RABBINIC LITERATURE

THE BIBLE AND WOMEN

An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History

Edited by Mary Ann Beavis, Irmtraud Fischer,
Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Adriana Valerio

Volume 4.1: Rabbinic Literature

SBL PRESS

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Tal Ilan, Lorena Miralles-Maciá, and Ronit Nikolsky

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Atlanta

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022935016

Contents

Abbreviations

1Q20	Genesis Apocryphon
4Q277	Tohorot B^{b}
AB	The Anchor Bible
AJSR	*Association for Jewish Studies Review*
Ant.	Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*
Arakh.	Arakhin
ARJ	*The Annual of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*
ASLRL	Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature
Avod. Zar.	Avodah Zarah
Avot. R. Nat.	Avot de-Rabbi Nathan
b.	Babylonian Talmud
B. Bat.	Bava Batra
B. Metz.	Bava Metzi'a
B. Qam.	Bava Qamma
B.J.	Josephus, *Bellum judaicum*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
Beit Mikra	*Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World*
Bekh.	Bekhorot
Ber.	Berakhot
Bik.	Bikkurim
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
ConJud	*Conservative Judaism*
Contemplate	*Contemplate: The International Journal of Cultural Jewish Thought*
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*

DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
Ed.	Eduyyot
EJJS	*European Journal of Jewish Studies*
Eruv.	Eruvin
ESV	English Standard Version
FCBT	A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud
frag(s).	fragment(s)
Git.	Gittin
Hag.	Hagigan
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HB	Hebrew Bible
Hor.	Horayot
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
Hul.	Hullin
IMF	*ʻIyunei Miqra u-Farshanut*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JANES	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHS	*The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JLAS	*Jewish Law Association Studies*
JNES	*Journal of New Eastern Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRB	*Jewish Review of Books*
JSem	*Journal of Semitics*
JSIJ	*Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSP	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
Jub.	Jubilees
Judaica	*Judaica: Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums*
KAY	*Kovetz Al Yad*
Kelim	Kelim
Ketub.	Ketubbot
KS	*Kirjath-Sepher*
l(l).	line(s)

LAB	Liber antiquitatum biblicarum
LDiff	*Lectio Difficilior*
Lěšonénu	*Lěšonénu: A Journal for the Study of the Hebrew Language and Cognate Subjects*
LXX	Septuagint
m.	Mishnah
Ma'as. Sh.	Ma'aser Sheni
Mak.	Makkot
Mas. Semah.	Massekhet Semahot
MEAHh	*Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos. Sección hebreo*
Meg.	Megillah
Me'il.	Me'ilah
Mek. R. Shim. bar Yoh.	Mekilta of Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai
Mek. R. Yishm.	Mekilta of Rabbi Yishmael
Menah.	Menahot
Mid.	Middot
Midr.	Midrash
Mikan	*Mikan: Journal for Hebrew and Israeli Literature and Culture Studies*
Mikw.	Mikwa'ot
Mo'ed Qat.	Mo'ed Qatan
MS	manuscript (see end for specific manuscripts)
MT	Masoretic Text
Nashim	*Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*
Naz.	Nazir
NDEJ	*Notre Dame English Journal: A Journal of Religion in Literature*
Ned.	Nedarim
Neg.	Nega'im
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
NT	New Testament
Ohal.	Ohalot
Or.	Orlah
OT	*Oral Tradition*
PA	*Pathways through Aggadah*
Parah	Parah

PC	*Passions in Context, Journal for the History of Philosophy of the Emotions*
Pesah.	Pesahim
Pesiq. Rab Kah.	Pesiqta of Rab Kahana
Pirqe R. El.	Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer
Proof	*Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*
PT	*Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication*
Qidd.	Qiddushin
QP	*Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*
Rab.	Rabbah
RHT	*Revue d'histoire des textes*
Rosh Hash.	Rosh Hashanah
RRJ	*The Review of Rabbinic Judaism. Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*
S. Olam Rab.	Seder Olam Rabbah
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
Sef	*Sefarad*
Shabb.	Shabbat
Sheqal.	Sheqalim
Shnaton	*Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
Sotah	Sotah
Sukkah	Sukkah
s.v.	*sub verbo*, under the word
t.	Tosefta
T. Jud.	Testament of Judah
T-S	Taylor-Schechter Genizah
Ta'an.	Ta'anit
Tamid	Tamid
TanB	Tanhuma of the Buber edition
TanP	printed Tanhuma
Tanh.	Tanhuma
Tarbiz	*Tarbiz: A Quarterly for Jewish Studies*
Ter.	Terumot
Tg. Ps.-J.	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
Tikkun	*Tikkun: A Quarterly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture & Society*
Tradition	*Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*

Trumah	*Trumah: Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg*
v(v).	verse(s)
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WIJ	*Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal*
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
Yad.	Yadayim
Yeda-Am	*Yeda-Am: Bama Lefolklor Yehudi*
Yelam.	Yelammedenu
Yevam.	Yevamot
Yoma	Yoma
Zevah.	Zevahim

Manuscripts

Cambridge UL, T-S 6-H: MS Cambridge University Library, T-S collection 6H. Cambridge, University Library.
Firenze 7: Manuscript Firenze 7. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale.
Firkovitch II: Manuscript Firkovitch II. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia.
Ginzburg 1134: Manuscript Ginzburg 1134. Moscow.
Jerusalem—YHH 1: Manuscript Jerusalem—Yad Harav Herzog 1. Jerusalem, Yad Harav Herzog Institute.
Kaufmann: Manuscript Kaufmann. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
London 406: MS London 406. London.
London BL Harl. 5508 (400): Manuscript 5508 (400). London, British Library.
Munich 95: Manuscript Munich 95. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.
Munich 140: Manuscript Munich 140. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.
Oxford 2637: Manuscript Oxford 2637. Oxford, Bodleian Library.
Oxford, Bodl. Libr. 154: Manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library 154. Oxford, Bodleian Library.
Oxford Opp. Add. 23: Oppenheimer collection, folio 23. Oxford, Bodleian Library.
Paris 1137: Manuscript Paris 1137. Paris.
Parma 3010: Manuscript Parma 3010. Parma.

Vatican 30: Manuscript Vatican 30. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
Vatican 111: Manuscript Vatican 111. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
Vatican 132: Manuscript Vatican 132. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
Vatican 134: Manuscript Vatican 134. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
Vienna 20: Manuscript Vienna 20. Vienna, Austrian National Library.

Introduction

Tal Ilan, Lorena Miralles-Maciá, and Ronit Nikolsky

1. Prologue

This volume of the international editorial project "The Bible and Women—An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History" is devoted to rabbinic literature. It originated in an international conference held at the Freie Universität Berlin, 4–5 December 2017, with the title Reception of Biblical Women and Gender in Rabbinic Literature. Most of the papers presented there are included in this book in a reworked and expanded version. Other authors were specifically invited to contribute new studies not presented in the conference in order to cover some missing but important aspects related to biblical women and gender in rabbinic literature. This literature, also known as the literature of the sages, encompasses Jewish textual corpora from the period of classical Judaism (from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages), as explained later in this introduction.

Rabbinic literature is male conceived and male expressed. When the rabbis directed their attention to women, they did so in order to regulate how and to what extent women, the "other" with whom they were obliged to live, affected the lives of men. The rabbis considered the biblical text, describing their past, as a mirror in which to reflect on their ideals. In this past, they put biblical women in their places, under their control, according to the rabbinic perception of the world. In their interpretations, they subjected biblical women to a process of rabbinization: On the one hand, they used biblical women to tackle legal issues that affected women in their society (e.g., marriage, divorce, and sexuality, among others). On the other hand, they developed new story lines for the biblical plots, endowing biblical women with additional characteristics and sometimes a new family, or another ethnic and religious identity. As instructive models, the roles of biblical women were revised and, to a greater or lesser extent,

rewritten from a rabbinic perspective: these women exemplified behaviors or demeanor worthy of imitation or disapproval, and were accepted, or not, into the fold. As in all patriarchal societies, the rabbis placed biblical women in the category of the other. For them, biblical women, though considered part of the same society, represented otherness not only as against male biblical figures, but also as against ideal Jewish men, embodied by the rabbis themselves. The characteristics of alterity with which the sages endowed biblical women shed light on the question of how women should—or should not—behave in the ideal rabbinic society, and which values women should—or should not—strive for from a manly, rabbinic point of view. This book explores both the legal aspects that concern women and the psychological, physical, and behavioral patterns that biblical women acquire in rabbinic exegesis and narrative: When are they given a voice? Why are they silenced? Which new roles do they assume? How do the rabbis harmonize biblical laws with their interests? and so on. What we find in the rabbinic texts is not a reading of the biblical law but its updating to fit rabbinic standards; we do not encounter the biblical Eve, Sarah, Miriam, Ruth, and so on, but rather the rabbinized Eve, Sarah, Miriam, Ruth, and so on.

This volume consists of fifteen contributions that feature different approaches to the question of biblical women and gender, and that encompass a wide variety of rabbinic corpora from diverse periods (Mishnah-Tosefta, halakhic and aggadic midrashim, Talmud and late midrash). Some essays analyze biblical law, gender relations, and regulations according to the sages' argumentation: Dvora Weisberg and Olga I. Ruiz-Morell, respectively, examine levirate marriage and divorce in biblical and rabbinic literature; Christiane Hannah Tzuberi looks at how gender works in the inspection of skin afflictions according to the rabbis; and Alexander A. Dubrau analyzes the suspected adulteress rite and exclusion/inclusion of women in the rite of the red heifer in halakhic midrashim and the Babylonian Talmud.

A second group of studies examines either the rabbinic portrayal of a certain figure or a group of women or the role of biblical women in a determined rabbinic context: Cecilia Haendler scrutinizes the information about female figures in the Mishnah and Tosefta; Gail Labovitz focuses on Hagar in Genesis Rabbah; Lorena Miralles-Maciá offers a general look at the more outstanding aspects of biblical women in Leviticus Rabbah; Susanne Plietzsch analyzes Sarah in Genesis Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud; Judith R. Baskin discusses female prophets in a Babylonian

Talmud passage; Yuval Blankovsky studies a talmudic section on seductive women who albeit were viewed positively because they did what they did "for the sake of heaven"; Natalie C. Polzer focuses on Eve in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan; Ronit Nikolsky inspects the way the "woman of valor" (Prov 31) is connected with Sarah in Tanhuma Yelammedenu; Devora Steinmetz considers the tradition of Dinah and Joseph being switched before birth; and Moshe Lavee is concerned with the nationality of the midwives in Egypt in a midrash from the Cairo Genizah. Tal Ilan, who is the author of the first contribution in this volume, inquires into rabbinic episodes in which women show acquaintance with Scripture. The following section of this introduction provides a general description of rabbinic literature, illustrated through references to the biblical prophetess Miriam, which it traces by demonstrating the approaches and methodologies represented in this book from the Bible through early and late rabbinic compositions, down to Arab conquest.

As noted above, this book brings together most of the contributions presented at the international congress held in Berlin, where a number of us had the opportunity to exchange opinions and plan this project. Irmtraud Fischer, one of the principal editors of The Bible and Women, joined us, as did several students and assistants, who took part in many productive discussions. We are grateful to all of them for giving us the opportunity to learn from each other. Special thanks go to Hannah Tzuberi and Marcel Gaida, who helped organize the congress and sessions.

We want to express our gratitude to the editors of the The Bible and Woman editorial project for their guidance: Irmtraud Fischer (Graz, Austria), Mercedes Navarro Puerto (Madrid), and Adriana Valerio (Naples).[1] We would also like to thank SBL Press (Atlanta). This volume, as others in the project, is translated into three other European languages: German (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), Spanish (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2021), and Italian (Trapani: Il pozzo di Iacobbe, forthcoming). We thank the editors of the project for taking on this difficult challenge, the translators, and the contributors who made an effort to submit their texts in two languages. We are quite aware of the challenge inherent in this translation work, due to the difficulties that the rabbinic literature entails.

1. More information about this project is available at "The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History," bibleandwomen.org, https://tinyurl.com/SBL6019a.

2. Methodological Introduction: The Case of Miriam in Rabbinic Literature

Rabbinic literature is a name for a very large corpus that was produced by Jews in Hebrew and Aramaic (the two languages spoken and written by the Jews) in the land of Israel and Babylonia in late antiquity (roughly between the end of the second century and the advent of Islam in the seventh century).[2] Although at the time of the composition of rabbinic literature Jews were living not just in the land of Israel and Babylonia but also in other diaspora centers, such as Egypt, North Africa, Asia Minor, Rome, and in other locations along the Mediterranean, and although these Jews probably also produced literatures in these and other languages (mostly Greek but perhaps also Latin), only rabbinic literature was eventually canonized by the Jews the world over and became authoritative.

Rabbinic literature began with the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE), as an attempt at a codification of biblical and postbiblical legal traditions. The ideology behind this composition was that God had given the Jews at Sinai two codes of law, a written and an oral one, and the Mishnah was an attempt to collect the latter and harmonize it with the former. It is a sustained attempt to justify the divine origin of Jewish law, not just the one found in the Bible but also all the legal traditions that accumulated over the years until the Mishnah was compiled and edited at the end of the second century.[3]

Alongside the Mishnah, contemporary compositions have come down to us: the Tosefta and the midreshei halakhah, which are running commentaries on the legal books of the Torah (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), in which an attempt is made to show that the oral law is already evident in the written law. Midrash is in principle a

2. For a good introduction see Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed., trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

3. There are many introductions to the Mishnah. Two very different examples are, on the one hand, Jacob Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and, on the other hand, Abraham Goldberg, "The Mishnah: A Study Book of Halakha," in *The Literature of the Sages, First Part: Oral Torah, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates*, ed. Shmuel Safrai (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 211–62. Slightly newer is Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Judaean Legal Tradition and the Halakhah of the Mishnah," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Martin Jaffee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 121–43.

rabbinic form of creative biblical exegesis. All these compositions, namely, Mishnah, Tosefta, and midreshei halakhah, are known as the literature of the Tannaim (literally, "repeaters"). They were all composed in the land of Israel and feature sages who predate or are contemporary with Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi (also known as the Patriarch), the sage who reportedly edited the Mishnah. All these compositions can be subsumed under the category of halakhah (literally "the way of walking," implying legal issues). Yet from its very inception, the Mishnah did not really succeed in creating a philosophical, impersonal codex of law. Next to its legal parts, nonlegal narratives, legal precedents, proverbs, folk sayings, and even historical anecdotes made their way into the text.[4] In this, the Mishnah was a true foreparent of all other rabbinic compositions that combine in them halakhah and aggadah (literally "what is told," that is, stories, implying all that is not halakhah).

Immediately with the conclusion of the editorial work on the Mishnah, it was recognized as canonical and distributed throughout the Jewish world. Study houses were founded in which the Mishnah was taught and interpreted, and in two separate centers official commentaries were produced on it: the two talmudim (plural for *Talmud*; literally, "learning"). One was in Galilee, in the land of Israel, not far removed from where the Mishnah itself was edited, but the other was in a far-off land and under another empire, in Mesopotamia, the land into which Jews were exiled after the destruction of the first temple (sixth century BCE) and where many of them continued to reside. The two commentaries are the Talmud Yerushalmi (fourth/fifth century) and the Babylonian Talmud (sixth/seventh century). It is interesting, perhaps even ironic, that several centuries later it was this second composition that gained the status of a canon and became the standard work studied in the standard Jewish study house (*beit ha-midrash*), a position which it continues to hold today.

The rabbis who produced the talmudim became known as Amoraim (literally, "sayers"), and they described themselves as following in the footsteps of the Tannaim. They were a large group of named sages, and they produced, aside from the two talmudim (which are basically halakhic but include a fair amount of aggadic material in them), also a large array of compositions (that were not canonized but were studied and transmitted)

4. On which see now Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

that are exegetical and homiletical works on various books of the Bible. These are called aggadic midrashim, and they began being composed in the land of Israel at the same time as the Talmud Yerushalmi but continued way beyond late antiquity. Opinions are divided about which compositions still belong to this genre and which postdate it.

In this book, we follow the most recent philological and structural parameters employed by scholars of rabbinic literature, in order to reconstruct the historical background of the various traditions, their relationship with one another, especially chronologically but also geographically. Consequently, we inquire about the possibility of tracing ideological, theological, and literary developments that reflect the changing historical circumstances of traditions on the reception of biblical women.

The Hebrew Bible constitutes, of course, the theological, historical, and cultural foundation of Judaism. Rabbinic literature took it for granted and built its entire worldview based on the veracity and God-given origin of every single word or syllable in this text. When these somehow contradicted themselves, or failed to meet with the Jewish world view of the rabbis, the latter harmonized and explained these textual difficulties away. Gender played a central role in this process—both because gender norms had changed dramatically from the ancient Near East, in which the Bible was composed, and the Roman world, in which the Mishnah was composed (and the Iranian-Sasanian world, in which the Babylonian Talmud later came into being); and because the Bible itself is full not just with contradictory explanations, views, and legal rulings touching on women, but also with many influential women, whose actions contradicted and continue to contradict the views of later Jewish generations on proper gender hierarchies.

One such woman is the prophetess Miriam, Moses's sister, who already in the Bible is an imposing figure, celebrating the victory of Israel on Egypt on the shores of the Red Sea, and at the same time one punished by God with *tzaraat* (leprosy?) for forgetting her subordinate position in comparison with her brother Moses. In the following lines we will trace the major trajectories we have tried to emphasize in this book, showing in each case how Miriam can demonstrate this phenomenon.[5] But first, the biblical Miriam.

5. Some of the conclusions presented here derive from the different places in which Tal Ilan discussed the Miriam traditions. See Ilan, "Biblische Frauen in Schrift und Tradition in jüdischer Perspektive," in *Geschlechtergerechtigkeit: Herausforderung*

A sister is mentioned in the story of Moses's birth (Exod 2:4). She stands on the shore of the Nile in order to watch over her baby brother, and then she recommends to Pharaoh's daughter, who finds him, her mother as wet nurse. We cannot be certain that in this story the same sister is intended who is later explicitly named Miriam, although later sources connect the two unquestioningly. As Miriam, she is first mentioned after the crossing of the Red Sea. There she is designated a prophetess, is described as the sister of Aaron, and leads the women of Israel in a victory song and dance (Exod 15:20–21). Next, she is mentioned in an enigmatic tradition in Num 12, where she complains to Aaron about Moses's marriage to an Ethiopian woman (אשה כושית) and claims for herself and for Aaron prophetic powers similar to those of Moses (Num 12:1–2). She is afflicted with *tzaraat* as a punishment for this action (Num 12:10). Rita Burns suggests that these traditions contain traces of the dangerous memory of a woman leader from the ancient past who had to be tamed.[6] This was done by making her the sibling of the two other leaders of the day, and by telling a story of how God himself asserted the superiority of Moses (and Aaron) and punished the woman. In Burns's opinion, the way this story is told in the Bible is already a taming of a really wild tradition about a strong and unusual woman.

Indeed, in later layers of the Bible itself there are competing traditions concerning Miriam, one of them certainly bent on taming her. In Deuteronomy, she is only mentioned once in a negative statement. Following a discussion of *tzaraat* we read: "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the journey after you left Egypt" (Deut 24:9).[7] For those who had intended Deuteronomy to supersede earlier versions of the Torah,[8] this verse would completely erase Miriam's important role as prophetess, while only her punishment would have been remembered. However, the

der Religionen, ed. Christoph Elsas, Edith Franke, and Angela Standhartinger (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2014), 143–56; Ilan, *Massekhet Ta'anit*, FCBT 2/9 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 132–40; Ilan, *Massekhet Hullin*, FCBT 5/3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 418–23.

6. Rita Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

7. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical and rabbinic translations are ours.

8. As formulated by Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5.1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 19: "This does not mean that the author of Deuteronomy sees his code as of lesser value. On the contrary … Deuteronomy would be seen as replacing the old book of the covenant and not complementing it."

prophet Micah records the trio Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as equal saviors of Israel. He states emphatically: "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Mic 6:4). This interpretation recognizes the biblical story of Exodus and Numbers as binding, and does not seek to transform or replace it. And because it is short, it includes no value judgment. Note, however, that in the ordering of the three siblings Miriam, the woman, is placed last. And since we do not know the birth order of Moses and Aaron, but we do know that Moses had an elder sister, it is clear that this ordering is not chronological, according to birth order. Obviously it refers to a descending order of importance. Moses the leader comes first, Aaron the priest second, and Miriam the sister, the woman, last.

All these traditions are repeatedly discussed and interpreted throughout rabbinic literature. In the following lines they will accompany us as we outline the concepts that have shaped the way this book is conceived, and they will demonstrate concisely the gendered ideas that are evident in different and more sporadic ways in the chapters commissioned for it.

2.1. Mishnah

Gender plays a significant role in rabbinic halakhah, as seen from the fact that one of the six orders (*sedarim*) of the Mishnah is called "the Order of Women" (Seder Nashim). Although it has been demonstrated that it is actually less about women and more about the relations between a man and his wife (how she is acquired, what are his responsibilities toward her, and how she is divorced),[9] this order certainly demonstrates well the relationship between the written, that is, biblical laws regarding women, and oral, that is, rabbinic laws on them. We have tried to include in this book a fair number of presentations of the tractates of this order that are based on biblical law. The first tractate in this order (Yevamot, so located because it is the longest tractate in all the order) deals with a very biblical institution—levirate marriage: the obligation of the brother to marry the childless widow of his deceased brother. Weisberg's contribution in this volume contrasts how the rabbis of the Mishnah incorporate rabbinic views on this institution with the biblical formulation. The second tractate

9. Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 5:13–16; see also Judith R. Wegner, *Chattel or Person: The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).