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## TEKI'OT TRANSFORMING TEXTS: ELUL SHOFAR BLASTS IN MEDIEVAL *MINHAG*\*

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From its first call, the shofar blast on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* jars the listener; its dissonant clash with the rhythm of prayer continues to shock and surprise for the duration of the month. This powerful custom is a central part of the individual and communal preparation for the Days of Awe, yet its origins are as unexpected as the sound itself. This article aims to uncover the sources and to trace the development of the textual history of this *minhag* in medieval *Ashkenaz*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is during the medieval period, broadly defined as spanning the 10th through 15th centuries, that one finds the most diversity of opinion surrounding the basis of the custom. Subsequent discussion largely concerns the questions of how many times a day and at what times the shofar is blown, from which day of *Rosh Hodesh* to start, how many days before *Rosh ha-Shanah* to stop, and what to do if the individual misses the shofar blast. For some of these discussions, see *Igerot Moshe Orach Hayim* 4:21, par. 5, *Mas'ei Binyamin* #2, and *Tzitz Eliezer* 12:48, as well as the commentaries to *Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayim* 581:1. See also the extensive discussion in Gedalia Aberlander, “*Minhag Teki'at Shofar be-Hodesh Elul: Hishtalsbeluto ve-Kiyumo*” (Hebrew), *Or Yisrael* 9:1:103-9 for a summary of the contemporary halakhic discussions about this custom.

This is essentially an Ashkenazic custom. By Ashkenaz, I mean primarily (northern) France-Germany; see Yisrael Ta-Shma, *Minhag Ashkenaz ha-Kadmon* (Jerusalem, 1999), 14-16, particularly footnote 1, and Haym Soloveitchik, *Yeinam* (Tel-Aviv, 2003), 17. However, I also include Provence, and I mention North Africa in the first century of the period I am analyzing. This custom is not practiced in *Sefarad*; however, see *Yalkut Yosef*, vol. 5 (*Mo'adim*), *Hilkhot Selihot* 14 (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 16, and footnote 27 there. The Sefardic custom of blowing shofar during *selihot*, coupled with their custom to begin *selihot* from *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, results in *Sefaradim* blowing shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* as well! A full study of how this developed in *Sefarad* is beyond the scope of this paper; however, especially notable is that sources from medieval *Sefarad* which discuss the custom refer to it as a “*minhag Ashkenaz*,” further proving the absence of this practice in *Sefarad* in the medieval period.

The custom began as a single shofar blast on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and organically expanded, at different times in different communities, to encompass the entire month of *Elul*, and sometimes an even longer period. Throughout, attempts were made to justify this expanded practice by rereading the original sources and adding supporting reasons and justifications. This ever-expanding *minhag* serves as an example of the tension between the development of *minhag* and its relationship to its textual sources. In a larger sense, it can be seen as a microcosm of the tension between text and tradition.

While this study will follow the development of the *minhag* chronologically and geographically, its major divisions are arranged according to the types of responses to the aforementioned text-tradition tension. This is not to undervalue the contribution of tracing the custom along chronological and geographical axes. There *is* a clear progression from blowing shofar only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* to blowing shofar for the entire month, with a possible intermediate period during which some communities blew shofar for an entire forty days from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* until *Yom Kippur*. Further, examining along the geographical axis *does* allow us to witness the acceptance and spread of this custom as it occurred differently in different regions and to speculate about the basis for those differences in the chains of tradition in medieval Ashkenaz.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, however, it is the text-tradition tension that characterizes the medieval Ashkenazic attitude towards this custom, so it will be the organizing principle for this study. In this regard, this study differs from and builds upon previous work on this topic<sup>3</sup> which collected different customs and justifications of those customs without significant attention to close readings focused upon the text-tradition tension.

<sup>2</sup> One methodological note is important to reiterate here. While a valuable approach to the study of *minhag* and *halakhab* is to trace their development in distinct geographic regions, that method must be undertaken with great care in this instance. First, some authors lived in one region but commented about the practices of other regions. Second, many moved frequently due to the unrest in various regions of Europe in the medieval period. Therefore, we must be careful to distinguish between the home of an author and the region about which he comments. Nonetheless, an essential distinction makes an attempt at regional analysis useful. While tracing the development of the *custom* by regions based on the textual evidence is difficult, tracing the *relationship between the text and the tradition* through these works is a viable and important project. That is what we will attempt here. Along the way we will briefly explore the generalizations that can be made about either regional practices or, perhaps more importantly, chains of teacher-student tradition reflected in these texts.

<sup>3</sup> Two very good articles have been written on this custom, in addition to brief discussions in a number of works on *minhag* and High Holidays. Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael*: vol. 2 (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1991), 204-14, discusses this custom in a chapter entitled "The Literary Source as a Factor in the Formation of the *Minhag*," and addresses some of the same issues discussed here. Aberlander's article (see note 1 above), although it does not employ our method, is a well-organized and expansive collection of sources progressing to the present.

In order to understand the basic approaches to this tension, we must first lay some groundwork. We will begin with the original textual source and Geonic literature. Subsequently, we will chronologically trace the earliest texts which respond to it. Within the twelfth century we will find the paradigmatic approaches to dealing with the text-tradition tension. We will then follow those basic schools through the subsequent 300 years of medieval Ashkenaz.

## I. THE PRIMARY SOURCE—*PIRKEI DE-RABBI ELIEZER*

The earliest source of the custom to blow shofar in *Elul* altogether is found in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (henceforth PRE<sup>4</sup>), Chapter 46. In a discussion of the process of Israel receiving the Torah, the *midrash* outlines the schedule of Moses' journeys up and down the mountain:<sup>5</sup>

And on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain" (Deut. 10:1),<sup>6</sup> and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp.<sup>7</sup> For Moses was ascending the mountain so that they would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted on that day through that shofar blast, as it is said, "God went up in the *teru'ah*-blast, the Lord in the sound of the shofar" (Ps. 47:6). Therefore the Sages enacted (*hitkinu hakhamim*)<sup>8</sup> that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Except when transliterated as part of its citation in other primary sources.

<sup>5</sup> All translations in this article are mine. In addition, I have added verse references where necessary.

<sup>6</sup> See David Lurya, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852 [reprinted in *Sefer Kitvei ha-Gaon R. David Lurya zt"l* (Jerusalem: NP, 1990)]), 110, end of comment 17. He points out that Ex. 24:12, which also uses these words, refers to the first tablets. Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (New York, 1965), 360, however, gives the attribution as Ex. 24:12.

<sup>7</sup> See Ex. 36:6 and Lev. 25:9.

<sup>8</sup> Whether there is a specific relationship to the force or widespread nature of this practice in PRE evidenced by the word enactment (*takanah*) as opposed to custom/ practice (*minhag*), is beyond the scope of this paper. Despite the language of enactment in PRE, which often suggests a more binding or forceful practice, this practice is clearly classified and treated as a *minhag* in almost all subsequent literature. Note, however, the different uses of these terms in the parallel *midrashim* cited below (footnote 10) and throughout the sources in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> PRE Hebrew text is from the Venice 1554 edition, taken from the facsimile edition of Hayim Meir Horovitz, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer: Mahadurah Mada'it* (Jerusalem, 1972). Alternate versions will be discussed below.

This source<sup>10</sup> immediately raises a few points regarding our custom. Most noteworthy is the indication that the practice was to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh*, not for the entire month as is so widely practiced today. Secondly, the shofar blast has little to do with the traditional associations with the initiation of a repentance process.<sup>11</sup> What, in fact, was its function in this midrashic narrative? PRE tells us that it served to prevent Israel from committing idolatry. How? Two possibilities present themselves. First, the shofar blast may have simply been a rallying cry to call the people to recognition or even to worship of God as Moses ascended for a second try at receiving the Ten Commandments for posterity.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, perhaps the shofar was blown to mark the time and date so that the people would not mistake the time of Moses' descent from the mountain and again stray towards idolatry as they did when building and worshipping the Golden Calf.<sup>13</sup> This second explanation fits well with remedying the original temptation to idolatry. However, it would make more sense if the shofar was subsequently blown every day at that time to keep track of Moses' sojourn on the mountain. This difficulty will be revisited in the later sources. Either way, the enactment of the Sages seems to be a remembrance of this event in the wilderness connected to an exhortation against idolatry, a far cry from our current associations with this custom.

Before examining the use of PRE in later sources, as much of this article does, we must first understand what custom, if any, PRE itself is reflecting, and where and when it would have been practiced. Such will reflect our earliest knowledge of the practice of shofar blowing in *Elul* altogether.

<sup>10</sup> This *midrash* appears in similar versions in three other midrashic texts: *Midrash Lekah Tov* (*Pesikta Zutarta*) Ex. 34 s.v. *va-yomer Hashem* (early 12<sup>th</sup> century), *Midrash Aggadah* Ex. 34 s.v. *pesol lekha* (12<sup>th</sup> century), and *Yalkut Shim'oni* Ps. *remez* 754 (early 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany). Each *midrash* includes a reference to the custom of blowing shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. *Lekah Tov* and *Midrash Aggadah* say, "therefore their practice was to blow (*nahagu litko'a*) shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*," while *Yalkut Shim'oni* matches the language of PRE in saying, "therefore the Sages enacted (*tikenu hakhamim*) blowing the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year." All three of these *midrashim* are much later than PRE, however, and are rarely, if ever, cited as sources for the *minhag*. For more information on the dating and organization of these *midrashim*, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Moshe David Herr, "Midrash," vol. 11, 1507-1514, and the *Encyclopedia Judaica* entries on these individual *midrashim*. In addition, see a preserved version of the *midrash* in Ramban, Ex. 33:7.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:4.

<sup>12</sup> Although the connection between the shofar and an exhortation against idolatry is not obvious, it might be implied by the verse adduced from Ps. 47:6—the notion of God being elevated by the shofar might simply be that a shofar blast served to remind Israel of their committed relationship to God.

<sup>13</sup> See *Shabbat* 89a. In this case, PRE relies on the midrashic tradition of these narratives, whereas the previous explanation can be justified according to the plain-sense meaning of the narrative as well.

Leopold Zunz contends that it is common for PRE to retroject later laws or customs into the Biblical period and to find a biblical source for them.<sup>14</sup> If so, PRE is likely referring to a *minhag*, extant in its time, of blowing shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* as a remembrance of the shofar blast on the first *Rosh Hodesh Elul* of Israel's peoplehood, upon Moses' second ascent up Sinai. In that case, the dating of PRE sets the latest possible start for this custom. While scholars argue within a range of over a hundred years, Zunz's widely accepted opinion places it in the early- to mid-eighth century.<sup>15</sup>

As for the location of the work, there is compelling but inconclusive evidence for PRE's composition in *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>16</sup> Zunz seems to indicate that at the time of PRE's composition this custom was practiced at least in *Eretz Yisrael*, and possibly in the Diaspora as well.<sup>17</sup> In summary, then, PRE appears to indicate a known custom of blowing shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* extant in the eighth century, with no reference to any shofar activity for the remainder of the month.

While PRE is the earliest reference to this custom, it should not be thought of as the origin of the custom. Although almost all subsequent texts that record any practice of shofar blasts on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and afterwards return to this source or a similar one,<sup>18</sup> PRE itself is clear, by its reference to the enactment of the Sages in the past tense, that it offers an explanation of a custom already in practice for some time. The dating of the enactment and earliest practice of this custom, however, remain clouded in the mysterious language of "the Sages enacted". Which Sages were these? While the term Sages (*bakhamim*) frequently refers to the Rabbinic period, there is no mention of the practice prior to PRE, suggesting that the custom began, at the earliest, in the post-Talmudic period. Nonetheless, because PRE is the first text which records and discusses the *minhag*, and almost all subsequent texts use it as their point of departure, it plays an essential role in framing the development of the *minhag*.

<sup>14</sup> Y.L. Zunz, *ha-Derashot be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1974), 137.

<sup>15</sup> Zunz 136. For a summary of the opinions on the dating of PRE, see Dina Stein, *Meimrah, Magyah, Mitos* (Jerusalem, 2005), 2-3, and Friedlander lii-liv.

<sup>16</sup> Stein 3, and Friedlander *ibid*. See also Joseph Jacobs and Schulim Ochser, "Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 58, who, despite pointing out that almost all the figures quoted in PRE are Palestinian, locate the original composition in Italy.

<sup>17</sup> Zunz 138 notes the mention in PRE of a number of Palestinian customs which were not practiced in Babylonia. However, he does not include the blowing of shofar in this list, but rather mentions it earlier in his general list of retrojected customs. This implies that Zunz had no reason to believe that this custom was a matter of dispute between the communities.

The relationship between PRE as a Palestinian text and the custom of shofar blowing based upon it as an Ashkenazic custom is not unusual. See Ta-Shma 14 footnote 1 and Aberlander 99, footnote 22.

<sup>18</sup> See the Eastern European school of the late 13th to 15th centuries discussed in Section IV.C for the major exception to this tradition.

## II. GE'ONIM

There is no extant discussion of this custom in Geonic literature. However, *Shibolei ha-Leket* (R. Tzidkiyah b. Avraham ha-Rofei, 13th century Italy) quotes R. Nisim Gaon's (R. Nisim b. Yaakov, 10th-11th century Tunisia) comment regarding this custom:

The Law of *Rosh Hodesh Elul*—Why They Customarily Blow Shofar

There are places that have the custom to blow the shofar on nights of *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, and I found in the work of Rabbeinu Nissim of blessed memory: as for the Sages' practice of blowing the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*—I found a basis for it in *midrash*, and similarly it is written in some aggadic texts: on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain," (Deut. 10:1) and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp. Moses went up the mountain to accept the second tablets so that they would not stray any longer<sup>19</sup> after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted on that day and through that shofar blast, as it is said, "God went up in the *teru'ah*-blast." (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year. So it appears in PRE.<sup>20</sup>

This quote of Rabbeinu Nissim does not appear in any extant material of his.<sup>21</sup> However, if the quote is accurate, *Shibolei ha-Leket* had a text of Rabbeinu Nissim which indicated his awareness of the practice of blowing shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. Rabbeinu Nissim lived in Tunisia in the late tenth to early eleventh

<sup>19</sup> Some versions of PRE have *stray* (*yit'u* with a *tav*), while others have *mistakenly follow* (*yit'u* with a *tet*). The original version from all reliable manuscripts follows *yit'u* with a *tet*.

<sup>20</sup> *Shibolei ha-Leket, Arugah Asirit—Seder Rosh Hashanah—Siman 281* (Buber edition p. 264).

<sup>21</sup> However, see Shraga Abramson, *Rav Nissim Ga'on: Hamishah Sefarim—Seridim me-Hiburav* (Jerusalem, 1965), 277-8, who published the Table of Contents of Rabbeinu Nissim's *Sefer Megilat Setarim*, which says, "122. That which many of the sages practiced, to blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, he brought a basis for it." See also *Menorat ha-Ma'or, ha-Ner ha-Hamishi, ha-Kelal ha-Sheni, ha-Helek ha-Rishon, Perek Rishon* [290] (Mossad ha-Rav Kook edition p. 615) who quotes Rabenu Nisim as follows: "[There are] many of the elders (*zekeinim*) and laypeople (*ba'alei ha-batim*) who blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. And I found a basis in the *midrash*: It was taught, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses. As it appears inside." (Abramson 278-9, footnote 212, which points to this source, should read *Ner He, Kelal Bet*, and not *Niddah Kelal Khaf*.) See also B.M. Levin, *Otzar ha-Ge'onim Masekhet Rosh Hashanah* (Jerusalem, 1933), 32, which cites *Menorat ha-Ma'or*'s version but, surprisingly, completes it by quoting a version of PRE which does not match *Shibolei ha-Leket*'s quote of Rabbeinu Nissim or the original version of PRE.

While it is clear that *Shibolei ha-Leket*'s quote of Rabbeinu Nissim begins before the words "the Sages' practice," the end of the quote is less clear. Logically, and by implication from the various versions of Rabbeinu Nissim cited in the paragraph above, it seems

century. While *Shibolei ha-Leket*'s quote of Rabbeinu Nissim does not imply that the practice necessarily took place there, it indicates that shofar blowing on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* was happening in Rabbeinu Nissim's time in a region with which he was familiar, and links the practice from the time of PRE to the end of the period of the *Ge'onim*.<sup>22</sup>

### III. EARLY ASHKENAZ (1000-1200)—NEW CUSTOMS, NEW TEXTS

The first source from early Ashkenaz that relates to this custom follows the trend established by PRE and Rabbeinu Nissim. *Mahzor Vitry* (R. Simhah of Vitry, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century France),<sup>23</sup> an early twelfth century work from the school of Rashi, records:

We say in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkanos*, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain," (Deut. 10:1) and you shall loudly sound<sup>24</sup> the shofar throughout the camp, for Moses went up the mountain so that Israel would

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most likely that it ends after the quote of the midrashic text, "every single year," and that *Shibolei ha-Leket* himself attributes this *midrash* to PRE. It seems unlikely that Rabbeinu Nissim would first say that he found the basis for a custom in a number of *midrashim* and then only after the fact identify the source as PRE. See Zunz 430-431, footnote 20, who adopts this reading of *Shibolei ha-Leket* as well.

What seems most likely, then, is that the original edition of Rabbeinu Nissim was in *Megilat Setarim* and included the quote of *midrash* as *Shibolei ha-Leket* cites it. *Shibolei ha-Leket* then attributes that quote to PRE. However, the original version of Rabbeinu Nissim's statement regarding who observed this custom—the sages (per *Shibolei ha-Leket*), many of the sages (per Abramson's *Rav Nisim Ga'on*), or many of the elders and laypeople (per *Menorat ha-Ma'or*), is not clear. This leaves open the interesting possibilities that the early practice of this custom was either not communal (a practice of some or all of the sages may imply that a select group blew shofar privately) or not agreed upon by everyone (if it was practiced only by many of the elders or laypeople) even in the communities in which it was followed.

<sup>22</sup> See, however, Sperber 207, who quotes a *piyyut* from *Eretz Yisrael* which he places between the 8th and 9th centuries that evidences a custom to blow shofar for the entire month of *Elul*!

<sup>23</sup> This attribution of authorship is still the subject of some scholarly debate. See, for example, Efrayim E. Urbach, "*Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi*" in *Sefer Rashi*, ed. Y.L. Maimon (Jerusalem, 1956), 322 footnote 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Mahzor Vitry* is the only source with the version: "you shall loudly sound." All other medieval versions that quote PRE, as well as all manuscript and printed editions of PRE, have "and they loudly sounded". See *Mahzor Vitry* (S. Hurwitz edition, Nuremberg, 1923), 361-2, footnote *alef* for a discussion of this variant. While the difference is irrelevant to this study, the midrashic significance of attributing the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* shofar blast at Sinai to a Divine instruction as opposed to a communal initiative is striking.

not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, “God went up in the *teru’ah*-blast, the Lord in the sound of the shofar.” (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year.<sup>25</sup>

*Mahzor Vitry* quotes PRE without elaboration. In the absence of further clarification, it is reasonable to assume that *Mahzor Vitry*’s reference to this text and the custom it relates indicates that the custom was in fact practiced.<sup>26</sup> If not, why reproduce the *midrash* in a text that was designed to be a guide for law and custom?<sup>27</sup> If it was indeed in force, then we have early evidence that the custom endured from PRE’s original context, to Rabbeinu Nissim’s North African community, and into early *Ashkenaz*. For *Mahzor Vitry*, then, there is no text-tradition tension. That is, if we assume that the text reflects the custom as practiced, then PRE continues to be a logical and accurate source to explain the custom.

The first rupture in the textual transmission of this custom occurs with Ra’avan (R. Eliezer b. Natan, 12th century Germany). In the section of responsa at the beginning of his major work *Sefer Ra’avan*,<sup>28</sup> in a long responsum regarding the arrangement of shofar blasts on *Rosh ha-Shanah*, Ra’avan concludes with a discussion of the 40 shofar blasts on *Rosh ha-Shanah*. He writes:

And the general idea of the blasts—thirty seated correlating to the *Malkhiyot*, *Zikhronot*, and *Shofarot*, and we add ten standing, which totals forty, corresponding to . . . the forty days of the second tablets, as it says in PRE, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* Moses blew the shofar and went up on the mountain, and on *Yom Kippur* he descended and blew the shofar to tell the Children of Israel that they should fast because of, “and you shall afflict yourselves” (Lev. 23:27). Because Moses blew the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, Israel still customarily blows the shofar **from** [emphasis mine] *Rosh Hodesh Elul*.<sup>29</sup>

A number of elements of this text are striking. First, the quote from PRE is a selective paraphrase. While PRE does mention the *Yom Kippur* shofar blast much later in the chapter, it is not juxtaposed to the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* blast.

<sup>25</sup> Par. 323, p. 361-2 in the S. Hurwitz edition.

<sup>26</sup> See Aberlander 97, who reads *Mahzor Vitry* this way as well. But see *Sefer ha-Manhig* (Yitzhak Refael edition, Jerusalem, 1978), vol. 1, p. 328-9, footnote to line 70, where Refael seems to suggest that although *Mahzor Vitry* implies that the shofar should be blown on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, its silence regarding the rest of the month cannot imply that the shofar was *not* blown for the remainder of *Elul* as well.

<sup>27</sup> See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Ernst Daniel Goldschmidt, “*Mahzor Vitry*,” vol. 11, 736-8.

<sup>28</sup> Also called *Even ha-Ezer*.

<sup>29</sup> *Sefer Ra’avan She’elot u-Teshuvot* #61 (Warsaw, 1905 edition [reprinted Israel, 1984], p.55).



Second, the purpose of the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* blast is not specified by Ra'avan, while it is in PRE.<sup>30</sup> Third, the custom itself is unclear regarding its terminus. Did the shofar blasts begin from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and continue until *Rosh ha-Shanah*? Or did they last for the entire forty days corresponding to Moses' time on the mountain?<sup>31</sup> The selective paraphrase focusing on the juxtaposition of the blasts of *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and *Yom Kippur* combined with the absence of a reason for the blast seem to point towards the likelihood that the custom extended from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* all the way until *Yom Kippur*.<sup>32</sup> However, this is not clear.

The final line of Ra'avan's text is ambiguous. Is "Because Moses blew . . ." a continuation of the paraphrase from PRE, or Ra'avan's own comment? If it is a paraphrase of PRE, it suggests that Ra'avan's PRE indicated a custom different from that which our editions of PRE record.<sup>33</sup> However, reading the last line of the Ra'avan as a part of his PRE is unlikely. First, we have neither manuscripts of PRE nor sources citing PRE before Ra'avan that indicate that the impact of Moses' blast was a practice to blow the shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and on. Second, the change in language from the record of an enactment of the Sages as PRE has it, to a note of current practice, as it appears in Ra'avan, suggests that Ra'avan has by this point stopped paraphrasing PRE. Third, the record of the enactment in PRE is mentioned only after PRE's discussion of the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* blast, not after the reference to the *Yom Kippur* blast. Finally, because the text is marshaled only to justify the forty shofar blasts based on Moses' forty days on the mountain, there is no need to quote the Sages' enactment from PRE. Rather, Ra'avan tangentially mentions that this PRE source, which he is bringing for the aforementioned purpose, is also a basis for the custom to blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* on. Therefore, I understand this final line as

<sup>30</sup> Both of these aberrations are simply explained by remembering that the purpose of PRE here is to show that Moses was on the mountain for forty days, not to explain the custom of shofar blowing in *Rosh Hodesh Elul*.

<sup>31</sup> In fact, the frequency of blowing is not made explicit by Ra'avan either. In the absence of alternate explanations, however, it seems likely that the shofar was blown daily. The time of day of the blast(s) is also not specified. These questions arise from many of the sources we will see, but are beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>32</sup> Urbach 353, footnote 12 also reads Ra'avan this way. However, Refael in *Sefer ha-Manhig* vol. 1, p. 328, notes to line 70, claims that the custom to blow for the whole month of *Elul* is mentioned in *Sefer ha-Ra'avan* #61—our section, and Sperber 205 also asserts that the Ra'avan has the same custom as Ra'avyah (blowing only for the month of *Elul*). Perhaps Refael and Sperber mean the whole month and possibly even more, but if these sources understand that Ra'avan is decisively recording a custom of blowing shofar for the whole month and not beyond to *Yom Kippur*, the basis of such an assertion is not clear to me.

<sup>33</sup> S. Hurwitz's *Mahzor Vitry* p. 361-2 footnote *alef* does assume that this is part of Ra'avan's version of PRE.

Ra'avan's acknowledgement that the current custom is an expansion upon the original practice of the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* blast recorded in PRE.<sup>34</sup>

Ra'avan, then, stands our analysis of this custom at a crossroads. He indicates no knowledge of a contemporary custom to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and not for the succeeding period, as PRE itself suggests was done. How can these contradictory practices be reconciled?

Perhaps we see here a geographic distinction in which some communities, such as France (based on *Mahzor Vitry*) and North Africa (based on Rabbeinu Nissim), blew shofar only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, while other communities' *original custom* was to blow for all of *Elul*, contrary to PRE. The community to which Ra'avan refers, likely his in Germany,<sup>35</sup> would have been among the latter. Alternatively, this may be part of a geographic-historical progression. Every community's *Elul* shofar custom began as blowing on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* alone, as PRE indicates, and at various times some places, like Ra'avan's community, expanded upon that custom, while others (e.g., those mentioned above), did not.<sup>36</sup>

Essentially, this distinction raises the question of whether communities that blow beyond *Rosh Hodesh Elul* arrived at that custom by expanding from an

<sup>34</sup> Although Ra'avan seems to have the basic narrative of PRE, because he offers only a short paraphrase, we do not know whether he had the Sages' enactment in his PRE or not. This is important in understanding the significance of Ra'avan's struggle with the text-tradition tension. If he did have the original Sages' enactment in his PRE, he is (albeit not explicitly) acknowledging that the current practice is an expansion beyond the original enactment of the Sages. If not, he is only holding a tension between the original narrative shofar blast and the current practice, a less striking tension.

<sup>35</sup> Although Ra'avan's language of "Israel still customarily blows\_" is ambiguous, a reasonable default assumption is that he refers to his own geographic region.

<sup>36</sup> A third theoretical option is that all communities originally blew shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* for the rest of the month or until Yom Kippur. In that case, the earlier sources which indicate blowing only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* might have been explaining just the reason for the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* blast. This is very difficult since those sources make no mention of the continuation of the shofar blasts past *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. While it is also possible that at the stage of these earlier sources communities which had begun by blowing shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and beyond had already undergone a reduction in their practice, it is unlikely both because *minhag* tends to expand and not reduce and because the only reasons for reducing this practice are introduced much later in the medieval period.

One final speculative possibility is that no alternative tradition yet exists, and that the original Ra'avan actually said, "Because Moses blew the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, Israel still customarily blows the shofar **on** *Rosh Hodesh Elul*," (that is, *be-Rosh Hodesh Elul* instead of *me-Rosh Hodesh Elul*) and that the change was put in later to harmonize Ra'avan with then current tradition. This makes for a more logical reading of that line in Ra'avan. Of course, the counter-argument is precisely that—*lectio difficilior praeferrenda est* (the more difficult reading is to be preferred). Furthermore, without any alternative textual traditions of Ra'avan, I am very reluctant to suggest this change.

original custom of blowing on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* only, or initiated that practice *ex nihilo*. It is almost impossible to make a determination based on the textual traditions we have, and the implications are minimal for this study.<sup>37</sup> It seems most likely that some communities underwent expansion from a *Rosh Hodesh Elul*-only custom and others started with the already-expanded custom. I assume that at least some places underwent an expansion simply because in the first few centuries of record of this custom, blowing only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* was by far the dominant practice. Many of the places in which the post-*Rosh Hodesh Elul* custom was practiced in subsequent centuries descend from these original communities, so it is likely that actual expansion took place in some communities. I will use that rubric in the rest of this paper with the awareness that I may also be describing communities whose original custom was the “expanded” one.

Given the expanded custom which took hold in some places in Ra’avan’s time, and given that Ra’avan had the original version of PRE and yet recorded an expanded custom, we can trace the subsequent history of the *minhag* by asking two questions. First, at what times and in what places did the expanded *minhag* take hold? Second, in communities that adopted the expanded custom, how did they reconcile it with the narrower custom recorded by PRE? Ra’avan marks the first approach to this second question. He acknowledges a custom that has expanded from the practice advocated by its source while maintaining both. This is essentially the first school of addressing the conflict between practice and source. It is a school which holds the text-tradition tension by acknowledging the gap between them, the difference between the original basis and the current practice, without necessarily justifying or mitigating it.

At this juncture we must ask an essential question: what induced the expansion of the custom? Despite its importance, the answer cannot be deduced from the texts and is largely subject to educated speculation. I will offer one brief suggestion here. It can be argued, particularly in *Ashkenaz*, that “*minhag* abhors a vacuum.” The trend of Jewish ritual and custom is to expand to cover more space and time in the Jewish life experience.<sup>38</sup> In early medieval *Ashkenaz* the shofar was being blown on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* as custom and on *Rosh ha-Shanah* as law. *Elul* was developing as a time of preparation for the Days of Awe, marked

<sup>37</sup> That is, either way the texts must struggle with the fact that the post-*Rosh Hodesh Elul* shofar blowing practice is at odds with the textual source from PRE. The text-tradition tension is a different one for each development. Communities that began with a post-*Rosh Hodesh Elul* practice have to justify *initiating* a custom which is both based on and at odds with PRE. Alternatively, places which underwent an explicit change from practicing in accordance with the fundamental text to expanding beyond it must justify the decision to expand beyond the original basis.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Ta-Shma 22 on the mourning periods and practices in the Jewish calendar.

in part by evolving and expanding customs of reciting *selihot*.<sup>39</sup> It seems likely that as part of the expansion of the importance of *Elul*, some medieval communities simply decided to fill the space between the shofar blasts of *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and *Rosh ha-Shanah* with the daily institution of the powerful call of the shofar.<sup>40</sup>

No matter what the cause of the expansion of this custom, its textual history changes dramatically only fifty years later in *Sefer Ra'avyah*<sup>41</sup> (R. Eliezer b. Yoel ha-Levi, 12th-13th century Germany):

That which they practiced to blow from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single day, thus was taught in *Perakim de-Rabbi Eliezer*, R. Yehoshua ben Korha said, Moses stood forty days on the mountain . . . and after forty days he descended and broke the tablets on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* . . . on the first of *Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, “Ascend to me upon the mountain” (Deut. 10:1), and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp, for Moses went up the mountain so that Israel would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, “God went up in the *teru'ah*-blast, etc.” (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the whole month every single year in order to warn Israel that they should repent, as it is said, “if a shofar shall be blasted in the city, etc.” (Amos 3:6), and in order to confuse the Satan so that he not prosecute Israel.<sup>42</sup>

Ra'avyah, Ra'avan's grandson, also recognizes an existing custom which, from his opening phrase, echoes that of his grandfather—blowing shofar daily from *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. Also like Ra'avan, the terminus of the daily blast is initially left unspecified. However, from the continuation of the quote of PRE, it is clear that Ra'avyah's custom is for the month of *Elul*. This continuation of the quote is quite astonishing. No earlier source made any reference to the custom of blowing for the entire month as a part of the text of PRE, nor to the additional two reasons—a call to repentance attached to the verse from Amos, and the confusion of

<sup>39</sup> For an example of *selihot* as an expanding custom, see Sperber, 214-6, especially 216. He also notes the interesting connections between the development of *selihot* and our custom and their joint relationship to PRE. For the concept of *Elul* becoming a time of preparation for the Days of Awe in the Geonic and medieval period beyond what it was in the time of the Sages, see *Entziklopedya Talmudit*, “*Elul*,” vol. 2, p. 2-3. The *minhagim* which developed around *Elul* are all post-Talmudic. See footnote 71 below.

<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, it is the opposite force which creates a post-medieval justification for the custom not to blow shofar on *Erev Rosh ha-Shanah*—so as to create a clear distinction between these customary blasts of *Elul* and the legally prescribed ones on *Rosh ha-Shanah*. See, for example, the commentaries to *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayim* 581:3.

<sup>41</sup> Also called *Avi ha-Ezri*.

<sup>42</sup> Par. 542 (Aptowitz edition, Jerusalem, 1938 [reprinted 1964]) vol. 2, p. 239.

the Satan. Ra'avyah's quote from PRE is an almost word-for-word rendition of our text, until the last line. Where PRE ends "therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year," Ra'avyah's version interpolates the phrase "for the whole month," and then adds the two justifications.

Grappling with this text is difficult. It is problematic to say that Ra'avyah's quote of PRE ends at "every single year" and the rest is his explanatory emendation, because then his citation of PRE would still contain the interpolated phrase "for the whole month;" Ra'avyah also provides no indication that the quote ends there. Grammatically, the two appended reasons seem inextricably tied to the quote of PRE. The alternative possibility is that Ra'avyah actually had this text of PRE in front of him. Verification of this thesis requires an examination of the variant editions of PRE.

The academic work on manuscripts and textual history of PRE is incomplete.<sup>43</sup> The most extensive work has been done by H.M. Horowitz, whose critical edition of PRE, an extraordinary undertaking, was never completed.<sup>44</sup> Even in incomplete manuscript form, it is still the most comprehensive study available. It is supplemented by the extensive work of Friedlander.<sup>45</sup> Although an edition was recently published by Hiegger,<sup>46</sup> it is based on a manuscript which was already used by Horowitz. The Lurya<sup>47</sup> edition, in wide circulation, has been censored and is among the less reliable.<sup>48</sup> Even with the variety of manuscripts and printed editions available, none of Horowitz, Friedlander, or Hiegger notes any textual variants in this last line of our section of PRE, nor do they bring evidence of anything resembling the version offered by Ra'avyah. Even Lurya, who argues in favor of this variant, does so only on logical grounds, and does not indicate any versions before the medieval period with this version.<sup>49</sup>

Given the absence of manuscript evidence, we must conclude that Ra'avyah offers here a drastically modified PRE. He interpolates the phrase "the whole month" and adds an extensive addition, and attempts to offer it as a text of PRE.<sup>50</sup> What motivates this break from the textual tradition? A comparison of

<sup>43</sup> See Stein 22-3 (footnote 15 above) for a clear summary of the scholarship on the editions of PRE.

<sup>44</sup> See footnote 9 above.

<sup>45</sup> Friedlander xiv-xv (see footnote 6 above).

<sup>46</sup> M. Hiegger published an edition of PRE in *Horev* volumes 8, 9, and 10. Its version of our section of PRE is very similar to the Lurya edition used above, although it locates this passage in Chapter 45. In addition, although it begins like the Lurya edition, "And on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* . . ." it ends, "therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Tishrei*!" This seems to be a scribal error.

<sup>47</sup> See footnote 6 above.

<sup>48</sup> Stein 23.

<sup>49</sup> Lurya 110, comment 18.

<sup>50</sup> See Sperber 207. Although he does not attribute the revised version to Ra'avyah, he does argue that Ra'avyah has a non-original PRE which was reworked in order to harmonize early text with contemporary practice.

Ra'avyah to Ra'avan is instructive here. As noted above, Ra'avan seems content to hold the traditional version of PRE with its custom of blowing shofar only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and simultaneously record the practice of blowing shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* onward. Ra'avyah, Ra'avan's own grandson and student, does not maintain that tension. He resolves the apparent contradiction by producing a text of PRE which reflects the community's practice. While it cannot be concluded whether Ra'avyah himself altered or reworked the PRE text he had in front of him, or if he inherited someone else's handiwork, it is practically incontrovertible that the original PRE text was adjusted to reflect a practice in consonance with the community's revised practice. Ra'avyah, then, represents a second school in tackling the text-tradition tension. Rather than dispense with the text or acknowledge the gap between it and the current practice, he offers a source, here a reworked PRE, which justifies the practice of his community.

One difficulty with Ra'avyah's approach should be pointed out here, which will be referenced when addressing later adherents to his school as well. While many of the reasons offered to justify the expansion to the month-long custom are appropriate, some appear to be justifications of something longer than a *Rosh Hodesh Elul*-only approach, but do not necessarily point to a month-long practice. Of the two reasons appended by Ra'avyah, the confusion of the Satan is certainly the more difficult one. Why does it justify a month-long practice? As this reason gains force in later sources, its problematic nature becomes even more strongly emphasized.<sup>51</sup>

Thus far we have constructed a theoretical development of this *minhag*. Sometime before the mid-eighth century, communities began to blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, perhaps for the reason described by PRE. This *minhag* continued and spread along with the transition of Diaspora Jewry to Europe and North Africa in the early medieval period. By the early twelfth century, some communities had begun the custom to blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and on, minimally for the whole month of *Elul* and possibly until *Yom Kippur*, an expansion beyond the practice recorded and dictated by PRE. By the late twelfth century, the grandson and student of Ra'avan (who had retained the original version of PRE), offered a version that had undergone a drastic change to reflect this expanded custom.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See commentaries to *Tur Orach Hayim 581: Perishah* ad. loc. *gimel* and *dalet*, and *Bab* ad. loc. *bet* on why the confusion of Satan is a difficult justification of the custom to blow for the month. In fact, the confusion of Satan argument may have the opposite effect—the only direct opposition to blowing shofar for the whole month in medieval Ashkenaz is precisely that Satan will become accustomed to it and no longer be confused by the unusual arrangement of blasts on *Rosh ha-Shanah* which are also designed to confuse Satan. See Aberlander 103 who cites this opposition in the name of R. Moshe mi-Lotra.

<sup>52</sup> See “*Elul: Tok'iin ba-Shofar*” in J.D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Dinim u-Minhagim* (Tel-Aviv, 1975) 17, who also suggests this two-stage development of the custom.

Three textual trends emerged in Ashkenaz in the subsequent 300 years. Ra'avyah's direction (which will be called by his name, even as it is utilized by texts that may have had no awareness of his PRE) was followed by a number of texts which recorded the *minbag* of blowing for the whole month and based it either on a text of PRE which corroborated that *minbag*, a paraphrase of PRE, or an alternate source altogether. A second stream, in the style of Ra'avan (which I will also call by his name), recorded the *minbag* to blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and beyond (though not always with a clear terminus) but retained a source, the original version of PRE or another, which dictated blowing shofar only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, holding the two in tension. A third tradition retained the custom as originally dictated by PRE to blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* alone, thus experiencing no tension between practice and text, similar to *Mahzor Vitry* as we read it. While the retention of the custom to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* into the later medieval period outside Sefarad is striking, it does not directly address the text-tradition tension, and as such will not be discussed here. We will trace the former two streams as we follow the development of this *minbag*.

#### IV. RA'AVYAH'S APPROACH—HARMONIZING TEXT AND TRADITION

##### A. RA'AVYAH'S PRE VERSION IN ARBA'AH TURIM

Ra'avyah's text follows a natural chain of transmission based on its subsequent appearances: via Rosh to two of Rosh's students, Tur and Rabbeinu Yeruham, all three of whom quote it almost word for word. However, a small but highly significant omission of the words "for the whole month" in both Rosh and Rabenu Yeruham removes them from this school altogether. As such, they will be discussed below in Section V.

The direct heir, then, of both Ra'avyah's expanded PRE and his approach to the text-tradition tension is Tur (R. Ya'akov b. Asher *Ba'al ha-Turim*, 13th-14th century Germany-Spain). Tur<sup>53</sup> opens his Laws of *Rosh ha-Shanah*, writing:

It was taught in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain" (Deut. 10:1) for then he went up to receive the second tablets,<sup>54</sup> and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp. Moses went up

<sup>53</sup> Although *Sefer ha-Rokeah* and *Ma'aseh Rokeah*, discussed in Part B of this section, preceded *Arba'ah Turim*, I have put *Arba'ah Turim* first both in order to follow the transmission of Ra'avyah's PRE text immediately after discussing it, and to provide a background against which to view the even more extreme harmonization approaches of *Sefer ha-Rokeah* and *Ma'aseh Rokeah*.

<sup>54</sup> This addition does not appear in either Ra'avyah's version or Rosh's.

the mountain so that Israel would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, “God went up in the *teru’ah*-blast, etc.” (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year and the whole month in order to warn Israel that they should repent, as it is said, “if a shofar shall be blasted in the city, will the nation not tremble?” (Amos 3:6) and in order to confuse the Satan. So they practice in Ashkenaz to blow every morning and evening after prayers.<sup>55</sup>

Tur probably took his text of PRE from Ra’avyah directly or from his father Rosh, and basically matches Ra’avyah’s expanded version, moving “the whole month” before “every single year” so that the entire section which seems to be an addition to the original PRE is in one piece.<sup>56</sup> Tur notes that this custom is an Ashkenazic practice, and adds that the custom includes blowing twice a day for the month. Essentially, Tur follows Ra’avyah’s school in presenting a text of PRE that explicitly reads the original enactment as justifying the custom of blowing the entire month.

Commentaries to *Arba’ah Turim* struggle with a textual and conceptual question (which also applies to Ra’avyah) which highlights the text-tradition tension that we have emphasized. If the enactment to blow the shofar was made to commemorate a single blast on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, why is it necessary to blow the

<sup>55</sup> *Arba’ah Turim Orach Hayim* 581. See also the Sefardic work *Tzeidah la-Derekh* of R. Menahem b. Aharon ben Zevah, 14th century France-Spain, *Ma’amar Revi’i, Kelal Hamishi, Perek Sheni* (Warsaw, 1880), p. 114a, whose text is a quote of Tur with only minor and insignificant variations.

<sup>56</sup> Sperber 204-5 argues that Tur must have taken his text from Ra’avyah and not Rosh because Tur includes the words “the whole month,” which Rosh omits. This argument is not conclusive, however. First, Tur may simply have had Rosh’s version and added in “the whole month” to make the enactment match either the explanations given or the practice he saw around him, just as Ra’avyah did before him. In addition, the last line of Tur, quoting the custom of blowing twice a day in *Ashkenaz*, is a direct quote from Rosh. Refa’el, *Sefer ha-Manhig* vol. 1, p. 328, notes to line 70, suggests that Tur took the PRE text from Ra’avyah and the record of the custom from Rosh. Even if this is true, the exact quote suggests that Tur saw Rosh’s paragraph in which the custom is recorded. In that case, even if Tur copied the PRE text from Ra’avyah (or from an entirely different manuscript of PRE which he had), he consciously chose to do so over using the one he saw in Rosh, perhaps indicating his preference to include the words “the whole month,” and then (if he was working from Ra’avyah) rearranged the order of words.

*Beit Yosef* and *Bah* ad. loc. note that *Sefer ha-Mordekhai* cites PRE after mentioning Rosh. However, we do not seem to have the referenced *Sefer ha-Mordekhai*. See *Arba’ah Turim ha-Shalem*, pub. *Makhon Yerushalayim* (Tel-Aviv, 1993), 319, footnotes *alef* and *bet*, and Aptowitz’s *Sefer Ra’avyah* vol. 2, p. 239, footnote 2. Tur presumably did not take his version directly from *Sefer ha-Mordekhai*, though, since he never cites *Sefer ha-Mordekhai* in *Arba’ah Turim*.



entire month? Additionally, if blowing the entire month is a logical way to remember the shofar blast at Sinai, then why adduce additional reasons and verses? The most satisfying answer is one that addresses both questions simultaneously, explaining that in fact there are two separate sources and two separate customs here. This is precisely the approach of *Binah le-Itim* (R. Azaryah Figo, 16th-17th century Italy) in his homily for *Shabbat Rosh Hodesh Elul*, who writes:

Know that the Rav *Ba'al ha-Turim z"l* in *Orah Hayim* at the beginning of Laws of *Rosh Ha-Shanah* brings this *baraita*<sup>57</sup> until “that they blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every year.” And he added and wrote, “and the whole month in order to warn Israel that they should repent, as it is said, ‘if a shofar shall be blasted in the city, etc.’ (Amos 3:6)” . . . and the whole essence [of PRE] is only to give a reason for why they enacted to blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* itself, and about this he said that it was a remembrance to the shofar they blew on that very day on account of the ascent of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him. The shofar blast of *Rosh Hodesh* has no relation to repentance, but rather a simple remembrance of the shofar blast of that time. The Tur further added of his own accord that also for the rest of the days of the month until its end they should blow the shofar. The reason for this blowing for the whole month was to awaken to repentance, and upon this matter the Tur brought the verse “if a shofar be blasted in the city, etc.” from which the nature of the shofar as an inspiration to repentance can be seen.<sup>58</sup>

*Binah le-Itim* is clear: the shofar blast in the wilderness on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* is the basis for the Sages’ original enactment of a shofar blast on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. The custom to blow for the entire month, however, developed later, and is primarily a call to repentance and secondarily an attempt to confuse the Satan. In saying this, *Binah le-Itim* supports our reading of Ra’avyah and suggests a two-stage development of this custom. However, while *Binah le-Itim* sees Tur as prescriptive—developing a new custom—we read Ra’avyah and those that follow as offering a descriptive textual basis that justifies an already existing practice.

*Binah le-Itim* makes one further argument which is essential for understanding both Tur and Ra’avyah and their positions on the text-tradition tension. He explains that Tur’s presentation of the two customs linked them so strongly that it misled *Beit Yosef* (R. Yosef Karo, 15th-16th century Spain-Israel) into understanding the Sages’ enactment as including both customs, the *Rosh Hodesh Elul*

<sup>57</sup> Referring to PRE; many of the texts brought here use terms like this to refer to PRE, reflecting a widespread medieval assumption that it was written by R. Eliezer b. Horkanos of the Tannaitic period.

<sup>58</sup> *Binah le-Itim, Et Ketz, Drosch* #56, (Warsaw, 1883 [reprinted Benei Berak, 1967]), p. 51a, cited also in the commentary of the Weinfeld edition of PRE (Jerusalem, 1973) 178.

blast and the month-long blowing.<sup>59</sup> In fact, though, *this seems to be Tur's goal in linking the two*. This permits understanding Tur as a more cautious member of Ra'avyah's school, desiring to preserve a *logical* distinction for the reader between the two customs while still presenting them both *historically* within the Sages' enactment. He does this as follows: while Ra'avyah's version reads, "Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* **the whole month every single year . . .**" Tur's version reads, "Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every **single year and the whole month . . .**" Tur's reading allows more room for teasing apart two independent practices, each with its own logical basis, as *Binah le-Itim* explains. (We will argue, however, that Tur did not want that historical distinction to be apparent, despite *Binah le-Itim's* recognition of it). For while Tur's words can be split between "every single year" and "and the whole month" to show these two customs, Ra'avyah's words permit no such split. Ra'avyah, by working "the whole month" earlier into the sentence, forces the reader to see one custom of blowing shofar for the whole month which is not made of two distinct parts.

For Ra'avyah, then, the PRE narrative becomes a historical source of a first shofar blast on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. From there, the Sages enact blowing from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* on, for which two additional reasons are given—awakening repentance and confusing the Satan. The shofar blast at Sinai ceases to be any more than the historical origin of a custom which then overtakes its source with an independent identity which absorbs even that first day of *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and that narrative basis. That is, Ra'avyah alleviates the text-tradition tension by collapsing two

<sup>59</sup> While *Beit Yosef to Arba'ah Turim*, ad. loc., attempts to explain why all three reasons are necessary to justify one unified custom of blowing shofar for the month of *Elul*, *Binah le-Itim*, as part of the ellipsed section in the quote above, explains:

And I am afraid to say that from reading between the lines of the words of the Rav z"l in the *Beit Yosef*, it seems that he understood these words [i.e., the section from "and the whole month" until "in order to confuse the Satan"] as being also from the body text of the *baraita* of PRE. Therefore he includes an entire discussion regarding the fact that since he already brought a proof from the shofar they blew in the wilderness, why does he need to include another proof from "if a shofar shall be blasted in the city, etc.". . . And after due pardoning [of *Beit Yosef's* honor; PRE, ed. Weinfeld (Jerusalem 1973), 178, quoting *Binah le-Itim*, adds here: "in the shade of God may he rest" (Ps. 91:1)], it seems that he has no need to say all of this, for the one who said this [i.e., PRE] did not say this [i.e., the section from "and the whole month" until "in order to confuse the Satan"—this was not in the original PRE], and the *baraita* did not bring the verse of "if a shofar be blasted in the city, etc."

So why did *Beit Yosef* not quote the simpler explanation? According to *Binah le-Itim*, the seamless interweaving of the two traditions, which we attribute to Ra'avyah's edited PRE, was so convincing that when replicated by Tur it convinced *Beit Yosef* that it was one continuous tradition with three independent reasons which were all interrelated.

customs with distinct histories and logical bases into one historical enactment with three reasons, creating an awkwardness with which subsequent texts struggle.

Tur's language, however, suggests a more cautious approach, but still one within the rubric of the Ra'avyah school. The cautious side of Tur is that which rearranges these phrases to take a step back from the complete merger that Ra'avyah performs, reminding the reader that there are in fact two distinct *logical* elements to this custom.<sup>60</sup> Tur likely sees the expanded PRE text in front of him and recognizes the two distinct historical and logical stages, although he does not originate the second as *Binah le-Itim* argues. Even so, Tur does not want the two *historical* stages to be apparent to the reader. To alleviate the text-tradition tension, perhaps, Tur unquestionably reads both those historical developments back into the original Sages' enactment, just as *Beit Yosef* understood him. If Tur had wanted to suggest that there was an original enactment and a later addition, he certainly would have separated the two sections with an explanation of that development. Thus, by retaining both customs under the unified language of "the Sages enacted", and simultaneously splitting between the justifications for the two customs, Tur both highlights the extreme rereading of Ra'avyah and stands as a more cautious version of him, a harmonizer of text with tradition to explain the medieval Ashkenazic practice.

#### B. REREADING THE SINAITIC SHOFAR—ROKEAH TEXTS

Rokeah (R. Elazar b. Yehudah Rokeah of Worms, 12th-13th century Germany), barely a generation after Ra'avyah, refers to PRE in two different locations. In his Commentary to the Siddur, in *Yom Kippur Ma'ariv*, he writes:

"*Atah vehartanu*" until "*zekher li-yetzi'at mitzrayim*" is forty-one words, corresponding to the forty days Moses spent for the Torah, which is one, and they ended on *Yom Kippur*, as it says in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain and be there," (Ex. 24:12)<sup>61</sup> and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp. For Moses went up the mountain so that they would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, "God went up in the *teru'ah*-blast." (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every year.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See footnote 56 for a discussion of the possible sources for Tur's comments and a demonstration that no matter which source he builds from, we can understand this arrangement of language as deliberate.

<sup>61</sup> This verse is not found in any other edition or quote of PRE. It is a strange choice, because it refers to the first tablets, which are out of context here. See footnote 6 above.

<sup>62</sup> *Peirush Siddur ha-Tefilah le-ha-Rokeah, Ma'ariv le-Yom ha-Kippurim*, Par. 136 (Hershler edition, Jerusalem, 1994), p. 694-5.

Rokeah does not seem to dispute the *minhag* recorded here. However, his quote of it is a tangential point, unrelated to his primary purpose for quoting PRE. Nonetheless, his choice to include the final line, which for his purpose is dispensable, may suggest that he at least recognized this custom in some form, at least as the origin of whatever subsequent shofar blowing custom took place in *Elul*. It also shows that he preserved an original version of PRE that was unlike the revised version of Ra'avyah (with whom he corresponded).<sup>63</sup> Rokeah's community did blow the shofar for the entire month of *Elul*, however, as he writes in his major work *Sefer ha-Rokeah*:

Above<sup>64</sup> it is written we blow the shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* because they enacted that they blow for forty days until *Yom Kippur*, recalling the forty days that Moses ascended to the heights and said to blow every day in order that they not mistakenly follow idolatry, and in this kingdom we only blow until *Rosh Ha-Shanah*.<sup>65</sup>

This is evidence for the claim that the notion of blowing from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* meant until *Yom Kippur*, but an alternate tradition either developed from that or emerged independently to blow only for the month of *Elul*. Rokeah's comment implies that he knew of another tradition which did, in fact, blow from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* until *Yom Kippur*. One wonders if that might have been precisely the tradition of Ra'avan, mentioned above.<sup>66</sup>

The more difficult question to answer regarding *Sefer ha-Rokeah* is what textual basis he cites as the source of this custom. PRE makes no reference to the shofar being blown for forty days. In fact, it is clear that the blast is unique: first, the text clearly describes a blast that was blown on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*; second, it clearly states, "the Blessed Holy One was uplifted **on that day** [emphasis mine] through that shofar blast. . . !"<sup>67</sup> If Rokeah was using PRE, he either had a different version or read our version drastically differently. From the fact that he mentions "in order that they not mistakenly follow after idolatry", Rokeah seems to point to the midrashic tradition which first finds its voice in PRE. However, the reading of a blast every day for forty days, while logical, is simply

<sup>63</sup> Avigdor Aptowitz, *Mavo le-Sefer Ra'avyah* (Jerusalem, 1934), 316.

<sup>64</sup> I have found no earlier reference to such a practice in Rokeah's work. It is unclear to what he is referring here.

<sup>65</sup> *Hilkhot Rosh Hashanah* Par. 207 (Shneurson edition, Jerusalem, 1967), p. 99.

<sup>66</sup> Or the *Sefer ha-Manhig*, which will be discussed below at the beginning of Section V.

<sup>67</sup> Not all versions have "on that day." Horowitz puts it in parentheses in the Vienna 1544 edition, and Hiegger and Friedlander omit it. However, even without it, "through **that** shofar blast" seems to refer to a single shofar blast. To justify a reading of our PRE that the shofar was blown every day, one would have to read "through that shofar blast" as "through that shofar blast that was blasted each day for those forty days," which is certainly not a straightforward reading.

not what our editions of PRE say. The alternative possibility is that Rokeah has some other midrashic tradition which records a shofar blast every day of Moses' sojourn on the mountain. However, a basic search of midrashic literature produced no such text.

Perhaps the answer to this question is found in a third source, *Ma'aseh Rokeah*. While authorship of *Ma'aseh Rokeah* is traditionally attributed to R. Elazar Rokeah of Worms, it is a subject of debate with ramifications for our study.<sup>68</sup> *Ma'aseh Rokeah* writes:

In PRE, when Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the second tablets he said to them, blow the shofar in *Elul* so that you no longer err,<sup>69</sup> and they are sensitized by the shofar blast and they repent<sup>70</sup> for a nation confounded by invaders and there was an elder there etc., as if he were saying to exhort them to repent before *Rosh Ha-Shanah*,<sup>71</sup> and such is the practice that we blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* until *Rosh Ha-Shanah*.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The editor of *Ma'aseh Rokeah*, R. Efrayim Zalman Margaliyot, argues in his introduction (published with the first printed edition in 1912, see footnote 72 below) that it was written by someone other than the author of *Sefer ha-Rokeah*. See his compelling arguments there. However, Hersh Goldwurm, *The Rishonim* (Brooklyn, NY, 2001), 139; Aptowitz, *Mavo* 316; and Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1998), 438-9, all identify the author of *Ma'aseh Rokeah* and *Sefer ha-Rokeah* as the same R. Elazar Rokeah of Worms, albeit without explanation.

<sup>69</sup> The editor inserts a long parenthetical citation here which is fascinating in its own right: "the version in front of us which is brought in the Rosh and Tur and Mordekhai is not [quoted] here, and it is: 'and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp. Moses went up the mountain so that they would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, "God went up in the *teru'ah*-blast, etc.' Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* etc.', and so it should say here." Not only is that *Mordekhai* no longer extant (see footnote 56 above), but neither do we have versions of Rosh or Tur which say "from Rosh Hodesh!"

<sup>70</sup> The text here seems corrupted, as the editor suggests (see previous footnote). Interestingly, the text from "for a nation" until "exhort them to repent" is a partial excerpt of a homily for *Shabbat Shuvah* found in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* Sec. 24, par. 1. The homily, which utilizes a parable of an elder warning people of an impending attack as an allegory for a call to repentance, is on Amos 3:6, the very verse used in the expanded PRE! Based on this, it seems that there is a lacuna or corruption between "and they repent" and "for a nation."

<sup>71</sup> As noted in the previous footnote, the original source from *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, a 6th or 7th century *midrash*, is a homily offered between *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*. In this medieval text, however, it is used to induce repentance for a period from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* until *Rosh ha-Shanah*. This points to the move of the repentance period from *Tishrei* back into *Elul* in the medieval period, which was suggested in Section III (see footnote 39) as a major cause for the expansion of the shofar blasts in *Elul*.

<sup>72</sup> *Hilkhot Rosh ha-Shanah* Par. 120 (Hirschsprung Dukla edition, Sanok, 1912) p. 29.

This text clearly indicates that the source for this custom is PRE. It shares some aspects in common with the source Rokeah cites in *Sefer ha-Rokeah*; however, the period of the shofar blasts is different. The latter part, after “so that you no longer err,” seems to be the author’s own addition, in which he explains why Moses might have instituted a daily shofar blast for the month of *Elul*. That explanation clearly seems to be a retrojection of the logic of his time and the goal of the *Elul* period onto the history of Sinai, since the context of the midrashic Sinai narratives have nothing to do with *Rosh Ha-Shanah*—it is not even mentioned at all.

Given this, *Sefer ha-Rokeah* and *Ma’aseh Rokeah* offer an interesting new method within the school of harmonizing text and tradition. The author of *Sefer ha-Rokeah*, although citing the original version of PRE in his Commentary to the Siddur, offers an unidentified source that justifies the expanded practice of shofar blowing beyond *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. He takes Ra’avyah’s approach a step further—instead of simply revising the Sages’ enactment, he retrojects the actual practice of blowing shofar for an extended period all the way back to Sinai. In this way, it is a more extreme version of harmonization. Still, *Sefer ha-Rokeah* also shares characteristics of Ra’avan’s school (albeit for a different inconsistency), for he is comfortable acknowledging that for some reason<sup>73</sup> his practice of blowing in *Elul* not for a full forty days departs from the text which offers its original basis. However, I contend that his textual basis, given its unclear origins and Rokeah’s explicit choice to ignore the PRE he quotes in his siddur in favor of this other, mysterious text, earns him a place in this section.

In light of the *Sefer ha-Rokeah*, *Ma’aseh Rokeah*’s radical approach becomes apparent. *Ma’aseh Rokeah* presents a text which he identifies as PRE which is different from our editions of PRE and completely falls in line with the practice of his community. The natural periods of shofar blasts for Moses’s forty day sojourn on the mountain are either for the full forty days, or just at the beginning, or at the beginning and at the end. Only *Ma’aseh Rokeah* claims that Moses actually instructed the people to blow for thirty days. This seems to be the most radical rereading of original sources in order to bring them into consonance with communal practice.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> It is also striking that he offers no reason for this deviation, just like Ra’avan. Given that *Sefer ha-Rokeah* appears to be rereading the midrashic tradition anyway, why not reread it in consonance with the current tradition? Perhaps he didn’t feel comfortable creating as extreme a rereading as *Ma’aseh Rokeah*, and wanted to revise in a way that still matched the logic of the original narrative’s forty days of blasts. In this way, *Sefer ha-Rokeah* illustrates what he might have felt to be the limit of a legitimate rereading.

<sup>74</sup> If the versions we have of *Sefer ha-Rokeah* and *Ma’aseh Rokeah* are accurate, the differences between them in this paragraph certainly support the position that the two works had different authors. Alternatively, their approaches are similar in revising the Sinaitic shofar narrative, and in this they are different from all other medieval sources. It seems reasonable, minimally, to posit a very strong connection between these works.

The practice of blowing shofar for the month of *Elul*, to which *Sefer ha-Rokeah* and *Ma'aseh Rokeah* testify, is in line with the previously recorded custom of Ra'avyah, who lived in the same region of Germany barely a generation earlier. Although Ra'avyah's record of the custom is good evidence for this practice in the region, the question of the textual struggle is a different story. The approaches of *Sefer ha-Rokeah* and *Ma'aseh Rokeah* to resolving the tension between tradition and text, by citing an alternative midrashic tradition which refers to either a thirty or forty day period of shofar blowing at Sinai, are novel and not based on any prior text or approach in the medieval literature.

### C. LEAVING PRE BEHIND—MAHARAM'S SCHOOL

A new way of relating to this custom within Ra'avyah's tradition emerges in late thirteenth century Germany with the school of Maharam of Rothenburg (R. Meir b. Barukh *me-Rotenburg*, 13th century Germany-France).<sup>75</sup> The first source to document this new attitude is *Sefer Minhagim de-Bei Maharam me-Rotenburg*, a compilation of the customs of Maharam and his community, and a work with unknown authorship and exact provenance.<sup>76</sup> In the beginning of the section on the preparatory practices of Maharam's community for *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, it states:

They practiced to blow shofar every morning and evening after leaving synagogue<sup>77</sup> from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* until three days before *Rosh Ha-Shanah* in order to teach and inaugurate commandments as the master says: "we inquire about the laws of a festival thirty days before the festival (cf. *Tosefta Megilah* (Zuckerman) 4:5)." Also, in order that he [Satan] not figure out when *Rosh Ha-Shanah* will be. . . . I have also heard that it is because the Satan caused Israel to err during the first forty days [of Moses' time on Mount Sinai] as it is said, "for this man, Moses," (Ex. 32:1)<sup>78</sup> and caused them to make the Calf as appears in the *midrash*: and on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* when Moses went up to receive the second tablets they said, let us make an enactment so that he [Satan] not cause us to err again, and let us blow shofar in order to confuse him.

<sup>75</sup> Maharam's customs and practice were enormously influential in Germany and eastward; it is not surprising that his practice and justification begins a school of a similar style. See Goldwurm 142.

<sup>76</sup> See the Introduction to the Elfenbein edition (New York, 1938) for an overview of the scholarship on these questions and their general indeterminacy.

<sup>77</sup> Maharam's community seems to originate the custom of blowing morning and evening; interestingly, after leaving synagogue. One wonders where it took place if indeed it was not in the synagogue!

<sup>78</sup> See Rashi ad. loc., and *Midrash Tanhuma* (Buber edition) *Parashat Ki Tisa* par. 13.

It is also written, “a great voice which did not grow,” (Deut. 5:19) and we translate it as which did not stop, teaching that the sound of the shofar was growing stronger the entire second forty days.<sup>79</sup>

Maharam’s community, like others in Germany, blew shofar for the month of *Elul*.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, in discussing the basis for this custom, this source all but leaves PRE entirely behind. The only mention seems to be the reference to the *midrash* offered as a third reason. Even that reading is substantially different from PRE as it originally appeared, here focusing on the confusion of the Satan which, even if it is a possible explanation of the *midrash*, is certainly not its simple reading.<sup>81</sup> This text offers the entirely new reason of training for *Rosh Ha-Shanah* practices thirty days beforehand, which removes from the custom any independent identity, instead seeing it merely as an introduction to the *Rosh Ha-Shanah* blasts. This approach differs from both types of harmonization seen above. It does not directly adjust PRE as Ra’avyah does, nor does it focus on Moses’ time on Sinai like Rokeah; rather, it leaves this for last, apparently preferring to justify the custom on grounds basically divorced from a historical basis. It is this novel approach of ignoring PRE (to greater or lesser extents) which characterizes the students of Maharam in Germany and surrounding regions, as we shall see.

R. Hayim Or Zaru’a (R. Hayim Eliezer b. Yitzhak Or Zaru’a, 13th-14th century Austria/Germany, henceforth referred to as Maharah), a student of Rosh and Maharam of Rothenburg,<sup>82</sup> writes:

And this is that which was customary to blow [shofar] from *Elul*, as it is said, “if the shofar be blasted in a city will the nation not tremble?” (Amos 3:6) Meaning, they will not tremble on their own, and this city is the synagogue, as it is said, “in the city of our God the mountain of God’s holiness,” (Ps. 48:2) and now it is called a miniature sanctuary.

Therefore the world practices blowing the whole month of *Elul* in order that they be used to blowing and not [make a] mistake. . . .<sup>83</sup>

Maharah records the custom of blowing shofar in *Elul*,<sup>84</sup> but he too has entirely left behind the original version of PRE and even any midrashic reference to

<sup>79</sup> *Seder Rinus le-Erev Rosh ha-Shanah* (Elfenbein edition, New York, 1938), p. 37.

<sup>80</sup> See further in the same section of *Sefer Minhagim de-Bei Maharam me-Rotenburg* for more discussion of stopping three days before *Rosh Hashanah*.

<sup>81</sup> It is also unclear what kind of shofar blowing would be necessary to confuse the Satan—just once on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, for the entire forty days, or for the month of *Elul*. See note 51 above.

<sup>82</sup> Goldwurm 149, and biography entry for R. Haim Or Zaru’a on Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD, Version 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Derashot R. Hayim Or Zaru’a* Par. 32, 33 (from Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD, Version 13).

<sup>84</sup> Despite the ambiguity in the first paragraph whether the custom to blow extends until *Yom Kippur* or not, the second paragraph makes it clear that the custom is for *Elul* alone.



Moses' sojourn on the mountain. The only remnant appears to be from the expanded PRE originated by Ra'avyah, with which he shares the verse from Amos, expanding on that homily. In addition, in the second paragraph, he adds a new reason altogether—so as not to make a mistake on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, which he uses as a chance to further elaborate on what constitutes a mistake. From this source one wonders whether more than one simple blast was blown each day, or whether the single blast sufficed to “warm up” the shofar blower.

Was Maharah aware of PRE? While Maharam's tradition only briefly notes it as a textual basis, Maharah's other teacher Rosh includes it fully, as we will see. Thus, Maharah's omission of PRE is surprising, assuming his familiarity with this source in some form.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps this was Maharah's method of dealing with the tension between the source suggesting blowing shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* alone and the Austrian practice of blowing shofar for the month of *Elul*. To resolve this tension, Maharah cites only the section of Ra'avyah's PRE that directly acts as a basis for the practice. In addition, he offers a very practical basis for the custom. This constitutes a striking moment in the development of this custom. At this juncture, Maharah is the first to sever the tie completely to the original PRE, and justify the practice based only on later developed material.

This trend continues into fifteenth century *Ashkenaz*, where we find in *Sefer ha-Minbagim* (R. Yitzhak Tirna, 14th-15th century Czechoslovakia), a major collection of customs:

It is a proper custom to blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* until *Zekhor Berit* which is *Erev Rosh ha-Shanah*. Then we stop blowing and return to blowing again on *Rosh ha-Shanah*, this is 30 days. The support for this is “blow a shofar on the month” (Ps. 81:4), which implies a whole month which is thirty days. And it is all to confuse the Satan so that he will not know when *Rosh ha-Shanah* is and [not] prosecute, God forbid . . . Another reason [why we blow], is because Moses our teacher went up the mountain on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* to get the second tablets and they loudly sounded the shofar in order that they not mistakenly follow after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar as it is said, “God went up in that shofar, etc.” (Ps. 47:6); therefore we blow from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* [until Tishrei].<sup>86</sup> [This is found in *Arba'ah Turim*] *Orah Hayim*.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Especially given his use of the proof-text from Amos, it seems likely that Maharah saw a source which included the expanded PRE, such as *Sefer Ra'avyah* or *Piskei ha-Rosh*, in which case he presumably saw PRE as well. This is not certain, however. Just as Ra'avyah seems to have originated the reason, it could certainly have been re-innovated independently by Maharah without his ever having seen PRE. This does seem unlikely, though, given Maharah's being a student of Rosh and the regularity with which Rosh's other students quoted this PRE.

<sup>86</sup> “Until Tishrei” is bracketed in the Hebrew text from which this was translated.

<sup>87</sup> *Sefer ha-Minbagim: Elul, Yemei ha-Selihot* (taken from Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD, Version 13, which cites Spitzer edition, Jerusalem, 1979).

*Sefer ha-Minhagim* cites a new homily as his primary justification for the practice of blowing shofar in *Elul*, following the creative Eastern European tradition begun by *Sefer Minhagim de-Bei Maharam* around a century earlier. To this, he appends the confusion of the Satan, and only subsequently mentions a reason based on the original PRE.<sup>88</sup> This may be understood as yet another variation on negotiating the text-tradition tension. *Sefer ha-Minhagim* removes PRE from a position of authority as the textual basis of the custom, instead offering a novel homily which he might have felt was a much better justification of the custom.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, he does append the *midrash*, perhaps given its significant place in the textual tradition regarding this custom.<sup>90</sup>

Following in the path of the *Sefer ha-Minhagim*, the contemporaneous *Sefer Maharil* (R. Yaakov ben Mosheh Halevi Moelin Segal, 14th-15th century Germany)<sup>91</sup> writes:

It is a custom throughout the Diaspora of Israel<sup>92</sup> to begin blowing the shofar from when *Elul* enters.

<sup>88</sup> Note that he does essentially include the original version of it, which is a retreat from the position taken by *Sefer Minhagim de-Bei Maharam* and Maharah before him of ignoring it completely.

An important direction for further analysis is a study of the cultural contexts of the communities in which these works were written. Particularly in this school, in which a variety of reasons, novel ones as well as old, are offered, the reasons may reflect the particular types of literature being written and the particular values or emphases of the community and author. For example, perhaps a Satan focus is more appropriate in a time in which superstition plays a stronger role, while a repentance/preparation focus fits a more pietistic community.

<sup>89</sup> The impact of relegating PRE to a tertiary justification has important repercussions: when R. Mosheh Isserles quotes *Sefer ha-Minhagim* as the source of his position on the custom, he does not cite PRE in his quotation, mentioning only the first two reasons! See *Darkhei Mosheh*, Tur *Orah Hayim* 581, comment *alef*.

<sup>90</sup> In quoting a version of PRE, however, *Sefer ha-Minhagim* must again grapple with the relationship between this *midrash*, which in its original form as he quotes it here advocates for shofar blowing on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* alone, and the custom. This tension is negotiated ambiguously by *Sefer ha-Minhagim* in his last line. Whether his “therefore we blow from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* [until Tishrei]” (which is not found in our editions of Tur *Orah Hayim* in any similar form despite the last line of *Sefer ha-Minhagim* claiming that it is) is meant to be understood as a part of the PRE-like tradition he is adducing, or meant to be his own comment afterwards, it does not reflect the original PRE, but rereads it as a basis for blowing shofar the whole month. Even after bringing a different midrashic basis for this custom, then, *Sefer ha-Minhagim*, like many before him, still feels compelled to understand PRE (or a text very much like it) against its original context in order to justify the communal custom.

<sup>91</sup> This work, which details the customs of Maharil, was written by his student R. Zalman of St. Goar.

<sup>92</sup> *Shinuyei Nuscha'ot* in the *Mekhon Yerushalayim* edition, letter *alef*, p. 260, has “*Ashkenaz*” instead of “the Diaspora of Israel” in two manuscript editions.

Mahari Segal<sup>93</sup> expounded that therefore we do not begin blowing the evening that *Rosh Hodesh* [*Elul*] enters, but rather on the morning of the first day of *Rosh Hodesh* because from that day until *Yom Kippur* is forty days, reflecting the forty days that our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, was on the mountain to receive the second tablets. And our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, went up in the early morning, as it says in the *Ki Tisa* portion, “and you should ascend in the morning” (Ex. 34:2), and that was *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, and Rashi explained similarly there. And he descended on *Yom Kippur* to inform Israel that the sin of the calf had been atoned for. Until here is found in [*Arba’ah Turim*] *Orah Hayim*. And Mahari Segal expounded the reason for the blasts from the entry of *Elul* as we say, from when *Elul* enters, we increase our repentance . . . Therefore we blow to warn and exhort the nation to repentance. An analogy by parable is [both] to a king who comes to lay siege to a city and to the lookout on the tower when he sees the legions coming upon the city: their way [i.e., that of the king and of the lookout] is to blast *teru’ah*-blasts and blow to warn the nation that they should stand on guard, and so it is in [*Arba’ah Turim*] *Orah Hayim*.<sup>94</sup>

Maharil records the custom to begin blowing shofar from the entry of *Elul*. Although he does not specify the terminus, it is likely that he follows the custom of Maharam’s school, in which he was trained, to blow only until *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. Although he argues for beginning the shofar blasts from the daytime of *Rosh Hodesh Elul* because the forty day period until *Yom Kippur* begins then, which suggests that forty days might be the duration of the blasts, the weight of evidence is against that argument. First, his teachers in *Ashkenaz* unanimously and explicitly wrote about blowing only until the end of *Elul*. Second, he cites Tur, who is clear about the custom being only for the month, without arguing against him. Third, the purpose for the blasts given by Mahari Segal is exhortation to repentance. While the period of Moses’ sojourn on the mountain was forty days, the period of preparation for repentance is really the month of *Elul*, culminating in *Yom ha-Din*, *Rosh ha-Shanah*. So a set of blasts meant to exhort people to repent would actually have ended on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*.<sup>95</sup>

Like his predecessors in this school, Maharil ignores the original PRE as the reason for the custom of beginning to blow during *Elul*. This is a noticeable omission since he cites that midrashic tradition as the reason to begin in the morning instead of the night, but not the basis for the practice altogether!

<sup>93</sup> This is the Maharil, as R. Zalman (see footnote 91) refers to him.

<sup>94</sup> *Hilkhot Yamim Nora'im* Par. 5 (*Makhon Yerushalayim* edition, Jerusalem, 1989), p. 260. See also p. 261, footnote 12 that the reference to *Arba’ah Turim* refers to the exhortation to repentance but not the parable, which does not appear in *Arba’ah Turim*.

<sup>95</sup> See also *Shinuyei Nusha’ot* *ibid.* letter *bet* which ends that first line “and to become accustomed to it, until close to *Rosh Hashanah*.”

Instead, he offers the alternative reason of exhorting the nation to repent. It is difficult to know whether Maharil's inspiration was Ra'avyah's expanded PRE<sup>96</sup> or whether he arrived at this reason independently.

This fifteenth century Eastern European attitude towards the custom and its relationship to the original text continues to be exhibited two generations after Maharil in *Leket Yosher* (R. Yosef b. Mosheh, 15th century Germany), a compendium of laws and customs of R. Yisrael Isserlein, author of *Terumat ha-Deshen*:

Let us return to repentance: from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and on one should begin [working on repentance] with alacrity and care, for it is then thirty days before the Day of Judgment, and the time of courts is thirty days (*Bava Metz'ia* 118a). And we blow shofar to exhort people to repentance and that one should seek his merits for the Day of Judgment. . . .<sup>97</sup>

A few pages later, *Leket Yosher* wrote as a heading to a homily, "I will begin by writing the headings of the homily. We blow from *Rosh Hodesh* to confuse the Satan and to exhort to repentance."<sup>98</sup>

*Leket Yosher* is characteristic of this school. His explanation of the custom begins with a creative reason, the period of courts, and returns to the two frequently offered reasons initially appended by Ra'avyah to PRE almost 300 years earlier. Yet again, the original PRE and Moses' sojourn on the mountain have disappeared. The text-tradition tension now exists only in echoes from the clash of reasons in slight disharmony with the custom's main movements.

#### D. SUMMARY

Three different schools emerge within the Ra'avyah school of resolving the text-tradition tension. In all three, the custom is widespread and well-accepted to blow shofar for the month of *Elul*, with minor variations regarding the terminus of the custom.<sup>99</sup> In addition, all three are based in Germany<sup>100</sup> and eastward. Two approaches initially coexist in the thirteenth century, exemplified by texts

<sup>96</sup> It could not have been more than an inspiration, since other than the reason of repentance itself, Maharil's omission of the verse from Amos and introduction of the parable shares nothing textual in common with Ra'avyah's suggestion of the custom being based on repentance.

<sup>97</sup> *Leket Yosher Helek Alef (Orah Hayim)*, Par. 4 (Freiman edition, Berlin, 1903 [reprinted Jerusalem, 1964]), p. 120.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, Par. 3, p. 123.

<sup>99</sup> The explicit possibility of blowing all the way until *Yom Kippur* surfaces seriously only in *Sefer ha-Rokeah*.

<sup>100</sup> For more records of the custom to blow shofar for the whole month in particular communities in *Ashkenaz* (collections compiled shortly after the medieval period that likely reflect customs dating back to that period), see Sperber 211. For two exceptions to this trend—records of Ashkenazic communities in the medieval period blowing shofar only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, see Aberlander 97 for his citation of *Da'at Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* and footnote 9 there for his citation of *Peirushim u-Pesakim le-Rabbeinu Avigdor ha-Tzarfati*.

from Tur and Rokeah. Tur prefers to retain an expanded PRE like Ra'avyah before him; while left with the awkwardness of integrating the original version with the expanded reasons in order for the current practice to make sense, he maintains fidelity to the importance of PRE's role in the *minhag*. The Rokeah texts prefer to distance themselves further from PRE, either quoting a different tradition altogether in which the historical basis matches the current custom, or citing PRE but with a drastically different version of the story to accomplish the same ends. In that sense, while displaying a stronger emphasis on the current practice having a basis in a Biblical narrative<sup>101</sup> which matches it "blast for blast," they are more willing to set aside the original text of PRE.

A third technique develops in the late thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, beginning with Maharam of Rothenburg. This trend briefly overlaps with the aforementioned approaches before eventually supplanting them completely. It almost entirely dispenses with the previous basis for the custom, preferring theological and pragmatic sources to ones grounded in a Biblical narrative; although it often turns back to the reasons offered by Ra'avyah long before, it does so without ever citing PRE. The tension between the original PRE (both the enactment and its narrative basis) and the practice of blowing for a whole month has not been creatively managed in the style of the former two schools, but has been obscured—even eradicated.

#### V. RA'AVAN'S APPROACH—LIVING WITH THE TEXT-TRADITION TENSION

The path paved by Ra'avan in the mid-twelfth century, acknowledging the deviation of the *Elul* shofar blowing custom from its origins, is next tread by a slightly later contemporary of Ra'avyah in *Sefer ha-Manhig* (R. Avraham b. Natan ha-Yarhi, 12th-13th century Provence-Spain):

The custom of *Tzarfat*<sup>102</sup> is to begin from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* to blow shofar, and I have a support for this in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain," (Deut. 10:1) and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp. For Moses went up the mountain, and they would not stray any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, "God went up in the *teru'ah*-blast, the Lord in the sound of the shofar." (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh*

<sup>101</sup> I use this terminology to refer to the narratives based in the Bible with an understanding that the shofar blasts emerge from a Rabbinic reading of the story. Many of the texts we have seen are aware of this distinction in some way as evidenced by their use of the language of *midrash*, and their not assuming this Sinai blast to be a part of the plain-sense Sinai story.

<sup>102</sup> This generally refers to the northern region of France, as distinct from Provence; see Soloveitchik 18-9 (from footnote 1 above).

*Hodesh Elul* every single year, and the people of *Tzarfat* do it from then on.<sup>103</sup>

*Sefer ha-Manhig* does not have Ra'avyah's expanded PRE. It acknowledges that while the text offers the basis of a tradition to blow on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, the custom of *Tzarfat* is to blow from then on. Like Ra'avan, the terminus of the practice is left ambiguous—does it end with *Rosh ha-Shanah* or continue throughout the period paralleling Moses' stay on the mountain, until *Yom Kippur*? While this remains unclear in the text,<sup>104</sup> *Sefer ha-Manhig's* relation to the text-tradition tension is clear. Like Ra'avan, *Sefer ha-Manhig* maintains the original PRE even while acknowledging an expanded custom.

It is readily understandable how the expanded practice to blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and on got started in *Tzarfat* in the early thirteenth century. We might imagine that while *Mabzor Vitry's* community a century earlier only blew the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, either the community's practice naturally expanded because of internal factors, or the expanded practice was transplanted or adopted from other communities in France-Germany. *Sefer ha-Manhig's* traditional version of PRE is not surprising, since R. Avraham had little connection to the German school which produced the novel version of PRE and inclined toward harmonization. As a student of Ri of Dampierre, a member of the French Tosafist school with which Ra'avan maintained a correspondence,<sup>105</sup> he shared an intellectual tradition with Ra'avan, increasing the likelihood of their adopting a similar approach.

Later in the thirteenth century, an Ashkenazic work of unknown provenance follows closely the approach of *Sefer ha-Manhig*. *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi*,<sup>106</sup> a halakhic compendium reflecting the traditions of the *beit midrash* of Rashi, writes:

[Concerning] their practice of blowing shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, I found a basis for it in *midrash*, and similarly it is written in some aggadic texts: On *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, "Ascend to me upon the mountain." (Deut. 10:1) They loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp, for Moses went up the mountain so that they would not stray any longer after idolatry, and

<sup>103</sup> *Hilkhot Rosh ha-Shanah* Par. 24 (Warsaw, 1885 [reprinted Jerusalem, 1970s (exact date blurred)]), p. 87-8. See also Yitzhak Refa'el edition (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 328-329, lines 66-71.

<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, Aberlander 98 and *Entziklopedya Talmudit*, "Elul," vol. 2, p. 2, footnote 16 both cite *Sefer ha-Manhig* as saying unequivocally that the custom was only practiced during the month of *Elul*. It is not clear to me on what textual basis this reading is founded.

<sup>105</sup> Goldwurm 131, 171.

<sup>106</sup> See Urbach (see footnote 23 above) 322-65. For the date and provenance of the work, see 328.

the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that *teru'ab*-blast, as it is said, "God went up in the *teru'ab*-blast." (Ps. 47:6) Therefore their practice is to blow every single year.<sup>107</sup>

The language of the opening line bears great similarity to Rabbeinu Nissim as brought in *Shibolei ha-Leket*, and the approach matches *Sefer ha-Manhig*. The ambiguity regarding the terminus of the practice remains. *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi*, however, addresses the text-tradition tension in a subtly different way. Whereas Ra'avan and *Sefer ha-Manhig* directly juxtapose the PRE narrative and the expanded custom, thereby highlighting the gap between them, *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* introduces PRE as the basis for a custom to blow shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every year, but does not conclude by directly contrasting them. While he offers neither revision of PRE nor alternative reasons, *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* still softens the text-tradition tension by avoiding bringing one's attention to the mismatch between text and practice.

Because the authorship and location of this work are unknown, little can be said about its place in the geographic and historical schema of this study. However, what we do know (based on Urbach's research) reveals it to stand at an interesting juncture. The author of *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* mentions Ra'avyah, and *Sefer Ra'avyah* serves as a major source of this work.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the author cites Ra'avan in a number of places, and draws some content from *Sefer Ra'avan*.<sup>109</sup> If *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* was aware of and directly drew from both of these two divergent schools, the author's decision to follow Ra'avan's approach is particularly striking as a potentially conscious decision to prefer one approach to the other.<sup>110</sup>

Ra'avyah's version of PRE appears again in *Piskei ha-Rosh* (R. Asher b. Yehi'el, 13th-14th century Germany-Spain), around a century after the PRE revision first appeared. In an appended section to his laws of *Rosh ha-Shanah*, Rosh writes:

<sup>107</sup> *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi, Inyan Rosh ha-Shanah*, par. 3, in Urbach 352.

<sup>108</sup> Urbach 326.

<sup>109</sup> Urbach 324.

<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, there is a second comment about this custom later in *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* which seems to belong to Ra'avyah's school and bears great textual similarity to part of the comment in *Sefer Minhagim de-Bei Maharam me-Rotenburg* (quoted in the beginning of Section IV.C):

The nation customarily blows shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* since . . . he ascended the next day on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* to receive the second tablets, and Israel said, "when Moses went up the first time, the Satan caused us to err in making a 'molten calf.' (Ex. 32:4) Now come let us confuse him", and they began to blow the shofar. Therefore the generations customarily blew shofar from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and the whole month to confuse him, so that he not prosecute Israel. (Urbach 356)

It is not clear whether these two comments in *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* were originally part of the same collection or not. See Sperber 205-6 for a discussion of the relationship between these two comments.

It is taught in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* Chapter 46, “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said . . . on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, “Ascend to me upon the mountain,” (Deut. 10:1) and they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp. For Moses went up the mountain so that they would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, “God went up in the *teru’ah*-blast, etc.” (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year in order to warn Israel that they should repent, as it is said, “if a shofar shall be blasted in the city, etc.” (Amos 3:6) and in order to confuse the Satan so that he not prosecute Israel.” Therefore they practiced in *Ashkenaz* to blow shofar the entire month of *Elul* morning and evening after prayers.<sup>111</sup>

Rosh has the same version of PRE as Ra’avyah. In fact, Rosh is clear in his language that he sees the quote from PRE as extending all the way until the words “prosecute Israel.”<sup>112</sup> It is likely that this version was quoted directly from Ra’avyah, as Aptowitz argues.<sup>113</sup> There is one striking difference between them, however. Rosh omits the words “the whole month” from his quote of PRE, even though it appears in Ra’avyah. In this way, Rosh continues in the tradition of Ra’avan. Even using Ra’avyah’s expanded PRE, Rosh maintains fidelity to what seems to be the original logic and language of the enactment. Perhaps Rosh removed the words “the whole month” because he felt that the Sages’ enactment in the context of PRE only made sense as an enactment for *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. Simultaneously, he records the expanded custom of *Ashkenaz* to blow shofar for the entire month, thereby acknowledging that the custom is an expansion beyond the logical basis of the text.<sup>114</sup>

Later in the fourteenth century, Rabbeinu Yeruham (R. Yeruham ben Meshulam, 13th-14th century Provence-Spain), Rosh’s student, writes:

<sup>111</sup> *Piskei ha-Rosh*, *Masekhet Rosh Hashanah* 4:14.

<sup>112</sup> This is made clear by the Rosh’s use of the language “*ad kan*,” “until here,” after those words. My quotation marks in the translation reflect that.

<sup>113</sup> Aptowitz, *Sefer Ra’avyah*, vol. 2, 239, footnote 2.

<sup>114</sup> See also *Hidushei ha-Ran* (R. Nisim b. Reuven of Gerona, 14th century Spain) Appendix to *Rosh Hashanah*, s.v. *garsinan be-Pirkei de-R”E ha-Gadol*, who appears to have quoted from Rosh (see Aptowitz, *Sefer Ra’avyah*, vol. 2, 239, footnote 2). He quotes the expanded version of PRE almost exactly but without Ra’avyah’s addition of “the whole month,” Ran even includes Rosh’s “*ad kan*” and concludes in language similar to Rosh’s: “and from here they relied in *Ashkenaz* to blow the whole month of *Elul* after prayers, morning and evening.” He adds, “and from here one can base the custom of those places that get up early from *Rosh Hodesh Elul*,” referring to *selihot* services. The use of PRE as a basis for the *selihot* period is an important point for further research on the relationship between *Ashkenaz* and *Sefarad* and for a broader understanding of the way the development of the shofar blowing custom fits into the larger context of the *Elul* period in medieval *minhag* literature.



They practiced in some places to blow from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every morning and evening to awaken the pathways of repentance, and similarly was the practice in Ashkenaz after prayers in the morning and evening. They based this on *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* Chapter 46 that on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* when Moses ascended upon the mountain they loudly sounded the shofar throughout the camp, for Moses went up the mountain so that Israel would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry. The Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast, as it is said, “God went up in the *teru’ah*-blast, etc.” (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every year in order to warn Israel that they should repent, as it is said, “if a shofar shall be blasted in the city, etc.” (Amos 3:6) and in order to confuse the Satan so that he not prosecute Israel.<sup>115</sup>

Following the textual development, Rabbeinu Yeruham has Ra’avyah’s expanded PRE. Like Rosh, however, he preserves the version that the original enactment was confined to *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, and acknowledges that as a basis of, but by implication not the whole justification for, the custom to blow the whole month. Although his language is not as clear as Rosh’s that the custom is just for the month of *Elul*, his reference to the custom of *Ashkenaz* makes it likely that in fact it is a month-long custom to which he is referring, and not until *Yom Kippur*.

One fascinating detail in Rabbeinu Yeruham not present in Rosh provides a window into his approach to the text-tradition tension. In his opening line, Rabbeinu Yeruham claims, “They practiced in some places to blow from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every morning and evening to awaken the pathways of repentance.” Only after this does he enter into his discussion of PRE. Perhaps Rabbeinu Yeruham is sensitive not only to the fact that the original enactment was to blow shofar only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, but that neither that original enactment nor the Satan argument seem an adequate basis to justify the expanded custom. He therefore takes the most compelling argument for a month-long custom, “awakening the pathways of repentance”, and privileges that at the front of his remarks. By elevating the status of this reason, he mitigates the tension which he exposes by retaining the custom and its origin in their inconsistent forms. Rabbeinu Yeruham hints at a reason for expanding from the original enactment to the current practice—awakening repentance—and in doing so he offsets the tension he exposes between the PRE basis and the current practice.

Also striking in Rabbeinu Yeruham is the differentiation between what appear to be two communities—the community of “some places” mentioned first, and that of *Ashkenaz* mentioned second. The practice of *Ashkenaz* is most probably based on Rosh, and reflects entirely what we have seen in Section IV, that the

<sup>115</sup> *Toledot Adam ve-Havah, Netiv 6 Helek 1* (Venice, 1553 [reprinted Jerusalem, ND]).

*Elul*-long shofar blowing custom was widespread in Germany. To where could “some places” refer? At first glance, two possibilities present themselves. Although exiled from Provence in 1306, Rabbeinu Yeruham might have been referring to a custom he observed there. From Provence, he went to Spain, where he studied with Rosh in Toledo. Because this custom was not referenced in any other Sefardic works to date as a Sefardic custom, it seems unlikely that Rabbeinu Yeruham is recording a custom in the Spanish communities in which he lived or traveled. Provence seems to be the most likely possibility. This would be the first evidence of the custom’s existence in Provence, and one of its rare mentions outside of Germany and northern France altogether.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>116</sup> A contemporaneous source with connections to Provence addresses this custom, but it probably cannot be read as part of Ra’avan’s school. *Orhot Hayim* (R. Aharon ha-Kohen of Lunel, 13th-14th century Provence-Spain) wrote:

A reason for the custom which they practiced in all places of Israel to begin and blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*: this custom has a basis in the *midrash*, and so it is written in PRE, it is a commandment (*mitzvah*) [Note: This is significantly different language for this practice than we find in any other literature, and this version of PRE does not appear in any known manuscripts or printed editions; see footnote 8] to blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* for on that day Israel blew, since it was the final *Rosh Hodesh* of the end of the forty years that Israel stood in the wilderness. And in the *aggadah* it says, on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* Moses ascended the mountain to receive the second tablets and they loudly sounded the shofar in the camp. For Moses went up the mountain so that they would not mistakenly follow any longer after idolatry, and the Blessed Holy One was uplifted through that shofar blast and that shofar [This version does not appear anywhere else—it is usually either “on that day and through that shofar blast,” or merely “through that shofar blast”], as it is said, “God went up in the *teru’ah*-blast, the Lord in the sound of the shofar.” (Ps. 47:6) Therefore the Sages enacted that they blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* every single year (*Hilkhot Rosh Hashbanah* Par. *alef* (Jerusalem, ND), vol. 1, p. 214).

Is the custom described here to blow shofar for the whole month or only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*? While the textual proofs justify only *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, the crucial point lies in the language “to begin and blow (*le-batbil ve-litko’a*) the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*.” It could be read as ‘to begin to blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*,’ suggesting a custom whose duration is longer than a day, presumably for the month. Alternatively, the phrase could be read to mean ‘to begin [the month] by blowing the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*,’ or ‘to begin [before *Rosh ha-Shanah*] and blow the shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*,’ in which case it refers only to *Rosh Hodesh Elul*. While Aberlander 97 includes *Orhot Hayim* among the sources that record the custom to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, Sperber 206 footnote 16 adopts the latter reading. However, the majority of the evidence seems to be against him. First, the two proofs both refer only to *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, including a *midrash* which does not appear in any other sources on this custom and supports the idea of

What characterizes the texts which maintain the tension between text and communal practice as pioneered by Ra'avan? One of the elements that unites them is actually what sets them apart from Ra'avan—they all utilize a direct, almost exact quote from PRE: the original version in *Sefer ha-Manhig* and *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi*, and the expanded Ra'avyah version in Rosh and his student Rabbeinu Yeruham.<sup>117</sup> These authors retain the centrality of PRE and record the current custom of blowing from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* onwards. Each deals with the tension inherent in quoting a textual basis which does not seem to justify the tradition it finds in a slightly different way.

Rosh and Rabbeinu Yeruham rely on the additional reasons of confusing the Satan and awakening repentance introduced by the expanded version of PRE (while maintaining intact the original version of the enactment to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*). Rabbeinu Yeruham prioritizes the repentance explanation before introducing PRE at all. *Sefer ha-Manhig* uses language which suggests a weaker link between text and tradition. His “I have a support for this in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* . . .”<sup>118</sup> suggests his ambivalence about the extent to which these texts justify the current practice. *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* uses similar language and, as we saw, refrains from explicitly juxtaposing the source and the custom. In contrast, the texts from Ra'avyah's school of harmonizing text and tradition are characterized by direct causal language like “because” and

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blowing on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* only even more unambiguously than PRE (regarding this *midrash* and its unknown origins, see *Yosef Ometz* #60, par. 2). Second, *Sefer Kolbo*, widely believed to be a precursor to *Orhot Hayim* by the same author (see Goldwurm 181), in a paragraph with many textual similarities to the *Orhot Hayim* parallel (*Sefer Kolbo Hilkhoh Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* Par. 65 (David Avraham edition, Jerusalem, 1993), vol 4., column 189-190), clearly advocates blowing shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* only. Given this evidence, it seems like *Orhot Hayim* is describing a custom to blow shofar on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* only, in which case he is not relevant to this paper because he faces no text-tradition tension.

If, however, *Orhot Hayim* is understood according to this alternative reading, that the custom was indeed the whole month of Elul (whether the expansion was for the month of *Elul* until *Rosh Hashanah* or beyond to *Yom Kippur* cannot be known, but the absence of any explicit reference to the forty days of blowing shofar being practiced weighs against the latter option), then he faces an even greater amount of tension, balancing two texts which advocate for a *Rosh Hodesh Elul*-only custom against the current practice. The simple technique *Orhot Hayim* would be using in that case is the language of “this custom has a basis in the *midrash*,” which acknowledges the *Rosh Hodesh Elul* textual basis and leaves room for an expansion which took place for some unaddressed reason, a common technique also used by others in Ra'avan's school.

<sup>117</sup> Ra'avan's use of the paraphrase instead of the full direct quote likely stemmed from his use of the source in discussing the reason for forty blasts on *Rosh Hashanah*, a different context than directly relating to the custom to blow shofar in *Elul*.

<sup>118</sup> And according to the less preferred reading of *Orhot Hayim* (see footnote 116 above), *Orhot Hayim*'s language “this custom has a basis in the *midrash*. . .”

“therefore” which connect the source to the text in ways that imply a necessary and sufficient relationship.

The final commonality between these sources is their location outside the German world. *Sefer ha-Manhig’s* R. Avraham and Rabbeinu Yeruham began in Provence and made their way to Spain. Rosh began as a central figure in Germany but fled to Spain the end of the thirteenth century. Only *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* and Ra’avan are located squarely in *Ashkenaz*, and *Likutim mi-Sifrei de-Bei Rashi* seems to have been written towards the very beginning of the divergence of the schools. Interestingly, even among the Provençal authors, none make explicit reference to the custom being practiced in Provence. In fact, *Sefer ha-Manhig’s* description of the presence of the practice in France implies that in his time it was not present in Provence.<sup>119</sup> Rabbeinu Yeruham, writing a hundred years later in the early fourteenth century, does supply evidence that the custom may have begun in Provence. If so, it entered Provence much later than in northern France and Germany, and in a limited fashion—only for *Rosh Hodesh Elul* in some places,<sup>120</sup> if at all. While this may well be more correlation than causation, the relationship between the geographic commonality of Provence (and to a lesser degree Spain) to the attitudes of these authors to the text-tradition tension is striking.<sup>121</sup> That is, perhaps this custom can point to a

<sup>119</sup> See, however, Sperber 205 footnote 9 who may be arguing that the *Sefer ha-Manhig’s* language implies that shofar was blown in Provence on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* only.

One other mention of our custom from Provençal literature, even earlier than *Sefer ha-Manhig*, is *Ba’al ha-Ma’or* (R. Zerayah ha-Levi, 12th century Provence), which would provide crucial information about early evidence of the custom in Provence. Strangely, although three sources cite “*Ba’al ha-Ma’or sof Rosh ha-Shanah*”, not only do they disagree with each other—two of them arguing that he indicates the Sages’ enactment was to blow for the entire month (Lurya 110, comment 20, and *Entziklopidya Talmudit*, “*Elul*,” vol. 2, p. 2, footnote 16), with the third claiming that he says the enactment was only for *Rosh Hodesh Elul* (Hurwitz’s *Mahazor Vitry* 362, footnote *alef*)—but the referenced *Ba’al ha-Ma’or* is not found in the printed editions of the Talmud! I was unable to find the text of *Ba’al ha-Ma’or* to which these sources were referring.

<sup>120</sup> *Kol Bo*, and *Orhot Hayim* (footnote 116 above) according to the preferred reading. While we cannot know whether *Orhot Hayim* was talking about Provence when he wrote that the custom was “practiced in all places of Israel,” it seems likely he was. It is unlikely he was describing France or Germany, where many locales were already blowing for the whole month of *Elul*. Born in Provence, the *Orhot Hayim* was also expelled in 1306 and wandered until spending the end of his life in Majorca, a Spanish island. The question of whose customs he is describing is then similar to that which we asked of Rabenu Yeruham’s “some places” above. Unlikely to be describing Spain, a locale for which we have no evidence that the custom was practiced, the *Orhot Hayim* was probably referring to a practice in Provence.

<sup>121</sup> A direction for further study in this context concerns the relationship between Provence and Spain in general. It would be instructive to examine the body of *minhag* literature from the medieval period for texts which fail to record this custom in contexts in which they would be expected to have done so. One such example is 13th century

characteristic attitude of the region and its writers: a willingness to hold the text-tradition tension and negotiate it without either rewriting or ignoring base texts.

## VI. CONCLUSION

We have shown the diversity of responses to a fascinating tension raised by the custom of blowing shofar in *Elul*: the divergence between the textual origins of the custom from PRE, to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, and the actual practice throughout Ashkenazic Europe of blowing for the entire month and possibly, in a few places, until *Yom Kippur*. The general trend in Germany is harmonizing text and custom through three approaches: revising PRE, selecting other versions of the Sinai story, and, in the latest chronological stage, putting aside the narrative entirely in favor of alternative pragmatic or theological bases. A second school, beginning with Ra'avan but followed largely by texts located outside of Germany, prefers to retain a version of PRE which suggests a custom to blow only on *Rosh Hodesh Elul*, consequently holding on to the tension and mitigating it through nuanced textual adjustments. The possible influence of the general intellectual culture of those communities (Jewish and secular) in those times to these two different approaches would be a future direction to continue this study.

The method of analysis used herein uncovers a layer of the complex fabric of Jewish medieval *minhag* literature. Rather than satisfy itself with examining the development of the custom through a mere collection of sources, it employs close readings of texts in an attempt to bring to the surface the ways in which texts engage with and respond to the customs they are describing. One possible outcome, as our case demonstrates, is the revelation of a range of techniques to manage those tensions. In fact, what we discover is a conflict of loyalties: the author of a text, at the interface between the universe of text and community, struggles to reconcile those two worlds as they repeatedly intersect over time. As textual histories and communal practices continue to develop in dialogue with each other, this method can help amplify and clarify the voices of the texts of *minhag* literature—voices that are often quieted by being heard as mere histories of custom and practice, but which in reality are raising and struggling with the tension between text and tradition.

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Provençal R. Asher b. Sha'ul of Lunel's *Sefer ha-Minhagot*, which does not mention this custom at all. It is possible that it was simply not as widely practiced in Provence as it was in Germany and northern France. If so, given the absence of this custom from Sefardic literature and practice, this might lend further credence to the general linkage between Provence and Spain. See regarding this Soloveitchik 18 and Ta-Shma 14 footnote 1.