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## ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

### HERMENEUTICS AS POETICS: THE CASE OF *MIDRASH HAGADOL*

Gilad Shapira

One of the fascinating characteristics of Midrash is its dual nature as both poetic and hermeneutic. Late Midrash has been shown to accentuate the literary, rather than the exegetical dimension of given genres (e.g. the Mashal, the retold biblical narrative). This paper addresses the place of hermeneutics in a seminal work of Late Midrash – *Midrash HaGadol* (Aden, Yemen, 14<sup>th</sup> century): This discussion is centered on the hermeneutical expression, ‘*zehu sheamar hakatuv*’ (this is what Scripture said) and the way it functions to create bundles of textual units around thematic focuses, and it indicates their components. Based on that, the paper argues that the function of hermeneutics in Midrash Hagadol is primarily poetic.

### THE ROAD TO LYDDA: A SURVIVOR’S STORY RABBAN YOHANAN BEN ZAKKAI’S FLIGHT FROM JERUSALEM ACCORDING TO *EICHA RABBA* 1:5

Moshe Shoshan

This article presents an analysis of the story of the escape of R. Yohanan ben Zakkai from Jerusalem as it appears in *Eicha Rabba*. This version of the story differs markedly from the accounts found elsewhere in rabbinic literature, most notably in that it does not refer to R. Yohanan’s request to save ‘Yavne and her sages’. The *Eicha Rabba* account focuses on the survival of the Jews rather than on the establishment of a center of Jewish study and practice to succeed Jerusalem. Torah is presented as a source of practical wisdom, which gives the rabbis the ability to save a remnant of their people. The article also explores the implications of the identification of the figure of Abgar with the figure of the same name known to us from Christian legend. In light of this, the story should also be read as an anti-Christian narrative.

WHY ARE THERE LAWYERS IN HEAVEN?:  
RABBINIC AGGADOT ON THE DIVINE COURTROOM

Richard Hidary

Although the rabbis barred lawyers from their earthly courts, numerous aggadot nevertheless imagine the divine court as packed with advocates. This is especially curious considering that the Talmud is suspicious of adversarial court procedure because it does not promote honesty or lead to justice. This article argues that the rabbis nevertheless continue and expand upon Second Temple traditions that describe angelic advocates, because this system provides a mechanism for tempering the harshness of divine justice. The rabbis appreciated the power of rhetorical persuasion and adversarial advocacy and – although wary of them in human courts – found an important role for them in engendering God’s mercy.

These findings will confirm the complex and nuanced approach of Talmudic sources towards truth and rhetoric that we have developed in previous papers. The rabbinic heavenly court contrasts sharply with that of Plato, who describes a heavenly court without advocates or rhetorical persuasion but based on absolute naked truth. The rabbis instead promote a tradition that God wishes to have mercy and therefore permits and encourages advocacy and rhetoric typical of Roman courts precisely because of their ability to sway from strict justice toward leniency.

SOLVING A RIDDLE OF JUDAH HALEVI

Kedem Golden

R. Judah Halevi’s poetic *œuvre* contains a significant section of literary riddles. The article is devoted to one of the most opaque of the poet’s riddles, the short poem beginning with הַאֵלֹהִים הֲיִשְׁפָּטוּן, which has hitherto been misunderstood by modern scholars. While the solution given in the standard edition of Halevi’s work is uncertain, the present article offers the correct explanation of the poem: it is shown to be a sophisticated linguistic puzzle, whose ‘solution’ can apply to any of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. This explanation was in fact well known among the early modern readers of the poem, whether or not they knew it was written by its illustrious author. The recurrence of an identical explanation of the poem in various unrelated sources from different localities also sheds light on the transmission of pre-modern Hebrew poetry.

‘EVERYBODY WANTS TO LIVE’:  
A LITERARY READING OF THE *MAQAMA*  
BY YEHUDA AL-ḤARIZI, ‘THE ROOSTER’

Idit Einat-Nov

This paper proposes a new reading of ‘The Rooster’, one of the best-known *maqamas* in Yehuda Al-Ḥarizi’s *Sefer Tahkemoni*, by comparing it to the original Arabic version by Ibn al-Shahīd. This reading stems from the hypothesis that this art of storytelling is based on the poetic principle of uncertainty and is therefore associated with various forms of the ambiguous and the ambivalent (the grotesque, the uncanny, the ironic, etc.). As I have argued elsewhere about other rhymed Hebrew stories, this approach is appropriate to the character of some of the most fascinating rhymed stories produced in medieval Hebrew literature. In the present study I suggest yet another demonstration of the benefit that can accrue from the adoption of this approach.

*OLAM HA-ZACHAR* (THE WORLD OF THE MALE):  
THE IMAGE OF SARAH IN ZOHAR *LEKH-LEKHA*  
(ZOHAR I: 95B-96A)

Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel

This paper explores the image of the biblical Sarah as she is portrayed in Zohar *Lekh-Lekha* (Zohar I: 95b-96a), focusing on her dominant matriarchal role in the rite of Isaac’s circumcision. It focuses on Sarah’s identification with the upper *sefirah* of *Binah* and traces the original process by which the Zohar incorporates female biblical heroes within the sefirotic system. In addition, the paper examines the issue of gender reversal, fluidity and androgyny in Kabbalistic literature, the fertile encounter between psychoanalytic theory and Zoharic homiletics, and Judeo-Christian polemics during the Middle Ages.