

SARIT KATTAN GRIBETZ, *Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). Pp. xii + 389. Hardback. US\$39.95.

In this revision of her doctoral dissertation, Sarit Kattan Gribetz has provided readers a highly informative study of the varied texture and effect of rabbinic discussions of time. Although clearly influenced by recent developments in scholarly works on temporality, whose jargon can at times border on the arcane, Gribetz's book wears its erudition lightly and usefully blends close textual interpretation with broader theoretical issues related to human productions and experiences of time. Each chapter focuses on a different temporal scale (the liturgical year, weekly observance, daily time, and momentary time) and through these discussions she ably guides readers through important ways in which rabbinic "conceptualization and organization of time were mechanisms...to construct various forms of difference" and "occasionally" to unsettle these differences (5).

Gribetz tackles the relation of Rabbinic and Roman time in chapter 1, focusing on the temporal rhythms of their respective annual festival calendars. At the outset of the chapter, Gribetz notes that in their efforts to avoid Roman feasts—and the idolatry associated with them—the Rabbis in practice had to cultivate knowledge of the Roman calendar. This dialectic of avoidance and knowledge, then, leads to a kind of inverted observance by which Rabbinic Jews closely followed the Roman calendar in order to ensure they did not inadvertently *observe* the Roman calendar. In a fascinating development, Gribetz shows how later Palestinian and Babylonian talmudic sages, building on earlier Mishnaic material (in *m. Avodah Zarah*), not only incorporated a knowledge of the Roman calendar in times and places when some or all of the festivals were no longer in practice, but also offered their own etiologies for the Roman festivals of Kalends, Saturnalia, Kratesis, and Genousia. These passages show that the Rabbis' efforts at subverting the Roman calendar required a deep understanding of political and religious themes at stake in the Roman festivals.

The second chapter turns to the role of the Sabbath in differentiating Rabbinic time from Christian time. Gribetz here notes another potentially confounding dialectic, namely, that “rabbis...found themselves in a peculiar situation, in which early Christian communities, and later also the Christian Roman empire, promoted an organization of time that was based, at least in part, on their own weekly system but that eventually elevated a different day as the week’s sacred focal point” (93). After tracing some early lines of Sabbath observance, Gribetz demonstrates the way in which the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael frames its account of Sabbath observance over against contemporary and competing views of Sabbath observance circulating early Christian texts (e.g., *Ep. Barnabas* and Justin Martyr). She follows this discussion by turning to later Rabbinic writings, composed or edited in relation to a largely Christian empire (e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* and later the *Bavli*) in which Christian critiques of Sabbath are subverted: Sabbath food is specially blessed and preserved by God, offering a spice only available to the faithful. In the third chapter, focusing on men’s time and women’s time, Gribetz faces a new challenge. While Rabbis, Romans and Christians can be positioned as addressing the same phenomenon (Roman festivals, Sabbath, etc.), the differences between men’s and women’s time emerge in Gribetz discussion from a *lack* of such an overlap. The rite taken as emblematic (even definitive) of men’s time is the daily recital of the Shema (in *m. Berakhot*). The defining feature of women’s time, however, is found in the later tractate on women’s purity, *m. Niddah*, where women were tasked with performing twice-daily, internal examinations for the presence of mensural blood. Presented with relative brevity in the Mishnah, later Talmudic sources expound on the scope and importance of these rituals, explicitly excluding women from the daily Shema recitation, and tacitly excluding men from any great concern over bodily discharges.

The final main chapter turns to the question of how divine and human times are distinguished and, indeed, how they are related. In pursuing this potentially abstract question, Gribetz shows how the Rabbis imagined God as fundamentally temporal, a non-

Augustinian account of divine time. The difference between divine and human time, then, is one of scale rather than quality: both experience the movement of days, weeks, months, years, but God experiences them precisely, able to act at exactly the right time. He is “perfectly punctual” (194) and the schedule of his work in creation, as well as his ongoing daily work in the world, is articulated and commented on in a variety of Rabbinic works (Pesiqta de-Rav Kahanah, Leviticus Rabbah, etc.).

Gribetz closes her book by briefly following through certain threads of temporal differentiation into the present, from Medieval negotiations of calendar time to contemporary Jewish feminist engagements with the temporal “legacies” of their own tradition.

Of course, this review has provided only an overview and cannot broach many of the fascinating threads woven through this rich tapestry. Gribetz is to be commended for producing a book replete with judicious and creative exegetical discussions combined with broader themes from contemporary work on the varied quality of temporal experience and production. This book will be of high interest to all those interested in Rabbinic engagement with matters, Roman, Christian, gendered, and theological.

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