Jews and
Syriac Christians

Edited by
AARON MICHAEL BUTTS
and SIMCHA GROSS

Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism

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Abbreviations

Rabbinic Texts

The following abbreviations are used for the citation of rabbinic texts:

m. Mishnah.


y. Palestinian Talmud, cited according to Y. Sussman, *Talmud Yerushalmi: Yotze le-or al-pi ketav yad Scaliger 3 (Or. 4720)* (Jerusalem, 2005).

b. Babylonian Talmud, cited according to the pagination of the Vilna edition (1880–1886).

The following Mishnah and Talmud tractates are referenced:

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Additional rabbinic texts cited include:


Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Cited according to H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ismael* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann, 1931) or J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi*
**Abbreviations**


**Pesikta de-Rav Kahana** Cited according to B. Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962).

**Pesikta Rabbati** Cited according to M. Friedmann, *Pesikta Rabbati* (Vienna: Selbstverlag des Herausgebers, 1880).

**Shemot Rabbah** Cited according to A. Shinan, *Midrash Shemot Rabbah. Chapters 1–14* (Jerusalem: Devir, 1984).


**Biblical Books**

*Hebrew Bible / Old Testament*

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<td>Job</td>
<td>Jb</td>
<td>Zechariah</td>
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<td>Psalm(s)</td>
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*New Testament*

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<td>Romans</td>
<td>Rom</td>
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<td>Luke</td>
<td>Lk</td>
<td>1 Corinthians</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Jn</td>
<td>2 Corinthians</td>
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Abbreviations

Galatians Gal Hebrews Heb
Ephesians Eph James Jas
Philippians Phil 1 Peter 1 Pt
Colossians Col 2 Peter 2 Pt
1 Thessalonians 1 Thes 1 John 1 Jn
2 Thessalonians 2 Thes 2 John 2 Jn
1 Timothy 1 Tm 3 John 3 Jn
2 Timothy 2 Tm Jude Jude
Titus Ti Revelation Rv
Philemon Phlm

Journals, Series, and Reference Works

AB Analecta Bollandiana
ACW Ancient Christian Writers
AJEC Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJS Review Association for Jewish Studies Review
AJEGL The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
AJSR Association for Jewish Studies Review
AO Acta Orientalia
AS Aramaic Studies
BHT Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BJS Brown Judaic Studies
BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BSOS Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies
BZ Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CA Christianisme antique
CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CELAMA Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages
CH Church History
CHR Catholic Historical Review
CHRC Church History and Religious Culture
CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSS Cistercian Studies Series
DJBA M. Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic
and Geonic Periods (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, and Baltimore:
Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
DJD Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers
DOT Dumbarton Oaks Texts
EC Early Christianity
ECS Eastern Christian Studies
Abbreviations

ÉS  Études syriques
ETL  *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
FC  Fontes Christiani
FO  *Folia Orientalia*
FoC  The Fathers of the Church
GCS  Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GECS  Gorgias Early Christian Studies
GRBS  *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
HCMR  History of Christian-Muslim Relations
HR  *History of Religions*
HTR  *Harvard Theological Review*
HTS  *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*
HUCA  *Hebrew Union College Annual*
IJS  Institute of Jewish Studies (University College London)
IOS  *Israel Oriental Studies*
JA  *Journal asiatique*
JAAS  *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*
JAC  *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JAJ  *Journal of Ancient Judaism*
JAOC  Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme
JAOS  *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL  *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JC  Judaism in Context
JCPSS  Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series
JCSSS  *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*
JECS  *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*
JECS  *Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JJS  *Journal of Jewish Studies*
JJTP  *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*
JLA  *Journal of Late Antiquity*
JLASS  *Journal of Jewish Law Association Studies*
JNES  *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR  *The Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRS  *Journal of Roman Studies*
JS  *Journal of Jewish Studies*
JSAI  *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
JSHL  *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*
JSIJ  *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal*
JSJ  *Journal for the Study of Judaism*
Abbreviations

JSIF  Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore
JSJS  Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements
JSOR  Journal of the Society of Oriental Research
JSOT  Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSP  Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha
JSQ  Jewish Studies Quarterly
JSS  Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS  Journal of Theological Studies
LAHR  Late Antique History and Religion
LCL  Loeb Classical Library
LS  Language Studies
LSAWS  Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MHR  Mediterranean Historical Review
MLR  Mediterranean Language Review
MPIIL  Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden
MUSJ  Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph
NT  Novum Testamentum
NTS  New Testament Studies
OC  Oriens Christianus
OCP  Orientalia Christiana Periodica
OLA  Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLP  Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica
OTM  Oxford Theological Monographs
PAAJR  Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
PETSE  Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile
PG  P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca.
PISBR  Publications of the Israel Society for Biblical Research
PL  P. Migne, Patrologia Latina.
PLAL  Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Language
PMAS  Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac: Text and Translation
PO  Patrologia Orientalis
POC  Proche-Orient chrétien
Prooftexts  Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History
PS  Patrologia Syriaca
PTS  Patristische Texte und Studien
RB  Revue Biblique
REJ  Revue des études juives
RHPR  Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses
RHR  Revue de l’histoire des religions
ROC  Revue de l’orient chrétien
RQ  Revue de Qumrân
RRJ  The Review of Rabbinic Judaism
RSR  Recherches de science religieuse
SBLSP  Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SC  Sources chrétiennes
SCH  Studies in Church History
### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum</td>
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<td>SFoC</td>
<td>Selections from the Fathers of the Church</td>
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<td>SJHC</td>
<td>Studies in Jewish History and Culture</td>
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<td>SJSJ</td>
<td>Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Studies in Late Antiquity</td>
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<td>SOR</td>
<td>Serie Orientale Roma</td>
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<td>SPB</td>
<td>Studia Post-Biblica</td>
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<td>SSS</td>
<td>Studies Supplementary to Sobornost</td>
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<td>STDJ</td>
<td>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</td>
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<td>STMAC</td>
<td>Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Culture</td>
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<td>Semitic Texts with Translations</td>
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<td>Traditio Exegetica Graeca</td>
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<td>Théologie historique</td>
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<td>YIS</td>
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Introduction*

Scholarly interest in intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians has experienced a boom in recent years. This is the result of a series of converging trends in the study of both groups and their cultural productions. The present volume contributes to this developing conversation by collecting sixteen studies that investigate various intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians over the first millennium CE. These studies are both indicative of the state of the question and signal ways forward for future work on the subject. In this introduction, we outline the types of intersections that are documented in the sources as well as the various scholarly approaches to studying them.

But, first, a few words about the title of the volume: We titled the volume Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections across the First Millennium to highlight the disciplinary connections we hope to draw between fields that have increasingly become the subject of comparison. These connections span many centuries, cross diverse geographical regions, and employ different corpora and methodologies, and therefore the studies in this volume fit best under the broad rubric of intersections. The use of the term intersections is, thus, deliberate. This term is purposefully general so as to allow room for various modes of contact, interaction, etc., without biasing the conversation with terminological preconceptions from the outset. In addition, the term intersections leaves room – and points to – the fact that this volume is primarily concerned with disciplines, i.e., intersections between the field of Syriac studies and the field of Jewish studies. Also in the title, the terms Jews and Syriac Christian are inherently loaded. Perhaps most relevant for this volume, these terms connote bounded and isolated communities which in reality were certainly more porous than the sources produced by religious elites would have us believe. In fact, several contributions in this volume challenge these very categories. Nevertheless, the terms Jews and Syriac Christians – especially in contrast with the abstractions Judaism and (Syriac) Christianity – serve as the best available heuristic in our view for the lived communities who defined, defended, or defied these terms.

* An earlier version of some of this material was presented at the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (PSCO) at The University of Pennsylvania on 1 October 2015. We are grateful to Annette Yoshiko Reed and Jae Han for inviting us to workshop this material. We would also like to thank the following people for helping in various ways with this introduction: Adam Becker, Janet Timbie, and Lucas Van Rompay. In addition, Butts’s work on this volume was supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship for Assistant Professors at the Institute for Advanced Study.
We propose that intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians can be divided into two broad categories. One of the categories involves cases in which the ‘other’ is explicitly referenced. This category is primarily concerned with texts, most, but not all, of which are polemical. Within this category, there are far more examples of ‘Jews’ appearing in Syriac Christian texts than of the inverse. But, regardless, scholars are faced with the same set of interpretative questions: Is the ‘other’ in the text ‘real’ or ‘imagined’? How is the ‘other’ construed? If ‘imagined’, what is the purpose of including an ‘imagined other’? What can it tell us about the one constructing the ‘imagined other’? And, more broadly, what, if anything, can these representations of the ‘other’, whether ‘real’ or ‘imagined’, tell us about the ‘other’ as (s)he actually existed?

The second category can, at least initially, be defined negatively: It comprises cases in which the ‘other’ is not explicitly referenced. More practically, this category involves cases in which scholars look to Syriac Christian texts, history, culture, and more to understand better the historical context of Jews, or vice versa. Many examples belonging to this category, especially those related to texts, fall within research paradigms that have been increasingly problematized in recent years. Most obviously, these comparisons, which by definition lack the control of an explicit reference to the ‘other’, conjecture a connection where none is explicitly stated. In addition, these comparisons tend to posit directionality and to prioritize simple one-sided exchange over other, more complicated explanatory models. These criticisms should not, however, compel us to reject a priori either the fruitfulness of such comparisons or the utility of resorting to the texts and material culture of both Jews and Syriac Christians to understand better the broader historical context in which both these communities participated. In the next two sections, we explore in more detail these two broad categories of intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians.

‘Other’ Does Not Explicitly Appear; or, Historical Contextualization

In recent years a number of Jewish studies scholars have looked to Syriac Christianity, and especially its vast surviving literature, to help shed light on Babylonian Judaism and in particular the Babylonian Talmud. This is part of a broader trend to locate Judaism in its historical context. Since the beginning of Wissenschaft des Judentums, scholars have investigated the Greco-Roman context of Jews located in Palestine. Traditional research in this vein culminated in the mid-twentieth century with S. Lieberman’s two monumental volumes, Greek in Jewish Palestine

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1 Moss (p. 207–208 below) has independently arrived at a similar categorization.
(1942) and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (1950). Interest in the Greco-Roman context of Jews continues until today, however, and includes new and innovative approaches, as evidenced by works such as S. Schwartz’s *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?* (2010) and H. Lapin’s *Rabbis as Romans* (2012), to name only a couple of the many examples.

It is only more recently that scholars have similarly sought to contextualize Babylonian Jews and the Babylonian Talmud. By far the clearest example of this recent trend is the subfield of Irano-Talmudica. Scholars of Irano-Talmudica have sought to locate Babylonian Judaism in its Iranian context, and in particular they seek to explain passages in the Babylonian Talmud by recourse to Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts. The comparison of the Babylonian Talmud to Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature is not, however, without its problems. One of the more serious is that the surviving Middle Persian sources leave much to be desired: The earliest Middle Persian manuscripts date well into the medieval period. They thus substantially post-date the Babylonian Talmud, even if one opts for a late date for its final redaction. While Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature no doubt preserves earlier material that originally circulated orally, distinguishing between earlier and later material is not straightforward. In addition, much of the scholarship in Irano-Talmudica has suffered from methodological issues. Most basically, the parallels offered are often not compelling, with studies that, on the one hand, border on parallelomania and, on the other hand, create low bars for comparison. More broadly, most of the scholarship in Irano-Talmudica has aimed to identify parallels without asking broader, second-order questions about those parallels. These critiques should not, however, be understood as a rejection of the pursuit of such parallels or of the use of Zoroastrian Middle Persian

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7 See the discussion in Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 111–126, which does not in our view entirely redress the issues.
literature. We remain convinced that the Irano-Talmudica school will continue to enrich our understanding of Babylonian Judaism, especially as it adopts more careful methodologies for identifying and analyzing comparison, as it is more cognizant of both the potentialities and limitations of the Middle Persian sources, and as it expands its interest beyond Zoroastrian literature to other kinds of royal and elite literature produced under the Sasanian Empire.

In the wake of this turn to the Sasanian context of Babylonian Judaism, some scholars have also looked to Syriac. Two articles stand out as especially foundational in this enterprise. The first was published by I. Gafni in 1982. In this article, Gafni pointed to a number of interesting overlaps in the terminology used to describe East Syriac and rabbinic academies and suggested that other comparisons between these institutions would be fruitful. This line of inquiry was subsequently aided by advances in our understanding of both East Syriac and rabbinic academies, though much work still remains to be done. The second article was published by Sh. Naeh in 1997, in which he argued that the word ḫeruta in b. Qidd. 81b is best understood in light of Syriac ḫerūṭā ‘freedom’, with its “Janus-like duality of meaning” – to use Naeh’s words – of self-control, suppression of influence, and so even celibacy, on the one hand, and the debauchery and licentiousness that can arise from uncurbed freedom, on the other.

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8 A position adopted by Brody (“Irano-Talmudica: The New Parallelomania?”), whose critique is, however, based at least in part on models of Sasanian feudalism and rabbinic insularity that have long been, and should be, rejected.


10 See the excellent summary in Herman and Rubenstein, “Introduction,” xvii–xxx.


13 Sh. Naeh, “Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptations and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background,” in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), The Book of...
proposal illustrates the utility of turning to Syriac literature to illuminate the Babylonian Talmud, and in particular, the stories (aggada) therein. These studies of Gafni and Naeh did not, however, immediately spawn a wave of similar studies. Rather, the turn to Syriac took time to percolate. But, by the second decade of this millennium, a number of studies began to appeal to Syriac texts to shed light on Jewish Babylonian literature, and this work continues to the present.14

In fact, several contributions in this volume, including those by M. Bar-Asher Siegal (pp. 27–46), G. Herman (pp. 145–153), R. Kalmin (pp. 155–169), and J. Rubenstein (pp. 255–279), fall within this trajectory, which could, we propose, be call Syro-Talmudica.

In theory at least, Syriac studies has much to offer for the contextualization of Babylonian Judaism. Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic are both dialects of

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Aramaic, and they share much in common linguistically, from lexicon to morphology and syntax.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, Syriac Christians were present throughout the Sasanian empire, where they undoubtedly lived alongside Jews.\textsuperscript{16} A huge corpus of literature survives in Syriac, whether written by Christians in the Sasanian empire, in the Eastern Roman Empire, or elsewhere. In fact, this corpus, which consists of tens of millions of words, is larger than all other surviving ancient Aramaic texts combined. Extant Syriac texts cover a range of genres, such as biblical exegesis (including but not limited to commentaries), canons, hagiography, history, law, liturgy, magic, philosophy, poetry, medicine, and science.\textsuperscript{17} A large number of Syriac texts were written during Late Antiquity, and, what’s more, not a small number of them are preserved in manuscripts from this period.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, in many ways, the corpus of Syriac literature presents fewer methodological challenges than Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature as a comparandum for the Babylonian Talmud, though to be sure this is not a zero-sum game: Different projects and questions require different sources.

\textsuperscript{15} A point of clarification is needed: It is often remarked in this regard that Syriac is an East Aramaic dialect like Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. This is not, however, so straight-forward. Traditionally, Syriac was indeed classified as a late East Aramaic dialect along with Mandaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. This was, however, challenged by D. Boyarin, who argued that Syriac shares several innovations with the late West Aramaic dialects of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and Samaritan Aramaic (D. Boyarin, “An Inquiry into the formation of the Middle Aramaic dialects,” in Y. L. Arbeitman and A. R. Bomhard [eds.], Bono homini donum. Essays in Historical Linguistics in Memory of J. Alexander Kerns [Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1981], vol. 2, 613–649). In light of Boyarin’s article, it can no longer be maintained that Syriac is simply East Aramaic, even if it remains disputed how exactly to understand Syriac’s relationship to the other Late Aramaic dialects (for further discussion, see A. M. Butts “The Classical Syriac Language,” in D. King [ed.], The Syriac World [New York: Routledge, 2019], 224–225).

\textsuperscript{16} A new history of Syriac Christians in the Sasanian Empire is needed. The classic study of J. Labourt (Le Christianisme dans l’empire perse sous la dynastie Sassanide [Paris: Victor Lecofre, 1904]) has long been outdated, in terms of data and, even more so, in terms of methodology. Better is A. Christensen, L’Iran sous les Sassanides (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1936), but it is still in need of update. Several recent studies have opened new avenues of research on Christians in the Sasanian Empire, especially R. E. Payne, A State of Mixture. Christians, Zoroastrians and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015) and K. Smith, Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). See also the recent overview in G. Herman, “The Syriac World in the Persian Empire,” in King, The Syriac World, 134–145. We should note that the same could be said of the history of Jews in the Sasanian Empire: J. Neusner’s A History of the Jews in Babylonia, 1–5 (Leiden: Brill, 1965–1970) is in desperate need of replacement.

\textsuperscript{17} Unfortunately, there is no up-to-date history of Syriac literature. The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage (GEDSH), however, contains entries for most authors of Classical Syriac. It is now available online at https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org.

In addition, there is tangible evidence that suggests that comparison between the Babylonian Talmud and Syriac literature is promising. For instance, the Babylonian Talmud seems to be aware of some traditions from the New Testament, especially according to its Syriac version, including one passage (b. Shabb. 116a–b) with a quotation of Mt 5:17, arguably according to the Syriac Peshitta version.\(^{19}\) In addition, the various versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, which emerged at some point in Late Antiquity, possess much knowledge about Christian traditions, and at times particularly Syriac traditions, which they parody at length.\(^{20}\) Despite connections such as these between Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jews, the results of Syro-Talmudica have not been as earth-shattering as at least some scholars had initially expected. As A. Becker wrote in 2013, “With few exceptions, there are no smoking guns, no simple parallels, no Syriac tales that serve as potential sources that clearly and definitively explain obscurities in rabbinic texts.”\(^{21}\) This is, however, slowly starting to change with several more recent studies showing how Syriac literature, at least occasionally, does in fact provide the proverbial key to unlock our understanding of passages in the Babylonian Talmud.\(^{22}\) But, even when such ‘smoking guns’ – or even slightly less direct comparisons – are deemed plausible, the identification of such parallels should not become an end in itself without asking second-order questions of *how* and *why*. As P. Schäfer, among others, has argued, identifying “influence” necessarily comes with understanding how “the recipient actively digests the transmitted tradition, transforms it, and creates something new.”\(^{23}\) By avoiding the search for parallels for their own sake, Syro-Talmudica, which is still very much in its infancy, can circumvent many of the pitfalls that attended the exciting but problematic beginnings of Irano-Talmudica. We are convinced that further reflection on the methodological – if not theoretical – underpinnings of Syro-Talmudica, as well as Irano-Talmudica, will only enhance our scholarship: What are we doing? Why are we doing it? How could we do it better?\(^{24}\) Such reflection is one of the principal aims of this volume.

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21 Becker, “Polishing the Mirror,” 901.

22 See, for instance, Gross, “A Persian Anti-Martyr Act: The Death of Rabbah Bar Nahmani” as well as several contributions in this volume.


24 To quote Becker once again: “… to take advantage of these [Syriac] sources, scholars must reflect methodologically and theoretically on the nature of comparison as well as on the cultural conditions of antiquity that make comparisons historiographically productive” (Becker, “Polishing the Mirror,” 897).
While comparative scholarship often defaults to searches for ‘smoking guns’, this is hardly the only type of comparative study. Rather, Syriac literature and the Christian communities that produced it provide a corpus of texts and a range of historical and social data that are linguistically, chronologically, and geographically proximate to that of the Babylonian Talmud with which to contextualize Babylonian Jews. As a first step, we will mention here one alternative approach to the search for parallels that we find particularly promising: to investigate how Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jews (as well as other communities) responded to common stimuli within their Sasanian context. This approach does not look for influence or depend on interaction between Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jews, but rather in this approach the two groups serve as foils for one another, enabling scholars to find meaning among dissimilarities as well as similarities. Becker has used this methodology in analyzing the East Syriac School of Nisibis and the Babylonian Yeshivot. A similar methodology has been employed by Herman in his studies of the Jewish resh galuta and the East Syriac Catholics. Such an approach opens further avenues of exploration, such as studies that do not select a single community as a starting point but instead view them with a significant level of abstraction to ask broader questions about the experience of non-Iranian or non-Muslim minorities in the Sasanian and Islamic Empires, respectively.

So far in this section we have focused exclusively on how scholars of Jewish studies have looked to Syriac texts to illuminate our understanding of Babylonian Judaism. Scholars in Syriac studies have, in turn, looked to Jewish texts to further their research in Syriac Christianity. This line of enquiry has, however, developed along a different trajectory.

Syriac Christianity, as well as Christianity writ large, shares of course a common heritage with Judaism. So, perhaps it is only natural that scholars in Syriac studies have often looked to this common heritage to explain various features of Syriac Christianity, especially in the early period. The most straightforward example of this is the Old Testament Peshitta: There is now general consensus that the Old Testament Peshitta was translated directly from Hebrew, and on this basis, as well as others, most Syriac scholars maintain that the text was translated by Jews and only later – even if only slightly later – adopted by Syriac Christians.

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26 Becker, “The Comparative Study of ‘Scholasticism’ in Late Antique Mesopotamia;” idem, “Bringing the Heavenly Academy Down to Earth.”
27 See Herman, A Prince without a Kingdom and especially his contribution below (pp. 145–153).
Thus, with the Old Testament Peshiṣṭṭa, we have a part of the Syriac tradition that diachronically derives from Judaism.

This connection has been further developed in a now classic study by S. P. Brock in which he compares the Syriac phrase 'etgli 'al ‘it was revealed over’ to similar phrases in the Jewish Targumim, especially in Targumim of Palestinian provenance. According to Brock, this feature of the Syriac language first entered Syriac Christianity by way of Jewish converts (for him, the same ones who served as the pivot for the Old Testament Peshiṣṭṭa), and it is in this way that the feature was then transmitted to fourth-century Syriac authors, such as Aphraḥat (fl. 336–345) and Ephrem (d. 373), as well as beyond. For Brock, this transmission from Judaism into Syriac Christianity was not limited – and this is important – to this single linguistic feature, but rather this feature is representative of a broader pathway from Judaism into Syriac Christianity. In Brock’s words:

… it would seem best to posit the existence ... of other Christian communities in the area of northern Mesopotamia whose origin was in Judaism, and whose orientation remained decidedly Jewish in character. Such a view would seem to accord best with the evidence, of which the phrase 'etgli 'al considered here is just a single strand. It will have been from such communities that at least most of the Jewish features in fourth-century Syriac writers derive, and, one might add, it was thanks to them that narrative haggadic techniques continued to live on in Christian Syriac literature for some centuries.

According to this argument, which we will label ‘the inheritance model’, “Jewish features” such as the “narrative haggadic technique” that is found in Syriac texts like the two fifth-century metrical homilies (mēmrē) on Abraham and Isaac, to which Brock alludes here, are due to the Jewish heritage of Syriac Christianity, having been transmitted from Judaism into an early Syriac Christian community “whose origin was in Judaism” through fourth-century Syriac authors such as Aphraḥat and Ephrem up to the fifth century.

This inheritance model, if accepted, would seem to offer prima facie a good deal of explanatory power. It could, for instance, perhaps explain the many
commonalities between Ephrem’s exegesis and Jewish texts: There are so many of these commonalities in fact that Narinskaya, the most recent author of a book on the topic, labeled Ephrem “a ‘Jewish’ Sage”! The inheritance model has also been used to explain the alleged ‘Jewish’ nature of Syriac asceticism. Or, to take one final example, Rouwhorst in a frequently cited study invokes the inheritance model to explain ‘Jewish’ features of Syriac liturgy as well as relatedly of church architecture.

Several of the underlying presuppositions of the inheritance model have, however, been undermined by recent scholarship. One series of challenges arises from scholarship on “The Ways that Never Parted.” In most of its iterations, the inheritance model assumes a relatively early split between Judaism and Syriac Christianity. For Brock, for instance, there is an early point where Christian communities in northern Mesopotamia “remained decidedly Jewish in character,” but – and this is crucial to the model – this shortly gave way so that by the fourth century Christianity and Judaism were distinct, reified entities. Recent scholarship has, however, questioned whether the distinction between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ were widespread, if operative at all, before the fourth century in the Roman Empire. This is not to say of course that some authors as early as Justin Martyr (d. 165) or even Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 108) were not trying to reify a distinction between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ but only that such a reification was not pervasive at the time of their writing. It has further been suggested that the distinction between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ would have materialized even later in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire and especially in the Sasanian empire. In addition,
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