Chaining as a Shaping Feature of Tannaitic Source Text
O encadeamento como um recurso de formatação do texto tanaítico

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Abstract: The Tannaitic source text, taken from tractate Eruvin of the Bavli (41b), features chaining as a prominent component – a formal-stylistic element which establishes a sequencing connection between one part of a narrative to the next among three parts of the same text. Where chaining is operative, each part of the text sequence appears in the same style and resembles the others in form.

Keywords: Chaining. Tannaitic Source. Bavli.

Resumo: O texto fonte Tannaitic, tirado do tratado Eruvin do Bavli (41b), caracteriza o encadeamento como um componente proeminente – um elemento formal-estilístico que estabelece uma conexão de sequenciamento entre uma parte de uma narrativa para a próxima entre três partes do mesmo texto. Onde o encadeamento é operatório, cada parte da sequência de texto aparece no mesmo estilo e se assemelha a outros na forma.

Palavras-chave: Encadeamento. Texto Tanaítico. Bavli.

1 Description of the Tannaitic source text

The Tannaitic source cites as follow:

> Our Rabbis learned: Three things deprive [cause to pass] a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his Creator, [and they are:], idolaters, an evil spirit, and oppressive poverty. Three kinds of person do not see the face of Gehenna, [and they are:], [one who suffers from] oppressive poverty, one who is afflicted with bowel diseases, and [one who is in the hands of] the [Roman] government. Three [classes of person] die even while they are conversing, [and they are:] one who suffers from bowel diseases, a woman in confinement, and one afflicted with dropsy. [Epstein ed.].

The Tannaitic text consists of three sections, the first of which opens with: "Our Rabbis learned: Three things[1] deprive [cause to pass] a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his Creator,[2] and they are: idolaters,[3] an evil spirit, and

1

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oppressive poverty."[4] The initial part of our text thus groups together "three things" which "deprive [cause to pass] a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his creator," and then goes on to itemize, detailing that these are "idolaters, an evil spirit, and oppressive poverty." The discussion in this section of the text leads to the question of "In what respect could this matter?" and a brief presentation of the Rabbis' way of solving the problem.

The second part of the Tannaitic source text goes on to state that "Three kinds of person do not see the face of Gehenna, and they are:[5] [one who suffers from] oppressive poverty, one who is afflicted with bowel diseases,[6] and [one who is in the hands of] the [Roman] government."[7]

The middle section thus also groups its subject together into "three," following this with an itemized list of "[One who suffers from], one who is afflicted with bowel diseases, and [one who is in the hands of] the [Roman] government." The subsequent discussion of this also concludes with the question of "In what practical respect does this matter?" followed by a brief consideration of the Rabbis' way of solving the problem, similar to the question and resolution in the preceding part of the text.

There is no kinship in content to unite the second part with the first; they are held together only by formal-stylistic design. This comes to the fore in that the second part opens with a list of a group of "three" ["Three kinds of person do not see the face of Gehenna"], paralleling the opening of the first part ("Three things deprive [cause to pass] a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his creator"), followed by a listing of three items.

The third part of the same Tannaitic source concludes with this: "Three [classes of person] die even while they are conversing, and they are: one who suffers from bowel diseases,[8] a woman in confinement,[9] and one afflicted with dropsy."

The third section thus also opens with a reference to a threesome, and then goes on to itemize the three instances: "one who suffers from bowel diseases, a woman in confinement, and one afflicted with dropsy." The discussion in this part of the text also concludes with the question of "In what[10] respect can this information matter?" – thus echoing the conclusion of the preceding two sections; this, in turn, is also followed by a brief statement of the Rabbis' approach to solving the problem.

In terms of content, the third section – like the first two – has no connection to what precedes it. The only link holding the three different sections of the text together is the formal-stylistic design evident in the language used to introduce the contents. Like the first two parts, the third opens with an invocation of a

2

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threesome, and then goes on to itemize three cases – in exactly the same way as the two parts which precede it.

2 The Structure of the Tannaitic Source

A commentator has previously noted the element of formal design and structure in the Tannaitic text, writing that:

> The Rabbis have taught: Three things, etc. A great many passages listing "three things" appear in the Talmud, which have not been brought together here, for here the principle was to make the second threesome include one taken from the first, and among the third group of three to have one from the second.[11]

As per his words, there are many instances of "three things" in a variety of textual sources, which could have been made a part of the Tannaitic text we are considering. However, they were not included in our text, which is built in such a way as to include in the second section one of the instances cited in the first, and among the three instances cited in the third section – one of those appearing in the second.

True enough, there is no detailed elaboration or extensive exemplification in these commentarial remarks (most likely, the author meant to appeal to the reader's own understanding). But what these comments spell out is enough to suggest that the three parts comprising our Tannaitic source text can be characterized by a shared line running through the three of them like a single thread, basting the first part with the second, and the second with the third by means of recurrent instances. The existence of a case common to all three sections of the source text makes it clear why these three instances in particular were chosen for explicit mention in this passage, to the exclusion of all other possible passages where "three things" are mentioned. (Once again, it is especially telling that the commentator cites no examples of such possible passages to clinch his argument.)

Applying the argument in practice, we find that the "oppressive poverty" threads its way from the first section of the text into the second, appearing as an element common to both. From the second section, the instance of one "suffering from bowel diseases" makes its way into the third section, becoming an element shared by both. The sequencing conveyed by the printed version follows a graphic pattern:

Part A	Part B	Part C
Three things deprive [cause to pass] a man of his senses and knowledge of his Creator, and they are:	Three kinds of person do not see the face of Gehenna, and they are:	Three [classes of person] die even while they are conversing, and they are:
idolaters,	[one who suffers from] oppressive poverty,	one who suffers from bowel
diseases,		
an evil spirit,	one who is afflicted with bowel diseases,	a woman in confinement,
and oppressive poverty.	and [one who is in the hands of] the [Roman] government.	and one afllicted with dropsy.

The graphic sketch demonstrates in the most obvious way how chaining operates from the formal-stylistic point of view.[12] The Tannaitic source text is characterized by shifts or transfer of a single example, which is passed on from the first to the second section, and then another one from the second section to the third.[13]

Elaborating on this verbally, we can point out that the instance of the "oppressive poverty," which had been third, becomes the first one listed in the second part of our source text. The instance of "one who is afflicted with bowel disease," which had been the second listed in the second part, moves to being the first in the list in the third text section. This is chaining[14] at work, the formal-stylistic device that binds together the first part with the second, and the second with the third, like links in a chain, by means of reiterating a word or an instance in two adjacent triples.

4

Arquivo Maaravi: Revista Digital de Estudos Judaicos da UFMG. Belo Horizonte, v. 10, n. 19, nov. 2016. ISSN: 1982-3053.

Chaining as a structuring element in the Tannaitic text as this text has been preserved in the printed version is borne out by a comparison with the other extant versions. Chaining is evident in the various other versions of the text, as well, but the shifts follow a different geometric pattern vis-à-vis the instance reiterated from one part to the next in the Tannaitic source, as follows:

Part A	Part B	Part C
Three things deprive [cause to pass] a man of his senses and knowledge of his Creator, and they are:	Three kinds of person do not see the face of Gehenna, and they are:	Three [classes of person] die even while they are conversing, and they are:
idolaters,	one who is afflicted with bowel diseases,	a woman in confinement,
an evil spirit, afflicted diseases,[16]	[one who suffers from] oppressive of poverty,[15]	one who is with bowel
and oppressive afllicted poverty.	and [one who is in the hands of] the [Roman] government.	and one with dropsy.

A sketch of these versions shows that the shift of the example, which chains from the first to the second section is unlike the chaining of the instance from the second section to the third.

Itemizing verbally, the instance of the "oppressive poverty," which appears third in the first part of the text, moves to second place in the second part. The instance of "one who is afflicted with bowel diseases," which is first in the second part, makes its way into second place in the third. There is no correlation or consistency in the order of the chaianing of the two cited instances in these versions of the text as opposed to the printed version. The printed

version preserves the relativity and the consistency in chaining every example that it moves from its place in an earlier section of the text to occupying first place in the next section.

Considering the lack of balance or consistency in the chaining instantiated in the other versions as opposed to the printed version, it becomes a reasonable argument that the chaining in the Tannaitic source as this has reached us in the printed version has been modified and reworked from earlier versions, until it finally took on the form it now has.

3 Another Stylistic-Formal Element in Light of Studying the Three Sections of the Tannaitic Source Text

The deliberation in each of the three parts of the Tannaitic source text is an outgrowth of the same basic question, "In what respect could this matter?" and a brief reply citing no more than a single example. The same question, reiterated in each of the three parts of the Tannaitic source, along with the different replies which always include a single instance as an example, together create a unified formal-stylistic context which brings the three parts of the text into one. This makes for another formal-stylistic feature: a tripartite structure,[17] in the following way (this is in addition to the use of "three" as a key opening word which recurs at the beginning of each part):

> The first part ("Our Rabbis learned: Three things deprive [cause to pass] a man …") includes the question of "In what respect could this matter?" and a brief answer citing a single instance ("In respect of invoking heavenly mercy of Heaven to be delivered from them").

The second part ("Three kinds of person do not see the face of Gehenna") includes the question of "In what practical respect does this matter?" as well as a short answer with the mention of single instance ("In respect of receiving [these afflictions] lovingly").

The third part ("Three [classes of person] die even while they are conversing") includes the question of "In what respect can this information matter?" and a short answer with a single instance ("In that of making arrangements for their shrouds to be ready").

The result is a tripartite structure of the cursory give-and-take about the Tannaitic source. It may be that originally all three sections of the source text

6

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were part of a single whole but were later separated from each other into three parts by the redactors of the text so as to achieve the tripartite composition.

A possible reason for this may be that the style and content of the Tannaitic source text in each of its three parts, such as the opening, identical in all three cases, which begins by listing some "Three…" as well as the detailed listing of three examples in each section, influenced the redactors of the text, leading them to divide the Tannaitic source text into three, and to treat each one as an independent textual unit. This would explain the emergence of the tripartite structure of the original Tannaitic source.

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Notes

[1] MS Munich 95, MS Vatican 109, MS Oxford 366 are missing the word: "thing"; RABBINOVICZ, 1960, p. 56, n. 5.

[2] MS Munich 95: "[…] of a knowledge of his creator and of his senses"; Cf. RABBINOVICZ, 1960, p. 56, n. 6; FEIVISH, 1733, p. 41b.

[3] Cf. MS Munich 95, MS Vatican 109, MS Oxford 366: "Gentile"; HANANEL, 1961, p. 41b: "Alien".

[4] HANANEL, 1961, p. 41b, the order of that part is different.

[5] MS Munich 95, MS Vatican 109, are missing the words: "And they are."

[6] RABBINOVICZ, 1960, p. 56 n. 7, the order of the two items is reversed.

[7] RABBINOVICZ, 1960, p. 56 n. 7 indicates different word to the third item.

[8] RABBINOVICZ,1960, p. 56 n. 8 the first item is missing in old printed versions except Venice.

[9] MS Munich 95, MS Vatican 109, MS Oxford 366, the order of the two items is reversed; RABBINOVICZ, 1960, p. 56 n. 8.

[10] MS Oxford 366 is missing the word.

[11] ZIMERING, 1974, p. 41b.

7

Arquivo Maaravi: Revista Digital de Estudos Judaicos da UFMG. Belo Horizonte, v. 10, n. 19, nov. 2016. ISSN: 1982-3053.

[12] FRIEDMAN, 1978, p. 39-40, on the ability of the graphic description to demonstrates the order and arrangement of the Talmudic sugya.

[13] Another example that shows the formal-stylistic point of view (in Pesachim119a), see JACOBS, 1983, p. 142: "There are thus *three* sets of four and, more-ever, David is the first in the first set, the second in the second set and the third in the third set."

[14] RIVLIN, 1998, p. 64.

[15] See, above, n. 6.

[16] See, above, n. 8.

[17] WÜNSCHE, 1911, p. 72-73.

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8

Arquivo Maaravi: Revista Digital de Estudos Judaicos da UFMG. Belo Horizonte, v. 10, n. 19, nov. 2016. ISSN: 1982-3053.