

Overcoming Dichotomies

Parables, Fables, and Similes
in the Graeco-Roman World

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Finding a Treasure

The Treasure Motif in Jewish, Christian, and Graeco-Roman Narratives in the Context of Rabbinic Halakhah and Roman Law

CATHERINE HEZSER

The motif of finding a treasure appears in parables in the Gospels of Matthew and Thomas as well as in rabbinic parables and stories. Finding a treasure or jewellery seems to be a stock motif in ancient Jewish and Christian sources of diverse literary forms. In the respective literary contexts, the motif is expanded and used for a variety of purposes. The focus is usually on the finder's reaction and its moral and theological implications. In ancient Jewish society, finding a valuable object or money would have been considered a divine blessing. At the same time, the proper handling of a find, that is, whether it had to be announced publicly and who had ownership rights, was regulated by both rabbinic halakhah and Roman law. An investigation of the legal rules concerning finds can indicate which of the reactions and behaviours mentioned in the parables and stories can be considered transgressive and/or morally improper. The meaning of the literary texts can be understood properly only if the social reality and the legal issues concerning finds are taken into account.

In the following, I shall first examine the treasure parable in its literary context in Matthew before comparing it with other Jewish and Christian parables, fables, and stories in which the treasure motif plays an important role. This comparison will indicate the variant ways in which the treasure motif was used to express different theological and ethical values and concerns. The literary, discursive role of the treasure motif functioned in a much wider socio-economic context in which the hope for – and actual reality of – finding hidden valuables was a phenomenon that also found repercussions in rabbinic and Roman law. Although we cannot know for certain whether and to what extent the tradents and editors of the narratives were familiar with particular legal rules, the legal discussions enable us to pay attention to specific details of the texts that seem to have been relevant in connection with such finds. Archaeological evidence of hidden hoards provides a historical basis to the otherwise fanciful fairytale motif of the narratives.

I would like to thank Jonathan Pater, Martijn Stoutjesdijk, and Albertina Oegema for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this text.

A. The Treasure Parable in Matthew 13:44

The Gospel of Matthew transmits the following parable:

The kingdom of the heavens (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) is like a treasure (θησαυρῶ) hidden in the field, which a person found and hid. And in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.¹ (Matt 13:44)

Since the parable appears in Matthew only, without any analogies in the other Synoptic Gospels, it probably belonged to Matthew's *Sondergut*, the traditions that were available only to the editor(s) of this Gospel.² In its literary context, the parable is followed by two other short parables that share some of the elements with it:

Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a merchant, who was searching for beautiful pearls. When he had found a precious pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matt 13:45–46)

Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a fishnet that was thrown into the sea and brought together [fish] of various types. When it had filled up, they drew it to the beach and sat down selecting the good ones into vessels but throwing away the mouldy ones. (Matt 13:47–48)

The following eschatological explanation (13:49–50: “So shall it be at the end of times [ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος]: the angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from the righteous. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”) with its threat of a judgement of the wicked, relates to the second part of the third parable only. The use of different terminology here, such as “the end of times” instead of “the kingdom of the heavens,” suggests that the parable and the application (nimshal) were not formulated by the same person. The three parables' parallelisms (all three begin with “the kingdom of the heavens is like”; in the first and second parable the finder sells his entire property to purchase the newly found treasure/pearl)

¹ For prior studies of the treasure parable, see, e. g., D. Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesu*, vol. 1, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisse*, JudChr 4 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 130–132; C. L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 279–282; J. Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 171–174; J. Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus: Parable, Aphorism and Metaphor in the Sayings Material* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 225–243; J. D. Crossan, *Finding Is the First Act: Trove Folktales and Jesus' Treasure Parable* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

² M. Köhnlein, *Gleichnisse Jesu: Visionen einer besseren Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999), 264, has suggested that the parable might reflect the special situation of Matthew's community at the end of the first century CE. Hiding the “treasure” of one's Christian belief from relatives and neighbours might have been necessitated by the persecution of Christians. The parable does not contain any notion of danger or threat to the finder, however. The threat of persecution by the Roman authorities would have applied to Christians elsewhere as well. Therefore this interpretation is not persuasive.

indicate that they were transmitted together, either at an oral or written (parable collection?) pre-editorial stage. While the first and second parables seem like variant versions of the same theme (someone finds something exceedingly precious and sells his entire property to get it), a phenomenon that is also common in rabbinic texts, the third parable has a different focus (selection rather than a find) and shares only its relation to “the kingdom of the heavens” with the preceding ones.³

Since all three parables make perfect sense without the reference to “the kingdom of the heavens,” and since their combinations of images do not provide immediately obvious analogies to this theological concept, their use to elucidate the kingdom of the heavens seems to have been superimposed on them at some stage. In the treasure parable (Matt 13:44) it remains unclear whether the kingdom of the heavens should be compared to the treasure itself or to the joy and readiness to give up everything with which the finder reacts to the discovery.⁴ Only the attachment of the second parable, which compares the kingdom to the merchant and repeats the finder’s reaction in the same words, seems to support the second option. While sharing the concept of the kingdom with the two preceding parables, the third parable shifts the focus to an entirely different aspect of eschatology, the judgment of individuals in the world to come.

The term “the kingdom of the heavens” appears thirty-three times in the Gospel of Matthew, in almost every chapter from 3:2 onwards, where John the Baptist calls for repentance due to its immediacy. In Matt 13 alone “the kingdom of the heavens” is mentioned eight times (13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52) and seven of these references are parables. The disciples’ alleged knowledge of “the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens” (13:11), which ordinary people can perceive in parables only (cf. Mark 4:11), introduces this series of kingdom-parables which are quite diverse in their imagery and meaning. The images are taken from various areas of daily life: agriculture (13:24, 31, 44), bakery (13:33), trade (13:45), fishing (13:47), and household (13:52). Together, they were probably meant to elucidate various aspects of “the kingdom of the heavens” Jesus’s followers believed in. The term “the kingdom of the heavens” does not appear in Luke (who, like Mark and the Saying Source Q, uses the term “kingdom of God”) and seems to be a Hebraized Greek form, the plural being based on the Hebrew plural שמים.

Whereas Luke shares with Matthew the reference to the “mysteries of the kingdom” that are available to the disciples only, while others are taught in parables (see Luke 8:10), an idea found in Mark already (4:11), this Gospel lacks

³ Parallel formulations appear in various literary forms such as case and example stories, see C. Hezser, *Form, Function, and Historical Significance of the Rabbinic Story in Yerushalmi Neziqin* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 271–278.

⁴ On this uncertainty, see also Köhnlein, *Gleichnisse Jesu*, 263.

the kingdom-parables of Matt 13 with the exception of two, the parable of the Mustard Seed (Luke 13:18–19, cf. Matt 13:31–32; Q 13:18–19) and the parable of the Leaven (Luke 13:20–21, cf. Matt 13:33; Q 13:20–21).⁵ This difference indicates that the editor(s) of Matthew’s Gospel had a particular interest in explaining “the kingdom of the heavens” by means of kingdom-parables.⁶ Perhaps they even added the term to parables that could have been told without it. In the present form of the parables, “the kingdom of the heavens” is the *nimshal*, that is, the application of the seven parables in Matt 13. The Sayings Source Q already indicates that “the kingdom of God” (or “the heavens”), a term that may have been used by John the Baptist and/or Jesus already, was an elusive and difficult to understand concept.⁷ Is it believed to be already present or expected of the (near) future? Is it an internal or external phenomenon (cf. Q 17:20–21)? In the first century CE, when political sovereignty belonged to the Roman emperor, Jews and (Jewish) Christians who posited a distinct “kingdom of the heavens” would have had to explain its spiritual character and lack of political implications.

When focusing on the situation described in the treasure parable in Matt 13:44, the finder’s action seems morally offensive. Someone finds a valuable object in a field that belongs to someone else, hides it so that the owner of the field is unable to detect it, and then goes and buys the field from him at a price that does not take the hidden treasure into account. From a moral point of view one might consider such behaviour egoistic and fraudulent. By not announcing the find, the owner of the field and the original owner – the two may or may not be identical – are left in the dark about its discovery. This moral dilemma is extenuated if one takes the other details of the parable into account, namely, the finder’s extraordinary effort to get hold of the treasure by selling his entire property to purchase the field.⁸

This behaviour constitutes the unusual element of the parable, since such an effort is unlikely to have happened in the real world. A thief would have stolen the treasure without purchasing the field. A Torah-observant Jew may have an-

⁵ On Luke’s version of the Q parables, see C. Heil, *Lukas und Q: Studien zur lukanischen Redaktion des Spruchevangeliums Q* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 46–49.

⁶ On Matthew’s focus on “the kingdom of the heavens” in chapter 13, see also J. P. Heil, *The Gospel of Matthew: Worship in the Kingdom of Heaven* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 61–62; H. Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 31–34. Clarke notes that this is “a concept almost completely absent from the Hebrew scriptures” (31). The meaning of this concept is “bewildering,” referring to “a new order of things” (32).

⁷ Liebenberg, *Language of the Kingdom*, 17, refers to C. H. Dodd’s association of the kingdom with Jesus’s alleged eschatological teaching. Whether the term relates to a “realized eschatology,” as Dodd assumed, the belief that messianic times were imminent, or some other type of eschatology is disputed and uncertain, though, see the other scholarly approaches to the kingdom discussed in Liebenberg, *Language of the Kingdom*, 5–47.

⁸ See also Liebenberg, *Language of the Kingdom*, 231.

nounced the find (see below). The finder of this parable, however, recognized such value in the find that he left moral scruples aside and invested everything he owned to get hold of it. The focus of the parable therefore lies on the value of the find, a value that is hidden and known to the finder only, for which he is willing to sacrifice everything else. For Matthew, “the kingdom of the heavens” constituted such a value and required such sacrifice from its believers.

If the parable was told at an earlier oral stage without the reference to the kingdom of heaven, the value for which everything is given up could signify the Torah.⁹ One might ask, however, why the Torah should be hidden before others. Torah sages would be interested in propagating its study. The hiding of the treasure once it has been found (Matt 13:44) serves to delimit knowledge about it and to safeguard it for the finder’s and his constituency’s own use. As in the case of the merchant, who finds and purchases a particularly precious pearl (13:45–46), we are not told what the finder does with his treasure. The emphasis is on obtaining it.

The aspect of secrecy, of knowledge that is hidden and available to a few only, is a motif that also appears elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁰ According to Matt 11:25, Jesus said that God had “hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants” only. In another parable, “the kingdom of the heavens” is likened to leaven that a woman hid in her dough (Matt 13:33, cf. Luke 13:20–21). Referring to the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, France writes: “The truth about the kingdom of the heavens is not only inconspicuous; it is also deliberately kept hidden for the time being.”¹¹ In this regard, the kingdom as the quintessence of early Christian beliefs, as far as the editors of Matthew’s Gospel are concerned, differed from the ancestral tradition of the Torah whose contents were meant to be known by and disseminated amongst Jews.

The very fact that the parable does not specify any use of the treasure suggests that it was concerned with its identification and safeguarding only. The narrative plot is not realistic but metaphorical, pointing to the hidden value of Jesus’s alleged message. In contrast to Mark (cf. 4:22: “For there is nothing hidden, except that it should be made known; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light”), the editor(s) of Matthew seem to have been particularly interested in stating that the kingdom was known to a few (Jewish) Christians only, who are explicitly distinguished from the wise, that is, from Pharisees and rabbis.¹² Perhaps this motif served to explain and legitimize the phenomenon

⁹ See, e. g., b. Shab. 88b: in a statement attributed to R. Yehoshua b. Levi, the Torah is compared to “the secret treasure which has been hidden” by God before the world was created to eventually reveal it to Moses. Elsewhere (b. Shab. 10b) the Sabbath is presented as a gift that God gave to Moses.

¹⁰ See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 527.

¹¹ France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 527.

¹² The so-called secrecy motif in Mark, that is, Jesus’s admonition to keep his healing and exorcistic powers secret, is different from Matthew’s insistence on the hiddenness of the king-

that few contemporary Jews, and especially few learned Jews of the editors' own time, were interested in Jesus's teaching in general and in the message of the kingdom of the heavens in particular.

In Matt 13:51–52, a passage that is found in this Gospel only, a short dialogue between Jesus and the disciples is attached to the parables. After asking them whether they had understood the parables' message, Jesus allegedly told his disciples: "Therefore, every scribe (γραμματεὺς) who has become a disciple of the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings out of his treasury (θησαυροῦ) new and old things" (13:52). While the broader notion of treasures is shared with the treasure parable in Matt 13:44, the specific type – hidden valuables versus a private storage room for valuables – and meaning are different. In association with the scribe, the "treasury" clearly relates to his expertise in religiously relevant knowledge here.¹³ No one within Jesus's close circle of disciples is ever identified as a scribe.¹⁴ A scribe sympathetic to Jesus's message is mentioned in Matt 8:19. Such a scribe of "the kingdom of the heavens" is expected to express both traditional and new types of wisdom. The editor(s) of the Gospel themselves probably stemmed from such circles and identified with this learned "disciple of the kingdom of the heavens" here.¹⁵

dom of the heavens. J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 63–64, associates Mark's secrecy motif with the alleged "messianic self-consciousness" of Jesus.

¹³ Scribes were always professional writers in antiquity. Jewish scribes could be scribes of Torah scrolls, who also sometimes worked as children's teachers, or scribes of documents, see C. Hezser, "Scribes/Scribality," in *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media*, ed. T. Thatcher et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 355–359. The former is more likely for the scribe mentioned in Matt 13:52.

¹⁴ Against G. R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 544, who writes in relation to Matt 13:52: "The parable proper likens the disciples as kingdom scribes to a homeowner with a storeroom ..." For the common identification of Jesus's disciples with the scribe, see also D. E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal*, JSNTSup 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989; repr. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 160. Orton believes that the disciples are presented as "apocalyptic" scribes here, see Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 137–148; J. Doles, *The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth: Keys to the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew* (Seffner: Walking Barefoot Ministries, 2009), 107, who assumes that the disciples "already had an understanding about God's purposes in the Old Testament."

¹⁵ See also J. Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 154, who writes in relation to Matt 13:52: "This sounds distinctly self-referential and would lead us to think of it as the signature of the author of the gospel." See also the discussion in A. O. Ewherido, *Matthew's Gospel and Judaism in the Late First Century C.E.: The Evidence from Matthew's Chapter on Parables (Matthew 13:1–52)*, StBibLit 91 (New York: Lang, 2006), 176–177.

B. Comparison with the Treasure Parable in the Gospel of Thomas

A more detailed version of the treasure parable is transmitted in the Gospel of Thomas:

Jesus says: The kingdom is like a person who has a hidden treasure in his field, [of which] he knows nothing. And [after] he had died, he left it to his [son]. (But) the son did not know (about it either). He took over that field (and) sold [it]. And the one who had bought it came, and while he was ploughing [he found] the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whom he wished. (Gos. Thom. 109.1–3)¹⁶

This version is more detailed and realistic, at least as far as human behaviour is concerned, than Matthew's version of the parable.¹⁷ A farmer leaves his field to his son when he dies and the son sells it. By chance, the new owner finds a treasure buried in the earth, of which the former owners were not aware. He uses the treasure to make an even larger profit by lending money on interest to others – in contradiction to Gos. Thom. 95.1–2, where lending money on interest is prohibited. Here the aspect of concealing the treasure after its discovery is absent. Also absent is the reference to the finder's joy and his readiness to give up everything to get hold of the treasure. In this version the transfer of the field from one owner to the next is conducted as an ordinary sales transaction. The purchaser's awareness of a hidden treasure is not mentioned at this stage. The morally questionable aspect of this parable is the finder's use of the treasure to exploit others. This stands in line with the Gospel of Thomas's renunciation of wealth (cf. Gos. Thom. 110).¹⁸

In the context of the Gospel of Thomas it is probably the general lack of knowledge of the treasure that is used as a metaphor for the heavenly kingdom.

¹⁶ Translation of the Berlin Working Group for Coptic Gnostic Writings, available at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/thomas-fifth.html>. The translation also appears in H. G. Bethge, S. J. Patterson, and J. M. Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 31.

¹⁷ The Gospel of Thomas is usually considered to have been created later than the Synoptic Gospels, see N. Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron*, AcBib 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), who suggests that the Gospel of Thomas is dependent on the second-century CE Syriac Diatessaron. S. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) maintains that the Gospel of Thomas was influenced by the Gospels and written in Greek. See also M. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): "Thomas is worth reading as Thomas, as a brilliant attempt to re-create Jesus' words in its own voice, drawing on the Synoptics but transcending them by providing new twists on the old sayings, and adding many more from its own, secret treasure chest" (194).

¹⁸ Jonathan Pater has suggested that the finder of the treasure might be an example of the "immoral hero" here, cf. Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 592–595. There is no indication that his action was meant to serve as an example to emulate, however, especially since lending on interest is condemned by the Gospel-writer.

Kvalbein writes: “There can be no doubt that the kingdom here is compared to the hidden treasure, and that the hearer is encouraged to ‘know’ where it is and to ‘find’ it.”¹⁹ None of the three characters actually fulfills this task – the original owners are not aware of it and the new owner uses it for egoistic purposes – and therefore the true destiny of the treasure/kingdom is spoiled. The parable can therefore serve as a warning to the Gospel of Thomas’s audience: they need to be expectant of the kingdom and actively look out for it.²⁰ Only knowledge (*gnosis*) of the treasure’s/kingdom’s existence can ensure its proper treatment.

Interestingly, it is “Pharisees and scribes” who are said to have “received the keys of knowledge, (but) they have hidden them” (39:1). The Gospel of Thomas lacks the Synoptic Gospels’ polemics against learned Jews.²¹ Based on the similarities between the treasure parable and a parable in the late rabbinic Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah (see below), Davies writes: “It is interesting, and probably significant, that the parable which appears in Thomas shows evidence of having circulated in a rabbinic milieu.”²² There is no reason to assume, however, that the very version of the parable that appears in the Gospel of Thomas “circulated in rabbinic circles,” was based on a rabbinic parable, or was known to rabbis. Rather, the various versions of the treasure parable in Matthew, the Gospel of Thomas, and rabbinic literature indicate that the motif of discovering a treasure could be used in different ways by different storytellers to convey a variety of meanings.

C. Comparison with Early Jewish Treasure Parables and Stories

I. The Hebrew Bible

Even in its broader meaning and different configurations the treasure motif – valuables that are hidden or stored away – does not feature prominently in the Hebrew Bible. In the Joseph story in Gen 43, Joseph’s brothers find an unexpected amount of money in their sacks when they come to visit Joseph in Egypt.

¹⁹ H. Kvalbein, “The Kingdom of the Father in the Gospel of Thomas,” in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, ed. J. Fotopoulos (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 221.

²⁰ At the very beginning of the Gospel of Thomas the text of the Gospel is identified as “the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said: ‘Whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death’” (1–2:1). Thus, the Gospel of Thomas presents itself as the guide to find the treasure/kingdom.

²¹ The only other reference to Pharisees is Gos. Thom. 109, where Pharisees are compared to “a dog sleeping in a cattle trough, for it neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat.” The image suggests that the author considered them rather ineffective; Gos. Thom. 39 points into a similar direction.

²² S. L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 2nd ed. (Oregon House, CA: Bardic Press, 2005), 11.

They fear that this could be held against them, that they could be considered thieves. Joseph's servant alleviates their anxiety, however, by explaining: "Your God and the God of your father has given you a treasure (מטמון) in your sacks" (Gen 43:23), that is, the additional money is presented as a divine blessing here. In Deut 28:12 the heavens are called God's "good treasury" (אוצרו הטוב): rainfall will bring prosperity so that the Israelites will be able to "lend to many nations; and you shall not borrow." According to Isa 33:6, "the fear of the Lord is his [i. e., Zion's] treasure" (יראת יהוה היא אוצרו). The saying in Prov 15:6 associates wealth with the righteous: "In the house of the righteous there is much possession (חסן), but in the income of the wicked there is trouble." In the Hebrew Bible, obtaining an (unexpected) treasure is considered the outcome of God's blessing, which is given to the righteous in acknowledgment of their obedience to God's will. Under normal circumstances, however, the possession of unexplained money is considered illegitimate. Detection and punishment are feared.

II. Philo of Alexandria

In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, the *Bildfeld* (field of images) of the treasure, both in the sense of the hidden treasure and of treasure-houses opened by God for the virtuous, appears frequently in Philo of Alexandria's writings. Certain similarities with Matthew suggest that both writers drew from a wider Hellenistic Jewish tradition in which treasure motifs were commonly used and associated with certain types of knowledge that had to be "treasured," that is, valued and kept safe. In this context I can merely present a few examples of Philo's use of this field of images.

In his *Legum allegoriae* Philo contrasts God's treasuries of good things with the storehouses of evil things (*Leg.* 3.34.104–105). While God opens his treasuries for those who live virtuously, his storehouses of evil things are sealed, that is, he refrains from immediate vengeance against the sinners to give them time for repentance (*Leg.* 3.34.106). A similar use is evident in *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, where Divine blessings are said to be stored up in heavenly treasuries to be bestowed upon those who live virtuous lives (*Sacr.* 5.20–23). Virtues are also associated with "treasures" in his tractate *De virtutibus*, where they are presented as accessible to everyone who seeks them (*Virt.* 2.5–6).

Interestingly, in *De cherubim* Philo suggests that sacred mysteries should be guarded like a "treasure," to prevent their seizure by the uninitiated:

Now I bid you, initiated men, who are purified, as to your ears, to receive these things, as mysteries which are really sacred, in your inmost souls; and reveal them not to anyone who is of the number of the uninitiated, but guard them as a sacred treasure, laying them up in your own hearts, not in a storehouse in which are gold and silver, perishable substances, but in that treasure-house in which the most excellent of all the possessions in the world does lie, the knowledge namely of the great

first Cause, and of virtue, and in the third place, of the generation of them both.²³ (Philo, *Cher.* 14.48)

The “initiated” and “purified” shall safeguard the “mysteries” in their souls and hearts and prevent the uninitiated from gaining access to them. These “treasures,” identified as a particular type of “knowledge,” are meant to be kept safe in a treasure-house or -store. Thus, two different images of the *Bildfeld* of the treasure are used together here. Like the Matthean parable discussed above (Matt 13:44), Philo emphasizes the need to protect the “treasure” for the benefit of a circumscribed set of people only. In both cases the actual type of knowledge represented by the “treasure” remains undefined: “the kingdom of the heavens” in Matthew and the “sacred mysteries” (knowledge of the creator God and of the virtues) in Philo’s case.²⁴

Philo also uses a treasure parable to elucidate his understanding of Scripture. For example, in his treatise, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis*, he refers to “a husbandman, whom some persons say, while digging a hole for the purpose of planting some fruit-bearing tree, found a treasure, meeting with good fortune which he had never hoped for” (*Deus* 20.91).²⁵ The farmer is likened to Jacob, “when his father asked him the manner in which he had acquired this knowledge, saying, ‘How did you find this so quickly, my son?’, answered and said, ‘Because the Lord my God brought it before me’” (*Deus* 92). Again, a special type of knowledge, available to an individual only, is likened to a found treasure here. Philo goes on to explain that the found “treasure” refers to knowledge that is revealed by God to those he chooses, without the need to study (“without any toil or labour”) to gain access to it (*Deus* 92). In fact, “it often happens to those who seek with great labour, that they miss that for which they are seeking; while others, who are seeking without any diligence, find with great ease even things that they never thought of finding” (*Deus* 93). If the editors of Matthew’s Gospel were familiar with such arguments, they might have used them to distinguish their own group of (Jewish-)Christians, who claimed the “treasure” of knowledge of “the kingdom of the heavens” for themselves, from Pharisees who “toiled” in the study of the Torah instead.

Philo associates the origins of the found treasure and the possession of the treasure house with God. It is God who enables an individual to find a treasure and who opens his treasuries to those humans whom he finds worthy of benefiting from them. In the treatise *De vita Mosis* Philo states: “God possesses everything and is in need of nothing; but the good man has nothing which is properly his own, no, not even himself, but he has a share granted to him of the

²³ Translation with C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus: On the Cherubim* (London: Bohn, 1854–1890), available at <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book5.html>.

²⁴ See also Philo, *Post.* 17.62, with reference to the “treasure-house of the memorials of knowledge and wisdom.”

²⁵ Translation with Yonge at <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book10.html>.

treasures of God as far as he is able to partake of them” (*Mos.* 1.28.157). Only the good and virtuous person can become the beneficiary of God’s treasures. The prospect of being granted access to treasures serves to motivate a virtuous – and ultimately Torah-obedient – life. By contrast, those who “treasure” money, gold, and silver in this world are associated with idolaters who worship other gods (cf. *Spec.* 1.4.23; 2.19.92: governors of cities who “fill their own stores with money ... preserving as a treasure the illiberal vices which defile their whole lives”).²⁶

Philo’s use of treasure metaphors was probably based on the phenomenon that the *Bildfeld* of the treasure was well-established in the Graeco-Roman world and familiar to him from the Hellenistic philosophical environment in which he wrote.²⁷ A similar repertoire would have been available to Paul (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). Treasure metaphors, parables, similes, and epigrams appear in various contexts in Hellenistic philosophical writings. For example, Diogenes Laertius tells of a person who found a hidden treasure of gold, took it, and left a valueless object in its place. When the owner came to recover his valuable possession and noticed that it was gone, he killed himself (*Vitae* 3.23, associated with Plato). Epictetus admonishes his audience to “make our religion and our treasure to consist in the same thing,” to prevent the concern for wealth and possessions to take overhand (*Disc.* 1.27). Treasure motifs also appeared in ancient fables, as the examples below indicate.

III. Tannaitic Midrashim

A treasure parable appears in *Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah* on Exod 14:5. This parable has already been translated, discussed, and compared with later versions by Lieve Teugels in her recent edition of the parables in this collection.²⁸ The parable is attributed to R. Shimon b. Yohai:

They tell this parable: to what is the matter similar? To someone to whom there has fallen a residence overseas as an inheritance and he sold it for a small amount. The buyer went and found in it treasures and stores of silver and gold, of precious stones and pearls. The seller began to choke. (*Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah* on Exod 14:5)²⁹

²⁶ See also Philo, *Prob.* 12.76.

²⁷ On Philo’s complex relationship to Stoicism, see M. R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 225–244.

²⁸ L. M. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhilot: An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*, TSAJ 176 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 134–142, see chapter 8 “The Cheaply Sold Field & the Cheaply Sold Residence.”

²⁹ Translation with Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhilot*, 135. The version in *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai* is almost identical, except for lacking the reference to “treasures” and listing “stores of silver, gold, and precious stones and pearls” instead. Like Philo, the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* version of the parable indicates that the images of the “treasure” and “treasury” (i. e., treasure houses or storage rooms filled with treasures) could easily be combined by narrators who made use of the *Bildfeld*.

In the context of the Mekhilta the seller is likened to the Egyptians, who regretted the Israelites' escape from servitude *post factum*, when they were unable to prevent it (Exod 14:5). From this perspective, the focus would be on the seller's loss of a property he never valued sufficiently ("he sold it for a small amount"). Yet the connection between the parable and the biblical verse is not straightforward. Whereas the seller of the parable would have been unaware of the treasures located within his inherited residence (why else would he have sold it at a low price?), the Egyptians had profited from the Israelites' labour for a considerable amount of time already. Furthermore, the seller merely despairs, whereas Pharaoh is said to have taken action. These inconsistencies suggest that the parable was not formulated for the midrashic context of biblical exegesis but circulated independently at an earlier, probably oral stage.

In its display of the buyer's luck and seller's misfortune the parable resembles the treasure parable in the Gospel of Thomas to some extent. Also shared is the notion that the seller had inherited the property that contained the valuable find. Whereas the parable in the Gospel of Thomas stresses the reaction of the buyer of the field and finder of the treasure, however, the Mekhilta parable is concerned with the seller's regret only. The buyer's reaction is not mentioned.³⁰ Both parables may have served as reminders to be aware of the "treasures" one already possesses, to value and protect them. Such a function would presume that the respective audiences identified with the sellers of the properties who lost valuable possessions they had no knowledge of. The call for greater awareness for the value of the Torah (Mekhilta parable) or the "kingdom" (Gospel of Thomas) would then be the shared purpose of these variant versions of treasure parables. Other versions in later Midrashim are discussed below.

IV. Amoraic Midrashim

As far as Amoraic Midrashim are concerned, images from the *Bildfeld* of the treasure, both in the sense of finding a treasure and partaking of items from a treasury, appear in Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah. The idea of a divine reward for good deeds is associated with workers allowed to enter the king's treasury in a king parable in Gen. Rab. 9:9. The parable is used to illustrate the difference between Gan Eden and Gehenna. This is likened "to a king who had an orchard, and he brought workers into it, and he built a treasury (אוצר)

³⁰ In the Mekhilta the treasure parable follows another parable about someone who had inherited a field and sold it for a small amount. This parable stresses the buyer's use of the field: "The buyer went and opened up wells in it, and planted gardens, trees and orchards" (translation from Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 134). The buyer's fortune is not based on the unexpected find of a treasure here but on his own hard work in cultivating the field. The reaction of the seller is told in similar terms as in the other parable: "The seller began [to choke]," i. e., his regret is stressed here as well.

at its entrance. He said: He who dedicates himself to the work of the orchard may enter the treasury; and he who does not dedicate himself to the work of the orchard may not enter the treasury.” The parable emphasizes the common rabbinic notion that Torah observance will be rewarded by God (cf. Deut 28:12: “The Lord will open for you his good treasury ...”).

This notion is extended to the support of sages in a treasure story in Lev. Rab. 5:4.³¹ According to this story, three tannaim of the first generation went to Antioch to collect money in support of sages. They visited a certain Abba Yudan, who used to be generous to them in the past. Now he had become impoverished, however, and ashamed of his inability to make a donation. His wife suggests that he should sell half of his field and give the proceeds to sages. After having received the money, rabbis tell him that God will make up for his loss. And this is what allegedly happened: “He went out to plough. When he was ploughing half of his [former] field, God enlightened his eyes, and the earth burst open before him, and his cow fell, and [its leg] was broken. He went to help her up and found a treasure (סימא) underneath.”³² When rabbis return to his town and ask how he is doing, they learn that he has become wealthy. He considers his wealth the consequence of rabbis’ prayer on his behalf. Rabbis tell him that despite his relatively small donation, they enlisted him first amongst the donors. Then “they made him sit next to themselves” and recite Prov 18:6 over him. This story extends the rabbinic notion of finding a treasure, that is, unexpected wealth as a reward for Torah obedience, to non-rabbinic Jews who support sages with their charitable donations.

A midrash in Lev. Rab. 2:11 shares the reference to “new and old” with Matthew’s discourse between Jesus and his disciples (Matt 13:51–52). As part of this discourse a treasure parable was cited: “Therefore, every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings out of his treasure new and old things” (Matt 13:52). A combination between “new and old” (in this sequence) and a “treasure” also appears in Lev. Rab. 2:11, in a passage that is meant to elucidate the term צפונה in Lev 1:11 (“And he shall kill it [the ram] צפונה before the Lord.”). In the first explanation, the expression is associated with the Binding of Isaac in the book of Genesis. Whether the term is already interpreted as derived from צפן, “to hide,” meaning “hidden” or “treasured” here, is uncertain but possible, that is, the memory of the Binding of Isaac is “treasured up before God.” In the following alternative interpretation this derivation is obvious:

“צפונה before the Lord” refers to the deed[s] of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are treasured up (צפונים) before Him. And from where [do we know] that this word means the laying up of a treasure (צפונה)? Since it is said: “New and old things have I laid up

³¹ The story has a parallel in y. Hor. 3:6(7), 48a.

³² The Yerushalmi version lacks the miraculous element of the earth bursting open. This element is unnecessary in the story and does not fit in very well with the cow episode.

as a treasure (צפנתִי) before you” (Song 7:14). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are [meant by] the “old ones,” Amram, son of Kohat and all the worthy ones who were in Egypt are [meant by] the “new ones,” as it is said: “New and old ...” (ibid.). [Alternatively], the company of Moses, and the company of Joshua, and the company of David and of Hezekiah are [meant by] the “old ones,” [while] the company of Ezra, and of Hillel, and of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, and of R. Meir and his colleagues are [meant by] the “new ones,” and it is of them that [Scripture] says: “New and old have I laid up as a treasure before you, O beloved.” (Lev. Rab. 2:11)

When referring to “new and old things” Matthew may have been aware of the verse in Song 7:11, which refers to new and old delicacies (כל־מגדים חדשים גם־ישנים) that the beloved (commonly associated with Israel) has preserved (צפנתִי) for her lover (commonly associated with God). The midrashic text indicates that various different interpretations and keyword associations with other biblical verses circulated among rabbis. While Matthew compares the “scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of the heavens” to a householder who extracts from his treasury (that is, from his storage room of valuable things) old and new things, the midrash identifies various sages of the first generation of tannaim, that is, probably contemporaries of the editor(s) of the Gospel, with the new items of the treasury that are presented before God together with the old ones, that is, biblical figures of the past.

Palestinian rabbis of the first centuries CE would have been aware of the Christian self-identification with everything “new,” whether the new covenant, new Israel, new sacrifice, or new “scribes of the kingdom of the heavens” who present new teachings and interpretations. As Peter Schäfer has already pointed out: “The Jewish sect triggered by Jesus in Palestine would eventually evolve into a religion of its own, a religion to boot that would claim to have superseded its mother religion and position itself as the new covenant against the old ...”; rabbis, on the other hand, “refused to accept the new covenant” and “insisted on the fact that ... the old covenant was still valid.”³³ In Lev. Rab. 2:11 prominent tannaitic rabbis are presented as the “new ones” that were treasured and beloved by God, together with their ancestral forefathers. Such pronouncements would have been an indirect affront to (Jewish-)Christian scribes like those mentioned in Matthew, who held up their new scriptural interpretations and belief in “the kingdom of the heavens” against them.

V. Post-Talmudic Midrashim

In the past, New Testament scholars have mainly compared the treasure parable in the Gospel of Thomas (above) with a parable in Song of Songs Rabbah.³⁴ It

³³ P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2, 80–81, 92.

³⁴ See Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 10, with references.

must be noted, however, that in their present form both Song of Songs Rabbah and Exodus Rabbah, where another treasure parable is transmitted, are post-talmudic, medieval Midrash collections that are commonly dated to the tenth to twelfth centuries CE.³⁵ Although the parables may be based on earlier traditions (the parable in Song of Songs Rabbah seems to be a later parallel to the Mekhilta parable discussed above), the text versions that are transmitted in these late compilations could not have preceded – or circulated at the same time as – those that are found in Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. Therefore Joachim Jeremias's suggestion that the version of the treasure parable in the Gospel of Thomas was created "under the influence of the rabbinic story" is not persuasive, even if the Mekhilta parable is concerned.³⁶ Similarly problematic is Davies's claim "that the parable which appears in Thomas shows evidence of having circulated in a rabbinic milieu."³⁷ Rather than assuming that direct influence existed, images associated with the *Bildfeld* of the treasure seem to have been used in partly similar and partly different ways in both Christian and Jewish circles in ancient and medieval times.³⁸ Some of the rabbinic uses of the treasure motif could resemble the one transmitted in the Gospel of Thomas, but a direct dependence is unlikely to have existed in either case.

Song of Songs Rabbah 4:25 transmits the following later version of the treasure parable that is already attributed to the tannaitic rabbi R. Shimon b. Yohai in Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah on Exod 14:5 (see above):

[The matter can be compared] to someone who received as an inheritance a place [used as] a garbage dump. And the heir was lazy, and he went and sold it for a small amount [of money]. And the buyer went and was industrious and dug up [the earth] and found in it a treasure (אוצר). And he built with it a large palace. The buyer began walking around in the market place and slaves walked behind him, [all] from the treasure that he acquired with it. [When] the seller saw [it], he began to choke and said: "Behold, what have I lost!" (Song Rab. 4:25)

³⁵ Midrash Exodus Rabbah is generally assumed to have been created in the tenth to twelfth centuries, see already H. L. Strack, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrash*, 6th ed. (Munich: Beck, 1976), 208. See also B. Lawrence, *Jethro and the Jews: Jewish Biblical Interpretation and the Question of Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 93 n 5, with reference to editions and translations. On the late date of Song of Songs Rabbah, see Strack, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrash*, 213; J. Neusner, "Rabbinic Judaism: Its History and Hermeneutics," in *Historical Syntheses*, vol. 2 of *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 165.

³⁶ J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 33.

³⁷ Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 11.

³⁸ On the term *Bildfeld* as a network of images/metaphors, see H. Weinrich, *Sprache in Texten* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 277–278, 282–288. Rather than focusing on individual metaphors such as the "treasure" in the parables at hand, one should examine and compare the use of all associations of a certain image in a certain literary text, see B. Debatin, *Die Rationalität der Metapher: Eine Sprachphilosophische und Kommunikationstheoretische Untersuchung*, GKK (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 174–175 (on Weinrich's approach). See also E. Rolf, *Metaphertheorien: Typologie, Darstellung, Bibliographie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 68–71.

The inherited “residence” of the Mekhilta version has been turned into a “garbage dump” here. The heir and seller of the property is derided by being called “lazy.” The buyer, on the other hand, about whom we learn nothing in the Mekhilta version, is turned into an industrious person. His diligence (he “dug up [the earth]”) leads to the treasure’s discovery. Furthermore, he is said to have built a palace and displayed his wealth in public. This public manifestation of the “garbage dump’s” potential constitutes the reason for the seller’s dismay (he “saw [it]”).

In contrast to the Mekhilta version, which focuses on the seller’s regret, the emphasis is on the buyer’s actions here. The buyer has become the hero of this parable, whereas the seller is presented as lazy and stupid. The buyer’s reward, namely, finding the treasure and using it for his own benefit and status within society, is therefore dutifully earned through his industrious work. The audience is invited to identify with the buyer and to ridicule the seller’s indolence and self-induced loss. The palace and servile entourage were status symbols that symbolized the buyer’s success.³⁹

The parable may have celebrated the “industriousness” of Torah study that will eventually be rewarded, whereas its neglect will cause loss and regret.⁴⁰ The emphasis on the public exhibition of the benefits derived from the treasure may point to a time when rabbis, who dedicated their time and energy to the “treasure” of the Torah, were highly respected leaders of local communities. Other passages in Song Rab. 1:17 point into the same direction: “Shimon b. Yohai taught: Just as a treasure (מַצְיָאָה) is not disclosed to everyone, so too the teaching of the Torah.” Here the Torah is clearly identified with the treasure. Only a select set of rabbinic scholars, who have gained their expertise through diligent study, are able to interpret it properly. The gist of the parable would then be that such scholarly expertise should be shown in public, to encourage others to follow the scholarly ideal.⁴¹

³⁹ On the practice of walking around in the market place, followed by one’s slaves, see C. Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity*, JSJSup 179 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 132.

⁴⁰ On this general idea, see also J. Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Song of Songs Rabbah* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 37: “Study of Torah is rewarded, and one must treasure teachings of Torah, for they afford access to the world to come.”

⁴¹ The identification of the Torah with the “treasure” and the idea that one’s religious “enlightenment” should be shown in public are made more explicit in medieval Jewish mysticism. See, e. g., the king parable in Sefer Habahir 72: “A king had a beautiful pearl, and it was the treasure of his kingdom. When he is happy, he embraces it, kisses it, places it on his head, and loves it.” The motifs of the “treasure” and “pearl” also feature in Hekhalot Rabbati and have a particular significance in the Zohar, where a “treasure” is mentioned twenty-four times. See, e. g., Bereshit, section 1, 91b (Soncino): “for the special treasure of God is deposited with the learned in the Torah”; Bereshit, section 1, 117b: “when you have reached the age of sixty years you are destined to find in this place a treasure of sublime wisdom”; Shemot, section 2, 54a: “the Torah, the most hidden treasure, shall be delivered into his hands to shake worlds both above and below”; Shemot, section 2, 174b: “setting before them the precious treasure of the Torah, which they neglect.”

What this version of the parable shares with the parable in the Gospel of Thomas is the original owner(s)' unawareness of the treasure and selling of the field. The major difference, however, is the positive image of the buyer in the rabbinic parable in contrast to the negative and morally deplorable action of the buyer in Thomas. The rabbinic storytellers do not criticize the buyer's use of the treasure to exhibit his wealth in public. On the contrary, they hold him up as an example of cleverness and hard work. The tradents of the parable in the Gospel of Thomas, on the other hand, clearly reject the lending on interest that results from the original owners' lack of awareness of the treasure in their field. The parable serves as a wake-up call to Thomas's audience, who are invited to identify with the seller. It reminds them to be mindful of the hidden treasure of the kingdom, lest it be misused and spoiled. The parables may be built on partly similar connections of images associated with the hidden treasure in the field, yet their emphasis, meanings, and functions in the larger literary contexts are entirely different.⁴²

The notion that treasures need to be guarded is expressed in a parable in Exod. Rab. 15:30:

[The matter may be compared] to a king who possesses treasuries (אוצרות) filled with gold and silver, precious stones and pearls. And he had a son. As long as the son was a child, his father guarded over everything. When the son had grown up and reached maturity, his father said to him: "As long as you were a child, I guarded over everything, but now that you have reached maturity, behold, I hand everything over to you." (Exod. Rab. 15:30)

In the context of the midrash, the king stands for God and the son for Israel, as is expressed in the following nimshal: "When Israel stood up [or: reached maturity], he handed everything over to them ..." Whereas the inheritance motif with the transfer of the property from father to son is shared with the parable in the Gospel of Thomas, the recognition of the value of the treasure and the emphasis on safeguarding it stand in stark contrast to the owners' unawareness of the treasure and sale of their field in the Christian parable. In the Gospel of Thomas the succession from father to son is relatively unimportant, whereas the late rabbinic parable focuses on their relationship: the father's gesture of entrusting his treasure to his son marks the latter's maturity and indicates his father's trust in him. The second part of the Christian parable (the new owner's find of the treasure) has no analogy in the rabbinic king parable. As in the case of the parable in Song Rab. 4:12, the selection and combination of images associated from the *Bildfeld* of the treasure could lead to partial overlaps while the focus and meaning are different.

⁴² For other later parallels the Mekhilta parable in Pesiq. Rav Kah. 11:7 and Exod. Rab. 20:5, see Teugels, *Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 140–146.

D. The Treasure Motif in Ancient Fables

Some scholars have pointed to similarities between parables and fables.⁴³ David Flusser emphasized “the affinities between the parables and the Aesop fable” and maintained that “the transition between these kindred *Gattungen* is evidently fluid.”⁴⁴ Similarities in subject matters become more obvious if one realizes that fables do not necessarily feature animals and inanimate objects as their main characters but also have human protagonists. Several fables deal with the finding, hiding, and guarding of treasures. As one of Aesop’s fables suggests, the opposite of neglecting a hidden treasure was the too frequent exposure of it:

There was a miser who sold his property and bought a lump of gold. The man then buried his gold just outside the city walls, where he constantly went to visit and inspect it. One of the workmen noticed the man’s behaviour and suspected the truth. Accordingly, after the man had gone away, he took the gold. When the man came back and found that the hiding place was empty, he began to cry and tear his hair. Someone saw the man’s extravagant grief and asked him what was wrong. Then he said to the man, “Enough of your grieving! Take a stone and put it where the gold was and make believe the gold is still there: it’s not as if you ever made any use of it!” (Gibbs 407; Perry 225)⁴⁵

The fable is critical of the safekeeping of valuables that are never used.⁴⁶ The rich man who delights in the mere existence of his wealth is contrasted with a simple labourer who had observed his behaviour and decided to take the gold, probably for his and his family’s benefit. The theft is not criticized here. On the contrary, the rich man’s loss is ridiculed. Obviously, the narrator’s sympathies were with the labourer who, as seems to be implied in the final sentence, would have made better use of the gold than its original owner.

A similar social-critical tendency is evident in another fable that features a dog rather than a human actor:

While digging up dead people’s bones, a dog uncovered a treasure. This outraged the spirits of the dead, and the dog was punished for his sacrilege by being stricken with a desire for wealth. Thus, while the dog stood there guarding the treasure, he took no thought for food and wasted away from starvation. A vulture perched above him is rumoured to have said, “O you dog, you deserve to die, since all of a sudden you began

⁴³ See, e. g., R. H. Stein, “The Genre of the Parables,” in *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 31.

⁴⁴ D. Flusser, “Aesop’s Miser and the Parable of the Talents,” in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist, 1989), 9.

⁴⁵ Translation with L. Gibbs, *Aesop’s Fables: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/225.htm>.

⁴⁶ See also T. Maccius Plautus, *Aulularia, or The Concealed Treasure*, ed. H. T. Riley (London: G. Bell & Sons), 1900), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0094>. The Athenian Euclio has discovered a pot of gold in his house and carefully watches over it. He hides his treasure at various places. Strobilus, the slave of Lyconides, watches him, discovers the treasure, and steals it.

to crave the wealth of a king even though you were conceived in the gutter and were raised on a dunghheap!" (Gibbs 405; Perry 483)⁴⁷

Here the finder's craving for wealth is criticized. The dog stands for a person of low social standing who, once he has chanced upon some money, may become greedy for more. The final sentence reminds the dog of his lowly origins. The fable suggests that finding a treasure is not always beneficial for the finder. It may preoccupy his mind and eventually lead to decrepitude due to the neglect of other aspects of one's life.

An inevitable change of fortunes is also addressed in another fable:

A ploughman, while hoeing, chanced upon a hoard of gold in his field. So every day he crowned the image of Mother Earth with a garland, convinced that it was to her he owed this favour. But the Goddess of Chance (*Tyche*) appeared to him and said: "Why, my friend, do you attribute to the Earth all the gifts I have made to you with the intention of making you rich? If times change and the gold passes to other hands, I am certain that it is me, Chance, who you will blame then." (Gibbs 469; Perry 61)⁴⁸

While ancient Jews considered unexpected wealth a divine blessing, Greeks and Romans would similarly thank their gods for unearthed treasures.⁴⁹ Philosophers such as Seneca questioned, however, "whether the gods have so much leisure that they can look after the affairs of private citizens" (*Ep.* 10.2).⁵⁰ Only a deluded mind will "scan the ground and explore what evils it can dig out, not content with what has been offered" (*Ep.* 110.9). Whatever a person may need is "near at hand": "We cannot complain of anything but ourselves; against the will of nature who has hidden them, we have fetched out what will destroy us" (*Ep.* 110.10). Here the image of the hidden treasure is turned upside down.⁵¹ Rather than searching for hidden riches and pleasures, the wise engage in the contemplation

⁴⁷ Translation with Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, see <http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/405.htm>.

⁴⁸ Aesop, *The Complete Fables*, trans. O. and R. Temple (London: Penguin Books, 2003), no. 84.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Horace, *Sat.* 2.6.10–13, where the narrator claims: "O let some sort of lucky break provide me with a pot of silver, like that guy who, when he got his treasure, bought and ploughed the very land on which he labored as a hired hand, and so became enriched by being tied to Hercules." Translation with A. M. Juster, *The Satires of Horace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 100. For a discussion of this text in comparison with Matthew's treasure parable, see Crossan, *Finding*, 70–77. He also refers to a later version in Porphyry of Tyre's writing.

⁵⁰ Seneca, *Selected Letters*, trans. E. Fantham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 238–239.

⁵¹ See also Aesop's fable about the farmer and his sons (Perry 42): "A farmer who was about to die wanted his sons to be knowledgeable about the farm, so he summoned them and said, 'My children, there is a treasure buried in one of my vineyards.' After he died, his sons took plows and mattocks and dug up the entire farm. They did not find any treasure, but the vineyard paid them back with a greatly increased harvest." Translation with Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 228 (no. 494), see <http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/494.htm>. I thank Jonathan Pater for this reference. Here the reference to a (non-existent) treasure serves educational purposes.

of the mind: “The things you need will be found everywhere; but superfluous things have to be constantly and obsessively sought out” (*Ep.* 110.11). We may assume that Philo and the rabbis as well as Jesus and Matthew would have agreed with this criticism of attributing supreme value to material wealth.

E. Finds in Rabbinic Halakhah and Roman Law

Particularly important for a proper understanding of the treasure parables are legal rules concerning finds in rabbinic and Roman law. Although the Mishnah was edited around 200 CE only, some of the halakhic issues mentioned in it may have been discussed among Torah scholars in the preceding centuries already. I do not claim that the Mishnaic form of the regulations would have been known to the editor(s) of Matthew and/or the Gospel of Thomas. But the general considerations that underlie the Mishnah’s discussions probably developed on the basis of customary practice that persisted over several generations. Questions such as the following must have concerned the storytellers and their audiences: Under which circumstances could finds be kept by the finder? What kind of behaviour was considered fraudulent? The actions of the parables’ protagonists need to be understood in the context of ancient property law to detect unusual elements in the form of transgressions of normativity.

I. Finds in Rabbinic Halakhah

Various legal aspects concerning finds are discussed in m. B. Mets. 2. What is irrelevant in these regulations is the value of the items. According to m. B. Mets. 2:1, the question whether the original owner would be able to identify his property is the crucial criterium for determining whether the finder may keep the item or is required to announce it publicly. Finds of scattered fruit, scattered coins, or baker’s loaves of bread are assumed to lack their owner’s identifying marks, so that the original owner is believed to have renounced recovery of his property. Therefore they do not require public announcement. According to a statement attributed to R. Yehudah at the end of this mishnah, “Whatever has a difference [from the ordinary, i. e., distinguishing mark] must be announced.” According to R. Shimon b. Eleazar, “All merchant’s items (כלי אנפוריא) need not be announced” (m. B. Mets. 2:1). The meaning of the term is not entirely clear.⁵² The assumption may be that new merchandise, that is, unused items would lack ownership marks and can therefore not be identified by the original owner.

⁵² M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horev, 1985), 87, derives the loanword from *ἐμπορία*, “journey for business, traffic, trade; also merchandise” and translates: “a merchant’s implements.”

The following mishnah lists types of finds that have to be announced, such as “fruit in a utensil, or a utensil by itself, money in a purse, or a purse by itself, ... heaps of coins, or three coins on top of each other” (m. B. Mets. 2:2). The assumption is that in such constellations the owner would be able to identify his property, e. g., by describing the purse or the number, type, and position of the coins. Therefore the finder must announce the find of such objects. The exact location of the find was also important. If there was an indication that the owner had deliberately placed or hidden an object somewhere, for safekeeping purposes or to retrieve it later, it should not be touched but left at its present location. Thus, m. B. Mets. 2:3 rules that a utensil found in a garbage dump should be left untouched if covered up and announced if uncovered. The mishnah shows that even items found in a garbage dump were not automatically considered to be thrown away by their owners if they were undamaged.⁵³ For the parables discussed above, a ruling in m. B. Mets. 2:5 is particularly relevant: “[If] someone purchased produce from his fellow or his fellow sends him produce, and he found coins in it, behold, they are his; and if they were bound together, he takes [them] and proclaims [the find].” In the first scenario, the individual coins are assumed to have entered the produce accidentally. Their original owner could be anyone, that is, he could not be identified anymore. A neat bundle of coins, on the other hand, might be identified, described, and retrieved by its owner. Therefore it has to be proclaimed.

The Talmud Yerushalmi’s commentary on this mishnah transmits a sequence of five stories that all deal with finds (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c).⁵⁴ The first four of these stories present examples of finders who return finds to their owners, for halakhic, moral, and theological reason. According to the first story, Shimon b. Shetah’s students “bought him an ass from a Saracen, and a pearl was hanging on it.” Whereas the students do not consider returning the pearl, their teacher urges them to do so. The owner of the ass may not have known about the (accidental) attachment of the pearl when he sold the donkey to them. The story adds an aspect to the discussion of finds that is not mentioned explicitly in the mishnah, namely, items belonging to non-Jews.⁵⁵ In the following discussion a theological reason for returning items to non-Jews is introduced. In reaction to the Jews’ good moral behaviour they might bless the Jewish God. The following three

⁵³ On the reuse of items and garbage disposal in ancient Jewish society, see J. Schwartz, “Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle: Prolegomena on Breakage and Repair in Ancient Jewish Society: Broken Beds and Chairs in Mishnah Kelim,” *JJS* 9 (2006): 147–180; C. Hezser, “Dirt and Garbage in the Ancient Jewish Religious Imagination and in Daily Life,” in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. S. Boustán et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 107–127.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of this *sugya*, see Hezser, *Form*, 59–77.

⁵⁵ m. B. Mets. 2:5 speaks of one’s “fellow” only. According to the Tosefta, “If he found lost property in [a city] and the majority [of its inhabitants] are gentiles, he need not proclaim [the find]” (t. Makhsh. 2:8).

stories all provide examples of Jews returning finds (bundle of dinars; bathing suit; necklace) to non-Jews, resulting in the owner's exclamation, "Blessed be the God of the Jews!" The stories provide examples of good moral behaviour that goes beyond halakhic requirements.

The fifth and longest story deals with Alexander of Macedon's (fictional) visit to the king of Qasya.⁵⁶ It is noteworthy because of the treasure tale that is integrated into it. While the two dignitaries meet,

a person came who had a case with his fellow. For he had bought a part [of his field], and dug in it, and found in it a treasure of dinars. The one who had bought [the field] was saying: A dunghill I bought, a treasure I did not buy. The one who had sold [the field] was saying: A dunghill and all that was in it I sold. (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c)

The situation described here resembles the one described in the Gospel of Thomas and the Mekhilta on Exod 14:5 (with its later parallels): the buyer of a property finds a treasure in it of which the seller was not aware. In Matt 13:44, on the other hand, the treasure is found before the field is purchased. In contrast to the parable in Gos. Thom. 109, where the buyer uses the treasure for his own benefit on the assumption that it belongs to him, the rabbinic story in the Alexander narrative problematizes the ownership issue and has both the buyer and seller distance themselves from ownership of the find. None of them wants to appear greedy. Both try to uphold their moral inculpability. In the context of Mishnaic law, the solution to the case is uncertain. On the one hand, one could argue that the treasure, if bundled, would be identifiable by the owner; on the other hand, the seller forsakes possession of the field and everything it contains. Theoretically, both could claim ownership of the treasure, but in the story both decide to abandon it.

In the Alexander narrative the king of Qasya's and Alexander's alternative solutions are juxtaposed: "While they were occupied with each other, the king said to one of them: Do you have a male child? He said to him: Yes. He said to his fellow: Do you have a female child? He said to him: Yes. He said to them: Let them marry each other, and the treasure shall belong to both of them." This wise suggestion of a joint ownership of the treasure by both families is countered by Alexander's egoistic alternative: "He [the king] said to him: If this case had been before you, how would you have judged? He [Alexander] said to him: We would have killed both and the treasure would have gone to the king." In the context of the narrative, this discourse provides further evidence of Alexander's bad character, lack of morality, and greediness, in contrast to the king of Qasya's wisdom and ordinary people's righteousness.

In comparison with the rabbinic protagonists of the stories in y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c, who all return finds, and the buyer and seller in the just mentioned parable,

⁵⁶ The story has parallels in Gen. Rab. 33:1; Lev. Rab. 27:1; Pesiq. Rav Kah. 9:1; Tanh. Emor 6, 37a (= Tanh. B. Emor 9, 44b–45a), see the comparative chart in Hezser, *Form*, 66–69.

who both renounce ownership, the finder in Matt 13:44 may seem egoistic and morally deplorable. Yet the legal issue involved here is more complex. On the one hand, one may argue that the finder, who decides to purchase the field with the treasure, would have known who the owner of the field was. On the other hand, the original field-owner's ownership of the treasure is questionable, since he is assumed to have been unaware of it. The parable does not provide any details about the loose or bundled-up status of the find (cf. m. B. Mets. 2:5). The finder is said to have hidden the find for safekeeping. With m. B. Mets. 2:3 one might argue that he should have announced the (uncovered) find before covering it up for himself. Yet he could argue that the original owner of the find was unknown and could not be identified anymore.

II. Roman Property Law

According to Roman property law, involuntary surrender of movable property happens if the owner forgets where an item is located: "If we lose that which we possess in such a way that we do not know where it is, we cease to possess it" (Dig. 41.2.25 pr. Pomponius in the 23rd book of his *Commentary on the Ius Civile* of Q. Murcius).⁵⁷ Since the owner of the field in Matt 13:44 was unaware of the treasure, even if he had once possessed it, he could no longer be considered the owner, since he would not have known its location. According to the jurist Paulus's account of Nerva's view, the aspect of custody of the object is crucial:

The younger Nerva⁵⁸ writes that we possess movable property, with the exception of slaves, as long as we find the property in our *custodia* – i. e., if we, as soon as we wish, can take natural possession (*naturalis possessio*) of it. So a cow that has wandered off, or a vase that is missing in such a way that we cannot find it, immediately ceases to be possessed by us, even if it has been taken into possession by no one else. It is different if the property is in my *custodia* but has not been found, since it is present, and in the meantime only a careful search for it is lacking. (Dig. 41.2.3.13 pr. Paulus in the 54th book of his *Commentary on the Praetor's Edict*)⁵⁹

Nerva's view complicates the situation. If the owner of the field left a purse with money or a valuable item in his field overnight, one might argue that he has not surrendered possession of the item but could go and get it, if he was so inclined. The finder's action of hiding the item may have made the search for it difficult but would not necessarily mean that its owner had relinquished custody. In the case of Matt 13:44 one might ask what the finder was doing on a field that did

⁵⁷ Translation here and below with H. Hausmaninger and R. Gamauf, *A Casebook on Roman Property Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81–84. Sextus Pomponius was a jurist who lived during the reigns of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, that is, in the second century CE.

⁵⁸ Probably Marcus Cocceius Nerva, a Roman jurist of the early first century CE.

⁵⁹ The Roman jurist Paulus lived in the second to third century CE.

not belong to him. If he is imagined as an agricultural worker, he would surely be expected to alert the owner of the field and/or his co-workers, who might have lost the item.

A further complication is the distinction between ownership (*dominium*) and possession (*possessio*) in Roman law.⁶⁰ This distinction takes effect if a lost item is submerged in the sea or buried in the earth:

Pomponius treats the problem of whether ownership (*dominium*) of stones that have sunk in the Tiber as a result of shipwreck and after some time have been raised again remains in force during the time they were submerged. I think that the ownership (*dominium*) is maintained, but the possession (*possessio*) is not. (Dig. 41.2.13 pr. Ulpian in the 72nd book of his *Commentary on the Praetor's Edict*)

Applied to the case in Matt 13:44 this may mean that, as long as the treasure was buried, the owner of the field maintained ownership (*dominium*) of the treasure. This would presuppose his prior awareness and possession (*possessio*) of the treasure, though, something that is not mentioned in the Matthean parable. The parable in Gos. Thom. 109 explicitly states that the original owner of the field and his son and heir “know nothing” of the treasure, that is, they would have lacked ownership rights. The purchaser finds the treasure by chance, through ploughing, rather than hiding it from others’ view. The tradents of this version may have been knowledgeable of Roman property law and added these details to render the situation lawful. A similar situation is presented in the parable in Song Rab. 4:25. The purchaser of the garbage dump finds the treasure as a consequence of his fieldwork only. There is no indication that the heir ever had ownership and/or possession of the treasure. Therefore the happy finder’s seizure and use of the treasure is fully legitimate.

The Digesta presents the following case:

Before travelling abroad someone had buried money in the ground for safekeeping (*custodiae causa*). After returning, when he did not locate the place due to his forgetfulness, it was asked whether he had ceased to possess (*possidere*) the money, and whether he would immediately begin to possess it again if he should later remember the location. I said that, since it is proposed that the money was buried for safekeeping (*custodiae causa*), the right of possession was not lost by him who buried it, and also that a failure of memory would cause no impairment to the possession (*possessionis*) of property that no one else had entered upon ... And it makes no difference whether I buried the money on my own or another’s land, since I, if another had buried money on my land, would possess it only if I had taken hold of it above ground. Therefore [the fact of burial on] another’s land does not remove my possession, since it makes no difference whether I possess property that is above or below ground. (Dig. 41.2.44 pr. Papian in the 23rd book of his *Legal Questions*)⁶¹

⁶⁰ On the difference between ownership and possession, see A. M. Riggsby, *Roman Law and the Legal World of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 135–141.

⁶¹ Aemilius Papinianus was a Roman jurist in the second half of the second and early third century CE.

According to this view, the intentional burial of money for safekeeping establishes an enduring possession of the money, irrespective of whether one forgets its location or owns the ground where it was hidden.⁶² For Matt 13:44 the aspect of taking hold of an object above ground is crucial here. If the finder had seized the treasure above ground, he could claim possession. Since he buried it before the field owner became aware of the treasure, one could argue that the finder was in possession of the find even before purchasing the field from its owner. On the other hand, if we focus on the original owner of the treasure, the fact that it was hidden could indicate safekeeping purposes. Even if he had forgotten the location of his valuables, the original owner might reclaim his property in the future. If the finder hid the uncovered treasure at a different place than where it was found, he might deliberately prevent its original owner from recovering it. Such behaviour might be considered fraudulent. The hiding places of the treasure are not specified in the parable, though.

Interestingly, in the rabbinic story about Shimon b. Shetah in *y. B. Mets.* 2:5, 8c, where his students buy him an ass from a Saracen with a pearl hanging on it, the sage asks exactly the right question, namely: “Did its owner know about it?” If the Saracen could identify the pearl as part of his possessions, he could have maintained ownership (*dominium*) and regained possession (*possessio*), if he was told about the present location of the pearl. Since the students cannot answer this question, to be on the safe side, their teacher suggests returning the find. In the subsequent story about Abba Oshaiah of Turya, who found a queen’s bathing suit, the queen is explicitly said to have renounced ownership of the item: “Of what use is it to me? I have better [ones] than that! I have more than that!” The finder would not be legally obliged to return it. His deliberate decision to return it to her is explained by reference to the Torah: “The Torah has decreed to return it.” The moral stringency of Torah observance is juxtaposed to Roman legal leniency here. Since the stories deal with finds of objects belonging to non-Jews, theoretically Roman law would apply. The rabbinic storytellers seem to have been aware of the significance of ownership (*dominium*) in Roman law, which could persist at a time when custody and possession (*possessio*) were absent. The owners’ knowledge about their property (in contrast to the mishnah’s reference to identifying marks on the object itself) was crucial in determining ownership.

In the fourth story in *y. B. Mets.* 2:5, 8c, where it is said that R. Shmuel b. Sosratai found a Roman queen’s necklace, “she issued a proclamation in the city: Whoever returns it within thirty days will receive so and so; after thirty days, his head will be removed.” By not returning the find within thirty days, the rabbi deliberately acts against the powerful Roman’s decree. This element is the focal

⁶² On this continuing right to the property in Roman law, in contrast to Common law, see also W. W. Buckland and A. D. McNair, *Roman Law and Common Law: A Comparison in Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 318; A. Watson, *Roman Law & Comparative Law* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 48.

point of the story: he refrained from returning the find in the stipulated time period “so that people will not say [that] because I was afraid of you, I did [it], but [rather] because I was afraid of God [I returned it]” (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c).

In the parable in the Alexander narrative a legal problem arises because both the original owner of the land and the buyer, who finds the treasure in it, renounce ownership of the treasure. The buyer insists that the sale involved the field only, whereas the seller states that the plot and “all that was in it” is sold (y. B. Mets. 2:5, 8c). Based on Roman law, the seller has relinquished both ownership and possession of the find, even if he knew about its location. Until the buyer took possession of the find, the treasure was ownerless. Therefore a “wise” independent decision was necessary.

F. The Safekeeping of Valuables in Antiquity

Although the motif of finding a treasure is a common folk motif that appears in the parables, stories, and fairy tales of many cultural traditions from ancient times onwards, it also has a basis in reality, at least as far as antiquity is concerned.⁶³ At a time when the institution of the bank had not developed yet, people had few safe options to protect their valuables from theft. One possibility was the deposit of goods with trusted persons, but such deposits were probably limited to more or less short absences for travel purposes.⁶⁴ Another possibility was the deposit of valuables in a wooden chest in one’s cellar, as was the case with the silver treasure found in the cellar of the House of Menander in Pompeii.⁶⁵ In this chest “the century’s major find of first-century BCE Roman silverware” was found.⁶⁶ It included silver plates, coins, and jewellery. Especially if the items were used occasionally, the owners would have wanted to have them close at hand. Yet burglary and looting, especially by those who knew where the valuables were kept, constituted a risk. (Pagan) temples were another option, some of which allowed the safekeeping of deposits for a fee.⁶⁷ We do not know whether the Temple in

⁶³ On the “treasure” as a persistent folk motif see, e. g., J. Garry and H. M. El-Shamy, eds., *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2017), 329, under “Treasure Trove”; H. M. El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to Motif Classification*, 2 vols. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995), 1:N500–N599 “Treasure trove,” 1:N550 “Unearthing hidden treasure”; E. W. Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966), N542 “Special conditions for finding treasure,” N550 “unearthing hidden treasure.”

⁶⁴ Deposits are discussed in rabbinic sources, see, e. g., y. B. Qam. 6:7, 5c with various narratives on this issue.

⁶⁵ K. S. Painter, *The Silver Treasure*, vol. 4 of *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁶⁶ J. Tamm, “Review of *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii*, vol. 4, *The Silver Treasure*, by Kenneth S. Painter,” *BMC*R (2002), <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2002/2002-09-29.html>.

⁶⁷ M. Silver, *Economic Structures in Antiquity* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 23–27.

Jerusalem also offered this service to private individuals. In any case, for Jews who lived in rural Galilee before 70 CE the Temple would have been too far away, and after 70 it was not an option anymore anyway.

The hiding and burial of valuables in the ground was probably the easiest and most common way to safeguard one's valuables, especially if small objects and bundles of coins were concerned. Several hoards from the Graeco-Roman period have been excavated in the Near Middle East. Some of them stem from Roman Palestine.⁶⁸ Hoards are identified as "two or more coins found in a context indicating intentional deposition together. Low- and high-value coinage was hoarded throughout Late Antiquity for safekeeping."⁶⁹ Families and individuals could hide their valuables on a routine basis, to prevent them from being stolen, or in times of upheaval and war. "Such hoards survive when circumstances prevented the owners from recovering their property."⁷⁰

One may therefore assume that the opportunity to discover a "treasure" by chance really existed in antiquity. The person who hid his or her valuables in the ground may have died, left his or her hometown, or forgotten about the items and their safe location. He or she may not have left heirs, or the earth where the valuables were hidden was sold to new owners. These new owners may have been unaware of any hidden treasures in their ground. Exactly because such a find was a real, if rare, possibility, the "treasure" and its associations would have constituted such a potent image to work with for ancient parable- and storytellers.

G. Conclusions

The hiding and finding of treasures are ancient folk motifs that appear in Aesopian fables already and are used in variant ways in Jewish and Christian parables and stories of the first centuries CE. The narratives combine different associations of the *Bildfeld* (field of images) of the treasure and the find to convey diverse meanings. A comparison of the narratives reveals their variant focal points. While the parable in Matt 13:44 focuses on the value of the treasure in the eyes of the finder, the parable in the Gospel of Thomas emphasizes the

⁶⁸ See, e. g., G. Bijozsky, "Numismatic Evidence for the Gallus-Revolt: The Hoard from Lod," *IEJ* 57 (2007) 187–203; J. W. Betlyon and A. E. Killebrew, "A Fourth-Century C. E. Coin Hoard from the Qasrin Village," in *Viewing Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology: VeHinnei Rachel: Essays in Honor of Rachel Hachlili*, ed. A/E. Killebrew and G. Fassbeck (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 33–47; J. DeRose Evans, *The Coins and the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Economy of Palestine* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2006), 55: "The Gold Hoard of Caesarea."

⁶⁹ R. Darley, "Hoards, coin," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed. O. Nicholson, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1:734.

⁷⁰ Darley, "Hoards, coin," 1:734.

hiddenness of the treasure and its loss through unawareness. Stories in rabbinic Midrashim illustrate the biblical belief in unexpected wealth as a divine blessing (Lev. Rab. 5:4). They stress the idea that industriousness in Torah study and observance will be rewarded and this reward should be exhibited in public to serve as a model for others to emulate (Song Rab. 4:25). Some of the rabbinic parables focus on the property seller's sense of loss (Mekh. R. Ishm. Beshalah on Exod 14:5) while encouraging the audience to identify with the buyer's good fortune.

Whether and to what extent the behaviours described in the narratives are ordinary or unusual, normative or transgressive becomes evident within the larger context of daily life practices and on the background of rabbinic and Roman law. Complex rabbinic and Roman legal discussions on the issue of finds underline the significance of certain aspects of the narratives such as the circumstances of finding a valuable object, the question whether the original owner hid his valuable for safekeeping and knows of their location, and whether a public announcement of the find is necessary.

Although we do not know to what extent the early Christian storytellers and audiences would have been familiar with Jewish and Roman law (the legal compilations themselves were edited in late antiquity but contain earlier regulations that may have been applied and discussed orally in the first and second centuries already), these discourses provide a glimpse of the wider intellectual context in which the popular narratives operated. While the behaviour of the finder in the treasure parable in Matt 13:44 may seem morally offensive at first sight, knowledge of the legal context makes his hiding of the find more legitimate. The field-owner may not have owned the treasure in the first place; he seems to have lacked knowledge of the find; the find probably lacked identifying marks, that is, would have been considered ownerless; once the finder has hidden the find and knows about its location, he could be considered the legitimate owner, even before purchasing the field. Similarly, rabbinic narratives that provide certain details about finds, e. g., whether their potential owner is aware of the object, function within this ancient legal context. Similarities between rabbinic halakhah and Roman law on finds suggest that the rabbinic storytellers were aware of some aspects of Roman property law, even if they did not study the Latin legal texts themselves.

Since the hiding of money and valuable objects was a common practice in antiquity, the finding of a "treasure" was a real possibility. Especially members of the lower strata of society would have dreamed of finding valuables or useful objects whose owners could not be identified. Or they hoped that their wealthy patrons would share items of their "treasuries" with them as a reward for their support and good work. The *Bildfeld* of the "treasure" needs to be understood as a broad category for which a variety of Hebrew/Aramaic, Greek, and Latin terms are used. Equally wide-ranging is the metaphorical use of the

treasure motif that ranges from the Torah to “the kingdom of the heavens” and beyond.⁷¹

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⁷¹ See, e. g., 2 Cor 4:7, where the treasure hidden in clay jars seems to refer to Paul’s “inner experience” while “[t]he visible outer nature is wasting away,” cf. D. H. Thiele, “Paul and Moses in 2 Corinthians 3: Hermeneutics from the Top Down,” in *Hermeneutics, Intertextuality, and Contemporary Meaning of Scripture*, ed. R. Cole and P. Petersen (Adelaide: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 73.

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