

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism
Spring 2009
Handout #12 (June 4, 2009)
“The Future of Judaism”

Historical Periods

When does “antiquity” end and “the Middle Ages” begin?

- 476: last Roman-born emperor in the Western Empire is deposed
- 600: Pope Gregory I (“The Great”) begins to act as a political intermediary and authority throughout western Europe
- 650s: Islam conquers the Persian Empire and moves into western Asia and North Africa
- 732: Islam achieves maximum conquest in Europe; turned back from France at the Battle of Poitiers
- 800: Charles the Great (*Carolus Magnus*, Charlemagne) is crowned “Emperor of the Romans” in Rome by the Pope

Quick history of Islam

- circa* 570: Birth of Muhammad
 - circa* 610: Beginning of the revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad
 - 622: *hijra*: the “Emigration” of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina), and the official foundation of the Islamic community (*umma*): year 0 in the Islamic calendar
 - 632: Death of Muhammad (most of Arabian peninsula under Islamic control by this time)
 - 638: Islamic conquest of Jerusalem; Pact of Umar (religious toleration)
 - 651: Islamic conquest of Persian Empire
 - 661-750: Umayyad Caliphate (capital: Damascus), reaches from Indus R. to Spain
 - 750-950: Abbasid Caliphate (capital: Baghdad), reaches from Indus R. to Spain
- dhimmi*: “protected” class, non-Islamic monotheists (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians) living under Islamic rule, granted tolerance on condition of certain civic disabilities

The genealogy of rabbinic sages

Tannaim (repeaters)

end of Second Temple period – 200 CE (Mishnah)

Amoraim (commentators)

Mishnah – 400 CE (Palestine) or 500 CE (Babylon) (Gemara)

Savoraim (interpreters)

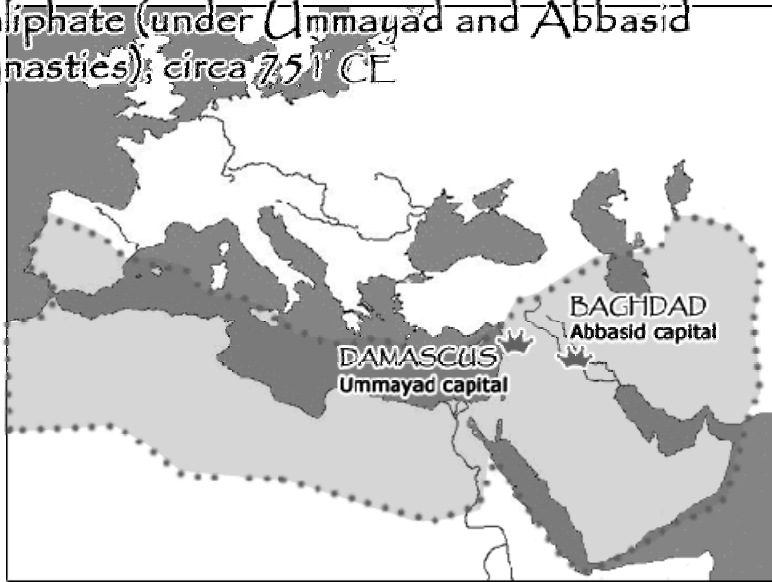
only in Babylonia: 500 CE – 600 CE (Talmud Bavli)

Geonim (sing. *gaon*), literally, “splendor[s],” an abbreviated form of “*head of the academy and the splendor of Jacob*” (cf. Nahum 2:3: “For *Yahweh* gives back the splendor of Jacob as the splendor of Israel”)

also known as the *heads of the academy* (*resh yeshivah*), 600 – 900 CE (or so)

Academies of *Sura* and *Pumbedita*

Map #3: The Greatest Extent of the United
Caliphate (under Umayyad and Abbasid
Dynasties); circa 750 CE



yeshivah: literally, “session” or “meeting”; an academy of rabbinic learning; in Talmudic times there were four academies, two of which (Sura, Pumbedita) moved to Baghdad under the Abbasids; the first European *yeshivot* were probably founded by the 900s

kallah: origin unknown; a biannual convention of rabbinic sages, headed by the *geonim* (heads of the academies, or *reshe yeshivot*)

semikah: literally, “putting [hands] on”; ordination, giving a sage the authority to judge *halakah* according to the Oral Torah

Karaite / Karaism: literally, “Reader-ites” (or *Scripturalists*): an anti-rabbinic movement founded in the ninth century by Anan b. David that rejected the authority of the Oral Torah

theology of witness: originally devised by Augustine (d. 430), a theology that allowed for Jewish survival as “witnesses” to the truth of Scripture and the consequences of rejecting Christ, as long as they were marginalized and miserable