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Creative Fidelity, Faithful Creativity
The Reception of Jewish Scripture
in Early Judaism and Christianity

Edited by Michael A. Daise and Dorota Hartman



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From Bad Example to Good Advice: Reading and Rewriting Deuteronomy 20 in Late Antique Judaism¹

PIERO CAPELLI

1. Deuteronomy 20: A Code for Holy War

One of the various representations of God in ancient Israelitic imagery is that of a warlord leading his people to victory. It already appears at the very beginning of Israel's sacred history, in the exodus from Egypt. In the so-called 'Song of the Sea' (Exodus 15) Moses and the Israelites thank their God for rescuing them from the Egyptians running after them, and they praise him as a sovereign triumphing over his foes in battle (a traditional similitude in ancient Near Eastern literature):

(...) I want to sing to Yhwh, because he triumphed highly:
he threw the horse and its rider in the sea! (...)
Yhwh is a man of war:² Yhwh is his name!
He hurled in the sea Pharaoh's chariots and army;
the best among his commanders are drowned in the Red Sea (...)
Your right hand, O Yhwh, is glorious in its strength;
your right hand, O Yhwh, crushes the foe!
In your great triumph you throw down all those who rise against you,
you unleash your wrath that devours them like stubble.³

In Israel, as in the other ancient Near Eastern cultures, warfare became a sanctified social practice.⁴ In ancient Israelite literature the principles and methods of sanc-

¹ My thanks to Ilaria Briata, Corrado Martone and Joseph Sievers for their precious suggestions; all mistakes or omissions are solely mine. This article develops ideas earlier published in Piero Capelli, 'Dalla guerra alla pace. La storia degli effetti di Deuteronomio 20 nell'ebraismo tardoantico', in *Guerra santa, guerra e pace dal Vicino Oriente antico alle tradizioni ebraica, cristiana e islamica. Atti del convegno internazionale Ravenna 11 maggio - Bertinoro 12-13 maggio 2004*, ed. Mauro Perani, Associazione italiana per lo studio del Giudaismo, Testi e studi 14 (Firenze: Editrice La Giuntina, 2005), 169-87.

² On this expression, see Mauro Perani, 'Yhwh iš milḥamah (Es. 15,3). L'espressione "Yhwh è un uomo di guerra" nell'esegesi ebraica', in *Guerra santa*, 141-50.

³ Exod 15:2-7. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the sources are mine.

⁴ On the idea of holy war in ancient Israel, see Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); trans. of *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1951); Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Reuven Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism: The Fall and Rise of a Controversial Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

tified warfare are formulated in their most complete form in the Torah, specifically in chapter 20 of the book of Deuteronomy. Here Yhwh dictates to Moses and the Israelites the rules for the war that he himself commands them to wage until they have exterminated the pagan nations (codified in the formulaic number of seven) then settled in Canaan, the land he has promised to give to the Israelites:

General exhortation

When you go to war against your enemies and see horses, chariots and troops larger than your own, fear them not, for Yhwh, your God, is with you, he who brought you out of the land of Egypt. In the imminence of battle, the priest shall come forth and speak to the people and tell them, 'Hear, O Israel! Today you are going to fight against your enemies: let not your heart faint! Fear not, waver not, nor be distressed in front of them, for Yhwh, your God, is walking with you, so as to fight for you against your enemies and rescue you'.

Categories exempted from battle

The officers shall speak to the people, 'Who has built a new house and has not yet inaugurated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in battle and someone else inaugurate it! Who has planted a vineyard and has not yet enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in battle and someone else enjoy it! Who has betrothed a woman and has not yet taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in battle and someone else take her!' The officers shall tell the people further, 'Who is scared and feels that his heart is fainting? Let him go back to his house, lest he transmit the anguish of his heart to the hearts of his brethren!'

Rules for waging war against the Canaanites

When the officers have spoken to the people, princes of the armies shall be appointed at the head of the people. When you draw near to a city to wage war against it, you shall offer peace to it. If it accepts peace and opens to you, all the people in it shall pay tribute to you and serve you. But if it does not make peace with you and makes war against you, you shall besiege it. When Yhwh, your God, gives it into your hand, you shall put to the sword all the males in it. The women, the children, the cattle and everything else in the city, all its loot, you shall take as loot for yourselves, and you shall eat the loot of your enemies which Yhwh, your God, has given to you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you and are not part of the cities of these nations. Only in the cities of these nations that Yhwh, your God, gives to you as an inheritance, you shall keep alive nothing that breathes, but rather you shall utterly exterminate them: the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivvites and the Yebusites,⁵ as Yhwh, your God, has commanded you, lest they teach you to do all the abominations they do for their gods, and you sin against Yhwh, your God. When you besiege a city for several days, making war against it in order to con-

⁵ The number of the Seven Nations (like that of the Twelve Tribes) often oscillates in the sources; cf. the complete list in Josh 3:10, at the beginning of the conquest of Canaan.

quer it, you shall not destroy its trees with an axe: eat their fruits but do not cut them down. Is a tree in the field a man, that it retreats from you inside the city under siege? You shall destroy and cut down only the trees which you know do not bear fruit. You shall use them to make siegeworks against the city you are making war against, until it falls.⁶

This chapter, when read from an historian's or anthropologist's perspective, is an expression of the same ethics of clanic societies that can still be seen at work in inter-ethnic conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa or elsewhere. In such contexts, law is granted by the strength of the clan, and victory in war is made safe only through the extermination of the enemy and its offspring—which may otherwise be committed to avenge the killed generation through blood feud. We read in Genesis that 'Cain is avenged sevenfold, Lamech seventy-sevenfold';⁷ the same idea is found in the ethos of archaic Hellenic warrior aristocracy, for instance in Homer and Archilocus.⁸ Moreover, Deuteronomy 20 is immediately preceded by one of the classic formulations of the principle of retaliation: 'Your eye shall have no mercy: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot'.⁹

The Deuteronomic narrative of the conquest of Canaan (whose normative formulation is found in our chapter 20) was used well into the modern age as a tool for legitimation of expansionist violence directed against ethnic and/or religious otherness. Telling and sad examples can be read in several sermons of Puritan preachers encouraging colonial troops against the natives of New England in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Their Anglican worldview, deeply rooted in the principle of *sola Scriptura*, modeled itself around the idea that New England was the new Canaan—a land of idolatry and sin—whereas the colonists (the Protestant, not the Catholic) were the new chosen people. Even more than to the general commandment of Deuteronomy 20 Puritan preachers referred to the way this protocol is prescribed by God to King Saul through the prophet Samuel against the Amalekites:

Thus speaks Yhwh of hosts, 'I considered what Amalek did to Israel—what they did to them along the road while they were coming out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly exterminate all their belongings: have no mercy on them, rather kill both the men and the women, both the children and the sucklings, both the oxen and the sheep, both the camels and the asses'.¹⁰

⁶ Deut 20:1-20.

⁷ Gen 4:24.

⁸ Cf. Archilocus, fr. 126 West: 'I know only one thing, but a great one: to return terrible evil upon the one who does evil to me'. Text for Archilocus, Martin L. West, ed., *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantata*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989-1992), 1:50.

⁹ Deut 19:21.

¹⁰ 1 Sam 15:2-3.

In keeping with this model the famous preacher Cotton Mather (also active in the Salem witchcraft trials at the end of the 17th century) encouraged the soldiers who were fighting the ‘just war’ against the natives, so that they could march ‘with your lives in your hands, against the Amalek that is now annoying this Israel in the wilderness’.¹¹ And similarly, in 1704 Henry Gibbs compared the ‘deliverance’ of the Promised Land accomplished by the Israelites to that of New England by means of the colonists’ artillery:

When Israel was to Enter and Possess Canaan, they must encounter their Enemies with force of Arms; although God gave them the Land, yet their Enemies were dispossessed thereof in a Warlike manner. And afterwards, when any notable deliverance was given to Israel from the Oppressions and Ravages of their Enemies, some certain Persons were raised up, who signaliz’d themselves with a Martial Spirit, to be their Saviours: the Valour and Power of the Judges were from the Spirit of the Lord moving in and resting on them. And of later days, the Salvations afforded to the People of God, have been wrought out, or effected for them in this way. Conclude we then, that the People of God may, yea it is their Duty, to employ their Arms against their Enemies, when Environ’d and molested by them; that vigilance and diligence are to be express for this purpose; and those who thus employ them in a rightful cause, do as truly fight the Battels of the Lord, as those of old did.¹²

Later, when the natives even allied with the French papists during the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, Reverend James Cogswell reminded the British soldiers that ‘the Israelites of old by the immediate command of God almighty made war on the nations of Canaan (...) and God was exceedingly displeased with Saul (...) for not entirely destroying Amalek’.¹³ Such was the ideology of the Puritans towards native Americans—whereas, when fighting the Dutch colonists who were their core-

¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Soldiers Counsell'd and Comforted: A Discourse Delivered Unto Some Part of the Forces Engaged in the Just War of New England Against the Northern and Eastern Indians. Sept. 1. 1689* (Boston: Samuel Green, 1689), 37, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00394.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

¹² Henry Gibbs, *The Right Method of Safety; or, the Just Concern of the People of God, to Joyn a Due Trust in Him, with a Diligent Use of Means. As it was Propounded in a Sermon Preached at Boston to the Artillery Company, of the Massachusetts-Bay in N.E. on the 5th of June 1704, Being the Day of their Election of Officers* (Boston: B. Green, 1704), 14-15, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00965.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

¹³ James Cogswell, *God, the Pious Soldier's Strength and Instructor: A Sermon Deliver'd at Brooklyn in Pomfret to the Military Company under the Command of Capt. Israel Putnam, on the Thirteenth Day of April, 1757* (Boston: John Draper, 1757). Here I draw from Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 167-69 (quotation page 169). The reference is to 1 Samuel 15, where the prophet Samuel reveals to Saul that God has turned his favor from him because, after defeating the Amalekites, Saul had transgressed the commandment of Deuteronomy 20 by sparing their king and part of the loot.

ligionists, they tried to keep to a code of just warfare. The Quakers alone experimented in certain circumstances with a friendly attitude towards the natives.¹⁴

But let us go back to ancient Judaism, and precisely to the Second Temple Period (6th century BCE–1st century CE), when the text of Deuteronomy 20 was eventually canonized as ‘Torah of Moses from Sinai’, the most sacred part of Hebrew scripture.

The first twelve chapters of the book of Joshua are an epic, quasi-western account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The ruling of Deuteronomy constitutes the ideological framework for the whole book of Joshua, which recounts that at the beginning of the conquest Joshua performed a public transcription and reading of the Torah.¹⁵ According to the book’s narrative, the Israelites observed rigorously the commandment of exterminating the foes they had defeated in the sieges of Jericho, Ai, Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Debir, Hazor and all the cities nearby, and, last, all the cities of the people of the Anakim.¹⁶ The narrative consistently stresses Joshua’s zeal as a full-fledged second Moses in observing the obligations listed in Deuteronomy 20:

Joshua smote the whole land, the hills, the Negev, the Shefelah, the slopes before the hills and all their kings. He left no one surviving and utterly destroyed every living being, as Yhwh, the God of Israel, had commanded.¹⁷

It was Yhwh who hardened their heart to make war against Israel, so that Israel utterly destroyed them, and treated them with no mercy, but rather annihilated them as Yhwh had commanded Moses. At that time Joshua went and wiped out the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, Debir, Anab and from all the hill country of Judah and all the hill country of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities.¹⁸

Only once did an Israelite, Achan, break the divine commandment and steal for himself a part of the booty from Jericho. On that occasion, Yhwh’s wrath punished all Israelites by causing them to be defeated in battle. The conquest of Canaan could start again only after a collective ritual of atonement and after returning to God the ill-gotten gain together with the culprit himself and all of his offspring, cattle and belongings: ‘all Israel stoned him; the others they burned in fire or stoned’.¹⁹

¹⁴ See Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 3-4 (on Deuteronomy 20 as a code, see pp. 66-68). On the role of the Bible in the formative period of the United States, see James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006).

¹⁵ Josh 8:32-35.

¹⁶ Josh 6:17, 21; 8:24-26; 10:28, 30, 32-33, 35, 39; 11:11-14, 21.

¹⁷ Josh 10:40.

¹⁸ Josh 11:20-21.

¹⁹ Josh 7:25.

2. *The Wars of the Maccabees and of the Hasmoneans*

A series of wars that the Israelites conducted for explicit religious reasons is narrated in the deuterocanonical books of 1-2 Maccabees. These wars were waged by the Maccabean dynasty (167-134 BCE.) against the Seleucid kings and other non-Jewish populations, first for the sake of independence, then for the sake of expansion. The narrative follows the historiographical and ideological model of the biblical epic of the conquest of Canaan, focusing in particular on Deuteronomy 20:3.²⁰ We are thus told that in order to 'protect the Law from the arrogance of the nations and the kings', Mattathias Maccabeus and his allies from the Hasidean party 'demolished (pagan) altars and forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys they could find in the territory of Israel. They granted no quarter to the haughty, and their endeavor turned out well'.²¹

Judas Maccabeus, in his turn, performed ritual penance and fasting, consulted the 'Book of the Law' and subdivided his army 'according to the Law'—that is, following exactly the precepts of Deuteronomy 20:5-9 (as we read in 1 Maccabees 3:46-56).²² In his campaign of 163 BCE against the non-Jewish populations of Idumaea (the 'sons of Esau') and Acrabattene (the 'sons of Baean'), if we are to follow 1 Maccabees, Judas once again strictly enforced the extermination prescribed in Deuteronomy 20 and practiced in the conquest of Canaan according to the book of Joshua: he besieged and conquered cities and destroyed the defeated by 'setting fire to the towers with everyone inside'.²³ He equally besieged, conquered and looted several cities of Transjordan, setting them on fire and killing all their male inhabitants: thus he did in Bozrah, Alema, Carnaim and Ephron,²⁴ not because of a craving for heroism, but for sheer observance of the Law, according to the ideology of the author of 1 Maccabees. In 160 BCE, fighting first Nicanor's army in Beth-Horon and then its survivors scattered around Judaea, Judas utterly exterminated the foes and seized the loot.²⁵ Finally, according to 2 Maccabees, he intended to

²⁰ Cf. Johann Maier, *Le Scritture prima della Bibbia*, Supplementi alla Introduzione allo studio della Bibbia 11 (Brescia: Paideia, 2003), 121.

²¹ 1 Macc 2:45-48.

²² Similarly, in 2 Macc 8:23 Judas summons the priest Eleazar, orders him to read the 'sacred book' and commands his soldiers to attack Seleucid troops. Maier thinks that the 'book' mentioned here (and in 1 Macc 3:48) was a copy belonging to the temple, which was used in war time; *Le Scritture prima della Bibbia*, 122. For the subdivision of troops, cf. also Exod 18:21; 2 Sam 18:1; 2 Kgs 1:9-14.

²³ 1 Macc 5:5.

²⁴ 1 Macc 5:28, 35, 44, 51. On 1 Macc 5:44, cf. 2 Macc 12:26 (the extermination of 'Karnion' and the pagan shrine of Atargatis); and on 1 Macc 5:51, cf. 2 Macc 12:27-28 (25,000 slain).

²⁵ 1 Macc 7:46-47.

‘eradicate’ the non-Jewish inhabitants of Jaffa, who had killed some Jews,²⁶ and carried out ‘an unspeakable number of massacres’ against the ‘mixed population’ gathered in Caspin of Gilead, who had insulted him and ‘were even blasphemous and said things against the Law’.²⁷

But the most detailed account of the belligerent expansionism of the Maccabees and of their successors, the Hasmoneans, is found in books 12 and 13 of Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* (1st century CE). Josephus, too, states that the Maccabees and the Hasmoneans kept to the commandments of Deuteronomy 20 in conducting their wars. The defeated were obliged to adhere to Jewish Law, including acceptance of circumcision: if they accepted, they became Jews and were subjected to the winners; if they refused, all the males were slain and their cities burned or razed. Thus, according to Josephus, did Judas Maccabeus in Bosora of Moab and in Mella of Gilead.²⁸ Thus also did the Hasmonean John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) later against the Idumaeans (who accepted circumcision and ‘Jewish laws’)²⁹ and against Samaria (which instead was seized by starvation and razed).³⁰ And eventually thus also did the Hasmonean Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE) against Pella of Transjordan, which was destroyed because its inhabitants did not accept the ‘ancestral customs of the Jews’.³¹ It is worth observing that Josephus held in the highest esteem at least one among these expansionist and militarist king-priests, namely, John Hyrcanus, whom he defines as a pious man whom God loved so much as to bestow on him the gift of prophecy, the quasi-prophetic privilege of hearing a voice descending from heaven while he was offering sacrifices in the Temple.³²

We cannot rest assured that the Maccabean and Hasmonean sovereigns actually adhered to the precepts of Deuteronomy 20 in their politics and warfare—or whether it was the authors of the books of Maccabees and, even more so, Josephus who built their accounts of those wars using Deuteronomy as a model for theological and literary inspiration. It is nonetheless beyond doubt that Deuteronomy 20

²⁶ 2 Macc 12:7.

²⁷ 2 Macc 12:13–16.

²⁸ *Ant.* 12:336, 340; cf. 1 Macc 5:28.

²⁹ *Ant.* 13:257–258. Text for Josephus: Benedictus Niese, ed., *Flavii Iosephi opera*, 7 vols. (Berolini: apud Weidmannos, 1885–1895).

³⁰ *Ant.* 13:276, 281.

³¹ *Ant.* 13:397; cf. also the description of the conquest of Gaza by Alexander Jannaeus in *Ant.* 13.356–364.

³² *Ant.* 13.299–300; *J.W.* 1.68–69. Cf. also the episode in *Ant.* 13.282–283, where Hyrcanus hears a voice from heaven while sacrificing in the temple. By contrast, in Josephus’ account Jannaeus was a drunkard who had killed one of his brothers (*Ant.* 13.323, 398), slaughtered other Jews—resorting even to such a heinous method as crucifixion (*Ant.* 13:376, 380)—and hired soldiers who were pagan and therefore impure (*Ant.* 13.374).

worked as a very effective model for the belligerent and expansionist ideology of ancient Israel—or for its representation in literature—in what was to be Israel's last period of political independence and military autonomy.

3. Deuteronomy 20 in Qumran

We can gather further information on the diffusion and uses of Deuteronomy 20 in the late Second Temple Period from the Dead Sea scrolls. These include three manuscripts of our text, all from the 1st century BCE (the time of the last Hasmonean kings and the beginning of the Herodian dynasty).³³ What is most relevant, though, is that large parts of the *Temple Scroll* and *War Scroll*—both among the longest and most important texts of extra-biblical literature from Qumran—are mere repetitions of Deuteronomy 20 or are entirely modeled after it.³⁴

1. The *Temple Scroll* (whose oldest manuscript dates from the end of the 1st century BCE) can be defined as a new formulation of the code of the covenant between God and Israel, in the form of a corpus of laws that is at many points a very autonomous reworking of the dictates of the Torah (already textually canonized by the time of the writing of the *Scroll*). In column lv God, speaking in the first person, commands to inquire and, if necessary, to wage war against Israelite cities that have lapsed into pagan worship. The rules for this warfare follow very precisely those of Deuteronomy 20:

(...) and if the thing is really certain and such abomination was committed in Israel, you shall certainly put to the sword all the inhabitants of that city, and you shall exterminate it; and you shall put to the sword everyone in it and all of its cattle. You shall gather its whole loot in the middle of its square, and you shall set fire to the city and to its whole loot, for the sake of Yhwh, your God. It shall be a heap of ruins forever and shall never be rebuilt, nor shall anything destined to extermination cling to your hand, so that I refrain from the fury of my wrath and have mercy on you; I shall have mercy on you and multiply you as I told your fathers.³⁵

Further, the rules for warfare in lxi 12-15 and lxii 3-6 are literal reprises of those in Deuteronomy 20:1-4 and 20:8-18, respectively. The only noteworthy variations are that the *Temple Scroll* mentions 'judges' (*šofeṭim*) instead of 'officers' (*šoṭerim*)—a reading nonetheless attested for Deuteronomy 20:8 in 4QDeut^{k2} from Qum-

³³ Frgs. 4QDeut^f (Deut 19:17-20:6, 75-50 BCE), 4QDeut^{k2} (Deut 20:6-19, end of 1st century BCE) and 4QDeutⁱ (Deut 20:9-13, first half of 1st century BCE). Cf. Corrado Martone, *The Judean Desert Bible: An Index*, Quaderni di Henoch 11 (Torino: S. Zamorani, 2001), 57-58, 141; Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls. Transcriptions and Textual Variants*, VTSup 134 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 217-19.

³⁴ Maier, *Le Scritture prima della Bibbia*, 121.

³⁵ 11QT^a lv 5-12. Text for the Dead Sea Scrolls: Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

ran),³⁶ that God speaks in the first person and that the Seven Nations are actually seven (with the integration of the Girgashites).

2. The *War Scroll* (whose main manuscript also dates from the late 1st century BCE) is an eschatological text describing the final battle that will take place between the ‘sons of Light’, faithful to the pristine covenant with God, and the ‘sons of Darkness’, destined to ultimate defeat and destruction. Column x, when declaring that God will side with the sons of Light in the final battle, quotes almost literally Deuteronomy 20:2-4 and reworks Deuteronomy 20:5-9:³⁷

[God] instructed us of old for our generations saying, ‘When you are in the imminence of battle, the priest shall stand and speak to the people, “Hear, O Israel! Today you are in the imminence of battle against your enemies: fear not, let not your heart faint, waver not, nor be distressed in front of them, for your God is walking with you, so as to fight for you against your enemies and rescue you”’. Our officers shall speak to all the brave at heart who are ready for battle, in order to strengthen them with God’s power and to send back all those who despair in their heart and strengthen [them] along with all the valiant soldiers. And this is what you said through Moses, ‘When a war will come to your land³⁸ against an enemy attacking you, you shall sound the trumpets, and shall be remembered before your God and rescued from your enemies’.³⁹

4. After 135 CE

The defeat in both the wars of independence against the Romans in 66-73 and 132-135 CE determined many radical changes for the Jews of Palestine. One was obviously the loss of any possibility to conduct a military politics of their own. At the beginning of the 4th century, when the Roman empire was officially christianized, the Jews rapidly became an ethnic and religious minority in their own homeland.⁴⁰ Their sacred scripture therefore started being adopted as their ‘portable homeland’.⁴¹ The text of Deuteronomy 20 had been canonized as scripture centuries ear-

³⁶ See Julie Ann Duncan, ed., ‘4QDeut^{k2}’, in *Qumran Cave 4/IX: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings*, ed. Eugene Ulrich et al., DJD 14 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), ad loc.

³⁷ For a detailed comparison, see Giovanni Ibba, *Il Rotolo della Guerra: edizione critica*, Quaderni di Henoch 10 (Torino: S. Zamorani, 1998), 146.

³⁸ The Masoretic text reads, ‘When you will go to war in your land’ (*tavo’u* instead of *tavo’*).

³⁹ IQM x 2-8, citing Num 10:9.

⁴⁰ See Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century*, trans. Ruth Tuschling (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 19-21; trans. of *Juden und Christen im Heiligen Land: Palästina unter Konstantin und Theodosius* (München: C.H. Beck, 1987).

⁴¹ This well-known expression (*portatives Vaterland*) is from Heinrich Heine, *Geständnisse* (1854), in *Vermischte Schriften* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1854), 1:85.

lier, and could no longer be eliminated nor modified. Its aggressively anti-pagan message—if centered on the Seven Nations of pre-Israelite Canaan alone—was now a problem for the new rabbinic leading class, that of the rabbis, who would gradually come to wide adjustments with Roman power and religion.⁴² The Bar Kokhba war of 132-135 CE had been particularly characterized by strong expectations of messianic redemption (which could have already been the case in the Jewish revolts in various provinces of the empire between 116 and 117 CE).⁴³ Recalling the victorious wars of independence from the past (such as the ones described in the books of Maccabees), or imagining new wars of liberation at the end of times (such as the ones described in apocalyptic literature and in the *War Scroll* from Qumran), could lead to reviving those very expectations of independence that had just proved fateful for the Jewish people, and to providing such expectations with a solid root in sacred scripture. As La Rochefoucauld would put it, one often gives good advice in order to console oneself for no longer being able to give a bad example.⁴⁴ I will argue that rabbinic Judaism engaged in gradually defusing the belligerent message of Deuteronomy 20, and that this task was accomplished by working on three different levels: (a) the constitution of the canon of sacred scripture; (b) the hermeneutics of scripture itself; and (c) preaching.⁴⁵

When rabbinic Judaism constituted its own canon of the Bible, it excluded from it the books of Maccabees, the apocalypses (with the partial exception of Daniel) and the other eschatological literature attested in Qumran.⁴⁶ This, too, was the fate of the *Megillat Antiokhus* (“The Scroll of Antiochus”), another text describing the independence war led to victory by the Maccabees.

⁴² On the relationship between the rabbinic class and Roman power, see among others Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome, A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); idem, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 101-76.

⁴³ Cf. Miriam Pucci ben Zeev, ‘The Uprisings in the Jewish Diaspora, 116-117’, in *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93-104 (particularly, pp. 93-94).

⁴⁴ François de la Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions, ou Sentences et maximes morales* (Paris: Barbin, 1665), n° 95.

⁴⁵ See Miguel Pérez Fernández, ‘La propuesta de paz de los Rabinos: Una lectura sincrónica de la tradición’, in *Biblical, Rabbinical, and Medieval Studies*, vol. 1 of *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the 6th EAJIS Congress. Toledo, July 1998*, ed. Judit Targarona Borrás and Angel Sáenz-Badillos (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 334-41.

⁴⁶ Roland de Vaux thought that the *War Scroll* might have been ‘inspired by the fanaticism of those Zealots who took part in the revolts against the Romans’; *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), 267.

5. The Megillat Antiokhus

Like the books of Maccabees, the *Megillat Antiokhus* tells the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV and his lieutenant Bagras (Bacchides), the real villain of the story, and the victorious Jewish revolt led by the Maccabees until the rededication of the Temple. The text is today thought to have been written in the 2nd century CE⁴⁷ (the same period of the great pseudepigraphical apocalypses *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*); it was meant for liturgical reading during *Ḥanukkah*, the commemoration of the rededication of the Temple. In the *Megillat Antiokhus* God's war against the pagans is once again presented following the biblical model of the conquest of Canaan, not without a penchant for gore, for instance, at the beginning of the Maccabean epic according to the Hebrew liturgical text:

(...) On that day Mattathias set out with his sons. They waged war against the Nations, and the God of heaven placed all the heroes of the Nations in their hands. They exterminated them with great slaughter: all those who wielded the sword and drew the bow, the generals and lieutenants of the army, nothing was left of them (...) The Jews rejoiced because those who hated them had been placed in their hands. Some they burned in fire, others they ran through with their swords, others they hanged on the wood.⁴⁸

The *Megillat Antiokhus* was not transmitted in all the *minhagim* (local liturgical traditions) of rabbinic Judaism: for instance, it is not found in Sephardic prayer books,⁴⁹ whereas it appears in some of the Italian ones.⁵⁰ Although it was not canonized as sacred scripture, this text enjoyed relevant popularity as part of the liturgy for *Ḥanukkah*. Yet, its prestige within Jewish piety and ideology was fluctuating in different periods and liturgical traditions.

6. Rabbinic Ideology of Peace in the Mishnah

The founding text of rabbinic Judaism is the *Mishnah*, a corpus of 63 tractates of religious law written at the beginning of the 3rd century CE and marking the textualization of the oral religious traditions that the rabbis maintained as 'oral Torah'—one of the two parts (along with the written Torah) of the revelation transmitted by God to Moses on Sinai.

⁴⁷ Following Menachem Zewi Kaddari, 'Megillat Antiokhus ha-arammit', *Bar-Ilan* 1 (1963): 81-105; 2 (1964): 178-214 (Hebrew).

⁴⁸ Text for *Megillat Antiokhus*: Menachem Emanuele Artom, ed., *Machazor di rito italiano secondo gli usi di tutte le Comunità*, 3 vols., Collana di testi liturgici ebraici 2-4 (Roma: Carucci, 1988-1990), ad loc.

⁴⁹ Cf., for instance, Shlomo Bekhor, ed., *Siyach Yitzchàk, Libro di preghiere tradotto e commentato: rito sefardita*, Edizioni DLI (Milano: Mamash, 1998), 756-67.

⁵⁰ Cf., for instance, Artom, *Machazor di rito italiano secondo gli usi di tutte le Comunità*, 1:716-25, where the *Megillat Antiokhus* is found in an appendix, with prayer and hymns which fell out of usage.

The *Mishnah* tractate *Soṭah* ('woman suspected of adultery') is dedicated to the ordeal prescribed in the written Torah to test a woman suspected of being an adulteress.⁵¹ Some parts of the tractate are actual redactional erratic boulders, whose content is not related to the rest of the text—their character being, not juridical, but rather homiletical-edifying or even apocalyptic (for instance, chapter 9). The whole eighth chapter thus happens to be a *midrash* (edifying commentary) to Deuteronomy 20:2-9.⁵²

The *midrash* in *Mishnah Soṭah* 8 is meant to limit as much as possible the belligerent message of the biblical passage in question. First, the *midrash* omits completely the cruel rules for extermination of the Seven Nations (20:10ff.).⁵³ It manifoldly endeavors to orientate the understanding of vv. 2-9 in an anti-belligerent direction:⁵⁴

When the (priest) anointed for war spoke to the people, he did so in the holy tongue,⁵⁵ as it is written, “*In the imminence of battle, the priest shall come forth*”—this is the priest anointed for war—“*and speak to the people*”—in the holy tongue—“*and tell them, ‘Hear, O Israel! Today you are going to fight against your enemies’*” (Deut 20:2-3) ...You are moving against your enemies: if you fall in their hands, they will not have mercy on you’.⁵⁶

At the time of the redaction of the *Mishnah*, the priest ‘anointed for war’ had long disappeared as an institution. By referring to him the *Mishnah* placed the ruling of Deuteronomy 20 in a temporally remote dimension—either a mythical past reconsidered from an antiquarian perspective or an eschatological utopia.

‘*Let not your heart faint!... for Yhwh, your God, is walking with you*’ (Deut 20:3-4): they go forth with the strength of human beings, but you go forth with the strength of the Omnipresent. The Philistines went forth with the strength of Goliath (1 Sam 17): and what was his end? In the end he fell by the sword and they fell along with him. The

⁵¹ Num 5:11-31.

⁵² An extremely precise textual parallel to this chapter is found in §192 of a lengthy rabbinic *midrash* to Deuteronomy known as *Sifre to Deuteronomy*, which we consider below.

⁵³ Deut 20:10-18.

⁵⁴ My following analysis is indebted to Günter Stemberger, ‘La guerra nella *Mišnah* e nei *midrašim* halakici’, 131-39, in *Guerra santa*.

⁵⁵ That is, in Hebrew, not in Aramaic, the most widespread language among Palestinian Jews at the time the *Mishnah* was written.

⁵⁶ M. *Soṭah* 8:1-2. Text for *Mishnah*: MS Kaufmann A 50 (Southern Italy, 11th-12th cent.), Jewish National and University Library, Hebrew University in Jerusalem Department of Talmud and the David and Fela Shapell Family Digitization Project, *Online Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts*, <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/jewish-collection/Talmud/Pages/default.aspx>.

Ammonites went forth with the strength of Shobach (2 Sam 10: Shobach was the commander of the Ammonites in their war against David): and what was his end? In the end he fell by the sword and they fell along with him. But you will not fall, 'for Yhwh, your God, is walking with you, so as to fight for you'—this is the camp of the Lord.⁵⁷

Where the Kaufmann MS has 'the camp of the Lord' (*maḥaneh ha-adon*), several other manuscripts read 'the camp of the Ark' (*maḥaneh ha-aron*).⁵⁸ It is a trivial variant reading determined by the very similar shape of the Hebrew letters *dalet* (*d*) and *resh* (*r*). But if one reads *aron*, the 'Ark' is the Ark of the Covenant that contained the Tables of the Law and was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. This variant reading therefore restricts the validity of the rulings of Deuteronomy 20 to the remote period between the giving of the Tables on Sinai and the destruction of the First Temple.

'The officers shall speak to the people, "Who has built a new house and has not yet inaugurated it? Let him go back..."': it is the same thing if he has built a barn, or a stable, or a woodshed, or a deposit; it is the same thing if he has built it, or bought it, or inherited it or received it as a gift.

'Who has planted a vineyard and has not yet enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house': it is the same thing if he planted a vineyard, or if he planted five fruit trees (even if of five different species), or if he planted (the vineyard), or propagated it by layering, or grafted it, or bought it, or inherited it or received it as a gift.

'Who has betrothed a woman and has not yet taken her? Let him go back to his house': it is the same thing if he has betrothed a virgin, or if he has betrothed a widow (even one awaiting levirate marriage),⁵⁹ or even if he has heard that his own brother died in battle⁶⁰—he goes back home. All these listen to the priest's words about the regulations for the battle, then they go back and provide water and food and fix the roads.

⁵⁷ M. *Soṭah* 8:3. That is, the camp of the Israelites marching through the wilderness towards the Promised Land and carrying the Ark of the Covenant with the Tablets of the Law.

⁵⁸ Thus, manuscripts Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, De Rossi 138 and Cambridge University Library T.-S. E1.97, as well as the *editio princeps* by Yehoshua' Shelomoh Soncino (Naples 1492); cf. t. *Soṭah* 7.18. *Tosefta* is quoted according to the subdivision of the text in Moses Samuel Zuckermann, ed., *Tosefta* (1882; repr. [of supplement to *Tosefta*], Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1963).

⁵⁹ Deut 25:5-10 prescribes that the brother of a man who died childless was obliged to marry the widow (levirate marriage, from the Latin *levir*, 'brother-in-law') and the firstborn would be considered son of the deceased. If the brother refused, the widow was obliged to summon him in the presence of the elders, pull out an item of his footwear and spit in his face. This ritual, called *ḥaliṣah* ('removal of footwear'), rendered void the obligation to levirate marriage.

⁶⁰ And, therefore, that he should marry his widow.

These cannot go back: one who has built a house for the keeper, or an exedra or a terrace; one who has planted four fruit trees, or five trees not producing fruit; a high priest who has married a widow, or an ordinary priest who has married a woman who had been repudiated or had performed *ḥaliṣah*, or an Israelite who has married a bastard woman or an oblate woman,⁶¹ or a bastard or an oblate who has married an Israelite woman—these cannot go back. Rabbi Yehudah says, ‘Also one who rebuilt his house as it was and where it was earlier cannot go back’. Rabbi Le‘azar says, ‘Also one who built a house of bricks in Sharon cannot go back’.

These cannot stir from their place: one who has built a house and has inaugurated it; one who has planted a vineyard and has enjoyed its fruits; one who has married his betrothed; one who has consummated his union with the childless widow of his own deceased brother, as it is written, ‘(A man who has newly married shall not go to war, nor shall he be charged with any commitment; he shall be free (for one year) to take care of his house’ (Deut 24:5): ‘of his house’ applies to his house; ‘(he shall be) free’ applies to his vineyard; ‘and he shall make happy his wife’ applies to his wife; ‘whom he married’ (is said) in order to include also the childless wife of his deceased brother. These do not provide water or food, nor do they fix the roads.

‘The officers shall say further to the people, “Who is scared and feels that his heart is fainting? Let him go back to his house, (lest he transmit the anguish of his heart to the hearts of his brethren!)”’. Rabbi ‘Aqiva says, “‘Who is scared and feels that his heart is fainting’ is to be understood literally: one who cannot bear the clash of armies in battle nor the sight of an unsheathed sword’. Rabbi Yose the Galilean says, “‘Who is scared and feels that his heart is fainting’ is one who is scared on account of the transgressions that he committed; therefore the Law links him to these others, that he may give back thanks to them’.⁶² Rabbi Yose says, ‘A high priest who has married a widow, or an ordinary priest who has married a woman who had been repudiated or had performed *ḥaliṣah*,⁶³ or an Israelite who has married a bastard woman or an oblate woman, or a bastard or an oblate who has married an Israelite woman: these “are scared and feel that their hearts are fainting”’.⁶⁴

Deuteronomy 20:8 rules that soldiers seized by panic be dismissed from the army so that they do not spread demoralization among the others. By contrast the rabbis quoted in the *Mishnah* are not concerned with removing the obstacles to victo-

⁶¹ The oblates (*netinim*) were a class of temple servants mentioned in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and 1-2 Chronicles. The *Mishnah* prohibited oblates and persons of mixed ethnicity (‘bastards’) from marrying Israelites or members of the priestly and Levitical classes; *m. Qidd.* 4:1.

⁶² According to Jewish traditional commentaries (e.g., that of ‘Ovadyah of Bertinoro, 1455-1516) this means that the transgressor was thus spared the shame of declaring his transgressions publicly.

⁶³ See note 59.

⁶⁴ *M. Soṭah* 8:4-6, 8-9.

ry, as much as they are with widening as much as possible the number of categories exempted from participating in the war:⁶⁵

‘When the officers have spoken...(to the people, princes of the armies shall be appointed at the head of the people) (and at the rearguard of the people)’. They placed ahead of them and behind them soldier guards holding iron axes and empowered to break the legs of those who sought to go back, since the beginning of flight brings forth defeat, as it is written, ‘Israel fled in front of the Philistines and there was a great slaughter among the people’ (1 Sam 4:17). And there is written, ‘The Philistines waged war against Israel, and the men of Israel fled in front of the Philistines and fell by the sword on Mount Gilboa’ (1 Sam 31:1).

To what does all that has been said till now apply? To a war waged for free deliberation; but in a war waged for commandment everyone goes out (to battle), even ‘a bridegroom out of his wedding room and a bride out of her wedding baldachin’ (Joel 2:16). Rabbi Yehudah said, “To what does all that has been said till now apply? To a war waged for commandment; but in a war waged in duty everyone goes out to battle, but in a compulsory war all go out to battle, even “a bridegroom out of his wedding room and a bride out of her wedding baldachin”.”⁶⁶

This passage applies for the first time to Deuteronomy 20 the juridical and religious distinction between a war waged for free deliberation (*milḥemet ha-rešut*, that is, a war waged to defend oneself) and one waged in compliance with a religious commandment (*milḥemet mišwah*, that is, one waged to defend one’s religion). Here it is also stated that Deuteronomy 20:10-18 only concerns voluntary warfare.⁶⁷ Elsewhere the *Mishnah* proclaims that voluntary warfare must be deliberated by a court (*sanhedrin*) composed of seventy-one members and that the Israelites must be led in war by their king.⁶⁸ As in the case of the priest anointed for war in *Mishnah Soṭah* 8:1, here, too, reference is made to institutions that belonged to Israel’s remotest past. Declaring an actual war was therefore not only unrealistic, but also juridically impossible. Furthermore, the quotation from Joel 2:16 refers in its original context to the ‘day of Yhwh’, that is, to the end of times. In all likelihood, therefore, the redactors of the *Mishnaic* passage quoted this verse to signify that even the commandment of mandatory warfare is to be understood as valid only for the end of times—that is to say, it was completely outside of human deliberation.

⁶⁵ Thus, Elisabetta Abate, “‘Il vostro cuore non venga meno’ (Deut 20:3): la paura della battaglia secondo *mSoṭ* 8’, in ‘Let the Wise Listen and Add to Their Learning’ (Prov 1:5): *Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, ed. Constanza Cordonì and Gerhard Langer, *Studia Judaica Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums* 90 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 304.

⁶⁶ *M. Soṭah* 8:10.

⁶⁷ Thus also in *t. Soṭah* 7.24 (parallel to Rabbi Yehudah’s saying) and *Sifre Deut.* §§190.203; see further under *Sifre to Deuteronomy* (below).

⁶⁸ *M. Sanh.* 1:5; 2:4.

7. *Tractate Avot and Pereq ha-Šalom*

At a much later time, probably already in the Islamic age, tractate *Avot* ('Fathers', also known as *Pirqe Avot*, 'Chapters of the Fathers') was incorporated into the canon of the *Mishnah*. It is a collection of wisdom sayings and moral precepts attributed to the rabbis of the early generations (from the 1st century BCE to the end of the 2nd century CE). Starting from its first chapter, the tractate highlights peace as one of the founding values of rabbinic ethos (which parallels the exclusion from the biblical canon of all the texts that could be taken again as supports for armed nationalistic ideologies):

Hillel says, 'Be of the disciples of Aaron, who love peace and pursue peace, love human beings and draw them close to the Torah'.⁶⁹

Further:

Rabban Shim'on ben Gamli'el says, 'The world stands on three things: on judgment, truth and peace (as it is written, "You shall render judgment according to truth and for the sake of peace" [Zech 8:16])'.⁷⁰

The *Pereq ha-Šalom* ('Chapter on Peace') is another rabbinic work specifically dedicated to peace. It is one of the so-called minor tractates of the *Babylonian Talmud*, since it was not included in its canon but was transmitted together with it as an appendix to its fourth part since the Giustiniani edition (printed in Venice, 1546-1551). The *Pereq* is a collection of nineteen lengthy wisdom sayings on peace attributed to various rabbis, all introduced by the anaphora 'Great is peace, because...'—a rhetorical device typical of the genre of homily.⁷¹ The first dimension of peace acknowledged and protected in the *pereq* is the private one, within one's family:

Rabbi Yishma'el said, 'Great is peace, because we find (in Scripture) that the Holy One, blessed be he, allowed his own name—which was written down in sanctity—to be diluted in water in order to make peace between a husband and a wife'.⁷²

⁶⁹ *M. Avot* 1:12. The expression 'who love peace and pursue it' is a reprise of Ps 34:15b, 'Look for peace and pursue it'.

⁷⁰ *M. Avot* 1:18. The prooftext from Zechariah only appears in some manuscripts.

⁷¹ A whole section of *Leviticus Rabbah* (the largest collection of rabbinic sayings and *exempla* on peace as a value) is built around this same anaphora. This is why the *Pereq ha-Šalom* is considered more recent than *Leviticus Rabbah* (not earlier than the 6th century) and derived from it.

⁷² *Pereq ha-Šalom* 9. Text for the *Babylonian Talmud*, in general, and *Pereq ha-Šalom*, in particular: *Talmud Bavli*, 20 vols. (Jerusalem: Torah la-'Am, 1962).

This saying is taken from an older rabbinic compilation, the *Tosefta* (3rd century CE),⁷³ and refers to the biblical ritual of the ‘water of bitterness’.⁷⁴ In this ordeal, a special imprecation including God’s name was written in ink on a parchment that was then washed with holy water. Dust from the floor of the Tabernacle was then diluted in the resulting admixture of ink and water. A woman suspected of being an adulteress (a *soṭah*) was forced to drink such ‘water of bitterness’: if she felt sick, she was considered guilty and put to death. It is slightly difficult to agree with Rabbi Yishma‘el that this was an ideal method for restoring conjugal peace.⁷⁵

According to the compiler of the *Pereq ha-Šalom* the quest for peace should not be circumscribed to the domestic realm. Psalm 34:15b—the basis for the above mentioned saying about Aaron ‘who loves peace and pursues peace’—is interpreted by Rabbi Ḥizqiyah as follows, where ‘another place’ means one’s neighbor:

‘(...) *Look for peace and pursue it*: search for it in your place and pursue it in another place.’⁷⁶

The quest for peace is deemed so important that for its sake one can even forsake keeping one of the Ten Commandments, the prohibition to bear false witness:

Rabbi (Yehudah the Patriarch) said, ‘All lies are prohibited, but one is allowed to lie in order to make peace between someone else and his neighbor’.⁷⁷

Later on, this principle is exemplified by resorting once again to the story of Aaron, Moses’ brother and the first Israelite high priest:

Aaron the priest was praised only on account of peace (...) If he saw two men hating each other, he went to one of them and asked him, ‘Why do you hate So-and-so? He just came to my house, became restless (or, he bowed down) in front of me and told me, “I sinned against So-and-so”. Go make peace with him’. Then he left, went to the other, and told him the same thing he had said to the first. Thus he made peace, love and friendship between a man and his neighbor.’⁷⁸

Peace is nurtured as a virtue even in heaven, where God cares to keep it among the angels:

Bar Qappara said, ‘Great is peace, because the angels harbor no animosity, nor envy, nor hatred, nor heresy (*minut*), nor meanness nor strife among themselves, since the Holy One, blessed be he, makes peace among them’. What is the meaning of the verse ‘*Domi-*

⁷³ *T. Šabbat* 13.5.

⁷⁴ Num 5:11-31.

⁷⁵ This tradition is found also in *Deut. Rab.* on Deut 5:15, where it is ascribed to Rabbi ‘Aqiva.

⁷⁶ *Pereq ha-Šalom* 4.

⁷⁷ *Pereq ha-Šalom* 5.

⁷⁸ *Pereq ha-Šalom* 18.

nation and fear are with him who makes peace from high heaven' (Job 25:2)? 'Domination' is (the archangel) Michael, 'fear' is (the archangel) Gabriel: the latter does not prevail on the first, yet the first is made of fire and the latter is made of water.⁷⁹ All the more so mankind (is in need of peace), among whom all those characteristics are to be found.⁸⁰

The rabbis did not assign eschatological expectations a central role in their model of Jewish spirituality. They had nevertheless learned from biblical prophetic literature (from Isaiah, for instance) that definitive peace among mankind will only be established by God at the end of times.⁸¹ The motif of final peace that can only be achieved by God through the messiah he will send in some undefined future is frequently attested in the *Babylonian Talmud* (5th-6th centuries), where it is stressed that messianic peace will only come after a long age of suffering and warfare for Israel and the whole world.⁸² The messiah will therefore be a pacifier, whose role is described in the *Pereq ha-Šalom* as follows:

Rabbi Yose the Galilean says, 'Even the name of the messiah is "Peace", as it is written, "And he is called (...) Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:5) (...) Great is peace, because the hour when the king messiah will reveal himself to Israel will only begin with peace, as it is written, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings who announces peace!" (Isa 52:7) (...) Great is peace, because (even) an hour of warfare will only begin with peace, as it is written, "When you draw near to a city to wage war against it, you shall offer peace to it"' (Deut 20:10).⁸³

At this point the *Pereq ha-Šalom* shifts from celebrating peace in the private dimension of everyday familiar and social relationships to declaring its collective, eschatological perspective. This is done by means of a quotation from Deuteronomy 20, the classical biblical example of the idea of sanctified warfare. As stated above, starting from the mid-16th century the *Pereq* was transmitted along with the *Babylonian Talmud*, where it is still today placed right after the two tractates of *Derekh Ereš* ('Good Manners'), containing behavioral and moral rules specifically meant

⁷⁹ Cf. *Deut. Rab.* (on Deut 5:12).

⁸⁰ *Pereq ha-Šalom* 8.

⁸¹ Cf. Isa 2:2-4, 'At the end of days...(Yhwh) shall judge between the nations and decide between many peoples; they shall forge their swords into plowshares and their spears into scythes; one nation shall no more lift up its sword against another, neither shall they learn war any more'. On ultimate peace sent by God, cf. Isa 9:5-6; 11:1-9; 32:18; 54:10; Mic 4:1-3; Ps 72:3, 7.

⁸² Cf. b. *Sanh.* 97a-98b (the theme of the 'birth pangs of the messiah', that is, the sufferings that will precede his coming, is already found in prophetic and apocalyptic literature: Isa 13:7-8; Ezek 38-39; Rev 12:1-2). See Piero Capelli, 'La profezia irrealizzabile nel presente: l'eschaton come utopia', *RStB* 1 (1999): 149-78; idem, 'Come i rabbini della tarda antichità attendevano il messia', *Humanitas* 60 (2005): 28-56.

⁸³ *Pereq ha-Šalom* 11.

for the young disciples of the rabbis. The *Pereq* has therefore enjoyed (and still enjoys) an almost canonical prestige within Talmudic literature, and has played a precise role in the formation of the rabbinic class.

8. Liturgy: The Haftarot of the Parašah of Šofetim and the ‘Amidah Prayer

Liturgy is the privileged moment for transmitting the system of values within any religious tradition. The sacralized reading of scripture in synagogue liturgy for Shabbat was soon structured in three main moments:

- i. Reading of one section (*parašah*) taken from the Torah: the founding document that God gave on Sinai to Moses and the Israelites is celebrated and sacralized.
- ii. Reading of one text (*haftarah*, literally ‘opening’) taken from one of the prophetic books of scripture: another founding document—also given by God to Israel through a prophet—is juxtaposed to the *parašah*, in order to introduce a pivotal concept that can direct the interpretation of the *parašah*.
- iii. Homily (*derašah*): on the basis of the *parašah* and its *haftarah*—but not only nor always starting from them—the constitutive values of the rabbinic ethos are taught to the community.

In late antique rabbinic Palestinian Judaism the reading of the Torah was programmed over three years. Deuteronomy 20 is attested as the *parašah* for the 146th and 147th Shabbats of the triennial cycle.⁸⁴ According to most of the evidence, the *parašah* for the 147th Shabbat began with Deuteronomy 20:10 (‘When you draw near to a city to wage war against it, you shall offer peace to it’); and its *haftarah* was Isaiah 66:12-16, where God promises to let peace flow ‘like a river’ towards Jerusalem before the final judgment. The presence of the word ‘peace’, *šalom*, in both Deuteronomy 20:10a and Isaiah 66:12a is the verbal hooking⁸⁵ by which a *haftarah* centered on peace is drawn together with a *parašah* centered on war. Such an interpretive choice was clearly functional to the teaching which the Palestinian rabbis of the first centuries CE meant their community to derive from that passage in the Torah.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ See Charles Perrot, *La lecture de la Bible dans la Synagogue: les anciennes lectures palestiniennes du Shabbat et des fêtes*, Collection Massorah, Série 1/Études classiques et textes 1 (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1973), 84.

⁸⁵ I borrow the expression from Perrot, *La lecture de la Bible dans la Synagogue*, 84 (*accrochage verbal*).

⁸⁶ Later, in the *minhagim* of the diaspora of Europe, the *parašah* of Šofetim (including Deuteronomy 20) has been coupled more often with other *haftarot* that are not related to the theme of war and peace. In the *Bibbia ebraica* edited by Dario Disegni two *haftarot* are listed for Šofetim: (1) 1 Sam 8:1-22 in the Italian rite (according to Elia S. Artom, ‘the *parašah* lays down the regulations for the ideal king; in the *haftarah* Samuel explains what the king will exact from the people’); and (2) Isa 51:12-52:12 in the Spanish and German rites (‘I, I am he who consoles you’: the *haftarah* bears no connection to the top-

Peace is also strongly highlighted as a value in daily prayer, both individual and collective. This can be seen for instance in the ‘*Amidah*’ ([Prayer] recited while standing)—also called *Šemoneh ‘Ešreh*, ‘Eighteen’, the number of supplications and blessings it includes), a widespread prayer that the *Babylonian Talmud* dated back to the foundational moment of rabbinic Judaism itself, that is, the synod that was purportedly held in Yavneh ca. 100 CE.⁸⁷ The supplications and blessings of the ‘*Amidah*’ culminate in a prayer that God would grant peace to Israel as its highest good:

Grant peace, good, blessing, life,⁸⁸ grace, goodness and mercy to us and to all Israel your people. Bless us, our father, because with the light of your countenance you gave us, O Yhwh, our God, a Law of life, love, goodness, justice, blessing, salvation, mercy, life and peace. Let it be your will that you bless all your people Israel⁸⁹ with your peace forever, in every time and in every hour. Blessed be you, O Yhwh, who bless your people Israel with peace. Amen!⁹⁰

9. Deuteronomy 20 in Targum and Midrash

The Aramaic translations of scripture (*targumim*) that were used in preaching grant no relevant information about the use of Deuteronomy 20 in rabbinic liturgy. They usually expand on the biblical text by integrating explanations into it. In the case of Deuteronomy 20, though, the various *targumim* are all peculiarly literal. Even in a very paraphrastic translation it was not easy to introduce irenic messages so divergent from the literal content of the biblical passage under scrutiny.

We have nonetheless very relevant examples of rabbinic hermeneutics applied to Deuteronomy 20 from the 5th to the 8th centuries, the age during which rabbinic Judaism gradually established itself as the leading trend in Jewish society and piety. First, I will consider two large homiletical commentaries (*midrashim*) to the whole book of Deuteronomy: *Sifre to Deuteronomy* and *Deuteronomy Rabbah*.

10. Sifre to Deuteronomy

This large, mainly juridical commentary to Deuteronomy expands on the distinction between mandatory and voluntary warfare that, as we have seen, was already applied to Deuteronomy 20 in *Mishnah Soṭah*. As in the *Mishnah*, here too the text of

ic of the *parašah*, and it is called ‘consolatory *haftarah*’, because its *parašah* is read in one of the *Shabbats* that follow the anniversary of the destruction of the temple on the 9th of Ab); *Bibbia ebraica: Pentateuco e Haftarah*, 3rd ed. (Firenze: Giuntina, 1995), 443-46.

⁸⁷ *B. Ber.* 28b-29a.

⁸⁸ This word appears only in the *minhagim* of Turin, Milan and Rome.

⁸⁹ ‘Let it be your will that you bless us and bless all your people Israel’, in the *minhagim* of Milan and Rome.

⁹⁰ Text for the ‘*Amidah*’: Artom, *Machazor di rito italiano*, 272.

Deuteronomy 20:10-18 is said to concern voluntary warfare alone;⁹¹ the severe prescription of warfare against the Seven Nations is therefore practically neutralized. For this reason, the distinction between mandatory and voluntary warfare would be reutilised in all subsequent midrashic hermeneutics.⁹²

Retreat is prohibited also in voluntary warfare,⁹³ since this is nonetheless God's war, and God marches in battle by his people's side:

'For Yhwh, your God, is walking with you' (Deut 20:4): they (the enemies) come forth (trusting) in a victory of flesh and blood, whereas you come forth (trusting) in the victory of the Lord. *'For Yhwh, your God, is walking with you'*: he who was with you in the wilderness will be with you in the time of distress; this is why Scripture says *'Yhwh will fight for you while you stay still'*.⁹⁴

The battle must be conducted in keeping with the regulations dictated by God in Deuteronomy. If these rules are observed, victory will be achieved; otherwise, Israel will perish in the fight:

'Lest he die in battle' (Deut 20:6): if he does not heed the priest's words, he will eventually die in battle (...) *'When Yhwh, your God, gives it in your hand'* (Deut 20:13): if you accomplish all that is prescribed about this, the Lord, your God, will eventually place (the city) in your hand.⁹⁵

All in all, on the exegetical level, *Sifre to Deuteronomy* fully confirms the entire harsh biblical ruling about war against the Seven Nations, including the obligation to exterminate the defeated foe and the right to loot. On the homiletical level, though, a decisive swerve is taken at one specific point of the text. The commentary to Deuteronomy 20:10 (the precept to offer peace to a city before besieging it) first circumscribes and attenuates the commandment of siege; then it uses the prescription of offering peace before the siege as a hinge to distantiate itself decidedly from the text and to turn it into an exhortation no longer related to religious law, but only aimed at edifying the audience and proclaiming peace as the founding value of Jewish and universal ethos:

'When you draw near to a city' (Deut 20:10): Scripture speaks about voluntary warfare. *'To a city'*: not to a great city. *'To a city'*: not to a village. *'To wage war against it'* (Deut 20:10): not to take it by hunger, nor by thirst nor to make it ill to death. *'You shall offer peace to*

⁹¹ *Sifre Deut.* §§190.203.

⁹² Cf. *Midrash Tanna'im* and *Midrash ha-Gadol*, as well as Rashi's commentary to Deut 20:10, 19 (Northern France, 11th century).

⁹³ *Sifre Deut.* §198 (on Deut 20:9).

⁹⁴ *Sifre Deut.* §§192-193. Text for *Sifre to Deuteronomy*: Louis Finkelstein, ed., *Sifre 'al Sefer Devarim*, Corpus Tannaicum: Sectio tertia, Veterum doctorum ad Pentateuchum interpretationes halachicas continens/Pars tertia, Siphre d'be Rab, fasciculus 2 (1939; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1969).

⁹⁵ *Sifre Deut.* §§195.200.

it' (Deut 20:10): great is peace, because even the dead need peace; great is peace, because even in Israel's war there is need for peace; great is peace, because those who dwell in the highest are in need for peace, as it is written, '*He who makes peace in the highest*' (Job 25:2); great is peace, because the priestly blessing ends with it.⁹⁶ Moses too loved peace, as it is written, '*I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemot to Sichon the king of Heshbon with words of peace*' (Deut 2:26).⁹⁷

11. Deuteronomy Rabbah

Deuteronomy Rabbah (*Midrash Rabbah to Deuteronomy*) is another exegetical compilation on Deuteronomy, of an even more homiletical character, and aimed at a wider, more variegated audience. Here the interpretation of Deuteronomy 20:10 is structured in a lengthy section that opens with a list of rabbinic arguments about how God, in creating the universe, bore in his mind the principle of peace between heavenly bodies and human beings.⁹⁸ The points made in the section—and duly supported by quotations from the Bible—are the following:

i. The biblical context deals with God-given regulations for holy war. Nevertheless, the *midrash* stresses that peace is anyway the best thing, even when it goes against God's previous intention:

The Holy One, blessed be he, told (Joshua) to wage war against Sihon of Og, as it is written, '*And wage war against him*' (Deut 2:24). Yet he did not, rather '*I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemot to Sichon the king of Heshbon with words of peace*' (Deut 2:26). God said to him, 'I told you to wage war against him, yet you began with peace. By your life! I shall confirm your decision: every war the Israelites enter, they will begin it with peace, as it is written, "*When you draw near to a city (to wage war against it, you shall offer peace to it)*"' (Deut 20:10).⁹⁹

ii. One should not even despise one's enemy, as can be inferred by juxtaposing Deuteronomy 23:8 ('You shall not abhor the Idumaeon, for he is your brother; nor shall you abhor the Egyptian, because you were a foreigner in his land') and Psalm 34:15b ('Look for peace and pursue it').¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ The priestly blessing (Num 6:24-26) ends as follows: 'May Yhwh lift his countenance towards you and grant you peace!'

⁹⁷ *Sifre Deut.* §199. As stated above, the anaphora 'Great is peace...' is a typical rhetorical device in the genre of oral preaching.

⁹⁸ *Deut. Rab.* 5:12 (on Deut 20:10). A wider discussion of the theme is found in *b. Git.* 59a.

⁹⁹ *Deut. Rab.* 5:13 (on Deut 20:10). Text for *Deuteronomy Rabbah* (unless otherwise indicated): Saul Lieberman, ed., *Midrash Devarim Rabbah*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965).

¹⁰⁰ Though the Idumaeans had been made brethren of the Jews by the Hasmonean kings only by means of war and forced circumcision, if we are to follow Josephus' account in *Ant.* 13:257-258.

iii. As in *Sifre to Deuteronomy*, Deuteronomy 20:10 is the hinge around which the content of the biblical passage is turned upside down and peace is promoted as the absolute value:

Our rabbis say, ‘Know how great is the power of peace, since even (about) war—which one wages only with sword and spear—the Holy One, blessed be he, said, “When you go wage war, do not begin unless with peace”. This derives from what we read, “When you draw near to a city to wage war against it, (you shall offer peace to it)”’ (Deut 20:10).¹⁰¹

The issue here is not peace in its generic dimension—be it familiar, cosmic or eschatological: it is concrete political peace between nations as an alternative to warfare. Further on in the *midrash* Deuteronomy 20:10 is quoted again at the opening of a compilation of *aggadot* (*exempla* and tales for the edification and the pleasure of the audience) on peace as a value within the family, in society at large and particularly in the relationship between nations.¹⁰² I translate here the two first examples, respectively, about peace between God and the pagan nations, and about peace between the Israelites and their Egyptian oppressors:

Another explanation of ‘*You shall offer peace to it*’ (Deut 20:10). See how great is the power of peace! Come and see: if a person of flesh and blood has someone who hates him, he continually seeks to do him (harm). What does he do to him? He goes to someone who is his superior and honors him, so that the latter does harm to the one who hates him. But the Holy One, blessed be he, is not like that. Rather, all the worshipers of the stars make him angry, then go to sleep, and all (their) souls ascend to him (How do we [know this]? From the verse ‘*In whose hand is the soul of every living being*’ [Job 12:10]); then in the morning he returns every soul to each one (How do we know this? From the verse ‘*He who gives breath to the people on it*’ [the earth, Isa 42:5]).

Another explanation: if a person of flesh and blood hurts his neighbor, the evil done never leaves the latter’s soul. But the Holy One, blessed be he, is not like that. Rather, when the Israelites were in Egypt and the Egyptians enslaved them and made them work with bricks and mortar, notwithstanding all the evil they had done to the Israelites, Scripture had mercy on them and said, ‘*Nor shall you abhor the Egyptian, because you were a foreigner in his land*’ (Deut 23:8); rather, you shall pursue peace, as it is written, ‘*Look for peace and pursue it*’ (Ps 34:15b).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Deut. Rab.* 5:12 (on Deut 20:10); cf. *Lev. Rab.* 11:7 (on Lev 9:1).

¹⁰² With parallels in *Lev. Rab.* 9:9 (on Lev 7:11-12).

¹⁰³ *Deut. Rab.* 5:15 (on Deut 20:10). Text for *Deuteronomy Rabbah* here: Moshéh Mirkin, ed., *Devarim Rabbah*, vol. 11 of *Midrash Rabbah*, 11 vols. (Tel Aviv: 1956-1967).

12. *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana and Pesiqta Rabbati*

Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana and *Pesiqta Rabbati* are the two most distinctly homiletic *midrashim* dedicated to the Torah sabbatical reading cycle in its articulation into *parashiyot*. Both pass Deuteronomy 20 over in a silence that in poor journalism would be labeled ‘deafening’ and that I deem indicative of the embarrassment that their authors must have experienced before a text that did not let itself be easily excavated in search of edifying values for preaching to the community. Only *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* includes Deuteronomy 20:17 (the precept to exterminate the Seven Nations), in a compilation of biblical passages where it is juxtaposed to Numbers 33:55 (‘But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those among them that you will leave there will become like thorns in your eyes...’) and to Joshua 6:25 (in which Rahab, the prostitute who had granted shelter to Israelite scouts before the conquest of Jericho, is said not to have been killed and her offspring not to have been driven out after the conquest).¹⁰⁴ Here the *midrash* proceeds by progressive associations towards an attenuation of the message of the biblical text: (1) the Israelites must exterminate the Seven Nations;¹⁰⁵ (2) if they do not drive them out (now it is no longer about exterminating), they will become like thorns in their eyes;¹⁰⁶ (3) nevertheless, Rahab’s offspring was not driven out;¹⁰⁷ (4) this all because, according to the *midrash*, Rahab was to become the ancestor of prophet Jeremiah, whose harsh words would indeed be like thorns in the eyes of the Israelites.

13. *Midrash Tanna'im and Midrash ha-Gadol*

Midrash Tanna'im, also sometimes called *Mekhilta Deuteronomy*, is a *midrash* to Deuteronomy mainly concerned with religious law. It was reconstructed in 1908 by David Hoffmann¹⁰⁸ from its quotations in a huge medieval compilation called *Midrash ha-Gadol* (‘The Great Midrash’, usually ascribed to David ben ‘Amram of Aden, 13th century). The redactional ties between the older and the newer compilation are not easily defined: I use here *Midrash ha-Gadol* following the edition of Solomon

¹⁰⁴ *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 13.5. Text for *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*: Bernard Mandelbaum, ed., *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana: A Critical Edition*, 2 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962).

¹⁰⁵ Deut 20:17.

¹⁰⁶ Num 33:55.

¹⁰⁷ Josh 6:25.

¹⁰⁸ *Midrasch Tanna'im zum Deuteronomium*, Jahres-Bericht des Rabbiner-Seminars zu Berlin (Berlin: Druck von H. Itzkowski, 1908—).

Fisch,¹⁰⁹ which shows no difference from Hoffman's edition in the passages that I will be quoting.

In its exegesis of Deuteronomy 20, *Midrash ha-Gadol* is an almost slavish repetition of *Sifre to Deuteronomy*, with minor differences in two points, so as to further soften the harsh regulations prescribed in scripture:

i. *Sifre to Deuteronomy* §199 (on Deut 20:10) reads, 'Great is peace, because even in Israel's war there is need for peace'; *Midrash ha-Gadol* eliminates the clause 'of Israel', thus giving the saying a much more general, rather universal meaning.

ii. At Deuteronomy 20:16 (the obligation to exterminate by the sword the inhabitants of the cities of the Seven Nations), differently from *Sifre to Deuteronomy* §201, *Midrash ha-Gadol* derives from the adverb *raq* ('alone') in the biblical text the possibility that, however peremptory the biblical command can be, a pacific settlement of conflict is nonetheless permitted. This argument is built upon a saying by Shemu'el bar Naḥman (Palestine, 4th century) found in other older rabbinic texts, stating that before starting the armed conquest of Canaan, Joshua offered the Seven Nations opportunities of peace that some of them actually accepted:

Rabbi Shemu'el bar Naḥman said, 'Joshua sent to the Land of Israel three injunctions before (the Israelites) entered the Land: anyone who wanted to go away might go away; anyone who wanted to make peace might make peace; anyone who wanted to make war might do so. The Gergashites went away, believed in the Holy One, blessed be he, and moved to Africa: "Until I come and take you to a land like your own" (2 Kings 18:32), that is, in Africa.

The Gibeonites made peace, "The inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel" (Josh 10:1).¹¹⁰

14. Midrash Tanḥuma

The last *midrash* I will consider is *Midrash Tanḥuma*. As with almost all *midrashim*, dating *Tanḥuma* is very difficult; after Leopold Zunz it is commonly deemed not older than the 9th century.¹¹¹ The version published in Warsaw in 1875—the one I

¹⁰⁹ David ben 'Amram ha-'Adeni, *Sefer Devarim*, vol. 5 of *Midraš ha-Gadol 'al Ḥamišah Ḥumše Torah*, ed. Solomon Fisch, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1972).

¹¹⁰ *Y. Šeb.* 6:1, 36c (4th-5th cent.). Text for *Yerushalmi*, Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed., *Talmud Yerushalmi: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, SJ 18-21, 23, 29, 68 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000-); parallels in *Lev. Rab.* 17:6 (on Lev 14:34); *Deut. Rab.* 5:14 (on Deut 20:10); and *tosefet to b. Giṭ.* 46a (gloss, Northern France, 12th-14th cent.). See the analysis by Yishai Kiel, 'The Morality of War in Rabbinic Literature: The Call for Peace and the Limitation of the Siege', in *War and Peace in Jewish Tradition: From the Biblical World to the Present*, ed. Yigal Levin and Amnon Shapira, Routledge Jewish Studies (New York: Routledge, 2012), 126-27.

¹¹¹ See Marc Bregman, 'Tanḥuma Yelammedenu', *EncJud*² 19:503-04; Moshe David Herr, 'Tanḥuma Yelammedenu', *EncJud* 15:793-96; Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and*

use here—is different from the one edited by Salomon Buber in Vilna in 1885, whose text (maybe of a European origin) lacks Deuteronomy 20.

The commentary to the section *Šofetim* (including Deuteronomy 20) follows the rules of the genre of *midrash*: a number of verses from the Bible are extrapolated from their original contexts and juxtaposed to the biblical passage under scrutiny, in order to be used as prooftexts for the message that the author of the *midrash* wants to derive from that passage and convey to the community. In our case the obligation to warfare is reaffirmed, but only against those who hate the Israelites and are first in ‘not having mercy on *them*’.

‘When you go to war...’ (Deut 20:1). As it is written above, before this *parašah*, ‘The judges will investigate carefully’ (Deut 19:18); once the judges have ruled, go out to war and you will win! For this reason David said, ‘I have done what is right and just: do not leave me to my oppressors’ (Ps 119:121). It is also written, ‘Be a warrant for good to your servant! Let not the haughty oppress me!’ (Ps 119:122). Also the Holy One, blessed be he, is glorified in this world only by means of judgment, as it is written, ‘Yhwh of hosts is extolled in judgment’ (Isa 5:16). Rabban Shim’on ben Gamli’el says, ‘The world stands on three things: on judgment, on truth and on peace, as it is written, “You shall render judgment according to truth and for the sake of peace”’ (Zech 8:16).¹¹² Rabbi Yehoshua’ ben Levi said, ‘And these things all depend on judgment, because peace is made through judgment and truth is made through judgment’. Thus, when the Israelites practice judgment, the Holy One, blessed be he, overthrows in front of them those who hate them, as it is written, ‘O if my people listened to me... I would soon humiliate their enemies...’ (Ps 81:14-15). Which are the ways of the Holy One, blessed be he? Justice and judgment, as it is written, ‘Let them keep the way of Yhwh to do what is just and right’ (Gen 18:19). Therefore it is written in the section of *Šofetim*, ‘They shall judge the people with righteous judgment’ (Deut 16:18). And further, ‘When you go to war against your enemies’ (Deut 20:1). What is the meaning of ‘against your enemies’? The Holy One, blessed be he, said, ‘Go against them as enemies: as they have no mercy on you, so have no mercy on them’. See what they say, ‘Come, let us wipe them out as a nation: let the name of Israel be remembered no more!’ (Ps 83:5)—that very name of which it is said, ‘Blessed be Yhwh, the God of Israel’ (Ps 106:48). Thus, ‘Go against them as enemies’. Said Israel, ‘O Lord of the universe, how long will they stand against us?’, as it is written, ‘O God, arrogant people rise against me; a band of violent men threatens my life’ (Ps 86:14). He answered them, ‘They did not rise against you alone, but also against me, as it is written, “The kings of the earth rise up, the rulers gather against Yhwh and his anointed”’ (Ps 2:2); look rather at how much they hate (you)’, and therefore it is written, ‘When you go to war against your enemies’.¹¹³

Midrash, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 302-306; trans. of *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 7th ed. (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung [Oscar Beck], 1982).

¹¹² The saying of Shim’on ben Gamli’el is taken from *m. Avot* 1:18.

¹¹³ *Tanḥ. Šofetim* §15. Text for *Midrash Tanḥuma*, David Kantrowitz, ed., *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Visberg edition, Warsaw 1875), in the *Judaic Classics Library*, CD ROM Version 2.2 (Chicago: Davka, 2001).

Earlier in the text of *Tanḥuma* (Šofetim §13) Deuteronomy 20:1 had been already juxtaposed to Proverbs 21:31 ('The horse is ready for the day of battle, but salvation belongs to Yhwh') and referred to the exodus from Egypt.

15. Conclusions

I have tried to show how chapter 20 of the book of Deuteronomy remained a vital and influential literary model until the end of the period of the wars against Rome. The authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees, Josephus and the *Megillat Antiokhus* recount the independence war of the Maccabees and the expansionist wars of the Hasmoneans as rigorously following the divine commandments listed in the biblical source. The *Temple Scroll* from Qumran, too, fully reconfirms the Deuteronomic regulations for war against the pagans.

But after the catastrophic conclusion of the second war against Rome, and at pace with the emergence and gradual predominance of the rabbinic version of Judaism, the new leading class took care that sacred scripture could not by any means be used to legitimate any nationalist drive within Judaism. Therefore the rabbis excluded from their biblical canon *both* the books that narrated the epic of the Maccabees and the Hasmoneans, *and* the books that projected liberation for Israel in an eschatological perspective, like the *War Rule* from Qumran and many other apocalyptic works patterned after the violent prophetic imagery of the 'day of Yhwh' and its final battle.¹¹⁴

In this perspective, Deuteronomy 20 was a potentially dangerous text. Still, by then it had already been part of the canonical Torah for centuries. It could therefore no longer be defused by simply excluding it from the canon of scripture; it required a thorough reworking in the realm of exegesis. The history of the effects of Deuteronomy 20 in early rabbinic literature shows how free and autonomous the rabbis could be in engaging with the requirements of scripture and with its system of values, so that the influence of chapter 20 in later Jewish tradition came to be extremely different from the one it could have generated—and eventually did generate, in other provinces of Western tradition, as we have seen. Rabbinic exegesis of Deuteronomy 20, particularly in its homiletical aim, managed effectively to utterly change the meaning and the effect of that whole part of scripture without diminishing by any means its sacredness. There was no need to deny the biblical postulate that, when Israel fought, its God fought by its side; all that was needed was stating that fighting was not suitable for Israel. This was no revolutionary innovation; rather, it was the simple acknowledgment of the present situation, since Israel was anyway no longer able to take arms or fight against anyone. Deu-

¹¹⁴ See, particularly, Isa 2:12-21; 13:6-22.

teronomy 20 excellently exemplifies how rabbinic Judaism managed to transform the biblical mandate to holy war into an education for peace. This quite counter-intuitive result was achieved through careful selection of the books that were to be Israel's sacred scriptures, as well as through a hermeneutics of Torah not always prone to its literal sense or to the supposed intentions of its implicit authors.

All this is to be seen against the background of an eschatological perspective, by which universal peace will be ultimately accomplished by God alone through his messiah. Yet the rabbis of the first centuries CE generally maintained a healthily detached attitude towards messianic expectations (even though they *almost* never recanted them and went on producing apocalyptic literature, if only a minor one):¹¹⁵ there had already been too many false messiahs like Bar Kokhba, and following them had already caused too much disaster for the Jews. In an Israel that was defeated, dispersed and totally aware of its own irremediable subjugation, an ethos of political engagement had no longer any meaning nor any market.¹¹⁶

Even revealed religions, consistently depending on their own written sources, can develop new values if they manage to keep a non-absolutist, dialectic—even elusive—relationship to those sources: a relationship in which dynamic fidelity to the sources can prevail over iconoclastic innovation or anarchistic acceptance of models from outside. The founding fathers of rabbinic Judaism read biblical tradition—at least the regulations for the holy war—in an actualising, non-fundamentalist way, the main principle of which, in my opinion, can be recovered in our age too. One can resign oneself to expect the Bible not to be what it is, namely, an anthology of texts that in many cases promote values that our worldview can no longer share. But if one considers peace as a value for building and directing social life, one can also refrain from envisaging the eschatological dimension, in which peace was projected by biblical prophets such as Joel and Isaiah, and even more so by their successors the apocalyptic thinkers. Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount called blessed 'those who work to make peace' (εἰρηνοποιοί)¹¹⁷—not those who pray and wait for the messiah to bring it at the end of times. This can perhaps work as a scriptural basis for the secular hope that peace, *any* peace, can be pursued, maybe even achieved, without having to wait for the next messiah to come bring it to us.

¹¹⁵ See Günter Stemberger, 'Das Fortleben der Apokalyptik in der rabbinischen Literatur', in *Biblische und Judaistische Studien: Festschrift für Paolo Sacchi*, ed. Angelo Vivian (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1990), 335-47; John C. Reeves, ed., *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader*, SBLRBS 45 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

¹¹⁶ Cf. Capelli, 'Come i rabbini della tarda antichità attendevano il messia', *passim*.

¹¹⁷ Matt 5:9.

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PART 2
THE RECEPTION OF JEWISH SCRIPTURE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

