STUDIES IN RABBINIC NARRATIVES

VOLUME ONE

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Contents

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJSR	*Association for Jewish Studies Review*
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
CRINT	Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
HeBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
HOS	Handbook of Oriental Studies
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
Jastrow	Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (1903; repr., New York: Pardes, 1950)
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JSIJ	*Jewish Studies Internet Journal*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period*
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series

JSP	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KJV	King James Version
MGWJ	*Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
OSHT	Oxford Studies in Historical Theology
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*
PMLA	*Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
SBAW	Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SJC	*Studies in Jewish Civilization*
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
YJS	Yale Judaica Series

Introduction

The studies in this volume are the proceedings of the conference entitled "Rabbinic Narratives" held at New York University on June 4–5, 2018. The goals of the conference were straightforward: to stimulate scholarship on rabbinic narratives and to provide a venue for its publication. While the study of rabbinic narratives has been an extremely fertile area of scholarship, there remains a great deal more to be done. Hundreds of narratives still lack even a single scholarly treatment. New methods of analysis developed by cultural and literary theorists have the potential to shed light on many rabbinic narratives. Aspects of the poetics of rabbinic stories are not fully understood and require further attention. Themes and motifs that cut across different stories within a rabbinic composition should be fully explored and the implications reckoned with. It was toward these ends that the conference was directed.

Drafts of the papers were precirculated, and a generous amount of time was allotted for questions, comments, and discussion of each paper. The wonderful collaborative atmosphere and the seriousness with which the participants and other attendees engaged each presentation contributed a great deal to the quality of the papers.

Fifty Years of Scholarship on the Rabbinic Narrative[1]

About fifty years ago scholarship on rabbinic narratives went through a Kuhnian paradigm shift for which three scholars deserve credit: Jacob Neusner, Yonah Fraenkel, and Ofra Meir. In the early 1970s Neusner and Fraenkel argued that previous scholars had mistakenly understood rabbinic narratives as fundamentally reliable historical-biographical sources, or at least as containing historical kernels that could be isolated and iden-

1. I prefer the term *narrative* because it is typically defined more broadly than *story*. A narrative refers to any sequence of events, whereas a story involves events, causality, and change. Many rabbinic narratives consist primarily of dialogue rather than actions and so would not qualify as stories by some definitions, as they lack events and change. Thus, all stories are narratives, but not all narratives are necessarily stories.

tified, on the basis of which biographies of the sages and the history of the rabbinic period could be written.[2] Rabbinic narratives were closer to what we would call didactic fictions that storytellers formulated, transmitted, and reworked for their own didactic purposes. These sources were first and foremost texts, not transparent reflections of a biographical or historical reality, and had to be understood as such. Literary analysis was therefore required to understand their literary qualities and narrative art. In a series of studies Fraenkel offered masterful analyses of dozens of rabbinic stories, exploring their literary structures, figurative language, uses of irony and wordplay, and other dimensions.[3] In the 1980s Meir contributed further studies of the literary features of rabbinic stories, including the role and function of the narrator, characterization, and the importance of the literary context.[4] These scholars laid the groundwork for decades of new studies, approaches, and methods.

A decade later, in 1990, Daniel Boyarin demonstrated the potential of this new understanding of the genre of the rabbinic narrative by drawing on contemporary literary and cultural theory. His *Intertextuality and the Study of Midrash*, as per the title, employed intertextuality to provide a theoretical understanding of rabbinic midrash, also invoking Wolfgang Iser's theory of literary gaps, Michael Riffaterre's notion of "ungrammaticalities," and other theories.[5] While Boyarin focused on midrash, that is, rabbinic biblical exegesis, he also treated exegetical narratives as well as a few sage stories.[6] In his *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, published five years later, Boyarin used new historicism and other literary theories to analyze rabbinic stories in conjunction with halakhic rulings and other aggadic sources—the book was published in a series entitled "The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics."[7] These path-breaking

2. Jacob Neusner, *Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yoḥanan ben Zakkai*, StPB 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 307–28; Yonah Fraenkel, "Hermeneutic Problems in the Study of the Aggadic Narrative" [Hebrew], *Tarbiṣ* 47 (1978): 139–72.

3. See the articles collected in Yonah Fraenkel, *The Aggadic Narrative: Harmony of Form and Content* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001).

4. See Ofra Meir, "Hasipur talui-haheqsher batalmud," *Biqoret ufarshanut* 20 (1984): 3–20; Meir, "Hashpa'at ma'ase ha'arikha 'al hashqafat ha'olam shel sipurei ha'aggada," *Tura* 3 (1994): 67–84. See too the discussion of her contribution and references to other works in Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 11–14.

5. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

6. On midrash and modern literary theory, see too David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies*, Rethinking Theory (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

7. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, New Historicism 25 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

studies provided models for other scholars to emulate in the fruitful application of literary and cultural theory to rabbinic narratives.

The work of Neusner, Fraenkel, Meir, and Boyarin paved the way for a dramatic proliferation of scholarship on rabbinic narratives in the decades that followed. This scholarship can be grouped into five main categories.

1. Source-criticism, redaction-criticism, and comparative studies, including attention to literary processes
2. Intellectual and cultural history
3. Literary and cultural theories
4. Literary and legal contexts
5. Cultural contexts of late antiquity

I will briefly review some examples of the contributions in each area and note how the essays in this volume continue these scholarly endeavors. Certainly these categories are for heuristic purposes and could be organized differently. This brief survey is not meant to be comprehensive but only to review the main trends in order to set the studies in this volume in a scholarly context.

1. Source Criticism, Redaction Criticism, and Comparative Studies, Including Attention to Literary Processes

The awareness that different versions of a sage story were explained by literary processes was a crucial factor in reassessing the genre of the rabbinic narrative. The versions found in different rabbinic compilations—sometimes within the same compilation—were not different reports offered by two or three eyewitnesses to a historical event but rather resulted from the transmitters and storytellers reworking their sources in different ways. Similarly, redactors of rabbinic compilations reworked their sources for their own literary purposes and so as to further their editorial aims. Emancipation from the effort to get behind the sources to a putative historical reality gave way to comparative studies that sought to understand parallel versions on their own terms. Source-critical and redactional-critical studies likewise sought to understand how and why later storytellers and redactors altered the sources they received.

Neusner had observed some of these literary processes in his early studies, noting that later versions consistently embellished and expanded earlier, presumably more original, ones.[8] Shamma Friedman's founda-

8. Neusner, *Development of a Legend*; Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

tional article, "Towards the Historical Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud," demonstrated that Bavli compilers of the long aggadic series of biographical traditions of R. Eleazar b. R. Shimeon and other rabbis in b. B. Meṣ. 83b–86a based the series on two earlier Palestinian story-cycles that had been glossed, reworked, expanded, and embellished by later Babylonian transmitters or by the redactors.[9] I attempted to document some of these literary processes in *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture*, attributing much of this work to the Bavli redactors, the Stammaim.[10] Amram Tropper, in his *Like Clay in the Hands of the Potter: Sage Stories in Rabbinic Literature*, meticulously traced the reworking of earlier traditions in the construction of rabbinic stories, suggesting that the storytellers reused and shaped their source material "like clay in the hands of the potter/creator (*yotser*)."[11] Similarly, Geoffrey Herman demonstrated that the Talmud's story of King David and Ishbi Benob in b. Sanh. 95a "culled its material from elsewhere. It has created, with great artistry, a mosaic of quotations through the combination of many rabbinic sources."[12]

Comparative studies of different versions of a story both helped confirm and later built upon these studies of literary processes to provide more accurate understandings of the didactic interests of storytellers. Three relatively early comparative studies of the Bavli and Yerushalmi versions of two well-known stories identified aspects of the literary reworking and elucidated the disparate interests of the later storytellers: Lee Levine's "R. Simeon b. Yohai and the Purification of Tiberias: History and Tradition" (1978), Ofra Meir's "The Story of R. Shimon bar Yohai and His Son in the Cave—History or Literature?" (1989), and Haim Shapira's "The Deposition of Rabban Gamaliel—Between History and Legend" (1999).[13] As the oppositions within the titles suggest—history and tradition, history or literature, history and legend—the precise degree to which history could be recovered

9. Shamma Friedman, "Towards the Historical Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud" [Hebrew], in *The Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, ed. Shamma Friedman (Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989), 11–63. An abbreviated English version of this article appeared as "Literary Development and Historicity of the Aggadic Narrative of the Babylonian Talmud: A Study Based upon B.M. 83b–86a," in *Community and Culture: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of the Ninetieth Anniversary of Gratz College, 1895–1985*, ed. Nahum W. Waldman (Philadelphia: Gratz College, 1985), 67–80.

10. See n. 4.

11. Amram Tropper, *Like Clay in the Hands of the Potter: Sage Stories in Rabbinic Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Institute, 2011).

12. Geoffrey Herman, "'One Day David Went Out for the Hunt of the Falconers': Persian Themes in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Shoshanat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman*, ed. S. Secunda and S. Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 111–36, here 117.

13. Lee Levine, "R. Simeon b. Yohai and the Purification of Tiberias: History and Tradition," *HUCA* 49 (1978), 143–85; Ofra Meir, "The Story of R. Shimon bar Yohai and His Son in the Cave—History or Literature?" [Hebrew], *Alei Siah* 26 (1989), 145–60; Haim Shapira, "The Deposition of Rabban Gamaliel—Between History and Legend" [Hebrew], *Zion* 64 (1999), 5-38.

from a rabbinic story was still an issue, but scholars were using the comparative method to understand a story's genre and literary development. Meir, in her magnum opus, *Rabbi Judah the Patriarch: Palestinian and Babylonian Portrait of a Leader*, systematically compared parallel stories about the sage and delineated the different ways he is portrayed in these respective sources.[14] In the next decades, comparative studies continued to provide new insights into the diversity of rabbinic ideas, values, and theologies, as well as to call into question previous notions. Pinhas Mandel, in "Was Rabbi Aqiva a Martyr? Palestinian and Babylonian Influences in the Development of a Legend," showed that it was only the Bavli that construed R. Akiva as a martyr, whereas the Yerushalmi parallel is a political drama that involved no death (in the uncorrupted text).[15] Mandel also documented that the Bavli storyteller used a "literary pastiche" of phrases and sources from elsewhere in the Bavli in the reworking process. Leib Moskovitz, in "'The Holy One Blessed be He … Does Not Permit the Righteous to Stumble': Reflections on the Development of a Remarkable BT Theologoumenon," argued that this doctrine, which appears in the Bavli version of a story of R. Pinhas b. Yair and in other Bavli sources, does not appear in the original story in the Yerushalmi, nor is the idea attested anywhere in Palestinian compositions.[16] Moscovitz accordingly concluded that the post-Amoraic "recontextualization of earlier Amoraic teachings significantly influenced, and sometimes altered, the scope and meaning of these teachings.… In addition, our analysis suggests that the anonymous material in BT sometimes differs theologically or ideologically from Amoraic material."[17]

Besides comparative analysis of the Babylonian and Palestinian versions of a narrative, this method can be applied profitably within each Talmud too. Thus Shamma Friedman's "A Good Story Deserves Retelling: The Unfolding of the Akiva Legend" compared the different versions of the story of R. Akiva and his devoted wife in b. Ketub. 62b and b. Ned. 50a.[18] Friedman argued that the Nedarim version is a reworking of the

14. Ofra Meir, *Rabbi Judah the Patriarch: Palestinian and Babylonian Portrait of a Leader* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999).

15. Pinhas Mandel, "Was Rabbi Aqiva a Martyr? Palestinian and Babylonian Influences in the Development of a Legend," in *Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine and Babylonia,* ed. Ronit Nikolsky and Tal Ilan, AJEC 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 306-54. See too the other essays collected in this volume.

16. Leib Moskovitz, "'The Holy One Blessed be He … Does Not Permit the Righteous to Stumble': Reflections on the Development of a Remarkable BT Theologoumenon," in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, ed. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, TSAJ 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 125–80.

17. Ibid., 174.

18. Shamma Friedman, "A Good Story Deserves Retelling: The Unfolding of the Akiva Legend," *JSIJ* 3 (2004): 1–39.

Ketubbot story and attempted to account for the differences, partly on the basis of the contexts of the two stories.

Several essays in this volume continue this line of inquiry, including Dov Kahane's "Problematizing Charity: Rabbinic Charity Narrative Cycle in Bavli Ketubbot 67b–68a," which analyzes stories about charity in the Bavli and their parallels in the Yerushalmi, and Jay Rovner's, "The All-Night Seder in Bene Beraq: A Literary and Cultural History," which compares the anecdote of the five rabbis who stay up all night at the seder in the Passover Haggadah and in t. Pes. 10:12. James Redfield's "The Iridescence of Scripture: Inner-Talmudic Interpretation and Palestinian Midrash" explores not only how Bavli storytellers reworked traditions from Pesikta de Rab Kahana, but also, as the title implies, how Bavli editors continued to gloss and augment traditions after their inclusion in the Bavli to forge connections between two passages. Redfield thus advances our understanding of the processes of reworking stories within the Bavli by triangulating the evidence from both internal and external sources. Barry Scott Wimpfheimer's "Conflict over the Essential Nature of Law: Bava ben Buta's Activism in Tosefta Hagigah" compares the Toseftan and Bavli versions of the famous story of Bava B. Buta's efforts to have the halakha follow the House of Hillel to reveal different attitudes of the storytellers toward rabbinic pluralism.

2. Intellectual and Cultural History

The strategy of comparing Babylonian and Palestinian sources has been particularly productive, especially where consistent differences appear across multiple stories and traditions. These patterns point to differences in the cultures and worldviews of the two rabbinic communities and can contribute to the production of intellectual and cultural history. Boyarin's *Carnal Israel* and Michael Satlow's *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* both adopted this approach to explore the different construction of sex and marriage in Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic tradition.[19] David Goodblatt also employed this method in his groundbreaking *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (1975).[20] Goodblatt's examination of stories and rabbinic anecdotes suggested that the Babylonian Amoraim met in disciple circles, with a small group of students attending an individual rabbinic master, and not in large and permanent institutionalized

19. See n. 7; Michael Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality*, BJS 303 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). See too Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

20. David Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia*, SJLA 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1975). See too Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence," *JSIJ* 1 (2002): 55–68.

academies. This and other related studies have resulted in a new understanding of the history of rabbinic institutional settings.

A related axis of analysis compares sources in earlier and later rabbinic documents for these consistent patterns, tracing diachronic development of rabbinic ideas and values. Tannaitic narratives compared with those of the Amoraic or Stammaitic sources reveal developments in rabbinic thought over the course of time. Thus, Daniel Boyarin, in *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, made a major contribution to this effort of reevaluating our view of the development of ideas sometimes considered characteristic of rabbinic Judaism.[21] In a provocatively titled chapter, "The Yavneh Legend of the Stammaim: On the Invention of the Rabbis in the Sixth Century," Boyarin claimed that the various stories about Yavneh in the Bavli, which are typically understood as traditions of the early rabbis who first constructed rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the temple, are in fact late traditions of the Stammaim.[22] They tell us about post-Amoraic theology and ideology, not about the period of Yavneh, and hence we must consider "Rabbinic Judaism as Stammaitic Invention."[23] Alyssa M. Gray, in "The Formerly Wealthy Poor: From Empathy to Ambivalence in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," observed that Tannaitic stories express "sympathy" for aristocrats who suffered a reversal of fortune and became impoverished whereas talmudic sources in both the Yerushalmi and Bavli are ambivalent. Moshe Lavee, in *The Rabbinic Conversion of Judaism: The Unique Perspective of the Bavli on Conversion and the Construction of Jewish Identity*, as the title suggests, claimed that some Bavli sources, including many stories, are far less welcoming of converts than those found in Palestinian sources.[24]

Dov Weiss's essay in this volume, "Jews, Gentiles, and Gehinnom in Rabbinic Literature," similarly argues for a development in rabbinic views of gentile salvation. While Tannaitic sources debate this question, Amoraic and post-Amoraic traditions almost without exception believe that gentiles are consigned to Gehinnom. Jay Rovner also employs this strategy by examining anecdotes of gatherings of multiple sages in Tannaitic sources, as opposed to the all-night seder described in the Haggadah, to identify the distinct concerns of the Haggadah's compilers.

21. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

22. Ibid., 151–201.

23. Ibid., 155.

24. Alyssa Gray, "The Formerly Wealthy Poor: From Empathy to Ambivalence in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *AJSR* 33 (2009): 101–33; Moshe Lavee, *The Rabbinic Conversion of Judaism: The Unique Perspective of the Bavli on Conversion and the Construction of Jewish Identity*, AJEC 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2018). However, Lavee claims that the Bavli's view is not monolithic, and some sources are more favorable.

3. Literary and Cultural Theories

The appropriation of methods drawn from literary and cultural studies has provided a great deal of insight into rabbinic Judaism and promoted an appreciation of the "cultural work" done by rabbinic narratives. Boyarin's *Carnal Israel* employed new historicism to explicate the rabbinic construction of sexuality and also Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogical" understanding of texts and theory of the grotesque body.[25] The very strange elements in the series of stories in b. B. Meṣ. 83b–86a, including Rabbi Eleazar b. R. Shimeon's self-inflicted "liposuction" through removing buckets of fat from his abdomen, and the discussion of the enormous size of rabbinic phalli—motifs that had baffled previous interpreters—became understandable in light of Bakhtinian theories of the symbolism of the body, borders and permeability, fertility and reproduction, and birth and death.[26] Barry Wimpfheimer continued this productive use of Bakhtin in his *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories*, employing Bakhtin's insights into novelistic discourses and his concept of heteroglossia to problematize the dichotomy between stories and law, between aggada and halakha.[27] In another chapter of this book, Wimpfheimer applied Pierre Bourdieu's method of "internal literary sociology" to several talmudic stories and his theory of "cultural capital" to knowledge of Torah.[28] Michel Foucault, a mainstay of cultural theory, has been employed by many rabbinics scholars, including Joshua Levinson in his study of the exegetical narrative, *The Twice-Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash*.[29] For Levinson, Foucault's understanding of commentary as "the opportunity to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is this text itself which is uttered" helps illuminate how rabbinic interpreters could add so much to the biblical text while claiming to be interpreting, not creating anew.[30] Levinson also employed "symptomatic reading," a derivative of psychoanalytic method, and various theories of interpretation such as the filling of literary gaps to clarify aspects of the exegetical narrative.[31] Mira Balberg adopted Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" in her analysis of two well-known talmudic stories of men who travel to the "cities by

25. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 12–13.

26. Ibid., 197–226.

27. Barry Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 13–16.

28. Ibid., 122–46.

29. Joshua Levinson, *The Twice-Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005).

30. Ibid., 41; see also 59, 119.

31. See my review essay, "The Exegetical Narrative: New Directions" *JQR* 99 (2009): 88–106.

the sea" to consort with prostitutes.[32] Galit Hasan Rokem and Dina Stein adopted methods from folklore, identifying features and motifs found in other folk traditions, while at the same time analyzing the function of the stories within rabbinic texts.[33] Among the salutary results of these studies was an appreciation of marginal voices within the stories, including those of women, children, strangers, and the uneducated, and an awareness of the different generic characteristics of rabbinic stories, including riddles, parables, and historical legends. Others have used methods drawn from narratology,[34] anthropology,[35] environmental studies,[36] postcolonial theory (especially James Scott's theory of "hidden transcripts"),[37] animal studies,[38] disability studies,[39] and other fields.

Feminist approaches and gender theory have been widely adopted by scholars of rabbinic narratives, as they have by biblical scholars. The journal *Nashim* already in 2001 devoted an entire issue to "Feminist Interpretations of Rabbinic Literature," with introductions by Charlotte Fonrobert and Tal Ilan. Ilan also coordinates the "Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud," a project involving many scholars, which has produced nine volumes to date, with more on the way.[40] Naturally, stories about Beruriah have been a site for feminist readings, many of which are sur-

32. Mira Balberg, "Between Heterotopia and Utopia: Two Rabbinic Narratives of Journeys to Prostitutes" [Hebrew], *Meḥkare Yerushalyim be-sifrut 'ivrit* 22 (2008): 191–214.

33. Dina Stein, *Maxims, Magic, and Myth: A Folkloristic Perspective of Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005); Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). In these books Stein draws on an array of literary and cultural theories including semiotics, reflexivity, Bakhtin, and Foucault. See too Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*, trans. Batya Stein, Contraversions (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). Earlier scholars of folklore had identified many folk motifs in talmudic stories but had not analyzed the stories in their entireties, nor discussed their function within the Talmud or midrash. That is, they were more interested in the folk-motifs within the stories than in the stories themselves. See, e.g., Haim Schwarzbaum, *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore*, Fabula: Supplement Series B.3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968).

34. Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

35. See, e.g., James Redfield, "Redacting Culture: Ethnographic Authority in the Talmudic Arrival Scene," *Jewish Social Studies* 22 (2016): 29–80.

36. Julia Watts Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

37. Julia Watts Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See pp. xix–xxi for survey of rabbinics scholars who have employed postcolonial theory.

38. Beth A. Berkowitz, *Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

39. Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction*, 86-90.

40. See the description on the Mohr-Siebeck website, https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/en/multi-volume-work/a-feminist-commentary-on-the-babylonian-talmud-799900000?no_cache=1 and the summary on the website "Ancient Jew Review," https://www.ancient

veyed in "'Beruriah Said Well': The Many Lives (and Deaths) of a Talmudic Social Critic," by Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz.[41] Among the stories discussed in Inbar Raveh's *Feminist Rereadings of Rabbinic Literature* is that of Judith, wife of R. Hiyya, who tricks her husband into permitting her to take a sterilization medicine (b. Yebam. 65a). Her "gender-based" reading attempts "to reconstruct and draw out what is concealed behind the recorded dialogue."[42] The same story, together with many others, is analyzed by Judith Hauptman in *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice*, who describes her approach as "contextualized feminism."[43]

This volume includes several essays that adopt contemporary literary and cultural theory to shed light on rabbinic stories. Zvi Septimus, in "The Deposition of Rabban Gamliel: Talmud and the Political Unconscious," offers a Marxist analysis, drawing on Fredric Jameson's concept of the "absent cause" of a narrative, as well as the theories of Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, and Raymond Williams. Beth Berkowitz's "Bio-Power, Sabbath Burdens, and the Badly Behaved Donkey in Bavli tractate Shabbat" invokes methods from animal studies, as does Julia Watts Belser's "'Hornets Came and Consumed Her': Gender, Animality, and Hunger in Bavli Sanhedrin's Stories of Sodom and Noah," which also draws on gender and ritual theory. Jane L. Kanarek's "The Righteous Women of Bavli Sotah: On Reading Talmudic Narrative in the Context of a Tractate" analyzes the extended aggadic section of the tractate with feminist and gender theories.

4. Literary and Legal Contexts

Fraenkel, committed to his new-critical method and principle of "closure," analyzed stories outside of their literary context and even tended to reject assessing the literary context in any significant way. It was the great contribution of Ofra Meir to demonstrate that the literary and halakhic contexts not only impacted the meaning of a story but in some cases impacted the text itself.[44] Different versions of a story seem to have been tailored to fit their contexts, and therefore context always has to be considered when analyzing a story. Scholars have accordingly devoted attention to the immediate and extended literary contexts of a story, and especially to the legal context within the talmudic *sugya* and the specific mishnaic context,

jewreview.com/articles/2016/4/6/the-feminist-commentary-on-the-babylonian-talmud-at-sbl-2015.

41. Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, "'Beruriah Said Well': The Many Lives (and Deaths) of a Talmudic Social Critic," *Prooftexts* 31 (2011): 181–209.

42. Inbar Raveh, *Feminist Rereadings of Rabbinic Literature*, trans. Kaeren Fish (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 74–75.

43. Judith Hauptman in *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).

44. See n. 4 above.

that is, the proximate Mishnah, with which the story is juxtaposed. That the parallel versions of stories in the Bavli and Yerushalmi may appear in different mishnaic contexts is potentially relevant to the meanings and messages the storytellers or editors intended to communicate. Eli Yassif has emphasized that many stories appear within "story-cycles" containing from three to forty stories in succession, and that this context is crucial to understanding the individual story, which takes on specific meanings in relation to the other stories in the cycle.[45]

Yonatan Feintuch, in his PhD dissertation, "Tales of the Sages and the Surrounding Sugyot in Bavli Neziqin," systematically examined the stories in those three tractates and argued that reading the stories in their contexts sheds new light on both the stories and their legal contexts, and also reveals new themes and messages.[46] In addition, the texts of the stories have been influenced by their contexts, as they contain phrases and key words that appear in the proximate talmudic discussion but not in the parallel versions of the stories.[47] Feintuch developed these ideas in *Face to Face: The Interweaving of Aggada and Halakha in the Babylonian Talmud*, discussing the different functions of stories in their legal contexts, in story-cycles, and sometimes in multiple contexts in one and the same talmudic passage.[48] Itay Marienberg-Milikowsky, in *We Know Not What Has Become of Him: Literature and Meaning in Talmudic Aggada,* discusses the multiple literary contexts of the story of Moses visiting R. Akiva's academy with great insight.[49]

Other scholars have broadened the scope of the relevant context beyond the immediate literary context to the entire chapter of Talmud or even the entire tractate. Devora Steinmetz explored the interrelationship of aggadot and stories in the third chapter of Bavli tractate Taʿanit, identifying a set of motifs and themes that render the entire chapter a literary unit.[50] Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert analyzes the stories of tractate Niddah in her discussion of the aims and purpose of the tractate taken as a whole (employing a method of "feminist literary criticism"),[51] and Mira Wasserman treats the

45. Eli Yassif, "The Cycle of Tales in Rabbinic Literature" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 12 (1990): 103–45.

46. Yonatan Feintuch, "Tales of the Sages and the Surrounding Sugyot in Bavli Neziqin" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2008).

47. See too Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 265–67. Wimpfheimer, in his *Narrating the Law*, also paid great attention to the broader talmudic contexts of the Bavli's stories, delineating their interaction with proximate discussions and halakhic debates.

48. Yonatan Feintuch, *Face to Face: The Interweaving of Aggada and Halakha in the Babylonian Talmud* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2018).

49. Itay Marienberg-Milikowsky, *We Know Not What Has Become of Him: Literature and Meaning in Talmudic Aggada* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2016).

50. Devora Steinmetz, "Perception, Compassion, and Surprise: Literary Coherence in the Third Chapter of Bavli Ta'anit," *HUCA* 82–83 (2011–2012): 61–117.

51. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender*, Contraversions (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 7.

stories of tractate Avodah Zarah in the same way, focusing on the entire tractate as the dominant frame for analysis.[52] So too Julia Watts Belser discusses the stories of responses to drought and disaster of tractate Taʿanit through a literary and cultural analysis of the tractate as a whole.[53]

In this volume Jane L. Kanarek continues in this line of inquiry by assessing an extended midrashic passage of the "righteous women" of the rabbinic retelling of the exodus narrative in the context of tractate Sotah. Dov Kahane's discussion of the story-cycle on charity in b. Ketub. 67b–68a and my article analyzing several story-cycles follow Yassif in paying attention to the context of individual stories within the collection in which they appear. Barry Wimpfheimer draws on the larger Toseftan context of the narrative of Bava b. Buta to shed light on the storyteller's perspective.

5. Cultural Contexts of Late Antiquity

Scholars of the nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement endeavored to find parallels to the themes, motifs, and plots of rabbinic narratives in Greco-Roman literature. This was often done in a crude way, the scholar simply pointing out the parallel or concluding that there was classical influence on the rabbinic sources, though it did sometimes explain puzzling narrative elements. More recently, scholars have made great advances in setting rabbinic stories in disparate cultural contexts in more sophisticated ways, discerning parallels in form and genre, and also understanding the relationship to be more complex than influence or borrowing. In his "The Tragedy of Romance: A Case of Literary Exile," Joshua Levinson observes "the adoption and adaptation of Greco-Roman literary models in midrashic literature" by documenting how a rabbinic story borrows but inverts the standard plot pattern of Hellenistic romance novels to create the opposite effect, namely, a sense of disintegration, isolation, and exile.[54] Catherine Hezser has provided a comprehensive study of the literary form of the Hellenistic "chreia" in rabbinic literature, analyzing its function, formal characteristics, and themes.[55] Haim Weiss's meticulous study of the "Talmudic Dreambook" in b. Ber. 55a–57b and other narratives about consulting dream interpreters elucidates the function and

52. Mira Beth Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

53. Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology*.

54. Joshua Levinson, "The Tragedy of Romance: A Case of Literary Exile," *HTR* 89 (1996): 227–44.

55. Catherine Hezser, "Die Verwendung der hellenistischen Gattung Chrie im frühen Christentum und Judentum," *JSJ* 27 (1996): 371–439.

dynamics of these sources by placing them in the context of Hellenistic and Mesopotamian dream manuals.[56]

The Sasanian-Persian context, which had received minimal attention from *Wissenschaft* scholars (apart from in matters of philology), has seen a great deal of fruitful research in recent years.[57] Daniel Sperber's influential article "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana" (1982) identified Persian motifs in the depiction of R. Yohanan's "Palestinian" academy and noted other literary features. This article contributed to the awareness of the fictional nature of Bavli narratives by documenting that some of the coloring added by later Bavli storytellers derived from their Persian cultural context.[58] Geoffrey Herman built on Sperber's study and identified further Armeno-Persian parallels, also noting Persian parallels to other Bavli stories.[59] Yaakov Elman, who stimulated much of this renewed interest in the Persian context, treated various narratives among his copious studies of rabbinic and Persian law.[60] Shai Secunda's *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context*, Jason Mokhtarian's *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran*, and Yishai Kiel's *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud* all discuss Persian themes and motifs found in many Bavli narratives.[61]

More recently, the Syriac context has received a great deal of atten-

56. Haim Weiss, *"All Dreams Follow the Mouth?" A Literary and Cultural Reading in the Talmudic "Dream Tractate"* [Hebrew] (Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2011). The parallels to Artemidorus's *Oneirocritica* had been noted by previous scholars, but Weiss's analysis is much more sophisticated and draws on a great deal of theory, as the title suggests.

57. See Geoffrey Herman, "Ahasuerus, The Former Stable-Master of Belshazzar, and The Wicked Alexander of Macedon: Two Parallels between the Babylonian Talmud and Persian Sources," *AJSR* 29 (2005): 283–85, for a review of early research on these questions. For a survey of studies of aggada and Persian-Sasanian sources, see Geoffrey Herman and Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "Introduction," in *The Aggada of the Bavli and Its Cultural World*, ed. Geoffrey Herman and Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, BJS 362 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2018), xii–xvii.

58. Daniel Sperber, "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia," in *Irano Judaica*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 1982), 83–100.

59. Geoffrey Herman, "The Story of Rav Kahana (BT Baba Qamma 117a–b) in Light of Armeno-Persian Sources," *Irano-Judaica VI: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2008), 53–86.

60. See, e.g., Yaakov Elman, "Dualistic Elements in Babylonian Aggada," in Herman and Rubenstein, *Aggadah of the Bavli*, 273–311; Elman, "'He in His Cloak and She in Her Cloak': Conflicting Images of Sexuality in Sasanian Mesopotamia," in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism*, ed. Rivka Ulmer, Studies in Judaism (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 129–64.

61. Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran*, S. Mark Taper Foundation Imprint in Jewish Studies (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Yishai Kiel,

tion.[62] Michal Bar-Asher Siegal's *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud*, has called attention to connections between rabbinic biographical traditions and Syriac hagiographical literature.[63] She argues, for example, that the differences between the Bavli's version of the story of "R. Shimon b. Yohai and the cave" and that of the Yerushalmi is a function of the Bavli adopting motifs found in Syriac lives of "holy men" and monks.[64] Other studies have also suggested that rabbis in both Talmuds are sometimes portrayed as "holy men" in the manner of the Syriac biographical tradition.[65] Simcha Gross has suggested that the Bavli story of the martyrdom of Rabbah bar Naḥmani is modeled on Syriac martyrological traditions such as those found in the Persian Martyr Acts, though it communicates different ideas about persecution and identity.[66] A number of studies of talmudic stories in their Persian and Syriac contexts are collected in the volume *The Aggada of the Bavli and Its Cultural World*, also published by Brown Judaic Studies.[67]

Tzvi Novick's contribution, "Mishnah as Story: Aspects of the Reception of the Mishnah in Midrash and *Piyyut*," discusses the reception of mishnaic traditions and several mishnaic narratives in piyyutim, which flourished in the Byzantine cultural context, blazing a new trail in these efforts to set rabbinic stories in late antique contexts. Julia Watts Belser draws on the Sasanian context and the Zoroastrian disgust toward insects to explicate the Sodomites cruelty of killing a woman by exposing her to hornets.

The essays in this volume continue these trends that have produced such fruitful research over the past half century and, in turn, contribute to their advancement. They exemplify the wide variety and diversity of methods and approaches developed in the past and also add new theoretical tools and lines of analysis to scholarship of the rabbinic narrative. It is hoped that future studies will build upon these essays in creative and innovative ways.

Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud: Christian and Sasanian Contexts in Late Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

62. For a review of studies of aggada and Syriac sources, see Herman and Rubenstein, "Introduction," in *Aggada of the Bavli*, xvii–xxx.

63. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

64. Ibid., 133–69.

65. See, e.g., David Levine, "Holy Men and Rabbis in Talmudic Antiquity," and Chana Safrai and Zeev Safrai, "Rabbinic Holy Men," both in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz, Jewish and Christian Perspectives 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 45–58 and 59–78. See too Herman and Rubenstein, "Introduction," xxvi–xvii, for further references.

66. Simcha Gross, "A Persian Anti-Martyr Act: The Death of Rabbah bar Naḥmani," in Herman and Rubenstein, *Aggada of the Bavli*, 211–42.

67. See n. 57 above.

Summary of Contents

Julia Watts Belser, in "'Hornets Came and Consumed Her': Gender, Animality, and Hunger in Bavli Sanhedrin's Stories of Sodom and Noah," probes narratives from the Babylonian Talmud's account of Noah and Sodom (b. Sanh. 108a–109b). She devotes particular attention to the final scene of the Sodom tale in which a woman who sneaks food to a starving man to subvert the men of Sodom's cruel decree is punished by being daubed in honey and stood upon the city wall, where she is eaten alive by bees. Reading these tales through the prism of hunger, Belser argues that the act of eating brings critical dimensions of gender, sexuality, social class, and species into sharp relief. Where the Sodom tale uses animal hunger to prop up an unjust regime and enact public violence on a woman's flesh, the Noah stories reveal animals disciplining their hungers, fashioning consumption into an expression of ethical agency and a mark of moral sensitivity. In the Sodom stories, hunger serves as an index of the bestial, a powerful force intertwined with violence, greed, and sexual perversion. The threat of the bestial haunts the Bavli's account of the flood, which it imagines as the consequence of illicit sex between humans and other animals. But in the Bavli's telling, the ark opens to an alternate form of interspecies intimacy, one in which the act of eating and feeding holds out the promise of mutuality and kinship between human and animal flesh.

In "Bio-Power, Sabbath Burdens, and the Badly Behaved Donkey in Bavli Tractate Shabbat," **Beth Berkowitz** examines Bavli Shabbat chapter 5 to explore how human techniques of animal control come to seem necessary and beneficial. The essay first looks at a legal passage dealing with disciplinary devices for animals and then turns to a story about a badly behaved donkey to argue that the story exposes the "disguises and pretenses" (a notion borrowed from Bertrand Russell) that the legal discourse puts into place. Putting critical animal studies in dialogue with the Talmud, this essay argues that the talmudic treatment of Sabbath burdens is an illuminating case study in the exercise of bio-power.

Dov Kahane, in "Problematizing Charity: Rabbinic Charity Narrative Cycle in Bavli Ketubbot 67b–68a," examines the cycle of charity narratives that appear on these two folios of the Babylonian Talmud. These narratives all share certain thematic and stylistic features and, taken as a whole, represent a highly redacted corpus. Each story speaks of a donor and his (and in one story, her) particular—often supererogatory—practice of charity. All of these stories present some type of twist on the expected outcome. Kahane argues that this cycle of narratives works to problematize aspects of the act of charity in the social context that is depicted. This problematizing reflects a cultural awareness on the part of the Bavli editors that—notwithstanding the notion that charity is the ultimate act of corporate solidarity—other concerns about its implementation are significant. This

awareness may well reflect the shift to greater rabbinic institutionalization of charity activities in late Amoraic and Geonic periods or the waning influence of euergetism. It may also reflect the academic culture of the editors of the Bavli and their desire to create a multivocal, nuanced text that eschews binary categorizations of normative behavior.

In "The Righteous Women of Bavli Sotah: On Reading Talmudic Narrative in the Context of a Tractate," **Jane L. Kanarek** argues that the talmudic narrative of the righteous women through whose merit Israel was redeemed from Egypt (b. Soṭah 11b) should be read not only within its local midrashic context but also within the wider context of the Bavli's presentation of the sotah ritual. With its description of women birthing a nation, the righteous-women homily portrays an act of political rebellion that mirrors the sotah ritual and acts as a subversive countertradition to the ritual. In addition, the homily may be part of a Babylonian trend toward shifting the focus of the sotah ritual from women's guilt to include men and male sin.

The Mishnah is a legal work, but because it includes many narrative elements, and because of its foundational importance in the rabbinic canon, later texts that are not designed principally for explication of the law often allude to it. **Tzvi Novick**, in **"**Mishnah as Story: Aspects of the Reception of the Mishnah in Midrash and *Piyyut*," collects five passages from the homiletical literature of Amoraic Palestine and from classical *piyyuṭ* that in different ways receive the Mishnah as story. Careful analysis of these passages yields new insight into a range of narrative motifs and, more generally, into the production of a legal culture in which law and narrative are inextricably intertwined.

Via source-critical analysis of two adjacent literary units in the Babylonian Talmud (b. B. Bat. 73a–75b), and a comparison to their parallels in the Palestinian work Pesiqta de Rab Kahana, **James Redfield**'s "The Iridescence of Scripture: Inner-Talmudic Interpretation and Palestinian Midrash" interrogates the relation between Babylonian and Palestinian midrash more generally and develops a model for accessing distinctive features of midrash in the Babylonian Talmud. Redfield argues the following: (1) the Palestinian and Babylonian parallels do reflect more popular as opposed to more scholastic ideologies, respectively; (2) the Babylonian material is composed of basically discrete units that were, however, gradually integrated through a process of "inner-talmudic interpretation"; (3) the dynamics of inner-talmudic interpretation involve the use of key words and catchphrases to open pathways for rereading among accumulated sources. This final, theoretical argument builds upon recent work in the field but stresses the need to combine precision about *active* links between sources with an appreciation for their *longue durée* and the relatively nonintentional formation of pathways in the "live" context of talmudic study.

Jay Rovner, in "The All-Night Seder in Bene Beraq: A Literary and Cultural History," observes that the *maʿaśeh* (story anecdote) about a Passover seder celebrated by sages with Rabbi Akiva in Bene Beraq appears to be a typical tale crafted sometime during the Tannaitic era, the period during which they lived. However, it is found only in the Passover Haggadah, and there was no Haggadah then. Comparison of different versions of this *maʿaśeh* shows that it was taking form and evolving much later, in the Geonic period. Indeed, it is one of several texts that were being developed or deployed in the formation of the *ʿavadim hayinu* section of the Babylonian version of the Passover Haggadah during that period.

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, in "The Story-Cycles of the Bavli: Part I" begins a comprehensive study of the clusters of stories found throughout the Bavli. Eli Yassif first called attention to this phenomenon in several studies beginning in 1990 and ultimately identified twenty-four story-cycles in the Bavli of between three and thirty-eight stories. Rubenstein argues that Yassif's pioneering study, based largely on folkloristic methods and interests, requires revision in light of recent scholarship on the nature and editing of the Bavli. He begins this project with analyses of five story-cycles: (1) Ber. 18a–b (five stories of the dead); (2) Ketub. 67b (nine stories of charity); (3) Šabb. 30b–31a (nine stories of annoying questions); (4) Šabb. 156b (three stories of astrology); (5) ʻAbod. Zar. 10a–11a (three stories of righteous gentiles). Rubenstein discusses the boundaries and definition of the story-cycle, parallels, composition and dating, halakhic context, and interruptions between the stories.

Zvi Septimus, in "The Deposition of Rabban Gamliel: Talmud and the Political Unconscious," argues that a Marxist reading of the Babylonian Talmud can be used to understand the impact of the process of urbanization on rabbinic ideology. At the same time, he proposes a method for the historical analysis of the development of rabbinic literature that contrasts with the standard diachronic model practiced in the field. The story of the deposition of Rabban Gamliel as *Nasi* (b. Ber. 27b–28a; y. Ber. 4:1), and its place within the Yavneh story-cycle, has received considerable scholarly attention. What these studies have in common is their desire to locate the authorship of the story in a concrete historical context and thereby use the story to discover something about both the historical period of the text's composition and the people who produced it, though a wide range of dates are proposed by various scholars. The diachronic method used in these studies relies on a comparison of two extant textual relics (in this case the Bavli and Yerushalmi versions of a story). Septimus assumes that many now-lost versions of the story existed over time and proposes a method for historical analysis that takes into account the important role these missing versions might have played in the development of the story that we now read. While a distant reading approach that resists narratological analysis is the starting point for such an investigation, Fredric Jameson's method

for finding the absent cause of a narrative provides the structure for the analysis. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson demonstrated that, though Marx's epochal scheme of history was inherently flawed, his central idea of historical materialism could nonetheless be salvaged. Septimus follows Jameson through his three stages of reading, representing three distinct semantic horizons, and displays how an increasingly urbanized rabbinic world dealt with traces of competing power structures located in different periods of Jewish history. Other Marxist thinkers, such as Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, and Raymond Williams, play central roles in the argument.

In "Jews, Gentiles and Gehinnom in Rabbinic Literature," **Dov Weiss** argues that, while the rabbis debated the question of gentile salvation in the Tannaitic period, the exclusivist position—which regarded the gentiles as destined for Gehinnom—reached near-unanimous consensus in the Amoraic and post-Amoraic periods. This fact—that the rabbinic belief in gentile damnation intensified and radicalized over time—has gone unnoticed in both Jewish and Christian scholarship. This essay further argues that a rabbinic anti-gentile soteriology worked in tandem with a new rabbinic doctrine that advocated a radical vision of Jewish privilege: all Jews–even the sinners–would escape the fiery torments of hell.

Barry Wimpfheimer, in **"**Conflict over the Essential Nature of Law: Bava ben Buta's Activism in Tosefta Hagigah," analyzes the story of Baba ben Buta, a disciple of Beit Shammai, who intervenes in the logistical execution of sacrificial rituals to achieve a practical legal outcome according to the position of Beit Hillel. This article lends texture to this narrative by reading into both the doubling of the story in the text and a series of editorial interruptions in the narration. These features combine with similar editorial interruptions in the famous adjacent passage about the temple-era legal system to tell a story of editorial resistance to the original story and its assumptions about law and jurisprudence. This example demonstrates that Jewish law as a unified consistent entity was already being contested in the Tannaitic period.

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