
Part One: ***Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer***

2 *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* in its Time

Since its redaction at the end of Late Antiquity, *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* has enjoyed enormous popularity. The work exists in around fifty printed editions and over a hundred manuscripts from every part of the Jewish Diaspora. The work was cited in the writings of the Geonim Sherira,¹ Hai,² and Nissim,³ in the biblical commentaries of Rashi (e.g., to Gen 27:9 and Deut 12:7), David Kimhi (e.g., to Jonah 1:7), and Moses Nachmanides (e.g., to Gen 1:8, Gen 28:12, and Lev 16:8), and in the philosophical writings of Judah ha-Levi (*Kuzari* III.65 and IV.29), Moses Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed* I.70 and II.26),⁴ and others.⁵ It is used throughout midrashic anthologies such as *Yalqut Shim'oni*⁶ and *Midrash ha-Gadol*.⁷ It was also a major influence on the *Zohar*.⁸

Christian interest in PRE begins only after the Middle Ages. Konrad Pellikan translated the work in 1546, shortly after the Venice edition of 1544.⁹ It was

1 Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *Sefer Or Zaru'a*, 2 vols. (Zhytomyr: Akiba Lehren, 1862), 2:53 (*Halakhot Milah* §107.2) [Hebrew], alluding to PRE 29 and citing the work by name.

2 Solomon Aaron Wertheimer, *Sefer Qehilath Shlomo: In Which are Gathered and Assembled the Questions and Responses of the Geonim of Old* (Jerusalem: 1899), 9 (translation) and 77 (text) [Hebrew], citing PRE 10.

3 Nissim Gaon: Jacob Nahum Epstein, "Collectanea from *Sefer ha-Mafteah* of Rabbenu Nissim (Ms. Jemen)," *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 1–26 (11) [Hebrew], citing PRE 50.

4 On Maimonides and other medieval citations of PRE, see further: Josep-Vicente Niclós, "Misticismo y filosofía judía en la Edad Media: Una cita de « Los Capítulos de Rabbi Eliezer » en Maimónides y en Shem Tob ibn Shaprut," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 22 (1997), 57–74.

5 David R. Blumenthal, "The Rationalistic Commentary of Ḥoṭer Ben Shelomo to *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*," *Tarbiz* 48 (1979): 99–106 [Hebrew]; Paul B. Fenton, "The Judaeo-Arabic Commentary on *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eliezer* by Judah b. Nissim Ibn Malka with a Hebrew Translation and Supercommentary by Isaac b. Samuel of Acre," *Sefunot* 6 (1993): 115–65 [Hebrew]; Katharina E. Keim, *Pirquei deRabbi Eliezer: Structure, Coherence, Intertextuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 31–32.

6 See, for example, Genesis §42 (PRE 22); Genesis §95 (PRE 30); and Jonah §550 (PRE 10).

7 Joseph Tobi, "Midrash ha-Gadol: The Sources and The Structure," 2 vols. (PhD Dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1993), 1:283–88 [Hebrew].

8 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), 170: "The names of the most important members of the group around Simeon ben Yohai are largely taken from a pseudepigraphical Midrash and given a spurious appearance of authenticity by the addition of the name of the father or other cognomens. This particular Midrash, the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, dating from the eighth century, is one of the most important sources for the Aggadah of the *Zohar* in general." Oded Yisraeli, *Temple Portals: Studies in Aggadah and Midrash in the Zohar*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), takes the influence of PRE for granted (see, e.g., 119 and 254).

9 Konrad Pellikan, *Das Chronikon des Konrad Pellikan*, ed. Bernhard Riegenbach (Basel: Bahnmeiers Verlag, 1877), 176 [entry for 1546]: "I also translated the wordy book of R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, called 'the Great,' filled with fables added to Genesis, Exodus, and Esther, sporadically called 'The

translated again by Willem Henricus Vorstius and printed in 1644.¹⁰ As with every pre-modern work about Adam and Eve, someone has posited that John Milton used it as a source for *Paradise Lost*.¹¹

The first translation of the work into a modern language was Gerald Friedlander's English rendition of 1916.¹² This was followed much later by French (1983),¹³ Spanish (1984),¹⁴ and German (2004)¹⁵ translations. A second English translation, intended for a religious rather than an academic audience, has recently appeared.¹⁶ The translation of the work coincides with two important phases in the study of the Pseudepigrapha. The first began with the collections of Emil Friedrich Kautzsch (1900)¹⁷ and R. H. Charles (1913)¹⁸ and lasted until the beginning of World War II. Charles' collection, in particular, had a major impact on Friedlander, who cites it in his introduction.¹⁹ The second phase began with the collection of James

Chapters of Eliezer' until chapter fifty-four" (*Transtuli quoque librum prolixum Rabi Eliezer, filii Hircani qui magnus cognominatur; refertum fabulis additis ad librum Geneseos et Exodi et libro Hester; usque ad capita quinquaginta quatuor allegatur passim Pirke Eliezer*). I have been unable to find this work.

10 Willem Henricus Vorstius, trans., *Capitula R. Elieser: Continentia inprimis succinctam historiae sacrae recensionem circiter 3400 ann. sive à Creatione usque ad Mardochaei aetatem, cum veterum Rabbīnorum Commentariis* (Leiden: Ioannis Maire, 1644).

11 Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

12 Gerald Friedlander, trans., *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (1916; repr. New York: Hermon Press, 1970).

13 Alain Ouaknin and Eric Smilévitch, trans., *Pirké de Rabbi Eliezer* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1983).

14 Miguel Pérez Fernández, trans., *Los Capítulos de Rabbí Eliezer* (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo para la Investigación Bíblica, 1984).

15 Dagmar Börner-Klein, ed. and trans., *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: Nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

16 Abraham Yaakov Finkel, trans., *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, 2 vols. (Scranton: Yeshivath Beth Moshe, 2009).

17 Emil Friedrich Kautzsch, ed., *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1900).

18 R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

19 Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, xiii: "The book usually designated *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (*Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer*) is not the least important of the Rabbinic Pseudepigrapha. The attention recently given to the study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha has, to a certain extent, been limited by the neglect of the Rabbinic side of the subject. The only Hebrew works translated in the magnificent Oxford edition of the *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* [of R. H. Charles] are the *Pirke Aboth* and the *Fragments of a Zadokite Word* [the *Damascus Document*]. The selection of these two books is singularly unfortunate, since neither belongs to the Pseudepigrapha proper. More appropriate would have been the inclusion in the afore-mentioned *corpus* of such works as

Charlesworth, completed in 1985, and is ongoing. The resurgence of interest in PRE in the 1980s, during the modern revival of interest in the Pseudepigrapha, is probably not a coincidence. As noted in the introduction, the fame of the work rests on its rapport with the “Pseudepigrapha,” especially the Enoch and Adam books.

Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer is attributed to R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, a second-generation Tanna of the late first and early second century and one of the most frequently cited authorities in the Mishnah.²⁰ He was known for his conservative opinions, such as a literal interpretation of the *lex talionis* (*b. Bava Qamma* 84a). Paradoxically, he also had a reputation as a magician and thaumaturge (*b. Sanhedrin* 68a). A combination of these two traits led to his eventual expulsion from the inner circle of rabbis. In order to demonstrate the halakhic fitness of a certain kind of oven (the “Oven of Akhnai”), he engages in magical combat with another rabbi (*b. Bava Metzia* 59b–60a). Another story involves R. Eliezer’s arrest by the Roman government on the suspicion that he was a crypto-Christian (*t. Hullin* 2:24; *b. Avodah Zarah* 16b–17a). Rabbinic tradition, therefore, presents R. Eliezer as a great authority with “heterodox” inclinations.²¹ It is fitting that PRE—a work that, as Annette Reed notes, breaks every taboo proscribed in the Mishnah (*m. Hagigah* 2:1)—is attributed to him.²² However, Eliezer b. Hyrcanus did not write *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*. As this chapter will make clear, it was written much later, in the early Islamic period. Although it was probably written by a single author, we can only deduce his identity by clues left in the composition itself.

The present chapter is intended to introduce the critical issues related to the study of *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*. The first issue is the manuscript tradition. As with many rabbinic works, the manuscript history is complex, and there is not yet a critical edition. The second issue is the content and structure. The work is apparently unfinished, and the structure is unusual, since it frequently departs from a strict chronological order. The date and the provenance of PRE are no longer points of contention—most scholars would date the work to eighth-century Palestine—but they once were, and it is important to document the basis of our current knowledge. Genre is a different matter. *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* is reflexively labeled a Midrash,

the *Othijoth de Rabbi Akiba* or the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, now presented, for the first, time, in an English translation.”

²⁰ On his life and work, see Jacob Neusner, *Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus: The Tradition and the Man*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1973), and Itzhak D. Gilat, *R. Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus: A Scholar Outcast* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1984).

²¹ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 22–41, refers to this episode as an illustration of the porous boundaries between Judaism and Christianity.

²² Annette Yoshiko Reed, “‘Who Can Recount the Mighty Acts of the Lord?’: Cosmology and Authority in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 1–3,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 80 (2009): 115–41 (116).

and while it is filled with aggadic content typical of Midrashim, it is structurally quite different. The current study argues that PRE is a type of “Rewritten Bible,” part of a chain of unbroken tradition from the Second Temple period that is also reflected in contemporary Muslim and Christian literature.

2.1 Manuscripts and Editions

The textual evidence for PRE is abundant and complicated. *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* is extant in well over a hundred manuscripts. Eliezer Treitl, who has written the most complete treatment of PRE’s textual tradition, lists 109, including primary manuscripts, “mixed” manuscripts, Genizah fragments, other fragments, copies of the printed editions, and adaptations and anthologies.²³ The oldest manuscripts come from the Cairo Genizah and are as early as the eleventh century.²⁴ Most, however, are not earlier than the fourteenth century. Not all this material is of equal value. Many manuscripts are merely copies of printed editions and have no textual value whatsoever. For his electronic synopsis of the text of PRE, Treitl used twenty-four witnesses, only nine of which are complete, while the rest contain major portions of the text.

Treitl divides twenty of his textual witnesses (nineteen manuscripts and the *editio princeps*) into three main branches. The first of these is the א or European (אירופי) branch, for which Treitl adduces nine manuscripts. Friedlander’s English translation was made from a Sephardi manuscript from this family (New York, JTS 10484, Treitl’s 5א). Michael Higger’s widely available edition (included in the Bar Ilan Responsa Project) is also based on a Sephardi manuscript (Rome, Casanatense 258, Treitl’s 4א), with variants from two other manuscripts found in the same library (Rome, Casanatense 1, Treitl’s 2א and Rome, Casanatense 3061, Treitl’s 8א), all of which come from the same family of texts.²⁵

23 Eliezer Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer: Text, Redaction and a Sample Synopsis* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 2012), 43–53 (a list of the manuscripts) and 278–310 (a description of every manuscript) [Hebrew].

24 Very little of the Cairo Genizah material has been published. See Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, “Genizah Fragments of Pirke R. Eliezer,” *Bar-Ilan Annual* 16–17 (1979): 102–11 [Hebrew]. Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 45, is skeptical of the textual value of the Genizah material.

25 This edition was initially published in the periodical *Horeb*: Michael Higger, “Pirke Rabbi Eliezer,” *Horeb* 8 (1944): 82–119; 9 (1946): 94–166; 10 (1948): 185–294 [Hebrew]. On this edition, see Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 408–10, and the critical remarks of Lewis M. Barth, “Is Every Medieval Hebrew Manuscript a New Composition?” in *Agendas for the Study of Midrash in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (Williamsburg: College of William and Mary, 1999), 43–62 (available online at: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/pre-text-editing-project/midrash-study-agenda/>).

Treitl's second branch, ד, consists of only two witnesses, the first printed edition (דפוס) of Constantinople (1514) and a related Sephardi manuscript of the fifteenth or sixteenth century (St. Petersburg, EVR I 249). This textual family is closely related to the European branch. The second printed edition of Venice (1544), which is the basis for most of the printed editions to follow (including David Luria's widely disseminated, though censored, edition and commentary),²⁶ also belongs to this textual family, inasmuch as the Venice edition is based, in large part, on the edition of Constantinople.²⁷ Therefore, the 1544 text, most recently published by Dagmar Börner-Klein alongside her translation, is a witness to this branch.²⁸

Treitl's third branch, ת, consists of nine Yemenite (תימני) manuscripts. The Yemenite branch is separate from the other two branches, even though all three go back to an original prototype. The Yemenite manuscripts, of which two—New York, JTS 3847 (Treitl's 1ת) and New York, Lehman 300 (Treitl's 2ת)—are complete, are generally considered the best texts. They are lacunose, however, whereas the European manuscripts tend to add text. The manuscript JTS 3847 (JTS Enelow 866) is the basis for the electronic text produced by the Academy of the Hebrew Language and is available at the website Maagarim (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx>). Zev Gottlieb, who began a critical edition of PRE but died before its completion, used Lehmann 300 as his base text.²⁹ One of these two manuscripts is likely to serve as the basis for a future critical edition.

Four other manuscripts figure into Treitl's synopsis. Moscow, Ginzberg 1455, which Treitl has given the siglum צ, belongs to the same textual tradition underlying א and ד and so serves as a joining (צירוף) of the two traditions. It is notable as the only manuscript to preserve subdivisions within the chapters. Another solitary manuscript, HUC 75 (Treitl: ס), belongs to the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati (סיניסני). It is an Iraqi (מזרחי) manuscript of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Its relationship to the other branches is not clear, although later hands have restored missing portions of the text by inserting the text of the *editio princeps*.

The two final witnesses, labeled מ by Treitl, belong to mixed (מעורב) textual traditions. The first, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Hebr. 710 (מ), freely combines the texts of families א and ד, at some points copying two versions of the text, one right after the other. It also includes portions of works unrelated to PRE, such as a

²⁶ David Luria, ed., *Sefer Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer from the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer b. Hyrcanos with the Commentary of Radal* (Warsaw: Zvi Jacob Bamberg, 1852).

²⁷ Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 406–7.

²⁸ Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: nach der Edition Venedig 1544*.

²⁹ See Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 43, n. 46, and Steven Daniel Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Renewal of Rabbinic Interpretive Culture* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 12.

chapter of *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* following PRE 29 (PRE 30 in the printed edition). It is of little textual value. The final witness, 22, is one text that has been catalogued as three manuscripts: St. Petersburg EVR II A 275 (the bulk of the text); St. Petersburg EVR II 582 (five pages that became separated); and St. Petersburg EVR II A 493 (a single page). It also copies alternately from 8 and 7.

There is, as yet, no critical edition of PRE. Lewis Barth has summarized the attempts at a critical text, which includes the aforementioned editions of Luria, Higger, Gottlieb, and the Academy of the Hebrew Language.³⁰ The only entry in this short catalogue that I have not yet mentioned is the “Critical Edition” of Haim Meir Horowitz, an annotated copy of the Venice edition that was published by Makor in 1972, long after Horowitz’s death in 1905.³¹ It is not therefore a critical edition or, really, an edition of any sort, but another document indicating Horowitz’s persistent fascination with his text.

The absence of a critical edition means that one must consult all the available textual evidence. This is now extremely easy thanks to Treitl’s online synopsis of PRE, available online as part of the Friedberg Genizah Project (<https://fjms.genizah.org>), under the rubric “Mahadura.” Quotations of PRE in this study come from JTS 3847 (17), which Barth tentatively cited as the *codex optimus*. I have read this manuscript in conjunction with Treitl’s synopsis to check for any major variants.

2.2 Contents and Structure

The discussion of the manuscripts leaves the impression that PRE is too textually unstable to be readable, but this is not the case. Although it is unfinished (an issue that will be addressed below), PRE presents a coherent account of biblical history from creation until the wandering in the wilderness. Typically, the work is divided into fifty-four chapters. The numbering of the chapters varies between manuscript and textual tradition. For example, the 8 family combines the last two chapters. In the printed editions, PRE 18 and 19 are reversed. The end of PRE 23 (Noah dividing the world among his sons) is sometimes found at the beginning of PRE 24. In one manuscript, the first two chapters are not numbered. And so on.³²

The fifty-four chapters fall into ten major parts, which can be described as follows.

³⁰ Barth, “Medieval Hebrew Manuscript.”

³¹ Haim Meir Horowitz, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: A Critical Edition* (Jerusalem: Makor Publishing, 1972) [Hebrew].

³² Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 403–6, gives the chapter divisions of the major manuscripts.

- 1) All complete manuscripts of PRE begin with a prologue (PRE 1–2), explaining how R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, the putative author, became a master of Torah. As Günter Stemberger has noted, Genizah fragments, including the very earliest manuscripts, already have the current chapter numbering, suggesting that these two chapters were already part of the original work.³³ The problem of whether these chapters belonged to the original work will be discussed below.
- 2) The second major section is the Hexameron, the six days of creation described in Gen 1 (PRE 3–11). Two notable subsections here are a long discourse on the calendar (PRE 6–8) on the fourth day (the creation of the sun, moon, and stars) and the story of Jonah and the big fish (PRE 10) attached to the fifth day (the creation of marine animals).
- 3) The creation of Adam on the sixth day (PRE 11) naturally links the second section to the third, the life of Adam and Eve (PRE 12–20; cf. Gen 1–3). In terms of structure, the most significant chapter is PRE 14, which introduces the recurring theme of the ten descents of God. The first of these descents is immediately after Adam's sin, narrated in PRE 13. A large portion of this section is given over to homilies on various subjects, including the doctrine of the two ways (PRE 15) and showing charity to those who rejoice (PRE 16) and to those who mourn (PRE 17). The section ends with several chapters on the celebration of the first Sabbath (PRE 18–20).
- 4) The fourth section, PRE 21–25, follows the descendants of Adam until the time of Abraham. Each chapter deals with a different subject: Cain and Abel (PRE 21), the fallen angels (PRE 22), Noah (PRE 23), the tower of Babel (PRE 24), and Sodom and Gomorrah (PRE 25). Chapters 24 and 25 treat, respectively, the second and third descents of God. Abraham appears briefly in both chapters, anticipating the next section.
- 5) The fifth section (PRE 26–31) is entirely dedicated to the ten trials of Abraham. They are:
 1. Abraham's occultation in infancy (PRE 26).³⁴
 2. The fiery furnace (PRE 26; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 38:6).
 3. The migration to Haran (PRE 26; Gen 11:32).
 4. The famine in Canaan (PRE 26; Gen 12:10).
 5. The abduction of Sarah (PRE 26; Gen 12:10–20 and Gen 20).
 6. The war of the kings (PRE 27; Gen 14).
 7. The covenant between the pieces (PRE 28; Gen 15).

³³ Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 9th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2011), 365–66.

³⁴ This story, abundantly cited in Muslim literature, only appears for the first time in Jewish literature in PRE 26. See Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 109–11 and 151–52.

8. The covenant of circumcision (PRE 29; Gen 17).
9. The expulsion of Ishmael (PRE 30; Gen 21).
10. The binding of Isaac (PRE 31; Gen 22).

The trials of Abraham, a theme as old as the book of *Jubilees* (17:17), is also a recurring theme in rabbinic literature (e.g., *m. Avot* 5:3).³⁵ This section is especially important for dating PRE, since PRE 28 mentions the kingdom of Ishmael while PRE 30 has several additional references to Islam. These will be discussed below.

- 6) Abraham is naturally succeeded by his son Isaac, the subject of the next brief section (PRE 32–34). Chapter 32 follows his life from the Aqedah until the blessing of Jacob (Gen 27). The next two chapters, PRE 33–34, are homilies on the resurrection, for which Isaac is the symbol *par excellence* in later rabbinic literature.³⁶
- 7) With PRE 35, the focus shifts to Jacob and his divine encounter at “Bethel,” here identified as the Temple Mount (Gen 28). The next four chapters (PRE 36–39) cover the rest of his life, with only a fleeting interest in the life of Joseph (Gen 37–50). The descent into Egypt (PRE 39) is counted as the fourth descent of God, who accompanies Jacob and his family.
- 8) Two more “descent” chapters introduce a lengthy section on Moses and the Exodus (PRE 40–48). These chapters narrate the two revelations to Moses at Sinai, the burning bush (PRE 40; Exod 3) and the giving of the Torah (PRE 41; Exod 19–24). The narrative then returns to the crossing of the Red Sea (PRE 42;

35 Lewis Barth has written extensively on this subject: Lewis M. Barth, “The Image of Sarah in Trial Four of a Lektion for the Second Day of Rosh Ha-Shanah,” in *The Bible in the Light of Its Interpreters: Sarah Kalmin Memorial Volume*, ed. Sara Japhet (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994), 157–69 [Hebrew]; Lewis M. Barth, “Genesis 15 and the Problems of Abraham’s Seventh Trial,” *Maarav* 8 (1992): 245–63 [Hebrew]; Lewis M. Barth, “Abraham’s Eighth Trial: A Comparison of Two Versions,” in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division C: Jewish Thought and Literature* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1989), 125–32 [Hebrew]. Lewis M. Barth, “Introducing the Akedah: A Comparison of Two Midrashic Presentations,” in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, ed. Philip R. Davies and Richard T. White (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1990), 125–38; Lewis M. Barth, “Textual Transformations: Rabbinic Exegesis of Gen. 22:14,” in *Bits of Honey: Essays for Samson H. Levey*, ed. Stanley F. Chyet and David H. Ellenson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 3–24. Lewis M. Barth, “Lektion for the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah: A Homily Containing the Legend of the Ten Trials of Abraham,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 58 (1987): 1–48 [Hebrew].

36 See especially Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice*, trans. Judah Goldin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), 30–37. According to Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129, PRE is the first Jewish work to tie Isaac to the theme of resurrection.

- Exod 14–15) and a related homily on repentance (PRE 43; Pharaoh is the penultimate example). From there, the story follows the biblical order: the war with Amalek (PRE 44; Exod 17), the Golden Calf (PRE 45; Exod 32), and Moses' intercession (PRE 46; Exod 33). Chapter 47 skips ahead to the sin of Baal Peor (Num 25), but PRE 48 circles back to the birth of Moses and the first Passover (Exod 1–12).
- 9) The next section, in its turn, passes over the rest of the biblical history to the story of Esther (PRE 49–50). It continues two separate threads introduced in the previous section 1) the enmity between Israel and Amalek, encapsulated in the person of Haman, a descendant of Amalek (PRE 49; cf. PRE 44); and 2) the significance of Passover, when the events of Esther take place (PRE 50). In this sense, Esther is a logical sequel to the story of Passover in PRE 48.
 - 10) The final section (PRE 51–54) is a potpourri. Chapter 51, on the new creation, would have been a fitting conclusion. It is followed, however, by a homily on the seven wonders of old (PRE 52) and a sermon against slander (PRE 53–54), which takes as its primary example the story of Miriam and Aaron's challenge to Moses' leadership (Num 12). Their rebellion occasions God's eighth descent.

In the manuscripts, the work abruptly ends with the following note (JTS 3847, f. 155a).

R. Jose said: If a man hires a diligent worker, discharges him, and gives him his full salary, what praise will they accord him? But if he hires a lazy man, discharges him, and gives him his full salary, to this one they will accord praise. Thus Solomon said before the Holy One, Blessed be He, "Master of all the worlds! Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were diligent workers. You gave them their full salary, from their own merit you gave it to them. But us? We are lazy workers. When you heal us, give us our full salary. Indeed, the whole world will praise you and bless you, saying, "Blessed are you, LORD, who heals the sick of his people Israel" (PRE 54).

As it stands, the narrative leaves the Israelites stranded in the wilderness, before the crossing of the Jordan or even the death of Moses.

The printed editions of Constantinople and Venice do not even have this ending. The text cuts off mid-sentence, leading to the suspicion that the original ending is missing. Solomon Wertheimer published a complete version of the last chapter from a manuscript,³⁷ but other mysteries abound. Both Luria³⁸ and Horowitz³⁹

37 Solomon Aaron Wertheimer and Abraham Joseph Wertheimer, eds., "The Last Chapter of Pirke Rabbi Eliezer," in *Batei Midrashot: Twenty-Five Midrashim Published for the First Time from Manuscripts Discovered in the Genizoth of Jerusalem and Egypt* (Jerusalem: Ktav va-Sepher, 1968) 1: 225–26 (introduction) and 238–43 (text) [Hebrew].

38 Luria, *Sefer Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, "Introduction to Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer," 13a–13b.

39 Haim Meir Horowitz, "Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, or: A Critical Introduction to Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer," *Hamagid* 24 (1879): 62, 70, 78, 86, 94, 102, 110, 118, 126, 134, 142, 150, 158, 166, 174, 182, 190, 206, 214, 222, 230, 238–39 (222 and 230) [Hebrew].

collected alleged quotations of the work that do not correspond with the surviving text. One manuscript of *Pseudo-Seder Eliyahu Zuta* (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina 3122 [De Rossi 1240]) features seven chapters of a work entitled *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, but their content does not complete the story of the Torah, as one might expect.⁴⁰ Nor, according to Treitl, are these chapters written in the author's signature style.⁴¹ Three additional chapters, called "Chapters of the Descents," do belong to PRE.⁴² They are versions of PRE 39–41: the fourth, fifth, and sixth descents of God. Therefore, they correspond to material that is already known from the work. No other text has come to light that could be recognized as the work's proper ending.

Two structural deficiencies suggest that, instead of a lost ending, the work is simply incomplete. The first is the recurring motif of the ten descents of God, introduced in PRE 14 and the subject of PRE 24, 25, 39, 40, 41, 46, and 54. The last chapter only reaches the eighth descent. Thanks to PRE 14, we know the occasion of the last two descents. God would appear a second time at the tent of meeting in the wilderness (though the exact circumstances are uncertain) and a final time in the future, presumably in the messianic era.

The second unfinished structural element is the insertion of blessings from the Amidah (the eighteen blessings, the central prayer of the synagogue liturgy) into the narrative. Leopold Zunz identified blessings in the following chapters: PRE 27 (the shield of Abraham), PRE 31 (resurrection of the dead), PRE 35 (sanctification of the name), PRE 40 (understanding), PRE 43 (repentance), PRE 46 (forgiveness), PRE 51 (redemption), and PRE 54 (healing).⁴³ The citations follow the blessings of the Amidah in their sequential order. Treitl, however, noted some problems with Zunz's analysis.⁴⁴ Two of the blessings (forgiveness and redemption) are not explicit. Two more (sanctification and healing) are not present in all the manuscripts. Finally, PRE 10 alludes to the thirteenth blessing (of the righteous; in this context, righteous converts) in its closing lines, meaning that the blessings are not necessarily in sequence. The lack of consistency suggests that the author had not yet figured out how to incorporate all the blessings of the Amidah into the work.

⁴⁰ Meir Friedmann, ed., *Pseudo-Seder Eliahu Zuta (Derech Ereç und Pirkê Rabbi Eliezer)* (Vienna: Achiasaf, 1904), 26–49 [Hebrew].

⁴¹ Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 29. He also notes that there were many other works attributed to R. Eliezer besides PRE. See Haim Meir Horowitz, "Open Letter," *Beilage zum Beth Talmud* 1 (1880): 1–24 (1–10) [Hebrew].

⁴² Friedmann, *Pseudo-Seder Eliahu Zuta*, 50–56.

⁴³ Leopold Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt* 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1892), 285, n. a. See also the table in Adelman, *Return of the Repressed*, 265–68.

⁴⁴ Treitl *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 33–39.

As Treitl and others have speculated, the “lazy worker” in the extant ending could be a coded reference to the author himself, who abandoned his work.⁴⁵

Despite the reservations of earlier scholars such as Gerald Friedlander,⁴⁶ recent scholars accept the essential unity of the composition, including Jacob Elbaum,⁴⁷ Rachel Adelman,⁴⁸ Steven Daniel Sacks,⁴⁹ Eliezer Treitl,⁵⁰ and Katharina Keim.⁵¹ The coherence of the work does not necessarily imply a single author, although this is generally understood. All these scholars point to the repetition of key ideas and phrases as well as the use of organizing principles such as lists (e.g., the ten descents and the blessings of the Amidah). Despite this consensus, a few issues about the work’s structure and organization remain unresolved. One of these is whether the opening chapters of the work (PRE 1–2), recounting the story of R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, is part of the original composition or a later addition. Another unresolved mystery is why the chapters are not always arranged in chronological order. This has, in my opinion, never been satisfactorily explained.

The first issue is the prologue, the story of R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus. The story is traditional. It was not invented by PRE, and it has several rabbinic parallels: *Genesis Rabbah* 41(42),⁵² *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan–A* 6, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan–B* 13, and *Midrash Tanhuma Buber, Lekh Lekha* 10.⁵³ The text of PRE 1–2 is closest to *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan–B* 13. It appears, in fact, that ARN-B was the direct source for PRE 1–2.

Friedlander doubted the originality of these chapters due to several manuscripts that begin with PRE 3 or else numbered the chapters as if PRE 1–2 were not present.⁵⁴ Treitl demolished his arguments.⁵⁵ The first manuscript Friedlander referred to, British Library 27089, is not a full manuscript but an excerpt of the

45 Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 39; Katharina E. Keim, *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer: Structure, Coherence, Intertextuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 71.

46 Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, xv–xviii.

47 Jacob Elbaum, “Rhetoric, Motif, and Subject-Matter—Toward an Analysis of Narrative Technique in *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 13–14 (1991): 99–126. [Hebrew].

48 Adelman, *Return of the Repressed*, 23–25.

49 Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity*. The whole book treats the subject.

50 Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 176–200.

51 Keim, *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*. The whole book treats the subject.

52 It is chapter 42 of the printed edition but chapter 41 in the critical edition of Julius Theodor and Hanoach Albeck, eds., *Midrash Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1912–1936), 1:397–99.

53 Dina Stein, *Maxims Magic Myth: A Folkloristic Perspective of Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), 115–68 [Hebrew].

54 Friedlander, *Pirkê de-Rabbi Eliezer*, xvi.

55 Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 24.

hexameral portion of the work. It therefore should not be expected to have the first two chapters. The same is true of the *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (Oxford, Bodleian Libraries Hebr. d. 11), which likewise begins with the Hexameron from PRE 3–11.⁵⁶ The numbering of the chapters tells us nothing, since the chapters are not always numbered consistently, and in at least one manuscript (St. Petersburg EVR I 249, Treitl's 2ד), the prologue is not numbered at all—but it is still part of the text.

Treitl suggested, with some hesitancy, that PRE 1–2 is the work of the original author.⁵⁷ Even though it is taken ultimately from ARN–B 13, the author has not adopted the text directly but rewritten it according to his own style. One phrase in particular, “that bursts forth and brings out water” (שהוא נובע ומוציא מים) is missing from ARN–B 13 but recurs in PRE 5 and PRE 33. Treitl makes a similar observation regarding PRE 13 (the sin of Adam and Eve) and ARN–B 1, where PRE turns the phrase “he was thinking to himself” (היה נותן בינו לבין עצמו) into the synonymous phrase (דן דין נחש בינו לבין עצמו), which the author reuses in PRE 10, PRE 41, and PRE 45.

A further examination of PRE 13 and ARN–B 1, on the serpent's temptation of Eve, reveals that *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* does, in fact, know ARN–B and has freely reworked the text. Placing the two sections in parallel columns illustrates this point. Some of the material from ARN–B (quoted from the text of the oldest manuscript, Ms. Parma 2785 [De Rossi 327], as printed in the synoptic edition of Hans-Jürgen Becker), has been rearranged to facilitate comparison.⁵⁸ For the same reason, I have also eliminated those portions of text in ARN–B which have no parallel in PRE.

PRE 13 (JTS 3847, f. 102a–102b)

[140] מ"ל ה"ד למלך שנשא אשה והשליט אותה באבנים טובות ומרגליות טובות ואמ' לה כל מה שיש לי בידך חוץ מחבית זו שהיא מלאה עקרבים נכנס זקן אחד אצלה כגון שואל חומץ אמ' לה מה המלך נוהג בד

ARN–B 1 (Parma, De Rossi 327, ff. 57b–58a)

[140] ר' אומ' למה היתה חוה דומה באותה שעה למלך שנשא אשה והשליטה על הכסף ועל הזהב ועל כל מה שיש לו ואמ' לה הרי כל שלי נתון בידך חוץ מן החבית זו שהיא מלאה עקרבים נכנסה אצלה זקנה אחת כגון אילו שואלות חומץ אמרה לה מה המלך נוהג עמך

⁵⁶ See Jerahmeel b. Solomon, *The Book of Memory, that is, The Chronicles of Jerahmeel: A Critical Edition*, ed. Eli Yassif (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 2001), 75–86. For a translation, see Jerahmeel b. Solomon, *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel: Or, The Hebrew Bible Historiale*, trans. Moses Gaster (1899; repr. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 5–19.

⁵⁷ Treitl *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 25–26.

⁵⁸ Hans-Jürgen Becker, ed., *Avot de-Rabbi Natan: Synoptische Edition beider Versionen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 319–321. I selected this manuscript out of the four witnesses in the synopsis because it is the one Becker himself used for his translation: Hans-Jürgen Becker, trans., *Avot de-Rabbi Natan B* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

[1.41]= אמרה לו יפה המלך נוהג בי כל מה שיש לו הרי הוא ביד חוץ מחבית זו שהיא מלאה עקרים אמ' לה והלא כל מה שיש למלך הרי הוא בחבית זו והלא קוסמין שלמלך אינו אלא בחבית זו מפני שהוא מבקש לישא לו אשה אחרת ולתנה לה

[1.42]= כך המלך זה אדם ואשה זו חוה ושואל חומץ זה נחש ועליהם הוא אומ' שם נפלו פועלי און דחו ולא יכלו קום

[1.30]= דן דין נחש בינו ובין עצמו אמ' אם אני הולך ואומ' לאדם יודע אני שאינו שומע לי מפני שהאיש לעולם קשה שנ' והאיש קשה אלא הרי אני הולך ואומ' לאשה שאני יודע שהיא שומעת לי שהנשים נשמעות לכל אדם שנ' פתיות ובל ידעה מה הלך הנחש ואמ' לאשה אף אתם מצווין על פירות האילן אמרה לו הין שנ' מפרי העץ אשר בתוך הגן כיון ששמע הנחש מתוך דבריה שלחוה מצא פתח לכנס בו

[1.35b]= אמ' לה והלא אין צווי זה אלא עין רעה שבשע' שאתם אוכלין ממנו תהיו כמוהו אלהות מה הוא בורא עולמות אף אתם יכולין לברות עולמות מה הוא ממית ומחיה אף אתם יכולין להמית ולהחיות שנ' כי יודע אלהים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע

[1.33–34]= הלך הנחש ונגע באילן והיה האילן צווח ואומ' רשע אל תגע בי שנ' אל תבואני רגל גאווה ויד רשעים אל תנידני

[1.35a]= הלך הנחש ואמ' לאשה הרי אני נגעת באילן ולא מתי אף את הגעי בו לא תמותו

[1.37]= הלכה חוה ונגעה בו באילן וראתה מלאך המות בא כנגדה אמרה אוי לי עכשיו אני מתה והק'ב'ה עושה אשה אחרת ונותנה לאדם הראשון אלא הרי אני גורמת לו שיאכל עמי אם נמות נמות שנינו ואם נחיה נחיה שנינו ולקחה ואכלה מפירות האילן ונתנה לו ואכל שנ' ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל

[1.41] אמרה לה יפה המלך נוהג עמי שהשליטני על הכסף ועל הזהב ועל כל מה שיש לו אמ' לי הרי כל שלי נתון בידך חוץ מן החבית הזו שהיא מלאה עקרים אמרה לה והלא כל קוזמיה שלו נתון בתוכה אלא שהוא מבקש לישא לו אשה אחרת ונתנם לה שלחה ידה ופתחה את החבית ונשכוה עקרים ומתה

[1.42] המלך זה אדם אשה זו חוה שואל חומץ זה הנחש שנ' והנחש היה ערום מכל חית השדה וכל כך למה שלא היה אדם הראשון יכול לעמוד במצוה קלה שפיקדו המקום

[1.30] היה הנחש נושא ונותן בינו ובין עצמו ואומ' [אם אלך אצל אדם ואומר לו יודע אני שאינו שומע לי אלא אלך]⁵⁹ לחוה שאם יודא שהיא שומעת לי שהנשים נשמעות לכל אדם הלך ואמ' לה אף כי אמ' אלהים לא תאכלו אמרה לו הן מכל עץ הגן נאכל ומפרי העץ אשר בתוך הגן כיון ששמע הנחש את דבריה של חוה מצא פתח ליכנס בו

[1.35b] תדעי לך שאין זו אלא רוע עין מה הוא אם בשעה שאתם אוכלים ממנו מה הוא יכול לבראות עולם אף אתם יכולין ליברות עולם מה הוא ממית ומחיה אף אתם יכולין להמית ולהחיות שנ' כי יודע אלהים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו

[1.33–34] הלך ונטל מפירותיו ואכל ויש אומ' כיון שאחז בו הרתיע ונטל מפירותיו ואכל ויש אומ' כיון שראה אילן את הנחש בא כנגדו אמ' לו רשע אל תיגע בי שנ' אל תבואני רגל גאווה ויד רשעים אל תנידני וכן הוא אומ' שם נפלו פועלי און דחו ולא יכלו קום

[1.35a] הלך ואמ' לה הרי נגעת בו ולא מתי אף את אם נגעת בו אינך מתה

[1.37] ויש אומ' כיון שאכלה חוה מפירותיו של אילן ראת מלאך המות שבא כנגדה אמרה דומה אני כאילו שאני מסתלקת מן העולם וסוף לבריא אחרת להבראות לאדם הראשון תחתי מה אני עושה גורמת אני לו שיאכל עמי שנ' ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאשה עמה ויאכל

59 Lacuna supplied by Ms. Munich 222 (following Becker, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan B*, 10).

[=1.38] כיון שאכל מפירו האילן נפקחו עיניו וקהו שניו אמ' לה מה הוא זה שהאכלתיני שעניי נפקחו ושני קהו עלי שכשם שקהו שני עלי כך יקהו שני כל הדורות

[1.38] ויש אומ' כיון שאכל אדם הראשון מפרותיו של אילן התחילו עיניו מתפקחות עליו ושניו קהות בתוך פיו אמ' לה חוה מה הוא זה שהאכלתיני המן העץ אשר צויתך לבלתי אכול ממנו האכלתיני שהרי עיני מתפקחות עלי ושניו קהות בתוך פיו אמ' לה כשם שקהו שיני כך יקהו שיני כל הדורות

Here is my translation of both passages.

PRE 13 (JTS 3847, f. 102a–102b)

[=1.40] To what can this be compared? To a king who married a woman and gave her precious stones and pearls. He said to her: “Everything that belongs to me is now in your hands, apart from this barrel that is filled with scorpions.” An old man visited her like one who asks for vinegar. He said to her, “How does the king treat you?”

[=1.41] She responded: “The king treats me well. Everything that is his he has placed in my hands, except for this barrel that is full of scorpions.” He said to her, “Is not everything which belongs to the king in this very barrel? The king’s jewelry is not anywhere but in this barrel, because he seeks to marry another woman and give it to her!”

[=1.42] The king is Adam, the woman is Eve, and the vinegar beggar is the serpent. About them it is said: “There the evil-doers have fallen and cannot rise again” (Ps 36:13).

[=1.30] Thus the serpent deliberated with himself, saying, “If I go and speak to the man, I know that he will not listen to me because the man is always harsh, as it is written, “The man is harsh” (1Sam 25:3) Therefore, I shall go and speak to the woman, for I know that she will listen to me

ARN-B 1 (Parma, De Rossi 327, ff. 57b–58a)

[1.40] Rabbi said: To what can Eve be compared in that hour? To a king who married a woman and gave her authority over the silver and the gold and all that he possessed. He said to her: “Behold, all that is mine is given to you, except for this barrel that is full of scorpions.” An old woman entered her house like those who ask for vinegar. She said to her: “How does the king deal with you?”

[1.41] She said to her, “The king treats me well! He has given me authority over the silver and the gold and over everything that is his. He said to me, ‘Behold, all that is mine is given to you, except for this barrel that is full of scorpions.’” She said to her, “Are not all of his jewels inside it? He is seeking to marry another woman and give them to her!” She stretched forth her hand and opened the barrel. The scorpions stung her, and she died.

[1.42] The king is Adam. The woman is Eve. The vinegar beggar is the serpent. As it is written, “The serpent was craftier than all the beasts of the field” (Gen 3:1). What was the reason for all this? Because Adam was not able to obey a light commandment that God had given him.

[1.30] The serpent was thinking to himself and said, “[If I go to Adam and speak to him, I know that he will not listen to me, but I shall go] to Eve. I know she will listen to me, for women listen to everybody.” He went and said to her: “Is it true that God said you shall not eat of any tree of

as women listen to everyone, as it is written, “She is simple and without knowledge” (Prov 9:13). The serpent went and said to the woman: “Have you also been commanded concerning the fruits of the tree?” She said to him: “Yes.” As it is written, “From the fruit of the tree which is in the garden [God said you shall not eat of it and you shall not touch it, lest you die]” (Gen 3:3). When the serpent heard these words of Eve, he found an opening to enter in.

[=1.35b] He said to her: “This commandment is nothing but the evil eye, for in the hour that you eat of it, you will become divine like him. Just as he creates worlds, so too will you be able to create worlds. Just as he puts to death and brings to life, so too you will be able to put to death and bring to life,” as it is written, “Because God knows that in the day you eat of it, you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5).

[=1.33–34] The serpent went and touched the tree, and the tree was screaming and saying, “Wicked one! Don’t touch me!” As it is written, “Do not let the foot of the proud come against me nor the hand of the wicked drive me away” (Ps 36:12).

[=1.35a] The serpent then went and said to the woman, “Behold, I touched the tree and did not die. Just the same, if you touch it, you will not die.”

[=1.37] Eve went and touched the tree. She saw the Angel of Death coming against her and said, “Woe is me! Now, I will die, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, will make another woman and give her to the First Adam. Therefore, I must convince him to eat with me. If we die, we shall die together. And if we live, we will live together.” She took and ate the fruit of the tree, and she gave it to him, and he ate, as it is written, “And she also gave it to her husband with her, and he ate it” (Gen 3:6).

the garden?” She said to him, “Yes, from every tree of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, [God said you shall not eat of it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die]” (Gen 3:3). When the serpent heard the words of Eve, he found an opening to enter in.

[1.35b] [He said to her:] “Know that this is nothing but the evil eye. In the hour that you eat of it, just as he can create a world, so shall you be able to create a world. Just as he can put to death and to bring to life, so shall you be able to put to death and bring to life,” for it is written, “Because God knows that on the day you eat of it [you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil]” (Gen 3:5).

[1.33–34] He went and took some of the fruit and ate. Some say that when he seized it, he recoiled. Nevertheless, he took some of the fruit and ate. And some say that when the tree saw the serpent come against it, it said to him, “Wicked one! Don’t touch me!” As it is written, “Do not let the foot of the proud come against me nor the hand of the wicked drive me away” (Ps 36:12). Thus it says: “There the evil-doers have fallen and cannot rise again” (Ps 36:13).

[1.35a] He went and said to her, “Behold! I have touched it, and I did not die. All the same, if you touch it, you shall not die.”

[1.37] And some say that when Eve ate the fruit of the tree, she saw the Angel of Death, who came against her. She said, “I seem to be departing from the world. In the end, another will be created for the First Adam in my place. What shall I do? I shall make him eat with me.” As it is written, “She took the fruit and ate, and she also gave it to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6).

[=1.38] When he ate the fruit of the tree, his eyes were opened and his teeth became dull. He said to her: “What is this that you have made me eat, that my eyes are opened and my teeth have become dull?! For as my teeth are now dull, so shall the teeth of all generations be dull.”

[1.38] Others say when the First Adam ate the fruit of the tree, his eyes began widening, and his teeth became dull in his mouth. He said to her, “Eve, what is this that you made me eat? Is it from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat? You made me eat it, and now my eyes are widening, and my teeth are dull within my mouth.” He said to her, “Just as my teeth have become dull, so shall the teeth of all generations.”

The two passages are far from identical, but they are clearly related. Several sections from ARN-B 1 are missing in PRE 13. The first two textual units (ARN-B 1.31 and 1.32) are asides about the usefulness of the serpent if it had not been cursed. A comment about Adam as Eve’s lord (ARN-B 1.36) is also absent. Finally, one of the two parables (ARN-B 1.39) is gone. The second parable, about the woman and the barrel of scorpions (ARN-B 1.40–42), is now placed at the beginning of the section. It serves as a bridge between the first half of PRE 13 and the ARN-B material in the second half: The parable in PRE 13 is immediately preceded by another parable comparing a man possessed by a demon to the wicked angel Sammael’s control over the serpent. This is an invention of PRE; no earlier rabbinic work links the devil to the serpent. Despite the differences, the two passages are remarkably similar. The serpent chooses Eve because of the same weakness and convinces her to transgress with the same arguments. Each work has also chosen the same unintuitive proof-text (Ps 36:12–13).

If it is clear that the two passages are related, it is equally clear that PRE has derived this passage from ARN-B. First, the parable of the king, his wife, and the beggar in PRE 13 is truncated to the point of incoherence; the wife’s reaction to the beggar and the consequences are never disclosed. Second, in PRE 13 Eve sees the Angel of Death *before* she eats from the tree, while ARN-B 1 more logically presents her as seeing the angel *after* she eats. Most importantly, the context of ARN-B 1 is a discussion of “placing a hedge around the Torah,” that is, observing the commandments more stringently than necessary. Eve reports that she was told that she could not even touch the forbidden tree (Gen 3:3), but this is not what God told Adam (Gen 2:17). The discrepancy is the “opening” the serpent enters to seduce Eve. The retelling of Genesis 3 in PRE does not necessitate this observation. Another telling point: Sammael, the dominant character at the beginning of PRE 13, has been completely absorbed into the character of the serpent in the second part. This is because Sammael is not in the source text. In other words, PRE 13, an integral part

of PRE, uses ARN-B. Therefore, the author of PRE had access to ARN-B and adapted PRE 1–2 from this work.⁶⁰

The importance of this conclusion is that PRE 1–2 is part of the fundamental plan of the work and not a later addition. Its presence strongly implies—though it does not outright state—that R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus is the author of the entire work. The prologue presents Eliezer as a new Moses, who rose from intellectually humble beginnings, learned the most basic prayers (the Shema, the Amidah, the Grace after Meals), and eventually became a master of Torah who astounds the nobility of Jerusalem. The discourse which follows (beginning with PRE 3) is written in R. Eliezer's voice and constitutes the body of his teaching. The frame narrative gives the work a catechetical dimension. I will return to this subject in the discussion of genre.

The second issue is why PRE mostly, but not always, follows the chronological order of Scripture. The use of the blessings of the Amidah and especially the ten descents as structural features shows that the arrangement of the chapters is not just chronological but thematic. In general, the narrative follows the order of the Torah, and digressions both narrative (Jonah, Esther) and non-narrative (the homilies in PRE 15–17 and PRE 33–34) are linked to the themes in the Pentateuchal narrative. Jonah, for instance, is explicitly linked to the creation of marine animals on the fifth day. Esther's story, which takes place over Passover (implicitly in the Bible but explicitly in PRE) follows the story of the first Passover. The homilies attached to Adam and Eve—following the story of their marriage (PRE 12), their sin (PRE 13), and its calamitous consequences (PRE 14)—address the *apropos* themes of choosing good over evil (PRE 15) and providing charity to those who rejoice (PRE 16) and those who mourn (PRE 17). Isaac, who is resurrected in PRE 31, is connected to the two homilies on resurrection in PRE 33–34.

The chronological disruptions in the Pentateuchal narrative are entirely the result of one structural element, the theme of the ten descents. Clusters of “descent” chapters are twice used as bridges between major units. In the first case, PRE 24 (Babel) and PRE 25 (Sodom and Gomorrah), the descents link the time of Noah to the time of Abraham. Abraham himself even appears briefly in both chapters, but they are formally separate from the sequence of the ten trials. In the second case, three descent chapters (PRE 39–41) provide the transition from Jacob to Moses. This decision has pushed the logical first chapter—the birth of Moses and the first Passover

⁶⁰ These are far from the only instances where PRE may have used ARN-B. They share several lists, such as what Adam did every hour he was in Paradise (PRE 11; ARN-B 1 and 42), the punishments allotted to Adam, Eve, the serpent, and the earth (PRE 14; ARN-B 42), the ten words of creation (PRE 3; ARN-B 36); the ten trials of Abraham (PRE 26–31; ARN-B 36); the objects planned before creation (PRE 3; ARN-B 37), and even the ten descents of God (PRE 14; ARN-B 37). See also Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 160, for a parable derived from Prov 13:20 found in both PRE 25 and ARN-B 11.

(PRE 48)—to the end of the section, but the chapters in between (PRE 42–47) follow biblical chronology. For that matter, the very last chapter, the eighth descent, also disturbs biblical chronology, since the last major event from the Torah is the sin at Baal Peor (Num 25; PRE 47), but the last chapter covers Miriam's slander (Num 12). Without the interruptions of the descent chapters, the internal chronology would be more consistent. This rearrangement of material is typical of "Rewritten Bibles," and that too will be addressed in the section below on genre.

2.3 Date

Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer is traditionally attributed to Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, the tannaitic Sage, but this attribution was not altogether uncritical. In the sixteenth century, Abraham Zacuto, in *Sefer Yuhasin*, could state breathlessly—on the same page!—that later Sages wrote PRE (much like later Sages, and not Simeon bar Yohai, wrote the *Zohar*) and that Eliezer b. Hyrcanus was the author of PRE.⁶¹ Zunz, the first to critically examine the work, deduced that it could not have been written before the Islamic period.⁶² Although Zunz was opposed by Haim Meir Horowitz,⁶³ his opinion has won the day, and for good reason. The work contains numerous, though cryptic, references to early Islamic history.

First, PRE 28—the covenant between the pieces (Gen 15)—introduces the traditional motif of the four kingdoms. The fourth kingdom, even in other parts of the work (e.g., PRE 35), is traditionally Edom, a cipher for the Roman Empire. In PRE 28, the fourth kingdom is Ishmael—the Muslim caliphate. The chapter includes a passage about the duration of the four kingdoms lasting for a little less than a millennium. Zunz and others have attempted to date the work based on the clues provided by this passage.⁶⁴ Expectedly, researchers attempting to decipher the date in an apocalyptic text have arrived at different, contradictory conclusions. The meaning might be teased out after establishing the date by other means, but the passage alone cannot be used as proof.

Similarly, PRE 30 tells the tale of Abraham's visit to Ishmael and his encounter with Ishmael's two successive wives, 'Ā'isha and Fāṭima. This story, though not the names of the wives, is frequently found in Islamic literature. 'Ā'isha (the wife

⁶¹ Abraham Zacuto, *Sefer Yuhasin ha-Shalem*, ed. Herschell Filipowski (London, 1857), 56 [Hebrew].

⁶² Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 289.

⁶³ Horowitz, "Open Letter," 16–19.

⁶⁴ Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 289 (729 CE); Friedlander, *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer*, 200, n. 6 (832 CE); Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel: From the First through the Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), 39–40 (620 CE).

of Muḥammad and the daughter of Abu Bakr, the first caliph in Sunni Islam) and Fāṭima (the daughter of Muḥammad and the wife of ‘Alī, the first Imam in Shi’a Islam) are portentous names in Islamic history. It is impossible that they are coincidental. Again, some scholars have tried to tease out the hidden meaning behind these names to determine the date of PRE, with mutually exclusive results.⁶⁵

Finally, PRE 30 ends with a list of fifteen signs the “Ishmaelites” will perform, including measuring the land, constructing buildings on the Temple Mount, and establishing the rule of two brothers. Once again, this passage has been the subject of diverse interpretations. The measuring of the land has been attributed to both the Umayyad and the ‘Abbāsid periods.⁶⁶ The construction on the Temple Mount has been identified as both the mosque of ‘Umar and the structure that eventually replaced it, the Dome of the Rock.⁶⁷ The prophecy of the two brothers has raised the most colorful interpretations. Heinrich Graetz proposed that they were al-Amīn (r. 193–198 AH/809–813 CE) and al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218 AH/813–833 CE), the warring sons of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁶⁸ Others have suggested a whole range of other candidates.⁶⁹

In the end, the internal evidence, on its own, can only tell us that the work belongs to the early Islamic period. A more precise date requires examining PRE’s latest sources (the *terminus post quem*) and its earliest citations (the *terminus ante quem*). For the *terminus post quem*, four sources are worthy of discussion, even if

65 For Gordon Newby, the story indicates the author’s sympathy for extremist Shi’ite sects from the early eighth century. For Ute Bohmeier, it is a reference to the Fāṭimid dynasty founded two centuries later. See Gordon Newby, “Text and Territory: Jewish-Muslim Relations 632–750 CE,” in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, ed. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 83–96, and Ute Bohmeier, *Exegetische Methodik in Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser, Kapitel 1–24: Nach der Edition Venedig 1544, unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008), 460.

66 Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099*, trans. Ethel Broido (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 295 (the time of al-Ma’mūn, r. 813–833); Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Volume III: Heirs of Rome and Persia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 163 (the time of Mu’āwiya, r. 661–680).

67 Silver, *Messianic Speculation*, 40 (Mosque of ‘Umar); Newby, “Text and Territory,” 89 (Dome of the Rock).

68 Heinrich Graetz, “Die mystische Literatur in der gaonäischen Epoche,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 8 (1859): 67–78, 103–18, 140–53 (112, n. 5).

69 Silver, *Messianic Speculation*, 41 (Mu’āwiya, the first Umayyad caliph, and his brother Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān); Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 316 (‘Abd al-Malik, who built the Dome of the Rock, and his brother ‘Abd al-‘Azīz); Newby, “Text and Territory,” 89 (Yazid III and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Walīd, the penultimate Umayyad caliphs); Bernard Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1950): 308–38 (al-Saffāh and al-Manṣūr, the first ‘Abbāsid caliphs). Lewis’ proposal is the one that best fits the other data.

they are not of equal value in determining the time of PRE's redaction. They are, in order of their probable dates of composition: *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan-B*, the *She'iltot* of R. Ahai Gaon, the *Secrets of Simeon bar Yohai*, and the *Baraita de-Samuel*. All these potential sources were likely written in the eighth century.

The previous section of this chapter discussed the strong possibility that PRE made use of ARN-B. The problem is the date of the latter document. Anthony Saldarini posited an upper date of about 700 for ARN-B based on the alleged citation of the work in the *She'iltot*,⁷⁰ while Menahem Kister gave a broader range of the eighth or ninth century.⁷¹ In truth, we do not know precisely when this work was written.

The *She'iltot* is not much better as a witness to PRE's date. It is a collection of homilies linking the talmudic halakhah to scriptural pericopes. The author, R. Ahai, is believed to have been an emigrant from Babylonia to Palestine, where he died around the year 752 CE.⁷² At least one passage of this work parallels PRE. *She'ilta* 11 has an extended narrative about Cain and Abel that includes two motifs also found in PRE 21.⁷³ First, the offerings of Cain and Abel are used as the justification for the law of *sha'tnez*, the prohibition of mixing flax and wool (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:11): Cain's paltry offering consisted of a few flax seeds, but Abel brought the wool of his flocks. The corresponding portion of PRE 21 is similar in substance, although the wording is different. Similarly, in *She'ilta* 11, two birds teach Cain the art of burial after Cain has killed Abel. In PRE 21, Adam and Eve, rather than Cain, are the ones who bury the corpse that Cain had abandoned in the field. The story of birds demonstrating how to bury Abel is widely known in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, including the Qur'an (Q 5:31).⁷⁴ It is almost always Cain who buries Abel to hide his crime. The version in PRE is secondary. In light of the uniquely Jewish concern about *sha'tnez*, PRE reads like a reworked version of the tradition in the *She'iltot*.

70 Anthony J. Saldarini, *Scholastic Rabbinism: A Literary Study of the Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 138.

71 See his introduction in Menahem Kister and Solomon Schechter, eds., *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan – Solomon Schechter Edition: With References to Parallels in the Two Versions and to the Addenda in the Schechter Edition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997), 13.

72 For basic information, see Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 202–15.

73 Ahai Gaon, *She'iltot de-Rav Ahai Gaon: A Critical and Annotated Edition*, ed. Samuel K. Mirsky, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1959) 1:82–85 [Hebrew].

74 For a multitude of other examples, see Christfried Böttrich, “Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben”: Überlieferungen zu Abels Bestattung und zur Ätiologie des Grabes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995).

Two factors call into question the originality of this passage. First, *She'iltot* 11 is written in Hebrew, while the rest of the work is written in Aramaic. The second factor is decisive. According to Robert Brody's study of the redaction of the *She'iltot*, the story of Cain and Abel is found in only two manuscripts of late provenance.⁷⁵ The passage is taken *verbatim* from *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Bereshit* 9–10 (of the “printed” recension). *Midrash Tanhuma* is a complicated work that, in its own transmission history, has borrowed from the *She'iltot* as well as PRE.⁷⁶ Consequently, it is difficult to state unequivocally that PRE has used *Midrash Tanhuma* and even more difficult to date that work, which has evolved over time. This problem will come up again in the next chapter.

Another potential late source is the *Secrets of Simeon bar Yohai*,⁷⁷ part of a cycle of literature about Jewish responses to the earliest Arab rulers that includes the *Prayer of Simeon bar Yohai*⁷⁸ and the *Midrash of the Ten Kings*.⁷⁹ All three are “historical” apocalypses that read the early history of Islam through a Jewish lens. Graetz first used the *Secrets* as a potential key to unlocking the Jewish history of the early Islamic period.⁸⁰ The kings mentioned in the *Secrets* follow an identifiable historical sequence up to the end of the Umayyad period. Graetz thought that it was written in 750, the year of the ‘Abbāsid revolution. He was opposed by Steinschneider, who thought that the historical references were too imprecise to reflect a contemporary writer.⁸¹ Horowitz, who published the *Midrash of the Ten Kings*, was also skeptical, believing that the cycle originated in the time of the Crusades.⁸² Bernard Lewis reconciled these views.⁸³ The core of the cycle was an apocalypse that originated at the very end of the Umayyad period and was regularly updated with new political crises: the ‘Abbāsid revolution, the rise of the Fāṭimids, and the

75 Robert Brody, *The Textual History of the She'iltot* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1991), 118, n. 4 [Hebrew].

76 Marc Bregman, *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of the Versions* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003), 8–9 [Hebrew].

77 Adolph Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der älteren jüdischen Literatur*, 6 vols. (Leipzig and Vienna, 1853–1877), 3:78–82 [Hebrew].

78 Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 4:117–126.

79 Haim Meir Horowitz, ed., *Beth Eked ha-Aggadot* (Frankfurt am Main: Elimelech Slovotsky, 1881), 38–55 [Hebrew].

80 Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 11 vols., (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1853–1875), 5: 489–97.

81 Moritz Steinschneider, “Apocalypsen mit polemischer Tendenz,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 28 (1874): 627–59 (635–47).

82 Horowitz, *Beth Eked ha-Aggadot*, 24.

83 Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History,” 308–38.

Crusades. In his reading of the *Secrets*, he refined the identification of the kings to include not only the last of the Umayyads but the first 'Abbāsid rulers.

The *Secrets*, but not the other two apocalypses, includes a *logion* about what the Ishmaelites will do after conquering the land. It is, appropriately enough, attributed to R. Ishmael. It reads like an earlier version of the fifteen signs at the end of PRE 30, which has given rise to so much speculation about the date of the composition. In particular, the *Secrets* anticipates the earlier, negative signs (signs 1 and 2) and the later, positive ones (signs 11–14). The middle signs are vague.

PRE 30 (JTS 3847, f. 118a)

ר' ישמעאל אומ' חמשה עשר דברים עתידין בני
[ישמעאל לעשות] בארץ באחרית הימים ואלו
הן [1] ימדדו את הארץ בחבלים [2] ויעשו בית
הקברות מרבץ צאן אשפתות ימדדו מהן ובהן על
ההרים [3] וירבה השקר [4] ויגנו האמת [5] וירחק
חוק מִישראל [6] ותרבה עניות בישראל [7] ויתערב
שני התולעת בצמר [8] ויקמל הנזר והקמוס [9]
ויפסל סלע מלכות [10] ויבנו את הערים החרובות
[11] ויפנו הדרכים [12] ויטעו גנות ופרדסים [13]
ויגדרו פרצות חומות בית המקדש [14] ויבנו בנין
בהיכל [15] ושני אחים יעמדו עליהם נשיאים

Rabbi Ishmael said: In the future the children [of Ishmael will do]⁸⁵ fifteen things in the Land in the last days, and these are: [1] They will measure the land with ropes; [2] They will turn cemeteries into pastures for sheep and garbage heaps; they will measure from them and on them upon the mountains. [3] Falsehood will multiply; [4] Truth will be hidden; [5] Law will be removed from Israel; [6] Poverty will increase in Israel; [7] Crimson worm will become mixed in wool; [8] Paper and pen will decay;⁸⁶ [9] They will exchange the currency of the kingdom;⁸⁷ [10] They will rebuild the ruined cities; [11] They will clear the roads. [12] They will plant gardens and orchards

*Secrets of Simeon bar Yohai*⁸⁴

ועוד היה רבי שמעון אומר ששמע מרבי
ישמעאל כיון ששמע שמלכות ישמעאל בא
עחידין למדד הארץ בחבלים שנאמר והארץ
יחלק במחיר ועושים בתי קברות מרעה לצאן
וכשימות אדם מהם קוברים אותו בכל מקום
שהם מוצאים וחוזרין וחורשין הקבר וזורעים
אותו שנאמר ככה יאכלו בני ישראל את לחמם
טמא מפני מה שאין בית הפרס נידש [. . .]
המלך השני שיעמוד מישמעאל יהיה אוהב
ישראל ויגדור פרצותיהם ופרצו' ההיכל וחוצב
הר המוריה ועושה אותו מישור כולו ובונה לו שם
השתחויה על אבן שתיה שנאמר ושים כסלע קנד

And R. Simeon said that he heard from R. Ishmael that he heard that the kingdom of Ishmael would come in the future to measure the land with ropes, as it is written, "he will divide the land for a price" (Dan 11:39). And they will turn cemeteries into pastures for sheep. When a man among them dies, they bury him in any place that they find. Then they will return and plow the grave and sow seeds in it, as it is written, "The children of Israel will eat their bread impure" (Ezek 4:13) because the impure fields are not known. [. . .] The second king that will arise from Ishmael will be a lover of Israel. He will repair their breaches and the breaches of the sanctuary, and he will excavate Mount;

⁸⁴ Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3:78–79.

⁸⁵ Lacuna supplied from Ms Lehmann 300.

⁸⁶ Following a suggestion of John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postbiblical Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 71, n. 27.

⁸⁷ See Reeves, *Trajectories*, 71, n. 25.

[13] They will repair the breaches in the wall of the Temple; [14] They will build a building in the place of the sanctuary; [15] And two brothers—princes—will rule over them.

Moriah and make all of it straight. He will build for himself there a place of prayer over the Foundation Stone, as it is written, “Place your nest above the rock” (Num 24:21).

The omitted passage in the *Secrets of Simeon bar Yohai* is a prophecy of Balaam regarding the Kenites (Num 24:21), identified with the Arabs, who will enslave Israel. *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* features the same oracle of Balaam, though focusing on the next two verses (Num 24:22–23). The chapter explains how Kedarites, descendants of Ishmael, inherited the land of the Kenites. Balaam himself makes a cryptic statement about how Israel and Ishmael are the only two nations who bear the name of God (“El”), and this similarity is somehow a portent of woe. The two passages are different in substance yet share the same viewpoint: Balaam predicted the Arab conquests.

Again, we are not seeing a direct lift but a reworking where PRE has taken an older tradition, reworded it, and even expanded it. *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* not only drew from this cycle of literature. It also contributed to it. The kings in the *Midrash of the Ten Kings* are not the early caliphs but the ten kings who ruled from one end of the world to the other. The list of kings in the apocalyptic work is identical to the one found in PRE 11.

A final source that may have been used by PRE is the *Baraita de-Samuel ha-Qatan*. It is a short astronomical treatise that was first mentioned by Shabbatai Donnolo in the tenth century.⁸⁸ It was subsequently lost until its fortuitous rediscovery and publication in 1861.⁸⁹ In the intervening centuries, a *Baraita de-Samuel* was cited alongside PRE in the works of Judah ha-Levi (*Kuzari* IV.29) and Abraham b. Hiyya (*Sefer ha-Ibbur* II.2 and II.4). These references led modern scholars to think that the two works were somehow related, especially since PRE 6–8 is, indeed, a major digression on the courses of the sun and moon and the rules for fixing the calendar. Herschell Filipowski, who edited *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, believed that the two works were, in fact, identical.⁹⁰ Senior Sachs, opposing Filipowski, saw PRE as an

⁸⁸ Shabbatai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakhmoni: Introduction, Critical Text, and Annotated English Translation*, ed. and trans. Piergabriele Mancuso (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 230: “From these books I realized that the whole of the science of the planets and constellations was based on the Barayta of Samuel the Wise, for the books of the gentiles, too, agree with it, but he has made his book very difficult to understand.” See also the introduction: 14, 23, and 35–36.

⁸⁹ Nathan Amram, ed., *Baraita de-Samuel ha-Qatan* (Thessaloniki, 1861) [Hebrew].

⁹⁰ Abraham b. Hiyya, *Abraham Bar Chyiah the Prince on the Mathematical and Technical Chronology of the Hebrews, Nazarites, Mahommetans, etc.*, ed. Herschell Filipowski (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), xiii [Hebrew].

aggadic compendium of world history in which a later redactor inserted an astronomical section from an entirely different work.⁹¹

When the *Baraita* was finally published, it was revealed to be quite different from PRE 6–8. The two, though broadly covering similar themes, have no textual overlap. Zunz believed that the material from PRE 6–8 was later incorporated into the *Baraita*, resulting in the confusion between the two in the Middle Ages.⁹² Haim Yehiel Bornstein had the opposite opinion. He believed that PRE distilled the ideas of the *Baraita*.⁹³ In principle, Bornstein's theory is more logical. It is more likely that an encyclopedic work like PRE summarized the obscure and difficult *Baraita* than that the *Baraita* expanded upon a work dedicated mainly to biblical history. This does not mean, however, that PRE used the *Baraita* as a source.

The two documents do share one important element in common: a lunation error. *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 7 and *Baraita de-Samuel* 5 both state that the length of the lunar month is twenty-nine days, twelve hours, and two-thirds of an hour. This calculation is only approximate. Not long after the eighth century, the correct calculation of twenty-nine days, twelve hours, and 793/1080 of an hour became standard in the rabbinic calendar.⁹⁴

To our good fortune, the *Baraita* provides a date that gives some insight into its origin. All of its calculations stem from the year 4536 *anno mundi* (776 CE), when the lunar and solar new years coincided, representing the conditions at the time of creation. With an improper lunation, the deficiency of this calendar would have become apparent within thirty years. Sacha Stern believed that this calendar was “fictitious,” reflecting a ceremonial rather than practical role.⁹⁵ With Katharina Keim, I find this hard to believe, since the calendars of *Baraita de-Samuel* and PRE, despite their inaccuracies, are unduly complicated (compare the elegant, though inaccurate, 364-day solar calendar of *Jubilees*).⁹⁶ Whether PRE used the *Baraita*, however, remains speculative.

91 Senior Sachs, “Bemerkungen über das gegenseitige Verhältnis der Beraita des Samuel und der Pirke de R. Eliesar,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 1 (1852): 277–82.

92 Leopold Zunz, “Die Baraita Samuels,” *Hebraeische Bibliographie* 5 (1862): 15–19.

93 Haim Yehiel Bornstein, “The Dispute of Rav Saadya Gaon and Ben Meir on Fixing the Calendar, 922–924 CE,” in *Jubilee Volume for Nahum Sokoloff* (Warsaw: Shuldberg, 1904), 19–189 (177–78) [Hebrew].

94 Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, Second Century BCE–Tenth Century CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 186, 203–4.

95 Sacha Stern, “Fictitious Calendars: Early Rabbinic Notions of Time, Astronomy, and Reality,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 87 (1996): 103–29.

96 Keim, *Pirke deRabbi Eliezer*, 157–59. See also: Katharina E Keim, “Cosmology as Science or Cosmology as Theology? Reflections on the Astronomical Chapters of Pirke deRabbi Eliezer,” in *Time*,

All four of these potential sources—ARN-B, the *She'iltot* (or, rather, *Midrash Tanhuma*), the *Secrets of Simeon bar Yohai*, and the *Baraita de-Samuel*—point to the eighth century as the date of composition. The strongest case, the *Secrets of Simeon bar Yohai*, indicates the middle of the century.

The earliest external reference to PRE is generally agreed to be the epistle of Pirqoi ben Baboi, a document found in the Cairo Genizah. There are other alleged citations of PRE from approximately the same time, but none of them are above the suspicion of an interpolated text. In addition to these, there is another witness, even earlier than Pirqoi ben Baboi, which has not been fully considered: the *paytan* Pinhas ha-Cohen.

The earliest possible citation of PRE is in *Massekhet Soferim*, one of the “extracanonical” tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, written sometime in the eighth century. *Soferim* 19:9 cites, in the name of Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, a tradition concerning two Temple gates that Solomon built for (respectively) bridegrooms and mourners (PRE 17).⁹⁷ Treitl has identified this citation as a later addition since it interrupts the sequence of thought and otherwise has nothing to do with the passage.⁹⁸ An addition to the tractate, published by Michael Higger, contains further material related to PRE, but this is not part of the original.⁹⁹

Another example of an interpolation is found in the legal compilation *Shibbolei ha-Leket* of Zedekiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe (13th century), who cites the *Halakhot Gedolot* attributed to R. Simeon Qayyara, a ninth-century Geonic legal code, as a source of information about the custom of placing a chair for Elijah during the circumcision, a custom that is first attested in PRE (and is cited as such by Zedekiah).¹⁰⁰ The cited passage is not found in *Halakhot Gedolot*. Zedekiah has mistakenly copied the passage from another legal code, the *Or Zaru'a* of Isaac b. Moses of Vienna (d. 1250).¹⁰¹

Astronomy, and Calendars in the Jewish Tradition, ed. Sacha Stern and Charles Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 41–63.

97 Michael Higger, ed., *Massekhet Soferim* (New York: Debe Rabbanan, 1937), 335 [Hebrew].

98 Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 3–4.

99 Higger, *Massekhet Soferim*, 365–72. This section mentions that Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, is Og of Bashan and was given to him by Nimrod (PRE 16). It also states that Aseneth is the daughter of Dinah (PRE 38).

100 Zedekiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe, *Sefer Shibbolei ha-Leket ha-Shalem*, ed. Solomon Buber (1866; repr., New York: Makon Sura, 1966), 376 (*Halakhot Milah* §6) [Hebrew]. For *Halakot Gedolot*, see Brody, *Geonim*, 223–30.

101 See Ezriel Hildesheimer, ed., *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot ad fidem codicum edidit, prolegomnis et notis instruxit*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1971), 1: 215, n. 30. See footnote 1 for the citation from *Or Zaru'a*.

Yet another problematic early citation occurs in the first Jewish prayerbook, *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*.¹⁰² Amram b. Sheshna was a Babylonian authority who lived in the later part of the ninth century (d. 875). The relevant part of his prayerbook is a *responsum* from another ninth-century authority, R. Natronai bar Hilai (d. ca. 858). The *responsum* refers to PRE 20 and its rendition of the *havdalah* ceremony. Natronai calls into question the necessity of looking at one's fingernails against the *havdalah* light during the ceremony, a practice advocated by PRE. Prayerbooks are susceptible to interpolation, but if the *responsum* is authentic (regardless of its place in the prayerbook), it is still not the earliest reference to PRE.¹⁰³

This brings us back to Pirqoi ben Baboi, a pro-Babylonian pamphleteer and zealous follower of Yehudai Gaon (d. ca. 760), who wrote his missive to warn the Jews of North Africa against following Palestinian customs, which had, in his opinion, become gradually corrupted over centuries of Christian persecution.¹⁰⁴ He identifies himself as the student of a student of R. Yehudai and claims that five centuries have passed since the beginning of Byzantine rule in Palestine. Both factors have led scholars to place his *floruit* around the year 800. The relevant citation appears at the beginning of the fragments published by Louis Ginzberg. It appears to be a citation of the opening lines of PRE 3, the proper opening of the entire book.

PRE 3 (JTS 3847, f. 81a.)

רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס פתח ואמ' מי ימלל
גבורות יי' וכי יש לך אדם שהוא יכול למלל
גבורתו שלהק' ב'ה' ולהשמיע כל תהלתו אף
מלאכי השרת אינן יכולין לומ' ואינן יודעין אלא
מקצת גבורתו שלהק' ב'ה'

Pirqoi ben Baboi¹⁰⁵

אמר ר' אלעזר מאי דכת' מי ימלל גבורות מי
שיכול להשמיע כל תהלתו שאפילו מלאכי
השרת אינם יכולים להשמיע כל תהלתו

¹⁰² Nachman Nathan Coronel, ed., *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Kaltar, 1865). 1:32a [Hebrew].

¹⁰³ See Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 3, n. 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁴ The major studies of Pirqoi include: Jacob Mann, "Les «Chapitres» de Ben Bâboi et les relations de R. Yehoudaï Gaon avec la Palestine," *Revue des Études Juives* 70 (1920): 113–48; Jacob Nahum Epstein, "Sur les «chapitres» de Ben Baboi," *Revue des Études Juives* 75 (1922): 179–86; Benjamin M. Lewin, "Geniza Fragments," *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 383–410 [Hebrew]; Shalom Spiegel, "On the Polemic of Pirqoi ben Baboi: From the New Series of the Cambridge Genizah," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, ed. Saul Lieberman, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 2: 243–74 [Hebrew]; Louis Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter II: Geonic and Early Karaitic Halakah* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1929), 504–73 [Hebrew]; Neil Danzig, "Between Eretz Israel and Bavel: New Leaves from Pirqoi ben Baboi," *Shalem* 8 (2008): 1–32 [Hebrew]; Robert Brody, *Pirqoy ben Baboy and the History of Internal Polemics in Judaism* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2003) [Hebrew]. For a general overview, see Brody, *Geonim*, 113–17.

¹⁰⁵ Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies*, 544–45.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus began his discourse and said: “Who can recount the mighty acts of the LORD?” (Ps. 106:2). Is there one among you who can recount the mighty acts of the Holy One, Blessed be He? Or to proclaim all his praise? Even the ministering angels are not able to say, and they know but a small portion of the mighty works of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

Rabbi Eliezer said: What is written here? “Who can recount the mighty acts [of the LORD?]” (Ps 106:2). Who is able to proclaim all his praise? Even the ministering angels are not able to proclaim all his praise.

Steven Daniel Sacks drew attention to a parallel passage in the Talmud (*b. Megillah* 18a), likewise an exegesis of Ps 106:2 placed in the mouth of R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus.¹⁰⁶ It reads: “R. Eliezer said: What is the meaning of the verse, ‘Who can recount the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can proclaim all his praise?’ (Ps 106:2). [It means:] For whom is it fitting to recount the mighty acts of the LORD? For the one who can proclaim all his praise.”¹⁰⁷ The absence of the angels, found in both PRE and Pirqoi’s epistle, is notable here.

Annette Reed found another parallel in the *Chapter of R. Nehunyah ben ha-Qanah*, a *hekhalot* text. Again, it takes the form of an exegesis of Ps 106:2. Reed translates the passage as follows: “Chapter of Rabbi Nehunyah ben ha-Qanah, which he taught to R. Ishmael. Who can recount the mighty acts of the LORD? (Ps 106:2) And who is able to announce the praise of the King of kings of kings? These are the ministering angels!”¹⁰⁸ In addition to having a different tradent, this saying makes exactly the opposite point of the opening of PRE: The angels can recount God’s mighty deeds after all! Therefore, Pirqoi seems to be preserving a tradition original to PRE.

The earliest writer to use PRE as a source might be R. Pinhas ha-Cohen, who shares with PRE a detailed knowledge of Palestinian customs. Unlike the earliest *paytanim*, such as Yose b. Yose, Yannai, or Qallir, the date of Pinhas is approximately known. In one of his poems, Pinhas refers to a fast commemorating a major earthquake that afflicted Palestine in 749 CE.¹⁰⁹ He therefore wrote sometime after this

¹⁰⁶ Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity*, 2, n. 3.

¹⁰⁷ My translation from the Vilna Shas: *Talmud Bavli*, 37 vols. (Vilna: Widow and Brothers Romm, 1880–1886).

¹⁰⁸ Reed, “Mighty Acts,” 124.

¹⁰⁹ See Yoram Tsafrir and Gideon Foerster, “The Dating of the ‘Earthquake of the Sabbatical Year’ of 749 CE in Palestine,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55 (1992): 231–35.

date, though not too long after: Saadia Gaon (d. 942) classes him among the “ancient poets” (including Yose, Yannai, and Qallir) rather than the “poets of our time.”¹¹⁰

Shulamit Elizur, the editor of Pinhas’ poetry, has noted several instances where the *paytan* unequivocally alludes to aggadic matter known from PRE.¹¹¹ The Shunamite woman visited by Elisha is identified as the sister of Abishag, the Bible’s other Shunamite woman (PRE 33). Isaac gives Abimelech, king of the Philistines, part of his saddle as a sign of a covenant between them (PRE 36). The right horn of the ram sacrificed in Isaac’s place will be blown at the time of redemption (PRE 31). The angels rejoice with Adam and Eve at the occasion of their wedding (PRE 12). Not only this, but Pinhas mentions many customs of Palestinian origin which are otherwise attested for the first time in PRE.¹¹² Among these are burying the foreskin in the dust at the time of circumcision and blowing the shofar in the month of Elul. The most remarkable similarity, however, is the calendar.¹¹³ Pinhas’ *Qiddush Yerahim* is, along with PRE, the first Jewish source to attest to the 19-year calendrical cycle. They are also the first to introduce the idea of the “secret of intercalation” (סוד העיבור) the knowledge of when to add an additional month to the year, a right reserved (according to these sources) to the Jewish authorities in Palestine.

Elizur presumes that PRE is older than the work of Pinhas, whom she believes lived in the latter half of the eighth century. She cannot state whether Pinhas used PRE as a source. Instead, she claims that they shared the same worldview, the result of living in the same area (Palestine; see the next section) and writing at approximately the same time. There are, however, undeniable links between the two, connections that are far stronger than between PRE and other *piyyutim* (see the next chapter). Although the subject requires further study, there are some clues that the *paytan* might depend directly on PRE. The covenant between Isaac and the Philistines is part of a longer section in PRE 36, where each of the patriarchs makes a covenant with the “people of the land” that David later annulled through his conquests. In isolation, the tradition about Isaac (which also appears in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Gen 26:31) does not make much sense. Pinhas ha-Cohen’s calendrical knowledge is also superior to PRE’s. Like PRE, Pinhas knows the 19-year lunar cycle, but he also knows the precise calculation of the lunar month, which

¹¹⁰ Yannai, *Mahzor Yannai: A Liturgical Work of the VIIIth Century*, ed. Israel Davidson (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1919), xlv, from *Sefer ha-Agron*, written in 913.

¹¹¹ Pinhas ha-Cohen, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Pinhas ha-Cohen: Critical Edition, Introduction and Commentaries*, ed. Shulamit Elizur (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2004), 201, n. 29 [Hebrew].

¹¹² Elizur, *Pinhas ha-Cohen*, 222–23.

¹¹³ Elizur, *Pinhas ha-Cohen*, 232–33.

PRE conspicuously does not know.¹¹⁴ Based on these two items, it seems that Pinhas wrote later than PRE. If, in the end, Pinhas used PRE, it would be invaluable for dating the work, providing us with a very narrow window between the earthquake of 749 and the composition of Pinhas' liturgical poetry.

Based on the above data, PRE appears to have been composed sometime between 750 and 800 CE.

2.4 Provenance

Most scholars today would agree that PRE was composed in Palestine. Among other reasons, the work is written in Hebrew (rather than Aramaic), is primarily aggadic in character (rather than halakhic), cites (with very few exceptions) only Palestinian Sages,¹¹⁵ and approves of Palestinian customs, tracing their origin back to the biblical period. Nevertheless, the scholarly consensus has not always been unanimous.

Zunz refrained from identifying a precise place of composition, offering the broad suggestions of Syria, Palestine, or even Asia Minor.¹¹⁶ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, opinions were varied. Max Grünbaum observed that the work was written under "Arabian rule" ("arabischer Herrschaft") which is not quite the same as saying that it was written in Arabia.¹¹⁷ Samuel Krauss used PRE 30 as a source for Byzantine history (though not explicitly saying that the work itself was Byzantine).¹¹⁸ Joseph Jacobs and Schulim Ochser, writing for the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–1906), claimed that the work was composed in Italy in the early ninth century, citing Isaak Marcus Jost as their authority.¹¹⁹ Finally, Adolf Büchler, in at least two articles, attempted to show that the work was composed in Babylon by appealing to certain halakhic opinions in the work.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Stern, *Calendar and Community*, 203–4.

¹¹⁵ Horowitz, "Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer," 182.

¹¹⁶ Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 290.

¹¹⁷ Max Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden: Brill, 1893), 124–25.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Krauss, *Studien zur byzantisch-jüdischen Geschichte* (Vienna: Verlag der Israelitisch-Theologischen Lehranstalt, 1914), 145.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Jacobs and Schulim Ochser, "Pirke de-Rabbi Eli'ezer," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 10:58–60. They cite Isaak Marcus Jost, *Geschichte des Judenthums und Seiner Sekten*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1857–1859), 2:35, n. 2.

¹²⁰ Adolf Büchler, "Les Dosithéens dans le Midrasch. L'interdit prononcé contre les Samaritains dans les Pirké di R. Eliézer, XXXVIII, et Tanhouma, Va-Yeshev §3," *Revue des Études Juives* 42 (1901): 50–71; Adolf Büchler, "Das Schneiden des Haares als Strafe der Ehebrecher bei den Semiten," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 19 (1905): 91–138.

Each of these propositions is wanting for different reasons. The story of Abraham's visit was well-known throughout the Muslim world and is not exclusively "Arabian."¹²¹ Krauss connects the end of PRE 30 to Muslim attempts to conquer Constantinople (first in 674–678, then in 717–718) and other *realia* reflecting the end of Byzantine rule in Palestine, such as new buildings and the change in currency. The conquest of "Rome" is a *topos* of Muslim eschatology.¹²² The author of PRE need not have lived in Asia Minor to be aware of this topic or the other dramatic social changes occurring in his day. Jacobs and Ochser, citing Jost, are undermined by Jost's own position. The nineteenth-century historian points to the *Baraita de-Samuel* and the Islamic elements in PRE 30 as proof of the work's late date, the second of which also points to an Islamicate milieu. Jost does not say anything about Italy, nor is there any reason why Italy should be favored above other options. Jacobs and Ochser interpret the end of PRE 30 as speaking of the Muslim attack on Rome in 830, but there was no such attack on Rome in that year.

Büchler's argument for a Babylonian origin depends on customs mentioned in PRE that reappear in Babylonian sources of the Geonic period: banning Samaritan proselytes (PRE 38) and cutting an adulterous woman's hair (PRE 14). These customs are indeed found in Babylonian sources. The ban on Samaritan proselytes is in *Halakhot Gedolot*,¹²³ while shaving the head of an adulteress is found in *Halakhot Ketuvot*, a legal code attributed to Yehudai Gaon.¹²⁴ The reference to these practices in Babylonian sources does not make them Babylonian. Büchler's attempts to locate anti-Samaritan rulings in Babylonia rather than in the Samaritan heartland seems particularly forced.¹²⁵ Supporters of Babylonian hegemony—such as Pirqoi ben Baboi—frequently cite Palestinian customs in their works. It is these customs, above all, which indicate that PRE is a Palestinian work.

Both Zunz¹²⁶ and Horowitz¹²⁷ made lists of the Palestinian customs found in PRE. Horowitz' list is the direct basis for the one that appears in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.¹²⁸ Treitl gives a succinct list of general customs (the prohibition of women

121 Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 76–79.

122 David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002), 54–66.

123 Hildesheimer, *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, 2:522.

124 Yehudai Gaon, *Halachoth Kezuvot attributed to R. Yehudai Gaon*, ed. Mordecai Margulies (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1942), 123 [Hebrew].

125 The ending of PRE 38 contains a violent anti-Samaritan polemic that could be offered as a confirmation of PRE's provenance if the evidence were not already overwhelming. See Hagith Sara Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 136, n. 97.

126 Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 288.

127 Horowitz, "Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer," 214.

128 Jacobs and Ochser, "Pirke de-Rabbi Eli'ezer," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 10:59.

from working on the New Moon; punishing adulterous women by shaving their heads), customs specific to Palestine (examining virgins with the finger; blessing a bride under a *chuppah*; standing on one's feet during Yom Kippur; circumcising over earth instead of water); and customs which seem to be unique to PRE (rejoicing over bridegrooms and comforting mourners in the synagogue; setting a chair for Elijah at the time of circumcision; blowing the shofar on the New Moon of Elul).¹²⁹ Adelman dedicated an entire section of her book to the study of these customs,¹³⁰ while Adiel Kadari has made two special studies of the *havdalah* ceremony.¹³¹

Some of these customs differed from Babylonian observance. An anonymous work, *Hilluf Minhagim*, describes fifty or so variations between Palestinian and Babylonian customs.¹³² Some of the Palestinian customs are attested in PRE, such as circumcising over earth instead of over water (*Minhag* 17; PRE 29), blessing a bride (*Minhag* 28; PRE 12), or deflowering a virgin with one's finger instead of with "the pipe" (*Minhag* 40; PRE 17).¹³³ This work is purely observational and takes a neutral stance on the discrepancies. Pirqoi ben Baboi, however, had a different perspective. One of his many grievances against Palestinian practice was combining the Shema (Deut 6:4) and the Qedushah, a prayer based on Isa 6:3 and Ezek 3:12.¹³⁴ This is precisely what *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* does at the end of PRE 4.¹³⁵ Another sticking point for Pirqoi was the use of *piyyut*.¹³⁶ *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer's* ties to the work of Pinhas ha-Cohen—to say nothing of the author's likely use of other *paytanim*—firmly places his work in Palestine.¹³⁷

In addition to affirming Palestinian customs, PRE engages in a direct polemic against Babylonian authority. Chapter 8 maintains that Palestinian Sages are the guardians of a "secret of intercalation" (סוד העיבור), which permits them to know when to insert an additional month into the Jewish lunar calendar. The secret was

129 Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 239–40. Blowing the shofar in Elul also appears in the work of Pinhas ha-Cohen.

130 Adelman, *Return of the Repressed*, 141–208.

131 Adiel Kadari, "Narrative and Normative: Havdalah in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 21 (2014): 136–52; Adiel Kadari, "A Blessing and its Midrash: Liturgical Formulas as an Interpretive Key in Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer," in *Jewish Prayer: New Perspectives*, ed. Uri Ehrlich (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2016), 327–40 [Hebrew].

132 Brody, *Geonim*, 112–13.

133 Mordecai Margulies, ed., *The Differences between the Easterners and the People of Palestine* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1937), 125, 144, and 161 [Hebrew].

134 Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies*, 550–52.

135 Ezra Fleischer, "The Qedusha of the Amida (and Other Qedushot): Historical, Liturgical and Ideological Aspects," *Tarbiz* 67 (1998): 301–50 (338–39) [Hebrew].

136 Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies*, 546–47.

137 See Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 256–66, and the next chapter.

initially given to Adam by God and passed through the generations of biblical worthies. Isaac maintained the secret while Jacob lived with Laban in Mesopotamia. God had to retransmit the secret anew to Moses after the Exodus. During the Babylonian Exile, the captives had to depend on the remnant in the Land of Israel for intercalation. The passage ends with God rebuking Ezekiel for attempting to intercalate the year in Babylon after Ezra and others had already returned from the Exile. The author underlines that the residents of Palestine, however simple they may be, have priority over Babylonians in calendrical matters.

This specific passage from PRE would play a role in future polemics over the calendar. The next to speak of a “secret of intercalation” was Pinhas ha-Cohen in his *Qiddush Yerahim*.¹³⁸ In the year 921–922, Saadia Gaon famously came to blows with one Ben Meir, the head of the Palestinian academy, who cited PRE 8 in a circular letter arguing that only Palestinian authorities had the right to determine the calendar.¹³⁹ Saadia prevailed, but this did not bring an end to the calendar controversy. Two centuries later, Evyatar ha-Cohen, the head of the Palestinian yeshiva (though, ironically, operating out of Tyre because of the Crusades), once more cites PRE 8 and its “secret of intercalation” to justify Palestinian authority over his political rivals in Babylon and Egypt.¹⁴⁰ *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer*, Pinhas, Ben Meir, and Evyatar demonstrate a continuous tradition regarding the “secret of intercalation” as a Palestinian prerogative.

2.5 Genre

The present study, as indicated by its title, views PRE as a kind of “Rewritten Bible.” This decision requires some justification. Ordinarily, PRE would be classed as Midrash, even by those who study the work from another perspective. For example, Stein studied it from the perspective of folklore and mythology,¹⁴¹ while Elbaum

¹³⁸ Stern, *Calendar and Community*, 190.

¹³⁹ Sacha Stern, *The Jewish Calendar Controversy of 921/2 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 230–31 (see also the Babylonian riposte, 362–63).

¹⁴⁰ Moshe Gil, “The Scroll of Evyatar as a Source for the History of the Struggles of the Yeshiva of Jerusalem during the Second Half of the Eleventh Century: A New Reading of the Scroll,” in *Chapters on the History of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages*, ed. B. Z. Kedar and Z. Baras (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1979), 39–106 (91–94) [Hebrew]. For the historical context of this scroll, see Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 326–40 (especially 337–39).

¹⁴¹ Stein, *Maxims Magic Myth*.

examined its apocalyptic elements,¹⁴² and Sacks evaluated (negatively) the claim that PRE was “rabbinic Pseudepigrapha.”¹⁴³ All three consider the work Midrash. At the same time, modern researchers are keenly aware that PRE is not a typical Midrash, and so they sometimes apply a modified label. Hence, Adelman called PRE a “Narrative Midrash,”¹⁴⁴ while Ute Bohmeier classed it as “Philological Midrash.”¹⁴⁵

The most popular modified label for PRE is probably “Late Midrash,” indicating that it represents a paradigm shift in the production of midrashic literature. Elbaum characterized this change as a turn away from verse-by-verse exegesis to narrative, or, as he puts it in another article, a progression “from sermon to story.”¹⁴⁶ In this regard, PRE is often coupled with *Seder Eliyahu*, a collection of sermons with a loose narrative framework that likewise breaks the rules of classical Midrash.¹⁴⁷ Lennart Lehmhaus elegantly summarizes Elbaum’s position, which perfectly encapsulates the ways that PRE differs specifically from classical Midrash.

The important difference in late midrash lies in a superordinate thematic arrangement of the text which diverges significantly from the two major principles of order in earlier midrash. The first guiding principle is realized in several midrashim that display a rather linear reading and exposition of a biblical text. The second principle pertains to a division of midrashic texts which is dependent on external factors, like following elements of the liturgical order, the yearly cycle of holidays, or the sequential reading of the Torah.¹⁴⁸

In the case of PRE, it is abundantly clear what the “superordinate thematic arrangement” of the text is. It is the biblical history itself, as opposed to the biblical text, which is the main organizing principle of classical Midrash, whether homiletical or exegetical. *Seder Eliyahu* also has a superordinate thematic arrangement, but it is not the same: Both PRE and *Seder Eliyahu* might be described as “a col-

¹⁴² Jacob Elbaum, “Messianism in Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer: Apocalypse and Midrash,” *Teudah* 11 (1996): 245–66 [Hebrew].

¹⁴³ Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity*.

¹⁴⁴ Adelman, *Return of the Repressed*, 3–21.

¹⁴⁵ Bohmeier, *Exegetische Methodik*, 6–18.

¹⁴⁶ Jacob Elbaum, “Between Redaction and Rewriting: On the Character of the Late Midrashic Literature,” in *The Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division C: Jewish Thought and Literature* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1985), 57–62 [Hebrew]; Jacob Elbaum, “From Sermon to Story: The Transformation of the Akedah,” *Prooftexts* (1986): 97–116.

¹⁴⁷ In addition to Elbaum, “Between Redaction and Rewriting,” see, Lennart Lehmhaus, “Between Tradition and Innovation: *Seder Eliyahu*’s Literary Strategies in the Context of Late Midrash,” in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Writings*, ed. Klaas Smelik and Karolien Vermeulen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 211–42, and Dina Stein, “Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer and Seder Eliyahu: Preliminary Notes on Poetics and Imaginary Landscapes,” *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 24 (2011): 73–92 [Hebrew].

¹⁴⁸ Lehmaus “Between Tradition and Innovation,” 218.

lection of discourses” (Keim’s preferred designation for PRE), but they have little else in common.¹⁴⁹ An overview of this literature, such as that provided in Günter Stemberger’s *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, gives the impression that “Late Midrash” is amorphous, having similar content (aggadah, that is, non-legal material) but a myriad of forms.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, if “Late Midrash” represents a new paradigm, it did not erase the old one: Arnon Atzmon characterizes several medieval works as “Late Neoclassical Midrash.”¹⁵¹

Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer, then, resembles Midrash with regard to its content (aggadah) but not its form. In fact, it does not always resemble classical Midrash in terms of content either. One notable difference between PRE and Midrash is its focus on biblical matter to the exclusion of any other kind of story, notably the lives of the Sages.¹⁵² Apart from the prologue (PRE 1–2), there is exactly one exception, Resh Laqish and his conversion from a life of banditry (PRE 43). The story is appropriately inserted into a series of *exempla* illustrating the power of repentance and how even the most notorious of sinners can find forgiveness. It also includes an infamous anachronism, since the tale of Resh Laqish, an Amora of the third century, is attributed to Simeon ben Azzai, a Tanna of the second century. This unforced error, though found in every complete manuscript, inculcates doubt about its originality to the work.¹⁵³ The only other passage that departs from the biblical tradition is the account of the death of Titus in PRE 49, part of a discussion of the genealogy of Haman and his connection to the kingdom of Edom (that is, Rome).

Since PRE follows the biblical history rather than the biblical text and privileges biblical matter over other subjects, I have opted to call it a Rewritten Bible rather than a Midrash. I am not the first to make this proposition,¹⁵⁴ though it has

149 Keim, *Pirqa deRabbi Eliezer*, 198. Keim’s views on PRE’s genre are most fully outlined in her entry on PRE for the *Database for the Analysis of Anonymous and Pseudepigraphic Jewish Texts of Antiquity* (<http://literarydatabase.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>), which she co-authored with Philip Alexander. She consistently subordinates PRE’s narrative elements to its discursive elements. For an introduction to the inventory and its methodology, see Alexander Samely, *Profiling Jewish Literature in Antiquity: An Inventory, From Second Temple Texts to the Talmuds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

150 Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 363–88. Appropriately, this section is labeled “Other Aggadic Works” (*Andere Haggadawerke*).

151 Arnon Atzmon, “Old Wine in New Flasks: The Story of Late Neoclassical Midrash,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (2009): 183–203.

152 Elbaum, “Rhetoric, Motif, and Subject-Matter,” 126.

153 Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity*, 75–79, describes the different scholarly attitudes to this passage. He himself defends its placement in the work as thematically appropriate.

154 Notably Joseph Heinemann, “Ancient Legends and their Reworking in *Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer*,” in *Aggadah and Its Development* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 181–99 [Hebrew].

been met with opposition in some quarters. Adelman, notably, opposed the idea that PRE was a Rewritten Bible and found it wanting in light of Philip Alexander's nine criteria for the genre.¹⁵⁵ These nine criteria are, in Alexander's own wording:

- 1) Rewritten Bible texts are narratives, which follow a sequential, chronological order.
- 2) They are, on the face of it, free-stranding compositions which replicate the form of the biblical books on which they are based.
- 3) Despite the superficial independence of form, these texts are not intended to replace or to supersede the Bible.
- 4) Rewritten Bible texts cover a substantial portion of the Bible.
- 5) Rewritten Bible texts follow the Bible serially, in proper order, but they are highly selective in what they represent.
- 6) The intention of the texts is to produce an interpretive reading of Scripture.
- 7) The narrative form of the text means, in effect, that they can impose only a single interpretation on the original.
- 8) The limitations of the narrative form also preclude making clear the exegetical reasoning.
- 9) Rewritten Bible texts make use of non-biblical tradition and draw on non-biblical sources.¹⁵⁶

Adelman's first objection is that PRE does not follow "a sequential, chronological order," in violation of the first criterion. Her second is that PRE does not observe a proper balance between "retelling" and "expansion," a dichotomy that appears in Alexander's comments to his fifth criterion. Her third and final objection is that the use of prooftexts and exegetical questions sometimes make clear the exegetical reasoning. She attaches this to the eighth criterion, but it also applies to the second, where Alexander, in his comments, explicitly says that Rewritten Bibles do not highlight the words of Scripture (unlike Midrash).

Adelman's second objection is purely subjective, but the other two are certainly true of PRE.¹⁵⁷ It does not always follow chronological order, and it makes

¹⁵⁵ Adelman, *Return of the Repressed*, 6–12. See also Rachel Adelman, "Can We Apply the Term 'Rewritten Bible' to Midrash? The Case of *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*," in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Geza Vermes*, ed. József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 177–99.

¹⁵⁶ Philip S. Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Linders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99–121 (116–18).

¹⁵⁷ It is not clear what constitutes a "proper" (versus an "improper") balance of retelling and expansion.

abundant use of prooftexts. Both characteristics, however, are also found in Alexander's four key examples: *Jubilees*, Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, and the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Although Second Temple works are presumed to have been written before the establishment of a closed biblical canon (hence the preference for "Rewritten Scriptures"), some are cognizant of—and defer to—a scriptural canon. The book of *Jubilees*, for example, twice quotes from the "First Law" (*Jub.* 6:22; 30:12), indicating both the authority of that First Law (i.e., the Pentateuch) and that *Jubilees* stands outside of it. Similarly, Josephus never cites Scripture directly but does refer to what he has read "in the sacred books" (e.g., *Ant.* I.82; II.347; III.81; IV.326), while Pseudo-Philo rhetorically asks whether its contents can be verified from the canonical books of Judges and Kings (*LAB* 35:7; 43:4; 56:7; 63:5). Even the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen XV.20) contains the tantalizing phrase "for thus it is written about you" (וְכֵן כָּתִיב עֲלֶיךָ) referring to Noah, but the text unfortunately breaks off.¹⁵⁸ The phrase is a citation formula, the very thing that is not supposed to appear in a Rewritten Bible.

The thrust of Alexander's second point is not that prooftexts and citation formulae are forbidden but that Rewritten Bibles, by reason of their narrative format, are not lemmatic commentaries. A Rewritten Bible is a *texte continué* rather than a *texte expliqué*.¹⁵⁹ Whether the prooftexts in PRE clarify the author's exegetical reasoning is a matter of debate. According to Treitl, the relationship of the text to the prooftexts is often tenuous or even completely extraneous.¹⁶⁰

Similar arguments can be made against Adelman's first objection. The main point of Alexander's first criterion is that Rewritten Bibles are narratives rather than law or poetry. Chronological order cannot be over-emphasized because, once again, all four of his examples break from the sequence of the biblical text. Josephus is the most blatant. He not only breaks chronological order, he informs the reader that he has done so (*Ant.* IV.197; VIII.224). *Jubilees* has a different approach. As Michael Segal has noted, the Hebrew Bible itself does not always follow chronological order, but *Jubilees* will break from the biblical sequence to arrange events chronologically.¹⁶¹ For example, in *Jubilees*, the sale of Joseph (*Jub.* 34; Gen 37)

¹⁵⁸ Daniel A. Machiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13–17* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 63.

¹⁵⁹ This distinction was first made by Charles Perrot and Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon. Les Antiquités bibliques. Tome II. Introduction littéraire, commentaire et index* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976), 24–26.

¹⁶⁰ Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 166–70. See also Elbaum, "Rhetoric, Motif, and Subject-Matter," 126.

¹⁶¹ Michael Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 121–22.

precedes the death of Isaac (*Jub.* 36; Gen 35:29). According to the data supplied by Genesis, Joseph must have been in Egypt when Isaac died. Pseudo-Philo also shuffles around the biblical narrative. He omits episodes (including most of Genesis) only to allude to them later (such as the Aqedah in LAB 32). Even the *Genesis Apocryphon* reflects subtle shifts in the presentation of material.¹⁶²

Alexander's definition of "Rewritten Bible" is not itself sacred scripture. If the body of literature were expanded beyond the four original examples, it surely would need to be refined a little, especially in light of later works that were written after the establishment of a biblical canon. It would not have to be refined by much, however. In the introduction, I identified the "Rewritten Bible" with the "History Bible" of the Middle Ages. These works not only resemble older compositions like *Jubilees* and Josephus, but they are directly dependent on them. Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, the fount of most other History Bibles in Western Europe, makes abundant use of Josephus and—to a much lesser extent—Pseudo-Philo.¹⁶³ The Greek and Slavonic *Palaea* literature use both Josephus and *Jubilees*, though indirectly, via the Greek chronographic tradition.¹⁶⁴ During this time, only the *Genesis Apocryphon* was still lying dormant in a cave.

Rewritten Bibles did not disappear between the Second Temple period and the Middle Ages. Birger Pearson considered several Nag Hammadi texts examples of "Rewritten Scripture," including the *Secret Book of John* (NHC II 1, III 1, and IV 1), the *Nature of the Rulers* (NHC II 4), *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II 5), the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V 5), and even the opaque *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII 1).¹⁶⁵ Of these, the *Secret Book of John* comes closest to fulfilling all of Alexander's criteria, even with regard to its interpretation of Scripture.¹⁶⁶ The *Chronica* of Sulpicius Severus (d. 425), also known as the *Historia sacra*, is an even better example. The author, a Nicene Christian of the late fourth and early fifth century, explained why he composed his work in a preface: His friends wanted a concise summary of bib-

¹⁶² Moshe J. Bernstein, "Re-Arrangement, Anticipation and Harmonization as Exegetical Features in the Genesis Apocryphon," *Dead Sea Discoveries* (1996): 37–57.

¹⁶³ Peter Comestor, *Scholastica Historia: Liber Genesis*, ed. Agneta Sylwan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), xix–xx.

¹⁶⁴ William Adler, "Parabiblical Traditions and Their Use in the *Palaea Historica*," in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Menahem Kister et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1–39.

¹⁶⁵ Birger A. Pearson, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in Gnostic Literature," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 635–52 (647–51).

¹⁶⁶ On this, see David Creech, *The Use of Scripture in the Apocryphon of John: A Diachronic Analysis of the Variant Versions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

lical history. It is a clear antecedent of *Comestor* and indebted to Second Temple sources such as *Josephus* and possibly *Jubilees*.¹⁶⁷

The *Cave of Treasures* is yet another example. It is not an isolated work but an entire cycle of literature. An outer satellite of this cycle is a discourse of Peter to Clement embedded in the Latin and Syriac Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* (I.27–71), called an “ancient Jewish Christian source” by F. Stanley Jones.¹⁶⁸ Peter’s instruction begins with creation, proceeds point-by-point through the narrative material of the Pentateuch, then transitions rapidly to the time of Jesus and the Apostles. Jones identifies *Jubilees* as one of the primary sources of the Petrine discourse, going so far as calling it the “most important source of this text.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, it boasts several key narratives from *Jubilees*, including Noah dividing the world among his sons and the subsequent violation of this arrangement by Canaan’s children, the development of warfare in the generation of Serug, and Abraham being instructed by an angel after deducing the existence of God from watching the stars. At the same time, this work anticipates important motifs in the *Cave of Treasures*, such as a euhemeristic interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 (the “Sons of God” were men, not angels, and anathema on those who think otherwise) and the curious portrayal of Nimrod as the founder of Zoroastrianism. Both points oppose *Jubilees*, which features the Watcher myth and never mentions the person of Nimrod. Perhaps most significantly, certain Arabic and Ethiopic versions of the *Cave of Treasures* (the *Book of the Rolls*; see chapter eight) also use the framework of Peter instructing Clement. The Petrine discourse is therefore an important missing link between older and later examples of “Rewritten Bible.”

One problem persists. “Rewritten Bible” is still a modern scholarly heuristic that would have been unknown to the author of PRE. What did the author think he was writing when he put pen to paper? The answer might be a genre of contemporary Islamic literature, the *Stories of the Prophets* (*Qışaş al-Anbiyā’*).¹⁷⁰ It seems strange

¹⁶⁷ See Sulpicius Severus, *Chroniques*, ed. Ghislaine de Senneville-Grave (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999), 31–33. Of greatest interest here is that Sulpicius Severus gives the Enochic myth of the Watchers and does not attribute Adam and Eve’s fall to Satanic intervention (I.1.1–3). The editor doubts that Sulpicius Severus used *Josephus* (42–43), yet he recounts the fall of Masada (II.30.2), something the author could not have known independently of *Josephus* (but perhaps indirectly, through an intermediary).

¹⁶⁸ F. Stanley Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27–71* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁹ Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source*, 138.

¹⁷⁰ Louis Ginzberg, “Jewish Folklore East and West,” in *On Jewish Law and Lore*, ed. Eli Ginzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 61–73, made a similar proposition long ago. He wrote that PRE “is modeled upon the Arabic collections of Biblical legends in which narrative is emphasized, while a rabbinic Midrash centers interest upon matters exegetical” (72). Aviva

to think of Muslim literature as falling under the category of “Rewritten Bible,” but when one considers that the “Bible” being rewritten is not the sacred text but the sacred history, then that is precisely what the *Stories of the Prophets* are. The *Stories of the Prophets* are histories—or, if one prefers, a series of discourses—covering the pre-Islamic prophets from Adam to Jesus, arranged in chronological order.¹⁷¹

The major difference is that the scripture they are supplementing is the Qur’ān rather than the Bible. Even so, there is a clear dialectic at play between the *Stories of the Prophets* and biblical literature. The Torah and Gospel are revealed scripture in Islam, although their extant versions are considered corrupt (the doctrine of *tahrīf*).¹⁷² The *Stories of the Prophets* are not the original, revealed Scriptures, but they do offer a corrective to the Scriptures in use by Jews and Christians. Despite their “Islamicized” approach to biblical history, the *Stories* themselves occupy a perilous liminal space. By the fourteenth century, they had become synonymous with the term *Isrā’īliyyāt*, spurious Jewish and Christian traditions about biblical history with a semantic range akin to the word “apocrypha.”¹⁷³ The writers of *Stories* certainly employed Jewish and Christian sources to fill in the gaps left by the Qur’ān. One of these sources was the *Cave of Treasures*.¹⁷⁴ The *Stories* are not merely similar in form to older Rewritten Bibles. They are part of a chain of tradition.

Schussman, “Stories of the Prophets in Muslim Tradition: With Special Reference to the *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Kisā’ī” (PhD Dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1981), 91–115 [Hebrew] directly compares PRE to one specific example, the *Stories* of al-Kisā’ī (11th c. or later). In her case, she is arguing for Islamic dependence on a Jewish source.

171 For a recent introduction and general bibliography, see Michael Pregill, Marianna Klar, and Roberto Tottoli, “*Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* as Genre and Discourse: From the Qur’ān to Elijah Muḥammad,” *Mizan: Journal for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations* 2 (2017): 5–44. This article is available online: <https://mizanproject.org/journal-post/qisas-al-anbiya-as-genre-and-discourse/#-text>. The most readily available examples (i.e., the ones that have been translated into English) are: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha’labī, *‘Arā’is al-Majālis fī Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’ or Lives of the Prophets*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Kisā’ī, *Tales of the Prophets (Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’)*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1997), and Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn Burhān al-Dīn al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets (Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’): An Eastern Turkish Version*, ed. and trans. H. E. Boeschoten and J. O’Kane, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

172 See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19–49.

173 Roberto Tottoli, “Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā’īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature,” *Arabica* (1999): 193–210.

174 See Michael Pregill, “*Isrā’īliyyāt*, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy: Wāḥb. B. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 215–84 (245–46), and chapter eight of the present study.

Like PRE, the *Stories of the Prophets* fall somewhere between history (*ta'rikh*) and exegesis (*tafsir*). A *ta'rikh*, such as the compendious chronicles of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310AH/ 923 CE) or al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284 AH/898 CE), will often begin with the stories of the pre-Islamic prophets. A *tafsir* will naturally elaborate on the pre-Islamic prophets since passages related to them constitute at least a fourth of the Qur'ān.¹⁷⁵ However, a *tafsir* has defined formal features—the complete text of the Qur'ān, segmented for commentary, and presented in canonical order¹⁷⁶—which separate it from the *Stories of the Prophets*. It is the form that is different, not the content. Entire collections of *Stories of the Prophets* have been crafted by excerpting material from world chronicles (in the case of Ibn Kathīr)¹⁷⁷ or from *tafsir* (Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī, drawing from the *Tafsir* of al-Ṭabarī).¹⁷⁸ The differences between *tafsir* and the *Stories of the Prophets* is a bit like the difference between classical Midrash and PRE. One is a lemmatic commentary on the sacred text; the other is an account of the sacred history. Both present similar material in different ways.¹⁷⁹

Among the similarities between PRE and the *Stories of the Prophets*, one can observe, first of all, the content (including Abraham's visit to Ishmael), but also certain formal features. The basic textual unit is like the one found in PRE. *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* inverts the structure of classical Midrash. Instead of the interpretation of a biblical verse by one or more rabbis, PRE has individual rabbis offer textual units that gradually form a narrative. Each of these textual units is stamped with a proof-text. This is also the method in the *Stories of the Prophets*, which begins with a tradent and ends with a verse from the Qur'ān. Consider the following example from al-Tha'labī as compared with the analogous passage from PRE, the beginning of the story of Noah (emphases added).

175 For overviews: Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2002); Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

176 Norman Calder, "Tafsir from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 2005), 101–40 (101).

177 Pregill, Klar, and Tottoli, "Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'," 13

178 See the introduction to Muḥammad ibn-Aḥmad ibn-Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2003).

179 This does not mean, however, that the *Stories of the Prophets* are merely *tafsir* with the material rearranged. See the instructive study of Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Al-Tha'labī wrote both a collection of *Stories* and a *Tafsir*, making him an excellent case study of the similarities and differences between the two genres.

PRE 22 (JTS 3847, ff. 106b–107a)

Rabbi Simeon said: From Seth arose and were descended all the generations of the righteous, and from Cain arose and were descended all the generations of the wicked, criminals and rebels who rebelled against their Maker, so that they said, “We do not need the drops of your rain or knowledge of your ways,” as it is written, “They said to God, ‘Depart from us!’” (**Job 21:14**).

Rabbi Meir said: Naked, with their flesh exposed, all the children of the generation of Cain were walking about, men, women, and beasts alike, and they were polluting themselves in every kind of sexual vice: a man with his mother and his daughter, his daughter-in-law or the wife of his neighbor, openly and in the streets. The thoughts of their heart were given over to the evil inclination, as it is written, “Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart [was only constant evil]” (**Gen 6:5**).

al-Tha’labī, ‘Arā’is al-Majālis¹⁸⁰

Ibn ‘Abbās said that there were two clans of the sons of Adam, one of which lived in the plain while the other inhabited the mountain. While the men of the mountain were handsome and their wives ugly, the women of the plain were beautiful, but their husbands were ugly. So Iblis came to one of the men of the plain in the form of a young lad, and hired himself out to him and served him. Iblis took something like the pipe that shepherds play, and made it play a sound unlike anything that had ever been heard. This (sound) reached those about them, and they came to hear him. They made this into a festival on which they would gather (each) year, when the women would display their charms to the men and the men to the women. One of the men from the mountain came upon them while they were celebrating their festival and saw the beauty of the women. He returned to his companions, telling them of this, whereupon they moved down to dwell with them. They began to engage in immoral deeds, as He has said: “Display not your finery, as did the pagans of old” (**Q 33:33**).

Like PRE, al-Tha’labī opens with an authority—Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68 AH/687 CE), the father of Qur’ānic exegesis—and closes the tradition with a proof-text from the Qur’ān. Neither of these elements is strictly necessary for the narrative, but they reinforce the authority of the various traditions. As in PRE, the proof-texts are very loosely connected to the narrative, and the cited authorities are probably invented.¹⁸¹

The use of authoritative tradents underscores an element of Rewritten Bibles that has not yet been fully appreciated: their catechetical function. A common framework for the Rewritten Bible is to place its narrative contents in the mouth of a supreme authority, whether the Angel of the Presence (*Jubilees*), the Apostle Peter (the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*), the Apostle John (the *Secret Book of John*), or Ephrem the Syrian (the *Cave of Treasures*). Even those composing under their own name are writing expressly for the instruction of others. Josephus’ intended audience is a Gentile public with no knowledge of the Hebrew Bible (*Ant.* 1.5–9).

¹⁸⁰ Al-Tha’labī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 92.

¹⁸¹ Claude Gilliot, “Portrait ‘Mythique’ d’Ibn ‘Abbās,” *Arabica* 32 (1985): 127–84; Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 156–57.

Sulpicius Severus wrote for friends who requested a summary of biblical history. Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica* is literally a textbook. Telling *Stories of the Prophets* for religious instruction was one of the duties of the *quṣṣāṣ*, a diverse group of teachers and preachers in early Islam.¹⁸²

Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer shows a similar catechetical intent. The work's use of "small forms," such as biblical citations with commentary, question and answer units, lists, and proverbs make it an ideal learning aid.¹⁸³ In this light, the prologue not only presents R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus as a potential author of the work but as an *exemplum* for others. He is introduced as an ignoramus who studied Torah late in life and did not even know basic prayers like the Shema and the Amidah. The reader (or hearer) will learn both prayers and many other things besides, allowing one to become a master of Torah like R. Eliezer.

Furthermore, PRE has a complicated relationship with homiletic literature. For example, Lewis Barth has published a sermon for the second day of Rosh ha-Shanah on the theme of the Ten Trials of Abraham (attached to late manuscripts of *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*) that bears a striking resemblance to PRE 26–31.¹⁸⁴ Treitl has judged that the sermon depends on PRE,¹⁸⁵ but it could also be reflective of the types of sermons that served as sources for the book. The book itself has certainly been excerpted in this manner.¹⁸⁶

The establishment of the *Stories of the Prophets* as a genre is contemporaneous with the redaction of PRE. The creation of the genre is credited to Wahn ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 112 AH/730 CE), a Yemenite scholar of Jewish and Christian traditions, although his work has been lost.¹⁸⁷ Michael Pregill, with Marianna Klar and Roberto Tottoli, argued that Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150 AH/767 CE), the biogra-

¹⁸² Lyall R. Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 33–38, 90–111.

¹⁸³ On these "small forms": Katharina E. Keim, "The Role of Small Forms in *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*," in *It's Better to Hear the Rebuke of the Wise than the Song of Fools* (Qoh 7:5): *Proceedings of the Midrash Section, Society of Biblical Literature, Volume 6*, ed. W. David Nelson and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2015), 141–66.

¹⁸⁴ Barth, "Lecture for the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah."

¹⁸⁵ Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 227–29.

¹⁸⁶ See Treitl, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 306–10, for a list of excerpts and adaptations in manuscript. These manuscripts include the prologue, the hexameral chapters (PRE 3–11), isolated chapters on the ten descents (such as the "Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer" attached to *Pseudo-Seder Eliyahu Zuta*), the Ten Trials of Abraham, and the story of Esther.

¹⁸⁷ On Wahn, see Raif Georges Khoury, *Wahn B. Munabbih*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972). He believes that parts of Wahn's *Stories* were preserved in later authors. See also Raif Georges Khoury, *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam: Depuis le Ier jusqu'au IIIe siècle de l'Hégire* (Wiesbaden: 1978).

pher of Muḥammad, was the true founder of the genre.¹⁸⁸ His *Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ* was a prologue to the biography proper, which gave a history of the major pre-Islamic prophets, constituting a sort of Muslim “Old Testament.” It too has been lost.¹⁸⁹ The earliest surviving work of the genre is the *Mubtadaʾ al-Dunyā wa-Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* of Ishāq ibn Bishr (d. 206A H/821 CE).¹⁹⁰ Even this is partially lost and preserved in a unique manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Libraries Huntington 388). One of the ironies of history might be that *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* is the first extant *Stories of the Prophets*. Pregill, Klar, and Tottoli even cite PRE specifically as a counter-discourse to the Islamic reading of biblical history offered by the *Stories of the Prophets*.¹⁹¹

2.6 Language

Finally, a word should be said about the language of the composition and the linguistic capacities of the author. *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* is written in an uncomplicated rabbinic Hebrew. There is a minimum of foreign words, which distinguishes PRE from rabbinic compositions of the classical period. Classical rabbinic literature mixes Aramaic and Hebrew (Aramaic dominates in the Talmud; Hebrew in the Midrash) and attests numerous Latin and Greek loanwords. The vocabulary of PRE is almost exclusively Hebrew, but it does employ a handful of Greek words, such as אוקיינוס (Ωκεανός) in PRE 31, מכיר (μάχαρα) in PRE 38, and פרהסייא (παρρησία) in PRE 47. The Greek, though limited, is perhaps a further indication of a Palestinian (as opposed to Babylonian) provenance.

The author also has a limited Aramaic vocabulary. Steven Daniel Sacks even doubted that the author knew Aramaic at all.¹⁹² Nevertheless, the limited use of Aramaic suggests some knowledge of the language. In one noteworthy example, PRE 28 claims that the fourth animal that Abraham sacrifices for the covenant between the pieces (cf. Gen 15) is not a turtle dove but a bull. In fact, the Hebrew word for “turtle dove” is identical to the Aramaic word for “bull” (תור). In another example, PRE 32 states that the Solomon received his name (שלמה) because he

¹⁸⁸ Pregill, Klar, Tottoli, “*Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*,” 12.

¹⁸⁹ A reconstruction based on later citations was attempted by Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), but see Lawrence I. Conrad, “Recovering Lost Texts: Some Methodological Issues,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993): 258–63.

¹⁹⁰ For a description of this work and some of its contents, see Meir Jacob Kister, “Adam: A Study of Some Legends in Tafsīr and Ḥadīth Literature,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 113–74.

¹⁹¹ Pregill, Klar, Tottoli, “*Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*,” 39, n. 35.

¹⁹² Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity*, 83–87.

would be the king of peace (שלום), citing the Aramaic word instead of the Hebrew cognate (שלום), presumably because of the Aramaic word's graphic similarity to Solomon's name. Sacks believed that such a facile use of Aramaic demonstrated ignorance, but the use of wordplay suggests familiarity, not ignorance.

As a resident of 'Abbāsid Palestine, one presumes that the author of PRE knew *some* Arabic, at least for day-to-day interactions. The evidence of the author's knowledge of Arabic is slight but significant. At the end of PRE 30, the author mentions three wars that the "Ishmaelites" will carry out at the end of time. He cites Isa 21:15, "For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the gravity of war" (כִּי־מִפְּנֵי הַחֲרֹבוֹת נָדְדוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב נְטוּשָׁה וּמִפְּנֵי) (קִשְׁתֵּי דְרוּכָהּ וּמִפְּנֵי כְבֶד מַלְחָמָה) as a proof-text, claiming that "swords" (חרבות) means "wars," but the word *herev* (חרב) does not mean "war" in Hebrew; rather, this is the meaning of the Arabic cognate *harb* (حرب). It is a play on words: The author derives a meaning from the Hebrew text based on an Arabic cognate, just as in the Aramaic examples above. Similarly, PRE connects the word *milḥamah* (מלחמה) from the same verse to the messianic war at the end of time. This is the common word for "war" in Hebrew, but its Arabic cognate *malḥama* (ملحمة) designates an eschatological conflict, especially the war with Constantinople, which is the exact context of the passage in PRE.¹⁹³ The evidence presented here is suggestive rather than decisive. In any case, Arabic remains one channel through which the author could have known non-rabbinic traditions.

2.7 Conclusion

Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer is not the work of R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus. The name of the actual author is lost to history, but he has left something of himself in the text. *Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer* is the work of one author and not a compilation. It was abandoned by its author and left unfinished. The author lived in Muslim Palestine, almost certainly in the second half of the eighth century. Within rabbinic literature, his composition is *sui generis*, but it has affinities with the contemporary *Stories of the Prophets* and may be broadly classed as a Rewritten Bible.

Further clues to the author's identity can be found in the sources he employed. In the next chapter, I will examine PRE's rabbinic and "para-rabbinic" sources, by which I mean those works that fall outside the rabbinic canon but were accepted

¹⁹³ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 22–23; Hayrettin Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: The 'Abbāsid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 47.

by the rabbinic movement in the Middle Ages. This includes apocalypses and the *hekhalot* literature as well as the “synagogal” genres of Targum and *piyyut*. This examination is intended to offer a profile of PRE’s traditions drawn from the full panoply of “Jewish” (Hebrew and Aramaic) literature. It is also intended to facilitate the identification of traditions that would be unusual within rabbinic tradition, ones that could potentially come from outside sources such as *Jubilees* and the *Cave of Treasures*.