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Outline

(1) The Masorah and its periodization across Tannaitic, Amoraic, Geonic period, slides 3-7

(2) Early texts written down by Tannaitic period: pinqasayot (lecture notes), megillot setarim, mishna (200), tosefta, Ta’anit, Slides 8-10

(3) Pervasive orality & Prohibition of Writing down Halakhot (Gittin 60b and Temurah 14b) explains pervasive orality: Slides 11-15

(4) In Times of Crisis permission to write down oral torah, Breaking the law to save the law in times of crisis Slides, 16-17

(5) Evolution of Written Text Genres across Jewish historical Periodization, slides 18-21

(6) Period of the Rishonim: Slow displacement of the hegemony of orality with Rashi’s quntres (1040-1105) and Tosophot’s glossiata; case of autodidact and Maimonidean Controversy: slides 22-32

(7) Medieval Educational Curriculum and purpose of learning:
   a) Slides 33-39 based on Rabbinic Texts, i.e. בן חמש שנים למקרא בן עשר למשנה בן שלוש עשרה למסכת
   b) Slides 40-45- based on archival docs. From Cairo Geniza

(8) Conclusion and Post-script, slides 46-49
The Masorah

• The oral torah (torah she be-al peh) & written torah were revealed together at Sinai as stated in mishnah Avot: מְשַהַ קְבַלּ תּוֹרָה מֵסִינִי וַמְסַרֶּה לַיהוָשָׁע וַיָּוֶשֶׁ יִהוָשָׁע לַדְּקָנֵיָּדֵקְנֵי לְהָבֵיָּדַיֵּי לְנוֹבָיֵי מָסְרָה לְאַנֵּשֵּי כְּנֵסָת הָגָדוֹלָה Rashi notes the text says “torah in general” and not “ha-torah” ergo the oral and written torah were revealed coterminously.
Periodization of Jewish history from the Zugot (Hellenist period)
## אנציקלופדיה לחכמי התלמוד והגאונים

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### הזוכים

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When R. Abahu arrived in Teveriah his face shone. The disciples of R. Yochanan speculated that he must have found a treasure. R. Yochanan thought otherwise, however, and inquired of R. Abahu what dvar Torah he had just heard. *R. Abahu answered that he had come across an old Tosefta [תוספתא עתיקא], whereupon R. Yochanan exclaimed (Koheles 8:1) “A Man’s wisdom lights up his face.”*

*ר' אבהו אתי לטבריא חמוניה תלמידו דר' יוחנן אשכח רבי אבהו סימה ו_fig. אתי לטבריא חמוניה תלמידו דר' יוחנן אשכח רבי אבהו סימה ו
*תוספתא עתיקא קרא עלייה*
MEGILLAT SETARIM ("Concealed Roll")

• Name of a roll supposed to have been found in the bet ha-midrash of R. Ḥiyya, and which contained halakot recorded by him. Three passages from it, which are maxims of R. Ise b. Judah, are quoted by Abba Arika in the Talmud (Shab. 6b; 96b; B. M. 92a) with the introductory phrase: "I found a hidden roll in the bet ha-midrash of R. Ḥiyya."

• According to Rashi (Shab. 6b), although it was not permissible to record halakot, the scholars were accustomed to write in rolls (which were then hidden) such sentences and maxims of various tannaim as were seldom repeated in the schools, and which were, therefore, liable to be forgotten; and he declares the Megillat Setarim was such a roll.

• R. Ḥiyya hid his Megillah during Rabbi's lifetime that he might not offend him; but after Rabbi's death this reason no longer existed, and Rab was permitted to see the scroll. This explanation of the origin and contents of the Megillat Setarim is also indicated by its name, "concealed roll," which implies that there were rolls containing halakot which were not kept secret, among them Rabbi's Mishnah collection.

http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10554-megillat-setarim
Exception case of Ta’anit written down in 2nd Temple period, preference for oral transmission

• An interesting remark of Rabbi Simon b. Gamaliel in BT. Shabbat 13b is found with regards to the authors of Ta’anit, a text which uncharacteristically was written down in the 2nd temple times before 70 CE. Rabbi Simon says that the redactors of Ta’anit “embraced troubles” and with regards to other tractates we would not be able to write them down (ein anu maspiqin).
Except for tannaitic reference to writings of Mishna (200 CE), Tosefta, and Megillat Setarim, culture of Pervasive Orality

- Jewish education in the medieval ages was punctuated by pervasive orality based on sugyot in Gittin 60b and Temurah 14b so that collections of manuscripts, did not occur until relatively later. In the Tannaitic, Amoraic, and Geonic era rabbinic sages were walking text memory-banks and the oral torah cast a spell of the hegemony of oral transmission over written transmission. The expression haka garsinan meaning “thus we repeat by rote” was meant literally in the oral culture.
Prohibition of writing down Oral Torah

- The relative paucity of “library collections” from the early medieval ages may be due to the Rabbinic ideology of “pervasive orality” that proscribed the writing down of oral torah (Gittin 60b). Teachings that were given to you orally you are not permitted to transmit in writing; and teachings that were given to you in writing i.e. The Five books of Moses, you are not permitted to transmit orally…

- R. Abba the son of R. Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yochanan- Those who write down the laws of the torah are like one who burns the torah (Temurah 14b)


- Particularly Kabbalists forbid mystical texts being set down in writing for a Kabbalist instructs his disciple (illuminati) orally who is a receiver (meqabbel) via initiation rite in chain of esoterica transmission of topics such as: ma’aseh merkavah, ma’aseh bereshit, Shimmusha de Hekualei Zutartei, Shimmusha de Shedei, Torat Sefirot, roshei peraqim (chapter headings), gematriot, noarikon, temurot, atbash, Ginat Egoz, cosmic cycles of shemittah and yovel, letter permutations of divine names (Parzufim), bat qol as qabbalot elyonot [qolot (divine voices)], sodot nifla’ot, gilgulim, Qabbalah sikhlit.
Devarim she-be’al peh

Rabbi Yochanan said : The Holy one Blessed is He, established a covenant with Israel- only on the basis of the oral teachings- As the verse states- for on the basis of these words- I have established a covenant with you- and with Israel: א"ר יוחנן: לא כתת ה' ברית עם ישראל אלא بشבעי דברים שבעל פה. שנאמר: כי על פי הדברים האלה כתתי ברית את ישראל.

Midrash Tanhuma brings down in the name of Rabbi Judah ben Shalom that “when the Holy one Blessed by He- said to Moses “write down” Moses asked that the Mishnah be written, but because the Holy One blessed be He- knew that the nations of the world will translate the Torah and read it in Greek and say “We are Israel.” [כנאמר ה' למשה כתב לך בקש Moses asked that the Mishnah be written, but because the Holy One blesses be He- knew that the nations of the world will translate למשה כתב לך בקש משה שתחזק המשנה בתכתב ולו יstrcpy הקב"ה שיאומת העולמים עתידיין לתרגם את התורה ולהייתה קוראים יוניית ימם אמוים אגר ישראל]
two responsa of the 10th century Academy of Pumbeditha

• Aaron Sarjado speaks of “the recitation (girma) of the entire academy and it is known that the recitation is from the mouths of the Masters, and most of them do not know what a book is-

• In the Epistle of the Sherira Gaon sent to Jacob b. Nissim and to the men of Kairwan (987), he answers the question, “How were the Mishnah and Talmud written?” and explains: “The Talmud and the Mishnah were not written but rather composed and the Rabbis are careful to recite it orally, but not from copies.
Idioms that emphasize preference for orality

- Our master comments for us
- says Rabbi
- Rabbi said
- Ve i-teima and if you will say
- Ve-amri lah and some say it
- Ika de amri there are those who say
- Keinu matnuta is the teaching really this
- Hakhi qa amor this is what he means by saying
- Eipokh reverse the opinion stated orally
- Muhlefet ha-shittah principle is revealed orally
- Hasurei mih assara something is certainly missing from the argument
- Kerokh v-teni wrapt together and recite
- Samei mi-kan remove from here
- Apeik ve-ayeil ad
- Litzedakin qa tani he rendered chiastically
- Lat kan there is not here
- Tanya did we not learn by hearing
- Metiue they responded orally
- I ba’it eima if you want I can say
- an hakhi qa amar This is what it means to say
- hakhi qa amar this is what he means to say
- keman dami who is this like
- mahu de tema ... hava aminu .... Qa mashma lan I would think therefore he informs us
- hakha be mai as I qinan with what are we dealing with here
- mai shema ... u mai shema what is the difference between x and y
- mahu de-teima / hava amaina ... qa mashma lan= I would have thought... he
- Ve it tannaye tani there are reciters who recite (PT Shab 5:2 (7b))
Historical **Times of Crisis** texts written down lest they be forgotten

• Texts were often written down in times of crisis. The aftermath of tragedy and persecution led to writing texts down. The **mishne, tosefta, and tannaitic midrashim** came after the bar Kochba revolt and Hadrianic persecutions. The **Yerushalmi** was composed after persecutions following the Christianization of the Roman empire. The **Bavli** was put to writing because the Yeshivoth were closed and scholars martyed in the rule of Khavad I. The **glossiata of Rashi and Tosaphists** similarly arose after the Crusade of 1096. Jewish communities of Mayence, Worms, and Cologne were devastated by the Crusades. The act of writing was to save from oblivion rabbinic learning that had been transmitted orally before catastrophe struck.

• Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi wrote down the mishna in 210 CE and the Rambam wrote down secrets of ma’aseh merkavah and ma’aseh bereshit, etc. in the Moreh HaNevukhim around 1195 CE. Essentially breaking the law in order to save the law.

• It was in the time of the rishonim, with Rashi and Tosophot that we can note a shift to more emphasis on the written word in ms. Form. Rather than relying completely on the ear, learners would henceforth derive transmission of teachings via the eye from written commentaries.
Breaking prohibition of writing down oral torah in time of crisis

• "עט לעשוח ליעקב הפור הורה"  ד"ה מועב תיטקר תורה ואל תשתכחו תורה Миישראל
• They said based on this verse (from Tehillim) that it is preferable that one letter of the torah be uprooted i.e. the law that prohibits the transcribing of oral torah so that the Torah itself should not be forgotten amongst Jews (Temurah 14b).

• Rashi comments on the prohibition of writing the oral law by noting: “From here you learn that in order to prevent the oral law form being forgotten.”
Genres of texts that evolved over Rabbinic periods included:

(1) The Mishnah (ca. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi in 190 CE)
(2) Tosefta recorded by R. Chiyya ca. 200 CE
(3) Babylonian Talmud (redacted by Rav Ashi (d. 427 CE) and Ravina II d. 475 CE)
(4) Jerusalem Talmud (R. Yose B. Bun 350 CE)
(5) Early Halakhic Midrashim (Mekilta, Sifra, Sifrei) from the Tannaitic era
(6) later Aggadic Midrashim in the Amoraic and Geonic periods
(7) The formation of the Jewish liturgy from the the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah and later religious prayers (piyutim)
(8) Translations into Aramaic (Targumim by Yonassen b. Uziel and Onkelos)
(9) Classic mephorshim (commentaries) on the Tanakh and rabbinic works by parshanim (commentators) who wrote gloasiata,
(10) Talmudic novellae (chiddushim) by Tosafists, Nahmanides, Nissim of Gerona, Solomon ben Aderet (RaShBA), Yomtov ben Ashbili (Ritva)
(11) TaRYAG Lists of the 613 commandments (mitzvoth)
Later Genres of Rabbinic Text Continued

(12) codes of law (Tur, Mishnah Torah, Shulchan Arukh etc.)

(13) Responsa genre of text known as sheolot ve-teshuvot

(14) Ethical works (Sifrei ha-middot) such as Hovot LeVavot by Bahya ibn Paquda, Sharei Teshuvah by Jonah of Gerona, Shemoneh Perakhim of the Rambam, and the 15th Century German work, called Orḥot Zaddikim

(15) Philosophic works (Sifrei Machshava) such as Emunot v'Dayyot by Rav Saadya Gaon, Kuzari by Rabbi Yehudah HaLevy, Moreh HaNevukhim by Rambam, Sefer Ikkarim by Joseph Albo, Milhamot HaShem by Gersonides, and Or Adonai by Crescas,

(16) countless mystical texts (Sifrei Kabbalah) from Sefer Yetzirah attributed to Rabbi Akiva who attributed it to Avraham to the Zohar of R. Shimon b. Yochai (ca. 170 CE) to 6th century Sifrei Hekhalot [(Palace texts) Hekhalot Rabbati, in which six of the seven palaces of God are described, Hekhalot Zutarti, Shiur Komah], to the Medieval Provencal Sefer HaBahir.

(17) Musar texts such as the 12th century Sefer Hasidim by Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (born 1140 in Speyer - Feb. 22, 1217[1] in Regensburg)

(18) Historical works (Sifrei HaDorot) post- Josephus, such as Azariah ben Moses dei Rossi’s Meirat Eynaim, to Shem ha-Gedolim by Haim Yosef David Azulai ben Isaac Zerachia (1724 – 1 March 1806)

(19) Sifrei Dikduk, Grammatical works from The Masoretes in the 7th to 11th centuries of the ben Asher family such as Aaron ben Moses ben Asher who refined the Tiberian vocalization to the High Middle Ages in Spain where grammatical works were composed by Judah ben David Hayyuj, Jonah ibn Janah, Abraham ibn Ezra [Moznayim (1140)], Joseph Kimhi, Moses Kimhi and David Kimhi.

(20) Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, and Yiddish Literature hybrid texts

(21) Letters (Iggerot) i.e. Letter of Sherira Gaon (900-940 CE), Amulets, & Miscellanea.
Rashi and Tosophot

- So when did written copies of Mishnah and Talmud start to become the norm that displaced the hegemony of orality? Sussman argues this happened in the Geonic period and Yuval argues for this transition as a reaction to the rise of Islam. However Gerhard Nachon argues it was with Rashi’s (1040-1105) commentary on Bavli which began to be used and the subsequent glossiata of the Tosaphot were written. Simcha Emanuel’s 1993 dissertation at Hebrew University titled “The Lost Books of the Tosaphists” notes a large # of books whose titles have been preserved but contents have not.

- However Rashi’s commentary – the quntres- along with the authoritative text of the B.T. were kept by a limited number of scholars. Rashi’s grandson Rabbenu Tam writes, בדקדוקי שבosopher (I have checked in Rashi’s own ms.) he emphasizes the rarity and uniqueness and exceptional value of his written sources in a culture of pervasive orality.
Exceptional Case of an Autodidact

• Tosaphists like Asher HaLevy from Spire, Jacob B. Isaac HaLevy, Meir b. Samuel from Ramerupt (Aube), and the latter’s son Jacob B. Meir Rabbenu Tam wrote down their supercommentaries. With the addition of tosaphot to Rashi’s commentary the essentially oral culture of the Jews became more based on writing although the passage from orality to written tradition happened slowly in the realm of custom, and the school where the masters handed down halakhah to students.

• An exception to the norm of orality is given by Rabbi Yosef b. Meir ha-Levy ibn Megas, a Spanish 12th century authority who quotes the case of an autodidact, “a man who has never read halakha with one master and does not know the way of halakha nor its commentary, nor its reading, but he saw many of the responsa of the Geonim and the books of laws.... [איש שלא קרא מעלם הלכה עם רב אווי ידע דרכו הלכה ולא פירושה ولا קריאתה אלא שמעה ראו הרבם מתשובות הגאונים ולוספים הדינים]

• This man had studied from books only and he became so expert in rabbinical matters that Joseph ibn Megas allowed him to teach law. This was the exceptional case and not the norm. In France and Germany the lucky few had recourse to written texts. Teaching derived its authority from an elite who transmitted orally to their students.
Yeshiva of R. Samuel of Dampierre

- And Rabbenu Isaac, the son of Rabbenu Tam’s sister the well known tosaphist who learned and taught in the yeshiva that my French masters attested in the name of their master that it was well known and famous that 60 masters learned before him (Issac b. Samuel of Dampierre) each of them understood the halakhah he said and also each of them learned one treatise of the Talmud that his fellow had not learned. They revised orally and our master Issac did not say one halakhah that was not in their mouth together. So the whole Talmud was put before their eyes during the lesson up to the solution of all the doubts of the Talmud, the whole halakhah and ruling, tanna or amora where contradiction appeared in another place. He sat down and corrected as is clear for whoever saw their tosafot, their questions and answers and commentaries and hassagot that they obtained from their grandfather Rabbeni Shlomo i.e. Rashi

- וְרָבָּנִי עָצַג אֶת חַכּוֹתוּ שֶל רַבְּנוֹ לְשֵׁל הַתּוֹסָפְּתוֹ שֶׁאָשֹׁר לְדֵמָיו לְיִדָּו בִּישָּׁרָה שֶׁיָּעַדוּ לוֹ רְבוּיִּים אַפֶּרֶתִים בְּשָׁמָה רְבֹאֵיתָם בָּאֶה לְךָ וְנַעֲשֵׂה לָךְ שַׁפִּיטִים אַפֶּרֶתִים בְּשָׁמָה לְכָל הַלְּאִדָּה שֶׁיָּשְׁמָעְתָּו הַגָּדוֹר שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הַגָּדוֹר שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו הָלָכָה שֶׁיָּשָׁמָעְתָּו H

Tos. Yebamot 84a: “hand-mouth-heart”

- Juda b. Yom tov from the 12th century Paris explained the oral pedagogy of the tanna-one author of the mishna: “In such a way the tanna is doing after he has commented upon the halakhot of the treatise: he reviews them again briefly in order that they should be filed on your hand and kept upon the mouth and in the heart. [דכן דרך התנה לאחר שפירש הלכות המובאות במוסכת זו הוא חוזר ושונה אותם בלשון קצר כדי שיהיו מסדרים בידך ושמורים בפה ובלב]
If Learn sugya 100 times, learn it 101 times, and review again

- Rashi’s explanation of the Talmudic statement (A.Z.19a): ליעלם ילמד אדם תורה ואחר פיך יהגו
- A young student learnt his first tractates from a local teacher. Then continued his advanced study in a renowned Yeshiva under a more advanced teacher. But every tractate he had to learn from the mouth of some teacher. In his commentary on the Talmud Rashi informs us that he received information “from the mouth of his teacher.” Whatever the student did learn, he had to repeat many times, and to review systematically at frequent intervals in later years, in order not to forget it.
- Avodah Zarah 19a, s.v: כל מי שלומד תורהמעט ורב ששת אמרמעט ומחקד עלין פעם חבר עד לשנגור בפיו אחר”כ חזרו זומד תלמודי מתכימים
- Thus everything a scholar knew he derived orally from his teachers. The immense body of oral learning possessed by the Ashkenazic Jews of the pre-crusade period, most of which was eventually written down by the schools of Rashi and the Tosphists, was the result of a continuous process of oral transmission, from generation to generation. That dedication to rabbinic memory and commitment to not letting it be forgotten and lost during times of crisis is the impetus for eventually writing the text down. Thus paradoxically in order to save the law (the prohibition of writing down halakhot of oral torah) the great Rabbinic composers had to break the law
Tosaphot on Megilla 32a: learn orally with song

- The tosaphot of Megilla 32a comments on quoting the wording of R. Shefaïta on behalf of R. Yohanan about a man who happened to teach Mishnah without music: “for they were in the habit of repeating the mishnaiot with music because people learned them by heart and in such a way they remembered more.”

[שהיו רגלין לשנות המשנאות בזמרה לפיו
שהיו שונין אתם על פהになりי כי היה הנכרים יותר]
Censorship in name of orality

• Thus composition of tosafot was the result of discussions held in the rabbinical schools and the recording took place before לפני the master and with his hashgamah. Only what the master agreed to was allowed in script. Thus oral elaboration may be deliberately omitted by the student who had received it orally, “And the commentary of our master Samuel b. Meir did not agree at all to R. Isaac b. Samuel de Dampierre therefore I did not write it down”:
As is the practice in many yeshivot today one exceptional student would be designated to transcribe the contents of a shiur. The students would write up the shiur. In the medieval Yeshivot there were two beit midrashim - one of biblical commentary and one of Talmudic tosaphot.

In conformity with the Brisker tradition we see that the practice of writing little goes back to the Middle Ages for even the great tosaphist R. Isaac b. Samuel of Dampierre “wrote little, or perhaps it has simply not survived. He certainly adopted the widespread method of reportatio.” At the end of a rabbinical commentary we find two letters: מ"ר מפי רבי which means “from the mouth of my master.”
שכתיבתם היא לימודם

• by the 13th century when R. Meir of Rothenburg was studying in France the committing into writing became more widespread whereby students had to review and correct their notes, “And R. Abraham said to us that the students wrote for themselves the things that were necessary for their learning since like the mouth their writing is their learning”: Mahar”א אמר לנו כי הבתונים היו כתבים לעצמאם דברים שצריכין ללימודם שכתיבתם היא לימודם.
Sefer Hasidim urges consultation of tosaphot

If one man has students and takes care of them and there is another good rabbi in the town who has good student like his own and he takes care of them as he does with his own; if he has a tosaphot and the other rabbi has not, he may not say, `I will not lend to him my tosaphot so that his students will come to me in order to study’ Therefore keep the rule `Be the honor of your colleague beloved as your own.’ (Avot 4:13) and it is written : That shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Lev. 19:18)

תلمידיך יושך בת科研院所 כך וביתא ת沙特 בהי ויהי תلمידיך טובים בת.ForEach יושך בת科研院所 כמיה ויהי ת過ごות כי לא ת過ごות כי ולא תגר אפי ת過ごות לא יאמר לאاشא ילאו יבאו תلمידיים ל胼 למלמד לכר אמור כי מבוד תברך חביב עליChelsea וכתיב אהבת לערץ

see Wisteinetzky, Sefer Hasidim, 1478, 358; also see Collete Sirat, La conception du Livre chez les pietisies ashkenazes (Geneva, Droz,1996).
Purpose of Medieval curriculum

• As Isidore Twerski has noted the purpose of the medieval Jewish education was to foster the striving for: (1) **Shlemut** (perfection) i.e. Rambam’s son, Abraham writes an ethical work titled Darkei Shelemut (Highways of Perfection), (2) **tikkun ha-nefesh** (correction of the soul), (3) **kedushah** (holiness), (4) **da’at torah** (Knowledge of G-d), (5) **ahavat Hashem** (love of G-d), (6) **avodat Hashem** (service of G-d).

Learning on a madrega lishma

• Some Christian scholars admired the dedication of some Jews' commitment to the principle of learning lishma. For instance one of Peter Abelard's students in the 12th century wrote a letter in which he noted the Jewish emphasis on educational learning lishma independent of reward in olam hazeh, exemplified by the regularity with which "Jews out of zeal for G-d and love of the law, “put as many sons as they have to letters, that each may understand G-d's law... “ [Smalley, Study of the Bible, 78. ]

• Maimonides forbid using the torah as a spade with which to dig.

• Jewish students often traveled from school to school to soak up wisdom from a variety of teachers. Rashi on Shir Hashirim 5:16 writes, "Like doves that wander from one dovecote to the second to seek their food, so they go from the school of one scholar to the school of another scholar to seek explanations.... for the Torah"
The ideal stages of accomplishment

- At age five one begins studying scripture. At ten, Mishnah; at thirteen fulfilling the mitzvoth; at fifteen studying Talmud; at eighteen entering the bride-chamber; at twenty pursuing a calling; at thirty authority; at forty discernment; at fifty counsel; at sixty being an elder; at seventy grey hair; at eighty special strength; at ninety a bowed back; at a hundred a man is one that has already died, passed on, and departed this world.

Avot 5:21
Elementary pedagogy: the first steps

• a proselyte who approached the first century sage Hillel indicates how gerim began their studies. According to this account the ger learned the Hebrew alphabet in different combinations. Apparently learning the alphabet backwards and forwards required the initiation into Jewish learning. The Talmudic account reads, “on the first day Hillel taught the convert aleph, bet, gimmel, dalet. On the following day he reversed the letters for him.” Thus the ger was taught the alphabet forwards and backwards.


• Another method of learning the alphabet is illustrated by Rabbi Akiva’s beginning studies. Rabbi Akiva learned the alphabet by pairing the first and last letter combinations (aleph-tav, bet-shin, etc.) The rabbis called this method atbash after the pairs aleph-tav and bet-shin and the entire set of letter pairing became part of an exegetical technique in rabbinic and medieval hermeneutics.

• It should not come as a surprise then that the earliest preserved Hebrew alphabet primers from the Cairo Geniza reflect this. Several pages include outlines of the alphabet written forwards and backwards, in the first last combinations and with opening verses from Leviticus.[ See: Assaf, Meqorot 4:16 (no. 21) from the Cairo Geniza ].

• Nehemya Allony studied _Book Lists from the Cairo Geniza_. According to Malachi Beit Ari there existed about 300 thousand books from this time while Collette Sirat estimates closer to 1 million titles. The question remains why did many of these not survive?
Kiddushin 29a

- A father’s obligation is to circumcise him, redeem him if a first born (pidyon ha-ben), and teach him Torah, teach him an occupation, and marry him off. ”

Many letters and court records from Cairo Geniza attest to the centrality of education in Jewish life for example a women from a family tried to prove in a trial that her husband did not have the rights of a husband because he did not pay for the education of his children (she paid herself). In a settlement a women confirmed that she had paid expenses associated with food, drink, clothing, and living quarters, and education of their three children.
1st pusek to learn?

• “May it be your will O L-rd our G-d that Your Torah be *my occupation* (*omanuti*)

• R. Hamnuna names the pusek from Devarim 33:4 “When Moses charged us with the Torah as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob”

• Korbanot in Vayikra pure and children pure [Midrash Vayikra 7:3
Schooling from Docs. Of Cairo Geniza and Geonic Responsa

• Cairo Geniza the Gaonic Responsa shed light on Jewish medieval education. Responsa refer to schools, teachers, and their salaries, pupils, books, teachers and tutors being appointed to small towns, and that Jewish children in synagogues learn Hebrew and Arabic script, as well as arithmetic. Other responsa mention that non-Jewish families were interested in sending their children to synagogues to learn non religious topics.

• See: Assaf, A sourcebook for the History of Jewish Education from the beginning of the Middle ages to the period of the Haskalah, with added comments and supplements edited by Shmuel Glick, 5 vols, NY: JTSA, 2002-6, vol.2, p.27;Rabbi Hai the head of the academy in Pumbedita in the 10th to early 11th centuries notes that children may study “Arabic script and arithmetic as an addition to the study of the torah. But without the teaching of Torah, one should not teach these” and that “one should avoid as far as possible teaching the children of gentiles in the synagogues; but if there is fear it may cause outrage then it should be permitted, so as to keep the peace.”
Another source for knowledge about medieval education is Goitein’s _A Mediterranean Society_ where a letter by a Jewish man, notes that “the knowledge we acquire as children is the only thing that make others respect us…. The teacher should be respected and the children should be sent to school in the synagogue every morning and every evening. This teacher responded this way because he received a complaint from a parent that he assigned too much homework. Further in a business letter a Jewish merchant advises his correspondent to make sure that his son does not interrupt his studies; if the need arises the friend was asked to advance the school fees. Many letters attest that fathers traveling abroad give instructions to their wives or other relatives regarding the proper education of their children. One Jewish merchant criticizes his wife for letting the children skip school and play in the streets. In the same letter he sends his brother 15 dirhams for his children’s teacher and a fine piece of clothing for his son, to encourage him to attend the bet sefer. The records from the Geniza also attest that the Jewish community made great efforts to provide education for orphans and the children of the poor. Each household in addition to school fees for their own children, had to pay an education tax to finance the primary education of orphans and poor children. Records from Fustat, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Baghdad mention “teachers of the orphans” supported by this communal tax. Every head of household who resided for over 12 months had to pay this tax to finance the schooling of the poor. This document from the Geniza also provides evidence of expenditures from individual households for their own children.

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• PRIMARY ARCHIVAL TEXT

• “Account of the teaching of children in bet sefer of R. Nisim son of Ibrahim, community leader from Shabat Bereishit until Shabat Va-Yoseha- 16 weeks, 8 dirhams
• Son of the carpenter called Chayoun the Mugrabi for 4 months- 8 dirhams
• Three sons of Calaf from the town of Almachla for 12 weeks- 15 dirhams
• Chayoun the Magrabi the orphan from the month of av until Shabbat Va-Yoshea- 5 months, 10.5 dirhams
• Sons of the shoemaker’s wife and a little boy of R. Yehoshua, for 10 weeks ending with Shabbat VaYoshea- 15 dirhams
• Son of Mechsan the Shamash and the sons of Baha the shomer Kasthruth supervisor for 12 weeks- 12 dirhams”

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Geniza scholars and their approaches

- **(1) Solomon Schechter**: brought back 26 trunks of geniza docs. To Cambridge Univ.
- **(2) Louis Ginzberg**: Yerushalmi Fragments, Geonica, Eine unbekannte jüdische Sekte. [Zadokite Text of DSS] (halakhic texts)
- **(3) Israel Davidson**: Geniza poetry including Yannai & Menachem Zulay: pioneer in research of poetry of geniza
- **(4) Haim Schirmann**: pioneer in research of poetry of geniza, and accomplished violinst
- **(5) Ezra Fleischer**, [friend of Chaim Vilsker who was librarian at Hebrew Univ., formerly of Saltykov Library St. Petersburg] and head of Geniza poetry Research Institute
- **(6) Jacob Mann**: doc. Evidence- letters, contracts, court records on communal life
- **(7) S.D. Goitein**: A Mediterranean society : the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza (trade, accounts, etc.)
- **(8) Marc Cohen**: Voice of the Poor in the M.A. Under the auspices of the Princeton Geniza Proejct one of Goitein’s leading students Cohen has since the mid-1980s supervised able students to transcribe and create a large searchable database of the Geniza’s historical documents in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew. Known as the “TextGarden”, the database currently includes some 400 thousand fragments, nearly a quarter of the Geniza’s documentary nonliterary materials
- **(10) Stephen Reif**: liturgical aspects; Reif has advanced the organization of Schechter’s original finds far beyond the black binders on rows and rows of shelves a few aisles down from the Charles Darwin papers in the closed stacks of the University library. The Taylor-Schechter collection constitutes 70% of the worlds Geniza stash. Besides what Schechter carted back it includes purchases from Wertheimer, chester, Henriques, and others. It was Reif who in 1973 began systematic examination. An energetic Scottish Jewish scholar and bibliographer Reif laid out an ambitious 10 year plan to bring order to the jumbled mess by conserving, cataloging, microfilming, and creating a bibliography for the collection in its entirety. Beyond Cambridge, Geniza fragments are held physically in private storerooms from the JTSA in NY to the Bodleian at Oxford. 75 collections have been counted.

http://www.slideshare.net/TCLibraries/the-cairo-geniza-and-its-scholars
Conclusion

• The re-construction of collections of rabbinic texts in the medieval ages involves complex detective work and well worth the effort as Rabbi Shimon Ben Zemach Duran author of Zohar HaRakia notes when he writes, “when the wise man lies down with his fathers, he leaves behind him a treasured and organized blessing: books that enlighten like the brilliance of the firmament (Daniel 12:3) and that extend peace like a river (Isa. 66:12).” Might we all turn our lives into a song as Rabbi Yehudah HaLevy urges in his comment, “My pen is my harp and my library like gardens that refresh the mind and delight the soul”.

• Reconstructing what constituted these early collections of texts, how they were organized and how they expanded is the job of the librarian as detective historian.