

Medieval Israel Class #2:

The Linguists: Masoretes and Poets in Tiberias

Timeline

- 20 CE City founded by Herod Antipas (Herod the Great's son)
- 67 Tiberias surrenders to the Roman General Vespasian during the Great Revolt
- 140 Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai purifies the city
- 220 Sanhedrin moves to Tiberias from Zippori
- 235 Patriarchate (נשיאות) moves to Tiberias from Zippori
- 365 Jerusalem Talmud completed
- 429 Patriarchate abolished, Jewish leadership remains in Tiberias
- 550 Byzantine Emperor Justinian builds the wall of the city
- 635 Tiberias conquered by the Muslims and made into the capital of their "Jordan District," Jews from Tiberias resettle Jerusalem
- 7th-10th centuries Masoretes and Paytanim active in Tiberias
- 749 Earthquake
- Circa 900 Aleppo Codex written
- 910 Rav Saadia Gaon in Tiberias
- 1033 Earthquake
- 1099 Crusaders conquer Tiberias and build the walls of their city (north of the ancient city)
- 1187 Saladin conquers Tiberias from the Crusaders and destroys it
- 1205 Maimonides buried in Tiberias
- 1563 Dona Gracia Mendes and Don Yosef Nasi granted rights over Tiberias by the Ottoman sultan
- 1740 Dahar el Omar rebuilds Tiberias and invites Rabbi Hayim Abulafia to head the Jewish community there
- 1837 Earthquake
- 1948 Tiberias conquered by Israel in the War of Independence

Sanhedrin Stations:

Jerusalem, Yavneh, Usha, Shfaram, Bet Shearim, Zippori, Tiberias

The Sages taught: The verse states: "Justice, justice, shall you follow." This teaches that one should follow the Sages to the academy where they are found. For example, follow after Rabbi Eliezer to Lod, after Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to Beror Hayil, after Rabbi Yehoshua to Peki'in, after Rabban Gamliel to Yavne, after Rabbi Akiva to Bnei Brak, after Rabbi Matya to Rome [*Romi*], after Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon to Sikhnei, after Rabbi Yosei to Tzipori, after Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira to Netzivin, after Rabbi Yehoshua to the exile [*gola*], i.e., Babylonia, after Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to Beit She'arim, and after the Sages in the time of the Temple to the Chamber of Hewn Stone. (Sanhedrin 32)

Hot Springs of Hamat

Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said in the name of bar Kappara: Initially, people would bathe even on Shabbat in hot water that was heated before Shabbat. The bathhouse attendants began to heat water on Shabbat and say that it was heated before Shabbat. Therefore, the Sages prohibited bathing in hot water and permitted sweating. And they would still bathe in hot water and say: We are sweating, and that is why we entered the bathhouse. Therefore, the Sages prohibited sweating and permitted bathing in the hot springs of Tiberias. And people would still bathe in hot water heated by fire and say: We bathed in the hot springs of Tiberias. Therefore, they prohibited even the hot springs of Tiberias and permitted them to bathe in cold water. When the Sages saw that their decrees were not upheld by the people because of their stringency, they permitted them to bathe in the hot springs of Tiberias, and the decree prohibiting sweating remained in place. (Shabbat 40)

Teaching Torah in the Synagogue in Hamat

Rabbi Meir would teach Torah on Friday nights in the synagogue in Hamat, a small town near Tiberias, and there was a woman who used to listen to his lectures. One night, Rabbi Meir spoke for longer than usual, and the woman stayed until he finished. By the time she got home, the candles had already burned down. "Where were you?!" demanded her husband.

"I was listening to a Torah lecture," she answered.

Her husband said to her, "I swear that you will not enter my house until you go spit in the face of the rabbi who was lecturing."

Not knowing what to do, she stayed outside, until her neighbors said to her, "Come, let's go together to the rabbi."

When Rabbi Meir saw them coming, Gd gave him insight into the problem. He immediately pretended that his eye hurt him.

"I need someone to spit in my eye, to cure it! Can one among you do it?" he asked.

Her friends nudged her forward.

"Spit in my eye seven times and I'll be cured," Rabbi Meir told her.

When she did, he told her, "Go home and tell your husband, 'You said I should spit once, but I spit seven times!'"

His students were appalled, and asked, "Rebbe, how could you let people disgrace you like that? When they disgrace a Torah scholar, they disgrace the Torah! If you'd told us to, we'd have forced her husband to let her come home!"

Rabbi Meir answered, "The honor of Meir is not greater than the honor of Gd! If the Torah tells us to erase the name of Gd for the sake of peace between a husband and wife in the case of a *sotah* (wayward wife),¹ surely Meir can be dishonored for the same reason!" (Yerushalmi Sotah 1:4)

Tiberias, City by the Sea

ירושלמי שביעית: כשראה [ר שמעון בר יוחאי] שנרגעו הדברים, אמר: 'נרד ונתרחץ במרחצאות אלה של הוא אמר: 'נטהר טבריה'. . . טבריה'. הוא אמר: 'צריכים אנו לעשות תקנה כמו שעשו אבותינו הראשונים' . והיה לוקח תורמוסים ומקצץ ומפזר, וכל מקום שהיה שם מת, היה צף ועולה לו למעלה

מדרש תנחומא (ורשא) פרשת שופטים סימן י מעשה היה ברבי ינאי ור"י שהיו יושבין על פיילי של טבריה והיו שם שני אסטרולוגין ראו שם שני יהודים יוצאין למלאכתן אמרו אותן שני אסטרולוגין אותן שני האנשים יוצאין ואינן נכנסין אלא הנחש שורפן, שמעו רבי ינאי ורבי יוחנן מה עשו ישבו על פתח המדינה לידע אם נכנסין הן אותן שני האנשים למלאכתן ונכנסו, וראו אותן רבי ינאי ורבי יוחנן אמרו לאיסטרולוגין לא אמרתם ששני האנשים הללו יוצאין ואינן נכנסין שהנחש שורפן, אמרו להן הן, אמרו להן הרי יצאו בשלום ונכנסו בשלום היו האיסטרולוגין מביטין בהם אמרו לנו מה עשיתם ביום הזה, אמרו להם לא עשינו דבר אלא כשם שהיינו למודין לעשות קרינו את השמע והתפללנו, אמרו להם יהודים אתם אין דברי האיסטרולוגין מתקיימים בכם שאתם יהודים, הוי ואתה לא כן נתן לך ה' אלהיך.

Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, despite the fact that they had thirteen synagogues in Tiberias, they would only pray between the pillars where they studied. (Berachot 8a)

Dhimmi Status

We heard from 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ghanam [died 78/697] as follows: When Umar ibn al-Khattab, may God be pleased with him, accorded a peace to the Christians of Syria, we wrote to him as follows:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. This is a letter to the servant of God Umar [ibn al-Khattab], Commander of the Faithful, from the Christians of such-and-such a city. When you came against us, we asked you for safe-conduct (aman) for ourselves, our descendants, our property, and the people of our community, and we undertook the following obligations toward you:

We shall not build, in our cities or in their neighborhood, new monasteries, Churches, convents, or monks' cells, nor shall we repair, by day or by night, such of them as fall in ruins or are situated in the quarters of the Muslims. We shall keep our gates wide open for passersby and travelers. We shall give board and lodging to all Muslims who pass our way for three days. We shall not give shelter in our churches or in our dwellings to any spy, nor bide him from the Muslims.

We shall not teach the Qur'an to our children. We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor convert anyone to it. We shall not prevent any of our kin from entering Islam if they wish it. We shall show respect toward the Muslims, and we shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit.

We shall not seek to resemble the Muslims by imitating any of their garments, the qalansuwa, the turban, footwear, or the parting of the hair. We shall not speak as they do, nor shall we adopt their kunyas.

We shall not mount on saddles, nor shall we gird swords nor bear any kind of arms nor carry them on our- persons. We shall not engrave Arabic inscriptions on our seals. We shall not sell fermented drinks. We shall clip the fronts of our heads. We shall always dress in the same way wherever we may be, and we shall bind the zunar round our waists

We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims. We shall use only clappers in our churches very softly. We shall not raise our voices when following our dead. We shall not show lights on any of the roads of the Muslims or in their markets. We shall not bury our dead near the Muslims. We shall not take slaves who have been allotted to Muslims. We shall not build houses overtopping the houses of the Muslims. (A version of the Pact of Omar, 7th century)

Earthquake!

ובכ"ג בשבט צום לארץ ישראל יקראוהו
צום הרעש משום שארץ ישראל רעשה ונפלו ממנה
הרבה ערים ומתו תחת החרבות חכמים

ויש לו במקראות רמז "בזעם תצעד ארץ". מזמן שחרבה
ירושלים עד הזמן שקרה (הרעש) בארץ ישראל מניין בזע"ם"

From the Cairo Genizah

Pinchas Ben Yaakov HaKohen

אח בנעליכם מכרתם
בשטמתכם על דמו קמתם
גדי עזים במרמה שחטתם
דאגתם לב אביכם וסוד הערמתם

אוי לכם מדין חוסף
אמר להם יוסף

האח חלילה לך מעשות זאת
ותמהנו כשמענו ממך כזאת
זקוף עיניך למרום ואל תגלה רזות
חובתינו גרמה על כן באה עלינו הצרה הזאת

בי אדוני בדברך הממתנו ברעדה
אמר להם יהודה

טרחתוהו ביד עושי חבלים
יעצתם לשום רגלו בכבלים
כאכזרים מכרתוהו לאנשים מחבלים
לישמעאלים בעבור נעלים

אוי לכם מדין חוסף
אמר להם יוסף

מללנו אליה כדל ורש
נדנו פנמצא הגביע הנדרש
סודנו אל תגל וריבה גפרש
על דמינו אל תעמד כי הדם מיד מאבידו יגדרש

בי אדוני בדברך הממתנו ברעדה
אמר להם יהודה

צפיתם בקנאתכם להחרים
קמתם והתמכרתם לשפף את דמו
רמיתם באביכם בזאת מצאנו וקמתם לנחמו

אוי לכם מדין חוסף
אמר להם יוסף

שיננתה לשונך כחצים לשכל
תמהנו מדבריה ולהשיב לא נוכל

פְּנֵה אֶל בּוֹרְאֶיךָ אֵל תִּלְךָ בְּנוֹ רָכֹל
נָא בִּי אֲדוֹנֵי רַבָּה רִיבֵנוּ בְּשֹׁכֵל

בִּי אֲדוֹנֵי בְּדִכְרֶךָ הִמָּתְנוּ בְּרַעְדָּה
אָמַר לָהֶם יְהוּדָה

חִיבְתֶּם מִיָּתָה מִשְׁנָה
שָׁב דַּרְכּוֹ סִכְרְתֶם מִשְׁכִּינָה
הָאֵל יִמְחֹל לָכֶם מִשְׁמִי מַעֲוֹנָה
כָּלְכֶם בּוֹאוּ אֵלַי גּוֹשְׁנָה

הֵן לִמְחִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי חוֹסֶף
נָם אֲנִי אֲחִיכֶם יוֹסֶף

חֹלְחִלוּ כְּשִׁמְעוּ מִלְתּוֹ
נָעוּ וְנִבְהִלוּ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לַעֲנֹתוֹ
קוֹל נָתַן בְּבִכִּי וּבְכֹו לַעֲמֹתוֹ
וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן דִּבְרוּ אֹתוֹ.

Too Complicated? HaKalir VS Ibn Ezra

אֶץ קוֹצֵץ בֶּן קוֹצֵץ / קִצּוּצִי לִקְצֹץ
בְּדַבּוֹר מְפֹצֵץ / רִצּוּצִי לְרַצֵּץ
לֶץ בְּבוֹא לְלוּצֵץ / פִּלֵּץ וְנִתְלוּצֵץ
כְּעֵץ מְחַצְצִים לְחַצֵּץ / כִּנֵּץ עַל צִפּוֹר לְנַצֵּץ

אֵיכָה יִשָּׁבָה תְּבַצֵּלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן.
וְדָמָם רוֹן מִפִּי נוֹשָׂאִי אֲרוֹן.
וְנָעוּ מִמִּשְׁמְרוֹתֶם כְּהִנִּים בְּנֵי אֶהָרֹן.
כִּנְמִסֵּר הַבַּיִת בְּמִסְרָבִי מְרוֹן:

בָּכוּ תִבְכֶּה מְחַמֶּשֶׁת סְפָרִים.
כְּנִהֲרֵג כְּהֵן וְנִבְיָא בְּיוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים.
וְעַל דָּמוֹ נִשְׁחָטוּ פְּרָחִים כְּצִפְרִים.
וְנָדוּ כְּצִפְרִים.

תְּהֵנִי צִפּוֹרִים

רבי אלעזר הקליר

ולמה לא נלמד משלמה, שלא היה חכם אחריו כמוהו, והנה תפלתו שהתפלל מודעת, וכל יודע לשון
הקדש יבין אותה, ואיננה חידות ומשלים

ועוד כי לשון הקודש ביד רבי אליעזר נ"ע עיר פרוצה אין חומה, שיעשה מן הזכרים נקבות והפך
הדבר

The Mystery of the Keter

The copy on which I relied is the well-known Egyptian codex which contains the twenty-four books of the Scriptures and which had been in Jerusalem for several years—used as the standard text for the examination of scrolls. Everyone relied upon it because it had been examined by Ben Asher who closely studied it for many years and examined it again whenever it was being copied. This codex was the text on which I relied in the scroll of the Law that I wrote according to the rules. (Maimonides, Laws of Writing a Torah Scroll 8:4)

Dueling Authorities: Exilarch in Babylonia

The members of the two academies [Sura and Pumbedita], led by the two heads [the geonim] as well as by the leaders of the community, assemble in the house of an especially prominent man before the Sabbath on which the installation of the exilarch is to take place. The first homage is paid on Thursday in the synagogue, the event being announced by trumpets, and every one sends presents to the exilarch according to his means. The leaders of the community and the wealthy send handsome garments, jewelry, and gold and silver vessels. On Thursday and Friday the exilarch gives great banquets. On the morning of the Sabbath the nobles of the community call for him and accompany him to the synagogue. Here a wooden platform covered entirely with costly cloth has been erected, under which a picked choir of sweet-voiced youths well versed in the liturgy has been placed. This choir responds to the leader in [prayer](#), who begins the service with 'Baruk she-amar.' After the morning prayer the exilarch, who until now has been standing in a covered place, appears; the whole congregation rises and remains standing until he has taken his place on the platform, and the two geonim, the one from Sura preceding, have taken seats to his right and left, each making an obeisance. (Nathan the Babylonian, 10th century)