

ISAIAH GAFNI

Jews and Judaism  
in the Rabbinic Era

*Texts and Studies in*

*Ancient Judaism*

173

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism

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173





Isaiah M. Gafni

# Jews and Judaism in the Rabbinic Era

Image and Reality – History and Historiography

Mohr Siebeck

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For Naomi



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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations for biblical books and rabbinic works follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, eds. Patrick H. Alexander et al. (Peabody, 1999).

<i>ArOr</i>	<i>Archiv Orientalni</i>
<i>b.</i>	Bavli, Babylonian Talmud
<i>b.</i>	ben, bar
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>CAH</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CIJ</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</i>
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>GLAJJ</i>	M. Stern, <i>Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>The Jewish Encyclopedia</i> (I. Singer)
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>LAB</i>	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>MGWJ</i>	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
<i>Mek.</i>	<i>Mekhilta</i>
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>PAAJR</i>	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (J.-P. Migne)

PL	Patrologia Latina (J.-P. Migne)
PPTS	<i>Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society</i>
R.	Rabbi
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
SCI	<i>Scripta classica Israelica</i>
t.	Tosefta
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
Vat.	Vatican
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
y.	Yerushalmi, Palestinian Talmud
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

# I

## Introduction

The articles in this collection are selected papers written over a period of forty years, with the earliest one (“Reinterment in the Land of Israel”, No. XVII) published in its original Hebrew version in 1977. Save for some very few exceptions none were updated (although mistakes, when discovered, were corrected), and thus represent what a dear friend and colleague in the field called, in dealing with his own collected works, “historical artifacts”.<sup>1</sup> As such, they reflect some of my major areas of interest during that period, as well as the conclusions I drew at the time.<sup>2</sup> The latter have certainly undergone reconsideration over the years, and require updating and at times revisions as well. One of the aims of this introduction is to suggest where I might have either changed my mind on certain issues in light of my own subsequent work or that of others, and to inform the reader of some major contributions, many by a new generation of young scholars, to the very issues taken up in these studies. The fact that some of these scholars were at one time or another my students is, of course, particularly gratifying.

The subtitle of this volume – “Image and Reality; History and Historiography” – already suggests the thrust of many of the arguments put forward in these studies. It will become apparent that while I consider myself a historian, my work often focuses not so much on hard historical realities, but rather on the manner in which images of the past were shaped and transmitted through a variety of literary genre, produced at times by some authors who certainly may be considered historians, but in other cases preserved in literary corpora, such as rabbinic literature, that made no claim to be transmitters of “what really happened” (although they may have believed that this was the case). The first and fourth parts of this volume address a variety of aspects of the historiographical process as it relates to the ancient and late antique history of the Jews. While Part One focuses on the projection of ancient images by a variety of transmitters (Hellenistic, rabbinic and geonic), Part Four sets out to examine how modern ideologies and discoveries have effected a

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<sup>1</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Significance of Yavneh and Other Essays in Jewish Hellenism* (Tübingen, 2010), p. IX.

<sup>2</sup> A more complete list of my publications can be found in: *Between Babylonia and the Land of Israel – Studies in Honor of Isaiah M. Gafni*, eds. Geoffrey Herman, Meir Ben Shazar and Aharon Oppenheimer (Jerusalem, 2016), pp. 17–26.

constant reshaping of our images of the past. Between these two parts are two sections that take up two major components of my research over the years. The first of these addresses the history of Babylonian Jewry in the period of the Talmud, arguably one of the most formative stages and settings of historical Jewish development. Toward this end, I published a monograph on the history of the Babylonian Jews in the talmudic era,<sup>3</sup> while the chapters in Part Two of this volume take up specific components of this development. Part Three addresses what is, to my mind, a critical component for understanding Jewish self-identity, both in antiquity as well as in the contemporary scene. Here, too, I published what began as a series of lectures and evolved into a monograph, entitled *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield, 1997); the articles in Part Three of the present volume take up focused examples of the center-diaspora phenomenon.

In many ways, the first and penultimate articles in this collection are complementary, as they both set out to alert readers of historical tracts about the tendentiousness that frequently crept into the writings of the most respected of Jewish historians, whether in antiquity, such as Josephus, or in modern times. This, of course, should surprise no one, but added to this problem is the constant question of whether any given transmitter of events has based his presentation primarily on source material, or has permitted agenda-driven license to color – or at times even create – a given reality. The first article (No. II) is a perfect example of how one historian, Josephus, reworked the source before him – 1 Maccabees – in an effort to forge a narrative that might comply with his particular worldview. But how are we to relate to visions of the past that are presented in decidedly non-historical tracts, such as rabbinic literature?<sup>4</sup> Four of the articles in this section set out to present rabbinic images of earlier times (Nos. III–VI). One paper examined the rabbinic ‘memory’ of the Hasmonaeans (No. V), while another attempted to piece together a past history (as well as the religious and legal status) of Jerusalem as imagined by the rabbis (No. VI).<sup>5</sup> When I initially organized the material for these last two papers, I had no idea to what extent, if at all, the

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah M. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era – A Social and Cultural History* (Jerusalem, 1990). Hebrew.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent list of scholars who have stressed the ahistorical nature of rabbinic literature, see: Vered Noam, “Lost Historical Traditions: Between Josephus and the Rabbis”, in *Sibyls, Scriptures and Scrolls – John Collins at Seventy*, II, eds. J. Baden, H. Najman and E. J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden/Boston, 2017), pp. 991–1017, here p. 993, n. 9; see also my article: “The Modern Study of Rabbinic and Historical Questions: The Tale of the Text”, in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, eds. Reimund Bieringer, Florentino García Martínez, Didier Pollefeyt, and Peter J. Tomson (Leiden, 2010), pp. 43–61.

<sup>5</sup> For a companion study, on Jerusalem in classical literature, see my article: “Jerusalem in Greek and Latin Literature”, in *Strength to Strength: Essays in Honor of Shaye J. D. Cohen*, ed. Michael Satlow (Providence, RI, 2018; forthcoming).

rabbinic picture exceeded a romanticized and idyllic picture of the past, or whether these traditions were based on earlier sources, be they written, oral or both. The working hypothesis was to assume an anachronistic imposition on the past, fashioned by a rabbinic worldview or, at the most, a retelling of Josephan material that somehow found its way to the sages.<sup>6</sup>

Recent studies, however, have become far more nuanced in their appraisal of rabbinic images of the past, and likewise have questioned the predominant linear process, from Josephus to the rabbis. Scholars have begun to assume a shared pool of information going back to Second Temple times, from which both Josephus and the rabbis drew independently, and subsequently fashioned and reshaped it to comply with their respective ideologies.<sup>7</sup> Were I to rewrite these two articles today I would give more thought to these possibilities. Indeed, in a very recent additional study of mine, on “Rabbinic Images of Second Temple Diasporas”,<sup>8</sup> I suggest that while some of the rabbinic representations of the Jewish Diaspora of Second Temple times were obviously fashioned to comply with rabbinic imagery and self-identity, they nevertheless may have been based on access to early Second Temple sources and information, and should not be dismissed out of hand as had been the case in earlier scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

My article on “The Hasmonaeans in Rabbinic Literature” (No. V) had an additional goal, namely to downplay the popular notion that the rabbis, in supposedly stressing the miracle of the cruse of oil as the basis for Hanukkah,

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<sup>6</sup> For a review of the various theories see Noam, “Lost Historical Traditions”, pp. 998–1002.

<sup>7</sup> This is the basic conclusion in Noam’s article; much of the groundwork for this revised appraisal of rabbinic images of the past, and primarily the Second Temple period, can be found in: Tal Ilan and Noam Vered, in collaboration with Meir ben Shazar, Daphne Baratz and Yael Fisch, *Josephus and the Rabbis*, I–II (Jerusalem, 2017), Hebrew. See also: Menahem Kister, “Aḥor va-qedem: Aggadot ve-darkhei midrash be-sifrut ha-ḥiṣonit u-be-sifrut ḥazal”, in *Higayon L’Yonah – New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyut in Honor of Professor Yona Fraenkel*, eds. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 231–259, who also argues for the likelihood of an early provenance of many rabbinic traditions that were only preserved in later, redacted texts. For a similar argument relating to historical parallels in Josephus and rabbinic literature see: Noah Hacham, “The High Priesthood and Onias’ Temple: The Historical Meaning of a Rabbinic Story”, *Zion* 78 (2013), pp. 439–469 (Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah M. Gafni, “Rabbinic Images of Second Temple Diasporas and Their Links with Judaea: History or Fantasy?”, in *Sources and Interpretation in Ancient Judaism – Studies for Tal Ilan at Sixty*, eds. Meron M. Piotrkowski, Geoffrey Herman, and Saskia Dönitz (Leiden/Boston, 2018), pp. 268–288.

<sup>9</sup> The article on “The Hasmonaeans in Rabbinic Literature” alludes numerous times to parallel sources on the Hasmonaeans in the writings of Josephus and rabbinic literature; were I to rewrite the article today I would definitely examine each and every case in light of the entries in the corpus of these parallel sources, see: *Josephus and the Rabbis* (above, n. 6).

were expressing an overall disdain for much of Hasmonaean activity in the political and even military sphere. By simply gathering all the rabbinic statements referring to Hasmonaeans, it becomes apparent that the overwhelming number of references to them *as a dynasty* were in fact positive. Indeed, a clear distinction can be made between rabbinic allusions to the Hasmonaean dynasty in general, and references to specific individuals of that family, to whom criticism is at times attached. Since that article appeared, a number of important studies by Vered Noam have confirmed, to a degree, the salient points of my arguments, and to my mind, her work has laid to rest mediaeval and early modern impositions of an overt anti-Hasmonaean predisposition among the rabbis.<sup>10</sup>

Part One of this collection concludes with two long studies (Nos. VII–VIII) on the *Iggeret* of Rav Sherira Gaon, arguably the most important source for the history of the talmudic era, and certainly for the Babylonian component of that history. To my mind Rav Sherira was one of the outstanding Jewish historians of all time, and his reading of the Talmud as a historical source was innovative and by and large unprecedented. He appears to have been the first author to have applied a historical mindset to talmudic literature, searching as he does for causal links between dispersed rabbinic traditions that enabled him to present a coherent narrative of the rabbinic world in the talmudic and geonic periods. The two papers enabled me to draw a clear distinction between Rav Sherira's chronography, almost certainly based on existing chronological lists, and his historiographical endeavor, where I posited a far greater creative role for the gaon, suggesting that here there appears to be far less evidence of a pre-existing narrative. Regarding the chronological framework supplied by the gaon, I maintained that through interdisciplinary cross-referencing we can corroborate the accuracy of a significant portion of the chronological data, thereby refuting the skepticism frequently evinced by some scholars. This claim was supported in some recent overviews on the

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<sup>10</sup> See Vered Noam, "The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil: The Metamorphosis of a Legend", *HUCA* 73 (2002), pp. 191–226; in her study Noam dispels the idea of the miracle story as a reflection of rabbinic attitudes; it is primarily an example of the dominance of the Babylonian Talmud in the minds of subsequent generations, hence "a reflection of later cultural processes, and not of the approach of the Sages themselves" (*ibid.*, p. 226); see also V. Noam, "Did the Rabbis Cause the Hasmoneans to Be Forgotten? A Reconsideration", *Zion* 81 (2016), pp. 295–333 (Hebrew); here she also agrees that the rabbis sought "to erase the memory of the individual Maccabean brothers, but ... did not display a negative attitude toward the Hasmonaean dynasty as an institution" (*ibid.*, Summaries, p. XXVII). A major portion of Noam's work on the image of the Hasmonaeans, much of which was originally published in Hebrew, has now appeared in English translation, together with a concluding chapter (pp. 186–221) that summarizes her most recent thoughts on how both Josephus as well as the rabbis attempted to deal with the Hasmonaean past; see: Vered Noam, *Shifting Images of the Hasmoneans* (Oxford, 2018).

*Iggeret*, most notably that of Robert Brody.<sup>11</sup> As for the historiographical creativity employed by Rav Sherira, Brody tempers my claim to a certain degree, suggesting – as did our late teacher Shraga Abramson – that while the basic distinction between the chronological component and the historiographical one is correct, there may be more room for positing earlier historiographical material employed by the gaon, rather than his sole reliance on talmudic traditions.<sup>12</sup> Nearly a century has passed since Lewin published his edition of the *Iggeret*, and a critical edition of this monumental source is still a major desideratum.

My interest in Rav Sherira's *Iggeret* was initially aroused by my preoccupation for many years with the history of talmudic Babylonia, which serves as the focus of Part Two of this volume. I chose to open that section with an overview of the period (No. IX), which might serve as a contextualizing framework for the more focused studies that follow. The overview was written some years ago, and is by now incomplete and in certain cases outdated. Our knowledge and understanding of the nature of the Sasanian Empire, and in particular the status of the various minorities that existed within its borders, has advanced considerably in recent years, and some excellent introductions that inform us of the unique status of the Jews within that empire can now be recommended. One outstanding example of such an introduction can be found in Geoffrey Herman's study of the Exilarchate.<sup>13</sup>

In recent years the history of Babylonian Jewry, and particularly the rabbinic element within that community, has enjoyed a major revitalization, with the emergence of a new school of scholarship. Twenty-seven years ago, in the introduction to my book on Babylonian Jewry I wrote that

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Brody, "The Epistle of Sherira Gaon", in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford, 2010), pp. 253–264, here pp. 258–259 and n. 18.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Brody, *Zion between the Tigris and the Euphrates: The World of the Babylonian Geonim* (Jerusalem, 2015), p. 23, n. 17 (Hebrew). (This book is an updated and expanded Hebrew version of the author's earlier book: *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* [New Haven/London 1998].)

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom* (Tübingen, 2012), pp. 21–53. In addition to this monograph, Herman has produced a series of updated studies on a wide variety of issues relating to talmudic Babylonian Jewry. If, for example, the rabbis were careful to delineate where the 'purer' elements of Babylonian Jewry were located, a subject discussed in a number of articles in the present volume, Herman has now provided us with an extremely careful and detailed analysis of the relevant passages on this issue; see: G. Herman, "Babylonia of Pure Lineage: Notes on Babylonian Jewish Toponymy", in: *Sources and Interpretation in Ancient Judaism* (above, n. 7) pp. 191–228.



philological research does not stop with the establishment of the text and explication of words, but strives to insert every tradition ... into an established historical-practical framework. Research on Babylonian Jewry requires knowledge of Iranian languages, and an expertise in the history of that land including all its political, social and cultural aspects ... the impressive achievements of [Saul] Lieberman in solving enigmas relevant to the Land of Israel in the first centuries CE ... inform us that we have yet to encounter a similar scholar equipped to solve the mysteries of Babylonian Talmudic Jewry.<sup>14</sup>

This challenge has been met in recent years with exceptional vigor, beginning with the work of the late Yaakov Elman<sup>15</sup> and continued by a devoted circle of students and colleagues.<sup>16</sup> Their collective goal has been to locate our knowledge of Jewish affairs as well as religious and legal behavior in the Sasanian Empire within the context of Iranian culture and religion, arguing that a full understanding of the talmudic discourse and its various allusions cannot be fully appreciated without searching for related, or even similar phenomena within Iranian society. To be sure, not all scholars have fully embraced the entire scope and implications of these comparisons, denying for example an overt Iranian legal influence within rabbinic circles, while willing to accept certain folkloristic points of contact.<sup>17</sup> I have included in this volume one of my own attempts at placing rabbinic references within a broader Iranian context, namely my article on “Babylonian Rabbinic Culture” (No. XI).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gafni, *Jews of Babylonia* (above, n. 3), p. 14; in truth, some of my teachers at the Hebrew University had begun to show the way in this endeavor, and I would note in particular the extremely learned article by Eliezer Shimshon Rosenthal, “For the Talmudic Dictionary – Talmudica Iranica”, in *Irano-Judaica*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 38–134.

<sup>15</sup> For a list of Elman’s publications see: *Shoshannat Yaakov – Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman*, eds. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Leiden/Boston, 2012), pp. XV–XXII (his relevant studies on Irano-Judaica begin in 2003; see the list in Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud* [Philadelphia, 2014], pp. 153–154, n. 39); for a concise introduction to many of the issues taken up by Elman in this area, see: Yaakov Elman, “Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, eds. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 165–197.

<sup>16</sup> For a partial list see Secunda, *ibid.*, p. 154, n. 40; for a brief overview of the current state of attempts to contextualize the Babylonian Talmud see: Simcha M. Gross, “Irano-Talmudica and Beyond: Next Steps in the Contextualization of the Babylonian Talmud”, *JQR* 106 (2016), pp. 248–253.

<sup>17</sup> One notable challenger has been Robert Brody, “Irano-Talmudica: The New Parallelomania?”, *JQR* 106 (2016), pp. 209–232.

<sup>18</sup> It goes without saying that almost every example of popular Babylonian culture referred to in that overview, such as Iranian loanwords in rabbinic literature or the magic bowls, has been addressed in detail by scholars in the field. The copious work of Prof. Shaul Shaked of the Hebrew University stands out as a model of this important research during the past generation.

Yet another study, on conversion in Sasanian Babylonia (No. XIII), notes that the majority of the limited Babylonian talmudic references to the phenomenon take place in Maḥoza, a fact that dovetails quite nicely with Elman's view of Maḥoza as something akin to a cosmopolitan center,<sup>19</sup> which to his mind considerably influenced the worldview of his hero, the fourth-century rabbi Rava. However, I have been cautious in asserting overt gentile influences on rabbinic legal instruction and institutional organization, preferring instead to point to a shared environment of political authority, language, economy, climate and other factors that may have produced similar behavior among different groups living in proximity to one another. An example of this approach may be found in my article on "Nestorian Literature as a Source for the History of the Babylonian Yeshivot" (No. XIV).

My main interest in Babylonian Jewry, however, was in the variety of strategies employed by its leadership in an effort to assert a sense of 'homeness' among the local Jewish community, thereby removing any potential pangs of guilt for establishing what ultimately became a competitive force within the Jewish world, vying with the Judaeian center for primacy. In my paper on "How Babylonia became 'Zion'" (No. X) I argued that the competition that comes to the fore in the geonic period (Pirqoy ben Baboy) had far deeper routes going back to talmudic times. In essence, the shift was not simply the result of a political struggle for leadership between the two rabbinic centers, but a reflection of the ideological confrontation of 'geography' (*Eretz Israel*) versus 'Torah' as the dominant factor of Jewish identity and authority, a debate that began to emerge just a few generations after the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar-Kokhba uprising. A recent study by Daniel Boyarin would appear to reinforce my conclusions.<sup>20</sup>

My interest in the Babylonian Jewish community, and specifically its complex attitude toward the Palestinian center, was accompanied over the years by the broader issue of Center and Diaspora in antique Judaism, a multifaceted subject whose genesis predates talmudic Judaism by hundreds of years. I briefly addressed the Jewish discourse of the Hellenistic-Roman period on the diaspora phenomenon in the first chapter of my book *Land, Center and Diaspora*, whereas in the present collection I chose to include those studies that take up the post-Temple expressions of the center-diaspora relationship.<sup>21</sup> Two of the articles in this section set out to identify the changes

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<sup>19</sup> This connection, based on my article, was noted by Elman's student, Shai Secunda, in his work *The Iranian Talmud* (above, n. 14), p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (Philadelphia, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> I briefly discuss aspects of the center-diaspora phenomenon in my introduction to another collection of articles; see: Isaiah M. Gafni, "Introduction: Center and Diaspora in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Periods", in: *Center and Diaspora: The Land of*

attached to the status of the Land of Israel in the aftermath of the Destruction and the Bar-Kokhba debacle (Nos. XVI–XVII). While the military events in Judaea may have effected a decentralizing process, demographically as well in a diminished obligation toward certain mitzvot connected to the Land, one senses a converse process, characterized by apparently unprecedented calls for maintaining an ideological loyalty to the Land, which included appeals for ‘*aliyah*’ and forbidding emigration, as well as forbidding the sale (or even leasing) of land to gentiles. In time these calls, almost all of which emanate from Palestinian sages, were joined by a growing belief in the metaphysical attributes of the Land, such as the belief that those buried therein will have their sins atoned for, that they will be the first to rise on the advent of the messiah, and so forth.<sup>22</sup> There is, however, an additional benefit to be derived from such studies. Nowhere do we find among the hundreds of statements in rabbinic literature attributed to pre-Bar Kokhba sages any similar expressions of required Judaeen loyalty or manifestations of ensuing advantages connected to the Land, although such anachronistic impositions might have been expected. How easy it should have been for late editors or pseudo-epigraphic formulators to insert such sentiments into the mouths of such notable authorities as R. Aqiva, R. Joshua and Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and their peers. And yet not one example of this appears anywhere in the hundreds of statements attributed in tannaitic literature to the luminaries of the years 70–132 CE, thus apparently attesting to an attitudinal change that took place at a particular point in time.<sup>23</sup> This is but one example of a preserved stratification in rabbinic literature, which tends to temper the popular notion of a homogenizing process imposed by the heavy-handedness of some late redactor. Recognizing this preserved stratification contributes significantly to what scholars have referred to, in other contexts, as ‘The Rehabilitation of Talmudic History’.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in the case of reinterment in the Land, one finds

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*Israel and the Diaspora in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Periods*, ed. Isaiah M. Gafni (Jerusalem, 2004), pp. 7–15.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion on how Babylonian sages responded to these projections of the virtues of life (and death) in the Land of Israel see: Jeffrey Rubenstein, “Addressing the Attributes of the Land of Israel: An Analysis of Bavli Ketubot 110b–112a”, in *Center and Diaspora* (above, n. 20), pp. 159–188 (Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> For this argument see my article “The Modern Study of Rabbinics and Historical Questions” (above, n. 4), pp. 58–60.

<sup>24</sup> A similar stratification, maintaining idiosyncratic generational attributions, is noted in the article on the *Pirqa* in this volume (No. XV). In fact, it was the gradual introduction of this term (and practice), beginning only in statements attributed to a specific generation of Babylonian amoraim, and in a similar manner the gradual introduction of the term ‘*kalla*’, that led David Goodblatt, among other reasons, to justify this ‘rehabilitation’, notwithstanding its limitations; see his article: “Towards the Rehabilitation of Talmudic History”, in *History of Judaism – The Next Ten Years*, ed. Baruch M. Bokser (Chico, 1981), pp. 31–44.

archaeological evidence that dovetails precisely with the earliest rabbinic allusions to the practice, thus again reinforcing a sense of the preservation of authentic (generational) attributions uncorrupted by later pseudo-epigraphic processes.<sup>25</sup>

The remaining articles in this section all reflect either on the nature of ties between the Judaeen center and diaspora communities, or the divergences between the various communities possibly resulting from disparate local norms. Two of these papers (Nos. XVIII and XIX) attest to links between the rabbinic center and the western diaspora, taking up the evidence of ‘apostles’ dispatched by the Palestinian Patriarch to those territories, and the role these messengers may have played in the communal life of Jews. What I attempted to question here was the degree to which the Jewish communities in the West were indeed “Split Diasporas” as some recent studies have contended, and conversely how familiar were Jews in the Babylonian East with the lifestyles and mores of their brethren in Palestine. I concluded that section with one of the many examples of disparate lifestyles and beliefs that distinguished the sages of Sasanian Babylonia from their colleagues in the West, namely different attitudes toward marriage (No. XX).<sup>26</sup> It should be apparent from a major portion of the articles in this volume, as well as from the monographs mentioned above, that I consider the fact that we have two corpuses of rabbinic literature, rooted in two very different social, religious and political environments, to be one of the great advantages for historians of Jews and Judaism in late Antiquity, particularly as they relate to the rabbinic community.

The final part of this volume sets out to reconsider modern perceptions of late antique Judaism, especially the rabbinic component of that community. What I tried to show in at least two of these studies is that beginning with the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and up to contemporary times, historians have played fast and loose with the evidence. The affinity of certain nineteenth-century maskilim for the Palestinian Talmud had little to do with the nature of that body of literature, and far more to do with the casting of aspersions on the Bavli, perceived (correctly) as being the underpinning of Jewish orthodoxy. Proceeding from the nineteenth into the twentieth century, the rabbinic model would be constantly repackaged to coincide with the celebrated ideologies of the day, moving from enlightenment to social and economic sensitivity to political activism and so on. Just as we encounter a rabbinization of the past in rabbinic literature, historians of the modern era

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<sup>25</sup> For an argument that questions how pervasive the practice of bringing corpses from abroad for burial in the Land really was, thus qualifying my conclusions to a degree, see: Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 479–499.

<sup>26</sup> My conclusion here was embraced by Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1993), p. 140 and n. 11.

constantly refashioned their own image of rabbinic society. Needless to say, these revisions were also the result of new discoveries as well as research tools provided to scholars in the field, as I noted in the survey article on “A Generation of Scholarship” (No. XXIV), which already requires an update for the early twenty-first century. As for myself, I am thoroughly aware of the changes in my own reading of the sources over the years, and my review of Jeffrey Rubenstein’s works (“Rethinking Talmudic History”, No. XXII) is no less a critique of some of my own conclusions in the past. As I concluded in one of the articles in that section, the only thing beyond the realm of the deity is the power to change history; only historians can do that.

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Thanks are due to a number of people who contributed to this publication. I should begin by thanking Prof. Peter Schäfer, one of the editors of Mohr Siebeck’s series, “Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism”, for recommending that I publish such a collection, and Dr. Henning Ziebritzki who accepted the publication on behalf of Mohr Siebeck. Both were extremely patient during the prolonged preparation of the manuscript, for which I am extremely grateful. At various stages of translation and editing, I received excellent assistance, at first from Hani Davis who contributed significantly to the early stages of the project, followed by Ruth Clemens, Dr. Shai Secunda and Hanan Mozes. I wish to thank in particular Dr. Claus-Jürgen Thornton, whose work on all aspects of the copyediting and preparation of this manuscript, including the indexes, was outstanding. The advantage of having a copyeditor who is also a scholar in his own right is priceless, and I cannot thank him enough for his sage advice throughout our work together.

I began teaching at the Hebrew University during the academic year 1967–1968. That same year I met and married my wife Naomi. I cannot imagine producing these studies without her constant support and encouragement, and so I consider this volume a mutual fiftieth anniversary present. My name may appear on the title page, but her love and devotion permeate every page within.

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