

3 Neighbour, townspeople, and fellow creature: The regulation of inter-human relationships in Palestinian rabbinic texts

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A study of the representation of the neighbour, townspeople, and fellow human being can throw light on the complexities of interpersonal relationships in ancient Jewish society and correct ancient and modern scholars' stereotypes, such as the allegation that Jews refrained from engaging with others in a similar way in which Greeks, Romans, and Christians did. Ancient Greek and Latin writers from the Hecataeus of Abdera (4th c. BCE) and Manetho (3rd c. BCE) in Egypt to the Romans Tacitus (1st-2nd c. CE) and Philostratus (2nd-3rd c. CE) often associated Jews with antisocial behaviour and *miso xenia*, that is, the fear or hatred of non-Jews.¹ They claimed that Jews adhered to an allegedly exclusive in-group socializing strategy and showed solidarity to fellow-Jews only. According to Hecataeus, Jews were "somewhat unsocial and hostile to foreigners" (Diodorus Siculus 40.3.4).² Manetho maintained that they refused to have "intercourse with any save those of their own confederacy".³ These allegations may have originated in Hellenistic Egypt but they were repeated in imperial Rome.⁴ The third-century C.E. sophist Philostratus goes so far as to claim that "Jews have long been in revolt not only against the Romans but against humanity".⁵ They allegedly erect boundaries between themselves and others and keep themselves apart. Benjamin Isaac has turned these allegations around and shown that xenophobia was rife in Greek and Roman society. Greeks and Romans saw non-Greek and non-Romans as "others" believed to be inferior to themselves. Isaac uses the term xenophobia "for various forms of ethnic prejudice and racism aimed at those seen as foreigners and immigrants, as they are commonly called today".⁶

While ancient writers associated antisocial behaviour with Diaspora Jews in Egypt and Rome, modern scholars such as Martin Hengel attributed an inward-looking perspective to post-70 CE rabbis in the Land of Israel. He contrasted rabbis with the allegedly universal perspective of Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity. According to Hengel, in Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism a "nationalistic legalism" developed that imposed "exclusive limitations" on

relations to non-Jews.⁷ Hengel even blames Jews themselves for hatred against them when writing: “The tendency toward segregation from non-Jews,..., led to ancient ‘antisemitism’”.⁸ Early Christians are presented as the successors of the prophetic belief in a universal eschatology, whereas Pharisees and rabbis allegedly prevented Judaism from becoming a world religion.⁹

Obviously, Hengel’s neat dichotomy between an allegedly universalistic Christianity and an inward-looking rabbinic Judaism is much too simplistic. In fact, it reads like a modern repetition of ancient prejudices against Jews, now directed against rabbis. Rabbinic literature and what it tells us about “others” must be understood within the context in which it was produced. Rabbinic traditions mostly deal with internal Jewish matters that were of interest to rabbinic scholars who lacked official recognition and authority within the Roman Empire.¹⁰ Rabbis had no leverage over their non-Jewish neighbours and could merely hope that a few of their fellow-Jews would follow their advice. If rabbinic traditions mostly deal with relations among Jewish neighbours, this is due to rabbis’ limited sphere of influence rather than to actual and intentional disregard for others. Yet even within the mostly Jewish focus of rabbinic texts the representation of others is much more complex than commonly assumed.¹¹

We can, in fact, identify concentric circles that move from the immediate space of the local neighbourhood to fellow human beings in other local contexts, and eventually to all humans as God’s creatures. Rabbinic references to the “neighbour”, “next”, “fellow”, or “creature” do not always specify the Jewish ethnicity or religion of the person concerned. While some halakhic and narrative contexts suggest that fellow-Jews were meant, in other contexts the meaning seems to have been broader, encompassing Jewish and non-Jewish neighbours and interlocutors. Interestingly, many traditions about neighbourly relations feature women, a phenomenon that fits their association with the private sphere of the house and its immediate neighbourhood. Men are more prominent in local work-related encounters. They are imagined as venturing further afield beyond their own neighbourhoods and hometowns.

Maintaining good neighbourly relationships

The majority of Jews in Roman Palestine would have lived in *insula* buildings that resembled crowded tenement buildings of modern times.¹² Each family, which could include more than one generation had its own living quarters, sometimes consisting of one or two small rooms only. The internal courtyard would have been shared by all residents and was used for various activities such as cooking, laundry, game playing, and handiwork.¹³ Especially in the warm summer months many family activities would have been carried out outdoors. In the evenings, residents would have met in the courtyard for meals, socialising, gossiping, and games.¹⁴ Families would have lived near their neighbours whom they met daily. They would

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overhear their neighbours' marital arguments and their children's noise through the walls, doors, and in the shared spaces. Cooking vapours and odours would invade private quarters. In such crowded living conditions privacy was difficult to maintain.¹⁵ Since the street-facing ground-floor spaces were often occupied by shops and workshops, non-resident customers, suppliers, co-workers, and business partners could invade and trespass the shared spaces. Many aspects of this housing situation of the lower and middle strata of Jewish society are reflected in Palestinian rabbinic sources.

Since men were probably occupied with work outside of the home or in adjacent workshops during daylight hours, private meetings may have happened mainly amongst female neighbours during the day. Sociologists have emphasized that neighbourhoods in which people know each other may serve as "save heavens" and create networks of mutual support.¹⁶ In defining neighbourhoods sociologically, Sharma writes: "Neighbourhood is the simplest community. In order of social importance, neighbourhood comes after the family. In it, there is a feeling of local unity".¹⁷ Outside of kinship groups such as the nuclear and extended family, "the deepest and most intimate relations are found to exist among neighbours".¹⁸ Neighbours would turn to each other for support and depend on each other's courtesy. In shared courtyards women might cook, weave, and engage in childcare activities together.

The Mishnah is clearly interested in good relations amongst neighbours. Yet it also considers the possibility that their standards of Torah observance might vary. Therefore, rabbinic rules for the lending of objects to female neighbours take different levels of purity observance into account:

"[A] A woman may lend to her neighbour [literally "friend" or "next", להברתה] who is suspected of [transgressing the rules of] *shevi'it* [i.e., Sabbatical year produce]: a sifter, a sieve, a handmill, or an oven, but she shall not sort or grind with her.

[B] The wife of a *haver* [who is strict in the observance of biblical purity rules] may lend to the wife of an *am ha-aretz* [who is careless in this regard] a sifter and a sieve; and she may sort and sift and grind flour with her. But once she has poured water [on the flour], she may not be in contact with [literally: touch] her, for one shall not strengthen the hands of [i.e., support] transgressors. And all of these [rules] they [sages] said only in the interests of peace [מפני דרכי שלום].

[C] And they strengthen the hands of [i.e., support] gentiles during the Sabbatical Year but not Israelites [who transgress the rules]. They greet them [literally: ask for their welfare/peace], all in the interests of peace" (M. Shevi'it 5:9).

This mishnah is formulated from the perspective of rabbis who observe the agricultural rules of the Sabbatical or *shmittah* year that are stated in Lev.

25:2-4 and outlined in M. Shevi'it 1:1.¹⁹ How should a woman who observes these rules behave toward a neighbour who is suspected of transgressing them or is less careful in her observance? The first part of the mishnah concerns a family that observes and one that transgresses *shmittah* rules; the second part the family of a *haber*, who is particularly strict about the observance of agricultural laws, and an *am ha-aretz*, who is less strict.²⁰ Partial observance based on a lack of detailed knowledge rather than outright negligence seems to be assumed here. In the first case (transgressor) the lending of certain objects that can be used for producing food and other purposes is permitted but the observant woman may not engage in any activities that might lead to the preparation of prohibited food.

In the case of a strictly observant family that lives next to the family of an *am ha-aretz*, the woman may lend the smaller household items of a sifter and sieve to her neighbour and even help her in food preparation. This rule is rather remarkable, even if some or most *am ha-aretz* families may have been assumed to follow some agricultural rules.²¹ It seems that intentional transgression is distinguished from mere ignorance and lack of trustworthiness here. Complicity in the pouring of water on the flour would constitute a step too far however, since the dough would then become subject to uncleanness. Any contact with the wife of an *am ha-aretz* must be avoided at this stage, since it would mean lending support to a transgression. At the end of these two sections, the purpose of these lenient rules is explicitly stated: to maintain peace between neighbours, that is, to preserve the harmony of the neighbourhood, negotiating different levels of Torah observance.²²

The third category referred to in this mishnah is the gentile. Since the same expressions are used, namely, to “strengthen the hands” or support the gentile “in the interests of peace” and since the text follows the discussion of neighbourly interactions, a similar neighbourly context seems to have been envisioned here. During the Sabbatical Year there is nothing that may prevent Jewish women from helping and being friendly to their gentile neighbours, because gentiles were not subject to the observance of Sabbatical Year rules. Since they were not obliged to observe them, they could not transgress them and incur impurity. An important phenomenon already observed by Mira Balberg is evident here: rather than declaring all gentiles impure and prohibiting Jews from having contact with them, “the rabbis unequivocally assert that Gentiles *cannot* contract and convey the impurities mentioned in the Priestly Code”.²³ Balberg emphasises that “one of the most efficient ways of creating boundaries between different groups is by using rhetorics of impurity, identifying outsiders as incorrigibly polluting”.²⁴ In the mishnah discussed here rabbis try to regulate social contacts between different types of Jewish neighbours but are entirely permissive about contacts between observant Jews and non-Jews. Even in the case of different levels of Jewish observance “the interests of peace” within the neighbourhood are their explicitly stated priority.

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Relations between female neighbours are also addressed in midrashic narratives. A story in Leviticus Rabbah 5:8 establishes a proper protocol for conducting a good neighbourly relationship:

“R. Aha said: There is a woman who knows how to borrow and there is a woman who does not know how to borrow. The one who knows how to borrow goes to her neighbour [מגירתא, literally: fellow resident, housemate], [finds] the door open [and] knocks on it. She says to her: Peace be upon you, my neighbour. How are you doing? How is your husband doing? How are your children doing? Is it convenient or not convenient [for me to come in]? Do you have such-and-such a utensil that you could give me? She will say to her: Yes. The one who does not know how to borrow goes to her neighbour. [Although] the door is closed, she opens it. She says to her: Do you have such-and-such a utensil that you could give me? She [the neighbour] says to her: No”. (Leviticus Rabbah 5:8).²⁵

In Leviticus Rabbah, this narrative is followed by a similar one about a tenant and his landlord. Both narratives are parables used to explain Israelites’ relationship to God. According to the introductory statement attributed to R. Shimon b. Yohai, “How skillful are Israel, for they know how to petition their Creator”. Although the text is stylised, the two forms of approaching one’s neighbour presented by the parable may be based on everyday life experience, where friendliness towards one’s neighbour would eventually pay off.

This idea is also expressed in Graeco-Roman texts. In Aristophanes’ play *Frogs*, a courteous approach is recommended: “... if a man said to his neighbour: Lend me a dish and, if you please, a saucer”, this phrasing is called “the best choice of words” (*Frogs* 1158). Xenophon has one of his interlocutors ask: “Do you want to please your neighbour, for instance, so that he may kindle a fire for you at your need, may support you in prosperity, and in case of accident or failure may be ready to hold out a helping hand?” (*Memorabilia* 2.2.12). In Plautus’ play *Casina*, Cleostrata is about to visit her neighbour when she sees her coming out of her door, realising “I’ve not started for my call at a convenient time” (*Casina* 2.1). In his play *Rudens* (*The Fisherman’s Rope*), Plautus has Ampelisca consider asking her neighbour for some water. When approaching the door, she shouts: “Hello there, is there anyone in the cottage? Is anyone going to open this door? Will anyone come out?” (*Rudens* 2.3). This behaviour is considered rude and the neighbour subsequently asks: “Who is it so furiously making an attack upon our door?” (*ibid.* 2.4). Even when Ampelisca changes her behaviour, the neighbour tells her that her visit is inconvenient at that time: “I’ll receive you with a welcome, if you come in the evening, by-and-by, just such as I could like; for just now I’ve no means to receive you, a damsel, thus early in the morning...” (*ibid.*).

These passages suggest that in antiquity a certain etiquette had to be followed when paying unexpected visits to one's neighbours. Rude behaviour and visits at inconvenient times were criticised and politeness recommended. Although some of the Graeco-Roman writers may have villa owners of the upper strata of society in mind, one may assume that in the crowded conditions of courtyard buildings courtesy toward one's neighbours would have been as significant, if not even more so.

Friendly relations between neighbours could easily turn sour, as another story in *Leviticus Rabbah* suggests:

“There was a case concerning a [woman] who went to kneed [dough] with a neighbour [מגירתה] and there were three denars tied up in her cloak.²⁶ She took them and put them before her. And when she was sitting and arranging [the dough], they became mixed in the loaf. She searched [for the coins] but could not find them. She said to the neighbour: Have you found three denars? This neighbour had three sons. She said to her: May this son be buried, if I found them. And she buried him. At a later time she said to her: Have you found three denars? She said to her: May my second son be buried, if I found them. And she buried him. At a later time she said to her: Have you found three denars? She said to her: May my third son be buried if I found them. And she buried him. She [the owner of the denars] said [to herself]: Should I not go and offer condolences to this neighbour? She took a loaf [of bread with her] and sat down [in her neighbour's home]. When she cut it, three denars fell out. And this is what people say: Whether guiltless or guilty, do not get entangled in oaths!” (*Leviticus Rabbah* 6:3).²⁷

Elsewhere in *Leviticus Rabbah*, stealing is strictly prohibited. According to a statement attributed to R. Yohanan, “anyone who robs his fellow [חבירו] even of the value of *perutah*. they [sages] reckon it to him as if he killed him” (*Lev. R.* 22:6). Neighbours who lived close together and frequented their neighbours' living quarters might easily be suspected of theft, so a certain amount of mutual trust was necessary to maintain a good relationship.

The two female neighbours of the midrashic story remain on good terms with each other throughout the story. They bake loaves of bread together and meet repeatedly. When her neighbour's sons die, the woman who has suffered a financial loss decides to deliver her condolences. The loss of the money does not damage their relationship. The first woman's questions to her neighbour are presented as legitimate. They are questions rather than statements of suspicion. It is the neighbour's oaths to her innocence that are criticised at the end.²⁸ Although she was, in fact, innocent, she lost her sons because her oaths threatened their fate. The first woman's regaining of her money is linked to her good neighbourly behaviour. She happened to take

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that loaf as a gift that contained the coins. The assumption is that the women baked many loaves of bread together and afterwards divided them amongst themselves. Who would get the loaf with the coins would have been determined by chance. Therefore, the neighbour's oath is presented as an exaggerated reaction here.

As we have seen, many of the stories about neighbourhood relations concern women. In the crowded conditions of insula buildings some spaces were shared, and women would have conducted activities together, such as the baking of bread. The close spatial contact and joint activities would have necessitated the maintenance of good neighbourly relationships of mutual support and the sharing of foodstuffs and cooking utensils. Different levels of Torah observance could challenge neighbourly cooperation to such an extent that gentile neighbours were sometimes preferred to Jewish neighbours whose purity observance was lax.

Relationships amongst local townspeople

The next level of social relationships was with people who were not neighbours but with whom one might interact on a more or less regular basis in daily life. These people were imagined as locals who lived in the same village, town, or city as oneself. The contexts envisioned by the texts are townspeople, work mates, business partners, and farm owners. The term *חבר* is usually used for this category of individuals. In most cases, “fellow” is a better translation than “friend”, since friendship involved emotional intimacy and was delimited to status-equals.²⁹ There is no ethnic or religious demarcation of who could be considered a “fellow”. The encounters mentioned in rabbinic traditions mostly concern fellow-Jews, however. Rabbinic case stories provide decisions for cases amongst Jewish litigants. Cases between Jews and Romans would have been dealt with by Roman jurists and decided in accordance with Roman law. The issues dealt with in the Mishnah usually concern specifically Jewish matters such as the observance of the Seventh Year, the separation of tithes, and the payment of the shekel tax. Accordingly, the local “fellow” envisioned by rabbis was usually another Jewish male. While female neighbours figure prominently in the texts about neighbours above, local collaborators, business partners, and other farmers were imagined as male householders whom one encountered in the broader sphere of the town or village. Perhaps rabbis imagined males to venture out further and meet more frequently in marketplaces and streets. Males were also associated with certain types of work, such as that of the travelling merchant and pedlar, while women are presented as sharing household activities.

The distinction between neighbour and townsman is explicitly mentioned in Mishnah Sheqelim 1:7. “He who pays the shekel [tax] on behalf of a poor person or on behalf of his neighbour [שכנו] or on behalf of his townsman [בן עיריו], he is exempt [from surcharges], but if he [did so by

means of] a loan, he is liable". The poor person may be distinguished here because his relationship to the householder who pays the shekel tax for him was considered irrelevant. The neighbour and townsman, on the other hand, stood in a relatively close spatial relationship to the householder from whose perspective this mishnah is formulated.

It is important to stress the connection between spatial and social closeness and distance here. In antiquity, when neither telephones nor the internet existed and the use of letters was very rare, the closest relationships would be maintained with those who lived close to oneself, that is, the members of one's household, one's neighbours, and fellow-townspersons, whom one could meet on a more or less daily basis. The majority of Jews in Roman Palestine probably maintained few social relations to people outside of their local space. Most Palestinian Jews worked in agriculture or crafts.³⁰ Farmers, whether small-holders or tenants, were linked to the land they cultivated. Crafts were carried out in local households and workshops.³¹ Neither farmers nor craftsmen would usually travel to regional markets themselves. The most mobile profession was therefore that of the peddler and travelling merchant, who bought local produce and products and transported them to markets and customers.³² In rabbinic texts some rabbis are presented as more mobile than others, covering longer distances. As I have suggested elsewhere, these rabbis may have been involved in inter-regional business themselves.³³ This means that most people's social and professional interactions would have been confined to the neighbourhood, village, or town they lived in.

The local population would have rarely consisted of Jews only. The cities of Roman Palestine were multi-ethnic in late antiquity, consisting of Jews, Samaritans, Christians, Greeks, Romans and possibly also members of other ethnicities and cultures. Yet ethnic and cultural diversity was not limited to urban environments. Isaac and Dauphin have argued that most villages and small towns of Roman Palestine would have been multi-ethnic as well: "The best explanation, they argue, is that villages with a homogeneous Jewish or Christian population were the exception rather than the rule (...)."³⁴ In some Galilean villages Jewish inhabitants may have constituted the majority, elsewhere, e.g., in the Transjordan region, they may have been a minority. At least from a literary point of view, the fellow townsperson mentioned in rabbinic texts remains ethnically and religiously undefined. Whether (s)he was imagined as Jewish or non-Jewish depended on the topics discussed in the texts. Did the topics concern Jews only? Would rabbis' halakhic regulations (perhaps indirectly) affect non-Jews as well?

An interesting mishnaic discussion concerns relations amongst farmers in the Sabbatical Year:

"[A] At first they [sages] were saying: A person may collect wood, stones, and weeds from his own [field] just as he may collect from [the

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field] of his fellow [during the Sabbatical Year], the larger [the pieces] the better.

[B] When the transgressors [of Sabbatical Year rules] multiplied, they ordained that this one may collect from [the field] of that one and that one from [the field] of this one, if it was not for [mutual] benefit. And it goes without saying that it excludes maintenance for them” (M. Shevi’it 4:1).

This mishnah talks about the collection of various types of rubbish from fields during the Sabbatical Year, when farmers were not allowed to sow seeds or eat Sabbatical Year produce. Sages allowed farmers to collect wood, stones, and weed for other than agricultural purposes, e.g., for building projects or to kindle fires. The regulations are distinguished chronologically here. In earlier times (before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE?) when Sabbatical Year observance was still widely maintained, a farmer was permitted to collect such material from his own and his fellow-farmer’s fields. In later times, when Sabbatical Year observance had generally decreased, collecting from one’s own field was no longer allowed, since rabbis suspected farmers of preparing their fields for agricultural use that way. A farmer could merely collect rubbish from another local farmer’s field, under the condition that the farmers had not agreed to do each other a favour by clearing their fields.

The mishnah addresses the issue of benefitting from another farmer’s field in a halakhically permissible way, while criticizing a possible collaboration for mutual benefit, if this benefit transgresses agricultural laws of the Bible. Whereas the fellow-farmer in the first rule could be either Jewish or non-Jewish (there is no reason why a Jewish farmer should not collect rubbish from a non-Jewish farmer’s field during the Sabbatical Year, if he has the latter’s permission), the second rule reckons with both farmers being obliged to observe *shmittah* rules, that is, they are both imagined as Jewish.

The amoraic Midrash collections Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah also contain references to fellow-workers and fellow-craftsmen. For example, a statement in Genesis Rabbah contrasts the craftsman, who allegedly hates his fellow-craftsman, to sages, who love their fellow-scholars (Gen. R. 32:2): “R. Tanhuma in the name of R. Yudah, R. Menahem in the name of R. [E]leazar: There is no human being who loves his fellow craftsman [בן אוימנתו], [but] the sage loves his fellow-craftsman, like R. Hiyya [who loves the colleague friends] of R. Hiyya [and] R. Hoshayah those of R. Hoshayah” (Gen. R. 32:2). Whereas relations between craftsmen are based on competition, those between sages were believed to be based on empathy and support.³⁵ What sages shared with craftsmen was an expertise in a particular area, but they differed in the commercial nature of the latter’s activity. To what extent the alleged harmony between Palestinian fellow-scholars existed in real life remains an open question.³⁶

Respect for other human creatures

The widest radius of interpersonal relationships rabbis dealt with are relations with fellow human beings. Since the biblical creation story suggests that humans were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), all humans were considered God's creatures and required to respect each other. Studies of the image of the non-Jew in rabbinic sources have usually focused on tractate Avodah Zarah in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmuds, which deals with "idolatry", that is, Graeco-Roman religious practices. In a recent study of Bavli Avodah Zarah Mira Beth Wasserman has argued that this tractate "engages a much broader set of concerns about relationships between Jews and non-Jews".³⁷ It depicts Jews and non-Jews as "commercial partners, religious rivals, political foes, masters and slaves, subjects and kings, friends, and lovers", that is, as engaged with each other in a wide range of contexts and activities.³⁸ Therefore one cannot talk about *the* rabbinic image of the non-Jew, as if there were a homogeneous presentation of non-Jews in rabbinic sources. The way in which non-Jews are depicted differs from one context to another. Concerning particular issues, such as, for example, attendance of non-Jewish fairs, a variety of rabbinic views existed. From the rabbinic perspective, the imaginary boundaries between Jews and non-Jews were blurred.

In the Avot tractates of the Mishnah rabbis deal with fellow human beings from a theological and ethical perspective. This tractate is very different from the rest of the Mishnah in its focus on moral rather than halakhic issues. Günter Stemberger therefore thinks that the tractate was composed at a much later time than the other tractates, perhaps as late as the fifth century CE.³⁹ Whether early or late, the focus is clearly on rabbinic scholarship here. Schäfer speaks of "[t]he self-confident rabbinic bias of Pirque Avot".⁴⁰ What is therefore astonishing is the frequent reference to fellow human beings in this tractate.

A few examples must suffice here. According to a statement attributed to R. Yehoshua, "The evil eye, the evil inclination, and hatred of [one's fellow] creatures bring a person out of the world", that is, (s)he will die a premature death (M. Avot 2:11). In another statement R. Haninah recommends praying for the welfare of the government whose rules prevent men from killing each other (M. Avot 3:2: איש את רעהו). Whereas these rules condemn violence and bad treatment of other humans, some rules encourage good inter-human relationships. For example, a statement attributed to R. Hanina b. Dosa suggests: "Everyone from whom the spirit of [fellow human] creatures [רוח הבריות] derives satisfaction, the spirit of God derives satisfaction from him" (M. Avot 3:10). The mishnah attributes to Ben Zoma the saying: "In the world to come, who is honoured? He who honours his [fellow human] creatures [הבריות], as it is said: 'For those who honour me I will honour...' (1 Sam. 2:30)" (M. Avot 4:1). Since humans are created in the image of God, honouring another human being is reckoned as

honouring God himself. The fact that the term בריות, “creatures” is used in these ethical statements indicates that rabbis had any other human being in mind, not just disciples of sages or fellow-Jews. In contrast to the neighbour and townsman discussed above, the scope is much broader here. Other humans, irrespective of their ethnic or religious origins or spatial or social closeness deserve honour and respectful treatment because, as God’s creatures, they reflect God himself.

This notion is also expressed in amoraic Midrashim. In Genesis Rabbah 24:7 R. Aqiva is said to have quoted the biblical rule, “And you shall love your next [or: neighbour, לרעך] like yourself” (Lev. 19:18) and declared it a greater principle than other commandments (כלל גדול ממנו). This is followed by the anonymous continuation: “So that you do not say: Because I have been shamed, let my fellow [or: neighbour, הברוי] be shamed”. The passage ends with the following comment attributed to R. Tanhuma: “If you do so, know whom you put to shame, ‘In the image of God He made him’ (Gen. 1:27)”. In this midrash the two most significant biblical verses concerning ancient Jewish anthropology and interhuman relationships are combined. Neither the biblical texts nor the rabbinic discussions are limited to next-door neighbours, townspeople, or fellow-Jews. The fundamental principle that all humans are created in the image of God is presented as the guiding principle of interhuman relations here. The “other” is not only like oneself but also like God. Hence, treating him/her in the same way as one might be treated by others is not sufficient, especially if the treatment was negative. Reminding readers of the Divine origin of all human beings sets up a very high moral standard.

Interestingly, Mishnah Avot also attributes to R. Aqiva the statement: “Beloved is the human being [אדם], for (s)he was created in the image [of God]. [It was an expression of] overabundant love that it was made known to him [i.e., the human being] that (s)he was created in the image [of God], as it is said: ‘In the image of God He made the human being’ [Gen. 1:27]” (M. Avot 3:14). Knowledge about this correlation or mirror image between humans and the Divine is presented as a privilege here. The fundamental idea of the creation story, namely, that humans are created in the image of God, elevates all social relations to a theological level and rules out mistreatment of others, if properly observed.

Conclusions

Palestinian rabbinic texts that try to regulate interpersonal relationships can neither be generalised as inward-looking and exclusivist nor as universalist. Such categories do not take the specific circumstances the texts relate to into account. Whether relations to next-door neighbours, townspeople, or human beings at large are addressed depends on the thematic issues the individual texts are dealing with. Good relations amongst neighbours and townspeople were of major concern to rabbis. Most ancient Jews’ social

networks would have been confined to their local neighbourhood, town, and village. Spatial closeness and social intimacy would have been inter-linked. This has become evident in stories about collaboration and mutual support among neighbourly women, whose residential proximity required them to maintain good neighbourly relationships.

In Palestinian rabbinic discussions of neighbourly relations and interactions with local collaborators and business partners the ethnicity and religion of the “other” remains unspecified unless it is halakhically relevant. This was the case if collaboration involved -- or could be regarded as participation in -- pagan religious practices, such as, for example, participation in the building of a pagan Temple or the conduct of business during pagan festivals.⁴¹ A context in which the non-Jewish Roman identity of the “other” becomes relevant are encounters with Roman soldiers and government officials on the road, who are often presented as potentially dangerous.⁴² Ordinary non-Jews, on the other hand, are hardly ever specified in Palestinian rabbinic sources except for the discussion of contacts with so-called “idol worshippers” in tractate Avodah Zarah of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmuds.⁴³

Since rabbis created halakhic rules for their fellow-Jews and could expect only Jews to adhere to their guidelines, most of the issues discussed in rabbinic sources concern Jewish neighbours and townspeople only. This is the case, for example, with Sabbatical Year regulations discussed above. As far as other areas are concerned, such as the treatment of labourers and slaves, or business relations with donkey drivers or shipping agents, the ethnicity and religion of the “other” would be irrelevant and is therefore not specified. Although rabbis would have encountered slaves in the houses of the wealthy and in the marketplace, their halakhic rules for freeborn Israelites did not apply to them. Texts about slaves therefore appear in the framework of slave-master relationships rather than in neighbourhood stories.

We may assume that especially from the third century onwards, rabbis who lived in cities would have had regular business relations and perhaps also social interactions with non-Jews in daily life. Rabbis also frequented Roman bathhouses, where they encountered other bathers from a variety of backgrounds.⁴⁴ In all likelihood, such relations would have been friendly and courteous. Rabbinic texts suggest that rabbis accommodated various aspects of their Graeco-Roman environment. The common scholarly view nowadays is therefore very different from that of Martin Hengel in the 1970s, outlined in the introduction above. While rabbis created a specifically Jewish alternative to Graeco-Roman intellectual culture, they were deeply embedded in that culture themselves.⁴⁵

Two biblical notions constituted the guiding principle in inter-human relations: the idea that humans were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and the commandment to “love your next [or: neighbour] like yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Rabbis understood these notions in a “universalistic” way, that is, they believed that they applied to all human beings, irrespective of their

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religious or ethnic backgrounds. They led to an anthropology that was grounded in theology: the treatment of other humans was considered a direct reflection of one's relationship to God.

Notes

- 1 See Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 167-8; Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 450-1. The texts are introduced and translated in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Science, 1974–1984).
- 2 According to R. Doran, “Pseudo-Hecataeus (Second Century B.C. - First Century A.D.: A New Translation and Introduction”, in: *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (2nd ed. Peabody, MA: Hendricksen Publishers, 2011), 912, Hecataeus mentioned this behaviour in the context of Egypt before the Exodus: “The explanation of strange customs was part of hellenistic ethnography...”.
- 3 Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 19 and 167.
- 4 Louis H. Feldman, “Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World”, in: *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*, ed. David Berger (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 30-1.
- 5 Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 5.33 (translated by F.C. Conybeare, Loeb Classical Library), referred to by Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 451. Isaac notes that Philostratus attributes this view to the Stoic Euphrates.
- 6 Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 38.
- 7 Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, two volumes in one (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1974), 309.
- 8 *Ibid.* 306.
- 9 *Ibid.* 309.
- 10 That rabbinic literature was produced by rabbis for scholars of future generations, that is, the intended reader was a rabbi or disciple himself, see David Kraemer, “The Intended Reader as a Key to Interpreting the Bavli”, *Prooftexts* 13 (1993) 125-40.
- 11 See already Christine Hayes, “The ‘Other’ in Rabbinic Literature”, in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 243: “... the self-other dyad is by no means stable or constant” but based on specific historical, cultural, and political circumstances and diverse within rabbinic society itself.
- 12 For *insula* buildings in Sepphoris see Rebecca Martin Nagy, *Sepphoris in Galilee: Crosscurrents of Culture* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996) 33; in Capernaum: Jack Finnegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 97-8, 107-9; Santiago Guijarro, “The Family in First-Century Galilee”, in: *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 52.
- 13 Katharina Galor, “Domestic Architecture”, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 433: “The courtyards provided space for wells, drinking

- troughs, and structures for animals, and bathhouses; as well as for activities such as cooking, grinding wheat for flour, washing clothes, and eating (...)."
- 14 See also Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 149 on gossip.
 - 15 Catherine Hezser, "'Privat' und 'öffentlich' im Talmud Yerushalmi und in der griechisch-römischen Antike", in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol.1, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 528-9, 541-3, with examples.
 - 16 Ellen Van Beckhoven and Ronald Van Kempen, "Social Effects of Urban Restructuring", in: *Life in Poverty Neighbourhoods: European and American Perspectives*, ed. Jürgen Friedrichs, George C. Galster, and Sako Musterd (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 59.
 - 17 Rajendra K. Sharma, *Fundamentals of Sociology* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers), 81-2.
 - 18 Ibid. 82.
 - 19 On rabbinic agricultural law see Jacob Neusner, *The Law of Agriculture in the Mishnah and the Tosefta: Translation, Commentary, Theology*, 3 vols (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), where several tannaitic texts about the Sabbatical Year are presented and discussed.
 - 20 On the categories of the *haver* and *am ha-aretz* see Aharon Oppenheimer, *The 'Am Ha-Aretz. A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Rocco Bernasconi, "Meanings, Function and Linguistic Usages of the Term 'am ha-aretz' in the Mishnah", *Revue des Etudes Juives* 170 (2011) 399-428.
 - 21 See the discussion in b. Gittin 61a.
 - 22 The emphasis on peaceful relations also appears in the Leviticus Rabbah texts discussed by Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003) 55-6.
 - 23 Mira Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 125.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 On this story see also Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 48-9.
 - 26 According to Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Talmudim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horev, 1903, reprint), 1543, a שׂוֹשֵׁפֶתָה was a "coarse cloak, used also as a bed sheet". This may indicate the woman's poverty and highlight the value of the coins for her.
 - 27 On this story see also Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 14-16.
 - 28 See also *ibid.* 15.
 - 29 On friendship in rabbinic texts see Catherine Hezser, "Rabbis and Other Friends: Friendship in the Talmud Yerushalmi and in Graeco-Roman Literature", in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 189-254.
 - 30 Zeev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1994).
 - 31 On the household economy see Alexei Sivertsev, "The Household Economy", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 229-45; on crafts see Uzi Leibner, "Arts and Crafts, Manufacture and Production", *ibid.* 264-96.
 - 32 On merchants and markets see Ben-Zion Rosenfeld and Joseph Menirav, *Markets And Marketing in Roman Palestine* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005); Jack Pastor, "Trade, Commerce, and Consumption", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford

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- University Press, 2010), 297–307, *ibid.* 301-2 on the *rochel* or travelling salesman in rabbinic sources.
- 33 Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 409-39.
- 34 David Goodblatt, “Population Structure and Jewish Identity”, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109, with references.
- 35 The notion that every man hates his fellow craftsman is also expressed in Gen. R. 19:4 and may be based on a popular proverb.
- 36 Richard Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia Between Persia and Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88, has argued that competition amongst rabbis was much more pronounced in Babylonia than in Roman Palestine.
- 37 Mira Beth Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud After the Humanities* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 3.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 39 Günter Stemberger, “Mischna Avot: Frühe Weisheitsschrift, pharisäisches Erbe oder spätrabbinische Bildung?” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96 (2005) 243-58.
- 40 Peter Schäfer, “Rabbis and Priests, or: How to Do Away with the Glorious Past of the Sons of Aaron”, in: *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Gregg Gardner and Kevin Lee Osterloh (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 169.
- 41 Temples: See the discussion in Martin Jacobs, “Pagane Tempel in Palästina -- rabbinische Aussagen im Vergleich mit archäologischen Funden”, in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 155-8. Festivals: Emmanuel Friedheim, *Rabbanisme et Paganisme en Palestine romaine. Étude historique des Realia tamudiques (Ier - IVeme siecles)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 313-28. Fritz Graf, “Roman Festivals in Syria Palaestina”, in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 435-52.
- 42 Catherine Hezser, “Strangers on the Road: Otherness, Identification and Disguise in Rabbinic Travel Tales of Late Roman Palestine”, in: *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 239-53.
- 43 See Giuseppe Veltri, “Römische Religion an der Peripherie des Reiches. Ein Kapitel rabbinischer Rhetorik”, in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 81–138.
- 44 See Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 128-30.
- 45 See Catherine Hezser, “Rabbis as Intellectuals in the Context of Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Christian Scholasticism”, in: *Scholastic Culture in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras: Greek, Latin, and Jewish*, ed. Sean Adams (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2019), 169-85.

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