Narratives constitute a coherent sector of Rabbinic documentary writing, with their own definitive traits, inductively discerned. These indicative traits of narrative characterize one document, and not another, e.g. narratives in the Tosefta not the Mishnah, or more commonly, one group of documents, and not some other, e.g., the Mishnah and the Tosefta but not Sifra or the two Sifrés. That is the point of this study,1 which carries out my second exercise in the detailed, systematic classification, by documents, of Rabbinic narrative writing. For Sifra and the two Sifrés this research-report supplies these facts:

1. What are the preferred types and forms of Rabbinic narrative?
2. How are these distributed across the canonical documents of the formative age, the first six centuries C.E.?
3. Do the several canonical documents or groups of documents exhibit each its particular preferences for types and forms of narratives?

An anomaly in the documentary program characteristic of the canonical writings explains why the answers matter. The rule is that the respective Rabbinic compilations from the Mishnah through the Bavli form coherent documents, each distinguished from all others by its congeries of indicative traits of rhetoric, logic, and topic.2 Consequently, if we were handed a coherent piece of unattributed canonical writing of an exegetical, analytical, or expository character—indeed of any type of writing but narrative—we should have solid grounds on which to assign that writing to a particular document, whether the Mishnah,3 whether Song of Songs Rabbah.

2 These traits are defined, document by document, in my Introduction to Rabbinic Literature. N.Y., 1994: Doubleday. The sole exception to the rule is Mekhilta attributed to R. Ishmael, where the sub-divisions of the document, the tractates, have to be differentiated from one another.
3 With the qualification that the Tosefta and the Mishnah overlap.
But when it comes to narrative writing, matters are not so clear. In *Writing without Boundaries* I demonstrate for a sample of eight documents, that writing roughly classified as narrative ignores the otherwise-governing documentary indicators. The unique congeries of rhetoric, logic, and topic that otherwise dictate the character of the writing in that document and in no other simply do not govern narrative writing of that same document. Consequently, if we were handed a narrative without indication as to its source, we presently have only a limited basis on which to assign it to one document and not to some other, e.g., to the Mishnah and not to Song of Songs Rabbah.

Now therefore I ask the documents to reveal their preferences, respectively, as to narrative types and their functions. This we may find out by describing and classifying the narratives contained in each document in sequence. Do the documents provide a clear account of the kinds of narrative (1) they require to accomplish their goals—

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5 That is not to ignore the appearance in more than a single document of some compositions and even composites. First, the volume of peripatetic writing in the aggregate is trivial, as I show in *Extra- and Non-Documentary Writing in the Canon of Formative Judaism. II. Paltry Parallels. The Negligible Proportion and Peripheral Role of Free-Standing Compositions in Rabbinic Documents*. Binghamton 2001: Global Publications. *ACADEMIC STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF JUDAISM SERIES*. Second, and more important, in many, many instances in which a composition or composite or even entire chapter appears in two or more documents, we are able by appeal to the characteristic traits of each document to discern to which of the two documents the shared pericope is primary, and to which it is secondary. For example, a passage of the Mishnah cited in Leviticus Rabbah never conforms to the indicative traits of Leviticus Rabbah and always conforms to those of the rest of the Mishnah. More to the point (and more subtly), a protracted passage, an entire parashah, that occurs both in Leviticus Rabbah and Pesiqta deRab Kahana can be shown to be primary to Leviticus Rabbah (conforming to its paramount documentary traits) and secondary to Pesiqta deRab Kahana (not conforming to the otherwise-indicative traits of Pesiqta deRab Kahana). This I show in *From Tradition to Imitation. The Plan and Program of Pesiqta deRab Kahana and Pesiqta Rabbati*. Atlanta, 1987: Scholars Press for Brown Judaic Studies.

6 Because of the results set forth in Volume I and here, we can now, in fact, define the narrative protocols that govern in the Mishnah and the Tosefta, Sifra and the two Sifrés. These protocols signal probabilities: a *ma'aseh/case with certain attributes is very likely to derive from the Mishnah, not Sifré to Deuteronomy, and so on; so too for the Mashal/parable.
and also (2) those not required? This we may discover by comparing and contrasting the repertoire of types of narratives of one document with that of another document, whether kindred (Mishnah/Tosefta) or distinct (Mishnah, Song of Songs Rabbah).

Why do the answers matter for the study of Rabbinic Judaism? At this time we do not know how Rabbinic narratives correlate with the boundaries defined by a particular document—or whether in the Rabbinic canon narratives form a non-documentary corpus of writing altogether. And what is at stake in answering that question is how on the foundations of literary evidence and its traits we are to describe the Rabbinic structure and system. That is because a theory on the way in which the documentary evidence took shape and on how it accomplishes its compilers’ goals is required for that description. If we do not know whether or how narratives fit into the canonical constructions of Rabbinic Judaism in its formative age and normative statement, we cannot account for important data of that Judaism.

Why then does the historical, literary, and religious study of that Judaism now require investigation of the order and regularity exhibited by narratives in the respective documents. Since narratives assuredly represent a distinct type of writing in the Rabbinic canon, we wonder whether they carry a distinctive message as well. Specifically, do they represent a separate component of the canonical documents in program as well as in form? Or do they cohere to the theological program of the document(s) in which they find their place? That is one way of dealing with the anomaly of narratives in the canonical compilations, a way demanded by the interior logic of the documentary hypothesis.

That problem certainly leaves open a variety of illuminating matters, not dealt with here. Issues of “narrativity” and “poetics,” important in the literary-theoretical context, for example, do not pertain to the study of problems of religion, its history and theology.7

7 One current instance of the aesthetic reading of Rabbinic narrative is Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture. Baltimore, 1999: Johns Hopkins University Press. He “strives to recapture the meaning and literary impact that the stories would have had for their original authors and audiences,” so Eliezer Segal, review, Journal of American Academy of Religion 2001, 69:954. Other instances are Yonah Frenkel, fyumin be’olamo haruhani shel sipur ha’agadah (Tel Aviv, 1981), and Ofra Meir, Hademuyot hapoelot besipure hatalmud vehamidrash (Jerusalem 1977), and her Sugot hapoetikah shel sipure hazal (Tel Aviv, 1993). My reading of David Stern, Parables in Midrash. Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Litera-
To be sure, a definition of “narrative” in contrast to all other kinds of writing in the Rabbinic canon is required. But even there, the documentary hypothesis governs the kind of definition that is set forth. Specifically, in the Introduction to, and Chapter One of, Volume One, the latter devoted to what I call pseudo-narratives, I define what, for the present purpose, I mean by narrative. There I answer the two-sided question of inclusion and exclusion. In those two statements readers will find a full account of my analytical procedures: the questions I systematically raise, item by item, document by document, and how I find answers to them. For those who prefer a brief summary, I supply a precis in the Introduction to this volume, which follows.

What, then, do I claim in this project to prove? I state with heavy emphasis:

Narratives no less than expository, exegetical, and analytical writing, do form part of the documentary self-definition of the Rabbinic canonical writings, a fact established in Volume One for the Mishnah and the Tosefta and here for Sifra and the two Sifrés. The fulcrum of interpretation and analysis, for narrative as much as for all other kinds of canonical writing in formative Judaism, therefore is the document.

What I show is that the repertoire of narrative forms and types in the documents treated in Volume One and here does serve the manifest documentary purposes of the respective compilers of those writings and does not ignore or disrupt them. The genre, the narrative, assumes a subordinated role within the programs of the several Rabbinic documents. And with what consequence for the study of the formative history of Judaism, which is the center of my enterprise? Again with emphasis:

It is analytically meaningless to talk about “the Rabbinic narrative” or “the Rabbinic parable” or “the Aggadah” or “the Rabbinic folk-tale” or any comparable, generic category that ignores documentary boundaries. The principal, and primary, analytical initiative commences with the document—the traits of its narrative, parable (Mashal), Aggadah, folk-tale, and other generic cate-
gories. We may then speak of the narrative or parable or case/precedent (ma'aseh) in the Mishnah or the Tosefta or Sifra or one or another of the Talmuds, and only then ask how the narrative or parable or ma'aseh as represented by the one document compares, or contrasts, with that of another.

It follows that, just as in Volume One I identified the documentary preferences as to narrative that characterize the Mishnah, tractate Abot, and the Tosefta, so here I do the same for the three Tanaitic Halakhic Midrash-compilations, which carry forward the work of the Mishnah and the Tosefta and cite both documents verbatim. We begin with the data of the Sifra, then Sifré to Numbers, and finally, Sifré to Deuteronomy. Volume Three then moves on to the characterization of some of the Rabbah-Midrash-compilations of the formative canon.

Concrete results even now come into view. My preliminary impression is that just as Mishnah-Tosefta prefer the ma'aseh, the former in its stripped-down, economical version, the latter in that version and in developments thereof, so Sifra and the two Sifrés prefer the Mashal, ordinarily, as the context requires, for Halakhic clarification or, still more commonly by far, for exegetical exposition. In both instances the Mashal derives from the exegetical or Halakhic context, particular to the case at hand, and not from some corpus of free-floating stories adapted for the purpose at hand. Indeed, the Mashal and the Ma'aseh emerge as affines in Sifra and the two Sifrés, differentiated by formal qualities, not by function at all. The preference of the Rabbah-Midrash-compilations will likely prove to be the fully-articulated story, with a beginning, middle, and end, with tension and resolution thereof, as I showed for the Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan in *Judaism and Story.*

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8 Clearly, at this stage we can say nothing about the types of narrative viewed in abstraction from the documents, e.g., in a canonical framework: “the Rabbinic narrative,” or “Talmudic stories” viewed without differentiation in their own framework or in documentary context, let alone “the Aggadic narrative,” as though all “Aggadah” formed an undifferentiated composition. The conclusions of the Preface pertain. But once the types of narratives of each canonical document, viewed on its own, have been collected and classified rigorously—explaining not only inclusion but exclusion—then work on “the Rabbinic narrative” or “Talmudic stories” or “the Aggadic narrative” will become analytically possible. As matters now stand, the premise of inquiry—documentary lines mean nothing—is untested by Rabbinic narratologists.

The larger plan of this project now takes shape. First, I plan a volume III of collection, classification, and analysis of narrative and pseudo-narrative data, document by document, for Lamentations Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah-Pesiqta deRab Kahana, and Song of Songs Rabbah. These documents—so I have the impression at this time—prefer the fully-articulated, authentic narrative to the ma‘aseh and furthermore shape the Mashal to their larger documentary preference for authentic narrative, a preference not documented for Mishnah-Tosefta or for the Tannaite Midrash-compilations. To volume III I will add a unit on “The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan Text”, reprising the results from Judaism and Story.

What then? A work of systematization, correlating the several principal types of narratives with the documentary venues they serve is required. For when the three volumes are completed, I will have shown the documentary correlation of narrative forms and types to particular compilations and explained the correlation by appeal to the larger program of the compilers of the respective documents. Results to sustain that work are already in hand. I contemplate a study tentatively called The Case, the Parable, and the Story in Rabbinic Judaism: A Canonical Perspective. This will yield the case/ma‘aseh highlighted as a distinct problem, with its variations as these characterize the usage in the different documents, so too the parable/Mashal and the “authentic story” (anecdote, protracted narrative).

As is always the case, I conduct my research in conversation with many colleagues and through diverse media, other peoples’ publications not the least of them. From some writings and counselors I learn what to do, from other writings, what not to do. I am especially thankful to those who, by telephone and e-mail, comment as the work unfolds in its successive drafts and changing results. In that context, as ever, Professor William Green has been especially helpful.

I express a special word of thanks to Professor Steven D. Fraade, Yale University, for promptly supplying me with data that I required and did not have ready at hand; and to Professors Ben LaFarge, Bard College, and Galit Hasan-Rokem, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for guiding me, in questions of literary theory, to illuminating books and articles, which I should otherwise have missed.

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