

Abstract

Abbaye's Family History: A Study in Rabbinic Genealogy

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The field of Jewish genealogy is developing innovative methods for studying family history as a fundamental component of Jewish social history. In developing an integrative methodology of research into family history consideration has to be taken of other disciplines, including:

- ❖ Onomastics and name giving patterns/practices
- ❖ Historical geography in clarifying family traditions regarding its geographic origins
- ❖ Genetic disorders or relationships as a means of identifying family traits
- ❖ Monumental artifacts related to burial practices
- ❖ Diverse documentary sources.

Recent genealogical research mainly focuses on modern Jewish family history. By way of contrast, this paper attempts to utilize the academic areas and methods of research mentioned above in order to shed new light on a renowned rabbinic family the Nahmanis of Pumbeditha that lived over 1800 years ago in Babylon and is frequently mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud.

The most famous members of this family were the *Amoraim* Rabbah and his orphaned nephew Abbaye. The family was of the cohanic (priestly) lineage, claiming descent from the ill-fortuned branch of the biblical Eli, the high priest of Shiloh (mentioned in I Samuel, I). This paper demonstrates that in Babylon the family maintained a strong oral tradition to the effect that they came from the Galilean village, now called Mamlah. This tradition helps to identify them as members of the ancient priestly family of Hezir, who served in the Second Temple and whose well known family tomb and monument is still to be seen in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem.