

PESHAT AND THE AUTHORITY OF HAZAL IN THE COMMENTARIES OF RADAK¹

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the study of medieval biblical interpretation, the tension between commentators' fidelity to rabbinic *midrash* and their independent quest for *peshat* continues to command serious attention. The place of the important Provençal exegete R. David Kimḥi (Radak, ca. 1160–ca. 1235) in the history of *peshat* commentary is of particular interest, influenced as he was by an especially wide range of traditions. On one hand, Radak's family, which was of Spanish origin, produced grammatical works and commentaries that exemplify the strict text-based approach of the Andalusian exegetes. Indeed, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, the most prominent representative of this school, influenced Radak considerably. Furthermore, Radak's dedication to Maimonidean rationalism, which has been amply demonstrated by scholars, would only have sharpened his resistance to fanciful midrashic speculation.²

On the other hand, Radak was well acquainted with Rashi, who embraces midrashic interpretation quite regularly, and it has recently been argued that his midrashic citations in particular tend to find their way into Radak's comments.³ In addition, Provence was home to a school of *darshanim*—most prominently, the eleventh-century figure R. Moses the Preacher—and this midrashic tradition, as F. Talmage has argued, undoubtedly had a substantial impact on Radak.⁴

1. I would like to thank Professors David Berger, Mordechai Z. Cohen, and Sid Z. Leiman, as well as an anonymous reviewer, for their comments. I bear responsibility for all final judgments.

2. On the Andalusian and Maimonidean influences on Radak, see F. Talmage, *David Kimḥi, the Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 23–42, 70–72; and idem, "David Kimḥi and the Rationalist Tradition," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968): 177–218. Concerning Ibn Ezra specifically, see, e.g., A. Lifshitz, "Ha-Ra'ava' be-ferushei ha-Radak u-vi-sefarav," *Sinai* 61 (1967), 92–109.

3. On Rashi's use of *midrash* see, e.g., S. Kamin, *Rashi: peshuto shel mikra' u-midrasho shel mikra'* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), esp. Chapter 2. On Radak's adoption of Rashi's midrashic citations, see N. Grunhaus, "The Dependence of Rabbi David Kimḥi (Radak) on Rashi in His Quotation of Midrashic Traditions," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 93 (2003): 415–30.

4. See Talmage, *David Kimḥi, the Man and Commentaries*, 9–10, 72–83.

Only recently have scholars begun to carefully evaluate Radak's relationship to rabbinic interpretation in focused, methodical studies.⁵ In particular, current scholars have suggested some appreciable midrashic influence on Radak's *peshat* interpretation, departing from the sharp division between *peshat* and *derash* suggested by some earlier formulations.⁶ N. Grunhaus, who has treated the question most extensively, aptly broadens the scope of the discussion to include what shall be the primary focus of this article—instances in which Radak actually rejects the rabbis' views: "Radak's perplexed consternation at certain rabbinic statements and his elaborate justification of his rejection of them in lengthy, forceful analyses illustrate that he felt bound by rabbinic traditions. Because the rabbis were vested with authority, he needed to dispute them carefully."⁷

My own systematic study of Radak's challenges to rabbinic assertions has yielded a comparatively moderate position: Rabbinic interpretation weighed heavily on Radak specifically within certain limited categories in which he sensed that the rabbis might lay claim to special authority. Most prominent is the category of *kabbalat*: historical traditions transmitted by the rabbis and considered to be authoritative.⁸ As Grunhaus has argued, beyond those statements

5. See M. Cohen, "Hashpa'ot midrashiyot 'al parshanut ha-peshat shel Radak," in *Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999), 143–50 (Hebrew section); N. Grunhaus, "The Interplay of Peshat and Rabbinic Traditions in the Exegetical Works of Rabbi David Kimḥi" (PhD diss., New York University, 2003); and A. Seidler, "The Exegetical Method of Rabbi David Kimḥi (Radak) Based Mainly upon His Commentary on the Books of Samuel and Isaiah" (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2003).

6. For example, J. Baker and E. W. Nicholson, *The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimḥi on Psalms CXX–CL* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), xvii, claim that "there is really no fusion [of *peshat* and *derash*]; it is as though the two streams meet and run in the same channel without their waters actually mixing" (cited in Cohen, "Hashpa'ot," 143). To be sure, we shall allude to the limited exceptions allowed for by Baker and Nicholson in their ensuing discussion, which conform to the thesis of this article.

7. Grunhaus, "Interplay," 255.

8. Radak refers to these in his well-trodden programmatic statement in the introduction to his commentaries on the Former Prophets: "I will also cite the words of our Sages in places where we need their interpretation or *kabbalah* (פירושים וקבלתם) in any case. I will also cite some of the *derashot* (קצת הדרשות) for lovers of *derash*." (Note that the term is not דרשות in the commentaries. See the vacillation in Talmage, *David Kimḥi, the Man and Commentaries*, 73–74; and cf. Grunhaus, "Interplay," 103–104.) M. Perez, "Le-yahaso shel Radak le-kabbalat historiyyot shel ḥazal," *Sinai* 92 (1983): 15, argues that the term *perush* in Radak's statement means an interpretation affirmed by Radak that is dependent on a *kabbalah*, whereas *kabbalah* refers to an authoritative tradition that is not linked to an interpretation that Radak accepts (see also Perez, "Le-shittato ha-parshanit shel R' David Kimḥi," *Beit Mikra* 45, no. 4 [2000]: 322–23). But according to this reading, Radak makes no mention of the rabbinic material he frequently cites for its interpretive value when no *kabbalah* is involved. With M. Z. Cohen, "The Qimhi Family," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1/2, ed. M. Saebo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), 407, I assume that a *perush* is a different category: It refers to any rabbinic interpretation that requires consideration, even if Radak proceeds to reject it. For Grunhaus, whose view of midrashic influence on Radak's exegesis is relatively broad, interpretations in the category of *perush* are "needed" for supplementary purposes even when Radak

that Radak himself terms *kabbalot*, there are no consistent criteria for determining which other assertions Radak assigns to this category⁹—an impression that is implicitly endorsed by A. Seidler, who writes of “the absence of a clear-cut position” in Radak “concerning the standing of rabbinic claims as historical reality.”¹⁰ In fact, the evidence suggests that when Radak had reason to dispute rabbinic assertions concerning stark historical fact, he was particularly motivated to express criticism, an apparent effort to justify his *denial* that they represent authoritative traditions. A similar tension arises when the rabbinic assertions concern halakhah or theology: The authority of the rabbis could not be easily dismissed in such cases, so that Radak, when he was unable to accept their position, would articulate his objection, at times betraying considerable unease while doing so. Beyond these types of cases, however, overt objections to rabbinic assertions are exceptionally rare in Radak. And crucially, in the sporadic cases noted by scholars in which Radak’s *preferred* interpretation displays midrashic influence, categories that suggest particularly commanding rabbinic authority again predominate.¹¹

provides an alternative peshat interpretation, including cases in which the rabbinic interpretation does not conform to the “*peshat* method” (but presumably not where it is to be seen as intended solely for “lovers of *derash*”); see “Interplay,” 134–35. Consistently, Grunhaus contends that Radak allowed for multiple layers of meaning in biblical texts based on the “sheer volume of [‘double interpretations’]” (“Interplay,” 186) and a small but striking group of examples in the realm of halakhah (“Interplay,” 299–307). Then again, we might view halakhah as a special category and understand the rabbinic components in double interpretations either as alternative (not supplementary) *peshat* suggestions or merely as fodder for “lovers of *derash*.” On this, see Section V herein. See also Seidler’s skepticism regarding multiple layers of meaning in Radak in “Exegetical Method,” 216.

9. Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 136–42.

10. See the full discussion in Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” 214–16.

11. Cohen’s thesis in “Hashpa’ot” is important, but in the final analysis, it is not at odds with the one presented here. Cohen demonstrates that although Radak’s *peshat* principles allow for denial of the significance of certain types of textual anomalies, Radak on occasion shuns such a *peshat* principle and ascribes meaning to the irregularity in the text. For example, where the text at Genesis 32:7 relates that Jacob’s emissaries told him, “We went to your brother, to Esau,” Radak, in keeping with his approach in similar cases, could easily have dismissed the apparently extraneous phrase “to Esau” as a mere explanatory aid to the reader (*tosefet be’ur*). However, based on the *midrash*, he chooses instead to provide a deeper explanation of its narrative function: The attitude of Jacob’s brother is still that of the old “Esau,” Jacob’s adversary. Cohen makes a persuasive case, but the nature of the midrashic influence here is limited: The “midrashic” orientation in such examples concerns primarily what Radak does *not* do—that is, to dismiss the significance of the textual problem—and secondarily, his moderately speculative, literary-critical solution. As Cohen himself observes, in such cases, Radak accepts only those “midrashic” inferences that fit the context, rejecting those that do not; in the end, the midrashic influence here essentially amounts to an expansion of the Andalusian *peshat* method beyond formalistic philological and rhetorical principles, not an acceptance of interpretations with no plausible basis in the text. In this connection, see also Chapter 2 of Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” concerning Radak’s treatment of redundancy in the biblical text. It is notable that almost all of Cohen’s examples are from the Genesis commentary, Radak’s only one on the Pentateuch, in which it is my strong sense that he was particularly inclined to attribute significance even to minor aspects of the text. On this, see n. 55 herein.

Before we consider the evidence, some introductory remarks are in order. First, in evaluating Radak's critiques of the rabbis, I limit the discussion to cases in which Radak expresses a challenge or rejection, leaving out the many instances in which he merely indicates a preference for his alternative interpretation—labeling his own reading *peshat* and/or the rabbinic reading *derash*; characterizing his reading as the “correct one” (הנכון); or introducing it with the phrase “and/but in my view” (ולפי דעתי) or “and/but one could interpret” (ויש לפרש). These terms mark Radak's standard efforts to express his exegetical preferences and to distinguish *peshat* from *derash*, with no tension implied, and the pattern I have noted does not extend to such cases. I also omit cases in which Radak raises objections to a rabbinic assertion in the context of arbitrating solely between different rabbinic alternatives, one of which he endorses.

Second, if we are to argue that a substantial number of Radak's critiques address rabbinic assertions that might be construed as *kabbalot*, we will need to evaluate what is and is not a candidate to be a historical tradition. Of critical importance, a prominent share of cases in which Radak challenges the rabbis fall into one of two rigorously definable categories in which the historical significance is readily apparent: cases in which the rabbis identify one biblical figure with another, and those in which they provide a chronological framework for the events in the narrative. At the other end of the spectrum, a significant portion of Radak's rabbinic citations—for example, many that concern biblical terminology—have no impact on the text's account of events, and it is indeed rare for Radak to challenge them frontally.

When the rabbis' claim concerns the occurrence of an event, the matter is more subjective, yet the evidence remains distinctly instructive. Consider, for example, the following kind of rabbinic citation: At II Samuel 2:23, where the text relates that Abner launched his spear into Asael 'el *ha-homesh*, Radak cites the rabbis' interpretation that this refers to the fifth rib (*ba-dofen ha-hamishit*). A rabbinic assertion such as this technically lays claim to a historical occurrence, but it is highly unlikely that it is a *kabbalah*, for two reasons: It is of relatively meager significance where in Asael's body the spear entered, and the assertion appears to be rooted in interpretation of the text rather than in tradition. Again, we will observe that it is rare for Radak to engage in a critique of such a claim. To be considered a likely candidate for a *kabbalah*, on the other hand, an assertion must be of sufficient importance to be preserved as a historical memory and less clearly rooted in interpretation. Although these criteria are not as rigorously objective, so that individual judgments lend themselves to dispute, I contend that the force of the cumulative evidence powerfully substantiates our conclusion.

Third, one finds two main types of theological tension that trigger Radak's objections.¹² In numerous cases, such as those in which the rabbis claim that a

12. I speak of “theological tension” in a broad sense, referring not only to philosophical issues but also to matters such as the moral stature of biblical heroes, in which Radak's religious worldview mandated a particular position.

miracle took place, it is Radak the rationalist who resists their authority. But elsewhere, as F. Talmage observes, it is Radak the traditionalist who resists a rabbinic claim, specifically when the rabbis attribute transgressions to biblical figures of distinction.¹³ In either kind of case, not only theological unease but also the possibility of a historical tradition might contribute to Radak's tension, as suggested, for example, by his reaction to the rabbis' assertion that Jephthah actually killed his daughter at Judges 11:31. After objecting to this claim based on several verses, Radak concludes, "So it appears according to the simple sense of the verses; and as for what our Sages said on this—if they had a tradition regarding it, it is incumbent upon us to accept it."¹⁴

Finally, when Radak challenges a rabbinic interpretation of halakhic consequence, at times he acknowledges this explicitly, and the unease he feels in casting doubt on the rabbinic reading is reasonably clear. Elsewhere, however, the halakhic relevance of the rabbinic reading is apparent only upon examination of its original source. Some such cases are clearly instructive, whereas in others, when considered individually, it is less obvious that the halakhic import of the rabbinic claim prompted Radak's need to contend with it.¹⁵ Again, however, I submit that the totality of the evidence remains compelling.

II. RADAK'S STRUGGLES WITH *MIDRASH* IN THE CHRONICLES COMMENTARY

I begin with the Chronicles commentary, which is widely considered to be Radak's first¹⁶ and which I have analyzed elsewhere in considerable depth.¹⁷ Ten critiques of rabbinic claims in the Chronicles commentary meet the criteria for our inquiry, and to illustrate the pattern in question, we will evaluate most of these at length.¹⁸ Importantly, Radak's revisions of this commentary—reflected in

13. Talmage, *David Kimḥi, the Man and Commentaries*, 69–70. See also Baker and Nicholson, *Kimḥi on Psalms*, xxii.

14. I employ the terms "simple sense" and "the manner of simple interpretation" to translate *peshat* and *derekh ha-peshat*, respectively. Such ambivalence confirms that Radak's objections reflect genuine tension rather than just a need to respond to what might have been the assumptions of his audience. Cf. the cases cited in Section V, in which he actually accepts *midrash*. See also Perez, "Kabbalot historiyyot," for other instructive cases in which Radak vacillates on whether to assign rabbinic historical claims to the category of *kabbalah*; and Grunhaus, "Interplay," 284–86.

15. In this connection, see also Grunhaus's discussion of Radak's view of Samson's status as a nazirite ("Interplay," 304–305).

16. To be sure, my own view is that Radak's very first commentary is the one on Proverbs, which I believe to be authentic. See N. Grunhaus, "The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimḥi on Proverbs: A Case of Mistaken Attribution," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54, no. 2 (2003): 311–27; and Y. Berger, "Radak on Chronicles: Critical Edition, Translation and Supercommentary" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 2003), 48–59 (English section). This commentary, however, contains few midrashic citations and none that are relevant to our discussion.

17. Y. Berger, "The Commentary of Radak to Chronicles and the Development of His Exegetical Programme," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 57, no. 1 (2006): 80–98; and idem, "Critical Edition."

18. I do not consider Radak's statement at I Chronicles 2:55 that "we need not seek (אין לנו לחפש) those [name derivations] whose matters are not recorded" an overt challenge to the rabbis, even as he is contrasting his approach to midrashic derivations. This comment is a statement of his fundamental program concerning genealogical lists, and, as Grunhaus has noted, there is no disparagement here

different manuscript traditions—provide striking glimpses into his struggle to justify the dismissal of rabbinic assertions that involve historical claims.

A. *Kabbalot*

Among Radak's challenges to the rabbis on Chronicles, one instance involves a rejection of a chronological account in Seder Olam, and three concern the rabbis' identification of one biblical figure with another.¹⁹ In the latter category, two cases are highly instructive and merit our close attention.

Consider the following comment at I Chronicles 2:18 on the phrase "Caleb son of Hezron":

There are those among our Sages (B. Sotah 11b) who have said that this is Caleb son of Jephunneh: Why was he called "son of Jephunneh?" Because he turned (*panah*) away from the plot of the spies.... But it does not appear so according to the simple sense of the verses. For according to the simple sense of the verses, it appears that this Caleb was among the earlier sons of Hezron, in that it says (I Chronicles 2:21) that afterward, he took the daughter of Machir when he was sixty years old. But if it is as our Sages said—that he was Caleb the son of Jephunneh—then when Hezron fathered Caleb, Hezron would have been one hundred and seventy years old! For Caleb said: "I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me" (Joshua 14:7)—and that was in the second year after they left Egypt, while Hezron was among those who came *to* Egypt.

Initially, this comment gives the appearance of a straightforward rejection of a rabbinic identification. Yet, in comments to both I 2:50 and I 4:1, Radak actually *assumes* the rabbinic view despite the reservations he expresses here. The manuscript evidence, however, suggests an explanation of how this contradiction emerged: In an earlier version of the commentary, attested in MS Paris National Library Heb. 198 and MS Munich Heb. 363, the text here does not read "There are those among our Sages who have said" (יש מרבתינו ז"ל שאמרו) but simply "Our Sages have said" (אמרו רבותינו ז"ל). That is, at first, Radak, unaware of any dissenting opinion in the rabbinic literature (indeed, I am unable to find such an

of the value of the midrashic speculations per se ("Interplay," 175). I have also omitted two cases that might support our thesis. First, in his introduction, Radak cites the rabbinic historical assertion that Ezra wrote the book of Chronicles but himself limits Ezra's role to that of canonizer. One might argue that his intention in this case is to reinterpret the rabbis, not to dispute them. Second, at I 1:36, he cites an interpretation that appears in the *midrash* claiming that Timna was the daughter of Eliphaz (see, e.g., *Tanḥuma va-Yeshev* 1), but he critiques it and labels it "the manner of *derash*." Because he prefaces the citation with the phrase "There are those who interpret" rather than "Our Sages have said" or the like, I suspect that his source is medieval, not rabbinic; see, e.g., Rashi at Genesis 36:12.

19. At II Chronicles 22:2, Radak dismisses the view expressed in Seder Olam with the phrase, "But this midrash is very far from the manner of simple interpretation." At I 3:15, in rejecting the rabbinic identification of King Shallum with King Zedekiah, Radak states that "in the manner of simple interpretation it does not appear so." I will discuss the other two examples later.

opinion) and wary of disputing the rabbis on this kind of matter, stuck with the rabbinic view in subsequent comments despite the difficulty he had raised. Only later did he change the text of his comment at I 2:18, presumably for one of two reasons: Either he managed to find a dissenting opinion not known to us, or he decided, even absent any explicit rabbinic debate,²⁰ that it was not necessary to presume this to be an uncontested historical tradition and, in turn, limited his view to the particular rabbinic source that he cites.²¹ Still, he did not change his comments at I 2:50 and I 4:1, which assume the identification. This, too, is for one of two reasons: Either he simply failed to make all of the changes necessary to maintain consistency with his later insertion—not an uncommon occurrence in the commentary²²—or he remained concerned that the view might, in fact, be a *kabbalah* and refused to dismiss it notwithstanding his objection.²³

A similar case concerns the rabbinic identification of Phinehas and Elijah. At I 9:20, Radak writes, “And there are those among our Sages (Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 47) who have said: Phinehas is Elijah.” Then, in a remark that parallels several others in his commentaries and reflects the seriousness with which he took this type of rabbinic statement, Radak proceeds to endorse the implication that Phinehas enjoyed an unusually long life but without quite affirming the identification:

And it is indeed true that Phinehas lived for a long time. For in the days of the concubine at Gibeah, more than three hundred years after the exodus from Egypt, we see that he was still alive, as it says there: “and Phinehas son of Eleazar” etc. (Judges 20:28), and [Phinehas] was among those who left Egypt.²⁴

20. Cf. I. Maori’s treatment of Ibn Ezra’s tendencies in this respect in “‘Al mashma‘ut ha-munah ‘divrei yahid’ be-ferush Ra’ava’ la-mikra’: le-yahaso shel Ra’ava’ le-midreshei hazal,” *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 13 (2002): 201–46.

21. The phrase “that he was Caleb son of Jephunneh,” after “But if it is as our Sages said,” toward the end of the passage, is also missing from the Paris and Munich manuscripts and is presumably late. This lends some support to the possibility that Radak found a dissenting rabbinic view, prompting his need to clarify that the rabbinic assertion to which he is referring is the one that makes the identification. On the other hand, and more decisively, at I 4:15, where the biblical text refers to Caleb son of Jephunneh, Radak, in the version of the commentary attested in the Paris manuscript, writes, “This is Caleb son of Hezron.” But in the later version, when he no longer feels committed to the identification, he amends this to, “We have already written that it is the opinion of our Sages that this is Caleb son of Hezron.” The latter formulation appears to suggest that he still knew of no dissenting rabbinic view. Either way, the various revisions of the commentary in connection with this identification make it abundantly clear that Radak’s attitude toward its merits changed over time.

22. See, e.g., Berger, “Radak on Chronicles,” I 6:7 and supercommentary.

23. Cf. Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 138–40, on Radak’s vacillation concerning the rabbis’ claim that Rabshakeh was a Jewish apostate.

24. The conception of earlier scholars that Radak resisted the acceptance of midrashic statements even of a historical nature—provided he did not expressly identify them as *kabbalot*—led to a highly problematic reading of this passage. F. Talmage, *David Kimhi, the Man and Commentaries*, 131 (cf. also 115), offers a specific reason for what he sees as Radak’s exceptional “acceptance” of

Now because here, as far as we know, Radak used the qualifying language—“And there are those among our Sages . . . who have said”—from the start, it cannot be ruled out that he was already aware of a dissenting rabbinic view. However, consider the following comment at I 8:27 on the phrase “Jareshiah, Elijah, and Zichri were the sons of Jeroham,” in which Radak troubles to state explicitly that there is another view:

I found in the midrash (Exodus Rabba 40:4) that this Elijah is the prophet Elijah, and that he had four names; and these four names are interpreted to refer to him, as is written in that midrash. He was a Benjaminite, then—for these are the lines of Benjamin, as it says (I Chronicles 8:1)—in which case Phinehas is not Elijah according to this midrashic author. I also found in Seder Eliyyahu Rabba (18) and in Genesis Rabba (71:9): He said to them: “My distinguished scholars, how much longer are you going to debate over me? I am a descendant of *Rachel!*” They said to him: “Provide evidence for your claim.” He said to them: “Is this not what it says in the book of genealogies: ‘Elijah and Zichri were the sons of Jeroham?’”

Strikingly, this passage is absent from the Paris and Munich manuscripts, which suggests that Radak “found” these sources only later. Despite Phinehas’s long life, Radak, it seems, hesitated to identify him with Elijah²⁵ and inserted this

this identification (here and at Malachi 2:5) with “no difficulty.” The claim that Phinehas lived for an unusually long time, argues Talmage, supports Radak’s view, expressed at length at Judges 17:1 and 18:1, that the story of the concubine at Gibeah, when Phinehas was still alive, indeed took place at the end of the period of the Judges, 300 years after the exodus. But in fact, consistent with our thesis, it is common for Radak to defend a component of rabbinic historical assertion, especially concerning chronology—often with the phrase, “And it is indeed true that . . .” (ואמת כן)—even where he does not indicate acceptance of the claim in its entirety. Thus, in this case, too, it is Radak’s intention to defend the rabbis’ assumption that Phinehas lived an unusually long life—using his conception of the chronology for support—even as he did *not* quite embrace the identification itself. For examples of similar comments concerning chronology, see Radak at Genesis 25:22 and 37:35; I Kings 13:1; II Kings 14:14, 20:1, and 22:14; and Isaiah 6:4. Talmage, *David Kimhi, the Man and Commentaries*, 74, 131, similarly misreads Radak’s reaction to the rabbis at Genesis 25:22—“and it is indeed true that Shem was alive [at the time of Rebekah]”—as a rhetorical question—“Is it believable that Shem was alive?”—even as Radak proceeds to calculate that Shem was alive, notwithstanding his rejection of the rest of the rabbinic statement. See also Radak’s comments at Genesis 5:29 and 49:33, which do not specifically concern chronology.

25. Still, the basis that Radak had provided for Phinehas’s unusually long life, one that renders the identification with Elijah plausible even for a rationalistically inclined exegete, prompted him to remain genuinely ambivalent on the matter—if not inclined in favor of the identification—in his commentaries to other biblical books. Thus, at Judges 20:28, Radak reiterates his conviction that Phinehas lived for more than 300 years and cites the view identifying him with Elijah, only to add that others, with some support from I Chronicles 8:27, consider him a Benjaminite. At Malachi 2:5, he again provides evidence that Phinehas lived a long life, “even for those who say Phinehas is not Elijah.” At I Kings 19:4, he deduces from the text that *Elijah* lived a long life, providing evidence for the identification with Phinehas. And finally, at I Kings 17:1, he cites the different rabbinic views on Elijah’s lineage and, in turn, on the identification with Phinehas, adding: “and each one of them bases his

comment when he discovered evidence that we are not dealing with an uncontested tradition.²⁶ These examples, I suggest, reflect the considerable tension that plagued Radak when he was inclined to reject a rabbinic statement that might suggest a historical tradition, prompting him to revise his remarks in accordance with the development of his thinking and research in each case.

Yet another critique of the rabbis in the Chronicles commentary relates to a claim that could well be seen as a preservation of a historical memory. At I 8:1, Radak first provides a nonmidrashic explanation of the omission of five out of ten Benjaminites from a list in Numbers 26. He concludes as follows:

But our Sages, of blessed memory (Numbers Rabba 21:8), have said that those families missing in [Numbers 26] perished in the wilderness in the affair of Balaam. What will they say, though, concerning Becher, who is not mentioned in [Numbers], but is mentioned above in this book (I Chronicles 7:8–9)—himself, his family, and the numbers they reached in the time of David?

Considering the historical significance of the claim that half of the families of Benjamin died in the wilderness, one could easily judge the rabbis' assertion to be a historical tradition, especially because there is no direct basis in the text for these deaths. Radak's objection, which is based on the text of Chronicles, prompts his rejection of their view and, should our pattern prove correct, reflects his effort to deny it the status of a *kabbalah*, considering it no more than an exegetical speculation even as it proclaims a historical event of importance.²⁷

view on the verses with arguments that are unpersuasive, and we do not know the truth." It is of particular interest that in this last case, the words "that are unpersuasive, and we do not know the truth" are apparently Radak's later addition to the Kings commentary, missing from one key manuscript, Oxford Bodleian 305, which preserves an earlier version of that work. After he found conflicting rabbinic sources, the question of the validity of the identification of Phinehas with Elijah appears to have vexed Radak well into his exegetical career, prompting him to insert what is little more than an expression of frustration into his commentary to Kings after its initial dissemination. On MS Bodleian 305, see the discussion herein of II Chronicles 5:9.

26. It is highly likely on independent grounds that this is Radak's primary motive: All other rabbinic homilies in this commentary appear in comments that otherwise address textual difficulties.

27. At times, an identification of one biblical figure with another can also be rooted in interpretation, whether straightforward or midrashic. For example, at I Chronicles 4:18, Radak cites the rabbis' identification of Caleb and Mered—Caleb having rebelled (*marad*) against the plot of the spies—but labels it midrashic interpretation, presumably intending it "for lovers of *derash*" only. Grunhaus, however, consistent with her broader view of midrashic influence on Radak's exegesis, cites this as an example of a rabbinic interpretation that Radak considered secondary but still "useful for explaining the text"; see "Interplay," 91–95, especially n. 16. See also 173–80, especially n. 176, where Grunhaus indeed notes that this case, among others, is distinct in that it involves not just a name derivation but an identification of biblical figure.

B. Theology

Radak's comment at II 5:9, concerning the positioning of the Ark and its poles in Solomon's Temple, provides further illustration of the pattern:

In a midrashic vein, our Sages (B. Yoma 54a) said: It is written: "the tips of the poles were visible," and: "but they could not be seen from the outside." How so? They pressed up against the curtain and protruded outward, so that they looked like the two breasts of a woman, as it says: "he sleeps between my breasts" (Song of Songs 1:13). But we have no need²⁸ for this midrashic interpretation, for it says that they were visible *upon the front* of the inner Sanctuary, but were *not* visible from outside of it. Nor do I know why they said (B. Megillah 10b) that the place where the Ark stood is not part of the dimensions and that it was situated there miraculously; for the text says that the wingspread of the cherubim extended over the Ark (II 5:8), so that the Ark was under the wings of the cherubim and need not be included in the calculation. What reason is there, then, to impose a miracle where it is not necessary? What they had said (B. Megillah 10b) was that there were ten cubits to each side of the Ark. But we do not find that, nor is it possible according to the verses! Yet those who said this knew what they were saying, for their intellect ranged beyond ours.

The physical characteristics of the Temple could reasonably have been the object of a historical memory, and this alone might have prompted Radak to feel some tension in rejecting the rabbis' assertions. The matter of the visibility of the poles, too, is an issue of historical fact, albeit of relatively minor import, and it is not out of character that Radak engages the rabbinic view, labels it midrashic interpretation from the start, and follows with a mild dismissal of its necessity.

What stands out, however, is the sharp language that Radak directs at the rabbis' claim of a miracle that is not stated in the text. It is unsurprising that the prospect of rejecting miracles avowed by the rabbis provokes theological tension, and it is precisely the rationalist's resistance to their authority on such matters that might trigger a strong response. Indeed, much of Radak's language—"Nor do I know why they said...", "what reason is there to impose a miracle..."—confirms that he is primarily reacting to his perception of the rabbinic view as overambitious nonrationalist exegesis.

Nevertheless, there is reason to suspect that it is not the claim of a miracle alone that prompted Radak's passionate reaction here. The talmudic passage that is the source of the rabbinic assertion reads, "R. Levi also said: *We have a tradition from our ancestors that the Ark took up no space.*"²⁹ Though the subsequent

28. On this terminology, especially in Ibn Ezra, see M. Z. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 79, 235–38.

29. The term used for "tradition" here is *masoret*, which derives from the term for the transmission of the tradition, rather than *kabbalah*, which calls attention to its reception. I cannot see a distinction for our purposes. Indeed, the same talmudic passage employs the term *masoret* to refer to the tradition that Amoz and Amaziah were brothers. Following this, Radak, at Isaiah 1:1, in a rare example of actually labeling a rabbinic identification of biblical figures as a tradition, cites it using the term *kibbelu*.

rabbinic analysis of the verses—disputed by Radak in his comment—is not necessarily part of the ancestral tradition, the explicit assertion that the essential claim *is* a tradition suggests that this could well be part of the reason for the tension apparent in Radak. Thus, with some hesitation (“Yet those who said this knew what they were saying, for their intellect ranged beyond ours”), he argues that the basis of the rabbis’ contention “is not possible according to the verses” and that the text emphatically does not mandate their position. Thus, he effectively questions the antiquity and reliability of the tradition reported in the Talmud.³⁰

That Radak was exceptionally concerned by this case—having felt the need to reject the authority of the rabbis concerning an alleged miracle that is *explicitly* called a tradition in the Talmud—becomes even more evident in light of his treatment of the matter in his Kings commentary. Radak remarks several times on I Kings—at 6:27, 8:4–6, and 8:8—that there is no need to conclude that the Ark stood miraculously. Notably, in one text witness that preserves this work in a particularly early form, MS Oxford Bodleian 305, *all of these comments are missing*.³¹ Evidently, Radak returned at a later stage to make this point repeatedly, advising the reader unequivocally that the rabbis’ imposition of this miracle need not be authoritative, “tradition” notwithstanding.

As I mentioned earlier, Talmage has observed that a very different kind of theological tension plagued Radak when the rabbis ascribed flaws to biblical figures of stature. In two cases in the Chronicles commentary, Radak reacts strongly to the rabbis’ claims that King Hezekiah took initiatives of which the religious authorities disapproved. At II 30:2, he comments,

I wonder about what our Sages have said (B. Berakhot 10b, Pesahim 56a) that he added another Nisan during Nisan [itself], and that [the religious authorities] did not accede to this. For it is written: “The king came to an agreement with his officers and the entire congregation in Jerusalem”—so the text says that they did accede to it! They even have no proof from the verse that he added another Nisan during Nisan; for this agreement could have taken place in Adar—to make a second Adar in place of Nisan, and to keep the Passover in the second month, that is, Iyyar, by changing it into Nisan for this purpose. Also, concerning what they said (B. Sanhedrin 12a–b) in

30. It is a crucial point that Radak was willing to question even what is explicitly called a tradition in rabbinic literature. See also his comment to Joshua 3:2, in which he recognizes the rabbinic debate concerning the date of Moses’s death even as he ultimately considers the date of the seventh of Adar to be an authoritative *kabbalah*. Though a genuine *kabbalah* by definition cannot be contested, such cases suggest that what was perceived as a *kabbalah* by at least some of the rabbis might not be truly authentic in the eyes of Radak. Compare also his comment to I Kings 3:3.

31. Bryna J. Levy, in “Radak’s Pre-Emptive Exegesis” (forthcoming), first noted the manuscript evidence for different stages of the Kings commentary. In data that she shared with me, this particular manuscript contains an especially brief version of Radak’s comment to I Kings 17:17 on the theologically sensitive question of whether the child whom Elijah revived had fully died. Omissions in this manuscript are only occasional, and it is especially striking that precisely these brief remarks affirming that the Ark need not have stood miraculously, all of which appear in the context of longer comments, were apparently added later.

debating why Hezekiah sought mercy (II 30:18), it is explicit, after all, that it was because many of them had eaten the paschal sacrifice in an unclean state, as it says: “yet they ate the paschal sacrifice in violation of what was written” (ibid.)³²

And then at II 32:30,

I am surprised that our Sages ... say that when he stopped up the flow of Gihon, the [religious authorities] did not accede to this. For it is written above: “he consulted with his officers (*sarav*) and warriors about stopping up the flow of the springs” (II 32:3), and *sarav* include the scholars of Israel; for it says “*sarei* (= chiefs of) thousands” when referring to the scholars of the judiciary (Ex. 18:21–22)! In fact, I found in an aggadic source (Avot d’Rabbi Natan A:2) that when he stopped up the flow of Gihon, his will corresponded with that of the Everpresent One.

Beyond the objections themselves, observe that just as in his remarks concerning the identification of Phinehas with Elijah, Radak adds that he was fortunate enough to “find” a rabbinic source that defends Hezekiah’s initiative concerning the waters of Gihon, thereby validating his skepticism of the alternative rabbinic position.³³

C. Halakhah

Finally, at I 2:23, on the phrase “All of these [were] the sons of Machir, the father of Gilead,” Radak’s objection is to the exegetical basis of a halakhic derivation:

This means: All these *cities belonged to* the sons of Machir, the father of Gilead—that is, to the sons of Machir’s daughter—and it is missing a prepositional *lamed*....But our Sages said based on this (B. Yevamot 62b): Grandsons, even sons of daughters, are like sons. Yet this does not hold up as far as the law is concerned. Now they interpreted “the sons of” straightforwardly, not as “belonged to the sons of,” as we interpret it. But the correct view is as we have interpreted; for if it says this concerning the sons, what does “All of these” mean, when it only mentioned Segub and Jair? Rather, it refers to the cities....

Here, Radak feels compelled not only to engage the rabbinic view and present his objection but also to record his controversial opinion that, in the end, the derived

32. Radak’s difficulty with the rabbinic debate as to why Hezekiah had to seek mercy also relates to the question of which month he added: One opinion in the Talmud maintains that his transgression concerned the unlawful addition of a second Nisan.

33. It cannot be ruled out that Radak also perceived these assertions to be possible historical traditions: Their textual basis is meager at best, and the relevant talmudic statement contains several additional claims regarding Hezekiah that cannot possibly have emerged from exegesis.

law is itself not binding (“Yet this does not hold up as far as the law is concerned”).³⁴ And in fact, when halakhic ramifications are at stake, Radak will at times reject the rabbinic reading even where the law in question *is* binding.³⁵

D. Conclusion

There remains only one instance in the Chronicles commentary in which Radak objects to a rabbinic assertion, albeit mildly, in which the possibility of a *kabbalah* is doubtful and I see no independent reason to consider the rabbis’ claim especially authoritative.³⁶ Regardless of whether we can account for that single apparent counterexample, our analysis of the Chronicles commentary exemplifies—and an assessment of the rest of the commentaries shall confirm—that such departures from the pattern prove to be infrequent exceptions. Radak’s overt challenges to rabbinic assertions in strictly exegetical contexts indeed prove to be far less common, intense, and elaborate than his objections to possible historical traditions and claims with theological or halakhic implications, in which his tense relationship with the rabbis is truly discernible.

III. COMMENTARIES TO OTHER NARRATIVE BOOKS

The picture that emerges from Radak on other narrative books provides strong confirmation of the pattern.³⁷ We shall consider the commentary to Kings as a representative example. Not only do Radak’s critiques of the rabbis

34. See the entry *ben* in the *Talmudic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. S. J. Zevin (Jerusalem: Rabbi Herzog World Academy, 1993), esp. note 15. The primary halakhic issue at stake concerns whether the birth of a grandson by a daughter counts toward the fulfillment of the requirement to procreate.

35. One example in which Radak rejects a halakhic derivation appears at Joshua 5:14, in which the text describes an armed man appearing before Joshua who, when asked where his loyalties lie, responds “No, I am the Lord’s general; now I have come.” Radak provides his own explanation of the problematic phrase “now I have come” and proceeds to cite an interpretation on which the Talmud bases a halakhic conclusion concerning commandments that compete with each other for precedence. Radak calls the rabbinic interpretation “improbable” and raises three separate objections to it. Talmage, *David Kimhi, the Man and Commentaries*, 77, describes the foregoing comments concerning Hezekiah as examples of Radak challenging the rabbis on “aggadic passages with halakhic content.” However, there are no halakhic derivations in them that would make them especially authoritative. See also Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 291–307, who cites numerous examples of Radak’s rejection of interpretations with halakhic import, including several that I do not mention because of the parameters of this study. She will expound on this matter in a forthcoming study of her own.

36. At II 13:20, Radak cites a “*derash*,” which he dismisses as “improbable,” that interprets a death mentioned in the verse as that of King Abijah. There is no real historical question at stake in this case. The motive for Radak’s frontal evaluation of the rabbis’ view might be that he is genuinely struggling to find his preferred explanation: Some reinterpretation of the verse is unavoidable, and a dissatisfied Radak cites one rabbinic view as a fully valid alternative to his own, followed by a more speculative one that he characterizes as improbable.

37. I refer specifically to Genesis and the Former Prophets. Radak’s commentary to the book of Jonah contains no relevant examples. We do not possess Radak’s commentaries on other narrative books of the Bible.

in Kings fall overwhelmingly into the categories in question, but, as our thesis might have anticipated, on this essentially historical book—filled with names, dates, and straight historical accounts often unencumbered by dialogue—Radak’s objections to the rabbis appear in especially high numbers.

The only clear departures from the pattern appear in the very first chapter. At I Kings 1:1, Radak considers the rabbis’ explanation of King David’s inability to be warned “improbable,” and at I 1:28, he uses the term “highly improbable” to describe their explanation of what is essentially a question of motive.³⁸ On the other hand, we have already cited the three places in Kings where Radak, in later additions to the commentary, insists that the text does not support the rabbis’ contention that the Ark miraculously took up no space. In another objection to an alleged miracle, at I 18:26, Radak considers a midrashic assertion that a bull spoke to Elijah “very far from sensible.”³⁹ Also in the category of theology, at I 18:37, Radak objects to a rabbinic interpretation that appears to limit free will, and he cites another rabbinic statement to support his skepticism. And at I 8:64, he considers “astonishing” the Talmud’s assumption, which is of halakhic (as well as historical) significance, that Solomon could have built a stone altar for the Temple in place of Moses’ copper one.

More important, in no fewer than sixteen cases, Radak reacts to rabbinic assertions of historical significance. At I 2:19, he considers the identification of the “king’s mother” as Ruth to be “highly improbable,” as she should not have been alive then. At I 8:9, he invokes the verse as a proof against the rabbinic claim that the Ark contained the broken Tablets and a Torah scroll. At I 11:26, he objects to the identification of Nebat with Micah and Sheba son of Bichri. At I 17:1, in connection with his ambivalence toward the rabbinic identification of Phinehas and Elijah, Radak cites three rabbinic views concerning which tribe Elijah came from, adding—in a later insertion that is missing from MS Bodleian 305—that “all their proofs are unpersuasive and we do not know the truth.” At I 18:11, he objects to the contention that Ahab ruled over the whole world. At II 18:17, he challenges the basis of the assumption that Rabshakeh was a Jewish apostate, but he allows that this could simply be a *kabbalah*. At II 22:8, he considers it “improbable” that the scroll found during Josiah’s reign had been hidden in the time of Ahaz and “highly improbable” that Manasseh transgressed for only twenty-two years. At II 24:18, he considers an implication of the rabbis’ identification of Shallum with Hezekiah “improbable.” And in six instances, with varying intensity, Radak challenges chronological accounts in Seder Olam: at I 15:33; II 8:16–17; II 8:26–27; II 13:20; II 14:22; and II 15:1 and 8. All told, then, Kings provides us with

38. A further example, at II 2:11, in which, with the phrase “it is a wonder” (תִּמְהָה הוּא), Radak challenges the rabbis’ understanding of Elisha’s “double” portion of prophecy as twice that of Elijah—manifest in his performance of twice as many miracles—can quite plausibly be considered of historical or theological significance and should not qualify as a counterexample.

39. I read this statement of skepticism of Aggadah as addressing this case alone. Contrast Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 121, who reads it as a more general statement.

twenty-two confirming examples, and just two counterexamples, both in Chapter 1.⁴⁰

IV. COMMENTARIES TO POETIC BOOKS

If a historical book such as *Kings* provided occasion for Radak to object to so many rabbinic historical claims, we might expect that in the case of poetic books, which refer to far fewer historical characters and events and in which didactic and philological concerns predominate, our thesis would predict that Radak challenges the rabbis very rarely. And indeed, this is just what we find.⁴¹ Furthermore, however sporadically Radak challenges the rabbis, his objections, strikingly, cluster in precisely the kinds of examples that lend support to our contention. It will be useful to look at the remarkably few yet exceptionally instructive examples that appear in Radak's commentaries to the Latter Prophets.

In the only case in *Isaiah* containing the sort of objection that meets the criteria of our survey, at 6:4, Radak rejects a passage in *Seder Olam* asserting that, based on the trembling of the pillars in *Isaiah's* chariot prophecy, the earthquake mentioned in *Amos* 1:1 took place on that day. This is not only a historical question for Radak but also a theological one: As he insists here, everything witnessed in this majestic representation of the Divine must be purely a vision. At *Jeremiah* 38:7, Radak objects to the rabbis' identification of *Ebed-melech* the Cushite as *Zedekiah*. At *Ezekiel* 4:6, he provides a lengthy critique, as at *II Kings* 22:8, of the chronology that allows for only twenty-two years of *Manasseh's* wickedness. At *Ezekiel* 8:1, he objects to yet another chronological account in *Seder Olam*, again on the basis of his view that the description in the relevant prophecy reflects a vision only. At *Hosea* 1:2, he further insists that what is written took place only in a vision—and that the prophet did not actually marry a harlot “even though the rabbis say this is meant straightforwardly.” At *Hosea* 9:8, he challenges the rabbis' apparent ascription of

40. The commentary to *Joshua*, too, contains only one real counterexample; see Radak at 7:5. For supporting examples, see Radak at 3:10, 4:11, 15:17, 24:11, 24:25, and 24:33. Concerning *Joshua* 5:14, see n. 35 herein. Among the many supportive examples in the *Genesis* commentary, see Radak at 4:1, 5:32, 6:2, 11:29, 19:18, 25:1, 25:22, and 47:15. All of the examples in the *Judges* commentary—at 5:27, 11:31, 16:21, 17:1, 18:1, 18:5, and 21:19—conform to the pattern. The last of these, on the surface a mere exegetical question, in fact bears considerable significance for a halakhic matter: It is based on its reading of the biblical text that the Talmud—in a decidedly halakhic context—defends its interpretation of a tannaitic source concerning the borders of Israel, with implications for laws of purity, tithing, and observance of the sabbatical year. The commentary to *Samuel* contains a group of examples that conform to the pattern at best ambiguously, but all told, even on this book, a distinct majority of instances fit our criteria. Supporting examples appear at I 1:9 (cf. B. *Ketubot* 65a), 4:12, 7:5, 12:2, 14:32, 17:23, and 25:43–44; and at II 12:30, 17:27, 20:19, 21:1, and 23:9–17 (cf. B. *Bava Kamma* 60b). More ambiguous cases appear at I 30:17, II 15:18, and II 23:20; clearer departures from the pattern appear at I 1:25, 3:10, and 25:38.

41. Beyond this, there are a relatively small number of rabbinic citations in Radak's commentaries to these books, largely attributable, I think, to his need to concentrate on philological interpretation in elucidating biblical poetry. The same can be said of his commentary to *Proverbs*, which contains no challenges to the rabbis and little rabbinic citation. On the *Proverbs* commentary, see n. 16 herein. For an alternative explanation of the paucity of challenges to the rabbis on poetic books, see Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 247.

the murder of Zechariah son of Jehoiada to the Ephraimites, insisting based on the account in II Chronicles 24 that the Judahites were the perpetrators. At Zechariah 12:10, he is “astonished” at the rabbis’ claim that the Messiah son of Joseph will die at war, as this is not mentioned in the text. This eschatological matter undoubtedly qualifies as potentially authoritative rabbinic theology. And at Malachi 1:1, Radak challenges the rabbis’ identification of Malachi with Ezra. In the only ambiguous case, at Jeremiah 17:12, Radak confirms the substance of the rabbinic contention that the Temple Mount stands opposite the Throne of Glory, but he argues—against the rabbis—that contextually, the particular verse in Jeremiah does not yield this interpretation. This, too, is arguably a theological matter: Radak discusses it at length at Psalms 132:2, referring to it as a “profound secret.”

Taken together, when one considers the overwhelmingly poetic content of the Latter Prophets and the philological orientation of Radak’s commentaries to them, these examples represent, I suggest, the most remarkable manifestation of the tendency of Radak’s objections to appear specifically in historical and theological contexts.⁴²

V. RADAK’S ACCEPTANCE OF *MIDRASH*

If the authority that Radak attributes to the rabbis on matters pertaining to history, theology, and halakhah is the source of such tension, we might anticipate that in these areas, at least in some cases, he would choose to accept rabbinic claims, even where they are not easily borne out by his *peshat* principles. Recent scholars have collected examples of midrashic influence on Radak’s *peshat* exegesis,⁴³ and it is indeed striking how consistently these examples fit into our categories of history and theology, and especially of *halakhah*—a category that has been independently isolated by Grunhaus and Seidler.⁴⁴

We may limit ourselves to brief illustrations of the positive evidence. In the category of potential historical traditions, Radak regularly incorporates even obscure rabbinic identifications of biblical figures—and appears to take them

42. Even the Psalms commentary, which does contain some counterexamples, remains suggestive of the pattern. (I refer, of course, to the unabridged version. On the abridged version in most printed texts, which omits the majority of rabbinic citations, see E. Z. Melamed, “Perush Radak le-Tehillim,” *Areshet* 2 [1959–60]: 35–95.) Here, Radak was working closely with a running *midrash*, so one might have expected fairly common objections to rabbinic interpretations, and, given the nature of the material, few that would support our thesis. Yet the commentary contains only nine objections that meet our criteria, and several, probably a majority, fit the pattern. Clearly supportive examples appear at 78:9, 90:15, and 91:6. Two additional examples, at 68:28 and 106:7, also address questions of historical fact, although their significance is arguably meager. An objection to the rabbis of possible halakhic concern appears at 62:12. Only three of Radak’s challenges—at 6:1, 86:2, and 132:5—depart from the pattern rather decisively. We do not possess Radak’s commentaries on poetic books other than Psalms, Proverbs, and the Latter Prophets.

43. Citations appear in what follows.

44. Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 161–69; and Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” 150–52, 213. Cf. Baker and Nicholson, *Kimhi on Psalms*, xx–xxi. Although Seidler’s presentation leaves the impression that Radak was consistently beholden to halakhic derivations, this study suggests otherwise, as does Grunhaus’s treatment in “Interplay,” 291–307.

quite seriously—even when they have no basis in the text. For example, at I Kings 20:13, he cites the rabbinic identification of the prophet who approached King Ahab as Micaihu son of Jimlah, and at I 22:8, he presumes this to be correct even though it raises a moderate difficulty with that verse.⁴⁵ In his effort to keep the deeds of biblical figures of stature within the boundaries of the law, at II Samuel 13:1, Radak incorporates the Talmud's assumption—based on no direct textual evidence—that Tamar's mother was a war prisoner, which makes her proposal that her half-brother Amnon marry her (and David's assumed consent to this) entirely legal.⁴⁶ And, as discussed by Grunhaus,⁴⁷ at Joshua 1:18, Radak incorporates a halakhic derivation—not necessitated by the text's simple sense—exempting one from heeding the sinful directives of a leader, and he makes clear his acceptance of the derivation by invoking it in several places.⁴⁸

On the other hand, when Radak cites rabbinic assertions in standard exegetical contexts, they can regularly be understood as entirely plausible *peshat* suggestions or as homiletics intended—as he famously writes in his introduction to the Former Prophets—“for lovers of *derash*.” To argue otherwise on the basis of any example, one would need to show—as in the foregoing examples—that Radak took the rabbinic interpretation seriously *and* that it transcends standard *peshat* exegesis. Grunhaus points to one kind of case that meets these criteria: Radak's reliance on midrashic interpretation—as at Genesis 18:8—to account for dots over letters in the biblical text.⁴⁹ Such cases, however, can be seen as unique, with little programmatic importance: As Radak observes on that verse, the significance of the dots does not lend itself to any straightforward means of interpretation.⁵⁰

45. Levy, “Pre-Emptive Exegesis,” compiles a list of several identifications. This example is my own. Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” 147–50, calls attention to another example of Radak's acceptance of a rabbinic claim with no textual basis, at I Samuel 12:5, and argues convincingly that he saw it as a *kabbalah*.

46. Grunhaus cites this example in “Interplay,” 160. In that discussion, she mentions several other cases of Radak's incorporation of the rabbis, including the *kabbalah* identifying Amoz with Amaziah and the assertion that Elisha performed twice the number of miracles as Elijah (to which Radak actually raises an objection at II Kings 2:11). Also cited is Radak's repeated acceptance in the Genesis commentary (such as at 6:18) of the rabbinic assertion that sexual relations were forbidden in Noah's ark. This involves a resolution of subtle textual disparities and is similar to the cases treated by M. Cohen, almost all of which are on Genesis; see nn. 11 and 55 herein. Radak's incorporation of the rabbinic debate concerning how the miraculous destruction of Sennacherib's army transpired quite clearly involves *peshat* analysis of the relevant verses; see “Interplay,” 160, and the comments of Radak mentioned there.

47. Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 161–64.

48. Beyond the halakhic examples in Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 161–69, and Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” 150–52, the case of Radak's repeated acceptance of the rabbinic understanding of the procedure for using the *urim ve-tummim* is also of halakhic consequence; see Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 159.

49. Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 142–48.

50. Similarly, Radak had no way to recover original name derivations, although in such cases, he rarely saw a need to cite midrashic speculations. See Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 173–80. Another special category involves philosophical exegesis, in which Radak understood certain biblical texts that relate to the nature of the Divine to reflect deeper meanings than what would emerge from a straightforward reading; see Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” 100–107.

Among other cases that scholars have noted, one that is discussed by Seidler comes closest to providing genuine evidence of fanciful midrashic influence on Radak's *peshat* exegesis.⁵¹ At Genesis 34:1, Radak appears to assume—based on a *midrash* he had cited earlier—that Jacob hid Dinah in a box to prevent the possibility of her marrying Esau and thus unwittingly facilitated the even worse result of her encounter with Shechem.⁵² Even here, however, as Seidler acknowledges, the initial citation of this *midrash*, at Genesis 32:23, serves as an alternative that is apparently for “lovers of *derash*” only.⁵³ Furthermore, Radak's later reference to it, intended to account for an extraneous phrase in the text, follows a midrashic explanation of yet another extraneous phrase, which Radak introduces with the verb *dareshu*.⁵⁴ Though Seidler concludes that the similar objective of these juxtaposed interpretations suggests that Radak takes *both* of them seriously—notwithstanding the term *dareshu*—it appears more likely that the term implies that both are intended for “lovers of *derash*” only. If this is true, Radak's allusion to our *midrash* serves to

51. In an additional example noted by Seidler, at I Kings 1:13, it is unclear to me what propels her assumption that the rabbinic citation is more than “for lovers of *derash*.” The *midrash* in question provides an elaborate, speculative motive for David's oath to Bathsheba that Samuel would be king, and although Radak provides no simpler alternative, it could well be that he considered the oath to be an entirely reasonable gesture, the motive of which required no elaboration on the level of *peshat*. In the case of a citation at II Kings 4:1, I concur with Grunhaus (“Interplay,” 154–55) that Radak took the rabbis' contribution seriously, but only to the extent that it contains identifications of biblical figures. Fundamentally, the citation could easily be for lovers of *derash* only. I similarly view Radak's comments at Judges 3:20 and Jeremiah 32:18 (see Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 155–56) as intended for lovers of *derash*. A citation at Judges 1:25 (Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 155), in which the rabbis interpret “showing” (presumably in contrast to “telling”) as discreetly gesturing with a finger, can be seen as plausible *peshat* interpretation given the context. Similarly, when Radak relies on Mishnah Middot to interpret the final chapters of Ezekiel, there is little reason to consider the rabbis' interpretations midrashic, and when Grunhaus speaks of the inadequacy of the “*peshat* method” in cases such as this (see “Interplay,” 149), she is apparently using the term more loosely. The several examples included in Grunhaus's discussion of cases in which Radak cites multiple rabbinic interpretations (“Interplay,” 169–73) I also view either as intended for lovers of *derash* or as plausible *peshat* exegesis. In none of the cases to which I have alluded is a clear argument offered to the contrary. See also Grunhaus, “Interplay,” 151–52, on Radak at I Samuel 3:2, in which the question concerns the contextual relevance of Eli's blindness. Radak indicates that he has no good explanation “if the matter is intended in the manner of its *peshat*.” He then provides an interpretation based on the possibility that it is intended “in the manner of *meshal*” (on the *peshat-meshal* opposition compare, e.g., Radak at Ezekiel 9:2), and finally cites a *midrash* that takes the blindness literally but provides a fanciful observation that, as Radak notes, is intended to explain its relevance. Because “the manner of its *peshat*” appears to refer to the literal, i.e., non-*meshal*, understanding of the blindness, and Radak writes that he has no good explanation of it, it is doubtful that it is his intention to take the rabbis' fanciful defense of this literal reading as more than for lovers of *derash*.

52. I am hesitant to consider this a potential *kabbalah*.

53. See Seidler, “Exegetical Method,” 214–15.

54. The full comment reads as follows: “‘Dinah daughter of Leah [who bore her to Jacob] went out’: She went out of the tents of her mother and father that were outside the city, and went to the city ‘to seek out the daughters of the land.’ Concerning the phrase ‘daughter of Leah,’ they explained midrashically (*dareshu*): [Dinah was] a woman who ventured out, and a daughter of the same (*yaz*) *anit bat yaz anit*, [as it says:] ‘Leah went out to meet him’ (Genesis 30:16). And it says ‘whom she bore to Jacob’ because what happened to her was a punishment of Jacob, as we have written (Genesis 32:23).”

complete the picture of how the two extraneous phrases can be explained homilectically—for the benefit of “lovers of *derash*.”⁵⁵

Yet even if this case stands as a lone counterexample,⁵⁶ it does little to change the general picture of Radak’s incorporation of fanciful *midrash* into his exegesis: Just as in instances in which he provides overt critiques of the rabbis, examples of his acceptance of midrash concentrate overwhelmingly in cases involving potential *kabbalot* and issues of theological or halakhic consequence. For it is specifically in these areas that the authority of the rabbis weighed heavily on Radak, prompting him to accept what he could and to contend vigorously with what he could not.

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55. Even if Radak indeed offers this as a plausible interpretation, I am convinced that it remains limited in its implications for Radak’s exegetical program. For as I noted earlier (n. 11) concerning Cohen’s argument, in the commentary to Genesis, Radak’s only work on the Pentateuch, he displays a far greater tendency to ascribe relevance to anomalies in the text, including this kind of redundancy. Thus, I strongly suspect that, as in Cohen’s examples, an inclination toward “omniscience” in the Pentateuch accounts for his decision here to offer a midrashic interpretation in the absence of any simpler one, even if it assumes information with no basis at all in the text. A full presentation of the argument for this conception of the Genesis commentary is beyond the scope of this study. A fairly detailed characterization of this work appears in R. Birin (Kugler), “*Derekhav ha-parshaniyyot shel Radak* (Rabbi David Kimḥi) ‘al pi perusho le-sefer Bereshit’” (Master’s thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1980).

56. In the only other possible counterexamples I can find, the “midrashic” interpretations are Radak’s own, not the citations of the rabbis. At I Samuel 1:3, in which the text relates that periodically Elkanah would go “from his city” (מעירו) to the Sanctuary at Shiloh, Radak offers that the apparently extraneous word מעירו implies that Elkanah would encourage others from his city to go as well. Also, at II Samuel 12:24, Radak claims that the apparent redundancy in ויבא אליה וישכב עמה—“he came to her and lay with her”—suggests that Bathsheba did not conceive from her first act of relations with David. These cases push the limits of close reading and arguably go beyond what is described in n. 11 herein as “the moderately speculative, literary-critical” readings suggested by Cohen’s examples in “*Hashpa’ot*.” But such exceptional cases should not skew our impression of Radak’s relationship to midrashic claims: Outside the categories we have established, convincing examples of his departure from pristine *peshat* interpretation are exceedingly rare, at best.