

wohlbekannte Debatte aufgerufen, die mit den Hauptthemen des Bandes aber nichts zu tun hat. In der Tat: »Jüdische Theologie kann sich aus dieser Frage heraushalten.« (Ebd.) Warum sie dann am Ende dieses Bandes überhaupt aufgeworfen wird, erschließt sich nicht recht.

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**Labovitz, Gail: Massekhet Mo'ed Qatan.** Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021. XIII, 532 S. = A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, II/10. Lw. EUR 149,00. ISBN 9783161582820.

With more than five hundred pages, this most recent volume in Tal Ilan's series of feminist commentaries on the Babylonian Talmud is the second most voluminous so far, although the tractate it is based on is one of the shortest. This phenomenon already indicates the richness and potential of the Babylonian Talmud for feminist inquiry that is alert to direct and indirect gender-related issues which may not be noticeable through a cursory reading of the text. The volume turns out to be a veritable treasure trove of interesting observations and analyses that touch upon topics such as slavery, purity, marriage, and excommunication which are relevant but not limited to women's issues. As such, it is a useful and necessary companion to the reading of the tractate by anyone interested in rabbinic culture and ancient Judaism.

The volume by Gail Labovitz follows the general structure of Ilan's feminist commentaries, of which nine have been published to date. An introduction to the tractate and the applied methodology is followed by a commentary on selected passages in the Mishnah (51–118) and the Babylonian Talmud (119–481) that the author considers relevant in relation to women's issues and worthy of being examined from a feminist perspective. The decision to first discuss the Mishnah and then the Gemara (the discussion is not limited to the previously selected Mishnah passages) is probably meant to avoid reading the tannaitic texts in light of the talmudic discussion, something that is difficult to avoid. The citation of the Hebrew/Aramaic text is followed by the author's own translation. Manuscript variants and parallels in other rabbinic documents are duly noted. Several more or less long excursions – e. g., on lamenting, cosmetics, women and time-bound commandments, the patriarch's female slave, the question whether marital matches are divinely ordained, the presentation of the Shekhinah in the Bavli – enrich the discussion.

Tractate Mo'ed Qatan (»Minor Festivals«) deals with the intermediate days of multi-day festivals (e. g., Passover and Sukkot) that are considered less sacred than the first and last days. For rabbis the main question was which activities should be prohibited or permitted on these days. Rabbinic discourse addressed aspects such as the intention of the practitioner and the urgency and relevance of the labour for the holiday itself. In her selection of passages that merit a gender studies based analysis, L. was »guided by feminist criteria« (13), such as explicit references to women or women's disappearance from particular versions of the text, the rabbinic construction of gender, matters concerning sexuality and family relationships. In connection with Mo'ed Qatan, the following questions arise: Are women included in the religious obligation to »rejoice«? To what extent were women's labours restricted? How do other gendered activities (e. g., lamenting and the use of cosmetics) feature in the text? To what extent are women present or absent in the discourse? Are they mentioned only when the halakhic discussion deals with a gendered topic? Especially interesting are rabbinic acknowledgments that women might act on their own agency, that impure women might read in the Torah, and that slave

women of the patriarch's household could be sufficiently learned to quote from the Torah (and possibly also tannaitic traditions). Attention to details that may otherwise be overlooked leads to observations that are relevant for rabbinic culture in general, not only for women's studies or the understanding of this specific tractate.

L. views the Mishnah and Babylonian Talmud tractate Mo'ed Qatan within the context of classical rabbinic literature, frequently referring to parallels and variants in the Tosefta and in the Talmud Yerushalmi. Such parallels are sometimes presented in synoptic columns and compared in greater detail. For example, special attention is given to the differences between the Babylonian (b. M.Q. 17a) and Palestinian (y. M.Q. 3:1, 81d) versions of a story about a female slave who observes a man striking a boy (excessively) and threatens him with excommunication. In the Bavli, the slave woman is a member of the patriarch's household who cites from the Bible and confronts an ordinary anonymous male. Rather than being evidence of a »blurring of the status differential« (253), however, the story seems to follow the Bavli's pattern of elevating the status of rabbis' slaves in accordance with the principle that »the slave of a scholar [...] is like a scholar« (b. A.Z. 39a). Another story (b. M.Q. 16a–b) about a woman in a seated position who »did not bow before« a disciple of sages might have benefited from a longer discussion of disrespectful behaviour in Palestinian stories about status-different males (Gen. R. 33 is mentioned on p. 243). The woman's behaviour towards a disciple of sages in the Babylonian story resembles disciples of sages' disrespectful behaviour towards their rabbinic masters in Palestinian narratives. As L. observes, no mitigating circumstances are associated with the woman in contrast to the male offenders.

Relevant Graeco-Roman analogies are mentioned to help explain certain Mishnah texts. In connection with m. M.Q. 1:7, which rules that one shall not marry women on the intermediate days of festivals »because it is happiness for him«, L. refers to the Roman custom of avoiding weddings of first-time brides on festival days and to Plutarch, who remarks that »maidens are grieved over marrying«. Since this mishnaic formulation focuses on the experience of men rather than women, however, she suggests that rabbis prohibited marriages on Mo'ed Qatan because they considered them commercial enterprises unsuitable for being conducted on holidays. Less common than references to the Roman context are references to Persian and Zoroastrian culture in connection with the Babylonian Talmud. A discussion of more Zoroastrian texts concerning women would have benefitted the discussion and matched the Persian milieu in which Babylonian rabbis lived.

One of the problems of the feminist commentaries is their selective focus, which might lead to a piece-meal treatment of the talmudic text, delving into specific details while overlooking or neglecting the gist of the *sugya* at hand. To some extent, the relatively short general introductions enable a broader perspective on the halakhic problem the text addresses. But they are too short to do justice to the complexities of those parts of the rabbinic discussion that do not relate to women specifically. Therefore, the feminist commentary may be most useful as a companion and supplement to a reading of the talmudic text as a whole, with the support of other traditional and modern commentaries.

This volume is an excellent example of the fecundity of even one of the shortest tractates of the Babylonian Talmud for feminist and gender-based explorations. Hopefully, it will inspire its readers to engage in such analysis themselves and to expand the project beyond the Bavli to other rabbinic compilations.