

Dr. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

Jewish Thought

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Dr. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal holds the Rosen Family Career Development Chair in Judaic Studies in the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Michal completed her BA and MA at the Talmud department, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was a winner of J.N. Epstein Prize. She is a graduate of the department of Religious Studies at Yale University (MA and PhD). She was a Harry Starr Fellow in Judaica at Harvard University and won the Allon Fellowship for Outstanding Young Researchers of Israel Council for Higher Education.

Her work focuses on philological studies of rabbinic texts and on Jewish-Christian relations in the first centuries CE, based primarily on the evidence provided by the Babylonian Talmud (composed between the third and seventh centuries CE, in Jewish Babylonia in the Persian Empire).

Her first book, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge University Press 2013), won the 2014 Manfred Lautenschlaeger Book Award for Theological promise (Heidelberg University). This book examines literary analogies in Christian and Jewish sources, culminating in an in-depth analysis of striking parallels and connections between Christian monastic texts (the *Apophthegmata Patrum* or “The Sayings of the Desert Fathers”) and Babylonian Talmudic traditions. The importance of the monastic Christian movement in the Persian Empire during the time of the composition and redaction of the Babylonian Talmud led to the fostering of a literary connection between the two religious populations. The shared literary elements in the literatures of these two religious communities shed new light on the surprisingly inclusive nature of the Talmudic corpus and on a non-polemical aspect of Jewish-Christian literary relations in Persia of late antiquity. In opposition to preconceived notions according to which the Babylonian Talmud had little to say about Christianity, and when it did allude to Christianity, its approach was a polemical one, this book offers a look at close literary contacts between the two religions, and possible monastic passages interwoven into the Talmudic narrative.

Dr. Bar-Asher Siegal's current book (under review) deals with stories in the Babylonian Talmud, in which figures named "minim" (lit. heretics) interact with rabbinic figures regarding the interpretation of Scripture. The book suggests reading the biblical texts found in the Talmudic dialogues as they were read in well known internal Christian debates. According to this reading, the Talmudic stories no longer have to be read solely as a reflection of Jewish-

Christian polemical debates, but rather a rabbinic attempt to answer Scripture-based debates taking place in Christian circles during this period.

Dr. Bar-Asher Siegal published articles in the field of Syriac studies, philological interpretations to rabbinic texts, legal midrashim, and comparative religion.