JEWISH HISTORY AND EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF JTS’S RARE MANUSCRIPTS

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INTRODUCTION

My research:
(1) The history of the transmission of Jewish knowledge over the course of the long first millennium
(2) The history of Jewish liturgy

➢ Hebrew manuscript studies as it interfaces with these two avenues of research

This class:
A) A brief introduction to Hebrew manuscript studies
B) An overview of the manuscript evidence of rabbinic literature, focusing on the Mishnah
WHAT IS A MANUSCRIPT?

- Literally—from the Latin: *manu* + *scriptus* (“written by hand”)
- So, a hand-written copy of a text
- A millennia-old technology, with much variety and history
- Some possible differences include:
  - Content, genre, language of the text, paratexts, materials, methods of preparation, book form, setting in which it was created, purpose, etc.

*The Eusebian Canons in the ca. 800 c. "Book of Kells" from Ireland or Scotland (f. 5r)*
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Handwritten Note, 2024, New York City
WHAT IS A HEBREW MANUSCRIPT?

- Generally speaking, manuscripts using Hebrew script
- Often times created for personal use
- A Key Distinction:
  - “Complete” Manuscripts: manuscripts that still more or less look as they did when they were initially created
  - Manuscript “Fragments”: a single page or several pages of a now dismembered manuscript, usually found in either a Genizah or in book binding waste

Two helpful introductions:


THE CAIRO GENIZAH

- Caches of discarded manuscript fragments, found largely in or near the Ben-Ezra synagogue in Cairo (Fustat)
- Scholars began to purchase and use such fragments in their scholarship towards the end of the 19th century
- Largest collections:
  - Cambridge University Library
  - The Jewish Theological Seminary

WHAT IS RABBINIC LITERATURE?

• The corpus of works that revolve around the sayings and acts of rabbis who operated in 1st-4th century Palestine and 1st-5th century Babylonia.

• Considered to comprise “the Oral Torah,” viewed as supplemental to “the Written Torah,” i.e., the Hebrew Bible.

• “Classical rabbinic literature”: works that date to the 3rd-6th centuries and are thus chronologically proximate to the rabbis whose opinions are recorded.

• Two axes:
  - Chronological: the earlier classical works were edited in Roman Palestine in the early third century, are almost entirely in Hebrew, and contain the opinions of earlier rabbis referred to in medieval chronologies as “tannaim.” Later works come from both Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia, are in a mix of Hebrew and Aramaic, and mention the tannaim alongside later rabbis known as “amoraim.”
  - Organization: midrashim are organized as Biblical commentaries, while the Mishnah is organized topically, and the Tosefta and two Talmuds—Palestinian and Babylonian—are patterned as supplements or commentaries to the Mishnah.
“The Academic Study of Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums) was the key invention of the nineteenth century that transformed Judaism…It consisted of the application of the new methods of textual study, especially philology and history, to the study of Jewish texts and the history of Judaism…Leopold Zunz, Eduard Gans, and Heinrich Heine, understood their enterprise to be imperative for the acquisition of equal rights: Judaism had to be emancipated in order for the Jews to be emancipated.”

- David Sorkin
Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907)—“the father of Jewish Bibliography”

Occasional protégé of Zunz

Taught for many years in Berlin at the Veitel-Heine-Ephraimsche Lehranstalt, training many important scholars

Author of well over 1,000 publications, including several important catalogues of Hebrew Manuscripts in European libraries
HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS: DISCIPLINES AND SUB-DISCIPLINES

- “Codicology”: The study of the creation of the codex book
- “Papyrology”: The study of works and ephemera written on papyri
- “Paleography”: The study of handwriting
- “Philology”: can be used to refer to linguistic studies, or to the study of textual versions of written works, focusing on their reconstruction and transmission
  - “Textual Criticism”: The study of manuscript and other versions to reconstruct the history of texts and perhaps also to create a critical edition of the text
  - “Ecdotics”: The study of the creation of critical editions

Malachi Beit-Arié (1937-2023)
MAJOR COLLECTIONS OF HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS

- The Jewish Theological Seminary of America!
- The National Library of Israel
- The Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Oxford colleges
- The Cambridge University Library, and the Cambridge colleges
- The British Library
- The Bavarian State Library in Munich
- The Berlin State Library
- The Bibliothèque nationale de France
- The Biblioteca Palatina in Parma
- The Vatican Libraries
- The National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg
THE LIBRARY OF THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

- 1886: JTS founded
- 1901-2: Reorganized, Solomon Schechter arrives
- 1903: Alexander Marx arrives, serving as Professor of History and Librarian until his death in 1953
  - Amasses the largest collection of medieval Hebrew Manuscripts in the world
  - Major purchase in 1923 of the collection of Elkan Nathan Adler

Alexander Marx, 1878-1953
THE RISE OF THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RABBINIC LITERATURE: JTS BRESLAU

- The Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau, founded in 1854
- First Director and Professor of Talmud: Zecharias Frankel
  - Later published major studies on the Mishnah (1859) and Palestinian Talmud (1870)
- Early Breslau professors:
  - Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891; Historian)
  - Jacob Bernays (1824-1881; Philologist, Philosopher, Librarian)
  - The Second Generation: Israel Lewy (1841-1917; Talmud)
At first, manuscripts were primarily used by modern scholars to publish “forgotten” rabbinic works:
- I.e., works that for whatever reason were not published in the Early Modern Period
- E.g., the Scholarly Society “Mekitze Nirdamim” (founded in Lyck, Prussia in 1861, moved to Berlin in 1885, and to Jerusalem in 1934)
- E.g., editions of rabbinic texts prepared by Solomon Buber (1827-1906)
The Breslau students, influenced especially by Jakob Bernays, and then by Israel Lewy, published some of the first “critical editions” of known rabbinic works.

See:
THE USE OF MANUSCRIPTS IN THE STUDY OF RABBINIC LITERATURE
THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF THE MISHNAH

• Traditional Approaches:
  • Halakhic Guidance
  • The individual *mishnah* as the main object of study

• Academic Approaches:
  • Rabbinic History
  • The Sources of the Mishnah and the History of the Mishnah’s Creation
  • Legal History
  • Cultural History—including Gender
  • Literary Studies
  • Text-Critical (Philological) Approaches and the Quest to Create a “Critical Edition” of the Mishnah
1878-1952
- Worked in Berlin on a Critical Edition of the Mishnah for The Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums
- 1925: Appointed Professor of “Talmudic Philology” at the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- According to Prof. Saul Lieberman, Epstein was “The Father of the Exact Talmudic Science”
EPSTEIN’S MAGNUM OPUS

- Began as a German introduction to a critical edition of the Mishnah
- Published in Jerusalem in 1948 as An Introduction to the Mishnaic Text, or in Hebrew, מבוא לموسת המשנה
- Primarily follows the history of the text of the Mishnah until the early print editions, but the vast majority focuses on the Talmudic period itself
- Clocks in at ~1,342 pages
- Lampooned in Joseph Cedar’s film Footnote (2011)
While agreeing that he composed the Mishnah, traditional accounts from the Middle Ages and on disagree on the question of whether Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi (late 2nd-early 3rd century) wrote down the Mishnah

- E.g., Sherira Gaon (late 10th c.), vs. Maimonides (12th c.)
- This has been at times a religiously charged issue
- It has a significant impact on how scholars understand the rabbinic movement, and on how they engage in textual criticism of the Mishnah

*To be sure, what this means is also debated
Was the Mishnah "written"?

In addition to the canonical Hebrew Scripture, the Jews of the second commonwealth possessed a compilation of laws, customs and ethical sayings known as Mishnah. This is the main source of the earlier statements of the Halakhat which

1. And other books such as the Targumim etc.

2. In this chapter the term Mishnah is employed in the sense given to it by the ancient and medieval Rabbis. The Baraitot are also included under this name. See J. N. Epstein, "Mishnah and Baraitot," pp. 805, 811 ff.

3. The origin of this word is not definitively established. Leopold Wenger (Conzen in den reinischen Rechtespul in den Poppen) undertakes to prove that canon as regular (see pp. 47-71) derived its meaning from canon, rent annually paid by the tenant to the land owner (kanon kypferen in canon) and canon, tax paid to the government. "The characteristic features of the economic and financial canon are that its amount is fixed beforehand as a regular, annual payment which, on principle, is unchangeable. These features are the bridge which connects the two meanings of the term. Canon as synonymous with regula shows the same traits as the various payments covered by the term: stability, regularity and fixness, although moderation is not excluded." (A. Berger, Seminar VIII, 1944, p. 90). Although Wenger's study covers a later period (canon as land tax is not attested by sources earlier than the fourth century C. E.) his research and reasoning perhaps elucidate our term. In Ezra (4:13 passim) the tax 'mil mot' is mentioned. It has been identified (see Genserus-Bubah, s. v. 'mil) with the Babylonian silus (tax) which is already extant in the laws of Hammurabi. From the Aramaic Indentures on the Documents of the Murâdî Sons (A. T. Clay in Old Testament and Sepentic Studies in Memory of W. R. Harper I, p. 808, No. 26; p. 316, No. 48) we learn that a land tax was called 'mil mot'. Hence it is possible that the term "mil mot", regular, fixed rule (regula fixa in canon), has its origin in the name of the fixed land tax.

In practice, however, has the same meaning as floor (literally "boundary") which means regula, and especially a statement of the law, a juristic principle, in antecedents to case law (genra), see P. Schuls, History of Roman Legal Science, p. 137, n. 4. The Rabbi (Sifre II 188, ed. Finkelstein, p. 227) interpreted the verse (Deut. 19:14) "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's boundary" (יִשָּׂרֵא) The Septuagint and Symmachus render it (גָּדָס) as a reference to the deliber

Sussman, 2005
Lieberman, 1950
Epstein, 1948
SO, IN THAT CASE, WHEN WAS THE MISHNAH PUT IN WRITING?

- We don’t really know!
- Scholars think this took place roughly between the 7th-8th centuries
- Earliest complete manuscript is from the 11th century
- There are certainly fragments in the Cairo Genizah from a few centuries earlier
- Lines from the Mishnah appear in a few magic bowls written in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, from Late Antique Babylonia
- Once written, the Mishnah was still (is still) memorized, and there is a recitation tradition

Schøyen MS 1929/6; Photograph courtesy of James Nathan Ford
MISHNAH MANUSCRIPTS: TYPHOLOGIES

- The Mishnah Alone
- The Mishnah with Talmud (that is, the Babylonian Talmud)
- The Mishnah with Commentary (that of Maimonides)
- The Mishnah in Liturgical Contexts

See Further:

“MISHNAH ALONE”

Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 3173 (de Rossi 138; Richler 710), 11th Century

Budapest, Akademia, MS Kaufman A50, ~12th Century
“MISHNAH ALONE”

New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, R934, North Italy, 1361
“MISHNAH ALONE”

Yitz Landes

THE “FINZI MISHNAH” (JTS, MS. R934) AND THE EARLY GENERATIONS OF THE FINZI FAMILY

Introduction

The Finzi family is one of the oldest and best-known of the Italian Jewish families, its members having excelled in all walks of commercial and intellectual life over the course of the later Middle Ages and into the modern era. In recent decades, several scholars have attempted to detail the early lineage of this illustrious family. The majority of these studies have focused on archival documents from cities in the Po River Basin. To a lesser extent, scholars studying the early generations of the Finzi family have also considered the evidence of Hebrew manuscripts, particularly paratextual elements such as colophons, bills of sale, and other signs of ownership. In what follows, I introduce an additional piece of paratextual evidence, the colophon of New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary Ms. R934—the so-called “Finzi Mishnah”—written in 1361 by one Binyamin the son of Yishaq Finzi, who includes his genealogy in the colophon. I will show that this colophon allows us to connect the evidence for two different branches of the Finzi family that have until now been studied in isolation from one another.

Considering the importance of the Finzi family, the conclusions advanced here regarding the family’s history are within themselves important for the history of Italian Judaism. In
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1 In preparing this article, I benefited from information found in Sherata (http://sherata.aho.org) and in the digital catalogue of the National Library of Israel (http://melkir.aho.org.il). I would like to thank Re’uma Ronstan, Yohes Z. Mayer, and Marco Santini for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.


3 See especially V. Golen, Judaism in Italy: mosaic i: giurisprudenza e giuridica ebraica nell’italia moderna, Padova (1998), 1-25; and the pioneering work of M. M. Steinheizer, Lettura ebraica di un documento (Rome: Tipografia della scienza matematica e fisica, 1931), 24-36.

4 For a brief description of this manuscript with reference to relevant secondary literature, see Yaakov Sussman, a collaboration with Yossi Rosenblit and Aharon Shwartz, The JTS, MS. B934 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2012), 556, no. 6611.

“MISHNAH WITH TALMUD”

New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, R15, Spain, 1290
The following items of gentiles are prohibited but their prohibition does not extend to all benefit: milk that was milked by a gentile without Israelite supervision, and their bread and oil; Rabbi and his court permitted oil; and boiled and pressed preserves into which they customarily put wine or vinegar, and pounded terit, and fish brine that has no fish, and hilek fish, and drops of asafetida, and sal conductorum. These are prohibited, but their prohibition does not extend to all benefit.

(Trans. Hayes [modified])
MISHNAH WITH MAIMONIDES

Jerusalem, The National Library of Israel, MS 5703O4, late 12th/early 13th century
MISHNAH WITH MAIMONIDES

- New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, MS 8254, f. 3 (formerly ENA 4045.8), 12th century
  - Maimonides handwritten draft of his commentary to the order of Taharot
“LITURGICAL MISHNAH”

New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, MS 8255, North Italy, 1471
“LITURGICAL MISHNAH”

New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, MS 8255, North Italy, 1471
“LITURGICAL MISHNAH”

New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, MS 8255, North Italy, 1471
“LITURGICAL MISHNAH”

- Tractate Avot in JTS’ “Rothschild Mahzor”
“Vi-Atah Titsaveh,” the twentieth parsha, appears before Shabbat XI, the twentieth chapter in the order Berakhot then Shabbat
“LITURGICAL MISHNAH”
THE LANGUAGE OF THE MISHNAH: ONE FURTHER TYPOLOGY

Moshe Bar-Asher:

- Within the Palestinian branch: there are differences of pronunciation between “Eastern” and “Western” versions, though the orthographic text of the Mishnah is the same.

And yet, all the traditions originate in the Land of Israel

19 The Different Traditions of Mishnaic Hebrew

19.1 Introduction

§ 1 Research into Mishnaic Hebrew, which has made great strides in the past seventy years, has concentrated primarily on the language of the Tanna’im. Only a few studies have been devoted to works or manuscripts belonging to later periods of rabbinic literature; and even within the language of the Tanna’im, scholars have mainly dealt with the language of the Mishna. The revered status of the Mishna within tannaitic literature is well-reflected in the following two points: (1) several complete manuscripts of Mishna are extant as well as hundreds of poorly preserved, fragmentary manuscripts of Mishna. There are, on the other hand, very few manuscripts of other tannaitic works; and (2) it is the only corpus of tannaitic literature for which a regular reading tradition has been preserved in the many different dispersed Jewish communities. This situation has led scholars to concentrate their efforts on the study of the language of the Mishna, neglecting other tannaitic corpora. As a result, there are scores of studies dealing with the grammar of the language of the Mishna.

§ 2 In many of these studies, especially those dealing with early manuscripts, one clearly discerns the desire of the researchers to recover the earliest features of mishnaic Hebrew. All studies attempt to lay bare changes and corrections which have entered the language during the long course of its transmission. J. N. Epstein and H. Yalon paved the way for such research with their exemplary studies; these scholars were followed by E. Y. Kutscher who gave added momentum to this method of research (Kutscher 1963). Kutscher sought, as he had done with Galilean Aramaic, to base the linguistic description of the Mishna on reliable manuscripts, i.e., manuscripts which either preserved or partially preserved the original language and text of the Mishna. According to Kutscher, MS Kaufmann (K) was the most reliable manuscript of the language of the Tanna’im in general, and the language of the Mishna in particular. He

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1 For example, see Sokoloff 1971 and especially Breuer 2002.
3 Kutscher’s main criticism of M. H. Segal’s A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew (1934) focused on the fact that Segal based his grammar on printed editions of rabbinic literature and ignored the evidence found in manuscripts. The existence of manuscripts was already known at the time he wrote his earlier edition of the grammar in English (1927). See Kutscher 1968a.
SOME LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES

- Palestine Branch "ונמנ" vs. Babylonian branch: "בין" (from him)
  - But "וניונ" is documented in letters from second century Judean Desert
- Palestine Branch "תיבב" vs. Babylonian branch "תיבא" (in the house of)
  - But "איבית" is documented in second-century letters of Bar Koseba

Other common differences:
- Palestine "אוהש ארוק, אוהש השוע", etc., vs. Babylonian "ארוקש, השועש", etc.
- Palestine "ןלעמל, ןעטמל", vs. Babylonian "הלעמל, הטמל"
- And many others
WHY THE DIFFERENCE?

- Chronological and Geographic Differences:
  - *The Mishnah was brought to rabbinic circles in Babylonia while it continued to be modified in Palestine*
  - *In some ways, then, the “earliest” versions of the Babylonian Mishnah may then predate those found in Palestinian sources, or in manuscripts that come more directly from that tradition*
A CONCLUSION: HOW TO PRESENT THE TEXT OF THE MISHNAH
Relative Number of Genizah Fragments

- Mishnah
- Tosefta
- Palestinian Talmud
- Babylonian Talmud
- Alfasi
Possible Number of Manuscripts Attested in the Cairo Genizah by Proportion

- Shabbat
- Berakhot
- Other
MISHNAH MANUSCRIPTS AND JEWISH EDUCATION: SCRIBAL ERRORS

Parma 3173 f. 90r (m. BM 4:11)
While scholars have used Hebrew manuscripts to study Jewish History and texts for well over a century, a significant amount of work remains to be done, and the nature of the work itself has changed.

- This is due to technological changes—how we can access and analyze manuscripts—and to methodological changes.
- To be sure, the two are related to one another.

In the study of manuscripts of rabbinic literature, one major shift is from studying the history of the text to the history of the work and corpus—and using this to shed light on the transmission of knowledge.

JTS is a center for this form of study, given our mission and resources.