CITIES OF THE SEA: IN SEARCH OF הערים הים

Jordan D. Rosenblum
University of Wisconsin-Madison

In this essay, I attempt to inscribe the mysterious location known as “the cities of the sea” (הערים הים) onto the map of rabbinic scholarship. Classical rabbinic authors look toward this mythic locale for three reasons: (1) to discuss tales of sin (and sometimes salvation); (2) to offer definitions and clarifications of obscure words; and (3) to explain halakhic exceptions. Through an examination of הערים הים in the classical rabbinic corpus, I argue that “the cities of the sea” should be understood as a locus of rabbinic pedagogy and not necessarily viewed as an actual, mappable location.

A handful of rabbinic texts make reference to a mysterious location known as “the cities of the sea” (הערים הים). Rabbinic authors look toward this locale for three reasons: (1) to discuss tales of sin (and sometimes salvation); (2) to offer definitions and clarifications of obscure words; and (3) to explain halakhic exceptions. Since, to my knowledge, no author has discussed the function of “the cities of the sea” as a rabbinic trope, in this essay I attempt to inscribe this mythic location on the map of rabbinic scholarship. I argue that the cities of the sea should be understood as a locus of rabbinic pedagogy, and not necessarily viewed as an actual, mappable location.

1. Sin

The only in situ tannaitic mention of the phrase הערים הים also happens to be its most well-known appearance. Sifre Numbers 115\(^1\) recounts the story of a rabbinical student who, while concerned about the biblical commandment to place fringes on the corners of four-cornered garments, is considerably more lax in some of his other practices.\(^2\)

---


\(^2\) Many scholars have written about this tale, including: S. J. D. Cohen, The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 162–164.
Rabbi Nathan says: There is no commandment in the Torah that does not give its reward alongside. Go and learn from the commandment of the fringes [ק maçית]

Once there was a man who was fastidious regarding the commandment of the fringes. He heard that there was a prostitute in the cities of the sea [באר כליכר ים] who would collect 400 בכסז of gold as a fee. He sent her 400 בכסז of gold and she set a time for him. When his time came, he went and was seated on the threshold of her house. Her female slave came and said to her: “That man with whom you made an appointment is now sitting on the threshold of the house.” She said to him: “Let him enter.”

When he entered, she spread out for him seven beds of silver and one of gold and she was on the highest one, and between each [bed] were step-stools of silver and the highest of gold. When they arrived to do the deed, his four witnesses for him and slapped him across the face. Immediately, he slipped away and sat on the ground. She, too, slipped away and sat on the ground. She said to him: “By the gappah of Rome, 4 I will not leave you alone until you tell me what blemish you saw in

---


3 This phrase could either refer to arriving at the temporal moment or to arriving at the physical location (i.e., they were both on the highest bed).

4 The meaning of this phrase is uncertain. While it is clearly an oath, some render it as “Capitol of Rome,” and others as “Love of Rome,” and still others as “Love Goddess of Rome.” Saul Lieberman argues that the phrase רפף על עליים is an oath to Isis, although I do not find his evidence compelling enough to settle the argument. See S. Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II-IV Centuries C.E. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1942), pp. 139–141.
me!” He said to her: “By the [Temple] service, I did not see in you a blemish! For, in the whole world there is none as beautiful as you. But Yhwh, our God, commanded us an easy commandment; and He wrote in it [i.e., the Torah]: ‘I am Yhwh, your God,’ ‘I am Yhwh your God’ two times.5 ‘I am Yhwh your God’: I will give you a reward; ‘I am Yhwh your God’: I will punish you.”

She said to him: “By the [Temple] service, I will not leave you alone until you write for me your name and the name of your city and the name of your study-house in which you learn Torah!” He wrote for her his name, and the name of his city, and the name of his teacher, and the name of the study-house in which he learned Torah. She arose and liquidated all her property:6 [she gave] a third to the government, a third to the poor, and a third she took with her and came and stood at the study-house of Rabbi Hyya.7 She said to him: “Rabbi, convert me!” He said to her: “Perhaps you are attracted to one of the students?” She brought forth the writing that was in her hand. He said to him [i.e., the student]: “Stand. You merit your acquisition. Those beds that she laid out for you in prohibition, she will spread them out for you in permissibility. If this is the reward given in this world, then in the World-to-Come I do not know how much!”8

One need not possess a dirty mind in order to pick up on the myriad of sexual innuendos that pervade this text. Even some rather innocuous sounding details can, in fact, be read as further sexualizing this narrative. For example, when the rabbinical student goes to meet the prostitute, he is described as sitting “on the threshold of her house.” With respect to women in rabbinic literature, the term “house” sometimes refers to female genitalia, an allusion that is probably in operation in this text.9

I highlight the sexual nature of this story because I believe that it is an integral part of this trope. In search of sin—explicitly sexual transgression—the rabbinical student looks towards the cities of the sea. There, he finds what he is looking for and, in the process, he hits the proverbial rock bottom. However, the cities of the sea also contain the solution to his problem, as it

---

5 Numbers 15:41, at the conclusion of a discussion concerning the commandment of the fringes (Num 15:37–41), states: “I am Yhwh, your God, who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a God unto you; I am Yhwh, your God.”

6 I take this felicitous translation from S. J. D. Cohen, The Beginnings, p. 163.

7 Some manuscripts read “Rabbi Meir.”

8 My division of this pericope into paragraphs follows M. L. Satlow, Tasting, p. 165. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Hebrew and Aramaic are my own.

9 On the association between women and “house” in rabbinic literature, see C. M. Baker, Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architecture of Gender in Jewish Antiquity (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 34–76.
is here that he returns to the “proper” path, one that ultimately leads to the World-to-Come.¹⁰

The parallel and variant versions of this tale are even more explicit. In b. Menahot 44a, a parallel text, the rabbinical student and the prostitute are both naked when they encounter one another on the uppermost bed. Comically, while the rabbinical student is explicitly described as being naked (לעים), he does not remove his fringed garment! In the variant text, b. Avodah Zarah 17a, Elazar ben Durdia is not depicted as wearing a fringed garment. Thus, it is the prostitute who, in flagrante delicto, warns Elazar of the repercussions (vis-à-vis rabbinic Judaism!) for his actions. Upset, Elazar walks away and “sits between two mountains and hills.” This geographical allusion to décolletage serves as a metaphor for the location, both literal and figurative, of Elazar’s transgressions.

In two other instances in which the location כרכי ים appears, non-sexual sin is encountered, but salvation is not. For example, b. Sanhedrin 39a recounts the following interaction:

אילך זכר עלוב ממלאתandro אתלילים מאי כה עבדיה ( heißtHAND) אתנוג ואיתנה אלי
מצי את איבי נל המק מן הבכר איבי והלא לועותי עלי בותא מתוחית גיום
אמר לי ידענא שיבא נוח אלי ידואנא באראנא לא ידענא דואנא ב.Dispose

A disbeliever [ помощи]¹¹ said to Rabban Gamaliel: “I know what your God is doing (and where He is sitting).” [Rabban Gamaliel] became faint and sighed. [The disbeliever] said to him: “What is this?” [Rabban Gamaliel] said to him: “I have a son in the cities of the sea, and I have a yearning [to see] him. I want you to show him to me.” [The disbeliever] said: “Do I know where he is?” [Rabban Gamaliel] said to him: “That which is on earth you do not know, [yet] that which is in heaven you do know?!”

In this case, כרכי ים serves as the location where Rabban Gamaliel finds “proof” to invalidate the disbeliever’s heresy. While no sin occurs on location at the cities of the sea, I would argue that its appearance in this context is an allusion meant to reinforce the heretical statement made by the disbeliever. Further, the fact that the disbeliever is unaware of daily events in the

---

¹⁰ The World-to-Come also appears in the midst of a discussion of a linguistic definition (in general, see below). However, in b. Sanhedrin 110b, the World-to-Come only serves as part of a comment that requires exegesis, which is how כרכי ים comes to be used in this instance of linguistic definition.

¹¹ Some manuscripts read קיסר (Caesar/Roman emperor) here.
cities of the sea introduces a (perhaps unintentional) irony: a man is proven to be a sinner by lacking knowledge about a location of sin!\(^{12}\)

The connection between sin and מדריך היה is reinforced in the second example of a non-sexual, non-salvation related sin. In *Genesis Rabbah* 28:5,\(^{13}\) several wicked generations from the Hebrew Bible are compared to one another, culminating in the following statement:

According to R. Hanan, the inhabitants of the cities of the sea did things that the generation of the Flood did not. This is a strong statement, especially when one considers the fact that the generation of the Flood was deemed sufficiently sinful so as to be wiped off the face of the earth by a flood! In order to “prove” the base nature of מדריך היה, R. Hanan cites Zeph 2:5, connecting the inhabitants of the cities of the sea with the Cherethites, whose very name is considered an eponym for extirpation.

R. Hanan’s association concretizes the perceived intrinsic connection between מדריך היה and sin. For, it is in this location that certain rabbis go to great lengths to find the best prostitutes and then, having found them, end up returning home with a reward far greater than a one-night stand; it is in this location that the disbeliever cannot locate Rabban Gamaliel’s son and, thus, “proves” his own heresy; and it is in this location that the inhabitants sin in ways unprecedented even by the notoriously-wicked generation of the Flood.

---


\(^{13}\) Theodor and Albeck, eds. *Genesis Rabbah* (Jerusalem: 1965), 1:264.

\(^{14}\) Zephaniah 2:5. The nation of Cherethites refers to the people of Crete. In Ezek 25:16, they are associated with Philistines, as well as the survivors of the seacoast (מדרים היה). Clearly, here, the location of the Cherethites at מדריך היה allows for a connection with מדריך היה—in this location, the disbeliever cannot locate Rabban Gamaliel’s son and, thus, “proves” his own heresy; and it is in this location that the inhabitants sin in ways unprecedented even by the notoriously-wicked generation of the Flood.

\(^{15}\) Parallel: *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1. A reviewer suggested that there is a word play between מדריך היה and and. However, I am not convinced that this is intentional.
2. **LINGUISTIC DEFINITION**

Another, perhaps comparatively more mundane, trope utilizing "cities of the sea" is one of linguistic definition. In this trope, which is by far the most common, "cities of the sea" is invoked in order to explicate or clarify a difficult term. For example, the question arises what is meant in Gen 2:22 by the phrase “Yhwh God built [בית] the rib [that he had taken from the man into a wife; and He brought her to the man].” Why does Scripture use the verb “built” in this context? The answer is found in the cities of the sea.

לדרש ר' סיון בן מגסי או דכתיב יוב, הא אתי וכלמלד שלפי הקב"ה לוהוה ובהו

For R. Shimon ben Menasia expounded: “Why is it written ‘Yhwh God built a rib’? [Scripture] teaches that the Holy-One-Blessed-be-He adorned Eve and brought her to the first man [i.e., Adam]. For in the cities of the sea they call ‘adorning’ [_bullet] ‘building’ [_bullet] [בנימין].”

Turning towards the cities of the sea, we now encounter a linguistic definition, rather than a sin. The semantic range for the Semitic root for the verb “build” (בנה) is said to expand in the cities of the sea, so as to encompass the concept of adornment. A seemingly difficult word choice in Genesis is thus elucidated by traveling to the cities of the sea.

This example offers both commonalities and exceptions to the other instances in which the trope functions in this manner. First of all, this tradition is attributed to R. Shimon ben Menasia, a Palestinian tanna. In general, most of the language traditions—regardless of trope—are attributed to Palestinian authorities (or to a הירחא, a Babylonian who traveled to, and brought traditions back from, Palestine), most of whom are Tannaim. However, exceptions to this rule do exist, so it should not be considered a *sine qua non*. Unfortunately, no definitive pattern as to date (Tannaitic or amoraimic) or provenance (Palestinian or Babylonian?) can be established for the cities of the sea.

---

16 The verb קפל can mean either to plait hair, to adorn, or to dress. See M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1996 [1903]), p. 1380 s.v. קפל. I have chosen to render the verb “adorn” in English, as I believe this translation encapsulates the other two definitions. In context, the precise meaning is uncertain.

17 *B. Berakhot* 61a (= *b. Shabbat* 95a; *b. Eravin* 18a; *Niddah* 45b; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7; cf. Avot de-Rabbi Natan A4:12-13). While there are other later parallels (e.g., *Kallah Rabbati* 1:2), I will confine my sources throughout this article to works from the Classical Rabbinic period.

18 Palestinian: e.g., *b. Sotah* 13a; *b. Rosh Hashanah* 26a. Babylonian: e.g., *b. Berakhot* 6b (also, Rav Dimi is an amora; *b. Shabbat* 21a attributes this tradition to Shmuel, a Babylonian transitional amora); *b. Shabbat* 54b.
Hebrew traditions. Second, the text switches from Hebrew to Aramaic when talking about the cities of the sea. While it is tempting to conclude that Aramaic is the language spoken in the cities of the sea, our evidence does not support this conclusion, as some are written in Hebrew throughout, or switch from Aramaic to Hebrew when discussing the cities of the sea.19 Thus, linguistic shifts do not provide any concrete or stable evidence for the cities of the sea. Third, b. Berakhot 61a and parallels utilize the phrase כֶּרֶם הָיָם. This formula appears in many, though not all, instances in which the cities of the sea trope functions as a linguistic definition.20 Once again, this is a common feature, but by no means a necessary one for the trope to function as such.

The trope of linguistic definition operates in a similar fashion, whatever the topic being defined. I will offer one more example of how this trope functions and then summarize the various terms defined via the cities of the sea. In b. Berakhot 6b,21 a strange term for a bird is elucidated:

שאמר חרב והלך לפניו אדם מהו חרב כחא ודק דימי ממון אוף אוחיז יש בכרך ים

ככרום שעון והכי שථוה ורגת ממחפס לכלמגנת

as it is said: “When the הָיוֹם is reviled among the sons of men.”22 What is [the meaning of] הָיוֹם? When R. Dimi came [from Palestine], he said: “There is a bird in the cities of the sea whose name is הָיוֹם, and when the sun shines upon it, it changes into many colors.”

Here הָיוֹם contains the answer to a crux in Ps 12:9. הָיוֹם, often translated “viliness” or “baseness,” is said to be a name for a photosensitive bird.23

Elsewhere, we learn that in cities of the sea: הדֹּם means a type of wood that induces sneezing so as to remove worms from a woman’s head;24 הדֹּמ (dig) means a precious stone;25 a הדֹּם (menstruant

---

19 To offer a few examples, only Hebrew appears in b. Sotah 42a (cf. Genesis Rabbah 31:12 [this line appears only in some manuscripts]) and Exodus Rabbah 19, while Aramaic shifting to Hebrew appears in b. Berakhot 6b (= b. Shabbat 21a) and b. Rosh Hashanah 26a (cf. b. Sotah 13a).

20 In addition to the examples already mentioned, it appears in b. Rosh Hashanah 26a (lacking מַשְׁגַע; cp. b. Sotah 13a); b. Sotah 42a (cf. Genesis Rabbah 31 [this line appears only in some manuscripts]); b. Sanhedrin 110b; Exodus Rabbah 19; and Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7. However, it does not appear in b. Berakhot 6b (= b. Shabbat 21a); b. Shabbat 54b; and b. Megillah 12a.

21 = b. Shabbat 21a.

22 Psalm 12:9.


24 B. Shabbat 54b. Instead of clarifying a word from the Hebrew Bible, here a word from the Mishnah (m. Shabbat 5:4) is elucidated.

25 B. Megillah 12a.
woman) is called a נשים (wives); a child is called a בנים (sons); and חמש (fools) are שונרים (rebellious ones). In each instance, the cities of the sea provide a linguistic definition for a difficult term. As in the case of the trope concerning sin, the trope of linguistic definition utilizes the cities of the sea as a locus of pedagogy. Whether the subject is sin or semantics, those who travel to כריים verbally therein encounter useful information.

3. HALAKIC EXCEPTION

Appearing in only a handful of texts, the third, and final, trope utilizes “the cities of the sea” to offer explanations for halakic exceptions. While rabbinic literature is replete with such explanations, on rare occasions these accounts turn towards כריים הים for answers. For example, according to b. Shabbat 134a:

It is taught [in a baraita]: R. Natan said: “Once I went to the cities of the sea and a woman came before me who had circumcised her first son and he had died [and she had circumcised her] second [son] and he had died. She brought [her] third [son] before me. Seeing that he was [too] red, I said to her: ‘Wait until the blood is absorbed.’ She waited until his blood was absorbed and [then] circumcised him and he lived. And they called him Nathan the Babylonian after my name.”

This baraita explicates an earlier statement by Abaye that, according to his mother, one must wait to circumcise a “red” baby because his blood has not yet absorbed and a “green” baby because he is deficient in blood. In this case, כריים הים appears in the midst of a discussion of a halakic exception, as,

---

26 B. Rosh Hashanah 26a (cf. b. Sotah 13a).
27 B. Sotah 42a (cf. Genesis Rabbah 31:12 [this line appears only in some manuscripts]). B. Rosh Hashanah 26a attributes this tradition to R. Aqiba, not R. Elazar and, more importantly, to Gallia (גילי) and not to כריים הים. For a comparison of b. Sotah 42a and b. Rosh Hashanah 26a, see C. E. Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 18–19, 224 n. 19. Further, according to y. Berakhot 9:2 (13c) (this appears in some printed editions as 9:1; I follow: ed. Schäfer and Becker, I/1–2:230), R. Levi attributes this tradition to Africa.
28 B. Sanhedrin 110b.
29 Numbers Rabbah 19:9.
30 = b. Hullin 47b.
31 B. Hullin 47b attributes this tradition neither to Abaye nor to his mother.
in general, a Jewish boy must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.  

Immediately following the story occurring in the cities of the sea, R. Natan also mentions a similar incident that occurred in Cappadocia, involving a “green” baby.  

I am unsure how to interpret the fact that one tale occurs in an explicit locale—Cappadocia (a land-locked, ascetic location)—and another one occurs in the cities of the sea (a water-front property associated with sin). While one could argue that this lends credence to being an actual place, I find that line of reasoning unconvincing. Rather, it seems to me that the cities of the sea functions as a pedagogical site. Perhaps there was a tradition attributed to R. Natan about “red” and “green” babies and the location of only one of these tales—Cappadocia—was known to the authors, transmitters, and/or redactors of this passage. They therefore set the first tradition in a known locus of pedagogy and halakic explanation: the cities of the sea. Or, perhaps since the “red” tradition was attributed to the cities of the sea, then the “green” tradition required a different location. I prefer the latter suggestion, since it mirrors the text’s order. The first story is set in the cities of the sea and the second story is set in Cappadocia. Regardless, I see no reason to conclude that this passage points toward an actual, mappable location for Cappadocia.

Another halakic exception found in Cappadocia is encountered in the midst of a convoluted discussion about whether a male convert to rabbinic Judaism may marry the wife of his deceased maternal brother. While the Torah mandates levirate marriage,  

the question that the rabbis ask is whether this law only applies to a native-born Israelite, and not to a convert. By providing a different scenario, the cities of the sea offer an answer:

Come and hear. As Ben Yasyan said: “Once I went to the cities of the sea. I found a certain convert who had married the wife of his maternal brother. I

32 One could argue that this is a halakic explanation without precedent, as earlier traditions (see the next note) only discuss the case of a “green,” and not “red,” baby. On rabbinic allowances for the delay or omission of circumcision, see S. J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised: Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 22–24.

33 The “green” baby account appears in t. Shabbat 15(16):8 (and parallels).

said to him, ‘My son, who permitted you [this marriage]?’ He said to me, ‘Behold, the woman and her seven children [who were converts].’”

The text goes on to offer support for the male convert’s actions by no less of an authority than R. Akiva himself. Once again, the cities of the sea offer a halakic exception. It appears that is a locus of difference—whether linguistic or halakic.

A final example of the cities of the sea and halakic exception is encountered during a discussion about the permissibility of using a dried-up lulav (לולא or date palm frond, one of the four species—along with myrtle, willow, and citron—necessary for the observance of the festival of Sukkot), which m. Sukkah 3:1 explicitly does not allow. According to y. Sukkah 3:1 (53c):

It is taught [in a baraita] in the name of R. Judah: A dried up one [i.e., a lulav] itself is valid. R. Yehudah said to them: “And is it not [the case] in the cities of the sea [that] they bequeath their lulavs to their children?” They said to him: “One does not learn [i.e., derive law] from a time of emergency.”

Once again, an halakic exception is cited as occurring in the cities of the sea. In this case, R. Yehudah attempts to resolve two competing Tannaitic traditions by appealing to the cities of the sea.

35 B. Yevamot 98a. Rashi’s suggestion that the woman and her seven children were converts makes contextual sense.
36 Further, as in the previous example, this text begins with the first-person singular perfect of the verb וַיֶּלֶךְ. Since it is absent from the next example, I do not consider this to be a necessary part of the trope. While one could argue that this is a similarity present only in the Babylonian Talmud (since the other example, as we shall see, is from the Palestinian Talmud), I am inclined to disagree for two reasons: (1) the small sample size; and (2) the same verbal form introduces a linguistic definition in b. Rosh Hashanah 26a.
37 Albeck edition, 2:266.
39 In t. Sukkah 2:9 (Lieberman edition, 2:264), which is the tannaitic source for this baraita, this sentence is written in the plural. There, as Lieberman notes, it refers to all of the four species.
40 Instead of the “cities of the sea,” t. Sukkah 2:9 (Lieberman edition, 2:264) begins R. Yehudah’s statement thusly: “It once occurred to the men of the cities (אמורי ולמידי מועש חודיע), I am inclined to disagree for two reasons: (1) the small sample size; and (2) the same verbal form introduces a linguistic definition in b. Rosh Hashanah 26a.
41 The inadmissibility of evidence found during a time of emergency is also discussed in b. Niddah 9b.
42 Interestingly, we learn here that רכבי גזים is considered as being in “a time of emergency.” The precise meaning of this phrase is uncertain. Is there a severe lulav shortage in the cities of the sea (thus requiring the usage of a dried lulav)? Is life difficult there for some reason? Is its climate unsuitable for growing lulavs?
On the surface, this trope may seem completely different than the other two. However, the connection between all three tropes is that they offer pedagogically useful data. Whether the lesson is moral, linguistic, or halakic, the cities of the sea provides relevant information.

4. CONCLUSION

Scholars have suggested various locations for סכרים ים, including Caesarea \(^{43}\) and Cyprus. \(^{44}\) However, when one examines all of the contexts in which the cities of the sea appear, it becomes apparent that סכרים ים is not necessarily a location to be charted on a map. Rather, I would suggest that סכרים ים is a locus to which rabbis sometimes turn when looking to narrate tales of sin (and, in some instances, salvation); to define difficult and obscure terms; and to explain exceptions to halakah. \(^{46}\) Of course, this is not to dismiss completely the possibility that, at least in some instances, rabbinic authors might have been referring to some actual location. In this manner, the cities of the sea may be considered analogous to depictions of the Indian Ocean in the medieval West, in which the boundaries between the real and the imaginary are often blurred. \(^{47}\)

It is now time to leave the cities of the sea. On our brief tour of סכרים ים, we have encountered some of the most rich and the most mundane texts in classical rabbinic literature, from a rabbi who visits a prostitute, to the meaning of obscure words for birds and rocks. Although no text explicitly acknowledges this fact, the cities of the sea clearly functions as a discursive site for pedagogical purposes. It is meant to be turned toward for instruction, and not necessarily to be located on Google Earth.

---

43 For example, S. Lieberman, Greek, p. 140.
44 For example, M. Jastrow, Dictionary, p. 482 s.v. סכרים ים.
45 As stated earlier, although most סכרים ים traditions are attributed to a Palestinian (or to a Babylonian who traveled to, and brought traditions back from, Palestine) tanna, this was not consistent.
46 There appears another rabbinic phrase that, at first glance, might seem comparable to סכרים ים: "דרכי ים סכרים" (the "city/province/country of the sea"). In the majority of instances where it appears, סכרים ים is used to explore the effect that overseas travel has on halakah, notably on marriage, divorce, and inheritance law (e.g., m. Yevamot 15:1, 6, 8–10; 16:1; t. Yevamot 14:3; b. Yevamot 25a; 87b; 149a–b; 94b). While this term on rare occasions seems to serve as a locus of linguistic definition (e.g., b. Shabbat 114a) and salvation (Leviticus Rabbah 37:2), the phrase סכרים ים appears to be deployed mainly in a concrete—and not literary—manner. Namely, סכרים ים is used to discuss an actual person who, for whatever practical reason (usually business), must travel a distance from home. If he were to die en route, this creates very real problems vis-à-vis halachic law. As such, halachic exceptions feature prominently in these discussions. However, these are concrete conversations about the effect of travel on law, and not literary appeals to a locus of pedagogy. It is for this reason that I do not dedicate an extended discussion to mapping סכרים ים.