

Establishment of Medieval Rabbinic Culture

November 27, 2006

- Housekeeping issues
- Cairo Genizah
- Establishment: "Rabbinization," Geonim, and the authority of the Babylonian Talmud
- Sectarianism: the rise of Karaites
- Divergent Jewish traditions in Islamic and Christian lands.

Housekeeping

- **Papers due this week**
- Sections are cancelled Dec. 11, 12
- Extra Review Sessions (Open)
 - Monday Dec 11, 11:00 (Key 0120)
 - Wed. Dec 13, 11:00 (Room TBA)
- Extra Credit possibilities

Extra Credit Possibilities: Secondary Sources

- Baskin, *Jewish Women*
 - Choose one chapter
 - Summarize argument
 - Choose primary sources **we studied** that either support or contradict the argument.
 - Discuss
- Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*
 - Using JSTOR on MDUSA (UM Libraries' database) search for reviews of the book.
 - Read five reviews. **Try** to find at least one positive and at least one negative review. Give **FULL CITATION**
 - Discuss: What elements appear most controversial? What do reviewers say is the most important contribution?
- 500–700 words. 5 pts. **Do only one.**

Cairo Genizah

- Cache of documents of medieval Jewish community of Cairo
- Brought to Western attention through travels of Agnes Lewis, Margaret Wilson (1897), by Solomon Schechter
- Important for nearly every aspect of Med. (and ancient) J. History




Establishment: “Rabbinization,” Geonim, and the authority of the Babylonian Talmud

- “Rabbinization”: adoption by Jewish communities of rabbinic norms, rules.
 - **Not** in place at time of redaction of Talmuds
 - Beginnings traceable to before the Muslim/Arab conquests
 - Fostered by centralization of Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258), status of the geonim in Baghdad
 - **Text:** Letter (pamphlet) of Pirqoi b. Baboi

Establishment (cont’d): Geonim

- Gaon: “glory” (not, as in modern Hebrew “genius”): title of the heads of the academies of **Sura** and **Pumbedita**
- By 9th C, while retaining these names, relocated to Baghdad (new city founded by the Abbasid Caliphs)
- Claimed prerogatives of **judging** cases; much of our knowledge comes from **responsa**

Establishment (cont'd): Authority of Babyl. Talmud

- Babylonian Talmud comes to be chief **basis for legal authority** and chief **curricular** document of medieval Jewry
- Reasons: Status of Geonim; successful polemical struggles
 - e.g., Sa'adiah Gaon (10th C), successfully claims right of Babylonian, not Palestinian academy to determine calendar
 - On the other hand, in some respects, esp. liturgy, Palestinian rabbinic tradition continues to be influential

Sectarianism: the rise of Karaites

- From Aramaic qara', scripture: the Scripture-alone people
- Complex beginnings:
 - Non- and pre-rabbinic forms of piety (asceticism, mourning the Temple)
 - Hostile reaction to rabbinization
 - In retrospect attributed to teachings of 'Anan b. David (8th C)
- Long period of coexistence between Karaites and **Rabbanites** in well-documented communities (e.g., Cairo)
- Stimulated Rabbanite work in grammar, theology/philosophy, exegesis.

Divergent Jewish traditions in Islamic and Christian lands.

- In the Islamic (and post-Islamic) lands
 - Talmud is prolegomenon to a complete education
 - E.g. presuppositions in Maimonides's Guide
- In the Ashkenazic lands
 - Bible, Talmud, law substantially made up Jewish education
 - Rashi (1040–1105) and Tosafot (a "school" including Rashi's sons-in-law and grandsons) reflect both the internalist focus, **and** (esp. Tosafot) some features of wider Christian intellectual tradition (scholastic dialectic)
- Scholars of So. France (e.g., Ramban = Moses b. Nahman = Nahmanides) harmonize these tradition
