Introduction

In recent years there has been a significant shift in the scholarly understanding of the development of rabbinic Judaism and the role of the rabbis in late antique Judaism. Earlier generations of scholars relied primarily on a positivistic reading of rabbinic literature to describe the role of the rabbinic sages in late antiquity. As a result, they articulated a version of Jewish history in which the rabbis emerged as the leaders of Palestinian Judaism shortly after the destruction of the second temple. According to this narrative, rabbinic Judaism became “normative” Judaism as early as the beginning of the second century CE.1 Through a more critical reading of the rabbinic texts, increased attention to archaeological and epigraphical evidence, and more serious consideration of the larger socio-political context of Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine periods, contemporary scholars have largely rejected this narrative of the rabbinic movement. Instead, the emerging consensus argues that the rabbis began as a marginal movement in the decades after the destruction and continued to be quite marginal for the first few centuries of the common era.2 Into the third century, the sages were considered to be authorities only by their own circles


of disciples. If they had any authority for the rest of the Jewish population, it was primarily over issues of purity, marriage and divorce, and tithes.\(^3\)

After the rise of Constantine, a combination of internal and external factors, including the urbanization of the rabbinic movement and the changing views of religion and identity prompted by the Christianization of the empire, led to the growth of rabbinic prominence and authority in the wider Jewish society. There remains debate over the speed of this process of rabbinization. Lee Levine and others argue that the rabbis’ influence began to grow in the late third to fourth centuries.\(^4\) Most recently, Seth Schwartz has argued that while a new form of Judaism was articulated in the fourth century, rabbinic Judaism did not become widely influential until, at the earliest, the sixth century.\(^5\) While there is still ample debate over the nature and causes of this process of rabbinization, it is clear that by the late fifth to sixth centuries, the rabbis had become influential in shaping the religious culture of Palestinian Jews.\(^6\)

The ancient synagogue has emerged as an important source of evidence for this recent re-evaluation of the role and position of the rabbis in late antique Judaism. Like the study of the rabbinic movement, the study of the ancient synagogue has undergone a significant shift in the past few decades. Until relatively recently, most scholars had assumed that synagogues were both an important part of Palestinian Jewish society and also sites for the practice of rabbinic Judaism from as early as the Yavnean period.\(^7\) Data which countered this view, such as the paucity of archaeological evidence for Palestinian synagogues in the second and third centuries, and the discovery of lavish iconic decorations in both Palestinian and diaspora synagogues, were interpreted as anomalous or irrelevant. The scarcity of archaeological evidence for second- and third-century synagogues was dismissed as either a fault of the archaeological record or as a result of the fact that synagogues in this period might not have been dis-

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\(^3\) Cohen, “Place of the Rabbi,” 161; Goodman, State and Society, 93–118; Hezser, Social Structure, 191–93.


\(^5\) Schwartz, Imperialism, 263–74.

\(^6\) I specify religious culture here to distinguish religious culture from other aspects of society, including the economic and jurisprudential.

tinguished from other types of buildings. The discovery of the lavish iconographic art in both diaspora and Palestinian synagogues did trigger a debate over the nature of Judaism in late antiquity. Erwin Goodenough argued that the art of the synagogue pointed to a well-developed, non-rabbinic, popular Judaism that was deeply mystical and hellenized. However, since his reading of the art itself was quite problematic, his analysis of the synagogue as a locus for a non-rabbinic form of Judaism did not become regnant in scholarly circles. Instead, the view of Michael Avi-Yonah, who argued that the images in the synagogue functioned as decoration, devoid of religious meaning, became dominant. As a consequence of this dismissive reading, the synagogue art did not challenge the portrait of the early synagogue as a rabbinic institution.

In recent years, this view of the development of the ancient synagogue has been challenged by one which is more firmly grounded in the archaeological and epigraphical evidence of the synagogues themselves, and also takes into account wider social trends in Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine periods. The prevalence of synagogues in Palestine during the first to third centuries is now a subject of debate. In his monumental work *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, Lee Levine argues that, despite the scarcity of archaeological evidence, the synagogue remained a central communal institution in Roman Palestine in this era. In contrast, Seth Schwartz argues that the scarcity of archaeological evidence reflects the infrequency of synagogue construction in this period. He argues that during these centuries, Jewish society had largely “disintegrated” and that most Jews in Palestine participated in the larger pagan culture of the empire, not in a particularist Jewish culture that would have supported the construction of synagogues. While there is debate over the prevalence of Palestinian synagogues in the second and early third centuries, the evidence for a synagogue building boom in the late third to fourth centuries is incontrovertible. The majority of synagogues excavated in the

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9. Although Goodenough’s particular reading of the synagogue art has been discredited, the insight that there were different “Judaisms” in late antiquity has become one of the fundamental axioms of the study of early Judaism. For a discussion of the reception of Goodenough’s work, see Jacob Neusner, *Symbol and Theology in Early Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 172–75.
areas of Judea, the Galilee and the Golan heights date from this period. This building boom suggests that from the fourth century at the latest, the synagogue was a prominent communal institution for Palestinian Jews.

The identity of the synagogue as a consistently rabbinic institution has also come into question. Rabbinic sources from the third to fourth centuries certainly testify to substantial rabbinic interest in synagogue activities such as communal prayer and the recitation of scripture, and also report some rabbinic involvement in the synagogue. However, the combined weight of both literary and non-literary evidence demonstrates that actual rabbinic involvement in synagogues in this period was, at best, marginal. This evidence suggests that the synagogues were run and supported by non-rabbinic leaders. Of the more than 100 inscriptions found in Palestinian synagogues, not one names a sage known to us from the rabbinic corpus. In addition, discussions of the synagogue in the Theodosian Code and in the writings of the fourth- to fifth-century Church fathers identify the patriarchs, the archisynagogoi and presbyters as synagogue leaders, but never mention the sages. Finally, the archaeological evidence points to norms of synagogue building which differed from rabbinic dicta. Whereas the Tosefta states that synagogue entrances should face east, only a handful of the excavated synagogues conform to this dictum.

Most strikingly, the rich figural decoration on the floors and walls of many of the excavated synagogues clearly contravenes the iconoclastic dicta of the rabbis. While it is impossible to know what the images of Helios in the synagogue mosaics of Hammat Tiberias, Bet Alpha, Huseifa, Sepphoris and Na’aran meant to the synagogue community, these images clearly violated the rabbinic prohibition against images of the deity. Even where the synagogue iconography is not so blatantly non-rabbinic, it still suggests that the culture of the synagogues was distinct from that of the rabbis. As Jacob Neusner has observed, the most common set of symbols in synagogue art—the lulav, etrog, menorah and shofar—does not appear as a central set of symbols in rabbinic literature.

Even the rabbinic sources themselves attest to tensions between rabbinic norms and expectations and synagogue practices. One of the most frequently cited sets of examples is found in J. Meg 4:1, 74d, which describes a series of cases in which the targum ritual of a synagogue contradicted rabbinic dicta. Thus, while the rabbinic literature testifies that the

15. Levine, Ancient Synagogue, 442–45.
17. Neusner, Symbol, 186–90.
rabbis had developed rules to govern synagogue practice by the late third century, these rules did not yet define and determine synagogue practice.

While rabbinic involvement in the synagogue was probably marginal during the first few centuries of the common era, by the fifth to sixth centuries the rabbis and rabbinic theology had become far more influential in the culture of the Palestinian synagogues. Both archaeological and literary evidence attests to this development. In the mid sixth century, there is a shift from iconic to aniconic art on synagogue floors. In addition, in the late fifth century, synagogues are constructed with apses to hold the Torah ark. While the apse itself was borrowed from contemporary church architecture, the inclusion of a permanent and monumental Torah shrine in the synagogue reinforces the centrality of the Torah within the synagogue. While neither of these architectural trends, in isolation, necessarily points to increased rabbinic influence in the synagogue, they do correspond to rabbinic iconoclastic tendencies and to the rabbinic conviction that the synagogue derives its holiness from the presence of the Torah within it.

Perhaps the strongest evidence for the increasing influence of the rabbinic movement in this period comes from the liturgical poetry (hereafter, piyyutim) of the period. The piyyutim (liturgical poems; sg. also piyyut), which were composed by professional synagogue poets, were written for performance during prayer services in the synagogue and thus are unquestionably and exclusively synagogue literature. At the same time, however, the piyyutim correspond to the statutory prayers as described and mandated in the rabbinic literature. In addition, the piyyutim are deeply informed by, and dependent on, rabbinic scriptural exegesis and rabbinic theology as it is articulated in rabbinic literature. The saturation of rabbinic motifs and traditions within the piyyutim testifies to the increased and institutionalized presence of rabbinic ideology within synagogue culture by the fifth to sixth centuries.

The emergence of piyyut in this period, supported by the evidence of the move toward iconoclasm and the increasing centrality of the Torah ark, suggests that by the fifth to sixth centuries Palestinian synagogues had increasingly become loci for the expression of rabbinic ideology and the practice of a rabbinic form of Judaism. Because the synagogue was already a popular communal Jewish institution, it became an important locus for the encounter between the rabbis and the wider Jewish community. As the rabbis sought to increase their influence within the wider community, the synagogue would have been a key place for the articulation

and propagation of a rabbinic theology which was designed for, and di-
rected at, the Jewish populace at large.

This book contributes to the ongoing research into the emergence of
rabbinic Judaism in the synagogue setting through a study of one constel-
lration of rabbinic and synagogue literatures: the sequence of prophetic
lectionary texts (hereafter, *haftorot*; sg. *haftarah*) designated for the sab-
baths surrounding Tisha b’Av, and the midrashim, piyyutim and targu-
mic texts that interpret them. The lectionary sequence for the Tisha b’Av
season consists of the haftarot designated for the three sabbaths preceding
Tisha b’Av; the book of Lamentations, which is read on the fast day itself;
and the haftarot for the seven sabbaths that follow it. While the constitu-
ent texts of this sequence are biblical, the lectionary sequence is a distinct,
post-biblical creation which was designed for liturgical use in the syna-
gogue.

The interpretive texts that I treat in this study are:

- Chapters 13 and 22 of Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (hereafter, PRK),
a collection of midrashim, probably dating from the late fifth to
the early sixth century, whose chapters comment on the lec-
tionary texts for festivals and special sabbaths. Chapters 13 and
22 correspond to the first and final sabbaths of the Tisha b’Av
season sequence.

- Selections from the *kedushtot* of Eleazar Kallir (sixth to seventh
century) for the first two sabbaths after Tisha b’Av. The *ke-
dushta* is a genre of piyyut composed as part of the sabbath
morning liturgy.

- Targum Jonathan’s treatment of the haftarot of the Tisha b’Av
cycle. Targum Jonathan (hereafter, TJ) is a highly literalist Ara-
maic translation of the prophetic books which probably origi-
nated in Palestine but went through several stages of revision
and redaction in Babylonia.

An analysis of this literary constellation allows us to better under-
stand two dynamics that are relevant to the discussion of the development
of rabbinic Judaism in the late antique synagogue: a) the relationship be-
tween the rabbinic Judaism that was propagated in the synagogue and the
non-rabbinic synagogue culture that the rabbis encountered and inter-
acted with there; b) the relationship between rabbinic literature that was
composed by sages for their rabbinic colleagues and students, and rab-
binic literature that was directed toward a wider Jewish lay audience as it
was imagined by the rabbis.
Interaction of Non-Rabbinic and Rabbinic Culture in the Late Antique Palestinian Synagogue

While we have little non-rabbinic Jewish literature from late antique Palestine, archaeological evidence from Palestinian synagogues from the fourth to sixth centuries bears witness to some patterns of theological concern and communal self-understanding. The appearance of central mosaics depicting Helios surrounded by the signs of the zodiac and depictions of the seasons in five synagogues in Palestine suggests that a cosmic creator theology was part of the ideology of synagogue culture in this period.\(^{19}\) In addition, the ubiquity of temple-related iconography testifies to a concern with the temple and a desire to invoke the temple and temple cult in the synagogue setting. Finally, the inscriptions of several Palestinian synagogues from this period identify the synagogues as holy places and the synagogue communities as holy communities.\(^{20}\) According to Seth Schwartz, by the end of the fifth century, Palestinian Jews considered their local communities to hold “the special religious status, the obligations and the promises that God granted to and imposed upon the Jews as a whole, according to the Bible.”\(^{21}\) While the archaeological evidence allows us to paint with broad strokes some central elements of pre-rabbinic synagogue

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ideology, the details of this ideology remain obscure. For example, it is impossible to discern with certainty the precise nature of this concern for the temple. Does the iconography represent a nostalgia for the defunct temple cult, an eschatological hope for its rebuilding, or an ongoing identification of the synagogue with the temple and its functions? How did the synagogue community understand the “holiness” that they attributed to themselves and to their synagogues? How did that holiness relate to the holiness of the defunct temple and the biblical notion of the holiness of the larger community of Israel? Despite these uncertainties, the archaeological evidence is vital because, as creations of Jews who were not members of the rabbinic class, the synagogue art, architecture, and inscriptions communicate something of the self-understanding and theological outlook of this segment of Jewish society.

In contrast, the lectionary cycle, the midrashim in PRK, and the translations in TJ are products of rabbinic culture. The liturgical poems of Kallir lie somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Kallir was a professional of the synagogue, not a professional member of the **beit midrash**, and he composed his poems for a general synagogue audience. At the same time, his poems are strongly informed by rabbinic theology and rabbinic exegetical traditions. By looking at these texts in relationship to one another and to the synagogue setting, I hope to contribute a more variegated portrait of the ways in which rabbinic, non-rabbinic and “semi-rabbinic” voices contributed to late antique synagogue culture.

**Synagogue and **beit midrash**: The Intended Audiences of Rabbinic Literature

The second distinction which is central to this study is that between two classes of rabbinic literature: literature directed toward an academic audi-

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22. The liturgical poets known to us never appear as tradents in the canonical rabbinic literature. In addition, rabbinic literature does not identify the composition of liturgical poetry as a rabbinic activity, nor does it include anecdotal references to rabbis as synagogue poets or vice versa. Thus there is no positive evidence that would lead us to identify them as members of the rabbinic academies. The use of the term “Rabbi” with regard to these poets is not conclusive, since by this period the term was used widely as an honorific. It did not narrowly identify those who had received ordination from the rabbinic academies. In addition, the archaeological evidence suggests that synagogue leaders and professional synagogue functionaries were distinct from the professionals of the rabbinic academy. This generalization, combined with the absence of specific evidence to the contrary, leads to the conclusion that the **payyetanim** (liturgical poets) were probably not professional denizens of the rabbinic academies.
ence of rabbinic colleagues and students, and literature intended for a wider audience of Jews who were not members of the rabbinic elite.

In the past, judgments regarding the degree to which rabbinic texts were directed at a popular or academic audience often depended on scholars’ intuitions and assumptions about popular discourse and ideology. For example, Joseph Heinemann identified the genre of the midrashic proem with live sermons because he thought that the proem’s creation and resolution of suspense would have been pleasing to a synagogue audience. A similar phenomenon occurs in targum studies where the identification of the targum’s popular *Sitz im Leben* is based partially on assumptions regarding the limited exegetical abilities of the general Jewish population of late antiquity.

In this study, I advocate a more sociological approach to the question of intended audience, an approach which is rooted in the demographics of the synagogue and the *beit midrash*. It is clear from both the archaeological evidence of the synagogues themselves and rabbinic comments regarding synagogues, that the synagogues were frequented by a heterogeneous Jewish population. Women and men of various social and economic positions attended, as did rabbis and non-rabbinic Jews. In contrast, the study houses were the province of the sages and their students—the rabbinic intelligentsia. In this study, I consider literature which was clearly composed for the synagogue to be literature directed at a general audience. In contrast, I consider literature which was composed for and disseminated in the *beit midrash* to be academic literature. Both of these literatures can be rabbinic; however, the imagined audience of the synagogue literature was that institution’s heterogeneous, lay population while the *beit midrash* literature was composed for the sages and their students.

In my view, the lectionary is the purest example of rabbinic literary production intended for a popular audience. While designated lectionary

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26. The rabbinic lectionary system, which I describe on pp. 17–19, was established before any thoroughgoing schedule of lectionary readings was established. For many centuries, individual communities determined their own haftarot and
texts may have also been read in the *beit midrash* setting, the *raison d’être* of
the lectionary system and selections was the *public* recitation of scripture. The
designation of Mondays and Thursdays as days for the public reading of Torah supports this assertion. If the lectionary texts were designated primarily for the *beit midrash* setting, there would have been no reason to designate market days as the days for the reading of scripture. This
designation only makes sense if the intended audience of the reading was the
general populace, which gathered together on these days.

Beyond the lectionary, however, the distinction between texts directed
at an imagined synagogue audience and those composed for rabbis is less
absolute. The intended audience of the homiletical midrashim and literal-
ist *targumim* (pl. of “targum”) has been the subject of much scholarly dis-
cussion. As I will discuss in greater detail below, many scholars have
identified the homiletical midrashim closely with the synagogue setting.
More recently, emphasis has been placed on the academic nature of these
midrashic texts.27 Within this study, I will argue that PRK is a text com-
posed by rabbis for a rabbinic audience; at the same time, however, the
text is dependent on, and oriented toward, scripture in its synagogue con-
text.

The literalist targumim, Targum Onkelos and TJ, have been consis-
tently identified as synagogue texts. While scholars have recognized in
the past few decades that the targumim were also used in academic set-
tings, the focus remains on their role as synagogue texts.28 In this study I
will argue that although Targum Jonathan came to be used in synagogues
and may even have been composed partially for synagogue use, it is pri-
marily an academic text which does not depend on or acknowledge the
synagogue context of the biblical texts.

Consideration of the intended audiences of these four genres contrib-
utes to the study of the development of rabbinic Judaism in two important
ways: It helps to further clarify the relationship between rabbinic “popu-
lar” theology, which was articulated for an imagined general audience,
and rabbinic “academic” theology, which was articulated for members of
the rabbinic elite. Attention to the intended settings of the genres high-

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27. See pp. 91–93.
lights the interrelationship between the *beit midrash* and synagogue settings while further clarifying the types of exegetical activity and theological production that occurred in, and for, each setting.

The Theology of the Tisha b’Av Season in the Context of Late Antique Palestine

While the lectionary, midrashic and poetic texts that I analyze were never recited together in a single synagogue setting, they provide a composite portrait of the theology of consolation that developed around the lectionary sequence of the Tisha b’Av season. This theology of consolation is particularly germane to both the liturgical season and the social and religious situation of the Jewish communities in late antique Palestine. Though the events commemorated on Tisha b’Av were long past by the fifth to sixth centuries CE, the issues raised by the season remained central to Jewish theology and Jewish identity. At the most universal level, the season raises the theological questions raised by any catastrophic event. Why did it happen? What was God’s role in these events? What do these events say about our relationship with God? These issues were quite compelling for Jews in the rabbinic period. Centuries after the destruction of the second temple, Jews of both the land of Israel and the diaspora were living with the consequences of this catastrophe, namely, the absence of Jewish sovereignty and the absence of the temple cult. Thus, when the texts of the lectionary complex discuss the destructions of the temples and their aftermaths, they are also addressing the contemporary community’s own situation.

The destructions of the temples and the prolonged absence of Jewish sovereignty were rendered particularly problematic by the theology of history which the Jews inherited from their biblical forebears. According to a central strand of biblical theology, God had entered into a covenant with the Israelites at Sinai. The covenant stipulated that, if Israel obeyed God’s commandments, the nation would prosper socially, economically and politically. If the people disobeyed, they would suffer the consequences in the spheres of both nature and politics. According to this deuteronomistic strand of biblical theology, political misfortune was a sign of covenantal disobedience and divine displeasure. One of the challenges faced by the theologians of the rabbinic period was the need to articulate a theology which both accommodated this biblical legacy and also asserted an ongoing, positive relationship between God and Israel despite continu-

ing political misfortune. Because Tisha b’Av commemorates catastrophes in Israel’s past and draws attention to their enduring consequences, the Tisha b’Av season becomes a locus for the articulation of this theology. When the texts of the liturgical anthology articulate consolatory responses to the catastrophes commemorated on Tisha b’Av, they are also articulating strategies for dealing with the theological challenges posed by the continuing lack of Jewish political power and the absence of the temple in the land of Israel.

As I will demonstrate below, these are subjects which were confronted and negotiated both within the rabbinic literature and within the contemporary synagogue culture. To cite just one example, the prevalence of temple cult iconography in third- to fourth-century synagogues testifies to both a concern with the temple and an attempt to forge some sort of connection between the synagogue and the defunct temple cult.

Exegesis and Theology in the Literature of the Tisha b’Av Season

While this project is cultural and theological, it is also exegetical. The literary features and exegetical strategies of each of the constituent genres of the Tisha b’Av season literature shape the theological meanings of the individual texts. The lectionary cycle itself is a carefully constructed sequence of biblical texts. The targum, midrash and piyyut employ different strategies to interpret, comment on, and develop the messages of the lectionary texts. For example, Targum Jonathan uses the strategies of translation and emendation to subtly transform the theology of the lectionary texts while Eleazar Kallir uses the poetic techniques of rhyme and allusion to explore the emotional and relational dynamics suggested by them. The divergent messages of these texts are not only a result of the authors’ individual understandings or proclivities—they are also the result of the different exegetical projects represented by targum and piyyut. In order to understand the theological messages of each of these texts, it is first necessary to understand how they function as works of literature and exegesis. Thus, the core of my study consists of literary analyses of selected texts of the literature of the Tisha b’Av season. Through close readings of the haftarot, as well as of selected texts from the midrashic, targumic, and poetic strata of reception and interpretation, I show how the literary and exegetical features of each genre shape the theology articulated by the individual texts. In my analysis of the haftarot, I show how literary structures, tropes and patterns function in the lectionary context to articulate a theology of consolation which is different from that articulated by the haftarot in their biblical contexts. In my analyses of the interpretive genres, I show how the
literary strategies and structures central to midrash, poetry and translation are used once again to expand and transform the meanings of the received texts.  

The nexus of exegesis and theology in any one of these genres merits a book-length study; consequently, it would be impossible to treat any of them comprehensively in a single chapter. I have dealt with this issue by focusing each chapter on particular exegetical strategies and theological issues. Each chapter conforms to a single structure. I begin by briefly addressing the question of the Sitz im Leben of the genre and the extant texts. I then discuss in theoretical terms the particular literary and exegeti-
cal strategies which will be the foci of the chapter. The third part of each chapter consists of close readings of selected texts. In these analyses I focus on the dual role of the texts as receptors and creators of meaning. The goal of the readings is to demonstrate that at each level of the literary constellation, particular exegetical strategies are employed to interpret and re-present the lectionary texts. The new interpretations and renderings of the lectionary texts in turn represent new responses to the issues raised by the Tisha b’Av season and the lectionary texts themselves. Because the lectionary sequence is the primary articulation of the themes and theology of the Tisha b’Av lectionary complex, it receives the most comprehensive treatment.

In chapter 2, I discuss the narrative and dialogic structures of the lectionary cycle as well as the more localized exegetical strategies of conjunction, echo and allusion. Through these strategies, the redactors of the lectionary cycle articulate a narrative of sin-punishment-redemption which extends from Israel’s past through the present into the future. At the same time, the lectionary cycle articulates a theology of divine attention and intimacy which might serve as immediate consolation for the worshiping community. In addition to these major themes, I discuss the ways in which the lectionary cycle suggests particular standpoints regarding issues such as the power of prayer and the reliability of prophecy.

In chapter 3, I analyze chapters 13 and 22 of PRK, which correspond to the first sabbath of rebuke and the final sabbath of consolation. In these analyses I focus on the exegetical features of the proem and the davar aher (additional comment), and on the overall structure of the chapters. I demonstrate how the midrashic authors and redactors use these literary structures to reinforce the lectionary’s narrative theology and elaborate on the lectionary’s assertion regarding the redemptive nature of divine love. In addition, I show how they use these literary strategies to explore and express the peculiar theological ambiguity which the exile comes to represent in rabbinic culture.

Chapter 4 focuses on the opening poems of the kedushtot by Eleazar Kallir for the first two sabbaths of consolation following Tisha b’Av. Here, I focus on the poetic strategies of rhyme and allusion and demonstrate how Kallir employs these strategies to explore the dynamics of the relationship between God and Israel that is described by the lectionary texts.

The structure of the case studies in chapter 5 differs slightly from that of the preceding chapters. Unlike the lectionary cycle, the midrashic pericopes and the piyyutim, Targum Jonathan’s interpretation of the haftarah texts does not underscore the romantic, erotic aspects of the God-Israel relationship. Rather, the targum downplays these aspects of the biblical text. In order to demonstrate the comprehensive nature of this revision, I first demonstrate how TJ’s characteristic exegetical strategies
revise and reshape the portrait of God in the text by preserving certain anthropomorphic features and revising and replacing others. I then analyze TJ’s treatment of romantic and erotic language within the haftarot of consolation in order to show how TJ subverts the sexual aspects of the biblical text.

In the conclusion I integrate the results of the individual analyses into a discussion of the function of the Tisha b’Av season as a whole and the relevance of this season to the study of the spread of rabbinic culture in late antiquity.