

Rats and Jews on the Eve of the Black Death

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Rothschild Pentateuch (Getty
Museum, Los Angeles)

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Ibn Sahula, *Meshal haQadmoni*, ed. and transl. R. Loewe (Oxford/Portland, OR: Littman Library 2004), Book III, illustrations in Volume 2, pp. 358-359.



צורת העכבר והחולדה מדברים שניהם
והפורה² דרוכה לפנייהם



*Weasel and Rat dialogise,
The trap² all set before their eyes*

Robert Campon, Mérode Altarpiece, ca. 1427-32. Cloisters Museum, NY:
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470304>



Someone asked a sage: rodents have eaten from my bread and may I eat from it? The sage responded, and why not? He answered him, lest I forget my learning (*talmudi*); I am wary of eating anything that might cause forgetting [my] learning but now I am hungry. The sage replied, you are not culpable “unless you deliberately remove [your studies] from your heart” [Avot 3:8]. I see that you are not occupied with Torah but idle when you might be. All day you do nothing the Torah says but go about with ignoramuses and listen to their foolishness. It would be better for you if you didn’t avoid [foods] that cause forgetfulness so that you might forget some of your foolish doings!

[*Sefer Hasidim Bologna*, s. 1008]

Over the first pot say, “leave this house and never return to it: this house is forbidden to you.” Over the second pot say: “Mice, mice, leave this house, in the secret [Name] of God who has created you, and do not return.” Over the third pot say: “Mice, mice, leave this house and do not return from this day until the Resurrection of the Dead!” Over the fourth pot say: “Mice, mice, soon none of you will remain in this house – soon! Soon!”

[G. Bos, “Hayyim Vital’s ‘Practical Kabbalah and Alchemy,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 89-90.]