Persia in Light of the Babylonian Talmud

Echoes of Contemporary Society and Politics: 
* hargbed and bidaxš*

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Introduction
One of the characteristics of the study of the Sasanian empire, and in particular its administrative hierarchy, is the diversity of sources that must be summoned for the task. In the absence of a detailed coherent narrative, scholars turn to literary sources in numerous ancient languages written before, during, and after the Sasanian era, from both within and beyond the borders of the empire, and decipher contemporary inscriptions on rocks, gems, bullae, ostraca, and papyri all in order to patch together the sparse data.¹ One of these contemporary literary sources is the Babylonian Talmud.² The BT’s potential for the study of the Sasanian history has not, however, been fully realized, both due to the compartmentalization of scholarship, and due to the fact that much

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¹ This article is a revised version of the lecture delivered at the conference, *Talmud in its Iranian Context*, UCLA, Los Angeles, May 6-7, 2007, but includes additional material, particularly the section on the bidaxš. My deep thanks to the participants and the audience at the conference. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan, of UCLA, are to be especially congratulated for the initiative and organization of the conference: גַּרְפֶּד בֶּדֶאָס (b.Bava Metzia 119a).
I would like to express my appreciation to Aaron Amit of Bar-Ilan University for his helpful comments on this paper and to M. Rahim Shayegan for providing me with additional biographical references.


² For a recent list of Iranian loanwords, mostly from the BT, including many from the realm of state administration, see Shaul Shaked, “Iranian Loanwords in Middle Aramaic,” in *Elr* 2 (1986): 259-61.
of the relevant scholarship appears only in Hebrew.\footnote{Already Nöldeke recognised the value of the rabbinic sources, as can be seen in the notes to his translation of Tabari. Notwithstanding the efforts of others (e.g., Salomon Funk, “Beiträge zur Geschichte Persiens zur Zeit der Sasaniden,” in Festschrift Adolf Schwarz, eds. Victor Aptowitzer and Samuel Krauss [Berlin & Wien: R. Löwit Verlag, 1917], 425-36), it is primarily in the work of two scholars that a more systematic approach is attempted, revealing the value of the BT as a primary source for the study of the Sasanian empire: Krauss, *Paras ve-Romi ba-Talmud u-va-Midrashim* [= Persia and Rome in the Talmud and in the Midrashic Literature] (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1948), published posthumously, progresses through topics such as “kingdom,” “grandees and functionaries,” “army and warfare,” “customs and taxes in Persia,” presenting the talmudic sources. This composition was, however, unfinished when published, and is replete with errors and lacks indices. Of a different nature are the numerous contributions by Bernhard (Dov) Geiger to the *Additamenta ad librum Aruch Completum* (Wien: Publications of the Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1937). Although essentially lexicographical, in his analysis of Sasanian terms we encounter a learned combination of Iranology and Rabbinics seldom found elsewhere. He also published a number of lexicographical studies in German, e.g., Geiger, “Zu den iranischen Lehnwörtern im Aramaeischen,” *WZKM* 37 (1930): 195-203; *idem*, “Mittelpersische Wörter und Sachen,” *WZKM* 42 (1935): 114-128; *idem*, “Mittelpersische Wörter und Sachen II,” *WZKM* 44 (1937): 52-54; *idem*, “Aus Mittelpersischen Materialien,” *Archiv Orientalní* 10 (1938): 210-14. See also Ezra Spicehandler, “Notes on Gentile Courts,” *HUCA* 26 (1955): 339.} It is, of course, obvious that such a situation is to the detriment of all,\footnote{Lack of familiarity with the Sasanian sources has lead to erroneous conclusions. For example, the *hazārbed* has been identified by some Jewish historians with the Talmudic term *ייזירסיפּי*, the lowly punitive officers, affiliated to the judicial system (b.Shabbat 139a, b. Sanhedrin 98a, and b. Ta’anit 20a). See Funk, “Beiträge,” 434; Krauss, *Paras ve-Romi*, 146-47; Spicehandler, “The Local Community in Talmudic Babylonia: Its Institutions, Leaders and Ministrants” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 1952), 26, but corrected in *idem*, “Notes on Gentile Courts,” 354, n. 92; Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 54, n. 1; *idem*, Review of Émile Benveniste, *Titres et noms propres en iranien ancien*. Travaux de l’institut d’études iraniennes de l’université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1 (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1966), in *JAOS* 88, 2 (1968): 362. It appears, however, in a most privileged position in third century royal monumental inscriptions, where it is clearly confined to members of the royal dynasty. See the recent survey by M. Rahim Shayegan, “Hazarbed,” in *Ebr* 12 (2003): 93-95, for further literature; see also the detailed and important study by Geiger in *Additamenta*, 118-19. The contemporary BT, on the other hand, explicitly lists the *ייזירסיפּי* (n.b. always in the plural!) among the lower ranks, to which Jews are not even appointed, and this precisely to epitomize their low status, see b.Ta’anit 20a.} but the gap which exists be-
tween the Iranologists and the Talmudists appears, unfortunately, to be widening.

Other developments within the field of Sasanian history, not directly related to the BT, also seem to have adversely affected the status of the BT as a useful source for Sasanian history. Earlier studies on the Sasanian administrative hierarchy have been heavily weighted in favour of the post-Sasanian Arabic literary sources. However, in recent decades there has been a tendency to construct our picture of the Sasanian administrative hierarchy on the basis of contemporary sources. There has even been a proposal to divide the available sources, a priori, according to a hierarchy of usefulness, based on various considerations, generally privileging the Iranian sources and contemporary epigraphic evidence over others. The proliferation of epigraphic sources has certainly encouraged such an approach and yielded valuable results. Some scholars have contrasted “official” Sasanian sources to “foreign” sources, and exhibited a preference for the former. Others have nuanced the advantages of this approach by observing – and establishing – the tendentiousness of many of our contemporary Iranian epigraphic sources, such as royal inscriptions, and the problems attending their use for an accurate reconstruction of the administrative hierarchy.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Especially Christensen, L’Iran sous les Sassanides.


\(^7\) See, for example, M. Rahim Shayegan, “Aspects of Early Sasanian History and Historiography” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999), on the historiographical practices of the Sasanians of employing narrative, thematic, and phaseological patterns characteristic of oral (epic) literature in their compositions of historical accounts. See also Albert De Jong, “Zoroastrian Religious Polemics and Their Contexts: Interconfessional Relations in the Sasanian Empire,” in Religious Polemics in Context: Papers Presented to the Second International
Within this broader picture, with a constantly growing corpus of epigraphic evidence one might be tempted to demote the BT to a position of secondary importance. It should not, however, be forgotten that in the realm of local administration the BT provides a unique and indispensable contemporary perspective regarding the administrative mechanism. In view of the general paucity and fragmentary nature of the evidence on the Sasanian administrative bureaucracy, in particular for the third and fifth centuries, the BT should be given due consideration. But its worth is not so much about quantity but of its unique quality. As a product of integrated Sasanian subjects, indigenous and immersed in the culture of the region, as well as reflecting their local experience, the BT has few parallels among other Sasanian sources. Indeed, it has the potential to convey to us some of the flavour of life in the Sasanian empire that few other sources offer. This rare perspective comes to play, no less, in how it relates to the Sasanian offices. A case in point is the āxwarrbed, or “stable-master” which I have addressed in a previous study. The title āxwarrbed appears in the list of officials on the royal inscription of Šābuhr at the Ka’abe-ye Zardošt, in the mid-third century. It is also attested in other literary sources. While the BT appearances have entered the philological discussions of the Iranologists, those concerned more generally with Sasanian society would do well to probe deeper into the BT, for it is, in fact, only from here that we can truly grasp the proverbial lowliness of the āxwarrbed in the contemporary imagination, and gain a taste of its mood and wit.


Therefore, the BT can hardly be ignored by serious scholars of Sasanian history and society, and yet the utilization of the BT as an historical source has many problems. In many ways, however, we are in a better position today to utilize this source than in the past. The application of a source critical methodology to the BT as is appropriate for the genre, has contributed towards ensuring that the historical data drawn from the BT is more reliable.\textsuperscript{12} Our ability to evaluate the Talmudic information on Sasanian administrative titles has also improved. These titles are essentially “foreign” words that are by their nature prone to defacement in the course of their transmission by generations of scribes for whom no ready means was available to clarify their correct form. However greater access to the manuscripts and geniza fragments of the Talmud and early textual witnesses, as well as tools for evaluating the textual variants, help increase our precision in the research of difficult terms.

In this paper, I shall discuss two Sasanian titles, the \textit{hargbed}\textsuperscript{13} (אָֹלֵ֖כַ֔פְּתָא) and the \textit{bidaxš}. In the first case, I wish to show that this key Sasanian title is reflected in the BT in striking accordance with the contemporary epigraphic Iranian evidence. To this end the pertinent rabbinic sources are submitted to a source critical analysis. In the second case, I shall assess the proposal of Nöldke and a number of subsequent Iranologists that the \textit{bidaxš} is attested in the BT. For that purpose I shall focus on evaluating the manuscript evidence. While with the \textit{hargbed} the identification of the Sasanian title is not in question, for the \textit{bidaxš} it is particularly the context wherein the title appears that can contribute to its identification. In both cases, however, it is precisely the portrayal of these titles, their context that is unique and reveals the invaluable role of the BT in offering us an alternative perspective, a popular and unofficial vantage-point from which to observe the Sasanian administrative hierarchy.

1. \textit{The hargbed (אָלֵ֖כַ֔פְּתָא)}

A Persian title appears in the bilingual Middle-Persian/Parthian inscription of Paikuli, a monument set up between 293-296 C.E.\textsuperscript{13} in the Middle-Persian

\textsuperscript{12} Here is an example relevant to the field of the Sasanian administrative hierarchy. Earlier Jewish historians have described the existence of the Greek civic office, \textit{agoranomos} in Sasanian Babylonia, supposedly appointed by the exilarch, basing themselves on sources found in both the PT and BT. Sasanian historians have generally accepted this information. However, my source critical study has revealed that the Talmudic evidence upon which this conclusion has been based actually originates in Palestinian sources that do not reflect Babylonian conditions. For the details, see my “The Babylonian Exilarchate in the Sasanian Period” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2005) (Hebrew with English abstract), 267-76 – an English translation is in preparation. See, also the recent discussion on the Talmudic traditions of Persian persecution by Richard Kalmin, \textit{Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 121-47.

\textsuperscript{13} The reference is to a \textit{hargbed} by the name of Šābuhr. The inscription is dated with certainty to these years, on the one hand, due to the mention of the Roman caesar Diocletian as
form פְּלֵגְפָּה, and is transliterated *hlgwpt/hrgwpt* (Parthian: *hrkpty*), and generally transcribed *hargbed*. It is also attested in Greek sources as ἄρκαπάτης/ἀρκαπάτης and in contemporary Palmyrene sources as ῥγάπατος. It is known from both the Parthian and Sasanian eras. Early scholarly uncertainty regarding the etymology of the title has been replaced by near consensus, largely on account of the unambiguous orthography on the Paikuli inscription, and the definition for the title accepted by most scholars lately and which seems reasonable is “chief of taxes.” It also appears in rabbinic

one of the well-wishers of Narseh, and on the other hand, because Narseh launched a war against Rome a short while thereafter.

14 The definition “head of a castle” has been rejected for a number of reasons, and in particular on account of the precise orthography provided by the Paikuli inscription. For the discussion of the etymology of the word and its orthography in the various sources, see Paul de Lagarde, *Semitica* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1878), 43-44; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, 5, n. 1; *idem*, “Beiträge zur Kenntniss der aramäischen Dialecte,” *ZDMG* 24 (1870): 107-8; Zsigmond Telegdy, “Essai sur la phonétique des emprunts iraniens en Araméen talmudique,” *JA* 226 (1935): 228-29; Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, 107; Ernst Herzfeld, *Paikuli: Monument and Inscription of the Early History of the Sasanian Empire*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), 492-99; Walter Sas, “Iranian Title,” *EIr* 2 [1987]: 400 continues to favour “fortress commander.”

sources as ורךבלא. These rabbinic sources have been cited and discussed by both Iranologists and historians of Babylonian Jewry, but, as I aim to demonstrate, they have generally not been read in their correct historical context and thus the importance of the rabbinic sources on the ḫark-bed has not been fully appreciated. In what follows, I shall study these rabbinic sources in light of their non-rabbinic counterparts. It is therefore necessary to begin by briefly summarizing the data from the non-rabbinic sources.

2. The ḫark-bed in non-Jewish Sources

The epigraphic and literary documentation for the ḫark-bed is varied. The title is first attested in a Greek document from 121 C.E. from Parthian Dura. A man named Phraates (Φραάτης) who was a eunuch and bureaucrat of the Parthian governor bore the title arkapatēs (ἀρκαπάτης). Three inscriptions from Palmyra from the 260s mention this office where it is appended to the official Roman title, procurator ducenarius. In the Paikuli inscription set up by Narsesh (293-303 C.E.), a ḫark-bed named Šābūr heads the list of notables and titled officers. Its prominence there is striking. The same ḫark-bed (ἄρχαρπατὴς Βαρσοβώρος), so it seems, is also mentioned by the Greek author, Petrus Patricius. He describes the reception of the Roman envoy at the court of Nar-

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There written ἀρχαρπατής and in Palmyrean, ṣארכביםא. For the early publication and discussion on the Palmyrean inscriptions, see Moritz Abraham Levy and Eduard Friedrich Beer, “Die palmyrischen Inschriften,” ZDMG 18 (1864): 89-90; Jean Baptiste Chabot, Choix d’inscriptions de Palmyre (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale – Paul Geuthner, 1922). For recent discussions, see Gnoli, The Interplay of Roman and Iranian Titles, and detailed references there to scholarship.

Herzfeld, Paikuli, 96-97, 1. 7; 102-103, 1. 20; 112-113, and l. 38; Prods Oktor Skjærvø, The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli, vol. 3, 1 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1983), 33-34, 37, 42, 45, 56, 63.

For the text of Patrus Patricius, see Immanuel Bekker and B. G. Niebuhr, eds, Dexippi, Eunapii, Petri Patricii, Prosci, Malchi, Menandri historium quae supersunt, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, 14 (Bonn: E. Weber, 1829), 135. See also Chaumont, “Researchers,” 32, 21. The minor correction of  for  is necessary. For an explanation on the creation of this form, see Szemerényi, 367, n. 207. It has also been suggested that this is the same as a certain hyparch called Sapore referred to in a recently published Manichaean Coptic text; see Niels Arne Pedersen, “A Manichaean Historical Text,” ZPE 119 (1997): 200.
ségoh in 298-299 C.E. Besides these sources the hargbed is also mentioned in the Christian martyrology literature of the Persian empire, in historical chronicles,21 and by Ṭabarī.22

We see through these sources a noticeable evolution in the status of this title. It was already used in the Parthian Empire,23 however, then it is depicted as a relatively low-ranking office. For instance, at Dura, it is a low-ranking revenue official who was subordinate to the Parthian governor, Manesos. At Palmyra it is the title of a civil fiscal official which, despite the importance of Palmyran trade at the time was still local.24 It remained insufficiently important for most of the third century. It is missing from Šābuhr I’s monumental inscription in Ka’be ye Zardošt. In this inscription, dated to around 260 C.E., members of the respective courts of Pābag, Ardašīr I, and of Šābuhr I are listed in order of importance. This entails a long list in an inscription which is fairly complete. The absence of the hargbed in these inscriptions is therefore noteworthy. On the other hand, a few decades later in the beginning of the reign of Narseh the sources reveal that the hargbed was now an office of the highest order within the Persian imperial hierarchy. It is not our concern here to explain how or why this happened,25 but only to observe that the sources reveal a clear line of development. Thus, the Paikuli inscription testifies that close to, or at the beginning of the reign of Narseh, the office of hargbed experienced “une promotion récente, aussi éclatante qu’exceptionnelle.”26

3. The hargbed in Rabbinic Sources

The hargbed is attested only a few times in rabbinic sources: It appears twice in the Palestinian Talmud (henceforth PT), and twice in the BT. These four Talmudic occurrences are, however, in reality two completely independent instances since, as we shall see below, one of the PT sources has evolved from the other, and one of the BT sources is merely a parallel version of the original PT source. It is also noteworthy that even though the term appears in the PT it is not a Palestinian, but essentially a Babylonian tradition. In addition to the Talmudic occurrences we also find the term a few times in the Biblical targums. Let us open by taking a closer look at the Talmudic sources.

21 Theophylactus, iii, 18: ἀργαβίδης.
23 For the Parthian era, see Harnack, “Parthische Titeln vornehmlich in den Inschriften aus Hatra,” 540-44; Gnoli, 95-113; see also Shifra H. Schnoll, “Parthian Mesopotamia: Greek Cities and Jewish Settlements” (Ph.D. diss., Jerusalem, 1975) (Hebrew), 104-5, 307-10.
24 See Gnoli, The Interplay of Roman and Iranian Titles.
25 See Szemerényi, 374.
26 Chaumont, “Recherches,” 14; and below, n. 64. Also see Szemerényi, 368. Rostovtzeff (Rostovtzeff and Wells, “A Parchment Contract,” 55) had already noted the significant difference in status between of the Parthian and Sasanian eras.
In y. Shevu'ot I, ii, (32d) there is a discussion regarding the various symptoms or signs of leprosy mentioned in the Bible for which a sacrifice must be brought in order to become purified. The basis for the discussion is Mishna Nega'im, 1, 1 which states that the shades of white, characteristic of leprosy consist of two principle shades, and a further two derivative or secondary shades. The Mishna then lists the four shades, describing the colouring of each. It begins with the principle shade with the most intense whiteness, then lists its derivative, next the other principle shade, and finally the derivative of the other. The PT, in discussing this mishna is interested in the relationship between these signs. It offers various parables to explain this relationship by reference to the imperial hierarchy. A series of examples, progressing through the amoraic generations are provided that reflect both the Roman and the Persian empires. It is the last example, provided by a Babylonian sage, Rav Ada bar Ahava as transmitted by R. Hanina, which is of interest to our discussion:

רבי חנינה בשם רב אחא

רמקל ורב חיליה וארקבה

וריש גלותא.

אמרת לאעזר ביר

יוסי: מסה לארקבה והאנורד מארד שארני זה הנחלות המות.

Rabbi Hanina in the name of Rav Aha bar Ahava: the king and the general and the arqabaṭa and the exilarch. Rabbi Le'azar the son of Rabbi Yose said before Rabbi Yose: [but] the Mishna states that they are not one above the other!

One may assume that the order presented here is intended to mirror the order in the Mishna, Nega'im noted above, whereby the sign is followed immediately by its derivative. Thus, the general is the derivative of the king and the exilarch is the derivative of the alqabaṭa. The exegetical point being made

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27 According to y. Shevu'ot 1: 1 (32d) and b. Shevu'ot 6a, the scriptural basis for this conclusion, derived from Leviticus 13:2, was understanding the word ספחת, not as “scab,” but in the sense of an attachment – for both the “rising” (שָאָם) and the “bright spot” (בְּהַרְת). A different approach appears in Sifra, Nega'im, (Tazri'a), 1, 4 [60a].

28 The legal significance of this distinction was apparently the ability of certain adjacent or derivative shades to combine in order to attain the minimum quantity required to be considered a leprous affection.

29 A detailed critical historical study of this important source is a desideratum. Valuable critical analysis of the sugya is found in Avram I. Reisner, “On the Origins of the Sugya: Tractate Shevuot of the Babylonian Talmud – Chapter One” (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1996), 206-40.

30 A Geniza fragment preserves the reading: אֲדָא. See Louis Ginzberg, Yerushalmi Fragments from the Genizah, vol. 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1909) 265, line 22. This Geniza fragment has the same name that appears in the BT version, thus אֲדָא בַּר אַחֲאָו אֲדָא בַּר אַחֲאָו. See Beer, The Babylonian Exilarchate (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1976), 25, n. 36; Ze‘er W. Rabinovitz, Sha'are Torath Eretz Israel (Jerusalem: Weiss Press, 1940) (Hebrew), 537.

31 Geniza fragment: מָלַכָּא.

32 Geniza fragment: אֵדֹלָה.

33 Geniza fragment: צְרָקְוֹת.

34 This reading, following the Geniza fragment and the BT parallels, is preferable to “his general.”
requires us then to understand that the *alqabaṭa* was in the second position in the hierarchy – immediately following the king.\(^{35}\) As such, the general is portrayed as inferior to the *alqabaṭa*. Rav Aḥa bar Aḥava’s parable is challenged by the fourth century C.E. Palestinian rabbi, Rabbi Le‘azar, the son of Rabbi Yose. It is possible that he was unfamiliar with the actual hierarchical distinctions in Babylonia, or perhaps appreciating the importance of the Aramaic title, *רַבָּ חַיִלָה* (general) but not the Persian title *alqabaṭa*, he assumed that they are listed in descending order of importance, and so he asserted that this list inaccurately reflects the relationship between the shades in the Mishna.

The source in the PT can be understood in light of the parallel from b. Shevu‘ot 6b:\(^{36}\)

"אר מרב ונענו משה לדודון בהוד ותוח... ויבא אשה בר אבב אוצר: כון מלכד אלקפתא ורופילא וירש עלות. אזו הלטע הלמה הוה אלא כון מלכד אלקפתא ורופילא וירש עלות.

Rabbi Hanina said: A rabbinic parable: To what shall we compare this... Rav Ada bar Ahava said: Such as the king, and the alqapaṭa, and the general\(^{37}\), and the exilarch. But

\(^{35}\) It is clear that the *alqabaṭa* would not have been considered equal to the king. On the BT version see below.

\(^{36}\) According to the Vilna edition.

\(^{37}\) אֵלֶּה thus only in the printed edition, but MS Vatican 156; MS Vatican Ebr 140; MS Firenze II, 1. 8-9; and MS Munich 95: אֵלֶּה.

The Talmud MSS consistently have *רַפִּילָה* and *רופילא* but the Arukh has *רַפִּילָה*. According to Jacob Levy, *Chaldaïsches Wörterbuch über die Targumim*, vol. II (Leipzig: Baumgärtner, 1868), 414, it is derived from Latin *rufulus*; see also Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnmörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, vol. II (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1899), 578; “Militärtribun,” (and see his *Paras ve-Romi ba-Talmud u-va-Midrashim*, 250) and many others. See also *Aruch Completum*, s.v. אָלָּקַפַּה, אָלָּקַפַּה, 292; Beer, *The Babylonian Exilarchate*, 25, n. 38, and there further references; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat Gan: Israel, Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 1067. Krauss’s suggestion was already rejected by Friedrich Schulthess, “Aramäisches (II),” *ZA* 24 (1910): 52, and *ibid.* 25 (1911): 293, who proposed a Greek term via Syriac. It is, however, unreasonable to expect terms derived from the Roman military in sources that originate from Babylonia. Furthermore, nothing close to “rufulus” is attested for the Sasanian army. Kohut’s alternative suggestion of a Persian derivation was rejected, as usual, by Geiger, *Additamenta*, 28, as untenable. Geiger rejected the possibility of *דִּרְפַּיָּא* in the grounds that the spelling בְּ רוּפִּיָּא is attested elsewhere. It also appears in Bava Metzia 49b; 107b; ‘Avoda Zara 33b, 61b, and in the targums. There can, however, be little doubt that this is, indeed, the same as the Aramaic *דִּרְפַּיָּא* of the PT parallel. Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 403, n. 29, takes it for a corruption. It is noteworthy that the historical spelling בְּ רוּפִּיָּא does not appear in the BT (including the manuscripts). The form בְּ רוּפִּיָּא should not, however, be understood so much as a scribal “corruption” of בְּ רוּפִּיָּא but as a dialectal form of the same reflecting its phonetic spelling. בְּ רוּפִּיָּא is attested as one word already in the Elephantine documents, and is also in Syriac; see Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1928), 706. Furthermore, it is probably the same as Mandaeic *rupiīsit*, a name given to *adunāt šabātu* in the Drower Collection of Mandaean manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Roll, Pa‘ar Miha, 816; see Ethel S. Drower and Rudolf Macuch, *A Mandaeic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). On the well-known phenomenon...
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this is one above the other, but rather: the king and the general, and the $alqapata$ and the exilarch.

The BT version first proposes a list where the $alqapaṭa$ precedes the general. This is considered the wrong order as it reflects, in descending order, their actual order of relative importance. The order is then corrected by switching the $alqapaṭa$ and the general around. This new order is the same as the list in the PT.  

The parable in the Palestinian Talmud and its parallel in the BT are ascribed to the rabbi, Ada bar Aḥava – according to the better manuscript readings and Ada bar Aḥava’s parable is transmitted by a fourth century Palestinian rabbi, Rabbi Ḥanina. There are two Babylonian rabbis bearing the name Ada bar Aḥava that are attested in the BT, one, considered a student of Rav, approximately from the late third century, and the second, a student of Rava, from the mid-fourth century who was a student of Rava. However we may only reasonably expect the earlier of the two to be mentioned in the PT, of erosion of the guttural $ḥ$ in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, see Jacob N. Epstein, A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic (Tel-Aviv: Magnes Press, 1960), 18; and recently, with respect to magic bowls, Matthew Morgenstern, “On some Non-standard Spellings in the Aramaic Magic Bowls and their Linguistic Significance,” JSS 52, 2 (2007): 251. See ibid., 264. I would like to acknowledge the helpful discussion about the term $ropheilah$ with Dr. Matthew Morgenstern of Haifa University.  

The formulation of the BT’s discussion on the list may be explained as follows: the BT may have received a version of the tradition similar to that in the PT, whereby the list is (unjustifiably) challenged as presented in order of importance; see above. The challenge might have reached them unattributed. Since, in Babylonia they were familiar with the correct order, they inverted the order of the $alqapaṭa$ and general where the tradition is first presented, and then provided the correction. This way they retained the challenge to the list, but in a way that was factually accurate. Reisner, 57, considers the challenge in the BT as stammaitic, however, it is part of the PT’s version of the source.  

This is the name in the manuscripts of the BT, see above, n. 45. For the situation with respect to the PT see above. See Reisner, 218, 238, n. 25.  

See Chanoch Albeck, Introduction to the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1987), 393-94.  

Ibid., 193. See b.Qiddushin 72b where he is said to have been born on the same day that Rabbi Judah I died. The scholarly literature on the date of the death of the latter is extensive. See Shmuel Safrai, “The Nesius in the Second and Third Centuries and its Chronological Problems,” in Proceedings of the Sixth world Congress of Jewish Studies, vol. II (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies (1975): 51-57; idem, In Times of Temple and Mishnah, Studies in Jewish History, vol. II (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994), 620-26; Neusner, vol. II, 126, n. 1, where the relevant literature is provided. He is also said to have lived a long life (b. Ta’anit 20b; y. Ta’anit 3,13, 67a).  

Albeck, Introduction, 354. Aaron Hyman, Toldoth Tannaim Ve-Amoraim, vol. I (Jerusalem: Kiryah Ne’emana, 1964), 103, opines there was a third Babylonian rabbi with this name but he belongs, at any rate, to a later period.  

In addition, his statement appears in the BT discussion before commentary by Rava – an irregular arrangement if the Rav Ada bar Aḥava was Rava’s student. As Reisner, 238, n.
which was completed at some point in the latter half of the fourth century and hardly mentions any traditions from the mid-fourth century Babylonian rabbis.

This description of the Sasanian hierarchy, and particularly the place of the exilarch therein, has been greatly discussed by scholars. Although early historians such as Graetz, based on this source, assumed that the exilarch was fourth in line in the Sasanian hierarchy, already Jost had expressed his reservations with respect to the elevated position of the exilarch here, and Nöldeke rejected this assumption altogether. Some have nevertheless attempted to salvage from this source some aspect of historical accuracy. Funk thought the exilarch was in the fourth rung of the aristocracy, and Nöldeke rejected this assumption altogether. It may not, however, be taken as indicative of the actual position of the exilarch in the Sasanian hierarchy. The Sasanian titles here have not, however, been randomly combined but rather derive from genuine knowledge of the proximity between the “general” and the hargbed, and the special relationship of the hargbed to the king. This proximity of the general to the hargbed, is affirmed by Ṭabarî, who states explicitly that the head of the army is above that of spāhbed and a little below that of the hargbed.

25, notes, it is puzzling that Albeck, Introduction, 354 attributes our statement to the latter of the two.


47 Nöldeke, Geschichte der Perser, 69.

48 Funk, Die Juden in Babylonien 200-500 (Berlin: M. Poppelaure, 1902), I 32-33.


50 = spāhbed “army commander.”

51 See de Goeje, Barth, Nöldeke, et al., vol. I, 869, ll. 2. See also the third name Kardar (کاردار): 13-10 صاحب الجيش الأعظم واسم مرتبط بالفارسية اسم خُوَرْسَان (شیران) هو مستمد من اسم مدينة الأزهري الأثرية. “Der Dritte, Kārdār, war Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres und führte den persischen Titel Artšātarān-sālār, das ist mehr als Spābbedh und beinahe so viel wie Argabedh” (Nöldeke, Geschichte der Perser, 111). A possible testimony for the closeness of these two offices might be seen in the Christian sources that deal with the fifth century. A certain Farādīb (أفراديب) of al-Asfar from the house of the Argabedh (Al-Asfar Mihrāb) is mentioned in the account of
This parable on leprosy seems to have served as the basis for another tradition that mentions the *alqapaṭa*, as I shall demonstrate. Within a discussion that addresses the difficulty in concentrating during prayer, we find in y. Berakhot 2, 4, 5a the following reflection by R. Ḥiyya the Great:

אֵמָ' רִיהִי רְבּוֹא לַמָּתָן אָלָם dhe tōm bi yem mohet ha-rēmah bīlūr o-mēriyah — 'אֵמָ' לָא קֹדֵם מָלָא קְדֵםָא rahăriy ḫēlōma;

R. Ḥiyya the Great said: I have never concentrated [in prayer] but one time, I sought to concentrate and I [found myself] pondering to myself and saying ‘who enters first before the king: is it the *arqabaṭa* or the exilarch?’

This tradition opens a series of reflections, none with the sense of *gravité* appropriate for a serious legal discussion, on the challenge of focusing during prayer. Although this tradition is attributed to “R. Ḥiyya the Great,” a late second century/early third century *tanna* of Babylonian origin, that would ostensibly place it before the other traditions we have considered, it should actually be considered as coming after it, due to the following considerations. Its literary relationship to the other PT source we have discussed is evident from the church synod of 410 C.E., whereas Elia from Nisibis, a church father, speaks of the same Mihr-sābūr, in the reign of Warahrahān V (420-438 C.E.), as a Ḥayyā bēr Yāwha. See Chabot, *Synodicon orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens*, Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, 37 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 21, ll. 21-2; and 260.


Following this statement Samuel confesses to counting birds (*birds* and not *chicks*, on the basis of the reading in the Geniza fragment; see Ginzberg, *Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud*, vol. I, 346), R. Bun bar Ḥiyya to counting rows of stones, and R. Matanya can be sure that by the time he reaches the “We thank you” benediction (when bowing is required) his head will bow of its own accord. The rabbis are ordered chronologically.

It should be noted that MS Rome has ‘R. Hiyya,’ which in the PT would indicate R. Hiyya bar Abba, a fourth century amora. This reading is also cited by additional medieval commentators (such as the *Ran* on the *Rif* (Rosh Hashana, I); the responsa Beer Sheva’ 69; responsa Yabi’a Omer, III, Orah Ḥayyim 8) and the reading *רִיהִי רְבּוֹא* actually appears explicitly in some commentaries. See Ratner, *Ahadath Zion We-Jerusolaim*, 55. The placement of his statement before Shemuel should indicate that the editor understood that an earlier Hiyya was being referred to, however, note also Joel Sirkis’s reading “R. Yohanan” in place of “R. Matanya” when he cites the PT for the parallel in b. Bava Batra 154b. These medieval readings might slightly undermine our confidence with the reading *רִיהִי רְבּוֹא*.
It also takes as its starting point the misunderstanding of Rav Ada bar Ḥava’s dictum in the PT, as presented above. It assumes that the list is in descending order, and so deliberates between the last two titles in this list. Hence, it is probably posterior to the challenge by R. Leʻazar, the son of R. Yose in the fourth century. The structure of this statement furthermore mirrors other PT traditions that relate to the order of entry before the patron, as was customary in the Roman practice of salutatio. Sources that explicitly depict the practice of salutatio appear in the PT with respect to sages that belong to the third and fourth centuries C.E. The formulaic similarity to these salutatio traditions is significant for how we evaluate this dictum. Despite R. Ḥiyya’s Babylonian origins, and even if one were to insist on the Babylonian provenance of this tradition, one would have to contend with the indelible signs of its reworking and adaptation to the unique social practices of the Roman world. Additional considerations for

59 It should also be compared to the statement that appears close by, in y. Berakhot 4, 6, (8c) whereby Shemuel declares that he has only once prayed the Musaf prayer, when the son of the exilarch died and the public did not pray:

דשמואל אמר: אנא פניך לא צלית דמוספא אלא חד זמן דמית בריה דריש גלותא ולא צלו ציבורא עלי

A parallel to that statement in the BT (Berakhot 30a-b) provides an alternative reason for the same that does not involve the exilarch. In that case, as I have argued in my doctoral thesis (190-91) the PT and BT provide alternative explanations for the non-prayer of Shemuel, each appropriate to their society (and city structure). Combining that source with this one on R. Ḥiyya (the Great), one does have a sense that the PT is associating Babylonian rabbis with the exilarch for the sake of the law that they intend to promote.


61 Michael Avi-Yonah, The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 47, surmises that in the days of Rabbi Judah I (late second and early third century C.E.) the salutatio practice commenced in the patriarchal house, this despite the fact that the testimony only begins with his grandson; see my “The Babylonian Exilarchate in the Sasanian Period,” 156-57.

62 Babylonian rabbinic society was unfamiliar with this Roman practice. For example, in the story of the deposition of Rabban Gamaliel, that is recorded in the PT and BT in parallel accounts, the phrase אֲנִי וְאַתָּךְ לְפַחְּדוּ דַּלֶּךָ מִלְחָדָה אֲנִי מַלְעָלָה, a formula for describing salutatio, appears at the conclusion of the story in the Palestinian version (y.Berakhot 4, 1, 7d), signifying willingness to subordinate to the patriarch. Its significance is missed in the BT version (Berakhot 27b-28a) that while citing the statement itself, continues to deliberate on the terms.
doubting that this source is a genuine tannaitic tradition include the fact that it appears in Aramaic instead of the more usual Hebrew, and indeed is part of a list of statements that are entirely in Aramaic and all the other interlocutors are amoras; the fact that it mentions the exilarchate, but the exilarch is not mentioned in any compositions that date to the tannaitic era. I suspect, in fact, as I have argued elsewhere, that the exilarchate did not even exist before the Sasanian era. In consideration of the stylistic and substantive similarities to other sources we have mentioned and cited, it would be reasonable to ascribe this tradition to a similar time frame. Earlier scholars, however, have treated this source as an historical testimony. It has been used as evidence for the existence of the exilarchate during the lifetime of R. Hiyya, the status of the exilarch at the Arsacid court, and the privileged status of R. Hiyya for being privy to such information. However, as we can see, in light of the non-rabbinic sources, it is unlikely that the office of hargbed was important enough for the historical R. Hiyya to ponder about, while in light of the rabbinic evidence, it is reasonable to see the attribution to R. Hiyya as non-historical, and treat this tradition as secondary to the other, and to date it accordingly.

The other example provided by the BT appears in tractate Zebahim 96b:

66 ר' יוחנן בר רב דראמי קמיה שכיח היה יודה בריה יצחק' ר' לקמיה ששת דרב ואזל שבמקיה יומא חד אשכחיה אמר ליה רמאי [רחמא בר] ארקפתא נקטן; ביד ריח אתי ליה. לידה אמר ליה. ליה המשומש שואתל לקמיה דרב ששחתיו [כ ר' ששח[ה]].

of the reconciliation. Shapira, “The Deposition,” sees the Palestinian version of this story as a third century creation. See also Herman, 142, n. 625 (Hebrew with English Abstract).

63 Herman, 127-94.

64 Notably, Neusner, vol. I, 102, 108. Chaumont, “Argbed,” 400, seems to have toned down her own earlier portrayal of the development of the hargbed from the Parthian to the Sasanian period in light of Neusner’s conclusions. She notes that “the presence of a high official holding the same title [i.e., hargbed G.H.] at the Parthian royal court is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud.”


66 Presented here according to MS Aleppo (= “French” version) cited in the Epistle of Rav Sherira Gaon, (Lewin ed., 45). I have only noted the variants necessary for the coherence of this source. There is nothing in any of the Talmud and epistle variants that adversely affects the point I am making from this source.

67 Thus the Yuhasin version – (ed. Constantinople) [= ‘Spanish’ version] and the BT: פָּנָן אָסָדַד אָסָדַד יַעֲבֹר בָּאָסָדַד.

68 Thus the Yuhasin version; missing in MS Aleppo.

69 Minor variations in the other witnesses of the epistle.

70 Thus Yuhasin version, and additional “Spanish” witnesses, and the BT. In MS Aleppo: יהוי.

71 Missing in the Yuhasin version.
Rav Yiḥaqq the son of Rav Yehuda was regularly before Rami bar Ḥama [i.e., as his student].
He left him and went [to study] before Rav Sheshet.
One day he encountered him,
He said to him: An Arqapata has taken one by the hand; a scent has reached the hand.
He said to him: Because you have gone before Rav Sheshet will you become like Rav Sheshet?!

The student has abandoned his teacher and gone to another. One day he has the misfortune of running into his disgruntled former teacher and is called upon to explain himself. Rami bar Ḥama is presumably citing a popular saying. In the words of Rashi, we have here “a parable relating to the arrogant who strive to stand in the place of superiors and say: ‘the duke has taken me by the hand and the scent of royalty has been absorbed into my hand.’”

He must be referring to an especially high office in order to convey his point and here Rav Sheshet is compared through this image to such an officer. As far as the saying goes, “king” would have been just as suitable and alqapata may have been evoked because it was topical. It is, in fact, the timeliness of the mention of the alqapata that is of particular interest. Based on the internal relative chronology of the BT, both Rami bar Ḥama and Rav Sheshet would have been the masters they are, as reflected in this source – towards the end of the third and very early fourth centuries C.E. – which corresponds very well with the time frame seen in the Iranian testimony of the emergence of the hargbed to prominence.

Finally, we shall briefly note the testimony from a number of different targums. In these texts alqabaṭa is used to refer to the second position in the kingdom, immediately after the king. According to Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 41, 44 (“I am Pharoah and apart from yourself none shall raise their hand nor leg in all the Land of Egypt”) Pharoah said to Joseph: “I am king Pharaoh and...
roah and you are the *alqabaṭ*.” And likewise with the verse from Esther, 10, 3: “For Mordechai the Jew was second to the King Ahasuerus and a great man for the Jews,” we find that according to many of the MSS of the First Targum of Esther, Mordechai had become the *alqabaṭ* to a king of excellent Persian credentials – Ahasuerus. The Aramaic Targum for the words *משנה למלך* in 2 Chronicles 28, 7 is also *ארumnos דמלכא*. These references certainly do not date prior to the end of the third century C.E. and most, if not all of these targums themselves, even post-date the Sasanian era.

In summary, we have examined two PT and two BT sources that mention the *hargbed*. One of the PT traditions is obviously a parallel version to one of the BT traditions. We have argued that the other PT tradition is of a secondary nature, stemming from the first PT tradition, and thereby posterior to it. Thus there exist two fully independent Talmudic traditions that mention the *hargbed*, and both evoke the office of *hargbed* in the same generation. This time frame corresponds to the very period when it grew in importance within the Sasanian hierarchy. These Talmudic sources indeed portray it in a manner reflecting this new importance. The correspondence between the Talmudic and Sasanian sources is also attested by the fact that one of these sources has mentioned the *hargbed* in a statement that reflects on the top positions within the Sasanian hierarchy. Furthermore, the comparison between the *hargbed* and general has a precise parallel in the works of Ṭabarī, who used Sasanian sources. It appears that echoes of developments within the Sasanian imperial hierarchy resonate quite audibly in the Talmudic sources.

The *bidaxš*

One of the more exalted titles within the Sasanian administrative hierarchy was the *bidaxš*. It is fairly widely attested during the Sasanian era in both Iranian and non-Iranian sources. It appears in epigraphic sources such as the third century royal monumental rock inscriptions and inscriptions on tombs and objects – in diverse places such as Georgia, Hatra, Paikuli, and Iran; as well as in literary sources, such as Armenian, Latin and Greek chronicles, and Syriac martyrologies. It is documented in various forms but we shall

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75 Moses Ginsburger, *Pseudo-Jonathan* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1903), 78: 
77 Pinkhos Churgin, *The Targum to Hagiographa* (New York: Horev, 1945), 190: 
limit ourselves here to noting the forms it takes in Aramaic sources. In Syriac, it appears as ܦܛܚܫܐ, ܐܦܛܚܫܐ, ܐܦܛܟܫܐ, and in Aramaic script from Hatra as ܒܛܚܫא and ܡܝܚܫא. There is not complete agreement regarding the etymology of this term, but the more probable explanation sees it as something like “vice-roy.”

There were a number of incumbents at any one time, generally members of the Sasanian dynasty who represented the king in various provinces, perhaps particularly in the border provinces. We lack detailed information with regard to its function, which was probably both administrative and military, but in practice, the details might also have varied slightly from place to place and with time.

The question is whether this title also appears in the BT. An interesting situation has emerged whereby a number of scholars, particularly Iranologists, in discussing the etymology of bidaxš have included references to the BT but this Persian identification is entirely absent from the mainstream Talmudic lexicographical literature. Nöldeke first identified as bidaxš the word that

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80 The most recent detailed study is in Khurshudian, 19-53.
81 For Šābuhr I’s inscription on the Kā′be-ye Zardušt dated 262 C.E., see Michael Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, Acta Iranica 18 – Textes et Mémoires VIII. (Téhéran and Liège: Bibilothèque Pahlavi, 1978; distributed by E. J. Brill), 152; for Narsēh’s inscription from 293-296 C.E., see Helmut Humbach and Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *The Sasanian Inscription of Paikuli*, vol. 3.1: Restored Text and Translation (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1983), 90.
84 See Mar Qardagh (see below).
85 See Brockelmann, 40: 564.
88 Ammianus Marcellinus (13.6.14), for instance, writing in the fourth century C.E. equates it to a *magister equitum*, “master of the cavalry.” A military role is also basic to the appointment of Mar Qardagh as both marzbān and bidaxš. See Paul Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriac*, vol. II (Paris: Otto Harrassowitz, 1891), 445.
appears in the printed edition of the BT, Shabbat 94a and Megilla 12b with the spelling פרדשא. He preferred the Arukh’s orthography: פרךשא, and assumed the minor change to פרדכשא. The Italian Iranologist, Pagliaro independently, albeit 50 years later, also made the connection. He suggested that the spelling found in the printed editions of the Talmud is corrupted and should be corrected to reflect bidaxš. Most recent Talmud lexicographers have also considered this Talmudic word to be Persian, but they have promoted other candidates. They have generally accepted the orthography of the printed editions, or with the minor alteration to פרדכשא— as some MSS have it, and sought appropriate contenders. Let us first attempt to establish the most probable original orthography. The following table summarizes the data from the principle textual witnesses I have found for the word in b.Megilla and Shabbat. It lists the three forms attested, and the witnesses where each of these forms appears. I have relegated information regarding the date and provenance of these witnesses to the notes.

Table 1

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<th>Arukh</th>
<th>MS Munich 95 (Megilla)</th>
<th>Printed versions (Vilna, Pesauro, Soncino)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MS Columbia University X893 T141 (Megilla)</td>
<td>MS Munich 140* (Megilla)</td>
<td>MS Oxford Bodl. (366) Opp. Add. Fol. 23 (Megilla and</td>
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vol. I (Atlanta: Georgia, Scholars Press, 1994), 289-90, n. 218, reviews the discussion on this term in the talmudic lexica.

* A third Talmudic reference to b. Shabbat 110a reading the words that appear there ברכша as one word, amended to ברכירה, is mentioned by Theodor Noldeke, “Review of Abbe-loos’ Acta Mar Kardaghi und Feiges Geschichte des Mâr ‘Abhdîšô’ und seines Jüngers Mâr Qardagh,” ZDMG 44 (1890): 552; it was favoured by Metzger, “A Greek and Aramaic Inscription,” and Khurshudian, Verwaltungsinstitutionen; however, this is unlikely on account of both orthography and context (the character is assumed to be Jewish).

* Joseph Perles had brought attention to the Arukh’s divergent spelling in his “Etymologische Studien zur Kunde der rabbinischen Sprache und Alterthümer,” MGWJ 19 (1870): 564.

* Pagliaro, “Medioperisano bitaxš, armeno bdeašx.” He cites Jastrow’s lexicon.

* Geiger (Additamenta, 336) suggests with hesitation, < MP par “above” and *daxš- “guard?,” that is, “superior of the guards.” Shaked, “Iranian Loanwords in Middle Aramaic,” EIr 2 (1987) 260, suggests < MP *pardak-kaš “one who draws the curtain.” Some earlier lexicographers sought a Greek origin for the word. Sokoloff, 928, under the heading פרדכשא leaves the etymology “uncertain,” and offers for a definition: “a certain official.”

* See below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Geonic explanation</th>
<th>MS British Library Harley 5508 (400) (Megilla)</th>
<th>Shabbat</th>
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<tr>
<td>München Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod hebr 436/17</td>
<td>MS Göttingen Cod. Ms. hebr. 3 Or. 13 (Megilla)</td>
<td>MS Munich 95 (Shabbat)</td>
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<td>Bologna State Archive</td>
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While one cannot generalize on the quality of individual Talmud manuscripts for particular words, there is little doubt that the form פרכשא is evidenced in an exceptionally high quality group of witnesses. They include the Geonic explanation, as cited in the Arukh; the Arukh, itself; and MS Columbia University X893 T141. The value of the geonic versions of the Talmud for early tex-

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(Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1981) (Hebrew with English abstract), 214, with further scholarly literature.

96 This is a fourteenth/fifteenth century Spanish manuscript according to Segal, *Textual Traditions*, 215, with references to earlier literature. Krupp, “Manuscripts,” 355, dates it to the thirteenth century.

97 It is cited in the Arukh. More precisely, it has: הא República according to most MSS of the Arukh, in the printed editions of the Arukh it is הר לבר. See Alexander Kohut, *Aruch Completem*, vol. VI (Wien, 1926), 412, n. 3. For the ending, one could suspect a popular etymology on the basis of the word šāḥ; see Lewin, *Otzar ha-Gaonim*, vol. 2, 2, *Tractate Shabbath* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem: H. Yagshal, 1984), 55, who cites: ארשפ. See Ernst Róth, *Hebräische Handschriften*, vol. II (Wiedbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1965), 293, no. 462. This is a fragment of b. Shabbat 93b-95a. A second folio (Cod. Hebr. 436/18) contains the continuation, i.e., Shabbat 95a-96b. Dr. Edna Engel from the Institute for Microfilm and Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library kindly examined it for me and concluded that on palaeographical grounds it is Ashkenazi and dates to the early thirteenth century.

99 This manuscript is a thirteenth century Spanish manuscript. The orthography is also Spanish. Although it is closely connected to the Yemenite MS Columbia, this similarity is not true for pages 11b-17a, wherein lies our source. See Segal, *Textual Traditions*, 13.

100 This is a fourteenth century Franco-German manuscript, according to the Institute for Microfilm and Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library. Segal, *Textual Traditions*, 111, notes that the manuscript has been written with considerable carelessness and has many omissions.

101 This manuscript is a thirteenth century Spanish manuscript. The orthography is also Spanish. Although it is closely connected to the Yemenite MS Columbia, this similarity is not true for pages 11b-17a, wherein lies our source. See Segal, *Textual Traditions*, 13.

102 This is an Ashkenazi manuscript dated by a colophon to 1343. The orthography is also Ashkenazi. See the detailed description in Rabbinovicz, vol. I, 27; Segal, *Textual Traditions*, 109.

103 According to the information provided by the Institute for Microfilm and Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library it is in a square Spanish hand from the thirteenth century. The 2 is a little unclear.
tual evidence is well-known; the eleventh century Arukh, likewise, is valued for its early readings of Talmudic sources. The Columbia manuscript is a Yemenite MS, dated 1546, of the oriental type. It has been judged following a comprehensive study, despite its lateness, on multiple criteria to be the best representative of this tractate.\textsuperscript{104} The addition of the Munich fragment is also interesting in that it is an early Ashkenazi textual witness.

In addition to the above, MS New York, JTS Rab. 15, a Spanish manuscript on tractate ŠAvoda Zara of unique importance,\textsuperscript{105} dated by a colophon to 1290, provides us, on folio 18a, not only with an additional occurrence of the term, but of an additional example of the spelling פרכשא. This occurrence is in fact a little messy but nevertheless unambiguous. פרכשא appears in the body of the text. The scribe has then collated the manuscript with others and made the sign for erasure over this word\textsuperscript{106}, offering between the lines two alternatives: first, פרכשא and as an additional reading, פרשא (“horseman”), the latter evidently being merely an explanatory gloss.\textsuperscript{107} Curiously enough all the other textual witnesses of ŠAvoda Zara 18a have lost the original word and preserve only this gloss.\textsuperscript{108} In this source R. Meir disguises himself as a פרכשא in order to test whether the daughter of R. Ḥananya ben Teradion, also his sister-in-law, who has been incarcerated in a state brothel has preserved her chastity. She employs various stratagems to discourage his advances, and he concludes that she has acted in a similar fashion with all previous potential clients. He then bribes the guard and redeems her. From the perspective of the plot, having R. Meir disguise himself as one of particularly high rank would serve to dramatise her plight and hence underscore her piety.

In sum, then, five textual witnesses, that in all respects would be highly prized as preserving a better text, have פרכשא or very close likenesses to this. These textual witnesses are, with the exception of the Yemenite MS, among the earliest witnesses we possess for the texts where the term appears, and also encompass a broad geographical scope (Iraq, Yemen, Spain, Italy, and Ashkenaz) that would support the primacy of this reading. With a ר/ד correction it is very close to the transcription of bidaxš in the contemporary Aramaic inscriptions from Hatra and in the Syriac attestations and so it, too, is likely to refer to the same. In Syriac, as we noted earlier, it is attested פרכשא and with

\textsuperscript{104} The detailed analysis of this manuscript is in Segal, \textit{Textual Traditions}, 1-107.


\textsuperscript{106} There is an additional sign of erasure just for the ר that may have preceded the decision to erase the entire word.

\textsuperscript{107} See \textit{Tractate 'Abodah Zarah}, 32 and notes, p. פרשיא מלכא.

\textsuperscript{108} Thus MS Munich 95: פרשיא; MS Paris 1337:浦רשיא]Melca; Pisaro and Vilna ed.:浦רשיא.
a prosthetic vowel, אפטshaw, אפטכשא, and from Hatra the forms פדכשא and פבטשא are found. The variations between these forms and פדכשא are within the realm of the usual cases of phonetic correspondence, i.e., ב/פ; ט/ד; and ח/כ. The possibility that we indeed have the bidaxš here is not contradicted by the context in which this title appears. As we shall see, in the other two Talmudic sources it is portrayed as a very high-ranking position.

In b.Megilla 12b King Ahasuerus is ridiculed for decreeing that “each man shall rule in his home” (Esther 1, 22). For the rabbis of the BT such a decree was quite superfluous since (according to MS Columbia University): אפילו קרחא בביתיה פרכשא ניהו – “in his own home, even a קרחא is a פרכשא.” The sense of this proverb is clear enough: even the most humble man is the master in his own house. However, the precise meaning, not only of פרכשא but also of קרחא has proved elusive. Relating קרחא to baldness seems unlikely in this context, but no readily acceptable alternative has been proposed. Rashi, capturing the essence of what is evidently a popular saying explains that even a weaver (גרדן) rules in his home, and describes פרדשכא as a high-ranking official (פקיד ונגיד). Weaving can certainly be portrayed as a humble trade, although for how Rashi made the connection here one can only conjecture and it may have been merely an example.

109 See the commentary of the Maharsha.
110 Sokoloff, 1039, concluded that the meaning is uncertain.
112 See, for instance, Tosefta ʻEduyot 1, 3. For a useful discussion on weaving in the relevant Jewish and Iranian sources, see Eli Ahдут, “The Status of the Jewish Woman in Babylonia in the Talmudic Era” (Ph.D diss., Hebrew University, 1999), 147-57. See also Moses Aberbach, Labor, Crafts, and Commerce in Ancient Israel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994), 209-12. He follows Rashi in interpreting our source. His chapter entitled “recommended and Undesirable Trades,” 159-240, provided no clue to our question here.
114 I shall nevertheless hazard the following tentative thoughts: it would be reasonable to expect the two key terms in this folk saying to resonate, and so, if the latter is indeed bidaxš then perhaps the former is קדחה with a ד in place of the ר. This provides a logical candidate for the proverbial lowly occupation: a canal digger. Mesopotamia’s canals and rivers required an intensive human investment in their creation, utilization and constant maintenance, such as the work of digging, damming, and dredging. Many a worker, with few skills, must have been employed in the water system; see Elman, “Up to the Ears in Horses’ Necks” (B.M. 108a): On Sasanian Agricultural Policy and Private ‘Eminent Domain,’” JSIJ 3 (2004): 95-149, which among other virtues provides an invaluable review of this subject with much literature. See also Julius Newman, The Agricultural Life of the Jews in Babylonia between the Years 200 C.E. and 500 C.E. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 82-89; Krauss, Talmudische Archäologie, vol. II (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), 346, with literature and sources cited on 685, n. 278. Among the many meanings of the root נזר, is “to bore through” (see Sokoloff, 983; and similarly in the Syriac lexica); it is specifically used in the BT with reference to the maintenance work on a canal. The source is b.Mo‘ed Qatan 4b, where we have three distinct rulings regarding labor that is permitted on the intermediate days of a festival. They consist of
The context of the occurrence of the term in b.Shabbat 94a is a little more involved. It appears in the midst of a discussion on Sabbath law and eventually addresses Persian customs of riding horses. The following incident of renown is cited at the conclusion in support of one of the opinions:  

דוהא פרכשא דרתח מלכא עליה ויהיט תלתא פרסי בכרעיה.  

There was a פרכשא with whom the king was angry and he ran three parasangs by foot.  

Here, too, we have the case of a well-known incident that is summoned as proof for a legal opinion. Evidently it was noteworthy because the humiliation was great. More significantly, it is precisely because the פרכשא is so high a rank that such a humiliation has entered folklore. The sum of the data then strongly suggests that the bidaxš is indeed attested in the BT.

Conclusions

The distance between historians of the Sasanian Empire and Talmudists remains large. Experts in Sasanian history are often hesitant to approach the BT, and generally do so uncritically, sometimes relying upon translations of the printed versions of the BT, and rarely delving deeper into the texts. Talmudists, on the other hand, are often unfamiliar with the Sasanian world. This study represents an effort to bridge this gap, albeit in a limited way. The Talmudic sources on two key titles from the Sasanian state administration have been analysed critically, in light of the data from Sasanian sources, with the expectation that they would shed light on one another.

A close source-critical examination of the Talmudic sources on the hargbed has lead to a more precise date for the earliest Talmudic references to

115 Here according to the Münchener Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod hebr 436.
116 MS Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Ebr. 108 adds: עליה ביבס (“in the sand”); see Ketubot 60b; ‘Aboda Zara 15b. This version is inferior as it deflects from the true focus of the humiliation.
117 The humiliation of forcing Persian horsemen to go by foot is explicit in other sources, such as Kārnāmag 10.10, and in the Armenian chronicle attributed to Sebeos. See Robert W. Thomson, ed., The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 149; for further discussion and details, see my article, “Iranian Epic Motifs,” 259.
the *hargbed*, and comparison with the Sasanian epigraphic evidence reveals a remarkable correspondence, suggesting that the BT was aware of, and responsive to, developments within the Sasanian administrative hierarchy.

Concerning the *bidaxš*, the primary purpose has been to determine whether this title is attested in the BT. Some Iranologists had proposed identifying this title with a word found in the BT on the unlikely basis of emendation, or supported by one rare textual witness against what was generally considered the better attested orthography. The close examination of the Talmud manuscripts and other important early textual evidence has yielded unexpected result. The spelling that was considered exceptional is in fact attested by a sufficient number of the better texts for it to be considered as the original form. This is, however, merely the necessary groundwork for further exploration on how the BT is using this, and other Sasanian administrative titles.

This paper may be construed as an invitation to experts in Sasanian history to take a closer look at the BT, but also to emphasize the need to apply the particular critical methodology required in the study of this literature.

We have tried to demonstrate that the BT contains precise datable material that, with due care, may be identified and relied upon as evidence – even for developments within the Sasanian bureaucracy. No less significant, perhaps, it provides a unique perspective that is often lacking in the other sources at our disposal. It offers us a taste of the popular reverberation of high officialdom among the more humble subjects of the empire. Epigraphic sources, gems, and bullae indeed provide us with invaluable lists of title-bearers and critical data on mapping out the Sasanian administrative geography and hierarchy. But left with such sources alone we would surely be all the poorer never having heard how a rabbinic sage might be likened to the powerful *hargbed* who, with the touch of his hand, dispels a potent fragrance.