

Usury and Poverty: A Case Study of the Post-Rabbinic Moment in Midrash and *Piyyut**

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■ Abstract

The Hebrew Bible prohibits lending at interest. This is usually linked to care for the poor. A similar connection is found in post-biblical literature as well. In Deut 23:20–21, however, usury is disconnected from the poverty laws. Classical rabbinic literature (second to sixth centuries) follows Deuteronomy in sharply de-coupling usury from poverty: the usury prohibition in that corpus regulates commerce and property, and is not intended to benefit the poor. In a sharp break with classical rabbinic tradition, the usury prohibition is reassociated with the poor in *piyyut* and in the Tanhuma midrashim, two late antique genres of Jewish literature associated but not entirely contiguous with classical rabbinic literature. Both genres bring this tradition to the fore through the use of earlier rabbinic materials, which do not espouse it. This combination of usury and care for the poor mirrors fourth-century Christian writings on usury.

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■ Keywords

money, usury, lending, midrash, *piyyut*, Tanhuma, rabbinic literature, philanthropy

■ Introduction

The Hebrew Bible prohibits lending at interest. This is often linked to care for the poor: “If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you . . . you shall not exact interest from them” (Exod 22:24). Lev 25:35–37, Ezek 18:17, and Prov 28:8 also couple usury and poverty.¹ Ben Sira (29), who views lending as a source of unnecessary worry and a good way to lose money, singles out lending to the poor as a positive activity that enjoys both the approval and guarantee of God. Philo associates avoidance of interest, forgiving of debts on the sabbatical year, and gifts to the poor with the civic ideal of *philanthrōpia*.² A similar connection is found in 4 Macc 2:7–9.³

In Deut 23:20–21, however, usury is disconnected from the poverty laws. The former appears in chapter 23, while the latter appear in chapter 15, with the slave laws and the laws of the sabbatical year. Both *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* follow Deuteronomy in sharply decoupling usury from poverty. The Mishnah’s discussion of usury at Bava Metzi’a 5 does not mention poverty; the parallel Tosefta (t. B. Metz. 4–6) does not either. The status accorded to the poor in scripture is explicitly erased in the midrash on Exodus from the school of R. Akiva, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Simon. This work expands the usury prohibition from “the poor” to all people.⁴ In classical rabbinic literature, the usury prohibition functions in the realm of laws related to commerce and protection of private property, not those intended to ameliorate the plight of the poor. Loans and favors between (Jewish) neighbors and peers are regulated as commercial transactions. A person who borrows on interest transgresses no less than the lender.⁵

As an economic problem, poverty can be ameliorated by giving money to the poor. Legislation about poverty may give benefits or penalties to people who are

¹ Samuel E. Loewenstamm, “מ/ת/ר/ב/י/ת and נשך,” *JBL* 88 (1969) 78–80; Thomas Moser, “The Old Testament Anti-Usury Laws Reconsidered: The Myth of Tribal Brotherhood,” *Économie et Sociétés* 33 (1999) 139–50; Hillel Gamoran, “The Biblical Law against Loans on Interest,” *JNES* 30 (1971) 127–34.

² Philo, *Spec.* 2.74–78; *Virt.* 82–87. See Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Jewish Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948) 218–22; Katell Berthelot, *Philanthrōpia Judaica: Le débat autour de la “misanthropie” des lois juives dans l’Antiquité* (JSJSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 265–300; Giovanni Battista Bazzana, “‘Basileia’ and Debt Relief: The Forgiveness of Debts in the Lord’s Prayer in the Light of Documentary Papyri,” *CBQ* 73 (2011) 511–25.

³ Robert Renehan, “The Greek Philosophic Background of Fourth Maccabees,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 115 (1972) 223–38. H. Anderson, in *OTP* 2:537–39, notes that the discussion of usury in 4 Macc 2:7 is an adoption of “Stoic language and echoes Stoic views.”

⁴ Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shim’on ben Yoḥai, ad Exod 22:24 (*Mekhilta d’Rabbi Šim’on b. Joḥai* [ed. Jacob Nahum Epstein and Ezra Zion Melamed; Jerusalem: Mekitsei Nirdamim, 1955] 212 [Hebrew]).

⁵ m. B. Metz. 5:11.

defined as poor. But poverty is also a matter of social imaginaries. The community can be imagined as one of equals, in which financial means do not determine civic status. It can also be imagined as bifurcated between classes, a system in which class forms a central part of an individual's identity. Finally, the community can imagine that it is a community of "the rich" with or without an obligation to another community of "the poor." If one imagines those of lesser means to be in one's community, they are no longer "the poor" but rather peers down on their luck.⁶ The radical inclusion of less fortunate peers in the rabbinic usury legislation brings the identity of their group to the point of conceptual and discursive erasure.⁷

I leave the value judgment of this shift to others better equipped to discuss such questions.⁸ In this paper I discuss the revival and return of the tradition that connected the usury prohibition to the poor in *piyyut* and in the Tanhuma midrashim. Both genres bring this tradition to the fore through the use of earlier rabbinic materials, which do not espouse it. This combination of usury and care for the poor mirrors fourth-century Christian writings on usury.

The paper will proceed thus. First, I discuss the precise nature of the coupling between usury and poverty in the Tanhuma midrashim, which transcends local textual issues, and note the ways in which these works employ earlier rabbinic sources in the service of this coupling. I then turn to *piyyut*, specifically two works by the fifth–sixth century *payyetan* Yannai, which feature this coupling as well. In

⁶ For "imagine" see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006). See now also Jörg Rüpke, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) 353–58.

⁷ Tannaic charity laws can be seen as similarly motivated by egalitarian and civic concerns. See Alyssa M. Gray, "Redemptive Almsgiving and the Rabbis of Late Antiquity," *JSQ* 18 (2011) 144–84, at 150–52; Gregg E. Gardner, "Who Is Rich? The Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism," *JQR* 104 (2014) 515–36; idem, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 33–35, 75–79. Per Gardner, "organized charity" in Tannaic literature was meant to limit begging; it also shifted the focus of "charity" from the individual recipient to a civic institution. Gray notes a similar erasure of the poor in the story of Monobases of Adiabene, in t. Pe'ah 8:14 (and parallels, y. Pe'ah 1:1, 15b; b. B. Bat. 11a), in which Monobases "scatters his treasures in years of drought." The poor, who are ostensibly the recipients of this scattering, are not mentioned. Gray compares this absence with Cyprian's depiction of the poor as holy containers which lift the donor up to God in his *De Opere et Eleemosynis*. See Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (OSHT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 12; see also eadem, "Constructed and Consumed: The Everyday Life of the Poor in 4th c. Cappadocia," in *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity* (ed. W. Bowden, A. Gutteridge, and C. Machado; Late Antique Archaeology 3.1; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 441–64; Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Cyprian's Care for the Poor: The Evidence of *De Opere et Eleemosynis*," *StPatr* 42 (2006) 363–68. For Christian authors, the poor are *present* in body, and are to be cared for by the wealthy. Their presence, as *poor people*, is a necessary vessel for the redemption of others. The relative absence of the poor in Tannaic literature, conversely, is because they are presumed to be equal in status to everyone else. The erasures then are not commensurate.

⁸ See e.g. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor, 2000); Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2011).

the third part of the article I situate these works in the context of the late Roman “rise of the Poor.”⁹

■ Tanhuma

Marc Bregman writes, “*Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* literature is best regarded as a particular midrashic genre which began to crystallize toward the end of the Byzantine period in Palestine (5–7th century C.E.), but continued to evolve and spread throughout the Diaspora well into the middle ages, sometimes developing different recensions of a common text.”¹⁰ All editions (and fragments) of the Tanhuma center their discussion of usury on the poor and their plight, and they associate the avoidance of usury with the salvation reserved for those who care for the poor.¹¹ In tone, they have much in common with the sermons of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Ambrose of Milan on usury, pointing out the social evils of lending at interest and casting the borrower as a victim of the lender.¹²

All published editions of the Tanhuma, as well as some of those still only in manuscript, use materials from Tannaitic literature and Leviticus Rabbah 34 to construct their homilies on Exodus 22:24.¹³ Some editions of the Tanhuma include more material from their sources; others use them sparingly.¹⁴

⁹ Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002); idem, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); idem, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Marc Bregman, “Tanhuma Yelammedenu,” *EncJud* 19:503–4. See also Dov Weiss, “Divine Concessions in the Tanhuma Midrashim,” *HTR* 108 (2015) 70–97; idem, *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism* (Divinations; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) 21–49.

¹¹ The parallels in the printed Tanhuma on Lev 25 (*Behar* 1) and some fragmentary editions of the Tanhuma that record a lection beginning at Lev 25:35 do not mention usury. In this they are similar to their source, Leviticus Rabbah 34. See Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* (2 vols.; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1940–1966) 2:141.

¹² On these sermons see Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, *They Who Give from Evil: The Response of the Eastern Church to Moneylending in the Early Christian Era* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012) 134–83.

¹³ Mann designates it *seder* 61 of the cycle. In a Targum scroll (T-S 20.155), it is *seder* 16 of Exodus; see Michael L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986) 282–97.

¹⁴ I used the following editions, with the invaluable assistance of *Maagarim*: 1) Printed Tanhuma, ed. Mantua: Giacomo Ropinelo, 1563 with MS Cambridge 1212 and other MSS listed in Marc Bregman, *Sifrut Tanhuma-Yelamedenu: Te'ur Nusaheiah ve-Iyyunim Be-Darke Hithavutam* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2003). 2) Tanhuma ed. Buber (Printed as Solomon Buber [ed.], *Midrash tanhuma ha-kadum ve ha-yashan*, Vilna: Romm, 1913), based on MS Oxford 154. 3) Exodus Rabbah, with Ayelet Lazarovsky, “Midrash Shemot Rabbah: Mahadurah Mada'it ve-iyun ba-sipurim” (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005) based on Exodus Rabbah, MS Jerusalem, National Library, 2^o 4 5977. 4) *Sefer ve-hizhir* (ed. E. M. Freimann; Leipzig, 1873), based on MS Munich 205. 5) MS Vatican Ebr. 44. 6) *Midrash Hadash* or Tanhuma ed. Mann, printed first in Mann, *Bible as Read*; re-edited by Gila Vachman, *Midrash hadash 'al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies, 2013) 22–39, based on MS JTSA 5029.

Tanhuma couples the usury prohibition and care for the poor in three ways: first, by the reworking of older rabbinic materials; second, the amplification of traditions found in non-rabbinic literature and their adaptation to fit the new coupling; and third, the introduction of new materials on the salvific import of the avoidance of usury and care for the poor.

■ Coupling Usury and Poverty: Redaction

Tanhuma homilists and redactors often used earlier rabbinic sources. In the case of usury, they turn both to Tannaitic literature and Leviticus Rabbah 34. The Tanhuma reworks these sources in service of its new ideology in various ways, as the following two examples indicate.¹⁵

Example 1: Tan. Exod Mishpatim 9 (and parallels) = t. B. Metz. 6:13

If you lend money to my people – this is what the verse speaks of *He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent* (Ps 15:5). Come and see: anyone who has wealth and gives charity to the poor and does not lend at interest, it is recorded about him as if he observed all the commandments.

R. Simon says: anyone who has coins and does not lend them at interest, about him the verse says *he that putteth not out his money to usury* [. . . *he who does these shall never stumble*]. Thus you see that those who lend at interest stumble away from the world.

The Tanhuma here reworks the Tosefta in three ways. First, the tradition is made anonymous. Second, the verse not only commends the avoidance of usury, but also giving charity to the poor. Third, avoidance of usury and engagement in charity is not only a way out of death but also tantamount to observing all the commandments. The insertion of *charity* and *poverty* into the Tannaitic tradition here brings it into conversation with the homily¹⁶ that follows it, which I discuss below.

¹⁵ Biblical citations in rabbinic sources, italicized, are adapted from the King James Version except where noted. In order to replicate the dialectical distinction between verse citation and midrash (between Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew), I use the KJV because it is intelligible to modern English readers but dialectically marked as archaic and different.

¹⁶ NB that I use “homily” as the technical equivalent for Hebrew דרשה. It does not imply the setting for which these literary sources were created or performed.

Example 2: Exod. Rab. 31:13 = Sifra Kedoshim 2:1 + Sifra Behar 5:1 + Mek. RI Kaspā 1 + Sifre Deut 262

Thou shalt not be to him as an usurer – if you lent money to him, do not oppress him.¹⁷

Do not point out a field or a vineyard and say to him: take a *mina* for yourself and trade with it, and write your field and your vineyard over to me. And tomorrow, he will lose the money and you will take his vineyard. This is why it says *thou shalt not be to him as a usurer*:

Hence you learn that those who charge interest have no fear of God . . .

You (pl.) shall not lay upon him usury – it should have said *thou shall not lay upon him usury*; who are “you”? Those are the witnesses and the scribe and the guarantor and the lender who transgress a negative commandment. For if the witnesses and the scribe had not come, [the borrower] would have taken nothing. Thus, they all suffer lashes.

And whence that the borrower suffers lashes? As it says *you shall not cause your brother to take interest*.

What is interest like? Like someone who was bitten by a snake and did not notice, and said: “who bit me?” And did not realize this until [the venom] rose up in him.

Exodus Rabbah here weaves together traditions from various Tannaitic midrashim, and frames them between two non-Tannaitic traditions which reflect

Sifra Kedoshim 2:1

Do not place a stumbling block before the blind – before someone who is blind in the matter . . . do not tell him: sell your field and buy a donkey, and you turn on him¹⁸ and take it from him. Perhaps you might say: I am giving him good advice? Behold, the matter is given over to the heart, as it says *and you shall fear your God, I am the LORD*.

Sifra Behar 5:1

I am the LORD your God who has taken you out of the land of Egypt – hence they said: all those who accept the yoke of usury accept the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. And all who unload from themselves the yoke of usury unload from themselves the yoke of heaven.

Mek. RI Kaspā 1

You (pl.) shall not lay upon him usury – what does this teach? As it says *you shall not give him your money with usury and increase* (Lev 25:37), this is an admonition for the lender, that he not lend at interest . . . and when he says *do not take from him usury and increase* (Lev 25:36) this is an admonition for the borrower . . . I have only an admonition for the borrower and the lender, whence for the guarantor, for the witnesses, for the scribe? It teaches to say *you shall not lay upon him usury*, in any manner.

Sifre Deut 262

You shall not cause your brother to take interest – this is the borrower.

¹⁷ אֵל תְּדַחֵקוּ; cf. Exod 22:24 LXX: καταπαύσων=כַּנְשָׁה; and the Palestinian Targum tradition (MS Neofiti 1, MS Neofiti marginalia, Fragment Targum V, and Genizah Targum A): כְּמַרְי חוּב דְּחָק.

¹⁸ עֲוֹקֵף עָלָיו; see Amit Gvaryahu, “Twisting Words: Does Halakhah Really Circumvent Scripture?” *JJS* 68 (2017) 260–83, at 263.

the usury-poverty coupling prevalent in the Tanhuma.¹⁹ The explanation of the Biblical Hebrew term נִשָּׂא as related to biting, and specifically snake bites, is conspicuously absent from classical rabbinic literature. Additionally, the prohibition against “oppressing” the borrower, though found in LXX and in the Targumim, is also absent from classical rabbinic literature. Re-working Tannaitic materials into this framework casts them as measures intended to better the lot of the borrower, the victim of usury.

Sifra Kedoshim is taken out of context to fit its new location. In its original context, it is a comment on Leviticus 19:14, “you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind.” In that context, Jews are admonished not to give bad advice to their unwitting peers to sell their fields with the intention of buying those fields at fire-sale prices later. Exodus Rabbah, perhaps reading into the Mishnah’s connection of this prohibition with usury (m. B. Metz. 5:11), takes Sifra’s admonishment from the context of bad advice to the more common context of borrowing against real estate. This practice was extremely common in the ancient Levant.²⁰ But it does not follow that bad advice causes a practice to become usurious. In fact, this same practice is mentioned and allowed in Mishnah Bava Metzi’a itself: “[If] a man lent another money on the security of his field and said to him, ‘If you do not pay me by this date three years hence it is mine,’ it is his. And thus Boethus b. Zonin did, according to the sages.”²¹ The Mishnah allows (encourages?) using fields as security for the express purpose of repossessing them after a period of time elapses. This is not a usurious transaction, because, in the rabbinic imagination, neither the value of the loan nor of the collateral increases with time. Thus, if the lender does not benefit from the produce of the field, it is completely permitted. Nonetheless, it is easy to see how a borrower might be victimized through just these kinds of contracts and lose all of their property. The very behavior criticized by the Tanhuma is explicitly allowed in the Mishnah.²²

¹⁹ “Exodus Rabbah” parashot 1–14 are a running commentary on Exodus which uses Tanhuma materials. Parashot 15–32 are an edition of Tanhuma on Exodus, similar to Tanhuma ed. Mantua. See Marc Bregman, “Midrash Rabbah and the Medieval Collector Mentality,” *Proof* 17 (1997) 63–76; and a survey of literature and manuscripts in Benjamin Williams, *Commentary on Midrash Rabba in the Sixteenth Century: The Or Ha-Sekhel of Abraham Ben Asher* (Oxford Oriental Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 1–9.

²⁰ See Piotr Steinkeller, “The Ur III Period,” in *Security for Debt in Ancient Near Eastern Law* (ed. Raymond Westbrook and Richard Jasnow; CHANE 9; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 47–62, and the documents in Claudia Kreuzsaler et al., “Capital,” in *Law and Legal Practice in Egypt from Alexander to the Arab Conquest: A Selection of Papyrological Sources in Translation, with Introductions and Commentary* (ed. James G. Keenan, Joseph Gilbert Manning, and Uri Yiftach-Firanko; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 226–75.

²¹ m. B. Metz. 5:3, translation adapted from *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (trans. Jacob Neusner; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

²² See also t. B. Metz. 4:2. From b. B. Metz. 63a and b. Arak. 31a it seems Boethus was the borrower but the Tannaitic materials say he was a lender. This fits with the portrayal of Boethus as a wealthy individual with business interests: see e.g. m. Avod. Zar. 5:3; t. Shab. 3:4; t. Pesah. 2:19, 10:12. For lender as huckster see Ambrose, *Tob.* 23–24.

Not all of the Tannaitic material here is similarly reworked and some of it remains at odds with the outlook presented in the Tanhuma. Thus, Tanhuma echoes Sifre Deuteronomy's censure of the borrower, whom the Tanhuma then likens to the victim of a snakebite.

The Tannaitic material is reworked and re-contextualized in the Tanhuma to include poverty and charity in the scope of the usury prohibition. Material from Leviticus Rabbah, which focuses exclusively on poverty and charity, stays mainly intact in the Tanhuma. It becomes related to borrowing, lending and the usury prohibition through context alone. By being cast as a commentary on the verses prohibiting usury in Exodus, and interspersed with discussions of usury, the poverty/charity homilies of Leviticus Rabbah now become a mirror image of the usury prohibition. Much like the insertion of charity into the Toseftan tradition above, materials from Leviticus Rabbah are used in the various editions of the Tanhuma to cast charity as the alternative to usury.

■ Material Unique to the Tanhuma Editions

Some material, found in several editions of the Tanhuma, is not found elsewhere and cannot reasonably be explained as a reworking of other rabbinic sources known to us. The two examples that follow include two kinds of unique material: (1) material with significant parallels in non-rabbinic works, such as Josephus and the Targumim and (2) material with no earlier Jewish parallels, but with some echoes in Christian literature.

■ Obadiah and Borrowing versus Lending

Exodus Rabbah, MS Vat. Ebr. 44 and MS Cambridge 1212, as well as the early Medieval Sefer ve-hizhir, contain the following homily:²³

Another matter: *if you lend money to my people*. This is what is written, *He that putteth not out his money to usury*. Come and see: anyone who has wealth and gives charity to the poor and does not lend at interest, it is recorded about him as if he observed all the commandments. And who is this? This is Obadiah, who was rich, and was the steward (אפוטרופוס) of Ahab the king of Israel, as it says *And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house* (1 Kings 18:3). And he was exceedingly rich, but he spent all of his money on charity, because he fed the prophets (see 1 Kings 18:4). And when the famine came, he borrowed money from Jehoram, son of Ahab, [in order to] supply the prophets. [Obadiah] upheld *he that putteth not out his money to usury* [. . . *he that does these things shall never be moved*]. But Jehoram, who lent at interest, [about him] God said: is this one still alive? Let Jehu come and kill him, as it says *And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart . . .* (2 Kings 9:24). And why *between his arms and the arrow went out of his heart?* For he hardened his heart and put his hands out and took interest. [And he

²³ The quote is from Exod. Rab. 31:4 (Lazarovsky, "Shemot Rabbah Mishpatim," 34).

died,] To uphold what Ezekiel said: *He hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live* (Ezek 18:13). Thus [God] admonishes them²⁴ and says *if you lend money to my people*.

The tradition about Obadiah borrowing money to feed the prophets whom he hid in a cave is found already in Josephus.²⁵ Josephus also provides a scriptural cue for this tradition, entirely missing from the Tanhuma. In 2 Kings 4:1: “Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, ‘Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves’” (NRSV). The husband of this woman clearly borrowed money, because the creditor is coming to take his sons. But who was this man? The only identification we have is that he “feared the Lord.” This is the same description of Obadiah, the steward of Ahab, found in 1 Kings 18:3 and 18:12.²⁶ Josephus, in retelling the story, says that the woman was the wife of Obadiah, and that she told Elisha that “a hundred [prophets] had been fed by him with money he had borrowed and had been kept in hiding; now, after her husband’s death, both she and her children were being taken away into slavery by her creditors.” The narrative thus begins with Obadiah providing for the prophets, and ends with a prophet providing for Obadiah’s sons.²⁷ A short allusion to this tradition is also found in Pesikta de-Rav Kahana *Shekalim* 5, attributed to R. Mani; but it does not go beyond identifying the woman asking Elisha for assistance as Obadiah’s wife.

Another source that reflects part of this tradition is the Targum to 2 Kings 4:1. In the targumic tradition, liturgical readings were sometimes prefaced by a lengthy narrative exposition called a *Tosefta*. These were sporadically preserved in fragmentary MSS and in biblical commentary, notably David Kimhi’s commentary to the prophets.²⁸ The Targum to 2 Kings contains the following expansion (in **bold**).

And one woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets called out to Elisha, saying: “your servant, **Obadiah**, my husband, is dead. And you know that your servant was fearful before the Lord. **For when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, he took one hundred men from them and hid them in groups of fifty men in a cave. And he would borrow and feed them, so that he would not feed them from Ahab’s property, for it was taken**

²⁴ מזהיר להם. This term is found in rabbinic literature only in Song. Rab. 5.16.4: *Midrash Hadash* (ed. Vachman), 229 l. 34.

²⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 9.47; English translation in LCL, 26–27. See also: Christopher T. Begg and Paul Spilsbury, “Ant. 9:47–50,” in *Flavius Josephus Online* (ed. Steve Mason) http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004320079_fjo_AJ_9_00047. See Christopher Begg, *Josephus’ Story of the Later Monarchy: (AJ 9, 1–10, 185)* (BETL 145; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 69, see also n. 2 above.

²⁶ One manuscript of Targum here has עבדיה בעלי מית (“Obadiah my husband is dead”) instead of עבדך בעלי (“your servant my husband”), which incorporates the identification of Obadiah into the scriptural text itself.

²⁷ Cf. Ps 37:25–26.

²⁸ Kimhi’s *toseftot* are cited as **(K)** in Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic: Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1992). See also Rimmon Kasher, *Toseftot Targum le-nevi'im* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1995) 137–41 (Hebrew).

under compulsion. And now, the creditor is coming to take my two sons for him as slaves.”²⁹

A standard Aramaic loan contract would have included interest.³⁰ But the expansion does not make the connection between the avoidance of interest and Obadiah’s god-fearing. Instead, it alludes to Prov 19:17, “Whoever gives freely (חריג) to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full” (NRSV). Obadiah borrows from Jehoram to lend to God, and thus his payment is assured.³¹

“Fearing the Lord” is also part of the admonishment against taking usury in Lev 25:36. Obadiah left substantial debt after his death but was “fearful of the Lord.” This leads the Tanhuman homilist to the conclusion that Obadiah both borrowed at interest and that he avoided *taking* interest. This conclusion is not necessarily warranted by logic: Obadiah could have simply borrowed large sums of money and not returned them (yet); but the homilist adopts it all the same, and casts Obadiah as a *willing victim* of the evil lender, Jehoram. The former is righteous, and the latter is evil, and both receive their just deserts.³² The tradition about Jehoram being the lender is not found in any other source.³³

The Mishnah censures both sides of a usurious loan contract (as well as the scribe, the witnesses and the guarantors). Borrowing at interest is equally problematic and equally forbidden, in the eyes of the Mishnah, as lending at interest.³⁴ But in the world the Tanhuma portrays, borrowers are victimized by their lenders. Commending Obadiah for only *borrowing* but not *lending* at interest fits nicely with this image. It also quite accurately reflects most of the usury prohibitions found in the Hebrew Bible.³⁵ Censuring those who lend at interest more than those who borrow is a salient feature of early Christian preaching against usury, for example in Ambrose:

²⁹ Kasher, *Toseftot Targum*, 138.

³⁰ See *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (ed. and trans. Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni; 4 vols.; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986) 2.B3.1, B4.2. Loans at interest are also found at Al-Yahudu; see Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer* (CUSAS 28; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2014).

³¹ On this verse, see Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) 35–52.

³² That Obadiah borrowed at interest mirrors his wife’s reward: a cruse of oil which never ceases to produce more oil, like capital lent at interest which breeds capital.

³³ Cf. Did. 4.5: “Do not be one who reaches out your hands to receive but draws them back from giving” (*The Apostolic Fathers* [trans. Bart Ehrman; 2 vols.; LCL 24–25; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003] 423–25).

³⁴ See m. B. Metz. 5:11, *Sifre Deut 262* (Louis Finkelstein [ed.], *Sifre ad Deuteronomium*, [Berlin: Jüdische Kulturbund in Deutschland, 1939] 284), b. B. Metz. 60b, 70b.

³⁵ Wisdom literature (and its echoes in Deuteronomy) has little patience for borrowers: “The borrower is the slave of the lender,” says Prov 22:7. Leviticus and Exodus, however, cast borrowers as members of the protected “poor” class, and place the responsibility on lenders to help them.

We accuse the debtor because he has acted somewhat imprudently, but nevertheless there is nothing wickeder than the usurers, who think that another's loss is their gain, and regard as their own loss whatever is possessed by others . . . The [lender] like a lion is seeking whom he may devour, the [borrower] like the young ox dreads the onslaught of the robber . . . The Lord therefore sees both the usurer and the debtor, he looks upon them as they meet, a witness of the wickedness of the one, the wrong of the other; He condemns the avarice of the former, the folly of the latter.³⁶

■ The Salvific Meaning of Usury

Exodus Rabbah, Tanhuma (ed. Mantua) and MS Vat. Ebr. 44 contain a homily that discusses the salvific meaning of usury and loans.³⁷ The homily centers on the term *ḥasid* נְחִיָּם, “reprobate silver” in Jeremiah 6:30, and connects it with other occurrences of “silver” and the verb *ḥasid* אָסַף, “to abhor” in the prophets. Taking its cue from verses in Jeremiah, which compare Israel to various scrap metals, the homily reads the commandment to lend without interest in conjunction with the commandment to return a pledge “by the coming of the sun” (Exod 22:25–26), as a description of the way in which Israel have fallen into exile and how they will be, in the end-times, taken out of it:³⁸

Another matter: *If you lend money to my people*. This is what is written: *Reprobate (ḥasid) silver shall men call them [because the LORD hath rejected them]* (Jer 6:30). When Israel were exiled from Jerusalem, the enemies took them out in collars. And the nations of the world said: The Holy (blessed be He) does not want these people, as it says *Reprobate silver shall men call them*, etc. Just as silver is smelted and made a vessel, and smelted again and made a vessel, and so many times over, until finally a man can crush them with his hand and it can no longer be used for work. So too Israel have no redemption, because the Holy (blessed be He) has rejected them, as it says *Reprobate silver*, etc. When Jeremiah heard this he came to the Holy (blessed be He) [and said]: Master of the Universe, is it true that you have rejected (*ḥasid*) your sons? This is what is written *Hast thou utterly rejected Judah . . . why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us?* (Jer 14:19).

The Holy (blessed be He) said to him: however, I have made a condition with them that if they sin, the temple will be pawned (*ḥasid* מִתְמַשְׁכָּן), as it says, *And I will set משכני among you* (Lev 26:11). Do not read משכני, *my tabernacle*, but

³⁶ Lois Miles Zucker, “S. Ambrosii De Tobia: A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation” (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1933) 43. In the last sentence, Ambrose interprets Prov 29:13 (LXX), “When creditor (δανιστής) and debtor (χρεοφειλέτης) meet each other, the Lord makes an inspection (ἐπισκοπήν) of both.” For Ambrose, however, the “inspection” finds one party more guilty than the other.

³⁷ On salvific or redemptive giving in the Talmuds, see Gray, “Redemptive Almsgiving.”

³⁸ The allegory hinges on reading the expression “coming of the sun” *עַד בֹּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ*, to mean “sunrise,” rather than “sunset.” For other attestations of this reading see Daniel Boyarin, “*La-leksikon ha-talmudi IV*,” *Teuda* 6 (1988): 63–75, at 67–69, 73–75.

rather משכני, *my pledge*. And thus Balaam says: *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings* (משכנתיך), *O Israel!* (Num 24:5). Two pledges. [And] They are called *tents* when built, and *dwellings* when they are destroyed.

I do not pawn my temple to the nations because I owe them anything. But your sins cause me to pawn my temple to them. Otherwise, to whom do I owe anything? As it says: *Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorce, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? To whom do I owe anything? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away* (Isa 50:1).

And this was my condition with Moses about them: *If thou lend money to my people the poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer*. If they transgressed these commandments, I will pawn two pledges, as it says: *If thou pawn to pledge* (הכל תחבל) *thy neighbour's raiment*. Moses said to him: Master of the Universe, will they be pawned forever? He said no, rather *by that the sun cometh* (Exod 22:25–26). Until the sun comes, as it says *But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings* (Mal 3:20).³⁹

Although it is an allegorical reading of silver, loans, pawns and the sun, the allegory and allegorized entities do not match up completely. Israel are called “reprobate silver” by the gentiles, as if God has cast them away. The homilist takes pains to prove that this is untrue. Sin however creates a debt and when Israel sinned, their temple was pledged as collateral for their debts. Apparently, God does not charge interest for the sins, but He withholds the pledge “*by that the sun cometh*,” i.e. until the day the messiah comes. The final day of salvation, on which the “sun of charity” will shine, is the day when Israel’s pledge will be returned to them and perhaps their debt will be forgiven.

The identification of the Messiah with the “sun of charity” in Malachi 3:20 is found already in the Testament of Judah,⁴⁰ and then in the Gospel of Luke (1:78).⁴¹ It is subsequently invoked by (in chronological order) Clement, Origen, Hippolytus, Gregory Nazianzus and Eusebius.⁴² It is not, however, found in rabbinic sources that predate the Tanhuma, which read the sun of Malachi 3:20 as the celestial body.⁴³

³⁹ Exod. Rab. 31:10.

⁴⁰ T. Jud. 24.1 (Marinus DeJonge [ed.], *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* [Leiden: Brill, 1978] 76–77). This text joins Mal 3:20 with Num 24:17, a verse which was read as messianic from a very early time (see, e.g., CD 7:16 and y. Ta’an. 4:6, 68d).

⁴¹ Luke combines ἔλεος with ἀνατολή, invoking the only combination of זרח and צדקה in the Hebrew Bible. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 28; 2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday: 1981–1985), 1:387; François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 77. Ayelet Wenger noted, in a private conversation, that Luke 1:17 quotes Mal 3:24, and she suggests that messianic readings of Mal 3:20 emerge from reading it in light of 3:24.

⁴² E.g. Clement, *Protr.* 11.114.3; Origen, *Cels.* 6.54, 6.79, 7.22, 7.31; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 32.24.

⁴³ See Catherine Hezser, “‘For the Lord God Is a Sun and a Shield’ (Ps. 84:12): Sun Symbolism in Hellenistic Jewish Literature and in Amoraic Midrashim,” in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, (ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser; TSAJ 163; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 213–36. Joseph

The combination of metaphors in this homily is especially rich: sin is debt; the temple's destruction is its taking in pledge; the coming of the messiah is the sun, bringing with it the return of the pledge.⁴⁴ The classical rabbinic discussions of usury and debt contain no such allegories. The metaphor of debt as sin is ubiquitous in classical rabbinic literature, as in Second Temple literature. It is also used creatively in parables and in statements *about* sin.⁴⁵ But discussions of usury in rabbinic literature do not mention this metaphor outright or utilize it in any significant way.⁴⁶

■ Yannai on Usury and Poverty

Usury and poverty are also connected in the work of the *payyetan* Yannai, who wrote in late fifth- and early sixth-century Palestine. The relationship between the Tanhuma midrashim and *piyyut* has not yet received the comprehensive treatment it deserves. Scholarship on this relationship seeks textual connections between *piyyut* and midrashim conventionally dated later than the *piyyut*.⁴⁷ I point however to thematic and ideological similarities without claiming a philological influence or a genetic relationship.

The *kerovah* for the reading beginning with Exodus 22:24 has not been preserved in its entirety. Most of it is missing, and only two of the *piyyutim* survive. Importantly, no *catenae* of verses, which typically end the poems and signal the shift to the end of each blessing, have been preserved. Thus, there are no traditions traceable from *piyyut* to midrash, but only an ideological shift that they both share. The connection is in tone, tenor, and agenda, which are significantly more difficult to gauge.

M. Baumgarten, "The Heavenly Tribunal and the Personification of *Sedeq* in Jewish Apocalyptic," in *ANRW* II 19.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979) 219–39. Cf. Targum Ps.-Jonathan on Deut 24:13.

⁴⁴ See Ambrose, *Tob.* 31–32. Tanhuma and Ambrose both highlight that Isaiah's God claims that Israel were passively sold for their sins. See also Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 5.21 (*The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage* [ed. W. Wright; London: Williams and Norgate, 1869] צו); English translation in *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (trans. Adam Lehto; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010) 163.

⁴⁵ For sin as debt in Second Temple literature, see Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). MH uses זכות and חובה for commandments and sins, and bears this metaphor out in parables, e.g. m. Avot 3:16, t. Pe'ah 1:3.

⁴⁶ Rabbinic halakhah emphasizes accurate measuring, and it is tempting to connect this to the "measures" of divine justice. However, this connection is never made explicit. See Shlomo Naeh, "'Polishing Measures and Cleaning Scales': A Chapter from the Tractate of Weights and Measures," *Tarbiz* 59 (1990) 379–96, at 393–94 (Hebrew); Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Measure for Measure as a Hermeneutical Tool in Early Rabbinic Literature: The Case of Tosefta Sotah," *JJS* 57 (2006) 269–86, at 269.

⁴⁷ See Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, "The Qerova of Yannai to Ex. VII-VIII and the Question of the Date of the Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Midrashim," *Bar-Ilan* 1 (1963) 207–19 (Hebrew); Shulamit Elizur, "From *Piyyut* to *Midrash*," in *Rabbi Mordechai Breuer Festschrift: Collected Papers in Jewish Studies* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Academon, 1992) 2:383–97 (Hebrew); Gila Vachman, "Poets' Language and Hints of *Piyyutim* in 'Midrash Chadash Al-Hatorah,'" *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 24 (2011) 55–71 (Hebrew); Tzvi Novick, "Liturgy and Law: Approaches to Halakhic Material in Yannai's *Kedushta* 'ot," *JQR* 103 (2013) 475–502.

The bulk of Yannai's work, preserved in the Cairo Genizah, consists of *piyyutim* for the Sabbath and holiday prayers. Most were published in 1985–1987 by Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, but Rabinowitz's edition contains no *piyyutim* for week 61 of the triennial lectionary cycle.⁴⁸ In 2002 Benjamin Löffler published a fragment with two *piyyutim* for this lection.⁴⁹ The following is the end of a "Five" *piyyut*, customarily a ten-line alphabetic acrostic ending with *yod*.⁵⁰

- א Four dusts you have made most stringent from among the laws / and they beat before them and after them
- ...
- ה For the dust of usury is the hardest of all / On the borrower and the lender, the debtor and the creditor
- ו And it brings sin to the guarantor and the writer and the witnesses / And to the house in which it is placed, and the wealth in which it is mixed
- ז It is meritorious to be a lender who does not take usury / for he lit the eye of the poor man in a time of darkness
- ח If the son of a gentile or the son of your people come to you to borrow / the commandment of the close precedes that of the far
- ט The good one, who feeds all is called the master of all / from his hand is all and his is all
- י A hand, when you open it to the needy one, makes you equal to your creator / lend to him and he will repay you, and give you your just rewards.⁵¹

"Five" *piyyutim* often center on the interplay between scripture and the legal issues in the lection.⁵² Here one may have expected a poetic catalog of financial transactions, based on the Mishnah and Tosefta. Instead, the poet offers a *mélange* of usury and charity. The section poetically invokes two Tannaitic traditions: it begins, following Tosefta Avodah Zarah 1:10, with a listing of legal areas which impart "dust." In the poem, "dust" is a curse or a dampening of profit surrounding a more severe prohibition.⁵³

⁴⁸ On this lectionary see Shlomo Naeh, "On the Septennial Cycle of the Torah Reading in Early Palestine," *Tarbiz* 74 (2004) 43–75 (Hebrew); Ezra Fleischer, "Remarks Concerning the Triennial Cycle of the Torah Reading in Eretz Israel," *Tarbiz* 73 (2003) 83–124 (Hebrew).

⁴⁹ MS JTS ENA 960.8, published in Benjamin Löffler, "נוסף עוד: נוספות על נוספות למחזור יניי על," [Additions to Additions to the *Mahzor* of Yannai, Redacted by Paltiel b. Efraim the *Hazzan*], *Assufot: Sefer Shanah le-mada'ei ha-yahadut* 14 (2002) 191–210. I examined the fragment at Princeton University Library in December of 2016.

⁵⁰ For the place of "fives" in the wider structure of the *kerovah*, see Novick, "Liturgy and Law," 481 n. 19. Here, this synthesis leads to an understanding of the laws that is different from the one in classical rabbinic literature.

⁵¹ The fragment ends here, as does the *piyyut*.

⁵² Novick, "Liturgy and Law," 485–89.

⁵³ I believe this is the proper understanding of "dust" in the Tosefta as well. For this definition see Gvaryahu, "Lending at Interest," 125–26.

The Tosefta lists four legal areas that impart “dust”: usury, seventh-year produce, evil speech and idolatry. It then explains what should be avoided due to these dusts: “Dust of usury” is a reason to avoid trading in bills of debt owned by another. Although the markup on that debt is not technically usury (t. B. Metz. 4:3), the Tosefta rules against it, saying it can impart “the dust of usury.” For Yannai “the dust of usury” is the fact that the sin of usury spreads to all those involved in contracting the loan, not just borrower and lender. Yannai thus combines the Mishnah (m. B. Metz. 5:11), which lists five transgressing parties for each usurious loan, with the tradition that usury imparts “dust,” and equates the two. This “dust” also brings a curse on the wealth itself, and the home it is placed in. The former tradition is found in the Talmud—but not the latter.⁵⁴

Yannai continues: “It is meritorious to be a lender who did not take usury / for he lit the eye of the poor man in a time of darkness.” The poor—entirely absent from the rabbinic usury laws—are brought into the conversation. The word זכות, which begins the line, is a financial term—it means “credit,” but also “merit.” In colloquial Palestinian Aramaic, beggars would say בי זכי בי or זכי גרמך בי, “cause merit to yourself through me” when asking for alms.⁵⁵ Yannai uses the term זכות in conjunction with an allusion to Proverbs 22:2 and 29:13, which are both about poor people meeting others with more means, to articulate the avoidance of usury. He thereby links usury and charity once again, as in Leviticus, Exodus, Psalms, and Ezekiel.

The second law in the *piyyut* is: “If the son of a gentile or the son of your people come to you to borrow / the ‘commandment’ of the close precedes that of the far.”

Yannai calls this lending a “commandment” מצוה, used (with its Greek cognate ἐντολή) in Second Temple literature to mean “charity.” This usage is rarely attested in the legal register of rabbinic literature, but there is ample evidence of it in colloquial speech and in epigraphy.⁵⁶ Thus, says Yannai, Jews should lend to Jews (“the close”) before they lend to gentiles (“the far”). This law is also Tannaitic in origin, found in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael (*Kaspa* 1).⁵⁷ The Mekhilta picks up

⁵⁴ For this curse, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Against the Usurers* (Ernest Gebhardt [ed.], *Gregory Nysseni Opera*; 10 vols [Leiden: Brill, 1967], vol. 9: 205), trans. Casimir McCambley, “Against Those Who Practice Usury by Gregory of Nyssa,” *GOTR* 36 (1991) 287–302.

⁵⁵ For this meaning see Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (3rd ed.; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2017) 176 and the literature cited there. See also Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, *Halakha and Aggada in the Liturgical Poetry of Yannai: The Sources, Language and Period of the Payyetan* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1965) 159 n. 10 (Hebrew).

⁵⁶ Saul Lieberman, “Two Lexicographical Notes,” *JBL* 65 (1946) 67–72; Tzvi Novick, “Blessings over Mišvot: The Origins of a Category,” *HUCA* 79 (2008) 69–86, at 84–86; Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 329. Some Tannaitic sources reflect a positive commandment to lend money to the poor. See Mek. RI *Kaspa* 1 and m. Shevi. 10:3. This commandment appears nowhere else in the Mishnah. In the *piyyut* discussed below, מצוה is used in this sense as well. That the commandment is “pure” alludes to Ps 19:9, reflecting a reading of this verse as about charity, which enlightens the eyes, following Prov 29:13. Dispelling anger (עברה) is also a function of charity, as seen in Prov 11:14. See also Anderson, *Charity*, 53–82.

⁵⁷ Haim Saul Horovitz and Israel A. Rabin (eds.), *Mekhilta d’rabbi Ismael* (Frankfurt: Kauffmann,

on the verbosity of Exodus 22:24, “if you lend money to my people, to the poor one among you.” Each of these qualifiers is read as denoting a precedence among two groups, and those not of “my people” or “among you” have a lower priority:

Israel and a gentile stand before you – [choose] *my people*
 A poor man and a rich man stand before you – *to the poor*
 *A poor man from your people and a poor man from your town – *the poor from among you**⁵⁸
 A poor man from among you from your town, and a poor man from among you from another town, it teaches saying – *the poor from among you*.

The *piyyut* ends with an exhortation to “open hands” to those in need. This alludes to the commandment to give charity in Deuteronomy 15:8 and 15:11, and paraphrases Proverbs 19:17, “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will repay him.” The combination of the commandment to “open hands” to the poor in Deuteronomy 15 and the commandment to abstain from usury in Deuteronomy 24 is novel in comparison to rabbinic literature, and to Deuteronomy itself, the first pre-rabbinic tradition to uncouple poverty and usury.

The *kerovah* for week 99 in the cycle, beginning with Leviticus 25:35, also couples usury, poverty and charity, using the same biblical verses and key terms. The *kerovah* was preserved more fully—there are two parallel Cambridge fragments that cover the first six *piyyutim* of the *kerovah*.⁵⁹ The text preserved includes the *catenae* of verses, which combine verses on usury (Lev 25:36; Prov 28:8) with verses on charity (Prov 22:2) as well as other verses, read in rabbinic literature as discussing charity (e.g. Eccl 11:1).⁶⁰

The association between avoidance of usury, loans to the poor, and charity is especially apparent, again, in the Five, which here too combines themes of usury (from Tannaitic literature) and charity (from Amoraic midrash). The *piyyut* begins with a paraphrase of Psalm 41:2, “Happy is he who considers the poor; the LORD delivers him in the day of trouble.”

1931), 315; Assaf Rosen-Zvi, “Text, Redaction and Hermeneutic in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Kaspa” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2017) 159 ll. 11–12 (Hebrew).

⁵⁸ This line, missing from all textual witnesses of the Mekhilta, was reconstructed by Rosen-Zvi, “Text, Redaction and Hermeneutic,” 26–28.

⁵⁹ See Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai According to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays* (2 vols.; Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik and Tel Aviv University, 1985–1987) I:473–78 (Hebrew).

⁶⁰ For the parallel in Ecclesiastes Rabbah 11.1 see Burton L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* (TSAJ 94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 121–34. This composition does not associate charity with the avoidance of usury or with loans.

- א Happy are those who uphold the *commandment* of stretching out the hand (מִטֵּי יָד)
 For it will be credited to him immediately (מִיָּד) and erect a monument to
 him (לְיָד)
- ב Its punishment is twenty four curses
 And its reward twenty-four blessings
- . . .
- ה Lend to him, that he may live and he will be equal to you
 Do not be a creditor to him, be a guarantor to him
- ו *And do not charge him five for a tetradrachm*
And do not increase an addition of produce upon him
- ז The admonishment of this merit, this commandment stated
 is heavy in the kingdom of the eternal king
- ח Giving freely (or: lending)⁶¹ to the lowly and oppressed and strengthening the
 staggering and destitute
 The commandment of the poor and downtrodden, the merit of the wanting
 and oppressed
- ט Good and bad, mercy and cruelty, life and death were given to man
- י He will benefit if he was a benefactor, he will be pitied if he gave pity
 He will be revived if he revived, merit if he gave “merit.”

The beginning and end of this *piyyut* contain traditions about charity known from elsewhere: charity brings twenty-four blessings and curses (Lev. Rab. 34:11); the names for the poor (Lev. Rab. 34:6); charity brings merit to be used immediately as well as in the future (m. Pe’ah 1:1). At the center of the *piyyut* is a paraphrase of the mishnah which defines usury, Bava Metzi’a 5:1: “And do not charge him five (denarii) for a tetradrachm (= four denarii) / And do not increase an addition of produce upon him.” In this paraphrase, Yannai brings the Mishnah ever closer to scripture, reaffirming the primacy of the scriptural context over the rabbinic law.

Lending to the poor, in the *piyyut* as in scripture—and not in the Mishnah—is part of the commandment to give charity: “Lend to him, that he may live, that he may be equal to you,” a paraphrase of Lev 25:36. Other *piyyutim* in the *kerovah* emphasize the giving aspect of charity: “you shall surely give to the destitute according to your hand, and He [=God] shall surely give to you according to His hand” (I:476 l. 30); “Do not let him be sore / do not oppress him if he borrows // support him and he will be with you / for he who gives to the poor lends to the Lord” (I:478 l. 51–52). Giving and lending are intermingled here as two aspects of charity, which is “The Commandment,” and “The Merit.”

Z. M. Rabinowitz noted that the end of the ה-stich, “be a guarantor to him,” parallels the Sifra (Behar 5:1): “do not take usury or increase from him—from him you do not take, but you can become a guarantor for him.”⁶² The Sifra rules that it is

⁶¹ חונן is synonymous with מלוה (e.g. in Ps 112:5); see Norman M. Bronznick, *The Liturgical Poetry of Yannai* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 2000) 260 ad l. 48 (Hebrew).

⁶² Isaac Hirsch Weiss (ed.), *Sifra Deve Rav hu Sefer Torat Kohanim* (Vienna: Schlossberg,

permissible to become a guarantor for a forbidden usurious transaction. This ruling opposes the law in the Mishnah (m. B. Metz. 5:11) that the guarantor transgresses a negative commandment by participating in the loan. The Bavli (b. B. Metz. 71a), perhaps following the Tosefta (t. B. Metz. 5:20), rules that the Sifra discusses loans to gentiles, but this is not apparent from the Sifra itself, which is commenting on the superfluous *מֵאֵת* in the verse. It seems dissonant with the tone of the *piyyut* that it should allow Jews to facilitate usurious loans for other Jews. Yannai might be using “guarantor” in a figurative sense, i.e. “do not become his creditor, but show solidarity with him and support him.”⁶³ However, a closer look at the new context of the usury laws explains how this makes sense: as we saw above, with regard to Obadiah, usurious borrowing is not as blameworthy as usurious lending. Being a guarantor for a poor person who is not able to obtain an interest-free loan, even from a Jew, is a meritorious act for Yannai, who relies on the Sifra to allow it. In the process, he transforms what is a relatively local and minor question—does someone who co-signs a usurious loan transgress a negative commandment—into a matter of moral and religious duty towards the poor.

In halakhic works, the usury prohibition and poverty remain disconnected throughout this period. In the Babylonian Talmud usury is connected to robbery and fraud, but not opposed to charity (b. B. Metz. 61a). The first halakhic work I have found that connects the two is a fragmentary short Arabic work on usury by Sa’adia Gaon, perhaps a lost fragment from a commentary on Exodus or Leviticus, published and translated most recently by Robert Brody.⁶⁴ Sa’adia succinctly and systematically lists the various kinds of usury according to a categorization scheme of his own invention, using phraseology adapted from the Mishnah. Then he turns to ask: “What is the aspect of wisdom (*wjt alhkmh*) for which He was so harsh (*šdd*) regarding usury?” (346 l. 42). Sa’adia provides several answers, some of which are known from Talmudic literature. The first, however, is not. Sa’adia says that most of those who borrow at interest are weak (*d’fy*), and lending at interest will just cause them to become poorer.

This line of reasoning continues in Ibn Ezra,⁶⁵ and it may have also been reflected at some point in the medieval debate on the permissibility of lending at interest to Jewish apostates.⁶⁶ But in the geonic period, as far as I can tell, this is a novelty.

1862), 109b; Rabinowitz, *Halakha and Aggada*, 55.

⁶³ This sense is apparent in Sifra *Behukotai* 2:5 (ed. Weiss, 112b).

⁶⁴ Robert Brody, *חבורים הלכתיים של רב סעדיה גאון* (Halakhic Works of Rav Sa’adya Ga’on), (Jerusalem: Yad Ha-Rav Nissim, 2014) 342–49.

⁶⁵ See both commentaries on Exod 22:24.

⁶⁶ See Ephraim Kanarfogel, “Changing Attitudes Toward Apostates in Tosafist Literature, Late Twelfth-Early Thirteenth Centuries,” in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations* (ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schachter; BRLA 33; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 297–327, at 311–17; David Malkiel, “Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe: Boundaries Real and Imagined,” *Past & Present* (2007) 3–34; Jacob Katz, “‘Though He Sinned, He Remains an Israelite,’” *Tarbiz* 27 (1958) 203–17 (Hebrew). Simcha Emanuel showed that Katz’s reconstruction of the sources was erroneous: see Simcha Emanuel, “Teshuvot Ha-Geonim Ha-Ketsarot,” in *Atara L’Haim: Studies in*

Sa'adia here introduces, in what seems to be a halakhic survey, an innovation found only in aggadic works from a Palestinian milieu—perhaps a reflection of his own education in Palestine before coming to Babylonia.⁶⁷ Sa'adia's incorporation of this idea into his own text is careful and measured, however. He marks the section as the “aspect of wisdom” of the usury laws. Although poverty relief is the first justification he provides, it is not the only one. Sa'adia also notes that usury was permitted “under the old regime,” so the Torah had to reinforce it with fear of God. He points to the fact that usury accumulates with time, and every cumulative sin is more severe.⁶⁸ He does not rank these reasons in any hierarchy. The very mention of the poor in this context may reflect the sensibility, already current in the Palestinian (which we might by now call *Shāmi*?) orbit that usury laws were, primarily, for the poor, and that it was their plight that they were meant to rectify.⁶⁹

■ The Broader Picture

For the Tanhuma midrashim and *piyyut*, the civic framework set out in the Mishnah and elaborated in the Talmuds was no longer satisfactory. They understood the usury laws as a means toward alleviation of poverty, and that is how they spoke about them. They also reworked the materials at their disposal similarly. They reframed and recontextualized Mishnah, Tosefta, and earlier midrash, while fusing them with new material, to make the focus on poverty seem as if it is evident from these earlier materials as well. Reading through these works, it is possible not to notice that anything at all has changed. But in fact, the political world envisioned by the Mishnah is no longer sustained, even discursively.

The process of rereading the rabbinic texts back into the world of scripture, with its rich and poor, and the protected classes of stranger, widow and orphan, is a central factor in the creation of this trend. When the worldview embedded in the rabbinic texts ceased to be a living reality, scholars, preachers, and poets turned to the primary canon for justification. “Re-scripturizing” can be found at Qumran and is embedded in the very beginnings of halakhic midrash.⁷⁰ It is an ongoing process which can always be initiated, because scripture is always there.

However, the world of scripture had been taken up, some centuries ago, by another community which placed a premium on poverty and care for the poor. The earliest Christian texts emphasize, following the Hebrew scriptures, that the poor

the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Hayyim Zalman Dimitrovsky (ed. Daniel Boyarin et al.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000) 439–459, at 447–49 (Hebrew). For additional primary sources, see *Beit Yosef* ad Tur *Yoreh de'ah* 159:2 and the sources cited there.

⁶⁷ See Robert Brody, *Sa'adya Gaon* (trans. Betsy Rosenberg, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013) 29–31.

⁶⁸ Brody, *Halakhic Works*, 346–49.

⁶⁹ Sa'adia also offers a list of permitted investments, as a response to a possible objection that the usury laws stifle trade. For the juxtaposition of usury and trade, cf. Qur'an Baqarah 2:275.

⁷⁰ For this term, see Yakir Paz, “From Scribes to Scholars: Rabbinic Biblical Exegesis in Light of the Homeric Commentaries” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016) 84 (Hebrew).

are a gateway to God. Building off this connection, they also raise up the figure of Christ as a paradigm of poverty. In time, the church would come to present its institutions and officials as a community of holy poor, who are the most deserving of charity, and also those who are authorized to distribute it.

It is difficult, under these conditions, not to imagine that such a significant shift in Jewish discourse on poverty would not have been in dialogue of some sort with what was, by that point, the mainstream opinion of the majority religion. This “common sense” drew on so many Jewish sources, as well as on sensibilities still extant in actual Jewish practice and speech patterns, that adopting significant parts of it into an elite Jewish discourse was all but inevitable.⁷¹

Scholars tell a story of the “Rise of the Poor” in late antiquity from a myriad of perspectives. Some discuss the shift in the legal vocabulary of the empire in the fourth century, when references to “poverty and ‘the poor’ per se occur with relative frequency.”⁷² Some discuss it from perspective of the classical city and its virtues of *philanthrōpia* and *megalopsychia* as opposed to the “new” virtue of *philoptōchia*, into which the older virtues are subsumed.⁷³ It is possible to describe a decisive discursive shift here because (1) we see the polemic against the older ethos in action and (2) the new discourse left its mark on the physical landscape of the city. Funds shifted from games and civic benefaction to the church and its charities.⁷⁴ Through the mediation of the church, urban grandees from around the empire began spending their money “Jewishly.”⁷⁵

Scholars of Jewish texts however assumed that Jewish charitable giving went relatively unchanged. Ephraim E. Urbach, for example, discussed “the rise of the poor” only in the context of rabbinic polemics against charitable giving by non-Jews in the early church.⁷⁶ But the “Jewish” ideas that moved the imperial elite were not received by the rabbis unfiltered or unaltered. In the earliest strata of rabbinic literature sacramental giving is not found. The poor do not occupy a place of privilege in Tannaitic literature, which presents a picture of a society nothing like the one bifurcated by rich and poor portrayed in the gospels and replicated in

⁷¹ I use this term following Clifford Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) 73–93.

⁷² See Caroline Humphress, “Poverty and Roman Law,” in *Poverty in the Roman World* (ed. Robin Osborne and Margaret Atkins; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 184; Evelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e-7e siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1977) 11–17.

⁷³ Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 1–44.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 53–71

⁷⁵ Anderson, *Sin*, 131–51.

⁷⁶ E. E. Urbach, “Political and Social Tendencies in Talmudic Concepts of Charity,” *Zion* 16 (1951) 1–27, at 7 (Hebrew). Similarly, Yael Wilfand, *Poverty, Charity and the Image of the Poor in Rabbinic Texts from the Land of Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014) assumes a historic continuity in giving practices described in both Tannaitic and Amoraic works. She assumes both spontaneous and organized giving changed little in practice in the classical rabbinic period. This may be true as a matter of practice, but the shifts in discourse are readily apparent, as shown by Gardner, *Origins of Organized Charity*, 180–92.

early Christian preaching. The poverty line is drawn quite high (200 denarii, the same amount as a woman's dowry), and "the poor" as a class are written almost out of existence.⁷⁷ The Mishnah has, for example, no laws on how or when to give charity to beggars.⁷⁸

The Mishnah represents a civic ethos, with a focus on the town as the locus of a man's temporal and spiritual activity, and the (Jewish) people of the town as the primary beneficiaries of charitable gifts.⁷⁹ This includes the civic institutions that the Mishnah envisions as meant to care for those citizens of lesser means: the food dole and the community chest, discussed at length by Gregg Gardner.⁸⁰ The Tannaim do not imagine that people of lesser means do not exist, or that others do not have obligations toward them. Rather, they imagine that the basic unit of Jewish community is "the city," and it is the obligation of "citizens" to care for one another through institutional giving. The Jewish "city" is envisioned as one in which differences in means, which clearly do exist, do not create differences in political status. If this is correct, we must return to our sources and scan them for signs of "the rise of the poor," as a concern independent of civic life, similar to what we know from Christian works.⁸¹

In some areas, such as giving to beggars or the spiritual significance of charity, the poor rise in prominence in Amoraic rabbinic literature, both Talmud and Midrash.⁸² But the recoupling of usury and poverty is a rather late phenomenon, which appears

⁷⁷ See Gardner, "Who is Rich?"; Yael Wilfand, "From the School of Shammai to Rabbi Yehuda the Patriarch's Student: The Evolution of the Poor Man's Tithe," *JSQ* 22 (2015) 36–61. For a poverty line of 200 denarii see also Modestinus in Justinian's *Digest* 48.2.10, and the discussion in Humphress, "Poverty and Roman Law," 197–200.

⁷⁸ See m. Avot 5:13. A comparison of the occurrences of the word צדקה in the Mishnah and in the Hebrew fragments of Ben-Sira using *Maagarim* yields 4 occurrences for the former (ca. 188,000 words) and 11 occurrences for the latter (ca. 13,000 words).

⁷⁹ E.g.: donations are collected and distributed in and by the town (m. Pe'ah 8; t. Pe'ah 4). Poor from one's own town precede those of another town for charitable lending (Mek. RI *Kaspa* 1). Charitable gifts are given to the gentile poor, "for the ways of peace" (m. Git. 5:8, t. Git. 3:13) but these too are collected and distributed in a civic setting. The additional prayer (תפילה המוספית) on the Sabbath is said only in the presence of a חבר עיר, i.e. a town assembly (m. Ber. 4:7), and the מעמד envisioned by Mishnah Ta'anit occurs in a city (m. Bik. 3:4; m. Ta'an. 4). On the Sabbath a person can walk in the borders of the city and around the city, but not from city to city, and Mishnah Eruvin details a procedure for surveying this border (m. Eruv. 5).

⁸⁰ Gardner, *Origins of Organized Charity*.

⁸¹ Gregg E. Gardner, "Cornering Poverty: Mishnah Pe'ah, Tosefta Pe'ah and the Re-Imagination of Society in Late Antiquity," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Ra'anan S. Boustán et al.; 2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 1:205–16.

⁸² The *loci classici* for charity in Amoraic literature are Lev. Rab. 34, y. Pe'ah 8:7–9, 21a–b; b. B. Bat. 7b–11a. See discussion in e.g. Visotzky, *Golden Bells*, 121–34; M. L. Satlow, "'Fruit and the Fruit of Fruit': Charity and Piety among Jews in Late Antique Palestine," *JQR* 100 (2010) 244–77; Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 130–35; Gray, "Redemptive Almsgiving"; Tzvi Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 105 (2012) 33–52; Gardner, *Origins of Organized Charity*, 180–92.

only in late rabbinic sources, or what we could term post-rabbinic sources, in the fifth or sixth century CE. In Christian treatments of wealth, too, speaking out against usury, and marking interest-free lending as a form of charitable giving, comes relatively late.⁸³ The rabbis returned to the poor in fits and starts, all in the context of the (discursive) demise of the civic ethos that was held dear by both the rabbis of the Mishnah and contemporary imperial elites. It did not happen in one moment.

How could we account for the shift towards recoupling of usury and poverty in the later rabbinic sources? We could chalk it up to genre: the legal nature of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmuds conceivably gives little room to the plight of the poor. But this is contradicted by the complete absence of a link between usury and poverty in “classical” midrash, cotemporaneous with the Yerushalmi, and arguably earlier than the Bavli. The usury laws in the Mishnah view usury as a crime against the divine, with no apparent human victim. They forbid both borrowing and lending equally.⁸⁴ Similarly, we might argue that the audiences are different: the Mishnah’s *polis* could be cast as a vision for the learned élite, whereas the synagogue-goers who would hear *piyyut* and perhaps Tanhuma homilies prefer their world more bifurcated. Perhaps this “popular” worldview existed alongside the Mishnah and its highbrow politics all along, but is only expressed and refined in later works.

During this time the Palestinian Talmud had already been “canonized” to the point where it ceased to be expanded. What halakhic literature was produced in this period in Palestine is terse and concerned with practical matters, and quotes Talmudic dicta as authoritative.⁸⁵ Fealty to rabbinic law was still proclaimed, and we have no reason to doubt it. But the legal canon no longer demanded creative engagement in its formation, and creativity shifted elsewhere. This was a time for rethinking narrative: the laws are not contested, but their meaning is recast, using all the available works in the expanded canon, rabbinic literature as well as the scriptures.⁸⁶

⁸³ In the earliest Christian documents there is little discussion of usury. See Matt 5:42 and Luke 6:34–35 (and cf. Sir 20:15). Also see Ihssen, *They Who Give*, 80–91; Robert P. Maloney, “The Teaching of the Fathers on Usury: An Historical Study on the Development of Christian Thinking,” *VC* 27 (1973) 241–65, at 241. For a survey of the earliest Christian literature on usury see Ihssen, *They Who Give*, 92–133; Thomas Moser, “The Idea of Usury in Patristic Literature,” in *The Canon in the History of Economics: Critical Essays* (ed. Michalēs Psalidopoulos; London: Routledge, 2000) 24–44; Robert P. Maloney, “Early Conciliar Legislation on Usury: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Moral Thinking,” *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 39 (1972) 145–57; idem, “Teaching.”

⁸⁴ See Gvaryahu, “Lending at Interest,” 221–53.

⁸⁵ Hillel I. Newman, “Early Halakhic Literature,” in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (ed. Robert Bonfil et al.; Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 14; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 629–42. For a terminus ad quem of the Palestinian Talmud see *ibid.*, 630.

⁸⁶ Ra’anana S. Boustán, “Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism,” *JQR* 101 (2011) 482–501. Boustán offers a critique of views of ancient Jewish mysticism and magic as dichotomously divorced from rabbinic Judaism and presents a complex model of the ways in which various literary corpora from late antiquity existed in “overlapping, though not identical domains.”

Another avenue of inquiry is material. We could look for changes in Jewish settlement patterns in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, to attempt a survey of their material wealth and to examine the institutions which may have survived, in order to see if they changed in any way from the classical rabbinic period.⁸⁷ For the sixth century, we might also consider the impact of the period known now as the “late antique ice age,” as well as the Justinianic plague, which in 541 made its first foray into the Roman empire at Pelusium.⁸⁸ Both may have had effects on population sizes and social structures, including the *polis*, throughout the Mediterranean basin. They might have brought about an economic downturn in the Roman empire, and made it more vulnerable to the attack of the Muslim armies from the south. Justinian also made significant restrictions on lending and severely curtailed interest rates.⁸⁹ Perhaps, with the demise of physical structures comes the demise of the polity the Mishnah imagines.

Third, the discursive shift in late rabbinic works has roots in the Hebrew scriptures but was amplified and carried out first by Christian readers of those scriptures. If the communal focus shifted away from the civic fabric and became centered on the faith community, it is likely that the Jewish attempt to mirror the structures of power and offer discursive alternatives to them would change as well. A sacramental and salvific concern for the poor took hold in Second Temple Judaism and then, with the rise of Christianity, in growing swaths of the Roman empire. While this salvific language was pushed to the side by the early rabbis, it resurfaced as the central idiom in post-rabbinic literature.

These options are not mutually exclusive; rather they could be read as mutually reinforcing. A change in material circumstances could lead to a reappropriation of latent or foreign ideas. Conversely, similar material circumstances could be cast differently in different times with alternating ideological scaffolding.

I have found little evidence of literary borrowing between Christian homilies and the *piyyutim* or Tanhuma midrashim on usury. That the same verses are quoted

⁸⁷ Cf. the debate on the fourth century in Uzi Lieberman, “Settlement Patterns in the Eastern Galilee: Implications Regarding the Transformation of Rabbinic Culture in Late Antiquity,” in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern* (ed. Lee I. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz; TSAJ 130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 269–95; Jodi Magness, “Did the Galilee Experience a Settlement Crisis in the Mid-Fourth Century?” in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity* (ed. Levine and Schwartz) 296–313. For the 5th century see Doron Bar, “Rabbinic Sources for the Study of Settlement Reality in Late Roman Palestine,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006) 92–113; idem, “Population, Settlement and Economy in Late Roman and Byzantine Palestine (70–641 AD)” *BSOAS* 67 (2004) 307–20; idem, “The Christianisation of Rural Palestine During Late Antiquity,” *JEH* 54 (2003) 401–21.

⁸⁸ Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) 199–245. For the date see *ibid.*, 206. Harper’s reading of events has not been uncontested. See, e.g., Lee Mordechai et al., “The Justinianic Plague: An Inconsequential Pandemic?” *PNAS* 116 (2019) 25546–54.

⁸⁹ *Codex Justinianus* 4.32.260, from 13 December 528, halved interest rates across the empire. See Demetria Gofas, “The Byzantine Law of Interest,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium* (ed. Angeliki E. Laiou; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2008) 1096–1104, at 1096–98.

often points to little more than a shared scripture, because they are employed in different ways. The fact that the same “common sense” is reflected in these works, differentiated by time, place, genre, language, and content, shows that they are the product of a shared discourse. Because it was read into scripture seamlessly, it was almost transparently adopted and became virtually self-evident. In this post-rabbinic environment, lending to the poor interest-free regained its status as part of the personal obligation to give charity, which it had lost in the regnant voice of classical rabbinic literature. Usury was now again envisioned as a means of oppressing the poor rather than a repudiation of civic status in the Jewish polity.