In this book, Lynn Kaye examines how rabbis of late antiquity thought about time through their legal reasoning and storytelling, and what these insights mean for thinking about time today. Providing close readings of legal and narrative texts in the Babylonian Talmud, she compares temporal ideas with related concepts in ancient and modern philosophical texts and in religious traditions from late antique Mesopotamia. Kaye demonstrates that temporal flexibility in the Babylonian Talmud is a means of exploring and resolving legal uncertainties, as well as a tool to tell stories that convey ideas effectively and dramatically. Her book, the first on time in the Talmud, makes accessible complex legal texts and philosophical ideas. It also connects the literature of late antique Judaism with broader theological and philosophical debates about time.

Lynn Kaye is an assistant professor in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at The Ohio State University.
For my parents
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts and Transliteration</th>
<th>page ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Introduction              | 1      |
| Articulating the Timelike | 3      |
| Midrashic Time and the Bavli | 11    |
| Bavli Temporal Thinking in Light of Second-Temple Jewish and Early Christian Sources | 14    |
| The Historical Layers of Bavli Temporality | 20    |
| Bavli Temporal Thinking in Late Antique Mesopotamia | 22    |
| Plan of the Book          | 28    |

1 Spatial, Temporal, and Kinesthetic Concepts of Simultaneity 32
   Simultaneous and Successive Events as Bodies Moving in Space 33
   It Is Im/possible to Reduce (חֵפֶל לְאָם לֶאָם) 38
   Temporal Implications of “It Is Im/possible to Reduce” 50
   Meanings of “לְאָם לֶאָם” (to Reduce) with Respect to Simultaneity 51
   Summary and Conclusion 54

2 Divine Temporal Precision and Human Inaccuracy 56
   Material Culture and Time-Telling 57
   The Law’s Optimal Margin for Error in Time-Telling 61
   Divine “Timeliness” in Sage Narratives 71
   Divine Timelessness or Divine Timeliness 80
   Summary and Conclusion 85

3 Being Fixed in Time 86
   Metaphor and Conceptualization 88
   Concrete and Abstract Expressions of the Root Q.B.’ 89
   Continuous and Recurring “Fixed” Phenomena 93
   Time, Motion, and Change 104
   Summary and Conclusion 108
## Contents

4 Retroactivity Reimagined  
   Bererah and Retroactivity  
   Bererah Connecting Actions with Intention, Knowledge, or Speech  
   The Imagery of Bererah and Related Terms  
   Is the Future Determined? Is the Past Settled?  
   Summary and Conclusion  

5 Matzah and Madeleines  
   Techniques to Engage the Past  
   The Distinctiveness of Passover for Experiencing Distant Moments in the Present  
   Contrasting Temporality in Bererah and in Passover Practices  
   Summary and Conclusion  
   Epilogue  

Bibliography  
Index
Texts and Transliteration

Translations of Babylonian Talmudic texts follow the texts in Ma’agarim, The Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, in consultation with Talmudic manuscripts and early printed editions in The Saul and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank. Quotations from the Mishnah are from Albeck’s critical edition of the Mishnah consulted in reference to the Online Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts of the Israel National Library. “Mishnah” refers to the entire composition, and “mishnah” describes an individual tradition within the corpus. Translations of the Palestinian Talmud are from the Synoptic edition by Peter Schafer and Hans-Jurgen Becker, with variants noted when relevant. Translations of rabbinic texts are my own unless otherwise noted. Quotations in English from the Bible follow the New Jewish Publication Society’s translation (Hebrew Bible) and the New Revised Standard Version (Greek Bible). Transliteration of key terms in Hebrew and Aramaic follow the Society of Biblical Literature conventions in the main text. Simplified transliterations also appear, in order to make reading easier.
Acknowledgments

Many people were important to this project. First among them is Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, who worked closely with me from the beginning and has remained a sounding board for my research. With Prof. Rubenstein, Daniel E. Fleming, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliot R. Wolfson gave me many gifts that improved my work and directed my thinking. They helped me become a scholar and have continued to mentor and support me in my early years of learning the profession. I hope I can help my own students in the future as they have helped me. Professors of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge set me on my way with a grounding in literary theory and Semitic languages and literatures. What I do now is indebted to my education there, especially to the guidance of Risa Domb (a’h), Robert Gordon, Geoffrey Khan, Nicholas De Lange, and Rachel Williams. Rabbi Moshe Kahn (with whom I first studied bererah) and Rabbi Daniel Wolff, professors at Stern College for Women’s Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies, built my skills in Talmud and halakhic literature. My colleagues at The Ohio State University and at my previous institution, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, have been wonderful resources and friends to me while I wrote this book. I particularly want to acknowledge Hannah Kosstrin and Ila Nagar, my writing partners, for their immense generosity and their patient, insightful help on this book. I would also like to thank the following people for their help: Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal, Adam Becker, Hanina Ben-Menahem, Yonatan Y. Brafman, David Brodsky, Andrea Cooper, Sergey Dolgopolski, Aryeh Edrei, Yaakov Elman, Steven Fraade, Moshe Halbertal, Amos Israel, Job Jindo, Sarit Kattan Gribetz, Alexander Kaye, Janez Kranjc, Suzanne Last-Stone, Sondra Leftoff, Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, Berachyahu Lifschitz, Dov Linzer, Diana Lipton, Yair Lorberbaum, Mahnaz Moazami, Paul North, Yakir Paz, Ram Rivlin, Tamar Rudavsky, Elizabeth Shanks-Alexander, Sacha Stern, Moulie Vidas, Steven Wilf, and Abby Zanger. Their generosity in responding to parts of
Acknowledgments

This book or being available to talk through ideas is what makes scholarship into community. Thank you to the scholars who responded to papers I have given on this material at conferences and seminars for the past few years. Lewis Bateman encouraged me and this book from its early stages, and Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press shepherded it to completion.

I gratefully acknowledge support for my research from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the New York University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dean’s Dissertation Grant, the Cardozo Law School’s Center for Jewish Law and Contemporary Civilization, and the Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization’s Scholar-in-Residence program. The Melton Center for Jewish Studies at The Ohio State University provided a research grant for indexing, and I am extremely grateful. The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at The Ohio State University has been supportive of my research in time and with research funds. OSU’s excellent library and the support of librarian Joseph Galron put necessary resources at my immediate disposal. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and its librarians gave me a place and intellectual community in which to complete the book.

I wish to thank the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City for permission to use the image of Kandinsky’s *Several Circles*. Portions of Chapter 3 were previously published in the *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2015): 127–60 in an article entitled “Time and Fixity in Talmudic Law and Legal Language.” Permission to use this material is gratefully acknowledged.

I am grateful to my parents, Daniel Nadis and Sally Zanger, for my education and for taking a continuous, active, and supportive interest in this project and in all of my work. I am grateful to my grandparents, Marilyn Zanger and Sara Nadis, and my great Uncle Ted Kurtz, for their enthusiasm about my pursuits. We mourn the recent death of Dr. Maxwell Nadis, whose pride in his family’s achievements made every success sweeter. My partner, Alex, makes everything possible.