In recent years, the interest in Midrash has increased in scholarly circles as well as among readers interested in Jewish culture. This led to a variety of publications; some of them are more generally concerned with the topic while others deeply specialize in one sub-area of Midrash. In the following, I would like to discuss a selection of the volumes published since 2005.

A fresh and open approach concerning the vast field of Midrash study today is presented in the volume *Current trends in the study of Midrash*, edited by Carol Bakhos, which is definitely outstanding among recent publications. This book contains 12 articles and helpful indexes of primary sources, names or subjects. Every article is carefully structured with footnotes and a list of relevant literature.

In his article “The origins of Midrash in the Second Temple period,” Paul Mandel questions whether the activity of the *darshan* could be described as developing from a hermeneutical approach. Through an examination of historical parallels in ancient Near Eastern traditions, he tries to explain the functions of the Hebrew *sofer* and *darash* within another framework. He argues that these activities have had much more in common with the Mesopotamian diviners who expounded celestial phenomena or with the functions of a legal instructor who explains and implements the Law (Torah). However, the conclusion of a rather late development of a creative hermeneutical approach in Amoraic times seems to circumvent the question of literary creation and innovation from internal biblical exegesis onwards.

In his contribution, “Rewritten Bible and rabbinic Midrash,” Steven D. Fraade discusses the interconnection of canon, scriptural authority and early Jewish exegesis. From his point of view, the distinction of a genre of “rewritten bible” and a literature on the

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bible with clear-cut boundaries between the authoritative source and the secondary commentary (e.g. Philo, Qumran) does not fit in the case of rabbinic Midrash. Analyzing a part of *Sifre Dtn*, he shows that Midrash tends to include features of both “genres.” On the one hand, one can find a marking of and pointing to a primary source (Bible). While on the other hand, as in the rewritten bible, Midrash retells biblical narratives by identifying anonymous places and figures, filling gaps in the source-text or omitting inconvenient details, etc. Therefore, in Midrash the two aspects of commentary and rewriting are mutually intersected without any chance to draw a borderline between them.

Chaim Milikowsky’s reflection of textual criticism in the study of Aggadah is a good description of the status quo in rabbinic research. Although he no longer struggles with the producers of synoptic editions, he presents the shortcomings of this method and the danger for the reader simply to get lost in a huge collection of variants or fragments of a textual tradition. He argues that quite the opposite has to be done. In face of the intertextual challenge in post-modern rabbinic studies, the role of the critical editor who searches for the most original text possible could not be overemphasized. He is convinced that a critical edition based on stemmatic analysis should be the goal of the textual research which can be accompanied by a synoptic edition as a digital version or hypertext.

Joshua Levinson’s article gives a short but comprehensive overview on literary approaches to Midrash which are always connected to specific cultural tasks and needs. He starts with the rationalist attitude of the Geonim, presents on the way the rising value through allegorization in the Middle Ages and in Maimonides and ends with the re-discovery of Midrash as literary fiction in the Renaissance and the European Enlightenment. In the field of rabbinic research, formerly dominated by historians, the “literary turn” of the 1970s made a deep impact. But the post-modern era witnesses the “return of history” which provides structural, literary analysis with a socio-cultural background. This approach tries to examine carefully the interdependence of historical and cultural patterns which not only in Judaism create a social image and serve a cultural reproduction of values and identity. Levinson illustrates his introduction to this field with two short examples of rabbinic gender-narratives which show the features mentioned above.

Richard Kalmin focuses in his paper on “The use of Midrash for Social History” and thus asks questions concerning the impact of