

☞ Introduction

In the Mishnah, the foundational document of rabbinic Judaism (c. 200–220 CE), the story is told of how the daughter-in-law of Shammai the Elder gave birth to a son during the festival of Sukkot, whereupon the child's grandfather climbed up onto the roof of the house and tore open the roof plaster above his grandson's head so as to create a sukkah opening to the sky.¹ This story is related in the very passage in which Jewish females are exempted by the rabbis from the obligation to inhabit the open-roofed booth, or sukkah, during the festival. In this tale, knowledge about sexual difference² has architectural ramifications: the newborn's "maleness" occasions the breaking open and partial destruction of the house into which he has just been born, whereas his mother's "femaleness" renders her presence in, or absence from, the sukkah halakhically irrelevant.³ The halakhic ruling renders narrowly and explicitly that which the narrative paints with greater ambiguity and dimensionality: the house of Shammai forcefully constructs a spatial gender distinction between mother and male child even at the very moment of nascence, when the spatial separation of the one from the other remains unthinkable. Gendering—and ethnic/religious identity—we discover, is partly realized in the building and unbuilding, the occupying and vacating of houses and other social spaces. While we can never know for certain whether or not the events of this story occurred "historically," and archaeologists will never excavate the remains of the Shammai house with evidence of its impromptu remodeling job intact, we can read the story itself, study its wider textual context and attendant rabbinic rulings, and also gain some sense of the material environment in which such stories, texts, and rulings took shape.

In this book I investigate several related “mappings” of ideas about sexual and ethnic difference in a particular time and place: Galilee during the centuries immediately following the last Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire—centuries that saw major socioeconomic changes in the region as well as the development of that small class of Jewish authors/authorities, the rabbis, with their particular vision of Judaism. I examine aspects of gender, class, ethnicity, and Jewish “nationalism” as these are constructed both in Palestinian rabbinic texts and “on the ground,” through practices that create (or contest) topographies of self versus other, male versus female, insider versus outsider. In simplest terms, the insight at the heart of this exploration is that gender and space are deeply intertwined and interdependent categories in the negotiation of Jewish cultural identity in the ancient past (as in the present)—but often in ways we might not anticipate or expect. Examination of the material, lived environments of ancient Galilee can help in laying out some of the parameters of such cultural negotiation, as can exploration of the spatial frames of reference employed in rabbinic texts preoccupied with sexual and ethnic difference. Indeed, I would suggest that the rabbinic location of women—and of the female body, in particular—within certain significant spatial frames of reference often signals points of cultural anxiety and tension that reveal a great deal about emerging rabbinic ideology in its relation to the wider discourses of Galilean Jewish society in the early centuries of the Common Era.

This book is rooted in a simple question: Where were the women? Like many feminist historians, I have often found myself asking this question when reading traditional or mainstream histories, anthologies, and textbooks in which women are either altogether invisible or else relegated to colorful anecdotes and the occasional chapter or subchapter on “women in . . .” or “women of . . .” or “women and . . .” Assumptions about where women were, or were not, underlie much of contemporary historiography, and the study of Jewish antiquity poses no exception in this regard. Moreover, in studying Judaism one attempts to understand and describe a culture in which the articulation of “gendered space” appears as a recurring—albeit highly variable and inconsistent—phenomenon. From the “women’s court” and “Israelite court” in Herod’s Temple to the *mehitzah* of medieval synagogues, and from the image of secluded,

veiled women in Philo and Ben Sira, to the image of merchants in the marketplace supporting Talmudic-scholar husbands and sons sequestered in study houses, Jewish history is replete with widely divergent ideas and practices intimately linking gender with space. At the same time, however, both literary and material constructions of space convey similarly ambiguous and multiplicitous impressions to those who study them with an eye to gender practices. Evidence of any sort for the presence or absence of women or men in particular places is never conclusive and frequently relies heavily on unfounded assumptions about gender-space correspondences for its interpretation.⁴

While this project began as an attempt to “find” Jewish women in antiquity, it has ultimately coalesced around the outlines of a much richer and complex play of practices and meanings than I could ever have imagined at the outset. In keeping with these several levels of engagement, I endeavor to work at three tasks (at least!) simultaneously throughout this book.

First, I seek to address some fundamental problems that have, from its beginnings, plagued the study of women and gender in Jewish antiquity. These problems, in broadest terms, have to do with locating Jewish men and women in relation to each other, and within the built environments and cultural landscapes that comprised their everyday lives in Roman Palestine. One goal of this study is, therefore, to question, complicate, and, where appropriate, lay to rest long-standing but inadequate narratives that have cast Jewish women as “private,” housebound creatures and Jewish men as “public,” social, mobile agents, each of whom occupied not only separate social “spheres” but separate spaces in their lived environment. I will respond to this narrative both on its own terms—that is, by rereading, *without the prior assumption of separate spheres/spaces*, the evidence brought to support this narrative and its conclusions—and also by questioning those terms—that is, by reconsidering the very categories and methods traditionally employed in the study of gender and space in Palestinian Jewish antiquity.

Second, I undertake to develop more appropriate and useful strategies for working with both literary and nonliterary material remains in investigating space and gender. In this study I begin to construct models and language through which to bridge the wide gulf that commonly exists

between archaeologists and Talmudists—between those who specialize in nonliterary material culture and those for whom rabbinic texts are the primary or exclusive source for engaging the past. I am not alone in this endeavor, yet at the same time, many of my methodological insights are drawn from the work of scholars in fields far distant from my own and thus require sustained and critical reworking to render them useful tools for understanding the peculiar and particular evidence with which I am engaged. Other insights grow out of my body of evidence itself, and are turned back on that evidence as magnifying lenses through which to examine various details and nuances.

Third, by bringing these developing insights and methodological strategies to the study of the built remains and early rabbinic texts of Roman Galilee, I begin to flesh out a richer narrative, one more sensitive and more accountable to the multiple, and at times conflicting or overlapping, impulses discernible in this one (polymorphous) culture's negotiations of gender and space. I seek, in this book, to lay a foundation for what I hope will be an ongoing "building" project with room to expand far beyond its present bounds. I do not attempt to treat any single space or document exhaustively; rather, my aim is to sink a "probe" or a "sounding" into a series of cultural loci (to use an apt archaeological metaphor) and to analyze and synthesize the cross section of evidence that emerges therefrom.

In the three substantive chapters of this book, I do not attempt to separate out one of these tasks from the others in the flow of the work. In the first, more methodologically focused chapter, by contrast, I proceed along a rather more linear and demarcated path, one which, to some extent, mimics the trilogy outlined above and goes part of the way toward meeting the first two aims. Thus, I will expend some small effort in the first chapter outlining and beginning to dislodge the reigning narratives and methodological paradigms evident in this field of study and then sketch the path of development, and expose the underpinnings, of my own methodological insights and frameworks.

Three sociospatial sites ground the remaining three chapters of the book: house, marketplace, and courtyard/alleyway. A sustained exploration of each site suggests ways in which different material elements and discourses might have participated in negotiations of gender, class, ethnicity, and "nation" among Jewish communities in Roman Galilee. Be-

fore providing brief synopses of each of these latter chapters, I would like first to highlight several general observations that grow out of this study as a whole.

To begin with, space, as noted above, does play a profoundly significant role in gendering. The built environment indeed participates in the creation, transmission, and contestation of knowledge about relation and difference. Yet rarely is such knowledge, and the power formations of which it is a part, encountered in the form of brute force or overt repression. Houses and courtyards are seldom prisons or private fortresses, nor are marketplaces generally as romantically carnivalesque or explicitly promiscuous as traditional formulations might lead one to believe. Instead, space becomes a part of subject and group identity in a far more subtle and pervasive fashion. Rather than locked doors, shuttered windows, and steadfast lines of demarcation (hallmarks of many historians' accounts of women's lives in antiquity), we are met in ancient Judaism with constructions of "womanhood" deeply embedded in the sociospatial discourses and practices of housing, dwelling, marriage, sexual purity and visibility/invisibility, while equally embodied in the discourses of the marketplace, of commercial interests and proprietary claims, of political accommodation and resistance. Similarly, we find rabbinic self-characterizations that locate the sage, rabbinic Judaism's paragon of "manhood," in seclusion, away from the eyes of the populace, surrounded by his "children" (students), engaged in Torah—but that nonetheless portray him as equally "at home" in street and alleyway, farm and field, trade and travel.

Thus, gender distinctions bear no simple correspondence to spaces or spatial practices, but rather manifest a range of locational possibilities. Furthermore, the spatialization of gender is hardly ever a matter of prohibition from, or admission to, particular spaces, but is instead carried out in terms of disciplines of the body associated with movement through, and occupation of, diverse spaces. Clothing and speech habits (head covering, silence, the sexualized voice), the disposition of the eyes (staring, not staring, not looking), and gestures of communal solidarity (*erub* and *shittuf*)⁵ or division (privatization and masculinization of Torah study) are all part of a spatialized language involved in gendering.

Such gestural, habitual, and rhetorical codes, however widespread, are not always consistent within ancient Jewish cultures, nor are they necessar-

ily shared between cultures. Thus, while the early rabbinic texts comprise a tradition that constitutes women/wives in relation to particular practices of dress and the gaze, they differ among themselves and with other Jews as to the specifics of such practices. Similarly, “public” and “private” are concepts recognizable both in rabbinic texts and in Latin and Greek literature, yet the *gendering* of these categories that is so prominent (if inconsistent) a feature of the latter body of literature (including Jewish works) is, as we shall see, largely absent from the former.⁶

The negotiation of gender in space is an integral part of all manner of cultural interactions and struggles. Each site explored in this book is at one and the same time a material, mappable space and a confluence of discourses and negotiations that are integral elements of that site. What exactly this means will become progressively clearer throughout the course of the book. For now, the following brief synopsis of each chapter should convey some sense of the dynamic confluences that characterize each site.

In Chapter 2, “The Well-Ordered *Bayit*: Bodies, Houses, and Rabbis in ancient Galilee,” I explore the relationship of housing and dwelling practices of Jews to broader cultural discourses involved in the negotiation of gender. Drawing insights from architectural remains and Palestinian rabbinic literature I consider how the domestic built environment, habits of dress and address, notions about seeing and being seen, and practices of cultic purity might all work together to “order” the Jewish female body, while also marking out some parameters for Jewish “masculinity” and “husbandry.” I explore, among other things, some of the ways in which the rabbinic textual construction of woman-as-house undergirds the rabbinic construction of man-as-householder/master—the latter no more nor less abstract and metaphoric an entity than the former, and each an interlocking component of a rabbinically reimagined “house of Israel.”

In Chapter 3, “Men, Women, and the *Shuk*: Cultural Currencies on the Open Market,” I offer a reading of Jewish women and the female body as represented within the ideological/spatial frame of reference of the *shuk*, or marketplace. Examining material remains of places of manufacture and commerce, I find that the *shuk* is as amorphous and fluid a site materially as it is in its textual dimensions. Close reading of Palestinian rabbinic texts reveals, further, that the *shuk* provides a space for the rabbis

to elaborate and negotiate the proprietary interests of men in the bodies and labors of Jewish women. Finally, I pursue some of the sociocultural implications of trade relationships between the “indigenous” Jewish and imperial non-Jewish populations of the Galilee, as these are played out on the bodies of women and in the traditions of the early rabbis.

The ubiquitous (and often shared) courtyards of ancient Galilee offer yet another rich perspective from which to explore the intricacies of gendering and Jewish practice. The final chapter, “Inside Out and Outside In,” considers precisely the kinds of spaces that pose some of the most interesting questions for those (contemporary scholars and ancient rabbis alike) who attempt to categorize space as either “inside” or “outside,” “*bayit*” or “*shuk*,” “public domain” or “private domain,” “ours” or “theirs.” “Intermediate” spaces like the *hatzer* (courtyard) and *maboi* (alleyway) provide a critical lens through which to reexamine commonly held assumptions about what spaces mean, how they work, and what they can tell us about the cultures that take shape in, and give shape to, these spaces. Other issues considered here are the overlap and intersection of discourses about women and discourses about space that appear in rabbinic texts, and the ways in which some of these rabbinic conversations have more to do with the crafting of a rabbinic identity and consensus than with Jewish customary practice, the dictates of Halakha, or knowledge about sexual difference. Part of the chapter is devoted, as well, to further consideration of Galilean Jewish negotiations of gender, power, and place in relation to Roman colonization and urbanization of the region. Thus, a significant focus of this chapter (and of the one preceding it) is on the ways in which spatial aspects of gendering are very often bound up with other “turf battles” and with creating or dissolving, bridging or buffering points of contact between a range of Jewish “selves” and their often ambiguous “others.”

Rabbinic “Nationalism” and the Politics of Space

These last observations bear some further elaboration here. As I have already intimated, I wish to propose that rabbinic Judaism, in its nascence, represented a peculiar sort of “nationalist” project—one that sought to (re)create its own version of a Jewish “nation” out of the ashes of the shat-

tered Temple and the catastrophes of the second Jewish revolt, and within the constraints (and opportunities) brought by direct Roman imperial rule, while at the same time establishing itself as the leader of that “nation” and arbiter of its laws. I will suggest that, as large-scale economic shifts and Roman urbanization projects in the Galilee were reordering the life of village, town, and city, the emerging rabbinic elite was undertaking its own attempts to rebuild, reconceive, and reorder the “house of Israel.” This reordering was, at least in part, a response—both accommodation and resistance—to the changing socioeconomic landscape of the Galilee and of Palestine as a whole. In the rabbinic building project, Jewish women appear to embody, on the one hand, some rabbis’ utopian/nostalgic vision of the house of Israel as a self-sufficient household with themselves (rabbis) at its head, and, on the other, the recognition that the walls of this house could (and ought) never fully confine or exclude—that this house stood, and would always stand, shoulder to shoulder and courtyard to courtyard with the houses of many “others.”

The peculiar “geohistorical moment” through which I explore these dynamics is somewhat arbitrary, although not entirely so. A rough starting date of my study, 135 CE, marks the defeat of the second Jewish revolt, led by the “messiah” Bar Kokhba (Simeon bar Kosiba)—a devastating blow to Jewish dreams of territorial sovereignty and hopes for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and its cult. In the aftermath of this war (as of the one in the previous century), thousands of survivors and displaced Jewish refugees apparently made their way to the north (the Galilee and the Golan) to make new lives for themselves. After 135 CE, according to most estimates, the Galilee represented perhaps the highest concentration of Jews in the eastern Roman provinces, and it is in this Galilee that the earliest rabbinic texts were fashioned.⁷ A rough endpoint for my “snapshot,” the early fourth century, is more random and represents no event in particular, but marks what later came to be considered the advent of the “Byzantine” period, with its widespread Christianization of Palestine and the Mediterranean world. This time span also encompasses what Talmudists call the “Tannaitic period” (and the advent of the “Amoraic period”), which, as already noted, produced the earliest rabbinic collections of traditions, codified chiefly (although not exclusively) in the Mishnah (c. 200 CE) and the Tosefta (c. 250 CE) whose further elaborations appear in the Talmuds.⁸

In these centuries, as well, a full Roman Army legion—Legio VI Ferrata—comprising tens of thousands of soldiers, was stationed throughout the Galilee.⁹ The province of Palestine was, therefore, not only under Roman rule and administration; it was home, for these centuries, to two Roman legions and additional auxiliary troops, half of whom were resident, some with their dependents, in the relatively small region of the Galilee, an area that accounted for less than 20 percent of the landmass of the entire province.¹⁰ Whether friendly or unfriendly, such a huge military and associated Roman civilian presence could not but have had a profound economic and cultural impact on the region and its inhabitants.¹¹ While textual and inscriptional sources of the period only occasionally provide anything in the way of direct information about particular events, or even about intercultural relations in general, Jews in Galilee—including those in its emerging rabbinic circles—were by all accounts a colonized culture, one whose “domestic politics” must be read and understood within a “colonial” framework.¹²

Part of what this means, then, is that the earliest rabbinic literature, with its focus on theories and practices of Jewish peoplehood, may be read as the documents of a nascent Jewish “nationalist” movement in the shadow of (not in the face of) the Roman Empire. Throughout this book, I place the word nationalist in quotes, as a means of marking off most rabbinic brands of “nationalism” from militant, statist forms of nationalism that have as their stated goal political autonomy and sovereignty over the land that their adherents occupy (or hope to occupy).¹³ The dominant rabbinic “nationalist” project, by contrast, was concerned with (re)creating a Jewish political/cultural entity—a reimagined “house of Israel”—of a non-sovereign or “subnationalist” sort.¹⁴ While this “nationalism” will not be a major focus of my study, it will inform my readings of rabbinic texts throughout, as well as my reconstruction of the cultural discourses and social dynamics in which some of these texts appear to participate.

In understanding the early rabbinic project to be a form of “nationalism,” I am clearly making an analytical, interpretive choice that, among other things, renders my subject amenable to the application of critical insights and forms of analysis developed by scholars who study colonialism, postcolonialism, and nationalist movements. These insights and modes of analysis can, I believe, occasionally serve as appropriate tools for under-

standing the discourses and dynamics of Jewish culture in Roman Palestine. At the same time, they may also usefully be invoked to assess modern historiographic practices (which produce a good deal of ancient Palestine's material remains) as these relate to the politics and cultures of present-day Palestine/Israel. In using such tools for reflecting on both ancient and modern Palestinian politics (with all resonances of these terms intended), I find myself intuiting some bemusing and provocative parallels between the spatial politics of rabbinic "nationalism" and the spatial politics of both modern Zionism and modern Palestinian nationalism.¹⁵ Risking the charge of anachronism at both ends of the historical spectrum, I invite my readers to nevertheless consider for themselves such potential parallels as are intimated in the following, preliminary reflections on earliest rabbinic spatial politics.

How, we may ask, might rabbinic conversations about and constructions of space and Jewish spatial practices be understood in relation to the rabbinic "nationalist" impulses and Roman imperial hegemony described above? Are there any discernible and comprehensible connections among these historical phenomena? What relationships might we reasonably hypothesize? In the introduction to *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, Paul Carter succinctly lays out his book's subject—a subject that, if only in its most generalizable sense, bears a striking resemblance to my own understanding of "Jewish space" (and rabbinic space in particular) in Roman Palestine:

It is not the geographer's space, although that comes into it. What is evoked here are the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence. It is spatiality as a form of non-linear writing; as a form of history. That cultural space *has* such a history is evident from the historical documents themselves. For the literature of spatial history . . . [is comprised of] written traces which, but for their spatial occasion, would not have come into being. They are not like novels: their narratives do not conform to the rules of cause-and-effect empirical history. Rather, they are analogous to unfinished maps and should be read accordingly as records of traveling.¹⁶

While Carter's focus is the spatial/textual creation of British-colonized Australia, drawn from the perspective of the imperial explorers and colonizers, the same kind of dynamic, I would suggest, is evident in the "spatial forms and fantasies through which" a colonized Jewish culture in Roman

Palestine “declares its presence.” The nonrabbinic Jewish *batei-am*, synagogues or “houses of the people,” that dot the ancient landscape are one such spatial declaration, as are the myriad “spatial forms and fantasies” found in rabbinic texts—including those explored in this book. Nor should it surprise us that colonizer and colonized engage in the same spatial strategies: ancient Rome builds Aelia Capitolina on the ground and creates for it a Roman history; the rabbis build Jerusalem and the Holy Land textually, through ruling after ruling and tradition after tradition of Temple rituals, of commemorative days, of economic boundaries, and through Jewish spatialized practices that mark/create Jewish bodies and “declare their presence.” Similar observations may be made of both modern Israeli spatial politics in the creation of the “Jewish state” and modern Palestinian spatial politics in the attempted creation of a Palestinian one. Certainly, the differences between those with the power to shape the larger material contours and content of geographical space and history and those without are vitally important, but such differences do not negate the fundamental observation about shared spatial strategies, nor need the clear differences between statist and nonstatist “nationalisms,” or ancient and modern examples, do so.¹⁷

As with Carter’s available archive—letters home, explorers’ journals, and unfinished maps—so, too, with rabbinic texts and other ancient Jewish cultural expressions: we discern through these a history of space and spatiality that is “non-linear,” not that of the geographer or the novelist, one that “does not conform to the rules of cause-and-effect empirical history.” Moreover, while Carter reads what are explicitly “records of traveling” in his documents, in the case of the ancient Jewish materials, that, too, is a rather apt (albeit metaphoric) characterization that captures very nicely the dynamism and cultural movement perceptible in the latter. The earliest rabbis rarely set out to explicitly articulate a “nationalist” geography (although the drawing of tithing and Sabbatical borders comes very close), yet, in a nonlinear sense, many of their traditions are involved in just such discursive construction.

As has often been noted, rabbinic texts show a profound disinterest in anything resembling diachronic historiography. And, as Yosef Yerushalmi has most eloquently observed, “Unlike the biblical writers the rabbis seem to play with Time as though with an accordion, expanding and collapsing

it at will.”¹⁸ Rabbinic perspectives on, and practices of, history and historical time only occasionally conform to our modern, secular notions of these. Rather, the rabbis, to quote Yerushalmi again, “salvaged what they felt to be relevant to them, and that meant, in effect, what was relevant to the ongoing religious and communal (hence also the ‘national’) life of the Jewish people.”¹⁹ (I would venture to guess that Yerushalmi and I have some of the same things in mind when we both use, with “scare quotes,” the term “national.”)

I believe one may speak in similar ways of rabbinic constructions of space. Like rabbinic time, rabbinic space seems often malleable, expanding and collapsing in a variety of ways, some of which will be examined in the chapters of this book. The earliest Palestinian rabbis lived in a time of great geographical and cultural shifts, among a range of people—Jew and non-Jew alike—from whom they expressed a need or desire to differentiate themselves, even while remaining in close spatial proximity. By their own account, these rabbis rarely, if ever, engaged in a spatial separatism akin to that of the Dead Sea community or later Christian monastics, nor did such separatism suit their general ideological bent. Instead, they created a discourse of Jewish peoplehood within a geopolitical situation in which they lacked any real political sovereignty or autonomy.

Yet, where they could not control or administer the larger geopolitical landscape, their traditions mobilized the potential for effecting a particular Jewish *reading* or *negotiation* of that landscape on both macro and micro levels. In rabbinic space, rabbis, their Torah, their male disciples, and their traditions occupied the center and served as the compass by which meaning was given to and drawn from the landscape. Their biblical midrash and traditions on tithing and Sabbatical produce delineated their “national” boundaries, while spatialized codes of dwelling, dress, comportment, and the like circumscribed and gave shape to the more intimate “national” topographies they envisioned and enacted.

Of a piece with their landscape, then, was their place in it and indeed, their very personae and the version of Judaism they embodied.²⁰ To rabbinic Judaism, after all, belongs the tradition of “building a fence around the Torah.” The fences articulated within rabbinic traditions staked out parameters of perception, discursive borders in which both words and walls might participate. Relationships and communication across such borders

were always possible, yet the borders themselves became, for them, the contours of communal identity and relation in very real ways. Earliest rabbinic Judaism built itself as it built its fences, and sustained itself and claimed its “national” jurisdiction through the maintenance of those fences and the spaces they encompassed. It did this in relation to the Roman imperial population and power structures in the province, in relation to other “indigenous” peoples of ancient Palestine and the Near East, and in relation to the vast majority of (nonrabbinic) Jews and practices of Judaism that served as its closest interlocutors, partners, and adversaries.

In sum, the spatial preoccupations and practices of ancient rabbinism are, it seems to me, as inextricable from discourses of “nation” as they are from discourses of gender. Gender and space remain the primary focuses of this study throughout, but “nation” is frequently a subtext (especially in Chapters 3 and 4). My theoretical musings here about the nature of rabbinic spatial politics are meant as preliminary and tentative, open to further development, questioning, and critique as they are brought into conversation with specific texts and other relevant material in what follows.

A final prefatory note: Throughout this work, I invoke disparate elements and artifacts of late ancient Galilean Jewish society as diverse voices or gestures involved in broad, shared, cultural conversations (and/or arguments) that took place in many locations and on many levels simultaneously. It should be clear, then, that I do not intend this book to be an examination exclusively, or even chiefly, of *rabbinic* Jewish culture and its textual practices. Inevitably, however, because of the balance and nature of the available evidence, I devote more space to consideration of rabbinic discussions and formulations than to consideration of nonliterary, nonrabbinic material culture. I do not mean thereby to accord greater interpretive or historical weight to the rabbinic texts. The earliest rabbis were a very small handful of Jewish voices among many others in Palestine; their voices are some of the most articulate and best preserved—and therefore some of the most satisfying, important, and worthwhile to engage. To the extent, however, that we can appropriately relativize these amplified voices by highlighting the ways in which *they are in constant conversation (and frequent conflict)* with a range of other Jewish cultural expressions and discourses, we have a better chance of gaining some much-needed perspective on the diversity that characterized Judaism and Jewish life in this period. So

too, we may better appreciate the kinds of creative self-fashioning and cultural visions that enabled the development of earliest rabbinic Jewish practice in the first place. For all these reasons, sustained attention to rabbinic textual practice is not only inevitable, but profoundly valuable, in a study such as this one. That said, rabbinic voices must not be—and to the best of my ability, have not been—regarded in this book as substitutes and scribes for the countless other Jewish voices forever lost to us, or whispering still through the scattered ruins of the ancient landscape. I have strained to catch some echoes of these other voices here, and I hope that, with time and continued careful research, these, too, may be amplified with even greater clarity.