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Introduction

In the late second and early third centuries C.E., the rabbis who authored and redacted the foundational texts of rabbinic Judaism outlined a system for giving to the poor through communal institutions. They saw organized charity as a way to bring an end to begging; their goal, however, was to solve not the problem of poverty – but rather the problem of charity.[1]

THE PROBLEM OF CHARITY

Charity, or *tsedaqah* in Hebrew, is a prominent concept in classical rabbinic literature, texts that took shape between the second and seventh centuries C.E. Living in Palestine under Roman rule and Babylonia under the Sasanians, the rabbis instruct that charity is a way to imitate God. Charity replaces sacrifices, brings one closer to the divine, and averts the evil decree on the day of judgment. Charity can redeem the world, the sages claim, and even save one from imminent death. The Babylonian Talmud instructs that giving charity adds twenty-two years to the benefactor's life. Indeed, charity is considered to be *the* commandment in some rabbinic texts. An examination of charity, therefore, will illuminate a central concept of rabbinic Judaism, the preeminent form of Judaism from the middle ages to today.[2]

[1] That charity could be a problem was not unique to the ancient world; see, e.g., Benjamin Soskis, "The Problem of Charity in Industrial America, 1873–1915" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2010).

[2] The most important discussions of charity in classical rabbinic literature are found in *m. Pe'ah* 8:7; *t. Pe'ah* 4:8–21; *y. Pe'ah* 1:1, 15b–c; *y. Pe'ah* 8:7–9, 21a–b (as noted earlier, citations from the Yerushalmi are according to the Leiden manuscript, as published in Schäfer and Becker, eds. *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*); *b. Bava Batra* 8a–11a; *b. Ketubbot* 66b–68a; and *Lev. Rab.* 5:4, 34:1–16. See also *t. Demai* 3:16–17; *y. Demai* 3:1, 23b; *b. Shabbat* 156a–b; *b. Sotah* 14a; *b. Sukkah* 49b; *Deut. Rab.* 5:3; *Exod. Rab.* 31:4. For collections of rabbinic sources on charity, see Alan J. Avery-Peck, "Charity in Judaism," in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism* (ed. J. Neusner

Rabbinic texts instruct that charity is best performed in a collective and organized way. "Just as in a coat of mail every small scale joins with the others to form one piece of armor," we read in the Babylonian Talmud, "so every little sum given to charity combines with the rest to form a large sum."[3] The rabbis envision that everyone in a community would contribute to their local *tamhui* or soup kitchen and *quppa* or charity fund. In turn, these institutions would distribute provisions to the poor. Organized charity would become a hallmark of Jewish approaches to charity and, more broadly, Jewish life and thought. "Never have we seen or heard of a Jewish community," Maimonides wrote, "that does not have a *quppa*."[4]

What are the origins of organized charity in rabbinic Judaism and why was it formulated in the way that it was? This book seeks to answer these questions, which will help us better understand the foundations of Jewish ethics and law, as well as the rabbinic movement's gradual consolidation of socioreligious authority over Jewish society. Because care for the poor through organized charity played an important role in the development of Judaism and Christianity, this topic has important implications for the broader study of the history of religions and late antiquity. I find that early rabbinic or Tannaitic texts prescribe a system of institutionalized almsgiving that provides an alternative to giving to beggars. The early rabbis or Tannaim sought to end begging in order to transform the way that people gave charity, which was deeply problematic.

The simplest form of charity, when one individual hands over food, money, or some other asset to a beggar, was the most prevalent form of support for the poor in ancient world. This straightforward transfer, however, created moral, ethical, and social dilemmas. The problems caused by giving charity directly to beggars are timeless and have been brought to light by a number of prominent thinkers. Immanuel Kant writes, "Almsgiving is a form of kindliness associated with pride and costing no trouble. . . . Men are demeaned by it."[5]

et al.; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 1:335–47; Robert B. Becknell, "Almsgiving, the Jewish Legacy of Justice and Mercy" (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 2000), 472–585; C. G. Montefiore and H. M. J. Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology* (Cleveland, Ohio, and Philadelphia: Meridian Books and Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963), 412–39.

[3] *b. Bava Batra* 9b. Likewise, later in the same text: "Just as in a garment every thread unites with the rest to form a whole garment, so every farthing given to charity unites with the rest to form a large sum."

[4] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot mattenot 'aniyyim* (Laws on Gifts to the Poor) 9.3; translation based on Joseph B. Meszler and Marc Lee Raphael, *Gifts for the Poor: Moses Maimonides' Treatise on Tzedakah* (Williamsburg, Va.: Department of Religion: The College of William and Mary, 2003), 64, with my emendations.

[5] Immanuel Kant, "Lectures on Ethics," in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (ed. P. L. Heath and J. B. Schneewind; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208. On Kant's approach to almsgiving, see J. B. Schneewind, "Philosophical

That altruistic giving has unsavory attributes is likewise noted by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The law of benefits is a difficult channel which requires careful sailing, or rude boats. . . . How dare you give them? . . . The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten."[6] Marcel Mauss, following Emerson, wrote, "Charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it, and the whole tendency of our morality is to strive to do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver."[7] Likewise, Mary Douglas writes that charity is meant to be a free gift and lauded as a virtue, yet "we know that it wounds."[8]

Charity is a problem because it can harm the recipient. Scholarship on gifts and gift exchange has been particularly helpful in this regard, as it illuminates how charity can deepen the recipient's sense of social exclusion.[9] Gifts, as Mauss and others have noted, generate an obligation for the recipient to give a gift in return.[10] Most societies, including those of the ancient Mediterranean, abide by the "norm of reciprocity," which entails an obligation to accept a gift when it is offered and to give something in return.[11]

The process of giving, receiving, and giving back creates relationships between the two parties and some forms of giving foster social cohesion.[12] Charity increases economic equity as it redistributes assets from rich to poor, reducing the gaps between the haves and have-nots. In its own way, however, charity also erodes solidarity.[13] Charity, whereby gifts are given and accepted

Ideas of Charity: Some Historical Reflections," in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy* (ed. J. B. Schneewind; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 65–72.

6 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Gifts," in *Essays & Lectures* (ed. R. W. Emerson and J. Porte; New York: Viking Press, 1844 [repr. 1983]), 536.

7 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (trans. W. D. Halls; New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 65.

8 Mary Douglas, "Foreword: *No Free Gifts*," in *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, by Marcel Mauss (trans. W. D. Halls; New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1990), vii.

9 It is notable that many ancient Jewish writers (e.g., Ben Sira, Josephus), conflate gifts and charity; see Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton, N.J., and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

10 Mauss, *The Gift*, see also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 98.

11 Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review* 25 (1960): 161–78. On the application of Mauss's ideas on gift exchange to antiquity, see Michael L. Satlow, ed., *The Gift in Antiquity* (Ancient World: Comparative Histories; Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

12 Gouldner, "Norm of Reciprocity," 162.

13 A similar point is made in passing by Tzvi Novick concerning the gifts for the poor given on Purim mentioned in Esth 9:22. Novick rightly points out that this verse distinguishes the gifts given to "the poor" from those that are exchanged between "one another." The poor, therefore, are placed outside the boundaries of normal social intercourse; see Tzvi Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 105 (2012): 34n. 3.

without the expectation of reciprocation or any kind of compensation in return, casts the recipient in an inferior light.[14] "There should not be any free gifts," writes Mary Douglas. "What is wrong with the so-called 'free gift' is the donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient."[15] The lack of an expectation to reciprocate reflects and projects social and economic inequalities between the benefactor and beneficiary.[16] The gift itself – the piece of bread, the bronze coin – concretizes and indexes the hierarchical relationship between the wealthy donor and the poor recipient.

Similarly, charity can undermine social cohesion by creating relationships of personal dependency. Societies have long prized economic independence and scorned dependence upon others. "A poor man who begs is constantly depreciating his personhood and abasing himself," Kant writes, "he makes his existence dependent on other people, and accustoms others, but the sight of him, to the means whereby we neglect our worth."[17] Just as society looks down upon those who are dependent, the poor resent those on whom they are dependent. "We wish to be self-sustained," Emerson writes, "We do not quite forgive a giver. . . . We can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving it from ourself; but not from anyone who assumes to bestow."[18]

At the heart of the matter are the intentions of the giver, as it is not only the transfer of alms that can injure the poor, but also the very intention to do so. Especially insightful is Barry Schwartz's work on the social psychology of gifts, which can be applied to illuminate charitable giving. Schwartz shows that gifts impose identities upon the giver and recipient, as they reveal "an important secret: the idea which the recipient evokes in the imagination of the giver."[19] When a gift is offered without the expectation of a return, the giver identifies himself or herself as a benefactor and reveals his or her perception of the recipient as a charity case – the recipient is poor and willing to accept support from others. This perception may be created at the moment when a poor man asks for alms. It may also be based on the benefactor's perception or interpretation of the semiotic code projected by the poor man's appearance: perhaps he wore tattered clothes or ate poor quality food, which are signs of poverty. Whatever the case may be, offering alms can be a damaging unilateral

[14] Mauss, *The Gift*, 65.
[15] Douglas, "No Free Gifts," vii.
[16] Aafke E. Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28–29.
[17] Kant, "Lectures," 431.
[18] Emerson, "Gifts," 536.
[19] Barry Schwartz, "The Social Psychology of the Gift," *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (1967): 2.

move, as the benefactor wounds an individual by identifying him or her as one willing to be dependent upon others. These otherwise intangible and ephemeral attitudes and ideas about the poor are concretized, objectified, and advertised by the things given.[20]

BEGGING IN LATE ANTIQUITY

The problems with begging were likewise apparent to the ancients. "My child, do not lead the life of a beggar; it is better to die than to beg," Ben Sira wrote in the second century B.C.E. "One loses self-respect with another person's food. In the mouth of the shameless begging is sweet, but it kindles a fire inside him."[21] Likewise, Philo observes that for many, begging is a "slavish state unbecoming the dignity of a freeman."[22] Begging breeds shame and indignity, and beggars are often suspected of deceit.[23] Yet, despite its problems, in the absence of organized charity in the ancient world, begging was the predominant way in which the poor could acquire what they needed.

Beggars were frequently seen in public soliciting alms and it was common to find them in and around religious spaces, such as Roman temples.[24] Jews were likewise known to beg near sacred spaces, such as the Temple compound in Jerusalem and synagogues.[25] The attraction of beggars to temples and other

[20] Komter, *Social Solidarity*, 7, drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 138–237, writes, "Gifts as 'tie-signs' disclose the nature of the tie between giver and recipient. They reveal how we perceive the recipient while at the same time showing something about our own identity." This section reworks material from my article "Charity Wounds: Gifts to the Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Gift in Antiquity* (ed. M. L. Satlow: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 174–76.

[21] Sir 40:28–30; see Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 87–88.

[22] Philo, *Flaccus* 64.

[23] Begging also fosters pity, which was often viewed in negative terms (as fear and weakness) by Greek and Roman writers; see A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), 77–88; Anneliese Parkin, "An Exploration of Pagan Almsgiving," in *Poverty in the Roman World* (ed. M. Atkins and R. Osborne; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 62–64.

[24] Parkin, "An Exploration," 66; Dominic Rathbone, "Poverty and Population in Roman Egypt," in *Poverty in the Roman World* (ed. M. Atkins and R. Osborne; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 110.

[25] Acts 3:1–5; Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 49–50. Lysimachus (second-first century B.C.E.; as cited by Josephus in *Ag. Ap.* 1.305) claims that when the Jews were in Egypt, they were afflicted with diseases and begged for food at temples. Cleomedes (first–second century C.E.) mentions beggars in synagogue courtyards (*On the Circular Motions of the Celestial Bodies,* 2.1:91). Artemidorus (second century C.E.) also refers to Jewish beggars at synagogues (*Interpretation of Dreams* 3.53). On these texts, see Aryay B. Finkelstein, "Julian among Jews, Christians and 'Hellenes' in Antioch: Jewish Practice as a Guide to 'Hellenes' and a Goad to

religious locales was twofold. First, because the poor are often understood to be under the special care of the divine, it follows that they would seek protection and comfort at the deity's abode. Second, the poor improved their chances of receiving alms by begging in areas where people gathered. It was strategic to solicit alms from the stream of people coming from and going to sacred places. Likewise, it was common to find beggars milling about marketplaces and at junctions in the road.[26] While exposure to the public increases the chances that a beggar will receive alms, it also adds to the visibility of their poverty and draws attention to their begging. Thus, begging traps the poor in a dangerous cycle of humiliation.

While begging was shameful, giving to beggars was praiseworthy in ancient Jewish and Christian texts. "Help the poor for the commandment's sake," writes Ben Sira (29:9), "and in their need do not send them away empty-handed." Likewise, in Tobit 4:6–7 (early second century B.C.E.), "To all those who practice righteousness give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you." The New Testament makes a similar point repeatedly, such as in Matthew (5:42), "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."[27] Likewise in the *Didache* (1.5), an early work on Christian discipline, we read, "To all who ask you give, and do not ask back, for from their own gifts the father wishes to give to all."[28] Thus, a number of early Jewish and Christian texts not only find giving to beggars virtuous, but also caution against rejecting them.[29]

Christians" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2011), 134–36; Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–1984), 2:157–58, 330.

[26] For sources on beggars in the Greco-Roman world, see Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313–450)* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 19–20; Richard Finn, "Portraying the Poor: Descriptions of Poverty in Christian Texts from the Late Roman Empire," in *Poverty in the Roman World* (ed. M. Atkins and R. Osborne; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 140–41; Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 97.

[27] See also Luke 6:30.

[28] As cited in Steven L. Bridge, "To Give or Not to Give? Deciphering the Saying of Didache 1.6," *JECS* 5 (1997): 555. Cf. Shepherd of Hermas, *Mandate* 2.4–6. Dates for the *Didache* range from the late first through the third century C.E.; see Jonathan A. Draper, "Didache," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. K. D. Sakenfeld; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2006), 120; Robert A. Kraft, "Didache," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:197–98.

[29] It is notable that Jews were associated with begging and identified as beggars by a number of Greek and Latin authors, such as Martial and Juvenal; see Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:529, 2:100–1.

In light of the early Jewish and Christian exhortations to give to beggars, as well as their warnings against turning panhandlers away empty handed, the early rabbinic approach to dealing with beggars is surprising:

> [If a poor man] went from door to door [begging, then] they [i.e., the householders] are not obligated to him in any way. (*t. Pe'ah* 4:8)

The Tosefta instructs the reader that if a beggar comes to the door, then one is not obligated to give him anything.[30] The Tannaim were not the only ones in the ancient world who warned against giving to beggars. One Greek dramatist wrote that you do no service to a beggar by giving him food or drink, because you lose what you give him and prolong his life of misery.[31] We see, however, no such reasoning in rabbinic texts. Rather, as I will show, the rabbis instruct their audience not to give to beggars because they seek to promote an alternative to begging: people should refuse beggars because they should give through the institutions of organized charity – the *tamhui* and *quppa*.[32] Later in this chapter I will discuss how organized charity can bring an end to begging.

THE PROBLEMS: BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

Two main issues have occupied scholarship on organized charity: its beginnings and ends. By "beginnings" I mean whether organized charity existed already in the Second Temple era and by the first century C.E. in particular. Exploring this issue will help us understand any possible background or predecessors to the earliest rabbinic discourses on the topic. By "ends" I mean the ends to which organized charity was put. Because the question of "ends" also illustrates the significance of organized charity (and, in turn, the significance

[30] By contrast, in *t. Pe'ah* 2:18 one must give at least a small amount to the poor in order to fulfill the poor tithe. It is common to read *t. Pe'ah* 4:8 through the apologetic lenses of later, traditional rabbinic interpretations, such as those in the Yerushalmi; see, amongst others, Ephraim Urbach, "Political and Social Tendencies in Talmudic Concepts of Charity [Hebrew]," *Zion* 16 (1951): 22. The image of the beggar at the door is also found in other early rabbinic texts, as well as extrarabbinic sources; see my discussion in Chapter 7.

[31] Plautus, *Trinummus* 339; on this text, see Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 107.

[32] On organized charity as an alternative to begging, see also the comments by the Roman Emperor Julian in 362 C.E.: "For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the numerous impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us [that is, from the pagan priesthood]." (Julian, *Ep.* 22; Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 2:549). What has often been overlooked in Julian's comments is that he writes that no Jew has to *beg* – he does not say that no Jew was needy. This should be contrasted with early Greek and Latin writings, where Jews are often portrayed as beggars. On this text, see Finkelstein, "Julian among Jews, Christians and 'Hellenes' in Antioch," 134–36.

of the present study) for the broader history of religions, I will start with it here.

The Ends of Organized Charity

At first blush, the primary goal of organized charity is its most obvious – to support the poor. While there can be no doubt of this, in late antiquity organized charity also served the needs and objectives of the giver. When charity is organized, it can be controlled. This adds up to control over the funds given as charity as well as control over the selection of the recipients. The special properties of organized charity and the mechanisms that lie behind them have been taken for granted by scholars and insufficiently studied to date. I will return to this topic in Chapter 3. For now, I wish to emphasize that organized charity has been used to gain and consolidate economic, political, and religious power, most prominently by leaders of the church beginning in the fourth century.

Using charity for political purposes has been illuminated and discussed by a number of scholars, from Ephraim Urbach to Paul Veyne.[33] Most prominent is the work of Peter Brown, who writes that the bishops gained and consolidated their authority by presenting their actions as responses to the needs of the poor, for whom they claimed to speak.[34] The bishops' claims enabled them to control an entire segment of society, the poor, by controlling the assets given as charity. Moreover, control over charity enabled them to direct funds back to the church. By the fourth century, Brown finds, the bishops and their clergy expected to be supported by fellow believers. They formed a new category of individuals, alongside the poor, who required support. They accepted these offerings "in the name of the poor" and understood themselves as the stewards of the church. After covering their own expenses, the bishops and the clergy were to distribute what was left over to those in need.[35] "This wealth was to be used by the clergy for the benefit of the poor," Brown writes, "In some circles, even private almsgiving was discouraged: ideally, all gifts to the poor were to pass through the hands of the bishops and clergy, for only they knew who needed support."[36] Brown's work points to the importance of organized charity in the bishops' project: control over almsgiving and the poor could

[33] Urbach, "Political and Social Tendencies," 3–4; Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (trans. B. Pearce; London: Penguin, 1992).
[34] Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2002), 8–9.
[35] Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 24–26.
[36] Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 24.

only be achieved if charity was organized. The church's control over the poor masses and over substantial economic resources were driving forces behind the bishops' consolidation of power and recognition by the state.[37]

The view that charity could be an instrument for obtaining and consolidating social, political, and religious authority is palpable in Palestinian Amoraic texts. *Leviticus Rabbah* and Yerushalmi *Pe'ah*, for example, depict rabbis as charity supervisors who collect contributions for, and distribute them to, other sages.[38] The Amoraim embed the texts with the terminology, structure, and imagery that is otherwise reserved for their discussions of organized charity for the poor.[39] That is, the Palestinian Amoraim self-consciously present the "collection of the sages" as a form of organized charity. This parallels the bishops, who cast themselves as "stewards" of charity and define "charity" to include contributions to clergy.[40]

While the confluence of authority and organized charity is palpable in late-antique Christian and Amoraic texts, it has yet to be investigated in Tannaitic texts. Did the Tannaim see organized charity as a means to promote their own authority? Or was this only a later, post-Tannaitic development? More generally, what are the objectives of the Tannaitic vision of organized charity, aside from supporting the poor? I will address these questions throughout this book. In general, I find that organized charity was not conceived by the

[37] Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 1–44; see also Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 53–90.

[38] *Lev. Rab.* 5:4; Mordecai Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah: A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts and Genizah Fragments with Variants and Notes [Hebrew]* (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1953–1960 [repr. 1999]), 110–11; the parallel in *y. Horayot* 3:6 (in MS Leiden = 3:4 in Venice printed edition), 48a, and the discussion in Michael L. Satlow, "'Fruit and the Fruit of Fruit': Charity and Piety in Late Antique Judaism," *JQR* 100 (2010): 244–77. On *y. Pe'ah*, see my discussion in Chapter 8.

[39] The language in *Lev. Rab.* 5:4 that recalls organized charity includes the root *g-b-y* (*gabbai tsedaqah*); "to do a commandment" which is a locution for giving charity (Saul Lieberman, "Two Lexicographical Notes," *JBL* 65 [1946]: 69–72); *yarad m'nikhasav* ("he who lost his wealth") is common in a number of texts on charity (Alyssa M. Gray, "The Formerly Wealthy Poor: From Empathy to Ambivalence in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *AJSR* 33 [2009]: 103–05); and the wife in the narratives is described as a "righteous [*tsadeket*] woman" recalling *tsedaqah*; and "fruit" or "rewards" [*perot*] are commonly promised for giving charity (cf. *t. Pe'ah* 4:18).

[40] Burton L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 123–24, minimizes the importance of the similarities between the collections of the sages in *Leviticus Rabbah* and the church's use of organized charity by suggesting that organized charity played only a minor role in Palestinian Amoraic texts. I find, however, that organized charity is an important topic throughout Palestinian Amoraic texts (e.g., *y. Pe'ah*). Thus, the parallels between organized charity in Palestinian Amoraic texts and late-antique Christian works are substantial and warrant further examination; see my discussion in Chapter 8.

Tannaim as a means to enhance their own socioreligious authority. Rather, it was envisioned as a way to provide support while protecting the dignity of the poor.

The Beginnings of Organized Charity

The importance of organized charity for the study of late antiquity and the history of religions has prompted a number of scholars to inquire about its origins. Neither the *tamhui* nor *quppa* appear *as institutions* in the Hebrew Bible.[41] Nor do we find organized charity among the pagan societies of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman eras.[42] The absence of a systematic approach to poverty and charity is a consequence of Greco-Roman societies' failure to recognize the poor as a distinct social category, as noted by Hendrik Bolkestein, Brown, A. R. Hands, Urbach, Veyne, and others. In the Greco-Roman world, people were identified as either citizens or noncitizens. The reimagining of society along economic lines, whereby individuals were identified as rich or poor, would have to wait until the fourth century. Until then, however, "the poor" as a distinct social entity was invisible.[43]

At the heart of the matter is the important role that politics and civic identity played in pagan Mediterranean culture. The wealthy had a responsibility to

[41] Michael Hellinger, "Charity in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature: A Legal, Literary, and Historical Analysis [Hebrew]," (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1999), 205; Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 229.

[42] For isolated instances of organized charity in the Greco-Roman world, such as in Rhodes in the first century C.E., see G. W. Bowersock et al., eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Harvard University Press Reference Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 287–88; Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 85. Organized almsgiving, however, was mostly absent from Roman society; see M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 40, and especially Greg Woolf, "Food, Poverty and Patronage: The Significance of the Epigraphy of the Roman Alimentary Schemes in Early Imperial Italy," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 58 (1990): 197–228, who demonstrates that the Roman empire's alimentary foundations (*alimenta*) for feeding children were not a form of poverty relief, as the recipients were selected due to their privileged status.

[43] Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*; Peter Brown, "Remembering the Poor and the Aesthetic of Society," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2005): 513–22; Brown, *Through the Eye*, 68–71; see also Hendrik Bolkestein, *Wohltätigkeit und armenpflege im vorchristlichen altertum; ein beitrag zum problem "moral und gesellschaft"* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1939), 101–48; Gregg E. Gardner, "Cornering Poverty: Mishnah *Pe'ah*, Tosefta *Pe'ah*, and the Reimagination of Society in Late Antiquity," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. R. S. Boustan et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 1.205–16; Gregg E. Gardner, "Who is Rich? The Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism," *JQR* 104 (in press); Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*; Urbach, "Political and Social Tendencies," 1–27.