PART THREE

PRK IN RELATION TO WHAT CAME BEFORE:
TANNAITIC COMPARISONS
CHAPTER FIVE

FROM EXEGESIS TO HOMILY: STYLISTIC COMPARISONS

Thus far we have examined the nature of the PRK text itself, its personal homiletical voice and its theology of intimacy and indulgence. Part of the claim has been one of novelty, that in PRK we see the development of a new kind of midrash. This chapter and the next one will explore this claim in greater depth by looking at some of the tannaitic midrashim that preceded the amoraic PRK historically.

In order to suggest a general historical shift, rather than a single document’s unique voice, these chapters will offer a comparison between two groups of midrashim: the amoraic midrashim PRK and Leviticus Rabbah (LR), on the one hand, and four tannaitic midrashim, Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael (Mekh), Sifra, Sifre to Numbers (Sifre Num), and Sifre to Deuteronomy (Sifre Deut) on the other hand. PRK and LR are generally considered contemporaneous, both redacted around the fifth or sixth century. They have a similar homiletical form and a similar organizational structure. They also share the exact text of five parshiyyot. On the tannaitic side, the midrashim were chosen in order to cover all the possible biblical books studied during the tannaitic period and to include midrashim from both the schools of R. Akiva and R. Ishmael; Mekhilta and Sifre to Numbers are considered Ishmaelan, and Sifra and Sifre to Deuteronomy, Akiban.

Comparisons will be made based on three types of evidence. First, I offer quantitative evidence which is based on a tally of the number of times certain frequently used terms appear in the selected tannaitic and amoraic collections. These numbers were acquired through the Bar Ilan Responsa CD-Rom, with adjustments made for the unequal size of materials on each side. The results appear in the table on p. 101.

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1 See discussion in the introduction to the Hebrew text appendix.
2 Genesis Rabbah, also considered an amoraic midrash, was not included because it is something of a bridge genre, an exegetical midrash offering verse-by-verse comment but making use of the petihta form. Here, I wanted to first establish the contrast using texts which create the starkest possible contrast. Genesis Rabbah also was not included because there is no parallel material in the tannaitic midrashim.