When two cultures attempt to occupy the same ecological niche and to permeate the lives of the same populations, one of those cultures will be weaker, to the extent that it can marshal less military and political power. There are three possible responses available to the weaker cultural system. First, the weaker culture can totally reject the foreign influence, call on its resources, insulate itself, and successfully reject the invading system. Second, the weaker culture may choose the strategy of total and unconditional surrender, adopting the new culture in toto, and thoroughly assimilating its values. Third, the weaker culture can take the middle road, adopting some features of the new culture, while attempting to maintain its own identity. Cultures successfully adopting the first of these strategies will, of course, thrive and survive, but the tactic could not have been effective in the face of such overwhelming strength—both military and social—as the hellenistic cultural imperialism evident in Palestine in the first few centuries of the Common Era. And any culture which adopted the "unconditional surrender" strategy could remain only as a fossil, a cultural system with no influence on subsequent generations. It is only through the third strategy—adopting some features, yet retaining essential identity—that any group could successfully encounter hellenistic cultural imperialism.

In the first few centuries of the Common Era, Palestine was the battleground in which Hellenism encountered a wide range of religious and cultural systems: among them rabbinic Judaism, the nascent Christian Church, the Dead Sea Sect, the Christian
Gnostics, and those identified by Scholem as Jewish Gnostics. The focus of the present paper is an evaluation of the rabbinic response to the challenge of Hellenism, and particularly how that response is evident in the aggadic literature concerning David and Solomon. To what extent were the Rabbis and Sages influenced by hellenization?

In order to appreciate the extent of hellenization in the aggadot, one must start by examining hellenization in other dimensions of Jewish life. First and foremost, the evidence for hellenistic influence on the language of the Rabbis is incontrovertible. Krauss has shown that many Talmudic and Midrashic references to military affairs and weaponry use Greek terms. Lieberman has described numerous loan-words, phrases and entire themes that derive from Greek and that appear regularly throughout Talmud and Midrash. And such linguistic borrowing is significant, indicating that "the Jews knew much more about the Greeks than the latter knew about them." Lieberman further argues that Jewish understanding of hellenistic culture was important for Jewish success in that era: "Jewish opinion of the non-Jewish world was the product of knowledge and not of ignorance, and this knowledge was undoubtedly a great asset."

But hellenistic influence extended beyond the linguistic realm of loan-words. David Daube has suggested that the rabbinic methods of interpretation derive from hellenistic rhetoric, and that rabbinic hermeneutics themselves are a product of the hellenistic civilization that dominated the entire Mediterranean world. Siegfried Stein has presented still other evidence of hellenistic influence on rabbinic literary style; he has suggested that the literary form of the Passover Haggada derives to a substantial extent from the Symposium...

4) Ibid.