



**Sacha Stern.** *Time and Process in Ancient Judaism.* Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003. 144 pp. \$29.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-874774-95-2.



**Reviewed by** David B. Levy (Head librarian Ner Israel Rabbinical College Mechina library)

**Published on** H-Judaic (March, 2005)

## Review of Stern's Analysis of Time as Process in Rabbinic Texts

This excellent, illuminating, insightful, perceptive, cogently argued, clearly written book is one of the most interesting books I have read in a long time, offering a new perspective on the world-view of ancient Judaism and its links with other cultures of the Near East of late antiquity. Stern casts a wide net, and his findings are intriguing. He is able to draw on texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and a host of other languages. Readers may find this book a source of delight and astonishing breadth, one that they cannot put down. It makes an original contribution to the fields of Rabbinics and Jewish studies. It is also cross-disciplinary with the fields of philosophy, classics, history of ideas, history in general, and anthropology.

Gell in *Anthropology of Time* has distinguished between cyclical, linear, and alternating time. Modern scientific understanding of time has expanded to include notions of continuous or atomistic, homogenous or diverse time. Kadushin argued that anthropological comparisons are inappropriate because, in his view, rabbinic society was "civilized." He further asserts that "obviously, the assumption that rabbinic society was 'civilized' is just

as problematic as the suggestion that it was 'primitive.' " Stern wishes to suggest that we not regard the absence of a concept of time as "backward" or "primitive," but only as an alternative to the modern Western world view. Stern does not regard the emphasis on time, as a process in ancient Judaism, as particular, unique, specifically Jewish, or unusual from other ancient cultures. Stern says that he resents the studies of Jewish time that have posited this as a starting and continuous assumption such as Neher's *Vision du temps* and S. A. Goldberg's *La Clepsydre*. Stern is arguing that even concepts of history and chronology are processes, rather than about the concept of time itself.

There are many books on the topic of time, but Stern's book is truly unique. It summarizes past findings and forges new understandings. This perceptive work offers a new perspective on the world-view of ancient Judaism and its links with other cultures in the Near East of late antiquity.

His book argues that time is a co-ordination of different processes (i.e., coordinating the reading of the Shema with sunrise or dusk) in the ancient Jewish worldview,

rather than an entity per se as suggested by the Greek concept of *chronos*. The ancient Jewish view also contrasts with that of medieval Judaism in which the concept of time became well established in ethics, philosophy, biblical exegesis, and *halakhah*, a development Stern attributes partly to the influence of Greek philosophy on medieval Jewish thinkers. Stern draws his carefully marshaled evidence of details from early rabbinic texts, Hellenistic literature, Qumran sources, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and inscriptions. Stern's methodological introduction creatively applies and draws on anthropological studies.

Stern is sensitive in analyzing words and phrases for and related to time such as *zeman*; *et* (which usually means a point in time, the "right time," sometimes a period of time); *mo'ed* (appointed time); *itim mezu-manim* (Ezra 10:14); *kets* ("end" in Biblical Hebrew, but meaning point in time or period in Qumran texts); etc. From the liturgy and Tosefta Berakhot 3 we encounter *mekadesh yisra'el vehazemanim* where *zemanim* means festivals. The phrase *higia zeman* means "the time set for a wedding has come" (Mishnah Ketubot 5:2). He considers the nuances behind phrases related to time such as *ba hodesh bizemano* (the month began at its right time in Shekalim 4:5), *zeman hamikra* (the time for reading in Berakhot 2:1), *hapesah bizemano vehahatat bekhof zeman* (Mishnah Zevachim 1:1). The phrase *mitsvat aseh shazeman geramah* (time dependent commandment in Kidushin 1:7) does not mean time-bound or time-caused positive commandment, but rather a commandment that becomes binding by the onset of its proper designated time. The phrases *zemanah shel reviah* (the season of rain in Tosefta Ta'anit 1:2), *zemanah de'aviv* (the season of spring in Tosefta Sanh. 2:6) refer to seasons. *Zeman* can also be used in the sense of a person's age as in Nidah 5:6. The common phrase *hazeman hazeh* can either mean now in a punctual sense, as in the liturgical *vehigianu lazeman hazeh* or now in the sense of nowadays, i.e. this period (Mishnah Ma'aser sheni 5:7). Most common is the use of *zeman* in adverbial expressions such as *bizeman she* (whenever, Berakhot 7:5), *kol zeman she* (as long as, Shevi'it 10:4; or whenever, Pe'ah 7:2) or *le'ahar zeman* (after a while, Gittin 8:8).

We also find the phrase *mah she'atid liheyot* (that which is ready to be, in Zera'im 86), *hanolad* (that which will be born, Avot 2:9), and *me'et le'et* (from one time to the next, in Nid. 1:1-6). Stern also considers concepts of time suggested by ideas such as "a thousand years are like one fleeting day in HaShem's eyes" (Ps.90:4). Ramban cites this verse to suggest that each creation day cor-

responds to a thousand years of human history which is based on a *gemarah* in BT Sanhedrin 97a-b. Thus the messianic era is supposed to dawn in the year 6000 of the Jewish calendar. Stern cites the *Siluk leparashat shekalim* (*Az ra'ita*) which deals with measuring systems of length, volume, time, and weight. Each section starts from the largest unit and finishes with the smallest. Thus the section on time ranges from the largest unit, the whole of world history, to the smallest fraction of the day. The text states, "For the whole world (*olam*) is 6000 years / which makes 5 cycles / and the number of the cycle (*mahzor*) is 22 jubilees / and the year of the jubilee is at the end of 7 weeks of years / and the weeks of years are 28 seasons / and the days of a season are 91 days / and the times (*onot*) of the day are 576 / and the moments (*rigei*) are to the time (*onah*) as the times (*onot*) are to the whole day / and the meticulous divide the moment (*rega*) into further submoments (*rega'im*). According to one opinion the first 2000 years of human history are of *tohu*, the second 2000 (2000-4000) are of Torah, and the last 2000 (4000-6000) are messianic."

Stern also addresses the concept of time implicit in the phrase "everything has its appointed time" (Eccl 3:1-8). Stern looks at passages in the *gemarah*, such as that said by R. Eleazar b. Azariah when he proclaims, "*harei ani keben shivim shanah*" ("I am like seventy years old," in Ber. 1:5). He considers timing and time-reckoning, not only with regards to prayer, Shabat, and Hagim, but also with regards to the complex procedures of *korbanot* suggested by the phrases such as *mehusar zeman* (lacking time, in Zevachim 14:3), *huts lizemano* (outside of time, in Zevachim 2:3), and generally wrong timing can render sacrifices invalid (*pigul* in Tosefta Pesachim 3:7, or *hazeman posel* in Tosefta Pesachim 3:2). Often the *Korbanot* are interrelated with Rabbinic legislation of *tefillah*, as in the well known opening of the Bavli Berakhot 1:1: "From what time does one recite the Shema in the evening. From the time when the priests enter to eat the heave-offering, until the end of the first watch—so Rabbi Eliezer. But the sages say: until midnight. R. Gamliel says: until the rise of dawn." The *gemarah* displays a social consciousness when it even supplies the opinion "when the poor man comes in to eat his bread with salt." In all cases, the recitation of the Shema is coordinated with a sacrificial process. Stern argues that midnight (*hatsot*) is not an abstract clock time, but the mid-point between the natural phenomena of nightfall and the rise of dawn. Some may disagree with Stern on this point. In rabbinic texts, the ritual of Tikkun Hatsot takes place at midnight for specific reasons just as the slaying of the first born of the Egyptians takes place at

midnight according to the Ha-aggadah. Further the passage in Berakhot regarding King David being woken at midnight, because the breeze caused music to be played upon the harp that was suspended above his bed, also takes place at midnight. Rachamim, the sages say, dominates from midnight to dawn, and King David is said to play music or *davon* until the sparkling of the dawn. In these three examples, midnight takes on supernatural dimensions. However Stern is correct that the recitation of Shema with processes, such as the priest eating terumah, the changing of the night watchers or the natural time phenomena of midnight and dawn, suggests that timing as co-ordination is coordinated with processes. Stern further notes that non-*halakhic* sources suggest that timing was commonly linked to natural phenomena. For example, when Moses told Pharaoh that the plague of hail would begin at the same time the next day, he made a scratch in the wall and said, “when the sun reaches this point, hail will descend.” Similarly when God promised Sarah a child exactly one year later, he made a scratch in the wall and said: “when the sun reaches this point, you will give birth.” Stern further notes, “What is distinctive about most rabbinic sources, however, is their use of standard events or processes such as dawn and night, midday and midnight, and a range of others (such as the call of the rooster in Mishnah Yoma 1:8, Tosefta Pesahim 10:9-11) that are pervasive in *halakhah* and form a systemic basis of all *halakhic* timing” (p. 173). Alongside the process-linked times of “sunrise” and “when one can tell the blue threads from the white threads,” the Mishnah mentions the third hour (*shalosh sha’ot*) as the latest time for the morning *shema*. The time when Kings rise is seen as a late time for reciting the *Shema*.

Stern notes that time-measuring devices are rarely mentioned in early rabbinic texts with remarkable exceptions of a stone sundial (*even sha’ot* in Targum 2 Kgs. 9:13/Targum Isa. 38:8 & Kel. 12:4-5= Eduy. 3:8 & Mekhilta derabi shimon bar yohai on Ex. 12:29), *orologin* (hour dial/clock in JT RH 1:3 & *Peskikta Rabati* 15:18), and to a *clepsydra* (water clock in Genesis Rabbah 49:12). Stern also notes terms for duration such as *kedei hilukh arba’ah mil* (as long as 4 mil walk in Pes. 3:2), *kedei sheye-halekh adam mil* (as long as take to walk 1 mil in JT Ber. 1:1 [2b], BT Shab 34b, BT Pes. 46a), *kedei tevilah vesipug* (duration for immersing and drying), *kedei shehitah* (as long as one slaughter in Hul. 2:3), *kedei akhilat peras* (duration to eat 300 cc), *kedei dibur* (as long as one utterance in Tosefta Ned. 5:1, JT Naz 4:1 [53a], BT Naz. 20b, BT BK 73a), *keheref ayin* (wink of an eye), *kedei hishtahava’ah* (as long as a prostration), *kedei lifshot velilbosh* (as long

as undressing and dressing), and *rega* (instant). Attention is given to R. Yose’s theory of cyclical time of recurrence (Tosefta Ta’an 4:9) and similarly suggestive remarks such as “the world (*olam*) is like a wheel (*galgal*) in Gen Rabbah 63:14. Stern cites Genesis Rabbah 63:14, which refers to *ha’olam asui kegalgal*. The word *galgal* means wheel (Kel. 1:3, 14:5) or refers to round objects such as the eye (Par. 2:2) or the sun (Tosefta Sot. 4:4, p.299). In Leviticus Rabbah 34:9 we find the notion that “the world is like a water-wheel (*galgala*) of which the full buckets are emptied and the empty are filled. This metaphor of the wheel also finds correlations in Far Eastern religions such as the wheel of fortune. Although Stern does not mention it, the Hebrew term for rolling is *galgel*, thus, an roll thee down (*ve-gilgatikha*) from the rocks (Jer. 51:25); and rolled (*va-yagel*) the stone (Gen. 29:10). For this reason it is said, “and like a rolling thing” (*u-khe-galgal*), “before the whirlwind” (Isa. 17:13) because of its rolling. The cranium is called *gulgolesh*, because of its being nearly round. Because every sphere rolls rapidly, every spherical thing was called *galgal*. Hence the heavens were called *galgallim* because of their being round, because it was believed that they were spherical. Accordingly HaZal says, with reference to fate (*morah*), it is a revolving *galgal* sphere (B.T. Shabbat 151b), for the same reason they likewise call a pulley *galgal*. Accordingly Yehezkel’s dictum—“as for the wheels (*ophannim*) they were called in my hearing *Hagalgal*” (Ezek. 10:13)—making their shape known. Sacred time is reckoned from *kidush ha-hodesh* (sanctification of the new moon) which in turn is related to the process of women’s biological clocks gauged to menstruation treated in Maseket Niddah.

Stern also shows brilliant insight with regards to Hellenistic notions of time suggested by concepts such as *chronos pleres* (full time), and *chronon diatribein* (to spend time). *Dietriben* is found in 2 Maccabees 14:23 but in the absolute, without the object *chronon*. Josephus also refers to “to spend/waste time” (*chronon diatribein*) implying that time is a usable resource. Stern notes that it may be assumed that both phrases borrowed from the classical Greek historians, Herodotus and Thucydides. Stern treats Josephus, in part, on page 100.

Other Greek phrases for time treated by Stern include: *aion* (eternity), *eis chronon aionion* (for eternal time), *eis ton apeiron aiona* (unlimited time), *eis ton hapanta chronon* (for the whole of time), etc. Stern argues that notions of time as an entity in itself, a dimension of reality, a quantity of time (*quantitas temporis*), a flowing continuum, or a useful commodity—all familiar to ancient Greek culture—are absent from ancient Jewish sources

written in Hebrew and Aramaic (p. 103). Resistance to the measurement of time on Shabbat is attested by Rabbi Jacob Moellin, known as the Maharil (1360-1427), even for the purpose of timing one's learning, on the grounds that this constitutes an act of measuring time. The prohibition is not only to use but also to handle clocks on Shabbat because they are defined as *keli shemalakhto le'isur*, a tool designed for forbidden work. The outcome of the sand-clock being turned over repeatedly is that time is automatically measured (*mimeila nimdad hazeman*). While it can be argued that clocks do not measure time, but rather estimate it (*mesha'er hazeman*), the Maharil still forbid their use on Shabbat when one enters into what Heschel was later to call "eternal time."

The term *kairos* normally means "right time" or "critical time" in a purely punctual sense. The Greek term *kairos* normally has the restricted meaning of point in time, right time, or critical time. The idea that "time will be accomplished" (*completum fuerit tempus*) or "until the time of the world is accomplished" (*quousque compleatur tempus seculi*) refers to the designated time or age of the world. The eschatological goal of all of human history is "*biyamei hamashiach*." The idea of the peak of time having past and the times growing old is found in 4 Ezra, a first-century Palestinian work which was composed originally in Hebrew but is available only in a Latin translation of the Greek. There we read, "*usquequo finiantur tempora. Quoniam saeculum perdidit iuventutem suam, et tempora adpropinquant senescere*" ("until the times are ended. For the era has lost its youth, and the times begin to grow old"). The Heikhalot text known as (Hebrew) 3 Enoch 45:6 reads, "till the end of time" ("*ad sof*," till the end). *Kairos* functions in the Septuagint as the usual translation of the Hebrew *et and mo'ed*, whereas in Greek literature the term *chronos* is used more frequently. For example, the term *anadeixin chronon* means proclamation of times. The idea of a body resting "for eternal time" (*eis chronon aionion*) and unlimited time (*eis ton apeiron aiona*) in its tomb is also given by Stern (p. 121). The phrase *eis ton hapanta chronon* means "for the whole of time."

The Hebrew God transcends time (having created time) as the *yesod olam* (everlasting foundation)—existing in the past, present, future (*min olam ve'ad olam*)—and is eternal by definition. According to Rabbi Jonah Gerondi, in Sha'arei teshuvah God was, is, and will be (*hiyah, hoveh, yihyeh*). Stern points out that an earlier source for God as *hiyah, hoveh, yihyeh* is in an anonymous piyut, "*Ha'ohaz beyad midat hamishpat*" from the Additional Service of Rosh HaShanah (see Zulay, Yannai, 336).

Stern also notes that it is attested in the anonymous medieval liturgical poem, *Adon olam*. The phrase, "God was king, God is king, God will be king" is attested in liturgy attributed to R. Elaazar Hakalir (7th c.?) in the Kerovot of the first day of Rosh Hashanah, and in a passage of the Heikhalot literature. Stern continues to remark that it appears in tractate Soferim 14:4.

The eternity of the Torah, which God used to create the world, is suggested by phrases of perpetuity such as *hok/hukat olam* (law in perpetuity in Ex. 12:14, 29:28), *berit olam* (covenant in perpetuity in Gen. 9:16, 17:7 regarding *brit milah*, Ex. 31:16), *ahuzat olam* (possession in perpetuity in Gen. 17:8, 48:4, Lev. 25:34), *zekher olam* (memory in perpetuity), and *shem olam* (Isa. 56:5), *yesod olam* (Mishle 10:25). Isaiah (40:8) remarks, "grass dries up and flowers wither, but the word of our God for ever stands." Stern further notes the terms *yemei olam* (the days of *olam* in Isa 63:9, 11, Amos 9:11, Mic. 7:14 also Deut. 32:7), *shenat olam* (the year of *olam* in Jer. 51:39, 57; cf. Ps. 77:6). Stern points out in footnote 51 that other terms connect the phrase with remote antiquity (with the word *kedem* as in Mic. 5:1, from antiquity, from the days of *olam* (*mikedem mimei olam*); Mal. 3:4 "as the days of *olam* and as ancient years (*mimei olam* *kadeshanim kadmoniyot*) and Prov. 8:23 "since *olam* from the beginning, since the origins of the earth (*me' olam merosh mikadmei arets*). Stern also adds, "other terms can be also used with *olam* with similar connotations i.e. *me'az* (Ps. 93:2). Stern further notes that the sense of remote past is also implicit in Deut. 32:7 and Isa. 63:11 (*vayizkor yemei olam* "remember the days of *olam*) and Prov. 22: 28 *gevu'at olam* (an ancient boundary). Stern encourages us also to see Mic. 5:1 "since the days of *olam* (*mimei olam*). *Beit olam* is used in Eccles. 12:5 meaning "everlasting home." The Jewish Aramaic *alema* or *le'alema* and the biblical Hebrew *olam* or *le'olam* (forever) are frequently translated, Stern notes, in the bilingual inscriptions as *eis to panteles* or *eis to parapan*, both meaning something like absolutely.

The breadth of Stern's focus is remarkable as he casts his net to even note the use of time in other ancient Near Eastern languages such as Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Phoenician (p. 113). He even casts his net to include ancient Iranian and Indo-European cultures. Further Stern notes that the main Chinese word for time, *shi*, meant punctual times, hours, seasons, or the right time. He speculates that one of the concepts of time may have emerged in India or Iran at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., from where it spread eventually to Greece by the sixth century B.C.E. (p. 119). In con-

trast, he argues that in antiquity, the world-view of Hebrew and Aramaic speaking Jews remained completely process related. Jews saw reality as a succession of objects and events, whereas the notions of time as an entity in itself, a human resource, a continuous flow, or a structure or dimension of the created world were foreign. This is not to deny that there is a natural process of time in the opening of Bereshit, which is established from the beginning. Stern notes that the force of the word “bereshit” is considerably reduced if one translates Gen. 1:1 like Sasson as “when God began to create” (JPS translates the verse as “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”). Buber and Rosenzweig render the text from Hebrew into German as, “Im Anfang schuf Gott den Himmel und die Erde.” One might compare the Septuagint (Greek), Vulgate (Latin), Tafsir (Arabic), Beur (German by Mendelssohn), and Peshitta (Syriac) to see if Sasson’s translation is supported by other translations. Some French translations render the phrase as, “Lorsque Dieu commença la creation du ciel et de la terre.”

Stern is aware that Rabbinic tradition holds that ten things were created on the first day: not only heaven and earth, *tohu* and *bohu*, light and darkness, wind and water, but also the “measure of day” and the “measure of night” (*midat yom umidat lailah*). Stern acknowledges that the latter has often been interpreted as meaning the creation of the time itself. Stern comments, “However all this passage refers to is the creation of a measure of time, or to be more precise, the measure of two processes: day and night. It should be noted furthermore, that this list is only an exegetical derivation from the first verses of Genesis (1:1-5), which have nothing to say about the dimension of time or its creation, just as, indeed, they have nothing to say about the dimension of space per se” (p. 38). Based on a statement of Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Simon in Genesis Rabbah 3:7 medieval philosophers understood that time pre-existed Creation and was not itself created. Stern points out that the relationship between time and Creation, i.e., whether time was created with the universe or preceded it, is a question Maimonides considers. Maimonides’ view about the creation of time was popularized by the fourteenth-century Yemenite Midrash hagado. Some members of Rabban Gamliel’s household were allowed to study Greek Bein hashemashot. The justification for this activity was to make them more effective in dealing with the government so that it was not a “waste of Torah.” The phrase bitul torah (waste of Torah), Stern notes, carries a different meaning in early rabbinic sources.

Stern notes that the process-related perception of

past, present, and future may be reflected in some cases in the grammatical features of the language in use. The fuzziness of tenses is emblematic to biblical Hebrew, (and rabbinic Hebrew), but fuzziness or even absence of tense is also attested to in the verb-systems of languages such as ancient Chinese, Burmese, and others. While it is true that words for past and future exist in early rabbinic Hebrew (not as grammatical categories, but only in a historical sense), most prominently in *avar* and *atid*, Stern argues that still the usage and meaning of these terms suggests that they are process-linked rather than temporal. Stern writes, “In a phrase like ‘one gives thanks for the past’ (*leshe’avar*) and ‘prays for the future’ (*le’atid lavo*), the term *leshe’avar* literally means ‘that which has passed, and *le’atid lavo*, often used elsewhere for the distant, eschatological future, literally means here ‘that which is ready to come.’”

Stern’s book deals with the religious aspects of time in Judaism, time in the Bible and Rabbinical texts, etc. It is a *tour de force* that should not be ignored. Not only does Stern prove the articulation of the concept of time in the ancient-Jewish world view but his findings have broad-ranging and revolutionary implications for a host of other disciplines such as philosophy, history of ideas, anthropology, culture studies, history, classics, and studies of pre-modern societies.

This work concerns neither religion nor politics, but it has raised much controversy and passion. Stern writes, “I think that the reason why some respondents invested so much passion in attempting to ‘prove’ the existence of a concept of time in ancient Judaism (with various degrees of success, but this is not the point at present) is that they felt, perhaps only implicitly, that my argument was a threat to the core of their own world-view. I concede that this work is radical, but it is by no means iconoclastic, aggressive, or extreme. In the course of studying ancient (or other) cultures, we must be prepared to emancipate ourselves from our prior assumptions and reconsider some of our most fundamental world-views” (p. 25).

One of Stern’s approaches is anthropological-historical. Stern argues that there is an absence of a concept of time in ancient Judaism, and the predominance instead of process in the ancient Jewish world-view. Many will feel that since there are concepts for timing, time-reckoning, and calendars, in early rabbinic culture, there must be a notion of the time-dimension. Stern’s argument in a nutshell is that early rabbinic sources do not assume a notion of time but only of processes.

Many may misunderstand what Stern is driving at, but regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with his carefully formulated thesis, the evidence that Stern marshals is carefully crafted and amazingly cogently argued. By “process,” Stern simply means a “structured or meaningful sequence of events.” Many will object that time is a reality and that Stern’s thesis is misguided. But when we listen carefully to what Stern is saying and understand the terms of his argument, we see that the implications of his thesis are that time, as a general category is not a reality, but only a reified abstraction. He writes, “Like all reified abstractions time may serve a useful conceptual process, but it is also to some extent a fallacy” (p. 3). Stern argues, “that the concept of time as an entity in itself was unknown in ancient Jewish cultures, and that reality was experienced only in terms of processes” (p. 3). So that Stern not be misunderstood it should be noted that his argument is not that reality was conceived of in terms of a general, abstract concept such as process, but rather that reality was conceived in empirical terms, as consisting of a multitude of discrete and concrete phenomena—activities, motions, changes, and events—occurring simultaneously or in sequence, i.e. processes. He notes that “time is abstract, process is concrete; time is one, process is many; time is reified, process is real.” Stern shows that the ancient Jewish timing, calendar, and chronology were not predicated only a concept of the time-dimension, but only on the concept of events and processes. While the centrality of timing in *halakhah* or of calendar reckoning in Qumran texts suggests an interest in astronomical and other processes, Stern argues that it does not represent a concept of an underlying, synthetic abstraction which we call “time-dimension.”

Detractors from Stern’s thesis will argue, “is it not true that all consciously aware humans have a concept of time through the observation of natural phenomena such as the rising and setting of the sun, the orbits of the stars, and the cyclical circulation of the seasons (summer, winter, spring, fall)?” This is true, and Stern will not deny that awareness of these natural patterns of time are absent, although modern man’s relation to the natural world may have become more alienated in the Marxist and other senses. Rather all the more so Stern is suggesting that the ancient cultures were more in tune with these natural phenomena as processes, which makes them significantly different from modern man’s quantification of time into an entity after the Greeks introduced the notion of *chronos*.

Time (*chronos*) is treated in classical Greek sources

as a category on its own; it is described as a continuum that is constantly passing or flowing, and that drives the course of human events and the course of history. This Greek view is very close to modern Western views of time. Stern argues that the Greek view of time has parallels in ancient Iran and India. Thus the Indo-European tradition of time differs from the Semitic Near Eastern world views of process. While Hellenized Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus incorporated the Greek notion of *chronos* into their works, Hebrew and Aramaic remain “devoid of the concept of time throughout the period of earlier and late antiquity” (p. 9). Stern is pointing out a revolutionary remark, namely that time is not an empirical reality like the sun or the stars; it is only a reified abstraction. Since time is only a man-made, cultural construct, it need not be shared by all cultures of mankind. Indeed many deemed “primitive cultures” lack the existence of a concept of time as an abstract reified quantity to be measured and quantified. Stern is arguing that to impose a modern concept such as an abstract notion of time on an ancient culture is not to meet that culture on its own terms, but to impose the modern categories onto a world outlook to which such categories might have been foreign. Following in Kadushin’s footsteps, Stern asserts that the imposition of modern ideas on ancient cultures and ancient sources is tantamount to an act of “violence.” It is not legitimate to invent or impose modern categories onto ancient ones.

Stern’s methodological introduction draws on anthropological studies. He begins by focusing on the word for time in early rabbinic literature, *zeman*. He shows it means only “points of time” or finite periods of time, but that the concept of time as a continuum—of time as a whole—is totally absent from rabbinic texts. He points out that it is unknown even in such obvious contexts as discussions of age, accounts of the creation of the universe, and other matters relating to timing and time-reckoning, the calendar, and chronology. He shows convincingly that, although timing was central to early rabbinic *halakhah*, it was not conceived of as a way of measuring the time dimension, but rather as a way of coordinating different processes. The calendar, he notes, was not a measurement of time but an astronomical scheme, and therefore purely process-related. He argues that the reduction of time to an entity or a resource, familiar to modern society, is unknown in rabbinic ethics.

Stern also draws on non-rabbinic ancient Jewish sources in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, including Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic works and the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are also concerned with calendar and

chronology. The absence of a concept of time is also attested to in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, but stands in contrast to Graeco-Roman culture with its pervasive concept of *chronos*. The ancient Jewish view also contrasts with that of medieval Judaism, in which the concept of time became well established in ethics, philosophy, biblical exegesis, and halakhah, a development which Stern attributes partly to the influence of Greek philosophy on medieval Jewish thinkers

The initial impetus to write about time in ancient Judaism came from Eva Frojmovic's call for papers for a conference on "*Zeman: Jewish Concepts of Time in the Middle Ages*," the proceedings of which were published in Jaritz and Moreno-Riano, *Time and Eternity*. Initially a short article, this work grew into a book. The one-day conference was part of the International Medieval Congress 2000, held at the University of Leeds on 10-13 July 2000. Later Stern came to the conclusion that the relationship between the Jewish calendar and the concept of time was actually only tenuous. Initially Stern expected to find indications that time was viewed as linear, or cyclical, or both, that the flow of time was experienced as relative or absolute, that time-saving was considered an ethical virtue and time-wasting the opposite, etc. Stern discovered that when used as a concept, the word *zeman* only refers to the temporal co-ordination of events, never to the dimension of time as a whole.

Chapters 1-4 draw on a wide range of ancient Jewish literary sources that are extant. Chapter 1 is titled "Time—or its Absence—in Early Rabbinic Culture." Chapter 2 is titled, "Timing and Time-Reckoning." Chapter 3 is titled, "Calendar, Chronology, and History." Chapter 4 is titled, "Time and Ethics: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages." In chapters 5 and 6 Stern draws on Qumran texts, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Jewish Hellenistic literature. He occasionally refers to epigraphic sources. Chapter 5 is titled, "The Greeks and Jewish Hellenistic Culture." Chapter 6 is titled, "Jewish Culture and the Ancient Near East." Chapter 6 is followed by "Concluding Remarks." The book includes a good bibliography and index.

The term "ancient Judaism" is not intended to imply a single, monolithic ideology. It is the sum of all ancient Jewish sources (from the post-exilic period to the end of antiquity), some often very disparate, which in the context of the study, happen to converge on the same point: a process-related world view. Stern has restricted ancient Judaism to sources from not later than approximately the seventh century C.E., which most would regard as the

end of antiquity (in the Near East). The periodization of Jewish history into ancient, medieval, modern, and post-modern deserves some definition. Not all Jewish historians agree upon for existence the beginning of modernity. Scholem defined Jewish modernity with the rise of Shabbatai Zevi who offered hope to a world torn persecuted Jewish population after 1648 (*Tach ve'tat*). Cooperman has located the rise of the Italian Jewish ghetto as the onset of Jewish modernity. Dinur has defined it as the revitalization of modern Zionism and resettlement of the land of Israel by various groups that made aliyah. Many Jewish historians define modernity with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, while others locate the rise of the modern Enlightenment and Emancipation after the French Revolution as the onset of modern principles. These definitions will also differ with secular historians. For example, musicologists often define modernity with the music of Beethoven who broke out of the classical mode of Mozart and others, which, in turn, was a break from the baroque. Mathematicians define modernity often with the formulation of Calculus with Leibniz and Newton. Still professors of literature demonstrate how artificial these categories are when they define modernism in literature as later still with writers such as Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, etc., which was a reaction to the Victorian period. Philosophers often note that Descartes and Spinoza mark the onset of modern philosophy. Descartes's "cogito ergo sum" was seen as shift to the modern ego and he located the penial gland in the brain rather than the heart as the source of cognition. Modern disciplines in philosophy grew up such as aesthetics with Woolf and Baumgarten, while matters of art in antiquity were categorized as politics. Spinoza's modern Biblical criticism set the methodology of modern bible studies markedly apart from traditional faith based approaches. Leo Strauss has pointed out that the medieval scenario of ibn Tufail of the modern Robinson and Crusoe myth is that of a man stranded on a desert island contemplating the attributes of God. In contrast, the modern novelist Defoe has the stranded man enslave the island's population and create a technological civilization that exploits the environment. The age of faith thus succeeds to the age of total domination and exploitation. It is interesting to note that Hegel defined the onset of modernity with the birth of Christianity and many Ancient Near Eastern Studies scholars locate the conquest of Alexander the Great around 300 B.C.E. as the onset of modernity. This plurality of opinions with regards to the definition of modernity would seem to suggest that disciplines which define modernity shed more light on their own assumptions and pre-

existing conceptualizations than on an absolute definition of modernity itself. It would seem that definitions of antiquity, medieval, and modern depend on the set of assumptions and criteria of the discipline which sets out to define such constructs. The question of the definition of post-modernity is especially interesting to Jewish scholars in that philosophers like Fackenheim have defined the Shoah as the break/rupture/fissure that separates modernity from post-modernity. Thus state-sponsored Judeocide would seem to be the *tremendum* (Arthur Cohen) that launched the world into what Lyotard was later to call the post-modern condition.

Stern admits that more work remains to be done on processes and timing in Judaism such as the biological fact of menstruation, with all its gender related implications in tractate Nidah. The *teveling* in a *mikvah* and the separation of a man from his wife, during the period of *nidah* and after, marks the regulation of a biological clock within the process of rabbinic *halakhah*. This is not the focus of Stern's work but has been explored most recently by a host of other rabbinics scholars. Rather Stern has focused on the absence of time to correct the time-dominated bias of the modern world view, and to explain why the notion of time could not be legitimately assumed to be present in, or inferred from, ancient Jewish sources. Stern is thus laying the ground for more detailed research into temporal or process-related phenomenon in ancient Judaism.

Stern has chosen to go "backwards" in history, rather than to start from the Bible and then progress to post-exilic Judaism. A reason is that the Hebrew Bible is not the intended focus of this work: its focus is only "ancient Judaism," which Stern defines as strictly the religion and, more generally, the culture of the Jews from the Persian Achaemenid until the later Roman periods. He asserts that although the Hebrew biblical books continued to hold a dominant position in Judaism throughout this period, it would be methodologically unsound to assume *ipso facto* that biblical ideas were maintained and carried forth into post-exilic Judaism. The Bible was interpreted through the lens of rabbinic biblical exegesis or in the case of Qumran through the sectarian's outlook. Stern's interest in the Hebrew Bible, in chapter 6, is only to show that a process related world-view was not restricted or original to the Judaism of later antiquity. It was also attested to in the cultures of the ancient Near East including the lands from Egypt to Babylonia. Thus Stern claims that its process-related world view was consistent with a much broader cultural context. This notion of time contrasts remarkably with the concept of time

that existed in ancient Greece (chapter 5) and classical Greek literature, where *chronos* is presented as an independent, infinite continuum, that flows eternally of its own accord, and that is endowed with active, quasi divine qualities which determine the course of events and history. Stern is illuminating when he treats the concept and use of the words for time in Greek writers such as Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Theophrastus, Pindar, Sophocles, Pherecydes, Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Plutarch, Pythagoras, Marcus Aurelius, Iamblichus, Proclus, Plotinus, Livy, Virgil, Tacitus, etc. (chapter 5). Stern also explores Qumran sources. The 364-day calendar and the lunisolar calendars that are represented in detail in Qumran sources constitute attempts to harmonize, often artificially, the heavenly processes of the week, the lunar month, and the solar year. The sectarians took their solar calendar from the book of Jubilees. Apocryphal, and Pseudepigraphic post-biblical literature is also within Stern's scope. He expands his analysis to the ancient Near East as a whole. It emerges that the concept of time as a separate category or entity, specific to Greek tradition, was alien not only to rabbinic literature but also to ancient Jewish culture and to the prevailing cultures of the ancient Near East.

The concept of time is a subject of metaphysics in philosophy and of interest to historians of topics in philosophy. Time became the object of systematic philosophical enquiry from the early fourth century B.C.E. Stern notes that Plato in the *Timaeus* describes how time was created together with the heavenly bodies, thereby suggesting that its existence depends on the existence (and presumably, motion) of these bodies. This does not mean, however, that time does not exist as an entity in itself. Stern notes that Plato draws a distinction between *chronos* (time) and *aion* (normally translated here as eternity), and posits that eternity is the idea (p. 94). Aristotle rejects Plato's notion of *eidos* and concludes that "time is the number of motion according to prior and posterior, which is usually understood to mean the (numerical) measurement of motion in terms of prior and posterior" (Physics 220'24). Stern notes further, "Time is thus completely predicated on motion: in a motionless world, there would be not time, because time is only the measurement of motion. Moreover since time is only a number, it cannot exist without someone (a soul) to count it" (p. 95). For Aristotle "time is an attribute (pathos) of movement" (Physics 223'18). The Stoics defined time as the extension (or dimension) of the universe's motion. Diogenes Laertius, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* brings down that time is incorporeal and that past and future

are infinite whereas present is finite. This definition is cited in Plutarch and other sources. Elsewhere Plutarch rejects Aristotelian and Stoic definitions of time as an attribute of motion or its accident, and, citing instead the authority of Pindar and Pythagoras, wrote that time was “cause and potency and principle of the symmetry which holds together all things that come to be, and of the order whereby the nature of the universe, being animate, is in motion; or rather, being motion and order itself and symmetry, it is called time.” Stern notes that the relationship between time and motion was thus denied. Plutarch goes on, in the same passage, to cite Plato’s *Timaeus* in support of his opinion, but time was explicitly assigned an essence (*ousia*) in its own right, and treated as the driving force of the entire universe. Elsewhere Plutarch wrote that time is something in motion, appearing together with moving matter, ever flowing, and retaining nothing, a receptacle, as it were, of decay and birth. Stern notes further that this definition, generalizing Aristotle’s concept of time into a universal category, also appears in the works of Philo. M. Aurelius in the *Meditations* (2nd C. C.E.) with reference to *aion* (eternity) refers to time as a kind of river and violent flow out of what comes to be. Proclus developing Plotinus argues that time was prior to the soul.

Although this is not the focus of Stern’s book, there are some important questions that he raises that have broad implications for philosophy. Stern does note, “Kant, and later the phenomenologists, have argued that time is only a subjective experience of the conscious self—although this idea probably has its roots in Augustine’s *Confessions*. The nature of this subjective experience has been given, in turn, a range of interpretations. According to Kant, time is not something that exists of itself, or an empirical concept derived from experience: it is an a priori intuition, a pre-existing structure in our minds that allows us to relate to objects and events.” To unpack and understand the nature of time in Kant’s *oeuvre* would take much effort and more space than allowed for in this review. Needless to say, however, is the fact that the treatment of time in *Critique of Pure Reason* is a very complex and multifaceted subject. Stern is aware of further developments in philosophy such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty who described how time is sometimes experienced by the subject as a static landscape through which he is for ever traveling, and sometimes on the contrary, as a dynamic stream that is constantly gushing towards one from the future and then rushing away into the past. A phenomenological analysis of the modern concept of time reveals that the notion of time per se is culturally

determined. Stern notes that other philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition have regarded time as a fundamental structure of objective reality invoking the authority of science, especially theoretical physics, which was a branch of philosophy in the time of Aristotle and up until Newton’s day. In mathematics, time is the fourth dimension or reality, alongside three-dimensional space—a concept derived from the four dimensional model of Hermann Minkowski. Stern is less interested in the understanding of time from the perspective of the hard sciences of physics and mathematics, for he is interested in how time is conceived in human experience and culture. Stern notes that the perception of time is a much wider cultural phenomenon that reaches far beyond the strict confines of scientific discourse. Most modern scientists have rejected Kant’s notion of subjective and intuitive time notions in favor of an empirical and objective understanding of time as real entity. Time is often conceived as a quantity or dimension being susceptible of being measured, but also as a flow that is autonomous, irreversible, and over which one has little control. This notion, of course, goes back to Thales the ancient Greek philosopher who likened time to a flowing river, in which one could never step at exactly the same place across the continuum of its flow onwards. However the implications of modern Einsteinian relativity upset this model for we can understand that time can flow backwards based on “frames of reference.” The general theory of relativity published by Einstein in 1915 establishes that time intervals are dilated in strong gravitational fields. Consequently, the time interval between two events will be measured differently according to the perspective of the observer.

In Einsteinian relativity theory it can be shown mathematically that, if one goes the speed of light, time stops, although this is impossible. If one goes faster than the speed of light, time flows in reverse. This is empirically validated by the fact that sensitive clocks on space ships that go very fast, actually tick slower and astronauts aboard actually age slower and thus return younger than those who stayed on earth. In Einsteinian relativity, time-intervals are not absolute and with fixed values (as according to Newtonian physics), but relative and dependent on the position and speed of the observer. The closer one approaches the speed of light (which is impossible to exceed), the more time intervals are dilated—and hence, for example clocks tick more slowly. However, what has not been upset from Thales’s revolutionary metaphor of time as an irreversible “flowing river” is the modern notion that time is a “thing” on its own

and thus in modern society can be treated as a “resource” that can sometimes be scarce and sometimes plentiful, saved, utilized, or wasted, and constitutes for some people a valuable and irreplaceable commodity. Many post-modern philosophers have objected to this in the name of an environmental ethics and holistic vision of man’s place within the cosmos, because it leads to what Marxists would describe as the reduction of human beings themselves to resources that can be exploited and used as so many disposable parts to be worn out and thrown away. Stern points out that in communities where time is not viewed as a commodity or resource, i.e. “primitive” non-modern cultures, “the concept of time as an entity in itself simply does not exist. Reality is explained in terms of events, changes, and processes, but in these world-views, the notion of pure time or an overarching time dimension is completely absent and unknown. The concepts of time-saving and time-management are, similarly, alien and unknown” (p. 12). As noted previously, the absence of a general concept of time appears surprising and invites doubt to many modern Westerners. Stern in the introduction investigates the ethnographic record of primitive societies. Stern’s resort to anthropology allows him to deconstruct the Western concept of pure time and its cultural related limitations. Drawing on the thought of social historian Norbert Elias, Stern wishes to expose that time itself is not an empirical experience, nor a palpable reality, it is only a generalized abstraction. “Inasmuch as we tend to treat it, in modern culture, as existing and real, time often becomes a ‘reified abstraction’” (p. 18). Events and processes are what fill time, not time that fills time. Elias argues that the concept of time as commonly accepted by the West is a relatively recent invention of modern society. “According to Elias, time is not a universal a priori of human experience, nor the conception of a flow, that exists objectively. Time is a man-made idea: it is only a conceptual generalization and synthesis of all observable events and sequences” (p. 19). Thus it is not really “time” that clocks or other devices measure, but only concrete things such as the length of a working day, or of a lunar eclipse, or a sprinter’s speed in the one hundred meters. Clocks themselves are only sequences of physical events. Stern notes, “Elias argues that it is the universalistic nature of the concept of time, as well as the standardization of modern clocks through which this concept is articulated, that has misled people into treating time as an independent entity, as something that objectively flows” (p. 19). Elias considers the concept of time as a social institution of considerable importance because it enables individuals in society to achieve a high degree of orienta-

tion in their social and natural environment (p.19). Elias wants to point out the misleading feeling that time is an entity on its own or that time is passing, whereas in reality, it is the sequence of life or world events to which the feeling of passing applies. According to Elias the reification of time began when Galileo represented the intervals between regularly repeated events with mathematical equations; time was thus taken up into mathematics, and came to be treated as something measurable. Stern cites Elias noting, “It is only as clocks began to be used by Galileo and his contemporaries to measure physical, natural sequences, that the concept of time as a law of nature or structure of physical reality gradually took shape” (p. 90). Newton further contributed to the reification of time which was further still revised in Einstein’s special theory of relativity published in 1905. Thus we see from this section on philosophy and physics the convergence of physics and phenomenological analysis of time, whereby all that exists are objects and events, and time is only a reified abstraction. However Stern is less interested in the philosophers’ and physicists’ quest for “truth” through empirical validation than he is interested in the plausibility of non-modern process-based world-views.

Stern notes that the study of the Nuer time-reckoning led Evans-Pritchard to the conclusion that the concept of time, in its modern Western form, did not exist in Nuer cognitive thought. The Nuer not only have no expression equivalent to “time” but that instead of time the Nuer thought in terms of the succession and sequences of mainly human activities. The division of the year into seasons are “not so much exact units of time as rather vague conceptualizations of changes in oecological relations and social activities which pass imperceptively from one state to another.” Hallpike in *Foundations of Primitive Thought* lays out the emphasis on process in non-modern Western “primitive” cultures. The concepts that are used to describe and interpret the universe are change, activity, events, and process.

Stern is Reader in Jewish Studies at the School of Oriental and African studies, University of London. He studied ancient history at Oxford and social anthropology at University College London, before completing his D. Phil in Jewish studies at Oxford. His published works include *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (1994) and *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, Second Century BCE-Tenth Century CE* (2001).

Stern’s work is only the tip of the iceberg regarding further courses of study. While much has been written

about Sukenic's discovery of the mosaic of the Zodiac in Hebrew letters surrounding a depiction of the God's merkavah at Bet Alpha, the archeological record's documentation of ancient notions of time awaits to be further uncovered. At the Bet Alpha synagogue a picture of the merkavah in Yehezkel's vision is given—a man, *ari*, *shur*, and *nesher*, which according to Zohar 262b Vaethhanan corresponds to the Avot and King David as the wheels of God's chariot. There we encounter, "Only HaShem had a delight in thy fathers" (Devarim 15). Commenting on this R. Simeon said that the Avot are the holy chariot above. As there is a holy chariot below, so there is a holy chariot above. And what is this? As we have said, the holy chariot is the name given to the Whole, all being linked together and made one. But the Avot are only three, and the chariot has four wheels. Who is the fourth? It says, "And chose their seed after them," this includes King David, who is the fourth to complete the holy chariot, as we learnt. The Avot are the consummation of the whole, and the Body was completed through them and made one. Then David the King came and perfected the whole and made firm the body and perfected it. Rabbi Yitzak said, "as the Avot merited to be crowned with the holy chariot, so did David merit to be adorned and gloried with the fourth support of the chariot" This passage is a gemara and Rabbi Lakish argues for David as the fourth wheel as well which makes sense since mashiach ben David will be allied with the four Emahot corresponding to the Shekhinah—the messianic age when God's presence will be manifest. The Bet Alpha mosaic is particularly interesting in that the Zodiac in Hebrew surrounds the picture of God's chariot. This is as if to suggest that the chariot controls the heavenly bodies which in turn legislate time. Since the first three wheels are the Avot, whose history is given in Bereshit, and the fourth wheel is David HaMelekh representing the rest of the Tanakh or the movement towards an eschatological messianic age, it makes further sense to deduce that the reading of the Torah (Bereshit—rest of Tanakh) is linked and determines time itself. God's chariot i.e. reading of the Torah and Haftorot and Megillot is related to the cosmic movement of the heavenly bodies which in turn cause time's flow.

Another future avenue of research will be linking the uncanny supernatural time occurrence in the Tanakh itself with hidden encoded temporal moments. For example Rambam in the Moreh HaNevukhim points out that Yehezkel's vision on the Chabar river in Babylon does not happen out of the blue or accidentally. Rambam notes that the letters of the word Chabar can be arranged also to spell *khruvim* (cherubs) and *rokhav* (to ride) which the

Rambam relates to Deut. 33:26 and Tehillim 68:5. Rambam sees a hidden pattern that we must pay attention to regarding the time the vision is said to occur. It takes place in the thirtieth year (*lamed*), fourth month (*daleth*) and fifth day (*hey*)—spelling *ladah* a form of the Hebrew verb "to give birth" which Rambam links to Hosea 9:11. Rambam writes, "To the whole of things requiring investigation belongs the tying of the apprehension of the Chariot to a year, a month, and a day, and also to a place. This is something the significance of which ought to be sought. It should not be thought that this is a matter without significance" (III, ch.7). Rambam's chapter headings are revealing. In BT Hagigah 13a this emphasis on chapter headings is also voiced when we encounter, "Till where is it permissible to teach ma'aseh merkavah? Rabbi Meir says, Till the last 'And I saw,' Rabbi Isaac says, 'Till the word 'hashmal' from the first 'And I saw' till the word hashmal, it is permissible to teach from there on the chapter headings are transmitted to the disciple. Some say from the first 'And I saw' the word hashmal, the chapter headings are transmitted to him; from there on, he may be taught if he is a wise man understanding in virtue of his own intelligence; and he may not if he is not that."

It is not accidental that mystical names such as *no-lad* and *ibbur* are used to describe the calendrical phases of the moon. This is all as if to draw our attention to the correlation between time and supernatural events or in the case of Yehezkel's prophecy itself. Stern does devote some space to the Rambam's understanding of time and notes that the Rambam recognizes that the study of Talmud requires much time (*zeman arokh*). In part the Mishneh Torah is given to people to spare time. Not that Talmud study is a waste of time, the Rambam encourages the study of Talmud, but offers his Code in the spirit of clarity and clarification of a complex sea of details. The Rambam does have a notion, however, of the sin of wasting time and suggests that "sforim hitzonim" such as Ben Sira, physiognomy, chronography, poetry, etc can be *ibud hazeman* (Commentary to the Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1). In his famous letter to ibn Tibbon he writes, "come in peace to see me, but not to get anything out of me, because my time is very scarce" ("Texts by and about Maimonides", JQR 25 (1925), p. 371). In some sense the MT is dedicated to the memory of Rambam's brother David. It is not accidental that the Yad Hazakah is in fourteen sections and the *gematria* of David is fourteen, for it was David who provided Rambam with the time to learn full time for much of his life. David was in the precious gems business and the *Guide* itself is likened to a

precious gem, but in a different way that Rabbi Yakov b. Asher's Arba'ah turim is which literally is an allusion to the twelve precious gems on the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*. Rather the *Guide* sees itself as a precious pearl that Rambam dove to the bottom of the sea (a euphemism for Talmud) to retrieve for the benefit of his rare reader and star pupil Yosef. It was after David went down on a ship in the Indian Ocean with the family fortune that the Rambam turned to serving as a physician. The demands of being a physician were very strenuous as Rambam notes further in his letter to ibn Tibbon. We recall, "Do not expect to be able to confer with me on any scientific subject for even one hour, either by day or by night, for the following is my daily occupation/routine: I dwell in Fostat and the Sultan resides in Cairo; these two places are two Sabbath days' journey distant from each other. My duties to the sultan are very heavy. I am obliged to visit him every day, early in the morning; and when he or any of his children, or any of the inmates of his harem are indisposed, I dare not quit Kahira, but must stay during the greater part of the day in the palace. It also frequently happens that one or two royal officers fall sick, and I must attend to their healing. Hence, as a rule, I repair to Kahira very early in the day, and even if nothing unusual happens, I do not return to Fostat until the afternoon. Then I am almost dying with hunger I find the antechambers filled with people, both Jews and Gentiles, nobles and common people, judges and bailiffs, friends and foes- a mixed multitude who await the time of my return. I dismount from my animal, wash my hands, go forth to my patients, and entreat them to bear with me while I partake of some slight refreshment, the only meal I take in the 24 hours. Then I go forth to attend to my patients, and write prescriptions and directions for their various ailments. Patients go in and out until nightfall, and sometimes even I solemnly assure you until two hours or more in the night. I converse with and prescribe for them while lying down from sheer fatigue; and when night falls, I am so exhausted that I can scarcely speak. In consequence of this, no Israelite can have any private interview with me, except on Sabbath. On that day the whole congregation or at least the majority of the members come to me after the morning service, when I instruct them as to their proceedings during the whole week; we study together a little until noon, when they depart. Some of them return and read with me after the minchah until ma'ariv. In this manner I spend that day. I have here related to you only a part of what you would see if you were to visit me" As we can see from the Rambam's description time to devote to learning itself is a great blessing may we all merit to enjoy. As Rabbi Tarfon says, "The day is short, the task

is great, the workers indolent, the reward bountiful, and the master insistent!"

If time is a number, the significance of time in the Tanakh has been the subject of much exegesis. Numerical patterns of 3, 7, 10, 50 etc. has been widely pointed out. For example, the tenth generation from Adam to Noah and Noah to Abraham is not accidental nor is the seventh day of rest accidental for there are seventy sacrifices on *sukkot*, seventy *zikanim*, and the word *dag* is the *gematria* of seven, while that of David is two sevens. Sevens are beloved, while tens are complete. The hidden encoding of numbers and numerology in the Tanakh, with its correlation to timing and the process of time itself awaits further revelation.

Stern also might have developed the relation of time to dreams-dream time. Indeed the Psalm that we sing on Shabbat refers to HaShem restoring us to our land "as if we were dreamers" and dreams, which are 1/60th of prophecy, and which operate in different modalities of dream time. Such issues await further exploration. For example, what is the nature of the dreams that Joseph and Daniel interpret with regards to their predication of events in time to come. The Midrash says that when Joseph dreams that the sun, moon, and stars bow down to him, the sun is correlated to his father, Yakov Avinu, the moon to his mother, Rochel, and stars to his brothers. This dream comes true when his brothers come down to Egypt bowing to him in request of grain during a famine. The other dreams that Joseph interprets also come true regarding the baker and cup bearer. Yosef is able to interpret dreams as a prophecy of what is to come. In the case of Daniel, he interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue with a head of gold, torso of silver, waist of bronze, and feet of clay. The head of gold represents the Babylonians, the torso of silver the Persians, the waist of bronze the Greeks and the feet of clay the Romans, i.e. the four nations that have oppressed the Jews. Abarbanel comments that we are still living under the oppression of the Romans who devastated the Beit HaMikdash in 70 C.E. Daniel converts dream time to offer a prophecy of all of Jewish history that is pushing towards its eschatological fulfillment of the messianic era and end of days which is touched upon in my review with H-Judaic on Kavka's book, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy*.

Stern's book is highly recommended for Judaica libraries. It will be of interest to students and professors of: Rabbinics, classics, anthropology, history of ideas, philosophy, history, and Jewish studies in general. Although, as Stern says, he has avoided "the highbrow aca-

demic disciplines of law, rhetoric, and philosophy, and  
dealt with a more fundamental aspect of human experi-  
ence,” readers will find this a delightful interdisciplinary  
work.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

**Citation:** David B. Levy. Review of Stern, Sacha, *Time and Process in Ancient Judaism*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. March, 2005.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10382>

Copyright © 2005 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).