INTRODUCTION

Blackness and Slavery

> The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled. Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."
>
> (Gen 9:18–25, RSV)

THIS BIBLICAL STORY has been the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years. It is a strange justification indeed, for there is no reference in it to Blacks at all. And yet just about everyone, especially in the antebellum American South, understood that in this story God meant to curse black Africans with eternal slavery, the so-called Curse of Ham. As one proslavery author wrote in 1838, "The blacks were originally designed to vassalage by the Patriarch Noah."[1]

This book attempts to explain how and why this strange interpretation of the biblical text took hold. It does so by looking at the larger picture, that is, by uncovering just how Blacks were perceived by those people for whom the Bible was a central text. What did the early Jews, Christians, and Muslims see when they looked at the black African? Clearly, the biblical interpretation is forced. How, then, did the biblical authors view Blacks and what were the postbiblical forces that wrung such a view from the Bible?

This is a book about the ancient link between black skin color and slav-

ery. It is, thus, a study of perceptions, symbolic associations, and historical ramifications. It explores how dark-skinned people were perceived in antiquity, how negative associations attached to the color black were played out on the stage of history, and how the connection between blackness and slavery became enshrined in the Curse of Ham.

In 1837 the painter and theorist Jacques Nicolas Paillot de Montabert wrote:

> White is the symbol of Divinity or God;
> Black is the symbol of the evil spirit or the demon.
> White is the symbol of light . . .
> Black is the symbol of darkness and darkness expresses all evils.
> White is the emblem of harmony;
> Black is the emblem of chaos.
> White signifies supreme beauty;
> Black ugliness.
> White signifies perfection;
> Black signifies vice.
> White is the symbol of innocence;
> Black, that of guilt, sin, and moral degradation.
> White, a positive color, indicates happiness;
> Black, a negative color, indicates misfortune.
> The battle between good and evil is symbolically expressed
> By the opposition of white and black.[2]

De Montabert wrote these words in a manual for artists. For us, they starkly demonstrate how deeply and in how many varied ways black-white symbolism is part of Western culture.

Some scholars argue that these associations were the cause of Black enslavement for centuries. They claim that the negative value of blackness—whether due to a psychological association of darkness with fear of the unknown or due to some other cause—underlies the negative sentiment toward dark-skinned people that resulted in Black slavery.[3] The historian Winthrop Jordan especially assigns a great deal of weight to the Africans' skin color. The associations of black and white as symbolic of evil and good, sin and purity, and the like, Jordan argues, were transferred to human beings when the light-skinned English came into contact with the dark-skinned Africans.[4] Speaking of the slaves in antebellum America, Toni Morrison put it this way:

> The distinguishing features of the not-Americans were their slave status, their social status—and their color. It is conceivable that the first would have self-destructed in a variety of ways had it not been for the last. These slaves, unlike many others in the world's history, were visible to a fault. *And they had*

inherited, among other things, a long history on the meaning of color; it was that this color "meant" something.[5]

"Color meant something." Indeed, it meant a great deal. And it conveyed the same negative associations in many different cultures. The same black-white color symbolism seen in Western traditions is found in China and South Asia.[6] It has been found among the Chiang (a Sino-Tibetan people), the Mongour (a Mongolian people), the Chuckchees of Siberia, and the Creek Indians of North America.[7] It is in Sanskrit, Caledonian, and Japanese, as well as Western, literature.[8] Indeed, according to many anthropology reports, the phenomenon is common even in black Africa.[9] It appears that the symbolism of black-negative and white-positive is widespread among peoples of all colors.[10]

The same associations of black and white are also found in our earliest written records in the ancient Near East and the classical world.[11] In Christianity these associations played a large role in the meanings given to light and darkness. "There is continual conflict between the world of darkness, that is sin, error and death, and the figure of Christ who is light, truth and life."[12] Jesus is "the light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5). "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). It played an even larger role when the church fathers in the third century began to allegorize the scriptural Black (the "Ethiopian") as sin, as we shall see later. The common patristic depiction of devils as Ethiopians was of one cloth with this symbolism in the service of exegesis.

The negative symbolism of the color black may indeed have influenced how the light-skinned European came to perceive the dark-skinned African. Some sociologists, however, have questioned whether black-white symbolism "must necessarily transfer to social relations"; to see blackness as a metaphor for negative values, they claim, is not the same as seeing black people negatively.[13] We cannot so easily jump from abstract metaphor to human reality.

Whether or not the negative value of blackness was the cause of anti-Black sentiment, and whether or not anti-Black sentiment led to Black slavery, it is clear that already by the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade in the fifteenth century Black and slave were inextricably joined in the Christian mind. Over and over again one finds Black enslavement justified with a reference to the biblical story of the curse of eternal servitude pronounced against Ham, considered to be the father of black Africa.

This book looks at the relationship between color symbolism and color prejudice and asks whether the former must lead to the latter, and whether color prejudice, strictly defined, must lead to ethnic prejudice. It seeks to uncover that point in time when blackness and slavery were first joined and it tracks the Western justification for the join in an evolving biblical inter-

pretation. The focus of the study is on those civilizations that accepted the Bible as a basis of life.

It begins the investigation by examining the ancient Jewish world. This is not accidental. If a biblically rooted Western civilization came to exhibit anti-Black sentiment over many centuries, could the origin of such sentiment lie in the Bible? If Christian exegesis from the earliest centuries interpreted the scriptural Black as sinner and understood the devil to be an Ethiopian, could these interpretations derive from Christianity's cradle, ancient Judaism? The question takes on even greater importance in light of recent writings by scholars and nonscholars alike who have concluded that there is indeed an underlying anti-Black sentiment in early Jewish society.[14]

Was Jewish antiquity where anti-Black attitudes originated and became fixed in Western civilization? To answer this question I examine how Jews of the ancient world perceived black Africans over a fifteen-hundred-year period, from about 800 B.C.E. until the eighth century C.E. after the appearance of Islam. What images of Blacks are found in Jewish literature of this period and what attitudes about Blacks are implicit in those images? How did Jewish society of the biblical and postbiblical periods relate to darker-skinned people, whether African or not? The examination of the ancient Jewish world will provide the necessary framework in which to examine and understand the biblical Curse of Ham text and its later interpretations in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic exegesis. If the biblical Curse reflects an anti-Black sentiment, that sentiment should be found elsewhere in early Jewish literature. If it is not, then we must account for the development of such sentiment and for its expression in the various biblical interpretive traditions.

From Exegesis to History

The importance of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) for Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam is obvious and can be gauged by the enormous quantity of biblical interpretation and expansion generated by these three faith-cultures and their offshoots. More than the quantity, it is most striking how the same interpretive traditions with and without variation are so widely disseminated among these monotheistic faiths. How can one account for this melting pot of biblical interpretation? Of course, when Christianity and Islam accepted the Jewish Bible as part of their heritage, they inherited as well some of Judaism's interpretations of its sacred text. It is often noted that the Qurʾan and later Islamic stories about biblical personalities and events (*isrāʾīliyyāt*) reflect much of ancient Jewish biblical interpretation. As the ninth-century traditionist, al-Bukhārī, wrote: "The Jews used to read the Torah in Hebrew and to interpret it to the people of

Islam in Arabic."[15] The same is true for Christianity in Asia Minor and the lands of the Near East. The Christian Syriac Bible translation, the Peshiṭta, has been shown to contain many Jewish interpretations embedded in its translation. The church fathers of the East, especially, but not only, Ephrem (d. 373), transmit Jewish midrashic explanations again and again. Origen (d. ca. 253), who wrote in Greek, not Syriac, lived in the Near East, first in Alexandria, then in Caesarea, and his works too contain many Jewish interpretations. So do the writings of Jerome, who lived in Bethlehem.[16] Sometimes these church fathers quote a contemporary, usually anonymous, Jewish source (e.g., "the Hebrew"). Many times they transmit a Jewish interpretation without attribution.

Of course, there are uniquely Christian and Islamic biblical interpretations. Jewish midrash, for example, sees no foreshadowing ("types") of Jesus or Muḥammad in the Hebrew Bible. But even many of the unique Christian or Islamic interpretations can often be seen to reflect earlier, Jewish, thinking. The concept of the *logos*, for example, which John 1:1–18 applies to Jesus ("In the beginning was the word [*logos*], and the word was with God, and the word was God. . . . Through him all things were made. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"), is used by the Jewish philosopher Philo (b. ca. 25 B.C.E.) as a device by means of which the infinite, transcendent God was able to create a finite, real world—the way an immaterial God can make contact with a material world. Similarly, the metaphor of light and darkness used by the early Christians ("You are all children of light," 1 Thessalonians 5:4–5; the Two Ways of Light and Darkness, *Barnabas* 18–20) is an echo of the dualistic theology of the Dead Sea sect (the "children of light" and the "children of darkness").[17] In other words, Hebrew Scripture together with its early Jewish interpretation became part of the common heritage of all biblically based cultures in the Near East during the first several centuries of the Common Era. If the church fathers transmit originally Jewish expansions and explanations without attribution, it is not because they want to hide their Jewish source, but because these interpretations had become part of the biblical package lived and studied by all, the way one read and understood the Bible. It was the vehicle of intellectual intercourse and commonality as much as the basis of, and impetus for, differentiation.

Whether Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, biblical exegetical traditions moved freely among the geographically and culturally contiguous civilizations of the Near East. It is precisely the fluidity of the various interpretations and legends that provides a unique opportunity for cross-cultural investigation. When we can determine the direction of a tradition, the very confessional permeability of biblical exegesis becomes a historical witness to changes in attitudes and perceptions. For as exegesis crossed denominational lines it took on new coloring reflecting its new environment. By

recognizing "the interactive character of such inter-hermeneutic encounters," we can "elucidate the dynamics by which religions incorporate, idealize, repress, deny, and otherwise remake their inheritance, as that inheritance is recreated."[18] "Tracing the threads" while tracking the changes provides evidence of the new attitudes and views conditioned by the new environment, just as within one culture exegetical changes over time reflect changes in attitudes due to different historical circumstances. In other words, following biblical interpretation synchronically as well as diachronically provides us a picture of changing views, opinions, and attitudes within and among the monotheistic cultures. By tracking exegetical traditions concerning black Africans across confessional lines, we can see how and why the original Jewish biblical interpretations change as they move into the different cultural orbits, and we can trace the trajectory as they move back into Judaism.

The main traditions on which I focus in this regard revolve around the biblical figure of Ham and the infamous Curse of Ham. I follow the exegetical changes in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literature, showing the origin of this postbiblical idea, how and when it took root, and how it was exegetically integrated into the biblical text. In other words, I show how non-Blacks began to look at Blacks as slaves and how this new perspective was reflected in biblical exegesis. In a related section, I track a second group of traditions that reflect another change, one of far-reaching consequences still with us today, that is, a new way of categorizing humanity—not by language, or religion, or citizenship, but by physiognomy, especially skin color. In sum, in this book I attempt to uncover the origins and development of anti-Black sentiment in Western civilization as reflected in the Bible and in postbiblical exegetical tradition, and how biblical exegesis was used to justify Black slavery.

The Plan of the Book

The book is structured in four parts. In Part I, where the investigation focuses on early Jewish views of the black African, the material is investigated chronologically rather than thematically, that is, biblical evidence is looked at first and then the postbiblical texts. This approach allows us to see continuities and discontinuities more clearly. It also allows for an informed approach to later ambiguous material. A prime example of what can happen when this approach is not taken can be seen in the claim of a recent work that in a rabbinic text "black people are described as drunken people."[19] I show later in this work that this reading of the rabbinic text is based on a scribal error; that the manuscripts and first printed edition speak of blackness rather than drunkenness; and that the correct reading

was already incorporated into a number of modern translations.[20] The text, in other words, describes Blacks as being black, not drunk. What is of importance here is that had the author considered the chronologically prior material, he would have found nothing to indicate that such a perception should appear in the rabbinic corpus. That conclusion would have led him to question the text as he understood it and, perhaps, to discover the correct reading. As a West African saying puts it, "If you do not know where you are or where you have been, you cannot know where you are going."[21]

This study documents several such examples of misreading of the sources, many of which cases are ultimately due to an assumption that the way things are now is the way things were in the past. The tendency is strong to read the past from the perspective of one's own time and place. It is especially important, however, to avoid this mistake when dealing with the topic of this book, for our perceptions of the Black have been conditioned by the intervening history of centuries of Black slavery and its manifold ramifications. Unfortunately, in too many cases we shall see that that mistake has not been avoided by those who attempt to read the past with the limited tools at their disposal.

In Part II, I move the inquiry from Black as an ethnic group to black as a color, and examine Jewish views of, and attitudes toward, dark skin color. The question is necessarily broader than asking about attitudes toward black Africans. Dark- and darker-skinned people are found in a variety of ethnic groups, and within the same ethnic group. Do we find in the Jewish sources disapproving attitudes toward dark skin color irrespective of the ethnic group? Does ancient Jewish literature exhibit a particular sentiment toward the color of one's skin?

Part III steps back from the examination of Jewish perceptions and attitudes and asks a more general and more concrete historical question: how early can we date Black slavery? Here I seek to determine if and when the black African became identified as slave in the Near East. The question is important for this study because an identity of Black with slave would be expected to influence views and opinions of the Black found in the literature. If we find no such influence in the Bible, it would indicate that such an identification did not take place in the biblical period. If it can then be demonstrated, as I believe it can, that an identification of Black and slave occurred in the postbiblical period, we should expect to find reinterpretations of biblical literature to coincide with the new historical situation and view of the black African as slave. Such reinterpretation, of course, happens in every age to every people who seek to live by the Book.

Part IV focuses on the reinterpretation of the Bible that occurred as a result of this new historical situation, that is the identification of Black with slave. The primary interpretive enterprise reflecting the new historical sit-

uation concerns the Curse of Ham. I track the exegetical changes in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literature, showing how these interpretations became historically possible, how they were textually implemented, and what views and attitudes underlie the exegesis. Methodologically, this section is the heart of the study. It shows how postbiblical literature, even if informed by the biblical world and even if formally structured around the Bible, nevertheless greatly reflects its own world. The Bible is not so much a framework, conceptual and structural, into which all subsequent thinking must fit (conform), as it is a grid upon which postbiblical thinking asserts itself, and in the process changes the biblical blueprint. The metaphor is equally applicable to all Bible-based religions. Judaism, Christianity (west and east), Islam, and even Samaritanism all refashioned the biblical grid, which, when read carefully, becomes a network of historical data. By looking at how the Bible is reinterpreted at different times and places we can detect shifting *mentalités*, and under them we can delineate historical changes. Conversely, if we know when and where crucial historical changes occur, we can explain how and why the interpretation-shaping attitudes began. Playing the two sides of the equation against each other, I show how history and exegesis are intimately related and how the exegetical mirror can act as a lens focusing on historical changes.

The set of views, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding black Africans and how they have been perceived has a long and complex development. The history of Western perceptions of the black African has many tributaries, and we today are the most recent inheritors of this long accumulating history. In this sense, the results of this study are diametrically opposed to the view expressed by John Ralph Willis in his study "The Image of the African in Arabic Literature." Willis wrote that "there is no need to dwell on the unpleasant statements in Arabic literature regarding peoples of African descent. . . . The matter which concerns us here is the origin of the unfavorable attitude. . . . Those Arab writers showing antagonism to people of dark color echoed the external traditions of the Jews, Greeks and perhaps others."[22] As if discovering origins will reveal Truth. As if the support mechanisms that keep an idea in place over millennia are irrelevant.[23] Given the body of common Near Eastern traditions and the permeability of each culture in admitting and transmitting these traditions, to speak of origins, even were it possible, is not enough.

The Question of Racism

Throughout my research for this book I have had two models in mind, Frank Snowden's *Blacks in Antiquity* (1970) and Lloyd Thompson's *Romans and Blacks* (1989). The question both authors sought to answer was

whether the world of classical antiquity was racist. Snowden was not the first to address the question, but he was the first to do so comprehensively. His attempt to examine every reference to black Africans, both literary and iconographic, in that world remains unsurpassed. With this magisterial work in mind, I have aimed for the same type of comprehensiveness in the Jewish world of antiquity. Thompson's contribution was to bring greater methodological nuance to the question of racism in antiquity. The main critique that has been leveled against Snowden was that he closed his eyes to obvious expressions of anti-Black sentiment in a world in which he believed there was none. Where Snowden refused to see anti-Black sentiment, Thompson saw it but explained it not as racism but as "ethnocentric reactions to a strange and unfamiliar appearance," and "expressions of conformism to the dominant aesthetic values."[24] Snowden saw this distinction too, but Thompson made it an important methodological basis of his work: "[Racism is evidenced by] reactions to an ideologically ascribed, and so almost infallibly predictable, social significance of a given set of somatic characteristics," whereas ethnocentrism, "a natural and universally evidenced human response," would allow for negative reactions to a strange and unfamiliar somatic appearance.[25] Ancient Roman society was indeed ethnocentric, but it was not racist.

The conclusion, shared by both classicists, that the ancient world was not racist hinges on their acceptance of the definition of racism as a socially defined creation. Racism exists when social structures assign "inferior and unalterable roles and rights" to a specific group; when this group cannot, practically speaking, assume the superior roles and rights of the dominant group; when a belief system or ideology supports these social structures; and when the group is defined by biological descent and perceptions of somatic and cultural identity. Looked at from the other direction, racial prejudice defines a set of attitudes that underlie discriminatory social structures. It is an attitude "that rests on an ideological perception of the individual as necessarily possessing particular desirable or undesirable qualities by virtue of his or her membership in a given socially defined group, in a social context in which the individual can do nothing to alter the basic situation."[26] This definition assumes two crucial differences between racism and ethnocentrism: biology and socially embedded discrimination.

Not everyone, however, agrees with this definition of racism. Others would consider any kind of social discrimination to be racist. Not biological hierarchy, but any hierarchy defines racism, for example, the cultural hierarchy of citizen-barbarian practiced in the Greco-Roman world, what others call ethnocentrism—in other words, institutionalized discrimination of any sort.[27] Still others would keep the biology and remove the social structures. To them, racism is "an ideology based on the conception that racial groups form a biogenetic hierarchy" period. Attributing inferiority or su-

periority to people on the basis of biological traits, "congenital inferiority" in the language of philosopher Harry Bracken, is the essence of racism.[28]

It seemed to me that if I would try to determine whether ancient Jewish society was racist, I would soon be up to my neck in theoretical quicksand. As an African American student once said in my class, racism is like obscenity, with which it is closely related: you know it when you see it, although it may be hard to define. When dealing with the Jewish material, therefore, I decided not to ask whether ancient Judaism was racist but instead to ask a simpler question: how did ancient Jewish society look at the black African? Only in the concluding chapter do I come back to the issue of racism to see how the answer to this question does or does not accord with various definitions of racism. I reasoned that to approach the topic this way would in any event lead to richer results, for it would attempt to describe in all its colors how Jews of antiquity, and then Christians and Muslims, perceived Blacks.

Some Remarks on Sources and Terminology

The Nature of the Evidence

The first half of this study explores the images of the black African found in Jewish society of the biblical and postbiblical periods. What is the nature of these images? As opposed to the Greco-Roman, and then Christian, world, they are not iconographic. There are some examples of representational art in early-century mosaics and in the wall paintings of the third-century Dura-Europas synagogue, but these depictions (mostly biblical scenes) contain no Blacks and thus provide no evidence for our purposes. Our images are all literary, starting with the Hebrew Bible of ancient Israel, continuing with Jewish writings in Greek, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, and the Dead Sea (Qumran) literature in the Hellenistic-Roman periods, and concluding with the rabbinic corpus (Talmud and Midrash) composed during the first seven or eight centuries C.E. The Bible consists of several different genres of literature, from the creation epics in Genesis to the love poem of Song of Songs, from the national founding narrative of Exodus to the universal wisdom of Proverbs. These many different genres and topics were gradually brought together and canonized as the core document of Judaism. But even before canonization occurred, and even while there were variant versions of some of its parts, this body of literature assumed a deep centrality in Jewish society. As a consequence, the vast majority of postbiblical Jewish literature consists of interpretation, expansion, commentary, discussion, and paraphrase of the Bible. Whether pseudepigraphic expansion or rabbinic interpretation, whether Philo's allegory or Pseudo-Philo's paraphrase, postbiblical Jewish literature generally takes the Bible as its starting point and its focus.

Determining a society's attitudes and perspectives from its literary remains is fraught with methodological difficulties. As Lloyd Thompson put it, "We depend almost entirely on the surviving remarks of a few long-dead people, none of which remarks was made in response to any carefully-worded question put to them by us."[29] Not only may the remains not properly represent the society, or even one group in the society, but the attitudes and views may never have been put into literary or iconographic form. In addition to these general methodological problems, much of postbiblical Jewish literature has its own set of difficulties for the historian, especially when we seek to uncover ideas and attitudes. This is particularly the case with regard to rabbinic literature, for the nature of this literature is such that it does not present systematic expositions of ideologies or attitudes. Such expositions may or may not have occurred in the rabbinic academies or study circles, but what we have in the extant literature does not record them. Furthermore, rabbinic literature is transmitted in a uniquely rhetorical discourse that presents barriers to historical inquiry.[30] The rabbinic medium does not allow for individual expression of the type that we find in the contemporaneous Greco-Roman world.[31] We do not find a parallel to Juvenal who would express his prejudices and preferences without mediation or mitigation.

Nevertheless, any interpretation of the biblical text will be influenced, however unconsciously, by the time and place of the interpreter, even as it attempts to explain or expand (also an interpretation) the text it is interpreting. Depending on the literary genre, the reflections of the interpreter's world may be explicit, like the *pesher* commentaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the homilies of the modern-day rabbi or preacher, or they may be implicit and hard to detect. Sometimes the influences of the interpreter's world may not be found in the content of the interpretation at all but only in the choice of one interpretation over another, or sometimes in the choice of one biblical verse to be interpreted over another. But the interpreter's world will surely be reflected in his work, one way or another.

And that world is not as narrowly defined as we tend to think from our perspective two thousand years later. The Jews of antiquity and late antiquity did not live in a vacuum but were part of a larger society and culture, a point abundantly reflected in the literature. The Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew-Aramaic Talmud and Midrash are suffused with foreign words and ideas. Rabbinic literature contains thousands of Greek loanwords that became part of the Jewish lexicon, reflecting social, literary, economic, and even theological influence. The opening chapters of the Bible are a uniquely Jewish theological statement fashioned from, and on the framework of, common ancient Near Eastern (Mesopotamian) material. The idiom, linguistic structure, and underlying concepts of Psalms, to take another example, are part and parcel of a larger ancient Near Eastern (Ugaritic) literary world. And, of course, Jewish literature written in Greek is thoroughly

Hellenistic. Two thousand years ago, as today, the Jewish world was constantly creating its world within a world, drawing on and reshaping foreign ideas. If Jewish literature, therefore, is a mirror of Jewish thought, as it is, then Jewish thought is a lens through which we may also perceive the non-Jewish surrounding environment.

Rabbinic Literature and Terminology

Much of the rabbinic source material used in this study will be unfamiliar to many readers. For this reason I have included a Glossary in which I briefly present the dates, place of composition, editions, and translations of the material, as well as definitions of unfamiliar terminology. Where available I have used critical editions of ancient texts, in which case the text is cited by the traditional section division, followed by the page number of the edition in parentheses. Thus *GenR* 36.7 (p. 341) refers to section 36.7, which is on p. 341 in Theodor and Albeck's edition of *Genesis Rabba*. For many of these texts, dating cannot be precise and is often given within the parameters of one or two centuries. Rabbinic texts and traditions chronologically belong either to the period of the *tannaim* (70–220 C.E.) or the *amoraim* (220–500). Beyond that gross classification, dating of rabbinic traditions is notoriously difficult, because anonymous early traditions may appear in works that were redacted much later than the traditions themselves. Even traditions that are attributed to named authorities may be much earlier than these authorities.[32] On the other hand, some scholars, emphasizing the role played by tradents and redactors of rabbinic traditions, accept the only certain date as the one of the final document in which the tradition is embedded.[33] My practice in this study is to date a tradition to the time of the authority in whose name the tradition is recorded. For our purposes, however, it matters little whether a tradition can be dated to, say, the year 135 or to the tannaitic period in general. Chronologically broad strokes in this regard will suffice. If the tradition is recorded anonymously, then I assign it the date of the redaction of the composition in which the tradition appears. An exception is made in the case of anonymous statements preceded by introductory markers of the tannaitic period, for example, *tanya'* ("it is learned"), *teno rabanan* ("our Rabbis have taught"), and so on. Such traditions appearing in works of the amoraic period are regarded as being authentically tannaitic. All dates that appear in this study are C.E. unless otherwise noted.

The Rabbis

At times in this study I will speak of "the rabbinic view" of such-and-such a matter. This does not mean that all Rabbis over more than four hundred

years agreed on a particular point. That would be unlikely were it even possible to ascertain a full documentation of rabbinic opinions. It means rather, in the words of Jay Harris, "that there is a certain conception of the past that finds expression in a number of rabbinic documents, that is not explicitly challenged and that serves as the basis for other discussions in the literature. . . . [It] shows the compatibility of certain claims and the broader culture."[34] The results of my research claim that there are indeed certain rabbinic conceptions (and lack of conceptions) concerning the black African; that these conceptions and perceptions are in agreement with the antecedent Jewish cultures of the biblical and Hellenistic-Roman periods, as they are with Near Eastern cultures generally. Not until after the rabbinic period in the seventh century do these views begin to change.

Cushite/Kushite/Nubian/Ethiopian/Black/Black African

The area south of Egypt descending into central Africa and extending east to the Red Sea was known to the ancient Near Eastern cultures as Kush. This is the name found in the Hebrew Bible. In Greek writing the name for this land was Ethiopia. We also find the name Nubia in the earlier sources. A more general term for the sub-Saharan inhabitants of Africa is Black or black African, terms commonly used in Greco-Roman studies. In this study I use all terms interchangeably as called for by the context. My preference is to avoid the use of Ethiopia as much as possible because of the association of the name with the modern nation-state, which is not the same as the ancient land of Kush. The capitalization of Black is intended to distinguish individuals whose ancestry is from sub-Saharan Africa from other dark-skinned people. In most translations of the Bible the name Kush is written with a *c: Cush*. This is due to the influence of Latin, which acted as an intermediary between the ancient and modern languages. Today, however, more and more scholars are writing Kush, which reflects the original spelling of the name in pre-Latin texts. I prefer this for consistency, since the phoneme *k* in ancient Near Eastern languages is transliterated with *k* and not *c*. Sometimes (infrequently), to avoid confusion, I will change Cush to Kush in a quotation.

Israel/Palestine/The Land of Israel

Due to today's political climate many scholars are reluctant to use the terminology of previous generations for the name of the Land of Israel in late antiquity and the rabbinic period. In the past "Palestine" was the term commonly used but the political connotations of the name today have led some to avoid it. "Israel" is linguistically the simplest alternative, and some have adopted the term, but the name is historically problematic since it

connotes the State of Israel, which came into existence only some fifty years ago. "The Land of Israel" (or its Hebrew counterpart "Eretz Israel") is historically accurate but stylistically cumbersome. The same problem of terminology obtains for the rabbinic composition known as the "Palestinian Talmud." Some use the alternative "Jerusalem Talmud," an accurate translation of the Hebrew title of the work. But "Jerusalem Talmud" never did become universally accepted, even in the past, for good reason: this Talmud was created primarily in Tiberius. I have not shied away from using the chronologically inaccurate but reader-friendly "Israel"; nor have I totally avoided the mouthful "Land of Israel." Nor, when dealing with the postbiblical period, have I rejected the older usage of "Palestine."

Translation and Transliteration

Bible translations usually follow one or more of the English versions, as noted. Translations of other sources are my own unless otherwise stated. Hebrew transliteration generally follows a popular format, for example, Hebrew *shin* is rendered *sh* and not *š*, vowel length is not indicated (*ḥam* and not *ḥām; kush* and not *kúsh*), nor are reduced vowels (*shaḥarut,* not *shaḥᵃrut*), nor doubled consonants and initial *alef* (*afriqiyim* and not *ʾafriqiyyim*). But when the discussion moves to philological issues these indications are preserved and a modified system of scientific transliteration of the consonants is adopted (*ʾ, b* or *v, g, d, h, w, z, ḥ, ṭ, y, k* or *kh, l, m, n, s, ʿ, p* or *f, ṣ, q, r, š, ś, t* or *th*). Arabic transliteration follows standard practice, and vowel lengthening and doubled consonants are shown. Syriac transliteration generally is shown without vowels. Other languages follow standard rules for those languages. Egyptian and Epigraphic Hebrew do not indicate vocalization, and when transliterating such texts, depending on the context, vowels may or may not be supplied: for example, *Kš* (*Кзš*) or *Kuš* for Kush. Spellings of biblical names differ from English Bible translations only in having *k* and not *c* represent Hebrew *kaf;* thus Kush, Sabteka. Names not generally found in the Bible are transliterated (Yoḥanan, not Johanan), unless the names are commonly found in English, in which case the familiar spelling is used (Akiba, not ʿAkiva or Akiva).