

BABA MEŞIA 2.11: SALVATION THROUGH WISDOM AS THE
JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PRIORITY OF A TEACHER OVER A
FATHER*

Baba Meşia 2,11: La salvación a través de la sabiduría como justificación
de la supremacía del maestro sobre el padre

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BIBLID [1696-585X (2012) 61; 7-26]

Resumen: La capacidad de transmitir la sabiduría como camino para acceder al mundo venidero es la razón por la que el pasaje de la Mişná *Baba Meşia* 2,11 le otorga preferencia al maestro sobre el padre en determinadas circunstancias. La primera parte de este artículo se centra en el contexto escatológico de la perícopa, atendiendo a los textos misnaicos que se refieren a los «dos mundos», al Mesías y al regreso del profeta Elías. A continuación se pondrá de manifiesto de qué manera, partiendo de la función escatológica de la enseñanza rabínica, el papel del maestro tiene preferencia sobre el del padre (incluso hasta ser degradado este último). Esta función está expresada tanto en *Baba Meşia* 2,11 como en la narración de SDt 32. Por último, se analizarán los testimonios de Tosefta *Baba Meşia* 2,30 y Tosefta *Horayot* 2,5, ambos paralelos de Mişná *Baba Meşia* 2,11, acerca de cuál es la condición del maestro para disfrutar de esta preferencia, basada en la enseñanza de la Torá.

Abstract: The ability to transmit wisdom as a path to the world-to-come is the ground upon which Mishnah Baba Meşia 2.11 attributes a teacher priority over a father, albeit under some specific conditions. This analysis takes its lead from the eschatological background of the pericope, with a focus upon Mishnaic references to the themes of the «two worlds», of the Messiah, and of the return of the prophet Elijah. It then argues that the subordination (and even the devaluation) of fatherhood, which accompanies the priority assigned to the teacher, rests on the eschatological function of rabbinic teaching, which is also expressed in the narrative parallel Sifre Deuteronomy §32. Finally, it examines the identification of the teacher who enjoys priority, as discussed in Tosefta Baba Meşia 2.30 = Tosefta Horayot 2.5 —the parallel Toseftan sources to BM 2.11, which put the emphasis on rabbinic Torah-teaching.

* This paper has been prepared in the framework of the Courant Research Centre Education and Religion (EDRIS), funded by the German Initiative of Excellence. For their suggestions I wish to warmly thank Piero Capelli, Tobias Georges, Stefanie Holder, Ron Naiweld, Andrea Villani, Günter Stemberger and the anonymous readers of the Journal. For the English language consultation I am grateful to Lucy Crystal (Amsterdam)

MEAH, sección Hebreo 61 (2012), 7-26

Palabras clave: Mišná. Tosefta. Sifre Deuteronomio. Mundo venidero. Preeminencia del maestro sobre el padre.

Key words: Mishnah. Tosefta. Sifre Deuteronomy. Rabbinic teaching. World-to-come. Priority of a man's teacher over his father.

Recibido: 25/05/2011 **Aceptado:** 15/02/2012

INTRODUCTION

The Mishnah —credited to the efforts of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, and his circle, which flourished in Roman Palestine around the year 200 C.E.— stands at the foundation of Rabbinic Judaism.¹ Its genre and content are generally defined as almost exclusively legal in nature. The scope and depth of *Halakhah*, however, cannot be reduced to any modern notion of secular law since it encompasses conduct within and between the religious, moral, social, sexual and legal spheres of life. Indeed, the Mishnaic pericope central to this essay clearly intertwines legal and non-legal matters within the domain of *Halakhah*.

Embedded in a set of rulings on issues of lost property, *Baba Mešia* (henceforth BM) 2.11 considers three different circumstances under which a man may find himself in relation to his father and to his teacher.² It translates as follows:³

1. For an introduction to the Mishnah see Stemberger, 1996: 108-148. See also Kraemer, 2006: 299-315.

2. My usage of the masculine form reflects the almost exclusively male participation in rabbinic circles and study activities. On the hypothesis that also girls and women received a literate education see Heszer, 2001: 44, and bibliography therein.

3. The translation is mine. Otherwise, translations of Mishnaic sources in the rest of the paper follow Danby, 1933. The Hebrew consonantal text of this passage in the Codex Kaufmann (=Neziqin 11.13-14), nearly identical in Codex Parma A (De Rossi 138) (=Neziqin 12.13), reads as follows: אבידתו ואבידת רבו שלו קודמת אבדתו ואבידת רבו שלו קודמת אבידתו ואבידת רבו של רבו קודמת משלאביו שאביו הביאו לחיי העולם הזה ורבו שלימדו חכמה הביאו לחיי העולם הבה | אם היה אביו שקול כנגד רבו אבידת אביו קודמת היה אביו או רבו נושאים משאוי מניח את שרבו ואחר כך מניח את של אביו היה אביו ורבו בבית השבי פודה את רבו ואחר כך פודה את אביו אבל אם היה אביו תלמי חכמי פודה את אביו ואחר כך פודה את רבו. For a collection of variant readings see Windfuhr, 1923: 115.

His lost property and his father's lost property —his own has precedence. His lost property and his teacher's lost property— his own has precedence. His father's lost property and his teacher's lost property —his teacher's lost property has precedence over his father's. For his father brought him to the life of this world, but his teacher, who taught him wisdom, brought him to the life of the world-to-come. If his father were his teacher's equal, his father's lost property has precedence. If his father or his teacher were carrying loads, he unloads his teacher's and then he unloads his father's. If his father and his teacher were jailed, he redeems his teacher and then he redeems his father, but if his father were a disciple of Sages he redeems his father and then he redeems his teacher.

The first ruling evaluates whose lost property enjoys precedence — whether the man's, his father's or his teacher's. In doing so, it establishes a hierarchy of priorities according to which the man's lost property precedes his teacher's, and the latter's precedes his father's. The second and third rulings affect, respectively, the release of the man's father and teacher from a burden and from captivity. In all cases, the teacher's condition is given priority over the father's. In the case of lost property, a remarkable reason for the legal norm is spelled out,⁴ which shifts the emphasis to a spiritual and ideological dimension: a teacher's lost property deserves a higher status because the teacher himself, through wisdom, bestowed access to «the life of the world-to-come» on his pupil.⁵ This somewhat surprising argument rests on a number of non-legal priorities —the precedence of wisdom and education over a lack thereof, and that of «the life of the world-to-come» over «the life of this world»— which are combined to characterize wisdom and education as a path to the world-to-come. As will be illustrated in this essay, what is surprising about this claim is that it expresses an interest toward eschatology that

4. On the justifications of rulings in the Mishnah (a quite rare feature) see Bernasconi, 2004: 1-61. Bernasconi, 2003: 77-96. In both studies, Bernasconi examines *Baba Mešia* but does not specifically dwell on this passage.

5. Both the Codices Kaufmann and Parma A preserve the forms *le-ḥayye-‘olam ha-zeh*, «to the life of this world» and *le-ḥayye ‘olam ha-ba’*, «to the life of the world-to-come». Albeck's text (see Albeck, 1952-1958: IV 73) has *le-‘olam ha-zeh*, «to this world», and *le-ḥayye-‘olam ha-ba’*, «to the life of the world-to-come».

contrasts with a general absence of extra-mundane themes in the Mishnah (see section 1. below). Probably less surprising is the proviso to the first and third rulings. This proviso accords precedence to a learned father's property and ransoming over those of a teacher, confirming the greater worth of rabbinic education while apparently restoring importance to the status of the father—who, it will be argued, is actually regarded here as inferior to the status of the Sages (see section 2. below).

In this essay it is my intention to look at several of the conceptual parameters that demand elucidation in BM 2.11. The following aspects will be analysed:

Section 1: The background behind references to «this world» and «the world-to-come». Some specific ways will be considered, in which the Mishnah refers to eschatological beliefs, such as the return of the prophet Elijah (which, out of seven occurrences in the whole Mishnah, appears five times in the tractate *Baba Mešia*) and the figure of a teacher who, through wisdom, can grant access to the world-to-come.

Section 2: The loyalty of a student toward his teacher as opposed to his duties toward his father. After reviewing some of the points offered by G. J. Blidstein in his analysis of this passage, an alternative interpretation will be proposed on the basis of the immediate literary context of BM 2.11, as well as on the narrative version of the same tradition, contained in *Sifre Deuteronomy* §32.

Section 3: The identity of the teacher whose lost property and ransoming enjoy priority and, from another perspective, the nature of the education he can impart. The Toseftan parallels to our Mishnaic source (T *Baba Mešia* 2.30 = T *Horayot* 2.5) and the notions of Torah-teaching they entertain will be examined.

MISHNAIC ESCHATOLOGICAL NOTIONS

As seen above, the ground on which BM 2.11 justifies the precedence of a man's teacher over a man's father under three legal circumstances is the following: «For his father brought him to the life of this world, but his teacher, who taught him wisdom, brought him to the life of the world-to-come». The distinction between the existing world and a radically new world located in the future (which can be traced back to the hope of the

creation of «a new heaven and a new earth» in Isaiah 65.17 and 66.22)⁶ is a common eschatological *topos* in the rabbinic discourse of salvation.⁷ Thus, the very mention of the «two worlds» sets our passage against the backdrop of reflections about the end of days and redemption. This seems to be the case despite a general Mishnaic tendency to avoid extramundane matters,⁸ and despite the fact that early rabbinic literature by-and-large represents a quietist discontinuity in the history of apocalyptic thought as it is attested in Second Temple literature and, later, in amoraic rabbinic literature.⁹ Rabbinic beliefs in these matters fundamentally include the coming of the Messiah, the reconstruction of the Temple, and the resurrection of the dead, but their expression is highly diverse and has not followed a linear and consistent development.¹⁰

Although our pericope mentions the «two worlds», it, typically, does not engage in defining their essence.¹¹ In tannaitic literature the term *ha-‘olam ha-ba’* —‘the world-to-come’— refers, on the whole, to the expected future salvation, though in some instances it aligns with the meaning of «the future world», and in others with that of «the days of the

6. See Schürer, 1973: II §29.9.

7. See Schäfer, 1978: 244 and 290-291.

8. On the tannaitic focus on the *hic et nunc* as opposed to the *eschaton* see Capelli, 2005: 32.

9. See Schiffman, 2006: 1062. On the historical background of the tannaitic eschatological attitude in the wake of the two disastrous rebellions against Rome see p. 1063. Günter Stemberger has argued in favor of a latent and continued existence of apocalyptic elements and literary units in non-rabbinic and rabbinic circles throughout late antiquity, which resurfaced later as a literary genre, against the thesis of a nearly complete absence of apocalypics in rabbinic literature, especially in its early phases (see Stemberger, 1990: 335-347). On the eschatological-apocalyptic piece in Sotah 9.15 see below.

10. See Milikowsky, 2001: 265.

11. On the tannaitic tendency not to define the essence of the «two worlds», and to focus on those who will have a share in the world-to-come, and on those who will not, see Schäfer, 1978: 264-271 and 274-281. For a list of expressions used in tannaitic literature to speak about access to the future age (such as «to have a share in the world-to-come») see p. 264.

Messiah». ¹² For example, whereas our source sets «this world» in opposition to the «world-to-come», *Berakhot* 1.5 sets it against the messianic times. ¹³ The few other incidental references to the messianic era, together with some discussion of the return of the prophet Elijah, and with the apocalyptic passage in *Sotah* 9.15, ¹⁴ are generally considered as the only expressions of eschatological concerns in the whole composition. ¹⁵

With regard to messianism, no comprehensive doctrine is articulated in the Mishnah, nor does the figure of a redeemer or saviour play any significant role in it. ¹⁶ The term «messiah» means ‘anointed priest’ in Mishnaic legal contexts, and, when it refers to the saviour of Israel, «the reference is casual, the language routine, the purpose merely factual», as

12. See Schäfer, 1978: 253. It should nonetheless be noted that P. Schäfer’s inquiry into the usages of the term is based only on fourteen occurrences of the term *ha-’olam ha-ba’* in the Mishnah, identified with the aid of printed concordances (see Schäfer, 1978: 248-249 and 251), whereas now available electronic databases generate a few dozens of records for the same term. This discrepancy would invite to follow upon and review P. Schäfer’s analysis, which is not the task of the present essay.

13. *Ber* 1.5 contains a midrashic dispute which proves why the «departure from the land of Egypt» (i.e., the section of the Shema ‘Israel in Num. 15.37-41) should be recited at night. The Sages are reported to expound Deut. 16.3 as follows: «The days of your life» —this world; «all the days of your life» —to bring in the days of the Messiah. For a discussion of the pericope see Samely: *Database*.

14. The most probably later addition *Sot* 9.15 dwells, with apocalyptic overtones, on the horrendous degeneration that will precede the end of days. It translates: «Children shall shame elders, and elders shall rise up before their children, for the son dishonours the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: a man’s enemies are the men of his own house [Micah 7.6]. The face of this generation is as the face of a dog, and the son will not be put to shame by his father. On whom can we stay ourselves?— On our father in heaven» (Transl. Danby, 1933: 306). It has been defined as a «systematic eschatology» (see Neusner, 1987: quote at 270). On its dating after the completion of the Mishnah see Stemmerger, 1990: 339-340.

15. See Schiffman, 2006: 1062.

16. See Neusner, 1987: 270. See also Capelli, 2005: 50. Conversely, other tannaitic compilations, and especially *Sifre Deuteronomy*, display a more lively interest in messianism. For a collection of messianic-related sources in the Mishnah, *Tosefta*, and *Halakic Midrashim*, see Collini, 2009: throughout.

noted by Jacob Neusner.¹⁷ In the main, Rabbinic literature does not know of a messianic future «connected to a messianic figure which will bring about the redemption of Israel».¹⁸

As far as references to the return of the prophet Elijah in the Mishnah are concerned, it is worth noting that the identification of Elijah with the precursor of the Messiah is not explicitly articulated. The first mention of his return suffices to illustrate the trend: «If a man found a document among his documents and does not know what its nature is, it must be left until Elijah comes» (BM 1.8), whereby the expression «until Elijah comes» hints at an epoch until which certain judicial cases are to be postponed, without any identifiable connection to the messianic age.¹⁹ Interestingly enough, the density of references to Elijah's return in our tractate is very high: most of those punctuate the first three chapters of the

17. See Neusner, 1987: 270 and 274. Different in tone is the reference to the «footsteps of the Messiah», the immediate pre-messianic period characterized by desolation and religious decline, in Sot 9.15 (=Sotah 9.22 in Codex Kaufmann), «With the footprints of the Messiah presumption shall increase».

18. See Milikowsky, 2001: 267.

19. The other pericopes about the advent of Elijah in BM are the following ones: «[I]f [he found] vessels of gold or glass he may not touch them until Elijah comes.» (2.8); «If two men deposited money with a third [...] the rest must be suffered to remain until Elijah comes. R. Jose said [...] rather, the whole is suffered to remain until Elijah comes» (3.4); «So, too, [if two men deposited] two things [...] the rest must be suffered to remain until Elijah comes. R. Jose said, [...] rather, the whole is suffered to remain until Elijah comes» (3.5). In the rest of the Mishnah see: *Sheqalim* 2.5 (the surplus of the money saved up for the burial of a dead person must be left aside until Elijah comes), the above mentioned Sot 9.15 (the resurrection of the dead will come through Elijah), and *Eduyyot* 8.7, the most articulated pericope with regard to this theme, which contains a dispute about the true purposes of Elijah's arrival, whether for purity matters or for removing injustice and bringing peace into the world (on it see Schürer, 1973: II §29.2, and Samely: *Database*). At the roots of the tradition according to which Elijah will come back as the harbinger of the future age lie the Biblical episode which sees him ascending to Heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2.11), and the verse «Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD» (Mal. 3.23, transl. JPS). On its development see Schürer, 1973: II §29.2. See also Fitzmyer, 1985: 295-296, and the bibliography therein quoted. Milikowsky, 2001: 276. For a list of occurrences of this notion see Collini, 2009: 106-107, *lemma* «Precursore» and *sublemma* «Azioni».

tractate *Baba Meṣia* —the immediate literary context of our source. On that basis one might be inclined to think of a wider web of ideas that would connect the eschatological function of rabbinic teaching and the mention of the world-to-come, found in BM 2.11, to all hints of the return of the prophet. Yet, the connections between these elements are not clarified in our source, and cannot be reconstructed *ex silentio*. What can certainly be said is that BM 2.11 associates the salvation inherent in the notion of the future age with the figure of the teacher, and not with that of the Messiah —in the Mishnah, the great absent.

THE LOYALTY OF A MAN TOWARD HIS TEACHER AS AGAINST HIS DUTIES TOWARD HIS FATHER (BM 2.10-11; KER 6.9; SIFREDEUT §32)

In BM 2.11 the eschatological function of rabbinic teaching is framed within a stark characterization of the teacher-student relationship, which exceeds the boundaries of affiliation between a rabbinic master and his pupil(s), in that it does not refrain from downgrading a father's status in order to emphasize a teacher's.²⁰ This aspect deserves attention, especially if contrasted to the great importance a father's pedagogical role has in rabbinic culture. A telling example with this regard is the interpretation of Deut. 11.19 offered in the Halakhic Midrash *Sifre Deuteronomy*, §46:²¹

And ye shall teach them to your children (Deut. 11.19): Your sons, not your daughters, so taught R. Yose ben Aqiba. Hence the Sages have said: Once an infant begins to talk, his father should converse with him in the holy tongue and should teach him Torah, for if he fails to do so it is the same as if he had buried him (alive), as it is said, And ye shall teach them your children, talking of them (11.19). If you teach them your children, Your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children (11.21); if not, your days may be shortened.

In a study about the negotiation of the dual loyalty toward one's teacher and one's father in rabbinic literature, Gerald J. Blidstein has

20. On the teacher-student relationship see Hezser, 1997: 332-346 (especially pp. 343-346 on the model of affiliation and loyalty), and the bibliography therein. See also Morfino, 2004: 141-234.

21. Translation as in Hammer, 1986: 98. On the didactic responsibility of fathers towards their children see Stemberger, 2002 (repr. 2010).

stressed that the norms contained in BM 2.11 contradict the only positive social imperative listed in the Ten Commandments, «Honour your father and your mother», and that they seem to completely disregard the educational role of parents in the cultural, ethical, and spiritual growth of their children. Nevertheless, Blidstein asserts, the Mishnah does not articulate a devaluation of parental needs that is independent of the specific context of conflicting concrete needs within which the priority of the teacher is set (i.e., the three instances of returning lost property, helping to unload a burden and ransoming the teacher or father from captivity).²² Whereas I acknowledge, with Blidstein, that the three given circumstances are discrete cases, which need not be taken as a basis for general conclusions, I disagree on diminishing the vigour of the ideology underlying them. To illustrate this point, I would like to draw attention to the proviso twice enunciated in BM 2.11. As seen above, the first time it appears it reads: «If his father was his teacher's equal, his father's lost property has precedence», and the second time it appears it states «[...] but if his father was a disciple of Sages, he redeems his father and then he redeems his teacher».²³ Were not the father a participant in the Sages' wisdom—one can conclude—his priority over his son's teacher would not be restored.

To sum up the ideas expressed in BM 2.11: the rulings subordinate a father's status to a teacher's on the basis of the former's lack of wisdom, and of his subsequent inability to guide his son to the world-to-come; the provisos elevate the father's status and role over the teacher's, provided he shares the teacher's wisdom or belongs to a rabbinic circle. Not only do these notions corroborate each other,²⁴ but the preceding Mishnaic unit also appears to lead into the ideological pattern they display: BM 2.10 states that a man who found a beast loose and unguarded in a stable (i.e., in a private domain) need not bring it back to its owner, but if he found it in a public domain he must do so. If he found it in a cemetery, he is not obliged to contract uncleanness for the sake of giving it back. A sharp

22. See Blidstein, 2002: 255-266, especially 258-259.

23. T BM 2.29 has «If his father is equivalent to his teacher». See section 3. below.

24. Conversely, Blidstein interprets this proviso as a faltering of the ideology expressed in the norm. See Blidstein, 2002: 258.

remark integrates this norm: «If his father said to him: Contract uncleanness, or if he said to him: Do not restore it, he does not listen to him». In essence, this unit entitles one to ignore his father's words as non-authoritative, thus reinforcing the pattern of parental devaluation. BM 2.10 seems to implicitly subordinate fatherhood to participation in rabbinic wisdom, which BM 2.11 more explicitly states. On which ideological grounds does this scheme rest? A key feature of the father's suggestions to contract uncleanness and not to restore the beast is that they contradict the halakhic guidelines formulated a few lines before in the Mishnah itself. Although they are not explicitly judged as mistaken, they are substantially delegitimized, probably because they do not correspond to the transmitted rulings. If this understanding is correct, the process under scrutiny entails the characterization of that hypothetical «nonaligned» father as an outsider, and converges toward the idea that a father deserves priority over a teacher only if he equals him in wisdom. In essence then, the reasons behind BM 2.11 go beyond the mere subordination of a father to a teacher as found in the three limited circumstances that are imagined in BM 2.10. Indeed, they appear to tend toward a dismissal of the value of fatherhood per se when it is compared with the importance of the teacher.

Continuing along the same line of thought, there is another point in Blidstein's analysis that is worth re-examining. As a point of departure for his study, he posits certain Gospel narratives that envision a rejection of familial relationships as the background for BM 2.11. He suggests that the devaluation of family ties occasionally expressed by the rabbis is not as dramatic or radical as that expressed in the Gospels, probably because the Rabbinic movement had no figure for whom to claim the kind of loyalty Jesus claimed, and because the Rabbinic movement was not counter-cultural, but tried to work within existing social structures.²⁵ To demonstrate the latter points, he resorts to the following statement in *Keritot* 6.9: «So, too, in the study of the Law, if the son gained much wisdom [the while he sat] before his teacher, his teacher comes ever before his father, since both he and his father are bound to honour the

25. See Blidstein, 2002: 264. An evaluation of these theses is beyond the scope of the present essay.

teacher».²⁶ Blidstein considers this source as parallel in essence to BM 2.11, and stresses that the priority it gives the master is not socially disruptive, in that it does not demand a break in family structure and loyalty. He sees «a picture of social integration», based on the acceptance of «the fact of the master's priority» by both father and son.²⁷ Although the absence of ruptures in this scene is undeniable, Ker 6.9 is a generalization of the priority of a teacher over a father, which in BM 2.11 is limited to three specific cases. Moreover, a remarkable difference can be detected in the essence of these two sources: whereas Ker 6.9 does not evoke any extra-mundane perspective, BM 2.11 introduces the world-to-come by highlighting the figure of a teacher who can guide to it.²⁸ Crucially, BM 2.11 envisages the downgrading of a father's status in a context defined by wisdom and oriented toward the world-to-come. The same conceptual configuration is even more evident in an extensive narrative section of SifrDeut. §32, wherein a group of prominent rabbis gather at the presence of their sick teacher, and support him by weighing his worth to Israel against the sun, the rain, and parents. The *aggadah* therein is as follows:

Once R. Eliezer fell ill, and R. Tarfon, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar ben Azaryah, and R. Aqiba came to visit him. R. Tarfon said to him: Master, you are more precious to Israel than the orb of the sun, for the orb of the sun sheds light on this world, while you have enlightened both this world and the world-to-come. R. Joshua said to him: Master, you are more precious to Israel than the gift of rain, for rain grants life in this world, while you give it in this world and in the world-to-come. R. Eleazar ben Azaryah said to him: Master, you are more precious to Israel than one's father and mother, for father and mother bring one into this world, while

26. Transl. as in Danby, 1933: 573. The pericope is Ker 6.9 and not Ker 6.7, as inadvertently indicated in Blidstein, 2002: 264 (cf. Albeck, 1952-1958: V 268. In the Codex Kaufmann it is Ker 6.5bis).

27. See Blidstein, 2002: 264. It should be kept in mind that rabbinic ideology and Mishnaic statements do not necessarily correspond to the actual practices in the diverse Jewish society of that time, and that the acceptance identified by Blidstein might express a rabbinical ideal, and might have been limited to a small social sector.

28. Blidstein has noted that it is the master who «links the son with a higher reality» (Blidstein, 2002: 259), but has not elaborated on that.

you have brought us into this world and into the world-to-come. R. Akiba said to him: Master, precious is suffering. R. Eliezer thereupon said to his disciples: Prop me up. [...] ²⁹

With the exception of R. Akiba's remark (which seems to be more successful in cheering up the master, and compositionally connects the narrative back to the previous exegetical exposition), the sayings in praise of R. Eliezer associate the supremacy of the teacher with the supremacy of the world-to-come. The substance of the reason for the norm in BM 2.11 is thus shaped differently in R. Eleazar ben Azaryah's consoling words. In BM 2.11, it is embedded in a relatively monotonous set of legal rulings — here, it is inserted in a lively narrative scene within an exegetical framework. There, it is transmitted anonymously and in general terms — here, it is dedicated by a caring named pupil to a weakened named master. There, it compares teacher and father — here, it compares teacher and both parents. There, moreover, it focuses on the teacher's extra-mundane function — here, it allocates him both this world and the future one. The latter concession in the narrative version of our tradition further diminishes the role of parenthood: ³⁰ R. Eliezer affects his pupils' lives in both worlds, therefore his importance for all Israel is greater than the importance of vital components of this world — including parents. The ideology underlying both the Mishnaic and the Midrashic versions of our tradition is clear: rabbis are greater than fathers/parents by virtue of their own wisdom, which grants pupils access to the world-to-come. ³¹

29. Transl. by Hammer, 1986: 61. On SifreDeut. see Stemberger, 1996: 266-268.

30. The Hebrew text in the edition by Finkelstein, 1939 is as follows, as made available by the Bar Ilan Responsa Project CD: וכבר היה רבי אליעזר חולה ונכנסו רבי טרפון ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבה לבקר, אמר לו רבי טרפון, רבי, חביב אתה לישראל מגלגל חמה, שגלגל חמה מאיר בעולם הזה ואתה הארת בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא, אמר לו רבי יהושע, רבי, חביב אתה לישראל ממתן גשמים, שגשמים נותנים חיים בעולם הזה ואתה נתתה בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא, אמר לו רבי אלעזר בן עזריה, רבי, חביב אתה לישראל מאב ואם, שאב ואם מביאים לעולם הזה ואתה הבאת בעולם הזה ולעולם הבא, אמר לו רבי עקיבה, רבי, חביבים יסורים, אמר להם רבי אלעזר לתלמידיו סמכוני.

31. For the notion that masters bestow good life on pupils as expressed in classical Graeco-Roman culture see Plutarch's expression of the affection Alexander the Great had for Aristotle: «[...] Aristotle he admired at the first, and loved him, as he himself used to say, not less than he did his father, for that the one had given him life, but the other had taught him a good life; [...]» (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 8, referred to in Perlow, 1931: 63 n. 3. This translation is based on Perrin, 2004 (1919): VII 243-244. Thanks to Dr A.

THE IDENTITY OF THE TEACHER WHO ENJOYS PRIORITY AND THE MEANING OF TORAH-TEACHING (TBM 2.30=THOR 2.5)

The eschatological tone which characterizes BM 2.11 and *Sifre Deut.* §32 does not emerge in Tosefta *Baba Mešia* 2.29-31 and Tosefta *Horayot* 2.5, two partial parallels to our Mishnaic passage, where Rabbinic discipleship lies in the background. The context of those Toseftan traditions appears as follows:³²

a) T BM 2.29 presents a ruling on the priority of the lost property of a man's teacher over that of a man's father, unless the father equals the teacher. The wording is nearly identical to the second and third sentences of BM 2.11 and the case in which the lost property of the man himself is considered (first sentence in BM 2.11) is lacking. T BM 2.30 is nearly identical to the first sentences of T Hor 2.5 (discussed below), and is absent from BM 2.11. T BM 2.31 extends the legal circumstances to other people (the man's father and mother; a husband and a wife; gentiles and shepherds; *minim*, apostates, and renegades).

b) The first sentences of T Hor 2.5 present a ruling on the priority of a man's liberation from captivity over that of his teacher's, and of the latter's over the man's father's. These are followed by a ruling on the priority of the liberation from captivity of the man's mother over the liberation of them all. Unlike BM 2.11, none of these rulings, in either

Villani for suggesting a few variations to the translation). Diogenes Laertius characterized Aristotle himself similarly: «Teachers who educated children deserved, he said, more honour than parents who merely gave them birth; for bare life is furnished by the one, the other ensures a good life» (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, V, 19, referred to by Goldin, 1972: 176-191, especially 178 n. 1. The passage is translated as in Hicks, 1959: I 463. See also Theon of Alexandria: «Isocrates the rhetor used to advise his students to honour their teachers before their parents, because the latter are the cause only of living, while teachers are the cause of living nobly» (Theon of Alexandria, 207, 17-20, in Hock - O'neil, 1986: 91, quoted in Jaffee, 2001: 130 n. 18 and 148 n. 72).

32. In sketching the contexts in which the parallel traditions to BM 2.11 occur in the Tosefta this essay refers to the Mishnah from a comparative perspective, without assuming that it is the basis of the Tosefta, for it does not aim at assessing whether the material in the Mishnah precedes that in the Tosefta, or vice versa. For an introduction to the Tosefta see Stemberger, 1996: 149-163. See also Mandel, 2006: 316-335; on the relationship between Mishnah and Tosefta see especially pp. 319-320 and 322-328.

intellectual and spiritual world of the rabbis.³⁶ The identity of the involved teacher does have a practical relevance with regard to the casuistic normative issues exposed in BM 2.11 and in its Toseftan parallels: Which teacher's property or liberation would have precedence over a man's father's if the given circumstances occurred in reality? However, the following views shift from the legal to the ideological dimension. In essence, they serve as answers to the questions «What is Torah-teaching?», and «What is Torah?» Exploring the semantic spectrum of the term «Torah» and its ideological implications is too vast a task for this essay.³⁷ Rather, suffice it to survey the main ideas evoked by our set of sources. That «rabbinic ideals reflected in literary sources cannot be taken as historical evidence about the real situation»³⁸ is a worth-while caveat to keep in mind.

2. «Rabbi Meir says: The teacher of his who has taught him wisdom, not the teacher of his who has taught him Scripture (alternately: Torah; alternately: a trade)». The first attributed answer specifies that a teacher who enjoys precedence over a father under the given circumstances is the one who conveys *ḥokmah*, 'wisdom'. The textual variants variously situate wisdom in opposition to a) *miqra* 'Scripture', likely to be understood as the rudiments of Bible knowledge; b) Torah, a term encompassing a broader spectrum than *miqra* (and already occurring in the first, anonymous answer), here interestingly subordinated to wisdom; c) a trade (also present in the first answer). On the ideological level, the privileged teacher is identified as one who partakes in the specific expertise and piety of the rabbis —who identify themselves as *ḥakamim*,

36. According to H.W. Guggenheimer, reference is made to the elementary school teacher, who taught the man reading and writing (Guggenheimer, 2008: 326-327 n. 137). About the expression *še-pataḥ lo teḥillah* see Jastrow, 2006 (1903): 1251. On the topic of Jewish education in Roman Palestine, see Heszer, 2001: 39-109, and the bibliography therein contained. About elementary instruction, see especially Heszer, 2001: 79: «The rabbinic image of a Jewish primary education which, where it existed at all, focused on the reading of Hebrew letters and portions of the Torah, may have had some basis in reality. Its goal was to create a pool of men with a basic religious education who could serve as Torah readers in synagogues».

37. On the topic see Hirshman, 2006: 899-924.

38. See Heszer, 2001: 39.

‘Sages’— as opposed to one who teaches subjects that are not under the sole control of the rabbis.³⁹

3. «Rabbi Judah says: Anyone from whom the greater part of his learning stems». These words focus on the kernel of a man’s learning (*talmud*), regardless of its origin in wisdom or Scripture, thus expanding both the legal scope of the rulings and the ideological meaning of Torah. In classical rabbinic literature, the meaning of the term *talmud* (as well as *mishnah*, which occurs in the next saying) is not easy to define. In tannaitic texts it seems to refer to rabbinic traditions in general.⁴⁰ Accordingly, although meaningful education seems to be perceived in a broader and more fluid manner here than in the preceding opinion, the overall impression is that this view is not less «rabbino-centric» than the previous one.

4. «Rabbi Yose says: Anyone who has enlightened his eyes by means of his tradition». This view solves the question with a poetic image of enlightenment bestowed on a man through the repetition of oral tradition (*mišnato*), again suggesting a specific kind of rabbinic training.

Although the wide range of explanations on the nature of Torah-study transmitted in this set of sources presents a certain variety of ideological stances, the discourse revolves around rabbinic learning, as the terms *hoḳmah*, *talmud*, and *mišnato* suggest.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Mishnah *Baba Mešia* 2.11, the foundational text of this essay, envisions an intimate correlation between rabbinic wisdom and access to the world-to-come, whose agent and key-figure is the teacher. Although our source does not spell out how wisdom and education can pave the way to the future age, it seems to voice extra-mundane expectations that are generally not said out loud in tannaitic literature, in that it regards salvation as a function of rabbinic instruction—that is, of the transmission of extra-Scriptural traditions by a living master to his pupil(s), who will have a part in the world-to-come for being members in rabbinic discipleship. The legal priority of a master over and against a father under

39. On scribes, judges and priests as competitors of the rabbis in matters of Torah knowledge see Heszer, 1997: 467-489.

40. See Heszer, 2001: 80.

three specific circumstances can be understood against this backdrop. Moreover, if read in association with the previous pericope (BM 2.10), our source appears to articulate a generalized downgrading of fatherhood that transcends the limits of specific legal circumstances. In doing so, the compound BM 2.10-11 expresses an elitist ideal that delegitimizes non-rabbinic teachings. It also contrasts with *loci* which insist on the father's duties in Torah instruction —not denying this basic pedagogical function of fatherhood, required by Scripture, but surely restricting it to an early phase of religious instruction.

The narrative version of the same tradition, as preserved in SifreDeut §32, shares with it both the explicit reference to salvation granted by rabbinic instruction, and the less explicit sociological presupposition, as the interaction between the master and his pupils is evidently set in the context of a disciples circle, which embodies an elitist view.

In contrast to the above versions of the tradition under study, the Toseftan parallels, T BM 2.30 = T Hor 2.5, interestingly do not exhibit any connection to a discourse of salvation. However, they all converge towards a strongly rabbinic-oriented characterization of a teacher who enjoys priority over a man's father, while putting forward a variety of interpretations concerning the teacher's identity —none of which is indicated as the one to be preferred.

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