Religions and Trade

Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West

Edited by
Peter Wick and Volker Rabens

CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................................................................ xi
List of Contributors ........................................................................................ xiii
List of Illustrations .......................................................................................... xvii

“Trading Religions”: Foundational and Introductory Matters ............ 1
Peter Wick and Volker Rabens

PROGRAMMATIC ESSAY

With the Grain Came the Gods from the Orient to Rome:
The Example of Serapis and Some Systematic Reflections .......... 19
Christoph Auffarth

PART ONE
TRADE AND THE TOPOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS SPACE

Localizing the Buddha’s Presence at Wayside Shrines in Northern
Pakistan ......................................................................................................... 45
Jason Neelis

When the Greeks Converted the Buddha: Asymmetrical Transfers
of Knowledge in Indo-Greek Cultures ......................................................... 65
Georgios T. Halkias

The Buddhakṣetra of Bodhgaya: Saṅgha, Exchanges and
Trade Networks .......................................................................................... 117
Abhishek Singh Amar

PART TWO

TRADE AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOL SYSTEMS

“Trading Religions” and “Visible Religion” in the Ancient Near East ................................................................. 141
Izak Cornelius

Trading the Symbols of the Goddess Nanaya ........................................ 167
Joan Goodnick Westenholz

“Trading Religions” from Bronze Age Iran to Bactria .......................... 199
Sylvia Winkelmann

PART THREE

TRADE AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

From World Religion to World Dominion: Trading, Translation and Institution-building in Tibet ........................................ 233
Michael Willis

Religious Transformation between East and West: Hanukkah in the Babylonian Talmud and Zoroastrianism ............................. 261
Geoffrey Herman

Sharing the Concept of God among Trading Prophets: Reading the Poems Attributed to Umayya b. Abī Ṣalt ........................................... 283
Al Makin
PART FOUR
TRADE AND RELIGIOUS-ETHICAL WAYS OF LIFE

Trading Institutions: The Design of Daoist Monasticism .................... 309
Livia Kohn

Philo’s Attractive Ethics on the “Religious Market” of
Ancient Alexandria .............................................................................. 333
Volker Rabens

Traveling Ethics: The Case of the Household Codes in
Ephesians 5:21–6:9 in Cross-Cultural Perspective ............................ 357
Loren T. Stuckenbruck

Index ................................................................................................................... 367
1. INTRODUCTION

When religious traditions travel they tend to adapt to their new surroundings. Like new products seeking to penetrate a foreign market, they often undergo a process of modification and re-packaging that makes them comprehensible and inviting to their potential clientele. This can often be a subconscious process whereby the elements in the imported tradition that evoke more familiar local practices rise to prominence and develop further, whereas others sink into the background. This article seeks to account for the development of the ritual observance of the festival of Hanukkah, a festival that was brought from Judaea to Babylonia. It pinpoints the holiday’s evolution upon its reception in Babylonia. Observing similarities in ritual between the receiving community—Babylonian Jewry—and the prevalent practices found among the Zoroastrians of the region, it suggests a connection between the two. This connection intimates that the ritual celebration of Hanukkah was radically and fundamentally transformed in its new religious environment as a result of its encounter with local religious custom.

The Jewish festival of Hanukkah is today one of the more widely observed and popular festivals in the Jewish calendar. It is celebrated for eight days starting on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev (November–December). Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the altar of the
Jerusalem temple after the Maccabean victory over the Seleucids in the 2nd century B.C.E., as related by the chief historical sources, 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees. It is marked by special liturgical additions and selections read from the Bible and the suspension of practices associated with mourning. The central ritual activity is the lighting of candles in the home after dark during the eight days of the holiday.

The evolution of the custom of lighting candles on Hanukkah is the focus of this paper. I wish to trace how the ritual lighting of candles acquired such a central role in the celebration of this festival. I shall make two arguments: the second also a partial explanation of the first. I wish to propose, firstly, that this custom in all its ritual detail is primarily a development that took place in Babylonia. The second argument is that this shift may have been stimulated by the encounter between Babylonian Judaism and Zoroastrian fire veneration. This festival, I will suggest, became for the Jews a way of celebration that subtly and perhaps subconsciously evoked Zoroastrian ritual practices.

Interest in the Jewish-Zoroastrian interface goes back to the earliest Study of Religions and has more typically embraced the Second Temple era. The topic addressed here, however, relates to Babylonian Judaism in the Sasanian era, the prime Jewish source for which is the Babylonian Talmud. Studies have suggested a degree of religious contact between Zoroastrianism and Babylonian Judaism as might be expected in view of the presence of the Jews within this Persian Empire, although the extent of this interaction remains unclear.

2. History of Research

Scholarship on the historical development of Hanukkah has pondered its relationship with the customs of other religious traditions that occur at about the same time of year, particularly in the Roman world, such as the celebration of the winter solstice and themes relating to a celebration


The connection of the ritual kindling of light on Hanukkah and the pervasive symbolism of light in the winter solstice celebrations such as the festivals of Saturnalia, and Kalends, has, in particular, been recognized as meaningful. Josephus names the Jewish festival phōta—lights. An alternative explanation for the timing of the festival, appearing in 2 Maccabees 1:18–36, connects a fire-based miracle from the era of biblical Nehemiah and the Persian rulers to the festival, itself an overt example of Jewish-Zoroastrian syncretism.

An additional focus of scholarship has been the depiction of Hanukkah in the early rabbinic sources. These consist of a spattering of ritual stipulations in the legal codices (that is the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Palestinian Talmud); a reference in a work known as the Scroll of Fasts, elaborated upon in its ancient scholia; and more detailed treatment in the Babylonian

---


5 See y. ‘Avodah Zarah 1:2 (39c); b. ‘Avodah Zarah 8a. On the correlation between Kalends and Hanukkah see also in the Toledot Yeshu literature. See, for example, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in Toledot Yeshu: Polemics as Indication for Interaction,” HTR 102:4 (2009): 487, 491. This list indicates the elevation of Hanukkah in the Jewish calendar—perhaps in response to the importance of Kalends in the Roman world. On Kalends and Saturnalia in connection with the Jewish sources cf. Emmanuel Friedheim, Rabbinisme et Paganisme en Palestine romaine, Étude historique des Realia talmudiques (1er–IVe siècles) (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 332–337. On Saturnalia see, especially Moshe Benovitz, “Until the Feet of the Tarmoda’i are Gone: The Hanukkah light in Palestine during the Tannaitic and Amoraic Periods,” in Torah Lishma, Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of Professor Shamma Friedman, ed. David Golinkin, et al. (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute, Bar-Ilan University Press, 2007), 20–24. Saturnalia tends to be rendered in the Babylonian tradition as סטרנורא (Vilna edition); סטרנוריא (MS NY JTS Rab 15, MS Munich 95); סטרניריא (MS Paris 1337). Also the reading of Tosefta, MS Erfurt: סטרניריא. The Babylonian Talmud seems to employ a word play based on סתר—“concealing the fire.”

6 His explanation for this name, however, is not attested elsewhere. Rabbinic sources and the Gospel of John (10:22) call the festival ‘Dedication’ [= Hanukkah].

7 This fire, one should recall, was for the sacrificial altar, and not the temple menorah. On the impact of this legend on the identification of Jeremiah with Zoroaster, see Joseph Bidez and F. Cummont, Les mages hellénisés (Paris: Société d’éditions “les Belles lettres,” 1938), 50; Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, A History of Zoroastrianism (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 438. On scholarly comparison between this tradition in 2Macc and Pausanias’ account of the temple of the “Persian goddess” see the discussion in Boyce and Grenet, History of Zoroastrianism, 235–237. The biblically inspired explanation in 2Macc is not alluded to in the rabbinic sources.

8 The Scroll of Fasts is a short Aramaic list considered to date from the Second Temple era that enumerates days of celebration.
Talmud. Together, these outline many of the laws and offer an etiological myth accounting for the practice of kindling lights—a miracle involving a cruse of pure oil that burned for eight days though with only enough oil to last for one.

Earlier generations of scholars were struck by the relatively minor place Hanukkah fills in the rabbinic sources, particularly those originating in Palestine. Some reasoned that the rabbis, disappointed with the Hasmonean dynasty’s subsequent sectarian and political choices, had deliberately downplayed the festival; or alternatively that they had advanced the miracle of the cruse of oil story as a spiritualized substitute for the celebration of the military victory. An alternative approach has posited the candle lighting as a clandestine domestic and subversive way to continue to observe the holiday after the de-legitimization of the Hasmoneans under Herod. Alternatively, some scholars have imagined the deliberate co-option of the holiday by Herod himself, and reinterpretation of the holiday observance, alongside the prevalence of similar (non-Jewish) light-inspired festivals of antiquity. Such theories, as shall become apparent, tend to bypass the distance, both chronological and geographical, between the key rabbinic sources and the period in which these developments are believed to have occurred.

More recently, however, these rabbinic sources themselves have been submitted to close critical scrutiny. Studies have availed the rabbinic sources to philological and redactional analysis. These studies have produced important results that confirm the transformation of the religious tradition upon its reception in Babylonia, and I shall refer to them below. It would seem profitable, then, to first offer an overview of the rabbinic sources that deal with Hanukkah, and in particular, those which deal with

---

9 Later rabbinic works that consider Hanukkah (e.g. Pesiqta Rabbati chs. 2–4, 6, 8; Midrash Tanhuma Naso, Tractate Soferim 206; She’iltot of Ahai Gaon, 26–28) are not relevant to the time frame of this paper.


the ritual kindling of lights, focusing on their distribution in the rabbinic corpora.

3. The Rabbinic Sources on Hanukkah

The rabbinic sources on Hanukkah, which are not numerous, are unevenly dispersed among the classical legal compendia. The earliest rabbinic legal works, the Mishna and Tosefta, that contain tractates on many of the festivals lack any concerted discussion on Hanukkah. Furthermore, the few curt appearances relate almost exclusively to calendrical or liturgical matters and only in one place, and there peripherally, does the Mishna (and its precise Tosefta parallel) refer to kindling a light for Hanukkah. This pattern is also the rule for the Palestinian Talmud where we find only six isolated traditions that refer to kindling lights for Hanukkah.

It is the Babylonian Talmud that collects the traditions on Hanukkah and creates a lengthy, detailed and coherent discourse on the holiday, elaborating on the laws and rituals, and particularly on the lighting of candles. Laws there discuss, for instance, the materials best for lighting, where and when to light, the benedictions to recite upon lighting, and the sanctity of the candles. It also alludes to repressive measures taken by Zoroastrian priests against the observance of the festival. It tells of Zoroastrian priests stealing the lit candles. The principle locus is in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbat, folios 21a–24a [see appendix].

---


14 M. Bava Qamma 6:6: “If a spark which flies from the anvil goes forth and causes damage, he [the smith] is liable. If a camel laden with flax passes through a street, and the flax overflows into a shop, catches fire at the shopkeeper’s lamp, and sets the building alight, the camel owner is liable; but if the shopkeeper placed the light outside, the shopkeeper is liable. R. Judah said: In the case of a Hanukkah lamp he is exempt.” It is tagged onto the end of the chapter. Cf. t. Bava Qamma 6:28 (Lieberman edition, 27).

15 Y. Terumot 11:9 (48b); y. Orlah 1:1 (60d); y. Shabbat 2:1 (4c); y. Sukkah 3:4 (53d); y. Sukkah 5:1 (55b) [= Lam. Rabba (Buber edition, 42a)]; y. Bava Qamma 6:6 (5c). The number of references to Hanukkah unrelated to kindling lights is not considerable.


Most of the material found there is not repeated elsewhere in the rabbinic corpora.

This uneven distribution of the rabbinic material calls for an explanation. Louis Ginzberg, some eighty years ago, would conclude that the holiday was almost forgotten in Palestine, and it was only in Babylonia, where he argued, observance of the holiday had been strengthened by the force of foreign oppression that it had continued to be observed.\(^{18}\) It would seem, however, that the data lends itself to a different manner of interpretation. The imbalance does not embrace all aspects of the holiday equally and some scholars have indeed pointed out the signs for the continued observance of the holiday in Palestine.\(^{19}\) The significance is not to be sought, then, in the question of the actual memory of the holiday,\(^ {20}\) but rather in the manner in which it was observed.

4. The Babylonian Re-invention of Hanukkah

Judging from the volume and innovative quality of source material in the Babylonian Talmud in contrast with the rest of the rabbinic corpora, the Babylonian contribution would appear to have been quite decisive in shaping the holiday observances in the direction of emphasizing the kindling of light(s). We see this right away from a couple of factors.

\(^{18}\) Louis Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter. I Midrash and Haggadah* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), 476: “It bears note that in the Talmud of the Land of Israel the laws of Hanukkah are almost not mentioned at all—neither in the words of the Tannaim nor in the words of the Amoraim, and only in Babylonia, where ‘fireworshippers’ decreed persecutory decrees against this precept, and as with every commandment upon which the Jews risked personal sacrifice, it was considerably strengthened for them and they were particularly scrupulous concerning it.” Much of the question revolved around the statement in the Babylonian Talmud *baraita*: “and in times of danger one places [the lamp] on the table that is sufficient for him.” While Ginzberg regarded this phrase, “in times of danger” as a reference to the Zoroastrian seizure of lamps referred to elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud, some other scholars saw it as a term for the Hadrianic persecution that followed the Bar-Kokhba revolt in Palestine. See Saul Lieberman, “The Martyrs of Caesarea,” *Annauaire d’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 7 (1939–1940): 424; Gedalyahu Alon, “Did the Jewish People and its Sages cause the Hasmoneans to be forgotten?,” in *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World translated by Israel Abrahams, Jerusalem*, ed. G. Alon (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 1–17; and Benovitz, “In Times of Danger in Eretz Israel and Babylonia,” *Tarbiz* 74 (2005): 5–20 for a detailed review of the sources.

\(^{19}\) See Alon, “Jewish People.”

\(^{20}\) This was the parameter through which Noam framed her analysis of the textual traditions on the “miracle of the cruse of oil,” see Noam, “The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil,” 193–194.
Firstly, the Babylonian Talmud chose to place its detailed discourse on Hanukkah in tractate *Shabbat*, as a digression within a chapter that discusses the suitable oils and wicks for lighting Sabbath candles. This very location, instead of one of the *loci* where Hanukkah is already discussed in the tannaitic corpora, as one might have expected, emphasizes the candle(s) as the central aspect of the holiday.\(^{21}\)

Secondly, although six traditions in the Jerusalem Talmud (henceforth: PT) refer to kindling lights on Hanukkah, a closer look suggests that there, too, the Babylonian input was predominant. Three of the six are based explicitly on cited Babylonian traditions.\(^{22}\) The remaining Palestinian traditions are not early—two of the three involve fourth century Palestinian rabbis.\(^{23}\) However, the quantity of such PT traditions is minute in relation to the Bavli’s treatment, and their content is also strikingly odd and lacking a broader contextual framework. Since the dated PT traditions that do not cite Babylonian rabbis are in fact chronologically later than those that do, this raises the possibility that even this PT material is ultimately an outgrowth of Babylonian deliberations.

Scholarship has, however, tended to regard the practice of lighting candles for Hanukkah as ancient and firmly rooted in the Palestinian

\(^{21}\) The one Palestinian Talmud source from this chapter of tractate Shabbat is, in fact, a Babylonian teaching. The tradition from *y. Terumot*, which discusses the use of ‘oil of defilement’ for the Hanukkah lamp, suggests a contextual relationship with the second chapter of tractate Shabbat. Two of the Palestinian Talmud references to kindling appear in tractate *Sukkah*, maintaining the ancient connection between Hanukkah and the feast of Tabernacles (*2Macc* 1:9, 18; 10:6–8). A third, in tractate *Bava Qamma*, also draws an analogy between the laws of Hanukkah and the feast of Tabernacles. The relationship between these two festivals, explicit in the earliest historical sources, continues in the rabbinic sources. See, for example, Liber, “Hanoucca et Soucot,” *REJ* 63 (1912): 20–29.

\(^{22}\) *Y. Shabbat* 2a (4c); *y. Sukkah* 3:4 (53d); *y. Orlah* 13 (60d). Two of these three sources involve statements by the Babylonian rabbis, Rav Hisda and Rav Huna, and one cites the opinions of other Babylonian rabbis with regard to the appropriate benedictions to be recited when kindling the candelabrum. The possibility that we have here original Palestinian traditions presented as Babylonian seems uncharacteristic of the Palestinian Talmud in general and of the evidence for this specific topic in particular. More significantly, the Palestinian discussions on candle lighting are themselves heavily indebted to the cited traditions of first generation Babylonian rabbis. In *y. Sukkah* 3:4 (53d), for instance, the discussion on the benediction to be recited begins with the ruling by the first generation Babylonian rabbi, Rav. Although the Talmud seeks the legal opinion of the key Palestinian rabbis, R. Yohanan and R. Joshua b. Levi, ultimately the Talmud does not cite actual rulings by these Palestinian rabbis but only infers how they might have thought through deduction. This entire discussion is Babylonian.

\(^{23}\) *Y. Terumot* refers to a fourth generation Palestinian amora, R. Nasa. *Y. Orlah* has late fourth century Yosi b. Bun (who has Babylonian origins). The third source, which is from *y. Sukkah*, is unattributed.
rabbinic tradition. This assumption has been undoubtedly based both on the two early non-rabbinic Jewish sources that link Hanukkah with fire/lights (2Macc and Josephus)\(^24\) and those rabbinic sources traditionally viewed as being of Palestinian provenance which we shall address shortly. And yet, even recognizing some ancient and vague connection to light/fire in the non-rabbinic (and pre-rabbinic!) sources does not account for the highly ritualized construction in the rabbinic sources. The latter needs to be examined on its own terms.

The rabbinic sources traditionally viewed as being of Palestinian provenance are, however, with the exception of the one Mishna/Tosefta statement mentioned above, all found exclusively in the Babylonian Talmud. This has been confirmed for one of these sources—the account of the miracle of the cruse of oil—only recently. It had long been noted that this account, the foundation story for the lighting of candles according to the Babylonian Talmud, is not found in the historical accounts of the holiday, 1Macc, 2Macc, or in the works of Josephus. Now, however, a recent study by Vered Noam has established after a careful textual examination that while it was thought to have belonged to a Palestinian source (the scholia of the Scroll of Fasts), it is only attested in the Babylonian Talmud’s citation from this composition.\(^25\) However, rather than quoting from the scholia the Babylonian Talmud has, in fact, revised its account of Hanukkah, introducing a miracle of a cruse of oil where the original (Palestinian) version referred to different (non-miraculous) activity—the


\(^{25}\) This Babylonian Talmud version appears to have subsequently contaminated a branch of the scholia. This source is not, as had been believed before, in the scholia to the Scroll of Fasts—a Palestinian source. See Noam, “The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil” for a detailed textual analysis and explanation; Shamma Friedman, “Hanukkah in the Scholion of Megillat Ta’anit,” Zion 71 (2006): 5–40.

repair of the sacrificial altar or the establishment of a makeshift temple menorah. Other studies have confirmed that this miracle account continued to be completely unknown to the Palestinian Jewish tradition, being absent from the liturgical poems (piyyut) that were composed there until the Muslim conquest.26

Another of these sources is a lengthy anonymous tradition introduced as of early Palestinian provenance (i.e. a baraita). It contains one attributed tannaitic tradition that is, in fact, ascribed to one of the earliest rabbinic pairs available—the schools of Hillel and Shammai! The likelihood that not only a substantial baraita, but also an authentic tradition ascribed to the schools of Hillel and Shammai have escaped the regular channels and only showed up in the Babylonian Talmud is highly suspect, albeit not impossible.

But here, too, there are problems with accepting all this as Palestinian. Most scholars have concluded that at least some parts of this baraita are not Palestinian at all, but are of Babylonian provenance,27 even as many have insisted that it nevertheless preserves an authentic Palestinian kernel. They have focused on expressions and word usage that reflect Babylonian Aramaic.28 Yet the philological evidence that has been offered for the fabrication of the baraita in a Babylonian milieu can serve to strengthen the impression that we are dealing with Babylonian sources, even for the parts that do not give away their Babylonian authorship so obviously. Furthermore, a recent still-unpublished study by Stephen Wald has argued for the Babylonian origins, not only of this baraita,29 but of much of the material on Hanukkah found in the Babylonian Talmud, including many


28 See especially the recent Friedman, “Uncovering Literary Dependencies,” 53–55; Benovitz, “Times of Danger.”

29 Depictions of this baraita as a “Babylonian baraita” go back to Ginzberg, Rosenthal, “For the Talmudic Dictionary,” 61.
of the amoraic sources for which a Palestinian provenance is claimed in the Babylonian Talmud.\textsuperscript{30}

Given the situation described above, it is hard to imagine that the single tannaitic source for kindling that is attested outside of the Babylonian Talmud, the Mishna/Tosefta reference, is the source or catalyst for all the other laws.\textsuperscript{31} Likewise, it cannot be seen as evidence that the tradition of lighting was so well established in Palestine. It would appear, and this can only be a conjecture, that the Mishna/Tosefta tradition does not go back to the period of mishnaic redaction. It might have been appended in the early amoraic era in the wake of the evolving customs of candle lighting.

Even as Josephus knows of some light-related aspect of Hanukkah, it would appear that in the \textit{rabbinic} sources the focus on candle lighting is fundamentally a Babylonian innovation. Thus the accepted way of observance of the festival in Palestine is reappraised and reinterpreted in its new Babylonian surroundings. We are called upon to seek an explanation for this religious dynamic. The motivation for this transformation, I suspect, was provided by the predominance of fire veneration in the Sasanian Empire.

5. \textsc{Zoroastrians, Fire, and Hanukkah}

A characteristic aspect of Zoroastrian religion is the veneration of fire. Zoroastrians have often been described as “fire worshippers.”\textsuperscript{32} Their elaborate cult of fire has been one of the most distinctive and striking aspects of their faith, and belongs to the earliest strata of their religious writings.\textsuperscript{33} Fire altars are the most visible Zoroastrian icon, featuring on Parthian and Sasanian coins, seals, rock inscriptions, images, objects, and graffiti. Their fire temples were ubiquitous.\textsuperscript{34} Priests recite sacred liturgy in the

\textsuperscript{30} S.Y. Wald, \textit{Talmud ha-Iggud Shabbat}, Chapter 2; \textit{Ha-Iggud leparshanut haTalmud} (forthcoming). Within the limits of this article it is not possible to elaborate on this point.

\textsuperscript{31} Cf. Wald (previous note), who sees many of the Babylonian Talmud rulings as expansions and elaborations derived from this mishnaic tradition.


\textsuperscript{34} See S. Wikander, \textit{Feuerpriester in Kleinasien und Iran} (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1946); Klaus Schippmann, \textit{Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer} (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971); J.P. de
presence of fire. The careful and meticulous preparation and tending of fires, maintenance of their purity, and prayer before fire, are basic to their religious practice—certainly in post-Achaemenid times, and particularly during the Sasanian era.\(^{35}\)

The Jews of the Sasanian Empire were aware of the fire cult, and it finds explicit mention in the Babylonian Talmud.\(^{36}\) An example of the degree to which the Babylonian rabbis might have been attune to the prominence of fire in the Zoroastrian cult is suggested by a precise parallel found in the Babylonian Talmud to a Zoroastrian tradition that delineates the various types of (spiritual) fires.\(^{37}\) This parallel—that would require a detailed treatment in its own right—offers valuable evidence of the rabbinic adoption of fundamental Zoroastrian taxonomy for its essential icon—fire veneration.\(^{38}\)

---


\(^{35}\) See, e.g., the stipulation in the Pahlavi work, *Mēnōg-i Xrad*, 533–5; J.J. Modi, *The Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees* (Bombay: J.B. Karani Sons, 1937), 390: "No Zoroastrian ritual or religious ceremony can be complete without the presence of fire."


\(^{37}\) *Ibid* 39; 20; *b. Yoma* 21b. The rabbinic source is introduced as a *baraita*.

\(^{38}\) On this tradition see James Darmesteter, "Les six feux dans le Talmud et dans le Bundehesh," *RE* 1 (1880): 186–196. He was preceded by Joshua H. Schorr, "Hatorot," *Hehalutz* 70 (1865): 48–49. Following the scholarly assumptions of his times, Darmesteter understood the Babylonian Talmud *baraita* to be a Palestinian tannaitic tradition, regarding it as evidence for the existence of this Bundahishn tradition in the second or third centuries and also for its transmission to Palestine. The capacity of the Babylonian Talmud to ascribe Babylonian traditions to Palestinian tannaitic provenance is, however, as we have seen, well attested. I am currently preparing a separate study on this intriguing parallel. Another case of such adaptation is the icon appearing on Jewish Sasanian seals, usually referred to as an image of the binding of Isaac. The image itself, however, is almost completely identical to the figure of a Zoroastrian priest standing before a fire-stand, a common feature of Sasanian seals owned by Zoroastrians, and indeed Sasanian coinage. Evidently, the Jewish owners have utilized an existing iconic image for their biblical theme. Christians also appear to have adopted this image on their seals. See Judith A. Lerner, *Christian Seals*.
The practical ways in which Zoroastrians used fire in their rituals were varied. Much interest has been devoted to the more monumental examples, the fire temples and accompanying rituals. There was also a more humble level of practice. Whether on a domestic or a local plane, there was fire veneration on a more modest standard than the officially sponsored fire temples often discussed in the national and legal Persian sources. The fire containers may have been simpler. The fires, themselves were perhaps set on a low stand or slab, an image that is often depicted in the visual evidence. Zoroastrians may even have used mere oil lamps as attested in later times. Likewise, perceptions of fire and its prophylactic capacity may have been pervasive. It is particularly this manner of observance that may have contributed towards fashioning Jewish observance in the way it is attested in the Babylonian Talmud. There were also Persian fire festivals that took place in the middle of winter. They appear to have been highly elaborate and visible but we cannot be certain of their precise nature. They may have impacted on the Jewish practice.

The original Babylonian Jewish practice for Hanukkah also appears to have been less elaborate. The Babylonian tradition involved only one light. The tradition of gradually increasing or decreasing the number of candles lit in the course of the eight days of Hanukkah, ascribed to the schools of

---


40 See the description in Modi, The Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees, 301.

41 See Choksy, “Reassessing the Material Contexts of Ritual Fires in Ancient Iran.” On kindling a lamp to burn for a number of days on the birth of a child, see Modi, The Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees, 5; at a betrothal (ibid., 18); in the house of the deceased (ibid., 59). Cf. Boyce, “On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians,” BSOAS 31 (1968): 54.

42 Cf. b. Shabbat 24a, where the Sabbath lamp is compared to the pillar of fire which protected the Israelites in the wilderness.

43 For instance, the extensive deliberations of the Babylonian Talmud on whether one may light from one lamp to another recalls the detailed process of preparation and purification of fires by Zoroastrians. In this process Zoroastrians transfer the flame through many sources of fire.

44 Rosenthal discusses the festival of Sadeh in the context of the geonic explanation of Zoroastrian priests stealing lamps from Jews and religious persecution. See Eliezer S. Rosenthal, “For the Talmudic Dictionary—Talmudica Iranica,” in Irano-Judaica, Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1982), 39–42. The festival of fire in the Zoroastrian month of Adur, falling in November would be another candidate. Most of the evidence for the practices associated with Sadeh comes from the Muslim era.
Hillel and Shammai, is a custom foreign to the Babylonian Talmud. The latter integrates it by portraying it as an act of exceptional piety.45

The sources do not reveal the motivation behind the evolution in Jewish practice, and we would not expect them to, but it is nevertheless illustrative to recall the manner in which the Babylonian rabbis have moulded the Palestinian Hanukkah tradition, and how the result has brought their praxis closer to the Zoroastrian customs. In the Babylonian tradition, with its “miracle of the cruse of oil” we see a shift from the repair of a sacrificial altar or, alternatively, a tool for illumination to a focus on the illumination. The impurity of the receptacle has been replaced by concern for the impurity of the fuel. The detailed ritualization of the kindling of the light—one light—elevated, sanctified, guarded, evokes the Zoroastrian fire cult. In sum, the focus of the holiday celebration has shifted from the synagogue to the domestic candle.

6. Conclusion

Religious tradition is adept at adaptation. The Babylonian Talmud, in particular, through analogy, and succinct comparison,46 draws the newcomer in and naturalizes it. The transformation of Hanukkah, as attested in the Babylonian Talmud, serves as an example of a religious dynamic stimulated by the arrival of new “religious knowledge.” This “religious knowledge” is negotiated through the prism of existing perceptions and rituals. The Babylonian Talmud’s reading of Hanukkah is not self-evident, natural, or inevitable. The seeds for this transformation were, indeed, embedded somewhere in the Palestinian tradition, but it was only in Babylonia where the environment was amenable to this growth that Hanukkah could evolve thus. It was here that the religious market facilitated exchange in the religious notions that impacted upon the way the festival was re-interpreted. The “miracle of the cruse of oil” tradition, the foundational basis for the centrality of candle lighting, perhaps best epitomizes the transformation that occurred in the image of the holiday. As it travelled from West to East, from Judaea to Babylonia, it changed from a festival of the rededication of the temple altar to a festival of the rededication of the temple candelabrum—an altar of fire.

45 The origin of the custom attributed to the schools of Hillel and Shammai remains, however, unknown, but in view of the time gap it would seem unlikely that it goes back to an authentic rabbinic custom from the time of the Herodians.
46 The prime themes of comparison are the laws of the sukkah and the Sabbath lamps.

Appendix: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 21a–24a

[21a] Rav Huna said: With regard to the wicks and oils which the Sages said: One must not light therewith on the Sabbath; one may not light therewith on Hanukkah, either on the Sabbath or on weekdays. Rava observed: What is R. Huna’s reason? He holds that if it [the Hanukkah lamp] goes out, one must attend thereto, and one may make use of its light. Rav Hisda maintained: One may light therewith on weekdays, but not on the Sabbath. He holds: If it goes out, [21b] it does not require attention, and one may make use of its light. Rav Zera said in Rav Mattenah’s name—others state, R. Zera said in Rav’s name: Regarding the wicks and oils which the Sages said, One must not light therewith on the Sabbath, one may light therewith on Hanukkah, either on weekdays or on the Sabbath. Said R. Jeremiah, What is Rav’s reason? He holds: If it goes out, it does not require attention, and one may not make use of its light. The Rabbis stated this before Abaye in R. Jeremiah’s name, but he did not accept it. [But] when Rabin came, the Rabbis stated it before Abaye in R. Yohanan’s name, whereupon he accepted it. Had I, he observed, merited the great fortune, I would have learnt this dictum originally. But he learnt it [now]?—The difference is in respect of the studies of one’s youth.

Now, if it goes out, does it not require attention? But the following contradicts it: Its observance is from sunset until there is no wayfarer in the street. Does that not mean that if it goes out [within that period] it must be relit?—No: if one has not yet lit, he must light it; or, in respect of the statutory period.

“Until there is no wayfarer in the street.” Until when [is that]?—Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in R. Yohanan’s name: Until the Palmyreans have departed.

Our Rabbis taught: The precept of Hanukkah [demands] one light for a man and his household; the zealous [kindle] a light for each member [of the household]; and the extremely zealous,—the school of Shammai maintain: On the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but the school of Hillel say: On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased. “Ulla said: In the West [that is Palestine] two amoraim, R. Yose b. Abin and R. Yose b. Zebida, differ therein: one maintains, The reason of the school of Shammai is that it shall correspond to the days still to come, and that of the school of Hillel is that it shall correspond to the days that are gone; but another maintains: the school of Shammai’s reason is that it shall correspond to the bull-ocks of the Festival, whilst the school of Hillel’s reason is that we promote in [matters of] sanctity but do not reduce.

47 The translation is based on the Soncino edition with minor changes, following the Vilna edition of the Babylonian Talmud.
48 See Benovitz, “‘Until the Feet of the Tarmoda’i are Gone.’”
49 That is the festival of Tabernacles.
Rabbah b. Bar Hana said: There were two elders in Sidon: one did as the school of Shammai and the other as the school of Hillel: the former gave the reason of his action that it should correspond to the bullocks of the Festival, while the latter stated his reason because we promote in [matters of] sanctity but do not reduce.

Our Rabbis taught: It is incumbent to place the Hanukkah lamp by the door of one’s house on the outside; if one dwells in an upper chamber, he places it at the window nearest the street. But in times of danger it is sufficient to place it on the table. Rava said: Another lamp is required for its light to be used; yet if there is a blazing fire it is unnecessary. But in the case of an important person, even if there is a blazing fire another lamp is required.

What is Hanukkah? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day’s lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.

We learnt elsewhere:50 If a spark which flies from the anvil goes forth and causes damage, he [the smith] is liable. If a camel laden with flax passes through a street, and the flax overflows into a shop, catches fire at the shopkeeper’s lamp, and sets the building alight, the camel owner is liable; but if the shopkeeper placed the light outside, the shopkeeper is liable. R. Judah said: In the case of a Hanukkah lamp he is exempt. Rabina said in Rav’s name: This proves that the Hanukkah lamp should [in the first instance] be placed within ten [cubits]. For should you think, above ten, let him say to him, “You ought to have placed it higher than a camel and his rider.” “Yet perhaps if he is put to too much trouble, he may refrain from the [observance of the] precept.”

R. Kahana said, R. Nathan b. Minyomi expounded in R. Tanhum’s name: [22a] If a Hanukkah lamp is placed above twenty cubits [from the ground] it is unfit, like sukkah and a cross-beam over [the entrance of] an alley.

Rabbah said: The Hanukkah lamp should be placed within the handbreadth nearest the door. And where is it placed?—Rav Aha son of Rava said: On the right hand side: Rav Samuel of Difi said: On the left hand side. And the law is, on the left, so that the Hanukkah lamp shall be on the left and the mezuzah on the right.

50 M. Bava Qamma 6:6.
Rav Judah said in R. Assi’s name: One must not count money by the Hanukkah light. When I stated this before Samuel, he observed to me: Has then the lamp sanctity? Rav Joseph demurred: Does blood possess sanctity? For it was taught: he shall pour out [the blood thereof], and cover it [with dust]: wherewith he pours out, he must cover, that is, he must not cover it with his foot, so that precepts may not appear contemptible to him. So here too it is that precepts may not appear contemptible to him.

R. Joshua b. Levi was asked: Is it permitted to make use of the booth decorations during the whole of the seven days? He answered him, Behold! It was said: One must not count money by the Hanukkah light. God of Abraham! Exclaimed R. Joseph, he makes that which was taught dependent upon what was not taught: [of] booths it was taught, whereas of Hanukkah it was not. For it was taught: If one roofs it [the booth] in accordance with its requirements, beautifies it with hangings and sheets, and suspends therein nuts, peaches, almonds, pomegranates, grape clusters, garlands of ears of corn, wines, oils and flours; he may not use them until the conclusion of the last day of the Feast; yet if he stipulates concerning them, it is all according to his stipulation.—Rather, said Rav Joseph: The basis of all is [the law relating to] blood.

It was stated: Rav said: One must not light from lamp to lamp; but Samuel maintained: You may light from lamp to lamp. Rav said: Fringes may not be detached from one garment for [insertion in] another, but Samuel ruled, Fringes may be detached from garment to garment. Rav said: The law is not as R. Simeon in respect to dragging; but Samuel maintained: The law is as R. Simeon in respect to dragging. Abaye said: In all matters the Master [Rabbah] acted in accordance with Rav, except in these three, where he did as Samuel: one may light from lamp to lamp…

One of the Rabbis sat before R. Adda b. Ahavah and sat and said: Rav’s reason is on account of the cheapening of the precept. Said he to them, do not heed him: Rav’s reason is because he impairs the precept. Wherein do they differ?—They differ where he lights from lamp to lamp: on the view that it is because of the cheapening of the precept, one may light from lamp to lamp; but on the view that it is because he impairs the precept, even from lamp to lamp is forbidden. [22b] second tithe, one may not weigh by it gold denarii, even to redeem therewith other second tithe. Now, it is well if you say that Rav and Samuel differ [over direct lighting] from lamp to lamp, yet with a chip Samuel admits that it is forbidden: then this is not a refutation. But if you [on Samuel’s view] say that it is permitted even with a chip, then this is a refutation?—Rabbah answered: It is a preventive measure, lest he does not find his weights exact and leaves them hulling.

R. Sheshet objected: Without the veil of testimony…shall [Aaron] order it: does He then require its light: surely, during the entire forty years that the Israelites travelled in the wilderness they travelled only by His light! But it is a testimony to mankind that the Divine Presence rests in Israel. What is the testimony?—Said
Rav: That was the western branch [of the candelabrum] in which the same quantity of oil was poured as into the rest, and yet he kindled [the others] from it and ended therewith. Now here, since the branches are immovable, it is impossible other than that he take [a chip] and kindle [it]; which is a difficulty both on the view that it is because of the cheapening of the precept and on the view that it is because of the impairing of the precept?—Rav Papa reconciled it [thus: it is lit] by long wicks. Yet after all, on the view that it is because of the impairing of precepts there is a difficulty? That is [indeed] a difficulty.

What is our decision thereon?—Rav Huna, the son of Rav Joshua, said: We consider: if the lighting fulfils the precept, one may light from lamp to lamp: but if the placing [of the lamp] fulfils the precept, one may not light from lamp to lamp. For the scholars propounded: Does the kindling or the placing constitute the precept?—Come and hear: For Rava said, If one was holding the Hanukkah lamp and thus standing, he does nothing: this proves that the placing constitutes the precept!—[No:] There a spectator may think that he is holding it for his own purposes. Come and hear: For Rava said: if one lights it within and then takes it outside, he does nothing. Now, it is well if you say that the kindling constitutes the precept; [for this reason] we require the kindling to be [done] in its proper place, [and] therefore he does nothing. But if you say that the placing constitutes the precept, why has he done nothing?—There too an observer may think that he lit it for his own purposes.

Come and hear: For R. Joshua b. Levi said [23a] With regard to a lantern which was burning the whole day [of the Sabbath], at the conclusion of the Sabbath it is extinguished and then [re-]lit. Now, it is well if you say that the kindling constitutes the precept: then it is correct. But if you say that the placing constitutes the precept, is this [merely] extinguished and [re-]lit: surely it should [have stated], It must be extinguished, lifted up, replaced and then relit? Moreover, since we pronounce a benediction, “Who sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to kindle the lamp of Hanukkah,” it proves that the kindling constitutes the precept. This proves it.

And now that we say that the kindling constitutes the precept, if a deaf-mute, idiot, or minor lights it, he does nothing. But a woman may certainly light [it], for R. Joshua b. Levi said: The [precept of the] Hanukkah lamp is obligatory upon women, for they too were concerned in that miracle.

R. Sheshet said: The [precept of the] Hanukkah lamp is incumbent upon a guest. R. Zera said: Originally, when I was at the academy, I shared the cost with my host; but after I took a wife I said, Now I certainly do not need it, because they kindle [the lamp] on my behalf at my home.

R. Joshua b. Levi said: All oils are fit for the Hanukkah lamp, but olive oil is of the best. Abaye observed: At first the Master [Rabbah] used to seek poppy-seed oil, saying, The light of this is more lasting; but when he heard this [dictum]
of R. Joshua b. Levi, he was particular for olive oil, saying, This yields a clearer light…

R. Hiyya b. Ashi said: He who lights the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing; while R. Jeremiah said He who sees the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing. Rav Judah said: On the first day, he who sees must pronounce two [separate benedictions], and he who lights must pronounce three blessings; thereafter, he who lights pronounces two, and he who sees pronounces one. What is omitted?—The “season” is omitted. Yet let the ‘miracle’ be omitted? The miracle holds good for every day.

What benediction is uttered?—This: Who sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukkah. And where did He command us?—R. Avia said: [It follows] from, “you shall not turn aside” (Deut. 17:11). R. Nehemiah quoted: “Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you” (Deut. 32:7)…. 

R. Huna said: If a courtyard has two doors, it requires two [Hanukkah] lamps. Said Rava: That was said only [if they are situated] at two [different] sides; but [if] on the same side, it is unnecessary. What is the reason? Shall we say, because of suspicion? Whose suspicion? Shall we say, that of strangers: then let it be necessary even on the same side? Whilst if the suspicion of townspeople, then even [if] on two different sides it is still unnecessary?—After all, it is on account of the suspicion of the townspeople, yet perchance they may pass one [door] and not the other, and say, “just as it [the lamp] has not been lit at this door, so has it not been lit at the other.”… 

Rav Isaac b. Redifah said in R. Huna’s name: A lamp with two spouts is credited to two people. Rava said: If one fills a dish with oil and surrounds it with wicks, and places a vessel over it, it is credited to many people; if he does not place a vessel over it, he turns it into a kind of fire, and is not credited even to one.

Rava said: It is obvious to me [that if one must choose between] the house light and the Hanukkah light, the former is preferable, on account [of the importance] of the peace of the home; [between] the house light and [wine for] the Sanctification of the Day, the house light is preferable, on account of the peace of the home. Rava propounded: What [if the choice lies between] the Hanukkah lamp and the Sanctification of the Day: is the latter more important, because it is permanent; or perhaps the Hanukkah lamp is preferable, on account of advertising the miracle? After propounding, he himself solved it: The Hanukkah lamp is preferable, on account of advertising the miracle.

The scholars propounded: Is Hanukkah to be mentioned in grace after meals? Since it is a Rabbinical [institution], we do not mention it; or perhaps it is mentioned to give publicity to the miracle?—Said Rava in R. Sehora’s name in R. Huna’s name: It need not be mentioned; yet if one comes to mention it, he does so in the “Thanks” [benediction]. Rav Huna b. Judah chanced to visit Rava’s
academy [and] thought to mention it [Hanukkah] in [the benediction] “he will rebuild Jerusalem.” Said R. Sheshet to them [the scholars]. It is as the Prayer: Just as [it is inserted in] the Prayer in the [benediction of ] “Thanks,” so [is it inserted in] grace after meals in the [benediction of] “Thanks.”

The scholars propounded: Is New Moon to be mentioned in grace after meals? Should you say that it is unnecessary in the case of Hanukkah, which is only Rabbinical, then on New Moon, which is Biblical, it is necessary; or perhaps since the performance of work is not forbidden, it is not mentioned? Rav said: It is mentioned; R. Hanina said: It is not mentioned. R. Zeriqa said: Hold fast to Rav’s [ruling], because R. Oshaia supports him. . . .

The scholars propounded: Should one refer to Hanukkah in the Additional Services? Since there is no Additional Service for [Hanukkah] itself, we do not refer to it; or perhaps it [the Sabbath and New Moon] is a day which requires four services?—Rav Huna and Rav Judah both maintain: It is not referred to; Rav Nahman and R. Yohanan both maintain: It is referred to. Abaye observed to Rav Joseph. This [ruling] of Rav Huna and Rav Judah is [synonymous with] Rav’s. For Rav Gidal said in Rav’s name: If New Moon falls on the Sabbath, he who reads the Haftarah in the prophetic lesson need not mention New Moon, since but for the Sabbath there is no prophetic lesson on New Moon. How compare! There, there is no prophetic lesson on New Moon at all; whereas here it [the reference to Hanukkah] is found in the Evening, Morning and Afternoon Services. Rather it is similar to the following . . .

Bibliography


Boyce, Mary. “Ātaš-zōhr and Āb-zōhr,” JRAS (1966), 100–118.


—. A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1941.


Rankin, Oliver S. *The Origins of the Festival of Hanukkah: The Jewish New-Age Festival*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930.


