

Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements

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Christine Hayes (eds.)

The Faces of Torah

Studies in the Texts and Contexts
of Ancient Judaism
in Honor of Steven Fraade

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Introduction

Steven Fraade, the Mark Taper Professor of the History of Judaism at Yale University, was born in New York City in 1949. He entered Brown University in 1966 as a physics major, and left in 1970 with a degree in religious studies, after taking courses with Salo Baron and Jacob Neusner. Steven spent a number of years after college in Israel, first as a member of the group that re-established Kibbutz Gezer, then at Kibbutz Hulda.

Upon returning from Israel, Steven took classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary, then, in 1974, entered the PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania in the Department of Oriental Studies, Near-Eastern Division. His studies there—especially under Jeffrey Tigay (Hebrew Bible), Barry Eichler (Ancient Near Eastern legal literature), Robert Kraft (Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity), Zvi Rin (Aramaic), R. E. A. Palmer (Roman History), and most importantly Judah Goldin (Rabbinics), his advisor—shaped Steven's academic career. He also took advantage of the presence of numerous visiting scholars from Israel to develop ties with Israeli academia, another determinative influence on his scholarly trajectory. Steven's dissertation would serve as the foundation of his first book, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Post-Biblical Interpretation*. Finally, and of no little moment, Steven's stint in graduate school also yielded his marriage, in 1979, to Ellen Cohen. They are the parents of Shoshana, Tani, and Liora.

After graduating from Penn in 1980, Steven took up a position in the history of early Judaism in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University, which has profited from his presence ever since. In his early years at Yale, Steven benefited from the support and guidance of senior colleagues in Religious Studies and beyond, among them Hans Frei, William Hallo, Geoffrey Hartman, Bentley Layton, Wayne Meeks, and Franz Rosenthal. The poststructuralist moment at Yale in the 1980s, which drew attention to the performative aspect of texts, helped shape Steven's second book, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy*, which was published in 1991 and won the National Jewish Book Award for Scholarship. Together with his colleagues in the Judaic Studies Program and beyond, Steven has made Yale's Religious Studies Department a major international destination for the study of Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism.

Steven has contributed in major and enduring ways to our understanding of the legal literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the "halakhic midrashim" of the early rabbinic movement, the dynamics of ancient scholasticism, and an assortment of issues in late antique Roman Palestine: rabbinic asceticism, rabbinic institutions,

literary and orality, translation, targum, and multilingualism. His scholarship is notable for its capaciousness and nuance. It is capacious in its chronological scope, stretching from Second Temple literature to the late antique synagogue. It is capacious, more importantly, in its methodological framework, which combines the philological precision for which Israeli rabbinic scholarship is rightly famous with the theoretical interests more characteristic of American scholarship. If this dichotomy of Israeli philology and American theory is less helpful today than it was in the past, this is in part due to Steven's work and influence. Finally, Steven's scholarship is capacious in its recognition of the impossibility of considering texts apart from history, or, in the areas of interest to his scholarship, history apart from texts. The categories that dominate Steven's work—rhetoric, performativity, translation—inhabit precisely the interface between text and history. The bridging work that Steven's scholarship achieves between periods, between methodologies, between text and history, is distinguished by its uncommon nuance. When Steven asks, as in the title of one of his articles, whether “hermeneutics, history, and rhetoric [can] be disentangled,” you can be sure that his short answer is no, and that his long answer involves an appreciative and instructive analysis of the entanglements. A collection of many of these articles was published in 2011 as *Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages*.

Steven has contributed to the field of Jewish studies in ways other than through his scholarship. The relationships that he has cultivated with scholars of early Christianity in the Department of Religious Studies have helped to build bridges between this area and Jewish studies. His long-standing ties with scholars beyond Yale, in America, Europe, and especially Israel, have yielded rich and varied fruit, some easily discernible, in the form of edited volumes and conference proceedings, and some less palpable, but no less important: conversations, collaborations, friendships, insights.

Steven is not only a great colleague but an inspiring teacher and mentor. His seminars model careful, nuanced textual and contextual analysis, and his graduate students can attest to his exemplary concern and support for them in every aspect of their studies. That many of Steven's former students have contributed to this volume is a testament to the closeness of the bonds that he has formed with them. It is no coincidence that much of Steven's research—on Tannaitic midrash, for example, and on 4QMMT—concerns the practice of teaching. Pedagogy, for Steven, is a topic worthy of careful attention, in theory and in practice. Nor does he confine his pedagogical pursuits to the academy. At his New Haven synagogue, Beth El-Keser Israel (BEKI), he regularly leads a class on the weekly Torah reading. He has occupied leadership roles in other capacities at the synagogue, as well as at nearby Jewish schools, the Ezra Academy and the Jewish High School of Connecticut. Many of the community members whom he has influenced joined with some of his students and colleagues at a conference in Steven's honor at Yale

University in May 2014, “Rabbis and Other Jews: Rabbinic Literature and Late Antique Judaism,” at which earlier versions of some of the papers included in this Festschrift were presented.

The articles collected here reflect many of Steven's scholarly interests. They divide into three sections, one on Second Temple literature and its afterlife, a second on rabbinic literature and rabbinic history, and a third on prayer and the synagogue.

This Festschrift would not have been possible without the help of many people, first and foremost the scholars whose work is contained herein. We acknowledge the numerous other scholars who wished to contribute an article in Steven's honor but were for one reason or another unable. An incalculable debt of gratitude is owed to Aviva Arad for her copyediting work. Our warmest thanks, too, to Renee Reed, the program administrator for the Judaic Studies Program at Yale, who coordinated the aforementioned conference, and assisted with other logistics in connection with the Festschrift. We thank Professors Armin Lange, Bernard M. Levinson, and Vered Noam, coeditors of the JAJ Supplements Series, for agreeing to publish the Festschrift in the series, and Christoph Spill, the editor for Religion and Theology at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, for ably shepherding the volume to publication. Finally, we acknowledge the generous financial assistance of Yale University through the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Fund and the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale.

Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

Tzvi Novick

Christine Hayes