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INTRODUCTION

THE FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENT of rabbinic Judaism, the Mishnah, opens with a question about time: מֵאֵמָּה, “from what time?” A person must declare devotion to God each morning and evening; the question is: *when*? Rabbinic literature is replete with concerns about time and the triangular relationship between people, God, and the hour.

These concerns about time were timely in the early centuries CE, when rabbinic Judaism emerged and flourished. In a period of Jewish theological creativity and ritual innovation, in the context of the Roman Empire and its imperial calendar, and in competition with developing Christian times, how did the rabbis of late antiquity conceive of the temporal rhythms of Jewish life? This book examines how, in this complex cultural context, rabbinic texts from the first six centuries CE constructed imperial, communal, individual, and divine rhythms of time through the practices that they mandated and the stories that they told.

Though time may appear to be natural and universal, based on elements such as the rising sun, the phases of the moon, or the seasons, time is, in fact, culturally constructed and communally specific. Temporal institutions can cultivate shared notions of time along with shared communal identities, but they can also differentiate those who mark their time in certain ways from those who mark their time differently. Time—as it is constructed, interpreted, and enacted—thus creates both shared worlds and different worlds, and through measurements and manners of conceptualizing and organizing time, different groups intertwine with each other in multiple ways. Mapping rabbinic timescapes, as this book does, demonstrates the central role that time played in how rabbis attempted to construct Jewish identity, subjectivity, and theology—indeed, how they constructed their worlds—during this formative period in the history of Judaism.

The overarching argument of this book is that the rabbis used time-keeping and discourses about time to construct crucial social, political, and theological difference. The book demonstrates, through close analysis of rabbinic texts, that as the rabbis fashioned Jewish life and theology in the Roman and Sasanian worlds, they articulated conceptions and structures of time that promoted and reinforced new configurations of difference in multiple realms. It explores four such realms: imperial, communal, gender, and theological cosmology.

Rabbinic texts constructed imperial difference by distinguishing rabbinic time from Roman time; communal difference by separating Jewish time from Christian time; gendered difference by dividing men's time from women's time; and theological difference by contrasting the time of those who dwelled on earth from the time of those in the heavenly sphere, including God and the angels. The four chapters that constitute this book analyze rabbinic texts that employ time to negotiate difference in each of these realms.

The book further contends that the processes through which various forms of difference are constructed in rabbinic sources, be they, for example, differences between men and women or between Jews and Christians, cannot fully be understood without also considering the constructions, discourses, and practices of time that undergird them. That is because time—its conception and its organization—serves as a powerful mechanism through which to enact difference and forge identity. Uncovering the specific ways in which conceptions of time and practices of time-keeping were used practically and discursively by rabbinic authorities actively to forge multiple types of inter- and intracommunal difference reveals the central role that constructions of time play in processes of differentiation within rabbinic texts. The book's primary intervention in the fields of rabbinics, ancient Judaism, and the study of religion in late antiquity is to identify the temporal dimensions that facilitated the construction of difference in the rabbinic corpus. The history of difference and the processes through which difference is forged, in rabbinic sources as in other corpora and cultures, are more fully comprehended when the role of time is both acknowledged and investigated. That conceptions of time and practices of time-keeping are often assumed to be natural or self-evident (or indeed to be objective) because they so frequently rely on natural or bodily phenomena (whether the rotation of the sun or the aging of a body) masks the fact that conceptions of time and practices of time-keeping are just as constructed as difference itself. It is the task of this book to investigate how time was used in rabbinic sources to construct the differences—between rabbis and Romans, Jews and Christians, men and women, humans and the divine—that the texts, and often their readers, take for granted.

This introductory chapter is structured in three parts. Part I introduces the underlying theoretical framework of the book by reflecting upon the categories of "time" and "difference" and the interrelationship between the two. Both time and difference are examined conceptually, informed by previous scholarship as well as the peculiarities of rabbinic sources, with an eye toward distilling what is particularly illuminating about probing the intersection of the two. Part II seeks to transport the reader back in time to the first and early second centuries CE, in order temporally to situate the rabbinic texts analyzed in the subsequent chapters. Three interrelated cultural and political dimensions of the rabbis' late antique world are discussed. Rather than set within a conventional historical contextualization, however, the story is told as a history of

time, highlighting specifically temporal aspects of the Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Christian contexts in which the rabbinic movement emerged and developed. Part III outlines the book's organizational structure, methodological orientation, and indebtedness to previous scholarship. The chapter concludes with a note about the terminology used in the book. Just as we cannot experience the world outside of time, so too we cannot escape the limits of language—leaving us to seek words that make adequate sense of the world and of time.

Part I: Time and Difference

WHAT IS TIME?

The question “What is time?” has preoccupied history's most sophisticated minds. More than two millennia of effort, however, has failed to yield a clear answer to this seemingly simple problem. Consider Augustine's iconic puzzle—ment as he groped for the proper language to articulate ideas about time: “What, then, is time? There can be no quick and easy answer, for it is no simple matter even to understand what it is, let alone find words to explain it.”¹ Maimonides expressed similar exasperation about the notion of time, explaining that “the analysis of the concept of time has presented difficulties to most thinkers, so much so that they became bewildered as to whether it had any real existence or not.”² Virginia Woolf, too, thematized the mysteriousness of time when she wrote, in 1928, that “time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation.”³

Despite difficulties articulating notions of time, this vexing topic has endlessly fascinated scholars from antiquity to the present.⁴ Naturally, each scholar's approach is informed by her particular methodological and disciplinary angle of inquiry: physical, metaphysical, phenomenological, biological, sociological, historical, religious, narrative, psychoanalytic. Philosophers, theologians, and scientists have contemplated whether time actually *is* (is time real? is it an illusion?), *what* time is (is it a precondition of being? a part of experience? a sense?), and *how* time functions (does it flow? is it relative?).⁵ Such questions have generated an extensive debate the outcome of which remains (necessarily, perhaps) inconclusive.

Sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and scholars of religion have largely set aside questions about the absolute nature of time, instead choosing

to interrogate time as it is conceived and comprehended, and how it functions, within particular societies. Such scholars have sought to understand how cultures and religious traditions conceptualize time, how these conceptions manifest themselves in the ways communities structure and narrate their times (rhythms of daily life, calendars, the recording of history and chronology, and so on), and what they reveal about the values and views of these cultures.⁶ Precisely because assumptions about time seem so natural and intuitive, it is easy to forget that these, too, are cultural products that merit contextual and historical investigation. Asking fundamental questions about how people in periods and places far removed from ours made sense of time can lead to surprising insights about their lives.

This book follows the latter approach, aiming to understand how a particular group of people (the ancient rabbis), as their ideas were preserved in a particular set of texts (rabbinic literature), conceptualized time and coped with the need to organize and signify it, and how their structuring of time constructed new identities, subjectivities, and forms of difference. Rabbinic sources devote much interpretive energy to outlining the precise timing of daily, weekly, and annual practices; many rabbinic texts can be regarded as elaborate deliberations about how a member of the rabbinic community might best organize and use their time in accordance with rabbinic values. Speculation about cosmic origins, memories of mythical pasts, constructions of chronologies and histories, and anticipation of a redemptive future also feature on the rabbis' agenda, alongside the nitty-gritty details of determining hours and setting calendars.⁷ Such concerns animated the rabbis and provide a broader temporal and historical context for understanding rabbinic attitudes to daily time. The study that follows therefore 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.⁸

Not long ago, some scholars of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel held that the limited temporal range of biblical Hebrew grammar and its tenses and the absence, in biblical texts, of philosophical discourses on the nature of time similar to those found in Greek and Roman philosophy signal that biblical sources—and thus ancient Israelites and later Jews—lacked chronological and temporal sophistication.⁹ In response to this claim, the historian Arnaldo Momigliano passionately insisted on the opposite: ancient Jewish texts indicate that ancient Jews conceived of time and temporality in ways no less complex and compelling than their Greek counterparts.¹⁰ Biblical sources, he acknowledged, are often more concerned with structuring quotidian time than in philosophizing about time in the abstract. “Biblical writers speak about time in the concrete way which would have been understandable to the ordinary Greek man, for whom there was a time of day in which the agora was full,” he quipped.¹¹ Meditations about the abstract category of time might not have

been central features of rabbinic texts either, but their absence does not mean that rabbis did not hold sophisticated opinions about time.¹² Indeed, they did.

This book is most interested precisely in the fashioning and conceptualization of time for Momigliano's "ordinary Greek man" on his way to the agora as well as the Roman woman going to the forum or the nearby church, her Jewish neighbor making his way to synagogue for evening prayers before the time for the recitation of the Shema has passed, and this neighbor's wife who, at the same time, walks in a similar direction to immerse herself in the ritual bath.¹³ How did their conceptions and experiences of time shape their respective identities and senses of self? When did the temporal rhythms of the daily lives of Jews and non-Jews and of men and women overlap? When did they diverge? And how did time play a role in the differentiation and synchronization of these people and their communities?

Rabbinic sources, written by a limited number of elite men in intellectual and scholastic contexts, do not provide decisive answers to these questions. Scholarship has emphasized just how little is known about how authoritative the rabbis were in the early centuries of the Common Era, how many Jews actually followed rabbinic laws, and how closely those who did complied with the many details outlined in rabbinic sources.¹⁴ The rabbinic corpus, however, does constitute a fascinating set of texts—an elaborate discourse—that reveals how these rabbis imagined, and hoped to shape, the times and identities of these subjects in relation to one another.¹⁵ This book, therefore, examines how the late antique rabbis whose ideas were preserved within the rabbinic corpus conceived of and constructed the rhythms of daily time, irrespective of whether their compositions describe a social "reality." The book focuses on the time-scapes that emerge in rabbinic texts and the possible social effects that this rabbinic system might have had on those who read their texts, heard their sermons, or abided by their prescriptions, either in late antiquity or in subsequent periods, when rabbinic tradition proved more authoritative and more widely studied, scrutinized, and observed.¹⁶

DEFINING DIFFERENCE

Difference, as a concept, operates on multiple levels in this study. *Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism* argues that the conceptualization and organization of time were mechanisms the late antique rabbis employed to construct various forms of difference and, occasionally, the mechanism through which they also unsettled such difference. Moreover, new conceptions and structures of time articulated in rabbinic texts promoted new configurations of difference. As with "time," the concept of "difference," too, has a long history in linguistics, philosophy, and critical theory (Derrida's *différance* captures the temporality of difference itself: always simultaneously distinct and deferred).¹⁷ As Jonathan Z. Smith has written: "Difference is rarely something simply to be

noted; it is, most often, something in which one has a stake. Above all, it is a political matter.”¹⁸ Along these lines, difference throughout this study is construed not as simple fact but as continually constructed through oral and written discourses and the circumstances that condition such discourses.¹⁹

Of particular interest are rabbinic texts that concern competing time frames and how these time frames constructed and reinforced multiple dimensions of difference—imperial, communal, gendered, and theological. That is, when sources insist that rabbis and Romans, Jews and Christians, men and women, humans and God, function within different time frames, how do rabbinic sources reify these very dimensions of difference? For example, how do they construct gendered difference through maintaining that men and women operate in differing timescapes? In part, rabbinic texts cultivated gendered difference by differentiating men’s and women’s times; similarly, these texts shaped rabbinic-Roman difference by distinguishing between rabbinic and Roman time. Excluding women from men’s time or banning rabbinic participation in Roman time, in turn, contributed to the construction of the difference that is assumed in these very distinctions. Additionally, various dimensions of difference also intersect, such that, for example, women’s and men’s times not only create gendered difference but can simultaneously reinforce ethnic, class, status, and other differences as well.

Time, so fundamental to human experience, plays a unique, if underappreciated, role in processes of differentiation. Émile Durkheim noted that “we can conceive of time only by differentiating between discrete moments.”²⁰ Natural phenomena such as the movement of the heavenly bodies, the tides, animal migrations, and plant cycles serve as points of reference for marking distinctions in time. Institutions as mundane as annual calendars, the unit of the week, rituals that mark the start and end of each day, and the portioning out of hours divide time and differentiate between years, months, weeks, days, and hours. On the one hand, then, communities cultivate the category of time through the differentiation of time into identifiable units. On the other hand, while calendars and schedules differentiate between moments of time, they are also mechanisms through which communities synchronize multiple types of time onto a single grid. Paul Ricœur, Jack Halberstam, and Carolyn Dinshaw, among others, remind us of the existence of many different dimensions of time: cosmic time, mythic time, historical time, lived time, narrative time, queer time.²¹ Calendars, for example, not only *differentiate* between days and months; they also *merge* the imagined universal “cosmic” time of the world and the “historical” time cultivated by a community with the personal “lived” time of the individual.²² The very same calendars, schedules, and rituals that distinguish between different units of time thus synchronize various dimensions of time into a unified system.

Additionally, temporal institutions such as annual calendars, weekly schedules, and daily rituals at once create commonality between people and differentiate those people from others. Shared time frames have long been recog-

nized as mechanisms that foster group cohesion and community.²³ But when calendars apply to particular people and not to others, when certain rituals are mandated for some but not all members of a community, or when narratives are told from one perspective rather than another, they also cultivate different conceptions of time and temporality that, in turn, construct communal difference.²⁴ Distinct communities can maintain competing calendars and festivals, and groups and individuals within a single community can interact with time in different ways, even when they look to the same temporal markers or use similar technologies of time-keeping to anchor their days, nights, weeks, months, and years.²⁵ Eviatar Zerubavel writes: “One of the most effective ways to accentuate social contrasts is to establish a calendrical contrast. Schedules and calendars are intimately linked to group formation, and a temporal pattern that is unique to a group often contributes to the establishment of social boundaries that distinguish as well as actually separate group members from ‘outsiders.’”²⁶ These different temporal rhythms and conceptions in turn reinforce other dimensions of difference. Marking time is thus itself a practice of synchronization and differentiation—both between moments and between subjects and communities. Instances of temporal transgression, when they occur, simultaneously accentuate and upset those differences.

Rabbinic sources affirm the multiplicity of time. Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*, devoted to the New Year and the rabbinic calendar, begins with an explanation not of a single moment in time but of four: “There are four New Years: on the first of Nissan is the New Year for Kings and Festivals; on the first of Elul is the New Year for the Tithe of Cattle . . . ; on the first of Tishre is the New Year for Years, Sabbaticals, Jubilees, and planting vegetables; and the first of Shevat is the New Year for Trees.”²⁷ The Mishnah introduces its section on the rabbinic calendar with an acknowledgment that annual time does not have one absolute beginning on a single date on the calendar. Rather, various months each mark new temporal beginnings of different sorts.²⁸

Other rabbinic sources recognize that distinctions in time-reckoning differentiate Jews from others. The Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael states that a solar eclipse is a bad omen for gentiles and a lunar eclipse is a bad omen for Israel because gentiles reckon time by the sun and Israel reckons time by the moon.²⁹ Genesis Rabbah further identifies the lunar calendar with the descendants of Jacob and the solar calendar with the descendants of Esau.³⁰ A theological dimension is added to the Mekhilta’s description of Israel’s calendrical system. By observing the moon every month, the Israelites regularly “lift up their eyes to their father in heaven.”³¹ The lunar calendar is thus presented as a mechanism for differentiation not only because it is distinct from the solar calendar but also because its rituals connect Israel more directly to its God. Moreover, the Mekhilta distinguishes between competing chronological systems. The midrash notes that biblical sources usually “count according to their own era” when they date events in reference to the Exodus or the temple’s construction or destruction (as they do in Numbers 1:1, 22:28; 1 Kings 6:1, 9:10; Ezekiel

40:1) but that they also occasionally “count according to the era of others” when they date events relative to the start of foreign rulers (as they do in Hagai 1:15).³² The midrash dramatically argues that relying on the times and histories of others rather than on “their own era” diverts Israel’s devotion away from God and eventually leads them to subjugation and oppression under the very authorities upon whose times they rely.³³

These rabbinic passages, as well as others across the rabbinic corpus, depict the coexistence and tension of multiple times and time frames. They even explicitly acknowledge that different groups of people divide time differently and that doing so differentiates them one from the other. Regarding the organization of time as a mechanism for the construction of identity, subjectivity, and difference suggests that time, in these rabbinic texts, was not only (or necessarily) a dimension through which individuals and communities pass but also (or rather) a dynamic force—a powerful if intangible tool that was harnessed and even manipulated to effect certain results.³⁴

Part II: Contextualizing Rabbinic Times

The classical rabbinic era encompasses, roughly, the period between the formation of the earliest rabbinic source, the Mishnah, in the second and early third centuries CE, and the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, dated variably to the fifth or sixth century CE. Many additional rabbinic sources were composed throughout this period, as well as thereafter. There are a number of ways to contextualize these sources historically: with reference to previous and contemporaneous events; in light of internal developments in Israelite and Jewish history; in relation to the Roman and Sasanian empires in which the texts were composed; and in conjunction with other religious communities who lived alongside, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in tension with, rabbinic communities in those empires (these contexts, interrelated and mutually constitutive as they are, are themselves not easily distinguishable). Historical contextualization in these multiple realms informs the textual analyses throughout this book. The section that follows, in contrast, provides select glimpses into the temporal worlds of the first and second centuries in order to situate the emergence of rabbinic Judaism and rabbinic engagement with temporal phenomena within a context of shifting conceptions of time and practices of time-keeping. Rather than a comprehensive pre-history, it aims to set the scene.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AS A TEMPORAL TRAUMA

The second Jewish temple stood in Jerusalem from 515 BCE, when the region was controlled by the Persian Empire, until 70 CE, when it was destroyed by

Roman forces. Sources from this period as well as modern scholarship about it often conceive of the temple as a center of gravity, anchoring Jewish cultic and intellectual life. The temple is portrayed, in such contexts, as a *spatial* center—a monumental building, a place of cultic worship, a site of pilgrimage—whose destruction left a spatial void as the war dispersed and fragmented the Jewish community in Jerusalem to other regions of Palestine, to Rome, and beyond.³⁵ But the temple can also be conceived as a *temporal* center and its destruction as a temporal trauma. After all, the temple's destruction and the broader political and theological shifts of the late first and early second centuries CE disrupted the way in which time was conceived, anticipated, and experienced. This is one of several contexts in which rabbinic conceptualizations and organizations of time can fruitfully be placed.

For the several hundred years when the temple operated, its daily sacrifices and associated cultic practices, along with priestly night watches, marked and divided day and nighttime hours. Weekly or biweekly schedules of priestly tasks enforced somewhat longer cycles of liturgical time, and annually recurring festivals punctuated the year with agricultural, biblical, and historical celebrations and an influx of worshippers to Jerusalem.³⁶ All of these rhythms variably shaped time for the priests who worked within the temple, their families who ate from their sacrifices and offerings, and the residents of the city, whose lives were necessarily affected by its scents, its sounds, and the congestion that it caused at certain times of the day, month, and year, even as these times affected distinct populations differently.

The temple's rhythms—real and imagined—also informed time for those unable to smell the smoke of its sacrificed animals, hear its trumpet's pre-Sabbath call, and witness the entourage of palm and myrtle on the festival of Sukkot. Biblical texts such as the book of Ezekiel and the Priestly and Holiness Codes constructed a world that anchored itself according to tabernacle/temple times even in the absence of a physical temple.³⁷ Many in the diaspora sent annual monetary contributions to help sustain the temple, and they were invested in the idea and practice of pilgrimage at particular times of year.³⁸ To cite another example, from the Second Temple period: one of the central ways through which those who lived about thirty kilometers east, in the Judean desert commune at Qumran, differentiated themselves from those who remained in Jerusalem was through their solar calendar, which conflicted with the temple's lunisolar calendar.³⁹ In their view, the solar calendar was the correct one, and they thought that it ought to be used in the temple. Thus, the members of this community consciously aligned their temporal daily and weekly schedules to this ideal temple calendar, even as they deliberately replaced sacrifices with prayers and developed new liturgical practices to punctuate those times.⁴⁰ The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice marked Sabbath times, for instance, through liturgical song instead of animal sacrifices.⁴¹ The book of Jubilees, over two dozen manuscripts of which were found buried in the

caves adjacent to Qumran, extolls the virtues of the sun for its calendrical and chronological time-keeping abilities, drawing a sharp contrast to texts such as Ben Sira, which emphasizes the moon's function as a temporal marker.⁴² This conflict of times most dramatically appears in Peshar Habakkuk, in which the temple's high priest, identified as the Wicked Priest, is described as visiting the community's Teacher of Righteousness when he was celebrating the Day of Atonement, specifically to disrupt his worship because, according to the Jerusalem temple's calendar, the festival was set for a different day.⁴³ Even while at odds with the calendar of the Jerusalem temple, those in the Qumran community imagined themselves to be maintaining the temple's accurate times (which, they argued, the corrupt authorities in Jerusalem had gotten wrong), to remain in sync with the times of the heavenly temple and its ministering angels, and to capture eternity through their daily practices.⁴⁴ The Psalms Scroll, for example, claims that David composed 364 songs, one for each day of the year, corresponding to the daily temple offerings; 52 songs for the weekly Sabbath offerings; and 30 songs mirroring the temple's new moon and festival offerings, linking the community's solar calendar with the temple's sacrificial schedule.⁴⁵ The sect also maintained a schedule of 24 priestly courses that James VanderKam writes "raises intriguing questions about why a group that was physically and ideologically separated from the current temple cult took the trouble to align the periods when the priestly courses would be on duty with other entities in their calendars . . . the act of coordinating the periods of service for the priestly divisions with the movements of the heavenly luminaries has a deep theological meaning."⁴⁶ Steven Fraade adds that such calendrical and liturgical texts from Qumran "convey[ed] the idea that the life of the community *as a whole* was in rhythmic concordance not only with the divinely created and serving celestial rotations, dominated by the sun, but also the cultic cycle of priestly service, which could be understood to function both humanly and angelically in the absence of a legitimate physical temple."⁴⁷ For those at Qumran who did not have a physical temple, as presumably also for others in the broader region, the temple's temporal rhythms of sacrifice and festivals nonetheless served as a powerful conceptual template for their own times of prayer and purity.

Even farther from Jerusalem, in communities that did not develop in opposition to the temple priesthood but that were at a significant geographical remove from it, the temple's times nonetheless anchored some of their own conceptions of time. The first-century philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who only visited Jerusalem in middle age, aligned the temple and its times with other biblical and non-biblical temporal rhythms in his meditation about daily, weekly, seasonal, and annual time. In *The Special Laws*, Philo presents a "festival manual" that lists ten festivals, their origins, and the practices associated with each one.⁴⁸ The list begins with a festival that Philo calls "every day" and then proceeds to discuss the Sabbath, the day of the new moon, three festivals

related to Passover, Pentecost, the Trumpet Feast, the Fast, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Philo's description of the festivals universalizes their meaning; he incorporates agricultural and historical dimensions of the festivals with Stoic and Platonic philosophical ideas.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Philo refers to a biblical list of sacrifices from Numbers 28–29 as the grounding source for his explanation of these Jewish festivals.⁵⁰ The most surprising festival on Philo's list is the first, which he titles “every day [ἡμέρα πᾶσα].” Though there is no such festival mentioned in the biblical book of Numbers or elsewhere in ancient Jewish sources, Philo interpreted the description of the morning and evening *tamid* offerings and the *minha* offerings brought each day in the tabernacle (and later in the temple), mentioned in Numbers 28:1–8, as one reason for treating each day as a festival. Though Philo's reliance on the Septuagint's Greek caused him to misunderstand the biblical text, he creatively structured his philosophy of daily time in part around the assumed regularity of the sacrificial rituals of the temple.⁵¹ The imagined rhythms of daily sacrifices became a scriptural hook on which to hang his call to dedicate each day to meaningful philosophical contemplation.

Even though there were multiple rhythms of time throughout the Second Temple period, many of which were not connected to the temple, temporal ties to the cultic center ran deep and wide. Thus, the temple's destruction—and the war that led to its destruction and to tremendous loss of life, property, and hope in and beyond Jerusalem—caused temporal crises on a number of levels. While, as Mira Balberg argues, for many Jews the temple, even as it still stood, had already functioned as a concept rather than a physical place of worship (and they thus could continue to relate to such a temple regardless of whether it still stood), the physical temple's destruction demanded contemplation about the role of the temple in contemporary life and the theological significance of its destruction, even for those far away. For example, the apocalyptic text 4 Ezra, written in the 80s or 90s CE, presents an urgent theological reflection about temporal uncertainty. Ezra, the text's protagonist, suffers from insomnia as he mourns the loss of the temple and contemplates unanswerable questions about the nature of the universe and his fate in the approaching future.⁵² According to Hindy Najman, 4 Ezra was written at a moment in which time seemed to stand still for its author, and the narrative attempts, through reimagining the past, to “unfreeze the present and recover the future.”⁵³ One of the recurring themes of the narrative is Ezra's desire to know precisely when redemption will transpire and how soon the “end of time” will arrive.⁵⁴ An angel explains to Ezra, however, that, just as a pregnant woman cannot predict with certainty the day and hour of the onset of labor and birth, he cannot know in advance the timing of redemption.⁵⁵ While Ezra's main concern is the eschaton, he anticipates the end so desperately in part because his present time—the daily markings of time associated with the temple and his lost city and with regular life as he used to live it—has been upended. Ezra

thus becomes a protagonist suspended in time (both quotidian and existential), grasping for signs and markers that might anchor his sense of timelessness. Because he no longer has them, he, too, finds himself in a temporal void—in a liminal time(lessness), a “time of *zwischen*” similar to the days before the onset of a woman’s labor.⁵⁶ The text begins with Ezra struggling to fall asleep in the wake of the temple’s destruction—his schedule, as his era, is no longer ordered.

The first-century historian Josephus’s *Jewish Wars* and *Antiquities of the Jews* represent examples of post-destruction works in a historiographical vein. The first provides a detailed chronological account of the revolt against Rome and the city’s destruction, and the second contextualizes the revolt and destruction in a longer account of Jewish history, starting at the beginning of time. Notably, Josephus not only vividly recounts the contours of the temple and the war; he also records the precise times—including the hours—when temple rituals were performed and when key battles transpired, preserving these important times in detail in his writings.⁵⁷ Both works seek to document and come to terms not only with the political and theological consequences of the temple’s destruction and the war that caused it but also with the temporal and historical uncertainties that the post-destruction era presented, in light of the recent past.

The phenomenon of temporal reordering after the destruction of Jerusalem can be comparatively contextualized among other periods of historical disruption that precipitated new configurations and conceptions of time. One of the longest-lasting innovations of the Seleucid Empire was its invention of an abstract, continual, linear dating system (the idea of which is still used today), conceived precisely at a moment of dramatic territorial and imperial reconfigurations and projected back by its innovators to the empire’s founding.⁵⁸ In the years following the French Revolution, the National Convention introduced a new calendar to replace the Gregorian calendar. New names were given for the new months; a decimal clock divided French days into ten hours of 100 minutes each; and the calculation of years began on the day when the Republic had been declared, thereby establishing a new chronological system.⁵⁹ The revolution signaled a new era, and part of the process of differentiating this period from what preceded it was the imposition of new conceptions of calendars, clocks, and chronologies (though they did not last long, in this case). In the midst of World War II, Emperor Hirohito decided to host massive celebrations commemorating the twenty-sixth centennial of the founding of the Empire of Japan.⁶⁰ Rather than inventing a new chronological system, as the Seleucids and the French had done, Emperor Hirohito revived an ancient—and mythological—chronological system in order to reshape Japanese national identity at a period of war. Again, a departure in time-keeping during a moment of crisis was used to signal and shape the uniqueness of the moment. Industrialization, capitalism, globalization, and technological and scientific innovations

such as the railway, telegram, and telephone in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also marred the fabric of social and economic life in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and beyond. In these periods, too, fierce debates accompanied the adoption of mechanical clocks, standardized clock time, and national mean times, again promoted as attempts to align the time with the times, even as “countertempos” developed in response and resistance.⁶¹ In the Roman context, to which this introduction will return, reforms to the Roman calendar—including standardizing intercalary days, renaming months, and adding festivals—followed the military and political turmoil of Julius Caesar’s wars. Fittingly, the year preceding these reforms was referred to as *ultimus annus confusionis*, the final year of confusion; though this phrase technically refers to the confusion of an unpredictable calendar, it might as well also have applied to the broader disorientation that Caesar’s brash decisions had caused for Rome in the years preceding his calendrical reforms. Caesar’s standardization of the calendar and the resulting predictability of time were attempts, in part, both to signal a new era and to impose temporal stability at an unstable time of transition.

The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the broader historical context in which that destruction transpired might be considered another such moment—a crisis of time following political and theological upheaval—for ancient Jewish communities.⁶² For if the temple was a temporal center, whether in a literal or a conceptual sense or both, then the temple’s physical destruction left a practical and philosophical temporal void. In the absence of sacrificial and cultic practices, how should Jews structure daily and annual time? Which temple-oriented time-markers and timely rituals could or should be maintained, and which ones needed to be reconceived? How ought Jews relate to the competing calendars and schedules of those who had destroyed their temple as well as to the organizations of time of the various other communities among whom they lived? What might God be doing with so much free time now that temple worship no longer punctuated the divine schedule? Those who regarded the temple’s destruction as a catastrophe needed (among many other things) to reimagine how time was demarcated and deployed on a daily basis and to give new meaning to their hours, days, weeks, and years—as well as to the times in which they lived.⁶³

RECONCEIVING TIME IN THE RABBINIC ERA

Despite the temple’s physical destruction, it never disappeared from Jewish, and especially rabbinic, consciousness. Rabbinic sources, composed in the period following Jerusalem’s destruction and, moreover, after hope for the physical temple’s rebuilding and Jewish sovereignty in Palestine vanished in subsequent decades, engaged with the loss of the physical temple and its accompanying times. For the rabbis, though, the temple still existed on a

conceptual plain, even in the absence of a physical structure, and it continued to anchor time. Rabbinic texts thus provide a lens through which to understand how this group of thinkers wrestled with the confusion of living in a new era and how they configured their time in this complex context.

Rabbinic texts capture contrasting dimensions of the rupture as well as the continuity between the rabbis' times and those prior to theirs, and rabbinic sources, multivocal as they are, variably attempt both to bridge and to widen temporal gaps. Whether we understand the rabbinic movement as beginning in the late first century CE, the years following the Bar Kokhba revolt in the 130s, or closer to the redaction of the Mishnah in the early decades of the second century, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple tends to play a key role in the periodization of this history, both as rabbinic texts imagine the origin of the rabbinic movement and as modern critical scholars understand it. Mishnah *Rosh Hashanah*, for example, draws a distinction between the period when the temple stood and the era that followed it by using the phrase "since the destruction of the temple" to describe how rituals were observed when the temple still stood and to differentiate these practices from how they could later be practiced in the absence of a temple.⁶⁴ This deliberate periodization is part of the process of rabbinic self-fashioning, in which rabbinic ritual reforms projected rabbinic authority as a replacement of previous forms of communal power, while also paying homage to the temple and preserving its memory.⁶⁵ Mishnah *Hullin* 5:1 likewise mentions that a law applies both "when the Temple existed and when the Temple did not exist," emphasizing the role of the temple in constructing a temporal distinction between the periods of "then" (when the Temple stood) and "now" (when it no longer stands). Such passages within the earliest rabbinic composition suggest that there was life before and after the temple's destruction and that these early rabbis, whose laws and other exegetical and narrative compositions are preserved in the Mishnah, thought of themselves as living in a new era, distinct from the Second Temple period. In these new times, they articulated the need to rethink their practices.

Mishnah *Rosh Hashanah* stresses the urgency of spatial and temporal reconfigurations: "Originally [בראשונה], the palm frond was carried in the temple for seven [days], and in [the rest of] the land one day; since the destruction of the temple, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai ordained that the palm frond should be carried [in the land] seven [days], in memory of the temple."⁶⁶ Subsequent reforms are also introduced with the term "originally" (בראשונה) to refer to practices from the Second Temple period that were adapted after the temple's destruction.⁶⁷ This particular reform not only marks two distinct historical periods but also assumes that temporal distinctions between Jerusalem and the rest of the land collapse after the destruction. It explains that prior to the temple's destruction the palm frond was used on all seven days of the festival of Sukkot in Jerusalem but only on the first day outside of the city, while

after the temple's destruction, it is carried on all seven days of the festival, anywhere in the land. In this new era, space and time have shifted, and rabbinic rituals reflect such changes. Significantly, however, this rabbinic reform does not discard temple practices and times. Rather, the temple's rituals are expanded to new spaces and thus the temple's temporal rhythms continue to be observed far beyond Jerusalem. Even as the physical temple no longer stood, a conceptual temple still dictated time. We notice here negotiation between preserving earlier temporal rhythms from the temple period and changing them to suit contemporary times. These altered rhythms of time simultaneously evoked memories of the temple and temple time frames, through what Eve-Marie Becker terms "ritual memory," and emphasized temporal continuity, but they also showed the rabbinic era as distinct from that which preceded it by adapting the temple's ritual times to different geographical regions.⁶⁸ Such negotiation stimulates forms of ritual reinvention that themselves embody the temporal tension between past and present. These ongoing rituals also served to perpetuate the memory of the temple, and perhaps to keep it standing, conceptually if not physically. Moreover, we see that periodization itself was forged through new practices and conceptions of time.

In contrast to these temporal conceptions, other rabbinic passages make no distinction between the pre- and post-destruction eras and presume, instead, a seemingly unremarkable continuity through time, blurring the boundaries between past, present, and future.⁶⁹ Substantial parts of the Mishnah and other early rabbinic texts thus simultaneously imagine a world in which the temple has never been destroyed, and they elaborate upon and innovate forms of piety associated with the temple. For example, when rabbinic texts address the ritual and spatial details of the temple and its sacrifices, to which one of six mishnaic orders is dedicated, or purity practices, to which a second order is devoted, the discussions unfold as though the temple were still standing, in the present tense, fashioning these matters as ones of great contemporary concern, rather than simply of antiquarian or theoretical interest.⁷⁰ This phenomenon can be observed in the opening lines of the Mishnah, which proclaim that the evening Shema can be recited at the time "when the priests enter to eat their *terumah* offering."⁷¹ Here, the Mishnah uses a time-marker related to the now-destroyed temple to explain when a rabbinic practice—performed long after the temple's destruction—ought to be performed.⁷² In this text, it is as though the temple in Jerusalem still stands and dictates when people ought to begin reciting the Shema each evening.⁷³ Other tractates recount temple rituals as contemporary practices.⁷⁴

Yet other passages skip over the temple entirely or altogether ignore its significance, such as when Mishnah *Avot* details its chain of transmission, omitting any mention of priests and linking the periods of Moses, Joshua, and the elders with the early generations of rabbinic thinkers without a hint of worry about the temple—its presence or its absence—or its priestly leaders.⁷⁵

Early rabbinic sources also reconceive of present time somewhat differently from the way that many Jews in the period preceding them and contemporaneous with them did. The late Second Temple period as well as the decades following the temple's destruction were fraught with messianic anticipation, apocalyptic thinking, and eschatological expectations. Josephus reports that several figures presented themselves as ushering in a new era, and texts such as the War Scroll from Qumran simulated what an end-time battle might entail.⁷⁶ Those who followed Jesus likewise awaited the coming Kingdom of God. Paul proclaimed that "the appointed time has grown short [ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν]" and urged the Corinthians to live as though present circumstances were temporary, "for the form of this world is passing away [παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου]."⁷⁷ To the Thessalonians, worried that their temporal expectations for an imminent end were not being met, Paul encouraged: "Now concerning the times and the seasons . . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."⁷⁸ The Gospels, written later in the century, depict Jesus as the messiah who, in Lynne Bahr's words, "continually asserts that the hour is unknown."⁷⁹ The protagonist of 4 Ezra, too, waits in eager suspense for the eschaton, which he believes to be imminent, even—or especially—after Jerusalem has been defeated. Rabbinic sources depict (albeit negatively) some rabbinic figures, most notably Rabbi Akiva, as fervent supporters of Bar Kokhba, who sought not only to rebuild the temple but also to bring about the final redemption.⁸⁰

The earliest strata of rabbinic texts, in contrast, tend to shy away from such speculation of cosmological origins as well as of cataclysmic end times, proscribing study of "what is ahead and what is behind."⁸¹ After Bar Kokhba's failed messianic attempt, anticipating an imminent redemption was politically dangerous and theologically futile. Even though rabbinic sources do not altogether abandon hope for a final redemption, several rabbinic calculations of the end continually postpone redemption to later dates or indefinitely push redemption well off into the distant, virtually unimaginable future rather than expecting it at any moment.⁸² Some passages express skepticism about such redemptive times and defiantly insist instead on life in the enduring present: Avot de-Rabbi Natan instructs a person who hears that the messiah has come while he is planting a tree to "go and plant the sapling, and then go to greet the messiah."⁸³ This passage, as others in the rabbinic corpus, urges care for the next generation and the natural environment rather than relying on an imminent end of this world. Apocalyptic and cosmogonic themes receive sustained attention mainly in later rabbinic texts, most notably the Babylonian Talmud, post-classical midrashim such as Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, and in non-rabbinic compositions such as Sefer Zerubavel, expressing, often at times of renewed persecutions or large-scale geopolitical conflicts, "a sense of living in an epoch on the verge of the messianic era," in Rachel Adelman's words.⁸⁴

Rabbinic sources likewise reconceive of the historical past and do not produce historiographical writings with the same enthusiasm nor in the same generic forms that some earlier biblical and Second Temple sources did.⁸⁵ While the rabbis certainly had a historical sense of past time and robustly engage with the past, they often deliberately played with the temporality of history, creatively blurred past and future, and chose to put their legal and hermeneutic energies elsewhere.⁸⁶ Such rabbis thus avoided both dwelling on a past of painful memories and harping on an imagined redemptive future that they did not believe would imminently end time as they knew it. They concentrated their temporal energies, instead, on present time, which seemed to them would continue in its current state indefinitely. It made sense, in this context, to establish a calendrical system that was sustainable in the long term (at first an observed calendar, and eventually a fixed and calculated calendar), delineating the days and months ahead with regularity, uniformity, and predictability.⁸⁷

This is all to say that many, though certainly not all, discussions preserved in rabbinic sources direct their gaze toward present time—on daily life, its hourly schedules and its annual calendar, and the quotidian, if sacred, activities therein—rather than on the beginning or end of time, or on the historical past as such.⁸⁸ The rabbinic phrase “this time” (הַזֶּמֶן הַזֶּה), employed to refer to contemporary times, captures this temporal focus well.⁸⁹ Even discussions of temple rituals, sacrifices, and purity practices unfold in the present tense, as matters of daily concern. This temporal orientation can be understood, in part, in the context of the disintegration of the physical temple and its established times. Turning to present daily time had become a more urgent concern and perhaps also a more comforting task. It was certainly a practical necessity. Though rabbinic timescapes did not emerge suddenly as a result of destruction, the persistent absence of a physical temple and its accompanying times—and yet its prominent place in rabbinic memory of the templated past and of its continued conceptual presence in the present—played a role in the development of new conceptions of both daily and cosmic time within the rabbinic corpus that continued to change throughout the rabbinic period and that, in their crystallized forms, were applied by Jews to their lives in periods thereafter.

ROMAN TIME

The Jewish revolt and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem also exacerbated tensions and precipitated new relations with the Roman Empire. Seth Schwartz writes that “the failure of the Jewish revolt against Rome brought about a comprehensive transformation of life in Palestine: the old political system was replaced by direct Roman rule, the Roman army became a permanent presence, the size of the population and the ratio of Jews to pagans changed.”⁹⁰ After 70 CE, the Roman Empire annexed Palestine as an imperial

province, named it Provincia Judaea, and appointed a governor of ex-praetorian rank (and soon thereafter ex-consuls, who were direct imperial appointees). The Army's Tenth Legion *Frentesis* remained in Jerusalem after the revolt, a second legion was soon permanently encamped in the province as well, and detachments were situated elsewhere in the region.⁹¹ These troops posed problems for the local population, but they also spent their disposable income in nearby communities, built elaborate road systems, and settled in the region after discharge.⁹² Jews were forced to redirect their temple contributions to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and some voluntarily adopted Roman or provincial law for certain aspects of their lives.⁹³ Many Jews embraced these new forms of Roman political, economic, social, and cultural life, while others sought to distance themselves from them.⁹⁴ All Jews, though, needed to contend with changing notions of Romanness in this and subsequent centuries, even as Roman authorities continued to permit them, for the most part, to practice Judaism freely.⁹⁵

One of the ways in which such Romanness must have been regularly encountered, both before and after 70 CE, was through calendrical time. According to Denis Feeney, Rome was "a society that [was] deeply invested in the semiotics and regulation of time. . . . At any period of Roman history one enters, the organization of time will be found to be integral to the way the Romans presented to themselves their religion, their past, and their identity as a culture."⁹⁶ Indeed, Rome was obsessed with time: calendars, *paraegmata*, water clocks, *horologia*, sundials, and depictions of time all constituted a grand visual presence not only in public temples but also in private dining rooms and other domestic spaces and eventually in scrolls and codices owned by individuals, both in Rome and in the provinces.⁹⁷ James Ker has highlighted how the Roman nundinal cycle likewise articulated core Roman values through the empire's temporal rhythms, especially as the seven-day week gained traction in the region.⁹⁸ By the late fourth and fifth centuries, Jewish synagogues, along with Christian churches, throughout the Galilee and beyond featured elaborate zodiac mosaics that depicted the months and seasons with local Greco-Roman imagery.⁹⁹ The sun god *Sol Invictus*/*Helios* riding a chariot along with an image of the moon and stars usually sat at the center of these mosaic floors, drawing attention to solar and lunar astronomical and temporal rhythms. These synagogue mosaics often also placed the zodiac, including its pagan imagery, alongside illustrations of the temple and ritual objects related to daily sacrifices and annual festivals as well as images of the biblical past, such as the story of the binding of Isaac.¹⁰⁰ The combinations of these images—*Helios*, the zodiac signs and names, personified seasons, temple objects, and biblical narratives—depicted biblical and temple times in dialogue with Roman temporal rhythms.

In the preceding centuries, too, Roman time informed renewed rabbinic interest in notions of time. The first century was precisely the period of calen-

drical and temporal reform in Rome. In 46 BCE, Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar, and in 8 BCE Augustus corrected its intercalary system. In the Augustan age and the early imperial period, this revised Roman calendar made its way to the far reaches of the empire and its provinces.¹⁰¹ Feeney suggests that the calendar, especially after Caesar's reform, "progressively redefined the meaning of what living as a Roman now meant, capitalizing on the *fasti*'s age-old function as a vehicle for representing Roman ideology and identity."¹⁰² The Roman calendar "itself continued to be a distinctive marker of Romanness . . . a context for apprehending and exploring Roman identity."¹⁰³ Ovid's moving—as well as deeply ambivalent—*Fasti* of 8 CE contended with these reforms, which restructured Roman time, standardized the calendar, and imposed an imperial character on a much-revered republican institution. As Roman control and presence in the region of Palestine grew, both in the first century BCE and especially after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the following century, those in Palestine were increasingly affected by the new calendar and the consciousness of time that it evoked.¹⁰⁴ Emmanuel Friedheim has suggested that rabbis might first have encountered the Roman calendar and its festivals through the Roman legions whose daily lives were bound to its rhythms and rituals in the late first and second centuries CE.¹⁰⁵ Sacha Stern, for his part, has proposed that the rabbis' own calendrical reforms—their tendency toward standardizing and fixing the Jewish lunar-solar calendar—can be understood, at least in part, in relation to the Julian calendar's fixedness.¹⁰⁶ These rabbinic calendrical changes were initiated in the early centuries CE but continued into the fourth century and thereafter in broader Roman contexts of continued empire-wide calendrical shifts.

Other time-keeping practices became connected with imperial ideology and Romanness in this period as well. The twelve-hour division of the day did not originate in Rome:¹⁰⁷ it developed in Egypt over the course of the second millennium BCE, where it remained in continual use in the millennium thereafter.¹⁰⁸ This hourly scheme made its way to other parts of the Greek-speaking world in the late Classical, Hellenistic, and Ptolemaic periods.¹⁰⁹ The practice of dividing the day into twelve hours and the technology that allowed people to do so were slowly incorporated into limited Roman contexts during the third or second century BCE, probably through contact with Egypt and Greece.¹¹⁰ Pliny the Elder notes that the first public clock in Rome hailed from Catania in Sicily, where it was acquired during the First Punic War as booty; it was placed in the forum Romanum.¹¹¹ Julius Caesar and Cicero both mention hours in their writings.¹¹² Hours were wholeheartedly adopted and popularized by Augustus, who is said to have erected an *horarium*, an hourly clock, in the Campus Martius.¹¹³ Such an ostentatious display of hourly time signaled imperial power and was used, as well, by the Roman military.¹¹⁴ Suetonius highlights Augustus's punctuality by mentioning that the emperor recorded

the exact hour of day or night in each letter he sent.¹¹⁵ Pliny remarks that all nations agree in the use of hours even though the Romans were quite late in adopting them.¹¹⁶ By the end of the first century and through the second and third centuries, hours began to be used more widely throughout the Roman Empire, including in rabbinic sources, which are the earliest Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic sources to employ the term “hour” (שעה) to refer to the twelve units of time that make up a day or night.¹¹⁷ The appearance of hours in such rabbinic texts was neither inevitable nor obvious: this trend, too, demonstrates the impact that technologies of time-keeping within the Roman Empire (even those that did not originate in Rome) had on the temporal rhythms of the diverse populations that lived within the empire’s boundaries.

The Roman Empire’s larger preoccupation with time—manifested in its chronologies, calendars, and clocks—thus offers a critical context for the story of rabbinic conceptions of time in antiquity. Rabbinic reevaluations of their own time as well as their negotiation of the times of others, however, must also be understood as participating in these broader Roman imperial trends, into which the Jews of Palestine entered as their region became, itself, increasingly Roman following Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem. For them, setting the time was bound up with what it meant to be a rabbinic Jew living in a Roman empire.¹¹⁸

THE EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIAN TIMES

Rabbinic reconfigurations of time forced rabbis not only to reenvision Jewish ritual life without a temple and to negotiate their position as minorities within an empire that had destroyed that temple but also to forge their distinctiveness vis-à-vis competing minority communities. In the later first through third century CE, communities of Jesus followers flourished in the Galilee, where the rabbis soon founded the centers of their communities as well, and in many other regions of Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome.¹¹⁹ For some followers of Christ, the temple’s destruction fulfilled Jesus’ prediction that the temple would fall and played a role in the parting of the ways between Jews and those who would soon be called, and call themselves, Christians.¹²⁰ The rejection of Sabbath observance, the setting of their own festival dates, and, eventually, the establishment of an alternative Lord’s Day were all integral to their differentiation as well.

This process of deliberate differentiation between Jewish and Christian communities is clearly articulated in medieval manuscripts of Toledot Yeshu, in a passage that Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra has dated to late antiquity.¹²¹ In a section of the text known as the anti-Acts, the apostle Paul (alias Elijah), serving as a double agent for the rabbis, is sent to forge unmistakable and irreversible distinctions between Jews who follow Jesus and those who do not—that is, to insist that followers of Christ truly sever their ties to Judaism and become full-

fledged Christians.¹²² One of the primary ways that Paul effects this differentiation is through time. Thus, Paul reports to the Jesus-followers that Jesus himself instructed them to celebrate a new set of festivals:

Everybody in my possession shall desecrate the Sabbath that already the Holy One, blessed be He, hated and keep the First Day [Sunday] instead, since on this day the Holy One, blessed be He, enlightened his world; and for [the days of] Passover, which Israel keeps, make them into the festival of the Resurrection, since on this [day] he rose from his tomb; and for Shavuot, Ascension, as this is the day on which he ascended to heaven; and for Rosh Hashanah the Passing Away / Invention of the Cross, and for the Great Feast [Yom Kippur] the Circumcision, and for Hanukkah, Kalends.¹²³

This narrative explains that Jewish followers of Christ *became* Christians through marking Sundays instead of Sabbaths, Easter instead of Passover, Ascension (or Pentecost) instead of Shavuot, and so on. Time and its marking through festivals, the passage suggests, were not incidental to the parting of the ways, nor a result of the separation of Christians from Jews. Time served as a primary mechanism through which difference was formed and differentiation accomplished.¹²⁴

One need not turn to a satirical polemic compiled in the medieval period, however, to observe how central time became in the gradual differentiation between Jewish and Christian communities, as well as the ways in which Jewish and Christian authorities employed time to articulate communal difference even when communal affiliations and identities remained fluid on the ground. Already the historical Paul, years before the temple's destruction, showed his appreciation of this mechanism when he reprimanded the Galatians: "You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted!"¹²⁵ In this epistle, Paul accuses the Galatians of following the wrong calendar and celebrating the wrong festivals. Despite two millennia of interpretation, it remains a matter of scholarly debate whether Paul thought that the Galatians ought to use a Jewish or Roman calendar and celebrate Jewish or Roman festivals.¹²⁶ Either way, for Paul, much was at stake concerning the Galatians' adherence to correct times.

In the late first century, the Didache instructed its readers: "let not your fasts be with the hypocrites," who fast on Mondays and Thursdays.¹²⁷ Instead, the Didache mandated its adherents to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. Here again, the days of worship served to distinguish true believers from hypocrites.¹²⁸ The Didascalia Apostolorum, a treatise contemporaneous with the rabbinic Mishnah, outlines detailed instructions for how followers of Christ should behave on Sabbaths and Sundays and states how doing so would distinguish them from other Jews.¹²⁹ A century later, John Chrysostom vigorously

warned his congregants against participating in the Jewish Day of Atonement, articulating his opposition to marking Jewish time in a sermon:

There are many in our ranks who say they think as we do. Yet some of these are going to watch the festivals and others will join the Jews in keeping their feasts and observing their fasts. I wish to drive their perverse custom from the Church right now. . . . But now that the Jewish festivals are close by and at the very door, if I should fail to cure those who are sick with the Judaizing disease, I am afraid that, because of their ill-suited association and deep ignorance, some Christians may partake in the Jews' transgressions; once they have done so, I fear my homilies on these transgressions will be in vain.¹³⁰

For Chrysostom, preventing his congregants from celebrating Jewish festivals and fasts was a timely problem. As the fall festival season approached, he experienced the predicament of overlapping times with such urgency that he left aside all other matters. One aspect of being a true Christian, Chrysostom insists, is to adhere to Christian times, not Jewish ones.¹³¹ Christian bishops and councils also devoted much effort to ensuring, through formal ecclesiastical channels, that the dating of Easter and Pentecost no longer relied on the Jewish calendar nor intersected with the Jewish festivals of Passover and Shavuot.¹³² The Nicaean Synodal Letter to Alexandria emphasizes this point, noting that the agreement about Easter's date was significant because it guaranteed "that all our brethren in the East who, until now, have kept this festival when the Jews did" are able to celebrate it, instead, on the date that the Western Christians did.¹³³ Commenting on this temporal split, the fifth-century church historian Socrates Scholasticus remarks that the new Easter date signaled the transition "when Judaism was changed into Christianity."¹³⁴ Other festivals, such as the fall celebrations of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, were likewise reconfigured in early Christian communities; Jewish festival celebrations also participated in forging difference between Jews and Christians, as on Purim.¹³⁵ These processes of temporal differentiation became so pressing precisely because, at first, these groups shared the same calendar and observed the same Sabbath.¹³⁶ Time was on the minds of Christians as they defined themselves vis-à-vis Jews. Christian concerns about proper times thus constitute a crucial context for understanding the other side of this differentiation, namely, how rabbis, too, contemplated time as they defined themselves vis-à-vis their neighbors.

Part III: Differentiating Rabbinic Timescapes

The empire in which the rabbis lived was adapting to a new Roman calendar and temporal system. A growing Christian minority made up of a constellation of communities (not all of whom agreed with one another about the

Christian calendar) was also differentiating itself from other Jews through marking its time separately—and independently—from them. The times and temporality imposed on Jewish institutional and ritual life by the temple and its schedules lay in ruins. And who knew, the rabbis wondered, what occupied God's time; these circumstances suggested that perhaps God had taken some time off. Much was thus at stake in how rabbis conceptualized and structured time for those within their communities. Multiple processes of time-marking enabled those who composed rabbinic sources to construct their unique identities within the Roman Empire (and eventually within the Christian Roman Empire), distinguish themselves from other communities within that empire, differentiate various groups from one another within their communities, and mediate a temporal relationship between themselves and their God.

Many rabbinic tractates—including *Avodah Zarah*, *Berakhot*, and *Niddah*, analyzed in this book alongside additional rabbinic sources—begin with elaborate discussions of time and use the category of time as a primary lens through which to construct and articulate rabbinic practices and beliefs. In the United States, students are taught as early as grade school to ask the fundamental questions of “who, what, when, where, and why?” of any given text or idea (a tradition that can be traced back to the Carolingian period, and which itself relies on ancient Roman rhetorical techniques).¹³⁷ The redactor(s) of the Mishnah often began with the question of “when?”¹³⁸ Just as tractate *Berakhot* begins with a series of questions about the timing of the Shema prayer, tractate *Avodah Zarah* opens with an elaborate debate about when Jews were obligated to separate from their Roman neighbors, and the first passage in tractate *Niddah* refers to the period of a woman's impurity as “her time” (שעתה) while establishing the contours of the times of menstruation. Tractate *Shabbat*, itself devoted to detailing the rituals and prohibitions of the central temporal institution of the Sabbath, not only begins with questions about time but also is the first tractate of the order of *Moed*—literally “Appointed Time.” Other rabbinic texts about the Sabbath likewise theorize about what makes the time of the Sabbath sacred (שקדוש, literally “separated” or “differentiated”).¹³⁹ First and foremost, then, these rabbinic tractates and texts are concerned with answering questions about time. *When* must one refrain from engaging with those who worship other gods? *When*, how, and why must one sanctify the Sabbath day? *When* each day can one begin blessing God and how else can one mark one's time in devotion to God? *When* is one's body ritually impure and in need of purification? These debates about time unfold in their earliest forms in the Mishnah and then further develop in ways that show their centrality to the project of communal definition and differentiation in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds as well as in other rabbinic compositions, including halakhic and aggadic midrashim.

In the past two decades, the topic of time has garnered increasing attention from scholars of ancient Judaism, rabbinic literature, and Jewish Studies.¹⁴⁰

Several studies, including a number by Sacha Stern, have interrogated the rabbinic calendar—how it functioned, the processes through which it became fixed, and its reception and adaptation by later communities—while calendrical and other time-related astronomical and eschatological texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls have been examined by James VanderKam, Devorah Dimant, Jonathan Ben-Dov, and Eshbal Ratzon, among many others.¹⁴¹ In addition to Stern, James Barr, Gershon Brin, Shamma Friedman, Avraham Yaskovich, and others have traced the origin, meaning, and evolution of specific units of time and duration, times of day, and time-markers (e.g., מועד, זמן, יום, שעה, רגע, הנץ החמה, קורת הגבר, עולם, and so on) across the biblical, Second Temple, and rabbinic corpora.¹⁴² Rabbinic notions of history and memory have been reexamined by Isaiah Gafni, Margarete Schlüter, Amram Tropper, Meir Ben Shahr, Naftali Cohn, Nathan Schumer, and others engaging with the work of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor*.¹⁴³ Alongside a tradition of exploring the theme of temporality in studies of rabbinic midrash, exemplified, for example, in the early work of Isaac Heinemann and Jonah Fraenkel and the more recent work of Rachel Adelman and Rivka Ulmer, other scholars, such as Sergey Dolgopolski and Moulie Vidas, have considered how notions of transmission through time shaped the formation of talmudic traditions and genres.¹⁴⁴ Max Strassfeld has productively introduced notions of queer temporality into the study of the Talmud.¹⁴⁵

Most recently, Lynn Kaye, in her book *Time in the Babylonian Talmud*, has outlined uniquely rabbinic temporalities, exploring concepts such as “simultaneity,” “fixity,” “permanence,” “retroactivity,” “tradition,” and “memory,” as they are developed and theorized in legal, narrative, and midrashic sources.¹⁴⁶ Kaye demonstrates that talmudic sources, far from lacking a time dimension (as has sometimes been argued), navigated between natural and imagined times, constructing imagined temporalities in order to overcome legal and narrative challenges posed by the ordering of natural time. Both times coexist simultaneously, on different temporal “registers.” Rabbinic sources thus ought to serve, according to Kaye, as resources for challenging contemporary taken-for-granted notions of time, especially the idea that time is exclusively linear and progressive, precisely because of how philosophically and conceptually complex rabbinic engagement with time and temporality actually is.

Scholars of later periods, including Elisheva Carlebach, Elisheva Baumgarten, Philipp Nothaft, and Justine Isserles, have dealt with the development of the Jewish calendar and Jews' engagement with other calendars, especially the Christian calendars used in medieval and early modern Europe.¹⁴⁷ These studies have also contemplated how media, including print culture and other material dimensions of time-keeping, impacted Jewish calendrical practices in calendrically diverse contexts. Literary and philosophical notions of time and temporality in medieval and modern Jewish texts and contexts, moreover, have been studied by Tamar Rudavsky and Elliot Wolfson.¹⁴⁸ David Zvi Kalman has

examined the impact of changing technologies of hourly time-keeping on the development of halakhah.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, recent scholarship in rabbinics has outlined the construction, in the rabbinic period, of new notions of rabbinic identity, subjectivity, and difference.¹⁵⁰

This book draws from these earlier studies while homing in on the regulation of everyday time as it is conceived and mandated in rabbinic texts. It demonstrates the central role that rabbinic ritual, narrative, and conceptual reconfigurations of time played in facilitating the development of rabbinic notions of imperial, communal, gendered, and theological difference. The focus specifically on time as a mechanism for the creation of varieties of difference aims to contribute both to the study of rabbinic literature and to the fields of religious studies, Jewish studies, and time studies more broadly defined.

The analysis in this book assumes that the rabbinic corpus contains polyphonic ideas about time and timing rather than a unified and singular “conception of time,” an idea emphatically articulated as well by Sylvie Anne Goldberg in *La Clepsydre*.¹⁵¹ It mines ancient sources for the temporal complexities and contradictions that rabbinic discussions bring forth, within each rabbinic composition as well as between sources from various periods of rabbinic history. It also argues, though, that among this multiplicity, some general trends about time and difference emerge, however messily, from these rabbinic compositions.

The chapters of this book are structured around units of time, social realms, discourses of difference, and rabbinic genres. The first chapter addresses rabbinic-Roman difference through examining annual time in the context of Roman imperialism; the second chapter focuses on Jewish-Christian difference through analyzing weekly time in the context of intercommunal relations; the third chapter centers on gendered difference through a study of daily time within communal boundaries; and the fourth chapter dwells on divine-human difference through a consideration of hourly time within theological discourse. Thus, the chapters shift from annual to weekly, daily, and hourly cycles, and they turn to increasingly constricted social domains, proceeding from the broadest context of the Roman Empire, to intercommunal relations between Jews and Christians (members of parallel yet competing communities within a broader imperial context), to gendered time within rabbinic communities, and then, expanding outward again, to the intersection of human and divine spheres.¹⁵² The choice to devote each chapter to a particular temporal cycle—annual, weekly, daily, hourly—is not meant to suggest that rabbis only constructed imperial difference on an annual basis, Christian difference on a weekly basis, gendered difference on a daily basis, and theological difference on an hourly basis. Rather, this editorial choice is intended to spotlight the variety and diversity of strategies used within rabbinic texts to order a wide range of different temporal durations, each chapter demonstrating a unique time frame.

Nevertheless, the unit of the day remains central throughout this study: the first chapter examines discourses about the significance of certain days of the year; the second chapter studies the status of certain days of the week; the third chapter investigates practices that mark the beginnings and ends of each day; and the fourth chapter analyzes the subdivision of days into hours and other units. The first two chapters deal with special or sacred types of days, those differentiated from other times; the second two chapters address quotidian time and more regular, seemingly mundane temporal rhythms of the day, on earth as well as in heaven. At its core, then, the book is about the construction of difference in daily life, through various scales of time-keeping from the annual to the hourly.

Each chapter begins with an examination of rabbinic sources from the second and third centuries (known as “tannaitic” literature) and then proceeds, in its second half, to an analysis of narrative materials from later rabbinic compositions from the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries (known as “amoraic” and “post-amoraic” literature). The chapters engage with texts from both Palestine and Babylonia, though the focus remains largely on Palestinian sources. The rabbinic material from the Babylonian Talmud is essential to the book’s argument even though it was composed and redacted beyond the borders of the Roman Empire and indeed in a different historical, cultural, and political context than rabbinic texts composed in the region of Palestine. Juxtaposing the Palestinian and Babylonian sources often brings into sharper relief what is distinctive about the Palestinian materials and how they approach time in ways that are different from how Babylonian sources approach the same or similar questions about time. At times, highlighting how the Babylonian Talmud interprets earlier traditions also proves generative. Moreover, following how ideas from Palestinian sources were received and adapted in Babylonia demonstrates how Palestinian ideas changed when they were applied and appropriated in new contexts.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The first chapter explores the differentiation and synchronization of rabbinic and Roman time by examining rabbinic attitudes toward the Roman calendar and its annual festivals. Mishnah *Avodah Zarah* begins with a list of Roman festivals and prohibitions against participating even in the non-cultic commercial activities that surrounded them. Ironically, by trying so deliberately not to observe the Roman calendar and by formulating laws intended to limit interactions between Romans and Jews on certain calendar days, the rabbis of the Mishnah actually integrated the rhythms of the Roman calendar into their own daily lives, embedding Roman temporal sensibilities into the Jewish calendar. However, the Roman calendar became integrated into the Jewish cal-

endar not only through the formulation of rabbinic laws intended to limit interactions between Romans and Jews on certain calendar days but also through the Judaization of the Roman calendar in the rabbinic imagination. The rabbis explicitly ban economic interaction and deride social engagement between gentiles and Jews. Yet, in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, the origin and history of Roman festivals are presented as Jewish or biblical at their core. In one story, about the festival Kratesis, the geological, mythical, and historical origins of the city of Rome are traced to the idolatrous sins committed by a series of Israelite kings. In another story about this same festival, the Romans are said to draw on the power of the Torah and their alliance with the Jews in order to defeat their Greek rivals. Similarly, both Talmuds attribute the festival of the Kalends of January to the biblical Adam. In the Babylonian Talmud, Adam establishes this festival “for the sake of heaven” but the passage concludes that the festival was later corrupted by the Romans and made into an idolatrous celebration. Through these later rabbinic eyes, the Roman year was punctuated with days that had Jewish stories—and indeed a long Jewish past—attached to them, even as they maintained a cautious distance from them. As Fritz Graf has argued, the Roman calendar mapped Roman history onto an annual cycle.¹⁵³ Rabbinic prohibitions against and stories about Roman festivals had a similar function, mapping a rabbinic anti-imperial narrative of Jewish history onto the Roman imperial year. These sources illuminate just how integral past and present Roman time was for the rabbis—a grave threat from which the rabbis sought to protect and distance their community, and so pervasive in the rabbis’ environment that they sought to Judaize the Roman calendar.

Chapter 2 turns to rabbinic discussions of the Sabbath in light of Roman pagan critiques of and competing Christian claims to a weekly sacred day and other weekly worship practices. The first half of the chapter analyzes a section of *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* that contains an extended exegetical discussion about the Sabbath. This midrash offers passionate engagement with ideas that were popular in Second Temple and early Christian debates about Sabbath observance. The second half of the chapter analyzes a series of rabbinic stories that explore the sanctity of the Sabbath, found in fifth-century rabbinic sources compiled after Sunday became an imperially sanctioned day of rest and worship. It appears that rabbis proactively promoted the Sabbath as a day with distinct qualities that were inherent to it and persuaded Jews of this dimension of the Sabbath precisely because they worried that Jews might be drawn to other weekly temporal rhythms or that they could be susceptible to Roman Christian and non-Christian disparagement of the Sabbath and might therefore stop observing the Sabbath altogether. In each narrative, rabbinic outsiders confirm the constitutional singularity of the Sabbath day. In one story, an emperor visits a rabbi for a Sabbath meal and concludes that food on the

Sabbath is more delicious than dishes prepared on any other day of the week. The narrative explains that the food is delectable thanks to the Sabbath's special qualities, which cannot be accessed by those who do not observe the day properly. In another story, a governor questions a rabbi about the qualities of the Sabbath, and the two figures engage in a long discussion that culminates in the official conjuring up his dead Roman father to verify the sanctity of the day. Although these stories are quite humorous, they are not told for purposes of entertainment. They appear in the later stratum of Palestinian rabbinic literature composed at the height of the Christianization of the Roman Empire, during the period when Sunday was added to the imperial calendar in an official legal capacity. The narratives address specific critiques of the Jewish Sabbath that are known to us from non-Christian Greek and Latin polemics as well as contemporaneous Christian polemics against Jews and Judaism, all of which were prevalent within the lands of the Roman Empire. They can be understood as rabbinic attempts to make the Jewish Sabbath more attractive to other Jews, who may have been inclined to view the Sabbath as a temporal burden and even an embarrassment. Here, again, rabbinic insistence on the Sabbath's essential sanctity and therefore the importance of its proper observance asserted Jewish difference vis-à-vis not only alternative Roman pagan time but also Christian rhythms of weekly time in a period in which these Christian times were becoming more deeply embedded into a Roman imperial framework and had become increasingly dominant.

Chapter 3 tracks the construction of a gendered temporality by examining a set of daily rituals mandated in rabbinic sources, some of which applied to men and others that were only required of women. The chapter begins with the first ritual discussed in rabbinic sources, the recitation of the Shema prayer. Timing became an essential component of the Shema's recitation (in contradistinction to the biblical passage on which this rabbinic practice is based), and thus the tractate includes numerous debates about ritual time. One's time, it is suggested, ought to be marked first and foremost by this regularized declaration of devotion to God each morning and evening. Another feature of the rabbinic Shema is that only men became obligated in its recitation. According to the Mishnah, women are exempt from the fulfillment of this particular ritual as well as from the entire category of rituals that are labeled "positive time-bound commandments." Women, in other words, are kept apart from the central devotional prayer that marks important moments of temporal transition during each rabbinic day, as well as from other rituals that similarly construct time for the individual and the community. Rabbinic texts do not regard women as completely disconnected from time-boundedness, however. While women are excluded from positive time-bound commandments, an entire set of rituals related to the laws of menstrual purity applies *only* to women and constructs a woman's time in ways that were markedly different from the time of men. The second half of this chapter follows the development of the laws of

bodily purity from biblical texts, which provide extensive instructions concerning both men and women, to rabbinic texts, which focus far greater attention on laws related to the menstruant woman. By the end of the classical rabbinic period, the web of menstrual purity laws functioned in ways that are remarkably different from the laws of purity that pertain to men, especially with regard to time. One of the defining features of women's time, in contrast to men's time, is the alternation between times of purity and impurity. This feature emerges already in tannaitic sources but is especially striking in the Babylonian Talmud. These alternating times were dictated by the state of a woman's body as well as the associated daily practices of bodily examination, which women were required to perform at the same times at which men were required to recite the Shema. It is not incidental that positive time-bound commandments are based on external time-markers such as the celestial bodies and are designed to orient men's time toward God while the menstrual purity laws, in contrast, rely on the internal rhythms of a woman's body and orient women's times toward their bodies, their husbands, and other objects that could be contaminated at times of impurity. When men and women are mandated to perform different rituals that structure their days in unique ways, their conceptions of time can radically differ as well. What it meant to be a halakhically observant rabbinic man or woman, then, was defined by distinct embodied rituals and experiences of time.¹⁵⁴

Chapter 4 explores the day and its hourly subdivisions as rabbinic sources imagine God and humans to operate within the same units of time. The first three chapters detail annual, weekly, and daily rhythms of time in human realms and analyze the various ways in which people were instructed to use their time to worship God and observe God's commandments. The fourth chapter, in contrast, concentrates on rabbinic sources that wonder whether God keeps time, and if so, whether God keeps the same time as humans and how God's time is used in service of them. In texts from across the rabbinic corpus, God's divinity is contingent, in part, on time. As this chapter demonstrates, the unit of the hour became especially associated with God's time. God keeps to an hourly schedule during the day, has an active nightlife, and engages in tasks that sustain earthly life. Often, in these texts, God spends time performing activities in which humans engage as well, for example studying Torah, wearing phylacteries, and matchmaking, but God also performs tasks that are exclusively divine, such as judging the world's creatures and worshipping with the angels. These aspects of God's temporality thus simultaneously differentiate God in the heavenly sphere from those in the earthly realm and draw similarities between the time of those in heaven and on earth. The end of the chapter returns to the historical events that frame the beginning of this book. In the Babylonian Talmud, one of the most surprising aspects of God's time is how much of it God spends mourning the temple's destruction. Just as Ezra, in 4 Ezra, suffers from insomnia as he

struggles to comprehend the tragedy of the destruction, God, as portrayed in the Babylonian Talmud, awakens to mark the nightly watches with pained cries of despair that the temple no longer stands. The fall of Jerusalem thus not only radically alters the human time frames that rabbinic sources attempt to reconfigure through revised rituals and laws. The destruction is also understood, in these later rabbinic sources, to cause a crisis of time for God, whose subsequent (post-destruction) times, too, needed readjustment. These sources about God's time highlight what the rabbis regarded as unique to human and divine time as well as how they imagined these two timescapes to intersect. They reinforce how important conceptualizing and dividing time was for the rabbinic enterprise not only in distinguishing men from women, Jews from Christians, and rabbis from Romans but also in distinguishing people from God and articulating what it meant, temporally and existentially, to be human or divine.

These processes of definition and differentiation did not end with the redaction of the Talmuds or the composition of later midrashim. Even as these temporal developments in classical rabbinic sources were tentative and gradual—and some of their social effects unintentional—many of the temporal practices became normative in the medieval period, establishing rhythms of time for later Jewish communities. Rabbinic discussions might have begun as legal and exegetical debates among the intellectual elites of the tannaitic and amoraic periods. Once the Babylonian Talmud gained semi-canonical status and dictated Jewish life more broadly in the subsequent centuries, however, its laws were often more widely mandated, enforced, and practiced even as they continued to evolve in new historical and cultural settings.¹⁵⁵ Medieval and modern legal literature and treatises devote much hermeneutical energy to interpreting prohibitions against participating in the forbidden times of those among whom Jews lived, marking the Sabbath, determining times for prayer, explicating the category of time-bound commandments, and further detailing the rhythms and rituals of bodily impurity and of God's time. In other words, the *conceptions* of daily time in the classical rabbinic sources that are at the heart of this study did, sooner or later, directly impact many aspects of Jewish *experiences* of time and influence the rhythm of daily life—to this day. The conclusion outlines how select groups of later Jews adopted and adapted (and, at times, ignored) these rabbinic concerns about time to their present circumstances and the lasting legacy of these time frames and the differences they constructed on the history of Judaism and Jewish life in the *longue durée*.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms used to identify and distinguish between groups of people are constructs, not merely descriptions. Nor are they stable categories but rather ever-

evolving, contingent, and complicated. Whom one includes under a particular label or how one categorizes texts is rarely simple or obvious; labeling functions deliberately or inadvertently to include and exclude certain people or groups of people—to forge similarity or difference. Labeling or categorizing is thus often a matter of contestation. This is as true today as it was in earlier times and places: one need only think of the politics surrounding contemporary questions about who counts as a “Jew” to understand the constructed nature of categories as well as the real and wide-ranging stakes and consequences of labeling and categorizing. This fact poses challenges for deciding which terms to employ, especially when writing about the process through which such identities, subjectivities, and differences were forged over the course of centuries. Here, I explain the terms I use in this book and the rationale behind my choices.

Scholars have stressed just how little we know about ancient Jewish life, given that our primary sources are texts that were produced by rabbis who were not necessarily representative of Jews more broadly. Thus, in my analysis, I generally refer to “rabbinic” texts and to “rabbis” as agents but to the target of their interests and prescriptions as “Jews” and the “Jewish” calendar, as the rabbis’ ambitions (if not their actual authority or influence) extended beyond their own limited circles to the entirety of the Jewish community, as they defined it.

When I use the noun “Roman(s),” it is in recognition of the shifting and diverse populations that this term encompassed from the first through the fifth century CE and cognizant of the evolving dimensions that notions of “Roman-ness” underwent during this period.¹⁵⁶ In the first century CE, few people in the region of Palestine were Roman citizens and most lived under local provincial law, while in the second century, many elites were Roman by virtue of individual citizenship grants and such status projected their superiority over non-Romans. By the second decade of the third century, virtually all free men in Palestine and the eastern provinces had been granted Roman citizenship through the Antonine Constitutions and were governed by Roman law.¹⁵⁷ That is, by the time of the Mishnah’s redaction, the rabbis were Roman citizens—they *were* Roman. Hayim Lapin writes that the rabbis of Palestine are “best understood as shaping their texts and their religious, social, and political stances as Roman provincials.”¹⁵⁸ Living in provincial Palestine, rabbis participated in the life of the empire and even their seemingly insular writings reflect the degree to which they were integrated and embedded within the empire. At the same time, rabbinic engagement with the Roman Empire and with Roman institutions and narratives was complicated.¹⁵⁹ Even though the rabbis living within the Roman Empire were Roman citizens, they actively asserted distinctions between rabbinic Jewish culture and practices and Roman imperial culture and practices. This book illuminates the intricate relationship that rabbis had with Roman-ness by examining the ways in which they confronted one

aspect of Roman culture: its calendar. I therefore use, when appropriate, the adjectives “rabbinic” and “Roman” to capture such distinctions, for example, when writing of “rabbinic time” and “Roman (imperial) time.”¹⁶⁰ It is a central claim of this book that rabbinic sources themselves participated in the very process of differentiation between rabbis and other Romans precisely in a period when the rabbis were Roman.

Occasionally, I employ the more controversial term “pagan” as shorthand for non-Jewish and non-Christian Romans from whose cultic practices the rabbis sought to distance themselves, despite the term’s negative connotations and historical anachronism.¹⁶¹ I do so to capture the charged distinctions the rabbis tried to create between themselves and these others rather than to describe these populations in a historical way. They would certainly not have called themselves “pagans” nor their worship “pagan,” nor would they have identified as a unified group. When appropriate, I use the rabbis’ own, equally derogatory, term “gentiles” (*goyim*) or “idolaters” (literally “worshippers of foreign worship”) for these same reasons.¹⁶² My use of these terms deliberately conveys the rabbinic conflation of these distinct populations into a single undifferentiated unit, as well as the disparaging meaning associated with them in rabbinic sources.

Similarly, scholars have conceptualized the distinction, constructed over time, between Jews and Christians and between Judaism and Christianity, as well as their continued intersections and overlaps. Some scholars present Christianity as the offspring of Judaism and speak of the birth of Christianity out of Judaism.¹⁶³ Others view the development of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity through the familial metaphor of siblings descended from an earlier form of parental Israelite religion or Judaism.¹⁶⁴ A third approach invokes the metaphor of paths and describes a “parting of the ways” between groups (made of yet more subgroups) that had earlier been a single entity or traveled on a single road, with insistence that in important respects the “ways never parted” or never fully parted.¹⁶⁵ A fourth, related, approach conceptualizes the continued development of Judaism and Christianity in constant conversation with one another.¹⁶⁶ Most recently, attention has been placed on Jewish-Christian difference by highlighting theological and rhetorical dimensions of similarity upon which such difference is constructed.¹⁶⁷ With regard to terminology, it has been demonstrated that texts from the first several centuries CE employ the term “Christian” but that the meaning of this term shifted, including and excluding various groups in accordance with the particular context of its use.¹⁶⁸ The terms “Jew,” “Judaean,” “Jewish,” and “Judaism” have similarly fraught histories.¹⁶⁹ Even after the crystallization of the categories “Jewish” and “Christian,” however, people applied them differently and crossed between them.

In this book, I use the terms “Jews,” “Christians,” “Jesus- or Christ-followers,” “Jewish-Christians,” and so on advisedly. In general, I aim to avoid anachro-

nism, preferring to use the labels and categories employed by the subjects of this book either to identify themselves or to identify others. For instance, I choose not to label a text as “Christian” simply because it later came to be included in the Christian New Testament canon, though when writing about a text that was later regarded as belonging to those who by then regarded themselves as “Christians” (e.g., the Gospels or the Letters of Paul), I note this as well if discussing the text in the later context. If the text was written by a late antique follower of Christ who would not have recognized the category of “Christian,” I label the text and its author as “Christ-following.” If the author was a follower of Christ and also regarded himself as a Jew (to the extent that we can ascertain), I label the author as “a Christ-following Jew” or a “Jewish follower of Christ.” For later authors who insisted on firmer distinctions between “Christian” and “Jew,” for example, bishops, I label them according to their preferred identity labels. This principle of preferring the labels with which authors identified themselves is often challenging to apply, given that authors do not always tell us their preferred labels. My approach to this challenge is conservative; I often use more cumbersome labels so as to avoid imposing anachronistic terms on texts or authors. Sometimes, though, for the sake of readability, I use less precise language and offer clarification in the notes. I trust that readers will keep in mind that all of these terms were never self-evident or absolute categories (nor necessarily mutually exclusive ones) but rather unstable and constructed.

Likewise, the binary categories “men” and “women” do not map onto nor account for the diversity of types of bodies and sexual/gendered identities in antiquity or in the present. These categories also often conflate sex and gender, usually referring to those born biologically female as women and biologically male as men while excluding other types of men and women and effacing altogether those born biologically between or beyond male and female, with gendered identities that do not fit into either of these imagined groups.¹⁷⁰ Rabbinic sources themselves acknowledge and make visible such gendered diversity when they discuss matters related to the categories of *tumtum*, *androgynous*, *saris*, *aylonit*, and so forth.¹⁷¹ Indeed, rabbinic discussions are often most interested in the areas between the binaries rather than in the binaries themselves.¹⁷² Yet rabbinic texts also often subsume these additional gendered groups, for practical ritual and legal purposes, within the broader categories of men and women (e.g., in laws of menstrual purity or circumcision), simultaneously reinforcing a gendered binary while also unsettling it. In this study, I use the categories “men” and “women” as inclusively as possible, denoting whomever rabbinic sources would have included within them and leaving their meaning deliberately open-ended.

In all these terminological choices, I do not intend to unnecessarily impose binary oppositions (rabbinic/Roman, Jewish/Christian, male/female, human/divine) upon the past but rather to recognize how such difference was con-

structed and developed over the course of the rabbinic period within rabbinic sources, as well as to identify instances in which such distinctions were challenged and binaries complicated. Throughout, I demonstrate the role that time and temporality played in these messy processes of differentiation and synchronization.

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