

New Light on the History of Hanukah and Its Commemoration: A Literary Analysis of Bavli Shabbat 21a–24a

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Hanukah lights have captured the modern imagination, on display everywhere from the White House to the International Space Station (albeit made of orange felt in the latter case). The celebration of Hanukah by lighting lamps in front of Jewish homes derives from rabbinic literature, appearing nowhere in Second Temple sources. Indeed, while the Second Temple stood, it would have made the most sense to celebrate the anniversary of its reconsecration in the Temple itself with song and added sacrificial offerings. It would make little sense as a home-based ritual. When and why, then, did the home lamp lighting come into practice?

This article will trace the development of Hanukah fire rituals demonstrating that while the Books of Maccabees emphasize the Hasmonean inauguration of the sacrificial altar, the rabbis shifted the focus of the commemoration from the altar to the menorah after the Temple's destruction as part of an effort to transfer the holiness of the Temple to the Jewish home. A contextual and literary analysis of the locus classicus of the Hanukah laws at Bavli *Shabbat* 21a–24a reveals themes connecting Hanukah lamps both to the Temple menorah and to household Shabbat lamps. The Talmud communicates this new centrality of home holiness through details of ritual law as well as by recontextualizing and retelling the miracle of the oil. Methodologically, this article will also offer a new contribution to Talmudic research by demonstrat-

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ing a thematic continuity, purpose, and literary structure over a large section of Talmud.¹

Past scholarship has presented many, sometimes contradictory, theories about the origins of the practice of lighting oil lamps and the associated miracle of the cruse of oil recorded in the Babylonian Talmud. Considering that Bavli *Shabbat* 21a–24a hardly mentions the victorious battle of the Hasmoneans, nineteenth-century historians proposed that the Talmudic rabbis downplayed military activism, which might encourage a dangerous replay of anti-Roman revolts. The ancient rabbis sought only religious freedom from the Romans rather than political sovereignty. They therefore shifted to the miracle of the small cruse of oil lasting eight days, symbolizing their religious and spiritual aspirations. These scholars pointed to the lack of a tractate about Hanukah in the Mishnah, which mentions the holiday only a few times in passing,² as evidence that they downgraded this holiday, stripped its political origins, and transformed it into a celebration of God’s miraculous providence in the Temple and in history. This generation of historians also noted Talmudic statements opposing non-Davidic kings like the Hasmoneans who were priests, not Judahites, and therefore ineligible to form a dynasty.³

¹ While previous scholarship tended to focus on individual pericopes or their immediate surroundings, Devora Steinmetz, “Perception, Compassion, and Surprise: Literary Coherence in the Third Chapter of Bavli Ta’anit,” *HUCA* 82–83 (2011–2012), 61 argues for “motifs and themes that weave throughout many aggadot” of a chapter of Bavli. See also further references there at p. 78 n. 35. This paper argues for sustained themes and persuasive goals across both non-legal and primary legal material over a span of several pages. For more examples and analysis of sustained arguments towards a legal interpretive goal, see Shamma Friedman, *Perek ha-’isha rabbah ba-Bavli* (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978); and Mordechai Sabato, *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin Chapter 3: Critical Edition and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2018) (Hebrew).

² Mishnah *Bikurim* 1:6, *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1:3, *Ta’anit* 2:10, *Megillah* 3:4 and 6, *Mo’ed Katan* 3:9, and *Bava Kamma* 6:6. See Geoffrey Herman, “Religious Transformation between East and West: Hanukkah in the Babylonian Talmud and Zoroastrianism,” in *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-cultural Exchange between East and West*, ed. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 265, regarding the scant Tosefta and Yerushalmi references.

³ See Zechariah Frankel, *Darkhei ha-Mishnah* (Leipzig: 1859), 302–3; Berl Katzenelson, “Introduction,” in *Sefer ha-gurab*, ed. Israel Halperin (1941), 9; and references cited at Joshua Efron, *Studies on the Hasmonean Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 8 n. 27 and 29 n. 84; Daniel Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 44 n. 2, and p. 55; and Vered

After the 1940s, however, historians challenged the previous view and brought to the foreground the many pro-Hasmonean rabbinic statements that not only acknowledge their military victory but that even portray some of the Hasmonean leaders in a positive light.⁴ The rabbis admired the heroic military battles of the early Maccabees,⁵ they valued Jewish sovereignty and they lamented its loss at the termination of the Hasmonean dynasty.⁶ But if the Hanukkah home lamps do not derive from Second Temple sources, and are also not a rejection of the Hasmonean military and political successes, then why did the Talmud teach this practice with such detail and enthusiasm?

Many scholars trace the background for Hanukkah and its celebration of lights back to pagan winter solstice festivals.⁷ Vered Noam assumes literary rather than political explanations for the centrality of the cruse of

Noam, *Shifting Images of the Hasmoneans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3–5, 199–201.

⁴ See Gedaliah Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 18–47; Efron, *Studies on the Hasmonean Period*, 13, 30–32; Schwartz, *Studies*, 44–56; Isaiah Gafni, “Ha-hashmonaim be-sifrut hazal,” in *Yemei beit hashmonai*, ed. D. Amit and H. Eshel (1995), 261–76; and Noam, *Shifting Images*.

⁵ Noam, *Shifting Images*, 32–75, 202–204.

⁶ Noam, *Shifting Images*, 157–185, 209–210.

⁷ See Joseph Tabory, *Jewish Festivals in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996) (Hebrew), 370; and Moshe Benovitz, “Herod and Hanukah,” *Zion* 68 (2003) (Hebrew), 5–40, and references on p. 16. Benovitz further dates the origin of Hanukah lamp lighting to the first century BCE when Julius Caesar instituted a new solar calendar and lamps were lit in celebration of Saturnalia. Marcus Terentius Varro, whom Caesar appointed as public librarian, writes that wax candles were given as gifts on Saturnalia (*On the Latin Language* 5.64). Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.7.31 cites Varro in an expanded form:

For many years they thought to propitiate Dis with human heads and Saturn with the sacrifice of men, since the oracle had bidden them: “Offer heads to Hades and a man (φῶτα) to the Father.” But later, the story goes, Hercules, returning through Italy with the herds of Geryon, persuaded their descendants to replace these unholy sacrifices with others of good omen, by offering to Dis little masks cleverly fashioned to represent the human face, instead of human heads, and by honoring the altars of Saturn with lighted candles instead of with the blood of a man; for the word φῶτα means “lights” as well as “a man.”

This idea that candles replaced sacrifices serves as a historical parallel to the argument of this article that Hanukah lamps replaced celebratory altar sacrifices.

oil miracle story.⁸ Geoffrey Herman proposes that Hanukah was hardly commemorated in Palestine and was only later introduced in Babylonia as a way to imitate and incorporate a Jewish version of a Zoroastrian fire worship festival.⁹ This article argues that a literary and contextual reading of the Talmud demonstrates how the rabbis shifted the focus of the commemoration from the altar to the menorah as part of an effort to transfer the holiness of the Temple to the Jewish home. The Temple's destruction would have logically ended the celebration of the holiday commemorating its inauguration.¹⁰ However, the rabbis did not want anyone to equate the Temple's destruction with God's rejection of the Jewish chosenness. They therefore instituted a menorah-like lighting ceremony in the Jewish home as a symbol to themselves and others of God's continued dwelling among the Jewish people. They furthermore legislated lighting outdoors as a public symbol of God's continual dwelling among the Jewish people. This message was particularly necessary and poignant after the Temple's destruction and the rise of Christian taunts of supersessionism.

Historiography of the Hanukah Celebration

To place the *Megillat Ta'anit* and Talmudic accounts of Hanukah in context, let us first review the prior historiography of this event. 1 Maccabees, written in Hebrew circa 100 BCE, describes the rededication of the altar and its eight-day celebration. After the battle to regain control of the Temple mount, Judah the Maccabee directed his men to tear down the defiled altar, build a new one, and cleanse the Temple, which took several weeks. They rededicated the Temple with new vessels on the 25th of Kislev, 164 BCE, the very same date the pagans had defiled it three years earlier. Chapter 4 relates:

(47) Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. (48) They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the Temple and consecrated the courts. (49) They made new holy vessels and brought the lampstand, the altar

⁸ Vered Noam, "The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 73 (2003), 191–226.

⁹ See Herman, "Religious Transformation," 261–281; and Shai Secunda, "The Development of the Chanukah Oil Miracle in Context of Zoroastrian Fire Veneration," <https://theGemara.com/article/the-development-of-the-chanukah-oil-miracle-in-context-of-zoroastrian-fire-veneration/>

¹⁰ Solomon Zeitlin, "Hanukkah: Its Origin and Its Significance," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 29 (1938), 9.

of incense, and the table into the temple. (50) Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. (51) They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken. (52) Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, (53) they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built...(56) So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering.¹¹

The Hasmoneans needed to fashion new vessels, including the lampstand, because Antiochus had plundered these gold and silver valuables.¹² But their primary objective was clearly building a new altar and restarting the sacrificial offerings; hence, the spotlight focuses on celebrating “the dedication of the altar,” deriving from the biblical phrase, *hanukat ha-mizbeah*,¹³ thus linking it to the time of Moses.

The linkage between the Hasmonean rededication of the altar and that of the Tabernacle is even more explicit in 2 Maccabees, written in Greek just a few decades after Judah’s victory of 164 BCE. 2 Maccabees begins with two letters to the Jews of Egypt encouraging them to observe the new festival of Hanukkah. The second letter traces a history of the miraculous fires that descended to consume the sacrifices both at the inauguration of Moses’ altar as well as that of Solomon.¹⁴ The letter reports a legend that close to the end of the First Temple, Jeremiah ordered some priests to take fire from the altar and hide it away in a cistern.¹⁵ When the altar of the Second Temple was to be inaugurated, priests went to look for that fire but found only some liquid naphtha, which they took, sprinkled on the altar, and when the sun shone on it, “a great fire blazed up, so that all marveled.”¹⁶ The leftover liquid was then poured onto large stones for storage where it miraculously blazed up and went out.¹⁷ The residue of that liquid remained and so was avail-

¹¹ NRSV translation.

¹² 1 Maccabees 1:21–23.

¹³ Numbers 7:10–11, 84, 88.

¹⁴ 2 Maccabees 2:10 based on Leviticus 9:24 and 2 Chronicles 7:1–3.

¹⁵ 2 Maccabees 2:1.

¹⁶ 2 Maccabees 1:22.

¹⁷ 1 Maccabees 1:30–36.

able for Judah the Maccabee and his followers to derive fire from it to ignite the rebuilt altar, as reported at 2 *Maccabees* 10:

(3) They purified the sanctuary and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint,¹⁸ they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. ... (6) They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the Festival of Booths, remembering how not long before, during the Festival of Booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. (7) Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also palm fronds, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. (8) They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.¹⁹

Like 1 Maccabees, this narrative also focuses on rebuilding the altar as well as restarting all the Temple rituals, including the sacrifices and the menorah lighting. However, the altar rededication here takes on even greater centrality by tracing the continuity of the original miraculous heavenly fire of the Tabernacle altar to its duplication at the inauguration of Solomon's Temple altar, the hiding and finding of that same fire in the form of flammable liquid to ignite the altar at the Second Temple inauguration, and the use of a remnant of the same liquid to ignite the Hasmonean rededicated altar. The miraculous fire at each stage serves to divinely authorize each altar, a validation that would be especially valuable for the Hasmoneans against their many detractors.²⁰

2 Maccabees 10:6 states that the Hasmonean celebration was modeled after Sukkot, thus explaining its length of eight days as well as the

¹⁸ Literally, "igniting rocks and taking fire from them." This refers back to the naphtha stored by Nehemiah for the future; see commentary at Daniel R. Schwartz, "2 Maccabees," in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, ed. Louis Feldman, et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013), 2863.

¹⁹ NRSV translation.

²⁰ See Moshe Simon-Shoshan, "Past Continuous: The Yerushalmi's Account of Honi's Long Sleep and Its Roots in Second Temple Era Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 51 (2020), 414–17, who connects this theme of the continuity of fire with Bavli's miracle of the oil, "There is also evidence that at least some rabbis knew of some form of the tradition of the hidden fire... The setting is simply shifted to the Maccabean rededication of the Temple and the liquid fire of the altar, to the miraculous oil of the menorah" (417), on which see further below.

practice to carry branches and recite thanksgiving hymns, probably Psalms.²¹ 2 Maccabees 2:12 suggests another reason for the eight-day Hanukkah celebration by noting that Solomon's Temple dedication lasted eight days. These two explanations converge considering that Solomon's celebration also overlapped with Sukkot.²² These details further emphasize the centrality of the altar in the Hasmonean inauguration considering that sacrifices were also the centerpiece of Solomon's inauguration.²³ Although 2 Maccabees 10:8 does not detail how this new festival would be performed each year, it was most likely an annual eight-day Temple-based celebration highlighting added sacrifices and recitation of psalms.²⁴

Writing in 94 CE, Josephus provides a first inkling relating Hanukkah to lights: "From that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights (φῶτα). I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival."²⁵ This name may relate to the origins of this holiday in winter solstice festivals. Be that as it may, his uncertainty as to the reason for this name indicates that lighting lamps, if practiced yet at all, was still not widespread.

Megillat Ta'anit, written in Aramaic not long before the destruction of 70 CE,²⁶ provides only basic dating information: "On the twenty-fifth day of it [Kislev], Hanukah of eight days, and one is not to eulogize." However, a Hebrew commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit*, developed during the Talmudic era and known as the Scholion, elaborates on the Megillah

²¹ See also 2 Maccabees 1:18 where Hanukkah is called "the festival of booths and the festival of fire."

²² See 2 Chronicles 7:9, which clarifies ambiguities in 1 Kings 8:65–66. The Tabernacle consecration also lasted eight days (Leviticus 9:1). See also 2 Chronicles 29:17.

²³ See 1 Kings 8:62–64 and 2 Chronicles 7:4–7. Note also the centrality of sacrifices in the consecration of the Tabernacle in Leviticus 9 and Numbers 7.

²⁴ The carrying of branches may have been observed only the first year because they were not able to celebrate Sukkot at all. For recitation of thanksgiving psalms, see 2 Chronicles 7:6 and Ezra 3:11. See also Hananel Mack, "Toledot hag ha-hanukah," in *Yemei Bet Hashmonai*, ed. D. Amit and H. Eshel (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1995), 313.

²⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 12:325. Translation from Flavius Josephus, *The Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981). This reference to φῶτα supports the relevance of the citation in n. 7.

²⁶ Vered Noam, "The Scroll of Fasting," in *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part*, ed. S. Safrai et al (Fortress Press, 2006) (Hebrew), 350.

and provides a bridge to the transformation we find in the Bavli. There are two versions of this commentary represented in manuscripts currently housed in Oxford and Parma, which were later combined into the version used in the first printing. Recently, a manuscript similar to the Oxford version was discovered in the binding of a copy of St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* in the library of St. Paul's Abbey in Austria. This is the most accurate text available of the Scholion:²⁷

The inauguration that Moses performed in the desert, as Scripture states, "The one who presented his offering on the first day" (Numbers 7:12), and similarly on the second and third days. When the Tent of Meeting was dismantled, its inauguration ceased. [The same was true for] the inauguration that Solomon performed, as Scripture states, "They observed the inauguration of the altar for seven days" (2 Chronicles 7:9).

But the inauguration of the Hasmonean dynasty continues for generations. Why is this one commemorated for generations? Because they achieved it through suffering, and they recited on it Hallel and thanksgiving and they lit lamps in purity. For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they made all the vessels impure, they did not have anything in which to light the oil. But when the hand of the House of the Hasmoneans was victorious, they brought seven metal spits and coated them with tin and they began to light lamps.

And why is it commemorated for eight days? Because they demolished the altar and rebuilt it and all seven days they were making the vessels usable.²⁸

Like both books of Maccabees, the Scholion mentions the demolition and rebuilding of the altar.²⁹ Here, however, the rebuilding of the altar is not the reason for the celebration but only an explanation for its length: since it took seven days to rebuild it and purify the vessels, they presumably could only complete the celebration on the eighth day. The historical altar dedications of Moses and Solomon are also mentioned, not as precedents for the Hanukkah celebration, but only by way of contrast to question why only the Hasmonean festival continued for genera-

²⁷ Yoav Rosental, "A Newly Discovered Leaf of 'Megillat Ta'anit' and its Scholion," *Tarbiz* 77 (2009) (Hebrew), 397–403. This text matches nearly exactly the quotation in Rabbi Isaac ben Moses of Vienna's *Or Zarua*, whose text was already recognized as the most accurate by Noam, "The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil," 213–16, before the discovery of the Austrian manuscript.

²⁸ This and all translations of rabbinic texts are my own.

²⁹ A memory of this event is also recorded at Mishnah *Middot* 1:6.

tions to come. Instead, the focus of the celebration is the construction and lighting of a new makeshift menorah out of seven spits, perhaps the very spears they just used for battle.³⁰

The Parma manuscript of the Scholion, copied in 1344, likely presents a later version of the text closer to Bavli's version considering that it makes no mention of the altar at all:

On the twenty-fifth of [Kislev], Hanukah of eight days when one may not [fast] nor eulogize. For the gentiles defiled the Temple, but when the Hasmonean kingdom gained victory, they searched it and found in it pure oil and they lit the lamps with it. All of the days upon which they lit lamps, they appointed as festival days... And why did they commemorate for eight days? Because in the Greek era, the Hasmoneans entered the Temple Mount with seven iron spits in their hands, which they covered with tin, and they worked on this all eight days.

This version includes finding pure oil, recalling the miraculous oil mentioned in 2 Maccabees. Significantly, both versions of the Scholion focus on the lighting of the menorah as the primary impetus for the festival. But, while the Oxford/Austria version points to the rebuilding of the altar to explain the length of the festival, the Parma version leaves out the altar entirely and replaces it with the fashioning of the makeshift menorah to explain the length of the festival.

We can summarize the development thus far as a shift from altar to menorah. The Books of Maccabees, taking a page out of biblical Tabernacle and Temple dedications, highlight the consecration of the altar and the first sacrifices as the primary expression of celebration. Starting with the Scholion, composed after the destruction of the Second Temple, miraculous stories and their implied symbolism about the altar transfer to human actions about the menorah. Significantly, none of the sources from the Second Temple era mention a Hanukah lamp lit at home.

The earliest reference to a ritual practice of lighting at least one Hanukah lamp derives from Mishnah *Bava Kamma* 6:6 and Tosefta *Bava Kamma* 6:26 in the name of Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai who lived many decades after the Temple's destruction. The only alleged evidence for Hanukah lamps before 70 CE is the *baraita* at Bavli *Shabbat* 21b (cited below)

³⁰ See Talmudic references to the Hasmonean makeshift menorah at Bavli *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 24a; Bavli *Avodah Zarah* 43a; Bavli *Menaḥot* 28b; and *Pesikta Rabbati* 2.

quoting the Houses of Hillel and Shammai.³¹ The first two anonymous opinions are later Babylonian insertions.³²

That leaves the opinions of the Houses of Hillel and Shammai regarding ascending or descending candle counts. Assuming this section records authentic Tannaitic traditions issued by the Houses,³³ these views may still reflect post-Destruction practices. The Houses were not physical buildings as much as loosely organized groups of sages whose allegiances continued well after 70 CE.³⁴

The focus on the menorah and its oil, with the significant addition of a home ritual, will continue to develop in the Talmudic sources, analyzed below. This movement parallels a more general trend of the rabbis

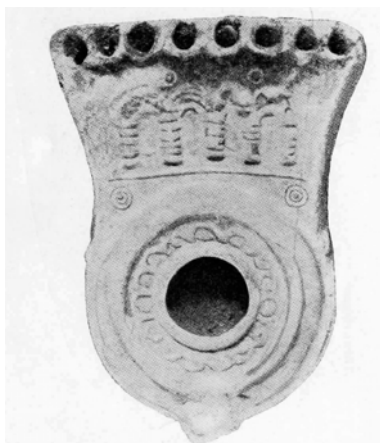
³¹ Shamma Friedman, “Shne ‘inyane Hanukah baScholion shel Megillat Ta’anit,” *Zion* 71 (2006), 5–16, argues that the legal section regarding lighting Hanukah lamps in the Scholion to *Megillat Ta’anit* is copied from Bavli.

³² See below n. 45.

³³ On the problem of attribution of statements to the Houses, see Jacob Neusner, “Why We Cannot Assume the Historical Reliability of Attributions: The Case of the Houses in Mishnah-Tosefta Makhshirin,” in *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. A. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 190–212; Israel Ben-Shalom, *The School of Shammai and the Zealots’ Struggle against Rome* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1993), 234–35 (Hebrew); Moshe Weiss, “The Authenticity of the Explicit Discussions in Bet Shammai–Bet Hillel Disputes,” *Sidra* 4 (1988) (Hebrew); and Y. N. Epstein, *Mevo’ot le-sifrut ha-Tannaim, Mishnah, Tosefta, u-midreshe halakhah*, ed. E. Z. Melamed (Jerusalem: 1957), 60–61. Epstein suggests that all disputes and dialogues recorded in the Mishnah between the Houses were actually collected and redacted by R. Yehoshua. See also Paul Heger, *The Pluralistic Halakhah: Legal Innovations in the Late Second Commonwealth and Rabbinic Periods* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2003), 358–59, for the suggestion that Yavnean sages attributed strict laws to the House of Shammai and lenient laws to the House of Hillel. Heger also puts forward the possibility that “the Sages of later generations who decided that the halakhah was always to be decided according to the House of Hillel may have reversed the attributions of specific declarations.” If true, this would make it difficult to know whether a tradition said by the Houses might have originated later and been attributed to them pseudepigraphically.

³⁴ On the dating and makeup of the Houses of Hillel and Shammai, see Richard Hidary, *Dispute for the Sake of Heaven: Legal Pluralism in the Talmud* (Providence: Brown University, 2010), 163–66. It is also possible that there was a tradition of lighting a lamp to celebrate Hanukah even during the Second Temple period. However, it may have been linked to the altar fire, which the Bavli then reinterpreted as a commemoration of the menorah fire. Alternatively, an early tradition of lighting a lamp for Hanukah may derive as a commemoration of Mattathias’s saving his daughter from *jus primae noctis*, on which see below n. 44.

to shift ritual service and the locus of holiness away from sacrifices to more relevant and practicable activities and places.³⁵



Pottery oil lamp, 4th Century CE, Israel³⁶

The Babylonian Talmudic Account

With this background we are ready to appreciate not only why the rabbis deemphasize the altar celebration, but also why they replaced it with a home-based lighting ceremony. Without the Temple standing and without the altar functioning, it would have made sense to abolish the Hanukkah holiday until the third Temple's arrival. However, the sages refused to give up on the belief that God's presence remained in their midst despite the absence of the physical Temple in Jerusalem. They continued to find God in synagogues, study halls, and at home, likening their dining room tables to altars.³⁷ While Jewish law forbade offering sacrifices without the altar and further prohibited manufacturing a seven-branched menorah,³⁸ the sages proposed that the best way to commemorate

³⁵ See Richard Hidary, "The Rhetoric of Rabbinic Authority: Making the Transition from Priest to Sage," in *Jewish Rhetorics: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Michael Bernard-Donals and Janice Fernheimer (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 16–45.

³⁶ Scholars debate whether this and other multi-wick lamps were used for Hanukkah. See Mordechai Narkis, *The Hanukkah Lamp* (Jerusalem: Bney Bezalel Publishing, 1939), 1–4.

³⁷ Mishnah *Avot* 3:3, 6.

³⁸ Bavli *Menahot* 28b and *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 24a–b. See also Steven Fine, *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 88.

God's continued presence was to light lamps at home. The style and shape of these lamps developed from individual or multi-nozzle clay lamps, to oil cups fixed onto a metal frame, and finally, over the past three centuries, to the nine-branched *hanukiah*.³⁹ These variously shaped lamps and lampstands avoided the Talmudic prohibition against forming a seven-branched menorah outside of the Temple.⁴⁰ The very need to avoid an exact replica of the Temple menorah highlights the close connection between the Temple and the home lights. This home holiness ritual at once remembers the importance of the Temple while also elevating the home as its functional replacement. A literary analysis of the Bavli bears out this thesis and we will analyze several sections that highlight these themes.

Bavli places the Hanukah mini-*masekhet* towards the beginning of the second chapter of Tractate *Shabbat* on the Mishnah that teaches which wicks and types of oil may and may not be used for Shabbat lamps to ensure that they remain lit without too much flicker that would prompt adjusting the flame in desecration of Shabbat. A comparison of the requirements of Shabbat lamps to both the Temple menorah and the home Hanukah lamps serves as the entry point to the topic of Hanukah at Bavli *Shabbat* 21a:⁴¹

Rami bar Hama taught: The wicks and oils that the sages taught that one may not kindle them on Shabbat, one may not kindle them in the Temple, as Scripture states, "To burn a lamp continually" (Exodus 27:20)....

Rav Huna said: "The wicks and oils that the sages taught that one may not kindle them on Shabbat, one also may not kindle them on Hanukah."

Rami bar Hama's *baraita* compares the materials for lighting Shabbat lamps to those of the Temple menorah. Considering that the Temple menorah can only be lit with olive oil, this linkage suggests a more symbolic association.⁴² Beyond the strictly legal point, the literary impact of

³⁹ On the development of the Hanukah lampstand, see Narkis, *The Hanukkah Lamp*.

⁴⁰ Bavli *Menahot* 28b and *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 24a–b. See also Fine, *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel*, 88.

⁴¹ Translations of Bavli are my own and follow the Vilna edition unless otherwise noted for significant manuscript variants.

⁴² Exodus 27:20. On this question see *Gilyon ha-Shas* of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, Rashash, and *Pnei Yehoshua*. Some explain that the law applies only to wicks, leav-

this statement prompts us to compare the holy space of the Temple with the holy time of Shabbat. An early midrash that we will examine in more depth below teaches that the Divine Presence resided in the Temple's menorah lamps.⁴³ The comparison to Shabbat lamps therefore suggests a transfer of the Temple's holiness to each home that welcomes and observes Shabbat with lamps.⁴⁴ After a short explanation, the Talmud continues with Rav Huna's teaching equating the requirements of Shabbat lamps to those of Hanukah lamps, an appropriate comparison since these are two household rituals, both extensions of the Temple menorah.

A debate ensues in the next lines on 21a about whether one is permitted to make use of the Hanukah lights just like one may use Shabbat lamps, or whether one may not benefit from the Hanukah lights (Rav's opinion), suggesting that their holy status is akin to the Temple Menorah. The discussion continues with a *baraita* teaching that the mitzvah to light lasts "from sundown until foot traffic in the marketplace ceases." This requirement indicates that although the Hanukah lamps are a home commandment, like Sabbath lamps, they also have a public aspect that passersby should see them.

This introduction, thus, already includes three major themes that run throughout the Hanukah mini-*masekhet*: the holy status of the Hanukah lamps akin to the Temple menorah, the obligation on the family unit to light at home, and the display of the lamps to publicize its message. The Talmud does not explicate these themes philosophically as much as it weaves them into the details of its regulations and derivations, thus embedding them into the practice and experience of the ritual lighting.

ing the mention of oil inapplicable. The Talmud returns to discuss types of oil later on *Shabbat* 23a where it concludes that olive oil is the best choice.

⁴³ See *Sifra Emor, parashah* 13, 9, cited below, and parallels.

⁴⁴ Bavli *Shabbat* 23b teaches that the lighting of Shabbat lamps prompts the onset of Shabbat and sets a peaceful and joyous mood in the home. The primary obligation on the woman of the house to light (Mishnah *Shabbat* 2:6) similarly reflects the home centeredness of this commandment. Significantly, Bavli *Shabbat* 23a teaches that women may also light Hanukah lamps, for they were involved in the miracle. This may refer to the story related in the Scholion (Oxford version) to *Megillat Ta'anit*, Elul 17, wherein Mattathias' zealotry was aroused to save his daughter from *jus primae noctis*. During that time of persecution, a lamp would be lit in front of a home celebrating a wedding as a secret invitation. This use of a lamp as a symbol of resistance and resilience may form the basis of the placement of the Hanukah lamp, also a symbol of courageous faith and victory. See also the parallels at Yerushalmi *Ketubbot* 1:5, 25c and Bavli *Sanhedrin* 32b.

Bavli *Shabbat* 21b next presents the fundamental law and basis of the Hanukah lamps in three *baraitot* and accompanying Amoraic comments:

The sages taught: The commandment of Hanukah is one lamp for each man and his household.

Those who seek to glorify kindle one lamp for each and every member.

Those who seek to glorify the most: The House of Shammai say that on the first day one lights eight lamps and from then on one decreases each night. But the House of Hillel say that on the first night one lights one lamp and from then on one increases each night.

‘Ula said: Two speakers in the West differed about this, Rabbi Yose bar Abin and Rabbi Yose bar Zebida. One said that the reason of the House of Shammai is corresponding to the number of days coming up and the reason of the House of Hillel is corresponding to the number of days going out.

The other said that the reason of the House of Shammai is corresponding to the number of bulls of the Sukkot festival and the reason of the House of Hillel is corresponding to the rule that we ascend in holiness and we do not descend...

The sages taught: The commandment for the Hanukah lamp is to place it outside the entrance of one’s home. If he lives on a second story, he places it at the window adjacent to the public domain. But at the time of danger, he places it on his table and that is sufficient....

What is Hanukah? The sages taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev the days of Hanukah are eight on which one may not eulogize and one may not fast.

For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they made all the oils in the Sanctuary impure. But when the dynasty of the House of the Hasmoneans arose victorious, they searched and could find only one cruse of oil with the seal of the high priest. There was only enough in it to light for one day. A miracle happened to it and they kindled from it for eight days. They established these days in the next year as festival days with Hallel and thanksgiving.

The *baraita* begins by tethering the obligation to light Hanukah lamps to the home and then to the individual members of the home.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Shamma Friedman, “Uncovering Literary Dependencies in the Talmudic Corpus,” in *The Synoptic Problem in Rabbinic Literature* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 53–55; idem, “Mehadrin min ha-mehadrin,” *Leshonenu* 67 (2005)153–60; and idem, “Shne ‘inyane Hanukah baScholion shel Megillat

The views of both Houses reflect a connection between the Hanukkah lamps and the Temple. As per the explanation of the Amoraim from Israel, the House of Shammai's descending pattern parallels the bulls of Sukkot. Numbers 29:13–32 legislates that thirteen bulls are offered in the Temple on the first day of Sukkot, twelve bulls on the second day, and so on until the last day of Sukkot when seven bulls are offered. Just as the number of bulls decreases each day, so should the Hanukkah lights. This explanation may reflect a late resonance of the Sukkot make-up tradition mentioned at 2 Maccabees 10:6. Although the rabbis did not cite any of the Books of Maccabees, they still may have preserved some traditions about the historical connection between Hanukkah and Sukkot. In any case, this connection between Hanukkah, the Temple, and Sukkot contributes to a running theme throughout this mini-tractate.⁴⁶

The explanation for the House of Hillel's increasing numbers applies the general rule, "We ascend in holiness and we do not descend."⁴⁷ This principle first appears at Mishnah *Shekalim* 6:5 and *Menahot* 11:7 to teach that the showbread are first placed on a marble table before being moved onto the Table of Presence, but the following week the bread is transferred from the Table of Presence, which was made from gold, onto a golden table because we must elevate from marble to gold and may not descend. A *baraita* at Bavli *Megillah* 12b makes another application in a case where a high priest becomes temporarily disqualified and a new high priest is appointed. When the original high priest returns to his position, the replacement could not go back to being an ordinary priest because we only rise in holiness and do not descend. Applying this rea-

Ta'anit," 5–16; argues that these first two sentences of the *baraita* regarding the obligation of one lamp per home and one per person, are not original Tannaitic traditions. The usage of the verb "*mehadrin*," meaning to seek out, is not Hebrew but Aramaic, demonstrating that these lines are later Babylonian insertions.

⁴⁶ See Bavli *Shabbat* 22a, which derives maximum height of the Hanukkah lights from the maximum height of a *sukkah*, and which also compares benefitting from Sukkot decorations with using Hanukkah lamps. On the connections between Hanukkah and Sukkot, see further below n. 54; Tabory, *Jewish Festivals*, 197, 374–75; Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 273; and Noam, "Miracle," 26–27.

⁴⁷ Yet another reason for the House of Hillel's ascending order may be rooted in the connection between Hanukkah and the winter solstice. See Bavli *Avodah Zarah* 8a and above, n. 7. Like the Hanukkah lamps, the *sukkah* is a household commandment that extends beyond the confines of the home. Both commandments also transfer the holiness of the Divine Presence from the Temple to one's private dwelling.

soning to the lighting of the Hanukah lamps highlights their connection to the holiness of the Temple service.⁴⁸

Further on, the *baraita* obligates one to place the Hanukah lamp at the entrance to one's home such that it is at once publicly displayed but also emerges from one's private home. This choreography parallels the placement and symbolism of the Temple menorah that resided in God's dwelling place as a public display to the nations of the world (see the *Sifra* cited below). The *baraita* here transfers the Temple menorah's ritual lighting and purpose to every Jewish home. In fact, the Talmud repeats explicitly that the goal of the Hanukah lamps is to publicize the miracle.⁴⁹ The need for public display also explains the requirement to light the Hanukah lamps while there are still pedestrians in the market.⁵⁰ The Gemara below further discusses the minimum and maximum height requirements for maximum visibility (21b–22a), exact placement in the doorway opposite the mezuzah⁵¹ (22a), and what to do with two entrances to avoid false suspicion (23a).

As mentioned above, the Hanukah mini-tractate begins with a connection between Shabbat, the menorah, and Hanukah lamps. This led into a discussion of the prohibition to benefit from the lights. The issue of using the Hanukah lights returns on 22a:⁵²

⁴⁸ The rule of rising in holiness is derived in a *baraita* at Bavli *Menahot* 99a from the Tabernacle construction and its altar covering. The rule is later applied in many contexts: replacing Yom Kippur lots (Yerushalmi *Yoma* 3:8, 41a); taking an animal designated for Rosh Hodesh and using it for Yom Kippur (Yerushalmi *Shevuot* 1:5, 33b); respecting sages (Yerushalmi *Bikkurim* 3:3, 65c and Bavli *Berakhot* 28a); using worn out *tefillin* for *mezuzah* (Yerushalmi *Megillah* 4:12, 75d and *Sofrim* 14:17); marriage choice (*Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 11:24); and winding of *tzitzit* (Bavli *Menahot* 39a).

⁴⁹ Bavli *Shabbat* 23b–24a and Bavli *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 18b.

⁵⁰ Bavli *Shabbat* 21a. See further at Moshe Benovitz, “‘Until the Feet of the Tarmoda’i are Gone’: The Hanukkah Light in Palestine during the Tannaitic and Amoraic Periods” [Hebrew], in: *Torah Lishma: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of Professor Shamma Friedman*, edited by David Golinkin and others (Jerusalem, 2007), 39–78; and an English summary at: <https://schechter.edu/ascribing-new-meaning-to-hanukkah-after-the-destruction-of-the-temple/>.

⁵¹ The *mezuzah*, like the Hanukah lamp, is also a home-based commandment that is displayed publicly.

⁵² The flow of topics within the Hanukah mini-tractate is difficult to determine. Noah Aminoah, “The Arrangement of the Laws of Hanukah in Tractate *Shabbat*,” *Sidra* 14 (1998) (Hebrew), 59–76, offers a source critical approach

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav Asi: One is prohibited to count money by the light of the Hanukkah lamp. When I said this before Shmuel, he said to me: Does the lamp have holiness in it?

...

They asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi:⁵³ May one benefit from the *sukkah* decorations all seven days? He said to them: Behold they taught, one may not count money by the light of the Hanukkah lamp.

Rav Asi prohibits using the Hanukkah lamps for counting money, seemingly in agreement with Rav earlier. Shmuel assumes that such a prohibition would indicate their holy status and disagrees, permitting their usage. Tractate *Sofrim* 20:4 explains that the Hanukkah lamps are prohibited for use because they are holy. The next section asks about benefiting from *sukkah* decorations and responds based on a comparison to Hanukkah lamps. As the ensuing Gemara exclaims, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who agrees with Rav Asi, surprisingly uses the rabbinic holiday of Hanukkah as a basis to derive a law about the biblical holiday of Sukkot! This is especially ironic considering that, as discussed above, 2 Maccabees 10:6 models the Hanukkah festival after Sukkot. This comparison strengthens the connection between Hanukkah and the Temple in light of the well-documented symbolism of the *sukkah* as holy space likened to the Temple and to the Clouds of Glory.⁵⁴

Bavli *Shabbat* 22b reports a midrash that encapsulates the symbolic significance of the Hanukkah lamps in Bavli as a replacement for the Temple menorah:

Rav said: One may not kindle from one lamp to another. But Shmuel said one may kindle in that way...

Rav Sheshet challenged: *Outside of the veil of testimony he will arrange [the menorah]* (Leviticus 24:3). Does He [God] require its light? After all, all forty years that Israel walked in the desert, they traveled only

that I find unconvincing. Instead, a literary approach helps explain most of the flow of the mini-tractate.

⁵³ This first-generation Amora from Lydda appears several times in this mini-tractate, always ascribing holiness or special significance to the Hanukkah lights. The same is true for Rav, the first-generation Babylonian Amora.

⁵⁴ See Jeffrey Rubenstein, "The Symbolism of the Sukkah," *Judaism* 43, no. 4 (1994), 371–87, and Yakov Nagen, *Water, Creation and Immanence: The Philosophy of the Festival of Sukkot* (Otniel: Gilui, Yeshivat Otniel, 2008) (Hebrew). Bavli *Shabbat* 22b, cited in the next paragraph, further describes the menorah as a manifestation of God's indwelling, similar to the *sukkah* that recalls God's protective cloud that accompanied the Israelites in the desert.

by His light! Rather, it is a testimony to all in the world that the Shekhinah rests in Israel. What is this testimony? Rava⁵⁵ said: It is the western lamp in which he places the same measure of oil as the rest. From it he would light and with it he would conclude.

Rav rules that one may not transfer fire from one Hanukah lamp to another, while Shmuel permits, consistent with his prior stance of denying the holiness of the lamps. Rav Sheshet challenges Rav's stringency considering that the Temple menorah would be relit from one lamp to the others. The discussion concludes by affirming Rav's view regarding the holiness of the Hanukah lamps and explains that lighting from lamp to lamp is permitted because lighting fulfills the commandment, just like the Temple menorah.⁵⁶ This *sugya* (Talmudic pericope) concretizes the dependency of the Hanukah lamps on the Temple menorah by using the latter as a precedent for the regulations of the former.

Rav Sheshet cites a *baraita* that highlights the menorah as a public sign to all nations that the Divine presence rests within the Temple of Israel. Rava adds a layer of interpretation to this Tannaitic source that features a daily miracle of oil. The *baraita* and Rava's elaboration are mentioned in parallel sources. First, *Sifra Emor parashah* 13, 9:

"The testimony" (Leviticus 24:3) — Testimony to all who live in the world that the Divine Presence is within Israel. Do they [the Israelites] require a lamp? After all, all forty years that Israel was in the desert they did not need a lamp, as Scripture states, "For a cloud of Hashem rested over the Tabernacle by day and fire in it by night" (Exodus 40:38). If so, why does it state, "The testimony"? Testimony to all who live in the world that the Divine Presence is in Israel.

⁵⁵ Following all manuscripts, which read "Rava"; printed editions read "Rav." All witnesses to the parallel at Bavli *Menahot* 86b also read "Rava," except for Munich 95, which has "Rav." Aminoah, "Arrangement," 72 n. 86, prefers "Rav" because Rav Sheshet of the third generation would not cite Rava of the fourth generation. However, it is more likely that Rav Sheshet only cited the tradition of the *Sifra* and assumed knowledge of the elaboration as we have it in the Tosefta. Rava's statement here merely fills in previously known Tannaitic material.

⁵⁶ By emphasizing that the lighting fulfills the commandment, not the placement of the lamps, Rav brings the Hanukah lamp lighting even closer to the menorah lighting ceremony, transforming the family members into local priests. Rav's opinion here is consistent with the explanation of his view on *Shabbat* 21a that if the lamps go out one need not relight them because the initial lighting fulfills the commandment. See Ran quoting Rashba and *Shulhan Arukh Oraḥ Hayyim* 673:4.

The *Sifra*, like the Bavli, assumes that “testimony” does not modify the curtain but rather refers to the menorah itself. Since the Israelites in the *Sifra*, and God in the Bavli, do not require the menorah’s light, its testimony must be directed to the foreign nations. This testimony of God’s allegiance to Israel may be a rabbinic response to Christian claims of supersessionism.⁵⁷ Archaeological support for this hypothesis possibly derives from a column found in Talmudic era Laodicea inscribed with a menorah, a *shofar* to its right, a palm frond and citron to its left, and a cross above it.⁵⁸ The cross may have been added at a secondary stage to impose Christian dominance over an originally Jewish set of symbols. If so, this artifact helps fill in the background for the *Sifra*’s highlighting of the menorah specifically as a sign of God’s presence among the Jewish people. When Christians pointed to the Temple’s destruction as a sign of God abandonment of Israel, Jews could respond that the Divine Presence simply moved to their homes as demonstrated by their Hanukkah lamps.⁵⁹



⁵⁷ For other rabbinic texts that reject supersessionist threats, see Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Jewish-Christian Dialogues on Scripture in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 143–164; and Israel Yuval, “The Orality of Jewish Oral Law: from Pedagogy to Ideology,” in *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts*, ed. L. Gall and D. Willoweit (De Gruyter, 2011), 237–60. See also parallel midrashim at Exodus Rabbah 36.2, Numbers Rabbah 15.5, Tanhuma *Be-Ha’alotekha* 5.

⁵⁸ Steven Fine, “The Menorah and the Cross: Historiographical Reflections on a Recent Discovery from Laodicea on the Lycus,” in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations in Honor of David Berger*, ed. E. Carlebach and J. J. Schacter (2012), 31–50.

⁵⁹ In fact, the one reference to Hanukkah in the Christian Bible serves as the context for Jesus telling his Jewish detractors, “you do not belong to my sheep” (John 10:22, 26).

Taken alone, the *Sifra* suggests that the very presence of the light of the menorah in the Temple, together with the holiness and grandeur it embodies, is itself the “light” unto the nations of Israel’s chosenness.⁶⁰ However, Rava in Bavli adds another layer of miracle based on a tradition preserved in Tosefta *Sotah* 13:7, which reads:⁶¹

As long as Shimon the Righteous was alive, the Western lamp remained lit continually. When he died, they went and discovered that it was extinguished. From then on, sometimes they found it extinguished and sometimes lit.

As long as Shimon was alive, the altar pyre remained lit continuously. When they arranged it in the morning it would continue its strength all day long and they would sacrifice upon it the daily and *musaf* offerings and their libations, and they would add to it no more than two logs of wood with the afternoon daily offering just to fulfill the obligation of wood, as Scripture states, “the priest will feed it...” (Leviticus 6:5). After Shimon the Righteous died, the strength of the altar pyre weakened so that when they arranged it in the morning, they did not stop adding wood all day long.

Shimon the Righteous was the widely respected high priest in the third century BCE whose two sons rivaled for succession, precipitating a civil war and the eventual onset of persecution under Antiochus IV.⁶² This Tosefta remembers that during his tenure, a daily miracle occurred of fire lasting longer than expected with minimal fuel, both for the menorah and the altar. Rav in Bavli adds a detail that all seven lamps were filled with the same amount of oil, just enough to last a long night, but only the Western lamp would remain lit all day so that the priest used that fire to relight the others. This miracle may be modeled off the burning bush that continued to blaze without consuming its fuel, thereby

⁶⁰ *Sifra Emor parashah* 13, 7 mentions that the western lamp sometimes stayed lit and sometimes went out, which may assume the miraculous fire tradition described in Tosefta *Sotah* 13:7 and the Bavli here. However, the *Sifra* does not connect that clause with the testimony, suggesting that the fire itself represents the *Shekhinah*, with or without the miracle.

⁶¹ See parallels at Yerushalmi *Yoma* 6:3, 43c, and Bavli *Yoma* 39a.

⁶² For a chronological analysis see Amram Tropper, *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented* (Brill, 2013), 199–212. See Sirach 52, Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.2.5 and Bavli *Menahot* 109b.

indicating its supernatural quality as a Divine manifestation.⁶³ This miracle ceased after Shimon's death marking an end to the period of authentic and holy service that began with the miraculous inauguration of the Temple service. In this light, the Hanukkah miracle of the oil recorded in Bavli *Shabbat* 21b, cited above, symbolizes a restart of Divinely authorized Temple service after corrupt priests and Hellenizers had defiled the altar with idolatrous pagan offerings. This provides the background to appreciate Bavli's explanation of the Hanukkah lamps as a commemoration of a miracle of oil lasting longer than normal.⁶⁴ Bavli *Yoma* 39b reports that the miracle of the Western candle ceased again forty years before the Second Temple's destruction, thus prompting the need for a replacement ceremony. Presenting the Temple menorah as testimony for Israel's chosenness and then commanding that a similar lighting ceremony continue after the Temple's destruction in Jewish homes served as a sign of God's continued presence among the Jewish people.

Interestingly, late antique Greeks and Romans record similar miraculous fires in ancient Temples. Plutarch describes an eternal flame over the Temple to Jupiter Ammon in Egypt that uses less and less oil every year.⁶⁵ Strabo describes an eternal fire in a Temple at the Acropolis:

The city itself is a rock situated in a plain and surrounded by dwellings. On the rock is the sacred precinct of Athena, comprising both the old temple of Athena Polias, in which is the lamp that is never quenched, and the Parthenon built by Ictinus, in which is the work in ivory by Pheidias, the Athena.⁶⁶

Pausanias (second century CE) similarly records a statue of Athena at the Acropolis along with a lamp:

A golden lamp for the goddess was made by Callimachus. Having filled the lamp with oil, they wait until the same day next year, and the oil is sufficient for the lamp during the interval, although it is

⁶³ See Exodus 3:2. In addition, the idea of a small amount of oil going a long way may derive from Elisha's miraculous filling of many vessels from just one jug at 2 Kings 4.

⁶⁴ See Daniel Sperber, "The History of the Menorah," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (1967), 137 n. 9, and 152–153.

⁶⁵ *De Defectu Oraculorum* 2.

⁶⁶ *Geography*, 9.1.16. Translation from peseus.tufts.edu.

alight both day and night. The wick in it is of Carpasian flax, the only kind of flax which is fire-proof.⁶⁷

The mention of flax as a proper wick resonates with the Talmudic discussion, which similarly permits flax wicks as long as they are processed correctly.⁶⁸ Pausanias separately mentions miraculously igniting altar fires in Zoroastrian shrines in Lydia.⁶⁹ These pagan traditions provide context for the midrashic teachings and highlight the aim of these midrashim to authenticate the service of the Jerusalem Temple in the face of any pagan, Christian, or sectarian Jewish detractors.

After recommending olive oil for lighting on Shabbat 23a, the Talmud continues to discuss the blessing upon lighting. That the blessing is “who commanded us to light the Hanukah lamp,” proves that the lighting fulfills the commandment. Nevertheless, one who witnesses someone else’s lamps must also bless, “who has performed miracles for our forefathers in that era during this time.” This reflects the dual nature of the Hanukah lights as a home-based Temple ritual, as well as a public display to announce the miracle. Indeed, this dual aspect perfectly mirrors the Temple menorah ritual lit by the priests as God’s servants but also as a display to the world of God’s dwelling among Israel.

Significantly, the liturgy of the blessing prompts a question on 23a regarding rabbinic authority considering that the blessing attributes the commandment of Hanukah to God even though it is a rabbinic enactment. The response, that God commanded that the nation heed the words of the sages, highlights the power of Hanukah as a rabbinic appropriation and reimagining of the priestly Temple service. The *sugya* ends on 23b as it began with a comparison between Hanukah and Shabbat lamps, this time regarding which takes precedence. It concludes that Hanukah lamps, a rabbinic enactment, take precedence over Shabbat

⁶⁷ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.26.7. Translation from *Description of Greece* with an English Translation by W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod, in 4 volumes. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1918. Digitized at perseus.tufts.edu.

⁶⁸ Bavli *Shabbat* 20b.

⁶⁹ Pausanias, *Descriptions*, 5.27.5–6. See Geoffrey Herman, “Religious Transformation,” 263 n. 7, citing Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Brill, 1991), vol. 3, 235–237; and Matthew P. Canepa, “The Transformation of Sacred Space, Topography, and Royal Ritual in Persia and the Ancient Iranian World,” in Deen Ragavan, ed., *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World* (Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013), 344.

Kiddush, a biblical commandment, because of the need to publicize the miracle.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In sum, Bavli's presentation about Hanukkah begins with a triple comparison between the lights of Shabbat, those of the Temple menorah, and those of Hanukkah. These links introduce three major recurring themes: first, the comparison of the Hanukkah lighting to the Temple and its holiness; second, the significance of kindling Hanukkah lights at home, similar to the Shabbat lights; and third, the goal of the Hanukkah lamps as a public display of God's presence in Israel. Throughout its extensive technical legal discussion, Bavli embeds and encodes key symbols and comparisons that join together to highlight the significance of the home holiness ritual of the Hanukkah lamps. While Second Temple sources emphasize the altar as the focus of the Temple inauguration, *Megillat Ta'anit* and the Talmud shift the focus to the relighting of the menorah. This shift allows for the transfer of this now primary ritual to the home where altars of any type were prohibited. Tannaitic sources and Yerushalmi already record the practice of lighting Hanukkah lamps, but Bavli develops its symbolism and significance through its editorial choices, carefully composing and interweaving themes throughout the legal and *aggadic* (homiletic) portions of this mini-tractate.

The destruction of the Temple could have meant the end of the Hanukkah holiday and forgetting about the once glorious Hasmonean victory. Through this creative and bold transfer to the home, the rabbis forged a path to remember the Hasmonean success and still feel the holiness of the Sanctuary by recreating that miraculous moment of dedication at the entry to every Jewish home, publicly displayed for all passers-by to see. Publicizing this miracle broadcasted a polemical message that would be understandable to pagans, Zoroastrians, Christians, and any other naysayers, while at the same time sustaining Jewish communities with the faith that God still dwells in their midst.

⁷⁰ A last glimmer of this theme reappears on *Shabbat* 24a regarding reciting Hanukkah prayers in the blessing after a meal.

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