

# LITERATURE AND LITURGY IN TIMES OF TRANSITION: THE PISKA “AND IT HAPPENED AT MIDNIGHT” FROM PESIKTA DE-RAV KAHANA

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the development and sources of the passage, “And it happened at midnight” in Pesikta de-Rav Kahana. Literary analysis of this passage decisively refutes the conjecture that the passage was copied from either Pesikta Rabbati or a lost homiletical midrash on the book of Exodus, and supports the contention that it was formulated by the redactor of the Pesikta itself. Nonetheless, the passage does deviate from certain characteristic trademarks of other piska’ot. The article proposes a general theory as to the dating, nature, and literary creation of the entire Pesikta. While the Pesikta is a unified work, it does include piska’ot that exhibit different literary patterns. These variations reflect changes in Torah reading practices that occurred in the period in which the Pesikta’s editor operated.*

### INTRODUCTION: PESIKTA DE-RAV KAHANA’S LITERARY AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (below: Pesikta) is arguably the most structurally complex midrashic composition in the landscape of the classic midrashim. The Pesikta is exceptional mostly because of its unusual organization. As is well known, the composition is not organized as a series of *derashot* on a particular biblical book. Rather, it has been variously described as a collection of *derashot* for “special days of the calendar year,” “selected places in the Bible,” or “a midrash on the calendar.”<sup>1</sup> The Pesikta, whose very discovery and reconstruction were beset by multiple obstacles, remains in some ways an unsolved mystery; many questions concerning the context in which it was created continue to occupy scholars to this day. Unresolved primary textual questions concerning issues such as the correct text of the Pesikta and the order of the various piska’ot from which it is comprised

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1. The state of scholarship for the Pesikta has not substantially changed since Zunz’s foundational study of the work, which was accompanied by Albeck’s addenda, and the editions of the work and introductions by Buber and Mandelbaum. See Leopold Zunz, *Ha-derashot be-Yisra’el ve-hishtalshelutan ha-historit*, trans. M. A. Zack, ed. Hanokh Albeck (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954), 81–86; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, ed. Solomon Buber (Lyck: Mekize Nirdamim, 1868); *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962). For a useful survey see Herman L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 319–21.

still persist.<sup>2</sup> This makes it even more difficult to deal concretely with foundational issues such as the creation of the composition, its editing, and the sources of its *derashot*.<sup>3</sup> Recently, there even arose some doubt concerning the very editorial unity of the composition. Was the entire Pesikta produced by one editor, or is it an eclectic collection of piska'ot that accrued during a lengthy process?<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these general questions concerning the entire Pesikta, scholars have raised questions concerning the “originality” or “authenticity” of certain individual piska'ot within the Pesikta, questioning whether they belong to the original redactional level of the composition or whether they were added at a later period in the history of its transmission. Two phenomena inspire questioning of a piska's originality, one connected to its literary context and the other to its liturgical context:

1. The literary context: If an entire piska is found in another composition it is possible that it was copied into the Pesikta from an outside source. This question was raised especially concerning the five piska'ot based on passages from Leviticus and found in a parallel form in *Vayikra Rabbah*.<sup>5</sup>
2. The liturgical context: The authenticity of certain piska'ot has been called into question because the verses on which they are based were not part of the festival Torah readings as practiced during the period of the Pesikta's composition. This question was raised especially concerning piska'ot on Passover and Shavuot that focus on readings from Exodus.<sup>6</sup>

One piska whose authenticity has been scrutinized is based on “And it happened at midnight” (וַיְהִי בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה) (Exodus 12:29), a verse topically appropriate for the

2. The Pesikta's textual witnesses—manuscripts and Genizah fragments—lack uniformity, and notwithstanding Mandelbaum's critical edition, they too contribute to the lack of clarity.

3. The latest studies concerning this issue are: Yaakov Elbaum, “Sha'are teshuvah le-'olam petuḥim: 'Iyyun be-mahzor ha-petiḥot shel parshat shuvah be-Pesikta de-Rav Kahana,” in *Higayon le-Yonah*, ed. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum and Galit Hazan-Rokem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007), 287–307. Elbaum distinguishes between different kinds of material in piskat “Shuvah,” some of which are reworkings of older material and some of which are the creation of the editor of the Pesikta himself. Menahem Hirshman, “Pesikta de-Rav Kahana and Paideia,” in Levinson, Elbaum and Hazan-Rokem, *Higayon le-Yonah*, 165–78, tries to delineate the general aims of the midrashic composition, which he posits are concerned with the temple. Burton Visotzky, in contrast, claims that the Pesikta should not be regarded as “homiletic midrash” at all, but rather as a well-structured editorial collection. See Burton L. Visotzky, “The Misnomers ‘Petihah’ and ‘Homiletic Midrash’ as Descriptions for Leviticus Rabbah and Pesikta de-Rav Kahana,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2011): 19–31.

4. This was first suggested by Albeck, *Ha-derashot be-Yisra'el*, 106.

5. For a recent summary of scholarship concerning this question see Chaim Milikowsky, “Textual Criticism as a Prerequisite for the Study of Rabbinic Thought: On God Not Giving Recompense for Fulfilling Commandments and on the Immutability of the Created World,” in *Tiferet le-Yisrael: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus*, ed. Joel Roth, Menahem Schmelzer and Yaacov Francus (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2010), 131–51. See also the literature cited there, on p. 134, n. 11.

6. Also on the second day of a holiday observed in the Diaspora, and Simḥat Torah.

first day of Passover. The problem is that M. Megillah 3:4 documents a different Torah reading for Passover: “the section in Leviticus related to the appointed times” (פרשת המועדות בתורה כהנים). Somewhat surprisingly, the Pesikta also includes a piska on “an ox or a sheep” (שור או כשב) (Leviticus 22:27), a reading that accords with the Mishnah’s halakhah. In other words there are two piska’ot that seem to be based on Torah readings for the first day of Passover. This led Louis Ginzberg to claim that the “latest arrangers” inserted the piska, “And it happened at midnight,” into the Pesikta, even though this material was not originally composed as a holiday reading, but rather as part of the Torah readings of the regular triennial cycle.<sup>7</sup> The assumption that this particular piska was originally part of a homiletic midrashic composition on Exodus also accords with the general theory proposed by Yonah Fraenkel, that the entire Pesikta is a secondary collection of *derashot* culled from homiletic midrashim on the Pentateuch, such as Vayikra Rabbah or other similar compositions that did not survive.<sup>8</sup>

Abraham Goldberg continued this trend, deeming the piska “not original to Pesikta de-Rav Kahana,” due to the fact that it is missing in two of the better manuscripts of the composition (א – Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Marshall Or. 24, and צ – Paris, Alliance Israélite Universelle H 47 A). Goldberg further supported this claim with literary-structural considerations, claiming that “This piska deviates from the usual characteristics of the piska’ot of the Pesikta.”<sup>9</sup> In his opinion, the relationship between the number of proems (פתיחתאות) and the number of interpretive *derashot* in each piska can be used to evaluate the authenticity of a piska. Piska’ot original to the Pesikta, so he claims, have more proems than interpretive *derashot* on verses. The piska, “And it happened at midnight,” which has four proems and nine interpretive *derashot*, is therefore not “authentic.”<sup>10</sup> In a different article, Goldberg described this piska as including “a mixture of proems, topical *derashot*, a new proem and then back to topical *derashot* which follow *derashot* on verses.” In his opinion, “A piska with these characteristics is very typical of Pesikta Rabbati, and perhaps other midrashim as well, but it is not typical of Pesikta [de-Rav Kahana].” Therefore, he concludes that “it was transferred there [to Pesikta de-Rav Kahana] from Pesikta Rabbati.”<sup>11</sup>

7. Louis Ginzberg, *Perushim ve-ḥidushim ba-Yerushalmi*, vol. 3 (New York: Ktav, 1941), 136 n. 151. See also Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 412.

8. Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhe ha-aggadah ve-ha-midrash*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Modan, 2006), 460 n. 91.

9. The study of aggadic midrashim has made great advances in recent years due to the development of analytics used to dissect recurring literary structures in homiletic midrashim. The scholar most responsible for these advances is Arnold Goldberg. See his article, “Form-analysis of Midrashic Literature as a Method of Description,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36, no. 2 (1985): 159–74. For an application of this methodology to our piska see Doris Lenhard, *Die rabbinische Homilie: Ein formanalytischer Index* (Frankfurt am Main: Gesellschaft zur Förderung Judaistischer Studien, 1998), 210–11.

10. Abraham Goldberg, review of *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum, *Kiryat Sefer* 43 (1967): 79.

11. Abraham Goldberg, “Le-mekoriyutan shel ha-piska’ot ‘va-yehi ba-ḥazi ha-laylah’ ve-‘shor ‘o kesev’ ba-pesikta,” *Tarbiz* 38 (1969): 184–85.

In contrast to Goldberg, Joseph Heinemann posited that “this piska is a product of the editor of the Pesikta himself,” since it is found in most of the Pesikta’s manuscripts. The piska, in his opinion, does reflect early Palestinian Torah reading customs, despite the fact that these customs are not documented in halakhic sources or early liturgical poetry (piyyutim).<sup>12</sup> Heinemann claims that it is actually the piska “an ox or sheep,” a passage that reflects the Mishnah’s halakhah to read this section of the Torah on Passover, that was transferred by copyists to the Pesikta. He rejected the possibility that the piska was copied from “one of the midrashim arranged on the Pentateuch,” for as far as we know there were never “homiletic” midrashim such as Vayikra Rabbah on the other books of the Torah.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, there are three possibilities that scholars have suggested as to the source of this piska: (1) It was created by the editor of the Pesikta; (2) It was transferred to the Pesikta from an early homiletical midrash on Exodus; (3) It was transferred to the Pesikta from Pesikta Rabbati.

This article will undertake a systematic literary examination of the piska, on the basis of which these three possibilities will be evaluated. The findings that emerge from this analysis lead me to reject the presumption that the piska was transferred from Pesikta Rabbati or from another midrash on Exodus, and bolster Heinemann’s position that it was created by the editor of the Pesikta himself. However, this analysis does affirm Goldberg’s assessment that the piska “deviates from the usual characteristics of piska’ot in the Pesikta,” although not the precise deviations pointed out by Goldberg. As stated above, these differences led Goldberg to propose that the piska was not the work of the editor of the Pesikta himself. To solve this conundrum, I propose a general theory as to the dating, the nature, and the literary creation of the entire Pesikta.

I see the Pesikta as a unified work, and hold that individual piska’ot should not be considered “secondary” without solid evidence in the Pesikta’s manuscripts. However, the Pesikta does include piska’ot that exhibit diverse literary patterns—in another words, there is a distinct lack of literary uniformity among the various piska’ot. Rather than suggesting that one format is “original” to the Pesikta and formats that deviate from it reflect material imported into the Pesikta from elsewhere, I suggest that these variations reflect changes in the Torah reading practices that occurred in the period in which the Pesikta’s editor operated and earlier, the same period in which the material available to him was being composed.

During the early amoraic period (third and fourth centuries CE), midrashic material was formed into piska’ot, or at least “proto-piska’ot” around passages from the Torah that were part of the ancient Torah-reading cycle for holidays, the special Sabbaths, and the regular triennial cycle. When available, the editor made use of this material. This explains, for example, the overlap in readings

12. Heinemann adopts the opinion of Meir Ish-Shalom that “this is an early Palestinian custom which the halakhah came to uproot.” See *Pesikta Rabbati*, ed. Meir Ish-Shalom (Friedman) (Vienna: M. Friedmann, M. Gudemann, 1860), 95.

13. Joseph Heinemann, “Parashot be-Vayikra Rabbah she-mekoriyutan mefukepeket,” *Tarbiz* 37 (1968): especially pp. 343–49.

for Leviticus with parallel passages in Vayikra Rabbah. In contrast, readings that became customary during a later period, around the fifth century CE, such as the readings for Passover from Exodus, had less consolidated midrashic material already associated with them. When the editor of the Pesikta wished to compose material appropriate for these readings, he was forced to be more creative, to make secondary use of material originally created for other contexts, and to adapt this material as much as possible to its new literary location. The process of the editorial adaptation of this material did not come to proper completion, with the end result that piska'ot containing uneven patterns were formed.

#### A STRUCTURAL-LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE PISKA "AND IT HAPPENED AT MIDNIGHT"

Piska 7, "And it happened at midnight," is composed of three units: the opening unit contains four proems (sections 1–4, ed. Mandelbaum, pp. 122–25); the middle unit contains five interpretive *derashot* related mostly to the first verse of the Torah reading, Exodus 12:29 (sections 5–9, pp. 125–30); and the concluding unit contains three narrative *derashot* on the plagues and finishes with a concluding *derashah* (sections 10–12, pp. 130–34). For each of these units I will point out features that deviate from the usual features found in the Pesikta, distinguishing characteristics that differ from those noted by Goldberg. After noting these "deviations," I will try to explain how they are a result of the editing process typical of this piska.

#### THE OPENING SECTION OF THE PISKA

The opening unit of the piska contains four proems. The second and fourth proems contain features that deviate from the usual structure of proems in classical midrashic literature, including the Pesikta itself. The form of the second proem seems to be very close to the one that precedes it, and it also conceptually completes it. Thus the first two proems seem to be one literary unit. The first is a short proem ascribed to "R. Tanḥum of Jaffa in the name of R. Nunya of Caesarea." The *darshan* explains David's words in Psalms 73:16, "So I applied myself to understand this, but it seemed a hopeless task" (ואהשבה לדעת זאת עמל היא בעיני) as referring to the gap between the divine ability to "determine the exact time of midnight" and the human inability to do the same. The proem ends with the typical formula: "And since no being except God can determine when exactly midnight is, that is why it says, 'And it happened at midnight'" (ולפי שאין בריה יכולה לעמוד על חצי הלילה אלא הוא, לפי אמ' ויהי) (בהצ'י הלילה). The second proem is structured similarly:

ר' אחא פתח אני י"י הוא שמי וכבודי לאחר לא אתן [ישעיה מב:ח] [...] ר' נחמיה בשם ר' מינא אמ' אין כל בריה יכולה להבחין בין טפה של בכור לשאינה של בכור אלא הב"ה, אבל אני, עמל היא בעיני, ולפי שאין בריה יכולה לעמוד על חצי הלילה אלא הוא, לפי ויהי בחצי הלילה [שמות יב:כט].

R. Aḥa opened [interpreted the verse]: *I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not yield My glory to another* [Isaiah 42:8] [...] R. Neḥemiah in the name of R. Mina: No other being in the world is able to distinguish between seed of a

firstborn and seed which is not of a firstborn except for the Holy One, blessed be He. But as for me this is too hard for me. And no other being can determine the exact moment of midnight except for Him, therefore Scripture says, *And it came to pass [precisely] at midnight* [Exodus 12:29].

As in the first proem, the second proem also uses a verse (this time from Isaiah) to highlight God's ability to make distinctions that human beings cannot. However, the divine ability on which the midrash focuses is different—whereas in the first proem it was the ability to tell precise time, in the second it is the ability to distinguish between a child who is a firstborn and one who is not. Both proems relate to the mention of God in the verse, “And it happened at midnight, *and the Lord* struck down every firstborn.” The first proem connects the phrase “and the Lord” to the beginning of the verse, as if it implies that only God can determine the exact moment of midnight; whereas the second proem connects “and the Lord” with the words that follow—only God can distinguish between a firstborn and one who is not a firstborn.<sup>14</sup> However, the second proem does not conclude in the manner one would expect. Instead, it repeats the conclusion of the first proem, and even the words of the verse cited in the first proem: “But as for me this is too hard for me. And no other being can determine the exact moment of midnight except for Him, therefore Scripture says, *And it came to pass [precisely] at midnight.*” At this point we were expecting the conclusion to read something like the following: “And since no other being in the world is able to distinguish between seed of a firstborn and seed which is not a firstborn except for the Holy One, blessed be He, that is why Scripture says, *And God struck every firstborn*” (ולפי שאין ברייה יכולה להבחין בין טיפה של בכור לשאינה של בכור אלא הב"ה לפי' וה' הכה כל בכור).<sup>15</sup>

In my opinion this unusual phenomenon, the lack of accordance between the conclusion of the proem and its content, is a result of the process in which the proem was edited. The editor lifted the conclusion from the previous proem, but stopped in the middle of his creative work before he had finished polishing up the transferred material to accord with its new setting.<sup>16</sup> The editor of the Pesikta fashioned this proem out of raw material that we can reconstruct, patterning the conclusion after the structure of the opening proem, but he left the concluding line as it was, without emending it to match its new setting.<sup>17</sup> It seems that the

14. See the notes in Mandelbaum's edition (p. 122).

15. It might have been possible to suggest that the ending was simply a mistake that occurred in the transmission of the text. But the uniformity of manuscripts of the Pesikta as well as Pesikta Rabbati (which in this case serves as another textual witness) makes this unlikely.

16. Although the proem is ascribed to R. Aḥa, it is clear that we must relate to this *derashah* as a literary creation of an editor and not as an actual *derashah* delivered orally. A proem is ascribed to a named sage when an independent statement of his is brought in the course of the proem. This statement has an exact parallel in Bereshit Rabbah, *Bereshit, par.* 17:4 to Genesis 2:19 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 155–56), where it interprets part of a verse. Concerning “artificial proems” such as this see Ḥanokh Albeck's introduction to the Theodor-Albeck ed. of Bereshit Rabbah, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Shalem, 1965), 15–16.

17. Buber used the Carmoli manuscript (Cambridge University Library Add. 1497) as the basis for the text of his edition. In this version the conclusion reads differently: “R. Naḥman in the name of R. Mani said: No other being in the world is able to distinguish between seed of a firstborn and seed which

editor took the body of the proem from a similar proem found in piska 21, “Arise, give light” (קומי אורי) (ed. Mandelbaum, p. 319):

ר' אחא פתח אני י"י הוא שמי [...] וכבודי לאחר לא אתן [...] ותהילתי לפסילים [ישעיה מב:ה].  
א' הקדוש ברוך הוא כבודי איני נתון לאחר, ואתם נותנים תהילתי לפסילים. ולמי אני נותן,  
לציון, קומי אורי כי בא אורך [ישעיה ס:א].

R. Aḥa began: *I am the Lord, that is My name [...] And My glory I do not give [...] Nor my renown to the idols* [Isaiah 42:8]. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I do not give My glory to anything else, and you give it to idols? And to whom do I give it? To Zion: *Arise, give light, for your light has come* [Isaiah 60:1].

The beginning of this proem is almost identical to the proem above, except that there the end of the verse, “And My glory I do not give to others” is connected more tightly to the verse, “And the glory of the Lord will shine on you” (וכבוד ה' עלייך זרה). The editor of our piska used the *derashah* on the verse, and wove into it the theme of God’s ability to discern between firstborns and non-firstborns,<sup>18</sup> as if God claims that “My glory” is found in the ability to make a type of distinction that humans cannot make. The editor concluded the proem with a structure he borrowed from the previous proem without adapting it to its new context. Taken together, the first two proems are one literary unit that emphasizes the supernatural nature of the plague of the firstborn, both in terms of time (exactly at midnight) and in terms of deed (ability to know who is a firstborn and who is not).

The fourth proem is based on the verse, “At midnight [חצות לילה] I will arise to thank You for your righteous judgments” (Psalms 119:62), which exhibits clear linguistic affinity to the verse at the center of the entire piska, “At midnight” (בְּחַצֵי הַלַּיְלָה). The midrashic idea is that David thanks God for all that happened to the forefathers at midnight. The midrash contains three alternative midrashim for the verse “for your righteous judgments.”<sup>19</sup>

is not a firstborn except for the Holy One, blessed be He. But this is too hard for me.” This reading is simpler, since the conclusion matches precisely the content of the proem. However, the problem remains that the words from the first proem, “But this is too hard for me” (בְּעִינֵי) remain.

18. A similar tradition in a different context is brought by the Amora Rava on B. Bava Meḥẓa 61b: “The Holy One, blessed be He said: I am the one in Egypt who distinguished between a seed of a firstborn and seed of one who is not a firstborn. I am the one who in the future will exact payment from one who makes it look as if he gave his money to a gentile so that he can loan them with interest to a Jew.”

19. See *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana: R. Kahana’s Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days*, trans. William G. Braude and Israel Kapstein (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 189 n. 7. Braude points out the tension inherent in the phrase, “Your righteous judgments.” “Judgments” is a legal term, whereas “your righteous” refers to charity. Based on this tension the *darshan* splits the terms in two, “judgments” that God does for one person, versus “righteousness” that He does for another.

1. For the judgments that God brought on evil Pharaoh, and the righteous acts He performed with Sarah, my ancestress.
2. For the judgments He brought on the nations of the world, and the righteous acts He performed for my ancestor and ancestress (Boaz and Ruth).
3. For the judgments he brought on the Egyptians in Egypt and the righteous acts He performed for our forefathers in Egypt.

The section concerned with Israel in Egypt is placed last—not according to its biblical order, which would have placed it second. This allows the *darshan* to conclude with the topic at hand, the plague of the firstborn. However, the *derashah* does not follow the typical pattern of a proem—concluding with the first verse of the public Torah reading. Rather it concludes:

... שלא היו בידם מצות שיגאלו בהם אלא שתי מצות, דם פסח ודם מילה, ה"ד ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך ואומר לך בדמיך חיי [יחזקאל טז:ו], בדמיך, דם פסח ודם מילה.

... for they only had two commandments through whose merit they could be redeemed: the blood of the paschal sacrifice and the blood of circumcision. That is what is written: *And I will pass over you and see you wallowing in your blood, and I will say to you, 'Live in your blood'* [Ezekiel 16:6]. *In your blood* [בדמיך]: the blood of the paschal sacrifice and the blood of circumcision.

As with the case above, Goldberg viewed this conclusion as evidence that the piska is not “original.” In my opinion, however, this is further evidence of an editorial process that was arrested at an incomplete stage.<sup>20</sup> The editor used a *derashah* whose original form is found in midrash Ruth Rabbah (6:1). There, the sections are found in the correct and logical biblical order. The last section, which refers to Ruth, ends with the verse featured in the *derashah*, “And you put a blessing in his heart, as it says, ‘Blessed are you my daughter to the Lord’” (ונתת בלבו) and Ruth 3:10).<sup>21</sup> The editor of the Pesikta adjusted the order of the sections but did not adjust the ending of the *derashah* such that it would accord with the structure of a proem. It is possible that he preferred to retain the conclusion because it connected to the topic of Passover eve.<sup>22</sup>

20. It is possible that the proem was meant to end several lines later: “But the Blessed One knows the times of night [therefore it says, ‘*And it happened at midnight.*’].” This is the reading found in the Buber edition (p. 63b), based on the Carmoli manuscript, see also Mandelbaum’s note (p. 125 n. 13). However, in light of the evidence found in the other manuscripts, this possibility seems unlikely. The division of piska’ot in the Mandelbaum edition, in which the piska ends as I quoted above, seems to be the correct division.

21. See Lerner’s comments in the introduction to the edition (Mayron B. Lerner, “Book of Ruth in Aggadic Literature and Midrash Ruth Rabba” [PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1972], 140), where he disagrees with Albeck (correctly in my opinion), who holds that Ruth Rabbah copied this midrash from the Pesikta.

22. This conclusion is based on a *derashah* by R. Matya b. Ḥarash brought in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, *Massekhta de-Pisha* 5 (ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 14): “The Holy One, blessed be

## THE MIDDLE SECTION OF THE PISKA

As stated above, this section includes five interpretive *derashot* related mostly to the first verse of the Torah reading, “And it happened at midnight and the Lord struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the cattle” (Exodus 12:29). All of these *derashot* exhibit close affinity to the Mekhilta.<sup>23</sup>

For example, the first *derashah* (section 5) opens with a direct quote from a tannaitic source very similar to the text found in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: “R. Shimon b. Yoḥai taught: Moses knew neither its times. . . .”<sup>24</sup> The second *derashah* (section 6) also concludes with a tannaitic source parallel to that found in the Mekhilta: “It was taught in the name of R. Natan: On the day that one of their firstborn died. . . .”<sup>25</sup>

This *derashah*, which describes the impact the plague of the firstborns had on houses in which the firstborn had already died before the plague, is attached in the Mekhilta to v. 30, “For there was no house in which there was no dead” (כִּי־אֵין בֵּית אִשׁר אֵין־שָׁם מֵת). It is noteworthy that in the Pesikta it directly continues the *derashah* on v. 29: “You should be perplexed—a house in which there is no firstborn to the woman or to the man, how can I fulfill [the verse] *for there was no house in which there was no dead*” (הֲגַע עֲצָמְךָ בֵּית שְׂאִין שֶׁם כְּבוֹר לְאִישׁ וְלֹא לְאִשָּׁה מָה) (אֲנִי מְקַיִּים כִּי אֵין בֵּית אִשׁר אֵין שָׁם מֵת). This shift is an excellent example of the overall aim of our piska’s editor to focus on the first verse of the public Torah reading.

The following *derashah* (section 7) also opens with a teaching that has clear parallels in both Mekhiltot, “From here [we learn] that Pharaoh too was a firstborn”<sup>26</sup> and continues with an Aramaic aggadah on the words, “He struck the Egyptian firstborns.”

He, gave them two commandments: the blood of the paschal sacrifice and blood of circumcision, so that they could fulfill them in order to be redeemed.” It is also mentioned in Yannai’s *kerovah* for the first day of Passover, Zvi M. Rabinowicz, *Maḥzor piyyute Rabbi Yannai le-Torah u-le-mo’adim*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1987), 251. A quote of the verse also made its way into some versions of the Passover Haggadah. See Shmuel and Zeev Safrai, *Haggadat ḥazal* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1998), 134.

23. The similarity is not consistent with either one of the existent Mekhiltot but wavers back and forth between them. It is possible that the author of the Pesikta knew of a different Mekhilta. Regarding the relationships between the aggadic sections in both Mekhiltot see Menahem Kahana, *Ha-mekhilot le-farashat ‘Amalek: Le-rishoniyutah shel ha-masoret ba-mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma’el be-hashva’ah le-makbilatah ba-mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999), 364–69.

24. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, *par. B’o*, to Exodus 12:29 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 42). In the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai the verse is interpreted differently.

25. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, *par. B’o*, to Exodus 12:29 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 44); Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai, *par. B’o*, to Exodus 12:29 (ed. Epstein-Melamed, p. 29).

26. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, *par. B’o*, to Exodus 12:29 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 43); Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai, *par. B’o*, to Exodus 12:29 (ed. Epstein-Melamed, p. 29).

The *derashah* in section 8 is of special interest:

ועד בכור השפחה. רב הונא ור' אחא בשם ר' אלעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי אפי' שפחות  
המכודנות לריחים היו אומרות רצוננו בשעבודנו וישראל בשעבודן [...]

*Until the firstborn of the handmaiden.* R. Huna and R. Aḥa in the name of R. Elazar, son of R. Yose Hagalili: Even handmaidens tied to millstones would say: We want to remain in our servitude and for Israel [to remain] in their servitude [...].

This *derashah* explains why the firstborns of handmaidens died and were specified in the verse: The punishment is retribution for their wish to remain enslaved as long as Israel too would remain enslaved. While the *derashah* seems to relate to Exodus 12:29, the phrase, “the firstborn of the handmaiden,” is found only in a parallel verse that appeared earlier, in Moses’s speech (Exodus 11:5): “And every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh until the firstborn of the handmaiden sitting behind the mill-stone, as well as all the firstborn of the cattle” (ומת כל-בכור בארץ מצרים מבכור פרעה הישב על-כסאו עד בכור השפחה) (אשר אחר הרחים וכל בכור בהמה). The *derashah* itself is a tannaitic tradition ascribed to R. Elazar son of R. Yose Hagalili, and it is found in a similar form in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai.<sup>27</sup>

There is no way to determine with certainty why the editor of the Pesikta placed this *derashah* here, out of its correct place. However, the realization that the editor had sources available to him that were mostly similar to those found in the two Mekhilotot can help us make an educated guess as to why he did so. While the *derashah* in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai (pp. 28–29) is based on the words, “the firstborn of the captive” (בכור השבי), it already shifts the focus to the words “the firstborn of the handmaiden” (בכור השפחה) found in the earlier verse:

כאן הוא אומ' בכור השבי ולהלן הוא אומ' בכור השפחה [...] ר' אליעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי  
אומ' מפני מה לקו עמהן מפני שהיו אומ' רצוננו נהיה בשעבודנו ויש' יהיו בשעבודן

Here it says *the firstborn of the captive* and there it says *the firstborn of the handmaiden*: R. Eliezer son of R. Yose Hagalili says: Why were they [the handmaidens] struck with the rest of them [the Egyptians]? For they said: We wish to remain in our enslavement as long as Israel remains in their enslavement.

We can presume that the editor of the Pesikta wanted to include R. Eliezer’s *derashah* on the verse at hand, “the firstborn of the captive,” but as occurred above, the process of adapting the *derashah* to its new location was not completed. Thus it looks as if the *derashah* is related to the words “the firstborn of the handmaiden.” Whatever the actual reason for why this *derashah* is not found in its proper context, it is clear that the *derashot* in the Pesikta exhibit a strong connection to

27. Ed. Epstein-Melamed, p. 28.

those in the Mekhilta. This connection is also manifested in the next *derashah* (section 9), which also has a parallel in the Mekhilta, from which it too was likely drawn.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE CONCLUDING SECTION OF THE PISKA

The third section, which concludes the piska, is composed of three summarizing narrative *derashot* on the ten plagues, followed by a concluding *derashah* (sections 10–12). The first *derashah* (section 10) emphasizes the idea that “the Master of Mercy does not first afflict human beings” (אין בעל הרחמים נוגע בנפשות) (תחילה). God is cautious not to hurt human beings until all other possibilities of affecting human behavior have first been exhausted. This principle is illustrated with four examples: Job, Mahlon and Kilyon (from Ruth), the scale diseases (נגעים) described in Leviticus 13–14, and the plagues in Egypt. A similar *derashah* is found in Vayikra Rabbah 17:4 (ed. Margulies, p. 381) but there the order is at first chronological: Job, Egypt, Ruth;<sup>29</sup> it then concludes with the topic at hand in Leviticus, the scale diseases. Friedman (Ish-Shalom) seems correct in his proposal that the *derashah*’s original setting was Vayikra Rabbah, where the references are in chronological order.<sup>30</sup> The order in the Pesikta was created by moving the stanza concerning Egypt to the end, without also moving the scale diseases stanza before the stanza on Ruth. More significantly, the stanza dealing with scale diseases is interpreted based on verses taken from the portion of Leviticus on which the *derashah* is located, whereas the stanza referring to the plague of the firstborn is not interpreted at all in reference to verses from Exodus. Rather, the verses it employs are from Psalms. This is a strong indicator that the *derashah* was created in the context of Leviticus and only later brought to the Pesikta, where it was placed in the context of Exodus. Again, we can see that the editor used a *derashah* from an earlier source and adjusted it accordingly, such that it concluded with the stanza on Egypt. However, he did not fully adapt it to its new location by referring to verses in Exodus.

The next clause (section 11) includes two topical *derashot* that survey the ten plagues from an innovative interpretive perspective.<sup>31</sup> The first *derashah*

28. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, *par. B’o*, to Exodus 12:29 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 44). It is possible that the editor of the Pesikta did not use the *derashah* in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on “the first-born of the captive” because it is identical to the *derashah* on “the firstborn on the cattle” and he wished to prevent repetition.

29. Concerning the dating of Job in rabbinic chronology see Hananel Mack, “‘Ela’ *mashal hayah*”: *‘Iyov be-sifrut ha-bayit ha-sheni u-ve-eyne hazal* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2004), 69–85.

30. *Pesikta rabbati*, ed. Meir Ish-Shalom (Friedman), 89b.

31. What I mean by this phrase is that these *derashot* do not interpret a given verse. Rather, they expand on a particular subject. Goldberg, “Le-mekoriyutan,” 74, called this type of *derashah* a “topical expansion” (פתיחות של עניין) and perceived them to function like proems. In contrast, Fraenkel called complete or partial *derashot* that focus on one religious-moral topic “aggadic sugyot” (סגיות אגדיות) (Fraenkel, *Darkhe ha-’aggadah*, 1:458).

counts the plagues as if they were the “the order of battle of kings” (טכסיס מלכים). The second *derashah* enumerates them with a look to the future, “the one who punished the former, He is the one who will punish the latter” (מי שפרע מן) (הראשונים הוא יפרע מן האחרונים). The *derashah* demonstrates that all of the plagues of Egypt will be meted out to Rome (אדום) in the future. Towards its conclusion the *derashah* reads:

[...] מה מצר'י חשך אף אדום כן, ונטה עליה קו תוהו ואבני בהו [ישעיה לדי:יא] מה מצר'י הגדול גדול שבהם הרגו אף אדום כן, וירדו ראמים עמם ופרים וכו' [שם שם:ז]. אמ' ר' מאיר וירדו רומיים עמם.

[...] Just as there was darkness in Egypt, so too will there be in Edom. *He shall stretch over [Edom] the line of [dark] chaos and the plummet of emptiness* [Isaiah 34:11]. As with Egypt He killed the greatest, so too, with Edom: *Wild oxen [ראמים] shall fall with them* [Isaiah 34:7]. R. Meir said: among those to come down shall be the Romans [רומיים].

Another *derashah*, which serves as a peroration (section 12), follows and continues this *derashah*:

כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ וערפל לאומים ועליך יזרה י"י וכבודו עליך יראה [ישעיה ס:ב]. ר' אחא בר כהנא אמ' חשך ואפלה שמשו בארץ מצרים שלשת ימים [...] אבל תוהו ובהו לא שמשו בעולם הזה. ואיכן עתידין לשמש, בכרך גדול של רומי, ונטה עליה קו תוהו ואבני בהו [ישעיה לדי:יא]. רבנן אמרין אומות העולם שלא קבלו את התורה שנתנה מתוך החשך עליהם הוא אומ' כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ וערפל לאומים [ישעיה ס:ב]. אבל ישראל שקבלו אותה מתוך החשך עליהם הוא אומ' ועליך יזרה י"י וכבודו עליך יראה [שם].

*Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but upon you the Lord will shine, and His glory shall be seen on you* [Isaiah 60:2]. R. Aḥa bar Kahana said: For three days darkness and thick darkness served in Egypt. [...] On the other hand, dark chaos and emptiness did not serve in this world. And where will they serve in the future? In the great city of Rome: *He shall stretch over it the line of [dark] chaos, and the plummet of emptiness* [Isaiah 34:11]. And the rabbis say: The nations of the earth which have not accepted the Torah that was given out of darkness [over Sinai], of them Scripture says, *Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples* [Isaiah 60:2]. But Israel, who accepted the Torah that was given out of darkness [over Sinai], of them Scripture says, *But upon you the Lord will shine, and His glory shall be seen on you* [ibid.].

This *derashah* connects directly with the verse cited in the previous *derashah*, Isaiah 34:11, concerning the plague of darkness. The motif of Rome being struck by dark chaos and emptiness is repeated. However, the connection between the peroration and the *parashah* is weak—it too deals with verses from Isaiah and to a certain extent with the plague of darkness. In reality, the source of the *derashah* is Vayikra Rabbah 6:6 (ed. Margulies, p. 146), where it serves as a conclusion to the section based on the verse, “If a person sins when he

hears a public charge” (ונפש כי תחטא ושמעה קול אלה) (Leviticus 5:1). The conclusion is tightly connected there through the motif of “received the Torah” (קבלו את התורה) found in the words of the rabbis.<sup>32</sup> The same concluding *derashah* is also found in the Pesikta, in piska 21, “Arise, give light” (קומי אורי) where it is well connected to the piska’s content. In the piska, “And it happened at midnight” the concluding *derashah* is not linked closely to the overall topic of the piska. Its main motif is “darkness,” which is not mentioned in the remainder of the piska. The weak connection that the peroration has in our piska, “And it happened at midnight,” with the larger *parashah* testifies again to the incomplete editorial process that the material in this piska underwent.<sup>33</sup>

#### SUMMARY OF THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE PISKA

In sum, the structure of the piska shows that it has undergone a certain amount of literary editing. Its various sections highlight the plague of the firstborn, and the end of the piska provides a summary of all ten plagues, both topics appropriate to Passover. It is not completely disorganized, as Goldberg claimed. However, there are multiple instances in which the structure of the *derashot* deviates from the literary norms found elsewhere in the Pesikta. Instead of accounting for these differences by positing that these sections were imports into the Pesikta that occurred at a later stage in its transmission, I have explained these as instances in which the editorial process of adapting literary material to new settings did not come to its full fruition. The editor used available sources to fashion a new piska for a new public Torah reading that had not, as of yet, had a full piska or *parashah* created for it.<sup>34</sup> The proof that these *derashot* were secondary literary creations by the editor is found in the traces of their original settings left in the *derashot*. The failure of the editor to fully integrate the material into its new setting is what allows us to trace their history and to reveal his editorial work.

#### THE LITURGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PISKA “AND IT HAPPENED AT MIDNIGHT”

One of the main proofs cited by scholars who held that this piska is not original to the Pesikta is the lack of documentation for such a festival Torah reading in early halakhic sources and piyyutim. This claim should be reexamined. According to M. Megillah 3:4, on Passover they read, “the section in Leviticus related to the

32. See Joseph Heinemann, “Omanut ha-kompoziziyah be-midrash Vayikra Rabbah,” *Hasafrot* 2, no. 4 (1971): 829.

33. Concerning the techniques used to connect concluding *derashot* to the larger *parashah* see: Edmund Stein, “Die homiletische Peroratio im Midrasch,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8–9 (1931–2): 353–55; Arnold Goldberg, “Die Peroratio (Hatima) als Kompositionsform der rabbinischen Homilie,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 6 (1978): 1–22.

34. Although “And it happened at midnight” did seem to serve as the beginning of a *seder* in the triennial Torah-reading cycle, and we can assume that it was expounded on, the midrashic material that has survived leads to the conclusion that these *derashot* were not woven into complete passages (see below).

appointed times” (בפרשת מועדות של תורת כהנים). The Mishnah does not distinguish between the first day of Passover and the other days. The Tosefta (Megillah 3:5), on the other hand, does offer such a distinction:

יום טוב הראשון של פסח קורין בפרשת הנף שבתורת כהנים ושאר כל ימות הפסח מדלגין מעניינות הפסח הכתובין בתורה.

On the first festival day of Passover they read the *parashah* of the waving [of the Omer] in Leviticus. And on the other days of Passover they skip from one passage about Passover to another that is written in the Torah.<sup>35</sup>

While the reading mentioned in the Tosefta for the first day of Passover is somewhat problematic, it seems to be consistent with that in the Mishnah.<sup>36</sup> In any case, the second line of the Tosefta, “And on the other days of Passover they skip from one passage about Passover to another that is written in the Torah,” hints at a new custom, one that had not yet been fully determined, of reading portions from the book of Exodus on the other days of the festival, a custom that was later more firmly established in Babylonia and recorded in the Bavli.<sup>37</sup>

A similar shift in Torah readings from Leviticus/Deuteronomy to Exodus occurred with the reading for Shavuot. The Mishnah mentioned above relates that on Shavuot they would read the passage “Seven weeks” (שבעה שבועות) in Deuteronomy (16:9), whereas the Tosefta reports an alternative tradition, according to which they would read “On the third month” (בחדש השלישי), a passage from Exodus (19:1).<sup>38</sup> Taken all together, it seems that the Tosefta demonstrates a process whereby readings from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, mostly halakhic passages, were replaced by more narrative passages from Exodus. These readings were perceived to serve as a better basis for *derashot* that would shape the character of the holiday and attract a greater audience.<sup>39</sup>

35. Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-feshutah* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992–), 5:1167–73; see also the baraita in B. Megillah 30b.

36. According to Lieberman the *parashah* of “Waving of the omer” overlaps with the *parashah* on “appointed times” (as is documented in the Erfurt manuscript of the Tosefta). Heinemann suggested that a line was omitted from the Tosefta and that it should read: “On the first day of Passover they read [‘And it happened at midnight’ and on the second day they read] the *parashah* of the waving of the omer.” Goldberg rejected this emendation, correctly in my opinion.

37. B. Megillah 31a. Despite the growing tendency among scholars to see the Tosefta as an earlier historical stratum in tannaitic law, it is unlikely that this is true in this case. See Ezra Fleischer, “He’arot le-zivyon ha-mahzor ha-telat shenati be-Torah ke-minhag ‘Erez Yisra’el,” *Tarbiz* 73, no. 1 (2004): 112.

38. A similar phenomenon occurs with Rosh Hashanah as well, but lack of space prevents further discussion.

39. This trend may be connected to the overall “rabbinization” of Jewish society at the end of antiquity, a trend that has been intensely discussed in recent scholarly literature. See for example: Seth Schwartz, “Rabbinization in the Sixth Century,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 55–69.

This shift developed and became entrenched over time, a phenomenon we can already detect within the Tosefta itself. For Shavuot, the new custom had already taken shape and therefore it is mentioned explicitly in the Tosefta. In contrast, the new custom of reading from Exodus on Passover seems to still be in formation, and thus it is cited in the Tosefta only for the remaining days of the festival, without any obligatory order as to which passage should be read on which day. Only at a later stage did the custom of reading from Exodus on the first day of Passover take root and replace the older custom. According to this reconstruction, the custom of reading “And it happened at midnight” on Passover is not a Babylonian custom, as Goldberg posited. It is indeed a Palestinian custom, although later than the earlier custom of reading from Leviticus. Ish-Shalom’s assertion (adopted by Heinemann as well) that this is an “early Palestinian custom which the halakhah came to uproot” has no supporting evidence.<sup>40</sup> Taking these two points into account, it seems likely that this development occurred in Palestine during the Byzantine period, probably sometime around the fifth century. This is also supported by the lists of liturgical poets (*paytanim*) from the end of the Byzantine period (Moses, Pinḥas) that take account of readings for the intermediate days of Passover, as cited by Heinemann in his article.<sup>41</sup> Goldberg rightfully rejected this as evidence for the antiquity of the custom. Nevertheless, in my estimation this finding does provide evidence for the fact that this was a new custom in Palestine itself.

This discussion concerning the custom of reading “And it happened at midnight” on the first day of Passover is also relevant for the custom of reading “And it happened when he sent out” (יִהְיֶה בְשֵׁלָה) on the seventh day of Passover. There is no halakhic or liturgical evidence that either of these customs existed in Palestine in antiquity (in the Mishnah and Tosefta).<sup>42</sup> In light of the argument above, we can assume that this custom also took shape during the Byzantine period in Palestine, and was alluded to in the Tosefta with the words, “the passages about Passover that are written in the Torah” (עֲנִינֹת הַפֶּסַח הַכְּתוּבִין בַּתּוֹרָה).

I suggest that the editing of the Pesikta occurred during the same time period as the shift in Torah reading customs for Passover from Leviticus to Exodus was happening. This explains why the Pesikta contains a piska for “And it happened at midnight,” from Exodus, which accords with the new custom alluded to in the Tosefta, alongside a piska for “An ox or sheep,” from Leviticus, which accords

40. *Pesikta rabbati*, ed. Ish-Shalom (Friedman), 95. Heinemann, “Parashot,” 343–49.

41. Heinemann, “Parashot,” 348; See also Menahem Zulai, *Yedi’ot ha-makhon le-ḥeker ha-shirah ha-ivrit be-Yerushalayim*, vol. 5 (Berlin: Schocken, 1939), 149.

42. Goldberg and Heinemann had no doubts that the piska “And it happened when he sent out” was original to the Pesikta and that it accorded with early Torah-reading customs, although the evidence for the originality of this piska is not all that different from that for “And it happened at midnight.” The Mishnah states only, “On Passover they read . . .” While Ginzberg interpreted this line in the Mishnah to refer to all of the days of Passover, there is no evidence for this interpretation. See Shmuel and Zeev Safrai, *Mishnat Erez Yisra’el, Megillah* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uhad, 2008), 339. Concerning the paytanic evidence see Binyamin Elitzur, “Pesikta rabbati: Pirke mavo” (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999), 83 n. 59.

with the Torah reading custom referred to in the Mishnah. The same is true for the piska, “And it happened when he sent out” for the seventh day of Passover, also alluded to in the Tosefta. In both cases, we can sense that the customs are in a state of transition, but that this change has not yet been completed. This state of transition is reflected in the halakhic texts by the differences between the Mishnah and the Tosefta, and in the midrashic texts, by the inclusion of piska’ot for both readings. In contrast, for Shavuot, the Pesikta includes a piska only for “On the third month,” which accords with the Torah reading custom mentioned explicitly in the Tosefta. There is no piska whatsoever for “Seven weeks,” the custom mentioned in the Mishnah. It seems that the new custom of reading from the book of Exodus on Shavuot had been sufficiently established to push aside the earlier custom entirely.

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We can now evaluate the literary findings that emerge from the analysis of the piska “And it happened at midnight” in light of the theory proposed above concerning the editing of the Pesikta. The piska’s editing is coherent; it is not “confused” as it was characterized by Goldberg. It includes three sections of *derashot* with a consistent theme: The plague of the firstborn is a summation of the entire process of the ten plagues. The composition of the piska and the relationship between the number of proems and the number of interpretive *derashot* on verses is not “unusual,” and does not serve to indicate any lack of “authenticity.”<sup>43</sup> The unusual features that were uncovered in the piska can be understood as the result of an editing process that was not fully completed. This explains, for instance, the two proems whose conclusions do not match the content, as well as the concluding *derashah* that seems disconnected from its context. This editing process also explains the editor’s massive dependence on the Mekhilta in the interpretive sections of the piska, and his adherence to the interpretation of the first verse of the *parashah*.<sup>44</sup> Finally, the same phenomenon explains the secondary use that the editor made of the piska “Arise, give light” (קומי אורי) in the second proem and in the peroration.

All of these unusual features are indicators of purposeful and creative editing of material available to an editor whose aim was to fashion a piska for “And it happened at midnight,” in a midrashic format similar to Vayikra Rabbah.<sup>45</sup> The editor of the Pesikta lived at a time when Torah reading customs were evolving, and he may have even wanted to support these changes. This historical background serves to explain why there are differences between the various piska’ot. In other words, the literary differences between the various piska’ot reflect the availability of materials to the editor, and this availability is largely a

43. As was claimed by Goldberg “Le-mekoriyutan,” 185.

44. In general, the interpretive portions of midrashic sections resemble amoraic interpretive midrashim such as Bereshit Rabbah. In contrast, in this piska the interpretive section seems to be the work of an editor who made use of the Mekhilta. Furthermore, the fact that the entire section relates to the first verse indicates that it is not an authentic interpretive midrash.

45. In this way I completely accept Elbaum’s opinion in his article mentioned above (“Sha’are teshuvah,” 287), that the midrash that served as a paradigm for the editor/author of the Pesikta was Vayikra Rabbah.

factor of the antiquity of the Torah reading custom at the heart of the individual piska. Piska'ot for Torah passages that had been part of the Torah reading for a long time, at least from the time of the Mishnah, such as "Shekalim," "This month," and others, were simpler for the editor to compose, because a significant amount of midrashic material suited to the common midrashic formula had already accrued on these passages.

In contrast, the composition of piska'ot for readings that had only just been instituted, such as "And it happened at midnight," "And it happened when he sent out," or "In the third month," presented a greater challenge for the editor.<sup>46</sup> Here he was forced to be much more creative and to use material that was not created specifically for holiday Torah readings. This explains the intensive use of the Mekhilta in the interpretive sections as well as the secondary use of the piska "Arise, give light" in the proem and conclusion.

The supposition raised by some scholars that the piska was copied, by the editor or by later copyists, from a lost interpretive midrashic composition on Exodus is implausible. First of all, there is no evidence that such midrashic collections existed, not even as fragments that were later embedded into Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu literature.<sup>47</sup> But beyond this argument from silence, the analysis of the piska itself makes this supposition unlikely. If this hypothesis was correct, we would expect to find uniformity in the five piska'ot in the Pesikta that relate to readings from the book of Exodus. But in reality, the signs of incomplete editing found in "And it happened at midnight" are not present in other piska'ot based on readings from Exodus, "Shekalim" and "This month."<sup>48</sup>

The literary differences between the various piska'ot are well explained by the theory proposed here. For Torah readings that had long been part of the reading cycle, there had already accrued ample midrashic material, whereas for readings that had only recently entered the cycle, the editor was forced to recycle midrashic material lifted from other settings: the Mekhilta, other classic midrashim, and other piska'ot in the Pesikta itself. Moreover, the connections that exist between this piska and the piska, "Arise, give light" negate the possibility that this piska was taken from an edited and fully formed "homiletic" midrash.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, the suggestion that copyists took this piska from Pesikta Rabbati and imported it into the Pesikta is problematic. First of all, the piska is found in

46. The piska, "And it happened when he sent out" (ויהי בשלח) requires an independent discussion, for which there is no space in the framework of this article. Concerning the piska, "In the third month," (בחדש השלישי) see Arnon Atzmon, "In the Third Month: Shavuot and the Redaction of *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 12," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 6, n. 1 (2015): 143–56.

47. A sample test I conducted on all the *parshayot* of the Tanḥuma that have parallels in the Pesikta shows that the Tanḥuma made extensive use of the Pesikta. Other sources were also available to the editors of the Tanḥuma, but it does not seem possible to reconstruct a "homiletic midrash" in the style of Vayikra Rabbah from these sources.

48. In the framework of this article there is no space for a detailed analysis of all of the piska'ot from Exodus.

49. There are other such connections throughout the composition. This is a subject to which I intend to return in a separate study.

most Pesikta manuscripts (צ, ק, 2א, 1א)<sup>50</sup> as well as a Genizah fragment (T-S 16.93).<sup>51</sup> More substantively, the piska is not structured in the typical style of Pesikta Rabbati, a composition that generally adheres to the Tanḥuma genre of midrashic literature.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in the Parma manuscript of Pesikta Rabbati, which is the most complete manuscript, there is an additional “Tanḥumaic” piska that is parallel to “And it happened at midnight” (ed. Ish-Shalom, pp. 195–7). It is very unlikely that both piska’ot were originally part of the same composition.<sup>53</sup> Goldberg is correct in his assertion that “a confusion of proems, topical *derashot*, a new proem and then a return to topical *derashot* following *derashot* based on verses” is typical of Tanḥuma literature, whose structures are looser than those found in classic midrashim.<sup>54</sup> However, as demonstrated above, the piska is not entirely “confused.” It has an organized structure of three sections: a proem, *derashot* on the first verse, followed by a conclusion that summarizes the ten plagues. While this is not the typical structure found in the Pesikta, it is still not so “unusual” as to force the claim that it is a late “Tanḥumaic” creation.<sup>55</sup>

All in all, it seems that both the literary process—the creation of the Pesikta as described here—as well as the liturgical developments that occurred during the same period—the transition to holiday Torah readings from the book of Exodus—reflect a similar trend. Both of these phenomena are connected to a shift in the rabbinic world to appeal to a broader, less rabbinic audience by changing the festival Torah reading customs and the midrashic rhetoric that accompanied them.<sup>56</sup> The Torah reading customs found in the Mishnah, those taken from the chapters in Leviticus and Deuteronomy concerning the festivals, are mostly halakhic in their content. Halakhic topics are more appropriate for a rabbinic audience steeped in

50. MS Oxford Opp. Add. 4<sup>o</sup> 128; MS Oxford Opp. Add. 4<sup>o</sup> 79; MS Casanatense 3324; MS Paris, Alliance H47A.

51. This fragment was published by N. Aloni and A. Diez Macho, “Pesikta de-Rav Kahana be-nikud ‘Erez Yisra’eli,” *Leshonenu* 23 (1959): 57–71. They date the fragment to the eighth or ninth century. Identification of the fragment as Pesikta de-Rav Kahana and not Pesikta Rabbati is supported by the fact that it includes the passages, “Ha-‘omer” and “‘Aser, ta-‘aser.”

52. Eighty percent of the piska’ot in Pesikta Rabbati begin with “Let our master [or named rabbi] teach us [יְלַמְדֵנוּ]” or “This is what was stated through the Holy Spirit” (זֶהוּ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ), whereas only five piska’ot are similar to Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, and were likely copied from there. See Elitzur, *Pesikta rabbati*, 94.

53. Concerning the structure of homilies in the Pesikta Rabbati see Rivka Ulmer, “Pesiqta Rabbati: A Text-Linguistic and Form-Critical Analysis of the Rabbinic Homily,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 64, no. 1 (2013): 64–97.

54. Norman J. Cohen, “Structure and Editing in the Homiletic Midrashim,” *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 1–20, demonstrated this well in relation to the piska “Shekalim” in the Pesikta in comparison with the parallel in Pesikta Rabbati.

55. It is not only that this piska does not have a proem in the “Yelammedenu” style; it also includes an Aramaic section that was translated into Hebrew in Tanḥuma parallels. The piska also lacks the names of sages usually found in Tanḥuma literature (see for instance Mandelbaum’s introduction to his edition of the Pesikta, p. 213.)

56. Rachel A. Anisfeld, *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes: Pesikta deRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 67–94, notes the rhetoric unique to the Pesikta and its connection with “rabbinization” of society that occurred during this period.

the nuances and particulars of Halakhah. For the Torah reading for Shavuot, the Tosefta already documents a shift to the passage in Exodus concerning the revelation on Sinai. The next step in this process seems to have been a shift to reading the story of the Exodus in the book of Exodus itself for the first day of Passover, and the passage on the splitting of the sea for the seventh day of Passover. These readings are mostly narratives; they allow the *darshan* to relate to the history of the festival and the reason it is observed, and to shape rhetoric that would be more appealing and meaningful to less educated synagogue attendees, and not just rabbis well versed in law. In these historical and social circumstances there developed a need for a literary composition to aid the *darshan* in coping with the new customs.<sup>57</sup>

Analysis of the literary phenomena occurring in this *piska* reveals the rich, surprising, and dynamic world of cross influences between literary and liturgical processes that left a deep mark on the formation of one of the most important and puzzling midrashic compositions from the amoraic period, the *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*.

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57. This notion of a midrashic composition as a handbook for *darshanim* was suggested by David Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash," in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128–29.