

Abstract for Jews and Melancholia Symposium
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Are "Jews" Melancholic? Acedia in Rabbinic (In)action

This paper probes political philology as a way to approach a complex image, figure, and concept of the "Jews" in the two Talmud. To that end, I will first commit a slow reading of Nedarim 49ab in the Babylonian Talmud and its parallels in late ancient rabbinic corpora from Palestinian Talmud to Midrashim (Exegetical and Isogetical readings of Scriptures.) The analysis will focus — empirically — on extreme cases in which "Jews" (יהודאי to mention only one spelling) figure in, and help conceptualize the discussions between, the characters in the Talmud. A theoretical aspect of that reading of the Talmudic discussion slowly will have to do with how modernist notions of melancholia in Kafka and Benjamin help laying bare the assumptions informing how these Talmudic texts have been approached or constructed so far. Through that process of reading slowly, I will arrive to the question of the relationship between *acedia*, a Christian theological notion, as associated as it became in modern times, with the broader notions of Melancholia and Allegoria on the one hand, and the practice of rabbinic (in)action, a position best approximated (but in no way fully grasped) by both grammatical and philosophical notions of the middle voice found in contemporary philosophical theorization of the Talmud.