

**Toward Investigation of Democracy in Jewish Thought:  
Freedom, Equality, and *Dimos* in the Rabbinic Literature<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

In this paper, we discuss whether the roots of democracy lie in rabbinic literature, by investigating the use of the word of *herut* (freedom), the image of the leader, and the use of the term *dimos*, from which the word democracy is presumed to originate. We found that neither complete freedom of the individual nor complete equality of the leader and the masses were assumed as a matter of course. Rather, freedom was something limited by the law, and leaders were required to behave in a specific manner as leaders. Furthermore, the findings of this paper suggest that there is no evidence that discussion about the democracy was inspired by the term *dimos* in the Jewish literature. Thus, we should be careful not to equate rabbinic Judaism with ideal democratic Judaism, as the scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentum* often did at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:**

Rabbinic Literature, Democracy, *Dimos*, *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Freedom

## 1. Introduction

While few in the modern age would deny the value of democracy, various problems have arisen in so-called democratic countries. Following the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, democracy seemed to be accepted worldwide. Various countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union gained independence and were established as democratic nations. With the expansion of globalization through information technology, the Internet revolution, and physical proximity via transportation, the concept of democracy and other Western and European values came to prevail globally. Indeed, as Westernization spread and countries in the Middle East began to turn toward democratization, democracy came to be regarded as the absolute virtue or good, and, in some instances, even a kind of creed or norm. However, over the past two decades, the march of democracy seems to have ground to a halt: the Arab Spring has collapsed, civil conflicts are tearing apart countries that once strove for independence and democracy, and exclusionism and populism are now widespread. We have reached a point where we must reconsider what democracy is and ask whether it is indeed acceptable in all regions and in all religions<sup>2</sup>.

In particular, as an originator of monotheism, Judaism has clarified the concept of democracy according to Jewish tradition and Jewish thought. Ever since its declaration of independence in 1948, Israel has declared itself a Jewish and democratic state, and the interrelationship between Judaism and democracy has become one of the most controversial topics in the political context<sup>3</sup>. It seems that Judaism is inseparable from modern values like freedom, equality, and democracy, particularly following Moses Mendelson (1729-1786) and Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) who claimed that universal values and Judaism can coexist and that Judaism indeed espouses these values. However, is this true? Does not the Jewish tradition, with its ancient roots, contradict the idea of modern idealistic democracy? To answer these questions, we should examine the basic concepts of each religion, such as freedom and equality, that mirror the tenets of democracy.

To this end, in this paper, we investigate the degree to which we can trace the roots of democracy in rabbinic Judaism, the foundation of present-day Jewish religions, in various aspects—the concept of freedom, the concept of equality through the image of the ruler, and particularly the usage of the term *dimos*, from which the word democracy originated. In the process of this investigation, we will see that part of the process of democracy was accepted in the rabbinic literature and we then ask whether it is reasonable to claim that Judaism is inseparable from what we call democracy today.

## 2. Freedom in the Rabbinic Traditions

Freedom is accepted as one of the basic conditions of democracy and as an undeniable value of the modern age, but what about freedom in the rabbinic age? According to my investigations to date, the concept of freedom was not the same in traditional Judaism as in Western thought. In the rabbinic literature, freedom is strongly related to social status, such as *ben hurin* and does not mean private or spiritual freedom. Only in the following source, Avot 6. 2. do we see the beginnings of freedom in the private arena creep into the rabbinic literature.

Avot 6. 2

R. Joshua b. Levi said; Everyday a divine voice goes forth from mount Horeb, proclaiming and saying, “Woe to mankind for their contempt of the Law!” For he that occupies himself not in the study of the Law is called reprobate....And it is written, And the tables were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God, graven (*harut*) upon the tables (Ex. 32.16). Read not *harut* but *heirut* (freedom), for thou find no freeman excepting him that occupies himself in the study of Law....

This source connects the graven (*harut*) letters, namely laws on the Tablets of the Commandments with freedom (*hirut*), thus indicating that freedom is not without its limitations. Rather, from a rabbinic perspective, from its inception, freedom is connected with the commandments of *mitzva* and *halacha*, amongst other orders<sup>4</sup>. In this concept of freedom related to order, the laws seem to precede modern theories of freedom, such as those advocated by John Rawls, who described freedom as based on social order and justice, and a liberal society as one that is “well-ordered.”<sup>5</sup> This is because, in Judaism, social justice and *mitzvot* comprise two sides of the same coin.

## 3. The Image of the Ruler

In traditional Jewish society, there were various authoritative positions, represented by the king and priest in ancient times. Cohen discussed this construction together with the prophets as the three crowns<sup>6</sup>. In the rabbinic age, the patriarch *Nashi*, who was the representative of the Jewish world in the Roman Empire, seized the secular administrating position<sup>7</sup>. Thus, his was a very high position of would-be ruler to the

Jewish world. However, in the rabbinic literature, we find various stories concerning the conflicts between sages and the patriarch. Sages often criticized the ruler or patriarch, particularly R. Judan haNeshia, as in GR. 80. 2 (JT Sanhedrin 2.6.2d) <sup>8</sup>. These traditions testify that sages were in a kind of tension with the patriarchal leader. Indeed, as we see in the Mishna Horayoto 3.1 and, sages did not suppose that the High Priests and the Nashis held a transcendental position and they were ready to criticize even them.

On the other hand, it is interesting that the sages supposed that the ruler should behave appropriately. The sages required the Neshia (R. Judan haNeshia) to wear appropriate clothes in the JT Sanhedrin 2.6. As seen in the following source, when King Saul visited a necromancer in Ein Dor in disguise, they considered this an inappropriate act for a king.

Lev. R. 26.7

“And Saul disguised himself (*wayyithhappes*)” (I Sam. 28. 8), that is to say, he divested himself (*hofshi*) of royalty. And put on other raiment (*ib.*); a commoner’s garments.

This tradition tells us that to put on commoner’s garments was to divest his position as king, indicating that the sages did not regard as ideal that there should be perfect equality between the ruler and his or her people. Furthermore, the term *hofshi* ‘divest’ originally meant ‘free’. This indicates that in the rabbinic tradition, the sages did not regard being free as a positive activity.

From these sources, we can surmise that the sages’ feelings towards the powers were complex. While they required that the relation between them be one that allowed them to criticize the powers, they also required that the powers should differentiate themselves from the masses. Thus, we must recognize the necessity of re-examining our concept of freedom or complete equality, and then democracy, which are asserted as absolute values in Western society.

#### 4. Usage of *dimos*

The term democracy comes from the ancient Greek words ‘*dēmos*’ and ‘*kratia*’ meaning ‘control by the people’. Seemingly, however, the rabbinic literature, as a body of ancient documents, does not revere the idea of democracy. Nevertheless, the writers of

these ancient rabbinic works were likely familiar with the term, as they lived contemporaneously with the ancient Greeks and Romans. Indeed, in the rabbinic literature, the word *dimos*<sup>9</sup> appears in quite a few sources and it is easy to associate *dimos* with the Greek word ‘dēmos’, meaning ‘people’. In fact, as per the standard Aramaic Hebrew Dictionary by Marcus Jastrow, the Hebrew *dimos* comes from the Greek word ‘dēmos’<sup>10</sup>. However, the term *dimos* has been attributed different meanings in the Jewish literature and with the passage of time, its various usages become increasingly sporadic. In this paper, we investigate the content and connotation of *dimos*, mainly in the rabbinic literature and later commentaries. We will examine how the meaning of *dimos*, originally meaning ‘people’, varied in the Jewish tradition and how its usage changed over time. We will also clarify that, for a long time, the concept of *dimos* in Judaism has not been directly related to that of democracy. Although this paper does not fully explore all the implications of the term, it is important to acknowledge the thin line between the concepts of *dimos* and democracy, which also reflects the status of democracy in Judaism. It is hoped that this exploration will provide insight into Judaism’s standpoint on people and democracy, the derivative of *dimos*, in the future, and further elaborate the relationship between democracy and Judaism.

My investigation is based on Bar Ilan’s Responsa Project ver. 25, in which almost 900 usages of *dimos* were collected from the rabbinic literature along with various commentaries from the rabbinic period to modern times. The term *dimos* does not occur in the Hebrew Bible or Mishnah, but appeared only in later Tannaitic sources, namely the Tosefta. The main references, however, are not seen until commentaries from a much later period (1c-10c).

In the rabbinic literature, it is strange that Babylonian sources mention only eight usages in BT<sup>11</sup>, while in the Palestinian sources (JT and Midrash Aggadah), nearly 100 examples have been found. The meanings of *dimos* among these 100 examples are ambiguous and signifies various things. However, we are able to divide into the following groups:

#### **4-1. *Dimos* as stacks of bricks or monuments made of rocks**

The earliest known mention of the term *dimos* occurred in Baraita’s work,<sup>12</sup> principally as stacks of bricks or monuments made of rocks, but the concrete details of these constructions is not clear. Thus, in later commentaries and discussions regarding the Baraita traditions, the term *dimos* was often mentioned, as will be seen below. The main issue in this usage of *dimos* is twofold. First, the ancient rule was that whoever lays

the last brick on top of a *dimos* is liable for the Shabbat regulations.

BT Shab. 102b

Samuel said, “One who positions a stone (in the ground) is liable. They challenged this [on the basis of the following Baraita]. If one sets the stone and another one adds the cement, the one who adds the cement is liable.” R. Yose stated, “According to your reasoning, consider the end [of the same Baraita], even if one lifted [a stone] and placed it on the top of a *dimos shel ‘ebnim* row of stones, he is liable.” Rather, there are three stages in the building [of a wall]. Bottom, middle, and top. The bottom row needs only positioning and [wedging] in the earth. The middle rows also need cement. The top row [is built] with mere placement.

In this source, BT Shab. 102b, the question is whether or not the positioning of the stone contravenes the Shabbat laws that prohibit work on the Shabbat. According to Samuel, only the person who adds the cement is liable not the person who only adds stones. However, this opinion seems to contravene that of Samuel, who claims that even those who place stones on a construction are liable. It is then revealed by R. Yose that Samuel’s intended meaning was putting a stone on *top* of the construction, signifying its completion, but this contravenes the Shabbat laws.

This discussion is related to the question regarding the limit of *malacha*, or creative works, which are prohibited on the Shabbat. In the case of construction, this would mean that putting stone on the ground was regarded as work. However, in the case of the middle level of construction, placing stone was not regarded as adding to the construction, while applying cement was.

In this context, *dimos* refers to a kind of stone construction. While the Talmud does not explain the meaning of *dimos*, the Rashi describes it as a row of stones, while some of the commentaries on the Rashi also describe it as a building made of stones<sup>13</sup>. This means that in the age of the Talmud, the meaning of *dimos* was known, but in later ages there arose a need for commentary. In reality, there is not much depth in the concept of *dimos*.

The second typical discussion in this context is: if a *dimos* was built as a tomb for someone while that person was still alive, could it be used to bury others?

#### BT Sanhedrin 48a

Come learn, if a tomb structure was built for a person who is still alive, it is permitted to derive benefit from it. [But if] a single row of stones has been added to it for a person who has died, it becomes forbidden to derive benefit [it may now be used solely for his burial].

BT Sanhedrin 48a recorded a discussion about *dimos*, wherein it refers to a stone monument for use as a grave. The point under discussion is whether something intended for a specific individual can be used for another individual, or whether something intended for use for a specific purpose can be used for other purposes. We find various viewpoints in this discussion. For example, *dimos* means a specific monument for the burial of a specific person; thus, once the *dimos* of a certain person has been added to a building, then that building should be used for the burial of that specific person. This means that we cannot use something for its original purpose once it has been used for another purpose. The discussion in the Talmud also deals with the case of *dimos*, but from a slightly different perspective – whether the money saved for person A can be used for another person. Since the Talmud referred to this statement as a Baraita, the original text might come from the Tannaitic era, although the exact source cannot be identified.

Since this reference to *dimos* comes from *domos*, we can exclude its usage. However, as *dimos* and *domos* were spelled identically in the rabbinic literature and later commentaries, we need to consider the possibility that the terms became conflated and influenced each other in the minds of sages and commentators. Indeed, rows of stones and monuments are basically public constructions. In its Greek origin, *domos* also signifies buildings and houses that are related to public spaces. The second issue in the usage of *dimos* is relevant to both the public and private domains. Furthermore, in the comments in later ages, we find discussions as to whether the stones used for *dimos* might be considered idolatry,<sup>14</sup> which may be relevant as a public concern.

Interestingly, the usage of *dimos* in the Babylonian Talmud can be classified only as a stone construction<sup>15</sup> or a memorial monument for burial. What is also interesting is that this usage increased greatly in the later age commentaries as discussed below.

#### **4-2. *Dimos* as a ‘public bath’**

This usage is also found in a number of Jerusalem sources, particularly in JT and Midrashim in the expression *dimosin detibria* or ‘public baths in Tiberias’.

In the Jewish tradition, keeping the body clean is a religious matter because it is an aspect of religious observance. Hence, scholars were forbidden from residing in cities that did not contain a public bath<sup>16</sup>. Public baths (*dimosin*) were thus regarded as a necessary public service, although they were originally a construction of the Roman Empire. While, in the rabbinic literature<sup>17</sup>, sages often criticized stadia and theatres, the constructions of the Roman Empire, by comparing them negatively to synagogues and *Beit Midrash* (House of Learning), public baths were considered institutions of importance. In fact, rabbis praised the Romans for constructing baths in Palestine<sup>18</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that in the BT sources, *Beit Merchaz* is used and there is no reference to *dimosin* in this sense. However, in JT, we find mention of *dimosin*, *dimosiyot*, and *Beit Merchaz*. In this usage, *dimos* is used in its plural form, *dimosin* or *dimosiyot*, and in most cases it occurs together with Tiberias. Thus, there is a strong relationship between public bath and Tiberias.

Indeed, as the book on Tiberias by Oded Avissar shows, the baths in Tiberias have a long history<sup>19</sup> and even today the spas there are very popular. It is true that in some cases rabbis warned that public baths posed a danger as they could be sites of idolatry<sup>20</sup>, but for the most part it seems that the sages themselves used them, as mentioned above. According to archeological findings, the bathhouses in Tiberias were very large, as the following stories relate and various largescale archeological findings prove.

JT Termot 8. 4.

Diclot, the swineherd, would be hit by the young student of R. Jehuda Nesiah. He became a king. He went down to Pameas and sent letters in pursuit of the Rabbis, "Be before me immediately after the departure of the Shabbat." He told the messengers, "Do not give them the letters until evening, close to sunset." The messenger indeed reached out to them in the evening close to sunset. As R. Judan Nesiah and R. Shumel bar Nahman were going to bathe in the Tiberias, Angitris the demon came to them....

In the scene above, R. Jehuda Nesiah (usually designated as R. Jehuda II or III) and Samuel bar Nahman were on their way to bathe. At the time of writing, R. Jehuda Nesiah was the patriarch, the representative of the Palestinian Jewish society. Thus, we see that rabbis of such status also used the Roman baths, probably periodically, particularly before Shabbat. We have also found some sources that report that sages used these public

baths.

Since Roman baths were so popular and were open to the public, it can be clarified that *dimos* naturally had the nuance of being something public. As mentioned in the popular story of the King's Parable, seen below in Lev. R. 26. 5<sup>21</sup>, *dimosin* are something that the public needs.

Lev. R. 26. 5

It is the way of the world that if a mortal king enters a province and all the citizens of that province praise him, and if their praise is pleasant to him he tells them: "Tomorrow I shall build for you public baths and bathhouses, tomorrow I shall construct a canal for you." Then he falls asleep and does not rise. Then, where is he and where are his words? The Holy One Blessed be He, however, is not so but "the Lord God is the true God" (Jer. 10.10).

These words tell us about the God's absolute performance compared with that of the mortal king who could not keep his promise. Here, we may observe that, for the sages, public baths were a necessary custom, one that even had relevance for the public. The role of bath systems for the public is reflected in the term *dimos* 'public' in its original Greek meaning of 'bathhouse'. Furthermore, the sages supposed that kings should take care of public needs and official issues. In other sources, we find the phrase regarding the needs of the masses *rchei rabim*, which the mortal king should offer to them<sup>22</sup>.

#### **4-3. *Dimos* as amnesty or pardon**

In other rabbinic stories, we find many cases of *dimos* used to refer to 'amnesty' or 'pardon', particularly in court scenes, whether the court is human or divine. In many cases, *dimos* in this sense appears paired with *specular*, meaning 'judgment'. The terms *dimos* and *specular* reflected the practical concerns of real courts.

The earliest source for this usage of *dimos* is the famous episode of Rabbi Eliezer, who was arrested by the Roman authorities on suspicion of heresy. After examination by the *Hegmon*, he was declared innocent, and the term used to do so was *dimos*, as mentioned in the following source.

## Tosefta Hurin 2.24

The episode of R. Eliezer. He was arrested on account of *minut* [heretical thought] and they brought him to court for judgement. The *Hegmon* said to him, “Should an elder of your standing get involved in such thing?” He (R. Eliezer) replied, “I rely upon the Judge.” The *Hegmon* supposed that he referred only to him but he referred to his Father in heaven. *Hegmon* said to him, “Since you deemed reliable, so thus I would say. Is it possible that these gray hairs should be err in such matters? Pardoned, you are free of liability.

It reflects the judgment of the real court and is the technical term used by the Roman judges. To date, this source has been much discussed, particularly the point where R. Eliezer was arrested and the content of the *minut* that captured him<sup>23</sup>. However, little attention has been paid to the use of the term *dimos* in this episode. It is true that the origin of this *dimos* comes from the Latin *dimissio*, meaning ‘the dismissal’. Thus, it may be not related to *dimos* referring to people. However, in the rabbinic literature, we should note that *dimos* and resignation have been conflated and therefore, *dimos* overlaps the meaning of *dimissio*, that is, to be liberated and innocent. These meanings were found in the same era as that of the rabbinic literature. Thus, *dimos* has various connotations.

In later Amoraic sources, *dimos* means ‘pardon’ as uttered by a heavenly voice. In the episode of Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai, who fled Hadrianus’ persecution with his two sons and spent 13 years hiding in a cave, he heard the heavenly voices say *dimos* and *specular* as in the following source.

## Gen. R. 69. 6

R. Simeon b. Yohai and his son were hidden in a cave for thirteen years. Their food consisted of withered carobs, until their bodies broke out in sores. At the end of this period he emerged and sat at the entrance of the cave and saw a hunter engaged in catching birds. Now whenever R. Simeon heard a heavenly voice from heaven, “Mercy *Dimos Dimos!*” the birds escaped; if it exclaimed, “Death! *Speculah*” they were caught. “Even a bird is not caught without the assent of Providence,” he remarked, “How much more than the life of a human being!” Thereupon he went forth and found that the trouble had finished. Then they went and bathed in cold baths. His son said to him, “Father, Tiberias has

done so much good; shall we then not purify it from the dead? ...”

R. Simeon b. Yohai realized then that even the destinies of tiny birds depend on God’s decision, so he and his sons came out of hiding in the cave and made efforts to purify the city of Tiberias. Although *dimos* and *specular* were terms of foreign origin, even the heavenly voice, which transmitted God’s will, uttered them. This indicates that they were in use in Hebrew as judicial terms<sup>24</sup>.

In much later sources, *dimos* was used to indicate God’s merciful judgement on the day of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement); one recent commentary explains *dimos* as a merciful attribute of God<sup>25</sup>.

Lev. R. 29.1

Thus, you are left to conclude that on New Year’s Day, in the first hour, the idea of creating man entered His mind, in the second He took counsel with the Ministering Angels, in the third He assembled Adam’s dust, in the fourth He kneaded it, in the fifth He shaped him, in the sixth He made into him, in the eighth he was commanded, in the tenth he transgressed, in the eleventh he was judged, in the twelfth, he was pardoned. “This,” said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Adam, “will be a sign to your children. As you stood in the judgment before Me this day and came out with a free pardon, so will your children in the future stand in judgment before Me on this day and will come out from My presence with a free pardon.” When will that be? In the seventh month, in the first day of the month (Lev.23.24).

Again, it is somewhat surprising that a term representing an attribute of God is drawn from a foreign language and it shows how these terms were accepted in the Jewish culture and without any negative connotations.

This usage was also very popular in the King’s Parables, as mentioned above. A mortal king who pronounced *dimos*—in other words, who granted pardon—was praised by all, but when he handed down severe judgements, he was criticized<sup>26</sup>.

These examples demonstrate that *dimos* did have positive connotations amongst later commentaries, because it is associated with *hasid* piety<sup>27</sup>, or *rahmim* compassion<sup>28</sup>, which are important attributes of the Holy One, blessed be. *Dimos* can also mean liberation.

#### 4-4. *Dimos* as People, Public affairs, Officers

This usage of *dimos* is probably the closest to the word democracy. Literal translations of the term are ‘people’ (Gen.R. 6.4, Ex. R. 15.17), ‘officer’ (Ex.R.2.2), ‘public affairs’, (Gen. R. 8.2)<sup>29</sup>, and ‘public necessities, tax’ (Yalkut. Shimoni)<sup>30</sup>. These usages demonstrate that the sages were not ignorant of the original meaning of *dimos* as ‘people’ or ‘public’; however, the term never acquired the meaning of a state controlled by the people, as did the linguistic root of the term “democracy.”

Gen. R 6.4

And the Stars (Gen. 1.16). R. Aha said: Imagine a king who had two governors *apotruphin*, one ruling in the city and the other in a province. Said the king: ‘Since the former has humbled himself to rule in the city only, I decree that whenever he goes out, the city council and the people *ocras* shall go out with him, and whenever he enters, the city council and the people *dimos* shall enter with him.’ Thus did the Holy One, blessed be He, say: Since the moon humbled itself to rule by night, I decree that when she comes forth, the stars come forth with her, and when she goes in, the stars shall go in with her.

Ex. R. 15.17

It is as if a beautiful tree was erected in the bath-house, and when the chief of the army *praepositus* with his suite came to bathe, they trampled upon the tree, and all the villagers and everyone else were eager to tread upon it. Sometime later, the king sent his bust to that province that they should put up a statue of him, but they could find no wood except that from the tree in that bath-house. The artisans said to the ruler: “If you wish to set up the statue, you must bring the tree which is in the bath-house, for that is the best there is.” They brought it and prepared it thoroughly, and placed it in the hands of a caver, who fashioned the bust on it and placed it within the palace. Then came the ruler and bowed before it; and the general, the prefect, the imperial officers, the legionaries, the people and everybody else did likewise. Then did the artisans say upon them: “Yesterday, you were trampling on this tree in the bath-house, and now you are bowing to it.” They replied: “It is not to the tree that we are bowing, but to the bust of the king engraved thereupon.”

Gen.R 8. 2

Said R. Hama b. R. Hanina: This may be compared to a country that received its supplies from ass-drivers, who used to ask each other, “What was the market price today?” Thus, those who supplied on the sixth day would ask of those who supplied on the fifth day... but of who would the first day supplier ask? Surely of the citizens who were engaged in the public affairs of the country *dimosah shel medinah* ! So, the works of each day asked the other...

Interestingly, *dimos*, in the sense of people and public, appears in the context of the Roman constitutional system, where it appeared in the context of Province, Medina, and various Roman governmental or army statuses, rooted in Greek or Latin. In other words, *dimos* is not regarded as a simple mass, but something comprising the Roman administrative organization. Moreover, in these three statements, the term Medinah province was probably mentioned by accident. In two of them, bath house was relevant, although the original term is *Beit Merachzt* not *dmosin*, as discussed above. Here, we infer some connotation of *dimos* in the rabbinic literature. *Dimos* was relevant to the system of the province, particularly the Roman province, including the bath house.

In the modern commentaries on JT, *al-Tamar*, we find discussions on the *dimosin* as a mass or group.<sup>31</sup> Here, the meaning of *dimos* is explained as order composed of groups of people, as in a market. In this usage, it is very close to the concept of “mass.”

#### 4-5. Further Remarks on *dimos*

As mentioned earlier, in the standard dictionary of Jastrow, *dimos* has various meanings. Through our investigations, it has indeed become clear that *dimos*' various meanings and roots have been mixed up. This is one of the many features of *dimos*.

Further analysis will demonstrate that the emergence of the various meanings has been very imbalanced. *Dimos* mainly appears in Palestinian sources in the rabbinic literature to refer to ‘a row or stack of stones’, ‘a monument’, ‘a public bath’, ‘a pardon’, ‘people’, or ‘public affairs’. Despite the various possible meanings, the intended meaning is clear in each context. On the other hand, in the Babylonian Talmud, *dimos* means a row of stones or a monument for burial only.

The degree of this imbalance increases in later ages. In the later Middle Ages, although we find widespread usage of *dimos* in the commentaries or response literature, most occur in the context of stone monuments, particularly a ‘monument as tombstone’,

which comprises almost 80 percent of all usages of *dimos*. This shows that the problem of *dimos* in the sense of stone monument was very relevant in the Middle Ages and we may infer that some problem may have occurred with respect to maintaining burial places in the Jewish community of this time.

Fig. 1

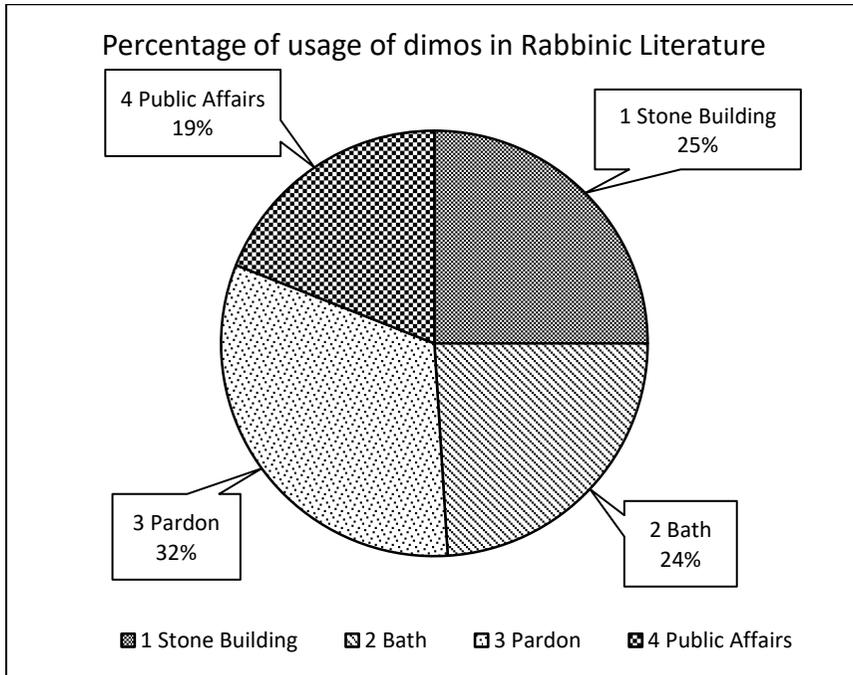
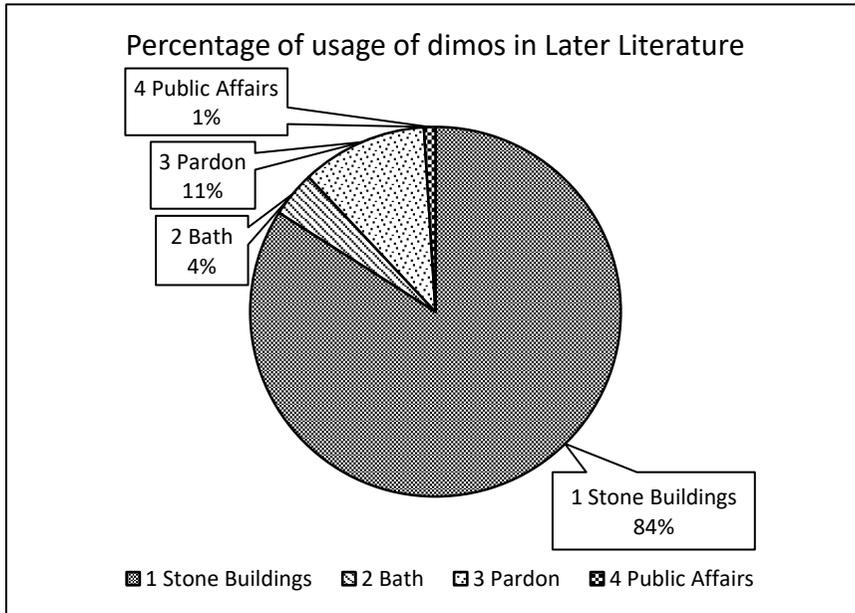


Fig. 2



Let us sum up our investigation on *dimos* to this point.

1. All the meanings enumerated seem to relate to each other in the sense that they indicate something of relevance to the public.
2. In Midrash, *dimos* is used to denote people and public. However, it does not refer to a simple mass, but is, rather, a component of the ruling system in the Roman empire.
3. By using it in the King's Parables to refer to preparing *dimosin* 'bathhouse', the rabbinic sources convey the message that kings should take care while preparing for and performing any action related to public issues.
4. In later Midrashic interpretations, *dimos* has been used to denote 'pardon' referring to God's mercy.
5. Through the Parables in the rabbinic literature, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, should take care of public affairs.
6. Even after being interpreted across a long period of time, *dimos* did not inspire any discussion on democracy or political issues; most usages dealt with the halachic discussion regarding stones or monuments.

My investigation has led me to conclude that *dimos* was never used in the sense of a democratic idea, or the state being controlled by the people; nor did it inspire the idea of democracy in the rabbinic literature, although it did convey a sense of something related to the public. At the very least, it may be said that it did not carry a negative connotation, as mentioned in Plato's criticism of the term, apart from a few exceptions.

What is interesting at this stage is that sages recognized and acknowledged the public domain. In the form of King's Parables, they presented their presupposition that in the human world, a person bearing the status of a king should control and take care of public issues. However, while a mortal king might not be able to keep his promises, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, would do so. According to the Parables, the sages supposed that both the king and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, should consider not only their own matters but also public issues and matters related to society. In this case, "public" signifies not only the Jewish people, but all those who visited the public bath in Tiberias.

Although the word *dimos* was used to indicate something relevant to the public, these usages are still far from the idea of democracy as we know it today. Therefore, we must concede that democracy was not a compelling issue in the rabbinic literature or its commentary tradition, despite the awareness of the concept of a public sphere and of the term *dimos*.

Therefore, when we attempt to relate Jewish traditional thought to political issues, particularly to democracy, we need to be very careful. It is likely that the sages' concept of the public (*kahar*), mass (*hamon, or lab*), people (*'am*) or the images of the various rulers, kings, owners, generals, and others, are key to a better understanding of their concept of freedom, equality, democracy, and so forth.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed whether the starting point of democracy can be observed by investigating the usage of freedom, the image of the leader, and the usage of *dimos* in rabbinic literature. Our investigation shows that the literature reflects its own ideas on each topic, which are not suited to the presupposition of what we call freedom today, i.e., democracy. In traditional Judaism, neither complete freedom of the individual nor complete equality of the leader and the masses were supposed as a matter of course. Rather, it was supposed that freedom was something limited by the law as a starting point and that leaders were required to behave as leaders. Furthermore, throughout history, in the tradition of Judaism, there is no evidence that the birth of democracy

resides in the term *dimos*, which was not an alien word in Jewish thought. Thus, we should not suppose that our ideas of freedom, democracy, and equality are universal values; rather, we should examine in detail how each tradition and religion views freedom, equality, and democracy according to their own literature.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP 16K02221 and based on a presentation at the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies, 2017, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In this paper, the following abbreviations are used: BT=Babylonian Talmud, JT=Jerusalem Talmud, Gen. R=Genesis Rabba, Ex. R= Exodus Rabba, Lev. R=Leviticus Rabba.
- <sup>2</sup> As for the democracy in the East Europe, former Soviet Union and Middle East, see my article, “The Image of Freedom and the Leaders in the Judaism” in K. Kohara and E. Katsumata eds., *Religions and Dialog*, (Japanese) (Tokyo: Kyobunkawn, 2017), 193-229.
- <sup>3</sup> See proceedings in N. Rothenberg and E. Schweid eds., *Jewish Identity in Modern Israel: Proceedings on Secular Judaism and Democracy* (Jerusalem, New York: Urim Publication, 2002). J. E. David ed., *The State of Israel: Between Judaism and Democracy* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2003). In the 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies, the theme of Judaism and Democracy, or Freedom, was discussed in four sessions, which tells us of the strong interest in the subject in Jewish society.
- <sup>4</sup> See my discussion, E. Katsumata, “‘Freedom’ in the Judaism: the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature” in *Kirisutokyo Kenkyu (Studies in Christianity)* vol. 77, 1-23, 2015.
- <sup>5</sup> J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), particularly 35-43.
- <sup>6</sup> S. A. Cohen, *The Three Crowns—Studies of Communal Politics in Early Rabbinic Jewry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).
- <sup>7</sup> On the system of the patriarch and its development, see D. Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994), I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1989).
- <sup>8</sup> On the conflicts between the sages and the patriarch, I. Levine, “The Jewish Patriarch (Nasi) in the Third Century Palestine” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II* 19/2 (1979), 197.
- <sup>9</sup> In this paper, ‘*dimos*’ in the alphabetical transcription of Hebrew term, while ‘*dēmos*’ is that of Greek one.
- <sup>10</sup> M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Baker Academic, 2005).
- <sup>11</sup> BT Shabbat 102a, BT Sota 44a, BT Qid. 63a, BT Mezia 118b, BT Sanh. 48a x3, BT A.Z.16b.
- <sup>12</sup> The Baraita means the traditions of Tannaic rabbis, some of which were collected in the Mishnah by the Patriarch Jehudah, but most of which were scattered throughout the rabbinic literature. The Brait’s statement was identified by its usual introduction, “*Tana rabbanan* (Our rabbis taught).” Statements with this introduction were then recognized as being part of an ancient tradition.
- <sup>13</sup> For example, comments by Rashi to the BT Shabbat 102b.

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- <sup>14</sup> *Yorea Deah* 145. 13, 656.
- <sup>15</sup> BT Shabbat 102b, BT Sota 44a, BT B. Mezia.
- <sup>16</sup> BT Sanh. 17b.
- <sup>17</sup> For example, Gen. R. 70.1, Ruth. R. 2.22.
- <sup>18</sup> BT Shabbat 33a.
- <sup>19</sup> On Tiberias, see, O. Avissar ed., *Sefer Tiberia: 'ir kineret u-yishuba beray hadorot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1973).
- <sup>20</sup> JT A.Z. 4.4.
- <sup>21</sup> Gen. R. 1. 5 (Theodor-Albeck p.10).
- <sup>22</sup> For example, in Mid. Tahnuma, Parsshat Mishpatim, 5, *studia* and *dimosin* are regarded as necessities of the masses, in the King's Parables.
- <sup>23</sup> See, J. Neusner, *Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus: The Tradition and the Man*, vol.1 (Leiden: Brill,1973), 400-403.
- <sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the place in which this episode occurred was Tiberias, which was also famous for *dimosin* as discussed above. Indeed, R. Simeon b. Yohai took a bath, though they were not called *dimosin*, and purified the bath house. It seems that there was some associative thinking in this Midrash.
- <sup>25</sup> Later commentary on the Maimonides' *Mishne Torah*, *Keter HaMelk Halachot Tshuba*3, 3, 614.
- <sup>26</sup> JT Ber. 9.14b.
- <sup>27</sup> *Keter HaMelk Halachot Tshuba*3, 3, 614.
- <sup>28</sup> *Keter HaMelk Halachot Tshuba*3, 3, 618.
- <sup>29</sup> *Malbim* (commentaries by R. Meir leibush Ben Yehiel Michel Weisser in the 19th century, Russia) on the Gen. 1. 25.
- <sup>30</sup> *Responsa* by R. Habat Yair 721, *Responsa* by the Gaon R. Openhyim 1.5.
- <sup>31</sup> *Alei Tamar* (commentaries by R. Isscal Tamar 20<sup>th</sup> century) on the Shebyit 9. 1, 462.