



Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah

Moshe Simon-Shoshan

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Winner of Honorable Mention in the Jordan Schnitzer Book Awards of the Association for Jewish Studies

Moshe Simon-Shoshan offers a groundbreaking study of Jewish law (halakhah) and rabbinic story-telling. Focusing on the Mishnah, the foundational text of halakhah, he argues that narrative was essential in early rabbinic formulations and concepts of law, legal process, and political and religious authority.

The book begins by presenting a theoretical framework for considering the role of narrative in the Mishnah. Drawing on a wide range of disciplines, including narrative theory, Semitic linguistics, and comparative legal studies, Simon-Shoshan shows that law and narrative are inextricably intertwined in the Mishnah. Narrative is central to the way in which the Mishnah transmits law and ideas about jurisprudence.

Furthermore, the Mishnah's stories are the locus around which the Mishnah both constructs and critiques its concept of the rabbi as the ultimate arbiters of Jewish law and practice.

In the second half of the book, Simon-Shoshan applies these ideas to close readings of individual Mishnaic stories. Among these stories are some of the most famous narratives in rabbinic literature, including those of Honi the Circle-drawer and R. Gamliel's Yom Kippur confrontation with R. Joshua. In each instance, Simon-Shoshan elucidates the legal, political, theological, and human elements of the story and places them in the wider context of the book's arguments about law, narrative, and rabbinic authority.

Stories of the Law presents an original and forceful argument for applying literary theory to legal texts, challenging the traditional distinctions between law and literature that underlie much contemporary scholarship.

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