discourse on heresy, the targeted indictment of Christians preserved in the Tosefta and subsequent rabbinic texts contribute to a distinct impression of just who the early rabbinic sages thought those people were. The Christians with whom they were acquainted were, in the first place, Jews. In other words, they were active players in the lives of the same Galilean Jewish communities frequented by the sages and their disciples" (207). Here too, Burns demonstrates impressive mastery of the contemporary modes of interpreting Mishnah, Tosefta, and the textual witnesses of both. Finally, in chapter 5, Burns makes his biggest contribution, arguing that the reign of Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Augustus from 198–217 CE brought economic benefits to the province of Syria and thus to the Jews of Palestine, the office of the *nasi'*, and in turn to the rabbis. He performs clever readings of Origen to show that it was in the beginning of the third century that a schism between Jewish and gentile Christianities led to the gradual disappearance of the former, and with it a concomitant reevaluation of Christians and Christianity as gentile Other in the literature of the Amoraim.

In tackling not only history as such, but also "Jewish Memory," Burns enters a burgeoning mode of discourse, not unlike the stance of Sarit Kattan Gribetz's analysis of rabbinic engagement with the Roman calendar in *AJS Review* 40, no. 1 (April 2016), in which she posits and describes a Jewish collective unconscious process of negotiating complex identities. Fascinatingly, Burns does not pretend to complete scholarly detachment, but rather, "write[s] as a Jew committed to [his] religion and the collective welfare of [his] people" (17). Given that the study of earliest Jewish/Christian encounters began within the domain of a particular strain of Protestant supersessionism, this book is a welcome corrective.

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Gregg E. Gardner. *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 235 pp.
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The field of "rabbinics" has in the last several decades branched in two directions: the history of ancient Judaism, which endeavors to provide a deeper portrait of people, institutions, and societies that populated the late ancient Jewish world; and the literature and culture of rabbinic Judaism, which attempts to plumb the depths of rabbinic texts to discover ideas or cultural attitudes that are often ignored or mischaracterized by casual readers. A book on organized charity, informed by the former approach, might be expected to consult rabbinic literature as one of several bodies of evidence in order to accurately describe the redistribution of wealth in the ancient Jewish world. Informed by the latter line of attack, the book might rather be expected to draw on modern political, economic, and social theory, while closely reading rabbinic literature, in order to discover a nuanced and sophisticated approach to poverty and almsgiving. Gregg Gardner's *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* impressively does both.

Straddling the disciplinary divide between so-called history and literature, the book closely attends to the language of Mishnah and Tosefta Pe'ah in order to construct a full account of the tannaitic concept of tzedakah, noting how it differs both from contemporary notions of charity and other late ancient thought about philanthropy. At the same time, the book's chief aim, as indicated by its title, is to locate a historical missing link. As the evidence for organized charity institutions in the Second Temple period is shown to be unconvincing (12), Gardner argues that organized charity in fact originates in the early rabbinic world. However, whether these rabbinic institutions actually existed, existed only as a rabbinic ideal, or whether the truth was somewhere in between remains an open and unsolvable (as of yet) question, according to Gardner (26). And so the origins of organized charity remain suspended between literary imagination and historical reality, as the book's methodology oscillates between intellectual and social history, attempting to avoid the inevitable pitfalls of each. This approach is both one of the book's chief strengths, and possibly its only real weakness.

The book begins with a strong introduction that clarifies some tricky definitional issues (What exactly *is* charity? What is tzedakah? What does it mean to us? What did it mean to people in late antiquity?) and clearly communicates the stakes of ancient arguments over how best to provide for those who are in need. Drawing on thinkers from Kant to Emerson to Mauss, Gardner reveals that the issue of charity is more wide ranging than the pragmatic concern of how to support those in need; it encompasses fundamental issues of dignity and social cohesion, as begging, the default solution to poverty in antiquity, erodes both. Gardner thus positions the beginning of organized charity as a solution to the problem of begging, as "charity with dignity," and as a "benefit to the community as a whole" (35).

Chapter 2 provides background to the discussion of rabbinic approaches to charity by giving a thick description of the realities of poverty in Roman Palestine during the time of the Tannaim, which was, as Gardner reveals, primarily before the "third-century crisis" in which poverty became widespread and endemic in much of the region. Gardner discusses the three main basic needs of life—food, clothing, and shelter—both in terms of their material and, drawing on Barthes among others, symbolic-semiotic significance. He thus follows Amartya Sen in identifying "two poverties": one based on biological needs and the other based on "value-judgments" (56). This division of poverty into two types is important for Gardner, as he will argue that the two charity institutions described in tannaitic texts—the *tamḥuy* and the *kuppah*—are not redundant but rather a dual approach necessary to address the dual pitfalls of poverty.

Chapter 3 reads almost as an excursus on the material properties of the actual vessels for which the tannaitic charity institutions were named, the *tamḥuy* and *kuppah*—a serving dish and a large basket. Though the book could have proceeded without this chapter, it adds depth to our understanding of these institutions as neither eternal nor inevitable, but having developed from tangible social realities.

The next two chapters, 4 and 5, continue by exploring the *tamḥuy* and *kuppah* as two distinct institutions. Gardner presents the *tamḥuy* as essentially a soup kitchen: an "adaptation of [ancient] hospitality" (99) that aims "to provide immediate and short-term support to any individual who claims to be in need" (85). Gardner argues persuasively that hospitality, as traditionally practiced, would not have been available to the poor because of the expectations about its reciprocal nature, and, if offered asymmetrically, would humiliate the poor and rob them of their dignity. The *tamḥuy* thus emerges as an impersonal institution that can alleviate "biological" poverty, providing food and shelter to those who desperately need it as well as minimal provisions for fulfilling religious duties on the Sabbath and holidays.

While the *tamḥuy* provides sustenance, it still marks its users with the social stigma of their low socioeconomic status. Gardner shows that the *kuppah* developed precisely to be "attuned to the semiotic values of material possessions" (111). However, the *kuppah* also served a different demographic: the "conjuncturally" poor, that is, wellborn individuals who fell into poverty. Chapter 5 delineates the details of the *kuppah's* mandate, which was to restore a household to its previous social status, even if that meant providing luxury items such as slaves or horses. Thus the *kuppah* was not really about sustenance; it was concerned with the social implications of poverty in a way that was "unique to the ancient world" (138). It is here, then, that we reach the crux of the book in its discovery of a unique rabbinic approach to managing poverty.

The next chapter explores the implications of this bold tannaitic concept, the "restorative charity" of the *kuppah*. The rabbis essentially invent a mechanism whereby both giving and receiving charity can be done virtually anonymously. They do this based on their "empathy for the [conjunctural] poor" (153), an attitude that Gardner shows was rare in the ancient world. Most of the time, the conjuncturally poor were blamed for their own condition—in fact, Gardner shows that the rabbis had similar explanatory paradigms for why the rich become poor. Nevertheless, they develop a systematic way to alleviate this type of poverty. It is extremely intriguing to note here, as Gardner does, that the rabbis stand out from others of their time and place in truly attempting to care for and ameliorate conjunctural poverty, but the explanation he provides for this phenomenon is not particularly robust. Gardner speculates that perhaps the rabbis feared the possibility of conjunctural poverty themselves, or simply empathized with people from their own circles who suddenly fell into poverty. But these ideas still do not explain why the rabbis, and not other wealthy elites elsewhere, would have tried to lift up the conjuncturally poor rather than use them as an object lesson. Moreover, the book mentions but glosses over another phenomenon: the rabbis' apathy toward the dignity of the *structurally* poor. In other words, the tannaitic rabbis, like their neighbors, dismissed the structurally poor as part of "the natural … order of the world" (153), but unlike their neighbors, felt empathy for and attempted to remedy the plight of the conjuncturally poor. This disjunction is something that could use deeper and more sustained attention than this book, endeavoring to track a historical, institutional development, is able to give to it, and it suggests an avenue for further research.

The last full chapter of the book turns its attention to the office of the "charity supervisor," arguing that he is imagined as a civic leader in the model of both a tax collector and a judge. The chapter masterfully weaves together ideas from rabbinic literature and the Greco-Roman world to create a vivid image of the ideal public official who would administer the charity fund.

Finally, an important conclusion/epilogue closes the historical gap that the tannaitic charity institutions are shown to have filled by bringing us to the era of late antiquity, in which organized charity institutions are well documented. Gardner makes a point of distinguishing these later institutions from the tannaitic ones both in form and in motive. The idea of charity is expanded to include support for the rabbinic movement itself, and the intent also subtly shifts from simply benefiting the poor and the community to exercising social control by the rabbis. *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* gives a convincing account not only of how charity institutions were born in a certain time and place but of the emergence (and disappearance) of a different model of charity in the ancient world: one that was attuned to the dignity of the poor and the social cohesion of the civic community.

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Reuven Hammer. *Akiva: Life, Legend, Legacy.* Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society and University of Nebraska Press, 2015. 243 pp.
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The desire to know the historical Akiva—to know how this cornerstone of rabbinic Judaism actually lived and died, what he really said and did—is natural. But our ability to satisfy this desire is very limited. We appreciate, thanks to Jacob Neusner among others, the challenges of writing rabbinic biographies. All rabbinic texts are anthologies, collected and edited, in many cases by strong hands, in light of interests and assumptions very different from the modern biographer's. The more famous the rabbi—and there is none more famous than R. Akiva—the more obscure he becomes, as he attracts to himself, like a black hole, the words and deeds of dimmer stars, and the desires and ideologies of later tradents. The best path for recovering what we can of the historical Akiva lies in a two-stage process. The first and conceptually prior stage involves piecing together a portrait of R. Akiva's milieu. What was it like to live as a Jew in Roman Palestine in the late first and early second centuries of the Common Era? What did the rabbinic movement look like at the time? What issues preoccupied its leaders? The second stage: collecting all of the sources on R. Akiva specifically, and distilling from them, by means of critical analysis, reliable data points. The background