

AUTHOR Norman Leslie Auerback

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THE MATRONA :

A Significant Character in Rabbinic Literature

Norman Leslie Auerback

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DIGEST

This thesis deals with two of the most intriguing subjects to be found in connection with the Talmud and Midrash. One of those subjects is the appearance there of foreign loan-words. This thesis investigates the appearance and use by the Rabbis of one of those words, a word borrowed from Latin which became a staple of rabbinic literature. The word is "matrona" and it was used by the Rabbis in their aggadot and their m'shalim. The other subject this thesis investigates is that of women in rabbinic literature. For the word "matrona" was used to describe a certain type of woman with whom the Rabbis were either acquainted by reputation, or by their own personal experience.

Who was the "matrona"? R. Jose b Halafta found her to be an exceedingly inquisitive woman, who was quite curious about Judaism and who might also have been hostile to the Jews. R. Jose had sixteen conversations with "a certain matrona," all of them coming in response to her question about a passage from Scripture or her inquiry into Jewish belief. This thesis discusses those conversations and tries to answer some questions that rise out of them: where the conversations took place; if they in fact did take place; why the matrona made her inquiries of R. Jose specifically; and if they did not take place, what purpose the conversations may have had as rabbinic literary devices. These conversations are the sole subject of the first chapter, for R. Jose is found to have the most contacts of any rabbi with a matrona.

The second chapter deals with the meetings of other rabbis with matronot. In these aggadot we find that the Rabbis found that the matronot had a contradictory character. The meetings between rabbis and a matrona span many generations to tannaim and amoraim. Some of the rabbis who encountered a matrona found her to be of great help to them. Others found her to be dangerous, picturing her as a sexually aggressive woman, or as a witch, or as a powerful courtesan. By most accounts it can be supposed that when the Rabbis used the word "matrona," they were talking about a gentile woman, and these accounts bear out the opinion that the Rabbis were not necessarily recluses, but rather were men of their time, coming into contact with their non-Jewish neighbors with some frequency.

The third chapter inquires into the identity of the matronot whom the Rabbis encountered. In every aggada discussed in the first two chapters, the matrona's identity is not disclosed. On the basis of inference from the descriptions of the matrona supplied by the Rabbis, this chapter discusses women who were named by the Rabbis in other aggadot and attempts to find a connection between them and the description of the matrona.

The fourth chapter discusses the m'shalim in which the matrona appears. Here the word has taken on a much different meaning for the Rabbis, for the word "matrona" is used in the mashal to describe the king's consort. As is common in the rabbinic parable, the "king" stands for God. This chapter inquires into what or whom the matrona was meant to represent, and why the Rabbis used this word, and not "malkah"--or another common Hebrew word--instead of "matrona."

Each chapter contains individual conclusions which are summarized and connected in a final conclusion which assesses the scope and importance of and insights derived from the use of the word "matrona" in rabbinic literature.

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INTRODUCTION

In Pirke Avot 1:5 we find this statement attributed to R. Jose

b. Johanan, a tana of the second or third centuries B.C.E.:

. . . and talk not much with womankind. They said this of a man's wife: how much more of his fellow's wife. Hence the Sages have said: He that talks much with ~~women~~ womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of Torah and at the last will inherit Gehenna.

This quotation has often been accepted as the definitive rabbinic statement regarding women. It has been responsible for the opinion that the Rabbis throughout the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods went out of their ways in order to avoid social intercourse with members of the opposite sex. A classic statement on the subject of the Rabbis and how they regarded women can be found in C. G. Montefiore's introduction to A Rabbinic Anthology:

The Rabbinic literature is written by men and for men. The difference in the relations of men and women to each other makes a constant difference between the Rabbis and ourselves. It is always cropping up. Modern apologists tend to ignore or evade it. They quote a few sentences such as 'Who is rich? He who has a good wife'; or they tell of a few exceptional women such as Beruria. It is quite true that wife and mother played a very important part in Rabbinic life; it is true the Rabbis were almost always monogamists; it is true that they honoured their mothers profoundly, and usually honoured and cared for their wives. But that is only one side of the story. 'Women, children and slaves': that familiar and frequent collocation means and reveals a great deal. Women were, on the whole, regarded as inferior to men in mind, in function and in status. Very few women were students of the Law: it was not intended that they should be. Yet the highest and most adorable thing in the world was to study the

Law. The greatest and purest joy in the world was to fulfil all the commandments and ordinances of the Pentateuch and Rabbinic codes. But women need not, and could not, observe them all. It was not for nothing that the daily blessing was said (the blessing which the modern orthodox Jews have not had the courage and good sense to remove from their prayer books); 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who hast not made me a woman.' This blessing was as sincerely said as the two previous ones: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who hast not made me a gentile or a slave.' Social intercourse with women was usually taboo. They were the source of moral danger. They were the incitements to depravity and lust. The evil impulse--the Yetzer ha-Ra--is especially and mainly the impulse which leads to sexual impurity. The result was not entirely healthy.¹

Much of what Montefiore said had a factual basis, but like many generalizations, facts can be brought to demonstrate another side of the case.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss a unique kind of literature which can be found in the Talmud and the Midrash. It is unique because not only does it give us a fuller view of how in fact the Rabbis regarded women and dealt with them, but it also demonstrates how the Rabbis were able to adapt themselves to living in a very cosmopolitan world. The outstanding characteristic of the literature that shall be discussed is the appearance of an unusual word. That word is "matrona." It is neither Hebrew nor Aramaic, yet it appeared time after time in the literature of the Rabbis. Without a doubt, the word was a loan-word from Latin. In the rabbinic mind this loan-word took on special significance. It is the significance of the word "matrona," and how it appears in the Talmud and Midrash that will be the main subject of study in this thesis.

It has been stated that the word "matrona" is a loan-word.

How can we know this? Were we to look for it in either Scriptures or in the Apocrypha, we would not find it. We would have to extend our search into early rabbinic literature to find it, and there we would come to a statement found in Avot d'Rabbi Natan that R. Zadok, who lived during the Roman siege of Jerusalem, was taken prisoner and made a slave in the house of a matrona.² The text does not tell us if R. Zadok regarded the woman as a matrona, but somewhere around that time it would seem that the word entered the language of the Rabbis. This would not be too surprising, for it would mean that the Romans brought the word with them when they made Palestine a part of their empire.

The word in Latin was pronounced "matrona." For the Romans the word had a very definite meaning: "A married woman, usually with the accessory idea of rank or dignity."³ The classic role of the matrona in Roman society was that described by Will Durant in regard to Stoic Rome (508-202 B.C.E.):

. . . [The status of woman in Rome] must not be judged from her legal disabilities. She was not allowed to appear in court, even as a witness. Widowed, she could not claim any dower right in her husband's estate; he might, if he wished, leave her nothing. At every age of her life she was under the tutelage of a man--her father, her brother, her husband, her son, or a guardian--without whose consent she could not marry or dispose of property. On the other hand, she could inherit, though not beyond 100,000 sesterces (\$15,000), and she could own without limit. In many instances, . . . she became wealthy because her husband put his property in her name to escape bankruptcy obligations, damage suits, inheritance taxes, and other everlasting jeopardies. She played a role in religion as priestess; nearly every priest had to have a wife and lost his office when she died. Within the home . . . she was honored mistress, mea domina, madame. She was not, like the Greek wife, confined to a gynaceum, or woman's quarters; she took her meals with her mate, though she sat while he reclined. She did a minimum of servile work, for nearly every citizen had a slave. She might spin, as

a sign of gentility, but her chief economic function was to superintend the servants; she made it a point, however, to nurse her children herself. They rewarded her patient motherhood with profound love and respect; and her husband seldom allowed his legal mastery to cloud his devotion.

The father and the mother, their house and land and property, their children, their married sons, their grandchildren by these sons, their daughters-in-law, their slaves and clients--all these constituted the Roman familia It was within this miniature society, containing in itself the functions of family, church, school, industry, and government, that the Roman child grew up, in piety and obedience, to form the sturdy citizen of an invincible state.⁴

Such a set of circumstances was not to be permanent as Rome began to expand into its great empire. Yet in looking back on its past, the Roman world had an idealized concept of what should be. As we will see, the ideal and the real often clashed. And our source for this information will be the words of those keen observers of the world during the early centuries of the Common Era, the Rabbis.

When the word "matrona" entered the vocabulary of the Rabbis, it must have carried connotations very different than it did for Stoic Rome. For the Rabbis used the word "matrona" to describe a certain kind of woman with whom they came into personal contact. What this woman might have been will be one of the main subjects of inquiry in this paper, as will the question of why some individual rabbis had frequent contact with her. We will discuss in particular R. Jose b. Halafta, a third generation tana and student of R. Akiba, who had sixteen separate conversations with a matrona according to rabbinic literature. One of the goals of this study will be to see how well the Rabbis adhered to R. Jose b. Johanan's admonition against conversing with women, and if Montefiore's thesis regarding the attitude of the Rabbis towards women,

especially in the area of social and intellectual intercourse, can be accepted as the case.

Another question that shall be asked is why the Rabbis wished to use a Latin loan-word at all. What were the connotations the word "matrona" carried for them so that they had no difficulty incorporating it into their language. Also, we shall try to discover whether the rabbinic definition of a "matrona" might have changed over a period of centuries, or whether its meaning remained static throughout that period of time.

In this study we shall analyze the kind of literature in which the word appears, to find more about the function of the matrona in the context of Talmud and Midrash. This will lead us to ask the question of whether or not the Rabbis who appear in connection with a matrona might have really come into contact with an actual woman, or whether the aggadot reporting the meeting of a rabbi and matrona might in actuality have been literary devices invented by the Rabbis.

This thesis will be divided into four sections. Two of them will be devoted to the meetings individual rabbis are reported in aggadot to have had with matronot. Another section will be devoted to a discussion of who the anonymous matronot in rabbinic literature might have been by trying to find parallel texts in which the women involved were named. The fourth section will be devoted solely to the appearance of the word "matrona" in the parable or mashal. It is hoped that by an exhaustive study of the original sources (with a Hebrew text provided in an appendix) we can come to some concrete conclusions about how and why the Latin loan-word became a staple term in the aggada.

FOOTNOTES--INTRODUCTION

1. C. G. Montefiere and H. Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1960), pp. xix-xx.
2. Avot d'R. Natan 9:7.
3. C. T. Onions, ed., The Oxford Universal Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, rev. 1955), p. 1218.
4. Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), pp. 57-58.

CHAPTER I

RABBI JOSE AND THE MATRONA

Among the rabbis who are reported to have had dealings with the woman who came to be known in rabbinic literature as "matrona" (or "matronita"), the name of R. Jose b. Halafta stands out. A prominent figure in both the areas of halakah and aggada, R. Jose was widely quoted, receiving over three hundred citations in the Babylonian Talmud alone. He is of special interest insofar as our study of the matrona goes in that he was the rabbi who had the most reported conversations with a matrona in rabbinic literature.

R. Jose, according to Yoma 66, was born in Sepphoris, the son of a family which had migrated from Babylonia. He was the son of R. Halafta, who was "among the most important rabbis in the era of R. Gamaliel II, R. Johanan b. Nuri, R. Hananiah, and it would seem, he [R. Halafta] was Av Beit Din in Sepphoris."¹ R. Jose, according to Kolatch,² was born around the year 97 C.E. The son of a scholar, R. Jose began to train early to follow his father's footsteps. He became a pupil of R. Johanan b. Nuri, and studied with Judah bar Ilai under R. Tarphon.³ He later studied with R. Akiba, and received smicha [ordination] from R. Judah b. Baba.⁴ This came in violation of a Roman edict banning ordinations.⁵

R. Jose was caught in the middle of the Bar Cochba revolt, and during that time he may have fled to Asia Minor.⁶ After the war he came

to Usha, where the Sanhedrin had been reconvened after its removal from Jabneh.⁷ In Usha he had close relationships with Rabbis Judah b. Ilai, Simon b. Gamaliel II and Meir.⁸ While there he probably learned the art of preparing animal skins, but it is generally supposed that he lived a life of poverty.

In Usha, R. Jose mediated between conflicting halakic opinions of R. Judah and R. Meir. He was so highly regarded as an halakist that it was said of him that he always "had something on which to lean," meaning that he could always cite a scriptural passage to support his argument.⁹ Beyond this, though, we know very little about his personal life. In one of the few statements which he made about himself, R. Jose was quoted as saying, "I cohabitated five times and planted five cedars in Israel."¹⁰ This was in reference to his five sons, two of whom became important rabbis (Ishmael and Eleazar). When his wife died, R. Jose may have married her sister.¹¹

The central event in R. Jose's life is reported in Shabbat:

R. Judah, R. Jose and R. Simeon were sitting and studying together. R. Judah began and said, 'How good are the deeds of this people [the Romans]. They have built market places, bridges, and they have erected baths.' R. Jose was silent. R. Simeon b. Yohai responded by saying, 'Everything they have made they made for themselves. They built market places to set harlots in them; baths, to rejuvenate themselves; bridges to levy tolls for themselves.' Now Judah, the son of proselytes, went and related what they had said, and they were heard by the [Roman] government. They [the government] decreed, 'Judah, who exalted [us] shall be exalted. Jose, who was silent, shall be exiled to Sepphoris. Simeon, who censured [us], let him be executed.'¹²

R. Jose's sentence was final. He was exiled and not permitted to leave Sepphoris to attend the sessions of the rabbis at Usha. While in Sepphoris, he probably came to be regarded as the chief legal

authority of the region, for there he opened an academy. It may also be that he received the designation of "rosh ha-ir," "chief city official."¹³

Tradition has it that while he was in exile in Sepphoris, R. Jose edited the "Seder Olam" ("World Chronology").¹⁴ In Yebamot 82, R. Johanan gives him credit for authoring this chronology of the Jews from the time of Adam to the death of Herod (with a brief chronology of the Bar Cochba wars), but there has been much controversy among modern historians regarding the veracity of this claim. In any event, historians throughout the ages cited R. Jose as the "great historian" and as the "chronologist."

It would seem by most accounts that R. Jose's academy in Sepphoris flourished. Among his leading students was R. Judah ha-Nasi, who later would compile the Mishna. (R. Judah would, late in his life, take up residence in Sepphoris for his health.¹⁵) R. Jose died there around the year 180.¹⁶

Among the greatest enigmas concerning the life of R. Jose b. Halafta are the sixteen conversations he is reported to have had with "a certain matrona." These conversations provoke a large number of questions. Among those questions these can be asked:

1. Are the reports to be found in the Talmud and Midrash concerning the conversations R. Jose held with the matrona accurate? Did they take place just as they are recorded?
2. If they are accurate, who might this woman have been, since she was not named in any of the sources?
3. Every discussion was begun with the matrona asking a question. Most often her question concerned the meaning or interpretation

of a specific scriptural passage. What was the function of her question--to prove that Scripture contained errors; to prove that her theology was supported by the Hebrew Scriptures; or did she truly want to learn from the rabbi?

4. Of all of the rabbis living in the Galilee at that time, why did she come to R. Jose in particular? Did he have a reputation for fair dealings with gentiles (if we can presume the matrona was a gentile) and with possible proselytes (if we can presume she might have been interested in converting to Judaism)?

5. Is the matrona mentioned in connection with R. Jose a single woman, or did he converse with more than one matrona?

6. Did these conversations take place at all, or were they merely rabbinic literary devices, used by the rabbis to clarify difficult passages of Scripture? If this were the case, why did the Rabbis use this particular literary device?

It is hoped that the majority of these questions can be answered in our study of the sixteen conversations between R. Jose and his anonymous matrona (matronot).

Let us first assume that these conversations took place just as they were recorded, and address ourselves to the fourth question. What was R. Jose's attitude regarding women, gentiles, the gentile world in general, and proselytes?

The following are some of R. Jose's statements about women and female proselytes. On the subject of his own wife, he is quoted as saying, "I have never called my wife 'my wife' nor my ox 'my ox.' Rather [I have called] my wife 'my home' and my ox 'my friend.'"¹⁷ This statement could be taken in many ways, but in context it would

seem R. Jose complimented his wife in this saying. For, it would seem, R. Jose saw in both his wife and his ox precious possessions, things to be cherished. This attitude would be supported by his statement regarding his "five cedars in Israel," his sons, a statement which is joined to that about his wife.¹⁸

In regard to women in general, there is this quotation from Baba Mesi'a: "Why is the word אֵלֶיךָ [in Genesis 18:9] dotted? The Torah teaches right conduct in that a man should ask at a hostel about the wife of a host."¹⁹ He should evince interest in her health.

Furthermore, we have an aggada in which Jose demonstrated concern about the honor of a servant girl:

R. Jose's wife argued with her handmaiden. R. Jose rebuked [his wife] in front of the handmaiden. [His wife] asked him, 'Why do you rebuke me in front of her?' He said, 'Did not Job say, "If I did despise the cause of my man servant, or of my maidservant, when they contended with me, what then shall I do when God rises up?" (Job 31:13-14)'²⁰

From his aggadic statements, R. Jose evinced care and concern for members of the opposite sex. In the area of halakah, we find that his opinions regarding female proselytes are more lenient than those about males. For example, in Ketubot we find this statement attributed to him:

It was taught²¹, a female proselyte, captive, or slave, who is ransomed, or proselytized, or manumitted, must wait three months Before be betrothal and marriage to a Jew.⁷ R. Jose permits immediate be trothal and marriage.²²

Also on this subject, he stated that if a woman discovered menstrual blood on the day of her conversion, she needed only be subject to the same laws of purity as all other Jewish women, and not have to wait three months to be be trothed and married.²³ Thus, even before she was

converted formally, R. Jose considered the female proselyte to have equal status of a Jew. This opinion could also be seen in a statement appearing in another section of the Talmud: "Even where a male proselyte had married a female proselyte, his daughter is eligible to marry a priest."²⁴

On the subject of the ger toshav (the "semi-proselyte"²⁵), R. Jose was harsher when fixing his status vis a vis the Jewish community. He is quoted as saying, "A ger toshav is subject to the same laws on the Sabbath that a Jew is subject to on the intermediate days of a festival. Just as on those days a Jew may heap his crop but not work the field, thus can a ger do on the Sabbath."²⁶

On the subject of requirements for conversion, R. Jose argued with R. Eliezer, who said only circumcision was necessary. R. Jose stated what became the majority opinion, that both circumcision and the mikvah were required.²⁷ But, according to him, such circumcision need not be performed by a Jew to be acceptable; even circumcision performed by a Samaritan was acceptable.²⁸

On the subject of proselytization, R. Jose made this statement which can be found in Avodah Zarah: "In the time to come idol-worshippers will come and offer themselves as proselytes."²⁹ In another text, he had this to say about proselytes:

A proselyte is like a newly born child. Why do troubles come upon them then? Because they are not as careful with the details of the mitzvot like Israel.³⁰

From these statements it would seem that R. Jose regarded the proselyte like a newly-born Jew. Just as one could not expect a young child to be careful carrying out the commandments, one could not expect a proselyte to be careful. They both had to be taught.

Bamberger characterizes R. Jose's attitude towards proselytes in these words:

He upheld the majority view that the convert may marry a mamzeret, which was a disability rather than a privilege. In a case involving this question, R. Jose's treatment of the converts seems to have been less than friendly. In other matters R. Jose takes a more lenient stand than R. Judah. We cannot suppose he was more favorable to converts than the latter: other legal questions were involved; still R. Jose's leniency suggests that he was not actively hostile. Moreover, R. Jose, in opposition to some teachers, expected the ultimate conversion of all the heathen. In any case, though less enthusiastic about converts than R. Judah, R. Jose cannot be regarded as actively opposed to proselytization.³¹

In general, it can be stated that R. Jose had high expectations for the future. The time would come when not only all of the gentiles would convert, but even all of the bastards in Israel would be rendered pure.³² God would choose the time, and in so doing, He would demonstrate that the only true religion was Judaism.

On one other subject did R. Jose have some strong feelings, that being in regard to the gentile kingdoms, especially Rome. He is quoted saying, "For the day of Edom is near, yet the retribution is not in a hurry to come, as it is written concerning them, 'And after many days shall they be punished.' (Is. 24:22)"³³ "Edom" usually meant Rome in rabbinic literature.

Of interest in the context of our study of R. Jose and the matronot, we find this statement: " . . . [T]hose who calculate the end of days, haters of scholars and their disciples, false prophets, and those who spread slander have no share in the world to come."³⁴ In regards to this statement, we find a comment by Salo Baron:

One wonders whether in [this] saying attributed to R. Jose . . . the second category [the 'haters of scholars and their disciples'] does not refer to that

permanent nuisance of scholars, the 'Epicurean' skeptic. This type is, indeed, expressly barred from the world to come in M. Sanhedrin 10:1 It is also against such 'smart alecky' debaters that the sages enjoined their pupils to be prepared with adequate answers (M. Avot 2:19).³⁵

If indeed R. Jose was referring to "smart alecky" debaters, it is difficult to believe that he would put the matronot he encountered into the same category, otherwise it seems unlikely that he would have had the patience which would take him through sixteen conversations with "a certain matrona."

If the conversations are authentic, where would R. Jose have met this matrona? As we shall see, she was probably not Jewish, so he must be located in some place where there was some sort of non-Jewish population. R. Jose is most closely associated with two towns in Palestine, Usha and Sepphoris.

After the Bar Cochba revolt, the Sanhedrin was called in the city of Usha, where it would seem many measures were taken to accommodate the Rabbis. In regard to the generosity of the city, we find this statement:

In sermons delivered during the early meetings, R. Judah bar Ila'i took occasion to express his appreciation to the audience, some of which had traveled a distance of 30-40 Roman miles, and R. Nehemiah profusely thanked the local citizenry which had strained its resources to accommodate learned guests and pupils alike.³⁶

It was probably there in Usha, where R. Jose remained silent during R. Judah and R. Simeon's debate on the merits of Rome, and, as a result, received the sentence of exile. It does not seem likely under these circumstances that Usha would have attracted too many gentiles, although this does not preclude the possibility of the conversations taking place there. But it would seem more likely that if the

conversations with the matrona took place at only one location, that one and only place would have been Sepphoris.

Sepphoris is one of the most unusual of the Galilean cities, as we find in the Jewish Encyclopedia: "Situated on a high mountain, Sepphoris was said to have a cold climate, so that its inhabitants were predisposed to catarrh (cf. Yer. Shab.14c)."³⁷ Throughout the tannaitic period, Sepphoris was the greatest rival of Tiberias as an intellectual and political center. During the reign of Agrippa, the Roman treasury and archive were placed in it. This was probably done with good reason, for during the civil war between Alexander II and Antipater for the throne, Aulus Gabinius, governor of Syria, wrested control away from both of them and divided Palestine (then Judea) into five districts, with Sepphoris serving as the seat of one of those districts, this around the year 60 B.C.E. Later Sepphoris sided with Antigonus in his war with Herod around 40 B.C.E.³⁸ In the chaos after Herod's death, the arsenal which had been established by Antigonus was seized by Jewish nationalists under the leadership of Judas the Galilean.³⁹ The Romans had to send a full division under Varus to subdue the city and put down the revolt against Rome. Sepphoris was burned and its citizens were sold into slavery.⁴⁰ When Herod Antipas came into power (4 B.C.E.) he rebuilt Sepphoris, surrounding it with strong walls.⁴¹ He had his capital there for a short while, and later moved to Tiberias, this around the year 25 C.E.⁴²

The coloring of the city of Sepphoris changed drastically in the period before the Jewish War of 66 C.E. As we find, "the influence of the Greek element of the city increased while that of the Jewish population declined"⁴³ The mood of the city shifted towards a

pro-Roman bias. When fighting between Jews and Romans broke out in 66, Sepphoris was the lone Galilean city which remained loyal to the Romans.⁴⁴ While Josephus made the round of the Galilean cities looking for support, Sepphoris made overtures for protection to the Roman authorities, and "Cestius Gallus entered it peaceably while the neighboring cities were ravaged."⁴⁵ Control over the city passed between Josephus and Cestius, with the latter finally winning out. After the war the Romans entrusted the city with Agrippa, assured of the loyalty of its citizens to the Empire.⁴⁶ This assurance was well-founded, for when the rebels under Bar Cochba dominated the Galilee, around 132-3, "the inhabitants of Sepphoris appear to have secretly maintained their devotion to the Romans, as they had formerly done under Vespasian and Trajan."⁴⁷

In the rabbinic period, Sepphoris became a major commercial center, which may account for its appeal to the Rabbis. In the Talmud we find that it also attracted Jews from such exotic places as Guphna and Babylonia.⁴⁸ Among the great academies which were founded there was R. Jose's, and the one established by his student R. Judah. That R. Judah was later given the title Nasi, and he spent his last seventeen years there for health reasons.⁴⁹ Among the Rabbis whom we find in connection with Sepphoris and its academies are Samuel, Hama, Hanina, Simeon b. Gamliel, Johanan, Huna, Bar Kappara, Eliezer and Mona. Yet, "despite the fact that Sepphoris was the seat of prominent Talmudic scholars and of great academies, and thus owed its importance in later times to the Rabbis, its inhabitants were by no means friendly to them."⁵⁰ The Jewish Encyclopedia quotes Hagiga 77a on the subject of the citizens of Sepphoris: "'[T]he people of Sepphoris have a hard heart; they hear the words of the Law; but they do not bow down before it.'"⁵¹ Thus, it

would seem that here, in a Hellenized, cosmopolitan, Rome-oriented city, a place unique in its proclivities during the last days of the Temple and post-destruction period, it is very possible that the exiled R. Jose may have encountered the matrona.

With this background, we should perhaps look at the conversations themselves to see what information they might shed on the identity of the matrona, and what they can teach us about her view of the world.

The conversations all begin with the matrona inquiring into a verse of Scripture, sometimes as a request for information, more often as a challenge to R. Jose. In the discussion of these aggadic pieces we will investigate the qualities of this woman, her reason for asking the question, how R. Jose reacted to her and her question, and the nature of his answer. This will lead us to inquire about why these sixteen conversations were preserved in the Midrash.

In three of the questions she posed to R. Jose b. Halafta, the matrona demonstrated an interest in the Jewish view of the creation of the world. Thus, in Genesis Rabbah we find her asking such a question of R. Jose:

A matrona asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'Why is it not written "for it was good" concerning the second day ~~of~~recreation?' He said to her, 'Nevertheless, it ~~of~~Scripture returned and included ~~all~~ of the days at the end, as it was written, "And God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1:31)' She said to him 'A parable. Six men come to you and you give each one a share, but you don't give one a share. And you return and give all a single share. Does not each one have a share and a sixth, and one ~~only~~ a sixth? I'm shocked!' He said to her according to what R. Samuel b. Nahman had said: 'Because work of the water was not finished, there it is written concerning the third day, "for it was good" twice, one for the making of the waters and one for the work done on that day.⁵² (I)

The matrona asked a fairly simple, yet revealing question. She seems to have asked it as a challenge to the rabbi to defend the fairness of the Torah, for it would seem she anticipated his answer from the outset. In the light that R. Jose's answer seems to have been very lame, it is no wonder why such a question would have been asked by an inquisitive and possibly hostile matrona.

The matrona must have been aware of one important fact when she posed her question. For the Rabbis, every word of Torah had to have some meaning. This included exclusions and omissions as well as what could be found in the Torah. The fact was that the Torah contained meaning above and beyond what could be found on the written page; the Rabbis could legitimize their authority to interpret Scripture by working from that premise. This was the premise of Torah sh-Be'al Peh, the Oral Law. What then was the meaning of the missing "ki tov" (for it was good)? The second day of creation would seem to have been cheated by God.

The Rabbis were very bothered by this question. In the Midrash many different answers were advanced to answer the matrona's inquiry. For example, in the same source we find R. Johanan quoting R. Jose on the subject, presenting an alternate answer to the one he is recorded to have given the matrona:

Why is 'for it was good' not written in connection with the second day? R. Johanan explained, and it was thus taught in the name of R. Jose b. Halafta, "Because Gehenna was created in it, and it is written, "For Tofteh⁵³ is ordered from yesterday." (Isaiah 30:33) Which signifies a day which had a yesterday, but not a day before yesterday."⁵⁴

Yet even this answer left the second day short, holding "one-sixth of a portion" rather than what it should have had, "a one and one-sixth portion."

The matrona's questions about creation did not end with her seeming victory on the question of the second day. In the Tanhuma this exchange is found:

It once happened that a matronita asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'In how many days did the Holy One create His world?' He said to her, 'In one day.' She said to him, 'What is the source of your teaching?' He said to her, 'Have you ever prepared a feast?' She said 'Yes.' 'And how many courses did you have?' She said, 'Such and such.' He said to her, 'Did you put them all before [the guests] at the same time?' She said, 'No. Rather, I cooked all the dishes together, but only brought [them] before them course by course.' [R. Jose said,] 'And all of them are in one verse, as it is written, "For He is the former of all things." (Jer. 10:16)'⁵⁵ (II)

The question the matrona asked here centers on the problem of the mechanics of creation. How did it come about? Was it made up of one big creation, or a series of smaller creations? R. Jose answered her by quoting Jeremiah 10 and drawing an analogy from her own experience. Creation was similar to her preparations for a dinner party; just as all of her dishes were cooked at the same time but only served course by course, so do we find that God created everything in one creation; the days of creation marked the times when the different parts of the original creation were apportioned. How do we know this was the case? Here is where R. Jose brought in the verse from Jeremiah. He interpreted the verse which says that God "is the former of all things," by saying that the verse means that God's forming was one act, which would mean that all creation was a product of that one act. Since we have no recorded answer from the matrona, it would seem that the Rabbis were convinced that she accepted R. Jose's answer to this question. There is no question that the matrona's inquiry was legitimate, although her reason for making this inquiry might not seem

to be readily understandable. It is within the realm of possibility that she may have been thinking of God's having help in the creation. If she could prove that creation took place over a long period of time, she could perhaps show that either Israel's God was not capable of doing all of the work at one time, or else she might have wanted to prove that God needed help (as we find suggested in Genesis Rabbah 1:3). Of course, we cannot know for sure what she intended by asking her question, but as has been mentioned, it would seem that she was satisfied with his answer.

We now come to the third question the matrona asked R. Jose regarding the creation. It is the most widely quoted dialogue between R. Jose and the matrona, appearing in different variations in these texts: Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Numbers Rabbah, Midrash Samuel, Pesikta d'R. Kahana, and the Tanhuma.

Perhaps the fullest account of this meeting is to be found in Genesis Rabbah:

R. Judah b. Simon opened [his discourse with this verse], "God makes individuals to dwell in a house." (Ps. 68:7)

A matrona asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'In how many days did the Holy One create His world?' He answered, 'In six days, as it is written, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth." (Exodus 31:17)' She asked him, 'What has He been doing from that time until the present?' He said, 'The Holy One sits and makes matches: this one's daughter to this one, the wife of this one to that one, this one's goods to that one.'⁵⁶ She asked him, 'This is His skill? Even I am able to do thusly. I have so many servants and so many handmaidens; in a brief time I can make matches.' He said to her, 'If you think it is easy, it is as difficult for the Holy One as dividing the Sea of Reeds.' And R. Jose b. Halafta went his way.

What did she do? She took one thousand slaves and a thousand handmaidens, and made them stand in rows, and said, 'This man will marry this woman, and this woman will marry this man,' and she matched them all in

one night. In the morning they came to her; this one wounded in the head, this one with his eye put out, this one with a broken leg. She said, 'What happened to you?' This woman said, 'I don't want this man,' and this man said, 'I don't want this woman.' Right away she sent for and brought in R. Jose b. Halafta. She said to him, 'Our god is not like your God. Your Torah is true, becoming, and praiseworthy. You spoke well.' He said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if it seems easy, it is as difficult for the Holy One as dividing the Sea of Reeds? The Holy One, what does He do for them? Does He match them against their will so that it will not benefit them? It is written, "God makes individuals to dwell in a house and brings forth the prisoners to prosperity." What is the meaning of בְּכֹשֶׁרִים ("To prosperity")? בְּכִי וְשִׁירָה ("Crying and song"). One [who desires] utters song; one [who] does not desire, cries.'

R. Berechiah said, 'In this manner did R. Jose b. Halafta answer her: "The Holy One sits and makes ladders. He brings down this one and brings this one up, brings down this one and raises up another. It needs say, 'God is a judge: He brings one down and raises up another.' (Psalms 75:8) There is one who goes to his mate and there is one whose mate comes to him. Isaac's mate came to him . . . while Jacob went to his mate . . ."'⁵⁷ (III)

As mentioned, there are other variant readings of this text.

There are slight textual differences in the text we find in Leviticus Rabbah. The rabbi who opens this discourse with the verse from Psalm 68 is R. Levi, rather than R. Judah in Leviticus Rabbah. Among other changes, it alters the question, "What has He been doing from that time until the present," with the question, "From that time until now what has He been sitting and doing?" It replaces "This is His skill?" with "Is that it?" And it omits any comment by the matrona about God's being true or praiseworthy; her praise is strictly reserved for the Torah. In Leviticus Rabbah there is also the transposition of R. Jose's question, "What does the Holy One do for them? Does He match them against their will?" to a place after the verse from Psalms, but these are all minor differences, and they do not significantly alter the text as

we have in Genesis Rabbah.⁵⁸

There are some greater differences in the Numbers Rabbah text. Its every premise demonstrates that it was transmitted to teach a different lesson than were the two texts already studied. Rather than having the matrona ask, "In how many days did the Holy One create His world?" she is here quoted as saying, "Everybody admits that in six days God created the world." It would seem that here she had already accepted R. Jose's first answer of the other texts--she did not debate this basic tenant of Jewish belief. But from this point there are some other notable changes.

In answer to the matrona's question, "What has He been doing from those six days until now?" We find in Numbers Rabbah 3:6 the answer which R. Berechiah transmitted in R. Jose's name. But here, it is attributed directly to R. Jose:

He said to her, 'He causes people to ascend ladders and to descend ladders. So and so who was rich [shall become] poor, and so and so who was poor [shall become] rich' as it is written, "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich." (I. Samuel 2:7)' (IV)

The answer R. Jose is quoted in the other texts as giving originally is in Numbers Rabbah presented as supplementary, transmitted in R. Berechiah's name:

R. Berechiah says, 'He did not answer her thusly. Rather, thusly: he said to her, "He makes matches in his world . . ."'⁵⁹ (IV)

As the Numbers Rabbah proceeds we find other differences from Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah. Rather than go through the long list of God's matches, this text simply states, "Such and such a man will marry such and such a woman, and such and such a woman will marry such and such a man."⁶⁰ And it ends this statement with, "And He causes them to

live in their homes."⁶¹ The matrona's boast is abbreviated: "I can make a thousand matches in one day."⁶² What specifically happened during the night? The other texts leave this to our imagination. Here we find more detail: "When they [the servants] entered with them [the maidservants] at night, quarrelling broke out among them, and they arose and beat each other." And in this text we do not find the matrona claiming that the Torah is true, or that her god is unlike his God; rather, she just tells him what happened⁶³ and receives a rebuke; he tells her that making matches is as difficult for the Omnipresent⁶⁴ as dividing the Sea of Reeds.⁶⁵

At the conclusion of this text, we find R. Jose explaining Psalm 68:7:

The Holy One sits and judges them and brings this [person] from a place and another one from another place and causes them to dwell together. 'He brings forth the prisoners' That means that He brings the prisoners out of their homes against their will and feeds them.⁶⁶

What is the meaning of נכוסרות? If they are not worthy, they cry; if they are worthy, they sing.⁶⁷ (V)

As mentioned, we find this exchange between the matrona and R. Jose repeated in Midrash Samuel, chapter 5, paragraph 13. Again we find variations of the Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah texts. There is one interesting addition to the material we found in Genesis Rabbah: there we found the matrona asking R. Jose, "What has He been doing from that time until the present?" When we come to Midrash Samuel we find two words included at the end of this question, which when translated ask the question, "He has ceased to exist?"⁶⁸ R. Jose is quoted as saying, "My goodness, He has not ceased [to exist]!"⁶⁹

As we go on in the Midrash Samuel text, we find, as we did in

Numbers Rabbah, that the matrona makes no mention of the qualities of the Torah, nor does she compare her god to his; all she can say at the end is, "I could not fulfill my word."⁷⁰ After having matched her servants to find that in the end her matches were not successful, and after being proven wrong by the rabbi, the matrona makes her one major concession of the piece: "He, who is your God, is good."⁷¹

The text concludes with R. Jose's comment on Psalm 68 and with R. Berechiah's quotation of R. Jose on God raising up people and bringing them down. What should be pointed out is that this text is unique also in its heavy use of Aramaic, as compared to the use of almost nothing but Hebrew in Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah. This text is unique also in that it does not comment on the word "בְּכוֹשְׁרוֹת" (Psalm 68:7).

In the Midrash Tanhuma, the encounter between R. Jose and the matrona can be found in two locations, in the chapter "Ki tisa" paragraph 5 and "Vy-yishlach," paragraph 10. In the former text there seems to be a telescoping of other variations of the Genesis Rabbah text, with some significant differences. For example, the matrona is quoted as asking here, "Since that time, what has He been doing every day?"⁷² R. Jose answers, "He makes matches and makes this person rich and that one poor."⁷³ She challenges him in the language of Genesis Rabbah, and he is quoted as answering her in this manner: "If it seems easy to you, it is as difficult for the Holy One as dividing the Sea of Reeds, as it is written, 'God causes individuals . . .'" The verse from Psalm 68 is transposed in the Midrash Tanhuma text to what is probably a more logical location, appearing before the matrona has attempted to make her own matches. By using the verse as it does, this midrash has R. Jose citing evidence for his contention early in their debate. In the other

texts in which the verse is only brought in after the matrona has failed, it would seem that the function of the verse there would be secondary to the evidence supplied by a life situation. Having failed in her attempt to discredit R. Jose, the matrona is quoted making a unique admission; rather than admit that his God is different from hers, or that the Torah is true--and nothing more, here she says:

I give witness that your God is true; his Torah is true; and that everything you have said was well said.⁷⁴ (VI)

With these words it would seem that the matrona underwent some sort of conversion as a result of her experience with R. Jose, for by them she has become a witness to the veracity of R. Jose's beliefs. It would seem that this expression is more than an admittance that "Our god is not like your God," in which the existence of two deities can be accepted. By stating that both God and the Torah are "true," it would seem that the matrona of the Tanhuma had to reject the existence of her deity or else be self-contradictory.

In another section of the Tanhuma there is a discussion of Psalm 68:7. It has already been noted that the other texts⁷⁵ have discussed R. Jose's commentary on this verse; thus we find in Genesis Rabbah:

'The Holy One, what does He do for them? Does He match them against their will so that it will not benefit them? It is written, "God makes individuals to dwell in a house"⁷⁶ (VII)

In the chapter "Ki tisa," the Tanhuma contains this variant text:

[R. Jose] said to her, 'The Holy One sits and matches them against their will and fastens a yoke on this [one's] neck, and brings him from the end of the earth and matches him with this one, as it is written, "God makes individuals to dwell in a house"⁷⁷ (VIII)

The other texts imply that God does not go against the wills of those He matches; this is the only time we find that He can and does. The image

of the yoke is absent from all of the other texts.

We now come to the other appearance of this aggada in Midrash Tanhuma; this time it appears in the section "Vy-yislach," paragraph 10. In this text the matrona asks, "In how many days did the Holy One create His world?" R. Jose answers by quoting Exodus 20:11, which is essentially the same as Exodus 31:17. Yet in answer to her question about what God has been doing, we find no mention of God as matchmaker. Rather, the only answer R. Jose gives her is that God makes ladders, causing one person to ascend and another to descend, making one rich and other poor.⁷⁸ This would seem to be an answer adapted from Berechiah's quotation of R. Jose which we have already seen in Genesis Rabbah and Numbers Rabbah. There may be good reason for this section to be missing here. The subject under discussion is not really what God has been doing since creation as it is God's responsibilities for the fortunes of men. God is justified in making one person rich and another poor, this text states, because, "I am a judge."⁷⁹ The proof text is Psalm 75:8, "For God is a judge."

Since the "Vy-yishlach" text is so abbreviated, and because it does not contain the central text of the other midrashim (God as matchmaker), it could only be regarded as tangential to this study. It is important, though, in that it does elaborate on Psalm 75:8, and uses the first part of that text for a proof text, while in other places the emphasis has been put on the second part.

We have already discussed six forms in which this aggada appears in rabbinic literature. There is yet one more, that being the Pesikta d'R. Kahana in its chapter "Shekelim."⁸⁰ This text is very close in form and substance to both Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah. The petihta

here has R. Jonah quoting, "For God is a judge . . ." rather than R. Judah quoting Psalm 68:7, "God makes individuals to dwell in a house" Whereas in the Genesis Rabbah text the matrona is quoted as saying, "This is his skill?," here she asks (as we find in Leviticus Rabbah), "Is that all?"⁸¹ The Pesikta also have R. Jose "leaving her,"⁸² as we find in Leviticus Rabbah; also she makes no mention of his God when she admits her failure, which might also demonstrate a closer relation between this text to Leviticus Rabbah than to any other variant of the aggada. Yet when we come to the injuries the servants inflicted on each other, it would seem that this text was not unfamiliar with Genesis Rabbah;

Genesis Rabbah: דין מוחיה פציע דין עיניה שמיטא דין רגליה חבירא

Leviticus Rabbah: דין מוח פציעה ודין עיני שמוטה ודין אצילים פריך

Pesikta: דין רישא פצוע דין עיניה שמיטא דין רגליה חבירא

It remains impossible to decide which of these texts may have been the oldest. The text which appears in Genesis Rabbah seems to be the most complete of all the variations, but this could easily mark it as the latest text rather than as the earliest. We now should perhaps ask the question what purpose does this aggada serve, and the corollary question, why is the most widely quoted conversation between the rabbi and the matrona?

It would seem that from the time of Augustus (30 B.C.E.-14 C.E.) the family in Rome was in trouble. Durant reports on the problems of the family in Rome among the nobility of that period:

The decay of the ancient faith among the upper classes had washed away the supernatural supports of marriage, fidelity, and parentage; the passage from farm to city had made children less of an asset, more of a liability and a toy; women wished to be sexually rather

than maternally beautiful; in general the desire for individual freedom seemed to be running counter to the needs of the race. . . . Protracted military service drew a considerable proportion of young men from marriage in their most nubile years. A large number of native-stock Romans avoided wedlock altogether, preferring prostitutes or concubines even to a varied succession of wives. Of those who married, a majority appear to have limited their families by abortion,⁸³ infanticide, coitus interruptus, and contraception.

In response to this state of affairs, Augustus passed through the Assembly a spate of laws whose purpose it was to correct this situation by making Rome more moral. These laws brought marriage under the protection of the state. They made marriage obligatory upon all marriageable males under sixty and women under fifty, imposed penalties on celibates among the two upper classes of Rome, and permitted widows to inherit their deceased husband's property only if they remarried within two months.⁸⁴ The purpose for these rulings was to prevent the total collapse of the upper classes of Rome by their not producing offspring who would guarantee their continued existence. Unfortunately, these decrees had only a very limited effect on the people of Rome.

Augustus' decrees failed to do the job he had intended for them to do. They failed to check celibacy, childlessness, abortion, and infanticide among the oldest Roman stocks. In spite of his expressed wishes, the middle and upper classes of Rome continued to "separate sex from parentage."⁸⁵ Long after Augustus was dead, the "older" Romans continued to refuse to give birth to a new generation--it was inconvenient and Rome was already overcrowded with foreigners and barbarians. As we find,

On the contrary, wealthy bachelors and childless husbands continued to be courted by sycophants longing for legacies. . . . Marriage, which had once been a lifelong economic union, was now among a hundred

thousand Romans a passing adventure of no great spiritual significance, a loose contract for the mutual provision of physiological conveniences or political aid. To escape the testatory disabilities of the unmarried some women took eunuchs as contraceptive husbands; some entered into sham wedlock with poor men on the understanding that the wife need bear no children and might have as many lovers as she pleased. Contraception was practiced in both its mechanical and chemical forms. If these methods failed there were many ways of procuring abortion.⁸⁶

Durant makes these generalizations in a chapter devoted to Epicurean Rome, 30 B.C. to A.D. 96. This is probably true of the Roman world R. Jose knew, being raised in a Roman-oriented city in Palestine during and just after that period.

If we can believe that the morality of Rome found its way into the lives of the Greeks and Romans who lived or were stationed in Palestine, then we might have an answer to the question regarding the reasoning behind R. Jose's claim that God was a matchmaker. For R. Jose, marriage was a sacred institution. We have already mentioned his pride in his wife and sons. To him, looking at the gentile world around him, it is easy to suppose he saw their marital proclivities as nothing short of an abomination. God had matched the earliest couple; He was in the process of matching all couples, and this was necessarily a full-time task. The casual attitude among Roman nobility can best be demonstrated by the matrona's playing matchmaker with her slaves. Such an act required a good deal of gall on her part, as for R. Jose warned her, the Omnipresent found matchmaking as difficult a task as opening the Sea of Reeds (which, it is implied, was also not exactly easy for Him). Thus, we find in this midrash a slashing condemnation of the practices of the Roman world by a man who lived in the midst of one of Rome's most important territories. There can be no doubt that in this case,

the matrona demonstrated all of the worst qualities of that world, and thus she was ripe for R. Jose's rebuke. It is no wonder that this aggada would be so popular: it reflected the high esteem of the Rabbis for marriage, it contained an implicit condemnation of the gentile world, and it had a humorous side as well. One must admit, the picture of a thousand slaves and maidservants fighting and then appearing before the matrona in all sorts of disarray borders on the ridiculous; thus this story was probably transmitted mainly as a humorous anecdote among the Rabbis.

Humor can be found in many of the conversations between the matrona and R. Jose b. Halafta. The debate over the missing "ki tov" of the second day of creation has its funny side. And so does this debate found in Genesis Rabbah 68:4 in which the matrona became indignant the way in which Eve had been created.

[And God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs . . .']
(Genesis 2:21)]

A certain matrona asked R. Jose, 'Why by theft?' He said to her, 'A parable: if a man deposited an ounce of silver in your care in secret, and you returned a litra of gold to him in public, is this robbery?' She said to him, 'Why in secrecy?' He said to her, 'At first He created her for him, and he [Adam] saw her full of discharge and blood; [thereupon] He removed her from him. He returned and created her for him a second time.'

She said to him, 'I can corroborate your words. It had been arranged that I should be married to my mother's brother, but because I grew up with him in the same house, I was repulsive to him, and he went and married another woman who is not as fair as I am.'⁸⁷ (IX)

This aggada is interesting in that it finds the matrona verifying a statement R. Jose has made with an experience she once had. We have seen this earlier in connection with the feast the matrona had prepared.

One question which can be asked about this aggada centers on the arranged marriage between the matrona and her uncle. Would this indicate that she could only have been a gentile? What did the Jewish world have to say about such a match? According to Louis Epstein, the Pharisees had no taboo against such matches; the Zadokites and Samaritans did, but

[a]gainst all this weight of public sentiment in favor of the Zadokite ruling the Pharisees taught that marrying a niece was permitted, and not only permitted but meritorious. They opposed the very basis upon which the new law of the Zadokites was founded⁸⁸

It would thus seem that the Rabbis had no objection to this kind of union. As for Rome, there would seem to be little stigma attached to this kind of union. Augustus' laws were pointed towards encouraging marriages among the upper classes; the only prohibitions seem to have been marriage outside of one's class.⁸⁹ Thus this aggada does not tell us for sure what the nationality of the matrona might have been.

It is interesting to note that there is a parallel dialogue between a kofer⁹⁰ and R. Gamliel's daughter which appears in Sanhedrin 39a. It is common to find that parallel texts will be found in the Talmud and Midrash quoting a different rabbi, or involving different personalities. For example, in Berakot 55a there is a discussion between a matrona and R. Ilai. Its parallel is found in Ecclesiastes Rabbati 8:1. There the same rabbi is reported to have been met by a gentile.⁹¹ In that case, assuming exact parallelism, we could prove that the matrona was definitely a non-Jew. But such a conclusion cannot yet be made.

We next find our matrona approaching R. Jose with another question about a passage of Scripture. It is a difficult passage, and it

can be presumed that many questions arose about it in the rabbinic period. Appearing in Genesis 5:24, it reads, "And Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him." In the Midrash Rabbah we find two adjoining discussions of this verse:

The minim⁹² asked R. Abbahu, 'We do not find that Enoch died?' He said to them, 'Why?' He is written here "taking" and it is written further on [in Scripture], "know thou that the Lord will take away your master from your head today?" (II Kings 2:3)' He said to them, 'If you are asking about "taking," it is written here "taking," and it is written there "taking," "Behold I take away from you the desire of your eyes." (Exodus 24:16)' R. Tanhuma said, 'He answered them well.'

A matrona asked R. Jose, 'We do not find death in connection with Enoch?' He said to her, 'If it said, "And Enoch walked with God," and no more, I would agree with you. Since it says, "And he was not, for God took him," it means that he was no more in this world, "For God took him." '93 (X)

These are fascinating exchanges. They deal with a theological question which was raised in reference to an apparent omission from the Torah like the missing "ki tov." Only, unlike the missing "ki tov," the text under discussion was of vital importance. Jastrow, as we see in note 92, interpreted the expression min to refer to that largely unknown group of Jewish-Christians who formed the backbone of the early church in Palestine. They certainly existed at the time of R. Abbahu, and it is not surprising that they would bring this question before him. Had Enoch been raised bodily from the earth without dying? If so, they might be able to find a precedent for their claims about Jesus, as his bodily resurrection seems to have been one of the oldest dogmas of Christianity. Moses Mirkin, in his commentary to this passage, makes this assumption: "Perhaps it was the intention of the Christians who sought to prove by the 'death' of others their contentions concerning the messiah."⁹⁴ It is also interesting to note that R. Abbahu did not enter

into a theological debate with these minim. Rather, he chose to answer them with a gazerah shavah, proving from the passage in Kings that the verb "to take" meant death, so that there could be no confusion that Enoch had been taken bodily to heaven.

The matrona asked the same question, yet for what reason is not obvious. Her question might have been inspired by the omission and nothing more, as we found in her question about the second day of creation. The fact that the rabbi does not use a proof text would seem to indicate that no real deep theological meanings were sought. R. Jose answers that the text is self-explanatory, and the matrona seems to accept this answer. Whether or not she was motivated to ask the question by the same reasons as the minim, we do not know.

Along with Enoch, Essau also stirred up a question for the matrona. He was older than his brother Jacob, therefore it would seem he was entitled to all of the rights of a first-born son. If he was not destined to receive them, why then was he the first born? This is how the aggada appears in Genesis Rabbah 63:8:

A matrona asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'Why did Essau issue first?' He said to her, 'The first drop was Jacob's.' He continued, 'A parable: if you place two gems in a tube, is it not that the one you first put in will come out last? So, the first drop was Jacob's.'⁹⁵ (XI)

This dialogue between R. Jose and the matrona appears in connection with several other explanations for Jacob's receiving the rights of the eldest son. R. Abbahu suggests that Essau's issuing first could be compared to a bath attendant who first scours the bath before washing the prince, meaning that by issuing first, Essau brought all of the offensive birth-material with him.⁹⁶ There are other explanations, for this text did open some knotty problems for the Rabbis, who had to

justify Jacob's case for receiving the rights of primogeniture. R. Jose's explanation in terms of physiology, poor as the explanation was (even though accompanied by an example--called a mashal here), seems to have satisfied the matrona. How it is possible that it did we cannot know, for in essence R. Jose b. Halafta seems to have established a precedent for giving the second twin all of the rights of the first-born. The matrona's question was justified, and it was important. It may be some reflection on how R. Jose views her that he answered her in an essentially fatuous way.

R. Jose's answers to the matrona regarding Enoch and Essau indicate that he did not take her questions as seriously as other rabbis took the same questions posed by others. In neither answer do we find the well-honed rabbinic mind at work, using the tools of interpretation which had been learned in the yeshiva. Yet we have seen that R. Jose was a very clever man with a wide range of knowledge on both theological and secular topics. His responses to these questions, and to the question about the missing "ki tov" would seem to indicate that they were not asked by one with a deep theological insight or leaning. It would seem rather that the matrona might have been a woman with some idle questions and not too much mental depth, for in the case of both her questions about Enoch and Essau, she seems to have been content with almost a "non-answer." Yet in the next discourse between the matrona and R. Jose, we find that she did ask a question to which the rabbi felt he should give a serious answer.

The matrona was perplexed. How was it possible that Joseph, a mere teenager, could have withstood the advances of Potiphar's wife? This is how the aggada appears:

'And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or be with her.' (Genesis 39:10)

A matrona asked R. Jose, 'Is it possible that Joseph [who was] seventeen years old, and who stood in all his heat, that he could have done this thing/ [i.e. resisted temptation]?' He brought the book of Genesis to her and began to read the story of Reuben and Bilha and the story of Judah and Tamar to her. 'If in the case of these, who were older and in their father's houses, that Scripture did not cover up [their deeds], this one, who was younger and under his own authority, how much the moreso.'⁹⁷ (XII)

Of all of R. Jose's answers to the questions of a matrona, this one seems to be the most reasoned of them all. The Torah, R. Jose told her, is a human document. It does not hide the fact that certain of Israel's ancestors were not morally untainted. This he showed her by quoting, "And it came to pass, while Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine" (Genesis 35:22) and from Genesis 38:18, concerning Judah and Tamar, "And he said: 'What pledge shall I give thee?' And she said: 'Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand.' And he gave them to her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him."

Moses Mirkin offers this interpretation of the aggada:

Joseph was then at least seventeen years old, yet we have the fact that a grown man stands in all of the hot blood of his age, thus how did he withstand his trial? The matrona sought to prove that his master's wife, [regarding] what she said about [Joseph] was the truth, and what the Torah reports is not the truth, rather it sought to guard his honor. And [R. Jose] proves to her that the Torah does not keep quiet regarding the truth in even more damning stories⁹⁸

Again the matrona inquired about a seeming omission from the Torah. This particular question, impugning the reliability of Scriptures, tells us a bit more about the matrona herself. For it would seem that she did not ask about Joseph as a matter of curiosity alone. As we

find in Mirkin's analysis, the matrona's purpose was for R. Jose to admit that what Potiphar's wife said might have been the truth. By proving that Scripture could have covered up the actual story, she might have wanted to undermine the whole of Scripture. If it were God's revealed word, and yet it harbored falsifications, how then could Jews--let alone the other peoples of the world--accept it? On this basis, it is not difficult to see why R. Jose b. Halafta took pains with his answer to demonstrate to the matrona that she did not have enough information to make her assertion. Her accusations were very threatening, thus they had to be answered thoroughly.

An element of attack can be found in the next aggada of our study. This is the last question a matrona asked R. Jose in reference to Genesis (not last in time--we have no date by which we can fix time sequence--rather it comes near the end of Genesis Rabbah). It appears in regard to Genesis 37:35: Jacob had just heard the news about the "death" of Joseph; at this point, the text relates, "All of his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted" This statement bothered the matrona

A matrona asked R. Jose, 'It is written, "For Judah prevailed above his bretheren . . ." (I Chronicles 5:2), and it is written, "And Judah was comforted" (Genesis 38:12). This one [Jacob] was the father of them all and yet "he refused to be comforted?!"'

He said to her, 'They are comforted for the dead, but not for the living.'⁹⁹ (XIII)

Judah was comforted for the death of his wife, Shua's daughter. And, as the matrona pointed out, Judah was the leader of his brothers (just as the tribe of Judah was the strongest of all the tribes).¹⁰⁰ Yet even he was comforted. But Jacob, his father, was not comforted--in fact, he refused to be comforted. How was this possible? R. Jose's

answer is ambiguous. It does not seem that he was worried about whether Jacob knew that his son was alive (he seems to think that Jacob knew); nor is he worried about how Jacob might have known. Rather, R. Jose was more interested in teaching the matrona a lesson about Jewish mourning rites. Mirkin offers this interpretation of what R. Jose told the matrona: "It is man's nature to be comforted for one for whom it is clear that he is dead, and not to be comforted for one whom one thinks may still be alive."¹⁰¹ According to Mirkin, it was Jacob's doubt that his son was dead which prevented him from being comforted, but this may be rationalizing R. Jose's answer to the matrona. According to R. Jose, Jacob knew for sure that his son was still alive.

This same question could have far-reaching theological implications, as we find in the Tanhuma:

A certain min⁹² asked our Rabbis, 'Is it possible that the dead shall live? Your fathers don't agree with you. What is written concerning Jacob? "All his sons and daughters rose to comfort him [and he refused to be comforted]". Rather, if he had known that the dead shall live, would he have refused to be comforted, and would he have said, "May, I will go down to the grave to my son mourning"?' The Rabbis answered, 'Fool. Because Jacob knew, by means of the Holy Spirit that Joseph was still alive, he refused to accept condolences for him.'¹⁰² (XIV)

The min attacked the Rabbis on the question of resurrection. Whereas in another aggada, the minim appeared to support the concept of resurrection,¹⁰³ here we have one who claims that the Patriarchs had no conception of life after death. The Rabbis answered by saying that the question was irrelevant to the matter under discussion, for Jacob knew all along that his son was alive. How did he know? Because God informed him, and Jacob knew not to accept condolences on behalf of the living. In this answer, the Rabbis seem to have agreed with R. Jose.

In addition, they gave the information concerning how Jacob had known that his son was alive. The רוח הקדש, God's holy spirit,¹⁰⁴ provided the information. As for the min's intention in asking the question, we do not know. He suggested that Jacob should have been aware of a future life. It might have been his intention to demonstrate to the Rabbis that the Patriarchs did not know everything, and that they were ignorant on this subject. There is another possibility. If the min was not, in fact, a Jewish-Christian, the meaning of his statement might have been something else altogether. It is possible that he wanted to convince the Rabbis that their belief in a life after death had no support in the Torah. By pointing to the example of Jacob, he provided evidence for his contention. However, the min intended his question, though, it was an important question, and the Rabbis had to regard it as such. On the other hand, judging from R. Jose's response to the matrona, when she phrased the question he did not take it as seriously. She might have meant it as a reproof of Jacob, or else it might have been a simple request for information. If the question demonstrates anything about the matrona, it is that she was familiar with the book of Genesis.

Assuming that the matrona who appears in these aggadot was the same woman each time, we can safely assume that she was familiar with Scripture. For example, in Exodus Rabbah we find her asking a question about Moses. The quotation which interested her was Exodus 4:3, which refers to Moses' staff: "And He said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent." From her question, we learn some more about the matrona:

A matrona said to R. Jose, 'My god is greater than your God.' He asked her, 'Why?' She said to him, 'When your God was revealed to Moses at the bush, Moses

hid his face. But when he saw the serpent, which is my god, immediately, "And Moses fled from before it."

He said to her, 'May your wind leave your bones.¹⁰⁵ When our God was revealed at the bush, he had no place to which to flee. Where could he flee? To the heavens? Or to the sea? Or to dry land? What is mentioned in regard to our God? "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:24) Whereas, [in regard to] the serpent, who is your god, when a man flees two or three paces from it, he is able to be saved from it. Therefore it is written, "And Moses fled from before it",¹⁰⁶ (XV)

We learn much from this midrash. For one, we know that this matrona is not Jewish. Rather, she probably belongs to one of the many mystery cults which existed at that time in the oriental world. Theophrastus wrote this account of snakes in Roman superstition:

Your superstitious Man will not sally forth for the day till he have washed his hands and sprinkled himself at the Nile Springs, and put a bit of bay-leaf from a temple in his mouth . . . Should he spy a snake in his house, if it be one of the red sort he will call upon Dionysus; if it be a sacred snake he will build a shrine then and there.¹⁰⁷

This superstition was probably not native to Rome, but rather, probably came from the East:

The new deities came with war captives, returning soldiers, and merchants. Traders from Asia and Egypt set up temples . . . for the cult of their traditional gods. The Roman government treated these alien faiths for the most part with toleration; since it would not admit foreigners to its own worship it preferred that they should practice their imported rites rather than have no religion at all. In return it required that each new faith should exercise a similar tolerance towards other creeds . . . Encouraged by this lenience, the Oriental faiths already domiciled in Rome became major religions of the populace.¹⁰⁸

There can be little doubt that the Rabbis came into contact with the worshippers of such strange gods as serpents, since the Rabbis lived in one of the most strategic areas of the world. It was a time of some religious curiosity among most people, so that Judaism must have been

under the scrutiny of many who wanted to know what solutions to the human predicament it offered. Thus to find a gentile who lived among the Jews and who also was knowledgeable about their rites and texts would not be surprising. Nor would it be surprising to conceive of such a gentile entering into a debate with a Rabbi in order to both understand Judaism a bit better and to challenge the rabbi from the basis of the gentile's belief. This is what the matrona does in this aggada.

This aggada stands in contrast to the Genesis Rabbah account of "God as matchmaker." There the matrona was reported as saying, "Our god is not like your God." Yet here she is quoted as making the claim, "My god is greater than your God." Unlike the Genesis Rabbah text, though, here the matrona offered evidence for her contention. There she did not describe the differences between the two deities, while here she does. It would seem that the Jewish concept of God provided the gentiles who challenged the Rabbis with ammunition for their charges. For example, we found in Midrash Samuel a matrona who wanted to prove that R. Jose's God had ceased to exist.¹⁰⁹ Thus we cannot ignore the thread of competition that can be found in several of the accounts of conversations between R. Jose and the matrona. Again, in the text about the serpent, we do not know how the matrona reacted to R. Jose's answer. But the response R. Jose gave her would indicate that he thought her question important, just as her question regarding Joseph and Potiphar's wife drew out of the rabbi a detailed response demonstrating that the Torah did not hide the truth.

Another question of some theological importance was that of circumcision. The particular question that the matrona asked on this subject appears in Pesikta Rabbati. Along with her question, there can be

found two other variations of the same question, one asked of R. Judah ha-Nasi by a "philosopher"; the other is asked by Aquilos the Proselyte of R. Eleazer. Although the "philosopher" and Aquilos asked the same question as the matrona, each received a slightly different answer. Thus we find, with regard to the "philosopher" and Rabbi:

The philosopher asked Rabbi, 'If circumcision is beloved [by God], why was it not given to the first man?' Rabbi said to him, 'Why does this man [i.e. why do you] cut the corner of his [your] hair, yet leave the corner of his [your] beard?' 'Because it grew with him since his youth.' Rabbi said to him, 'If so, let him put out his eyes and cut off his hand and break off his feet, because they grew with him since his youth.' The philosopher said, 'To such words we have come.' Rabbi said, '[This is] to let you know painlessly is impossible. Rather, everything which was created in the six days of creation needs perfecting. Mustard needs sweetening, and lupine needs sweetening. Wheat needs to be milled. Even man needs perfecting.'¹¹⁰ (XVI)

The conversation between Aquilos and R. Eleazer revolved around the same question:

'Since circumcision is beloved by the Holy One, why was it not included in the Decalogue?' He answered him, 'Before the Decalogue, it [circumcision] was given, as it is written, " . . . and [if] you guard My commandment . . ." (Exodus 19:5). This is [what it meant about the word] covenant--The Sabbath and circumcision.'¹¹¹ (XVII)

The question the matrona asked R. Jose was the same as Aquilos', but her answer from the rabbi was different:

A matronita asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'If circumcision is beloved by the Holy One, why was it not given in the Decalogue?' He said to her, 'It had already been given, [as it is written,] " . . . and the ger¹¹² who is within your gates . . ." This is the ger who observes the Sabbath "babrit" like Israel.'¹¹³ (XVIII)

There is some question about the meaning of the word "babrit" (בבְּרִית).

Its primary problem is in the "ב" prefix: does it literally mean "in the covenant?" and if so, what does that mean? Friedmann suggests,

quoting Hiyya who once said that an uncircumcised gentile risks death for observing the Sabbath,¹¹⁴ that this "ב" should be taken as a "ו"; this would have the text read, " . . . who observes the Sabbath and Circumcision like Israel [i.e. the Jew]." If this were the intention of the text, then the ger would mean a proselyte.¹¹⁵ Whether this is the way R. Jose took it cannot be known for certain, but Friedmann's suggestion clarifies a difficult text.

In any case, the question of the importance of the rite of circumcision must have been paramount in the minds of non-Jews, particularly if they might be interested in becoming proselytes. This was probably not the matrona's reason for asking the question, but for a proselyte such as Aquilos who probably had to undergo it, circumcision would be a major question. And as we have seen, the gentile world did not have a positive reaction to this ritual. Hadrian, in his decrees, expressly forbade circumcising Jewish children, and Jews in the Hellenistic world were known to have surgery in order to erase their circumcisions.¹¹⁶ Thus it is not surprising that a "philosopher," a learned Greek or Roman, would want to know if it were as important as the Jews made it seem; and if it were, why it was not given to all men at birth. And it is not surprising that the rabbi would answer him in a didactic style, which ultimately serves to ridicule him. In all three cases the Rabbis treated this as an important question, one that they probably heard quite often, even from matronot.

But, as we have seen before, quite often the questions posed to the Rabbis by others could be called ridiculous, so much so that one might suppose them to be the inventions of playful rabbis. For example, we find this aggada in the Midrash:

'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.' (Exodus 20:7) A matronita asked R. Jose, 'What reason is there that the lamed is taller than the other letters?' He said to her, 'Because it is a public crier, and it is customary for public criers to stand on a high place and make announcements.'¹¹⁷ (XIX)

In the Decalogue one word stands out: the word is "אל," the negative imperative, "thou shalt not." It makes twelve appearances. It thus is not surprising that we find aggadot devoted to this word. Whether this aggada stems from a matrona's question to R. Jose or not cannot be known. If someone wanted to record R. Jose's homily on the lamed, in the context of the Decalogue it would find its perfect spot, for the letter's height called attention to an important part of Torah. On the other hand, we have found that the matrona was not held in the highest respect by the Rabbis; in fact, a common rabbinic dictum was that all women were "weak minded."¹¹⁸ That being the case, it would be possible that the Rabbis came by this opinion honestly, by being asked this kind of question by both Jewish and gentile women. A gentile woman, which we have presumed the matrona to have been, learning Hebrew out of curiosity or for other reasons, would be learning a new alphabet, which might be more than enough reason for her to ask about the shape of the letters. It is doubtful that she would have asked this question strictly in the context of the Decalogue; on the other hand, it would make sense for R. Jose to explain the lamed's height in terms of the Decalogue, as he is quoted as doing in this aggada.

The question of the lamed was not one of the most theologically important questions a matrona is reported to have asked of a rabbi. But as has been mentioned, quite often her question seems to have been theologically oriented, and she is reported as raising questions which could

be embarrassing to the Rabbis, and particularly R. Jose. One question of that nature can be found in Midrash Tanhuma. And, as we shall see, the matrona had some skill in rabbinical hermeneutics, for here she attempted to use Scripture against the Jews:

'It is written, "That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land which the Lord swore unto your father to give them as the days of the heavens above the earth." (Deuteronomy 11:21) [Therefore] you will exist only as long as the heavens and the earth exist. In the future the heavens and the earth are going to wear out, for so Isaiah said, "Lift up your eyes on high and see: who hath created these . . ." (Isaiah 40:26) and it is written, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look [upon the earth beneath; For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, And the earth shall wax old like a garment]." (Isaiah 51:6)

He said to her, 'From the same prophet that [you use to] rebuke me, I shall respond to you. As it is written, "For as the new heavens [and new earth, which I shall make, shall remain before Me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain]." (Isaiah 66:22)'¹⁹ (XX)

R. Jose's answer to the matrona turned her interpretation of the two texts from Isaiah against her. On their face, the two verses she interpreted presented a formidable argument for the fact, as she saw it, of the non-eternality of the Jewish people. Using the Isaiah verses in conjunction with Deuteronomy, she set out to prove that only as long as there were "heavens and earth" would there be Jews. This argument was based on g'zerah shavah. It is not surprising that R. Jose brought a strong argument against her. Were he to permit her interpretation to stand, it could undermine the heart of rabbinic authority, which was derived from the ability of the Rabbis to interpret Torah using the same hermeneutics. For she was proving that Torah said the Jews were not an eternal people, and R. Jose interpreted Scriptures to say that they were: therefore he had to go back to the same prophet

to find counter-balancing statements to substantiate his position and disprove the matrona's conclusion. There will be, said R. Jose, in the future a time when the present heavens and earth do wear out. The matrona therefore was correct up to a point. But Isaiah also said that there would be new heavens and a new earth created when the present ones wear out, and God has promised that at that time there will still be Jews. The matrona's explanation of Scripture did not give the full story. But it is interesting to see the matrona enter into intellectual competition with a rabbi on his own territory. This would give us greater reason to suspect that she was a woman who knew the rabbinic mind very well, and who was not adverse to exploiting it in either playful, or polemical (and this debate could be either) arguments.

If there is one theme which can be found in questions the matrona asked R. Jose, it would be that errors could be found in the Torah, or else that the Rabbis misinterpreted the Torah. Here we have three versions of a matrona's debate with R. Jose on a verse which seemed to cast doubt on both the logic of the Scriptures, and on the powers of God. The verse is Daniel 2:21: " . . . [God] gives wisdom to the wise."

The version appearing in Midrash Tanhuma is in reference to Exodus 31:3, "And I have filled [Bezalel] with the spirit of God, in wisdom. . . ." This is how it appears:

'And I have filled him with the spirit of God, i in wisdom' For he already had wisdom. This teaches you that the Holy One does not fill one with wisdom who does not already have it.

A certain matrona asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'What is the meaning of the passage, "He gives wisdom to the wise"? It would seem more proper to say, "to simpletons."' He said to her, 'My daughter, if two men came to you, one poor and one wealthy, and they

needed to borrow something of value, to which of them would you lend?' She said to him, 'To the wealthy man.' He said, 'Why?' She said, 'If it were lost, he would have something of value to repay, but in the case of the poor man, if he lost my money, from whence could it be repaid?' He said to her, 'Listen to what you have just said. For if the Holy One gives wisdom to fools, they would sit in the toilets, the busy alleyways, and the wash houses, and would not be busy /using/ it; rather, the Holy One gives it to the wise, for they would sit in the academy of the elders, in the synagogues, and in the schools and occupy themselves with it; therefore it is written, "I have filled him" He filled him who already had wisdom.'¹²⁰ (XXI)

The variation of this text found in Buber's Tanhuma has some interesting differences from the other Tanhuma text. It is found here in the chapter on the sedra "Mi-ketz." The subject which opens discussion on wisdom is the verse, "Now Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt" (Genesis 42:1) "This is what Torah teaches," it continues, "'It is not the great that are wise nor the aged that discern judgement.'" (Job 32:9) The text interprets the verse from Job thusly: "Not everyone who is occupied with the Torah becomes wise . . . unless the Holy One gives him the spirit so that he will be accustomed to study"¹²¹ At this point the matrona appears to ask her question of R. Jose:

A matrona asked R. Jose b. Halafta, 'See how much the Holy One is praised because He gives wisdom to the wise, as it is written, "He gives wisdom to the wise" There was no need to say this, rather, "He gives wisdom to fools" He said to her, 'Do you have jewelry?' She said, 'Yes.' He said to her, 'If a man came to borrow your jewelry, would you lend [it] to him?' She said, 'If he were a wealthy man I would lend him my jewelry.' He then said to her, 'You would only lend your jewelry to a wealthy man. Should the Holy One give wisdom to a simpleton? Therefore it is written, "He gives wisdom to the wise"'¹²² (XXII)

The version we have just discussed is the most unique of the three variations of this aggada. The Ecclesiastes Rabbati text is

very close to the first of the two texts (from Tanhuma (Handipas)).

The Buber text uses two Greek words not found in the other texts, for "jewelry"---"קורמין" and the Greek for "wealthy"---"אוקניס." Yet for the slight differences, the force behind the texts is similar in all three cases. What should be noted, as in previous conversations,¹²³ is that these texts also have the matrona lending substance to R. Jose's answer to her question by having her cite an experience from her own life which would substantiate the logic of his answer.

Our own text from Ecclesiastes Rabbati brings us back to the two men who want to borrow from the matrona. The text introducing this aggada is, "All rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full." (Ecclesiastes 1:7) The matrona is introduced asking her question of R. Jose about the meaning of the Daniel 2:21 verse; she complains, "Scripture ought to have said, 'He gives wisdom to those who are not wise and knowledge to them that know not understanding.'"¹²⁴ This is how R. Jose is quoted as answering:

'If two men came to borrow something of value from you, one of them rich and one of them poor, to which of them would you lend? To the rich man or the poor man?' She said to him, 'To the rich man.' He asked, 'Why?' She answered, 'If the rich man lost my valuable thing, he has some source from which to repay, but if the poor man lost my valuable thing, from whence could he repay me?' He said to her, 'Listen to what you have just said. If the Holy One gave wisdom to fools, they would sit and meditate upon it in toilets, theatres, and bath houses; but the Holy One gave wisdom to the wise, and they sit and meditate upon it in the synagogues, and in the academies. Hence, "He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."¹²⁵ (XXIII)

This text may be the most satisfying of the variations. For in it we find an explanation for the matrona's choice of lending to the rich man rather than the poor man, an explanation not clearly made in

Buber's text. Also, there is the image of fools squandering their God-given wisdom, as they are not able to put it to constructive uses.

An interesting question could be asked here. Why did R. Jose choose to speak specifically of "toilets, busy alleyways and bath houses" in connection with fools squandering their wisdom? It may be that he meant also to chastise those people who had adjusted their ways of life to the Roman world. If we remember the debate between R. Simeon, R. Judah and R. Jose, R. Judah is said to have praised the Romans: "How good are the deeds of this people. They have built marketplaces, bridges, and they have erected baths." Simeon responded, "Everything they have made they made for themselves."¹²⁶ The Romans not only sent their legions and governors to Palestine, but they also exported their culture. R. Judah probably reflected the opinions of a substantial proportion of the Jewish population in his positive remarks about what the Romans had erected. R. Jose, of course, remained silent. But this does not mean that he had no opinion concerning the imposition of Roman culture upon the Jews. When here he singles out some of the expressions of that culture, its bath houses and theatres and marketplaces, he is giving his answer to R. Judah. These are places for fools to sit and meditate; the wise would be better off in school. This may also be an indication of R. Jose b. Halafta's own wisdom, for we know that had he spoken these words during the debate, he too might have incurred the death penalty as did R. Simeon.

That we have a text which makes no mention of these public buildings (in Buber's Tanhuma) may indicate one of several possibilities. Either it is the oldest text, and the other two are expositions on the "core" text which Buber presents, or the aggada may have changed during

the period of its oral transmission. Or else R. Jose's implied criticism of the Romans might have been suppressed by the editors of the original text, just as many references to Rome in rabbinic literature of the time were cloaked by references to "Edom." Criticism could bring a death sentence, so those who transmitted the text we find in Buber may have found it to be a dangerous thing to preserve the aggada in toto. A less offensive (to the Romans) variation, teaching the same essential lesson, might have been the one that was transmitted for the sole purpose of protecting the rabbis from the fate of those who were outspoken in their condemnation of the Roman government and who had to pay for it.

As mentioned, in these aggadot concerning the matrona's question about God giving wisdom to the wise, R. Jose asked her to provide evidence from her own experience (or common sense) to substantiate his contention. And as we have noted, there are other examples of R. Jose doing the same thing in other conversations with a matrona. Now we come to Numbers Rabbah 3:2 and Midrash Samuel where we find R. Jose employed the same technique. The theme of the aggada found in these two places is that of God choosing one tribe or one person from among many. The two texts are almost identical. The Numbers Rabbah version is introduced by two passages, Number 3:6, "Bring the tribe of Levi near," and Psalm 65:5, "Happy is the man whom Thou choosest and bring near." The matrona brings up the question of how God selects; perhaps even those who are unworthy are brought near.

A matrona said to R. Jose, 'Whomever your God wants He brings near.' He brought her a basket of figs and she chose well, choosing and eating. He said to her, 'You know how to choose; and the Holy One does not know how to choose? He who He sees has good deeds, He chooses and brings to Himself.'¹²⁷ (XXIV)

The text in Midrash Samuel introduces this subject of God's choosing with the example of Eli: "And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest?" (I. Samuel 2:28) The body of the aggada only differs from Numbers Rabbah in some spelling; this is not surprising in the light of the fact that Aramaic was not a precise language, and words could take several forms.¹²⁸

Moses Mirkin wrote an extended commentary on this aggada. Why, he asked, was the matrona upset about the verse from Psalm 65? His answer is a suggestion that the matrona thought "a man may not deserve being especially singled out [for being brought to God] except that it hangs on the arbitrariness of God's will."¹²⁹ It was R. Jose's responsibility to show that this was not the case: a man's works determine if God will bring him near. God is not arbitrary.

It should be noted that the matrona here questioned the fairness of R. Jose's God. This is a recurring theme which can be found throughout these conversations. Her frequent references to "your God" seem to point up the fact that she was not Jewish, and possibly was even hostile to the Jews.

Earlier we discussed the question posed by the min concerning the biblical treatment of the subject of life after death.¹³⁰ That question probably was not answered to the man's satisfaction, and the answer R. Jose gave the matrona seems to have ignored the whole area of life after death. In Ecclesiastes Rabbati the question arises again, and is discussed in greater detail:

'Who knows the spirit of man whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth.' (Ecclesiastes 3:21)

A matrona asked R. Jose b. Halaftha, 'What is the meaning of this which is written, "Who knows the spirit

of man whether it goes upward"? He said, 'These are the souls of the righteous which are placed in the treasury, for so did Abigail say to David, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life." (II Samuel 25:29) One might think that this will be so even for those /souls/ of the wicked. Therefore Scripture says, "And the souls of your enemies, them shall He sling out as from the hollow of a sling." (Ibid.)' She asked him, 'What is the meaning of this that is written, "And the spirit of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth"?' He said to her, 'These are the souls of the wicked; they descend to Gehenna below, as it is written, "In the day he went down to the netherworld I caused the deep to mourn and cover itself for him." (Ezekiel 21:15)'¹³¹ (XXV)

In this exchange, the matrona again demonstrated a good knowledge of Scriptures, as she quoted text to R. Jose. Her question here was geared to finding some information. The interpretation of "wicked men" for "beasts" can be found in Ecclesiastes Rabbati where R. Bun used Johah 4:11 to interpret the word "cattle" for men.¹³² It does not seem that the matrona was aware of this midrash when she asked R. Jose to explain the rabbinic concept of reward and punishment after death. This dialogue did not have the same bitterness as in its parallel involving the min, but it did produce more information about these rabbinic concepts.

In this aggada we do not find the matrona drawn in the rich colors that we have in other aggadot. There seems to be an air of artificiality in the aggada. Yet she does appear in the context of an important theological question, that being whether the Scriptures did contain the doctrine of life after death. In answer to this question, R. Jose provided an interpretation that supported the rabbinic thesis that the concept could be found there, and therefore must be accepted as valid. R. Abbin (Called Bun in the midrash¹³³) lived a generation after R. Jose, and he may have been aware of the older rabbi's interpretation

of Ecclesiastes when he offered his interpretation of Jonah. R. Meir, R. Jose's contemporary, is quoted as using the verse from Ezekiel with the punishment of the wicked: "Wherewith are the wicked covered when they go down to Gehenna? With the deep."¹³⁴ Thus what R. Jose said was not unique in the midrash, and his interpretation of text was in the mainstream of rabbinic thought.

We find in rabbinic literature one more discussion R. Jose had with the matrona. This one is recorded in several sources: Leviticus Rabbah, Pesikta Rabbati, and Pesikta d'Rav Kahana. Again the text under discussion is a difficult one, the command in Leviticus, "And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave." (Leviticus 23:11) The subject which the matrona brought up was also a difficult one. This is how the text appears in Leviticus Rabbah:

. . . R. Johanan said, 'Never allow the commandment of the omer to be taken lightly, for by means of the commandment of the omer was Abraham worthy to inherit the land of Canaan, as it is written, "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:8)' R. Abbahu and R. Simon and R. Joshua b. Levi said, 'It stood for them in the days of Gideon, as it is written, "And when Gideon came, behold, there was a man telling a dream unto his fellow, and saying, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and lo, a cake of barley bread" (Judges 7:13) What is this "cake of barley bread?" Our Rabbis said, "Because that generation was devoid of righteous men, by whose worth were they saved? By the worth of the 'barley bread.' What worth was that--the commandment of the omer.'"

Our Rabbis said, 'It was [the same merit] which stood for them in the days of Ezekiel, as it is written, "Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley and beans and lentils, and millet and spelt . . . and thou shalt eat it as barley cakes." (Ezekiel 4:9). R. Hama b. Halafta said, 'He mixed in barley into [the cakes].' and R. Samuel b. Naham said, 'He mixed in things to loosen the bowels.' And R. Samuel Said, 'There¹³⁵ they say that they made some of it for a dog, but he refused to taste [it].'

A certain matrona asked R. Jose, 'How much this righteous man was troubled. How many slaves and maid-servants he had and they were finding fault with his food and drink.' He answered her, 'Why [does it say] all this? To teach you that all of the time Israel was in trouble, so the righteous are with them in trouble.'¹³⁶ (XXVI)

The commentator Ez Joseph made this explanation of the dialogue between R. Jose and the matrona:

[The matrona here is perplexed because] a rich man like this whose servants are wasting his food, eating that food to satiation, how can he now be troubled to eat strange bread which is opposite to his normal routine? So Ezekiel could be an example. He did not have to go to such lengths; but as Jose answered, there is yet a need for the righteous to be in sorrow when the multitude of the people are in sorrow; this is included in the general principle in Ezekiel 4:13, 'And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations whither I will drive them.'¹³⁷

The version of this aggada found in Pesikta Rabbati reads slightly differently. It is found in the chapter on the "Omer." The paragraph is introduced by R. Hami, who described how the sheafs are to be waved. Following that come the comments of R. Johanan, "Do not let the commandment concerning the omer seem light to you . . .," and the various midrashic statements of those who benefitted by observing the commandment, namely Abraham, Gideon and Ezekiel:

[And the Rabbis said] 'It was this [merit] which stood for them in the days of Ezekiel . . . , "Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley and beans and lentils, and millet and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof; according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie on your side, even three hundred and ninety days, shalt thou eat thereof." (Ezekiel 4:9) What is the meaning of 'make thee bread thereof? He mixed barley into it.' R. Samuel b. Nahman said, 'Things which loosed the bowels.' R. Samuel said, 'There they said that they made some of it for a dog, but he refused to taste [it].'

A matronita asked R. Jose, 'How much this righteous man was troubled. How many slaves and

maidservants he had and they were shaming him about [his] food.' Finally he answered her, 'To let you know that in every place where Israel is in distress, the righteous are with them in distress.'¹³⁸ (XXVII)

The third version is to be found in Buber's Pesikta, again in the chapter on the "Omer." The discussion about the "barley bread" here is identical with the above except in the introduction where the matronita claimed that the servants were "wasting food and drink."¹³⁹ What this meant was explained by Buber in a note: "they ate delicacies and he ate loathsome food."¹⁴⁰ Otherwise this text is identical with Pesikta Rabbati.

All of these texts open an interesting question. In the biblical texts there is no mention that Ezekiel ever had any servants, let alone that they ever "found fault with his food," "shamed him about his food," or "wasted food and drink." Moses Mirkin commented: "It is not the intention of the text to say that he had many servants, or even that it was clear to her that he did; rather, that they despised his food and drink, and would not eat it."¹⁴¹

R. Jose's answer to the matrona had two points. The first is that Ezekiel afflicted himself by eating "barley cakes" to identify with the Jews in Babylonian exile who were in distress on account of their captivity. He ate the same foods as they so that he could be one of them. The second part of this answer centers on the nature of the food he ate. Ezekiel, by eating food with barley mixed in, was in essence performing the mitzvah of the omer, one of the ingredients of which was raw barley. And because he did carry out--in one form or another--the commandment of the omer, he brought ultimate benefit to the people.

Thus we have sixteen conversations which are reported as having occurred between the matrona and R. Jose. In none of the conversations is the woman named, nor is there any hint as to where they might have taken place. They were all initiated by the matrona, and we do not have a record of R. Jose ever refusing to answer the matrona's inquiry. Quite often the matrona had another question or comment after having heard what the rabbi said, and some of the conversations are particularly rich in detail and imagery. But it seems most of them were brief and right to the point, ending with R. Jose's original answer.

In many of her questions, the matrona challenged R. Jose. For example, we find the matrona claiming that God ceased to exist after the act of creation.¹⁴² This might have been a question, but it seems to have been an assertion by the matrona. If we were to decide that this was her assertion, and if we were also to accept the hypothesis that this was the same woman, then the matrona's statement, "He who is your God is good"¹⁴³ would be her self-refutation. This might even mean that she had an inclination towards becoming a proselyte, but even this must remain in the realm of theory, for we have no proof that she ever became Jewish.

Many of her questions were more than questions. The rich debate in which she asked R. Jose why "ki tov" had not been included in reference to the second day of creation ends with the matrona claiming that the second day was shortchanged.¹⁴⁴ It demanded all of R. Jose's homiletic skills to explain why the expression did not appear. Nevertheless, the matrona used a favorite aggadic tool, the parable, to argue her case against him, demonstrating that she had a good, quick mind, and was something of an expert in rabbinic method.

We can find other areas where her antagonism to Judaism appear. For example, in reference to Genesis 2:21, she accused God of being a thief. The idea of thieving gods was not an unusual theme at that time. The major Greek and Roman gods, such as Zeus, Hera, Prometheus and Jason were not always moral in their treatment of their fellows or of humanity. Why, suggested the matrona, should she accept the Jewish assertion that God was wholly moral and was entitled to insist on morality from His worshippers?¹⁴⁵

Included in the matrona's questions was the whole area of Jewish practice. For example, she wanted to know why circumcision was practiced by the Jews, and if it were so important, why it was not included in the Decalogue.¹⁴⁶

And in two of her questions, she used passages from Scripture to make her point against the Jews. For example, she found that Moses fled from her god, the serpent, yet when he was addressed by God, he stood his ground. Would this not demonstrate that he feared her god more than his? In response, R. Jose leveled his only oath against her. After rebuking her for asking the question, he went on to explain that one could not escape from God's presence, a concept about which she was probably ignorant.¹⁴⁷

Her strongest challenge, in that the texts the matrona used seem to support her, was that the Scriptures predicted that the Jews would not exist eternally. It is not clear if she were suggesting that other peoples were eternal. It is possible that she might have been in touch with one of the many religions of the Oriental world which taught an afterlife, such as the cults of Dionysus and Osirus, or possibly she knew incipient Christianity.¹⁴⁸ Their doctrines did include the subjects

of life after death and resurrection, and she might not have known about the rabbinic view on these subjects. The question she asked would seem to be pointed to a future world, after there was no longer either heaven or earth. Thus it was up to R. Jose to demonstrate that Scripture did, in fact, refer to a world to come, and that the Jews were already assured of a place in that world to come. He felt rebuked by her question, therefore he had to rebuke her back with the answer he gave her.¹⁴⁹

One of R. Jose b. Halafta's favorite techniques of answering the matrona was to have her give evidence for his point of view from her own experience, or by her own example. Therefore, when she asked about God's ability to choose those He wants to bring near, he had her demonstrate his point by having her select between good and bad figs.¹⁵⁰ We have many examples of such a technique.

The lady challenged, inquired, and debated with the rabbi. She demonstrated that she had a good knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that she also had some knowledge about how the Rabbis interpreted them. She asked for information. She asked in order to debate. In only one of her questions does she seem to have been able to "defeat" R. Jose. Some of her conversations with him have all the trappings of a real encounter. Others seem much more stilted; these sometimes duplicate exchanges between an anonymous person with another rabbi. These conversations are sometimes left dangling on R. Jose's answer, in comparison to much fuller development in other parallel texts. A good example can be seen in the case of Genesis Rabbah 84:21 and the parallel text to be found in Buber's Tanhuma.¹⁵¹ This might indicate that there was more to the conversation which was not recorded. Otherwise, this might be evidence to support the contention that these conversations did not

really take place. Rather, that they were a literary device employed by the Rabbis to discuss texts or concepts of importance and about which questions were raised not only by non-Jews, but also by Jews.

We know as a fact that the Rabbis did converse with their gentile neighbors. Living in such close proximity with them (as we find R. Jose b. Halafta living in Sepphoris, a town largely populated by gentiles), there can be no question that debates such as those recorded in rabbinic literature did exist. We know that rabbis even conversed with such powerful men as Hadrian and Antoninus. As in the case of the conversations between R. Jose and the matrona, those other conversations were usually introduced by a fixed formula, such as "so-and-so asked Rabbi so-and-so" So just as we can argue that R. Jose never conversed with the matrona, we can say with perhaps greater probability that in fact he did converse with her, and at least some of those conversations we have studied here are accurate reports of those conversations.

In these conversations, R. Jose made a strong defense of his faith against some very difficult questions. From what we know about him, he was a very learned man, both in aggada and halakah, so such statements as we find him making could very well have been his. And, from what we have seen of his background, R. Jose seems to have had not basic antipathy to speaking with a non-Jewish woman, especially if he had the possibility of convincing her of the veracity of his faith. He surely had the opportunities for such conversations, living in a cross-roads town of great importance.

We can speculate that such a woman, if the matrona was just one woman, might have been very wealthy (after all, she is supposed to have owned "one thousand slaves and handmaidens"), learned, probably a

"heathen" (she worshipped a snake), inquisitive, and she may have been a potential proselyte. We know of her praising God and the Torah, and even of telling the rabbi, "Our god is not like your God." If becoming a proselyte was her intention, then we would have a good reason for R. Jose's conversations with her. They would not only serve to inform her about Judaism, but also to bring her to it. He is quoted as saying, "In the time to come idol worshippers will come and offer themselves as proselytes."¹⁵² It is possible that in these conversations, R. Jose b. Halafta was trying, in the case of one woman, to speed up that process.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER I

1. Benjamin Bacher, Aggadot ha-Tannaim (Tel Aviv: Devir, n.d.), p. 102.
2. A. Kolatch, Who's Who in the Talmud (New York: Johnathan David, 1964), p. 239.
3. Bacher, loc. cit.
4. Ibid.
5. Sanhedrin 14a.
6. Baba Mesi'a 84b.
7. Genesis Rabbah 97.
8. Bacher, loc. cit.
9. Bacher, p. 103.
10. Shabbat 118b.
11. Aaron Hyman, Toldot ha-Tannaim v'Amoraim, (London: Express Press, 1910), I, 712-713.
12. Shabbat 33b.
13. A. Hyman, p. 797; J. Kiddushin 2:45.
14. Hermann Strack, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, (New York: Harper, 1931), p. 225; Bacher, op. cit., p. 103.
15. Genesis Rabbah 96:5 and 33:3.
16. Kolatch, op. cit., p. 240.
17. Shabbat 118b.
18. Ibid.
19. Baba Mesi'a 7a.
20. Genesis Rabbah 48:3.
21. "In a beraita."
22. Ketubot 37a.
23. Ibid.

24. Kiddushin 77a.
25. Marcus Jastrow, Dictionary (New York: Pardes, 1950), I, p. 263, explains ger toshav as "one who, for the sake of acquiring limited citizenship in Palestine, renounces idolatry."
26. J. Yebamot 8:1.
27. Ibid.
28. Avodah Zarah 27a.
29. Avodah Zarah 3b.
30. Yebamot 48b.
31. Bernard Bamberger, Proselytism in the Talmudic Period (New York: Ktav, 1968), p. 284.
32. Kiddushin 72b.
33. Sifre Deuteronomy, quoted in Bacher, op. cit., p. 129.
34. Mas. Derek Eres, Tos. VI:13, quoted in Salo Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (New York: Columbia, 1960), II, p. 434, note 22.
35. Ibid.
36. Baron, p. 378,
37. Samuel Krauss, "Sepphoris," J.E., 1901-1906.
38. Ibid.
39. Baron, op. cit., pp. 124-5.
40. Ibid.
41. Emil Schurer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus (New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 167.
42. Baron, p. 137.
43. Samuel Krauss, loc. cit.
44. Baron, p. 333.
45. Samuel Krauss, loc. cit.
46. Baron, p. 333.
47. Baron, p. 414.

48. Samuel Krauss, loc. cit.
49. Genesis Rabbah 96:5.
50. Samuel Krauss, loc. cit.
51. Ibid.
52. Genesis Rabbah 4:6.
53. R. Alcalay, Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary (Tel Aviv: Massadah, 1965), p. 2829, translates as "pyre, burning-place; hell, inferno." Jastrow, op. cit., p. 1689, says "symbolical name of Gehenna (Erub. 19b)."
54. Genesis Rabbah 4:6.
55. Midrash Tanhuma, "Bereshit," p. 1, paragraph 2 [ed. Buber].
56. Ez Joseph to Genesis Rabbah 68:4 translates as "dowery."
57. Genesis Rabbah 68:4.
58. Leviticus Rabbah 8:1.
59. Numbers Rabbah 3:6.
60. פלוני ישא פלוניה ופלונית חשא פלוני
61. ומושיבו בבחיהן
62. לזווג אלף ביום אחד
63. ספרה לו המעשה
64. This is the only occurrence in these aggadot of God designated as צמקום
65. Numbers Rabbah 3:6.
66. Ez Joseph to Numbers Rabbah 3:6: "It is against their will to begin with, but after it happens it is desired."
67. Cf. Genesis Rabbah 68:4.
68. בטל הוא
69. Midrash Samuel 5:13.
70. לא יכילתי קיים על מלתי
71. טובכון מאן הוא אלהכון

772. The following phrase is added:
73. מזווג זיווגים ומעשיר לזה ומוריש לזה
74. Midrash Tanhuma, "Ki Tisa," P. 117, paragraph 5 [ed E. Zundel].
75. Cf. the texts of Midrash Samuel, Genesis Rabbah, and Leviticus Rabbah.
76. Cf. Genesis Rabbah 68:4.
77. Tanhuma [ed Zundel] loc cit.
78. Tanhuma, "Vy-yislak," p. 44, paragraph 10 [ed. Zundel], reads:
עושה סולמות מעל לזה ומוריד לזה...
79. אני דייך
80. Pesikta d'R. Kahana p. 11b, paragraph 12.
81. הדא היא
82. הניחה
83. Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 222.
84. Durant, p. 223.
85. Durant, p. 363.
86. Durant, p. 364.
87. Genesis Rabbah 17:7.
88. Louis Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and Talmud (Cambridge: Harvard, 1942), pp. 251-252.
89. Durant, p. 223.
90. Marcus Jastrow, op. cit., p. 662, translates as "unbeliever."
91. גוי
92. Jastrow, p. 776, translates "מין" in this manner: "A Jewish infidel, mostly applied to Jew-Christians . . ."
93. Genesis Rabbah 25:1.
94. M. Mirkin, Midrash Rabbah (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1956-62), I, p. 186-187.
95. Genesis Rabbah 63:8.

96. Ibid..
97. Genesis Rabbah 87:6.
98. Mirkin, op. cit., to Genesis Rabbah 87:6.
99. Genesis Rabbah 84:21.
100. Mirkin, to Genesis Rabbah 84:21.
101. Ibid.
102. Tanhuma, "Vy'yeshev," p. 91, paragraph 8 [ed. Buber].
103. Cf. Genesis Rabbah 25:1.
104. Jastrow, p. 1458, translates " רוח הקדש " as "the holy spirit, prophetic inspiration . . ."
105. The oath " תפח עצמותה ," may mean, "May you die suddenly."
106. Exodus Rabbah 3:2.
107. Durant, The Life of Greece (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1939), p. 196.
108. Durant, Caesar, pp. 389-390.
109. Midrash Samuel 5:13.
110. Pesikta Rabbati 117a.
111. Ibid.
112. גר
113. Pesikta Rabbati, loc. cit.
114. Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:21.
115. Pesikta Rabbati, loc. cit.
116. Salo Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (Philadelphia, J.P.S., 1960), II, pp. 106-107: ". . . Hadrian attacked his Jewish subjects at an even more vulnerable point, at their self-government. . . . Hadrian prohibited circumcision, classifying it, with castration, as a capital crime. . . . Other edicts of Hadrian were directed against the Jews exclusively. According to rabbinic sources, he prohibited public gatherings for instruction in Jewish law, forbade the proper observance of the Sabbath and holidays, and outlawed many important rituals. We do not know whether the latter

prohibitions were directed only against the Jews of Palestine or against those of the whole empire . . ."

117. Pesikta Rabbati, 110b.
118. קליות ראש : Cf. Sukkot 51b.
119. Tanhuma, "Mi Ketz," p. 8, paragraph 2 [ed. Buber].
120. Tanhuma, p. 128, paragraph 2 [ed. Zundel].
121. Tanhuma, "Mi Ketz," p. 9, paragraph 9 [ed. Buber].
122. Ibid.
123. Cf. Genesis Rabbah 4:6.
124. Ecclesiastes Rabbati 1:5.
125. Ibid.
126. See Shabbat 33b.
127. Numbers Rabbah 3:2.
128. Midrash Samuel, Chapter 8, paragraph 2: we find the following spellings: שאלת, לבור, מקרב ; in Numbers Rabbah 3:2, their spellings are: שאלה, לברור, מקריב.
129. Mirkin, op. cit., to Numbers Rabbah 3:6.
130. Tanhuma, "Mi Ketz," p. 8, paragraph 20 [ed. Buber].
131. Ecclesiastes Rabbati 3:21.
132. Ecclesiastes Rabbati 3:18.
133. See above.
134. Numbers Rabbah 1:1.
135. Erubim 81a.
136. Leviticus Rabbah 28:6.
137. Ez Joseph to Leviticus Rabbah 28:6.
138. Pesikta Rabbati, 92-93.
139. Pesikta d'R. Kahana, p. 71a.
140. See Buber's note in Pesikta d'R. Kahana 71a.

141. Mirkin, op. cit., to Leviticus Rabbah 28:6.
142. Midrash Samuel 5:13.
143. Ibid.
144. See Genesis Rabbah 4:6.
145. See Genesis Rabbah 17:7.
146. See Pesikta Rabbati, p. 117a.
147. See Exodus Rabbah 3:2.
148. Durant, Caesar, p. 522.
149. See Tanhuma, "Mi Ketz," p. 8, paragraph 20 [ed. Buber].
150. See Numbers Rabbah 3:2.
151. Genesis Rabbah 84:21.
152. See Avodah Zarah 3b.

CHAPTER II

OTHER RABBIS AND THE MATRONA

In the Talmud and Midrash we find many exchanges, conversations, debates, and meetings between the Rabbis and a matrona. The list of the rabbis who encountered a matrona, and whose encounter is recorded in rabbinic literature is long. The list includes R. Zadok, R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, R. Joshua b. Hanania, R. Akiba, R. Judah B. Shammu'a, R. Judah b. Ilai, R. Johanan b. Nappaha, R. Kahana, R. Hanina b. Pappi, R. Hisda, Rabba, R. Huna, R. Joshua b. Tanhuma, R. Samuel Susratai, R. Abbahu; the list will also include Ketiah b. Shalom, who became a proselyte, according to the midrash, at the time of the visit to Rome of R. Eliezer, R. Joshua and R. Gamaliel. These men span a long period of time, living during both the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods. Some of them were very influential both during their lives and after their deaths: they were highly regarded for either their halakic opinions or their midrashim, and in some cases, for both. Others included in this list of rabbis who had some kind of relationship with a matrona seem to have had little influence, for they are rarely quoted in rabbinic literature.

It will be our purpose in this chapter to take each incident in chronological order, to discuss it in the context it appears in the Talmud or Midrash, to present the text and translation, and to discuss its content, then to use these separate texts to attempt to build a composite picture of the matrona. We will want to ask why she appears in

this literature as often as she does, and what function did she serve? Later in another chapter we shall look at those women who are named in rabbinic literature, and who might have been given the title matrona.

The earliest rabbi to have any dealings with a matrona to be found in rabbinic literature is R. Zadok. R. Zadok was one of the heroes of the Jewish resistance to the Roman besiegers of Jerusalem. Tradition tells us that he fasted throughout the siege in order to seek God's intervention and to prevent the destruction of the city by Titus and Vespasian. The story of his fast can be found in two places, Gittin 50b and Lamentations Rabbati 1:5. In fact, these sources record that the fast lasted not just through the period of the siege, but rather that it lasted forty years. Unfortunately, it was not enough. In Lamentations Rabbati, Vespasian is quoted as offering R. Johanan b. Zakkai one request after the rabbi had been successfully smuggled out of the city. R. Johanan's request, it is recorded, was that the Romans bring R. Zadok out and spare him, although by that time he was both emaciated and old. R. Johanan's reasoning was simple, according to the text; R. Zadok was important because "he eats one fig, and on account of the strength [it gives him] he offers up a hundred lectures."¹ This confidence was borne out by future events. After being freed by the Romans, R. Zadok accompanied R. Johanan to Jabneh, and there he sat in R. Gamaliel's bet din.²

R. Zadok is reported to have had two meetings with matronot. One source is Avot d'R. Natan, and this source seems to have taken liberties with the chronology of R. Zadok's life. Yet, as we shall see, the text was probably not so concerned with historical accuracy as it was with describing the personalities of the individuals involved.

This is how it appears:

R. Zadok was a prominent man of his generation. When he was taken prisoner to Rome, a certain matronita took him and sent him a beautiful handmaiden. When he saw her he set his eyes on the wall in order that he should not see her, and he was sitting and studying all night. In the morning she went and complained to her mistress. She said to her, 'I am worthy of death rather than your giving me to this man.' She [the matronita] sent and called to him and said to him, 'Why did you not do with that woman as men do?' He said to her, 'What should I do? I am descended from the high priesthood. I come from a great family. I said [to myself]: Perhaps I will come to her and cause the multiplication of bastards in Israel.' When she heard what she said, she commanded concerning him, and dismissed him with great honor.³ (I)

As mentioned above, this text took liberties with the events of R. Zadok's life. Although he was taken prisoner by the Romans, he was not brought to Rome. In addition, it is very unlikely that, supposing he actually had been brought to Rome, he would have been desirable to a handmaiden. After all, after forty years of fasting, he must have been in generally poor physical shape. But, if we look at the people involved, we learn some things about the reputation of R. Zadok, and about the reputation of the matrona (matronita).

The matrona in this story seems to have had a plan. By offering one of her handmaidens to R. Zadok, she clearly intended to turn him into her slave. Were he to give in to his sexual appetite, she reasoned, her task of making him a slave would be much less difficult. For R. Zadok, the temptation became a test. He knew that he could give in, but he chose not to for two reasons. First, as a descendent of priests, he was very careful with the halakic standards to which he had become heir. Any offspring resulting from his illicit intercourse with a heathen would become mamzarim, bastards. Secondly, he would have to deny his

background, abandon his task, and become a slave to the matrona were he to partake in illicit intercourse. He knew that he ran a high risk. Rabbinic literature is full of stories of martyrdom resulting from the refusal of a rabbi or other Jew to accede to the demands of a gentile. For example, we read about R. Ishmael. He was regarded as one of the seven most handsome men in the world. When the king sentenced him to death, the "king's daughter" saw him and fell in love. In one version she attempts to save him, and failing that, asks for the skin which is stripped from his face.⁴ In another version, she promises him his life if he does her will, but he refuses and is flayed alive.⁵ R. Zadok made himself very vulnerable by refusing the matrona's offer of her handmaiden. Since she was his mistress, the matrona could have had him punished. Yet by standing his ground, not only was R. Zadok able to save himself from possible servitude, according to the midrash, but he was also dismissed by the woman with great honor.

This midrash teaches us some details connected with the matrona. For example, here she is clearly Roman. As we shall see in other midrashim, there may be some doubt about the nationality of the matrona. Here she is also a slave-owner. This would compare to the incident of the matrona and R. Jose b. Halaftha, when the lady attempted to play the part of God by matching her "thousand slaves and thousand handmaidens."⁶ The matrona of this midrash, though, was not interested in making theological points when she tried to match her newly acquired Jewish slave with her handmaiden. By her response to following events, it would seem that the matrona was really surprised when her plan failed.

Temptation is the key word describing both encounters between R. Zadok and a matrona. In addition to the incident reported in Avot d'R.

Natan, we find this rather bizarre midrash in Kiddushin:

R. Zadok was summoned by a certain matrona. He said to her, 'My heart is faint and I am not able.'⁷ Is there anything to eat?' She said to him, 'There is unclean food.' He said to her, 'What am I to learn from this? That he who does this, eats this.' She fired the oven [and put] the portion into it. He went up and sat inside it. She said to him, 'What is the meaning of this?' He said to her, 'He who does this falls in this.' She said to him,⁸ 'If I had known this, I would not have tormented you.' (II)

Rashi found some difficulty with this text. In explaining R. Zadok's question, "What can I learn from this?" Rashi stated: R. Zadok meant "one who has done this, who has intercourse with a Roman woman, is fit for eating unclean food."⁹ What is implied in the Talmud text is expressly pointed out by Rashi. The woman has enticed R. Zadok to have intercourse. The whole point of his asking for food is to teach her a lesson, that being, he who has intercourse with a gentile woman deserves the same punishment as he would for eating non-kosher food. The fact that R. Zadok was a descendent of the priests would make this lesson even more vivid. Rashi took this one step further in his commentary. In commenting on the phrase, "she fired the oven," Rashi said:

This same Aramean woman added wood to the oven's fire to roast the unclean thing, and a huge flame was rising [and] he had the opportunity to be free from her and give her the opportunity to kill him.¹⁰ (III)

In saying this, Rashi was reporting two things. First, he called her an "Aramean." This would recall Berakot 6b, where Rabba is quoted as saying, "Do not sit upon the bed of an Aramean woman." Some sources believe this refers to a proselyte woman.¹¹ But in this context what is probably meant is the same thing implied in another phrase in Berakot 8b. The woman is a gentile prostitute. Also Rashi states that R. Zadok was willing to give up his life rather than give up his honor to this lady.

There are great similarities to be found in the two aggadot. In both cases, R. Zadok is presented with an opportunity to have sexual relations with a gentile woman, and in fact he risks punishment for refusing the opportunity. Yet he takes the chance of risking his life, and is rewarded in the end for his perseverance. These aggadot point up a major concern among the Rabbis, one which we find repeated quite often in the context of the meetings between rabbis and matronot. In coming into frequent contact with gentile women in Palestine, it would seem that there was a degree of sexual anxiety felt by the Rabbis. Quite often we will find a rabbi enticed by a gentile woman for some sexual immorality, and we will find the rabbi taking a course of action which is sometimes quite dangerous in order to escape the situation. Among the rabbis who we will find in similar situations are R. Hanina and R. Kahana. As a body of unique rabbinic literature, these stories, as well as those aggadot in which witchcraft plays a significant role, may tell us quite a bit about how many of the rabbis viewed their contacts with gentile women, and with the gentile world in general.

The next rabbi we will be discussing is R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus. He was the brother-in-law of R. Gamliel II, and he taught at Lydda, which became a major rabbinic academy in the early part of the second century.¹² The following incident is related in two versions, in Yoma and in Numbers Rabbah. Both texts describe an incident which closely parallels those which take place in R. Jose b. Halafta's life. In these versions, a matrona came to R. Eliezer with a question regarding a biblical text with which she was having difficulties: why did those who had sinned with the golden calf die by three different kinds of death? But in this instance, unlike R. Jose, R. Eliezer refused to answer the

woman. He would not have anything to do with her, and he pushed her away with a curt phrase. After he had pushed her away, R. Eliezer stirred up a controversy among his fellow rabbis, among whom was his father.

In Numbers Rabbah the aggada appears in the context of a discussion on Numbers 5:27. This section deals with testing the sotah, the suspected adulteress. The Rabbis used this section homiletically, associating the different steps in the examination of the sotah with the examination Moses made of the people after the incident of the calf. Thus, the aggada is introduced as part of the discussion of the test for the sotah:

'And afterward [the priest] shall make the woman drink.' (Numbers 5:26) After he/[Moses] entreated for their sakes and turned away [God's] anger, as you read, 'And Moses turned away . . . ' (Exodus 32:15)¹³ then he tested them [the people] like sotot; [for] he made them drink the water. (cf. Exodus 32:20)¹⁴ (IV)

After establishing the parallel between the two tests, the midrash uses the analogy to describe what happened to the people:

'And when he hath made her drink the water, then it shall be if she is defiled, and has acted unfaithfully against her husband, that the water . . . shall enter her and become bitter . . . ' (Numbers 5:27) When they drank, some of them were tested, and all who had sinned died unnatural deaths.¹⁵ (IV)

Now, having set the stage by describing how the people were tested, and by stating that those who had sinned with the calf died unnatural deaths, the midrash records the matrona's question to R. Eliezer:

A matrona asked R. Eliezer, 'Why is it since there was only one sin in conjunction with the calf, that they died by three kinds of death.'¹⁶ He said to her, 'Women have no knowledge other than of the spindle, as it is written, "And all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands." (Exodus 35:25)'¹⁷ (IV)

In saying this, R. Eliezer sent the matrona away without giving

her an answer. This brought a rebuke from Hyrcanus, and the following statement, about which there is some question:

Hyrcanus said to him, 'Since he did not answer her with one¹⁸ word of Torah, she deprived him of three hundred kor¹⁹ of tithe annually.' (IV)

We are not positive about what Hyrcanus meant by this remark. Did R. Eliezer, being a priest, have a tithe? Was this the tithe he would receive as a priest, or was it some kind of tithe he was required to give as a rabbi? Did the matrona indeed punish him for not answering her by confiscating something that was his, or was this a threat on the part of his father that he could be punished for his rudeness? Does this indicate that the matrona had the authority to make a confiscation, or did she have friends in authority who could do it for her? These questions remain questions. There is no answer in the text, just R. Elizer's answer: "It is better to burn the words of Torah than to give them to women."²⁰

The text continues with a discussion of the matrona's question, and possible answers. It seems that the question was a major one for many of the rabbis, for several are engaged in trying to supply an answer:

His students said to him [R. Eliezer], 'Rabbi, you pushed her away with a fragile reed. What answer will you give us?'

R. Berechiah bar R. Abba b. Kahana in the name of R. Elazar said, 'Everyone who sinned who had witnesses and a warning died by the decision of the court; witnesses, but no warning, he was tested like the sotah; no witnesses and no warning, he died in a plague.' Rav and Levi bar Sisi, both said, '[If] he sacrificed, offered incense, or poured a libation, he died by decision of the court; [if] he clapped his hands, danced or laughed, he was tested like a sotah; [if] he was happy in his heart, he died by plague.'²¹ (IV)

It would seem here that it was not for a want of answers that R. Eliezer refused to answer the woman. He seems to have been of the conviction

that a woman has no need to understand Torah, and should not, therefore, waste a learned man's time with questions. His remark to the matrona is one of the most hostile delivered by the rabbis we will be discussing, and there is no question that R. Eliezer meant what he said to her.

There is an abbreviated version of this midrash in Yoma, and some variations in the opinions of some of the rabbis:

A wise woman asked R. Eliezer, 'Since in the deed of [making] the calf all were equal [ly] guilty, why were their deaths not all the same?' He said to her, 'Women have no knowledge other than of the spindle, for as it is written, "And all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands."'

It is stated, Rab and Levi were disputing the matter. One said, 'Whosoever sacrificed and burned incense died by the sword; whosoever embraced and kissed it died by "the death" [Rashi: "plague"]; whosoever rejoiced in his heart, by dropsy.' The other said, 'He who had witnesses and a warning, by the sword; witnesses without a warning, by "the death"; neither witnesses or warning, by dropsy.'²² (V)

The significant difference between the two texts besides the fullness of their treatment of R. Eliezer's encounter with the matrona, is the fact she is not called a matrona in Yoma. Rather, there she is called "אשה חכמה," "a wise woman." This is the only time that we will find this parallelism. In most cases, a parallel text will use matrona. Yet there may have been a reason for the rabbi who transmitted this particular aggada to call her a "wise woman." For example, it would seem that she had some mastery of the Torah. In addition, the fact that there were three different kinds of death meted out to those who worshipped the calf is not Toraitic. Rather, it was arrived at homiletically.²³ She would have had to be aware of rabbinic thinking on this issue in order to bring her particular question to R. Eliezer. This might indicate that the rabbi who transmitted the aggada pictured the

woman as being a Jew; this can be borne out by the fact that the Yoma text does not record that she took any action against the rabbi when he refused to answer her.

There are other differences between the two texts. It is possible that R. Berechiah was quoted in R. Eliezer's name in Numbers Rabbah, though we find there that R. Eliezer was quoted. Also, Yoma makes no mention of Hyrcanus' or Eliezer's students. Also, the tradition of Rab and Levi is different in the two texts, the fuller answer being found in the Talmud. Which of these two texts is the older cannot be known for sure, but they offer us a unique view of the woman as seen by at least one of the great rabbis of his time.

A contemporary of R. Eliezer was R. Joshua b. Hananiah. Of all the rabbis who had relations with important non-Jews in the tannaitic period, he was among the most prominent. R. Joshua lived between 40 C.E. and 125. He was a Levite, and tradition teaches that he was a member of the Temple choir. After the destruction, he became a student of R. Johanan ben Zakkai.²⁴ Upon his teacher's death, he succeeded to the head of the Great Sanhedrin in Jabneh. There he disputed with R. Gamaliel II, who served as Nasi. His residence was either the town of Pekiin or Bekiin, and his trade was either that of needlemaker or smith.²⁵

The Talmud is replete with meetings between R. Joshua and Emperor Hadrian. R. Joshua is known to have made at least one trip to Rome (in 95), and it is possible that he might have gone earlier (in 75). In the trip of 95 he travelled with Rabbis Gamaliel, Eliezer and Akiba. In Rome he probably debated with court philosophers.²⁶

The topics about which he and Hadrian debated were mainly theological in nature. Hadrian asked him about how God created the world.

He also wanted to see God. He wanted to put a meal before God. And he wanted to know the significance of Amos' statement (3:8) about God roaring like a lion.²⁷ The following has been written about those conversations:

The conversations between R. Joshua b. Hanania and Hadrian have a common characteristic, for R. Joshua always bases his answers on the trials, deeds, tricks and ~~his~~ observations to bring the matter to the attention of the emperor. In the presentation of the conversations, one must words on account of the exaggeration or alteration of the aggada. A few of the conversations must be considered absolutely untrue. But in the general view of the conversations, we can derive a picture from the give and take between the great tana and determined emperor who loves knowledge . . . as Tertulian gives testimony.²⁸

In connection with these conversations, there are some who believe that they did not take place in Rome, but rather in Alexandria. For example, we know of conversations R. Joshua had with citizens of Alexandria (who were probably Jews).²⁹ Those conversations were concerned with issues of halakah. In addition, it is known that Hadrian was in Alexandria, and it is possible that Joshua encountered him there.

In the context of this study, it is not R. Joshua's conversations with Hadrian with which we should be concerned, but rather with his encounter with a matrona. When or where this encounter might have happened we do not know. This is how it is recorded in the Talmud:

Our Rabbis taught: The students of the sages were once in need of something from a certain matronita around whom all of the prominent men of Rome could be found. They said, 'Who shall go?' R. Joshua said to them, 'I shall go.' R. Joshua and his students went. When he reached the door of her house, he removed his tefillin at a distance of four cubits, entered, and shut the door in front of them. After he came out he descended, took a ritual bath, and studied with his students. He said, 'When I removed my tefillin, of what did you suspect me?' 'We said, our Rabbi reasons, "Let sacred words not enter a place of uncleanness."'

'When I shut [the door], of what did you suspect me?'
'We said, "Perhaps he must discuss an affair of state with her."' 'When I descended and had a ritual bath, of what did you suspect me?' 'We said, "Perhaps she spit from her mouth onto our rabbi's clothes."' He said to them, 'By the service, thus it was, and just as you judged me favorably, so may the Omnipresent judge you favorably.'³⁰ (VI)

This is a fascinating story, for it tells us much about the times in which R. Joshua lived. We do not know what "the students of the sages" needed that they would have to delegate someone to visit a matrona. That it had something of importance to do with the government can be supposed first by what R. Joshua's students answered him, and also by the fact that this was a woman "around whom all of the prominent men of Rome could be found." It would thus seem that the matrona was a woman who held power, or else that she was very influential among those who did wield power for the Roman government. We do not know the outcome of R. Joshua's meeting with her, but it may be assumed that this was the only course open to the rabbis for getting what they needed.

Who might the matrona be, and where did this take place? The second part may be the easier of the two to answer. The likely location is Palestine. The reason for eliminating Rome or Alexandria is simply that we have no record that when R. Joshua travelled he was accompanied by his students. Another reason for eliminating Alexandria is that R. Joshua, in one of his conversations with Hadrian there, "described himself as old and weak."³¹ That being the case, we cannot suppose that his students would have harbored any fears about his conduct with the woman.

As for who the matrona (she is called a matronita in this text) might have been, or as for what she might have been, there is a possibility

that she might have been a member of the class of women known as hetairai. This is a Greek term that was applied both to the women of Greece and Rome. These women were courtesans. They are described by one of their number in these words: they were

usually women of the citizen class, who have fallen from respectability or fled from the seclusion required [of both Athenian and Roman wives]. They live independently, and entertain at their own homes the lovers whom they lure. . . .By occasional reading, or attending lectures, some of them acquire a modest education, and amuse their cultured patrons with learned conversation. . . .Many of them are renowned for their wit, and Athenian literature has an anthology of hetairai epigrams. Though all courtesans are denied civil rights [in Athens], and are forbidden to enter any temple but that of their own goddess, Aphrodite Pandemos, a select minority of the hetairai enjoy a high standing in male society . . .; no man is ashamed to be seen with these; philosophers contend for their favors; and an historian³² chronicles their history as piously as Plutarch.

These women, according to Durant, were the intimates of powerful men, and quite often they were bilingual or multilingual.

It is not so unusual that a Jew might be found visiting one of these courtesans. There is little reason to believe that the situation of the Jews of Palestine was much different from that of the Jews of Rome, about which we find this statement in Radin:

[I]t is especially necessary to note the invaluable records of actual life that appear in the papyri and inscriptions, especially where they show that the intercourse between Jews and pagans was far from being as precisely limited as the Mishna would compel us to suppose, and men who are at no pains to conceal their Jewish origin permitted themselves certain indulgences that would certainly not have met with the approval of the doctors of Jamnia and Tiberias.³³

Radin continues that according to the Epigrams of Martial regarding Jews who lived in Rome, they "did not live aloof from [their] fellow citizens, and wealthy Jews did not scruple to purchase in the market the

gratifications they were especially enjoined by their faith to forgo."³⁴ According to Radin, the Mishna might have been a reflection of the rabbinic view of the ideal life of the Jews, and not as a record of how they lived. In Menachot we find an aggada that bears out the fact that among the pagans with whom some Jews made contacts were women who might have been members of the hetairai class. That story concerns a student who went to visit an expensive courtesan, and was prevented from sleeping with her by his zizit. He explained the meaning of the zizit to her, and on the strength of his explanation she abandoned her sinful ways and became a convert.³⁵

For R. Joshua to be closeted with a woman who was known to entertain the "prominent men of Rome" would most certainly be a subject of concern for his disciples. And it is not at all surprising that the Rabbis would recognize their concern. Therefore, when he tests his students, he attempts to vindicate himself in their eyes, and to preserve his own reputation.

So here we have another, very enlightening description of a matrona. Again there are unanswered questions, but this much seems certain. The matrona of this piece is a powerful woman, probably Roman, with close ties to the government. She is someone who can intercede with the government, and has a reputation which is so well known that the rabbis would have been aware of her. She would also seem to be a potential threat to Rabbi Joshua, much like the matronot we encountered in connection with R. Zadok. Her morals were not above question by R. Joshua's students, and her sexual attraction to men was seemingly well known to them. The possibility of their Rabbi falling prey to her seems to have occurred both to the students and R. Joshua. And this

element would make his visit to her a very dangerous affair. As with R. Zadok, the matrona whom the rabbis encountered was seemingly not just like all other women, for the overt sexuality expressed in these aggadot seems an almost omnipresent subject of rabbinic concern. As we shall see in other examples, there was an exchange of roles in many of these encounters: the matrona was pictured taking the aggressive role, while the rabbi remains passive, almost to the extent of preserving his virtue. This lent another dimension to the encounter, and heightened the tension of the meeting. These meetings were very threatening to the Rabbis, and thus the need of this aggada to clear R. Joshua's reputation, and remove the questions which arose out of the meeting with the matrona.

We now come to R. Akiba. He too had dealings with a matrona, yet in the case of this aggada the sexual element is missing. The aggada is alluded to in Nedarim 50a, but the details are to be found in Rashi's commentary. This is what we find in the Talmud text:

From six incidents did R. Akiba become rich: from Kalba Shebu'a; from a ship's ram. For every ship is provided with the figurehead of an animal. Once this was forgotten on a seashore, and R. Akiba found it. From a hollow trunk. Once he gave four zuz to sailors, and he told them to bring something. But they found only a hollow log on the shore, which they brought to him, saying 'Do tarry (?) on it, our master.' It was found to be full of denarii, for a ship sank and all of its treasures were placed in the very same log, and it was found in that time. From serokita and from a matrona.³⁶ (VII)

It was left to Rashi to explain the meaning of the expression, ". . . and from a matrona." This is what Rashi wrote:

And from a matrona. For once the Sages were in need of a large sum of money for a school. They delegated R. Akiba to go to a certain matronita and borrow a great sum from her. And she she gave [it] to him, she said to him, 'Who will be a surety for me that you will repay me at a fixed time?' He said to her, 'Whomever

you wish.' She said to him, 'The Holy One and the sea, for your school will be on the seashore.' R. Akiba said to her, 'I agree.' When the time arrived R. Akiba fell ill, and was not able to bring the money. The same matronita went to the seashore, and she said, 'Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known to You that I entrusted my fortune to You and this sea.' The Holy One caused a mad fit in the heart of the Emperor and he entered the treasure house and took a chest full of treasures and threw it into the sea. And the sea conveyed it to the doorstep of the matronita, and she took it. After a time R. Akiba brought her the money and said to her, 'Don't be angry because I brought you the money after the time we had fixed, for I was ill.' She said to him, 'You may keep it all because my money came to me at the proper time,' and she told him what happened, and gave him large presents and sent him away in peace.³⁷ (VIII)

As we will see, the role of the miraculous plays a large part in the aggadot of the Rabbis and the matronot. The idea of the elements being brought into force by God in order to redeem a rabbi's pledge is not uncommon in rabbinic literature in general.³⁸ In some of those cases, though, the Rabbis had to pray for God's help in rescuing them from difficult situations. For example, the aggada concerning R. Nakdimon b. Goria takes this form: R. Nakdimon was obligated to borrow water from a Roman officer and to repay him in a period of time. At the last moment, when he found he did not have the required amount, R. Nakdimon had to go to the Temple to seek God's intercession. And, in that situation his prayers were answered.³⁹

In this aggada R. Akiba is passive. It is the matrona who seeks God's intervention on R. Akiba's behalf. The fact that her request is answered would indicate that according to the Rabbis, God found that R. Akiba's merit was so great that something must be done to protect his reputation. The money was acquired for a good cause, so there must be no reason for not seeing that the money was returned.

We learn some things about the matrona in this midrash. For example, she is pictured as being quite wealthy, and willing to lend from her wealth to a rabbi so that he can open a school. Not only will she lend to him, but she also requires no collateral. In effect, she only requires the rabbi's word. It would seem also that she is no stranger to Judaism. She is quoted as addressing God as "Master of the Universe," reminding Him of His omnipotence.⁴⁰ This address could be a prayer; it could also be a challenge to God to fulfill R. Akiba's promise. Yet, unlike the Roman officer in the story of R. Nakdimon, the matrona does not come after R. Akiba for repayment. This would indicate a large degree of genteelness on her part, indicating that she was, in fact, a woman of high rank and stature.⁴¹

We find in this aggada many unknowns. For example, we do not know if the matrona pictured in this story is necessarily a non-Jew. The one indication that she might be is the fact that R. Akiba, one of the most respected rabbis of his generation, is singled out to make the overtures to her. This might indicate that the Rabbis thought there would be some difficulty in obtaining the money from her. Yet, the fact that she lends the money for the unprofitable venture of building a school would indicate her confidence in the rabbis to fulfill their words. The point of the midrash, according to Rashi, is that in the end the money was repayed out of God's respect for R. Akiba, and for his promise that God would assure repayment. Thus the aggada serves as a subtle praise of the good rabbi.

The next rabbi we encounter who had dealings with a matrona is R. Judah b. Ilai. He was mentioned with R. Jose b. Halaftha, his fellow scholar. R. Judah b. Ilai is regarded as one of the great auth-

orities of his time, which makes the aggada concerning his discussion with R. Jose and R. Simeon and what came out of that discussion very illuminating. While discussing the Roman occupation the three rabbis were divided in their opinions, the aggada relates. R. Judah is reported as praising the works and projects of the Romans, for which he was honored by the Romans; R. Simeon disagreed and earned the death sentence, and R. Jose, for remaining silent, was banished by the authorities.⁴²

R. Judah b. Ilai was a student both of R. Tarphon and R. Akiba, and he was "one of the five students who received ordination from Judah ben Baba during the Hadrianic persecutions."⁴³ Later we find him at Usha, where he played a strong part in the rabbinic discussions which served as the basis of the Mishna. He meanwhile had no trade, and had to find work wherever he could.⁴⁴ His statements demonstrate that he had some ambivalent feelings about Rome. On one hand, he could praise their works, yet on the other, he is quoted as saying, ". . .the destroyers [Rome] are going to fall into the hands of Persia."⁴⁵

R. Judah is mentioned in conjunction with a matrona one time in rabbinic literature, and the aggada is to be found in three different versions appearing in four different sources.

Two of the sources are to be found in the Babylonian Talmud in Berakot and Nedarim. This is how it appears in the former:

R. Judah said further, 'There are three things the drawing out of which prolongs a man's days and years: the drawing out of prayer, the drawing out of a meal, and drawing out in the privy.

. . .A certain matronita said to R. Judah b. R. Ilai, 'Your face is like that of pig-breeders and usurers.' He said to her, 'By the faith, both are forbidden me.' Rather, there are twenty-four privies between my lodging and the school, and whenever I go there I test myself in all of them.'⁴⁶ (IX)

This is how we find the aggada related in Nedarim:

A certain matronita said to R. Judah, 'A teacher and a drunkard!' He said to her, 'My word on this woman's head [I swear to you] that I taste [no wine] but that of the kiddush, havdalah and the four cups of Passover, on account of which I have to bind my temples from Passover to Shavout. Rather, "a man's wisdom makes his face to shine." (Ecclesiastes 8:1)!

A certain Sadducee said to R. Judah, 'Your face is like that of a money lender or pig breeder.' He answered, 'Among the Jews both of them are forbidden. Rather, I have twenty-four privies between the house and school, and every hour I enter one of them.'⁴⁷ (X)

Here we have two traditions for the same story. It would seem that either the Nedarim text was compacted in Berakot, or that the Berakot text was expanded. In both instances R. Judah encounters a matrona who, seeing his face red and shining, deduces that he is a drunkard. She condemns him by comparing him to a pig-breeder (a lowly occupation) and a usurer (another occupation not held in high favor). In the Nedarim text we also find a Sadducee, an interesting designation seeing that the Sadducee party came to an end with the destruction of the Temple. This title is probably a circumlocution, seeing that R. Judah is quoted as saying, "Among the Jews" It is highly probable that the "Sadducee" is really a non-Jew, and possibly a Christian, for we find that the Rabbis often used such circumlocution to attack their enemies, primarily the Romans and Christians, for to use direct attack would leave the rabbi open to reprisals from those in power.

These two accounts appear in different contexts, and therefore their significance is different in both cases. The Berakot text is specifically referring to the last part of R. Judah's introductory statement that spending time in the privy will lengthen one's days. An argument is presented. Another rabbi suggests that one can shorten his days by straining himself there. The story of R. Judah b. Ilai is brought in

to demonstrate the case of one who did strain himself by "testing himself" in all of the privies between home and school. In the Nedarim text, this is the answer R. Judah gives to the "Sadducee," but not to the matrona. His answer to her is that he is not able to handle large quantities of wine. The reason for his shining face is to be found in Ecclesiastes 8:1: "A man's wisdom makes his face shine." He is a learned man, and that is the reason for his shining face.

This last answer, quoting Ecclesiastes, is also found in Ecclesiastes Rabbati:

A certain gentile saw R. Judah b. Ilai that his face shone brightly, and he said, 'This man is one of three things---he is drunk with wine, or is a usurer, or a pig breeder.' R. Judah heard him and said to him, 'I am not a usurer, for it is written, "Thou shalt not lend for interest." (Deuteronomy 23:20) I am not a pig breeder, for this is forbidden a son of Israel to breed pigs, for we have learned⁴⁸ "In no case shall a man raise pigs." And I am not drunk with wine, for even the four cups that I drink on the night of Passover hurt my head from Passover to Shavout.' He said to him, 'Then why is your face shining?' He answered, 'It is Torah which brightens my face, for it is written, "A man's wisdom causes his face to shine."⁴⁹ (XI)

What should be noted here is that so far the matrona has been linked to a Sadducee and a gentile, both of whom are stereotyped opponents of the Rabbis in rabbinic literature. This is heightened when R. Judah answers the "Sadducee" as if he were a foreigner, which, in all probability he was meant to be regarded.

R. Judah's meaning in the Nedarim text about pig-breeding is cleared up in Ecclesiastes Rabbati where he quotes a mishna in his defense. His argument against the "Sadducee" is the most personal, as the "Sadducee's" original question seems to be an attack on the rabbi and his sobriety.

We have one more source of this aggada; this variation would lend support to those who might claim that R. Judah's answer to the matrona based on Ecclesiastes 8 is the one around which the original text was built. It comes in the Jerusalem Talmud:

R. Jonah drank the four cups of wine of Pesach and bound his head until Shavout, and R. Judah b. R. Ilai drank four cups of wine on Pesach and bound his head until Sukkot.

A certain matrona was angry at him [because of] his shining face. She said to him, 'Old man, old man, you are one of three things. You are a drinker of wine, or a money lender, or a pig breeder.' He said to her, 'May her breath be stopped! I have done none of these things, rathy my study is found with me, for it is written, "A man's wisdom makes his face to shine."⁵⁰ (XII)

This is the only source which quotes R. Judah cursing the matrona, perhaps coming in response to her denegrating address to him. It is very uncharacteristic of the rabbis to openly disparage female questioners; thus it would seem that we find in the case of this midrash the comment of the traditionary, and not the words of R. Judah. R. Judah's hostile response to the woman is not difficult to understand in the light of her addressing him as "old man." Yet the question of these being the words of the original tradition, or later embellishment, cannot be solved in any way other than to look at how the tradition has come down in its different forms. This text is close to Ecclesiastes Rabbati. We have no mention in J. Shabbat, for example, of R. Judah's using the privies between his home and the school, as we find in Berakot and Nedarim. In the end it would seem that we have in these four variant texts two traditions, and in only one place (Nedarim) are they to be found together. The common elements are the appearance of the matrona; her accusation; and the rabbi's self-defense. Each version has its own embellishments which were brought in by the transmitters of the aggada. Therefore,

it is difficult to decide which of these texts might have been the oldest, for just as a text could be embellished, it could have been given in shorthand. It remains interesting, though, to see how many themes, and how many ways of being told a basically simple aggada could have.

The next rabbi we encounter whose dealings with a matrona received mention in rabbinic literature is R. Judah b. Shammua. This is one of the tannaim who received very little mention in the sources, consequently very little is known about him. It would seem that the only information we have about him is to be found in this particular midrash which deals with his meeting the matrona, and some brief halakic statements ascribed to him in the Talmud.

The aggada is introduced by a discussion of fast days, which days may be set aside for fasts, and on which days fasts are forbidden. The particular day under discussion is the twenty-eighth of Adar:

R. Tobi b. Mattenah raised an objection: 'On the twenty-eighth came the good news to the Jews that they should not turn from [the study] of Torah. For the government issued a decree which forbade them from studying Torah, and from circumcision of their young, and [it commanded them] to profane the Sabbath. What did Judah b. Shammua and his colleagues do? They went and took counsel with a certain matronita around whom all of the prominent men of Rome could be found. She told them, 'Go and cry for help in the nighttime.'⁵¹ They went and made entreaty at night, saying, 'Woe O heavens, are we not your brothers, are we not all children of the same father, and are we not all children of the same mother? Why are we different from every nation and tongue, that you issue such harsh decrees upon us?' And they [the government] canceled them. And on that day [the Rabbis] proclaimed a holiday. Now, if you maintain that Megillat Ta'anit was annulled, if the established [days for fasting] are annulled other ones should be added? If you should say that this was in the period when the Temple was still standing, this Judah b. Shammua was the student of R. Meir, and R. Meir was after the destruction of the Temple.⁵² (XIII)

What the decrees mentioned in this aggada might have been cannot

be positively known because of our ignorance about R. Judah b. Shammua's dates. Most likely, the Rabbis were referring to Hadrian's decrees, issued before and after the Bar Cochba revolt. The earliest of those decrees, unmentioned in the aggada, was for the erection of a temple to Capitoline Jupiter over the site of the Temple. The edict proclaimed against the Jews by Hadrian after the revolt is similar to the edict which appears in the midrash. It may, as Baron suggests, have been proclaimed to bring the Jews into the empire by denying them those things by which they were able to keep their identity, in order to make the empire more homogeneous.⁵³ It is possible that Hadrian wished to destroy Judaism in Palestine in the process. This edict contained a ban on all circumcisions, which were put into the same legal class as castration. Hadrian also, according to rabbinic sources,

prohibited public gatherings for instruction in Jewish law, forbade the proper observance of the Sabbath and holidays, and outlawed many important rituals.⁵⁴
holy

The edict contained in the aggada is identical. The source of Baron's information might be this aggada and its parallels in the rabbinic sources. In any case, the edicts remained in force until Antoninus Pius became emperor in 138 C.E., and it is possible that R. Judah b. Shammua may have had a hand in getting the edict revoked.

There are many theories about the reasons for Antoninus removing the decrees. At least one Jewish historian, Graetz, suggests that there might be some historical validity to the story of R. Judah; he even goes so far as to say that the matrona may have been none other than the wife of Tinnius Rufus, the governor of Judea.⁵⁵ All of the information Graetz had, though, came from the Talmud, so the authority of his sources can be questioned. Yet, it is possible that the Jews of

Judea, who were probably the only Jews in the Roman Empire affected by Hadrian's edict,⁵⁶ did make petition to Antoninus. If so, Judah may have been among the petitioners. In any case, the emperor did relax the restrictions, and Jews were permitted to reestablish their schools and circumcise their sons. They were also permitted to observe the Sabbath.⁵⁷ The date tradition fixed for the revocation of the edict is the twenty-eighth of Adar, either in 139 or 140 C.E. Thus the point R. Tobi b. Mattenah made would have support: for Jews should not fast on a day in which such a great event happened for them.

This midrash would place R. Judah b. Shammua around the time of the Bar Cochba revolt. If we were to assume that the events as they were described in the Talmud were factual, there is a possibility that we could ask a question about the matrona. Namely, was the matrona who helped R. Judah b. Shammua the same woman who R. Joshua encountered? There are many similarities between these two aggadot. Both rabbis come to the matrona with a piece of urgent business which pertains to relations between the Jews and the Roman government (this is implied in R. Joshua's encounter with the matrona). In both cases, the matrona is a lady "around whom all of the prominent men of Rome can be found."⁵⁸ Thus it would seem that this woman, or women, was very close to the most powerful men in the government.

But was this the same woman? R. Joshua was closely connected with the destruction of the Temple, yet he was quite young at that time, probably in his teens. Later in life he was close to Hadrian, having many conversations with him, and possibly attempted to stop him from rebuilding Jerusalem as another Roman city.⁵⁹ The probable date of R. Joshua's death was around the year 130. R. Judah b. Shammua's protest

would have been about 139 C.E. If R. Joshua went to see the matrona late in his life, it is possible the same woman could have been alive in 139. The fact remains that in both aggadot the matrona is pictured as powerful, and these are the only instances of rabbis going to a matrona for advice or intercession in regard to the government. Thus, there is a possibility, although it is remote and relies on many suppositions, that the two matronot were the same lady. But to say she might have been the wife of Rufus, or any other woman specifically for that matter, would be to ask too much from our sources. If she existed, she might have been anyone from the wife of a leading official to a successful courtesan. In at least R. Joshua's case there was some concern with her sexual appeal to the rabbi, but that really gives us little additional information about her. All we know from our sources is that she was a "matrona." All else must remain conjecture.

At this point we can derive some picture of what the Rabbis meant when they called a woman a "matrona." For the Rabbis, she was a woman of wealth, a woman of some wisdom, a woman who either possessed or was close to power, a woman who could be alluring to the Rabbis. She was also seen as a woman who could be hostile to a particular rabbi, or to Jews in general, and whose purpose might have been to destroy a rabbi--such as R. Zadok. From this brief analysis, it would seem that the matrona was a unique kind of woman as far as the Rabbis were concerned.

In one aggada we found the matrona involved had some knowledge both of the written Torah and rabbinic interpretation of the Torah. There is an aggada which describes a matrona who was skilled in a different area entirely. We find her providing medications to R. Johanan

b. Nappaha.

R. Johanan lived in Palestine between 200 and either 279 or 289. Like R. Jose b. Halafta, R. Johanan lived in Sepphoris, and later moved to Tiberias. He was a student of R. Judah ha-Nasi there. His most important work was carried out in Sepphoris, where he established an academy of his own. Later he moved it to Tiberias, which would become one of the major centers of rabbinic learning in the Amoraic period. In his career he taught such important rabbis as Abbahu, Ammi, Assi, Eleazar ben Pedath and Hiyya b. Abba. Some of these men would carry his teachings to the great talmudic academies of Babylon. Among R. Johanan's closest associates was R. Simeon b. Lakish. As a teacher, R. Johanan b. Nappaha's greatest work was involved with the finished Mishna, which he interpreted and explained. He became one of the key rabbis in the formation of the Jerusalem Talmud.⁶⁰

R. Johanan's meeting with a matrona appears in connection with a mishna attributed to R. Matthia b. Heresh, who is quoted as saying,

If a man has a pain in his throat they may drop medicine into his mouth on the Sabbath, since there is doubt whether [his] life is in danger, and whenever there is a doubt whether life is in danger this overrides the Sabbath.⁶¹

The incident involving the matrona appears in this form:

R. Matthia further said: R. Johanan suffered from scurvy. He went to a matrona. She prepared something for him on Thursday, and on the eve of the Sabbath. He said to her, 'What shall I do on the Sabbath?' She said to him, 'You won't need it.' He said to her, 'If I need it, what will be?' She said, 'Be sworn to me that you will not reveal [that you use it].' He swore, 'To the God of Israel I shall not reveal it.' He left her and expounded on it in his lecture. But had he not sworn to her, 'To the God of Israel I shall not reveal it?' [Does this mean?] 'To the people of Israel I shall reveal it?' Is this not a profanation of God's name? He revealed this to her from the beginning.⁶² (XIV)

Rashi claims that R. Johanan somehow conveyed from the outset to the matrona that when he made his oath he took it literally, meaning he would not reveal his taking medicine on the Sabbath to God. In addition, he made no reference in the oath to the people. So he felt under no constraint to hide the fact of his taking medicine on the Sabbath from the people.⁶³ This is a very strange aggada, for on the face of it, it would seem that R. Johanan did deceive the lady, who presumed when he made his oath that the oath was binding in all respects, and that her secret was safe.

If we look at this aggada in context, though, the oath seems to take on secondary importance. As noted above, R. Matthia permitted medicine to be taken on the Sabbath, even if there was only a slight possibility of life being in danger. And it is R. Matthia who quoted the story of R. Johanan, with the clear intention that the aggada serve as proof for his halakah. If R. Johanan, who merely suffered from scurvy, was willing to take medicine on the Sabbath, then, according to R. Matthia, there should be no further debate on the subject.

As mentioned previously, this aggada points to the fact that matronot may have been knowledgeable about cures for certain ailments, including the very common disease suffered by R. Johanan. The Rabbis were very curious about the ingredients she used. One rabbi suggested that she used leaven, olive oil, and salt; R. Ashi was sure that she used the fat of a goose wing; R. Abaye offered his own cure.⁶⁴ From what the midrash suggests, matronot who dabbled in cures relied on a type of folk medicine which was probably widespread. It is possible the matrona here may have been familiar with cures used by Greek physicians; the probability is that she knew nothing of Greek medicine, and that her cure

was the equal of that of any Greek physician. It should be noted here that in the age of Rome, women had a long history as healers, and in Rome itself there was a firm tradition of women serving as physicians.⁶⁵

There is one major question which could be asked about this aggada. Why would the matrona demand that R. Johanan keep the fact that he took her medicine on the Sabbath a secret, both from God and the people? A possible answer can be offered. Possibly there was some danger for her to be known to prescribe medicines to be taken on the Sabbath. This may be because the general population did not accept R. Matthia's dictum. Therefore, we would have a reason for R. Johana's going ahead and revealing the matter to his students, in order that he could justify his taking the medicine.

To this point, the matrona has only been mentioned in connection with Palestinian rabbis. But this does not mean that they alone had dealings with those women whom the rabbis called "matronot." In the Talmud we find Babylonian amoraim who had dealings with matronot. Yet the interesting detail about the talmudic citations is that those meetings probably took place outside of Babylon. One of the few cases where the location of the event is in doubt is found in the case of R. Kahana, a contemporary of R. Johanan b. Nappaha. Although he originally came from Babylon, R. Kahana spent much of his rabbinic career in Palestine. He studied with R. Johanan.⁶⁶ Therefore he was in either or both Sepphoris and Tiberias. In this area, as we have already seen, meetings between a rabbi and a matrona were not infrequent.

As we shall see, the temptation of R. Zadok by a matrona was not an isolated incident in the rabbinic sources. Closely associated with that story, we find two others, one of them referring to the temptation

of R. Kahana, the other referring to R. Hanina b. Pappi, R. Kahana's contemporary. In reference to Rab Kahana, the aggada gives us some biographical information as it relates the incident of his meeting the matrona:

R. Kahana was selling reed baskets. A certain matrona urged him [for sexual immorality]. He said to her, 'I shall go and make myself ready.' He went up and threw himself from the roof to the ground. Elijah came [and] caught him. He said to [R. Kahana], 'You troubled me [to come] four hundred parasangs.' ⁶⁷ [R. Kahana] said to him, 'What caused me [to do this]? Was it not poverty?' ⁶⁸ [Elijah] gave him a shifa of denarii. ⁶⁹ (XV)

The matrona, attempting to entice R. Kahana to have intercourse with her, forced him to make a difficult decision. She seems to have been a powerful woman. Rashi comments that she was "a great lady, and he could not escape from her."⁷⁰ Whether or not that was true, R. Kahana reacted to her overtures in the most extreme manner possible. He was willing to take his own life. It is possible that those trained in Freudian psychology might be able to find a great deal of information about the rabbis who transmitted this aggada from this passage in Kiddushin. The theme of the sexually aggressive woman and the rabbi trying to protect his virtue (intercourse for R. Kahana here most certainly was a "fate worse than death") appears several times in the context of these aggadot. It can be conjectured that there may have been some projection by the Rabbis of their own feelings towards non-Jewish women to be found in these aggadot. For example, the Rabbis' attraction towards non-Jewish women and the concomitant need to repress that feeling may have been translated into stories of women who wanted to seduce the Rabbis. For justification for the extreme measure R. Kahana took, for example, to protect his "virtue," the rabbis of later generations need only have

looked at the conclusion of the midrash with Elijah racing from the other end of the world just to save R. Kahana's life. In including this miracle, the author made the point that R. Kahana had done the right thing in attempting to take his life; if he had not been right, what reason would Elijah have had to exert himself in R. Kahana's behalf, and then by giving R. Kahana a large sum of money, to remove the rabbi physically from the market place where future problems with such women might arise? R. Kahana found himself in a threatening situation. But where was the real threat? Did it come from the woman's sexual aggression, or did the threat arise from the rabbi's desire to do just what the matrona in the aggada wanted him to do? By acceding to her invitation, R. Kahana may well have committed the sin of giving in to his "evil inclination." The moral of the story, then, would be better possible death than to give in to one's inclination, especially if that inclination was to have intercourse with the kind of woman the rabbis called matrona."

Sex was not the only element to be found in these aggadot. As we saw, the miraculous had a part to play when the Rabbis attempted to save themselves from following after their "yetzer hara," their evil inclinations. The miraculous will again appear. Also, there is a theme of magic which the Rabbis included in their tales of the battle of wits between matrona and the rabbi. These elements all appear in our next aggada.

R. Hanina, as already mentioned, was a contemporary of R. Kahana. He was an amora, a close associate of R. Simon b. Pazzi, R. Abbahu, and R. Isaac Nappaha. A student of R. Samuel b. Nahman, he studied in Tiberias, and later he moved to Caesaria where he worked with R. Abbahu.⁷¹ Of all the rabbis, it would seem that R. Hania b. Pappi was one of the

most interested in the subjects of magic and superstition. It is reported that he would study the "Book of Creation"⁷² every Friday, and, with R. Oshaiah's aid, would form a calf for the Sabbath meal out of nothing.⁷³ Many other of his appearances in the Talmud are also connected with magic, as the following will demonstrate.

This aggada, like those concerning R. Zadok and R. Kahana, appears in Kiddushin. All support a contention that one who is tempted to commit a transgression and who resists should receive the same reward as one who had performed a mitzvah.⁷⁴ What was the temptation R. Hanina b. Pappi had to resist? This is what the aggada says:

. . . [A]s in the case of R. Hanina b. Pappi, whom a certain matronita urged [for sexual immorality]. He said something and [covered] himself with boils and scabs. She did something, and he was healed. He fled and hid himself in a certain bathhouse where [people] would go in pairs; even in daytime they would suffer harm [there]. The next morning the Rabbis said to him, 'Who guarded you?' He said to them, 'Two armor-bearers of the emperor guarded me all night.' They said to him, 'Perhaps you were tempted and overcame the temptation, as it has been taught, "You mighty in strength, who fulfill His word, listening to the voice of His word." (Psalms 103:20)'⁷⁵ (XVI)

According to this aggada, R. Hanina, in protecting his "virtue," took two chances. First of all, he pitted his magical powers against those of the matrona. As the confrontation developed, it would seem that they were equally adept in this area. Strangely, the idea of a woman being adept at the "black arts" evoked little comment from the Rabbis, just as the idea of a woman preparing herbal medicines was accepted by R. Johanan as a matter of course. What is more interesting in this particular incident is that R. Hanina took an even greater chance than using magic against magic: he spent the night in a bathhouse where one was certain to be harmed by demons.⁷⁶ Yet R. Hanina took the

the chance and survived his ordeal. From this experience the Rabbis drew a reasonable conclusion: by resisting temptation R. Hanina merited a reward (in this case, being guarded by "two armor-bearers of the emperor" throughout the night).

Thus, if we analyze the three confrontations between a rabbi and a matrona in Kiddushin, a clear pattern emerges. To have succumbed to the woman's overtures would be a "fate worse than death," yet to have resisted could, according to Rashi, have meant death for the rabbi. All three were willing to die rather than to have illicit intercourse. Because of this willingness, in two cases, miracles intervened to save the rabbis from harm. In the story of R. Zadok, his attempt to take his own life taught the matrona a lesson, and she repented that she had ever forced him into such a situation.

In all three events, the matrona appears as a threatening, sexually motivated woman who has a special penchant for rabbis. She can manipulate nature to gain her ends. She is thus a consummate threat to the Rabbis, the provoker of their "evil inclinations." The only way the Rabbis thought they could resist her would be to take their own lives.

With these aggadot in mind, it would seem obvious that the Rabbis were very dubious about the morality of the matrona, even if she had not tempted one of them. This can be seen in the instance of R. Joshua, who visited a "popular" lady in order to discuss a matter of importance. It can also be seen to have played a part in the meeting between R. Judah b. Shammua and the matrona (where the description of the woman not only implied her political power, but also her loose morals). To add the dimension of magic to the description of this woman would also seem to indicate how much of a threat she could be to the Rabbis. This

can be seen in the next aggada to be discussed.

The Rabbis were travelers. But travelling from place to place during the rabbinic period was not absolutely safe. The proverb that was current at the time reflects this: "When you travel from one house to another, you lose a shirt; from one country to another, you lose a life."⁷⁷ Another parable went this way: "Travelling causes a person to become despised." (This parable comes regarding Sarah, who seemed surprisingly attractive to Abraham, even after their long trip into Egypt.)⁷⁸ At best, travelling was not good for one's appearance. At worst, travelling could mean the loss of one's life. Even in the Roman world, with improvements in transport and communication, there was danger in travelling long distances. Yet, as we shall see, sometimes the danger came from an unforeseen source.

Such was the case of R. Hisda and Rabba, two Babylonian amoraim. We have no idea where they were travelling; this detail was immaterial to R. Abaye, who transmitted their tradition. As in the cases of the other rabbis we have discussed, Hisda and Rabba came upon a matrona.

The aggada is brought in to support R. Abaye's statement that one should not eat vegetables which are tied up by the vegetable dealer or gardener, not because it might appear as an act of gluttony, but rather because to so do might lay one open to the dangers of magic. This is how the aggada appears in Hullin:

Rab Hisda and Rabba b. Rab Huna were leaving on a ship. A certain matronita said to them, 'Let me sit with you.' They did not let her sit with them. She said something and she stopped the ship. They said the same thing, and it was freed. She said to them, 'What can I do to you who do not cleanse yourselves with a potsherd⁷⁹ or crush a louse on your clothes, nor do you eat vegetables from a bunch tied up by a vegetable dealer [or gardener].'⁸⁰ (XVII)

Rashi suggests in this context that the two third century rabbis were experts in magical formulae, "and there are some who say they pronounced a name, but there is no evidence for what the words might be."⁸¹

Of interest in connection with the aggada is the reasoning of the matrona to explain her inability to have power over the rabbis. For some reason not mentioned in the aggada she "knew" that the rabbis were observant even of the most minor parts of the halakah. She was aware of R. Johanan's halakah concerning the use of a potsherd on the Sabbath. She also seemed to know that both rabbis were cautious in their observance of this rule. She must, therefore, have been an extraordinary woman, having this knowledge on top of her ability to use magic. Rashi suggests that she was a gentile.⁸² Yet she must have been a gentile who had an acute knowledge of rabbinic law, and of Jewish life, and she must have known with whom she was dealing. These things are in the realm of possibility, but only that. If the Rabbis granted that gentiles could use magic, it was not difficult for them to assume that earlier rabbis knew and were able to use magic if necessary. Yet if we are to grant credibility to any of the aggadot involving a matrona and a rabbi, this particular aggada must rank as one of the most incredible.

Rabba and R. Hisda's encounter with this woman while embarking for a long voyage has parallels with an aggada found in Genesis Rabbah. This concerns R. Joshua b. Tanhuma, a fourth generation Palestinian amora. He too planned to take a sea voyage, and he too ran into some trouble.

There are two variations of this particular story, one found in Genesis Rabbah and the other in the Jerusalem Talmud. From these two sources we learn that R. Joshua's home was either K'far Hanun or Agin

(possibly two names for the same place).⁸³ This is how the aggada appears in both sources. First, Genesis Rabbah:

R. Jonathan said, 'Three things were given as a gift to the world: the Torah, the luminaries, and the rain.' . . . R. Isaac b. Marion said, 'The crossing of the Great Sea also, as it is written, "Thus says the Lord, who gives a way in the sea." (Isaiah 43:16)' The Rabbis say, "' . . . who gives a way in the sea" -- this is from Shavuot to Sukkot; "And a path in mighty waters" -- from Sukkot to Chanukah.'

R. Nathan the Cohen, the brother of R. Hiyya bar Abba was going to sail the sea. [He said to his brother, 'Pray for me.' He said to him, 'Why should we pray for you? When you bind your lulav you should bind your foot [i.e. 'don't go any distance']. If you enter a synagogue and hear them praying for rain, do not rely on my prayers.']

R. Joshua b. R. Tanhuma b. R. Hiyya of K'far Hanun was in Asia.⁸⁴ He wanted to sail. A matrona said to him, 'You want to travel during these days? I'm surprised.' His father appeared to him in a dream [and] said to him, 'My son, without a grave [i.e. 'you will not be buried in a grave'], as it is written, "He also had no grave." (Ecclesiastes 6:3)' And he did not listen to the words of this one or the words of that one, and such happened to him.⁸⁵ (XVIII)

This is how the parallel texts appears in Shabbat in the Jerusalem Talmud:

R. Isaac b. Marion said, 'Even though it is written, "Thus says the Lord, who gives a way in the sea" When a man would enter it, he would die.' The Rabbis say, "'who gives a way . . ." means between Shavuot to Sukkot, "and a path in mighty waters" from Sukkot to Chanukah.' R. Joshua the son of R. Tanhum of K'far Agin happened to be in Asia.⁸⁴ He wanted to cross [the Great Sea] between Sukkot and Chanukah. A certain matrona said to him, 'At a time like this you are crossing?' His father appeared to him [saying, "'He also had no grave."'] And he did not listen to the words of this one or the words of that one, and he died in the sea.⁸⁶ (XIX)

These two texts are full of fascinating details. Not the least of them is the fact that the Rabbis were proven right in what they said about the dangers of sailing the "Great Sea" (the Mediterranean) during

the late fall and early winter (between Sukkot and Chanukah). Durant presents this following account of the dangers of sea travel in the days of the Roman Empire:

Ships were driven with sails, aided by one or more banks of oars. . . . Nevertheless, voyages except along the coasts were still dangerous, as Saint Paul found; between November and March only a few vessels ventured across the open Mediterranean, and in midsummer eastward voyages were made almost impossible by the etesian winds.⁸⁷

Evidently, this trip was the one taken unsuccessfully by R. Joshua. There is some doubt among the experts just what is meant in both texts by the word "Asia." Jastrow offers two definitions: "Asia Minor, or rather the Roman province embracing the Western part of the peninsula of Asia Minor" and "/it is the/ name of a town supposed to be Essa, east of the lake of Tiberias."⁸⁸ Yet it seems clear from the context in which the aggada appears, especially in Genesis Rabbah, that the place meant is Asia Minor, for travel from there to Palestine (the presumed destination) meant crossing the "Great Sea." What R. Joshua might have been doing there is not important for the purposes of the text. What is important is the fact that he disregarded two strong warnings that he delay the trip, and he paid for his mistake.

The two warnings warrant some study. On one hand, it seems to have been common knowledge that travelling after Sukkot on the Mediterranean was a dangerous proposition. It might for this reason alone that the matrona warned R. Joshua. But she might have had another reason. It is possible this woman could actually see into the future, according to the text. The rabbis who transmitted the aggada seem to have been sure that she knew he would not survive the trip. We have already discussed the fact that in some cases the matrona was regarded

as something of a witch. And it is known that by the Augustan age in Rome,

magic and sorcery, witchcraft and superstition, charms and incantations, 'portents' and the interpretation of dreams were deeply woven into the tissue of Roman life.⁸⁹

These were not unknown to women. In all probability, women were among the leading practitioners of the "black arts." In some aggadot the word "woman" is synonymous with "witch," so the problems of Rome were, to some degree, the problems of the Jewish world in regard to women. For example, in Leviticus Rabbah we find the story of the woman who disobeyed the king's order not to gather fruit during the sabbatical year. She was punished by being marched in public. Her response was this: she begged the king to hang the fruit around her neck so that the people would not suspect that she was being punished for either immorality or witchcraft.⁹⁰ The Rabbis, as we have already seen, were wary of women. As much as the Rabbis seemed to know about the opposite sex, and as much as they prescribed rules for them, they were very naive about women.⁹¹ It was not uncommon for the Rabbis to accept general feelings about women which were circulating in the gentile world. Thus it would seem significant here that, of all of the people who might have warned R. Joshua not to make the trip, it happens to have been a matrona, who knew in advance what his voyage would bring.

We do not know that the matrona actually "knew" in advance the outcome of the journey. But this is implied when joined to the warning in the dream. Like their Roman counterparts, the philosophers and the priests, the Rabbis were very interested in the study and interpretation of dreams. In tractate Berakot there appears an extended discussion of the subject of dreams and what they might mean. From this chapter we

learn that there were men who made their living from interpreting dreams, and that they would give a more favorable interpretation to those who paid them more.⁹² Also of interest was the discovery by the Rabbis of something Freud would rediscover hundreds of years later--that dreams contain puns, and that even the most innocuous subject matter might be full of meaning.⁹³

Warning which came in dreams were usually heeded. In Ta'anit the following midrash appears: Rabba put a man to death for having intercourse with a gentile woman. This action angered King Shapur, who sought to punish him. Ifra Hormuz (about whom more will be said later) tried to convince the king that Rabba had the power to influence God. The king devised a test: the rabbi would have to pray for rain during the dry time of year. He did, and the resulting rains produced a flood. Then, the story continues, Rabba's father appeared to him in a dream, asking, "Is there anyone who troubles Heaven so much?" This was a reproach. But he also warned his son to change his sleeping place, as doing that would change his luck. Rabba listened and complied. The next day he found his bed cut with knives.⁹⁴ Here we have a close parallel to R. Joshua. Even if the matrona could not foresee the future, the dream did accurately predict what would happen.

In the midrash on Psalms called Shoher Tov and in J. Baba Mesi'a we find similar aggadot, yet they must be put together for better understanding. Both concern a highly-placed woman, but in only one of the texts is she called a "matrona," and only in the other do we find out who the rabbi involved was. He was R. Samuel b. Susratai, a rather anonymous Palestinian amora who, these aggadot relate, truly was worthy of being called a "hasid."

The text in which we find the rabbi's identity is related in Baba Mesi'a. This is how it appears:

R. Samuel b. Susratai went to Rome. The queen lost her jewels and he found them. She made a decree throughout the land that whoever returned them within thirty days would receive a reward [literally, "would receive thus and thus"]. After thirty days, they would cut off his head. He did not return them during the thirty days. After thirty days he returned them. She said to him, 'Weren't you in the country?' He answered, 'Yes.' She said to him, 'Why didn't you return them during the thirty days?' He said to her, 'So that you would not say that it was because of fear for you that I did it, rather it was for the fear of heaven.' She said to him, 'Blessed is the God of the Jews.'⁹⁵ (XX)

In this aggada we find similarities to the conversations between the matrona and R. Jose b. Halafta. As with those conversations, the rabbi, having proven his case, gets a positive response from the lady, an expression of praise for God. Yet the difference is that this text claims she was the queen. In Shoher Tov there appears another explanation of whom she might have been:

'...[A]s David said, "Help Lord, for the righteous ceases." (Psalms 12:2)' It once happened concerning a certain righteous man [literally, "hasid"] that a matronita lost a box full of denarim,⁶⁹ and the righteous man found it and brought it to her. When he brought it, they said to her, 'He does not know what it is, therefore he brought it to you.' She said to them, 'The box is covered on the outside by gold, and you say he does not know what it is?' She said to him, 'May it be that your people are given over to you [i.e. "may there be no others like you"]'. She said to them [probably "they said to her"], 'He returns your lost box and you curse him?' She said to them, 'Were there another like him among his people, we could not survive in the world.'⁹⁶ (XXI)

The two aggadot are dissimilar enough that they might be supposed to come from two different traditions. In one the person who returned the lost box was named. In the other he is not named. In one, it is the queen who lost her jewels; in the other, it was a matrona who

lost a box full of money. In one, the rabbi returned the jewels out of fear of God, not of the queen: the hasid, on the other hand, had no decrees to fear, and his motivation was not explained. Yet, even as the details of the two aggadot are different, the essential elements are similar. In both there appear a pious Jew and a foreign woman of power and wealth. And in both cases the woman learned the essential lesson of the righteousness of God, and of God's people.

If the two aggadot are tied by the same tradition, then we might learn a bit more about who the matrona might have been. She is, for example, the equal of royalty, if not royalty itself. She possesses the power of life and death over others. This would make this particular aggada unique among those we have been discussing. In the other place where the woman had this power over a rabbi, in the case of R. Zadok, it was hers because the rabbi had granted it to her. He put her in a position which gave her the choice of letting him live or die. In the case of R. Samuel, the woman had the option because she held the power.

The point of the Baba Mesi'a text is the conflict between human and divine law. The rabbi must demonstrate that in the face of divine law, human law is of secondary importance to him. He has returned the lady's missing jewels because God commanded it. He waited until after the period she set to demonstrate that her threatened punishment could not compare to God's punishment. We thus find a measured contempt for this queen and her power (which is seemingly the power of Rome) voiced through this aggada. That would put it in the class of anti-Roman statements by the rabbis (such as those which label the Romans "the wicked government" and "Edom," Israel's traditional enemy).⁹⁷ As for human government in general, the same sentiments would apply.

Such political considerations may not have been as important in the aggada of the pious man who returns the matronita's box of denarim. The man's act seems to have been a simple act of righteousness. There is a political element here, though. We do not know in what spirit the lady cursed the rabbi, but an element of anti-Jewishness on her part can be detected in her statement, here translated, "'May it be that your people are given over to you'" meaning, "' . . . may there be no other like you among your people.'"98 The unusual element is that she gives the hasid permission "to enter and leave without needing permission."99

By combining these two meetings between a rabbi (or "hasid") and matrona we see that very strained relationships between Jew and gentile are to be found in some aggadot. This would reflect the general situation of the Jewish people who found themselves in a gentile world. Relations were almost of necessity strained. There were many instances, such as that between R. Akiba and the matrona who lent him money to build his school, when we find good relations between the two sides reflected in the Midrash and Talmud. We know from the conversations between Hadrian and R. Joshua that between Jews and gentiles there were civil relations. But the world of the Rabbis was in many ways incompatible with that of Rome, and in general it would seem relations between the two were very strained.

In mentioning R. Joshua b. Hanania, we should also mention the fourth century Palestinian amora, R. Abbahu. He was a student of R. Johanan b. Nappaha and a disciple of R. Joshua b. Hanina.¹⁰⁰ According to Rosh Hashona 34a, he was active in Caesaria, and was probably head of a school there. Another source states, "He was a student of the Greek language and culture."¹⁰¹ This knowledge he brought to good use to argue

with the minim (either early Christians or Gnostics).¹⁰² In fact, R. Abbahu probably adopted much of Hellenistic culture for his own personal enjoyment; as Graetz reports,

He was wealthy, kept Gothic slaves, and had ivory seats in his house; his trade was the manufacture of women's veils. He understood Greek perfectly, which was the case with but few of his contemporaries; he frequented the society of educated heathens, and had his daughter taught Greek. . . . By reason of his familiarity with contemporary civilization, which many people regarded as sinful, a verse in Ecclesiastes was applied to him: 'It is good that thou takest up this (the study of Halakah) and neglectest not that (the learning of the Greeks), for the pious are able to fulfill all duties.'¹⁰³

What is of special interest here is what Graetz added in his description of R. Abbahu, for it has direct bearing on the rabbi's encounter with the matronot:

Abbahu was held in great esteem by the Roman Proconsul, and probably also by the Emperor Diocletian, on account of his profound learning, which was heightened by the charm of a dignified figure and a generous character. By means of this influence with the authorities he was enabled to avert many severe measures.¹⁰⁴

This is the aggada which relates how R. Abbahu was received at the Emperor's palace:

When R. Abbahu came from the yeshiva to the Emperor's residence, the matronot of the Emperor's residence came out and ~~[were]~~ singing to him, 'Great one of his people, leader of his nation, a lantern which gives light, may you coming be blessed with peace.'¹⁰⁵ (XXII)

It is followed by a Rashi comment which tells that R. Abbahu was worthy of this designation of "leader" because he was the parnas ['chief'] of the Jewish community, and was close to the Roman government. Rashi also suggests that when the women called R. Abbahu a "lantern" it was because of his physical attractiveness.¹⁰⁶

It is difficult to know if the aggada was intended to report

historical truth. We know a good deal about the court life of Diocletian, with whom R. Abbahu was linked, and this could cast some light on the authenticity of the Sanhedrin report. Thus we find in Durant:

. . . Diocletian developed the cult of the Emperor's genius into a personal worship of himself as the earthly embodiment of Jupiter, while Maximian modestly consented to be Hercules; wisdom and force had come down from heaven to restore order and peace on earth. Diocletian assumed a diadem--a broad white fillet set with pearls--and robes of silk and gold; his shoes were studded with precious gems; he kept himself aloof in his palace, and required visitors to pass the gantlet of ceremonious eunuchs and titled chamberlains, and to kneel and kiss the hem of his robe.¹⁰⁷

It is possible to assume, then, that the Emperor's retinue did contain a chorus of noblewomen, whose function it was to sing the praises of visitors to the palace. This abundance of ceremony was probably copied in local Roman capitals throughout the empire. Thus the welcome reported in the Talmud might have been pro-forma and nothing more, the kind of welcome given to any visiting official. Of course, it is impossible to know what the text meant when it spoke of "matronot." Were they noblewomen or slaves? Most probably they were the former, for Durant speaks of the "gantlet of ceremonious eunuchs and titled chamberlains," and to this point we have found no indications that the Rabbis meant anything but a freewoman when using the designation of "matrona." Therefore, it would seem that we can learn more about R. Abbahu than about the identities of the matronot from this aggada.

With R. Abbahu we come to the end of our survey of the meetings between individual rabbis and a matrona. We have begun with the strange tales surrounding R. Zadok, the survivor of the fall of Jerusalem, and ended with an equally unusual report of how R. Abbahu was received when he came to court in Caesaria. At this point we should go back in time

and introduce yet another unusual meeting between rabbis and matrona. We must, therefore, go back to the year 95, when Rabbis Eliezer, Joshua and Gamaliel travelled to Rome. The purpose of that trip is still as yet unclear to the historians. It was possibly made in reaction to some threat made against the Jews by the emperor. The matter must have been of significant urgency for these three rabbis, who at times had been rivals, to join together in order to make the long journey.¹⁰⁸

The journey is described by Graetz in the following manner. Flavius Clemens, a cousin of Domitian, and his wife, Flavia Domitilla, converted in secret to Judaism. The news of their conversion was kept secret from all but the "Jews of Rome" and "leaders in Palestine."¹⁰⁹ Upon hearing this news,

. . . together with the information that a decree of extermination had been passed against the Jews residing in the provinces of the Roman Empire, the four chiefs, the Patriarch Gamaliel and his coadjutor Eliezer, the son of Azariah, Joshua and Akiba¹¹⁰, set out on the journey to Rome.¹¹¹

Domitian, according to Graetz, was at that time "at the height of his bloodthirsty tyranny,"¹¹² and among his measures against the Jews there was one preventing Jewish proselytizing. When Domitian heard of Flavius leaning towards Judaism, the emperor condemned his cousin to death.

Not only that, but Graetz continues,

The four teachers of the Law from Palestine, who had come to Rome on his [Flavius'] account¹¹³, and who expected a brighter future from him were witnesses of his death. His wife . . . , who was exiled to the island of Pandataria, is said to have declared to the teachers of the Law that Clemens had been circumcised before his death.¹¹⁴

A slightly different view of these happenings is offered by Bernard Banberger. This is how he relates the story:

It is a matter of historic record that Flavius Clemens and his wife Flavia Domitilla, who were closely related to Domitian and whose sons were intended for the imperial succession, were denounced and punished for impiety, because they leaned to 'Oriental superstition.' Flavius Clemens was executed, his wife banished. There is some doubt as to whether they were converted to Judaism or to Christianity. At any rate, Flavius Clemens has been plausibly identified with the pious Senator of the Midrash and with Ketiah b. Shalom.¹¹⁵ We need not follow Graetz in his elaborate theory that the journey of the four Rabbis to Rome was expressly to be present at the conversion of this eminent patrician, and that a reference to the affair is preserved in the New Testament . . .; but it is highly probable that in these Talmudic stories there is a recollection, correct in essence even though confused in detail, of the conversion and martyrdom of a great Roman figure.¹¹⁶

With this background, we can address ourselves to the two aggadot which purport to be a description of these events. Their protagonist is one of the interesting figures who appear in rabbinic literature, Ketiah b. Shalom. He is a shadow figure, but from these stories, it is possible to suppose he was a high official who was martyred for saving the Jews in the face of a decree made against them. As Bamberger points out, his name might be a circumlocution, for it literally means, "the cut (circumcised) one who obtained peace."¹¹⁷ This is how Ketiah appears in the Talmud:

What about Ketiah b. Shalom? There once was an emperor who hated the Jews. One day he said to the prominent members of his government, 'If one has a wart on his foot, shall he cut it away and live, or leave it and suffer?' They said to him, 'He should cut it away and live.' Ketiah b. Shalom said to him, 'You are not able to do away with all of them, for it is written, "I have spread you abroad as the four winds of heaven." (Zecharia 2:10) What [does this verse mean]? Unless it said that they were scattered as the four winds, it would require saying to the four winds: rather just as it is impossible for the world to be without winds, it is as impossible for the world to be without Israel. And in addition, your kingdom will be called "the cut-off kingdom."' He said to him [Ketiah], 'You speak well,

yet anyone who corrects a king, they throw him into the circular furnace.'

When they were taking him away, a certain matronita said to him, 'Pity the ship that sails without paying the tax.'¹¹⁸ He fell on his foreskin, cut it, [and] said, 'You render the taxes, you pass and enter.' When they threw him [into the furnace] he said, 'All of my possessions [go] to R. Akiba and his companions.' And R. Akiba interpreted, '"And it shall be unto Aaron and his sons," (Exodus 29:28) meaning one-half to Aaron and one-half to his sons.' A bat kol [a voice out of heaven] went out and said, 'Ketī'ah b. Shalom is invited for life in the world to come.' Rabbi wept and said, 'There is one who acquires eternity in a single hour, and another who acquires it only after many years.'¹¹⁹ (XXIII)

In the Avodah Zarah version of the story, we find that the rabbis did not play a consequential part in Ketī'ah's decision to become circumcised and to receive God's judgement as a full Jew. The version appearing in Midrash Rabbah offers another view entirely:

Another explanation of "Thou shalt return to the Lord thy God." (Deuteronomy 4:30) You shall not have anything greater than repentance. Once our rabbis were in Rome, R. Eliezer, R. Joshua and R. Gamaliel¹²⁰, and the Senate of the king decreed, saying 'From now and for thirty days there shall be no Jews [left] in the world.' A senator of the king was a 'Fearer of heaven.'¹²¹ He came to Rabban Gamaliel and revealed the matter to him. Our rabbis were very disturbed. The same 'fearer of heaven' said to them, 'Do not be disturbed. In the next thirty days the God of the Jews will help you.' After twenty-five days he revealed the matter to his wife. She said to him, 'Behold, twenty-five days have passed.' He said to her, 'There are still five days.' His wife was more righteous than he; she said to him, 'Do you not have a [poison] ring? Suck it and die, and the Senate will cause thirty days to pass on your account and the decree will be nullified.' He listened to her and sucked his ring and died. Our rabbis heard and they went up to his wife to express sympathy. Our rabbis said, 'Alas, the ship that sailed without paying its tax,' which is to say, 'This righteous man was not circumcised.' His wife said to him, 'I understand what you are saying. By your lives, the ship did not sail without paying its tax.' Right away she entered the chamber and brought out a box to them in which was the foreskin, and rags filled with blood placed on top of it. And our rabbis proclaimed upon him this scriptural passage: '"The

princes of the peoples are gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham; for unto God belong the shields of the earth. He is greatly exalted." (Psalm 47:10)' What is the meaning of 'the shields of the earth?' God said, 'To Abraham I became a shield of strength.' Whence do we know this? From this passage: 'I am thy shield.' (Genesis 15:1) 'To this one [Ketī'ah] I shall become many shields.' How? The Holy One said to Abraham, 'I shall make you a great nation, and I will bless you . . . and I will make your name great.' (Genesis 12:2) And only after that did he circumcise himself. To this one--I gave him no assurances. What is the meaning of 'He is greatly exalted?' This one is exalted above Abraham.¹²² (XXIV)

These aggadot leave several questions unanswered. The first of them would be the real identity of Ketī'ah. Was he Flavius, or another anonymous official in Rome? Another question would be this: why the emphasis on Ketī'ah being circumcised before his death, especially seeing that there is no mention that he did so because he had converted or was considering converting? All we have is the statement of the matronita: "'Pity the ship that sails without paying the tax,'" a remark which he understands to mean that she pitied him that he was not circumcised. By his not being circumcised, it would seem, she thought he would be denied the privileges accorded to a Jew after death, that he would be forbidden entrance into Paradise. Ketī'ah assured his entrance by circumcising himself. In the other version, he permitted himself to be circumcised by his wife prior to his death by poisoning. We do not know the circumstances of his decision, only that it was a fait accompli when the rabbis made their appearance. If in fact this aggada, or its parallel in the Talmud, does reflect the historic fact of Flavius' conversion, then there is much more meaning to the act of circumcision in the case of this notable Roman.

There is yet another question which can be asked in this context. If Ketī'ah were a rabbinic pseudonym for Flavius, why the act of circum-

cision at all? It would seem that Flavius was already considered a proselyte before the rabbis arrived in Rome. What was then the function of circumcision? The answer comes out of both versions: circumcision was the final act of conversion, and it was an act of defiance towards the emperor and the ultimate act of identification with Judaism. According to Rashi, since he was to be put to death on account of the Jews, he should receive their portion in "the world to come."¹²³ When the rabbis quoted the parable about the ship paying its taxes, they alluded to this fact; having "paid his tax," Ketī'ah was entitled to enter "port," i.e. Paradise.

There remain many problems with the two texts. We do not know which is the older and closer to the original tradition. And what was the nature of the emperor's original threat--to kill all the Jews of the empire, or just those living outside Rome? What provoked him? And why would a matrona make a statement about his not being circumcised, and phrase it as she does? Or, in the Midrash Rabbah, why do the rabbis use the expression otherwise quoted from the matrona? (The allusion to a ship paying its taxes would not seem to have been a common expression among the rabbis as it seems to be Greek or Roman in origin.)¹²⁴ In any case, Ketī'ah b. Shalom remains a unique personage in rabbinic literature. In the face of all the questions which can be raised in connection with him, his story remains both fascinating and enlightening in that the rabbis found champions for Judaism even in the court of Domitian.

We now come to the end of this study of rabbis who had dealings with matronot. We will next be asking who some of these ladies might have been, or if we have examples of women who might have been put into this category by the rabbis some time in their lives. Perhaps we can

make some tentative suggestions about how the matrona appears in rabbinic literature to this point.

We learn from the commentary of Rashi to Nedarim 50a that a matrona can be a "fearer of heaven," not necessarily a semi-proselyte, but one who has respect for the God of the Jews and for the Jews themselves. Had she not petitioned God but gone after R. Akiba to repay her loan, we might have a different picture, a picture of a woman who knew the rabbi could not repay her, therefore giving her a chance to discredit his surety, his God. We also find that here she was a wealthy woman, and willing to lend from her wealth. On the other hand we have the two matronot encountered by R. Zadok. One is a temptress who corners him in the kitchen. The other lady is the mistress of a great house in Rome, the owner of slaves. Yet unlike the wealthy matrona who helped R. Akiba, this woman had the same intentions as the matrona in the kitchen. The Roman lady wanted to destroy R. Zadok by igniting his sexual passions. Unfortunately, she, like her sister, failed in this attempt. We find similar stories in regard to R. Kahana, who was approached in the market, and in regard to R. Hanina b. Pappi, who had a magical contest with the matrona in order to save himself from sexual immorality. On this theme, we find that magic plays a major role in the encounters between rabbi and matrona. R. Hisda and Rabba both were confronted by a matrona who possessed magical powers, and whose incantation could stop a ship from sailing. And at least one matrona was mistress of magic's stepchild of that period, that being medicine. In this case, the elements of the potion remain a secret, but the matrona seemed quite expert in prescribing her potion for R. Johanan. It must have been helpful, for R. Johanan was willing to take it on the Sabbath, when only drugs of life-saving

capabilities were permitted to be taken. On the other hand, the mastery of the medicinal properties of some elements could, and usually did, imply mastery over their other uses (and thus the other side of the coin of matrona as physician would be that of the matrona as poisoner),

We have in these aggadot several examples of a matrona's hostility towards a rabbi. R. Judah is accused in several texts by a matrona of being a drunkard, money lender or pig breeder because of his redness. His answer is that his wisdom caused his face to be red.

Thus the picture these aggadot draw of the matrona is that of a thoroughly unappetizing woman, a temptress, a witch, a shrew, a threat to men of the high standards of the rabbis. She could use sex or magic in order to gain her ends. Thus she would be the opposite of the woman encountered by R. Akiba.

Were these the only characterizations of the matrona to appear in rabbinic literature, obvious conclusions could be drawn. For example, one conclusion would be that the matrona personified for the Rabbis all of the negative aspects of the female. Strangely, this was not the case. In some places the matrona was clearly pictured as a licentious witch. But in other places she appears as a helper, or else as a counselor and friend of the Rabbis. The matrona who lent a sum of money to R. Akiba has her counterparts in many other aggadot.

We find a favorable picture of the matrona in two aggadot. Even though the woman's moral qualities may be questioned by the Rabbis, in both aggadot she gave a rabbi needed help. For example, R. Joshua had to speak to a matrona "around whom all of the great men of Rome could be found" about a subject of great urgency. Even though she might have been a courtesan, he spoke to her in private, and she provided him with

satisfactory answers. In another case, R. Judah b. Shammu'a also had to seek help from a matrona in order to get the Roman government to remove its restrictive legislation which it had imposed against the Jews. And again the woman provided the help the rabbi needed. There might be a question of the morality of R. Joshua's action, but that question was squelched by Shabbat127b, which upheld the rabbi's honor.

It seems significant that we find only one rabbi who had an experience similar to those of R. Jose b. Halafta and his dialogues with a matrona. That rabbi was R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus who, like R. Jose, was approached by a woman with a question based on Scripture. Her question centered on the punishments arising out of the episode of the golden calf. Surprisingly, both versions of the aggada have R. Eliezer refusing to answer her; in fact, in one version he even curses her. This is significant for what it tells us about R. Jose's conversations with a matrona. For even though R. Eliezer was brought to task for refusing to answer her, and possibly was punished by the woman as well for not answering, she did not receive a direct answer in either version of the aggada. In R. Jose's case, on the other hand, the matrona usually did receive an answer of some kind. This would point to those sixteen conversations being unique in rabbinic literature. Debates between rabbis and gentile women over such issues did not often occur, it would seem. We have debates between emperors and rabbis, anonymous gentiles and rabbis, but only in R. Jose's case do we have multiple dialogues between a matrona and rabbi. This could present two possible conclusions. The first possible conclusion is that the woman who questioned R. Jose, supposing that there was just one woman, was unique. She was knowledgeable about Jewish belief, and the possible flaws which could be found in the

doctrines and texts of that belief structure. Otherwise, she might have been a foil, invented by the Rabbis, whose purpose was to expose those parts of faith or Bible which troubled the Rabbis. They then could have couched their own questions in the form of the debates with the matrona. It is probably true that this technique was used to give the Rabbis an opportunity of dealing with their colleagues' and their own questions. R. Eliezer's reaction to the matrona may not have been too far away from the common opinion shared by his associates towards foreign women, no matter what their status, when he told her that she would be better off at home knötting rather than asking deep theological questions of him. In view of the questionable character of most women known as "matrona," it would not be surprising for the rabbi not to answer her. This would probably be the closest to an authentic situation between rabbi and matrona.

What about R. Jose? We have mentioned that the conversations he had with the matrona might not have taken place, that they might have been invented by later rabbis for expressing their own theological questions. There may be some evidence to support this. First, there is the reputation of R. Jose. He was an accepted halakist, his opinion being accepted hundreds of times in Mishna and Gemora. In spite of all the material that can be gleaned from the sixteen conversations, the different texts bear a very close relationship to each other, a regularity that would seem to be formula. In those conversations we find little information per se about the matrona. We find out more in this chapter of unrelated conversations. This also would tend to support the contention that there was no real matrona to question R. Jose. The question, though, can still be plausibly argued the other way. Unfortunately,

there seems to be no conclusive evidence available.

In conclusion, the woman whom the Rabbis called "matrona" remains an object of fascination throughout rabbinic literature. From what we have seen in these two chapters, we can be almost positive that the Rabbis did have contacts with foreign women in Palestine. The events recorded by the Rabbis reflect the time in which they lived, and the difficult circumstances in which they strove to keep their society alive. Though the Rabbis are often pictured sitting in their yeshivot and schools in Jabneh and Usha, locked away from the world, in reality they were citizens of their time and place. They were involved in the daily life of their people. Though their interests may have been different from the majority of the Palestinian Jewish community, they shared the same experiences. Included among those experiences must have been meetings with those women who would become known in their literature as "matronot."

Footnotes---Chapter II

1. Lamentations Rabbati 1:5:31.
2. Schulim Ochser, "Zadok," J.E.
3. Avot d'Rabbi Natan 9:7.
4. A. Jellneck, Bet Ha-midrash (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wehrman, 1938), VI, 23.
5. Nahum Glatzer, A Jewish Reader (New York: Schocken, 1966), p. 180.
6. See Genesis Rabbah 68:4.
7. Marcus Jastrow, Dictionary (New York: Pardes, 1950), p. 825, gives this translation of "זֶמֶן."
8. Kiddushin 40a.
9. Rashi to Kiddushin 40a.
10. Ibid.
11. Berakot 8b.
12. Hermann Strack, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (New York: Harper, 1965), p. 111.
13. The rabbis interpreted this as meaning that Moses "turned away God's anger," and not that he turned to go down the mountain.
14. Numbers Rabbah 9:48.
15. Ibid.
16. Ez Joseph to Numbers Rabbah 9:48 interprets the three kinds of punishment as being "by the sword" (see Exodus 32:27), "by plague" (see Exodus 32:35) and "by the water ordeal" (see Exodus 32:20).
17. Numbers Rabbah 9:48.
18. Jastrow, 625, explains the word "כֹּר" as referring to "a measure of capacity."
19. Numbers Rabbah 9:48.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.

22. Yoma 66b.
23. See note 16.
24. Hirschel Revel, "Joshua ben Haniniah," U.J.E.
25. Sanhedrin 32b; Strack, 111; Revel, loc. cit.
26. Sanhedrin 119a and 90b.
27. Genesis Rabbah 10:3; Hullin 59b-60a.
28. Bacher, Aggadot ha-Tannaim (Berlin: Devir, n.d.), VI, 126.
29. Bacher, IV, 134, Niddah 69b.
30. Shabbat 127b.
31. Bacher, IV, 134.
32. Will Durant, Life of Greece (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939) p. 300.
33. M. Radin, The Jews among the Greeks and Romans (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1915), pp. 328-0.
34. Radin, 326.
35. Bernard Bamberger, Proselytism in the Talmudic Period (New York: Ktav, 1968), p. 247; Menachot 44a.
36. Nedarim 50a.
37. Rashi to Nedarim 50a.
38. See Ta'anit 19b, 23 a-b; Ecclesiastes Rabbati 9:1.
39. Ta'anit 19b.
40. Since this is a rabbinic text, it is not unusual that a gentile would be quoted addressing Israel's God as "Master of the Universe." Whether these were the matrona's words or those of the author of the aggada cannot be known for certain.
41. See this chapter's conclusion.
42. See Shabbat 33b.
43. Chanoch Albeck, "Judah ben Ilai," U.J.E.
44. Ibid.
45. Yoma 10a.

46. Berakot 54b-55a.
47. Nedarim 49b.
48. Mishna Baba Kama 7:7.
49. Ecclesiastes Rabbati 8:1.
50. J. Shabbat 8:1.
51. Rashi to Rosh Hashonah 19a: "'Cry out in the market places and the streets so the officials [of Rome] can hear and have mercy on you.'"
52. Rosh Hashonah 19a; see also Ta'anit 18a.
53. S. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), II, 106-7.
54. Ibid.
55. Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1967), II, 432.
56. Baron, II, 107.
57. Graetz, II, 433; A.L. Sachar, A History of the Jews (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 146.
58. See Shabbat 127b.
59. Graetz, II, 407.
60. Ludwig Rosenthal, "Johanan bar Nappaha," U.J.E.
61. Yoma 83a.
62. Yoma 84a.
63. Rashi to Yoma 84a: "At that time he revealed to her, 'I did not swear to you for thus I said formerly.'"
64. Yoma 84a.
65. Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 366.
66. Strack, op. cit., p. 122.
67. Jastrow, 1223, explains that a "parasang" equals fifty cubits.
68. Rashi to Kiddushin 40a: "'...which caused me to be busy with women's work.'"

69. Jastrow, 1565, explains that a "shifa" is a unit of dry measure of unknown quantity; Jastrow, 302, explains that a "denar" is a coin of unknown value. Kiddushin 40a.
70. Rashi to Kiddushin 40a.
71. S. Mendelsohn, "Hanina b. Papa" U.J.E.
72. Strack, 225, explains "ספר יצירה", "The Book of Creation" thusly: "[It is a book] of linguistic and cosmogonic speculations, the former on the letters, the latter under gnostic influences. Before the date and provenance of the book . . . can be ascertained, a critical edition is required." Another opinion is that found in Sachar, 233: "One of the most important Cabalist volumes developed by the speculation of the Middle Ages was The Book of Creation, the oldest philosophical work in the Hebrew language. . . . It was variously attributed to Abraham, to Akiba, to a number of Talmudic sages. It is likely that some parts of it date back to the early Christian period; certainly it was compiled earlier than the ninth century, when Saadiah wrote a commentary upon it. The little volume was concerned primarily with the problems of cosmology and sought to explain the creation . . ."
73. Baron, II, 121.
74. Kiddushin 39b.
75. Ibid.
76. Rashi to Kiddushin 39b: "They used to be injured, for demons were found there."
77. Genesis Rabbah 39:11.
78. Genesis Rabbah 40:4.
79. Shabbat 81b: "R. Johanan said, 'One must not cleanse oneself with a potsherd on the Sabbath.'"
80. Hullin 105b.
81. Rashi to Hullin 105b.
82. Ibid.
83. Jastrow, 12.
84. Jastrow, 93, explains, "Asia Minor, or rather the Roman province embracing the western part of the peninsula of Asia Minor . . .; name of town supposed to be Essa . . ."
85. Genesis Rabbah 6:5.

86. J. Shabbat 2:6.
87. Durant, Caesar, 325. Italics mine.
88. Jastrow, 93.
89. Durant, Caesar, 388.
90. Leviticus Rabbah 31:4.
91. C. G. Montefiore and H. Lowe, A Rabbinic Anthology (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1960), pp. xviii-xix.
92. Berakot 56a
93. Ibid.
94. Ta'anit 24b.
95. J. Baba Mesi'a 80:2.
96. Shoher Tov, Mizmor 12.
97. Berakot 61b and Leviticus Rabbah 13:5.
98. See Shoher Tov, Mizmor 12.
99. These words at the end of J. Baba Mesi'a.
100. Joshua Finkel, "Abbahu," U.J.E.
101. Strack, 125.
102. Avodah Zarah 4a.
103. Graetz, II, 538-9.
104. Graetz, II, 539-40.
105. Sanhedrin 14a.
106. Rashi to Sanhedrin 14a: "He was called 'a lantern wick gives light' because he was great in beauty."
107. Durant, Caesar, 640-1.
108. See page 75.
109. Graetz, II, 387.
110. R. Akiba's name is missing in the Deuteronomy Rabbah version.
111. Graetz, II, 387-8.

112. Ibid.
113. That being, to convert him.
114. Graetz, II, 388-9.
115. See Bamberger, op. cit., 262, note 68: "Graetz, Geschichte, Vol. 4, p. 403, n. 12: 'Die jud. Proselyten,' pp. 28ff., where he answers those scholars who believe that F.C. became a Christian. Graetz admits that his wife was probably a convert to Christianity. . . ."
116. Bamberger, 237-8.
117. Bamberger, 236.
118. Rashi to Avodah Zarah 10b.: "That is to say, 'Woe to you, since for their sakes you will be put to death and you have not circumcised yourself in order to share their reward.'"
119. Avodah Zarah 10b.
120. Again note there is no mention of R. Akiba.
121. Bamberger, 135-6, explains the term "fearer of heaven, " "יִרְאָה שְׁמַיִם", thusly: "We have seen that in addition to full converts, there were many Gentiles who attached themselves to the synagogue and who accepted the ethical monotheism and some of the forms and ceremonies of Judaism. . . . They appear to have been welcomed by the Jewish group and its leaders, though technically and legally they were still heathen."
122. Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:24.
123. Rashi to Avodah Zarah 10b.
124. Jastrow, 50, explains that the use of " אֵילָפָא " for "ship" was Assyrian in origin.

CHAPTER III

THE IDENTITY OF THE MATRONA

There seems to be ample evidence that the Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash did come into contact with women who, in some way, fulfilled the description of the matrona. Who might these matronot have been?

We have already discussed one possibility, that advanced by Graetz. In the context of the events following the ascent of Antoninus Pius to the throne, Graetz wrote,

A noble Roman lady of Caesarea or Antioch, who had pity on the sufferings of the Jews, advised them to petition the Roman authorities that the persecutions might cease. This lady was perhaps the wife of Rufus [a Roman governor in the time of the Hadrianic persecutions], and is said to have had inclination towards Judaism. Following this advice, a few men, headed by Jehudah ben Shamua, repaired to the governor to beg for mercy.¹

Such a viewpoint as that advanced by Graetz is speculative in the extreme. But what he wrote bears out a certain tendency in rabbinic literature, as we find in Avodah Zarah:

. . . When R. Akiba saw the wife of the wicked Tyranus Rufus, he spat, then laughed, and then wept. Spat, because she came from a putrefying drop. Laughed, because he foresaw that she would become a proselyte, and that he would marry her. Wept, because such beauty would decay in the dust.²

As we see in the text from Avodah Zarah, there was great concern on the part of some rabbis about the great women of their time. Not only would this Roman woman become a proselyte, she would even marry the

foremost rabbi of the time. Such an eventuality never came to be; but it is in aggadot such as this that we may be able to find the identity of the anonymous matronot. For if we were to look at Rosh Hashonah 19b, we would find R. Joshua discussing an important matter with "a matronita around whom all of the prominent men of Rome could be found." Such a woman might possibly have been of the rank of the wife of Rufus, then one of the highest placed Roman women in Palestine.

Other women who appear in the Talmud might also be deserving of the designation of "matrona." This is because the women have a certain function in the text which is very similar to that of the woman who is specifically called a matrona. These women are challengers of the Rabbis, or questioners of the Rabbis.

An anonymous "daughter of the emperor" appears in the story of the ten martyrs as one of those challengers. She may be the same woman who is found in other texts of the Talmud and Midrash. She is presented in the texts as a foe of the Rabbis. For example, in Ta'anit and Hulin the rabbi is R. Joshua b. Hanania. As for the possibility that he might have come into contact with a "daughter of the emperor," we find him debating with Hadrian in many texts. It is highly possible that he did come into contact with her during the course of his visits to the emperor. In any case, she appears as highly antagonistic to R. Joshua; for example, in Ta'anit 7a she criticizes the rabbi for his appearance, saying, "'O glorious wisdom in such an ugly vessel.'" This is interpreted to mean, "It is a shame that such a wise man [and perhaps she meant this sarcastically] should be so ugly." R. Joshua answers her by asking a question: "'But does not your father keep wine in an earthenware vessel? You who are noble should keep it in rich vessels.'" She leaves the rabbi and

reports her conversation with him to the emperor. Upon her request he puts his wine into vessels of gold and silver, where it sours. Called to account for his advice, R. Joshua tells the emperor, "'I answered her according to the way she spoke to me,'" meaning that knowledge is like fine wine--both come to their best vintage in ugly containers.

In another aggada we find the emperor's daughter challenging R. Joshua's beliefs. She tells him, "'Your God is a carpenter, for it is written, 'Who layeth the beams of His upper chambers in the waters.' (Psalm 114:3)'" In making this statement, the "emperor's daughter" challenged the basic Jewish belief in creatio ex nihilo. Were God a "carpenter," He would need preexisting materials for creation. This concept would contradict the Genesis account. But since the "emperor's daughter" employs a scriptural passage to support her point, R. Joshua cannot ignore her. But in this instance we do not find him answering her. Rather, he teaches her an object lesson. He prays, and she contracts leprosy. As a leper, she is taken to the open square of the city and is given a spool, the common treatment for lepers in those days. She is also given a certain wrap to put on so that people will recognize her condition and pray for her recovery. But their prayers do not avail her. The text continues, saying that one day R. Joshua was walking through the square and saw her sitting there. He is quoted as saying, "'My God has given you a beautiful spool,'" meaning that God is responsible for her condition. He says to her, "'I pray you, ask your God to take back what He has given me.'" R. Joshua's answer is simple, and cruel (which might reflect some of the intolerance she showed him in their earlier meetings): "'Our God grants a request, but never takes it back.'" ³

In these two aggadot we find clear parallels to the matrona.

In the case of R. Judah b. Il'ai, we find the matrona commenting on the rabbi's appearance, accusing him of being either a pig breeder or a drunkard.⁴ Here we find the "emperor's daughter" commenting on R. Joshua's appearance. And, of course, the Hullin text is very similar to the many conversations R. Jose b. Halafta had with a matrona.

Although we know that the matrona who debated R. Jose was not the anonymous "daughter of the emperor" (for example, we know that R. Jose never went to Rome), it is still possible to suppose that the woman involved in those debates and conversations--again, if it was only one woman--had a high status. And there is no reason to suppose that the rabbis would not have called the "emperor's daughter" a matrona. Not only did she have a lofty social position, but she appears to have been a shrew, a common characteristic among the matronot.

There are other women who are named in rabbinic literature who might also have deserved being described as matronot. For those women, though, the term would be complimentary. We have seen, as in the case of the matrona who lent money to R. Akiba to build his school,⁵ the designation "matrona" had positive connotations. One woman who might have been called a matrona was Beluria the Proselyte. Like the matrona who questioned R. Jose, Beluria questioned Rabban Gamaliel about Deuteronomy 10:17 and Numbers 6:26. She found a contradiction in them. The former text reads, "For the Lord your God, He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty and awful, who regards not seasons, nor takes rewards." The text from Numbers reads, "The Lord lift His countenance upon thee" Beluria pointed out that one text said that God was uncaring of man; it literally reads, "who does not lift His countenance." The other text said the opposite, that God does care.

R. Jose the Priest resolved her question. He presented the parable of a man who lent his friend a valuable object with the king as witness. The other man promised to repay it in the king's name. When the time arrived for repayment, the borrower did not have enough money to repay. He went to the king to beg forgiveness, which he received; but the king told him that he should seek forgiveness from the man who lent to him. R. Jose the Priest resolved Beluria's dilemma by telling her that the verse from Deuteronomy referred to God's treatment of transgressors, while the verse in Numbers, to those who had not transgressed.⁶

In her questioning of the Rabbis, Beluria wanted to know more about Judaism, and her questions to R. Jose and R. Eliezer reflected her search. This search parallels the many passages discussed in the chapter on Rabbi Jose and the matrona where the woman seems to have wanted to inquire into the tenets of Judaism, and to come to a better understanding of the Jews. In the case of the matrona, though, there was the possibility that she wanted to entrap the rabbi. We have no such question about Beluria.

We do not know for sure who Beluria might have been. Bernard Bamberger collected many opinions, and his conclusions offer some reasons to believe that Beluria, too, might be regarded as a matrona. Bamberger wrote:

The name of this distinguished woman convert appears in various forms: Beluria, Beruria, Beruziah. Some scholars regard it as equivalent to Valeria; but Graetz has identified Beluria with Veturia Paula (or Paulina) whose tombstone has been found in Rome. She was converted to Judaism at an advanced age, took the name of Sarah and was known as 'Mater Synagogarum.' There is a good deal to commend this identification, though it does not seem to me beyond question. Incidentally, the custom of conferring a new name on converts, which later became standard in Judaism,

seems in our period to have been customary only in the Diaspora

In Talmudic works, 'Beluria' is mentioned chiefly in connection with the problem created when her slave women took ritual baths in her presence Elsewhere, she is represented as asking Rabban Gamaliel about the apparent contradiction between Numbers 6:26 and Deuteronomy 10:17, her question being answered by R. Jose the Priest. The identification of Beluria with Veturia Paula appears to involve the rejection of this tradition as unhistorical. Rabban Gamaliel indeed visited Rome with several of his colleagues; and on this occasion the problem of her slaves might have 'come before the sages,' and she might have sought help in understanding Scripture. But there is no record (to my knowledge) that R. Jose the Priest was among the scholars who went to Rome.

In any event, Beluria is represented as a woman of means, possessing a considerable number of slaves.

From Bamberger's account, Beluria was a woman of means who converted to Judaism. She would thus come into the category of matrona because of her position in gentile society and because of her role in rabbinic literature.

Two other foreign women of high rank could also have been known to the rabbis as matronot. One was Queen Helena of Adiabene, the mother of King Izates. The other was Ifra Hormiz, the mother of King Shapur, a fourth century monarch in Persia. The aggadot and other stories in Jewish literature about these two women are rich in their detail.

The full story of the conversion of the royal house of Adiabene has received detailed treatment in Josephus, Graetz, Talmudic accounts, and more recently, in Jacob Neusner's A History of the Jews in Babylonia.⁸ All historians, though, must ultimately rely in Josephus and the Talmud.

Adiabene was a state located within the territories of ancient Assyria. It was located between Armenia and Babylonia. In the year 64 B.C.E. it was a Parthian satrapy, and had a feudal relationship to the Parthian government.⁹ According to Josephus' report, Queen Helena

married her brother, Monobazus, and gave birth to three sons. Izates, the eldest, was sent to a town on the Persian Gulf where he was instructed in Judaism by a Jewish merchant. In the meantime, Helena and Monobazus received instruction and became proselytes, this around the year 20 C.E. According to the sources,

The royal family maintained close ties with Jerusalem and made every effort to impress the Palestinians, particularly the Pharisees, both with their loyalty to Judaism and with their benevolent attitude toward the Jews. That they succeeded is indicated by numerous Talmudic stories about the piety and generosity of both convertes, as well as of Monobazes II, Izates' brother.¹⁰

But all was not calm in Adiabene. There was a great deal of resistance on the part of the nobility, threats of revolt, and more threats of external intervention. Adiabene was invaded, but not because of the religion of its royal family, but rather in the course of a Parthian civil war.¹¹ Through all this, Helena and Izates, who came to the throne in 36 C.E., remained steadfast in their faith and were able to weather the storms for thirty years. When Helena died, she was buried with Izates in Jerusalem by Monobazes II.¹²

Helena often appears in rabbinic literature. She and Monobazes decorated parts of the Temple in Jerusalem. Monobazes had the handles of all the vessels used on Yom Kippur plated with gold, while Helena "made a golden candlestick over the door of the Holy of Holies, and she even made a golden tablet, on which the section of the sotah was written."¹³ Her piety is also described in Sukkah 2b. There a halakah is found which reads, ". . . a sukkah which is higher than twenty cubits is not valid." R. Judah disagreed, stating that "it is valid to a height of forty or fifty cubits." R. Judah cited the case of Helena who built her sukkah

in Lydda to a height of more than twenty cubits. Judah said, "Nevertheless the elders still entered it, and spoke not a word to her."

The Talmud says that Helena was so pious that she pledged to become a Nazirite for seven years if her son returned safely from war. As we find in Nazir 19b, he returned and she fulfilled her vow. After the seven years, she travelled to Palestine where the rabbis of Bet Hillel insisted that she observe their dictum and remain a Nazirite for another seven years. This she did. Close to the end of the second period she is said to have become ritually unclean, and was therefore obliged to extend the period of her vow yet another seven years for a total of twenty-one years.

Helena remains a rare woman in Talmudic literature. She is one of the few converts to whom the Rabbis often referred. The praise she receives from them is expansive, and probably well-deserved. Whether she was considered a matrona by those same rabbis is questionable, but such credentials as her feeding Jerusalem in the famine might qualify her as one of the great benefactors of rabbinic literature. Not all of the matronot were witches or sexually demanding women. As we have seen, the matrona could be a God-fearing and helpful person. That would make Helena a paragon among the matronot.

Such could also be said of Ifra Hormiz. Ifra is reported as sending a chest of gold to R. Joseph, a fourth century amora in Pumbeditha, with the request that it be used to carry out an important religious precept. According to Baba Batra 8a, R. Abaye told R. Joseph that he should use it to redeem captives, that being one of the great religious precepts. Ifra is also recorded as sending four hundred dinars to R. Ammi, who refused to accept money from her because she was a heathen.

But the lady was not to be dissuaded, and she sent the same sum to Rabba, who accepted it. According to the text in Baba Batra (10b-11a), his reason for accepting was to maintain peace between the Jews and Persian government. Subsequently, R. Ammi became indignant and chastised Rabba for accepting. The text then asks, "Was not R. Ammi also anxious not to offend the government?" In answer to this question, Rabba is reported to have told him that he distributed the money to gentile poor, and was therefore not guilty of any wrongdoing. The text adds that R. Ammi was angry because he had not been consulted by his colleague.

Another story in the Talmud may indicate that Ifra was a "fearer of heaven," because she sent Rabba an offering which she requested be offered up in honor of heaven. Rabba devised a scheme which allowed him to fulfill her request without defiling an altar. He did not see her as having a formal relationship to the Jewish community. What is probably closer to historical fact is that this Queen Mother of Persia, like most Eastern potentates, paid her respects to all religious groups found in her sons' empire by offering on their altars.¹⁴ Yet in Niddah we find that Ifra sent some of her menstrual blood to Rabba to determine if she were ritually clean. Rabba inspected it and reported that it was "the blood of lust," a discharge resulting from sexual desire. This was the correct answer (although it demonstrates the lack of knowledge both had in the area of female physiology); Ifra went to her son to prove the wisdom of the Jews. She then devised a test for Rabba. She sent him sixty different kinds of blood, all of which he correctly identified save one, lice blood; to save face, she sent him a hint by which he was able to make the right guess. She brought this further proof to her son, saying, according to Niddah 20b, that the Jews "seem to live in the inner

chamber of one's heart." As far as she was concerned, the Jews were all-knowing.

As Ifra was not a proselyte, nor probably was she a true "fearer of heaven" or semi-proselyte, her case is much different from that of Queen Helena. Yet Ifra seems to have been very friendly to the Jews of the Persian empire. She seems to have exerted a restraining influence on her son when he was inclined to punish the rabbis for invoking Jewish law instead of submitting the case to Persian law. As Graetz relates,

Shabur [Shapur] II was not friend of the Jews. In ancient times numerous Jewish families had been transported to Armenia, and now lived there in their own cities; of these, Shabur led an immense multitude . . . into captivity, and colonized them in Susiana and Ispahan. Shabur appears to have oppressed the Jews of Babylonia in no less degree for Raba was obligated to expend considerable sums of money in preventing persecution. . . . On one occasion it was with great difficulty that he managed to escape a personal danger which threatened him in his capacity of principal of the schools. He had ordered a Jew to be flogged for having held carnal intercourse with a Persian woman, and the chastisement had caused the death of the culprit. The case happening to come to Shabur's knowledge, he commanded a heavy punishment to be inflicted on Raba for having exercised the criminal jurisdiction. The latter appears to have escaped the penalty by flight All further consequences of this occurrence were averted by Ifra, the queen mother, who is reported to have said to her son: 'Do not meddle in any way with the Jews, for God grants them whatever they pray for.'¹⁵

Though she lived after the time when the term "matrona" was most commonly used by the Rabbis to describe foreign women with whom they came into contact, it would seem that the designation might have been fitting for Ifra Hormiz because of her particular role in Jewish history as it is reported in rabbinic literature. Her deeds strongly resemble those of the matronot, and her status in the gentile community would clearly qualify her for this designation.

Only one woman in rabbinic literature is both named and called a matrona, that being Sarah. Yet even in reference to her the word "matrona" has some non-Jewish connotations, as for example in this aggada found in Genesis Rabbah 52:12:

'Behold, it is a covering of the eyes for you.' (Genesis 20:14) R. Johanan explained: 'Makes a covering for her so that all will look at the covering and not at her beauty.' 'A covering of the eyes' [means] 'a covering that attracts the eyes.' R. Berechiah said, 'He made her a matrona.' 'כסות' means that she is covered from the eyes. (I)

In referring to this aggada, Ez Joseph suggested that the word "כסות" meant a head-covering which served as a mask with holes for the eyes and nose so that she could not be seen.¹⁶ As for her being called a matrona, it would seem obvious that it was a high rank befitting a woman held in such high esteem both in the eyes of Pharaoh and the Rabbis.

Also in Genesis Rabbah 41:2 do we find Sarah identified as a matrona. This is in reference to Genesis 12:17: "And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife." What was the Pharaoh's sin? A rabbi provided this answer: "Because he dared to come near the shoe of that matrona." (II) This is interpreted to mean that Pharaoh's servants entered her chamber at his command to remove her shoe and lay her on the bed against her will.¹⁷

The important aspect of these aggadot is that in them Sarah shared a designation with a disparate group of women whose common bond was only the shared designation "matrona." Perhaps this means that they held a position in society--the ladies who have been discussed in this chapter certainly had high rank. Yet we have found many types of women also called matrona--from benefactresses to witches and women knowledgeable in magic formulae. In spite of this factor, it seems unreasonable to

think that the Rabbis did not have some precise idea of what they meant when they used the word. We do not know if the Rabbis thought of Ifra as a matrona, or of the anonymous "emperor's daughter," or even of Queen Helena. All three women share common characteristics with matronot we have discussed in other contexts, in that they either helped the Jews when they were in distress, or asked a rabbi a question about Judaism or Scriptures, or troubled another rabbi. Yet to make a guess as to what the Rabbis intended by using the term "matrona" would be difficult because of the many contradictions that appear in regard to the women who received the designation.

The figure of the matrona is very contradictory. In rabbinic literature she appears often as a woman of quality, a wealthy woman possessing large sums of money or jewels and a quantity of slaves. At times she appears as a woman of great political power, or else with connections to such power. Yet she uses the power she has to help the Rabbis. She might, therefore, have been the wife of a major official. Otherwise, she might have been a successful courtesan. In other places, though, the matrona appears as a destructive force, as a seductive and dangerous woman whose goal it was to destroy an individual rabbi. In many cases she is an inquisitive person, but her reason for asking a question of a rabbi might either be to trap him into making a contradictory statement, or else to have him help her decide to become a convert to Judaism.

In any case, the matrona is, in all but one case, anonymous. We can only conjecture that when the Rabbis used the term, they were thinking specifically of those foreign women with whom they or their colleagues came into contact in their daily life. Inasmuch as the word held many

meanings, it might seem that the Rabbis might have done better to use more than one term. Yet, on the other hand, the role of the matrona in rabbinic literature was rather circumscribed. By using the word, the aggadist could set a mood among his audience towards the lady in question. His specific intention in using her would be spelled out as he continued his story. The sum total of those aggadot which have been retained in Talmud and Midrash enable us to arrive at the meaning the Rabbis put on the word by induction. And while no specific conclusion can be made as to the precise identity of the matronot we find in the literature, through this study of encounters between rabbis and a matrona we can better understand why she appeared as she did, and what purpose she served in the literature.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER III

1. Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia, J.P.S., 1967), vol. II, p. 432.
2. Avodah Zarah 20a.
3. Hullin 60a.
4. J. Shabbat 8:1.
5. Nedarim 50a.
6. Rosh Hashona 17b.
7. Bernard Bamberger, Proselytism in the Talmudic Period (New York: Ktav, 1968), p. 234.
8. Jacob Neusner, A History of the Jews in Babylonia (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), pp. 55-56, 58 ff.
9. Neusner, op. cit., p. 59.
10. Neusner, op. cit., p. 60.
11. Ibid.
12. Graetz, op. cit., p. 219.
13. Yoma 37a.
14. Zebahim 116b.
15. Graetz, op. cit., pp. 591-2.
16. Ez Joseph to Genesis Rabbah 52:12.
17. Ez Joseph to Genesis Rabbah 41:2.

CHAPTER IV

THE MATRONA IN THE PARABLE

In previous chapters we have been discussing the role of the matrona in a distinctive kind of rabbinic literature. Her meetings and dealings with the Rabbis were recorded as aggadot, part of the non-legal compendium of literature which is found in the Midrash and Talmud. The term "aggada" encompasses a huge range of literature: tales, such as those we have already discussed, homiletical interpretations of the Bible, anecdotes, descriptions of historical events, paradigms for the religious life, fables, and proverbs, along with many other kinds of literature. But in speaking of the occurrence of the matrona in rabbinic literature, we must not neglect another branch of the aggada, that being the "mashal" ("parable").

The mashal was a much used tool in the hands of the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash. The value of the parable was that it could lend concreteness to intangible concepts, and it could be used to substantiate a rabbinic statement by offering an illustration of that statement. Its introductory phrase, "למה הדבר דומה", "to what can this matter be likened," would seem to be the best indication of how the Rabbis put the mashal to use. In fact, it was so highly regarded by some rabbis that the following was said in its behalf:

The rabbis said: Let not the mashal be lightly regarded, for by means of it a man can understand the words of Torah. It is like a king who has lost a pearl and finds it with the aid of a candle worth only a

centime. Solomon clarified the Law by means of parables. R. Nachman, R. Jose, R. Shila and R. Hanina illustrated the idea thus: The wise king tied a rope at the entrance of a labyrinth-like palace, and was able to find his way out of it; he cut a path in a wild thicket of reeds; he fashioned a handle for a cask of liquid so that it could be moved; he joined rope to rope, and was able to draw water from the deep well. Thus from word to word, from mashal to mashal, Solomon attained the uttermost secret of the Torah.¹

It is in these m'shalim that we find many references to the matrona. Yet, though the word "matrona" is the same as that we have discussed, we find that the term "matrona" had a new meaning for the parable-makers. No longer was she the noble lady, or lady of high rank whom the rabbis found in their Roman world. Rather, in the parable the matrona had a very new identity, as we shall see in our discussion of the m'shalim. This new use of the term precluded its referring to a specific person; it would not be possible to claim that the matrona we find in the parable could possibly be Rufus' wife or Queen Helena. The importance of the term lay in its symbolism, in what it represented.

It is interesting to note that to a man, the rabbis who were credited with formulating the m'shalim in which we find the matrona were all Palestinians. They may have taught in Babylonia, but their roots and in almost every case, their own education lay in Palestine. It would seem that the word "matrona," like many other words borrowed from Greek and Latin words, such as "epicurus," the pronunciation was kept pretty much intact in the Hebrew, but the meaning was changed to bring the term into the Middle Eastern context. The epicurian philosophy of "materialism and free will, of joyful gods and a godless world . . . [of] the omnipresence of law, the self-ruled independence of nature, the forgivable naturalness of death,"² was reinterpreted in the world of the

Rabbis, and the word "epicoros" was used by them to refer to the heretic, the one who denied their religion. Though there are links, the word did not convey the same meaning to both the Greek and Jewish mind. Like the word "epicoros," "matrona" changed in meaning and significance from the world of Greece and Rome to the world of the Rabbis. And even among the Rabbis, the word held different implications. This can be seen as we follow the use of the word "matrona" chronologically as it was used in the rabbinic parable.

Two fifth-generation tannaim seem to have been among the earliest rabbis to build a mashal around a matrona. They are R. Hiyya bar Abba and Simeon b. Halafta. The two were very close associates. The former, a native of Kaphri (Near Sura in Babylon), came to Tiberias in the latter part of his life and became a silk merchant. There he became a close associate of Judah I. He also became a physician and master halakist and aggadist. He collected beraitot and formulated his own halakot, derived from the Mishna through the use of hermeneutics. He contributed to the Sifra and was credited with authoring the Tosefta, although this has been debated by some scholars. In aggada, R. Hiyya also made his mark. He is quoted extensively both in the Midrash and Talmud. "Hiyya's aggadot are particularly rich in thoughts concerning the moral life and relations of human beings to one another."³ One of those aggadot can be found in Deuteronomy Rabbah. It is offered to explain Deuteronomy 7:14: "Thou shalt be blessed above all [מכל] peoples." What did this mean, particularly the word מכל, translated here "above all"? R. Hiyya explained both the use of that particular word and gave an example of its force:

A matrona is not praised when her relatives do not

the praising, rather when her enemies praise her.⁴ (I)

The text should be interpreted to mean, "by all." This is understood in R. Hiyya's comment, and is also explained in the same fashion by Ez Joseph.⁵ Unfortunately, the Midrash tells us very little about what a matrona might be.

We get much more information from the aggada of R. Simeon b. Halafta. A friend of R. Hiyya, he lived near Sepphoris at either 'Es Te'enah'⁶ or 'En-Tina.'⁷ One of the last of the tannaim, he lived during the middle and end of the second century C.E. He, like R. Hiyya, was a friend and student of Judah ha-Nasi, who held Simeon in high honor. He is especially noted in the Midrash and Talmud for the miraculous events which filled his life, and it was related that he was a confidant of Elijah. As a rabbinic authority, he was strongest in the aggada.⁸

"Simeon b. Halafta is rarely mentioned in the halakic tradition, but frequently in the Haggadah, in which he is especially noted for the parables which he employed in his Scriptural exegesis."⁹ He is often mentioned in Midrash Rabbah, where we find several m'shalim, including one in which a matrona plays a part.

This particular midrash appears in reference to Deuteronomy 7:12: "וְשָׁמַר ה' אִתְּךָ לְכָל הַבְּרִית וְאֶחָדָם" . . . that the Lord thy God shall keep for thee the covenant and mercy (חסד) . . ." What did the text mean by using the phrases "ברית," and "חסד," here translated "covenant" and mercy"? R. Simeon gave this explanation.

To what can this matter [phrase] be compared? To a king who betrothed a matrona and she gave him two precious stones; the king also had two corresponding stones set for her. The matrona lost hers and the king (also) took his. After several days she arose and set herself aright with him, and brought the same two stones, and the king also brought his. The king said, 'These

and these [stones] will make a crown, and it shall be placed on the matrona's head.' Similarly you find Abraham: he gave his sons two precious stones, as it is written, 'For I have known him to the end that he may command his sons and household after him, that they guard the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice.' (Genesis 18:19) God also set for them two precious stones--'חסד' ('mercy') and 'רחמים' ('compassion'), as it is written, 'that the Lord thy God shall keep for thee the covenant and mercy.' And it says, 'And He will give thee mercy and have compassion upon thee.' (Deuteronomy 13:18) Israel lost theirs, as it is written, 'For ye have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.' (Amos 6:12) And even the Holy One took His, as it is written, 'For I have taken away My peace from this people, saith the Lord, even mercy and compassion.' (Jeremiah 16:5) Israel arose and rightened themselves and brought the self-same precious stones. Whence [do we know this]? As it is written, 'Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return to her with righteousness.' (Isaiah 1:27) The Holy One also brought His. Whence [do we know this]? Thus it is written, 'For the mountains may move, and the hills topple, but My mercy (חסד) shall not depart from thee, neither shall My covenant (ברית) of peace be removed, saith the Lord who has compassion (רחמים) upon you.' (Isaiah 54:10) When Israel brought theirs and the Holy One gives his, the Holy One says, "These and these shall make a crown and be placed on Israel's head, as it is written, 'And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever, and I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness and in justice and in mercy and in compassion, and I will betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord.' (Hosea 2:21)¹⁰ (II)

This is a beautiful aggada by any standards. And it establishes a pattern for other m'shalim in which the matrona plays a part. The basic idea, which is expanded upon homiletically, is the comparison of the matrona to the people of Israel and of the king to Israel's God. The matrona is no longer seen as a foreign woman of high rank. Now she is seen as a queen, and "matrona" becomes synonymous with "malkah"--the Hebrew word for a queen. As we shall see, there may be very good reason for this substitution of terms.

In parables, metaphor was widely used by the Rabbis to convey

their message. God's two precious stones which he bestowed upon the people represented justice and righteousness. The people squandered them, as we see in Amos 6:12. For His part, God then put aside the stones he had received in his relationship to Israel, namely mercy and compassion. The wastefulness and extravagance of the people caused them to lose the benefits of all of the "stones." It is only when they vindicated themselves by "rediscovering" the stones which were originally in their possession, that God granted them the benefits of the other two stones which they had given him. Once they dedicated themselves (as we see in Isaiah 1:27) to make use of the gifts God had given them, and learned how to use justice and righteousness to their full advantage, then God could cement the original covenant with mercy and compassion from His side. In the end, all four "stones" were for the advantage of Israel, as we see in Hosea 2:21. Just as, in the mashal, the king makes a crown out of all four of the precious stones for his matrona, God crowned Israel with the "precious stones" of righteousness, justice, mercy and compassion. In this aggada R. Simeon showed himself to be a master of the mashal, using a simple idea to convey a rich sermon on the historical conduct of the Jewish people, and their future possibilities.

In discussing the Amoraic period, we will find that the pattern exemplified by the mashal of R. Simeon was carried on by the later rabbis. The matrona became a symbolic figure in the aggada, a metaphor, used to teach a particular lesson. This we find with R. Hama b. Hanina, a Palestinian who lived during the third century and was a contemporary of R. Johanan. He directed a school at Sepphoris, and was noted as both a distinguished halakist and aggadist. "In his homilies Hama sought to convey practical lessons," and interpreted Scripture so that it taught

one how to live a godly life.¹¹ One such aggada may be found in Genesis Rabbah. This particular aggada was directed towards God, rather than man, and the matrona-parable was invoked to illustrate a case not of a nation as we have found before, but rather of an individual. The question which provoked the midrash grew out of Genesis 22:15f, "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn . . .'" The question asked by the Rabbis was this: what need was there for this particular oath? What provoked it?

Two answers to this question were provided by the Rabbis, one anonymously, the other by R. Hama. The first answer proposed by a rabbi was that the oath came in response to an appeal by Abraham: "Promise me that you will not again try me or ever try my son Isaac."¹² R. Hama disagreed with this interpretation, and he offered one of his own; according to him Abraham made another request of God:

[Abraham said to the angel] 'Swear to me that you shall not again try me from this time forth.' A parable. [It can be compared] to a king who was married to a matrona. She gave birth to his first son and he divorced her. A second, and he divorced her. A third, and he divorced her. When she had given birth to his tenth son, all of them entered before him and said to him, 'Swear to us that you will not divorce our mother from now on.' Thusly, when our father Abraham was tried with the tenth trial, he said /to [the angel], 'Swear to me that you shall not again try me from this time forth.'¹³ (III)

(Actually, these two explanations do not give the full reason behind the purpose, as other Rabbis saw it, for the oath. They both assumed it was a second oath, and that it was given in response to a request Abraham made, yet which went unreported in the text. What was the first oath? Ez Joseph gives us that answer: the first oath came when God made a covenant with Abraham (which can be found in Genesis 15:9 ff.)

The difference between the anonymous author's answer given above and that put forward by R. Hama is not that easy to perceive. One opinion has Abraham pleading for both his son and himself; R. Hama had him pleading only for himself. R. Hama's reasoning may have centered on interpreting the events of Isaac's life as "trials," just as the Rabbis were able to find in the midrashic manner that God tried Abraham ten times. These ten trials, which are spelled out in many different sources, as Avot d'Rabbi Natan,¹⁴ were arrived at homiletically, seeing the word "לנסות," "to try" appears but one time in conjunction with Abraham. Just as these nine other trials were the results of interpretations, it was possible to see Isaac's life as also filled with trials.

The mashal which R. Hama presented to support his interpretation of the text offers much interesting material to consider. In point of fact, for example, was the practice of a king divorcing his wife after she gave birth, and then remarrying her, a common enough occurrence that to use it in a parable would not becloud the issue? Such a case probably did not happen in real life. R. Hama seems to have employed another much-used rabbinic tool to make his point--exaggeration. Yet this presents another possibility. If his matrona, who seems to represent Abraham in the context of the homily, was unfairly treated, could this not be taken as an implicit condemnation of God's treatment of Abraham? Just as the ten "trials" of the matrona seem to be unjust, as well as meaningless, could the rabbi also be saying that God's treatment of Abraham was equally unfair? Obviously, R. Hama contended, after ten trials Abraham felt he had enough, and that he asked God to let him be (even though we have no such statement in the Torah text). It was assumed, though, that Abraham did make such a request. On this one

piece of evidence, we have the possibility that R. Hama was not willing to accept God's tests of Abraham, which he thought both willful and pernicious, or so his mashal would indicate. This would be one of the few negative uses of the ten trials in rabbinic literature if such a conclusion as this could be made.

Another rabbi of the third century who made use of a matrona in parable was R. Joshua b. Levi, another Palestinian amora. He headed a school in Lydda, and was a contemporary of R. Johanan bar Nappaha, about whom later. He is known in the literature as a peace-loving man, and even in his many dealings with minim was quoted as pronouncing upon them nothing worse than Psalm 145:9, "The Lord is good to all; And His tender mercies are over all His works." (Berakot 7a) Although related to the nasi, he broke with him by ordaining his students without the nasi's permission; his status was not damaged by this, though, as he was still regarded as a representative of the community. At one point in his life he and R. Hamina came to present a case on behalf of their community before the Roman proconsul in Caesaria. His high status was an outgrowth of R. Joshua's halakic and aggadic erudition. "It is beyond doubt, however, that the Hagadah occupied a very important place in the teaching of R. Joshua b. Levi; this is evident from the many aggadot quoted in his name directly or given in his name by his disciples and contemporaries."¹⁵

R. Joshua authored two parables in which a matrona appears. Both appear in Exodus Rabbah. The earlier midrash appears in reference to Exodus 3:11, "And Moses said unto God: 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharoah . . .?'" It deals with Moses, and what Moses perceived to be an unfinished promise from God. Of interest here is that the

reference to a matrona goes back to our previous chapters. In this case she is not a queen. This is how the midrash appears:

'And Moses said unto God: "Who am I . . .?"' R. Joshua b. Levi said, 'A parable. [It can be likened] to a king who gave his daughter in marriage and allocated to her a state, and a handmaiden [who was] a matronita. And he gave her a black handmaiden. His son-in-law said to him, "You allotted a handmaiden [who was] a matronita for me." Thus said Moses before the Holy One, "When Jacob went down to Egypt, did you not say to him, 'I shall go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again' (Genesis 46:4)? Now, You are saying to me, "Go and I will send thee unto Pharaoh," (Exodus 3:10) but I am not he about whom you said, "I will also surely bring thee up again."¹⁶ (IV)

This aggada revolves around the word "אֲנִי." This form of the personal pronoun is usually found in connection with God. Very infrequently do we find a biblical character apply it to himself when he says, "I." Thus there must be a lesson in its being employed by Moses in this context. And to support this contention, not only did R. Joshua supply the explanation, but he gave a parable to support his explanation.

The use of "אֲנִי" can be compared to the use of the same word in Genesis 46:4: "וְאֲנִי אֵעֶלֶךְ," ("I shall go down with you). . . and I will also surely bring you up again." There is a gizrah shavah. In the past, God, using the word "אֲנִי," promised to bring Jacob's descendants out of Egypt. But in Exodus 3:10 God seems to renege on His promise by commanding Moses to go to Egypt to do the job. Moses was surprised, so surprised, according to the aggada, that he covertly reminded God that He had promised to rescue the people Himself, and not leave it to someone else. This could be compared to a king promising his daughter and son-in-law a handmaiden of high status, a matronita, and then reneging on his promise by giving them a black maid servant instead. In authoring this midrash, R. Joshua said that God was not

willing to carry out His promise to Jacob to the letter, and was only willing to send Moses as a poor substitute. Moses, for his part, tacitly reproved God: when he said, "Who am I," he meant, "I am not the 'אנכי' for whom the people are waiting."¹⁷

This is one of the few times when the matrona who appears in the parable is not a queen. Ez Joseph claims here, though, that the hand-maiden promised by the king came from royal stock.¹⁸

The next mashal also speaks about the carelessness of Israel. The tradition of the mashal is delivered in R. Joshua b. Levi's name by R. Simeon. This is how the mashal appears in context:

"They have turned aside quickly." (Exodus 32:8)
R. Jonah in the name of R. Samuel b. Nahman [said], 'Every prophet who arose repeated the prophecy of his companion. And why did he speak the word of his companion? In order to clarify it.' R. Joshua b. Levi said, 'He needed say only his own prophecy. Only Moses said all of the words of the prophets and his own. And everyone who prophesied, his prophecy was an outcome of Moses' prophecy. And all of the commandments he declared outside of two, for the Holy One Himself gave them to Israel [namely] "I am the Lord your God," and "Thou shalt have no other god." The Holy One said, "You had to sin with just the two commandments which I commanded you?"'

R. Simeon said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi, 'A parable. [This matter can be compared] to a king who betrothed a matrona with two precious stones which he gave her. And he returned and sent her eight more by a messenger. And she was jesting with her lover she lost the two stones which the king had given her. When the king learned [of this], that she had lost them, he exiled her from his house. Her intimate friend came to him to intercede with the king. He said, "My lord, King, when shall you find one so praiseworthy and pleasant as she?" The king said, "By heaven. I gave her two precious stones and I sent her eight through you. She could have lost yours, or three of them, or all. But so much did she condemn me that the selfsame precious stones which I personally gave her she lost." It is as the Holy One said to Jeremiah, "For My people have committed two evils . . ." (Jeremiah 2:13) But [was it only] two evils they committed? For them He was indulgent towards twenty-two [others]?¹⁹ What

is the meaning of, "For My people have committed two evils?" [They transgressed] "I am the Lord your God," and "Thou shalt not have . . ." Therefore, "They have turned aside quickly: from the way which I commanded them."²⁰ (V)

In this aggada we again find a king, God, betrothing a matrona, Israel, with two precious stones. These precious stones represented the two commandments which, tradition teaches, God transmitted to the people directly. The people's transgression was in construction and worshipping the calf, (represented by the matrona's adulterous affair), thus the reason for the location of the midrash. As we have seen, the matrona (Israel) was not careful with those precious stones, and the king banished her. Moses is represented in the mashal by the intercessor, the confidant of both God and Israel, and the one whose responsibility it becomes to reconcile the two. Again we see the matrona (Israel) pictured as a frivolous and untrustworthy queen who earns the king's displeasure with her irresponsibility. Only Moses' intercession and the people's repentance returned them to God's favor.

There are contemporaries and students of R. Joshua b. Levi who were his traditionaries. R. Alexander was one of them. Another was R. Simeon b. Pazzi.²¹ R. Alexander was the older of the two, but both rabbis were probably R. Joshua's students in Lydda during the late third century.²² It may have been from their teacher that they learned how to use the matrona in the parable. R. Alexander kept his attachments with Tiberias while R. Simeon made his home in the south, and travelled to Babylonia where he lectured on aggadic subjects.²³ As we have seen above, R. Simeon often quoted R. Joshua b. Levi in his aggadot, but in the following aggada we have a direct statement from him. It is also found in Exodus Rabbah.

In R. Simeon's aggada we again find the metaphor of king and matrona. This parable is found in a protracted discussion of Amos 3:8, "The lion has roared, who will not fear." The Rabbis associated this verse with the giving of the first commandment, "I am the Lord thy God" (Exodus 20:1). The tradition was that, as we have seen, this commandment was given to the people directly by God during one of the few times God is supposed to have spoken to the people directly. The Rabbis thus wished to describe the event. Amos came to their minds, as it came to R. Simeon's. With the use of the word "lion" there, R. Simeon found another use of the same word, and therefore put two texts together to form a g'zerah shavah; the other verse came from Hosea:

Another explanation for "The lion has roared." As it is written, "They shall walk after the Lord who shall roar like a lion." (Hosea 11:10) R. Simeon said, 'A parable. [This can be likened to] a king who entered his palace. His matrona heard and gave a place [made room] and was trembling. If the matrona is afraid, what should the handmaidens and slaves do? Thus when the Holy One revealed himself to give the Torah to Israel, they heard his voice and died, as it is written, "My heart failed when He spoke." (Song of Songs 5:6) If Israel was thusly, how much the more so the peoples of the earth.²⁴ (VI)

The purpose of the midrash is to fill in information which seemed to be missing from the Exodus text. The g'zerah shavah shows that Israel's God could be compared to a lion. His pronouncing the first commandment was as frightening to the people as if they had heard a lion roar. What about the other people, the non-believers? If Israel should be afraid of their own God, how much the more so (using a kal va-homer--inference a minori ad maius) should other peoples of the world be afraid. For they were pictured in the aggada as slaves and servants compared to Israel's exalted position as God's consort, his matrona.

R. Alexander (he is usually called R. Alexandri) is quoted in the Pesikta d'R. Kahana as presenting a very convoluted midrash on the subject of Shemeni Atzeret. What was that day's purpose? For his answer R. Alexander compared the festival of Sukkot to the feast of a king. Again the matrona appears metaphorically, but this time she represents something new:

R. Alexandri said, '[It may be compared] to a king who celebrated a happy event, and all seven days of the feast the matrona was hinting to the people of the palace and was saying to them, "While the king is busy with his day of rejoicing, make your requests of him." When they did not understand, the matrona squeezed in one more day for them. Thus, [during] all seven days of Sukkot, the Torah hints to Israel and says to them, "Ask God for rain." How do you know this is so? [The Torah says,] "on the second day . . . and their drink offerings" ("נִסְכֵּיהֶם") (Numbers 29:17,19), "on the sixth day . . . and its drink offerings" ("נִסְכֵּיהָ") (Numbers 29:29,31) and on the seventh day . . . according to their ordinance" ("כַּמִּשְׁפָּט") (Numbers 20:32,33) This gives us "מ", "י", "מ",--and thus we have "מִיָּה." From this we know that on Sukkot the prayer "To pour forth water" [is recited] [because it comes] from the Torah. When they did not understand [this] the Torah squeezed in another day, therefore the Torah had to say, "The eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you." (Numbers 20:35)'²⁵ (VII)

By extrapolating the last letters of the three phrases, and ignoring the final "ה" of "נִסְכֵּיהֶם" in Numbers 29:31, R. Alexander was able to discover that the Torah text formed the word "water." How was this possible? He drew an analogy between the word "drink offering" and rain. Also, in all of the other days we find that "נִסְכֵּה" always appears in the singular. In these three instances, the same word appears in the plural, or else the word "כַּמִּשְׁפָּט" ("according to the ordinance") appears in the singular, as opposed to its appearance in Numbers 29:33 with the plural pronominal ending. And thus we have the reason for the setting aside of the eighth day for worship--it was set so the people

could influence God to send the rain during the autumn and winter. As for our matrona, here she represented the Torah interceding on behalf of the people (the servants and other members of the king's household in the parable), and having them get the ear of God, the king in the parable.

The amora R. Johanan was a contemporary of R. Alexander's. Also called R. Johanan bar Nappacha, he ranks as one of the most influential rabbis of the Talmudic era. He was a student of R. Judah, and as a teacher he influenced a large number of students (partly due to the fact that he lived as long as he did, from 199 to 279). He became an associate of R. Judah II. A teacher in Tiberias, and head of a school there, he became an often-quoted master of the Mishna. He was one of the main supporters of Hellenization for the Jewish community, yet was adamantly hostile to the Romans.²⁶

Among his many aggadot we have two in which the matrona appears. One of them was transmitted by R. Hiyya, the other by R. Abba b. Kahana. The mashal found in Deuteronomy Rabbah is widely quoted in the Midrash and Talmud. It deals with the Sabbath, and explains why the Rabbis were opposed to non-Jews observing it.

The discussion in this text is derived from Deuteronomy 2:31, but R. Johanan's comment is more directed towards the halakah of the sages and R. Levi, who is quoted as saying, "When the sons of Noah were given commands, they were only commanded concerning seven things, and the Sabbath was not one of them . . ."²⁷

This is R. Johanan's comment, as it appeared in context:

R. Jose b. Hanina said, 'An idol worshipper who observes the Sabbath before he permits himself to be circumcised deserves death. Why? Because they were not commanded to observe it.' But what proof do you have that you can say, 'An idol worshipper who observes the

Sabbath deserves death?' R. Hiyya b. Abba said, 'Thus did R. Johanan say, "It is customary in the world, [when] a king and matrona are sitting and conversing together, whoever comes and interrupts them ["comes between them"], does he not deserve death?" Thus this Sabbath brings Israel and the Holy One together, as it is written, "Between Me and the children of Israel" (Exodus 31:17). Therefore, thus [in the case of] the idol worshipper who comes between them before he permits himself to be circumcised, he deserves death.²⁸ (VIII)

We see from this aggada that even though R. Johanan might have had a positive response to foreign culture, it was only to the extent that those who carried that culture did not emulate the life style of the Jew. Jews might adopt some of the trappings of foreign cultures, but R. Johanan was ready to condemn any non-Jew who might attempt to adopt the trappings of Jewish culture. His statement here is very strong, as strong as the comment he makes which is found in Sanhedrin 59a, "The idol worshipper who studies Torah deserves death, for is written, 'Moses commanded us a law for an inheritance.' (Deuteronomy 33:4) It is our inheritance, not theirs."

As for the matrona, as is usually the case in the parables, she represents Israel in its relationship with God. Just like the conversation between the king and matrona, the Sabbath is a shared intimacy between the people and God.

This basic theme is carried through his other mashal in which we find the matrona. Of this one we have three variations: from Lamentations Rabbati, the Pesikta Rabbati, and Pesikta d'R. Kahana. Again we have a description, framed in a parable, of the relationship between God and Israel. This is how it appeared in its three forms:

'This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.' (Ecclesiastes 3:21) R. Abba b. Kahana in the name of R. Johanan said, 'To what can this matter be likened? To a king who betrothed a matrona and wrote

a marriage contract to her which was large, and said to her, "Thus and thus number of bridal chambers I am preparing for you, thus and thus number of purple garments am I giving you." The king left her and went to a land across the sea and remained there. All of her neighbors came in to her and vexed her and were saying to her, "The king left you and went to a land across the sea, and, moreover, he will not return to you." And she cried and sighed. But when she entered her house, she would open and take out the marriage contract and read and see in her marriage contract, "Thus and thus number of bridal chambers I am preparing for you, thus and thus number of good purple garments am I giving you." And right away would she be comforted. After awhile, the king came and said to her, "My daughter, I am surprised how you waited for me all of these years." She said to him, "My lord, King, were it not for the marriage contract which was generous which you wrote and gave me, already would my neighbors have destroyed me."²⁹ (IX)

Having presented the parable in this formulation, R. Abba then explains what R. Johanan meant when he composed it originally:

'In such [a manner] are the nations vexing Israel and saying to them, "Your God has hidden His face from you and removed His ~~Shechinah~~ [divine presence] from you, and He shall not again return to you," and they [Israel] are crying and sighing. But when they enter their synagogues and academies and read the Torah and find that is written there, "And I will have respect unto you and make you fruitful and multiply you . . . I will set My tabernacle among you and I will walk among you," (Leviticus 26:9), and they are comforted. In the future, when in the end redemption shall come, the Holy One will say to Israel, "My sons, I am surprised at you, how have you waited for Me all of these years?" And they answer, "Master of the Universe, were it not for Your Torah which You gave us, our neighbors would already have destroyed us."³⁰ (IX)

The presentation of this mashal is pretty straightforward. It points up the different purposes which the Torah was seen to fulfill by the Rabbis. Not only did it embody God's promises to the Jews, but it also served a purpose similar to the Sabbath. It bound Israel and God together. And this opinion would seem to support a theory that R. Johanan was very jealous on the subject of Torah and Sabbath. The Torah was

Israel's document alone, a personal testament from God to his only betrothed. This implied, as R. Johanan explicitly stated in Sanhedrin, that the Torah was not a universal document intended for all nations--that is, until they not only acceded to the fact of there being one God, but also became proselytes to Judaism. The hope the Torah embodies has been seen as a refuge from the realities the Jews have had to face, for it contains Israel's ultimate vindication by God.

Our variant texts are elaborations on Lamentations Rabbati. Though different in context and details, they yet remain faithful to R. Johanan's original intention in formulating the aggada. For example, the aggada is presented in Pesikta Rabbati in the discussion of "I am the Lord thy God." (Exodus 20:1) Here it details the marriage contract: the king gives the matrona treasuries, boats on the sea and forests.³¹ It also details how Israel's neighbors vexed her: ". . . (they were saying to her), 'Old woman, your husband left before you grew up while you were not yet full strength.'"³² (X) Leaving the metaphor, the text then goes on to describe what the nations have been saying to Israel:

'How long will you die for your God, and be killed for Him, and give up your lives on His account? How many retributions He brings upon you; how much He shames you; how many kingdoms He has brought against you . . .'³³ (XI)

Then the text adds a section not found in Lamentations Rabbati. The other nations coax Israel to forsake God and come over to their side. They offer all kinds of inducements: 'Return to us, and we will make you dukes and prefects and military governors.'³⁴ (XII)

The conclusion of the text is very close to that of Lamentations Rabbati. But in the meantime, we have a text which is much more interesting. For one thing, we have different ranks and titles. "דוכסות,"

might better be rendered "commanders"; it is Latin, "dux."³⁵ As for the word "איפרכא," according to Jastrow it is Greek, and means "prefect of a province or town; governor, lieutenant."³⁶ And the title "איפטרטילתיך" must, according to the same authority, also come from the Greek word for "commander in chief or military governor."³⁷ It is not unusual that these titles would be used, seeing how Israel had become the "host" of the two cultures from whose languages the titles came. And, of course, if other nations were to lure Israel away from her God, those nations would probably be led by Rome; so it is totally understandable that the rabbi would have them address the Jews in the international languages of the time, Latin and Greek. And since Israel was a Roman province, such titles must commonly have been used in any case.

In the Pesikta d'R. Kahana, the parable is given in the context of Isaiah 51:12, "I am He, I am He, your comforter." It is very close to the Pesikta text. The king gives his matrona "תכשיטיך," "jewelry," and "חיסבראית," "treasuries."³⁸ When her companions vex the matrona, they say: "For how long will you sit? Your husband is too old for you while you are yet young, while you are not yet at full strength."³⁹ (XIII)

When we come to the situation of Israel among the other nations, we find this text parallel to Pesikta Rabbati. Israel is asked by them why she has put up with so much suffering, some of which is at the hands of God (which is a surprising statement in the mouth of non-believers).⁴⁰ The conclusion of the aggada, when Israel is redeemed, is related this way:

[Israel says,] "Master of the Universe, were it not for the Sefer Torah which You wrote for us, the nations of the world would already have caused us to perish [before You]. As it is written, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope," (Ecclesiastes 3:21),

and thus did David say, "Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction." (Psalms 119:92)'41 (XIV)

With this conclusion we have arrived at the place where the Pesikta Rabbati began. The Torah is Israel's eternal source of hope, its marriage contract with God.

Chronologically we are at the point which Strack calls "the third generation of amoraim."42 Among these rabbis were some of the foremost aggadists of the entire Amoraic period. We will be discussing several of them, notably R. Samuel b. Nahman, R. Isaac Nappaha, R. Levi and R. Samuel b. R. Isaac, all of whom used the figure of the matrona in their m'shalim.

R. Isaac Nappaha was a pupil of R. Johanan who transmitted that rabbi's teachings and statements. He was active in Caesaria and later in Babylonia. He was a noted aggadist as well as halakist. He was often quoted on the subject of Israel and Rome. He "paraphrased Ecclesiastes, 'A kingdom cometh, a kingdom passeth away, but Israel abideth for ever,' (Ecclesiastes Rabbati I:9 on verse 1:4)" on the subject of the eternity of both Rome and Israel.43 Yet he was thankful for the protection of Rome from Teuton mercenaries.44

The particular midrash we shall be discussing does not relate to Rome so much as it does to Israel's experience with another people, and what that experience demonstrated about the relationship between God and Israel. The midrash appears in Exodus Rabbah on the subject of Israel in Egypt:

Another explanation [of] 'And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt.' (Exodus 12:1) What was the Holy One doing for Israel in Egypt? R. Isaac Nappaha said, 'A parable. [It can be compared] to a matrona who angered the king. He put her into

prison, and he went away. [Then] he was with her in prison. They asked him, "What does it matter to you?" He said, "As long as I am with her she will not acquire an evil reputation." Thus, Israel was in servitude in Egypt, and God was exiled with them, as it is written, "I shall go down to Egypt with you." (Genesis 46:4)⁴⁵ (XV)

The rabbi tried to make an analogy between the situation of the king who joined his matrona in prison to protect her reputation, and God, who came to Egypt to be with His people in captivity. Yet there is a point where the analogy fails, for we do not find in Genesis that God placed his people in servitude. Rather the Torah ascribes the blame to the Egyptians. But this was not the crucial matter as far as the rabbi was concerned. Rather, he wanted to know why God was willing to exile Himself to a land filled with idol worshippers and their gods.⁴⁶ R. Isaac's answer demonstrated the intimacy between Israel and God. God exiled Himself both to protect His people and to prevent them from "breaking forth in scandalous conduct while in Egypt."⁴⁷ This is the strong part of the analogy, for like the king, God put Himself into a prison for the sake of His beloved, the people of Israel (represented by the matrona).

Like his contemporary, R. Johanan bar Nappaha, R. Samuel b. Nahman was active in Tiberias. Born at the beginning of the third century, R. Samuel lived until the beginning of the fourth. He studied with R. Jonathan b. Eleazer, one of the foremost aggadists of his time. He was a native of Palestine, but made at least two trips to Babylonia--once in his youth, and once in some official capacity to the Jewish community there to help determine the calendar. In the year 286 he accompanied R. Judah II to Tiberias at Emperor Diocletian's order, and later he joined the emperor at Paneas. As an aggadist, R. Samuel was

very highly respected, and "he was asked questions by many of the great scholars including Judah II."⁴⁸

R. Samuel b. Nahman's ability as an aggadist can be seen in the following mashal:

'Thou art a God of seeing: for she said, Have I ever here seen Him that seeth me?' (Genesis 16:13) [Hagar] said, 'It was not enough that I was granted speech, but also with royalty, as it is written, "Who am I, O Lord, God, and what is my house that Thou hast brought me thus far?" (II. Samuel 7:19)⁴⁹ 'Have I even seen Him that seeth me?' 'Not only was I favored to see the angel with my mistress, even my mistress who was with me did not see [him].'

Another explanation: 'Not only was I worthy [to see him] with my mistress, but also when I was alone,' R. Samuel b. Nahman said, 'A parable. [This can be likened] to a matrona to whom the king said, "Pass before me." She passed before him, and she was leaning on her maidservant and was hiding her face, and she did not see the king, but her handmaiden saw.'⁵⁰ (XVI)

In his analysis of the text from Genesis, R. Samuel brought together two chapters, Genesis 16 and 18, which describe the appearance of an angel to Hagar and the visit of the three angels to Abraham. During their appearance before Abraham, described in Genesis 18, Sarah remained hidden. It may be that R. Samuel presumed she did this because of modesty, and thus was not able to see the angels. It may also be because she was afraid, as we find was suggested by a commentator:

'Pass before me.' She should pass before him for inspecting. It was customary for the queen to lean on the maidservant while walking, and the queen would be afraid of the king, for perhaps he would find that she needed being improved upon. So she did not see the king. But the maidservant was not afraid, so she looked at the king. Here the fear was principally Sarah's [for she had forced Hagar out of her home against God's--and Abraham's--will], therefore she did not see [the angel].⁵¹ (XVI)

According to the commentator, Sarah was afraid that if she appeared before the angels (God's representatives), she would be found flawed

because of her previous conduct toward Hagar. This transgression might disqualify her from having a son. If this was also R. Samuel's meaning, the midrash would be that much more understandable. Hagar was unafraid for she, like the handmaiden, had no reason to fear. Sarah had reason to fear, and therefore she hid herself from God's sight, just as the matrona hid herself from the king.

The most prolific author of m'shalim in which we find the matrona was a contemporary of R. Samuel b. Nahman's, and a student of R. Johanan. This was R. Levi. R. Levi was in the main an aggadist, though he is frequently cited as the transmitter of the halakic statements of his predecessors. A close associate of R. Abba b. Kahana, he became a traditionary of R. Hama, who was probably one of his teachers. At R. Johanan's direction, he took an independent lectureship for twenty-two years.⁵²

"Levi's name but rarely appears in halakic literature, and then mostly in connection with some Scriptural phrase supporting the dicta of others. In the Haggada, on the contrary, he is one of the most frequently cited."⁵³ So well was he received that many rabbis who were hostile to aggadists would send their students to hear him lecture. "To render Scriptural terms more intelligible Levi frequently used parallels from cognate dialects . . .; and to elucidate his subject he would cite popular proverbs and compose fables and parables."⁵⁴ This is borne out by the m'shalim which will be discussed here.

The first midrash which we shall discuss has striking similarities to that of R. Samuel. It too discusses a matrona who was commanded to pass before the king. It appears in a discussion of Genesis 17:1, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram and said unto him: I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be

thou whole [תמים]."

R. Levi said, 'This can be compared to a matrona to whom the king said, "Pass before me." She passed before him and her face was pale. She said, "Shall you say that a defect is found in me?" The king said to her, "You have no defect except for the nail of your little finger which is a little bit too long; remove it and the defect will be gone." Thus said the Holy One to Abraham our father, "You have no defect other than this foreskin; remove it and the defect will be gone."⁵⁵ (XVII)

While in R. Samuel's parable the matrona represented Sarah, here the matrona represents Abraham. The same kind of fear is present in both parables. Each matrona was afraid that the king will in some way find her unworthy, and that he might punish her as a result. Sarah, according to one view, was afraid of being judged harshly. In R. Levi's parable, Abraham was afraid that some physical defect would disqualify him from God's consideration. After all, God commanded not only that Abraham pass before Him, but also that he be found "tamim"--which the aggadist interpreted to mean "without a flaw." And, as opposed to the Hellenistic and Roman attitudes of the time which disapproved of circumcision, it was the intention of this parable to teach that God recognized only circumcised men as being physically flawless. One of the intentions of this aggada then might have been to attack those Hellenizing Jews who were reluctant to remain circumcised and to have their sons circumcised.⁵⁶ If this was the rabbi's intention, he made a very strong case for a very important issue.

We find two more m'shalim of this nature in Leviticus Rabbah. Both refer to Leviticus 22:27, "When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat, is brought forth, then it shall be seven days under the dam; but from the eighth day and thenceforth it may be accepted for an offering made by fire unto the Lord." In one aggada R. Levi attempted to give a reason

why the animals were mentioned in this particular order. In the other, there is an explanation of why there should be a seven day delay.

Why was the bullock mentioned first in this passage? This is the interpretation R. Levi provided:

R. Levi said, 'A parable. [This can be likened] to a matrona who was given a bad name in connection with one of the important men of the kingdom. The king made inquiry into the matters and did not find any substance in them. What did the king do? He made a great feast and sat that same man at the head of the guests. Why all of this? To make known that the king had inquired into the matters and did not find any substance in them. Thus, because the nations of the world were vexing Israel and saying to them, "You made the calf," the Holy One inquired into the matters and did not find any substance in them, therefore the bullock was made the first of all the offerings, as it is written, ". . . a bullock, a sheep, or a goat . . ."⁵⁷ (XVIII)

This particular midrash is incomplete as it stands, for all signs point to the fact that the people did transgress by fashioning the calf. What then did God discover when He made His inquiry? This is answered by R. Huna and R. Aibu in R. Samuel b. Nahman's name:

Israel was saved from that deed, for if Israel had made the calf, they should have said, "This is our god." Rather the proselytes that came with them from Egypt made it, and they taunted Israel by saying, 'This is your god, Israel.' (Exodus 32:8)⁵⁸

Thus it can be seen that the aggada not only explained the text to make the scripture more understandable, but it also provided apologetics. Scripture, as we have seen, was not the exclusive property of the Jews. Their rivals, including nascent Christianity, were quick to pick out those passages from Scriptures which they could use to discredit the Jews. This particular section was one of those, so the aggadists took upon themselves the task of nullifying the negative aspects of the passage. The true Hebrews, they recounted, were not responsible for the

calf; rather it was the proselytes who jeered at the Hebrews after building the idol.

As for the other mashal on the same verse from Exodus, it can be found in two places: Leviticus Rabbah and the Pesikta d'R. Kahana. The question was, why must there be a seven day period before an animal could be offered as a sacrifice? And again, R. Levi provided a suitable parable:

R. Joshua of Eiknin said in the name of R. Levi, 'A parable. [This can be likened] to a king who entered a province and made a decree and said, "All of the inhabitants who are here cannot see my face until they see the face of the matrona before." Thus said the Holy One, "You may not bring a burnt offering before Me until a Sabbath has passed over it." For there is not a seven day period that does not have a Sabbath, and there is no circumcision without a Sabbath, as it is written, ". . . but from the eighth day and thenceforth it may be accepted."⁵⁹ (XIX)

This particular parable is not complete according to Buber. It is only complete when joined with the sentence which appears before it in Leviticus Rabbah. There it said that the period of waiting was to make sure the animal was free of blemishes.⁶⁰ But this is not clear either. Thus Ez Joseph suggested that it was only after seven days that a young calf could stand upon his own legs--if his mother had not trodden him underfoot.⁶¹ Only after that period could they be sure that the young animal could stand.

The Rabbis were not faced with an important theological question by this passage. There was no real need to explain it. Yet they wanted to understand the point of view of the text and the reasoning behind such minor commandments. The reason as R. Levi saw it was that it was important that a Sabbath pass over the animal, just as it is customary that the circumcision ceremony take place after a Sabbath has come and gone.

It is also interesting to note that in his parable, the matrona came to symbolize the Sabbath. This appears in other places, and would be in line with the adage that the Sabbath is the "queen of days."

In Song of Songs Rabbah we again find R. Levi quoted comparing Israel to a matrona and God to a king who has betrothed her. "In a simple and beautiful way he describes their relationship, using passages from Song of Songs. The parable is introduced by a quotation from R. Kahana which describes God and Israel praising one another. R. Levi's parable appears in this form:

[It can be compared] to a king who betrothed a matrona and said, 'I wish to see her.' When he saw her he began to praise her and do her honor, as it is written, 'This thy stature is like to a palm tree.' (Song of Songs 8:8) She also said, 'I wish to see him.' When she saw him, she began to praise him with praise: 'His mouth is most sweet, yet, he is altogether lovely.' (Song of Songs 5:16)⁶² (XX)

Also in Lamentations Rabbati we find parables attributed to R. Levi. Both illustrate very difficult texts relating to the crimes committed by Israel, and the punishment God meted out to the people. In these we have come a long way from the previously discussed parable on Song of Songs--which would seem to illustrate just how well the parable could be used for any text.

The first parable to be discussed arises out of an anonymous explanation of Ecclesiastes 1:9, "Her filthiness was in her skirts." This discusses how Topeth was used as a place to sacrifice children, and how one man sacrificed a child whom he took from school. The midrash quoted God as saying, "Evil man, of all of the sons you have there is none you are willing to sacrifice for idol-worship except this child who is consecrated to My name." (XXI) At this point, the text introduces the

following parable:

R. Judah b. R. Simeon¹ [said] in the name of R. Levi, '[This can be compared] to a matrona whose lover said to her, "Make me hot food." She took the picture of a king and made him hot food. The king said to her, "Of all the wood available to you in this house, you had nothing with which to make a hot dish for your lover besides my portrait?" So did the Holy One say to the selfsame evil person, "Of all the sons you have there is not one to sacrifice for idol worship of other than this one, who is sanctified to My name?"' 63 (XXI)

There are several important ideas to be found in this text. One of those ideas is that there was no question that Jews, if called upon to do so by one of the "wicked priests" of Zedekiah's day, were willing to sacrifice their children. Yet they would sacrifice only the child they would be most willing to give up, the one who was the least productive. Of course, for the rabbi, a child who studied Torah was really the most important of all of the sons; and in his quotation of God, R. Levi suggests that God might have accepted any one of the other sons in the place of the school child who was ultimately given up. So important was the school child, according to the parable, that he could be compared to the image of the king. Thus it would seem that according to R. Levi if man was created in God's image, a man, or a child, who devoted his life to study of Torah was even more so.

The role of the matrona presented here is much different than the roles she plays in other parables. She is here the adulterous wife of the king, who demonstrates her lack of respect for her husband by using his picture to cook food for her lover. This is a good parallel to the man who would demonstrate his contempt of God by sacrificing his own son.

Also to be found in Lamentations Rabbati is R. Levi's discussion

of Lamentations 3:1, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." Here he is quoted by R. Joshua of Siknin again. His parable deals with a common Talmudic tradition, that Israel was not the first nation asked to receive the Torah--even though Israel was God's ultimate choice:

R. Joshua of Siknin said in the name of R. Levi, "I am the man, I am he who has seen affliction [who is learned in suffering]." What pleases You pleases me. A parable. [This can be compared] to a king who was angry at a matrona and thrust her out of the palace. She went and hid her face behind the pillar. The king happened to pass by and he saw her. He said to her, "Restrain your anger." She said to him, "My lord, King, such is fine for me, and such is pleasant for me, and such is fit for me that you have not received another woman besides me." He said to her, "I am he who disqualified all the women for your sake." She said to him, "If this is so, why did you enter such and such alleyway and such and such courtyard, and such and such place. Was it not for such and such a lady, and did she not receive you?" Thus did the Holy One say to Israel, "Restrain your anger." They said to Him, "Master of the world, such is fine for us and such is pleasant for us and such is worthy for us that You did not receive another nation for Your Torah other than me." He said to them, "I am He who disqualified all of the other nations for your sake." They said to Him, "If so, why did You take Your Torah around to the nations, and they did not receive it, as it is taught,⁶⁴ in the beginning it was revealed to B'nai Essau [Edom] as it is written, 'And He said: The Lord came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them' (Deuteronomy 33:2), but they rejected it. He transmitted it to B'nai Ishmael [the Arabs] but they did not receive it, as it is written, 'He shined forth from Mount Paran' (Deuteronomy 33:2). Finally He transmitted it to Israel, and they accepted it, as it is written, 'And He came forth from the myriads holy, at His right hand was a fiery law unto them, as it is written, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we shall hear."⁶⁵ (XXII)

This is a rather involved use of the parable, yet here again we have a king who was angry at his matrona, just as we see in the Scriptures that God was angry with Israel. There is one quotation here which is open to some question, "What pleases You pleases me," "אנא על מה דאנהי" 77." This is how it is explained:

. . . The rendering adopted is that of Matnah Kehunah, meaning, I recognise that when it pleases God to make me suffer, it is for my own benefit. The illustration which follows, however, seems to be entirely irrelevant on this interpretation. Yefe 'Anaf and Ez Joseph explain thus: What gave pleasure to Thee (viz my acceptance of the Torah) has indeed been of benefit to me! (Spoken in a mood of bitter sarcasm.) For had I not accepted the Torah I would not have been called to account for my sins any more than the heathens have been called to account. But because I pleased Thee by accepting it when no other nation would do so, I am now so grievously punished.⁶⁶

This idea that God offered the Torah to all of the other nations is very popular in rabbinic literature. In Avodah Zarah 2b we find God calling all of the nations before Him and asking them if they will receive the Torah. Each nation finds a reason why it cannot uphold the laws written in the Torah. Part of this section is to be found in R. Levi's midrash. Many rabbis, including R. Levi, thought since God offered the Torah to the other nations, it would then be fitting to have Israel ask God why He had done this. This is similar to the case of the matrona who suspected her king of looking for another woman, and who thought she had caught him in the act. It then becomes necessary for the king (God) to justify himself, saying that it was done for the sake of his beloved; it gives him a chance to prove that there was none as worthy as she. This assurance was important for the Rabbis, especially in the light of R. Levi's first statement in the midrash. Since the Torah brought mixed blessings for the Jews, they had to be reassured that it was special and that they were special by having it. This would indicate a great amount of ambivalence about the possession of the Torah, and some question among the Rabbis, who lived in difficult times, about the value of being the possessors of this great document. Yet, because the Torah was the greatest of all documents, there could be no question about it being

a great gift, and thus we have the conclusion which R. Levi made in his aggada.

R. Samuel b. R. Isaac, who was a pupil of R. Hiyya II bar Abba, spent some time in Babylonia, where he studied with Rab Huna.⁶⁷ He is quoted in both Talmuds, and was known both as a halakist and aggadist. Among his aggadot is this one found in Genesis Rabbah:

'In the beginning God created' R. Huna and R. Jeremiah in the name of R. Samuel b. R. Isaac said, 'The intention to create Israel preceeded everything else. A parable. [This can be compared] to a king who was married to a matrona yet had no son by her. One time the king happened to pass through the market place. He said, "Take these inks and pen for my son." And they all were saying, "He has no son, yet he says, "Take these inks and pen for my son."'" They returned and said, "The king is a great astrologer. Were it not that he foresaw that he would raise up a son from her, he would not have said, 'Take these inks and pen for my son.'" So, were it not that the Holy One foresaw that after twenty-six generations Israel would receive the Torah, He would not have written in the Torah, "Command the children of Israel" (Numbers 28:2) [and] "Speak unto the children of Israel."⁶⁸ (XXIII)

Along with the idea that the Torah was offered to all of the nations of the world, we also find in R. Levi's mashal the idea expressed that it was intended for Israel all of the time. This midrash is very much connected to the same theme. Just like the king who could read in the stars the birth of his son, God knew well beforehand that Israel would receive the Torah. This would happen after twenty-six generations (the length of time between Adam and Moses).⁶⁹ Also understood here is that the Torah was preexistent to the world, as we find in the section preceeding Samuel's mashal:

"Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were created, while the creation of others was contemplated. The Torah and the Throne of Glory were created. The Torah, for it is written, 'The Lord made me as the beginning of His way, prior to His works of old.'" (Proverbs 8:22)⁷⁰

In Genesis Rabbah we even find that the Torah came a thousand years before the world.⁷¹ Thus, just as the king made provisions for his son, God made provisions for Israel in the Torah, as we see in many commands which were directed solely to Israel, of which R. Samuel b. Isaac gave but two examples. And thus we have the evidence which would fully support the contentions of R. Levi that the Torah was meant for Israel alone, and an argument against the nations (especially the Christians) who would claim that the Torah was meant for them. The only way the gentiles could make claim on the Torah would be to become proselytes.

In the "fourth generation" of amoraim (the fourth century C.E.), the men we will be discussing are R. Judah b. Simeon (Simon), R. Aha of Lydda, and R. Abin (Rabin), three of the most important teachers of their generation.

R. Judah b. Simeon (Simon) was the son of R. Simeon b. Pazzi of Lydda. He was known as an aggadist, transmitting aggadic aphorisms in the name of his father, R. Joshua b. Levi, and R. Johanan, and R. Simeon b. Lakish. Though not a halakist, he transmitted some of their halakic statements as well. In this aggadot, R. Judah made much use of parables, as this aggada will demonstrate.⁷² It comes from Song of Songs Rabbah, and it carries with it a criticism of the Jews:

'Turn away thine eyes' (Song of Songs 6:5)
 R. Azariah said in the name of R. Judah b. Simon, [This can be likened] to a king who was angry with a matrona, and who forced her from the palace. [When she was] out⁴ side, what did she do? She went and pressed her face behind a pillar outside of the palace. When the king passed by he said, "Remove her from my sight, for I am not able to bear [it]," Thus, when the bet din proclaims a fast, and only a few fast, the Holy One says, "I am not able to bear [it], 'for they have overcome Me.' (Song of Songs 6:5) They have forced Me to stretch out My hand against My world." When the bet din proclaims a fast, and the children fast, the Holy One says, "I cannot bear

[it], 'for they have overcome Me.' They made Me king over themselves.'" (Exodus 15:18) And when the bet din proclaims a fast and only the old men fast, the Holy One says, "I cannot bear [it], 'for they have overcome Me.'" They received My kingship upon themselves at Sinai, and they said, 'All that the Lord has said we shall do and we shall hear,' (Exodus 24:7); and it is written, 'I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as among them that know Me.'" (Psalms 87:4)'73 (XXIV)

R. Judah's complaint in this aggada is obvious. In his days, the rabbinical court (bet din) was not powerful. It theoretically had authority over both the daily and ritualistic life of the Jews in Palestine. For example, we know that the bet din had the authority to intercalate the year.⁷⁴ A bet din was the gathering of three or more learned men acting as a Jewish court of law. Among their ritual powers was the power to declare fasts. But they did not have the authority to compel the Jews of their area to carry the fast out, indicating that rabbinic control over the religious lives of the people was in a period of eclipse at the time R. Judah formulated his aggada, and their authority was ignored by the mass of people. As a rabbi, R. Judah was very unhappy about the lack of respect the people gave to ritual decrees of the bet din. So in his midrash, the incident between the king and matrona is incidental to the second part of the statement, in which R. Judah has God complaining that the people are ignoring Him because they are ignoring His appointed authorities on earth, the Rabbis who constitute the bet din. God would like to punish His people as the king punished his matrona, by exile. The people have gone against their promise to God that by making Him king over them, that He would command and they would obey (and this obeying related equally to the oral law and those who interpreted it.) As for the meaning of Psalm 87:4, it is suggested by Ez Joseph that this has reference back to God's complaint

that His people forced Him to raise His arm against the world, by punishing Egypt ("Rahab") and Babylon on Israel's account.

The aggada also reinforces the fact that in the past God acted on behalf of the Jews, yet now they ignored the directions of the interpreters of God's law, the Rabbis of the bet din. Those who should not be fasting were the only ones to carry out the dictates of the court. Those who should be fasting, the healthy people, were the ones who ignored those dictates. This was a serious matter for the Rabbi, for it indicated a break-down in the peoples' respect for the authority of his colleagues and himself.

R. Judah b. Simon is also responsible for two more aggadot in which we find a matrona mentioned. They are variations on the same theme, which receives elaboration in the text we find in Numbers Rabbah. The shorter text is found in Song of Songs Rabbah.

In Song of Songs Rabbah the discussion centers on Song of Songs 5:1, "I am come into my garden." There is a discussion by R. Manahem about how once God dwelled on the earth, but with each sin committed by mankind, He removed himself farther and farther from the earth, until with the coming of Abraham, God was to be found in the seventh firmament.⁷⁵ Abraham brought Him down to the sixth firmament, and when Moses came on the scene, God's shechinah (His divine presence) came back to rest on the earth, to remain as long as there were righteous people on the earth.

In line with this discussion, we find this statement by R. Judah as it supplies evidence for R. Isaac:

R. Isaac said, 'It is written, "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever." (Psalms 37:29). . . . When did the shechinah rest upon the earth? On the day when the Tabernacle was established, as it is written, "And it came to pass on the

day that Moses had made an end of setting up the Tabernacle, etc." (Number 7:1)'

R. Azariah said in the name of R. Judah b. Simon, 'A parable. [This can be compared] to a king who was angry with a matrona and forced her out of his palace. Afterwards, he sought to be reconciled with her. She sent to him and said, 'Let the king make something new for me and he can come to me.' Thus, in the past, the Holy One used to receive burnt offerings above, as it is written, 'And God smelled the sweet savor, etc.' (Genesis 8:21) Now He receives below, as it is written, 'I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.' (Song of Songs 5:1) This is the incense of spices and the handful of frankincense. 'I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey.' (Song of Songs 5:1) These are the parts of the burnt offering and the lambs, the most holy things.⁷⁶ (XXV)

The variation of this aggada is to be found in Numbers Rabbah 13:2. It appears in a section devoted to discussions of the offerings. The opening verse comes from 7:12, "And he that presented his offering the first day was" Numbers Rabbah fills in more detail than we find in Song of Songs Rabbah. For example, it explains that it was Adam who forced God to expell him, and, in a sense, who alienated God from mankind. This was touched upon in the previous text. It is spelled out much clearer here, though, why God wanted a reconciliation:

R. Azariah said in the name of R. Judah b. R. Simon, 'A parable. [This can be compared] to a king who was angry with a matrona and drove her out of his palace. After a time he sought to bring her back. She said, "Let him make something new for me and afterwards he can bring me back." Thus, in the past, Adam lived in the Garden of Eden in the camp of the shechinah. The Holy One was angry with him and exiled him from His camp. When Israel went out of Egypt, the Holy One sought to return Israel to His camp. He told them to make Him a tabernacle and He would dwell in their midst, as it is written, "Make Me a tabernacle" Israel said to Him, "Let the Holy One make something new, for He seeks to cause us to return to Him" What was the new thing? In the past the Holy One received burnt offerings above, "And God smelled the sweet savor, etc." (Genesis 8:21) And now, He is receiving burnt offerings below, as it is written, "Let my beloved come to his garden"-- this is the shechinah. "And eat his precious fruits"

(Song of Songs 4:16)--these are the burnt offerings.⁷⁷
(XXVI)

Just as R. Judah b. Simon used the parable to castigate the people, there is a theme of castigation in the aggada of R. Aha. Only this time, it is not necessarily for what the people were doing (or not doing) in his day, but for what they had done in the past. Yet, as in many of the aggadot, there seems to be an underlying reason for the Rabbi's statement; possibly he saw that what was happening in his own day was similar to what happened in the distant past of the people. Thus, as we see in the parable of the matrona who lost the ten pearls, it would not be farfetched to say that R. Aha saw the matrona again losing the pearls. This will become clearer as we look at the next mashal. (Of interest about R. Aha himself, in the context of R. Judah's statement, is that he, R. Huna II and R. Judah b. Pazi constituted a bet din in the middle of the fourth century in Tiberias, and that he was noted both as an eminent halakist as well as aggadist.)⁷⁸ This particular aggada is found in Exodus Rabbah:

'[And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said . . . : Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel . . .]' (Exodus 32:11, 13)] R. Abin said in the name of R. Aha, 'A parable. [It can be compared] to a king whose friend entrusted ten pearls. His friend died, and he left a single daughter. The king arose and took her as his wife, and made her a matrona, and gave her a necklace of ten pearls and she put them on her neck. After awhile, she lost the necklace. The king began to seek to exile her. He said, "I shall drive her from my house, and put her away from me." Her close friend entered before the king and he was appeasing him, but the king would not listen to him; rather he said, "I shall banish her." He [the friend] said, "Why, my lord King?" Said he, "I gave her ten pearls, and she lost them." He said, "By the life of my lord the King, nevertheless you need to be placated and reconciled to her." The king did not listen to him. When the friend saw what he intended to do with her, and that he was not appeased, rather angrier, saying, "I shall banish her myself," he [the friend] said,

"For the sake of ten pearls which she lost, you intend to drive her out? Do you not know what I know, that her father entrusted ten pearls with you? Let the ten be in exchange for the ten." Thus, when Israel performed that same deed [that is--constructing the calf], God was angry with them; He began to say, "Leave off from Me that I might destroy them." (Deuteronomy 9:14) Moses [then] said, "Master of the world, why are You angry with Israel?" [God] said, "Because they nullified the Decalogue." [Moses] said to Him, "They have a source from which to repay." He said to him, "Whence?" [Moses] said, "Remember. You tried Abraham with ten trials, so let the ten be in exchange for the ten." Therefore/[we have the statement], "Remember Abraham."⁷⁹ (XXVII)

We see here several themes which have appeared in earlier parables in which the matrona can be found. For one, there is the issue of the missing jewels. We can see that a like theme appeared in the aggada of R. Joshua b. Levi. God, in that aggada, gave the people two precious gifts, the two commandments which He spoke directly to the people. The rabbi compared this to the king who gave his matrona two precious stones; she lost them while jesting with her lover. The rabbi compared that to the incident of the calf.⁸⁰ In R. Simeon b. Halafta's aggada we have another case of the matrona losing precious stones. In that case they represented the gifts Israel received through Abraham, those being "righteousness" and "justice."⁸¹ In both those cases, as in the case presented by R. Aha, the king sought to exile his matrona (representing God's desire to exile Israel). In R. Joshua's parable, the king actually did exile her. In R. Aha's, he contemplated it, only to be prevented by the intercessor, the mutual friend of both the king and the matrona. In every case the intercessor represented Moses, who sought to lessen God's wrath towards the people by convincing Him that there was no other people who could be compared to them. In R. Aha's aggada the intercessor admitted to the king that the matrona had indeed broken his trust; but, on

the other hand, her guilt was offset by some collateral (namely, the ten pearls entrusted to the king by her father, i.e. the ten trials which Abraham withstood on his own and on the people's behalf.)

The three parables all point up one major fact. The people often did transgress the command or will of God. They often did break His trust. But they could be vindicated, and this kept their relation with God alive.

In this context we could also mention R. Levi's mashal on the order in which the animals were listed as possible sacrifices.⁸² R. Levi's aggada did not go as far as R. Aha's in admitting that the people were at fault. According to R. Levi, the people were not guilty, and God knew it. Accepting the argument of R. Samuel b. Nahman, R. Levi seems convinced that it was the proselytes who had done the deed, not the native-born Jews.

The fact that there is so much rabbinic literature on the subject of the calf shows that the Rabbis could be very defensive on the subject of the past sins of the Jews. And they probably had good reason. Incipient Christianity, looking for a scriptural vindication of their claim to being the "new Israel," surely used the episode of the calf to demonstrate how "perfidious" the Jews had been and continued to be, and how much they rebelled against God. The aggada, then, probably served as a means of rabbinic apologetics against the attacks of the Christians and other gentiles who were bent on ~~opousing~~ using the Hebrew Scriptures against the Jews.

As far as the other aspect of R. Aha's, and the others', concern with the Jews' squandering the gifts they had received from God, we need only look at R. Judah b. Simon's condemnation of the people for

ignoring the dictates of the bet din. In the past, the people incurred God's wrath by disregarding the gifts He had placed before them, or by throwing those gifts away. In their own world the Rabbis saw the same thing happening. Many people with whom they came in contact daily may have been Jews in name, but when it came to practicing their Judaism, they fell short. The Rabbis saw these people as dangerous, for they threatened the continuation of Judaism and the Jewish people. This is reminiscent of R. Simeon b. Yohai's aggada about the three men who were sailing in a boat; one of them started to bore a hole beneath his seat. When questioned about this by his companions, the man defended himself, saying, "What business is it of yours? Am I not boring under myself?"⁸³ Just as Israel once squandered its gifts and responsibilities with the fashioning of the calf, the Jews of the Rabbis' time were seen as squandering their gifts from God, and their responsibilities to God, by their disregard for the practices of Judaism. So, while R. Aha's midrash seems directed solely to the past of his people, his message was probably directed to the people of his own time as well.

R. Abin was a younger contemporary of R. Aha and a traditionary of that rabbi. He spanned the fourth and fifth generations of the amoraic period, and like R. Aha was a native Palestinian. He studied under R. Jeremiah in Tiberias, and later went to Babylon, as so many of his colleagues did. During his life R. Abin frequently made the journey between the two countries, and was able to blend in himself their two rabbinic traditions in halakah and aggada. In these journeys he carried with him halakic decisions arrived at in the academies, and earned a high reputation among such leaders as R. Abaye and Raba, who learned that they could rely upon him for the traditions of the Palestinian schools.

"[W]hen, in the reign of Constans, persecutions of the Jews occurred in Palestine, R. Abin, with a considerable number of scholars, deserted his native land and settled in Babylon In old age, however, he returned to Palestine, where he died, and where R. Mana ordered general mourning for his death."⁸⁴ Constans' persecutions took place around 339, and we find that R. Samuel b. Judah exiled himself from Palestine about the same time.⁸⁵ Thus we can fix R. Abin's dates.

R. Abin was responsible for four aggadot in which he used the matrona in a parable in order to clarify the lessons to be found in Scripture. Two of those m'shalim involve a purple cloak, the garment of royalty. The parable we find in Numbers Rabbah not only speaks of king, matrona and purple cloak, but it also presents an interesting insight into the mentality of the fair sex:

'And it came to pass [on the day that Moses had made an end to establishing the tent of meeting]' (Numbers 7:1) There was woe.⁸⁶ Who said, 'Woe?' R. Abin said, 'If it could be said, the Holy One said, "Woe." To what can this be compared? To a king who had a discontented matrona. The king said to her, "Make me a purple cloak" All the time that she was busy with that purple cloak, she did not complain. After a while she finished the purple cloak and gave it to the fuller who made/[finished] it, and she brought it to the king. When he saw her, he began to cry, "Woe. Oh that she not return to her discontent." Thus, you find that Israel were complaining all of the time, as it is written, "And the people murmured against Moses." (Exodus 15:24) And also, "The whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured, etc." (Exodus 16:2) And also, "[The children of Israel murmured, saying,] 'You have killed the people of the Lord.'" (Numbers 17:6) The Holy One requested that they make Him a sanctuary, as it is written, "And make Me a sanctuary, etc." (Exodus 25:8) You find that all of the time that they were occupied with the work on the tabernacle they did not complain, but when they finished the work of the tabernacle, the Holy One began to cry, "Woe. Oh that they not return and complain just as they were complaining [in the past.]'"⁸⁷ (XXVIII)

Just as the unfortunate king just put up with a nagging and com-

plaining woman, whom he otherwise loves, God has to put up with a whole nation of complainers. How to divert them? God's solution was the solution of the king; give the beloved something to keep her busy so that she will not have the time or the energy to complain.

In composing this particular aggada, R. Abin might also have had the intention of answering another question. Given the fact that the people were wandering in the desert, and were without a large number of costly or finely worked objects with which to build the tabernacle, why were God's commands about what should go into the construction so exacting? The answer is provided by this midrash. God was not overly concerned with the objects that went into it; He really did not need them. What He wanted was the work to take so long and to take so much of the people's energy that He would have a period of peace and quiet from their incessant demands upon Moses and upon Himself. No matter how great and omnipotent God might be, His patience had a breaking point. Thus, it would only be normal that once the work was complete, God would exclaim, "Woe," because He was faced with the possibility that He would again be troubled as the people returned to their normal routine. The analogy to the complaining matrona seems very appropriate to describe how the people behaved in the wilderness. R. Abin would allude to their conduct in another of his aggadot.

But first, we should discuss the other appearance of the purple cloak in one of R. Abin's midrashim. This particular midrash appears in Deuteronomy Rabbah, and again we find that the matrona is a metaphor for Moses:

'Behold [17] your days approach [to die].' (Deuteronomy 31:14) R. Abin said, 'What is the meaning this "behold?" To what can this be compared? To a matrona

who made a purple cloak for the king which was praiseworthy. The king took it and put it down. The time approached when the matrona would die. The king said to her, "Take the same purple cloak with which you honored me." So did the Holy One say to Moses, "You praised Me with 'behold,' therefore, I decree death for you with 'behold.'" 88 (XXIX)

In this midrash, R. Abin referred back to Deuteronomy 10:14, where Moses said, "הן לה' אלהיך השמים," "Behold, unto the Lord thy God belongeth the heaven" In using the same form of the word to begin His decree of death for Moses, God was both praising him (for the word had been formerly incorporated in a phrase of praise), and also God was reminding Moses of the high esteem in which he was held. Just as the king was willing to reward his matrona with the same garment of royalty she had made for him, God would bestow on Moses the praise Moses had once given Him to accompany him to his death.

In Song of Songs 1:4, we find the phrase, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." The Rabbis were interested in drawing implications for midrashic purposes from particular words used in the Scriptures. Here we have the only appearance in Scripture of this form of the verb, "to pull or draw." What could "משכני" mean homiletically? R. Abin, among other rabbis, thought he had an answer. He offered a parable to support the theory (which was proposed anonymously) that the word was in actuality a contraction of two words, "מן שכני," "from my neighbors." Israel's neighbors had something to do with Israel's running after God. What could that be? Here is a possible answer:

"...we shall run"--from my hostile neighbors whom Thou hast stirred up against me." R. Abun [Abin] said, '[This can be compared to] a king who was angry at the matrona and who incited her evil neighbors against her, and she began to cry, "My lord, King, save me!" Similarly, Israel . . . : "The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you, and you

cried unto Me, and I saved you out of their hands."
(Judges 10:12)⁸⁹ (XXX)

This text reminded R. Abin of Judges 10:12, in which God reminds Israel that it was only after they were endangered that they sought His assistance. Thus we have a text which ostensibly discusses a verse from Song of Songs, but in effect is a commentary on a verse from Judges, explaining that God was responsible for the hostility and successes of Israel's enemies in the past. His intention was that fear would bring them back to Him. We see this in R. Abin's mashal. R. Abin saw the early Hebrews as a complaining and forgetful people, and seems to be in full sympathy with God's problems of the past, as his aggadot make clear.

In Numbers Rabbah there is an extended discussion of Proverbs 19:29, "Judgments are prepared for scorners and stripes for the backs of fools." In this context, R. Berechiah interprets the word "מהלומות," "stripes," as "מה לו מות," "what unto him? Death." This is in reference to a man who has incurred the penalties mentioned before in the chapter (namely the five scourges--the different diseases of the skin God prepared with which to punish men).⁹⁰ R. Abin provided a mashal to show that one whose actions incurred all of God's penalties then deserved death; also,

R. Abin said, 'A parable. [It can be likened] to a matrona who entered the palace and saw staffs and lashes and was frightened. The members of the palace said to her, "Do not be afraid. These are for the slaves and handmaids. As for you, [you are] to eat, drink, and be honored." Similarly, when the children of Israel heard the section of the curses and afflictions, they became frightened. Moses said to them, "These are for the nations of the world. For you, [you need only] to eat, drink, and engage in the study of Torah."⁹¹ (XXXI)

Ez Joseph makes the comment here that, ". . . if you guard the Torah you will be worthy of all good, and to rejoice in [all good things]"⁹²

R. Abin's mashal points out the contemporary world view of many

of the Rabbis. When evil befell a man, it was because of some sin, or else because God had a definite reason for afflicting him. The upright, the person who was loyal to God, should not, in theory, have any fears of God's retributions. Only the evil had to fear the punishment of leprosy. Such was the view expressed throughout Scriptures, especially in Proverbs (although in Job, questions about the sufferings of the innocent were asked which are not fully answered). The interesting idea of this aggada was the assertion that Israel need not worry about the afflictions, a sentiment which might have been debated by other rabbis of R. Abin's time. R. Samuel b. Nahman is quoted in R. Jonathan's name, for example, as saying:

A visitation of punishment comes upon the world only when there are wicked people in the world, and it begins with the righteous. When permission is given to the Destroyer, he makes no difference between righteous and wicked, and he even begins with the righteous.⁹³

And we have this statement from Tana d'Be Eliyyahu:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, and saw how corrupt Israel had become, he gazed at the Tablets, and saw that the letters which were on them had flown away from the stone. So he broke the Tablets beneath the mountain. Immediately he became dumb, and was unable to utter a word. At that very time a decree was issued concerning Israel that Israel should learn them through affliction and enslavement, through exile and banishment, through straits and through famine. And on account of that suffering which they had undergone, God will repay their recompense in the days of the Messiah many times over.⁹⁴

The popular opinion, it would seem, among the Rabbis was that Israel deserved God's afflictions; in fact, they seem necessary for the people in order for them to accept God. The afflictions were not to be held in abeyance. Rather God meant to freely mete them out in order to keep the people in line. Given this tenor in rabbinic literature, R.

Abin's midrash was very optimistic.

It would seem from these few midrashim that R. Abin's view of God, Israel and the world was both very insightful, and optimistic as well. While Israel could be compared to the complaining matrona, it also was God's chosen people for whom He created a new and special condition, and for whom He made special provisions in the world.

One other Palestinian amora is quoted as giving a parable which centered on the matrona. This was R. Tanhuma b. Abba, a Palestinian amora of the fifth generation, and one of the foremost aggadists of his time. A pupil of R. Huna b. Abin, he transmitted his teacher's halakic and aggadic statements, along with those of his other teachers, R. Judah b. Shalom and R. Phinehas.

R. Tanhuma is noted mainly for his aggadot. He often pointed to Scripture to give a basis for the sayings of older authors, and often explained statements which had been handed down from earlier times. He "often made use of symbolism to illustrate his thought."⁹⁵ He had much contact with the gentile world, arguing religious matters with Christian scholars,⁹⁶ and this produced in him a general feeling of tolerance, as we find in J. Berakot 12c, where he is quoted as saying, "When a non-Jew greets you with a blessing, answer him with an 'Amen.'"

The exegetical talents of R. Tanhuma are apparent in his discussion of how Moses sought to have the people intercede for him before God when he knew he would not be permitted to enter the land of Canaan. The question before the rabbi was this: what was the meaning of Moses' statement to the people, "Thou art to pass over the Jordan this day." (Deuteronomy 9:1) This is how R. Tanhuma interpreted it:

R. Tanhuma said, 'Moses prostrated himself

before them and he said to them, "You are passing over. I shall not pass over." And he gave them an opening--perhaps they would seek compassion for him. But they did not comprehend this. To what can this matter be likened? To a king who had many children by a matrona. She became offensive to him and he sought to expel her. He said to her, "Know that I am going to take another." She said to him, "Yes. But will you not tell me who she is whom you are going to take?" He said to her, "So and so." What did the matrona do? She gathered her children and said to them, "Know that your father seeks to divorce me and to take so and so. Is it possible that you could be subject to her?" They said to her, "Yes." She said to them, "Know what she intends to do with you." She was saying [this] with the possibility that they would understand and intercede on her behalf with their father, but they did not understand. When they did not understand, she said, "I only command you for your own sake, that you be careful with the honor of your father." So in the case of Moses, when the Holy One said, "Take thee Joshua, the son of Nun, etc." (Numbers 27:18), "For thou shalt not go over this Jordan" (Deuteronomy 3:27), Moses said to Israel, "And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deuteronomy 9:29)--"you are to pass over this day; I shall not pass over." Perhaps they will understand and seek mercy for him. But they did not understand. When they did not understand, he said, "I am only commanding you so that you will be careful with the honor of your Father in heaven." Where [do we find this]? It is written, "That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God ⁹(to keep all His statutes . . .)" (Deuteronomy 6:2) ⁹⁷ (XXXII)

Again the matrona stands for Moses. As great as Moses was, and as triumphal as his life may have been, he was a man who also became familiar with defeat. After many long years of shepherding a recalcitrant people to the promised land, he suddenly found the way into the land blocked for him on account of his failure at one time to fully trust in God. Although he served God faithfully, much as the matrona served her king by raising up a large family, he found rejection in the end, just as the matrona found that she would be divorced and replaced. Moses, too, would be replaced. God had even told him that his replacement

would be Joshua, and that Joshua would take the people across the Jordan. For Moses of the Scriptures, his response is stoic. He receives God's decision with equanimity. But the Rabbis read between the lines of the Torah and found something altogether different, an attitude which we find echoed by R. Tanhuma's midrash.

In rabbinic literature, Moses did not receive God's decision calmly. According to the Rabbis, he fought for the chance to lead the people into Canaan. Thus we find in Deuteronomy Rabbah:

. . . When, however, Moses saw that the decree against him had been sealed, he took a resolve to fast, and drew a small circle and stood inside it, and said, 'I will not move from here until You blot out the decree.' What else did Moses do then? He put on sackcloth and wrapped himself with sackcloth and rolled himself in the dust and stood in prayer and supplications before God, until the heavens and the order of nature were shaken . . . 98

Moses put up a fight, as we also see here in R. Tanhuma's aggada. But as we find in that aggada, Moses finally came to the point where he knew he could not win. The children of Israel would not intercede on his behalf, no matter how broad the hints he made to them. Therefore, forsaking his personal interests, he communicated his concern for the people who would no longer have his leadership, especially his concern that they not break away for all time from God. Just as the matrona told her children to be careful and guard the honor of their father, Moses commanded Israel to continue to adhere to God's commandments, or they would not only discredit themselves, but also God, who had given them those commandments. Moses was thus like a loving parent, who, although faced with the loss of his children, in the end was more concerned about them than himself, and thus we find him in the aggada of R. Tanhuma.

This concludes our study of how particular Palestinian rabbis were able to incorporate the matrona into their parables. These rabbis span the entire amoraic history of Palestine. Already in the early third century, Babylonia was the undisputed center of rabbinic learning. Pumbeditha and Sura became the centers of Jewish intellectual life, as R. Samuel and Rab were able to wrest intellectual supremacy from Palestine in the middle of the third century.⁹⁹ The Palestinian schools remained in existence into the fourth century, but pressure from Christian Rome, economic instability, and the opportunity for greater freedom to be found in Babylonia, gradually led to their closing. The final blow to rabbinic activity in Palestine happened in 425, when Emperor Theodosius II abolished the patriarchal office, which had traditionally been held by the head of the academy.¹⁰⁰

The Rabbis of Palestine had left their mark. Not only did they lay the groundwork for post-Destruction Judaism by formulating the Mishna and later mishnaic material, they also left a legacy of biblical interpretation and exegesis by which future generations could keep Scripture relevant to their own times. They formulated unique methods of coping with the events of their times, especially with the pressures that were put on Judaism by an often hostile and very powerful Christianity. And among their many formulae of self-expression and defence from the attacks of Christians, they borrowed from the vocabulary and ideas of the dominant culture of the West, Rome, challenging their antagonists with their own ideas, and in their own language. As we have seen, the word matrona served such a purpose. It was a word which all could understand, and to which all could relate; and to use it in parables gave the Rabbis an opportunity to bring a homiletic interpretation more clearly to the

understanding of Jews and gentiles alike.

The word "matrona" was definitely a culturally defined term. Although we find that some of the Rabbis who used it in their m'shalim did spend some time in the Babylonian centers, they were all natives or long-time residents of Palestine. The kind of parables we have been discussing were almost never employed by those Rabbis whose careers were confined to Babylonia. About the only Babylonia amora who can be quoted as employing a matrona in a parable is R. Huna, the third century leader of Babylonia Jewry from Sura.

In the particular midrash we will discuss, we will see that R. Huna had some familiarity with Greek. As one of the great authorities of his time, it would be perfectly proper to suppose he had great knowledge of Palestinian tradition and the language of Palestine. As we see with the word "matrona," Hebrew had no difficulty in adopting foreign words for objects or ideas that were not indigenous to Palestine. Thus, "טקופוס, טקופוס," became a proper Hebracism of the Greek work for a litter in which one was carried. And, we find this aggada on the subject of Proverbs 8:20, "I lead in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of judgment':

The Torah says, 'On which path shall I be found? On the ways of those who perform righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice.' R. Huna [said,] '[This can be compared] to the litter of a matronia. When she passes through the market place, they bring forth weapons before her and after her. Such is the case of the Torah. [There are] laws before it [that is, the Decalogue], "There He made for them a statute and an ordinance . . .," (Exodus 15:25) and laws after it, "These are the statutes you shall set before them . . ." (Exodus 21:1)'¹⁰¹ (XXXIII)

R. Huna's parable points to a possible meaning of the verse from Proverbs. The Torah guards one who is following its teachings; it also

leads one to perform justice and righteousness, for only if one is so disposed can he in the end receive the Torah as his own possession. There is a fence around the Decalogue of laws which protect the Decalogue just as the weapon-carriers protect the matronia, and the Torah is a protecting fence around him who practices its teachings.

Unlike some of the preceding aggadot the parallelism between the parable and the subject under discussion here is not as clear as it might be. For example, there is a clear comparison between the Decalogue and the litter of the matrona. Yet the connection to the person who performs righteousness and justice remains difficult, unless we are to take "on the ways" as meaning Torah precedes him, and "in the midst" as meaning that Torah follows him. What is clear here is that the form of the matrona-parable was familiar to at least one Babylonian teacher who was physically removed from the world of the Rabbis of Palestine.

In this study of the matrona in the parable, we find it also occurs without being attributed to any particular rabbi. For example, we find in Exodus Rabbah the following aggadot, one of which might have given R. Huna material for his parable. This aggada refers to Exodus 31:1, "Now these are the ordinances":

Another explanation. What is written before this section? 'And let them judge the people at all seasons.' (Exodus 18:22) And it was here, 'Now these are the ordinances.' And the Decalogue is in between. It is likened to a matrona who was walking with armed guards [cf. Ez Joseph] on either side and she in the middle. Thus the Torah [the Decalogue] has laws preceding it and laws following it, with it in between. Hence it says, 'I walk in the way of righteousness.' (Proverbs 8:20) The Torah [Decalogue] says, 'On which path shall I go; I will go in the path of those who perform righteousness in the midst of the path of justice.' The Torah [Decalogue] is in the middle and laws precede and come after it. Before it, as it is written, 'There He made for them a statute

and an ordinance.' After, as it is written, 'These are the statutes',¹⁰² (XXXIV)

It cannot be known for sure whether this anonymous aggada supplied R. Huna with an idea for the aggada we have just discussed. Both discuss a matrona surrounded by armed guards as representing the Decalogue, which is flanked by commandments. Of the two, the anonymous aggada seems to be the more coherent, for the additional material of the performer of righteousness is not found in the anonymous aggada. Rather it personifies--anthropomorphizes--the Decalogue trying to determine the character of the whole Torah before the Torah has been shaped into its final form. Using the words which are found in Proverbs 8, it decides that in its final form the Torah be characterized by justice and righteousness. Therefore the Decalogue builds a fence around itself (the laws which surround it in the preceding and following chapters) to keep it on the path it has set for itself. As with R. Huna's parable, this one may not be entirely clear, yet it serves an important homiletical purpose.

In another section of Exodus Rabbah we find another anonymous mashal, authored by a rabbi who was disturbed by the appearance of two very similar verses in Scripture: Exodus 12:43, "This is the ordinance of the Passover," and Numbers 19:2, "This is the ordinance of the law (. . . that they bring the red heifer . . .)." The question the rabbi asked was which of the two ordinances is the more important? The solution to this question is presented in a mashal:

A parable. [This can be likened] to two matronot who were walking side by side together, and who seemed to be equal. Who is the greater? She whom her friend accompanies to her house, and so is really following her. Similarly it is written concerning Passover "חקה" ("this is the ordinance"), and concerning the heifer it is

written "חקה" ("this is the ordinance"). Which is greater? The red heifer, for those who eat the Paschal lamb need it, as it is written, 'And for the unclean, they shall take of the ashes of the burning of the purification from sin' (Numbers 19:17)¹⁰³ (XXXV)

The conclusion of the text is straightforward: if there were no cleansing by the ashes of the sacrifice of the red heifer, those who were ritually unclean could not eat the Paschal lamb. Therefore, of the two ordinances, that referring to the heifer must of necessity take precedence over that ordinance referring to the Passover itself, and so the rabbi concluded.

In Exodus we also find that Moses became upset with the people several times. The Rabbis deduced that there was at least one time when Moses became so angry with the people that he would not leave the Tent of Meeting to go back to the camp. The biblical portion which brought about the following aggada is based on how the author read the text. The text is Exodus 33:11: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to a friend. And he would return into the camp, but his minister Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the Tent." The Hebrew reads "ושוב" ("and he would return"); but the rabbi read it "ושׁוב" ("return!") And thus this midrash:

God said to Moses, 'Return to the camp!' But he said, 'I am not going back.' God then said, 'If you do not return, behold there is Joshua. Know that he is in the tent.' A parable. [This can be likened] to a matrona who became angry with the princess and left the palace. And there was an orphan girl who grew up with her [the princess] in the king's palace. He said to her [the matrona], 'Return to your place.' But she did not seek [to do so]. He said to her, 'If you do not return, know that this orphan is in the palace.' So said the Holy One to Moses, 'Return to the camp. And if you will not, Joshua is in the Tent.' Who caused Moses to return to the camp? Joshua b. Nun.¹⁰⁴ (XXXVI)

This midrash demonstrates just how far the Rabbis might go to find a homiletic opening. The question which our anonymous scholar wished to answer was this: why mention the fact that Joshua was in the Tent of Meeting when the relationship of Moses and God was the main subject of the verse? Since nothing in the Torah was superfluous, there must have been a meaning which was not apparent. And that meaning could be divined by merely reading the word "וַיֹּסֵף" as an imperative rather than as a past tense with a pre-formative "vav" which would render it as an imperfect. By merely changing a vowel, the author then could create a midrashic situation in which the mention of Joshua could be accounted for. When Moses refused God's order to return to the camp, all God needed to do was remind him that he could be replaced for not obeying; and the man who would replace him would be none other than Joshua, who already had the preferred place of being in the Tent all of the time and was easily accessible for God. Thus, Moses could not, by this author's point of view, ever feel himself so well entrenched in his position that he was irreplaceable. God gave him fair warning that he could be replaced at any time God so decided. Moses is again represented in the parable by a matrona who becomes so self-righteous that she almost loses her position in the king's palace.

Anonymous parables in which we find the matrona can be found in other parts of the Midrash Rabbah. In Numbers Rabbah there is a discussion of whom might qualify from the generation of those who fashioned the calf to enter the land of Canaan. In the midst of this discussion which is based on Numbers 14:19, "Pardon, I pray Thee, the iniquity of this people," we find a parable illustrating Malachi 3:18:

Come and see what is the difference between the righteous and the evil ones, 'Between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.' (Malachi 3:17) A parable. [This can be likened] to a matronita who had a Cushite handmaiden. Her husband left for a land across the sea. All night the same handmaiden was saying to that matronita, 'I am comlier than you, and the king loves me more than you.' The matronita said to her, 'When morning comes we will know who is more beautiful and who the king loves.' Thus do the nations of the world say to Israel: 'As for us, our deeds are fine and the Holy One prefers us.' Therefore, Isaiah said, 'Let the morning come and we shall know whom He prefers, as it is written, "The watchman said, The morning cometh and also the night . . ."' (Isaiah 21:12) The world to come, which is called "Morning," shall come and we shall know whom He prefers. 'Then ye shall discern between the righteous and the wicked.' (Malachi 3:17)¹⁰⁵ (XXXVII)

This is a very satisfying aggada for we find an excellent use of the parable. The matrona is a metaphor for Israel, while the Cushite handmaiden represents the other nations. The nations tell Israel that they are the favorites of God, just as the handmaiden claims that the king favors her over his wife, the matrona. Rather than argue, though, the matrona feels safe in the assurance that her husband loves her alone. All she need do is await his return to prove this love. And is this not the situation of Israel? While Israel is dispersed, she is fair game for her enemies to claim that God has rejected her and prefers them. But Israel, according to this midrash, needs only look to Scriptures, especially to the verse from Isaiah, for comfort. The interpretation of "morning" for the world to come is not unusual; such seems to be its force in the Isaiah text. But even more, the theme of light is often found in conjunction with the coming of the messiah and world to come. For example we find:

"At that hour will God brighten the light of King Messiah and of Israel, so that all the nations who are in darkness and in gloom, will walk in the light of the Messiah

and of Israel, as it says, 'And the nations shall come to thy light.'¹⁰⁶

In Deuteronomy Rabbah we find three anonymous parables in which the matrona appears. Two of them touch on subjects we have already discussed: Moses' fate as decreed by God, and his reaction to the fate, and the verse from Deuteronomy 9, "Hear O Israel, Thou art to pass over the Jordan this day." (9:1)

On the subject of Moses, we have an interpretation of Deuteronomy 3:23, "And I besought the Lord at that time saying, . . . Let me go over, I pray Thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan" The Rabbis wanted to know why the use of the word "besought." What did it signify in this context? To explain, a rabbi presented this interpretation:

To what can this be likened? To a matrona who gave birth to a son. All of the time that he was alive, she used to enter the palace by right. Her son died, and she began to request entrance with supplication. Similarly, all of the time that Israel lived in the wilderness, Moses would enter before the Holy One by right: 'Lord, why doth Thy wrath wax hot against Thy people?' (Exodus 32:11), 'Pardon, I pray thee, the iniquity of this people.' (Numbers 14:19) When the Israelites had died in the wilderness, he began to seek to enter the Land with supplications: 'And I besought.'¹⁰⁷ (XXXVIII)

According to the commentator, Moses benefitted from the merit of the generation of the Exodus. But, we also find in Ez Joseph:

When none from that generation who Moses caused to improve remained alive, their merit no longer benefitted Moses, and the merit of the later generations did not stand for Moses at all.¹⁰⁸

At that point God informed Moses, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter . . . for thou shalt not go over this Jordan." (Deuteronomy 3:26, 27)

Exactly what merit of that generation stood on Moses' behalf is

not clearly pointed out. But we do have a hint in the commentary: because Moses caused them to improve, he was worthy of his position of leadership. But that ended when the first generation died, for Moses himself was not entirely blameless in God's eyes, and had to pay the penalty of his transgression against God, when he smote the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20:8 ff.). Thus, when confronted with his fate, Moses left off making demands of God, and began to make supplications that his case be heard, and that he receive fair treatment from God, just as the matrona sought entrance into the palace after the key to her high position, her living son, had been taken away from her.

On the theme of Moses' reaction to his fate, we earlier discussed how he hoped the people would intercede with God when he hinted to them that he would not accompany them across the Jordan.¹⁰⁹ Here is another interpretation of that verse:

For what reason did he have to say, 'Hear O Israel' to them. Our Rabbis said, 'To what can it be compared? [It can be compared] to a king who betrothed a matrona with two jewels. She lost one of them. The king said to her: 'You have lost one. Guard the other.' Thus did the Holy One betroth Israel with 'נעשה' and 'נשמע' ('we shall do and we shall hearken') (Exodus 19:8). They lost the 'נעשה' ('we shall do') when they made the calf. Moses said to them, 'You have lost the "נעשה," guard the "נשמע" ("we shall hearken").' Therefore [we have] 'Hear O Israel . . .'¹¹⁰ (XXXIX)

As we see here, the Rabbis found importance in single words and found in them functions which were not intended by the Scripture. This is a classic g'zerah shavah--finding the same word in two different contexts, and by so doing, building a bridge between those two verses in which the word appear. "Hear O Israel" as a form of address was rarely used in the Torah, therefore it must have another meaning. Moses was using it to remind Israel of the obligation they had taken upon

themselves by agreeing to accept the Torah by reminding them of what they had said. It was now for Israel to pay heed to the hint, for like the matrona, they stood in danger of losing their relationship with their Beloved. The function of the parable here can be explained this way: though the "we shall do and we shall hear" seems to have been the gift of the people to God, in the text it is regarded as a possession of the people which they had to guard. We find a parable in Exodus Rabbah which is similar. There, the king gives his servant two cut-glass vessels, one of which the servant breaks. The king then charges his servant to be more careful with the other vessel.¹¹¹ The jewels are possessions to be guarded. The people must be careful that they uphold their responsibilities, and cling to the commandments. And this would parallel the other midrash on this verse, in which Moses is reported as charging the people to be careful with God's honor.

Miriam also is discussed in one of the parables in which we find the matrona. It comes into a discussion of Deuteronomy 24:9, "Remember (what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam . . .)" And this teaches a lesson in proper conduct:

Our Rabbis said, 'To what can this be likened? To a king who returned from the war. A matrona praised him. The king said, "Let her be called the mother of the senate."¹¹² After a while she began to disturb the king's provisions. The king said, "She did such and such. Let her be sent to the place of exile." Similarly, when the Holy One made war at the Sea, Miriam chanted a song, and she was called a prophetess, as it is written, "And Miriam the prophetess took . . ." (Exodus 15:20). But when she slandered her brother (Moses), the Holy One said, "Let her be sent to a place of exile, " as it is written, "And Miriam was shut up (without the camp . . .)" (Numbers 12:15)¹¹³ (XL)

The transgression for which Miriam received punishment from God was slander, for she and Aaron had spoken out against Moses "because of

the Cushite woman whom he had married" (Numbers 12:1). And this slander was great enough to offset the praise she had rendered to God. Ez Joseph interprets the word "אֹנְנָה," as meaning "gift."¹¹⁴ She misused the gift she had been given, that being, that God called her a prophetess. She did this when she attacked her brother. Slander was her crime, but underneath it was her contempt for God's gift to her. This interpretation of the word "אֹנְנָה" by the author of Ez Joseph would also make the parable that much clearer: the matrona misused the gift (or title) the king had given her, and thus her activity reflected upon his judgment in bestowing that gift upon her. Thus the king, like God, had no choice but to take action against the woman, and the choice of punishment was exile. In exile, neither the matrona nor Miriam could misuse their titles, for in exile, those titles meant nothing.

In Song of Songs Rabbah, we find the following aggada:

'We will be glad and rejoice in Thee.' (Song of Songs 1:4) [This can be compared] to a matrona whose husband the king and who sons and sons-in-law travelled to a land across the sea. They came and said to her, 'Your sons have come.' She said, 'What does it matter to me? Let my daughters-in-law rejoice.' When her sons-in-law returned, they came and said, 'Your sons-in-law have returned.' She said, 'What does it matter to me? Let my daughters rejoice.' They said to her, 'The king your husband has returned.' She said, 'This is a real pleasure, a joy on joy.' So in the time to come, the prophets will come and say to Jerusalem, 'Thy sons come from afar.' (Isaiah 60:4) She will say, 'What does it matter to me?' 'And thy daughters are borne on the side.' (Isaiah 60:4) She will say, 'What does it matter to me?' When they say to her, 'Behold thy king cometh unto thee, he is triumphant and victorious,' (Zechariah 9:9); she will say, 'This is a complete joy.' As it is written, 'Sing and rejoice, 'O daughter of Zion.' (Zechariah 2:14) At that time she will say, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God.' (Isaiah 61:10)¹¹⁵ (XLI)

Here we have a variation on the theme that we have found in the

matrona-parable. Rather than to represent the entire people or one single individual, the matrona is here meant to represent the city of Jerusalem awaiting the fulfillment of the prophetic promise of the return of God and her people. In the future, there will be people who will echo the words of Isaiah sixty and sixty-one, announcing the imminent return of God. And when such an announcement is made, the personified city will react like the matrona who heard the news of the return of her husband. God's return will be Jerusalem's triumph, a far greater joy than even the return of the Jews from their dispersion.

This midrash is also to be found in Pesikta d'R. Kahana, and it is not radically different from the text that has just been discussed. There the key text is that from Isaiah 61, "I shall greatly rejoice in the Lord." There the city does not answer the announcement that her sons are coming with the question, "What does it matter to me?" Rather, Jerusalem given an answer similar to that found in Song of Songs Rabbah, that is, the text of Zechariah 2:14. When she hears that her daughters are also returning (in the Pesikta), Jerusalem is then quoted as reciting the same text that she uses to welcome her sons: for her sons, "Let Mount Zion be glad"; for her daughters, "Let the daughters of Judah rejoice." (Psalms 48:12) This is the only significant difference between the two texts, and at that, it is a very minor variation.¹¹⁶

There is a much different note sounded in Lamentations Rabbati. The two anonymous aggadot deal with a matrona who has angered the king, and with a matrona who was unfairly treated by the king. The first theme is the more common of the two in this kind of literature, but we find examples of the badly treated matrona as well.

Lamentations 1:1 reads, "How is she become as a widow." What

did the text mean by this? In answer, the following parable was advanced:

The Rabbis said, '[This can be compared] to a king who was angry with the matrona and who wrote a "get" (bill of divorce) for her, and then rose and snatched it from her. Whenever she sought to marry another, he would say, "Where is your get?" Whenever she sought provisioning for herself, he said, "Have I not already divorced you?" Thus, whenever Israel sought to worship idols, the Holy One would say to them, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" (Isaiah 50:1) And whenever they sought that He do miracles as [He had done them] in the past, the Holy One would say, "I have already divorced you," as it is written, "I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce." (Jeremiah 3:8) 117 (XLII)

The tension that many rabbis felt existed between Israel and God is rarely as well expressed as we find it here. When the author of the midrash wrote, "How is she become as a widow," he described the city and the people as living in a condition in which God still made demands of them, yet was at the same time alienated from them. Jerusalem, and the people, were like the matrona who had angered the king and who paid for her transgressions by suffering all of the pains of being a divorcee/widow without any compensation for that status. Jerusalem's sins had caused God to abandon her, to leave her to the forces He had stirred up against her. He would no longer perform the miracles that He had been responsible for in the past. Yet Jerusalem was still the "holy city," and the Jews were still God's people--apostacy and revolt against God could not be countenanced. They were not so worthy as to have the miracles, but at the same time, they were not so unworthy as to be rejected by God. No solution is posed in this parable, but rectification of this situation was one of the main subjects of rabbinic literature. The Rabbi's ultimate hope was for the repair of the breach between God and His people in the future, an option which this particular midrash does not discount, for the king, like God, could also destroy

the get when the time came to do so, and so return his matrona to favor.

There is a parallel midrash to this one to be found in the same source and in Pesikta d'R. Kahana, again coming from an anonymous source. The verse to be explained is Lamentations 1:21, "They have heard that I sigh, There is none to comfort me; All mine enemies have heard of my trouble and are glad, For thou hast done it." And the midrash focuses on the last part of the verse: "For Thou hast done it":

'For Thou hast done it.' A parable. [This can be likened] to a king who married a matrona. He said to her, 'Do not converse with your friends, do not borrow from them or lend to them.' After awhile, the king became angry with her and drove her out of the palace. She went around to all of her neighbors, but they did not receive her, and she returned to the palace. The king said to her, 'Restrain your anger.' The matrona said to the king, 'My lord, were it that I had lent them something or borrowed something from them, and my handiwork could be found with them, and theirs could be found with me, would they not have received me?' Similarly, the Holy One said to Israel, 'Restrain your anger.' They said to Him, 'Master of the world, did You not write in Your Torah, "Neither shalt thou make marriage with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son." (Deuteronomy 7: 3)?' If we had lent to them or eaten with them, or given our sons or taken their daughters, would they have not accepted me?' Therefore, 'For Thou hast done it.'¹¹⁸ (XLIII)

In the context of the Pesikta this particular aggada can be found within a discussion of Isaiah 51:12, "I, even I, am He that comforteth you." After Israel's enemies entered Jerusalem, it was declared that every place the people tried to flee, they would be prevented. In support of this idea the text presents different verses from Amos 1, showing that God had cursed all of Israel's neighbors. These curses led those nations to prevent the Jews entry, which was God's plan. The Jews then asked God if He were not responsible for their condition.¹¹⁹

In Lamentations Rabbati there is no discussion which leads into

this aggada. The author took the verse on its own merit. Israel's enemies, according to Lamentations 1:21, took delight in Israel's troubles. How they took delight, what they did is not spelled out clearly. It is expressed in the parable: because God commanded Israel to isolate herself from her heathen neighbors, when it came time for Israel to seek their help, that help was not made available to them. The bitterness of the situation comes through in the parable. Left on her own, Israel could have had good relationships with her neighbors, the rabbi says. But God intervened between them, commanding His people not to have any intercourse with them. What this meant in the end was the situation spelled out in the Pesikta. After the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem, the people found themselves "outcasts" from the world.

Of course this was not the real situation. As we see in Jeremiah, a number of refugees made their way into Egypt and were able to settle there. What then would the point of this aggada be? There are two possibilities. On one hand, this could be a rabbinical condemnation of the trouble Israel has had to bear throughout her history. As the people God had singled out, they were obligated to be different and to restrain themselves from the lifestyles of their neighbors. Israel's role has always been to be alone in the world, and this has meant a great amount of hardship (much of which might seem to be unnecessary). This particular aggada could be a rabbi's complaint--by being prohibited from intermingling with the other nations, we have been made too vulnerable, too open to the retaliation of our neighbors. On the other hand, the Pesikta text begins with this phrase: "כשגמרו העוונות," "when the transgressions were over." Accordingly, this parable may simply be saying that the particular generation in question deserved their fate

(even though their fate might be overstated in the aggada). They deserved to be rejected by their neighbors, not because they were faithful to God's laws, but because they had not been faithful to them (which was the main reason for God permitting Jerusalem to be destroyed in the first place). God was responsible. It was His plan that the people be forbidden to enter their neighbors' lands, God had foreknowledge of the destruction, and with this knowledge He imposed upon the people laws forbidding intercourse with the other nations. This was a punishment upon punishment.

Perhaps both of these answers apply. There was, and remains, a certain tension in Judaism about how much Jews should keep themselves separated from other peoples. There are disadvantages to being separate, as we have seen in the midrash (even though it might have been overstated). But there are certain advantages in knowing that there are certain promises whose fulfillment rests on the bedrock of Jewish particularism.

We have seen how the Rabbis dealt with the tension arising out of the destruction of Jerusalem in the previous midrash. There was an inseparable bond between God and Israel, according to the Rabbis. God and Israel were bound together even in the worst of times, when the people had transgressed their responsibilities and forced God to punish them. But even in the act of punishing, God could not reject them. They might be alienated for a time from God, but it was not to be forever. For God had made certain promises to Israel which He bound Himself to carry out, and those promises went all the way back to Abraham.

The relationship between God and Israel could be represented in no better way, according to the Rabbis, than in the images of the Song of Songs. God and Israel were pictured as lovers. They were even more

than that according to the Rabbis. As we have seen in the preceding parables, their relationship could almost be called a marriage, with God pictured as a king, while Israel was His matrona. This permitted the Rabbis to use their imaginations in formulating parables to explain the relationship between God and Israel; for example, why Israel was able to maintain some standing with God even after some of her greatest transgressions.

The matrona whom we meet in the rabbinic parable gives us an interesting look into how the Rabbis saw women. She lost the precious stones her husband had given her, stones representing "mercy and compassion"¹²⁰; and she lost two other stones (representing the first two commandments of the Decalogue) when cuckolding the king (Israel's constructing the calf)¹²¹; and she lost a necklace of ten precious stones.¹²² In other words, the matrona was often pictured as frivolous and careless. There are other examples of her carelessness, each used to represent Israel transgressing God's commands or her carelessness with God's gifts.

One of the most consistent themes to be found in these parables is that of an angry king driving his matrona out of the palace. She has a continuing ability to incite the king's anger. Sometimes her transgression is spelled out (as her losing the king's gift); more often it is not spelled out. One of the more unusual results of the expulsion of a matrona can be seen in R. Isaac Nappaha's aggada: the matrona angered the king, who expelled her, yet later joined her in prison to save her reputation.¹²³ And it would seem that this might have been a real rabbinic preoccupation. For as we find in R. Levi's aggada, the proclivities of the matrona were such that she could incite suspicion, especially that she might have an affair with a court notable.¹²⁴

She could thus be described as a careless, promiscuous, rebellious shrew. And nowhere do we have a better picture of this than in R. Levi's aggada of the matrona who used her husband's picture to cook warm food for her lover¹²⁵, and the story of the discontented matrona who always complained until she had something to do (make a royal garment for her husband, which parallels Israel's building the Tabernacle).¹²⁶

The matrona, again representing the people of Israel, could also be very demanding. For example, we have R. Isaac's parable in which the matrona angered the king. When the king sought to be reconciled with the matrona, it was she who made the demands, telling the king that he could only come to her were he to make something new for her (referring to God receiving sacrifices on earth rather than heaven).¹²⁷

Quite often in these midrashim, though, the opposite case was true. The matrona is guiltless, and the king still treats her badly. We have one example based on Song of Songs 1:4, " . . . we shall run": the king incited the matrona's neighbors against her so that she would come to rely on him even more.¹²⁸ In the midrash just discussed we find another example: the king commanded his matrona not to have any intercourse with her neighbors, which left her isolated in her time of distress, (although the Rabbis thought there was a legitimate reason for the king's/God's actions).¹²⁹ A good example of the guiltless matrona being mistreated by the king is a midrash which speaks not of the people, as is normally to be found, but rather of an individual, Abraham. In that parable, the matrona was divorced by the king after each time she gave birth, and in the end, she had to have her sons plead for the king's consideration on her behalf, just as Abraham had his ten trials set before God so that he could find a respite from any

more trials.¹³⁰

Abraham was not the only individual for whom the metaphor of the matrona was employed. For the Rabbis, there seems to have been little need to correlate the sex of their characters in order to make a point. Quite often Moses was represented by the matrona when the Rabbis described his relationship with God. Like Abraham, Moses sought intercession from others in order to get God's consideration. In the parable, his relationship with the people was compared to that of matrona and her children. Thus we have the exquisite commentary on Deuteronomy 9:1, "Thou art to pass over the Jordan this day," in which, it is explained, Moses hinted about his fate to the people in hopes that they would plead on his behalf.¹³¹ Moses was also compared to the spiteful matrona who was almost willing to abdicate her position in court until she was reminded that there was someone waiting to take her place.¹³² Another biblical character was also likened to the matrona. This was Miriam, on whom the status of prophetess was bestowed by God, yet who misused God's faith in her by denouncing Moses. She was likened to a woman upon whom the king bestowed a high rank, and who misused the prerogatives she had been given.¹³³

There is yet another theme which can be found in these parables. That theme is the loving relationship between the king and matrona, a relationship which survives the worst crises and the denunciations of others. In these parables, there is no hint of the demanding shrew. Rather, the matrona is pictured as the faithful loving wife. For example, R. Johanan pictured the king and matrona sitting together in intimate conversation, so intimate that one coming between them would deserve death.¹³⁴ Another example involves a matrona whose Cushite servant insisted that the king liked her better (when the king was not there).

Yet the matrona clung to her faith that she was the king's beloved, in spite of the arguments made against her.¹³⁵ Also we find the matrona rejoicing when her husband returns from a trip, discounting the fact that her sons and sons-in-law have returned with him. Her main concern was for the king.¹³⁶

The king is also regarded in some of these parables as having special esteem and consideration for his wife. We have mentioned the parable in which the king imprisoned himself to protect the matrona's reputation. There are other examples. R. Joshua authored a parable about the king who entered a new province and declared that the inhabitants could not see him until they had beheld his matrona, the matrona representing the Sabbath which had to pass before an animal could be sacrificed.¹³⁷ And we have R. Levi's mashal in which the king, upon seeing his matrona begins to praise her, and she returns his compliments in the words of the Song of Songs.¹³⁸

Thus the parables covered the whole gamut of relations between a king and his matrona, a man and his beloved, God and His servants (Moses and Miriam), and perhaps most importantly, God and the people of Israel.

One question remains, one for which there is probably no precise answer. Why did the Rabbis choose to use the word "matrona?" There are several possible answers to this question. One of them is that it is common to find in most literatures certain paradigms which fit into certain contexts. The matrona in the rabbinic parable served as a kind of paradigm. In Latin, the word "matrona" carried with it the idea of a married woman of rank and dignity.¹³⁹ And since there was really no word to compare to that in Hebrew, it was perfectly natural for "matrona"

to be incorporated into Hebrew. By using the matrona in a certain context, the Rabbis were using a kind of shorthand to save their having to explain what kind of woman they were dealing with, and how she fit into the general structure of society. Yet, as we have seen here, there seems to have been two distinct meanings for the word when it was used by the Rabbis. When they described a woman with whom they came into contact, the term "matrona" was used in a different way than when they employed it in the parable. We rarely find the word "matrona" used to describe a queen or member of royalty in the context of an encounter between such a woman and a rabbi. On the other hand, in the parable the term more often than not is used to describe the wife of the king. Thus, "matrona" seems to have had different levels of meaning, depending on how she appeared in the aggada. Yet, because there was such parallelism in the particular aggadot of the rabbi-meets-matrona genre, and also parallelism in the parables in which the matrona appeared, the use of the term painted such a clear picture of the woman that little further discussion about her was necessary.

But why was she not called "malkah" in the parable? In other parables we find the woman with whom the king has a relationship called "אשה," meaning either "woman" or else "wife."¹⁴⁰ And she is sometimes called "מלך בנה," meaning "a princess," specifically a princess whom the king takes for his wife.¹⁴¹ The question is difficult to answer, though. All that we can do is to speculate on possible answers.

One reason for the word "malkah" not being used in the parable, it may be suggested, is that the word was not current in the vocabulary of the people. When the Rabbis formulated their parables using the figure of a king as a metaphor, they seem not to have gone back into biblical

history for the picture of the king, but, they rather looked to the best example of a king then available, namely the emperor in Rome. Thus, in the parables of the Rabbis, we find such examples as this: "It is customary that when a legion rebels against the king, it deserves death."¹⁴² Another example can be found in Genesis Rabbah: "This may be compared to two countries that revolted against the king. The king ordered one to be burnt down at its own cost"¹⁴³ It can also be noted that in discussing the king's officials and activities, Latin and Greek titles were given; as we find in Leviticus Rabbah the word "פרוודוגמא," a Greek loan-word meaning "proclamation."¹⁴⁴ In fact, there is a large number of Greek and Latin loan-words used in connection with royalty in the m'shalim: "סנקליטין," "senators," "אסטרטיגוס," "bodyguard," "אפיטריפין," "administrators," etc.¹⁴⁵ Allusions to the king putting to death one who interrupted his conversation with the queen would also seem to come out of the Roman context in which rulers proclaimed themselves gods.¹⁴⁶ Since there seems to have been a great deal of preciseness in naming the officials of the king's court, it would seem reasonable to assume that the use of the word matrona might also have its roots in common Latin usage. This, again, can only be the result of conjecture, seeing that the Roman rulers called themselves "Caesars," a term which found its way into the rabbinic vocabulary in this form: "קיסר." (According to Reuben Alcalay, though, the word "melek" could also be translated as "emperor."¹⁴⁷)

Here we can introduce another element. In every case, the king of the parable is a metaphor for God. This may have something to do with the coice of "matrona" to designate the king's consort. It is possible that the Rabbis may have been reluctant to use the word malkah for

a specific reason that is related to the function of the parable. For example, it may have been a touchy issue for the Rabbis to present the king of the parable as being married, for if there were parallelism to the biblical text or to the real-life situation, their enemies could use the parable against them. This can be seen in the idea of the "Queen of Heaven" which had a long history, dating back to the days of the Canaanites. Jeremiah attacked the women of Israel who worshipped this goddess in Egypt (Jeremiah 14:24 ff), for seemingly the worship of a female deity was very wide-spread towards the end of the First Commonwealth, possibly reflecting the military and cultural expansion of Babylonia.¹⁴⁸ There may have been a fear among the Rabbis that if they used the word "malkah" in the parable, that their enemies might claim this as proof that the Jews were polytheists. After all, the Rabbis lived in a world in which the worship of female deities, malkot shamayim, was not unusual, and the cults of Isis and the Roman/Greek female deities had numerous followers among the nations, including Palestine. During Rome's period of Hellenistic revival in the second century C.E. Isis was regarded by many Romans as "Queen of Heaven" as well as "Mother of God" (that is, of Osiris).¹⁴⁹ Thus, it might have been with some trepidation that the Rabbis would want to associate, even in parable form, a "queen" with God.

Even more important, the period we have been discussing saw the rise of Christianity, which claimed that it was a monotheism. The adherents of Christianity were the arch-rivals of the Rabbis in the area of theological polemics. It is possible that the Rabbis were reluctant to give their enemies any opportunity to find evidence for their claims against the Jews in the very words of the Rabbis. Not only did the

Rabbis make it clear that they were not speaking about a divinity when they employed the word matrona, they also made it clear that they spoke only of the people whom God loved and singled out, or an individual whom God held in high esteem, such as Miriam.

The function of the parable form of aggada encapsulates the whole reasoning behind the rabbinic midrashim. The function of these parables was to be both edifying and apologetic. The purpose included teaching the meaning of Scripture and, at the same time, answering the claims made on behalf of Christianity using the same text. The parable was used by the Rabbis to explain God's relationship with His people, Israel, and with the leaders of the people. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, some rabbis held the parable-form in very high regard as a means of illuminating difficult to understand scriptural passages and rabbinic statements. Though sometimes the parable seems to have been overly simplistic, its function was all important, for it helped bring the message of Israel home to its adherents and enemies alike in terms which were rapidly comprehensible. Though the mashal everyone became like Solomon, able to attain "the uttermost secret of the Torah."¹⁵⁰

Footnotes--Chapter IV

1. Louis Newman and Samuel Spitz, The Talmudic Anthology (New York: Behrman, 1966), p. 35. Ecclesiastes Rabbati 2:11 and Song of Songs Rabbah 1:1:8.
2. Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 148.
3. Herman Strack, Introduction to Talmud and Midrash (New York: Harper, 1965), p. 119. Isaac Broyde, "Hiyya bar Abba," J.E.
4. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:6
5. See Ez Joseph to Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:6.
6. Strack, loc. cit.
7. J. Z. Lauterbach, Simeon b. Halafta," J.E.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:7.
11. S. Mendelsohn, "Hama b. Hanina," J.E.
12. Genesis Rabbah 56:11.
13. Ibid.
14. Judah Goldin, The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan (New Haven: Yale, 1967), p. 132.
15. Herman Abramowitz, "Joshua b. Levi," J.E.
16. Exodus Rabbah 3:4.
17. Ibid.
18. Ez Joseph to Exodus R. 3:4.
19. See Ta'anit 5a, where we find R. Nahman stating that the people committed twenty-four transgressions (enumerated in Ezekiel 22). See also Leviticus Rabbah 33:3.
20. Exodus Rabbah 42:8.
21. He is also called "מַרְיָם" by some texts.
22. Strack, op. cit., p. 122, 125.

23. Alfred Kolatch, Who's Who in the Talmud (New York: Johnathan David, 1964), p. 298.
24. Exodus Rabbah 29:9.
25. Pesikta d'R. Kahana 193 b [ed. Buber].
26. Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1967), pp. 492-5.
27. Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:21.
28. Ibid.
29. Lamentations Rabbati 3:21.
30. Ibid.
31. Pesikta Rabbati 21 a-b [ed. Friedmann].
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Marcus Jastrow, Dictionary (New York: Pardes, 1950), I, p. 285.
36. Jastrow, I, p. 59.
37. Jastrow, I, p. 92.
38. Pesikta d'R. Kahana 139 b [ed. Buber].
39. Ibid.
40. "כמה צער הוא מביא עליכם," "how much sorrow He brings upon you."
41. Ibid.
42. Strack, op. cit., p. 124.
43. Salo Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1958) II, p. 153.
44. Baron, op. cit., II, p. 238.
45. Exodus Rabbah 15:16.
46. See Ez Joseph to Exodus R. 15:16.
47. Ibid.
48. Schulim Oscher, "Samuel ben Nahman (Nahmani)," J.E.

49. The expression that Hagar uses, "הלוך," "thus far," is the same as David uses in II Samuel. The text presumes a gazerah shavah--the term has the same meaning in both places.
50. Genesis Rabbah 45:10.
51. Ez Joseph to Genesis R. 45:10.
52. S. Mendelsohn, "Levi II," J.E.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Genesis Rabbah 46:4.
56. The most serious attack on the rite of circumcision in the Jewish community (before the acceptance of Paul's views in the gentile world) was Hadrians' decree forbidding circumcision. See Graetz, II, p. 423 ff.
57. Leviticus Rabbah 27:8.
58. Ibid.
59. Leviticus Rabbah 27:10. See also Pesikta d'R. Kahana 78a.
60. Leviticus Rabbah 27:10.
61. Ez. Joseph to Leviticus Rabbah 27:10.
62. Song of Songs Rabbah 5:16:6.
63. Lamentations Rabbati 1:9:36.
64. "In a beraitah."
65. Lamentations Rabbati 3:1:1.
66. A. Cohen, Midrash Rabbah: Lamentations (London: Soncino, 1961), p. 188.
67. Strack, op. cit., p. 126.
68. Genesis Rabbah 1:4.
69. See Genesis Rabbah 1:100 and Pirke Avot 4:2.
70. Genesis Rabbah 1:4.
71. Genesis Rabbah 1:10.
72. Strack, p. 129; J.Z. Lauterbach, "Judah ben Simeon ben Pazzi," J.E.

73. Song of Songs Rabbah 6:5:1.
74. Sanhedrin 11 b. In Louis Ginzberg, "Bet Din," J.E.: "The bet din as the highest religious as well as civil authority . . . existed for the period between 70 and the end of the third century. It was Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai who made his bet din the intellectual center of the Jews when the destruction of Jerusalem deprived them of their bond of unity. . . . It had entire charge of the calendar system, and hence became the religious and national center not only of Palestine, but also of the Diaspora. . . . On the death of Judah ha-Nasi, the bet din of the Nasi lost its importance in consequence of the rise of Jewish scholarship in Babylonia toward the middle of the third century, as well as the increasing oppression of the Palestinian Jews under Roman rule. . . . According to Talmudic sources, decrees . . . binding for all Judaism were issued by the patriarchs before and during the time of Judah Nesi; but his successors had not such authority.
- Aside from the Bet Din ha-Gadol and the similar bet din of the Nasi, the term was applied to every court, consisting either of 23 members, who sat only in capital cases . . ., or of three (according to some, five), who decided in monetary affairs. . . ."
75. G.F. Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard, 1966), I, p. 368: "From such expressions as 'the heaven and the heaven of heavens,' (Deuteronomy 10:14, etc.) a plurality of heavens was inferred [R. Judah . . . deduced that there were two firmaments. . ., Hagigah 12 b; others counted three . . .]. Under the influence of astronomical doctrine, a scheme of seven heavens was evolved, and Biblical names and proof-texts discovered for them."
76. Song of Songs Rabbah 5:1.
77. Numbers Rabbah 13:2.
78. S. Mendelsohn, "Aha (Aha) III," J.E.
79. Exodus Rabbah 44:4.
80. Exodus Rabbah 84:2:8.
81. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:7.
82. Leviticus Rabbah 27:8.
83. Leviticus Rabbah 4:6.
84. S. Mendelsohn, "Abin," J.E.
85. Graetz, op. cit., II, p. 567.
86. The rabbi finds a relationship between "ווי," "woe," and "ויהי," "and it came to pass." Plays on words were common in this literature.

87. Numbers Rabbah 12:7.
88. Deuteronomy Rabbah 9:7.
89. Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4.
90. See Numbers Rabbah 13:4.
91. Ibid.
92. Ez Joseph to Numbers Rabbah 13:4.
93. Baba Kama 60a.
94. Tana d'Be Eliyyahu, 117, quoted in C. Montefiore and H. Lowe, A Rabbinic Anthology (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1960), p. 551.
95. J.Z. Lauterbach, "Tanhuma b. Abba," J.E.
96. See Genesis Rabbah 19:4.
97. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:11.
98. Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:10.
99. Abram Sachar, A History of the Jews, (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 149.
100. Ibid.
101. Pesikta d'R. Kahana 103a /ed. Buber/.
102. Exodus Rabbah 30:3.
103. Exodus Rabbah 19:2.
104. Exodus Rabbah 45:4.
105. Numbers Rabbah 16:23.
106. Pesikta Rabbati, 162 a-b, quoted in Montefiore and Lowe, p. 607.
107. Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:4.
108. Ez Joseph to Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:4.
109. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:11.
110. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:10.
111. Exodus Rabbah 27:9.
112. This term corresponds to the title which was bestowed upon Veturia Paula, who "was converted to Judaism at an advanced age, took

the name of Sarah and was known as 'Mater Synagogarum'" See B. Bamberger, Proselytism (New York: Ktav, 1968), p. 234.

113. Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:12.
114. Ez Joseph to Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:12.
115. Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4:2.
116. Pesikta d'R. Kahana, pp. 147 a-b.
117. Lamentations Rabbati 1:3:3.
118. Lamentations Rabbati 1:21:56.
119. See Pesikta d'R. Kahana, pp. 138 a-b.
120. See Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:7.
121. See Exodus Rabbah 42:8.
122. See Exodus Rabbah 44:4.
123. See Exodus Rabbah 15:16.
124. See Leviticus Rabbah 27:8.
125. See Lamentations Rabbati 1:9:36.
126. See Numbers Rabbah 12:7.
127. See Song of Songs Rabbah 5:1.
128. See Exodus Rabbah 15:16.
129. See Lamentations Rabbati 1:21:56.
130. See Genesis Rabbah 56:11.
131. See Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:11.
132. See Exodus Rabbah 45:4.
133. See Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:12.
134. See Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:21.
135. See Numbers Rabbah 16:23.
136. See Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4:2.
137. See Leviticus Rabbah 27:10.

138. See Song of Songs Rabbah 5:16:6.
139. C.T. Onions, ed., Oxford Universal Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 1218.
140. See Pesikta Rabbati 50b; Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:2, Numbers Rabbah 2:15.
141. See Pesahim 56a.
142. Numbers Rabbah 20:19
143. Genesis Rabbah 51:2.
144. Leviticus Rabbah 11:7.
145. See Shoher Tov 42; Genesis Rabbah 3:6; Exodus Rabbah 46:5.
146. See Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:21.
147. Reuben Alcalay, The Complete English-Hebrew Dictionary (Jerusalem: Massadah, 1965), p. 1350.
148. Salo Baron, Social and Religious History, I, p. 311.
149. Will Durant, Caesar, p. 523.
150. See Ecclesiastes Rabbati 2:11.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The appearance of the word "matrona" in rabbinic literature can serve both to give us a deeper insight into the minds of the Rabbis and to evoke in us many important questions. For the word is unique in the Talmud and Midrash, not just because it was a Latin loan-word, but because for the Rabbis it took on a different kind of meaning than it did for the Romans. As we have seen, the word "matrona," describing a certain kind of woman for whom little further description was necessary, was utilized time after time by the Rabbis, to the point where it became the key to a distinct style of aggadic literature.

In this study, we have seen how the matrona literature developed, the word making its first appearance in the aggadot in reference to R. Zadok. Thus the term seems to have been used at the time of, or shortly after, the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. It was a word which would become almost the exclusive property of the Rabbis who would, over the next two centuries, be in closest contact with the Latin-speaking world, those rabbis being the teachers at Jabneh and Usha, Sepphoris, Caesaria and Tiberias. The list of those rabbis who are reported to have actually encountered matronot would include R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus of Lydda, R. Akiba, R. Hanina of Caesaria and Tiberias, R. Judah b. Ilai of Usha, and, of course, R. Jose b. Halaftha of Sepphoris. And their occasions for meeting and dealing with those women who were called "matrona"

became the subject of many stories and much discussion in later generations by both rabbis and commentators.

The literature dealing with the social and intellectual intercourse between rabbi and matrona provides us with a good deal of personal information about both the rabbi and the matrona. It also gives us greater understanding of how the Rabbis looked upon the foreign, non-Jewish women in their midst. No two rabbis reacted to a matrona in exactly the same way. R. Jose¹ most probably did deal with at least one matrona, probably while in exile in Sepphoris. He usually bore her questioning with equanimity, providing her with answers to her often incisive inquiries into the Scriptures and offering her proof texts or proof drawn from her own experience in order to demonstrate the validity of both his Scriptures and his faith. On the other hand, when a matrona enquired about a passage of Scripture regarding the punishment dealt out to those responsible for the molten calf, R. Eliezer refused to answer her, telling her that she had no business involving herself with the subject and quoting Exodus 35:25 to her: "And all the women that were wisehearted did spin with their hands." While some rabbis made an effort to educate an inquiring matrona, there were others who seem to have taken the words of Avot I:5: ". . . and talk not much with womankind," to heart.

In the accounts of those meetings between matrona and rabbi, many of the attitudes which were held towards women among the Rabbis are apparent. We cannot overlook the erotic content of many of those aggadot, especially Kiddushin 39b and 40a, where three separate accounts appear of a matrona summoning a rabbi for illicit intercourse. The rabbis were R. Hanina b. Pappi, R. Kahana and R. Zadok. These aggadot, as well as those in which the matrona is related as having used witchcraft against

a rabbi, would bear out Montefiore's contention on the subject of the rabbinic attitude towards women: "[Women] were the source of moral danger. They were incitements to depravity and lust."¹

Yet it is very difficult to characterize the matrona in this literature. There are many themes which run through the encounters. We have on one hand a matrona who is very helpful to the rabbi: she either provides him with the funds to build a school or help in solving a problem with the government. She may be a woman who is trying to come to a better understanding of the Jews and their beliefs. She may be a woman who is knowledgeable in medicine who uses her skill to cure a rabbi. On the other hand, she may be openly derisive of a rabbi, accusing him of being a drunkard. Or else she may be sexually aggressive, enticing the evil inclination of a rabbi. Or else she might be a witch. All of these descriptions of the matrona are scattered throughout post-Destruction rabbinic literature so that there does not seem to be a particular pattern of rabbinic attitudes towards the woman. For example, we do not find that the initial attitudes of the rabbis were positive, and that the earliest rabbis to come into contact with a matrona were dealing with a friendly, helpful lady, while those rabbis who came into contact in later generations with a matrona dealt exclusively with witches. The term bore a meaning which we have been trying to infer from the different aggadot, seeing how the many theses are intertwined.

Who was the matrona? As has been stated above, there is no one single answer. The common characteristic of all of the matronot was their anonymity. The evidence provided by the sources is that she was not Jewish. We find matronot speaking to the rabbis of "your God," "your Torah," while also speaking of "our god." Their being foreigners

in what was still a Jewish land, although it was part of the Roman Empire, the matronot helped to both strengthen and destroy the fragile bridge between the two cultures. Some demonstrated the worst characteristics of gentile society at that time, reflecting those Roman aristocrats, who, according to Jerome Carponino,

. . . evaded the duties of maternity for fear of losing their good looks; . . . [who] took a pride in being behind their husbands in no sphere of activity, and vied with them in tests of strength which their sex would have seemed to forbid; . . . [and who] were not content to live their lives by their husband's side, but carried on another life without him at the price of betrayals and surrenders for which they did not even trouble to blush.²

Others among the matronot demonstrated another proclivity which was symptomatic of their world. The religious world of the second century was filled with what Durant called, "eclectic confusion."³ The Roman world contained hundreds of different sects and mystery cults, some dating back into classical Roman and Greek times, others imported from Egypt (the cult of Isis), Persia and even farther east. The emperors of Rome were worshipped as gods. Others worshipped the bull. The new faiths appealed to the emotions of the time: many were classless and raceless in nature, accepting anyone who accepted their beliefs; they were also full of pagantry and aesthetically appealing. And it was into this atmosphere of toleration and curiosity that Judaism made great inroads in the area of proselytization. As we have seen, "probably among the people most readily converted were women. We have spoken of Helen and of Beluria. In the period between the Destruction and the rise of Christian Rome, according to Jacob Raisin (who was one of the earliest historians to do serious study of rabbinic proselytization), "Every Jew constituted himself a self-appointed missionary."⁴ We have seen that

the subject of Judaism and its beliefs was a prime subject between emperors and rabbis, and between matronot and rabbis. As Raisin reports, "The names of patricians as well as slaves are found on Jewish tombstones dating to the days of Augustus,"⁵ and, although there is still much debate in the matter, he suggests that such notables as Pomponia and Sabina Poppaea (Nero's concubine) might also have been secret adherents of Judaism.⁶ It thus is a strong possibility that the conversations which R. Jose, among others, had with a "certain matrona (or matronita)" may have had the woman's conversion to Judaism as a primary incentive. In a world where shopping for a religion was commonplace, it would not have been too unusual to find that there were a significant number of people, both men and women, who made the difficult decision to become proselytes to Judaism. With our knowledge of R. Jose's attitudes on the subject of converts, it would not be too difficult to understand why he would have the patience to answer the matrona's sixteen questions, knowing that by providing the proper answer, she could not help but be impressed with the teachings of Judaism.

We have touched here on one set of appearances of the word "matrona" in rabbinic literature. We should not neglect the fact that the word appeared in a much different context at the same time as rabbis were meeting matronot or transmitting the aggadot describing those meetings. For the word "matrona" also appeared in rabbinic m'shalim, parables. In those parables she was used to illustrate certain biblical passages. In many of the parables she represented the rebellious Children of Israel, or an equally rebellious Miriam or Moses. Quite often the word "matrona" was used by the rabbis to represent the wife of a king, who represented God. This is an aspect of the word "matrona" which is not to be found

in the accounts of personal meetings between a matrona and rabbi. The bond of matrona and king in the maschal was comparable to the bond between God and Israel. Though Israel did rebel against its King, it was never rejected. The king might punish the matrona for her misdeeds, but never would he totally reject her, for she was the only person fitting for him to make his beloved and bride. The king might make up a get for his wife, and yet keep it, preventing her from seeking another husband (or god), but he would not give it to her and thus divorce her. Rather, he would, at least once, be willing to imprison himself with her for the sake of her honor.

The usage of the word "matrona" in the parable seems somewhat more sophisticated than it was in the aggadot describing flesh and blood women. The Rabbis, it may be contended, had to be very precise in their use of the word. They had others to choose from, including the word "malkah" ("queen"), to describe God's mate in the parable. Why they chose "matrona" is a matter of conjecture to be sure, but it seems logical to say that for the Rabbis the word "malkah" carried connotations they wished to avoid. We have already discussed the fact that in the rabbinic period, the word "queen" had a great theological importance. The cult of Isis was very strong throughout the empire, and, according to Durant, "devout litanies hailed her as 'Queen of Heaven.'"⁷ Such a theology would be abhorrent to the Rabbis, although they were most certainly acquainted with the cult and its adherents directly or indirectly. By refraining from using the word "malkah" in the parable, they may have wanted consciously to avoid saying that they were talking about a literal wife for God. For them the word "matrona" became a safer metaphor for use in the parable, for its use in Hebrew, as demonstrated in the aggadot,

was ambiguous.

What must be of central importance for us is that in these aggadot and m'shalim we have a literature built around an unusual word. Brought to Palestine by its Roman conquerors, the word "matrona" became a common word in the vocabulary of the teachers and leaders of the Jewish community. It must have been a word in common usage in the general community, for in the midrashim--the lessons derived from Scriptural passages--the word made many appearances without involved explanation as to what the author of the passage meant. Yet what a rabbi meant when he used the word, and what a Roman meant when he used the word was not exactly the same. The word in Hebrew became a sort of shorthand by which a certain kind of lady could be introduced into a text and be recognized immediately by those who read or heard it. There were many different kinds of matronot. What happened in the course of the parable or story would explain which kind of matrona was intended. Some of the texts might have been far-fetched; some were probably inventions. But the mention that the anonymous woman was a "matrona" must have put the intention of the text across to the audience. Whether it was the author's intention to tell a story, relate a "true" event, or tell a joke, his use of the word "matrona" created a mood which facilitated his making his point.

In the course of this study we have come across other loan-words which appear in rabbinic literature. It is not surprising that many did. Palestine was a crossroads of the world. Even a small town like Sepphoris had residents from Greece, Rome, Babylonia and points beyond. With many languages in use in daily life, there must have been hundreds of words which one language had that another had not developed. As the world became more sophisticated, and therefore more sophisticated words and terms

had to be used, it was probably easier then, as it is today, to borrow the precise term from another language than to attempt to invent one in one's own language. Since Rome stationed a large garrison on Jewish soil, Roman military terms most certainly crept into the daily language of the Jews, as did the Latin for "litter," and other inventions which were imported. On top of that, the Rabbis and general Jewish population of Palestine, and of the world, came into contact with the philosophies of both East and West, and adapted the terms of those philosophical systems, and to describe their opponents, such as the "epicoros." Since their experience was different than that of the Greeks and Romans, the words took on different significance for the Rabbis than they had for other peoples. The incorporation of foreign words into the Rabbi's vocabulary has been called "linguistic rabbinic universalism" for their language is indicative of their general world view. The inclusion of such a large number of non-Hebrew or Aramaic terms in their vocabulary is one of the best arguments against those who choose to think of the Rabbis as closed-minded and provincial, interested only in making heavier "the burden of the Law." Such was far from the case. The Rabbis were very interested in their world.

The Rabbis were keenly aware of their world and what went on in it, because they saw as their primary task the preservation of a viable Judaism in a rapidly changing and progressively hostile world. They could not have the luxury of blinding themselves to what went on around them, for all that happened vitally affected them. The Rabbis in Usha were not isolated. They were in touch with the Jewish communities in Babylonia and in the Mediterranean world. Many knew Greek and Latin, as well as Hebrew and Aramaic. And they knew that the only way they could

defend their faith was to provide their people with the tools with which to do this: halakah and aggada. They provided the people with a guide for living a godly life. And they provided, in the aggada, the lessons and reasons for living a Jewish life. In the course of their teachings, the Rabbis also provided the Jewish people with the means of arguing their case against their growing rivals, the early Christians, who sought to find in Scripture rationalizations for their own beliefs. In the end, this became the most serious struggle of them all. Signs of that struggle can probably be seen in the aggadot we have discussed in this thesis. But the primary purpose of aggada was not apologetic. The aggada formed a thread which tied the individual Jew, be he rabbi or layman, to God. The aggadot had to teach important messages so that all might learn and understand. Thus language and brevity played an important part in conveying that message. It would seem that the inclusion of the word "matrona" was far from accidental, for it helped the Rabbis succeed in their primary task; it was a word with which all were familiar and therefore it could convey a thought clearly and precisely. With the word "matrona" the Rabbis could set a mood, and having succeeded in that, they could then teach their lesson.

In the end, the task of creating aggada was not a light one, and the success the Rabbis had in fulfilling and carrying out this task is nowhere better illustrated than in this statement from Sifre Deuteronomy ("Ekev," paragraph 49): " . . . 'If you wish to know the Creator of the World, learn aggada, for from it you will learn to know God and to cleave to His ways.'"³

Footnotes--Chapter V

1. C. G. Montefiore and H. Lowe, A Rabbinic Anthology (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1960), p. xviii.
2. J. Carcopine, Daily Life in Ancient Rome (New Haven: Yale, 1962), p. 90.
3. Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 523.
4. Jacob Raisin, Gentile Reactions to Jewish Ideals, Herman Hailperin, ed. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 293.
5. Ibid., p. 318.
6. Ibid., pp. 321-323.
7. Durant, loc. cit.
8. Montefiore, 162.

APPENDIX

ORIGINAL TEXTS FOR CHAPTER I

I. שאלה מטרונה את ר' יוסי אמרה לו למה אין כתיב בשני כי טובץ אמר לה, אעפ"כ חזר וכללם כולם בסוף. שנא וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד. אמרה לו משל ששה בני אדם באין אצלך ואתה נותן לכל אחד ואחד מנה ולאחד אין אתה נותן מנה. ואתה חוזר ונותן לכולם מנה ושנות וביד אחד שנות. אתמהא חזר ואמר לה כההיא דאמר ר' שמואל בר נחמן. לפי שלא נגמרה מלאכה המים. לפיכך כתיב בשלישי ב' פעמים כי טוב. אחת למלאכת המים ואחת למלאכת היום.

II. מעשה שאלה מטרוניתא אחת את ר' יוסי בן חלפתא לכמה ימים ברא הקב"ה את עולמו. אמר לה מיום ראשון. אמרה לו מניין אתה מלמדני. אמר לה עשרות מימין אריסטון אמרה לו הן. וכמה מיסון היה לך אמרה לך כך וכך אמר לה וכולם בבת אחת נתת לפניהם. אמרה לו לאו אלא כל התבשילין כאחת אבל לא הכנסתי לפניהם אלא מיסון מיסון. וכולם ממקרא אחת, שנא' כי יוצר הכל הוא וגו'.

III. ר' יב"ס פתח /תהלים סח/ אלהים מושיב יחידים ביתה. מטרונה שאלה את ר"י בר חלפתא א"ל לכמה ימים ברא הקב"ה את עולמו. א"ל לו ימים כדכתיב /שמות לא/ כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ. א"למה הוא עושה מאותה עשה ועד עכשיוץ א"ל הקב"ה מזווג גיווגים. בתו של פלוני לפלוני. אחתו של פלוני לפלוני ממנו של פלוני לפלוני. א"ל ודא היא אומליתיה. אף אני יכולה לעשות כן. כמה עבדים וכמה שפחות יש לי לשעה קלה אני יכולה לזווגן. א"ל אם קלה היא בעיניך קשה היא לפני הקב"ה כקריעת ים סוף. הלך לו ר"י בר חלפתא. מה עשתה. נטלה אלף עבדים ואלף שפחות והעמיד אותן שורות שורות אמרה פלן יסב לפלונית ופלונית תיסב לפלוני וזיוגה אותם בלילה אחת. למהר אתון לגבה דין מוחיה פציע. דין עיניה שמיטה. דין רגליה תבירה. אמרה להון מה לכוך. דין אמרה לית אנא בעי לדין ודין אמר לית אנא בעי לדא. מיד שלחהוהביאה את ר"י בר חלפתא א"ל לית אלהא כאלהכוך. אמת היא תורתכון נאה משובחת יפה אמרת. אמרללה לא כך אמרת לך אם קלה היא לפני הקב"ה כקריעת ים סוף. הקב"ה מה עושה. להם מזווגן בעל כרחן שלא בטובתן הה"ד /תהל' סח/ אלהים מושיב יחידים ביתה מוציא אסירים בכושרות. מהו בכושרות. בכי ושירות. מאן דבעי אמר שירה ומאן דלא בעי בכי. א"ר ברכיה בלשון הזה השיבה ר"י בר חלפתא הקב"ה יושב ועושה סולמו משפיל לזה ומרים לזה מוריד לזה ומעלה לזה. הוי אומר אלהים שופט זה ישפיל וזה ירים. יש

שהוא הולך אצל זיווגו וזיווגו בא אצלו.

IV. אמר לה מעלה סולמות ומוריד סולמות. פלוני שהיה עשיר יעני. ופלוני שהיה עני יעשר שנה 7 ש"א ב' ה' מוריש ומעשיר וגו'. ר' ברכיה אומר לא השיבה כן אלא כך אמר לה מזווג בעולמו זוגים....

V. הקב"ה יושב ודן אותם ומביא זה ממקום א' וזה ממקום אחר ומושיבן בבית אחד. מוציא אסירים בכושרות שהנא מוציאן מבתיהן אסורים בעל כרחן ומזווגן. בכושרות אמ אינן זוכים בוכים ואם זכו משורדין.

VI. מעידה אני שאלהיכם אמת תורתו אמת שכל מה שאמרת יפה אמרת.

VII. הקב"ה מה עושה להם מזווגן בעל כרחן שלא בטובתן הה"ד תה"סח / אלהים מושב יחידים ביתה....

VIII. הקב"ה יושב ומזווגן בעל כרחן וקושר קולר בצואר זה ומביאו מסוף העולם ומזווג לזה בסוף העולם שנה' אלהים מושב יחידים ביתה....

IX. מטרונה אחת שאלה את ר' יוסי אמרה לו למה בגניבה. א"ל משל אם הפקיד אדם לידך אונקיא של כסף בחשאי וחזרת לו ליטרא של זהב בפרהסיא זו גניבה. א"ל למה במטמוניות. א"ל בתחלה בראה לו וראה אותה מלאה רירין ודם. והפליגה ממנו חזר ובראה לו פעם ב'. א"ל מוספת אני על דבריך אמורה הייתי להנשא לאח אמי וע"י שגדלתי עמו בבית התכערתי בעיניו והלך ונשא לו אשה אחרת ואינה נאה כמוני.

X. המינים שאלו ל רבי אבהו א"ל אין אנו מוצאין מיתה לחנוך. א"ל למה. א"ל נאמר כאן לקיחה ונאמר / מלכים ב' ה' / כי היום ה' לוקח את אדוניך מעל ראשך. א"ל אם ללקיחה אתם דורשים נאמר כאן לקיחה ונאמר להלן / יחז' כד' / הנני לקח ממך את מחמד עיניך. א"ר תנחומא יפה השיב ר' אבהו.

מטרונה שאל את רבי יוסי. א"ל אין אנו מוצאין מיתה בחנוך. א"ל אילו נאמר / ברא' ה' / ויתהלך חנוך את האלהים ושתק הייתי אומר כדבריך. כשהוא אומר ואיננו כי לקח אותו אלהים ואיננו בעוה"ז כי לקח אותו אלהים.

XI. מטרונה שאלה את ר"י בן חלפתא א"ל למה יצא עשו תחלה. א"ל טיפה ראשונה של יעקב היתה א"ל משל אם תניחי שתי מרגליות בשפופרת אחת לא זו שאת נותנת ראשונה יוצאה אחרונה. כך טיפה ראשונה של יעקב היתה.

XII. ויהי כדברה אל יוסף יום ויום ולא שמע אליה לשכב אצלה להיות עמה... ברא' לט / מטרונה שאלה את ר' יוסי אמרה לו אפשר יוסף בן י"ז שנה עומד בכל חומותיו והיה עושה הדבר הזה. הוציא לפניו ספר ברשית והתחיל קורא לפניו מעשה ראובן ובלחה. מעשה יהודה ותמר. אמר לה מה אם אלו שהם גדולים וברשות אביהן לא כסה עליהם הכתוב. זה שהוא קטן וברשות עצמו עאכ"ו.

XIII. מטרונה שאלה את ר' יוסי אמרה לו כתיב כי יהודה גבר באחיו וכתיב וינחם יהודה ויעל על גוזזי צאנו. וזה ^א אביהם של כולם וימאן להתנחם א"ל מתנחמים על המתים ואין מתנחים על החיים.

XIV. שאל מין אחד לרבינו אפשר שהמתים חיים. אבותיכם אינם מודים ואתם מודים מה כתיב ביעקב ויקמו כל בניו וכל בנותיה לנחמו. אילו היה יודע שהמתים חיים היה ממאן להסתחם. וזה אומר כי אריד אל בני אבל שאלה. אמר לו רבינו שוטה שבעולם. מפני שהיה יעקב אבינו יודע ברוח הקדש שהיה יוסף חי לפיכך לא קיבל עליו תנחומין שאין מקבלין תנחומין על החי.

XV. מטרונה אמרה לר' יוסי אלהי גדול מאלהיך אמר לה למה. אמרה לו בשעה שנגלה למשה בסנה הסתיר פניו משה אבל בשעה שראה את הנחש שהוא אלהי מיד וינס משה מפניו. א"ל תפח עצמותה. בשעה שנגלה אלהינו בסנה לא היה לו מקום לברוח. אנה היה בורח לשמים או לים או ליבשה מה נאמר באלהינו / ירמיה כג' / הלא את השמים ואת הארץ אני מלא נאם ה'. אבל הנחש שהוא אלהיך כיון שאדם בורח ממנו ב' או ג' פסיעות יכול להנצל ממנו. לכו כתיב וינס משה....

XVI. לא תעשה כל מלאכה.... פילוסופוס שאל את רבי אם חביבה המילה למה לא ניתנה לאדם הראשון. אמר ליה אם כן מפני מה אותו האיש מגלח את פאת הראש ומניח פאת הזקן אמר ליה מפני שגדל עמו בשטות. אמר ליה אם כן יטמא אותו האיש את עיניו ויקטע ידין וישבר את רגליו שגדלו עמו בשטות. אמר ליה לאילין מיליא אחינן. אמר ליה להודיאן חלק א' אפשר. אלא כל מה שנברא בששת ימי בראשית צריך תיקון. החרדך צריך למתק התורמוס צריך למתק החיטין צריכין ליטחן. אפילו אדם צריך תיקון. עקילוס הגר שאל את ר' אליעזר. אמר לו הואיל וחביבה היא מילה לפני הקב"ה מפני מה לא נתנה בעשרת הדברות.

XVII. אמר לו קודם עשרת הדברות נתנה דכתיב ושמרתם את בריתי / שמות יט' / זו ברית שבת וברית מילה. מטרונת שאלה את רבי יוסי בר חלפתא. אמרה לו אם חביבה מילה לפני הקב"ה מפני מה לא ניתנה בעשרת הדברות. אמר לה כבר ניתנה וגרך אשר בשעריך... זה הגר שהוא משמר את השבת בברית כ"שאל.

XIX. לא תשא את שם אלהיך לשוא / שמות כ/. מטרונה שאלה את ר' יוסי אמרה לו מה ראה למד להיות גבוה מכל האותיות אמר לה מפני שהוא כרוז ודרכו של כרוז להיות עומד במקום גבוה ומכריז.

XX. כתיב למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם וגו'. כימי השמים על הארץ / דברים יא/. אין אתם קיימים אלא כל זמן שמים וארץ קיימים, ועתידין שמים וארץ להתבלות שכך אמר ישעיה שאו מרום עיניכם וראו וגו' / ישעיה מ/, וכתיב שאו לשמים עיניכם והביטו וגו' / שם נא/. אמר לה מאותו נביא שהוכחתי, ממנו אני משיבך, שנא' כאשר השמיסה חדשים... / שם י/.

XXI. ואמלא אותו רגח אלהים בחממה שכבר היתה בו חכמב למדך שאין הקב"ה ממלא חכמה אלא למי שיש בו כבר. מטרונה אחת שאלה את ר' יוסי בר חלפתא מהו שכתב יהב חכמתא לחכימין / דניאל ב/ לטפשים היה צריך לומר. אמר לה בתי אם יבאו אצלך שנים אחד עני ואחד עשיר והן צריכין ללות ממך ממון לאיזה מהם אנת מלוה. אמרה לן לעשיר אמר לה ולמה. א"ל שאם יהיה לו ממון שיפרע אבל עני אם יאבד מעותי מהיכן יפרע. אמר לה ישמעו אזניך מה שפיר מדבר כך אם היה הקב"ה נותן חכמה לטפשיין הוי יושבין בבתי כסאות ובמבואות מטונפות ובבתי מרחצאות ואין מתעסקין בה אלא נתנה הקב"ה לחכמים שיהיו יושבין בישיבת זקנים בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות ועוסקין בה. לכן כתיב ואמלא. מלא מי שהיה בו כבר חכמה.

XXII. שאלה מטרונא לר' יוסי בן חלפתא אמרה לו הרי כל שבחו של הקב"ה שהוא נותן לחכמים חכמה, שנא' יהב חכמתא לחכימין. לא היה צריך לומר אלא יהב חכמתא לטפשיין, אמר לה יש לך קוזמין אמרה לו הן. אמר לה אם בא אדם לשאול קוזמין שלך משאלת את אותם לו, אמרה לו אם יהיה אדם אוקנוס אני משאלת לו קוזמין שלי, אמר לה קוזמין שלך אין את משאלת אלא לאדם אוקנוס, הקב"ה יתן את החכמה לטפשיין, לפיכך אמר יהב חכמתא לחכימין....

XXIII. אם יבאו אצלך שני בני אדם ללות ממך ממון אחד מהן עשיר ואחד מהן עני לאיזה מהן את מלוה לעשיר או לעני. אמרה לו לעשיר א"ל ולמה. אמרה לו שאם איבד העשיר ממוני יש לו מהיכן יפרע אבל אם איבד העני ממוני מהיכן יפרע לי. א"ל ולא ישמעו אזניך מה שאת מוציאה מפיר. אילו נתן הקב"ה חכמה לטפשיין היו יושבין והוגין בה בבתי כסאות ובבתי תיאטריאות ובבתי מריצות אלא נתן הקב"ה חכמה לחכימין והם יושבין והוגין בה בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות...

XXIV. מטרונא שאלה לר' יוסי א"ל אלהכון מאן בעי מקריב.

הביא לפניו כלכלה של תאנים והיתה בתורת יפה ובוררת ואוכלת. א"ל את יודעת לברור והקב"ה אינו יודע לברור. מאן דהוא חמי עובדיו טבין הוא בחר ביה ומקריב ליה.

XXV. מי יודע רוח בני אדם /קהלת ג./ מטרונה שאלה לר' יוסי בר' חלפתא אמרה לו מה הוא דין דכתיב ומי יודע רוח בני האדם העולה היא למעלה. אמר לה אלו נשמותיהן של צדיקים שהם נתונות באוצר שכל אביגיל אמרה לדוד ברוה"ק והיתה נפש אדוני צרורה בצרור החיים וגו'. יכול אף של רשעים כן. ת"ל ואת נפש אויבך יקלענה בתוך כל הקלע אמרה ליה ומהו דין דכתיב ורוח הבהמה היורדת היא למטה לארץ. א"ל אלו הן נשמותיהן של רשעים שהם יורדות לגיהנם למטה שנא' /יחז. לא/ ביום רדתו שאלה....

XXVI. ר' יוחנן אמר לעולם אל תהי מצות העומר קלה בעיניך שע"י מצות העומר זכה אברהם לירש את ארץ כנען. הה"ד /בראשית יז/ ונתתי לך ולזרעך אחריו עלמנת ואתה את בריתי תשמור ואי זה מצות העומר.... א"ר אבהו ור' סימון ור' ב"ל היא שעמדה להם בימי גדיון הה"ד ויבא גדיון והנה איש מספר לרעהו חלום חלמתי והנה צליל לחם שעורים. מהו צליל שעורים. רבנן אמרי על שצלל עליכם אותו הדור מן הצדיקים ובזכות מה ניצולו בזכות לחם שעורים ואיזן זו. זו מצות העומר.... ורבנן אמרי היא שעמדה להן בימי יחזקאל הה"ד ואתה קח לך חטין ושעורים.... ר' חמא ב"ר חלפתא אמר ריבה בהן שעורין. ר' שב"נ אמר ריבה בהן דברים שהן מריצין לבני מעים. ושמאל אמר תמן אמרין עבדין מיניה לכלבא לא טעמא. שאלה מטרונה אחת את רבי יוסי א"ל כמה נצטער אותו צדיק כמה עבדים וכמה שפחות יש לו והן מפסלין באוכלין ומשקין שלו אמר לה כ"כ למה לחודיך שכל זמן שישראל בצער אף הצדיקים הויז עמהם בצער.

XXVII. היא שעמדה להם בימי יחזקאל ואתה קח לך חטין ושעורין ופול ועדשין ודוחן וכוסמים ונתתה אותה בכלי אחד ועשית אותה ללחם למספר הימים אשר אתה שוכב על צדך שכל מאות וחשעים יום תאכלנו. מה ללחם. ריבה בה שעורים. רבי שמואל בר נחמן אמר דבריש שהם מצירים את בני מעים. שמואל אומר תמן אמר עבדיה מיניה לכלבא ולא טעמיה. שאלה מטרונות את ר' יוסי בן חלפתא אמרה לו כמה צער נצטער אותו הצדיק כמה עבדים וכמה שפחות יש לו והם מבזין בו במאכל. בסוף אמר לה להודיעך שבכל מקום שישראל בצער הצדיקים הוויז עמהם בצער.

ORIGINAL TEXTS FOR CHAPTER II

I. שהרי רבי צדוק היה גדול הדור כשנשבה לרומי נטלתו מטרוניתא אחת ושגרה לו שפחה אחת יפה. כיון שראה אותו נתן עיניו בכותל שלא יראנה והיה יושב ושונה כל הלילה. לשחרית הלכה והקבילה אצל גבירתה. אמרה לה שוה לי המוח משתחנני לאיש הזה. שלחה וקראה לו ואמרה לו מפני מה לא עשית עם אשה זאת כדרך שיעשו בני אדם. אמר לה ומה אעשה מכהונה גדולה אני ממשפחה גדולה אני אמרתי שמא אבא עליה והרביתי ממזרים בישראל. כיון שמעה דבריו צוהה עליו ופטרתו בכבוד גדול.

II. ר' צדוק תבכתיה ההיא מטרוניתא אמר לה חלש לי ליבאי ולא מצינא איכא מידי למיכל אמרה ליה איכא דבר טמא אמר לה מאי נפקא מינה דעביד הא אכול הא שגרת תנורא קא מנחא ליה סליק ויחיב בגויה אמרה ליה מאי האי אמר לה דעביד הא נפיל בהא אמרה ליה אי ידעי כולי האי לא צערתיך.

III. אותה ארמית הסיקה התנור לצלות דבר הטמא שם ואשה גדולה היתה לא יכול ליפטר ממנה ומסור בידה להורגו

IV. ואחר ישקה את המים. אחר שנתחלה עליהם והסביר פניו של זעם, כמה דתימה, ויפן וירד משה, אחר כן בדקן כסוטות. והשקה את המים.../במדבר ה/. בעת ששתו מהם נבדקו ומתו כל החוטאים מיתה משנה. מטרונה שאלה את ר' אליעזר. מפני מה חסיה אחת בעגל והם מתו בה שלש מיתות. אמר לה אין חכמה לאשה אלא בפלכה דכתיב וכל אשה חכמת לב בידיה טו /שמות לה/. אמר לו הורקנוס בשביל שלא להשיבה דבר אחד מן התורה אבדת ממנו שלש מאות כר מעשר בכל שנה. אמר לו ישרפו דברי תורה ואל ימסרו לנשים. וכשיצאה אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי לזו דחית בקנה לנו מה אתה משיב. ר' ברכיה ר' אבא בר כהנא בשם ר' אלעזר אמר כל מי שהיה לו עדים והתראה היה מת בבית דין. עדים ולא התראה היה נבדק כסוטה. לא עדים ולא התראה היה מת במגפה. רב ולוי בר טיסי תרויהון אמרין זבח קטר ונסך היה מת בבית דין. טפח רקד שחק היה נבדק כסוטה. שמח בלבו היה מת במגפה.

V. שאלה אשה חכמה את ר' אליעזר מאחר שמעשה העגל שזון מפני מה אין מיתתן שוה אמר לה אין חכמה לאשה אלא בפלך וכך הוא אומר וכל אשה חכמת לב בידיה טו איתמר רב ולוי חד אמר זירח וקיסר בסייף גפף ונישק במיתה שמח בלבבו בהדרוקן וחד אמר עדים והתראה בסייף עדים בלא התראה במיתה לא עדים ולא התראה בהדרוקן.

VI. אמרו רבותנו פעם אחת הוצרך דבר אחד לתלמידי חכמים
 אצל מטרוניתא אחת שכל גדולי רומי מצויין אצלה אמרו
 מי ילך אמר להם ר' יהושע אני אלך הלך רבי יהושע
 ותלמידיו כיון שהגיע לפתח ביתה חלץ תפיליו ברחוק
 ארבע אמות ונכנס ונעל הדלת בפניהן אחר שיצא ירד וטבל
 ושנה לתלמידיו ואמר בשעה שחלצתי תפילין במה חשדתוני
 אמרו כסבור רבי לא יכנסו דברי קדושה במקום טומאה
 בשעה שנעלתי במה חשדתוני אמרנו שמא דבר מלכות יש בינו
 ובינה בשעה שירדתי וטבלתי במה חשדתוני אמרנו שמא
 ניתזה צינורא מפיה על בגדיו של רבי אמר להם העבודה
 כך היה ואתם כשם שדנתוני לזכות המקום ידין אתכם
 לזכות.

VII. מן שית מילי איצתר רבי עקיבא מן כלבא שבוע מן אילא
 דספינתא דכל ספינתא עבדין ליה מן עינא זימנא חדא
 אנשייה על כיף ימא אתא הוא אשכחיה ומן גוויזא דזימנא
 חדא יהיב ארבעה זוזי לספונאי אמר להו אייתי לי מדעם
 ולא אשכחו אלא גוויזא כל כיף ימא אחייה ליה אמרו ליה
 עתיד מרנא עליה אישתכח דהוה מלי דינרי דזימנא חדא
 טבעת ספינתא וכולי עיסקא הוה מחית בההוא גוויזא ואשתכח
 בההוא זימנא דמן דסרוקיתא ומן מטרוניתא....

VIII. ומן מטרוניתא. שפעם אחת הוצרכו חכמים ממון הרבה לבית
 המדרש ושיגרו אחרי עקיבא אצל מטרוניתא אחת ולוה ממנה
 ממון גדול וכשנתנה לו אמרה לו מי יהיה לי ערב שתפרע
 לי לזמן קבוע אמר לה מי שתדע אמרה לו הקב"ה והים
 שהיה ביתה על שפת הים אמר לה ר"ע כן יהיה כשהגיע הזמן
 חלה ר"ע ולא היה יכול להביא הממון יצאת אותה מטרוניתא
 על שפת הים ואמרה רבש"ע גלוי וידוע לפניך כי לך וליים
 הזה האצמתי מעותי הכניס הקב"ה רוח שטות בלבו של קיסר
 ונכנס לבית גנזיו ונטל קרטלית יזרקה לים והשליכה הים
 לפתח ביתה של אותה מטרוניתא ונטלתה ולאחר זמן הביא
 לה רבי עקיבא הממון ואמר לה אל יחר לך שלא הבאתי
 לך הממון בזמן שקבענו שחליתי אמרה לו יהא הכל שלך
 שממוני בא לידי בזמנו וספרה לו כל המעשה ונתנה לו
 מתנות גדולות וסרתו לשלום.

IX. ואמר רב יהודה שלשה דברים מאריכין ימיו ושנותיו של
 אדם המאריך בתפלתו והמאריך על שלחנו והמאריך בבית
 הכסה.... דשמרה ליה ההיא מטרוניתא לר' יהודה בר'
 אלעאי פניך דומים למגדלי חזירים ולמלוי ברבית אמר לה
 הימנותא לדידי תרוייהו אסידן אלא פ"ב בית הכסא איכא
 מאושפיזאי לבי מדרשא דכי אזילנא בדיקנא נפשאי בכולהו.

X. אמרה ההיא מטרוניתא לרבי יהודה מורה ורבי אמר לה הימנותא בידא דההיא איתחא אי טעימנא אלא קידושא ואבדלתא וארבעה כסי דפסחא וחוגרני צידעי מן הפסח עד העצרת אלא חכמת אדם תאיר פניו אמר ליה ההוא צדוקי לרבי יהודה פניך דומיק אי כמלוי רבית אי כמגדלי חזירין א"ל ביהודאי תרוייחו אסירן אלא עשרים וארבעה בית הכסא אית לי מן ביתא עד בי מדשא וכל שעה אני נכנס לכל אחד ואחד.

XI. גוי אחד ראה את ר' יהודה בר' אלעאי חמתיה אפוי נחריין אמר הדין גברא חדא מן תלת מילין אית ביה או שתוי חמר או מוזיף ברבייתא או מרבי חזירי. שמע ר' יהודה בר' אלעאי אמר ליה תיפח רוחיה בהחוא גברא דחדא מן תלתייהו לית בי. לא מוזיף ברבייתא אנא דכתיב /דברים כג/ לא תשיך לאחריך. ולא מרבי חזירי אנא דאסור ליה לבר ישראל למרבי חזירי דתנינן תמן לא יגדל אדם חזירים בכ"ס. ולא שתוי חמר אנא דאפי' ארבע כסיה דאנא שתי בלילא פסחא אזיף לרישי מן פסחא לעצרתא. א"ל ועל מה אפך נהירין א"ל אורייתא היא דמנהרא אפוי דכתיב יכמת אדם תאיר פניו וגו'.

XII. רבי יונה כדעתיה דר' יונה שתי ארבעתי כסיי דלילי פסחא וחזק רישיה עד עצרתא ורבי יודא בי ר' אילעאי שתי ארבעתי כסוי דלילי פיסחא וחזק רישיה עד חגא וחמתיה חדא מטרונה אפיי נהורין א"ל סבא סבא חדא מן תלת מילין אית בך אישתיי חמר את או מלוה ברביית את או מגדל חזירין את אמר לה תיפח רוחה דההיא איתחא הדא מן תלת מילייתא לית בי אלא אולפני שכיח לי דכתיב חכמת אדם תאיר פניו.

XIII. ...מתיב רב טובי בר מתנה בעשרים ותמניא ביה אתח בשורתא טבתא ליהודאי דלא יעידון מאורייתא שגזרה המלכות גזרה שלא יעסקו בחורה ושלא ימולו את בניהם ושיחללו שבתות מה עשה יהודה בן שמוע וחביריו הלכו ונטלו עצה ממטרוניתא אחת שכל גדולי רומי מצויין אצלה אמרה להם בואו והפגינו בלילה אמרו אי שמים לא אחייכם אנחנו ולא בני אב אחד אנחנו ולא בני אם אחת אנחנו מה נשתנינו מכל אומה ולשון שאתם גוזרין עלינו גזירות קשות וביטלום ואותו היום עשאוהו יום טוב ואי ס"ד בטלה מגילת תענית קמייתא בטול אחרנייתא מוסיפין וכי תימא הכא נמי בזמן שבת המקדש קיים והא יהודה בן שמוע תלמידו של רבי מאיר.

XIV. ועד אמר ר' מתיא ר' יוחנן חש בצפידנא אצל גבה דההיא מטרוניתא עבדא ליה מלתא חמשא ומעלי שבתא אמר לה בשבת מאי אמרה ליה לא צריכת אי מצטריכנא מאי אמרה ליה אישתבע לי דלא מגלית אישתבע לאלהא דישראל לא מגלינא נפך דרשה בפירקא והא אישתבע לה לאלהא דישראל לא מגלינא הא לעמו ישראל מגלינא והא איכא חלול השם דמגלי לה מעיקרא....

XV. רב כהנא הוה קמזבין דיקולי תבעתיה ההיא מטרוניתא אמר לה איזיל איקשיט נפשאי סליק וקנפיל מאיגרא לארעא אתא אליהו קבליה אמר ליה אטרחתן ארבע מאה פרסי א"ל מי גרם לי לאו עניותא יהב ליה שיפא דינרי.

XVI. כי הא דרבי חנינא בר פפי תבעתיה ההיא מטרוניתא אמר מלתא ומלי נפשיה שיחנא וכיבא עבדה היא מילתא ואיתסי ערק טשא בהווא בי בני דכי הוו עיילין בתרון אפילו ביממא הוו מיתזקי למחר אמרו ליה רבנן מאן נטרך אמר להו שני נושאי קיסר שמרוני כל הלילה אמרו ליה שמא דבר ערוה בא לידך וניצלת הימנו דתנינא כל הבא דבר ערוה לידו וניצל הימנו עושין לו נם גבורי כח עושה דברו לשמוע בקול דברו.

XVII. רב חסדא ורבה בר חונא הוו קאזלי בארבא אמרה להו ההיא מטרוניתא אותבן בהדייכו לא אותבוה אמרה מלתא אסרתה לארבא אמרו אינהו מילתא שריוה אמרה להו מאי איעביד לכו דלא מקנח לכו בחספא ולא קטיל לכו כינה אמנייכו ולא אכיל לכו יתקא מכישא דאסר גינאה.

XVIII. אמר ר' יוחנן ג' דברים נתנו מתנות לעולם ואלו הן התורה והמאורות והגשמים... ר' יצחק בר מריון אומר אף הפרשת הים הצדול שנא' כה אמר ה' הנותן בים דרך רבנין אמרי הנותן בים דרך מעצרת ועד החג. ובמים עזין נתיבה מן החג ועד החנוכה. ר' נתן כהן אחוה דר' חייא בר אבא הוה מפרש בימא... ה' יתהשע בריה דר' תנחומא ב"ר חייא דכפר חנון הוה באסיא בעה דיפרוש. אמרה ליה מטרונא באילן יומיא פרשי אתמהא. אתחזי ליה אבוי בחלמא א"ל ברי בלא קבורה. שנא' גם קבורה לא היתה לו /קהלת ו/. ולא שמע לא למילי דדין ולא למילי דדין ולקא הוה לו.

XIX. א"ר יצחק בר מריון אילולי דכתיב כה אמר ה' הנותן בים דרך כיון שהיה אדם יורד לתוכו היה מת ורבנן אמריין הנותן בים דרך מן העצרת ועד החג ובמים עזים נתיבה מן החג ועד חנוכה רבי יוסה בריה דרבי תנחום דכפר אגין עובדא הוה באסיא אחא בעי מפרוש מן חגא ועד חנוכה המתי' חדא מטרונה א"ל כדון מפרשין איתחמי ליה אבוי וגם קבורה לא היתה לו ולא שמע לא לדין ולא לדין ואזיל בממא.

XX. ר' שמואל בר טוסרטי עלה לרומי. אבדו למלכת תכשיטיה ומצאם. הציאה כרוז במדנה מי שיחזיר תוך שלשים יום יטול כך וכך לאחר שלשים יום יחזירו את ראשו לא החזירם תוך שלשים יום לאחר שלשים יום החזירם אמרה לו לא היית במדינה. אמר לה הן. אמרה לו ולמה לא החזירת תוך

שלשים יום. אמר לה שלא תאמרי בשביל מורא שלך עשיתי
אלא בשביל מורא שמים. אמרה לו ברוך אלהי היהודים.

XXI. אמר דוד הושיעה ה' כי גמר חסיד. מעשה היה בחסיד
אחד שאיבדה מטרונית אחת קופסא מלאה דינרין ומצאה אותו
חסיד והוליכה לה. כיון שהוליכה אמרו לה אינו יודע מה
הוא לפיכך הביאה לך. אמרה להוקוטמא כולה דדהב מלבד
ואתם אומרים אינו יודע מה הוא. אמרה ליה תהא אומתך
מסורה לך. אמרה לה הוא מחזיר לך אבידתך ואת מקללת
אותו. אמרה להן אילו עוד חד הוה באומתיה כותיה אנן
לא הוינן בעלמא /וגזרה שיהא נכנס ויצא בלא רשות/.

XXII. רבי אבהו כי היה אתי ממתיבתא לבי קיסר נפקי מטרוניתא
דבי קיסר ומשרייך ליה רבה דעמיה מדברנא דאומתיה
בוצינא דנהורא בריך מתייך שלום.

XXIII. קטיע בר שלום מאי דההיא קיסר דהוה סני להודאי אמר להו
לחשיבי דמלכותא מי שעלה לו נימא ברגלו יקטענה ויחיה
או ניחנה ויצטער אמרו לו יקטענה ויחיה אמר להו קטיעה
בר שלום חדא דלא יכלת להו לכולהו דכתיב כי כארבע
רוחות. מאי קאמר אלימא דבדרתהון בד' רוחות הא
כארבע רוחות לארבע רוחות מבעי ליה אלא כשם שא"א לעולם
בלא רוחות כך א"א לעולם בלא ישראל ועוד קרו לך מלכותא
קטיעה א"ל מימר שפיר קאמרת מיהו כל דזכי שדו ליה
לקמוניא חלילא כד הוה נקטין ליה ואזלין אמרה ליה ההיא
מטרוניתא ווי ליה לאילפא דאזלא בלא מכסא נפל על רישא
דעורלתיה קטעה אמר יהבית מכסי חלפית ועברית כי קא שדו
ליה אמר כל נכסאי לך"ע וחביריו. יצא ר"ע ודרש והיה
לאהרן ולבניו מחצה לאהרן ומחצה לבניו יצחה בת קול
ואמרה קטיעה בר שלום מזומן לחיי העוה"ב. בכה רבי ואמר
יש קונה עולמו בשעה אחת ויש קונה עולמו בכמה שנים.

XXIV. ד"א ושבת עד ה' אלהיך אין לך דבר גדול מן התשובה.
מעשה שהוי רבותינו ברומי ר' עליעזר ור' יהושע ורבן
גמליאל. וגזרו סנקליטין של מלך לומר מכאן ועד ל' יום
לא יהיה בכל העולם יהודי. והיה סנקליטו של מלך ירא
שמים. באואצל רבן גמליאל וגילה לו הדבר. והיו
רבותינו מצטערים הרבה אמר להם אותו ירא שמים אל
תצטערו מכאן ועד ל' יום אלהיהן של יהודה עומד להם.
בסוף כ"ה ימים גילה לאשתו את הדבר. אמרה לו והרי שלמו
כ"ה ימים. אמר לה עוד חמשה ימים. ושמרת אשתך אהת
ממנו אמרה לו אין לך טבעת מוץ אותה ומוח וסנקליטון נטל
עליך שלשים ימים אחרים והגזירה עוברת. שמע לה ומוץ
את טבעתו ומח. שמעו רבותינו ועלו אצל אשתו להראות לה
פנים. אמרו רבותינו חבל לספינה שהלכה לה ולא נתנה המכס
כלו' הצדיק הזה לא מל. אמרה להן אשתו יודעת אני מה
אתם אומרים חייכם לא עבדה הספינה עד שנתנה מכס שלה.

מיד נכנסה לתוך הקיטון והוציאה להן קופסא שהיתה המילה
בתוכה וסמרטוטים מלאים דם נתונים עליה וקראו עליו
רבותינו המקרא הזה /תה' מז/ נדיבי עמים נאספו עם
אלהי אברהם כי לאלהים מגני ארץ מאד נעלה. מחה מגיני
ארץ. אמר הקב"ה לאברהם נעשיתי מגן עוז. מנין שנא'
/ברא' טז/ אנכי מגן לך לזה אני נעשה מגינים הרבה.
כיצד אמר הקב"ה לאברהם ואעשר לגוי גדול...ואח"כ מל.
וזה לא הבטחתי אותו. מהו מאד נעלה זה נתעלה מאד
מאברהם.

ORIGINAL TEXT FOR CHAPTER III

- I. הנה הוא לך כסות ענים /בראשית כ.../א"ר יוחנן עשה
כסות יהיו הכל מביטין בכסותה ולא בנויה. כסות
ענים. כסות שהיא עשויה עינים עינים. ר' ברכיה אמר
עשה מטרונה כסות שהיא מכוסה מן העין.
II. עלו דטולמוסין למקרב למסאנא דמטרונא.

ORIGINAL TEXTS FOR CHAPTER IV

I. אין שבחה של מטרונה בשעה שמתקלסת מקרובותיה אלא בשעה שמתקלסת מצרותיה.

II. למה"ד למלך שנשא למטרונה והכניסה לו שנים אריסין אף המלך זקף לה כנגדן שני אריסין. איבדה מטרונה את שלה אף המלך נטל את שלו. לאחר ימים עמדה וכשרה את עצמה והביאה אותן שני אריסין. אף המלך הביא את שלו. אמר המלך אלו ואלו יעשו עטרה וינתנו בראשה של מטרונה. כך אתה מוצא, אברהם נתן לבניו שני אריסין שנא' /בראשית יח/ כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט. אף הקב"ה זקף להן כנגדם שני אריסין חסד ורחמים שנא' /דברים ט/ ושמר ה' אלהיך לך את הברית ואת החסד. ואומר /דברים יג/ ונתן לך רחמים ורחמך והרבך וגו'. אבדו ישראל את שלהם שנא' /אמוס ו/ הפכתם לראש משפט ופרי צדיק ללענה. אף הקב"ה נטל את שלו שנא' /ירמיה טז/ כי אספתי את שלומי את החסד ואת הרחמים. עמדו ישראל וכישרו את עצמן והביאו אותן שני אריסין. מניין שכן כתיב /ישעיה א/ ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה. אף הקב"ה הביא את שלו. מניין. שכ"כ /שם נד/ כי ההרים ימושו והגבעות תמוטינה וחסדי מאתך לא ימוש וברית שלומי לא חטוט אמר מרחמך ה'. וכיון שיביאו ישראל את שלהם, והקב"ה נותן את שלו. אומר הקב"ה אלו ואלו יעשו עטרה וינתנו בראשם של ישראל שנא' /הושע ב/ וארשתיך לי לעולם וארשתיך לי בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד וברחמים וארשתיך לי באמונה וידעת את ה'.

III. א"ל השבע לי שאין את מנסה אותי עוד מעתה. משל למלך שהיה נשוי למטרונה ילדה ממנו בן ראשון וגרשה. שני וגרשה. שלישי וגרשה. וכיון שילדה ממנו בן עשירי נחכנסו כולם וא"ל השבע לנו שאין את מגרש את אמנו מעתה. כך כיון שנחנסה א"א נסיון עשירי א"ל השבע לי שאין את מנסה אותי עוד מעתה.

IV. מי אנכי. א"ר יהושע בן לוי משל למלך שהשיא את בתו ופטק ליתן לה מדינה ושפחה אחת מטרונית ונתן לה שפחה כושית. א"ל חתנו. לא שפחה מטרונית פסקת ליתן לי. כך אמר משה לפני הקב"ה. רבון העולמים כשירד יעקב למצרים לא כך אמרת לו אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלך גם עלה. ועכשיו אתה אומר לי לכה ואשלחך אל פרעה. לא אנכי הוא שאמרת לו ואנכי אעלך גם עלה.

V. סרו מהר. ר' יונה בשם ר' ישמאל בר נחמן אמר כל נביא שהיה עומד היה אומר נביאתו של חבירו ולמה היה אומר דבר חבירו לברר נביאותו. ור' יהושע בן לוי אומר לנבואתו הוא נזקק. חוץ ממשה שאמר כל דברי הנביאים ושליו. וכל שהיה מתנבא מעין נבואתו של משה היה. וכל הדברות הוא אומר חוץ משנים שהקב"ה אמרן לישראל מפיו אנכי ולא יהיה לך. אמר הקב"ה לא היה לכם לחטוא אלא במה שצויתי אתכם. אר"ש בשם רבי יב"ל משל למלך שקדש מטרונה בב' מרגליות מיד ליד. וחזר ושלח לה עוד שמונה ע"י שלוחו. עם שהיתה משחקת עם אוהבה אבדה את ב' המרגליות שנתן לה המלך. כיון שידע המלך שאיבדה אותן טרדה מביתו. בא לו שושבינה לפייס למלך אמר אדני המלך אימתי אתה מוצא משובחת ונאה כמותה. אמר המלך אי שמים ב' מרגליות נתתי לה מידי לידה ושלחתי לה על ידך שמנה לא היה לה לאבד את שלך או ג' או אפי' כולם אלא כך היתה בוסרת עלי שאותן שתי מרגליות שנתתי לה מיד ליד איבדה אותן. הוא שהקב"ה אומר לירמיה כי שתיים רעות עשה עמי ושתי רעות עשו לך ויתר על כ"ב. ומהו כי שתיים באנכי ולא יהיה לך. הוי סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתים.

VI. אריה שאג. הה"ד אחרי ה' ילכו כאריה ישאג. א"ר סימון משל למלך שנכנס בפלטין שלו. שמעה מטרונה שלו ונתנה מקום והיתה מרתחת. אם המטרונה מתיראת מה יעשו השפחות והעבדים. כך כשנגלה הקב"ה ליתן תורה לישראל שמעו קולו ומתו שנא' נפשי יצאה בדבר. אם ישראל כך עומדי כוכבים עאכ"ו.

VII. א"ר אלכסנדר ללמך שבאת לו שמחה וכל שבעת ימי המשתה מטרונה מרמזת לבני פלטין ואומרת להן עד שהמלך עוסק באלריא שלו שאלו צרכיכם, וכיון שלא הבינו כשבה להם מטרונה עוד יום אחד. כך כל שבעת ימי ההג תורה מרמזת לישראל ואומרת להם שאלו מה' מטר, תדע לך שהוא כן, בשני ונסכיהם, בששי ונסכיה, ובשביעי כמשפטם, מ"ם יו"ד מ"ם, הרי מים, מכאן לנסוך המים בחג מן התורה, וכיון שלא התבוננו כבשה להם התורה עוד יום, לפיכך צריך הכתוב לומר ביום השמיני עצרת תהיה לכם.

VIII. ואמר ר' יוסי בר חנינא עובד כוכבים ששמר את השבת עד שלא קבל עליו את המילה חייב מיתה. למה שלא נצטוו עליה. ומה ראית לומר עובד כוכבים ששמר את השבת חייב מיתה. אמר ר' חייא בר אבא אמר ר' יוחנן בנוהג שבעולם מלך ומטרונה וזשבים ומסיחין זה מישבא ומכניס עצמו ביניהם אינו חייב מיתה. כך השבת הזו בין ישראל ובין הקב"ה שנא' ביני ובין בני ישראל, לפיכך כל עובד כוכבים שבא ומכניס עצמו ביניהם עד שלא קבל עליו למול חייב מיתה.

IX. זאת אשיב אל לבי על כן אוחיל. ר' אבא ב"כ בש"ר יוחנן אמר מלה"ד למלך שנשא מטרונה וכתב לה כתובה מרובה ואמר לה כך וכך חופות אני עושה לך כך וכך ארגוונות טובות אני נותן לך הניחה המלך והלך לו למדינת הים ואחר לשם. נכנסו שכנותיה אצלה והיו מקניטות אותה ואומרות לה הניחך המלך והלך לו למדינת הים ושוב אינו חוזר עליך והיתה בוכה ומתאנחת. וכיון שנכנסה לתוך ביתה פותחת ומוציאה כתובתה וקוראת ורואה בכתובתה כך וכך חופות אני עושה כך וכך ארגוונות טובות אני נותן לך. מיד היתה מתנחמת. לימים בא המלך אמר לה בתי אני תמה איך המתנת לי כל אותן השנים. אמרה לו אדני המלך אלמלא כתובה מרובה שכתבת ונתת לי כבר אבדוני שכנותי. כך האומות מונין את ישראל ואומרים להם אלהיכם הסתיר פניו מכם וסליך שכינתו מכם עוד אינו חוזר עליכם והן בוכין ומתאנחין. וכיון שנכנסין לבתי כנסיות ולבתי מדרשות וקורין בתורה ומוציאין שכתוב /ויקרא כו/ ופניתי אליכם והפריתי אתכם...ונתתי משכני בתוכם והתהלכתי בתוכם והן מתנחמין. למחר כשיבא קץ הגאולה אומר להם הקב"ה לישראל בני אני תמה מכם היאך המתנתם לי כל אותן השנים והן אומרים לפניו רבש"ע אילולי תורתך שנתת לנו כבר אבדונו האומות.

X. סיבי לך בעל עד דאת עלייה עד דחייליך עליך.

XI. עד מתי אתם מתים על אלהיכם ונהרגים עליו ונותנים נפשיכם עליו. כמה פורעניות הוא מביא עליכם כמה בוזזים מכם כמה מלכודות הוא מביא עליכם.

XII. שובו לכם אצלינו ואנו עושים אתכם דוכסים ואיפרכים ואסטרטלים.

XIII. עד אימתי את יתיבא, סיב לך בעל עד דאת טליא, עד חילך עלך.

XIV. רבון העלמים אילולי ס"ת שכתבת לנו כבר הוי או"ה מאבדין אותנו ממך הה"ד זאת אשיב אל לבי על כן אוחיל וכן דוד אומר לולי תורתך שעשועי אז אבדתי בעניי.

XV. ד"א ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן בארץ מצרים לאמר. מה הקב"ה עושה במצרים בשביל ישראל. אמר ר' יצחק משל למטרונה שהיתה מקטרגת למלך נתנה בפילקי והלך לו היה עמה המלך בפילקי. אמרו לו מה איכפת לך. א"ל כל הימים שאני עמה אינה נוטלת שם רע. כך נשתעבדו ישראל במצרים וגלה הקב"ה עמהם שנא /בראשית מו/ אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה.

XVI. אתה אל ראי כי אמרה הגם הלום ראיתי אחרי רואי. אמרה לא דיי שנתקתה לדבתי אלא למלכות המד"א /ש"ב ז/ כי

הביאתני עד הלום. ראיתי אחרי ראי. לא די שנזקקתי
עם גברתי לראות המלאך. אלא שאפילו גברתי עמי לא
ראתה. ד"א לא די שנזקקתי עם גברתי אלא ביני לבין
עצמי. אר"ש בר נחמן משל למטרונה שא"ל המלך עבדי
לפני. עברה לפניו והיתה מסתמכת על שפחתה וצימצמה
פניה ולא ראתה המלך והשפחה ראתה.

XVII. אמר ר' לוי למטרונה שאמר לה המלך עברי לפני ועברה
לפניו ונתכרכחו פניה. אמרה תאמר שנמצא בי פסולת.
אמר לה המלך אין בר פסולת אלא ציפורן של אצבע קטנה
שלך גדולה קימעה. העבירי אותו ובטל המום. כך אמר
הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו אין בר פסולת אלא הערלה הזאת.
העביר אותו ובטל המום.

XVIII. א"ר לוי משל. למטרונה שיצא עליה שם רע עם אחד
גדולי מלכות. ובדק המלך בדברים ולא מצא בהם ממש.
מה עשה המלך. עשה סעודה גדולה והושיב אותו האיש
בראש של מסובים. כל כך למה. להודיע שבדק המלך
בדברים ולא מצא בהם ממש. כך לפי שהיו או"ה מונים את
ישראל ואומרים להם אתם עשיתם את העגל ובדק הקב"ה
בדברים ולא מצא בהם ממש לפיכך נעשה שור ראש כל
הקרבנות.

XIX. ר"י דסכנין בשם ר' לוי אמר משל למלך שנכנס למדינה
וגזר ואמר כל אכסנאין שיש כאן לא יראו פני עד שיראו
פני המטרונה תחילה כך אמר הקב"ה לא תביאו לפני
קרבן עד שתעבור עליו שבת שאין ז' ימים בלא שבת ואין
מילה בלא שבת הה"ד ומיום השמיני והלאה ירצה.

XX. למלך שקידש את מטרונה ואמר מבקש אני לראותה כיון
שראה אותה התחיל משבחה ומקלסה הה"ד זה קומתך דמתה
לתמר /שה"ש ח/. גם היא אמרה רוצה אני לראותה. כיון
שראתה אותו התחילה בקילוס שקילסתו /שם ה/ חכו ממתקים
וכולו מחמדים.

XXI. רעיע מבל בניו דאית לך לא הוה לך להפילו לע"א, אלא
זה שמקודש לשמי. ר' יודן בן ר' סימון בשם ר' לוי
למטרונה שאמר לה אוהבה עשה לי חמים ונטלה לורטיא של
מלך ועשתה לו חמים. ונטלה לורטיא של מלך ועשתה לו
חמים. אמר לה המלך מכל עצים שיש לך בבית זה לא היה
ליך לעשות חמין לאוהבך אלא בלורטיא שלי. כך אמר
הקב"ה לאותו רשע. מכל בנים שיש לך לא היה לך להפילו
לע"כ אלא זה שמקודש לשמי.

XXII. ר"י דסכנין בשם ר' לוי אמר אני הגבר, אנא הוא דילפנא
יפורין אהני עלי מה דאהני לך. משל למלך שכעס על
מטרונה ודחפה והוציאה חוץ לפלטין. הלכה וצמצמה

פניה אחר העמוד. נמצא המלך עובר וראה אותה א"ל
 אקשית אפ"ר. אמרה לו אדוני המלך כך יפה ליוכך נאה
 וכך ראוי לי שלא קבלה אותך אשה אחרת אלא אני. א"ל
 אני הוא שפסלתי כל הנשים בעבורך. אמרה לו א"ל למה
 נכנסת למבוי פלוני ולחדר פלוני ולמקום פלוני לא בשב"ל
 אשה פלונית ולא קבלה אותך. כך אמר הקב"ה לישראל
 אקשיתו אפ"ר. אמרו לפניו רבש"ע כך יפה לנו וכך
 נאה לנו וכך הגון לנו שלא קבלה אומה אחרת תורתך אלא
 אני. א"ל אני הוא שפסלתי כל העו"ג בשבילכם. אמרו
 לו אם כן למה החזרת תורתך על האומות ולא קבלוה
 דתניא בתחלה נגלה על בני עשו הה"ד ואמר /דברים לג/
 ה' מטנני בא וזרה וגו'. ולא קבלוה. החזירה על בני
 ישמעאל ולא קבלוה הה"ד /שם/ הודיע מהר פארן. ולבסוף
 החזירה על ישראל וקבלוה הה"ד ואתא מדבבות קדש מימינו
 אש דת למו וכתוב כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע.

XXIII. בראשית ברא. ר' חונא ור' ירמיה בשם ר' שמואל בר ר'
 יצחק אמרו מחשבתן של ישראל קדמה לכל דבר. משל למלך
 שהיה נשוי למטרונה אחת ולא היה לו ממנה בן. פעם אחת
 נמצא המלך עובר בשוק. אמר טלו מילנין וקלמין זו לבני.
 חזרו ואמרו המלך אשטרולוגוס גדול אילולי שצפה המלך
 שהוא עתיד להעמיד ממנה בן לא היה אומר טלו מילנין
 וקלמין לבני. כך אלולי שצפה הקב"ה שאחר כ"ו דורות
 ישראל עתידין לקבל את התורה לא היה כותב בתורה צו
 את בני ישראל, דבר אל בני ישראל.

XXIV. הטב עיניך. ר' עזריה בשם ר' יהודה בר' סימון למלך
 שכעס על מטרונא ודחפה והוציאה מפלטיין. בחוץ מה
 עשתה הלכה וצמצמה פניה אחר העמוד חוץ לפלטיין.
 לכשעבר המלך אמר המלך העבירוה מנגד פני שאיני יכול
 לסבול. כך בשעה שב"ד יושבין וגוזרין תעניות והיחידים
 מתענים. הקב"ה אומר איני יכול לסבול שהם הרהיבונני.
 הם גרמו לי לפשוט זדי בעולמי ובשעה שב"ד גוזרין
 תענית ותינוקות מתנענים אומר הקב"ה איני יכול לסבול
 שהם הרהיבונני. הם המליכוני עליהם ואמרו ה' ימלוך
 לעולם ועד. ובשעה שגוזרין תעניות וזקנים מתענים
 אומר הקב"ה איני יכול לסבול שהם הרהיבונני הם קבלו
 מלכותי עליהם בסיני ואמרו כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע
 וכתב /תה' פז/ אזכיר רהב ובבל ליודעי וגו'.

XXV. א"ר יצחק הה"ד צדיקים יירשו וגו'. אימתי שרת שכינה
 עליה ביום שהוקם המשכן שנא' /במ' ח/ ויהי ביום כלות
 משה להקים את המשכן. ר' עזריע בשם ר' יהודה בר'
 סימון משל למלך שכעס על מטרונה והוציאה מתוך פלטיין
 שלו ואח"כ בקש להתרצות לה. שלחה לו ואמרה יעשה לי
 המלך דבר חדש ויבא אצלי. כך לשעבר היה הקב"ה מקבל

הקרבנות מלמעלה זכתיב /בר' ח/ וירח ה' את ריח הניחות וגו'. עכשיו מקבל מלמטה. הה"ד /שה"ש ה/ באחי לגני אחותי כלה. אריתי מורי עם בשמי. זה קטרת הסמים וקומץ הלבונה. אכלתי יערי עם דבשי. אלו אוברי עולה ואימרי קדשי קדשים.

XXVI. ר' עזריה בש"ר יודא בר"ס משל למלך שכעס על מטרונה וטרדה והוציאה מתוך פלטין שלו לאחר זמן בקש להחזירה אמרה יחדש לי דבר ואח"כ הוא מחזירני. כך לשעבר היה אדם שרוי בג"ע במחנה השכינה. כעס עליו הקב"ה וגירשו ממחיצתו כשיצאו ישראל ממצרים בקש הקב"ה להחזיר ישראל למחיצתו וא"ל שיעשו לו משכן וישכן בתוכם כמד"ח ועשו לי מקדש וגו'. אמרו ישראל יחדש לנו הקב"ה דבר אחד שהוא חפץ להחזירנו אצלו. מה הוא החידוש. לשעבר היה הקב"ה מקבל קרבנות מלמעלה וירח ה' את ריח הניחות ועכשיו יהא מקבל קרבנות מלמטה הה"ד יבא דודי לגני זו השכינה. ודאכל פרי מגדיו אלו הקרבנות.

XXVII. א"ר אבין בשם ר' אחא משל למלך שהפקיד לו אוהבו אצלו עשרה מרגליות. מת אוהבו והניח בת אחת. עמד המלך ונטלה לאשה ועשתה מטרונה ונתן לה שלשלת אחת של י' מרגליות ונתנה אותה בצוארה. לאחר ימים אבדה השלשלת. התחיל המלך מבקש להוציאה. אמר מגרשת אני מביתי אוציאה מאצלי. נכנס שושבינה אצל המלך והיה מפייתו ולא היה המלך נשמע לו אלא היה אומר מגרשה אני מאצלי. א"ל למה אדוני המלך. אמר שנחתתי לה י' מרגליות ואבדתן. אמר חי מרי המלך. אעפ"כ צריך אתה להתפייס ולרצותה. לא היה המלך שומע לו. כיון שראה השושבין מה שבקש לעשות עמה ואינו מתרצה אלא מתריס ואומר אגרשנה אני אמר לו בשביל י' מרגליות שאבדה אתה מבקש להוציאה. אין אתה יודע שאני יודע שהפקיד אביה אצלי י' מרגליות. יוצאות י' בי'. כך כיון שעשו ישראל אותו מעשה היה האלהים כועס עליהם. התחיל אומר הקב"ה הרף ממני ואשמידם. אמר משה רבון העולם על מה אתה כועס על ישראל. אמר בשביל שבטלו עשרת הדברות. א"ל יש להן מהיכן ליפרע. אמר לו מניין. אמר הזכר שנסיית אברהם בי' נסיונות ויצאו עשר בעשר הוי זכיר לאברהם ליצחק ולישראל.

XXVIII. ויהי. ווי היה. מי אמר ווי. א"ר אבין כביכול הקב"ה אמר ווי. למה"ד למלך שהיה לו מטרונה רוסננית וא"ל המלך עשה לי פו רפפרא. כל ימיה שהיתה עטופה באותה פורפירא לא היתה מרגונית. אחר ימים הפורפירא ונתנה אותה לכבש ועשאה והביאה למלך. כיון שראה אותה המלך התחיל צווח ווי. אמרה ליה מרי המלך פורפירא שלך עשויה ואתה צווח ווי. אמר לה שלא תחזור לרוסננית.

כך אתה מוצא, שהיו ישראל בכל שעה מרננים כמה שכתב /שמות טו/ וילנו העם על משה ועל אהרן וכן /שם טז/ וילנו כל עדת בני ישראל וכן /במדבר יז/ ואתם המתם את עם ה'. תבע הקב"ה בידם שיעשו את מקדש כמ"ש /שמות כה/ ועשו לי מקדש. את מוצא כל הימים שהיו עטופים במלאכת המשכן לא היו מרננים. וכיון שגמרו מלאכת המשכן התחיל הקב"ה צווח ווי שלא יחזרו וירננו כשם שהיו מרננים.

XXIX. הן קרבו ימין. ד"א אמר ר' אבין מהו הן. למה"ד למטרונה אחת שעשתה פורפירא משובחת. נטלה המלך והניחה. הגיעו ימיה של המטרונה למות אמר המלך תיטול אותה פורפירא שכיבדה אותי. כך אמר הקב"ה למשה קילטת אותי בהן ובהן אני גוזר עליך מיתה.

XXX. משכני אחריך נרוצה. נרוצה ממה שגירית בי שכני הרעים. א"ר אבון למלך שכעס על מטרונה וגירה בה שכניה רעים והתחילה צווחת אדוני הושיעני כך ישראל וציהונים ועמלק ומעון לחצו אתכם ותצעקו אלי ואושיעה אתכם מידם.

XXXI. א"ר אבין משל למטרונה שנכנסה לפלטיין וחמת שוטיא וברדיליא והיא מדחלא. אמרו לה בני פלטיין דידיה לא תדחלי אלו לעבדים ולשפחות הם אבל את לאכול ולשתות ולהתכבד. כך בני ישראל טעשו מעו פרשת אהליות ונגעים התחילו מתראין. אמר להם משה אלו לאו"ה אבל אתם לאכול ולשתות ולעסוק בתורה.

XXXII. א"ר תנחומא שהיה משה מחבט עצמו לפניו ואומר להם אתם עוברים אני איני עובר ופותח להם פתח שמא יבקשו עליו רחמים ולא היו מבינים. למה"ד למלך שהיו לו בנים הרבה ממטרונה. טרחה עליו מטרונה ביקש להוציאה. א"ל תהא יודעת שאני נוטל אחרת. אמרה לו איין. ואין את אומר לי מי היא זו שאתה עתיד ליטול. א"ל פלונית. מה עשתה מטרונה כינסה את בניה אמרה להן הוו יודעין שאביכם מבקש לגשני וליטול את פלונית יכולין אתם שלא להשתעבר בה. אמרו לה הן. אמרה להן תדעו מה היא עתידה לעשות בכם. והיתה אומרת שמא יבינו ויבקשו עליה מאביהן ולא היו מבינים. כיון שלא הבינו אמרה ואיני מצוה אתכם אלא בשביל עצמכם שתיו זהירים בכבוד אביכם. כך משה כיון שא"ל הקב"ה קח לך את יהושע בן נון וגו' כי לא תעבור את הירדן הזה היה אומר לפני ישראל והיה כי יביאך ה' אלהיך אל הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה אתה עובר היום אני איני עובר שמא יבינו ויבקשו עליו רחמים ולא היו מבינים. כיון שלא הבינו אמר איני מצוה אלא בשביל עצמכם שתיו זהירין בכבוד אביכם שבשמים. מניין שנא' את ה' אלהיך תירא וגו'.

XXXIII. התורה אומרת באיזה שביל אני מצויה. בדרכן של עושי צדקות בתוך נתיבות משפט. א"ר הונא לטקופוטי של מטרוניא כשהיא עוברת בשוק משמטין טייף וזיין מלפניה וטייף וזיין מלאחריה, כך היא התורה דינים מלפניה, שם שם לו חק ומשפט / שמות טו / ודינים מלאחריה, ואלה המשפטים אשר חשים לפניהם / שם כא /.

XXXIV. ד"א... מה כתיב למעלה מן הפרשה / שמות יח / ושפטו את העם בכל עת. ואמר כאן ואלה המשפטים והדברות באמצע. משל למטרוניא שהיתה הזין מכאן והזין מכאן והיא באמצע. כך התורה דינין מלפניה ודינין מאחריה והיא באמצע. וכה"א / משלי ח / באורח צדקה אהלך התורה אומרת באי זה נתיב אני מהלכת. אהלך בדרכו של עושה צדקה בתוך נתיבות משפט. התורה באמצע ודינין מלפניה ודינין מאחריה. מלפניה שנא' שם שם לו חק / שמות טו /.

XXXV. משל לשתי מטרוניות דומות שהיו מהלכות שתייהן כאחת נראות שוות מי גדולה מזו אותה שתברתה מלוה אותה עד ביתה והולכת אחריה כך בפסח נאמר בו חקה ובפרה נאמר בה חקה ומי גדולה הפרה שאוכלי פסח צריכין לה שנא' / במדבר יט / ולקחו לטמא מעפר שריפת החטאת.

XXXVI. א"ל הקב"ה שוב אל המחנה. א"ל איני חוזר. א"ל אם אין אתה חוזר הרי יהושע הוי יודע שהוא באהל. משל למטרוניא שכעסה על בת המלך ויצאה חוץ לפלטרין והיתה יתומה אחת מתגדלת עמה בפלטרין של מלך אמרלה חזרי למקומיך ולא בקשה. אמר לה אם אין את חוזרת הוי יודעת שאותה היתומה נתונה בפלטרין. כך אמר הקב"ה למשה שוב אל המחנה ואם לאו יהושע בתוך האהל. מי גרם למשה ששב אל המחנה יהושע בן נון.

XXXVII. בא וראה מה בין צדיקים ורשעים בין עובדי אלהים לאשר לא עבדו. משל למטרוניא שהיתה לה שפחה כושית והלך בעלה למדה"י. כל לילה אומרת אותה שפחה לאותה מטרוניא אני נאה ממך והמלך אוהב אותי יותר ממך. אמרה לה אותה מטרוניא יבא הבוקר ונדע מי נאה ומי שאוהב אותה המלך. אף כך או"ה אומרים לישראל אנחנו מעשינו יפים ובנו חפץ הקב"ה לךך אמר ישעיה / כא / יבא הבוקר ואנו יודעים במי חפץ שנא' אמר שומר אתא בקר.... בעוה"ב שנקרא בקר ואנו יודעים במי חפץ ושבתם וראיתם בין צדיק לרשע / מלכי ג /.

XXXVIII. למה"ד למטרוניא שילדה בן. כל ימים שבנה קיים היתה נכנסת בפלטרין בזרוע. מת בנה חתחילה מבקשת ליכנס בתחינות. כך כל זמן שהיו ישראל קיימים במדבר היה

משה נכנס לפני הקב"ה בזרוע למה ה' יחרה אפך בעמך
/שמות לב./ סלך נא לעון העם הזה וגו' /במדבר יד./
כיון שמתו ישראל במדבר התחיל מבקש ליכנס לא"י
בתחנונים ואתחנן.

XXXIX. מה ראה לומר להם כאן שמע ישראל. רבנן אמרי למה"ד
למלך שקידש מטרונה בב' מרגליות אבדה אחת מהן א"ל
המלך אבדת אחת שמרי את הב'. כך קידש הקב"ה את
ישראל בנעשה ונשמע. אבדו את נעשה שעשו את העגל.
אמר להן משה אבדתן נעשה שמרו נשמע הוי שמע ישראל.

XL. רבנן אמרי למה"ד למלך שעלה מן המלחמה קילסה אותו
מטרונה. אמר המלך תיקרי אמן של סנקליטור. לאחר
ימים התחילה לערב אוננה של מלך. אמר המלך כך עשה
תיטרד למטלון. כך בשעה שעשה הקב"ה מלחמת הים אמרה
מרים שירה ונקראת נביאה שנא' /שמות טו./ ותקח מרים
הנביאה. כיון שאמרה לשה"ר על אחיה אמר הקב"ה תיטרד
למטלון שנא' ותסגר מרים. /במדבר יב./

XLI. נגילה ונשמחה בך 7 שה"ש א./ למטרונה שהלך המלך בעלה
וחתניה למדינת הים. ובאו ואמרו לה באו בניך. אמרה
מה אכפת לי תשמחנה כלותי. כיון שבאו חתניה אמרו
באו חתניה. אמרה מה איכפת לי תשמחנה בנותי. אמרו
לה בא המלך בעליך אמרה האי חדותא שלימה חדו על חדו.
כך לע"ל באין הנביאים ואומרים לירושלים /ישעיה ט/
בניך מרחוק יבואו. והיא אומרת להם מה איכפת לי.
ובנותיך על צד תאמנה /שם/. אמרה מה איכפת לי כיון
שאמרו לה הנה מלכך יבא לך צדיק ונושע /זכריה ט/
אמרה הא חדותא שלימה /דנתיב /שם ט/ גילי מאד בת ציון /
וכתיב /שם ב/ רני ושמחי בת ציון וגו'. באותה שעה
היא אומרת /ישעיה טא/ שוש אשיש בה' תגל נפשי באלהי.

XLII. ורבנן אמרין למלך שכעס על מטרונה וכתב לה גיטה.
ועמד וחטפו ממנה. וכל זמן שמבקשת לינשא לאחר, היה
אומר לה היכן גיטך. וכל זמן שהיתה הובעת מזונותיה
היה אומר לה ולא כבר גרשתיך. כך כל זמן שישראל
מבקשים לעבוד עבודה כוכבים היה אומר להם הקב"ה אי
זה ספר כריתות אמכם. וכל זמן שמבקשים לעשות להם
נטים כבתחלה אומר להם הקב"ה כבר גרשתי אתכם הה"ד
/ירמיה ג/ שלחתיה ואתן את ספר כריתותה אליה.

XLIII. כי אתה עשית /איכה א./ משל למלך שנשא למטרוניה א"ל
אל תשיחי עם חברותיך ואל תשאלי מהן ואל תשאלי להן.
לימים כעס עליה המלך וטרדה חוץ לפלטיין וחזרה על כל
שכינותיה ולא קבלו אותה וחזרת לפלטיין. אמר לה המלך
אקשית אפריך, אמרה המטרונה למלך אדני אילולי הייתי
משאילה להם ושואלת מהן מנא והוה עבידתי גבה או

עבדתה גבי לא הוון מקבלין לי. כך אמר הקב"ה לישראל
אקשיתון אפיוכון. אמרו לפניו רבון העולמים לא כתבת
בתורתך /דברים ז/ ולא תתחתן בם בתך לא תתן לבנו ובתו
לא תקח לבניך אילולי הוינן משאלין להון ונסבון מינהון
ואינון מינן והוית בריתיה גבי או ברתי גביה לא חוו
מקבלים לי חוי כי אתה עשית.

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