

JEWISH STUDIES

犹太研究

第25辑

Are the Rabbis Part of the Wisdom Tradition?

Ishay Rosen-Zvi Tr. YUAN Jiahui

Abstract: In this article, I argue that the rabbis perceive themselves as part of the broader wisdom tradition, which is reflected in their self-designation as “sages”. However, two fundamental aspects set them apart from this tradition. First, The Birth of the Study House, for the rabbis, wisdom is not only identified with the *Torah* but is also inseparable from the practice of study. This institutionalized approach to learning redefines wisdom as an exclusive, distinctly Jewish pursuit. Second, Anthropological Pessimism—Unlike the classical wisdom tradition, which often attributes transformative power to wisdom, the rabbis maintain a more skeptical view. For them, wisdom does not inherently refine or elevate an individual; sages must continuously struggle against the yetzer (inclination to sin) throughout their lives. These two characteristics—possibly interconnected, as the ethos of study fosters an accumulative rather than a transformative intellectual model—ultimately constrain the rabbis’ participation in the broader wisdom tradition.

Key Words: Rabbis (Sages), *Torah*, Study (Learning), The Wisdom Tradition, Yetzer