

STUART S. MILLER

Sages and Commoners
in Late Antique 'Erez Israel

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*

111

Mohr Siebeck

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Martin Hengel and Peter Schäfer

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Sages and Commoners
in Late Antique *'Erez* Israel

A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions
in Talmud Yerushalmi

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

The seeds for a book length treatment of a complicated subject often take some time to germinate. Already on my first sabbatical in Jerusalem in 1988, these seeds were planted, although I had no idea at the time that the investigations I pursued then would lead to the writing of this volume. The results of those efforts were a couple of articles, one on R. Ḥanina bar Ḥama and the other a preliminary overview of many of the traditions investigated in chapters one to three below. It was many years later, after thinking and rethinking the nature of my earlier inquiries and contemplating some of the recent transformations in the perceptions of the rabbis and the society they lived in, that I realized the timely nature of this monograph.

Many people, both in the academy and beyond, deserve my thanks, either for stimulating my thoughts or for enabling me in various ways to pursue my research. These include Lawrence Schiffman, Steven Fine, Lee Levine, Catherine Hezser, Alexei Sivertsev, and Gary Rendsburg. My many colleagues on the staff of the Sepphoris Regional Project, especially its original co-directors, Eric and Carol Meyers, deserve recognition for nudging me to think “beyond the text,” an approach I hope is evident in this textually focused study. J. P. Dessel, Jonathan Reed, Jürgen Zangenberg, and Katharina Galor have all increased my awareness of the ways in which material finds inform our understanding of literary sources—and to the hermeneutical challenges in assessing both in their own right, a subject we have pursued together in a number of sessions at the annual meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research.

I am grateful to the Lady Davis Trust for the Professorship I was awarded in 1995–1996 at the Hebrew University and especially to Shaya Gafni for his sponsorship. It was on that occasion that I began to realize that my earlier explorations of “local traditions” might lead me in new directions that would reveal a whole lot more about the world of the rabbis than I had initially envisioned. I have since realized how indebted I am to David Goodblatt, whose work on the *Neharda’ei* first got me thinking about “local traditions” as they applied to *’Erez* Israel. Special thanks also go to Jay Berkovitz, who has now spent three sabbaticals in Jerusalem sipping cappuccino with me and discussing all sorts of paths and byways that only someone with expertise in later periods and genres of rabbinic literature could suggest.

The University of Connecticut Research Foundation has supported my work on each of my sabbaticals and oftentimes in between. I am especially grateful for the Provost's Research Leave I was granted along the way by my home institution. My fellow colleagues in Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at UConn, Sara Johnson, Roger Travis, Daniel Caner, and Allen Ward, have provided much interdisciplinary food for thought that is truly the hallmark of a great program and university. I am also grateful to our erstwhile department head in Modern and Classical Languages, David Herzberger, now of the University of California, Riverside, for his constant encouragement and advice on formulating and bringing a book project to conclusion. Thanks also to Arnold Dashefsky, Director of the Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life at UConn, with whom I have worked on so many matters since arriving at the university in 1982, and to our administrative assistant Lorri Lafontaine for all sorts of prompt help. The Center's support of the final stages of production of this book is especially appreciated.

The staff of the Jewish Studies Reading Room of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem deserves recognition for their professionalism and help during all of my sabbaticals, but especially in Fall, 2004, when this book took shape. The extensive updating and revising of the original manuscript that ensued upon my return from Israel could not have been accomplished without the resources of my home institution. The first rate staff of the Interlibrary Loan department of the Homer Babbidge library of the University of Connecticut has certainly brought the research capabilities of our university into the twenty-first century with aplomb and have made them second to none. My thanks go to Joseph Natale, Lana Babij, and Lynne Sweet for their professionalism and patience with yet another member of the faculty whose every request arrived with "ASAP" attached to it. Sandy Gallup, our library's liaison to Judaic Studies and to Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies similarly deserves my thanks for her attentiveness to UConn's ancient studies holdings.

I am honored that the editors of *Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum*, Martin Hengel and Peter Schäfer, graciously accepted this book into their series. Tanja Mix of Mohr Siebeck was especially helpful and patient in seeing this project to its conclusion.

Andrew Gross did a splendid job readying the initial manuscript for major editing. Gregg A. Serene made the preparation of an excruciatingly technical work for publication feasible and suggested a good number of scholarly insights along the way. I especially appreciated his attention to detail where philological issues were concerned. Clinton Moyer brought the manuscript down the homestretch, added a good number of stylistic final touches, and readied the indices for publication. His help in preparing

the detailed indices is especially appreciated since it will hopefully make the scholarly arguments and analysis of the book more accessible to researchers. Shimmy Trencher of the Hebrew High School of New England helped with the conception and technical aspects of the diagram of rabbinic circles (Figure I). Les Loew of the University of Connecticut Health Center helped me grasp some of the ways in which “complexity theory” is applied in the sciences and in mathematics. My formulation of “complex common Judaism” benefited from and was enhanced by our discussions.

A brief note about transliterations and translations in this work is in order. The system used for transliterations herein is derived from that of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. At times, popular spellings, usually those used in the encyclopedia, were used; at others, more scientific ones were preferred. The transliteration of Aramaic terms is a particularly treacherous endeavor, particular where Western and Galilean Aramaic are concerned. The recent lexical efforts of Michael Sokoloff and the standard grammars, most notably that of Steven E. Fassberg, have been routinely consulted. Numerous judgment calls nevertheless were made along the way for the sake of consistency and readability. The Jewish Publication Society’s 1986 translation of the *Tanakh* is usually followed, although in some instances, usually indicated, this is not the case. The translations of rabbinic passages are my own.

The first draft of this book came to fruition in Israel in early 2004, the week of my wife Laura’s birthday. The final editing was concluded the week of our thirtieth anniversary in summer, 2006. Recalling both of these dates below is my way of acknowledging Laura’s love, encouragement, and support. Our daughters, Aviva, Rena, and Tova, and Aviva’s husband Adam have seen first hand the exhilaration and frustration that the writer/researcher faces. The frequently distracted scholar can only count as a blessing such an understanding and supportive family.

This volume is dedicated to my mother and father, Eva and Irving Miller, and to my in-laws, Florence and Benjamin Nelson (*zikhrono li-verakhah*), in appreciation of their devotion to Jewish learning and for the support and love they have always shown.

12 Tevet 5764/January 6, 2004
21 ’Av 5766/August 15, 2006

Jerusalem, Israel
West Hartford, Connecticut

For Mom and Dad

Eva and Irving I. Miller

And for my in-laws

Florence and Benjamin (*zikhrono li-verakhah*) Nelson

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List of Abbreviations

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AJSR	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
Ed(d).	Edition(s)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JRASS	Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
JSSR	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
MGWJ	<i>Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
n.s.	new series
PAAJR	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SCI	<i>Scripta Classica Israelica</i>

Introduction

Background

During the course of my research into the history of Sepphoris, I have frequently wondered about the size and extent of the rabbinic movement in what was essentially a Roman city with a significant and, very likely, predominant, Jewish population. With each season of excavation at Sepphoris, I have tried to imagine how the rabbis who once lived there would have related to their neighbors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and to urban surroundings that were inspired by Greco-Roman culture. In addition, I have often pondered the nature of the rabbinic presence in Sepphoris and, more importantly, in Galilean society during the Talmudic era.

Earlier studies have tended to ascertain the extent of Hellenization in Galilee in order to better appreciate the nature of Judaism in the first century, when Jesus found many of his earliest followers in this region. These studies focused on the Jewish background of nascent Christianity.¹ Few rabbis are associated with Galilee in the first century, so the extent of “rabbinization” would not yet be germane. After the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 C.E.), all this would begin to change, or so it has been believed for some time. The Jews of Lower Galilee would be joined by émigrés from the South, who, of course, included not only rabbis, but also priests and the patriarchal house.

The influx of Jewish refugees from Judea cannot be doubted. Recently, however, aspects of the emergence in Galilee of the priestly families known as “courses” (*mishmarot*) and the arrival there of the “Sanhedrin” have been questioned, both after significant analysis of the literary traditions. My inquiry into the presence of priests at Sepphoris questioned when they arrived and to what degree they were an important element in the city. The Talmudic accounts only allow for the conclusion that individual priests, and presumably their families, lived at Sepphoris prior to the third century, and it was only then, at the very earliest, that the *mishmar* of *Yeda'yah*, and therefore, a more substantial priestly presence, became asso-

¹ See, in particular, M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989).

ciated with the city.² My suggestion that this phenomenon might very well be true of the other twenty-three priestly courses associated with Galilean locations was later corroborated.³ Similarly, L. Levine has convincingly argued that the traditional “migrations” of the Sanhedrin to the Galilee should be understood in light of the efforts of later editors to project authority upon places where some rabbis convened at the request of the *nasi*, especially at Tiberias, the final “academy” of note to emerge in the North in the third century.⁴

The present study turns to the issue of the rabbis in Talmudic *ʿErez Israel* and, as with my earlier investigation of the priests, resorts to a close textual and philological examination of relevant sources in the hope that at least some questions can be fine-tuned, others answered, and in general further clarification and nuance can be brought to a thorny subject. Some of my earlier inquiries have addressed the issue of the interplay of rabbinic tradition and what we know about Jewish life in either Sepphoris or Galilee. My examination of traditions that speak of Sepphoris and Tiberias in the same contexts demonstrated that these two cities were seen in a special light by the rabbis and that various reports evoke a sense that the rabbis regarded these two towns as pivotal centers of Torah study.⁵ My investigations of the *minim* raised questions about the identity of these “heretics” and the extent of their presence in Sepphoris and elsewhere. In particular, I maintained that the *minim* should not be seen exclusively as “Jewish

² See my *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sepphoris* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 62–132 and the next note.

³ D. Trifon, “Ha-ʿIm ʿAvru Mishmerot ha-Kohanim mi-Yehudah la-Galil ʿAḥare Mered Bar Kokhba?,” *Tarbiz* 59 (1990): 77–93. The settling of priests in Galilee might, however, be separate from the phenomenon of the association of whole *mishmarot* with specific towns and villages there, which may very well be a literary tradition. See my “Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Galilee,” in *Ancient Galilee in Interaction, Religion, Ethnicity and Identity* (ed. H. W. Attridge, D. B. Martin and J. Zangenberg; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

⁴ See the discussion of B. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 31a–b and *Genesis Rabbah* 97 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 1220–1221) in L. I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak ben-Zvi; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989), 76–83. See also D. Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 77–130, 232–276, who maintains that Palestine lacked a national council in the form of a Sanhedrin already before 70 C.E. and subsequently only had a “consilium” that functioned alongside of the *nasi*. Cf. my review of Goodblatt’s book in *AJSR* 24 (1999): 123–128.

⁵ “Intercity Relations in Roman Palestine: The Case of Sepphoris and Tiberias,” *AJSR* 12 (1987): 1–24. The special light in which these two cities were cast by the rabbis persisted into the medieval and later periods beyond *ʿErez Israel*. See my “Zippori ve-ha-Tefuzot: ha-Hashpaʿah ha-Mitmashekhet shel Merkaz Talmudi ba-Galil,” in *Merkaz u-Tefuzah, ʿErez Yisraʾel ve-ha-Tefuzot bi-Yemei Bayit Sheni, ha-Mishnah, ve-ha-Talmud* (ed. I. Gafni; Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2004), 189–216.

Christians” or as any other well-defined group of opponents of the rabbis. The sages mostly were concerned with the individual *min*, whom they did not really think of as representative of a larger, *organized* threat, but who, nevertheless, was considered a threat.⁶ Indeed, the rabbis were very much aware that they lived in what we would call today, *mutatis mutandis*, a “pluralistic” society, which brought them into daily contact with Gentiles and fellow Jews whose way of life challenged their own. Archaeological finds were not necessary to prove the existence of this diversity; they merely corroborated what the rabbis make exceedingly evident and, as in biblical studies, further enhanced our appreciation of the complexity of an ancient society.⁷

My investigations of ancient synagogues took precisely the same path. Many of the synagogues uncovered by archaeologists raise important questions concerning who ran what in the Jewish community. They also present a great number of challenges to prevailing views of the role of the rabbis in the towns in which they lived. I have maintained, however, that these discoveries must continue to be seen as only part of the story. Relevant rabbinic evidence must be understood in its own light rather than constantly being forced into a procrustean archaeological bed. Otherwise, what results is a history of “*the synagogue*,” a monolithic institution that never actually existed. There were other synagogues, undoubtedly more modest than many of those whose remains have been preserved.⁸ The impressive number of synagogue ruins discovered to date distracts us from the realization that, regardless of the size of the town or village, at most only two

⁶ Cf. my “The *Minim* of Sepphoris Reconsidered,” *HTR* 86 (1993): 377–402 and “Further Thoughts on the *Minim* of Sepphoris,” *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), div. B, 1:1–8. The quote attributed to me in L. V. Rutgers, “Some Reflection on Archaeological Finds from the Domestic Quarter on the Acropolis of Sepphoris,” in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine* (ed. H. Lapin; Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 1998), 194, concerning Jewish Christians appears nowhere in my articles on the *minim*. Moreover, I am in essential agreement, not disagreement as Rutgers contends, with much of what he says there about the makeup of the population of Sepphoris. It should be noted that the English term “sage/s” is used interchangeably with “rabbi” in this study and is not to be understood exclusively in the sense of *ḥakham/ḥakhamim*. More technical and precise understandings of Hebrew and Aramaic terms used to designate persons who associated with the rabbinic movement, including *talmid ḥakham*, will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

⁷ For biblical studies, see W. G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, U. K.: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁸ See my “The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue,” in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue* (ed. S. Fine; London: Routledge, 1999), 57–70.

synagogues have been found in any given place. The literary record indicates the presence of a greater number of *battei kenesiyot*, at least in the larger towns, even if the numbers reported are sometimes exaggerated and the frequently heard assertion today that Sepphoris had eighteen synagogues is the result of a faulty reading and understanding of a Talmudic passage.⁹ While not many communities could have afforded to build more than a single *monumental* structure, larger towns such as Sepphoris and Tiberias certainly maintained other, less formidable structures and places for worship.

Moreover, my most recent treatment of synagogue-related issues, "'Epigraphical' Rabbis, Helios and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?,"¹⁰ argues for a much more nuanced appreciation of the interplay between rabbinic tradition and the *seemingly* problematic pagan themes found in many a synagogue mosaic floor. The pagan themes do not necessarily argue for decreased influence of the rabbis or, conversely, for the overwhelming input of a larger community beyond the rabbis, which itself was hardly monolithic in religious practice and belief. Things were much more complicated.

In this study, I turn more directly to the rabbis and, for lack of a better word, to their "movement." While it can no longer be pretended that Jewish society was "rabbinic," recently there have been attempts to see the emergence of "rabbinic Judaism" as a rather late development that does not truly come into its own until the advent of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century.¹¹ This argument is based on many

⁹ See my "On the Number of Synagogues in the Cities of 'Erez Israel," *JJS* 49 (1998): 51–66, esp. 59–63, where I analyze P. *Kil'ayim* 9, 32b.

¹⁰ *JQR* 94 (2004): 27–76.

¹¹ See D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 16–19, who maintains that rabbinic Judaism emerged *after* Christianity became a distinct religion in the fourth century. For a more recent permutation of this argument, see S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For the defining of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity in light of each other's theological positions, see I. J. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish Christian Dialogue," in *Passover and Easter: Origins and History to Modern Times* (ed. P. F. Bradshaw and L. A. Hoffman; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 98–126 and his *Shenei Goyim be-Vitnekh, Yehudim ve-Nozrim—Dimmuyim Hadadiyim* (repr., Tel Aviv: Alma-Am Oved, 2003), 16–107. Boyarin has more recently refined his approach in *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), where he analyzes the similar, parallel, and sometimes intersecting heresies formulated by the rabbis and church fathers that stemmed from the determination of each to define their respective orthodoxies. See Miller, "The First True Religion," *Jerusalem Report*, 3 October 2005, 38–40. I am preparing a comprehensive review essay,

suppositions, most importantly, that Talmudic sources can safely be utilized *only* for the periods in which they were written and edited.¹² The events they report and the ideas they describe have been thoroughly filtered, making their accuracy and original intent obscure. This study certainly does not pretend that what we have before us in Talmudic sources is history in the ordinary sense, and it does recognize that the editorial layer must be taken into consideration when understanding the unfolding of a tradition or the use of terminology.¹³ Nevertheless, the approach resorted to here follows the view of historians who have demonstrated that just as the tradition pulls us in the forward, later direction, it also can oftentimes be shown to have evolved over many centuries from clearly identifiable earlier sources.¹⁴ The view that emerges does not amount to history *per se*,

“Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society” (tentative title), which will consider recent treatments of this subject.

¹² This assumption is made more questionable by the presumption that the time of editing of rabbinic documents has been securely arrived at and that the process itself was static. Cf. H.-J. Becker, “Texts and History: The Dynamic Relationship between Talmud Yerushalmi and Genesis Rabbah,” in *The Synoptic Problem in Rabbinic Literature* (ed. S. J. D. Cohen; Providence, R. I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 145–158, who argues that the *Yerushalmi* and *Genesis Rabbah* were not completed all of a sudden at the end of the fourth century and that the whole process of redaction of rabbinic texts was fluid, making it difficult to fix both the “beginning” and the “end.” Becker, 157f., also sees a relationship between social processes and tradition history and argues that “...the dynamics of history become apparent through the dynamics of text-transmission.”

¹³ J. Neusner has effectively demonstrated that biographical and aggadic materials underwent significant development, making historical reconstruction treacherous. For a brief reprise of his findings, see J. Neusner, *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 50–53. Cf. W. S. Green, “What’s in a Name—The Problematic of Rabbinic ‘Biography,’” in *Approches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (ed. W. S. Green; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1978), 77–96. At the same time, Neusner’s subsequent emphasis on the unfolding of attributed opinions is also reassuring, at least where the history of *ideas* is concerned. See, for example, his *Judaism, The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), where Neusner shows how ideas emerged and were refined among the *tannaim* from period to period. Cf. Miller, *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sepphoris*, 9–11. For a detailed overview of Talmudic methodology, see C. E. Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11–17, where she discusses the “diachronic markers” found in rabbinic sources. Cf. J. L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 5–21. See following note.

¹⁴ For further refinement of the notion that materials from different periods can be clearly discerned and identified, see R. Kalmin, *Stories, Authors, and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 12f. and 43–60; and D. Kraemer, “On the Reliability of Attributions in the Babylonian Talmud,” *HUCA* 60 (1989): 175–190. Kraemer revised his views somewhat in “Rabbinic Sources for Historical Study,” in

but it will hopefully allow for a fairly credible peek into the perception of the rabbis of their own movement and of their relationship with some of their fellow Jews.

The often-heard argument that the tendentiousness of rabbinic sources makes them useless for historical reconstruction of any type and that archaeological finds prove just how unworthy these sources are is also fallacious. Each of these types of materials poses serious hermeneutical issues and must first be understood in its own light. Only afterwards can the sources be appreciated in view of each other. That monumental synagogues with seemingly pagan themes become common in fourth-century synagogue floors does not testify to the unimportance of the rabbis and their relative impotence in Jewish society.¹⁵ Rather, it calls for a renewed investigation of rabbinic sources to better understand what the rabbis indeed reveal about their perception of the world around them.¹⁶

The present study is intended to force this very issue by examining nomenclature used by the rabbis, primarily in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, to refer to those belonging to their circles and to “non-rabbis,” whom we shall call “commoners.”¹⁷ Many terms found in Talmudic literature are assigned to various elements of the Jewish population of cities and towns. Indeed, this source is replete with relevant nomenclature whose meaning scholars of the literature and historians have often taken for granted, but which requires closer examination. Here it will be maintained that sundry designations used in the *Yerushalmi* to refer to residents of towns and cities are

Judaism in Late Antiquity, part 3, *Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism* (ed. J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 1:201–212. See too the other articles in this volume dedicated to the contemporary discussion of the use of rabbinic sources for historical reconstruction. For a critique of the tendency today to be overly skeptical about the value of attributed statements, see A. Cohen, “Was Age the Decisive Criterion of Subordination among the Amoraim?,” *JQR* 92 (2002): 289, n. 35, and especially Y. Elman, “How Should a Talmudic Intellectual History be Written? A Response to Kraemer’s *Responses*,” *JQR* 89 (1999): 371–385.

¹⁵ As contended by Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, 200–202, and, in subsequent chapters, *passim*. See my forthcoming “Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society.”

¹⁶ See, for example, Miller, “‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?”

¹⁷ Cf. J. Schwartz, “Babylonian Commoners in Amoraic Palestine,” *JAOS* 101 (1981): 317–322, esp. n. 3. I too use the term “commoners” to refer to Jewish non-rabbis or non-sages of all types, regardless of whether they might be considered identical to the “ammei ha-’arez,” who are discussed at length below, chapter six. Also, as will be demonstrated below, some “non-rabbis” referred to in the sources are actually members of rabbinic households or others who in some way were connected to rabbis or their circles. For the difficulties in identifying “rabbis” and “non-rabbis” and distinguishing between them, see R. Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 23f.

an important key to understanding the rabbis' self-perception and the extent and composition of their movement. These terms also provide some hints of the inner workings of the rabbinic movement and of the sages' perception of their influence over, and relationship with, their Jewish neighbors. In particular, it will be shown that designations such as *Zippora'ei* ("Sepphoreans"), *Tibera'ei* ("Tiberians") and *Deroma'ei* ("southerners"), as well as similar, less frequent, terms applied to residents of other locales, have been imprecisely understood, leading to the impression that the rabbis wished to portray their surroundings as thoroughly "rabbinized." An extensive, philological-contextual study of these and other terms will shed considerable light on their use and will enable a more accurate assessment of the rabbis' representation of the society they lived in, especially from the vantage point of the *Yerushalmi*. While such an investigation might be regarded as one-sided because of its emphasis on the *Yerushalmi*, it is an essential preliminary inquiry for fine-tuning our understanding of the extent of the rabbinic movement and its role in society.

The Extent of the Rabbinic "Movement" and Its Relationship to Other Jews: History of Research

Previous generations of scholars tended to view the sages as playing a leading role in Jewish society, within which they had many followers. One only has to peruse A. Büchler's *The Political and Social Leaders of the Jewish Community of Sepphoris in the Second and Third Centuries*,¹⁸ G. Alon's *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age, 70–640 C.E.*,¹⁹ or E. Urbach's *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*,²⁰ three efforts that span the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, to gain a sense of how far the discussion has evolved since.²¹ Most recent discussions of the rabbinic

¹⁸ (London: Jews' College, 1909).

¹⁹ (trans. and ed. G. Levi; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Originally in Hebrew, *Mehqarim be-Toledot Yisra'el bi-Yemei Bayit Sheni u-vi-Tequfat ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (2 vols.; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1957–1958).

²⁰ (trans. I. Abrahams; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987). Originally in Hebrew, *Hazal: Pirqei 'Emunot ve-De'ot* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1969). Cf. E. E. Urbach, "Class Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (1968): 60, 64.

²¹ On Büchler and his influence, see my comments in "Those Cantankerous Sepphoreans Revisited," in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine* (ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 543–573. For Büchler's possible motivations in depicting the Sepphoreans as a rambunctious and contentious lot, see my "New Perspectives on the

movement in Roman Palestine have seen the rabbis as a limited “movement” and have argued for a more nuanced appreciation of the role of the rabbis within Jewish society.²² In *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity*,²³ L. Levine sketches various aspects of the position of the rabbis in society, paying special attention to their relationship with the patriarch (*nasi*), urban aristocracies, and Jews in general. In *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*,²⁴ C. Hezser shares many of these interests but is especially concerned with the mechanisms that enabled rabbis to communicate their teachings to their disciples and to others. Hezser resorts to “social network” theory to arrive at an understanding of the rabbis as an informal “personal alliance system” in which small groups of sages formed “clusters” that were based on social ties. Individual rabbis belonging to these clusters would have had their own circles of students and followers. The attempts of Levine and Hezser to refine our appreciation of the extent and functioning of the rabbinic movement follow in the footsteps of M. Goodman’s examination of the later tannaitic period and of J. Neusner’s evaluation of the rabbis as portrayed in *Talmud Yerushalmi*. Both Goodman and Neusner perceived the rabbis as wielding considerably less influence than their literatures imply.²⁵

Despite decidedly different methodological approaches, many recent inquiries into the role and prevalence of the rabbis in society have resulted in some remarkably converging conclusions. According to S. Cohen, who examines case law of the tannaitic period, “the rabbis were but a small part of Jewish society, an insular group which produced an insular literature.”²⁶ In the period of Yavneh, rabbis, who according to Cohen resembled a “sect, guild, or caste but [were] none of these,” resided in only two cities,

History of Sepphoris,” in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (ed. E. M. Meyers; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 147f.

²² For a noteworthy exception see Z. Safrai, *Ha-Qehillah ha-Yehudit be-'Erez Yisra'el bi-Tequfat ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1995), esp. 18f., where the more traditional approach is defended.

²³ (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi; [New York]: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989).

²⁴ (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

²⁵ See M. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132–212* (Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 93–111. As opposed to Goodman, who suggests that rabbinic authority picked up somewhat in the early third century, J. Neusner, *Judaism in Society: The Evidence of the Yerushalmi: Toward the Natural History of a Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 196f., contends that the rabbis competed with other “Jewish Big Men” in amoraic times.

²⁶ S. J. D. Cohen, “The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society of the Second Century,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. L. I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 173 and idem, “The Rabbi in Second-Century Jewish Society,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3, *The Early Roman Period* (ed. W. Horbury, W. D. Davies, and J. Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 975.

Lod/Lydda and Sepphoris. This situation began to change in the time of R. Judah *ha-Nasi*, when the rabbis began “to abandon their rural haunts in favor of the cities.”²⁷ It was under Judah, that is, “Rabbi,” that the rabbis became increasingly urbanized and less insular, incorporating the poor and receiving greater recognition from the Romans.²⁸ Cohen’s assessment of the increased urbanization of the rabbis by the time of Judah is derived solely from his study of halakhic case law wherein specific events are sometimes assigned to urban locales.²⁹

Hezser presents the most in-depth discussion of the rabbinic movement to date. She defines the rabbis as an informal “social cluster” that included individuals who were known to be teachers of Torah, regardless of whether they bore the title “rabbi.”³⁰ Hezser too notes the increasing urbanization in the third century, but argues that the transformation that took place was gradual, with some cities frequented more by rabbis and some villages less so than previously. The third century should not be regarded as a major turning point, however. Hezser similarly maintains that the urbanization of Palestine was gradual and was well underway before the third century. Thus the two phenomena, the urbanization of *ʿErez* Israel and that of the rabbis, were not parallel developments, since some places (e.g., Caesarea) became cities long before rabbis appeared therein.³¹ Although Hezser sees the rabbis as a network of teachers whose greatest influence was likely to have been upon small groups of personal contacts, she readily admits, indeed argues, that the location of many rabbis is unknown and that there must have been other Torah scholars than those familiar to us from Talmudic sources.³²

In a lengthy article devoted to rabbinic settlement in the Galilee, B. Z. Rosenfeld adopts another approach. Rosenfeld assigns rabbis (he establishes criteria for defining just who should be considered a “rabbi”) to

²⁷ Cohen, “The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society of the Second Century,” 160, and “The Rabbi in Second-Century Jewish Society,” 967, 976. According to Cohen, in the tannaitic period, the “followers” of the sages were represented in towns and villages by a “two to one” margin over those of the cities.

²⁸ Cohen, “The Places of the Rabbi in Jewish Society of the Second Century,” 172–173 and idem, “The Rabbi in Second-Century Jewish Society,” 941.

²⁹ On which, see the excursus below to chapter five.

³⁰ See especially C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 111–142 and her earlier discussion, “Social Fragmentation, Plurality of Opinion, and Nonobservance of Halakhah: Rabbis and Community in Late Roman Palestine,” *JSQ* 1 (1993/94): 234–251.

³¹ Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 165.

³² Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 118–119, 180. On “rabbis” mentioned in inscriptions, see my “‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?,” 39–48, and my updated discussion below, chapter eight.

specific villages, towns and cities and, borrowing the theoretical, social-scientific framework of E. Shils, considers the relationship of the “center” to the “periphery.”³³ He further maintains that a sage in Talmudic literature who was associated with a given village or city very often can be assumed to have been an influential resident there. For example, Todos *’ish Romi*, whom Rosenfeld considers to be a sage,³⁴ lives in Rome and also introduces practices (*hinhig*) for the *benei Romi*. Similarly, R. Ḥanina ben Teradion introduces a practice in Sakhnin, and R. Simeon bar Yoḥai, following the view of Rabbi, does so at Tekoa. In amoraic passages, Simeon ben Ḥalafta is clearly assumed to reside in ‘Ein Te’nah, R. Mana at Akko, R. Tanḥum at Parod, and R. Avdimi *de-Haifa* taught in Haifa.³⁵ At the same time, Rosenfeld discerns an urban bias in the *Yerushalmi*, a work which was produced in cities, particularly Tiberias. Thus urban rabbis, specifically those of Sepphoris and Tiberias, are *less* often designated by the city they lived in because there would have been not as great a need to indicate the place of origin of these sages. Those from the “periphery” are more often designated by their place of origins and residence.

Rosenfeld’s conclusions for the tannaitic period coincide with Cohen’s assessment of tannaitic case law. Thus Rosenfeld finds that some thirty-two sages lived in twenty-five rural settlements in Galilee in tannaitic times. Although six sages could be assigned to Sepphoris, and another, “perhaps,” three to Tiberias, these cities really did not serve as centers of rabbinic life at this point. Early in the period of Yavneh there was a weak rabbinic presence in Galilee. There was, however, a close connection with the Judean centers, which enabled the later spread of the sages to the Galilee.³⁶ After the Bar Kokhba revolt, the village of Usha, under R. Judah bar Ilai and Simeon ben Gamaliel, emerged as the main “center.” The leadership of the sages had not yet settled in either of the two major cities, Sep-

³³ B. Z. Rosenfeld, “Meqomot Moshavam shel ha-Ḥakhamim ba-Galil, 70–400, Periphery mul Merkaz,” *HUCA* 69 (1998): 57–62. Center-Periphery theory was originally presented in E. Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975). See also idem, “Center and Periphery: An Idea and Its Career, 1935–1987,” in *Ideas and Institutions* (ed. L. Greenfeld and M. Martin; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 250–264, and the literature cited by Rosenfeld, 59, n. 5.

³⁴ But see the discussion of Todos below, 175f., 214f.

³⁵ See Rosenfeld, “Meqomot Moshavam shel ha-Ḥakhamim ba-Galil,” 62, n. 9.

³⁶ Rosenfeld, “Meqomot Moshavam shel ha-Ḥakhamim ba-Galil,” 91, cites R. Ilai, who was from Usha but studied at Lod with R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and with Rabban Gamaliel. Similarly, R. Yoḥanan ben Nuri was from Ginneigar in the Jezreel Valley (174.229) and also studied with Rabban Gamaliel.

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