THE MISHNAH IN THE LATER MIDRASHIM

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The citation from one body of literature within another is one of the key characteristics of Rabbinic literature, which is, is to a certain extent, a literature of citations. Many of these quotations are from the Tannaitic stratum of Rabbinic literature, either the identifiable works “Mishnah” and “Tosefta” or the statements of the non-canonized Baraitot. In addition to the early midrashim and the Talmudim, the so called “later midrashim” incorporate quotations from the Mishnah, although in an uneven distribution. Midrash in general, and in particular the homiletic later midrashim contain numerous quotations, whereas the purely aggadic later midrashim have very few Mishnah quotations. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, I divide the “later midrashim” into two very fluid and often overlapping categories: (I) The later midrashim that display the discernible forms of Rabbinic midrash or the Rabbinic homily,

2 The meaning of the term “later midrashim” depends upon the particular method applied to the analysis of midrash. M.D. Herr (Encyclopaedia Judaica, Jerusalem, 1972, vol. 11, cols. 1510-1514, s.v. “Midrash”) divides this literature into early midrashim (or “classical amoraic midrashim”), midrashim of the middle period, and the later period. Here I exclude midrashic works that are mainly comprised of “halakhic midrashim” and that are companions to the Mishnah. I investigate those later midrashim that are “companions to the Talmudim” according to Neusner and some of the “later midrashim” according to Herr’s categories. Some of the later midrashim are possibly pseudepigraphic, as mentioned by Herr (ibid., col. 1513). The inclusion of midrashic works such as Gen. Rabbah, Lev. Rabbah, and Pesikta de-rav Kahana is based upon the analysis of Jacob Neusner, “Rabbinic Judaism, Formative Canon of (4): The Aggadic Documents. Midrash: The Later Compilations,” in J. Neusner, A.J. Avery-Peck, and W.S. Green, eds., The Encyclopaedia of Judaism (Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2000), vol. III, pp. 1176-1206.
3 J.N. Epstein, Mavo le-Nusah Ha-Mishnah (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 759f.
which are often referred to as the “classical midrashim;” (II) the later, usually medieval, midrashim that are somewhat reminiscent of the previously mentioned homiletic or exegetical midrashim but show few formal characteristics and that rarely cite the Mishnah. In the later midrashim of the homiletic genre (I), we find interactions between different textual “canons” as well as different levels of texts interpreting each other. First there is an interaction between two “canonical” traditions, the bible and the Mishnah/Tosefta stratum. The next interaction is between these “canonical” texts and the midrash. However, the ultimate interaction in the later midrashim is with propositions raised from biblical lemmata and the homiletic agenda. In addition, the midrash accomplishes the exegetical procedure that is often missing in the Mishnah. Usually the Mishnah states halakhic statements without displaying an involvement in the exegetical process that is underlying these statements. In their utilization of the Mishnah the later midrashic texts provide an exegetical framework for the Mishnah statements.


5 In this group I have checked the following Rabbinic works: Midrash Jonah, Midrash Yehudit, Midrash Haserot Viyterot; Midrash Va-yosha’; Midrash ‘Eser Galuyot, Megillat Antiochus, Midrash Hallel, Petirat Aharon, Aggadat Bereshit, Pesikta Hadta, Midrash Konen, Petirat Moshe, Midrash Temurah, Divrei hayamim shel Moshe, Midrash Tadshe, Midrash Va-yisa’u, Gen. Zutta, Midrash Proverbs, Midrash Samuel.