of Bernadette Brooten and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza respectively, have a sounder scholarly basis.

Sawyer attributes much of the apparent equality given to women in very early Christianity to the expectation of the imminent end of this world, and the gradual reduction of such equality to the emergence of organization and social conformity in the Church (p 106). The direct or indirect influence of Aristotle is evident in much Christian prescription about female behaviour (pp 112-13). She might have noted the influence of classical Greek models in another context: according to Philo (Flaccus 89), the Jewish women of Alexandria were totally secluded from unrelated men. This is a very different situation from that implied by the fairly unrestrained mixing of women and men in the New Testament or the Beruria story, and perhaps indicates that Philo was subscribing (as he also does in a passage quoted on p. 36) to one of the ideals of Athenian men, the power to keep ‘their’ women in seclusion.

There are some surprising exclusions. The best documented historical Jewish woman of the first century C.E., Babatha, is not mentioned, neither is the first Christian woman to speak to us with her own voice, Perpetua. The Acts of Paul and Thecla, a non-orthodox but very influential Christian work, shows a network of female mutual support, even to the extent of a lioness refusing to eat Thecla, and has a heroine who conspicuously outshines Paul in her determination to serve God and reject social pressures. Sawyer only devotes one paragraph to it (p. 109), and says nothing at all about the other Apocryphal Acts, some of which include equally strong female characters. The scanty source material, which at least potentially offers a female perspective, surely deserves rather more attention.

David Noy


In her article in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (New Haven, Yale, 1994, reviewed above), Judith Hauptman called for a feminist research agenda to be applied to the study of rabbinic texts. This agenda was to include considering mishnaic texts in the context of the Tosefta and of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud; tracing the history of lenient or ‘profeminist’ positions; and establishing the social and religious direction of rabbinic legislation. In *Rereading the Rabbis*, Hauptman answers her own call.

The book contains ten chapters, each concerning a Talmudic topic which is relevant to women: *sotah*; relations between the sexes; marriage; rape and seduction; divorce, procreation; *niddah*; inheritance, testimony; and ritual. In her introduction, Hauptman specifies that she is reading the texts in a dynamic way, comparing them with their biblical precursors as well as with other rabbinic material. Within this approach, she has two goals. To determine how the law changed over time, and to dispel myths about the topic. Hauptman asks the following questions: does rabbinic legislation improve the status of women in comparison with their position in the Torah? and can discomfort with, and opposition to, the status quo be found within rabbinic texts? Her argument is that the rabbis developed a ‘benevolent patriarchy’, introducing measures to ameliorate women’s status without seeking women’s equality or the abolition of patriarchal social organization.

It is clear that Hauptman has thought seriously about the complexities of a feminist critical reading of rabbinic texts, acknowledging that her approach will be opposed on
one side by those Jews who will reject the concept of halakhic development, and on
the other side by those feminists who will dismiss her work as apologetic. These issues
are raised in the introduction, but it is by her treatment of each particular topic that
the effectiveness of Hauptman's approach can be evaluated. Two of the chapters will
be discussed in this review: 'Sotah' and 'Testimony'.
Many key issues emerge in Hauptman's first chapter, which discusses sotah, the
woman suspected of adultery, and her trial by ordeal (Num. 5:11–31). She skillfully
identifies the tension within the tannaitic texts: on the one hand, the rabbis have con-
tempt for the suspected adulteress, and on the other hand, they move to establish legal
procedures which significantly reduce the possibility of the rite's application, or ren-
der its results ambiguous. The thrust of her argument is that their concern for fairness
predominates over their antipathy towards the suspected adulteress, leading to a re-
duction of the injustice in the biblical text. For this argument, Hauptman needs to
postulate that the material in the Mishnah which elaborates upon the sotah's humili-
ation is earlier than the later, more just material with which it was framed by the
rabbis. This is an intriguing suggestion which might be helped by a comparison with
the redactional decisions of other tannaitic texts. She also presents new interpretations
of the notorious passage concerning whether women should be taught Torah (M Sot.
3:4), including a sympathetic, but to this reviewer's understanding unlikely, reading of
Ben Azzai's positive response, whereby Hauptman suggests he is rejecting the entire
ritual. This being said, one of the strengths of the book is that the author proposes
creative solutions to old problems, but also is willing to qualify some of her interpre-
tations as tentative.
Hauptman raises a key question in this chapter: is the rabbis' concern for justice
equivalent to a concern for the fair treatment of women? Her answer is affirmative, but
the tractate itself is not so clear; even the humiliation of the individual sotah can be
related to the rabbinic pursuit of justice for the community. For this reason and others,
Sotah may well be the most difficult tractate to assess from an academic feminist point
of view. Hauptman's chapter, while revealing some of these difficulties, is a valuable
addition to the extant scholarship.
The ninth chapter, on testimony, is among the strongest in the book. This topic re-
quires a different approach than sotah, insofar as the relevant material is not found in a
single tractate, rather, it is dispersed throughout the rabbinic corpus. Here, Hauptman
raises and discards two popular theories concerning rabbinic restrictions on women
giving testimony: first, that the courtroom context was thought to be an assault on
women's dignity, and second, that women were thought to be emotionally and intel-
lectually shallow, and therefore unreliable. These theories are refuted with examples
showing that women did appear in courtroom settings in the Talmud and that their
testimony was accepted as trustworthy in a number of situations—namely, those where
a woman is testifying concerning a woman.
Hauptman presents two alternate explanations for the limitations on women's tes-
mony: first, that rabbis were concerned that a woman's subordinate social status
(namely, as a wife) could compromise her ability to tell the truth, and second, that
women were excluded from cases where their testimony might threaten to override
that of men, thereby threatening men's dignity. The second explanation is also used
in the final chapter, to explore the obligation, exemption, and exclusion of women in
the realm of ritual. In both chapters, it is a significant theoretical move which reveals
previously unidentified patterns.
Rereading the Rabbis is intended for a broad audience, in her introduction, Haupt-
man emphasizes that each chapter has been written with 'Talmudic novices as well as
veterans' in mind (p. 10). It should be noted that novices might find some arguments
difficult to follow, but not impossible. Conversely, veterans might be somewhat impa-
tient in parts, but Hauptman offers enough new and rigorous readings to keep fellow Talmudists on their toes. The book has also been written for an academic and a non-academic audience. Accordingly, conversation with other scholars (Wegner, Boyarin, Ilan etc.) is confined to the notes, and those who are looking for Hauptman's critique of other approaches to the subject should be directed to her essay in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. At the same time, she manages to convey recent insights on topics such as the Mishnah–Tosefta relationship clearly and briefly, and those who do read the notes will find them useful. Most notably, Hauptman does not fall into the simplifications and dichotomies which frequently appear in this field.

Although she avoids connecting her discussions explicitly with current debates within the Jewish community (the chapter on divorce being an example of where such connections would be possible), Hauptman is deeply engaged with her work. Readers who are less engaged may be uninterested by comments within the book which are shaped by the larger project of modern rabbinic Judaism. This should not deter them. Hauptman is a formidable scholar, and the academic community should pay attention to *Rereading the Rabbis*. It is an original and insightful contribution.

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ALBERDINA HOUTMAN, Mishnah and Tosefta A Synoptic Comparison of the Tractates Berakhot and Shebat (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum, 59) J C B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1996 xvi, 255 pp. plus Appendix Volume *Synopsis of Tosefta and Mishnah Berakhot and Shebat*, iv, 92* pp. DM 198 00

Modern scholarship of halakhic literature has devoted much study to both Mishnah and Tosefta and to the inter-relationship between the two Tosefta has been considered either a type of 'Talmud on the Mishnah', a collection of *beraitot*, or the oldest remnant of an ancient Palestinian Mishnah (p. 1). Not surprisingly, there has been little agreement among the renowned scholars representing the different schools of thought. Alberdina Houtman decided to re-open the discussion. Firstly, she realized that Mishnah usually received a higher status in scholarship because of its higher religious status. Then she saw that most work on Mishnah and Tosefta focused on a single relationship instead of on different kinds of relationships between parts of the Mishnah and Tosefta. Next, she found that previous research studied both literatures as a *textus receptus*, while in actuality the study of manuscripts showed that there was constant change. This led her to look for a new tool which she found in the compilation of a synopsis, which allowed for detailed comparison of small textual units (p 2).

The idea of using a synopsis in Rabbinic literature was not new, particularly since this was long an accepted tool in New Testament Studies, and scholars such as Morton Smith in his classic *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels* had even used the method for comparing relationships between the Synoptic Gospels and relationships between different works in tannaitic literature. Not that this methodology met with universal approval, and scholars debated the pros and cons of this approach. Houtman shows that in spite of this, a synopsis of Mishnah and Tosefta is both possible and necessary. The problem was scope and time, especially for what started out as a doctoral dissertation. One tractate was chosen to highlight any differences between Palestinian and Babylonian material, should there be any (Shebiit), and the second one from the same order yet far removed from the agricultural framework of Shebut (Berakhot)