

Principal Texts of Rabbinic Literature

November 6, 2006

- **From last time:** Roman Empire & Christianization; Mesoptamia 150–637
- Preliminary terms: Midrash, Halachah, Aggadah
- Mishnah: the first rabbinic corpus
- Texts organized around Mishnah
- Texts organized around Scripture (Midrash)

Jews and the Christian Roman Empire 312–634

- Constantine: “Conversion” and “Toleration” 312; conquest of East 324
 - Christianization of the Empire
 - As a majority religion, probably at least a century after Constantine
 - Beginning with Constantine, increasingly the **public** face of the empire
 - Palestine: Particular locus of monumentalization
- (cont'd)

Jews and the Christian Roman Empire 312–634 (ii)

- Problem of Jews for Christian Empire: a fundamental theological problem
 - Theologically wrong, even criminally so; yet (ultimately unlike pagans, heretics, **tolerated**)
 - Augustine: doctrine of witness. Protected **and** subordinate; attest to consequences of rejection.
- Roman (Christian) law on Jews
 - Increasingly collapses citizens and Christians
 - Recurrent areas of concern
 - Conversion (of slaves, free; esp. of Christians)
 - Synagogues: protecting old, later prohibiting new
 - Jews in visible positions of authority/honor
 - Briefly (390s to 420s): role of Palestinian Patriarchs

Jews in Mesopotamia 150–637

- Sources:
 - Parthian period (to 224 CE), very poorly known
 - Sasanian period (224–637), better known, but from late sources
 - Knowledge about Jews almost exclusively from Babylonian Talmud (more next time). **Represents Jews from Mesopotamia (Iraq), rather than Iran**
- Distinctive **Rabbinic movement** (dependent upon Pal. tradition, but eventually claims superiority)
- Exilarch (Aram. Resh Galuta, "Head of the Diaspora")
 - Perhaps precedes Sasanians
 - Important Jewish figure under Sasanians (maintained courts etc.)
 - Esp. important administratively under Muslim rules (after 637)

Sasanian Empire (Shapur I, 241–272 CE)

(Source: Enc. Brit., Roman border added)



Preliminary terms

- **Tanna** (pl. tannaim): "reciter"
 - functionary charged with reciting traditions
 - (chron./authority): rabbi pre-ca. 225
 - **Amora** (pl. ammoraim): "stater"
 - attendant of a senior rabbi, repeater
 - (chron./authority): rabbi 225 and later
- *** Texts classified as "**Tannaitic**" or "**Amoraic**" on the basis of the latest rabbis mentioned in them
- **Midrash**: "inquiry; interpretation," rabbinic interpretation of Scripture
 - **Halachah**: "walking, procession," rabbinic legal norms or practices.
 - **Aggadah**: "narration, telling," non-legal rabbinic material



Mishnah: the first rabbinic corpus

- Organized by **topic** into six **orders** and the orders into **tractates**. Although edited in ca 200, Temple, tithing, and purity laws dominate.
- Dependence on Scriptural law varies
 - Purity and sacrificial laws, heavily dependent on Biblical interpretation
 - Laws on real property very little dependence on Scripture
- Formally, not organized as interpretation of Scripture even when close study shows dependence
- One of the tasks of halachic **midrash** to re-connect rabbinic legal traditions with Scripture
- Connected to the emergence of the rabbinic idea of "Oral Torah" transmitted at Sinai along with Written.



Mishnah: Six Orders (**ZeMaN NaQaT**)

1. **Zeraim**: "Seeds"—Agricultural law, prefaced by tractate on prayer.
2. **Mo'ed**: "Appointed Times"—Festivals (esp. Temple practice of)
3. **Nashim**: "Women"—Marriage, divorce, also vows (and by association Nazir)
4. **Neziqin**: "Damages"—Property, contracts, and legal procedure (also two miscellanies)
5. **Qodashim**: "Holy things"—Temple sacrifice,
6. **Toharot**: "Purities"—Purity-related practices



Texts organized around Mishnah

- Tannaitic
 1. Tosefta ("the supplement")
- Amoraic
 2. Palestinian Talmud
 3. Babylonian Talmud



Texts organized around Scripture (Midrash)

- Tannaitic
 1. "Halachic": includes concern with legal issues.
*** Pentateuch (Exodus-Deuteronomy) only
- Amoraic (overwhelmingly "aggadic")
 2. "Exegetical" (verse-by-verse progression)
 3. "Homiletical" (clustering of interpretations around select verses, probably beginning of a reading section)
*** Pentateuch and others.
