

The Fiction of a Jewish Hellenistic Magical-Medical *Paideia*

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The idea of Greek influences on Hellenistic Judaism appears to be so deeply engrained within modern scholarship that nothing could upset this apple cart, at least as reflected in two recent books on various aspects of magic, astronomy, and medicine in Jewish sources from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The usual frame of reference relies upon paradigms clearly outlined by Saul Lieberman and Martin Hengel, that Greek culture and science had penetrated Jewish thinking to such an extent, that even Hebrew and Aramaic texts from Qumran or the Mishnah were eventually integrated into an undefined Hellenistic-Greek Jewish *episteme*. The present review article advocates an alternative Near Eastern context for Jewish writings in the period, one that did not reflect Hellenism in any form.

The elusive quest for a Greek-Jewish *paideia* governing the cultural life of Judea carries on unabated, even in the most unlikely of circumstances. The absence of Hebrew or Aramaic translations of classic works such as pre-Socratic philosophy, medicine (Hippocrates), or science (e.g., Plato or Aristotle), or even specific citation of this literature, does not appear to deter scholars from the tendency to rely upon Greek thought as the main comparative frame of reference for Jewish texts from Qumran and rabbinic literature. A recent book by Annette Yoshiko Reed, with the somewhat misleading title of *Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism*, is actually a proponent of the idea of Hellenistic Jewish *paideia* rather than a treatise on magic. The book follows a long and venerable tradition of works by a previous generation of scholars led by Saul Lieberman and Martin Hengel,¹ as well as many highly competent younger scholars like Yair Furstenberg and Ishay Rosen-Zvi² among others, who envisage the deep penetration of Hellenistic intellectual culture and even Greek

This is a review article of *Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism*. By ANNETTE YOSHIKO REED. Cambridge: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2020. Pp. x + 353. £90; and *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*. By MIRA BALBERG. Berkeley: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2014. Pp. viii + 265. \$90. I am grateful for the comments and corrections of Lennart Lehmann and Cale Johnson.

1. See S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II–IV centuries C.E.* (New York: JTS, 1942), followed by his equally influential *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century B.C.E.–IV Century C.E.* (New York: JTS, 1962), and M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (1974), translated from the earlier German edition *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts vor Christus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988). The classic works of these scholars inspired all subsequent approaches to Hellenistic Palestine, including my own. Nevertheless, considerable time has elapsed, and their conclusions need to be reevaluated.

2. See, among many others, Y. Furstenberg, “Rabbinic Responses to Greco-Roman Ethics of Self-Formation in Tractate *Avot*,” in *Self, Self-Fashioning, and Individuality in Late Antiquity New Perspectives*, ed. M. R. Niehoff and J. Levinson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 125–48 (reference courtesy I. Rosen-Zvi), and I. Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: “Yetzer Hara” and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Major figures in rabbinic scholarship pursue a similar line of argument, such as D. Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009). All of these works employ sophisticated methodologies to identify a perceived common ground between Greek and rabbinic thought, particularly in Palestine but even extending into the Babylonian Talmud, based upon a common assumption that Hellenistic Jewish scholars were aware of elements of Greek philosophy.

philosophy into Hellenistic Palestine after Alexander and under Roman rule. It is a daunting task to swim against such a strong current, but arguments counter to this popular consensus have been generally overlooked and need to be put forward.³

The book produced by A. Yoshiko Reed is a good starting point. For someone interested in demons (like the present reviewer), her book should be read from back to front. The fullest treatment of angels and demons appears in the final chapter five on Jubilees, but otherwise the reader has to wait until chapter four for a fuller discussion of demonology. The bulk of the book has less to do with angelology and demonology than with the globalization of Greek *paideia* and the influence of Hellenism on Second Temple-period Jewish writings, based upon a broad range and impressive selection of secondary sources, clearly demonstrating the author's erudition and industry. Although Yoshiko Reed never engages directly with any primary sources, she succeeds in summarizing and drawing inferences from almost every corner of Anglophone scholarship on Hellenistic-period Jewish literature, making her work an invaluable reference work for the current *communis opinio* on the period under study.

Nevertheless, certain central themes put forward in Yoshiko Reed's work are open to questions that challenge some basic assumptions of current scholarship. Leaving aside the problem of how angels and demons may have appeared contradictory to strict monotheism (raised in chapter one), let us turn to the pertinent question of Enochic literature,⁴ which features prominently in relation to the so-called Astronomical Book and Book of Watchers, two subsections of 1 Enoch. This work is treated as pre-Maccabean, and although Greek translations existed, Yoshiko Reed acknowledges that Enoch was originally composed in Aramaic, as now proven by fragmentary extracts from Qumran. Her problem is how to square this literature with the "globalization of *paideia*" often mentioned in this book (pp. 128, 187, 220, etc.). In order to put this question into perspective, it may be useful to provide some historical context.

Yoshiko Reed assumes that Judea under Ptolemaic sovereignty, after the dissolution of Alexander's empire, experienced an enlightened century, introducing Hellenistic scholastic culture into a Palestine that had been previously been under Persian domination. Citing a number of secondary sources, Yoshiko Reed downplays the intensive anti-Hellenistic rhetoric of the Books of Maccabees (p. 103) in favor of seeing this period as a time of institutional stability (p. 246), allowing for the introduction of highly valued Greek *paideia*. There are two problems with this viewpoint. There is no evidence for a literary culture in fourth-century BCE Palestine, Greek or otherwise, since sources from this period are scarce except perhaps for the Zenon papyri, which show that Ptolemaic rule was only interested in acquiring commodities and slaves from Judea rather than instilling Hellenistic culture into the region. What is surprising about the historical record is how little popular opposition there was to the enormously significant transition from Ptolemaic to Seleucid rule in 200 BCE; the rabbis and apocryphal sources were completely silent on this momentous change, probably for a reason. If we take the anti-Hellenistic stance of the books of Maccabees seriously (as we ought to do), the perceived advantage of Seleucid Babylonian hegemony was that it was not Helle-

3. Recent studies dealing with Mesopotamian influences on Hellenistic Jewish writings have mostly been restricted to a few texts from Qumran and First Enoch, dealing with astronomy and physiognomic omens, but little attention has been paid to the large corpus of rabbinic texts. See in particular Jonathan Ben-Dov and Seth Sanders, eds., *Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge in Second Temple Literature* (New York: New York Univ. Press and Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, 2014), and the present author's review of the volume in *JAOS* 137 (2017): 393–400.

4. Only First Enoch features in Yoshiko Reed's discussion, although there is no evidence for Second Slavonic Enoch being later than First Enoch or that it is irrelevant to the present discussion.

nized; there was no Alexandria in Babylonia, nor was there a large Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora. Only after forty years, when Antiochus raided the Jerusalem temple treasury, did revolt break out in Judea, but this had more to do with imperial politics than anti-Hellenistic sentiments (although Hellenism took the blame). In any case, the strong opposition to Greek culture should not be underestimated.

This recalls the general theme of Hellenism in Jewish Palestine, raised by Saul Lieberman long ago and still dominating current thinking. Although there is no doubt that *koine* Greek was widely spoken in Judea, along with Aramaic and Hebrew, this is far from proving the influence of Greek thought on local scholarship or a Hellenistic-Jewish episteme in Palestine. There is not a single reference to Aristotle, Plato, Hippocrates, Galen, or any single Stoic philosopher in any of the apocrypha or rabbinic literature. The Greek vocabulary imbedded within Mishnaic Hebrew was not philosophical, nor did it reflect Greek literature. On the contrary, after the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 BCE, the local language had to conform to the Pax Romana but not to a Greek worldview, which was very different in its orientation, as Tim Whitmarsh has shown in his well-crafted arguments on atheistic thought.⁵ We know from later periods and places such as Edessa in Syria what Hellenistic influence looks like: translations of Greek literature into Syriac and numerous citations of Greek authors. None of this can be demonstrated for Palestine before the Byzantine period.

Then there is the Jewish community of Seleucid Babylonia, the history of which we know virtually nothing about. We do know that the famous scholar Hillel came from Babylonia to Palestine, which might indicate that he had some schooling before he arrived.⁶ Two things are clear from the Babylonian Talmud—that Babylonian rabbis generally knew no Greek, and that Babylonian dialects of Aramaic (such as Eastern Syriac and Mandaic) show little evidence of Greek loanwords or influence. This picture allows us to contextualize Enochic literature, which was clearly composed in Aramaic, although translations were later made into Greek, Ethiopic, Latin, and Syriac. There are a number of salient points that need to be clarified about Enoch.

First, there is no evidence that the books of Enoch were composed in Palestine, since neither Jerusalem or Judea is ever mentioned in this literature, nor is there any secure evidence for Greek loanwords in the Aramaic of this text. An interesting case in point is the name for Watchers—“Gregoroi”—used in Syncellus’s Greek text and in Slavonic Enoch, and this same word was employed by the LXX for being ‘wakeful’.⁷ However, instead of being a Greek term, the word “Gregoroi” might actually be a Semitic loan into Greek, reflecting the root עור (ʿwr) ‘to rouse, watch’, with an intensive *palpel* form עורר or ערער, with the same meaning.⁸ Not only is there scarcely any noticeable Greek influence in Enoch, but the overwhelming number of correspondences between the Aramaic Astronomical Book and Akka-

5. *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (New York: Vintage, 2016), which coincidentally explains how the internal debates within Greek philosophy were often based upon uniquely Greek circumstances and conditions that were not universally applicable to the rest of the Hellenistic world. A similar approach can be found in S. Stern, *Time and Process in Ancient Judaism* (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), 90–102, in which he convincingly argues that a uniquely Greek concept of time (*chronos*) was absent in rabbinic literature and only appeared exceptionally in Hellenistic Jewish writings (e.g., Philo, Josephus), which were composed in Greek rather than translated into Greek.

6. See now the brief survey on Babylonian Jewry in I. Gafni, *Jews and Judaism in the Rabbinic Era* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 211–15.

7. Yoshiko Reed’s description of the Watchers (see p. 81) does not include a discussion of this term.

8. Greek *gamma* can correspond to Semitic *ayin* (e.g., Gaza / עזה), and this may also explain the demon name in an Aramaic magic bowl, עררתא (ʿrrtʿ, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 884), as well as an Aramaic passage in the Midrash, Kohelet Rabbah 21.4.15, חדא מערערא הדא (hdʿmʿrʿrʿhdʿ), ‘one [sin] awakens another’.

dian astronomical texts MUL.APIN and *Enūma Anu Enlil* leave virtually no doubt about the Babylonian origin of this material. While Yoshiko Reed has cited Henry Drawnel's detailed text edition and convincing study of Qumran astronomical texts (including fragments of 1 Enoch),⁹ she avoids drawing the obvious inference that 1 Enoch and other Aramaic astronomical fragments were composed in the third century BCE in Babylonia and were later brought to Palestine and integrated into a Hellenistic intellectual environment.¹⁰

Part of the problem is a general lack of familiarity with Hellenistic astronomy and what impact this had on the period in question. Although the third century BCE witnessed a dramatic growth in mathematical astronomy in Babylonia, which profoundly influenced Greek astronomy (rather than the other way around),¹¹ the Enochic Astronomical Book and the Aramaic fragments of astronomy found at Qumran reflect classical textbook astronomy rather than the more up-to-date mathematical astronomy (so-called Goal Year Texts and Ephemerides, as well as Astronomical Diaries). The highly abstract observation-based technical astronomy known to Babylonian scholars of this period was not exported to provincial Judea, although Greek astronomy made good use of it.¹² Nevertheless, astronomy made a considerable cultural impact, which is why Enoch the visionary traveled *up* to heaven in order to acquire knowledge, rather than *down* to the netherworld, as was common in previous literature (Gilgamesh, Homer, etc.). There was an earlier Babylonian model for Enoch's ascent in the person of Enmeduranki, an antediluvian scholar who was brought to heaven to acquire knowledge of celestial divination, according to a tablet from Nineveh from roughly the seventh century BCE. Although it is described in detail by Drawnel (*Aramaic Astronomical Book*, p. 12) and by Seth Sanders,¹³ Yoshiko Reed overlooked this crucial information as background to Enoch's apocalypse. Both of these texts reflect a shift from netherworld to heavens, which is certainly relevant to any discussion of angels, demons, and Watchers.

9. *The Aramaic Astronomical Book (4Q208-4Q211) from Qumran* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011) has a fifty-page introduction with a clear and concise description of all Aramaic astronomical texts from Qumran.

10. See the conclusions arrived at in Jonathan Ben-Dov's often-cited study, *Head of All Years: Astronomy and Calendars at Qumran in their Ancient Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 279–81. While Ben-Dov fully acknowledges the Babylonian origins and context for Aramaic astronomy at Qumran, he finds it difficult to explain how Akkadian technical literature (known from MUL.APIN and other texts) shows up in Palestine (specifically Qumran) in Aramaic. While Enoch itself has no Akkadian *Vorlage*, it is plausible for a Jewish text like Enoch (presumably composed in Babylonia, as indicated by the astronomy) to have arrived in a Jerusalem library intact, eventually being deposited in Qumran. The problem may be somewhat less complicated than perceived by Ben-Dov and others. While the translation of "textbook" Akkadian astronomy into Aramaic is a plausible scenario, leather or papyrus are not preserved in ancient Iraq, which is why the chance survival of Babylonian Aramaic texts in jars found at the Dead Sea is a happy coincidence. Akkadian texts relevant to calendar reckoning and prediction, such as divination texts found at Qumran (i.e., physiognomic and celestial omens), were not meant for private study but were generally relevant to king and country, since predictions were general rather than individual. Such texts required specialist training to interpret and were not intended as bedtime reading for Qumran sectarians. The establishing of Hasmonean hegemony in the late second century BCE might have encouraged the importation of technical literature from its former imperial rulers in Seleucid Babylonia, where a substantial community of astronomers and scholars were active in this period. The importation of Aramaic texts would hardly be difficult, and adapting the science to local conditions (e.g., a Hebrew version of physiognomic omens) by local scholars would be a natural progression of events.

11. The decisive influence of Babylonian astronomy is clearly explained in the recent book *Hellenistic Astronomy: The Science in Its Contexts*, ed. A. Bowen and F. Rochberg (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

12. One reason for this might be that before the advent of independence under Hasmonean rule, Judea was not equipped to process this level of science.

13. A recent discussion of Enmeduranki is in S. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 15–18, tracing the association of Enoch with Enmeduranki back to Heinrich Zimmern in 1902. This and other Mesopotamian parallels were discussed by R. Borger, "Die Beschwörungsserie *Bīt Mēseri* und die Himmelfahrt Henochs," *JNES* 33 (1974): 183–96.

So how can this originally Aramaic work be integrated into a globalized Jewish *paideia*? The justification for the domestication of Enoch into a Hellenized episteme is based upon references to Enoch in other texts, especially Pseudo-Eupolemus and later Jewish Sybilline Oracles. The former source merits particular attention, although B. Wacholder's insightful treatment of the text¹⁴ was uncharacteristically overlooked by Yoshiko Reed. Pseudo-Eupolemus takes credit for being the earliest author (second century BCE) to refer to Enoch, to whom, along with Abraham, he attributes the discovery of astronomy and its introduction to the world. While there is no doubt about the Jewish origins of this text, the fact that it survives in two Greek fragments hardly proves that it represents Greek-Jewish literature; there are other examples in this book under review of Jewish texts in Hebrew and Aramaic that were translated into Greek (and other languages), with their originals being lost. Since we have no idea of Pseudo-Eupolemus's actual name or where he lived, there is hardly good reason to assume that his work represents Jewish-Hellenistic-Greek literature. Wacholder (*Pseudo-Eupolemus*, p. 84) recalls earlier studies pointing out that Pseudo-Eupolemus described Abraham as coming to Phoenicia as well as to Har Gerizim; hence Pseudo-Eupolemus was assumed to have been a Samaritan. This inference is hardly secure, since a Jewish author living in Babylonia, familiar with the Enoch narrative and writing in Aramaic, might not have been completely familiar with the geography of the far-off Levant, and the translation into Greek could also have left room for later interpolations.¹⁵ Not much can be deduced from this reference, or indeed other references to Enoch in texts that survive in Greek, as an argument for some sort of Jewish *paideia*.

In general, the search for *paidaea* is not a fiction, but rather the *paidaea* itself. This quest for a globalized Greek-Jewish *paideia* has been tacitly promoted by Classical scholarship, which assumed that, after the conquest of Alexander, any cultures coming into contact with Greek and its literature eventually abandoned their barbarian literature in favor of a more advanced level of Greek thought. If one examines the landscape of Judea and its literature, one is hard pressed to identify pervasive Hellenistic influence, beyond the presence of vernacular Greek. There is some evidence that a Greek *meturgeman* or translator could theoretically function within the synagogue, although the usual pattern was a simultaneous translation into Aramaic when the Torah was being read out. The synagogue itself may look like a Greek institution, since the name itself is Greek, and the institution was unknown in "pre-Maccabean" times, while the idea of communal meals and group learning might conjure images of a Jewish lyceum in Jerusalem. However, the comparison is flawed, since Greek religion had no room for priests giving sermons or moral instruction, unless one might consider Dionysus cults or mystery cults, which is not quite the model one is looking for. Romans had symposia where one could discuss philosophy while being served by male and female slaves, but this is also hardly the right model either. Synagogues in later periods looked rather Greek, with zodiac mosaics showing Helios, but this had become a universal cultural icon under the Pax Romana, and villas at Sephoris show that the rich could afford to hire Greek artists for interior decorating. Any institutions for a globalized *paideia* remain elusive.

14. "Pseudo-Eupolemos' Two Greek Fragments on the Life of Abraham," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 83–113.

15. A possible hint to the Babylonian background of Pseudo-Eupolemus is his description of Abraham's birthplace as either Ur or Kamarina (see Wacholder, 99–101, although he is unable to identify the second city). It may be that Kamarina is a bad corruption of KÁ(KAN4)-DINGIR-RA, literally 'gate of the god', the Sumerian name of the city of Babīlu (Babylon); Pseudo-Eupolemus also tried to etymologize the name Babel (p. 90). The sign KÁ has a reading /kan/, which might explain some of the corruption.

Finally, we should turn to the primary topic of the book under review, angels and demons. Although the present author has been working with demons and magical texts (both Jewish and non-Jewish) for many years, little of this experience is recognizable in Yoshiko Reed's book. For one thing, the Bible is not particularly interested in either category of demons or angels, and for good reason. The Bible is a relatively slender selection of textual data compared to the vast array of literature from other contemporary ancient societies. We possess no Israelite incantations, medical prescriptions, or divinatory texts that would provide evidence for either harmful demons or benevolent demons (angels). Even popular female demons like Lilith hardly make an appearance in the Bible, not to mention the usual array of witches and ghosts and baby-stranglers and disease-demons that usually populate magical literature. All of this no doubt existed in ancient Israel of the Bible, but the relevant texts did not survive, except for some amulets and some fragmentary incantations from Qumran.¹⁶ The point is that fallen angels in Enochic literature have little to do with any presumed magical culture of ancient Palestine, about which we are badly informed. It is much more likely that the Watchers and celestial host of Enoch belonged to a Mesopotamian milieu, in the same way that Enochic astronomy was modeled on MUL.APIN and Babylonian celestial divination. Although there are no fallen angels as such in Mesopotamia, there is a category of demons known as Daughters of Anu (the god of heaven), to which the gruesome demoness Lamaštu also belonged. While Lamaštu was thoroughly feared by women as a harmful baby-killer, the other Daughters of Anu were either viewed as malevolent demons in standard incantations such as *Maqlû*, or as helpful agents within other incantations.¹⁷ Moreover, the idea of a demon having sexual relations with a human partner would not have shocked a Babylonian client, since he would know that demons seek out their victims as if betrothing them, and the act of "seizing" a victim had conjugal overtones (from the root ^ʾHZ). This kind of ambivalence might be relevant to the Watchers in Enoch, who conveyed esoteric knowledge to those they married.

The difficulties encountered by the present author are not exclusive to the book under review, but they reflect a general problem within the tight-knit circle of scholarship dealing with the Second Temple period. Although Yoshiko Reed has cited a vast array of secondary literature, she appears reluctant to consult the text translations and secondary literature of Assyriology, which in recent years has produced an impressive amount of data on Seleucid and Hellenistic Babylonia. A good example is her discussion of *Listenwissenschaft* in Babylonian scholarship. What is missing is familiarity with relevant Akkadian scholastic works, such as lexical lists or god lists or divination texts.¹⁸ Had these been studied, Yoshiko Reed's treatment of lists of angels in Enochic literature would have been easily contextualized, since such lists (rather than explanatory treatises) comprised one of the key tools of Babylonian scholarship. Furthermore, the types of word play in Enoch between angelic names and their

16. See I. Fröhlich, "Theology and Demonology in Qumran Texts," *Henoch* 32 (2010): 101–29. Lennart Lehman has reminded me of the Book of Tobit as another possible work of Jewish Babylonian origin, as argued in A. Attia, "Disease and Healing in the Book of Tobit and in Mesopotamian Medicine," in *Mesopotamian Medicine and Magic: Studies in Honor of Markham J. Geller*, ed. S. V. Panayotov and L. Vacín (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2018), 36–68.

17. See W. Farber, "*Mannam lušpur ana Enkidu*: Some New Thoughts about an Old Motif," *JNES* 49 (1990): 299–321.

18. See, for example, N. Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Tradition* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 22; M. Hilgert, "Von 'Listenwissenschaft' und 'epistemischen Dingen': Konzeptuelle Annäherungen an altorientalische Wissenspraktiken," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 40 (2009): 277–309, and most recently, M. Van De Mierop, "Theses on Babylonian Philosophy," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 5 (2018): 23–26.

functions reflect puns etymologizing proper names in cuneiform script, as pointed out in a recent article by E. Jiménez.¹⁹

These comments are not intended to diminish the value of this book under review as a fresh approach to apocryphal literature, which has often been perceived as second rate because it failed to be included within the biblical canon. If one aim of Yoshiko Reed's work is to create renewed interest in the texts of Enoch and Jubilees, she has certainly succeeded, since these texts provide rich new insights into the period when they were produced. At the same time, it is important to reconsider the possible Babylonian origins of certain Hellenistic-period Jewish texts, stemming from a context that is mostly unknown to other Jewish sources but unlikely to have been influenced by Greek thought.

Yoshiko Reed's book is not alone in advocating Greek cultural impact on Hellenistic-period Jewish texts, as if de-emphasizing the geographical setting of Judea within the Near East. This is not to suggest that arguments for Greek influence in Roman Palestine are without justification, since the increasing imposition of Roman civil rule altered the landscape both physically and intellectually,²⁰ but the "modernity" offered by Rome (and the considerable opposition to it) did not manage to diminish to any great extent local adherence to traditional forms of Jewish texts.

The Mishnah, edited in the early third century CE, forms an interesting case study, since this text contains numerous Greek loanwords, although the format and content bear no resemblance to Greek scholastic literature. Nevertheless, the relentless quest for Greek influence carries on, as can be seen in two works by Mira Balberg, who argues forcibly for the presence of Greek and Roman medicine within an unusual tractate of the Mishnah.²¹ Balberg's work also deserves much credit for drawing attention to the Mishnaic tractate *Nega'im*, 'lesions', which functions as a commentary on the biblical passages in Leviticus 13 and 14 dealing with *tsorath*, a skin pathology often mistranslated as 'leprosy', for which there is no known modern counterpart; *tsorath*, according to Leviticus, could also affect leather and walls of houses.²² In other respects, Balberg's arguments include valuable insights into various rabbinic concepts of purity and impurity, contamination, and attitudes toward menstruation, but with a limited view of comparative material. Somewhat like Yoshiko Reed's style of argumentation, she posits a dominant role for medicine within Greek *paideia*,²³ thereby inferring that if this was the case, rabbinic scholars also familiar with *paideia* would integrate medical knowledge into their own work. The problem is that assertions of Hellenistic influence are based mainly on secondary literature (also following the same pattern seen in

19. "As Your Name Indicates': Philological Arguments in Akkadian Disputations," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 5 (2018): 87–105, in which Jiménez discusses various ways in which Mesopotamian proper names could be interpreted through cuneiform wordplay. Yoshiko Reed would not have been able to consult these 2018 publications (see previous note).

20. See H. Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 25. Lapin also discusses Roman influences on rabbinic habits and attitudes, such as the popularity of Roman baths in Palestine, but this institution was not available in Babylonia.

21. In addition to the book here under review, see eadem, "Rabbinic Authority, Medical Rhetoric, and Body Hermeneutics in Mishnah *Nega'im*," *AJS Review* 35 (2011): 323–46.

22. Balberg, "Rabbinic Authority," 325–26, notes that the Mishnah *Nega'im* employs the same terminology of Leviticus without referring to any other sources, and that the structure of the Tractate closely follows Leviticus.

23. Cf. Balberg, "Rabbinic Authority," 323–24, with some weak arguments. There is no reason to assume that medicine was more "indispensable to everyday life" in Roman society than in earlier periods, since the study of medicine had been well established by this time as an academic discipline. Nor can one argue that *technical* medical knowledge had become integrated into general education or even into philosophy, with the exception of a few specialists like Galen. Although awareness of medicine as a *technē* may have become prevalent, it is impossible to assess how much specific medical knowledge would have been part of general education.

Yoshiko Reed's work) rather than on any primary sources.²⁴ Balberg's main justification for her perceived rabbinic familiarity with Greek and Roman medicine turns out to be based on the classic but highly flawed and badly outdated work of Julius Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (Berlin: S. Karger, 1911).²⁵ Objections to this point of view are not difficult to propose. A signature theme in Greek medicine such as a theory of humors has never been found in rabbinic texts, and the typical Greek medical treatment of bloodletting is only sporadically cited with caution and suspicion in rabbinic sources.²⁶ Moreover, not a single Greek or Latin medical authority (including Hippocrates or Galen) is ever cited by name by the rabbis, probably because their works never formed part of the curriculum.

In theory, Balberg is correct in searching for external influences in a Mishnah tractate dealing with medical issues, but the pertinent question is whether the Mishnah might have borrowed concepts from other systems of medicine that did not belong to the Classical world. Specifically, can one even entertain the possibility that the Mishnah, deeply rooted as it is within the context of Roman Palestine, could have incorporated elements known exclusively from Babylonian medicine? This would certainly be surprising and for this, one would have to examine primary sources, both from the Mishnah and from Akkadian medical literature.

The tractate of *Nega'im* is unusual in its layout, with some passages demonstrating the typical format of *Listenwissenschaft*, more typical of Babylonian than Greek scholarship. We will focus on two consecutive passages from the Mishnah *Nega'im* 1.5–1.6, which have only minimal reliance upon the thesaurus of Leviticus 13 and 14.

כיצד להקל?

היה בו שער לבן והלך לו שער לבן היו לבנות והשחירו אחת לבנה ואחת שחורה והשחירו שתיהן ארכות והקצירו אחת ארכה ואחת קצרה והקצירו שתיהן נסמך השחין לשתייהן או לאחת מהן הקיף השחין לשתייהן או לאחת מהן או חלקן השחין ומחית השחין והמכוה ומחית המכוה והבהק היתה בו מחיה והלכה לה המחיה היתה מרבעת ונעשית עגלה או ארכה מבצרת ונעשית מן הצד מכנסת ונתפזרה ובא השחין ונכנס בתוכה הקיפה חלקה או מעטה השחין או מחית השחין והמכוה ומחית המכוה והבהק

היה בו פסיון והלך לו פסיון או שהלכה לה האום או שנתמעטה ואין בזה ובזה כגרים השחין ומחית השחין והמכוה ומחית המכוה והבהק חולקין בין האום לפסיון הרי אלו להקל

כיצד להחמיר?

לא היה בו שער לבן ונולד לו שער לבן היו שחורות והלבינו אחת שחורה ואחת לבנה והלבינו שתיהן

קצרות והאריכו אחת קצרה ואחת ארכה והאריכו שתיהן נסמך השחין לשתייהן או לאחת מהן הקיף השחין את שתיהן או את אחת מהן או חלקן השחין ומחית השחין והמכוה ומחית המכוה והבהק והלכו להם

24. On this basis, Balberg looks for common ground with concepts such as “contagion” in Roman medicine; see *Purity, Body, and Self*, 56. She cites Vivian Nutton's comments on Latin *contagio / contagium* meaning ‘to touch together’, which is not actually the same as the modern concept of contagion based upon bacteriology, since ancient ideas envisaged the spread of disease as the result of pollution rather than simple contact.

25. Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 205, and earlier in “Rabbinic Authority,” 324, is in agreement with studies (not enumerated) that show that “rabbis were familiar with Graeco-Roman medical perceptions” and she further accepts “traces of Hellenistic medicine in rabbinic compilations.” In both her article and monograph, Balberg also cites Samuel Kotték, “Medical Interest in Ancient Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Literature of the Sages*, ed. S. Safrai et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006), 2: 485–96, and while Kotték's work is much more up-to-date than Preuss, his orientation is also based on exclusive comparisons with Greek medicine.

26. See the reviewer's “Bloodletting in Babylonia,” in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*, ed. H. F. J. Horstmanshoff and M. Stol (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 305–24.

לא היתה בו מחיה ונולדה לו מחיה היתה עגלה או ארכה ונעשית מרבעת מן הצד ונעשית מבצרת
 מפזרת ונתכנסה
 ובא השחין ונכנס בתוכה הקיפה חלקה או מעטה
 השחין או מחית השחין והמכוה ומחית המכוה והבהק והלכו להן לא היה בה פסיון ונולד בו פסיון
 השחין ומחית השחין והמכוה ומחית המכוה והבהק חולקין בין האום לפסיון והלכו להן הרי אלו
 להחמיר

Nega'im 1. 5

When is it (required) to be lenient (not to enforce quarantine)?

(If) it (the lesion) had a white hair and a white hair went away, they were white and turned black, one was white and one was black and both turned black,
 (if) long and became short, one was long and one short and both became short;
 (if) the boil was attached to both of them or one of them, (or) the boil connected both of them or one of them, or (if) the boil separated them,
 and (as for) the scab (lit. 'healing')²⁷ of the boil and the burn and scab of the burn and white spot, (if) it had a scab and the scab went away,
 (if) it was square and grew round or long, (if) surrounded or grew from the side, (if) clustered or spread out,
 and (if) the boil developed and entered into the middle (of the lesion), (if) the boil joined it, separated it, or diminished it,
 or (regarding) the scab of the boil and the burn and scab of the burn and white spot,
 (if) it had an extending or the extending went away, or (if) that the origin (of the lesion) went away or that it was diminished and (if) **neither was the size of a bean**,
 and (if) the boil and the scab of the boil and the burn and scab of the burn and the white spot were divided between the origin (of the lesion) and the extending (of it)—
 these are (all cause) for leniency (in quarantine).

Nega'im 1. 6

When is it (required) to be stringent (enforce quarantine)?

(If) it (the lesion) had no white hair in it but white hair appeared (lit. was born), (or) they (the hairs within the lesion) were black and turned white, (if) one was black and one was white, but both turned white,
 (if) they were short and became long, (or) one was short and the other long, but both became long,
 (if) the boil was attached to both of them or to one of them (the hairs), (if) the boil connected both of them or one of them, or (if) the boil separated (them)
 and (if there is) the scab of the boil and a burn and scab of a burn and a white spot and (then) they went away;
 (if the lesion) had no scab but scab appeared (lit. 'was born');
 (if) it was round or long and grew square, (or) it was at the side (of the boil?) and became surrounded, it spread out or clustered,
 and a boil developed and entered into the middle (of the lesion)
 (if) the boil joined it (the lesion) or separated from it or diminished it,
 or (if) the scab of the boil or the burn or scab of the burn and white spot disappeared,

27. Cf. Biblical Hebrew *mhyh hmkwh*, 'scab of the burn', Lev. 13: 24. Hebrew *mhyh* 'healing', 'sustenance' (< *hyh* 'to live') has no exact Aramaic equivalent and might be a calque on Akkadian *balātu*, 'to live', which can also mean to 'get well', with a D-stem *bulluṭu* meaning 'to heal', and other derived forms all dealing with healing (*balṭu*, 'healthy, raw', and *bultu*, 'prescription'). The idiomatic use of *mhyh* as 'scab' could be derived from this same idea, i.e., that the scab represents the healing stage of a lesion.

it had no extending but the extending appeared (lit. ‘was born’), (if) the boil and scab of the boil and burn and scab of the burn and white spot were divided between the origin and extending (of the lesion) and (then) went away—these are (all cause) for stringency (in quarantine).

Both of these repetitive passages, although grouped in the printed editions of the Mishnah as paragraphs, actually consist of individual clauses. There is no running syntactic narrative and each clause should be understood as a separate proposition, although it is occasionally difficult to determine when a clause begins or ends. In any case, as standard translations indicate, each proposition is understood as a conditional (‘if’)-clause, that is, a protasis of a proposition with an implicit apodosis, either to be lenient (l. 5) or stringent (l. 6) in regard to quarantine. Both entries (l. 5 and l. 6) are anonymous, in contrast to the passages in the Mishnah both before and after, and both describe skin pathologies, in this case skin lesions with colored hairs (white and black) growing in them, whether long or short, whether spread out or clustered on the skin, also characterized by having boils, burns, scabbing, or a white spot (scurf) on the skin. The main difference between the two passages with their similar descriptions of skin pathologies is the size of the lesions: if smaller than a bean, there was no need to quarantine the patient. These passages, as primary examples of *Listenwissenschaft*, have a parallel in the Babylonian *Diagnostic Handbook*, which listed several thousand entries with individual signs and symptoms observed in human anatomy, generally organized from head to foot.²⁸ There is no Greek equivalent to this text.

Tablet 33 of the *Diagnostic Handbook* has some similar passages, with a specific format.²⁹ Each individual clause begins with a formulaic expression, *šumma simmu šikinšu kīma X Y šumšu*, “if a lesion’s feature is like X, its name is Y.” For instance, the opening lines of the tablet read:

šumma simmu šikinšu kīma ummedi ašû šumšu
šumma simmu šikinšu kīma ummedi irāššišumma ukkak pān simmi mē inaddī[ma] ašû
šumšu
šumma simmu šikinšu kīma ummedi u āšītsu ebiṭ mašakšu irāššišumma adi [...] lēt
simmi ugdallab ašû šumšu

If the lesion’s feature is like cluster-sores,³⁰ its name is *ašû*-disease.

If the lesion’s feature is like cluster-sores [and] itches him,³¹ he scratches the surface of the lesion [so that] it produces fluid, its name is *ašû*-disease.

If the lesion’s feature is like cluster-sores and a discharge is bound [to it], his skin itches him until [it bleeds?],³² the side of the lesion is shaved [i.e. hairless], its name is *ašû*-disease.

Three later lines read as follows (ll. 13–15):

28. The English translation of this text can be found in JoAnn Scurlock, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 13–272.

29. Scurlock, *Sourcebook*, 231–43.

30. The translation ‘clustered’ for *ummedi* follows Scurlock, *Sourcebook*, 235 (“that it is clustered”), rather than assuming a noun *ummedu*, a kind of sore. The translation fits well with the Mishnah passage.

31. Following CAD R, 207, rather than the meaning of ‘becoming red’. Scurlock, *Sourcebook*, 235, translates “(his skin) is reddish.”

32. This suggested translation is from Scurlock, *Sourcebook*, 235.

*šumma simmu šikinšu kīma himṭi ēmma illak mē lā ukāl simmu [šū] irabbi³³
girgiššu šumšu*

šumma simmu šikinšu kīma himṭi ēmma mē ukāl bubu'tu šumšu

šumma simmu šikinšu kīma himṭi ēmma mē lā ukāl bubu'tu šehrēti malū išītu šumšu

If the lesion's feature is hot like a burn and it *goes*,³⁴ it does not contain fluid, the lesion *grows large*, its name is *girgiššu*.

If the lesion's feature is hot like a burn and contains fluid, its name is *bubu'tu-pustules*.

If the lesion's feature is hot like a burn and does not contain fluid, it is full of small *bubu'tu-pustules*, its name is *ešītu* ['dimness']

Other symptoms pertain to the color of the lesion (ll. 19–20):

šumma simmu šikinšu sāmu pešū ikkalšu mē ukāl ruṭibtu šumšu

šumma simmu šikinšu šalmu harasu šumšu

If the lesion's feature is red [or] white [and] hurts him, it contains fluid, its name is *ruṭibtu* ['moisture']

If the lesion's feature is black, its name is *harasu*.

A further broken passage refers to black and white hair growing out of the lesion (ll. 85–86)

[šumma . . . ina] libbišu šārtu šalamtu uššā ib[alluṭ]³⁵

[šumma . . . ina] libbišu šārtu pešātu uššā lā ib[alluṭ]

[If . . . from] the middle of it (a lesion), black hair emerges, it will *get better*.

[If . . . from] the middle of it (a lesion), white hair emerges, it will not *get better*.

Although the actual content of these two texts is not identical, there is a logic common to both. The two lists have quite different contexts and purposes. The Mishnah describes individual symptoms of various skin pathologies to try to determine if quarantine was necessary, or in other words, to determine whether this is a disease that could be considered infectious. The usual model for this kind of diagnostic list in the Babylonian *Diagnostic Handbook* is for each entry (or line of text) to represent a protasis and apodosis, with the latter clause giving a prognosis as to whether the patient will live or recover, die, or suffer chronic illness. Tablet 33 of the *Diagnostic Handbook* deviates from this usual pattern, since it is an explanatory text meant to identify different types of skin lesion by name, without offering a prognosis in most cases. Nevertheless, the organizational principle is the same, with each entry being complete (read horizontally), but forming a consistent pattern when read vertically (as a group of conditional clauses). The general aim was to provide a catalogue of identifiable skin ailments, with various colors, textures, whether hot, or having black or white hair, etc.

Similar characteristics appear in the Mishnah, although the two sets of conditions determining leniency or stringency contain virtually the same type of data, except for the single clause in *Nega'im* 1. 5 (marked in bold) stipulating that each lesion in cases of leniency had to be less than the size of a bean. Otherwise, strangely enough, the clauses are similar. One would imagine that editors could have listed all of the conditions of stringency, and at the

33. Reading G[G.BI] GAL!. The alternative reading (Scurlock *Sourcebook*, 231) is G[IG . . .] TUKU.

34. The reading is uncertain (DU-*a/k*), but the meaning 'goes' does not appear to mean to 'go away', as in the similar phrasing in the Mishnah.

35. Restoring the end of the line as T[I.LA] from the published copy.

end simply appended a corollary to say that if lesions are very small, they can be treated with leniency. The Mishnah editors, in this case, must have felt compelled to leave the format in its original form, reflecting a typical order of *Listenwissenschaft*, which can be seen from Akkadian models, in which it was common to describe a symptom (e.g., the lesion contains fluid) and then the opposite symptom (the lesion does not contain fluid). This also reflects the general logic of the Mishnah passage, which groups similar symptoms, with those of the first group all sharing the same condition of being smaller than a bean, and with the second group sharing the condition of being larger than a bean. These conditions had significance for the prognosis, whether the patient had to be quarantined or not.

These examples raise important questions regarding the Mishnah *Nega'im*, especially since other examples of pathologies can be found in this same Tablet 33 of the *Diagnostic Handbook*, referring to the color, texture, and placement of skin lesions and other external body symptoms.³⁶ It is noticeable that the *Listenwissenschaft* format features prominently in the comparison of these two texts, which is not typical of Greek medical writings.

The question is how a text of the Mishnah might have been influenced by a literary format and textual logic that are typically Babylonian and distant from rabbinic schools in Roman Palestine. There is no easy answer to this question, which in any case is not posed by modern scholars of the Mishnah. One possible avenue of approach is to consider other works from Babylonia that appeared in Palestine in roughly the same period—Aramaic astronomical and divination texts found in Qumran—which clearly originated in Babylonia and found their way into Judean archives (as mentioned above in reference to Yoshiko Reed's work). The assumption in this case would be that an extract from Babylonian diagnostic omens (another form of divination), perhaps originally in Aramaic, could have been brought to Judea and translated into Hebrew, eventually to be incorporated into the Mishnah. As correctly noted by Mira Balberg, the Mishnah of *Nega'im* is in any case *sui generis*, bearing little similarity to other works in the corpus and apparently unstudied by later academies, judging by the fact that there is no rabbinic commentary on the text, in either the Babylonian or Jerusalem Talmud.

This still does not answer the question of when and how such a Babylonian inspired passage in the Mishnah might have arrived in Judea. As noted above (n. 10), the answer may be relatively straightforward—that technical literature like astronomy and divination (both physiognomic and medical omens), in their Babylonian context, were the province of scribes belonging to the palace or major temple, since the literary endeavors that produced such texts were probably supported by official patronage. It would make sense, therefore, for the Hasmonean kings to import such literature from their former ruling powers—Seleucid Babylonia—as a matter of royal prestige. In any case, whether this is correct or not, this kind of literature hardly reflects Hellenistic influence or Greek thought, which is the usual paradigm employed by modern scholarship.

36. For the most recent discussion of the structure of the *Diagnostic Handbook*, see U. Steinert, "Disease Concepts and Classifications in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Systems of Classification in Premodern Medical Cultures: Sickness, Health, and Local Epistemologies*, ed. U. Steinert (London: Routledge, 2020), 140–94, and esp. p. 157 for a description of skin diseases in the *Diagnostic Handbook* that are relevant to the Mishnah *Nega'im*.