

Transmitting Mishnah

Departing from the conventional view of mishnaic transmission as mindless rote memorization, *Transmitting Mishnah* reveals how multifaceted the process of passing on oral tradition was in antiquity. Taking advantage of the recently burgeoning field of orality studies, Elizabeth Shanks Alexander develops a model of transmission that is both active and constructive. Proceeding by means of intensive readings of passages from tractate Shevuot and its talmudic commentaries, Alexander alerts us to the fact that transmitters and handlers of mishnaic text crafted both the vagaries of expression and its received meanings. She illustrates how the authority of the Mishnah grew as the result of the sustained attention of a devoted community of readers and students. She also identifies the study practices and habits of analysis that were cultivated by oral performance and shows how they were passed on in tandem with the verbal contents of the Mishnah, thereby influencing how the text was received and understood.

Elizabeth Shanks Alexander received her Ph.D. from Yale University in 1998. She has taught at Haverford College and Smith College, and she is currently an assistant professor at the University of Virginia. She received an NEH summer grant to work on this book.

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The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition

Elizabeth Shanks Alexander
University of Virginia



Cambridge University Press
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521857505

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First published 2006

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Alexander, Elizabeth Shanks, 1967–
 Transmitting Mishnah : the shaping influence of oral tradition /
 Elizabeth Shanks Alexander.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-10: 0-521-85750-3 (hardcover)

ISBN-13: 978-0-521-85750-5

1. Mishnah – Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Tradition (Judaism) 3. Oral
 communication – Religious aspects – Judaism. 4. Jewish law – Interpretation and
 construction – History – To 1500. 5. Mishnah. Shevu'ot – Criticism, interpretation,
 etc. I. Title.

BM497.85.A44 2006

296.1'2306–dc22 2005026195

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85750-5 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85750-3 hardback

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For Avraham Dov Baer ben Avraham

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Acknowledgments

This book is based on research I did for my doctoral dissertation at Yale University. A huge debt of gratitude goes to my two mentors there whose intellectual gifts make their mark on my work in countless ways every day. Steven Fraade introduced me to the idea of reading texts for their performative effect, an approach that is fundamental to my work in this book. Christine Hayes gave me a vocabulary and set of descriptive categories for discussing rabbinic hermeneutics, thereby enriching my understanding of how rabbinic intellectual culture was generated. Both were generous teachers, making my years at Yale a rich and rewarding experience. Both inspire me with the rigorous approach they take in their own scholarship; they remain powerful role models for me.

I must also thank Martin Jaffee, without whom this book simply would not have come about. When I was a doctoral student just starting to work on my dissertation, a conference on midrash brought Professor Jaffee to New Haven. I took the opportunity to make an appointment with him to share ideas about my project. The feedback he gave me has been fundamental to everything I have done since. I recall sitting with him in Claire's Kosher Cafe, as he told me that my thinking about the relationship between the Mishnah and the Tosephta was

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all wrong. He suggested I do a little reading in the area of orality studies, and he gave me a bibliography. From that simple redirection has come all that follows. This book, simply stated, is an exploration of how the insights of orality studies open up new ways of thinking about the relationship not only between the Mishnah and the Tosephta but also between the Mishnah and the Talmuds, and about what the Mishnah is at its core. Ever since that auspicious moment, Professor Jaffee has been generous with his time in support of my learning. I am extraordinarily grateful for his kind assistance and willingness to engage me so extensively, and even more important, for my good fortune that he invested so much energy mastering a field that has proved so fruitful to my work. I recently had the opportunity to reread his book *Torah in the Mouth* while working on an article, and I was impressed by how many new things I saw in what was, at least, my tenth complete reading of the book. Through conversations and his writings he has opened up avenues of insight that would otherwise be unavailable. I thank him.

Today, as in antiquity, the discussion of rabbinic wisdom and tradition often becomes an occasion to form social bonds. I would like to thank Hindy Najman and Jonathan Schofer, whose intellectual companionship has infinitely broadened my horizons. Both read significant parts of the manuscript and offered valuable feedback, but equally (and maybe even more) importantly, both were conversation partners in whose presence the ideas discussed here (and others!) came to life so that they could be interrogated and invigorated. I must also thank my dear friend and long-term study partner Rachel Cousineau. Together we read and studied more than a third of the Mishnah, between pregnancies and babies. Throughout the course of our study I tested many of the hypotheses in this book, and I thank Rachel for allowing our study to open up to the world of scholarship. Daniel Schreiber and Alena Nye-Knutson were also valuable study partners for assorted tracts of the Mishnah.

At various points in the writing I received valuable feedback from readers who generously gave of their time. I would like to thank Shaye

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Cohen and the anonymous reader from the Brown Judaic Studies Series who read a very early version of this book. They offered insightful and intelligent suggestions, which ultimately led to a complete restructuring. Jessica Feldman, Harry Gamble, Peter Ochs, Robert Wilken, and the anonymous readers from Cambridge University Press all read the manuscript in its entirety and made comments that led to substantive improvement. Reader B deserves a special note of thanks for reading the manuscript with painstaking care and attention, not once but twice! I, of course, accept full responsibility for any errors or weaknesses that remain. I am grateful that they caught as many problems as they did and directed me to elegant solutions.

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia has proved a very collegial environment in which to work. My colleagues create an atmosphere of stimulating and respectful conversation in which I have flourished. I thank everyone – faculty, students, and staff – for providing an environment conducive to productive work. I would especially like to thank the students of my seminar in the spring of 2002, entitled “Orality, Tradition and Religion,” who shared in the intellectual development of many of the ideas in this book. The larger university has also proved very supportive. I would like to thank the Dean’s Office for generous grants that enabled me to work on this book during the summers of 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided generous support during the summer of 2002. A grant from the Yad HaNadiv/Beracha Foundation enabled me to do the final revisions in Jerusalem in the fall of 2004.

Thanks also for the support of Andy Beck, Phyllis Berk, Janis Bolster, and others at Cambridge University Press whose interest and faith in the project, as well as hard work on its behalf, helped to provide a publishing venue.

Chapter 3 began its life as an article entitled “Casuistic Elements in Mishnaic Law: Examples from M. Shevu’ot.” I extend my gratitude to the *Jewish Studies Quarterly* for permission to reprint substantial portions of that article in this context.

Acknowledgments

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Their abundant love anchors me in all that I do. I thank my father, Hershel Shanks, whose embrace of vigorous debate and hard work inspires me and who taught me from a very young age not to be afraid of criticism. I thank my mother, Judith Shanks, for being a constant presence in the life of my young family. She has offered extraordinary physical and emotional support as we navigate the complexities and challenges of daily life. I thank my sister, Julia Shanks, for her companionship and friendship. My husband, Drew Alexander, has been a source of constant and unfailing support. He has had faith in the value of this project since its inception and in my ability to bring it to fruition. He has generously given of his time as a reader and talked with me about how to resolve various challenges that arose in the process of writing. Whenever I reached an impasse, I could always count on his insight to help me find a way through. His intellectual and emotional companionship grounds me to such an extent that I cannot imagine tackling a project like this without it. Finally, I would like to thank my children, Charlie and Nancy, who as of yet understand nothing of the Mishnah and Talmud but whose eager faces reveal a glimpse of the next generation of Torah learning.

For each of these blessings, I thank the Creator.

Elizabeth Shanks Alexander
Jerusalem, Israel
17 Tevet 5765
December 29, 2004

Abbreviations

b.	Bavli
BB	Baba Batra
Bekh.	Bekhorot
Bik.	Bikkurim
BK	Baba Kamma
BM	Baba Metzia
Dem.	Demai
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Dt.	Deuteronomy
Eruv.	Eruvin
Ex.	Exodus
Ez.	Ezekiel
Gen.	Genesis
Git.	Gittin
Hal.	Hallah
<i>HJP</i>	<i>Hellenism in Jewish Palestine</i>
Hor.	Horayot
<i>IRSG</i>	<i>Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon</i>
<i>ITL</i>	<i>Introduction to Tannaitic Literature</i>
<i>ITM</i>	<i>Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah</i>

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Abbreviations

Ker.	Keritot
Ket.	Ketubot
Kid.	Kiddushin
Lev.	Leviticus
Mak.	Makkot
Maas.	Maaserot
m.	Mishnah
Meg.	Megillah
Ned.	Nedarim
San.	Sanhedrin
Shab.	Shabbat
Shev.	Shevuot
Shevi.	Shevi`it
Shevu.	Shevuot
Sif.	Sifre
t.	Tosephta
Ter.	Terumot
y.	Yerushalmi
YBC	Yale Babylonian Collection
Yeb.	Yebamot
Zev.	Zevahim