the swan's singing is explicitly attributed to its "nature" (τὴν φύσιν). On the other hand, the epimythium claims that the story demonstrates how μουσική can postpone death (where μουσική means both "music" and, more generally, "learning"), a proverbial sentiment. But the story

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[47] Translation from L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2002), 146.

[48] For example, the man's motivation for acquiring both birds is elaborated (τὸν μὲν γὰρ ᾠδῆς, τὸν δὲ τραπέζης ἐκέκτητο χάριν), and a clear reason is offered for why he was unable to distinguish between the two (νὺξ μὲν ἦν).

[49] Practically all of the fables in Aphthonius's collection use both a pro- and epimythium (Aphth. 18 is the exception).

turns on the ancient belief that swans sing precisely at the moment when they are about to die, again, because it is in their nature (*phusis*) to do so.

In Aphth. 17, a mother deer attempts to counsel her son, but she cannot live up to her own advice:

> μῦθος ὁ τῆς ἐλάφου νουθετεῖν παραινῶν τὸν καὶ πράττειν δυνάμενον. ἔλαφον ἡ μήτηρ ἐνουθέτει "τί ταῦτα;" λέγουσα· "κέρας μέν, ὦ παῖ, παρὰ τῆς φύσεως εἴληφας, μεγέθει δὲ διενήνοχας σώματος καὶ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι παθών, ἀποδιδράσκεις ἐπιόντας τοὺς κύνας". ταῦτα ἦν, καὶ κυνῶν δρόμος ἠκούετο πόρρωθεν· ἡ δὲ μένειν τῷ παιδὶ παραινέσασα, αὐτὴ τῆς φυγῆς προκατήρξατο. παραινεῖν ἕτοιμον ἃ ποιεῖν ἀπορώτερον.

> A story about a deer, urging that advice should be given by a person who is also capable of action. The deer was being lectured by his mother, "Why do you act this way, my child? You have been naturally endowed with horns, and you are powerfully built, so I cannot understand why you run away at the approach of the dogs." That is what the mother said. Then, when she heard the sound of the hunting dogs in the distance, she again urged her child to stand firm while she herself took off at a run. It is easy to advise action which cannot be carried out.[50]
> (Aphth. 17 [Perry 351])

Aphthonius's fable characteristically avoids complex syntax and difficult vocabulary, depends on simple contrasts (μὲν … δέ), and is markedly brief – as soon as the stage is set and words are exchanged (29 words), there is an action marked by a verb of perception (ἠκούετο πόρρωθεν), leading directly to the denouement (17 words). The promythium opens with an announcement of the subject of the story (μῦθος), using the participle for the advice the fable urges (παραινῶν).[51] Advising then becomes a theme within the narrative, repeated in the body of the story (ἐνουθέτει, παραινέσασα) and in the epimythium (παραινεῖν), and then contrasted with action twice (πράττειν δυνάμενον, ποιεῖν). There is nothing naturally or culturally implausible introduced into the narrative: deer are stereotypically associated with cowardice in fictionalized fables and would have good reason to run from hunting dogs in the real world.

Finally, to highlight some aspects of Aphthonius's fable style, it may be helpful to compare one of his fables (Aphth. 24) to its likely model in the poetic version in Babrius (Babrius, *Fab.* 120):[52]

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[50] Translation from Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 122.
[51] The word παραινῶν appears in the promythia of twenty-eight of the forty Aphthonian fables: 3–5, 8–14, 16, 18–22, 25–29, 31, 33–36, 39, 40.
[52] Babrius's collection, in choliambic verse and produced sometime in the second-century CE, is believed to be the main source of Aphthonius's fables; cf. van Dijk, "Rhetorical Fable Collection."

Aphthonius 24	*Babrius 120*
μῦθος ὁ τοῦ βατράχου παραινῶν κρίνειν πρὸ τοῦ κέρδους τὸν ὑπισχνούμενον. βάτραχος τῆς τῶν ἰατρῶν κατηλαζονεύετο τέχνης, πάντα μὲν εἰδέναι φάρμακα γῆς ὑπισχνούμενος, πᾶσι δὲ μόνος εἰς ὑγείαν ἀρκέσειν· καὶ παρεστῶσα τοῖς λόγοις ἀλώπηξ, τὸ ψεῦδος ἀπὸ τοῦ χρώματος ἤλεγχε. "τί δῆτα – λέγουσα – νόσου μὲν τοὺς ἄλλους ἐλευθεροῖς, νόσου δὲ φέρεις ἐπὶ τῆς ὄψεως σύμβολον;" ἀλαζονεία τὸν ἔλεγχον οἴκοθεν εὕρατο.	ὁ τελμάτων ἔνοικος ὁ σκιῇ χαίρων, ὁ ζῶν ὀρυκτοῖς βάτραχος παρ' εὐρίποις, εἰς γῆν παρελθὼν ἔλεγε πᾶσι τοῖς ζῴοις· "ἰατρός εἰμι φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμων, οἵων ταχ' οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδ' ὁ Παιήων, ὃς Ὄλυμπον οἰκεῖ καὶ θεοὺς ἰατρεύει." "καὶ πῶς" ἀλώπηξ εἶπεν "ἄλλον ἰήσῃ, ὃς σαυτὸν οὕτω χλωρὸν ὄντα μὴ σώζεις;"
A story about a frog, urging us not to trust someone's promises before they are fulfilled. There was a frog who claimed to be trained in the physician's art, acquainted with all the medicinal plants of the earth, the only creature who could cure the animals' ailments. The fox listened to the frog's announcement and exposed his lies by the color of his skin. "How can it be," said the fox, "that you are able to cure others of their illnesses, but the signs of sickness can still be seen in your own face?" Boastful claims end up exposing themselves.[53]	That denizen of the swamps who likes the shade, the frog, who lives beside the ditches, once came forth on dry land and bragged to all the creatures: "I'm a physician, skilled in the use of drugs such as no one, doubtless, knows, not even Paean who lives on Olympus, physician to the gods." "And how," said a fox, "can you cure someone else, when you can't save yourself from being so deathly pale?"[54]

A number of differences emerge from the comparison: the fable's "message" in Babrius is delivered exclusively by one of the characters,[55] while Aphthonius frames his version with both a pro- and epimythium; the poetic, kenning-like naming of the frog in Babrius (ὁ τελμάτων ἔνοικος ὁ σκιῇ χαίρων) is replaced by the straightforward and prosaic noun βατράχου in Aphthonius; repetition and parallelism is avoided in Babrius, but occurs in Aphthonius (πάντα μὲν … πᾶσι δὲ, νόσου μὲν … νόσου δὲ); the words ἰατρός and φάρμακον appear in both Babrius and Aphthonius, but only Aphthonius uses (indeed, repeats) words for health (ὑγείαν) and sickness (νόσου … νόσου), making the concerns of the story explicit; Babrius describes the frog's condition indirectly (οὕτω χλωρόν), while Aphthonius is again more direct (νόσου δὲ φέρεις ἐπὶ τῆς ὄψεως σύμβολον).

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53   Translation from Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 148.
54   Translation from Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 157.
55   Nøjgaard, *Fable*, labelled this the "réplique finale"; cf. Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:443.

Here and throughout the collection, Aphthonius follows the lead of the pro-gymnasmata in providing models of *aphelic* Greek prose, avoiding implausibility with respect to nature and animal behavior, and attaching simple messages to each narrative, even when the ethical import or gnomic elements are neither particularly edifying nor entirely clear. The purity of expression and prosaic simplicity of Aphthonian fable provide useful models for students early in the process of mastering the simple style. In using natural, conversational language to create fictions that are internally plausible, with messages attached that make simple gestures toward a real-life application, Aphthonius's fabulous style demonstrates the basic lessons learned from the exercises in the progymnasmata.

E. Conclusion

Aesopic fables were introduced early in the progymnasmatic curriculum because they allowed teachers and students to focus on fundamental aspects of Greek prose composition, such as narration (ἀπαγγέλλειν), declension (κλίνειν),[56] expansion (ἐπεκτείνειν), contraction (συστέλλειν), confirmation (ἀνασκευάζειν), and refutation (κατασκευάζειν), all of which would be applicable to writing in many different forms and genres. As brief, self-contained, and complete units of meaning, fables minimize difficulties of comprehension and memorization, and they provide relatively easy material for beginner-level students developing these essential, transferable skills.

In addition, the fable exercises that appear to have been more specifically geared to fable-composition, such as those involving the weaving of fable into a larger narrative (συμπλέκειν αὐτὸν διηγήματι) and, above all, the addition of the fable's characteristic explanatory message (ἐπιλέγειν αὐτῷ τινὰ λόγον), were also undoubtedly useful in other arenas. But, as we have seen, there are also a number of guidelines and principles related to style articulated in the progymnasmata that suggest another set of benefits gained from an encounter with fables early in the curriculum, beyond those of the individual exercises. For the writers of the progymnasmata, the fable was the very model of the simple style. The lessons learned from making animals speak must have been formative in conceptions of simplicity and purity of expression for generations of Greek writers. Furthermore, the progymnasmata link style to plausibility and persuasiveness; beginning with Theon, the authors of the progymnasmata texts define fable as a fictional representation of the truth (μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν), thereby challenging students to craft plausible fictions by drawing on both their knowledge of the observable, natural world and their fa-

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[56] Although basic grammar and morphology would have been learned before students began the progymnasmata, fable exercises in "declension" further developed these skills, with an emphasis on variation in the use of direct and indirect discourse; see, e. g., Theon, *Prog.* 74.

miliarity with the conventions of fictional narratives. Although they were placed quite early in the sequence, the fable exercises thus cultivated a complex and nuanced conception of plausibility, one that applied to both truth and fiction, which would be indispensable for future orators.

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"Look at Heracles!"

The Role of Similes and Exempla
in Epictetus's Philosophical Teaching

Gerard J. Boter

David Flusser devotes a chapter of his book on the rabbinic and New Testament parables to the origin and prehistory of the Jewish parables.[1] At the end of this chapter he tentatively concludes that "es eine griechische Vorgeschichte der jüdischen Gleichnisse gab."[2] Flusser's hypothesis is based on the comparison of a number of anecdotes and similes told by Greek authors such as the physician Hippocrates, the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes, and the fables of the Aesopic corpus. Flusser repeatedly refers to similes in Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher of the first century of our era. For example, in chapter 7 of the *Encheiridion*[3] Epictetus compares the position of man to the position of sailors who are collecting shellfish and bulbs on the beach: when the captain calls the sailors telling them that they should get back to the ship immediately, they leave behind the bulbs and shellfish. By the same token man must obey God's orders and give up his wife and children if God bids him to do so. This simile is quoted in full by Flusser, who comments: "Jesus hätte dasselbe Bild zu einem andern Zweck verwenden können: um klarzumachen, dass man auf alles verzichten muss, auf das Eigentum und auf die Verbindung mit der eigenen Familie, wenn man sich dazu entscheidet, ihm zu folgen."[4] Flusser pays ample attention to Jesus's parable of the playing

[1] D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 141–160.

[2] See Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse,* 156–158. Flusser admits that his thesis cannot be proved beyond doubt: "In unserm Falle aber ist ein griechisch-popularphilosophischer Einfluss auf die Entstehung der rabbinischen Gleichnisse wahrscheinlich. Ganz zu bezweifeln ist er jedenfalls nicht" (156); "Unsere Annahme eines griechischen Einflusses auf die Gattung der jüdischen Gleichnisse muss bisweilen hypothetisch bleiben" (158).

[3] For the *Discourses* I have used the standard edition by H. Schenkl, *Epicteti Dissertationes ab Arriano Digestae*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1916). Translations of the *Discourses* are borrowed from W. A. Oldfather, *Epictetus: The* Discourses *as Reported by Arrian, the* Manual*, and Fragments*, LCL, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1925 [vol. 1], 1928 [vol. 2]), with adaptations. References to the *Discourses* have the abbreviation *Disc.*, references to the *Encheiridion* the abbreviation *Ench.*

[4] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 149–150. Flusser refers to this simile again on pages 155–166.

children, told in Matt 11:16–19 and Luke 7:31–35. With regard to the message of this parable Flusser comments: "Im Gleichnis Jesu sind die unbeständigen Kinder das Spiegelbild für unvernünftige Erwachsene."[5] He then draws attention to similar Epictetean images in *Disc.* 3.15.5, where Epictetus points out that children do not concentrate on one single activity, and to 4.7.5, where we read "as children playing with potsherds strive with one another about the game but take no thought about the potsherds themselves." Flusser compares the latter passage to the parable of Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazar, who illustrates the worthlessness of possessions by pointing out that children use stones of fruits as the stake for their games but abandon these once the game is finished (Sem. R. Hiyya 3:5); Flusser comments: "Sowohl das Gleichnis des Rabbi Schimeon als auch das Gleichnis des Rabbi Nathan könnten auch bei Epiktet stehen. Andererseits wären auch die spielenden Kinder Epiktets kein schlechtes Thema für ein rabbinisches Gleichnis. Auch Jesus könnte Ähnliches gesagt haben …. Wie dem im Detail auch sei – die Wankelmütigkeit der spielenden Kinder ist jedenfalls ein für die Griechen, für die Rabbinen und für Jesus mögliches Gleichnisbild!"[6]

I do not wish to engage in the discussion of whether there may be Greek sources for the rabbinic and New Testament parables. Nor will I discuss the question of whether Epictetus had knowledge of the New Testament. Nowadays, the prevailing opinion is that Epictetus did know Christians, possibly already in his youth in Hierapolis, but that he may only have had indirect knowledge of Christian thought. It is virtually excluded that he knew writings of the New Testament, let alone that in his own teaching he underwent influence of the New Testament.[7] However, Flusser's thesis evokes the interesting question of how Epictetus, in his philosophical lectures, makes use of similes and related strategies.

In the present contribution, I will give an overview of the ways in which Epictetus incorporates similes and examples in his teaching. As I will show, his usage of similes and examples is in accordance with ancient literary theory on rhetoric in which examples (παραδείγματα, *exempla*) and similes (παραβολαί, *similitudines*) are treated under one heading.[8] Thus Aristotle, in his *Rhet.*

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[5] See Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 151–155. The quotation is found on p. 154.

[6] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 155. The parable of R. Nathan was related by Flusser on p. 24. The other Epictetean passages quoted by Flusser are the following. In *Disc.* 3.22.2–4 the order of the cosmos is compared to a household in which the house-owner stands for God; Flusser relates this image to the father of the two sons in Matt 21:28–32 (149). In *Disc.* 1.15.6–8 Epictetus says that a fig tree needs time in order to bear fruit; this evokes Jesus's story in Mark 4:26–29 (150).

[7] For a thorough discussion of the issue, see now S. Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst: Epiktets Theologie und ihr Verhältnis zum Neuen Testament," in *Epiktet: Was ist wahre Freiheit?,* ed. S. Vollenweider et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 125–131.

[8] An interesting account of the relevance of ancient rhetoric for the New Testament parables is given by R. Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables and Ancient Rhetoric: The Contributions of Aristotle and Quintilian to the Form Criticism of the Parables," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse*

1393a28–b8, divides examples into historical examples (παραδείγματα in a narrow sense) and fictional examples, subdividing the latter group into similes (παραβολαί)[9] and fables (λόγοι).[10] According to Aristotle, examples belong to the realm of κοιναὶ πίστεις, "general means of persuasion" (*Rhet.* 1393a23). Quintilian discusses the use of examples in his *Inst.* 5.11.1–31.[11] He distinguishes three main groups: historical examples, fictional examples and similes.[12] The only difference with Aristotle's division is that Quintilian does not bring together similes and fables in one subgroup but regards them as separate categories besides historical examples. Quintilian's category of historical examples also comprises mythological examples, witness his reference to Vergil's *Aen.* 2.540 in *Inst.* 5.11.14. These historical examples, fictional examples, and similes were used by rhetoricians to persuade the audience in the assembly or in the courtroom.

Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte, ed. R. Zimmermann and G. Kern (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 238–258. See also R. Zimmermann et al., eds., *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 20–21.

[9] I have chosen to translate Aristotle's παραβολαί as "similes" and not as "parables" because, in the context of this volume, this might create confusion. Aristotle defines the παραβολή as follows (*Rhet.* 1393b4–7): παραβολὴ δὲ τὰ Σωκρατικά, οἷον εἴ τις λέγοι ὅτι οὐ δεῖ κληρωτοὺς ἄρχειν· ὅμοιον γὰρ ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις τοὺς ἀθλητὰς κληροίη μὴ οἳ δύνανται ἀγωνίζεσθαι ἀλλ' οἳ ἂν λάχωσιν, ἢ τῶν πλωτήρων ὅντινα δεῖ κυβερνᾶν κληρώσειεν, ὡς δέον τὸν λαχόντα ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸν ἐπιστάμενον, "Comparison (παραβολή) is illustrated by the sayings of Socrates; for instance, if one were to say that magistrates should not be chosen by lot, for this would be the same as choosing as representative athletes not those competent to contend, but those on whom the lot falls; or as choosing any of the sailors as the man who should take the helm, as if it were right that the choice should be decided by lot, not by a man's knowledge." (trans. Freese, LCL). In the New Testament παραβολή is the current term for "parable."

[10] See Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables," 245, for a schematic arrangement of Aristotle's division.

[11] Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables," 252, gives a schematic structure of Quintilian's analysis.

[12] The similes are subdivided into similes in the narrow sense (*similitudines*, *Inst.* 5.11.22 and 5.11.26–31) and comparisons (*collationes*, which is Cicero's translation of παραβολαί, *Inst.* 5.11.23–25). At the start of the discussion of similes and examples Quintilian remarks (*Inst.* 5.11.1) that in general Latin authors translate the Greek word παραβολή as *similitudo*. Quintilian himself uses the word in a more specific sense (*Inst.* 5.11.23): "Nam parabole, quam Cicero conlationem vocat, longius res quae comparentur repetere solet. Nec hominum modo inter se opera similia spectantur (ut Cicero pro Murena facit: 'quod si e portu solventibus qui iam in portum ex alto invehuntur praecipere summo studio solent et tempestatum rationem et praedonum et locorum, quod natura adfert ut iis faveamus qui eadem pericula quibus nos perfuncti sumus ingrediantur: quo tandem me animo esse oportet, prope iam ex magna iactatione terram videntem, in hunc, cui video maximas tempestates esse subeundas?') sed et a mutis atque etiam inanimis interim ⟨similitudo⟩ huius modi ducitur," "*Parabolē*, which Cicero calls *collatio* ('comparison'), often fetches its terms of comparison from a distance. Nor is it only human actions which are compared with each other (as by Cicero, in *Pro Murena*: 'But if sailors who are coming into harbour from the sea often take great trouble to give those who are setting out information about storms and pirates and coasts – for nature makes us think kindly of those who are entering on dangers we have been through ourselves – how, I ask, should I feel, who am now almost in sight of land after all my tossing at sea, towards this man, who, I know, will have great storms to weather?') – but ⟨similes⟩ of this kind can be drawn also from animals and even from inanimate objects." (trans. Russell, LCL).

Quintilian (*Inst.* 5.11.5) assigns the same role to examples and similes as Aristotle does: they are relevant to proof (*ad probationem pertinent*).

Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.11.5 remarks in passing that similes are sometimes employed for embellishment (*similitudo adsumitur interim et ad orationis ornatum*). With regard to Epictetus's use of quotations (which might be regarded as a subcategory of historical examples, as will be illustrated below) Wehner argues that in a few cases these quotations serve to embellish Epictetus's own account.[13] This is not the place to discuss Wehner's hypothesis in detail but to my mind Epictetus has only one goal, namely to persuade his audience. An internal argument in favor of this thesis is furnished by the fact that Epictetus often speaks scornfully about people who do their best to impress their audience with embellished speech, e. g., at *Disc.* 3.23.19–21, where he mockingly makes someone remark about the opening of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*: ʽπολλάκις ἐθαύμασα, τίσιν ποτε λόγοις’. οὔ· ἀλλὰ ʽτίνι ποτε λόγῳ’· τοῦτ’ ἐκείνου λειότερον, "ʽI have often wondered by what arguments ever’ – no, but ʽby what argument ever’ – this form is smoother than the other!" This absence of interest in sophisticated formulations makes it improbable that Epictetus used similes and exempla for literary embellishment.

My examination of Epictetus's usage of similes and examples will follow Aristotle's and Quintilian's categorization. Two of Aristotle's and Quintilian's three categories are found in Epictetus, namely historical examples and similes.[14] Fables are totally absent from Epictetus's works. One can only guess at the reasons lying behind this absence; maybe he disliked the genre; maybe he did not find it worthy of philosophical instruction. Hence, the following discussion will be divided into two parts. First, I will examine the ample use of similes in Epictetus's work; the bulk of this section is devoted to the *Discourses*; in the final section I will turn to the *Encheiridion*.[15] Secondly, I will analyze Epictetus's usage of examples. We often find references to Greek mythology in Epictetus's work, besides references to historical events and events experienced by Epictetus himself. As we will see, a characteristic of Epictetus's usage of examples is that his audience was so familiar with this mythological corpus that in many cases the mere mention of a mythological character suffices to evoke the (part of the) story which Epictetus uses to illustrate what he wants to convey to his audience. By the same token, when Epictetus refers to historical characters and events he usually confines himself to mere name dropping or briefly sketching the event, assuming that his audience knows what he is talking about.

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[13] B. Wehner, *Die Funktion der Dialogstruktur in Epiktets* Diatriben (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000), 220–222.

[14] In this respect he resembles such predecessors as Teles (third century BCE) and his own master Musonius Rufus.

[15] The difference in character between the *Discourses* (*Diatribai*) and the *Encheiridion* will be discussed below.

Before I embark on this project of examining Epictetus's usage of similes and examples, I will first provide a short introduction on Epictetus, his philosophical ideas, and his works. This introduction is important for understanding Epictetus's usage of similes and examples. While the explicit lesson to be drawn from these similes and examples can be present or absent, the overall purpose of Epictetus's similes and examples is one of persuasion: they serve to bring home to the audience the necessity of accepting and practicing the tenets of Stoic philosophy.

A. Epictetus's Philosophical Teaching

Epictetus (ca. 50–130 CE) is one of the three major representatives of the so-called New Stoa, the others being Seneca and the emperor Marcus Aurelius.[16] According to Epictetus, the world can be divided into two categories: the things which are under our control (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) and the things which are not under our control (τὰ οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν). To the latter category belong such things as health, reputation and possessions. The former category consists of our opinion, choice, desire, aversion etcetera. The category of τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν belongs to the domain of our προαίρεσις, which can be rendered as "moral choice." The προαίρεσις enables us to distinguish between the things under our control and the things not under our control thus allowing us to spend all our energy on the first category. In our daily life, we are constantly confronted by φαντασίαι, "impressions," for instance the impression that the death of a beloved person is a bad thing. We should always test our impressions by applying the standard (κανών), "is it under my control or not under my control?" If we confuse the categories of the things under our control and not under our control we will inevitably become unhappy sooner or later.

Everything in the world happens according to a divine plan. Because God is absolutely good and almighty, everything that happens is in itself good. Therefore we should aim at accepting and even welcoming everything that happens to us. This is our freedom: we have the freedom to accept or not to accept. We cannot choose *what* will happen to us but we can choose *how* we deal with what happens to us. This way of living is called "living in accordance with nature" by the Stoics.

The bulk of the extant works by Epictetus is constituted of the four extant books of *Discourses* (Gk. Διατριβαί, *Diatribai*; Lat. *Dissertationes*), written down by his pupil Arrian, which vary in length from eight lines (*Disc.* 2.25) to well over thirty pages (*Disc.* 4.1). It is certain that there must have been more

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[16] An excellent recent account of Epictetus's life and philosophy, with extensive bibliography, is given by P. P. Fuentes González, "Épictète," in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. 3, ed. R. Goulet (Paris: CNRS, 2000), 106–151.

books but they have been lost.[17] However, we also have the *Encheiridion* or *Manual*, which is based on the *Discourses*.[18] Although some scholars assume that Epictetus is responsible for at least part of the composition of the written works,[19] it is almost universally accepted that Epictetus did not publish anything himself: everything that remains of his teaching is owing to the work of his pupil Arrian. Most scholars believe that the *Discourses* are a more or less verbatim report of Epictetus's actually delivered lectures. The *Encheiridion* is commonly described as a compilation of excerpts from the *Discourses*. Elsewhere, I have illustrated that this is a gross simplification.[20] In reality, the *Encheiridion* is Arrian's creative digestion of Epictetus's philosophy. Accordingly, the appreciation of the works must be founded on a quite different basis. The *Discourses* are presented by Arrian as verbatim reports of Epictetus's actual teaching; in an introductory letter to Lucius Gellius he even claims that the *Discourses* were initially divulged against his intention.[21] In composing the *Encheiridion* Arrian had two types of readers in mind: for those already acquainted with Epictetus's philosophy (either by personally attending Epictetus's teaching or by reading the *Discourses* as reported by Arrian) it could serve as an *aide-mémoire*; for the uninitiated it presented a crash course in Epictetean philosophy.[22]

The genre of Epictetus's *Discourses* has been the subject of much debate. In the medieval manuscripts of the *Discourses* we find the title Διατριβαί, and this is also how the sixth-century Greek philosopher Simplicius designates the work in his commentary on the *Encheiridion*.[23] The Greek word διατριβή means "pastime" (LSJ, s. v. 1), "serious occupation," "discourse," "short ethical treatise or lecture," "school of philosophy" (LSJ, s. v. 2). The diatribe as a literary genre is an invention of late nineteenth century scholarship. The matter has been dis-

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[17] See Fuentes González, "Épictète," 119–121. The fragments from the lost books of the *Discourses* are collected in Schenkl, *Epicteti Dissertationes ab Arriano Digestae,* 455–475.

[18] For the *Encheiridion* I have used the editions by G. Boter, *The* Encheiridion *of Epictetus and Its Three Christian Adaptations* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), and Boter, *Epicteti Encheiridion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), in which the line numbers differ somewhat from those in Schenkl's edition. Translations of the *Encheiridion* are borrowed from Boter, Encheiridion *of Epictetus.*

[19] See for instance H. W. F. Stellwag, *Epictetus: Het Eerste Boek der* Diatriben: *Inleiding, vertaling en commentaar* (Amsterdam: Paris, 1933), 11–13; R. Dobbin, *Epictetus: Discourses Book I* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), xxi–xxiii.

[20] G. Boter, "From Discourses to Handbook: The *Encheiridion* of Epictetus as a Practical Guide to Life," in *Knowledge, Text and Practice in Ancient Technical Writing,* ed. M. Formisano and Ph. van der Eijk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 170–174.

[21] This introductory letter has been the subject of much debate. For a full discussion, see Wehner, *Dialogstruktur,* 27–36.

[22] See Boter, "From Discourses to Handbook," 181–183.

[23] Simplicius, *In Epict.* P(raefatio), 9–11 (in I. Hadot, *Simplicius: Commentaire sur le* Manuel *d'Épictète: Introduction et édition critique du texte grec* [Leiden: Brill, 1996]): Τὰ δὲ αὐτὰ σχεδὸν καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ὀνομάτων σποράδην φέρεται ἐν τοῖς Ἀρριανοῦ τῶν Ἐπικτήτου διατριβῶν γραφομένοις, "The same material can be found in practically the same words at various points in Arrian's writings on the discourses of Epictetus."

cussed exhaustively by Fuentes González whose findings are summarized in the abstract as follows: "Elle [the diatribe, GJB] se laisse appréhender comme une stratégie de communication fondée sur un rapport pédagogique (réel ou fictif) impliquant un maître et un disciple, ou quelqu'un qui est envisagé comme tel (notamment mais pas uniquement dans un contexte philosophique)."[24]

To sum up: Epictetus's only goal in his *Discourses* is to bring home to his pupils that they should put into practice what they learn in the classroom, namely to exclusively pay attention to the things under our control and to happily accept everything that befalls us. Similes and examples serve to illustrate and corroborate this message.

B. Similes

I. Similes for Philosophy: Medicine, Athletics and Military Life

In order to characterize the essence of philosophy Epictetus uses three recurrent metaphors, of medicine, athletics and military life.[25] In the metaphor of medicine the patient stands for the student of philosophy, medicine for philosophy and the doctor for the teacher of philosophy. An illustrative instance of this metaphor is found in the following passage:

> Ἰατρεῖόν ἐστιν, ἄνδρες, τὸ τοῦ φιλοσόφου σχολεῖον· οὐ δεῖ ἡσθέντας ἐξελθεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀλγήσαντας. ἔρχεσθε γὰρ οὐχ ὑγιεῖς, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ μὲν ὦμον ἐκβεβληκώς, ὁ δ᾽ ἀπόστημα ἔχων, ὁ δὲ σύριγγα, ὁ δὲ κεφαλαλγῶν. εἶτ᾽ ἐγὼ καθίσας ὑμῖν λέγω νοημάτια καὶ ἐπιφωνημάτια, ἵν᾽ ὑμεῖς ἐπαινέσαντές με ἐξέλθητε, ὁ μὲν τὸν ὦμον ἐκφέρων οἷον εἰσήνεγκεν, ὁ δὲ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὡσαύτως ἔχουσαν, ὁ δὲ τὴν σύριγγα, ὁ δὲ τὸ ἀπόστημα;

> Men, the lecture room of the philosopher is a hospital; you ought not to walk out of it in pleasure, but in pain. For you are not well when you come; one man has a dislocated shoulder, another an abscess, another a fistula, another a headache. And then am I to sit down and recite to you dainty little notions and clever little mottoes, so that you will go out with words of praise on your lips, one man carrying away his shoulder just as it was when he came in, another his head in the same state, another his fistula, another his abscess?

(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.23.30–31)

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24 P. P. Fuentes González, "La 'diatribe' est-elle une notion utile pour l'histoire de la philosophie et de la littérature antiques?," in *La rhétorique au miroir de la philosophie: Définitions philosophiques de la rhétorique et définitions rhétoriques de la philosophie*, ed. B. Cassin (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 127–173. For the abstract of this article, see *L'année philologique¸* http://cpps.brepolis.net.vu-nl.idm.oclc.org/aph/search.cfm?action=search_simple_detail_selection&st artrow=1&endrow=1&AUTHOR=%22CASSIN%2C%20Barbara%22&PERIOD_CLOSE_ MATCHES=0&source_selection=855066. See also Fuentes González, *Télès*, 44–78, and, with special regard to Epictetus, Wehner, *Dialogstruktur*, 15–16.

25 Cf. A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120.

The simile of philosophy and medicine is found very frequently in Stoic texts.[26] To the simile as such Epictetus adds the notion that medicine hurts.[27] Indeed, Epictetus is well aware that he sometimes must hurt his pupils, as when he reproves a young man who pays too much attention to his looks:

Ἐντεῦθεν οὐκέτι ἔχω σοι πῶς εἴπω· ἄν τε γὰρ λέγω ἃ φρονῶ, ἀνιάσω σε καὶ ἐξελθὼν τάχα οὐδ᾽ εἰσελεύσῃ· ἄν τε μὴ λέγω, ὅρα οἷον ποιήσω, εἰ σὺ μὲν ἔρχῃ πρὸς ἐμὲ ὠφεληθησόμενος, ἐ[ρ]γὼ δ᾽ οὐκ ὠφελήσω σ᾽ οὐδέν, καὶ σὺ μὲν ὡς πρὸς φιλόσοφον, ἐγὼ δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἐρῶ σοι ὡς φιλόσοφος.

Beyond that I know not what more I can say to you; for if I say what I have in mind, I shall hurt your feelings, and you will leave, perhaps never to return; but if I do not say it, consider the sort of thing I shall be doing. Here you are coming to me to get some benefit, and I shall be bestowing no benefit at all; and you are coming to me as to a philosopher, and I shall be saying nothing to you as a philosopher.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.1.10)

Epictetus regards it as his duty to correct his pupil, even if he has to hurt his feelings. This is the sense of the simile in *Disc.* 3.23.30–31: just as the doctor has to hurt his patients in order to cure their corporeal diseases, the philosopher must hurt his students in order to heal their mental diseases.[28]

The metaphor of athletics serves to illustrate the importance of philosophical training, ἄσκησις.[29] Just as the athlete who wants to win an Olympic victory has to train his bodily skills, the philosopher who wants to confront the difficulties of life must train his mental skills. The main elements of the simile are all mentioned in this passage:

Αἱ περιστάσεις εἰσὶν αἱ τοὺς ἄνδρας δεικνύουσαι. λοιπὸν ὅταν ἐμπέσῃ περίστασις, μέμνησο ὅτι ὁ θεός σε ὡς ἀλείπτης τραχεῖ νεανίσκῳ ⟨συμ⟩βέβληκεν. –Ἵνα τί; φησίν. – Ἵνα Ὀλυμπιονίκης γένῃ· δίχα δ᾽ ἱδρῶτος οὐ γίγνεται.

It is difficulties that show what men are. Consequently, when a difficulty befalls, remember that God, like a physical trainer, has matched you with a rugged young man. What for? someone says. So that you may become an Olympic victor; but that cannot be done without sweat.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.24.1–2)

The trainer stands for God, the sweat for the mental effort, the sparring partner for the difficulties in life, the Olympic victory for successfully dealing with

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[26] Cicero (*Tusc.* 4.10.23) even states that the simile has become a platitude. According to Galen (*SVF* 3.471 [120.9]) the image was introduced by Chrysippus.

[27] Other passages in Epictetus include *Disc.* 2.13.12; 2.15.15; 2.21.15; 3.16.12; 3.21.20; 3.22.72.

[28] On Epictetus's harshness towards his pupils, see G. Boter, "Evaluating Others and Evaluating Oneself in Epictetus' *Discourses*," in *Valuing Others in Antiquity*, ed. R. M. Rosen and I. Sluiter (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 339–345. Other passages in Epictetus where philosophy is compared to medicine include *Disc.* 2.13.12; 2.15.15; 2.21.15; 3.16.12; 3.21.20; 3.22.72.

[29] The classical monograph on the subject is B. L. Hijmans, *ΑΣΚΗΣΙΣ: Notes on Epictetus' Educational System* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959).

difficult circumstances in life. Elsewhere, Epictetus equates the physical training of the athlete and the mental training of the philosopher:

> Κἂν ἐθισθῇς οὕτως γυμνάζεσθαι, ὄψει, οἶοι ὦμοι γίνονται, οἶα νεῦρα, οἶοι τόνοι ….
> Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ταῖς ἀληθείαις ἀσκητὴς ὁ πρὸς τὰς τοιαύτας φαντασίας γυμνάζων ἑαυτόν.

> And if you form the habit of taking such exercises, you will see what mighty shoulders you develop, what sinews, what vigour …. The man who exercises himself against such external impressions is the true athlete in training.
> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.18.26–27)

Epictetus stresses the importance of realizing what it means to engage with philosophy before actually starting to do so. It is the same with athletes who want to become Olympic victors. Philosophers and athletes alike should be ready to suffer hardship and to undertake sacrifices. If not, they would do better not to start at all. Here is the advice given to the athlete:

> Δεῖ σε εὐτακτεῖν, ἀναγκοφαγεῖν, ἀπέχεσθαι πεμμάτων, γυμνάζεσθαι πρὸς ἀνάγκην, ὥρᾳ τεταγμένῃ, ἐν καύματι, ἐν ψύχει· μὴ ψυχρὸν πίνειν, μὴ οἶνον ὅτ᾽ ἔτυχεν· ἁπλῶς ⟨ὡς⟩ ἰατρῷ [γὰρ] παραδεδωκέναι σεαυτὸν τῷ ἐπιστάτῃ· εἶτα ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι παρορύσσεσθαι, ἔστιν ὅτε χεῖρα ἐκβαλεῖν, σφυρὸν στρέψαι, πολλὴν ἀφὴν καταπιεῖν, μαστιγωθῆναι· καὶ μετὰ τούτων πάντων ἔσθ᾽ ὅτε νικηθῆναι. ταῦτα λογισάμενος, ἂν ἔτι θέλῃς, ἔρχου ἐπὶ τὸ ἀθλεῖν.

> You have to submit to discipline, follow a strict diet, give up sweetcakes, train under compulsion, at a fixed hour, in heat or in cold; you must not drink cold water, nor wine just whenever you feel like it; you must have turned yourself over to your trainer precisely as you would to a physician. Then when the contest comes on, you have to dig in beside your opponent, sometimes dislocate your wrist, sprain your ankle, swallow quantities of sand, take a scourging; yes, and then sometimes get beaten along with all that. After you have counted up these points, go on into the games, if you still wish too.
> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.15.3–5)

When Epictetus speaks about the result of training, the physical progress of the athlete stands for προκοπή, philosophical progress:[30]

> Σὺ οὖν ἐνταῦθά μοι δεῖξόν σου τὴν προκοπήν. καθάπερ εἰ ἀθλητῇ διελεγόμην ᾽δεῖξόν μοι τοὺς ὤμους᾽, εἶτα ἔλεγεν ἐκεῖνος ᾽ἴδε μου τοὺς ἁλτῆρας᾽. ὄψει σὺ καὶ οἱ ἁλτῆρες, ἐγὼ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τῶν ἁλτήρων ἰδεῖν βούλομαι. ᾽λάβε τὴν περὶ ὁρμῆς σύνταξιν καὶ γνῶθι πῶς αὐτὴν ἀνέγνωκα.᾽ ἀνδράποδον, οὐ τοῦτο ζητῶ, ἀλλὰ πῶς ὁρμᾷς καὶ ἀφορμᾷς, πῶς ὀρέγῃ καὶ ἐκκλίνεις, πῶς ἐπιβάλλῃ καὶ προ[σ]τίθεσαι καὶ παρασκευάζῃ, πότερα συμφώνως τῇ φύσει ἢ ἀσυμφώνως.

> Do you yourself show me, therefore, your own progress in matters like the following. Suppose, for example, that in talking to an athlete I said, "Show me your shoulders," and then he answered, "Look at my jumping-weights." Get out of here with you and

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[30] For the concept of προκοπή in the Stoa, see G. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue: The Stoic Doctrine of Moral Progress and Its Reception in (Middle-)Platonism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005). Roskam deals with Epictetus in chapter 2.6 (pp. 103–124).

your jumping-weights! What I want to see is the *effect* of the jumping-weights. "Take the treatise *Upon Choice* and see how I have mastered it." It is not *that* I am looking into, you slave, but how you act in your choices and refusals, your desires and aversions, how you go at things, and apply yourself to them, and prepare yourself, whether you are acting in harmony with nature therein, or out of harmony with it.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.4.13–14)

The image of the athlete is used here to express an ever recurring feature of Epictetus's teaching, namely that philosophical knowledge as such does not have any value. Knowledge of the tenets of Stoic philosophy is an instrument and a means but not a goal, as Epictetus says in § 17: μηδέποτε οὖν ἀλλαχοῦ τὸ ἔργον ζητεῖτε, ἀλλαχοῦ τὴν προκοπήν, "and so never look for your work in one place and your progress in another."

Making progress is a process of trial and error both for the athlete and for the philosopher. But there are also two important differences between the two. The first of these is expressed in the following passage:

Οἷον εἴ τις πληγὰς λαβὼν ἀποσταίη τοῦ παγκρατιάζειν. ἀλλ᾽ ἐκεῖ μὲν ἔξεστι καταλῦσαι καὶ μὴ δέρεσθαι, ἐνθάδε δ᾽ ἂν καταλύσωμεν φιλοσοφοῦντες, τί ὄφελος;

It is just as if a man should give up the pancratium because he has received blows. The only difference is that in the pancratium a man may stop, and so avoid a severe beating, but in life, if we stop the pursuit of philosophy, what good does it do?
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.10.6–7)

Thus the athlete may stop practicing his sport but the philosopher has no choice but to go on living. In another respect, however, the philosopher is in an advantageous position:

Τί οὖν; οὐδ᾽ ἂν ἀπαυδήσωμεν ἐνταῦθα, κωλύει τις πάλιν ἀγωνίζεσθαι οὐδὲ δεῖ περιμεῖναι τετραετίαν ἄλλην, ἵν᾽ ἔλθῃ ἄλλα Ὀλύμπια, ἀλλ᾽ εὐθὺς ἀναλαβόντι καὶ ἀνακτησαμένῳ ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν εἰσφέροντι προθυμίαν ἔξεστιν ἀγωνίζεσθαι. κἂν πάλιν ἀπείπῃς, πάλιν ἔξεστιν, κἂν ἅπαξ νικήσῃς, ὅμοιος εἶ τῷ μηδέποτε ἀπειπόντι.

What follows? Why here, even if we give in for the time being, no one prevents us from struggling again, and we do not have to wait another four-year period for another Olympic festival to come around, but the moment a man has picked himself up, and recovered himself, and exhibits the same eagerness, he is allowed to contest; and if you give in, you can enter again; and if once you win a victory, you are as though you had never given in at all.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.25.4)

The life of the philosopher is an uninterrupted ἀγών, "contest."[31]

Military metaphors serve to illustrate that one should carry out the orders of the commander, that is, God:

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[31] Other Epictetean passages in which philosophy is compared to athletics include *Disc.* 1.18.21; 1.24.2; 2.17.29–30; 3.15 passim, and 4.4.30.

Οὐκ οἶσθ᾽, ὅτι στρατεία τὸ χρῆμά ἐστιν; τὸν μὲν δεῖ φυλάττειν, τὸν δὲ κατασκοπήσοντα ἐξιέναι, τὸν δὲ καὶ πολεμήσοντα· οὐχ οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι πάντας ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ οὐδ᾽ ἄμεινον .... στρατεία τίς ἐστιν ὁ βίος ἑκάστου καὶ αὕτη μακρὰ καὶ ποικίλη. τηρεῖν σε δεῖ τὸ τοῦ στρατιώτου καὶ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ πρὸς νεῦμα πράσσειν ἕκαστα· εἰ οἷόν τε, μαντευόμενον ἃ θέλει.

Do you not know that the business of life is a campaign? One man must mount guard, another go out on reconnaissance, and another go out to fight. It is not possible for all to stay in the same place, nor is it better so ....
So also in this world; each man's life is a kind of campaign, and a long and complicated one at that. You have to maintain the character of a soldier, and do each separate act at the bidding of the General, if possible divining what He wishes.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.24.31–35)

Elsewhere, Epictetus tells an historical anecdote (borrowed from Xenophon, *Cyr.* 4.1.3) with the same purpose:

Ἀλλὰ Χρυσάντας μὲν παίειν μέλλων τὸν πολέμιον, ἐπειδὴ τῆς σάλπιγγος ἤκουσεν ἀνακαλούσης, ἀνέσχεν· οὕτως προυργιαίτερον ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ τὸ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ πρόσταγμα ἢ τὸ ἴδιον ποιεῖν.

But Chrysantas, when he was on the point of striking the foe, refrained because he heard the bugle sounding the recall; it seemed so much more profitable to him to do the bidding of his general than to follow his own inclination.[32]
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.6.15)

II. Similes on Children

Epictetus very often makes use of all kinds of similes. By way of illustration I will single out a frequent image, namely the image of children who are evaluated both negatively and positively in Epictetus. In many passages the child illustrates the absence of rationality; see for instance:

Ταῦτα δ᾽ ὁ Σωκράτης καλῶς ποιῶν μορμολύκεια ἐκάλει. ὡς γὰρ τοῖς παιδίοις τὰ προσωπεῖα φαίνεται δεινὰ καὶ φοβερὰ δι᾽ ἀπειρίαν, τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν πρὸς τὰ πράγματα δι᾽ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ παιδία πρὸς τὰς μορμολυκείας. τί γάρ ἐστι παιδίον; ἄγνοια. τί ἐστι παιδίον; ἀμαθία.

But Socrates did well to call all such things "bugbears." For just as masks appear fearful and terrible to children because of inexperience, in some such manner we also are affected by events, and this for the same reason that children are affected by bugbears. For what is a child? Ignorance. What is a child? Want of instruction.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.1.15–16)

The child illustrates excessive greed which leads to dissatisfaction and frustration:

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[32] Other military metaphors are found in *Disc.* 1.14.15 and 3.22.97.

Ἀπλήρωτός σου ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπιθυμία, ἡ ἐμὴ πεπλήρωται. τοῖς ⟨παιδίοις⟩ εἰς στενόβρογχον κεράμιον καθιεῖσιν τὴν χεῖρα καὶ ἐκφέρουσιν ἰσχαδοκάρυα τοῦτο συμβαίνει· ἂν πληρώσῃ τὴν χεῖρα, ἐξενεγκεῖν οὐ δύναται, εἶτα κλάει. ἄφες ὀλίγα ἐξ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐξοίσεις. καὶ σὺ ἄφες τὴν ὄρεξιν· μὴ πολλῶν ἐπιθύμει καὶ οἴσεις.

Your strong desire is insatiate, mine is already satisfied. The same thing happens to children who put their hand down into a narrow-necked jar and try to take figs and nuts: if they get their hand full, they can't get it out, and then they cry. Drop a few and you will get it out. And so do you too drop your desire: do not set your heart upon many things and you will obtain.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.9.21–22)

With regard to this negative evaluation of the child Adolf Bonhöffer aptly remarks: "Wenn er das Kind gering wertet, so ist dies die notwendige Folge des stoischen Intellektualismus, der den Logos, das Organ aller menschlichen Größe und Vollkommenheit, erst mit dem Ende des Kindheitsalters gleichsam geboren werden läßt."[33]

On the other hand, Epictetus sometimes presents a positive image of the child, as when he advises someone who complains of being in a lonely place to follow the example of children:

Ποία οὖν ἔτι ἐρημία, ποία ἀπορία; τί χείρονας ἑαυτοὺς ποιῶμεν τῶν παιδαρίων; ἅ τινα ὅταν ἀπολειφθῇ μόνα, τί ποιεῖ; ἄραντα ὀστράκια καὶ σποδὸν οἰκοδομεῖ τί ποτε, εἶτα καταστρέφει καὶ πάλιν ἄλλο οἰκοδομεῖ· καὶ οὕτως οὐδέποτε ἀπορεῖ διαγωγῆς.

What kind of forlornness is left, then, to talk about? What kind of helplessness? Why make ourselves worse than little children? When they are left alone, what do they do? They gather up sherds and dust and build something or other, then tear it down and build something else again; and so they are never at a loss as to how to spend their time.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.13.18)

Epictetus says that no one can resist the charm of little children:[34]

Τὰ παιδία τὰ πιθανὰ καὶ δριμέα τίνα οὐκ ἐκκαλεῖται πρὸς τὸ συμπαίζειν αὐτοῖς καὶ συνέρπειν καὶ πρὸς τὸ συμψελλίζειν;

Who is not tempted by attractive and wide-awake children to join their sports, and crawl on all fours with them, and talk baby talk with them?
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.24.18)

Analogously to the negative and positive image of children Epictetus refers to animals. Tame animals like sheep stand for people who irrationally seek satis-

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[33] A. Bonhöffer, *Epiktet und das Neue Testament* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1911), 63.

[34] See R. Renner, "Das Kind: Ein Gleichnismittel bei Epiktet," in *Festschrift zum 25-jährigen Stiftungsfest des Historisch-philologischen Vereines der Universität München,* ed. G. Ammon, O. Bey, and J. Melber (München: Lindau, 1905), 61: "… daß von einer eigentlichen Verachtung und Verkennung nicht die Rede sein kann, und daß eine Ahnung vom ethischen Wert der Kinderseele auch der Stoa, wenigstens der jüngeren Schule, nicht völlig abging." Renner is quoted with approval by Bonhöffer, *Epiktet,* 63 n1.

faction of bodily needs; wild animals stand for people who have destroyed their humanity.[35] On the other hand, when Epictetus stresses the paramount importance of freedom he refers to birds who try by all means to escape from their cages and sometimes even wish to die rather than to live on in their cage (*Disc.* 4.1.25–27). To Epictetus, freedom represents the highest good to be obtained by means of philosophy. Freedom is up to us: we only have to live according to Stoic philosophy, and it is up to us to make this choice, as appears from *Disc.* 1.17.28 ἐὰν θέλῃς, ἐλεύθερος εἶ, "if you will, you are free."

III. Extended Similes

Extended similes occur only rarely in the *Discourses*. Therefore it is all the more remarkable that in paragraphs 85–110 of *Disc.* 4.1, the longest of all discourses, entitled *On Freedom*, we find a trio of interrelated similes.[36] The first simile (*Disc.* 4.1.85–90) sketches the complete freedom from fear which results from capturing our inner citadel.[37] This inner citadel is ruled by the tyrants who represent everything which is not under our control: physical needs, property, reputation and so on. Once these tyrants have been driven out there is no need to have fear of the citadel, because the danger of the citadel consisted only of the tyrants within and not of the citadel itself nor of the guardians. As a result we will be able to positively wish for everything that God makes happen. Freedom consists of the complete coincidence of one's own will with God's will (*Disc.* 4.1.89): προσκατατέταχά μου τὴν ὁρμὴν τῷ θεῷ. θέλει μ' ἐκεῖνος πυρέσσειν· κἀγὼ θέλω, "I have submitted my freedom of choice unto God. He wills that I shall have fever; it is my will too."[38]

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35 See *Disc.* 1.3.7–9; 1.9.9; 1.28.19–21; 2.9.1–6; 2.10.2; 2.22.33; 3.22.4.

36 A full discussion of the three extended similes is given in Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst," 133–140. I have gratefully made use of Vollenweider's discussion. See also Lothar Willms's very full commentary, in Willms, *Epiktets Diatribe über die Freiheit (4,1): Einleitung, Übersetzung, Kommentar,* 2 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011–2012).

37 Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst," 133 (with n49) aptly remarks that the negative role of the citadel is surprising because in Seneca (*Ep.* 82.5) and Marcus Aurelius (*In semet ipsum* 8.48.3) the citadel is used as a positive image.

38 For the importance of freedom, see the concluding remarks of the preceding section. Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst," 134–135, argues that the nearest parallel in the New Testament is the scene in Gethsemane, where Jesus prays (Mark 14:36): ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ, πάντα δυνατά σοι· παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σύ, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." According to Vollenweider "markiert die Getsemane-Erzählung der Evangelien eine Station auf dem Passionsweg Jesu, der die vollständige Konvergenz der beiden Willensbewegungen narrativ zur Darstellung bringen wird: Jesus ergibt sich als leidender Gerechter in den Gotteswillen bis zum Tod am Kreuz" (135). But Jesus's humbly accepting and obeying the will of his Father is by no means tantamount to sharing his Father's will, that is, positively wishing what his Father wishes him to do.

The conclusion of the first simile constitutes the bridge to the second one which uses the simile of travelling (*Disc.* 4.1.91–98). The wise traveler does not seek the company of other men but attaches himself to God as his companion (4.1.98): οὕτως ἐφίστησιν καὶ ἐννοεῖ ὅτι, ἐὰν τῷ θεῷ προσκατατάξῃ ἑαυτόν, διελεύσεται ἀσφαλῶς, "Thus he reflects and comes to the thought that, if he attaches himself to God, he will pass through the world in safety." The image of life as a journey or a voyage is wide-spread and it is also used elsewhere in Epictetus (e. g., *Disc.* 2.23.36–39; 4.6.5–9). Usually, the destination of the journey is the central issue, but Vollenweider rightly states that in our passage "Der Weg ist das Ziel."[39]

The concluding sentence of the second simile leads to a question of one of Epictetus's pupils: Πῶς λέγεις προσκατατάξαι;, "How do you mean, 'attach himself'?" Epictetus begins his answer by repeating the conclusion of the first simile: Ἵν', ὃ ἂν ἐκεῖνος θέλῃ, καὶ αὐτὸς θέλῃ καὶ ὃ ἂν ἐκεῖνος μὴ θέλῃ, τοῦτο μηδ' αὐτὸς θέλῃ, "Why, so that whatever God wills, he also wills, and whatever God does not will, this he also does not will." Then follows the third simile, the simile of the feast (*Disc.* 4.1.99–110). Our existence on earth is a feast to which we were invited by God; we must enjoy it as long as we are allowed to stay but we should leave when God tells us it is time to go without protesting but be grateful for the time we spent at the feast.[40]

IV. Similes in the Encheiridion

The character of the *Encheiridion* is quite different from that of the *Discourses*. The lively dialogue of the *Discourses* is substituted for dogmatic and apodictic exposition of Epictetus's philosophical tenets.[41] In a few places similes are embedded in the discourse, as in the following passage, in which the reader is advised not to talk about philosophical issues but to live in accordance with them:

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[39] Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst," 136–137. Vollenweider adduces some parallel passages in the New Testament where Jesus invites his audience to follow him: Mark 8:27–10:52, esp. 8:34; Matt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20; John 14:16–17.

[40] As Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst," 138–139 states, "Die Konvergenz des göttlichen und des menschlichen Wollens kulminiert im guten, befriedeten Abschiednehmen-Können vom festlich bewegten Kosmos." With regard to the New Testament Vollenweider draws attention to passages where Jesus eats in the company of others (Matt 8:11; 11:19; Mark 2:15; Luke 14:13), attends wedding parties (Matt 22:1–10; 25:1–13; Mark 2:18–20; John 2:1–11; 3:29; Rev 19:9) and especially to Heb 12:22, in which the word πανήγυρις is actually used, see Vollenweider, "Lebenskunst als Gottesdienst," 139–140.

[41] For the relation between the *Discourses* and the *Encheiridion*, see Boter, "From Discourses to Handbook."

Ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ πρόβατα οὐ χόρτον φέροντα τοῖς ποιμέσιν ἐπιδεικνύει πόσον ἔφαγεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν νομὴν ἔσω πέψαντα ἔρια ἔξω φέρει καὶ γάλα· καὶ σὺ τοίνυν μὴ τὰ θεωρήματα τοῖς ἰδιώταις ἐπιδείκνυε, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν πεφθέντων τὰ ἔργα.

For sheep, too, do not bring their food to the shepherds to show them how much they have eaten, but after they have digested their food within themselves, they produce wool and milk outside themselves; you too, therefore, do not show the philosophical principles to the non-philosophers, but show them the deeds that result from the principles as digested by you.[42]
(Epictetus, *Ench.* 46.2)

Five chapters of the *Encheiridion* are extended similes. In *Ench.* 15 the addressee is advised to behave in life as at a banquet: do not strive to get the most attractive pieces of food but just accept what is offered to you. In *Ench.* 17 the role of man in life is compared to a play: the playwright, who stands for God, distributes the roles among the actors; the actors should play the roles assigned to them as well as they can. In *Ench.* 38 the addressee is advised to take care not to harm his guiding principle in the same way in which he takes care not to step on a nail or to twist his foot when walking. *Ench.* 39 sketches what happens when we transgress the right measure of material possessions by pointing out what happens when the foot is not content with just wearing shoes but wishes to have gilded, purple or embroidered shoes.

The most enigmatic simile in the *Encheiridion* is found in chapter 7, which I quote in full:[43]

Καθάπερ ἐν πλῷ τοῦ πλοίου καθορμισθέντος εἰ ἐξέλθοις ὑδρεύσασθαι, ὁδοῦ μὲν πάρεργον καὶ κοχλίδιον ἀναλέξῃ καὶ βολβάριον, τετάσθαι δὲ δεῖ τὴν διάνοιαν ἐπὶ τὸ πλοῖον καὶ συνεχῶς ἐπιστρέφεσθαι μή τι ὁ κυβερνήτης καλέσῃ, κἂν καλέσῃ, πάντα ἐκεῖνα ἀφιέναι, ἵνα μὴ δεδεμένος ἐμβληθῇς ὡς τὰ πρόβατα, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ βίῳ, ἐὰν διδῶται ἀντὶ βολβαρίου καὶ κοχλιδίου γυναικάριον καὶ παιδίον, οὐδὲν κωλύσει· ἐὰν δὲ ὁ κυβερνήτης καλέσῃ, τρέχε ἐπὶ τὸ πλοῖον ἀφεὶς ἐκεῖνα ἅπαντα μηδὲ ἐπιστρεφόμενος· ἐὰν δὲ γέρων ᾖς, μηδὲ ἀπαλλαγῆς ποτε τοῦ πλοίου μακράν, μή ποτε καλοῦντος ἐλλίπῃς.

Just as on a voyage, when the ship rides at anchor, if you go ashore to get water, you will also collect a shellfish or a bulb on your way, but you will have to keep watching the ship and continually look back in case the captain is calling, and, if he should call, give up all these things, lest you should be thrown on board tied up like the sheep, so too in life, if instead of a shellfish or a bulb you are given a wife or a child, there will be nothing against it; but if the captain calls, give up all these things and run to the ship, without so much as looking back; and if you are old, never even move far away from the ship, lest you should be missing when he calls you.
(Epictetus, *Ench.* 7)

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[42] See further *Ench.* 25.3–4 (a head of lettuce has its price) and 36 (the disjunctive and conjunctive propositions).

[43] As already mentioned in the introduction, Flusser also pays attention to this chapter. See Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 149–150, 155, 166.

It will strike the reader immediately that this simile is very obscure. The only things that can be regarded as certain in this simile is that the captain stands for God and that the shellfish and the bulb stand for a wife and a child but here the consensus among scholars stops. The main problem is the question of whether human life is represented by the voyage as a whole or by the landing.[44] In the first interpretation the landing is just an episode in life; in the second it stands for birth. By the same token, in the first interpretation the call of the captain indicates that a new episode in life is about to start; in the second it indicates death. In the latter case, does the sea stand for the afterlife? And what to do with the final sentence, in which the old man is advised not to move too far from the ship? Should he stay close to the ship because he is too old to run fast when the captain calls? And what does the captain call him for, to continue his voyage or to die? In the latter case, what are the consequences if he arrives too late at the ship: will he escape death? The interpretation is complicated by the fact that after the οὕτω-sentence has started there is a return to the image with ἐὰν δὲ ὁ κυβερνήτης καλέσῃ, after which there is no explanation of the image.[45] At any rate, the final word about this enigmatic chapter has not yet been spoken.

Encheiridion 19a is an aphorism based on *Disc.* 3.22.102, in which Epictetus states about the Cynic philosopher Diogenes that he knew how to pick his battles: he never entered any battle where he might be defeated, that is, he only confronted matters which were fully within the power of his προαίρεσις, "moral choice."[46]

I will end this section with a brief discussion of *Ench.* 27, which is almost as enigmatic as *Ench.* 7. Like *Ench.* 19a it takes the form of an aphorism:

> Ὥσπερ σκοπὸς πρὸς τὸ ἀποτυχεῖν οὐ τίθεται, οὕτως οὐδὲ κακοῦ φύσις ἐν κόσμῳ γίνεται.

> Just as there is no target set up for misses, so there is no nature of evil in the universe. (Epictetus, *Ench.* 27)

Elsewhere, I have argued that πρὸς τὸ ἀποτυχεῖν should not be taken as an adverbial constituent dependent on οὐ τίθεται, but rather as an attributive constituent to σκοπός.[47] That is, there is a target-for-hits (corresponding to the

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[44] The first (and to my mind most plausible) interpretation is defended by a. o. U. Brandt, *Kommentar zu Epiktets* Encheiridion (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015), 92; the second by a. o. I. Hadot and P. Hadot, "La parabole de l'escale dans le *Manuel* d'Épictète," in *Les Stoïciens,* ed. G. Romeyer Dherbey and J. B. Gourinat (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 428.

[45] Cf. Brandt's note on ἐὰν δε ὁ κυβερνήτης κτέ: "Der Vergleich springt auf die Bildebene zurück, indem die Protasis ἐὰν δὲ ὁ κυβερνήτης καλέσῃ den zunächst als möglichen und hernach als eingetretenen Fall vorgestellten Gottesaufruf wiederholt," in Brandt, *Kommentar zu Epiktets* Encheiridion, 97.

[46] For the comparison of the life of the philosopher to athletics, see below, section 3.1.

[47] See G. Boter, "Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 27," *Mnemosyne* 45 (1992): 473–481.

nature of good) but there is no target-for-misses (corresponding to the nature of evil) because evil has no autonomous status. But the phrasing is enigmatic and other interpretations have been proposed.[48]

C. Examples

I. Examples from Mythology

Every Greek who had enjoyed even the most superficial education was familiar with the rich material of Greek mythology and this certainly goes for Epictetus's audience, the members of which may be supposed to have belonged to the upper layers of society.[49] Accordingly, Epictetus never gives full versions of mythological stories. He always applies the technique of referencing, that is, he mentions a salient detail of a story which he assumes to be well known to his audience. In some cases, he does not even mention the name of the mythological characters because the audience are able to identify them by themselves from the context. For instance, in *Disc.* 1.24.16 the quotation ἰὼ Κιθαίρων, τί μ' ἐδέχου;, "O Cithaeron, why did you receive me?," is enough to bring the figure of king Oedipus to the audience's mind. The line is taken from Sophocles's tragedy *King Oedipus* (l. 1390), in which Oedipus, having discovered that he had killed his father and married his mother, regrets that he was not killed on Mount Cithaeron, where he had been exposed shortly after his birth.

Let us first pay attention to some well-known characters from Greek mythology. Among these Heracles is Epictetus's undisputed hero. This does not come as a surprise because to the Stoics in general Heracles was the shining example who achieved immortality thanks to his own virtue. The Greek letter *ypsilon* was a favorite symbol for the Stoics, serving as a reference to the famous story of Heracles at the crossroads, where he had to choose between a life of leisure and luxury, leading to decadence, and a life of hardship and toil, leading to virtue.[50] In a number of passages Epictetus mentions Heracles in order to refute objections by his students who complain that the task he imposes upon them is too heavy. Thus we find the following discussion between Epictetus and a fictitious

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[48] See for instance Brandt's commentary in Brandt, *Kommentar zu Epiktets* Encheiridion, 185–188. Usually, the text is rendered as: "Just as a mark is not set up in order to be missed, so neither does the nature of evil arise in the universe" (Oldfather, LCL).

[49] Wehner, in her excellent monograph on the dialogical structure of the *Discourses*, devotes a long chapter to quotations and anecdotes. See Wehner, *Dialogstruktur*, 219–248. Because of this approach she does not pay attention to passages in which a mythological or historical character is merely mentioned by name or briefly referred to otherwise. In my view, these passages serve the same purpose as those in which (part of) the story is told.

[50] The story is told in Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.1.21–34. The Y is called "Pythagoras's letter" because Pythagoras was credited with having introduced it as the symbol of the choice of life; see Persius, *Sat.* 3.56–57; Lactantius, *Inst.* 6.3.6.

interlocutor who adduces a very poor excuse for not bringing the tenets of Stoic philosophy into practice:

> Ναί· ἀλλ' αἱ μύξαι μου ῥέουσιν.᾽ τίνος οὖν ἕνεκαχεῖρας ἔχεις, ἀνδράποδον; οὐχ ἵνα καὶ ἀπομύσσῃς σεαυτόν; – Τοῦτο οὖν εὔλογον μύξας γίνεσθαι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ; – Καὶ πόσῳ κρεῖττον ἀπομύξασθαί σε ἢ ἐγκαλεῖν; ἢ τί οἴει ὅτι ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ἂν ἀπέβη, εἰ μὴ λέων τοιοῦτος ἐγένετο καὶ ὕδρα καὶ ἔλαφ[ρ]ος καὶ σῦς καὶ ἄδικοί τινες ἄνθρωποι καὶ θηριώδεις, οὓς ἐκεῖνος ἐξήλαυνεν καὶ ἐκάθαιρεν; καὶ τί ἂν ἐποίει μηδενὸς τοιούτου γεγονότος; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι ἐντετυλιγμένος ἂν ἐκάθευδεν;

> "Yes, but my nose is running." What have you hands for, then, slave? Is it not that you may wipe your nose? – "Is it reasonable, then, that there should be running noses in the world?" – And how much better it would be for you to wipe your nose than to find fault! Or what do you think Heracles would have amounted to, if there had not been a lion like the one which he encountered, and a hydra, and a stag, and a boar, and wicked and brutal men, whom he made it his business to drive out and clear away? And what would he have been doing had nothing of the sort existed? Is it not clear that he would have rolled himself up in a blanket and slept?
> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.6.30–33)

Here Epictetus gives a positive twist to what at first sight might seem to be negative. Just as the gods gave Heracles the possibilities to become what he really was, namely the bravest hero in the world, they have given us the tools which enable us to confront the challenges of everyday life, namely our moral choice and our capacity to decide which things are under our control and which are not.

In *Disc.* 3.24 someone is complaining that he is forced to leave his native town and to live in a foreign country. Epictetus retorts that the real Stoic is able to live happily anywhere, because the world is his homeland. He then once more adduces the example of Heracles:

> Καὶ τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ τὸ συμβὰν τοιοῦτόν τι ἦν·
> πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω· (Homer, *Od.* 1.3)
> καὶ ἔτι πρόσθεν τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ περιελθεῖν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην
> ἀνθρώπων ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην ἐφορῶντα (Homer, *Od.* 17.487)
> καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐκβάλλοντα καὶ καθαίροντα, τὴν δ' ἀντεισάγοντα. καίτοι πόσους οἴει φίλους ἔσχεν ἐν Θήβαις, πόσους ἐν Ἄργει, πόσους ἐν Ἀθήναις, πόσους δὲ περιερχόμενος ἐκτήσατο, ὅς γε καὶ ἐγάμει, ὅπου καιρὸς ἐφάνη αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐπαιδοποιεῖτο καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἀπέλ⟨ε⟩ιπεν οὐ στένων οὐδὲ ποθῶν οὐδ' ὡς ὀρφανοὺς ἀφιείς; ᾔδει γάρ, ὅτι οὐδείς ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος ὀρφανός, ἀλλὰ πάντων ἀ[ι]εὶ καὶ διηνεκῶς ὁ πατήρ ἐστιν ὁ κηδόμενος.

> Now it was something of this sort which fell to the lot of Odysseus:
> Many the men whose towns he beheld, and he learned of their temper. (Homer, *Od.* 1.3)
> And even before his time it was the fortune of Heracles to traverse the entire inhabited world,
> Seeing the wanton behaviour of men and the lawful, (Homer, *Od.* 17.487)

casting forth the one and clearing the world of it, and introducing the other in its place. Yet how many friends do you suppose he had in Thebes, in Argos, in Athens, and how many new friends he made on his rounds, seeing that he was even in the habit of marrying when he saw fit, and begetting children, and deserting his children, without either groaning or yearning for them, or as though leaving them to be orphans? It was because he knew that no human being is an orphan, but all men have ever and constantly the Father, who cares for them.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.24.13–16)

This passage shows how Epictetus can adapt a myth to his own purposes. Like his father Zeus, Heracles was a renowned phallocrat, impregnating every beautiful woman who crossed his path. According to Epictetus this behaviour was part of the divine plan and Heracles left his children in the firm conviction that God himself would take care of them.

What is more, this passage illustrates what I would call Epictetus's method of appropriation of a myth, that is, he can take a quotation out of its original context and adapt it to suit his own purposes. The first quotation comes from the proem to the first book of Homer's *Odyssey*; it is quoted in the same form as we find in our text of Homer.[51] The second one, however, comes from *Odyssey* book 17. Antinous, the most insolent of all of Penelope's suitors, has just thrown a foot-stool to Odysseus, who has entered his own palace disguised as a beggar. The other suitors warn him that he should not behave so rudely towards the beggar, adding:

Καί τε θεοὶ ξείνοισιν ἐοικότες ἀλλοδαποῖσι,
παντοῖοι τελέθοντες, ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας,
ἀνθρώπων ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην ἐφορῶντες.

And the gods do, in the guise of strangers from afar, put on all manner of shapes, and visit the cities, beholding the violence and the righteousness of men.
(Homer, *Od.* 17.485–487 [Murray-Dimock, LCL])

Epictetus transforms the plural nominative ἐφορῶντες of the last line of the quotation, which refers to the gods, into the accusative singular ἐφορῶντα, which refers to Heracles. To those who know the passage from which the quotation is taken it serves to link Heracles to Odysseus because the quotation comes from a passage in which Odysseus, who will in the end kill Antinous, is now being wronged. Further, by applying the line which originally tells something about the gods to Heracles himself, Epictetus turns Heracles himself into a god. And indeed further on in the passage (*Disc.* 3.24.16) Epictetus tells that Heracles regarded Zeus as his father.

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[51] For a detailed examination of the discussion of Homeric quotations in Epictetus, see C. Muckensturm-Poulle*,* "Les références homériques dans les *Entretiens* d'Epictète," in *Troïka: Parcours antiques: Mélanges offerts à Michel Woronoff*, vol. 2., ed. S. David and É. Geny (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2012).

Heracles is invariably referred to by Epictetus as an admirable example to be followed by everyone. Other mythological characters are mostly mentioned by Epictetus as instances of wrong behaviour, that is, behaviour that is not in accordance with the Stoic world view. Invariably, these mythological characters commit the crucial mistake of attaching importance to things which are in fact indifferent, such as wealth, power, kingship, a beautiful woman and so on. I will discuss some instances of Epictetus's way of dealing with such characters.

The figure of Medea, who murdered her own children in order to take revenge on Jason, is often referred to in Stoic texts.[52] She is the classic example of someone who *chooses* to let her anger prevail over other motives. Epictetus refers to her in order to illustrate that it is impossible not to act in conformity to one's convictions. She wrongly believes that it is advantageous for her to kill her children and therefore she has no choice but to do this. When referring to the Euripidean Medea Epictetus doesn't even mention her name; he refers to her by saying:

> Πῶς ἡ λέγουσα
> "καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά,
> θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων";
> ὅτι αὐτὸ τοῦτο, τῷ θυμῷ χαρίσασθαι καὶ τιμωρήσασθαι τὸν ἄνδρα, συμφορώτερον
> ἡγεῖται τοῦ σῶσαι τὰ τέκνα.

> How of her who says,
> "Now, now, I learn what horrors I intend
> But passion overmastereth sober thought?"
> It is because the very gratification of her passion and the taking of vengeance on her husband she regards as more profitable than the saving of her children.
> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.28.7 = Euripides, *Med.* 1078–1079)

Quoting these two famous verses (which, by the way, possibly were not composed by Euripides)[53] is enough to evoke the whole tragedy for Epictetus's pupils. Euripides's tragedy is not a lesson teaching us that irrational behaviour defeats rationality but it shows that wrong rational convictions inevitably lead to wrong decisions.[54]

In *Disc.* 2.22 Epictetus illustrates that even brothers such as Eteocles and Polynices, sons of Oedipus, can turn into embittered enemies when they wrongly regard the kingship of Thebes as something desirable:

> Ὁ Ἐτεοκλῆς καὶ ὁ Πολυνείκης οὐκ ἦσαν ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς μητρὸς καὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πατρός;
> οὐκ ἦσαν συντεθραμμένοι, συμβεβιωκότες, συμπεπωκότες, συγκεκοιμημένοι,

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[52] See Dobbin, *Epictetus: Discourses*, ad loc.

[53] See J. Mossman, *Euripides:* Medea *with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2011), ad 1021–1080 and ad 1078–1080.

[54] For the Stoic view of the character of Medea, see, e. g., Dobbin, *Epictetus:* Discourses, 220–223; M. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 70–72.

πολλάκις ἀλλήλους καταπεφιληκότες; ὥστ' εἴ τις οἶμαι εἶδεν αὐτούς, κατεγέλασεν ἂν τῶν φιλοσόφων ἐφ' οἷς περὶ φιλίας παραδοξολογοῦσιν. ἀλλ' ἐμπεσούσης εἰς τὸ μέσον ὥσπερ κρέως τῆς τυραννίδος ὅρα οἷα λέγουσι·
ποῦ ποτε στήσῃ πρὸ πύργων; – ὡς τί μ' † ἐρωτᾷς τῷδ' †;[55] –
ἀντιτάξομαι κτενῶν σε. – κἀμὲ τοῦδ' ἔρως ἔχει.
καὶ εὔχονται εὐχὰς τοιάσδε.

Were not Eteocles and Polynices born of the same mother and the same father? Had they not been brought up together, lived together, drunk together, slept together, many a time kissed one another? So that I fancy if anyone had seen them, he would have laughed at the philosophers for their paradoxical views on friendship. But when the throne was cast between them, like a piece of meat between the dogs,[56] see what they say:
 Polynices: Where before the wall dost mean to stand?
 Eteocles: Why asked thou this of me?
 Polynices: I shall range myself against thee in order to kill thee.
 Eteocles: Mine is also that desire!
Such also are the prayers they utter.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.22.13–14)

We have already seen that Epictetus never tells a story from beginning to end. But in his way of referring to myths he goes further than that. In general the effect of the intertextual reference goes beyond the mere words which are quoted. As an instance we will have a look at a passage from *Il.* 2, which is embedded in a discourse on Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher who had acquired kingly status with the Stoics.

Ποῦ μοι λοιπὸν ἐκεῖνος ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁ τοῖς κοινοῖς προσευκαιρῶν,
 ᾧ λαοί τ' ἐπιτετράφαται καὶ τόσσα μέμηλεν, (Homer, *Il.* 2.25)
ὃν δεῖ τοὺς ἄλλους ἐπισκοπεῖν, τοὺς γεγαμηκότας, τοὺς πεπαιδοποιημένους, κτέ.

Where, I beseech you, is left now our king, the man who has leisure for the public interest,
 Who hath charge of the folk and for many a thing must be watchful? (Homer, *Il.* 2.25)
Where, pray, is this king, whose duty it is to oversee the rest of men, those who have married, those who have had children, etcetera.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.22.72)

The words are spoken by the divine Dream who appears to Agamemnon and advises him to arm the Greeks in order to attack Troy. Thus the audience need to understand that the quotation applies to Agamemnon in order to make the association between Agamemnon as the king of the Greeks and Diogenes as the king of all men. In fact, what Epictetus intends to make clear is that Diogenes outdoes Agamemnon by far: while Agamemnon only commanded the Greek soldiers, Diogenes has to take care of all people in all circumstances. The term

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[55] Here the text is corrupt but the general meaning is clear.
[56] It is remarkable that here Epictetus introduces a simile within an example.

king, βασιλεύς, is often used for the Cynic philosopher.[57] But there may be more to it. Those students who knew the context of the Homeric line quoted by Epictetus would know that the next line runs (Homer, *Il.* 2.26): νῦν δ᾽ ἐμέθεν ξύνες ὦκα· Διὸς δέ τοι ἄγγελός εἰμι, "Now listen to me quickly; I am a messenger from Zeus to you." The same qualification, "messenger from Zeus," applies to Diogenes in this same *Discourse* (*Disc.* 3.22.23): Εἶθ᾽ οὕτως παρασκευασάμενον οὐκ ἔστι τούτοις ἀρκεῖσθαι τὸν ταῖς ἀληθείαις Κυνικόν, ἀλλ᾽ εἰδέναι δεῖ, ὅτι ἄγγελος ἀπὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἀπέσταλται κτέ., "Then, if he is thus prepared, the true Cynic cannot be satisfied with this; but he must know that he is sent a messenger from Zeus to men." Thus Epictetus makes use of the so-called common ground: he takes for granted that his pupils know and mobilize the context of the reference he makes.

It has already been mentioned that Epictetus sometimes adapts and appropriates texts with mythological content in order to suit his didactic purposes, sometimes interpreting it in a way in which it cannot possibly have been intended by the author. As an instance I will discuss two passages from Euripides. In *Disc.* 4.5 Epictetus speaks about people who misbehave towards other people and who by doing so ruin their own fidelity and humaneness. About such people he states:

> Τοῦτον **ἔδει συνελθόντας θρηνεῖν, εἰς ὅσα κακὰ ἐλήλυθεν**· οὐχὶ μὰ Δία **τὸν φύντα** ἢ **τὸν ἀποθανόντα**, ἀλλ᾽ ᾧ ζῶντι συμβεβήκει ἀπολέσαι τὰ ἴδια, οὐ τὰ πατρῷα, τὸ ἀγρίδιον καὶ τὸ οἰκίδιον καὶ τὸ πανδοκεῖον καὶ τὰ δουλάρια (τούτων γὰρ οὐδὲν ἴδιον τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ πάντα ἀλλότρια, δοῦλα, ὑπεύθυνα, ἄλλοτε ἄλλοις διδόμενα ὑπὸ τῶν κυρίων), ἀλλὰ τὰ ἀνθρωπικά.

> This is the kind of person for whom "**men should come together and mourn, because of all the evils into which he has come**"; not, by Zeus, "**the one who is born,**" or "**the one who has died,**" but the man whose misfortune it has been while he still lives to lose what is his own; not his patrimony, his paltry farm, and paltry dwelling, and his tavern, and his poor slaves (for none of these things is a man's own possession, but they all belong to others, are subservient and subject, given by their masters now to one person and now to another); but the qualities which make him a human being.
> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.5.15)

The words printed in bold type are a direct reference to a passage from Euripides's play *Cresphontes*, of which only fragments are preserved:

> Ἐχρῆν γὰρ ἡμᾶς σύλλογον ποιουμένους
> τὸν φύντα θρηνεῖν εἰς ὅσ᾽ ἔρχεται κακά,
> τὸν δ᾽ αὖ θανόντα καὶ πόνων πεπαυμένον
> χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων.

We ought to have an assembly and to lament the newly born because of all the troubles that lie in store for him and we ought to bless the dead man who is freed from all afflictions and to carry him out of the house full of happiness.
(Euripides, frag. 449)

This fragment is an instance of the wide-spread *topos* that it is better not to be born at all or otherwise to die immediately. It is often quoted in philosophical literature and therefore we can safely assume that Epictetus's pupils knew the whole fragment. In the original the message is that we ought not lament the dead but the newly born. Epictetus states that we ought to lament neither the newly born nor the dead but the man who, while being alive, kills the humane element in himself and who is therefore so to say turned into a living dead: that he is no longer a real man.

The second passage I wish to discuss comes from an unknown tragedy by Euripides (frag. 965): Ὅστις δ' ἀνάγκῃ συγκεχώρηκεν καλῶς, σοφὸς παρ' ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ θεῖ' ἐπίσταται, "Whoever has complied well with necessity, is a wise man in our eyes, and he knows the things of the gods." This quotation is part of the final chapter of the *Encheiridion*, which consists of four maxims one should always have ready at hand; it is not found in the extant books of the *Discourses*. Even in the absence of any context it is possible to reconstruct in which way Epictetus must have appropriated Euripides's couplet. The appropriation focuses on three key terms, ἀνάγκη, σοφός and τὰ θεῖ' ἐπίσταται. To the Stoics the well-known concept of ἀνάγκη, 'Fate' or 'Necessity,' came to be equivalent to the perfect Divine Plan which governs the universe, that is, with Nature itself. The word σοφός, 'wise,' was used by the Stoics to designate the perfect sage, who was a perfect sage exactly because he complied with Fate under all circumstances. τὰ θεῖ' ἐπίσταται, "knowing the things of the gods," finally, is the other side of the same coin: the perfect sage complies with fate because he has perfect insight into the divine plan. And this, again, provides us with a link to Epictetus's adaptation with the Socratic tenet "knowledge is virtue."

Epictetus can go still further, namely by appropriating the author of the quotation himself. A case of this procedure is found in *Disc.* 4.10. Epictetus scorns Achilles for mourning the death of his friend Patroclus, inviting him to look for someone else who can be his helper and his friend, a scene from book 19 of the *Iliad*. He then goes on to say:

Ἂν δ' ἡ χύτρα, ἐν ᾗ ἥψετό σοι τὸ κρέας, καταγῇ, λιμῷ σε δεῖ ἀποθανεῖν, ὅτι μὴ ἔχεις τὴν συνήθη χύτραν; οὐ πέμπεις καὶ ἄλλην καινὴν ἀγοράζεις;
οὐ μὲν γάρ τι,
φησίν,
κακώτερον ἄλλο πάθοιμι.
τοῦτο γάρ σοι κακόν ἐστιν; εἶτ' ἀφεὶς τοῦτο ἐξελεῖν αἰτιᾷ τὴν μητέρα, ὅτι σοι οὐ προεῖπεν, ἵν' ὀδυνώμενος ἐξ ἐκείνου διατελῇς; τί δοκεῖτε; μὴ ἐπίτηδες ταῦτα συνθεῖναι **Ὅμηρον, ἵν' ἴδωμεν, ὅτι** οἱ εὐγενέστατοι, ⟨οἱ⟩ ἰσχυρότατοι, οἱ πλουσιώτατοι, ⟨οἱ⟩

εὐμορφότατοι, ὅταν οἷα δεῖ δόγματα μὴ ἔχωσιν, οὐδὲν κωλύονται ἀθλιώτατοι εἶναι καὶ δυστυχέστατοι;

If the pot in which your meat used to be boiled gets broken, do you have to die of hunger, because you do not have your accustomed pot? Won't you send out and buy a new one to take its place? He says,

Ill no greater than this could befall me.

Why, is this what you call an ill? And then, forbearing to get rid of it, do you blame your mother, because she did not foretell it to you, so that you might continue to lament from that time forth? What do you men think? **Did not Homer compose this in order for us to see that** there is nothing to prevent the persons of the highest birth, of greatest strength, of most handsome appearance, from being most miserable and wretched, when they do not hold the right kind of judgements?

(Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.10.34–36)

What strikes us here, is the phrase which is printed in bold type, **Did not Homer compose this in order for us to see that** etcetera. Here Epictetus is not content to give a new twist to Homer's words but he actually states that Homer *himself* wrote this with the intention to demonstrate that even the noblest of men can become utterly unhappy when they fail to have the right convictions, that is, when they do not accept the tenets of Stoic philosophy. And thus he turns Homer into a Stoic philosopher *avant la lettre*.

II. Examples from History

Apart from mythological exempla Epictetus often refers to historical characters and events. There is a marked distinction between his dealing with large scale history and with minor contemporary events. In the former case Epictetus usually confines himself to the mention of a name or event without telling the whole story he wants to evoke in his audience. Thus Epictetus mentions king Croesus in *Disc.* 1.2.37 and 3.22.27, the battle of Thermopylae in *Disc.* 2.20.26, the Macedonian kings Perdiccas, Philippus, and Alexander and the Persian king in *Disc.* 3.24.70, and the Assyrian king Sardanapalus and the emperor Nero in *Disc.* 3.22.30. These characters and events are metonymies: Croesus stands for richness, the Spartans who died at Thermopylae for bravery and for holding death in contempt, the Macedonian and Persian kings for supreme power, Sardanapalus and Nero for decadence.[58]

Anecdotes about contemporary events are usually told in detail; obviously, Epictetus did not take it for granted that every member of his audience was acquainted with these events. The anecdote about Helvidius Priscus serves to illustrate freedom of mind towards omnipotent rulers.[59] To Helvidius, doing his duty as a senator was more important than his life:

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[58] For Sardanapalus and Nero, see Billerbeck's commentary ad loc., in Billerbeck, *Epiktet: Vom Kynismus*.

[59] Helvidius is also mentioned at *Disc.* 4.1.123.

Ταῦτα εἶδεν καὶ Πρῖσκος Ἑλουίδιος καὶ ἰδὼν ἐποίησε. προσπέμψαντος αὐτῷ Οὐεσπασιανοῦ, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς τὴν σύγκλητον, ἀπεκρίνατο ''Ἐπὶ σοί ἐστι μὴ ἐᾶσαί με εἶναι συγκλητικόν· μέχρι δὲ ἂν ὦ, δεῖ με εἰσέρχεσθαι'. 'ἄγε ἀλλ' εἰσελθών', φησίν, 'σιώπησον'. 'μή μ' ἐξέταζε καὶ σιωπήσω.' 'ἀλλὰ δεῖ με ἐξετάσαι.' 'κἀμὲ εἰπεῖν τὸ φαινόμενον δίκαιον.' 'ἀλλ' ἐὰν εἴπῃς, ἀποκτενῶ σε.' 'πότε οὖν σοι εἶπον, ὅτι ἀθάνατός εἰμι; καὶ σὺ τὸ σὸν ποιήσεις κἀγὼ τὸ ἐμόν. σόν ἐστιν ἀποκτεῖναι, ἐμὸν ἀποθανεῖν μὴ τρέμοντα· σὸν φυγαδεῦσαι, ἐμὸν ἐξελθεῖν μὴ λυπούμενον.'

This is what Helvidius Priscus also saw, and, having seen, did. When Vespasian sent him word not to attend a meeting of the Senate, he answered, "It is in your power not to allow me to be a member of the Senate, but so long as I am one I must attend its meetings." "Very well then, but when you attend, hold your peace." "Do not ask for my opinion and I will hold my peace." "But I must ask for your opinion." "And I must answer what seems to me right." "But if you speak, I shall put you to death." "Well, when did I ever tell you that I was immortal? You will do your part and I mine. It is yours to put me to death, mine to die without a tremor; yours to banish, mine to leave without sorrow."
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.2.19–20)

To the Stoics, doing one's duty is not a burden but a logical consequence of living in accordance with nature. We have no influence on the ultimate results of our efforts but we are free to do what we think is fitting and right. This attitude is well expressed in the following short anecdote:

Διὰ τοῦτο ἡ γυνὴ καλῶς εἶπεν ἡ πέμψαι θέλουσα τῇ Γρατίλλῃ ἐξωρισμένῃ τὸ πλοῖον τῶν ἐπιμηνίων κατὰ τὸν εἰπόντα ὅτι 'Ἀφαιρήσεται αὐτὰ Δομιτιανός', 'Μᾶλλον θέλω', φησίν, 'ἵν' ἐκεῖνος αὐτὰ ἀφέληται ἢ ἵν' ἐγὼ μὴ πέμψω.'

Wherefore, that was an admirable answer which the woman gave who wished to send a boatload of supplies to Gratilla after she had been exiled. To a man who said, "Domitian will confiscate them," she replies, "I should rather have him confiscate them than myself fail to send them."
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.7.8)

The Stoic slogan of living in accordance with nature means that we should happily accept everything that happens to us. The anecdote about Agrippinus illustrates how this can work in practice:

Διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ Ἀγριππῖνος τί ἔλεγεν; ὅτι ''Ἐγὼ ἐμαυτῷ ἐμπόδιος οὐ γίνομαι'. ἀπηγγέλη αὐτῷ ὅτι 'κρίνῃ ἐν συγκλήτῳ.' – 'Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. ἀλλὰ ἦλθεν ἡ πέμπτη' (ταύτῃ δ' εἰώθει γυμνασάμενος ψυχρολουτρεῖν)·'ἀπέλθωμεν καὶ γυμνασθῶμεν.' γυμνασαμένῳ λέγει τις αὐτῷ ἐλθὼν ὅτι 'Κατακέκρισαι.' – 'Φυγῇ,', φησίν, 'ἢ θανάτῳ;' – 'Φυγῇ.' – 'Τὰ ὑπάρχοντα τί;' – 'Οὐκ ἀφῃρέθη.' – 'Εἰς Ἀρίκειαν οὖν ἀπελθόντες ἀριστήσωμεν.' – Τοῦτ' ἔστι μεμελετηκέναι ἃ δεῖ μελετᾶν, ὄρεξιν ἔκκλισιν ἀκώλυτα ἀπερίπτωτα παρεσκευακέναι. ἀποθανεῖν με δεῖ. εἰ ἤδη, ἀποθνῄσκω· κἂν μετ' ὀλίγον, νῦν ἀριστῶ τῆς ὥρας ἐλθούσης, εἶτα τότε τεθνήξομαι. πῶς; ὡς προσήκει τὸν τὰ ἀλλότρια ἀποδιδόντα.

Wherefore, what was it that Agrippinus used to remark? "I am not standing in my own way." Word was brought to him, "Your case is being tried in the Senate." – Good luck betide! But it is the fifth hour now" (he was in the habit of taking his exercise and then

a cold bath at that hour); "let us be off and take our exercise." After he had finished his exercise someone came and told him, "You have been condemned." – "To exile," says he, "or to death?" – "To exile." – "What about my property?" – "It has not been confiscated." – "Well then, let us go to Aricia and take our lunch there." This is what it means to have rehearsed the lessons one ought to rehearse, to have set desire and aversion free from every hindrance and made them proof against chance. I must die. If forthwith, I die; and if a little later, I will take lunch now, since the hour for lunch has come, and afterwards I will die at the appointed hour. How? As becomes the man who is giving back that which was another's.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.1.28–32)

Occasionally, Epictetus tells an event of his own experience, such as the famous story of the theft of his lamp:

Κἀγὼ πρῴην σιδηροῦν λύχνον ἔχων παρὰ τοῖς θεοῖς ἀκούσας ψόφον τῆς θυρίδος κατέδραμον. εὗρον ἡρπασμένον τὸν λύχνον. ἐπελογισάμην, ὅτι ἔπαθέν τι ὁ ἄρας οὐκ ἀπίθανον. τί οὖν; αὔριον, φημί, ὀστράκινον εὑρήσεις.

Something similar happened to me also the other day. I keep an iron lamp by the side of my household gods, and, on hearing a noise at the window, I ran down. I found that the lamp had been stolen. I reflected that the man who stole it was moved by no unreasonable motive. What then? Tomorrow, I say, you will find one of earthenware.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.18.15)

Among the philosophers to whom Epictetus refers the most prominent position is taken by Socrates and Diogenes.[60] Epictetus not only mentions these philosophers with regard to their philosophical doctrine but especially because they practised what they preached.[61] Socrates was not afraid of disobeying tyrants, as he showed when in 403 BCE the tyrants (οἱ τριάκοντα, "the Thirty") commanded him to bring Leon, the leader of the democratic opposition, to them:[62]

Ἐπὶ Λέοντα δ' ὑπὸ τῶν τυράννων πεμφθείς, ὅτι αἰσχρὸν ἡγεῖτο, οὐδ' ἐπεβουλεύσατο εἰδώς, ὅτι ἀποθανεῖν δεήσει, ἂν οὕτως τύχῃ. καὶ τί αὐτῷ διέφερεν; ἄλλο γάρ τι σῴζειν ἤθελεν· οὐ τὸ σαρκίδιον, ἀλλὰ τὸν πιστόν, τὸν αἰδήμονα.

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[60] For Socrates in Epictetus, see K. Döring, "Sokrates bei Epiktet," in *Studia Platonica: Festschrift für Hermann Gundert zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 30.4.1974*, ed. K. Döring and W. Kullmann (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1974), 195–226; K. Döring, *Exemplum Socratis: Studien zur Sokratesnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im frühen Christentum* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979)*,* 43–79; J. B. Gourinat, "Le Socrate d'Épictète," *PA* 1 (2001): passim and Long, *Guide,* passim; for Diogenes, see Billerbeck, *Epiktet,* passim and Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life,* 15–16, 57–61, 66, 98, 138.

[61] Time and again, Epictetus points out to his pupils that philosophical theory is quite worthless if it is not put into practice. See for instance *Disc.* 1.4.14: 'λάβε τὴν περὶ ὁρμῆς σύνταξιν καὶ γνῶθι πῶς αὐτὴν ἀνέγνωκα.' ἀνδράποδον, οὐ τοῦτο ζητῶ, ἀλλὰ πῶς ὁρμᾷς καὶ ἀφορμᾷς, πῶς ὀρέγῃ καὶ ἐκκλίνεις, πῶς ἐπιβάλλῃ καὶ προ[σ]τίθεσαι καὶ παρασκευάζῃ, πότερα συμφώνως τῇ φύσει ἢ ἀσυμφώνως, "'Take the treatise *Upon Choice* and see how I have mastered it.' It is not that I am looking at you slave, but how you act in your choices and refusals, and apply yourself to them, and prepare yourself, whether you are acting in harmony with nature therein, or out of harmony with it."

[62] The same anecdote is referred to in *Disc.* 4.7.30–31.

And when he was sent by the Tyrants to fetch Leon, because he regarded it as disgraceful, he never deliberated about the matter at all, although he knew that he would have to die, if it so chanced. And what difference did it make to him? For there was something else that he wished to preserve; not his paltry flesh, but the man of honour, the man of reverence, that he was.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.1.160–161)

Epictetus repeatedly refers to Socrates's trial and execution by means of two short quotes. The first of these quotes is a paraphrase of Plato, *Apol.* 30c9–d3: ἐμὲ δὲ Ἄνυτος καὶ Μέλητος ἀποκτεῖναι μὲν δύνανται, βλάψαι δ' οὔ, "Anytus and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot hurt me."[63] The second quotation comes from the *Crito*, when Socrates is awaiting his execution (*Cri.* 43d7–8): ὦ φίλε Κρίτων, εἰ ταύτῃ τοῖς θεοῖς φίλον, ταύτῃ γινέσθω, "Dear Crito, if it so pleases the gods, so be it."[64] These two quotes can be presented without context: as in the case of mythological examples discussed above, Epictetus assumes that his audience will immediately recognize them. The two quotes were so essential to Epictetus's philosophy that Arrian included both of them in the final chapter (53) of the *Encheiridion*, which consists of four quotations which one should always keep at hand.

Epictetus uses Socrates's stay in prison as an illustration of spiritual freedom:

'Βάλε αὐτὸν εἰς φυλακήν.' ποίαν φυλακήν; ὅπου νῦν ἐστιν. ἄκων γάρ ἐστιν· ὅπου δέ τις ἄκων ἐστίν, ἐκεῖνο φυλακὴ αὐτῷ ἐστιν. καθὸ καὶ Σωκράτης οὐκ ἦν ἐν φυλακῇ, ἑκὼν γὰρ ἦν.

"Throw him into prison!" What sort of prison? Where he now is. For he is there against his will, and where a man is against his will, that for him is a prison. Just as Socrates was not in prison, for he was there willingly.
(Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.12.23)

Here Epictetus turns Socrates into a Stoic *avant la lettre*: Socrates's refusal to accept Crito's proposal to escape from prison and to flee to Thessaly is interpreted as a token that he actually *wants* to be in prison. The real Stoic sage not only accepts what is happening but he actually desires it; see for instance *Disc.* 1.12.15 τὸ παιδεύεσθαι τοῦτ' ἔστι μανθάνειν ἕκαστα οὕτω θέλειν ὡς γίνεται, "instruction consists precisely in learning to desire each thing exactly as it happens."[65]

Diogenes is Epictetus's second hero. To Epictetus, he is the perfect incorporation of the Cynic ideal of αὐτάρκεια, "self-sufficiency," coupled to free-spirited independence of mind. In *Disc.* 3.22, a long discourse with the title περὶ κυνισμοῦ, he plays a central role; he is depicted as a κατάσκοπος, "scout," sent by the gods in order to explore what is good and what is bad to mankind.[66]

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[63] This quote occurs at *Disc.* 1.29.18; 2.2.15 and 3.21.23.

[64] This quote is found, with slight variations, in *Disc.* 1.4.24; 1.29.18; 3.22.95; 4.4.21.

[65] See also *Disc.* 2.14.7; 2.17.17–28; 4.1.89–90; 4.7.20 and especially *Ench.* 8.

[66] See *Disc.* 3.22.24; 3.22.38; 3.22.70, and also 1.24.6; 1.24.7; 1.24.10.

Diogenes was renowned for his witty and provocative answers to mighty men; collections of his apophthegms were in wide circulation in antiquity.[67] Epictetus refers to Diogenes's behaviour when he was captured by pirates, and to the way he dealt with the Macedonian kings Philippus and Alexander and with the master who had bought him to be his slave.[68] Once more, Epictetus contents himself to a mere reference, assuming that his students recognize what he is talking about.[69]

Epictetus turns Diogenes into a Stoic *avant la lettre* (as he had also done with Socrates) by making him give the following report of his education by Antisthenes:

> Ἐδίδαξέν (sc. Antisthenes) με (= Diogenes) τὰ ἐμὰ καὶ τὰ οὐκ ἐμά. κτῆσις οὐκ ἐμή· συγγενεῖς, οἰκεῖοι, φίλοι, φήμη, συνήθεις τόποι, διατριβή, πάντα ταῦτα ὅτι ἀλλότρια. "σὸν οὖν τί; χρῆσις φαντασιῶν." ταύτην ἔδειξέν μοι ὅτι ἀκώλυτον ἔχω, ἀνανάγκαστον· οὐδεὶς ἐμποδίσαι δύναται, οὐδεὶς βιάσασθαι ἄλλως χρήσασθαι ἢ ὡς θέλω.
>
> He taught me what was mine, and what was not mine. Property is not mine; kinsmen, members of my household, friends, reputation, familiar places, converse with men – all these are not my own. "What, then, *is* yours? Power to deal with external impressions." He showed me that I possess this beyond all hindrance and constraint; no one can hamper me; no one can force me to deal with them otherwise than as I will.
> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.24.68–69)

This passage is full of Epictetean idiom, as appears from a comparison with the opening sentences of the *Encheiridion*:

> Τῶν ὄντων τὰ μέν ἐστιν ἐφ' ἡμῖν, τὰ δὲ οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. ἐφ' ἡμῖν μὲν ὑπόληψις, ὁρμή, ὄρεξις, ἔκκλισις, καὶ ἑνὶ λόγῳ ὅσα ἡμέτερα ἔργα· οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν δὲ τὸ σῶμα, ἡ κτῆσις, δόξαι, ἀρχαί, καὶ ἑνὶ λόγῳ ὅσα οὐχ ἡμέτερα ἔργα. καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐστι φύσει ἐλεύθερα, ἀκώλυτα, ἀπαραπόδιστα· τὰ δὲ οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἀσθενῆ, δοῦλα, κωλυτά, ἀλλότρια.
>
> There are two classes of things: those that are under our control and those that are not. Under our control are opinion, choice, desire, aversion and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our possessions, our reputations, our offices and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing. The things that are under our control are by nature free, unhindered, unimpeded; the things that are not under our control are weak, slavish, hindered, up to others.
> (Epictetus, *Ench.* 1.1–2)

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[67] A large number of apophthegms is collected in book 6 of Diogenes Laertius's *Vitae philosophorum.*

[68] See *Disc.* 2.13.24; 3.22.25; 3.24.66 and 4.1.115.

[69] In *Disc.* 2.13.24 Epictetus says λέγειν Διογένης μεμελετήκει ὁ πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον <u>οὕτως</u> λαλῶν, ὁ πρὸς Φίλιππον, ὁ πρὸς τοὺς πειρατάς, ὁ πρὸς τὸν ὠνησάμενον αὐτόν ⟨…⟩, "Diogenes, who talked to Alexander <u>the way he did</u>, to Philip, to the pirates, to the man who had bought him ⟨…⟩." Here the adverb οὕτως suffices to refer to the content of the anecdote.

D. Conclusion

This contribution took its origin in Flusser's mentioning of a number of Epictetean similes in the context of his discussion of the sources of the rabbinic parables. Flusser has done well by drawing attention to the fact that many subjects occurring in the rabbinic parables are also attested in Epictetus and other Greek authors, but the present survey has shown that there is more to be said about the use of parables in rabbinic literature and in the New Testament than might be concluded on the basis of Flusser's treatment. Our survey has shown that Epictetus makes ample use of rhetorical devices such as similes and examples. His method is in accordance with the theoretical analyses by Aristotle and Quintilian, who regard examples and similes as rhetorical means to persuade their audience. While there are considerable differences between the rabbinic and New Testament parables on the one hand and Epictetus's similes and examples on the other with regard to form and content, the function of similes and examples in Epictetus's philosophical teaching is comparable to the role of parables in the theological teaching by the rabbis and Jesus: parables, similes and examples have a primarily didactic purpose.

As to examples, Epictetus usually takes it for granted that his audience understand what he is talking about when he refers to an event merely by naming the protagonists or by mentioning a few salient details. The same goes for quotations taken from very well-known works such as Plato's *Apology* and *Crito* and Cleanthes's prayer to Zeus. This is a remarkable difference in relation to rabbinic and New Testament parables which always tell a complete story, even though it be very short. To all practical means and purposes similes fulfil the same role as parables: they serve to illustrate the issue at stake and at the same time they want to persuade.

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Animal Similes in Roman Imperial Epic in Their Literary, Cultural, and Political Contexts

Annemarie Ambühl

As the contributions gathered in this volume amply demonstrate, many genres of ancient literature feature comparisons and analogies drawn from various source domains that are often used to convey didactic or moral messages. The present contribution focuses on a particular type of comparison standing at the intersection of simile, parable, and fable, namely animal similes in Greek and Latin epic. On the one hand, these similes belong to a well-established category within the Graeco-Roman epic tradition; as an easily recognizable structural element they function as generic markers and guides to interpretation. On the other hand, they may also open up perspectives beyond epic. The comparison of a human being with an animal qua behavior or character, that lies at the core of the animal simile, forms a link to animal parables and fables, despite their obvious formal differences. Moreover, as the imagery reflects underlying cultural constructions of the relations between animals and humans,[1] they allow interesting glimpses into early imperial Roman culture, the background of the

[1] In the wake of Human Animal Studies in the humanities (cf. R. Borgards, ed., *Tiere: Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch* [Stuttgart: Metzler, 2016]), cultural and literary animal studies have become a focal point of classical scholarship as well; e. g., L. Kalof, ed., *A Cultural History of Animals in Antiquity* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); A. Alexandridis, M. Wild, and L. Winkler-Horaček, eds., *Mensch und Tier in der Antike: Grenzziehung und Grenzüberschreitung* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008); J. P. Brugal, A. Gardeisen, and A. Zucker, eds., *Prédateurs dans tous leurs états: Évolution, biodiversité, interactions, mythes, symboles* (Antibes: APDCA, 2011); G. L. Campbell, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); P. A. Johnston, A. Mastrocinque, and S. Papaioannou, eds., *Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); T. Fögen and E. Thomas, eds., *Interactions between Animals and Humans in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); R. Mattila, S. Ito, and S. Fink, eds., *Animals and Their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World,* UKS/SUCH 2 (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019); T. Schmidt and J. Pahlitzsch, eds., *Impious Dogs, Haughty Foxes and Exquisite Fish: Evaluative Perception and Interpretation of Animals in Ancient and Medieval Mediterranean Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019). A selection of sources on various species can be found in K. F. Kitchell, *Animals in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2014), and S. Lewis and L. Llewellyn-Jones, *The Culture of Animals in Antiquity: A Sourcebook with Commentaries* (London: Routledge, 2018).

epics to be considered here. Incidentally, this is roughly the same period the New Testament originates from. Although no direct confrontation between epic similes and animal parables in early Christian literature will be attempted here, animal similes definitely offer a highly promising potential of interaction with various literary and cultural contexts.[2]

These similes can thus be approached from several angles by exploring them on intra-, intertextual, and contextual levels. Starting from discussions of the simile in ancient rhetorical handbooks and a brief overview of modern scholarship on the epic simile, we will then look at a specific sample of animal similes in imperial Roman epic, mainly from Statius's *Thebais*. Based on predator similes featuring lionesses and tigresses and their interactions with their offspring as well as with hunters and prey, the interpretation investigates the intertextual engagement of these similes with their epic predecessors from Homer on and their structuring functions within the epic narrative as a reflection of human family relationships and a guide to audience responses. In the second part of the contribution, the innovative imagery visible in these similes, such as the tiger hunt and the arena, is placed in the historical and cultural context of first-century Rome and compared and contrasted with other contemporary genres, among them epigram, natural history, and philosophical texts.[3] It is shown that beyond their immediate narrative functions in the epics, such similes and related forms of rhetorical speech can assume wider moral and political significance in the light of the discourse on the "good" versus the "bad" emperor. In particular the ascription to the animals of fatherly or motherly love (or the lack thereof) can serve as a trigger for the audience to relate the similes to their own contemporary world.

A. Ancient Rhetorical Handbooks and Modern Scholarship on the Simile

In ancient rhetorical theory, the boundaries between simile, parable, and fable and other forms of comparisons tend to be fluid.[4] In his handbook of rhetoric (*Institutio oratoria*), the Roman professor of oratory Quintilian discusses the use of various sorts of comparisons, among which he also lists the *similitudo* as

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[2] For animals in Greek fables and in Jewish and Christian literature, see the contributions by Ruben Zimmermann, Lieve Teugels, Mary Ann Beavis, Konrad Schwarz, and Ingvild S. Gilhus in this volume.

[3] Borgards, "Tiere und Literatur," in Bogards, *Tiere*, 225–244 (esp. 228–232), points out the methodological need for such historicizing and contextualizing readings of literary animals, adducing Goethe's *Novelle* (1828), which happens to feature a lion and a tiger.

[4] M. H. McCall, *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Simile and Comparison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) reviews the definitions from Aristotle to Quintilian and beyond. Cf. also D. Innes, "Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory as Ornaments of Style," in *Metaphor,*

the Latin equivalent of the Greek *parabole* (*Inst.* 5.11.1).[5] Although Quintilian is primarily concerned with the use of comparisons in speeches, he also pays attention to epic similes that are often more elaborate than the rhetorical ones. He quotes some similes from Vergil (*Inst.* 8.3.72–73; 8.3.78–79), and in his overview of the literary canon in the tenth book, he praises Homer's similes that along with the other outstanding features of his epics have set an example for other poets to follow (*Inst.* 10.1.49). As suitable material from which similes can be drawn he names the actions of human beings as well as more remote domains such as the behavior of non-speaking beings (i. e., animals) or even inanimate things (*Inst.* 5.11.23). Quintilian thus recognizes animal similes as a specific category of similes,[6] whereby he defines animals as "mute" (*a mutis*). Indeed, in contrast to animal fables (to which he refers in *Inst.* 5.11.19–20), in epic similes animals do not normally talk like human beings, but still they can be attributed thoughts and feelings, as we will see below.[7]

Unlike a fable, which often (though not necessarily) constitutes a self-contained narrative, an epic simile is always embedded in and subordinated to the narrative context which it serves to illustrate. Yet it is not only the tenor of the simile, its point of reference and meaning for the epic action, that is to be taken into account for the interpretation, but also the contents of the vehicle itself, that in extended similes may develop into a little tale in its own right, fulfilling thematic, affective, and pragmatic or performative functions.[8] In general, the

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Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions, ed. G. R. Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7–27, and for the terminology of the Homeric scholia regarding the similes R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 282–298. For the role of fables in the Greek rhetorical tradition, see the contributions by Jeremy Lefkowitz and Ruben Zimmermann in this volume.

[5] Cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990), 419–422: *similitudo* (843–847).

[6] Aristotle, too, in *Rhet.* 1406b21–22 uses a lion example to demonstrate the difference between a (Homeric) simile/εἰκών (ὡς δὲ λέων ἐπόρουσεν, "he was like a lion in his attack") and a metaphor/μεταφορά (λέων ἐπόρουσε, "he was a lion in his attack"); cf. Innes, "Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory," 18. For animals figuring in Greek and Roman rhetoric and beyond, see also D. Hawhee, *Rhetoric in Tooth and Claw: Animals, Language, Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) and generally H. Maye, "Tiere und Metapher," in Bogards, *Tiere*, 37–45.

[7] On fables, see recently T. Korhonen, "Anthropomorphism and the Aesopic Animal Fables," in *Animals and Their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World*, ed. R. Mattila, S. Ito, and S. Fink, UKS/SUCH 2 (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019), 211–231. L. M. Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables: A *contradictio in terminis*?," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 129–148, adduces talking animals in rabbinic parables in order to argue against a strict distinction between similitudes, parables, and fables based on their level of "realism."

[8] The terms "vehicle" and "tenor" correspond to "source domain" and "target domain" in metaphor theory. On the functions of epic similes from a comparative perspective, see S. A. Nimis, *Narrative Semiotics in the Epic Tradition: The Simile* (Bloomington: Indiana

polysemy or semantic surplus conveyed by the similes is a crucial constituent
of the epic narrative. Moreover, in the course of Graeco-Roman literary history,
the simile as a typical structural element of epic keeps accumulating intertextual
layers and evolves into a kind of code language, as epic poets self-consciously
define their place in the epic tradition by taking up and transforming their pred-
ecessors' similes. Such processes can be observed by tracing a particular type
of simile diachronically in the epic tradition as well as synchronically within a
specific epic, as will be done in our case by singling out a thematically related
series of predator similes from Statius's *Thebais*. In this sense, the animals in the
similes to be studied here are not so much creatures of flesh and blood (although
some real-life contexts will be taken into account as well) but rather "creatures of
speech," as the lions in the Homeric similes have been called.[9]

B. Animal Similes in Epic: Of Lions and Men

Animal similes and among them predominantly predator-prey similes form an
essential part of the fabric of epic from the beginnings of the Greek epic tradition.
It is especially the Homeric lion similes that have been studied intensely in classi-
cal scholarship.[10] In comparing the epic warrior to a beast that is either killing
sheep and cattle or that is itself being attacked by hunters, these similes parallel
war with other forms of violence. At the same time, the similes may also function
as windows onto an alternative world to the world of war, the peaceful, but ever
precarious life of the farmer. Although these similes mainly serve to characterize
the male warrior as a lone, aggressive predator, they can also be used to illustrate
his social network and to convey a broader range of human emotions like love or

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University Press, 1987); on performative aspects R. P. Martin, "Similes and Performance,"
in *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*, ed. E. Bakker and
A. Kahane (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 138–166. J. L. Ready, *Character,
Narrator, and Simile in the* Iliad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) distinguishes
between similes in narrator-text and in character-text and sees a reference to the genre of fable
in a lion simile spoken by Achilles in *Il.* 22.262–266 (ibid., 61–69). For a selection of scholarship
on Homeric similes, see below section B, for Statius below notes 20 and 21.

   [9] S. H. Lonsdale, *Creatures of Speech: Lion, Herding, and Hunting Similes in the* Iliad, BA 5
(Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990).

   [10] Besides Lonsdale, *Creatures of Speech*, on lion similes in Homer, see among others
H. Fränkel, *Die Homerischen Gleichnisse*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977),
59–70; W. C. Scott, *The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 58–62, and
W. C. Scott, *The Artistry of the Homeric Simile* (Hanover: University Press of New England,
2009), 194–196; C. Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems,* Hypomnemata 49 (Göttingen:
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 139–141; A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros, masques: Les
représentations de l'animal chez Homère* (Paris: Maspero, 1981); R. Friedrich, "On the Com-
positional Use of Similes in the *Odyssey*," *AJP* 102 (1981): 120–137; W. T. Magrath, "Progression
of the Lion Simile in the *Odyssey*," *CJ* 77 (1982): 205–212; M. Clarke, "Between Lions and Men:
Images of the Hero in the *Iliad*," *GRBS* 36 (1995): 137–159.

grief by ascribing them to the animals as well.[11] For example, in book eighteen of the *Ilias* the quintessential epic warrior Achilles, who grieves for his fallen friend Patroclus, is compared to a lion mourning his lost cubs:

> πυκνὰ μάλα στενάχων ὥς τε λὶς ἠυγένειος,
> ᾧ ῥά θ’ ὑπὸ σκύμνους ἐλαφηβόλος ἁρπάσῃ ἀνὴρ
> ὕλης ἐκ πυκινῆς· ὃ δέ τ’ ἄχνυται ὕστερος ἐλθών,
> πολλὰ δέ τ’ ἄγκε’ ἐπῆλθε μετ’ ἀνέρος ἴχνι’ ἐρευνῶν
> εἴ ποθεν ἐξεύροι· μάλα γὰρ δριμὺς χόλος αἱρεῖ.

> with outbursts of incessant grief. As some great bearded lion
> when some man, a deer hunter, has stolen his cubs away from him
> out of the close wood; the lion comes back too late, and is anguished,
> and turns into many valleys quartering after the man's trail
> on the chance of finding him, and taken with bitter anger.
> (Homer, *Il.* 18.318–322)[12]

While the exotic lion will not have been a familiar animal for Homer's audience and probably reflects Near Eastern influences,[13] the behavior of the animal is (apparently) immediately recognizable and triggers the audience to sympathize with the grief and anger experienced by animal and hero alike, emotions that may at least partly derive from a feeling of guilt because they both have come too late and therefore have not been able to protect their loved ones.[14] On the structural plane, the lion's turn from passive grief to aggressive anger anticipates the bloody revenge Achilles is to take on Hector, Patroclus's killer, in book twenty-two of the *Ilias.*

The gender ambiguity inherent in attributing to the grammatically male lion behavior more typical of a female was already noticed by the Homeric scholia; they argue that the lion in the simile is to be identified as a lioness, because female lions have beards and males manes, it is the females and not the males that rear the cubs, and Homer does not yet have a specific term for the lioness (λέαινα)

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[11] For the attribution of mental and emotional faculties to the Homeric animals, especially the lions, see Lonsdale, *Creatures of Speech*, 33–38 and 133–135, and J. Heath, *The Talking Greeks: Speech, Animals, and the Other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42–51. See also below notes 31 and 32.

[12] Translated by R. Lattimore, *The* Iliad *of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 383.

[13] Besides a possible link to the Gilgamesh epic, M. Alden, "Lions in Paradise: Lion Similes in the *Iliad* and the Lion Cubs of *Il.* 18.318–22," *CQ* 55 (2005): 335–342, connects the simile to Near Eastern lion hunts and the practice of taking the cubs alive (see below section E). Cf. also B. A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,* OBO 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

[14] In *Il.* 17.132–137, it is Ajax, not the absent Achilles, who defends Patroclus's corpse just as a (male) lion defends his young against hunters, while in *Il.* 17.3–6, Menelaus attempting the same task is likened to a mother cow protecting her new-born calf. For an interpretation of the contrasting similes in terms of characterization, see Ready, *Character, Narrator, and Simile,* 198–201.

but uses the masculine form as a common gender noun.[15] Remarkably enough, in other similes from the *Ilias*, Achilles's relation with Patroclus is compared to a relationship not only between father and son (*Il.* 23.222–225) but also between mother and daughter (*Il.* 16.7–11).[16] The memorable Homeric lion simile from *Il.* 18 thus constructs a miniature dramatic tale of a lion "family" torn apart in order to illustrate human social relationships that are endangered or even destroyed by war. It also serves as a reminder that similes not always work through straight analogies but may also exhibit striking asymmetrical aspects in their relation to the epic action, for instance regarding gender.

These same areas, the imagery and narrative functions of similes on the one hand and the representation of gender and family relations and the emotions associated with them on the other hand, have been a focal point of recent scholarship on Latin epic as well, but they have mostly been studied in isolation from each other.[17] The following investigation of predator similes from Statius's *Thebais* that depict family relationships among animals and humans can thus serve to bring together the different approaches in a fruitful way.[18]

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[15] The scholia on *Il.* 18.318 and 17.133–136 (see the preceding note) give the same explanation, adding that the lines in book 17 were even excised from some editions on these grounds. Cf. Lonsdale, *Creatures of Speech*, 29–30 and 44, and the commentary by M. W. Edwards, *Books 17–10. The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5:75–76 and 5:184.

[16] Cf. *Il.* 9.323–324, where Achilles compares his selfless efforts for the Greeks to a mother bird providing food for her nestlings. On human and animal families in the Homeric similes, see Fränkel, *Gleichnisse*, 89–96, and on their role for characterizing the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus Moulton, *Similes*, 99–116 (cf. 141–145); S. Mills, "Achilles, Patroclus and Parental Care in Some Homeric Similes," *GR* 47 (2000): 3–18; C. Warwick, "The Maternal Warrior: Gender and Kleos in the *Iliad*," *AJP* 140 (2019): 1–28. Reverse-sex animal similes (cf. H. P. Foley, "'Reverse Similes' and Sex Roles in the *Odyssey*," *Arethusa* 11 [1978]: 7–26; D. Turkeltaub, "Penelope's Lion, θυμολέων Husband, and θυμός-Destroying Pain," *CJ* 110 [2015]: 279–302; C. Pache, "Mourning Lions and Penelope's Revenge," *Arethusa* 49 [2016]: 1–24) are found in the *Odyssea*, too, where Penelope, who fears for the safety of her son Telemachus, is compared to a lion in fear of hunters (*Od.* 4.787–793) and angry Odysseus to a bitch barking at a stranger, ready to defend her puppies (*Od.* 20.13–16).

[17] Within our subject area, the so-called Flavian epics, see, e. g., N. W. Bernstein, *In the Image of the Ancestors: Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); A. Augoustakis, *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); M. McAuley, *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); N. Manioti, ed., *Family in Flavian Epic,* MnemSup 394 (Leiden: Brill, 2016). For literature on the similes, see below section C.

[18] In Statius's second, unfinished epic *Achilleis* on Achilles's youth, animals, family and gender issues are linked more closely in the narrative through hunting and transvestitism; cf. P. J. Heslin, *The Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius'* Achilleid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 157–192; C. McNelis, "Similes and Gender in the *Achilleid*," in *Brill's Companion to Statius*, ed. W. J. Dominik, K. Gervais, and C. E. Newlands (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 189–204.

C. Predator Similes and Family Relationships
in Statius's *Thebais*: Mourning Lionesses
and Vengeful Tigresses (and Vice Versa)

Statius's *Thebais* is a mythological epic in twelve books on the struggle between the sons of Oedipus for the throne in Thebes, composed by the poet Publius Papinius Statius under the reign of the emperor Domitian (81–96 CE). Although it treats a mythological subject matter, the *Thebais* also resonates with the historical Roman civil wars that led to the Principate and to the rise of the Flavian dynasty after 69 CE.[19] In this sense, the fratricidal war between Eteocles and Polynices parallels the myth of Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers suckled by the she-wolf (see below section D). Troubled family relationships form a crucial leitmotif throughout the *Thebais* that is also reflected through animal similes. These similes form a dense network of correspondences across the various books, highlighting the conflicts within the dysfunctional royal family, that is plagued by incest and parricide, and the detrimental effects the resulting war has on other families as well.[20]

The particular thematic cluster selected for our linear reading features some of the epic's most extended and intriguing similes.[21] All of them revolve around a lioness or tigress with her cubs, but they sketch very different pictures, from a man-eating aggressor to a quasi-human mourning mother, depending on their respective narrative contexts. Although many of them underline the prominent roles of female characters in the epic, they not only illustrate the bond between mothers and children but a wider spectrum of family and social relations. Moreover, besides reflecting the human family relations on the plane of the epic action, the thematically corresponding predator similes also constitute a sort

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[19] For resonances of civil war in Statius and generally in the literature from the Flavian period, see L. Donovan Ginsberg and D. A. Krasne, eds., *After 69 CE – Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome,* TC 65 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

[20] W. J. Dominik, "Similes and Their Programmatic Role in the *Thebaid*," in *Brill's Companion to Statius*, ed. W. J. Dominik, K. Gervais, and C. E. Newlands (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 266–290, who identifies 236 similes in the *Thebais*, links them mainly to the theme of the abuse of power. On the connections between the animal similes and the dehumanizing violence of the conflict, see S. Franchet d'Espèrey, *Conflit, violence et non-violence dans la* Thébaïde *de Stace* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999), 127–190.

[21] Similar studies could be performed on other thematic clusters, e. g., bull similes: cf. B. Kytzler, "Gleichnisgruppen in der *Thebais* des Statius," *WS* 75 (1962): 141–160 (esp. 144–149, cf. 150–154 on the predator similes). Generally on the similes and especially animal similes in Statius, see L. Legras, *Étude sur la* Thébaïde *de Stace* (Paris: Bellais, 1905), 293–310; S. von Moisy, *Untersuchungen zur Erzählweise in Statius'* Thebais (Bonn: Habelt, 1971), 58–110 (esp. 94–106); A. Luque Lozano, "Los símiles en la *Tebaida* de Estacio," *Habis* 17 (1986): 165–184 (esp. 182); A.M Taisne, *L'esthétique de Stace: La peinture des correspondances* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994), 120–161 (esp. 137–144); U. Gärtner and K. Blaschka, "Similes and Comparisons in the Epic Tradition," in *Structures of Epic Poetry,* vol. 1, *Foundations*, ed. C. Reitz and S. Finkmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 727–772 (esp. 756–759).

of sustained para-narrative about (inevitably anthropocentrically construed) animal families.

The first simile to be studied here comes from the beginning of the second book. The reigning king of Thebes, Eteocles, wakes up from a nightmare in which the bloody ghost of his murdered grandfather Laius has provoked him to challenge his exiled brother Polynices in a fight for power:

> *qualis ubi audito venantum murmure tigris*
> *horruit in maculas somnosque excussit inertes,*
> *bella cupit laxatque genas et temperat ungues,*
> *mox ruit in turmas natisque alimenta cruentis*
> *spirantem fert ore virum: sic excitus ira*
> *ductor in absentem consumit proelia fratrem.*

> As when a tigress hears the noise of the hunters, she bristles into her stripes and shakes off the sloth of sleep; eager for battle she loosens her jaws and flexes her claws, then rushes upon the troop and carries in her mouth a breathing man, food for her bloody young; so enraged does the leader relish in the fight against his absent brother. (Statius, *Theb.* 2.128–133)[22]

On the level of the story told within the simile, the hunters mentioned at the beginning raise the expectation that what follows will be a traditional hunting simile, where the animal is about to be wounded or killed. However, the cubs that are mentioned later on (*Theb.* 2.131: *natis*) suggest that this will not be an easy task, as mother tigresses were considered as especially aggressive (see below sections D and E), which may also account for the sex reversal between the simile and its point of reference, the king. Moreover, the simile is focalized not from the point of view of the humans (there is no description of hunting tactics), but wholly from the perspective of the tigress herself. Suddenly, she launches a counter-attack, and the hunting party is turned into a man-kill, as if the tigress from the beginning had wanted to fetch food for her cubs. Depending on the readers' perspective, the simile thus allows for two different interpretations: From the point of view of the hunters, the tiger family appears as cruel, man-eating beasts; their human prey is still alive and the young are described as *cruenti* (*Theb.* 2.131), either (proleptically) smeared with the blood of their meal or (permanently) blood-thirsty.[23] But another reading that takes into ac-

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[22] All translations from the *Thebais* are by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, LCL, sometimes adapted. I consequently use personal pronouns for the animals but differentiate between Latin terms of kinship like *mater* ("mother") or *nati* ("young") and technical terms such as *catuli* ("cubs"). Interestingly, the varying use of affective or technical terms is already noticed by the Homeric scholia on the similes in *Il.* 17.4 and 133–136 (see above note 14).

[23] Another simile (*Theb.* 7.529–533) features man-eating lions who have killed their attackers and contentedly lie down upon their bodies before satisfying their hunger. The lions stand for Polynices's troops, who temporarily have been calmed by Jocasta's attempt at mediation, but soon will turn to fight. Ironically, the fighting is caused by the tame tigers of Bacchus, who are whipped up by the Fury into their former aggressive state; after they attack

count the internal focus of the simile sees the tigress as a protective mother who defends and nourishes her young (*Theb.* 2.131: *alimenta*).

How do these two contrasting readings of the simile relate to the narrative context? It is clear that the tigress within the simile stands for king Eteocles and the emotions he feels at this point, the shock of being woken from his nightmare, anger (*Theb.* 2.132: *ira*) and the overwhelming urge to fight his brother who (as he has been warned in the manipulative dream) is about to attack him. The cubs thus apparently represent the city of Thebes and its inhabitants whom the king is prepared to protect against the attack. However, things are not so simple. We, the external audience, already know that Eteocles is not the good king defending his city, but rather a tyrant lusting for power. The internal focus of the simile thus represents Eteocles's distorted self-image. His brother, whom he sees as the alien hunter to be killed and fed to his cubs, is actually part of his own family. Thus the protective instinct of the tigress is replaced by the quasi-cannibalistic instinct of the enemy brothers that will end in mutual fratricide – already now Eteocles "feasts" (*Theb.* 2.133: *consumit*) on the imaginary fight.[24] So although the moral message is not spelled out explicitly, in the end the bloodstained cubs do not represent the king's role as a protector of his family and his city but rather his lust for power which he is willing to pursue at any price; he himself is as it were stained with the blood of his grandfather from the dream (*Theb.* 2.129 f.: *vanumque cruorem/excutiens*).[25]

The various strands inherent in this complex simile are taken up and developed further in the course of the epic. Whereas the first simile is linked to the king as instigator of the war, the further similes involving tigresses or lionesses and their cubs stand for relations between mothers and their young sons who will fall victim to the brothers' war. One of these is the huntress Atalanta, who has raised her son Parthenopaeus as a single mother. As soon as she hears that he is about to volunteer for the attack against Thebes, she storms through the

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some Argives, they are killed and their death in turn provokes the Thebans to start fighting (*Theb.* 7.564–607).

[24] For readings of the simile along these lines cf. N. Coffee, "Eteocles, Polynices, and the Economics of Violence in Statius' *Thebaid*," *AJP* 127 (2006): 415–452 (esp. 429–431) and the commentary by K. Gervais, ed., *Statius, Thebaid 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111–113.

[25] For verbal repetitions marking correspondences between simile and narrative, cf. J. Perkins, "An Aspect of Latin Comparison Construction," *TAPA* 104 (1974): 261–277 (esp. 271). In an analogous way, the simile in *Theb.* 7.393–397, where Eteocles mustering his troops for battle is compared to a good shepherd ushering his flock to pasture and lovingly caring for the ewes and lambs, actually serves to unmask his egotism in leading his people to "destruction in an unjust cause" (J. J. L. Smolenaars, *Statius Thebaid VII: A Commentary* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 175–176). For animal imagery depicting the excessive violence and cannibalism of epic characters, see S. Braund and G. Gilbert, "An ABC of Epic *ira*: Anger, Beasts, and Cannibalism," in *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen*, ed. S. Braund and G. W. Most, YCS 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 250–285, and V. Andò, *Violenza bestiale: Modelli dell'umano nella poesia greca epica e drammatica* (Rome: Salvatore Sciascia, 2013).

woods "as an angry tigress bereft of her young follows the tracks of the robber's horse" (*Theb.* 4.315–316: *raptis velut aspera natis/praedatoris equi sequitur vestigia tigris*). This brief comparison continues the story from the first simile with a different ending. Here the tigress just like the lion in *Il.* 18 has not been able to protect her cubs from the hunter who has stolen them. This anticipates the fate of her young son, who will eventually be killed by the enemy; ironically enough, he will ride to battle on his hunting horse which is proudly covered with a tiger's hide (*Theb.* 9.685–686). In contrast to the first simile, the motherly instincts of the animal depicted in the simile in this case correspond to real motherly love felt by the human character, but still she will not be able to save her son.[26]

We will come back to Parthenopaeus's fate shortly, but first there follows another instance where even motherly love is perverted on the human level. The former queen Hypsipyle recounts the tale of the Lemnian women, who in a state of fury decided to kill all their male kin. She illustrates the imminent attack with a lion simile:

> *non aliter Scythicos armenta per agros*
> *Hyrcanae clausere leae, quas exigit ortu*
> *prima fames, avidique implorant ubera nati.*

> Not otherwise do Hyrcanian lionesses encircle herds in Scythian fields; early hunger drives them forth at dawn and their greedy young implore their udders.
> (Statius, *Theb.* 5.203–205)

In its narrative context, the simile of the lionesses who have to go hunting in order to produce enough milk to feed their hungry cubs sounds almost cynical, for the Lemnian women to whom they are compared not only kill their husbands but also their young sons.[27] In their merciless actions the crucial distinction between killing one's prey and nursing one's young maintained by the lionesses in the simile collapses. This contrast underlines the women's "unnatural" behavior, except the narrator's own, who alone saves her elderly father.

In the second half of the epic the focus on mothers and young sons is again thrown into relief through similes.[28] In the narrative of Parthenopaeus's *aris-*

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[26] Cf. the commentary by R. Parkes, ed., *Statius, Thebaid 4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 188–189, who notes that the simile "is focalized from Atalanta's point of view." See also below section E.

[27] So the child Epopeus is stabbed by his own mother and the girl Lycaste is forced by her mother to kill her twin brother Cydimus (*Theb.* 5.224–230). Moreover, Lycaste's reluctance is compared to a tamed beast that despite being goaded refuses to turn wild again (*Theb.* 5.231–233); for such examples drawn from the circus, see below section E.

[28] Another of these tragic young men is Atys, the betrothed of Oedipus's daughter Ismene, who in *Theb.* 8.572–576 is compared to a young lion who is still "innocent" of a big kill (574: *magnique etiamnum sanguinis insons*) and only feeds on a lamb; the lion's mother does not come into play, as Atys is already of marriageable age. Inevitably he falls prey to the warrior Tydeus, who in turn is likened to a lion who disdains the calves and heifers and goes for the bull of the herd (*Theb.* 8.593–596) – for him Atys is nothing but collateral damage.

teia, which continues the story from the fourth book, the crucial turning points are marked by two corresponding lion similes. In the first one, Parthenopaeus's youthful overconfidence in his fighting skills, which will prove fatal for him, is illustrated by the simile of a young lion who after having been raised by his mother leaves her to enjoy his newly-won freedom:

> *ut leo, cui parvo mater Gaetula cruentos*
> *suggerit ipsa cibos, cum primum crescere sensit*
> *colla iubis torvusque novos respexit ad ungues,*
> *indignatur ali, tandemque effusus apertos*
> *liber amat campos et nescit in antra reverti.*

> So a lion, to whom when small his Gaetulian mother herself brings bloody food, when for the first time he has felt his neck increase with a mane and looked grimly at his new claws, scorns to be fed and dashing out at last to freedom loves the open plains nor thinks of returning to the cave.
> (Statius, *Theb.* 9.739–743)

While his mother Atalanta had been compared to a tiger mother bereft of her young (*Theb.* 4.315–316), now her son is compared to a young lion who does not want to be nursed any longer; the reference to the bloody prey provided by his mother echoes the tiger simile from the second book (*Theb.* 9.739–740: *cruentos … cibos*, 742: *ali*; cf. *Theb.* 2.131: *natisque alimenta cruentis*). The adolescent lion's natural emancipatory impulse will however prove fatal for his human counterpart, who is not yet a match for a more experienced warrior and is indeed killed soon after. His comrades try to recover his body at night but are surprised by the enemy. Again, this is illustrated by a simile:[29]

> *ut lea, quam saevo fetam pressere cubili*
> *venantes Numidae, natos erecta superstat,*
> *mente sub incerta torvum ac miserabile frendens;*
> *illa quidem turbare globos et frangere morsu*
> *tela queat, sed prolis amor crudelia vincit*
> *pectora, et a media catulos circumspicit ira.*

> So a lioness who has newly whelped, beset by Numidian hunters in her wild den, stands upright over her young, gnashing her teeth in grim and at the same time piteous wise, her mind in doubt; she could disrupt the groups and break their weapons with her bite, but love for her offspring binds her cruel heart and from the midst of her rage she looks round at her cubs.
> (Statius, *Theb.* 10.414–419)

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[29] This simile is inspired by *Il.* 17.132–137, where Ajax protects the fallen Patroclus like a lion does his cubs, whereas the animal's mental conflict is closer to the simile of the bitch in *Od.* 20.13–16 (see above section B). Incidentally, these two Homeric similes together with the simile of the mother bird in *Il.* 9.323–324 are quoted by Plutarch (*Am. prol.* 494c7–e2) as examples of the love of offspring in animals; cf. U. Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch im Denken der Antike: Studien zur Tierpsychologie, Anthropologie und Ethik*, SAP 6 (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1977), 10.

In the absence of the young man's mother, who had been compared to a tigress, his older comrade Dymas (who incidentally uses a tiger's hide wrapped around his left arm to protect himself, *Theb.* 10.411) assumes the role of a surrogate father, who through a reversal of gender roles is likened to a lioness.[30] Her inner conflict between aggressive and defensive impulses is focalized through a glimpse into the animal's mind. In contrast to the first simile, where the tigress who unhesitatingly attacks the hunters illustrates the egotistic character of king Eteocles (the care for her cubs comes only as an afterthought), in this simile the protective instinct of the animal who prioritizes the safety of her cubs above her aggressive impulses corresponds to the true altruistic love of a soldier, who tries to protect his young leader's body at the cost of his own life.

The element of focalization is even more prominent in the next simile, where another mother who has lost her son Menoeceus, a young member of the royal family who has sacrificed himself for the sake of Thebes, is compared to a mourning tigress:

> *sic aspera tigris*
> *fetibus abreptis Scythico deserta sub antro*
> *accubat et tepidi lambit vestigia saxi;*
> *nusquam irae, sedit rabidi feritasque famesque*
> *oris, eunt praeter secura armenta gregesque:*
> *aspicit illa iacens; ubi enim quibus ubera pascat*
> *aut quos ingenti premat expectata rapina?*

> So the fierce tigress whose young have been stolen lies forsaken in her Scythian cave and licks the prints on the stone that is still warm; gone is her rage, quiet the wildness and the hunger of her rabid mouth; herds and flocks pass by unafraid; she looks and lies; for where are they for whom she should nourish her teats, whom, long awaited, she should load with massive prey?
> (Statius, *Theb.* 10.820–826)

This simile sketches yet another possible outcome of the story told in the preceding similes. The tigress has lost her young for good and is paralyzed by depression, resulting in the complete loss of her hunting instincts. Here the focalization is intensified by means of a brief inner monologue in the form of rhetorical questions (*Theb.* 10.825–826).[31] The attribution of thoughts to the animal more-

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[30] In an analogous situation in *Theb.* 9.115–119, Hippomedon is likened to a mother cow defending her calf against a wolf; there her biological sex is emphasized, as she "forgets her weaker sex and as a female imitates mighty bulls" (*Theb.* 9.118–119: *sexusque oblita minoris / spumat et ingentes imitatur femina tauros*). The thematic correspondences between these similes are moreover marked by their shared links to the Homeric intertexts.

[31] This is not a genuinely talking animal, as the tigress's thoughts are articulated by the narrator (as are the lion's hopes of finding the hunter in *Il.* 18.322; see above section B). Still, the similarity of animal and human grief is underlined by the episode of the Bacchus tigers (see above note 23), where the mortally wounded animals' groans imitate (human) complaints (*Theb.* 7.597: *gemituque imitante querelas*). In several anecdotes in Pliny the Elder, animals are able to communicate with humans, among them a female panther who "asks" a passerby

over involves a striking reversal of roles, for the human mother after delivering a bitter speech is not allowed to express her grief any longer (*Theb.* 10.815–816) and completely loses her ability to communicate with words or thoughts (*Theb.* 10.820: *iam vocis, iam mentis inops*); she does not even get a name and disappears from the epic without further mention. As the whole episode is concluded by the simile, the audience's pity for the grieving mother seems to be transferred to (nearly) genuine empathy with the animal.[32] This must have been a rather unexpected perspective for Roman readers, who enjoyed watching shows with exotic tigers in the arena or kept lion cubs as pets for the rich (e.g., Seneca, *Ira* 2.31.6) – precisely the market for the stolen cubs from the simile (see below section E).

The last two similes to be considered here form a link between the concluding books of the *Thebais* and return to the core family of the Theban myth. At the end of the eleventh book, after the mutual fratricide of Eteocles and Polynices and the suicide of their mother Jocasta, the old Oedipus is exiled by the new king Creon. His daughter Antigone beseeches Creon, but her embittered father drags her away and threatens her not to seek pardon for him. In his weak but still aggressive state he is compared to an old lion:

> *qualis leo rupe sub alta,*
> *quem viridem quondam silvae montesque tremebant,*
> *iam piger et longo iacet exarmatus ab aevo,*
> *magna tamen facies et non adeunda senectus;*
> *et si demissas veniat mugitus ad aures,*
> *erigitur meminitque sui, viresque solutas*
> *ingemit et campis alios regnare leones.*

> Like a lion under a high crag, at whom in his prime forests and mountains once trembled; now he lies inactive, disarmed by length of years, yet his look is grand and his old age best left alone; and if a sound of lowing comes to his drooping ears, he rises up and remembers himself, groaning for his strength decayed and that other lions rule the plains.
> (Statius, *Theb.* 11.741–747)

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to rescue her cubs from a pit and shows her gratitude after he has understood and fulfilled the grieving animal's wish (*Nat.* 8.59–60). For an actually speaking animal, see below note 44, for the ancient philosophical debate below notes 32 and 39. Cf. also the recent volume by H. Schmalzgruber, ed., *Speaking Animals in Ancient Literature,* Kalliope 20 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020).

[32] Such reversals of perspective and the issue of empathy with animals are discussed with respect to Greek literature by T. Korhonen and E. Ruonakoski, *Human and Animal in Ancient Greece: Empathy and Encounter in Classical Literature*, LCS 15 (London: Tauris, 2017), esp. 113–122 on epic similes. For a variety of postmodern and even posthuman approaches, see also M. DeMello, ed., *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and G. M. Chesi and F. Spiegel, eds., *Classical Literature and Posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), esp. part 1: "De/humanization and animals." For a comparative study of classical and modern literature cf. M. Payne, *The Animal Part: Human and Other Animals in the Poetic Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

In stark contrast to the depressed tiger mother who mourns the loss of her cubs, the old lion is a loner who nostalgically longs for his own past glory. His resentment towards the younger lions mirrors Oedipus's resentment towards Creon. The lion thus symbolizes Oedipus anti-social character and the passive-aggressive behavior towards his family members, including his own children, for it was his curse that ultimately caused the death of both his sons.[33] In contrast, Antigone not only cares for her blind father but also for her brother Polynices, whose burial Creon has forbidden. In the last book she defies the guards and ventures on her own into the nightly battlefield in order to look for his dead body. While breaking free she is compared to a young lioness:

> *fremitu quo territat agros*
> *virginis ira leae, rabies cui libera tandem*
> *et primus sine matre furor.*

> with a cry like the angry roar of a virgin lioness, striking terror into the countryside, her rage free at last and her fury for the first time without her mother.
> (Statius, *Theb.* 12.356–358)

Antigone, who has lost almost all her family members including her mother, in contrast to the old, weak lion who symbolized Oedipus is likened to a young lioness full of confidence in her strength. Unlike Parthenopaeus, who had been compared to a young lion in vain trying to emancipate himself from his mother (*Theb.* 9.739–743), she seems well fit for a life on her own. The simile marks the climax of her evolution within the epic from a shy, over-protected maiden to an independent young woman who places the burial of her brother above obedience to the king. Yet the emphasis on the lioness's furious state of mind (*ira*, *rabies*, *furor*) also reveals a darker side of Antigone's character. This fits in with interpretations of the concluding book of the *Thebais* not as a solution but as a continuation of the fratricidal war, as Antigone and Polynices's widow Argia battle furiously over the privilege to be punished for his burial (*Theb.* 12.456–463, esp. 462: *iram odiumque putes*, "it might seem anger and hatred").[34]

Let us draw some preliminary conclusions from this sample of animal similes in Statius's *Thebais*. To be sure, the similes discussed here are dispersed over different books of the epic, but even across the distance they form a dense network that can be read on two levels, with respect to their significance for the epic action as well as with respect to the imagery of the similes themselves. Although

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[33] If Statius was familiar with the tale that younger lions care for their old, weak father by sharing their prey with him (cf. Plutarch, *Soll. an.* 972c8–d3, and the much more anthropomorphized version in Aelian, *Nat. an.* 9.1, where the old lion expresses his gratitude to his sons), this might be a pointed reversal.

[34] For the simile as "an indication of Antigone's dehumanized state" cf. the commentary by K. F. L. Pollmann, *Statius, Thebaid 12* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 172–173. On the role of similes and family relationships in book 12, see also A. Sacerdoti, *Novus unde furor: Una lettura del dodicesimo libro della* Tebaide *di Stazio* (Pisa: Serra, 2012).

for some of the similes there are models in the epic tradition from Homer on, the intensity and complexity of the correspondences between the thematically related predator similes across the epic seems to be an innovation on the part of Statius, for the epics of his near-contemporaries Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus feature only a few isolated predator similes involving family relationships. It is especially this focus on the bonds between animal mothers and their young that links the similes with each other as well as with the epic action.[35] Most of the similes illustrate the loss of young sons and the grief of their mothers, for example by linking the episodes narrating the departure, *aristeia*, and death of Parthenopaeus through books four to ten. Other similes highlight the perversion of the love between family members, among the Theban royal family as well as in the inlaid tale of the Lemnian women, by contrasting it with the "natural" behavior of animals, so that paradoxically the focus on family bonds within the similes emphasizes the lack thereof on the level of the action. Interestingly, most of the similes feature lionesses and tigresses, which does not seem to be simply a matter of grammatical gender (*tigris* in Latin poets always being feminine) but a conscious choice that sometimes even results in a gender cross-over when applied to male figures such as Eteocles and Dymas.[36] This strong emphasis on positive (although often futile) female agency in the animal similes seemingly mirrors the interactions among the human characters, where fathers are either absent or like Oedipus exert a destructive influence and brothers fight each other, whereas prominent female characters such as Jocasta (who is at the same time mother, wife, and grandmother of her children) or Antigone try to mediate, even if ultimately to no avail.

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[35] Parent-child relations in the *Thebais* have even been projected onto the metaliterary level as a reflection of the author's ambiguous stance towards his epic brainchild; cf. K. Gervais, "Parent-Child Conflict in the *Thebaid*," in *Brill's Companion to Statius*, ed. W. J. Dominik, K. Gervais, and C. E. Newlands (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 221–239; McAuley, *Reproducing Rome*, 297–389.

[36] This is thus the exact opposite of the grammatically male Homeric lions as noted by the Homeric scholia (see above section B), although strictly speaking in the simile likening Eteocles to a tiger in *Theb.* 2.128–133 the animal is not explicitly marked as female apart from the suggestive presence of cubs (in contrast to the *aspera tigris* in *Theb.* 4.315–316 and 10.820). A similarly ambiguous case is the panther, who is generically feminine in Greek (πάρδαλις) and Latin (*panthera*) but can also be attributed typically "female" or "male" behavior (see also below section D); cf. J. Walter, "Der Philosoph im Pantherfell: Aelian, *Natura animalium* 5,54 vor dem Hintergrund antiker Prätexte und moderner Tierethologie," *ANR* 25 (2015): 173–202 (esp. 190–191), and S. Mühlenfeld, *Konzepte der 'exotischen' Tierwelt im Mittelalter* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2019), 123–148 (esp. 135). A. Corbeill, *Sexing the World: Grammatical Gender and Biological Sex in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) has shown that Roman poets consciously play with such linguistic phenomena. L. J. Hawtree, too, in her unpublished PhD dissertation "Wild Animals in Roman Epic" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2011), 44–52 and 102–114, reads the grammatically feminine lionesses and tigresses in Roman epic as a means to convey a new, less male-centered form of heroism.

The series of thematically related similes in Statius's *Thebais* thus constitutes a meta-narrative that reflects the man-made violence on the level of the epic action not so much in the bloody kills to be expected from the "cruel" animals, but rather through the hunters who disrupt the animals' reproductive cycle by stealing their cubs. At the same time the similes depicting animal families establish a narrative of parental love that counterbalances the destruction of all social bonds by the fratricidal war at Thebes. However, in the two last similes discussed here its contaminating influence seems to have reached even the animal realm, when the isolated old lion and the raging young lioness sever their family ties, too.

D. Philosophical Contexts: Ethics and Natural History

As Statius's *Thebais* is a mythological epic, the moral message potentially implied in the comparisons between humans and animals is not spelled out as explicitly as in a didactic or philosophical text, and the applicability to the readers' own life must remain a matter of speculation. Still we may wonder whether through the similes the human beings are animalized and turn out to be more savage than the wild beasts, or the animals are humanized and even appear as the better humans.[37] This might seem a purely anthropocentric approach, and of course the animal similes in the first place serve to illustrate human behavior and human emotions,[38] but they do not contradict other classical sources on animal behavior. Although the distinction between humans and animals is normally kept strictly hierarchical, writers like Aristotle or Plutarch attribute a rational mind and the ability to communicate at least to certain species of animals.[39]

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[37] So in his philosophical writings Seneca argues that humans should not act more beastly than the wild beasts they tame (e. g., *Ira* 2.31.6); see Ä. Bäumer, *Die Bestie Mensch: Senecas Aggressionstheorie, ihre philosophischen Vorstufen und ihre literarischen Auswirkungen*, SKP 4 (Bern: Lang, 1982) and F. Tutrone, *Filosofi e animali in Roma antica: Modelli di animalità e umanità in Lucrezio e Seneca* (Pisa: ETS, 2012), 155–291. For animal comparisons in Epictetus, see the contribution by Gerard Boter.

[38] In contrast to tigresses, the model of single lionesses defending their young does not reflect the social behavior of (African) lions, although in one case Statius has a pride of lionesses hunting together (the Lemnian women in *Theb.* 5.203–205). The details are thus mainly due to the adaptation of the similes to their respective narrative contexts.

[39] These philosophical issues, which can only be touched marginally here, have been discussed extensively, among others by Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch*; Heath, *Talking Greeks*; R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); C. Osborne, *Dumb Beasts and Dead Philosophers: Humanity and the Humane in Ancient Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); M. Bettini, *Voci: Antropologia sonora del mondo antico* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008); T. Fögen, "Animal Communication," in Campbell, *Oxford Handbook of Animals*, 216–232; O. Hellmann, "On the Interface of Philology and Science: The Case of Zoology," in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship,* vol. 2, *Between Theory and Practice*, ed. F. Montanari, S. Matthaios,

As a background to Statius's predator similes, here some constructions of animal "families" especially with respect to the love between parents and their young in ancient philosophy and natural history will be adduced. The similes' focus on mothering lionesses and tigresses is paralleled by the sources' interest in the females of the species, for although they agree on the principal superiority of the males, they acknowledge the "lion's share" of the females in rearing the young.[40] Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 8.51) notices the braveness of the lioness when fighting for her cubs; the detail that she fixes her eyes on the ground so as not to be frightened by the hunting spears seems to be adapted from the simile in *Il.* 17.133–136, where the lion defending his young draws his skin down to cover his eyes, but in contrast to the grammatically masculine gender of the Homeric lion (see above section B), Pliny emphasizes that the lioness has newly whelped (*feta*).[41] There is even a peculiar zoological tradition starting from Herodotus (*Hist.* 3.108.4), who in the context of an excursus on Arabia claims that in contrast to prolific animals of prey such as hares, predators such as lionesses only whelp once in their lifetime, and only a single cub, for the embryo with its sharp claws destroys the uterus, which is expelled at giving birth. This anecdote is referred to as a popular belief by Aristotle (*Hist. an.* 6.31.579b2–7), Pliny (*Nat.* 8.43–44), and Aelian (*Nat. an.* 4.35), who reject its credibility but still seem fascinated by it. Indeed it perfectly fits the concepts of the inborn aggression of the lion cub and the mother's self-sacrificing love for her offspring. The first aspect is also reflected in a choral song from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (*Ag.* 717–736), where

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and A. Rengakos (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1235–1266 (esp. 1235–1245). See also the studies by S. T. Newmyer: *Animals, Rights, and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2006); *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2011); *The Animal and the Human in Ancient and Modern Thought: The 'Man Alone of Animals' Concept* (London: Routledge, 2017). With respect to early Christian literature, cf. I. S. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2006); J. E. Spittler, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: The Wild Kingdom of Early Christian Literature*, WUNT 2/247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); P. Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[40] Cf. S. M. Connell, *Aristotle on Female Animals: A Study of the Generation of Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). M. Miziur-Moździoch in her unpublished PhD dissertation "Exotic Animals in Life, Culture and Imagination of the Hellenistic Period: Big Cats" (PhD diss., University of Wrocław, 2015) studies the zoology of felines in Aristotle and other sources. For the superiority of the males, cf. the Aristotelian *Physiognomonica* (*Physiogn.* 809a26–810a13, esp. 809b14–36 on the lion) as well as Pliny (*Nat.* 8.42) and Aelian (*Nat. an.* 11.2) on the male lion's mane; for the females taking care of the young, see, e. g., Pliny, *Nat.* 8.66 (see below section E).

[41] This story about the lioness is not found in the section on lions in Aristotle's *Historia animalium* (*Hist. an.* 9.44.629b–c), on which Pliny draws heavily, but the same explanation is given by the scholia on the Homeric simile. Generally on Pliny's reception of Aristotle, see P. Li Causi, "Un Aristotele romano? Ricezione e metamorfosi del corpus zoologico in Plinio il Vecchio," in *La zoologia di Aristotele e la sua ricezione dall'età ellenistica e romana alle culture medievali*, ed. M. M. Sassi, E. Coda, and G. Feola (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2017), 85–111.

Helen, the seductive but destructive cause of the Trojan War, is associated with an orphaned lion cub reared like an infant in the arms of his foster parents, who when grown up shows the nature of his true parents and creates a bloodbath in the house.[42]

In Rome, the legend of the she-wolf who suckled the twins Romulus and Remus shows a similar ambivalence between motherly love and innate aggression. The story of this cultural icon cannot be sketched here in full, but suffice it to say that the she-wolf has provoked widely diverging interpretations in Roman literature, especially during the turbulent transition from the Late Republic to the Empire.[43] On the one hand, her extraordinary kindness towards the abandoned babies is commended (e. g., Livy, *Urbe cond.* 1.4; Ovid, *Fast.* 2.413–422 and 5.465–468), on the other hand, Romulus's crimes, the murder of his brother Remus, and the rape of the Sabine women, are explained by the fact that he has been nourished with the milk of a wild beast (e. g., Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.6.19–22 and 4.4.53–58). This characterization of an inhumane, cruel man who allegedly was born or suckled by a lioness or tigress is also applied to faithless lovers who are accused by the women they have betrayed, for instance Theseus by Ariadne in Catullus (*Carm.* 64.154–156) or Aeneas by Dido in Vergil's *Aeneis* (*Aen.* 4.366–367); paradoxically, the strong maternal feelings ascribed to lionesses and tigresses are denied here, when they are paralleled with insensate objects like rocks or monsters like Scylla.

In a political context, the negative characterization of Romulus as a wolf-child can be extended to the whole Roman people by (fictive) critics of Roman imperialism; so king Mithridates according to Justin's *Epitome* of the *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus (38.6.8) ascribed to the Romans the wolf-like spirit of their founders, blood-thirsty and greedy for empire and riches. In Livy (*Urbe cond.* 26.13.12–13) the Capuan Vibius Virrius contrasts the natural love of animals for their offspring with the pitilessness of the Romans: wild beasts can be diverted from a blind attack when one threatens their cubs (cf. the lioness in Statius, *Theb.* 10.414–419), but the Romans did not give up the siege of Capua even when Rome itself, their women and children were threatened by Hannibal, such was their thirst for blood. Worse still, in the civil wars, they turn this lust for blood against themselves: so Horace in *Epod.* 7 censures the Romans, who unlike wolves or lions wage war against their own kind (*Epod.* 7.11–12), following the precedent of Romulus, who bestowed the curse of his fratricide

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[42] Aristophanes in the *Ranae* (*Ran.* 1431–1432) has Aeschylus give a political twist to the image by applying it to Alcibiades and his ambiguous relation to Athens.

[43] Cf. T. P. Wiseman, *Remus: A Roman Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 63–76, and C. Mazzoni, *She-Wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 91–116; on interpretations of Romulus's fratricide, see C. J. Bannon, *The Brothers of Romulus: Fraternal Pietas in Roman Law, Literature, and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), esp. 158–173.

upon his descendants (*Epod.* 7.17–20; cf. Lucan, *Bell. civ.* 1.93–97). In Statius's similes, too, unlike the human characters the lions or tigers never turn against their own species.[44] Comparisons between humans and animals in these texts thus work both ways: either humans imbibe like mother's milk the innate cruelty that is characteristic of wild beasts, or the predators show behavior that is more humane than that of human beings.

E. Cultural Contexts: Tiger Hunting and the Amphitheater in Early Imperial Rome

One of the most innovative thematic features of Statius's similes is the prominence of tigers, which may reflect the Bacchic associations of Thebes; indeed on the level of the epic action itself the holy tigers of Bacchus play an important role as agents in the outbreak of the war (*Theb.* 7.564–607).[45] The similes alluding to the hunt for living tiger cubs (*Theb.* 4.315–316 and 10.820–826) find parallels in the contemporary epics of Valerius Flaccus (*Argon.* 1.489–493), where due to the narrative context, the abduction of young Acastus by Jason, the simile is focalized from the hunter's perspective, and Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 12.458–462), where the tigress succeeds in catching the hunter.[46] Beyond the mythological and poetic contexts, this practice, which is presupposed but not fully explained in the similes, can also be referred to the "real world" of early imperial Rome.[47] Background information about this hunting technique is provided by the *Naturalis historia* of Pliny the Elder, another contemporary work that combines zoology with cultural history and imperial ideology.[48] The hunter uses a swift

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[44] Such arguments are taken up in an interesting way by the Christian apologist Arnobius, who in his work *Adversus nationes* (*Ad. nat.* 7.9) has a cow hold a speech against animal sacrifice, arguing that animals, too, love their offspring and even have a language of their own; it is the humans who in their violence against animals as well as their own kind surpass the ferocity of beasts. Cf. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 152–153; K. Smolak, "Das Opfertier als Ankläger," in Alexandridis, Wild, and Winkler-Horaček, *Mensch und Tier*, 205–215; J. Breuer, "Patristische Perspektiven des Verhältnisses zwischen Mensch, Tier und Gott," *ANR* 21 (2011): 69–88 (esp. 84–85).

[45] See above notes 23 and 31. While in Greece the cult of Dionysus was associated with felines such as leopards and panthers (cf. M. Miziur-Moździoch, "Fierce Felines in the Cult and Imagery of Dionysus: Bacchic Mania and What Else?," in Johnston, Mastrocinque, and Papaioannou, *Animals*, 361–392), tigers appear in Roman times.

[46] The earliest, brief similes of a tigress searching for her stolen cubs seem to be Lucan (*Bell. civ.* 5.405) and Seneca (*Med.* 863–865), whereas Ovid (*Metam.* 13.547–548) in adaptation of the Homeric simile (*Il.* 18.318–322) still has a lioness (cf. Valerius Flaccus, *Argon.* 3.737–740).

[47] For such contemporary features introduced into the similes in Roman epic, see L. J. Hawtree, "Animals in Epic," in Campbell, *Oxford Handbook of Animals*, 73–83 (esp. 75 and 79); cf. also Hawtree, *Wild Animals*, 26–58 and 100–121.

[48] Cf. E. Gunderson, "The Flavian Amphitheatre: All the World as Stage," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 637–658 (esp. 645–649); K. A. E. Enenkel, "Die antike Vorgeschichte der Verankerung der Naturgeschichte in Poli-

horse to kidnap the tiger cubs, and every time he has to change horses, he throws one of the cubs at the pursuing mother tiger in order to distract her, until with the remaining cubs he finally reaches the ship that is to take them to Rome.[49] As in Statius's similes, in Pliny, too, the hunt is partly focalized from the tigress's point of view:[50]

> *at ubi vacuum cubile reperit feta (maribus enim subolis cura non est) fertur praeceps odore vestigans. raptor adpropinquante fremitu abicit unum ex catulis. tollit illa morsu et pondere etiam ocior acta remeat iterumque consequitur, ac subinde donec in navem regresso inrita feritas saevit in litore.*

> But when the mother tiger finds the lair empty (for the males do not look after their young), she rushes off at headlong speed, tracking them by scent. The captor when her roar approaches throws away one of the cubs. She snatches it up in her mouth, and returns and resumes the pursuit at even a faster pace owing to her burden, and so on in succession until the hunter has regained the ship and her ferocity rages vainly on the shore.
> (Pliny, *Nat.* 8.66 [Rackham, LCL])

Beyond such specific links to cultural practices, the predator similes evoke wider associations, as lions and tigers gain a highly symbolic significance in connection with imperial ideology.[51] The display of exotic animals and large-scale *venationes* in the arena were a crucial part of the self-representation of the Roman emperors and their communication with the people, starting with Hellenistic-style

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tik und Religion: Plinius' Zoologie und der römische Imperialismus," in *Zoology in Early Modern Culture: Intersections of Science, Theology, Philology, and Political and Religious Education*, ed. K. A. E. Enenkel and P. J. Smith, INT 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 15–54; B. M. Gauly, "Plinius' Zoologie und die Römische Naturgeschichte," in *Philosophie in Rom – Römische Philosophie? Kultur-, literatur- und philosophiegeschichtliche Perspektiven*, ed. G. M. Müller and F. Mariani Zini, BA 358 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 469–487; cf. also Li Causi, "Aristotele romano."

[49]   For further textual and pictorial representations of this hunting technique, see J. M. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art,* AGRL 32 (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 71–81, and H. Walter, "Zum Tigergleichnis des Valerius Flaccus (*Arg.* I 489 ff.)," *RhM* 118 (1975): 153–165.

[50]   Similarly in an ethnographical note in Valerius Flaccus (*Arg.* 6.147–149). Incidentally, Pliny's description may remind readers of the story of Medea, who according to Ovid (*Trist.* 3.9) chopped up her young brother Apsyrtus and scattered the pieces across the fields in order to slow down her father Aeetes, while she escaped with Jason and the stolen Golden Fleece by ship. Here, conversely, it is the female character who plays the part of the hunter and shows no love for her own kin (anticipating her infanticide), whereas it is the father who cares for his offspring. Later, the tigress's maternal love is emphasized by the church father Ambrose (*Hex.* 6.4.21–22), who uses the description of the hunting technique (in a different version involving a glass ball, wherein the tigress sees her own reflection and mistakes it for her cub; cf. Claudian [*Pros.* 3.263–268] to illustrate the natural love between parents and children that is often neglected by humans against God's will.

[51]   While lions had regularly been displayed during the late Republic, tigers were presented by an Indian embassy to Augustus on Samos in 19 BCE (Cassius Dio, *Hist. rom.* 54.9.8), and the first tame tigress in Rome was shown at the dedication of the Theatre of Marcellus in 11 BCE (Pliny, *Nat.* 8.65; cf. Suetonius, *Aug.* 43.4); see Toynbee, *Animals*, 61–82. Martial's epigram 8.26 mentions several tigers in the context of Domitian's Sarmatian triumph in 93 CE.

triumphs in the late Republic.[52] Through his control over dangerous exotic beasts, the emperor presents himself as master of the world.

These spectacles in turn inspired poets who used the symbolic associations of the arena for panegyric ends. In their poems on tamed beasts the emperor is praised as the bringer of an utopian *Tierfrieden*, a paradisiacal state of peace between animals and humans. Statius himself in one of his occasional poems from the collection of *Silvae* (*Sil.* 2.5) deplores the accidental death of a tame lion during a *venatio* in the arena, which moved even the emperor to tears.[53] Another case in point is Martial's *Liber spectaculorum*, the book of epigrams probably composed for the opening of the Flavian amphitheatre, the Colosseum, where the games displaying exotic animals are described.[54] Moreover, in the first book of his collection of epigrams, Martial devotes a whole cycle of epigrams to the emperor Domitian, where he explores the topic of circus lions who have been trained to play with hares that escape unharmed from their jaws (*Epigr.* 1.6, 14, 22, 44, 48, 51, 60, 104).[55]

However, in some of these epigrams also the reverse thing happens when a tame beast unexpectedly turns wild again. So in *Spec.* 12 a lion attacks its trainer, and in *Spec.* 21 a tame tigress, who used to lick her keeper's hand, in an un-precedented fight tears a (male) lion to pieces with excessive ferocity. Another incident is reported in *Epigr.* 2.75, where a circus lion kills two slave boys who are raking the sand of the arena. In all three cases the epigrammatist criticizes these "perverse" acts of violence perpetrated by tamed beasts: the treacherous lions should be afraid of the watching emperor (*Spec.* 12.5–6) or learn from the Roman she-wolf to spare young boys (*Epigr.* 2.75.9–10). The most poignant comment is directed at the lion-slaying tigress: she did not commit such acts while she still lived in the wild, but since she is among "us" (humans or perhaps

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[52] Cf. A. Bell, *Spectacular Power in the Greek and Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 151–198, and specifically for the Flavian period, Gunderson, "Flavian Amphitheatre."

[53] Cf. the commentary by C. E. Newlands, ed., *Statius Silvae Book II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192–202. A. Augoustakis, "*Unius amissi leonis*: Taming the Lion and Caesar's Tears (*Silvae* 2.5)," *Arethusa* 40 (2007): 207–221, points out the transfer of the civil war theme to the animal realm and draws parallels to the tiger simile reflecting the fratricide in *Theb.* 2.128–133; see also S. Chomse, "Instability and the Sublime in Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*," in Ginsberg and Krasne, *After 69 CE*, 387–409 (esp. 401–405) on echoes of Lucan (see below section F).

[54] See the commentary by K. M. Coleman, ed., *M. Valerii Martialis* Liber Spectaculorum: *Text, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), who also discusses the issue whether the Caesar addressed is Titus or Domitian.

[55] These epigrams have also been interpreted on a metaliterary level as the potentially risky, but in the end harmless play of the witty poet (the hare) with the mighty emperor (the lion); cf. S. Lorenz, *Erotik und Panegyrik: Martials epigrammatische Kaiser*, CM 23 (Tübingen: Narr, 2002), 126–134. For the epigrams on the spectacles in the arena as panegyric of Domitian, cf. J. Leberl, *Domitian und die Dichter: Poesie als Medium der Herrschaftsdarstellung*, Hypomnemata 154 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 270–276.

more specifically Romans), she possesses more ferocity (*Spec.* 21.5–6: *Ausa est tale nihil, silvis dum vixit in altis: / postquam inter nos est, plus feritatis habet*). Apparently her stay at Rome has exercised a corrupting influence upon the tigress. These paradoxical examples of "unnatural" cruel acts committed by circus animals that even surpass their natural wildness can thus be read as an allegory for the ambivalence between the civilizing power of the Roman Principate and its latent, "wolfish" potential for violence that may erupt again.

F. Political Contexts: The Emperor as Beast?

This political dimension is reflected in another innovative type of predator similes found in early imperial Latin epic depicting the wild beast in the cage, whose innate thirst for blood may awaken any time. In Lucan's *Bellum civile* this image is applied to the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. After a brief period of fraternization between the soldiers of both parties in Spain, the Pompeians suddenly turn against their fellows and massacre them, just as tamed beasts when tasting a drop of blood turn wild again and hardly spare their keeper (*Bell. civ.* 4.237–242). Earlier Caesar in a speech had denounced Pompey as a pupil of bloodthirsty Sulla through a comparison with tigers never losing their inborn taste for blood (*Bell. civ.* 1.327–332).[56]

Such a rhetorical comparison of a political leader with a predator returns in a speech composed only a few years after Statius's epic. Pliny the Younger in his *Panegyricus* on the emperor Trajan, held in the year 100 CE, constructs the emperor Domitian, who in 96 had been killed in a conspiracy within his own palace and fell victim to a *damnatio memoriae*, as the negative counterpart of the "good emperor" Trajan.[57] In a crucial passage Domitian is compared to a beast hiding in the palace like in a cave:

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[56] A non-political simile of a circus lion is found in Statius, *Ach.* 1.858–863, where young Achilles hiding among girls remembers his true nature when he sees weapons (cf. above note 18). Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 85.8 and 41.

[57] On the origins of the concept of the "bad emperor" applied to Nero and Domitian, see L. Cordes, *Kaiser und Tyrann: Die Kodierung und Umkodierung der Herrscherrepräsentation Neros und Domitians,* PhilS 8 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), V. Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation: Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian*, MnemSup 427 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), and especially R. R. Nauta, "*Mali principes*: Domitian, Nero und die Geschichte eines Begriffes," in *Nero und Domitian: Mediale Diskurse der Herrscherrepräsentation im Vergleich*, ed. S. Bönisch-Meyer et al., CM 46 (Tübingen: Narr, 2014), 25–40. Interestingly, the beast of Revelation, that among other parts features the mouth of a lion (Rev 13:2), seems to combine aspects of Nero and Domitian; cf. K. Backhaus, "Der Tyrann als Topos: Nero/Domitian in der frühjüdisch-frühchristlichen Wahrnehmung," in Bönisch-Meyer et al., *Nero und Domitian,* 379–403 (esp. 392–396); R. Mucha, *Der apokalyptische Kaiser: Die Wahrnehmung Domitians in der apokalyptischen Literatur des Frühjudentums und Urchristentums* (Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic Research, 2015).

domo, quam nuper immanissima belua plurimo terrore munierat: cum velut quodam specu inclusa, nunc propinquorum sanguinem lamberet, nunc se ad clarissimorum civium strages caedesque proferret.

in this house, where recently that fearful monster had built his defenses with uncountable terrors; as it were locked-up in his den he licked up the blood of his murdered relatives or emerged to plot the massacre and destruction of the most distinguished citizens.[58]

(Pliny, *Pan.* 48.3)

Through this hyperbolical comparison, Domitian is imagined as an antisocial, blood-thirsty beast feasting on his own family members and fellow citizens.[59] Although the term *belua* can refer to a wider range of huge beasts or "monsters," the details of licking blood and breaking out of the cage seem to specifically evoke the image of the predator on the loose.[60] This is confirmed by two further passages from the speech. One of Domitian's potential victims was none other than the present emperor Trajan, who in the speaker's vision was snatched by Jupiter from the jaws of the most rapacious predator (*Pan.* 94.3: *praedonis avidissimi faucibus*). *Ex negativo* the same image is evoked in the context of Trajan's generous gifts to the people that in contrast to his predecessor have not been stolen from rich people executed by the emperor; under Trajan as the ideal father of the Roman people (cf. 21: *pater patriae*), "the citizens' children are not fed like wild beasts cubs on blood and slaughter" (*Pan.* 27.3: *neque a te liberi civium, ut ferarum catuli, sanguine et caedibus nutriuntur*) – here it is implied that the beastly father Domitian did care for his offspring, although in the wrong manner.[61]

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[58] Translation from Radice, LCL, slightly adapted. See B. Radice, *Pliny the Younger: Letters*, vol. 2, *Books 8–10. Panegyricus*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 429.

[59] On Domitian's negative image in the *Panegyricus*, see P. Roche, "Pliny's Thanksgiving: An Introduction to the *Panegyricus*," in *Pliny's Praise: The* Panegyricus *in the Roman World*, ed. P. Roche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–28 (esp. 10–14), and G. O. Hutchinson, "Politics and the Sublime in the *Panegyricus*," in ibid., 125–141 (esp. 128–129).

[60] Cf. Seneca, *Clem.* 25.1 on the quasi-cannibalistic cruelty of Alexander the Great, who envies a man-eating lion, and *Clem.* 26.3–4 on the tyrant who attacks his own kin in contrast to the habits of wild beasts such as lions; cf. Bäumer, *Bestie Mensch*, 119–125, who refers to the precedent of Cicero (*Rep.* 2.48 and 3.45; *Off.* 3.32), where just as in Pliny the tyrant is associated with the *immanitas* of a *belua*. On the contrary, in Plato's *Gorgias* (*Gorg.* 484a), the Sophist Callicles uses the image of a lion breaking free in a positive sense for the tyrant who has unnaturally been tamed by democracy; cf. A. Pabst, "Hasen und Löwen: Tiere im politischen Diskurs des klassischen Griechenland," in Alexandridis, Wild, and Winkler-Horaček, *Mensch und Tier*, 83–97 (esp. 91–92). On the tyrant as beast in Greek and Roman thought, see R. Baumgarten, "The Sovereign and the Beast: Images of Ancient Tyranny," in Chesi and Spiegel, *Classical Literature and Posthumanism*, 123–130 and generally on predators in political discourse A. Kling, "Die Tiere der Politischen Theorie," in Borgards, *Tiere*, 97–110.

[61] In contrast, in Byzantine literature, lions and lion cubs are used in an almost exclusively positive sense for the emperor in relation to his family and his subjects; see T. Schmidt, "Protective and Fierce: The Emperor as a Lion in Contact with Foreigners and his Subjects in Twelfth- and Early Thirteenth-Century Byzantine Court Literature," in *Cross-Cultural Ex-*

Besides rhetorical and philosophical precedents, Pliny's comparison of Domitian with a parricidal, blood-thirsty beast that acts as a foil to the image of Trajan as the ideal father figure might also have been inspired by epic similes. From the reverse perspective, we may wonder whether there is also a political subtext to the predator similes in Statius's *Thebais*. After all, Statius's epic was dedicated to Domitian, the same emperor who posthumously is construed as a bad emperor in the image of a predator. The *Thebais* has indeed been subjected to political readings that identify a covered criticism of Domitian's reign in the negative figure of the tyrant Eteocles.[62] For example, as we have seen, through the first tiger simile (*Theb.* 2.128–133) Eteocles's self-image as a parental protector of his city is exposed as a hypocritical mask that hides his lust for power at any price. Nevertheless, a direct link to the emperor Domitian is nowhere suggested in the epic action, and the risk of superimposing modern subversive readings upon ancient texts is not to be underestimated. Although the technique of using *oratio figurata* for covered criticism of rulers is mentioned by Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.2.65–69), we should keep in mind that the emperors, too, enjoyed the same rhetorical education as their peers and therefore might easily have detected such hidden messages.[63] Moreover, the negative image of Domitian is mainly a later construction propagated by the succeeding dynasty of emperors in their own interests. But still, in a wider sense Statius's predator similes can be read as instances of "figured speech" insofar as they evoke literary, cultural, and political associations far beyond their immediate narrative contexts in the epic.

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change in the Byzantine World, c.300–1500 AD, ed. K. Stewart and J. Moreton Wakeley, BNS 14 (Oxford: Lang, 2016), 159–173, and T. Schmidt, "Father and Son like Eagle and Eaglet – Concepts of Animal Species and Human Families in Byzantine Court Oration (11th/12th c.)," *ByzZ* 112 (2019): 959–990; cf. Schmidt's PhD dissertation *Politische Tierbildlichkeit in Byzanz: Spätes 11. bis frühes 13. Jahrhundert*, MVB 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020), with a brief chapter on "tyrannical" lions (96–101).

[62] See, e. g., W. J. Dominik, *The Mythic Voice of Statius: Power and Politics in the* Thebaid, MnemSup 136 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 130–180, for a discussion of the *Thebais*'s political relevance to contemporary Rome, especially regarding the abuse of power. S. Rebeggiani, *The Fragility of Power: Statius, Domitian and the Politics of the* Thebaid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. 68–72, argues that Statius's originally anti-Neronian readings in line with Domitian's ideology were later turned into anti-Domitianic readings.

[63] While Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.2.67) speaks of fictional tyrants in declamations, F. Ahl, "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome," *AJP* 105 (1984): 174–208, applies the technique of "figured speech" to writers under Domitian as well; cf. also Dominik, *Mythic Voice of Statius*, 135–145.

G. Conclusion

Animal similes in Greek and Roman epic do not reflect the relations between animals and humans on a systematic philosophical plane or teach moral lessons in a straightforward manner. Nevertheless, the predator similes in Statius's *Thebais* that have been the focus of the present study not only engage with poetic models in order to enhance the impact of the narrative but also interact with early imperial discourses on natural history, ethics, and politics. Although reader responses to these similes are difficult to gauge, their sustained focus on family relationships and parental emotions that link the exotic animals and the human characters may be seen as a means to actively involve the audience in the process of interpretation by appealing to their own experience or imagination.

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The Fables according to Babrius
and the New Testament Parables

Ruben Zimmermann

Within parable scholarship of the last century, fables have played only a minor role.[1] A few New Testament scholars, however, have pointed out the importance of fables for the parables of Jesus, or even claim that Jesus's narrative parables are identical to ancient fables.[2] And indeed, there are close overlaps regarding the criteria for identifying the genre of fables and parables. Additional reasons for reading New Testament parables alongside fables pertain to matters of language, time, and geography. Parables and fables may have the same cultural and geographical roots. Babrius, for instance, mentioned that the fable derives from Syria.[3] Whereas the Latin fable tradition of Phaedrus is better known, the Greek fable tradition of Babrius has been neglected. Niklas Holzberg, in a recent edition and translation of Babrius's fables, states that there is hardly an ancient

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[1] See R. Zimmermann, "Gleichnishermeneutik im Rückblick und Vorblick: Die Beiträge des Sammelbandes vor dem Hintergrund von 100 Jahren Gleichnisforschung," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann, 2nd ed., WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 25–63; R. Zimmermann, "'Die Wahrheit Gottes ist konkret': Hans Weder und die neueste Gleichnisforschung (2014–2017)," in *Gleichnisse verstehen: Ein Gespräch mit Hans Weder*, ed. J. Frey and E. M. Joas, BThSt 175 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 25–65.

[2] See A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1910; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 1:94–101; M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 473–498; F. Vouga, "Formgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu den Gleichnissen und zu den Fabeln der Jesus-Tradition auf dem Hintergrund der hellenistischen Literaturgeschichte," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, ed. F. van Segbroeck et al., BETL 100 (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 173–187; more recently J. D. Strong, "The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Their Form, Origins, and Implications" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2019; revised version published as *The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: A New Foundation for the Study of Parables*, SCCB 5 [Paderborn: Brill|Schöningh, 2021]).

[3] See Babrius, *Fab.* 2.*praef*.1-3: Μῦθος μέν, ὦ παῖ βασιλέως Ἀλεξάνδρου, Σύρων παλαιῶν ἐστιν εὕρεμ' ἀνθρώπων, οἳ πρίν ποτ' ἦσαν ἐπὶ Νίνου τε καὶ Βήλου ("Fable, son of King Alexander, is the invention of the Syrians of old, who lived in the days of Ninus and Belus"), translation from B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1965), 139 (unless otherwise noted, all translations and textual citations are taken from this edition). Regarding the Syrian origin of Babrius, see also M. J. Luzzatto, "Babrios," *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider, 16 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003), 2:383–384, here 383; on the overlaps between Greek and oriental fables in a broad horizon, see F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 287–332.

author who has been so shamefully ignored by his own discipline.[4] It is therefore not surprising but all the more regrettable that New Testament scholarship has not yet engaged in a promising dialogue with Babrius. Such a dialogue is promising because there are many overlaps in motifs, moral impact, and religious elements. Maria Luzzatto, one of the editors of the Teubneriana edition of Babrius, demonstrated that there are close overlaps between the semantics and syntax of LXX and NT-Greek with Babrius.[5] Some scholars – like Perry[6] – date Babrius back to the first century CE and locate him in Syria. Thus, the temporal and geographical location links Babrius with early Christian writings.

The major interest of this contribution is to begin a promising intertextual reading between the fables of Babrius and the New Testament parables. This article will begin with some general information on fables and parables, referring to the general consensus in scholarship (A). This agreement, which is mostly not questioned, will be challenged by taking a closer look at the texts focussing on three different aspects: (1) genre, (2) animals, and (3) religion, in particular the role of God(s). The fables of Babrius (B) and the parables from the New Testament (C) will each be examined in their own right, with respect to the three areas and with a view towards the other group of texts. In the last section (D) some preliminary, general insights for a comparison and further research will be formulated.

A. Fables and Parables as Two Different Genres: "Common Sense" as a Starting Point?

1. Fables and Parables as Two Different Genres

The genres of parable and fable are similar, but also distinguishable. This has been noticed since the beginning of theoretical reflection on the different types of texts. I will briefly reflect upon some insights about the similarities and differences on two levels: rhetoric and literary criteria.

The first theoretical reflection about the genre of our types of texts is found in the works of Aristotle. In his *Rhetorica*, Aristotle discusses "examples" (παραδείγματα) as analogous to induction as a possible means of persuasion. Like enthymemes (ἐνθύμημα), examples serve as arguments set forth in a

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[4] See N. Holzberg, *Babrios: Fabeln: Griechisch-Deutsch*, ST (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 9: "In der gesamten Weltliteratur dürfte es keinen Autor von hohem künstlerischen Rang geben, der von der zuständigen Wissenschaft, in diesem Falle der Gräzistik, so hartnäckig vernachlässigt (ja im Grunde ignoriert) wurde wie der besonders durch sein Erzähltalent und seinen skurrilen Witz faszinierende Fabeldichter Babrios."

[5] See M. J. Luzzatto, "La cultura letteraria di Babrio," *ASNSP* ser. 3, 5 (1975), 17–97, here 52–65.

[6] See Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, li–lii.

speech and as such are similar to induction.[7] This rhetorical function of fables and parables has endured throughout the centuries. Following Holzberg, it is still valid for the collections of fables in the Hellenistic and Roman period. The function of those anthologies was to create a pool of texts to be used by authors of speeches.[8]

Let us take a closer look at these rhetorical reflections. In *Rhet.* 2.20 Aristotle distinguishes between historical and fictional examples. The latter are subdivided into "parables" and "fables" (τούτου δ᾽ ἐν μὲν παραβολὴ ἐν δὲ λόγοι), such as those of Aesop and the Libyan.[9] As an example of a fable, Aristotle tells a fable by Stesichorus and one by Aesop, both of them animal fables. Following the rhetorical tradition, in Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.11 we find a similar distinction between "fabella" (*Inst.* 5.11.19 f. with reference to Aesop), and "collatio" (*Inst.* 5.11.23–25) presented as synonymous with παραβολή.[10] Thus, fable and parable are considered to be related to each other as fictional examples, even though they are also clearly distinguished by ancient rhetoricians.

But what, in particular, are the points in common and how do both forms of texts differ? To answer this question I want – with a second approach – to focus on literary criteria by means of which the two types of texts can be described. Genre is a type of text which can be recognized in a communication culture by certain signals. For instance, the introduction of a text with the phrase "once upon a time" provides a strong signal for the reader to recognize the following text as a fairy tale. When defining genre by core and supplementary criteria I am working along the lines of more recent genre theories which define a genre as a construction of meta-communication.[11] Genres do not exist as such in an essential way. However, the construction of genre already presupposes a discourse concerning genre. Thus, the criteria which can be named to identify a genre are

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[7] See Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2 (1356b4 f.): "I call an enthymeme a rhetorical syllogism, and an example rhetorical induction."

[8] See N. Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel: Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012), 28: "Die Geschichte des antiken Fabelbuches beginnt mit dem hellenistischen Fabelrepertorium, das ohne jeden Anspruch auf literarischen Eigenwert Verfassern von Reden und Literaturwerken Fabeln als Gebrauchstexte bequem zur Verfügung stellte."

[9] See Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.20 (1393a28–31); for details, see R. Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables and Ancient Rhetoric: The Contributions of Aristotle and Quintilian to the Form Criticism of the Parables," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann, 2nd ed., WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 238–258, here 243–247; R. Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 127–132.

[10] See Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Ausbildung des Redners: Zwölf Bücher – Institutionis oratoriae, libri XII*, ed. and trans. H. Rahn, 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 1:596–617.

[11] See R. Zymner, *Gattungstheorie: Probleme und Positionen der Literaturwissenschaft* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2003), 59; R. Zymner, ed., *Handbuch Gattungstheorie* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010).

text-based and discourse-based at the same time. They are not free-floating and gratuitous, even though they are constructions.[12]

Let me take up a brief definition of fable by the Alexandrian rhetorician Aelius Theon (1st cent. CE) used in exercise three of his *Progymnasmata*:

> Μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν
>
> A fable is a fictitious story giving an image of truth. (Theon, *Prog.* 4)[13]

Using only a few words, Aelius Theon has named three criteria: a fable is a story (λόγος), it is figurative (εἰκονίζω), and it recounts something true beyond the surface story, in other words: a truth (ἀλήθεια) within the vehicle of an invented story. Turning these criteria into my own terminology, a fable can be described as a fictional and metaphorical narrative.[14]

The same criteria can also be found in recent definitions of parables. The wider ranged criteria for identifying parables, which I have discussed in detail elsewhere,[15] will be used as a basis to describe genre similarities and differences concerning parables and fables: Both, parables and fables, are "brief narrations," "fictional texts" (contrary to historical examples), and "metaphorical texts" with transfer signals (a semantic transfer of meaning takes place between two different semantic domains). Both groups of texts have "appeal character": the parables and fables call up a process of interpretation. Within the fables of Babrius, for instance, in seventeen epimythia the direct speech "you" or the vocative is used (see *Fab.* 18.15 f.; 74.15).[16]

The crucial difference seems to be "that a parable is 'realistic,' whereas a fable presents anthropomorphized animals, plants, or natural phenomena."[17] The parable may be, literally speaking, fictional, that is to say invented, but it

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[12] For details, see H. Fricke, "Definieren von Gattungen," in *Handbuch Gattungstheorie*, ed. R. Zymner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), 10–12.

[13] Translation from G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, WGRW 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 23. Cf. L. von Spengel, *Rhetores graeci*, 3 vols., Teubneriana (Leipzig: Teubner, 1853–1856), 2:72.

[14] See R. Zimmermann, "Fable III: New Testament," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. D. C. Allison et al., 30 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–), 8:650–651.

[15] See R. Zimmermann, "Parabeln – sonst nichts! Gattungsbestimmung jenseits der Klassifikation in 'Bildwort,' 'Gleichnis,' 'Parabel,' und 'Beispielerzählung,'" in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann, 2nd ed., WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 409–419; Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 137–150.

[16] There is controversy about which of the epimythia represent the authentic voice of Babrius and which had been added by later editors. For Holzberg, the 77 epimythia out of a number of 122 fables (according to Codex Athous) are not authentic because of their prose style; see Holzberg, *Babrios*, 13. Others, like J. Vaio, *The Mythiambi of Babrios: Notes on the Constitution of the Text,* Spudasmata 83 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2001), xlii–xlvii discuss every single case, taking into account linguistic and metric reasons as decisive for an assessment of authenticity. See a brief overview on the debate in Holzberg, *Babrios*, 13–17.

[17] Zimmermann, "Fable," 650.

is an "invented truth." That which is narrated in the parables could have indeed taken place in that way.[18] The fable, on the contrary, tells us something which is beyond human experience, usually animals talking and behaving like humans. In his first prologue, Babrius resolves the contradiction with observed reality by locating the fable's content in the so-called Golden Age:

> Now in the Golden age not only men but all the other living creatures had the power of speech and were familiar with such words as we ourselves now use in speaking to each other … even the pine tree talked, and the leaves of the laurel (Babrius, *Fab.* 1.*praef.*5–9).[19]

A second point of difference can be seen in the issue of "contextuality." Most New Testament scholars, myself included,[20] consider parables to be always contextually embedded in a macrotext. The fable – at least in the Hellenistic-Roman collections – is more of an isolated text, standing on its own, which can be listed – as in the case of Babrius – in alphabetical order, one right after the other. As a substitute for a context, paratexts (promythium and epimythium) could be added, like "fabula docet," which can be clearly demonstrated with P.Ryl. 493.

The fact that in the first and second century two fable collections are written in poetry[21] and the Jesus parables are composed in prose should not be viewed as particularly significant. Babrius himself noted that Aesop also presented fables in prose (*Fab.* 1.*praef.*14–16), and the oldest collections of fables, the so-called *Aesopia* of Demetrius of Phalerum (360–280 BCE), which is now lost, was also a prose text. The extensive Collectio Augustana presents 231 respectively 244 prose fables in Greek. However, as the main codices (e. g. cod. Monac. gr. 564) date from the Middle Ages, it is difficult to decide where it may have preserved ancient forms of texts.[22]

At first glance, summarizing the "common sense" approach to genre theories, parables and fables are similar types of texts which have many criteria in common. However, the genres of fable and parable have also been distinguished for good reasons. Does this generally accepted assessment stand up to examination when we take a closer look at the parables and fables with regard to certain aspects? This will be the subject of discussion in the next section.

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[18] On the so-called "Realitätsbezug" of the parable, see Zimmermann, "Parabeln," 412–414.

[19] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 2–3.

[20] See R. Zimmermann, "How to Understand the Parables of Jesus? A Paradigm Shift in Parable Exegesis," *AcT* 43 (2009): 157–182, here 170–173; R. Zymner, "Fabel," in *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen*, ed. D. Lamping (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2009), 234–239, here 234.

[21] See Phaedrus and Babrius, both authors state that they were the first to bring the fables into verse form (details see below). Avianus in the fourth or fifth century presents 42 fables in elegiac distiches.

[22] See Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel*, 5–7. The different numbers results from the nos. 1–231 of the Aesopica, and the fables of recension 1a (nos. 232–244), see Perry 1–244.

B. The Fables of Babrius

I. Babrius's Fables: Some Basic Information

Because of the lack of explicit testimony by other ancient authors, very little can be known with certainty regarding the author of the *Mythiambi Aesopici*.[23] The name of the poet is given only by a few later sources, such as the Latin fabulist Avianus (400 CE).[24] In the later Codex Harleianus 3521 (17th cent. CE), we learn that the name of the author of the *Mythiambi* is "Valerius Babrius."[25] The name Babrius itself indicates a Roman origin, since the name is well attested in Latin and was especially widespread in Umbria. It may therefore be one of the curiosities of history that the Latin-writing Phaedrus – according to many scholars – was of Greek origin,[26] while the Greek-writing Babrius was of Italian/ Roman origin. He was probably "a Hellenized Italian living in Syria … in the second half of the first century (CE)."[27]

Though the name "Babrius" or "Babrios" remains uncertain, we can gain some information from internal evidence. According to Babrius himself, in his first prologue Aesop told the fables in a free prosaic manner (Αἰσώπου μύθους φράσαντος τῆς ἐλευθέρης μούσης [*Fab.* 1.*praef*.15–16]).[28] Babrius, however, reformulated the fables and used the iambic verse-meter (in particular "choliambic meter"; Ger. "Hinkjambus"), what he called the "mythiambs" (μυθίαμβος), in other words he was the first author who lifted Greek fables to the level of literature.[29] The poetic form of iambs usually was used for invectives, but as ex-

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[23] This title is used by the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae. In Codex Athous we find βαλεβρίου μυθίαμβοι αἰσώπειοι κατὰ στοιχεῖον, which was taken over with slight difference (Βαβρίου instead of βαλεβρίου) by M. J. Luzzatto and A. La Penna, eds., *Babrii Mythiambi Aesopi,* BSGRT (Leipzig: Teubner, 1986), 1. Perry notes ΒΑΒΡΙΟΥ ΜΥΘΙΑΜΒΟΙ ΑΙΣΩΠΕΙΟΙ (Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 2).

[24] Avianus writes: "Quas Graecis iambis Babrius repetens in duo uolumina coartauit" (ed. R. Ellis, *The Fables of Avianus* [Hildesheim: Olms, 1887]).

[25] See O. Crusius, "Babrius." in *Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. G. Wissowa and W. Kroll, 50 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1894–1963), 2:2655–2667, 2657. The exact headline in the Codex, which only refers to fable 58, is Βαβρίου Βαλερίου χωριαμβικοὶ στίχοι. Crusius assumes that the title in Codex Athous results from a copying error (Βαλε[ρίου Βα]βρίου) and, thus, confirms the name Valerius Babrius.

[26] See N. Holzberg, *Phaedrus: Fabeln: Lateinisch-Deutsch*, ST (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 29. Holzberg himself prefers an anonymous author with a pseudonymous name.

[27] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xlviii. See K. J. Neumann, "Die Zeit des Babrius," *RhM* 35 (1880): 301–304, here 301: "römische Nationalität des Babrios" who refers to a study of Otto Crusius dealing with the nationality of Babrius comprehensively ("De Babrii aetate," *LSCP* 2 [1879]: 125–248). T. J. Morgan, "Living with the Gods in Fables of the Early Roman Empire," *RRE* 1 (2015): 378–402, here 380: "Babrius was probably either a hellenised Italian or a Greek who took the name of an Italian patron."

[28] See Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 2–3.

[29] Babrius most likely knew the first collection of Aesopic fables in prose which was published by Demetrius of Phalerum, entitled Αἰσωπείων/*Aesopia* according to Diogenes Laertius,

plained in the second prologue, Babrius wanted to soften it: "I do not sharpen the teeth of the iambs, but I test them and refine them as it were in the fire, and I am careful to soften their sting."[30]

In all likelihood, Babrius edited two volumes of fables[31] which are, according to derived manuscripts, presented in alphabetical order.[32] Each of the volumes is introduced by a prologue. From volume 1, we have 107 well-preserved fables. It includes the letters *alpha* to *lambda*, and we can assumed that it was originally a collection of about 200 fables, of which – following Holzberg – at least 72 are written by Babrius himself, and the others derived from older fable traditions (which can be seen by parallel versions) and are retold in a poetic form by Babrius.[33] From volume 2, however, we only have 36 fables; none of the extant manuscripts preserved the second book as a whole. The most valuable codex A (Codex Athous),[34] rediscovered in 1842 at the Mount Athos monastery, contains a total of 122 fables. According to the critical edition from Maria J. Luzzatto and Antonius La Penna[35] as well as the most recent edition (and German translation) by Niklas Holzberg,[36] 144 fables are preserved; Luzzatto and La Penna added 21 reconstructed fragmentary fables from other sources.[37]

Little clarity, but plenty of speculation can be found regarding the historical settings of the text (*Einleitungsfragen*), especially regarding the place and time of origin. In prologues 1 and 2, names are mentioned such as "Branchos" and "Alexander," which scholars have tried to identify with historical individuals. For example, as an allusion to an Alexander of the so-called Severan dynasty (2nd–3rd cent. CE).[38] Alternatively, Teresa Morgan and others think of Alexander as a king mentioned in Josephus's *Antiquitates judaicae* (*A. J.* 18.140), son of Tigranes V, who was a client king of Nero in Armenia and who according to Josephus is

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Vitae 5.80, see Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xiii. The *Aesopia* has not survived, but it was still extant in the tenth century.

[30] Babrius, *Fab.* 2.*praef*.14–15. The translation follows Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 141.

[31] According to Codex Athous and the fable author Avianus. The Byzantine lexicon Suda, however, mentions ten books of Babrian choliambic verses. See L. Spielhofer, "Babrios – Person, Werk, Überlieferung," in *Grazer Repositorium antiker Fabeln*, ed. U. Gärtner (Graz 2020), 1–8, here 2.

[32] It is a matter of debate in scholarship whether this was the original order, see Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel*, 58–59.

[33] See Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel*, 65.

[34] See Luzzatto and La Penna, *Babrii Mythiambi Aesopi*, xxiii–xxv (the codex is currently at the British Museum Addit. 22087).

[35] See Luzatto and La Penna, *Babrii Mythiambi Aesopi*, v–xi, 1–140.

[36] See Holzberg, *Babrios*, 25–27.

[37] See Luzatto and La Penna, *Babrii Mythiambi Aesopi*, 140–166, as fragments 1 (fable 163) to 21 (fable 194). The counting tries to fit the alphabetic order.

[38] The name "Alexander" could be an allusion to Marcus Aurel(l)ius Severus Alexander, Roman emperor 222–235 CE, who was, as his original name Valerius Bassanius indicates, a descendant of the priest Iulius Bassanius, the priest of the god Elagabal, who was worshipped in Emesa in Syria. See Neumann, "Die Zeit des Babrius," 303; M. Weglage, "Babrios," in *Metzler Lexikon antiker Autoren*, ed. O. Schütze (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 134–135, here 134.

said to have been a descendent of Herod the Great.[39] Others consider them to be fictitious characters, whereby Alexander could be an allusion to Alexander the Great and Branchos could possibly refer to a poem by Callimachus (who lived at the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria) with the same name.[40]

Finally, the date of origin of the Babrian fable collection can only be vaguely determined. The *terminus a quo* could be the first century CE, due to stylistic reasons and the assumption of the foregoing publication of the fables of Phaedrus in iambic verses.[41] *Terminus ad quem* can be defined through citations of choliambic fables (to be identified with Babrian fables), in particular in the wax tablets of Palmyra (before 272 CE) and in the *Hermeneumata* of Pseudo-Dositheus, which are usually dated to 207 CE.[42] In other words, the *Mythiambi Aesopici* are most probably written in the first or second century CE.[43]

If one attempts to classify the fables of Babrius within the literary history of ancient fables,[44] the following picture emerges: Even though the fables have long

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[39] See Josephus, *A. J.* 18.139–140 (ch. 4): "As to Alexander, the son of Herod the king, who was slain by his father, he had two sons, Alexander and Tigranes …. Alexander had a son of the same name with his brother Tigranes, and was sent to take possession of the kingdom of Armenia by Nero; he had a son, Alexander, who married Jotape, the daughter of Antiochus, the king of Commagena" (trans. W. Whiston, *Flavius Josephus: The Antiquities of the Jews* [1737; repr. n. p.: Floating Press, 2008], 1310–1311). See T. J. Morgan, "Fables and the Teaching of Ethics," in *Escuela y literatura en Grecia antigua*, ed. J. A. Fernández Delgado, F. Pordomingo Pardo, and A. Stramaglia, CS 17 (Cassino: Università degli studi di Cassino, 2007), 373–404; similar Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xlvii–xlix.

[40] See Holzberg, *Babrios*, 25. Similarly, K. L. Mann, "The Fabulist in the Fable Book" (PhD diss., University of California, 2015), 180, following Hawkins, who argues that Branchus's name is one of many allusions to Callimachus that appears in Babrius, see T. Hawkins, *Iambic Poetics in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88, 101, 110.

[41] See Hawkins, *Iambic Poetics*, 128–134 on the relationship between Phaedrus and Babrius.

[42] In the *Hygini genealogia*, one of the sources for the *Hermeneumata*, according to Leidensis Voss. Gr. Q. 7, we find a preface, telling: "In the consulship of Maximus and Aper, on the third day before the Ides of September, I transcribed the genealogy of Hyginus known to all …'" (see the Greek and Latin text in G. Flammini, *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana Leidensia*, Teubneriana [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004], 103–104). The consulship of Maximus and Aper was in 207, which leads to an exact date: September 11, 207 CE. The interpretation of this preface, however, is debated in scholarship, see for details E. Dickey, *The Colloquia of the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana*, vol. 1, *Colloquia Monacensia-Einsidlensia, Leidense-Stephani, and Stephani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37–39; Strong, *Fables of Jesus*, 183–185. Among the 18 fables attested by Pseudo-Dositheus, only two are cited in choliambic verses corresponding to Babrian fables (no. 16 = Babrius, *Fab.* 84; no. 17 = Babrius, *Fab.* 140), see Flammini, *Hermeneumata,* 89–90. Eleven of the fourteen fables, attested by the wax tablets found at Palmyra, are also citations of Babrius's fables (43, 78, 91, 97, 117, 121, 123 [vv. 2–7], 136, 137, 138, 139). The wax tablets are dated to around 258–273 CE, before the destruction of Palmyra. See D. C. Hesseling, "On Waxen Tablets with Fables of Babrius (Tabulae Ceratae Assendelftianae)," *JHS* 13 (1892–1893): 293–314.

[43] See Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xlvii. Most scholars agree that Babrius should be dated to the second century, see O. Crusius, "Babrius," 2.2:2659; Weglage, "Babrios," 134–135; Luzzatto, "Babrios," 383–384; Spielhofer, "Babrios," 2.

[44] See the extensive work of Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:48–139 for details; a brief overview also in Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel*, 13–35.

been attributed to Aesop, there are no writings of Aesop himself, some even deny the existence of this historical person.

The oldest collection of fables probably came from Demetrius of Phalerum (360–280 BCE) who had collected Aesopian fables in prose in a Greek so-called "promptuarium," this is a collection of texts used by rhetors for their speeches. Unfortunately this writing has not been handed down. Some scholars, however, assume that the four fables found on P.Ryl. 493 (1st cent. CE), may be citations of this text.[45] What we definitively have, are the five books of Latin fables of Phaedrus from the first century and the two books of Greek fables of Babrius from the first or second century. Both authors state that they were the first to bring the fables into verse form, whereby Phaedrus writes with six-footed iambic verses, whereas Babrius uses the rare limp or choliambic, as mentioned above. In short: With Babrius we have the oldest coherent collection of fables in the Greek language.

Since the information about the author and the context of the work remains limited, we would do well to let the text speak for itself. Let us therefore enter into a kind of dialogue, a dialogue between fable and parable on different levels.

II. The Role and Lack of Animals in Babrius

Animals play a major role in fables in general, especially so in the fables of Babrius. We find an impressive variety of all kinds of animals: domesticated ones like a chicken, goat, and ox, as well as wild animals like a fish, wolf, or nightingale.

Statistically we find more than thirty different kinds of animals, the five mentioned most often are the lion (18×), fox (16×), dog (15×), wolf (13×), and donkey (10×). All of these animals are well-known, the most exotic ones might be an ape (35, 56, 81, 106, 125), a crab (109), or a toad (24). It is noteworthy that there are about 24 different kinds of birds mentioned, beginning with the eagle (5, 99, 115, 137), heron (94), nightingale (12), swallow (12, 118), and stork (13), up to a turtle dove (72) or a chicken and rooster (5, 17, 97, 121, 123, 124).

It is not the right place in this article to discuss the role and function of a specific animal. There is little doubt that it makes a difference whether a lion or a toad is the focus. However, it is not as easy to interpret the role of animals as one might assume at first glance. Well-known traits of animal characters are used, but such traits are also used ironically. Just to mention two examples: In *Fab.* 1, not only is the harmony between humans and animals, that was described in the prologue, harshly shattered, also the lion fearfully flees from man. According to *Fab.* 98, a lion fell in love with a human girl and to gain the family's trust, he disarms himself in a drastic manner. He extracted his teeth and cut out his claws with a surgeon's knife. After he had made himself defenseless, however, he did not get his beloved girl, but was beaten to death.

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[45] See Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel*, 28.

The questions to be asked with regard to the animals are raised in a nuanced way already by Lessing in his essay on fables. In the second chapter ("Von dem Gebrauch der Tiere in der Fabel") he discusses the limited usage specific animals have when appealing to the audience.[46] More recently, the animals in fables have also been discussed against the background of animal studies.[47] Lefkowitz, for instance, argues that in many cases, well beyond symbolism, the fables have an interest in the real behavior of animals and in this respect can be evaluated for natural history.[48] Referring to animals in Babrius, Pertsinidis argues, that "Babrius uses direct speech to enhance the dramatic quality of his narratives and to draw the reader closer to his narrative and his characters."[49] By doing so, the animals were more humanized within Babrius than in other fables and, thus, his approach serves his moralizing purpose.

For this article, I would like to draw attention to a striking observation regarding the fables. Not all of the fables present animals or plants as anthropomorphic figures. There are 41 fables of Babrius (about one third of the extant number), in which no animals talk or act on the plot level like humans.[50] In some of them animals are mentioned in a realistic manner. For example, fable 79 reads as follows:

> A dog stole a piece of meat from a kitchen and with it ran beside the river. Seeing in the stream the shadow, much larger than the meat itself, he let go the meat and dashed for the shadow. This he did not find, nor the meat that he had dropped. Still hungry he crossed back the way he came.[51] (Babrius, *Fab.* 79)

In 25 fables animals are not even mentioned.[52] As an example from this group *Fab.* 22 reads:

> A man already in middle age was still spending his time on love affairs and carousals. He wasn't young any more, nor was he as yet an old man, but the white hairs on his

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[46] See G. E. Lessing, *Fabeln: Abhandlungen über die Fabel*, ed. H. Rölleke, RUB 27 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013), 105–115.

[47] See N. Harel, "The Animal Voice behind the Animal Fable," *JCAS* 7 (2009): 1–20 and J. Schuster, "The Fable, the Moral, and the Animal: Reconsidering the Fable in Animal Studies with Marianne Moore's Elephants," in *Representing the Modern Animal in Culture*, ed. J. Dubino, Z. Rashidian, and A. Smyth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 137–154; T. Korhonen, "Anthropomorphism and the Aesopic Animal Fables," in *Animals and Their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World*, ed. R. Mattila, S. Ito, and S. Fink, UKS/SUCH (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019), 211–232.

[48] See J. B. Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. G. L. Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–23.

[49] S. Pertsinidis, "Articulate Animals in the Fables of Babrius," in *Speaking Animals in Ancient Literature*, ed. H. Schmalzgruber (Heidelberg: Winter, 2020), 81–102, 99–100.

[50] See fables 2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 30, 36, 37, 45, 47, 49, 52, 54, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63, 64, 66, 68, 70, 71, 75, 79, 92, 114, 116, 117, 119, 126, 127, 136, 141, 142, 143.

[51] Text and translation by Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 98–99.

[52] See fables 2, 10, 15, 18, 30, 36, 38, 47, 49, 54, 57, 58, 59, 63, 64, 66, 68, 70, 71, 114, 116, 119, 126, 127, 142. Among them, there are nine fables in which natural phenomena such as the wind and the sea are anthropomorphized (18, 36, 38, 64, 70, 71, 114, 126, 142).

head were mixed up in confusion with the black. He was making love to two women, one young, the other old. (Babrius, *Fab.* 22)

The young woman wanted him to look like a young lover, the old one like one of her own age. Accordingly, on every occasion the mistress who was in the prime of her life plucked out such of his hairs as she found to be turning to white, and the old woman plucked out the black ones. This went on until each of them presented the other with a baldpated lover by the pulling out of his hair[53] (Babrius, *Fab.* 22).[54]

There are other significant examples that narrate brief stories from social life (e. g. *Fab.* 116: a love triangle between a couple and a young man) or local urban traditions (e. g. *Fab.* 15: on the Athenian and the Theban). A story without animals or other anthropomorphized figures can be classified as "realistic." What is told in such examples could have happened in the real world. Therefore, these texts fulfill an additional criterion characteristic of a parable.

This leads to two possible conclusions: (1) the collection, edited by Babrius, includes animal fables as well as parables, without animals; (2) the distinctiveness of our definitions must be doubted. Is the separation of genres in the ancient discourse perhaps not as clear as assumed?

The second option is also supported by the terminological findings. Turning back to Aristotle, we realize that while parable is connected with the Greek term παραβολή, the unspecific term λόγος in *Rhet.* 2.20 stands for what I just translated with "fable"; yet, it is only with the explanatory addition "like the Aesopian or the Libyan" that the fable translation can be justified. Additionally, the Greek terms αἶνος or μῦθος are also translated with "fable."[55] Babrius speaks of the artificial word of the "myth-iambs," that is, he uses the term μῦθος, which is specified by its verse measure. As seen above, the definition of Aelius Theon also uses this term. But would such a definition not also apply to the parable: an invented story that depicts a truth?

In this respect, one can ask: Are fables and parables not just generic siblings, but perhaps even twins? The study of Babrius makes at least the New Testament scholar doubt the absoluteness of the guiding principles with respect to genre distinction. Parables and fables are even closer than is usually assumed in research.

One might conclude that the difference between fables and parables was not as fixed as later genre theories assume. However, a majority of fables in Babrius

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[53] Text and translation are based on Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 32–35.

[54] The plot of this fable can also be found in the Babylonian Talmud (b. B. Qam. 60b), see L. Miralles Maciá, "The Fable of 'the Middle-Aged Man with Two Wives': From the Aesopian Motif to the Babylonian Talmud Version in b. B. Qam. 60b," *JSJ* 39 (2008): 267–281 (I am grateful to Justin David Strong for this reference).

[55] See on terminology Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:3–12; similar P. Hasubek, "Fabel," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. G. Ueding, 12 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992–2015), 3:185–198, here 185.

deal with anthropomorphic animals and plants. As will be seen below, none of the early Christian parables shows personification of animals or plants in that manner.[56]

III. God(s) and Religious Elements in Fables and Parables

The fables of Babrius mostly deal with human and social issues. Their major concern is the right and wrong behavior of humans as they interact with each other. Even the mention of gods seems to serve this final goal. We find a self-reflection of Babrius in that regard when he says in the epimythium of fable 119:

> Καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς Αἴσωπος ἐμπλέκει μύθους
> Βουλόμενος ἡμᾶς νουθετεῖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους

> Aesop brings even the gods into his fables
> in the course of cautioning us one against another.
> (Babrius, *Fab.* 119)

According to prologue 1, the time of the fables is set within the "Golden Age" (*aetas aurea*), in which animals not only could communicate with humans but they also lived in perfect harmony, just as humans and the gods lived in harmony. Against the backdrop of this introductory passage, two aspects are remarkable: First, within the fables themselves the animals do not at all live in harmony, but harm and kill each other (e. g. Babrius, *Fab.* 28: an ox crushed casually a child of the toad; Babrius, *Fab.* 95: a lion, fox, and stag defraud and murder each other).[57]

Secondly, the role of the gods in Babrius remains ambivalent, not to be compared for instance with Avianus's fables where they remain unquestioned and should be honored without any doubt.[58] In Babrius, gods are presented not only as human-like, combative, or jealous, but also as ignorant and somehow stupid. In *Fab.* 72, for instance, Zeus is not aware of the false plumage of the jackdaw, and the swallow must enlighten him.

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[56] "Early Christian" refers to New Testament texts, being aware of the problematic use of those terms for a period before the parting of the ways. Obviously "Jewish" rabbinic "parables" *do* have talking animals. See L. M. Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables: A *contradictio in terminis*?," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 129–148, here 139: "... a talking animal or plant does indeed appear, occasionally, in rabbinic parables." Teugels refers to the talking fox in b. Ber. 61b as a sample.

[57] On this aspect, see K. Mann, "The Puzzle in Babrius's Prologue," *GRBS* 58 (2018): 253–278.

[58] On this topic, see also D. Bartoňková, "Rolle der Götter in der antiken Fabel," *SPFBU* 18 (2013): 33–41. The German translation of this article includes some severe mistakes, e. g. 38, φρῦνος = toad is translated with "Schildkröte" ("turtle"). Other inaccuracies are also striking, e. g. the German translation of the epimythium of fable 121 (Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 119) does not fit to the Greek text which is quoted on p. 34.

The omniscience of the gods is also challenged humorously by *Fab.* 2, in which a farmer was asking for god's help to find the thief of his hoe. When entering the city he was told that 1,000 drachmas would be paid for information revealing the whereabouts of properties stolen from the god's temple. When the farmer heard this, he said: "How useless for me to have come! How could this god know about other thieves, when he does not know who those were who stole his own property?"[59] Teresa Morgan suspects a conflict between rural and urban gods and generalizes to the point that the transition to "foreign" local deities is risky.[60]

Without having to question that Morgan discovers valuable aspects of a historical-contextual interpretation here, in my opinion the fundamentally critical tone of Babrius regarding the worship of the gods remains undervalued. This is particularly evident in connection with other fables on the subject. According to some fables worshipping the gods is also presented critically, if not as absurd. For instance, in *Fab.* 48 the only honor that Hermes expects from a dog is that it does not urinate upon his statue: "Beyond that, pay me no respect."[61]

According to *Fab.* 119, a craftsman honored a statue of Hermes every day by pouring out libations and offering a sacrifice. However, "he continued to fare badly in his business none the less."[62] Thus, he was angry with the god and dashed it to ground. And from its broken head there poured forth gold. The craftsman concludes: "Hermes, you're a pig-headed fellow and ungrateful to your friends. When I was serving you with adoration you gave me no help at all and now that I have insulted you, you have repaid me with many blessings. I didn't understand the strange kind of service that you require."[63]

Theologically this fable could be read as a case against the "do-ut-des-principle." I think, however, that it challenges the worship of the gods even more pointedly: what is annotated here as a "strange kind of service" questions all kinds of worship and sacrifice. There is no logical or comprehensible interaction with the gods at all. This becomes even more obvious in *Fab.* 20:

> An ox-driver was bringing his wagon home from the village when it fell into a deep ravine. Instead of doing something about it, as the situation required, he stood by idly and prayed for help to Heracles, of all the gods the one whom he really worshipped and held in honor. Suddenly the god appeared in person besides him and said: "Take

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[59] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 7.

[60] See Morgan, "Living with the Gods," 394 f.: "[Babrius] farmer's initial recourse to city gods is presented as a vote of no-confidence (on this occasion) in his rural gods, which (in a witty subversion of expectation of a kind, common in fables, which we have already seen) is itself undermined by his experience in the city. Babrius shows how going over the heads of one's local gods in search of greater authority, far from being a routine form of reassurance, is a provisional and risky exercise … If this is part of the conclusion of the fable overall, then it suggests that whatever people think, it is not the case that country gods are less reliable or observant than those of the city."

[61] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 65.

[62] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 155.

[63] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus,* 157.

hold of the wheels. Lay the whip on your oxen. Pray to the gods only when you are doing something to help yourself. Otherwise your prayers will be useless."[64] (Babrius, *Fab.* 20)

In other words: the gods help those who help themselves. Bluntly stated, the gods are not necessary anymore, or they are reduced to functioning as self-motivation. Following Kristin Mann, who focussed on the educational aspect within the fables of Babrius, she states that Babrius wants to make his readers feel that gods are not only unreliable when asking for help, but also useless teachers. In contrast, his fables are the medium to educate his audience, and even more, to teach them how to learn.[65]

With regard to asking for help, the parable of Jesus on prayers according to Matt 7:8–11 reads quite differently:

> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt 7:8–11)[66]

This leads me to the next section, which addresses Jesus's parables.

C. Early Christian Parables

I. Basic Information and Terminology

There are some parables within the Hebrew Bible[67] and early Judaism.[68] However, within the biblical tradition it was Jesus who is remembered as the parable teller *par excellence.*[69] Within early Christian sources, in particular those in the

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[64] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 31.

[65] See Mann, *Fabulists*, 201–203 and 222–232 (on Bad Teachers).

[66] All biblical quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.

[67] See, for instance, 2 Sam 12:1–4; Isa 5:1–7; Ezek 16:1–63.

[68] Given the abundance of rabbinic meshalim (see, for instance, L. M. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot: An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai,* TSAJ 176 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019]) only a few of them can be traced back to pre-rabbinic time (e. g. Pesiq. Rav Kah. 11:3). The term *mashal* occurs only three times in the Mishnah (m. Sukkah 2:9; m. Nid. 2:5; and m. Nid. 5:7), see J. Neusner, "The Parable ('Maschal')," in *Ancient Israel, Judaism, and Christianity in Contemporary Perspective: Essays in Memory of K. J. Illmann*, ed. J. Neusner et al. (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 259–283, here 261. See on parables and fables in Philo and 4 Ezra the articles in this volume by Sean A. Adams and Stephen Llewelyn and Lydia Gore-Jones.

[69] By using this terminology I want to make it obvious that I am not following the historical Jesus-approach, according to which a number between four (see J. P. Meier, *Probing the Authenticity of the Parables,* vol. 5 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016]) and forty (see G. Lohfink, *Die vierzig Gleichnisse Jesu*, 2nd

four canonical Gospels, the sayings source Q, and the Gospel of Thomas, we find more than one hundred parables with Jesus as the parable teller.[70] Therefore, the parable genre is closely linked with Jesus and early Christian writings.

We already find some kind of meta-reflection in the canonical Gospels concerning the use of parables by Jesus, e. g. the so-called parable-theory according to Mark 4:10–12, which tries to consider the function and impact of Jesus's parabolic speech.

In the Synoptic Gospels the term παραβολή is used constantly in the introductory verses to classify the brief narrations which follow. In the Gospel of John the term παροιμία serves as genre classifying terminology, which is also used synonymously with παραβολή in the LXX-translation of the Hebrew term *mashal* (see Sir 39:3; 47:17). The classifying term combined with literary criteria of specific passages therefore lead to the conclusion that a number of parables can also be found in the Gospel of John.[71]

The New Testament, however, does not make use of the typical Greek terms αἶνος (see Matt 21:16; Luke 18:43) and λόγος (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.20 [1393a30 f.]) with the meaning "fable." The same is to be observed with the term μῦθος which occurs in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; cf. 2 Pet 1:16), but there the term hardly means "fable,"[72] but denotes "myth" as such (see Titus 1:14).

In summary, following the paratextual classification terminology, which can be evaluated as a signal of the authors' genre consciousness, there are no fables in the New Testament,[73] but rather a multitude of parables.

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ed. [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2020]) are accepted to be the authentic voice of Jesus. For the arguments from the memory approach, see R. Zimmermann, "How to Understand," 157–182; R. Zimmermann, "Memory and Jesus' Parables: J. P. Meier's Explosion and the Restoration of the 'Bedrock' of Jesus' Speech," *JSHJ* 16 (2018): 156–172.

[70] See the not exhaustive collection (translation and commentary) of 104 Jesus parables in R. Zimmermann et al., eds., *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015).

[71] See M. Stare, "Gibt es Gleichnisse im Johannesevangelium?," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann, 2nd ed., WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 321–364; R. Zimmermann, "Are There Parables in John? It is Time to Revisit the Question," *JSHJ* 9 (2011): 243–276.

[72] In 1 Tim 4:7 the term μῦθος is used to describe pejoratively the old wives' gossip tales, which could include fables in the narrow sense (τοὺς δὲ βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις μύθους παραιτοῦ: "Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales").

[73] One exception might be the fable of the body in 1 Cor 12, where the different parts of the human body compete with each other and talk like persons (e. g. 1 Cor 12:15–27). Parallel texts on the same topic (see Livy, *Urbe cond.* 2.32.7–33.1; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 6.86.1–5; Plutarch, *Cor.* 6.1–4; Maximus Tyrius, *Diss.* 15.5) also confirm the connection to fables for this material. For details, see R. Zimmermann, "The Body Fables in Babrius, *Fab.* 134 and 1 Corinthians 12: Hierarchic or Democratic Leadership in Crisis-Management?" *HTS* 77 (2021).

II. Animals and Nature in New Testament/Early Christian Parables

Though animals play a role in numerous New Testament texts and are even presented beyond the realm of experienced reality as in the animal visions in Revelation (e. g. the beast in Rev 13), they are – at first glance – not the crucial characters in Jesus's parables. We do not find any animal talking to others, so we could conclude that the animals in parables clearly are to be distinguished from animals in fables.

A closer examination, however, reveals some interesting details which can initiate a reconsideration. In 27 parables of the early Christian tradition (i. e. about a quarter of the texts according to the *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*) animals can also be found. The range of variation of the animal species is not substantially smaller within the parables than within the fables: Besides sheep, goats, and pigs (domesticated animals), we find all kinds of wild beasts such as vultures, snakes, or a scorpion.[74] In total there are about fifteen different animal species mentioned in parables. At the same time, when one focuses on the frequency of the species, one quickly realizes that the dominant animals in Babrius (lion, fox, wolf, and donkey) are not found in the New Testament parables.[75] From the opposite perspective, sheep, which is the animal mentioned most often in the parables,[76] is found only seven times in Babrius (ranked # 6 in frequency, the same as the mouse). In general, there are many overlaps that demonstrate a similar Mediterranean fauna as the empirical background of both groups of texts. In some cases, such as the parable/fable of the Fish in the Net (Matt 13:47–50; Gos. Thom. 8; Babrius, *Fab.* 4), there are even close contact points that make further investigation seem worthwhile.[77]

What can be said about the role and function of the animals within the parables of Jesus? In some parables the animals only serve as minor or walk-on characters. For instance, the calf and the goat in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:29–30). In other parables, however, the animals can be called main characters because they represent the driving force for the whole plot.

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[74] See the Lost Sheep (Q/Luke 15:4–7); Eagle and Vultures (Q/Luke 17:37); Bread for Dogs and Kids (Mark 7:27–28); Pearls for Pigs (Matt 7:6); Fish in the Net (Matt 13:47–50); Separation of Sheep and Goats (Matt 25:32–33); Snake instead of Fish, Scorpion instead of Egg (Luke 11:11); Shepherd and the Sheep (John 10:1–5); Sheep and Wolf (John 10:12–13); Lion (Gos. Thom. 7); Fish and Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8); Lamb and the Samaritan (Gos. Thom. 60); Dog in the Cattle Feeding Trough (Gos. Thom. 102).

[75] The lion is mentioned only in Gos. Thom. 7; a wolf is mentioned in John 10:10–12, a text which is not accepted as a parable by many scholars. On parables in John, see the references in note 69 and Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 333–339.

[76] See Luke 15:4–9//Matt 18:12–14; Matt 25:32–33; John 10:1–5; Gos. Thom. 60.1–2.

[77] In Matthew and Babrius, the same wording is used to describe the "net" (σαγήνη) being "thrown out" (βάλλω). In Babrius and in the Gospel of Thomas we find the opposites of "small" and "big"; both texts mention a fisherman (Gos. Thom.: "wise fisherman"), see on these texts the contribution of Konrad Schwarz in this volume.

As a sample, I will refer to the "lost sheep," as narrated in Matt 18:12–14:[78]

> What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.
> So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. (Matt 18:12–14)

With regard to focalization, the parable is told from the perspective of the shepherd, who is the human character in the narration. He leaves the ninety-nine sheep, searches and finds the one, and rejoices. Nothing is said about the feelings of the sheep. No insight is given concerning their or its "inner life." Shall we then conclude, that the sheep offers no role of identification for the reader? Are the group of sheep or the one which went astray just walk-on characters, no more than a stage prop?

Dieter Roth is correct when he states: "The opening scene of the parable introduces two characters, the shepherd and the sheep."[79] Although the parable only provides basic information, Matthew twice mentions that one sheep has gone astray (Matt 18:12a and 12b: πλανάομαι pass. with active meaning "go astray"). The sheep is the subject of this deed and not only the object of the shepherd's actions. This perspective prompts the reader to reflect on the sheep's motive: Did it run away from the group? Did it want to find the way on its own? The Matthean context also emphasizes this perspective because the evangelist is concerned about the "little ones" in the community (Matt 18:10 and 18:14: ἓν τῶν μικρῶν τούτων).

If we turn to the other version of the parable in the New Testament, this trait is even more obvious. In the Gospel of Luke we find the same parable embedded in the so-called "chapter of the three lost ones/things" (prodigal son, lost coin, and also lost sheep; see Luke 15:4–7). Within this context the sheep is, without a doubt, a main character along with the shepherd.[80] Its situation is described in greater detail (wilderness, laid on shoulders) and its fate is closely linked with feelings of the community. Thus, being "lost" is offered to the reader to identify with, analogous to the prodigal son. Following this line of interpretation Animosa Oveja explores the psychological so-called "group dynamic interpretation" ("Gruppendynamische Deutung"),[81] which focuses on the sheep as identification figures as one possible avenue of interpretation.

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[78] The parable is part of the double tradition (see Luke 15:3–7), which most scholars explain best with the Sayings source Q; see D. T. Roth, *The Parables in Q*, LNTS 582 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 374–390 (on the Lost Sheep).

[79] See Roth, *Parables*, 379.

[80] See also C. L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 212: "The parables of the lost sheep and lost coin involve animals and inanimate objects as main 'characters.'"

[81] See A. Oveja, "Neunundneunzig sind nicht genug! (Vom Verlorenen Schaf) Q 15,4.5a–7

To conclude: the animal, in this case the sheep, is not only a passive walk-on character, but a main character with hints of human traits, which attracts and invites readers for identification.

Let me turn to a second example, which might not be as well-known as the first one: the parable of the Bread for Dogs or Children, as told by Mark 7:27–28. While traveling to Tyre a Gentile woman of Syrophoenician origin begged Jesus to cast out an unclean spirit from her daughter.

> He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." (Mark 7:27–28)

In this somewhat difficult text, the daily experience with dogs is the point of reference by means of which both Jesus and the woman make their arguments. The feeding of children and dogs is told from the perspective of a man within the household. It is obvious that the dogs, at the plot level, do nothing spectacular: they simply eat the children's crumbs; they do not speak, comment, or perform any other anthropomorphic action. Nevertheless, the dogs are the points of reference and identification for the woman.[82] She picks up the metaphorical transfer and utilizes it to make her own point. She identifies herself with the dog, which is fed next to the children from the same table. So, once again, the animal is not simply a walk-on character, but crucial to the parable's narration.

A brief look at the natural phenomena found in New Testament parables[83] might help us gain a more comprehensive picture of the use of non-human material. In the parable of the Mustard Seed, we might discuss whether there was such a thing as a mustard tree in ancient Palestine, as mentioned in Matthew (Matt 13:31–32), or only a mustard bush mentioned in Mark (see Mark 4:30–32). In Matthew, there might be an exaggeration, most likely prompted by tradition.[84] However, the mustard seed does not have human qualities. In the same manner, the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:4–9) tells the story of a man sowing grain on different ground. The productiveness of the grain might be exaggerated. Accord-

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(Mt 18,12–14/Lk 15,1–7/EvThom 107)," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al., 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 205–219, here 211 f.

[82] See G. Guttenberger, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, ZBK (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2017), 175–180.

[83] See Fruits of a Tree (Q/Luke 6:43–45); Weather Forecast (Q/Luke 12:54–56); Salt (Q/Luke 14:34–35); Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30–32); Sower and Seeds (Mark 4:3–9); Fig Tree (Mark 13:28–29); Wheat and the Weeds (Matt 13:24–30); Rooting Up the Plants (Matt 15:13); Blowing Wind (John 3:8); Living Water (John 4:13–14); The Wheat Is White (John 4:35–48); Dying Grain (John 12:24); Cleansing of the Vine (John 15:1–8); see also Wood and Stone (Gos. Thom. 77.2–3); Palm Tree, Wheat, and Ear (NHC I 2 Ap. Jas.).

[84] See Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 247–251. Matthew refers to the "World Tree" as an apocalyptic image for kingdom and sovereignty, as explored in Ezek 17:1–24; 31:1–18; Dan 4:1–34.

ing to Varro in his agrarian handbook, a piece of grain normally yields fifteen to forty fold (*Rust.* 1.44–48). However, at the level of the narration, neither the seed nor the rocky ground nor the thorns are developed into independent human-like characters. The transfer of meaning to the realm of humanity is made by the contextual setting only, the introductory verses and – in this case – the following interpretation (Mark 4:16–20). In this context, the interpretation offered for the different kinds of ground is that of people who receive the word of God. In other words: the reader/listener of this parable is invited to identify with a natural phenomenon.

A different grain-parable goes one step further, this is the parable of the "Dying Grain" according to John 12:24:

> Amen, Amen, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

It is noteworthy that here the grain is not sowed by a sower in a passive way. It falls (act. ptc.), dies, and bears fruit. The grain is the subject in this little story. It is, in fact, the only subject and thus the main character of the plot.[85] The narration does not move fully into anthropomorphism (e. g. the grain does not speak); however, I would argue that here the line has already been toed or even crossed, such that the plant is portrayed as an "active" entity/character.

To summarize, at first glance, there is a clear difference between the animals in fables and parables. A closer examination, however, demonstrates that the distance is not nearly as great as scholarship has assumed. Animals and plants are presented as main characters, which invite readers to identify with them.

III. Theology and Religion in New Testament Parables

In the fables of Babrius we find some references to religion and gods as characters. For New Testament parables, it can be stated that all of them address religious issues.[86] This general declaration is even more true when we take into account the fact that the parables are part of religious macrotexts, the Gospels, and told by a man who is honored as the Son of God. Once again, it is helpful to have a closer look at the sources themselves to gain a more nuanced picture, or even to correct simple black and white models.

Are the parables all about God and his world? Investigating the parable texts in detail, we only find one (out of 104), in which God is present as a character in

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[85] See the narratological analysis in R. Zimmermann, "Das Leben aus dem Tod (Vom sterbenden Weizenkorn) Joh 12,24," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al., 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 804–816.

[86] Some scholars explicitly focus on this theological meaning; see for example Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* and K. Erlemann, *Fenster zum Himmel: Gleichnisse im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017); see the overview within more recent scholarship in Zimmermann, "Wahrheit Gottes," 52–57.

the plot. In the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16–21) God's voice is heard.[87] We may add the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), where we gain insight in the heavenly realm, but only Abraham, not God himself, is seen on stage. This means that we have more explicit references to God(s) in the fables than in the parables.

One might be inclined to argue that the plot remains earthly without any transcendent beings. However, in the paratexts, the close link with God's realm is definitively made. It is one of the constant dogmas in New Testament scholarship that Jesus told parables about the Kingdom of God. Indeed, many parables are introduced by the sentence: "The Kingdom of God/of Heaven is like …" (ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν; e. g. Matt 13:31). However, I have demonstrated elsewhere that this notion is a fusion of two different strains of memories only developed by the evangelist Matthew, who uses this introductory sentence ten times.[88] In the oldest early Christian sources of the Gospel tradition, that is the Q-Document and the Gospel of Mark, the Kingdom-of-God-introduction is found only three times out of a total of 44 parables within these sources.[89]

To avoid misunderstandings: by no means do I want to deny that God's reality and religious aspects play a major role in the New Testament parables. However, the matter is not as obvious as it has often simply been assumed to be in biblical scholarship. To look at the problem from a different vantage point: we find many parables in early Christian sources that focus on ethics and moral behavior, quite similar to the fables of Babrius with their reader-oriented appeal. Indeed, there are exegetes who wanted to read the Jesus parables foremost as ethical texts that challenge social order and behavior. Ernest van Eck, for instance, summarizes his socio-historical monograph on parables claiming that these texts are "not earthly stories with heavenly meaning, but earthly stories with heavy meanings, exploring how human beings could respond to an exploitative and oppressive society crated by the power and privilege of the elite."[90] Charles Hedrick even goes a step further. For him, the parables do not even teach a moral lesson, but are simply "first-century Palestinian fictional narratives."[91] "The proper way to

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[87] Luke 12:20: "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" (NRSV).

[88] See Matt 13:24–30; 13:44; 13:45–46; 13:47–50; 13:52; 18:23–35; 20:1–16; 21:28–32; 22:1–14; 25:1–13. For the argument, see Zimmermann, "Memory and Jesus' Parables," 169–172.

[89] The parable of the Mustard Seed appears in both sources. With reference to Dieter Roth's most recent study on parables in Q (*Parables*, 20–21) we discover a total of 27 Q parables; βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is mentioned only in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven (Q/Luke 13:18–19, 20–21). Out of a total of seventeen Markan parables, the Kingdom of God is referred to only in the parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26) and that of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30).

[90] See E. van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 314 where he refers to Herzog's parable interpretation.

[91] C. W. Hedrick, *Parabolic Figures or Narrative Fictions? Seminal Essays on the Stories of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), xiv.

read them is not to ask about their meaning but rather to ask, what is going on in the narrative."[92] Although I do not agree with Hedrick in general, because he disregards the metaphorical aspect of these texts,[93] Hedrick emphasizes the "secularity of the stories,"[94] which brings them closer to the fables of Babrius. For instance, the parable of the Speck in a Brother's Eye and the Plank in One's Own Eye (Q/Luke 6:41–42) conveys the same message as Babrius, *Fab.* 66 (the Two Wallets), which concludes in Babrius: "Men see the failings of each other very clearly, while unaware of those which are their own."[95] The parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:23–35) and what one might call the fable of the "Unmerciful Viper" (Babrius, *Fab.* 143) have some structural similarities: both protagonists experience extreme mercy and compassion, but are unwilling to extend the same to others.

To summarize, although the New Testament parables are first and foremost religious texts dealing with God's realm, they are also concerned with daily social life and human behavior. They represent a crucial part of the "narratival ethics" of the New Testament.[96]

D. Conclusions

I conclude by summarizing some findings on the three points discussed:

(1) Genre: As early as the first reflections on genre with respect to parables and fables, close similarities as well as differences were observed and noted. Both genres include characteristics such as narration, fictionality, metaphorical transfer, and appeal, which produce multiple interpretations. They differ in their reference to reality and embedding in macro-contexts. However, this difference might not be as strong as scholarship has contended in the history of research. Among the fables of Babrius a certain number of texts does not present an-thropomorphic animals, but instead tells stories from daily life which meet the criterion of "realistic" in the same manner as Jesus's parables. With respect to "contextuality" the fable collections may have served a specific function which allowed an orator to insert the fables into different contexts.[97] Furthermore, van

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[92] Hedrick, *Parabolic Figures*, xv.

[93] See my critique in details in Zimmermann, "Wahrheit Gottes," 44–46.

[94] See Hedrick, *Parabolic Figures*, xv.

[95] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 82–83.

[96] See R. Zimmermann, "The Etho-Poetic of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37): The Ethics of Seeing in a Culture of Looking the Other Way," *VEE* 29 (2008): 269–292; R. Zimmermann, "Die Ethico-Ästhetik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Ethik durch literarische Ästhetik am Beispiel der Parabeln im Matthäus-Evangelium," in *Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ*, ed. F. W. Horn and R. Zimmermann, WUNT 238 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 235–265.

[97] For instance, the same fable of an Owl and Birds is told by Dion of Prusa (Dio Chrysos-

Dijk in his fundamental investigation has demonstrated, that many fables can also be found in ancient Greek drama, historiography, or philosophy,[98] where the fables are closely linked to a certain context. Thus, the isolated form of a fable within the collections could have been the exception. Therefore, genre theory should not be misunderstood as an impervious system of classification but could open up space for overlaps that can be seen in concrete texts.

(2) Animals: There are animals in both groups of texts. There is a clear tendency in the fables to depict anthropomorphic animals, a tendency not found in parables. Beyond this meta-observation there are broad areas of overlap and good reasons to question sharp distinctions. On the one hand, we do find animals in core positions in parables; in some cases they are even developed into main characters. On the other hand, in some fables animals are part of realistic scenes and behave just like animals in the known world. In some of the fables of Babrius animals are even missing.

(3) Religion/God: At first glance one might declare that fables are moral narrations and that parables talk about the Kingdom of God.[99] We have seen that this oversimplified view should be rejected in favor of a more nuanced perspective. There are many fables in Babrius reflecting religious topics, and gods in particular. Furthermore, interpersonal human interactions along with an emphasis on ethics is also a fundamental dimension for the New Testament parables. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the parables of Jesus are texts that convey a theological message. With their metaphorical transfer of meaning and the framing in the macro-text of the Gospels they speak about God and the reality of God, even though this might be experienced within everyday situations. There will be need of further investigations to get a more comprehensive picture of the "theological" message of Babrius when dealing with the gods and religious rituals. Is his irony and humor, for instance, part of a more general critique, or does he only critique certain misunderstandings and practices?

The dialogue between the fables of Babrius and early Christian parables has only just begun. There are many more facets to be discovered and investigated in further detail. However, this article may represent an initial result that some

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tom) in two different contexts and in two different ways; see *Or.* 12.7–8 (*Dei cogn.*) = Perry 437 and *Or.* 72.13–16 (*Hab.*) = Perry 437a, see Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel*, 28.

[98] See G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature: With a Study of the Theory and Terminology of the Genre* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Van Dijk also lists epic, satyr play, oratory and rhetoric, science, grammar and scholia, see van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 124–361. Grethlein correctly notes that scholarship has mostly addressed the fable collections in the Roman imperial period and neglected the many fables integrated within older texts like drama (e.g. Aeschylus), historiography (e.g. Hesiod), and philosophy (e.g. Plato's dialogues), see J. Grethlein, "Die Fabel," in *Handbuch der griechischen Literatur der Antike*, vol. 1, *Die Literatur der archaischen und klassischen Zeit*, ed. B. Zimmermann and A. Schlichtmann (Munich: Beck, 2011), 321–325, here 323 f.

[99] See, for instance, Erlemann, *Fenster zum Himmel*, 198: "Fabeln erläutern allgemeingültige Erfahrungswerte, Gleichnisse ein aspektreiches Bündel religiöser Erfahrungen."

boundaries, which were strictly drawn, can no longer be maintained. The former black-and-white picture must be replaced with the art of more colorful readings of fables and parables when read in light of one another.

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Early Jewish and Rabbinic Literature

Fables in Philo of Alexandria

λόγος, μῦθος, and παραβολή

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Philo of Alexandria, although known best for his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, engaged with a wide range of Greek literature. This contribution begins with a discussion of terms associated with ancient parables and fables (λόγος, μῦθος, and παραβολή) with a specific investigation as to how these terms are used by Philo. I will follow this with an evaluation of Philo's use of fables and fable language within his corpus, arguing that these literary devices provide insight into Philo's interpretive approach and his educational background. In particular, Philo's engagement with Greek fabula in *Conf.* 4–14 provides a strong example of how Philo explicitly engaged with fabula and how Philo differentiated biblical stories from their Greek counterparts.

A. Definitions and Terms for Fable and Parable

One's definition of fable determines the number of examples identified and their composition. An overly prescriptive definition essentially presupposes what a fable is and excludes perceived heterodox examples. In contrast, an encompassing definition of fable, as is found in the work of Rodríguez Adrados and which is evidenced in some ancient collections, minimises the barriers to entry so that many literary constructions, such as myth, anecdote, simile, or metaphor, could be classified as fables.[1] For this study, I will adopt the definition of fable offered by Theon, which is broadly accepted by other rhetoricians and ancient authors: "a μῦθός is a fictitious story imaging truth" (μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν, *Prog.* 72).[2] This definition emphasises the elements of fictionality,

[1] F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 17–24.

[2] Followed by Maximus Tyrius, *Diss.* 32.1; Aphthonius, *Prog.* 1; Nicolaus, *Prog.* 1. In contrast, there is no mention of παραβολή in Theon. For the Greek text of Theon, see L. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1854), 2:59–130. Perry adapted and expanded this definition in his studies, cf. B. E. Perry, "Fable," *SG* 12 (1959): 17–37; B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables,* LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), xix–xxiv. Cf. K. Snodgrass,

narrativity, and the enlightening purpose of the literary form,[3] and provides a core understanding of the nature of a fable from an ancient, emic perspective. It also recognises the multiformity of expressions and the inadequacy of strict literary delineations.[4] Such a perspective fits well with a cognitive-prototype approach to genre, which posits that authors construct prototypical and non-prototypical examples of a literary form and that a specific work can participate in multiple genres.[5]

Fables and parables are related literary forms that lack substantial formal elements by which to distinguish them.[6] The earliest explicit discussion of these two forms is by Aristotle, who, in *Rhet.* 2.20.1–9, presents the parable and fable as related (δὲ ἓν μὲν παραβολὴ ἓν δὲ λόγοι, *Rhet.* 2.20.3). Both are classified as invented "examples" (παράδειγμα), but they appear to differ in their relationship

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Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 7–9. Although not explicitly mentioned, the criterion of size, namely that fables are short and not extended compositions, is regularly assumed.

[3] This definition naturally excludes maxims and chreiai, as they would not satisfy the criterion of narrative. Although the latter, with reference to a specific person, could easily be expanded, it would not pass the criterion of fictionality. Aphthonius, in his discussion of chreiai (*Prog.* 3–4, Χρεία ἐστὶν ἀπομνημόνευμα σύντομον εὐστόχως ἐπί τι πρόσωπον ἀναφέρουσα), encourages his reader to differentiate the type of chreia being given with a specific heading, of which he includes "comparison" (παραβολῇ) and "example" (παραδείγματι). A similar use is found in Tryphon's περὶ τρόπων (200.31–201.2) and Hermogenes's discussion of maxims (*Prog.* 10, κατὰ παραβολήν, κατὰ παράδειγμα). H. Rabe, ed., *Aphthonii Progymnasmata*, RG 10 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1926), 1–51; H. Rabe, ed., *Hermogenis opera*, RG 6 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913, repr. 1969), 1–27. On the difference between παραβολή and παράδειγμα, with the former referring to an unspecified individual and the latter to a specific person, see R. F. Hock and E. N. O'Neil, *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises*, WGRW 2 (Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 109. Importantly for this contribution, this definition also excludes the investigation of Philo's allegorical commentary as part of the discussion of fables, as Philo's treatises are lengthy and many do not have continuous narrative. The relationship between allegory and parable has been important in the history of scholarly discussion. For more on this topic, see I. Heinemann, "Die Allegoristik der hellenistischen Juden außer Philo," *Mnemosyne* 5 (1952): 130–138; H. J. Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 96–104; J. Leopold, "Rhetoric and Allegory," in *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria: A Commentary on the "De gigantibus" and "Quod deus sit immutabilis,"* ed. D. Winston and J. Dillon (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 155–170.

[4] G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature,* MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 34–37.

[5] G. Lakoff, *Woman, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); M. Sinding, "After Definitions: Genre, Categories, and Cognitive Science," *Genre* 35 (2002): 181–219; G. C. Bowker and S. L. Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 54. For application to Jewish texts, see B. G. Wright III, "Joining the Club: A Suggestion about Genre in Early Jewish Texts," *DSD* 17 (2010): 289–314; R. Williamson, "Pesher: A Cognitive Model of the Genre," *DSD* 17 (2010): 336–360. Cf. S. A. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020).

[6] Cf. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 20–22; discussing the work of R. Dithmar and D. Ewald, 36.

to reality.[7] For instance, the παραβολή is an example that could be found in real life, whereas the fable is purely fictitious. Such a differentiation based on the possibility or impossibility of the story is not pressed in subsequent discussions, although it is clear from Theon's comment that some of his contemporaries were attempting to make a similar distinction between types of fables.[8] Over time, the term παραβολή among Greek authors became more associated with the act of comparison,[9] leading some scholars to argue that the parable is closer in relationship to the simile than to the metaphor.[10] In contrast, the fable became a distinct literary form, although it was thought to be related to other similar (sub)genres (e. g., proverb, maxim, myth) and so in need of differentiation.[11] In discussions of fable in the post-classical eras, two terms were predominantly used by Greek-writing authors: λόγος and μῦθος.[12]

In contrast, the term παραβολή continued to be used in Jewish literature. The use of παραβολή in the Septuagint as the standard gloss for *mashal* (משל) – which can stand for a range of literary types: proverb, riddle, allegory, or taunt – led to its continued use in Jewish Scripture to describe a large range of speech acts and not just the act of comparison.[13] For example, in Num 24, the responses given by the seer Balaam to King Balak are identified as παραβολαί (Num 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23).[14] Of importance for our discussion of Philo is the corresponding

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[7] Cf. Aristotle, *Top.* 8.1 (157a15); Ptolemaus, *Diff.* Π 121; Tryphon, περὶ τρόπων 201.13–15; Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.11.19–21.

[8] Theon, *Prog.* 73: "Those who say that some [fables] involve mute beasts, others human beings, some are impossible, others capable of being true, seem to me to make a silly distinction." Translation from G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, WGRW 10 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).

[9] E. g., Timaeus (*FGrH* 566) F7; Polybius, *Hist.* 1.2.2; (Ps.-)Demetrius, *Eloc.* 90, 146; (Ps.-)Longinus, [*Subl.*] 37.1; Rhet. Her. 4.59. Cf. M. H. McCall Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Simile and Comparison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 24–27.

[10] E. g., A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Mohr, 1888–1899), 1:44–70.

[11] For examples of genre differentiation in antiquity, see van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 78. Cf. K. Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament," *ANRW* 25.2 (1984): 1031–1432, esp. 1110–1124.

[12] Theon identifies three terms that were used for fables in antiquity: *ainoi*, *logoi*, and *mythoi* (προσαγορεύουσι δὲ αὐτοὺς τῶν μὲν παλαιῶν οἱ ποιηταὶ μᾶλλον αἴνους, οἱ δὲ μύθους· πλεονάζουσι δὲ μάλιστα οἱ καταλογάδην συγγεγραφότες τὸ λόγους ἀλλὰ μὴ μύθους καλεῖν, *Prog.* 73). For a discussion of terms with examples, see van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 79–111. Latin terms, especially *fabula* and its cognates and derivatives, although important for the wider discussion, are not pressing for our investigation of Philo.

[13] Cf. A. R. Johnson, "משל," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 162–169; D. W. Suter, "*Māšāl* in the Similitudes of Enoch," *JBL* 100 (1981): 193–212, esp. 193–202. The use of παραβολή to render משל could support the view that משל is inherently comparative. For a recent discussion, see K. Schöpflin, "משל – ein eigentümlicher Begriff der hebräischen Literatur," *BZ* 46 (2002): 1–24. For the use of משל in relation to apocalyptic visions, see 1 En. 37:5; 60:1. On fables in the Hebrew Scriptures, see D. Daube, *Ancient Hebrew Fables: The Inaugural Lecture of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[14] The use of παραβολή in these passages was sufficiently odd that a number of manu-

near-absence of the term μῦθος and its cognates in the Septuagint, the two occurrences of which are from books without an extant Hebrew text (Sir 20:19, μῦθος ἄκαιρος; Bar 3:23, μυθολόγος).[15] Within the Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament, παραβολή is consistently used to indicate a discourse of Jesus in which he speaks about the kingdom of God/heaven (e. g., Matt 13:24, 31, 33; Mark 4:30) and is presented as a means by which Scripture was to be fulfilled (Matt 13:10–17; Mark 4:10–12; Luke 8:10).[16] In the two other occurrences of the term in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews employs παραβολή as "symbol" (9:9; 11:19). This brief discussion provides a rough idea of how certain terms were used in antiquity and will provide some points of comparison in our evaluation of Philo's terminology.

B. Fables and Parables in Philo of Alexandria

Fables in Philo of Alexandria and the Septuagint are not considered in the major discussions of fables by classicists.[17] While the latter might be understandable, though not to be encouraged, the former is lamentable as Philo is an author whose thorough education in Greek literature would provide another datapoint

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scripts, including the Coptic, have παρεμβολη (or the corresponding gloss); J. W. Wevers, ed., *Numeri*, vol. 3.1 of *Septuagint Vetus Testamentum Graecum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

In some cases, the saying identified in the Septuagint books as a παραβολή would best be rendered in English by the word "proverb" (e. g., 1 Kgdms 10:12; 24:13; 3 Kgdms 5:12; Ezek 12:22–23; 18:2–3), although in other situations the term παραβολή could stand for a range of literary compositions (e. g., Ps 77:2; Sir 1:25; 3:29; 13:26; 39:2). All references are to the LXX unless specified otherwise. For a wider discussion with connection with simile, allegory, metaphor, and catachresis, see F. Hauck, "παραβολή," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 5:741–759, esp. 747–752.

[15] Cf. S. A. Adams, *Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Greek Text of Codex Vaticanus*, SCS (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 106.

[16] For the use of both παραβολή and λόγος in the same context, see Matt 15:12–15. Cf. R. Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables and Ancient Rhetoric: The Contributions of Aristotle and Quintilian to the Form Criticism of the Parables," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte,* ed. R. Zimmermann, WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 238–258. For fables as hidden speech because one is not able to speak openly or directly, see Phaedrus, *Fab.* 3.*praef*.33–37; Julian, *Or.* 7.207c. In the rabbinic period, משל continues to be used in reference to parables (e. g., m. Sukkah 2:9; b. Ber. 61b; b. B. Bat. 134a; b. Shab. 31a, 153a; b. Sukkah 28a). Parables in John are described by the word παροιμία (e. g., 10:6; 16:25, 29). For rabbinic parables, see D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 4–45. For the relationship between Jesus's parables and those of the rabbis, see D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus,* vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 141–160.

[17] These texts are essentially absent in even the most comprehensive studies; i. e., Rodríguez Adrados, van Dijk. Indeed, there appears to be a resistance to engage with any Jewish texts, in-

for understanding how authors participated in this genre in antiquity, in this case from a different cultural background.[18] We will begin our discussion of Philo by looking at his employment of terms typically associated with fable/parables (i. e., παραβολή, μῦθος, and λόγος).[19] Philo does not use the term αἶνος in his corpus and so it will not be discussed further. Subsequently, we will consider Philo's education, along with discussions of fables in the progymnasmata, and evaluate specific passages in Philo's corpus that could be viewed as participating in fable. The final section will specifically focus on *Conf.* 4–14, in which Philo most explicitly engages with Greek fables. Although this study emphasises and illuminates the Greek elements of Philo's work, his practices of reading are both deeply influenced by Graeco-Roman culture and deeply Jewish. As a result, this study does not represent the fullness of Philo's engagement of this topic, but addresses a hitherto overlooked comparison.[20]

C. Fable and Parable Language in Philo

One might expect that Philo, who engages deeply with the Septuagint, might have adopted its language when discussing fables. This does not appear to be the case, as Philo only employs the term παραβολή three times in his corpus.[21] In the first instance, Philo claims that Moses used parabolic language in his dis-

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cluding the New Testament and rabbinic literature. A notable exception is M. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, TSAJ 86 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 210–246, although she focuses exclusively on parables. Unfortunately, the volume on Philo and Greek myths edited by Alesse and De Luca was published after this contribution was completed and at the publisher. This work begins to address a lacuna in Philonic scholarship, cf. F. Alesse and L. De Luca, eds., *Philo of Alexandria and Greek Myth: Narratives, Allegories, and Arguments*, Philo 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[18] A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria*, MHUC 7 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1982), 7–10.

[19] For the Greek texts used, see L. Cohn et al., *Philo von Alexandria: Die Werke in Deutscher Überstzung*, 7 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1909–1964).

[20] Niehoff's study of Philo's parables (*Philo*, 210–246) highlights Jewish parallels and could be viewed as a counterbalance to this contribution. The question of how Philo draws on a 'pagan' mode of reading also shapes his own reception of the Jewish Scriptures. Scholars recognise that Hebrew or Aramaic authors are thinking Greek in their compositions, but there is also growing attention to how certain Greek texts are shaped and determined by Hebrew thinking, genres, and modes of reading. The absence of fables from much of Hebrew/Aramaic literature from the Second Temple period (e. g., Qumran) reinforces the argument that different Jewish communities/authors engaged in the interpretation of texts differently and that Philo embodies the reading trends prominent in his locale (i. e., Alexandria) and his educational training.

[21] Philo, in his surviving works, also does not engage with what modern scholars have identified as fabula from Scripture (e. g., Judg 9:7–15, fable of the trees choosing a king; 2 Sam 12:1–4, Nathan's story to David about a stolen sheep; cf. 2 Kgs 14:9–10; 2 Chr 25:17–19). The term παραβολή is only used in one passage of Josephus (*A. J.* 8.44), when discussing Solomon's compositions, which could suggest that Jewish authors who received a thorough Greek education and wrote in the Roman era intentionally avoided this term. In *A. J.* 5.236–239, when discussing

cussion of the appearance of the world (παγκάλως δ᾽ ἔχει τὸ ἐν παραβολῆς, *Conf.* 99). The other two occurrences are found in Philo's *Quaestiones* (*QG* 2.54; *QE* 1.3) and relate to the idea of comparison and so are not a technical term for parables or fables, but follow contemporary Greek usage.[22]

Much more prominent is Philo's use of μῦθος. However, despite using the lexeme, most of Philo's μῦθός language does not specifically discuss parables or fables as we have defined them. Rather, Philo employs μῦθός to describe myths and stories from other nations, primarily about their gods, which are problematic in their ontological outlook.[23] In particular, μῦθός is regularly collocated with πλάσμα and ποίημα,[24] and the phrase μύθων πλάσματα, with varied inflections, is something that Philo regularly speaks against.[25] For example, μύθων πλάσματα are associated with poets and sophists and are used by them to obscure their ideas in order to manipulate their hearers (*Opif.* 157; cf. *Opif.* 1, 170; *Spec.* 2.164; *Praem.* 8). In other passages Philo associates μύθων πλάσματα with the narratives surrounding the festivals of Greeks and barbarians, the purpose of which is to create false vanity (*Cher.* 91), but they pose a real threat to the Jewish people and the proper worship of God (*Spec.* 1.79).[26] For Philo, Phinehas provides the quintessential model of daring (τόλμημα τολμήσας), slaying those propagating the transgression, and in doing so rescued the people around him from committing a similar offence (*Spec.* 1.56–57). These mythic narratives and their corresponding acts of worship need to be abandoned by all who seek the truth, not only by the Jewish people, but even those from other nations, specifically "proselytes" (προσηλύτους) who have chosen to pursue piety (*Spec.* 1.51; *Virt.* 102, 178).

In particular, Philo is highly critical of one element of μῦθος, namely, the representation of the divine as human-like. For example, he critiques μυθοποιΐα (a term which can be rendered as "fables" or "mythmaking" with the semantic range of both) in which God undertakes human activities, such as tilling the soil

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Judg 9, Josephus does not label this story a "fable" (contra Thackeray and Marcus, LCL), but refrains from classifying it. However, he does add that "when the trees had human voice" (ὡς τὰ δένδρα φωνὴν ἀνθρώπειον, *A. J.* 5.236), which fits with the claims of Babrius (*Fab.* 1.*praef.*9) and the perspective of certain fables of Aesop (e. g., *Fab.* 19, 175, 213, 250).

[22] Philon d'Alexandrie, *Quaestiones in Genesim et in Exodum: Fragmenta Graeca,* ed. Françoise Petit (Paris: Cerf, 1978).

[23] Myth terminology is also employed negatively in Josephus's works, especially in discussions of historiography (e. g., *A. J.* 1.15, 22; *B. J.* 2.156, associated with the Greeks; *C. Ap.* 1.105; 2.120).

[24] E. g., Philo, *Congr.* 61–62; *Det.* 125; *Fug.* 42 (κάκιστον μὲν τὸ μυθικὸν πλάσμα, τὸ ἄμετρον καὶ ἐκμελὲς ποίημα).

[25] Cf. Philo, *Opif.* 157; *Abr.* 243; *Mos.* 2.271; *Spec.* 4.178; *Dec.* 156; *Praem.* 8; *Contempl.* 63; *Aet.* 58; *Legat.* 13, 237; *Prov.* 2.66; Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 1.67.11; 4.70.1; Plutarch, *Thes.* 28.2.

[26] Both Egyptians and Greeks create fables in order to justify their worship of animals or celestial objects (Philo, *Decal.* 54–55, 76). The composition of such stories, according to Philo, was prohibited by God in the second commandment he gave to Moses (*Decal.* 156).

or planting trees (*Leg.* 1.43), or takes on a human appearance or traits (*Post.* 2; *Deus* 59). Although most fables in antiquity did not include divine characters, there were a few that did,[27] and for Philo this depiction of divine beings was highly problematic because it could give the wrong idea about God, creating a false impression of the truth in order to deceive (*Spec.* 1.28) or win a reputation (*Decal.* 54–55). For Philo, both the act of mythmaking and the myth itself are regularly in conflict with truth (*Post.* 52; *Det.* 125), distancing them from the core nature and purpose of fable articulated by Theon. Avoidance of uncertain "myth-making" (ἀβέβαιον μυθοποιίαν, *Sacr.* 13) is necessary, because if one accepts the constructed tales and builds one's worldview on them, that person will not fully understand the power of God (*Sacr.* 76), nor will she/he be able to become manly and rise above her/his womanly spirit (*Post.* 165).

As a result, Philo regularly defends Moses and his laws from the potential claim that they contain myths or fabulous stories,[28] such as the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt (*Fug.* 121, οὐ μυθοπλαστῶν, ἀλλὰ πράγματος; cf. *Gig.* 7, 58).[29] Moses did not invent fables, nor did he adopt the fables of others, as to do so within his legal work would obscure the truth (*Opif.* 1–2).[30] Nevertheless, some parts of the Pentateuch, on a surface reading, could be viewed as fabulous, such as the claim that a woman could be made from the rib of a man (τὸ ῥητὸν ἐπὶ τούτου μυθῶδές ἐστι, *Leg.* 2.19). In these cases, the charge of fabulous composition is undermined by the text's deeper meaning, which Moses, as an inspired author, embedded within the text (*Gig.* 60). According to Philo, by recognising the allegorical aspect of the text, the issue of fables and myths immediately recedes and the truth of the text is plain (*Agr.* 97).[31] Readers who are focused on the literal or surface reading of the text will also be able to refute

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[27] E. g., Aesop, *Fab.* 100, 102–104, 106–109, 111 (Perry).

[28] Philo shows awareness of a number of Greek "myths" within his corpus. E. g., the myths of nectar and ambrosia (τὴν νέκταρος καὶ ἀμβροσίας τῶν μεμυθευμένων, *Deus* 155), of Ganymede (*Prov.* 2.7), of Mnemosyne (*Plant.* 129–130), of Triptolemus and the giving of corn to the earth (*Praem.* 8), and the story of Ulysses and the Cyclops (*Contempl.* 40).

[29] Moses is said to have been well versed in educational matters in order to be able to contend with sophists in Egypt, who, according to Philo, honour specious fables over the truth (*Migr.* 76). Education in a subject is not necessarily an endorsement of it, but might be necessary in order to overcome opposition (e. g., sophists, *Migr.* 82; *Fug.* 23–24; *Somn.* 2.80–92). Philo also defends himself, claiming that what he is saying is not μῦθος, ἀλλὰ χρησμὸς (*Mut.* 152; *Somn.* 1.172). In doing so, Philo explicitly contrasts the nature and content of the 'holy writings' with stories that would lack credible origins.

[30] On the creation of myths by poets and by prose writers, see Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 20 (*Mor.* 358 f.); Julian, *Or.* 1.2b–c.

[31] The lexeme συμβολικῶς is also used extensively by Philo to speak of symbolic or allegorical interpretations. As such, it is related semantically to fable/parable and is part of Philo's wider range of terms for comparison. Cf. *Opif.* 154; *Leg.* 1.1; *Her.* 127; *Abr.* 99. For another example of Philo's comparison language, see *Ebr.* 155 (τίνι οὖν ἀπεικάσωμεν). Figurative or hypothetical language is also signaled in Philo by the phrase εἴποι τις ἄν (e. g., *Abr.* 73; *Spec.* 1.302). Allegorical language is also used in Ps.-Clementines, *Hom.* 4.24 and 6.2–10 for interpreting fables.

the critiques of hostile readers (*Conf.* 14), but this is not the approach adopted by Philo.[32]

The other term for fable that was prominent in the Hellenistic and Roman eras is λόγος.[33] This term is found throughout Philo's corpus, especially in his philosophical discussions of reason (e. g., *Legat.* 6) and his descriptions of Scripture and divine communication (νόμοι καὶ λόγοι θεῖοι, *Decal.* 13; *Leg.* 3.204).[34] Of primary importance for Philo is his association of λόγος with the Logos: God's instrument in the creation of the world (*Leg.* 3.96; *Sacr.* 65), which was conceived before all things (*Abr.* 124–125; *Her.* 166; *QE* 2.68), the agent that unites the two powers of the transcendent God (*Cher.* 27–28), and the location of the Ideas (*Opif.* 20). These uses of λόγος are by far the most dominant in Philo's corpus and their technical meaning would be recognised by ancient readers conversant with Greek philosophy.[35]

Much less frequently does Philo use λόγος to discuss fables, although there are a few instances.[36] One example is *Somn.* 2.70, in which Philo states: "But you, pass by 'the smoke and wave' and flee quickly from the foolish cares and aims of mortal life as from that fearsome Charybdis and do not touch it, as the saying goes (τὸ τοῦ λόγου δὴ τοῦτο), with the tip of your finger."[37] Here an unattributed proverbial saying is associated through a quotation of *Od.* 12.219 (καπνοῦ καὶ κύματος ἐκτὸς) with the Homeric scene of Odysseus, who, having successfully passed the sirens, steers his ship away from Charybdis but close to the shore on which Scylla dwelt. The use of λόγος here does not necessarily imply a fable, "saying" is arguably a more appropriate rendering, but the invocation of a realistic narrative with appended moral partially aligns with our definition above.

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[32] For the role of conjecture in Philo's argument, its association with myth, and its appropriateness for philosophical inquiry (as is modelled by Plato), see M. R. Niehoff, "Philo's Views on Paganism," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity,* ed. G. N. Stanton and G. G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 135–158.

[33] Theon, *Prog.* 73, claims that λόγοι was the preferred term for prose writers (over μύθοι or αἶνοι), although he then states that Plato used both λόγοι and μύθοι. Following van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi,* 83, it might be preferable to say that poets (expect Aristophanes) did not use λόγος to designate fables.

[34] On Philo's use of Logos, see H. Kleinknecht, "λόγος, κτλ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 4:77–91, esp. 88–90. Although insightful, Kleinknecht problematically focuses exclusively on the theological and philosophical elements of λόγος and does not grant that Philo occasionally used this term to reference fables. Logos is also used for the ten commandments (οἱ δέκα λόγοι, *Decal.* 154; *Spec.* 1.1).

[35] Cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B. C. to A. D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 158–161.

[36] The example of *Conf.* 9 will be discussed in detail below.

[37] ἀλλὰ σύ γε τοῦ μὲν καπνοῦ καὶ κύματος ἐκτὸς βαῖνε καὶ τὰς καταγελάστους τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου σπουδὰς ὡς τὴν φοβερὰν ἐκείνην χάρυβδιν ἀποδίδρασκε καὶ μηδὲ ἄκρῳ, τὸ τοῦ λόγου δὴ τοῦτο, δακτύλῳ ψαύσῃς. Cf. *Post.* 39; *Deus* 168. Unless specified, all translations are my own.

The use of myth language (μυθεύω) in *Det.* 178 – the other mention of Scylla – suggests that reading λόγος as fable is not unreasonable and that this narrative might be viewed by Philo as fictitious. Here Philo employs the character of Scylla for his discussion of Cain: "For his death is nowhere mentioned in the whole of the Law, riddling that, just like the mythic Scylla (ἡ μεμυθευμένη Σκύλλα), folly is a deathless evil, one that never completely dies, but also one that dies for all eternity."[38] Here Philo uses Scylla as an example of folly that will continue to live indefinitely.[39] The phrase, "folly is a deathless evil," in summarising the main idea in a pithy, proverbial saying, provides a sort of *epimythion* (ἐπιμύθιον) for the character of Cain in particular and for the treatise as a whole.[40] The parallel between Cain and a grotesque monster who kills men in anger and lives as an outcast from society is apt, although not exact. In the story of Circe and Scylla it is Circe who, in her rage at being scorned by Glaucus, put a potion in Scylla's bath to transform her into a monster.[41] In this tradition, Scylla is the victim and Circe the perpetrator, thus inverting the roles of Cain and Abel. Nowhere else in antiquity is Scylla described as "foolish" (ἀφροσύνη). Rather, she is consistently presented as a ferocious, fearsome monster who imperils sailors (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1232–1236) and whose actions are a fitting response to ingrate men (e. g., Ovid, *Her.* 12.123–126).[42] The difference in interpretation between Philo and surviving literature suggests that certain readings of Scylla have not survived and that Philo might provide evidence for an additional, if not alternate, understanding of the Scylla myth.[43]

In general, Philo does not contrast *logos* with *mythos*, although there are two passages in which fabulous narratives are discussed and both lexical items are employed: *Legat.* 112 and *Mos.* 2.253.[44] In *Legat.* 112, Philo contrasts the Ares

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[38] οὐ γὰρ θάνατον αὐτοῦ διὰ πάσης τῆς νομοθεσίας δεδήλωκεν αἰνιττόμενος ὅτι, ὥσπερ ἡ μεμυθευμένη Σκύλλα, κακὸν ἀθάνατόν ἐστιν ἀφροσύνη, τὴν μὲν κατὰ τὸ τεθνάναι τελευτὴν οὐχ ὑπομένουσα, τὴν δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν πάντα ἐνδεχομένη τὸν αἰῶνα.

[39] Cf. Homer, *Od.* 12.80–100, 222–259. Scylla, according to some traditions, is identified as a naiad, possibly because of her association with a pool. Cf. John Tzetzes, *Commentary on Lycophron,* 45. For editions, see A. Hurst, *Lycophron: Alexandra* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008); E. Scheer, ed., *Lycophronis Alexandra*, vol. 2, *Scholia continens* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1908, repr. 1958).

[40] For the construction of fables or maxims to fit a situation or argument, see Theon, *Prog.* 75–78.

[41] Ovid, *Metam.* 13.730–737, 898–969; 14.8–74; Hyginus, *Fab.* 199.1–2. For a different tale involving Scylla and love scorned, see Callimachus, *Hec.* frag. 288; Ps.-Vergil, *Ciris.*

[42] Cf. Vergil, *Aen.* 3.420–432; Hyginus, *Fab.* 125.14; 151.1.

[43] Alternatively, although I think less likely, Philo might not know the Scylla tradition, and so uses it inappropriately, or he could intentionally be reading against tradition to form his own opinion.

[44] The phrase οἳ μυθικῶν μὲν ἀλογοῦσι πλασμάτων in *Spec.* 1.51 is also related. In *Her.* 228, Philo uses the phrase μυθευομένην τερατολογίαν with reference to the Stoic idea of general conflagration (cf. *Aet.* 102). This has clear resonances with the creation and telling of myths (Photius, *Lex.* T 166; Suda, *Lex.* T 330). For examples of authors contrasting μῦθος and

of μῦθος with that of λόγος, providing a clear example of the complexity of the terms and how to render them: "We know, do we not, that the might of Ares – not the Ares of myth (οὐχὶ τοῦ μεμυθευμένου) but the Ares who belongs to the Logos in Nature, whose province is courage – averts evil and helps and defends the injured, as his very name shows?"[45] Unlike in other places where Philo critiques the existence of the other gods (e. g., *Conf.* 75), here he explains the mythical Ares in terms of the Stoic system, treating him as a personification of the principle of courage, taking his name from ἀρήγειν ("to help," *Legat.* 113).[46] The practice of personifying ideas was not limited to Stoics, but was also adopted by fabulists, although this was not prominent.[47] In this passage, Philo is not creating a fable, nor is he necessarily referencing a specific fable, as the use of *logos* here does not refer to a genre but a philosophical construct.[48] Rather, the paired terms help distinguish how Philo viewed these related concepts.

The other collocation of *mythos* and *logos* is found in *Mos.* 2.253. Here, Philo is in the midst of recounting the miraculous rescue of the Jewish people by God at the edge of the Red Sea. Moses had just finished giving a speech in which he recounted his prophetic vision of the destruction of the Egyptians and their dead bodies when Philo states that the likeliness of this happening was so low that fables appeared more credible: "But they began to find by the experience of facts the truth of the heavenly message. For what he prophesied came to pass through the might of God, though harder to credit than any fable."[49] The contrast between a divine word (λόγιον) and myth echoes the discussion in Plato, *Gorg.* 523a, in which Plato teases out the truth of the story regarding the judgment of humans after death and the division of a person into a body and a soul: "Give ear then, as they say, to a fine story (καλοῦ λόγου), which you will regard as a myth (μῦθος), I think, but I as an actual account (λόγον), for what I am

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λόγος in Greek literature, see G. Stählin, "μῦθος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 4:762–795, esp. 769–771 (e. g., Plato, *Phaedr.* 61b). Importantly, μῦθος and λόγος are not antithetical, but can be mutually defined in a range of ways.

[45] τὴν Ἄρεως οὖν οὐχὶ τοῦ μεμυθευμένου, τοῦ δὲ ἐν τῇ φύσει λόγου ὃν ἀνδρεία κεκλήρωται, δύναμιν οὐκ ἴσμεν ἀλεξίκακον οὖσαν καὶ βοηθὸν καὶ παραστάτιν ἀδικουμένων ὡς καὶ αὐτό που δηλοῖ τοὔνομα. Translation revised from E. M. Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium,* 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Smallwood translates τοῦ μεμυθευμένου as "fable," but "myth" would be a better rendering as a genre is not indicated.

[46] Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini,* 204. For reading Philo's parables in light of the Stoic practice, see Niehoff, *Philo,* 216–220.

[47] E. g., Aesop, *Fab.* 355 (Truth), 367 (War and Insolence), 535 (Truth and Falsehood).

[48] Mars is prominent in Hyginus's *Fables*, although in these texts Hyginus primarily discusses his offspring and family relationships (e. g., *praef.*20; 173.1; 250.1–2). J. Y. Boriaud, *Hygin: Fables: Texte établi et traduit* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997). Cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 933–937.

[49] οἱ δ᾽ ἐπειρῶντο ἔργοις τῆς περὶ τὸ λόγιον ἀληθείας. ἀπέβαινε γὰρ τὰ χρησθέντα θείαις δυνάμεσι μύθων ἀπιστότερα·. Translation from C. H. Colson, *Philo,* 10 vols, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–1962).

about to tell you I mean to offer as the truth (ἀληθῆ)."[50] Philo's use of μῦθος and λόγος in both of these passages helps provide some boundaries to how Philo employs these terms. Importantly, they are not interchangeable and when used together μῦθος is contrasted negatively with λόγος.

Summary

From this lexical discussion a few conclusions can be offered. First, Philo does not often discuss or mention fables in his corpus. Second, when Philo does use fable terminology, he has a distinct preference for λόγος and μῦθος over that of παραβολή and αἶνος. This not only aligns him much more strongly with Greek writers in the Hellenistic and Roman eras, but also suggests that παραβολή language was not prominent for discussing fables within his community and/or intended readership, despite its prominence within the Septuagint as a gloss for משל. Third, Philo's primary use of μῦθος is not in reference to parables or fables, but within the domain of "myth," especially those developed by other nations (e. g., Greek, Egyptian).[51] As a result, the term is primarily used negatively. Fourth, λόγος is also not typically used to refer to fables or parables. Fifth, despite his general use of μῦθος and λόγος, Philo does employ both terms to refer to fables and fabulous stories (i. e., *Somn.* 2.70; *Det.* 178), thus participating in the wider semantic ranges of these lexical items. This discussion supplies the underpinning for our investigation of Philo's literary education, providing important constraints to lexical similarities and his potential engagement with fables.

D. Fables and Progymnasmata

Fables are firmly rooted in Greek literary education. Given to children as a means by which to instil moral frameworks, fables were employed at multiple levels of schooling and our best understanding of their didactic function comes primarily, but not exclusively, through the progymnasmata.[52] Within the progymnasmata,

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[50] Ἄκουε δή, φασί, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἡγήσῃ μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον· ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν. Cf. Plato, *Gorg.* 524b. For similar terminology, see Plato, *Tim.* 26d–e, τό τε μὴ πλασθέντα μῦθον ἀλλ᾿ ἀληθινὸν λόγον εἶναι πάμμεγά που.

[51] On the differentiation between myth and fable, with the former being taught to adults and the latter to children with educational purport, see Julian, *Or.* 7.207a–d. On the usefulness of stories/myth to gain a listener's, especially children's, attention and to educate them through novelty and entertainment, see Strabo, *Geogr.* 1.2.7–8.

[52] H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 201; S. F. Bonner, *Education in the Roman World: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), 250–276; R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 225–230; T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191–192; R. Webb, "The Progymnasmata at Practice," in

the fable was regularly the first exercise prescribed by ancient rhetoricians because it was thought to be most effective in improving the pliable mind of the young person (Hermogenes, *Prog.* 1, ἔτι οὖν αὐτοὺς ἁπαλοὺς ὄντας ἀξιοῦσι πλάττειν).[53] Given that Philo was highly educated in Greek literature, it is very likely that he was familiar with Greek fables and elements of rhetorical training.[54]

Ancient scholars and educators subdivided, categorised, and gave specific labels to fables based on their content and, most often, the nature of the characters within the work (i.e., animal, human, god). Sybarite fables, namely those that involve human beings, were one classification of fable in antiquity, although it was rejected by Theon as being a silly distinction (*Prog.* 73).[55] Philo, in his few discussions of Sybarites, does not use the term primarily in association with fables, but with regard to luxury and licentiousness (e.g., *Spec.* 4.102). In *Spec.* 3.43–45, the noun Συβαρίτης is linked with the myth of Pasiphaë and the birth of the minotaur (cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 4.77), as well as to the stories of hippocentaurs and Chimaeras, but here the term describes Pasiphaë's unnatural passion for a bull and not the story itself. However, in *Mos.* 1.3, Philo parallels Sybaritic works with comedies (συγγράμμασι κωμῳδίας καὶ συβαριτικάς), which could imply a recognition that the term has genre connotations.[56]

Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity, ed. Y. L. Too (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 289–316; Hock and O'Neil, *Chreia*, 1; E. Dickey, *The Colloquia of the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012–2015), esp. 1:24–25.

[53] E.g., Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolas, Libanius. Theon places fable second after chreia. Cf. Plato, *Resp.* 2.377a; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.2. Philo claims that Moses chose to open his work with stories, rather than laws, because in these stories his readers can see the embodiment of Torah in individuals (*Abr.* 3–5). Here Philo emphasises the pedagogical possibility of stories and how they can inspire their hearers towards emulation (καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ὅμοιον ζῆλον ἀγαγεῖν). For evidence of fables in extant papyri, see T. Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 341. For Christian (and possibly Jewish) apprehension of the young being indoctrinated by fables, see Ps.-Clementines, *Hom.* 4.18–19.

[54] Cf. T. M. Conley, "Philo of Alexandria," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C. – A.D. 400*, ed. S. E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 695–713; J. Cazeaux, *La trame et la chaîne: Ou les structures littéraires et l'exégèse dans cinq des traités de Philon d'Alexandrie,* ALGHJ 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 526–543. On Philo's engagement with chreia, see B. L. Mack, "Decoding the Scripture: Philo and the Rules of Rhetoric," in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert, and B. L. Mack (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 82–115. Philo uses the term προγυμνάσματα once in his corpus (*Legat.* 30), but in this instance it is not related to rhetorical training, but is in reference to the preliminary exercises of war and physical combat. Similarly, Philo uses the phrase προγυμνασία βασιλείας when discussing how being a shepherd was suitable training for Moses and his subsequent role as king (*Mos.* 1.60). The image of king was important for Philo and was used by him in a number of images/parables, especially in his discussions of the divine (e.g., *Opif.* 17–20; *Cher.* 99–100; *Dec.* 61).

[55] Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.11.19–20; Aphthonius, *Prog.* 1. For Sybarite fables as involving humans, see Aristophanes Schol. *ad Aves* 471; Schol. *ad Vespae* 1259. Philo does not use the term Λιβυκός to classify fables.

[56] On the relationship between fable and comedy, especially iambic, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 240–285.

By far the most prominent name associated with fables is that of Aesop,[57] but he is only mentioned by Philo once in his corpus (*Anim.* 46).[58] This general absence does not necessarily imply ignorance by Philo, but rather that Aesop was not thought to be a useful author to invoke for his arguments.[59] In *De animalibus*, a treatise to Lysimachus about Philo's nephew Tiberius Julius Alexander,[60] Aesop becomes a fitting example as the discussion engages the topic of the intelligence of animals. Philo not only displays an awareness of Aesop's use of talking animals, but also that certain animals are associated with specific characteristics: monkeys are stupid but playful and foxes have a keen sense of hearing. Indeed, monkeys are regularly depicted in the fables as good dancers (*Fab.* 83, 463) or foolish (*Fab.* 73, 81, 203); however, there is no extant fable attributed to Aesop or other fabulist in which the fox is said to have a very good sense of hearing.[61] This difference should not be taken to imply that Philo was unknowledgeable of fables, but could suggest that such a fable has not survived or that the keen-hearing fox was recognised as proverbial.[62] Despite this knowledge, Philo does not explicitly attribute any fable to Aesop.

Philo, however, quotes a range of Greek authors and, on a number of occasions, does not specify the source of the quotation (e. g., ὡς εἶπέ τις, ὥς φασι, or κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν),[63] regularly offering proverbial sayings that, almost by their nature, are not linked directly with one specific source.[64] In our attempt to determine the extent of Philo's engagement with Greek fables, it is worth considering

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[57] For discussions of Aesop's prominence, how his name became associated with fables, and the origins of fables, see Theon, *Prog.* 73; Aphthonius, *Prog.* 1; Nicolaus, *Prog.* 6–7; John of Sardis, *In Aphth. Prog.* 7–8. The association with fables with the wisdom of the east is asserted by Babrius, who claims that fables were "the invention of the Syrians of old" (i. e., Assyrians, *Fab.* 2. *praef.*1–3). Cf. Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 287–364. For the discussion of Aesop traditions, collections, and narratives, see N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 72–104.

[58] A. Terian, *Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus: The Armenian Text with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, SHJ 1 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981). The Latin fabulist, Phaedrus (1st century CE), is also not mentioned. On Phaedrus, see E. Champlin, "Phaedrus the Fabulous," *JRS* 95 (2005): 97–123. The fabulists Babrius and Romulus lived after Philo and so are not referenced.

[59] *Anim.* 73 could be read as Philo affirming that he studied fables at school, referring to "instructions" which embodied certainty, had intriguing names, and were easy to comprehend. Cf. Terian, *Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus*, 183–184.

[60] For a discussion of the relationship of these two individuals to Philo, see Terian, *Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus*, 25–28.

[61] Aesop, *Fab.* 252 recounts a fox hearing a rooster, but there is no mention of his keen hearing.

[62] This attribution is widely attributed to the fox by ancient authors (e. g., Pliny, *Nat.* 8.107; Plutarch, *Prim. frig.* 949d) with fabulists depicting the fox as cunning and deceitful (e. g., *Fab.* 9, 149), as noted by Philo (*Anim.* 46).

[63] For a list of Philo's citations and allusions to Greek authors, see D. Lincicum, "A Preliminary Index to Philo's Non-Biblical Citations and Allusions," *SPhA* 25 (2013): 139–167.

[64] Cf. Lincicum, "Preliminary Index," 161.

if any of these unattributed sayings have substantial overlap with extant fables. One example comes from *Virt.* 35, in which Philo highlights, through the mouth of the Midianites, that the defence of the Jewish people is not their numbers, but unity and agreement (ἡ ὁμόνοια καὶ συμφωνία). This statement resonates with Aesop's fable of an Old Man, who, though the image of a bundle of sticks, teaches his sons the lesson that strength is in unity (ὁμοφρονῆτε, *Fab.* 53).[65] Similar conceptual overlap is found between Philo, *Spec.* 3.69 (νόμου βίαν, ὥς φασί τινες, προτιμοτέραν) and Aesop, *Prov.* 136 (Ὅ⟨που ἡ⟩ βία πάρεστιν οἱ νόμοι ἀσθενοῦσιν)[66] with both texts recognising that the prioritisation of power and its residence in one or few people has the ability to undermine legal frameworks and pervert justice. In neither example does Philo quote the specific fable/proverb; however, there is substantial topical overlap and, within the latter example, significant verbal parallels. The lexical overlap with inflectional difference could be viewed as following one of the standard ways that fables, chreiai, and maxims were taught, namely by recasting the saying in different forms in order to highlight specific elements (Theon, *Prog.* 74, 101).

Philo also engages in parabolic language when discussing the biblical texts, drawing on images or common life experiences to illustrate a point (e. g., athlete, agriculture, travel, etc.).[67] However, these examples are closer to simile or metaphor, rather than parables or fables. In *Congr.* 46–47 Philo asks a series of questions regarding the benefit of knowledge: What good is a flute player if he does not play, a harpist if he does not use his harp, or a carpenter who does not create? Furthermore, a *pankration* is not successful or is not of value if his hands are tied behind his back. To these questions Philo concludes with the statement, "without actions, bare knowledge is of no benefit to those with understanding" (ἡ γὰρ ἄνευ πράξεως θεωρία ψιλὴ πρὸς οὐδὲν ὄφελος τοῖς ἐπιστήμοσιν). This reasoning is similar to a number of fables, including some found in the progymnasmata.[68] The difference in Philo is that, although each of the examples

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[65] Cf. Babrius, *Fab.* 44, 85. Although phrased differently, a similar idea is expressed in Eccl 4:12 (καὶ ἐὰν ἐπικραταιωθῇ ὁ εἷς οἱ δύο στήσονται κατέναντι αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ σπαρτίον τὸ ἔντριτον οὐ ταχέως ἀπορραγήσεται).

[66] B. E. Perry, *Aesopica* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), 1:256–291. Cf. Aesop, *Fab.* 149, 339.

[67] For example, Philo uses the image of runners running a race (*Migr.* 133; cf. 1 Cor 9:24–27), labour and training metaphors (*Congr.* 35; *Mut.* 84), agriculture (e. g., trees need to produce fruit in order to be useful; philosophy is like a field, with physics the plants, logic the walls and fences, and ethics the fruit, *Mut.* 73–75; *Leg.* 1.57; cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 5.1; Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.18), voyaging (life is a voyage, with the sovereign mind a sail, and sense perception the oar, *Somn.* 1.44; *Leg.* 3.80), the "path" as virtuous life (*Migr.* 146; *Deus* 162–165), the house/city as examples of progress of virtue (*Congr.* 10). Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.72–82; T. Conley, "Philo's Use of Topoi," in *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria: A Commentary on the "De gigantibus" and "Quod deus sit immutabilis*," ed. D. Winston and J. Dillon (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 171–178.

[68] E. g., Aesop, *Fab.* 226 (Tortoise and the Hare), found in Libanius, *Prog.* 1.2.1–3 (Tortoise and the Horse).

could have been expanded into a fable, none is. Rather, the passage reads as a compression of a fable with the speech and narrative removed.[69]

On occasion, Philo has an expanded example that could be viewed as a parable. One such example is *Opif.* 78, in which Philo compares the creation of the world by God prior to the formation of humans to a host preparing a banquet prior to the arrival of the guests and to an event organiser securing competitors and entertainment prior to the coming of the spectators.[70]

> Just as (καθάπερ) those who give a banquet do not invite their guests to the meal before they have made ready everything for the banquet, and those who organise athletic or dramatic contests, before they assemble the spectators in the theatres and the stadiums, make ready a multitude of competitors and spectacles and sounds, so in the same manner (τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον) did the governor of all, like a person organising games or giving a banquet, when he was about to invite people to a banquet and to see a spectacle, first made ready what was needed for both kinds of entertainment … (Philo, *Opif.* 78)

This passage is a good example of the porous boundary between imagery and parable, which in actuality is better understood as a spectrum. The figurative language is signalled by Philo's use of καθάπερ and τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, something that is not uncommon in his corpus.[71] The author's participation in parable is recognised by the extending of the image to include a sense of narrative; namely, we follow stock characters as they fulfil their designated tasks. At the same time, the narrative is brief, with Philo relying on his readers' knowledge of cultural schemata to complete the analogy and so establish the truth of his argument. The exempla are also realistic, drawing on events consistent with everyday human activity.[72] The parables of Jesus and the rabbis regularly fall into this category and could be viewed as participating in παραβολή as defined by Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2.20.4), although the term παραβολή is not used by Philo in this way.[73]

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[69] The compression of fables into the most compact form, especially removing speech, was an exercise suggested by progymnasmata authors (e. g., Theon, *Prog.* 74; Hermogenes, *Prog.* 2).

[70] This passage is part of a larger discussion by Philo regarding the place of humans in the cosmos (*Opif.* 77–88). For Greek philosophical underpinning, see D. T. Runia, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses: Introduction, Translation and Commentary,* PACS 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 245–259. For Jewish background, see P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time*, NovTSup 86 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 225–235.

[71] E. g., Philo, *Opif.* 20; *Leg.* 2.30; *Sacr.* 36; *Det.* 8, 43, 105–109, 128; *Post.* 107; *Spec.* 1.332.

[72] Another example of this type of image is the analogy of the lecture hall with students with varying degrees of listening and retention (*Congr.* 65–68). This example uses a recognisable experience to explain the deeper meaning of what could be perceived as an odd addition to Gen 16:2.

[73] E. g., Matt 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20; 12:1–11; Luke 8:4–15; 13:18–19. In particular, t. Sanh. 8:9 also uses the image of the banquet, although interestingly not the games or dramatic contests, for answering this same question and identifies the example as a "parable." For other rabbinic parallels, see P. Borgen, "Man's Sovereignty over Animals and Nature according to Philo of Alexandria," in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts: Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman*, ed. T. Fornberg and D. Hellholm (Oslo: Scandinavian

Another example of this type can be found in *Det.* 104–109. Philo, interpreting the lemma of Gen 4:12, provides an extended illustration of how someone who is skilled in "tilling" can cultivate vines and trees. In this passage Philo intentionally expands his example, focusing on the craft of the farmer and the need for expertise in the farming arts,[74] in order to drive his point home: a farmer is not an unskilled labourer (*Det.* 108).[75] Philo, however, does not end the discussion here. Rather, having established his position, he applies his earthly metaphor to spiritual wellbeing, with the result that *Det.* 104–109 and the narrative of the farmer is a good example of narrative analogy with an educative summary.[76]

These examples provide some evidence of Philo's engagement with the genre of fables, suggesting that some of his unattributed sayings could be fruitfully read in the context of fabulist compositions and that his use of extended imagery and proverbial pairing could be plausibly read as participating in the literary form of fable, based on the definition given above. However, the best evidence for Philo's knowledge of and engagement with Greek fables is found in *Conf.* 4–14, to which we now turn.

E. Fables in *Conf.* 4–14

Fables, as a characteristically small literary form, were easy to incorporate into larger compositions. This embedding of fables was not limited to a specific genre, but is found in both prose and poetic works.[77] Of particular importance for our discussion of Philo is that fables were also readily adopted by philosophers in their treatises, providing a way for them to discuss and visualise complex ideas.[78]

University Press, 1995), 369–389. Niehoff, *Philo*, 220–228, reads this parable in light of similar examples from the Gospels and rabbinic literature, arguing that they are of a similar nature. Niehoff's definition of parable hinges on the idea that the author takes a "mundane" example (*mashal*) and applies it to the spiritual realm (*nimshal*). Although this definition aligns well with the Jewish examples provided, it creates a very specific criterion for inclusion; one that I am not sure would be accepted fully in antiquity. Cf. D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 85–92.

[74] "For every farmer is a craftsman, because farming is also an art" (γεωργὸς μὲν γὰρ πᾶς τεχνίτης, ὅτι τέχνη καὶ ἡ γεωργία, Philo, *Det.* 104).

[75] A similar topic using the imagery of a doctor and a medical scholar is given earlier in *Det.* 43, in which Philo claims that those who have devoted themselves to practical wisdom have often neglected to pay attention to their language and those who have thoroughly learnt the nature of words have not treasured up instruction in their soul. The theme of skilled musicians producing quality from the same instrument that an unmusical person played without success is given as an image by Philo in *Post.* 107 for the ability of a good mind to produce good words.

[76] Philo regularly uses agricultural imagery to describe virtuous behaviour (e. g., *Spec.* 3.32–33, sowing seeds; *Spec.* 1.246, types of fields).

[77] This practice of embedding fables was not only found in Greek literature, but is also found in the Egyptian work, *Myth of the Sun's Eye*.

[78] Cf. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 311–350.

Because fables are versatile and widely used, Philo is also concerned to dif-
ferentiate biblical stories from fables and myths that might appear to be similar
(e. g., Hades, *Congr.* 57).

Philo's most explicit engagement with the topic of fabula occurs in
Conf. 4–14, in which he distinguishes the narrative of the tower of Babel found
in Gen 11:1–9 from two Greek fables, arguing that what is found in the Books
of Moses is not related to mythic or fabulous material found in Greek texts. In
Conf. 4–5, Philo begins by challenging the claim made by some antagonists (cf.
Conf. 2–3, 5), that the Babel narrative parallels the Homeric Aloeidae, Otus
and Ephialtes, who planned to pile three great mountains on top of each other
(i. e., Olympus, Ossa, and Pelion) in order to ascend into the heavens (Homer,
Od. 11.305–320).[79] However, prior to them reaching manhood, which would
have granted them the strength to complete the task, Apollo came down and
slew them.[80] The similarities between the narratives – namely the attempt by
some mortals to reach the heavens through a physical edifice, the act of which
compels the divine to come down and stop them – make the connection plau-
sible. Philo strongly protests the association, claiming that a tower would never
be able to reach the heavens, given its small foundation. In making this claim,
Philo disassociates Jewish Scripture from Greek fables. In doing so, he employs
similar approaches to the texts as his Greek contemporaries, implying that both
corpora can be read through a similar lens. The primary difference for Philo is
the inspiration of Scripture, which demands that Moses's "fable talk" be inter-
preted differently.

The second, potential parallel introduced by Philo is said to derive from
"fable makers" (μυθοπλαστῶν), who recount a time in which all animals spoke
the same language (*Conf.* 6).[81] The story, according to Philo's recounting, is
that the animals, because they had language in common, were able to share in
each other's joys and sorrows and live in unity. However, when they demanded
immortality, like that perceived to have been given to the lowly snake, they were

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[79] In his translation of *Her.* 228, Yonge inserts a line – "which we touched upon when
speaking of the building of the tower" – that explicitly links this passage with *Conf.* 4–5. Al-
though both passages similarly discuss the issue of myth, a specific connection is not warranted.
C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*, 4 vols. (London: Henry
G. Bohn, 1854–1855).

[80] Vergil (*Georg.* 1.280–283) states that Zeus stopped them. For a different story of their
death, in which they slew each other (for various reasons), see Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 5.51.1–2;
Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.53; Hyginus, *Fab.* 28. Cf. Philo, *Decal.* 55–56, which identifies the story
of the Dioscuri (which precedes the Aloeidae, *Od.* 11.298–304) as being invented by fabulists
(μυθογράφοι).

[81] Philo also uses λόγος and μῦθος language in *Conf.* 9, "Now the one bringing his λόγον
nearer to the truth [i. e., Moses] has distinguished between the rational and irrational as he
testifies that the unity of language is only for humanity. And this, they say, is μυθῶδες" (ὁ δ᾽
ἐγγυτέρω τἀληθοῦς προσάγων τὸν λόγον τὰ ἄλογα τῶν λογικῶν διέζευξεν, ὡς ἀνθρώποις
μόνοις μαρτυρῆσαι τὸ ὁμόφωνον. ἔστι δέ, ὥς γέ φασι, καὶ τοῦτο μυθῶδες).

punished for their audacity with diversity of language (*Conf.* 6–8).[82] Philo's fable strongly parallels Aesop, *Fab.* 431 and Callimachus, *Iam.* 2, frag. 192 (Pfeiffer), reinforcing the idea that Philo was aware of specific fables in antiquity. Philo's recounting is different than Callimachus's with the former claiming that the animals' ability to speak was taken away and given to humans and the latter that their language was confused, but remained with them. This difference could imply an alternate interpretation of the fable and/or the ability of Philo to adapt the fable to fit a new literary context. Regardless of the origin of the changes, Philo, once again, challenges the perceived parallel, noting first that his antagonists grant that Moses only attributed unity of speech to humans and not to animals, although even this, they say, is mythical (*Conf.* 9). Second, and more importantly for Philo, the arguments made by those who critique Moses are easily refuted even by those who take a literalistic approach to the text. As a result, Philo's allegorical approach will allow for a reading of this story that is logically consistent (*Conf.* 14; cf. § 190) and this is accomplished through a careful reading of the text and close scrutiny of the specific terms used by Moses (e. g., *Conf.* 191–193).

Philo's explicit engagement with Greek fables in this section provides our best insight into his understanding of this genre. First, Philo displays an awareness of fables, including the knowledge of a specific example taken from Homer (Aloeidae, *Conf.* 4–5) and the motif of shared language, which is a central component to most fables. Second, in the section leading into this discussion, Philo, giving a speech-in-character of those who critique Scripture, demonstrates familiarity of the practice of excising myths from a larger work to form a collection (μύθους περιέχουσιν, *Conf.* 3), a practice that was becoming more common in the Hellenistic period.[83] Third, Philo differentiates Moses's works from fabulistic material, arguing that the former is not inherently false (although articulating a truth), but that the Books of Moses are both true *and* reveal deeper truth (*Conf.* 2), thus expressing his dual understanding of myth.[84] This argument fits with Philo's larger understanding of Moses's writings, namely that they are not myth but composed

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[82] The claim that all animals, including humans, could speak the same language (and so be understood by each other), is a fundamental component of ancient fables, especially those classified as Aesopic. Cf. Aesop, *Fab.* 384 (= Vit. Aes. 133), 387 (= Vit. Aes. 99); Babrius, *Fab.* 1.*praef.*5–13; Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.7.13–14; Jub. 3:28; 12:25–26; Philo, *QG* 1.20, 32. The ability to speak with animals is used as a sign of great knowledge (e. g., Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.19.2; 1.20.3; Porphyry, *Abst.* 3.3.6). For more discussion, see D. L. Gera, *Ancient Greek Ideas on Speech, Language, and Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18–67. For a parallel with Callimachus, see M. R. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 87–89.

[83] For our first reference to the collection of Aesop's fables, here by Demetrius of Phalerum, see Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 5.80. For examples of this practice in the Hellenistic period, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 411–497, 503–509; 2:725.

[84] Cf. Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 9.66–74), who also draws from the "myths" of *Od.* 11, here to critique the internal consistency of Stoic arguments.

of three genres (ἰδέαι): 'the creation of the world, that concerning history, and the third with legislation' (τήν μὲν περὶ κοσμοποιίας, τὴν δὲ ἱστορικήν, τὴν δὲ τρίτην νομοθετικήν, *Praem.* 1; *Mos.* 2.45–48).[85] Fourth, Philo's engagement with Greek fabula provides a platform for cultural negotiation and a means by which Philo can differentiate biblical stories from their Greek counterparts.[86]

F. Conclusion

Fables are not prominent within Philo's corpus, although he does mention them on occasion. When discussing fables, Philo does not align his language to that of the Septuagint (i. e., παραβολή), but instead primarily uses μῦθος and its cognates and, occasionally, λόγος terminology. In this practice, Philo is similar to contemporary Greek authors and the vocabulary employed by them. When Philo does discuss fables, it is often with the purpose of distancing Scriptural texts from presumed similarities and the idea of fiction or myth that was regularly associated with them. In these discussions, Philo displays familiarity of specific fables, the knowledge of which likely came from his education. Accordingly, it is worth considering how some of Philo's unattributed maxims or proverbial sayings could be read in light of the moralistic truisms of fabula.

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[85] For Philo's unified view of the Pentateuch, despite participating in three genres, see A. Kamesar, "The Literary Genres of the Pentateuch as Seen from the Greek Perspective: The Testimony of Philo of Alexandria," *SPhA* 9 (1997): 143–189. On the difference between μῦθος and ἱστορία in Greek authors, see Ptolemy, *Vocab.* M 97 (μῦθος καὶ ἱστορία διαφέρει. ἱστορία μὲν γὰρ ἡ προγεγονότα πράγματα περιέχουσα, ὁ δὲ μῦθος πεπλασμένα καὶ ψευδῆ); Ammonius Grammaticus, *Vocab.* 328. Cf. V. Palmieri, "Ptolemaeus, *De differentia vocabulorum*," *AFLFUN* 24 (1981–1982): 191–225.

[86] It is not clear in this section with whom Philo is in disagreement (οἱ μὲν δυσχεραίνοντες τῇ πατρίῳ πολιτείᾳ, *Conf.* 2). Colson inserts "our" with reference to τῇ πατρίῳ πολιτείᾳ in his translation, implying that the critique is coming from without the Philo's community; whereas Yonge includes "their," which would suggest an internal conflict.

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Cognitive Blending Theory and the Mashal of the Forest and the Sea in 4 Ezra 4:13–17

The Boundedness of Human Knowledge

Stephen Llewelyn and Lydia Gore-Jones

The Fourth Book of Ezra (4 Ezra, or 2 Esdras 3–14) represents the pinnacle of Jewish apocalyptic literature at the end of the Second Temple period.[1] Pseudepigraphically attributed to the biblical Ezra, it is fictionally set in Babylon after the destruction of the first Jerusalem Temple. There Ezra, the hero of the book, questions God about divine justice in allowing the calamity to happen, and seeks the knowledge of God's hidden purpose for his own people as well as humanity and the world as a whole. 4 Ezra has been studied for various purposes and with diverse methodologies, of which most notably are the historical, literary and theological perspectives. For example, written in the wake of the destruction of the second Temple, 4 Ezra is often studied as a Jewish religious response in transition to the later period that saw the rise of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism.[2] On the other hand, much study has been carried out on the coherence of the text and the characterisation of its protagonist.[3] Alternatively, 4 Ezra has been mined for ideas in theological categories such as theodicy and soteriology.[4] In contrast

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[1] For a general introduction on text and dating of 4 Ezra, see G. H. Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse: Being Chapters 3–14 of the Book Commonly Known as 4 Ezra (or II Esdras)* (London: Pitman, 1912); B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:517–559; B. W. Longenecker, *2 Esdras* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary of the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

[2] E. g. M. E. Stone, "Reactions to the Destructions of the Second Temple," *JSJ* 12 (1981): 195–204. In more recent years, various approaches have been adopted; see e. g. D. Daschke, *City of Ruins: Mourning the Destruction of Jerusalem through Jewish Apocalypse*, BibInt 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); J. A. Moo, *Creation, Nature and Hope in 4 Ezra*, FRLANT 237 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); H. Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[3] E. g. E. Breech, "These Fragments I Have Shored against My Ruins: The Form and Function of 4 Ezra," *JBL* 92 (1973): 267–274; M. E. Stone, "On Reading an Apocalypse," in *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, ed. J. J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth, JSPSup 9 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 65–78; H. Najman, "Traditionary Processes and Textual Unity in 4 Ezra," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall*, ed. M. Henze and G. Boccaccini, JSJSup 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 99–117; L. Gore-Jones, "The Unity and Coherence of 4 Ezra: Crisis, Response and Authorial Intention," *JSJ* 47 (2016): 212–235.

[4] E. g. A. L. Thompson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra: A Study Illus-*

to the common perspectives outlined above, we will take a cognitive linguistic approach to explore the theme of human knowledge and its limitations. Our primary focus will be on the mashal of the Forest and the Sea (4 Ezra 4:13–17).[5]

As Ezra questions unceasingly, the angel Uriel is sent by the Most High to instruct him. After having made his initial point about human limitation in understanding divine things, Uriel accedes to Ezra's request. Of significance is the fact that the angel makes recurring use of figurative devices (*meshalim,* pl. of *mashal*) as a bridge to facilitate human understanding. Meshalim, it seems, meet the shortfall, where reasoned argument fails. In a way the function of such devices is similar to the allegories told by Plato in his middle-period dialogues *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, and *Respublica.* The present contribution looks at the first figurative device used by Uriel, namely, the mashal of the Forest and the Sea (4:13–17), which itself is told to evoke in Ezra a judgement (4:18–19) and thereby an appreciation of the limit of human understanding (4:20–21). Cognitive Blending Theory (CBT) will be used to analyse the mental mechanics in the formulation of the mashal and to illustrate the contribution that CBT can make to a better understanding of how meshalim work as narrated metaphors and as a means to achieve a new insight.[6] The results of this analysis will then be compared with Plato's allegory of the Cave (*Resp.* 514a–520a), a choice motivated both by the allegory's analogous treatment of human understanding and by the scope of the present volume as it embraces the ancient Mediterranean world more generally. First, however, we must consider the place of 4 Ezra within the wisdom tradition.

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trating the Significance of Form and Structure for the Meaning of the Book, SBLDS 29 (Missoula: Scholars, 1977); B. W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1–11*, JSNTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); K. M. Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom Debate and Apocalyptic Solution*, JSJSup 130 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[5] *Mashal* (משל) is the Hebrew term used to describe such text-types as parable and allegory. It is defined by S. Niditch, "Folklore and Wisdom: *Mashal* as an Ethnic Genre," in *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) as "a form of oblique and artful communication that sets up an analogy between the communication … and the real-life settings of the listeners" and as such "provides a model of or a model for reality and points to unresolved tensions and ambivalences in Israelite worldviews" (86). It is also worth bearing in mind that the term has a much wider meaning than the English terms of parable and allegory, including such literary devices as metaphor, riddle, illustration, example, etc.

[6] Cognitive linguistics argues that language is non-modular and part of the neural networks of the human brain. As such, emotion, thought, language, perception, motor systems etc. are all interconnected neural functions and are mutually activated. It is important to understand this in looking at CBT, which, in attempting to describe itself, resorts to metaphors from various source domains (e. g. graphic design and geography) as well as a sequential account of the cognitive process. But such are approximated structures and procedures placed on what actually happens simultaneously in the brain's networks. The narrated account of what is thought to happen appears sequential, when in reality it may not be. And as CBT is keenly aware, in order to handle complex systems and processes the brain uses human-scale devices such as compressions and metaphors to cope. Under such provisos we will use CBT and the terminology of G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), to analyse the mashal of the Forest and the Sea in 4 Ezra.

A. 4 Ezra and the Limitation of Human Knowledge
in the Biblical Wisdom Tradition

It may appear questionable at first to see 4 Ezra, an apocalypse, placed within the wisdom tradition.[7] However, although the opinion of von Rad that apocalypticism is a child of wisdom failed to gain unanimous acceptance,[8] the distinctive sapiential elements found in apocalyptic texts have drawn wide attention, leading to readjustments to conventional scholarly definitions of "apocalypticism" and "wisdom" alike. By "wisdom tradition" we refer not to the biblical literary genre – if that is a useful term at all to represent the "wisdom" corpus;[9] instead, wisdom is better understood as a conceptual paradigm for understanding knowledge, truth and divine revelation for the practical purpose of ordering human life. It has been argued that in the Second Temple period, the sapiential paradigm absorbed and accommodated other religious paradigms, notably the Mosaic Torah tradition, the prophetic tradition and the apocalyptic tradition.[10] As a result, wisdom became the adopted lens, or in the term of Gerald Sheppard the "hermeneutical construct," through which religious ideas were perceived and articulated.[11] It has even been argued that "the entities usually defined as sapiential and apocalyptic often cannot be cleanly separated from one another because both are the products of wisdom circles … in the Greco-Roman period."[12] Some common elements that are directly relevant to our discussion here are parenetic functions, wisdom motifs (e. g. creation, Torah, theodicy),

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[7] On the relationship of these two concepts, see M. Goff, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism," in *Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. J. J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52–67; J. J. Collins, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. L. G. Perdue et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 165–185; and G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed. L. M. Wills and B. G. Wright, SymS 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17–37.

[8] G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1965), 2:315–330.

[9] The understanding of the Hebrew wisdom tradition as a straightjacket genre that comes with a uniform worldview, e. g. J. L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), has been convincingly challenged in recent years. See e. g. J. J. Collins, "Wisdom Reconsidered, in Light of the Scrolls," *DSD* 4 (1997): 265–281; also M. Sneed, "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?," *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71; S. Weeks, "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*, ed. H. Najman et al., JSJSup 174 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–23.

[10] See J. T. Sanders, "When Sacred Canopies Collide," *JSJ* 32 (2001): 121–136. He uses the sociological theory of Berger and Luckmann to explain the coexistence of competing religious paradigms. P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); and P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978).

[11] G. T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980).

[12] Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism," 20.

and claims to revelation. In particular, what places 4 Ezra squarely within the wisdom tradition is the theme of the pursuit of knowledge. As George Nickelsburg observes, foremost in wisdom is "the notion of searching and seeking": "one seeks to understand one's world, how to live aright in it, and how it relates to God's greater designs and purposes."[13] Ezra is portrayed precisely as a seeker of divine wisdom, but he is first confronted with the unsurpassable boundary between the human and the divine.

In the mashal of the Forest and the Sea, the angel draws on knowledge about the created world to instruct Ezra. This is not only experiential knowledge of the natural world, but the contextual knowledge about creation in the scriptures. It is in creation that divine wisdom is first and foremost perceived. The Book of Proverbs (*meshalim*) says that "the LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew" (3:19–20 NRSV). Here "understanding" and "knowledge" are used as parallel terms for "wisdom." Wisdom, חָכְמָה (*ḥokhmah*), even takes on her own persona, as a witness of and even a partaker in creation (Prov 8:22–31). Wisdom thus speaks: "When he established the heavens, I was there" (Prov 8:27); "when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master's worker" (Prov 8:29). Furthermore, divine wisdom and power are equated, as it is God "who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens" (Jer 10:12 // 51:15). The Psalmist says that it is by God's "awesome deeds" and by his "strength" that he "established the mountains"; "girded with might" he silences "the roaring of the seas" (Ps 65:5–7). The powerful deeds of God are also expressed in terms of creation by naming (e. g. Ps 147:4); and by his "word" and "breath" the heavens and earth and all that are within were made (Ps 33:6–9). By the time of the later Second Temple period, the divine attribute, "maker of heavens and earth," had likely become a fixed ritualistic phrase, frequently appearing in the liturgical psalms in Book Five of the Psalter (e. g. Pss 115:15; 121:3; 124:8; 134:3; 146:6).[14]

The vast distance between the divine and the human has made a distinct imprint on biblical consciousness. It is explicitly pronounced in the wisdom tradition. A manifestation of God's wisdom in creation is the setting of boundaries that cannot be trespassed. Echoing the creation account in Gen 1, the Psalmist describes the earth being established "on its foundation" which "should never be shaken"; "the waters stood above the mountains," while "the mountains rose, the valleys sank down," to the places appointed for them, as God set a "bound which they should not pass" (Ps 104:5–9). The sun and the moon, days and nights, months and seasons move according to ordinances. The plants of the

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13   Nickelsburg, "Response to Sarah Tanzer," 51–54.

14   See C. H. Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 114–119, on Creation in the Psalms.

earth, cattle of the field, beasts of the forest, birds of the sky, and "innumerable teeming things" in the sea live according to the territories assigned to them (Ps 104:17–26). Humankind's own place is found within the created order, to "cultivate" plants and "bring forth" food from the earth, "wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart" (Ps 104:14–15).

In the biblical wisdom tradition, the boundary between humankind and its maker is unsurpassable. While the inhabitants of the earth "are like grasshoppers," God "sits above the earth" and "stretches the heavens like a curtain" (Isa 40:22). While humans are grass that appears in the morning and "fades and withers" in the evening (Ps 90:6), God is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps 90:2). Like "the heavens are higher than the earth," God's ways are not for humans to comprehend (Isa 55:8–9); "his understanding is unsearchable" (Isa 40:28). "God is great and we know Him not" (Job 36:26). The mashal of the Forest and the Sea in 4 Ezra (4:13–17) sits within this wisdom tradition that circumscribed human knowledge of the divine.

B. Cognitive Blending Theory
and the Mashal of the Forest and the Sea

As noted, the mashal is the first of a series told by the angel Uriel, who is sent to Ezra to give him instruction, as the latter fervently wishes to "comprehend the way of the Most High" (4 Ezra 4:2). The angel is blunt about the impossibility of the task, as he asks rhetorically:

> How … can your vessel comprehend the way of the Most High? For the way of the Most High is created immeasurable. And how can one who is corrupt in the corrupt world understand the way of the incorruptible? (4 Ezra 4:11)[15]

Seeing that Ezra is determined in his pursuit, Uriel tells this parable:

> I went into a forest of trees of the plain, and they made a plan and said, 'Come, let us go and make war against the sea, that it may recede before us, and that we may make for ourselves more forests.' And in like manner, the waves of the sea also made a plan and said, 'Come, let us go up and make war against the forest of the plain so that there also we may gain more territory for ourselves.' But the plan of the forest was in vain, for the fire came and consumed it; likewise also the plan of the waves of the sea, for the sand stood firm and stopped them. If now you were a judge between them, which would you justify, and which condemn? (4 Ezra 4:13–18)

To this question, Ezra answers,

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15   The English translation of 4 Ezra is taken from M. E. Stone and M. Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) with consultation of the NRSV text where necessary.

> Each has made a foolish plan, for the land is assigned to the forest, and to the sea is assigned a place to carry its waves. (4 Ezra 4:19)

Having heard the expected answer, Uriel drives his point home:

> You have judged rightly, but why have you not judged so in your own case? For as the land is assigned to the forest and the sea to its waves, so also those who dwell upon the earth can understand only what is on the earth, and he who is above the heavens can understand what is above the height of the heavens. (4 Ezra 4:20–21)

I. Understanding the Mashal in Terms of CBT

Although the mashal looks quite simple, in fact it results from a complex sequence of blendings and set of compressions. At the outset, it is worth noting that the process assumes a schematic knowledge drawn from the biblical tradition of creation discussed above, in particular the idea that the heavens, the land and the sea were created by divine acts of division or separation. The mashal takes advantage only of the division between land and sea to create its blend and thus leaves in abeyance the heavens until the subsequent dialogue between Uriel and Ezra. The reason for this will become apparent. However, we will first describe the mashal in terms of Cognitive Blending Theory (CBT) as formulated by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner.[16] In brief, CBT seeks to describe how the human mind works especially in regard to its innovative, imaginative and creative capacities. As such, it can be variously used to analyse jokes, advertisements, riddles, metaphors, etc. It relies on the mind's ability to compare and manipulate the building blocks of thought and thereby to gain new insight into the issue that gives rise to the comparison in the first place. By way of caution, however, in seeking to show how the mind arrives at its insight, it should not be assumed that CBT can also be used as a tool to find different insights or meanings as, for example, a new interpretation of the mashal of the Forest and the Sea. It merely explicates how we arrived at the insight that we have. We now turn to a fuller description of CBT using the mashal.

a) *Input spaces*: According to CBT there must be at least two input spaces to form the blend. The input spaces are *mental spaces*, i. e. "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action."[17] An input space is created "on the run," so to speak, to suit its context. Also a blend can become an input space for a second blend.

b) *Frames*: An input space has elements (and often the roles or relations between them) organised and structured by its respective frame, i. e. "long-term schematic knowledge" or "structures from long-term memory" that specify

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[16] G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

[17] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think,* 40.

"the nature of the relevant activity, its events and participants."[18] In terms of the present mashal the input spaces are those of *forest*/יער, *sea*/ים and *nation*/גוי[19] that each minimally consists of: (1) ground (usually viewed as uncultivated land), trees (timber) and the roles/relations between those elements;[20] (2) water, waves and the roles/relations between those elements;[21] and (3) territory (i. e. land marked by a boundary or גבול), people, language and the roles/relations between those elements.[22] Each of these input spaces has a topology structured and organised by their respective frames of *forest*,

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[18] According to Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think,* 102: "Spaces have elements and, often, relations between them. When these elements and relations are organised as a package that we already know about, we say that the mental space is framed and we call that organisation a 'frame.'" Frames are themselves mental spaces that have become either culturally or experientially "entrenched." As such, they are similar to Idealised Cognitive Models or ICMs.

[19] The existence of a mental space *nation*/גוי is inferred from the personification of the trees and waves and the common identity of either belonging to the forest or the sea that each shares. Since mental spaces are culturally conditioned, we retain the Hebrew terms for those spaces. We assume that although most extant versions of 4 Ezra depend on a Greek *Vorlage*, the Greek text was itself a translation from Hebrew.

[20] Given the origins of 4 Ezra, it is appropriate to seek an understanding of its mental spaces in the traditions to which it was heir and thus primarily in the texts of the Hebrew Bible. We proceed by association of concepts in the literature, but recognise that this will not capture all elements of a mental space. On association of *forest* with uncultivated land, see Josh 17:15, 18; Isa 29:17; 32:15; with trees and timber, see Deut 19:5; 1 Kgs 7:2; 2 Kgs 19:23; Neh 2:8; Isa 10:34; 37:24; 44:14; Jer 10:3; 46:23; Ezek 39:10; Zech 11:2; 4 Ezra 9:21; 15:42, 62. As noted above, input spaces are created "on the run" to suit their contexts and thus a selection of elements and their relations are made. We thus note that a number of elements are absent from the present input space, e. g. the forest as a place of danger, esp. from wild animals (2 Sam 18:8; Pss 50:10; 80:13; 104:20; Isa 56:9; Jer 5:6; 12:8; Hos 2:12; Amos 3:4; Mic 5:8; 4 Ezra 11:37; 12:31; 15:30; 16:6) or at risk of destruction by fire (Ps 83:14; Isa 9:18; Jer 21:14; Ezek 20:47; 4 Ezra 15:62), though the latter will be activated in the running of the blend.

[21] On association of *sea* with water, see Gen 1:10, 22; Exod 14:21, 26, 29; 15:10, 19; Lev 11:9–10; Pss 77:19; 78:13; Prov 8:29; Isa 11:9; 43:16; 57:20; Ezek 47:8; Amos 5:8; 9:6; Nah 3:8; Hab 2:14; 4 Ezra 16:58; with waves and winds/storms (e. g. parting of the Red Sea) see Job 9:8; Pss 65:7; 89:9; 93:4; 107:25, 29; Isa 48:18; 51:15; 57:20; Jer 31:35; 51:42; Ezek 26:3; Dan 7:2; Jonah 1:4, 11–15; 2:3; Hab 3:15; Zech 10:11; 4 Ezra 13:2–3; 16:12. Elements and relations absent from the present input space include: fish and fishing (Gen 1:21, 26, 28; 9:2; Lev 11:9–10; Num 11:22; Job 12:8; Ps 8:8; Ezek 26:5 [net]; 38:20; 47:10; Hos 4:3; Hab 1:14; Zeph 1:3); boats and sailors (1 Kgs 5:9; 9:26–27; 10:22; 2 Chr 2:16; 8:18; Ps 107:23; Prov 30:19; Ezek 27:9, 25–29; 27:34; Jonah 1:4, 5; 4 Ezra 7:5; 9:34); and sand and seashore (Gen 22:17; 32:12; 41:49; Deut 33:19; Josh 11:4; Judg 5:17; 7:12; 1 Sam 13:5; 2 Sam 17:11; 1 Kgs 4:20, 29; 9:26; 2 Chr 8:17; Job 6:3; Ps 78:27; Isa 10:22; Jer 5:22; 15:8; 33:22; Hos 1:10), though the latter will be activated in the running of the blend.

[22] In the Hebrew Bible the term "nation" (גוי) is often found in parallel with kingdom/king, land or people. For *nation* and land (ארץ), see Deut 19:1; Pss 2:8 (in parallel); 105:44 (lands of nations); 106:27 (in parallel); Isa 26:15 (in parallel); 36:18, as well as 4 Ezra 13:33, 40–42. Other references are too numerous to cite here, but see 4 Ezra 3:7 (nations, tribes, peoples, clans); 3:13 (nation, people); 9:3 (nation, peoples, leader, princes) for their association in the present text. On its association with language, see Gen 10:5 *et passim*; Deut 28:49; Isa 66:18 (nations and tongues); Jer 5:15; Dan 3:4, 7, 29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14 (peoples, nations, and languages) and Zech 8:23. Absent in the input space of the mashal are associations of *nation* with law and

sea and *nation*. Furthermore, a frame can make available, if required at a later stage, other elements, roles and relations for use in the blend. As we will see below, the whole integrated network of mental spaces remains activated in the blending process, thereby providing the elements of fire and sand that were not salient in the original input spaces of *forest* and *sea*.

c) *Generic space*: Besides the input spaces, there is a generic space which facilitates a comparison between the input spaces as it operates at a more abstract level by the employment of a super-ordinate (more abstract) frame or organising "structure that inputs seem to share."[23] For example, in the parable of the Return of the Unclean Spirit (Matt 12:43–45b // Luke 11:24–26) the generic space for the input spaces of ἄνθρωπος and οἶκος, is that of the well-known concept of container which often functions as an unspoken primitive metaphor.[24] Elements and relations that have counterparts in the input spaces are mapped between those spaces as well as between each input space[25] and the generic space. In terms of the input spaces of *forest*, *sea* and *nation*, the generic space is a way of categorising the world's surface and it consists of the elements of physical space, its occupants and the relationship between them. It is these elements in the generic space that permit a matching of ground–territory, water–territory, trees–people, waves–people and the connection between occupants and their physical spaces in the blend.[26]

d) *The blend*: The input spaces are blended to create a new *mental space*, i.e. the blend. Blending involves *conceptual integration* ("the heart of human

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customs (Deut 4:8, 38; 18:9, 14; 28:1, 65; 1 Kgs 14:24; 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:8, 26; Isa 58:2; Jer 9:26; 14:22; Ezek 11:12 and 4 Ezra 3:8, 35).

[23] If in some sense the input spaces, understood in terms of metaphor theory as source and target domains, share a more abstract frame or organising structure, then how does one avoid reducing metaphor, which is based on similarity across different domain matrices, frames or knowledge networks, to metonymy, which is based on contiguity, where both elements belong to the same domain matrix, frame or knowledge network? Is the distinction just in the eye of the beholder (i.e. a matter of conceptual construal or perspective) and/or do both metaphor and metonymy sit on a continuum that depends on the conceptual distance between their input spaces or domains? Cf. Fauconnier and Turner's discussion of the degrees of figurativeness in the use of "father" (*The Way We Think*, 140–143). See also R. Dirven, "Metonymy and Metaphor: Different Mental Strategies of Conceptualisation," in *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*, ed. R. Dirven and R. Pörings (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 75–111.

[24] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 29–32.

[25] Land–water–territory, trees–waves–people and the relationship of tree to land, wave to water and people to territory are the three sets of counterparts between the three input spaces.

[26] We note that there is a potential matching between tallest tree and leader; however, this feature is not required in this instance by the generic space; it may also lack a clear analogue among the waves of the sea. Furthermore, it is noted that waves rather than fish have been chosen as the counterpart of people. The reason for this may be the choice of sand/shore to mark the sea's boundary, as this would construe the breaking of waves on the shore, especially in storms, as an analogue of assault.

imagination")[27] that selects and compresses the *vital relations* (e. g. cause and effect, time, space, representation, identity, change, whole and part, role, analogy, uniqueness, etc.) that exist within (inner-space) or between (outer-space) input spaces, and then projects that selection and compression to the blend. *Compression*[28] is itself guided by any number of governing principles, but also by an overriding objective to achieve human-scale in the blend, i. e. a mental space that "typically (has) very few participants, direct intentionality, and immediate bodily effect and (is) immediately apprehended as coherent." In the present mashal the outer-space vital relation of analogy (i. e. tree is to ground as people is to territory) is compressed to identity and then uniqueness (i. e. trees are a people and ground is its territorial possession).[29] And similarly for waves.[30] Language and its relation to a people are also selected from the input space of *nation* and projected to the blend.

e) *Emergent structure*: An emergent structure which was not directly available in the input spaces, is generated by means of *composition*, *completion* and *elaboration*. The blend is composed of the blended space consisting of personified trees and waves, their respective territorial domains and language and is completed by the use of a well-known frame from outside the blend, in particular, from "background knowledge" of how two different nations tend to interact with each other. That new frame of *war*/מלחמה is the emergent structure.[31] The blend is now complete and as a simulation it is ready to *run* (also called elaboration).

f) *Running the blend*: The running of the blend is the mashal itself. It is narrated that the personified trees and the personified waves speak and make plans against each other, "Come, let us go and make war against … so that there also we may gain more territory for ourselves" (vv. 14–15). But their plans are in vain for "fire came and consumed" the forest(s) and "the sand stood

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[27] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 89.

[28] Various modes of compression are possible, e. g. where one input has a tight human-scale topology or frame, it can be projected as the topology of the blend (e. g. in many metaphors where the source domain structures the target domain), or a vital relation like time might be scaled back or syncopated as in a ritual that is a symbolic re-enactment of a more diffuse and abstract, imagined state of affairs, or again a vital relationship might be compressed into another such as representation (and whole/part) to uniqueness as when one shows a photograph of a face and asks if this is John Citizen.

[29] In terms of CBT, trees, waves and people, as well as ground, water and territory, share roles under a common frame; in this instance dominion of the earth's surface.

[30] The personification of trees and waves had already been anticipated in the literary tradition. For example, trees of the forest can sing in joy or praise (Ps 96:12 and Isa 44:23), allegory uses trees/vines for a nation (Ezek 17 and 31), human descendants are described as seed and fruit, and the sea is commanded to sing praise or can speak (Ps 69:34; Job 28:14; Isa 23:4), or similes are used to compare human activity to that of trees, e. g. shaking (Isa 7:2) and taking root (Hos 14:5; Heb 12:15), or the sea as seeing and fleeing (Ps 114:3, 5).

[31] No doubt the frame of *war* was uppermost in the author's mind, given the text's intention to address theological dilemmas posed in the aftermath of the events of 66–70 CE.

firm and stopped" the waves. It will be noted that neither fire nor sand is part of the initial cross-space matching and mapping to the blend. However, as input spaces are "constructed as we think and talk" and the entire integrated network including its input spaces remains active and intact, the new frame of *war* alters the way in which the original input spaces of *forest* and *sea* are contextualised. The elements of fire and sand are now made salient[32] in the input spaces of *forest* and *sea* as sources of impediment to expansion within each input space. 4 Ezra's tradition had already anticipated this; cf. "I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it" (Jer 5:22); and Isa 10:13–19, where the king of Assyria boasts of his wisdom and understanding in being able to remove the boundaries of peoples (i. e. conquer them) but where the light of Israel will become a flame and burn the trees of his forest (people). In the blend under the frame of *war* the sand and fire become impediments to expansion and conquest. The blend has now been run.

g) We addressed earlier the principle of human-scale in guiding compression. It is the same principle that enables global insight as what is understood or the insight gained in the blend through compression is projected back to the input spaces and their vital relations providing insight over the complexities inherent in those vital relations. We will return to describe this later as the mashal is further developed.

Fauconnier and Turner observe: "We do not establish mental spaces, connections between them, and blended spaces for no reason. We do this because it gives us global insight, human-scale understanding, and new meaning."[33] The mashal of the Forest and the Sea is told to provide such insight and understanding. After his telling of the mashal, Uriel asks Ezra to judge between them, to justify or to condemn their plans or intentions (4:18), and Ezra's answer asserts the territorial boundedness of the land and the sea: "Each has made a foolish plan, for the land is assigned to the forest, and to the sea is assigned a place to carry its waves" (4:19). The judgement draws on Ezra's "long-term schematic knowledge," as established by personal experience and received tradition (cf. above for its discussion of the wisdom tradition), that the land and the sea are physically bounded and separated spaces. In terms of CBT, what has happened

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[32] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 44, speak of "backward projection" and they understand by this the reverse mapping of elements developed in the blend back to an original input space. What we have here is a somewhat different situation; for, as we understand it, an input space is only ever a partial representation of possible elements and their relationships. The frame of *war* that emerges in the blend and is active across the integrated network makes salient other elements and relationships that were initially passed over in the first iteration of the input spaces. As noted, such a development is already anticipated in the literary tradition.

[33] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 92.

here is that the plans of the personified (or compressed) elements in the blend are projected back to the still active input spaces and what is known more generally about them; in this instance, that the territorial domains of *forest* and *sea* are determined as bounded and separate.[34] Equally, in the input space of *nation* the notion of territorial boundary is made salient and now is configured in the counterparts ground–territory and water–territory. The "disanalogy/incompatibility" between the input spaces and the blend is compressed in the blend to the property (an inner-space vital relation) of foolishness which now qualifies the plan. By personifying the trees and the waves and knowing full-well its implications for the integrated network, and thus what Ezra's reply to his question would be, Uriel has imaginatively sought an analogy to Ezra's own quest to understand God's ways. As the angel states: "those who dwell upon the earth can understand only what is on the earth, and he who is above the heavens can understand what is above the height of the heavens" (4:21). Human knowledge is bounded just as the land and sea are bounded physical spaces. The mashal together with Uriel's question is told to help Ezra realise that his wish to understand God's ways, expressed metonymically as the heights of heaven, is like trees planning to possess the sea or waves planning to possess the land.

II. Understanding the Analogy of 4 Ezra 4:20–21 in Terms of CBT

As just noted, in 4 Ezra 4:21 Uriel uses the above blend to prompt for universal insight and it is at this point that the mental space of "created order" (itself a blend) is introduced as well as the frame of "wisdom/understanding" determining the relationship between the creator ("the heights of heaven")[35] and the created (humankind/"this world") in that mental space. Both had already been the subject of the questions and answers forming the preceding discussion in 4 Ezra 4:2–11, a section that evokes the questioning of Job and the divine response (Job 38), and as such constitutes the context of the mashal as a whole. The mes-

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[34] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 332, observe: "One of the powers of the blend is that it carries in itself the germ of the entire network. If one already has the entire network active, then running the blend gives inferences and consequences for the rest of the network" and "if relevant portions of it (i.e. the network) are not active in the moment of thinking, then the blend does good work in prompting for those activations." In the present case, compression to uniqueness in the blend (personified trees and waves that are unlimited in mobility) conflicts with the topology of the input spaces (where trees and waves are bounded). In other words, the blend does not satisfy the topology principle that "other things being equal, set up the blend and the inputs so that useful topology in the inputs and their outer-space relations is reflected by inner-space relations in the blend."

[35] As to the later introduction of "the height of the heavens," its placement avoids what might have been problematic had it been included in the *mashal* at the same time as the *forest* and the *sea*, namely, that the heavens' power and authority when exercised beyond its territory like that of the trees and waves might be seen as circumscribed and foolish, and that Ezra's desire to know God's ways might be viewed under the frame of *war* as an act of aggression.

sage is clear: to Ezra and humankind more generally, the ways of the Most High (4:2, 11) are incomprehensible and to seek to understand them is to act contrary to wisdom, i.e. it is a foolish plan; after all, a continual refrain in the wisdom tradition is that "the fear (i.e. awe) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

According to Fauconnier and Turner, when two Role-Value compression networks (i.e. a network that assigns a value, e.g. Isaiah, to a role, e.g. prophet) share a common role, the networks are linked by analogy. Thus, for example, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah can be said to be analogous as they are each a value assigned to the same role. Applying the same definition to the present analogy, there are two Role-Value compressed networks that share the role "making a foolish plan"; the values in one mental space are the trees and the waves; in the other mental space, it is Ezra (humankind). Accordingly, Ezra's desire to understand God's ways is analogous to the trees' and waves' desire to conquer each other's domains. The mashal, therefore, creates a blend that is contrary to what is known from both personal experience and received tradition (i.e. the boundedness of land and sea) with the intention of offering a human-scale analogy to the far more abstract and diffuse concept of divine incomprehensibility. To what extent the mashal offers a human-scale analogy for the modern reader is a moot point; however, for the ancient hearer endowed with an apocalyptic imagination and expectation of the fabulous, the mashal did offer a way to "understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another."[36]

We now turn to analyse Plato's allegory of the Cave. As noted above, our choice here is motivated both by the allegory's analogous treatment of human understanding and by the scope of the present volume. The analysis will also use CBT but in a more truncated form, as the reader has already been introduced to how the theory approaches its subject matter in the above discussion of the mashal.

C. Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Plato's allegory (εἰκῶν, *Resp.* 517a) of the Cave creates a visual image[37] that is said to illustrate the true nature of education (παιδεία, *Resp.* 514a and 518b–d),[38] an education not based on questionable sense experience, but on a sure rational

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[36] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

[37] The use of images is extensive in the Platonic dialogues and as noted by P. Destrée and R. G. Edmonds, eds., *Plato and the Power of Images,* MnemSup 405 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1, the term itself covers allegory, simile, metaphor, analogy, model and "even vivid writing styles that capture characters in dialogue." Furthermore, M. Dixsaut notes, the use of words to see is frequent throughout the myth's telling, see "Myth and Interpretation," in *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths*, ed. C. Collobert, P. Destrée, and F. J. González (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 25–46, esp. 40. For an analysis of εἰκῶν and related terminology, see C. Collobert, "The Platonic Art of Myth-Making: Myth as Informative Phantasma," in *Plato*

foundation.[39] From childhood people are pictured as fettered in such a way that they cannot see each other but only the back of a cave and the shadows cast by objects (such as human and animal images) moved outside the cave's mouth. The objects themselves are moved by people who are concealed behind a low wall so that they themselves can be heard but not seen by those imprisoned in the cave. The prisoners, it is argued, would think that the shadows are reality and would associate the voices heard with the shadows cast by the images. Thus human language also falls within the ambit of this confused identification (*Resp.* 515b). Plato then goes on to describe the *aporia* and pain experienced by anyone who, once freed from his fetters, turned around to look up towards the light and the passing images; he would still hold to his former perception of reality and turn to look upon it again (*Resp.* 515d–e). However, if someone were to drag him up (εἰ δέ … ἐντεῦθεν ἕλκοι τις αὐτὸν βίᾳ) and out of the cave and into the light of the sun, at first he would be unable to see.[40] Yet gradually habituated (συνηθείᾳ, *Resp.* 516a), he would finally dismiss what had formerly passed as reality and the honours that formerly served as rewards among the prisoners. He would count himself happy in the change but pity the other prisoners that remained in the cave (*Resp.* 516c). Nevertheless, should he return to the cave and contend (διαμιλλάομαι, *Resp.* 516e; ἀγωνίζω and διαμιλλάομαι, *Resp.* 517d) with the prisoners about the shadows, unaccustomed to the darkness he would appear blind to them and be an object of laughter. They would believe any attempt to ascend from the cave not worthwhile and seek to lay hands on and kill the one who attempted to release and lead them up out of the cave (*Resp.* 517a).

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and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths, ed. C. Collobert, P. Destrée, and F. J. González (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 88–108.

[38] See G. Ledbetter, "The Power of Plato's Cave," in *Plato and the Power of Images*, ed. P. Destrée and R. G. Edmonds, MnemSup 405 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 121–137. She argues that for Plato's Socrates, "education is not what some people declare it to be, namely putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes, but rather turning the whole soul around" (123) and that the affective power of the allegory resides in its mimetic quality where the prisoner and Glaucon (and with him the reader) "are simultaneously led through a process of ascent" (135).

[39] On the use of metaphor and analogy within epistemology more generally, see P. Thagard and C. Beam, "Epistemological Metaphors and the Nature of Philosophy," *Metaphilosophy* 35 (2004): 504–516. On the cave allegory they note on p. 511, "the cave analogy is an attack on empiricist foundationalism, designed to show the weakness of sense experience as a source of knowledge. Plato's aim, however, was not to espouse coherentism but rather to defend a kind of rationalist foundationalism via the theory of forms."

[40] See also *Resp.* 533d that speaks of dialectic dragging and leading up the eye of the soul that was, according to Orphic myth, mired in mud. The same terminology is also used at *Resp.* 439b, d to describe the contrary actions that allow the philosopher to establish the soul as tripartite (see footnote 44).

I. CBT and the Allegory of the Cave

In terms of CBT, the allegory appears to involve two stages of blending. In the first, the input spaces of cave (darkness, cave walls, below ground, entrance tunnel, outside world and its objects/actors, etc.) and prison (darkness, cell walls, below ground, fetters, entrance, outside world and its objects/actors, prisoners) are blended to produce the mental space consisting of a darkened cave, prisoners chained to its walls, a tunnel leading to the outside world and the light.[41] The first blend in essence makes the cave a prison (thereby supplying it with the additional elements of inmates and constraint to free movement) and a place from which the inmate should wish to escape, i. e. the emergent structure according to which the blend is run as the allegory. The allegory becomes one of the input spaces for a second blend, with its other input space being the soul within the Platonic concept of dualism (visible realm and intelligible realm, material and form, opinion and knowledge).[42] As such, this input space is itself a product of blending[43] and consists of such elements as the soul's tripartite

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[41] The input spaces appear to be mirror networks as both cave and prison share organising frames that are very similar, i. e. they are structured by darkness, walls, below ground and restricted entrance. Caves, no doubt, often served as places of confinement.

[42] In seeking to explain to Glaucon the allegory, Socrates shows (*Resp*. 517a–b) that the conception of the soul is the second input space. He likens the ascent and vision of the things above to the upward movement of the soul to the intelligible realm (ὁ νοητὸς τόπος). The soul is in bondage to the body and weighed down by the enticements of the visible world (*Resp*. 519a–b); the vision on ascent is of the idea/form of the good (i. e. the realm of the forms or ἰδέαι, *Resp*. 517b, or τὸ ὄν, *Resp*. 518c), which is the source of all things right and beautiful in the visible world and in the intelligible realm of truth and reason (*Resp*. 517c). Knowledge of it is also a necessary condition for those who wish to govern the city. Moreover, the vision of the intelligible realm is made possible by anamnesis or recollection of what the soul had already seen (*Resp*. 518d) and can be facilitated by the skill of looking where it is necessary (*Resp*. 518d). On *anamnesis*, see also *Meno* 81c–86b and *Phaedr*. 72e–77a. For Plato a single recollection can lead through the interconnectedness of everything to the recollection of all other things (*Meno* 81d). Accordingly, R. E. Allen, "Anamnesis in Plato's '*Meno* and *Phaedo*,'" *RMet* 13 (1959): 165–174, argues that recollection is really about inference rather than memory, as it entails "the *intensional* relationship which the Forms bear to one another" (167), and also that knowledge of the forms/universal is prior to knowledge of the particulars/instances which exemplify them. Thus the forms are implicit in all cognition (172).

[43] The blended space of the soul (within the Platonic conception of dualism) is reflected in Plato's later allegory of the charioteer (*Phaedr*. 246a–250c). Here the soul consists of the three parts of charioteer, a good horse and an evil horse (*Phaedr*. 246b). Ideally, nourished by beauty, wisdom, and good etc. the soul grows wings that enable it to ascend to the heavenly realm, and then travelling higher to glimpse with its mind's eye what lies beyond (τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, *Phaedr*. 247c), namely true being (οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα, *Phaedr*. 247c). This is the realm of the forms. However, being able to look unhindered beyond the heavens is the lot of the gods; the other souls gain to varying degrees glimpses due to the unruly nature of their evil horse (*Phaedr*. 247b–c) and how much one sees determines what sort of person the soul enters when it falls to earth in the first cycle of transmigration (*Phaedr*. 248d–e). Then follows either three (philosophers) or ten cycles of judgement and subsequent transmigration, each lasting 1000 years. But after 10000 years, all souls regrow their wings and return whence they came

nature,[44] immortality, the former existence of the soul where it could glimpse true reality, *anamnesis* (i. e. the possibility of recollecting that reality), present attachment to the visible world through embodiment, etc. The frames are thus "escape from the cave" and "transmigration of the soul" with counterparts between them being: cave–visible world; prisoner–soul;[45] fetters–attachment to visible world; darkness–ignorance; light–true knowledge;[46] shadows–visual perception; outside world–place where true being (sun = the forms) can be seen, etc. Conceptual integration selects, projects and compresses these elements and the blend is run (elaborated) under the already compressed, human-scale structure offered by the frame of "escape from the cave." That frame offers a tight compression of time and events that is now used to think about the more diffuse and abstract concept of the soul's transmigration; it is now conceived as a prisoner's release, turning around, being dragged up the tunnel and gradual habituation to the light. Furthermore, the vital relation of analogy allows the abstract concept of education to be understood as the more accessible and concrete image of being physically dragged up from darkness (ignorance) to light (true knowledge) and from the apprehension of shadows (opinions) to the contemplation of reality as it is.

II. *Myth and Knowledge of the Supra-Celestial Realm in Plato*

Like the parable in 4 Ezra, Plato's allegory of the Cave operates with a separation between realms, though they are somewhat differently conceived. Whereas for 4 Ezra the boundary is determined in God's creation and thus viewed in more personal terms as that between God and human beings who were nevertheless made in the image of God, Plato considers the boundary (or separation, Gk. χωρισμός)[47] as epistemologically based (i. e. between the visible realm of opinion and the intelligible realm of knowledge) and therefore views it in more

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(*Phaedr.* 248e–250b). Understanding, as the ability to combine numerous instances of perception into a sole logical concept, relies on recollection (ἀνάμνησις) of what the soul saw when it glimpsed into the realm of the forms (*Phaedr.* 249b–c). Recollection, however, is hindered by how much the soul glimpsed on its journey and the sort of life lived by the soul imprisoned in the body (*Phaedr.* 249e–250a).

[44] In the *Respublica*, Plato attempts to establish by dialectic that the soul is tripartite, consisting of reasoning, appetitive and emotional parts. He bases his argument on conflicting attitudes towards the same outcome that are present in the human condition, i. e. "an inclination toward some action and a pulling back from that same action," as expressed by G. R. F. Ferrari, "The Three-Part Soul," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's* Republic, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 168. Moreover, in the *Respublica* (unlike in Plato's early dialogues) reason can be overcome when in conflict with the non-rational parts.

[45] For the metaphor of imprisonment of soul in body, see *Phaedr.* 82d–83a. Release is by the practice of philosophy.

[46] The allegory takes advantage of the long established tropes of seeing as knowing, light as μαθία, and darkness as ἀμαθία.

[47] See *Phaedr.* 74a–76c.

impersonal terms. However, like the Orphics who claimed "I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven, but my race is heavenly" (Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον), Plato held to the divine nature of the soul's reasoning part that allowed it by dialectic to ascertain the existence of an intelligible realm and then by *anamnesis* or recollection of things perceived in its prior existence to know it in the here and now.[48] Nevertheless, due to the limits of language the intelligible realm cannot just be described as it really is but only in terms of what it is like, i.e. by the use of figurative language. The boundary thus becomes for Plato not one of knowledge but how to express it.[49] Even so,

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[48] See F. Trabattoni, "Myth and Truth in Plato's *Phaedrus*," in *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths*, ed. C. Collobert, P. Destrée, and F. J. González (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 305–321, who uses the later discussion at *Phaedr.* 249b–c to argue that dialectic, in accord with Platonic dualism, advances in two stages: (1) by reason or λογισμός that combines the many physical sensations into one form/idea), and (2) by recollection or ἀνάμνησις of that form, as a result of the pre-existence of the soul and its journey in the supra-celestial realm (ὁ ὑπερουράνιος τόπος = intelligible realm). However, though dialectic can establish the existence of supra-celestial (i.e. metaphysical) entities, it cannot describe or establish their nature and at this point must cede the field to myth. The problem with such an approach, as with ours, is that what had earlier been called the intelligible realm (ὁ νοητὸς τόπος) is no longer subject to dialectic; however, dialectic must still play a vital role in formulating the philosophical myth. Trabattoni senses the problem and asks how one can then know if the resulting myth is true. Metaphysical truth, he argues, is pre-propositional and grasped by *anamnesis*, and as such beyond the limit of the spoken word, i.e. irrational and similar to the mantic arts (*Phaedr.* 275b–c; *Leg.* 682a; cf. also *Phaedr.* 245a). As it is attained by a soul in its supra-celestial journey, the determination of mythical truth is ultimately subjective in nature and itself based on a circular argument that uses myth to argue mythical truth. In the end, citing *Phaedr.* 144d, Trabattoni falls back on an argument like Pascal's wager, i.e. that to believe a philosophical myth is a worthwhile risk. Such risks or wagers, it will be noted, are undertaken because they accrue benefits in the visible realm, and in particular in the city that is the primary object of Socratic interest.

[49] The variety in kinds of myth told for different reasons and by different characters and an apparently evolving attitude to the genre makes any definitive statement about Plato's attitude problematic. Thus Socrates speaks of the cave allegory as expressing his hope (ἐλπίς) of a truth that only god knows (*Resp.* 517b). Also for Socrates, human language falls within the ambit of confused identification or reference failure (*Resp.* 515b), i.e. the prisoners in the cave think that they name the passing shadows that they see. He can alternate between naming the genre *logos* or *mythos* (e.g. *Resp.* 376e–377a), and yet the myths told children are "in some degree to speak generally false (ψεῦδος), but there is also in (them) truth (ἀληθῆ)" (*Resp.* 377a). So also in *Gorg.* 523a, Socrates speaks of his own myth: "'Hear then,' they say, 'a very fine account (λόγου)' which you, for your part, will think a myth (μῦθον) as I imagine, but which I, for my part, think an account (λόγον); for I'm about to tell you as being true (ἀληθῆ)." However, the focus of much discussion is on *Phaedrus* because of its use of myth in each of its three parts. Thus with regard to the myth of Boreas and abduction of Oreithyia, Socrates, in disavowing the pursuit of naturalistic explanations of myth, explicitly indicates that in his search to know himself he uses the images of the hybrid Typhon of mythology (*Phaedr.* 229e–230a). In other words, the myth as metaphor conveys some truth. Before the myth of the charioteer Socrates notes that to speak of the nature of the soul's form (i.e. οἷον μέν ἐστιν) requires divine and lengthy description, but to speak of what it is like (ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν) only requires human and shorter description (διήγησις) (*Phaedr.* 246a). In other words, the myth offers a semblance of the true nature of the soul and its pre-existence. A little later he observes that "no poet of the earthly realm has yet sung worthily

and despite criticism of poetry (literature) as third removed from the intelligible realm,[50] Plato does offer portrayals of the intelligible realm in several of the myths he tells. He believes that myth/allegory can, to some degree, portray reality as it really is, i. e. it does not just portray its appearances in the visible world.[51] Moreover, he holds that myth can play an affective role in strengthening the reasoning part of the soul.[52] But here one must be aware that, when the intelligible realm is represented as supra-celestial, this, in actual fact, is itself just a spatial metaphor. The boundary between the visible and intelligible realms is found within this world in which we live. As Francisco Gonzales observes concerning the myth of Er at the end of the *Respublica*:

> The myth thematises everything that such reasoning cannot penetrate and master, everything that stubbornly remains dark and irrational: embodiment, chance, character, carelessness, and forgetfulness, as well as the inherent complexity and diversity of the factors that define a life and that must be balanced in order to achieve a good life.[53]

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of the supra-celestial realm (ὑπερουράνιον τόπον), nor will one ever sing; but it is thus, for one must speak at any rate the truth (τὸ ἀληθές), especially when speaking about truth (ἀλήθεια). The colourless, formless and intangible essence which truly exists (οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα) is seen by the mind alone (μόνῳ θεατὴ νῷ), the steersman of the soul" (*Phaedr.* 247c). The mind "sees" the intelligible realm but can only sing of it in myth. Thus Socrates can liken myth to prophecy (the mantic arts) which tells truth (*Phaedr.* 275b–c) and tentatively speaks the mythic hymn about love composed in figurative language (ἀπεικάζω) but grasping (ἐφάπτομαι) in some way the truth (*Phaedr.* 265b).

[50] Poetry and painting are viewed as mimetic art and third removed from true reality (*Resp.* 602c). Moreover, they are not only associated with those parts of the soul most remote from intelligence (φρόνησις, *Resp.* 603a–b), but they also seek to appeal to and influence those appetitive and emotional parts (*Resp.* 605a–b). As such, they are to be excluded from the city (*Resp.* 607a). Poets are also excluded due to their portrayal of the gods as immoral (*Resp.* 377b–383c). The relationship between *logos* (dialectic, philosophy, reasoned discourse) and *mythos* (poetry, the mythopoetic/literature) and the latter's place in the Platonic dialogues are a source of ambiguity.

[51] See Collobert, "Platonic Art of Myth-Making," 88–108. For Collobert, there are two types of mimesis or myth, namely, one based on knowledge and the other based on ignorance, and where the philosopher bases his image on knowledge (93–94): "the philosopher as a verbal image-maker demonstrates an ability to compensate for the weaknesses of images by exploiting them as devices to exhibit, that is, to make visible what is intelligible, which works as an original, that is, as a model for Platonic myths" (94) and "Plato asks us to infer from the sensible/visible to the intelligible/invisible, from the most familiar to the less familiar" (105).

[52] See J. Moss, "What Is Imitative Poetry and Why Is It Bad?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's* Republic, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 415–444.

[53] F. J. González, "Combating Oblivion: The Myth of Er as Both Philosophy's Challenge and Inspiration," in *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths*, ed. C. Collobert, P. Destrée, and F. J. González (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 259–278 (esp. 272). Unfortunately, Gonzales still appears to distinguish between the "supersensible" (intelligible) realm as "the divine place beyond the heavens" and the "nonsensical" realm, or "the in-between-place or non-place of human embodied life" (276–277). See also Trabattoni, "Myth and Truth in Plato's *Phaedrus*," 320, "unless we completely refrain from using words to cross over the boundaries

We are forever bounded, as Plato observed, by the limits of language; however, images and likenesses of the intelligible realm as grasped by the mind (the eye of the soul) can be offered in myth. In this way, myth is not third-removed from the intelligible realm and thus not altogether mimetic; for the mimetic arts are modelled on the visible realm, which in turn is modelled on the intelligible realm, whereas myth is properly modelled on the latter only. In terms of metaphor theory, Socratic myth models itself at one level on the intelligible realm (metaphorical or target domain) and on the other on the visible realm (source domain). In the terminology of CBT, it is the result of "double-scope" blending. It is for this reason that Glaucon can exclaim that both Socrates's image and prisoners are strange (ἄτοπος, *Resp.* 515a).

III. A Final and Overlaying Blend

The running of the blend activates or selects elements from the input spaces as it progresses, but then goes beyond just release from the cave to consider the prisoner's return to enlighten the prisoners who remained in the cave. The latter, in particular, indicates that a third input space, namely the philosophic life as typified by the life of Socrates (the midwife), has also been working in the background (e. g. the identity of the people who move the objects as the poets,[54] the questioner at *Resp.* 515d, the agent dragging the prisoner up the tunnel at *Resp.* 515e) and now contributes to the continued running of the blend through the return of the enlightened prisoner (*Resp.* 516e–517a). The philosopher would want to remain in contemplation of true reality and not return to the visible world of the cave. However, should he return in pity for the remaining prisoners, he would appear to them laughable, if he, still unaccustomed to the darkness, should contend in courts of law or elsewhere concerning the shadows and images of justice. In running the blend, then, one of the key insights afforded to Socrates as he entertains the movements between darkness and light is the need for habituation to the changed condition:

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of the physical universe (which therefore means retaining the most rigorous silence on realities such as *hyperoûranios topos*), we must give a second chance to the irrational, namely, to myth and poetry. In other words, since for Plato there is a kind of truth not expressible through *logos* (as it is available only in a pre-discursive way, with reference to the anamnesis-theory), both myth and poetry, though far weaker than *logos*, could be possibly philosophically useful as substitutes of strictly dialectical arguments. Clearly, *logos* has only succeeded in establishing this existence within the limits of its capabilities; yet these are also the limits of all discourse and all human knowledge regarding the truth."

[54] According to P. Destrée, "Spectacles from Hades: On Plato's Myths and Allegories in the *Republic*," in *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths*, ed. C. Collobert, P. Destrée, and F. J. González (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 110–126 (here 119), "the carriers represent the poets who are believed to educate people, the world of which Glaucon is a prisoner is his own cultural, and political world." The allegory of the Cave reflects Plato's criticism of poetry (i. e. the shadows cast by the poets) as third-removed from reality.

Anyone who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other. (Plato, *Resp.* 518a–b)[55]

But there is a still more significant insight in the allegory with the addition of the input space of the philosophic life and it overlays and complicates the blend described in the above analysis. Whereas in this analysis the cross-space counterparts were:

> cave–visible world, prisoner–soul, fetters–attachment to visible world, darkness–ignorance, light–true knowledge, shadows–visual perception, outside world–place where true being (sun = the forms) can be seen

in the final blend there are superimposed the cross space counterparts:

> cave–Athens, prisoner–citizen of Athens, fetters–attachment to the city, shadows–the mimetic arts of the poets, and the prisoner who ascends from and then returns to the cave–Socrates.

The other cross space-counterparts (i.e. darkness–ignorance, light–true knowledge, and outside world–place where true being can be seen) remain in place with the result that education (παιδεία) within the city is nothing less than release from the mimetic persuasions of the poets (and sophists) to contemplate reality as it truly is. The allegory is thus a richly layered tapestry of input spaces that defies any simplistic attempt at unpicking.

D. Crossing the Boundary: Back to 4 Ezra

If for Plato it is only the true philosopher, such as Socrates, who may through contemplation glimpse reality by the eye of the soul, for 4 Ezra, it is only a righteous man like Ezra, "called the scribe (i.e. a wise man) of the knowledge of the Most High" (14:50), who may through divine revelation see truth in apocalyptic visions. Ezra is educated by the angel Uriel – whose name itself symbolises divine enlightenment[56] – through three dialogues (3:1–9:25) that are interspersed with figurative language and meshalim, beginning with the mashal of the Forest and

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[55] Translation by B. Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett*, 4th ed., 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), 3:218.

[56] The angel's name, אוריאל, which may be derived from the Hebrew word אור, "light," literally means "God is my light."

the Sea. Thus having been prepared and readied, Ezra receives three visions, in which he sees the heavenly Jerusalem, the city that is eternally with God and cannot be destroyed, as well as what is to take place at the end of this age and in the age to come (9:26–13:58). The nature of the visions is eschatological and is concerned with the destiny of the Jewish nation. This is largely due to the historical context in which 4 Ezra was composed: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple naturally prompted the author to ask historical and theological (meta-historical) questions. Dream visions in earlier Jewish apocalypses such as the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 1–36) and the Book of the Luminaries (1 En. 72–82) feature astronomical and celestial secrets instead.[57]

The differentiation between temporal and spatial is not important here; the point is that these visions involve a human recipient obtaining knowledge about a reality that is otherwise hidden and beyond reach by human senses and human intellect. What Ezra and the prisoner in Plato's allegory (i. e. Socrates) have in common is that both are the few that cross the epistemological boundary. In 4 Ezra, Ezra is said to be the only one who has been enlightened about divine knowledge (e. g. 12:36; 13:55). As Plato's prisoner takes on the duty to return to the cave to enlighten the others, Ezra is charged with the task of going back to his people, to "comfort the lowly" and "instruct those that are wise" (14:13). However, once having seen reality outside the cave, it is impossible for the prisoner to go back to a false belief in shadows; rather, his desire is to remain outside and to contemplate the intelligible realm. In the case of Ezra, similar to other visionaries in Jewish apocalyptic literature (e. g. Enoch and the apocryphal Moses),[58] once having partaken in knowledge of the divine, he can no longer remain among humankind. He is commanded to "cast away … the burdens of man" and "divest of [the] weak nature" (14:14). "Ezra was caught up and taken to the place of those who are like him" (14:50).

The boundary that faces Plato due to the limits of human language is also palpable in 4 Ezra, albeit with a difference. For Plato, one can say what the

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[57] For text and commentary, see G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, vol. 1, *A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); G. W. E. Nickelsburg and J. C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch*, vol. 2, *A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 37–82* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

[58] Enoch is transformed into one of the angels; see 1 En. 71:11; 2 En. 22:5–9. On 2 Enoch, see F. I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch (Late First Century A. D.) with Appendix: 2 Enoch in *Merilo Pravednoe*," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:91–221. In the now lost text, the Assumption of Moses, Moses is also translated to heaven. See the allusion in Jude 9; Origen, *Princ.* 3.2; R. H. Charles, *The Assumption of Moses* (London: Black, 1897), 107–110; J. Priest, "The Testament of Moses," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:919–934. This tradition is no doubt the prototype of the translation of a righteous man in later Christian apocalypses. See E. G. Chazon, "Moses' Struggle for His Soul: A Prototype for the Testament of Abraham, the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra and the Apocalypse of Sedrach," *SecCent* 5 (1985): 151–164.

intelligible realm is like, but not what it is; hence the need of myth and allegory. For 4 Ezra, on the other hand, divine knowledge must be conveyed by divine revelation, but serious doubt is cast upon human worthiness to access that knowledge and human capability to comprehend it. Indeed, it may be asked whether the apocalyptic visions are nothing more than narrated metaphors or meshalim and if so, whether they are functional analogues to Plato's myths and allegories. Is the only difference that Plato is explicit about what he was doing or is the silence in apocalyptic literature to be taken as an acknowledgement that this is how things are rather than what they are like? Before his translation to the heavenly realm, Ezra asks the Most High to permit him to write anew the now destroyed Torah for the teaching of the populace. Although Ezra is already initiated into divine knowledge, he still must depend on the words poured into him from the Most High in order to complete the task:

> A full cup was offered to me; it was full of something like water, but its colour was like fire. And I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it, my heart poured forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, and my spirit retained its memory; and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed. (4 Ezra 14:39–41)

Not only Ezra, but the five scribes chosen to assist him are also under divine inspiration. Of significance is the mention that "they wrote what was dictated, in characters which they did not know" (14:42). Ninety-four books were written, but the Most High instructs Ezra to make only twenty-four public, the number of books in the Hebrew Bible. The other seventy books are to be kept away from public viewing, and are only for the eyes of "the wise" (14:44–46). It is in these sealed books that are found "the springs of understanding," "the fountains of wisdom," and "the river of knowledge" (14:47). But are the seventy books meant to be real books? Or could "seventy" be a symbol for the concept of completeness and perfection, and book (ספר, scroll), an expression for wisdom that is authoritative and sacred?[59] Who would be able to decipher them anyway, if even the scribes who created them could not read the characters in which they were written? In other words, knowledge of God's ways is to remain hidden, though supposedly revealed.

E. Conclusion

The above analyses have shown that whilst the dramatic characters of both Socrates and Uriel maintain a strict boundary between a "higher" (i. e. heavenly, supra-celestial or intelligible) and a "lower" (earthly or visible) realm, there is a

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[59] Cf. the symbolic scroll given to Ezekiel to eat: "He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey." (Ezek 3:1–3 NRSV).

key difference in whether the former is knowable to humankind as members of the "lower" realm. For Socrates the divine origin of the soul and its pre-existent participation in the "higher" realm entailed the notion that the "higher" realm was knowable, though it could not be expressed or described in any declarative sense. Instead, one could say what it was like by the use of narrated images or myths. As such one supposes that the images would be thought to evoke in the hearer a recollection of the soul's past experience in the "higher" realm. The mashal of the Forest and the Sea, on the other hand, is told by Uriel for a different purpose altogether, for it seeks to show to Ezra that the boundary between realms is fixed in the act of creation and therefore that there is no way in which he and humankind in general can know the divine mind and its purposes. The mashal, however, uses the implicit metaphor of interpersonal relationships, much as Gen 2–3, to describe the divine-human interaction; it thus opens a way for humankind to know the divine mind through an act of communication, i.e. revelation by God. It is in this sense that the revelation of Torah and the seventy hidden books in 4 Ezra is to be understood. Unlike the Socratic conception, language itself was not limited to the same degree in its ability to express or describe the "higher" realm. And one is tempted to ask whether it was the high regard given to Torah, conceived either as written or spoken, that prejudiced the judgement as to the ability of language to express the divine mind. The result is that for Ezra the revelations contained in his apocalyptic visions can be described and explained in language without any explicit acknowledgement that they might be telling it as it will be like (mashal/myth) rather than what it will be.

We have also attempted to analyse the mashal (parable) and allegory in terms of CBT and to show how the notion of running the blend offers a useful tool to discuss such narrated or extended metaphors and how they are created. That metaphor is used to talk about an "entity" that lacks a referent within the immediate domain of human perception (e.g. the "higher" realm in the examples discussed above) is, of course, not a novel idea; using what one believes as the perceptible traces of such an "entity," we talk about what it might be like rather than what it is and thereby build up a mental image of it, e.g. Plato's idea of a tripartite soul, based, as noted above, on conflicting attitudes, desires and thoughts in the human condition that then finds expression in the image of the charioteer. By so doing we are enabled to talk about it. Indeed, CBT itself is an example of the use, especially of spatial metaphors (e.g. input space and cross-space mapping), to describe the mental processes that lie beyond human cognition. And more generally all God-talk is made possible by metaphor. However, as the cognitive theory of language argues,[60] the use of metaphors based on our

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[60] See R. W. Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), for a discussion of a wide range of studies that bear on embodiment and human perception, thought and language.

embodied existence is not just limited to such "entities," but is foundational to the way we think.

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From the Lion to the Snake,
from the Wolf to the Bear

Rescue and Punishment in Classical Fables
and Rabbinic Meshalim

Lieve Teugels

A man had committed a murder and was being pursued by the victim's relatives. He reached the river Nile and when he found a lion there, he was afraid and climbed up a tree; in the tree, he saw a snake and was practically scared to death, so he threw himself into the river, where a crocodile devoured him. The story is for people who commit murders: neither earth nor air nor water nor any other place will be able to protect them.
Fable by Aesop (sixth century BCE), transmitted by Babrius (first century CE)

(This can be compared) to someone who was walking on the road and he encountered a wolf and he was rescued from it, and he would recount what happened to him with the wolf. He encountered a lion and he was rescued from it. He forgot the affair with the wolf and he would recount what happened to him with the lion. He encountered a snake and was rescued from it. He forgot the affair of both the former and he went on and told the affair of the snake. So also do later troubles cause the former ones to be forgotten.
Parable from Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael (third century CE)

The two above stories circulated in the Graeco-Roman world. The first originated in a pagan context, but was further transmitted and adapted in Christian versions. The second is preserved in Jewish texts. I listed them in the order of their transmission but their origin is veiled in mystery, as is common in traditional folktales. The make-up and motifs of the tales are remarkably similar. The first text is known as "the fable of the Murderer." The second is called a parable, in Hebrew a *mashal*. Both have been transmitted with an application: in the fable this is called an *epimythium*, and in the parable a *nimshal*. In this article, I will focus on this and other rabbinic meshalim that display a pattern and motifs similar to the fable of the Murderer. My purpose is not to retrieve *Urtexts* or to establish dependencies or influences. Rather, the adventures of these stories are examples of the interplay between common cultural heritage and separate identities in the ancient world. Moreover, they demonstrate the creative genius of the tellers who reused these tales in ever new ways, to let their audiences discover ever new messages.

A. Fable, Parable and Mashal:
Confusion of Tongues or Creative Blend of Cultures?

The term fable is usually associated with a classical Greek or Latin type of story. Famous are the fables of Aesop, that are, among others, transmitted by Babrius and Phaedrus. The characters in many of these fables are thinking and talking animals, even though humans can serve as their main characters too, as is the case in the fable of the Murderer that will be studied in this article. In the context of this volume I see no need to introduce the fable genre or the Aesopian fable tradition.[1]

The rabbinic mashal, however, may need some introduction. In Hebrew, *mashal* means parable *and* fable, as well as various other sorts of tales, riddles[2] and sayings, such as the Old Testament proverbs – *Mishlei* is the title of the book of Proverbs in Hebrew.[3] Certain studies written in modern Hebrew still do not make a distinction between the two.[4] This is especially the case in folklore studies, where the content, rather than the form, is the focus of attention.[5] A fable denotes in this case a fantastic, exemplary story, in which often animals are found as actors, as in classical fables.[6] In certain cases, such a fable is, however, found in the form of a parable (also mashal), as I will define that term in the following.

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[1] A good and concise introduction can be found in N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[2] About riddles and their relation to parables and other similar genres, see G. Hasan-Rokem and D. Shulman, *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99.

[3] On the various meanings of *mashal* (parable, fable, proverb) in Hebrew and its parallels in other Semitic languages, see H. Schwarzbaum, "*Mishle esopos umishle hazal* [The Parables of Aesop and the Parables of the Sages]," *Maḥanayim* 112 (1967): 112–117. A translation of this study appeared online at Wholestones.org: https://wholestones.org/blog/translations/aesops-fables-and-the-parables-of-the-sages/. In the following I will refer to the page numbers of the translation. Schwarzbaum demonstrates, on the basis of Sumerian proverbs, that the various classifications of mashal "constituted a single genre without differentiation." He argues that all proverbs are in fact short versions of anecdotal stories. See also further, note 40.

[4] See, e. g. S. Back, "Die Fabel in Talmud und Midrasch," *MGWJ* 24 (1875): 540–555; *MGWJ* 25 (1876): 267–275; *MGWJ* 29 (1880): 102–114; *MGWJ* 30 (1881): 124–130; *MGWJ* 33 (1884): 255–267; A. Zinger, "*Iyun bemishlei shualim besifrut haza'l*," *MYBY* 4 (1987): 79–91. Zinger treats three rabbinic "meshalim," among which is the mashal about the fox and the fishes by Rabbi Akiva that is quoted further in this study, but discusses only matters of content and typology, not the fact that this fable is actually integrated in a parable. See also A. Zinger, "Animals in Rabbinic Teaching: The Fable" (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979).

[5] See e. g. D. Noy, *Hamashal besifrut ha-aggadah: Tipusim umotivim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1960), who deals mostly with fables; H. Schwarzbaum, *The* mishle shu'alim *(Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), and his other studies on rabbinic fox fables.

[6] A similar distinction is made by M. Caspi and J. T. Greene, *Parables and Fables as Dis-*

In more recent rabbinical studies, mashal is treated as a technical term to denote a textual form that is often found in the context of midrash, i. e. rabbinic biblical interpretation.[7] I have called such rabbinic parables midrashic meshalim.[8] In the study of midrashic meshalim, the form of the mashal is a defining factor. Typically, a rabbinic mashal has two recognizable parts: mashal proper and nimshal (application), which forges the connection to the biblical text that is being discussed. These two parts are typically introduced with stereotypical formulas, such as "to what is the matter similar" for the mashal, and "so also" for the nimshal. Thus, the rabbinic parable or mashal is defined by its form, rather than its contents. Even though many meshalim have (stereo)typical characters, such as the king, his son, or his slave, the occurrence of these characters is not a requirement for a text to be called a mashal. The subjects or actors in midrashic meshalim can also be other humans, animals, or even things.

I rely on it that the readers of this volume are familiar with the parables by Jesus as transmitted in the New Testament and apocryphal gospels. The distinctions within the New Testament parables (similes, comparisons, parables, exemplary tales, etc.), such as made by Adolf Jülicher and other, mostly Germanophone, pioneers of New Testament parable research, will not be addressed here, as they are not relevant for this study.[9] But the distinction made by many New Testament scholars between parables and fables deserves attention.

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tinctive Jewish Literary Genres: The Origins and Structure of Indirect Speech about God (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 24.

[7] E. g. A. Goldberg, "Das schriftauslegende Gleichnis im Midrasch," *FJB* 9 (1981): 1–90; D. Stern, "David Stern Responds," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 276–280; D. Boyarin, "An Exchange on the Mashal: Rhetoric and Interpretation – The Case of Nimshal," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 269–276; D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Y. Fraenkel, "*Hamashal,*" in *Darkhe ha-aggadah vehamidrash* (Givatayim: Yad latalmud, 1991), 323–393; D. Boyarin, "Midrash in Parables," *AJSR* 20 (1995): 123–138.

[8] L. M. Teugels, "The Contradictory Philosophical Lessons of the Parable of the Lame and the Blind Guards in Various Rabbinic Midrashim," in *From Creation to Redemption: Progressive Approaches to Midrash: Proceedings of the 2015 and 2016 SBL Sessions on Midrash*, ed. R. Ulmer and W. D. Nelson (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017), 153–171; L. M. Teugels, "Between Hermeneutic and Rhetoric: The Parable of the Slave Who Buys a Rotten Fish in Exegetical and Homiletical Midrashim," in *Hebrew Texts in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Surroundings*, ed. E. Staalduine and K. Spronk, SSN 69 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 50–64; L. M. Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables: A *contradictio in terminis*?," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 129–148; L. M. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot: An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai*, TSAJ 176 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 7–9.

[9] See, among others, A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963); J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 6th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962); P. Fiebig, *Altjüdische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904); P. Fiebig, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu im Lichte der rabbinischen*

In New Testament studies, often a sharp divide is made between fables, which
are typified as unrealistic tales featuring animals, and parables, which are re-
alistic and usually deal with human activity.[10] The reason for this sharp divide
may be simple: in the New Testament no parables are found that feature talking
animals. It is, however, not unlikely that Jesus has told parables in which animals
act like humans. Indeed, in rabbinic literature, teachers that are more or less
contemporary, and even earlier than Jesus, are quoted telling such animal tales.
It is related of Bar Kappara (2nd–3rd century CE) that he told three hundred
fox fables at every course of one dinner party. Unfortunately, these fables are not
quoted in the source where this tradition is related, and probably this is more of
a "topos" than a historical report.[11] Nevertheless, the account indicates that the
telling of fables was associated with famous teachers. A well-known example of
a fable, told by a famous rabbi, is the mashal of the fish and the fox, attributed to
Rabbi Akiva (2nd century CE) according to the Babylonian Talmud:[12]

> R. Akiva says: (*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart) and with all your
> soul (and with all your might)* (Deut 6:5): even if He takes away your soul. Our Rabbis
> taught: Once the wicked Government issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study
> and practice the Torah. Pappus b. Judah came and found R. Akiva publicly bringing
> gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: Akiva, are
> you not afraid of the Government? He replied: I will explain it to you with a parable.
> A fox was once walking alongside a river, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one
> place to another. He said to them: "From what are you fleeing?" They replied: "From
> the nets cast for us by men." He said to them: "Would you like to come up on to the dry
> land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your
> ancestors?" They replied: "Are you the one that they call the cleverest of animals? You
> are not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much
> more in the element in which we would die!" So it is with us. If such is our condition
> when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written: *For thereby you shall have life
> and shall long endure* (Deut 30:20), if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall
> be![13] (b. Ber. 54a)

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*Gleichnisse des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters: Ein Beitrag zum Streit um die "Christusmythe" und
eine Widerlegung der Gleichnistheorie Jülicher* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1912). More recently,
see R. Zimmermann, "Parabeln – sonst nichts! Gattungsbestimmung jenseits der Klassifikation
in 'Bildwort', 'Gleichnis', 'Parabel' und 'Beispielerzählung'," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu:
Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann and
G. Kern, WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 383–419.

[10] M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study* (Washington: Catholic Biblical
Association of America, 1977), 25; Zimmermann, "Parabeln – sonst nichts!," 414.

[11] The source is Lev. Rab. 28:2. Cf. Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 4–5. In Gen. Rab. 78:7 it is
even used in a fable where a fox is said to have known 300 fox fables!

[12] See my discussion of this parable and other animal meshalim in Teugels, "Talking
Animals in Parables," 129–148.

[13] Translation I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1978). I re-
placed the biblical citations with the JPS translation, and changed the transcription of the name
Akiba into Akiva in line with the practice in this study.

In his 1977 dissertation about tannaitic parables, Robert Johnston called a rabbinic parable that features animals acting like humans, such as the above one, a "fable-mashal."[14] Rabbi Akiva's fable-parable, just like other similar rabbinic parables about animals, is not different in form from rabbinic parables that have human subjects. This is not to say that the genre of the (fox-)fable was of no influence in the construction of such meshalim; rather their content and function have been molded into the form of a mashal, acquiring the function of a mashal and hence they need not be treated in a different way than other meshalim. Apart from a mashal proper, a nimshal is present, and there is a clear connection to a biblical text, namely Deut 6:4–9 (first part of the Shema prayer). Rabbi Akiva's parable is an eminent example of the creative genius of the rabbinic sages, who twisted classical content (fox-fables) into a new content (the fish outsmarted the fox), used it in a new context (midrash, i. e. explicit interpretation of a biblical text) and presented it in the typical two-part form of the rabbinic midrashic mashal.[15] In tannaitic midrash, meshalim in which animals act as humans, are not common, but some examples are attested, such as the parable of two dogs who make peace to fight a wolf, in Sifre Num. 157.[16]

Returning to Jesus, even though no parables about talking animals are attributed to him, it is not unthinkable that he would have told some. If such a parable, told by Jesus, would have survived, the sharp distinction between parables and fables, made by many New Testament scholars, may not have occurred.[17] Not all New Testament scholars agree with the sharp distinction between parable and fable. Jülicher, the father of New Testament parable research, who was very keen to make clear distinctions between various kinds of parables and likenesses, equated the parable in the strict sense (*Gleichnis*) with Aristotle's *logos* or Quintilian's *fabula* or fabella.[18] David Flusser emphasized the influence of Graeco-Roman genres, among which the Aesopian fables, on rabbinic parables and on the parables of Jesus.[19] In his recent monograph, Justin David Strong, who

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[14] R. M. Johnston, "Parabolic Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim" (PhD diss., Hartford Seminary, 1977), 177. I followed Johnston in this, see Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 28.

[15] See for an analysis of this mashal in relation to Aesopian fables E. Yassif, "Storytelling and Meaning: Theory and Practice of Narrative Variants in Religious Texts," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception*, ed. A. Houtman, T. Kadari, M. Poorthuis, and V. Tohar, JCP 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 2–20.

[16] See Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables," 129–148. This mashal is also found in b. Sanh. 105a.

[17] This is implied, cynically, in an inaugural lecture by D. Daube, *Ancient Hebrew Fables* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 7: "If it were the other way around, we should never hear the end of it: Jesus's *Naturnähe*, nearness to nature, in contrast with rabbinic aridity. As it is this way around, the fact has escaped notice."

[18] The reference is to Aristotle's Ῥητορική (*Ars rhetorica*) and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*. An overview of these equivalents and the classical and modern terminology is found in Boucher, *Mysterious Parable*, 3–4, and the appendix, 86–89.

[19] D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus,* vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 52, 153–154.

also contributed to this volume, prefers to use only one term, namely "fable." He describes the renaissance of the fable genre in the first century and explains how especially Luke presents Jesus as a fable-teller.[20] Even though there are good arguments for his point, I decided, for the sake of clarity and brevity, to stick with the name mashal to talk about the rabbinic parable in comparison with the classical fable.

Apart from the fact that no parables about talking animals by Jesus are known, there may be another issue that has led to the sharp divide between parable and fable in many studies of Jesus's parables. Fables are usually associated with animals, and therefore it is often overlooked that there are classical fables that do not feature talking animals, but humans. Mary Ann Beavis has demonstrated that certain classical fables are quite similar to the New Testament parables. She specifically refers to classical fables that depict human activities, rather than animals.[21]

In this study I will discuss a fable featuring a human hero, as well as some rabbinic meshalim that are similar in content, pattern and message to this classical fable. The common pattern is simple: a character encounters an obstacle, often an animal, overcomes it, and ends up with the next obstacle. Sometimes this pattern is repeated.[22] In the classical fable, the outcome is negative, but in the rabbinic meshalim not necessarily, as we will see. These meshalim not only display a similar narrative pattern as the classical fable, but also share the same combination of realism and extravagance. Moreover, as we shall argue, both fables and meshalim are not specifically religious stories that are used to elucidate religious or moral situations or texts. Despite the similarities, the rabbinic parables, even those that share the said pattern with the Aesopian fable, display a remarkable creativity when incorporating elements from the fable genre. Flusser calls this process "pseudomorphosis … an example of the adaptation of foreign impulses, that have introduced, in an internal process of growth, an extraordinary literary genre."[23]

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[20]   J. D. Strong, *The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: A New Foundation for the Study of Parables*, SCCB 5 (Paderborn: Brill|Schöningh, 2021).

[21]   M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 480.

[22]   Mary-Ann Beavis ("Parable and Fable," 480) compares these fables with the parables in the Synoptic Gospels. Whereas, indeed, these fables are comparable to certain Synoptic parables in that they "are brief, invented narratives about incidents which shed light on certain aspects of human experience and behavior" and have "religious and ethical themes," the similarity with the rabbinical parables to be discussed in this article is even larger.

[23]   Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 158.

B. The Fable of the Murderer

This is the version of the fable of the Murderer published as no. 45 by Émile Chambry and translated by Laura Gibbs.[24]

> A man had committed a murder and was being pursued by the victim's relatives. He reached the river Nile and when he found a lion there, he was afraid and climbed up a tree; in the tree, he saw a snake and was practically scared to death, so he threw himself into the river, where a crocodile devoured him. *The story is for people who commit murders: neither earth nor air nor water nor any other place will be able to protect them.* (Gibbs 168; Chambry 45; Perry 32)

Despite the fact that animals occur in this fable, the main character is "a man" who has killed someone. Again, the criterion, used by some scholars of the New Testament, that fables deal with anthropomorphic animals and parables deal with humans, clearly does not hold. Indeed, the main characters of many Aesopian fables, including the present one, are humans rather than animals. The murderer is fleeing from the revengeful victim's kinsmen. When trying to do so, he is attacked by several animals, and eventually he gets his "due" punishment not from the kinsmen, but from a crocodile.

An interesting detail is that the Aesopian fable has been transmitted in two variants: one in which the fugitive murderer encounters a lion, and another where he meets a wolf. As we will see, in one of our meshalim, there are also variants that exchange a wolf for a lion. Other variants of the fable hold that the murderer is pursued by "his father" rather than simply his relatives; and that the Nile is replaced by a "lake." In yet another version, the element of murder is altogether absent.[25]

The message of the fable in all its versions is clear: one cannot escape punishment; eventually your crime catches up with you. In the quoted version, this message is explicitly adduced in a so-called epimythium, which I rendered, as does Gibbs, in italics.[26] This epimythium, as does the fable itself, betrays a stoic background (so Rodríguez Adrados): a human cannot escape his fate. It would be over-hasty and uncritical to read an explicitly religious application into the

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[24] Translation from L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 87. See also http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/32.htm. Text from É. Chambry, *Ésope fables: Texte établi et traduit*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1927), 23. See also: http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/chambry/45.htm.

[25] The version with the wolf is listed in the appendix of B. E. Perry, *Phaedrus and Babrius: Fables,* LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), as no. 32. F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 3, *Inventory and Documentation of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, MnemSup 236 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 46–47, describes the various variants of this fable, studies the metre, and tries to reconstruct the oldest version. In one version, the lion is said, by Rodríguez Adrados, to stand for Alexander the Great.

[26] On the phenomenon of the epimythium, see Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, xii–xiv.

Aesopian fable.[27] But this fable is known in various other traditions, including Christian ones, with multiple variants. These are worth looking at, because they betray a monotheistic perspective similar to the rabbinic examples that we will study in this article.

The fable of the Murderer had a remarkably popular appeal throughout antiquity, even for educational purposes. This is obvious by the many attestations of variants of this same fable in late antique Christian papyri, dating from the fifth to the seventh century CE, that were used as school writing exercises.[28] This is a version of the tale, from an Egyptian papyrus, as translated by Raffaella Cribiore:

> A son who killed his own father, fearing the law, took refuge in a desolate place, but when he reached the mountains, he was pursued by a lion. Since the lion chased him, he mounted a tree. But he saw a serpent lying on it and, unable to climb further, he was killed. *The evil man never escapes from God, for the divine leads evil people to justice.*[29]

The differences with the Aesopian fable are subtle but obvious. Lerer points to the subtle changes in the fable that turn it into a Christian moral-religious tale. First, this is a case of patricide. In the Bible "it is always fathers who test their sons." More specifically, for Christian children, the automatic reference would be to God the father, "who makes true believers of children." Second, the son "fears the law" rather than the relatives of the victim, which would, incidentally, be his own relatives. Third, the murderer takes refuge in a "desolate place." The reader is advised to make a mental note of this detail as this is a relevant parallel to the mashal of the slave who flees to a graveyard that we will discuss momentarily. Lerer sees the desolate place as "a place not simply geographical but moral. Desolation is the spiritual condition of the killer, and the lion in pursuit now stands for something far more allegorically significant that the beast of Aesop's fable."[30] Fourth, the crocodile and the Nile are missing. According to Cribiore, this was done to eliminate any Egyptian feel from the exercises, even in Egypt, and make them more "Greek" for the students. Nevertheless, the Egyptian content is what might have originally attracted the teachers according to Cribiore. Fifth, the serpent and the tree receive an undeniably biblical connotation. It is hard to miss the allusion to the biblical creation story, especially when read through the Christian lens of the original sin that caused human death. With the crocodile and the river missing, the focus is now on lion, serpent and tree. Again, these

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[27] In his translation of this fable, Chambry does enter a religious note where this is not explicitly found in his Greek original: "La fable montre qu'aucun élément, ni la terre, ni l'air, ni l'eau, n'offre de sûreté aux criminels poursuivis par les dieux." See Chambry, *Ésope fables*, 23.

[28] Cf. texts 230–232, 314, 323, 409 and 412 in the appendix of R. Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt,* ASP 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996). See the discussion of these variants by S. Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, From Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 39–40.

[29] R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 180.

[30] The quotes are from Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 39.

elements get allegorical connotations. Finally, also this fable is transmitted with an epimythium, this time with a clearly monotheistic religious message: the *evil man never escapes from God who brings people to justice*.[31]

The fable of the Murderer thus received an obvious Christian packaging by means of subtle changes that modify the content and purpose of the tale significantly. There are no Jewish stories from antiquity that can be considered as actual variants of this fable in the same way as is the case with these Christian versions. What we will look at are, rather, Jewish parables that display similar patterns and motives but that do not seem to be dependent on the fable of the Murderer in the same way as the Christian variant is. Nevertheless, these rabbinic fables may be considered Jewish versions of the fable genre,[32] and as such they attest to the creative application of this genre, including some common motives such as the appearance of specific animals, and the moral lesson. Indeed, just like the classical fables, including their Christian variants, the rabbinic parables as a rule contain an "epimythium," better known as nimshal.

C. Rabbinic Meshalim and Fables: Similarities and Differences

Before delving into the rabbinic parables that are comparable with the fable about the Murderer, I want to outline some similarities and differences between rabbinic meshalim and Aesopian fables in general, that we need to keep in mind when comparing texts from these two corpora.

I. Similarity: Complex Tradition Histories

The adventures of this Aesopian fable show that a tale can go a long way in being re-interpreted and re-used for various purposes, in various contexts, to make ever-new points. In the case of the Aesopian fables, it is impossible to speak of an *Urtext*, as Aesop himself is a figure veiled in mystery. His stories have been passed down orally for at least three centuries before they were written down, and have then been transmitted in various versions, none of which can make reasonable claims to be the "original" one. As we have seen, the fables also obtained a Christian *Wirkungsgeschichte*. A similar case can be made for rabbinic literature, which is traditionally considered part of the "oral Torah." The entire makeup of rabbinic texts breathes oral transmission. Midrashim, in which most of the parables are embedded, contain structural elements, such as the *petichta*, that may have originated in, or that are at least modeled on, synagogue sermons.[33] They are found in

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[31] Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 40.

[32] Justin David Strong therefore prefers to use only the term "fable," also for rabbinic parables and the parables attributed to Jesus. See note 20.

[33] See the classical discussion by Joseph Heinemann in J. Heinemann, "The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim: A Form-Critical Study," *ScrHier* 22 (1971): 100–122.

various versions that were adapted, depending on the needs of the author, editor, preacher, or even scribe. Midrashim, including parables, are often transmitted in various recensions, attesting to the geographical dispersion of the text. Moreover, the parables in particular are found in various versions, depending on the biblical text that is being interpreted and which the parable comes to illuminate.

II. Similarity: "Profane" Stories with Moral or Religious Applications

Like the Aesopian fables, the narrative parts of rabbinic meshalim (mashal proper) are as a rule not religious in themselves: they are typically non-religious stories that are told to elucidate biblical stories or topics. For example, God will not appear in a parable, but rather a human king. Similarly, the classical fables themselves are often stories that are not explicitly moral or religious, but from which a moral lesson should be deduced, or to which a moral lesson is appended. This means that a hermeneutical move is expected from the listener or reader of the parable or fable: through the "profane" story, they are expected to receive a moral or religious lesson, even if this hermeneutical move is not made explicit. In many of the fables, and in most rabbinic parables, this move *is* however made explicit in the epimythium or the nimshal, the application of the parable. I will leave open the question as to whether the epimythium is an original part of the fable. It has been suggested, notably by David Flusser, that the nimshal is not an original part of the rabbinic parable, but then, almost all extant rabbinic parables come with an explicit nimshal. So the quest for the "original," naked, rabbinic mashal is in fact a theoretical quest based on very scant evidence. It must be noted that Flusser, in his enthusiasm to show that Jesus's parables are indeed Jewish parables, ends up presenting the rabbinic parables, and especially the midrashic parables that we are dealing with in this article, in a rather negative light. He sees them as a declining manifestation of the genre and approvingly quotes Jülicher in that the later rabbinic parables are "a poor copy" of those of Jesus.[34] The rabbinic nimshal, which is part and parcel of almost all extant meshalim, has as a rule a religious content, if only for the very fact that the rabbinic parables are usually found in interpretations of biblical texts, which are religious by nature. And this is where we come to a difference between the rabbinic meshalim and the classical fables.

III. Difference: Rabbinic Meshalim Are Meta-Texts

In contradistinction to the classical fables, and, indeed, to the parables attributed to Jesus, rabbinic parables found in midrash (midrashic meshalim) are meta-

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[34] Cf. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, passim. He calls them "Verfallserscheinungen," "späteren," "barocken," "Gleichnisart," (27) and "epigonalen rabbinischen Produkten" (33).

texts, and often even doubly so. First, they draw on, and are meant to interpret, a biblical text.[35] Second, in many cases, the meshalim don't draw directly on the biblical text, but on the midrash on this text.[36] Whatever the pre-history of the genre mashal – and this may indeed have included narrative, popular, even oral teaching – most extant meshalim are transmitted as parts of midrash. When analyzed textually, they need to be treated in this midrashic context. Even more, admitting that meshalim may have functioned in non-midrashic contexts in the pre-rabbinic period, most extant meshalim seem to have been specifically composed to function in midrash, and if they have an oral pre-history, they have been deliberately adapted to their new midrashic context. This redactional decision should be respected and considered when reflecting on the meaning of a mashal. Rabbinic meshalim should not be extracted from their literary context. Incidentally this should also not be done with Jesus's parables, despite the fact that this happens all too often.[37]

D. Meshalim about Rescue and Punishment

The biblical texts with which all the parables that will be discussed here are associated, contain the motifs of divine intervention, retribution or salvation. These motifs, found in the biblical text, are easily also *read into* the mashal (proper). However, as in the fable, the story and its biblical application (nimshal) should not be mixed up. The mashal proper or the fable may be about misfortune, punishment, or rescue, but not explicitly about *divine* retribution or salvation. When in the subtitles of the sections below I use the categories "retribution" and "salvation," this refers to the biblical texts which the meshalim illuminate by means of stories about escape and rescue.

The meshalim that I will present are found in the two tannaitic sister-Midrashim to the book of Exodus: Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai.[38] These are tannaitic Midrashim, and as such belong to the oldest stratum of rabbinic literature, dated to the third century CE. The

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[35] This also includes most meshalim found in the Babylonian Talmud and other rabbinic scriptures, such as the mashal attributed to Rabbi Akiva that I quoted before.

[36] See Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 15–17. In later Midrashim, the phenomenon that parables draw on the midrash rather than directly on the biblical verse is even more common, see R. Nikolsky, "Are Parables an Interpretation?," in *Sources and Interpretation in Ancient Judaism: Studies for Tal Ilan at Sixty*, ed. M. Piotrkowski, G. Herman, and S. Doenitz, AJEC 104 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 289–315.

[37] See the critique of Amy-Jill Levine on the out-of-context use of parables in sermons and as children's tales in Christian churches and similar contexts: A. J. Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

[38] For an introduction to these two Midrashim, and the relation between them, I refer to Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 67–74. See also M. Kahana, "The Halakhic Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, In-*

meshalim to be discussed here have been selected because their pattern and/or topic has affinities with that of the fable of the Murderer. In some of these, the similar structure, i. e. the escape from several wild animals, is most obvious; in others, the outcome or message is similar: escape is impossible.

I. Retribution Turned into Salvation: Escape from Wolf, Lion and Snake

The pattern of the first parable resembles that of the classical fable most. Here, the main character encounters three dangerous wild animals, as in the fable. Unlike the fable, the hero in this parable survives his encounters with the three beasts. This has to do with the biblical verse which the parable comes to illustrate, i. e. Jer 23:7–8 that deals with divine salvation and delivery from consecutive enemies.

The mashal is found in Mekh. R. Ishm. Pisha and in Mekh. R. Shim. Yoh. Shirata. Despite the fact that these meshalim are parallels, they are located in different tractates (*masekhtot*) in the respective Mekhiltot, i. e. Pisha and Shirata. In Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, the mashal occurs in a midrash to Exod 13:2 and in Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai the base verse is Exod 15:11. In both sources, the mashal occurs as the second in a set of two meshalim. These meshalim do not immediately relate to the respective base verses, but to the prooftext Jer 23:7–8, or Jer 16:14–15 (the text is a blend of these two very similar verses). This may explain the location of the parables in two different tractates in the two Mekhiltot: the parables don't seem to belong to the exegetical context of Exodus but rather draw on the text in Jeremiah. Since the parables are almost identical, I will only give the text of Mekh. R. Ishm. Pisha 16:

> *Assuredly, a time is coming – declares the Lord – when it shall no more be said, "As the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt," but rather, "As the Lord lives, who brought out and led the offspring of the House of Israel from the northland and from all the lands to which I have banished them"* (Jer 23:7–8/16:14–15).
>
> They told this parable. To what is the matter similar? To someone who was walking on the road and he encountered a wolf and he was rescued from it, and he would recount what happened to him with the wolf. He encountered a lion and he was rescued from it. He forgot the affair with the wolf and he would recount what happened to him with the lion. He encountered a snake and was rescued from it. He forgot the affair of both the former and he went on and told the affair of the snake. So also do later troubles cause the former ones to be forgotten. (Mekh. R. Ishm. Pisha 16 on Exod 13:2)[39]

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   [39] See Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 107–114 (ch. 5). In this article, I have omitted the critical signs in the translation, such as brackets that indicate that words are not found in my regular base manuscript but are present in other textual witnesses. These issues are not relevant to the present article.

This parable, like the fable of the Murderer, ends with an epimythium rather than a typical nimshal. The stereotypical introduction "so also" is there, but what follows is a general wise saying "later troubles cause the former ones to be forgotten," rather than a reference to the biblical base text or a quote thereof, as could be expected in a rabbinic nimshal. Not only the content, but also the pattern of this mashal resembles the fable more than the following examples. Yet there is also a biblical influence.

Indeed, this mashal seems inspired by a biblical text, a sort of parable in itself, that already contains the pattern found in the fable. In Amos 5:19, a very similar course of events is related. Interestingly, in that biblical context "the day of the Lord" is not presented as deliverance, but as a black day. In this text in Amos, we find a bear rather than a wolf.

> As if a man should run from a lion
> And be attacked by a bear;
> Or if he got indoors,
> Should lean his hand on the wall
> And be bitten by a snake.
> (Amos 5:19)

In this use of a well-known biblical motif, we recognize the creative twist and bend in rabbinic meshalim at first hand. First, the topic of the mashal resembles the classical fable of the Murderer. Second, the form and content of the lesson at the end are that of the epimythium of a fable, rather than a typical rabbinic nimshal. Nevertheless, a theme from the own, biblical, tradition is used. But also that is, in its turn, craftily adapted to fit the new context and the new purpose.[40] Whereas in the biblical image, the theme is divine retribution, the midrash applies the same imagery in a context of divine salvation.

II. Salvation for One, Retribution for the Other: The Dove and the Hawk

The two Mekhiltot each contain two parables about a fleeing dove. In both, the dove represents Israel that found itself in a dire situation, trapped between the Egyptian army and the Sea of Reeds (Exod 14). In the first parable, the focus is on Israel, the dove. The Egyptians are represented by a hawk, and the sea by

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[40] H. Schwarzbaum ("Aesop's Fables," 3 [in the English translation, see note 3]) mentions this example in relation to an older Sumerian proverb with a similar content. The presence of similar proverbs and fables in various contexts need not imply direct dependency but rather confirms that such patterns occurred in various narrative traditions and were filled in according to the context and the message they needed to convey. See, for more elaborate studies by Schwarzbaum: H. Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities in Some Aesopic Fables," in *IV International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research in Athens (1.9–6.9 1964): Lectures and Reports*, ed. G. A. Megas (Athens: n. p., 1965), 466–483, esp. 467–483; H. Schwarzbaum, *Jewish Folklore between East and West: Collected Papers* (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1989), 198.

a snake. The dove is found trapped between these two dangerous animals. In the second, the focus is on the Egyptians, again represented by the hawk that pursues the dove. Here, however, the dove escapes and the hawk gets trapped.

The first parable illuminates the situation in the Exodus story where the Israelites are still in danger. I present the text of Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael:

> To what were Israel similar in that moment? To a dove that fled from before a hawk, and entered in the cleft of a rock, and a snake was hissing at her. If she enters inside, see, there is the snake. And when she goes outside, see the hawk is there to fetch her. So were Israel in that moment: The sea closing them in and the enemy pursuing them. (Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah 3 on Exod 14:13)[41]

The image of the dove in the cleft of a rock is directly derived from Song 2:14.[42] Again we find a well-known image from the own tradition that is used in a different context, a midrash on the exodus from Egypt.[43]

The second parable reflects the later situation, when the Israelites have already passed through the sea, but the Egyptians are still trapped inside. In this case, however, it is the hawk, representing the Egyptians, who is trapped between two dangers: it is locked in a closed room, and arrows are thrown at it.

> *And the Egyptians fled towards it* (Exod 14:27). This teaches that to every side to which an Egyptian would flee, the sea would run against him. They tell this parable. To what is the matter similar? To a dove that fled from a hawk and entered in the dining room of the king. The king opened the eastern window for it, and it went out and left. The hawk entered after it, and the king closed all windows before it and started to throw arrows at it. Thus, when the last of Israel rose out of the sea, the last of the Egyptians descended into it. The ministering angels started to throw arrows and hailstones, fire and brimstone, as it is said: *I will punish him with pestilence and with bloodshed; and I will pour torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone upon him and his hordes and the many peoples with him* (Ezek 38:22). (Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah 7 on Exod 14:27)[44]

This mashal presents a more advanced, or more remote, adaptation of the motif "fleeing from one thing – being caught up or trapped by another thing." To be sure, in this parable, the hawk, representing the Egyptians, is not fleeing from something in the beginning of the story. It is, rather, pursuing a fleeing dove. Nevertheless, it is the hawk, and not the dove, that is the central character here, for, indeed, the hawk represents the Egyptians that are the protagonists (and the

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[41] Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 152–158 (ch. 11).

[42] In Song Rab. 2:14:2 we find the parable appended to this verse, but with an explicit reference to its tannaitic origin by the introduction "It was taught in the school of Rabbi Ishmael." See a blog of Tamar Kadari about the relation between Song of Songs and this parable: T. Kadari, "The Song of Songs and the Story of the Exodus from Egypt," https://schechter.edu/the-song-of-songs-and-the-story-of-the-exodus-from-egypt/.

[43] In chapter 7 "The Song of Songs, Lock or Key: The Holy Song as a Mashal," Daniel Boyarin presents the Song of Songs as a whole as a mashal on the Exodus story, see Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 105–116.

[44] Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 211–219 (ch. 17).

subject) of the base verse. Thus, the hawk, even if not starting out from a fleeing position, ends up in a "trapped" position not unlike the dove in the previous mashal, and the other protagonists of the fable and meshalim that have been presented thus far.

The comparison of these two similar parables shows how, with the same elements, a different message can be broadcasted. Whereas the first parable shows the salvation of the Israelites, the second one pictures the reverse side of the medal: the punishment of the Egyptians.

Interestingly, these meshalim have animals, be it not talking animals, as main characters. This shows again that the distinction between parables, which would be about humans, and fables, which are supposed to deal with animals, is not a decisive one.

III. Divine Protection: A Father Protects His Son

A parable about a father who protects his son from various dangers occurs once in Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai and twice in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael.[45] The first variant, which occurs in both Mekhiltot in tractate Beshalah, is found in a midrash on Exod 14:19: "The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them."

In the mashal, the father represents the angel who moved before and behind the Israelite army when it made its way through the desert:

> *The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them* (Exod 14:19). R. Yehudah says: Behold, this is a verse of Scripture that is rich in many places! They tell this parable. To what is the matter similar? To someone who was walking on the road and his son was leading before him. Robbers came to capture him from before him. He took him from before himself and placed him behind himself. A wolf came. He took him from behind himself and placed him before himself. Robbers came from before him, and wolves from behind him. He took him and placed him on his arms. As it is said: *I have pampered Ephraim, taking them in My arms* (Hos 11:3). (Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah 5 on Exod 14:19)[46]

In Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, the parable is related a second time, in a midrash on the words in Exod 19:4: "I bore you on eagles' wings."[47] In this case, the parable compares the eagle, that (allegedly) protects its young with its body by having them ride on its shoulders, with a father who protects his son from dangers coming from various directions. When robbers and a wolf attack, he moves the child around so as to protect him from the danger with his own body. Again, we see that motifs are used creatively, depending on the context and

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45 See Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 167–177 (ch. 13).
46 Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 167–168.
47 The second instance of the parable is found in Mekh. R. Ishm. Bahodesh. See Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 390–394 (ch. 37).

the message the narrator wants to convey. Both attestations of the mashal are found in a midrash on a biblical text that deals with divine protection. Hence, the parable, even though displaying the pattern of consecutive dangers, has a positive outcome: the son is saved.

We see here that, even though robbers are humans and a wolf is an animal, these two categories are used indiscriminately to indicate various kinds of dangers for a wayfarer. The same is sometimes the case in Aesopian fables, where dangerous animals are put on a par with robbers as comparable dangerous elements on the way.[48]

IV. No Escape: The Slave Cannot Flee from His Master

I want to adduce a last parable that displays less the pattern of consecutive flight from various dangers as in the Aesopic fable of the Murderer, but rather the impossibility of escape, also present in that fable. This has to do with the biblical text on which the parable draws. This parable is found in Mekh. R. Ishm. Pisha 1 on Exod 12:1, but in fact it draws on the prooftext that is adduced in this midrash: Jonah 1:3. The message of the book of Jonah is not that Jonah is punished, but rather that he cannot escape from his divine mission.

> *The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt* (Exod 12:1). … You can learn from the following that the Shekhinah does not reveal itself outside of the land. It is said: *Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from the Lord's service.* (Jonah 1:3). Could he have thought of fleeing from the presence of God? … But Jonah said: I will go outside of the land (Israel) where the Shekhinah does not reveal itself, because the gentiles are inclined to repentance, so as not to make Israel condemned. They tell this parable of a slave who belonged to a priest. He said: I will flee between the graves, a place where my master cannot come after me. His master said to him: I have others like you. So said Jonah: I will go outside to a place where the Shekhinah does not reveal itself because the gentiles are inclined to repentance, so as not to make Israel condemned. The Place said to him: I have other messengers like you, as is said: *But the Lord cast a mighty wind (upon the sea)* (Jonah 1:4). (Mekh. R. Ishm. Pisha 1 on Exod 12:1)[49]

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[48]　See this fable in Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 85: A lion was standing over a young bull whom he had killed when a robber showed up and demanded a part of the spoils. "I would agree," the lion said, "if you were not already in the habit of taking whatever you want!" Thus, the lion refused the villain's request. Meanwhile, an innocent wayfarer also happened upon the very same spot, although he backed away as soon as he saw the ferocious lion. "There is nothing to be afraid of," the lion said to him in kindly tones. "Please, take without hesitation the portion of this prize that your modesty has earned for you." He then divided the bull into pieces and went away into the woods, so that the man would come forward freely. *This is an altogether outstanding and admirable model of behaviour; in the real world, however, greed grows wealthy while honesty goes unrewarded.* (Gibbs 165; Phaedrus, *Fab*. 2.1; Perry 487)

[49]　Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 100–103 (ch. 3).

This parable illustrates the futility of Jonah's attempt to flee from God's presence, because he does not want to fulfill His command. The reason given by Jonah in the midrash before the mashal: "because the gentiles are inclined to repentance, so as not to make Israel condemned," is a paraphrase of what is already found in the Bible, i. e. that Jonah is afraid that the Ninevites will in fact repent, as eventually happens indeed (Jonah 3:5–10; 4:2). According to the midrash, Jonah reasons that, if the Ninevites repent, the Israelites, who are not inclined to repent, will look bad compared to them. In the parable, a slave flees to a graveyard, where he thinks his master, a priest, will not follow him easily because then he will become ritually impure. The reason why the slave flees is not given. The motif of fleeing, by Jonah and by the slave, corresponds to the fleeing of the murderer in the classical fable. I already pointed out earlier that a graveyard may be seen as a "desolate place," as in the variant of the fable of the Murderer in the Christian writing exercise. The equivalent of the various dangerous animals are in this mashal simply "others," meaning "other slaves." In this parable, elements of the mashal and of the nimshal or the biblical situation seem to be intermingled, as the story of Jonah and that of the fleeing slave need to be read together. The outcome of the story of the slave needs to be derived from the nimshal: the slave is eventually caught by the "others." That a fantastic story (Jonah) is explained by means of a less fantastic mashal is rather exceptional. By reading the two stories together, Jonah's story is in fact presented as a fable in itself: "the mighty wind," that in the Bible is the first impediment to Jonah's escape, stands on a par with one of the other slaves in the mashal. A remarkable parallel with the fable of the Murderer is found on the level of the epimythium/nimshal. In both stories, the purpose is to demonstrate that no geographical move, over water or over land, enables the fleeing protagonist to escape his fate.

E. Conclusions

Let me start with a few specific insights this study has offered, or confirmed. First, the distinction between parable and fable along the line "no animals" – "only animals" does not hold. We have used an example of a fable in which the main character is a human and have put this along parables that have animals as their main actors. In another mashal, as in a classical fable, human robbers and a wolf are put on a par as dangerous opponents.

Second, the main characteristics of the rabbinic midrashic mashal are related to form and function. The midrashic mashal is by its nature metatextual, often even doubly metatextual: the mashal relates to a biblical text, often through the mediation of a midrash. Further, the two-tier structure of the rabbinic mashal (mashal proper and nimshal) is defining of the rabbinic midrashic parable. This feature is not found in most parables attributed by Jesus. In the Aesopean fables,

however, the epimythium that is usually transmitted along with the fable, is re-
markably similar in form and function to the nimshal of the rabbinic midrashic
meshalim. In the case of the epimythium as well as the nimshal, scholars have
argued that these do not originally belong to the fable c. q. mashal. Be that as
it may, there is no evidence for fables and parables in their "original" (usually
thought to be oral) state. In the literary form in which both genres have reached
us, the fables and parables have been adapted to their context, and that is the way
in which we study them.

Third, because many biblical texts and midrashim bear the message that
God is the savior and protector of the Israelite people (when they behave
correctly), the rabbinic meshalim that display the same pattern as the Aesopian
"no escape" fable, display a more positive message than their fable-counterpart.
The only parable with an undeniably negative outcome is where the subject, a
hawk, represents the enemy of Israel, Egypt. There, the message is one of divine
retribution, as could be expected.

Finally, I want to draw a more general conclusion about the relation between
fables and parables. Rabbi Akiva's fable-mashal of the fox and the fishes, displays
an exquisite blend and twist of classical content and rabbinic application. This
particular fable has no Aesopian parallel, and it is unlikely that an exact parallel
ever existed. In this fable, the fox, that is traditionally considered clever, is called
"foolish." Rabbinic reversal, even to the point of subversion, turns the familiar
elements of the fox fable into a mashal with the opposite message of fables that
contain similar elements. In this article, I have demonstrated other examples
of this creative rabbinic genius by putting an Aesopian fable, and rabbinic me-
shalim that share its pattern and motifs, side by side. Whereas the cultural blend
between Athens and Jerusalem is almost tangible in these meshalim, each and
every mashal creates a new combination of common, even classical, elements
and new applications.

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The Rabbis' Double Vision

Folk Narrative Poetics
of Late Antique Parables and Fables

Galit Hasan-Rokem

A. Studying Ancient Folk Literature

The following article is intended to delineate some of the principles that guide the study of ancient literatures from the point of view of folk narrative scholarship, with special reference to the ancient literature produced by the rabbis of late antiquity who were active in Palestine and Babylonia. My discussion below will introduce some classics of folk narrative scholarship in general, as well as refer to folk narrative scholarship on rabbinic sources, alongside with other pertinent scholarship of those sources. My text readings will especially address the interfaces of oral and written, as well as of performance and text. The selection of parables brought into this discussion is focusing on the dialogic relationship of early Christian and rabbinic texts, especially delineating a Jewish parabolic tradition. Throughout, I shall point at the interpretive potential of folk narrative methodology to elicit meanings of the rabbinic texts, perhaps otherwise not easily seen.

Today very few people who work on any kind of folklore or folk literature would define their object of study as a separate, well defined corpus. We are rather interested in folk creativity as a mode that occurs in diverse contexts, in varied social groups – elite as well as non-elite – and in a variety of media, performed, written, audio and video-recorded, internet transmitted and so on. Whereas the classical imagined site of folktales is around an open fire, between grandmothers and fathers and their youngest offspring, or something similarly romantic and stereotypical, this is of course a very partial truth. Folk narratives may be found in novels, and proverbs are certainly all over the place. Alan Dundes has answered his own rhetorical question "who are the folk?" stating that any particular group of people, gender or age cohort, family, guild or workplace community could constitute "folk" and create their particular *folk lore*.[1]

    [1] A. Dundes, "Who Are the Folk?," in *Frontiers of Folklore*, ed. W. Bascom (Washington,

It is important to clarify that approaching texts of the rabbis with folk narrative methods does not entail a characterization of their level of education, nor their socio-economic status. Taking into account that folk narratives are a shared mode of expression and a shared mine of contents opens up the study of texts and in our case ancient texts, to include relevant intertextual networks, as well as the mutual inspiration between diverse media, such as literature and visual arts. Also, for a folk narrative scholar even some written texts are, in terms of poetics, encoded messages of performance: performances that took place in the past or that could have taken place in the past.[2] I emphasize: performances encoded in traditional genres, forms and content motifs, not recorded messages or reconstructed messages. The study of ancient texts from a folk narrative perspective engages with the transformations between the performed and the written, the continuous and the fixed, the local and the transportable. Among its central methods are the comparison of motifs and tale types, and the investigation of adaptation to specific cultural and physical contexts. In contemporary scholarship, those comparisons are in best cases made not for purely taxonomic purposes but rather in order to interpret the transformations mentioned above.[3]

Folk creativity is a dynamic mode of expressive culture in which we may discern modes that crystallize as genres. So the enigmatic modes of culture find their most well defined form in the riddle, but they may appear in less easily discernable portions in other genres such as narratives, songs, novels, laments and movies. Moreover, although very often found in written documents, texts, they communicate a dynamic relationship to performance, including less or more explicit markers of oral and embodied performance. Those markers may be formulated as a direct quote: so and so said to say and so, or to an audience, or they may be associated with stylistic and content elements that scholarship has identified in actual oral performances of verbal arts.

B. Parables as Genre

Parable is a Greek word – *parabolè* – extant already among the ancient philosophers and rhetoricians.[4] It refers to a short verbal unit making some kind of parallel or comparison. The rabbis, who were active mainly in Palestine and in Babylonia during the first seven centuries CE, produced a great amount of texts

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DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1977), 17–35; reprinted in A. Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

   [2] R. Bauman, "Performance," in *Companion to Folklore*, ed. R. F. Bendix and G. Hasan-Rokem (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 94–118.

   [3] E. g. A. Houtman, T. Kadari, M. Poorthuis, and V. Tohar, eds., *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception*, JCP 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

   [4] H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, "παραβολή II," *LSJ* 1:1305: "juxtaposition, comparison … illustration, analogy … parable … by-word, proverb."

including exegetical texts linked to specific passages of the Hebrew Bible, and praxis oriented texts that address diverse fields of Jewish social and personal life, religion as well as everyday life and holidays. Among these there are numerous texts that fit into the genre definition of the parable.

The Hebrew word *mashal* refers to a number of textual phenomena and genres, from which I shall focus on what in cross-cultural genre taxonomies may be conceptualized as three different genres: proverb, fable and parable.[5] The aforementioned three genres will be most pertinent to discuss my main theme: the interconnection and mutual interchange of folk literary – possibly oral – materials, and the written and learned works of the rabbis. The terminological fusion between the names of the three genres points, to use Wittgenstein's versatile concept, at a family resemblance between them. The resemblance has been acknowledged by many scholars of each of the three genres.[6] But there are also differences. The proverb is usually considered the shortest of them and in most cases it lacks a narrative plot, for example: "It is not good for the human to be alone" (Gen 2:18). This is not only the first proverb in the Hebrew Bible, but it is also coined by God himself, thus according to the narrative in Genesis, God created the proverb among all the other creations of the first seven days.[7] This proverb is used in writing and speech until this day, although no human may ever be as totally alone as Adam as the sole inhabitant of the Garden of Eden before Eve's creation. Thus, even proverbs lacking a metaphor or a comparison, are removed from their literal meaning already from their first occurrence.

The boundary between these genres may also be somewhat fluid, making the genre distinction flexible.[8] For instance, the following talmudic proverb clearly has a plot:[9] "This is what people say: The camel went to ask for horns, and the

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[5] B. H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 3–4, elaborates on the etymology and semantic extension of *mashal*. Among Young's sources Joachim Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu,* 6th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), who on p. 12, footnote 4 claims also the meaning of riddle to be implied with *mashal/mathla* and *parabolè*, and the list of meanings of Hebrew/Aramaic *mashal/mathla* on p. 16 includes: "bildliche Reden aller Art: Gleichnis, Vergleich, Allegorie, Fabel, Sprichwort, apokalyptische Offenbarungsrede, Rätselwort, Decknamen, Symbol, fingierte Gestalt, Beispiel, (Vorbild), Motiv, Begründung, Entschuldigung, Einwand, Witz." I thank Eric Ottenheijm for pointing this out.

[6] H. Schwarzbaum, "*Mishle esopos u-mishle hazal* [The Parables of Aesop and the Parables of the Sages]," *Mahanayim* 112 (1967): 112–117 (Hebrew); see also the preface of S. Shpan in his Hebrew translation of Aesops fables: S. Shpan, trans. *Mishle esopos* [Aesop's Fables] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960) (Hebrew).

[7] G. Hasan-Rokem, "And God Created the Proverb: Inter-Generic and Inter-Textual Aspects of Biblical Paremiology – or the Longest Way to the Shortest Text," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. S. Niditch (Atlanta: SBL, 1990), 107–119.

[8] A. M. Cirese, "Wellérismes et micro-récits," *Proverbium* 14 (1969): 384–390.

[9] Also an ancient Greek fable: F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, trans. L. A. Ray, ed. F. Rodríguez Adrados and G. J. van Dijk, 3 vols., MnemSup 201, 207, 236 (Leiden: Brill, 1999–2003), 1:362 and 3:153–154. Rodríguez Adrados's note, 3:153, describes a

ears that he had were sheared off." (b. Sanh. 106a). This saying, one of around a hundred and fifty in the rabbinic corpus formulaically ascribed to popular usage, usually applies to situations in which someone demands something beyond her or his possibilities, and as a result loses what they already own. In the talmudic context it refers to Bileam son of Beor's death (Num 31:8) as punishment for greediness. It also serves as a condensed etiological tale to explain the small ears of the camel.[10]

Both proverbs and parables function in interactive situations. The parable often includes the application as a scene within the narrative framework itself, as we shall see in an example below, the rabbinic parable of the fox and the vineyard, and in Jesus's parables from the New Testament that will be discussed in comparison to rabbinic texts. As I have suggested regarding metaphorical proverbs, for every such text with a concrete image there is at least one possible application, the literal one.[11] The literal application may often be exemplified by a detailed narrative. Thus the proverb derived from Eccl 11:1 "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" has in Hebrew narratives since the Middle Ages served as the title of a tale whose plot structure literally follows it: a man who used to throw bread into the river or sea, as his father had commanded him quoting the verse, is amply rewarded by the king of the fish after undergoing a number of adventures and hardships.[12]

Another of the relevant cluster of genres, fables, are mostly animal tales that may also be told without a pragmatic application, and in that form they sometimes appear in children's books and in oral story-telling. The historical fables attributed to a slave named Aesop from the sixth century BCE, largely animal tales, were not originally accompanied by the explanatory morals called

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Sumerian version of the short fable, thus local Mesopotamian tradition may be the inspiration for the talmudic text rather than Greek sources or a parallel emergence. Rodríguez Adrados, 3:154, mentions a Haggadah derivation and further documentation elsewhere, but not the Talmud per se. Cf. L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 510, refers to Perry 117, http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/117.htm. Many thanks to Martijn Stoutjesdijk for fruitful exchanges on the classical sources.

[10] A somewhat different message is communicated by the following Georgian proverb, however likewise a short narrative: "The eyeless ant asked God: Give me eyelashes." G. Hasan-Rokem, *Adam le-adam gesher: Pitgamim shel yehudei gurgia be-israel* [Human to Human Is a Bridge: Proverbs of Georgian Jews in Israel] (Jerusalem: The Ben Zvi Institute, 1993), 131 (Hebrew).

[11] G. Hasan-Rokem, *Proverbs in Israeli Folk Narratives: A Structural Semantic Analysis*, FFC 232 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1982), 18. The most famous visual representation of literal interpretations of proverbs is Piet Breughel the Elder's painting "The Dutch Proverbs" also known as "The Blue Cloak"; see also A. Dundes and C. A. Stibbe, *The Art of Mixing Metaphors: A Folkloristic Interpretation of the Netherlandish Proverbs by Pieter Bruegel the Elder,* FFC 230 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1981).

[12] D. Noy, "The Jewish Versions of the 'Animal Languages' Folktale (AT 670): A Typological-Structural Study," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, ScrHier 22 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1971), 171–208.

epimythia; those were attached to them centuries later in Greek and Latin compilations. The events in the fables themselves happen in a parallel world of animals – in a minority of cases in the world of plants, body parts or inanimate objects – a world that is correlated by educators, orators, etc. to a situation in the human world, in a poetical and cognitive procedure similar to the usage of proverbs, that is, by creating a structural parallel between the relevant situation and the narrative plot. An example from the classical Aesopic corpus is summarized here: A hungry fox enters a hollow tree and eats the food left there by shepherds. Another fox passing by tells him that only after some days without food will he be able to leave the hollow. The moral of the fable, probably added later, is formulated as follows: Time solves even the most difficult problems.[13] The semantic gap between the parable and the epimythium as one of the possible applications of the parable indicates the inbuilt tension between the text and its potential performances.

C. Comparing Contents and Genre Unbound

In addition to the genre perspective that I have discussed until now, folk narrative scholars studying ancient texts have focused on content and have traced shared motifs and tale types both in geographically and linguistically related communities. However, parable and fable scholars relating to both Jewish and Christian repertoires as growing out of folklore, have not often employed the methodological approaches current among folklore scholars.[14] Common motifs and tale types, universal as well as regional, serve as the basis for comparative studies emphasizing on one hand common elements, and on the other hand pointing at the particular features of the narrative of one community or even one narrator. The Aesopic fable summarized above has in comparative terms been identified in the international index of the folktale types number 41 titled "The Wolf Overeats in the Cellar."[15]

While comparing the Aesopic fable with a parallel from rabbinic literature, I shall also expand the scope of folk narrative research methods presented here, from the comparative to other perspectives. Some words on classical rabbinic literature are in place. Tradition as well as scholarship discern in this corpus an early phase of the first to third century, consisting of mostly but not only texts

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[13] B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 106–107.

[14] E. g. B. H. Young, *Parables*, 15 ff. Other scholars of ancient Jewish parables and fables have not included the folkloristic background in their description of the genre, e. g. D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[15] A. Aarne and S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, FFC 184 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1973), 29.

addressing law and ritual, but also including the earliest Hebrew post biblical collection of proverbs, Mishnah Avot, known as the Teachings of the Fathers. On the basis of this earlier stratum, the rabbis elaborated during ca. the next four hundred years in two works named the Talmud – Babylonian and Palestinian – an endless variation of genres: law, philosophy, exegesis, myth and a numerous short narrative forms. In the midrashic compilations of the same period, the exegetical, narrative and discursive genres are interwoven in commentaries to the Hebrew Bible, without formal references to the legal and ritual frameworks of the earlier rabbinic texts. The following example is from this later corpus, from a late sixth/early seventh century midrashic compilation for the book of Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth Rabbah, on the verse:[16]

> As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand. (Eccl 5:14 NKJV)[17]

Here is the first part of the midrash text linked to that verse; the words in bold font are elements that I shall address, viewed as folk narrative elements:[18]

> "As he came forth of his mother's womb," Geniva said:[19] Like the **fox** that found a vineyard that was fenced from all sides, and there was one hole [in the fence], and it/ he wanted to enter and could not do so. **What did he do?** It/he fasted for **three** days until it/he became skinny and exhausted, and entered in that hole and ate and became fat. He wanted to leave but could not get through [the hole]. He again fasted another **three** days until he became skinny and exhausted and returned to his previous [form]. (Qoh. Rab. 5:14)[20]

The fox is famously an international stock figure of animal tales, that appears in numerous Aesopic fables, as well as in the parallel Indian, Persian and Arabic traditions, transmitted through the Latin Romulus corpus to a variety of European and Mediterranean languages, surfacing in the late medieval German and French collections of fox fables, Reineke Fuchs and Roman de Renart, as well as in the Hebrew *Mishlei shuʿalim* (fox fables) by thirteenth century West European scholar Berechiah ha-Nakdan.[21]

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[16] M. Hirshman, *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 1–6: Critical Edition with an Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2016), 19 (Hebrew).

[17] Eccl 5:15 in the Christian tradition. Translations on biblical and rabbinic texts are taken from various versions according to their compatibility with the Hebrew original used by the rabbinic interpreters. E. g. NKJV retains here the singular unlike some other translations. In some cases, I have translated in order to attain precision, and most rabbinic texts are in my translation, unless quoted from other scholars as indicated.

[18] In the translation I have retained the Hebrew ambiguity between "it" and "he" at the first stage, and retained only "he" in the second stage for reasons that the ensuing interpretation will hopefully clarify.

[19] Geniva is identified by Hirshman as a Babylonian sage, see *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah,* 325.

[20] Hirshman, *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah,* 324–326.

[21] Cf. E. Yassif, "Storytelling and Meaning: Theory and Practice of Narrative Variants

The tale's opening sentence is in Hebrew, but the tale is mostly in Aramaic from the rhetorical question "what did he do?" onward.[22] The use of both languages may be viewed as a concrete example of the interlacing of the oral – Aramaic – and the written – Hebrew – components of the text, although it is not unambiguous evidence thereof, since it may also be the result of conscious stylization. And this leads us to the second topic that has interested folk narrative scholars in ancient as well contemporary oral texts: formal characteristics of the text, especially style and plot structure.

In the early twentieth century, based on his studies of medieval Icelandic poetry, Danish scholar Axel Olrik proposed a set of rules that according to him govern the shaping of folk narration, among them the framing of narratives by formulaic openings and closures, the dialogue as an animating element, a conflict at the heart of the plot, and contrasts between the descriptive elements, adding up to circa ten such rules (the exact number depends on what is included), among them the rhetorical question, as in this fable, that also includes the formulaic number three mentioned by him.[23] Significantly for our discussion, Olrik's epic rules of the folk narrative were integrated in both Rudolf Bultmann's and Claus Westermann's work of the parables of Jesus.[24]

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in Religious Texts," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception,* ed. A. Houtman, T. Kadari, M. Poorthuis, and V. Tohar, JCP 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 6–20. D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 52, suggests on the basis of Luke 13:32 that Jesus too was acquainted with fox fables. See also M. Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 76–77 for a sophisticated analysis of animals in the Mishnah reflecting and constructing social hierarchies, that has clear implications for the study of fables, especially rabbinic.

[22] The rhetorical question does not appear in the shorter and poetically less developed parallel version in Midrash Qoheleth Zuta, Hirshman, *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah*, 324.

[23] A. Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. A. Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), 129–141.

[24] C. Westermann, *The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament*, ed. and trans. F. W. Golka and A. H. B. Logan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 154, quotes R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 203–210. About fifteen years ago I revised three dominant Nordic theories of folk narrative research, among them Olrik's rules. Regarding Olrik's "laws," I demonstrated that they were not super-organic stylistic rules as they were introduced by Alan Dundes in his headnote to Olrik's essay, but rather basic rules of effective communication in oral interactions, that as said earlier, are amply encoded in rabbinic and New Testament parables. G. Hasan-Rokem, "Aurora Borealis: Trans-Formations of Classical Nordic Folklore Theories," in *Norden og Europa: Fagtradisjoner i nordisk etnologi og folkloristikk*, ed. B. Rogan and B. G. Alver (Oslo: Novus, 2000), 269–285; Spanish translation: "Aurora boreal: Transformaciones de las teorías clásicas del folklore nórdico," *RIF* 17 (2002): 33–46.

D. Texts and Performances

All folk narrative research is informed by oral narrative performance. Inspired by the foregrounding of performance by the contextual turn in folklore studies in the second half of the twentieth century,[25] and the semiotic study of poetics formulated by Roman Jakobson,[26] my research of ancient texts, involves an identification of the semiotic markers of performance in the text.[27] Thus, applying Olrik's scheme, the opening and closure create a poetic frame for the narrative event and separate it from the flow of speech, or writing.[28] The conflict and the contrast make the one-person-show of the narrator more effective, by enabling the ability to impersonate clear-cut figures, the giant and the boy, the young and the old, women and men. The rhetorical question, as above, is a means to engage the audience in, at least formally, participating in the narrative event. All these textual elements introduce markers of oral narration into the text, and invite us to retrieve it from written contexts.

Eric Ottenheijm has rightly posed the study of parable performance as a desideratum for a deeper understanding of the genre.[29] In rabbinic literature the three genres mentioned above – proverb, fable and parable – regularly connect social, cultural and personal situations to biblical verses and thus to scriptural exegesis.[30] This is how these genres embody the vision of the text of the Hebrew Bible, Tanakh, as an eternally applicable text, and construct and propagate what the rabbis conceptualized as the enduring relevance of the biblical text.

With this in mind let us return to the ending of the rabbinic fable to learn what happened to the fox:

> When it had left it turned its face around and looked at it [the vineyard] and said: vineyard, vineyard, how good you are and how good are these fruits inside you, all that

[25] D. Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," *JAF* 84 (1971): 3–15; R. Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1977), 3–58; Bauman, "Performance," mentioned above in note 2; B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "A Parable in Context: A Social and Interactional Analysis of Storytelling Performance," in *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, ed. D. Ben-Amos and K. S. Goldstein (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973), 105–130, for focused formulations of this school.

[26] R. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language,* ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 350–377.

[27] G. Hasan-Rokem, "Narrating Bodies and Carnal Knowledge," *JQR* 95 (2005): 501–507. For similar questions in the study of modern Hebrew literature, see S. Werses, "Folk Narrative Processes in the Work of Agnon," *JSJF* 1 (1981): 101–126.

[28] R. Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events," *JAF* 82 (1969): 313–328, explicates the formal and functional traits of narrative events as oral communication in a group.

[29] E. Ottenheijm, "Waiting for the Harvest: Trajectories of Rabbinic and 'Christian' Parables," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception,* ed. A. Houtman, T. Kadari, M. Poorthuis, and V. Tohar, JCP 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 314–334.

[30] Young, *The Parables*, 23. I however find it hard to agree to his proposal on page 14, that parables convey a single message.

is in you is good and laudable, but what pleasure is there from you, as a **human being** enters you he leaves, this is like this world. (Qoh. Rab. 5:14)[31]

Here, the fluidity between the genres of fable and parable becomes evident in the smooth move from the animal world to the world of humans within the narrative framework itself. A parable emerges from the fable, and the fox turns into a melancholy human, indeed the subject of the text of biblical Ecclesiastes,[32] caught in the reflexive moment of looking back on the process, and drawing a philosophical lesson from the narrative plot. The moral enters the narrative framework instead of staying separate as in the Aesopic corpus. Attention is drawn to the performance by mentioning a narrator, Geniva, elsewhere in rabbinic literature identified as a producer of both legal and narrative materials, and even of another parable.[33]

E. Cultural Variation and Adaptation: Ecotypes

The parable of the fox and the vineyard opens up for yet another perspective of folk narrative research. In his environmentally focused and function oriented scholarship on Swedish folk traditions, Carl Wilhelm von Sydow developed the concept of the ecotype, later developed by, among others, Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko.[34] The ecotype is a locally, culturally and ethnically adapted form of an international tale type. Von Sydow emphasized the adaptation to the natural environment of each locality; Honko added an emphasis on the adaptation to genres, dominant cultural heroes and the character of each tradition. I have, discussing their work, suggested that ecotypes fill a function in expressing ethnic identities, especially of minorities and marginalized groups.[35] The ecotypical Hebrew-Aramaic Jewish version of the tale type of the overeating wolf, stages a fox in front of a vineyard, who turns into a rabbi interpreting the Bible after a sobering experience of gluttony.

As Paul Ricoeur has taught in his essay "Listening to the Parables of Jesus," it is the very improbability of the parables that are their message, and they allow

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[31] Hirshman, *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah*, 326.

[32] Thanks to Tamar Kadari for this insight.

[33] A parable in Ber./Gen. Rab. 10:9; halakhic matters e. g. y. Ber. 3:5, 6d; b. Ber. 25a, 27a; b. Hul. 44a, 50b; narratives e. g. b. Ber. 27a; b. Git. 65b.

[34] C. W. von Sydow, "Geography and Folk-Tale Oicotypes," in *Selected Papers on Folklore* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1948), 44–59; L. Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," *SF* 26 (1981): 19–33.

[35] G. Hasan-Rokem, "Ökotyp," in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. R. W. Brednich, 15 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 10:258–263; eadem, "Ecotypes: Theory of the Lived and Narrated Experience," *NC* 3 (2016): 110–137. Cf. D. Hopkin, "The Ecotype or a Modest Proposal to Reconnect Cultural and Social History," in *Exploring Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke,* ed. M. Calaresu, F. de Vivo, and J. P. Rubiés (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 31–54.

no translation into conceptual language.[36] They relate to things that like human birth and death, or the kingdom of heaven, cannot be referentially described, and the only way to talk about them, as about God, is to compare them to something else. That something else constitutes the plots and the dramatis personae of the parables. Ricoeur also draws our attention to the aspect of a concrete performance. After Jesus has spoken in a synagogue in chapter 12 of Matthew, in chapter 13, he explicates the poetics of the parables of the kingdom of heaven with special reference to the kind of listening audience, that is: they are clear to the disciples but hidden for everybody else, in a way that is inherent for the parable, and marks its connection to the riddle genre. The following description demonstrates a concrete performance setting:

> The same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the seaside. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a boat and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore. (Matt 13:1–2 KJ21)

After the setting of the stage follows the parable performance:

> And He spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside; and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (Matt 13:3–8 KJ21)

The narrator, Jesus, also commands theoretical knowledge about the audience's reception of the parable:

> "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." And the disciples came and said unto Him, "Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. (Matt 13:9–11 KJ21)

Jesus addresses his parables to an audience standing on dry, fast land while he is sitting in a boat on the wavy sea delivering the parables whose meanings swing between hidden and revealed, hidden to the multitudes, revealed to the disciples. A later Galilean performance appears in a text from the fifth century midrashic compilation on Genesis, Bereshit Rabbah, where a fable is framed by the political and historical context of events that elicited it, and the concrete scene of performance. The parable is in the text linked to the following Bible verse: "that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace ..." (Gen 26:29

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[36] P. Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. C. Reagan and D. Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 239–245.

NRSV). This is said by the men of Abimelech proposing a bond with Isaac after their quarrel about the wells of Abraham. In the Genesis Rabbah text, the verse is followed by the historical background:

> In the days of Joshua ben Hananiah the [Roman] ruler ordered the temple to be built. Pappos and Lulianos set up tables from Akko to Antokhia (Antioch) and they catered for the needs of the pilgrims from the diaspora.
> [Aramaic] The Samaritans (Kuthim) went and told him "The king should know that if this crushed city is built and its walls fortified they will pay neither tribute, poll-tax nor land-tax" (ref. Ezra 4:13).
> He said: "What shall I do, I have already issued the order?" They said to him: "Send a message to them that they either change the location [of the temple] or add or remove five ells and that will cause them to revoke on their own."
> The [Jewish] communities were gathered in the valley of Beit Rimon. When [the ruler's] edict arrived they began to weep. They aspired to rebel against the ruling power [Rome]. They [the sages, the rabbis] said: "Let a wise man rise [in the natural amphitheater of the gorge] and calm down the congregation." They said: "Let Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah rise, he is a scholar of the Torah [*askolastika de-orayta*]." He entered and performed a homily: [Hebrew] "A lion devoured prey [and] a bone got stuck in its [his] throat. [Aramaic] It [he] said: To anyone who will come and remove it I shall pay a reward. An Egyptian heron with a long beak came and put his beak in [the mouth of the lion]. Said [the heron to the lion]: give me my reward. Said [the lion to the heron]: Go and boast and say 'I entered the mouth of the lion in peace and came out in peace.'" So too, it is enough for us that we entered into this nation in peace and came out in peace." (Gen. Rab. 64:29)[37]

There are diverse views about the exact historical context reflected in this text. It helps to know that Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah lived ca. 90–130 CE. We may also assume that the scene described in it may not have taken place in exactly this form or at all. On the other hand, the dramatic contextualization and the parable show the *imagined* political and spiritual power channeled here into the form of a fable, whereas, as far as we know, that rebellion did not break out. The text, like the text quoted above from Matthew, also reflects the awareness, that "performance must be viewed as a joint achievement of performer and audience" as proposed by folklorist and linguistic anthropologist Richard Bauman.[38]

The combination of the *orayta*, the Aramaic term for the Torah, and the term *askolastika* reveals how the association that may be easy to assume between Greek culture and the genre of the fable, also permeates the terminology of the biblical knowledge of the rabbis. It would thus be misleading to limit the present exposition of the parables of the rabbis to classically Aesopic, animal fables, as the examples from Ecclesiastes Rabbah and Genesis Rabbah may imply. Their presence in the corpus indeed indicates that the rabbis were part of the com-

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[37] J. Theodor and C. Albeck, eds., *Bereschit Rabba: Mit kritischen Apparat und Kommentar*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965), 2:710–712. Author's translation.
[38] Bauman, "Performance," 101; Bauman, "Verbal Art," 11.

plex late antique literary world, sharing oral and written repertoires of fables, parables, proverbs, legends, political humor and a mythological imaginary, with other people and languages in the region.

F. Royal Parables

But more than the animal fable, the rabbis favored a subgenre of parables, namely kings' parables or royal parables.[39] This subgenre is related to the parables of the kingdom of heaven told by Jesus, whose relationship to the rabbinic parables David Flusser established following and debating with earlier scholars.[40] Jesus and the rabbis share the symbolical image of a kingdom as an elevated state following the model of sacred kingship in the Hebrew Bible.[41] The sobering experiences under the rule of so many unholy royalties from the Seleucids to the Roman empire notwithstanding, it retains its glory and ideal character, referring to the divine in these parables.

David Stern has proposed a normative form of the *mashal*, demonstrated by the following text from the rabbinic elaboration on the Book of Lamentations, the sixth century Lamentations/Eikhah Rabbah:[42]

> It is written, "A song of Asaph. O God, heathens have entered Your domain" (Ps 79:1). A song?! It should have said, "A weeping"!
> Rabbi Eleazar said: It is like a king who made a bridal-chamber for his son. He cemented, plastered, and decorated it. One time his son angered him, and the king destroyed the bridal-chamber. The pedagogue sat down and began to sing. [People] said to him: The king has destroyed his son's bridal-chamber, and you sit and sing?! He said to them: For this reason, I sing: For I said: Better that he poured out his anger upon his son's bridal-chamber, and not upon his son.
> Similarly, people said to Asaph: The Holy One, blessed be He, has destroyed His temple, and you sit and sing? He said to them: For this reason, I sing: For I said: Better that the Holy One, blessed be He, pour out his anger upon wood, stones, and dirt and not upon Israel. That is what is written, "And He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured the foundations thereof" (Lam 4:11 KJV). (Lam. Rab. 4:11)

This regulative form suggested by Stern is divided into clearly delineated two parts: the fictional narrative about the king *and* the application to God and Israel. This particular parable recapitulates the apologetic theodicy on the destruction of Jewish Jerusalem and the second Temple. Most other genres in the

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[39] I. Ziegler, *Die Königsgleichnisse des Midrasch beleuchtet durch die römische Kaiserzeit* (Breslau: Schottlaender, 1903).

[40] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse,* see above note 21.

[41] Sacred kingship in the Bible has been widely studied, see e. g. M. Z. Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1989; repr. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009).

[42] Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 8.

same midrashic compilation on the book of Lamentations, address the physical, political and spiritual distress caused by the violent Roman occupation. By emphasizing the resulting human suffering, the texts often defy theodicy and point out the disproportion between the claimed sin and the punishment. Thus this parable and some others, both counterpoint and subvert the many other narrative and folk literary genres in this work. Some parables express more subversive views, as in the following example from the opening section of Lamentations Rabbah, that Paul Mandel has shown to be of later provenance than the main body of the work:[43]

> Rabbi Shimon ben Laqish said: Like a king who had two sons, he was angry at the first one, took a stick and thrashed him so that he writhed in agony and died, and he began to mourn for him. He became angry at the second, and he took the stick and thrashed him so that he writhed in agony and died. He said: No longer have I the strength to lament over them, so "Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come" (Jer 9:16a). Similarly, when the ten tribes were exiled, He began to lament over them: "Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel." (Amos 5:1); when Judah and Benjamin were exiled the Holy One, blessed be He, said, if I dare say so, "No longer have I the strength to lament over them, saying: 'Thus says the Lord of hosts "Consider and call for the mourning women etc."'" (Lam. Rab. proem 2b)[44]

The parable ironically criticizes the king, who is unmistakably interpreted as God acting through Israelite and Jewish history.[45] Other texts employ the voices of women or a feminine perspective to criticize the divine power that is conceptualized as a male God.[46] This open strategy of resistance, albeit using the double speech of the parable, is blatantly different from the hidden transcript of subversion that Joshua Levinson, adopting James Scott's concept, pointed out in another parable in the rabbinic Genesis elaboration Bereshit Rabbah, commenting on God's role in Cain's murder of Abel:[47]

> Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai said: This [thing, verse] is hard to interpret and the mouth cannot utter it: Like two athletes who were standing and wrestling before the king. Would the king have wanted he could have separated between them, [but] he did not

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[43] P. D. Mandel, "Between Byzantium and Islam: The Transmission of a Jewish Book in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Period," in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. Y. Elman and I. Gershoni (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 74–106, suggests a cautious dating of Lamentations Rabbah in the Byzantine and early Islamic period (ca. 600–800 CE) and of the preamble of the *petiḥtaot* somewhat later, possibly the ninth century.

[44] S. Buber, ed., *Midrash Eikhah Rabbah* (Vilna: The Widow and Brothers Romm, 1899), 4.

[45] G. Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 111–112.

[46] E. g. Lam. Rab. 1:2, 21; 3:1, 20.

[47] J. Levinson, "*Atlet ha-emunah: 'Alilot damim ve-'alilot medummot* [The Athlete of Faith: Blood Plots and Imaginary Plots]," *Tarbitz* 68 (1999): 61–86 (Hebrew) refers to J. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

separate between them, and one bested the other and killed him, and he was calling out, I want my justice before the king, I want my justice in front of the king. So also "[And He said, 'What have you done?] The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.'" (Gen 4:10). (Gen. Rab. 22:9–10)[48]

Unlike the direct reproach of the later Rabbi Shimon ben Laqish in the explanatory part of the parable on the murderous father, the earlier Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, generally known for his activist anti-Roman politics, veils his criticism against God by both taking up a mythical narrative from the past, Cain and Abel, and articulating the criticism in a parable, proposing it as a mode of expressing the inexpressible.[49]

G. Parables of Neighbors and Tenants

In a very different spirit, another series of parables conveys the message about God's election and special providence for Israel and the special ability of the Jews to appease God. Here are some from the late fifth century rabbinic compilation on Leviticus, Leviticus/Vayiqra Rabbah:

> Said Rabbi Aha: There is a woman who knows how to ask/borrow and there is a woman who does not know how to ask. The woman who knows how to ask approaches her neighbor, and knocks on the gate even if it is open, says to her: Peace on you my neighbor, how fare you, how fares your husband, how fare your children? Should I enter or shouldn't I? If you have a certain tool, would you lend it to me? And the answer is: Yes. The woman who does not know how to ask approaches her neighbor; even if the gate is latched she opens it and says: If you have a certain tool, would you lend it to me? And the answer is: No. (Lev. Rab. 5:8)[50]

The woman who knows how to ask stands for Israel, the other one for everyone else. This parable recalls an ecotypically adapted tale-type, current in oral traditions of various Jewish ethnic groups, which runs as follows: A poor woman meets on Passover eve the traditional itinerant anonymous miracle maker, the prophet Elijah. Answering his question, she praises her situation while her house is literally empty, and is rewarded with a house full of food. Having heard this, her affluent neighbor complains about her situation, only to return home to find it empty.[51]

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[48] Theodor and Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba*, 216.

[49] D. Weiss, *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 74–79, 116–119, demonstrates how rabbinic parables are used to criticize God.

[50] M. Margulies, ed., *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah: A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts and Genizah Fragments with Variants and Notes*, 5 vols., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1972), 123–124.

[51] G. Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 48–50 and 159 (note 40).

Another parable in the same sequence clarifies the message by repeating the structure:

> Rabbi Hunya said: There is a tenant who knows how to ask and there is one who does not know. The one who knows how to ask combs his hair, cleans his clothes, bears a nice countenance. When he goes to his master he asks: how fares the land, and he answers: May you be lucky and enjoy its fruits. How fare the oxen, and he answers: May you be lucky and enjoy their fat. How fare the goats, and he answers: May you be lucky and enjoy their kids. What do you want? If you have ten dinars could you lend them to me? He says: If you want twenty, take them.
> The one who does not know how to ask, his hair is tousled, his clothes soiled, he bears a bad countenance. He went to his landlord to ask him and he said: How is the land faring, he answered: May it yield what we threw in it. How do the oxen fare, he said: Weary. How do the goats fare, he said: Weary. He asked, what do you want. He said: If you have ten dinars could you give them to me. Said he: Go and get me my property that you keep. (Lev. Rab. 5:8)[52]

Rabbi Hunya adds the *nimshal*, the *explanans* of the *mashal*: "David was one of the good tenants." The rabbinic parable on tenants is rounded up with verses from the book of Psalms, from Pss 19:2, 13–14; 25:11, casting the Psalmist, King David, as the good tenant of the parable, as representative for all Israel. The hearer or reader is reminded of Jesus's parable of the evil tenants extant in the three synoptic gospels.[53] The ecotypical addition of the good tenant in the Jewish parable may be a defensive corrective for the New Testament parable that may be and has been read as casting the Jews as the evil tenant:[54]

> "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone

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[52] Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 124–125.

[53] Mark 12:1–11; Matt 21:28–43; Luke 20:9–18; see also Matt 20:1–16; 25:14–29 and parallels.

[54] Although there is no reference to "Jews" in any of the versions of the parable of the "Wicked Tenants," but rather to the Temple hierarchy, the exegetically problematic Matt 21:43, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people [ἔθνει, in other translations: nation] that produces the fruits of the kingdom," could be and has been in Christian tradition read as referring to the Jews. This verse may thus have acted as a narrative foil for the reaction of the King in the Leviticus Rabbah parable. Thanks to Eric Ottenheijm for an illuminating discussion.

that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. (Matt 21:33–45)

As in Jesus's parable quoted above from Matt 13, this one is also framed by a performative context, including an exact reference to the audience reception of the priests and the Pharisees. Due to the personal attribution of Jesus's parables to one narrator and their function in both the narrator's biography and in the redemption history encoded in it, they are more often embedded in a detailed performance than rabbinic parables whose context is not only, however primarily, exegetical. The reference of the Leviticus Rabbah parallel suggests a reinforcement of the perception of the continuity of the Jewish parable tradition. Jesus interprets his parable on tenants with a Hebrew Bible quote: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes" (Ps 118:22–23 NRSV) thus an intertextual link with the Psalms quoted in the midrashic text above is evident, also revealing a textual mode that Daniel Boyarin has suggested as the very basis of rabbinic creativity.[55] This textual practice became standard not only in the rabbis' parables, but in most of their narratives and legal rulings. Significantly, Jewish prayers, the verbal appeasing of God, especially the most ancient ones, are replete with verses from the Psalms, attributed to David.[56]

H. Parables of Pro-Creation

The parable genre encodes performative exchanges between a narrator and a listener or an audience. It also illuminates wider perspectives of late antique interreligious dialogues. In midrashic style, I shall conclude with a positive and hopeful theme that also echoes discursive exchanges between early Christians and early rabbis, namely birth.

Various genres in chapter 14 of Leviticus Rabbah elaborate on conception, gestation, pregnancy and birth as a human-divine co-production, including two series of parables, from which I shall introduce a few.

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[55] D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[56] O. Münz-Manor and T. Arentzen, "Soundscapes of Salvation: Resounding Refrains in Jewish and Christian Liturgical Poems," *SLA* 3 (2019): 36–55, refer to this topic on p. 40 as follows: "the development of the liturgical use of the psalter remains understudied, especially in Jewish liturgy," see also note 15 there.

Rabbi Levi said: The way of the world is that if a human secretly deposits an ounce of silver with someone and he publicly returns to him a pound of gold, does he not feel grateful? Thus the human creatures secretly[57] deposit with the Holy One Blessed be He a drop of white,[58] and the Holy One Blessed be He returns to them publicly complete and praiseworthy souls. Is that not praise? That is: I will justify my Maker – my Maker I shall justify (Job 36:3). (Lev. Rab. 14:2)[59]

The first of Rabbi Levi's three parables, of which not all can be discussed here, turns the act of procreation into a pecuniary relationship between males, eliminating the presence of women at this stage of the process. The white seed transforms into a full person, an accomplished soul. The chiastic arrangement of the Job verse in the refrain "Is that not praise? I will justify my Maker – my Maker I shall justify" marks the text as the first in a set of hymns praising God for His active participation in the act of conception.

A tense dialogue with the Virgin birth narrative of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, and in later early Christian texts, is encoded in the description of the impregnation occurring "secretly"[60] in the first parable of Rabbi Levi. The general line of argument of the chapter is that the virgin birth of Jesus may indeed be a miracle, but so is every human birth and God is actively involved in it.

Rabbi Levi's three parables are followed by three of Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, further reinforcing the image of human pregnancy and birth as a miracle, with another verse from Job as its refrain: "You bestowed on me life and grace,[61] Your providence watched over my spirit." (Job 10:12). Whereas Rabbi Levi's parables

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[57] The explanation of Jesus to his disciples about using parables as hidden language in Matt 13, proceeds with a number of parables about hiding seeds that will grow, and further on with the parable of the Baking Woman in Matt 13:33, the Vulgate rendering "aliam parabolam locutus est eis simile est regnum caelorum fermento quod acceptum mulier **abscondit** in farinae satis tribus donec fermentatum est totum" using the term *absconditus*, Jerome's term for the description of the conception of the Virgin, following from the Greek "*egkrypto*." Cf. A. Kamesar, "The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14: The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century," *JTS* 41 (1990): 51–75.

[58] The textual variants for this expression complicate the translation although the whiteness of semen seems to be the dominant motive.

[59] Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 301–302. Rabbi Levi's first parable has an interesting parallel in Ber./Gen. Rab. 17:7, in the context of the creation of Eve, staged as a dialogue between Rabbi Yosi and a "matrona." While this parallel occurrence reinforces the links between the two texts, as was the case in the parallels between Lev. Rab. 14:1 and Gen. Rab. 8:1, as discussed in our earlier article on this chapter, G. Hasan-Rokem and I. J. Yuval, "Myth, History and Eschatology in a Rabbinic Treatise on Birth," in *Talmudic Transgressions: Engaging the Work of Daniel Boyarin*, ed. C. E. Fonrobert, I. Rosen-Zvi, A. Shemesh, and M. Vidas, JSJSup 181 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 243–273; in this case the Genesis Rabbah version is both less poetically developed and lacks the same contextual adequacy as the Leviticus Rabbah version discussed here.

[60] The version in Gen. Rab. 17:7 has *be-matmoniyot*. Cf. J. Chrysostom's invective *Adv. Jud.* 1.6.2.

[61] The substitution of the JPS Bible translators' choice "care" (KJV: "favour") for *ḥesed* with "grace," is based on the LXX for *ḥayim ve-ḥesed*: ζωήν δέ καὶ ἔλεος, although most English translations have "favor," following the King James Version.

focused more or less on the perspective of the fetus, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana's mostly address the perspective of the mother:

> "You bestowed on me life and grace, Your providence watched over my spirit" (Job 10:12). Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said three [parables]: Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: The way of the world is that if a man takes a pouch with coins and turns it upside down, do not the coins spread around? Hence, when the unborn dwells in its mother's insides and the Holy One Blessed be He keeps it so that it will not fall and die, is it not life and grace? (Lev. Rab. 14:3)[62]

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana's parables open with the same formula as Rabbi Levi's that relates the parables' image to the "way of the world," familiarizing it to everybody. The images here are even more concrete and quotidian, and more striking. Like the first parable in Rabbi Levi's triad, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana's first parable also speaks figuratively on money, maybe characterizing progeny as concrete and symbolical capital. The language of miracle becomes even stronger than in the earlier series, reporting the observation of the law of gravity transcended in each successfully terminated pregnancy. The purse turned upside down also reminds us of older gynecological beliefs, such as "the woman's uterus is likened to an upside-down jar," found, as Froma Zeitlin has suggested "throughout the Hippocratic corpus and the works of the later, more sophisticated anatomists."[63] The miraculous approach to surviving pregnancies sounds reasonable in ancient societies where miscarriages, stillbirths and death in infancy were frequent.

The concreteness of imagery and the connection of pregnancy with material goods are intensified in the next parable:

> Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said another [thing]. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: The way of the world is that the beast walks around reclining, and the unborn lies in its womb like in a covered cart.[64] And the woman walks around upright and the baby lies in her womb and the Holy One Blessed be He watches over it so that it does not fall and die, is that not life and grace? (Lev. Rab. 14:3)[65]

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana's second parable intensifies the sense of miracle by singling out the exceptional vertical nature of human pregnancy that defies gravity and by comparing it to the horizontal pregnancy of domesticated beasts.

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[62] Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 303–304.

[63] F. I. Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 65; C. E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 61; J. Levinson, "Cultural Androgyny in Rabbinic Literature," in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized and Jewish Lore and Early Christian Literature*, ed. S. Kottek and M. Horstmanshoff (Rotterdam: Erasmus Publishing, 2000), 124 (note 30).

[64] The translation is based on Margulies's derivation of the original as having a Greek loan word *skopesti*, related to the word σκέπας associated with cover, shelter, protection; cf. Liddell and Scott, "σκέπας," *LSJ* 1:1606.

[65] Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 303–304.

From here on the fluid boundaries of the parable genre become evident because from the second parable on, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana uses his and others' experience and observations regarding pregnancy and birth-giving *without* a comparative fictional figure. Thus the speculative mode expressed in parables is replaced by the mode of pragmatic human observation and experience. The expression "life and grace" interconnects the parables and the real life accounts, human lives and divine grace.

The concluding refrain of Rabbi Abba bar Kahana's three parables, "life and grace," the Hebrew *ḥayim va-ḥesed* is by the Septuagint on Job 10:12 articulated: ζωήν δέ καὶ ἔλεος (Gr. *zoèn de kai eleos*). This formulaic element may reveal one more inter-textual link to Christian tradition. The term ἔλεος (*eleos*) appears three times in one chapter in Luke glorifying pregnancy – in Mary's thanksgiving praise to God after the unborn leaped in the womb of Elizabeth upon Mary's greeting her – in the so-called "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46–55). This reference to the formula in the parables supports the idea conveyed by the chapter that each human birth is a miracle, toning down the uniqueness of the Virgin Birth.

Marc Hirshman has noted that when compared with the rabbinic text of Leviticus Rabbah, narrative genres such as parables are relatively scarce in Origen's allegorical interpretation in his homilies on Leviticus, that covers the same Pentateuchal materials as Leviticus Rabbah and reveals reference to similar topics, in this case pregnancy and virgin birth.[66] The narrators/authors/editors of Leviticus Rabbah were aware of the allegorical mode of interpretation, but they systematically avoided that mode in the chapter that appears to address and negotiate the idea of the virgin birth. Instead, they enlisted a genre of which they were masters, the parable, and demonstrated its rhetorical power to link everyday life and human experience to theological questions, well known from the discursive practices of Jesus in the New Testament. According to James Kugel, midrash in general and its favorite genre of parable (*mashal*) does not contrast allegory per se;[67] it opens allegorical modes of expression to negotiations with

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[66] Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus,* trans. G. W. Barkley (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990); *Homélies sur le Lévitique: Texte Latin, traduction, notes et index*, trans. M. Borret, 2 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 1981), especially the eighth homily. We have elaborated on this connection in G. Hasan-Rokem and I. J. Yuval, "Rabbinic Reflections on Divine-Human Interactions: Speaking in Parables on the Miracle of Pregnancy and Birth," in *Tolerance, Intolerance, and Recognition in Early Christianity and Early Judaism*, ed. O. Lehtipuu and M. Labahn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 195–226; inspired especially by M. Hirshman, "Origen and the Rabbis on Leviticus," *Adamantus* 11 (2005): 93–100. See also R. L. Wilken, "Origen's Homilies on Leviticus and Vayikra Rabbah," in *Origeniana Sexta*: *Origene et la Bible/Origen and the Bible: Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum, Chantilly, 30 aout–3 septembre 1993*, ed. G. Dorival and A. le Boulluec, BETL 118 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 81–91.

[67] J. Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. H. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 77–105.

other texts,[68] and as shown in the discussion above, often to texts of everyday life, and of physical, emotional and spiritual experiences.

I. Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to demonstrate analyses of rabbinic parables guided by major theoretical precepts and methods of folk narrative studies, with the purpose of drawing attention to levels of meaning and function of the genre less attended to in traditional parable scholarship. Suggesting that folk narrative study may contribute to a deeper and more diversified understanding of parables, I have also been aware of the fact that this direction has been wished for by some scholars in the field. As has been shown above, a folk narrative approach focuses on the performances encoded in the text and thus enables us to connect the texts to behavioral, historical, inter-religious and ethnographical contexts. Thus they also turn the parables to a pertinent source of information for socio-cultural history. From a literary point of view, the above analyses have highlighted the fluid boundaries between the genres of fable, parable and proverb, and between them and the exegetical and homiletical co-texts in which they are embedded. Thus the folk narrative approach also draws attention to ideological and theological perspectives of the parable texts.

Parables illuminate an imaginary doubling of the world, projecting a parallel existence where possibilities absent in the empirically experienced reality become possible. They open up dialogues and they encode dialogues of the past in ancient texts. They immortalize fleeting performances and illustrate the multivocal in seemingly unified discourses. Parables are a procreative discursive act, they produce two verbal sequences out of one idea, of one event. Their double structure synchronizes two parallel linear narratives and thus create a timeless moment or rather a moment saturated with what Ricoeur has called surplus meaning.[69] They become a meta-hermeneutic figure, their two levels are mutually interpretive, and they again interpret texts, history and life.

Parables enrich the ancient texts of the rabbis by widening their expressive scope. Their repetitive and doubling structure creates an aesthetic pleasure comparable with the pleasure of repetition in rhyme, in musical composition, in ornamental friezes. However, the slight or sometimes significant gap of signification[70] that emerges between the two narrative levels, leaves room for unaccounted for spheres of experience, cognition and emotion; enables a move-

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[68] Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 80–129; Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, esp. 152–184.

[69] P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

[70] Stern, *Parables in Midrash,* 15; Y. Fraenkel, *Darkhei ha-aggada vehamidrash* [The Ways of Aggadah and Midrash] (Givatayim: Yad latalmud, 1991), 335–337 (Hebrew). Cf. J. D. Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (New York: The Seabury Press,

ment towards the unattainable. This is how they serve discourses that link everyday life with the transcendent, with the divine. And maybe, just maybe, when the rabbis spoke about God they spoke in parables and really meant humans.

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Folktale Images in the Midrashic Context

Fable Motifs in Leviticus Rabbah 4

Lorena Miralles Maciá

This article examines the motifs related – clearly or potentially – to the fable realm that appear in the fourth chapter of Leviticus Rabbah (henceforth Lev. Rab.), a Midrash on Leviticus whose final version dates back to fifth-century Palestine.[1] It does not focus on folklore in a broad sense, but only on those "images" that might have come from the fable tradition, understanding "fable" as one of the categories of "folktale" genres in rabbinic literature.[2] The aim of this study is to identify the fable motifs as well as the literary devices the rabbis used in the midrashic exposition in Lev. Rab. 4, explaining the relationship between these motifs and the context.

One of the main difficulties when studying fables in rabbinic literature is how to identify these narratives and their motifs in the texts, in which a variety of materials are interwoven in an exegetical exposition or a legal discourse. The rabbinic literature as it has come down to us is a product of intellectual elites. In a

[1] See e.g. B. L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah*, TSAJ 94 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1–9; G. Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 9th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2011), 322–323. For over a century many scholars accepted the definition of this work as a "homiletic midrash," but this is a question under debate; see e.g. G. Stemberger, "The Derashah in Rabbinic Times," in *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity*, ed. A. Deeg, W. Homolka, and H. G. Schöttler, SJ 41 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 7–21; B. L. Visotzky, "The Misnomers '*petihah*' and 'Homiletic Midrash' as Descriptions for Leviticus Rabbah and Pesikta De-Rav Kahana," *JSQ* 18 (2011): 19–22. In this article, I refrain from using the terms "homily" or "homiletic midrash," and prefer "chapter," "commentary" or "interpretation" as the case may be. In the same vein, *parashah* is used as a synonym for chapter according to the indications in the preserved manuscripts.

[2] E. Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. J. S. Teiltelbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 191–209, 503–505; E. Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature in Late Antiquity," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4, *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. S. T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 734–741.

rabbinic corpus, such as the Midrash and the Talmud, a complex question is how to define the boundaries between the literature produced by the rabbis to illustrate their legal positions and explain the Bible, and what scholars have called "folklore,"[3] that is to say, the limits between the creations themselves elaborated in the rabbinic circles and the external traditions used as part of the cultural – or rather cross-cultural – background of the rabbis in late antiquity. The matter is made even more complicated by the fact that folktales underwent a process of Judaization[4] when the rabbis reworked these short narratives or adapted their plots and figures (as well as realia) to a halakhic/aggadic framework. In the construction of the literary weave of the text, the margins between genres are blurred, those margins that scholarship attempts to demarcate by "erecting the fence."[5] In this article, the paradox of exploring fables – or fable features – in a commentary on the Bible, elaborated in the context of the rabbinic academy, is assumed in advance; likewise are the tensions between orality and literary creation.[6]

As one of the genres the rabbis took from folk literature, fable narratives were rooted in the rabbinic corpora with different literary forms. The artificial relationship between genre – associated with a certain subject matter – and form entails a still unresolved problem in general and especially in rabbinic literature. The most accepted definitions overall describe the fable as a short narrative/fictitious tale with a moral lesson, in which the characters are personified animals, plants, inanimate objects or human beings (and sometimes gods or heroes).[7]

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[3] About the use of the term by scholars of rabbinic Judaism, see D. Stein, "Let the 'People' Go? The 'Folk' and Their 'Lore' as Tropes in the Reconstruction of Rabbinic Culture," *Prooftexts* 29 (2009): 206–242. Stein observes that from certain perspectives "the designation of 'folklore'" has implied "an opposition to that which is 'not-folklore'" (208).

[4] From this perspective, D. Noy, "The Jewish Versions of the 'Animal Languages' Folktale (AT 670): A Typological-Structural Study," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, ScrHier 22 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1971), 172–176 considers two kinds of changes between the standard tale-type and the Jewish "oicotype": 1) "Minor ethnic and local substitutes" and 2) "Major deviations and re-workings of the narrative structures and plots." Noy uses C. W. von Sydow's terminology, see C. W. von Sydow, "Geography and Folktale-Oicotypes," in *Selected Papers on Folklore*, ed. L. Bodker (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1948), 44–59.

[5] Thus Galit Hasan-Rokem's title of the first chapter of her *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1–27. She concludes the chapter by observing: "The powerful creative thrust of the Rabbinic textual institution is marked by the fact that it seems to communicate not only what has traditionally been considered its inner discourse but also its dialogic counterparts and even its antithesis … it teaches us about the variety and mobility of ideas and literary creativity active at the heart of the dynamic process that we historically define as Rabbinic literature" (27).

[6] In Galit Hasan-Rokem's terms: "Oral transmission was a feature that folk literature shared with midrashic writings at the time of their composition. Nevertheless, in the written version available to us today, the distinctive oral features emerge as an antithesis to the written formulation" (G. Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*, trans. B. Stein [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000], 9).

[7] See e. g. the definitions found in three reference encyclopedias on the field of Jewish studies: G. Hasan-Rokem, "Fable," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum,

They focus on the genre, i. e. the features that constitute a fable (story, topics, characters, lesson-moral). But from a formal viewpoint, what kinds of narratives were used to convey a fable? Put another way, what are the literary forms in which fables – or fable motifs – were incorporated in rabbinic literature?

The most visually recognizable form of a fable is the mashal (parable), which usually has a formal application (nimshal) to the topic discussed in the commentary.[8] The term *mashal* encompasses different sorts of narratives and, therefore, scholars relate the fable genre to only a certain sort of mashal, i. e. a parable with the abovementioned features.[9] However, how are other literary forms in which fable motifs and plots intervene to be considered? Do not these narratives belong to the fable realm precisely because they are not adapted to the traditional scheme of the mashal-parable? From my perspective, delimiting the study of the fable to its relationship to the mashal is a very restrictive approach. These folktales and their motifs were often reworked – recreated by the rabbis in the written versions accessible to us – as a parable,[10] but also rephrased in a

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2nd ed., 22 vols (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 6:666; E. Yassif, "Fable. IV. Judaism," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. D. C. Allison et al., 30 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–), 8:651; and R. Patai and H. Bar-Itzhak, "Fable," in *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions* (Armonk: Sharpe, 2013), 155. For a more complete definition, see e. g. H. Schwarzbaum, *The* mishle shuʿalim *(Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), I. About the modern definitions of fable and the difficulties to define the genre, see F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, trans. L. A. Ray, ed. F. Rodríguez Adrados and G. J. van Dijk, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 24–42.

[8] David Stern points out that "only in Rabbinic literature does the word *mashal* become a formal generic title for parables and fables" (D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994], 9–10). About the relationship between parable and fable, see M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 473–498.

[9] See, among others, R. A. Steward, "The Parable Form in the Old Testament and the Rabbinic Literature," *EvQ* 36 (1964): 135–137; A. Goldberg, "Das Schriftauslegende Gleichnis im Midrasch," *FJB* 9 (1981): 1–90, re-edited in A. Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung: Gesammelte Studien*, ed. M. Schlüter and P. Schäfer, TSAJ 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 136–141; H. K. McArthur and R. M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables: Rabbinic Parables from the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 122–124; D. Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Studies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 39–40; D. Stern, "The Rabbinic Parable and the Narrative of Interpretation," in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. M. Fishbane (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 78. The problem with the definition of "parable" was recently discussed by L. M. Teugels, "Talking Animals in Parables: A *contradictio in terminis*?," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 129–148; for an overview of the previous studies on mashal, see L. M. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, TSAJ 176 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 20–64.

[10] As a "narrative *mashal*" made up of its structural characteristics enumerated by R. M. Johnston: illustrand, introductory formula, the parable proper, application, scriptural

more concise form,[11] or in a different way (e. g. as a simple reference, a nod to the receiver who shares the same cultural context and knows the story alluded to). Even some scholars – such as Eli Yassif, who considers "parables and fables" in the same category in his classification of folktales – examine fable motifs conveyed in narratives that exceed the boundaries of the parable in their studies of the fable genre in rabbinic literature.[12] Accordingly, my analysis of the fable images in Lev. Rab. 4 will focus not only on the parables with a potential fable origin, but also on the possible fable motifs that could influence the rabbinic creations, whatever their literary forms.

Traces of a folkloric origin (characters, situations, themes, popular expressions and language, among others) are a baseline for the analysis of certain rabbinic narratives,[13] and sometimes the traditional comparative methods are a fruitful approach to the texts. This is especially the case with fables, in which the cross-cultural interactions of the Jews with their surrounding environment played an important role. As shown by scholars from recent centuries, the comparison to other textual corpora from antiquity (such as Graeco-Roman, ancient Near East, Egyptian or Indian fables) usually becomes an important point of departure for the study of the fable.[14]

The narratives in Lev. Rab. 4 studied in this article are imbedded in the midrashic commentary on Lev 4:2: "If a *nefesh* [i. e. "person"/"soul"] sins …," the verse around which the chapter revolves (i. e. the lemma verse). Leviticus

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quotation; in R. M. Johnston, "The Study of Rabbinic Parables: Some Preliminary Observations," SBLSP 10 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 342.

[11] For instance, as an aphorism; see, among others, Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 194–196; Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature," 736–738; S. Friedman, "The Talmudic Proverb in Its Cultural Setting," *JSIJ* 2 (2003): 25–82 (Hebrew); L. Miralles Maciá, "The Fable of 'the Middle-Aged Man with Two Wives': From the Aesopian Motif to the Babylonian Talmud Version in B. B. Qam. 60b," *JSJ* 39 (2008): 267–281.

[12] Especially when the rabbinic narratives have parallels in other literatures such as, for instance, the Aesopian tradition. Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 191–209 and Yassif, "Jewish Folk Literature," 734–741.

[13] E. g. Galit Hasan-Rokem refers to "everyday life" as a "cultural category" in Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 11–12.

[14] See e. g. S. Back, "Die Fabel in Talmud und Midrasch," *MGWJ* 24 (1875): 540–555; 25 (1876): 126–138, 195–204, 267–275, 493–504; 29 (1880): 24–34, 68–78, 102–114, 144, 225–230, 267–274, 374–378, 417–421; 30 (1881): 124–130, 260–267, 406–412, 453–458; 33 (1884): 23–33, 34–55, 114–125, 255–267; J. Jacobs, "Aesop's Fables among the Jews," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. I. Singer, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/874-aesop-s-fables-among-the-jews; H. Schwarzbaum, "*Mishle esopos umishle hazal* [The Parables of Aesop and the Parables of the Sages]," *Maḥanayim* 112 (1967): 112–117 (Hebrew); H. Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities of Some Aesopic Fables," in *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature*, ed. H. A. Fischel (New York: Ktav, 1977), 425–442; H. Schwarzbaum, *Mishle shuʿalim*, i–lv; Friedman, "Talmudic Proverb," 73–82; Miralles Maciá, "The Fable of 'the Middle-Aged Man," 267–281. Yassif also makes use of comparative methods in his studies about the folktale: *Hebrew Folktale*, 191–209 and 503–505; "Jewish Folk Literature," 734–741.

Rabbah 4 presents four narratives whose background is, or could be, in the fable tradition: (1) the cooperation between a lame man and a blind man guarding a king's orchard; (2) the bodily members and the soul; (3) the sheep with a hurt limb; and (4) the man on a ship boring a hole beneath his place.[15] The four accounts, transmitted in the main section of the chapter (i. e. the *gufa*),[16] are related to the midrashic interpretation of the word *nefesh* in Lev 4:2 as a "person" (as in the biblical text) or a "soul" (like a large part of the midrashic readings of the verse in Lev. Rab. 4).[17] My investigation focuses on these four images from a comparative perspective and the figurative language in which they are expressed; the midrashic form will be examined as a literary device. My approach to the subject is not exclusive and does not pretend to exclude other – literary, anthropological, theological, among others – perspectives for studying the *parashah*, but rather to focus on one of the optic effects of the midrashic kaleidoscope, with a movement that may enrich the picture.

A. The Lame and Blind Guards

Paragraph 5 of Lev. Rab. 4 starts with the lemma verse of the chapter "Speak to the Israelites: If a *nefesh* sins …" (Lev 4:2), and raises the question "why *nefesh*?;" namely, why is the term *nefesh* used in this verse with the meaning of "soul" (i. e. instead of another word that alludes to a person, for example *adam*)? This is answered with the statement: "It caused harm over the *nefesh*-soul."[18]

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[15] For other fable motifs in Leviticus Rabbah, see e. g. B. L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells,* 37 and esp. 44–45; L. Miralles Maciá, "Motivos filo-esópicos en el Midrás: Fábulas y anécdotas de rabinos en Levítico Rabbá 22,4," *Sefarad* 69 (2009): 281–302.

[16] The chapters of Leviticus Rabbah are divided in two main sections: *petihah* – or rather *petihot* – ("proem/s") and *gufa* ("main section"). For the literary structure, see e. g. Stemberger, *Einleitung*, 268–272 (and the bibliography, 268–269); B. L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells*, 23–30; Visotzky, "Misnomers," 26–28.

[17] See L. Miralles Maciá, "'If a *nefesh* Sins …' (Lev 4:2): Parables on the Soul in Leviticus Rabbah 4," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 265–279. Mira Balberg explores the meaning of *nefesh* as "soul" and "gullet" in Lev. Rab. 3–4, relating the two chapters of Leviticus Rabbah, in M. Balberg, "The Animalistic Gullet and the Godlike Soul: Reframing Sacrifice in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah," *AJSR* 38 (2014): 221–247. According to her analysis, "The *nefesh*-gullet that consumes food is disparaged as animalistic in nature, whereas the *nefesh*-soul that offers sacrifices while giving up its own food is praised as godlike." (223).

[18] למה נפש, קיפח על הנפש (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 87). The English translations follow the Hebrew text of *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah: A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts and Genizah Fragments with Variants and Notes*, ed. M. Margulies, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture of Israel, 1953–1960; repr., New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993). The edition by Chaim Milikowsky and Margarete Schlüter will be also taken into account: C. Milikowsky and M. Schlüter, eds., *Wayyiqra Rabba: Synoptic Edition*, hosted by Bar-Ilan University, http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/midrash/VR/.

Subsequently, two meshalim-parables, with their applications to the context (nimshalim), shed light on the interpretation of *nefesh* as "soul," one of the two entities (together with the body) that constitute the human being according to the midrashic interpretation.[19]

The first mashal, the focus of my interest, is about the collaboration between two men with different disabilities, lameness and blindness, guarding a king's orchard. It is attributed to R. Ishmael (a tanna from the first-second century CE) and reads thus:

> [It is compared] to a king who had an orchard in which there were excellent early figs. He placed in it two guards, one lame and the other blind, to guard it. He told them: "Take care of the early figs." He left them and went on his way. The lame one said to the blind one: "I see some excellent early figs." [The blind one] said: "Come on, let's eat!" [The lame one] said: "Can I then walk?" [The blind one] said: "Can I then see?" What did they do? The lame one rode on the blind one, and they took the figs and ate them. [Then] they went and each sat in his place. Some days later the king came [and] asked them: "Where are my early figs?" The blind one said to him: "Can I then see?" The lame one said to him: "Can I then walk?" What did the king, who was clever, do? He made the lame one ride on the blind one and he judged them as a single one. He said to them: "This is how you did it and ate them."[20] (Lev. Rab. 4:5)

According to the nimshal, the lame guard and blind guard represent the soul and the body being judged in the time to come. They will blame each other before God for having sinned without assuming their responsibility. Hence, God "will restore the soul into the body and judge them as a single one."[21] In the context of Lev. Rab. 4:5, this narrative is related to a second mashal attributed to R. Hiyya (ca. 200 CE). It presents the story of a priest married to two women, the daughter of a priest and the daughter of an Israelite, who made impure the *terumah* dough

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[19] For the rabbinic terminology for and conceptions on the human being, see e. g. E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. I. Abrahams, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 214–254, 784–800; N. Rubin, "Body and Soul in Talmudic and Mishnaic Sources," *Koroth* 9 (1988): 151–164; N. Rubin, "The Sages' Conception of the Body and Soul," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, ed. S. Fishbane, J. N. Lightstone, and V. Levin (Montreal: Department of Religion Concordia University, 1990), 47–103; A. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87 (1994): 171–195, esp. 176–178; R. Kimelman, "The Rabbinic Theology of the Physical: Blessings, Body and Soul, Resurrection, and Covenant and Election," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4, *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. S. T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 946–976, esp. 952–959.

[20] למלך שהיה לו פרדס והיו בו ביכורות נאות הושיב בו שני שומרין, אחד חיגר ואחד סומא, לשמרו. אמ' להן היזהרו בביכורות. הניחן והלך לו, אמ' לו חיגר לסומא ביכורות נאות אני רואה. אמ' לו הבא ונאכל. אמ' לו וכי יכול אני להלך. אמ' לו סומא וכי רואה אני. מה עשו רכב חיגר על גבי סומא ונטלו את הביכורות ואכלום. הלכו וישבו להם זה במקומו וזה במקומו. לימים בא המלך אמ' להן היכן ביכורות. אמ' לו סומא וכי רואה אני. אמ' לו חיגר וכי יכול אני להלך. מלך שהיה פיקח מה עשה, הרכיב חיגר על גבי סומא ודן אותם כאחד. אמ' להם כך עשיתם ואכלתם. (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 88–90).

[21] מחזיר נשמה לגוף ודן אותן כאחד (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 89). The text uses *neshamah* as a synonym for *nefesh*.

(i. e. the dough that has the status of heave offering and has to be kept pure according to purity standards). The husband argues with the daughter of the priest (i. e. the soul in the nimshal), because she is "trained according to" her "father's house," while the other (i. e. the body) is "an Israelite's daughter and not trained according to her father's house."[22] Both counterparts in the meshalim (lame/blind guards and daughter of a priest/an Israelite) denote the soul and the body interacting. The first parable appears in other talmudic and midrashic texts (as seen below), but Lev. Rab. 4 is the only source that combines the two stories. This raises the question about the responsibility for a sin; i. e. whether soul and body have equal responsibility and, therefore, would be judged as a unit, as inferred from the first mashal, or if the soul has more responsibility in keeping with its predominant position, as shown by the second mashal (according to its nimshal, the soul is "from the upper ones," where there is no sin). In the Leviticus Rabbah context, the parable of the Priest with Two Wives shapes and redefines the ideas transmitted in the mashal of the Lame Guard and the Blind Guard. Beyond the explanation about the link between the two stories, which is not the focus of this article,[23] these "co-texts"[24] illustrate the term *nefesh* in the interpretation of the lemma verse of the chapter (Lev 4:2).

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[22] Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 90–91. In my opinion, this mashal would require an analysis from the perspective of folklore studies. The parable, which is mentioned here only in passing, shows features of everyday life where women are "central figures," such as the stories that focus on the interaction between women, the relationship between husband and wife (in this case wives) and legal issues related to the preparation of dough (here the *terumah*); see G. Hasan-Rokem, "Folk Narratives in Rabbinic Literature," in *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions*, ed. R. Patai and H. Bar-Itzhak (Armonk: Sharpe, 2013), 180. In her *Tales of the Neighborhood,* 14–18, Hasan-Rokem studies the story of a woman who went to knead dough at her neighbor's house and her three dinars became mixed in the bread (Lev. Rab. 34:16). Although the context is very different from Lev. Rab. 34:16, could the mashal in Lev. Rab. 4:5 belong to the stories in which women are involved in these household affairs? Could this mashal be inspired by popular scenes rabbinized with Jewish features (such as the identification of the husband as a priest) and the legal question involved (like the purity of the *terumah* dough)? For this *en passant* observation, it would be important to identify all the folklore features in Lev. Rab. 4 as part of the rabbis' cultural context (although this issue falls beyond the scope of this article).

[23] Indeed, scholars differ about the ideas embodied by both parables in combination; i. e. if the narratives present an opposite point of view between the parable of the Lame Guard and the Blind Guard and that of the Priest with Two Wives (e. g. L. M. Teugels, "The Contradictory Philosophical Lessons of the Parable of the Lame and the Blind Guards in Various Rabbinic Midrashim," in *From Creation to Redemption: Progressive Approaches to Midrash*, ed. W. D. Nelson and R. Ulmer, JC 20 [Piscataway: Gorgias, 2017], 166; Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 250) or, on the contrary, complementary ideas (e. g. Miralles Maciá, "If a *nefesh* Sins," 272). For both parables in connection, see, among others, Rubin, "Body and Soul," 155–157; Visotzky, "The Priest's Daughter and the Thief in the Orchard: The Soul of Midrash Leviticus Rabbah," in *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs*, ed. V. Wiles, A. Brown, and G. F. Snyder (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 165–171; Visotzky, *Golden Bells*, 91–96; Kimelman, "Rabbinic Theology," 957–959; Teugels, "Contradictory Philosophical Lessons," 164–166; Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 248–250; Miralles Maciá, "If a *nefesh* Sins," 269–272.

[24] According to Visotzky, "Priest's Daughter," 171.

The parable of the Lame Guard and the Blind Guard in its several rabbinic versions – sometimes together with the story of the Priest with Two Wives – has been analyzed from different points of view. Among scholars of Classical Judaism, the anthropological perspective has been the most prevalent. This approach studies rabbinic positions in tannaitic-amoraic times about the dual nature of the human being as well as the kind of relationship established between soul and body.[25] A diverse outlook – less explored to my knowledge by scholars of rabbinic literature in recent decades – is related to folklore studies. The story of the Lame Guard and Blind Guard has been handled as a folktale by Yassif, who includes the talmudic version of this mashal (b. Sanh. 91a–b) in his study of the "parables and fables" as part of the folktale in the rabbinic period.[26]

This mashal, which in Leviticus Rabbah sheds light on the rabbinic interpretation of *nefesh* in Lev 4:2, is not an ad hoc rabbinic creation from amoraic times to illustrate this verse according to the rabbinic accounts. Two tannaitic works convey a version of this mashal (it appears in both Mekhiltot). However, the question of whether the parable is a story with a tannaitic origin – reframed within the amoraic academy – is controversial, especially considering that versions in other literatures from late antiquity have come down to us (see below). Then what kind of story is this and can the germ of the story be identified?

In addition to the talmudic version mentioned by Yassif (b. Sanh. 91a–b), the parable, as noted above, is also transmitted in the tannaitic midrashim Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael[27] and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai.[28] In the three versions, the mashal appears in a fictitious discussion about the soul and the body being judged together, held by Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi (first-second century CE) and Antoninus, identified as one of the Roman emperors/authorities. The talmudic version of the story is conveyed in a collection of episodes about the two figures. In the Mekhiltot it is connected to the section on Exod 15:1 and follows the commentary on "the horse and its rider." According to the midrash on this verse, God would judge every horse and its Egyptian rider as a unit after

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[25] For the parable of the Lame Guard and the Blind Guard, see e. g. G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 3 vols., 10th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962–1966), 1:486–488; Urbach, *The Sages*, 223–224 (referring to the talmudic version); Rubin, "The Sages' Conception," 58; Goshen Gottstein, "The Body," 177–178.

[26] Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 204–205, underlines "the role" the rabbis "assigned" to the mashal "in the historical and social reality of their time." In the version referred to by Yassif, the story is in the framework of one of the episodes in which Antoninus talks to Rabbi (Yehudah ha-Nasi); see below.

[27] Mekh. R. Ishm. Shirata 2, partially transmitted in the manuscripts. See H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Kauffmann, 1931; Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1960), 125.

[28] J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed, eds., *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai: Fragmenta in Geniza Cairensi reperta digessit apparatu critico, notis, praefatione instruxit* (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1955), 76–77. See Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 239–242.

having cast them into the sea. In the trial, God would respectively ask the horse and the rider the reason for having chased the people of Israel, and both would blame each other asserting that they did it against their own will.[29] The story is also conveyed in the late midrash. In Tanhuma (Wayyiqra 12, Buber 8) the story is anonymous, related to the interpretation of Lev 4:2 – as in Leviticus Rabbah – and linked to another parable: the mashal about Two Men Who Sin against the King, one provincial and the other from the palace (Wayyiqra 11, Buber 7–8). Despite the textual and contextual differences between the versions and contexts,[30] all of them evoke the anthropological viewpoint about the body-soul linkage and the philosophical question about their responsibility for sin. According to the rabbinic accounts, this story might have been incorporated as a mashal into the rabbinic discussion about soul-body linkage in the tannaitic period, and the parable was already part of the rabbinic background in amoraic times. However, much has been discussed in the last century about the origin of the story and the influences that the various versions had on each other (see below).

Yassif distinguishes between fable and parable narratives according to the in/dependence of the context: "Narrative fables … are likely to exist free of their context or the attached epimythium, and they can be told independently at a performance event," while "the parable … stems from its link to the ideic theme … and lacks any status independent of this context."[31] Although I prefer to talk about parables whose origin was a fable – or what Robert M. Johnston classifies as "mashalized fables"[32] – the criterion of in/dependence is, in my opinion, a starting point to tackle this case.

In addition to the rabbinic parallels, the narrative has also come down to us in Hellenistic and Indian corpora, supposedly the most ancient versions.[33]

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[29] This image has been related to the Platonic allegory of the tripartite soul (see Plato, *Phaedr.* 246a–254e, and especially 246a–b) represented as a chariot with two horses, one of noble breed and the other of ignoble breed, guided by a charioteer (i. e. the appetitive, the spirited and the rational part). See also Philo's interpretation of Exod 15:1 (*Leg.* 2.102–103). According to Augustine (*Civ.* 19.3), Varro (first century BCE) used the simile of the rider and the horse to explain the relationship between the soul and the body. See M. Kister, "Allegorical Interpretations of Biblical Narratives in Rabbinic Literature, Philo, and Origen: Some Case Studies," in *New Approaches to the Study of Biblical Interpretation in Judaism of the Second Temple Period and in Early Christianity*, ed. G. A. Anderson, R. A. Clements, and D. Safran, STDJ 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177–178; Teugels, "Contradictory Philosophical Lessons," 158–159, and Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 245. For this simile in later sources, see H. Malter, "Personifications of Soul and Body: A Study in Judaeo-Arabic Literature," *JQR* 2 (1912): 466–467.

[30] For this examination, see Teugels, "Contradictory Philosophical Lessons," 153–171, and Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 223–259.

[31] Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 503 n 108.

[32] R. M. Johnston, "Study of Rabbinic Parables," 343. He refers to Samuel Back's classic study "Die Fabel in Talmud und Midrasch" that designated these compositions as "uneigentlich," see Back, "Die Fabel in Talmud und Midrasch," *MGWJ* 29:24–34.

[33] For medieval sources related to Arabic literature, see e. g. Malter, "Personifications of Soul

Epiphanius (fourth century CE), in his *Pan.* 64.70.5–17, quotes the parable (in Greek) in relation to the resurrection of the dead, from – what he identifies as – "Ezekiel the prophet in his own apocryphon … For speaking enigmatically, he refers to the righteous judgment, in which soul and body share."[34] In this case, the parable is framed in the context of a king who prepares a wedding feast for his son inviting everyone, all drafted as soldiers in his kingdom, except two civilians: the blind man and the lame man. According to most scholars, the apocryphon can be dated no later than the end of the first century,[35] and Epiphanius's story is a Christianized parable, with more or less influence from or over the rabbinic versions.[36] The motif is also found in several epigrams in the *Anthologia Graeca* (9.11–13b) related to the cooperation between a lame man and a blind man.[37] In the Indian tradition, the story appears in Ishwara Krishna's *Sankhya Karika*, illustrating the philosophical question about the Creation in terms of two principles (the self and nature/primal matter), where the union between the soul and the body are represented by a blind man and

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and Body," 454–455; J. R. Mueller, *The Five Fragments of the Apocryphon of Ezekiel: A Critical Study*, SJPSup 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 39–40. About this motif in Arab context, see H. M. El-Shamy, *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale-Type Index* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 290–291 (no. 0520A§).

[34] J. R. Mueller and S. E. Robinson, "Apocryphon of Ezekiel (First Century B. C.-First Century A. D.): A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 492. A more recent translation in E. Chazon, "1.1. The Blind and the Lame," in *The Apocryphal Ezekiel*, ed. M. E. Stone, B. G. Wright, and D. Satran, EJL 18 (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 12–13.

[35] According to the reference in Josephus, *A. J.* 10.79 (about the Apocryphon) and 1 Clem. 8:3 (a passage of the Apocryphon is quoted); see e. g. Mueller and Robinson, "Apocryphon of Ezekiel," 487–488.

[36] See about the discussion, e. g. M. R. James, "The Apocryphal Ezekiel," *JTS* 58 (1914): 236–243; L. Wallach, "The Parable of the Blind and the Lame: A Study in Comparative Literature," *JBL* 62 (1943): 335 (in connection with the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matt 22:1–14 and Luke 14:16–24); M. Bregman, "The Parable of the Lame and the Blind: Epiphanius' Quotation from an Apocryphon of Ezekiel," *JTS* 42 (1991): 125–138 (he concludes that Epiphanius "seems to have used as his primary source some form of a rabbinic homily … preserved primarily in the later Tanhuma-Yelammedenu genre of Midrashic literature," 136). Bregman ("Parable of the Lame and the Blind," 134–135) and Mueller (*Five Fragments*, 84) again relate the motif of the wedding feast to Matt 22:2; according to Richard Bauckham, "the motifs common to the parable in the Apocryphon and Matt 22:2 were part of the repertoire of Jewish religious storytelling in that period," in R. Bauckham, "The Parable of the Royal Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14) and the Parable of the Lame Man and the Blind Man (Apocryphon of Ezekiel)," *JBL* 115 (1996): 482.

[37] Attributed to Philippus, Leonidas of Alexandria, Plato the Younger, and Antiphilus of Byzantium in *The Greek Anthology*. With an English Translation by W. R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 3, *Book 9: The Declamatory Epigrams*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 6–9; also in A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, ed., *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 1:321 and 2:351 (no. XXXV), 1:111 and 2:134 (no. XXIX). For comments and bibliography, see G. Galán Vioque, ed., *Antología Palatina,* vol. 2, *La Guirnalda de Filipo*, BCG 321 (Madrid: Gredos, 2004), no. 51 and no. 448.

a lame man who meet in a jungle and decide to help each other to escape from there.[38]

Some scholars consider the Indian version the original story,[39] which entered Hebrew literature through Jewish-Hellenistic channels.[40] However, the difficulties, for one reason or another, in dating and placing the germ of the story keep the discussion going. James R. Mueller summarizes the main scholarly positions since the beginning of the twentieth century.[41] According to these perspectives, arguments for and against a Jewish, Indian or Hellenistic origin can be found, as can a reasonable justification about the influence of one source over another. For the purpose of this study, there is no need to explore either the origin of the narrative as an Indian or Jewish tale or the influences of one version on another. On the one hand, the study of the germ of the story presents a challenge that, for the moment, seems like a dead end for academia unless new accounts appear. On the other hand, the influences among the versions are a question that will probably continue to be debated, as happened in the last century, since scholars have not reached a general agreement. However, the existence of different versions in diverse languages shows that 1) the narrative was a well-known *fable* in late antiquity that circulated among the cultures under Hellenistic influence (whatever the original framework of the fable, if there was only one);[42] and 2) Jews shared the same code as well.[43] Accordingly, the fable might have been submitted to a process of Judaization and adapted to the mashal-parable form in the rabbinic period (or even earlier, depending on the dating of the apocryphal parable).

In most of the contexts of transmission, the fable, which is recorded in various literary frameworks, reveals a concern for the anthropological question about the two entities of the human being, as occurs in the Indian tale, the rabbinic versions, probably the apocryphal parable – if we accept Epiphanius's infor-

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[38] See e. g. J. Davies, *Hindu Philosophy: The Sānkhya Kārikā of Īśwara Krishṇa* (London: Trübner, 1881), 51–54 (no. 21).

[39] E. g. Moore, *Age of the Tannaim*, 3:148 (N 206); This question has relied, for the most part, on the dating of the *Sankhya Karika*, ca. fifth century, or considering the existence of more ancient versions (Wallach, "Parable of the Blind and the Lame," 333–334 and the bibliography). R. S. Sugirtharajah takes up the idea of the Indian origin of the story based on Moore's position, in R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 29–30, 267 nn 29–30.

[40] E. g. Wallach, "Parable of the Blind and the Lame," 334.

[41] Mueller, *Five Fragments*, 38–47.

[42] See the motifs of Indian folklore catalogued by S. Thompson and J. Balys, *The Oral Tales of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 374 (N886). For the general classification of the motif N886, see S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends,* rev. and enl. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958), http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/thompson/index.htm.

[43] About the motif N886 in rabbinic literature, see D. Neuman (Noy), "Motif-Index of Talmudic-Midrashic Literature," 4 vols. (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1954), 3:632.

mation – and Epiphanius's parable. At a certain point, the story might have been associated with this anthropological discussion, at the same time that the motif continued to be freely transmitted in other contexts unrelated to this issue, as with the epigrams in the *Anthologia Graeca*.

The image of the lame man and the blind man cooperating seems to have been so widespread in this period that a folk origin may be considered for the rabbinic versions, in which oral transmission would have played an important part. Moreover, the association of the fable with the anthropological question about the human being could have been, to a certain extent, part of the Hellenistic shared code as well,[44] which the rabbis adopted and incorporated into their discussions. The plasticity of the fable – or rather the fable-mashal – allowed the rabbis to adapt the story to the diverse contexts of interpretation (in both Mekhiltot, the Talmud, Leviticus Rabbah and Tanhuma), illuminating their beliefs on and concerns about this issue throughout the rabbinic period, in which different positions and nuances appeared.[45]

B. The Bodily Members and the Soul

The beginning of the *gufa* section in Lev. Rab. 4:4 takes up the commentary on the topic of the lemma verse: "If a *nefesh* sins unintentionally" (Lev 4:1), and offers an anonymous inventory of the members of the body that "serve the *nefesh*" and their functions. This list is also conveyed with differences in other sources, with no mention of the *nefesh*, as happens in the talmudic texts (see below). In the Lev. Rab. 4 context, however, the bodily organs are subordinated to the *nefesh* (i. e. soul), which God addresses, blaming it for its behavior. This image of the personified soul in charge of the organs could evoke the debates between the body parts found in the ancient fables that have come down to us and, therefore, the inventory would have acquired a new meaning in this midrashic context.

> Ten things serve the *nefesh*, and these are: esophagus for food, windpipe for the voice, liver for anger, bile for envy, the lungs for absorbing [liquids],[46] stomach to grind (the food), spleen to laugh, maw for sleep, kidneys advise, heart understands, tongue concludes [i. e. decides].[47] And the soul (*nefesh*) is placed above all of them. The Holy One,

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[44] In this regard, most scholars have examined the influences of platonic – or Neoplatonic – philosophy on the Sages' thought; see for different perspectives the bibliography in notes 19 and 23.

[45] About the evolution of the rabbinic notion of the human being in rabbinic times, see e. g. Miralles Maciá, "If a *nefesh* Sins," 267–268 and the bibliography mentioned there.

[46] For drinking? About מתשתן, see Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 87 note. In b. Ber. 61b: "The lungs absorb all kind of liquids" (ריאה שואבת כל מיני משקין).

[47] גומר in most manuscripts. In some of them: מחתך, "sentences." In b. Ber. 61b and b. Shab. 33b: "The tongue sentences and the mouth concludes [i. e. decides]."

blessed be He, said to it [the soul]: I made you [to be] above all of them and you go out and sin, steal and rob: "If a soul sins unintentionally" (Lev 4:1).[48] (Lev. Rab. 4:4)

The other rabbinic inventories – with a greater or lesser degree of parallelism with Lev. Rab. 4:4 and with no allusion to the *nefesh* – refer to some of these organs, usually with the same functions. The accounts differ in the number of the bodily members itemized and, especially, their contexts. In the Babylonian Talmud, b. Ber. 61a–b, this explanation about the functions of the members of the body, which is attributed to the rabbis (תנו רבנן), appears in the discussion about good and evil inclinations. According to this context, every organ should serve its specific purpose; if it plays another role, the person sickens (or according to another tannaitic opinion [תנא], dies). This is illustrated with the case of the maw, which brings sleep, and the nose, which awakens, assuming the role of the other (or according to the previous tannaitic opinion, assuming the same role). Another reference to the members of the body and their functions is found in b. Shab. 33b. The text focuses on the four signs that indicate a negative behavior. With regard to slander, a respiratory affliction, identified as croup,[49] is mentioned. To the question raised in the vineyard of Yavneh about "why this affliction [i. e. croup] begins in the bowels and concludes in the mouth?" (מכה זו מפני מה מתחלת בבני מעיים וגומרת בפה?), the tanna R. Yehudah bar R. Ilai (second century) answered that "although the kidneys counsel, the heart understands and the tongue sentences, the mouth concludes it" (אף על פי שכליות יועצות, ולב מבין, ולשון מחתך – פה גומר). As in the previous talmudic text, the explanation is not connected with the *nefesh* and its role.

The closest parallel to Lev. Rab. 4:4 is transmitted in Qoh. Rab. 7 on Qoh 7:19, with an explicit reference to the *nefesh*. In this passage there are two interpretations of Qoh 7:19 related to the members of the body and their functions. The commentaries on the verse apply the first sentence ("Wisdom strengthens a wise man") to Adam and (the people of) Israel respectively, and the second ("more than ten rulers who are in a city") to the ten things that minister to the *nefesh*. Both inventories are similar to Leviticus Rabbah (with slight changes/differences)[50] and the organs are also said to "serve the *nefesh*."[51] The versions in

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[48] עשרה דברים משמשין את הנפש, ואילו הן וושט למזון. קנה לקול. כבד לחמה. ומרה לקנאה. והריאה מתשתן. המסס לטחון. הטחול לצחק. קיבה לישינה. כליות יועצות. לב מבין. לשון גומר. והנפש למעלה מכולם. אמ' לה הקב"ה אני עשיתיך למעלה מכולם ואת יוצאה וחוטאה, גוזלת וחומסת, נפש כי תחטא בשגגה. (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 86–87).

[49] S. v. אסכרא, אסכרה, in M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (Leipzig: Drugulin; London: Luzac; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1903), 94, http://www.tyndalearchive.com/TABS/Jastrow/.

[50] See also Midr. Ps. 103:1 (S. Buber, ed., *Midrasch Tehillim* [Wilna, 1891; repr. Jerusalem, 1966], 431).

[51] There are indeed three enumerations of the members of the body, but that related to Moses as the "wise man" identified in the verse (Qoh 7:19) seems to correspond to the observation of the digestive system (of an animal, a person or both?) and connected with the *guf*, the

Qohelet Rabbah are based on the same tradition conveyed in Leviticus Rabbah. Why, then, are the bodily organs subject to the soul in the inventories in Leviticus Rabbah and Qohelet Rabbah?

The representation of each organ performing a certain function, whether physical or related to managing emotions, was a position accepted – at least by part of the rabbis – in amoraic times both in Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic Judaism. The talmudic texts attribute this instruction about the members of the body and their functions to the tannaim. Beyond the Babylonian opinion about the tannaitic authorship of the observation, examples of the organs playing a specific role are already found in the Hebrew Bible, for instance Isa 6:10, "And his heart will understand" (ולבבו יבין),[52] in which the same verb is used,[52] and Ps 16:7: "My kidneys admonish me (יסרוני כליותי) at night," i. e. the kidneys are the organ that advises.[53] Consequently, this perception of the organs' (physical or emotional) functions was present in the Jewish worldview dating back to biblical times, with more or less influence from – or, if preferred, similarities to – the Mesopotamian/Iranian or Hellenistic environment.[54]

Leviticus Rabbah 4:4, or some of its parallel texts, have usually been examined by scholars to shed light on the physiological and anatomical rabbinic point of view on the human body.[55] But what happens with the *nefesh*? What role does it play? The *nefesh* is only mentioned in Leviticus Rabbah and Qohelet Rabbah versions, but not in the talmudic texts. Its role depends on the meaning to be understood according to the context: *nefesh* as "person," *nefesh* as "soul" or – as proposed by Mira Balberg about some units of Lev. Rab. 3–4 along with "soul" –

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body. The inventory also appears in Lev. Rab. 3:4 related to the commentary on the offerings (Lev 2:1) through the case of a bird (Lev 1:16), and is connected with the term *nefesh*. See Balberg, "Animalistic Gullet," 229.

[52] About the heart, see e. g. F. Rosner, *Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud: Sections from Classical Jewish Sources,* LJLE 5 (New York: Ktav, 1977; repr., New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1995), 93–110.

[53] For more instances about the kidneys, see e. g. G. Eknoyan, "The Kidneys in the Bible: What Happened?," *JASN* 12 (2005): 3464–3471; S. S. Kottek, "'The Kidneys Give Advice': Some Thoughts on Nephrology in the Talmud and Midrash," *Koroth* 10 (1993–1994): 44–53; S. S. Kottek, "'My Reins Admonish Me at Night' (Psalm 16:7): The Kidneys in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Sources," *MedSec* 22 (2010): 465–470.

[54] For an in-depth description of the parts of the body, see chapter two in the classic book by J. Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine,* ed. and trans. F. Rosner (Lanham: Jason Aronson/ Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 41–137, originally published as *Biblisch-talmudische Medizin* (Berlin, 1911). For a general description, see J. O. Leibowitz, "Anatomy," in *Encyclopedia Judaica,* ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 2:133–135. For the influence of medical thought of neighboring cultures on rabbinic knowledge, see Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine*, passim, who echoes the contact points in different observations in his book. For a general approach, see G. Veltri, *A Mirror of Rabbinic Hermeneutics: Studies in Religion, Magic and Language Theory in Ancient Judaism*, SJ 82 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 106–110.

[55] See e. g. Rosner, *Medicine*, 93–94, 102–103, 108; Kottek, "'The Kidneys Give Advice,'" 45 and 53.

nefesh as "gullet." Indeed, Balberg considers Lev. Rab. 4:4 part of "the [homiletic] thread" that "contrasts what the *nefesh* could be (godly and leading one towards good deeds and fulfillment of commandments) with what it in fact chooses to be (animalistic and voracious), and maps out this contrast through the two meanings of *nefesh*, soul and gullet respectively ...."[56] According to Balberg's position, Lev. Rab. 4:4 can be considered a spring unit that encompasses both meanings for *nefesh* (gullet and soul). In my view, though, in the context of Lev. Rab. 4, this unit opens the *gufa* section by taking up the interpretations of *nefesh* as soul, as in Lev. Rab. 4:5 with the two related parables (section A).[57] The role played by the *nefesh* in this context is revealed after the reference to the organs and their functions, in connection with the lemma verse (Lev 4:2), where God said to the *nefesh*: "I made you [to be] above all of them." However, the *nefesh* does not carry out its mission (i. e. being in charge of all these "ten things") as it is supposed to do according to its status, because – as God continues – "you go out and sin, steal and rob."

The version in Lev. Rab. 4:4 offers an explanation related to the rabbinic medical/anatomical knowledge in combination with an anthropological conception of the human being accepted, to a greater or lesser extent, in the amoraic period. This view is framed in the discussion on the philosophical question about the responsibility for sin, in which the *nefesh* has a leading role above the organs of the body. In this context, the *nefesh* embodies one of the two entities that make up the human being, the "soul," and is portrayed by means of a personification. Could this literary device pose a new perspective on the organs spoken of in Lev. Rab. 4:4? With the mention of the personified soul, the inventory of these organs and their functions acquires a new dimension in the midrashic version, indeed.

Folktale in ancient literatures offers examples of personified bodily parts that try to demonstrate their superiority according to the roles they play.[58] Most of these examples were transmitted as fables in which a debate or *agon* between two or more members takes place. One of these debates has been conserved on an Egyptian scholastic tablet, and deals with a dispute before the divine court between the head and the body arguing about the excellence of their members and functions (mid-to-late second millennium BCE).[59] This kind of dispute also appears with variances in Graeco-Latin fables in diverse contexts of application.[60] For instance, the Aesopian tradition has transmitted the fable of the stomach and the feet disputing their supremacy, which is applied to the case of the troops

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[56] Balberg, "Animalistic Gullet," 238.

[57] Miralles Maciá, "If a *nefesh* Sins," 272–273.

[58] See Thompson, *Motif-Index*, J461.1.

[59] See A. Erman, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2009), 173–174; E. Brunner-Traut, *Altägyptische Tiergeschichte und Fabel: Gestalt und Strahlkraft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), 40–41; J. López, *Cuentos y fábulas del Antiguo Egipto* (Madrid: Trotta, 2005), 147–152, and also the bibliography quoted there.

[60] Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:329–330.

and their generals (Perry 130).[61] Another example is found in Titus Livy, who conveys the fable of the stomach and the limbs told by Menenius Agrippa to reconcile plebeians and patricians (fifth century BCE). The members of the body were offended because the stomach enjoyed all their efforts, and the bodily members decided not to play their roles. When they became exhausted, they recognized the value of the stomach (Livy, *Urbe cond.* 2.32.9–11).[62] There are some other versions/derivations of this fable in the Graeco-Latin texts.[63] Likewise, the fables in which the members of an animal appear personified and in dispute are considered part of the same tradition.[64] In the Aesopian collections, the fable of the tail of the snake that decides not to follow the head, wanting to go first and be the leader (Perry 362),[65] is conveyed with different variations in the textual corpora (for instance, in Babrius's fables).[66] In the Indian tradition the same motif is found in the *Panchatantra*. In the fable of the Bharunda bird, this bird has two heads that argue about the food each one finds and eats, without taking into consideration that they share the same stomach and, therefore, destiny.[67]

The motif of the personified bodily organs/limbs – acting and talking – is also an image in rabbinic literature.[68] It is found in several midrashic and talmudic

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[61] B. E. Perry, *Aesopica: A Series of Texts Relating to Aesop or Ascribed to Him or Closely Connected with the Literary Tradition That Bears His Name*, vol. 1, *Greek and Latin Texts* (Urbana: The Illinois Press, 1952). For the Greek-Latin versions, see F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 3, *Inventory and Documentation of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, trans. L. A. Ray, ed. F. Rodríguez Adrados and G. J. van Dijk, MnemSup 236 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 170–172 (H. 132).

[62] See L. Gibbs, *Aesopica: Aesop's Fables in English, Latin & Greek*, http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/66.htm. Rodríguez Adrados considers the Egyptian fable to be a model for Livy's (*Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:329–330 and 2:106–107).

[63] See Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 3:170–172 (H. 132) and 3:527 (non-H. 238); and for medieval versions, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 3:735–736 (M. 336).

[64] Thompson, *Motif-Index*, J461.1.1 and J461.1.3.

[65] Gibbs, *Aesopica*, http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/362.htm.

[66] B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 174–175 (134). For the different sources, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 3:356–357 (H. 291).

[67] Thompson and Balys, *Oral Tales of India*, 254 (J461.1.1). Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 2:622, considers this fable a derivation of the fable H. 132 (i. e. the stomach and the feet). For a translation in English and German, see, among others, Vishnu Sharma, *The Panchatantra*, trans. A. W. Ryder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 216; A. Greither, ed., *Pancatantra: Die fünf Bücher indischer Lebensweisheit*, mit 107 Zeichnungen von Josef Scharl (Munich: Beck, 1986), 227–229.

[68] See Neuman (Noy), "Motif-Index," 3:529 (J461 and variations). This image appears in the New Testament as well; see 1 Cor 12:14–26, in which the idea that all the parts belong to the same body illustrates the relationship between Christ and the members of the Church. The same image, applied to "believers," can be found in the hadith literature; see "Sahih Muslim: The Book of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners, and Joining of the Ties of Kinship," https://sunnah.com/search/?q=believers+body; G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 469.

parallels that apply Qoh 12:6 ("and the pitcher is shattered at the spring") to the belly's behavior after one's death.[69] For instance, in Lev. Rab. 18:1, R. Abba bar R. Pappi and R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin in the name of R. Levi explain the connection between the verse and the belly (i. e. the pitcher) like this: "Three days after [one has died] his belly (כריסו) bursts and erupts into the mouth (פה) and says [to the mouth]: Here is what you stole and robbed (גזלת וחמסת) and put into me!"[70] Balberg observes the relationship between Lev. Rab. 18:1 and Lev. Rab. 4:4, in which the same verbs (steal and rob) are used. She considers that this unit "helps us see the extent to which the characterization of the gullet as stealing and robbing is rooted in Greek and Roman rhetoric and imagery used in criticisms of gluttony and preoccupation with food."[71] This imagery may be, in my opinion, rooted in the shared folktale as well: the belly indeed returns all that the mouth has violently taken, and this action is accompanied by a vehement speech, similar to those that appear in the abovementioned fables associated with this motif.[72] Another example, on this occasion related to the limbs of an animal, is conveyed as a mashal in Deut. Rab. 1:10. It concerns a version of the Aesopian fable of the quarrel between the tail and the head of a snake, in which the tail wants to lead and the head allows it, suffering the consequences.[73] According to the context, this happens when the great ones permit the small ones to lead. Yehoshua ben Levi argues that this fable illustrates Moses's words addressed to the people of Israel about the importance of obeying the judges.

The inventory of the bodily members and their functions in Lev. Rab. 4:4 can be considered a medical/anatomical description of the organs in a human being (as in the talmudic versions), the reference to the *nefesh* and its outstanding position can be understood as another anthropological explanation in the midrash about the entities that comprise the human being, and the allusion to sin would be related to a philosophical question about the soul's responsibility for a trans-

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[69] Lev. Rab. 18:1 (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 397–398); Qoh. Rab. 12 on Qoh 12:6; y. Moed Qat. 3:5, 82b; y. Yevam. 16:3, 15c; b. Shab. 151b. In Gen. Rab. 100:7 (J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, eds., *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary*, 3 vols. [Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965; Berlin, 1912–1936], 1290) the parallel is transmitted in an eschatological context; see Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities," 473–474.

[70] Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 387–388.

[71] Balberg, "Animalistic Gullet," 244.

[72] For an example of the parts of the body arguing with one another, see the debate between the tongue and the bodily members in Midr. Ps. 39:2 (Buber, *Midrasch Tehillim*, 128). L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* 7 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 6:302 n 97.

[73] M. A. Mirkin, ed., *Midrash Rabbah*, 11 vols. (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1956–1967), 11:14. Neuman (Noy), "Motif-Index," 3:529 (J461.1.1); see Jacobs, "Aesop's Fables." Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 20, includes this fable among the "controversy-parable," where "the plot revolves around an argument or debate, and the victory of one protagonist over the others is the main subject of the tale and its messages." See also A. M. Singer, "Animals in Rabbinic Teaching: The Fable" (PhD diss., The Jewish Theological Seminary of America; London: University Microfilms International, 1979), 79–82.

gression. But how are these complex ideas brought together in this context? The literary device that encompasses them is, in my opinion, the fable imaginary. In the Lev. Rab. 4:4 unit, the motif of the fables mentioned above appears in a new light, creating a narrative that surprises its recipients: a) the *nefesh* is personified, as occurs in the application of the fable of the Blind and the Lame Guards (Lev. Rab. 4:5, its parallel texts and other non-Jewish versions); b) if the *nefesh* is personified, the members of the body are also supposed to be, as in the fables where the organs play their specific roles; c) although there is no debate/*agon* in the strict sense between two or more bodily members, God's words show a reaction to the *nefesh*'s behavior and, therefore, a kind of dispute can be perceived here; d) instead of a member of the body aspiring to assume an incorrect function, the *nefesh* is the entity that follows the wrong path (the *nefesh* that sins does not accomplish its correct function). From this perspective, a combination of well-known fable features, with which the rabbis were acquainted in late antiquity, could be recreated in the Midrash with important innovations.

C. The Sheep with a Hurt Limb

Leviticus Rabbah 4:6 begins with two narratives that may be related to motifs existing in ancient fables: the Sheep with a Hurt Limb and the Man on a Ship Boring a Hole beneath His Place (the latter will be analyzed in section D). Both stories are connected with the interpretation of *nefesh*, although the word is not mentioned in either of them. The relation of the stories to the term is fascinating: both illuminate the idea that the behavior of a single "person" – implicitly alluding to *nefesh* – falls on the whole group, because all its members are part of the same collective, that is to say, they share the same destiny, the same "soul."[74]

The first narrative is attributed to Hezekiah, a Palestinian rabbi (third century), who is said to have taught (תני) "Israel is a scattered sheep" (Jer 50:17) by means of an analogy between the people of Israel and the animal referred to in the verse:

> Israel is compared to a sheep. Just as with a sheep, if one of its limbs is hurt,[75] all its limbs feel it,[76] so it is with Israel:[77] "Shall one man sin,[78] [and you will be angry with the whole congregation?]" (Num 16:22).[79] (Lev. Rab. 4:6)

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[74] For the interpretation, see the episode told by R. Elasaah at the end of the paragraph about R. Yehoshua ben Qarhah and a gentile, who was not able to bring peace among his sons, and R. Yehoshua's explanation addressed to his disciples about *nefesh-nefashot* (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 92–93).

[75] *Editio princeps*: "It is hurt on its head or one of its limbs" (הזה לוקה על ראשו או באחת מאבריו).

[76] Several manuscripts read: "The whole body feels it" (וכל גופה מרגיש).

[77] *Editio princeps* adds: "One of them sins and all of them feel it" (אחד מהן חוטא וכולן מרגישין).

This comparison also appears in tannaitic midrashim, in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael[80] and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai[81] on Exod 19:6, commenting on "(holy) nation." The explanation involves the holy things that all the Israelites could eat before making the golden calf (i. e. the whole nation was allowed to consume holy food), but after this episode the holy things were reserved for the priests. Accordingly, "Israel" – as the verse says – "is a scattered sheep" (Jer 50:17). In both Mekhilot, the case of the people of Israel, which is punished if one of its members sins,[82] contrasts with that of the gentile nations: they are happy if one suffers. In Leviticus Rabbah, this reference to the holy food is not made and, in lieu of the gentile nations, Num 16:22 is quoted in allusion to the whole congregation of Israel. This comparison has a different aim in Leviticus Rabbah, which focuses on Israel alone.

Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai deserves special attention. The arguments adduced to explain "nation" – before the verse in Jeremiah – are more developed than in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael. Among them, it is said that "'nation' (Exod 19:6) teaches that they were like one body and one soul (*nefesh*),"[83] i. e. if one of the two entities that make up the human being sins, both suffer the punishment. On the one hand, *nefesh* is related to the midrashic representation of the sheep in Jer 50:17, while on the other hand, the body-soul (*guf-nefesh*) linkage, which does not appear in Leviticus Rabbah associated with the verse in Jeremiah, is nonetheless connected with the rabbinic ideas illustrated by the parable-fable of the Blind Man and the Lame Man in charge of an orchard. As already seen above, both Mekhilot and Leviticus Rabbah – as well as the Talmud – present a version of the famous story of the two guards. According to Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the anthropological conception of the human being was linked to the image of the sheep with a hurt limb at a certain stage of the tradition.

Defining the narrative of the Sheep with a Hurt Limb as a fable is problematic according to the most widespread and accepted definitions of fable in scholarship.[84] The interpretation of the verse in Jeremiah is, indeed, presented as an analogy, not as a tale or a fictitious story with an animal acting/speaking as a human being. However, the boundaries between genres are flexible and the

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[78] "One man," האיש אחד, in Num 16:22 is linked to the term נפש in Lev 4:2 with the meaning of "person": "If a *person* sins." The same idea supported by Num 16:22 appears in Song of Songs Rabbah on Songs 6:11 (in relation to a nut taken from a heap).

[79] נמשלו ישראל בשה, מה שה אחד מאיבריה לוקה כל איבריה מרגישין, אף ישראל כך, האיש אחד יחטא וגו' (במדבר טז, כב). (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 91).

[80] Mekh. R. Ishm. Bahodesh 2 (Horovitz and Rabin, *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael*, 209).

[81] Epstein and Melamed, *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai*, 139.

[82] See note 68.

[83] וגוי מלמד שהן כגוף אחד ונפש אחת. As an example, this version then mentions a verse about Achan son of Zerah, who disobeyed the command about the anathema and the whole community suffered the consequences (Josh 22:20).

[84] See note 7.

same motif can be conveyed as a fable, but also in a different form.[85] This could have happened with the image of the sheep with a hurt limb. The motif of a limb/organ whose behavior and suffering falls on the rest of the body did have a significant impact in ancient literatures, including rabbinic texts.[86]

As noted in the previous section, ancient fables include examples of debates/ *agones* between two or more parts of the body (either a human being or an animal), as in the aforementioned story of the bodily organs in conflict or that of the tail of the snake. Might the rabbinic representation of the sheep with a hurt limb have been inspired by those fables? Obviously, clear differences between the case in both Mekhiltot and Leviticus Rabbah and those fables can be observed: the literary form is an analogy, the sheep is not personified – the text only says that "its limbs feel it" – and there is no direct interaction between the limbs of the sheep. However, the image (the fact that the condition of one limb determines the situation of the whole body) and, to a certain extent, the lesson derived (everybody is responsible for the community's welfare) echoes this motif.

The consideration of the analogy of the sheep with a hurt limb as a rabbinic version of such fables with a significant re-working of the narrative[87] would be, to my mind, too bold. Nevertheless, motifs are versatile. They not only were adapted and applied to different contexts with substantial differences, but also provided inspiration for new narratives. Stories related to the connection between the bodily organs of the human being and the limbs of an animal circulated, indeed, from antiquity on and, as the rabbinic accounts have shown, the sages were acquainted with versions of them. Therefore, stories such as these fables could have exerted some influence over the rabbinic interpretation of Jer 50:17, turning the "scattered sheep" into a sheep[88] with a hurt limb whose suffering affects its entire body (i. e. the whole congregation of Israel). From this perspective, a direct relationship between the rabbinic image of the "scattered sheep" and these fables cannot be established, but, in my view, nor can the influence of these kinds of folktales/motifs over the rabbinic origin of the interpretation be excluded.

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[85] See note 11.

[86] In rabbinic literature there is a narrative about the snake that bites a single limb of a person and all the limbs feel it, see e. g. y. Peah 1:1, 16a; Lev. Rab. 26:2 (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 591–592); Deut. Rab. 5:10 (Mirkin *Midrash Rabbah*, 11:92); see Singer, *Animals in Rabbinic Teaching*, 82–87.

[87] See note 4.

[88] The sheep is a recurring character in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern tales, just like the lamb and the ram. It suffices to look at Thompson's *Motif-Index*, and for the Jewish literature, see Neuman's "Motif-Index."

D. The Man on a Ship Boring a Hole beneath His Place

After the analogy of the sheep with a hurt limb, Lev. Rab. 4:6 continues with a mashal ascribed to R. Shimon ben Yohai (first-second century). The parable is attributed to this tanna, but it appears for the first time in Leviticus Rabbah (so it has no parallel in any of the Mekhiltot, like the previous analogy).[89] This mashal sheds light on the same interpretation as the preceding analogy, reinforcing the idea that the sin of an individual affects the whole group (i. e. all Israel will suffer the punishment for one's transgression) or what Joel Kaminsky defines as "corporate responsibility."[90]

> [This is compared] to men that were on a ship and one of them took a borer and began boring beneath his place. His fellows said to him: Why are you doing this? He said to them: What do you care? Am I not boring beneath my place? They said to him: Because you will flood the ship on us. So Job said: "And even if I have erred, my error remains with myself" (Job 19:4). His fellows said to him: "He adds rebellion to his sin, he spreads it among us"[91] (Job 34:37); [i. e.] you spread your transgressions among us.[92] (Lev. Rab. 4:6)

The parable in the context of Leviticus Rabbah seems to be elaborated ad hoc in connection with the reframed analogy: both narratives, although with different literary forms, are paired. This is not the only passage in Lev. Rab. 4 with this sort of midrashic elaboration. As seen above (in section A), the parable of the Lame

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[89] See a version of the parable with important differences in S. Eli. Rab. (11) 12 (M. Friedmann, ed., *Seder Eliahu Rabba und Seder Eliahu Zuta (Tanna d'be Eliahu)* [Vienna: Israelitische Lehranstalt, 1902; repr. Jerusalem: Baberger & Wahrmann, 1960], 56). Here the man boring beneath his place does not appear, but a compartment in the ship splits apart.

[90] I. e. "The way in which the community as a whole is liable for the actions committed by its individual members," J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible,* JSOTSup 196 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 11 (he quotes the parable in Leviticus Rabbah). That all Israel is responsible for one another is a recurring saying in rabbinic literature, as noted by Margulies in his Leviticus Rabbah edition (*Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 91 note); see e. g. Sifra Behuqottai per. 7 (I. H. Weiss, ed., *Sifra* [Vienna, 1862; repr. New York, 1947], 112a); b. Sanh. 27b; b. Shev. 39a; Song of Songs Rabbah on Song 7:8. New Testament scholars note the same conception about 1 Cor 5:6b ("Don't you know that a little leaven ferments all the dough?"); indeed, Kenneth E. Bailey connects this passage with the parable in Lev. Rab. 4:6, in K. E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 167. From a philosophical perspective, Richard L. Fern also quotes this parable by examining biblical stories of innocent people who were called to account for the sin of the other, in R. L. Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175.

[91] Masoretic Text: "He *claps his hands* against us," from ספק I. The midrashic reading interprets ספק II, "divide, distribute, supply"; see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1015–1016 s. v. ספק II.

[92] תני ר׳ שמעון בן יוחי משל לבני אדם שהיו נתונין בספינה ונטל אחד מהן מקדח והתחיל קודח תחתיו. אמרו לו חביריו למה את עושה כן, אמ׳ להן מה איכפת לכם, לא תחתי אני קודח. אמרו לו מפני שאתה מציף עלינו את הספינה. כך אמר איוב ואף אמנם שגיתי אתי תלין משוגתי (איוב יט, ד). אמרו לו חביריו כי יוסיף על חטאתו פשע בינינו יספוק (שם לד, לז), בינותינו את מספיק עוונותיך. (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 91–92)

Guard and the Blind Guard – transmitted in different tannaitic and amoraic versions – is accompanied in Lev. Rab. 4:5 by another mashal about a priest married to two women, the daughter of a priest and the daughter of an Israelite, who made impure the *terumah* dough. This second mashal has no parallel in tannaitic sources, but it complements the teaching and lesson derived from the first parable in the context of Lev. Rab. 4:5. Leviticus Rabbah 4:4 does not contain two meshalim in the strict sense, but an analogy and a parable in connection. The first narratives, respectively in Lev. Rab. 4:4 and 4:5, also appear in both Mekhiltot, whereas the second stories are only found in Leviticus Rabbah. The second stories, probably created in amoraic times, are rabbinic devices that help to redefine the topics represented and rabbinic conceptions illustrated in the first narratives and to amplify[93] and adapt them to the hermeneutic context in Leviticus Rabbah.

The parable of the Man on a Ship Boring a Hole Beneath His Place could be inspired, in my view, by other narratives and folktale images, either from the Jewish or neighboring cultures. Probably the first example that comes to mind is the biblical story of Jonah with the episode of the prophet travelling on a ship (Jonah 1). The biblical episode and the midrashic parable are not directly connected, as are other passages in rabbinic literature.[94] However, both the scenario and the fact that the attitude of a man affects the welfare of all the travelers are common aspects in the two texts. Stories about people in danger at sea experiencing the same tragic fate recur in ancient fables, as in the Aesopian collections. For instance, a fable concerns the case of two enemies travelling on a ship, one sitting at the prow and the other at the stern. When the ship was about to capsize in a storm, the one at the stern asserted that he did not care because his enemy, at the prow, would die first (Perry 68). This fable is about extreme hatred between enemies, but it also shows the shared destiny of those travelling on a ship.[95]

One of the more interesting fables, to my mind, is in Babrius's Aesopian corpus. The fable tells the story of a man who saw a ship sinking with all the passengers on board and said that the gods' judgments were unfair, "because, for the sake of one impious man who had boarded the ship, many others who were innocent went to their death along with him" (Perry 306).[96] The fable goes on

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[93] Jacob Neusner considers that "the simile" of the sheep with a hurt limb "is amplified," in J. Neusner, *Jeremiah in Talmud and Midrash: A Source Book* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 135.

[94] See e. g. the episode (*ma'aseh*) on a certain child travelling on a ship who, when a storm arises, yells at the sailors to plead with the creator of the sea; i. e. contrary to Jonah's behavior (t. Nid. 5:17, K. H. Rengstorf, ed., *Die Tosefta*, vol. 6, *Seder Toharot*, Rabbinische Texte, Reihe 1 [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967], 239–240).

[95] See Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 3:94–95 (H.69); Gibbs, *Aesopica*, http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/159.htm.

[96] Translations by Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 152–153 (117). See Gibbs, *Aesopica*, http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/306.htm. For the different sources, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 3:429 (not-H. 82).

to explain what this man was doing by saying these words, revealing – as Perry entitles the story – "the double standard of justice."[97] While he was saying this, a swarm of ants came to him eager to feed on the chaff of his wheat, and when he was bitten by one of them, he trampled most of them. Hermes then appeared and struck the man with his wand saying: "How now, won't you endure to have the gods judge you the way you judge the ants?"[98] Despite the clear differences (related to both the story itself and the main lesson) between the Aesopian fable and the rabbinic mashal, both narratives show a sinner on a ship whose destiny affects all the travelers. Babrius's fable raises a question about divine un/justice: why should all the passengers on board die because of a single transgressor? From the rabbinic mashal in Lev. Rab. 4:6 and its application, the same idea can be deduced with respect to the case of Israel: why should all Israel suffer as a consequence of a sinner's transgression? Could this fable or a version of it be the source of inspiration for the rabbinic parable?

The rabbis were acquainted with sea journeys[99] and very aware of the dangers of the sea. Bad weather (storms, tempests, winds) was a significant cause for concern, but not the only one.[100] Rabbinic literature also contains stories about sea voyages in which extraordinary events play an important part.[101] Scenes related to sea travels are used to illustrate the rabbinic positions and exemplify certain situations, as well.[102] Some of these images have been connected with the fable tradition, as Haim Schwarzbaum does with regard to the Aesopian fable conveyed by Babrius (Perry 306). Schwarzbaum relates this ancient fable to later stories in rabbinic literature and the Qur'an (b. Nid. 31a[103] and Q Al-Kahf

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[97] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 153. For the motif, see Thompson, *Motif-Index*, U21.3.

[98] See Thompson, *Motif-Index*, J225.0.2.

[99] C. Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, TSAJ 144 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 161–196. About ships and sailing in talmudic times, see D. Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

[100] See e.g. Lev. Rab. 25:1 (Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 567) about robbers and pirates (Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, 172).

[101] See e.g. Pesiq. Rav Kah. 18:5 (B. Mandelbaum, ed., *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, 2 vols. [New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962], 1:298). Dina Stein studies the mini-travelogues and tall tales conveyed in b. B. Bat. 73a–75b, an important number of which place the story on a ship. These include a Babylonian parallel to the text in Pesiqta. D. Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 58–83, 156–164 (for a translation of the text in English, see 125–135). H. Schwarzbaum, "The Jewish and Moslem Versions of Some Theodicy Legends (Aa-Th. 759)," *Fabula* 3 (1959): 142–143, connects the passage in Pesiqta de Rav Kahana with a qur'anic story (Qur'an Al-Kahf 18:59–81); see below. In the New Testament, one of the most famous episodes is that of Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4:35–41; Matt 8:23–27; Luke 8:22–25.

[102] Sometimes directly to interpret a verse midrashically; see e.g. the comparison of the "day of birth" and the "day of death" (Qoh 7:1) to two ships, one leaving the harbor and the other entering it. According to the rabbinic point of view, people should not rejoice at the ship leaving, because they do not know about the dangers they will find (Qohelet Rabbah on Qoh 7:1; Exod. Rab. 48:1, Mirkin, *Midrash Rabbah*, 6:191).

[103] A briefer version in Midr. Ps. 136:3 (Buber, *Midrasch Tehillim*, 519).

18:59–81), in which divine justice is questioned in a similar scenario.[104] In b. Nid. 31a, the Babylonian Rav Yosef (third-fourth century) explains Isa 12:1 ("I will give thanks to You, Lord, because You was angry with me; Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me") by means of a story about "two men that went out on a business trip, a thorn penetrated in [the foot of] one of them, [and] he began to blaspheme and curse," because he could not travel. "After a time, he heard that his fellow's ship had sunk in the sea, [and] he began to give thanks and praise" God because of the thorn injury. Accordingly, it is said: "Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me." In Surat al-Kahf 18, an encounter between Moses and the servant of Allah takes places. The latter allows Moses to accompany him on the condition that he is patient and does not ask him questions. The servant of Allah carries out three deeds, which are unjust according to Moses's human standards (but not according to the divine master plan, as will be explained at the end). One of these deeds is related to the fact that the servant of Allah embarked on a ship with the intention of sinking it. Reacting to this allegedly unfair behavior, Moses reproached him for his desire to drown all the passengers (Q 18:71).[105]

Turning again to the parable in Lev. Rab. 4, Marcel Poorthuis recently related it to the Islamic tradition. He connects the mashal to a parable in a hadith (on the authority of al-Nu'man b. Bashir recorded in al-Bukhari's *Sahih*).[106] The hadith parable contrasts the case of someone who carries out Allah's injunctions with those who violate them. This is compared to people who rent a ship together and cast lots for their places. The passengers on the lower deck have to bother those on the upper deck when they need water. To avoid this, the lower deck passengers suggest making a hole in their part of the ship. If the upper deck passengers allow them to do this, all the passengers will drown; if not, all will be safe.[107] The two parables share the same setting and the lesson derived from

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[104] Schwarzbaum, "*Mishle esopos umishle hazal*," 113–114; Schwarzbaum, *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 447; Schwarzbaum, *Mishle shu'alim*, xiii–xiv and xlv.

[105] About the similarities between this story and narratives in rabbinic literature, see, in addition to the bibliography in note 104, Schwarzbaum, "Jewish and Moslem Versions," 142–143. Schwarzbaum himself stresses that Babrius's fable "has penetrated into early Moslem *Hadith* literature." He relates the destruction of the swarm of ants in Babrius to the story about a certain prophet beneath a tree who was bitten by a single ant and decided that all the ants must be burnt; see Schwarzbaum, *Mishle shu'alim*, xiii. In the Ḥadīth, the story is attributed to Abu Hurayra, one of the companions of Muhammad, and transmitted in different accounts (ca. from the ninth century on) in, among others, al-Bukhari's *Sahih* 3019; see "Fighting for the Cause of Allah (Jihaad)," https://sunnah.com/bukhari/56/228; Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 16.

[106] M. Poorthuis, "The Transformative Creativity of Islamic Storytelling: Jewish and Christian Sources of Parables in the Ḥadīth," in *Parables in Changing Contexts: Essays on the Study of Parables in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism*, ed. E. Ottenheijm and M. Poorthuis, JCP 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 90–91.

[107] In al-Bukhari's *Sahih* 2493; see "Partnership," https://sunnah.com/bukhari/47/11. About the parable, see Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 469–470.

their examples, calling for co-responsibility and, as Poorthuis notes about the hadith parable, solidarity between the members of a group (the bad deeds of a person/subgroup affect the whole community in keeping with the God-given parameters of justice).

According to the information at hand, none of the aforementioned Aesopian and Islamic narratives can be considered, to my mind, a *direct* parallel – whether earlier or later – to the mashal in Lev. Rab. 4; the differences among them are striking. But equally striking are the aspects they have in common. All of these stories take place in the same situation (a sailing trip) in which a disaster happens – or is about to – and in which the divine standards of justice play a paramount role with regard to understanding the sequence of events in accordance with the application of the example to the context. Some of these narratives are, in addition, of special interest in terms of suggesting a possible origin for the parable in Leviticus Rabbah. The scene of the shipwreck with all the passengers drowning on account of a single transgressor is a motif that appears in the ancient fable collections, as Babrius's version shows. This scene in the Aesopian fable is interwoven with that of the destruction of the swarm of ants and Hermes's intervention, and the story has a different aim (i. e. to show the "double standard of justice" of a man who does the same thing that he criticizes the gods for). However, substantial modifications may have happened in the process of adapting the fable traditions to new cultural parameters. Indeed, Q 18 shows that similar stories of a shipwreck were well-known in later neighboring literatures with variations (for instance, in this case it is not the sinner who sinks the ship, but the servant of Allah). The hadith parable is another example of the widespread transmission of these stories.

Babrius's Aesopian fable was probably neither the parallel that preceded the Leviticus Rabbah mashal of the Man on a Ship Boring a Hole beneath His Place nor the origin of this rabbinic parable. However, a version of the story of the shipwreck with a transgressor responsible for the fate of all the passengers may have circulated in late antiquity and beyond (as the Qur'an and hadith literature show). Intercultural contacts would have been a significant factor in its transmission, in which orality would have played an important role. A version of this story might have been part of the rabbinic background and, accordingly, have undergone a process of Judaization in amoraic times or simply been the inspiration behind the rabbinic parable conveyed in Lev. Rab. 4.[108] The mashal (as it occurs in Islamic literature) ignores the weather conditions that often characterize stories related to a shipwreck (as, for instance, in b. Nid. 31a), and provides an unexpected feature: the danger comes from the stupidity of a man. The rabbinic parable shows a vaudeville scene that causes hilarity[109] in contrast

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[108] And perhaps for other rabbinic narratives as well, such as that in b. Nid. 31a, according to the connection established by Schwarzbaum (see above).

[109] In a draft of my text, the editors of the volume called my attention to the ancient jokes

to the seriousness of the question dealt with in Lev. Rab. 4:6, as the verses from Job reveal. If this narrative as it has come down to us is not, properly speaking, a fable (i. e. it does not "exist free of" its "context" according to Yassif's definition of fable),[110] fable motifs could intervene in the elaboration of the story, bringing, in addition, a dose of humor to the philosophical question of sin and the responsibility of every Israelite for his own people.

E. Conclusions

1. Of the four passages analyzed in Leviticus Rabbah, only the parable of the Blind Man and the Lame Man Guarding an Orchard (Lev. Rab. 4:5) can be clearly defined as a "fable" in the traditional sense. The versions in other literatures are proof of the independence of the story, and the parallels in both Mekhiltot show that from tannaitic times the fable was well known by the rabbis. Accordingly, in the amoraic period, the fable was part of the rabbinic repertoire of stories conveyed as a mashal-parable. Despite the autonomy of the fable, it was always associated in rabbinic texts and often in other contexts to the anthropological question on the nature of the human being. The other three passages examined cannot be considered fables in keeping with the criterion of independence from the context. However, to my mind, they could be inspired by the folktale motifs that are also found in ancient and late antique fables among the neighboring cultures. These motifs underwent a process of Judaization according to the literary contexts or at the least were sources of inspiration for the rabbinic narratives.

2. The anatomical inventory of the bodily organs with their functions has come down to us in several amoraic sources (although attributed to tannaim in the Talmud). However, Lev. Rab. 4:4 offers a new perspective that relates this list to the role of the *nefesh*: the bodily organs are said to serve the soul, which is personified and in charge of them. The sins of the soul, which is considered to lead the human being, have a negative impact on the entire person. Unlike the talmudic versions, Leviticus Rabbah takes an anthropological position on the dualistic conception of the human being and explores the philosophical question about the responsibility for sin. In my opinion, the version in Leviticus Rabbah was influenced by the ancient debate/*agon* about the bodily members/

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about stupidities on ships; see e. g., the collection of jokes in Greek known as Philogelos (fourth century). In R. D. Dawe, ed., *Hierokles, Philagrios: Philogelos*, BSGRT (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 11 (no. 30), 27–28 (no. 80 and no. 81), 80 (no. 256); the respective translations in English in e. g. W. Berg, ed., *Philogelos: The Laugh Addict* (London: YUDU Media, 2001), 28 (no. 30), 39 (no. 80 and no. 81), 86 (no. 256). None of these narratives are related to the situation described in our Leviticus Rabbah mashal, but show how boat trips provided an interesting setting for hilarious scenes.

[110] See note 31.

organs arguing about their superiority, a widespread motif in the ancient fable collections. In Leviticus Rabbah, the soul, the main innovative feature, is the entity that does not fulfil its function and, therefore, is admonished by God.

3. The analogy of the Sheep with a Hurt Limb (Lev. Rab. 4:6), based on the rabbinic interpretation of the "scattered sheep" in Jer 51:17, was also well known in tannaitic times according to the versions in both Mekhiltot. It could also have been inspired by the motif of the bodily members (on this occasion, of an animal) whose situation affects the whole body, illustrating the rabbinic opinion that the actions of an individual fall on the whole community.

4. The mashal of the Man on a Ship Boring a Hole beneath His Place (Lev. Rab. 4:6) is, in keeping with my analysis, a literary narrative created – as far as known – within the Leviticus Rabbah framework, which amplifies and complements the ideas illustrated by the analogy of the sheep with a hurt limb. However, this narrative, which is found for the first time in an amoraic source, echoes a scene that appears in ancient fables (as Babrius's Aesopian fable shows) and in later neighboring literatures (as in Islamic literature). The plot of this fictitious story is placed on a ship on which the travelers' lives are put at risk. The danger comes not from the bad weather, but from the foolishness of a man. This innovation would not only have drawn attention, but also caused hilarity in contrast to the gravity of the issue posed.

5. It has not been my intention in this contribution to enter into the old debate about genre (i.e. the fable) and form (i.e. the mashal-parable). In my approach to the texts, the boundaries that categorize the fable as a subgenre of the parable have been blurred. In my view, for the rabbis, the plasticity of the fable motifs was an anchor point to retell, recreate and echo the stories by means of different narratological devices (parable, comparison or even a simple narrative), and to inspire new stories introducing unexpected features. A fable motif – or a nod to a fable – is not a fable, but is part of the fable realm and, therefore, still attached to the folktale tradition, an issue that deserves to be explored.

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New Testament and Early Christian Literature

Finding a Treasure

The Treasure Motif in Jewish, Christian, and Graeco-Roman Narratives in the Context of Rabbinic Halakhah and Roman Law

Catherine Hezser

The motif of finding a treasure appears in parables in the Gospels of Matthew and Thomas as well as in rabbinic parables and stories. Finding a treasure or jewellery seems to be a stock motif in ancient Jewish and Christian sources of diverse literary forms. In the respective literary contexts, the motif is expanded and used for a variety of purposes. The focus is usually on the finder's reaction and its moral and theological implications. In ancient Jewish society, finding a valuable object or money would have been considered a divine blessing, At the same time, the proper handling of a find, that is, whether it had to be announced publicly and who had ownership rights, was regulated by both rabbinic halakhah and Roman law. An investigation of the legal rules concerning finds can indicate which of the reactions and behaviours mentioned in the parables and stories can be considered transgressive and/or morally improper. The meaning of the literary texts can be understood properly only if the social reality and the legal issues concerning finds are taken into account.

In the following, I shall first examine the treasure parable in its literary context in Matthew before comparing it with other Jewish and Christian parables, fables, and stories in which the treasure motif plays an important role. This comparison will indicate the variant ways in which the treasure motif was used to express different theological and ethical values and concerns. The literary, discursive role of the treasure motif functioned in a much wider socio-economic context in which the hope for – and actual reality of – finding hidden valuables was a phenomenon that also found repercussions in rabbinic and Roman law. Although we cannot know for certain whether and to what extent the tradents and editors of the narratives were familiar with particular legal rules, the legal discussions enable us to pay attention to specific details of the texts that seem to have been relevant in connection with such finds. Archaeological evidence of hidden hoards provides a historical basis to the otherwise fanciful fairytale motif of the narratives.

A. The Treasure Parable in Matthew 13:44

The Gospel of Matthew transmits the following parable:

> The kingdom of the heavens (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) is like a treasure (θησαυρῷ) hidden in the field, which a person found and hid. And in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.[1] (Matt 13:44)

Since the parable appears in Matthew only, without any analogies in the other Synoptic Gospels, it probably belonged to Matthew's *Sondergut*, the traditions that were available only to the editor(s) of this Gospel.[2] In its literary context, the parable is followed by two other short parables that share some of the elements with it:

> Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a merchant, who was searching for beautiful pearls. When he had found a precious pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matt 13:45–46)

> Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a fishnet that was thrown into the sea and brought together [fish] of various types. When it had filled up, they drew it to the beach and sat down selecting the good ones into vessels but throwing away the mouldy ones. (Matt 13:47–48)

The following eschatological explanation (13:49–50: "So shall it be at the end of times [ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος]: the angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from the righteous. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.") with its threat of a judgement of the wicked, relates to the second part of the third parable only. The use of different terminology here, such as "the end of times" instead of "the kingdom of the heavens," suggests that the parable and the application (nimshal) were not formulated by the same person. The three parables' parallelisms (all three begin with "the kingdom of the heavens is like"; in the first and second parable the finder sells his entire property to purchase the newly found treasure/pearl)

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[1] For prior studies of the treasure parable, see, e. g., D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesu*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 130–132; C. L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 279–282; J. Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 171–174; J. Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus: Parable, Aphorism and Metaphor in the Sayings Material* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 225–243; J. D. Crossan, *Finding Is the First Act: Trove Folktales and Jesus' Treasure Parable* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

[2] M. Köhnlein, *Gleichnisse Jesu: Visionen einer besseren Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999), 264, has suggested that the parable might reflect the special situation of Matthew's community at the end of the first century CE. Hiding the "treasure" of one's Christian belief from relatives and neighbours might have been necessitated by the persecution of Christians. The parable does not contain any notion of danger or threat to the finder, however. The threat of persecution by the Roman authorities would have applied to Christians elsewhere as well. Therefore this interpretation is not persuasive.

indicate that they were transmitted together, either at an oral or written (parable collection?) pre-editorial stage. While the first and second parables seem like variant versions of the same theme (someone finds something exceedingly precious and sells his entire property to get it), a phenomenon that is also common in rabbinic texts, the third parable has a different focus (selection rather than a find) and shares only its relation to "the kingdom of the heavens" with the preceding ones.[3]

Since all three parables make perfect sense without the reference to "the kingdom of the heavens," and since their combinations of images do not provide immediately obvious analogies to this theological concept, their use to elucidate the kingdom of the heavens seems to have been superimposed on them at some stage. In the treasure parable (Matt 13:44) it remains unclear whether the kingdom of the heavens should be compared to the treasure itself or to the joy and readiness to give up everything with which the finder reacts to the discovery.[4] Only the attachment of the second parable, which compares the kingdom to the merchant and repeats the finder's reaction in the same words, seems to support the second option. While sharing the concept of the kingdom with the two preceding parables, the third parable shifts the focus to an entirely different aspect of eschatology, the judgment of individuals in the world to come.

The term "the kingdom of the heavens" appears thirty-three times in the Gospel of Matthew, in almost every chapter from 3:2 onwards, where John the Baptist calls for repentance due to its immediacy. In Matt 13 alone "the kingdom of the heavens" is mentioned eight times (13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52) and seven of these references are parables. The disciples' alleged knowledge of "the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens" (13:11), which ordinary people can perceive in parables only (cf. Mark 4:11), introduces this series of kingdom-parables which are quite diverse in their imagery and meaning. The images are taken from various areas of daily life: agriculture (13:24, 31, 44), bakery (13:33), trade (13:45), fishing (13:47), and household (13:52). Together, they were probably meant to elucidate various aspects of "the kingdom of the heavens" Jesus's followers believed in. The term "the kingdom of the heavens" does not appear in Luke (who, like Mark and the Saying Source Q, uses the term "kingdom of God") and seems to be a Hebraized Greek form, the plural being based on the Hebrew plural שמים.

Whereas Luke shares with Matthew the reference to the "mysteries of the kingdom" that are available to the disciples only, while others are taught in parables (see Luke 8:10), an idea found in Mark already (4:11), this Gospel lacks

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[3] Parallel formulations appear in various literary forms such as case and example stories, see C. Hezser, *Form, Function, and Historical Significance of the Rabbinic Story in Yerushalmi Neziqin* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 271–278.

[4] On this uncertainty, see also Köhnlein, *Gleichnisse Jesu*, 263.

the kingdom-parables of Matt 13 with the exception of two, the parable of the Mustard Seed (Luke 13:18–19, cf. Matt 13:31–32; Q 13:18–19) and the parable of the Leaven (Luke 13:20–21, cf. Matt 13:33; Q 13:20–21).[5] This difference indicates that the editor(s) of Matthew's Gospel had a particular interest in explaining "the kingdom of the heavens" by means of kingdom-parables.[6] Perhaps they even added the term to parables that could have been told without it. In the present form of the parables, "the kingdom of the heavens" is the nimshal, that is, the application of the seven parables in Matt 13. The Sayings Source Q already indicates that "the kingdom of God" (or "the heavens"), a term that may have been used by John the Baptist and/or Jesus already, was an elusive and difficult to understand concept.[7] Is it believed to be already present or expected of the (near) future? Is it an internal or external phenomenon (cf. Q 17:20–21)? In the first century CE, when political sovereignty belonged to the Roman emperor, Jews and (Jewish) Christians who posited a distinct "kingdom of the heavens" would have had to explain its spiritual character and lack of political implications.

When focusing on the situation described in the treasure parable in Matt 13:44, the finder's action seems morally offensive. Someone finds a valuable object in a field that belongs to someone else, hides it so that the owner of the field is unable to detect it, and then goes and buys the field from him at a price that does not take the hidden treasure into account. From a moral point of view one might consider such behaviour egoistic and fraudulent. By not announcing the find, the owner of the field and the original owner – the two may or may not be identical – are left in the dark about its discovery. This moral dilemma is extenuated if one takes the other details of the parable into account, namely, the finder's extraordinary effort to get hold of the treasure by selling his entire property to purchase the field.[8]

This behaviour constitutes the unusual element of the parable, since such an effort is unlikely to have happened in the real world. A thief would have stolen the treasure without purchasing the field. A Torah-observant Jew may have an-

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[5] On Luke's version of the Q parables, see C. Heil, *Lukas und Q: Studien zur lukanischen Redaktion des Spruchevangeliums Q* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 46–49.

[6] On Matthew's focus on "the kingdom of the heavens" in chapter 13, see also J. P. Heil, *The Gospel of Matthew: Worship in the Kingdom of Heaven* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 61–62; H. Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 31–34. Clarke notes that this is "a concept almost completely absent from the Hebrew scriptures" (31). The meaning of this concept is "bewildering," referring to "a new order of things" (32).

[7] Liebenberg, *Language of the Kingdom*, 17, refers to C. H. Dodd's association of the kingdom with Jesus's alleged eschatological teaching. Whether the term relates to a "realized eschatology," as Dodd assumed, the belief that messianic times were imminent, or some other type of eschatology is disputed and uncertain, though, see the other scholarly approaches to the kingdom discussed in Liebenberg, *Language of the Kingdom*, 5–47.

[8] See also Liebenberg, *Language of the Kingdom*, 231.

nounced the find (see below). The finder of this parable, however, recognized such value in the find that he left moral scruples aside and invested everything he owned to get hold of it. The focus of the parable therefore lies on the value of the find, a value that is hidden and known to the finder only, for which he is willing to sacrifice everything else. For Matthew, "the kingdom of the heavens" constituted such a value and required such sacrifice from its believers.

If the parable was told at an earlier oral stage without the reference to the kingdom of heaven, the value for which everything is given up could signify the Torah.[9] One might ask, however, why the Torah should be hidden before others. Torah sages would be interested in propagating its study. The hiding of the treasure once it has been found (Matt 13:44) serves to delimit knowledge about it and to safeguard it for the finder's and his constituency's own use. As in the case of the merchant, who finds and purchases a particularly precious pearl (13:45–46), we are not told what the finder does with his treasure. The emphasis is on obtaining it.

The aspect of secrecy, of knowledge that is hidden and available to a few only, is a motif that also appears elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel.[10] According to Matt 11:25, Jesus said that God had "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants" only. In another parable. "the kingdom of the heavens" is likened to leaven that a woman hid in her dough (Matt 13:33, cf. Luke 13:20–21). Referring to the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, France writes: "The truth about the kingdom of the heavens is not only inconspicuous; it is also deliberately kept hidden for the time being."[11] In this regard, the kingdom as the quintessence of early Christian beliefs, as far as the editors of Matthew's Gospel are concerned, differed from the ancestral tradition of the Torah whose contents were meant to be known by and disseminated amongst Jews.

The very fact that the parable does not specify any use of the treasure suggests that it was concerned with its identification and safeguarding only. The narrative plot is not realistic but metaphorical, pointing to the hidden value of Jesus's alleged message. In contrast to Mark (cf. 4:22: "For there is nothing hidden, except that it should be made known; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light"), the editor(s) of Matthew seem to have been particularly interested in stating that the kingdom was known to a few (Jewish) Christians only, who are explicitly distinguished from the wise, that is, from Pharisees and rabbis.[12] Perhaps this motif served to explain and legitimize the phenomenon

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[9] See, e. g., b. Shab. 88b: in a statement attributed to R. Yehoshua b. Levi, the Torah is compared to "the secret treasure which has been hidden" by God before the world was created to eventually reveal it to Moses. Elsewhere (b. Shab. 10b) the Sabbath is presented as a gift that God gave to Moses.

[10] See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 527.

[11] France, *Gospel of Matthew,* 527.

[12] The so-called secrecy motif in Mark, that is, Jesus's admonition to keep his healing and exorcistic powers secret, is different from Matthew's insistence on the hiddenness of the king-

that few contemporary Jews, and especially few learned Jews of the editors' own time, were interested in Jesus's teaching in general and in the message of the kingdom of the heavens in particular.

In Matt 13:51–52, a passage that is found in this Gospel only, a short dialogue between Jesus and the disciples is attached to the parables. After asking them whether they had understood the parables' message, Jesus allegedly told his disciples: "Therefore, every scribe (γραμματεύς) who has become a disciple of the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings out of his treasury (θησαυροῦ) new and old things" (13:52). While the broader notion of treasures is shared with the treasure parable in Matt 13:44, the specific type – hidden valuables versus a private storage room for valuables – and meaning are different. In association with the scribe, the "treasury" clearly relates to his expertise in religiously relevant knowledge here.[13] No one within Jesus's close circle of disciples is ever identified as a scribe.[14] A scribe sympathetic to Jesus's message is mentioned in Matt 8:19. Such a scribe of "the kingdom of the heavens" is expected to express both traditional and new types of wisdom. The editor(s) of the Gospel themselves probably stemmed from such circles and identified with this learned "disciple of the kingdom of the heavens" here.[15]

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dom of the heavens. J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 63–64, associates Mark's secrecy motif with the alleged "messianic self-consciousness" of Jesus.

[13] Scribes were always professional writers in antiquity. Jewish scribes could be scribes of Torah scrolls, who also sometimes worked as children's teachers, or scribes of documents, see C. Hezser, "Scribes/Scribality," in *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media*, ed. T. Thatcher et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 355–359. The former is more likely for the scribe mentioned in Matt 13:52.

[14] Against G. R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 544, who writes in relation to Matt 13:52: "The parable proper likens the disciples as kingdom scribes to a homeowner with a storeroom …" For the common identification of Jesus's disciples with the scribe, see also D. E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal*, JSNTSup 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989; repr. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 160. Orton believes that the disciples are presented as "apocalyptic" scribes here, see Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 137–148; J. Doles, *The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth: Keys to the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew* (Seffner: Walking Barefood Ministries, 2009), 107, who assumes that the disciples "already had an understanding about God's purposes in the Old Testament."

[15] See also J. Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 154, who writes in relation to Matt 13:52: "This sounds distinctly self-referential and would lead us to think of it as the signature of the author of the gospel." See also the discussion in A. O. Ewherido, *Matthew's Gospel and Judaism in the Late First Century C. E.: The Evidence from Matthew's Chapter on Parables (Matthew 13:1–52)*, StBibLit 91 (New York: Lang, 2006), 176–177.

B. Comparison with the Treasure Parable
in the Gospel of Thomas

A more detailed version of the treasure parable is transmitted in the Gospel of Thomas:

> Jesus says: The kingdom is like a person who has a hidden treasure in his field, [of which] he knows nothing. And [after] he had died, he left it to his [son]. (But) the son did not know (about it either). He took over that field (and) sold [it]. And the one who had bought it came, and while he was ploughing [he found] the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whom he wished. (Gos. Thom. 109.1–3)[16]

This version is more detailed and realistic, at least as far as human behaviour is concerned, than Matthew's version of the parable.[17] A farmer leaves his field to his son when he dies and the son sells it. By chance, the new owner finds a treasure buried in the earth, of which the former owners were not aware. He uses the treasure to make an even larger profit by lending money on interest to others – in contradiction to Gos. Thom. 95.1–2, where lending money on interest is prohibited. Here the aspect of concealing the treasure after its discovery is absent. Also absent is the reference to the finder's joy and his readiness to give up everything to get hold of the treasure. In this version the transfer of the field from one owner to the next is conducted as an ordinary sales transaction. The purchaser's awareness of a hidden treasure is not mentioned at this stage. The morally questionable aspect of this parable is the finder's use of the treasure to exploit others. This stands in line with the Gospel of Thomas's renunciation of wealth (cf. Gos. Thom. 110).[18]

In the context of the Gospel of Thomas it is probably the general lack of knowledge of the treasure that is used as a metaphor for the heavenly kingdom.

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[16] Translation of the Berlin Working Group for Coptic Gnostic Writings, available at http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/thomas-fifth.html. The translation also appears in H. G. Bethge, S. J. Patterson, and J. M. Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 31.

[17] The Gospel of Thomas is usually considered to have been created later than the Synoptic Gospels, see N. Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron,* AcBib 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), who suggests that the Gospel of Thomas is dependent on the second-century CE Syriac Diatessaron. S. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) maintains that the Gospel of Thomas was influenced by the Gospels and written in Greek. See also M. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): "Thomas is worth reading as Thomas, as a brilliant attempt to re-create Jesus' words in its own voice, drawing on the Synoptics but transcending them by providing new twists on the old sayings, and adding many more from its own, secret treasure chest" (194).

[18] Jonathan Pater has suggested that the finder of the treasure might be an example of the "immoral hero" here, cf. Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 592–595. There is no indication that his action was meant to serve as an example to emulate, however, especially since lending on interest is condemned by the Gospel-writer.

Kvalbein writes: "There can be no doubt that the kingdom here is compared to the hidden treasure, and that the hearer is encouraged to 'know' where it is and to 'find' it."[19] None of the three characters actually fulfills this task – the original owners are not aware of it and the new owner uses it for egoistic purposes – and therefore the true destiny of the treasure/kingdom is spoiled. The parable can therefore serve as a warning to the Gospel of Thomas's audience: they need to be expectant of the kingdom and actively look out for it.[20] Only knowledge (*gnosis*) of the treasure's/kingdom's existence can ensure its proper treatment.

Interestingly, it is "Pharisees and scribes" who are said to have "received the keys of knowledge, (but) they have hidden them" (39:1). The Gospel of Thomas lacks the Synoptic Gospels' polemics against learned Jews.[21] Based on the similarities between the treasure parable and a parable in the late rabbinic Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah (see below), Davies writes: "It is interesting, and probably significant, that the parable which appears in Thomas shows evidence of having circulated in a rabbinic milieu."[22] There is no reason to assume, however, that the very version of the parable that appears in the Gospel of Thomas "circulated in rabbinic circles," was based on a rabbinic parable, or was known to rabbis. Rather, the various versions of the treasure parable in Matthew, the Gospel of Thomas, and rabbinic literature indicate that the motif of discovering a treasure could be used in different ways by different storytellers to convey a variety of meanings.

C. Comparison with Early Jewish Treasure Parables and Stories

I. The Hebrew Bible

Even in its broader meaning and different configurations the treasure motif – valuables that are hidden or stored away – does not feature prominently in the Hebrew Bible. In the Joseph story in Gen 43, Joseph's brothers find an unexpected amount of money in their sacks when they come to visit Joseph in Egypt.

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[19] H. Kvalbein, "The Kingdom of the Father in the Gospel of Thomas," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, ed. J. Fotopoulos (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 221.

[20] At the very beginning of the Gospel of Thomas the text of the Gospel is identified as "the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said: 'Whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death'" (1–2:1). Thus, the Gospel of Thomas presents itself as the guide to find the treasure/kingdom.

[21] The only other reference to Pharisees is Gos. Thom. 109, where Pharisees are compared to "a dog sleeping in a cattle trough, for it neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat." The image suggests that the author considered them rather ineffective; Gos. Thom. 39 points into a similar direction.

[22] S. L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 2nd ed. (Oregon House, CA: Bardic Press, 2005), 11.

They fear that this could be held against them, that they could be considered thieves. Joseph's servant alleviates their anxiety, however, by explaining: "Your God and the God of your father has given you a treasure (מטמון) in your sacks" (Gen 43:23), that is, the additional money is presented as a divine blessing here. In Deut 28:12 the heavens are called God's "good treasury" (אוצרו הטוב): rainfall will bring prosperity so that the Israelites will be able to "lend to many nations; and you shall not borrow." According to Isa 33:6, "the fear of the Lord is his [i. e., Zion's] treasure" (יראת יהוה היא אוצרו). The saying in Prov 15:6 associates wealth with the righteous: "In the house of the righteous there is much possession (חסן), but in the income of the wicked there is trouble." In the Hebrew Bible, obtaining an (unexpected) treasure is considered the outcome of God's blessing, which is given to the righteous in acknowledgment of their obedience to God's will. Under normal circumstances, however, the possession of unexplained money is considered illegitimate. Detection and punishment are feared.

II. Philo of Alexandria

In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, the *Bildfeld* (field of images) of the treasure, both in the sense of the hidden treasure and of treasure-houses opened by God for the virtuous, appears frequently in Philo of Alexandria's writings. Certain similarities with Matthew suggest that both writers drew from a wider Hellenistic Jewish tradition in which treasure motifs were commonly used and associated with certain types of knowledge that had to be "treasured," that is, valued and kept safe. In this context I can merely present a few examples of Philo's use of this field of images.

In his *Legum allegoriae* Philo contrasts God's treasuries of good things with the storehouses of evil things (*Leg.* 3.34.104–105). While God opens his treasuries for those who live virtuously, his storehouses of evil things are sealed, that is, he refrains from immediate vengeance against the sinners to give them time for repentance (*Leg.* 3.34.106). A similar use is evident in *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, where Divine blessings are said to be stored up in heavenly treasuries to be bestowed upon those who live virtuous lives (*Sacr.* 5.20–23). Virtues are also associated with "treasures" in his tractate *De virtutibus*, where they are presented as accessible to everyone who seeks them (*Virt.* 2.5–6).

Interestingly, in *De cherubim* Philo suggests that sacred mysteries should be guarded like a "treasure," to prevent their seizure by the uninitiated:

> Now I bid you, initiated men, who are purified, as to your ears, to receive these things, as mysteries which are really sacred, in your inmost souls; and reveal them not to anyone who is of the number of the uninitiated, but guard them as a sacred treasure, laying them up in your own hearts, not in a storehouse in which are gold and silver, perishable substances, but in that treasure-house in which the most excellent of all the possessions in the world does lie, the knowledge namely of the great

first Cause, and of virtue, and in the third place, of the generation of them both.[23] (Philo, *Cher.* 14.48)

The "initiated" and "purified" shall safeguard the "mysteries" in their souls and hearts and prevent the uninitiated from gaining access to them. These "treasures," identified as a particular type of "knowledge," are meant to be kept safe in a treasure-house or -store. Thus, two different images of the *Bildfeld* of the treasure are used together here. Like the Matthean parable discussed above (Matt 13:44), Philo emphasizes the need to protect the "treasure" for the benefit of a circumscribed set of people only. In both cases the actual type of knowledge represented by the "treasure" remains undefined: "the kingdom of the heavens" in Matthew and the "sacred mysteries" (knowledge of the creator God and of the virtues) in Philo's case.[24]

Philo also uses a treasure parable to elucidate his understanding of Scripture. For example, in his treatise, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis*, he refers to "a husbandman, whom some persons say, while digging a hole for the purpose of planting some fruit-bearing tree, found a treasure, meeting with good fortune which he had never hoped for" (*Deus* 20.91).[25] The farmer is likened to Jacob, "when his father asked him the manner in which he had acquired this knowledge, saying, 'How did you find this so quickly, my son?', answered and said, 'Because the Lord my God brought it before me'" (*Deus* 92). Again, a special type of knowledge, available to an individual only, is likened to a found treasure here. Philo goes on to explain that the found "treasure" refers to knowledge that is revealed by God to those he chooses, without the need to study ("without any toil or labour") to gain access to it (*Deus* 92). In fact, "it often happens to those who seek with great labour, that they miss that for which they are seeking; while others, who are seeking without any diligence, find with great ease even things that they never thought of finding" (*Deus* 93). If the editors of Matthew's Gospel were familiar with such arguments, they might have used them to distinguish their own group of (Jewish-)Christians, who claimed the "treasure" of knowledge of "the kingdom of the heavens" for themselves, from Pharisees who "toiled" in the study of the Torah instead.

Philo associates the origins of the found treasure and the possession of the treasure house with God. It is God who enables an individual to find a treasure and who opens his treasuries to those humans whom he finds worthy of benefitting from them. In the treatise *De vita Mosis* Philo states: "God possesses everything and is in need of nothing; but the good man has nothing which is properly his own, no, not even himself, but he has a share granted to him of the

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[23] Translation with C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus: On the Cherubim* (London: Bohn, 1854–1890), available at http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book5.html.

[24] See also Philo, *Post.* 17.62, with reference to the "treasure-house of the memorials of knowledge and wisdom."

[25] Translation with Yonge at http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book10.html.

treasures of God as far as he is able to partake of them" (*Mos.* 1.28.157). Only the good and virtuous person can become the beneficiary of God's treasures. The prospect of being granted access to treasures serves to motivate a virtuous – and ultimately Torah-obedient – life. By contrast, those who "treasure" money, gold, and silver in this world are associated with idolaters who worship other gods (cf. *Spec.* 1.4.23; 2.19.92: governors of cities who "fill their own stores with money … preserving as a treasure the illiberal vices which defile their whole lives").[26]

Philo's use of treasure metaphors was probably based on the phenomenon that the *Bildfeld* of the treasure was well-established in the Graeco-Roman world and familiar to him from the Hellenistic philosophical environment in which he wrote.[27] A similar repertoire would have been available to Paul (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). Treasure metaphors, parables, similes, and epigrams appear in various contexts in Hellenistic philosophical writings. For example, Diogenes Laertius tells of a person who found a hidden treasure of gold, took it, and left a valueless object in its place. When the owner came to recover his valuable possession and noticed that it was gone, he killed himself (*Vitae* 3.23, associated with Plato). Epictetus admonishes his audience to "make our religion and our treasure to consist in the same thing," to prevent the concern for wealth and possessions to take overhand (*Disc.* 1.27). Treasure motifs also appeared in ancient fables, as the examples below indicate.

III. Tannaitic Midrashim

A treasure parable appears in Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah on Exod 14:5. This parable has already been translated, discussed, and compared with later versions by Lieve Teugels in her recent edition of the parables in this collection.[28] The parable is attributed to R. Shimon b. Yohai:

> They tell this parable: to what is the matter similar? To someone to whom there has fallen a residence overseas as an inheritance and he sold it for a small amount. The buyer went and found in it treasures and stores of silver and gold, of precious stones and pearls. The seller began to choke. (Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah on Exod 14:5)[29]

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[26] See also Philo, *Prob.* 12.76.

[27] On Philo's complex relationship to Stoicism, see M. R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 225–244.

[28] L. M. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot: An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai,* TSAJ 176 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 134–142, see chapter 8 "The Cheaply Sold Field & the Cheaply Sold Residence."

[29] Translation with Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 135. The version in Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai is almost identical, except for lacking the reference to "treasures" and listing "stores of silver, gold, and precious stones and pearls" instead. Like Philo, the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael version of the parable indicates that the images of the "treasure" and "treasury" (i. e., treasure houses or storage rooms filled with treasures) could easily be combined by narrators who made use of the *Bildfeld*.

In the context of the Mekhilta the seller is likened to the Egyptians, who regretted the Israelites' escape from servitude *post factum*, when they were unable to prevent it (Exod 14:5). From this perspective, the focus would be on the seller's loss of a property he never valued sufficiently ("he sold it for a small amount"). Yet the connection between the parable and the biblical verse is not straightforward. Whereas the seller of the parable would have been unaware of the treasures located within his inherited residence (why else would he have sold it at a low price?), the Egyptians had profited from the Israelites' labour for a considerable amount of time already. Furthermore, the seller merely despairs, whereas Pharaoh is said to have taken action. These inconsistencies suggest that the parable was not formulated for the midrashic context of biblical exegesis but circulated independently at an earlier, probably oral stage.

In its display of the buyer's luck and seller's misfortune the parable resembles the treasure parable in the Gospel of Thomas to some extent. Also shared is the notion that the seller had inherited the property that contained the valuable find. Whereas the parable in the Gospel of Thomas stresses the reaction of the buyer of the field and finder of the treasure, however, the Mekhilta parable is concerned with the seller's regret only. The buyer's reaction is not mentioned.[30] Both parables may have served as reminders to be aware of the "treasures" one already possesses, to value and protect them. Such a function would presume that the respective audiences identified with the sellers of the properties who lost valuable possessions they had no knowledge of. The call for greater awareness for the value of the Torah (Mekhilta parable) or the "kingdom" (Gospel of Thomas) would then be the shared purpose of these variant versions of treasure parables. Other versions in later Midrashim are discussed below.

IV. Amoraic Midrashim

As far as Amoraic Midrashim are concerned, images from the *Bildfeld* of the treasure, both in the sense of finding a treasure and partaking of items from a treasury, appear in Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah. The idea of a divine reward for good deeds is associated with workers allowed to enter the king's treasury in a king parable in Gen. Rab. 9:9. The parable is used to illustrate the difference between Gan Eden and Gehenna. This is likened "to a king who had an orchard, and he brought workers into it, and he built a treasury (אוצר)

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[30] In the Mekhilta the treasure parable follows another parable about someone who had inherited a field and sold it for a small amount. This parable stresses the buyer's use of the field: "The buyer went and opened up wells in it, and planted gardens, trees and orchards" (translation from Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 134). The buyer's fortune is not based on the unexpected find of a treasure here but on his own hard work in cultivating the field. The reaction of the seller is told in similar terms as in the other parable: "The seller began [to choke]," i. e., his regret is stressed here as well.

at its entrance. He said: He who dedicates himself to the work of the orchard may enter the treasury; and he who does not dedicate himself to the work of the orchard may not enter the treasury." The parable emphasizes the common rabbinic notion that Torah observance will be rewarded by God (cf. Deut 28:12: "The Lord will open for you his good treasury …").

This notion is extended to the support of sages in a treasure story in Lev. Rab. 5:4.[31] According to this story, three tannaim of the first generation went to Antioch to collect money in support of sages. They visited a certain Abba Yudan, who used to be generous to them in the past. Now he had become impoverished, however, and ashamed of his inability to make a donation. His wife suggests that he should sell half of his field and give the proceeds to sages. After having received the money, rabbis tell him that God will make up for his loss. And this is what allegedly happened: "He went out to plough. When he was ploughing half of his [former] field, God enlightened his eyes, and the earth burst open before him, and his cow fell, and [its leg] was broken. He went to help her up and found a treasure (סימא) underneath."[32] When rabbis return to his town and ask how he is doing, they learn that he has become wealthy. He considers his wealth the consequence of rabbis' prayer on his behalf. Rabbis tell him that despite his relatively small donation, they enlisted him first amongst the donors. Then "they made him sit next to themselves" and recite Prov 18:6 over him. This story extends the rabbinic notion of finding a treasure, that is, unexpected wealth as a reward for Torah obedience, to non-rabbinic Jews who support sages with their charitable donations.

A midrash in Lev. Rab. 2:11 shares the reference to "new and old" with Matthew's discourse between Jesus and his disciples (Matt 13:51–52). As part of this discourse a treasure parable was cited: "Therefore, every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings out of his treasure new and old things" (Matt 13:52). A combination between "new and old" (in this sequence) and a "treasure" also appears in Lev. Rab. 2:11, in a passage that is meant to elucidate the term צפונה in Lev 1:11 ("And he shall kill it [the ram] צפונה before the Lord."). In the first explanation, the expression is associated with the Binding of Isaac in the book of Genesis. Whether the term is already interpreted as derived from צפן, "to hide," meaning "hidden" or "treasured" here, is uncertain but possible, that is, the memory of the Binding of Isaac is "treasured up before God." In the following alternative interpretation this derivation is obvious:

> "צפונה before the Lord" refers to the deed[s] of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are treasured up (צפונים) before Him. And from where [do we know] that this word means the laying up of a treasure (צפונה)? Since it is said: "New and old things have I laid up

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[31] The story has a parallel in y. Hor. 3:6(7), 48a.

[32] The Yerushalmi version lacks the miraculous element of the earth bursting open. This element is unnecessary in the story and does not fit in very well with the cow episode.

as a treasure (צפנתי) before you" (Song 7:14). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are [meant by] the "old ones," Amram, son of Kohat and all the worthy ones who were in Egypt are [meant by] the "new ones," as it is said: "New and old ..." (ibid.). [Alternatively], the company of Moses, and the company of Joshua, and the company of David and of Hezekiah are [meant by] the "old ones," [while] the company of Ezra, and of Hillel, and of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, and of R. Meir and his colleagues are [meant by] the "new ones," and it is of them that [Scripture] says: "New and old have I laid up as a treasure before you, O beloved." (Lev. Rab. 2:11)

When referring to "new and old things" Matthew may have been aware of the verse in Song 7:11, which refers to new and old delicacies (כל־מגדים חדשים גם־ישנים) that the beloved (commonly associated with Israel) has preserved (צפנתי) for her lover (commonly associated with God). The midrashic text indicates that various different interpretations and keyword associations with other biblical verses circulated among rabbis. While Matthew compares the "scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of the heavens" to a householder who extracts from his treasury (that is, from his storage room of valuable things) old and new things, the midrash identifies various sages of the first generation of tannaim, that is, probably contemporaries of the editor(s) of the Gospel, with the new items of the treasury that are presented before God together with the old ones, that is, biblical figures of the past.

Palestinian rabbis of the first centuries CE would have been aware of the Christian self-identification with everything "new," whether the new covenant, new Israel, new sacrifice, or new "scribes of the kingdom of the heavens" who present new teachings and interpretations. As Peter Schäfer has already pointed out: "The Jewish sect triggered by Jesus in Palestine would eventually evolve into a religion of its own, a religion to boot that would claim to have superseded its mother religion and position itself as the new covenant against the old ..."; rabbis, on the other hand, "refused to accept the new covenant" and "insisted on the fact that ... the old covenant was still valid."[33] In Lev. Rab. 2:11 prominent tannaitic rabbis are presented as the "new ones" that were treasured and beloved by God, together with their ancestral forefathers. Such pronouncements would have been an indirect affront to (Jewish-)Christian scribes like those mentioned in Matthew, who held up their new scriptural interpretations and belief in "the kingdom of the heavens" against them.

V. Post-Talmudic Midrashim

In the past, New Testament scholars have mainly compared the treasure parable in the Gospel of Thomas (above) with a parable in Song of Songs Rabbah.[34] It

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[33] P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2, 80–81, 92.
[34] See Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 10, with references.

must be noted, however, that in their present form both Song of Songs Rabbah and Exodus Rabbah, where another treasure parable is transmitted, are post-talmudic, medieval Midrash collections that are commonly dated to the tenth to twelfth centuries CE.[35] Although the parables may be based on earlier traditions (the parable in Song of Songs Rabbah seems to be a later parallel to the Mekhilta parable discussed above), the text versions that are transmitted in these late compilations could not have preceded – or circulated at the same time as – those that are found in Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. Therefore Joachim Jeremias's suggestion that the version of the treasure parable in the Gospel of Thomas was created "under the influence of the rabbinic story" is not persuasive, even if the Mekhilta parable is concerned.[36] Similarly problematic is Davies's claim "that the parable which appears in Thomas shows evidence of having circulated in a rabbinic milieu."[37] Rather than assuming that direct influence existed, images associated with the *Bildfeld* of the treasure seem to have been used in partly similar and partly different ways in both Christian and Jewish circles in ancient and medieval times.[38] Some of the rabbinic uses of the treasure motif could resemble the one transmitted in the Gospel of Thomas, but a direct dependence is unlikely to have existed in either case.

Song of Songs Rabbah 4:25 transmits the following later version of the treasure parable that is already attributed to the tannaitic rabbi R. Shimon b. Yohai in Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah on Exod 14:5 (see above):

> [The matter can be compared] to someone who received as an inheritance a place [used as] a garbage dump. And the heir was lazy, and he went and sold it for a small amount [of money]. And the buyer went and was industrious and dug up [the earth] and found in it a treasure (סימא). And he built with it a large palace. The buyer began walking around in the market place and slaves walked behind him, [all] from the treasure that he acquired with it. [When] the seller saw [it], he began to choke and said: "Behold, what have I lost!" (Song Rab. 4:25)

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[35]   Midrash Exodus Rabbah is generally assumed to have been created in the tenth to twelfth centuries, see already H. L. Strack, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrash*, 6th ed. (Munich: Beck, 1976), 208. See also B. Lawrence, *Jethro and the Jews: Jewish Biblical Interpretation and the Question of Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 93 n 5, with reference to editions and translations. On the late date of Song of Songs Rabbah, see Strack, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrash*, 213; J. Neusner, "Rabbinic Judaism: Its History and Hermeneutics," in *Historical Syntheses*, vol. 2 of *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 165.

[36]   J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus,* 3rd rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 33.

[37]   Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 11.

[38]   On the term *Bildfeld* as a network of images/metaphors, see H. Weinrich, *Sprache in Texten* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 277–278, 282–288. Rather than focusing on individual metaphors such as the "treasure" in the parables at hand, one should examine and compare the use of all associations of a certain image in a certain literary text, see B. Debatin, *Die Rationalität der Metapher: Eine Sprachphilosophische und Kommunikationstheoretische Untersuchung,* GKK (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 174–175 (on Weinrich's approach). See also E. Rolf, *Metaphertheorien: Typologie, Darstellung, Bibliographie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 68–71.

The inherited "residence" of the Mekhilta version has been turned into a "garbage dump" here. The heir and seller of the property is derided by being called "lazy." The buyer, on the other hand, about whom we learn nothing in the Mekhilta version, is turned into an industrious person. His diligence (he "dug up [the earth]") leads to the treasure's discovery. Furthermore, he is said to have built a palace and displayed his wealth in public. This public manifestation of the "garbage dump's" potential constitutes the reason for the seller's dismay (he "saw [it]").

In contrast to the Mekhilta version, which focuses on the seller's regret, the emphasis is on the buyer's actions here. The buyer has become the hero of this parable, whereas the seller is presented as lazy and stupid. The buyer's reward, namely, finding the treasure and using it for his own benefit and status within society, is therefore dutifully earned through his industrious work. The audience is invited to identify with the buyer and to ridicule the seller's indolence and self-induced loss. The palace and servile entourage were status symbols that symbolized the buyer's success.[39]

The parable may have celebrated the "industriousness" of Torah study that will eventually be rewarded, whereas its neglect will cause loss and regret.[40] The emphasis on the public exhibition of the benefits derived from the treasure may point to a time when rabbis, who dedicated their time and energy to the "treasure" of the Torah, were highly respected leaders of local communities. Other passages in Song Rab. 1:17 point into the same direction: "Shimon b. Yohai taught: Just as a treasure (סימא) is not disclosed to everyone, so too the teaching of the Torah." Here the Torah is clearly identified with the treasure. Only a select set of rabbinic scholars, who have gained their expertise through diligent study, are able to interpret it properly. The gist of the parable would then be that such scholarly expertise should be shown in public, to encourage others to follow the scholarly ideal.[41]

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[39] On the practice of walking around in the market place, followed by one's slaves, see C. Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity*, JSJSup 179 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 132.

[40] On this general idea, see also J. Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Song of Songs Rabbah* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 37: "Study of Torah is rewarded, and one must treasure teachings of Torah, for they afford access to the world to come."

[41] The identification of the Torah with the "treasure" and the idea that one's religious "enlightenment" should be shown in public are made more explicit in medieval Jewish mysticism. See, e. g., the king parable in Sefer Habahir 72: "A king had a beautiful pearl, and it was the treasure of his kingdom. When he is happy, he embraces it, kisses it, places it on his head, and loves it." The motifs of the "treasure" and "pearl" also feature in Hekhalot Rabbati and have a particular significance in the Zohar, where a "treasure" is mentioned twenty-four times. See, e. g., Bereshit, section 1, 91b (Soncino): "for the special treasure of God is deposited with the learned in the Torah"; Bereshit, section 1, 117b: "when you have reached the age of sixty years you are destined to find in this place a treasure of sublime wisdom"; Shemot, section 2, 54a: "the Torah, the most hidden treasure, shall be delivered into his hands to shake worlds both above and below"; Shemot, section 2, 174b: "setting before them the precious treasure of the Torah, which they neglect."

What this version of the parable shares with the parable in the Gospel of Thomas is the original owner(s)' unawareness of the treasure and selling of the field. The major difference, however, is the positive image of the buyer in the rabbinic parable in contrast to the negative and morally deplorable action of the buyer in Thomas. The rabbinic storytellers do not criticize the buyer's use of the treasure to exhibit his wealth in public. On the contrary, they hold him up as an example of cleverness and hard work. The tradents of the parable in the Gospel of Thomas, on the other hand, clearly reject the lending on interest that results from the original owners' lack of awareness of the treasure in their field. The parable serves as a wake-up call to Thomas's audience, who are invited to identify with the seller. It reminds them to be mindful of the hidden treasure of the kingdom, lest it be misused and spoiled. The parables may be built on partly similar connections of images associated with the hidden treasure in the field, yet their emphasis, meanings, and functions in the larger literary contexts are entirely different.[42]

The notion that treasures need to be guarded is expressed in a parable in Exod. Rab. 15:30:

> [The matter may be compared] to a king who possesses treasuries (אוצרות) filled with gold and silver, precious stones and pearls. And he had a son. As long as the son was a child, his father guarded over everything. When the son had grown up and reached maturity, his father said to him: "As long as you were a child, I guarded over everything, but now that you have reached maturity, behold, I hand everything over to you." (Exod. Rab. 15:30)

In the context of the midrash, the king stands for God and the son for Israel, as is expressed in the following nimshal: "When Israel stood up [or: reached maturity], he handed everything over to them …" Whereas the inheritance motif with the transfer of the property from father to son is shared with the parable in the Gospel of Thomas, the recognition of the value of the treasure and the emphasis on safeguarding it stand in stark contrast to the owners' unawareness of the treasure and sale of their field in the Christian parable. In the Gospel of Thomas the succession from father to son is relatively unimportant, whereas the late rabbinic parable focuses on their relationship: the father's gesture of entrusting his treasure to his son marks the latter's maturity and indicates his father's trust in him. The second part of the Christian parable (the new owner's find of the treasure) has no analogy in the rabbinic king parable. As in the case of the parable in Song Rab. 4:12, the selection and combination of images associated from the *Bildfeld* of the treasure could lead to partial overlaps while the focus and meaning are different.

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[42] For other later parallels the Mekhilta parable in Pesiq. Rav Kah. 11:7 and Exod. Rab. 20:5, see Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot,* 140–146.

D. The Treasure Motif in Ancient Fables

Some scholars have pointed to similarities between parables and fables.[43] David Flusser emphasized "the affinities between the parables and the Aesop fable" and maintained that "the transition between these kindred *Gattungen* is evidently fluid."[44] Similarities in subject matters become more obvious if one realizes that fables do not necessarily feature animals and inanimate objects as their main characters but also have human protagonists. Several fables deal with the finding, hiding, and guarding of treasures. As one of Aesop's fables suggests, the opposite of neglecting a hidden treasure was the too frequent exposure of it:

> There was a miser who sold his property and bought a lump of gold. The man then buried his gold just outside the city walls, where he constantly went to visit and inspect it. One of the workmen noticed the man's behaviour and suspected the truth. Accordingly, after the man had gone away, he took the gold. When the man came back and found that the hiding place was empty, he began to cry and tear his hair. Someone saw the man's extravagant grief and asked him what was wrong. Then he said to the man, "Enough of your grieving! Take a stone and put it where the gold was and make believe the gold is still there: it's not as if you ever made any use of it!" (Gibbs 407; Perry 225)[45]

The fable is critical of the safekeeping of valuables that are never used.[46] The rich man who delights in the mere existence of his wealth is contrasted with a simple labourer who had observed his behaviour and decided to take the gold, probably for his and his family's benefit. The theft is not criticized here. On the contrary, the rich man's loss is ridiculed. Obviously, the narrator's sympathies were with the labourer who, as seems to be implied in the final sentence, would have made better use of the gold than its original owner.

A similar social-critical tendency is evident in another fable that features a dog rather than a human actor:

> While digging up dead people's bones, a dog uncovered a treasure. This outraged the spirits of the dead, and the dog was punished for his sacrilege by being stricken with a desire for wealth. Thus, while the dog stood there guarding the treasure, he took no thought for food and wasted away from starvation. A vulture perched above him is rumoured to have said, "O you dog, you deserve to die, since all of a sudden you began

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[43] See, e. g., R. H. Stein, "The Genre of the Parables," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 31.

[44] D. Flusser, "Aesop's Miser and the Parable of the Talents," in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist, 1989), 9.

[45] Translation with L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/225.htm.

[46] See also T. Maccius Plautus, *Aulularia, or The Concealed Treasure*, ed. H. T. Riley (London: G. Bell & Sons), 1900), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0094. The Athenian Euclio has discovered a pot of gold in his house and carefully watches over it. He hides his treasure at various places. Strobilus, the slave of Lyconides, watches him, discovers the treasure, and steals it.

to crave the wealth of a king even though you were conceived in the gutter and were raised on a dungheap!" (Gibbs 405; Perry 483)[47]

Here the finder's craving for wealth is criticized. The dog stands for a person of low social standing who, once he has chanced upon some money, may become greedy for more. The final sentence reminds the dog of his lowly origins. The fable suggests that finding a treasure is not always beneficial for the finder. It may preoccupy his mind and eventually lead to decrepitude due to the neglect of other aspects of one's life.

An inevitable change of fortunes is also addressed in another fable:

A ploughman, while hoeing, chanced upon a hoard of gold in his field. So every day he crowned the image of Mother Earth with a garland, convinced that it was to her he owed this favour. But the Goddess of Chance (*Tyche*) appeared to him and said: "Why, my friend, do you attribute to the Earth all the gifts I have made to you with the intention of making you rich? If times change and the gold passes to other hands, I am certain that it is me, Chance, who you will blame then." (Gibbs 469; Perry 61)[48]

While ancient Jews considered unexpected wealth a divine blessing, Greeks and Romans would similarly thank their gods for unearthed treasures.[49] Philosophers such as Seneca questioned, however, "whether the gods have so much leisure that they can look after the affairs of private citizens" (*Ep.* 10.2).[50] Only a deluded mind will "scan the ground and explore what evils it can dig out, not content with what has been offered" (*Ep.* 110.9). Whatever a person may need is "near at hand": "We cannot complain of anything but ourselves; against the will of nature who has hidden them, we have fetched out what will destroy us" (*Ep.* 110.10). Here the image of the hidden treasure is turned upside down.[51] Rather than searching for hidden riches and pleasures, the wise engage in the contemplation

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[47] Translation with Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, see http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/405.htm.

[48] Aesop, *The Complete Fables*, trans. O. and R. Temple (London: Penguin Books, 2003), no. 84.

[49] See, for example, Horace, *Sat.* 2.6.10–13, where the narrator claims: "O let some sort of lucky break provide me with a pot of silver, like that guy who, when he got his treasure, bought and ploughed the very land on which he labored as a hired hand, and so became enriched by being tied to Hercules." Translation with A. M. Juster, *The Satires of Horace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 100. For a discussion of this text in comparison with Matthew's treasure parable, see Crossan, *Finding*, 70–77. He also refers to a later version in Porphyry of Tyre's writing.

[50] Seneca, *Selected Letters*, trans. E. Fantham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 238–239.

[51] See also Aesop's fable about the farmer and his sons (Perry 42): "A farmer who was about to die wanted his sons to be knowledgeable about the farm, so he summoned them and said, 'My children, there is a treasure buried in one of my vineyards.' After he died, his sons took plows and mattocks and dug up the entire farm. They did not find any treasure, but the vineyard paid them back with a greatly increased harvest." Translation with Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 228 (no. 494), see http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/494.htm. I thank Jonathan Pater for this reference. Here the reference to a (non-existent) treasure serves educational purposes.

of the mind: "The things you need will be found everywhere; but superfluous things have to be constantly and obsessively sought out" (*Ep.* 110.11). We may assume that Philo and the rabbis as well as Jesus and Matthew would have agreed with this criticism of attributing supreme value to material wealth.

E. Finds in Rabbinic Halakhah and Roman Law

Particularly important for a proper understanding of the treasure parables are legal rules concerning finds in rabbinic and Roman law. Although the Mishnah was edited around 200 CE only, some of the halakhic issues mentioned in it may have been discussed among Torah scholars in the preceding centuries already. I do not claim that the Mishnaic form of the regulations would have been known to the editor(s) of Matthew and/or the Gospel of Thomas. But the general considerations that underlie the Mishnah's discussions probably developed on the basis of customary practice that persisted over several generations. Questions such as the following must have concerned the storytellers and their audiences: Under which circumstances could finds be kept by the finder? What kind of behaviour was considered fraudulent? The actions of the parables' protagonists need to be understood in the context of ancient property law to detect unusual elements in the form of transgressions of normativity.

I. Finds in Rabbinic Halakhah

Various legal aspects concerning finds are discussed in m. B. Mets. 2. What is irrelevant in these regulations is the value of the items. According to m. B. Mets. 2:1, the question whether the original owner would be able to identify his property is the crucial criterium for determining whether the finder may keep the item or is required to announce it publicly. Finds of scattered fruit, scattered coins, or baker's loaves of bread are assumed to lack their owner's identifying marks, so that the original owner is believed to have renounced recovery of his property. Therefore they do not require public announcement. According to a statement attributed to R. Yehudah at the end of this mishnah, "Whatever has a difference [from the ordinary, i. e., distinguishing mark] must be announced." According to R. Shimon b. Eleazar, "All merchant's items (כלי אנפוריא) need not be announced" (m. B. Mets. 2:1). The meaning of the term is not entirely clear.[52] The assumption may be that new merchandise, that is, unused items would lack ownership marks and can therefore not be identified by the original owner.

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[52] M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horev, 1985), 87, derives the loanword from ἐμπορία, "journey for business, traffic, trade; also merchandise" and translates: "a merchant's implements."

The following mishnah lists types of finds that have to be announced, such as "fruit in a utensil, or a utensil by itself, money in a purse, or a purse by itself, … heaps of coins, or three coins on top of each other" (m. B. Mets. 2:2). The assumption is that in such constellations the owner would be able to identify his property, e. g., by describing the purse or the number, type, and position of the coins. Therefore the finder must announce the find of such objects. The exact location of the find was also important. If there was an indication that the owner had deliberately placed or hidden an object somewhere, for safekeeping purposes or to retrieve it later, it should not be touched but left at its present location. Thus, m. B. Mets. 2:3 rules that a utensil found in a garbage dump should be left untouched if covered up and announced if uncovered. The mishnah shows that even items found in a garbage dump were not automatically considered to be thrown away by their owners if they were undamaged.[53] For the parables discussed above, a ruling in m. B. Mets. 2:5 is particularly relevant: "[If] someone purchased produce from his fellow or his fellow sends him produce, and he found coins in it, behold, they are his; and if they were bound together, he takes [them] and proclaims [the find]." In the first scenario, the individual coins are assumed to have entered the produce accidentally. Their original owner could be anyone, that is, he could not be identified anymore. A neat bundle of coins, on the other hand, might be identified, described, and retrieved by its owner. Therefore it has to be proclaimed.

The Talmud Yerushalmi's commentary on this mishnah transmits a sequence of five stories that all deal with finds (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c).[54] The first four of these stories present examples of finders who return finds to their owners, for halakhic, moral, and theological reason. According to the first story, Shimon b. Shetah's students "bought him an ass from a Saracen, and a pearl was hanging on it." Whereas the students do not consider returning the pearl, their teacher urges them to do so. The owner of the ass may not have known about the (accidental) attachment of the pearl when he sold the donkey to them. The story adds an aspect to the discussion of finds that is not mentioned explicitly in the mishnah, namely, items belonging to non-Jews.[55] In the following discussion a theological reason for returning items to non-Jews is introduced. In reaction to the Jews' good moral behaviour they might bless the Jewish God. The following three

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[53] On the reuse of items and garbage disposal in ancient Jewish society, see J. Schwartz, "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle: Prolegomena on Breakage and Repair in Ancient Jewish Society: Broken Beds and Chairs in Mishnah Kelim," *JJS* 9 (2006): 147–180; C. Hezser, "Dirt and Garbage in the Ancient Jewish Religious Imagination and in Daily Life," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. S. Boustan et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 107–127.

[54] For a detailed discussion of this *sugya*, see Hezser, *Form*, 59–77.

[55] m. B. Mets. 2:5 speaks of one's "fellow" only. According to the Tosefta, "If he found lost property in [a city] and the majority [of its inhabitants] are gentiles, he need not proclaim [the find]" (t. Makhsh. 2:8).

stories all provide examples of Jews returning finds (bundle of dinars; bathing suit; necklace) to non-Jews, resulting in the owner's exclamation, "Blessed be the God of the Jews!" The stories provide examples of good moral behaviour that goes beyond halakhic requirements.

The fifth and longest story deals with Alexander of Macedon's (fictional) visit to the king of Qasya.[56] It is noteworthy because of the treasure tale that is integrated into it. While the two dignitaries meet,

> a person came who had a case with his fellow. For he had bought a part [of his field], and dug in it, and found in it a treasure of dinars. The one who had bought [the field] was saying: A dunghill I bought, a treasure I did not buy. The one who had sold [the field] was saying: A dunghill and all that was in it I sold. (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c)

The situation described here resembles the one described in the Gospel of Thomas and the Mekhilta on Exod 14:5 (with its later parallels): the buyer of a property finds a treasure in it of which the seller was not aware. In Matt 13:44, on the other hand, the treasure is found before the field is purchased. In contrast to the parable in Gos. Thom. 109, where the buyer uses the treasure for his own benefit on the assumption that it belongs to him, the rabbinic story in the Alexander narrative problematizes the ownership issue and has both the buyer and seller distance themselves from ownership of the find. None of them wants to appear greedy. Both try to uphold their moral inculpability. In the context of Mishnaic law, the solution to the case is uncertain. On the one hand, one could argue that the treasure, if bundled, would be identifiable by the owner; on the other hand, the seller forsakes possession of the field and everything it contains. Theoretically, both could claim ownership of the treasure, but in the story both decide to abandon it.

In the Alexander narrative the king of Qasya's and Alexander's alternative solutions are juxtaposed: "While they were occupied with each other, the king said to one of them: Do you have a male child? He said to him: Yes. He said to his fellow: Do you have a female child? He said to him: Yes. He said to them: Let them marry each other, and the treasure shall belong to both of them." This wise suggestion of a joint ownership of the treasure by both families is countered by Alexander's egoistic alternative: "He [the king] said to him: If this case had been before you, how would you have judged? He [Alexander] said to him: We would have killed both and the treasure would have gone to the king." In the context of the narrative, this discourse provides further evidence of Alexander's bad character, lack of morality, and greediness, in contrast to the king of Qasya's wisdom and ordinary people's righteousness.

In comparison with the rabbinic protagonists of the stories in y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c, who all return finds, and the buyer and seller in the just mentioned parable,

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[56] The story has parallels in Gen. Rab. 33:1; Lev. Rab. 27:1; Pesiq. Rav Kah. 9:1; Tanh. Emor 6, 37a (= Tanh. B. Emor 9, 44b–45a), see the comparative chart in Hezser, *Form*, 66–69.

who both renounce ownership, the finder in Matt 13:44 may seem egoistic and morally deplorable. Yet the legal issue involved here is more complex. On the one hand, one may argue that the finder, who decides to purchase the field with the treasure, would have known who the owner of the field was. On the other hand, the original field-owner's ownership of the treasure is questionable, since he is assumed to have been unaware of it. The parable does not provide any details about the loose or bundled-up status of the find (cf. m. B. Mets. 2:5). The finder is said to have hidden the find for safekeeping. With m. B. Mets. 2:3 one might argue that he should have announced the (uncovered) find before covering it up for himself. Yet he could argue that the original owner of the find was unknown and could not be identified anymore.

II. Roman Property Law

According to Roman property law, involuntary surrender of movable property happens if the owner forgets where an item is located: "If we lose that which we possess in such a way that we do not know where it is, we cease to possess it" (Dig. 41.2.25 pr. Pomponius in the 23rd book of his *Commentary* on the *Ius Civile* of Q. Murcius).[57] Since the owner of the field in Matt 13:44 was unaware of the treasure, even if he had once possessed it, he could no longer be considered the owner, since he would not have known its location. According to the jurist Paulus's account of Nerva's view, the aspect of custody of the object is crucial:

> The younger Nerva[58] writes that we possess movable property, with the exception of slaves, as long as we find the property in our *custodia* – i.e., if we, as soon as we wish, can take natural possession (*naturalis possessio*) of it. So a cow that has wandered off, or a vase that is missing in such a way that we cannot find it, immediately ceases to be possessed by us, even if it has been taken into possession by no one else. It is different if the property is in my *custodia* but has not been found, since it is present, and in the meantime only a careful search for it is lacking. (Dig. 41.2.3.13 pr. Paulus in the 54th book of his *Commentary on the Praetor's Edict*)[59]

Nerva's view complicates the situation. If the owner of the field left a purse with money or a valuable item in his field overnight, one might argue that he has not surrendered possession of the item but could go and get it, if he was so inclined. The finder's action of hiding the item may have made the search for it difficult but would not necessarily mean that its owner had relinquished custody. In the case of Matt 13:44 one might ask what the finder was doing on a field that did

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[57] Translation here and below with H. Hausmaninger and R. Gamauf, *A Casebook on Roman Property Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81–84. Sextus Pomponius was a jurist who lived during the reigns of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, that is, in the second century CE.

[58] Probably Marcus Cocceius Nerva, a Roman jurist of the early first century CE.

[59] The Roman jurist Paulus lived in the second to third century CE.

not belong to him. If he is imagined as an agricultural worker, he would surely be expected to alert the owner of the field and/or his co-workers, who might have lost the item.

A further complication is the distinction between ownership (*dominium*) and possession (*possessio*) in Roman law.[60] This distinction takes effect if a lost item is submerged in the sea or buried in the earth:

> Pomponius treats the problem of whether ownership (*dominium*) of stones that have sunk in the Tiber as a result of shipwreck and after some time have been raised again remains in force during the time they were submerged. I think that the ownership (*dominium*) is maintained, but the possession (*possessio*) is not. (Dig. 41.2.13 pr. Ulpian in the 72nd book of his *Commentary on the Praetor's Edict*)

Applied to the case in Matt 13:44 this may mean that, as long as the treasure was buried, the owner of the field maintained ownership (*dominium*) of the treasure. This would presuppose his prior awareness and possession (*possessio*) of the treasure, though, something that is not mentioned in the Matthean parable. The parable in Gos. Thom. 109 explicitly states that the original owner of the field and his son and heir "know nothing" of the treasure, that is, they would have lacked ownership rights. The purchaser finds the treasure by chance, through ploughing, rather than hiding it from others' view. The tradents of this version may have been knowledgeable of Roman property law and added these details to render the situation lawful. A similar situation is presented in the parable in Song Rab. 4:25. The purchaser of the garbage dump finds the treasure as a consequence of his fieldwork only. There is no indication that the heir ever had ownership and/or possession of the treasure. Therefore the happy finder's seizure and use of the treasure is fully legitimate.

The Digesta presents the following case:

> Before travelling abroad someone had buried money in the ground for safekeeping (*custodiae causa*). After returning, when he did not locate the place due to his forgetfulness, it was asked whether he had ceased to possess (*possidere*) the money, and whether he would immediately begin to possess it again if he should later remember the location. I said that, since it is proposed that the money was buried for safekeeping (*custodiae causa*), the right of possession was not lost by him who buried it, and also that a failure of memory would cause no impairment to the possession (*possessionis*) of property that no one else had entered upon ... And it makes no difference whether I buried the money on my own or another's land, since I, if another had buried money on my land, would possess it only if I had taken hold of it above ground. Therefore [the fact of burial on] another's land does not remove my possession, since it makes no difference whether I possess property that is above or below ground. (Dig. 41.2.44 pr. Papian in the 23rd book of his *Legal Questions*)[61]

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[60] On the difference between ownership and possession, see A. M. Riggsby, *Roman Law and the Legal World of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 135–141.

[61] Aemilius Papinianus was a Roman jurist in the second half of the second and early third century CE.

According to this view, the intentional burial of money for safekeeping establishes an enduring possession of the money, irrespective of whether one forgets its location or owns the ground where it was hidden.[62] For Matt 13:44 the aspect of taking hold of an object above ground is crucial here. If the finder had seized the treasure above ground, he could claim possession. Since he buried it before the field owner became aware of the treasure, one could argue that the finder was in possession of the find even before purchasing the field from its owner. On the other hand, if we focus on the original owner of the treasure, the fact that it was hidden could indicate safekeeping purposes. Even if he had forgotten the location of his valuables, the original owner might reclaim his property in the future. If the finder hid the uncovered treasure at a different place than where it was found, he might deliberately prevent its original owner from recovering it. Such behaviour might be considered fraudulent. The hiding places of the treasure are not specified in the parable, though.

Interestingly, in the rabbinic story about Shimon b. Shetah in y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c, where his students buy him an ass from a Saracen with a pearl hanging on it, the sage asks exactly the right question, namely: "Did its owner know about it?" If the Saracen could identify the pearl as part of his possessions, he could have maintained ownership (*dominium*) and regained possession (*possessio*), if he was told about the present location of the pearl. Since the students cannot answer this question, to be on the safe side, their teacher suggests returning the find. In the subsequent story about Abba Oshaiah of Turya, who found a queen's bathing suit, the queen is explicitly said to have renounced ownership of the item: "Of what use is it to me? I have better [ones] than that! I have more than that!" The finder would not be legally obliged to return it. His deliberate decision to return it to her is explained by reference to the Torah: "The Torah has decreed to return it." The moral stringency of Torah observance is juxtaposed to Roman legal leniency here. Since the stories deal with finds of objects belonging to non-Jews, theoretically Roman law would apply. The rabbinic storytellers seem to have been aware of the significance of ownership (*dominium*) in Roman law, which could persist at a time when custody and possession (*possessio*) were absent. The owners' knowledge about their property (in contrast to the mishnah's reference to identifying marks on the object itself) was crucial in determining ownership.

In the fourth story in y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c, where it is said that R. Shmuel b. Sosratai found a Roman queen's necklace, "she issued a proclamation in the city: Whoever returns it within thirty days will receive so and so; after thirty days, his head will be removed." By not returning the find within thirty days, the rabbi deliberately acts against the powerful Roman's decree. This element is the focal

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[62] On this continuing right to the property in Roman law, in contrast to Common law, see also W. W. Buckland and A. D. McNair, *Roman Law and Common Law: A Comparison in Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 318; A. Watson, *Roman Law & Comparative Law* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 48.

point of the story: he refrained from returning the find in the stipulated time
period "so that people will not say [that] because I was afraid of you, I did [it],
but [rather] because I was afraid of God [I returned it]" (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c).

In the parable in the Alexander narrative a legal problem arises because
both the original owner of the land and the buyer, who finds the treasure in it,
renounce ownership of the treasure. The buyer insists that the sale involved the
field only, whereas the seller states that the plot and "all that was in it" is sold
(y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c). Based on Roman law, the seller has relinquished both own-
ership and possession of the find, even if he knew about its location. Until the
buyer took possession of the find, the treasure was ownerless. Therefore a "wise"
independent decision was necessary.

F. The Safekeeping of Valuables in Antiquity

Although the motif of finding a treasure is a common folk motif that appears in
the parables, stories, and fairy tales of many cultural traditions from ancient times
onwards, it also has a basis in reality, at least as far as antiquity is concerned.[63] At
a time when the institution of the bank had not developed yet, people had few
safe options to protect their valuables from theft. One possibility was the deposit
of goods with trusted persons, but such deposits were probably limited to more
or less short absences for travel purposes.[64] Another possibility was the deposit
of valuables in a wooden chest in one's cellar, as was the case with the silver
treasure found in the cellar of the House of Menander in Pompeii.[65] In this chest
"the century's major find of first-century BCE Roman silverware" was found.[66]
It included silver plates, coins, and jewellery. Especially if the items were used
occasionally, the owners would have wanted to have them close at hand. Yet bur-
glary and looting, especially by those who knew where the valuables were kept,
constituted a risk. (Pagan) temples were another option, some of which allowed
the safekeeping of deposits for a fee.[67] We do not know whether the Temple in

[63] On the "treasure" as a persistent folk motif see, e. g., J. Garry and H. M. El-Shamy, eds.,
Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook (London: Routledge, 2017),
329, under "Treasure Trove"; H. M. El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to
Motif Classification*, 2 vols. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995), 1:N500–N599
"Treasure trove," 1:N550 "Unearthing hidden treasure"; E. W. Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index
of the Folktales of England and North America* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966), N542 "Special con-
ditions for finding treasure," N550 "unearthing hidden treasure."

[64] Deposits are discussed in rabbinic sources, see, e. g., y. B. Qam. 6:7, 5c with various
narratives on this issue.

[65] K. S. Painter, *The Silver Treasure*, vol. 4 of *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii* (Ox-
ford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[66] J. Tamm, "Review of *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii*, vol. 4, *The Silver Treasure*,
by Kenneth S. Painter," *BMCR* (2002), http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2002/2002-09-29.html.

[67] M. Silver, *Economic Structures in Antiquity* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 23–27.

Jerusalem also offered this service to private individuals. In any case, for Jews who lived in rural Galilee before 70 CE the Temple would have been too far away, and after 70 it was not an option anymore anyway.

The hiding and burial of valuables in the ground was probably the easiest and most common way to safeguard one's valuables, especially if small objects and bundles of coins were concerned. Several hoards from the Graeco-Roman period have been excavated in the Near Middle East. Some of them stem from Roman Palestine.[68] Hoards are identified as "two or more coins found in a context indicating intentional deposition together. Low- and high-value coinage was hoarded throughout Late Antiquity for safekeeping."[69] Families and individuals could hide their valuables on a routine basis, to prevent them from being stolen, or in times of upheaval and war. "Such hoards survive when circumstances prevented the owners from recovering their property."[70]

One may therefore assume that the opportunity to discover a "treasure" by chance really existed in antiquity. The person who hid his or her valuables in the ground may have died, left his or her hometown, or forgotten about the items and their safe location. He or she may not have left heirs, or the earth were the valuables were hidden was sold to new owners. These new owners may have been unaware of any hidden treasures in their ground. Exactly because such a find was a real, if rare, possibility, the "treasure" and its associations would have constituted such a potent image to work with for ancient parable- and storytellers.

G. Conclusions

The hiding and finding of treasures are ancient folk motifs that appear in Aesopian fables already and are used in variant ways in Jewish and Christian parables and stories of the first centuries CE. The narratives combine different associations of the *Bildfeld* (field of images) of the treasure and the find to convey diverse meanings. A comparison of the narratives reveals their variant focal points. While the parable in Matt 13:44 focuses on the value of the treasure in the eyes of the finder, the parable in the Gospel of Thomas emphasizes the

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[68] See, e.g., G. Bijozsky, "Numismatic Evidence for the Gallus-Revolt: The Hoard from Lod," *IEJ* 57 (2007) 187–203; J. W. Betlyon and A. E. Killebrew, "A Fourth-Century C. E. Coin Hoard from the Qasrin Village," in *Viewing Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology: VeHinnei Rachel: Essays in Honor of Rachel Hachlili*, ed. A/E. Killebrew and G. Fassbeck (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 33–47; J. DeRose Evans, *The Coins and the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Economy of Palestine* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2006), 55: "The Gold Hoard of Caesarea."

[69] R. Darley, "Hoards, coin," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed. O. Nicholson, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1:734.

[70] Darley, "Hoards, coin," 1:734.

hiddenness of the treasure and its loss through unawareness. Stories in rabbinic Midrashim illustrate the biblical belief in unexpected wealth as a divine blessing (Lev. Rab. 5:4). They stress the idea that industriousness in Torah study and observance will be rewarded and this reward should be exhibited in public to serve as a model for others to emulate (Song Rab. 4:25). Some of the rabbinic parables focus on the property seller's sense of loss (Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah on Exod 14:5) while encouraging the audience to identify with the buyer's good fortune.

Whether and to what extent the behaviours described in the narratives are ordinary or unusual, normative or transgressive becomes evident within the larger context of daily life practices and on the background of rabbinic and Roman law. Complex rabbinic and Roman legal discussions on the issue of finds underline the significance of certain aspects of the narratives such as the circumstances of finding a valuable object, the question whether the original owner hid his valuable for safekeeping and knows of their location, and whether a public announcement of the find is necessary.

Although we do not know to what extent the early Christian storytellers and audiences would have been familiar with Jewish and Roman law (the legal compilations themselves were edited in late antiquity but contain earlier regulations that may have been applied and discussed orally in the first and second centuries already), these discourses provide a glimpse of the wider intellectual context in which the popular narratives operated. While the behaviour of the finder in the treasure parable in Matt 13:44 may seem morally offensive at first sight, knowledge of the legal context makes his hiding of the find more legitimate. The field-owner may not have owned the treasure in the first place; he seems to have lacked knowledge of the find; the find probably lacked identifying marks, that is, would have been considered ownerless; once the finder has hidden the find and knows about its location, he could be considered the legitimate owner, even before purchasing the field. Similarly, rabbinic narratives that provide certain details about finds, e. g., whether their potential owner is aware of the object, function within this ancient legal context. Similarities between rabbinic halakhah and Roman law on finds suggest that the rabbinic storytellers were aware of some aspects of Roman property law, even if they did not study the Latin legal texts themselves.

Since the hiding of money and valuable objects was a common practice in antiquity, the finding of a "treasure" was a real possibility. Especially members of the lower strata of society would have dreamed of finding valuables or useful objects whose owners could not be identified. Or they hoped that their wealthy patrons would share items of their "treasuries" with them as a reward for their support and good work. The *Bildfeld* of the "treasure" needs to be understood as a broad category for which a variety of Hebrew/Aramaic, Greek, and Latin terms are used. Equally wide-ranging is the metaphorical use of the

treasure motif that ranges from the Torah to "the kingdom of the heavens" and beyond.[71]

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[71] See, e. g., 2 Cor 4:7, where the treasure hidden in clay jars seems to refer to Paul's "inner experience" while "[t]he visible outer nature is wasting away," cf. D. H. Thiele, "Paul and Moses in 2 Corinthians 3: Hermeneutics from the Top Down," in *Hermeneutics, Intertextuality, and Contemporary Meaning of Scripture*, ed. R. Cole and P. Petersen (Adelaide: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 73.

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How to Interpret Parables in Light of the Fable

Lessons from the Promythium and Epimythium

Justin David Strong

Grasping how lessons were derived from the ancient fable allows us to better understand how to interpret parables. Because exegetes are largely unfamiliar with the fable tradition, they have either ignored or misunderstood the relationship between the parable text and certain framing materials before and after the narrative. Such framing devices, known as the promythium and the epimythium, are common to the ancient fable. From the style, content, and function of these framing devices in the ancient fable literature, I will show that the Gospel authors found it natural to use the promythium and epimythium to frame many of their parables. An overview of the development and use of the fable promythium and epimythium is provided here, followed by an introduction to their content and style, so that readers can recognize them among the parables. I then offer case studies with the parables of the Judge and the Widow (Luke 18:1–8) and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14) to show the heuristic value of interpreting parables in light of the ancient fable. Finally, I highlight a number of broader implications for Jewish and Christian parables, concluding that a parable framed by a promythium or epimythium should be reckoned as a fable.

A. An Overview of the Development and Use of the Promythium and Epimythium

In fable collections, the promythium and epimythium are short explanatory texts outside the frame of the fable narrative, addressing the reader, typically having no literary continuity with the world of the story.[1] When it appears before (*pro*) the fable (*mythos*) begins, it is a promythium, and when it follows (*epi*) the fable

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[1] The most important article on the subject of these framing devices is B. E. Perry, "The Origin of the Epimythium," *TAPA* 71 (1940): 391–419. For the literary critical perspective, the detailed study of Nøjgaard remains the most thorough, M. Nøjgaard, *La fable antique*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: NYT Nordisk, 1964–1967), see 1:359–380 (Collectio Augustana), 2:106–119 and 2:165–188 (Phaedrus), 2:309–315 and 2:432–438 (Babrius). Rodríguez Adrados discusses the development of the promythium and epimythium at some length in his chapter on Demetrius of Phalerum: F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 444–465. In addition

(*mythos*), it is the epimythium; the plural forms are promythia and epimythia, respectively.[2] Here are two examples with the promythium and epimythium italicized, showing how they are used in first-century fable collections:

> *No one likes to revisit the place that has brought him injury.*
> Her months of pregnancy having duly gone by, a woman on the point of giving birth was lying on the ground uttering piteous moans. Her husband urged her to lay her body on the bed, where she might better deposit the burden of nature. "I'm not at all convinced," said she, "that my troubles can be ended in the very place where they began."[3] (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 1.18)

> Two boys were buying meat together. When the butcher turned around, one of them quickly picked up a pig's foot and stuffed it in the other's shirt. The butcher turned again and looked around for it. He accused the boys, but the one who had taken it swore he didn't have it, and the one who had it swore he hadn't taken it. The butcher saw through their trick and said, "You may deceive me with your lies, but you won't deceive the gods."
> *The story shows that perjury is still a sin, even if it is cleverly done.*[4] (Perry 66)

These framing devices – the promythium and epimythium – are tightly associated with the fable genre.[5] As far back as the evidence of Greek literature can take

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to the material in this article, see the further discussion of the promythium and epimythium in J. D. Strong, *The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: A New Foundation for the Study of Parables*, SCCB 5 (Paderborn: Brill|Schöningh, 2021), 383–448. Brief discussions appear in M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 473–498; C. Münch, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu im Matthäusevangelium: Eine Studie zu Ihrer Form und Funktion*, WMANT 104 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 147–148; and C. W. Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and His Modern Critics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 18–22.

[2] Our earliest reference to the terms "promythium" and "epimythium" is by Lucian (2nd cent. CE), who writes: "Permit me this joke at my own expense, in the spirit of Momus. I refuse to draw the moral (ἐπιμύθιον), I swear; for you already see how the fable applies to me." (Lucian, *Dion.* 8 [Harmon, LCL]). Among the progymnasmatists, it is first used by Aphthonius (4th–5th cent. CE), who uses both terms in the fable exercise of his progymnasmata: "When the moral (παραίνεσιν) for which the fable has been assigned is stated first, you will call it a promythium (προμύθιον), when added at the end, an epimythium (ἐπιμύθιον)" (Aphthonius, *Prog.* 1). The standard English terms are obviously Latinized from the Greek, though one still occasionally encounters "epimythion" in the secondary literature. The earlier progymnasmatists, Theon and Hermogenes, among other authors, refer to the epimythium as the ἐπίλογος.

[3] Unless stated otherwise, my translations of the authors Babrius and Phaedrus are taken from the Loeb-edition: B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). This quotation has been lightly adapted from B. E. Perry.

[4] Perry numbers 1–244 are fables derived from the Collectio Augustana and its dependent recensions. When a citation in this form is given, e. g. "Perry" or "Chambry" followed by a number, this indicates the number of a fable as catalogued in their respective editions. Perry numbers refer to those in B. E. Perry, *Aesopica: A Series of Texts Relating to Aesop or Ascribed to Him or Closely Connected with the Literary Tradition That Bears His Name*, vol. 1, *Greek and Latin Texts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952); while Chambry numbers refer to those in É. Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1925–1926). Unless stated otherwise, translation of the ancient prose collections are from L. W. Daly, *Aesop without Morals: The Famous Fables, and a Life of Aesop* (New York: Yoseloff, 1961).

[5] According to F. Rodríguez Adrados, an epimythium is *required* for a text to be considered

us, the epimythium was already a fixed element of the form when fables begin to appear in the archaic Greek period.[6] While fables without a promythium or epimythium are common enough,[7] when one of the framing devices appears, it is a straightforward genre indicator that a given text is a fable. Thus, the identification of promythia and epimythia in the Gospels yield important evidence that we should conceive of these parables as fables and interpret them accordingly.[8]

In the first-century fable collections, both the promythium and epimythium generally provide a lesson for the reader. When fables appear in narrative contexts, our only extant sources for them in the centuries before the turn of the Era, epimythia are usually addressed to characters at the story level of the fable teller. A couple typical examples of fables that are embedded in narrative will be useful. In this first example from the Vita Aesopi, Aesop delivers a fable addressed to the Delphians, who are intending to kill him:

> The Delphians were not deterred but took him off and stood him on the cliff. When he
> saw the fate that was prepared for him, he said, "A certain farmer who had grown old

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a fable in a strict sense, though most do not follow him on this point. As anyone familiar with Rodríguez Adrados's colossal study knows however, he does not let this conviction dissuade him from discussing the hundreds of fables without either framing device. When noting that Babrius and Phaedrus regularly do not have an epimythium, he admits that "Phaedrus and Babrius … evidently eliminated from the definition of the fable something that was essential to it" (Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:38). For one discussion of the elements of the fable that Rodríguez Adrados argues are fundamental, see his *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:32–38.

[6] The oldest fable preserved in Greek literature is the Hawk and the Nightingale, found with its epimythium at Hesiod, *Op.* 202–213 (ca. 700 BCE). As Holzberg remarks, "Eine 'moral von der Geschichte' gehört seit den für uns greifbaren Anfängen der Gattung in Griechenlands archaischer Literaturepoche zu den festen Elementen der Text" (N. Holzberg, *Babrios: Fabeln* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019], 13–14).

[7] Fables that have neither a promythium nor epimythium often omit them because the fable story contains within it what some fable specialists call an endomythium (see L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], xv–xviii). An endomythium is the lesson supplied by a character within the fable, who speaks it aloud within the storyworld at the conclusion. Fables with endomythia may still be framed with the other literary devices as well, such as the example fable from Aristophanes provided below. Perry suggests that promythia together with endomythia would be the norm for a rhetor's fable *repertorium*, such as appears to be the case in P.Ryl. 493 (Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xiv–xv).

[8] Though I have taken to avoiding the term "parable" to describe the fables of Jesus and the rabbis in my own writing, for the sake of clarity I use "parable" and "fable" in the traditional (and in my view, incorrect) sense for most of this contribution. Especially toward the end of this article, where "parable" is traditionally expected, I will employ the term "fable" as a natural outcome of the findings presented here. On this thesis, see Strong, *Fables of Jesus*. My working definition of the fable is adopted from Theon (probably first century CE) and the other ancient authors of Progymnasmata: "a fable is a fictitious story picturing truth," μῦθος ἔστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν (Theon, *Prog.* 1 and repeated verbatim in *Prog.* 4). This definition, with qualifications, is adopted by the lion's share of influential fable scholars such as Holzberg, van Dijk, and Perry: N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 19–20; G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature,* MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 5; Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xx.

in the country and had never seen the city begged his children to let him go and see the city before he died. They hitched the donkeys to the wagon themselves and told him: 'Just drive them, and they'll take you to the city.' On the way a storm came up, it got dark, the donkeys lost their way and came to a place surrounded by cliffs. Seeing the danger he was in, he said: 'Oh Zeus, what wrong have I done that I should die this way, not even by horses, but only these miserable donkeys to blame it on?'" *So it is that I am annoyed to die not at the hands of reputable men but of miserable slaves.* (Vit. Aes. [G] 140 [trans. Daly])

Here is another example from Aristophanes in which the fable is told against an opponent in a lawsuit:

Accuser: "You say. I don't need any lawsuits and trouble."
Philocleon: "A man from Sybaris fell out of a chariot, and somehow he got his head seriously injured. It happens he wasn't an experienced driver. And then a friend of his stood over him and said, 'Let each practice the craft he knows.' *Thus also you do the same and run off to Pittalus's clinic!*" (Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 1427–1432 [Henderson, LCL])

In narratives then, we can see that an epimythium is used to apply the fable to the situation at hand in the overarching story. In the second example, the fable concludes with the character speaking a moral within the fable itself, but this did not deter Aristophanes's character Philocleon from supplying an epimythium as well.

Though they would eventually become synonymous in function, originally, the promythium did not serve the same purpose as the epimythium. For the history of the fable, the distinction is a nuanced, but important one. As B. E. Perry describes the original function of the promythium:

The function of the promythium was to index the fable under the heading of its moral application for the convenience of a writer or speaker who would consult the fable-repertoire for the purpose of finding a fable that would illustrate an idea that he wished to express effectively.[9]

By the fifth century BCE, the fable was used in various oratorial contexts and it is here that scholars such as Perry presume the promythium originated. Since the promythium probably began as nothing more than an index for an orator who had fables gathered under promythia headings in a manuscript, it is scarcely found in narratives. The promythium described the subject matter, the topic, or the individual about whom a particular fable was applicable. For this reason, this older form of the promythium generally begins with a formula that we would render into English something like, "on the topic of …," or "against those who …" The nature of the promythium as an index meant that its syntax was normally arranged with the object prioritized at the front, and any formulaic statements, such as "… this fable applies," often appear at the end.

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[9] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xv.

In contrast to the promythium, the epimythium appears as early as Hesiod's epic to tell the "moral of the story."[10] In narratives, the epimythium is normally used to make explicit how the fable applies to whatever is taking place in the narrative context. In the fable collections, where there is no overarching narrative to impose a context-bound limit on how it applies, any number of moral applications could be drawn out from a fable. In every context, the epimythium provides the bridge between the fable storyworld and the world in which it is told, making explicit the desired takeaway.

In the collections, the conclusions contained in an epimythium may be broken down into two main categories: first are morals that explain "the way things are," that is, the natural order.[11] The second class of epimythia are those that attempt to influence the reader's behavior. The way the fable is supposed to exert this influence can be of two different sorts: the negative and the positive. The more prevalent of the two are cautionary fables that provide negative examples to warn against certain behaviors or character traits, which are explicated in the epimythium. The other direction of influence is the positive example, exhorting the reader to emulate the behavior of one of the characters, with a particular trait or virtue extolled in the epimythium. Especially when more than one moral is appended, it is also possible for a third type: the commendation of one character with the exhortation for the reader to emulate them, alongside the condemnation of the other character, warning the reader against their behavior by way of their negative example.

By the beginning of the Common Era (CE), the erosion of the distinction between the promythium and epimythium was well underway, with the moralizing function of the epimythium appearing more and more in the promythium.[12] Our earliest material evidence of the ancient fable in Greek or Latin, Rylands Papyrus 493 (first half of the first century CE), contains only promythia of the older form, presumably reflecting the norm established by the use of fable in oratory.[13] In Phaedrus, who wrote five fable books over the course of the first

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[10] When the epimythium came to be used in fable collections in addition to its more ancient use in narratives is a debated matter. According to Perry, it was not until the final centuries BCE that the epimythium was used in fable collections. Others suppose that the use of the epimythium in collections is as old as the use of the promythium, but because orators such as Demetrius of Phalerum wanted the fable rather than the epimythium, when they scraped fables into their collections, they did not copy the epimythium along with it. This debate is not crucial for our purposes, but for a summary of the issue, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:443.

[11] These are commonly etiological fables, which are not found in the Gospels, but compose a much higher proportion of fables surviving from before the Imperial Period than they did at the beginning of the Common Era.

[12] For the reasons behind the erosion of the distinction, see B. E. Perry, "The Origin of the Epimythium," *TAPA* 71 (1940): 391–419.

[13] This is also the form of promythium that Perry presumes Demetrius of Phalerum's book of fables must have taken (Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xiv–xv); though Rodríguez Adrados disagrees (*Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:444–465). The *editio princeps* of P.Ryl. 493 is found in C. Henderson Roberts, ed., *Theological and Literary Texts*, vol. 3 of *Catalogue of the Greek*

half of the first century CE, we may observe the distribution of promythia to epimythia change from book to book, with the latter appearing with increasing frequency.[14] As Perry notes, already in Phaedrus, the originally distinct roles of the promythium and epimythium are "only very dimly, if at all, recognized."[15] In Babrius, who probably lived during the second half of the first century and is the best-preserved named author of fables in Greek,[16] we find no promythia at all, an epimythium semi-regularly, and neither in many cases.[17] In the earliest prose collection of Greek fables, the Collectio Augustana, the promythium has also disappeared entirely, with an epimythium following nearly all fables.[18]

There are a number of subtle ways that the gradual conflation of the two framing devices and the displacement of the promythium by the epimythium impacted the development of the fable and would have affected the reader. While the intricacies of the process need not detain us, there is one resulting development with significant implications for parable interpretation: multiple morals. While reconstructions of the history of this process of conflation are necessarily conjectural, by the time we have firm evidence from Phaedrus in the first century, multiple morals were applied to the same fable in the same collection.

Ascribing multiple lessons to a single fable is achievable in two ways. The first is to provide both a promythium and epimythium bookending a single fable with two discrete lessons drawn from it.[19] Typically, these dual morals are complementary, such as:

> *Where silence brings torment, the penalty for speaking out is equally great.*
> When the lion had made himself king of the beasts, and wished to acquire a reputation for fair dealing … No sooner had he spoken than the ape of the flattering tongue was killed, in order that the lion might have the benefit of his flesh for food without delay.

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and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1938), 119–128, and plate 7.

[14] In the first book, the proportion of promythia to epimythia is twenty-five to four. By Phaedrus's final book, the proportion of promythia to epimythia is two to seven. Some of the more aberrant fables in Phaedrus's collection, which appear especially in the later books (e. g. 4.15–16 [extremely short], or 19 [very long]), lack a moral either before or after.

[15] Perry, "Origin of the Epimythium," 408.

[16] Other fable specialists argue for a second century date. For a discussion of Babrius's most likely floruit, see Strong, *Fables of Jesus*, 90–107.

[17] A number of the epimythia appended to the Babrian fables are surely not original to him, but there is no consensus about which epimythia are genuine. On the issue, see M. Becker, "Gefälschtes *fabula docet* in der Fabeldichtung des Babrios," *RhM* 149 (2006): 168–184; and N. Holzberg, *Babrios: Fabeln* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 13–17.

[18] Since our manuscripts for the Collectio Augustana are comparatively late, it is difficult to determine if the Collectio Augustana was originally organized this way, or if it was conformed to the later norm by replacing promythia with epimythia at some point in its transmission. As I discuss below, Perry believes he can identify several epimythia in the recension of the Collectio Augustana that were originally promythia on the basis of their promythium formula ("Origin of the Epimythium," 411–412).

[19] This organization is found throughout the fable collection of Aphthonius, the author of progymnasmata mentioned in note 2 above.

The penalty is the same for the one who speaks and for him who does not speak. (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.14)

But one may also qualify the common wisdom of the other, such as:

"Nothing is more profitable to a man than to speak the truth." This is a maxim that should, of course, be approved by everyone; but sincerity is usually brought to its own destruction [in places where the current value of falsehood is greater than that of truth.] Two men, one in the habit of practicing deception, the other habitually truthful, were making a journey …. Immediately orders were given for this man to be torn to pieces by teeth and claws, because he had told the truth.
This is a tale for wicked men who love deceit and malice, and who murder honesty and truth. (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.13)

Or, the two morals may be unrelated, as in the following examples:

The fable warns us not to do anything in which there is no profit.
An ant and a fly were disputing vigorously with each other which was the more important …. "… you challenge me in the summer; when it is winter you are silent. I've said enough, I'm sure, to deflate your pride."
A fable of this kind distinguishes two brands of men, those who decorate themselves with illusory honours and those whose quality displays the charm of genuine worth. (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.25)[20]

A story about a bird catcher, exhorting us to pay attention to deeds, not words.
A bird catcher heard a cricket …. The bird catcher then denounced the whole process of deducing from appearances, since it often leads people to make mistaken judgments.
The fable shows that persons of no value can seem to be greater than they really are. (Aphthonius, *Fab.* 4; Perry 397)

The second way of organizing the fable to draw out multiple morals, is simply to dispense with the promythium altogether and tack on a second, or even a third lesson after the end of the fable. Phaedrus regularly speaks not as a narrator transmitting the epimythia of others, but as the author of them, sometimes penning several lessons for the reader. After one of his fables, Phaedrus writes:

How many useful lessons are contained in this story will now be explained by the author himself, no other. In the first place, it means that often those whom you yourself have fed turn out to be the most hostile to you; secondly, it shows that crimes are punished not by the anger of the gods, but in time as decreed by the Fates; and, lastly, it forbids the good man to share the use of anything with the wicked. (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.11)[21]

From these examples we can clearly see that the fable does not have a "single point" when multiple morals are applied to it. It should also be no surprise to discover that when a fable is preserved in more than one ancient collection,

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[20] Other fables in Phaedrus with morals both before and after include *Fab.* 3.10; 4.13, 14.
[21] See also Phaedrus, *Fab.* 3.10, where the author records multiple morals, and then apologizes for the fable's length.

as many are, the morals attached to them can be quite different. Consider the following fable:

> Once a wolf had a bone lodged in his throat. He promised a heron that he would give him a suitable fee if the latter would let his neck down inside and draw out the bone, thus providing a remedy for his suffering. The heron drew out the bone and forthwith demanded his pay. The wolf grinned at him, baring his sharp teeth, and said: "It's enough pay for your medical services to have taken your neck out of a wolf's mouth safe and sound."
> *You'll get no good in return for giving aid to scoundrels, and you'll do well not to suffer some injury yourself in the process.* (Babrius, *Fab.* 94)

The same fable is preserved in a number of versions in various collections, with the following morals appearing in those sources:

> The promythia from Phaedrus: "He who wants to serve rascals and be duly paid for it makes two mistakes: first, he helps the undeserving, and, secondly, he enters into a deal from which he cannot emerge without loss to himself." (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 1.8)

> The epimythium in the Collectio Augustana: "The fable shows that the greatest return for good service to bad men is not to be wronged by them in a bargain." (Perry 156)

> The promythium and epimythium in Aphthonius: "The fable of the wolf teaches not to show kindness to mean individuals ... The wicked are saved by doing wrong to their saviors." (Aphthonius, *Fab.* 25)

> The epimythium in Genesis Rabbah: "Thus, let us be satisfied that we came into dealings with this people in peace and came out in peace."[22] (Gen. Rab. 64:10)

From the examples above, we can see the variety and multiplicity of lessons that regularly accompany the ancient fables. With these basics in hand, we may turn to the style and content of these framing devices and compare them to what we find in the Gospel parable tradition.

B. The Form of the Promythium

The most straightforward way of identifying these framing devices in a narrative text such as the Gospels is to consider their style and genre qualities. Rylands Papyrus 493 is a suitable guide for how promythia would have appeared in the fable collections of orators. Those promythia that are preserved in this papyrus, with tentative translations of those that can be recovered, are as follows:

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[22]   For the use of fables by the rabbis, see D. Ben-Amos, "Narrative Forms in the Haggadah: Structural Analysis" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1967), 134–159; E. Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 191–209; Strong, *Fables of Jesus*, 173–199, and idem, "Aesop and Bar Kappara: The Mashal and the Fable Teller" (working title), in *The Power of Parables: Narrating Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Ottenheim, M. Poorthuis, and A. Merz, JCP (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

προς το[ν] ισχυ[ρον] τον και [α]λλους // .. κα . τα[.]χ[.]εθητα [...] . λε . // νον οδε λογος εφ[α]ρμοζει [ι]ππος

Concerning the strong man and others [who allow themselves to be controlled],[23] *this fable is applicable.* A horse ... (fragment A, column 2, lines 19–21)[24]

[κ]α[τα] των [τους με]ν α[λ]λους ευ ποι // ουντων τους δε φιλους κακως // οδε λογος εφαρμοζει ποιμην θεις[25]

Against those who treat strangers well but friends badly, this fable is applicable. A shepherd ... (fragment A, column 3, lines 35–37)[26]

προς τον πλουσιον ισα και πονη[ρον] // οδε λογος εφαρμοζει ο Ζευς τ[ον]

To the [both] rich and wicked person, this fable is applicable. Zeus ... (fragment B, column 5, lines 75–76)[27]

π[ρος το]ν [c. 18 letters] (fragment C, column 8, line 132)[28]

προς τον μ[c. 13 letters οδε λο] // γος εφαμ[οζει c. 10 letters αν] // θρωποι ν[c. 18 letters] (fragment C, column 8, lines 153–155)[29]

Though we cannot reconstruct the content of them all, we may observe the formulaic pattern they follow: the initial letter extends into the margin,[30] the promythium begins with the preposition πρός followed by the accusative indicating the subject matter. As we saw above, depending on the subject, we might render πρός variously: "to those who ...," "against the man who ...," "on the subject of ...," "about ...," etc. In this collection, the promythium concludes each time with the same formula, found only in this papyrus: οδε λογος εφαρμοζει, meaning "... this fable is applicable." As we should expect from the pattern described earlier, the syntax of these promythia follow the formulaic scheme, with the subject and verb shunted to the end.

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[23] Because of the lacunae, there are a few translation possibilities for this promythium. I have provided what I think is the most plausible translation.

[24] The first fable here is How the Horse Got Its Bridle, attested widely and with numerous variations (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.4; Babrius, *Fab.* Prose Paraphrase 166; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.20; Conon, *Narr.* 42; Perry 269; Chambry 328 [with variants]).

[25] With only the single letter *nu* at the end of the article secure in the opening formula of this fable, I am uncertain of Roberts's justification for reconstructing a separate formula with κατα των in this case. Roberts does not discuss his reason for this reconstruction and virtually nothing is preserved of this obliterated line before the end. The regular formula opening with προς τον would also fit the space.

[26] This promythium is attached here to the fable of the Shepherd and Sheep (Perry 208; Chambry 316).

[27] This third fable is a variant of Heracles and Plutus (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.12; Perry 111; Chambry 130).

[28] In spite of the poor preservation of this column, this line is identifiable as the start of a fable because the *pi* projects into the margin.

[29] An additional promythium without its introductory formula intact precedes these at fragment A, column 1, lines 5–7: [c. 10 letters π]ονηρο[.]σασι[.]...[.] // [c. 12 letters]ε[.]δομεν[...]σ// [c. 10 letters οδε λ]ογος εφαρμοζε[ι]. Given the space in the lacuna, the editor presumes the opening of line five runs: προς τους πονηρους ... (126).

[30] In later fable manuscripts without promythia, divisions between fables are often indicated by extending the first line of each fable into the margin.

To the examples of promythia from P.Ryl. 493, we might add some from the Collectio Augustana. Perry conjectures that no fewer than thirty-six of the epimythia in the Collectio Augustana once stood as promythia because they adhere to the promythium formula: πρός, followed by the accusative indicating the subject matter, combined with "this fable applies."[31] Here are a couple of examples:

> About those who readily borrow money but with grievance give it back, this fable applies.
> πρὸς τοὺς ῥαδίως δανειζομένους, μετὰ λύπης δὲ ἀποδιδόντας <u>ὁ λόγος εὔκαιρος</u>. (Perry 102; Chambry 109)

> To the lying man, this fable applies.
> πρός ἄνδρα ψευδολόγον <u>ὁ λόγος εὔκαιρος</u> (Perry 103; Chambry 111)[32]

From the examples in P.Ryl. 493 and perhaps these once-promythia in the Collectio Augustana, we observe the same formula: the preposition πρός, followed by the target person or idea of the fable, with a verb more flexibly placed at either the end or the beginning, with the presumption that the end was a more original form. This kind of promythium supplies us not with the moral of the story, but the topic, the applicable situation, or applicable person.

With this formula in mind, let us consider now the verses that precede the two sequential parables of the Judge and the Widow (Luke 18:1–8), and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14). Prior to the narrative of each, Luke gives us a narrativized but recognizable version of a promythium introducing the subject matter of the fable. Since visualization will aid in the recognition of these framing devices as they stand out from their context, here they are with the surrounding verses:

> (17:37) He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." (18:1) And he told a parable to them <u>about the need for them to pray always and not to neglect (this)</u>; (2) saying, "There was a certain judge in a certain town …"
> <u>πρὸς τὸ δεῖν πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι αὐτοὺς καὶ μὴ ἐγκακεῖν.</u> (17:37b–18:2a)

> (18:8) … Yet when the son of Man comes, will he find faith on Earth? (9) And he said <u>against those who are confident in themselves that they are just while treating others with contempt,</u> this parable. (10) "Two men went up to the temple to pray …"
> <u>πρός τινας τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενοῦντας τοὺς λοιποὺς</u> (Luke 18:8b–10a)

Here Luke has woven the non-narrative promythia from his L "parable" material into the story by adding simple narrative transitions.[33] In the promythia here, and as we will see especially in the discussion of the epimythia below, Luke is a marginally successful seamster and he struggles to create fluent transitions. Since he wishes to preserve the substance of the content of the promythium, a

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[31] Perry, "Origin of the Epimythium," 411–412.
[32] For dozens more, see Perry, "Origin of the Epimythium," 412.
[33] This same technique is also found at the beginning of the Crafty Steward (Luke 16:1).

non-narrative, quasi-paratextual feature of his source material in the *narrative* framework of the Gospel, his task is not an easy one.[34]

In the promythium to the Judge and the Widow, Luke creates an unwieldy sentence. As he has concocted it, the sentence beginning in Luke 18:1 now refers to the disciples twice in quick succession by αὐτοῖς and αὐτούς.[35] At least one of them is superfluous and is a way to fit the promythium into the literary context in which it currently stands. Following the promythium of Luke 18:1, and before the beginning of the fable narrative in 18:2 (λέγων· κριτής τις ἦν ἔν τινι πόλει ...), Luke also eases the stark disjunction of the fable from its promythium by inserting a pleonastic λέγων.[36] In spite of the Lukan additions, recovering something like the original promythium is not challenging, since its core – πρός followed by the subject matter or person, is readily apparent: πρὸς τὸ δεῖν πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι καὶ μὴ ἐγκακεῖν, "On needing always to pray and not give up."

In the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke succeeds at incorporating the promythium into the narrative more fluently, with a clever use of syntax unique to this verse in his Gospel. An English translation reflecting the syntax of the verse will explain the point clearly: "<u>And he also said</u> [against those people convinced about themselves that they are righteous and regard everyone else with contempt] <u>this parable</u>," Εἶπεν δὲ καὶ πρός τινας τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενοῦντας τοὺς λοιποὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην. The words Luke composes at the beginning and end of the verse create an artificial transition into the promythium that gives it narrative continuity with what preceded. By simply allowing these initial narrativizing words (Εἶπεν δὲ καὶ) to drop out, we arrive at a stock promythium: πρός τινας τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενοῦντας τοὺς λοιποὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην, "Against those who think of themselves that they are righteous and regard everyone else with contempt, this parable [applies]." In terms of their style then, these adjacent parables are both preceded by promythia that begin with the now-familiar formula: πρὸς τὸ δεῖν πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι ... (Luke 18:1), and πρός τινας τοὺς πεποιθότας ... (Luke 18:9).

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[34] Both these parables belong to the L *Sondergut* tradition. For a discussion of the L *Sondergut*-parables in light of the ancient fable, see Strong, *Fables of Jesus*.

[35] As Christopher Evans notes, this construction with the preposition πρός governing a verb in the infinitive is unique to this verse, and more peculiar still in that it does not indicate purpose; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, TPINTC (London: SCM, 1990), 637.

[36] We see this pleonastic λέγων repeatedly at similar transitions preceding Luke's fables to smooth the disjunction with the preceding text (Luke 12:16; 14:7; 15:3).

C. The Content of the Promythium:
"Against Those Who …" and Other Subjects

In addition to the philological clues, equally weighty reasons to read Luke 18:1 and 18:9 in light of promythia are found in their contents and how they are arranged. First, in terms of their arrangement, we may note that there is only the barest indication of narrative continuity with the material before or after, or between the two fables. As Luke orders things, the Judge and the Widow is addressed to the disciples both as the audience for and addressees of the fable. Once the Judge and the Widow ends, without any signal of a change of time, setting, or audience, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector begins with: "He also told a parable to certain ones who think of themselves that they are just and treat others with contempt." If we render πρός not as "to," as if we suddenly changed the scene and the addressees without notice, but as we would a promythium in a fable collection with "about," "against," or "concerning," then these difficulties are resolved: "He also told a parable about those who think of themselves that they are just and treat others with contempt." Thus, there is no narrative progression between the two fables as it is always rendered in our Bibles, instead we have a sequence of two fables governed by the rhetorical subject-matter. This sequence of promythium headings informing the reader about the topic of the fable to follow is exactly what we would expect in a first-century fable collection. I should add that these two, along with the Rich Fool (Luke 12:15), are perhaps the only occasions in the Gospels where we find the subject matter or lesson spelled out in this manner *before* the narrative.[37]

   As for the content of the promythia, this too accords with what we find framing the ancient fable collections: the faults of certain types of people, and subjects of prudent behavior and morality. In their content, the Lukan promythia cohere with the abundant fable promythia that survive in the ancient fable collections:

> Against those convinced about themselves that they are just and regard everyone else with contempt … (Luke 18:9)
> Against those who treat strangers well but friends badly … (P.Ryl. 493)
> A fable about a bird catcher, exhorting us to pay attention to deeds, not words. (Aphthonius, *Fab*. 4)

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[37]   The fable of the Rich Fool has a promythium of the later type that is synonymous with the epimythium (Luke 12:15). For a discussion of the framing devices of the Rich Fool, see Strong, *Fables of Jesus*, 441–445. One may wish to consider whether the repetitious phrase appearing before a number of parables, "the kingdom of heaven is like," should qualify as a promythium (e. g. Matt 13 passim). How superfluous these opening phrases often are and how poorly this topic occasionally fits the parable it precedes, might be evidence of their secondary character. On the other hand, there are many other possible explanations for this opening formula unrelated to the fable form, and perhaps more significantly, this phrase does not bear the expected formal markers of the promythium or epimythium. Regardless of form, the function of such phrases certainly bear a resemblance.

> A fable about honeybees and a shepherd, urging us not to set our hearts on wicked gains. (Aphthonius, *Fab.* 27)
> A fable about needing to pray always and not give up … (Luke 18:1)

From the preceding observations, it should be clear that these two parables – the Judge and the Widow and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, which supply the topical material before they begin, use the expected literary techniques of the first-century fable. The use of promythia that are normally reserved for fable collections hints strongly at the evangelist's reliance on written, non-narrative source material here.[38] When we grasp how a promythium is intended to be used, what it signals to the reader, and can unpack how Luke has adapted it to fit a narrative context, we gain a better understanding of how to read these two fables. We may turn now to the other literary framing device, the epimythium, which is much more widespread in the Gospel and rabbinic tradition.

D. The Forms of the Epimythium

In contrast to the promythium, which is relatively straightforward to analyze stylistically and formally, the epimythium is more complex. Not only does the epimythium take numerous forms, as we saw above, we are often dealing with more than one attached to a single fable. Because the epimythium goes back nearly as far as Greek literature itself and became the norm from around the end of the first century CE, we have hundreds of examples. We are thus in a much better position than we were with the promythium to identify epimythium patterns, styles, and the like. Rodríguez Adrados, who has exhaustively catalogued the Greek and Latin fables (excluding those in the Gospels of course), has identified seven general types of the epimythium that occur with such regularity that they can be systematized.[39] The following table (p. 340 f.) shows the most common forms of the epimythium in a digestible format (with examples to follow).

In this table, we can see that numbers 1–3 are standalone formulas, while 4–6 are introductory formulas that are regularly followed by one of the first three. We have already encountered many examples of fable epimythia above from classical literature that conform to these various types.

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[38] On the subject of a fable collection standing behind much of Luke's L source material, see Strong, *Fables of Jesus*, 449–522.

[39] Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:460–461.

Type	*Description*	*Sub-types*	*Description*
1 Maxims	Generally with ἐστί (elidible). The subject occurs frequently with a relative, or with an article and participle, or with a neutral adjective used as a noun.		
2 Exhortations	Frequently with χρή, δεῖ, etc., with the hortatory subjunctive in first person plural ("let us do …"), etc.		
3 Personal sentences directed at a "you"	In the imperative, optative, or future, or μή and subjunctive and with subordinates: temporal types ("when you do …"), conditional types ("if you do …"), etc.		
4 "This fable shows …" (ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ)[40]	Regularly it is followed by types 1, 2, or 3 (or even 5 + 1, 2, or 3). The types that follow this formula thus appear as the sub-types to the right.	A Maxims	Generally with ἐστί (elidible). The subject occurs frequently with a relative, or with an article and participle, or with a neutral adjective used as a noun.
		B Exhortations	Frequently with χρή, δεῖ, etc., with the hortatory subjunctive in first person plural ("let us do …"), etc.
		C Personal sentences directed at a "you"	In the imperative, optative, or future, or μή and subjunctive and with subordinates: temporal types ("when you do …"), conditional types ("if you do …"), etc.

5 "Thus/so (also/even) …" (οὕτως [καί])	This type is then followed by types 1, 2, or 3. In other words, just as in type four, it can take the same sub-types, shown to the right.	A Maxims	Generally with ἐστί (elidible). The subject occurs frequently with a relative, or with an article and participle, or with a neutral adjective used as a noun.
		B Exhortations	Frequently with χρή, δεῖ, etc., with the hortatory subjunctive in first person plural ("let us do …"), etc.
		C Personal sentences directed at a "you"	In the imperative, optative, or future, or μή and subjunctive and with subordinates: temporal types ("when you do …"), conditional types ("if you do …"), etc.
6 "Nevertheless …" (ἀτάρ)	Conveying a strong contrast. With ἀτάρ it is always with a variant of type 2 (δεῖ), hence sub-type A.[41]	A Exhortations (with δεῖ)	δεῖ, with hortatory subjunctive in first person plural ("let us do …"), etc.
7 Different types of reference[42]	Certain types of people or situations to which a fable is applicable, similar to the promythium.		

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[40] Though Rodríguez Adrados lists this number with the formula, "this fable shows" (ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ), we should also include here the many closely related formulae using other verbs, such as διδασκάλειν, λέγειν, "this fable teaches/says," and so on, as well as other words for "fable," such as the term μῦθος.

[41] This permutation with ἀτάρ is an older Attic formula, which creates the same strong contrastive as πλήν in the Judge and the Widow (see below). Rodríguez Adrados's insistence that ἀτάρ be followed by δεῖ does not always bear out (e.g. the fable at Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1394a, using ἀτάρ without δεῖ).

[42] Here Rodríguez Adrados refers to epimythia that address certain types of people or situations to which a fable is applicable, similar to the promythium. See Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:454–455.

To provide some further examples here and to demonstrate how well the verses immediately following the Gospel fables conform to the epimythia patterns, consider the following:

The epimythium to the Place at the Table (Luke 14:7–11), and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14):

Type 1 A maxim with a relative clause, using articular participles.
πᾶς ὁ ὑψῶν ἑαυτὸν ταπεινωθήσεται, καὶ/ὁ δὲ ταπεινῶν ἑαυτὸν ὑψωθήσεται.
All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. (Luke 14:11; 18:14b)

An epimythium to the Ten Maidens (Matt 25:1–13):

Type 3 A personal sentence directed at a "you" (only implied here by οἴδατε) in the imperative (γρηγορεῖτε).
γρηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν.
Keep awake then, since you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt 25:13)

One of the several epimythia to the Crafty Steward (Luke 16:1–13):

Type 3 A personal sentence directed at a "you" (ὑμῖν, ὑμᾶς) in the imperative (ποιήσατε) with a temporal subordinate clause (ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπῃ δέξωνται) telling the reader "when you do …/if you do …"
ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω, ἑαυτοῖς ποιήσατε φίλους ἐκ τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπῃ δέξωνται ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς.
And I say to you, make for yourselves friends of mammon of injustice, in order that whenever it should run out, they will receive you into their eternal tabernacles. (Luke 16:9)

The epimythium to the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–16):

Type 5A An opening οὕτως ("thus," "so") followed by type 1, a maxim in which the subject is an articular participle.
οὕτως ἔσονται οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι.
So the last will be first and the first will be last. (Matt 20:16)

The epimythium from the Wolf and the Heron in Genesis Rabbah:

Type 5B An opening οὕτως (the Hebrew cognate כך) ("thus," "so") followed by type 2, an exhortation with hortatory subjunctive in the first person plural, "let us …" (דיינו).
כך דיינו שנכנסנו לאמה זו בשלום ויצאנו בשלום.
Thus, let us be satisfied that we came into dealings with this people in peace and came out in peace. (Gen. Rab. 64:10)[43]

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[43] The form and style of the Greek fable is manifest in the Hebrew fables as well. The constraints of space do not permit me to further demonstrate the fact here, but it should not be terribly difficult for others to follow through on this elsewhere.

The epimythium to the Worthless Slaves (Luke 17:7–10):

Type 5C   An opening οὕτως καί ("thus," "so") followed by type 3, a personal statement directed at a "you" (ὑμεῖς) with the imperative (λέγετε) and a conditional, "when you do ..." (ὅταν ...).
οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν, λέγετε ὅτι δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν, ὃ ὠφείλομεν ποιῆσαι πεποιήκαμεν.
So also you, when you do all the things that are commanded to you, say, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done that which we ought to have done." (Luke 17:10)

One of the epimythia following the Judge and the Widow (Luke 18:1–8):

Type 6   A strong contrastive statement, beginning with "nevertheless ..."
πλὴν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐλθὼν ἆρα εὑρήσει τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς;
Nevertheless, when the son of man comes then will he find faith on the earth?
(Luke 18:8b)

From these examples we can see that the verses following the parables of Jesus (and the rabbis) conform to the expected schemes of the fable epimythium. The fact that these examples represent not just one but numerous types of the staple epimythia patterns offers us ample confirmation that these are the very same as those found in the fable collections and imbedded into other narratives.[44]

These framing devices that follow Jesus's parables have not gone unnoticed by exegetes, but have been puzzled over for generations by scholars unfamiliar with the ancient fable. Parable scholars and form critics have frequently remarked on what they perceived to be various notes, lessons, and applications appended to the end of many of the Gospel parables, Luke's in particular. Noting the applications after the Crafty Steward for example, C. H. Dodd ruminates: "We can almost see here notes for three separate sermons on the parable as text."[45] Martin Dibelius grapples with these post-"parable" verses in some detail as secondary "notes," "applications," "explanatory sentences," and "exhortations" of the primitive Church.[46] Now that we are familiar with the promythium and the epimythium, we are able to recognize that these "notes" and "applications" are the framing devices of the ancient fable. The reason that biblical scholars and parable interpreters have either ignored or misunderstood the relationship between the parable texts and these framing devices is a simple lack of familiarity with the ancient fable tradition.[47] We are positioned now to have a closer

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[44]   In addition to types three and five, which predominate in narratives, Luke's fables also take on forms that tend to be used in fable collections. This supports the idea that Luke is using fable collection source material.

[45]   C. H. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1936), 17.

[46]   M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1935), 248–258.

[47]   Birger Gerhardsson offers a fine example of a clearly erudite article that considers the importance of the "parable" frames, while also appearing unaware of the ancient fable framing devices: B. Gerhardsson, "If We Do Not Cut the Parables out of Their Frames," *NTS* 37 (1991): 321–335.

look at the epimythia of the Judge and the Widow and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

E. Lessons from the Epimythia of the Judge and the Widow and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

After the narrative of the Judge and the Widow is completed in verse five, we encounter two or (more likely) three epimythia in verses 6–8.

> (18:1) *And he told them a fable about the need for them to pray always without ceasing.*[48]
> (2) There was a certain judge in a certain city, he neither feared God nor regarded people. (3) And a widow was in that city and she kept coming to him saying, "Avenge me against my opponent!" (4) And he did not want to for a time, but after these things, he said to himself, "Even though I neither fear God nor have regard for people, (5) on account of the beating this widow is giving me I will avenge her, lest by the end of her coming she gives me a black eye!"
> (6) *And the Lord said, "Hear what the judge of injustice says!"* (7) *And would not God perform justice for his elect when they call out to him day and night, and long suffer over them?* (8) *I say to you that he will grant vengeance for them in haste. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:1–8)

These verses surrounding the Judge and the Widow have been a puzzle for scholars and the comments on them resemble those about "sermon notes" and "explanatory sentences" above. In François Bovon's description, it is as though there were several individuals commenting and competing over the meaning of this parable in verses 6–8 through its pre-Gospel transmission.[49] So curious are these concluding morals that Stephen Curkpatrick has devoted a lengthy article to examining the ways that verses 6–8 relate to each other, how they relate to 18:1, to the "parable" they surround in 18:2–5, and how any attempt to read Luke 18:1–8 together with a single interpretation is folly.[50]

As commentators often note, verse six is strange in a number of ways on its own: "And the Lord said, 'Hear what the judge of injustice says,'" εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος· ἀκούσατε τί ὁ κριτὴς τῆς ἀδικίας λέγει. For our present purposes, the issue is its temporal relationship to what precedes and what follows, exacerbated

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[48] When it is clear to what genre the term παραβολή refers, it is preferable to specify the genre as I have here by rendering παραβολή as "fable." Translating παραβολή in this manner is not new; it is commonly rendered as "proverb," for example, in Luke 4:23: "He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb (παραβολήν), "Doctor, cure yourself!"'" (NRSV). So also should we render παραβολή in Luke 18:9 as "fable." See further my discussion of παραβολή as an umbrella term in note 8.

[49] F. Bovon, "Apocalyptic Traditions in the Lukan Special Material: Reading Luke 18:1–8," *HTR* 90 (1997): 383–391, especially 387–391.

[50] S. Curkpatrick, "Dissonance in Luke 18:1–8," *JBL* 121 (2002): 107–121; and a subsequent double-dip: S. Curkpatrick, "A Parable Frame-up and Its Audacious Reframing," *NTS* 49 (2003): 22–38.

especially by the use of the present tense λέγει.[51] If the verse refers to what precedes then the statement is superfluous and arbitrary. It would also make λέγει a historical present, which Luke despises.[52] If verse six refers to the material following, then it demands a certain amount of time pass between verses five and six. As Alfred Plummer imagines: "The insertion indicates a pause, during which the audience consider the parable, after which Jesus makes a comment and draws the moral of the narrative."[53] Of course if this were the goal, then the verse creates both an awkward pause not signaled in the narration, and leads to an expectation that we will hear something more of what the judge says. The reader is left hanging in suspense. For Funk and Curkpatrick, here "a change of 'speaking subject' indicates 'a seam in the discourse (story),' further compounding the argument for incorrigible dissonance between parable and frame."[54]

Understanding Luke 18:6–8 as a group of epimythia, together with verse 18:1 as a promythium, offers a simple explanation for the many peculiarities of these verses that has eluded interpreters. What all of these exegetes are observing in this awkward shift taking place in Luke 18:6, but without the vocabulary to identify it precisely, is the shift of this fable to its epimythia. The "seam" between verses five and six, the "pause" during which the audience reflects on the "parable," is the expected break between a fable and its epimythium. Understanding verse six as the opening of an epimythium provides us with an explanation for the use of λέγει as a historical present, or why we are told to listen to what the unjust judge says, but then are not given any speech after this verb of speaking. As we saw in type four of the chart above, the epimythium of a fable will often begin with a stock transitional phrase after the narrative, such as: "the fable says," "the fable teaches," or "the fable shows."[55] Here are a couple examples from Babrius:

> λέγει δ᾽ ὁ μῦθος "εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἀκινδύνως τῆς λαμπρότητος ἠτέλεια βελτίων."
> And the fable says: "If to live without danger is one's goal, it is better to be obscure than distinguished." (Babrius, *Fab.* 31)

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[51] F. Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 535: "The use of the present λέγει ('he [the unjust judge] says') constitutes something of a problem. This verb could initiate a new speech and refer to what follows (v. 7 maybe even vv. 7–8), but that seems improbable to me. I prefer to understand this verb as a reference to the decision the judge has just made (vv. 4b–5)."

[52] See, for example, G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Historical Present in the Gospels and Acts," *ZNW* 68 (1977): 258–262.

[53] A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922), 413. Similarly, Bock thinks, "Jesus tells the disciples to reflect on the judge's response," in D. L. Bock, *Luke*, BECNT 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 2:1450.

[54] Curkpatrick, "Dissonance," 114. The quotation of Funk in Curkpatrick is from R. W. Funk, "Unravelling the Jesus Tradition: Criteria and Criticism," *FF* 5 (1989): 31–62.

[55] In the Collectio Augustana, the formula Ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ predominates. One could speculate that the verb δηλόω replaced λέγω so as to avoid the redundancy of Ὁ λόγος λέγει. Ὁ λόγος διδάσκει also appears regularly in the fables (Perry 3, 78) as does the formula with ἐλέγχει.

λέγει δ᾽ ὁ μῦθος "πραότητα, παῖ, ζήλου. ἀνύσεις τι πειθοῖ μᾶλλον ἢ βίᾳ ῥέζων."
And the fable says: "Cultivate gentleness, my son; you will get results oftener by
persuasion than by the use of force."[56] (Babrius, *Fab.* 18)

The parallel between Luke and these fables is evident in these transitional
phrases, which shift from the narrative past tenses of the fable to the present
tense governing what follows in the epimythium. In Babrius, this is achieved
using the same verb and form encountered in Luke 18:6: λέγει. In other words,
λέγει functions as it does in the fables, not so literally as "says," but rather in the
sense of "teaches," "shows," or "demonstrates." Understanding the Judge and the
Widow as a fable allows us to translate Luke 18:6 in a way that makes sense for
once: "The Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge teaches,'" followed by the less-
ons. To whom the Lord is addressing the fable, the characters in the narrative, or
the reader as if a fable collection, is left tantalizingly ambiguous.

With verse six resolved, we may also confront now the multiplicity of the
lessons. Within the epimythia there are at least two contrasting morals: 18:7–8a
and 8b. As Curkpatrick puts it,

> The conclusion, Luke 18:8b, appears to mock the allegory that the frame has created
> from the parable … Not only is there dissonance between parable and frame, but there
> is also dissonance within the frame between assured speedy vindication and a doubt
> that such eschatological vindication will occur.[57]

If one of the most essential rules of parable interpretation since the beginning of
the twentieth century is that a parable has a single point, the problem is obvious.
Two contrasting points are canonized in Scripture. For a fable however, this is
a non-issue. Though it is out of place in a narrative, it is possible for a single
individual to append more than one lesson to a fable. It is also possible that these
two epimythia derive from two different hands. Such a practice would not have
struck the fable reader as the least bit unusual – at least in a fable collection.

While a few exegetes have discussed the irreconcilability of the framing de-
vices in the Judge and the Widow, none have explored the same issue with the
Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

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[56] There are similar examples in the other fable authors, e. g. *Hac re probatur quantum
ingenium valet; virtute semper praevalet sapientia*, "This affair shows how much ingenuity
can accomplish; cleverness is always more than a match for hardihood" (Phaedrus, *Fab.*
1.14); Οὗτος ὁ λόγος λεχθείη ἂν κατὰ ἀνδρῶν οἵτινες τοὺς εὐεργέτας ἀδικοῦντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ
κολάζονται, "This fable would be said concerning men who are punished by God for their
unjust deeds" (Perry 77; Chambry 103). In the critical editions of the prose collections, these
types of formulaic introductions to the epimythia, e. g. "the fable shows," are often omitted
because they are secondary and found in some manuscripts but not others. Such formu-
laic transitional phrases are widely attested in various manuscripts as I have observed when
examining them by autopsy.

[57] Curkpatrick, "Dissonance," 119.

Against those who are convinced about themselves that they are righteous but treat others with contempt.
Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"
I say to you, this one went vindicated to his house rather than that one, since all who lift themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted. (Luke 18:9–14 NRSV)

As noted above, the epimythium fits Rodríguez Adrados's first type exactly: a maxim with a relative clause, using articular participles. After the maxim in verse fourteen, Luke immediately resumes his narrative without the barest narrative continuity between this fable epimythium and the next episode.

While the content of the epimythia attached to the Judge and the Widow have a particularly Christian ethical flavor, turning briefly to the content of the epimythium following the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, we find a moral familiar from other first-century fables. Unlike the Judge and the Widow, the promythium and the epimythium of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector are in the same ballpark and so have generally been conflated, their divergences glossed over. We may note a number of very similar lessons found in the contemporary fable collections. Examples of boastfulness and pride in the epimythia include:

You too, man, never be boastful when fortune elevates you above another. Many have been saved by the very fact of not succeeding. (Babrius, *Fab.* 5)
Exult not overmuch in the pride of thy youthful strength. Many a man's old age is spent in weary toil. (Babrius, *Fab.* 29)

The value of humility is also a common but separate theme:

Whenever a people is hard pressed by a grim calamity it is their leaders in high position who are in danger; the humble, common people easily find safety in obscurity. (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.6)[58]

The specific pairing of the lemmata "uplifting" (ὕψος) with "the humble" (ταπεινός) is also found in the epimythium of the following Babrian fable:

φιλαδελφία μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ἀνθρώποις, ἥ καὶ ταπεινοὺς ὄντας ἦρεν εἰς ὕψος.
Brotherly love is the greatest good for men; even the humble are exalted by it.
(Babrius, *Fab.* 47; cf. Perry 53)

In terms of both their style and their content, the promythium and epimythium of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector clearly belong to the first-century fable milieu.

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[58] See also Babrius, *Fab.* 12 (the epimythium), and especially 112.

From their style, form, and content, there are many recognizable promythia and epimythia in the verses preceding and following New Testament "parables." This fact has gone essentially unrecognized in biblical scholarship until now.[59] If these verses are the framing devices of the ancient fable, then they should be interpreted accordingly.

F. Implications and Conclusions

The Judge and the Widow and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector have served as *exempla* by which to familiarize the reader with how fables communicate their lessons, and to provide test cases to leverage broader claims that I may now highlight. Perhaps the most significant implication relevant to this volume is what I indicated in the introduction: since the archaic Greek period, the epimythium was one of the hallmarks of the ancient fable genre. First-century readers would have recognized a story with these literary devices appended before or after as fables. If having a promythium or epimythium renders a text a fable, then the Gospel "parables" with these framing devices must be reckoned as fables as well. If there were ever two discrete *genres* called "parable" and "fable," the Gospel audience encountering these stories would have been deaf to the distinction. This is consistent with my thesis that the evangelists do not use παραβολή in the sense of a genre called the "parable"; rather, they use it as a broad term meaning something like "comparative illustration" that encompasses several forms, including proverbs, similes, and fables. As a proper genre, what most imagine with the term "parable" is actually the genre fable. Such a bold claim requires more evidence than can be marshalled here in a single article, but the use of the promythium and epimythium is one substantial point in its favor.[60]

The ancient fable presents some fundamental problems for parable interpretation as well. Though it has come under greater scrutiny lately, the goal of arriving at a single meaning of a parable has long been considered a foundational premise of parable interpretation since Adolf Jülicher's work made its initial impact.[61] As we have seen from the preceding study, no exclusive "single point" method of parable interpretation can survive an encounter with the contemporary fable literature and the fables found in the Gospels with multiple morals.

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[59] The significant exception is Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 473–498.

[60] The interested reader can find the details of the broader thesis worked out in Strong, *Fables of Jesus.*

[61] A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1899), esp. 1:25–118. For the decreasing focus on the "single point" method in parable research, see the histories of interpretation in W. S. Kissinger, *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen: American Theological Library Association, 1979), 1–230; and the more up to date and concise treatment by R. Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 21–55.

The goal of interpreting a fable is not to divine a single meaning or moral lesson that the author has in mind. While it may well be that an original author had composed a fable to teach a specific moral (though certainly not always), and that a speaker may use it in a particular rhetorical context to support a particular argument, it is perfectly in keeping with the goals of the genre to create separate lessons from the same fable, particularly in the course of its transmission. Whether lessons derived from the fable are synonymous, one qualifies another, or they stand in total contradiction with each other is perfectly acceptable in this genre. If we should reckon the texts discussed here as fables, then the privileged place of the "single lesson" among the canons of parable interpretation cannot be sustained.

While the ancient fable presents the parable interpreter with a number of problems, it grants us new solutions as well. In offering a close examination of the Judge and the Widow and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, I showed how grasping the ancient fable form helps to resolve some long-noted peculiarities of the "parable" tradition, in Luke especially. The solutions to many more interpretive conundrums are also found in a comparison with the host of contemporary fables and in properly understanding how fables communicate their lessons. This is a frontier of scholarship with room for many intrepid researchers.

Still another venue open for further research is the relationship of the rabbinic mashal and nimshal to the fable and its epimythium, respectively. While a few skillful researchers have compared certain Hellenistic forms to what we find in the rabbinic materials, a comparison of the Greek and Latin fable material to the rabbinic mashal has been conspicuously absent.[62] As it relates to this contribution specifically, one of the most essential issues surrounding the theory of the rabbinic mashal is how to properly construe the relationship between mashal and nimshal. Do the rabbis begin with the answer and then craft a mashal to illustrate it, or begin with a story from which they derive a lesson? Does one element have ontological priority over the other or is there a more complex inter-dependency between mashal and nimshal? Might the meaning of each element and dynamic between them change from context to context? Such essential questions have been raised and debated by the likes of David Stern and Daniel Boyarin.[63] If we situate the mashal in the world of the fable and equate the

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[62] The most notable recent work in this area is by R. Hidary, *Rabbis and Classical Rhetoric: Sophistic Education and Oratory in the Talmud and Midrash* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). His monograph is noteworthy both for its erudition in every other regard and for the absence of any discussion of the mashal as it relates to the fable. David Flusser suggests a genetic relationship between the rabbinic mashal and the Hellenistic fable in *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesu*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981).

[63] The importance of these issues is captured by David Stern, who writes in his influential book *Parables in Midrash*: "The answer to this question – the purpose of the nimshal – is in a way, the linchpin of the conception of the mashal that underlies this book," *Parables in*

nimshal with the epimythium, we can shine light on this question from several new angles. Between the various authors of progymnasmata, other educators such as Quintilian, and a variety of other classical commentators, we have a number of ancient discussions concerning the theory of the fable, how a fable relates to its epimythium, and how a fable and its lesson are adapted depending on the circumstances. If the classical rhetorical forms serve as the basis for the rabbinic forms or are analogous to them, then there are many ancient authors with something new to teach us about these modern questions.

In this contribution, my goal has been to introduce the framing devices of the ancient fable – the promythium and the epimythium – by which the fable presents its subject and communicates its lessons. After providing a general orientation to the promythium and the epimythium, I then offered some methods by which these same fable techniques can be identified in the biblical (and rabbinic) "parables." I provided a close examination of two Gospel fables as a case study, to demonstrate how properly understanding these fable framing devices can affect how we interpret a Gospel fable. Finally, I offered a few broad implications and pointed to areas open for future research. As a contribution to the broader aims of this volume, it is my hope that this contribution demonstrates not merely the utility of becoming more familiar with the ancient fable, but how essential the ancient fable is to a proper grasp of the parable tradition, and the many new and exciting questions it presents for the field. This collaborative volume represents one of the first fruits of what should become the next wave of parable research, shaped by an encounter with the ancient fable.

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Fables, Parables and Slaves

Epictetus, Aesop and the Gospels in Conversation with North American Slave Narratives

Mary Ann Beavis

There has been a recent upsurge of scholarly interest in the conundrum of slavery in early Christianity.[1] Despite this enhanced attention, the question remains of what drew slaves to the church, compared to other religious options they might (or might not) have pursued (e. g., mystery cults, voluntary associations). Admittedly, some slaves, such as those who likely worked in the household of Lydia (Acts 16:15), were baptized, with or without their consent or understanding, along with other members of her *oikos*. Some may have been attracted by the possibility of manumission at the expense of the local church.[2] A few, like Blandina, Felicitas and the unnamed *ancillae* mentioned by Pliny, risked martyrdom for their commitment, and for the freedom offered by the promise of a blessed afterlife.[3] There are faint traces of evidence that a few slaves achieved leadership positions in their communities[4] – a welcome contrast to the lack of honour due to their servile status.

As with the study of slavery in antiquity in general, scholarship on slavery in early Christianity is hampered by the extreme rarity of writings by (or echoing

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[1] E. g., K. A. Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); S. M. Elliott, *Family Empires, Roman and Christian*, vol. 1, *Roman Family Empires: Household, Empire, Resistance* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2018), 85–96, 231–268; M. A. Beavis, "The Parable of the Slave, Son and Vineyard: An Early Christian Freedman's Narrative (Hermas Similitudes 5.2–11)," *CBQ* 80 (2018): 655–669; J. Bodel, "Household Religion and Religions of the House: The Spiritual Lives of Roman Slaves," paper presented at the conference "*Sacra privata*: From Pagan Religiosity to Early Christian Domestic Cult," Universität Wien, 22 May 2015, https://domesticreligion.univie.ac.at/conference/audio-files/; M. Flexsenhar III, *Christians in Caesar's Household: The Emperor's Slaves in the Making of Christianity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019); M. B. Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor and Gendered Enslavement in Early Christian Discourse: Double Trouble Embodied* (London: Routledge, 2018); C. L. de Wet, *The Unbound God: Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought*, RSECW (London: Routledge, 2018); R. Charles, *The Silencing of Slaves in Early Jewish and Christian Texts*, RSECW (London: Routledge, 2020).

[2] See J. A. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

[3] For a biting critique of the early Christian treatment of slaves, see K. R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, KTAH (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 145–153. See also J. A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

[4] Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership*, 42–62, 87–110.

the voices of) ancient slaves. This article presents two ancient figures whose works have been interpreted as reflecting their experience as slaves: the Stoic philosopher Epictetus and the legendary fabulist Aesop. In the next section, Epictetus is offered as an example of a freedman whose philosophy reflects his past experience in slavery. However, since the focus of this anthology is on parables and fables, more attention will be given to the Aesopic tradition,[5] which will be considered side-by-side with the slave parables of the Gospels to search for traces of servile experience submerged in the parable tradition.

This examination raises complex questions of authorship and audience. Epictetus is the one author who, as a freedman, had a background in slavery, and yet the "slave" whom he addresses in his *Discourses* is a free man enmeshed in the metaphorical slavery of his social obligations and ambitions. The Aesopic tradition is literarily and chronologically wide-ranging, but claims its origins in the storytelling of a quick-witted slave (and later, freedman) whose fables can be imagined as entertaining both slave and free listeners. The parables, also the product of a complex process of transmission and redaction, are attributed to Jesus, a figure with no background in slavery, but whose teachings, including the parables, were almost certainly delivered to audiences that included slaves, and which might be expected to show some sympathy or regard for slave listeners. The discussion below will be attentive to these questions, in conversation with cross-cultural evidence from North American slave narratives. The material from the slave narratives is a useful source of comparative material to supplement the extremely sparse evidence of ancient evidence of the experiences and perspectives of the enslaved.[6]

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[5] Although Epictetus makes use of similes and what some might call parables, his work does not feature slave parables/fables.

[6] For comparisons of ancient and modern slavery, see K. R. Bradley, "Engaging with Slavery," *BibInt* 21 (2013): 541–542; K. R. Bradley, "Roman Slavery: Retrospect and Prospect," *CJH* 43 (2008): 478–500; K. R. Bradley, "Resisting Slavery at Rome," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. K. R. Bradley and P. Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 369–370, 376; E. Dal Lago and C. Katsari, "The Study of Ancient and Modern Slave Systems: Setting an Agenda for Comparison," in *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern*, ed. E. Dal Lago and C. Katsari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3–31. For my own efforts in this vein, see my publications "Parable of the Slave, Son and Vineyard"; "The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30): Imagining a Slave's Perspective," *JGAR* 2 (2018): 7–21; "Six Years a Slave: The *Confessio* of St. Patrick as Slave Narrative," *ITQ* 85 (2020): 1–13; "Slaves Obey Your Masters according to the Flesh (Col 3:22a; Eph 6:5a) in Servile Perspective," *Listening* (2021): forthcoming; and *Onesimus in Context: The First Christian Slave* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).

A. Epictetus

J. Albert Harrill observes that ancient figures as prominent as the philosopher Epictetus (ca. 50–135 CE) and the comic playwright Terence (ca. 195–159 BCE) were freedmen who had experienced slavery,[7] although scholars disagree as to whether that experience coloured their work.[8] Harrill argues that Epictetus's works do indeed evidence his background as a slave, although his observations are buried in a footnote.[9] More recently, and at greater length, Eva Ebel has come to a similar conclusion.[10]

It is plausible that Epictetus used examples that were drawn from his past experience and that reflect the perspective of an ex-slave. For example, in *Disc.* 1.13, the philosopher chides a master who blames his slave for bringing him tepid, rather than hot, water, with the observation that both master and slave are children of Zeus (cf. *Disc.* 1.19). Similarly, an ailing master should not feel sorry for himself if his slave is slow in bringing him a bandage (*Disc.* 1.18). Epictetus recalls laughing with his fellow-slaves at a suppliant to his former master, Epaphroditus, complaining that he only had a million and a half denarii left in his coffers (*Disc.* 1.26). He fantasizes about assaulting an unworthy master

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[7] J. A. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 19.

[8] Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 19, cites M. I. Finley and P. A. Brunt as skeptical of any evidence of freedmen's perspectives in these authors, against the views of W. A. Oldfather and Chester Starr who claimed that Epictetus, in particular, spoke of freedom so eloquently and passionately because of his personal experience as a slave. Harrill doesn't offer a similar analysis of Terence; Amerasingh, however, notes that Terence's slaves are unconventional in that they are depicted more realistically than in other comic plays; rather than managing the action, they are ineffectual, lukewarm in their master's cause, foolable, or uncooperative (C. Q. Amerasingh, "The Part of the Slave in Terence's Drama," *GR* 19 [1950]: 62–72). Amerasingh does not connect the playwright's distinctive portrayal of slave characters to his own background in slavery, but it may be germane.

[9] Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 20 n 24: "See Art. *Epict. diss.* 1.12; 1.13; 2.10; 2.16.42; 2.21.5; 3.24.43; 4.1.52–53. Even from reading these few pages one can learn that Epictetus's arguments indeed reflect his experiences with slavery. He often employs metaphors and images that did not come from the standard commonplaces of Greco-Roman moral exhortation literature, but were drawn from his own experience and reflect the slave's point of view. E. g., Aer. *Epict. diss.* 2.20.29–31 (here Epictetus brings a new twist to the stock *servus callidus* figure by making the slave a hero); 1.25.7–8 (on the joys of Saturnalia); 4.1.25–28 (servile sympathy with caged animals); 1.29.59–60 and 2.1.9–11 (the frightened runaway); 1.9.8–10 (the resourceful runaway); 2.18.12 and 3.25.9–10 (fear of the whip); 2.17.29–33 (athletic training and competition, perhaps as a slave); 1.8.14 and 1.12.24 (crippled leg, perhaps as a result of a sports injury while a slave, but cf. Origen, *Cels.* 7.53 for another reason for Epictetus's crippled leg). In the reference to *Contra Celsum*, Celsus claims that Epictetus's leg was injured by a cruel master." Contra Harrill, the *servus callidus* as hero was a dramatic convention (Amerasingh, "Part of the Slave," 62). See also J. P. Hershbell, "Epictetus: A Freedman on Slavery," *AS* 26 (1995): 185–204.

[10] E. Ebel, "Ein ehemaliger Sklave spricht über Sklaverei und Freilassung: Zum sozialgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Epiktets Diatribe über die Freiheit," in *Epiktet: Was ist wahre Freiheit?*, ed. S. Vollenweider et al., SAPERE 22 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 79–96.

(*Disc.* 2.20), and deplores a master who picks a fight with a poor slave (*Disc.* 2.21). He cites the example of slaves who wait solicitously on elderly masters and mistresses all the while wishing they would die (*Disc.* 4.1). He recalls the pleasures of Saturnalia as an example of the arbitrariness of fate (*Disc.* 1.25; cf. 4.1). He expresses sympathy with caged animals (*Disc.* 4.1).[11] He realistically observes that runaway slaves are dependant for their sustenance on nothing but themselves (*Disc.* 1.9); elsewhere, he cites the constant anxiety of the runaway slave (*Disc.* 1.30). Epictetus's observations about the unrealistic expectations of the enslaved about freedom (*Disc.* 4.1) may echo his own past disappointments and frustrations.

Similar themes are expressed in the memoirs of North American slaves. The freedmen and women often recall the cruelty of slaveholders.[12] They remember masking their true feelings about their masters: "When any stranger is present we have to love them very much … [But when they were sick or dying] Then they all look glad, and go to the cabin with a merry heart."[13] They looked forward to holidays, especially Christmas, when many received several days off to visit with family and friends on other plantations,[14] but New Year's Day marked a return to hard labour, or worse, auction day, where family and friends might be separated permanently.[15] Animal tales that sympathize with the weakness and fear of non-human creatures are commonplace in African-American folklore.[16] The dangers and hardships of running away are a frequent theme.[17]

It may not be too far a stretch to suggest that Epictetus's reflections on moral slavery and freedom, although consistent with Stoic doctrine, were influenced by his personal experience as a slave:[18]

> God has set me free, I have learned to understand His commands, no one can make a slave of me any more, my judges and he who claims my freedom are as they should be. "Am I not the master of your body?" Why should that concern *me*? "Am I not the master of your property?" Well, how does that concern *me*?[19] (Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.7)

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[11] On the animalization of slaves in antiquity, see K. R. Bradley, "Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction," in *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays*, ed. K. R. Bradley, PSV 50 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 59–78.

[12] J. W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. and enl. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 317.

[13] Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 312–313.

[14] A. J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 224.

[15] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 224.

[16] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 127–128.

[17] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 196–205.

[18] See Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 192–203. See also Glancy, *Slavery*, 30–34, and, especially, M. Forschner, "Epiktets Theorie der Freiheit im Verhältnis zur klassischen stoischen Lehre," in *Epiktet: Was ist wahre Freiheit?*, ed. S. Vollenweider et al., SAPERE 22 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 98–118.

[19] P. E. Matheson, trans., *Epictetus*: *The* Discourses *and* Manual*, Together with Fragments of His Writings*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916), 168.

It is easy to surmise that the philosopher's ideas began to coalesce while he was still a slave attempting to cultivate a sense of inner freedom in the midst of bodily servitude. John W. Blassingame observes that many African American slaves survived

> almost indescribable cruelties because they were resigned to their fate. Henry Clay Bruce contended that there were many slaves, "who though they knew they suffered a great wrong in their enslavement, gave their best services to their masters, realizing, philosophically, that the wisest course was to make the best of their unfortunate situation." … Frederick Douglass spoke for many of them when he asserted: 'A man's troubles are always disposed of when he finds endurance is his only remedy'."[20]

The Stoic conviction that the divine dwells in everything,[21] even a slave, would have had special appeal to a slave or freedman.

B. Aesop

Harrill notes that another body of literature that may evidence the slaves' point of view is the fable, since the consummate fabulist Aesop was reputed to have been a slave; one of his later anthologists, Phaedrus, was a freedman of Augustus.[22] Harrill speculates that "with its 'trickster slave' character, the fable may have functioned as a vehicle for slave protest and indirect criticism of slaveowners."[23] Indeed, Phaedrus explained Aesop's use of the fable as an opaque form of speech that allowed the clever slave to express his opinions without being punished for them: "The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories" (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 3.*praef*.35).[24]

Keith Bradley finds credible the notion that fables originated as "an oral form of servile protest otherwise unknown,"[25] although obviously the literary

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[20] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 309–310. Quotations are from H. C. Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-nine Years a Slave; Twenty-nine Years a Free Man* (York: Anstadt & Sons, 1895), iii; and F. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 65.

[21] See Matheson, *Epictetus*, 193–194, 198. Blassingame notes: "Often he [the slave] disobeyed his earthly master's rules to keep his Heavenly Master's commandments because he had greater fear for his immortal soul than for the pain which could be inflicted on his body" (*Slave Community*, 311).

[22] Harrill, *Manumission of Slaves*, 20.

[23] Harrill, *Manumission of Slaves*, 20. On the servile origins of the fable, see also K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 18, 150–153.

[24] B. E. Perry, ed., *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 255.

[25] K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman World: A Study of Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 151.

fables preserved in the extant collections originated from various sources, and often express themes with little apparent relevance to slaves and slavery. Bradley identifies several Phaedrian fables that he sees as expressive of servile protest: The Frogs Complain against the Sun (1.6): the frogs are fearful that the sun's marriage will cause him to procreate and dry up their ponds even more, thus causing their deaths – possibly expressing slaves' anxieties about their future treatment at the hands of their masters' children;[26] The Wolf and the Crane (1.8): a crane agrees to extract a bone from a wolf's throat, only to be denied the promised reward and informed that he was lucky to escape decapitation, perhaps reflecting the unreliability of slaveholders' promises of manumission;[27] The Eagle and the Fox (1.28): an eagle carries off a fox's cubs to feed her own young, and returns them only when the fox sets fire to the tree that bears her nest, possibly a warning to slaveholders that slaves may retaliate (or at least want to) if they are sold away from their families;[28] The Stag among the Oxen (2.8): a stag fleeing from hunters takes refuge in an ox stall and is ignored by the farm slaves and even the *vilicus*; only the *dominus* notices the slaves' neglect of the animals, and finds the stag, which he kills before the entire *familia* – "especially appropriate to a servile audience as a reminder to beware the master," perhaps told with an ironic awareness that slaves have the ability to annoy their owners;[29] The Wolf and the Dog (3.7): a dog has a place to live and is well fed by his master in return for his services as a night watchman, but he is chained up during the day; a wolf, preferring his liberty to food and shelter, refuses the dog's offer to join the household, a fable with obvious relevance to slaves' aspirations to freedom, even if they were guaranteed food and shelter;[30] The Horse and the Wild Boar (4.4): a horse secures the aid of a man in a dispute with a boar; the man kills the boar, but enslaves the horse, with the moral that "it is to warn hot-tempered men that it is better to suffer an injury with impunity than to put one's self in the power of another."[31] Bradley speculates that this is an indirect commentary on a legal system in which a slave could only get redress against an unjust master by being handed over to a new owner.[32] Finally, The Old Dog and the Hunter (5.10): an old hunting dog who is no longer as capable as he was in the past is scolded by his master for losing his grip on the ear of the boar, and the dog defends himself: "It was not my spirit that failed you but my strength; praise me for what I was, if you condemn me now for what I am."[33] The applicability to slaveholders' abandonment of slaves when they were old, sick

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[26] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 151.
[27] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 152.
[28] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 152.
[29] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 152.
[30] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 153.
[31] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 305.
[32] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 153.
[33] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 369.

or weak is patent.[34] Bradley recognizes that his interpretations of these fables do not prove their servile origins, but observes that the ease with which they can be related to slave circumstances "supports the view that fables were at least influenced by forms of slave protest-statements."[35]

The larger corpus of Aesopic fables contains similarly-themed stories. Among the many fables featuring human characters, slaves figure prominently. In several, the slave character is wise and apt: Aesop uses the story of an old bull yoked to a young bull to instruct a father whose son is in the habit of brutally whipping the domestic slaves, to keep the youth near him so as to restrain him and curb complaints within the household (Phaedrus, *App.* 12); a wise Thracian slave woman mocks the astronomer Thales for being more occupied with what was happening over his head than with what was going on at his own feet (Plato, *Theaet.* 174a); Aesop meets a runaway slave who complains about the harsh treatment he received from his master; Aesop warns him that he will experience even worse treatment when he is caught (Phaedrus, *App.* 20); Aesop is ordered to prepare dinner earlier than usual, and snappily replies to a chatterbox who mocks him for appearing with his lamp lit in the middle of the day that he is looking to find a real man (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 3.19). Some of the fables reflect the scandals, gossip and jealousies that might circulate among household slaves: Aphrodite rebukes an ugly and wicked slave woman whose master is in love with her for her constant prayers, sacrifices and supplications, since in the goddess's view, the woman is neither beautiful or worthy of love (Babrius, *Fab.* 10); Tiberius has a household steward who shows up in fancy dress to sprinkle water before the emperor on the sizzling earth, vainly expecting the reward of manumission (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 2.5); Socrates rebukes an insolent slave who is known to be sleeping with his master's wife with an assurance that he will be punished by the one he is supposed to be pleasing – this master – because he is pleasing someone he ought not to – the wife (Phaedrus, *App.* 27). Some simply reflect the harsh and brutal realities of slave life: A runaway slave takes refuge in a mill, much to his master's ironic delight when he finds him there (Plutarch, *Conj. praec.* 41 [144a]); as Laura Gibbs explains: "Slaves were regularly punished by being sent to turn the millstones along with the draught animals"[36] (cf. the story of Aesop and the runaway slave above); Aesop is whipped when he admonishes his ugly mistress for spending her days applying makeup and wearing fancy clothes (Phaedrus, *App.* 17); a Theban, who holds that Heracles is the greatest of the heroes is bested by an Athenian who prefers Theseus, because Heracles had been a slave (Babrius, *Fab.* 15).[37]

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[34] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 153.

[35] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 153.

[36] L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 210. Cf. Plautus, *Pers.* 22.

[37] Slavery was held by the freeborn to stigmatize the freedperson; see W. W. Buckland,

Many more fables, like those discussed by Bradley (above), feature stories of animals in servile relationships to humans, or to each other (e. g., dogs, donkeys, onagers, horses). This is similar to North American slave lore:

> Identifying with the frightened and helpless creatures, so similar in their relations to the larger animals to the relationship of the master, the slave storytellers showed how the weak could survive. Especially in the Brer Rabbit tales, the hero, whether trickster or braggart, always defeated the larger animals through cunning. On occasion the weaker animals (slaves?) injured or killed the stronger ones (masters?). Although it is obviously possible to read too much into these tales, the slave's fascination with weakness overcoming strength cannot be discounted.[38]

It may be significant that Aesop, the ultimate clever slave as depicted in the Vita Aesopi, only comes to grief when he accuses the Delphians of being descended from slaves, thus disavowing his own servile origins (126–142).[39]

The Aesopic fable tradition can, then, with due caution, be regarded as a body of tradition containing a credible substratum of material that originated as what Bradley calls "slave protest statements."[40] This form of slave protest is paralleled in North American slave folk tales, which, as Blassingame observes, "represented folk wisdom and were used as an instructional device to teach young slaves how to survive. A projection of the slave's personal experience, dreams, and hopes, the folk tales allowed him to express hostility to his [or her] master, to poke fun at himself, and to delineate the workings of the plantation system."[41] Recent scholarship on ancient slavery distinguishes between organized "resistance" and the everyday "tactics" used by slaves to disrupt the strategies of domination imposed by slaveholders;[42] "weapons of the weak" adopted by subaltern groups to undermine elite strategies of domination.[43] There is abundant evidence of slave manoeuvres like laziness, insolence, malingering, petty sabotage and theft that likely constituted acts of defiance in the minds of the slaves who resorted to them.[44] Storytelling was one of them.

Elementary Principles of the Roman Private Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 22. See also H. Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10–35. Wojciechowski notes that Vit. Aes. 61 sheds light on the foot washing in John 13:1–20: "The feet of a guest should be washed by a slave; if the host's wife does it, it is a favour" (M. Wojciechowski, "Aesopic Tradition in the New Testament," *JGRChJ* 5 [2008]: 108).

[38] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 127–128.

[39] See L. W. Daly, *Aesop without Morals* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 86–90.

[40] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 153.

[41] Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 127.

[42] See S. R. Joshel and L. Hackworth Peterson, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 8–17; see also M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. F. Rendal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[43] See J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); see also J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[44] K. R. Bradley, "Resisting Slavery at Rome," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery,*

Another tactic we have some evidence of is philosophical or intellectual, e. g., the Stoic ethos of cultivating inner freedom regardless of one's free, slave or freed status.[45] It is credible that slaves who were unable to practice the philosophical detachment cultivated by Epictetus developed their own tactics of mental resistance to the abuse and stereotyping to which they were subjected, perhaps including clandestine religious activity.[46] The creation and circulation of fables can be counted as such a tactic.[47] This is not to say that the slaves who fabricated and retold fables thought that these stories could damage the institution of slavery; much less did the fabulists, rhetoricians and philosophers who collected and repeated them. However, for slaves, fables could be, as Phaedrus explained, a way of "eluding censure" by saying what they wanted to say "in jest" – or simply of letting off steam by sharing a laugh at the slaveholder's expense.

C. Slave Parables

Harrill lists parables and myths among the primary sources for ancient slavery.[48] Various other scholars have argued that the parables of the Gospel tradition are comparable with the Aesopic fables,[49] formally and in content:

> Both are brief, invented narratives about incidents which shed light on certain aspects of human experience and behavior. These fables, like parables, are not fantastic stories, but involve ordinary human characters and situations: a harassed farmer driven to cruelty by a thieving fox; warring siblings corrected by an affectionate father; a criminal fleeing from justice; passengers in a storm at sea. These fables, like many parables,

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ed. K. R. Bradley and P. Cartlege (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 363; cf. Tit 2:9–10, where slaves are admonished *not* to answer back or to pilfer. An interesting cross-cultural example is J. D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave* (Huddersfield: Henry Fielding, 1864), who "portrays himself throughout the narrative as a trickster who frequently escapes punishment or avenges himself by deceiving others … While Green's tricks, at times, have serious consequences, a reader might view Green's trickery as systematic resistance and rebellion against the system of slavery that otherwise denies him the power to act. His resistant attitude is reflected in his multiple attempts to escape and his cleverness in escaping detection on his journey" (see J. Williamson, "Summary of J. D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave, from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848*," *Documenting the American South*, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/greenjd/summary.html).

[45] See P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 128–155.

[46] On slave religiosity, see D. P. Peralta, "Slave Religiosity in the Roman Middle Republic," *ClAnt* 36 (2017): 317–369.

[47] For cross-cultural examples, see T. Harris, "The Trickster in African American Literature," *Freedom's Story: Teaching African American Literature and History*, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/trickster.htm.

[48] Harrill, *Manumission of Slaves*, 18.

[49] M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 478–498; Wojciechowski, "Aesopic Tradition," 99–109.

have religious or ethical themes: the inevitability of divine retribution (the fox, the murderer); the importance of inner virtue, as opposed to external beauty (sister and brother); responses to the fickleness of fortune (the storm at sea). Despite their realism, the fables contain an element of extravagance: the farmer is excessively cruel to the fox; the beauty and ugliness of the two children are extreme; the vicissitudes met by the murderer stretch credulity; the voyagers overreact to both storm and calm.[50]

Like the fables, some of the parables prominently feature slave characters: watchful slaves (Mark 13:35–37; Luke 12:35–40); wise and foolish slaves (Matt 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–48); master and slave (Luke 17:7–10); an unmerciful slave (Matt 18:23–34); a shrewd steward (Luke 16:1–8);[51] wise and foolish virgins (Matt 25:1–13);[52] worthless slaves (Luke 17:7–10); slaves and talents (Matt 25:14–30; cf. Luke 19:12–27). In a few, slaves appear as minor characters: tares among the wheat (Matt 3:24–30, 36–43); slaves killed by wicked tenants (Matt 21:33–44; Mark 12:1–11; Luke 20:9–18); the banquet (Luke 14:15–24); the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). Several proverbial sayings rely on the trope of slavery: "No one can serve two masters" (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13); "to my slave [I say], 'Do this,' and the slave does it" (Matt 8:9; Luke 7:8); "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master" (Matt 10:24); "it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master" (Matt 10:25); "whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:44; Matt 20:27); "Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34); "The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever" (John 8:35); "the servant [slave] does not know what the master is doing" (John 15:15).

Of course, unlike Aesop, Jesus, the consummate parable teller of the synoptic tradition, was not reputed to have been enslaved at any stage of his life.[53] In view of the certainty that slaves made up part of the membership of early Christian communities, it is possible that at least some of the slave parables and proverbs originated with slaves, as with the fables discussed above – or at least that they were told with a nod to the enslaved members of the *ekklēsia.* This seems especially likely in view of the bold claims that have been made about the parables' radical, authentic, liberative and subversive qualities.[54] It is easy to see how

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[50] Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 280.

[51] On the slave status of the *oikonomos*, see M. A. Beavis, "Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–8)," *JBL* 111 (1992): 37–54.

[52] For an argument that the ten virgins are slaves, see M. J. Smith, *Insights from African American Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 82–86.

[53] Winsome Munro's suggestion that Jesus was or had been a slave has not gained much traction in subsequent scholarship (*Jesus, Born of a Slave,* SBEC 37 [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1998]); for critique, see Glancy, *Slavery*, 100, 123, 127–129.

[54] E. g., J. D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); W. R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); L. Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis:

the so-called baptismal formula of Gal 3:28 (1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11; Eph 6:8) would have appealed to slaves in early Christian communities, although slaves may have been frustrated by the free members' failure to implement its real-life implications by not funding their manumissions. It is conceivable that the formula was forged in conversation between slave and free members of Pauline congregations; it is hard to imagine that free, Jewish males would contemplate the erasure of their privileged status "in Christ" without vigorous contestation by women and slaves.[55]

In contrast to the slave perspective obliquely discernible in Gal 3:28, the slave parables, as they are crystallized in the Gospels, almost without exception, un-critically reflect the perspective of slaveholders to the detriment of slaves. Slaves whose master is away from home must be watchful even if they must stay awake all night to attend to him on his return (Mark 13:35–37). A slave who neglects his duties and misbehaves while the master is away will be subject to harsh, even life-threatening, corporal punishment (Matt 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–48). A slave who has spent the day at hard agricultural labour does not expect his master to join him at table but to serve the master's needs and eat later (Luke 17:7–10); the kyriarchal perspective is unequivocally expressed in the epimythium: "Do you [as *kyrios*] thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (Luke 17:9–10). In the parable of the Unmerciful Slave (Matt 18:23–34), the king is only dissuaded from selling an unprofitable managerial slave along with his wife and children "and all his possessions" when the slave begs him abjectly for more time to repay his debt, but when the slave has a fellow-slave imprisoned for debt, the *kyrios* hands him over to be tortured. A slave hearer of the story might sympathize with his "unmerciful" colleague who although the king initially forgives his huge debt, demands payment from a debtor so as not to be in danger of being sold away (and likely parted from his family) – and wonder how the *kyrios* could extract payment from a slave under torture (v. 34). In the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1–11; Matt 21:33–44; Luke 20:9–18), slaves are repeatedly sent to the tenants only to be beaten and killed ("and so it was with *many others*; some they beat, and others they killed," v. 5b); in contrast to the expendable slaves, the

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Fortress, 2005); R. F. Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); M. Ball, *The Radical Stories of Jesus: Interpreting the Parables Today* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2000); R. A. Bellioti, *Jesus the Radical: The Parables and Modern Morality* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015). K. M. Snodgrass sees the parables as a window into the authentic teaching of Jesus (Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]). For a critique of this view, see M. A. Beavis, "The Power of Jesus' Parables: Were They Polemical or Irenic?," *JSNT* 82 (2001): 3–30.

[55] On the reception of the Letter to Philemon by slaves in the household, see Elliott, *Roman Family Empires*, 241–267.

owner of the vineyard mistakenly assumes that his son is unassailable (v. 6). The parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14–30) shows a master testing three managerial slaves of varying abilities and harshly punishing the one who fails to produce; a slave might sympathize with the candor of the third slave who admits that he fears his master's harshness (v. 24), but wince at the scene of the "worthless slave" being thrown "into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30).[56] In the Lucan variant (Luke 19:12–27), the unproductive slave gets off more easily; his mina ("pound") is handed over to the slave who made the most profit (v. 26). However, the final endomythium ("But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and slaughter them in my presence") not-so-subtly aligns the timid slave with the enemies of the *kyrios*. It could be argued that the hearer of such parables is invited to identify with the slave subservient to the all-powerful master, thus assuming a "slaves'-eye view."[57] This assumes, however, that the hearer of the parable is a free person, perhaps a slaveholder, who is bidden to humble him or herself by self-identifying as a slave in relation to a divine master, an image frequently found in ancient philosophical and theological discourse that did nothing to disrupt the institution of slavery.[58]

The reactions of actual slaves to such parables is instructive. For example, Solomon Northup recalls bitterly that a favourite text of his master's brother-in-law's sermons was Luke 12:47: "That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating."[59] Lunsford Lane recalls that "on the Sabbath there was one sermon preached expressly for the colored people which it was generally my privilege to hear. I became quite familiar with the texts, 'Servants be obedient to your masters.' – 'Not with eye service as men pleasers.' – 'He that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes,' and others of this class: for they formed the basis of most of these public instructions to us."[60] Far from exhorting

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[56] See Beavis, "Parable of the Talents."

[57] Munro, *Born of a Slave*, 351.

[58] See, e. g., C. Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 327–345. Cf. 1 Cor 7:21–23; Eph 6:6–8; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Pet 2:18–19; D. R. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 1990).

[59] S. Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (London: Sampson Low, 1853), 128. On the use of Scripture in slaveholder preaching, see Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 269–270. On slaveholder religion in the Matthean parables, see M. J. Smith, *Insights from African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 77–98.

[60] L. Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane*, 2nd ed. (Boston: J. G. Torrey, 1842), 21. See also H. Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1848), 30. For a sample of ante-bellum sermons written for slaves, see A. Glennie, *Sermons Preached on Plantations to Congregations of Negroes* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1844). See also L. K. D. Wedlow, "'Servants Obey Your Masters': Southern Representations of the Religious Lives of Slaves," *GCJCWE* 5 (2014): 1–27, and E. B. Powery and R. S. Sadler, Jr., *The Genesis of Liberation: Bib-*

masters to empathize with slaves, a preacher cited by Henry Watson exhorted slaves to imagine trading places with slaveholders: "Suppose you were masters and mistresses, and had servants under you; would you not desire that your servants should do their business faithfully and honestly, as well when your back was turned as while you were looking over them?"[61] Harriet Jacobs remembers that slaves who heard such sermons understood their self-serving intent and could be contemptuous of them; after one such sermon, she reminisces that after a similarly-themed homily, the slave audience "went home highly amused."[62] These former slaves recognized the slaveholder bias even in teaching attributed to Jesus, as, no doubt, did some of their ancient counterparts.

As in some of the fables (Perry 544, 393), slaves appear as incidental characters in several parables (Luke 15:11–32): slaves report to their master that tares have been sown among the wheat and ask what to do about it (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43); a slave delivers invitations to a banquet (Luke 14:15–24); the father of the prodigal calls his slaves to bring a robe for his son (Luke 15:22); slaves inform the elder brother of the younger's homecoming (Luke 15:26). Despite the prodigal's abject state on his return, he asks his father to treat him as a "hired hand" (*hōs hena tōn misthiōn*) (Luke 15:19), not as a *doulos*; the elder son complains that he has metaphorically (and degradingly) "slaved" (*douleuō*) for his father for many years, with no reward (Luke 15:29). The proverbial sayings are mostly conventional in their portrayal of slaves, who are supposed to be loyal to one master (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13), be at their master's beck and call (Matt 8:9; Luke 7:8), and know their place in the household (Matt 10:24–25; Luke 17:9–10; John 8:35). Slavery is compared to captivity to sin (John 8:34); disciples are friends, not slaves (John 15:15–16).

Of the synoptic parables, the only ones that arguably show sympathy toward slaves are the Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:1–8) and Luke's reworking of the Watchful Slaves (Luke 12:35–38). It has been argued that the *oikonomos* of Luke 16 is likely a slave;[63] another possibility is that he is a hired steward fearful of being consigned to slavery to compensate his employer for his mismanagement of the household accounts (v. 3). The steward is a trickster figure who escapes punishment for his negligence by hatching an audacious scheme to collect reduced payments from his master's debtors (vv. 6–7). Admittedly, this story is conventional in that it portrays a *servus callidus*, a slave who gets himself out of a tight spot with his master by cleverly ingratiating himself with the debtors.[64]

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lical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 156–159.

[61] Watson, *Narrative*, 29.

[62] H. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 69.

[63] Beavis, "Unjust Steward," 37–54.

[64] See F. J. King, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Parable: The Steward, Trick-

However, one of the functions of the comedic slave may be to act "as a form of wish-fulfillment for all who feel in one way or another subjected or inferior to others in a social hierarchy."[65] If so, it is conceivable that slave reception of the parable was appreciative.[66]

David E. Watson speculates that the Vita Aesopi's lampooning of the master-slave relationship would have been similarly appealing to marginalized hearers: "One could imagine, for example, slaves or freedmen identifying with the hardships of a life of slavery, cheering on Aesop, and jeering at Xanthus. In fact, it is not difficult to envision this story having a widespread and sympathetic body of listeners."[67] Also like the Vita Aesopi, the parable: "while taking for granted the hierarchical structures of status and slavery, mocks certain practices and attitudes within those structures. Far from threatening the stability of the structures of status and slavery, this story may have reinforced them."[68] The stereotypical literary character of the shrewd *oikonomos* ultimately does nothing to subvert, or even question, the system. Harrill warns with respect to comic plays featuring such characters: "Because these plays were performed at religious festivals and publicly funded by magistrates, it is unlikely that they expressed a 'hidden transcript' of the slaves (or others similarly oppressed) without a voice in public life."[69] This does not mean that the slaves in the audience did not identify with the shrewd slaves of the comedies, perhaps recognizing some of their tactics of manipulation. The Lucan story appears in a very different literary and social context, inviting the question of how slave members of the *ekklēsia* would have received it – with sympathy for the steward, admiration for his ingenuity, relief at the master's commendation, as an admonition to place the interests of the divine *kyrios* above those of their earthly masters (cf. Luke 16:13)?

The one New Testament parable that does subvert – or invert – cultural norms is Luke 12:35–38, which portrays a *kyrios* returning from a wedding banquet, finding his slaves alert, and rewarding them by inviting them to sit at table while he serves them. Similarly, the adage embedded in Mark 10:43–44 ("whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*], and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave [*doulos*] of all"; cf. Matt 20:27; Luke 22:26b–27) does live up to the counter-cultural claims made by

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sters and (Non)sense in Luke 16:1–8," *BTB* 48 (2018): 19–25. See also J. A. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 83.

[65] King, "A Funny Thing Happened," 22, quoting R. Tordoff, "Introduction: Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comedy," in *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama*, ed. B. Akrigg and R. Tordoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 42.

[66] On slave reception of Plautus, whose use of the *servus callidus* is famous, see A. Richlin, "Talking to Slaves in the Plautine Audience," *ClAnt* 33 (2014): 174–226.

[67] D. E. Watson, "The *Life of Aesop* and the Gospel of Mark: Two Ancient Approaches to Elite Values," *JBL* 129 (2010): 712–713.

[68] Watson, "The *Life of Aesop*," 714.

[69] Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 80.

some scholars for the parables corpus – and mostly wanting in the slave parables. The Lucan parable of the Watchful Slaves, in particular, is a reworking of the utterly conventional Mark 13:35–37, the parable of the Doorkeeper. Is there a hint here of enslaved members of the *ekklēsia* imagining a desired Saturnalian order where the liberative consequences of the good news for the enslaved were realized in the *basileia tou theou*?[70] Were the implications of these eschatological traditions for slaves (cf. Joel 2:29; Philo, *Contempl.* 70–72; y. Pesah. 10:1, 37b) acted out in sacred meals, or were the slaves in the community reminded not to presume on their status as *adelphoi/adelphai* of the free members, especially their legal masters (1 Tim 6:2)? Probably both, in different communities at different times. Did the role reversal envisioned in Mark 10:44 involve the actual *diakonia* of leaders waiting on members, including slaves? As Carolyn Osiek observes, "Even if at the common meal at the assembly, there was some measure of commonality, someone had to serve."[71] In ritual settings where free persons waited on the enslaved, the role reversal was imaginal and temporary: slaves remained slaves, masters remained masters.

Taken as a body, with the few exceptions noted above, the slave parables and aphorisms are as conventional as the paraenesis directly addressed to slaves (1 Cor 7:21; Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22; 1 Tim 6:1–2; Tit 2:9–10; 1 Pet 2:18; Did. 4.11; Barn. 19.7). This does not mean that early Christian slaves who heard the parables did not appreciate the prospect of their human *kyrioi* being subjugated to the divine *kyrios*, hope that their masters would heed the call to treat them moderately, or that they did not view being "slaves of God" as a covert identity that gave them some purchase on personal honour. As Watson notes, "Given the ignominy that they had to endure, it would be important for slaves to develop strategies that allowed them to reject the degradation that was heaped upon them and understand themselves as honorable people."[72] The freedman Hermas, whose book includes a slave parable that arguably does reflect servile experience and which defies cultural expectations about slaves and masters (Herm. Sim. 5.2–11),[73] nonetheless frequently uses the "slaves of God" metaphor.[74] The one

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[70] See A. Standhartinger, "The Saturnalia in Greco-Roman Culture," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, ed. D. E. Smith and H. E. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 179–190.

[71] C. Osiek, "What We Do and Don't Know about Early Christian Families," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. B. Rawson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 206. On slave involvement in early Christian meals, see L. I. Larsen, "Early Christian Meals and Slavery," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict*, ed. D. E. Smith and H. E. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 191–203; and J. E. Glancy, "Slaves at a Greco-Roman Banquet: A Response," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict*, ed. D. E. Smith and H. E. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 104–111.

[72] Watson, "The *Life of Aesop*," 713.

[73] See Beavis, "Parable of the Slave."

[74] E. g., Herm. Vis. 1.2.4; 4.1.3; Mand. 3.1.4; 4.1.2, 8; 4.3.4; 5.2.1, 2; 6.2.4, 6; 8.1.4, 5, 6, 10;

canonical slave parable that actually does qualify as subversive speech is Luke's parable of the Servile Master (12:35–38). Here, it is possible to imagine the dissatisfaction of slave members of the *ekklēsia* who heard the conventional parable of the Watchful Slaves (Mark 13:34–37) – or even more, of the Worthless Slaves (Luke 17:7–10) – and observed that in a *basileia* where the last were first and the first were last, the faithful slaves of the master would be blessed by his service to them in anticipation of the eschatological banquet.

D. Conclusion

This article has examined three bodies of ancient slave lore that might be expected to show empathy for the enslaved. Epictetus's teachings reflect his background in slavery as he exhorts his pupils to cultivate philosophical freedom from metaphorical servitude irrespective of their stations in life. The Aesopic tradition, attributed to a slave, features many fables where slave characters – and animal characters with servile characteristics – are presented in ways that might be appreciated by slave hearers. Neither Aesop nor Epictetus set out to undermine the institution of slavery, but both show some sympathy for slave experience and perspectives. This is illustrated by the affinities of these traditions with similar themes in North American slave memoirs.

The slave parables, in contrast, consistently take the perspective of the *kyrios*: slaves must obey their masters, disobedient slaves are punished, and unproductive slaves are worthless. The role reversal envisioned in Mark 10:43–44 (cf. 12:35–38) is the exception rather than the rule. Far from demonstrating empathy with slaves, much less a commitment to their liberation, the slave parables are imbricated in what Frederick Douglass centuries later called "slaveholder religion"; "the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land."[75] Unlike Aesop's parables and Epictetus's *Discourses*, both of which claim authorship by the formerly enslaved, the slave parables, attributed to the free Jesus, show little interest in sympathetically addressing the slaves in the audience, or of slave involvement in their composition. Rather, they assume the perspective, and reinforce the ideology, of the slaveholding members of the *ekklēsia*.

9.1.8; 10.1.2; 11.1.1; 12.1.2, 3; 12.2.1, 2; 12.3.1; 12.4.1; 12.4.3; Sim. 1.1.1; 2.1.4; 5.5.3; 6.2.1; 6.5.6; 8.6.5; 8.10.3; 9.15.3.

[75] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 355. Compare Glancy's taxonomy of abuses inflicted on slaves in Matthean parables: "Slaves are seized (*kratēsas*, 18:25; *labontes*, 21:35; *kratēsantes*, 22:6), imprisoned (18:30), treated with dishonor (*hybrisan*, 22:6), beaten (*edeiran*, 21:35; *typtein*, 24:49), cut to pieces (*dichotomēsei*, 24:51), handed over to torturers (*paradōken auton tois basanistais*, 18:34), consigned to a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (24:31, 25:30), killed (21:35, 22:6), and stoned (21:35)" (Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 119).

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Parabolic Stories in the Gospel of Thomas and the Aesopic Tradition

Some Reflections on Reading Practices and Literary Traditions in the Second and Third Century

Konrad Schwarz

The Gospel of Thomas is an extraordinary document of ancient Christian literature which reveals a specific theological profile. A central issue of twentieth-century exegetical debate was whether or not this second-century Gospel contains previously unknown words of Jesus. Although this discussion continues, the Gospel of Thomas is increasingly acknowledged to belong to a distinctive reception history of early Jesus tradition rather than evidence of otherwise unknown sayings.[1] Another relevant aspect is the Gospel's religious profile, which a majority of earlier scholars designated as "Gnostic." This view of a "Gnostic" Gospel of Thomas is basically influenced by three related factors: first, a wider, more general definition of "Gnosticism"; second, the Coptic manuscript of this Gospel is associated with mythological writings, such as the Apocryphon of John; and third, there are several accounts by ancient Christian authors who claim that the text was written or used by heretics. In current discussion, however, the concept of "Gnosticism" itself is subject to debate. While some scholars regard this concept largely inappropriate,[2] others aim to define "Gnosticism" in a narrow, precise way.[3] Recent studies are therefore less inclined to associate the Gospel of Thomas with "Gnosticism" but to explore the text's specific theological outlook on its own merits. As a consequence, the issue of the Gospel's distinctive position in early Christian theology is debated again, together with the relationship between the Gospel of Thomas on the one side, and ancient philosophy and literature, on the other.

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[1] For a recent exploration of the Gospel of Thomas's distinctive reception of Jesus, see K. Schwarz, "Gospel of Thomas," in *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*, vol. 2, *From Thomas to Tertullian: Christian Literary Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE*, ed. J. Schröter and C. Jacobi (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 265–279.

[2] Important studies which substantiate this position are M. A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and K. L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2003).

[3] An influential concept of this kind is B. Layton, "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 334–350.

Parables and similitudes make up approximately one-quarter of the Gospel of Thomas. Since the beginning of research on this writing, there was debate whether the parabolic stories in the Gospel of Thomas are dependent on the Synoptic parallels.[4] However, the similarities between ancient parabolic stories in the Aesopic tradition and the Gospel of Thomas did not receive much attention, except for two specific passages that will be discussed below.[5] In a broader perspective, this article intends to contribute to the current debate about the contextualization of the Gospel of Thomas within ancient literature. Following the proposed topic of this volume, this article will outline several similarities between the Gospel of Thomas and the ancient Aesopic tradition in various respects. The first section will take up recent academic reflections which pay increasing attention to literary manuscripts, considering them as material artefacts of ancient Christianity. Remarkably, the earliest known manuscripts of both the Gospel of Thomas and Babrius's *Mythiambi Aesopici* have been discovered in the Egyptian town of Oxyrhynchus. These manuscripts represent interesting examples for considering how both writings were received by readers in the second to third century CE. Subsequently, the parable of the Sensible Fisherman" (Gos. Thom. 8) will be discussed in the second section, as this parable shows some similarities with a parabolic story in Babrius's composition, while it is also part of a complex history of tradition in early Christian literature. The third section, finally, will turn to the similitude of the Dog in the Cattle Trough (Gos. Thom. 102), which has proverbial parallels apart from the Aesopic tradition in the works by Lucian of Samosata and others, before it later became part of a Latin collection of fables. At the beginning, however, some preliminary remarks concerning the conceptualization of parabolic genres are in order.

As is well known, defining parables, fables and related literary genres is a complex issue which involves several historical transformations. Therefore the following paragraph can only touch some aspects in brief. In ancient Greek literature, significant terms referring to fables are αἶνος, λόγος and μῦθος, all of which have a wider range of meaning. In ancient collections following the tradition of "Aesop," the definition given by Theon may represent a kind of nucleus: "a fable (μῦθος) is a fictitious story giving an image of truth."[6] Around this nucleus, common characteristics include animals as protagonists, although a number of "Aesopic" stories also tell about plants, gods and human beings as

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[4] One of the earliest studies on the Gospel of Thomas and its parables was published by Gérard Garitte and Lucien Cerfaux, even before the *editio princeps* of the Coptic text was published (G. Garitte and L. Cerfaux, "Les paraboles du Royaume dans l'Évangile de Thomas," *Muséon* 70 [1957]: 307–327).

[5] Gos. Thom. 8 and 102.

[6] Theon, *Prog.* 4. Translation by G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, WGRW 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 23. Alternatively, ἀλήθεια may be translated as "reality" (G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature,* MnemSup 166 [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 5).

main characters.[7] Moreover, the story is usually told in the past tense.[8] The term παραβολή, on the other hand, is used in very different ways in Graeco-Roman, Jewish and early Christian writings.[9] Aristotle, for instance, explains that a παραβολή is an invented kind of "example" (παράδειγμα) which he describes as typical for Socrates's way of argumentation. To illustrate what a παραβολή is like, Aristotle uses two extended comparisons in the present tense.[10] In the Septuagint, however, the term παραβολή covers a broad meaning ranging from Balaam's "oracular utterance" (Num 23:7, 18 etc.) to "proverb" (1 Kgdms 10:12 etc.) to a figurative story (Ezek 17:3–10).[11] Apart from the stories of Jesus which the Synoptic Gospels describe as παραβολαί, some early Christian authors employ the term παραβολή to refer to "the general concept of the contemporary application of scripture."[12]

Because of the "fuzzy borders" and the multiple ways in which generic terms are used in ancient literature, it is heuristically useful to aim at a more precise determination of the generic terms.[13] Thus, this contribution will take up a modern concept by literary theorist Rüdiger Zymner, according to which one can delineate a spectrum of "parabolic" or parable-like genres. Similitude, parable, fable and allegory are part of the spectrum of parabolic genres in which the parable takes a critical center position. According to this concept, a parable is an epic-fictional story in which transfer signals indicate to the readers that the meaning of the text is different from its literal wording.[14] Parabolic transfer

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[7] J. Grethlein, "Die Fabel," in *Handbuch der griechischen Literatur der Antike*, vol. 1, *Die Literatur der archaischen und klassischen Zeit*, ed. B. Zimmermann and A. Schlichtmann, HA 7.1 (Munich: Beck, 2011), 321.

[8] Cf. B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), xx; and M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 476.

[9] For recent contributions to this discussion, see the volume by J. Schröter, K. Schwarz, and S. Al-Suadi, eds., *Gleichnisse und Parabeln in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Methodische Konzepte – Religionshistorische Kontexte – Theologische Deutungen*, WUNT 456 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021).

[10] Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.20 (1393b). The optative with ἄν expresses potentiality. Cf. A. Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 242; and also the commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetorica* by Christof Rapp, who translates παραβολή as "Vergleich" (*Rhet.* 2.20), while εἰκών is translated as "Gleichnis" (*Rhet.* 3.4 etc.). C. Rapp, *Aristoteles: Rhetorik*, AWDU 4.2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2002), 731–733 and 850–852.

[11] Cf. the detailed analysis by R. Brucker, "Zur Verwendung von παραβολή in der Septuaginta," in *Gleichnisse und Parabeln in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Methodische Konzepte – Religionshistorische Kontexte – Theologische Deutungen*, ed. J. Schröter, K. Schwarz, and S. Al-Suadi, WUNT 456 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 31–42.

[12] C. K. Rothschild, "Παραβολή in Hebrews," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. R. Zimmermann, WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 379, concerning Heb 9:9 and 11:19. See also Barn. 6.10, and Justin, *Dial.* 77.7; 90.2 etc.

[13] H. Fricke, "Aspekte der literaturwissenschaftlichen Gattungsbestimmung: 1. Methodische Aspekte. 1.1 Definitionen und Begriffsformen," in *Handbuch Gattungstheorie*, ed. R. Zymner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), 7.

[14] R. Zymner, "Parabel," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. A. Hettiger et al., 12

signals may appear explicitly (e. g. "The reign of God *is like* …") and also in inter-pretative comments before or after the story. Apart from this, transfer signals may also reveal themselves to the readers in an implicit way, most often by em-ploying common metaphorical concepts. The parable's feature of *epic* fictionality means that the parabolic story is usually told in the past tense, especially at its beginning. Moreover, the narrative world of the parable is generally affiliated with known reality and does not narrate of anthropomorphic characters (e. g. talking animals or plants). A fable, on the other hand, shares most features with the parable except that non-human characters play a leading role.[15] Finally, a similitude is typologically conceptualized as an extended comparison. Basically, in a similitude the comparison "A is like B" is extended by a *hypothetical*-fictional story, which means that the plot line is imagined as possibly taking place in present time instead of being located in the past.[16] The pragmatic effect is that, in general, hypothetical-fictional similitudes appeal to their hearers more directly, while past-tense parables allow them, to some degree, a more distant reflection.[17] In narrative as well as in argumentative texts, parables are more easily recognized as embedded stories because of their initial change of tense, while the narrative extension in similitudes often develops more gradually.

With these considerations of parabolic genres in mind, attention now turns to a selection of parables, fables and similitudes in the Gospel of Thomas, selected works by ancient authors like Lucian of Samosata, and in the Aesopic tradition,

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vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992–2012), 6:502–503. Also Ruben Zimmermann's definition of the parable genre is based on Zymner's concept (R. Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015], 137 n 113). However, Zimmermann does not accept Zymner's distinction between "Gleichnis" (similitude) and "Parabel" (parable).

[15] The differentiation between parable and fable according to their leading characters is rejected by some scholars, like L. Koep, "Fabel," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klauser et al., 35 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–2018), 7:133, and van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 36–37. To distinguish between the two genres is, nevertheless, common in modern literary studies. Among other reasons, this differentiation is influenced by the impact of Jesus's parabolic stories, which generally do not tell about non-human characters in an anthropomor-phic manner, and also by the reception of Aristotle's *Rhetorica*, where the stories of the two λόγοι ascribed to Stesichorus and Aesop tell about animals (*Rhet.* 2.20). As Beavis rightly states, "In literary-historical terms, then, parable and fable are closely related" ("Parable and Fable," 478). In Zymner's concept employed in this contribution, this is accepted by assigning both parable and fable to the same spectrum of parabolic genres.

[16] Sometimes, similitudes are defined by a lack of narrativity or plot development (cf. e. g. K. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018], 12). However, narrativity may also be conceptualized "in a scalar sense," i. e. a text may appear as more or less narrating (H. P. Abbott, "Narrativity," in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. P. Hühn et al. [Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2014], www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrativity), so that it is hard to define a minimum requirement for narrativity.

[17] Cf. E. Rau, *Reden in Vollmacht: Hintergrund, Form und Anliegen der Gleichnisse Jesu*, FRLANT 149 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 26–35, based on a concept by Harald Weinrich.

particularly in its prosaic form by Babrius. First, however, some consideration will be given to early manuscripts to explore how ancient readers in the second and third century might have received these texts.

A. The Gospel of Thomas and Babrius's *Mythiambi Aesopici* in Imperial-Roman Oxyrhynchus

Early Christian manuscripts as artefacts of ancient Christianity and its reading practices have received considerable attention in recent scholarship. Manuscripts are therefore explored not only to find some form of the "original" text but they are also considered important witnesses as to how the texts were used in antiquity. In particular, this applies to Christian texts that did not become canonical, as ancient Christian authors communicate little or inconsistent information about the readers of so-called apocryphal texts. With regard to the topic of this contribution, it is remarkable that important textual witnesses of both Babrius's fables and the Gospel of Thomas were discovered in the Egyptian site of ancient Oxyrhynchus (modern el-Bahnasa). However, the enormous amount of findings at this archaeological site in general has to be borne in mind so that the following remarks aim at a predominantly illustrative treatment of the matter.

Regarding the Gospel of Thomas, which was probably composed in substance in the second century,[18] two Greek papyri from Oxyrhynchus are the earliest known fragments (P.Oxy. IV 654 and I 1). The fragmentary Greek text of the papyri corresponds, to a large extent, to the nearly complete Coptic version in Nag Hammadi Codex II, probably written in the fourth century CE.[19] Interestingly, the Greek fragments exhibit different palaeographical features.[20]

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[18] Given the similarities and differences between the Greek papyri and the Coptic version, it is likely that "the Coptic text *in substance* goes back to a second-century Greek original resembling our Oxyrhynchus fragments" (S. J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, TENTS 11 [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 24). This is supported by the evidence that Ps.-Hippolytus (*Haer.* 5.7.20) and Origen (*Hom. Luc.* 1) mention the "Gospel according to Thomas" in the first half of the third century CE. Concerning the introductory matters of the Gospel of Thomas, see Schwarz, "Gospel of Thomas," 265–267.

[19] Cf. the detailed discussion by Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 24.

[20] For a complete palaeographical analysis of the papyri, see H. W. Attridge, "The Gospel according to Thomas: Appendix: The Greek Fragments," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 Together with XIII,2*, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, vol. 1, *Gospel according to Thomas, Gospel according to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, ed. B. Layton, NHS 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 95–128; L. W. Hurtado, "The Greek Fragments of the Gospel of Thomas as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654 and Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655," in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, ed. J. Frey, E. E. Popkes, and J. Schröter, BZNW 157 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 19–32; and A. Luijendijk, "Reading the Gospel of Thomas in the Third Century: Three Oxyrhynchus Papyri and Origen's *Homilies*," in *Reading New Testament Papyri in Context/ Lire les papyrus du Nouveau Testament dans leur contexte*, ed. C. Clivaz and J. Zumstein, BETL

The first papyrus, P.Oxy. IV 654, is part of a re-used scroll from the middle or late third century CE. Some kind of a survey list has been written on the inner side of the papyrus, while a Greek version of the Gospel's beginning was copied some time later on the outer side.[21] No more than one column of the text is extant and, because of a vertical break of the papyrus, approximately the second half of each line is lost. As Larry Hurtado remarks, the size and formation of the letters, together with a number of textual errors, indicate "a scribe characterized by a noticeable level of carelessness or limited skill."[22]

The lectional aids used in the manuscript are another remarkable feature of P.Oxy. IV 654. A *coronis* sign (shaped like ⁓) appears three times before the phrase λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς ("Jesus says") and follows the phrase in one instance.[23] In addition, a *paragraphos* sign (approximately ___) is drawn five times below the line to which the sign relates. The *paragraphos* occurs most often below the lines which contain the phrase λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς, but in one instance it marks off the narrator's introduction to a question asked by the disciples.[24] While ancient manuscripts use the *coronis* sign infrequently within the body text,[25] the *paragraphos* is a widespread reading aid which serves various purposes. For instance, it marks a change of speaker in dramatic texts and Platonic dialogues, but it also indicates the beginning of a new section in other kinds of literature. *Paragraphoi* are generally held in high esteem for reading Greek *scriptio continua*. Thus, William A. Johnson suggests that "the *paragraphus* in Greek prose texts was added primarily to assist with reading aloud – the typical way in which these literary texts would have been used."[26] Unlike the majority of ancient manuscripts,

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242 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 241–267. In the present article, P.Oxy. IV 655 will not be taken into consideration because the papyrus deviates significantly when compared with the other Greek and Coptic textual witnesses of the Gospel of Thomas. Cf. J. Schröter, "Das Evangelium nach Thomas (Thomasevangelium [NHC II, 2 p. 32,10–51,28]) Oxyrhynchus-Papyri I 1, IV 654 und IV 655 (P.Oxy. I 1, VI 654 und IV 655)," in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. 1, *Evangelien und Verwandtes*, ed. C. Markschies and J. Schröter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 488–492; and Schwarz, "Gospel of Thomas," 266–267.

[21] Prologue until Gos. Thom. 7. Cf. Attridge, "Gospel according to Thomas," 97.

[22] Hurtado, "Greek Fragments," 25.

[23] Lines 5, 9 and 36. In line 36, λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς is preceded by a *vacat* and the *coronis* follows the phrase. Because of the small number of instances, it is uncertain whether this is an error or perhaps the scribe did not follow a consistent rule.

[24] Below line 5, 9, 21, 27, 31. Hurtado supposes that the *paragraphoi* were added later by someone else than the copyist ("Greek Fragments," 26), without giving reasons for this assumption. Apart from that, the *coronides* (or at least blank spaces where they might have been inserted) should be regarded as original.

[25] A similar sign appears more often at the margins of a column and is usually called *diplē obelismenē* or "forked *paragraphos*." Cf. W. A. Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus*, SBPC (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 341–342. In a number of manuscripts, the *paragraphos* does not correspond to a *coronis* but to a blank space (*vacat*) in the text body (e. g. P.Oxy. I 9; I 16; V 842; V 844).

[26] W. A. Johnson, "The Function of the Paragraphus in Greek Literary Prose Texts," *ZPE* 100 (1994): 68.

however, P.Oxy. IV 654 follows the Christian practice of using the abbreviation ιης̄ for ᾽Ιησοῦς as a *nomen sacrum*.[27]

The second papyrus, P.Oxy. I 1, is a single leaf of a codex, which is dated approximately to the middle of the third century CE.[28] The Greek text of the papyrus roughly corresponds to Gos. Thom. 26–33 in the Coptic codex.[29] There is a pagination at the top of the papyrus's verso side (ια, i. e. 11), which suggests that one or more other texts preceded the Gospel of Thomas in the codex.[30] The script is rather dense and "exemplifies an informal literary hand," as it is also used in contemporary manuscripts of Christian texts which became part of the New Testament.[31] Specific signs or lectional aids signalling sense units are absent, but there are a relatively high number of various contractions and *nomina sacra*.[32]

There is an ongoing debate in current research about whether the Greek papyri of the Gospel of Thomas were originally made for private use or for being read aloud in a community. Hurtado concludes that both papyri were prepared for "private study" because of the smaller size and the more economic production of the manuscripts.[33] AnneMarie Luijendijk, on the other hand, considers that P.Oxy. I 1 is large enough for being read aloud. In addition, she suggests that the lectional aids in P.Oxy. IV 654 might have been copied from the scribe's *Vorlage*. Therefore her evaluation concerning P.Oxy. IV 654 remains more open:

> Why does this copy have so many lectional aids? I offer several solutions. The manuscript may have been used in a liturgical setting .... Alternatively, this text may have been intended for reading out loud in a different context, for instance, in an educational setting. ... Or the scribe may have copied the punctuation from the Vorlage. ... If that has happened with *P. Oxy.* IV 654, too, we find a hint of an earlier stage in the transmission of the text, with a copy intended for declamation. Thus a possibility has opened up that if we peeked into an early Christian worship service, we could overhear the *Gospel of Thomas* being read from *P. Oxy.* IV 654's exemplar.[34]

Contributing to this debate, Christopher Tuckett recently came to the conclusion that P.Oxy. IV 654 was prepared for being read in a Christian community,

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[27] P.Oxy. IV 654, line 2, 27 and 36.

[28] B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri IV* (London: Horace Hart, 1904), 10 ("not later than about the middle of the third century").

[29] A remarkable difference is that the Greek text of P.Oxy. I 1 recto, line 6–9 does not correspond to the Coptic version at this place but the phrase appears later in Gos. Thom. 77.2–8 (NHC II 46.26–28).

[30] For a discussion of the possible amount of the text, cf. Hurtado, "Greek Fragments," 23–24.

[31] Attridge, "Gospel according to Thomas," 96.

[32] In P.Oxy. I 1 verso, line 5, 11 etc. appears ιϲ̄ for ᾽Ιησοῦς, in verso, line 8 θῡ for θεοῦ, in verso, line 11 πρᾱ for πατέρα, in verso, line 19 ανων̄ for ἀνθρώπων, and in recto, line 11 πριδι for πατρίδι.

[33] Hurtado, "Greek Fragments," 26.

[34] Luijendijk, "Reading the Gospel of Thomas," 253–254.

"produced from a possibly 'cash strapped church.'"[35] One might add, neverthe-
less, that the same could also apply to an ancient Christian educational setting.

As already mentioned, among the numerous findings from Oxyrhynchus
is also an important textual witness to the work of Babrius, who probably
composed his *Mythiambi Aesopici* in the second century CE.[36] The papyrus frag-
ment P.Oxy. X 1249, which is dated to the second or early third century CE on
palaeographical grounds, is most probably the oldest extant manuscript of this
author.[37] The papyrus contains the upper part of a column with the beginning
of sixteen lines but the right-hand side of the column is not preserved. The
fragmentary text, "neatly written in rather small round uncials,"[38] includes four
fables, at least in part: the last line of the epimythium of the fable of Betrayed by
the Source of His Own Pride (43),[39] almost all lines of Always Ready to Go (110),
and Close to the Law But Far from Justice (118), and finally, some words of the
first line of Why the Hares Refrained from Suicide (25). Therefore, the fables do
not appear in alphabetical order but begin respectively with the letters Ε, Μ, Ξ
and Γ. While earlier scholarship took this papyrus as evidence for the argument
that the alphabetical order of Babrius's work was made in the Byzantine era,[40]
current research assesses the alphabetical order according to the Codex Athous
as generally going back to Babrius.[41] Accordingly, the fragment P.Oxy. X 1249
should be regarded as a compilation or excerpt brought together by the specific
interests of the scribe or the customer for whom it was written.

P.Oxy. X 1249 shows a number of palaeographical characteristics. Each
choliambic verse starts at a new line and the fables are divided by *paragraphoi*.
In addition, the beginning of a fable is indicated by the use of so-called *ekthesis*,
which means that the first line of a section projects slightly to the left of the
column.[42] Interestingly, the handwriting of P.Oxy. X 1249 is similar to a large

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[35] C. M. Tuckett, "What's in a Name? How 'Apocryphal' Are the 'Apocryphal Gospels'?,"
in *The Other Side: Apocryphal Perspectives on Ancient Christian "Orthodoxies,"* ed. T. Nicklas
et al., NTOA 117 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 155.

[36] N. Holzberg, *Babrios: Fabeln: Griechisch–Deutsch*, ST (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 27.
Justin David Strong argues for an earlier composition of Babrius's work in the second half of the
first century (cf. his contribution in this volume).

[37] Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes*, 18; cf. Holzberg, *Babrios*, 12. The *editio princeps* notes
that the handwriting "can hardly be put later than the end of the second century, and may easily
be appreciably earlier" (B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri X* [London:
Horace Hart, 1914], 133).

[38] Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri X,* 133.

[39] Titles according to Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus.*

[40] Thus, for instance, Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri X,* 134.

[41] N. Holzberg, *Die antike Fabel: Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed., EKP (Darmstadt: Wissen-
schaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012), 60. This is supported by the fact that the Codex Athous
shows some exceptions in the alphabetical ordering and combines certain fables according to
common topics.

[42] P.Oxy. X 1249, lines 2, 6 and probably 16 (the beginning of this line is damaged). *Ekthesis*
is also used in the prosaic repertory P.Ryl. III 493, which does not use *paragraphoi*.

number of fragments from Oxyrhynchus which contain the text of various plays by Aeschylus.[43] Johnson therefore concludes that the papyri were written by the same scribe, and states that "the use of *paragraphus* and *ekthesis* to mark a new fable is akin to the treatment of lyric (in *eisthesis* from the trimeter) and of strophe/antistrophe (marked by *paragraphus*) in the Aeschylean fragment."[44] Nevertheless, the fable papyrus is of "considerably lower quality."[45] The papyri's owner – or various owners – are unknown.

These brief observations give a glimpse into the reading practices of an Egyptian city in the second and third century CE where both Babrius's work and the Gospel of Thomas are present. The discussed manuscripts are remarkably close to the presumed time of the texts' composition, which may also point to their early popularity. A comparison between the fragmentary excerpt of the *Mythiambi Aesopici* (P.Oxy. X 1249) and the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas on a papyrus roll (P.Oxy. IV 654) reveals interesting correspondences concerning their employment of lectional aids. With regard to P.Oxy. IV 654, it is perhaps remarkable that an ancient scribe structured this piece in a way similar to the scribal habits in the Babrian papyrus by use of the *paragraphos*. In general, however, it is important to notice that this scribal practice was very popular at this time in a variety of literary genres. In addition, the second papyrus of the Gospel of Thomas (P.Oxy. I 1) is a leaf from a codex which is more closely related to contemporary biblical manuscripts. Although it is hard to conclude from the extant manuscripts exactly in which way the Gospel of Thomas has been read in the city of Oxyrhynchus, the papyri fragments perhaps indicate that there were various ways and contexts in which this Gospel was used. It remains uncertain whether the Gospel of Thomas was read aloud in a Christian community, in some kind of a catechetical or educational context, or by individuals interested in this Gospel. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Babrian papyrus and the Gospel of Thomas's P.Oxy. IV 654 seem to represent manuscripts which were particularly prepared according to the specific needs of their users, since the papyrus which contains Babrius's verses is probably an excerpt, while P.Oxy. IV 654 is written on a re-used papyrus scroll, apparently by a scribe with limited skills.[46] Finally, another interesting result is that the excerpt of Babrius's work and the manuscripts of the Gospel of Thomas seem to be linked to different literary subcultures. This is because the fragment of Babrius's verses is related to a number of Aeschylean papyri with regard to palaeography, whereas the manuscripts of the Gospel of Thomas employ *nomina sacra* according to ancient Christian scribal practice.

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[43] P.Oxy. XVIII 2159–2164; P.Oxy. XVIII 2245–2255 PSI XI 1208–1210. Cf. Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes*, 61.

[44] Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes*, 19.

[45] Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes*, 19.

[46] Cf. Hurtado, "Greek Fragments," 25.

B. The Parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8)
and the Aesopic Tradition

There has been much scholarly debate on the parallels between the parabolic stories in the Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels, whereas the literary relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and the ancient Aesopic tradition has not attracted much scholarly attention.[47] However, the affinity to some stories in ancient fable collections has frequently been noted, particularly with respect to the parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8). In the Gospel of Thomas, the parable told by Jesus reads as follows:

> (1) And he says: "The human being is like a sensible fisherman, who cast his net into the sea, (and) drew it up from the sea filled with little fish. (2) Among them, the sensible fisherman found a large, fine fish. (3) He threw all the little fish back into the sea, (and) he chose the large fish without any effort. (4) Whoever has ears to hear should hear."[48] (Gos. Thom. 8)

This is the first parabolic story in the Gospel of Thomas. Joachim Jeremias and others suggested the uncommon introduction ("The human being [*prōme*] is like ...") was originally meant as a kingdom parable, but later adapted to the preceding macarism in Gos. Thom. 7.[49] This assumption, however, is difficult to verify and perhaps based on the idea that Jesus's "original" parables always speak about the kingdom.[50] There are many similar parables in the Gospel of Thomas which lay emphasis on prudent human action when confronted with the "kingdom of the father."[51] The fisherman is characterized two times as "sensible" in an explicit way. Perhaps this indicates to the readers that they should be attentive to recognize exceptional wisdom in the fisherman's action. The final call to "hear" (Gos. Thom. 8.4) may similarly point to the idea that the meaning of the parable is not obvious on the surface but requires deeper reflection.[52] The parable concludes with this vague call, without any explanation.

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[47] A noteworthy exception is J. F. Priest, "Thomas and Aesop," in *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism*, vol. 2, *Religion, Literature, and Society in Ancient Israel, Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner et al., SJud 2 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 115–132.

[48] The translation of the Gospel of Thomas used in this study is based on the English version of the translation by the Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften, most recently published in S. J. Patterson, H. G. Bethge, and J. M. Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

[49] Gos. Thom. 7.1: "Blessed is the lion that a person (*prōme*) will eat and the lion will become human (*ᵉrrōme*)." See J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 1972), 102.

[50] Cf. also, for instance, the narrative introduction in Luke 7:31–32: "To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace ...." (NRSV).

[51] Gos. Thom. 76, 96–98.

[52] For a summary concerning the phrase "Whoever has ears (to hear) should hear" in the

The parable focuses on a single character and his action. At the same time, the story is marked by a lexical opposition between the numerous "little fish" and a single "large fish," which at one point is called "fine." Undoubtedly, the "large fish" relates to a desirable entity. The motif of "finding" is common in the Gospel of Thomas from its beginning, where the reader is urged not to "cease seeking until he finds" (Gos. Thom. 2.1). As a general observation, a number of parabolic stories in this Gospel place emphasis on the moment of the discovery, while the narrator does not report of an intentional search for the valuable entity.[53]

A particular question concerning the parabolic story in its socio-historical context is whether ancient readers perceived that the fisherman acts in the ordinary way or not. Jacobus Liebenberg evaluates the story as quite plausible. He infers from the explicit mention of the one "fine fish" that "the other fish were not only small, but also useless."[54] Uwe-Karsten Plisch, in contrast, states that the "sensible fisherman in the *Gospel of Thomas* acts rather foolishly in throwing the whole catch away."[55] Which reading is correct is difficult to determine. The interpretation of the parable is nevertheless indicated by the explicit attributes of the fisherman and the fish: The main character appears as exemplary in his decision for the single valuable item, which coincides with the preference of "singleness" in the Gospel of Thomas.[56] From a narrative point of view, the story is externally focalized and there is no report of the character's feelings or direct speech. An exception is the brief remark at the end, according to which the fisherman makes his decision "without any effort" (*khōris hise*). The Coptic noun *hise* is quite strong, meaning "labour, weariness, suffering" and the like.[57] Within the narrative, the remark "without any effort" could perhaps indicate that the "sensible fisherman" does not need to ponder his next move but the decision comes to him "readily,"[58] but elsewhere the Gospel of Thomas appreciates "suffering" very much,[59] and the parable of the Lost Sheep explicitly remarks that "after he had toiled" the shepherd said to the recovered sheep: "I love you

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Gospel of Thomas, see K. Schwarz, *Gleichnisse und Parabeln Jesu im Thomasevangelium: Untersuchungen zu ihrer Form, Funktion und Bedeutung*, BZNW 236 (Berlin: De Gruyter), 85–86.

[53] Gos. Thom. 76, 109. The parable of the Lost Sheep (Gos. Thom. 107) mentions that the shepherd "sought the one until he found it."

[54] J. Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus: Parable, Aphorism and Metaphor in the Sayings Material Common to the Synoptic Tradition and the Gospel of Thomas*, BZNW 102 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 271 n 322.

[55] U. K. Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, trans. G. Schenke Robinson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008), 53.

[56] Cf. Gos. Thom. 22.4–5, 106.1.

[57] W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), 711b.

[58] Cf. the translation by Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 52.

[59] Gos. Thom. 58: "Blessed is the person who has suffered. He has found life." In the parable of the Woman Carrying a Jar (Gos. Thom. 97) the term "toil" plays a significant role, but the interpretation of this parable is much disputed. Cf. Schwarz, *Gleichnisse und Parabeln Jesu*, 217–225.

more than the ninety-nine" (Gos. Thom. 107.3). In this wider context, the phrase "without any effort" in Gos. Thom. 8.3 may imply that the fisherman's previous "labour" comes to an end at the moment of his discovery.[60]

Turning to the ancient Aesopic tradition, it is worth noting that the character of the fisherman belongs to the most popular human characters, apart from the farmer. A famous parabolic story, for instance, is the Fisherman with the Flute, which has been told by Cyrus the Younger according to Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.141). This story also became part of the Aesopic tradition in the ancient collections.[61] Another story about a fisherman, which shows greater similarity to Gos. Thom. 8, is told by Babrius:

> A fisherman drew in the net which he had cast a short time before
> and, as luck would have it, it was full of all kinds of delectable fish.
> But the little ones fled to the bottom of the net
> and slipped out through its many meshes,
> (5) whereas the big ones were caught and lay stretched out in the boat.
> It's one way to be insured and out of trouble,
> to be small; but you will seldom see a man who enjoys a great reputation
> and has the luck to evade all risks.
> (Babrius, *Fab.* 4 [Perry, LCL; line break adapted approximately according to the choliambic verses])

In this parabolic story, the narrator mentions the fisherman, who is the character initiating this action, only at the beginning. The focus in the following development is on the contrast between small and big fish. It is worth noting, moreover, that in line 3 the small fish are not simply named by reference to their size

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[60] In the *gradatio* Gos. Thom. 2.2, "finding" is a necessary but not the final step. Desirable objects or locations which have to be found are, e. g., the "kingdom" (Gos. Thom. 27.1; 49.1) and the place or presence of Jesus (Gos. Thom. 77.3).

Plisch suggests that Gos. Thom. 8 is an allegory based on the *ichthys* symbol in early Christianity. Consequently, "the active reader" should decode the symbol of the "fish" so that the "'human being' would then be no other than the one who seizes Christ" (Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 54). However, this interpretation neglects that the "Christian image of the fish is both complex and polysemic" because the symbol frequently refers to believers of Jesus in general, baptized believers, or to Jesus himself (R. M. Jensen, "Fish Symbol," in *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*, vol. 3, *From Celsus to the Catacombs: Visual, Liturgical and Non-Christian Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE*, ed. C. Keith [London: Bloomsbury, 2020], 289). Moreover, the popularity of the fish symbol is well attested at the turn of the second to the third century (e. g. in Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.11; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 1; and the Abercius inscription), while the symbol's earlier use is less clear (cf. the review of the literary and archaeological evidence by T. Rasimus, "Revisiting the *ICHTHYS*: A Suggestion Concerning the Origins of Christological Fish Symbolism," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices; Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, ed. C. Bull, L. I. Lied, and J. D. Turner, NHMS 76 [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 327–348). Therefore it is uncertain whether the first recipients of the Gospel of Thomas in the second century would have been aware of this specific meaning of the fish symbol.

[61] This parable is part of the work of Babrius (*Fab.* 9) and the Collectio Augustana (Perry 11).

but they are also called λεπτός ("poor, miserable"), which might have a social connotation.[62] The epimythium following the story transfers the meaning to a social level and emphasizes the contrast between "small" and "big" people with regard to their "reputation" (τῇ δόξῃ).[63] Within the general "map of the ethical landscape" in the Aesopic tradition, Babrius's story of the Fisherman and the Fish is part of the "largest group of surviving fables," which deals with "relations between the strong and the weak, or the more and less powerful."[64] A message similar to the story of the Fisherman and the Fish is also portrayed by the fable of the Fir Tree and the Bramble (Babrius, *Fab.* 64). Babrius clearly states in the epimythium that "Every distinguished man not only has greater fame than lesser men but he also undergoes greater dangers" (Babrius, *Fab.* 64 [Perry, LCL]).[65]

Babrius's narrative about the Fisherman and the Fish shows interesting similarities with the parable of the Sensible Fisherman in the Gospel of Thomas, although there are notable differences too. In both narratives, a single character initiates the story's action, and the contrast between small and big fish is significant. The similarities therefore concentrate at the beginning of the two stories but the subsequent plot develops in different ways. In Gos. Thom. 8 the focus remains on the sensible fisherman and his decision, while Babrius's narrative concentrates later on the two groups of fish without giving attention to the fisherman's skills. Moreover, the parable in the Gospel of Thomas singles out the "large, fine fish" so that the difference between a single entity and a multitude becomes important.

A major issue in the exegetical debate about Gos. Thom. 8 is the relationship of this parabolic story with the parable of the Dragnet in Matt 13:47–48. The Matthean parable, which follows the Merchant with the Pearl (Matt 13:45–46), mentions the "kingdom of heaven" as a point of reference and pays more attention to the net. The human agents of this story remain in the background as much as possible.[66] The relevant opposition is not between small and large fish but between "good" (τὰ καλά) and "rotten" or "bad" fish (τὰ σαπρά). The

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[62] F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. and trans. M. Goh and C. Schroeder (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1227. Holzberg interprets the variation as "metapoetisch konnotiert" (Holzberg, *Babrios*, 202).

[63] Ron Cameron suggested that the epimythium is a "secondarily appended moral" (R. Cameron, "Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2 [1986]: 29 n 78). Nevertheless, there are good reasons to assess the epimythium as authentic because the parabolic story is not finished by direct speech of a narrative character as in Babrius, *Fab.* 1–3 (cf. Holzberg, *Babrios*, 16 and 195).

[64] T. Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 63.

[65] Holzberg remarks concerning the authenticity of this epimythium: "Das in A und G überlieferte Epimythium folgt auf wörtliche Rede, rundet aber wie 18,14–16 und 65,6–8 … eine Rangstreitfabel ab" (Holzberg, *Babrios*, 209). An epimythium with similar content is given in Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.6.

[66] Note the passive voice in Matt 13:47 (βληθείσῃ) and the verb form συνέλεξαν in v. 48, which has no antecedent.

parable is completed by an explanation with regard to the final judgment ("So it will be ..."), wherein the fish are interpreted as "the evil" and "the righteous" (Matt 13:49). This eschatological prospect finishes Jesus's discourse in parables according to Matthew, followed by the short similitude concerning "every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 13:52).

The picture of the history of tradition in the second century seems to be highly complex because Clement of Alexandria offers two related but differing parallels. In the opening part of *Strom.* 1, Clement alludes to the parables of the Merchant with the Pearl and the Dragnet to illustrate the purpose of his extensive discussion of Greek philosophy:

> And now, to say it briefly – for among many pearls is the one, and in a large catch of fish is the beautiful fish – with time and hard work, and with excellent help present, the truth will shine. (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.1.16.3)

The second passage appears in *Strom.* 6, which is part of Clement's elaborate reflection about wisdom and Christ's essential role as the mediator of creation:

> I do not mention, at this point, the parable which says in the gospel: "The kingdom of heaven is like a person who cast a net into the sea, and out of the multitude of fish that were caught, he made a selection of the better ones." (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.11.95.3)

In the first instance, Clement seems to harmonize the parable of the Merchant with the Pearl and the story of the Dragnet in *Strom.* 1 in an aphoristic way. Instead of the Matthean "good" fish in the plural (τὰ καλά, Matt 13:48), Clement concentrates here on a single fish, which is artfully called "the beautiful fish" (ὁ κάλλιχθυς). Because of the combination and order of the two motifs, however, it is likely that Clement had Matt 13:45, 47 in mind.[67] The parable in *Strom.* 6, on the other hand, focuses on the fisherman, who is active throughout the parable, and the opposition is between a "multitude of fish" and the "better ones." The basic structure of the story seems to be similar to Gos. Thom. 8 because of the concentration on a single, active character and his "choice" in both narratives. At the same time there are fewer similarities between Clement's parable in *Strom.* 6 and Babrius's story because Clement does not speak of "small" and "big" fish and his interest remains with the fisherman's action until the end.

A special point of debate is the relationship between Clement's version of the parable in *Strom.* 6 and the Sensible Fisherman in Gos. Thom. 8 on the one side, and Matt 13:47–48 on the other. Ron Cameron, for instance, suggests that "Clement's version of the parable seems to represent an independent tradition that is shared with Thomas."[68] A more cautious theory is developed by Bernard

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[67] Similarly T. Baarda, "Clement of Alexandria and the Parable of the Fisherman: Matthew 13:47 f. or Independent Tradition?," in *Essays on the Diatessaron*, by T. Baarda, CBET 11 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 290–291.

[68] Cameron, "Parable," 28. Similarly, Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 52.

Brandon Scott. He argued that Babrius, *Fab.* 4 and Clement share a "proverbial insight" which also "forms the basis of both the Matthean and *Thomas* parables." According to Scott, however, "it seems impossible to reconstruct an originating structure for a Jesus parable from this history of tradition."[69] Nevertheless, in this discussion it might be useful to analyse not only the versions of the parable in an isolated way but also to consider the relationship of the relevant writings more generally.

There are basically two aspects which indicate that Clement's "fisherman" in *Strom.* 6 refers to a written gospel instead of some kind of oral tradition. Concerning the phrase "the parable which says *in the gospel*," it is worth noting that "for Clement 'the gospel' is in the first instance a singular, anonymous literary entity."[70] Moreover, the phrase βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν usually appears when Clement refers to passages from Matthew's Gospel.[71] It seems likely therefore that in *Strom.* 6 Clement is paraphrasing the Matthean version.[72] At the same time, it is difficult to decide whether Clement's version of the parable is based on Matt 13:47–48 and perhaps influenced by the brief narrative structure of the parables in Matt 13:44–46, which concentrate on a single character's action. Alternatively, Clement might have been acquainted with a version similar to Gos. Thom. 8, which he possibly wove together with Matt 13:47–48.[73] As a general observation, moreover, it is worth noting that there are no indications that Clement was acquainted with the Gospel of Thomas in particular.[74]

The issue of the relationship between Gos. Thom. 8 and Matt 13:47–48, again, should also be considered in the context of some general reflections about the possible connection between both gospels. In brief, there was a divide in twentieth-century scholarship concerning the Gospel of Thomas. Many scholars

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[69] B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 315–316. Cf. the evaluation by Priest: "With some diffidence I suggest that the Aesopic version, in some form, was prior to and known by both Matthew and Thomas" (Priest, "Thomas and Aesop," 128).

[70] F. Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 430. When Clement cites passages with reference to "the gospel," they are generally related to the gospels which became canonical. Other gospels are either explicitly named (cf. *Strom.* 2.9.45.5; 3.9.63.1; 3.13.93.1) or the relevant passage is not attributed to "the gospel" (e. g. *Strom.* 5.14.96.3). A more difficult case is the agraphon "in a certain gospel" in *Strom.* 5.10.63.7.

[71] Cf. *Strom.* 3.6.50.1; 3.7.59.4; 3.15.99.4; 4.6.34.6; 5.1.13.4 etc.

[72] This position is advocated by Baarda, "Clement of Alexandria," 291–298.

[73] Thus the suggestion by M. Grosso, "Trasmissione e ricezione della parabola del pescatore (Vangelo secondo Tommaso 8,1–3)," in *La trasmissione delle parole di Gesù nei primi tre secoli*, ed. M. Pesce and M. Rescio, AeNT 8 (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2011), 113.

[74] Clement does not mention the "Gospel according to Thomas" in his works. Interestingly, in *Strom.* 3.13.92.2–93.1 Clement attributes a certain passage to the Gospel "according to the Egyptians," although this passage shows similarities with Gos. Thom. 37. See also Clement's references to the "Gospel according to the Hebrews" (*Strom.* 2.9.45.4–5 and 5.14.96.3), which are related to Gos. Thom. 3. Cf. Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 63.

suggested that it used the Gospels that later became canonical,[75] while others argued that, at least in its primitive form, the Gospel directly drew from oral tradition, independently from the Synoptics.[76] At the end of the twentieth century, several scholars proposed that the relationship with the Synoptic Gospels should be examined at the level of individual sayings in the Gospel of Thomas,[77] but this approach led to a rather fragmentary discussion which did not consider the Gospel in its entirety. In recent research, however, the Gospel of Thomas is increasingly recognized as a theologically coherent writing, although there are indications that it has not been written without knowledge of the Synoptic Gospels. Thus, Simon Gathercole observes a number of redactional "traces" of Matthew and Luke in the Gospel of Thomas, and concludes that there is "in *Thomas* what one might term 'significant' influence identifiable from Matthew and Luke."[78] At the same time, Gathercole cautiously remarks: "In the end, we need to recognise the limits of our knowledge. While we may be reasonably confident about the 'that' of Matthew's and Luke's influence upon *Thomas*, and indeed that this influence is significant, the 'how' is much less accessible to us."[79]

In addition to apparent Matthean redactional elements in the Gospel of Thomas, there are two illustrative aspects which support the notion that this Gospel has been influenced by Matthew. One important observation is the appearance of the disciple Matthew as a dialogical partner of Jesus in Gos. Thom. 13. This is surprising because Matthew does not play a major role in early Christian literature of the first and early second century. This might point to Matthew's prominence as author of a gospel, for which Papias is the earliest known voice.[80] Another interesting discovery is that there is "an apparent fondness for the parables of Matt. 13, every one of which is paralleled in *Thomas*,"[81] even though the literary proximity varies to a large extent. The parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8) in particular differs significantly in comparison with the parable of the Dragnet in Matt 13:47–48, as we have seen. In the Gospel

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[75] Cf. the study by Wolfgang Schrage, which became influential in a large part of European research. See W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964).

[76] The most prominent voices for this position are J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, eds., *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), which was expanded by several studies by Robinson and Koester, and later also S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993).

[77] Risto Uro suggested, in particular, that the Gospel of Thomas used oral tradition already influenced by written gospels ("secondary orality"). See R. Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).

[78] S. J. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, SNTSMS 151 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 223.

[79] Gathercole, *Composition*, 224.

[80] Gathercole, *Composition*, 170.

[81] M. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Making of an Apocryphal Text* (London: SPCK, 2012), 80.

of Thomas, this coincides with a frequent theme in several parables, namely a single character finds a special or precious item and acts appropriately.[82] Moreover, there is an explicit theological preference for the "solitary ones" when Jesus announces that they originated from "the kingdom" and will return to it.[83] At the same time, however, it might also be possible that parabolic stories of the Aesopic tradition influenced the literary form of the parables in the Gospel of Thomas in an indirect way. It is worth noting, above all, that in the early Roman Empire fables were held in high esteem in various stages of elementary and rhetorical education.[84] Babrius, in particular, "enjoyed a higher degree of presence in schools when compared with other fable authors."[85] The artistic claims in the prologues of Babrius's two books suggest, nevertheless, that he wrote "for the delectation of an educated public rather than for the schoolroom."[86]

There is, moreover, an interesting correspondence between them apart from the potential relationship between the stories about fishermen. Several parables in the Gospel of Thomas are introduced by a Coptic predication of possession, using the form "a certain *person had* something," for example at the beginning of Gos. Thom. 57: "The kingdom of the Father is like a man who had [good] seed."[87] There is a relatively small number of analogies in the parables with reference to "a certain person" (ἄνθρωπός τις) in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, especially when Jesus addresses a group by use of a parabolic question.[88] In several parabolic stories by Babrius, however, the phrase "a person (or animal) had something" appears frequently in the opening line, but usually without using the noun ἄνθρωπος.[89] In the *Mythiambi Aesopici*, the common use of the verbal form εἶχε in the first line may also have metrical reasons because it is often absent in the related prose versions.[90] As a result, it seems possible that

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[82] Apart from Gos. Thom. 8, also in Gos. Thom. 76, 107 and 109. For a detailed explanation, see Schwarz, *Gleichnisse und Parabeln*, 263–264.

[83] Gos. Thom. 49; cf. Gos. Thom. 16.4 and 75.

[84] Cf. M. Becker, "Gefälschtes *fabula docet* in der Fabeldichtung des Babrios," *RhM* 149 (2006): 168–169.

[85] J. A. Fernández-Delgado, "Babrio en la escuela grecorromana," in *Three Centuries of Greek Culture under the Roman Empire: Homo Romanus Graeco Oratione*, ed. F. Mestre and P. Gómez (Barcelona: Publications i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2014), 83.

[86] N. Hopkinson, "Babrius, Valerius," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 218.

[87] Cf. Gos. Thom. 63.1; 64.1; 65.1; 76.1; 107.1; 109.1.

[88] See Matt 12:11; Luke 15:4, 11; 16:1. Concerning this form, cf. the analysis by R. Zimmermann, "Form und Funktion der Frageparabeln des erinnerten Jesus," in *Gleichnisse und Parabeln in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Methodische Konzepte – Religionshistorische Kontexte – Theologische Deutungen*, ed. J. Schröter, K. Schwarz, and S. Al-Suadi, WUNT 456 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 99–118.

[89] Babrius, *Fab.* 7 begins with "A man had a horse" (Ἄνθρωπος ἵππον εἶχε.). Without ἄνθρωπος, see Babrius, *Fab.* 9 (Ἁλιεύς τις αὐλοὺς εἶχε). Cf. Babrius, *Fab.* 25, 42, 51, 55, 73, 86, 119, 136.

[90] Cf. Babrius, *Fab.* 9 (Perry 11); 25 (Perry 138); 86 (Perry 86).

parabolic stories of the Aesopic tradition, in general, and specifically perhaps Babrius's *Mythiambi Aesopici*, influenced the form of how the parables in the Gospel of Thomas are narrated. But it is difficult to determine specific literary influence at particular instances. As has been shown, the parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8) shares certain similarities with Babrius's story of the Fisherman and the Fish (Babrius, *Fab.* 4), but the affinities concentrate at the respective stories' beginnings while the following plot develops in different ways. Thus, the complex history of tradition – including Gos. Thom. 8, Matt 13:47–48, and the parable's versions in Clement's *Stromateis* – should give rise to a more cautious evaluation. While these parabolic stories share a number of motifs, it is interesting that they are utilized in different contexts. The interpretation of the parabolic story in Babrius, *Fab.* 4 is summarized by its epimythium, referring to the social implications of either being "small" or having "great reputation." In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus immediately explains the parable's interpretation concerning "the end of the age," introduced by the signal word οὕτως (Matt 13:49). Finally, in the parabolic story in Gos. Thom. 8 it is striking that there is no interpretative explanation. This corresponds to the fact that there are few interpretative comments or explanations regarding the parables in the Gospel of Thomas in general,[91] on the one hand, and also the invitation to the readers in the Gospel's prologue that they should "find the meaning of these words" so that they "will not taste death," on the other.

C. The Similitude of the Dog in the Cattle Trough
(Gos. Thom. 102)

The similitude of the Dog in the Cattle Trough (Gos. Thom. 102) is different from the parable discussed previously in the ancient history of literature. First, the similitude in Gos. Thom. 102 is relatively short and closely embedded in its literary context. Second, unlike in other ancient parables, its history of tradition seems to take place outside of the common Aesopic tradition in Babrius, Phaedrus, and the prosaic fable collection. The following discussion analyses Gos. Thom. 102 briefly at first, before the second part will pay attention to the ancient history of literature concerning this similitude.

While the previous passages address the issue of how people belong to Jesus and his community (Gos. Thom. 99–101), the word of woe in Gos. Thom. 102 looks at a different topic:

> Jesus says: "Woe to them, the Pharisees, for they are like a dog sleeping[92] in a cattle trough, for it neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat." (Gos. Thom. 102)

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[91] Most probably in Gos. Thom. 57.4; 64.12; 76.3. Subsequent to similitudes, cf. Gos. Thom. 21.6–7; 22.4–7; 60.6.

[92] Or: "lying."

The syntax indicates that the similitude is subordinated to Jesus's word of woe against the Pharisees. The similitude therefore aims at giving reasons for this statement in a specific way, which is marked by the double use of "for." The story's action is narrated very briefly. Because of the polyvalent meaning of the Coptic verb *ᵉnkotk*, it is uncertain whether the dog "sleeps" or "lies" at its place. As a consequence, an open question is whether the dog is awake, thus preventing the cattle from eating in an active way,[93] or whether the cattle is driven away simply because of the dog's presence. The story's main emphasis is generally negative because it concentrates on what is *not* happening, and there is no indication how the situation may be changed.

The Gospel of Thomas agrees with a majority of early Christian literature in its predominantly negative attitude towards dogs. According to Gos. Thom. 93.1, Jesus warns about giving "what is holy to the dogs, lest they throw it upon the dunghill."[94] Moreover, dogs are often associated with uncleanliness and threat,[95] which is apparent when Paul inveighs against his opponents calling them "dogs" (Phil 3:2). Cattle, in comparison, are predominantly regarded as valuable and useful animals, which also need feeding and care.[96]

A separate issue concerning the word of woe at the beginning is the question of how the term "Pharisees" may be interpreted in the literary context of the Gospel of Thomas. In Gos. Thom. 39, Jesus characterizes "Pharisees and scribes" in a negative way as people who "received the keys of knowledge (but) they have hidden them" and prevent others from "entering." The Gospel generally shows a great distance from Judaism and disapproves of Jewish religious practice. In the only instance where the term "Jews" occurs, they are portrayed as negative examples with regard to self-contradictory behaviour (Gos. Thom. 43.3). The "twenty-four prophets in Israel" – which probably refers to the authors of the Jewish scriptures – are rejected because they are "dead," and consequently remote from "the Living One" (Gos. Thom. 52). Nevertheless, some elements of Jewish religious practice are perhaps used in a positive way in metaphorical speech, for instance when Jesus encourages his followers to "abstain (*rnēsteue*) from the world" and "make the (entire) week (*sambaton*) into a Sabbath (*sabbaton*)."[97] This is also seen when Jesus states that "the true circumcision in the spirit has

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[93] Thus the argument by J. Leonhardt-Balzer, "Wer vertreibt den Hund aus der Futterkrippe? (Vom Hund in der Futterkrippe): EvThom 102," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 927.

[94] Cf. Matt 7:6.

[95] See Luke 16:21; 2 Pet 2:22. Cf. J. Verheyden, "Dog: II. New Testament," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. D. C. Allison et al., 30 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–), 6:1034.

[96] For instance Luke 13:15, and the reception of Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor 9:9 and 1 Tim 5:18.

[97] Gos. Thom. 27. The Greek text in P.Oxy. I 1 makes use of a pun: καὶ ἐὰν μὴ σαββατίσητε τὸν σάββατον (verso, line 8–10); similarly in the Coptic version. The translation "make the (entire) week into a Sabbath" has been suggested by Peter Nagel, most recently in *Codex apocryphus gnosticus Novi Testamenti*, vol. 1, *Evangelien und Apostelgeschichten aus den Schriften von Nag Hammadi und verwandten Kodizes: Koptisch und Deutsch*, WUNT 326 (Tübingen: Mohr

prevailed over everything."[98] Moreover, it is remarkable that Jesus often speaks about Jewish religious practice in dialogue with the disciples, where they seem to represent general Christian beliefs to which the Gospel of Thomas takes a critical stance.[99] Therefore it may be possible that the term "Pharisees" in Gos. Thom. 102 does not refer to Jewish leaders but to other Christian groups. It may be that this term is used because the Gospel of Thomas accuses Christian groups of adhering too much to Judaism,[100] or because the "Pharisees" have generally become exemplary enemies of Jesus in a large part of early Christian writings.[101]

Soon after the publication of the Coptic version of the Gospel of Thomas, Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman discovered that Gos. Thom. 102 has several parallels in ancient literature.[102] There are, however, some uncertainties concerning the similitude's history of tradition.[103] A relatively safe point of departure are two instances in the writings by Lucian of Samosata (ca. 120–190 CE), who spent most of his life in Roman Syria and Egypt, although he travelled for several years to other parts of the Roman Empire, particularly in Greece. In his pamphlet *Adversus indoctum* ("The Ignorant Book Collector"), which originated after the death of Peregrinus in 165 CE,[104] Lucian states polemically:

> But you never lent a book to anyone; you act like the dog in the manger, who neither eats the barley herself nor lets the horse eat it, who can. (Lucian, *Ind.* 30 [Harmon, LCL, slightly adapted by K. S.])

Siebeck, 2014), 123. Gathercole disapproves this interpretation and translates "And unless you observe the Sabbath" (*Gospel of Thomas*, 328).

[98] Gos. Thom. 53.3. This statement is used following Jesus's explicit rejection of physical circumcision because (male) children are born uncircumcised. In this instance, the Gospel of Thomas shows no understanding of the Jewish concept that circumcision is a sign of Israel's special election.

[99] See, for instance, the negative opinion about the disciples' faith as an insufficient attempt to recognize Jesus (Gos. Thom. 91.1), and Jesus's rebuke concerning prayer and fasting (Gos. Thom. 104; cf. Gos. Thom. 14). Interestingly, Jesus's revelatory speeches about his own identity and his mission are not directly addressed to a specific group in the narrative world of the Gospel (cf. e.g. Gos. Thom. 16–17, 28, 77), but when the disciples ask questions about Jesus's identity, he usually answers indirectly in a more puzzling way (Gos. Thom. 12, 24, 37, 43, 91).

[100] This accusation is sometimes linked to the cliché of "judaizing." Concerning this discourse in the second century, cf. M. Murray, "Judaizing," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. D. C. Allison et al., 30 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–), 14:993.

[101] Cf. Günter Stemberger's evaluation concerning early Christian literature in general that "Die verschärfte Polemik gegen die Ph[arisäer] ist Teil der Verdrängung des Jüd[ischen] im frühen Christentum" (G. Stemberger, "Pharisäer," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klauser et al., 35 vols. [Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–2018], 27:555).

[102] R. M. Grant and D. N. Freedman, ed., *The Secret Sayings of Jesus: The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas*, trans. W. R. Schoedel (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 184.

[103] Concerning the following discussion, cf. the study by J. F. Priest, "The Dog in the Manger: In Quest of a Fable," *CJ* 81 (1985): 49–58.

[104] H. G. Nesselrath, "Lukianos von Samosata," in *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider, 16 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003), 7:493.

The same motif appears in the dialogue *Timon* ("Timon, or The Misanthrope"). Zeus addresses Ploutos, the personified riches, speaking scornfully about the behaviour of wealthy people:

> As a matter of fact, you (sc. Ploutos) used to say that they acted absurdly in that they loved you to excess, yet did not dare to enjoy you when they might, and instead of giving free rein to their passion when it lay in their power to do so, they kept watch and ward, looking fixedly at the seal and the bolt; for they thought it enjoyment enough, not that they were able to enjoy you themselves, but that they were shutting out everyone else from a share in the enjoyment, like the dog in the manger that neither ate the barley herself nor permitted the hungry horse to eat it. (Lucian, *Tim.* 14 [Harmon, LCL])

While the syntactical construction of the similitude varies between both instances, the core of the brief storyline is closely related: a dog, conspicuously situated "in the manger" (ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ), in opposition to a horse, which needs to eat "barley." In each case the similitude follows a specific claim to illustrate or give reason for a criticism that people do not share their useful property. In comparison with Gos. Thom. 102, however, it is striking that Lucian does not mention cattle but a single horse.

Another, more remote form of the parabolic story is used in the *Musa puerilis* by Straton of Sardeis, who flourished probably during Hadrian's time:[105]

> A certain eunuch has good-looking servant-boys – for what use? – and he does them abominable injury. Truly, like the dog in the manger with the roses, and stupidly barking, he neither gives the good thing to himself nor to anyone else. (Anthologia Graeca 12.236 [Paton, LCL])[106]

The plot of this version of the Dog in the Cattle Trough is more fictional, rather comical and perhaps paederotic.[107] Conspicuously, the dog guards roses, the mention of the manger is actually superfluous, and there is no other animal mentioned explicitly.

An extended version of this parabolic story is part of the Latin collection by Heinrich Steinhöwel, published in 1476/1477 in the category of the *fabulae extravagantes*:

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[105] Cf. M. G. Albiani, "Straton von Sardeis," in *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider, 16 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003), 11:1044.

[106] Gathercole cautiously remarks: "As is the case in such anthologies, the attribution may not be completely certain" (Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 570). In addition, there is perhaps a relevant entry by the Greek lexicographer Pausanias in the Hadrian era: ἡ κύων ἐπὶ τῆς φάτνης· παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν μήτε χρωμένων μήτε ἄλλοις μεταδιδόντων (H. Erbse, *Untersuchungen zu den attizistischen Lexika*, ADAWB: PHK 1949 Nr. 2. [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1950], 184, alphabetic letter η, no. 6). However, the attribution of this passage to Pausanias in the work by Eustathios of Thessalonike (12th cent. CE) is very uncertain and depends on the premises explained in Erbse, *Untersuchungen*, 20.

[107] Albiani, "Straton von Sardeis," 1044.

A dog without conscience lay in a manger full of hay. When the cattle came to eat of the hay he would not let them, but showed his teeth in ugly mood. The oxen protested: "It is not right for you to begrudge us the satisfaction of indulging our natural appetite when you yourself have no such appetite. It is not your nature to eat hay, and yet you prevent us from eating it." And so it was when this dog had a bone in his mouth; he couldn't gnaw it any more himself, but he wouldn't let another dog gnaw it.[108]

The Latin fable is framed by a promythium and a brief epimythium.[109] The fable's story is narrated in two scenes, which are separated by the word *similiter*: the first scene shows the dog's activity and the oxen's elaborate argument with a logical reference to the dog's "nature," while the second scene is comparably short and connects to the first because of the same dog. Most importantly, this is the earliest known version of this parabolic story telling about a dog in opposition to oxen, apart from the Gospel of Thomas. Unfortunately, the Latin source of the *fabulae extravagantes* in Steinhöwel's collection "remains a mystery."[110]

As a result, different versions of the Dog in the Cattle Trough appear in ancient literature dating from the middle of the second century CE, or perhaps the century's beginning. The most prominent form in Lucian's writings tells about a dog in opposition to a horse, but the origin of the longer Latin version, which shows the dog barking at oxen, remains obscure. Grant and Freedman state freely that "The dog in the manger … was proverbial in the second century."[111] The origin and date of this proverbial use is undetermined, nevertheless. It remains unclear if this phrase was connected to horses at first. On the assumption that this was the case, Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer suggests that the Gospel of Thomas intentionally exchanged the horse for cattle. Thus the Gospel would not talk about a status symbol but about useful valuable objects, which are closer to the presumed readers in a rural area.[112] Besides this, it may also be possible that the wording of Jesus's reproach against the "hypocrites" in Luke 13:15 may have played a role: When the leader of the synagogue is indignant because of Jesus's healing activity during the Sabbath, Jesus asks the parabolic question: "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?"[113] Thus, Luke 13:15 is similar to Gos. Thom. 102 regarding their context mentioning a prominent Jewish character, and the Lukan phrase also shows a link between an "ox" – at this instance in singular – and a "manger." However, the Dog in the Cattle Trough could also

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[108] Translation according to Perry, *Babrius*, 597. Latin text in B. E. Perry, *Aesopica: A Series of Texts Relating to Aesop or Ascribed to Him or Closely Connected with the Literary Tradition That Bears His Name*, vol. 1, *Greek and Latin Texts* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1952), 696 (no. 702).

[109] For the Latin text of the promythium and epimythium, see Perry, *Aesopica*, 696.

[110] Priest, "Dog in the Manger," 52 n 17.

[111] Grant and Freedman, *Secret Sayings*, 184.

[112] Leonhardt-Balzer, "Hund," 930.

[113] Luke 13:15 (NRSV).

have circulated in various forms from early on. The Latin version, or at least its basic structure, might perhaps go back to the Roman imperial era, although this remains uncertain.

D. Conclusions

While twentieth-century scholarship on the Gospel of Thomas was often focused on the Gospel's literary relationship with the Synoptic Gospels or its "Gnostic" characteristics, recent studies aim at widening the scope with regard to the Gospel's literary, religious and philosophical context in antiquity. This provides an appropriate basis to investigate possible literary connections and similarities between the parabolic stories in the Gospel of Thomas and the Aesopic tradition. Following a trajectory in current research which increasingly considers ancient reading practices by exploring early Christian manuscripts, this article reflected on some fragments of the Gospel of Thomas and Babrius's *Mythiambi Aesopici*. Thus, the papyrus fragments discovered in Oxyrhynchus allow some insight into the reading practices of an Egyptian city in the second and third century CE. The fragments originate remarkably close to the presumed time of composition of both writings, and the papyri also share certain similarities concerning their use of lectional aids for structuring the text. The fragment of Babrius, however, is probably related to several fragments of Aeschylean plays, while the two papyri of the Gospel of Thomas use various contractions and *nomina sacra* which are common in early Christian papyri. Although the three papyri provide a relatively limited basis for such observations, it allows perhaps a small glimpse into different literary circles.

The parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8) and the similitude of the Dog in the Cattle Trough (Gos. Thom. 102) are two instances in the Gospel of Thomas which seem to be related in different ways to the Aesopic tradition. To some degree, the Dog in the Cattle Trough (Gos. Thom. 102) has affinities to various proverbial phrases by Lucian of Samosata and others, probably starting in the second century. There are, moreover, some similarities between the parable of the Sensible Fisherman (Gos. Thom. 8) and Babrius's story about the fisherman with the small and big fish (Babrius, *Fab.* 4), but the correspondences concentrate at the beginning of each story, while the subsequent plot develops differently. In addition, this instance becomes particularly difficult because the Gospel of Thomas has probably been influenced by the Gospel of Matthew, where Matt 13:47–48 has a complex reception history in the second and early third century.

Apart from that, the increasing popularity of the Aesopic tradition in Imperial-Roman education, and specifically also Babrius's work, might indicate that the way in which the parables in the Gospel of Thomas are narrated might

have been influenced by Aesopic stories, although this depends on rather general observations which could not be investigated in detail at this place. Another disputed matter in scholarly discussion concerning the Aesopic tradition are the interpretative comments in the promythia and epimythia. As current classical research considers many of these "morals" as probably authentic, it is remarkable again that the Gospel of Thomas has so many parabolic stories but very few explanations following them. This seems to be consistent with the Gospel's prologue, according to which the readers are invited to "find the meaning of these words" spoken by the "living Jesus," so that they "will not taste death." Finally, unlike the Aesopic tradition, a characteristic feature of the Gospel of Thomas is its frequent repetition of the phrase "Jesus says." This gives its readers the impression of a more direct access to the voice of the "living Jesus" so that the parabolic stories are related more closely to the speaker's identity.

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"You Ought to Observe Hounds
When They Are Hunting Hares"

Examples and Similes about Animals
in the Apophthegmata Patrum

INGVILD S. GILHUS

A. Stories in the Apophthegmata Patrum

The subject of this article is animal stories in the Apophthegmata Patrum ("Sayings of the Fathers"). The Apophthegmata Patrum are collections of sayings, attributed to Christian monastics who lived in the fourth and fifth century CE, mostly in Egypt. The sayings were part of a living tradition, which was characterized by an extraordinary textual fluidity.[1] They were written down in Greek in the fifth and sixth century. The most important collections of apophthegms are the Alphabetical Collection (A), the Systematic Collection (S), and the Anonymous Collection (N).[2] The stories served as pedagogical tools and were used to teach monastics the right way to live ascetic lives.[3] They were highly entertaining and

[1] S. Rubenson, "Textual Fluidity in Early Monasticism: Sayings, Sermons and Stories," in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. L. I. Lied and H. Lundhaug, TUGAL 175 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 178–200.

[2] Editions and translations used in this article are: J. Wortley, ed., *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Select Edition and Complete English Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Apophthegmata Patrum (Alphabetical) in J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca*, 162 vols. (Paris, 1857–1886), 65:72–440; B. Ward, ed. and trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, rev. ed., CSS 59 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications; Oxford: Mowbray, 1984); J. C. Guy, *Les Apophtegmes des Pères: Collection systématique*, 3 vols., SC 387, 474, 498 (Paris: Cerf, 1993–2005); J. Wortley, ed. and trans., *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Systematic Collection*, CSS 240 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012); N. Russel, ed. and trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, Introduction by B. Ward, CSS 34 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications; Oxford: Mowbray, 1981); D. C. Butler, ed. and trans., *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); J. Wortley, ed. and trans., *Palladius of Aspuna: The Lausiac History*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015). I have but with a few exceptions followed the English translations of these sources.

[3] L. L. Larsen, "The Apophthegmata Patrum: Rustic Rumination or Rhetorical Recitation," *PNA* 23 (2008): 21–31; L. L. Larsen, "The Apophthegmata Patrum and the Classical Rhetorical

hugely popular and were translated from Greek to several ancient languages.[4] Similar stories were included in the travelogues of Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* (*Hist. Laus.*) and in the Historia monachorum in Aegypto (Hist. mon. Aeg.) by an anonymous author. Stories from the two travelogues are also referred to in this article.

The stories about animals in the apophthegms belonged to ascetic and monastic milieus, were developed in an Egyptian landscape, include biblical references to animals, and were part of the wider literary world of animal fables and parables. What species of animals do the apophthegms include and what views on animals do they reflect? What do the apophthegms say about real animals and to what degree do they reflect observations of animals? When do the animals conform to the typical behavior of a species and when do they act differently? How are human-animal relationships described and what themes are the animals used to illuminate? Short comparisons between the apophthegms and Egyptian fables, biblical texts, Graeco-Roman literature, Aesopic fables, and the Babylonian Talmud will be attempted in order to shed light on the broader cultural context of the animal parables in the Apophthegmata Patrum.[5] First, however, it is necessary to discuss briefly the relation between fables and parables in the Apophthegmata.

The background of the genre of ἀπόφθεγμα ("apophthegm") can be traced to a gnomic tradition and to the wider Graeco-Roman philosophical and rhetorical milieu. Apophthegms have much in common with the ancient wisdom genre of chreia (Gr. χρεία). The two terms are sometimes used synonymously.[6] In their instructions about ascetic and monastic life, the apophthegms include fables or parables. The genres of fables and parables and the differences between them are notoriously difficult to discern, as are the subgenres of the two categories.[7] Ben Edwin Perry describes the fable with reference to the rhetorician Theon as "a fictitious story picturing a truth."[8] Gert-Jan van Dijk defines a fable in three

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Tradition," in *Historia biblica, ascetica et hagiographica*, ed. F. Young, M. Edwards, and P. Parvis, StPatr 39 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 409–415.

[4] C. T. Schroeder, "Apophthegmata Patrum," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. R. S. Bagnall et al., 13 vols. (London: Blackwell, 2013), 1:562–563.

[5] Aesopic fables mean "fables that are felt to be in the manner of Aesop." (J. M. Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry 750–1150* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993], 16). In the Aesopic fables, the characters are animals.

[6] C. Hezser, "Apophthegmata Patrum and Apophthegmata of the Rabbis," in *La narrativa cristiana antica: Codici narrativi, strutture formali, schemi retorici*, SEAug 50 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1995), 453–464; C. Hezser, "Die Verwendung der Hellenistischen Gattung Chrie im frühen Christentum und Judentum," *JSJ* 27 (1996): 371–439. Chreiai are sayings or acts attributed to a famous person (cf. Hezser, "Die Verwendung der Hellenistischen Gattung Chrie," 371–372).

[7] Cf. R. Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 105–150.

[8] B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), xx.

words: "a fictitious metaphorical narrative."[9] Francisco Rodríguez Adrados is more elaborate, explaining that "the fable narrates a unique and concrete event that has taken place at another time; and that this event is symbolic; whether the event is fictive or not is less important. It is an event that, on being considered symbolic of a current situation, prejudices the result of this and explains it."[10] In addition to the fable's referring to a single event, Rodríguez Adrados points to the prevalence of animal themes as well as satire and criticism, but he also adds that not all elements are always present. Niklas Holzberg stresses that while it is a tendency "to equate *fable* with *animal fable*" ancient texts were in reality more varied.[11]

When a distinction is made between fables and parables, an argument frequently put forward is that while both fables and parables teach a moral lesson, the protagonists in the fables are animals or non-human objects, while in parables the protagonists are humans.[12] The distinction, however, is artificial; a fable is also a parable in a literary sense when it is a projection of one story onto another (παραβάλλειν in this context means "to use an analogy"). Mark Turner contends that the parable combines "two of our basic forms of knowledge – story and projection," and defines a parable as "the projection of story."[13] The apophthegms themselves do not support the idea that parables only pertain to humans. On the contrary, the term παραβολή, which is here translated as a simile, is used five times in the Systematic Collection; and in one instance, it refers to a story about a talking ass (S 4.100.6) (see below). In addition, the term is used to characterize the story about the bruised reed and the smoking flax in Matt 12:29 (S 5.4.58); one is about two women in a barrel and pertains to slandering (S 9.12); one is about crops and famine and pertains to hospitality (S 13.6); and one is about seeing a king and pertains to ascetic life (S 14.13). Except for the story about the speaking ass, the other stories do not include animals. In the Anonymous Collection, the term is applied to the story about the talking cedar and the reeds (N 753) (see below).

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[9] G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature: With a Study of the Theory and Terminology of the Genre*, MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 113.

[10] F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 32.

[11] N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 19.

[12] According to Mary Ann Beavis, "In literary-historical terms, then, parable and fable are closely related. Ancient Near Eastern stories were the prototype of both Greek fables and Jewish parables" (M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 [1990]: 478). Ruben Zimmermann lists four core criteria of the genre parable (narrational, fictional, realistic, and metaphoric) and two supplemental criteria (active in appeal and contextually related) (Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus*, 138).

[13] M. Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5 and 7.

The apophthegms only contain a few animal fables in the more restricted sense, i. e. stories with only or mostly animal characters. In the apophthegms, animals interact with humans and – with a few exceptions – tend to be mute. The main aim of stories about animals is to illuminate ascetic life. I have made a distinction between stories in which animals and named saintly ascetics interact in a direct way and stories where a source story about the general behavior of animals is juxtaposed to and projected onto a target story about ascetic life, usually by means of "like" or a similar expression. Sometimes target stories are only implied and not spelled out as in this apophthegm of John the Dwarf, where the meaning and relevance for ascetic life is implicit: "He also said, 'Who is as strong as the lion? And yet, because of his greed he falls into the net, and all his strength is brought low'" (A John the Dwarf 28). The story can be interpreted as a general warning against greed and more specifically about the dangers of greed in a monastic setting. Examples of more general and implicit projections are found in the Systematic Collection, where the various apophthegms are grouped in twenty-one themes, which illustrate specific ascetic virtues, such as tranquility (ἡσυχία), or vices to be avoided, such as fornication (πορνεία).

For the first type of stories where animals and humans interact directly, I have tentatively applied the term example stories while for the second type I have used the term similes.[14] This distinction is not made in the apophthegms themselves.[15] Similes contain invented examples in the form of short comparisons using comparative particles and are in the apophthegms sometimes designated with παραβολή. Similes are sometimes integrated in example stories as when monks tell similes. In the similes, in most cases a stereotypical behavior of animals is used to show a general truth about ascetic life, but there is also a simile with a talking ass. In example stories, certain animals interact with specific saintly ascetics in ways that frequently deviate from the normal behavior of the animal species and sometimes also from the normal behavior of the non-animal species in what constitutes a unique "historical" event.[16]

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[14] Simile is here seen as a subgenre of parables. Cf. the discussion in G. P. Anderson, "Parables," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, and N. Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 651–653.

[15] Ruben Zimmermann has recently discussed the parable genre in relation to the New Testament and to ancient rhetoric and the difficulties dividing it into subgenres (Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus*, 105–150). Despite his very reasonable criticism, it is still helpful to divide the animal stories into two categories in the Apophthegmata as such a division highlights differences in these stories, especially in their conception of animals.

[16] When animals are part of the background in example stories, they act in line with their nature.

B. Anthropomorphized Animals

Christian theological views of animals, based on the creation stories in Genesis, tend to be anthropocentric. This does not stop animals from playing prominent roles in Christian literature or even be given the power of speech. The Hebrew Bible includes two talking animals, the serpent in Genesis and the ass of Balaam.[17] The serpent is more of an independent actor, while the ass of Balaam is an instrument of God. In postbiblical literature, animals are sometimes equipped with human voice, especially in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.[18] The apophthegms are more restricted than the apocryphal acts when it comes to talking animals but still include an example story about a talking crocodile, a simile about a talking ass, and a simile about talking plants.

In the apophthegm about the crocodile, the reptile eats a monastic while he is bathing naked:

> A brother going to Scete arrived at the Nile worn out by the journey. At the heat of the day, he took his clothes off and went down to bathe. Then an animal called a crocodile rushed in and seized him. Now an elder who had the second sight passed by and saw that the brother had been seized. He shouted at the animal, saying, "Why did you eat the *abba*?" In a human voice the beast said to him, "I did not eat an *abba*. I found a worldling and ate him; the monk is there," and it nodded toward the habit. The elder went his way grieving over what had taken place. (S 18.53)

The example story illustrates that monastics should under no circumstances appear in the nude. It presupposes that animals can speak and that the challenge is to understand what they say, and because the elder is gifted with clairvoyance, he rises to the challenge. The apophthegm is grouped among the stories which illustrate second sight.

The simile about the ass is narrated in response to a brother who has trouble with his belly and asks an abbot what to do (S 4.100.6; N 431). In the simile, the ass walks wherever it wants to and is beaten by its master but objects to the harsh treatment: "Do not beat me; I will walk correctly from now on." The owner hides the staff, and the ass makes its way to the crop. The master takes up the staff again and beats the animal until it walks in the direction which the master wants. The story ends with an explicit comparison, "that is how (οὕτως) it is with the belly too," and is characterized as a simile (παραβολή).

In addition to the two stories about talking animals, there is also a simile about talking plants (N 753), which is introduced as "a simile (παραβολή) about

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[17] The serpent has two lines and takes part in a dialogue with Eve (Gen 3:1–4). The ass of Balaam sees the angel of God and speaks two lines in a dialogue with Balaam (Num 22:28–30).

[18] Cf. I. S. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2006), 255–258; J. E. Spittler, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, WUNT 2/247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 130–148, 228–232.

humble-mindedness" (see below). In this simile, the cedar asks the reeds why they are not broken in storms, since they are so frail. The answer is that while the cedar withstands the wind, the reeds bend with it. The narrative is used to explain that "it is necessary to give place to anger and not resist and fall into inappropriate *logismoi* [Gr. Λογισμοί] and deeds." The apophthegm ends with a quote from Paul about anger (Rom 12:19).

Stories about talking flora and fauna are rare in the collections of apophthegms. Such stories seem to be problematic and require explanation.[19] When they are explicitly characterized as similes (παραβολή), it seems to indicate that these stories are invented and fictive, which makes them more acceptable.[20] This also means that they have a subtext which shows that animals and plants do not speak – only in similes. In the example story about the crocodile, the stress is on the second sight of the elder monastic, which explains why the speech of the crocodile is understood and can be recorded (S 18.53). The story is only found in the Systematic Collection, and only in one manuscript.[21] This reflects the marginality of talking animals in the apophthegms.

Even if they do not usually talk, animals in the example stories sometimes show that they understand human speech and interact with the ascetics in human-like ways. In the hagiographic literature, such animals are regular characters, for instance the lions that, according to Jerome, dug the grave of Paul (*Vit. Paul.* 16) and the lioness who rescued Thecla when she had been thrown to the lions (Acts Paul Thecl. 26–39).[22]

The lion is a powerful animal; it is dangerous to humans and may kill and eat them. It was the king of animals and the preferred game of Mesopotamian kings and pharaonic rulers of Egypt, who showed their power by hunting lions. Ascetic heroes possess a different kind of power that can subdue wild and fearsome animals, including lions. In one apophthegm, an ascetic goes into a cave in the heat of the day and encounters a lion. The feline grinds its teeth and roars, but the ascetic addresses it in an equanimous way: "Why are you getting upset? There is enough room here for both you and me. If that is not to your liking, then get up and leave." The lion then immediately leaves the cave (S 19.19; N 333, cf. *Hist. Laus.* 52). The story implies that the lion understood what the ascetic said, and furthermore that the ascetic was able to command wild animals. In the

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[19] A recent discussion of talking animals is found in E. Segal, *Beasts That Teach, Birds That Tell: Animal Language in Rabbinic and Classical Literatures* (Calgary: Alberta Judaic Studies, 2019).

[20] A discussion of animal fables and fiction is found in the Progymnasmata, see G. A. Kennedy, ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2003), 177 ff., cf. 94, 96, 136–137.

[21] Ambrosianus C 30-Inf, cf. Guy, *Apophtegmes des Pères*, 3:135.

[22] Ampullae and oil lamps with her name show her popularity in fifth century Egypt (J. K. Elliott, "Graphic Versions: Did Non-Biblical Stories about Jesus and the Saints Originate More in Art Than in Texts?," *TimesLitSupp* [2018]: 15–16).

Systematic Collection, the story is placed under the heading "Wonder-working" (Gr. σημειοφόρον). Subduing the lion merely by talking to it reveals the moral strength, power, and special status of the ascetic, which is the purpose of the story. Not only lions but other wild animals are the object of the power of the ascetics, as when Abba Bes first commands a violent hippopotamus ravaging the countryside to go away. Afterwards Bes bids a crocodile to leave (Hist. mon. Aeg. 4.3).

Wild animals are sometimes cast as instruments of God. In one elaborate apophthegm, two priests who have died and gone to heaven pray that God will send a lion to kill a sinful brother, so that this punishment shall bring the weight in balance while he is on earth, and he shall be saved (N 597). The plot thickens when a lion attacks the sinner, but another brother, who has second sight sees what is going on and prays that the brother who has sinned should *not* be eaten by the lion. The story draws attention to the danger from wild animals, but it also makes the point that being attacked and killed by them could potentially be an expression of the will of God and even be considered as something positive for the victim. This does not only pertain to lions. In another apophthegm, an angel explains that a brother eaten by a hyena has paid the penalty for his few faults in this world, "so that he might be found spotless before God in the next one" (S 18.41, cf. N 368). Behind these apophthegms lies an attempt to explain why bad things sometimes happened to ascetics and monastics. Their aim is to show that God is almighty and behind everything that happens and to convince the readers that what happens is ultimately for the best. Therein also lies a touch of theodicy.

The subdual of wild animals usually happens in a confrontational way, but sometimes also in a more friendly manner. Stories about interactions between saintly ascetics and hyenas include both varieties. In one story, a brother obeys a command made jokingly by his *abba*, "tie her up and bind her," in a literal way and catches a hyena as if it were a dog (S 14.5, cf. A John the disciple of Paul 1). This story exalts the virtue of obedience. Another story illustrates lust. In this long apophthegm, a brother is so tormented by lust (πορνεία) that he walks into the den of hyenas so that they can eat him. However, the animals only lick him (S 5.54, cf. *Hist. Laus.* 23.3–4). In the third story, a brother is breastfed by a hyena as if he were one of its cubs because God has granted his wish to tame a wild beast (N 440). In the Historia monachorum in Aegypto, a hyena leads an ascetic to her cubs so that he can cure one of them from blindness. Afterwards the hyena kills a ram and gives its skin to the ascetic as a thank-offering (Hist. mon. Aeg. 21.15). In this travelogue, there is a general tendency for animals to be more an-thropomorphic than they are in the three collections of apophthegms. Ascetics subduing wild animals is one of three standard scenarios of ascetics and wild animals in the apophthegms. The other two are ascetics grazing with animals, and ascetics confronting crocodiles when crossing fords and rivers.

In the second of the three scenarios, ascetics graze with wild animals (θηρία) (S 20.13) or are in their company (Hist. mon. Aeg. 6.4), sometimes with buffaloes (βούβαλος) (S 20.15; N 132, 516), and other times with antelopes. One example is Macarius the Great, who sees two naked men among the animals in the desert, who have come to a sheet of water to drink (A Macarius the Great 2). Sometimes the naked ascetics are only covered with their hair. According to Kristi Upson-Saia, this is a sign of their liminal state on the path to holiness.[23] She also points out that ascetics roaming with the animals and acting more like animals have placed themselves outside society and reached an angelic status. In the *Historia Lausiaca*, Macarius of Alexandria is traveling in the desert without water. There he meets a herd of buffaloes, and a female with a calf lets him drink from her udder (*Hist. Laus.* 18.9). In these stories, the "normal" relationship between humans and animals is changed and the boundaries between them are deconstructed.

The interactions between animals and ascetics in the desert constitute a departure from more standard ways of ascetic living and serve to characterize the ascetics as holy. The stories reflect a tension in the Apophthegmata, and more generally in monastic literature, between different ways of living the ascetic life – in monasteries, in semi-anchoretic cells, or in solitude. In the most extreme cases, the apophthegms present ascetics who live in the desert only with the company of wild animals. Such stories are part of what Oliver Freiberger has called "the discourse about the ascetic's habitat."[24] When the ascetics roam freely among the animals in the wilderness, they have reached a paradisiacal or prelapsarian state. The stories describe an extreme type of life in the desert and are projected on conceptions about salvation, at the same time as they are lived out interpretation of Scripture (cf. Mark 1:12–13).

In the third standard scenario where ascetics interact with animals, they interact with crocodiles. In the Systematic Collection, there are three parables about crocodiles interacting with humans. One is about the talking reptile which eats the bathing monk, mentioned above (S 18.53); the second presents a monastic who crosses the Nile and is encountered by crocodiles, which, instead of eating him, lick his body (S 14.27; N 294); in the third story, a crocodile ferries a monastic across the river (S 14.32; N 46). The Historia monachorum in Aegypto includes a story about a crocodile which has devoured many people. Abba Helle uses the animal as a mount when he has to run an errand on the other side of a ford. After having returned in the same way on the back of the crocodile, he commands the beast to die because it has taken many lives: "Whereupon the animal

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[23] K. Upson-Saia, "Hairiness and Holiness in the Early Christian Desert," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. K. Upson-Saia, C. Daniel-Hughes, and A. J. Batton (London: Routledge, 2014), 155–172, 167–169.

[24] O. Freiberger, "Locating the Ascetic's Habitat: Towards a Microcomparison of Religious Discourses," *HR* 50 (2010): 175.

at once sank onto its belly and died" (Hist. mon. Aeg. 12.7). There are further stories about ascetics commanding crocodiles to leave an area (Hist. mon. Aeg. 4.3) and others taming them, for instance John the Little, who had a crocodile which followed him like a pet.[25]

Crocodiles were, of course, a real danger to humans. In the epilogue to the Historia monachorum in Aegypto, the anonymous author describes how he and his traveling companions saw three stranded crocodiles, which they thought were dead. The beasts suddenly lunged at them, but when the frightened travelers called on Christ, the reptiles immediately darted into the water (Hist. mon. Aeg. Epilogue 11–13). While the stories referred to above reflect the danger of crocodiles, they also show the saintly status and supernormal power of the ascetics who conquer them.

In the example stories, animals are the instruments of God, obey the orders of ascetics, act towards them in friendly ways, or are destroyed by them. Taming hostile powers or eradicating them was part of the general repertoire of the abilities of saints.[26] In the prologue to the Historia monachorum in Aegypto, one of the things that are stressed is that the holy fathers "have slain wild beasts" (Hist. mon. Aeg. Prologue 9). When the church historian Socrates refers to the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius, he specifically mentions that it reveals "how wild beasts became subject to their authority" (*Hist. eccl.* 4.23).

The example stories show the special power and status of ascetics, who have reached or are on the path to sainthood. The animals are mediums by which the holiness of the ascetics is revealed to the readers. These stories present the world in an ideal state where animals obey the command of God and saintly ascetics, sometimes by perishing, but sometimes also by living peacefully together with humans.

C. Stereotypical Animal Behavior

Different from the example stories, which pretend to refer to actual events and where animals sometimes behave in anomalous and human-friendly ways, the point of departure in the similes is the normal or stereotypical behavior of animals, but, as mentioned, there are exceptions. This behavior is typical of animals in general or, more frequently, of a class of animals such as snakes or birds, or of a species, such as lions or asses. More general categories such as clean beasts, wild beasts and beasts of burden also appear in the similes, for instance an elder who escapes to the furthest corner of his cell whenever someone comes to see him says, "Even the wild animals, when they flee to their lairs, are saved" (A Isidoros

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[25] *Life of John the Little* in D. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 91.

[26] Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 91.

the Elder 7). A limited range of animals are present in the similes. They mainly include birds, dogs, snakes, lions, asses, sheep, pigs, horses, scorpions, mice, fish, camels, flies, bees, and worms. Overall, there are about forty different animal similes in the three collections of apophthegms.

The similes are built on narrative analogy where a typical animal behavior is used to illustrate either ideal monastic behavior or the opposite. The simile usually starts with the source narrative, which is followed by the target narrative. In some cases, it is the other way around, the apophthegm first presenting a target situation, which is then illuminated by the animal source story. The moral is usually presented at the end (ἐπιμύθιον) but sometimes at the beginning (προμύθιον). Some of the parables are integrated in a much longer apophthegm.

The simile tends to be introduced as a saying without context, as in this example, attributed to a female ascetic, Synkletike: "She also said, 'Just as the most bitter medicines put poisonous animals to flight, so prayer with fasting expels a sordid *logismos*' [Gr. λογισμός]" (S 4.50).[27] Sometimes a simile is introduced with an explicit question as when an elder is asked how a serious brother cannot not be offended when he sees some monastics returning to the world:

> He said, "You ought to watch hounds when they are hunting hares. When one of them spots the hare, he chases after it. The other hounds who only see the hound running in pursuit run too, for a while, but later they fall back from the chase. Only that hound which saw the hare pursues it until he catches up with it, not distracted from the aim of his running by the hounds that turn back. Nor does he care about ravines and undergrowth; even in the midst of thorns, in spite of many scratches, he does not stop. So (οὕτως) does he who seeks Christ the Master keep the cross in mind without wavering, overcoming every offence he encounters until he reaches the crucified one." (S 7.42, cf. N 203)

Here the point is made that only the hound which actually sees the hare will continue its pursuit. The comparison is to one who seeks Christ and keeps the cross in mind. This story is more like a fable because of the interaction between two animals. Most of these similes are short and easy to grasp, but some are longer and more elaborate. One example is an apophthegm about a lamp that is not provided with oil and a mouse which comes to eat the wick. It contains many details and functions as a source story for a target story about the Holy Spirit (S 11.78; A Orsisios 2).

A few of the similes are integrated in example stories and are in a way staged and played out. One example story is about a brother who has renounced the world and given his goods to the poor but has kept a little for himself. Abba Antony asks him to go to a village, buy some meat and put it on his naked body and then come back:

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[27] *Logismos* is a technical term in monastic literature, which refers to thought, attitude, or disposition.

When the brother did that, the dogs and the birds tore his flesh. When he came back to the elder, he inquired whether it had happened as he had counseled. The other showed his lacerated body, and Abba Antony said, "They who have renounced the world and want to have money are cut up like this by the demons who are making war on them." (S 6.1, cf. A Antony 20)

If the source story about the birds and the dogs tearing meat from the naked body, had been generalized and projected onto the target story about ascetics renouncing the world and keeping some of their money, the example had been turned into a simile.

What kind of target stories do the similes contain? As in the story about the monk with the meat, the animals in the similes are frequently projected on demons. Another related and frequently used projection is to λογισμοί, thoughts: "Abba Hyperechios said: 'Just as a lion is fearsome to wild asses, so is the well-tried monk to *logismoi* about luxurious living'" (S 4.53, cf. A Hyperechios 1). In this story, the lion is likened to the monk and the wild asses to thoughts, which have a destructive effect on ascetic life. Evil thoughts are internal enemies, and demons are external enemies. However, because evil thoughts are frequently seen as caused by demons, and also because demons can act from within the ascetic, evil thoughts and demons are closely connected.

D. Between Sheep and Serpents

In what ways do observations of real animals play a role in the construction of example stories and similes? To what degree do they reflect general conceptions of animals held by the ascetics and monastics, and what conceptions do they reflect? Are some species of animals conceived of as evil or are the species only used allegorically?

One context for the interpretation of animals is the Septuagint, where unclean animals are sometimes regarded as demons.[28] According to Origen, wild animals have something in common with demons, and as for unclean animals, he sees "some sort of kinship between the form of each species of demon and the form of each species of animal."[29] Shenoute, the powerful father of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, "saw a connection between demons and animals that went beyond the analogues to something more concrete."[30] In other words, there was a certain precedent for identifying some animals with evil powers. For example, after a confrontation with Nathaniel, a demon "was transformed into a whirlwind

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[28] Cf. D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.

[29] Origen, *Cels.* 4.92.21–22 and 4.93.14–15; cf. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 226 and Brakke, *Demons*, 107.

[30] Brakke, *Demons*, 107.

and into wild asses, bounding and noisily running off" (*Hist. Laus.* 16.6). When demons are transformed into actual animals, it is evident that the boundaries between demons and animals for some species are rather blurry. According to Macarius of Alexandria, "seventy demons came out of the garden tomb to meet me, shouting and flying in my face like crows" (*Hist. Laus.* 18.7). The demons likened to crows notwithstanding, it is rather open to debate whether what Macarius saw was demons or crows, which points to the close connection between demons and some species of animals.

Snakes are the animals most consistently cast as evil and regarded as demons or instruments of evil powers. Poemen quotes Ps 42:1 and presents a story about deer which eat poisonous reptiles and come to the springs to drink as similar to the monastic who is burned by the venom of demons and longs for Saturday and Sunday and for the Eucharist (A Poemen 30). According to another simile, "For just as a snake immediately takes flight if it emerges from its lair, so an evil *logismos* is eliminated as soon as it is brought to the light" (N 592.50).

That snakes are imagined as evil is not surprising, since several things speak against them. One is that the serpent in Genesis was cursed by God, and a connection was later made between the serpent and Satan. Second, a connection is made between snakes and scorpions and demons in Luke 10:19, "I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you," which is used as a reference to demons (N 383; S 10.95). Such passages "suggested to Christians both that the demons were like snakes, scorpions, and other animals in their ferocity and malice and, even more, that these animals were themselves somehow demonic."[31] A third thing is that several of the species of snakes in Egypt were poisonous, which contributed to their reputation as evil. Didymus "used to kill scorpions, horned vipers and asps with his bare feet" (Hist. mon. Aeg. 20.12); and Macarius the Great "was bitten by an asp, a deadly animal. He took it up in his two hands, held it by the jaw and tore it apart" (*Hist. Laus.* 18.10). Others are said to have destroyed "many serpents and asps and horned vipers" with their bare hands (Hist. mon. Aeg. 9.1). Just as the subduing of wild animals pointed to a paradisiacal state, so did the power to destroy reptiles. Abba Paul used to take various types of snakes in his hand and cut them down the middle (A Paul 1). He explained it with his purity and compared it to the state of Adam "when he was in Paradise before he transgressed the commandments" (A Paul 1).

The animals in monastic literature are sometimes rather fantastic. There are examples of serpents attributed with supernatural proportions and powers.[32] Wild animals behave in human-like ways, and a few animals can even talk.

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[31] Brakke, *Demons*, 31.

[32] A large serpent ravages the neighborhood and kills many animals, but it bursts when it is cursed by Amoun (Hist. mon. Aeg. 9.8). Dragons, as well, flee the monastics (A Theodore of Pherme 23).

The description of a species is not always in line with zoological knowledge, for instance when a crocodile licks a brother, the apophthegm does not take into account that the tongues of crocodiles are stuck in the back of their mouths.

Different from some of the example stories, the similes are frequently based on observation of animals and what they typically do. The soul that is accustomed to sin is likened to a dog accustomed to food at the butcher's (S 15.26). A brother who is used as an example of humility compares himself to a dog which goes when it is driven off and comes when it is called (S 15.83; N 306), and hounds hunting hares are used in a source story as metaphors for not giving up monastic life (S 7.42; N 203, see above). Three different observations of the life of dogs are here turned into different source stories.[33] Similar to dogs, other species appear both as illustrations of good and of evil. The life of Abba Serapion is likened to the life of birds because he did not possess a thing in the world and never stayed in his cell (S 15.116; N 565; A Bessarion 12). This is based on a more general observation of birds and is in line with Matt 6:26, which makes birds' way of living an example for humans to imitate. However, birds can also point to things to be avoided, and a more specific experience of birds can be made into a source story. An elder who keeps watch over the trees to drive off birds when the figs are ripe cries, "Away with you, evil *logismoi* inside – and birds outside." (S 11.110; N 277).

Similar to how some species can illustrate both good and evil, the same source narrative can be projected on several target narratives. The blindfolding of a beast of burden is used of an animal turning the mill, and the blindfold is likened to how the devil covers the eyes of the heart (S 11.108; N 276). In another apophthegm, an image is used about an animal which, because of the blindfolding, cannot eat the fruits of its labor. This is a metaphor for humans are blindfolded by Divine Providence so that "we do not think highly of ourselves at the sight of good works and thus lose our reward" (S 15.100; N 322). In other words, blindfolding is used as a source story both for a negative and for a positive outcome; in the first case, the simile refers to the devil, while in the second case to Divine Providence.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of good and evil animals, where snakes are mainly found at the evil pole and other animals can go in both directions, sheep belong to the positive pole. In this apophthegm, some people come to an elder with a man who is possessed by a demon so that the elder can heal him (N 307; S 15.84). The demon asks the elder, "who are the goats and who are the sheep," and the elder answers, "The goats, it is I; God knows who the sheep are." When the demon hears the elder, it cries out: "Look, through your humility, I am coming out," leaving the man. In this story, the demon interprets the elder's

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[33] In one apophthegm, the devil flees through a window like a dog (A Joseph of Panephysis 11).

identification with the goat as a sign of his humility, which it cannot bear. In the Systematic Collection, the apophthegm refers explicitly to Matt 25:32–33 about the shepherd who separates the sheep and the goats. Sheep is treated as the positive category and goat as the negative. The elder is identified with the sheep by the reader because he shows his humility by identifying with the goat. The positive identification of sheep is in line with their role in the parables in the Gospels and with how sheep and shepherding are used as positive markers of a saintly ascetic.[34]

E. Comparison and Cultural Context

Stories about animals have existed for millennia with a recognizable form, though it is important to notice that when the stories are used, they are adapted to context.[35] Since the apophthegms speak of life among monastics and ascetics, it means that a source story about animals is projected onto a target story, which refers to ascetic life. While the target story aims at ascetic and monastic issues, the conception and description of animals in the apophthegms are part of a wider zoological, cultural, and religious context.

The Egyptian context is of special interest, since it was there that the apophthegms were developed.[36] However, a comparison between the apophthegms and fables about animals in ancient Egypt, as they are presented by Emma Brunner-Traut in her book *Altägyptische Tiergeschichte und Fabel*, does not reveal an obvious link.[37] While the apophthegms do not include fables where animals act like humans as they do in the Egyptian tradition, we have already seen that several of the example stories refer to animals of the Egyptian fauna. The treatment of these animals in monastic literature has been analyzed by David Frankfurter. He sees the saints' assimilation to their Egyptian environment in their capacity to repel and control what was earlier regarded as a "Sethian" fauna – crocodiles, serpents, hippopotamuses, scorpions, and antelopes.[38] According to Frankfurter, each legend of a saint "also shows a familiarity with

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[34] One example is Spyridon in the Alphabetical Collection (A Spyridon 1).

[35] Cf. Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, 25.

[36] Animals had a special place in the Egyptian imagination. Noting that among ca. 800 hieroglyphic signs, 176 represent animals or are parts of animals, Emily Teeter stresses "the constant presence of animals in the Egyptian psyche" (E. Teeter, "Animals in Egyptian Literature," in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East*, ed. B. J. Collins, HdO 64 [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 252). Egyptian fables as well as wisdom texts and didactic literature include talking animals and are moralistic (Teeter, "Animals in Egyptian Literature," 255). The Egyptian pantheon is further characterized by the use of animals to express divinity.

[37] E. Brunner-Traut, *Altägyptische Tiergeschichte und Fabel: Gestalt und Strahlkraft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 34–40.

[38] Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 90–91.

the Egyptian landscape and the particularities of its dangerous fauna."[39] The Christian saints have a precursor in the ancient Egyptian god Horus, who subdued and tamed crocodiles.[40] When the saintly heroes of the apophthegms are treading on scorpions and asps, killing serpents with their hands, and subduing lions, they refer to Scripture (e. g. Deut 8:15; Sir 39:30; Luke 10:19), but also recall Horus standing on crocodiles and holding several species of dangerous animals in his hands.[41]

However, while the example stories in the apophthegms reflect Egyptian wild fauna, especially pertaining to species of wild animals such as crocodiles and hyenas, the similes also include animal species which are part of the broader Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern literature.[42] Since the apophthegms are dependent on the Bible and especially on the New Testament,[43] one source for the selection of animal species is the Bible, and the apophthegms are frequently in line with biblical valuations of the species. The dependence on the Bible may also explain why some species are missing in the apophthegms even if they were prominent both in the Egyptian fauna and in the Aesopic fables. An obvious example is cats. While cats and dogs were household pets in Egypt and both species figure prominently in the fable literature – though dogs more than cats – only dogs are mentioned in the apophthegms. The absence of cats is probably due to their absence from biblical texts as well as to their former sacred status in Egypt. The absence of wolves and foxes, which are prominent in the Aesopic fables, is more difficult to explain; perhaps the hyena has taken their place?

The Graeco-Roman philosophical and literary context[44] is reflected in the apophthegms. According to Poemen, "David, when he was fighting with the

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[39] "Sethian" means that these animals were connected to the desert god Seth and regarded as demonic, cf. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 92.

[40] A Horus *cippus*, a magical stele of Horus on conquered crocodiles, was erected in Egyptian temple courtyards. It was thought to provide protection against wild animals. Egyptians also carried Horus *cippi* as amulets. Cf. C. Mayeur Jaouen, "Crocodiles et saints du Nil: Du talisman au miracle," *RHR* 217 (2000): 733–760; D. Frankfurter, "The Binding of Antelopes: A Coptic Frieze and Its Egyptian Religious Context," *JNES* 63 (2004), 97–109; J. Draycott, "Size Matters: Reconsidering Horus on the Crocodiles in Miniature," *Pallas* 86 (2011): 123–133.

[41] David Frankfurter has pointed out that the symbolic principles of the Horus *cippi* continued to inform Christian iconography, including its traditional repertoire of wild animals, such as crocodiles, snakes, scorpions, and antelopes (Frankfurter, "Binding of Antelopes," 99 and 107).

[42] This does not mean that the animals in the apophthegms were not found in Egypt. Herd animals in Egypt were bulls, cows, and oxen, as well as goats, sheep, and pigs. Beasts of burden were from old times oxen and donkeys, while the camel was introduced in Roman times (D. Brewer, "Hunting, Husbandry and Diet in Ancient Egypt," in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East*, ed. B. J. Collins, HdO 64 [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 446). These species are found in the apophthegms, but they are not specific to the Egyptian fauna.

[43] For the use of Jewish-Christian and Christian themes in the ancient genre of chreia, including apophthegms, see Hezser, "Die Verwendung der Hellenistischen Gattung Chrie," 419–423.

[44] Cf. S. Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism, I: Eastern," in *The Cambridge History of*

lion seized it by the throat and killed it immediately. If we take ourselves by the throat and by the belly, with the help of God, we shall overcome the invisible lion" (A Poemen 178, cf. A Poemen 115; S 5.11). The biblical reference is to 1 Sam 17:34–36, where David is said to kill both a lion and a bear. The internalizing of the lion, which is presupposed in the simile, has a predecessor in Plato's discussion of the inner beasts of humans, where the lion is an expression of the emotional side of humans (*Resp.* 588b–589b). In Plato's text, the goal is not to kill the lion but to dominate and make use of it to control the beastly part of the soul (the many-headed beast). In a Coptic and rather muddled version of this Platonic passage in the Nag Hammadi library, beasts, including the lion, are reinvented as external hostile powers.[45] Another text from Nag Hammadi, the Gospel of Thomas, also mentions a lion: "Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man."[46] The logion has been much discussed,[47] but can be interpreted as an encouragement to conquer one's bestial nature. Like the saying of Poemen about the lion, these ideas seem to be developments from an original Platonic thought.[48] In the case of Poemen, a source story based on the Old Testament hero David is used in a target story inspired by Plato.

A shared supply of animal stories in classical culture is also reflected in a source story about pigs. According to the apophthegm, pigs normally look down:

> Another of the fathers said, "The eyes of a pig have a natural tendency to turn toward the ground and can never look up to the sky. It is the same," he said, "for the soul of those who are addicted to pleasure. Once it has slipped into the quagmire of enjoyment, it is difficult for it to be able to raise its eyes to God or to pay attention to what is worthy of God." (S 18.35; N 364)

A similar source story is part of emperor Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods.* Julian uses the observation that the pig is made so that it can never look upwards in order to explain that the animal is only suitable as sacrifice to the gods of the underworld (177 C). The source story is the same, but the target stories are different.[49]

Christianity, vol. 2, *Constantine to c. 600*, ed. A. Casiday and F. W. Norrius (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 640; Larsen, "Apophthegmata Patrum," 30.

[45] NHC VI 5, see Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 217–219.

[46] Gos. Thom. 7 (NHC II 2, 33.24–29), cf. also the Teachings of Silvanus (NHC VII 4, 108.6–14).

[47] Both the last-mentioned texts were part of the Nag Hammadi codices, probably used by monastics; cf. H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, STAC 97 (Berlin: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[48] Cf. H. M. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic: Creator and the Platonic Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

[49] In another apophthegm, angels are contrasted with hogs, as something which is present when the speech of the monastics is pious versus when it is evil (N 713, S 18.43). Because pigs are the prototypical unclean animal, there is a tendency to regard them negatively, though Palladius says that the Pachomians kept pigs (*Hist. Laus.* 32.10).

While the examples of the lion and of the pig have parallels in Graeco-Roman philosophy and literature, there are also parallels with Aesopic fables. Some of these parallels are weak, but others are more substantial. Similar to the apophthegm of the hounds hunting hares (see above), the fable tradition also includes a hound which hunts hare.[50] The outcome is different; in the fable, the hare runs faster than the hound. In both cases, however, the involvement of the runner determines the result. In the apophthegm, it is the hound that has actually seen the hare which catches it; in the fable, a difference is made between running to catch another and running for one's life, which makes the hare win. Another story, the simile with the cedar and the reeds mentioned above (N 753), is similar to the Aesopic fable about the Oak and the Reed.[51] This fable has several versions; one is even found in the Talmud (b. Taan. 20a–b, Simon ben Eleazar). This suggests a shared treasure of fables across various cultural traditions.

Rabbinic literature, and especially the Babylonian Talmud, has been compared with the apophthegms. Bar-Asher Siegal has studied the literary similarities between the two traditions regarding style, form, and common themes.[52] One of her examples is the image of fish out of water, which is used as a source story both in an apophthegm and in rabbinic literature. In the apophthegm,

> Abba Antony said, "Just as fish die if they are on dry land for some time, so do monks who loiter outside their cells or waste time with worldlings (*kosmikón*) release themselves from the tension of the *hesychia*. So, we should hasten back to the cell (like the fish to the sea) lest while loitering outside we forget to keep watch on the inner [self]." (S 2.1, cf. A Antony 10)

Siegal presents two versions of the story in rabbinic literature.[53] According to one version, Rab Yehudah, like Anthony in the apophthegm, narrates the story about the fish:

> Rab Yehudah says in the name of Samuel: "Why is it written, 'And Thou makest man as the fishes of the sea' (Hab 1:14). Why is man compared to fishes? To tell you, just as the fishes of the sea, as soon as they come on to dry land, die, so also men, as soon as they abandon the Torah and the precepts, die." (b. Avod. Zar. 3b)[54]

The other rabbinic version is more elaborate and more reminiscent of a classical fable.[55] Unlike the apophthegm, it has only animal protagonists, fish and a fox,

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[50] Perry 69; There are weak parallels to the dog and the butcher (S 15.126, cf. Perry 254), and to the ass, which made its way into the crops (S 4.100, N 431, cf. Perry 182). I am grateful to Jonathan Pater, who made me aware of the two weak parallels and of the parallel referred to in note 51.

[51] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 434 (Perry 70).

[52] M. Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[53] Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 101–103.

[54] Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 102.

[55] b. Ber. 61b in Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature,* 102.

and the two species talk to each other so that the moral of the story is revealed through their conversation. In the apophthegm, the target story is monastic life in the cells, while in rabbinic literature, the target story is life without Torah.[56] Siegal contends that the "common use of specific literary images to express shared notions and concepts testifies to a shared cultural world,"[57] and further, "that we can speak about 'cognate stories' in different cultures that share a common origin. These stories 'sound different' in each culture, having gone through several adaptions to fit the culture within which they operate."[58] Shared source stories were attached to different target stories, which in turn were adapted to the purpose and cultural context of their respective narrators.

F. Conclusion

The stories about animals in the apophthegms are characterized by an idealization of the ascetic life in the lonely monastic cells and the wilderness in Egypt. They are not, however, isolated from the wider cultural context of animal stories. With their overlaps with Graeco-Roman philosophy and literature and their connections to the Babylonian Talmud, they are part of a broader tradition.

The selection of animal species in the apophthegms is dependent on biblical models and on the Egyptian fauna. It shows some overlaps with the selection of animals in Aesopic fables, but also significant deviations from them.[59] Jeremy B. Lefkowitz points out that animal fables are primarily allegories about humans. He does "attempt to identify tension in fables between the symbolic value of anthropomorphic animals and authentic concerns about real animals,"[60] but stresses that for the Aesopic fables, it is "increasingly difficult to characterize the genre's attitude towards animals in simple terms."[61] The same is the case with the attitude towards animals in the apophthegms, but to a lesser degree than with the Aesopic fables as the target in the apophthegms is the ascetic life, while the fables are ultimately about life in general. There are also significantly fewer apophthegms about animals than Aesopic fables.

In the animal similes, the stress is on what is conceived as typical for a species, but there is, as has been shown in this article, a simile, which includes a talking ass, and also a simile about talking plants (see above). The example stories combine the typical with an anthropomorphized version of animals and some-

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[56] Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 102.

[57] Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 101.

[58] Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 107.

[59] The most frequently appearing animals in the Aesopic fables are asses and donkeys, wolves, lions, foxes, and dogs followed by cats, apes, crows, and eagles.

[60] J. B. Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. G. L. Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

[61] Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," 1.

times an "angelified" version of humans. In the example stories, both animals and humans transcend the boundaries of their respective species. Animals sometimes behave in ways that are not in line with their nature, acting more like humans. Though sometimes they speak with the ascetics, these cases are exceptional. More commonly, animals understand what humans say without having the ability to speak themselves.[62] Example stories are about conquering animals or living on friendly terms with them, largely depending on what kind of animal is involved. The dependence, however, is not complete. While it is easier to graze with buffaloes and antelopes than interact with hyenas in a friendly manner, the ascetic heroes do both. Both attitudes reveal their superior status. Example stories and similes involving animals are thus part of a key narrative of ascetic life, where the goal is to develop into a superior category of human being and gain salvation.

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[62] Stories about metamorphoses between animals and humans are not among the repertoire of the apophthegms in the three collections, but a story about a transformation of a woman into a horse by means of magic and back again with the intervention of Macarius the Egyptian is known from the two travelogues (Hist. mon. Aeg. 21.17 and *Hist. Laus.* 17.6–9). In the *Lausiac History*, Macarius makes a point of the woman not really being transformed – she only seems to – which probably shows the ambiguity in that type of transformation (*Hist. Laus.* 17.9).

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Diachronic Perspectives

Fables, Proverbs, Parables, Allegories

Ancient Border-Crossing Lore

Peter J. Tomson

> Folk themes, figures of speech, and entire proverbs migrate across geographical and cultural boundaries by routes which are often impossible to trace or document.[1]

The following is an "essay," an endeavour, into the fascinating and bewildering world of ancient fables and parables. What is fascinating about it is the attractiveness of fables and their ability to cross any borders of language, culture, ethnicity, and religion, while in addition, there is the playful profundity of parables. It is also a bewildering world, because in order to understand fables and parables, we have to take into account as well proverbs, riddles, and allegories, closely related yet different. Indeed, while modern scholars may tend to see differences between all these types of utterances, many of the ancients viewed them as basically one genre indicated in Semitic languages as *mashal* or *matla*.

In order to grasp the nature of this border-crossing lore, one must be ready to cross borders oneself, venturing into often unknown territory and being dependent on the guidance of authorities one had not known of before. It is impossible to encompass this world in one thorough and well-documented investigation in the confines of one paper. We must choose and either go for thoroughness in one well-delineated part or aspect, losing the advantage of being able to view the material from many sides in one overall perspective, or for an overall approach and renounce the possibility of solid documentation at every step.

In the present essay we go for the second option, following the thread wherever the material brings us, probing in depth at interesting or decisive junctures, and trying to make overall sense of our observations made underway. In result, the argument will be less systematic than one may expect in a handbook; much material will be overlooked and many questions remain unanswered. Our curiosity

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[1] J. M. Lindenberger, "Ahiqar (Seventh to Sixth Century B.C.): A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works,* ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 486.

will be about transitions and contiguity rather than demarcation and definition, about natural developments rather than "essential" differences. Meanwhile, the journey we are about to embark on will hopefully reduce the bewilderment and convey some fascination.

A. Ancient Near Eastern Roots

In his introduction to the Penguin edition of the *Fables of Aesop* (1954), S. A. Handford writes:

> There is reason to believe that some Egyptian and Assyrian fables became known to the Greeks in classical times, but no evidence exists to suggest that these influences were either early or important. As far as we can see, therefore, the fable was invented by the Greeks – it may well be, by the Greeks of Asia Minor, the country of the lion which appears so often in these stories, and the traditional birthplace of Aesop.[2]

Underlying this presentation of Aesop's fables is, one might say, the "classic" view of Greece and its culture in their splendid isolation. One early scholar even wrote that the fable "sprang spontaneously from the Greek genius."[3] This view is no longer tenable. Greek culture and literature did not fall from the sky, nor did they jump into being in full armour, as Athena did from the head of Zeus, as the myth has it in Hesiod's *Theogonia*, eighth century BCE, and is frequently pictured on Greek earthenware from the sixth century BCE on.[4] Ironically, the *Theogonia* it-self draws on ancient traditions, as appears from Hittite texts discovered in 1945, and the myth of Athena's birth, found also in the Homeric hymn to Athena, has been presented as a showcase example of the convergence between Meso-potamian and Greek lore.[5] According to the prominent scholar of Greek religion and culture, Walter Burkert, the discovery of the Hittite texts has caused a re-versal of the "classic" view.[6] Burkert discerns an orientalizing influx especially during the so-called "dark age" in Greek history, which lasted from the twelfth to eighth centuries BCE: "The history of religion cannot disregard the fact that

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[2] S. A. Handford, *Fables of Aesop* (London: Penguin Books, 1954), xiv.

[3] L. Levrault, *La fable, des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Mellottée, 1928), 13 (as quoted by M. Nøjgaard, *La fable antique*, vol. 1, *La fable grecque avant Phèdre* [Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1964], 430).

[4] Hesiod, *Theog.* 924–929. See e. g. the *exaleiptron* no. CA616 in the Louvre, 570–560 BCE, at https://www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/12-554988-2C6NU08G55TT.html.

[5] C. Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod* (London: Routledge, 1994), 230–236.

[6] W. Burkert, *Die Griechen und der Orient*: *Von Homer bis zu den Magiern* (Munich: Beck, 2003), 11; cf. W. Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur*, SHAW 1 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1984). See also Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia*, 2 and literature mentioned in note 1.

it was precisely during the dark age, the time of confusion and debilitation, that the gates were opened for oriental influence."[7]

If pre-classic Greece was open to influence from Near Eastern culture, we should not be surprised to find further traces in classic Greek culture. Burkert mentions another element, simple but vastly significant, in any sense: the alphabet, vessel of Greek literature. It is of West Semitic origin, as appears from its very name, *alpha-beta* – or in the Hebrew, *alef-bet* – and the Greeks probably adopted it from the Phoenicians, again in the eighth century BCE.[8] Furthermore, as to Asia Minor, it could not only boast many lions, as Handford liked to observe, but, more to the point, also a particularly intense exchange between East and West. Not only humans of Hittite, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and other provenance, but also gods of all stripes would mingle in this intercultural meeting-place, either as friends or foes.

There are important consequences for the long-standing debate on "Judaism and Hellenism." A dominant scholarly narrative considers Hellenistic culture to be the primary reference also for anything to do with ancient Judaism. However, such leading scholars as the classicist and Judaic scholar Arnaldo Momigliano and the historian of the Persian empire Pierre Briant speak of a "Hellenocentric" view of antiquity and of an underestimation especially of the Persian period and its influence. Certainly, ancient Judaism was influenced by Hellenism, but Hellenistic culture itself was impregnated with oriental elements as from its pre-classic and classic periods. In other words, as Momigliano always put it, Judaism and Hellenism shared common traditions, resulting in parallel developments such as Greek historiographies and Jewish chronicles.[9] We can add fables, as we shall see.

As concerns proverbs and fables, Aesop is a big name indeed, though in antiquity he was not the only one. According to the Greek Vita Aesopi (first or second century CE), Aesop was a literate slave from Phrygia in Asia Minor who arrived at the court of king Lykeros of Babylon and earned a place of honour by virtue of his wisdom. An interesting description follows of the *Sitz im Leben* of the material we are dealing with:

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[7] W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, 2nd ed., RdM 15 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 47–53, quotation p. 52.

[8] Burkert, *Die Griechen und der Orient*, 23–27. Similar emphasis in M. L. West, trans., *Hesiod: Theogony and Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vii–viii.

[9] Hellenocentrism: P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse*: *De Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 9–14; A. Momigliano, "Some Observations on Causes of War in Ancient Historiography," in repr. in *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici*, by A. Momigliano, SeL 77 (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960), 13–27; repr. in *Studies in Historiography*, by A. Momigliano (New York: Harper Torchbook 1966), 112–126; A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Historiography: A. Momigliano, "Eastern Elements in Post-Exilic Jewish, and Greek, Historiography," in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*, by A. Momigliano, re-edited with a new foreword by A. Grafton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 25–35.

In those days the kings were at peace with one another, and used to amuse themselves by sending one another sophistical questions to answer (προβλήματα τῶν σοφιστικῶν);[10] and those who could resolve them used to get for their answers tribute from those who proposed them ... So Aesop, who was associated with Lykeros, used to solve the problems which were sent to him, and caused the king to be famous.[11] (Vit. Aes. 23)

There may indeed have been an "historical Aesop," but in many respects his name was just a legend that engendered collections of fables.[12] Both the story and collections of fables involving his name are mentioned by Greek and Latin authors from Herodotus onwards.[13] The earliest collection of Aesopic fables, now lost, is said to have been composed by Demetrius of Phalerum in the late fourth century BCE, and further collections, including versified ones, kept appearing from the late first century CE onwards, in Greek, Latin, and further translations. Exhaustive modern editions of the extant Vita Aesopi, fable collections, "extra-collectional" fables, and testimonies in Greek and Latin have been prepared by Ben Edwin Perry and Gert-Jan van Dijk.[14]

The other big name is Ahiqar. As distinct from Aesop, his sayings were not handed on and recycled in medieval Europe, and consequently they are little known also to scholars. In antiquity, this was different. Both the story of Ahiqar and his proverbs are mentioned by ancient Greek authors, and (late) antique versions in languages such as Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian have been preserved. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200 CE) asserts that the fourth century BCE Greek author Democritus had translated materials of Ἀκικάρος and given them

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[10] More probable seems the special meaning "riddle" for πρόβλημα, as in Samson's πρόβλημα // חידה, Judg 14:12–19, see H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. with revised supplement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), *sub voce*; cf. Hab 2:6. At the "pre- or nonphilosophical" level, there presumably was open communication with Near-Eastern wisdom traditions. See below at note 90.

[11] R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, vol. 2, *Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 780.

[12] L. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 13, declares herself "agnostic on this point," while her topic is "'Aesop' as a mobile, free-floating figure in ancient culture," "reading at one remove ... a penumbra of traditions through a patchwork of textual fragments."

[13] Listed thematically by B. E. Perry, *Aesopica* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), 211–241: Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.134, Αἰσώπος ὁ λογοποιός (Perry 13, cf. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 370–382 on the term); Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 1446 (Perry 20); Plato, *Phaedr.* 60d, 61b (Perry 73); Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1393a (Perry 41, 87, 94; see below); Aristotle, *Mete.* 356b (not listed by Perry).

[14] Perry, *Aesopica*; G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature,* MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); cf. the succinct overview in Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 43–46. On Demetrius's collection, see Perry's monographic article: B. E. Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fables," *TAPA* 93 (1962): 287–346. See also the extensive descriptions of F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 2, *The Fable during the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages*, MnemSup 207 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

out as his own. Also, explicit references to Ἀχικάρος in the book of Tobit show that in roughly the same period the story had been adopted in Jewish tradition.[15] Interestingly, the section of the Vita Aesopi quoted above most likely is an insert copied from the Life of Ahiqar, and there are also parallels between their proverbs.[16] For scholars the question was, of course, how old this material actually is, where it came from, and in what language.

This question was solved to a large extent when in 1907–1908 a fifth century BCE papyrus containing the life and proverbs of Ahiqar (אחיקר) was discovered in the remains of a Jewish garrison of the Persian army in Elephantine in Egypt. In introducing the text, R. H. Charles wrote in his *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (1913) of the surprise of the discovery itself and of the language the papyrus is written in, Imperial Aramaic: "A language, that is, which had been conjectured as its original, and of an antiquity even greater than had been assigned to it by any of it investigators."[17] While the papyrus was recovered in pieces and is partly illegible, another surprise was the role played by animals in the fables and proverbs.[18] A new edition with commentary of the proverbs was made by James Lindenberger, who also published a new translation in Charlesworth's *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (1985), while the complete extant text was newly edited by Ada Yardeni and Bezalel Porten (1993).[19] Lindenberger estimates on linguistic and literary grounds that the work was composed in the seventh to sixth century BCE in Northern Syria, while the proverbs, which are in a different Aramaic dialect, seem to have had their own, even older history. Invocations of "Shamash" and "Shamayn" bespeak a pagan origin of the collection.[20] Its inclusion in modern editions of "Pseudepigrapha"

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[15] Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.15.69.5. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 177 n 44, noting doubts about Clement's assertion, concludes that even if it concerned "pseudo-Democritean material," it would document the circulation of Ahiqar's proverbs; Tob 11:19; 14:10 (Ms Sinai).

[16] Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 176–185; cf. Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 479–493 (introduction); and see Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 780.

[17] Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 715.

[18] Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 715. On the discovery, see J. M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 6 f. The first edition (1911) with elaborate commentary and sublime photographs was made by E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militär-Kolonie zu Elephantine: Altorientalische Sprachdenkmäler des 5. Jahrhunderts vor Chr.*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911); see p. 181 for a list of animals involved.

[19] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar"; B. Porten and A. Yardeni, eds., *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vol. 3, *Literature, Accounts, Lists* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1993; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), with modern Hebrew and English translation.

[20] Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 19, 69 f. and Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 485, conjecturing an echo of the Syrian/Phoenician god Baal Shamin/Shamem in saying 13. For a recent survey of scholarship, prefacing an analysis of the extant Aramaic text viewed in its context in Persian Upper-Egypt, see S. A. Bledsoe, "Wisdom in Distress: A Literary and Socio-Historical Approach to the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2015), 42 f. Bledsoe accepts the datings of the narrative and the proverbs proposed among others by Lindenberger.

of the Bible is justified given its adoption into a Jewish library in Upper Egypt, its echoes in Tobit, and its later Jewish and Christian recensions.[21]

The combined evidence of the Aesop and Ahiqar traditions only serves to enhance our awareness of the border-crossing vigour of this material. Referring to its rhetorical form, Perry sums it up:

> Aesopic fable … was one of the cultural inheritances which the Greeks were bound to receive almost subconsciously from their western Asiatic neighbours, who, under the influence of the Sumerian–Babylonian–Assyrian literary tradition, had been morally minded and thoroughly literate for many centuries before the Greeks themselves had begun to write anything or think philosophically.[22]

Only in this light can we fully appreciate the remarks rather obscurely made by Babrius, probably the first to edit Aesopian fables in Greek verse, in his second prologue: "Fable … is the invention of the Syrians of old, who lived in the days of Ninus and Belus; the first to tell fables to the sons of the Hellenes, they say, was Aesop the wise …."[23]

The importance of Ahiqar in connection with Aesop is duly picked up by Leslie Kurke in her wonderfully exploratory *Aesopic Conversations*.[24] The wide-ranging approach she develops is important for our survey on several levels. On the social level, the story of the "Near Eastern vizier and wise man Ahiqar" according to Kurke confirms the view of Aesop "as sage in the pre- or nonphilo-sophical tradition." Rather than to the "high tradition," restricted to the Greek social and literary elite, Aesop's life story and fables belong to the "low tradition," shared by the common people and the elite alike, while it were members of the elite who collected and edited the basically oral material in writing. Fables are "humble in content and style, just as Aesop himself is poor, lowly, and margin-al … a slave, non-Greek, hideously ugly." However, Kurke is not interested in the

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[21] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 479.

[22] B. E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), xxvii–xxxiv, quote p. xxxiv, citing many examples, see also lix–lx. See further Nøjgaard, *La fable antique*, 1:431–437; M. L. West, ed. and comm., *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 13, 28 f.; H. Schwarzbaum, *The* mishle shuʿalim *(Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), xix; F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, vol. 1, *Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, MnemSup 201 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 276 f., 299–309; M. A. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 473–498; S. Friedman, "The Talmudic Proverb in Its Cultural Setting," *JSIJ* 2 (2003): 25–32, http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/2-2003/Friedman.pdf (Hebrew, with an English summary). Van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, is silent on Ahiqar.

[23] Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 138 f., cf. Perry's Introduction there, p. xlix. Quoting the passage, J. Landsberger, מתליא דסופוס: *Die Fabeln des Sophos: Syrisches Original der griechischen Fabeln des Syntipas* (Posen: Merzbach, 1859), xcvii, could still conclude that the true inventors of fable were the ancient Hebrews, but for Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus*, 181 it was clear that Babrius must have meant fables such as those of Ahiqar.

[24] Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 176–185, quotes in the following from 2 f., 8, 14.

(possibly non-Greek) "prehistory of the fable," but rather in the development of Greek literature with a view on social register. While she finds parallels between the sayings of Ahiqar and Aesop to be negligible,[25] the adoption of Ahiqar's ascendance as royal counsel into Aesop's story makes sense as an enhancement of its social orientation.[26]

Kurke's approach is also important for us on the level of literary production. She describes the Vita Aesopi as "a narrative whose written surface is stratified, fissured, and uneven," representing "the accretion of multiple acts and agents, in a written work that itself already contains a centuries-long conversation of 'great' and 'little' traditions." Similarly, Kurke describes the medieval manuscripts that contain collections of Aesopian fables as "an open tradition in which different readers/redactors/copyists over centuries felt free to add or subtract material, as well as to rewrite or paraphrase existing fables."[27] This description would effortlessly fit rabbinic literature, which has also been described as a collection of complex, stratified written records of a polymorphous tradition created by a multitude of sages, and in particular the aggadic collections.[28] On a smaller scale it also goes for the Gospels, which are classified as *Kleinliteratur* by the pioneer of New Testament form criticism, Martin Dibelius, and are basically to be understood as repeatedly re-written compositions variously drawing on a ramified oral tradition. The analogy is telling as parables, a genre overlapping with fables, are a characteristic ingredient of both rabbinic literature and the Gospels. Correspondingly, David Flusser has allotted fables and parables to the category of popular wisdom literature which draws on conventional morality.[29]

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[25] Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 180, recognises only two overlapping wisdom sayings; but see below. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations,* 181 n 37, observes that the many fables and sayings in Ahiqar involving animals and plants "have all but disappeared from the Aesop versions, to be replaced by much more generic Seven Sages wisdom."

[26] It is to be noted that the analysis of the Ahiqar narrative and proverbs by Bledsoe, "Wisdom in Distress," 375–381, yields a different message, revolving around humanity's treachery, the kings' cruelty, and wisdom as the means to cope and survive.

[27] The two quotations are taken from Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 8, 44. For the ramification of versions, see B. E. Perry, "The Text Tradition of the Greek Life of Aesop," *TAPA* 64 (1933): 198–244. Cf. the term "text network" used in this connection by Daniel Selden as quoted by S. Kinoshita and P. McCracken, *Marie de France: A Critical Companion*, Gallica 24 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), 37.

[28] Cf. S. Safrai, "Oral Tora," in *The Literature of the Sages*, vol. 1, *Oral Tora, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates,* ed. S. Safrai et al., CRINT 2.3a (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 35–119; M. B. Lerner, "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages*, vol. 2, *Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*, ed. S. Safrai et al., CRINT 2.3b (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 133–230.

[29] M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959), 1–8; D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 156.

Finally, on the level of content, Kurke registers the actual use early Greek authors made of fables. Thus, Hesiod's *Theogonia*, already mentioned for its Near-Eastern echoes, is notable also for the fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale, which Kurke calls "the oldest extant example of beast fable in the Greek tradition" and which is also found in the various Aesopian collections.[30] Similarly, Herodotus narrates that Cyrus, having subjugated the Lydian king Croesus, is approached by the neighbouring Ionians and Aeolians who want to negotiate favourable conditions, and tells them the fable of the Flute Player and the Fish. The fable is also found in the Aesopian collections and has echoes variously in the Gospels and rabbinic literature.[31] Herodotus is known for his "ethnographic" curiosity and was familiar with the Aesop tradition, as we saw. Obviously, he meant to portray Cyrus as a ruler who understood popular wisdom traditions from the East.[32]

For a more intimate understanding let us now review some fables from Ahiqar and Aesop. The Aramaic Ahiqar contains a classic example of an animal fable:

> (Once upon a time) a leopard came upon a she-goat who was cold. The leopard said to the goat, Won't you let me cover you with my pelt? The goat replied to the leopard, Why should I do that, my lord? Don't take my hide away from me! For (as they say), A [leopard] does not greet a gazelle except to suck its blood.[33]

Remarkably, the fable concludes with the goat pronouncing a proverb about gazelles, which functions, as Lindenberger says, as "a saying-within-the-saying." The phenomenon is seen as well in Hesiod's fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale just mentioned, as also in the later fable collections.[34] It is one of the continuous formulaic elements of fable discussed by Kurke, who called it the "internal verbal quip or 'punch line' … which is properly termed the *epilogos*," and which successively developed into the standard external *epimythium* or

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[30] Hesiod, *Op.* 202–211; Perry, *Aesopica*, 322 f. (Perry 4 and 4a); van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 127–134 ("the oldest one extant in Greek literature"); Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 403 f., with discussion of the significance of the fable on the compositional level. Cf. Nøjgaard, *La fable antique*, 1:442–446.

[31] Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.141.1–3; Perry, *Aesopica*, 326 (Perry 11 and 11a); Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 400–402; cf. Matt 11:16 f. and Luke 7:32 (children do not dance when the flute is played); b. Ber. 61b (the fish do not respond to the fox's luring talk). See Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 51 f.; S. Reece, "'Aesop,' 'Q' and 'Luke,'" *NTS* 62 (2016): 357–373.

[32] A. Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography," *History* 43 (1958): 1–13; repr. in *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici*, by A. Momigliano, SeL 77 (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960), 29–44; repr. in *Studies in Historiography*, by A. Momigliano (New York: Harper Torchbook 1966), 127–142. This relates to Kurke's conclusion on Herodotus, *Aesopic Conversations*, 431: "both *historiē* and *logopoiïa*." See also van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 270–274.

[33] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 502, no. 35; Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook*, 46 f., ll. 166–168.

[34] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 502; Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 108 f.; Hesiod, *Op.* 210 f., see comments by West, *Hesiod: Works and Days*, 208.

"moral."[35] An Aesopian parallel of the Goat and Leopard fable is extant in the Greek fable collection ascribed to Syntipas and in a Syriac translation of the same.[36]

And there are more parallels between Ahiqar's and Aesop's fables. Here is an Aesopian fable quoted by Aristotle from Stesichorus:

> There was a horse who was the sole owner of a meadow. Then a stag came and wreaked havoc in the meadow. The horse wanted to get revenge, so he asked a certain man if he would help him carry out a vendetta against the stag. The man agreed, provided that the horse took the bit in his mouth so that the man could ride him, wielding his javelin. The horse consented, and the man climbed on his back but instead of getting his revenge, the horse simply became a slave to the man.[37]

In another version, a wild boar plays the role of the stag.[38] The same idea, more concise and with a different cast, is found in Ahiqar:

> [A man said] one [da]y to the wild ass, [Let me ride] on you, and I will provide for you. [The wild ass replied,] Keep your care and fodder, I want nothing to do with your riding.[39]

Lindenberger comments: "The issue … is food versus freedom. The wild ass is proverbial for an animal which cannot be tamed; cf. Job 39:5–8."

Another example is about trees. Let us first hear Ahiqar:

> The [bram]ble (סניא) sent a message to the pomegranate as follows: Dear Pomegranate, what good are all [your] thorns [to him who tou]ches your fruit? The pomegranate replied to the bramble, You are nothing but thorns to him who [tou]ches you.[40]

Lindenberger: "This is a disputation fable, a literary type well known in the ancient Near East," of which plant-fables "constitute a recognized sub-type." Two significant Old Testament examples are the fables of Jotham and Jehoash (Judg 9:8–15; 2 Kgs 14:9). In the Aesopian version, the plot is more complex and a corresponding epimythium has been added:

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[35] Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 45. On the development of the epimythium, see B. E. Perry, "The Origin of the Epimythium," *TAPA* 71 (1940): 391–419; Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable,* 1:443–465; Nøjgaard, *La fable antique,* 1:487–510. See also the contribution of Justin David Strong in the present volume.

[36] Syntipas no. 44, involving goat and wolf; Landsberger, *Die Fabeln des Sophos,* 61–64, no. 36.

[37] See next footnote.

[38] Perry, *Aesopica*, 425 (Perry 269 and 269a) (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.20 [1393a]). Translation from L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), no. 47.

[39] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 507, no. 106; Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 203; Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook*, 50 f., ll. 203–204. Square brackets show restored text at damaged places.

[40] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 506, no. 73; Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 167–169, with comments; Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook*, 38 f., l. 101–102.

The pomegranate and the apple tree were debating about their beauty. They had both gone on at great length arguing back and forth when a bramble bush in a nearby hedge heard them and said, Dear friends, let us put a stop to our quarrel. *The fable shows that when there is a dispute among sophisticated people, then riff-raff also try to act important.*[41]

To sum up, proverbs and fables migrated and invaded not only the world of classical Greek literature but also of the Bible, early on; for the latter, we must add the similarities between Ahiqar's Aramaic sayings and the biblical Proverbs.[42] The same concerns the story of Ahiqar, somehow. It is what scholars have called a Near Eastern "court story," featuring a foreign protagonist who against all odds is elevated from his or her lowly state, analogies of which can be found in the stories of Daniel, Esther, and Joseph.[43] Thus both classic Greek and Jewish literature evince a multiform popular wisdom tradition with roots in the ancient Near East. Following Leslie Kurke's approach, the environment in which this basically oral material could thrive and "go viral" was the lower level of society, where tall stories were shared as avidly as fables and proverbs, while it was preserved in writing by members of the literate elite who cited isolated samples or compiled entire collections. This social embedding also helps explain the multiform and malleable literary nature of the material, featuring multiple parallel versions differing in dramatic detail or narrative elaboration.

B. Meshalim

The preceding would put us in a good position to study the development of this "low tradition" within early Judaism, in particular as regards the fable and its close relative, the parable. Here, however, we first need to deal with the traditional paradigm dividing the relevant sources and concomitant scholarly disciplines into a "Jewish" and a "Christian" domain. The partition into two such domains in late antiquity is a fact which needs not be disputed. For the early centuries of the era, however, the idea is problematic and arguably counter-productive. It is more helpful to take our departure from the now common insight that Jesus and his earliest followers were part of multiform first-century CE Judaism, while a drawn-out separation process got underway somewhere around the turn of the century.[44]

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[41] Perry, *Aesopica*, 404 f. (Perry 213); translation Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, no. 201.

[42] Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," 486–488, stressing the difference between parallels and influence.

[43] G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Post-Biblical Times," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. M. E. Stone, CRINT 2.2 (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 34.

[44] See also P. J. Tomson and J. Schwartz, eds., *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How To Write Their History*, CRINT 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1–14.

The two most relevant bodies of sources for our inquiry were already mentioned: the Gospels and rabbinic literature, committed to writing, respectively, toward the end of the first century CE and from the third century onwards. Both are notable in three respects: their aggregate character and collective authorship, their proximity to popular tradition, and their profuse utilisation of parables. In this, they differ from the extant works produced by the literate elite. Philo apparently was acquainted with fables, but when using them paraphrases the narratives in a discursive way,[45] and similarly Josephus and Paul, when occasionally using a fable, take care to integrate it stylistically into their argument. This way of adapting fables agrees with the practice fostered by the rhetorical training for the young (progymnasmata).[46] It differs fundamentally, however, from the frequency of the genre in the Gospels and rabbinic literature and from the eager and unconstrained way in which these texts use it to illuminate the message at hand. More particularly, we are speaking of the *Synoptic* Gospels and *Palaestinian* rabbinic literature. The Gospel of John differs as it contains no parables involving a narrative, but only allegorical discourses;[47] we shall come back to that. Also, Babylonian Jewry seems to have contributed marginally, while parables remained a typically Palaestinian Jewish phenomenon.[48]

The susceptibility of early Judaean Judaism to the flexible, border-crossing "low tradition" is obvious. Flusser spotted the earliest evidence in the parabolic saying of Antigonos from Sokho about the slaves who work for their master without wages.[49] Another early example is the fable of the Pliable Reed Stem and the Sturdy Oak echoed in Jesus's saying that John the Baptist is "not a reed shaken by the wind" – the implication being that he was an oak bound to get up-

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[45] Having retold the story of the garden of Eden, which is "intended symbolically rather than literally" (συμβολικῶς μᾶλλον ἢ κυρίως φιλοσοφεῖσθαι), Philo concludes, "Now these are no mythical fictions, such as poets and sophists delight in, but modes of making ideas visible, bidding us resort to allegorical interpretation guided in our renderings by what lies beneath the surface." (The original is too telling to be omitted: ἔστι δὲ ταῦτα οὐ μύθου πλάσματα, οἷς τὸ ποιητικὸν καὶ σοφιστικὸν χαίρει γένος, ἀλλὰ δείγματα τύπων ἐπ᾽ ἀλληγορίαν παρακαλοῦντα κατὰ τὰς δι᾽ ὑπονοιῶν ἀποδόσεις [Philo, *Opif.* 154, 157]). And answering the question "why man comes last in the world's creation" (Philo, *Opif.* 77 f.), Philo seems to be retelling the parable of a man who invited his guests only when all preparations for the meal were ready, which reminds us of the later rabbinic parable of the king who fully prepared his palace before inviting the guests, cited in answer to the same question in t. Sanh. 8:9. See also Philo, *Anim.* 46, 73 and *Conf.* 6–9 (thanks to Jonathan Pater for these references).

[46] Josephus, while retelling Jotham's fable (παραβολή, *A. J.* 5.235–239, cf. Judg 9:7–21), feels the need to explain to his readers that the trees were "gifted with a human voice" (φωνὴν ἀνθρώπειον). Paul uses the fable of the body and its members in 1 Cor 12:14–23, but dissolves it into his argument from the start. Again, thanks to Jonathan Pater for the reference to the progymnasmata.

[47] A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu,* 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1899), 1:119 f.

[48] Thus Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 18. Cf. the observation of Jerome, below note 98.

[49] m. Avot 1:3; Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 31.

rooted because he publicly confronted Herod Antipas. In this case, the flexibility in form has allowed the fable, which is known more fully from the Aesopian collections and also figures in rabbinic literature, to be condensed in a single clause.[50] Interestingly, Flusser notes two further cases where Jesus sarcastically refers to Antipas and John, adding that it seems hardly coincidental that there as well, Aesopian features are involved: Herod is called a mischievous "fox," while John is compared with a gloomy "wailer," as distinct from Jesus's merry "flute playing." A characteristic note of social protest is often implied, although what Kurke calls the "hegemonic ideology" typically remains in place.[51]

An instructive example cited in an epistolary context is found in the denunciation of false prophets in 2 Pet 2:22. It is the case of a self-conscious author who expressly uses popular sayings in his written argument: "What happened to them is truly proverbial: *The dog turns back to its own vomit*, and, *The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud*." The first saying is known from Prov 26:11, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who reverts to his folly," and the second is cited by Clement of Alexandria: "For swine delight in mud more than in clean water, and wallow in a drain, according to Democritus." We recall that Clement has told us elsewhere that Democritus copied proverbs of "Akikaros."[52] Tellingly, the author of the letter attributed to Peter, while aiming to write educated Greek,[53] is recycling oriental shareware.

The terminology the author uses for the sayings he quotes is interesting: "παροιμίαι," "proverbs." Apart from being used in the Gospel of John, the term is known from the Septuagint's title for the "Proverbs": Παροιμίαι Σαλομῶντος, which translates משלי שלמה.[54] However, the more usual Graeco-Jewish equivalent of משלים is παραβολαί, as found e. g. in Prov 1:6,[55] and significantly, these two are the terms overwhelmingly used in rabbinic literature and in the Synoptic

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[50] Perry, *Aesopica*, 348 (Perry 70); ed. A. Hausrath and H. Hunger, *Corpus fabularum Aesopicarum*, Teubner: Leipzig, vol. 1 1970, vol. 2 1959, no. 239; Luke 7:24; Matt 11:7; cf. Josephus, *A. J.* 18.116–117 on the Baptist. See Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 5; Reece, "'Aesop,' 'Q' and 'Luke,'" 373–375. The fable is cited in elaborated form at b. Taan. 20a; b. Sanh. 105b; Pesiq. Zut. Balak 129a; Kal. Rab. 7.1. See also Friedman, "Talmudic Proverb," 73–82, with a listing of Aesopic fables reflected in rabbinic literature.

[51] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 52, 153, mentioning Luke 13:32 (fox) and 7:31–35 (flute playing and dancing, see above note 31; cf. Matt 11:16–19), as also the fable told by Herodotus. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 45 n 140, differentiates between the Vitae Aesopi with their more subversive message and the collections.

[52] Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 75, see above note 15.

[53] R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 768; W. G. Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 21st ed. [Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1963), 380. Cf. the phrase itself in 2 Pet 2:22, συμβέβηκεν αὐτοῖς τὸ τῆς ἀληθοῦς παροιμίας.

[54] But Prov 25:1 משלי שלמה = παιδεῖαι Σαλομῶντος.

[55] In Sir 6:35 (LXX), משל בינה = παροιμίαι συνέσεως, but otherwise in Sirach παραβολή, see Sir 1:22 (LXX 1:25), משלי שכל = παραβολαὶ ἐπιστήμης, and similarly Sir 3:27 (LXX 3:29); 20:20 (LXX); 38:45 (LXX 38:33). See also Sir 39:4, נסתרות משל ... חידות משל = ἀπόκρυφα παροιμιῶν ... αἰνίγματα παραβολῶν.

Gospels, respectively – the two bodies of sources most frequently using *mesha-lim*, "parables."[56] In classical Greek the fable was indicated as λόγος, gradually to be replaced by μῦθος, while in pre-classical Greece it had been αἶνος, a word which interestingly also has the meaning of "riddle" and shall have our attention later.[57]

This raises questions of definition. Several times already, we have noted the malleable character of our material, morphing as easily, it seems, into condensed proverbs as into elaborate narratives.[58] Indeed, both παραβολή and משל, as well as the Aramaic equivalent מתלא, cover meanings ranging from "saying" and "proverb" to "fable" or "parable" and even "allegory," as we shall see. Correspondingly, scholars have warned against narrow definitions, because we are dealing with "recyclable material" that migrates and changes, adapting itself to ever new situations.[59] The succinct definition given in Aelius Theon's late first century CE handbook for rhetorical education is ever relevant: μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν, "A fable is a made-up saying that pictures truth." Perry added an element, defining fable as a fictional story which is told as though it happened "once upon a time" and has a paraenetic point.[60] Similarly, Adolf Jülicher, the pioneer of modern research into Jesus's parables, stressing the close affinity with fables, defined them as being dual in nature: they involve a fictional world created by a straightforward narrative about people or animals, thus implying a moral lesson in the real world.[61] In turn, Flusser added the insight that the fictional character of the little story is typically accentuated by schematic patterns and bizarre details.[62] Proverbs, strictly speaking, do not contain a narrative, but as we shall see, they often seem to allude to one. In allegories, finally, the fictional character of the story becomes questionable, as we shall discuss later.

In the course of this study, it appears to be impossible to use a strictly systematic terminology, and we must learn to operate with overlapping concepts. The reason is probably that we are dealing with multiple written records of a dynamic

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[56] παραβολή 48x in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

[57] Van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 79–88; Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations,* 43.

[58] For a convincing example, see A. Goldberg, "Das schriftauslegende Gleichnis im Midrasch," *FJB* 9 (1981): 49f., citing the clock parable, abbreviated in Pesiq. Rav Kah. 5 (S. Buber, ed., *Pesiqta* [Lyck: Mikize Nirdamim, 1868; repr., New York 1949], 53a–b; B. Mandelbaum, ed., *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962], 102) and extensive in Tanh. B Bo 12 (24b).

[59] Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations,* 43, citing Perry; R. Zimmermann, "Die Gleichnisse Jesu – Eine Leseanleitung zum Kompendium," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 5–8, speaking of "Wieder-gebrauchsformen."

[60] Aelius Theon, *Prog.* 59.21; 72.28, see Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations,* 43, citing Perry's translation: "a fictitious story picturing a truth," and citing his own definition of fable; cf. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus,* xx. Van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 408f. (cf. 5) prefers "reality" for rendering ἀλήθειαν.

[61] Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, ch. 2, "Das Wesen der Gleichnisreden Jesu."

[62] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, chapters 2 and 3.

oral tradition, in which concepts are distinguished or merged organically, not rationally as in Aristotle's classifications.[63] Thus, following ancient Hebrew usage, we shall speak of *meshalim* to indicate fables, proverbs, and parables as one overall phenomenon, including also allegories on occasion. However, we shall also encounter occasions where relative differences emerge between "fables" and "parables" or "parables" and "allegories," and correspondingly use these distinct terms where appropriate.

We now must discuss in more detail the relationship between our two main bodies of sources, the Gospels and rabbinic literature. Given the traditional paradigm cited above, it does not surprise that scholars have often been prone to draw borders and perceive discontinuities rather than find continuities between both bodies. Jülicher, although preferring the broad meaning of παραβολή as equivalent of משל, was highly ambivalent about the rabbinic parables. They are closely related to those of Jesus and therefore useful for comparison, but the "halakhic" bent of rabbinic teaching made them into an inferior product of the "Hebrew" or "Israelite spirit" – a spirit which found true expression only in the parables of Jesus, whose originality would be compromised by even considering influence from rabbinic traditions.[64] Half a century later, a similar ambivalence was expressed by Joachim Jeremias. As a New Testament scholar, Jeremias was notable for his life-long interest in the Jewish surroundings of Jesus. Nevertheless, he was most hesitant about drawing in the rabbinic writings for comparison. Right at the outset, his monograph on parables states that these represent Jesus's characteristic message of joy as contrasted with the teachings of the Pharisees. Jesus's parables are "completely new" and may even have influenced the development of the rabbinic ones.[65]

By contrast, Flusser's study on parables, written in continuous conversation with "my friend Jeremias," stresses the influence of Hellenistic popular wisdom in early Judaism, and in that framework assumes a basic continuity between the parables of Jesus and those of the rabbis.[66] The close similarities between the sayings of Jesus and Rabbi Tarfon (ca. 100 CE) on the shortage of labourers in the huge harvest and the saying of Hippocrates, "life is short, work long," are a case in point.[67] In Flusser's perspective, the parables of the "expert parable-

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[63] R. Zimmermann, "Jesus' Parables and Ancient Rhetoric," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 238–258; Zimmermann, "Die Gleichnisse Jesu," esp. 17–28.

[64] Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 166 f., 170–172, quoting similar utterings by A. Wünsche.

[65] J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 8th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 7 f.; cf. J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1979), 39.

[66] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, esp. ch. 6. On the work, see P. Tomson, "David Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus*," *NedTT* 71 (2017): 201–210.

[67] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, ch. 6. See m. Avot 1:3; Hippocrates, *Aph.* 1; Matt 9:37 f.//Luke 10:2. As does Hippocrates's proverb, R. Tarfon's consists of a chain of short sayings.

teller" Jesus represent the fully developed form of the "classic" Jewish parable which is also extant in a number of rabbinic examples. A biblical verse may often serve as a trigger or peg, though not always and rarely so in Jesus's case. Noting that the rabbinic parables are all in Hebrew, with occasional Aramaic elements in the parable itself or its narrative context, Flusser supposed that Jesus also told his parables in Hebrew. In his opinion, the later rabbinic parable evidenced in the midrash collections is a further development, serving to illustrate biblical verses or characters, and he considered this a "symptom of decline in terms of genre."[68] In this, his concern was with scholars such as Jeremias and Jülicher who disqualified the rabbinic parable as material for comparison. Distinguishing the "classic" from the later rabbinic parable allowed him to argue that both many rabbis and Jesus used the first type, continuing the popular wisdom tradition in its "Socratic" nature.[69]

Ostensibly the opposite view was taken by the Judaic scholar Arnold Goldberg. Rather than being a mere symptom of decline, the development noted by Flusser led to "a new, independent phenomenon in its own right," the "expository parable" (*schriftauslegendes Gleichnis*) which serves as one of the hermeneutical tools of rabbinic midrash. Although materials, motifs, and narrative structures may be similar, this type has a quite different function than the Gospel parable. The latter, which Goldberg termed the "rhetorical parable," illuminates a question issuing from daily life or brought up in conversation, aiming at engaging the listeners or readers. The expository parable, however, serves to explain a verse from the revelatory Scriptures. Developing Jülicher's description and adding highly technical terminology, Goldberg described its tripartite structure: a "lemma" consisting of a verse, a "related" part comprising a fictional mini-narrative, and the "correlated" part that draws the conclusion for the lemma. Goldberg was aware that his formal analysis relates only to the expository parable in its written form, not in its hypothetical oral form.[70]

Goldberg's objections against Flusser's views were shared to some extent by Simon Lauer and Clemens Thoma. While on the one hand accepting, with Flusser, the influence of the Hellenistic and oriental "low" tradition, on the other, they cannot view the parables of Jesus and of the rabbis as one single genre because of the difference in function and context: popular teaching in the first case, liturgy and scholarly discussion in the second.[71]

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[68] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 18, Hebrew or Aramaic, and "eine Geschichte des Verfalls der Gattung der Gleichnisse"; Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse,* 22, "eine gattungsmässige Verfallserscheinung."

[69] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, ch. 1.

[70] Goldberg, "Das schriftauslegende Gleichnis," speaking of "Lemma," "Relat," and "Korrelat." Goldberg also makes much of distinctions between "Gleichnis" and "Vergleich," "Parabel," or "Fabel."

[71] C. Thoma and S. Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, vol. 1, *Pesiqta deRav Kahana (PesK): Einleitung, Übersetzung, Parallelen, Kommentar, Texte*, JudChr 10 (Bern: Lang, 1986),

Nevertheless, Flusser's basic approach is shared by many recent studies.[72] It is also more helpful in the overarching perspective here pursued. The malleable "low tradition" of ancient Middle-Eastern provenance, spreading through the Graeco-Roman world, variously precipitated also in rabbinic and Christian literature, and comparative study is only likely to enhance our view on the different outgrowths of the tradition. Precisely so, we need to reflect on the distinction Flusser and Goldberg made between the "classic" and the "expository" parable, or the "midrashic parable" as we shall henceforth call it. Actually, the two scholars agreed that the midrashic parable, being part and parcel of the redacted midrash collections, has a different function and is focussed on the interpretation of Scripture. They also agreed that the focus of the "classic" or "rhetorical" parable is on the moral and religious questions of human life raised in conversation, as in the Gospel narrative; we shall henceforth call this the "conversational parable." In fact, Flusser and Goldberg disagreed only about the valuation of the midrashic parable. On this, we can be brief. In a comparative perspective, qualifications in terms of "degeneration" are not advised; rather, all varieties in function and meaning must be seen as phenomena in their own right. Accepting the points Goldberg and Flusser agreed on, we shall henceforth distinguish *midrashic and conversational parables.*

Flusser surmised that the midrashic parable arose among the disciples of R. Akiva in the mid-second century CE and became predominant along with the rise of Torah study as the central Jewish value and the subsequent shaping of midrashic works as running commentaries. He also pointed out that conversational parables continued to be created and transmitted, most frequently in "marginal" collections such as Tanna de-vei Eliahu and Semahot de-R. Hiyya. As to the proposed date, mid-second century, rabbinic tradition does preserve the memory of a change-over in the domain of meshalim. This does not convey

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46–55, 73–77; Thoma shows less reservations in C. Thoma, "Literary and Theological Aspects of the Rabbinic Parables," in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist, 1989), 26–41.

[72] P. Dschulnigg, *Rabbinische Gleichnisse und das Neue Testament: Die Gleichnisse der PesK im Vergleich mit den Gleichnissen Jesu und dem Neuen Testament*, JudChr 12 (Bern: Lang, 1988), esp. 26–30; B.H Young, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989); D. Stern, "Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen," in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist, 1989), 42–80; D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); H. K. McArthur and R. M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables: Rabbinic Parables from the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990); C. A. Evans, "Jesus and Rabbinic Parables, Proverbs, and Prayers," in *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, by C. A. Evans, AGJU 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 251–269; Zimmermann, "Die Gleichnisse Jesu"; R. S. Notley and Z. Safrai, *Parables of the Sages: Jewish Wisdom from Jesus to Rav Ashi* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2011). An independent approach on Jesus's parables attentive to the rabbinic ones is found in K. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

a change in their character, however, but rather a sense of loss of expertise and materials. It is reported that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, the first century CE leader of Pharisees and rabbis, among his wide-ranging fields of interest also knew "fables about fullers and foxes" (משלות כובסין, משלות שועלים). But in a litany of "illustrious men" long gone, R. Meir, a former disciple of R. Akiva who flourished around the middle of the second century CE, is called the last of "tellers of parables/fables" (מושלי משלים). R. Yohanan, who flourished another century later, is even cited as reminiscing, "When R. Meir died, the last of fable-tellers disappeared," and adding, "R. Meir knew 300 fox fables (משלות שועלים), and we know only three." And in fact, a fable involving a fox and fish is attributed to R. Meir's teacher, R. Akiva.[73] However, these are legendary reports, and the number 300 is a "fabulous" exaggeration frequently found.[74]

Irrespective, it is reasonable to assume that the rise of the midrashic parable did relate to the emergence of midrash as a separate discipline of rabbinic teaching, in which the two "schools" of midrash founded by R. Ishmael and R. Akiva played an important part.[75] The question how the midrashic parable evolved along with the development of the tannaitic and amoraic midrash collections is interesting and needs further investigation.

C. Fable and Parable

We have been treating fables and parables as basically belonging to the single genre of meshalim. However, the growth of the midrashic parable from the second century CE onwards presents itself as the natural development of a distinct phenomenon. Thus there are occasions where we need to consider fables and parables as being separate. Often, a strict distinction is made between fables as being populated with animals, and parables, with humans. This is not tenable. Parables are not devoid of animals, and Aesopian fables are populated with humans, gods, and plants, in addition to the animals that do indeed often figure in them. Nor is it true that parables can be distinguished from fables because they are religious and ethical in intent, while fables would merely teach sensible lessons, for a number of Aesopic fables do have a clear religious message.[76]

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[73] Successive quotes from m. Sotah 9:15; b. Sukkah 28a; b. Sanh. 38b; b. Ber. 61b.

[74] Schwarzbaum, *Mishle shuʻalim*, xxiii–xxiv. Samson's "300 foxes" in Judg 15:4 may have given inspiration, as surmised already by Landsberger, *Die Fabeln des Sofos*, xxiv.

[75] On the "schools," see M. Kahana, "The Halakhic Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages*, vol. 2, *Midrash, Aggada, Targum, Berakhot, Liturgical and Mystical Texts, Contracts and Inscriptions, Ancient Science and Languages*, ed. S. Safrai et al., CRINT 2.3b (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 1–105.

[76] See esp. Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 473–498, with examples at hand; Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xxi–xxii.

Nevertheless, the midrashic parable typically does involve humans as protagonists, not animals, and the same is true of Jesus's parables and of rabbinic parables of the conversational type. Often, the protagonists are a king, landowner, or father along with his slaves, sons, subjects, guests, or enemies; alternatively, they may be a bridegroom who marries his bride, or a husband divorcing his wife, and so forth. It is to be noted that in rabbinic parlance, as we shall see, fables are specifically indicated as משלות שועלים, "fox meshalim," thus treating fables as a sub-category of meshalim. Also, where the "point" of the "Aesopic" fable may appeal to any kind of popular wisdom and common sense, the Jewish parable specifically refers to elements of Jewish ethics and beliefs. The latter derive, of course, from the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, another way of putting it is that Jewish parables are particular in that they presuppose an intertextual relationship with the Hebrew Scriptures and the notions and values derived from it.

What is interesting, however, is that this presupposed biblical intertextuality of the parable does not seem to imply a real borderline vis-à-vis the fable. In addition to parables with biblical innuendos, both Jesus and the rabbis also are attributed with an ongoing interest in fables. Thus Jesus's teachings contain many allusions to animal or plant fables, and it seems likely that these on occasion could be "diluted" to actual fables being told. In addition to calling Antipas a "fox" and the Baptist a "reed stem," he evokes "the birds of the sky and the flowers of the fields" as examples, sends his apostles as "sheep among wolves," tells them to be "shrewd as snakes and ingenuous as doves," envisages "a city built on mountain" and "a lamp on lampstand," and warns for "vultures circling over the carrion." He also tells parables and sayings that recall fables, such as the parable of the Lost Sheep, the Growing Seed or Mustard Seed, Plants and Weeds, Leaven in the Dough, a Piece and a Garment, Wine and Wineskins, Fig Trees, Flute-Playing and Dancing, Dirge-singing and Weeping.[77]

Nor does the rise of the midrashic parable among the rabbis mean that they lost all interest in fables. To the contrary, they continued telling them in lively conversation. Thus in a sublimely told and witty Aramaic narrative, the well-known "Aesopic" storyteller Bar Kappara (early third century), piqued by a gaffe of R. Shimon the son of R. Yehudah the Prince, ruins a meal offered by the latter by telling "300 fox fables" (מתלין מן הדין תעלא) at every dish and thus capturing the audience, so all the dishes grow cold and have to be sent back to the kitchen.[78]

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[77] For Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 88 f., these are all παραβολαί. See examples in Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 473–498 and M. Wojciechowski, "Aesopic Tradition in the New Testament," *JGRChJ* 5 (2008): 99–109.

[78] Lev. Rab. 28:2 (M. Margulies, ed., *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah: A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts and Genizah Fragments with Variants and Notes*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. [Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1972], 2:653–655). Bar Kappara's "Aesopic" features are pointed out in the PhD dissertation on fables and parables of Justin David Strong, who kindly let me read parts of his innovative and important study: J. D. Strong, "The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Their Form, Origins, and Implications" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2019); published in

Further examples involve early second century sages. Wishing to discourage the people in Beit Rimon from revolting, R. Yehoshua is said to have told them the Aesopian fable of the Lion and the Heron, cited partly in Aramaic in Genesis Rabbah. Similarly, in a conversation about idolatry, R. Gamliel told a "philosopher" the parable of the King Who Went to War, which the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael cites all in Hebrew. Already mentioned was R. Akiva's fox and fish fable cited in the Babylonian Talmud in Hebrew.[79] Again, R. Levi (mid-third century) is attributed with an Aramaic fable illustrating Jacob's lack of courage in the face of Esau's approach in which, ironically, the fox (תעלא) brags to possess 300 fables (מתלין) to appease the angry lion with, but successively forgets all of them and the animals have to go and appease the lion one by one.[80] And R. Pinhas (late third century) is said to have told a fable, again in Aramaic, in which the animals were invited for a meal by a lion, who overlaid the benches with the hides of lions and other predators, whereupon the fox assured them of their certain salvation, which in turn serves to illustrate Israel's assured salvation from Haman in the Esther story.[81] In another story, which we shall yet see is Aesopian and is found in a medieval midrash collection, a lion too old to feed himself held himself sick in a cave, devouring the animals who came to visit him. The fox passing by politely asked how he was doing, but when the lion begged him to come visit him, as politely explained why he was not going to do so.[82] Although the riches of the past may always seem unrivalled, fables clearly were not forgotten among the rabbis. The use of Aramaic in many rabbinic fables is interesting in view of the predominant Hebrew of midrashic parables, but this should be investigated in relation to the main language of the collections concerned.

It is also striking that in a number of the above examples, fables function as narrative illuminations of Scripture, precisely as do parables. In fact, R. Akiva's fox and fish fable cited in the Babylonian Talmud ends with a scriptural quotation, as would any midrashic parable, and it is introduced with the formula אמשול לך משל, which normally announces a conversational parable: "Let me tell you a *mashal*." It becomes ever clearer that we are dealing with partly overlapping categories. We could even speak in terms of a spectrum of meshalim ranging from proverb and fable via conversational parable to midrashic parable,

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revised form as *The Fables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: A New Foundation for the Study of Parables*, SCCB 5 (Paderborn: Brill|Schöningh, 2021).

[79] Gen. Rab. 64:9 (J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, eds., *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 3 vols., 2nd ed. [Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965], 2:712); for the Aesopian parallel, see Friedman, "Talmudic Proverb," 24; Mekh. R. Ishm. Yitro Bahodesh 6 (H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael*, 2nd ed. [Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1970], 226); b. Ber. 61b (above note 31).

[80] Gen. Rab. 78:7 (Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 2:924 f.).

[81] Esth. Rab. 7:3 (Vilna ed.; the beginning is in Hebrew, but the parallel in Yalq. Shim. Esther no. 654 is wholly in Aramaic).

[82] Ch. Albek [= Albeck], ed., *Midraš Berešit Rabbati* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1940), 116, see below at note 115 and note 124.

thus provisionally viewing the conversational parable as a middle form between fable and midrashic parable.

D. Parable, Riddle, Allegory

We must also discuss the relationship between parable and allegory. Jülicher strongly emphasised a contrast between the two, claiming that Jesus's parables are unique and have only one point of comparison with the real world. The evangelists, however, mistook his intentions and, following ancient Jewish authors such as Sirach, understood his parables as allegories in which all the details have hidden meanings that need being "interpreted." Similarly, for Jeremias, Jesus's parables have nothing of the extended allegories of some of the prophets; rather, their mark of originality is that they breathe the simplicity of daily life.[83] These views have rightly been criticised as exaggerated, among others, by Raymond Brown, Hans-Josef Klauck, and David Flusser.[84] Firstly, as do allegories, parables as well narrate "another reality," and an absolute borderline cannot be drawn. Secondly, it is not unlikely that the "interpretation" that accompanies the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Mark 4:13–20) basically stems from Jesus. It is a particular case, Flusser points out, because the "parable" involves not a mini-narrative but a fourfold simile. Thirdly, parables such as the one of the Wicked Tenants and the Ten Maidens involve allusions to Jesus's own person (Mark 12:1–12; Matt 25:1–10), in which case the allegorical trend of his parables stems from himself, though, as Brown emphasises, this does not compare with "the more complicated allegories given by the Fathers."[85]

These considerations can be further enhanced. As shown long ago by Isaac Heinemann, an openness toward allegory is basic to the Old Testament and

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[83] Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 42–51; Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 7–18, evoking "das Verdienst A. Jülichers, definitiv mit der allegorischen Auslegung gebrochen zu haben" (14).

[84] R. E. Brown, "Parable and Allegory Reconsidered," *NovT* 5 (1962): 36–45, mentioning further critical studies; Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 119–137: "Die wirkliche und vermeintliche Allegorese." H.-J. Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, NTAbh 13 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 354–361, concludes that the use of standing metaphors and caricature in Jesus's parables implies an allegorical potential (though he denies any esotericism and ascribes the "regelrechte Allegorese" of Mark 4:14–20 to the Christian apocalypticism seen also in Hermas). Similarly R. B. Eggen, *Gleichnis, Allegorie, Metapher: Zur Theorie und Praxis der Gleichnisauslegung*, TANZ 47 (Tübingen: Francke, 2007), describes a "middle way" between parable and allegory in the use of metaphor (cf. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 51–59). Cf. also C. E. Carlston, "Parable and Allegory Revisited: An Interpretive Review," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 228–242; C. L. Blomberg, "Interpreting the Parables: Where Are We and Where Do We Go From Here?," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 50–78 (exaggerating the opposite way and "viewing the parables as allegories," 54, 61); S. K. Wong, *Allegorical Spectrum of the Parables of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), developing the concept "spectrum" introduced by Blomberg, "Interpreting the Parables," 52.

[85] Brown, "Parable and Allegory," 41.

ancient Jewish writings. A concomitant terminology is also found, often associating "parable" with "riddle" and "allegory."[86] In Ezekiel, most strikingly, an allegorical narrative with extensive interpretation involving two eagles, a cedar tree, and a vine is introduced by the following divine commission: "O mortal, put forth a riddle (חוד חידה), and speak a parable (ומשל משל) to the house of Israel" (Ezek 17:2 KJV). The compound משל משל occurs more often in Ezekiel;[87] we shall come back to it. The noun משל can also have the connotation of "oracle," as in the phrase, "And Balaam uttered his oracle," with משל rendered as παραβολή in the Septuagint.[88] Furthermore, the expression חוד חידה recurs in the story of Samson, who said, אחודה־נא לכם חידה, "Let me put a riddle to you." His riddle has all the qualities of a paradoxical saying: מהאוכל יצא מאכל, ומעז יצא מתוק, "Out of the eater came something to eat, out of the strong came something sweet" (Judg 14:12, 14). Pointing at Minoan and Aesopian backgrounds, Azzan Yadin has even questioned the translation "riddle" in this passage.[89] In any case, the association of "parable" and "riddle" is found more often in the Hebrew Bible.[90] In our trans-cultural perspective, this is interesting since, as we have seen, the pre-classic Greek term for fable was αἶνος, a word directly related to αἴνιγμα, "riddle." We are reminded of the sphinx of Thebes who would devour anyone who could not solve her riddle (αἴνιγμα): "What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?" A sphinx of mythical descent figures in Greek literature from Hesiod onwards.[91]

Extensive enigmatic allegories reminiscent of Ezekiel and his imagery (eagles, trees, a vine, etc.) are found in Daniel, Enoch and other apocalyptic writings, often with historical references and in an eschatological perspective. This is crucial for Jesus's background. His teachings bear a clear apocalyptic aspect, as indicated already by his unique and frequent use of the Enochic and Danielic phrase, "son of man." Correspondingly, his parables contain a degree of prophetic allegory, although it does not necessarily always have an eschatological

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[86] I. Heinemann, *Altjüdische Allegoristik = Bericht des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars (Frankelsche Stiftung) 1935* (Breslau: Marcus, 1936), 14–25 on terminology. See also Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese*, 67–84, adding dream interpretation to the repertoire (Joseph cycle; Daniel). Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 36, is aware of these connections, and likewise Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 39 f., treats parable and riddle in close proximity; yet both are fixated on the idea of Jesus's absolute originality.

[87] Ezek 12:23; 18:3; 24:3.

[88] Num 23:7–24:23, וישא משלו ויאמר, in LXX, literally: καὶ ἀναλαβὼν τὴν παραβολὴν αὐτοῦ εἶπεν.

[89] A. Yadin, "Samson's ḥîdâ," *VT* 52 (2002): 407–426, interestingly suggests Minoan and Aesopian backgrounds. Cf. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 38.

[90] Yadin, "Samson's ḥîdâ," 410 f. mentions Hab 2:6; Ps 44:4 (read 49:5); 78:2; Prov 1:6; Num 12:8; 1 Kgs 10:1 f.; Dan 8:28.

[91] Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.5.8; the riddle was fatefully solved by Oedipus. Cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 327.

slant.[92] John Collins and others have pointed out that apocalyptic thinking operates not only on a temporal, but also on a spatial axis, and correspondingly, it may often have a mystical intent and an esoteric import.[93] In apocalypses, "mysteries" and "hidden things" are glimpsed that need being "unveiled." Precisely that, John Ashton has suggested, is seen in the conversation following Jesus's parable of the Sower and the Seed. The disciples are told: "To you has been given the secret (μυστήριον) of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables (παραβολαῖς)" (Mark 4:11).[94] In a pronounced way, all of this is also reflected in Jesus's use of the bridegroom metaphor, which draws on the Song of Songs and has both mystical and eschatological aspects, in parallel to the allegorical midrash on the Song subsequently practised by the rabbis, notably R. Akiva.[95] For a correct understanding, however, it must be emphasised that in the Synoptic Gospels, the esoteric is only one, literally "hidden," aspect of Jesus's parables. It comes in addition to his engaging, un-esoteric message of compassion as expressed by the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Good Samaritan, of hope and good faith in those of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, or of true dedication to God's kingdom in those of the Treasure and the Pearl. The synoptic Jesus has "come to seek out and to save what is lost" (Luke 19:10).

In the Gospel of John, the balance between parable and allegory is lacking. For one, Jesus's healings and other miracles, while few in number, are here called "signs" (σημεῖα) and have an obvious allegorical intent. Similarly, as already mentioned, Jesus does not tell parables but gives extended allegorical discourses called παροιμίαι, often openly referring to himself in the first person. The dis-

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[92] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 64, 66, 185f. (cf. 14–16) disagrees with the eschatological emphasis proposed by Jeremias.

[93] J.J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. J.J. Collins (Missoula: SBL, 1979 [= *Semeia* 14 (1979)]), 1–20; C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

[94] J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 383–406, discussing the terminological equivalence of משלים with the "similitudes" in 1 Enoch (in Ge'ez: *mesalē*, cf. *'amsāl*, "likeness") as proposed by D.W. Suter, "*Mašāl* in the Similitudes of Enoch," *JBL* 100 (1981): 193–212. Cf. the discussion between Jeremias (*Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 9f., "Verstockungstheorie," cf. 75–78) and Flusser (*Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 235–263, rejecting an esoteric interpretation yet allowing for Jesus's "hohes Selbstverständnis"). The mystical strand in Jesus's teachings has been stressed by Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 358–368; C. Rowland and C.R.A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament,* CRINT 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 99–132. C.B. Quarles, "Jesus as *Merkabah* Mystic," *JSHJ* 3 (2005): 5–22, rejects a similar claim advanced by Bruce Chilton in his popular "biography" of Jesus, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), because the rabbinic sources are too late for sound comparison. Cf. the similar discussion of Christopher Morray-Jones with Peter Schäfer in Rowland and Morray-Jones, *Mystery of God*, 219–498.

[95] P.J. Tomson, "The Song of Songs in the Teachings of Jesus and the Development of the Exposition on the Song," in *Studies on Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries*, by P.J. Tomson, WUNT 418 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 235–262.

ciples cannot understand these at first, but the evangelist explains that they will do so later, in what Ashton calls his "theory of riddling speech."[96] This recalls the synoptic idea of the "mystery of the kingdom," but here it is centre stage and is not counterbalanced by the engaging message of parables. Instead, as from the prologue, the Fourth Gospel is about such concepts as "truth" and "believing." In all, it has a decidedly "philosophical" or sophistic penchant. The prologue, which sets the tone, strikingly opens on the abstract concept of the *logos* as intermediary in the creation (John 1:1, 14). The comparison with Philo is obvious and has often been made, although there are considerable differences and Philo's Greek is incomparably higher. Compared with the synoptics, however, the Gospel strikes a consciously "sophistic" tone meant to appeal to the elect who can follow this. Hence the absence of parables and their replacement by soaring allegorical discourses could relate among other possible causes to this spiritual elitism and could be a matter of social register.

Seen in this light, the Gospel of Thomas presents a peculiar case. On the one hand, its esoteric portent is explicit as from its opening sentence: "These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said, Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death." On the other, it does contain fifteen parables, four of which are not found in the Synoptic Gospels. The fact that they are all without an interpretive morale or epimythium is differently interpreted. Jeremias takes it simply to reflect the earliest, pre-allegorising stage of the synoptic tradition, but Flusser suspects a more sophisticated development, in which the editors suppressed apparent links with the Synoptic Gospels along with all epimythia and wilfully left it for the readers to find the secret "interpretation" of the parables.[97]

The absence of parables from John corresponds with a general feature of Christianity. Three centuries later, the learned monk Jerome, commenting on the parable in Matt 18:23, offered his readers this oft-quoted clarification: "The inhabitants of Syria, and even more those of Palaestina, have the habit of using parables in all their conversations, so that what the hearers cannot grasp by way of a simple precept, they can by images and examples."[98] Hence Jerome's Christian readers, at least those outside Palaestina and Syria, are not familiar with parables as an element of daily conversation. A century and a half earlier, a similar

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[96] John 10:6, the allegory of the Good Shepherd; 16:25 (2x), 29, the evangelist's "theory." Ashton, *Understanding*, 397.

[97] Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 20 f., 86 f.; Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 128. For discussion, tables, and literature, see E. E. Popkes, "Einleitung," in *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 855–861. Thanks to the editors for drawing my attention to the parables in the Gospel of Thomas.

[98] Jerome, *Comm. Matt.* 4.1.85: *Familiare est Syris et maxime Palaestinis ad omnem sermonem parabolas jungere, ut quod per simplex praeceptum teneri ab auditoribus non potest, per similitudinem exemplaque teneatur.* Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 32, could not help ironically calling this "die tausendmal gedruckte Notiz des Hieronymus."

impression arises from Origen, one of the greatest scholars of the early Church. Commenting on Prov 1:6, he explains: "A parable is a tale about something as though it happened – not actually happened as it is stated, but could happen – that figuratively denotes matters through transference of the things told in the parable." This precise definition does not leave much to improve upon for modern scholars. In addition, Origen shows fine consideration for his readers as he continues to explain in less abstract terms: "For it has not happened as in the phrase, 'The sower did go out,' the way we say that events in history have happened, but it is possible to happen, as it is stated, 'Behold, the sower went out, etc.'"[99] In Origen's explanation, the truncated imperative "behold" functions as equivalent of "once upon a time," evoking the fictional nature of the story. Meanwhile our growing impression is that the audiences of the Church Fathers were not of themselves familiar with the phenomenon of parables.

Origen, who was also a fervent reader of Philo and a mystic and wrote important commentaries on the Gospel of John and the Song of Songs, initiated the important patristic tradition of the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, in which moreover Jerome was one of his prominent followers. While Origen may have been drawing on early Christian tradition going back to Jesus, he developed his own version of the tradition of allegorically reading the Song of Songs known also from the ancient rabbis.[100] For the latter, as for Jesus, this went nevertheless along with an undiluted creativity in the domain of parables. The contrast with Origen and Jerome is striking. Not only were parables apparently not a part of the culture of their Christian audiences. In addition, notwithstanding their knowledge of the genre, telling "simple" parables just did not match with their style. Origen's predilection for Philo, which was shared by Jerome, will not have been of great help here either. As members of the literate elite, their habitat was the "high tradition."

A quick survey appears to confirm these impressions. Eusebius cites the mid-second century bishop Papias who from "unwritten tradition" knows some "unknown parables and teachings" (ξένας … παραβολὰς καὶ διδασκαλίας) of Jesus.[101] What is meant by these "parables" transmitted orally is not clear. They could be real parables, as Eusebius distinguishes them from further "more legendary" traditions (μυθικώτερα) to do with chiliasm, but that is just a possibility. In any case, the early Christian use of παραβολή does as a rule not point to real parables. In his Dialogue with the Jew Trypho, Justin Martyr,

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[99] Origen, *Fr. Prov.* 13.20: ἔστι τοίνυν παραβολὴ λόγος ὡς περὶ γενομένου, μὴ γενομένου μὲν κατὰ τὸ ῥητόν, δυναμένου δὲ γενέσθαι, τροπικῶς δηλωτικὸς πραγμάτων ἐκ μεταλήψεως τῶν ἐν τῇ παραβολῇ λελεγμένων. οὐ γὰρ γέγονε κατὰ τὴν λέξιν τὸ, Ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων, ὡς λέγομεν γεγονέναι τὰ τῆς ἱστορίας, πλὴν δυνατὸν γενέσθαι κατὰ τὸ ῥητόν, Ἰδοὺ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων κ. τ. ε.

[100] Tomson, "Song of Songs."

[101] Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.12.

a contemporary of Papias, frequently uses the expression ἐν παραβολῇ when in his view things written in Scripture are to be understood "allegorically."[102] Furthermore, the Shepherd of Hermas, a second-century apocalyptic text from Rome carrying some Jewish Christian features, in its third part consists of so-called παραβολαί – *similitudines* in the Latin version – that contain allegorical narratives comparable to the Enochic "similitudes." The phrase παραβολή is also used in the earlier parts, the "visions" (ὁράσεις or ἀποκαλύψεις) and the "commandments" (ἐντολαί), and there the word has the meaning of an enigmatic "allegory" that needs a "solution" (ἐπίλυσις), not unlike its meaning in the Epistle to the Hebrews.[103] However, the Shepherd does contain one real parable comprising a long fictional narrative with elaborate explanation. It contrasts with the surrounding allegorical tales that directly involve the seer in the other "parables" and deserves further study.[104]

The preceding occasions a more profound discussion of the relation between parable and allegory. While we have seen that these are closely related and partly overlapping categories, we may discern a difference in purpose. Both parable, fable and allegory use fictional narrative, but to a different aim. Fable and parable, expressions of popular wisdom, narrate their story by way of "parenetic fiction" exhorting the listeners to a particular moral behaviour. In allegory, by contrast, the narration serves to inform the listeners about a present or imminent state of affairs. This use of "parables" not as parenetic fiction but as "imaginative realism" is typically seen in apocalypticism.[105] Jesus was certainly partial to that, as were the rabbis, but they kept at the same time telling parables and alluding to fables. Jesus's saying of the son of man coming on the clouds with his angels has much of a prophetic allegory linking up with the Apocalypse of Enoch, and his παραβολή of the Fig Tree likely reflects an allegorical reading of a Song of Songs passage that is found extensively in a more elaborate form in later rabbinic midrash.[106] Besides that, however, he told fable-like parables such as the one of the Woman Who Had Lost a Penny or the Farmer Who Sleeps While the Grain Buds. The juxtaposition of sapiential fable and parable with apocalyptic allegory seems characteristic of the teachings of both Jesus and the ancient rabbis.

While the above claims evidently are in need of corroboration by more extensive research, the provisional impression is that Christian tradition from

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[102] E. g. Justin, *Dial.* 36.2; 52.1; 90.2.

[103] E. g. Herm. Sim. 56.1 f.; 57.2; 58.1; Heb 9:9; 11:19.

[104] In the "Fifth Parable," Herm. Sim. 55.2–11. See Martijn Stoutjesdijk in his "Building a Fence around the Vineyard: Shepherd of Hermas' Fifth Parable in Light of Comparative Parable Research," in *Power of Parables*, ed. E. Ottenheijm, M. Poorthuis, and A. Merz, JCP (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

[105] Collins, "Morphology," 9, definition: "'Apocalypse' is a genre … disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal … and spatial …."

[106] Mark 13:26 f., cf. 1 En. 1; Mark 13:28 f., cf. Song 2:10–13; Pesiq. Rav. Kah. 5:6–7 (Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 87–98), see Tomson, "Song of Songs," 238–240.

the second century on, at least as we know it, preserved parables as part of the Synoptic Gospels, but hardly continued creating them. Christian authors did, however, continue writing down visions and apocalypses, in amazing quantities even, calling them παραβολαί or *similitudines*, among other names. In so doing, they carried on the tradition developed by apocalypticists, both Jewish and other, preserving also many of the works of the latter.[107] Here, allegories appear to be as border-crossing as other variants of meshalim. In the same period, the production of Jewish apocalypses became restricted to mystical, other-worldly works relegated to the margins of rabbinic tradition, possibly reflecting a decrease in political interest after the Bar Kokhba war (132–135 CE).[108] As a result, telling parables seems to have remained a specialty of Judaean and Palaestinian Jewry. When compared with rabbinic parables, some of Jesus's parables may seem somewhat special given their allegorical innuendos. Nevertheless, qua genre they belong to the "lower" tradition of parables that also surfaces in Palaestinian rabbinic literature, rather than in the culture and tradition of the early Church. In this respect, parables seem to be less border-crossing than fables and allegories.

E. Overview

Let us now collect our gleanings and, adding some further observations, try to arrange them in an overall picture. In the beginning, it seems, there was fable. As we can observe throughout this survey, fables are the most widespread and border-crossing of all types of meshalim. Then, there are conversational parables. Situated in conversational settings, they appear not only in the Synoptic Gospels but continue to show up in rabbinic literature, especially in "marginal" rabbinic works like Tanna de-Vei Eliyahu. They go along with an undiminished interest in fables. We reviewed passages that report fable-telling or directly quote fables while involving rabbis from the early second to the late third century, sometimes

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[107] See the survey of Christian apocalypses in A. Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre,* ed. J. J. Collins (Missoula: SBL, 1979 [= *Semeia* 14 (1979)]), 61–121, as also the surveys of Greek, Roman, and Persian ones in J. J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (Missoula: SBL, 1979 [= *Semeia* 14 (1979)]. See also J. C. Vanderkam and W. Adler, *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, CRINT 3.4 (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). A striking specimen of border-crossing material are the Sibylline Oracles, see J. J. Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. M. E. Stone, CRINT 2.2 (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 357–381.

[108] A. J. Saldarini, "Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Literature," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 348–358; A. J. Saldarini, "Apocalypses and 'Apocalyptic' in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism," in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. J. J. Collins (Missoula: SBL, 1979 [= *Semeia* 14 (1979)]), 187–205.

responding to questions about scriptural verses. We get the impression of an uninterrupted tradition of meshalim told in conversation about moral issues or questions involving Scripture.

In addition, we have the midrashic parable, extensively documented especially in the aggadic midrash collections. Goldberg has outlined its basic three-part structure: scriptural lemma – narrative – application. We can add that it is typically phrased in Hebrew, the exclusive language of the tannaitic collections and hence presumably the preferred language of rabbinic dialectics. Correspondingly, as indicated by Goldberg as well as Thoma and Lauer, its *Sitz im Leben* is in the *beit midrash*, the rabbinic "academy," and its *Sitz in der Literatur* in the edited midrash of the collections. Often, the narrative of the midrashic parable may be contracted into a single clause, as though it were an abbreviated reminder for the preacher preparing his sermon or the scholar rehearsing his material. It involves formulary which, as Goldberg justly wrote, "is as stereotypical as it is divergent."[109]

Thus we find the introductory formula whose peculiar first part must derive from the expression used in Ezek 17:2 noted above: משלו משל, למה הדבר דומה, "They told a parable: what does this look like?" Often, shortened forms appear like, משל, למה הדבר דומה, "A parable: what does this look like?," or, למה הדבר דומה, "What does this look like?" Very often we have just: משל ל ..., "A parable, like ...," or even only the prepositional prefix: ל ..., "Like ..."[110] It must be noted, however, that similar formulae may introduce conversational parables, thus typically: אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה, "Let me tell you a parable: what does this look like?" We have seen that even R. Akiva's "conversational fox fable" is introduced with this formula. Less developed, similar introductory formulae also appear in the Gospels.[111] We are once again reminded that strict, rational distinctions cannot be made here and that we are dealing with the dynamic genre of meshalim in its various permutations.

The latter observation becomes more cogent when we also take into account the correlate Aramaic introductory phrase, מתלין מתלא, "they have a saying," or "the saying goes." In various forms, it is particularly used in rabbinic collections while introducing a pithy saying, typically in Aramaic. Shamma Friedman has studied this interesting phenomenon and thinks such sayings actually may often summarise a mashal. Given some unusual Aramaic vocabulary, they may even derive from external collections of Aramaic wisdom sayings such as are

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[109] Goldberg, "Das schriftauslegende Gleichnis," 20.

[110] Cf. the abbreviated midrashic parables beginning with למלך ... or לבן מלכים in Gen. Rab. 1:14 and 2:2 (Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:13 and 15).

[111] E. g. Mekh. R. Ishm. Yitro Bahodesh 6 (Horovitz and Rabin, *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael*, 226); Pesiq. Rab. 23 (M. Friedmann, ed., *Pesikta Rabbati* [Vienna, 1880; repr., Tel-Aviv 1963], 120a); b. Ber. 61b (R. Akiva). For the Gospels cf. Mark 4:30, πῶς ὁμοιώσωμεν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ; Matt 11:16, τίνι ὁμοιώσω τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην. Matthew shows most of a stereotyped formulary similar to the rabbinic one.

exemplified in the Book of Ahiqar.[112] Similar examples are known from the Gospels.[113] In any case, the introductory formula in its Hebrew and Aramaic variants appears to have an even wider application, covering not only midrashic and conversational meshalim but also Aramaic proverbs that possibly summarise fables.

Another structural element shared in common by conversational and midrashic meshalim is the concluding clause. We have seen how Ahiqar's fable of the Leopard and the She-Goat ends with the she-goat pronouncing "a saying within the saying." Such a conclusion is more often seen in ancient fables, and Kurke and others think it gradually developed into the separate epimythium that became standard in fable collections. Typically, it consists of a proverb or similar specimen of popular wisdom. We have also reviewed some rabbinic fables told to illustrate biblical motifs such as Jacob's cowardice or Haman's fall. In those cases, the "epimythium" takes the form of a rather loose midrashic comment.[114] From there, we can imagine a straight development towards the full-blown midrashic mashal that functions as a hermeneutical tool in the midrash collections, beginning with a lemma that presents the "case," continuing with a mini-story, and concluding with the application to the lemma. In this structure, the concluding verse with its hermeneutic formulary takes the place of the epimythium. The development seems to signify that the amorphous, oral reservoir of popular wisdom is replaced by the well-defined treasure of scriptural verses: the Torah is seen as the source of all wisdom.

An interestingly hybrid case is found in the fable of the Old Lion and the Fox cited above. It is found combined with another brief fable in Bereshit Rabbati, an eleventh century midrash collection.[115] The midrashic peg is Gen 26:7, where Abimelech leaves Isaak's wife alone in notable contrast with Gen 20:2, where he captures Abraham's wife Sarah but then receives a severe warning in a dream. Then a saying is cited in comment, introduced with the formula we have just reviewed: "The proverb goes (מתלא אמר): He who has been bitten by a snake, is frightened by a rope." The saying is known from Qoheleth Rabbah, and it clearly compresses a fable in the way indicated by Shamma Friedman.[116] Only then follows our fable, in which the fox apprehends the danger that looms if he would visit the lion, and wisely passes over. This time round, a more elab-

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[112] Friedman, "Talmudic Proverb," esp. 162 f. with n 155.

[113] E. g. Luke 4:23, "He said to them, Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb (παραβολήν), 'Physician, cure yourself!'" For physicians in Aesopic fables, see the index in Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, and cf. the Frog and Fox fable cited by Wojciechowski, "Aesopic Tradition," 107.

[114] Gen. Rab. 78:7 and Esth. Rab. 7.3, above notes 80–81.

[115] Albeck, *Midraš Berešit Rabbati*, 115 f., see introduction, 1–37; J. Elbaum, "Genesis Rabbati," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 7:401–402; I. Ta-Shema, "Moses ha-Darshan," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 12:429.

[116] The manuscript misreads מלתא אמר, see comments by Albeck.

orate comment follows: "The lesson is as follows (מלפא דין): someone who has suffered distress once, will, when danger (קינדונוס, i.e. κίνδυνος) looms, hold back and flee from it; similarly Abimelech: because he suffered after having captured Sarah, he refrained from capturing Rebeccah." This in fact constitutes a double epimythium: a general saying as in a fable collection, plus an "exegetical" conclusion as one would expect in a midrash commentary. The compiler has copied the fable, along with its hybrid epimythium and including the Greek loanword, from an ancient Syriac translation of the Aesopian collection of Syntipas contained in a Hebrew manuscript published in 1845, also preserved in a slightly different version in another manuscript published in 1859.[117] It has separate epimythia beginning with such formulae as, מלפא דין, מודעא דין, "This teaches," "This informs us." What is interesting is, first, that we have different versions of a late antique Aesopian collection in Syriac. Second, while compiling his collection, our medieval midrashist copied both from this fable collection and from an aggadic midrash, providing the lemma as a whole with a midrashic conclusion but leaving the fable epimythium in place. Welcome to the age of compilations.

Fables of Aesop and Ahiqar in Greek had been collected, as we have seen, since Demetrius and Democritus in the fourth century BCE. As such, they continued the Middle-Eastern tradition exemplified in the fifth century BCE Aramaic Book of Ahiqar, in the collections contained in the Hebrew Bible, and in the still much older collections in Akkadian and Sumerian. The style and inflexion of these ancient Middle-Eastern collections bespeaks educational and sapiential purposes. Similarly, the Greek Aesopic collections were made, among possible other purposes, for the education of rhetors, witness the rhetorical handbook of Aelius Theon cited above.[118] A number of such parallel and partially overlapping collections have survived, starting with the so-called Augustana Collection (presumably first century CE), documenting the complex development of the "open tradition" described by Leslie Kurke.[119] The collections of versified Aesopic fables in Latin produced by Phaedrus around the turn of the eras and in Greek by Babrius somewhat later exemplify the combined purposes of delectation for literates and education of their young ones by reading these elegantly phrased,

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[117] B. Goldberg, *Chofes matmonim sive anecdota rabbinica* (Berlin: Bethge, 1845), 58, no. 42 (Hebrew), and Landsberger, *Die Fabeln des Sophos,* 81–83, no. 45; cf. the Greek versions from Syntipas, Perry, *Aesopica*, 541 (Perry 37), and from the Collectio Augustana, Perry, *Aesopica*, 376 (Perry 142). On the manuscripts, see also Friedman, "Talmudic Proverb," 69 n 173. For the Syriac Aesopica, see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 2:403–428. The *Chofes matmonim* version contains seven doublets (13–19 = 44–50), and in addition, both manuscripts are full of corruptions and hard to interpret, cf. Albeck's comments *ad loc*. Both also show up the loan word קירים (κύριος) addressed by the fox to the lion, which Albeck, however, wishes to read as קודם.

[118] See Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 477 and Reece, "'Aesop,' 'Q' and 'Luke,'" 368 for references including Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.1–3.

[119] Above at note 24.

entertaining and edifying little stories.[120] The further expansion of the fable tradition is seen in the translations into Syriac, Arabic, and other languages. Christian interest in the fable collections has been decisive for their survival. Byzantine monks must have produced the manuscripts that in turn were copied in the Middle Ages or translated to other languages. One interesting specimen is the old Anglo-Norman versified collection by Marie de France, late twelfth century. An early representative of Christian interest in fables may be the author of the Gospel of Luke, as argued by Steve Reece.[121]

As observed above, an analogy is seen in the composition of the rabbinic collections, especially the extremely complex process of composition of the aggadic midrash collections. An expert account of the latter was given by Myron Lerner.[122] The oldest rabbinic documents, edited in Hebrew in the tannaitic academies and written down from the early third century onwards, are halakhic in purpose and design. Nevertheless, the "Halakhic Midrashim," and to a lesser extent the Tosefta and even the Mishnah, contain portions of aggadic, i. e. non-halakhic midrash. Thus it is altogether likely that aggadic midrash collections, both in oral and written form, had been in circulation for some time. The great production of aggadic collections, however, started in the amoraic period that followed, and it resulted in written documents from the fifth century onwards, starting with works like Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah, Wayyiqra (Leviticus) Rabbah, and Eikhah (Lamentations) Rabbah, and lasting well into the Middle Ages. Given on the one hand the enormous ramification of traditions, versions, and variants, and on the other, the great loss of documents and the laborious work of tracking down and collating surviving manuscripts, the task of editing and publishing this literature is enormous.

Both in the case of the growth of the Aesopic fable collections and of the aggadic midrash collections, we are dealing with small, basically oral literary units from a "low tradition" that are brought together, redacted, and passed on by members of the literate elite who take an interest in them. There is also a similarity in purpose. Whether arranged by way of "exegetical midrash" following the biblical text verse by verse or of "homiletic midrash" arranged by pericopes, the aggadic midrash collections reflect the social setting of homilists summarising their sermons held in the community and passing their summaries on to subsequent users. The fifth century collections just mentioned abound in the use of the vernacular, Galilean Aramaic, although as indicated the midrashic parables

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[120] See Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xi–xiii on the purpose of versified fable, and xlvii–cii on Babrius and Phaedrus.

[121] Reece, "'Aesop,' 'Q' and 'Luke'". See also Beavis, "Parable and Fable," 482 f. (Matthew and Luke providing promythia and epimythia) and 493 f. (Jesus presented as fabulist). On Marie de France, see e. g. Kinoshita and McCracken, *Marie de France* with pp. 35–44 on the origin of her *Ysopë*.

[122] Lerner, "Works of Aggadic Midrash." Cf. Stemberger, *Einleitung*, 272 f.

contained in them are largely in Hebrew, often interrupting the Aramaic of its context. That brings us to the analogy most relevant to our study: the lavish use of meshalim in the midrash collections, drawing, as the fable collections do, on the reservoir of shared popular wisdom dispensed and recycled in preaching and teaching in the community. Given these analogies, border crossings are no great surprise: we have seen that the aggadic midrash collections also contain fables which often can be traced back to the Aesopic collections.[123]

Around the turn of the millennium, as Lerner describes it, the midrashic endeavour started to decline, and compilations drawing on earlier collections began to be produced. Some of these preserve many older materials otherwise lost, such as the earliest specimen of this category, Sefer Pitron Torah (late ninth century). Others, such as the fourteenth century Yemenite Midrash Hagadol, preserve important superior versions of extant works, in addition to lost materials. Further types of collections were also produced, thus for example the midrashic anthology we have quoted above, Bereshit Rabbati. It is preserved in one single, fragmentary manuscript copied in several hands from different versions of the work. According to its editor, Ch. Albeck, it is an epitome from a large commentary on Genesis no longer extant by R. Mosheh Hadarshan of Narbonne, early eleventh century. Freely and creatively adapting and improving his material, he has used not only practically all known rabbinic writings, but also many extra-rabbinic sources such as notably the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.[124] The quotation of an Aesopic fable in a Syriac translation we have just cited only adds to the richness of its resources.

A ripe fruit of this age of compilations finally to be mentioned is the work called *Mishlei shu'alim*, "Fables." It is a fine collection of 119 Aesopian fables elaborately told in rhymed Hebrew by the thirteenth century R. Berekhia Hanaqdan. Drawing on the collection of Marie de France and other sources, he evidently wrote his work as much for enjoyment as for moral instruction. Seated at the threshold between the "low" and the "higher" traditions and joining the useful with the agreeable, it follows the European tradition of versified fables that was to extend well into the nineteenth century.[125]

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[123] In addition to the references above, see L. Miralles Maciá, "Aesopian Tradition and Rabbinic Literature," in *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ed. A. de Francisco Heredero, D. A. Hernández de la Fuente, and S. Torres Prieto (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 433–446.

[124] Albeck, *Midraš Berešit Rabbati*, 1–37 (introduction); Elbaum, "Genesis Rabbati"; Ta-Shema, "Moses ha-Darshan." Cf. the brief mention by Lerner, "Works of Aggadic Midrash," 154.

[125] On *Mishlei shu'alim*, see A. M. Haberman, "Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Nakdan," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 4:596–598; Translation: M. Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop: Translated from the Fox Fables of Berechiah ha-Nakdan* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1967); exhaustive commentary: Schwarzbaum, *Mishle shu'alim*. On medieval Jewish fable collections in general, see G. Hasan-Rokem, "Fable," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 6:1125–1133.

Collections of fables were made and recycled, and so were midrash collections which include midrashic meshalim – but no collections of parables. What appears to be the only "collection" are the few parables of Jesus brought together in Mark 4 and further edited in Matt 13, exemplifying the teachings of the master from Nazareth.

F. Anthropological Epilogue

Why are fables so good at crossing ethnic, cultural, and religious borders? Evidently because they are found attractive everywhere. They are shareware, everyone's possession. They are what humans create for the entertainment and edification – of humans. An anthropological take suggests itself. It is similar but a little different with parables and allegories, which we must try to factor in, while developing our amateur anthropological approach.

Fables are caricatures of our own human lives, blowing up their petty dimensions, and they entertain as well as comfort us by the stubborn predictability of the characters. They are the spoken comics of antiquity. The contrast between the lion and the mouse is both funny and hopeful, for against the odds, the mouse can do what the lion cannot: gnaw through the mazes of the net. This teaches that you shouldn't think too small of yourself. Nor think you don't need the small ones because you are big. Fables also edify, because they can be cruel and still give hope: where the monumental oak is defenceless against the hurricane, the lowly reed survives, and this also makes you smile. So don't think too strong of yourself, and don't ever think that you are worthless because you are low.

Fables and proverbs are precious for their humour and wisdom, they are portable treasures free of charge. "A living dog is better than a dead lion," says the Preacher (Eccl 9:4), and young David seemed to know this when king Saul was after him: "Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A single flea?" (1 Sam 24:14). Implicitly, there is always this resourceful and resilient social message, this "Aesopic critique" Leslie Kurke reads in the Vita Aesopi: Aesop, "a mobile figure within the common or 'little' tradition in which nonelite and elite participated together … enabled or gave voice to critiques of power and inequitable power relations from below."[126] The fables and proverbs associated with "Aesop," as with "Ahiqar," are for kings and servants to teach and educate them, but if the king recoils and becomes a bad king, the wise servant has good hopes to survive. This is how common people survive and get along: thanks to humour and wisdom. It is sublimely phrased in Agur's funny paradoxes gathered up in the Proverbs of Solomon, patently evoking fables:

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[126] Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 53, 59.

These four are small on earth, yet they are wiser than all:
Ants, a people without strength, prepare their food in summer;
badgers, a people without power, build their house on the rock.
A king is not found with the locust, still it marches like an army;
the gecko can be caught in your hand, yet it dwells in the palace of kings.[127]
(Prov 30:24–28)

At the same time, fables hold up a mirror to us. They are anthropological mirrors: sayings "reflecting" humans. Comparing humans with ants or lions is both funny and sobering. It involves a self-consciousness that includes an awareness of the behaviour of humans as "social animals," it reveals the animality that governs human society. Alpha males and laughing stocks are equally targeted, ill-advised power play as much as ideological rigidity. Fables embody a home-made anthropology otherwise called "wisdom," an anthropology that is not discursive and objectifying but narrative and aphoristic. They are told to those who are "just like that," in the appropriate way: by way of a funny story or a paradoxical saying.

Fables involve a view of humans and animals as being basically related and as such predisposed to understand each other in the behavioural and social. Modern zoology confirms and deepens this awareness. Primatologist Frans de Waal explains to us that empathy is a capacity humans share with certain animals.[128] Also, there seem to be successful forms of psychotherapy using mammals as "buddies." Given this animal-human empathy, we can understand why even fictional apes, lions, or foxes can teach us a lesson, certainly if they can talk.

This brings us back to the relation between fable and parable. Although parables do not exclude animals – witness the pigs in the parable of the Prodigal Son – their protagonists typically are humans. This may well be due to the presupposed biblical world view discussed earlier. Intertextual links import this view, in which humans are fellow-creatures of animals, but such as are accountable to the creator. In parables, the protagonists must "mirror" the implied human predicament, both in obedience and generosity and in sin and foolishness. Insofar as these are understood to relate to precepts of the divinity, the protagonists cannot be animals but must be humans who are aware of precepts and can be held responsible.

Anthropologically speaking, this does not imply an absolute difference vis-à-vis the fable. Rather, it can be read as involving an enlarged intertext, the difference being not in superior content but in an additional reference potential.

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[127] In my translation, retaining the multiple parallelism of the first couplet and the layered chiasm of the second.

[128] For the work of de Waal, see e. g. F. de Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism among the Primates* (New York: Norton, 2013) and F. de Waal, "The Evolution of Empathy," *GGM* (September 1, 2005), https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_evolution_of_empathy.

Parables presuppose a reservoir of shared popular knowledge that has been amplified by the basic biblical values. This may be explicit in the rabbis' identification of the Mosaic Torah with divine "wisdom," but the idea is much older. An example is already found in the parable Samuel tells David after he had arranged for Uriah to be killed in order to take his wife Bathsheba. When David, angered, pronounces the damages the rich man in the parable has to pay for taking the poor man's sheep, Samuel says: "You are that man!" (2 Sam 12:7, cf. Exod 22:1). The implied reference of the parable in its narrative context is to the precepts of the creator of humans and animals.

This is where many parables of Jesus and the rabbis fit in. Whether they be midrashic or conversational parables, the awareness of human accountability is always presupposed. The implicit reference lends the parable an allegorical aspect. It is embodied among other details in the stock characters of the father or king and their sons or subjects.[129] The elaborate parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) is not only about the possibility to repent however great one's sin, but also about the father's infinite forgiveness and the elder brother's embarrassing lack of such. It is a parable with multiple "allegorical points." Similar examples with multiple points of comparison can be found in rabbinic parables, for instance the one Flusser cites from Tanna de-vei Eliyahu, where it serves to illustrate the duty to honour one's parents by dressing them better than oneself:

> They told a parable: what does this look like? Like a king of flesh and blood who had a servant that ran away from him, passing through all the countries, until finally he fell again in his hands and was led before him. When he was led before him, he took him by the hand and led him around his palace, showing him the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls, all the treasures of his house. Then he led him over the estate, showing him the gardens and orchards and everything in his fields. Then he showed him his children, big and small, and his slaves, big and small. After showing him all this he said, Did you see that I do not need your service at all? But do come and do your work along with my children and my slaves, big and small, and treat me with honour and respect, as the people treat me with honour and respect. – Because the holy one, blessed be he, has made his honour equal to the honouring of one's father and mother, as it is said: "A son honours his father, and a servant their master; if then I am a father, where is the honour due me?" etc. (Mal 1:6).[130] (Tanna Eli. 25)

This late specimen shares many features with the parable of the Prodigal Son both in its plot and in its multiple points of comparison: the slave's accountability towards the king, the king's generous forgiveness, the slave's solidarity

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[129] This aspect is developed by Eggen, *Gleichnis*, 257, under the heading of "metaphor" as middle ground between parable and allegory (cf. above note 84).

[130] Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse*, 301; Tanna Eli. 25 (M. Friedmann, ed., *Seder Eliahu Rabba and Seder Eliahu Zuta*, 3rd ed. [Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1969], 136). This midrash collection is variously dated to the gaonic or late talmudic period (fifth–eighth century) and may well contain many older traditions.

with the other slaves and children, and the call to serve the king out of honour and respect.

Because of the prerequisite amplified reservoir of wisdom, parables seem to travel less lightly than fables. They need the fertile ground of basic "biblical values" in order to grow. Where this is not available, they cannot play their game. At the same time, their game only works when they are taken as close relatives of fables. For all their biblical innuendos, parables stand next to fables with their drastic wittiness. Both for the rabbis and for Jesus, the awareness of account-ability does not equal out the basic "animality" of humans; it remains part of the play. Thus if the parable of the King and His Runaway Slave is earnest and pious in tone, there is also something exhilarating about it once we hear it as we would a fable. The narrator portrays himself as much as his hearers as inhabitants of this little imaginary world where things are clear and radical, as puppets in a Punch-and-Judy show that dramatize the high points of their funny little lives. And animals are not far away. The prodigal son, having squandered his posses-sions and reached the end of his tether, sits brooding and looking at the swine he has to herd, envying them for their fodder of pods and peels (Luke 15:16). In turn, the dutiful elder son envies his younger brother, unable to share in the exhilaration of his incredible come-back. They both are funny, the one for his envy of the well-fed swine, the other for the awkward stiffness towards his adven-turous brother.

We have also considered the relation between parable and allegory, suggest-ing that the reification of the fictional narrative marks a transition line. It is significant that in addition to allegorical tales, Jesus did keep telling parables and alluding to fables, as did the rabbis. It may actually be that the living link with the fable preserved their parables from turning into all-out allegory. We seem to see this at work in the saying attributed to Jesus about this most consequential of future events, the coming of the Messiah: "If they say to you, Look! He is in the wilderness, do not go out. If they say, Look! He is in the inner rooms, do not believe it … Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" (Matt 24:26–28). Similar, though maybe more sceptical and with a fainter hint to fable, is the saying ascribed to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, "When you are planting a sapling and they come telling you, Look! The Messiah is here – go plant your sapling first, then go out to greet him!" (Avot R. Nath. B 31).[131]

Finally, the above raises some further questions about the geographical spread of parables. Unlike fables, proverbs, and allegories, the production of parables appears to have been confined to Hellenistic and Roman Judaea, as Jerome suggested and our documents seem to confirm. Why is this? We have

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[131] S. Schechter, ed., *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Feldheim, 1967), 67. On Yohanan's saying compared with Luther's apocryphal uttering – speaking of border-crossing! – see E. Bammel, "Das Wort vom Apfelbäumchen," in *Judaica: Kleine Schriften I*, WUNT 37 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 140–147.

mentioned the requisite fund of "biblical values," available of course only among Jews and Christians. Ancient Christians as we know them, however, did continue to produce and to read allegories and fables, but hardly any parables. Diaspora Jews, similarly, do not strike us as particularly creative in the field of parables either. Then could it be that Judaean Jews had a special talent for the witty, drastic narrative style of the parable? And is this not precisely the point where the parable is closest to the Aesopic and Ahiqarian fable? In other words, are we not beginning to understand that the culture of such Jews as Jesus and the rabbis, and the presumable precursors of the latter, the Pharisees, was particularly congenial to the "low tradition" of fable telling? And is it not the case then that this Jewish popular culture, grown in Hellenistic and Roman Judaea at the crossroads of the Near East and the Mediterranean, was an ideal breeding ground for a fusion of Aesopic style with Mosaic values?

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