

## Reading Piyyut Reading: A Case Study from a Qillirian Geshem

Tzvi Novick

### Introduction

The chiastic title of this article encapsulates its bidirectional thesis. We must appreciate classical *piyyut* as literature (“reading *piyyut*”) in order to appreciate how *piyyut* reads its sources (“*piyyut* reading”). And likewise in reverse: Appreciating how *piyyut* reads its sources contributes to our understanding of how *piyyut* works as literature.

A standard feature of contemporary editions of *piyyutim* is a commentary apparatus that explains challenging words and phrases, identifies biblical allusions, and makes reference to relevant passages in rabbinic and para-rabbinic (mystical, targumic, etc.) literature. A reference to a rabbinic text can raise at least two distinct sets of questions. The first, on which the commentary apparatus often remains studiously ambiguous, is genealogical. Did the rabbinic text serve as a source for the *piyyut*, or is the relationship between the rabbinic text and the *piyyut* more indirect? This question is bound up, at the general level, with the question of the “bookshelf” of the *paytanim*: Which rabbinic works did they “know,” and in what forms did they know them?<sup>1</sup>

The second set of questions, which the commentary apparatus rarely takes up in any detail, and on which this article will focus, is compositional. Supposing that the *paytan* drew on the rabbinic text in question, what led the *paytan* to make use of just this text, and at just this point in the poem? If the preceding line of the *piyyut* was engaged with a

\* My thanks to Dr. Avi Shmidman for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1 For the case of Yannai’s bookshelf see Zvi Meir Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai According to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays: Critical Edition with Introductions and Commentary* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1985), 1:55-60, summarizing and adding to his own earlier work. In using the word “bookshelf” I do not mean to prejudice the question of whether a particular rabbinic text circulated in writing or orally.

different rabbinic text, why did the *paytan* decide to change course, and what led him from one rabbinic text to the next? Did the poet take up the rabbinic text to fill in a predetermined space in the poem, or does the rabbinic text play a role in the literary unfolding of the *piyyut*? At the general level, what technologies did *paytanim* employ to organize their sources prior to or during the production of their poems? Did their rabbinic bookshelf familiar to them lie before them like an open book, to draw from as the spirit moved them, or did they collate sources according to a particular logic or by a particular mechanism?<sup>2</sup>

In many cases, compositional questions can be uninteresting, because there is an obvious consideration that led the *paytan* to the rabbinic text to which he alludes, and the role that this text plays in the *piyyut* as a literary work is equally evident. In other cases, the exercise of reconstructing a poem's compositional process can be too speculative. In some cases, however, asking compositional questions enables, with a reasonable degree of confidence, unexpected glimpses into the workshop of the *paytan* as he builds his poem through complex coordination among the poem's formal and substantive constraints and among the different works in his rabbinic bookshelf. In the continuation of this section, I briefly analyze three *piyyutim*, the first by Qillir and the other two by Yannai, from a compositional perspective, in order better to clarify the sorts of questions that I collect under the rubric of composition, and the circumstances under which these questions become interesting. The main body of the article consists of an extended case study of another *piyyut* by Qillir.

Consider first the One (*magen*) of a *qedushta* by Qillir for the morning service for the Day of Atonement, אזרחי ידעך מכל אומות ("The native knew you out of all nations").<sup>3</sup> This mono-rhyming, 24-line acrostic poem (with

- 2 The framing of these more general expressions of the compositional question draws inspiration from Monika Amsler's recent book, *The Babylonian Talmud and Late Antique Book Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). For an earlier foray of mine into compositional questions, from a later historical period, see Tzvi Novick, "Yatziv Pitgam: Poetry as Talmud Commentary," *Lehrhaus* May 14, 2021 (<https://thelehrhaus.com/commentary/yatziv-pitgam-poetry-as-talmud-commentary/>).
- 3 See Shulamit Elizur and Michael Rand, *Liturgical Poems for Yom Ha-Kippurim: Rabbi El'azar Berabbi Qillir* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2021), 267-69. Translations of biblical verses depend on the NJPS, sometimes with modifications; all other translations are solely my own.

two lines each for  $\psi$  and  $\tau$ ) divides by topic into three units of two quatrain strophes each. The first unit (ll. 1-8) describes the beginning of Abraham's career: how he discovered God, sought to bring others to belief in him, and abandoned his home to follow God.<sup>4</sup> Qillir dedicates the next two strophes (ll. 9-17) to the story of the binding of Isaac. The final unit (ll. 18-24) takes up the figure of Jacob, whose descendants, the children of Israel and in particular Aaron, are given the mechanisms of atonement. The key compositional logic of this poem is straightforward: Qillir sought to proceed chronologically through the three patriarchs, to arrive ultimately at the Day of Atonement.

In the commentary apparatus to their edition of this poem, Shulamit Elizur and Michael Rand cite numerous rabbinic texts. For example, l. 2 tells that *בעודו בן שלוש היבין בהכמות* “when [Abraham] was yet age three he understood wisdom.” Their comment: *ש'בן שלש שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו* (“for ‘at age three Abraham recognized his creator’ (GenRab 64:4).” Elizur and Rand presumably do not mean to commit to a position on the genealogical question, i.e., to advance the strong view that the passage in Genesis Rabbah was Qillir's (direct or indirect) source. Rather, they mean only to explicate Qillir's words, and to show that his exegetical claim is already attested in early rabbinic literature.<sup>5</sup> Even if we suppose that Qillir did draw specifically on GenRab 64:4, the rabbinic passage, which has no other point of contact with the *piyyut*, clearly does not

4 I take l. 6 *בתעלומות שמך וקידש שמך* “and he sanctified your name in concealment” to refer not (*pace* Elizur and Rand) to the preaching of God's hidden wisdom, or to Abraham's obedience to God even in private, but to his willingness to die for God's sake in the fiery furnace. Qillir's description of the furnace as concealed or hidden corresponds with the fact that rabbinic literature consistently speaks of Abraham “descending” into it, e.g., in GenRab 38:13 (364); 42:7 (413). In fact, it is likely that lines 5 and 6 together refer to the same event. On this approach, l. 5 *העליתו מכשד* “you raised him up from Chaldea with an exalted right hand” describes how God brought Abraham up safely out of the Chaldean furnace.

5 Qillir's most proximate source might have been Yannai's *qedushta* to Genesis 12:1. Yannai's Five (Rabinovitz ed., 1.125) begins: *אז בן שלוש שנים היה איתן / ויראה וחוכמה*: “Then, three years of age was the strong one, / and fear and wisdom in his heart were given.” (Following Maagarim, I fill out Rabinovitz's edition with Cambridge, University Library, T-S Collection, NS, 274, 4e.) This line, like Qillir's, joins Abraham's age to a reference to wisdom.

represent a compositional building block for it. Rather, at the compositional level, Qillir wished, at this point in the *piyyut*, to describe Abraham's early life, and to do so, he drew in l. 2 (*ex hypothesi*) from GenRab 64:4, and in other lines from other sources. From a compositional perspective, then, we can characterize the allusion to GenRab 64:4—if there is an allusion at all—as punctual; it does no more than slot into a predetermined space in the poem's structure.

In ll. 15-16, the poem describes the turn in the story of the binding of Isaac: שוחחך אל תשלח משבעה מרומות / ען יי יראה בשני עולמות "When you said 'do not send forth' from seven elevations, / he answered, 'the Lord shall be seen' in two worlds." In their comment on l. 16, Elizur and Rand call on the reader to "compare" (השווה) SifreDeut 352 (410), where Abraham's pronouncement, "the Lord shall be seen, etc." (Gen 22:14), is understood to indicate that Abraham foresaw the temple built and destroyed, and then a new temple בנוי ומשוכלל לעולם הבא "built and perfected in the next world."<sup>6</sup> With respect to the genealogical question, a claim for dependence is stronger in this case than in the case of l.2, as the exegetical content here is not a commonplace in the way that Abraham's recognition of God at age three is. It is reasonable, then, to suppose that l. 16 depends on SifreDeut 352. At the compositional level, Qillir's use of SifreDeut 352 in l. 16 matches, in the main, his use of GenRab 64:4 in l. 2: Coming to the conclusion of his recounting of the binding of Isaac, he turns to a rabbinic source that interprets a verse from this part of Genesis 22.

But we can advance a more interesting compositional hypothesis about Qillir's decision to turn to SifreDeut 352. Perhaps, having in mind as he approached the end of the second unit that he would be turning to Jacob in the third, and that he would be introducing therein the beloved motif of the face of Jacob inscribed on the heavenly throne, Qillir went looking for a bridge element. He discovered one by finding "two worlds" (שני עולמות) in the comment on Gen 22:14 in SifreDeut 352, which

6 Parenthetical references to *Sifre Deuteronomy* identify the page number in the Finkelstein edition, but quotations come from Vatican 32, as transcribed in Maagarim, with occasional minor modification for ease of reading (expanding abbreviations, etc.). Elizur and Rand quote the Finkelstein edition, which has לעתיד לבוא "in the future to come" rather than לעולם הבא "in the world to come"; Qillir's reference to עולמות "worlds" supports the version with לעולם הבא.

anticipate the characterization of Jacob in the beginning of the third unit (l. 18) as having been fashioned in “two seals” (שתי חותמות), one on earth (the human Jacob) and one in heaven (the face on the heavenly throne). Or we might build out a different and compatible hypothesis. The extended case study below will suggest that Qillir has a predilection for using numbers and number exegesis in transitional moments. Lines 15 and 16, concluding the second unit, both invoke numbers: the seven heavens, the two worlds. Perhaps it was the predilection for a number transition that inspired Qillir’s turn to SifreDeut 352. In any case, note that these compositional hypotheses depend on an underlying claim about the poem’s literary structure, i.e., that there is a unit break between l. 16 and l. 17. Returning, then, to this article’s title, we must “read *piyyut*” (i.e., appreciate the poem’s literary features) in order to see “*piyyut* reading” (i.e., how the poem reads, or compositionally deploys, its rabbinic sources).

An example from Yannai’s oeuvre illustrates the opposite compositional extreme from the above example, where a single rabbinic text is the substrate of the entire *piyyut*. The Three (*meshaleš*) of Yannai’s *qedushta* to the *sefer* beginning with Gen 15:1 אחר הדברים האלה היה דבר ה' אל אברם במחזה “after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, etc.” (Rabinovitz ed., 1.136-37) is a revision of a comment on Gen 15:1 in GenRab 44:6 (429).<sup>7</sup> Yannai works some striking changes on the rabbinic passage, changes that show him to be an attentive reader and that shed light on formal distinctions between midrash and *piyyut* as genres; I describe these changes in my recent book, *Piyyuṭ and Midrash*.<sup>8</sup> From a compositional perspective, however, the Three is relatively uninteresting, because the poem evidently does not coordinate among different rabbinic texts, nor is the rabbinic text put to work in supporting the poem’s literary structure. The only compositional question to ask in relation to the Three in itself is why Yannai chose to base it on GenRab 44:6, and the main answer to this question is relatively straightforward:

7 Parenthetical references to *Genesis Rabbah* identify the page number in the Theodor-Albeck edition, but quotations come from Vatican 60, as transcribed in Maagarim, with occasional minor modification for ease of reading (expanding abbreviations, etc.).

8 Tzvi Novick, *Piyyuṭ and Midrash: Form, Genre, and History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 89-92.

The Three concludes with citation of the first verse of the *haftarah*, in this case Isa 1:1 “הזון ישעיהו” “the vision of Isaiah, etc.,” and GenRab 44:6 addresses an aspect of the first verse of the *seder*, Gen 15:1, namely, divine speech, that also bears on the first word of the *haftarah*. Other compositional questions, too large even to begin to address here, do present themselves when we lift our eyes beyond the Three, for example: Did the selection of GenRab 44:6 impact, or was it impacted by, other compositional choices in the *qedushta*? Or more broadly still: How does Yannai’s selection of GenRab 44:6 figure in relation to his use of Genesis Rabbah in general?

Let us consider, as a final preliminary example, Yannai’s *qedushta* to the *seder* beginning with Num 26:52 “לאלה תחלק הארץ” “among these shall the land be apportioned” (Rabinovitz ed., 2.117). The topic of the *seder*, and thus of the *qedushta*, is the division of the land of Israel among the tribes. The Four poem runs as follows.<sup>9</sup>

ארץ אשר לה בעוז נהלתנו / מתנה טובה הנחלתנו  
 ירשה אחזה נחלה חזקה / בחבל ובחלש בפור ובגורל  
 ארץ חטה ושערה / לראשית שעורה  
 ארץ גפן / לנטועי כגפן  
 ארץ תאינה / לביכור תאנה  
 ארץ רימון / לפילח הרמון  
 ארץ זיית / להודם כזיית  
 ארץ זבת חלב ודבש / לתחת לשונם חלב ודבש  
 היא קדש / והם קודש  
 יבואו קדושים וינחלו קדושה ומקדשה  
 ויקדישו לנורא וקדוש

9 There are minor uncertainties and gaps in the Hebrew text, which I have filled out in accordance with Shulamit Elizur’s edition in her book, *A Poem for Every Parasha: Torah Readings Reflected in the Piyyutim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1999), 289.

A land to which you in your strength led us / as a good gift  
you bequeathed us:

Possession, holding, inheritance, dominion, / through rope  
and lot, through draw and portion.

A land of wheat and barley / for the first of the barley,

A land of vines / for them planted as vines,

A land of figs / for the first fruit of the fig,

A land of pomegranates / for the slice of a pomegranate,

A land of olives / for them whose crown is like an olive,

A land flowing with milk and honey / for them who under  
their tongue is milk and honey.

It is holy / and they are holy.

May they come, who are holy, / and inherit that which is  
wholly holy,

And let them call holy Him who is awesome and holy.

The body of the poem correlates each of the seven species of the land of Israel that are listed in Deut 8:8 with the people Israel. This correlation explains God's gifting of the land to the people. Shulamit Elizur notes that assorted rabbinic passages also identify the people Israel with one or another of the named fruits, sometimes in reliance on the same verses to which Yannai alludes.<sup>10</sup> But Yannai does not manifest dependence on these passages, and neither they nor any other known rabbinic source seeks specifically to correlate the people with the seven species of the land. What led Yannai to this undertaking?

The answer may lie hidden in the first line of the poem, in which Yannai characterizes the land of Israel as a "good gift." As Nahum Bronznick observes, Yannai appears to allude to a statement attributed to R. Shimon b. Yohai in MekRish *ba-hodesh* 10 (Horowitz-Rabin ed., 240) and SifreDeut 32 (57), according to which the Jewish people were given

10 *Ibid.*, 290-92.

three “good gifts” (מתנות טובות), all acquired through suffering: Torah, the land of Israel, and the world to come.<sup>11</sup> The proof-text for the land of Israel is the juxtaposition of Deut 8:5, which speaks of God disciplining Israel, and Deut 8:7, where Moses says that God will bring Israel to “a good land” (ארץ טובה).<sup>12</sup> The verse that lists the seven species, Deut 8:8, comes immediately after this proof-text. Perhaps, then, having been drawn to R. Shimon b. Yohai’s statement on account of the *qedushta*’s topic, Yannai was inspired to make Deut 8:8 the centerpiece of his Four.<sup>13</sup>

Because classical *piyyut* is dense with references to rabbinic texts, the study of classical *piyyut* has always involved attention to its engagement with the rabbinic corpus.<sup>14</sup> Among recent contributions we can point to research by Shulamit Elizur and others, identifying instances and characteristic features of exegeses that *paytanim* originated, and that sometimes found their way into later midrashic works, so that the conventional vector, where exegesis travels from midrash to *piyyut*, is reversed.<sup>15</sup> Yehoshua Granat’s recent book, on the category of things created before the beginning of the world, clarifies characteristic ways in

- 11 See Nachum N. Bronznick, *The Liturgical Poetry of Yannai* (2 vols. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 2000, 2005), 1.337. A passage in *Sifre behuqotai* 2:7 (Weiss ed., 112c) seems to know some version of this tradition.
- 12 Of the three “good gifts,” the land of Israel may have been the exegetical starting point for R. Shimon b. Yohai’s statement, given that only in this case does the proof-text refer to the object as given to Israel and as good.
- 13 The first line seems to serve as a template for the Four’s structure in a different way as well. The opening words, אשר לה בעוז נהלתנו “a land to which you in your strength led us,” derive, as also noted in Bronznick, *Liturgical Poetry*, 1.337, from Ex 15:13 קדשך אל נוה קדשך “In your love you guided the people whom you redeemed; in your strength you led them to your abode of holiness.” This verse not only joins the people to the land, in anticipation of the main body of the Four. It also coordinates them under the aegis of holiness, a category that Yannai invokes in the last lines of the poem as a bridge to the obligatory final word of the Four, קדוש “holy.”
- 14 Yannai has received the most careful attention in this regard. See the classic treatment in Saul Lieberman, *הזנות יני*, *Sinai* 4 (1938), 221-50, and Rabinovitz, *Liturgical Poems*; Bronznick, *Liturgical Poetry*.
- 15 See, e.g., Shulamit Elizur, “From *piyyut* to *midrash*,” in *Rabbi Mordechai Breuer Festschrift* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992), 383-97, and the literature cited in Novick, *Piyyut and Midrash*, 11 n. 6.



which *paytanim* modify their midrashic sources, and in general demonstrates how the examination of the same motif across midrash and *piyyut* can illuminate both corpora.<sup>16</sup> My own research, overlapping in part with Granat's, has focused on the formal features that distinguish *piyyut* from midrash.<sup>17</sup>

The set of compositional questions described above remains, in the midst of this research, largely unaddressed. Below I offer a detailed analysis of a *piyyut* by Qillir that shows it to be a case in which the *paytan*, in composing his *piyyut*, drew on a small set of rabbinic sources to which he was led and among which he navigated according to a largely reconstructable compositional logic. I argue, moreover, that an appreciation for the literary structure of the *piyyut* is an essential precondition for discerning this compositional logic.

### Context for the Case Study

The poem in question, תכנבם לארץ והוצות ("He measured them out for land and countryside") appears in the *geshem* ("rain") by Qillir that is preserved in the Ashkenazi rite, אף ברי אותה שר מטר ("The Prince of Rain was glyphed *Af-Beri*"). (For a full translation of the poem see Appendix 1.) *Geshem* is the name given to a *piyyut* sequence or macroform designated for the *amidah* of *musaf* of *Shemini ašeret*, the eighth day following after the seven days of Sukkot. *Shemini ašeret* marks the beginning of the season for rain prayers, which extends to the first day of Passover.<sup>18</sup> The *musaf* of the first day of Passover, in turn, is the occasion for a macroform called

16 See Yehoshua Granat, *Before 'In the Beginning': Pre-existence in Early Piyyut* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2023). Compare, from an earlier generation, Shalom Spiegel's extensive treatment of the motif of the "exile of the Presence" in *The Fathers of Piyyut: Texts and Studies Toward a History of the Piyyut in Eretz Yisrael* (ed. Menahem H. Schmelzer; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1996), 308-68.

17 See Novick, *Piyyut and Midrash*.

18 On the development of the rabbinic laws of rain prayers see David Henshke, "On the Dates of Mentioning Rain and Their Request in Prayer: Towards an Understanding of the Mishnah's Arrangement," in *Yaakov Neeman Memorial Volume* (ed. Aharon Barak and David Gliksberg; Jerusalem: Sacher Institute, 2023), 191-216; David Sabato, "Praying for Rain (*she'ilat Geshamim*) in Israel and Diaspora: Halacha, History and Geography," *Oqimta* 8 (2022), 117-40.

the *ṭal* (“dew”), because then Israel ceases to pray for rain, and seeks dew instead. The *ṭal* for the Ashekanzi rite, also by Qillir, is בדעתו אביעה הידות (“With his consent I will express riddles”).

The *geshem* and *ṭal* macroforms belong to the *shiv'ata* genre. We need not enter into their structure in detail; most relevant for our purposes is the fact that the expansive section of the macroform in the second blessing of the *amidah* includes, as a general rule, a *seder olam* (“the history of the world”) or *seder yeširah* (“the ordering of creation”), i.e., a history stretching from creation to some relevant point, told through a particular lens, in these cases, those of the rain (on *Shemini ašeret*) and the dew (on Passover).<sup>19</sup> In the *geshem* and *ṭal* compositions by Qillir that are preserved in the Ashkenazi rite, the *seder olam* consists of two *piyyuṭim*, the first structured by a forward alphabetical acrostic, from א to ת, and the second

19 For a description of the range of formal structures in Qillir’s extant *geshem* and *tal* poems, in particular for the *seder yeširah* and the *seder pesuqim* that follows it, see Michael Rand, “Compositional Technique in Qillirian *Piyyuṭim* for Rain and Dew,” in *From a Sacred Source: Genizah Studies in Honour of Professor Stefan C. Reif* (ed. Ben Outhwaite and Siam Bhayro; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 249-87. Rand draws on his own extensive work on this genre, especially *idem*, “Liturgical Compositions for Shemini ‘Atzeret by Eleazar be-rabbi Qillir,” *Ginzei Qedem* 3 (2007), 9\*-99\*, on which see also the subsequent exchange: Yehoshua Granat, “Clarifications of the Text, Interpretation and Attribution of Fragmentary Poetic Compositions for Shemini ‘Atzeret from the Cairo Geniza,” *Ginzei Qedem* 4 (2008), 117-44; and Michael Rand, “A Response to Yehoshua Granat,” *Ginzei Qedem* 4 (2008), 83\*-98\*. Among other important recent contributions to the published corpus and formal analysis of this genre see especially Shulamit Elizur, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Pinḥas ha-Kohen: Critical Edition, Introduction and Commentaries* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2004), 104-10; *eadem*, “‘Visit Your Land with Rain’: Poetic Fragments of Early *Šiv'atot* for Rain,” *Ginzei Qedem* 1 (2005), 31-78. Elizur establishes (*ibid.*, 46) that the structure employed by Qillir for his *geshem* and *tal*, including the incorporation of a *seder olam*, crystallized already in the pre-classical period, but that in the pre-classical period, this *seder olam* was evidently closer to the world histories familiar from the *avodah* genre of the Day of Atonement, which adopt a more expansive storytelling posture that does not focus exclusively on the theme of the day (atonement in the case of the *avodah*, water in the case of the *geshem* and *ṭal*).

by a reverse alphabetical acrostic, from ת to א.<sup>20</sup> The *piyyut* on which we will focus, תכנמ לארץ וחוצות, is the second of the two poems in the *seder olam* sequence for the *geshem*; the first is אקשטה כסל וקרב (“Let me set loin and midst”).<sup>21</sup>

If we compare the *geshem* and the *tal* by Qillir preserved in the Ashkenazi rite, we note an important difference with respect to the content of the *seder olam*. The *seder olam* of the *tal* encompasses the entire history of the world. The first poem, אאגרה בני איש (“Let me gather sons of the man”) moves from the creation of the world to Joshua, while the second, תחת אלת עפרה (“Under the terebinth at Ophrah”) picks up with Gideon and carries the narrative forward to Elijah. Elijah’s resurrection of the Sarephite woman’s son is taken as a sign of the final resurrection, and thus advances the narrative to the eschaton.<sup>22</sup>

- 20 For editions of these compositions see, respectively, Daniel Goldschmidt and Jonah Fraenkel, *מחזור סוכות, שמיני עצרת ושמחת תורה לפי מנהגי בני אשכנז לכל ענפיהם* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1981), 403-32; Jonah Fraenkel, *מחזור פסח לפי מנהגי בני אשכנז לכל ענפיהם* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1993), 208-42.
- 21 I note intriguing points of contact between these poems and a partially preserved unpublished *geshem* transcribed in Maagarim, פתח ממרום חרקי ארובות ... (“... Open from the height the sluice lattices”) (Cambridge, University Library, T-S Collection, 10H 4, 3) that evokes Yannai’s poetics in aspects of its form and content, including a strophe lamenting Israel’s exile. This *geshem* includes a two-poem sequence with a regular and then a reverse alphabetical acrostic, אהלה לאל מודד מים (“I beseech the God who measures water”) and תנואת שטר חובותינו תקרע (“Our constraining [?] bill of indictment, tear!”), which contains many overlaps with our *seder olam* sequence. See, e.g., the formulation יחדו יעמדו צרורים עד יורשו להפיצה “together they stand, bound, until they are given leave to scatter” (אהלה לאל מודד מים, l. 42), which is almost identical to Qillir’s account, עומדים צרורים עד ירשו להריק מים, “standing bound until they are given leave to empty themselves of water” (אקשטה כסל וקרב, l. 32). This *geshem*’s genealogical relationship to אף ברי אותת שר מטר requires further analysis.
- 22 Beyond the chronological progression, the two poems are united by a remarkable *inclusio*. In the first poem, after two introductory strophes, but before turning to creation in strophe 4, Qillir devotes the third strophe—the ג and ד lines—to the relationship between God and Israel: גל בינו לביני סיום אות טל / גלוי לכל כאש אוכלת ולי: “He revealed between him and me the definitive sign of dew: / revealed to all as a consuming fire, and to me like the flowering of dew. // He decided from then (i.e., from the beginning) to be for me as dew. / Also when he appeared to me he knocked with a head full of dew.” Fraenkel takes the ג line as a reference to the Sinai event, but it in

By contrast, the *seder olam* of the *geshem* does not in fact trace the sweep of history. The first poem, אקשטה כסל וקרב, does begin with the creation of the world, but it makes almost no progress beyond this point.<sup>23</sup> Qillir begins by describing the waters preceding the first day of creation (ll. 3-4), and the things fashioned prior to the creation of the world, including Gehenna and the Garden of Eden, the Torah, and God's throne, which is borne by angels (ll. 5-18).<sup>24</sup> A key turning point comes in ll. 19-22, where God determines to provide water for the earth. At first he thinks to do so by means of ground sources, but כשר בעלי זרוע כי יהסמו מים "when he saw strongmen stopping up water," he turns instead to celestial sources, which cannot as easily be appropriated by the powerful.

Lines 19-22 allude in different ways to GenRab 13, a fact that will demand our attention in the continuation; I note here the clearest and most

fact almost certainly refers to the eschaton: From the very beginning, God determined that he would in the end appear as fire to the nations of the world, but to Israel as dew. (The 7 line links the ultimate redemption to the first redemption, from Egypt.) The concluding lines of the second poem, devoted to the eschaton, return to this notion: פרוה יפרחו כשושנה בטל // אל ארץ דגן ותירוש אף שמיו יערפו טל / ראותם אש אוכלת כי נהיה כטל "They will flourish like a lily through dew // to a land of grain and wine, whose skies drip dew. / Though they saw a consuming fire, we will be like dew." The correlation of this world and the nations with fire, and the next world and Israel with dew, occurs also in a rabbinic text that is evidently genealogically related to Qillir's poem, ShirRab 1, 14:3 (Vatican 76, according to the transcription in Maagarim): "Said R. Levi son of Zechariah: If in this world, where it is written of the Holy One, blessed be He, 'for the Lord your God is a consuming fire,' he rejected the nations of the world and conceded to Israel, in the future to come, in which he is compared to dew, as it says, 'I shall be as dew for Israel,' all the more so." See also the 7 strophe of the *seder pesuqim* (233 ll. 77-80), which returns to the eschatological contrast between fire for the nations and dew for Israel.

- 23 On this difference between Qillir's *tal* and *geshem* see already Rand, "Compositional Technique," 256. As Rand notes, the opposite is the case in the pre-classical instances published in Ezra Fleischer, קרובה קדם- (והגשם): לקדמוניות פיוטי הטל (הגשם), *Qoveš 'al Yad* 8(18) (1975), 110-39 and in Elizur, "Visit Your Land." The pre-classical *tal* poem extends only to the creation story, with additional reflection on the role of dew in the agricultural cycle, while the *geshem* progresses to the flood story and beyond, through to the exodus and the splitting of the sea.
- 24 On the inclusion of the creation of Gehenna as a fixed feature in the creation narrative in the *seder avodah* for the Day of Atonement see Shulamit Elizur, מדרש, *Sinai* 99 (1986), 99.

important allusion, in l. 22.<sup>25</sup> The biblical lemma (Gen 2:5-6) indicates that, when there was yet no rain, God irrigated the soil from a mist rising from the earth. The midrash infers that God's original plan was for the earth to draw moisture from below in general, but after this initial instance, he reconsidered, and committed to having the earth be supported by rain from above. The following teaching explains God's change of mind. (GenRab 13:9 [119]).

בשביל ד' דברים חזר בו הק' שלא תהא הארץ שותה אלא מלמעלן מפני בעלי זרוע ובשביל להזיח טללים רעים ושיהא הגבוה שותה כנמוך ושיהא הכל נושאין עיניהם למרום הא' כ' ד' א' לשום שפלים למרום וקדרים שגבו ישע

Because of four things, the Holiness, blessed be He, reconsidered, so that the earth should drink only from above: on account of strongmen; to scatter bad dews; so that the elevated should drink like the low-lying; and so that everyone should raise their eyes heavenward. This is what it says, “[Who gives rain to the earth, and sends water over the fields,] who raises the lowly up high, so that the dejected are secure in victory.” (Job 5:10-11)<sup>26</sup>

Qillir might have been led to single out the first of the four factors on account of its salience, as the first factor, and by the fact that the prooftext at the end supports this factor most explicitly.

What follows afterward in the *piyyut* is a detailed description of rain and related meteorological phenomena—rainbows, lightning, winds, clouds—that runs through to the penultimate strophe (ll. 23-42), and that also engages with passages from GenRab 13.<sup>27</sup> The final strophe (ll. 43-44) takes up the river from Eden that splits into four heads. Thus, as a

25 For the allusions in ll. 20 and 22 see the commentary of Goldschmidt and Fraenkel *ad loc.* In l. 21, the word *ישוב* may depend on the reference at GenRab 13:1 (113), 13:9 (123) to rain as serving for “settling” (*ישוב*) the world.

26 It may not be a coincidence that almost just prior, in GenRab 13:7 (117), the midrash asserts, *לא נברא אדם אלא לעמל* “human beings were created only for toil,” a close paraphrase of Job 5:7 *אדם לעמל יולד* “human beings were made for toil,” which appears just a few verses prior to the prooftext in the current passage.

27 On the meteorological elements in *קרבן כסל וקרבן* see Michael Rand, “Clouds, Rain, and the Upper Waters: From *Bereshit Rabbah* to the Piyuṭim of Eleazar bi-rabbi Qillir,” *Aleph* 9 (2009), 13-39.

whole, the poem engages far more in description than in narration. What little plot it has manifests chiefly in God's decision to shift from terrestrial to heavenly water sources. This decision turns the rivers of Eden into a question: What need is there for rivers if God settled on rain?

The final strophe of the poem represents a bridge to the next *piyyut*, תכנם לארץ והוצות, which begins by answering this very question, and complicating the narrative, such as it is, of אקשטה כסל וקרב.<sup>28</sup> God continues to irrigate all the lands of the earth with water; it is only the land of Israel that depends exclusively on rain. Rain as a manifestation of the singularity of the land of Israel, and by extension the people Israel, is the central topic of תכנם לארץ והוצות, which does not advance the historical narrative at all. If the performative present of *piyyut* emerges implicitly in the corresponding *tal* poems in the Ashkenazi rite, insofar as it is this performative present that represents the dividing line between the biblical past and the future eschaton, in תכנם לארץ והוצות the performative present emerges explicitly, in the form of a direct address to God calling on him to heed Israel's prayer for rain. We will analyze תכנם לארץ והוצות in detail below, but it is already evident that its content follows in an organic way from אקשטה כסל וקרב, even though the two poems do not form a continuous history of the world like the two corresponding *tal* poems do.<sup>29</sup>

- 28 Both the last strophe of אקשטה כסל וקרב and the first strophe of תכנם לארץ והוצות begin with the 3ms perfect *piel* verb תכן, and the phrase לכל גיא וגיא “for each and every valley” in the former mirrors the phrase לכל אחד ואחד “for each and every one” in the latter.
- 29 We may attend in this light to the *geshem* of the *paytan* Pinhas, אשפורך לך לב כמים, (“Let me pour out heart to you like water”) (Elizur, *Liturgical Poems of Pinhas*, 494-503), which reflects throughout the influence of Qillir (on which see *ibid.*, 104-10). Pinhas has one poem alone corresponding to אקשטה כסל וקרב and תכנם לארץ והוצות. This poem, אז מאז היה העולם מים במים, (“Then from then, was the world water in water”), describes elements of the creation story connected with rain, then turns to meteorological elements related to rain, then concludes with a prayer for rain. Pinhas borrows none of Qillir's references to the distinction between terrestrial and celestial water sources; indeed, Pinhas is silent about rivers altogether. Nor does he distinguish between Israel and the nations; cf. ll. 63-64, which draw from Qillir's description of the provision of water to all of the different lands, but without reference to rivers, or to a contrast with Israel. Note incidentally that the fragmentary l. 70 of Pinhas' poem can be illuminated by תכנם לארץ והוצות l. 19, on which it undoubtedly depends; Pinhas, like Qillir, evidently calls on God to send rain so that Israel can undertake ritual immersion.

### A Literary Reading

Formally, *תכנם לארץ וחוצות* is a reverse alphabetical acrostic, where the second stich of each line is governed by a name acrostic (אלעזר בירבי קליר (מקריית שפר). Each stich ends with the fixed sequence -מ and -ayim (usually in the form of the word מים, but sometimes שמים, and, in one variation from the monorhyme, מעים). From a structural perspective, the poem divides into two roughly parallel units, the first comprising ll. 1-14, and the second, ll. 15-22. This division emerges most clearly in the fact that both ll. 1-2 and ll. 15-16 contrast other lands with the land of Israel.<sup>30</sup> There is a progression from ll. 1-2 to ll. 15-16 in two related respects. First, substantively, in ll. 1-2, the contrast concerns sources of water: rivers for other lands, and rain for Israel. In both cases, it is God who provides the water. But in ll. 15-16, God attends directly to the land of Israel alone, while responsibility for the other lands is assigned to the constellations, i.e., the sidereal angels. Second, ll. 1-2 refer to God in the third person, and the third person holds until ll. 15-16, where there is a shift to the second person, which Qillir maintains through to the end of the poem. Thus, just as ll. 15-16 describe an even greater intimacy between God and Israel than that suggested by ll. 1-2, these lines enact this intimacy by addressing God directly. This shift reaches its crescendo in the final line of the poem, l. 22, which contains the only vocative in the poem (אדון “Master!”) and boldly characterizes Israel as רעים “your friends.”

In both sections, following elaboration on the phenomenon of rain in the land of Israel (ll. 3-5, l. 17), there is either a reference to prayer (ll. 6-8), in the first section, or in the second, befitting its performative character, an actual prayer (ll. 18-22). Afterward, in both sections, there is extended reflection on numbers: seven and three in the first case (ll. 8-11), forty and seven in the second (ll. 19-21). Lines 12-14, in praise of rain, follow

30 It is notable that the contrast in ll. 15-16 is much easier to decode than that in ll. 1-2: While ll. 1-2 depend (as noted below) on rabbinic interpretation of a verse from Proverbs, ll. 15-16 refer explicitly to “all of earth’s living things” and use the famous epithet, “flowing with milk and honey.” Cf. Shulamit Elitzur’s observation (*Sod Meshalshei Qodesh: The Qedushta From its Origins Until the Time of Rabbi El’azar Berabbi Qillir* [Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2019], 705 704 l. 27) that, in his early *qedushta* compositions, Qillir follows Yannai in progressing from the more obscure to the more transparent.

organically from the description of the upper and lower waters in ll. 10-11, but they also represent something of a bridge or interlude preceding the major turn in ll. 15-16.

This general account of the *piyyut* as literature will be important for understanding how Qillir uses rabbinic sources. As important for the latter question are more local literary features, which are integrated into the discussion of Qillir's sources in the next section.

### **Qillir's Sources in Midrash**

How did Qillir produce this poem? He began, drawing from the resources of the paytanic tradition, with certain formal constraints—the alphabetical and name acrostics, a loose meter, and monorhyme—but how did he determine its content? Despite the large number of allusions to biblical and rabbinic texts, the process can be summarized in a sentence. Qillir toggles between, on the one hand, SifreDeut 37-40, the tannaitic commentary on Deut 11:10-12 (distinguishing between the land of Egypt, nurtured by a river, and the land of Israel, dependent on rain), and, on the other hand, the aforementioned GenRab 13, the amoraic commentary on Gen 2:5 (on the mist that irrigates the soil prior to the fall of rain), and he fills out the poem at structural turning points with reflection on the performative present as well as number homiletics. The paragraphs below flesh out this summary, and Appendix 2 collects the passages in SifreDeut 37-40 and GenRab 13 to which Qillir alludes.

Lines 1-2 read Deut 11:10-11 through the prism of the interpretation of Prov 8:26 in SifreDeut 37 (69-71), on Deut 11:10. SifreDeut 37 engages with the question of whether the Deuteronomy verses, contrasting the lands of Egypt and Israel, come to praise the land of Israel, or to condemn it. It argues for the former view, on the basis of Num 13:22, which indicates that the city of Hebron was built seven years prior to the city of Şoan of Egypt. On the assumption that one builds the superior thing before the inferior thing, this verse proves that Hebron, and by extension the land of Israel, are superior to Şoan, and by extension the land of Egypt. The midrash then turns to establish that it is the way of God to make the more beloved thing first. Thus we find—*per* Prov 8:22-23 and Jer 17:12, applying the words *ראשית*, *ראש*, and *ראשון* to (as the rabbis understand the verses) the Torah and the temple—that the Torah and the temple were



created first, and likewise we find—*per* Prov 8:26, applying the word ראש to תבל “world,” understood as a reference to the land of Israel—that the land of Israel, too, was created first. The midrash then devotes much energy to establishing that the word תבל signifies the land of Israel.

We have noted that Qillir’s engagement with Deut 11:10-12 at the beginning of ארץ והוצות תכנם לארץ follows organically from the main plot element in אקשטה כסל וקדם, i.e., the shift from terrestrial to celestial water sources, *per* GenRab 13. It, therefore, stands to reason that in opening the poem, he should have looked for inspiration to SifreDeut 37, on Deut 11:10. It may even be possible to explain why Qillir fastened on the use of Prov 8:26 in this passage. Constitutive of paytanic discourse is the widespread use of the epithet (כינוי). The use of epithets in *piyyut* long preceded the classical period, when the influence of rabbinic literature became pervasive.<sup>31</sup> But rabbinic literature, by advancing such exegetical claims as the above one, that the generic term תבל in Prov 8:26 in fact refers to the land of Israel, generated a rich new supply of epithets for *paytanim*. We may speculate that Qillir’s attention was drawn to this particular passage in SifreDeut 37 for this reason. It is also possible that Qillir fastened on it because Prov 8:26 is the biblical source for a very prevalent *paytanic* formulation (עד לא “yet not”) concerning things created before the beginning of the world.<sup>32</sup>

For l. 3, praising rain for the fact that it furnishes water to all parts of the region alike, whether high or low, exposed or concealed, Qillir draws

31 On one category of epithet in pre-classical *piyyut*, with references to earlier scholarship on the general topic, see Ophir Münz-Manor, “The Payytanic Epithet and its Relations to Figurative Language in Pre-Classical *Piyyut*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 28 (2015), 93-112. For the use of epithets in a Qumran liturgical text with other affinities to the language of *piyyut* see Noam Mizrahi, “Aspects of Poetic Stylization in Second Temple Hebrew: A Linguistic Comparison of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* with Ancient *Piyyut*,” in *Hebrew in the Second Temple Period: The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources* (ed. Steven E. Fassberg et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 161-62.

32 On this motif see Yehoshua Granat, *Before ‘In the Beginning,’* and see *ibid.*, 103-04, for discussion of the passage in SifreDeut 37. As Granat notes (*ibid.*, 103 n. 37), Qillir alludes to Prov 8:26—though not, it appears, altogether according to the interpretation assigned it in SifreDeut 37—in a *qedushta* for Shavuot.

on SifreDeut 39 (79).<sup>33</sup> We might speculate that Qillir was drawn to this line because it overlaps with the passage from GenRab 13:9, quoted above, that plays so crucial a role in the preceding poem, אקשטה כסל וקדם; the third of four reasons for favoring celestial water, according to that passage, is שיהא הגבוה שותה כנמוך “so that the elevated should drink like the low-lying.” In any case, l. 4 is continuous with l. 3 in substance—like l. 3, it lists four types that serve as a merism for the whole, in this case types of precipitation rather than types of topographies—and depends on the continuation of the exegesis in SifreDeut 39.

Lines 5-7 form a unit that identifies another aspect of the land of Israel’s dependence on rain, the one of central importance in Deut 11:10-12: It makes the land of Israel, and thus its people, dependent on God. Qillir draws in an element to this dependence relationship that occurs in the verses immediately following, namely, that God will block the rain if Israel sins (Deut 11:16-17 ועצר את השמים ... וסרתם “[lest] you turn away ... and he will stop up the heavens”).<sup>34</sup> And crucially, Qillir introduces another element absent from the biblical text: that when God responds to Israel’s sins by blocking the rain, Israel can pray to God to relent. This addition sets the stage for the turn in the next line, l. 8, to the performative present of prayer. A wordplay, originating in the name of the holiday that defines the performative present, i.e., *Shemini ašeret*, facilitates this transition: The root עצ"ר indicates the stopping up of rain in l. 6, and the assembling to pray for rain in l. 8.

While the Deuteronomy passage is the most prominent ingredient in the composition of ll. 5-7, Qillir makes considerable use of rabbinic commentary in SifreDeut 38, 40 and GenRab 13. Lines 5-6 appear to depend, in the main, on SifreDeut 40 (81).

- 33 The same idea occurs in SifreDeut 38 (73-74), but as Goldschmidt and Fraenkel note, l. 4 appears to depend on the continuation of the exegesis in SifreDeut 39, and therefore the latter passage should be understood as the source for l. 3. Further reason for identifying the passage in SifreDeut 39 as the source for l. 3 lies in the fact that SifreDeut 38 speaks of גבוה “high” and נמוך “low,” while SifreDeut 39 refers to הר “mountain” and בקעה “valley,” which seem likelier candidates for underlying Qillir’s תלול “lofty” and עמק “deep.”
- 34 Drawing on Deut 11:17, Qillir deploys the root עצ"ר in l. 6 for the stopping up of the rain, but he independently introduces the alliterative root עצ"ם for the sin (פשע אם) העצם “If sin grows strong”) so as verbally to link the sin and the punishment.

היו רשעים בראש השנה ונגזרו עליהן גשמים מועטין וחזרו בהן להוסיף עליהן  
 אי איפשר אלא תמיד עיני יי אלהיך בה מורידן בזמן כדאי בארץ ושולה בהן  
 ברכה

If they were wicked on the New Year, and little rain was decreed upon them, and then they repented, adding to [the rain] is not possible, but “the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it” (Deut 11:12): He brings [the rain] down in a proper time on the land, and sends blessing in it.

But Qillir rewrites this passage by introducing an allusion to Job 36:27a *יגרע נטפי מים*, as these words are understood in GenRab 13:15 (60), namely, to signify that God brings the rain in its proper measure.<sup>35</sup> In GenRab 13:15, however, the interpretation of Job 36:27a is not connected with Israel’s response to limited rainfall; it is Qillir who weaves together his two main sources. Another instance of such weaving occurs in the very next line, line 7. The first stich depends on the same key passage in GenRab 13:9, which identifies the fourth consideration in favor of celestial rain as *ושיהא הכל נושאין עיניהם למרום* “so that everyone should raise their eyes heavenward,” while the second stich depends on SifreDeut 38 (74), which celebrates the fact that, while in Egypt, one must give up *שנת עיניך* “the sleep of your eye” to draw water from the river, in the land of Israel, *הן ישינן על מיטותיהן והמקום מוריד להן גשמים* “they sleep on their beds and God brings down water for them.” It may be that the reference to the eye in the SifreDeut 38 passage (“the sleep of your eye”) encouraged Qillir to link it to GenRab 13:9, which likewise refers to the eye; in any case, the eye of Israel in l. 7, drawn from Qillir’s rabbinic source, mirrors the eye of God in l. 5, drawn from Deut 11:12.

Lines 8-9 engage the performative present: Israel begins praying for water “today,” in the *musaf* prayer on *Shemini ašeret*, after the seven-day

35 The interpretation assigned in GenRab 13:15 also occurs, in different contexts, in GenRab 4:5 (29); LevRab 15:1 (321). The GenRab 13:15 passage has a close parallel in *yTa’an* 1:3 (64b) = *yBer* 9:2 (14a), but in the Yerushalmi *sugya*, Job 36:27a is given a different interpretation: *יגרע* indicates the separation of droplets of water from each other. The phrase *מגרע נטפי מים* occurs also in *אקשטה כסל וקרר*, l. 24, and here it may be that Qillir employs it according to this latter interpretation; for this suggestion see Rand, “Clouds,” 39 n. 45.

Sukkot festival. The reference to a number bridges to the next line, which introduces another ritual in the performative present, or at least, a ritual that would have been performed in the performative present, were the Temple standing: the daily water libation during Sukkot, consisting, *per* mSuk 4:9, of three *logs* of water. In l. 8 and the first stich of l. 9, then, Qillir departs from his two key texts, and, as it were, *ad libs*, by means of reference to the performative present and invocation of a well-known work, the Mishnah. In this transitional moment, he sets aside SifreDeut 37-40, and lays the groundwork for taking up GenRab 13 as his main interlocutor. In particular, by referencing the three *logs* of the water libation, Qillir can link them to two instances of the number three in GenRab 13:13 (122-23). This passage first discusses the amount of rainfall that constitutes a “shower” (רביעה) for each of the three showers that typically occur at the beginning of the rainy season. Qillir alludes to this notion in the second stich of l. 9. The passage in GenRab 13:13 then proceeds to the assertion that, for each “male” *tefah* (or טיפה “drop”) of water that falls from heaven, two “female” *tefahs* (or טיפות “drops”) of water come up to meet it from the depths.<sup>36</sup> Qillir rewrites this notion in ll. 10-12.<sup>37</sup>

Lines 13-14 depend on a remarkable passage near the very end of GenRab 13 that attaches to Gen 2:6 כל והשקה את “and it irrigated all [the face of the ground].” GenRab 13:16 (124-25) introduces sayings and stories that see in the verse’s use of כל an indication that not just crops but

36 It is possible, alternatively, that the three showers in the second stich of l. 9 are none other than the three water measures (one from above and two from below) of ll. 10-12. So Goldschmidt and Fraenkel appear to understand these lines, but I think the interpretation above is more likely. Notably, it is only the parallel to GenRab 13:13 in yTa’an 1:3 (64b) that explicitly refers to three showers; the version in GenRab 13:13—and likewise that in tTa’an 1:4, according to Saul Lieberman’s *Tosefta Kifshutah* commentary *ad loc.*—is somewhat different. If I am correct, against Goldschmidt and Fraenkel, that Qillir alludes in l. 9 to the tradition of the three showers, then the allusion may have implications for the determination of the text of GenRab 13:13, since it seems certain that Qillir has the version in GenRab 13:13 in mind, and not the Yerushalmi parallel. In any case, the tradition concerning the male and female waters is paralleled in yTa’an 1:3 (64b).

37 It may not be a coincidence that Isa 55:10, which constitutes the first half of l. 12, is cited in or in the vicinity of both key texts, SifreDeut 39 (79-80); GenRab 12:11 (110).

all things are blessed when rain falls: commerce, the sick, jewels, fish. Qillir draws the notion that the sick receive relief from their suffering directly from the passage. The notion that fish drink from the rain seems to be Qillir's inference from a story in this passage in which the fish that fishermen catch after the rain falls weigh more than expected.<sup>38</sup>

At this point in the poem, Qillir returns to the beginning: Lines 15-16 reprise ll. 1-2, with the differences noted above. Qillir may draw specifically from SifreDeut 38 (74), which asserts that for all the lands (כל הארץ), God assigned servants (ניתנו להן שמשין) to serve them—the Nile for Egypt, the rivers for Babylon—whereas for the land of Israel God provides rain himself.<sup>39</sup> Why does the return to the beginning occur precisely at this point? We can only speculate, of course, but it may be that Qillir's rabbinic sources encouraged this shift. Broadly, the dominant source for ll. 1-7 is SifreDeut 37-40. Across ll. 8-9, Qillir transitions to GenRab 13, which becomes his major source for ll. 9-14. In these lines, Qillir takes up, in order, GenRab 13:13 and then GenRab 13:16. The latter passage represents almost the very end of GenRab 13; there is only one more short comment in the unit. It may be that the fact of coming to the end of GenRab 13 encouraged Qillir to return to the beginning of the poem by way of bringing it toward its summation. And in returning to the opening lines, Qillir also returns to SifreDeut 37-40, the rabbinic source that underlies them.

The notion in l. 17 that the keys to the treasury of rain are under God's authority alone is a recurrent motif in rabbinic literature.<sup>40</sup> But the

38 It is notable that Qillir shuns precisely the commercial elements in the passage: He makes no mention of the blessings upon commerce or precious stones, and in the case of the fish, what is important is not the economic gain of fishermen, but the satisfaction of the fishes' own desire for water. The allusion to Prov 25:25 in l. 14 is probably inspired by the occurrence of this verse in the exegetical unit immediately preceding the one underlying ll. 13-14, namely GenRab 13:15 (124).

39 Admittedly, the servants in this passage are rivers, and not, as in Qillir's poem, the stars. But this passage is closer than the ones cited by Goldschmidt and Fraenkel *ad loc.*, and of course it occurs in one of Qillir's two major sources for the poem.

40 Goldschmidt and Fraenkel point to the Palestinian Targum tradition to Gen 30:22. A more or less precise Hebrew equivalent occurs in DeutRab (Lieberman) *ki tavo* 6 = DeutRab (Vilna) 7:6. It is notable that the continuation of the DeutRab passage also includes a Hebrew translation of parts of GenRab 13:16, on the notion that commerce and fish are blessed by the coming of rain. We should probably

proximate inspiration is likely SifreDeut 40 (83), where R. Shimon b. Yoḥai compares God to a king who has the keys to the treasury in his hand (ומפתחות שלאוצר בידו). Prooftexts here also supply a verbal form of פת"ה and the word מטר, and the parable follows immediately after a discourse on what things lie in God's authority (ברשותי). In short, the central idea and all of the key vocabulary for l. 17 occur in SifreDeut 40, which therefore, given Qillir's dependence in ll. 1-7 on SifreDeut 37-40, and given his return to the beginning of the poem and to SifreDeut 37-40, in ll. 15-16, should be understood as the main source for l. 17.

In the remaining lines, ll. 18-22, Qillir returns to the discourse of ll. 8-9, with a focus on the performative present and on numbers. As in those lines, so here, Qillir does not exhibit dependence on his two key rabbinic texts, but instead draws together a combination of well-known motifs and numerical traditions: the forty-*se'ah* measurement of the ritual bath, the seven biblical terms for rain and for the earth, the seven heavens, the seven pillars on which the earth rests, and the seven days of the Sukkot festival.

## Conclusion

A close reading of the literary structure and allusive practices of the *piyyut* תכנם לארץ והוצות yields many suggestive hypotheses about how Qillir, starting from certain formal constraints, constructed his works in dialogue with the rabbinic corpus. It suggests, first and foremost, that in composing a *piyyut*, Qillir did not necessarily keep before his eyes the whole rabbinic corpus, to draw from as the spirit moved him. Rather, in this case, and probably in not a few others, he relied mainly on a small number of discrete passages. Only at certain transitional points in the poem, bound up with the performative present, did he turn to other traditions—well-known texts, tropes, numbers—to navigate forward.<sup>41</sup>

As we peer further into Qillir's workshop, we glimpse other compositional decisions. His attention is drawn to an exegesis that supplies

understand Qillir's poem and the DeutRab passage as two independent but convergent instances of anthologizing earlier rain traditions.

41 Shulamit Elizur has observed (מבית מדרשם של פייטנינו הקדומים), *Derekh Aggadah* 12 [2013], 282-86) a tendency among *paytanim* to manufacture "exegetical" number analogies. Here we see how such analogies can function compositionally, in interaction with allusions to rabbinic material.

a new epithet. He enters into the performative present and related number homiletics to shift from the first of the two major rabbinic sources (SifreDeut 37-40) to the second (GenRab 13), and then, upon coming to the end of the latter, he circles back to the beginning of the poem, and also to the first source. We notice, too, that Qillir does not allude to neighboring sections of Sifre Deuteronomy (e.g., SifreDeut 36 or 41), evidently because Deut 11:10-12, the subject of SifreDeut 37-40, constitutes a distinct unit, separate from the verses preceding and following. Further systematic study of the compositional dimensions of the engagement by Qillir and other classical *paytanim* with rabbinic literature is necessary to determine the prevalence of such compositional decisions, and to discover and name others.

## Appendix 1: Qillir's Poem

The Hebrew text is from Daniel Goldschmidt and Jonah Fraenkel, מחזור סוכות, 415-17. The translation is mine.

תכנם לארץ וחוצות לחצות מים / אמן לכל אחד ואחד מה יתנו מים

1. He measured them out for land and countryside to distribute water. / He trained each and every one of them in what they should give of water.<sup>42</sup>

שקל לראש עפרות תבל לבד פלגי מים / למטר השמים תשתה מים

2. He weighed out for the head of earth's dust heaps alone streams of water: / "By the rain of heaven you will drink water,"<sup>43</sup>

רצות לה שלום בירידת מים / עמק ותלול גלוי וחבוי כאחת שתות מים

3. Seeking peace for her through the descent of water, / with deep and lofty, exposed and concealed, at once drinking water.<sup>44</sup>

קרח וכפור ושלג ונזל מים / זמנו לה לשוקקה בכל מיני מים

4. Ice and frost and snow and current of water / were appointed for it, to irrigate it with all sorts of water.

צופה בה עין להתמידה במים / ראשית ועד אחרית דרושה רוות מים

5. He peers at her with an eye to keep her always with water. / From first to last she is sought for saturating with water.<sup>45</sup>

42 See Prov 8:26. God directed the rivers to furnish water sufficient for each land.

43 See Deut 11:11. God determined that the land of Israel should depend on rain. *Contra* Goldschmidt and Fraenkel, I take לבד as modifying תבל ראש עפרות תבל, underscoring that what is said of the land of Israel in this line is proper to Israel. I also take מים פלגי to refer to water sources generally, not specifically to rivers, as in רב, אקשטה כסל וקר, l. 19.

44 I.e., rain makes peace, because all of the land—ravines and mountains, exposed and concealed areas—have equal access to rain.

45 See Deut 11:12. God's eye is always on the land of Israel, from the beginning to the end of the year, to supply it with rain.



פשע אם העצם ונגזר עצירת מים / בתחן ופלל יפתו מגרע נטפי מים

6. If sin grows strong and there is a decree for stoppage of water, / with pleading and prayer they entice for measured drops of water.<sup>46</sup>

עין ישאו לרוכב בעזרם שמים / ישנים היות במצע והוא מספיק למו מים

7. They will raise an eye to him who rides to their aid in the heavens./ While they sleep on their bedspreads, he provides them with water.

שיח מהיום נעצרים להזכיר בשיחם מים / רוגשים בסוף שבעה לצין במוסף מים

8. They assemble in speech today to mention in their speech water, / clamoring at the end of seven to mark in *musaf* water.<sup>47</sup>

נסוך מנסכים שלשת לגי מים / במ לערך כסדר שלשת רביעיות מים

9. Libation they libate, of three *logs* water, / through them to arrange after the order of three showers of water,<sup>48</sup>

ממעל להרביע זכרות רבע מים / יעל בכפל מתחת פרית נקבות מים

10. From above to lay down the male shower of water, / and rising doubled from below, the fruiting of the female water,<sup>49</sup>

ליפתח ארץ ויפרו ישע מטר מים / קוראים זה לזה עד ישיקו מים למים

11. To him who opens the land so that salvation sprouts, and rain of water, / they call, one to the other, until water clings to water.<sup>50</sup>

כאשר ירד הגשם והשלג מן השמים / לצמאון ישעוהו עינות ותהומות מים

46 See Job 36:27. “Entice” is a synonym in this context for prayer. For the rendering of מגרע as “measured” see the body of the article.

47 “Today” is *Shemini ašeret*, coming after seven days of Sukkot.

48 The water libation, performed on Sukkot, involves a measure of three *logs* of water, corresponding to the typical sequence of three showers of water at the beginning of the rainy season.

49 For every “male” rain shower that comes from above, impregnating the earth, the earth, through its own terrestrial, “female” sources, produces two water showers.

50 See Isa 45:8. The male and female waters call out to each other in prayer to God, and cling to each other.

12. When rain and snow fall from the heavens, / out of thirst the springs call out to him, and abysses of water.<sup>51</sup>

יחד דגת וקשקשת הגדלים בהמון מים / יתאוו לרדתו גמות מנו מעט מים

13. Together the scaly fish that grow in great water / pant at its descent, to swallow of it a little water.<sup>52</sup>

טרוחי שחין וכאב וחולי מעים / רוגעים ומתרוחים באווי קרת מים

14. Those beset with boils and pain and sickness of bowels / are calmed and eased through desire for cold water.<sup>53</sup>

חיי כל נשי מסרת במזלות שמים / ממנים על-כל-ארץ איך לפרנסה מים

15. You entrusted all of earth's living things to the constellations of heaven / who are appointed over each land, how to supply it with water.

זבת חלב ודבש ארץ נחלי מים / קדשת לשמך אותה למוגגה מים

16. The one flowing with milk and honey, the land of rivers of water, / you dedicated to your name, to soften with water.<sup>54</sup>

ואתה בידך תתה מפתח מטר מים / רשות אין להנתן בלעדיך לפתח אוצר מים

17. And you put in your hand the key of rainwater. / Authority is given to no one besides you to open the treasury of water.

הקם דברך הטוב תת בשפע מים / יחד לרצון לנדב לטהר להניף מים

51 See Isa 55:10. The terrestrial water sources drink from the heavens.

52 Fish look forward to the rain. Qillir playfully alludes to Gen 24:17, where the servant asks Rebecca: “let me swallow a little water from your pitcher.” This allusion might have come to mind because the lemma of the rabbinic comment on which Qillir depends here—GenRab 13:16 (124-25)—is Gen 2:6 “and it irrigated all [the face of the ground],” and the verb השקה figures very prominently in the story of Rebecca and the servant (Gen 24:14, 18, 19, 43, 45, 46).

53 See Prov 25:25.

54 See Deut 8:7; Ps 65:11. God took upon himself to supply the land of Israel with water.

18. Fulfill your good word, to give in abundance water, / together for desire, for gift, for purity to scatter water.<sup>55</sup>

די ארבעים סאה משער מקוה מים / תמימך איך בו יטהרו אם אין בו שעור מים

19. Sufficient for forty *se'ah*, to measure out a bath of water, / else how should your perfect ones become pure, if it lacks the measure of water?<sup>56</sup>

גשמים שבעה משבעה רקיעי מים / שבע ארצות שבע ושבעת עמודי מים

20. With seven rains from the seven firmaments of heaven, / sate the seven lands and seven pillars of water.<sup>57</sup>

בצור חוגגים שבעה ונעצרים עדי מים / פלולם קשב בשפכם לך לב כמים

21. They celebrate with prayer for seven of prayer, then gather for water. / Heed their plea, when they pour out their heart to you like water.<sup>58</sup>

אדון השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים / רעיך לנהל ברבץ כעל מבועי מים

22. Master, look down from your holy abode, from the heavens, / to guide your friends, with rest as upon sources of water.<sup>59</sup>

55 See Ps 68:10. The *paytan* calls upon God to provide beneficial rain.

56 The rain will furnish the minimum forty *se'ah* of water that a ritual bath requires to enable God's nation ("your perfect ones") to immerse therein and become pure.

57 Rabbinic texts identify seven terms for rain, seven heavens, and seven names for the earth. They also imagine the seven pillars of the earth (Prov 9:1) as resting in water.

58 Israel gathers to pray for rain on *Shemini ašeret*, after seven days of Sukkot prayers.

59 See Deut 26:15; Ps 23:8; Isa 49:10. Qillir quotes these verses in the verse string following the poem.

## Appendix 2: Qillir's Two Main Rabbinic Sources

The parenthetical page references are to the Finkelstein edition (SifreDeut 37-40) and the Theodor-Albeck edition (GenRab 13), but the Hebrew texts are from Vatican 32 and Vatican 60, respectively, as transcribed in Maagarim, with occasional minor modification for ease of reading (expanding abbreviations, etc.). The translations are mine. The parenthetical line references are to the lines of Qillir's poem that allude to the rabbinic text. I have ordered the sources according to the lines that they inform.

### 1. SifreDeut 37 (70) (ll. 1-2)

ארץ ישראל שחביבה מכל נבראת לפני כל שנאמר עד לא עשה ארץ וחוצות [וראש עפרות תבל] ארץ שאר ארצות וחוצות אלו מדברות תבל זו ארץ ישראל

The land of Israel, which is more beloved than all, was created before all, as it says, “when he had yet not made land and countryside [or the first clumps of earth]” (Prov 8:26). “Land”: the other lands. “And countryside”: This is the deserts. “Earth”: This is the land of Israel.

### 2. SifreDeut 39 (79) (ll. 3-4)

או לפי שעפרו של הר קל ושל בקעה שמן יכול יהי מים גורשין את העפר ממקום בקעה ותהא בקעה מחוסרת מים ... או לפי שארץ ישראל מכופלת בהרים יהא גלוי שותה שאין גלוי אין שותה ... או לפי ששותה מי גשמים אבל אינו שותה מי שלוחים ... או לפי ששותה מי שלוחים אבל אינה שותה מי שלגים ... או לפי ששותה מי שלגים אבל אינה שותה מי שלגים ...

Or, since the soil of mountains is fine, and of valleys dense, perhaps (i.e., one might think) that the water would drive the soil from (!) the place of the valley, and the valley would end up lacking water ... Or, since the land of Israel is doubled over with mountains, it might be that what is exposed would drink, and what is not exposed would not drink ... Or, since it drinks rainwater, it might, however, be that it does not drink drawn water ... Or, since it drinks drawn water, it might however be that it does not drink snow water ... Or, since it drinks snow water, it might however be that it does not drink dew water ...

## 3. SifreDeut 40 (81) (ll. 5-7a)

היו רשעים בראש השנה ונגזרו עליהן גשמים מועטין וחזרו בהן להוסיף עליהן אי איפשר  
אלא תמיד עיני יי אלהיך בה מורידן בזמן כדאי בארץ ושולח בהן ברכה

If they were wicked on the New Year, and little rain was decreed upon them, and then they repented, adding to [the rain] is not possible, but “the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it” (Deut 11:12): He brings [the rain] down in a proper time on the land, and sends blessing in it.

## 4. SifreDeut 38 (74) (l. 7b)

ארץ מצרים אם אתה עמל בה בפסל ובקרדום ונותן שנת עינך עליה ואם לאו אין בכך כלום  
אבל ארץ ישראל אינו כן אלא הן ישינין על מיטותיהן והמקום מוריד להן גשמים

The land of Egypt: If you labor on it with pick and axe, and give up the sleep of your eye over it, but if not, there is nothing in it. But the land of Israel is not so, but rather, they sleep on their beds and God brings down water for them.

## 5. GenRab 13:13 (122-23) (ll. 9-12)

כמה גשמים יורדין ויהא בהן כדי רביעה כמלוא כלי שלשלשה טפחים כדברי ר' מאיר ר'  
יהודה אומר בקטנה טפה ובבינונית טפחיים ובשביעה ג' טפחים אמר ר' שמעון בן אלעזר אין  
לך טיפה יורדת מלמעלה שאין הארץ מעלה כנגדה (טפחיים) [שתי טיפות] מה טעמא תהום  
אל תהום קורא לקול צינ' אמר ר' לוי המים העיליונים זכרים והתחתונים נקבות הן אומרין  
אילו לאילו קבלו אותנו אתם בריותיו שלהק' ואנו שלווחיו מיד הן מקבלין אותן הד' ה' דכתיב  
תפתח ארץ וגו' כנקובה זו שהיא פותחת לזכר ויפרו ישע שהן פרין ורבינ' אני יי בראתיו  
לתיקונו שלעולם ולישובו

How much rain must fall for it to suffice for a “shower”? As much as to fill a vessel of three *tefahs*, according to the words of R. Meir. R. Judah says: for a small one, a *tefah*; for an intermediate one, two *tefahs*; for satiation, three *tefahs*. Said R. Shimon b. Eleazar: There is not a drop that falls from above that the earth does not raise to match it (two *tefahs*) [two drops]. What is the reason? “Deep calls to deep in the roar of your cataracts” (Ps 42:8). Said R. Levi: The upper waters are male, and the lower are female. They say, these to these: Receive us; you are the Holy One’s creatures and we are his emissaries. Immediately they receive them. This is what is written: “Let the earth open up, etc.” (Isa 45:8), like the

female that opens for the male; “and let triumph sprout” (*ibid.*), that they bear fruit and multiply; “I the Lord have created it” (*ibid.*), for establishing of the world and settling it.

#### 6. GenRab 13:16 (124-25) (Il. 13-14)

והשקה את כל אמר ר' אלעזר בשם ר' יוסי בן זמירה הכל מתברך משא ומתן מתברך והפטגריטין מתרווחין ר' יוחנן בר' לוי אמר אף [מוכי שחין] מרוויחים ר' אחיה בר אבא אמר אף החולים מרוויחים ואבריהן רפין עליהן ... ר' א' אף אבן טבא מרגשת רבנין אמר' אף הדגים מרגישים אמר ר' פינחס עובדא הוה בעכו דצ'ר (!) ון חד נון ושמותה ג' מאה ליטרין ותקלותה ואשכחותה ב' מאה ליטרין הוה תמן חד סב צייר (!) אמר להון דלא נחתת רביעתא כיון דנחתת רביעתה צדון חד נון ושמותה תרתין מאה ליטרין ותקלותה ואשכחותה ג' מאה ליטרין

“And it irrigated all” (Gen 2:6). Said R. Eleazar in the name of R. Yose b. Zimra: All is blessed (by rain). Commerce is blessed; those with joint pain find relief. R. Yoḥanan b. R. Levi says: Also those afflicted with boils find relief. R. Aḥiya b. Abba says: Also the sick find relief, and their limbs loosen from them. ... Rabbi says: Also precious stones are sensitive (to the rain). The rabbis say: Also the fish are sensitive. Said R. Pinḥas: It happened in Acco that they caught a fish, and estimated it at three hundred *litrin*, and they weighed it and found it to be two hundred *litrin*. An old fisherman was there and said: Because the rain shower has not yet fallen. After the rain shower fell, they caught a fish and estimated it at two hundred *litrin*, and they weighed it and found it to be three hundred *litrin*.

#### 7. SifreDeut 38 (74) (Il. 15-16)

כל ה(!) ארץ ניתנו להן שמשין לשמשן מצרים שותה מן הנילוס בבל שותה מן הנהרות אבל ארץ ישראל אינה כן אלא הן ישינין על מיטותיהן והמקום מוריד להן גשמים

Every land was assigned a servant to serve it: Egypt drinks from the Nile; Babylon drinks from the rivers. But the land of Israel is not so, but rather, they sleep on their beds and God brings down water for them.

#### 8. SifreDeut 40 (82-83) (I. 17)

מראשית וגו' וכי יש פירות בשדה מתחילת השנה ועד סופה אלא הן ברשותי ליתן בהן ברכה בבית כשם שאני נותן ברכה בשדה ... או לפי שמידת טובה מרובה ממידת פורענות יכול לא יהו ברשותי ליתן בהן מאירה בבית כשם שאני נותן מאירה בשדה תלמוד לומר ... ר' שמעון

בן יוחי אומר משל למלך שהיו לו בנים ועבדים הרבה והיו ניזונין ומתפרנסין מתחת ידו ומפתחות של אוצר בידו כשהן עושין רצונו הוא פותח את האוצר והן אוכלין ושביעין וכשאינן עושין רצונו הוא נוט(!)ל את האוצר והן מתין ברעב כך ישראל כשעושין רצונו שלמקום יפתח יי לך את אוצרו הטוב וכשאינן עושין רצונו מה הוא אומר וחרה אף יי בכם

“From the beginning, etc.” (Deut 11:12). And are there fruits in the field from the beginning of the year to its end? Rather, they are under my authority, to give through them blessing in the house just as I give blessing in the field. ... Or, since the measure of good is greater than the measure of punishment, perhaps it would not be under my authority to set a curse through them in the house just as I set a curse in the field? Hence it says, ... R. Shimon b. Yoḥai says: A parable to a king who had many sons and servants, and they were fed and supported by his hand, and the keys to the treasury were in his hand. When they do his will he opens the treasury, and they eat and are sated. And when they do not do his will he locks the treasury and they die from hunger. So Israel, when they do the will of the Place, “the Lord will open for you his good treasury” (Deut 28:12), and when they do not do his will, what does it say? “And the anger of the Lord will burn against you” (Deut 11:17).