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The Shaping of the Shabbat: The Transformative Journey of Jewish Tradition

Yahudi Geleneğinin Dönüşüm Sürecinde Şabat'ın Şekillenmesi

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged in academic scholarship that the Jewish religious tradition has undergone significant cultural, legal, and theological transformations across its long and complex history. These shifts are often tied to moments of political disruption, exile, and reinvention, which necessitated new religious articulations and structures of authority. One of the clearest reflections of this historical dynamism is the institution of the Shabbat (Shabbat), whose evolving function and meaning serve as a valuable lens through which broader patterns of change in Judaism can be traced and analyzed. Originally instituted—at least according to tradition—during the Mosaic period as a divinely ordained day of rest marked by the cessation of labor, the Shabbat began as a simple ritual of pause embedded within a covenantal relationship between God and Israel. However, over time, this day of rest evolved into a highly codified legal framework governed by intricate halakhic rulings and interpretive traditions. The Shabbat attributed to Moses can thus be viewed not as a static institution but as the foundational model upon which later, more detailed ritual and legal systems were constructed. Importantly, this transformation did not occur in a single moment or under a unified authority; rather, it unfolded gradually across multiple historical stages and sociocultural contexts. The early textual traces of this evolution are partially preserved in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), where Shabbat is presented in various registers—from a creation-oriented cosmological pattern in Genesis to a socially ethical commandment in Deuteronomy. Yet these texts lack the complex legal infrastructure that would later characterize rabbinic Shabbat observance. It was during the Talmudic period that the Shabbat attained its fully developed halakhic form, shaped through the interpretive efforts of rabbinic sages responding to shifting communal needs, theological concerns, and the realities of post-Temple Jewish life. This study explores the historical transformation of the Shabbat by examining its scriptural origins and tracking its gradual legal and theological elaboration through the rabbinic corpus. In doing so, it positions the Shabbat as a paradigmatic case through which to understand how Jewish law, ritual, and identity were renegotiated and redefined in response to the evolving historical conditions of the Jewish people.

Keywords: History of Religions, Judaism, Tanakh, Talmud, Shabbat, Transformation.

Introduction

It is a firmly established consensus among scholars that Jewish tradition has undergone profound and multi-dimensional transformations from the Mosaic period to the present day. These transformations extend beyond the religious sphere to encompass significant cultural, social, and legal developments. Throughout this historical process, many ritualistic practices that originated during the time of Moses have been subjected to reinterpretation, modification, and, in some cases, systematic codification. One of the most illustrative examples of this enduring evolution is the institution of the Shabbat (*Shabbat*)[1]. Initially conceived as a simple day of rest marked by cessation from labor, the Shabbat has, over time, developed into a highly intricate halakhic system characterized by extensive legal regulations, a detailed enumeration of prohibited activities, and severe legal consequences for non-compliance.

This study aims to analyze, in detail, the transformation of the Shabbat[2] as a core institution within Judaism. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to examine the primary textual foundations of Jewish religious tradition, namely the *Tanakh* and the *Talmud*. The *Tanakh* presents the earliest conceptualization of the Shabbat, reflecting its initial formulation and theological foundations. The *Talmud*, by contrast, reveals how the Shabbat was expanded into a complex legal institution with detailed prohibitions and interpretive elaborations.

Accordingly, this article is structured into two main sections. The first section examines the transformation of the Shabbat within the corpus of the *Tanakh*, focusing on its theological, ritual, and legal dimensions as they evolved in the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods. In examining the transformation of the Shabbat within the Tanakh, particular emphasis will be placed on the books of the Torah and Nevi'im, where the earliest and most fundamental examples of this transformation are evident. The second section investigates the development of the Shabbat in the Talmudic era, tracing how rabbinic interpretation and halakhic systematization reshaped the nature and scope of Shabbat observance. By conducting this twofold analysis, the study seeks to illuminate how a fundamental religious practice underwent a profound transformation, reflecting the broader evolution of Jewish identity, law, and communal life across different historical epochs.

1. The Evolution of Shabbat in Written Tradition: Insights from the Tanakh

Understanding the Shabbat's transformation in the Torah necessitates careful consideration of the dating and compositional history of biblical texts. Modern biblical scholarship, through philological, literary, and historical methodologies, has demonstrated that many texts

[1] While referring to the Jewish day of rest, different transliterations of the Hebrew term שַׁבָּת (Shabbat) appear in various historical and linguistic contexts. The form Shabbath reflects an older, more phonetic transliteration often found in early English texts or influenced by German scholarship. Sabbat, on the other hand, stems from Greek (sabbaton) and Latin (sabbatum) renderings, and is frequently encountered in Christian theological writings and historical sources. The more accurate and contemporary transliteration, Shabbat, aligns with modern Hebrew pronunciation and is widely adopted in Jewish and academic contexts today. In this study, I adopt the term Shabbat to remain faithful to the original Hebrew and to reflect current scholarly conventions.

[2] For a comprehensive examination of the origins of Shabbat, including philological analyses and its conceptual framework, see: Salime Leyla Gürkan, *Yahudilik'te Şabbat (Sebt) - Kökeni, İlgili İnanç ve Uygulamalar* (Master's Thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 1994).

traditionally attributed to earlier periods were, in fact, composed or redacted later, often reflecting post-exilic realities. Scholars generally distinguish between two primary phases in the Torah's development: the pre-exilic period, marked by a tribal religious identity centered around Mosaic traditions, and the post-exilic period, which witnessed the emergence of a more systematic, national-religious identity under the framework of Judaism. In exile, the Israelites were compelled to redefine themselves not merely as a collective people but as a religious nation rooted in ancestral narratives, necessitating stricter boundaries and clearer legal norms. This shift is reflected in the nature of the commandments: post-exilic texts tend to articulate laws with greater precision and exclusivity. The Shabbat, originally part of a broader, more flexible tradition, thus became a central institution essential to the preservation of Jewish identity. By critically analyzing these scriptural layers—whose chronological stratification is well established in contemporary scholarship—this study seeks to illuminate how the Shabbat, shaped by historical ruptures and theological realignments, evolved into the structured observance recognized in later Jewish tradition.

1.1. The Early Shabbat: Concept Shabbat in the Tanakh

The references to the Shabbat within the textual layers of the Pentateuch—particularly those identified by source-critical scholarship as the Yahwist and Deuteronomic strands—demonstrate significant continuities with post-exilic formulations. Although these earlier strata differ in literary style and theological emphasis, they do not suggest a fundamentally separate conception of the Shabbat. Rather than positing a clear-cut division between pre-exilic and post-exilic traditions, this study approaches the texts diachronically, viewing the development of Shabbat theology as a process of reinterpretation and adaptation across historical contexts. In this light, the transformation of the Shabbat tradition reflects not a rupture but an evolving discourse shaped by changing communal, theological, and ritual needs.

The formation and conceptualization of the Shabbat in ancient Israelite religion reflect significant developments over time, particularly when approached through the framework of source criticism. Among the various models within this field, this study adopts the Documentary Hypothesis as its primary lens of analysis—specifically engaging with the Yahwist (J), Deuteronomic (D) and Priestly (P) strata as representative of distinct theological and literary traditions within the Hebrew Bible.[3] This selection does not ignore the substantial critiques raised by alternative models, such as the Supplementary Hypothesis, which question the chronological layering proposed by the classical documentary model. While the Supplementary Hypothesis regards the Deuteronomic and Priestly materials as exilic or post-exilic compositions, it nevertheless acknowledges the Yahwist layer as the earliest foundational source upon which later

[3] Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885); Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Priestly Torah: Narrative and Law in the Priestly Source," *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Views on the Priestly Strata*, ed. Sarah Shectman & Joel S. Baden (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009); Jeffrey Stackert, *Rewriting the Torah: Literary Revision in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Legislation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Jeffrey Stackert, *A Prophet Like Moses: Prophecy, Law, and Israelite Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

expansions were built.[4] In this sense, rather than leading our investigation in a radically different direction, the supplementary approach ultimately supports similar methodological outcomes—particularly in tracing how earlier theological frameworks, such as that of J, were reworked and extended in response to shifting historical and ideological circumstances. The discussion also incorporates prophetic voices—particularly those attributed to Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah—to contextualize evolving Shabbat conceptions beyond the Pentateuchal corpus. These sources not only offer varying theological and social interpretations of the Shabbat but also reflect the broader transformation of Israelite religion from a tribal, agrarian system to a more centralized, normative religious tradition.

The earliest references to Shabbat observance appear in the so-called JE texts, notably Exodus 34:21[5] and 23:12.[6] Both texts emphasize a simple yet central formula: six days of labor followed by a seventh day of rest. This refrain, appearing repeatedly in various Shabbat injunctions throughout the Hebrew Bible, serves as a foundational motif. Martin Noth argues[7] that Exodus 34:21 represents an early Shabbat formulation, with verse 21a embodying the original structure, while 21b is likely a later addition emphasizing agricultural seasons—evidence of a society transitioning into settled agrarian life.[8] Likewise, Exodus 23:12, regarded as part of the Covenant Code, reflects an early period of Israelite settlement prior to monarchic institutions, where rest on the Shabbat is extended not only to humans but also to animals and foreign laborers. This extension has led some scholars, including Frey[9] and Andreasan[10], to suggest Deuteronomistic editorial influence in the later layering of the text. Both Noth and Andreasan place these texts in a context where Shabbat observance was primarily a pragmatic institution, likely reflecting early agricultural rhythms rather than a fully developed religious ideology. Shabbat observance at this stage appears to function as a community-based labor regulation, devoid of the theological elaborations that characterize later priestly and post-exilic materials. Andreasan and Beyerlin further associate these laws with a settled society in pre-monarchic Canaan, suggesting that the institutionalization of Shabbat laws corresponded with a shift from nomadic subsistence to structured, land-based productivity.

4 John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Christoph Levin, *The Yahwist: A Historian of Israelite Origins* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005); Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. James Nogalski (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

5 "***a*** Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; ***b*** you shall cease from labor even at plowing time and harvest time."; Exodus 34:21.

6 "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your home-born slave and the stranger may be refreshed." Exodus 23:12.

7 Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 264.

8 For more comment look; Niels-Erik Albinus Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation* (PhD Thesis, Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1971), 89; Walter Beyerlin, *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 95.

9 Mathilde Frey, *The Sabbath in the Pentateuch: an Exegetical and Theological Study* (PhD Thesis, Michigan: Andrews University, 2011), 176.

10 Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation,* 90.

The Deuteronomic text in Deuteronomy 5:12–15[11] introduces a significant theological innovation: the Shabbat is now observed not in remembrance of creation, but in memory of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Unlike the JE texts, which offer little rationale beyond the act of ceasing from labor, the Deuteronomist presents a moral and historical imperative. This text, widely associated with the reforms of King Josiah in the late seventh century BCE, mirrors the Deuteronomic concern for social justice, covenant fidelity, and historical consciousness. The Shabbat becomes an ethical institution—its observance linked to Israel's collective memory of bondage and liberation. As Blevins[12] and Brueggemann[13] argue, this theological shift reframes Shabbat observance as an act of socio-political solidarity, not merely ritual compliance.

The Deuteronomic text expands the Shabbat command by listing not only family members but also slaves, animals, and resident foreigners, emphasizing a communal rest that transcends social hierarchies. Scholar such as George suggests that this inclusive language reflects a reformist ethos, aimed at confronting social inequalities and fostering communal empathy. George particularly contrasts the P (Priestly) and D (Deuteronomic) sources, identifying their distinct portrayals of divine authority: while P presents God as the sovereign creator who commands rest based on cosmological order, D portrays God as the suzerain redeemer who liberates and demands covenantal loyalty in return.[14] This dichotomy illustrates how theological shifts shape legal formulations and ritual obligations. The Deuteronomist's emphasis on the Shabbat as a means of social renewal aligns with Josianic reforms aimed at centralization, moral reform, and the eradication of idolatry. The appeal to Egypt as a symbol of oppression reinforces the narrative of divine justice and national identity, providing a compelling reason for Shabbat observance even to non-Israelites within the community. This theological development marks a turning point in the understanding of the Shabbat—not merely as cessation from work, but as an ethical and covenantal duty grounded in historical memory.[15]

Further insights into the pre-exilic Shabbat are found in prophetic literature, particularly in Amos 8:4–6[16], Hosea 2:11 (13)[17], and Isaiah 1:13[18]. These texts do not offer legal instruction but provide critical reflections on the misuse and hollowing of religious rituals, including the Shabbat.

11 "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as your God יהוה has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God יהוה; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and your God יהוה freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, your God יהוה has commanded you to observe the sabbath day." Deuteronomy 5:12–15.

12 Kent Blevins, "Observing Sabbath", *Review & Expositor*, 113/4 (2016): 484-486.

13 Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 68-69.

14 Mark K. George, "The Sabbath, Regimes of Truth, and the Subjectivity of Ancient Israel", *Journal of Religion & Society* Supplement 13 (2016):11-19.

15 Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation*, 133; Hutton Webster, *Rest Days : A Study in Early Law and Morality* (New York : Macmillan, 1916), 256.

16 "Listen to this, you who devour the needy, annihilating the poor of the land, saying, "If only the new moon were over, so that we could sell grain; the sabbath, so that we could offer wheat for sale, using an ephah that is too small, and a shekel that is too big, tilting a dishonest scale." Amos 8:4-5.

17 "And I will end all her rejoicing: Her festivals, new moons, and sabbaths—All her festive seasons." Hosea 2:11 (13).

18 "Bringing oblations is futile, Incense is offensive to Me. New moon and sabbath, proclaiming of solemnities, Assemblies with iniquity I cannot abide." Isaiah 1:13

Amos denounces the exploitation of the poor and the eagerness of merchants to bypass Shabbat restrictions for profit. Amos critiques the economic injustices that undermine its ethical foundation. Andreasan warns against reading these passages as evidence of strict Shabbat legislation; instead, they reveal the Shabbat as a socio-ethical ideal compromised by greed and hypocrisy.[19] Hosea's critique suggests that even joyful religious festivals, including the Shabbat, have lost their meaning in a society preoccupied with ritual but devoid of justice. Similarly, Isaiah condemns the performance of religious rituals—Shabbats included—as detestable when accompanied by injustice and moral corruption. All three prophets articulate a vision where the Shabbat is not rejected but emptied of its sacred meaning through the people's ethical failures. Their collective witness illustrates the emergence of a Shabbat consciousness in the prophetic imagination—one that insists on inner integrity and social righteousness over formal observance.[20]

The association of the Shabbat with the New Moon in these prophetic texts also invites further analysis. Wellhausen and later scholars observe that the early Israelites seem to have maintained a lunar calendar, with New Moon festivals holding comparable importance to the Shabbat. Yet, while the Shabbat was increasingly elevated in biblical law and later rabbinic tradition, the New Moon gradually faded from prominence. Wellhausen posits that this marginalization reflects a deliberate theological move away from practices perceived as syncretistic or pagan.[21] Webster, however, cautions against assuming a polemical intent, suggesting instead that the Shabbat gradually overshadowed the New Moon as the religious calendar evolved. He highlights that New Moon offerings continued in priestly texts and persisted in certain communal practices, particularly among women and in liturgical contexts.[22]

In summary, the pre-exilic development of the Shabbat reveals a complex trajectory. The earliest JE texts reflect a practical rest pattern embedded within agrarian cycles, likely intended to regulate labor in a newly settled society. The Deuteronomic text expands this framework, imbuing the Shabbat with covenantal and ethical dimensions rooted in Israel's redemptive history. Prophetic critiques underscore the dangers of ritual formalism and the erosion of the Shabbat's moral force. Collectively, these sources attest not only to the historical presence of Shabbat observance prior to the exile but also to its transformation from a pragmatic rest day to a central symbol of Israelite identity, justice, and divine-human relationship. This evolution laid the foundation for the post-exilic and rabbinic conceptualizations of the Shabbat, where the day would acquire further theological, legal, and liturgical weight.

1.2. Post-Exilic Approaches to Shabbat: New Perspectives in the Tanakh

This part of work examines the transformation and integration of Shabbat observance within the broader narrative of the Hebrew Bible. While the previous section argued for the presence of

19 Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation*, 62.

20 Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005), 210-215.

21 Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel: With a Reprint of the Article "Israel" from the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Cambridge: University Press, 2013), 117.

22 Webster, *Rest Days*, 255-256.

pre-exilic Shabbat traditions, this part focuses on how these traditions were reinterpreted and systematized during the post-exilic period. A central thesis—advanced by scholars such as Jacob Milgrom and John Van Seters—is that the experience of exile played a formative role in the legal and theological rearticulation of Israelite identity, particularly through the codification of ritual laws such as Shabbat observance.[23] As part of this broader process of transformation, the study explores how the Torah—especially through the manna episode in Exodus 16:1–36—interacts with what modern scholarship has identified as the Priestly (P) and Holiness (H) sources, ultimately producing a more structured and ideologically charged vision of the Shabbat. This framework raises an important question: does the Shabbat tradition, as reflected in Exodus 16, predate the Sinai revelation? A surface reading of Exodus 16:22–30 suggests that Shabbat observance was introduced prior to the theophany at Sinai, which may point to the existence of an earlier tradition. However, such an implication cannot be accepted uncritically. From the standpoint of modern biblical criticism—as opposed to traditional Jewish interpretation—this passage must be understood within its compositional context, and it remains possible that references to the Shabbat in this narrative reflect later editorial insertions intended to retroject post-Sinaitic or even post-exilic legal structures into the pre-Sinaitic storyline.

In Exodus 16:22-30[24], the "Manna narrative" is presented as a crucial moment in Israel's wilderness experience. Here the Israelites collect a double portion of manna on the sixth day, and on the seventh day they find no manna—a direct act of divine testing. Scholars have long debated whether this episode indicates that the Israelites already possessed knowledge of a Shabbat or if this is the point at which Shabbat observance was introduced in a formative way. Some scholars—such as Martin Buber—argue that expressions like "holy Shabbat" and the divine rebuke, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions?"[25], imply the existence of an established tradition of Shabbat observance that predates the Sinai revelation. This view reflects a broader interpretive stance that sees the narrative as drawing upon pre-existing oral traditions.[26] Others, including scholars like J.K. Hoffmeier and Johannes Frey,[27] argue that the legal language and theological framing in Exodus 16 bear the marks of a later, post-exilic redaction.[2] From this perspective, the narrative does not preserve an early memory of pre-Sinaitic Shabbat practice, but rather retrojects post-exilic norms into the wilderness setting. Hoffmeier, in particular,

23 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); John Van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

24 "On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each; and when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what יהוה meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of יהוה. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning." So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it. Then Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath of יהוה; you will not find it today on the plain. Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none." Yet some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found nothing. And יהוה said to Moses, "How long will you all refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings? Mark that it is יהוה who, having given you the sabbath, therefore gives you two days' food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain in place: let no one leave the vicinity on the seventh day." So the people remained inactive on the seventh day." Exodus 16:22-30.

25 Exodus 16:28.

26 Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and The Covenant* (New York: Harper, 1958), 80.

27 Frey, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch", 75, 78-79.

underscores that the seven-day week was not characteristic of Egyptian calendrical systems, and thus the introduction of a weekly Shabbat observance is best understood as a conscious cultural and theological divergence, likely articulated in the exilic or post-exilic period rather than immediately after the Exodus.[28] Scholars like Dressler, on the other hand, suggest that the repetition of legal motifs and ritual vocabulary in this passage reflects a continuity with older traditions—possibly oral in nature—which were later codified and systematized by redactors.[29] This source-critical approach, represented by a range of scholars across the documentary and supplementary schools, is central to understanding how the Shabbat narrative evolved from earlier oral formulations into the complex literary layers of the Pentateuch.

The next passage often cited by scholars as reflecting redactional activity—whether through revision or interpolation—is Genesis 2:2–3,[30] which integrates the Shabbat motif into the creation account. This passage, which describes how God rested on the seventh day after creating the heavens, the earth, and all living beings, serves as a theological foundation for the Shabbat laws later codified -Priestly Code- in Exodus. This creation account was incorporated—or "grafted"—into the legal tradition to provide a divine rationale: if God himself rested, then human beings are also commanded to rest. However, scholars remain divided regarding its source affiliation. Some posit that the language and theological motifs of Genesis 2 are characteristic of the P source, while others see differences suggesting a later redaction (as argued by scholars such as Ilgen and Gabler).[31] Similarly, Exodus 20:8-11[32]—the passage forming part of the Decalogue—commands the Shabbat with terms like "remember" and emphasizes the prohibition against work on this day. The textual analysis extends to the differences between Exodus and Deuteronomy (where "keep" is used instead of "remember"), implicating shifts in the intended audience's cultural memory and ritual practice. The legal and theological reinforcement of Shabbat observance during the Sinai period is best understood as a multifaceted process, relying on both earlier creation motifs and later redactional modifications. The text states that, unlike other Shabbat-related commandments—which generally do not prescribe capital punishment—the violation of the Shabbat in this passage (Exod. 35:2[33]) is explicitly associated with the death penalty. What

[28] James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173.

[29] Harold H. P. Dressler, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 24.

[30] "On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken: [God] ceased on the seventh day from doing any of the work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done." Genesis 2:2-3

[31] Johann Gabler & Johannes Eichhorn, *Urgeschichte I,* (Nürnberg: Ben Monath und Russler, 1790); https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=UpsUAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA1&hl=tr&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false; Karl David Ilgen, *Die Urkunden des Jerusalemischen Tempelarchivs in ihrer Urgestalt: Theil I: Die Urkunden des ersten Buchs von Moses*, (Halle: Hemmerde und Schwetschke, 1798), 434.

[32] "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God יהוה: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days יהוה made heaven and earth and sea—and all that is in them—and then rested on the seventh day; therefore יהוה blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-11.

[33] "On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of complete rest, holy to יהוה; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the sabbath day." Exodus 35:2–3.

distinguishes the following verse (Exod. 35:3) is its concrete prohibition against kindling fire in one's dwelling, which many scholars interpret as a later specification aimed at clarifying or intensifying Shabbat restrictions. According to most of scholars this prohibition was not present in earlier sources (J, D, or even P) and appears to be a later addition, possibly incorporated in the post-exilic period to mark a clear distinction between Israelite practices and those of surrounding cultures. Scholars such as Robinson argue that an original version of the law might have included a reference to "foreign fire," which was later redacted.[34] Timmer[35] and Cassuto[36] suggest that the prohibition against fire was both an intrinsic symbol of cessation of all creative activity and an attempt to differentiate the Israelites from pagan fire rituals. The modern scholarship generally agrees that the fire prohibition is not an archaic part of the Shabbat tradition but a later, redacted feature that functions to enforce the cessation of work and to preserve the integrity of the Shabbat as a marker of cultural and religious identity.

Among the prophetic texts written after the exile, Ezekiel contains the most information about the Shabbat. Ezekiel's oracles (particularly in chapters 20, 22, and 23) sharply criticize Israel's disregard for Shabbat observance, portraying such transgressions as symptomatic of a wider failure in maintaining the covenant. The scholars contrast scholarly positions on whether these passages represent the genuine teachings of Ezekiel or are redactions incorporating earlier H source material. On the one hand, some scholars -Hölscher[37] and Cooke[38] argue that the repetitive and almost formulaic language in Ezekiel's references to Shabbat observance indicates reliance on an established legal tradition rather than an independent prophetic innovation. On the other hand, scholars like Zimmerli[39] and Andreasan[40] defend the view that Ezekiel, while echoing familiar themes, articulates his own critical stance by stressing that the Israelites' failure to distinguish between the sacred and the profane has led to divine retribution. In this regard, the discussion of Ezekiel's texts illuminates how, in the post-exilic context, the failure to observe the Shabbat is used as both a theological indictment and a diagnostic indicator of Israelite spiritual decline.

In conclusion, according to the comprehensive analysis presented reveals that the Shabbat law, as it appears in the biblical text, is not a monolithic tradition but rather the product of a complex redactional process. The Manna narrative, the creation account, and the later legal formulation—as exemplified in Exodus 20—demonstrate how the Shabbat functioned as a dual symbol: a ritual of divine rest and a legal marker of Israelite identity. Furthermore, the introduction of unique prohibitions (such as the fire prohibition in Exodus 35) and the prophetic

34 Gnana Robinson, "The Prohibition of Strange Fire in Ancient Israel: A New Look at the Case of Gathering Wood and Kindling Fire on the Sabbath", *Vetus Testamentum* 28/3 (1978): 301-317.

35 Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle and Sabbath: The Function of the Sabbath Frame in Exodus 31:12–17; 35:1–3* (PhD Thesis, Illinois: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006), 82-83.

36 Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967),455.

37 Gustav Hölscher, *Hesekiel, der Dichter und das Buch: eine literarkritische Untersuchung* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1924), 110.

38 George Albert Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 213.

39 Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1955), 447.

40 Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation,* 42-43.

rebuke found in Ezekiel underscore the evolving nature of Shabbat observance. Whether through debates on the timing of its introduction (pre- or post-Sinaic) or through the critical lens of source criticism (with arguments concerning the P, H, D, or J materials), it is evident that the Shabbat underwent a theological and sociocultural transformation—shifting from a covenantal obligation and ethical imperative, as emphasized in Deuteronomic texts, to a more formalized and ritualized identity marker in the Priestly and Holiness traditions. While Deuteronomy already presents the Shabbat as a sign of Israel's distinctiveness, especially in relation to the liberation from Egypt, the Priestly and Holiness sources further institutionalized it as a central symbol of holiness and cosmic order, embedding it within a broader system of purity and cultic law. Ultimately, this transformation not only provided a theological rationale for a day of rest but also helped forge a distinct cultural identity for the Israelite community in its post-exilic phase—a legacy that continues to influence both Jewish law and broader religious practices today.

2. Shabbat in Oral Tradition: Interpretations in Talmud

The period following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE marked a pivotal transformation in Judaism, transitioning from a religion centered on written revelation to one increasingly grounded in oral tradition. This shift gave rise to the Talmudic era, stretching from the first to the sixth century CE, during which rabbinic authorities—Tannaim and Amoraim—systematically shaped Jewish law and identity.[41] Central to this process was the reinterpretation of the Shabbat (*Shabbat*), whose observance emerged as a defining marker of Jewish identity particularly in the aftermath of the Roman suppression of Jewish revolts and the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). While circumcision is explicitly attested as a banned practice under certain Roman imperial edicts—most notably during the reign of Hadrian following the Bar Kokhba revolt[42]—there is little direct evidence in Roman legal or administrative texts of comparable prohibitions against Shabbat observance. This relative silence in historical records has led scholars to suggest that the symbolic and communal significance of the Shabbat may have been further emphasized and elevated in rabbinic discourse as part of a broader post-Temple identity reconstruction.

The academy of Yavne, traditionally associated with Yohanan ben Zakkai's relocation following the destruction of the Second Temple, became the epicenter of this religious and legal reorientation. Through institutions like the Sanhedrin and the codification efforts culminating in the Mishnah and the Talmud, rabbinic Judaism forged a durable post-Temple identity.[43] In this context, Shabbat laws—particularly the prohibition on kindling fire—were deeply elaborated and linked to the work of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), serving not only as legal precepts but also as cultural-symbolic constructs. The evolving focus on Shabbat, alongside detailed halakhic deliberations on the 39 prohibited labors (*melachot*), exemplifies how Jewish sages, navigating the

41 W. M. Christie, "The Jamnia Period in Jewish History", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 26/104 (1925): 347-364.

42 Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 218–220.

43 Anthony J. Saldarini, "Johanan Ben Zakkai's Escape from Jerusalem Origin and Development of a Rabbinic Story", *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 6/2 (1975): 191-193.

political and spiritual crisis of exile, redefined core elements of Jewish practice to ensure communal cohesion and continuity.

2.1 Tannaitic Views on Shabbat: 39 Melachots and "Fire" Melacha

2.1.1. The Talmudic Conceptualization of the 39 Prohibited Labors on the Shabbat

The Mishnah's treatment of the Shabbat reveals an intricate legal and theological endeavor to frame the day as a cornerstone of Jewish ritual and identity. Within Masechet Shabbat of the Babylonian Talmud, the 39 categories of prohibited labor (*avot melachot*) form the earliest and most structured articulation of halakhic boundaries on what constitutes work on Shabbat. This framework not only reflects the rabbinic response to post-Temple Judaism but also codifies a spiritual ideology wherein divine rest is mirrored through cessation from creative labor.

The Mishnah, particularly in tractate Shabbat 7:2, enumerates the 39 principal categories of labor. These labors are not arbitrary; rather, they derive conceptually from activities associated with the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), the portable sanctuary described in the Torah. Each prohibited act symbolizes an aspect of human creative mastery over the material world. The Mishnah's formulation is terse, listing only the names of the labors, while the Talmud—through the Amoraic layer known as the *Gemara*—expands on their practical applications, boundaries, and exceptions.

Rabbinic interpretation introduces a layered system of prohibited activities, distinguishing between *avot* (primary categories) and *toldot* (derivative or secondary forms of labor).[44] This taxonomic system enables the halakhic tradition to account for evolving social and technological contexts while maintaining fidelity to the original categories. For example, while kindling fire (*mav'ir*) is classified as a primary labor, certain indirect actions—such as increasing or decreasing a flame's intensity—may be categorized as secondary forms of labor depending on their functional and halakhic implications. This system demonstrates how rabbinic legal reasoning negotiates the tension between inherited categories and their application in varied practical scenarios. Moreover, the Talmud's halakhic exegesis reveals a clear concern with legalistic nuance. Each melacha is not only defined in terms of its general function (e.g., sewing, building, baking) but is also deconstructed into specific actions that could potentially violate the Shabbat boundaries. This intense scrutiny demonstrates the centrality of Shabbat in constructing Jewish law's practical contours. Discussions around actions such as carrying, lighting fires, or even writing two letters are explored with meticulous detail, suggesting a culture deeply committed to safeguarding the sanctity of time through behavioral discipline. From a methodological standpoint, the Talmud employs its characteristic dialogical structure to explore these laws. Legal rulings are debated, counterexamples are introduced, and often conflicting rabbinic opinions are juxtaposed to present the reader with a nuanced mosaic of thought. This approach does not yield a monolithic rule but a spectrum of possibilities that allow Jewish communities to adapt legal principles to their lived realities.

44 *Shabbat* 73a; https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.73a.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en .

The significance of the 39 *melachot* extends beyond legal theory; it contributes to the existential dimension of Jewish identity. While Shabbat had already functioned as a core marker of Jewish distinctiveness—as evidenced in texts from the Second Temple period, including *2 Maccabees*[45] —it took on heightened symbolic and institutional meaning in the rabbinic period, particularly in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt and under increasingly repressive Roman policies that curtailed public Jewish practice. In this context, rabbinic efforts to refine and codify Shabbat observance were both theological and political, reinforcing it not only as a sacred day but also as a temporal sanctuary—a countercultural assertion of identity that helped sustain communal coherence in exile. In conclusion, the Talmudic construction of the 39 prohibited labors reflects a multi-layered process involving legal precision, historical adaptation, and religious intentionality. Shabbat, as structured through the framework of the *39 melachot*, becomes a testament to the rabbinic tradition's ability to translate abstract biblical prohibitions into a comprehensive, embodied practice that shaped daily life and communal identity. The enduring relevance of these categories, and their dynamic interpretation across generations, underscores their foundational role in the continuity of Jewish law and spiritual consciousness.

Regarding the origin of the list, the Mishnah only lists the activities, while the later Gemara attempts to explain the origins of this list. Interestingly, these explanations are absent from the earlier Tannaitic period and only emerge during the Amoraic discussions. This temporal gap suggests that the linkage of the 39 labors to the *Mishkan* may have been a retrospective theological rationalization rather than a foundational principle of the list itself. Such a hypothesis indicates that the list of 39 melachot might not have originally been conceived as deriving from biblical precedent, but later rabbinic figures sought such a foundation to legitimize and anchor their legal traditions in scriptural authority.

2.1.2 The Prohibition of Fire on the Shabbat in Talmudic Tradition: A Legal and Theological Examination

This part explores the Talmudic rationale behind the distinct mention of fire in the Shabbat prohibitions and evaluates rabbinic interpretations concerning both kindling and extinguishing fire. While the Mishnah enumerates 39 categories of prohibited work on the Shabbat, Exodus 35:3 explicitly forbids: "You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat day." This distinctive textual emphasis prompted significant rabbinic deliberation. The question driving this inquiry is not only why fire is singled out in the Torah but how its prohibition functions both legally and symbolically within rabbinic halakhah and ancient Jewish theology.

The Talmudic sources, especially Yevamot 6b, Sanhedrin 35b, and Shabbat 70a, document early rabbinic debates on the fire prohibition. Rabbi Yishmael's school raises the central question: Why is the prohibition of kindling fire uniquely singled out among the Shabbat laws in the Torah ?[46] Two prominent interpretations follow. According to Rabbi Yosei, the Torah emphasizes the fire prohibition to demarcate it as a lighter offense. While most Shabbat violations carry the death

[45] II Maccabees 6:6.

[46] *Sanhedrin 35b: 6-7.*

penalty, fire kindling warrants only a lesser punishment, distinguishing it from other melachot.[47] In contrast, Rabbi Natan sees the singling out of fire not as indicative of lesser severity but as a paradigmatic act, selected to establish the principle that each forbidden labor on the Shabbat constitutes an independent offense requiring a separate sin offering when violated unknowingly.[48] These interpretations are not isolated rulings but are rooted in the hermeneutical traditions of two rabbinic schools. Rabbi Yosei, a student of Rabbi Akiva, follows a textualist method where every word and nuance in the Torah carries legal significance. His interpretation highlights the gravity of individual melachot based on penal distinctions.[49] Rabbi Natan, also aligned with Akiva's school yet influenced by broader exegetical traditions, adopts a systemic approach where the legal architecture of Shabbat prohibitions demands the differentiation of each labor type for halakhic clarity and accountability.[50]

Despite the Talmudic explanations of Rabbi Yosei and Nathan, the question of why the prohibition of fire is specifically given in the Torah, separate from other prohibitions, remains unanswered. In this context, we argue that the Talmudic focus on fire's legal implications reflects a broader rabbinic methodology: Fire becomes a prototype through which other melachot can be understood and structured. Both Yosei and Natan's views point toward the functional centrality of fire within the halakhic system. This halakhic prototyping does not aim to address any symbolic or theological connotation of fire in the biblical narrative—if such exists—but rather redirects the focus toward legal codification. Instead, it shifts the discourse toward legal codification, enabling the rabbis to construct a durable and adaptable Shabbat framework. This interpretive strategy reveals a tension in rabbinic thought between theological inquiry and halakhic application. Rather than speculating on why the Torah highlighted fire, the rabbis turn the prohibition into a legal model.[51] The approach affirms a key feature of rabbinic jurisprudence: the prioritization of legal enforceability and clarity over speculative engagement with symbolic or theological meanings that may be embedded in the biblical text. However, it also reflects a loss of symbolic depth in the service of normative structure.

We have stated the claim that fire is the prototype of other prohibitions, but this claim raises a new question. Why was fire chosen as the prohibition? What is the importance of fire? Thus, to address the underlying question—why fire is singled out in the Torah—the study extends beyond rabbinic legalism into cultural-religious history. Fire has held a central place in the sacred rituals

47 *Yevamot 6b: 4- 6.*

48 *Shabbat* 70a: 3- 7.

49 Solomon Schechter & M. Seligsohn, "Jose Ben Halafta", Jewish Encyclopedia; https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8789-jose-ben-halafta.

50 Wilhelm Bacher & A. S. Waldstein, "Nathan", Jewish Encyclopedia, erişim: 25.04.2025, https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11344-nathan; David Joseph Bornstein & Stephen G. Wald, "Nathan Ha-Bavli", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, (New York: Thompson Gale, 2007), 15: 15-16.

51 Deborah Weiser, *Fire and The Sabbath: A Look at Exodus 35:3 and the Jewish Exegetical History of the Biblical Prohibition Against Using Fire on the Sabbath Day* (PhD Thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 2002), 31.

of ancient civilizations, including Mesopotamia,[52] Egypt,[53] and Greece.[54] It served as a transformative, purifying force in divine worship but was also tightly regulated within sacred spaces to preserve ritual purity and divine order. The Torah's prohibition may reflect this broader pattern: fire, as both a creative and destructive force, becomes a symbol of human transformative power that must be restrained in sacred time. Thus, the Shabbat prohibition of fire parallels other ancient restrictions placed upon fire during holy times or in sanctified places. Shabbat, conceptualized as sacred time rather than space, mirrors the tabernacle's holiness. In this framework, abstaining from fire use on the Shabbat could symbolize the relinquishing of human creative power in deference to divine rest and sovereignty.

Unlike fire kindling, the extinguishing of fire is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah but appears in the Talmud as part of the 39 melachot. Its inclusion arises through rabbinic derivation, notably in Mishnah Shabbat 7:2 and Shabbat 73a, which tie the prohibited labors to activities associated with the construction and maintenance of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Although modern scholarship questions the historical link between the Mishkan and the 39 melachot, the rabbis presented this association to legitimate the expansion of Shabbat law through hermeneutic tradition. The Tannaim, particularly Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, are instrumental in formalizing extinguishing as a melachah.[55] Rabbi Natan supports this by asserting that kindling logically implies extinguishing, as one act completes the other in ritual or utilitarian contexts. The inclusion of extinguishing is thus justified both functionally and hermeneutically.

In conclusion, the prohibition of fire on the Shabbat occupies a unique legal and symbolic position in Jewish law. While the Torah highlights it singularly, rabbinic authorities transform it into a prototype for broader Shabbat prohibitions. Their approach prioritizes legal clarity and structural coherence, often foregoing engagement with the symbolic or theological dimensions that fire may have held in the biblical imagination—such as its association with divine presence, purification, or creative power. However, a comparative study with ancient Near Eastern religious practices suggests that the Torah's fire prohibition also reflects a deeper cultural logic, delineating the boundary between divine order and human intervention.

2.2 Amoraic Insights on Shabbat: The Mishkan as Narrative Foundation for the 39 Melachot

The 39 melachot—categories of labor prohibited on the Shabbat—form the backbone of rabbinic Shabbat legislation. While these prohibitions are formally codified in the Mishnah (Shabbat 11:2, 12:3), their origins are not explicitly stated in the biblical text. The Mishnah itself does not directly attribute these labors to any specific narrative or theological source. However, rabbinic tradition, as preserved in the Gemara, ultimately links these prohibited actions to the

52 Belinda Winder, "Positive aspects of fire: Fire in ritual and religion", *The Irish Journal of Psychology* 30 (21 November 2012): 14-15; Benjamin D. Sommer, "The Babylonian Akitu Festival: Rectifying the King or Renewing the Cosmos." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 27/1, (2000): 86.

53 Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901),79-83137,173,181.

54 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Universe, the Gods, and Mortals : Ancient Greek Myths* (London: Profile, 2001), 53-56.

55 Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, "The Textual Source for the 39 Melachot of Shabbat", *The Torah.com*, erişim: 25.04.2025, https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-textual-source-for-the-39-melachot-of-shabbat .

construction of the Mishkan , thereby rooting halakhic categories in sacred narrative.[56] This shift from implicit legal tradition to explicit narrative foundation represents a profound development in the evolution of Jewish law.

The Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 49b) explicitly states that the number and nature of the 39 prohibited labors correspond to those performed during the building of the Mishkan. Rabbi Hanina bar Hama is cited as the source of this view, asserting that the labors prohibited on the Shabbat derive from the creative acts used in erecting the Tabernacle. This represents the first unambiguous linkage between halakhic prohibition and historical-religious event. In contrast to the Mishnah, which contains no reference to the Mishkan, the Gemara articulates a theological rationale that integrates Shabbat observance with Israel's sacred history. Notably, this attribution is singular in its source: no other rabbi in the Talmud makes this association so clearly, raising critical questions about the motives and authority of such a claim.

To understand this interpretive move, one must contextualize Rabbi Hanina bar Hama within the transitional period between the Tannaitic and Amoraic eras. The rabbinic figure of Hanina—portrayed in third-century sources as a student of Judah HaNasi, the redactor of the Mishnah—illustrates a discursive shift in rabbinic literature from a restrained legal approach to a more expansive interpretive engagement with the Torah. Whether or not Hanina reflects a historical individual, his reported claim that he could reconstruct the Torah through logical reasoning alone exemplifies a broader hermeneutical tendency: a move away from the passive reception of tradition toward an active reconstruction of textual meaning within the rabbinic imagination.[57] This trend aligns with the broader goals of Amoraic interpretation, which was not merely exegetical but also constructive. Rabbinic interpretations, especially in the school of Rabbi Akiva, were predicated on the belief that every word, letter, and repetition in the Torah held halakhic significance.[58] Thus, the halakhah was not extracted mechanically but was reimagined through a blend of inherited tradition and contemporary needs. This method, known as *asmakhta (אסמכתא)*, involved deriving laws through associative links rather than explicit scriptural mandate.[59]

Hanina's interpretive model must be viewed within the broader context of the post-Temple Jewish world. The destruction of the Second Temple necessitated a shift from a cultic system rooted in priestly rituals to a textual tradition grounded in legal discourse and exegetical authority. In this new landscape, rabbinic legitimacy depended not only on scriptural fidelity but also on the ability to root legal norms in the mythic and covenantal past of Israel. Although the Mishkan is rarely mentioned explicitly in the Mishnah, later rabbinic texts evoke it as a symbolic prototype, perhaps because it functioned less as a historical site and more as a conceptual foundation for linking halakhic categories—such as Shabbat labor—to a divinely sanctioned narrative. While some scholars have identified rhetorical and interpretive parallels between

[56] *Talmud Shabbat 49b:6-7.*

[57] Zvi Kaplan, "Hanina Bar Hama", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Thompson Gale, 2007), 8: 321.

[58] Richard A. Robinson, *The Laws of Prohibited Labor on the Sabbath in Relation to the Book of Exodus: From Exodus Through the Mishnah* (Westminster: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 332-333.

[59] Robinson, *The Laws of Prohibited Labor on the Sabbath in Relation to the Book of Exodus,* 334.

rabbinic thought and contemporaneous Hellenistic and early Christian traditions, particularly in terms of moral discourse and textual reasoning, it is more accurate to understand these as part of a shared intellectual environment rather than evidence of a universalistic ethos in rabbinic literature. But the distinction between the Mishnah and the Talmud is better understood not as a shift from universalism to particularism, but as one from a utopian to an apologetic orientation—both firmly Israel-centered in outlook.[1] In this light, the association between Shabbat labor and Mishkan construction functions not merely as a technical derivation but as a theological strategy to reinforce Jewish identity through a sacred narrative exclusive to Israel, particularly in the context of increasing marginalization under Christian rule during the Gemara's redactional period.

Scholars differ on when the Mishkan-Shabbat connection first emerged. While Jacob Neusner maintains that this association is a late Amoraic development, occurring only in the Gemara,[60] others like Sidney Hoenig argue for an earlier origin, suggesting that connections between Shabbat and temple reconstruction appear as early as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Hoenig views the Mishkan as a proto-temple, and thus a natural symbol around which Shabbat prohibitions could crystallize.[61] This debate is not merely chronological; it is methodologically significant. If the Mishkan–Shabbat link is indeed a post-Mishnaic construction, as Neusner contends, then its function within the Talmud reflects a retrospective hermeneutic move aimed at grounding rabbinic law in a sacred narrative past. If, however, the association can be traced to Second Temple literature, as Hoenig suggests, then the Talmudic formulations build upon pre-existing theological motifs. In either case, by the time of the Gemara's compilation, the connection between Mishkan labors and Shabbat restrictions had become axiomatic, serving as a cornerstone for halakhic categorization and theological legitimation.

In conclusion, the claim that the 39 *melachot* stem from the labors associated with the Mishkan is not merely an exegetical construct, but a hermeneutical repositioning that reflects broader rabbinic strategies of legal grounding. While figures such as Rabbi Hanina bar Hama are often cited in Talmudic discussions linking Shabbat labor to the Mishkan, attributing this development to a specific historical transformation requires caution, given the composite and layered nature of rabbinic literature. The transition from the Mishnah to the Gemara reflects not only a shift from legal enumeration to narrative elaboration, but also a tendency to embed halakhic categories within scriptural and symbolic frameworks. In the case of the Shabbat, this does not merely codify prohibited actions, but aligns them with a narrative of sacred history—one that evokes Israel's formative encounters with divine order. Although this interpretive move may not fully reframe the Shabbat's legal core, it does suggest how rabbinic tradition engages narrative motifs to reinforce the spiritual and communal resonance of Jewish law.

60 Jacob Neusner, "Formative Judaism: Religious, Historical and Literary Studies; Third Series; Torah. Pharisees, and Rabbis", *Brown Judaic Studies*, *46* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1983).

61 Sidney B. Hoenig, "The Designated Number of Kinds of Labor Prohibited on the Sabbath", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 68/4 (1978): 193-208.

Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of the Shabbat (Shabbat) institution by closely examining key texts from both the Tanakh and the Talmud. Separate conclusions have been drawn for each corpus. Within the Tanakh, the earliest sources—namely the Yahwist (J) strands—portray Shabbat primarily as a pragmatic labor schedule linked to the transition into settled agricultural life, devoid of a discernible theological foundation. In these texts, Shabbat is simply framed as six days of labor followed by a seventh day of rest. The Deuteronomic (D) source, considered slightly later, presents a transitional model in which Shabbat begins to acquire moral and covenantal weight, aligned with Deuteronomy's overarching concern for social reform. However, it still lacks the theological rigor of the Priestly (P) source. Post-exilic Priestly texts such as Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, and Exodus 31:17 reframe Shabbat as rooted in creation, a motif absent from earlier traditions—suggesting that the association between Shabbat and creation was a later theological development. These texts systematically reconstruct Shabbat's foundation: first by embedding it in a collective historical memory (e.g., the wilderness narrative of Exodus 16), then by linking it to the divine act of creation (Genesis 2:2–3), and finally by institutionalizing it within legal code (Exodus 20:8–11). The prohibition of kindling fire on Shabbat (Exodus 35), the latest of these additions, further reinforces this trajectory. Its late emergence invalidates the claim that such a prohibition existed from the outset; rather, it reflects a conscious distancing from neighboring pagan fire rituals and a deliberate strategy of identity formation among exiled Judeans. Therefore, even fire—once ubiquitous in Israelite cultic life—undergoes a transformation, emerging as a prohibited act only in the post-exilic period. In sum, Shabbat evolves from a socially grounded agricultural rest day prior to the exile into a systematized religious ritual with clear theological and legal underpinnings after the exile.

During the Talmudic period, the efforts of the Tannaim and Amoraim not only preserved Jewish law amid socio-political instability but also shaped Shabbat into a deeply structured and halakhically defined institution. While early biblical texts do not mention detailed Shabbat restrictions, the Talmud introduces the *avot melachot*—a list of 39 primary prohibited labors—which became central to rabbinic Shabbat observance. This codification, absent from earlier scriptural tradition, reflects a post-temple need for systematization and identity formation. The attribution of these prohibitions to the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), particularly in the Gemara, represents a rabbinic attempt to root Shabbat in sacred historical precedent. Among these, the prohibition against kindling fire stands out as the only explicitly biblical Shabbat restriction, prompting significant rabbinic commentary. While some rabbis used this law as a model to derive broader halakhic frameworks, others emphasized its distinction in penalty and application.

Furthermore, the development of *toldot* (secondary labors) and the expansion of Shabbat laws through detailed rabbinic discourse underscore the dynamic and adaptive nature of Jewish legal tradition. Ultimately, the Talmudic transformation of Shabbat demonstrates the shift from a simple day of rest to a theologically and ritually dense system—one that continues to define Jewish religious identity.

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Özet

Akademik literatürde genel kabul gören bir yaklaşım, Yahudi dinî geleneğinin uzun ve çok katmanlı tarihi boyunca kültürel, hukukî ve teolojik düzlemlerde önemli dönüşümler geçirdiğidir. Bu dönüşümler, çoğunlukla politik kırılmalar, sürgün deneyimleri ve toplumsal yeniden yapılanma süreçleriyle doğrudan ilişkilidir. Her yeni tarihsel evrede, Yahudi toplumu mevcut ritüel ve hukuk sistemlerini yeniden yorumlama ve kurumsallaştırma ihtiyacı hissetmiş; bu da dinî uygulamalarda belirgin yapısal değişimlere yol açmıştır. Bu tarihsel dinamizmin en belirgin şekilde gözlemlenebildiği ibadet biçimlerinden biri Şabat'tır (*Shabbat*). Geleneksel anlatıya göre Musa döneminde ilahî buyrukla tesis edilen Şabat, başlangıçta Tanrı ile İsrail arasındaki ahdin bir göstergesi olarak altı gün çalışmanın ardından yedinci gün dinlenmeye dayanan basit bir düzenleme olarak sunulmuştur. Ancak zamanla bu ritüel, yalnızca bireysel bir duraksama günü olmanın ötesine geçmiş; halahik sistem içerisinde detaylı yasaklara ve çok katmanlı yorum geleneklerine dayalı kurumsal bir forma dönüşmüştür. Bu bağlamda Musa'ya atfedilen Şabat modeli, durağan bir yapıdan çok, ileride inşa edilecek daha kapsamlı bir dinî-hukukî sistemin çekirdeğini temsil eder. Bu dönüşüm ani bir kırılmadan ziyade, çeşitli tarihsel katmanlar boyunca, farklı toplumsal ve kültürel bağlamlarda kademeli biçimde gerçekleşmiştir. Şabat'ın evriminin erken izleri, Tanah içerisinde farklı anlatı düzeylerinde gözlemlenebilir. Örneğin, Yaratılış kitabında Şabat kozmolojik bir model içinde Tanrı'nın yaratma eylemini tamamlamasıyla bağlantılı olarak sunulurken; Tesniye kitabında sosyal adalet ve kölelikten kurtuluş bağlamında anlamlandırılır. Bu erken metinler, ritüelin çok yönlü anlam katmanlarını yansıtsa da, henüz detaylı bir hukukî çerçeve sunmaz. Asıl detaylı halahik yapı ise, İkinci Tapınak'ın yıkılmasının ardından şekillenen rabbanî Yahudilik döneminde, özellikle Mişna ve Talmud metinleri aracılığıyla oluşturulmuştur. Bu dönemde, değişen siyasal ve toplumsal koşullara yanıt olarak Şabat, yalnızca bir ibadet günü değil, Yahudi kimliğini koruyan ve toplumsal dayanışmayı sağlayan bir normatif yapı haline gelmiştir. Böylece Şabat, bireysel dindarlığın yanı sıra kolektif hafızanın ve tarihsel bilincin de taşıyıcısı olmuştur. Bu süreçte, geçmişin kutsallığı ile geleceğin idealleri arasında bir köprü kuran Şabat, Yahudi kimliğinin sürekliliğini sağlayan temel ritüellerden biri olarak şekillenmiştir. Bu çalışma, Tanah'taki temellerden başlayarak Talmudik sisteme kadar uzanan süreçte Şabat'ın geçirdiği dönüşümü incelemekte ve bu ritüel üzerinden Yahudi dinî hukukunun tarihsel evrimini örneklemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Aynı zamanda, Şabat'ın dönüşümü bağlamında ortaya çıkan metinsel ve yorumsal stratejilerin, Yahudi düşüncesinin tarihsel dayanıklılığını nasıl mümkün kıldığı da sorgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinler Tarihi, Yahudilik, Tanah, Talmud, Şabat, Dönüşüm.