

מיפוי מחדש של אליטות בשלהי העת העתיקה: יהודים, נוצרים ופגאנים

Remapping Elites in Late Antiquity: Jews, Christians, and Pagans

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תקציר

פרויקט המחקר המוצע עוסק בנושא מרכזי לחברה אנושית קדומה ועכשווית כאחד: תחרות בין אליטות. בתחרות הזאת הקבוצה המנצחת משיגה שליטה על הקבוצות אחרות ועל מנת לבסס את מעמדה היא מציגה את דעות יריבותיה כשוליות ודוחקת את ערכיהן. המחקר יתבסס על מקורות חדשים ששופכים אור על התהליך המורכב של עלייתן ונפילתן של אליטות בשלהי העת העתיקה באימפריה הרומית ממערב, ובאימפריה הססנית ממזרח. הפרויקט שואף לקרוא תיגר על הדימוי העצמי הקנוני של האליטות הדומיננטיות, כגון דימויים של חז"ל (ביטוי שבעצמו מקבע את הקנוניזציה). מקורות ספרותיים, דוקומנטריים וארכיאולוגיים שנתגלו לאחרונה ישמשו על מנת למפות את מגוון האליטות בשלהי העת העתיקה לשם יצירת תמונה היסטורית מדויקת יותר העומדת על הרב-תרבותיות והמנעד הדתי הרחב המאפיינים חברות קדומות.

לשם מחקר זה גיבשנו קבוצה שחוקריה חולקים עניין משותף בתקופה ומשלימים זה את זה בהכשרתם. הרכב הקבוצה מבטיח עבודה בין תחומית וסינארגיה פורצת דרך שתכיל באחת זוויות מבט מרובות על האליטות בשלהי העת העתיקה באזורים גאוגרפים נרחבים אך מקושרים. זוהי הזדמנות ייחודית למחקר משווה בין מזרח למערב המבטיח הפריה הדדית בנושאים הקשורים לעירוניות, היברידיות תרבותית, והמציאות הדתית שביום יום ("Lived Religion").

עניין המחקר חוצה גבולות באקדמיה ואף פורץ אל העניין הציבורי. מלבד המפגשים השבועיים, והכנס הבין לאומי בסוף הפרויקט, הקבוצה גם תשתף פעולה עם קבוצת ה"עבר בעבר" בסכוליון, עם המרכז לחקר ההיסטוריה של הים התיכון באוניברסיטת חיפה ושתי קבוצות מחקר מחוץ לארץ, האחת באוניברסיטת טיבינגן שבגרמניה, והאחרת באוניברסיטת קליפורניה שבסן דיאגו בארה"ב. כמו כן הקבוצה תפנה אל הציבור הרחב דרך הספרייה הלאומית, מכון ון ליר, ומכון יד בן צבי.

Abstract

The proposed project addresses a subject of central importance in human societies from antiquity until today: the competition of elites which tend to seek domination over others and, if successful, present their former competitors as marginal and suppress their values. The project is based on new sources, which throw light on the enormously complex processes of emerging elites in Late Antiquity, especially in the Roman Empire in the West and the Sassanian Empire in the East. Rather than perpetuating the canonical self-images of the dominant elites, such as the rabbis, the project will use newly discovered literary, documentary, and archaeological sources to remap the variety of ancient elites and offer a historically more accurate picture of the hybridity of cultures, religions, and societies at large.

The group's composition promises groundbreaking interdisciplinary work, based on complementary competences in adjacent fields. The synergy between the four researchers will create an integrative perspective, which considers different, yet related geographical areas in Late Antiquity and uses various disciplinary approaches. The project will provide an almost unique opportunity for comparisons between West and East, promising cross-fertilization especially in the areas of urbanity, cultural hybridity, and "lived religion".

The topic of the research group is of wider academic and even of public interest. Besides the weekly-meetings and the international conference at the end of the project, the group will thus also cooperate with the Scholion group "The Past in the Past", the Center for Mediterranean Studies at Haifa University and two research groups abroad, one at the university of Tübingen (Germany), the other at UCSD (USA). The group will also reach out to public institutions and initiate broader discussions at the National Library, the Van Leer Institute, and the Yad Ben Zvi Institute.

Detailed Description of the Research Project

1. Subject

The competition of intellectual, religious, and political elites is a central feature of human societies from antiquity until today. Elites tend to seek domination over others and, if successful, present their former competitors as marginal or even non-existent. Processes of textual, religious, and cultural canonization often cover the radical changes underlying the establishment of new elites. The proposed project aims at creating an interdisciplinary research group, which will analyze the enormously complex processes of emerging elites in Late Antiquity, especially in the Roman Empire in the West and the Sassanian Empire in the East. Late Antiquity was a period of momentous changes and crises which opened new possibilities for Pagans, Jews, and Christians to position themselves both within their local societies and in the empire at large. Different elites established themselves within each of the societies under consideration and competed for dominance, some of them achieving canonical status even until today, while others later disappeared and left only fragmentary evidence, some of which has recently come to light and will play a major role in our project.

Rather than perpetuating the canonical self-images of the dominant elites, such as the rabbis, the project will use newly discovered sources to remap the variety of ancient elites and offer a historically more accurate picture. The project will reconstruct elites that have been silenced and uncover their dialectical impact on the emergence of groups, which became dominant and shaped their societies' religious, cultural, and intellectual make-up. By joining forces and overcoming disciplinary boundaries, the group will provide a new model for studying the relationship between competing elites, society, and "lived religion". The topic of the research group is of wider academic and even public interest, as its results will also illuminate other periods and geographical areas, including our own. The group will thus cooperate with the Scholion group "The Past in the Past", the Center for Mediterranean Studies at Haifa University and two research groups abroad, one at the university of Tübingen (Germany), the other at UCSD (USA). The group will also reach out to public institutions and initiate broader discussions at the National Library, the Van Leer Institute, and the Yad Ben Zvi Institute.

2. New Sources challenging the State of Scholarship

The starting point of the proposed project is the sensational discovery of new sources in the fields of Jewish Thought, Talmudic Studies, and archaeology. These findings throw new light on the emergence and canonization of ancient elites, both in the Roman and Sasanian Empires, and their relationship with the rest of society. They prompt a comprehensive remapping of historical elites and ancient "lived religions". Current scholarship is still characterized by a strong isolation of disciplines, even within Jewish Studies, let alone between Jewish studies and the so-called

general humanities or between textual and material studies. Furthermore, most scholars still rely on the images conveyed by the canonical sources.

The field of Jewish thought has traditionally adapted the perspective of the rabbinic sources, which were taken to represent the whole, supposedly homogeneous Jewish people. The rabbis' ideas were similarly perceived as Jewish theology *per se*, which was assumed to have developed from within itself. Following De Lange 1976, 1996, however, it has become clear that the rabbis of Late Antique *Palaestina* entertained close, often competitive relations with Origen and other Christians, and faced Greek-speaking Jews, who insisted on reading the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Bible. Origen's new homilies on Psalms, which emerged in 2012 in the library of Munich, enable us to make unexpected progress in this field. Using the homilies, we can reconstruct numerous aspects of Hellenistic Judaism flourishing next to the emerging rabbinic establishment and remap the relationship between Pagan, Christian, Jewish-Hellenistic and rabbinic elites.

Shortly after their discovery, Origen's new homilies were published by an Italian team of scholars and amount to 523 pages of original Greek text in the critical edition (Perrone 2015). *Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* is available online at the *Staatsbibliothek*, permitting scholars to check the readings and grasp aspects of early interpretation. While Italian, German, American and French teams work on the respective translations, scholars have confirmed the authenticity of Origen's new homilies and interpreted their exegetical and theological features in the context of his overall oeuvre (Adamantius 2014, Perrone 2017, Mitchell 2017). Buchinger 2019 has started comparative historical research, contextualizing the homilies in Late Antique *Palaestina* with special attention to Jewish liturgy. It is time now for a systematic historical analysis of the new homilies in view of Hellenistic culture, contemporary rabbinic literature, Hellenistic Judaism, and material evidence.

Niehoff's studies are a first step in this direction. Niehoff 2020a translates for the first time and analyzes a passage on the theater in view of Pagan and rabbinic literature as well as material evidence. Origen's creative engagement with masks is interpreted in view of the Second Sophistic, especially Lucian's treatise *On Dance*. The article shows that Origen was not opposed to the theater, as has often been assumed, but positioned Christianity on the stage and in dialogue with Pagan elites. Origen's use of the theater for religious purposes also throws new light on the well-known stories about Rabbi Abbahu and other rabbis, who encountered the theater not as a general phenomenon of Classical Greek culture, but rather as a concrete practice of contemporary and often Greek-speaking Jews. Niehoff 2020b translates for the first time and analyzes all the passages in Origen's new homilies which treat Biblical women, including Judith. While the latter is fashioned as "most wise" and a model of Christian piety, Eve, Sarah, and Hagar are allegorized as markers on the path to Christian identity. The most relevant insight of the article to the current project is the suggestion that one specific tradition, of which Origen says: "I

have heard of a tradition *ad locum*", may have circulated among Greek-speaking Jews. Finally, Niehoff submitted a 40-page article (in English to a *Festschrift* and in Hebrew to *Historia*), which translates for the first time and analyzes a large passage in Origen's new homilies on the Olympic Games (*Hom. IV Ps. 77*, par. 4). The article uses material evidence from Caesarea and Asia Minor, showing that Origen creatively engages the famous Greek tradition and positions himself as a superior judge of the games. The article moreover contextualizes Origen within contemporary Pagan and rabbinic literature. Lucian and Philostratus emerge as congenial authors on Hellenistic gymnastics and the rabbis in mShab. 22.6, tShab. 16.22 and GR 77.3 are shown to react to the same discourses and social reality as Origen addresses. Non-rabbinic Jews in Late Antiquity, who were socialized in Hellenistic culture and sport activities, emerge as a significant point of reference for the rabbis. Origen's new homilies thus show that Pagan, Christian, Jewish-Hellenistic and rabbinic elites existed next to each other, constructing themselves by competing discourses of authority. A comprehensive study of the homilies will complete the picture.

Evidence for the existence of several competing elites in the Greco-Roman cities of *Palaestina* could be corroborated not only from textual sources but also from Archeological finds. However, while the field of archaeology is defined as a subfield of the classics intertwined with ancient text and art-history (Schaps 2011: 177), the discipline often tends to develop in isolation from the textual and cultural studies in the humanities, using the latter in a highly selective manner. Archaeological data is usually analyzed quantitatively on its own before being juxtaposed with some ancient texts (Shaw 1980). Conversely, some historians of the Roman Near East depend to a limited extent on archaeological evidence (e.g. Sartre 2005), but for the most part use mainly epigraphy (Isaac 1992, Millar 1993, Eck 2007). Since 2010 more than 3000 inscriptions were gathered in four volumes of the multilingual *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae Palaestinae* (CIIP I-IV), and 2000 more from the Galilee are forthcoming (CIIP V). Archaeological data from *Palaestina* multiplies on a yearly basis as evident from the extensive list of archaeological reports by the *Israel Antiquities Authority*. Hence, the ground is prepared for archaeologists to address large cultural questions, such as phenomena of urbanization.

Ecker 2016 is a first step in the direction of utilizing archaeological data to trace formation processes of Greco-Roman cities in *Palaestina* in view of historical and administrative developments. One of his conclusions is that the urban elites of late Roman Palestine shared "Hellenic" mores of civic life regardless of ethnicity and religion. Ecker and Zissu (2020) examined the rural environment of Judea, publishing a clay seal mentioning the existence of a *boule* (a city council) in a village. This paper shows that the elites in the countryside aspired to emulate city life by naming local institutions with names borrowed from the *polis*. In a forthcoming article Ecker discusses the epitaph of a veteran of the Roman army within the Jewish necropolis of Sepphoris, exemplifying the blurring boundaries between being Jewish and "becoming Roman" (Ecker, forthcoming).

A new excavation in Tell Abu Shusha (led by Ecker and Gordon) is likely to throw important new light on processes of urbanization and the interaction of competing elites in Roman *Palaestina*. The site is on the western edge of the Jezreel Valley and is identified with Gaba Philippi, a city located between Caesarea and Sepphoris, on the seam between the coast, the hills of Samaria and the lower Galilee near the camp of the *legio VI Ferrata* at Megiddo (Mazar 1988, Safari and Linn 1993; Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, Klostermann ed., 70). The accounts of Josephus (*BJ* 3.36; *Ant.* 15.295) and the city's coins portray it as a Pagan bastion set against the predominantly Jewish Lower Galilee. Excavations, however, reveal an active commercial relationship between the inhabitants of Gaba and the Lower Galilee, as cooking pots and storage jars produced in the Lower Galilee are the most common local wares in the assemblage. Vessels of chalkstone typically identified with the observance of Jewish purity laws were moreover found in the fills. Such finds are ubiquitous in Sepphoris and rare in Caesarea. As excavations progress Ecker intends to examine the architecture and small finds from this site, which is expected to be influenced by both Caesarea and Sepphoris, and to recover the relationship between the elites of these cities.

Turning to the Jews in the East, the Babylonian Talmud is considered as the principal source regarding the many Jewish communities in the Sasanian empire. As a result, scholarship has focused mainly on the rabbinic elite while painting a rather monolithic picture of ancient Jewish society. However, the Babylonian Talmud is in fact a product of a particular rabbinic elite mostly confined to an extremely limited geographical area – the region of Babylonia (Bet Aramaya), no more than 100 km north and south of modern-day Baghdad, in the area between the Euphrates and the Tigris. Considering this, through various sources that are often overlooked, Manekin-Bamberger and Paz each seek to go beyond the Talmudic perspective in order to reconstruct the history of Jewish communities and their elites in the Sasanian Empire.

Manekin-Bamberger's research focuses on a corpus of hundreds of Jewish magical amulets written on bowls. Currently around 450 Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls and some 200 more inscribed in Syriac and Mandaic have been published. This number is likely to double or even triple in upcoming years. This large corpus of texts, usually intended for protection from curses and demonic harm is our only Jewish Babylonian literary source from this period outside of the Babylonian Talmud, and thus offers a crucial and unique vantage point from which to view Babylonian Jewish society, practices, traditions, and more. Yet despite their scope and the insight they provide, historians of ancient Judaism and scholars of rabbinic texts have typically overlooked them. Moreover, scholars tend to describe the magic bowls as "popular religion". This popular form of religion is often juxtaposed with the "official religion" of the rabbis, which, by implication, was more authentically Jewish and more refined and elite.

But as more and more bowls come to light, the distinction between rabbinic and popular religion is difficult to maintain. First, some bowls were written for a rabbinic client (Shaked 2015).

Second, many bowls cite Jewish literature, such as Scripture and Aramaic Targum as well as Hekhalot literature and Jewish liturgy. There are also three bowls that contain direct quotations of the Mishnah (Levene 2007, Shaked 1995, Shaked 2005). Furthermore, the bowls contain a considerable number of legal formulations known from rabbinic literature and ancient Jewish documents (Manekin-Bamberger 2015). The extensive knowledge of Jewish scribal formulae alongside the expert knowledge of scripture, Targum, and other Jewish texts, indicates that some of the bowl writers were expert Jewish scribes, *soferim* (Manekin-Bamberger 2020).

Additionally, in a forthcoming article, Simcha Gross (UPenn) and Manekin-Bamberger argue that the Jewish bowls do not constitute a single corpus. Instead, they were produced by different groups of scribes, some of whom preferred specific Jewish traditions, and some of whom were in greater social proximity to the rabbis (Gross & Manekin-Bamberger, forthcoming). Though the medium they employed – ceramic bowls – was the same, some scribes consistently employed a specific repertoire of motifs and gave special prominence to the rabbis. Simultaneously, it appears that a large amount of bowls with clusters of Jewish motifs also lack appeals to non-Jewish deities. These conclusions support recent studies that challenge the dichotomy between the worlds of the rabbis and the “magicians”, showing that the rabbis and some of the bowl scribes are best understood as practitioners and competitors within a shared world of symbols, objects, and practices, drawn to distinct motifs and sources of power. In sum, a close study of the heterogeneous materials in the bowls may help render a diverse picture of Babylonian Jewish religion, reflecting different knowledgeable Jewish elites.

While Manekin-Bamberger focuses mainly on the diversity of Jewish society in Babylonia, Paz plans to survey the Jewish communities in other regions of the Sasanian Empire. Modern scholars have mostly adopted the Babylonian Talmud’s perspective on Jews outside Babylonia uncritically (e.g. Gafni 1990; Neusner 1966-1969) and have yet to fully appreciate the fact that the Babylonian rabbinic elite represented in the Babylonian Talmud had its own agendas and a strong sense of Babylonian local patriotism. Thus, many of the Bavli’s (mostly negative) statements concerning Sasanian Jews and their elites outside Babylonia should not be taken at face value. Considering this, in his project Paz intends to reconstruct a more balanced picture of the diverse religious, economic, political, and social aspects of Jewish communities and their elites in the Sasanian Empire outside of Babylonia, focusing on the Jewish communities in the regions of Mesene (southern Iraq), Khuzestan (south-western Iran), Mede (central Iran) and Northern Mesopotamia and Armenia. The reconstruction of the local traits of these communities is to be done by *de-biasing* the Bavli’s statements, prejudices and stereotypes concerning the Jews outside of Babylonia considering external accounts, composed in Syriac, Middle Persian, Greek, Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Mandaean and Arabic. Many of these sources, especially those in Syriac, Mandaic, Manichaean, and Armenian, have barely been utilized by Talmudic scholars. These sources do not always explicitly engage with Jews, yet they enable us to better understand

the specific, and at times unique, features of each region in which Jewish communities were long established. Against this backdrop Paz will re-evaluate and examine critically the Talmudic accounts of these regions to present a more balanced account of the Jewish communities there. The suggested project promises to provide a fresh perspective of the Jewish communities and elites, whether rabbinic or not, in the Sasanian Empire and will help us to better appreciate their distinct identities and rich and variegated culture and history during this crucial period.

A first step in this project has been carried out in Paz 2018, which focused on the Jews of Mesene (southern Iraq). In this paper - sidestepping the question of whether the Jews of Mesene were in fact descendants of slaves, bastards or heavily intermarried, as the rabbis in the Talmud claim - Paz focused instead on examining the historical, religious, and economic features of Mesene and its Jews which helps explain some of the rabbinic motivations and anxieties regarding the region. We are thus able to capture some regional perspectives of the Jews of Mesene themselves. Mesene was for centuries a distinct political and economic entity with its own dialect and diverse, and at times unique, religious landscape. The region and its Jews were thus clearly distinguishable from those in the "North." Among the unique features of Mesene that may have earned it rabbinic opprobrium are the presence of several sects with Jewish components, Palmyrene economic dominance and integration in Mesene, the Sasanian deportation policies of various western groups to Mesene, alongside the possible adherence of the Mesenean Jews to Palestinian (and not Babylonian) halakha. These features marked Mesene and its Jewish denizens as different from the central Babylonian rabbis, and contributed to the development of their anti-Mesene prejudice. Such an analysis, which balances facts about the region with the rabbinic prejudices, offers us a glimpse into the unique history of the Mesenean Jews, of which we have almost no sources outside of the Babylonian Talmud.

3. Interdisciplinarity of the Group and Interaction between its Members

The group's composition promises groundbreaking interdisciplinary work, based on complementary competences in adjacent fields. The synergy between the four researchers will create an integrative perspective, which considers different, yet related geographical areas in Late Antiquity and uses various disciplinary approaches. The group's composition strikes an excellent balance between difference and overlapping interests: the competences are similar enough to create a common language and guarantee effective cooperation, but also sufficiently diverse to promise exciting new insights and mutual inspiration.

Two researchers will focus on urban culture in Late Antique *Palaestina* (Ecker and Niehoff), one from an archaeological, the other from a textual perspective. Two other researchers will focus on Babylonia (Manekin-Bamberger and Paz), one from the perspective of the magic bowls, the other based on texts from various backgrounds. The textually oriented researchers (Niehoff and Paz) have some experience with archaeological and material evidence,

while the archaeologist (Ecker) is trained in Classical sources and the expert in magical bowls (Manekin-Bamberger) is trained in rabbinic literature. In addition, two researchers (Manekin-Bamberger and Niehoff) bring to the project an interest in gender as one category of analyzing elites in their interaction with society. The project will provide an almost unique opportunity for comparisons between West and East, promising cross-fertilization especially in the areas of urbanity, cultural hybridity, and “lived religion”.

The cooperation between the members of the team will develop in the weekly seminars and culminate in the organization of an international conference towards the end of the project. During the various ZOOM meetings in preparation for the application the researchers got to know each other and discovered that the cooperation is highly productive. If elected, the group will make maximum use of the facilities of Scholion and create a vibrant research environment, which will prompt many spontaneous intellectual developments. Already at this point several areas of cooperation can be identified. Niehoff will consult with Ecker about features of urbanity in late antique *Palaestina* and rely on his archaeological expertise to better understand the textual evidence from Caesarea. She will also benefit from Paz’ rabbinic expertise in her analysis of Palestinian sources and discuss possible similarities between the urban centers of Caesarea and Mesene, two international cities with hybrid Jewish communities. Manekin-Bamberger’s insights into “lived religion” will help Niehoff to understand the background of daily life in Origen’s homilies. Ecker will consult with Niehoff about urban life in Caesarea, including newly discovered Christian and Jewish Hellenistic texts. He will also benefit from Paz’ and Manekin-Bamberger’s insights into the complexities of urban life further East and begin comparative studies of urbanity on a larger scale. Paz will consult with Niehoff about different forms of Christianity and compare features of Hellenistic Judaism in Caesarea with evidence of non-rabbinic Jews in Mesene. He will also consult with Ecker (a co-editor of the CIIP) about ostraca and other epigraphic matters and continue the cooperation with Manekin-Bamberger on ancient magic. Manekin-Bamberger will consult with Niehoff about gender issues and “lived religion” in Origen’s homilies and with Ecker about material evidence of “lived religion”. Ecker has moreover proposed to write a joint article about the juxtaposition of textual and archaeological evidence, which is likely to articulate a new interdisciplinary approach with broader implications.

The interaction of the researchers will be enriched by cooperation with additional research teams. The Scholion group “The Past in the Past” has signaled interest to work together during its third year, which will be devoted to “memory and oblivion”. This topic has direct implications for processes of canonization, which will be studied during the first year of the proposed project. The two research groups will hold some joint seminars and interact at the international conference on “the Past in the Past”. The competences of Reuven Amitai, Uzi Leibner, Nili Wazana, and Alexander Yakobson are an excellent fit for the present project. Further cooperation is planned with the center for Mediterranean Studies at Haifa University. Gill

Gambash, the head of the center, has signaled a strong interest in cooperation and will provide the necessary funds to implement it. Moreover, the members of two research projects at Tübingen University have expressed a keen interest in broadening the cooperation with Niehoff, an officially affiliated member of both, and work jointly with the proposed project by using some of their funds. The two groups, SFB 923 *Threatened Orders* and the DFG group *Migration and Mobility in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, perfectly fit the proposed group's profile. Finally, Professors Ed Watts and Mira Balberg at the University of California, San Diego, have expressed interest to broaden an earlier cooperation within the IAS group on the Self and organize joint workshops, based partly on funding from S. Diego.

The group also plans outreach activities beyond the academy. As a first step, the group will approach the academic committee of the annual conference on rabbinic thought at the National Library, of which Niehoff is a member, to devote one of the future conferences to the topic of competing elites. As a further step, the group will contact the Van Leer and the Yad Ben Zvi Institutes to organize similar events for broader publics.

4. Research Objectives

The objective of the group is to create a productive, academic environment in which each of the researchers will produce groundbreaking work in his/her field while benefiting from the competences of the other members of the group. The objectives of each researcher can be outlined as follows:

Niehoff plans to focus on 9 of the newly discovered homilies of Origen, which interpret LXX Ps. 72 and were apparently delivered during Easter, then still celebrated for a full week, parallel to the Jewish Passover (ed. Perrone, 351-478). During the first year of the project, Niehoff will study the Greek manuscripts of these texts, which have not yet been translated, from a philological, textual, and stylistic perspective, translating some of them into Hebrew. The second year will be devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the 9 homilies with special attention to the descriptions of the Passover in the Mishnah and the Tosefta, the latter of which was redacted precisely at the time of Origen's activity in Caesarea. The new homilies are likely to answer some of the questions, which Israel Yuval (1995) still had to leave open. They will provide the key to understand competitive constructions of religious identity, liturgy, and authority in a multicultural context, allowing us to reconstruct Greek-speaking Jewish elites next to the rabbis. The homilies also reflect Origen's spoken words, often to the extent that the reader feels present at his sermons, and thus allow us to grasp "lived religion" as perceived and shaped by a member of the elite. During the second semester questions of gender will be given special attention, again with a view to relevant rabbinic discussions. During the third year, Niehoff will synthesize what

we know about Origen's interactions with other elites and reconstruct features of Hellenistic Judaism and the emerging rabbinic establishment.

Ecker plans to delve into the study of the city of Gaba Philippi and the Jezreel valley during Late Antiquity as a hub of interaction between vying elites. As central as Gaba was, it was also a small settlement, in no way as influential as Sepphoris, Caesarea or even the legionary camp next to it. Accordingly, a *mélange* of cultures is expected to emerge. As excavations progress it will be possible to examine the finds from the site and compare them to those of Caesarea, and Sepphoris as well as the nearby Roman military camp in Megiddo. The first year of research will be dedicated to the creation of a profile of the material culture of the elites in each of the above-mentioned sites. Surprisingly, such an attempt has never been made. Such a profile will be created based on the fusion of known texts (Origen being one, Julian of Ascalon a possible second), inscriptions, artifacts, and architecture: house types, imported vessels, art, coinage, food stuffs (from storage jars and amphorae), and other aspects that illuminate local identity. With these profiles in hand, Ecker will approach the finds from Gaba Philippi aiming to map the influences of the surrounding cities and major centers on this small town. This approach is expected to give a "ground up" view of the urban environment rather than creating distinctions mainly based on dichotomous points of view of ancient writers.

Manekin-Bamberger plans to offer a new understanding of lived Jewish religion in "Talmudic" Babylonia. During the first and second years, she intends to conduct a thorough study of the various religious content found on the bowls, including a detailed catalogue of the invocations of deities, angels, demons, religious motifs, quotations from religious literature and use of Hebrew. The third year will be devoted to an in-depth synthesis of the socio-religious implications of this catalogue. Based on initial research, she anticipates that some bowls will reflect rabbinic traditions, while others will be closer to neighboring religious communities. The results will contribute to the knowledge of Babylonian Judaism in two main ways. First, a comprehensive study will provide us with previously unknown perspectives on the "lived religion" of the producers and users of these bowls, including the canonical and non-canonical textual resources at their disposal, their perceptions of the world of angels and demons and the proper ways of handling them, their knowledge of Hebrew, rabbinic culture, synagogue liturgy, and more. Moreover, most of the clients of these bowls were women, thus giving voice to an enormous part of ancient society, which is usually left unheard. Second, a rigorous study of the data may potentially offer a new socio-religious survey of Late Sasanian Jewish society. Including the existence of diverse Jewish scribes, representing differing religious knowledge and diverse Jewish "libraries", previously unknown connections between Jewish groups and other minorities in the Sasanian Empire such as Syriac Christians and Mandaeans, as well as the existence of other religious elites.

Paz plans to reconstruct the Jewish communities, and especially their elites, outside of “Talmudic” Babylonia, focusing on Khuzestan, Mede, and Northern Mesopotamia. During the first year of the project Paz will survey all sources concerning these regions during the Sasanian period in texts composed in Syriac, Middle Persian, Greek, Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Mandaean and Arabic. As part of this study Paz plans, in collaboration with Simcha Gross (UPenn), to produce an edition and translation of a group of Syriac martyr acts, known as the “The Khuzestan Cycle”. These specific martyr acts contain invaluable information on the process of construction of a local Christian elite in Khuzestan, which rivaled the “official” elite in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. These texts, as Paz hopes to demonstrate in detail, could serve as a template for reconstructing local Jewish elites and their relation to the Babylonian rabbinic elite. During the second year Paz plans to compare these sources with extant rabbinic sources on these regions in an effort to *de-bias* the rabbinic account to create a more balanced picture of the Jews and their elites outside of Babylonia. In the final year Paz will seek to synthesize what we know of the various elites in the different regions and their relations to the Babylonian rabbis to rethink the role and centrality of the Babylonian rabbinic elite vis-à-vis other Jewish elites in the Sasanian Empire.

5. Main Methodologies

The project is based on the methods of historical, philological, and archaeological research. All the documents will be analyzed in their original languages, which the researchers know well. The project moreover relies on the methods of historical contextualization, juxtaposing all the available sources from different cultural contexts, which are usually studied in isolation. In addition, the wider framework relates to recent scholarly conceptualizations of “lived religion”, especially in antiquity (Ammerman 2016, Knibbe and Kupari 2020, Raja and Rüpke 2015, Rüpke 2016). The study of lived religion, or everyday religion, seeks to understand religion not just as a set of canonical laws or beliefs, but rather as a diverse body of experiences as manifested in text, archaeology, and material culture (Albrecht *et al.* 2018, Rüpke 2016). This interdisciplinary, theoretical framework, rarely employed in the study of ancient Judaism, will be fruitful in providing a richer account of Late Antiquity and its various elites at a formative time. Finally, recently developed methods to study urban culture will be employed, especially Raja 2012 in the field of archaeology and Rüpke 2020 in the field of Roman history.

6. Expected Results

The results of the project are expected to change our views of ancient elites in Late Antiquity. New elites, which have thus far been overlooked, will come into focus and their place in the competition for domination will be assessed. *Vice versa*, the elites which became canonized, will appear in a completely new light, namely as results of continuous negotiations with other elites in their immediate environment. These insights will produce a new model that can then be applied to other regions and periods, including our own.

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