

ENGLISH SUMMARIES

The term “*demai*” is commonly thought of as referring to the agricultural produce of ‘*amei ha’aretz*’ (“common folk”), who were not scrupulous about separating the tithes from their produce. Yet the term is not defined this way explicitly anywhere in tannaitic sources. **Ruth Elster**, in “The Meaning of the Term ‘*Demai*’ in Tannaitic Literature”, examines whether the common definition denotes the concept accurately, as it was used in these sources.

Elster clarifies the matter in several stages. First, she discusses the *baraita* (*Sota* 84a) that tells of the enactments of Yochanan the High Priest. This is the most explicit source identifying *demai* with the produce of an ‘*am ha’aretz*. Nevertheless, this identification is to be found in only one of the parallel versions of this *baraita*. Thus it is not proof of that definition applying in all of tannaitic literature. Next, Elster relates to the structure and language of Mishnah Tractate *Demai*. Although the tractate does discuss these two matters — the laws of *demai* and the relationship between a *chaveir* and an ‘*am ha’aretz* — nevertheless, there are many indications that the tractate was constructed from two different collections, each one of which deals with only one of these subjects: *demai*, as one matter, and the relationship between a *chaveir* and an ‘*am ha’aretz* as a completely independent matter.

Next, Elster examines the tannaitic sources that define the situations in which produce becomes *demai*. No tannaitic source exists that requires one to link the term *demai* specifically to ‘*amei ha’aretz*. To the contrary, many sources link the term to the selling of crops. Elster concludes that the ancient meaning of the term *demai* denoted all types of doubt that arose concerning the setting aside of *ma’asrot* (tithes) from the crop. These doubts stemmed, in general, from ignorance about the source of the produce, as happened in the market place, in storage containers and pits, with found objects, and with deposits for safekeeping. Only at a later stage did the significance of the term become restricted to a narrower group of situations which required separating the tithes, in a way that was also called *demai*.

Priestly gifts and tithes, after being set aside from harvested crops, remained with the crop owner until he gave the priestly gifts to a priest of his choice and the tithes to a Levite of his choice. According to the prevailing tannaitic law, the owner was thus entitled to derive economic benefit from the gifts (*tovat hana’ah* — the priest

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or Levite he chose would “owe him a favor”). However, the *amoraim* restricted this right, and some even rejected it, by the prohibition against “the priest who works on the threshing floors”.

In “Distribution of the Priestly Gifts and Tithes: Failures and Lessons”, **Yitzhak Brand** argues that the two laws mentioned above were based on lessons learned from the failures of the distribution of gifts towards the end of the Second Temple period. According to the sages, these failures brought about the destruction of the Temple.

In “*Millot HaMishnah* by R. Saadia Gaon — the First Commentary to the Mishnah”, **Uziel Fuchs** presents a large Geniza fragment, a translation into Arabic and commentary on difficult words in the Mishnah. The Geniza fragment includes commentaries on tractates from three of the six Orders of the Mishnah — *Mo’ed*, *Nashim*, and *Nezikin*. Fuchs shows that this fragment is part of the commentary *Millot HaMishnah* (“Mishnah Terms”) by R. Saadia Gaon, of whose existence there are early testimonies. Fuchs surveys several proofs that the fragment is attributable to R. Saadia Gaon, and presents several examples of the importance of the commentary, *inter alia*, for identifying place names in the Mishnah.

One of the well-known disputes between the Pharisees and the Boethusians/Sadducees towards the end of the Second Temple period concerned whether the high priest should begin to burn the incense before entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, or only after entering. Three of the sources in rabbinic literature that report this dispute also tell the story of a Boethusian/Sadducee high priest who violated the Pharisee halakhic position blatantly, and died.

In “The Tale of the Sadducee and the Incense in b. *Yoma* — the Metamorphosis of a Text and Commentary”, **Yonatan Feintuch** focuses on the version of the story in *Yoma* 91b. Feintuch examines the various textual witnesses of the story, and presents and explains the significant differences between them. Similarly, the *Bavli* story is compared to the early Land of Israel parallel versions in the Tosefta and in the *Yerushalmi*, while highlighting the evolution of the story as it passed from one source to the next.

In the second part of the study, Feintuch compares the Sadducee story in *Yoma* to the story of the death of R. Akiva in *Berakhot* 16b. He discusses earlier research that dealt with the relationship between the stories, and presents a new discussion in light of the textual witnesses of the story in *Berakhot*. Finally, Feintuch examines the hypothesis that the relationship between the stories affected the differences in style between the story in *Yoma* and its parallel versions in the Land of Israel sources.

Rivka Raviv, in “The ‘Son of Man’ Vision in Rabbinic Literature”, discusses the interpretations in rabbinic literature of the “son of man” vision in Daniel 7, 13–14.

Raviv discusses them in light of the early Jewish interpretations from the Second Temple period, and in light of the relationship between those interpretations and the interpretations in early Christian literature. This vision was highly significant in the ancient Christian world. Raviv also examines whether there are any references to the Christian interpretation or to Jewish-Christian polemic in rabbinic literature.

Raviv's principal conclusion is that rabbinic literature preserved a highly homogeneous interpretative approach regarding the "son of man" vision — an approach whose roots may be found in *Fourth Ezra*. The sages distinguished between the "son of man" vision and "the ancient of days" vision in verses 9–10. They generally interpreted the "son of man" as a reference to the messiah. In spite of the differences between this interpretive approach and the Christian one, an examination of the entire complex of traditions in rabbinic literature shows that there was no overt polemic trend between Judaism and Christianity regarding these traditions.

In responding to a request from Provence to interpret a passage in the *Yerushalmi*, thirteenth century R. Solomon b. Adret of Barcelona expressed surprise that anyone from southern France would turn to him for help in understanding the *Yerushalmi*. "I am baffled that you ask me to explain the *Yerushalmi*, when you have a father for reading and interpreting it — the great Rabbi Judah ben Yakar. I also see that you are deeply familiar with this text yourself." Indeed, the *Yerushalmi* played a more prominent role among the Jewish communities of Provence and Languedoc than in most other medieval Talmudic centers.

Pinchas Roth, in "On Exegesis of the *Yerushalmi* in Medieval Provence", focuses on a series of short exegetical comments on passages in *Yerushalmi Bava Kamma*. These comments, found in ms. Paris BN 1931, have not been published previously. They preserve the attempts of a fourteenth century Provençal Talmudist to explicate difficult sections of the *Yerushalmi*. The comments also record an explanation in the name of Aharon b. Meshulam of Lunel, an important twelfth century Talmudist whose writings have been lost almost completely. Elsewhere in the same manuscript, a question posed by Aharon b. Meshulam is preserved, followed by the response given to his question by R. Abraham b. David of Posquières. Thus, the author of the *Yerushalmi* comments may have had access to now-lost writings of Aharon b. Meshulam.

In "A Field the Size of Four *Kabin*", **Yaacov Choueka** and **Mordechai Sabato** discuss the texts of the commentators who calculated the area of a field the size of four *kabin* (in which that volume of seeds was customarily sown), which appears in Mishnah *Bava Batra* 6, 7. Choueka and Sabato show that the simple arithmetical calculation mentioned in the commentaries of R. Samuel b. Meir ("Rashbam") on the Talmud, of Rashi on Alfasi, and of R. Obadiah b. Abraham of Bertinoro on the

Mishnah, was not authored by any of them. The first print edition of each of those three commentaries has a different calculation, which does not correspond to the arithmetical calculation; the version in our printed editions is the consequence of an emendation. The authors trace the evolution of the textual variants in the various printed editions, stage by stage, and discuss its significance. In the second part of the paper the authors discuss the calculation of the length of the side of a square the size of four *kabin*, and compare the arithmetical calculation to the calculations of three Talmudic annotators, R. Shlomo Luria (“Maharshal”), R. Yoel Sirkis (the “Bach”), and R. Shmuel Eidels (“Maharsha”).

In “The Press”, **Daniel Sperber** clarifies the nature of the various types of presses mentioned in rabbinic literature, and identifies them with archeological finds from the same period.

Collective punishment, which does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, was of great concern to the Talmudic sages. **Gilad Sasson**, in “The Question of Collective Punishment in the Homilies of the Palestinian *Amoraim* in *Breishit Rabba* 49”, examines the attitudes of the *amoraim* of the Land of Israel towards this issue. Sasson analyzes a collection of homilies (*Breishit Rabba* 49) presented in the context of the intense exchange between God and Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The section opens with a disagreement between the *tannaim* regarding the way in which Abraham approached God: whether to do battle, to placate, or to pray. Next, amoraic homilies are presented which are developments of the tannaitic positions. The *amoraim*, however, do not address the story of Sodom and Gomorrah specifically, but, rather, the fundamental question of divine justice. Many sages’ views are brought to the discussion, and their attitudes are variegated. Some try to justify God’s collective punishment while others do not balk at presenting God as punishing the righteous together with the wicked out of uncontrollable rage. The editor of the homilies integrated all the different positions into the text, yet he edited them in such a way as to moderate the sharp criticism.

The scholarly debate about the *amora* Mar Zutra continues unabated. Some hold that he was an exilarch; some hold he was the head of the *yeshiva* in Pumbedita; some hold that Pumbedita was not his place and that he did not hold either of those positions. In “On the Quality of the Text of *Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon*”, **Harry Fox** brings new proofs from chronicles that attest to his being the head of the *yeshiva* in Pumbedita, and additional proofs that he was the exilarch. Furthermore, it should be noted that an examination of *Bavli* manuscripts also points to his having been referred to by both titles—*Mar* and *Rav*. Fox also discusses the importance of examining chronicles that supplement and that oppose *Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon*, such as *Seder Tannaim v’Amoraim*.

Avinoam Cohen, in “Rebuttals to Harry Fox’s Arguments”, continues the

discussion concerning the offices filled by Rav Ashi's colleague, the *amora* Mar Zutra (see **Sidra**, volumes 24–25 and 26). Fox argued that Mar Zutra served both as exilarch and as the head of the *yeshiva* at Pumbedita. Cohen rebuts all of Fox's arguments. Cohen maintains the position that he established through cumulative evidence in earlier papers, namely, that Mar Zutra did not serve in either of these capacities. One principal proof of this was through an analysis of all chronicles — both rabbinic and karaitic — from the period of the *Geonim*. The analysis showed that no exilarch by the name “Mar Zutra” lived during the period of the *amora* Mar Zutra. Moreover, Mar Zutra appeared in all of the important Torah centers of his time, while he never appeared specifically in Pumbedita, where ostensibly he served as head of the *yeshiva*. Since Mar Zutra, the *amora*, was linked strongly to the school of Sura, and since he lived near Sura, and since he frequently quoted traditions “in the name of Rav Papa” — who reigned as head of the *yeshiva* in Narsh, near Sura, Cohen surmises again that Mar Zutra served as head of a local *yeshiva* in Narsh. In Cohen's view, that is why Mar Zutra was not included among the *yeshiva* heads in Pumbedita listed in the Epistle of Rav Sherira Gaon, not because he was “omitted” by mistake, as Fox argued.

In “Nostrils, Navel or Heart? Significant Textual Talmudic Variations Concerning Signs of Life” (**Sidra**, volume 26), Alex Tal discussed the textual variations of the *sugya* concerning removing a pile of stones that had collapsed on a human being (*Yoma* 58a). There are three groups of versions to that *sugya*. Tal chose as correct the Yemenite manuscript and MS. Munich 6, which refer to the navel and the heart of the victim as the places to examine for signs of life. Tal's principal rationale was that this is the version that can be challenged since in this variant the *baraita* that speaks of the initial formation of the fetus does not correspond to the *baraita* that speaks of removing the pile of stones.

In “A Response to Alex Tal”, **Rabin Shushtri** counters that the common printed variant can also be challenged, for the Talmudic reply deals only with rejecting the correspondence with Abba Shaul's view, and does not reject the correspondence with both tannaitic views. Therefore, Shushtri proposes that in the original version the question from the *baraita* about the formation of the fetus followed upon Rav Papa's statement, introduced by the term “*neima k'tanna'v*” (“shall we say this dispute corresponds to a tannaitic dispute?”). This discussion was transferred from *Yoma* to the *sugya* in *Sotah* (54b) on the Mishnah concerning the place on a murder victim's body from which to measure the distance to the nearest town, where the term “*neima hani tanna'i k'hani tanna'v*” (“shall we say these *tannaim* correspond with these [other] *tannaim*?”) was fixed. Following upon the *sugya* in *Sotah* the tradents then “corrected” the *sugya* in *Yoma*, and placed the discussion following the *baraita* concerning removing the pile of stones, thus creating the difficulties in

the *sugya* in *Yoma*. Therefore, one cannot determine the correct formulation of the *baraita* on the basis of the difficulties in the *sugya*. Thus it appears that one should prefer the common printed version, which is also supported by the parallel text in the *Yerushalmi*.

Alex Tal, in “Reply to Rabin Shushtri”, returns to the two *sugyot* that deal with the subject of removing on Shabbat a pile of stones that had collapsed on top of a human being — *Yoma* 58a, and *Sotah* 54b. Tal concludes again, in opposition to Shushtri’s suggestion, that a study of both *sugyot* points to the conclusion that the discussion in *Yoma* drew upon the *sugya* in *Sotah*. This conclusion also clarifies the problematic nature — noted by Shushtri — of the correspondence suggested in the Talmudic *sugya* between the views of Abba Shaul and the first tanna, on the one hand, and the *baraita* concerning the formation of the fetus, on the other hand. The disconnecting of Abba Shaul’s view from the *baraita* is understandable against the background of its natural placement in the *sugya* in *Beitza*. Furthermore, human physiology and the relative distances between the organs under discussion (nose, heart, navel) support this conclusion.