Leopold Zunz – Pioneer of Midrash Research

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In his first major essay, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur* published in 1818, Leopold Zunz makes mention of midrash only marginally.[1] So it is all the more astonishing that only 14 years later, he brought out a comprehensive study on midrash literature entitled *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden.* As Moritz Steinschneider writes in his preface to the second edition – a work which in reality was only a reprint of the first supplemented by several emendations and additions by the author, along with an index – prior to Zunz no one had even dreamed of a critical history of the Jewish "didactic lectures" *(Lehrvorträge):* "the 'Midrash' had become a blurred congeries of activity, author and book."[2]

For his own opus, Zunz was able to rely directly only on a small number of previous preliminary spadework, principally bibliographies and catalogs of libraries, along with two major works: the extensive volume by the Italian Rabbi Azarya de' Rossi (1511?–1577?), *Me'or Enayim,*[3] which in the 16th century represented a path-breaking accomplishment similar to that of Zunz 300 years later, and the biographical lexicon *Shem ha-Gedolim* (Livorno 1774–1786) by Hayyim Azulai (1724–1807). But the latter, due to its confusing arrangement, was little consulted at the time, and was only rendered a useful scholarly tool many decades later, published in a newly arranged revised edition. The only contemporary Zunz repeatedly refers to, and with whom he had a lively correspondence, was Salomo Yehuda Rapoport from Lvov (Lemberg), later rabbi in Prague. Since 1829, he had been publishing studies on Sa'adya and other Jewish scholars of the medieval period in *Bikkure ha-Ittim,* and in this connection was obliged again and again to deal with questions of the rabbinical literature.[4] Yet,

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[1] L. Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur: Nebst Nachrichten über ein altes bis jetzt ungedrucktes hebräisches Werk,* Berlin 1818, reprinted in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften von Dr. Zunz. Herausgegeben vom Curatorium der "Zunzstiftung",* vol. 1, Berlin 1875 (Reprint Hildesheim 1976), pp. 1–31. On p. 21, fn. 4, Zunz notes that the *Midrash Rabba* contains more Greek than the Babylonian Talmud; otherwise there is nothing else on this topic.

[2] *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt. Ein Beitrag zur Altertumskunde und biblischen Kritik, zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte,* Frankfurt am Main [2]1892 (Reprint Hildesheim 1966), p. XVII. Quotes from this book cited hereafter as GV, with corresponding page numbers.

[3] First ed. Mantua 1573–75; ed. D. Cassel, Vilna 1866. An English edition with numerous notes is Joanna Weinberg, *The Light of the Eyes. Azariah de' Rossi* (Yale Judaica Series 31), New Haven – London 2001.

[4] On this see I. E. Barzilay, "The scholarly contribution of Shelomo Judah Leib Rapoport (Shir) (1790–1867)", in: *PAAJR* 35 (1967), pp. 1–41.

as is clearly evident from his extensive footnotes, in the main Zunz relied on the direct perusal of the primary rabbinical sources. He made a thorough evaluation of the *Arukh,* the Talmudic lexicon of Natan ben Yechiel of Rom (11th c.), and the midrashic anthology *Yalqut Shim'oni* (13th c.) was an inexhaustible source of information for Zunz. In addition, he studied Rashi, Nachmanides and the other great scholars of medieval Judaism. As indicated by the various text editions Zunz consulted for comparison, he had superb libraries at his disposal. But how in a relatively short period he was able to burrow through all this material, subjecting it to critical analysis and weaving it into his magisterial historical study, remains an astonishing and truly admirable feat of scholarship.

1. Halakhic Midrashim

In the early 19th century, there were various printed editions of certain halakhic Midrashim available: the *Mekhilta, Sifra* and *Sifre* on Numbers and Deuteronomy. In Zunz's view, they were "edited later than the Mishna, but are in their content in part older than it. […] In these three works we can discern the more ancient course of the Midrash" (GV 49f.). In regard to the Haggada contained therein, Zunz emphasized once more the bond uniting these Midrashim, here supplemented by *Sifre Zutta:* "Among the texts of the older Midrash, the principal works are the Sifra, Sifri, Sifri Zutta, and Mekhilta; these have a quite similar character in relation to the haggada" (GV 88), even if the *Sifra* and *Sifre Zutta* contain significantly less Haggada, while by contrast some three-sevenths of the *Sifre* are Haggada (GV 88f.).

As is evident, Zunz also dealt thoroughly with the content of these Midrashim as well. It may be somewhat striking that he mentions the *Mekhilta* only after the other Midrashim, even though as a commentary to Exodus it should stand in first place. This is apparently due to the fact that Zunz regarded the *Mekhilta* as a later work. He notes that the Talmud makes frequent mention of *Sifra* and *Sifre* and utilizes their content: "the rabbis mentioned there stem at the latest from the first half of the third century" (GV 50f.). Zunz seems to have regarded this time period as the frame for the origin of these Midrashim, a traditional view espoused by many right down to the present – as is the common assumption that a portion of their content predates the Mishna. Zunz distinguished between *Sifra* and *Sifre* and the *Mekhilta:* "The Mekhilta appears to have been edited at a considerably later date"(GV 51).

In the accompanying footnote, Zunz does not give any direct reason for this later dating, which B. Z. Wacholder has recently taken up again, seeking to support his argument with a large number of proofs.[5] Rather, Zunz points to the

[5] B. Z. Wacholder, "The Date of the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael", in: *HUCA* 39 (1968), pp. 117–144.

broader use of the title *Mekhilta,* which according to Maimonides includes four books of the Pentateuch, and also mentions references to a *Mekhilta* by R. Aqiva. Zunz is certain that the name of R. Yishma'el, to whom the *Mekhilta* is attributed, says nothing about its editing and dating. It is named in this way "because the work begins with his pronouncements on Exodus chap. 12" (GV 51, fn. c). But in a comment added in the second edition, Zunz also remarks: "It is also called the Mekhilta of R. Simon b. Yohai," and he cites the Torah commentary by Nachmanides for "various editions of our Mekhilta."

Zunz here brought together a number of observations whose contradictory nature evidently prompted his judgment on the genesis of the *Mekhilta* at a later date (Zunz does not mention other criteria, esp. observations regarding the midrashic text itself). He was at yet in no position to think that references to a *Mekhilta* by R. Shim'on ben Yohai or to R. Aqiva in actuality can refer to another halakhic Midrash on Exodus. In his edition of the *Mekhilta* (Vienna 1870), M. Friedmann collected the quotations from the *Mekhilta* of R. Shim'on ben Yohai known to him. But it was not until the early finds in the Geniza of Cairo and the arrival of the first manuscripts of the *Midrash ha-Gadol* in Europe at the end of the 19th century that D. Hoffmann was able to venture an *editio princeps* of this Midrash (Frankfurt 1905).

On the other hand, Zunz noted already in 1832: "In addition, we also have strong fragments of a second Midrash to the fourth Book of Moses, called the *second* or *small* Sifri" (GV 51). He lists here quotations from Rashi, the *Arukh,* Simson of Sens, Maimonides and others, and refers to Azarya de' Rossi, who likewise had discussed this Midrash, known only from quotations (*Me'or Enayim* II, 20, ed. Cassel 239).[6] D. Hoffmann later studied this Midrash as well. The discovery of a textual fragment in the Cairo Geniza spurred further research, and finally H. S. Horovitz was able to bring out a text edition.[7] Without Zunz's suggestion, this would doubtless not have come about so quickly. Zunz's attribution of a special place to the *Mekhilta* among the halakhic Midrashim demonstrates his fine sense of discrimination for the special character of this text, whose precise classification remains problematic down to the present day. Zunz must have studied these Midrashim far more thoroughly than his brief annotations suggest at first glance. These leave much unsaid or virtually presupposed as a given – even though this is pristine scholarship, the very beginning of Midrash research.

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[6] S. Lieberman, *Siphre Zutta (The Midrash of Lydda)* (in Hebrew), New York 1968, interprets this passage, building on arguments by S. Poznanski, as evidence that Azarya was in the possession of a manuscript of this Midrash (p. 10).

[7] D. Hoffmann, *Zur Einleitung in die halachischen Midraschim,* Berlin 1886/87; H. S. Horovitz, *Siphre D'be Rab. Fasciculus primus: Siphre ad Numeros adjecto Siphre zutta,* Leipzig 1917, Jerusalem ^{2}1966.

2. Midrash Rabba

Zunz notes at the beginning that the *Midrash Rabba* on the Torah and the five Megillot is often attributed to a teacher from the 3rd or 4th century: the common view is that "the Rabbot is a unified work written by the same author. We will leave these opinions to stand for the moment" (GV 184). Zunz analyses the individual parts of the collection separately, arriving at conclusions whose general contours are today still largely valid, even if of course it is no longer possible to agree with Zunz in the details. The rabbis quoted in *Genesis Rabba* extend back into the period of the Emperor Julian (GV 185). Due to the numerous excerpts from the Palestinian Talmud, edited after Julian's reign, the Midrash has to be dated later. He argues that the tale of the attempted reconstruction of the Temple under Trajan[8] was in actuality best placed in the period of Julian. This mistaken attribution suggests that the Midrash must have been redacted considerably later. Since the editor also appears to have known the *Seder Eliyahu Rabba,* Zunz concludes: "It is therefore highly likely that the collection and editing of Bereshit Rabba can be dated to the 6th century" (GV 186). As in the case of the other Midrashim, Zunz then lists all the early evidence for the use of the Midrash in the medieval period, beginning with the 11th century.

The reference by Zunz to *Seder Eliyahu* is evidently to the work mentioned in the Talmud, a text he believed had been lost (he dates the *Seder Eliyahu,* also called *Tanna debe-Eliyahu,* to the 10th century). The passage regarding the reconstruction of the Temple can hardly be considered a criterion for such a late dating of the Midrash, today usually placed in the 5th century. This does not detract in the least from Zunz's critical accomplishment here. The criteria on which he based his attempted dating in this case and that of the other Midrashim remained basically the same which he pioneered in critical-historical method applied to Jewish sources. With a discerning eye, he also recognized the special character of the final five chapters of the Midrash in the printed editions common at the time: "Almost everything there differs from the other parashas: the beginnings, the expressions, the presentation" (GV 265). In his view, much was similar to the *Tanhuma.* He dated a possible reworking of these chapters to the 11th century (GV 267).

Zunz was correct in hypothesizing that the *Midrash Lamentations* was closely associated in temporal terms with the *Genesis Rabba.* He believed a number of sections were added later, and one passage may contain an allusion to the rule of the Arabs. Although none of the rabbis mentioned postdate the Palestinian

[8] GenR 64,10; ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 710–712.

Talmud, the "conclusion of the entire work" was probably datable to the second half of the 7th century at the earliest (GV 190).

In commenting on *Leviticus Rabba,* Zunz correctly noted the peculiarity of the genre of this Midrash compared with *Genesis Rabba,* even if he did not as yet term the work a homiletical Midrash. Here "are the parasha's necessary and self-contained components. They do not interpret, comment and apply the Book of Leviticus as such, but rather 37 texts of that same book. This circumstance suggests that this Midrash is younger than that on Genesis" (GV 192). He dates *Leviticus Rabba* to about the middle of the 7th century. Even if today no one uses the difference in genre between homiletical and exegetical Midrash as a criterion for dating, and the work is seen as roughly contemporaneous with *Genesis Rabba,* Zunz's analysis of the literary genre is an important accomplishment. Zunz also recognized that these three works were the oldest parts of the *Midrash Rabba.* They "reveal various collectors and times and a different plan." For that reason, a *single* individual cannot have been the author of the *Midrash Rabba* (GV 195).

In its structure, Zunz compared *Deuteronomy Rabba* with *Leviticus Rabba,* the *Tanhuma* and the *Pesiqta Rabbati.* He classified the work within a genre we call homiletical Midrash today, and works out the uniform structure of its 27 constituent units. These each begin, as in the *Tanhuma,* with a Halakha, though utilizing a different formula. They then lead on, using a fixed formula, to the main section, and generally conclude with a prospect of redemption. As in connection with the other Midrashim, Zunz, for purposes of dating, collected parallels in earlier rabbinical writings and evidence for the use and knowledge of the Midrash in the Middle Ages. Because of the language and manner of presentation, he accorded the Midrash author "a place among the later compilers of the Haggada. […] Perhaps the era of the year 900 is closest to the truth. I have been unable to determine his country of origin" (GV 264).

In regard to *Numbers Rabba,* Zunz pointed to the far more detailed treatment of the first two *parashiyot* as compared with the rest of the biblical book, and correctly concluded that the two parts cannot be attributed to one and the same author (GV 270). The second part is closely related to the *Tanhuma,* yet much was added at a considerably later date. By contrast, although the first part, too, is connected with the *Tanhuma,* "a torrent of new Haggada, so to speak, sweeps up and consumes the Midrash that has served as the basis, destroying the economy of the Yelamdenus. It does so to such an extent that it is highly unlikely we can ascribe the other portion of the Bamidbar Rabba to this same author" (GV 272). He assumes that the author wrote out *Tanhuma, Pesiqta* etc., mixing it with an artificial application of Scripture, and over long passages did not mention any sources. "It is therefore highly unlikely that this

edition predates the 12th century" (GV 213). This dating is surprisingly similar to the results of the most recent studies.[9]

In the case of *Exodus Rabba,* by contrast, though Zunz recognized the signs of a later origin, he did not distinguish between the two parts, instead dating the entire work as a unit: "although probably appearing right after *Bereshit Rabba,* it is separated from the latter by an entire continent and half a millennium" (GV 268). He notes that much has been culled from older works, especially the *Tanhuma,* but "the tone and style reflect a more recent period, probably the 11th or 12th century, in whose final years this Midrash is first mentioned" (GV 269). With this assessment, Zunz comes very close to contemporary dating of the first part of *Exodus Rabba,* even if it is now considered to be slightly older. By contrast, the second part is regarded today as considerably older; contemporary with the other Tanhuma Midrashim.

Zunz deals only very briefly with the *Midrash on the Song of Songs,* which he includes among the more recent Haggada, though predating the *Pesiqta.* He also comments on *Midrash Esther,* and is correct in noting that its final section incorporates many later additions. In connection with *Midrash Ruth,* he stresses the parallels with the Palestinian Talmud, the *Rabbot* on Genesis, Lamentations and Leviticus, but does not evaluate these for purposes of dating. In one passage, he believes he can discern use of the Babylonian Talmud. In *Midrash Qohelet,* Zunz clearly discerns the spirit of later collectors and other marks of a more recent period, along with much material from older Midrashim. But he does not want to date the work to too late a juncture, since it was known to the author of the *Arukh* (GV 275–277). Here too, Zunz comes quite close to contemporary research and its findings. On the whole, his first attempt at analyzing the *Midrash Rabba* historically and in literary terms, and properly classifying it in respect to time of origin, remains in its basic contours an insightful analysis – one still valid today.

3. Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana

Zunz's doubtless most astonishing accomplishment is his reconstruction of the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana,* in his days familiar only from a few quotations. Zunz dealt with this work in an essay of more than 40 pages, going into greater detail than with any other Midrash, clearly aware of his pioneering scholarship on this unexplored textual terrain.

[9] H. Mack, "Numbers Rabba: Its Date, Location and Circulation" (in Hebrew), in: *Teuda* 11 (1996), pp. 91–105.

His point of departure were Azarya de' Rossi's *Me'or Enayim* and the *Shalshelet ha-Qabbala* by Gedalya ben Josef Ibn Yahya (Venice 1586), who both wrote on a *Pesiqta* without any further differentiation that it is "neither that rabbati nor zutarta, and consequently should be regarded as unknown or forgotten in Jewish literature" (GV 196). In addition to the quotations given there, Zunz collected hundreds of passages in *Yalqut, Arukh,* Rashi and in more recent authors. It is especially clear from the *Arukh,* which distinguishes between the *Pesiqta* and *Pesiqta Rabbati* as two different sources, that these terms are not simply two different names for the same work. Nor can *Pesiqta* be an additional designation for a Midrash known by another name, even if in content there are numerous parallels to the *Pesiqta Rabbati* and *Leviticus Rabba.*

Zunz also argued that it was improper to attribute the quotes in the *Arukh* cited as *Pesiqta* to various different works. Rather, the *Pesiqta* should be regarded as a unitary work, because "1) Yalqut only has the general name Pesiqta, although the excerpts given there very often contain the quotations of the Arukh from the Pesiqtas; 2) most authors after Arukh and Rashi cite Pesiqta without any addition; 3) the designations in the Arukh often conincide with the beginning or the Biblical passage of the fragments in the Yalqut […]; 4) several sections in the Pesiqta Rabbati agree in title and content with those designations and fragments" (GV 198).

Subsequently Zunz attempted to reconstruct the structure of this work. His point of departure were the quotations named after passages in books of the Prophets. In each instance, these form the beginning of a Haftara reading (Rashi expressly cites one passage as "Pesiqta of the haftara"). By combining various quotations, Zunz can establish the existence of a block of text encompassing the Sabbaths from the 17th of Tammuz to Tabernacles (Sukkot), Sabbaths on which, evidenced for the first time in the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana,* the sermon is based on the reading from the Prophets.

If the terms taken from the Prophets correspond to haftarot, Zunz goes on, "then it can be safely concluded that the Pesiqta names corresponding to passages in the Pentateuch belong to Sabbath or holiday readings from the Law. And one can quickly discover several sections of the Law which are read on the Day of Atonement, Passover, Shavuot and even Hanukka, and which consequently complete those Pesiqtas which already designate holidays. The sections are also found which are read on the four special Sabbaths, before and after Purim, after the Parasha of the week. Thus the seeming confusion of the Pesiqtas dissolves into a regular cycle of Haggadas which, encompassing all the holidays and the more important Sabbaths of the entire year, interpret in some cases the readings from the Pentateuch and in other instances the readings from the Prophets for these days" (GV 201).

Zunz finds references to 30 chapters in the quotes in the *Arukh.* But since two terms alternatively designate the same chapter, he postulates 29 chapters whose sequence must follow that of the Jewish calendar. Since R. Natan in the *Arukh* quotes a text as from the "beginning of the Pesiqta", and since it belongs together with another quoted as the section for Rosh ha-Shana (the *Yalqut* reads both as a unit), Zunz concludes that the arrangement of the individual sections of the *Pesiqta* is as follows: "the first four belong to the holiday of the New Year and Yom Kippur, along with the Sabbaths falling between them. The following four belong to Tabernacles and the closing festival. The 9th section for the Hanukka Sabbath is followed by the mentioned four special Sabbaths. The 14th section is for the New Moon, the next for that of Nissan, followed by three for Passover and two for Shavuot. The closing is formed by the 10 Pesiqtas found at first, for the same number of Sabbaths between the 17th of Tammuz and Tabernacles. […] The work, which opened with serious calls for repentance, ends with comforting hopes for future bliss" (GV 202). Since it is unlikely that the *Arukh,* which carefully excerpted the *Pesiqta,* skipped over a full section in its entirety, Zunz is certain that the entire work never contained more than 29 chapters. Any additional chapter would only have disturbed the internal structure of the work.

Usually the work is simply termed *Pesiqta,* supplemented by the designation of the given chapter. If some medieval authors speak about a *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana,* they are probably referring to the sections beginning with the twelve Haftarot, the first of which begins with R. Abba bar Kahana: "hence that designation is probably an abbreviation or distortion of this name" (GV 204).

Zunz concludes that every chapter is a thematic unit; customarily it begins with a *petiha* and ends with a vista of the coming Redemption. Entire sections are identical with *parashiyot* from *Leviticus Rabba.* There are likewise many parallels from the Palestinian Talmud, *Genesis Rabba* and the *Midrash Lamentations.* The rare halakhic introduction to a chapter and the inclusion of Simhat Torah, the use of the Haftara and similar criteria convince Zunz the work should be dated to about the year 700. He discovers traces of the Midrash already in the *Sheiltot of Rav Ahai Gaʾon* (8th cent.), but also in the *Midrash on the Song of Songs* and in Eleʿazar Kallir. Consequently, according to contemporary datings, the *Pesiqta* would have to be a century older than Zunz assumes. Yet Zunz is also well aware of the problem of making more detailed statements about a work that he has only reconstructed from quotations.

Zunz also deals in detail with the later history of the Midrash, which is mentioned by name beginning with the 11th century, but became known only at a later date in Spain. "Yet from the close of the 15th century on, no one appears to be familiar any longer with the *Pesiqta* except from these excerpts in the

Yalqut. With the two so-called printed *Pesiqtas,* the old and actual Haggada by this name was gradually forgotten. On occasion, a few authors were familiar with several individual sections, and no more. But no one knew the entire work and its arrangement" (GV 208f.). Rapoport already called attention to the *Pesiqta* cited in the *Arukh,* and it was from him that Zunz received a copy of the chapter on *Be-Shallah* (Ex. 13:17–17:16), the only chapter known in manuscript form at the time: "But the real restoration of the Pesiqta was undertaken for the first time in our present investigation" (GV 210), as Zunz notes with justified pride before presenting the detailed proof for the individual chapters of the *Pesiqta,* with all its textual evidence.

The reconstruction by Zunz evidently awakened interest in this Midrash. In the following decades, four manuscripts of the Pesiqta were discovered, and Salomo Buber based his *editio princeps* of the work on them (Lyck 1868). They basically confirmed the reconstruction of Zunz, even if they at the same time showed how sequencing, structure and the number of chapters in a homiletical work for practical use in the congregations remained in principle quite flexible. The discovery of further manuscripts and progress in the edition of rabbinical texts led to Buber's edition being replaced by a new one.[10] At the same time, Zunz's reconstruction was given added confirmation. The only controversial point that remains is the question of the original beginning of the sermon cycle: was it at Rosh ha-Shana, as Zunz postulated (and also appears to have been confirmed by a book list from the Geniza), or was it at Hanukka (as Buber maintained with his main manuscript)? There are good arguments for both theses. It is no exaggeration when Mandelbaum comments on Zunz's discovery with the laudatory observation: "There is no more dramatic illustration of the genius of his achievement than the story of the discovery of the Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana", calling this "a unique scholarly feat".[11]

4. Tanhuma

While Zunz succeeded in proving that the *Pesiqta* mentioned in medieval citations must be distinguished from the *Pesiqta Rabbati,* he argues just the opposite in an apparently similar case, the citing side by side of *Tanhuma* and *Yelamdenu* in medieval quotations; here he asserts that *Yelamdenu* is identical with the well-known *Tanhuma* – since what the *Arukh* quotes from Yelamdenu

[10] B. Mandelbaum (ed.), *Pesikta de Rav Kahana. According to an Oxford Manuscript,* 2 vols., New York 1962. Instead of Zunz's 29 postulated chapters, Mandelbaum's edition contains 28 chapters and seven addenda which have differing supporting evidence in the manuscripts.
[11] Mandelbaum, vol. 2, p. X.

the *Yalqut* finds in the *Tanhuma* as we know it today. Because *Yelamdenu* passages (halakhic questions, introduced by the formula *yelamdenu rabbenu,* "may our master teach us") stand directly before interpretations attributed to R. Tanhuma, it is argued that it was possible to use both names for the same work. "It would be impossible to explain how a Midrash so similar to the Yelamdenu, as Tanhuma must be in any case, could have remained so totally unknown to R. Nathan, while his contemporary constantly quotes it. And this in relation to Yelamdenu would to a certain extent also hold true of Rashi. So the identity of the two Haggadas would seem thus to have been demonstrated" (GV 239).

By contrast, Zunz himself comments that the *Yalqut* contains many quotations from *Yelamdenu* which correspond barely or not at all with the text of our *Tanhuma.* By contrast, texts cited in the *Yalqut* as stemming from the *Tanhuma* usually do correspond to our *Tanhuma.* In one case, *Tanhuma* and *Yelamdenu* are even quoted side by side. But since even quotations cited as *Tanhuma* frequently cannot be found in our *Tanhuma,* Zunz reasons: "consequently, we cannot draw conclusions from the edition we have of this work about its nature in the past […] even old manuscripts deviate markedly both from each other and from the editions, which themselves vary. The original Yelamdenu as presented in the manuscripts from the 11th or an earlier century was no longer similar to the more recent versions and excerpts from this work circulating as Tanhuma. They were already known to the compiler of the Yalqut as different Haggadas. For that reason, he used both, sometimes allowing one to mutually supplement the other" (GV 241f.). In Zunz's view, the editions only contain a selection from the Midrash with supplements, while the manuscripts represent the older versions of the *Yelamdenu.*

Yelamdenu or *Tanhuma* is the oldest Midrash which encompasses the entire Pentateuch, dividing it into self-contained sections in the manner of *Leviticus Rabba* or *Pesiqta* (i.e. a homiletical Midrash), but is more recent than these. A number of passages in the *Tanhuma* are similar to the *Sheiltot* or other Gaonic writings. "One can often traverse entire long passages without the mention of any ancient authority, and some of the names cited have even been altered in an erroneous manner. The style now and then is broad, prosaic, reminiscent of the commentaries of the 11th century. There also seems to be polemic against the Karaites. I therefore think I am not doing any injustice to the Yelamdenu if I date its author to the first half of the 9th century" (GV 247). "The actual compiler, who also authored the halakhic introductions, must have lived at some later time, perhaps in the second half of the 9th century" (GV 248). Zunz believes that Europe is likely as a place of origin, perhaps Greece or southern Italy.

From today's perspective, one can criticize Zunz for having based the dating and localization of the Midrash too much on the editions available to him, failing to distinguish sufficiently between the actual text and later interpolations. Yet he should be praised for the sharp eye with which he recognized the Gaonic passages in the work, and also correctly discerned certain of its characteristic features. Even if today it is generally assumed that the Midrash stemming primarily from Palestine was earlier, and it is possible to identify many later additions, one can agree with Zunz that southern Italy probably played a central role in the further editing of the Midrash and its transmission. Distinguishing between the *Tanhuma* which the editions contained and earlier manuscript versions, which he termed *Yelamdenu.* Zunz shaped the direction of inquiry for a long time to come, stimulating the search for the original "ur-*Tanhuma*" or "ur-*Yelamdenu.*" One initial result of that quest was Salomo Buber's publication of a second version of the *Tanhuma* (Vilna 1885). Further research established that *Tanhuma* is not simply a single Midrash in two editions. Rather, it constitutes a separate genre of Midrash which characterizes many works completely or in part. Here too, the point of departure for these studies likewise lay in Zunz's early observations.

5. Later Midrashim

A short description will be presented here of Zunz's work on several late Midrashim. Commenting on the *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliʿezer,* often dated very early due to their attribution to Eliʿezer ben Hyrkanos, Zunz initially notes that the work, which ends with Miryam's punishment, must be incomplete. This may be derived from the fact that from chapter 27 on, benedictions from the *Shemone Esre* are utilized as chapter endings; yet the work only extends as far as the Eighth Benediction (of 18). Moreover, only eight of God's ten descents are presented. The work was certainly supposed to extend to the death of Moses. But already R. Natan in his *Arukh* was not familiar with any more material than we have today. The work is similar to works of the Gaonic period, where the detailed references to the calendar also fit. The author lived under Arab rule. The "style and spirit of the Midrash, the artificiality of the plan and the content are in complete accordance" with this. "Our haggadist indulges in extensive observations on all manner of topics in connection with the Pentateuch. Some of these are concerned with secret wisdom, some with Biblical events, but most with the religious life of the Jews. […] In the book before us, we see nothing of the conditions of life of the first three or four centuries, whose expression we encounter on almost every page in the older halakhic works and even in numerous Haggadas. Likewise in respect to language, there is little independent

vitality" (GV 288f.). For that reason, the book can be dated to the 8th century at the earliest. Here too, Zunz correctly characterized the work with sound judgment. Aside from filling in the details, present-day inquiry has gone no further than Zunz.

Zunz regards the *Seder Eliyahu* – according to the Talmud (bKet 106a), taught by the prophet Elijah to R. Anan – to be a lost work (GV 93). Perhaps the later *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* and *Zutta,* together also called *Tanna debe-Eliyahu,* utilized *Seder Eliyahu.* Based on a quote at the beginning of the Midrash and following Rapoport, Zunz dates this work to "around the year 974", attributing it to a Babylonian rabbi of unknown name. He describes it as a "morally religious work […] dedicated to inculcating virtue, a religious way of life and the study of the Law" (GV 119). "The presentation is animated by tales and parables, especially by the fiction as though it consisted of lectures given by an old teacher, in the Great Yeshiva in Jerusalem or travelling around, to young people, eager to direct questions to him. This is Elijah, as is evident from the book itself and parallel passages although, at points the author seems to forget this frame of presentation, also referring to Elijah in the third person" (GV 120f.). Zunz deals in detail with the structure and sources of the *Seder Eliyahu Zutta,* noting that only the chapters 1–14 are originally part of the work, while the following chapters down to chapter 25 constitute a late compilation from a variety of sources, "something which even manuscripts seem to confirm" (GV 123). Zunz had an eagle eye for the essential element here.

In regard to the *Midrash Psalms,* Zunz notes that for literary reasons, a distinction must be made between the section on Psalms 1–118, in which the interpretations usually are introduced with the formula "this is what scripture says", and the second section. In the second section the interpretation is also broader, drawing largely from the Babylonian Talmud. Zunz thinks it is possible "that everything from Psalm 119 on is a later completion of the Midrash" (GV 279). But he finds signs of the Gaonic period in the first part as well, and discerns in the Midrash on Psalm 9 even several references that bespeak a familiarity with Apulia and Sicily, making it likely that the author lived in Italy, perhaps in southern Italy. The Midrash was generally well-known by the middle of the 11th century at the latest. Zunz postulates that the origin of the Midrash from Psalm 119 on is late and separate from the rest of the work. This is confirmed by the circumstance that the second part is not known through manuscripts, and was published in Saloniki in 1515 as a separate independent work. It was probably to a large extent excerpted from the *Yalqut.* Unlike Zunz, scholars today would be more cautious in drawing conclusions based on individual passages, which moreover are often textually uncertain, and applying these conclusions to the whole of the work's main section. For some psalms,

they would certainly consider the possibility that they are considerably earlier, at the same time assuming a continual growth over centuries for the Midrash.[12] Further basic research is an essential desideratum here.

In closing, it is useful to consider the *Yalqut,* or more precisely *Yalqut Shim'oni.* Not only did Zunz constantly use it as the primary basis for many of his observations on midrash literature, he also analyzed it in copious detail as an independent work.

Quotations from more than 50 books are arranged in the *Yalqut* following the Biblical order and structured into a new work. Zunz describes the structure and organization of the work and the origin of its sources, which stem from all periods in midrash literature, including "a substantial number from the more recent Haggada, extending down into the 12th century" (GV 310). Zunz explains the fact that Targumim and esoteric writings are not exploited by pointing out that such texts were difficult to integrate into the total overall plan of the work. More recent writings, by contrast, "were in some cases not known to the author. Or the author believed they lacked the necessary authority to be incorporated into the interpretation of the Ancients" (GV 311).

Zunz regards this as the foundation for dating the *Yalqut.* If it had existed in the 11th century, it most certainly would have been used by Rashi and would have been referred to by the *Arukh.* In Zunz's opinion, books used in the *Yalqut,* such as *Exodus* and *Numbers Rabba,* can be dated to the late 11th century at the earliest. Whoever cites them together with the older Haggada must have lived and written at a much later time. Nor does any author of the 12th century mention the *Yalqut.* Most likely the *Yalqut* did not come into being until the first half of the 13th century.[13] Frankfurt am Main is mentioned as the domicile of the author, where Jews were persecuted around the year 1240. Zunz reasons that only before that year could the author have found the tranquillity necessary for composing such a work; he finds support for this date in the fact that Azarya de' Rossi (*Me'or Enayim* II, 6, ed. Cassel 250) quotes a manuscript of the *Yalqut* (on Daniel) from the year 1310 – a manuscript that certainly was not the autograph, since Azarya would surely have mentioned this. The fact that the *Yalqut* goes almost unmentioned in the 14th and 15th century is due to the very unfavorable situation which the Jews found themselves in at the time: "as a consequence, almost everywhere there is a lack of both authors and books from this time period. Tranquillity and relative prosperity were necessary for

[12] See W. G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms,* 2 vols., New Haven 1959, p. XXXI: the Midrash Psalms, Braude suspects, developed from the 3rd to the 13th century.

[13] Zunz refers here to Azulai, *Shem ha-Gedolim* II 40a, according to which the author of the *Yalqut* lived approximately at the beginning of the 6th millennium (around 1240).

the copying and acquisition of a work of this scope: the German Jews had neither at the time" (GV 313). Yet by the end of the 15th century, the *Yalqut* is repeatedly quoted even by Spanish authors.

Zunz stresses that an important contribution of the author of the *Yalqut* was his exact indication of the sources. It was impossible for a later editor to have added these, since he never would have been able to locate the fragments in the individual Midrashim, and would not have been able to distinguish so precisely between similar Midrashim. He sees the great exactitude and care of the editor of the *Yalqut* precisely in his references to the *Pesiqta* and *Yelamdenu,* for Zunz the foundation of his most important discoveries. "It is noteworthy that at times no source whatsoever is mentioned by name, or only referred to by the general word 'Midrash'. The first misleads a person to mistakenly consider various different fragments to be one and the same. Perhaps this neglect is to be blamed on the editions, specifically in the five Megillot. […] In the case of some more recent Midrashim, the author himself probably failed to do this" (GV 314). The inclusive term 'Midrash' is found especially in reference to Samuel and Psalms, where it refers to the relevant Midrash, but also in the case of Midrashim which in general are of a late date. Here Zunz can only offer the following explanation: "Either in these few cases, Rabbi Simeon was actually expressing himself in a more general way lacking sufficient clarity, or he made use of an older collection, without going back each time to the actual sources" (GV 315).

In Zunz's eyes, the reason why so many older Midrashim were neglected lay in the *Yalqut*'s wide dissemination since the end of the 15th century. As he saw it, the popularity of this work among the broad public was reflected in its 10 editions that were known to him. "However, their presentation in scientific terms is quite inadequate" (GV 315). Only recently was a critical edition of the *Yalqut* published.[14] In respect to the basic contours of its sources, literary character and period of origin, Zunz's analysis has stood the test of time.

6. Final Observations

These brief remarks on a few chapters of the *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge* by Leopold Zunz should have demonstrated the extent to which Zunz, over 170 years ago, not only entered onto new scientific pathways with his historical analysis of the entire literature of the Midrash but also set scholarly standards

[14] *Yalqut Shim'oni 'al ha-Tora le-Rabbenu Shim'on ha-Darshan,* ed. D. Hyman, D. N. Lerrer and I. Shiloni, 9 vols., Jerusalem 1973–91; the first volume of *Yalqut Shim'oni 'al ha-Nevi'im* has recently appeared: *Nevi'im Rishonim,* ed. D. Hyman, Jerusalem 1999.

which have remained valid down to the present. Certainly Zunz's analysis is outdated today in many of its details. It may be striking that specifically in the field of *piyyut,* in which he did yeoman pioneer work, as in so many other fields of research, he dates the great liturgical poet Eleʿazar Kallir so much later than is customary today. The dating now is of course based on a far more comprehensive knowledge of the manuscript tradition. After all, the Cairo Geniza was not discovered until some 60 years after his great work. This naturally also impacted on the dating of Midrashim, whose reverberations he believed to discover in Kallir. The question as to which text uses another text or is used by this other text, cannot always be unequivocally clarified even today. Zunz, working at the very beginning of the development of such inquiry, generally had nothing but unsatisfactory traditional editions at his disposal, although wherever possible he utilized manuscripts. Naturally, it was only possible for him in a small number of cases to work out the later supplements and textual harmonisations they contained. In reality, it is thus all the more astonishing in how many cases he managed to succeed, thanks to his enormous erudition and honed sensitivity to the nuances of style.

In connection with the very late Midrashic works from the 10th to 12th century, Zunz often suggested astonishingly accurate datings, still valid today. Yet he frequently dated other Midrashim much later than the common scholarly wisdom would now assume. There is virtually no instance where he dates a Midrash too early. His tendency to prefer a later dating can be readily explained:

1. Often Zunz was still unable to distinguish between later reworkings of a Midrash and its more "original" form, frequently postulated on the basis of good manuscripts discovered at a later date. In case of doubt, Zunz proceeded from the final version that happened to be available to him, even if he recognized that there was certainly much older material at its basis. Here we are confronted with a problem resurfacing with renewed vigor again today in research into Midrash, namely how to distinguish between the editing of a Midrash (or any other rabbinical work) and its reworking. Nowadays, some scholars proceed on the basis of the basic incompleteness of these works and reject the assumption that there was a "final redaction" of a work prior to the available textual witnesses as unprovable. Proceeding on such assumptions, they naturally arrive at datings which lie far closer to those of Zunz. More traditional datings are proposed by scholars who accept a basic redaction of a work at a specific date, but reckon with its fundamental vulnerability to later intrusions, interpolations and changes up to the period of printing. The discussion remains still largely open in this regard. The presuppositions Zunz was operating with would appear to many contemporary researchers as quite modern.

2. Probably more important is Zunz's critical approach, rooted in the history and praxis of the times. In that era, traditional attributions of rabbinical works to rabbis they were named after or their direct pupils was the rule. Other writings were dated according to the rabbis mentioned in them, to the extent there was interest at all in historical questions. It was this context in which Zunz had first to work out criteria for examining objectively such assertions. Analogous criteria had been advanced by scholars at the time in classical philology and historical source criticism, and he was able to adapt these to his rabbinical sources. This required working through a huge amount of material. Each individual citation of a text in the Middle Ages, each cross-reference from one Midrash to another, any significant deviation of one edition from another, all formed one stone in the textual mosaic. With difficulty and meticulous precise work, a total picture could be crafted from these stones. When some depreciatingly term Zunz more an assiduous antiquarian than a historian in the full sense of the word, they overlook the total picture, the unity Zunz fashioned from a plethora of details, concentrating more on the exacting toil that this comparative textual digging required. Those many details were for Zunz, almost in a kind of textual archeology, always a requisite means to the ultimate end.[15] Where it was necessary to blaze a path for a historical-critical approach to Midrash literature in general, Zunz certainly tended when in doubt to overestimate the value of later details in the text. In so doing, it is probably almost impossible to avoid a tilt toward systematic later dating.

Scholars have often wondered why Zunz did not bring out a thoroughly revised new version of his magisterial early work, since over the years he had added a wealth of individual new notes and comments. It is customary to point here to his personal situation as the underlying cause. It drained him of the energy and desire needed to embark upon a comparable task once again. But maybe he also thought that the time was simply not ripe for such an undertaking. He saw how active and successful the search for Hebrew manuscripts had become, to an appreciable extent spurred by his own writings. He witnessed

[15] Significant are these comments by Zunz (GV 324–328) about his more general intentions: "And precisely to make sure that no injustice transpires to what is true and eternal in the Midrash, we had to take into more focused account the form, what is transitory: the eras, the homeland, directions and figures, the age and character of a work, paying greater attention even to the authorities cited and the authenticity. Only in this way can we expect justice to be done to the Midrash. Only in this manner can we hope to extract a certain result from its literature for the history of the religious institutions of the Jews" (GV 324). Here he also writes about the aesthetic and literary form of the Midrash and how these works are a necessary product of the constitution, history and culture of the Jewish people. On this, see M. R. Niehoff, "Zunz's Concept of Haggada as an Expression of Jewish Spirituality", in: *LBYB* 43 (1998), pp. 3–24.

how, on this basis, critical editions of various Midrashim were brought to fruition (such as in the work of M. Friedmann, E. H. Weiß and S. Buber). Perhaps he thought it would be best to wait until a broader textual foundation was available. Until that point, any revision of his own work would only be an alteration in a tapestry of many details. But little had changed in major contours of the broad canvas he had sketched in his early work. Little had altered in the general outline and the catalog of criteria which he had laboriously worked out, infusing it with an abundance of textual evidence. And in the main, that remains true down to today.[16] Perhaps Zunz was far more interested in the "bigger picture" than in the thousands of details, the innumerable mosaic stones, however necessary they naturally were for his history of the Midrash.

Translated by Bill Templer

[16] That is also reflected in the Hebrew translation of the work, *Ha-Derashot be-Yisra'el,* Jerusalem 1954, supplemented by notes by H. Albeck.