Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism by Sarit Kattan-Gribetz (review)

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abusing it. Laudably, Papaconstantinou, for one, investigates the facts of how debt functioned in practice at ground level as recorded in the dense papyrological record that enables such an inquiry. She finds that at almost every point of strategic significance the facts contradict the grand theory. This said, however, we might usefully turn to the other aim of this collection. Beyond the documenting of contrarian facts, the individual studies are valuable historical analyses of debt both as an economic fact, as an instrument of social coercion, and as a moral category of thought (as well as related matters). The prospective reader is encouraged to consult them for their insights on these problems. They achieve this praiseworthy goal, however, in the face of their quixotic devotion to a "big idea" which, beyond its most simplistic levels, ought by now to be seen as thoroughly discredited and fundamentally at odds with the record of the past.

Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism

Sarit Kattan-Gribetz
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Upon sitting with Sarit Kattan Gribetz's *Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism*, the reader journeys through the multifaceted temporal worlds that the rabbis' imagination fashioned in Late Antiquity, from Roman Palestine to the Sasanian Empire, from Second Temple times to the Talmud. To reveal how these universes of time in turn intersect with the creation of forms of difference within and beyond the rabbinic community—such is the promise of the book. It does so with exquisite erudition and delightful readability, while distilling the conceptualization of "rabbinic timescapes" (1, 5, and 22)—as the author put it, "the many dimensions of time that operate within any given society—similar to the use of 'landscape' to describe the variety of natural and human dimensions of space in any given location" (258 n. 16). The approach taken does not merely spatialize time. It actualizes and classifies its multiplicity as contained in rabbinic texts: time reveals itself as at once mythic and quotidian, historical and lived, ritual and biological. The book aims at demonstrating how these dimensions of time function as vectors of cohesion and separation.

The Introduction sets the scene upon the remains of a lost epoch: the disappearance of the temple leaving behind it a "temporal trauma" (9). Henceforth a "conceptual temple" commands the rabbinic effort to re-imagine and negotiate the shifting boundaries of timekeeping and community. The following chapters associate a particular configuration of time—from the units of the year and the week to that of the day and the hour—to the formation of a series of respective dualities: between rabbis and Romans, Jews and Christians, men and women, human and divine. Each chapter's textual analyses embody the playfulness of rabbinic engagement with time, their refusal to dwell in the past or linger in an uncatchable future. They would rather drink the promise of the present. Emulating this promise, the book offers itself as much as the linear unfolding of temporal scales as the sketching of a mosaic of identities generated by quotidian rhythms. In other words, imagine a rabbinic replay of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* or Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

Time has captivated countless studies. In the context of the most recent

tide of this fascination (which Gribetz has elsewhere labelled as "the temporal turn"), the book bears affinities with investigations in ancient Judaism and beyond uncovering rabbinic calendars, time-markers, chronologies, ideas of history and memory—from Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor* to Eve-Marie Becker's *The Birth of Christian History* and Lynn Kaye's *Negating Time*. The book favors a sociological approach (in the footsteps of Eviatar Zerubavel) focusing on discourses and practices. Yet its intellectual lineage reaches wider and deeper. Drawing from anthropology and phenomenology to neuroscience, from historical studies to the technicities of timekeeping in the ancient world, the investigation invokes as its theoretical foundation a mesmerizing array of interdisciplinary analyses of time. It stands out by the conviction and exactitude with which it navigates between "the conceptual and the practical, the symbolic and the quotidian, weaving together the history of daily life, social history, cultural studies, religious studies, and rabbinics" (4). As a result, a series of close readings unfold the "constellation of times and differences" (230) that the rabbis' literary mastery, legal virtuosities, and ritual innovations designed.

Chapter 1 gives a captivating glimpse into the cultivation of a Roman-rabbinic identity through the differentiation and synchronization of Roman and Jewish annual rhythms. The reader may delight in the minute weaving of material and textual sources. Numismatic depictions, frescoes, and floor mosaics give sharper relief to the "temporal modes of imperial resistance" (39) of the Midrashic project. Yet these "hidden transcripts" (57) are not without similarities to Livy or Ovid. The rabbis' practices of storytelling emulate Roman etiologies. The Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds project a "hybrid historical time onto the Roman calendar" (38), which points to the (paradoxical) Romanness both resisted by and inherent to the rabbinic sense of difference.

With the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the second chapter moves to a different (counter)-tempo: that of the "weekly Sabbath as a contested time between Jews and Christians" (94). The chapter succeeds in two delicate literary-critical and historical exercises. First, it traces the diverse geographical and cultural contexts of the composition of rabbinic texts against the "fundamental—and quite radical—shift in how [Roman law] legislated time" (103) with the emergence of Sunday in the post-Constantinian world. Second, the analysis reconstitutes the threads of the "multivocal dynamic conversation" (134) that tie rabbinic discourses about the Sabbath's meaning and observance with their Roman, pagan, and Christian rivals. The polyphony of history (once dear to Henri-Irénée Marrou) comes to the fore. Over the disputed realms of rest and holiness, the Midrashic project reveals an increasing need to make the Sabbath rest attractive to Jews, especially in fourth- and fifth-century rabbinic strategies to accentuate the inherent sacredness of the Sabbath day.

The third chapter inaugurates a shift turning to the creation of intracommunal subjectivities in the realms of bodies and rituals. In relation to the recitation of the Shema and menstrual purity laws, the ritual times inhabited by men and women result in the "development of a gendered temporality" (135)—an "intriguing case of the mapping of social and cultural structures of time onto biological rhythms" (138). Weaving intertextual and conceptual links between rabbinic

sources (Mishnah's Berakhot and tractate Niddah), the study demonstrates how the Babylonian Talmud's ritual innovations construct men and women's liturgical bodies, bestowing upon the first external cosmological time-markers to recite the Shema and internal bodily ones upon the latter to control their days of (im)purity. The relationship to the divine itself does not escape this gendering process.

However, seeming to transcend this temporal dichotomy and distinct from its previous counterparts, the last chapter astounds with its unveiling of the shared temporal sensibility between God and humans on an hourly rhythm. Though time persists as a criterion to distinguish between creatures and Creator (*à la* Philo of Alexandria or Augustine of Hippo), rabbinic texts stress the shared existence of humans and God in time. The chapter unearths the "underlying theological tension" (190) of a God inhabiting the hours of each day, busying himself with matchmaking, playing with Leviathan, mourning the loss of the temple, or keeping the watches of the night. The chapter touches upon evidence as diverse as the preaching of sermons, the recitation of poetry, or the synagogal chanting of biblical texts, to which once again a compelling selection of visual materials respond. The story told is one of a God whose use of the hours serves as "inspiring models of how humans ought to spend their time meaningfully or as celebrating God's close bond with Israel" (248). By way of narrative choices made in light of their audiences, literary contexts, and performance settings, the rabbis turn their communities' time on God's clock.

The book draws its conceptual force from the triangulation of time-text-difference. The close readings' attention to literary contexts and devices, to narrative, and to audience attests to a text-centered methodology. For this reason, the (otherwise brilliant) textual analyses could have benefited from stating their literary and theoretical underpinnings with further clarity. True, Gribetz gives us a clue. "Just as we cannot experience the world outside of time, so too we cannot escape the limits of language" (3). Thus, if time is expressed in and embedded in language, it calls for what Robert Alter once described as "the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York, 1981, 13). The book offers not merely a history of time (2–3). What emerges is a poetics of time and difference.

Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism will stand out on the shelves of scholarly achievement for "grasp[ing] some of the tangible effects of the intangible quality of the human experience we call 'time'" (250). Intertwining types of temporalities may serve as conceptual tools to unearth the kaleidoscopic dimensions of self and identity in Late Antiquity. With delicate inventiveness and scholarly precision, the investigation bridges the gap between normative texts and social realities. It opens a way of reconciling the "extraordinary discrepancy" once noticed by Virginia Woolf "between time on the clock and time on the mind" (*Orlando: A Biography*, New York, 1928, 72). To echo Arnoldo Momigliano's "ordinary Greek man, for whom there was a time of day in which the agora was full," there was indeed a time of day which happened as an architect of identity and marker of distinction.