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“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 an article published in 2010, Catherine Hezser declared, “Shaye Cohen’s view that ... ‘epigraphical rabbis’ could not have been Torah scholars and should therefore be distinguished from the ‘literary rabbis’ is hardly convincing and not accepted by most scholars nowadays.”¹ Hezser was referring to Cohen’s influential, 1981 article, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, in which he questioned whether “rabbis” known to us from inscriptions should be thought of as sages in the same sense as those of Talmudic literature, i.e., the “literary rabbis.”² In doing so, he was further questioning whether the inscriptional rabbis informed our appreciation of rabbinic Judaism. In any event, since the publication of Hezser’s most recent comment on the subject, three new treatments of the issue have been published, two of which, those of Fergus Millar and Ben Zion Rosenfeld, build upon Hezser’s and my own earlier discussions of the subject and lend further support to her just quoted, summary assessment.³ The third and most recent discussion is that of Hayim Lapin, who seeks to resuscitate Cohen’s overall minimalist view, albeit with an occasional – and not insignificant – nod to the consensus that Hezser, evidently prematurely, felt had emerged.⁴

This is a pertinent theme for our conference and volume as it addresses a question that has become recurrent ever since scholars have begun to grapple with the hermeneutical challenges posed when rabbinic texts and material

1 C. Hezser, “Correlating Literary, Epigraphic, and Archaeological Sources”, C. Hezser, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford, 2010), 23.

2 S. J. D. Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72.1 (1981), 1–17. This article was reprinted with additions in idem, *The Significance of Yavneh and other Essays in Jewish Hellenism* (Tübingen, 2010), 227–243. The original version is cited here.

3 F. Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011), 253–277; B. Z. Rosenfeld, “The Title ‘Rabbi’ in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine Revisited”, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 61.2 (2010), 234–256. C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen, 1997), 119–123. I have taken up the subject in a number of venues, which will be cited below.

4 H. Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101.3 (2011), 311–346. Lapin updates the catalogue of relevant inscriptions in the appendix to his article, 333–343.

finds seem to intersect.⁵ And in this very instance, where an entire conference has been devoted expressly to the ways in which rabbinic literature inform our understanding of the finds, we could not have a better example. After all, at the heart of the original question of “epigraphical rabbis” is how to avoid giving priority to the literary evidence, which in this particular case may be, as we shall see, not only reasonable, but defensible from a scholarly point of view. In fact, I will argue that with the type of archaeological evidence under consideration, to wit, inscriptions – as opposed to artifacts – this way of proceeding is sometimes fully justifiable.

Before we make this case, a review of the most recent treatments of the subject is warranted. Cohen’s central point, that Erwin Goodenough was essentially correct in asserting that the rabbis known to us from synagogue inscriptions and epitaphs were not to be identified with *the Rabbis*⁶ of Talmudic literature remained unchallenged almost until the end of the twentieth century. During this time, Lee Levine and other scholars interested in the history of the ancient synagogue premised their historical reconstructions upon Cohen’s assessment, which allowed them to significantly downplay the role of *the Rabbis* not only in *the Synagogue*, but also in Jewish society during the Roman Period.⁷ The limited extent of the rabbinic movement may be generally accepted today by most scholars,⁸ but where epigraphical rabbis fit in and what their existence says about the literary Rabbis’ lack of influence is another story altogether. In her 1997 book, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* Hezser addressed the question of “epigraphical rabbis” anew and concluded:⁹ 1. From the first century forward, the title “rabbi” was “predominantly (and perhaps even exclusively)” applied to teachers of Torah who had disciples. 2. The title might be applied to someone by others who thought he had earned the recognition. The Rabbis, therefore, did not

5 Although I could not attend the conference, having been on sabbatical in Israel at the time, I am grateful to Steven Fine for his invitation to contribute to this volume.

6 Capitalized “Rabbi(s)” and “Rabbinic” will on occasion be used in this paper to clarify and/or emphasize that I am referring to the literary rabbis, i.e., those who all would agree belonged to the “rabbinic movement”.

7 Cohen’s emphasis in “Epigraphical Rabbis” on the question of the role of the Rabbis in the synagogue, was largely responsible for the direction of the discussion that ensued. Cohen, taking his cue from Goodenough, repeatedly refers to the question of rabbinic “control” of the synagogue throughout his article, but see especially his assessments, pp. 13–17.

8 There remains disagreement about just how limited the rabbinic movement was, but it is no longer accepted that rabbis and their followers were to be found everywhere in exceedingly great numbers. See discussion below.

9 Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 121–123.

exercise any exclusive control over its application.¹⁰ 3. The "rabbis" were not limited to those sages referred to in Talmudic sources. Moreover, prominent students of the literary rabbis may have prevailed upon the editors of the collections to preserve stories about and opinions concerning a select group of rabbis. Hezser also asserts that there were a variety of views among the rabbis about artwork so that the fact that a tomb either has Hellenistic decoration or Greek motifs is hardly an indication that it could not belong to a "Rabbi."

About the same time that Hezser arrived at these conclusions, I began to question whether too sharp a line was being drawn between "the synagogue" and "the Rabbis." In "The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue,"¹¹ I argued that the term "rabbi" in inscriptions was more than a hollow honorific and that there were significant indications in Talmudic literature that the rabbinic movement was rather diversified and included figures who were not expressly named. I furthermore began to formulate my claim that there really was no such thing as "the" synagogue and that portrayals of "the" rabbis as either controlling or lacking influence over this institution were an overly simplistic, artificial construct. I elaborated this view further in "'Epigraphical' Rabbis, Helios and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?"¹² I subsequently, revisited the issue of "epigraphical rabbis" (in what I thought was to be the last time!) in my *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*.¹³

My interest was not, as apparently some have thought, in documenting "a more extensive rabbinic role in Palestinian Jewish society."¹⁴ That the rabbis were *relatively* limited in number and influence is really no longer an issue – and is readily acknowledged throughout my *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, even if I do argue for a more stratified and somewhat larger movement than others contend existed.¹⁵ The issue at hand, however,

¹⁰ According to Hezser, the rabbis may not have had a formalized "rite of ordination" that would have led to a greater degree of institutionalization. This is an important point that will be discussed below.

¹¹ In S. Fine, ed., *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue* (London, 1999), 57–70.

¹² *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (2004), 27–76.

¹³ S. S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi* (Tübingen, 2006), 427–445.

¹⁴ See Lapin 312 where he directly attributes this motivation to me, and again p. 313, where he states that even those who see epigraphic rabbis as belonging to the rabbinic movement must admit "the limited number and scope of these rabbis". See next note.

¹⁵ While I did explore terms in the *Yerushalmi* that indicate that the rabbinic movement included others who are referred to collectively and not named individually (see below), I still readily admitted that the actual number of sages would not have been very large. The only

is: *who* are the epigraphical rabbis? – which can only be properly addressed once we ascertain all we can about the literary rabbis! We certainly have to know as much as possible about the composition and dynamics of the rabbinic movement, if we are to ask meaningful questions pertaining to “rabbis” who are only known to us from inscriptions. For this reason, I aimed to demonstrate that the world of the literary rabbis and that of other Jews (including epigraphical rabbis) was not bifurcated and that the figurative art and Hellenistic themes that appear especially in mosaics belonging to the monumental synagogues were not a threat to the sages of Talmudic literature, whose cosmological thinking allowed for a rather nuanced understanding of where the sun/Helios fit into God’s world.¹⁶

This conclusion certainly would further undermine the view that the literary Rabbis and the seemingly more Hellenized epigraphical Rabbis, particularly those buried at Bet She’arim, could not have belonged to the same rabbinic world. However, increasing the number of official Rabbis was not my focus. Rather, it was (and continues to be) the *dynamics* of the larger “movement,” having taken my cue from, especially, Hezser as well as the work of David Goodblatt and Isaiah Gafni on rabbinic circles and institutions in Babylonia.¹⁷ A larger rabbinic movement would not necessarily explain how rabbinic Judaism eventually, by Late Antiquity, gained recognition and ultimately, by the medieval period, became more closely identified with “Judaism”. A vibrant, if numerically still limited and insular, movement composed of sages with different attainments, in many instances cloaked in the *Yerushalmi* behind collective terms such as *rabbanan*, *rabboteinu*, *Tsippora’ei*, *Deroma’ei*,

claim I am making regarding the size of the movement is that it should not be restricted to the number of *named* rabbis, on which, see H. Lapin, “The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement in the Land of Israel”, S. T. Katz, ed., *The Cambridge History of Judaism, The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge, 2006), 4: 221 f. The *composition* of the movement was/is of greater interest to me than the question of its “extent”. See especially my concluding chapter, p. 447, where I state: “The rabbinic movement was neither as ubiquitous as was once thought, nor as diminutive as some have recently maintained” and, in the same chapter, p. 464: “The rabbis were largely speaking, studying, and teaching among themselves and their households. Only when the sources ... are read in an uncritical fashion can one conclude that the rabbinic movement aggressively and successfully ‘reached out’ in a major way to those beyond the circles of the sages and their households.” See ensuing discussion.

16 See “‘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, 1 (2004), 27–76.

17 See Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*; D. M. Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden, 1975), and the relevant sections of I. M. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A Social and Cultural History* (Jerusalem, 1990) (Hebrew).

Tibera'ei, and *havrayya'*, would, once their methods of networking were further understood, tell us a whole lot more. Indeed once these matters are understood, we might just have a better appreciation of the role the increasing association of the Rabbis with cities by the third century and their resulting urban mentality played in solidifying and institutionalizing their movement.¹⁸ Again, the size of the rabbinic movement and, for that matter, its "influence", were never my main interest.¹⁹ What I especially sought to accomplish was to move the discussion beyond questions of "control",²⁰ which only distort our appreciation of what was a "complex Jewish society" that *included* the rabbis and their circles, and, in fact, was largely responsible for nurturing what would eventually become their, for lack of a better word, "movement."²¹

18 This is a major theme of *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, where I also focus on the role of "houses" such as that of Rabbi (Judah ha-Nasi) and of R. Yannai. Urbanization alone would not explain the increasing institutionalization of the movement and its ultimate success. Nor, to my mind would the recognition on the part of the Romans of either the patriarchate or the rabbis, which may have been a byproduct of urbanization. On urbanization see especially, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 8 f., 12 f. 198–200, 446–466. On the role of houses see pp. 339–393. Cf. H. Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities in Later Roman Palestine: The Literary Evidence", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999), 187–207 and S. J. D. Cohen, "The Rabbi in Second-Century Jewish Society", W. Horbury, W. D. Davies, and J. Sturdy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3 *The Early Roman Period* (Cambridge, 1999), 937–941.

19 Where I do take up the question of numbers, it is only to gain a better appreciation for the make-up of the movement, as indicated above, n. 15, and to counter the preoccupation with "influence". See Miller, "The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue", 61 f., idem, "Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and other Identity Markers of 'Complex Common Judaism'", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41 (2010), 220, and my, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 14–20, 394–466, and *passim*. Cf. Michael Satlow, "Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm", in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intercontext* (ed. A. Norich and Y. Z. Eliav [Providence, R. I., 2008]), 37–53, esp. 51. Also see A. Schremer, "The Religious Orientation of Non-Rabbis in Second-Century Palestine: A Rabbinic Perspective", Weiss et al., *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I Levine*, 319–324.

20 Aside from the references in the previous note, again see Miller, "Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and other Identity Markers of 'Complex Common Judaism'." 220: "It was precisely because the question of the rabbis' possible influence or lack of influence on these synagogues seemed of little heuristic value for the study of Judaism in Late Antiquity, that I attempted to demonstrate where rabbinic tradition and some of the themes of the mosaic floors overlap." I go on to invoke Lapin who has pointed out that the intersection of the world of the rabbis and that of the synagogue raises questions about how we should characterize the community or society to which the sages belonged. See H. Lapin, "Locating Ethnicity and Religious Community in Later Roman Palestine", *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine* (ed. H. Lapin; Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 1998), 17–23.

21 For a discussion of the relationship of the rabbis to what I characterize as "complex common Judaism" and the society which it spawned, see Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late*

Here, I will not reproduce my earlier analysis of “epigraphical rabbis” in its entirety. Instead I will explain how Rosenfeld and Millar have since contributed to the discussion and how some of their arguments improve upon my and Hezser’s earlier efforts or take them in new directions. Along the way I shall also consider how they arrived at their conclusions. I will then take up Lapin’s contribution and examine how and why his distinct approach has led him to revive Cohen’s basic premise.

Rosenfeld goes further than anyone else in accepting the identification of some of the named epigraphical rabbis with figures known to us from Talmudic sources. Not only does he identify the R. Joshua ben Levi and two of his descendants who appear in inscriptions in Catacomb 20 at Bet She’arim with the known, third century sage by that name and his family, he also seems to accept Nahman Avigad’s identification of various figures who appear in bilingual, Hebrew-Greek inscriptions in the supposed “Patriarchal tomb”, Catacomb 14, with two sons of R. Judah ha-Nasi and his close associate, R. Hanina bar Ḥama.²²

To be sure, Rosenfeld too rejects the notion that the extensive use of the title “rabbi” reveals much about the influence of the sages. (For Rosenfeld too, “influence” is *not* the issue.) Instead, he seeks, in addition to arguing for the identification of some of the epigraphical rabbis with known figures, to provide documentation of new inscriptions unknown earlier to Cohen, to reexamine some earlier known inscriptions in light of the new, to develop a chronology for the use of the term “rabbi”, and to provide some “social scientific” analysis of the use of the title. He concludes that the title “rabbi” in epitaphs was a “status symbol”, one that he assumes especially accrued to Torah sages and served as a “source of pride which strengthened their social cohesion.”²³

Antique 'Erez Israel, 21–28; idem, “Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and other Identity Markers of ‘Complex Common Judaism’”, 214–243, and my forthcoming *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee*, Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement Series (Göttingen, forthcoming), *passim*.

22 “The Title Rabbi in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine: Revisited”, 246–247. Cf. B. Z. Rosenfeld, “Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and his Wife Kyra Mega – Interpretation of Inscriptions from Beth-She-arim”, *Cathedra* 114 (2004), 11–36 (Hebrew). Rosenfeld maintains that epitaphs found at Jaffa, particularly an Aramaic inscription mentioning “Kura daughter of Rabbi Bisna”, also relate to known literary rabbis. See Y. Kaplan, “A Proposal for a New Reading of Two Aramaic Inscriptions on Gravestones from the Ancient Jewish Cemetery of Jaffa”, *Eretz Israel* 19 (1987), 284–287. Also, see N. Avigad, *Beth She’arim, Report on the Excavations during 1953–1958*, vol. 3, *Catacombs 12–23* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1976), 62–65 and 238–254. On the recent discovery of an inscription at Sepphoris with the name of R. Joshua (Yehoshua) ben/bar Levi, see below, n. 29.

23 “The Title Rabbi in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine: Revisited”, 255 f.

One of Rosenfeld's major arguments is that the widespread use of the term "rabbi", both in inscriptions and in Talmudic sources, indicates that "society at large" would have been familiar with the intention of the term. That is, such a ubiquitous term as "rabbi" would likely have had a fairly uniform meaning in Jewish society. Thus, Rosenfeld reasons, a term that appears in epitaphs from Sepphoris (as opposed to the centralized catacombs at Jaffa and Bet She'arim) could only have had the same meaning that it had for those sages who bore the title and were known from Talmudic sources to have lived there. Those referred to in the epitaphs, Rosenfeld deduces, were "members of the rabbinic community that was active in Sepphoris."²⁴ Rosenfeld's argument makes some sense in view of the fact that epitaphs and dedicatory inscriptions especially call out to the viewer to take note of a deceased's or honored person's identity.²⁵ Furthermore, as John Bodel has noted, "Tombstones that urged passersby to pause and read their texts often invited not only contemplation but conversation."²⁶ "Rabbis" memorialized, and remembered in stone would presumably have been on the lips of the local Sepphoreans, for whom "rabbi" must have had some consistency in meaning. Rosenfeld's argument is further strengthened by Mordecai Aviam and Aharoni Amitai's recent mapping of the main Jewish graveyard and tombs around Sepphoris and cataloguing of the known Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions, which are mostly from the third and fourth centuries and name eleven rabbis (*rabbi*, in a couple of cases, *rav*).²⁷ While none of these, including the sensational "Rabbi Yehoshua [Joshua] bar Levi Qapparah,"²⁸ can be identified with known literary rabbis, it is really difficult to believe that the title "rabbi" would have meant one thing

²⁴ Rosenfeld, 253, points out that dedicatory synagogue inscriptions were even more public than epitaphs. His point seems to be that these would all the more so have been understood in the same way that "rabbi" is overwhelmingly understood in Talmudic literature. He further notes (252) my suggestion that a R. Tanḥum bar Yudan who appears in Talmudic sources might be an ancestor of the R. Yudan bar Tanḥum in a fifth century mosaic from an unexcavated synagogue at Sepphoris and also of Yose bar Yudan and Tanḥum bar Yudan in separate inscriptions from the excavated fifth century synagogue. Cf. Miller, "The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue", 62 f.

²⁵ See J. Bodel, "Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian", idem, *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions* (London, 2001), 26.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ M. Aviam and A. Amitai, "The Cemeteries of Sepphoris", *Cathedra* 141 (2012), 8–26 (Hebrew).

²⁸ The inscription reads: הָדֵן מִשְׁכַּבָּה דְּרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בַּר לֵוִי קַפָּרָה ("This is the resting place of Rabbi Yehoshua bar Levi Qapparah"). See Aviam and Amitai, 21.

to visitors to the cemeteries of Sepphoris and another to those acquainted with the rabbis who according to Talmudic writings lived there.²⁹

To support his position further, Rosenfeld summons the number of occurrences of the term “rabbi” in Talmudic sources. The statistics he amasses, however, are rather unwieldy since he includes the entire corpus of Talmudic literature from Late Antiquity, without considering the peculiarities of the various collections, especially their repeated and parallel traditions, and what is known of their redaction histories. But he is correct that there is an internal consistency: It is clearly in a relatively miniscule minority of instances that the term “rabbi” refers to a “master” that is not a “scholar of the Oral Law.”³⁰ While Rosenfeld admits (following Lapin) that inscriptions only begin to use the term as a “professional” designation³¹ for sages of Torah in the third century, once the usage takes off, it becomes pretty much accepted.³²

29 The Rabbi Yehoshua bar Levi Qapparah inscription is unlikely to belong to the tomb of the early third century *amora*, Joshua ben Levi who was not known to have lived at Sepphoris. Aviam and Amitai, “The Cemeteries of Sepphoris”, 21 f., also discount the possibility mostly because the name “Qapparah” sets this person apart from the known *amora*. Interesting for our purposes is the authors’ observation (24) that their survey is the first concerning graveyards surrounding a Jewish city in the time of the Mishnah and Talmud. This would reinforce the importance of Rosenfeld’s argument.

30 The same is true if we only include literature contemporaneous with much of the epigraphical data, that is, midrashic literature from the fifth- to seventh-centuries. See Rosenfeld, 238 and discussion below.

31 To prove his point that we can identify some specific epigraphical and literary rabbis, Rosenfeld, “The Title Rabbi in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine: Revisited”, 237, points to Alexander of Aprhodosias, whose name appears on his father’s gravestone as the author of the epitaph. Both have the same title in the inscription: *philosophos*. A philosopher by this name is indeed known from literary sources of the late second, early third century.

32 See Rosenfeld, 239 f. Rosenfeld makes a point (253) of emphasizing the public nature of dedicatory inscriptions, as opposed to epitaphs. He seems to imply that such a publicly stated honorific had to have some readily understood significance. Cf. my argument, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 442, that the use of “rabbi” in a formal setting such as a synagogue mosaic or in epitaphs had to have been more than a common way of expressing respect. While it is true that by the modern period *rabbi*, or *reb*, is so used, it is more likely that in antiquity, say during the late second Temple period, it was used that way (compare how the disciples address Jesus as “rabbi” in the Gospels), but later, when the more specific meaning came into being and was attached to the names of specific masters/teachers, what was likely a colloquial usage became the exception rather than the rule. The same is in fact true today, where we find in traditional Jewish cemeteries epitaphs with “rabbi” before the name of the deceased, even when the person was not an actual, ordained rabbi. But, I believe someone so designated in epitaphs today oftentimes will actually have been a “rabbi” and in dedicatory inscriptions, practically always. This admittedly requires further study to ascertain its pertinence to circumstances in antiquity.

Rosenfeld regards a newly published inscription from Zoar as “unequivocal epigraphic proof” that an epigraphical rabbi was a member of the Rabbinic community. The Aramaic inscription in question reads: “May Rabbi Simeon *Beribbi* rest, who died on the fourth [day of the week] on the third of Adar, the seventh year of the sabbatical cycle, which is 385 years since the destruction of the Temple.” The epitaph closes with “May the *hakham* rest in peace [and] may he awaken to the sound of the one who heralds wellbeing.”³³ Following earlier scholarship, Rosenfeld takes *berebbi* to be an exceptional scholar of Torah, which allows him to then assert that the “double title” *rabbi berebbi* serves to emphasize the “charismatic personality” of Simeon. Building on my understanding of the use of *hakham*, particularly in *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65c, Rosenfeld sees the inclusion of this term as further evidence that the epitaph from Zoar refers to a scholar of Torah. After all, he points out, the Palestinian Targumim, which like the epitaph are in Aramaic, on occasion render Hebrew *hakham* as “Torah scholar.”³⁴

It could be maintained that Rosenfeld’s argument is circular, based on a presumption that the extensive use of the term “rabbi” in Talmudic sources to refer to a scholar of Torah predetermines the associations he assigns to “epigraphical rabbis.” The same cannot be said of the effort of Fergus Millar, who is sensitive to this point and offers a rationale for starting with the presumption that epigraphical and literary rabbis are the same. Millar turns at least one, central question that has preoccupied scholars on its head. Instead of asking how Talmudic sources inform our understanding of the synagogue, Millar suggests that we ask what synagogue finds tell us *about the Rabbis*. Millar goes further, however, forcefully arguing that we could make the case

33 תנוה נפשה דרבי סימון בירבי דמית יום ארבעתה בתלתה יומין בירח אדר בשתה שביעיתה דשמטתה דהי שנת תלת מאון ותמנין וחמש שנין לאחרבן בית מקדשה ינוה חכם בשלום יתעורר לקול משמיע שלום. See J. Naveh, “Sheva’ Mazevot Hādashot Mi-Zo’ar”, *Tarbiz* 69 (2001), 622 (Hebrew). For “one who heralds wellbeing” see Isaiah 52:7 and Nahum 2:1 and cf. Naveh, 620 f.

34 See Rosenfeld, “The Title Rabbi in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine: Revisited”, 245–251, who points out that this is especially true of Targum Neofiti and cites (249, n. 58), S. A. Kaufman and M. Sokoloff, *A Key-Word in-Context Concordance to Targum Neofiti: A Guide to the Complete Palestinian Aramaic Text of the Torah* (Baltimore, 1993), 539 f. In my review of some of the relevant passages, I found that more often Targum Neofiti uses Aramaic forms derived from *h/k/m* alongside expressions that suggest an association with the teaching of Torah. See Targum Neofiti to Numbers 12:16 and 24:6, and especially Deuteronomy 32:29, where the Hebrew reads: לֹא חָכְמוּ יִשְׁכְּלִי, which the Targum Neofiti renders: אֵילֹ חַכְמוּ אֵילֹ הוּא חֲכִימִין הוּן מִסְתַּכְלִין בְּאוֹרֵייתָא. ישראל וילפון אורית. Cf. Pseudo Jonathan: באורייתא באורייתא 438–441 and discussion below. *Sages and Commoners in Late Antiquity Erez Israel*, 438–441 and discussion below.

that the rabbis *were* marginal if indeed they did *not* appear at all in the epigraphic evidence. Millar's words are worth considering:³⁵

If the inscriptions from Late Antique Palestine, as the most direct means of access which we have to the Jewish society of the period, were found to make no mention of rabbis, that would inevitably suggest either that rabbis were indeed wholly marginal to the communal life of ordinary Jews – or even that the representation of the rabbinic movement and of rabbinic authority is in some way a literary construct, which had no real place in the Palestine of the second to seventh centuries.

But alas the inscriptions do include the names of rabbis, allowing Millar to claim that scholars who do not start with the assumption that these epigraphical rabbis and the literary rabbis are one and the same flout a basic “empirical principle” – that we presume that terms have the same meaning when they are being used in the same society. Millar is essentially arguing that our starting position should be precisely what it was before Cohen came along and insisted that “archaeology is our only sure guide”, thereby severing the relationship between the rabbis we recognized from literary sources from those who bear the title in inscriptions.³⁶

Millar believes that the empirical evidence is staring us in the face and only by bringing other issues to the fore do we cloud the issue. He points out that the rabbis about whom we do know something, that is, the literary sages, were not office holders. They were not assigned religious posts similar to those of the “clerical hierarchy” in the Church. Certainly, the literary rabbis were not “synagogue-officials” who controlled the synagogues so there is no reason to begin with to expect synagogue inscriptions that refer to rabbis to tell us something more about their supposed authority. Moreover, on a much more basic, philological level, the inscriptions – whether in Greek, Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic, share with the literary rabbis not the common form *rav* meaning “master”, but *rabbi*, that is *rav* with the addition of the pronominal suffix. Just as *mar* consistently appears in Christian Syriac literature as *mari* and refers to “persons of sanctity or ecclesiastical rank”, so the Jews had transformed *rav* into a very specific and meaningful honorific.³⁷

Millar, like Hezser, maintains that the artwork and Greek ethos of Bet She'arim is hardly a problem, if only because the style and language of the inscriptions in which the “rabbis” appear were likely to have been determined by others. More importantly, he argues, what we have is exactly what you would expect to find in a bi- or multi-lingual society. But it is the Rabbi Eli'ezer

³⁵ Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, 257.

³⁶ See Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, 17.

³⁷ Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, 256–259.



Fig. 1: “This is the Study House of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar”, Basalt, Dabbura, Golan Heights (Courtesy of Steven Fine).

ha-Qappar inscription from Dabbura in the Golan, with its reference to the sage’s *beit midrash*, and the undeniably rabbinic narrative preserved in the Tel Reḥov column and floor that Millar believes are decisive, not merely for understanding the term “rabbi” in the fourth and later centuries when these inscriptions were written, but earlier as well.

Because the evidence from Dabbura and Tel Reḥov is critical to our assessment of all of the views presented here, we shall turn to it after considering some of the views of Hayim Lapin. His “reconsideration” of “epigraphical rabbis,” moves in the direction of Cohen’s original view, although he readily admits that “The question of how we understand the title *rabbi* in inscriptions is ... more complicated than Cohen left it in 1981 ...”³⁸ At the same time, Lapin sees himself as having a “fundamental methodological point of difference with Miller, Rosenfeld, and Millar.”³⁹ Lapin lumps these three scholars together despite the fact that they actually come to the topic from rather distinct vantage points and approaches, as already indicated. Whether or not his claim that the three of us “transfer the specific rabbinic meaning of *rabbi* or one of its variants onto epigraphic occurrences” is correct, his tendency is to do just the reverse, in starting – unreasonably as Millar (and I) would argue – with the assumption that epigraphical and literary rabbis are distinct and then proceeding not only to set the bar rather high for identifying the two but also to have rather extraordinary expectations of what “rabbis” would be expected to look like in inscriptions.

According to Lapin, in order to securely identify a specific rabbi known from an inscription with a named sage who appears in rabbinic literature,

³⁸ Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration”, 322. Lapin also says that at least one “pillar” of Cohen’s position has “fallen away”: the dating of epigraphical rabbis to the same period as the literary rabbis. But not everyone would agree with Lapin’s late dating of the relevant epitaphs from Beit Shearim and Jaffa. See below, nn. 43 and 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 317, n. 22.

there has to be some criteria “beyond coincidence of names”. Here Lapin is absolutely correct, even if this approach casts some doubt on whether we can safely identify individuals named in catacomb 20 at Bet She’arim with members of the family of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, as Rosenfeld, concludes. The same is true with Catacomb 14, usually considered the Patriarchal Tomb because inscriptions found therein bear the names Gamaliel, Simeon, and Hanina, which, so Avigad reasons, refer to two of R. Judah Ha-Nasi’s sons, and Ḥanina bar Hama, his prominent disciple-colleague.⁴⁰ Lapin could be correct that the names were common and that their occurrence in the epitaphs could, therefore, easily be coincidental. There is no way to be certain. The Rabbi Eli’ezer ha-Qappar inscription from Dabbura is a whole other matter, one that we shall soon consider.

It is when Lapin asserts that we not “harmonize two bodies of data,” i.e., literary and epigraphic, in order to establish a connection, not with specific rabbis but with the rabbinic movement, that he may be misreading how others have viewed the evidence. To be sure, the last half century of Biblical and Talmudic studies has seen a reaction to the harmonization of conflicting sources, and there certainly is no going back now. This is especially true when we are dealing with literary texts. The hermeneutical issues posed by material finds, in particular how they are to be understood in light of extant literary sources, is, however, a whole other challenge, one that scholars, as indicated by the subject of this very conference, are grappling with anew.

With regard to epigraphical rabbis and Talmudic sources, what is required is not “harmonization” but a reasonable approach to reading what amount to two forms of writing in light of each other. Epigraphy is another, arguably distinct, dimension of the inquiry into the interpretation of material finds, one that calls for creative and defensible “intertextual” readings in which relevant inscriptions, which are more akin to “texts” than to other material finds, and literary sources are understood in light of each other. Inscriptions “speak” in a manner very different than material finds because they give “voice” to someone’s intentions, very much like literature does.⁴¹ Inscriptions enhance what we know from literary texts by filling in the gaps, oftentimes, by providing names of unknown consuls, governors, “leading men”, priests, and other persons who someone thought deserved to be honored.⁴² This undoubtedly is one

⁴⁰ See above, n. 22.

⁴¹ On the “voice” of inscriptions, see Bodel, “Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian”, 15–19. On their similarity to literature, see Bodel, 41–45 and F. Millar, “Epigraphy”, M. Crawford, *Sources for Ancient History* (Cambridge, 1983), 98–110.

⁴² See O. Salomies, “Names and Identities: Onomastics and Prosopography”, Bodel, ed., *Epigraphic Evidence*, 87–91.

reason why the original tendency was to view epigraphical rabbis from a purely prosopographic point of view and consider them as extensions of the rabbinic movement. A better reason to do so, is that when the ancient inscriptions "speak" and they are studied in light of *other*, roughly contemporaneous literary sources, they are likely to share some consistency in linguistic usage and meaning even after differences in nuances caused by chronological and regional differences are taken into account.⁴³

Lapin, however, insists that inscriptions "reflect different social settings and relationships from those of our literary texts", which is why he raises the issue of harmonization. This assumption, while correct, does not automatically rule out some consistency in usage between the two sets of evidence. Moreover, as I have argued in the case of ancient synagogue art, the world of the rabbis and that reflected in the synagogues were not altogether distinct. That is, it is unnecessary and, indeed, oftentimes counterintuitive to draw sharp lines between the "social settings" of literary texts and those of inscriptions. While inscriptions may "speak" to us very differently than other material finds, linguistic usage has a complexity *as well as a uniformity* that often transcends borders presumed to demarcate well-defined "social settings."

The rejection of the prospect that the rabbis of the inscriptions were "Rabbis", needs to be based upon some compelling reasoning, if not hard evidence. Lapin insists that we examine the inscriptions without preconditions. Yet he brings his own presuppositions into consideration, and these are less persuasive than what we already know from the texts: that a "rabbi" was usually a teacher of Torah. Lapin repeatedly argues that the inscriptions do not provide any indication that the rabbis (either literary or epigraphical) were "office holders." He looks for indications of a "specific communal function or rank" in the inscriptions in Hebrew or Greek from Beit Shearim that mention a rabbi.

⁴³ See my discussion above of Rosenfeld's argument concerning the use of "rabbi" in the environs of Sepphoris. On the importance of the local character of inscriptions for the history of nomenclature, see Millar, "Epigraphy", 91. I maintained elsewhere (most recently in *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 429) that one possible reason we have no overlap between the epigraphical rabbis and the literary sages is because most of the former belong to synagogue inscriptions, which are from a later period. Lapin, "Epigraphical Rabbi: A Reconsideration", 320–322, wishes to place *all* of the epigraphical rabbis out of bounds by dating most of the relevant epitaphs from Beit Shearim no earlier than the fourth century and those from Jaffa even later. See below, n. 86. While the dating of the Bet Shearim and Jaffa inscriptions is debatable, I would in any event maintain that where linguistic usage is concerned, we have enough of an overlap time-wise. That is, many of the inscriptions are at least close enough chronologically to the amoraic period. Moreover, the inscriptions are largely from 'Erez Israel, where there is less likelihood of great differences in meaning in usage, even where distinct regions are concerned (i.e., Judah, Galilee, Golan, etc.).

“Nothing in the inscriptions links the title to offices”, he asserts, noting that the number of references to rabbis in inscriptions exceeds by far what we would expect for official appointments.⁴⁴ But beginning with the premise that the holding of an office is what we would expect if these were *real* Rabbis is a rather arbitrary assumption. After all, rabbinic texts do not make this a usual characteristic of one who bore the title “rabbi”, as Millar has pointed out. The literary rabbis on occasion do refer to the “appointment” (*minnuy*) of a rabbi to what often appears to be a judicial role, perhaps even in behalf of the patriarchal house, but the position intended usually does not extend beyond the “rabbinic” orbit, a point Lapin himself, now surprisingly, made in an earlier article.⁴⁵ The titles that went with some of these appointments, such as *zaqen* (“elder”) or *hakham* (see below), appear to have been *internal* modes of recognition of a rabbi’s level of Torah knowledge, which might entitle him to judge but did not denote an official, communal or civic responsibility.⁴⁶ Hezser has maintained that whatever judging the rabbis did was largely for followers who were willing to abide by their decisions – an observation made also by Lapin in the article alluded to above!⁴⁷ In short, literary rabbis evaluated themselves and others *within their circles* by one’s degree of knowledge of the

⁴⁴ Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration”, 316 and 329. The one exception might be an inscription believed to be from the Jerusalem area that has been reconstructed to read: “Rabbi Samuel, the Phrygian *archisynagogos*”, but we are obviously dealing with an office held in a Diasporan community. See Lapin, 341 and Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, 6 and 14.

⁴⁵ See H. Lapin “Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco Roman Environment”, P. Schäfer, C. Hezser, eds., *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* (Tübingen, 2000), 59–65. Lapin, 60, points out that the notice in *y. Hagigah* 1, 76c–d (= *y. Nedarim* 10, 42b) that the early third-century *amora*, R. Joshua ben Levi, relied on his own authority to appoint all his disciples to judicial positions, did not imply “official status with respect to the urban government.” He further states (62), “... the localized traditions about ‘appointments’ are problematic, but they do not appear to reflect unambiguous institutional structures (such as offices [emphasis mine] or statuses, or the power to confer ‘appointment’).” See below, n. 47.

⁴⁶ One possible exception to the rule is the position of the *parnas*. This appears to have been a communal office to which some Rabbis evidently were appointed. See Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 87 and especially S. D. Fraade, “Local Jewish Leadership in Roman Palestine: The Case of the *Parnas* in Early Rabbinic Sources in Light of Extra-Rabbinic Evidence”, reprinted in idem, *Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages* (Leiden, 2011), 555–576.

⁴⁷ On the entire matter, see Hezser’s convincing presentation, cited in the previous note, esp. 93, n. 82. Lapin’s view appears in “Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco-Roman Environment”, 63, where he asserts, “... the phenomenon of rabbis judging does not appear to be connected to any clear institutional structures, and is perhaps better understood as a role that rabbis played *primarily for adherents* [emphasis mine] much as pagan or Christian holy or influential men might have done in roughly the same period.”

Torah. *Their* measure of a “rabbi” – including his readiness for a *minnuy* – was Torah knowledge. And this is the *only* measure of a “rabbi” of any type that we can be certain of!

Indeed, the types of information and honorifics found in inscriptions give us little if any reason to even expect an allusion to the “office” of a rabbi. The well known synagogue inscription from Khirbet Susiya is a case in point. In this, admittedly late (Byzantine?) inscription we hear “Remembered for good the holiness of (*qedushat*) *Mari* Rabbi Isi the honorable (*mekhubbad*), the priest, *beribbi*.” There is also a reference to his son, “Rabbi Yoḥanan, the priest, the scribe *beribbi*.” Certainly the designations *kohen* (“priest”) and *sofer* (“scribe”) have their usual, specific meaning here and are not empty titles.⁴⁸ The same is true of *beribbi*, which I have argued at length elsewhere, refers to exceptional scholars in literary sources, for example, the mid-second century *tanna* R. Yose ben Ḥalafta of Sepphoris.⁴⁹ The inscription itself acknowledges R. Isi for his construction (‘*asah*, “making”) of the mosaic and for plastering the walls for which he apparently pledged funds at a feast, perhaps in celebration of the wedding of his son, Rabbi Yoḥanan. R. Isi’s son may be otherwise responsible for the formulation of the inscription itself. If so, he may have decided precisely how he wanted his honorable father to be remembered.⁵⁰

No doubt *mekhubbad* is meant to describe R. Isi’s character, as is *qedushat*, which is often used to refer to the piety often associated with teachers of Torah.⁵¹ Of the remaining titles, that is, *mari* (“my master”) and *rabbi*, the former, as Millar has noted, is usual, as we have seen, in Christian Syriac texts, where it is a meaningful honorific. Rosenfeld suggests that *mari rabbi*

⁴⁸ See Miller, “The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue”, 62 and 68, n. 48.

⁴⁹ My most extensive discussion of the meaning of *beribbi/berabbi* is in *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 443 f.

⁵⁰ The entire inscription, which can be found in J. Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Jerusalem, 1978), reads as follows:

זכור לטובה קדושת מרי רבי
איסי הכהן המכובד בירבי שעשה
הפסיפוס הזה וטח את כותליו
בסיד מה שנתנדב במשתה
רבי יוחנן הכהן הסופר בירבי
בנו שלום על ישראל אמן

Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, 266. considers the possibility that the feast was in honor of R. Yoḥanan’s wedding, but he points out that the notice about R. Yoḥanan, which is on a separate line and may be read independently of the previous line, may simply indicate he is the author of the inscription. On the *mishteh* as a wedding feast, See Naveh, 116.

⁵¹ See discussion below, p. 28.

Isi should be understood as “My Master, the sage *Isi*.”⁵² Millar prefers that the term *mari*, which is grammatically so similar to *rabbi*, also be stripped of its possessive sense and understood simply as “master”. Accordingly, R. *Isi* would be titled “Master” (*mari*) and “(Torah) Sage” (*rabbi*).⁵³ There is an alternative where these seemingly repetitious terms are concerned: Rather than see *mari* and *rabbi* as synonyms, I would suggest that the two terms have a distinct connotation. Accordingly, “master”, in keeping with its contemporaneous meaning in Syriac, serves as acknowledgment of the ecclesiastical role (but not necessarily a specific “office”) for which teachers of Torah, that is, “rabbis”, were eventually, like Christian “holy men”, recognized in Late Antiquity. In the final analysis, this inscription provides insight into how one very honorable “Master-Rabbi” was remembered for his contribution to a synagogue. Providing him an “official communal function” would not have made him any more of a “rabbi.”

Interestingly, Lapin also wonders whether we should expect epigraphical rabbis, assuming they *are* unconnected with the Rabbis, to have been officials or appointees of some sort. Thus he asks whether, at least in the case of catacomb 20 in Beit Shearim, with its many *rabbi* inscriptions and Hebrew onomasticon, the title *rabbi* might connote that the interred person was an officeholder, *as opposed to a teacher of Torah*. Here, curiously, he finds some support in *y. Bikkurim*, 3, 65d, where we hear of “those appointed for money”, which Lapin understands to be an allusion to “a class of people appointed to functions or tasks who insist on the title (or at least the greeting) *rabbi*, to the displeasure of Rabbis.”⁵⁴ It is all too easy – and tempting – however, to read too much into this passage. As I have attempted to show elsewhere and will further elaborate below, “those appointed for money” appear to be an internal issue, one that revolved around status *within* the rabbinic movement and the undue acknowledgment – and “appointments” – that some rabbis or their disciples received on account of their wealth.⁵⁵ No matter, since Lapin is forced in the end to conclude that there really is no evidence that the epigraphical rabbis at Beit Shearim held *communal* offices (any more than literary rabbis) and the most that can be said is that the title *rabbi* ran in families and its use in

52 B. Z. Rosenfeld, “The Inscription of Rabbi Isi Ha-Cohen from the Synagogue of Susiya”, *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 14 (2005), 171 (Hebrew).

53 Millar renders “(my) Master Rabbi Ise [*sic*]” and then explains that the “my” can be dropped altogether. See Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, 259 and 266.

54 Lapin, *Epigraphical Rabbis: “A Reconsideration”*, 327.

55 See Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 435–442 and discussion below.

epitaphs "may reflect nothing more than family preference and self-perceived rank."⁵⁶

The one thing that all who have studied "epigraphical rabbis" admit is the importance of the ca. fourth century inscription from Dabbura and the "halakhic inscription" from Tel Reḥov, found in two versions, the earlier, ca. fifth century, on a column, and the somewhat later second one, in a mosaic. The Dabbura inscription appears on a door lintel and expressly declares "This is the *beit midrash* of Rabbi Eli'ezer ha-Qappar."⁵⁷ The lengthy inscription from Tel Reḥov deals with *halakhot* pertaining to the Land known to us in similar formulation from tannaitic and amoraic sources.⁵⁸ There is nearly universal agreement that these inscriptions are "Rabbinic" in the usual sense, even if there is continued debate as to their implications for understanding "epigraphical rabbis" and their relationship to literary sages.

The difficulty in identifying the Rabbi Eli'ezer ha-Qappar of the Daburra inscription with the *tanna* by that name was made clear already by Cohen, who questioned whether Rabbi Eli'ezer, a late second- early third-century sage, was likely to have had any connection to the Golan, a region not usually associated with the *tannaim*.⁵⁹ This was subsequently addressed by Dan Urman who noted that R. Hoshaya Rabbah, a disciple of the literary R. Eli'ezer/ Eleazar ha-Qappar, is known to have been connected with Qisrin, usually

56 See Lapin, "Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration", 329, where he notes that one "rabbi" in Catacomb 20 in Beit Shearim was only seventeen years old. Our modern tendency to see the title "rabbi" as a title one is awarded after a period of learning in a seminary, much as a doctorate is awarded after a course of study and proven research capability at a university, may be what surprises us about the assigning of the title to someone so young. The title was more informally assigned in antiquity which is precisely why "those appointed for money" posed a problem for the rabbis and why a seventeen year old may have been acknowledged for some degree of expertise in Torah. Still, in the modern world, there certainly have been a good number of outstanding but very young men who reportedly were "ordained" by their mentors. But that is precisely the point – we are dealing here with non-institutionalized, informal arrangements. For more on the youthful "rabbi" from Catacomb 20 see Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 433 f., n. 121. See too my discussion of the nature of the rabbinic "movement", below. And, of course, there is the legendary sixteen year old (*Bavli*: eighteen) Rabbi Eleazar ber Azariah in talmudic sources, see *y. Berakhot* 4, 7d and *b. Berakhot* 28a.

57 See R. C. Gregg and D. Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and Other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* (Atlanta, 1996), 129.

58 Discussed in greater detail, below.

59 Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis", 11. R. Eli'ezer/ Eleazar ha-Qappar is usually thought to be the father of Bar Qappara, although some have thought the two were identical. See H. L. Strack and G. Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. M. Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 88 f.

thought to be Caesarea Maritima, but identified by Urman, as Qisrin/Qatsrin in the Golan, a village situated some eight kilometers to the southeast of Dabbura. If R. Eli'ezer ha-Qappar was located in Dabbura, this would have made R. Hoshaya's visits to see or study with his mentor all that much easier.⁶⁰

Once it was determined that the lintel on which the inscription from Daburra was engraved is likely to belong to a structure from around the fourth century, and not from the tannaitic period, Urman's explanation seemed untenable. More recently, Zeev Safrai has suggested that the lintel was the work of disciples of R. Eli'ezer who, like Christians who venerated their saints, wished to perpetuate the memory of their mentor by fostering his mode of study in a *beit midrash* named after him.⁶¹ Steven Fine, picking up on Safrai's suggestion, more recently has called the inscription both "pseudepigraphic" and "hagiographic." Fine furthermore maintains that my assessment of the *mishmarot* ("priestly courses"), supports this possibility inasmuch as I argue that the plaques upon which the priestly course names are preserved were intended to invoke the memory of the Temple and especially its personnel, thereby keeping alive the hope of a future restoration and redemption.⁶² As the Jews entered Late Antiquity, they, in like manner to their Christian neighbors, appropriated the Holy Land by associating specific places either with Biblical

60 D. Urman, "The Location of the Battei Midrash of Bar Qappara and Rabbi Hoshaya the Great", M. Stern, *Nation and History: Studies in the History of the Jewish People* (Jerusalem, 1983), 163–172 (Hebrew). Cf. Gregg and Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christian in the Golan Heights*, 129 and 308. In his, "Jewish Inscriptions from the Period of the Mishnah and the Talmud in the Region of Qazrin in the Golan", 542–544 (Hebrew), Urman claims that a Rabbi Abun in an epitaph from Qisrin is to be identified with a rabbinic figure belonging to the fourth century, who, according to the Zohar (!), *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, Ruth, 29a, had spent his life in Qisrin in the Golan (as opposed to Caesarea Maritima). Aside from the question of the dating of the inscription, Urman's argument is forced. Moreover, the Zohar frequently gets geographic information confused. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (reprinted, New York: Schocken, 1971), 168–170; and especially idem, "Questions regarding Zohar Criticism arising from its Knowledge of the Land of Israel", *Me'assef Ziyyon* 1 (1926), 40–55 (Hebrew). Cf. S. S. Miller, "Sepphoris and the Diaspora: The Ongoing Influence of a Galilean Talmudic Center", I. Gafni, ed., *Center and Diaspora: The Land of Israel and the Diaspora in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Periods* (Jerusalem, 2004), 202 f. (Hebrew).

61 Z. Safrai, *The Missing Century, Palestine in the Fifth Century, Growth and Decline* (Leuven, 1998), 64.

62 See S. S. Miller, "Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Galilee", H. W. Attridge, D. B. Martin, J. Zangenber, eds., *Religion, Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition*, (Tübingen, 2007), 386–394 and, more forcefully argued, in my forthcoming *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee*. It should be noted that the *mishmarot* are also preserved in an inscription in the Tel Rehov synagogue.

figures or with holy/cultic personnel from their past. That a "rabbinized geography," to borrow Fine's terminology, existed really is not surprising.⁶³

But whether or not R. Eli'ezer is the figure known to us from Talmudic sources is actually less important than the uncontested fact that he is associated with an institution known to us only from the literary rabbis. The *beit midrash* is a quintessential *Rabbinic* institution, one in which sages of the Talmudic writings engage in the process of *derash/darash*, that is, the inquiry into and exposition of, first and foremost, *the Torah*.⁶⁴ This remains true whether R. Eli'ezer ha-Qappar is to be identified with an earlier *tanna* of the same name or whether he is some other renowned sage worthy of having a *beit midrash* named after him. It is his association with the *beit midrash* that makes this epigraphical rabbi, undeniably a Teacher of Torah, equivalent to a literary rabbi.⁶⁵

If the inscription from Dabbura is not convincing enough, that from Tel Rehov certainly is. Here we have a text that appears to have been adapted from *Sifre Deuteronomy* 51, *Tosefta Shevi'it* 4, *y. Demai* 2, 22c–d, and *y. Shevi'it* 6, 36c, or at least belongs to the same literary tradition. The parallel with the *Tosefta* reproduces (*t. Shevi'it* 4:6) the statement "Rabbi permitted Kefar tsemah,"⁶⁶ leaving the impression that people in Late Antiquity would have been familiar with who "Rabbi," i.e. Judah ha-Nasi was. More crucially the inscription also adds to the parallel to the *Yerushalmi* the assertion that "Our

63 Steven Fine, *Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity* (Leiden, 2013), 123–37. Cf. S. Fine, "'Their Faces Shine with the Brightness of the Firmament': Study Houses and Synagogues in the Targumim to the Pentateuch", in *Biblical Translation in Context* (ed. F. W. Knobloch; Bethesda, MD., 2002), 74. Cf. my discussion of "Mary and Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi at Sepphoris: Christian and Jewish Appropriation of the 'Ornament of all Galilee'", in preparation. See too, Millar, "Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine", 264 and Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 428 f., esp. n. 103. Lapin, "Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration", seems to be onto a similar understanding when he suggests that "late antique rabbinic circles created meeting places and invented histories for them that link them to earlier antecedents." He does not, however, take this any further nor does he consider earlier suggestions along the same lines.

64 On the meaning and application of Hebrew *darash*/Aramaic *derash* in rabbinic sources from Talmudic Palestine, see Miller, Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 234–263, where I demonstrate that these terms were especially used in the *Yerushalmi* with a rabbinic setting or audience in mind.

65 Fine too drives home this point in his forthcoming, "'Epigraphical Rabbis' and their Study Houses in Late Antique Palestine: Another Look." Cf. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 428 f.

66 ורבי ה'יתיר כפר צמח. The text can be found in Y. Sussmann, "A Halakhic Inscription from the Beit Shean Valley", *Tarbiz* 43 (1974), 159 (Hebrew).

rabbis are suspicious of it.”⁶⁷ Unfortunately the inscription does not elaborate who precisely “our rabbis” (*rabboteinu*) were supposed to be. Millar suggests that they are “rabbis” associated with the Rehov community contemporaneous with the inscription(s). Alternatively, he proposes that there was another, rabbinic text in circulation which had this formulation.⁶⁸ There is perhaps a third possibility. Although *rabboteinu* is used to refer to a specific group of rabbis in Talmudic times,⁶⁹ perhaps here it is a reference to or projection onto sages of Torah who carried on for those who preceded them in the actual texts – that is, the inscription is asserting that “Rabbis of today” (i.e., *rabboteinu*) have their doubts on the matter at hand *just as their predecessors did*. In any event, Millar concludes that “It was a free choice on the part of the Rehov community or of someone associated with it, to make a selection of “rabbinic” texts on the topic of tithing and the Sabbatical year, to include in it references to “Rabbi” ... and to ‘our rabbis’ and to set the whole text in the mosaic floor at the entrance to the synagogue.”⁷⁰ That certainly is significant – and incontrovertible.

Even Lapin concedes that the Rabbi Eli’ezer ha-Qappar of the Dabbura lintel is connected with a Rabbinic institution and that the inscription from Tel Rehov “reflects the existence and literary tradition of the rabbinic movement, *as may other inscriptions* [emphasis mine].”⁷¹ But he apparently only has in mind contemporaneous inscriptions that suggest that the rabbis only became “visible” beyond rabbinic texts in the fourth century and beyond. It is only then that some epigraphical rabbis may line up with what would comprise the rabbinic movement. Until then, the (literary) rabbis “remain only minimally visible in the epigraphic and archaeological record among other later antique Jewish men who may have shared broadly similar conventions of nomenclature and of commemoration and benefaction.”⁷² In arriving at this conclusion, Lapin, who has devoted so much of his research to explaining how the rabbis constituted an urban elite in the Roman period, would *appear* to be conforming to the now rigorously challenged view that the rabbinic *movement* only emerged once the Roman Empire became Christianized.⁷³ To

67 חוששין לו רבותינו

68 Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, 276.

69 Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 412–414.

70 Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, 277.

71 Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis, A Reconsideration”, 332.

72 Ibid.

73 See Lapin, “The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement in the Land of Israel”, 224, where he alludes to the role of Christianization. Cf. my critique of this view in S. S. Miller, “Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society: Belayche’s

be sure, Lapin, unlike those who maintain this view does contend, “By some time in the third century, if not before, it is possible to talk about a rabbinic movement.”⁷⁴ However, it is clear that the movement he has in mind is not yet as “visible” or as institutionalized as it would become in the next century.⁷⁵ Perhaps our perception of “movement” is what is in need of clarification, or, at least, qualification, a thought to which I shall return.

One thing about which there may very well be consensus is that the meaning and usage of the term “rav/rabbi” evolved since Second Temple times and that sometime in the first century CE it occasionally functioned as a form of address with the connotation “teacher” on top of its more basic meaning of “master” or even “sir.”⁷⁶ The use of the term as a title introducing a name (“Rabbi X”) certainly takes hold in early rabbinic circles of the tannaitic period

Iudaea Palaestina, Schwartz’s *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, and Boyarin’s *Border Lines Reconsidered*,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 31.2 (2007), 1–34. Cf. Schremer, “The Religious Orientation of Non-Rabbis in Second-Century Palestine: A Rabbinic Perspective,” 339–341. Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration”, 331 f., maintains that this new visibility of the rabbis in the material “environment” beginning with the fourth century argues against those who maintain that the Rabbis were in decline at this time rather than on the rise. Lapin is clearly not as extreme as others who insist on the insignificance of rabbinic circles earlier on. It is the rabbinic *movement*, which he believes becomes institutionalized and perhaps more ubiquitous in the fourth century, now including the villages of the countryside. This fits his rejection of the view, heard of late, that the priests replaced the Rabbis in “social importance” in Late Antiquity. I totally concur with Lapin on this last point, even if I see the rabbinic movement as having emerged earlier, and, therefore, as being quite “visible” in the third century. See further discussion below. On the priests in Late Antiquity see my, “Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Galilee”, which has been revised, corrected, and expanded in my forthcoming, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee*.

⁷⁴ Lapin, “The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement in the Land of Israel”, 218.

⁷⁵ Seth Schwartz too agrees that if any adherents to Judaism survived after 135 CE, it would have been the rabbis, but he regards their importance – and their number – during this period as extremely negligible. See S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton, 2001), 12, 129. Cf. Miller, “Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society”, 338.

⁷⁶ For bibliography, see my, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 432 f., n. 120. H. Lapin, “Rabbi”, D. N. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols., New York, 1992), 5:601 f., is a bit hesitant to assign the meaning “teacher” to *rabbi* in the New Testament, but concludes, nevertheless, “The semantic shift from ‘sir’ to ‘teacher’ that is reflected in rabbinic literature has left traces in those NT passages in which *rabbi*, used of Jesus because of his greatness, is overlaid with the predominant sense of ‘teacher’”. Cf. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 55–62 who discusses (61 f.) the use of διδάσκαλος in relationship to “rabbi” and Jesus in the Gospels and states (59) that “rabbi” is used in the New Testament as “an informal address of charismatic teachers.”

and eventually finds its way into inscriptions.⁷⁷ Lapin has documented a few instances in tannaitic literature in which “rabbi” is a way of respectfully addressing a judge or even a king.⁷⁸ However, there can be no denying that the predominant use of “rabbi” in all of Talmudic literature, as Rosenfeld has shown, is to designate a “Torah scholar.”⁷⁹

The following passage, *t. Baba Metsi’a* 2:30, suggests that the rabbis were conscious of the semantic relationship of “rabbi” to the term *rav*, and points to a transformation in meaning that was evidently already well underway in the tannaitic period:⁸⁰

- A. Who is “his master” [*rabbo*]? – His master who taught him Torah, but not his master who taught him a craft.
- B. And who is this [master]?⁸¹ – His master who taught him, and showed him the way [in Torah] at the outset.
- C. R. Meir says, “His master who taught him wisdom [*hokhmah*], but not his master who [only] taught Scripture [*miqra*].”
- D. R. Judah says, “Anyone from whom one has gained the bulk of his [theoretical] knowledge [*talmudo*].”
- E. R. Yusak [Yose] says, “Anyone who enlightened him with his [knowledge of] oral Torah [*mishnato*].”

Both here and in the Mishnaic parallel (*m. Baba Metsi’a* 2:11) the lead-up discussion (*t. Baba Metsi’a* 2:10) proclaims that one is to return a lost object belonging to one’s “master” (*rabbo*) before returning one that belongs to one’s

⁷⁷ When precisely the term appears followed by a name in inscriptions depends on one’s dating of the epigraphic finds. See, discussion below and nn. 43 and 86. Two inscriptions on ossuaries discovered in the vicinity of Jerusalem that were thought to have been early have since been discounted as evidence altogether. See Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration”, 319 and cf. Rosenfeld, “The Title Rabbi in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine: Revisited”, 239 f.

⁷⁸ Lapin, “Rabbi”.

⁷⁹ Rosenfeld, “The Title Rabbi in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine: Revisited”, 239 f. Cf. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 122 and *passim*. For an explicit tannaitic attempt to define “rabbi” as a form of address for a teacher who has disciples, see *t. ’Eduyot* 3:4.

⁸⁰ MS Vienna (Lieberman, 72) reads:

ואי זהו רבו רבו שלימדו תורה לא רבו שלימדו אומנות ואי זה זה רבו שלימדו ופתח לו תחלה ר' מאיר אומר רבו שלימדו חכמה לא רבו שלימדו מקרא ר' יהודה או' כל שרוב תלמודו ממנו ר' יוסה או' כל שהאיר עיניו במשנתו

⁸¹ *ואי זה זה רבו* is pleonastic. See the parallel at *y. Baba Metsi’a* 2, 8d, which attributes to R. Meir: “Who is the master who imparts wisdom [*hokhmah*]? Anyone who shows him the way at the outset.”

father ('*aviv*). Our passage obviously takes for granted (A) that *rav* can mean "master" of a craft, but quickly turns to the only type of *rav* who mattered in the eyes of the sages: the one who has mastered "Torah". This is more than just a distinction in the type of skill or knowledge acquired. It is the *transmission* of that skill or knowledge that now becomes essential to the definition of the "master." The latter is no longer someone who has acquired (or "masters") an expertise, but someone who *passes it on* to others and, in the case of the teacher of Torah, sets them on their path towards mastery (B). A *rav* has become a teacher who at the very least, according to Rabbi Meir (C), imparts (*limmed*) Scripture (*miqra*'), but, ideally, also conveys "wisdom" (*hokhmah*), i.e., the understanding of *both* written and oral Torah. It is he who is a true "master". According to Rabbi Judah (D), a "master" is someone who transmits the theoretical underpinning (*talmudo*), apparently of the oral Torah, while Rabbi Yusah (E) insists that one who conveys oral Torah itself (*mishnah*), qualifies as a *rav*.⁸²

Cohen correctly points out that this passage applies *rav* to a "master craftsman" and that *rabbi* is similarly used to refer to mastery of different profession, brigandry, in the well-known Babylonian account of the lowly origins of the third century Palestinian sage Resh Laqish in *b. Baba Metsia* 84a.⁸³ There Resh Laqish asserts that he was once called "my master" (*rabbi*), that is, when he associated with brigands, but now ("here", i.e., among the sages of Tiberias?) he is called "rabbi", an apparent allusion to his mastery of Torah.⁸⁴ Obviously we are dealing with a later stage (and likely geographical usage), when "my master", has already gained the connotation of a *teacher* of Torah. The formulator of the passage is possibly aware of the earlier sense of the term and that it had morphed into a designation for a different kind of "master". The point is well-taken: Resh Laqish *was* once a teacher of thieves; now he is a mentor to students of Torah. Not too much should be made of this ironic usage of *rabbi*. At most it reveals that in *Bavel*, as in *'Eretz Israel*, the older connotation continued to linger alongside the new, which, at least according to rabbinic sources, had completely engulfed it.⁸⁵

⁸² See in greater detail, Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 431 f., esp. n. 118.

⁸³ See S. J. D. Cohen, "The Rabbi in Second-Century Jewish Society," in W. Horbury, W. D. Davies, and J. Sturdy, eds., *The Early Roman Period*, vol. 3, *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge, 1999), 924.

⁸⁴ MS Vilna: הָתָם רַבִּי קָרוּ לִי הָכָא רַבִּי קָרוּ לִי.

⁸⁵ Cf. my discussion of *B. Baba' Metsia* 84a, in *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 432, n. 119.

Interestingly, none of the epitaphs from Beit Shearim, which are thought to be from the second to the fourth century CE, or those from Jaffa, from the second and third centuries CE,⁸⁶ or even the later synagogue dedicatory inscriptions associate “rabbi” with any craft or profession. As maintained above, there is no reason to expect that the inscriptions would reveal any local, communal office that the epigraphical rabbis might have held. However, should we not expect the older, generic connotation that rabbinic sources display limited, but definite, knowledge of to show its head? Indeed, if the term “rabbi” really continued to connote in Late Antiquity “mastery” of some craft or profession, would we not find at least a few inscriptions (from whichever period) that provide some hint, if not direct reference, to what that might be?

Instead, what we do have in the case of the epitaphs from Beit Shearim are Hebrew and Greek references to the piety or holiness (Hebrew *qadosh*, Greek *hosios*) of some of the interred “rabbis.”⁸⁷ While, there undoubtedly were other “holy men” in Roman Palestine, Jewish or otherwise, literary rabbis, like their epigraphic counterparts, were often characterized as “holy” (*qadosh*) – be they the *tanna* Rabbi Meir, who is referred to by Rabbi Yose ben Ḥalafta, as *’adam qadosh* (“holy man”), R. Yose himself, R. Judah Ha-Nasi, who was known as *rabbeinu ha-qadosh* (“our holy rabbi”), or, later, the *amora* R. Menaḥem ben Simai, who is called *qodesh qodashim* (“holy of holies”).⁸⁸ When R. Aḥa insists in *y. Mo’ed Qatan* 3, 81d, that an “elder” (*zaqen*) who forgets his learning through no fault of his own is treated with the sanctity [*qedushah*] of an ark of the Torah, we understand precisely why sanctity accrued to the ancient synagogue, *as well as* to the *beit midrash*. The ark, like the *rabbi*, is a repository and, therefore, likewise a *source* of Torah.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, 10. Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis, A Reconsideration”, 321 argues that most of the relevant inscriptions from Bet Shearim belong to the late fourth century and follows Hannah Cotton, who believes that the inscriptions from Jaffa date to the fifth and sixth centuries.

⁸⁷ Cf the “holiness of R. Isi” in the inscription from Khirbet Susiya, above.

⁸⁸ For sources, and fuller discussion, see Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, 434. On R. Yose ben Ḥalafta, see also, S. S. Miller, “New Perspectives on the History of Sepphoris”, E. M. Meyers, ed., *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, IND, 1999), 153 f.

⁸⁹ Cf. S. Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame IND, 1997), 67–72. A remarkable example of just how entrenched this idea would become by Late Antiquity is illustrated by the later reformulation of a story in *y. Kil’ayim* 9, 32b concerning the death of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi. Bar Qappara there hints at the death of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi stating, “Mortals and angels were grasping the tablets of the covenant, and the hands of the angels prevailed and snatched the tablets (*luḥot*).” Cf. the other Palestinian parallels in *y. Ketubot* 12, 35a and Qohelet Rabbah to Eccl. 7:11. In the parallel in the *Bavli*

Were the “holy rabbis” buried in Beit Shearim teachers of Torah? Talmudic sources, unlike the inscriptions, spell out for us and, therefore, leave no question as to what precisely a “rabbi” is – a teacher of Torah – and also how some rabbis came to be regarded as holy, which had everything to do with their dedication to Torah. Remarkably, these same writings provide little indication that the Rabbis were aware of the existence of other “rabbis”, holy or otherwise, who did not teach Torah, something we would expect them to have noticed and to have commented often upon. The single source that is often invoked as evidence that indeed the rabbis were aware of what they would have regarded as fake rabbis is the already alluded to passage from *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d. Although I have examined this passage elsewhere in detail, here I shall emphasize and elaborate a few pertinent points and use them to segue to my concluding observations about the identity of “epigraphical rabbis.”⁹⁰

- A. R. Mana denigrated those who were appointed for [their] money.
- B. R. Immi [Ammi] applied to them the verse “[... you shall not make any] gods of silver nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold” [NJPS Exodus 20:19].
- C. R. Josiah said, “And the mantle [*tallit*] that is upon him is like the saddlebag of an ass.”
- D. R. Shayan said, “One⁹¹ who is appointed for [their] money – we do not rise before them, and we do not call them ‘rabbi’. And the mantle that is upon him is like the saddlebag of an ass.”

(*b. Ketubot* 104a), Bar Qappara’s allusion to the death of the Nasi appears as, “Angels and upright mortals (*metuqim*) were holding on to the *holy ark* (*‘aron ha-qodesh*). The angels prevailed over the upright mortals and the holy ark was captured.” The substitution in the *Bavli* of *‘aron ha-qodesh* for the *tablets* [of the Law] found in the Palestinian versions drives home that the rabbi-patriarch had come to be thought of in terms of the Torah kept in the synagogue ark rather than as merely the embodiment of the *luhot* once deposited in the ark of the Temple. For a discussion of the Palestinian tradition, see S. S. Miller, *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sepphoris* (Leiden, 1984), 120–122. For the dependence of the version of the Babylonian Talmud on that of the *Yerushalmi*, see O. Meir, *Rabbi Judah the Patriarch: Palestinian and Babylonian Portrait of a Leader* (Tel-Aviv, 1999), esp. 303–305 and 329–333 (Hebrew).

90 The interested reader should consult my fuller treatment in *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Erez Israel*, 435–442. All passages from the Palestinian Talmud cited herein follow MS Leiden unless otherwise indicated. ר' מנא מיקיל לאילין דמיתמני בכסף ר' אימי קרא עליהון. אלהי כסף ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם אמ' ר' יאשיה וטלית שעליו כמרדעת שלחמור אמ' ר' שיינ זה שהוא מתמני בכסף אין עומדין מפניו ואין קורין אותו ר' והטלית שעליו כמרדעת שלחמור ר' זעירא וחד מן רבנן הוון יתיבין עבר חד מן אילין דמיתמני בכסף אמ' יתיה דמן רבנן לר' זעירא נעביד נפשו תני ולא ניקום לון מקומו תירגם יעקב איש כפר נבוריא הוי אומר לעץ הקיצה עורי לאבן דומם הוא יורה יודע הוא יורה הנה הוא תפוש זהב] וכסף לא בכספייא איתמני וכל רוח אין בקרבו לא חכים כלום הוי אומ' בעיתון ממנייה ולי' בהיכל קדשו הא ר' יצחק בר לעזר בכנישתא מדרתא דקיסרין.

91 *Midrash Samuel* 7 (ed. Buber, 34b), has instead: “An elder (*zaqen*) ...”

- E. R. Zeira and one of the *rabbanan* were sitting [together].
- F. Along came one of those who were appointed on account of [their] money.
- G. The one who belonged to the *rabbanin* said to R. Zeira, “Let us pretend that we are studying and let us not rise before him.”
- H. Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia rendered [*tirgem*, that is, each phrase in Habakkuk 2:19–20, as follows]:⁹²

“Ah, you who say, ‘Wake up’ to wood, ‘Awaken’ to inert stone! Can that [one] instruct [*yoreh*]?”⁹³

 - Does such a person know how to instruct [*yoreh*]?
 - “Why, it is encased in gold and silver.”
 - Was he not appointed for money [“silver”]?
 - “But there is no breath inside it.”
 - He is not knowledgeable [*ḥakkim*] at all. Yet you desire to appoint him!
 - “But the Lord is in His holy Temple [*be-hekhal qodsho*].”
 - Behold, R. Isaac bar [E]lazar [sits and teaches Torah] in the synagogue of the Rebellion [?] in Caesarea.”

This passage certainly conveys the impression that there were individuals who bore the title “rabbi,” but, at least in the eyes of those who considered themselves legitimate teachers of Torah – including R. Zeira and “one of the *rabbanin*” (E) as well as the rather controversial Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia (Nabratein) – did not deserve the title. The material leading up to this passage (y. *Bikkurim* 3, 65c) takes up the application of Leviticus 19:32, “You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old [*zaqen*].” The rabbis generalized standing (“rising”) out of respect when one is in the presence of an “elder/scholar” (*zaqen*) to others, including a *kohen gadol*, a *ḥaver*, a *nasi*, an *’av beit din* and a *ḥakham*. “*Zaqen*,” “*ḥaver*,” and “*ḥakham*,” are, as I have shown elsewhere, terms that represent the attainment of various levels or types of Torah knowledge among the rabbis.⁹⁴ The *kohen gadol* (“High Priest”), of course, belonged to another time, but that did not prevent the rabbis from seeing him in rabbinic terms. That is, they “rabbinize” this figure, who in

⁹² *Midrash Samuel* 7 adds “in the synagogue of the rebellion of Caesarea and the *rabbanin* praised him.”

⁹³ I follow the *New Jewish Publications Society* translation, (Philadelphia, 1985), translation here with the exception of the last phrase (“Can that one instruct?”). *New Jewish Publications Society* translates: “Can that give an oracle?” My translation suits the exegesis of Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia’s better.

⁹⁴ See *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, *Index of Foreign Terms*, 513–524, which includes page references for related phrases and terms, e.g. *ziquei* (*ha-*)Darom, *ḥav-rayya*, *ḥakkimei*, *ḥakkimayya*, etc.

reality drew his inspiration and instructions from the Torah, making him one of their own.⁹⁵ As for the two figures usually associated with the “patriarchal court”, to wit, its head, the *nasi*, and his associate, the *’av bet din*, in this context these are figures whom the rabbis very much regarded as belonging to *their* movement. As such, the *kohen gadol*, *Nasi*, and *’av bet din* are viewed as Torah scholars, at least implicitly.

Before taking this last point further and examining its implications, we need to turn to the central concern of the passage under discussion: “those who were appointed for money.” The tie-in with the preceding material is established at D with Rabbi Shayan’s assertion that “we do not rise before them and we do not call them ‘rabbi.’” It is apparent that all of the late third- and early fourth-century sages mentioned have a problem with “those who were appointed for money” and that the exegesis of Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia (H), which is otherwise independent of the comments at A–E and the story at E–G, establishes the underlying issue, i.e., the appointees’ lack of Torah knowledge *and*, perhaps most strikingly, their resulting inability to convey it.⁹⁶ Aside from the context of the larger *sugya*, which as we have seen, emphasizes respect for the attainment of Torah wisdom, the exegesis of Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia, with its stress on the ability to instruct (*yoreh*) and achieve knowledge (*hakim*), and, finally, its portrayal of a *rabbi*, Isaac bar Elazar, who serves as an exemplar of these attributes, drives the point home.

Scholars have taken the appointments alluded to here as references to offices that were beyond the rabbis’ purview. Gedaliah Alon, in particular, believed that “those who were appointed for money” were appointees of the patriarch who did not belong to Rabbinic circles.⁹⁷ Complicating matters, of course, is the fact that our passage is preceded by a discussion of the honor accorded to a *nasi* and to an *’av bet din* – as well as to a *hakham*, which not surprisingly, has been taken by some to mean an official, representative “Sage” belonging to the administration of the patriarchal court, a view that

⁹⁵ Compare how Moses would appear in late *midrashim* as “Moshe Rabbeinu” (also, much less frequently, “Moshe Ravkhem”, in *b. Shabbat* 89 and elsewhere) precisely because he is the conveyor of “Torah” *par excellence*. But even without referring to the High Priest as an actual rabbi, he, like some of the more revered kings and others from the biblical record are fully made over in the rabbinic image.

⁹⁶ All of this is made more explicit in the version found in Midrash Samuel 7. See my detailed discussion in *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, 439 f.

⁹⁷ G. Alon, “Those Appointed for Money: On the History of the Various Judicial Authorities in Eretz-Israel in the Talmudic Period”, *ibid.*, *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age*, 70–640 CE (G. Levi, trans., Cambridge, MA, 1989), 374–435, esp. 432. On appointments connected with the patriarchal house/court, see Lapin, “Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco Roman Environment”, 59 f.

was resoundingly rejected by Hugo Mantel years ago.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the use of the term “appointed” (*mitmannay*) in the phrase “those who were appointed for money” might still be taken as an allusion to the assigning of judicial offices in the patriarchal *court*.

Our passage, however, is followed immediately by a discussion of whether it is appropriate to “appoint” elders (*zeqenim*) beyond the borders of *’Eretz Israel*. In a sense, the *sugya* picks up where the earlier theme concerning the proper respect shown towards a *zaqen* and other Rabbinic figures (imaginary or otherwise) leaves off. There as well as here, the underlying subtext is that the one who has acquired Torah knowledge, as indicated by their various titles (*zaqen*, *ḥaver*, *ḥakham* or even *kohen gadol*!), deserves recognition. It is he who truly deserves the title “rabbi”. It is evident that the appointment intended in the discussion of one who has gone abroad is a *form of rabbinic* “ordination”.⁹⁹ Several figures named here bear the title “Rabbi” and/or are portrayed elsewhere engaging in halakhic deliberations.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that terms like *zaqen* and *ḥakkim* were gradations in *minnuy* that were below the highest level of “ordination”.¹⁰¹ In *y. Ta’anit* 4, 68a, we learn that R. Ḥanina bar Ḥama had offended Rabbi and, for that reason, the *Nasi* sends word to that sage that he appointed him *ḥakkim*, that is, rather than some more prestigious form of *minnuy*.¹⁰² Similarly, in *y. Mo’ed Qatan* 3, 81c, Bar Qappara has offended Rabbi, who responds by saying “I do not recognize you, *zaqen*!”¹⁰³

98 H. Mantel, *Studies in the History of the Sanhedrin* (Cambridge, 1961), 129–135. Cf. discussion of L. I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem and New York, 1989), 74–76 (which includes a discussion of *av beit din*) and H. Lapin, “Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco Roman Environment”, 61.

99 I am thinking in particular of Judah ben Titus and Simeon bar Vava (Abba), who are denied appointment, and perhaps the title “rabbi”, while they are abroad, yet both are associated with halakhic deliberations in other talmudic sources – where they also appear with the title. See Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, 441, esp. n. 148.

100 See the fuller discussion in Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, 441 f., esp. n. 148.

101 See esp. *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, 406 f. My work on the composition of the rabbinic movement drives home that not all teachers of Torah would have had the title “rabbi.” Cf. the earlier treatment in Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 113–119, and also 255–306, where she considers stratification within the rabbinic movement, something my research supports.

102 The parallel in *Qohelet Rabbah* 7:7 has Rabbi appoint Ḥanina *zaqen*, which is in line with the story about Bar Qappara. See ensuing discussion.

103 See Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique ’Erez Israel*, 406. David Fraenkel, *Qorban ha-’Edah* understand Rabbi’s words to Bar Qappara, אֲנִי מֵכִירְךָ זָקֵן, to mean that the *Nasi* was refusing to appoint the sage a *zaqen*. Freanckel apparently understands the response to mean “I do not recognize you as a *zaqen*.” See, however, Moshe Margaliot, *Penei Moshe*, *ad loc.*, who seems to understand the response more along the lines I am suggesting, although

Here again a rabbi is dressed down by the patriarch, who uses a lesser title when he addresses the sage. Ḥanina and Bar Qappara each realize from the manner in which he is addressed by the patriarch that "he would not be appointed/ordained in his [Rabbi's] lifetime."¹⁰⁴ But one had to be "appointed" *zaqen* or *ḥakkim*, as *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d (*zaqen*) and *y. Ta'anit* 4, 68a (*ḥakkim*) indicate, so these too are considered a type of honor! Indeed, *y. Megillah* 4, 75b, has R. Zeira declare with reference to *Rabbi Simeon safra de-Tarbenet*, whose method of teaching children (?) to read Torah he approved of, "Had this *safra* (teacher) lived in my day I would have appointed him *ḥakkim*."¹⁰⁵ Although the full sense of *minnuy* remains elusive to the modern reader, it is evident that there were various types and degrees of "ordination" that ordinarily did not gain one the title "rabbi" but rather were an acknowledgement that someone who already was being addressed by his followers as a rabbi was entitled to teach at more advanced levels of Torah or to adjudicate specific types of halakhic cases.¹⁰⁶

he explains that what Bar Qappara understood was that he would not be appointed "*ḥakham*". See too *b. Mo'ed Qatan* 16a, which has Rabbi say to Bar Qappara, "I have never known you" איני מכירך מעולם. Rabbi's insistence in the *Bavli* that he does not recognize Bar Qappara is similar to my reading of the *Yerushalmi*, which finds even greater support in the very similarly formulated account involving R. Ḥanina bar Ḥama in *y. Ta'anit* 4, 68a. Perhaps too the term *zaqen* in *y. Mo'ed Qatan* 3, 81c, is intended to carry the connotation of "old man" although this would not be consistent with the expression used in *y. Ta'anit* 4, 68a where *ḥakkim* does bear a technical sense. See next note.

104 In *y. Ta'anit* 4, 68a Rabbi tells Ḥanina that when he goes to Babylonia he should report to Rav Hamnuna that "I have appointed you a *ḥakkim*." The passage, following L. Ginzberg, *Ginzei Schechter* (3 vols., New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1928–1929), 1:427 reads: אמור ליה דהא מניתך חכים וידע דלא מתמני ביומי. The episode with Rabbi and Bar Qappara (and Bar 'El'asah) in *y. Mo'ed Qatan* 3, 81c reads:

אמ' ר' איני מכירך זקן וידע דלית הוא מתמניא ביומי

105 מניתיה חכים ספרא ביומי. See Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 166 and 405 f.

106 Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 90 f., similarly maintains that all those who reportedly received *minnuy* already were called "Rabbi." For different levels of Torah study, see *t. Baba Metsi'a* 2:30, which is discussed above. Much of the confusion surrounding the understanding of *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d, arises from the inclination of the modern reader to assume that "appointment" is identical to "ordination" in the formal, modern sense, and that "those appointed for money" were purchasing their rabbinical "position". Hezser notes that *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d is the single Palestinian text that uses the title "rabbi" in relation to appointments. According to Hezser, nowhere are forms of *m/n/h* used with reference to a "graduation", in other words, a ceremony marking the attainment of a full-fledged *semikhah* ("ordination"), which, she claims, in all likelihood did not exist. I agree with her assertion, p. 93 n. 82: "If מניי is seen as appointment to a public office rather than "ordination", the problem [why some rabbis were not "ordained"] becomes obsolete." (How-

Scholars further complicate matters when they view the patriarchal house and rabbinic circles as separate and distinct, when in reality their interests were closely intertwined.¹⁰⁷ While many of the prerogatives of the *Nasi* remain unclear, Talmudic sources assign to him many responsibilities that reflect the patriarchate's and rabbis' shared interests. These include: the declaring of fast days, the declaration and annulment of bans, the appointment of judges, the intercalation of the calendar, the overseeing of sundry communal activities and taxation, regulation of agricultural laws (e.g., tithing, sabbatical year, purity affecting the land), and even of laws that pertain to or involve women, including marital relations, divorce, and menstrual impurity.¹⁰⁸ From this list, it is difficult to see how anyone could conceive of patriarchal authority and rabbinic authority as independent of each other. So many of the interests of the rabbis and of the patriarchs dovetail and more importantly, are derived from the Torah, which is precisely why it is really difficult to sort out judicial appointments that were "rabbinic" from those that were "patriarchal". The sages themselves regard the *nesi'im* as rabbis in every sense of the word, which allows them to further perceive and portray the patriarchal house and "Sanhedrin" as rabbinic institutions.¹⁰⁹ To be sure, the rabbis single out individual *rabbi-nesi'im* for both approbation and criticism and some sages were more supportive of the patriarchate than others.¹¹⁰ But the fact remains that the rabbis recognized that patriarchal and rabbinic authority overlapped and coex-

ever, I would characterize *minnuy*, when it involved rabbis, as usually an appointment involving a specific responsibility or role rather than "a public office".) With this in mind, there is no need to read into *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d some form of bribery on the part of "those appointed for money" that landed them the title "rabbi". The phrase could easily be understood as an allusion to some obsequious partiality displayed at times *within* a loosely structured rabbinic movement that occasionally landed less well-versed rabbis who happened to be wealthy an appointment. These deficient rabbis, according to R. Shayan do not deserve to be called "rabbi" *in the first place* precisely because they were lacking (perhaps in some specific area related to their appointment?) knowledge of Torah.

107 Cf. Alon, "Those Appointed for Money", 375–377.

108 See L. Levine, "The Jewish Patriarch (Nasi) in Third Century Palestine", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.19:2 (1979), 663–676, from which this list has been adapted.

109 Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity*, 76–82 claims that the rabbis' use of the term "Sanhedrin" is "anachronistic". There was no such supreme council in the tannaitic period and when the third century CE Tiberian authorities, R. Yoḥanan and R. Eleazar, invoke the institution, they are really referring to their academy of Tiberias, to which they believed the authority of the Sanhedrin of old had been transferred.

110 See Levine, 676–680. See too my discussion of the sages' attitudes towards a priest attending the funeral of the *Nasi* in Miller, *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sephoris*, 116–120 and my forthcoming, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee*.

isted, so much so that they cannot regard the patriarchate separate from their world.¹¹¹

If I have digressed, it is only to drive home the point that "those who were appointed for money", are an *internal* matter that does not in any way point to the existence of "rabbis" in name only who came from *beyond* the world of the literary rabbis. The real issue that the rabbis are struggling with throughout this *sugya* (y. *Bikkurim* 3, 65c–d), as Seth Schwartz has recently demonstrated, is the dissonance created by the "totally merit-free *zaqen*" (or other appointees). How can one stand and show respect for such a person? But how can one not in view of Leviticus 19:32: "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old [*zaqen*]?" The successive anecdotes that are introduced all indicate the rabbis' thinking on the matter. In Schwartz's words, "The only thing ... that truly merits the deference or honor implicit in the act of rising is the Torah; humans who possess it, whether in the form of learning or in the form of *mitzvot*, are the ones who truly merit honor, regardless of their formal rank."¹¹²

Even if "those appointed for money" were patriarchal appointees, something the passage really does not indicate, the close connection between the patriarchate and the rabbinic movement and the alignment of their many Scripture-derived common interests suggests that, under normal circumstances in the amoraic period, both would have looked to scholars who possessed Torah, i.e., "Rabbis", when it came to making "appointments", at whatever level. Phony (from the literary rabbis' perspective) "rabbis" who knew not Torah, or who were considered deficient in Scriptural knowledge, were the exception and not the rule. The countryside was not teeming with "rabbis"

111 See especially y. *Sanhedrin* 1, 19a. There we hear R. [Ab]ba state that originally, meaning in the days of the *tannaim*, rabbis would ordain/appoint (*minah*) their own disciples. From the context, it is evident that the "appointment" was to take on various judicial responsibilities associated with a *beit din*. The continuation of the passage suggests that sometime towards the end of the tannaitic period it was decided that appointments that were made by a court (*beit din*) without the knowledge of the *Nasi* were invalid but those initiated by the *Nasi* without consent of the *beit din* were valid. Sometime later, it was decided ("they reverted") that neither the *Nasi* nor a *beit din* could make appointments without the approval of the other. Cf. Alon, "Those Appointed for Money", 401 f., and especially Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 89 f.

112 S. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?: Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton, 2009), 149–165. The quotes are from p. 164. See discussion of y. *Moed Qatan* 3, 81d, above. For a discussion of y. *Bikkurim* 5, 65c–d that takes up "expressions of visual veneration and deference" that appear therein, see Rachel Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2013). My thanks to Dr. Neis for sharing her interesting manuscript with me before publication.

who “were appointed for money” who, coincidentally all get buried in Jaffa or Bet She’arim, or who left their mark by making humongous donations to a local synagogue and were notably *not* Torah scholars.

This does not, however, mean that there were no distinctions between teachers of Torah. Cohen acknowledges that the connotation of *rav/rabbi* changed with time when he comments: “What is subject to dispute is the point at which the ambiguity [regarding the meaning of “rav”] was resolved and the unofficial or popular use of the term fell into desuetude.” As indicated above, there is still some dispute as to whether the common use of the term “rabbi” completely faded. But Cohen only sees two possibilities: the popular use and the official one by Talmudic rabbis who “helped to write the literature and shape the Judaism we call Rabbinic.”¹¹³ This is precisely the problem: Cohen and those who followed in his footsteps are looking for an overly exact “Talmudic scholar” when in reality what is more probable is a loose network of teachers of Torah who shared a common “R/rabbinic” interest in applying the Torah to daily life.¹¹⁴

Cohen, Hezser, and others have actually zeroed in on the underlying dynamic that is responsible for our present day confusion: The title “rabbi” was not regulated by anybody.¹¹⁵ Rather, it was an informal title that was applied, at the earliest sage, to a “master” of any craft or profession who was so acknowledged and addressed by his apprentices, and later by students who were addressing *their teacher of Torah*. The mistake has been to think of the rabbis as belonging to a fully institutionalized and centralized “movement.” Indeed the designation “movement”, while the best perhaps we can find, is problematic and misleading,¹¹⁶ as it evokes the modern Jewish “movements” i.e., fully developed and institutionalized collectives with centralized rabbinic and lay leadership and members. In reality a “social movement” of any type begins as an unstructured group of individuals who at a certain point bind

113 Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, 9. Cf. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 113 and 122.

114 Actually, Cohen does go on to assert (13), “Within Rabbinic Judaism we find contrasting trends which must not be homogenized. For example, some Rabbis were mystics, others were not”. So he certainly sees diversity within the movement. But he uses this point to argue that others could pin the title “rabbi” on whomsoever they wished, “regardless of their practices and beliefs”. I am not arguing otherwise here, only that this would have been the exception to the rule, as most people would have used the title with reference to teachers of Torah who were increasingly associated with the “rabbinic movement”. That the movement itself was diversified cannot be disputed and in effect is essential to the point I am making.

115 See Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis”, 12 f., and Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 113 and 122.

116 As I already suggested in *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 447, n. 2.

together to work towards a common cause but which continues to evolve and, with time, becomes better defined, organized and, finally, "institutionalized."¹¹⁷ The "rabbinic movement" followed such a trajectory.¹¹⁸ The important thing is that in the period we are interested in, there were indeed "rabbis" and rabbinic circles beyond those known to us from literary sources, and these too were comprised of teachers of Torah, many of whom had much in common and undoubtedly maintained relationships with "literary rabbis."

Indeed, the literary rabbis themselves provide some tantalizing hints that this was the case. Thus, in my earlier work, I demonstrated how the mostly urban Rabbis of the *Yerushalmi* would only acknowledge the right of village rabbis to teach non-halakhic interpretations of the written Torah. Indeed, these village rabbis are singled out in the *Yerushalmi* with the denominative 'ish Kefar X or di-kefar X that followed their title and name ("Rabbi X of village X") indicating a strong self-awareness, at least among the editors of the *Yerushalmi*, of who was the superior, or at least well-rounded "rabbi", as opposed to those who only taught *aggadah*.¹¹⁹ Yet some of these same village "rabbis" elsewhere, particularly in the *Bavli*, are reported to have taught *halakhah*.¹²⁰ No doubt they did, at least on occasion (who would prevent them?), even if the Rabbis of the *Yerushalmi* could not fully come to terms with it. And, at the same time, the *Yerushalmi* has no issue labeling these figures "rabbis!" It

117 In reference to "social movements", Herbert Blumer has famously identified four stages: "social unrest", "popular excitement", "formalization", and "institutionalization." See H. Blumer, "Collective Behavior", A. M. Lee, ed., *Principles of Sociology* (New York, 1969), 103. These could be easily applied to a religious "movement", and certainly to the rabbis, who, after all, constituted a social collective that evolved in a period of social ferment post-70 CE and took on more formal components as time went on. Blumer's emphasis (and that of the "Chicago School") on the origins of social movements in collective behavior has in more recent times been critiqued as has his overall approach, which has been considered too negative in its characterization of movements, but his theoretical framework remains influential. See S. M. Buechler, *Understanding Social Movements: Theories from the Classical Era to the Present* (Boulder, CO, 2011), 63–66 and 141–156.

118 Cf. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?*, 164 where he says, "The rabbis of the Talmud were trying to make sense of their own status, which in the third and fourth centuries was in the process of institutionalization."

119 The quote from Schwartz in the previous note is relevant here too. For a list of the 'ish/di-kefar rabbis and discussion of their exegesis, see Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 186–189.

120 Ibid., 191, 200–202, where I discuss R. Shila di-kefar *Tamarata*, R. Simeon ben Judah 'ish kefar Akko (whose halakhic views appear in tannaitic sources, but not in the *Yerushalmi*, where he once appears reporting a biblical exegesis), and R. Tanḥum bar Ḥiyya (who appears as 'ish kefar Akko in the *Bavli*, but not in the *Yerushalmi*, where, not surprisingly, his halakhic views are quoted – and is frequently found in the company of urban rabbis!).

would be difficult to imagine that some “teachers of Torah” were resigned to only convey non-legal interpretations, whereas, the sages of the “Rabbinic Movement” became known for their teaching of “Oral Law”. What is more likely is that the *Yerushalmi* was the product of urban rabbis who attempted to assign to themselves a prerogative they wished to deny the “rabbis” from the countryside.¹²¹ Some village teachers of Torah (here the admittedly title-less Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia comes to mind) may have actually preserved halakhic teachings that were unacceptable to the Rabbis.¹²²

The fact that we have not been able to securely connect the dots between the epigraphical rabbis and those in our literary sources should no longer confound us. If my assessment is correct, there is little reason not to conclude that practically *all* rabbis by the amoraic period, epigraphical or literary, were teachers of “Torah” who belonged to a still inchoate network of teachers of Torah. Some, including many an epigraphical rabbi even when unknown to us from rabbinic writings, may have belonged to the self-selecting group responsible for these texts; others were less closely associated with the literary rabbis, but still belonged to the evolving “movement” if only because they shared the same devotion to conveying the meaning of “Torah.”¹²³

121 See my summary statement, Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 210, and 446 and 451.

122 Where Jacob of Kefar Nevoraia is concerned, we have a title-less teacher of Torah *from a village* who in the *Yerushalmi* is primarily known for his biblical exegesis. In fact, Jacob excels at non-halakhic biblical exegesis and his interpretations are met with approval among the sages in the *Yerushalmi*, as we saw in *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d with regard to “those appointed for money”. Remarkably, the one time in the *Yerushalmi* that Jacob gets in trouble for a teaching is when he interprets *halakhah* – an incident which has him submit voluntarily to punishment before a well known Tiberian sage! In *y. Yevamot* 2, 4a (= *y. Qiddushin* 3, 64d) Jacob, on a visit to Tyre, provides a, for him, rare halakhic interpretation to those who “came and asked him” a legal question. *Rabbi Haggai*, the Tiberian sage, takes Jacob to task for his teaching and of course has the better, and in the end, decisive end of the argument. In the midrashic parallel in *Genesis Rabbah* 7:2 (Theodor-Albeck, 51f.), Jacob completely steps over the boundary, becoming assertive in “instructing” (*horei*) a halakhah and, in the end, turning confrontational. This hardly sounds like the Jacob who knows a true “rabbi” from one “appointed for money” in *y. Bikkurim* 3, 65d! Another interesting story that illustrates the village-city divide is that pertaining to R. Levi bar Sisi (frequently, but wrongly, said to have not been titled rabbi), who in *y. Yevamot* 12, 13a has to be sent to the village of Simonias by Rabbi because the villagers do not have in their midst someone who, among all his other expected qualifications, can teach Torah *and* tannaitic tradition. Cf. the story in *y. Hagigah* 1, 76c, which has R. Yudan (Judah III), dispatch R. Hiyya, R. Assi and R. Ammi to the villages (as *qiryata* should be understood) to teach tannaitic traditions. For detailed treatments of these episodes see *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel*, 192–206.

123 Yehudah A. Kurtzer, “What Shall the Alexandrians do? Rabbinic Judaism and the Mediterranean Diaspora”, (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009), 248, considers some of the issues

In 2012, what remains of the Cohen's theory and the various implications drawn from it? Not much, if we mean the attempts to limit the *Rabbinic* movement to literary rabbis and in turn to ask simplistic (as we now know) questions concerning their influence and control over the synagogue and Jewish community. A whole lot, if we understand that out of the fruits of the ensuing discussion has emerged a better appreciation for the loose network of teachers of Torah that comprised the incipient rabbinic movement and which, sometime in the third century, was already *well on its way* to developing a more formal self-definition and coherence. What has emerged is an appreciation not only for the complexity of the Rabbinic movement and its workings but also for the complexity of the society out of which all rabbis emerged.

pertaining to epigraphical rabbis and suggests (248) that "Rabbis" should be seen as a "subset" of "rabbis" (that is, rather than the other way around). This is similar to the point I am making here. Kurtzer has a useful discussion of the term *zagen*, which he contends is a rough equivalent to *presbyter*, which was the Greek title for a would-be "rabbi" in the Diaspora. Kurtzer claims that this would explain why the term "rabbi" itself is rare in the Diaspora. I would like to thank Yehudah for sharing his dissertation with me. While we are on the subject of the Diaspora, although my understanding is that many of the references to rabbis in the Babylonian magic bowls are pseudepigraphic, Shai Secunda reports that the list of "epigraphical rabbis" in the magic bowls from Babylonia "continues to grow" and awaits publication by Shaul Shaked. See <http://thetalmudblog.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/the-talmud-in-arabic-and-more-epigraphical-rabbis/>. In the meantime, see S. Shaked, "Form and Purpose in Aramaic Spells: Some Jewish Themes (The Poetics of Magic Texts), S. Shaked, ed., *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (Leiden, 2005), 19–22, where he discusses one Rav Aḥa bar Rav Huna who appears in a bowl inscription. Shaked is appropriately very hesitant to identify him with a figure by the same name in the Babylonian Talmud. Many of the questions he raises are reminiscent of those put forth over the years by scholars who have taken up the Palestinian epigraphical rabbis. I thank Michael Swartz for recommending this article.

