On a personal note, I can say that rabbinic literature is a field that was too little explored during my training as a biblical exegete. Once I entered the doctoral program, however, the relevance and richness of this literature soon became undeniable for the study of the Bible and related topics. Therefore, the expert colloquium at our faculty was an excellent opportunity to get an overview of the developments and areas within the field of rabbinic literature and its importance for New Testament scholarship.

Divided over two days, the fifteen lectures were grouped in four large topical areas: “State of the Art,” “Methodology,” “Halakha,” and “Language and Literature.” After the welcoming address and opening of the colloquium by Didier Pollefeyt, President of Institutum Judaicum, the Interuniversity Center for the Academic Study of Judaism in Belgium, and Jan Willem van Henten from the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER), Peter Tomson chaired the first session of the symposium.

William Horbury had the honour of introducing the audience to the topic of the symposium. In his lecture “The New Testament and Rabbinic Study: A Historical Sketch” he provided an overview of New Testament interpretation in the light of rabbinic tradition. Although this kind of interpretation only became a distinct field of research in the seventeenth century, already in the third century the interest in Jewish literature and tradition in Christian biblical study was stimulated through controversies between the two religions. This resulted in the practice of confronting the New Testament with Jewish tradition, which also regularly evoked resistance. At the end of the Middle Ages (15th–16th centuries), rabbinic material was prominent in the commentary tradition of New Testament parts of early printed Bibles. The renaissance of Greek was accompanied by an efflorescence of post-Biblical Hebrew study among non-Jews. The Christian Hebraists of the 17th and 18th centuries created the environment which resulted in the work of, for instance, Strack and Billerbeck. Like in ancient times, the application of the rabbinic tradition to the New Testament

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evoked resistance in modern times. Yet, two points of defence put forward by the modern Hebraists are still worth considering: (i) Some parts of the New Testament can hardly be understood without rabbinic knowledge, and (ii) in some form, the rabbinic claim of a continuous tradition going back to Second Temple can be defended as a thesis.

The second speaker, Isaiah Gafni, presented an overview of recent directions in the critical research of rabbinic literature and their implications for a variety of historical questions that have been raised as a result of these studies. His lecture “The Modern Study of Rabbinics: Historical Questions” focused on various schools of Talmudic research and how their respective approaches influence the historian’s treatment of these sources. After a discussion on the various shortcomings and pitfalls in the use of rabbinic materials as a historical source, Gafni suggested several methods for overcoming some of these obstacles.

In his lecture “From Textual Improving to Heuristic Pragmatism: A Status Questionis on Editing/Explaining Rabbinic Texts,” Giuseppe Veltri described the editing of a text, both ancient and modern, as a titanic task. Besides the question regarding the number of authors that worked on a text, the main question is whether to document all the different versions of the literary creation or to privilege the “original” text. The meaning of the “original” text is also open for discussion; it can be seen as either the absolute beginning of the creation of the text or of its final redaction. Veltri presented three questions that are central in investigating and editing rabbinic manuscripts: (i) Can we edit a text without interpreting it? (ii) What is the decisive factor in choosing variant readings? and (iii) Which textual and literary significance should be attributed to the so-called original text? After dealing with these questions Veltri illustrated pragmatic editing by means of the edition project of Midrash Tehillim at the University of Halle.

The afternoon session on “Methodology” was chaired by Jan Willem van Henten. The lecture by Günter Stemberger “Dating Rabbinic Traditions” briefly went over the general criteria for establishing absolute and relative dates of rabbinic documents; for instance, the usefulness of names of rabbis and the method of attestation developed by Jacob Neusner for dating specific textual units. The main emphasis of the paper was on recent attempts to trace the origin of rabbinic texts, or at least their contents, to the period before the destruction