

The Halakhot Gedolot and their rabbinic sources

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The Halakhot Gedolot, the ‘Large (collection of) Halakhot’, is an early codification of Talmudic halakhah, generally attributed to Simeon Qayyara and dated to the second half of the ninth century. It exists in two textual versions, the ‘Babylonian’ version first published in Venice 1548, and the ‘Sefardic’ or ‘North African’ version, published by Azriel Hildesheimer in 1892 on the basis of a Vatican manuscript. The work is closely related to the Halakhot Pesuqot, the ‘Decided Halakhot’, attributed to Yehudai Gaon (8th century), but also to the She’iltot of Rav Aḥai Gaon with its homiletic sections –how exactly is still a matter of dispute. This lecture does not enter into this question, but is limited to the rabbinic sources of the Halakhot Gedolot, taking as textual example the first part of the Hilkhot Pesah, the rules concerning the 14th of Nisan. A special feature of the Halakhot Gedolot is its frequent use of Palestinian sources, which causes Robert Brody to consider the possibility of a Palestinian origin of the work. The discussion of the rabbinic sources shall demonstrate the Halakhot Gedolot as an excellent example of rabbinic intertextuality, using earlier rabbinic texts, normally without indication of the sources, to construct a compendium of halakhah.

Hauptautor: STEMBERGER, Günter (Universität Wien, Emeritus)

Vortragende(r): STEMBERGER, Günter (Universität Wien, Emeritus)