Yehoshuʿa Ben Levi Encyclopedia Article

Yehoshuʿa Ben Levi

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Contents

Yehoshuʿa Ben Levi Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Yehoshuʿa Ben Levi.....3

Yehoshuʿa Ben Levi

YEHOSHUʿA BEN LEVI, Palestinian amora of the early third century. A native of Lydda (modern-day Lod), Yehoshuʿa reflects the interests and traditions of Judaea at a time when rabbinic activity was becoming increasingly concentrated farther north in Galilee.

Yehoshuʿa's son married into the patriarchal house (B.T., *Qid*. 33b), a fact that may explain the notorious incident in which Yehoshuʿa arranged for a wanted Jewish nationalist to be handed over to the Romans (J.T., *Ter*. 8.10, 46b). In general, he was an active representative of Jewish interests before the Roman authorities, both in the regional capital at Caesarea (J.T., *Ber*. 5.1, 9a) and, apparently, even in Rome (*Gn. Rab*. 33.1, 78.5). On the other hand, by ordaining his own disciples (J.T., *Ned*. 10.8, 42b), Yehoshuʿa contributed to one of the important developments in Palestine in the third and fourth centuries—the weakened prestige of the patriarchate among the rabbis of the Land of Israel.

Yehoshuʿa's main distinction was as a master of *aggadah* (nonlegal rabbinic thought), a rubric of learning that he associated with the "honor" promised in *Proverbs* 21:21 (B.T., *B.B*. 9b). He was a fervent advocate of Torah study (B.T., *Mak*. 10a, *Meg*. 27a, *ʿEruv*. 54a). His descriptions of the fates of the righteous and the wicked after death (B.T., *ʿEruv*. 19a) and his reported conversations with the Angel of Death and with the prophet Elijah (B.T., *Ber*. 51a, *Ket*. 77b; J.T., *Ter*. 8.10, 46b) made him a favorite subject of later legend. It was to him that Elijah allegedly made his famous remark that the Messiah might come any day—any day, that is, that Israel was ready to listen to God's commands (B.T., *San*. 98a).

Although Yehoshuʿa was technically not a tanna, he lived close enough to the tannaitic period, and his teachings were honored enough, that one of his sayings was added to the closing paragraph of the Mishnah (*Uqts*. 3.12) and another was included in the supplementary chapter added to the Mishnaic tractate *Avot* (known as *Ethics of the Fathers*, 6.2).

See Also

Amoraim.

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