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ANIMATION OF THE CULTIC STATUES, THE MAGIC OF MEMORY AND THE PUPIL'S INITIATION¹

Abstract: The article traces the links between the ANE rituals of animation of the cultic statues, the magical practice of creation of the golem and the medieval Ashkenazic rituals of pupils' initiation. These links, mostly unacknowledged by the bearers of the tradition, can be partially explained by the ritual gestures and formulas that embody a latent historical memory, which under certain constellations can be actualized and lead forgotten symbolic and conceptual patterns to reappear.

Keywords: Egyptian and Mesopotamian ceremonies of animation of cultic images, medieval Ashkenazic rituals of pupils' initiation, creation of the Golem

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ОДУШЕВЛЕНИЕ КУЛЬТОВЫХ СТАТУЙ, МАГИЯ ПАМЯТИ И ИНИЦИАЦИЯ УЧЕНИКОВ

Резюме: В статье исследуется связь между древнеближневосточными ритуалами одушевления культовых статуй, магической практикой создания Голема и средневековыми ашкеназскими ритуалами инициации учеников. Эту связь, практически не осознаваемую традицией, можно частично объяснить наличием ритуальных практик и формул, сохраняющих скрытую историческую память. Сочетание определенных условий ведет к актуализации памяти и к возвращению забытых символических и концептуальных моделей.

Ключевые слова: древнеближневосточные ритуалы одушевления культовых образов, средневековые ашкеназские ритуалы инициации учеников, создание Голема.

¹The paper was read at the XIX Annual International Conference on Jewish Studies at Moscow in January 2012.

There's an old joke from the Brezhnevian era. A husband worked at a factory producing baby carriages. His pregnant wife urged him to steal a part every day in order to build a stroller for their coming baby. After a while he said to his wife: I don't understand. No matter how I put the parts together, I keep getting a machine gun.

One of the difficult questions arising in the course of the tradition-historical studies is a question of transmitting concepts and motifs through the cultural or temporal gaps, which prevent direct interaction. Sometimes we can postulate the existence of some additional chain links that have escaped us. But in some cases this is not a sufficient explanation. If we dealt with the reappearance of lost, totally forgotten memories of an individual, we could think about unconscious and psychological repression. But what happens in the realm of culture? Of course these questions can be easily answered with Jungian concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious. But what can be done without accessing Jungian theories?

In my opinion one of the alternative answers is that the assembling parts of cultural tradition — words, idioms, metaphors, and gestures carry within themselves memory of their early stages. This memory is unrecognizable to their practitioners and transmitters, but in certain circumstances and constellations it can reappear, as in the joke about the machine gun.

This paper explores a possible case of one such phenomena, namely the reappearance of an ancient near eastern cultic pattern in a mediaeval Ashkenazic ritual. Egyptian and Mesopotamian ceremonies of animation of cultic images attracted the scholarly attention already in the nineteenth century². Most of the versions of the Egyptian ceremony of the “opening of mouth (and) eyes” wp(j).t rA jr.tj refer to the mummy or funerary statues, but similar rituals were applied to all kinds of cultic images³ and to newborn babies⁴. The Babylonian ceremony of the “washing of the mouth” (mīs pī) and the “opening of the mouth” (pīt pī) were performed with the newly formed statue of the god. This process started in the workshop, where the statue was made, and ended in the sanctuary, where it came to dwell. Both ceremonies were complex performances lasting many days and composed of dozens of separate stages or episodes. Despite the obvious consideration that the meaning of such elaborate ceremonies cannot be reduced to a simple formula, it would not be a mistake to label them as initiations, as birth or rebirth. This point is expressed, in particu-

² Ernesto Schiaparelli, *Il Libro dei Funerali degli antichi Egiziani*, vol. 1–2, Rome, 1882–90; Heinrich Zimmern, *Beiträgt zur Kenntnis der Babylonischen Religion*, Leipzig 1901; E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of Opening of the Mouth*, vol. 1–2, London 1909.

³ This placement of the ceremony is regarded as an original one; see Eberhard Otto, *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, Bd. II, Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 2–8.

⁴ Ann Macy Roth, “The psš-kf and the “Opening of the Mouth” Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992), pp. 113–147; idem, “Fingers, Stars, and the “Opening of the Mouth”: The Nature and Function of the ntrwj-Blades,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993), pp. 57–79; cf. Jan Assmann *Death And Salvation In Ancient Egypt*, pp. 108–109.

lar, in the fact that many episodes of these ceremonies reproduce the practice of child care — newborns, infants and babies.

Starting with the last decade of the twentieth century, interest in this topic has increased significantly, judging at the very least by the quantity and quality of publications issued⁵. One of the characteristic points in the current trend of publications — is the widespread use of Egyptian and Babylonian materials for the interpretation of biblical texts⁶. This applies to the satirical descriptions of idols by the biblical prophets, to the story of the creation of Adam in the second chapter of Genesis, to the motif of the original dumbness/tongue-tie of the prophets, and to the prayers for opening of the lips.

⁵ To mention only books and dissertations: H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, *Die Vision von der Statue im Stein: Studien zum altägyptischen Mundöffnungsritual*, Heidelberg, 1998; Angelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik*, Göttingen 1998; Ingo Baldermann et al., eds. *Die Macht der Bilder* (Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 13), Neukirchen-Vluyn : Neukirchener, 1999; Michael B. Dick, ed. *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: the Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake 1999; Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pi Ritual* (SAALT 1), Helsinki 2001; Gregory Yuri Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, Sheffield 2001; Neal H. Walls, (ed.). *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, Boston 2005; Gregory K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic 2008; Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation. Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, Grand Rapids 2010; Peggy Boden, “The Mesopotamian washing of the mouth (mis pi) ritual An examination of some of the social and communication strategies which guided the development and performance of the ritual which transferred the essence of the deity into Its Temple Statue”, Ph. D. Johns Hopkins University 1998; Nathaniel B. Levtow, “Images of others: Icon parodies and iconic politics in ancient Israel”, Diss. Brown University, 2006; Catherine Leigh Beckerleg, “The image of God in Eden: The creation of mankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in light of the mis pi pit pi and wpt-r rituals of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt”, Ph.D., Harvard University, 2009.

⁶ In addition to books listed in the previous note, see Victor A. Hurowitz, “Isaiah’s impure lips and their purification in light of mouth purification and mouth purity in Akkadian sources,” *HUCA* 60 1989, p 39–89; Michael Brennan Dick, “Second Isaiah’s parody on making a cult image (Isaiah 40:18–20 : 41:6–7) and the Babylonian “mis pi”,” “*Lasset uns Brücken bauen...*”; *Collected Communications to the XVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Cambridge, 1995*. Hrsg.: K.-D. Schunck, M. Augustin. Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1998, 193–202; Sol Cohen, Victor A. Hurowitz, “Hukkot ha-ammim hevel hu” (Jer 10:3) in light of Akkadian “parsu” and “zaqiqu” referring to cult statues”, *JQR* 89 (1999), pp. 277–290; Victor A. Hurowitz, “The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb,” *JAOS* 23 (2003), 147–157; idem, “What Goes In Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues”, *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis. Providence, RI 2006, pp. 3–23; Marilyn J. Lundberg, “The “mis-pi” rituals and incantations and Jeremiah 10:1–16”, *Uprooting and Planting; Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, ed by John Goldingay. New York: T&T Clark, 2007, 210–227

In discussing the significance of “animating of statues” for the rituals found in post-biblical Jewish sources, one should bear in mind that at different times these sources can interact with three different “animation” traditions: 1) the Ancient Near Eastern ceremonies of “washing” or “opening of the mouth”, 2) Hermetic tradition of animated statues⁷, and finally 3) the tradition of the Golem. There is some historical connection between the three forms of animation of statues: Hermeticism presents itself as a continuation of the Egyptian tradition⁸, and the hermetic influence on the Golem tradition is also quite well known⁹. Additionally, there is the possibility of indirect interaction between the traditions: the Babylonian ritual is reflected in the biblical story of creation of a man¹⁰, and this story, in turn, became the basic text of the Golem tradition¹¹. In an article published about fifteen years ago¹² I drew

⁷ Cf. also τελεστική of Chaldean Oracles and Late Neoplatonism. See E. R. Dodds, “Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism,” *Journal of Roman Studies*, 37 (1947), 55–69; Hans Lewy, *The Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*², ed. Michael Tardieu, Paris, 1978, pp. 495–496; Ruth Majerick, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Leiden: Brill, 1989; Todd C. Krulak, “The animated statue and the ascension of the soul: Ritual and the divine image in late Platonism,” Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 2009, 55–58. However, while the hermetic claims for Egyptian lineage contains a grain of truth, there is very little Chaldean in the Chaldean Oracles.

⁸ *Asclepius* 23b-24a. For evaluation of Egyptian lore in Hermeticism see Erik Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*. (Opuscula Graecolatina, 27), Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1984. For additional references see László Kákosy, „Probleme der Religion im römischen Ägypten,” *ANRW* II.18.5, p. 3038, n. 102; Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zaunich, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005, pp. 65–71. For mouth-opening ritual in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt see Mark Smith, *Liturgy of Opening the Mouth for Breathing*, Oxford 1993; idem, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*. Oxford 2009, pp. 349–387. For mouth-opening in Greek Magical Papyri see Jozef Vergote, “Sur les mots composés en égyptien et en copte”, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 18 (1961), pp. 213–214; H. J. Thissen, „Ägyptologische Beiträge zu den griechischen magischen Papyri,” U. Verhoeven/E. Graefe (Hrsg.) *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten*, Leuven 1991, pp. 298–300. Joachim Friedrich Quack, „Königsweihe, Priesterweihe, Isisweihe,” Assmann, Jan (Hrsg.) *Ägyptische Mysterien?*, München 2002, pp. 95–108; Ian S. Moyer, Jacco Dieleman, “Miniaturization and the Opening of The Mouth in a Greek Magical Text (PGM XII.270–350),” *Journal of ancient Near Eastern religions* 3 (2003) pp. 47–72.

⁹ Moshe Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism”, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. I. Merkel and A. G. Debus, Folger Books: Associated University Presses, 1988, pp. 59–76; idem, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid*, Albany, 1990, index, s. v. Hermeticism.

¹⁰ See Beckerleg, “The image of God in Eden”.

¹¹ Gershom Scholem, “The Idea of the Golem,” *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New York: Schocken, 1965, 159–165; E. L. Greenstein, “God’s Golem: The Creation of the Human in Genesis 2”, *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. H. Reventlow and Y. Hoffmann, Sheffield 2002, pp. 219–239.

¹² Michael Schneider, “Joseph and Aseneth and Early Jewish Mysticism,” *Kabbalah* 3 (1998), pp. 303–344. The new expanded version: Michael Schneider, *Scattered Traditions of Jewish Mysticism* (in Hebrew), Los Angeles: Cherub Press 2012, pp. 11–79.

attention to the cross-cutting theme of opening/purification of the closed/impure mouth in the Jewish-Hellenistic romance “Joseph and Aseneth”¹³.

It’s worth noting that Aseneth’s lips are initially impure because she “blesses with her mouth dead and dumb idols” (8.5). For the biblical mind, which had been familiar with the idea of reviving the statues, but rejected it, the idols are dumb and dead, and so are those who worship them: “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, and there is no breath in their mouths. Those who make them and all who trust them shall become like them”¹⁴. The message of Aseneth’s story is that not the idols, but rather the person who rejects them, can experience the genuine animation and the opening of the mouth¹⁵.

In Aseneth’s initiation, oil and honey were featured¹⁶, or put more precisely, the oil — “ointment of incorruption” — appears in a relation to the initiation in the earthly context (8.5, 15.5(4)), while a supernatural honey appears in the description of initiation carried out by an angel (16.2–17.4). Nevertheless,

¹³ Almost all mention of the mouth and lips in the book are somehow related to this topic, cf. 8.5,6, 11.2,3,9,15,16,17,18,19, 12.5,(6),11(10), 13.9(8), 16.9,11(6),15(9),19(14),20(15), 21.7(5) (mouth); 13.9 (8) 16.19(14) 18.9 21.7(5) (lips). Cf. the similar motif in *Vita Adae et Evae* 6.2, see Schneider, “Joseph and Aseneth”, p. 311, n. 54.

¹⁴ Ps 135:15–18, NRS; cf. also Is 6:9–10, and see Beale, *We Become What We Worship*.

¹⁵ Of particular interest is the connection of the mouth-opening with the initiation into the mysteries of Isis (see Quack, “Königsweihe, Priesterweihe, Isisweihe”, pp. 100–108) since the close affinities between the conversion of Aseneth and Isis initiation has long attracted the attention of scholars.

¹⁶ For oil and honey in *mīs pī* ritual see for example Walker&Dick, *Induction*, p. 54, passim. Authors note: Akkadian *dišpu* is probably a syrup (from dates?) rather than the traditional “honey” (p. 14 n. 35), but the same held is for its Hebrew cognate *ḏbaš* (see for example A. Caquot, “Debash”, *TDOT* 3:130–1). In addition, ghee/butter is constantly mentioned together with honey. There are many examples of its use in rituals of initiation; Schneider, *op. cit.* did not pay particular attention to this substance, since in Aseneth’s story it does not appear, but see *Scattered Traditions*, p. 57–58 and n. 194. Cedar, cypress, tamarisk and other tree species are also playing a prominent role in this ritual. They are gods’ trees, that connect the heavens and the underworld: “bright wood, (like) the spring of a stream, which is born in the pure Heavens, spreads out on the clean earth, your branches grow up to Heaven, Enki makes your root drink up pure water from the Underworld” (Walker&Dick, *Induction*, p. 120.30–31). Cedar and cypress appear in the description of Aseneth’s transfiguration: “your bones will grow strong like the cedars of the paradise of delight of God” (16.16); “her neck like an all-variegated cypress” (18.9). These sacred trees of which statues of gods were made, called “flesh of gods” of “bones of gods”; so the priest that performs *Maqlū* ritual says “my fingers are tamarisk, the bone of the *Igigi!*”, see CAD, vol. 4, s. v. *ešentu*, 1. e, p. 343; s. v. *erēnu* A 4’, p. 275; Graham Cunningham, *Deliver Me from Evil: Mesopotamian Incantations, 2500–1500 BC*, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1997, p.28; Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, Oxford 1986, pp. 103–111; Hurowitz, “What Goes In Is What Comes Out,” pp. 3–23; Michael Schneider, *The Appearance of the High Priest* [Hebrew], Los Angeles 2012, p. 162, n. 58.

from the text of the story, it is clear that these two substances are used interchangeably,¹⁷ apparently due to the fact that they are both representations of manna. In the aforementioned study, I tried to trace the continuity of the ritual of initiation, one of the characteristics of which is the use of honey and oil, from Philo and “Joseph and Aseneth” to the high Middle Ages.¹⁸ More than a thousand-year gap can be partially filled in by a Syrian rite of initiation of school children, the legend of Rabbi Eliezer Qalir¹⁹, the ritual of Sar Torah (the angel of the Torah)²⁰, the cycle of Talmudic legends about the salvation of children in Egypt²¹, and other traditions.

The twelfth- and thirteenth- century German Pietists gave a detailed description of the initiation of children who start to study the Torah, which takes place on the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost). Honey plays a special role in this ritual: children are given a cake made of the three measures of flour mixed with oil and honey. The children read the alphabet written on a tablet, and then it is smeared with honey, and the children lick the honey from the letters.²² Ivan Marcus, who wrote the only monograph devoted to this ritual, considered this to be a mediaeval innovation. He did not deny that there are “building blocks” of this ritual in earlier traditions:

The various elements of the initiation rite that I have discussed combine several traditions from ancient Palestinian sources and practices, many of which went underground, so to speak, and reemerged in the combination before us as an elaborate rite of passage for a child first entering school. Within this overall historical development, three basic patterns emerge from our investigation of the various elements that comprise the mediaeval Ashkenazic initiation ritual. These are: (1) pedagogic and mnemonic themes and practices; (2) rabbinic literary commentary and magical gestures; and especially (3) children’s schooling practices and adult Shavuot Torah rituals²³.

¹⁷ See 15.15(9)-16.

¹⁸ Schneider, *Scattered Traditions*, pp. 46–59.

¹⁹ See Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, New Haven 1996, pp. 59–64; Schneider, *Scattered Traditions*, pp. 49–59.

²⁰ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 45, 52, 69; Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton 1996, Detroit 2000, p. 47, 53–149; Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering Through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*, pp. 140–142; Schneider, *Scattered Traditions*, pp. 25, 28, 50, 59, 63; idem, *Appearance of the High Priest*, 168 n.9, 191 n. 32; idem, *The Divine Retinue: The Variety of Jewish Mysticism* [Hebrew], index s.v. “sar Torah”.

²¹ For example, b. Sotah 11b; Abot R. Nat. A, 33; Ex. Rab. 1:12, 23:8; Deut. Rab. 15; Pirke R. El. 48; S. Eli. Rab., 7; Tg. Neof. Marg., Fg. Tg., Tg. Ps-J. on Ex 15:2; Schneider, *Scattered Traditions*, pp. 52–57.

²² Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, pp. 25–33; idem, *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage from Biblical to Modern Times*, Seattle 2004, pp. 68–71.

²³ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, p. 73

However, the ritual as a whole is a new creation, which reflects the ideology, cultural context and the existential situation of the Ashkenazic Jewry:

Although the new rite combines variations of elements found in Talmudic mnemonics and early medieval magical traditions for increasing and retaining one's learning, this ceremony emerged when Jews in medieval northern France and Germany took these early elements and their awareness of contemporary Christian images and rituals all around them and fashioned this ritual as a polemical response to them²⁴.

So the traditional elements serve as building material, while the ultimate meaning belongs to an integral composition. This does not mean, of course, that those traditional building blocks are completely devoid of inherent significance, but it is assumed that it is subordinate to the significance of the whole and absorbed by it. This description of the relationship between the traditional lore and a new synthesis seems plausible, but I would like to offer an alternative vision of the topic. Of course, the cultural phenomena may differ significantly from each other with regard to the proportion of traditional elements and the creator's innovation. If my arguments in the above-mentioned article are correct, the Ashkenazi initiation ritual is the product of a long evolution. It is possible that it belongs to the heritage of German Pietism whose roots go back to Southern Italy and a Byzantine background. No doubt, that the Pietists also offered their own contribution to the formation of the ritual.

In this article, I would like to ask a question, not about the relative weight of the traditions and the innovation, but rather about the very significance of the traditional elements. It seems to me that the cultural memory carried within those elements, often does not allow them to simply serve as passive building material for new compositions. Rather, it turns them into a powerful mechanism for reproduction of ancient meanings, sometimes contrary/independently to the intentions of the creator that uses them.

The necessity of rethinking the relationship between initiation rites and the animation of cultic statues occurred to me while reading the papers of Chaim Gevaryahu.²⁵ Reading these articles, I became convinced that their author was ahead of his time in discussing the biblical allusions to the Babylonian ritual. In an article on the passage of Immanuel's prophecy, "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:15 KJV), Gevaryahu argues that this reflects the tradition of honey and oil as a magical means

²⁴ Marcus, *The Jewish Life Cycle*, p. 69

²⁵ חיים משה יצחק גבריהו, "חמאה ודבש יאכל": (ישעיהו ז'), ספר אורבך; מאמרים בחקר התנ"ך. מוגש ללכבוד אליהו אורבך למלאת לו שבעים שנה. בעריכת א' בירם, ירושלים: קריית ספר, תשט"ו, 169–174; הג"ל, 'עיונים בספר דניאל', בית מקרא ט"ו, 139–146; הג"ל, "הצילני מדמים אלהים" (תהילים נ"א)', ספר יוסף ברסלבי (ברסלבסקי): מחקרים במקרא, בלשון ובידיעת הארץ, מוגשים לו בהגיעו לשיבה, בעריכת י' בן שם, חמ"י גבריהו, ב"צ לוריא, ירושלים: קריית ספר, תש"ל, 107–131

for the development of a child's mind and speech. He presents various examples which link the acquisition of wisdom and eloquence with honey and butter, mentioning, among other things, the Asheknazic initiatory ritual²⁶. The phrase "know to refuse the evil, and choose the good," recalls the biblical story of the tree, the fruit of which gives to those who have tasted it an understanding of good and evil. According to the article's author, the idea of the magical properties of honey and butter predetermined their use in the ritual revival statues. According to Gevarya-hu, descriptions of pagan idols by the authors of the Hebrew Bible indicate their familiarity with the ritual of the "opening of the mouth". Additionally, the echoes of this ritual in his "purely technical aspect, purified from all pagan and magical connotations," occur in prophetic commission narratives. In an article on Psalm 51, Gevaryahu explains in the same vein the phrase, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise" (Ps. 51:17). He emphasizes that the author of the psalm understands the "mouth opening" in a purely spiritual sense, releasing the formula from all ritual and magical connotations. In the notes to the article, he says that the book "Joseph and Aseneth," in which a conversion of the heroine and the acquisition of the knowledge of God are associated with the eating of the honeycomb is of a special interest in this regard²⁷.

It is interesting to note that the initiatory ritual of feeding honey and oil is somehow connected to the etymology of the main Hebrew verb indicating education, initiation and dedication. The standard Bible dictionaries (*BDB*, *HALOT*, *TDOT*) associate the verb הניך with הך, palate²⁸ and the Arabic verb "ḥanaka (denom. from ḥanak = הך) to rub the palate of a new-born child with date-juice or oil"²⁹. The lexicons cite Julius Wellhausen as the source of this etymology. Describing Arabic Life-cycle ceremonies of pre-Islamic origin, he writes "The gums of the newborn child are smeared with some of the juice of pressed dates, or something similar; this is called taḥnik³⁰; similar customs are found among other ancient peoples³¹. Among the Hebrews the child was rubbed with salt;³² but the verb הניך, which has survived among them in the

²⁶ "Butter and honey shall he eat", p. 172.

²⁷ "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness", p. 127, n.52. In his notes to Joseph and Aseneth Christopher Burchard quotes Gevaryahu's proposal, communicated to him orally, but rejects it, see *OTP*, II, p. 230, n. f2. See also Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, pp. 279–380

²⁸ Or gums, see *BDB*.

²⁹ *HALOT*, s.v. הניך.

³⁰ The Taḥnik ritual is of some interest in the context of our study; however, the limited scope of this article makes us refrain from the detailed discussion. See Julian Morgenstern, *The Rites of Birth, Marriage, Death, and Kindred Occasions among the Semites*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1966, pp. 34–35, 207–208, 274; Avner Gil'adi, "Some Notes on Taḥnik in Medieval Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47 (1988), pp. 175–179.

³¹ Wellhausen refers here to Samuel Bochart, *Hieroicoicon*, Leiden 1712, col. 630. Bochart quotes mainly Greek and Latin sources mentioning feeding milk and honey to babies, but none of them spoke about feeding as a ritual.

³² Wellhausen's note: Ezech. 16,4. Vgl. Augustins Confessionen I, 11: "condiebar eius sale".

general connotation “to initiate,” proves the antiquity of the Arabic rite, for it is derived from the Arabic word for “gum” (ḥanikun)³³. The examples discussed in this article suggest that also in the Jewish tradition the specific rituals reflecting the etymology of this verb were not completely lost.

One may disagree with Gevaryahu when he, in the Frazerian mode, suggests the primacy of magic in relation to the ritual, however, the relationship of mutual assimilation, a mimesis between the ritual of animation of the cultic images and the practices of child care, feeding and training, noted by author, deserves attention. The rites of initiation, at least those dealt with in this article, are conceptualized as birth, training, and acquisition of the new knowledge. Similarly, the animation of the statues represents birth, baby care, feeding, fostering different skills, training, etc.

Jewish sources draw a clear parallel between the child’s learning and the animation of the golem.³⁴ The Tosefta reads:

מנין שכל השונה פרק אחד לחבירו מעלה עליו כאלו יצרו ורקמו והביאו לעולם. שנ’ א”ם תוציא יקר מזולל כפי תהיה. כאותו הפה שזרק נשמה באדם הראשון. כך כל המכניס בריא אחת תחת כנפי השכינה מעלין עליו כאלו יצרו וריקמו והביאו לעולם.³⁵

Anyone who teaches neighbor (at least) one chapter (the Torah) is credited as if he had molded him, gave him a form (lit. embroidered him) and brought into the world, as it says, “and if you extract precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth” (Jer 15:19) — as the mouth, which have breathed (lit. “thrown”, “casted”) soul into in the first human. So anyone who brings at least one person under the wings of the Shekhinah, is credited as if he had molded him and gave him a form (embroidered it) and brought him into the world.

“And drawing them to the study of Torah”. Everyone who brings one person under the wings of heaven, God accounts it as though he created him and formed him, as Scripture says : “If you bring forth what is precious

³³ *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin 1897, p. 173; the English translation according to Morgenstern, *The Rites of Birth*, p. 34.

³⁴ It should be emphasized, even though I accept the traditional designation of the product of the magical creation as a “Golem”, in fact, this term refers to the initial stage of the process of creation. The authority of the Talmud (b. Sanh. 65b), that stated that no man can create a perfect, speech endowed creature, influenced later exponents of the tradition and “Golem” has become a designation of the end-product of creation, expressing its fundamental incompleteness. But from the perspective of the radical variants of tradition, that admits the possibility of animated, speech-endowed creatures, we should speak not about the creation of the golem, but the creation from the golem. As for the meaning of the word golem in rabbinic literature, most sources understand it as monolithic unstructured mass, which, however, has already acquired the outer contour of the future product. Moshe Idel drew attention to the Midrash Lev. Rab. 29 (*Golem*, pp. 35–38), which applies this term to a completely formed, but not fully animated human body. This meaning has become dominant in the medieval tradition of the golem. Nevertheless, for those that consider the creation of full-fledged human beings possible, these nuances in terminology do not matter.

³⁵ Tosefta Horayot II, 7.

from the vile, you shall be as my mouth (Jer. 15:19).” Like my mouth which breathed a soul into Adam...”³⁶

This statement, of course, relies on an early tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 38b) that Adam was first created as “golem” molded out of clay, then his body was “embroidered” as a fabric, and then the soul was “thrown” into him. This is quite evident from the occurrence of the highly specific terms in both texts. The word “embroidered” is directly connected with the term “golem” through the Scripture verses: “...when I was being made in secret, intricately woven (embroidered) in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance (golem)...” (Ps. 139:15–16). It can also be assumed that already the Mishnah, calling ill-bred person Golem,³⁷ also refers to this tradition. In a number of later sources, this tradition is associated with the verse, “And Abram took Sarai his wife ... and the souls that they have created in Haran” (Genesis 12:5):

ר' אלעזר בש' ר' יוסי בן זימרה. אם מתכנסים הם כל באי העולם לברות יתוש אחד. לזרוק בו את הנשמה. אינו יכולין. ואת אומ'. 'זאת הנפש אשר עשו'. אלא אילו הגרים שגייירו. ויאמר שגייירו. למה 'שעשו'. אלא ללמדך שכל מי שהוא מקרב את הגוי כאילו בראו.³⁸

R. Eleazar in the name of p. Yossi Ben Zimra. If all that dwell on earth will come together to create a mosquito, they will not be able to throw in his soul. And you say “the souls that they have created in Haran”?! But it's proselytes, whom they converted [to Judaism]. But if so, it would have to write a “converted [to Judaism],” why, “created”? From here you learn that everyone who brings a heathen (to God), as if he created him.

אמ'ר חוניא. אברהם היה מגייר האנשים ושרה הנשים. ומה תל' לומ' 'זאת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן'. מלמד שהיה אברהם אבינו מכניסן לביתו ומאכילן ומשקן ומאה[י]בן ומקרבן ומגייירן ומכניסן תחת כנפי השכינה. הא למדת שכל המכניס בריה אחת לתוך כנפי השכינה מעלין עליו כאילו הוא בראו ויצרו ורקמו.³⁹

R. Huniah said: Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women. And what does the phrase “the soul that they have created in Haran” means? This means that Abraham, our father, took them into his home, gave them food and drink, awakened in them love, and brought them near, and converted them, and entered them beneath the wings of the

³⁶ Anthony J. Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*: Abot de Rabbi Nathan (Version B), Brill Academic, 1975, p. 156.

³⁷ שבעה דברים בגולם ושבעה בחכם. “Seven qualities characterize the clod and seven the wise man” (m. Abot 5:7). It is interesting that these qualities are related to speech etiquette, and the power of speech is precisely what distinguishes man from golem.

³⁸ Siphre Deut. 32.

³⁹ Cant. Rab. I, 3.3.

Shekhinah. From here you learn that anyone who brought under the wings of the Shekhinah even a single creature shall be credited as if he created, molded and “embroidered” it.

ומקרבן לתורה. [כיצד]. מלמד שיהא אדם מקפח את הבריות ומקרבן תחת כנפי השכינה כדרך שהיה אברהם אבינו עושה. ולא אברהם בלבד אלא שרה אימינו היית' מקפחת הבריות ומכנסתן תחת כנפי השכינה. שני' "ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן". והלא [אם] כל באי עולם מתקבצין אינן יכולין לבראות אפילו יתוש אחד. מה תיל' ["ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן"]. מלמד שהעלה עליהן הביה כאלו עשה אותם].

“And drawing them to the Torah”: what is that? This teaches that one should bend men to and lead them under the wings of the Shekhinah the way Abraham our father used to bend men to and lead them under the wings of the Shekhinah. And not Abraham alone did this, but Sarah as well; for it is said, And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had made in Haran. Now, not all the inhabitants of the world together can create even a single gnat! How then does the verse say, And the souls that they had made in Haran? This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, accounted it to Abraham and Sarah as though they had made them⁴⁰.

Another interpretation. To everyone who brings one person under the wings of heaven, God accounts it as though he created him and formed him, as Scripture says: “And the persons that they had made in Haran... (Gen. 12:5).” Did Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace, create them or form them? If all the creatures in the world came (together) to create a single mosquito, they could not. If that is the case, why does Scripture say: “And the persons that they had made in Haran...”? To teach you that Abraham our father, may he rest in peace, made the men proselytes and Sarah his wife made the women proselytes, as Scripture says: “And the persons that they had made in Haran...” That he had made is not written, but “That they had made”. This teaches that both of them are equal in merit.”⁴¹

The understanding of the Biblical verse, denied by this Midrash, is contained in some versions of the Book of Creation, according to which Abraham and Sarah created the animate beings by the principles outlined in this book.

Because Abraham our ancestor, blessed be his memory, contemplated and looked, saw and investigated, understood and engraved, extracted and combined and formed, and succeeded in his hand [the creation/creature,

⁴⁰ *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, translated from the Hebrew by Judah Goldin, New Haven 1955, p. 86.

⁴¹ Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, pp. 156–157.

as it written “and the souls that they had made in Haran”]⁴², the Master of the Universe was revealed to him and He made him sit in His bosom and He kissed him upon his head and called him My beloved and put him [as] his son⁴³.

An addition in brackets appears to be a mediaeval gloss, based upon the interpretation of Genesis 12:5, which is attested to in the writings of R. El-eazar of Worms⁴⁴ and other medieval authors. In fact, we can claim that the word “succeeded” that is found in all the versions supposes this interpretation. This word ends the string of verbs, “contemplated and looked, saw and investigated, understood and engraved, extracted and combined and formed”. In §19 we also have very similar string of verbs which concludes with “and He created by them the soul of all the formation”. So it is natural to assume that Abraham’s success was his ability to create living beings. If so, it is possible to conclude that the sources cited above polemicize with this understanding of the verse, that (such tradition) existed already in the tannaitic times.⁴⁵ Similar considerations about early development of traditions about the Golem have been advanced by Moshe Idel.⁴⁶

In any case, the close relationship between the formation and animation of the golem on the one hand, and teaching the Torah and the converting of proselytes on the other hand, is expressed very clearly in the sources cited. We can add one more point of similarity between the rituals of initiation of the disciples and converts, and the creation of the Golem. In the Ashkenazic rite, initiated pupils recite the alphabet — in its order, and then in reverse, and then in pairs, the first letter with the last, the second with the next to last, and so on. As noted by Marcus, the forward and backward recitation of the alphabet is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 31a) in connection with the initiation of proselytes.

If the epilogue of the Book of Creation actually states that Abraham was creating animated creatures with the help of the Book of Creation, then it can be concluded that he did that with a combination of letters of the alphabet:

Twenty-two letters, He engraved [ḥaqaq] them and He extracted (or carved) [ḥazav] them and weighed them and permuted them and combined them,

⁴² This phrase appears in many traditional editions of *Sefer Yešira* and in the citation in the commentary of Pseudo-Rabad (Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi 14th cent.).

⁴³ *Sefer Yešira* §61, according to Idel, *Golem*, p. 14, with minor changes; cf. Hayman, *Yešira*, 181–186.

⁴⁴ See the citation below.

⁴⁵ So Scholem: “If this exegesis of Genesis 12:5 is an old one, the polemical question of the midrash — “Are we to believe that Abraham could make souls?” — may quite possibly have been directed against its currency in esoteric circles” (Scholem, “The Idea of Golem”, p. 171).

⁴⁶ See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 5–7.

and He created by them the soul [nefesh] of all the formation [yezur] and the soul of all which will be formed in the future...⁴⁷

A more specific description of the procedure can be found, for example, in the commentary of R. Eleazar of Worms (note that it is this author that gives the first known description of the Ashkenazi rite of initiation⁴⁸):

העוסק בספר יצירה יש לו לטהר עצמו ללבוש בגדים לבינים ואין לו לאדם לעסוק יחידי כ"א [כי אם] ב או ג דכתיב "ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן". וכתוב "טובים השנים מן האחד". וכתוב "לא טוב היות האדם לבדו, אעשה לו עזר כנגדו", לכך התחיל ב' בראשית ברא. ויש לו ליקח קרקע בתולה במקום הרים שלא חפר בה אדם שם. ויגבל העפר במים חיים, ויעשה גולם אחד. ויתחיל לגלגל באלפא ביתות של רכ"א שערים כל אבר לבד, כל אבר שכת"ב באו"ת בספר יצירה כנגדו. ויתגלגלו בתהילת א"ב ואח"כ יגלגל בהברת א א א א א א א א ולעולם אות השם עמהם. א וכל הא"ב ואח"כ א"י ואח"כ א"י ואח"כ א"י ואח"כ א"י וכן א"ו וכן א"ה כולו. ואח"כ ימליך ב' וכן ג' וכל אבר באות שנועד בו. והכל יעסוק בטהרה. אלו רכ"א שערים הם.

Whoever studies *Sefer Yezirah* has to purify himself [and] don white clothes. It is forbidden to study [*Sefer Yezirah*] alone, but only [in groups of] two or three, as it is written: "and the souls they made in Haran." And it is written: "two are better than one [alone]", and it is written: "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." Therefore, [Scripture] begins with a bet, *bereshit bara*, He created. It is incumbent upon him to take virgin soil from a place in the mountains where no one has plowed. And he shall knead the dust with living water, and he shall make a body [Golem] and shall begin to permutate the alphabets of 221 gates, each limb separately, each limb with the corresponding letter mentioned in *Sefer Yezirah*. And the alphabets will be permuted at the beginning, and afterwards he shall permutate with the vowel א א א א א א א א. And always, the letter of the [divine] name with them; א and all the alphabet; afterward

א"ו, then א"י, and then א"י, and then א"י. Afterward [the permutation of] א"ו, and similarly א"ה in its entirety. Afterward, he shall appoint ב and likewise ג, and each limb with the letter designated to it. He shall do all this when he is pure. These are the 221 gates⁴⁹.

Thus, the recitation of the alphabet is crucial in the creation of golem as in the initiation of pupils and proselytes. The main function of this recital is the empowerment of the Golem by speech, namely, the "injection" of a "speaking

⁴⁷ *Sefer Yeşira* §19, according to Idel, *Golem*, p. 10 with minor changes; cf. A. Peter Hayman, *Sefer Yeşira: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary*, Tübingen 2004, p. 100–104.

⁴⁸ See Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, pp. 26–29.

⁴⁹ Eleazar of Worms, *Commentary on Sefer Yeşirah*, Przemysł 1883, fol. 15 col. 4, apud. Idel, *Golem*, p. 56.

soul” into it.⁵⁰ This example can be adduced to the cases discussed above of reciprocal assimilation of initiatory rites and ceremonies of animation of the cultic statues. We can point to additional similarities, for example, one of the main stages of Mesopotamian *mīs pī* ceremony was taking the statues to the river, which is similar to the Ashkenazi pupils’ initiation of the child who was taken to the river bank.

What is the significance of our observations for the rethinking of the relationship between initiation rites and the ceremonies of “opening the mouth”? Images and motifs of revival, resurrection, and rebirth present, apparently, a universal feature of the rituals of initiation. In the examples discussed, rebirth is connected with learning. Pupils and proselytes are born anew, for learning and by teaching. In the Ancient Near East rituals the statues of the gods are animated by their “education.” It should be remembered that the connection between the consecration/initiation and education is attested in the Hebrew verb *hnk* which has both meanings⁵¹. As we have seen, education is correlated with the creation of a man, as described in Genesis 2:7, and through him, with the practice of animation of the statues and the creation of a golem. This correlation gives a distinct and definite significance to the individual elements of the ritual of initiation, and also to the whole, composed of them.

The same applies to a number of magical elements of the ritual. Marcus believes that the magical means to strengthen memory originally had no inner connection with the initiation. However, it should be noted that the purpose of these manipulations is designated as an opening, the “opening of the heart” — the typical formula of initiation⁵². The ritual of the “Prince of Torah” is clearly marked by the symbolism of transformation and new birth, and according to one version, Rabbi Ishmael performs it when he reaches the age of thirteen⁵³, the age of the bar mitzvah initiation⁵⁴. All this indicates that the magical elements themselves can also convey the idea of initiation, and that, as such, they have been incorporated into the overall ceremony.

⁵⁰ Compare also Hieronymus, Preface to the Books Samuel and Kings (circa 391): As, then, there are twenty-two elementary characters by means of which we write in Hebrew all we say, and the human voice is comprehended within their limits, so we reckon twenty-two books, by which, as by the alphabet of the doctrine of God, a righteous man is instructed in tender infancy, and, as it were, while still at the breast. (NPNF², VI, p. 489). As twenty-two letters shape and give form to the formless voice, so twenty-two holy books form the human soul that in itself has only a voice but not articulated speech, like a baby who is endowed with a voice but no articulate(ed) speech (in-fans).

⁵¹ See above, p. 5 and notes 29 and 33. For *hnk* meaning “to educate” see for example Hananel Mack, ““Train a lad in the way he ought to go; he will not swerve from it, even in old age” (Prov. 22:6) — Scripture, Aggada, and Interpretation”, [Hebrew], *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* VIII, ed. Sh. Vargon, A. Frisch, M. Rachimi, Ramat Gan 2008, pp. 147–163.

⁵² Marcus, *Rituals*, pp.21, 28, 56–57

⁵³ Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen 1981, §§ 278, 560.

⁵⁴ See Israel M. Ta-Shma, “The Earliest Literary Sources for the Bar-Mitzva Ritual and Festivity [Hebrew],” *Tarbiz* 68 (1998–1999), pp. 594–595.

We have discussed above the relationship between the disciples' initiation, creation of Adam in Gen 2:7 and the "opening of the mouth" ceremony. The description of the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26–27, in contrast to Gen 2:7, does not contain "technical details" that might link it with the motif of animation of the statues. However, in these verses there has been used the word *şelem*, the primary significance of which belongs to the cult statue⁵⁵. These verses also have a significant impact on the idea of education. Motifs of the image that contained in them and motifs of sealing and imprinting derived from them by exegetes such as Philo, the Palestinian Talmud, Rashi, have close relations to education⁵⁶. Association between the *Bildung* and the *Bild Gottes*, pointed by Gadamer⁵⁷, appears for example in Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed:

ובזאת ההשאלה נאמר ב'אדם', 'ויחי אדם שלושים ומאת שנה, ויולד בדמותו כצלמו'; וכבר קדם לך ענין 'צלם אדם ודמותו' מה הוא; וכל מי שקדמו לו מן הבנים לא הגיעה אליהם הצורה האנושית באמת, אשר היא 'צלם אדם ודמותו', הנאמר עליה, 'בצלם אלוהים ובדמותו' אמנם 'שת', כאשר לימדהו והבינהו ונמצא שלם השלמות האנושי, נאמר בו, 'ויולד בדמותו כצלמו'. (מורה נבוכים, חלק א פרק ז)

In this figurative sense, it is said of Adam: And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begot a son] in his own likeness, after his image. It has

⁵⁵ See Beckerleg, "The Image of God in Eden", pp. 254–257.

⁵⁶ For link between the statue-motif and the education in Greek *paideia* see Plato, *Phaedrus* 252c-d; Plotinus *Enn I*, 6.9. A.H. Armstrong writes: "In 1.6.9 [Plotinus] uses the metaphor of "working on the statue" from the *Phaedrus* with a very significant change. Plato showed the lover working on his beloved to make him more godlike, and becoming more godlike himself in the process. Plotinus exhorts the lover of absolute beauty to go on working on "his own statue" so as to make himself perfect and fit for the final vision ...for Plotinus the eros of aspiration to and union with the good is a solitary love, a love of one for One." In view of the ancient concepts discussed in the article, it is difficult to consent to the words of Werner Jaeger: "To use that knowledge as a formative force in education, and by it to shape the living man as the potter moulds clay and the sculptor carves stone into preconceived form — that was a bold creative idea which could have been developed only by that nation of artists and philosophers. The greatest work of art they had to create was Man. They were the first to recognize that education means deliberately moulding human character in accordance with an ideal... Only this type of education deserves the name of culture, the type for which Plato uses the physical metaphor of moulding character. The German word *Bildung* clearly indicates the essence of education in the Greek, the Platonic sense; for it covers the artist's act of plastic formation as well as the guiding pattern present to his imagination, the idea or *typos*. Throughout history, whenever this conception reappears, it is always inherited from the Greeks..." (Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. I, Oxford 1946, pp. XXII–XXIII). Of course, the Greek idea of education — is a profound innovation in the history of Western civilization, but the concept of education as the creation of an ideal human statue has clear ANE precedents. The motif of animating statue by education persists in Modern Literature: animating of wooden Pinocchio depended upon his education and B. Shaw's prof. Higgins tries to convert low class female golem into "lady" by endowing correct pronunciation.

⁵⁷ Hans G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode, Gesammelte Werke I*, Tübingen 1986, p. 16.

already been explained to you what the meaning of the image of Adam and his likeness is. Now none of the children of [Adam] born before [Seth] had been endowed with true human form, which is the image of Adam and his likeness referred to in the words: the image of God and His likeness. As for Seth, it was after [Adam] had instructed him and procured him understanding and after he had attained human perfection that it was said of him: And [Adam] begot [a son] in his own likeness, after his image⁵⁸.

We surveyed several motifs which appear in various rituals of initiation. Some of these motifs can be traced back to the ancient rites of statues' animation, while others have only similarity with the elements of these rites. The Ashkenazic ceremony stands out among the other initiation rituals by a significant amount of such motifs, which come together into a coherent pattern. Even if the ritual as a whole was formed in Ashkenaz in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as suggested by Marcus, it was not only an expression of a new, actual message, but also a synthesis of traditional patterns and motifs associated with the initiation, where the ancient animation ritual resurfaced from below. We cannot exclude that the pietists, synthesizing the initiation ritual from traditional materials, had in mind the golem tradition, but of course they did not know anything about the Mesopotamian and Egyptian rituals. However, it may be that the cultural memory, accumulated within the assembling parts of their composition caused this pattern reappear, as in the joke about the machinegun.

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⁵⁸ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Volume 1, tr. Shlomo Pines, Chicago 1963, pp. 32–33.

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