Principal Texts of Rabbinic Literature

November 6, 2006

- From last time: Roman Empire & Christianization; Mesopotamia 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 rulers (after 637)

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**Sasanian Empire (Shapur I, 241–272 CE)**

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

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**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

- **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)

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.
  2. Petateuch (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.