Rabbinization in Egypt?

Mapping Rabbinic Impact in Late Antique Papyri from Egypt

Once again Jewish Palestine, though debased and politically impotent, exerted great influence on the Jewish diaspora, this time shaping the Jewish community according to new principles of Judaism, as laid down by the Talmudic authorities.
—Victor Tcherikover[1]

1. Introduction

In 1958, the great Jewish historian and papyrologist Victor Tcherikover (1894–1958) wrote an important overview of the history of the Jews in Egypt, much of which remains valid today, despite having been written more than half a century ago.[2] In his work, Tcherikover argued that, while the Jewish revolts in Judaea and Egypt had shattered the grandeur of both communities, rabbinic Judaism, which originated in Palestine, exerted a significant influence on the Jewish diaspora, including the community in Egypt, during Late Antiquity.[3]

Indeed, several rabbinic traditions involve Egypt, such as one preserving the saying of the prominent second-century sage and disciple of Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai: "Whoever has not seen the [Great] Synagogue of Alexandria in Egypt has never seen the glory of Israel."[4] This text suggests that the magnificent and illustrious house of worship—the Great Synagogue of Alexandria—had an equally illustrious visitor in Rabbi Yehuda. Moreover, he seems not to have been alone. This story, for that matter, is not the only one mentioning rabbis traveling to Egypt or rabbis of Egyptian origin.[5] What, then, did these rabbis do there? Did they teach rabbinic *halakha* to Egyptian Jews? Did they establish rabbinic academies in Egypt? Did they, as Tcherikover suggested in the statement serving as this paper's motto, "rabbinize" Egyptian Jewry?

In a 2021 article on the Jewish community of Byzantine Egypt, Tal Ilan has the following to say about Tcherikover's assessment of the period:

> For more internal evidence on the Jews in Egypt at this time [i.e., in the Byzantine period] Tcherikover searched rabbinic literature. This was an important move, because only the story

> told by the authors of this literature was eventually incorporated into the story of post-Temple Judaism, until the arrival of Islam. However, what Tcherikover found was very disappointing. He found in it some Egyptian rabbis, but only two (a certain Rabbi Zakkai of Alexandria—for example, y*Ket* 4:6, 28d—and perhaps also a Tanḥum son of Papa—y*Qid* 3:12, 64d) could really be dated to the time he was researching. Both appear in dialogue with the rabbinic community in Palestine. Tcherikover took this to support his thesis on the close relationship between the Jews of Egypt and those of rabbinic Palestine. However, … rabbinic influence on Egyptian Jews at the time is virtually non-existent.[6]

Tcherikover and Ilan's reconstructions of the history of Egyptian Jewry in Late Antiquity and its relationship to rabbinic centers to the east could not be more different. While Ilan marginalizes the scope of rabbinic influence—or to use another term: "rabbinization"—on Egyptian Jewry, for Tcherikover, it was an undisputed fact. But was this truly the case? Is there any evidence of "rabbinization" in Egypt? And if so, did it originate from Palestine? In other words, was rabbinization imported into Egypt, or did it arise indigenously? Should we lean more towards Ilan's interpretation, or towards Tcherikover's? What insights can this debate offer about Judaism and the Jews of Egypt in Late Antiquity?

It should be noted, however, that the purpose of Ilan's article is to provide a concise overview of the Jewish community in Late Antiquity rather than focusing on the influence of rabbinic culture in Egypt—an issue she, in fact, addresses only marginally.[7] Therefore, a detailed study on this topic in relation to Egypt has not been undertaken, and my aim here is to fill that gap.

Until the fifth century CE, our textual knowledge of Jews and Judaism derives primarily from two sources: Christian writings and classical rabbinic literature. Both groups of sources, however, present challenges as historical evidence. Christian sources are often tendentious, frequently reflecting anti-Jewish biases, while rabbinic material tends to be largely ahistorical.[8] Needless to say that we lack a Josephus to tell us about the history of the Jews in this period. Fortunately, another rich source of information exists, particularly concerning Egypt: papyri. These documents provide invaluable evidence about Jews and Jewish life in Late Antiquity. This paper relies exclusively on papyrological evidence for the

simple reason that papyri constitute the primary source for understanding Jewish life in Egypt during the period under discussion (third to seventh centuries CE).

In the well-known *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, Tcherikover, Alexander Fuks, and later Menahem Stern, collected Jewish papyri (and those related to Jews) from Egypt in three volumes, published from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s.[9] But Tcherikover and his colleagues focused solely on publishing Jewish papyri in Greek, neglecting those in other languages, such as Hebrew and Aramaic, which actually constitute the bulk of the evidence for Jewish life in late antique Egypt. Some of these papyri were published as early as the late nineteenth century and were known to the editors of *CPJ*, but as noted, they were deliberately ignored.[10] In the last sixty years, no up-to-date collection of Jewish papyri from Egypt had been undertaken until recently, with the publication of a new *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Volumes IV–VI), edited by Noah Hacham and Tal Ilan in collaboration with Zsuzsanna Szántó and myself.[11] This project not only continues the earlier edition of *CPJ* (Volumes I–III) by publishing papyri that have remained unpublished, but also expands it by incorporating papyri written in languages other than Greek, such as Demotic, Hieratic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Thus, the new edition of *CPJ* includes fresh evidence that can shed new light on the lives of Jews in Egypt during Late Antiquity.

The aim of this study is thus to deepen our understanding of rabbinization with a particular focus on Egypt. By analyzing papyri preserved from Late Antique Egypt, this paper seeks to chart the areas of Jewish life and culture where the impact of rabbinic culture may have been felt most acutely—if at all. I will argue that the papyri contain only faint traces of what might be described as "rabbinization." These traces, moreover, are largely inconclusive and appear to reflect the general *Zeitgeist* of late antique Jewish life rather than evidence of a significant expansion of rabbinic activity. Ultimately, I contend, with Ilan, that rabbinic influence on Egyptian Jews in Late Antiquity was insubstantial.

2. On Rabbis in Egypt, Rabbinization, and Jewish Papyri: Some Methodological Remarks

For generations, scholars of rabbinic Judaism assumed that:

(a) rabbis were, by nature, the leaders of Jewish society;

(b) rabbinic scholarship was considered authoritative and widely accepted by Jews in both Palestine and the diaspora; and

(c) this acceptance occurred immediately after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

In recent years, however, these assumptions have been called into question and more nuanced approaches have been proposed.[12] One such approach contends that while rabbinic Judaism eventually became the dominant form of Judaism, it is inaccurate to speak of an immediate and universal acceptance of rabbinic authority and culture. Instead, this transformation occurred gradually over time, a process often referred to as "rabbinization."[13] Like any process, rabbinization too, varied in its pace, geographical spread, and specific communal contexts. Despite significant scholarly advances in recent years, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that led to rabbinic Judaism becoming the primary authoritative expression of Jewish practice and religious observance.[14] For clarification, I adopt Seth Schwartz's understanding of "rabbinization," which views it as a gradual and complex change that allowed for the coexistence—and at times tension—between rabbinic and non-rabbinic practices, often labeled as *minhagim* (customs).[15] This perspective emphasizes that rabbinization was not a straightforward process of conquest or domination but rather a multifaceted evolution, permitting significant cultural diversity among Jewish communities, including those in Egypt during Late Antiquity.

While the region of Palestine has historically received the lion's share of scholarly attention regarding rabbinization, other geographical regions, such as Babylonia, have recently come into focus.[16] This paper, by contrast, turns its attention to Egypt. For the reasons outlined above, this study relies exclusively on papyrological evidence, as papyri

constitute the primary source for understanding Jews and Jewish life in the late Roman and Byzantine periods.[17] But before delving into the papyri and their connections to rabbinic Judaism, a few methodological remarks are necessary.

(a) Identifying Jews in Late Antique Papyri

Any study of Jewish papyri inevitably raises the question of how to identify a given papyrus as Jewish.[18] This can be a challenging task, particularly in the period of Late Antiquity, when papyri often lack explicit indicators of Jewishness beyond names and are frequently written in non-Jewish languages (i.e., languages other than Hebrew or Aramaic). However, the majority of the papyri considered in this survey are written in Hebrew or Aramaic, leaving no doubt about their Jewish origin.

In searching for traces of rabbinization (for criteria, see point "d" below), I have also examined Jewish papyri written in Greek from this period. Apart from over a dozen papyri containing the Hebrew Bible in Greek (LXX; see n. 34), only one is included in this discussion because it can potentially be connected to an issue also addressed in rabbinic *halakha*.[19] Two additional noteworthy documents bridge these linguistic divides. The first is a bilingual (Greek/Aramaic) marriage contract (P. Köln Nr. 5853), which I will discuss in detail in section 6. The second is a fragmentary contract (MS Heb. D 86 (P) r = *CPJ* 3.503) drafted in Aramaic and signed, among others, by an individual in Greek who apparently lacked proficiency in Aramaic, at least in writing.

(b) The Nature of the Evidence: Documents vs. Literature

Another aspect of studying Jewish papyri that merits attention concerns the nature of the evidence, specifically the common scholarly preference for documentary papyri over literary papyri. But, whereas the nature of a particular study often dictates what type of papyri are

examined (e.g., historical studies typically rely on documentary evidence), I wish to stress that this study includes both types. Although the majority of the papyri analyzed here are documentary, evidence from literary papyri—an often understudied category—is also considered.[20]

(c) The Dating Game

Most of the documents examined in this study can be tentatively dated to the Talmudic period, broadly spanning the third to eighth centuries CE; tentatively, because, apart from two examples,[21] none of the papyri contain explicit dates. Their proposed dates are primarily based on paleographic analysis, which introduces its own set of problems when it comes to chronological accuracy.[22] Nevertheless, the range of their suggested dates, combined with their content, situates them firmly within this period, allowing for their inclusion in the framework of this inquiry.

(d) What is "Rabbinic"?

This brings us to an essential question: when searching for evidence of rabbinic Judaism in late antique papyri from Egypt, what precisely can be categorized as "rabbinic"? Put differently, what defines a text as rabbinic, and how do we identify such evidence in the papyri? What exactly are we looking for?

The most straightforward answer would be the discovery of a rabbinic text: a pericope from the *Mishnah*, a citation from the *Talmud*, a fragment of *halakha* or *aggadah*, a *responsum*, or something similar. However, our investigation is complicated by the fact that, to date, no scrap of papyrus containing a rabbinic text has been found. But in this respect, an additional question arises: In view of the overall scarcity of evidence for rabbinic culture from late antique Palestine itself, would we expect to find similar evidence in Egypt at all?

Papyri are archaeological artifacts, and just like inscriptions that can be linked to the world of the rabbis—specifically, the Reḥov inscription from the Beit She'an region in Palestine that cites a rabbinic text—we can imagine the discovery of a papyrus containing rabbinic literature.[23] Over the past century, we have encountered occasional archaeological chance finds, such as the Qumran libraries, Dura-Europos, and, more recently, the Magdala stone. Who is to say that papyri will not surprise us as well? In addition, there is a geographical aspect to consider: Egypt is not Palestine, and what we have not found in Palestine, we might find in Egypt.

In the meantime, while it is difficult to determine why rabbinic texts on papyrus are absent, three possible explanations come to mind. First, Egyptian Jewry may have been a non-rabbinic society, rejecting rabbinic law and lore. Second, Rabbinic teachings were predominantly oral, meaning that rabbinic texts might not have been written down at all during this period. And, third, there is the matter of chance: Papyri containing rabbinic literature may simply not yet have been discovered.

While it is important to consider these hypotheses as we proceed, we must also explore other leads to pursue. For example, can we detect traces of rabbinic legislation and its observance—or non-observance? Do we find individuals bearing the title "Rabbi," or phrases and terminology paralleled in rabbinic literature? Are there even direct citations of rabbinic texts? References to rabbis in epigraphical or papyrological material, or the presence of texts with rabbinic content, could suggest the existence of rabbinized Jewish communities. Indeed, as we will see, some papyri reveal such features. However, the key question remains: can these features be considered evidence of the rabbinization of post-diaspora revolt Egyptian Jewry? Let us see.

3. Traces of Rabbinic Legislation?

Classical rabbinic literature is, broadly speaking, predominantly concerned with legislation, laws, and the proper way to observe them. Rabbinic law, therefore, represents one facet of the broader process of rabbinization. Assuming that Egypt experienced some degree of rabbinization, we would expect Egyptian Jews—or at least some of them—to exhibit some familiarity with rabbinic law and legislation. In the absence of actual copies of rabbinic legal treatises, one potential avenue for exploring rabbinic influence on Egyptian Jewish society, thus, is to search for traces of rabbinic legislation in other documents, such as contracts. This endeavor will be undertaken in the following section.

The "Manumission Document" (P.Oxy. 9.1205 = CPJ 3.473)

A well-known papyrus connected to the Jews of Oxyrhynchus in Middle Egypt (more on which below) is P.Oxy. 9.1205 (= *CPJ* 3.473), dated to 291 CE and often referred to as "the manumission document." This document records the actions of a certain "Aurelius Justus, senator of Ono in Syrian Palestine (βουλευτ[ο]ῦ Ὠνειτῶν τῆς Συρίας Παλαιστείνης), father of the [community?],"[24] who travelled to Egypt on an important mission. Apparently, Aurelius Justus was sent to assist the local Jewish community of Oxyrhynchus in redeeming and freeing Jewish slaves, specifically a forty-year-old woman by the name of Paramone and her two children, aged four and ten. Only the younger child, Jacob, is mentioned by name (ll. 5–6, 19). Paramone and her children were freed for the considerable sum of 14 talents of silver—a small fortune and roughly six times the average price for an adult slave. This detail, as we will discuss later, is quite noteworthy.[25]

The funds for this manumission were provided by two individuals named Aurelius: Aurelius Dioscurus, who seems to have been a prominent member of the Jewish community in Oxyrhynchus, and Aurelius Justus, who was an equally significant figure in the Jewish

community of Ono in Palestine.[26] The document, among other things, highlights the strong connections between the Jewish community in Oxyrhynchus and other Jewish communities in Palestine. Importantly, this is not an isolated example of such connections.[27]

For our purposes, the primary significance of the document lies in its focus on the act of manumitting Jewish slaves. According to Jewish tradition, captivity is regarded as a punishment worse than starvation or death (cf. Jer 25). The ransoming of Jewish captives, known as *pidyon shvuyim* (פדיון שבויים), was regarded by the rabbis as one of the most important obligations of a Jewish community.[28] Do we, then, have here an example of the fulfillment of a rabbinic prescription? If so, this would imply two key points: (a) such rabbinic legislation was known; and (b) it was recognized as authoritative by Egyptian Jews and their communities.

Before passing judgment on this case, it is worth pointing to a papyrus from the Ptolemaic period that belongs to the archive of the Jewish *politeuma* of Herakleopolis in Middle Egypt.[29] *Politeumata* appear to have been (military) associations of foreign mercenaries stationed in nome capitals and other significant cities in Ptolemaic Egypt.[30] These associations held legal authority over specific areas within these cities. Members of the *politeuma*, as well as locals, could submit petitions to the *politarch* (the governor of the *politeuma*) and his council (*archontēs*), whose members acted as judges.

One such petition, P.Polit.Iud. 2 (*CPJ* 4.558), was filed by a Jewish prisoner named Petaus, son of Phillipos, who was serving a sentence in a state prison. The exact reason for his incarceration is not provided. In his petition to the judges of the *politeuma*, Petaus pleaded for his release, arguing that he had already served a disproportionately long sentence for whatever misconduct he may have committed. In Ptolemaic prisons, inmates were expected to sustain themselves, relying heavily on their families for support. However, as Petaus notes in his petition (lines 11–13), he was a foreigner in Egypt and lacked a local support network.

As a result, he suffered greatly during his imprisonment. Faced with this dire situation, he turned to the *politeuma* in the hope that the Jewish judges would intervene on his behalf with the non-Jewish legal authorities to secure his release.

What is particularly interesting here, in relation to the Jewish custom of *pidyon shvuyim* (the redemption of captives), is Petaus's choice of audience. Instead of appealing to the local authorities or the prison director, he chose to address a body of Jewish judges. This decision appears to have been motivated by his knowledge of the customary obligation within Jewish communities to redeem captives, a practice deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.[31]

But should we conceive of this custom as "rabbinic"? Should we imagine that the custom of *pidyon shvuyim*, as seen in P.Oxy. 9.1205 (*CPJ* 3.473), was already widely practiced in Egypt, as exemplified earlier by P.Polit.Iud. 2 (*CPJ* 4.558), even before the rabbis codified it in their legal texts? This does not appear to be the case, for the following reasons.

In my discussion of the "manumission document" (P.Oxy. 9.1205 = *CPJ* 3.473), I have pointed out that the sum required to free Paramone and her children was about six times as much as the average price for an adult slave. This detail is significant because, if we were to assume that (a) Egyptian Jews were knowledgeable about rabbinic law, and (b) followed it, then paying such an exorbitant amount would clearly violate rabbinic prescriptions. According to the Mishnah, the redemption of captives should not exceed their market value.[32]

In sum, scrutinizing "the manumission document" leads to the conclusion that, in third- to fourth-century Oxyrhynchus, rabbinic law does not appear to have been known, and even if it was, it certainly was not observed. Let us now turn to another case.

Mishnah Megillah 2:2 and Jewish Biblical Fragments on Papyrus: Non-Observance of Rabbinic Legislation?

As argued earlier, one possible explanation for the absence of rabbinic texts on papyrus is that Egyptian-Jewish society was largely "a-rabbinic." Even in cases where we believe we can identify traces of rabbinic legislation—such as the example discussed above—substantial uncertainty remains.

Another approach to addressing this issue is through proof by negation. In other words, we could examine instances where Egyptian Jews seem to have intentionally violated rabbinic *halakha*. However, this approach presents a methodological challenge: Did Egyptian Jews knowingly disregard rabbinic laws? Such an assumption would require that they were already aware of those laws. Alternatively, were the rabbis reacting to existing Jewish practices they deemed inappropriate by prohibiting them, even though other (Egyptian) Jews might not have been aware of these prohibitions? These questions are difficult to answer definitively. Nevertheless, given the lack of evidence to support the first assumption—that Egyptian Jews were aware of and adhered to rabbinic legislation—it seems more plausible to adopt the latter perspective: the rabbis were responding to practices they encountered, which may not have been aligned with rabbinic ideals.

Against this backdrop, I wish to briefly discuss another example: the numerous papyri containing fragments of the Hebrew Bible in Greek (LXX). Of the approximately 260 papyri preserving Jewish scripture in Greek,[33] there are 15 whose origin I consider Jewish.[34] However, it is noteworthy that the existence of Jewish scriptural fragments written on papyrus contradicts the early rabbinic prohibition of this practice. Thus, in Mishnah Megillah 2:2,[35] the rabbis instruct that,

> "[If one reads from a *megillah* {i.e. a scroll}] that was written [not with ink] but with *sam*[36], or with *sikra*[37], or with *komos*[38], or with *kankantom*[39], or from a *megillah* that

> was written not on parchment but on *neyar*[40], or on *diftera*[41], he has not fulfilled his obligation. He does not fulfil his obligation unless he reads from a *megillah* that is written in *Ashurit*[42] on parchment and with ink."[43]

This rabbinic ruling, which is more or less contemporaneous with the Jewish LXX fragments from Egypt, explicitly undermines the writing of scripture on papyrus. As we have seen, copying or writing scripture on papyrus was common, and we cannot help but think that otherwise, the rabbis would have had little incentive to prohibit it.

But what was the rationale behind the rabbis' aversion to scripture written on papyrus? Emanuel Tov has proposed that the rabbinic ruling may have been influenced by Christian scribal practices: since Christians were copying both the Old and New Testaments on papyrus, Jews should do different.[44] Indeed, some biblical texts discovered in Egypt were written on parchment.[45] Aside from religious identity and rabbinic rulings, we may add here that the choice between papyrus and parchment also had a lot to do with economic factors. Although papyrus was more affordable than parchment, it was still not universally accessible.[46] The production and writing (i.e., the scribal work) of a parchment roll or codex was about as costly as buying a luxurious car by today's standards—something not everyone could afford.[47] Were Egyptian Jews aware of the Mishnaic ruling at all? Did they deliberately ignore rabbinic *halakha*, or were they simply mindful of their wallets? These questions are difficult to answer, but both explanations are certainly plausible and not mutually exclusive.

In sum, these cases suggest that, in the absence of firm evidence to the contrary, Egyptian Jews (at least those who preferred to worship in Greek) were neither aware of rabbinic rulings nor adhered to them. We must therefore conclude that rabbinic legislation had not yet reached Egypt, at least by the late Roman period.

Between Law and Liturgy: Mishnah Yoma on Papyrus?

The Middle-Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus, the "City of the Sharp–Nosed–Fish," is perhaps archetypically best known for its association with papyri. In six seasons of excavations beginning in the winter of 1896/7,[48] two recent Oxford graduates, Bernard Pyne Grenfell (1869–1926) and Arthur Surridge Hunt (1871–1934), supervised the excavation of several garbage heaps at outskirts of the city in a hunt for papyri. Describing what they called a "torrent of papyri,"[49] it is estimated that almost half a million papyrus (and parchment) fragments were unearthed at Oxyrhynchus. The majority of these were in Greek, but there were also fragments in other languages, such as Latin, Coptic, and even Syriac. Among these were also a small number of papyri in Hebrew and Aramaic.[50]

One such fragment, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Heb. c. 57 (P), Fragment c, belongs to this group of Hebrew and Aramaic papyri and was discovered at Oxyrhynchus in 1905.[51] The fragment was found alongside other Greek and Syriac papyri that can be dated to the third to fifth century CE. Thus, this text too may reasonably be dated to the same period, based on its archaeological context.[52] Although, frustratingly, we cannot assign a more precise date to the papyrus, its chronological *Sitz im Leben* is late antique. It preserves six fragmentary lines of a Hebrew text inscribed on the *recto*. The papyrus displays traces of horizontal and vertical folding, indicating that it was carried about with its owner.[53] Because the papyrus is damaged, only a few words in each line are legible, leaving the precise contents of the text uncertain. Nevertheless, based on the few remaining legible words—particularly the references to the two lots in lines 5-6, which relate to the sacrifice of the scapegoat in Lev 16:8–10—we can infer that the fragment preserves a religious text connected to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Similar fragments have also been discovered at Oxyrhynchus.[54] The text reads as follows:

MS Heb. c. 57 (P), Fragment c:

[ ]Before God purif[y]	לפני יי תטהר[ו][	]
[ ] the ineffable name (i.e. God)[ ]	] השם מפורש . [ ]	]
[ ] . of/about the (?) [ ]	ם על הרצ[פה][	]
[they] to him confes[s]	או לו להתודו[ת][	]
[ ]. two lots [ ]	]א שני גורלות[ ]	]
		5
[ ]on it the lot .[ ]	]עליו הגורל ל[ ]	]

Michael Swartz has interpreted this fragment as a fluid version of Mishnah Yoma, which may have been recited in synagogues of Roman Egypt.[55] Indeed, some words and phrases used in this fragment also appear in Mishnah Yoma, particularly in m. Yoma 3:8, 3:9, and 4:1. This would lend support to Swartz's view that the fragment contains quotations or references. Notably, line 3 mentions an element found in m. Yoma 1:7, which describes various activities performed by the priests on the Day of Atonement.[56] However, the word is reconstructed and thus cannot be used for this purpose with any degree of certainty. In fact, the phrase "לפני יי תטהרו" ("Before God purify") in the fragment's opening line is also paralleled in m. Yoma 3:8, but in this context, as in MS Heb. c. 57 (P), it is rather the biblical verse, Lev 16:30, which is cited, not necessarily the Mishnaic text.[57]

Swartz notes that: "It is apparent that this text is not a direct quotation from our extant Mishnah. Nor is it clear from the fragment that the text is formal poetry or piyyut."[58] But if Swartz is correct that it is not *clear* that the text is *formally* poetic, we must ask what the exact nature of the fragment is. Since, as noted, other religious texts linked to Jewish holidays were discovered at Oxyrhynchus,[59] this fragment, too, is in all likelihood liturgical—rather than exegetical—and apparently connected to worship in the synagogue.

It is often recognized that Jewish liturgical poetry (*piyyut*) lies outside the rabbinic canon. However, a central component of its poetic method is the employment of allusions to biblical exegesis.[60] At the same time, it has been noted that the *piyyutim* have many affinities to rabbinic Midrash, although they rarely cite rabbinic authorities.[61] Although *piyyutim* often include *aggadic* details and motifs, these traditions diverge from most of the early rabbinic

canon.[62] Moreover, while rabbinic literature was predominantly the product of group discourse in academies, *piyyutim* were largely the work of individual poets, frequently associated with synagogues rather than rabbinic study houses. Based on the assumption that the rabbinic movement did not quickly come to dominate Jewish society during this period, some scholars have suggested that other socially and culturally influential groups vied for leadership roles, such as the priests.[63] In a similar vein, other scholars have proposed that the that the *paytanim* (liturgical poets) were part of a "priestly revival" that emerged in the Galilee during the fifth and sixth centuries.[64] Indeed, some poets included the title *kohen* (priest) alongside their names in acrostics, which, however, does not necessarily indicate that they were members of the priestly class, but may instead reflect their status as religious leaders in the context of worship. What all this adds up to, as noted, is the notion that rabbis and poets belonged to two distinct and, at times, antagonistic worlds.

But, as noted, this situation is complex: Some *piyyutim* draw on materials and traditions affiliated with rabbinic literature, and some classical *paytanim* even make ample references to the Mishnah.[65] In some instances, a connection can be identified based on a shared exegetical tradition that appears in the same sequence in both a *piyyut* and a rabbinic text. In other cases, it can be argued that a *piyyut* reinterprets a rabbinic midrash when it links exegetical material to specific biblical verses that are also presented in the same context within the midrashic text. This situation has led other scholars to claim that the very existence of the *piyyut*–genre points to a certain degree of rabbinization.[66] This perspective highlights how some *piyyutim* engage deeply with rabbinic traditions, suggesting that the *paytanim* were influenced by, or even contributed to, the broader rabbinic interpretive framework.

The interpretive overlap, however, is not straightforward. As Laura Lieber has noted, many texts now considered part of the rabbinic canon were likely still fluid in Late Antiquity. Rather than simply "citing" these texts, *paytanim* may have been actively engaging with and

contributing to evolving interpretive traditions that later solidified into the prose compositions we know today.[67] This makes it difficult to determine any hierarchical dependence between *piyyutim* and rabbinic literature. [68]

The boundaries between *paytanim* and *piyyut*, on one hand, and rabbis and rabbinic literature, on the other, are thus complex and blurred. However, this does not imply that specific texts, such as MS Heb. c. 57 (P), Fragment c, directly cite rabbinic literature or that the genre of *piyyut* necessarily reflects significant rabbinization in Egypt as early as the third–fifth centuries. Rather, the relationship between *piyyut* and rabbinic traditions must be understood as a multifaceted and evolving dynamic.

Papyrological Rabbis?[69] *Letters, Titles, and Terminology*

Perhaps the most rewarding source for discovering traces of rabbinization in late antique papyri from Egypt are letters. In the general absence of written rabbinic texts, an examination of the language employed in these letters can be quite valuable. Let us turn our attention to four letters (in Hebrew) and one bilingual fragmentary contract (in Aramaic/Greek) written between the fifth to eighth centuries. This period was marked by the creation the most important and influential rabbinic texts, the Talmudim (the *Yerushalmi*, i.e. the Jerusalem Talmud, and the *Bavli*, i.e. the Babylonian Talmud), and several *aggadic* and *halakhic* Midrashim, produced in the academies in Palestine. As we will see, each of these documentary papyri displays a certain affinity with the world of the rabbis. Some refer to a person as "rabbi," while others employ terms and themes that are typical of rabbinic literature.

This evidence raises a number of interlocking questions, which have already been at the heart of scholarly debates about inscriptional evidence from Palestine and what it can and cannot tell us about the rise and influence of the rabbinic movement there.[70] Is the title

"rabbi" used in these documents as a general honorific or does it refer to rabbis in the technical sense, as representatives and/or members of the rabbinic movement or academies? Does the use of the term itself signify rabbinization? In other words, does the use of the title "rabbi," and the use of other terminology found in rabbinic literature, mirror a contemporary fashion, or is it a sign that the rabbinic movement gained momentum in Egypt at a time when rabbinic scholarly activity was at its peak elsewhere? We begin with titles.

Unlike papyri in other languages, Hebrew and Aramaic papyri have remained largely understudied, with only a few exceptions. One papyrus that has garnered some scholarly attention over the past few decades is MS Heb. d. 69 (P), housed in Oxford's Bodleian Library. This document is a personal letter in Hebrew detailing a loan transaction between two Jews. It is tentatively dated to the fifth or sixth century CE.[71] It will concern us again later, but for now, it suffices to turn our attention to its opening salutation and the way in which it references its addressee.

Following two lines of salutations and blessings (lines 1–2),[72] line 3 reveals the addressee of the letter, a certain Rav Jacob, son of Isaac.[73] Was Rav Jacob a rabbi? The title "rabbi" does not appear here in form of a noun ("the Rabbi"),[74] or in reference to a particular function associated with the world of the rabbinic movement, for example, as heads of a rabbinic academy.[75] Rather, "Rav" refers here to an honorary title and polite form of address; the appellation merely denotes the modern equivalent of "Sir or Mr.".[76] Therefore, this letter is not addressed to a member of the rabbinic movement.

The same conclusion can be drawn with respect to the next two examples, which reference the Aramaicized form of the Hebrew honorary title Rabbi/Rav (רב/רבי), namely בירבי (*barrabi*/*b[e]irabbi*).[77] One of these texts, likewise discovered at Oxyrhynchus, is MS Heb. D 86 (P) r (Oxford, Bodleian Library). It has been assigned a fourth to fifth century date based on palaeography.[78] Besides mentioning the title *beirabbi*, this papyrus has an

interesting story: The papyrus is in a poor state of preservation and only five lines of it have been preserved. It was once part of an official document (or contract?) which appears to have been bilingual—Greek and Aramaic.[79] The first two preserved lines are in Greek, the remaining ones in Aramaic.

…	ᾧ[…]	
... as stated above. Aurelios Samuel	ος πρόκρειται Αὐρήλιος Σαμουήλ	
Witn[ess:		שהד[יא
[*beire*]*bbi* (Rabbi) Kahanah		[(ב)ר]בי כהנה
[a]bout (on) them […]		[ע]ליהון ממ[

In 1964, this papyrus—or rather an excerpt of it—was published under the title “The end of a document” by Tcherikover et al. in the third volume of *CPJ*.[80] Since the editors of *CPJ* only published Greek papyri,[81] and, although being well aware of the fact that “In 1905 some scraps of Hebrew–written papyri were found by Grenfell and Hunt in Oxyrhynchos [*sic*], and Cowley … edited them ...”,[82] they published only the second Greek line (the first is illegible) which all but preserves the signature of the (perhaps?) document’s bearer, and deliberately neglected the subsequent lines in Aramaic which were published by Cowley roughly half a century earlier.[83] Setting aside this interesting publication history of the papyrus, it is in the “real” (Aramaic) end of the document that we encounter a witness who apparently (the title is reconstructed) bore the title *beirebbi* (or: Rabbi) Kahanah. However, as in the previous case, it is to be doubted that this witness was a member of the rabbinic movement. Rather, here, too, the title *beirebbi* (“rabbi”) does not appear in the form of a noun, and the title seems to function as an honorific.[84]

Our third papyrological “rabbi” is mentioned in a mutilated letter housed in Florence’s Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (*PSI* inv. 26018 + 26019). The document consists of two separate papyrus fragments of unknown provenance and is dated paleographically to

the sixth–seventh century CE.[85] Since the letter is addressed to an anonymous "Head of the Synagogue"[ראש] הכנסת ,[86] the two fragments belong to a group of documents addressed to this particular assembly, which I will discuss presently.[87] Thus, this particular document also bridges the next sub–section, which adduces more evidence of terminology found in rabbinical texts. But for the moment, it is the signee of this letter, a certain Reuben (ראובן), who sparks our interest. The text is too fragmentary to retrieve the reason for Reuben's application to the "Head of the Synagogue," but he signs his letter referring to himself as *beirabbi*.[88] Did Reuben write to the synagogue official in his capacity as a "rabbi"? The title itself does not appear here as noun, or in the sense of a professional title. Rather, as in the other instances, it is used here as an (self–designated) honorific title. With this in mind, let us now discuss other terminology that appears in rabbinic literature.

Our first example is MS Heb. d. 83 (P), fragment b, another papyrus that was discovered at Oxyrhynchus. It consists of five lines which constitute the remnants of a letter written in Hebrew to the "Heads of the Synagogue" (ראשי הכנסת). Based on the letter's palaeography, Cowley dated it to the third to fifth century CE, but Mishor suggested a later date (fifth–sixth century CE).[89] This letter is related to other documents that mention the "Head(s) of the Synagogue," a phrase that clearly refers to the leadership of the local Jewish community.[90]

MS Heb. d. 83 (P), Fragment b, reads as follows:

[ ] From Oshaiah son of I[saac?	]	]מן אושיה בן י[צחק?
[ ] calling the Heads of the [Synagogue	]	]קראום לראשי ה[כנסת?
[ ] . . and the leaders (*prostatin*)	]	]ות ולפרוסטטין
[ ] (the) place of men of (good) deeds/reputation[	]	]מקום בעלי שם[

5

2 illegible lines

The figure of the *rosh knesset*—the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek term *archisynagogos* (ἀρχισυνάγωγος)—is mentioned about a dozen times in nine independent rabbinic pericopae.[91] These traditions are fairly evenly divided between Palestinian and Babylonian sources, with almost all referring to a Palestinian setting (only one is set in Babylonia).[92] These passages unanimously consider the Head of the Synagogue to be a person of considerable importance, as, in fact, all synagogue-related officials are in rabbinic texts.[93] It is, nevertheless, noteworthy that rabbinic texts invariably treat the *rosh knesset*'s position as inferior to that of a rabbi.[94]

The dossier of papyri mentioning the "Heads of the Synagogue" attests to the existence of this group of Jewish community officials, not only in general but specifically in Egypt, reflecting the time period in which they were active. Despite the often–ascribed dichotomy of the world of the rabbis vis-à-vis the world of the synagogue,[95] an outright antagonism is not tangible—at least in the sources under scrutiny here. On the other hand, it is surely significant that we see here evidence of a community whose life centered on the synagogue and its officials, without any mention of rabbinic leaders. The papyri referencing the "Heads of the Synagogue" appear to reflect a general absence of rabbinic influence during the fourth and fifth centuries, even as this period saw the production of the bulk of classical rabbinic literature.

Two, perhaps three,[96] papyri—all of which are letters—mention the Hebrew expression "men of good reputation" בעלי שם (טוב). In classical rabbinic literature, the phrase designates a person of good deeds or reputation.[97] Only in later Jewish tradition, particularly in the Middle Ages, did the term come to designate a holy man and/or certain Kabbalistic rabbis who possessed esoteric knowledge, using the names of God for healing, performing miracles, exorcisms, and blessings.[98] However, in our case, the term seems to refer to socially privileged members of local communities. Thus, "those of (good) reputation"

are mentioned in line 4 of MS Heb. d. 83 (P) fragment b (]... בעלי שם), following the "Heads of the Synagogue" and the "leaders (of the community?)" [*prostatin*/פרוסטטין].[99]

These "men of good reputation" appear again, perhaps, in a badly mutilated Oxyrhynchus papyrus (MS Heb e. 111g [P]) dated to the sixth or seventh century, which merely preserves these three legible words: "בעל שם טוב" ("[of] good reputation").[100] As with the "Heads of the Synagogue," the papyri preserve the contemporary jargon and titles prevalent in Late Antiquity, the world the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis shared with the rest of the Jews of the diaspora, including those in Egypt.

To conclude this section, we have discovered in the documents—mostly letters—references to rabbis as well as other terms with which we are familiar from rabbinic texts. These texts are difficult to date, but tentatively cover a period between the fourth to the seventh centuries. The references to the title "rabbi" and its derivates roughly coincide with the appearance of the title, mostly in inscriptions from the Palestine (e.g., Bet Shearim and Ioppa) and other places in the diaspora (e.g., in Italy). As previous scholarship on these inscriptions has shown, there is no particular reason—except in a small handful of instances[101]—to believe that these inscriptions refer to "rabbis" understood as members of the rabbinic class.[102] The same conclusion can be drawn in the case of the papyrological evidence. In other words, papyrological rabbis are very much like epigraphical rabbis, and that should not surprise us.

In the period to which these letters are tentatively dated to (roughly from the fifth to eighth centuries), the rabbinic movement had already begun to leave a social and cultural imprint on Jewish life in Palestine.[103] Nonetheless, we can find virtually no evidence for this process in the papyri from Egypt. Concerning the other terminology we detected, the "Head(s) of the Synagogue" and "men of good reputation," we can explain their appearance as contemporary late antique jargon, reflective of the common world shared by the rabbis and

their Jewish contemporaries, rather than as a sign of any distinct rabbinic influence on Egyptian Jewry *per se*.

6. "Imported" Rabbinization?

At the outset of this paper, I reviewed Tcherikover's reconstruction of the alleged "close relationship" between the Jews of Egypt and the rabbinic establishment in Palestine and Ilan's critical assessment of his claims. The present inquiry into rabbinic influence on Egypt has thus far yielded negative results, largely vindicating Ilan's views. However, the next three documents that I wish to discuss appear to tell a rather different story. Two of these are personal letters, and one is marriage contract (*ketubbah*). The two letters exhibit some form of rabbinic influence—in one instance it is language adopted from rabbinic literature; in the other, it is what we may categorize "rabbinic ideology." In the final example, the style of and some details specified in the contract reveal parallels to common rabbinic marriage contracts. What these three documents have in common, however, is the possibility that the types of rabbinization found in them was not endemic to Egypt, but was "imported" from Palestine. While my interpretation of this evidence points to hitherto unappreciated traces of rabbinic culture in Egypt, I do not believe that this slim dossier should be taken to suggest that the Jews of late antique Egypt had undergone a robust process of rabbinization or were indeed rabbinized to any significant degree. I will begin with letters.

Ms. Heb. e. 120, housed in Oxford's Bodleian Library, is a personal letter in Aramaic. It was written by a woman with the unusual (and elsewhere unattested) name Ḥarqan, to her brother Eleazar. The date of Ḥarqan's letter is difficult to determine, but a late Roman or early Byzantine date (third–fifth century CE) appears to be realistic.[104] The letter, which—unlike most of the extant material that has survived on papyrus—is preserved in its entirety,[105] reads as follows:[106]

1. From Ḥarqan daughter of Yoḥanan the Priest to Eleazar my dear brother
2. and beloved, my honour and my prospect, my remnant of the house
3. of my Father. Peace. The prayers of my sons are for your life and (the life of) Mariam
4. my sister, your partner and (the life of) your sons.

[1] מן חרקן ברת יוחנן כהנה לאלעזר אחי חבובי
[2] ורחימי סברי וסכוי ופלטתי ממביתה
[3] דאבה שלם צלותו דבני לחיך ודמרים
[4] חתי שותפתך ודבניכון

There is, of course, much to say about this four-line text, such as the literacy and education of (Egyptian-Jewish) women in Late Antiquity and their social status.[107] But for our purposes, we should focus instead on an expression used by Ḥarqan in line 2: "my honour and my prospect" (סברי וסכוי). This literary expression is very unique and its only other occurrence(s) is in rabbinic literature.[108] In Ilan's words: "the precise use of this rare rabbinic expression within a letter on papyrus is the closest we get to a rabbinic text preserved on the early papyri from Egypt." [109] But does this serve as evidence of the rabbinization of Egyptian-Jewish society, or does it indicate influence from Palestine, from where this letter may have been dispatched?

In fact, we do not know precisely where Ḥarqan lived. We can be certain that her brother lived in Egypt, where the letter was discovered.[110] Lines 2–3 seem to offer a clue as to where Ḥarqan lived and from where the letter was sent. In her opening salutation, Ḥarqan refers to her brother as "my remnant of the house of my father." What does that mean? Was there a situation (war? unrest? economic strain?) that forced Eleazar to leave his sister and family behind and find his fortune in Egypt? While Ḥarqan may have sent her letter from elsewhere in Egypt, it is also possible that she sent it from somewhere in Palestine, from where many came as immigrants.[111] But this would also mean that what Ilan considers to be the "closest we get to a rabbinic text preserved on the early papyri from Egypt"—though not untrue—Tcherikover would see as rabbinic influence from Palestine. Indeed, this seems to be a case of "imported rabbinization." After all, the period during which this letter was written

and dispatched (roughly the third to fifth centuries CE) coincided with a peak of rabbinic activity in Palestine. On the other hand, we may also question whether the use of an unusual epistolary expression that infrequently appears in rabbinic literature has anything to do with rabbinic influence.

Our second example is MS Heb. d. 69 (P) *recto*, a papyrus letter in Hebrew also housed in Oxford's Bodleian Library that concerns a loan. It was probably written in the fifth or sixth century, and was acquired by Bernard P. Grenfell from an unnamed antiquities dealer in Cairo in 1899.[112] The letter was dictated to a scribe by the name of Isi (איסי) and deals with an unpaid loan and the efforts of the lender, Lazar son of Yose בן לעזר (יוסה), attempting to recover it from the borrower, a certain Jacob son of Isaac (יעקב בן יצחק) whom we have met earlier, as he is designated "Rav" in the letter.

The contents of the letter describe a cat-and-mouse game. Jacob first comes to Lazar to obtain the money from him, promising to pay back later at least a share of the sum Lazar had lent him, before Lazar intended to come to Jacob's abode "in the South" (לדרום). However, in the end, Lazar was not spared from making that trip southwards, because Jacob did not repay him the outstanding sum. Initially, upon Lazar's arriving at Jacob's residence in the South, Jacob is nowhere to be found, but it seems that Lazar has gotten hold of him after all, and requested that Jacob send him the rest of the loan via a trustee of his choice.

We do not know how the story ended and whether or not Lazar finally retrieved the whole sum owed to him by Jacob. But three details in the letter are of interest to us here: One is geography and the question where "South" is. That is, did all the events described in the letter occur in Egypt (where the letter was discovered), or did Lazar come from Judaea to visit Jacob in Egypt (in the "South")? The second issue pertains to the terms of the loan itself, which appears to follow Roman, rather than rabbinic law. The third issue concerns the

language used in the second valediction of the letter, which is distinctly rabbinic in character. Let us begin with the last of these three items.

In the second valediction of the letter Lazar subscribes it by referring to himself as Jacob's "[Your] servant and your dust and your student {and dust}".[113] This jargon can be comfortably placed into the world of the rabbis, which revolves around the master (*rav*)–student (*talmid*) axis. Does this indicate rabbinization? Before jumping to conclusions, let us briefly discuss the remaining two issues I raised, namely the loan and geography, and see if they provide further insight into this question.

The loan was originally made for one year and amounted to 27 *Ḥarubin* (חרובין),[114] i.e. one *solidus* (a gold coin worth 24 *Ḥarubin*) plus three *Ḥarubin*, which was the maximum legal annual interest until Justinian's economic reforms (l. 8).[115] Jacob repaid part of the debt —half of the principal loan and two thirds of the interest (in all 14 *Ḥarubin*), but 13 *Ḥarubin* were still outstanding (l. 11). In an effort to retrieve them, Lazar sought out Jacob who was hiding from him with a gentile. Lazar was lucky, however, and apprehended Jacob on a Friday evening ("on the eve of the Sabbath") just before he could slip away on a boat (lines 16–17). Being cornered, and eager to appease Lazar, Jacob succumbed to new conditions. Lazar added 5 and 1/4 *Ḥarubin* to the outstanding debt, which increased it from 13 to 18 *Ḥarubin* (lines 20–21). This was precisely the interest on the main loan of one *solidus* for exactly one year and nine months, the time that had passed since the first year ended. What we must emphasize here is the fact that Jacob paid an *interest* on his loan, something that is prohibited by biblical and rabbinic law in its wake.[116] Therefore, Lazar's and Jacob's actions clearly violated rabbinic law.[117] In short, while the letter speaks in a rabbinic idiom, the individuals mentioned in it do not follow the norms prescribed in those texts. How can we explain this fact?

A possible solution to this puzzle may be the particular geography of the letter, namely, its opaque reference to "the South." Lazar notes in line 9 of his letter that Jacob anticipated him once, before Lazar came to seeking him out in his abode in the south (עד שאני באתי לדרום אצלך). However, placing this reference into a more or less precise geographical context turns out to be a difficult undertaking: it could either be understood as a relative direction ("south") or as a toponym ("Darom/Daroma"). Mishor interpreted the term as a toponym, noting that in the late Roman/Byzantine period, this term could refer essentially to three geographical locations: (1) all of Judaea; (2) the district in and around Bet Guvrin/Bait Jibrīn (= Eleutheropolis, in the southern part of Palestine); and (3) the city of Lod.[118] Naveh, on the other hand, suggested that "South" denotes a relative direction and that the entire action took place in Egypt (i.e. in the "south of Egypt"), where the letter was also discovered. The mention of Jacob's intended boat-journey (lines 16-17), according to Naveh, refers to travel up and down the Nile.[119]

There is, however, also another possibility: (a) considering Mishor's suggestions that "Darom" is a toponym in southern Palestine, and (b) the debtor (Jacob) was from "Darom," but the creditor (Lazar) was from somewhere in Egypt. Although the find–spot of the letter indeed implies Egyptian provenance, it would not be far–fetched to assume that when Jacob came to Egypt to pay back part of his debt, he stayed there, and the letter was sent to his Egyptian location.[120] In fact, based on the rather well–attested contacts between the Jews of Bet Guvrin/Eleutheropolis and Oxyrhynchus (a possible provenance of this letter) in other documents, Mishor's proposed second identification of the toponym "Darom" appears to be the most attractive of the four options discussed above.[121] Why is that important for our purposes?

The connection to Palestine can explain why we encounter, on the one hand, formal conventions of address and style familiar from rabbinic literature, and, on the other, terms of

a loan at interest rates based on Roman legal norms, and in direct conflict with rabbinic law.[122] In other words, the Jewish–Egyptian lender apparently relies on common rabbinic conventions to converse with his debtor from Palestine, while dictating the terms of the loan based on local Egyptian legal conventions that reflect an environment that was essentially non-rabbinic and in which rabbinic law was not recognized. This would bring us back to our hypothesis that (a) rabbinization in Egypt was virtually non-existent, and (b) whatever signs of rabbinization we do encounter appear to be imported and/or stand in some form of relation to Palestine.

Let us know turn to Jewish marriage contracts (*ketubboth*) written on papyrus from late antique Egypt. It is difficult to trace the origin of the *ketubbah*—the standard (and standardized) Jewish marriage contract. The oldest extant *ketubboth* date from the fifth century BCE and were actually discovered in Egypt, at the island of Elephantine.[123] They were written in Aramaic on papyrus. One of the earliest literary attestations of the practice of formulating a (Jewish) marriage contract is found in the apocryphal Book of Tobit (from the third or early second century BCE), which describes how Tobias and Sarah were wedded by means of a (marriage) contract.[124] Moreover, Jewish marriage contracts from the second–century CE have been discovered in the Judaean Desert,[125] and many more such documents were found in the Cairo Genizah.[126]

In addition, a few late antique Jewish marriage contracts from elsewhere in Egypt have survived on papyrus,[127] most of them in a very poor state of preservation. The most complete and most important one among them, is the so–called Cologne *ketubbah* from Antinoopolis (P. Köln Nr. 5853), which also happens to be the only dated document (417 CE) in Jewish characters from Late Antiquity.[128] Since about half a millennium separates the discovery of the *ketubboth* from the Judaean Desert from those discovered in the Genizah, the Egyptian–Jewish marriage contracts on papyrus constitute a missing link and show, *inter*

alia, that over the centuries, the *ketubbah* had gradually developed from a universal document to a decidedly Jewish one.[129] This development was pushed forward by the rabbis, who, already in the Mishnah, and later in the Talmudim (m. Kettuboth; y. Kettuboth and b. Kettuboth), recorded norms and regulations concerning marriage, from the stereotypical formulae of the marriage contract itself (in Aramaic) to the obligations between a husband and wife during the marriage and after its (potential) dissolution.[130]

That said, a *ketubbah* is not a rabbinic text *per se* and therefore no tell-tale sign of rabbinization. Jewish marriage contracts came in a variety of shapes and formulations. Different Jewish groups, such as Karaites for instance, use(d) marriage contracts which (deliberately) diverge from common and standardized rabbinic versions.[131] So, when we are looking for evidence of rabbinization in Egyptian-Jewish marriage contracts on papyrus, the question must be: what kind of *ketubbah* we are looking at? In other words, do these *ketubboth* employ formulas and features of Jewish marriage contracts sanctioned by the rabbis?

With this in mind, we return to Antinoopolis and the *ketubbah* that was written there in 417 CE. As noted, the *ketubbah* includes a very precise date (in Greek in Hebrew letters), a location (Antinoopolis), and a specification that the marriage is according to the law (*nomos*/νόμος) of all the house of Israel (כנימוס כל בית ישראל). It then proceeds to list all the items included in the marriage contract (clothes and jewelry) and ends with the husband's pledge to pay all his possessions to his bride, should the occasion arise. It is the inventory listed in the *ketubbah* (lines 14–19) which seems to tie the document to rabbinic practice.

As such, it is noteworthy that most of this list of clothing items and jewelry, which constitute Greek loanwords rendered in Aramaic in the document, are the same items that are recorded in a passage from the *Yerushalmi* (y. Shabbat 6:4, 8b), in Aramaic, which is essentially an interpretation of Isa 3:18–22, listing women's clothing and jewelry.

Accordingly, we would have in front of us a rabbinized form of an Egyptian document drafted and used in Egypt.[132] However, the integration of a list of items that is paralleled in a Palestinian rabbinic tradition seems not to be the sole Palestinian influence on this document. Along with language and orthography,[133] this contract features characteristics which assign it to a so–called Palestinian–style *ketubbah*, similar to *ketubboth* found in the much later Cairo Genizah, but not to other *ketubboth* found in the same archive, which are of a Babylonian style.[134] Among the many items listed there, one particular object in the dowry of the bride—שאירין (bracelets) —appears also in other Palestinian-style *ketubboth*.[135] Because of these characteristics, Colette Sirat and her colleagues have argued that the scribe must have been an immigrant from Palestine,[136] which implies, in the context of the present inquiry, that whatever evidence of rabbinization we encounter in this document, appears to have been imported from the Palestine. However, if this *ketubbah* is typical of the Jewish communities in Byzantine Egypt, whose close connections with Palestine are well known, there is no need to assume that it lacked professional scribes who could write *ketubboth* for its marrying members. As Susanna Wolfert–de Vries has argued, the Jewish community in Antinoopolis maintained its Aramaic heritage while selectively adopting Greek elements. The marriage contract, thus, reflects a deliberate balance between adherence to Jewish traditions and integration into the Graeco–Egyptian legal framework, highlighting the complexity of identity in late antique Jewish communities and their ability to navigate and harmonize diverse cultural and legal systems.[137]

Be that as it may, although the *ketubbah* from Antinoopolis can be taken as evidence of the Palestinian influence on the Jewish community of Egypt in the fifth century, this influence is elusive, at least in this period. It seems more tangible in the previous document I have discussed, namely the letter of Lazar, son of Yose (MS Heb. d. 69 [P]), which appears to have been written about a century after our *ketubbah*. By the ninth or tenth century at the

latest, however, the rabbinization of Egypt was well underway, when we find the earliest copies of rabbinic texts in the Cairo Genizah.[138]

7. Conclusion

The evidence of the papyri from late antique Egypt provides an invaluable resource for assessing the scope, speed, and nature of rabbinization among Jews in the Mediterranean diaspora. We must assume that the process of rabbinization began already sometime before we first encounter rabbinic texts in the Cairo Genizah, but we cannot pinpoint the date when precisely this happened; after all we speak about a process. What happened in the period prior to the ninth century? It is a black hole, difficult to fill, but I have suggested in this paper to turn to papyrological evidence in order to see if there was any evidence of rabbinization for the "classical rabbinic" period. In the absence of a papyrus preserving pieces of rabbinic literature, I have proposed to examine papyri that either contain references to rabbinic legislation, or contain titles, terminology, and expressions we are familiar with from rabbinic literature. I have surveyed an array of papyri, both documentary (letters and contracts) and literary (liturgical and biblical fragments) in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

One of the major challenges posed by the evidence at hand is the question of the precise dating of the papyri. I have discussed texts roughly dating from the third to the eight centuries and thus to the period in which the bulk of what we consider "classical rabbinic" literature was composed in Palestine and in Babylonia. So far, we have seen in the papyri only faint traces (if at all) of what could be labeled "rabbinization." Based on the suggested, sometimes very rough, paleographical dating, we may, however, observe that as we progress along the timeline, the traces of rabbinization appear to increase. Take, for example, MS Heb. d. 83 (P), which is roughly dated to the third to fifth centuries and makes only a fleeting reference to things rabbinic, namely the mention of a *rosh knesset* (Head of the Synagogue).

This is a far cry from MS Heb. d. 69 (P), which is dated to the fifth to six centuries and employs not only the honorific title "rabbi" but also uses various expressions linked to the world of the rabbis, such as the phrase "[Your] servant and your dust and your student."

While the process of rabbinization appears to gain momentum over time, it seems more closely tied to later developments in neighboring Palestine. Overall, however, the evidence for rabbinization is largely inconclusive and may reflect the broader *Zeitgeist* of late antique Jewish life rather than signaling a significant expansion of rabbinic influence. How are we to explain this?

Despite Egypt's proximity to Palestine, which, in that period, was a major center of rabbinic activity (alongside Babylonia), Egypt appears to have been at the fringes and was slow to adopt rabbinic Judaism, whose full adoption only came in the last two centuries of the first millennium. Perhaps three exceptions are the two letters and the Antinoopolite *ketubbah* examined in the last section of this paper, which allowed rare glimpses of potentially rabbinic influence from Palestine. This dynamic was already championed by Tcherikover, however, in a rather maximalist way. Throughout this inquiry, I have followed a minimalist approach, and failed to detect any early rabbinic influence on Egyptian Jewry. Perhaps not every reader will acquiesce to this approach. However, even if we were to factor into the equation texts like the *piyyut* for the Day of Atonement (MS Heb. c. 57 [P], Fragment c) discussed in section 4, and agree that it is indeed an early version of Mishnah *Yoma*, along with the three documents discussed in the last section of this paper (section 6), and consent that they have no connection to Palestine at all and should thus be considered clear-cut evidence for rabbinization in Egypt, the evidence would still be marginal, at least roughly for the period from the third to the seventh centuries. Of course, one caveat, as noted, is the lack of certainty surrounding the precise dating of our evidence. Given that rabbinization had landed in Egypt by the ninth century, could we be looking at the first evidence of it? And is this evidence

representative? Perhaps, but on the whole, we must still conclude with Ilan, that rabbinic influence on Egyptian Jews in Late Antiquity is virtually non–existent.[139]

We can only speculate as to why this is the case. In the introduction to this paper, I suggested several possible reasons for the absence of rabbinic texts on papyrus. One possibility is that rabbinic culture was primarily oral, with texts only being written down at a later stage. Another is that Egyptian Jewry was largely a non–rabbinic society, making the presence of such texts unlikely. It is also possible that papyri containing rabbinic material have simply not yet been discovered, though they may exist. The idea that rabbinic texts were not written down early enough to appear in Egyptian papyri is perhaps the weakest explanation. Rabbinic texts were already being edited by the second century in Palestine, and by the fourth or fifth century, the process of writing them down appears to be already established in both Palestine and Babylonia.[140] Had Egypt been significantly "rabbinzed", we would expect a similar development there. This makes the absence of such texts more likely to stem from the broader nature of Egyptian Jewry itself or from gaps in the surviving evidence.

We have seen examples suggesting that rabbinic law (*halakha*) was either unknown in Egypt or, if it was known to some extent, there is no evidence that it was observed. So, the general impression is such that late antique Egyptian society was "a-rabbinic." This point, on the one hand, is mainly based on conjecture. On the other hand, until new evidence will tell us differently (which pertains to the final point), our conclusion must remain that late antique Egypt was largely "un–rabbinized."

Whether rabbinic fragments still await discovery, whether the shift from "oral Torah" to "written Torah" only occurred in Egypt in the ninth century, whether Egyptian Jews were simply "a-rabbinic," or whether we wish to assess the evidence from a minimalist or maximalist perspective, the conclusion remains the same: Egypt was never a center for

rabbinic teaching in Late Antiquity. These centers were located elsewhere, namely in Palestine and in Babylonia. This, however, was also destined to change with time. From the tenth to twelfth centuries, Egypt, too, would produce illustrious rabbinic figures like Sa'adiah ben Yosef Gaon (a.k.a. "al–Fayyūmi") and Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), along with their own corpora of "rabbinic" literature—*gam zu le–tova*.[141]

[1] Victor Tcherikover, “Prolegomena,” in *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, ed. Victor Tcherikover, Alexander Fuks, and Menahem Stern, 3 vols. (Magnes Press and Harvard University Press, 1957—64), 1:106 [henceforth *CPJ*]. See also the statement by Doron Mendels and Arye Edrei in their *Zweierlei Diaspora: Zur Spaltung der antiken jüdischen Welt* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 37: “On the other hand, it is conceivable that rabbis traveling to Alexandria occasionally instructed the Jews living there on matters of practice. However, they likely did not succeed in transmitting the entirety of the oral tradition in Hebrew and Aramaic to the Egyptian diaspora, as this community had long relied on Greek. Even if some rabbinic teachings and *halakhah* reached Egypt, the quantity of these transmitted elements was negligible compared to the vast rabbinic corpus being developed at that time.” [“Andererseits ist es denkbar, dass Rabbinen, die nach Alexandria reisten, die dort lebenden Juden sporadisch in Fragen der Praxis unterwiesen haben. Es dürfte ihnen dagegen nicht gelungen sein, den gesamten mündlichen Erbschatz in hebräischer und aramäischer Sprache an die ägyptische Diaspora zu vermitteln, denn diese beruhte seit alters her auf dem Griechischen. Selbst wenn als rabbinische Lehre und Halacha nach Ägypten gelangt sein sollten, war die Quantität der eingedrugnenen Elemente, verglichen mit dem gewaltigen rabbinischen Korpus, das zu dieser Zeit entstand, vernachlässigenswert.”] The translation is mine.

[2] Tcherikover, “Prolegomena,” in Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* I, 1–111.

[3] See above, n. 1 (Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* I, 106).

[4] t. Sukkah 4:4 (אמר רבי יהודה כל שלא ראה בדפלסכיון של אלכסנדריא של מצרים לא ראה כבוד לישראל...). Interestingly, R. Yehuda is attributed more than once in teachings (mostly of aggadic character) associated with Egypt as e.g., the Temple of Onias (b. Menaḥot 109b), and the Septuagint (b. Megillah 9a).

[5] For example, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Peraḥya, who is said to have fled to Alexandria in the wake of the Hasmonean king Alexander Yannai’s persecution of the Pharisees (b. Sotah 47a), also described in Jos. *Ant*. 13.372–383; b. Kiddushin 66a; b. Sotah 47a; b. Sanhedrin 19a); 4QpNah (4Q169) 3–4 i 1–9; Rabbi Zakkai of Alexandria (e.g., y. Ketubot 4:6, 28d); and perhaps also a Tanḥum son of

Papa (y. Kiddushin 3:12, 64d); see also Rivka Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash* (De Gruyter, 2009), 187–93.

[6] Tal Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah: The Jewish Community in Late Antique Egypt," in *The Jews in Medieval Egypt*, ed. Miriam Frenkel (Academic Studies Press, 2021), 4.

[7] Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah," 19–21.

[8] Moshe Lavee, "Rabbinic Literature and the History of Judaism in Late Antiquity: Challenges, Methodologies and New Approaches," in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late–Roman Palestine*, ed. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford University Press, 2011), 319–52; with respect to Christian sources, see Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah," 2–3.

[9] See above, n. 1.

[10] See, e.g., M. Steinschneider, "Hebräische Papyrus-Fragmente aus dem Fayyûm," *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 6 (1879): 250–54; and, e.g., the item cited in nn. 51 and 71. See also the discussion in section 3 on *CPJ* 3.503.

[11] Noah Hacham and Tal Ilan in collaboration with M. M. Piotrkowski and Zs. Szántó, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* IV-VI, 3 vols. (De Gruyter, 2020–).

[12] See e.g. the work of Hayim Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities in Later Roman Palestine: The Literary Evidence," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999) 187–207; Seth Schwartz, "The Patriarchs and the Diaspora," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999) 208–22. For an early formulation of this problem, see Jacob Neusner, "Introduction," In *Understanding Rabbinic Judaism: From Talmudic to Modern Times*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Ktav, 1974) 5–26.

[13] For an overview of the history of research on rabbinization, see Ra'anan Boustan, "Afterword: Rabbinization and the Persistence of Diversity in Jewish Culture in Late Antiquity," in *Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish Texts and Societies between 400 and 1,000 CE*, ed. Gavin McDowell, Ron Naiweld, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Open Book Publishers, 2021), 286–99 (available online at https://books.openbookpublishers.com/ 10.11647/obp.0219.pdf, accessed 5 January 2023).

[14] See the subsequent note, and the literature cited below, in n. 63.

[15] Seth Schwartz, "Rabbinization in the Sixth Century," in *Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco–Roman Culture*, Vol. III, ed. Peter Schäfer, 3 vols. (Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 55–56.

[16] See e.g., Simcha Gross, "Babylonian Jewish Communities," in *The Routledge Handbook of Jews and Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Routledge, 2024), 419.

[17] As noted, the bulk of our historiographic sources for this time is non–Jewish, mainly Christian, and highly tendentious; see Tal Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah," 2–5.

[18] On the problem of the identification of Jewish papyri, see Gideon Bohak, "Good Jews, Bad Jews, and Non–Jews in Greek Papyri and Inscriptions," in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin 13.–19.8.1995, Volume 1*, ed. Bärbel Kramer, Wolfgang Luppe, Herwig Maehler, and Günter Poethke (Teubner, 1997), 105–12; Hacham and Ilan, *CPJ* IV, 5–15.

[19] P.Oxy. 9.1205 = *CPJ* 3.473, which is written in Greek.

[20] On this issue, see Meron M. Piotrkowski, "Literary Jews: The Jewish Community of Oxyrhynchus in Light of Non–Documentary Texts on Papyrus," in *Sources and Interpretation in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Meron M. Piotrkowski, Saskia Dönitz, and Geoffrey Herman (Brill, 2018), 143–173.

[21] See above, note 19. The papyrus is dated to 14 April 291 CE. The other document is the so–called Cologne *Ketubbah* (P. Köln Nr. 5853) from Antinoopolis (see our subsequent note), dated to the year 417 CE. On this document, see Colette Sirat, Patrice Cauderlier, Michele Dukan, and Mordechi Akiva Friedman, *La Ketouba de Cologne: Un contrat de mariage juif à Antinoopolis* (Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986).

[22] Hebrew palaeography, especially Late Antique Hebrew palaeography, is oftentimes inaccurate since there are hardly any dated documents that can function as palaeographic comparanda—one to be precise, namely the aforementioned *Ketubbah* from Antinoopolis (P. Köln Nr. 5853), dated 417 CE.

[23] On the Reḥov-inscription, see e.g. Ze'ev Safrai, "The Rehov Inscription," *Immanuel* 8 (1978): 48–57; Chaim Ben–David, "The Rehov Inscription: A Galilean Halakhic Text Formula?" in *Halakhah in Light of Epigraphy*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Hanan Eshel, Ranon Katzoff, and Shani Tzoref (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 231–40; Steven D. Fraade, "The Rehov Inscriptions and Rabbinic Literature – Matters of Language", in *Talmuda de-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine*, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller (De Gruyter, 2014), 225–38.

[24] "πατρὸς τῆς [συναγωγῆς". The text is broken off here (l. 9), but it seems reasonable to restore the word *synagogēs* [συναγωγῆς] ("community/congregation") here; see also Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* III, 35 (n. to ll. 8–9 *ad loc*.). The term *synagoge* is mentioned in l. 7 (συνα[γ]ωγῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων), but it is not clear whether its meaning refers to a building (i.e., a synagogue), or to the local Oxyrhynchite "community of the Jews." For the former view, see Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah," 10–11 and, for the latter, Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* III, 35 (*ad loc*.); and Eldon J. Epp, "The Jews and the Jewish Community in Oxyrhynchus: Socio-Religious Context for the New Testament Papyri," in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (Brill, 2006), 34 n. 82, who follows Tcherikover's explanation that the synagogue, as a house of worship, is uniformly described in Egypt as *proseuchē* (προσευχή), not as *synagogē* (συναγωγή).

[25] Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* III, 36 (n. to l. 9 *ad loc*.) and Epp, "The Jews of Oxyrhynchus," 34 and the literature cited by both.

[26] Aryeh Kasher has suggested that Aurelius Justus had been honored with the title of "father of the congregation" in Oxyrhynchus, however, this remains uncertain due to the fragmentary state of the papyrus. Aryeh Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 153–54.

[27] See Zsuzsanna Szántó, "Jews from Eleutheropolis—Cosmopolitan Life in Late–Roman Oxyrhynchos," Lecture given at the 18th World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem (8 August 2022). My gratitude to Dr. Szántó for kindly providing me with the draft of her lecture.

[28] m. Gittin 4:6; b. Gittin 45a; b. Bava Batra 8b.

[29] On this archive James M.S. Cowey and Karl Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis (144/3 – 133/2 v. Chr.) Papyri aus den Sammlungen von Heidelberg, Köln, München und Wien* (Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001) and Sylvie Honigman, "The Jewish Politeuma at Heracleopolis," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002): 251–66.

[30] Patrick Sänger, *Die ptolemäische Organisationsform politeuma: Ein Herrschaftsinstrument zugunsten jüdischer und anderer hellenischer Gemeinschaften* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

[31] See Robert A. Kugler's commentary on this petition in Hacham and Ilan, *CPJ* IV, 4, 93–4. Kugler notes that "…the language of his [Petaus'] plea suggests that they [the *archontēs* of the *politeuma*] did not have the power to release him outright … Making his appeal as a Jew to the leaders of the Jewish politeuma suggests that Petaus anticipated that they might have the necessary power to order the civil authorities to reassess Petaus' situation." Hacham and Ilan, *CPJ* IV, 93. See also, more recently, Robert A. Kugler, *Resolving Disputes in Second Century BCE Herakleopolis: A Study in Jewish Legal Reasoning in Hellenistic Egypt* (Brill, 2022), 83–95.

[32] m. Gittin 4:6.

[33] This figure is the result of a search in the Leuven Database of Ancient Books (LDAB; accessed December 22, 2022. https://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/index.php;) when searching the lemmata "Old Testament," "Greek," and "Papyrus." The actual number is 319, but the breakdown includes biblical texts in Coptic and (one) in Arabic, which I excluded here.

[34] Several scholars have produced lists of Jewish biblical papyri, among them Kurt Treu ("Die Bedeutung des Griechischen für die Juden im römischen Reich," *Kairos* 15 [1973]:123–44); Epp, "The Jews of Oxyrhynchus," 15 n. 8 [with respect to biblical papyri from Oxyrhynchus in particular] and Robert A. Kraft, "The Textual Mechanics of Early Jewish LXX/OG Papyri and Fragments," available online at http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/earlypap.html (accessed 07 January 2025), on which I rely here. Kraft lists 30 items of which I exclude the following from this survey: his numbers 1, 3–5, 7, 10–13, because these fragments were discovered in the region of the Dead

Sea (either at Qumran, or at Naḥal Ḥever) and not in Egypt; no. 16 (P.Fouad 203), because it is a prayer (or amulet?); nos. 20 (P.Oxy. 7.1007) and 26 (P.Vindob. 39777), which were, albeit Jewish, written on parchment/vellum (on this issue see also Thomas J. Kraus, "'Parchment Or Papyrus?': Some Remarks About The Significance Of Writing Material When Assessing Manuscripts," in *Ad Fontes: Original Manuscripts and Their Significance for Studying Early Christianity — Selected Essays*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus [Brill, 2007], 13–24), and no. 24 (Cairo Ostracon 215) respectively, because the text was written on an ostracon; and finally, no. 23 (P.Oxy. 8.1075), about whose origin I am unsure: The *recto* of the papyrus features the ending of Exodus, but the opening verses of Revelation on its *verso* (which was published separately as P.Oxy. 8.1079). Despite being written by a different hand, apparently later than the *recto*, it remains uncertain whether the *recto* was written and used by a Jew, only to be reused by a Christian (who presumably also added Revelations on the *verso*)—a scenario that is utterly conceivable—but for the sake of caution, I prefer to exclude the text from this survey; cf. Kraft, "Textual Mechanics," 62–3.

[35] See also m. Shabbat 12:4, which is not an exact parallel, but lists some of the same products.

[36] סם: in this case, a yellow-tinged arsenic; see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. (Luzac & Co, 1903), 998 (סם).

[37] σίκερα: fermented liquor; see Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Peeters, 2009), 621.

[38] κόμμι: gum; see *LSJ*, s.v. "κόμμι".

[39] χάλκανθος: copper sulfate, an ink–ingredient that causes corrosion; see Samuel Krauss, "Metals" in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906): 516.

[40] The term here denotes "papyrus," although it usually means "paper;" cf. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, II: 904 (נייר). Another term is *gome* "גומא," which may have a more botanical connotation, i.e., seems to refer to the papyrus *plant*, rather than the (writing–) *material*; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, I: 222–23.

[41] διφθέρα: a kind of (unprocessed leather) scroll and/or a notebook; see Muraoka, *Greek–English Lexicon*, 172.

[42] I.e., in the Hebrew language and using Hebrew script.

[43] הָיְתָה כְּתוּבָה בְּסַם, וּבְסִקְרָא, וּבְקוֹמוֹס וּבְקַנְקַנְתּוֹם, עַל הַנְּיָר וְעַל הַדִּפְתֶּרָא, לֹא יָצָא, עַד שֶׁתְּהֵא כְּתוּבָה אַשּׁוּרִית, עַל הַסֵּפֶר וּבִדְיוֹ.

[44] Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Brill, 2004), 30: "… at the same time early Christian writings were written on that material [i.e., papyrus]." However, and far removed from any Christian context, we find a similar notion in the *Letter of Aristeas* (3–4): "[3] It was my devotion to the pursuit of religious knowledge that led me to undertake the embassy to the man I have mentioned, who was held in the highest esteem by his own citizens and by others both for his virtue and his majesty and who had in his possession documents of the highest value to the Jews in his own country and in foreign lands for the interpretation of the divine law, for their [4] laws are written on leather parchments in Jewish characters." The translation derives from Robert J. H. Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), II: 12. This, of course, was going to change, at least as regards the language.

[45] See e.g. n. 34 (Robert Kraft's nos. 20 and 26) above, and P.Ant. 47–50, which are Hebrew fragments from 1Kings 22; 2Kings 21; and Job 20-21. They were published by Jelle Verburg, Tal Ilan, and Jan Joosten, "Four Fragments of the Hebrew Bible from Antinoopolis, P.Ant. 47–50," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 105 (2019): 209–16.

[46] On the economic aspect of ancient book production (papyrus and parchment), see in particular Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 50–69.

[47] Bagnall, *Early Christian Books*, 52–5.

[48] Their last excavation at Oxyrhynchus was conducted in 1906/7.

[49] "The flow of papyri soon became a torrent which it was difficult to cope with." Bernard P. Grenfell, "Oxyrhynchus and its Papyri," *(Egypt Exploration Fund) Archaeological Report* (1896-

1897): 7.

[50] Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, “Graeco-Roman Branch: Excavations at Oxyrhynchus,” *(Egypt Exploration Fund) Archaeological Report* (1904–1905): 13; where they also discuss papyri in languages other than Greek.

[51] Alfred E. Cowley, “Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments from Oxyrhynchus,” *JEA* 2 (1915): 209.

[52] Cf., Cowley, “Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments,” 209, 212. The Syriac papyri were published by David S. Margoliouth, “Notes on Syriac Papyrus Fragments from Oxyrhynchus,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 2 (1915): 214–16, in the same year, journal, and volume as Cowley’s Hebrew fragments.

[53] Colette Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques trouvés en Egypte* (Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1985), 120.

[54] E.g., MS Heb. C. 57 (P), Fragment b; or MS Heb. f. 35 (P), which is a *piyyut* for the New Year (*Rosh HaShanah*).

[55] Michael D. Swartz, “Yoma from Babylonia to Egypt: Ritual Function, Textual Transmission, and Sacrifice,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 43 (2019): 339–53.

[56] m. Yoma 1:7: “[If the High Priest] sought to sleep at night, the young priests would snap the middle finger [against the thumb] before him, and they would say to him: “My Master, High Priest. Stand [from your bed] and chill yourself once on the floor [to overcome the drowsiness]. And they would engage him until the time would arrive to slaughter the daily offering.”

(בְּקֵשׁ לְהִתְנַמְנֵם, פִּרְחֵי כְהֻנָּה מַכִּין לְפָנָיו בְּאֶצְבַּע צְרֻדָה, וְאוֹמְרִים לוֹ, אִישִׁי כֹהֵן גָּדוֹל, עֲמֹד וְהָפֵג אַחַת עַל הָרִצְפָּה. וּמַעֲסִיקִין אוֹתוֹ עַד שֶׁיַּגִּיעַ זְמַן הַשְׁחִיטָה.):

[57] כִּי-בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם, לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם: מִכֹּל, חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, תִּטְהָרוּ. (“For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the LORD.”).

[58] Swartz, “Yoma from Babylonia to Egypt,” 351.

[59] See the list compiled by Piotrkowski, “Literary Jews,” 155.

[60] Michael D. Swartz, "Society and the Self in Early Piyyut," in *Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish Texts and Societies between 400 and 1,000 CE*, ed. Gavin McDowell, Ron Naiweld, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Open Book Publishers, 2021), 39–41; and see recently, Yitz Landes, "Piyyut, Mishnah and Rabbinization in the Sixth to Eighth Centuries," *JSQ* 30 (2023): 28–47, which is in some tension with Swartz's analysis.

[61] Swartz, "Society and the Self in Early Piyyut," 39–41.

[62] An example of this on papyrus is Berlin, Staatliche Museen, P.8498 (probably from the Fayûm; third–fifth century CE), which features the well-known *piyyut* "Ezel Moshe" ("Go Moses") that is related to the Torah readings of for the seventh day of Passover (i.e., the "Crossing of the Red Sea") and for Shavuot/Pentecost ("Mt. Sinai Revelation"). It is a dialogue, or rather a dramatic portrayal of the stand-off, between Moses and the (personified) Red Sea who refuses to split, thus denying passage to the fleeing Israelites. A very similar tradition is found in Exodus Rabbah 21:6. Although, this particular passage belongs to the second part of *Exodus Rabbah* (Part B), which was compiled earlier (probably sometime between the fifth-seventh centuries) than the first part of that Midrash (ninth–tenth centuries?), the *piyyut* still antedates it; see Joseph Yahalom, "Ezel Moshe on Papyrus," *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 173–84 [Hebrew]; on the dating of *Exodus Rabbah*, see Anat Raizel, *Introduction to the Midrashim* (Tevunot, 2011), 117–8 [Hebrew].

[63] See, e.g., Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society – 200 B.C.E to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[64] Michael D. Swartz, "Sage, Priest, and Poet: Typologies of Religious Leadership in the Ancient Synagogues," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Steven Fine (Routledge, 1999), 101–17; Oded Irshai, "Priesthood and Authority: Jewish Palestinian Leadership in Late Antiquity," in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Yad Ben-Zvi, 2004), 67–106 [Hebrew]; Ze'ev Weiss, "Were Priests Communal Leaders in Late Antique

Palestine? The Archeological Evidence," in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, ed. Daniel R. Schwartz and Ze'ev Weiss, (Brill, 2012), 91–111; Stuart S. Miller, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

[65] See Landes, "*Piyyut*, Mishnah and Rabbinization," 28–47.

[66] Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans*, 157; Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 263–64.

[67] Laura S. Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2010), 187.

[68] Ophir Münz-Manor, "The Liturgical Performance of Identity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Jews and Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Routledge, 2024), 389–90.

[69] The heading is lent from the title of Shaye J. D. Cohen's influential "Epigraphical Rabbis," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1981): 1–17.

[70] See Cohen's foundational "Epigraphical Rabbis". Despite the importance of Cohen's paper, his conclusions have been contested, especially by Stuart S. Miller in, e.g., S. Miller, "The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Steven Fine (Routledge, 1999), 57–70; Miller, "Epigraphical Rabbis, Helios and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (2004): 30–49; Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Eretz Israel* (Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 30–49; Miller, "This Is the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Eliezer ha–Qappar" (Dabbura Inscription) – Were Epigraphical Rabbis Real Sages, or Nothing More Than Donors and Honored Deceased?" in *Talmuda de-Eretz Israel*, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller (De Gruyter, 2014), 239–74. See also Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 119–23; Hezser, "Correlating Literary, Epigraphic, and Archaeological Sources," *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford

University Press, 2010), 8–27; Fergus Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011): 253–77; Ben-Zion Rosenfeld, “The Title ‘Rabbi’ in Third– to Seventh–Century Inscriptions in Palestine Revisited,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 61 (2010): 234–56. Nevertheless, Cohen’s minimalist approach still has its proponents; see, e.g., Hayim Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011): 311–46.

[71] The dating is based on the letter’s paleography; see Edna Engel, “A Palaeographic Study of Oxford Ms. Heb. d.69 (P),” *Lěšonénu* 53 (1989): 265–86 [Hebrew]; Mordechai Mishor, “A Hebrew Letter: Oxford Ms. Heb. d.69 (P),” *Lěšonénu* 53 (1989): 216 [Hebrew]; see also more recently Amit Gvaryahu, “A Hebrew Letter and Its Contexts: Oxford MS Heb.d.69(P),” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient 65* 65 (2022): 700, who suggests a mid–fourth to late–seventh century date.

[72] [l. 1] Much peace from above and deliverance; [l. 2] from above and endless blessings (רוב שלום ממרומים ורווח; ממרום וברכות עד בלידיי). On this letter and the salutations and other formulae, see Lutz Doering, “Jewish Letter Writing in Late Antiquity,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Jews and Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Routledge, 2024), 316.

[73] “To Rav Jacob, son of Isaac peace” (לרב יעקב בן יצחק שלום).

[74] As, for instance, in a fifth–sixth century CE inscription from Venosa which mentions “two apostles and two rabbis (*duo apostuli et duo rebbites*);” see Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” 2 (nos. 4–5), 14.

[75] See the (perhaps?) second century CE inscription on a lintel from Dabbura (Golan) which mentions a Rabbi (Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar) who ran a rabbinic academy (*Bet Midrash*). He should hence be associated with the rabbinic movement; see Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” 3 (no. 8), p. 14; Hayim Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011): 316 n. 17, 321. A Tannaitic figure by that name is mentioned in the Mishnah (*Pirkei Avot* 4:21), the Talmud (Megillah 29a), and in some Midrashim (e.g. in Sifre Numbers 42; Tanḥuma (Buber)

Shmini 7:6; Avot de-Rabbi Nathan 26:6). We cannot be certain, however, that this is the same individual mentioned in the inscription; cf. Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” 11.

[76] See also Mishor, “A Hebrew Letter,” 240, 247 [Hebrew]. The more so since the title “Rav” (as opposed to “Rabbi”) was usually reserved to Babylonian rabbis, and, though not entirely unrealistic, it would be difficult to argue in this case that Jacob hailed from Babylonia.

[77] For more *beirabbis*, see Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” 3–6, 8 (and his nos. 16, 43–44, 47, 55–56). Lapin adds the interesting fact that of the eight to nine *beirabbis* collected by Cohen (which are part of 58 “rabbis” overall; one of the readings is unsure), four occur in burial inscriptions in the necropolis of Ioppa; see Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration,” 317. Does that imply that the witness signing in Aramaic came from Palestine? This thought is not too far-fetched, we have witnessed contacts between the communities of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt and Ono in Palestine in the first document which I discussed (P.Oxy. 9.1205 = *CPJ* 3.473). For evidence of contacts between the communities of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt and Eleutheropolis in Palestine, see above, n. 27.

[78] See Cowley, “Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments,” 213; Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* III, 90; Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques*, 122.

[79] Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques*, 21. Other examples of bilingual documents in Greek and Aramaic are Naḥal Ḥever 17 and 20 from the Judaean Desert.

[80] Tcherikover et al., *CPJ* III, 90.

[81] With the exception of three documents in Latin (*CPJ* 3.457b, 463, 465).

[82] Tcherikover, “Prolegomena,” In *CPJ* I, 101.

[83] Cowley, “Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments,” 212; see also Hacham and Ilan, *CPJ* IV, 2.

[84] It is unclear whether “Kahanah” was the witness’ name or if it is a noun, referring to his priestly descent (or both?). One could also reconstruct the reading: “[the] Rabbi [and?] Priest,” but such a reconstruction is doubtful in this case. Priests usually enjoy(ed) an elevated status in Jewish society (see, e.g., Irshai, “Priesthood and Authority”), which would readily explain why he deserves the

honorific title *beirebbi* in the first place (if the reading stands).

[85] Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques*, 60–61; Morderchai Mishor, "Papyrus Fragments in Hebrew Letters," *Lěšonénu* 55 (1991): 286 [Hebrew].

[86] Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 2005), 418, 420.

[87] More "Head(s) of the Synagogue" are mentioned in the following extant documents: MS. Heb. C. 57 [P]; MS. Heb. d. 83 [P], Fragment b; MS Manchester Box 5 14/25; and MS Vienna H 36.

[88] The line (l. 28) reads as follows: "Peace (be upon you) forever Reuben *beirabbi*" (לעולם שלום ראובן בירבי).

[89] Cowley, "Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments," 212; Mishor, "Papyrus Fragments in Hebrew Letters," 285 [Hebrew].

[90] That the phrase refers to the local Jewish community is also clear from the mention of the *prostatin* in l. 3, a Greek loanword (προστάτης) meaning "president," "leader" or "patron", for which no Hebrew equivalent seems to have existed. See also Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 418, 420.

[91] m. Yoma 7:1; m. Sotah 7:7–8; t. Megillah 3:21; t. Terumot 2:13; y. Berakhot 3:1, 6a; b. Pesaḥim 49b; b. Shabbat 29b; b. Gittin 60a; Tractate Semaḥot 14:14. On the designation *archisynagogos* (ἀρχισυνάγωγος); see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 415–27 (in particular pp. 420–2); and Tessa Rajak and David Noy, "*Archisynagogoi*: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue," *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 75–93.

[92] Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 421.

[93] Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 421–2. See for example b. Gittin 59b–60a ("After them we call [to the Torah] sages who are *parnasim*; after them, sages worthy of being *parnasim*; after them, sages whose ancestors were *parnasim*; and after them, heads of the synagogue and anyone else."). Note that the "Heads of the Synagogue" form a distinct group and are not designated "sages" in this passage. As Levine notes: "Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, rabbinic sources mention the

archisynagogue only on occasion. The contexts in which the title appears are most often religious-liturgical, which is quite understandable given the predilections and concerns of the sages. Nonetheless, even this evidence hints at a much wider role for this official, who, as noted, is referred to as *rosh knesset*. The earliest context in rabbinic literature associated with the *rosh knesset* relates to a Torah-reading ceremony in the Temple. Both a *ḥazzan* and *rosh knesset* were part of the chain of officials who transferred the Torah scroll to the high priest or king for reading during the Yom Kippur and *Haqhel* ceremonies" (Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 420).

[94] Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 422.

[95] This antagonism is often argued in view of the archaeological evidence and art in ancient Jewish synagogues vis-à-vis rabbinic prescriptions to curtail such decorations and imagery; see for instance, Lee I. Levine, "Synagogue Art and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2 (2011): 79–114.

[96] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Heb. e. 111g [P] and MS Heb. d. 83 [P], fragment b; l. 5 of *PSI* inv. 26018 + 26019 (MS Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana) mentions "… and (the) crown (of) good reputation" שם טוב (וכתר), which is not an identical, though perhaps related expression.

[97] m. Avot 4:13: רבי שמעון אומר, שלשה כתרים הם, כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות, וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביהן ("Rabbi Shimon said: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty, but the crown of a good name supersedes them all."); Kohelet Rabbah Parasha 7 (on Eccl. 7:1) טוֹב שֵׁם, מִשֶּׁמֶן טוֹב; וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת, מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ; "A good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death than the day of one's birth."; Tanḥuma, Parashah Va–Yikahel 1; Midrash HaGadol to Deut. 1:15.

[98] Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (University of California Press, 1996), 11–26 (esp. pp. 13–17).

[99] Their mention is preceded by a broken-off reference to a certain "place of those of good reputation" שם (מקום בעלי), but its exact meaning and context of this reference remains unclear.

[100] As, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Heb. c. 57 (P), Fragment c (see Cowley, "Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments," 209), also this papyrus belongs to a group of eleven Hebrew and Aramaic papyri discovered at Oxyrhynchus by Grenfell and Hunt in 1905. They were presented to the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1915. The *verso* of this papyrus was left blank and despite its badly mutilated state, it is considered part of a letter, presumably in Hebrew; see Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques*, 124.

[101] See above, nn. 74 and 75, the inscriptions from Venosa and from Dabbura (Golan); Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," 2, 14 (nos. 4–5), 3 (no. 8).

[102] I leave open whether their "distinctiveness" is rooted in the individuals' high social rank or economic status (or a mixture of both); see also Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," 9–10.

[103] See also Schwartz, "Rabbinization in the Sixth Century," 55–69.

[104] Cowley noted that Adolf Neubauer suggested an eight century CE date for the letter (Alfred E. Cowley, "Hebrew and Aramaic Papyri," *Jewish Quarterly Review* [1904]: 7). Edna Engel is in favor of a fifth century date; see Engel, "A Palaeographic Study," 265–86 [Hebrew]. Ada Yardeni argued for an even earlier, third century date; Ada Yardeni, *The 'Nahal Se'elim' Documents* (Israel Exploration Society, 1995), 91 n. 1 [Hebrew]; see also Mordechai Mishor, "MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pap. Heb e.120," *Lěšonénu* 63 (2000–1): 53 [Hebrew]; and the discussion by Doering, "Jewish Letter Writing," 315.

[105] Since the papyrus as we have it displays not a lot of text on a largely unused writing surface (also its *recto* is blank), it has been suggested that the letter was never finished (Cf., Cowley, "Hebrew and Aramaic Papyri," 7). This, however, does not seem to be the case, because: a) the letter ends with a salutary formula, as most letters do (see e.g., Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* [University of Michigan Press, 2006], 16–17) and b) there are signs that it was folded (and hence sent) as Mishor has noted (Mishor, "Papyrus Oxford e.120," 57 [Hebrew]).

[106] The text of the letter and its translation are taken from Tal Ilan, "An Addendum to Bagnall and Cribiore, Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt: Two Aramaic Letters from Jewish Women," in *Israel in Egypt: The Land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period*, ed. Alison Salvesen, Sarah Pearce, and Miriam Frenkel (Brill, 2020), 401.

[107] An indication of Ḥarqan's apparent higher social standing is the "wasted," i.e. unused, space in the papyrus. Papyrus, though varying in quality, was generally not cheap. A person who could afford to send a letter in such a form, i.e. using a fresh and largely left blank papyrus sheet indicates that that papyrus (in general) was not regarded as expensive. For the economy behind the use and acquisition of papyrus, see Bagnall, *Early Christian Books*, 50–69 (Chapter III "The Economics of Book Production") and Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, 34–35.

[108] Sifra, *Aḥrei Mot*, Parashah 13:11 (ושמא תאמר: אבד סברי ואבד סכוויי? תלמוד לומר: אני ה׳ אני סברך ואני סכוויך ועלי בטחונך) ויקרא יח ד(

"And lest you say: My honor is lost and my prospect is lost, therefore it is written 'I am the Lord' (Lev 18:4). I am your honor, and I am your prospect, and in me is your trust." Variations of that datum appear four more times in rabbinic texts: 3x in the Babylonian Talmud (b.ʿErub 21a–b; b. Yoma 72a; b. Bava Metzia 33b) and once in a late Palestinian midrash (Midr. Pss. 1:20).

[109] Ilan, "An Addendum," 403.

[110] The letter's provenance is, in fact, unclear. Cowley noted that some of the Hebrew and Aramaic papyri published by him were either discovered by Grenfell & Hunt during their first excavation campaign in the winter of 1896/7 in Oxyrhynchus (such as Cowley's no. 1; cf., Cowley, "Hebrew and Aramaic Papyri," 1), while others were acquired either by Grenfell or Rev. Greville Chester (on whom see Gertrud Seidmann, "The Rev. Greville John Chester and 'The Ashmolean Museum as a Home for Archaeology in Oxford'," *Bulletin for the History of Archaeology* 16 [2006]: 27–33) from (an) anonymous antiquities dealer(s) in Cairo (see e.g., Cowley's nos. 2–4, 6–7; Cowley, "Hebrew and Aramaic Papyri," 4–5, 7–8). Unfortunately, he is silent about this particular piece, and so is

Mishor; cf. Mishor, “Papyrus Oxford e.120,” 53 [Hebrew]. In light of these observations, there are only two options: our letter was either discovered by Grenfell & Hunt at Oxyrhynchus, or it was bought on the Cairo antiquities market by either Grenfell or Rev. Chester. In any case, the letter was discovered in Egypt.

[111] For the possibility that Ḥarqan resided in Palestine, see Ilan, “An Addendum,” 406–7.

[112] Cowley, “Hebrew and Aramaic Papyri,” 5. Regarding the dating, see above n. 71.

[113] Lines 30–31: “ותלימדך} ועפרך עבדך ועפרך}”.

[114] A *Ḥarub* חרוב)) is the equivalent of 1/24th of a Roman gold *solidus*; see Daniel Sperber, *Roman Palestine, 200–400, Money and Prices* (2nd ed.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 237–8; and Gvaryahu, “Hebrew Letter,” 694–95.

[115] Gvaryahu, “Hebrew Letter,” 696.

[116] Lev 25:36–37; Exod 22:24; Deut 23:20–21; and see Ezek 18:13, 17; b. Bava Metzia 61b.

[117] Another case in which a Jew paid an interest on a loan is preserved in *CPJ* 4.564 from the Ptolemaic period. As in the case of the above-mentioned papyrus *CPJ* 4.558 (P.Polit.Iud. 8), also this document is part of the archive of the Jewish *politeuma* at Herakleopolis; see Hacham and Ilan, *CPJ* IV, 111–4 and n. 29, above.

[118] Mishor, “Hebrew Letter,” 241 [Hebrew]. Mishor, for that matter, suggested that the letter was sent from somewhere in Palestine to one of those places called Darom in Judaea, or simply somewhere south of the residence place of the author, but still in Palestine (p. 255). However, if that were the case, it is somewhat difficult to grasp why the letter was found in Egypt.

[119] Cf. Joseph Naveh, “Epigraphic Miscellanea,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 52 (2002): 248.

[120] The same scenario was suggested in Gvaryahu “Hebrew Letter,” 691–94.

[121] P.Oxy. 14.1722; 50.3574; 77.5119; and see above, n. 27 (Zsuzsanna Szántó, “Jews from Eleutheropolis.”). Regarding provenance of the letter, see above n. 112. It was acquired on the antiquities market in Cairo, where many papyri from Oxyrhynchus and the Fayum were sold. The possible reference to Bet Guvrin and the rather well-attested relationship between the two local

Jewish communities bolsters the possible Oxyrhynchite provenance of the document. This does not, of course, rule out other provenances, but the Bet Guvrin–Oxyrhynchus axis is conspicuous and notable, because no other such connection between localities in Egypt and Bet Guvrin are known from other papyri.

[122] Notably, Gvaryahu lists further items contradicting rabbinic law, such as Lazar's pursuit of Jacob, appearing at his home in order to extract from him the outstanding sum of money (ll. 13–15), and Jacob's intent to board a ship on the evening of the Sabbath (ll. 16–17); see e.g., y. Shabbat. 1:7, 4c; b. Shabbat 19b; and Gvaryahu, "Hebrew Letter," 697.

[123] See, e.g., Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt, Vol. 2, Contracts* (Eisenbrauns, 1989), 30–33, 60–63, 78–81, 132–40.

[124] Tobit 7:11–13 ("[11] I have given my child to seven husbands, and when they came in toward her, they died during the night. But for now be merry." Then Tobias said, "I will taste nothing here until you a stand firm and are confirmed in my regard." So Ragouel said, "Take her from now on, according to the decree. And you are her brother, and she is yours. Now may the merciful God prosper you both with the best." [12] Then he called Sarra his daughter, and taking her hand, he gave her over to Tobias as wife, and he said, "Behold, according to the law of Moyses take her, and lead her away to your father." And he blessed them. [13] Then he called Edna his wife, and taking a scroll, he wrote out a contract, and they set their seals to it." [transl. NETS]).

[125] See Pierre Benoit, Józef T. Milik, and Roland de Vaux, *Les Grottes de Murabba'at, vol. 2 of DJD* (Clarendon Press, 1961), 109–17; 243–56; Naphtali Lewis (with Yigael Yadin), *The Documents from the Bar-Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri* (Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 76–82, 130–33; Ada Yardeni and B. Levine (with Yigael Yadin and Jonas Greenfield), *The Documents from the Bar-Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri* (Israel Exploration Society, 2002), 118–41; Hannah M. Cotton and Ada Yardeni, *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts from Naḥal Ḥever and Other Sites, vol. 27 of DJD* (Clarendon Press, 1997), 57–59, 224–37, 250–74.

[126] Mordechai A. Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Geniza Study*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv University Press, 1980).

[127] See e.g. Papyrus Vienna H 44 (Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques*, 97); Papyrus Vienna H 78 (Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques*, 103); Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms Heb.e 113; and P 8497 from Berlin formerly interpreted as a simple contract. The text is very fragmentary but it begins by mentioning a man (תאוומסי —Thaumasios) and a woman (מטרונה —Matrona) and the extant end includes a list of goods and prices. See Tal Ilan, "Another Ketubbah on a Papyrus from Byzantine Egypt?" in *Eretz Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies*, ed. Shmuel Ahituv, Hannah Cotton, Matthew Morgenstern (Israel Exploration Society, 2021), 23–30 [Hebrew].

[128] See above, nn. 21 and 22.

[129] See also Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah," 15–16.

[130] For an example of such formulae, see t. Ket. 4:9 (דרש הלל הזקן לשון הדיוט. כשהיו בני אלכסנדריא מקדשין נשים, אחר בא וחוטפה מן השוק, ובא מעשה לפני חכמים, בקשו לעשות בניהן ממזרין, אמ' להם הלל הזקן הוציאו לי כתובת אמותיכם, הוציאו לו, וכתוב בה כשתכנסי לביתי תהוי לי לאנתו כדת משה וישראל.): "Hillel the Elder would explain [in the] lay-language. When the people of Alexandria would betroth wives, another would come and seize her from the street. The matter came to the Sages. They sought to make their children bastards. Hillel the Elder said to them: 'Bring to me the *ketubbah* of your mothers.' They brought them for him, and it was written in it 'When you enter my house, you will be my wife according to the law of Moshe and Yisrael.'" (Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta*, 12 vols. [The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1973], 4: 68); the translation is mine; see also b. *B.M*. 104a. Note the suggestion that Hillel the elder adopted the custom as a safeguard against the matrimonial irregularities of "the Alexandrians" i.e., Egyptians (Jews), implying that they did not follow rabbinic law.

[131] Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, *Karaite Marriage Documents from the Cairo Geniza: Legal Tradition and Community Life in Mediaeval Egypt and Palestine* (Brill, 1998). Samaritans, too, use different *ketubboth*.

[132] This is also Sirat's overall assessment of the document; she considers it clear proof of rabbinic (Palestinian) influence, see Colette Sirat, Patrice Cauderlier, Michèle Dukan, and Mordechai A. Friedman, *La Ketouba de Cologne: Un contrat de mariage juif à Antinoopolis* (Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986), 9. Others are not as convinced; see, e.g., Ross Kraemer, *The Mediterranean Diaspora in Late Antiquity: What Christianity Cost the Jews* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 396–97, who rejects the idea of any form of rabbinization. In this context, note also, the similarity of the common formula "in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel" (כדת משה וישראל) with the one employed in the document (l. 8) "in accordance with the law of all the House of Israel" (כנימוס כל בי֯ת ישראל). For the formula כדת משה וישראל, see Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine*, 1: 162–67. The Hebrew נימוס is a loan-word from the Greek νόμος (law), and is documented in this sense already in tannaitic Hebrew (e.g. in m. Gittin 6:5). The use of נימוס in this common *ketubbah* formula is rare, but occurs in a few *ketubboth* from the Cairo Genizah; see Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine*, II: 157 (no. 13, l. 5); II: 317 (no. 34, l. 5).

[133] In the *ketubbah*, Greek loanwords are interspersed within the Aramaic, which reflects the spoken Aramaic of the Jews, prevalent in fifth-century Egypt, as in Palestine. Palestinian Aramaic orthography is evident in the use of the definite article and female suffix, ה (unlike the Babylonian א) throughout, see e.g. אנה, l. 5; אתה ,בתולתה, l. 8; חתנה, l. 9 and more; see Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine*, I: 54–55). Another typical Palestinian orthographic phenomenon is the form לעזר (Lazar, short for Eleazar), the bride's father's name (ll. 8, 13, 23). The fall of the initial א in Palestinian names is well documented feature, see Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity: Part II—Palestine 200–650* (Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 11–12.

[134] Sirat et al., *La Ketouba de Cologne*, 11. This Palestinian style is indicated by the use of first person by the groom, the mutual obligations of the bride and groom (ll. 8–13), the groom

voluntarily taking upon himself marriage (ll. 6-7), and the guarantee clause (ll. 23–25).

[135] Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine*, II: 49.

[136] Sirat et al., *La Ketouba de Cologne*, 10.

[137] See Susanna Wolfert–de Vries, "Religious and Local Identifications in the Jewish Marriage Contract From Fifth–Century Antinoopolis," in *Religious Identifications in Late Antique Papyri. 3rd–12th Century Egypt*, ed. Mattias Brand and Eline Scheerlinck (Routledge), 167–90.

[138] Robert Brody and Ernest J. Weisenberg, *A Hand–List of Rabbinic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[139] Ilan, "Between the Hellenistic World and the Cairo Genizah," 4.

[140] Although this issue is contested, the texts of the Mishnah and the *Yerushalmi* are extant and written versions of it must have existed already in Late Antiquity. The synagogue inscription from Reḥov, for instance, can also be adduced as evidence of this process. On the issue of orality and the process of writing down rabbinic literature, see Yaakov Elman, "Orality and Redaction in the Babylonian Talmud," *Oral Tradition* 14 (1999): 52–99; Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Jaffee, "Oral Tradition and Rabbinic Studies," *Oral Tradition* 18 (2003): 37–39; Yaacov Sussmann, *Oral Law Taken Literally: The Power of the Tip of a Yod* (Magnes Press, 2019) [Hebrew]. On the Reḥov–inscription, see the literature cited above, n. 23.

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