

ABSTRACT

THE END OF THE AMORAIC PERIOD IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL:  
PERIODIZATION, HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Uzi Leibner

The historical circumstances that led to the termination of the Amoraic period in the Land of Israel are unclear. Even the criteria for determining the end of this period are in doubt. For example, while the Talmud Yeushalmi – the major work of the Palestinian Amoraim – was compiled ca. the late 4th century CE, the accepted date for the Amoraic midrashim is the fifth, sixth and even early seventh century. However, they mention no figure or event later than the fourth century and names of their Sages are identical to those of the Yerushalmi.

This paper discusses the parameters for defining the end of the Amoraic period in the Land of Israel, and the historical circumstances that put an end to the activity of these sages. It opens with a survey of the '*Sitz im Leben*' in which the Amoraic literature was created and the data, which places it mainly in the Galilee. The dating and editing of works belonging to this literature are discussed next, as well as internal changes in the world of the Amoraim. These and other parameters lead to the conclusion that the Amoraic period ended in the late fourth century CE.

The dramatic historical events that took place in the fourth century, and their possible impact on the Galilean population and the disappearance of rabbinic circles, are discussed next. Archaeological data from recent surveys and excavations in the Galilee point to extensive settlement abandonment and sharp demographic decline, culminating in the late fourth century CE. These data stand in sharp contradiction with the common current view that Galilean Jewry enjoyed an era of prosperity during the Byzantine period, like other regions in Palestine. The historical and demographic processes that took place in the Galilee account for the disappearance of the rabbis in the fourth century and mark the end of the Amoraic era