

ABSTRACT

*MA'AMADOT*: A FIRST STAGE IN THE HISTORY OF RABBINIC PRAYER?

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Tannaitic sources attest to public Torah reading throughout the Land of Israel in Temple times, when the members of the watches (*mishmarot*) of the lay delegations (*ma'amadot*) served in the Temple. To these descriptions, the Mishnah (m. Ta'anit 4:1) adds that, on those days, the priests recite the priestly Benediction four times: '(1) at the *Morning Service*, (2) at the *Additional Service*, (3) at the *Afternoon Service*, and (4) at the *Concluding Service*'. This has led to a widespread scholarly assumption that the lay delegations were a fundamental link in the development of the statutory prayers. But, based on the testimony of the Tosefta and additional sources, which mention the *ma'amadot* even after the destruction of the temple, this article argues that while the Temple stood the service of the *ma'amadot* was confined to the Torah reading, and that the description of the four prayers on those days refers to the post-destruction period.

Analysis of the Mishnah, its language and its internal contradictions, supports this argument and leads to the conclusion that the Mishnah is composed of two strata: one early, which describes the *ma'amadot* in Temple times as reading the Torah no more than three times a day; the other later, which describes the *ma'amadot* in the post-destruction era. The latter followed the pattern of a public fast, which has four-prayer services in addition to the fast.

Against the background of the Torah reading by the *ma'amadot*, the article examines the import of the institution of Torah reading in general. This was not simply a didactic setting, but rather a liturgical ceremony of divine worship, and it functioned as such in the context of the lay delegations. This conclusion contradicts the claim that in Temple times there could be no additional forms of divine worship. Thus, although the *ma'amadot* cannot be viewed as the source for institutionalized public prayer in the Temple era, such an institution could, based on the conceptual foundation of the Torah reading, have developed while the Temple still stood.