DAVID M. GROSSBERG

Heresy and the Formation of the Rabbinic Community

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Heresy and the Formation of the Rabbinic Community

Mohr Siebeck

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To Chaim Ber Grossberg, z"l

– mi-ka'n ve-'eilakh torah meḥazzeret 'al 'akhsanya shellah

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Introduction

The Formation of the Rabbinic Community

In the year 70 C.E., when the Roman legions surrounded Jerusalem in the final days of a desperate siege, a sage named Yohanan ben Zakkai had himself smuggled out of the besieged city. Yohanan approached the Roman General Vespasian,[1] gained his favor by prophesying his impending coronation as Emperor, and begged a boon in return: "Give me Yavneh and its sages and the Gamlielian dynasty."[2] Vespasian agreed to spare Yavneh, a small coastal city south of modern Jaffa, and Yohanan gathered there a group of sages and the family of Rabban Gamliel, from whom would come the line of Patriarchs who would rule Roman Palestine in the coming years. At Yavneh, Yohanan quickly succeeded in forging a unified community of sages out of the chaos of Second Temple era sectarianism and the tragedy of the failed revolt against Rome, giving birth to the group that scholars refer to as *the rabbis* or *the rabbinic community*. This new community of rabbis reconvened the great Sanhedrin that used to sit in the Temple in Jerusalem, now destroyed by the Romans.[3] They cleansed Judaism of ideological deviants by inserting a curse against heretics in the daily Jewish liturgy.[4] And, they ensured Judaism's survival by compiling the ancient traditions of the Oral Torah that the first century B.C.E. sages Hillel and Shammai had received from a chain of transmission going back to Moses himself.[5] A heavenly voice blessed this work, declaring, "These and these – the words of Hillel and

[1] So the story appears in the Babylonian Talmud. In fact, it would have been Titus leading the siege at this stage, Vespasian having been recalled to Rome and proclaimed as Emperor. See n. 17, below.

[2] See n. 17, below, for the Aramaic text and parallels in the rabbinic literature. "Gamlielian" here follows my preferred spelling of Gamliel. More common in the literature is "Gamalielian."

[3] All of these purported occurrences are, of course, legendary, as I will explain. But even the actual role and constitution of the Second Temple period Sanhedrin is itself a complicated matter involving a good deal of legend. See David M. Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 38; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 77–130.

[4] See n. 19, below.

[5] The idea that a corpus of orally preserved traditions exists that is equal in authority and antiquity with the Hebrew Bible is characteristic of rabbinic literature, though the idea develops over time. The Bible itself (and especially its first five books) is thought of as the Written Torah and this oral corpus is referred to as the Oral Torah. See my discussion at the start of chapter three, section two and the notes there.

the words of Shammai, even where they contradict one another – are the words of the living God!"[6]

This familiar narrative of the rabbinic community's formation is, of course, a myth.[7] It is a myth of rabbinic origins that developed in the centuries subsequent to the period that it purports to describe. It appears in its full detail only in the Babylonian Talmud in approximately the sixth century.[8] Although a previous generation of scholars accepted that this tale's "historical kernel" preserved details of actual events that occurred in the first century, more recent scholarship has grown increasingly skeptical regarding almost all aspects of this relatively late story's historical accuracy.[9] But in the wake of the collapse of this scholarly consensus on the rabbinic community's origins in 70 C.E. Yavneh, we are left with no clear consensus or even generally accepted outline of how the rabbinic community did in fact come to be. Given the historical importance of the literary corpus attributed to these rabbis, known as the *rabbinic literature*, which became the ideological basis for almost all subsequent forms of Judaism up until modern times, this lack is very problematic. This book aims to address this lack through a reexamination of the formation of the rabbinic community.

Rather than supposing, however, as previous studies have, that the rabbinic community's formation was an *event* that occurred in a discrete period before which there was not a rabbinic community and after which there was,[10] my

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[6] See n. 20, below.

[7] Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World, Revised Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 138, refers to it as "a founding myth of rabbinic Judaism."

[8] This date for the Babylonian Talmud's editing is more or less conventional in contemporary scholarship, though the mechanics of the Talmud's composition and editing are complex and remain contentious. See my discussion of style and method in section four of this chapter and nn. 61–64, there.

[9] The specific matter of Yavneh is just one part of a more general increase in both skepticism and methodological sophistication in regard to the use of rabbinic texts for the study of ancient history over the last few decades. The most recent and best representative of the traditional approach is Gedalyahu Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70–640 C.E.)* (2 vols.; ed. and trans. Gershon Levi; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984). Important works critical of this approach include Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Jews, Christians, and Muslims, from the Ancient to the Modern World; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*. (12 vols.; New York: Pantheon, 1952–1968), 12.184–198; Michael Avi-Yonah, *Jews of Palestine: A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976); Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1989); Goodblatt, *Monarchic Principle*; and Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee: A.D. 132–212, Second Edition* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000).

[10] See Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 27–53, and n. 9, above.

analysis examines the development of the *idea* of a rabbinic collective. This is not an idea that appears fully formed at any specifiable moment, rather it evolves gradually. This gradual evolution is reflected in the kinds of polemical strategies that the various rabbinic texts deploy in constructing rhetorical boundaries between themselves and others. Diachronic trends in polemical strategies mirror developments in collective self-conception. The tool that I have chosen for this analysis is rabbinic textual polemic against marginal or threating figures within the broader Jewish community such as sinners, sectarians, and perceived deviants of various sorts. My argument in brief is that as the rabbis developed from diverse, fractious, and loosely organized local circles of sages, scribes, and judges into a centralized, institutionalized, and authoritative community,[11] they recast the kinds of rhetorical boundaries that they inscribed between themselves and the opponents discussed in their texts and traditions. As the rabbis' awareness of themselves as a distinctive community developed, they strategically redeployed named polemical targets from earlier texts such as Epicureans and the "sinners of Israel" in ways that highlighted their relationship to the rabbis as a group rather than stressing specific misdeeds in belief or practice as was typical in the earlier texts.

An important methodological implication of my approach is that the targets of rabbinic polemics will no longer be effectively analyzable using the oversimplified and potentially anachronistic category of heresy as has been standard in previous studies.[12] Typological "heretics" such as the "sinners of Israel," who are sharply rejected in earlier texts, might be enthusiastically praised in later texts. And even quintessential opponents such as the well-studied but still obscure *minim*, which I will discuss at length in chapter two, are continuously recast in complex ways that are flattened and distorted by thinking of them merely as heretics. Through its study of the role of boundary rhetoric in the rabbinic community's formation,[13] this book also critically reexamines and demonstrates the inadequacy of the entire category of heresy in the study of rabbinic literature.

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[11] On the idea of institutionalization, see Hezser, *Social Structure*, 185, "By institutionalization scholars mean that the rabbinic movement had fixed, permanent judicial and/or educational bodies in the form of a central court or sanhedrin and/or academies," and see the summary of the scholarship on this issue there. David M. Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Studies in Judaism of Late Antiquity 9; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 267, defines an academy as "an institution which transcends its principles. It has a staff, a curriculum, and most important, a life of its own, a corporate identity. Students come and go, teachers leave and are replaced, the head of the school dies and a new one is appointed – the institution goes on." This is in contrast to a disciple circle in which "when the master dies, the disciple circle disbands."

[12] I will discuss this matter in detail in chapter one.

[13] On the idea of boundary rhetoric, see the extended discussion in Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 98–146; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and the suggestion of a trend towards a generalized "boundary theory" in Jonathan Boyarin, "Responsive Thinking: Cultural Studies and Jewish

I. Yavneh and the Myth of Origins

Modern historical studies of the rabbis have been interested in the Yavneh narrative for several decades.[14] This narrative's latest and most fully developed version, which appears in tractate Gittin of the Babylonian Talmud,[15] still forms the basis of the common understanding of how the rabbinic community was formed. Scholars of a previous generation accepted this story's key elements, what they called its "historical core," as accurate.[16] But more recent scholarship has demonstrated that all of the narrative's critical dramatic elements – Yohanan's request to Vespasian,[17] the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin,[18] and the liturgical curse on deviants[19] no less than the heavenly voice's declaration that both Hillel and Shammai spoke the words of the living God[20] – are not actually associated with Yavneh until the time of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, edited in Roman Palestine and Persian Babylonia, respectively, around the fifth and sixth centuries. Earlier strands of rabbinic literature, known as the *tannaitic literature*, provide the story's smaller details that the later Talmuds build up into a foundation myth. The great collections of biblical interpretation known as *midrash* written around the time of the Talmuds' editing – Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Lamentations Rabbah, and the Pesiqta of Rav Kahana – barely mention Yavneh at all. That something memorable to the incipient rabbinic movement

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Historiography," in *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness: Identities, Encounters, Perspectives* (ed. Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 475–493, at 491.

[14] For a convenient bibliography see Adiel Schremer, "Stammaitic Historiography," in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada* (ed. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein; Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 114; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 219–236, at 228–229 n. 34.

[15] In b. Gittin 55b–56b. See section four of this chapter for a note on the style of citation of rabbinic texts.

[16] See n. 9, above.

[17] As mentioned in n. 1, above, the Babylonian Talmud has Vespasian leading the siege on Jerusalem at a time when he had, in fact, already been recalled to Rome and proclaimed as Emperor. The likely reason for this confusion is that the Bavli's narrative is based, at least in some indirect way, on a similar story that Josephus relates about himself in *The Jewish War* 3.399–408, which is set earlier, during the siege of Jotapata in 67 C.E. See Peter Schäfer, "Die Flucht Johanan b. Zakkais aus Jerusalem und die Gründung des ‚Lehrhauses' in Jabne," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.19.2 (1979): 43–101, at 85–86; and Hezser, *Social Structure*, 294–295. The request in b. Gittin 56b is: תן לי יבנה וחכמיה ושושילתא דרבן גמליאל. The text continues: ואסוותא דמסיין ליה לרבי צדוק. Variants of this story occur in b. Gittin 55b–56b, Lamentations Rabbah 1:31, and Avot of Rabbi Natan A 4, though the specific request made varies.

[18] See Goodblatt, *Monarchic Principle*, 232–276.

[19] I refer here to the *birkat ha-minim*, the "curse on the *minim*," which I discuss in chapter two, section two (see n. 58, there, for scholarship and relevant texts) and chapter three, section one (and, see nn. 12 and 13, there).

[20] This appears in b. Eruvin 13b (ed. Vilna): אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן. The Bavli text does not explicitly associate this legend with Yavneh, but the Yerushalmi does in its discussion in y. Berakhot 1:4, 3c. See section four on the style of citation of rabbinic texts.

actually did happen in Yavneh is clear enough from its frequent mention in the earliest rabbinic texts. But it is also clear that the event's importance was given additional weight over time, and it gradually accreted significance until it became the rabbis' birthplace.

The rabbis certainly did eventually become a recognizable community with institutions of study and accreditation, a process of ordination, established courts with authority on behalf of the sovereign rulers, and a system of enforcing their judicial decisions and transmitting them to diaspora Jewish communities. But the scholarship has clearly demonstrated that this was not the case in the first century. Indeed, it may not have been the case until the end of Late Antiquity or even into the early medieval period. As the scholarly consensus of a rabbinic community inventing itself and emerging triumphant after the Second Temple's destruction has given way to increasing skepticism about whether rabbinic sources are of much use for illuminating this early historical period,[21] we are left without a clear model of this community's formation between the first and sixth centuries C.E. Somehow a diverse collection of Pharisees and Sadducees, scribes and priests, sages with their discipleship circles, wonder-workers with their devotees,[22] and wealthy aristocratic dynasties[23] developed into a recognizable and circumscribed community. But there is still no definitive scholarly consensus in regard to whether we can specify a narrow timeframe for when this transition from diversity to collectivity occurred.

A growing contingent of scholars is now inclined to skepticism about whether it makes sense to talk about the existence of a rabbinic community at all before the third century. And perhaps even into the fourth century, what we think of as the rabbinic community was still in fact rather a loose network of circles of authority centered around individual sages and their students and close colleagues.[24] This proposed dating, however, leads to a very peculiar situation. If the rabbinic community did not exist until the third or fourth century, then the corpus of classical rabbinic literature's earliest texts, starting with the first rabbinic text, the Mishnah, which was compiled around the year 200 C.E., existed before the rabbinic community did. Indeed, all of the tradents of the traditions that appear in the earliest rabbinic works, the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Sifra, the Sifre Numbers and Sifre Deuteronomy, and the Mekhilta, lived before the

[21] See n. 9, above, and nn. 60, 61, and 63, below, and see my discussion of style and method in section four of this chapter.

[22] These are various groups, categories, or professions that existed in the ancient world, some unique to the Jewish ethnicity and some merely Jewish versions of larger Greco-Roman phenomena. They are part of the diverse intellectual culture of the first century that formed the intellectual and traditional basis of the rabbinic culture and the rabbinic traditions.

[23] I have in mind most importantly the Gamlielian line that eventually gave rise to the patriarchate. See Goodblatt, *Monarchic Principle*, 143–146.

[24] This position has been convincingly argued by Hezser, *Social Structure*. I rely on many of Hezser's findings for the following analysis.

rabbinic community's formation. In other words, the literature that these early rabbis produced, which is certainly the foundation of all of rabbinic literature, was not produced by "the rabbinic community" at all!

This is not an especially tenable conclusion, which suggests that the lack of a precise scholarly model for the formation of a unified rabbinic community is a significant hindrance to further progress in the study of the rabbinic corpus. To address this problem is one of the present study's major aims. I suggest that rather than looking for an occasion of rabbinic self-invention, rather than seeking a narrow date-range before which there was not a rabbinic community and after which there was, we would be better off supposing that the formation of a unified rabbinic self-conception was a process that occurred only gradually and unevenly over this entire period. And if so, there would be no need, from the perspective of our analysis of the rabbinic corpus, to imagine sharp divisions between the first and second centuries – marked by two momentous events, the Second Temple's destruction in 70 C.E. and the Bar Kokhba revolt in the 130s C.E. – or between the second and the third centuries – marked by the Mishnah's composition and promulgation around 200 C.E. Rather, we can approach this corpus with the assumption that the Pharisees, scribes, sages, and sectarians of the first century were indeed tradents of the traditions that form the foundation of the later rabbinic works. Of course, the process of collection and preservation involved distortion and intentional adaptation or reinvention of these earlier traditions. And this process of innovating, preserving, adapting, promulgating, reimagining, and redeploying of traditions was ongoing throughout the first to the sixth century, whether we refer to the tradents of these traditions as Pharisees, scribes, sages, or rabbis.

We will therefore approach the various collections of traditions that we will be examining in what follows – the tannaitic literature, including the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Sifra, Sifre Numbers, Sifre Deuteronomy, and the Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael (the Mekhilta);[25] and the *amoraic literature* including the Pesiqta of Rav Kahana (the Pesiqta), Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, and Lamentations Rabbah (these four works are known collectively as the classical Palestinian midrash),[26] and the Palestinian Talmud (the Yerushalmi) and the Babylonian

[25] Scholars have endeavored to reconstruct a number of other tannaitic collections, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, Sifre Zutta on Numbers, and Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy. These texts are generally considered not as reliable as the other tannaitic texts enumerated here, though I will refer to them where appropriate. For a convenient introduction to these works, see Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch, Ninth Edition* (Munich: Beck, 2011), 284–287, 298–299, and 303–304; for an earlier version of this book in English translation, see H.L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, Second Edition* (trans. Markus Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 257–259, 268–270, and 273–275.

[26] Later works of midrash will also be relevant, especially when they contain variants of traditions from these earlier works, but the later the work the more suspect it is often considered

Talmud (the Bavli) – as repositories collected at various periods from the third to the sixth century of traditions that date from the Second Temple period until the start of the medieval period. Yet we will also recognize that the earliest forms of the earliest strata of these traditions might be so modified as to be unrecoverable. As a scholarly convention, we refer to this material collectively as "rabbinic literature" and to the tradents of these traditions that are named in this literature as "the rabbis." The tradents of the tannaitic literature are also referred to as the *tannaim* (singular tanna, plural tannaim, lit. "repeaters" of tradition) and the tradents of the amoraic literature are also referred to as the *amoraim* (sg. amora, pl. amoraim, lit. "expounders" of tradition).

But this is not to say that the tradents of these traditions would have thought of themselves in such neat collective terms. Rather, it appears that many of the figures that appear in the classical rabbinic corpus would have thought of themselves primarily as the members of the people Israel.[27] However, they were not commoners among this people, but its intellectual elite. They were the "sages," or, more modestly, the "disciples of sages," of the traditions of Israel. Over time, the idea of the sage developed from an individual ideal to an identifiable and circumscribed group, and this development was accompanied by an increasing tendency to rhetorical representation of collective self-conceptualization in the texts themselves. The gradual development of the foundational Yavneh myth is a good example of this process. But in the current study, we will be examining how this evolving rhetorical representation is reflected in polemical efforts to inscribe boundaries between the rabbis and others.

It must be stressed that the methodological starting point for all scholarly reference to this period is a corpus of medieval manuscripts containing the texts that I just enumerated. These manuscripts are all collections of traditions, some attributed and some not, and collections of commentary or elaboration on these traditions that sometimes place them in discursive frameworks of various sorts. It is modern scholars who, following conventions established already in the medieval period, have come to refer to the tradents named in these traditions as "the rabbis." And it is these scholars who typically treat these rabbis in their studies as if they were a circumscribed group throughout the period of our concern. So in each generation from the first to the sixth century, scholars can list the rabbis of that generation, where they lived, what they taught, and how they thought about themselves as Jews. Scholars call this corpus of texts "rabbinic literature" and the five or six centuries of the flourishing of its tradents "the rabbinic period." And scholars attempt to abstract a uniform ideological approach to the rabbis' religion across all of these texts and refer to this constructed system as "rabbinic

to be in regard to its accurate preservation of early tradition. See the discussion of style and method in section four of this chapter.

[27] On the various ethnonyms for the Jewish ethnicity, see my discussion in section four, below, and in nn. 68 and 69, there.

Judaism," even though such a unified system of thought never existed in any single time and place in antiquity.

All of these scholarly abstractions, the rabbis, the rabbinic period, rabbinic literature, and rabbinic Judaism, are anachronistic and heuristic. They need not be rejected, and I adopt many of them in this study, so that I will use the term "the rabbis" to refer generally to the tradents of the traditions that appear in the classical rabbinic corpus. Yet it must always be kept in mind that these are just modern ideas that help us make sense of the past. No one alive at that time would have used these terms in the sense in which we use them or would have thought of themselves or their religion in this fashion. As we shall see, especially for the early part of this period, the rabbis had no special group designation for themselves,[28] they had no unique mode of dress or behavior that would have enabled an observer to pick them out of a crowd,[29] they had no formal process for ordination or determining membership,[30] they had no fixed and recognized institutions neither of learning nor of carrying out judicial functions,[31] and they had no imperial authority whatsoever.[32] Indeed, one might ask in what sense were they a group at all?

II. The Sage Idea and the Development of a Collective

As scholars have become increasingly cognizant that the model of 70 C.E. Yavneh as the geographical and temporal moment of rabbinic self-invention cannot be sustained in light of a critical examination of the evidence, the need for an alternative model of the development of a rabbinic collective has become increasingly more urgent. Scholars have therefore come up with various models to explain the rabbis' existence. The assumptions underlying these models are reflected in the remarkable variety of conceptual descriptors for the rabbinic collective that these scholars have utilized. The most common approach continues to refer to the named tradents who appear in the rabbinic literature as "the rabbinic community," but acknowledges that this community was formed somewhat later than 70 C.E., perhaps around the third century. Another approach, either skeptical that a recognizable "community" existed that early but still needing to account for the fact that at least some of the traditions included in the tannaitic literature likely predate the third century or based on the conjectured ideological

[28] See nn. 42–44, below.

[29] Hezser, *Social Structure*, 123–130.

[30] See nn. 42–44, below.

[31] On the *beit midrash*, see n. 42, below; on the Sanhedrin see nn. 3 and 18, above; and on institutionalization, see n. 11, above.

[32] See Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 175: "The rabbis were not authorized by the state and had little glamor after the revolts."

or social contours of an early collective have adopted other naming strategies to refer to these tradents, such as the "rabbinic party" (Sanders),[33] "rabbinic class" (Levine),[34] "rabbinic movement" (Hezser),[35] "or rabbinic guild" (Lightstone).[36] In these studies, the ideas of community, party, class, movement, or guild are typically contrasted to one another or to other collective designations such as sect or even "church." A third approach recognizes the potential distortion involved in applying these modern concepts to antiquity and so proposes alternatives more appropriate to the ancient world, such as philosophical school (Saldarini)[37] or voluntary association (Lapin).[38]

However, it is clear that all of these models, whether phrased in contemporary or ancient terms, are still in fact modern scholarly approximations. Although the works of the scholars just mentioned all represent important advances in our understanding of the rabbis, and the present study is best seen as an extension and refinement of their findings, I believe that it is important to consider more carefully the fact that the rabbis do not refer to *themselves* as a community or a class or a movement; they do not refer to themselves as a voluntary association or a philosophical school.[39] In fact, examining the rabbinic literature, one is

[33] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 156 n. 52: "On the basis of present evidence, the Pharisees are better called a party than a sect, and the Rabbis were certainly motivated by the party spirit rather than by sectarianism. A party is a group which believes itself to be right and which wishes others to obey or agree, but which does not exclude dissenters from 'Israel.'" See also Levine, *Rabbinic Class*, 13–14.

[34] Levine, *Rabbinic Class*, 14: "A 'class' refers to a group for whom social and religious issues are of prime importance, yet it differs from a 'party' primarily with respect to its political involvements or, more precisely, lack thereof." Cf. Hezser, *Social Structure*, 33.

[35] Hezser, *Social Structure*, 1 n. 1. See Lee I. Levine, "The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine by Catherine Hezser," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 90 (2000): 483–488, at 484–485, for a criticism of Hezser's terminology.

[36] Jack N. Lightstone, *Mishnah and the Social Formation of the Early Rabbinic Guild: A Socio-Rhetorical Approach* (with an Appendix by Vernon K. Robbins; Studies in Christianity and Judaism 11; Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002).

[37] Anthony J. Saldarini, *Scholastic Rabbinism: A Literary Study of the Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (Chico: Scholars, 1982). Also, see Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

[38] Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans*, 7, 64, 91–92, 97. Cf. Hezser, *Social Structure*, 319–320, who discusses voluntary associations while discussing rabbinic *ḥavurot*, which she does not see as best compared to voluntary associations. Rather, she suggests a comparison of the rabbinic *ḥavura* to the philosophical circles of friends (*filoi*).

[39] See Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 163: "But the rabbis were emphatically not normal elites or subelites of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. All the efforts of scholars over the last 150 years to detect significant similarities in social role and status between rabbis and sophists, philosophers, *iurisprudentes*, or other easily recognizable high imperial types have only highlighted the fact that the rabbis were *not* sophists, philosophers, or *iurisprudentes*. One reason these parallels … have not proved convincing is that the rabbis combined elements of all of these functions in a way that no one else in the Greco-Roman world did, except, mutatis mutandis, Christian bishops. This, in turn, is because the rabbis were unique in deriving their self-understanding from the Torah, which in their view was the repository of everything

struck by the fact that they did not have seem to have any consistent, clear, and explicit self-designation for themselves as a collective at all.[40] Of course many, but not all, of the tradents of rabbinic traditions bear the title "rabbi." But this was a title of respect that, at least in the first few centuries C.E., accorded no official authority,[41] entailed no fixed process or locus of ordination,[42] and which pre-existed the rabbinic community and continued to be used outside of it.[43] Indeed, in the vast majority of instances where this term is encountered outside of rabbinic literature it would seem to be applied to figures that scholars would

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worthwhile. Although in reality their wisdom may sometimes have had a Stoic or Cynical tinge, their legislation may have owed something to Roman civil law, and their miracles (or miracle stories) resembled those performed by (or told about) such figures as Apollonius of Tyana, as far as the rabbis themselves were concerned, the source of all wisdom, law, and numinosity was the Torah alone. In this way they closely resembled their predecessors in the Second Temple period and rabbinic colleagues in Mesopotamia, and they were at odds with their nonrabbinic contemporaries and counterparts in the Greco-Roman cities."

[40] The scholarship on groups in the sociological literature is extensive. For a convenient summary, see Hezser, *Social Structure*, 233–237. Rather than relying on modern sociological concepts and categories that may or may not be appropriate to the ancient world, I prefer in the following discussion to compare rabbinic concepts based on their own usage. From this perspective, it is clear that individual designations such as "rabbi" and "sage" do not function in the rabbinic texts as group designations such as "Sadducee" or "Israel" do. They are, rather, more like individual designations such as "righteous person" or "*meshummad*" in the sense that the latter pick out aggregates of individuals rather than corporate groups. See n. 46, below.

[41] On rabbinic authority, see n. 32, above; and see Hezser, *Social Structure*, 454: "Rabbinic authority may rather be defined as personal authority based on each rabbi's individual reputation combined with authority based on his role as Torah teacher and sage. At least from the third century onwards, but probably already earlier, rabbis tried to legitimize this role by recurring to the supernatural origin of rabbinic teachings."

[42] See Hezser, *Social Structure*, 55–68, 111–121. Although various types of "appointments" exist in the rabbinic corpus, it is not typical to appoint someone explicitly as a "rabbi" (on b. Bava Metzia 85a, see Hezser, *Social Structure*, 91–92). Lawrence A. Hoffman, "The Origins of Ordination," in *Rabbinic Authority: Papers Presented Before the Ninety-First Annual Convention of the Central Conference of Rabbis* (ed. Elliot L. Stevens; New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1982), 71–94, at 89, writes, "The amazing thing is that we have not a single instance of a man actually receiving the title 'Rabbi.' In other words, we know that there were rabbis from the year 70 onward, but no source tells us explicitly about them. True, we have Palestinian accounts involving the root *mnh*, and some seem to be about rabbis; but never is the word *mnh* coupled explicitly with the word 'rabbi.'" Moreover, at least in the early period, there does not seem to have been any fixed institution for granting such an ordination, but rather only study circles or discipleship circles. Scholars disagree regarding the function of the *beit midrash*. See Levine, *Rabbinic Class*, 25–29, and Hezser, *Social Structure*, 195–214. On the archaeological evidence, in particular a lintel that mentions "the *beit midrash* of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qapper," see Levine, *Rabbinic Class*, 29, Hezser, *Social Structure*, 205, and Goodman, *State and Society*, 76.

[43] See Hershel Shanks, "Origins of the Title, 'Rabbi,'" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1969): 152–157; S. Zeitlin, "The Title 'Rabbi' in the Gospels is Anachronistic," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1968): 158–160; Hershel Shanks, "Is the Title 'Rabbi' Anachronistic in the Gospels?" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 53 (1963): 337–345; and Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1981): 1–17. And see n. 2, in the conclusion.

not consider part of the rabbinic community at all.[44] Moreover, rabbinic texts do not typically use the term rabbi as an abstract substantive as scholars tend to use it today, though this type of usage does occur in later texts. Its major function is as a title of respect, like "Mister" (or perhaps better, "Master") or "Sir" in modern usage.

More relevantly, the tradents of rabbinic traditions do consistently refer to themselves as sages or as the "disciples of sages," and some scholars eschew the expression "the rabbis" preferring instead to refer to "the sages."[45] But the rabbis did not invent the idea of a sage, nor was it, in its common usage, primarily a group designation. The sage-idea was already ancient by the first century C.E. The designation did not refer to a circumscribed group like designations such as "Pharisees" or "Sadducees," or "Stoics" or "Epicureans," or even "Christians," "Jews," or "Israel" did. As an appellation, the term "sage" had more in common with terms such as "sinner" or "righteous person" that picked out an aggregate of individuals based on personal failings or achievements rather than specifying a collective based on ideological conformity with a corporate group.[46] For this reason, the Tosefta in t. Qiddushin 3:8 (see section four of this chapter for a note on citation style for rabbinic texts) can state that if a person makes an oath on the condition that he is a sage, then that oath will be binding if he is considered wise according to the standards of the town in which he lives. He is not held up to the standards of revered sages of the imagined rabbinic past such as Shimon ben Azzai and Shimon ben Zoma nor is he measured against a fixed standard of achievement or an institutionalized ordination. And the sage idea was not limited to Jews. The Palestinian Talmud recognizes that there are sages among the gentiles as well as among Israel.[47] The concept of a sage in Judea in the first centuries before and after the Common Era was widespread and commonly understood, though no doubt what it entailed specifically was a matter of debate and disagreement. It was, in any case, neither a fixed ideal nor a circumscribed collective designation. Rather it was a marker of individual achievement that

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[44] Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," 12, writes, "Even in antiquity not all rabbis were Rabbis." And see n. 43, above, and n. 2, in the conclusion.

[45] See, for example, Shmuel Safrai, ed., *The Literature of the Sages, First Part: Oral Tora, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987).

[46] Hezser, *Social Structure*, 325, cites the Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni in this regard: "Alberoni distinguishes between 'aggregative collective phenomena' and 'group collective phenomena.' Aggregative collective phenomena 'are characterized by the fact that a large number of people behave in the same way' by, for example, dressing alike or spending their money alike. They act independently of each other and do not form any organization or group: 'every individual, though behaving in the same way as the others, acts in reality for himself and for himself alone. All those who behave in a given way … do not form a higher-order social entity with which they identify themselves; in other words, they cannot be considered a group." See Francesco Alberoni, *Movement and Institution* (trans. Patricia C. Arden Delmoro; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 16.

[47] Y. Bava Batra 8:1, 16a.

others might or might not acknowledge. One might compare it very loosely to the modern idea of an "intellectual," in the sense that there seems to be a vague community-wide standard of the kinds of things that an intellectual ought to know but no fixed standard is forthcoming.

I suggest, therefore, that we think about the rabbinic community's formation not as the time when a corporate group invented itself but rather as a gradual evolution and expansion of the ancient idea of a sage. A sage was a Jew distinguished by his learning and as such was a community-wide ideal. It would seem that the curriculum that a sage was required to have mastered was not formalized, at least not until an institutionalized rabbinic community had clearly established itself through a fixed process of ordination. Before this time, however, the types of texts or areas of expertise that characterized a sage's mastery were likely to have been rather fluid. Over time one would expect, not consensus but increasing agreement regarding an expanding collection of especially significant texts or subjects. So, for example, no doubt mastery of the ancient biblical texts would have been a common denominator of the sage-idea already in the Hellenistic period. By the first century C.E., we might imagine Hellenistic era texts like the book of Ben Sira increasingly to have been considered important knowledge for a sage. More importantly, the types of judicial hermeneutics that worked to expand the applicability of biblical precepts that we see in works such as Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls would likely have been recognized as a form of general expertise required of a sage. From this perspective, schools such as those of Hillel and Shammai or those of Yishmael and Akiva in the centuries around the turn of the era would be understood as circles of study and expertise consuming and producing a curriculum for sages, not necessarily in an intentional and formal way, but by the fact of their own work and their own aspirations to realize the sage ideal.

As these schools produced collections of traditions that circulated through elite Jewish society, ideas about what a person must know in order to make a legitimate claim to be a sage expanded. A pivotal moment in this process would have been the production of the Mishnah. As a text that presents itself in a well-organized and comprehensive fashion as the core curriculum of a sage,[48] it appears quickly to have become widely distributed and accepted. Perhaps its success led to the production of related collections such as the Tosefta and the

[48] Goodman, *State and Society*, 6, notes, "[The Mishnah] does not prescribe correct behavior, but rather describes that behavior as if it is normal." He sees this as "a not uncommon technique for importing solemnity into a law code." Perhaps as well, this style is appropriate to a document that was aiming to lay out a core curriculum for a sage, that is, what a sage ought to be. Generally speaking, scholarship on the question of the Mishnah's purpose suggests three possibilities: a collection of sources, a teaching manual, or a practical code of law. See David M. Grossberg, "Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41 (2010): 517–561, at 552 n. 82. The idea of a core curriculum for a sage is along the lines of the first and second of these three.

tannaitic collections of midrash mentioned above, the Sifre, Sifra, and the Mekhilta. As these collections were produced and consumed, the program of study for a sage both grew and became more strongly established.

In short, I am proposing that an important driving factor in the development of the rabbinic community was the idea of the sage itself. As this idea was increasingly formalized through the production and mastery of texts, the unified community of sages that the texts only imagine as part of their rhetorical landscape became increasingly established in actuality among the diverse circles of scholars and scribes that studied and promulgated these texts. Such a process would involve a complex and incremental interplay between text and collective, between sage and curriculum, that in time led to the institutionalized and authoritative group of sages that scholars now refer to as the rabbinic community, which was well established by the sixth century in Sasanian Persia.

For the purposes of the present study, what is important is that the formation of the rabbinic community was an extended process and not a discrete occasion. This process was ongoing for centuries and embraces much of the period during which the rabbinic corpus' foundational texts were produced. Over this period, the tradents of the traditions in this corpus developed new ideas about what it meant to be a rabbi and who the rabbis were as a collective. We would expect, therefore, that as these ideas changed we should see corresponding changes in the traditions themselves. We would expect that the way that these traditions discuss collective boundaries, whether boundaries between the pious and impious, boundaries between rabbis and others, or boundaries among the rabbis themselves, should change in consistent ways that map out developments in rabbinic self-conception. We will undertake a careful study of these changes in the coming chapters.

It bears repeating that the foregoing review of various scholarly approaches to rabbinic community formation was not intended as a criticism of these important studies. My work relies on and extends these studies' most significant findings, relying especially on Catherine Hezser's *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Community in Roman Palestine*. There appears to be an increasing recognition in the field that the formation of the rabbinic community was a longer and more uneven process than what scholars would have thought even two decades ago. My study taken in isolation does not aim to prove all the controversial details of this emerging consensus. Rather, I bring to bear the tool of analyzing stylistic developments in rabbinic boundary rhetoric to show how the rabbinic corpus reflects this gradual process in unexpected ways in its polemical and narrative texts. Thus, although as just discussed I am uncertain whether common terms for describing the rabbis, whether as a "collective," "group," "movement," or "community," can ever attain a high level of precision, I do adopt these terms in this book. Just as at the end of the last section, I acknowledged using the terms "the rabbis" and "rabbinic literature" in a purely conventional sense, here also

I will use the terms "collective" or "group," and "movement" or "community" in a conventional sense. I use these terms only comparatively to highlight stages of a relatively less or more identifiable or unified entity. I am not aiming to discover when a rabbinic "movement" turned into a rabbinic "community." However, when I need to compare a relatively less unified to a relatively more unified stage of development, I might refer in the earlier stage to the "rabbinic movement" and in the later to the "rabbinic community." But other terms would do just as well. By way of illustration of my use of these terms, I might say that we are examining a period from the first century – during which time there were, perhaps, merely individual sages and their disciples with no significant collective characteristics, a period which predated the beginnings of the "rabbinic movement" – to the sixth century, when there likely was an ideologically unified and institutionalized group of rabbis, easily identifiable as a "rabbinic community." Thus, even if precise stages of absolute development cannot be reconstructed, I will use these comparative concepts to point out where the texts can shed light on key moments of relative development.

III. Heresy and the Formation of Community

Much good scholarship has already been done examining the rabbis through studying the ideas that they had about themselves.[49] In this book, we will examine the formation of the rabbinic community in large part through studying the ideas that the rabbis had about others. Because the formation of community entails the rhetorical construction of a boundary, those that are imagined to be outside of this boundary are as important as those that are imagined to be within. Recent scholarship has been increasingly interested in this kind of rabbinic boundary rhetoric, and my work owes much to these efforts.[50] But I believe that a critical reexamination of the convention to approach this subject with the all-purpose category of heresy has become necessary.[51]

In the following chapters, I will analyze strategies for rhetorical construction of boundaries in the rabbinic literature as they change and develop chronologically. I will examine how the exclusion and inclusion of perceived deviants and marginal figures functions in the construction of a boundary defining the rabbis as a collective. And I will demonstrate how rabbinic traditions constantly reimagine such boundaries in complex and changing ways. An opponent that an

[49] See n. 9, above.

[50] See, for example, Boyarin, *Border Lines*; Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[51] See my extended discussion and bibliography in chapter one.

earlier tradition treats in an exclusionary fashion, a later iteration of that same tradition might treat in an inclusionary fashion. A polemical target imagined as a kind of Jewish insider might be remimagined as a non-Jewish outsider. A group treated as impious might be split into two groups, one sinful and one normalized, in effect subtly shifting an established boundary between rabbis and others or within the rabbinic collective itself. Scholarly application of heresy as a concept to rabbinic polemics has tended to focus attention too narrowly on the exclusion of deviants. This focus takes insufficient account of such rhetorical shifts and captures only part of the characteristics and contours of these texts. My research suggests that such strategic redeployment is integral to the fluid collection of discrete traditions that is so characteristic of the rabbinic corpus. Relying on fixed standards imported from other period literary genres can at times hinder more nuanced readings of the rhetorical intent of rabbinic polemics.

Greater precision in our analysis is necessary if we are to come to a clearer understanding of the rabbinic community's formation because the drawing of boundaries and community formation are intrinsically linked. Relying on overly schematic representations of the rabbis' rhetorical development can impose limits on our understanding of their social development. For instance, one influential early study of rabbinic origins proposed, apparently based on literal readings of the Babylonian Talmud, what might be thought of an "ecclesiastical narrative" of rabbinic history.[52] I refer to it in this way because of its similarity to the narrative of early Christian history that the fourth century Church historian Eusebius popularized. Eusebius writes that until the end of the first century the church was like "a pure and uncorrupted virgin,"[53] in the sense that it had maintained a single doctrine that was directly attributable to Jesus. It was only after the first disciples died that this doctrine was corrupted through the "folly of heretical teachers."[54] In other words, this narrative claims that Christian orthodoxy came first, and only later the corrupting influence of demonic powers

[52] I refer to Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire* (135–425) (trans. H. McKeating; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See also Marcel Simon, "From Greek Hairesis to Christian Heresy," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition* (ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken; Théologie Historique 54; Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979), 101–116.

[53] These words are attributed to the second century heresiologist Hegesippus. Eusebius, *Church History* 3.32:7–8 (ed. Schaff): "the Church up to [the last decades of the first century] had remained a pure and uncorrupted virgin, since, if there were any that attempted to corrupt the sound norm of the preaching of salvation, they lay until then concealed in obscure darkness. But when the sacred college of apostles had suffered death in various forms, and the generation of those that had been deemed worthy to hear the inspired wisdom with their own ears had passed away, then the league of godless error took its rise as a result of the folly of heretical teachers, who, because none of the apostles was still living, attempted henceforth, with a bold face, to proclaim, in opposition to the preaching of the truth, the 'knowledge which is falsely so-called.'"

[54] Ibid.

brought about the distortion of this original doctrine, and the result was heresy. This bit of polemical historiography is neat and even seductive in its simplicity, and it has proved tenacious in its hold. However, as historians of early Christian heresiology have demonstrated over the last several decades, the narrative does not stand up to scholarly scrutiny.[55] Some of the doctrines that early Christian polemicists labeled as heretical may have actually preceded those represented as orthodox! If so, this would suggest that perhaps the direction of doctrinal development was not from an original unity to a corrupt diversity but from a primordial variety to an artificial and at times violently imposed uniformity. The victorious doctrine is called "orthodox" and the anathematized doctrine is called "heresy," but these are contested badges of legitimacy rather than descriptive categories of sociological reality.

A similar kind of totalizing narrative has been proposed for the rabbis, which builds on the myth of Yavneh already discussed.[56] And this narrative as well, not at all coincidently, relies on the ideas of orthodoxy and heresy. It is supposed that following on the purported events at Yavneh in 70 C.E., the newly formed rabbinic community ejected heretics from Israel by establishing a "curse on the heretics" in the daily liturgy obligatory on all Jews. The rabbis then imposed a "Talmudic orthodoxy" on Judaism and this resulted in the formation of a type of Judaism, "rabbinic Judaism," which predominated until modern times.[57] In this narrative, it is the rabbinic community, ancient, medieval, and modern, that acts as the crusaders against heresy. As already discussed, however, this kind of ecclesiastical narrative would appear to be a very poor reconstruction of the events of the first centuries C.E., and it is in some of its details wildly anachronistic. But it does demonstrate how the idea of rabbinic heresy and the idea of rabbinic community formation are closely linked and must be critically reexamined together. This is the approach of the current study.

I will examine the concept of heresy at length in the first chapter and explore both its usage and application in the study of the religions of the ancient world, and the limits of its application to the study of the classical rabbinic corpus. I will argue that heresy, properly contextualized in antiquity, is part of

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[55] See Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1934) – the 1964 second edition of this work was translated as *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (ed. and trans. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) – and Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque, IIe-IIIe siècles* (2 vols.; Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985).

[56] See n. 52, above.

[57] Simon, *Verus Israel*, 61–62: "[After 70] supreme authority belonged to the Patriarch. … the Sanhedrin … as a purely religious academy … was made subordinate to him and served as his council. Patriarchs of provinces and heads of local synagogues derived their powers from him … [his 'apostles'] organized the struggle against heresies, and in particular against Christianity … and were largely responsible for imposing on Judaism the uniformity that Talmudic orthodoxy required" (*Verus Israel*, 61–62).

an early Christian technical lexicon that functions within heresiology as an early Christian polemical literary genre. This genre should be understood as just one manifestation of the larger human endeavor of boundary rhetoric, one typical of early Christianity but not of ancient Judaism. The rabbis certainly do inscribe rhetorical boundaries around themselves and target opponents in an exclusionary and at times in an inclusionary fashion, but they do this using their own characteristic literary genres and polemical lexicon. So, for example, both early Christian heresiology and the very important rabbinic traditions targeting the obscure *minim* that I will discuss presently, can be understood as strategic approaches to polemical exclusion, but they are not equivalent or interchangeable. As I will demonstrate, the wholesale adoption of what is in fact a narrow early Christian polemical lexicon to study ancient Judaism has stood in the way of progress in our understanding of rabbinic community formation. The approach of this book is to avoid reliance on this narrow early lexicon and to study instead more broadly how rhetoric and polemic and the targets of this rhetoric and polemic, the construction of rhetorical boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and exclusion and inclusion functioned in the formation of the rabbinic community.

Having established this book's methodological approach in the first chapter, I will proceed in the subsequent chapters to analyze diachronic developments in the conceptualization of the most important rabbinic opponents, concentrating on those groups that previous studies devoted to the idea of rabbinic heresy have treated more narrowly. I will show how these polemical opponents are reconceptualized and recast in ways that highlight the drawing of clearer boundaries around the rabbinic community and around the larger ethnic collective that it increasingly aspired to lead, the people of Israel. I will in general be less interested in trying to identify *whom* precisely these opponents were than in *how* they function as straw men and polemical tropes, recognizing that they are often mostly imaginary and typically highly unstable.

In chapter two, I will analyze the most important of these rabbinic opponents, the *minim* (sg. *min*, pl. *minim*). This term is usually translated as "sectarians" or "heretics," or even as "Jewish-Christians,"[58] but it is one of a very few obscure terms with a range of complex meanings in the rabbinic corpus that must remain untranslated in this work so as to avoid circular argumentation. I will demonstrate how in its earliest usage *minim* was a narrow appellation for a Jewish sectarian entity that is treated in the texts as the Pharisees and the Sadducees are. Over time, however, the *minim* as an abstract opponent accreted more characteristics and eventually became associated with binitarian theological beliefs. Finally, in the latest strata of the rabbinic corpus *minim* function as straw men

[58] The category of "Jewish-Christian" is problematic and is of very questionable relevance to the period under consideration in this book. I refer here only to how other scholars have treated the term *minim*, which I critically reexamine in chapter two. See n. 3, there.

opponents for the rabbinic collective generally as non-Jews or idolaters shorn of much of their ideological specificity. The movement is therefore from *minim* as sectarian Jewish insider to *minim* as a threatening hybrid to *minim* as a complete outsider, a foil for a rhetorically constructed rabbinic collective.

In chapter three, I will examine another category of deviant that is sharply excluded in the earliest strata of rabbinic literature, the sinners of Israel. In this case, the chronological movement will be from sharp exclusion to hyperbolic inclusion in the latest strata, in which the sinners of Israel are said to be full of good deeds. However, I will demonstrate that this rhetorical inclusion serves a purpose in the construction of a rabbinic self-conception that encompasses even sinners and deviants within the community of Israel over whom the rabbis' teachings have jurisdiction. This development from exclusion to inclusion is thus integral to the process of rabbinic community formation, which functions strategically by co-opting earlier opponents into the larger collective that the rabbis aspired to lead.

Where chapter two examines a rhetorical movement from insider to outsider and chapter three examines a movement from exclusion to inclusion, chapters four and five examine subtle shifts of a boundary within targeted opponent groups. These groups tend to be treated in an exclusionary fashion, but I will demonstrate how boundaries are shifted in such a way as to serve an at times inclusionary but still polemical aim. In this context, I will examine the *meshummadim* (sg. *meshummad*, pl. *meshummadim*) and the *apiqorsim* (sg. *apiqoros*, pl. *apiqorsim*), but again I will leave these words untranslated to avoid distorting semantic implications (the convention has been to translate *meshummad* as "apostate" and *apiqoros* as "Epicurean"; I will touch more on this book's approach to specialized scholarly terminology and translation in the following section on style and method). I will demonstrate how subsequent redeployments of these polemic targets reveal a remarkable shift in the conditions or mode of exclusion. In the first case, the rabbis invent the idea that only some types of *meshummadim* are excluded from the community of pious Jews, yet other *meshummadim* are in effect included. The second case entails a shift in the fundamental relevance of the *apiqoros* to the rabbis, expressed in the extent to which active disputations with *apiqorsim* is encouraged at all. Like the movement from insider to outsider and from exclusion to inclusion to be examined in the first two chapters, in chapters three and four a shift in the line over which one must cross to be considered impious works together with careful exhortations regarding how a pious rabbi ought to respond to such impiety to highlight the rabbis as a group, collectively opposing reconceptualized and regrouped opponents.

And finally, chapters six and seven examine two important polemical targets that are unexpectedly closely related in the latest strata of the rabbinic corpus, "those who say that there are two powers" and "those who sin and cause the public to sin." In both cases, a category sharply excluded in the earlier strata is