

“Wasted Seed,” The History of a Rabbinic Idea

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The many advances in source-criticism of the Babylonian Talmud can be a valuable tool in the study of the intellectual history of the rabbis. Here I attempt to combine source-criticism with philological and comparative methodologies to show that the idea that the non-procreative emission of semen is in itself condemned is limited to the redatorial strata of the Babylonian Talmud. This difference might be due to differing assumptions about the nature of semen: for Palestinian rabbis, like their non-Jewish counterparts, sexual self-control and procreation were areas of concern, not semen *per se*. Later Babylonian rabbis, on the other hand, may have assumed that semen possessed special powers. This thesis is developed through: (1) close reading of the most important text on this idea, *b. Nid.* 13a-b; (2) examination of other occurrences of this idea in rabbinic literature, especially where they are paralleled in other rabbinic documents; and (3) comparison of the rabbinic assumptions revealed in these sources to non-rabbinic texts on the same topic.*

Despite the enormous gains made recently in the development and application of source-critical methodologies to rabbinic literature, little progress has been made applying these gains to the study of rabbinic culture. Whereas in 1968 in his book *Hazal: Pirke emunot v'deot*, Ephraim Urbach could be sure of the central and primary beliefs of the hardly-differentiated “Sages”, we are all too aware not only of the source-critical issues that must now be taken into account in such a study, but also of the diversity of rabbinic culture.¹ Study of rabbinic literature over the last decade has led to serious challenges to the historical use of rabbinic literature.² Recent reappraisal of the “rabbis” has challenged the very notion

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(1) Translated as Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, 1987).

(2) Movement in this direction was begun by Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (3 vols.; Leiden, 1971). For a summary of the state of the field, cf. the bibliographical appendix in Richard Kalmin, “Saints or Sinners, Scholars or Ignoramus? Stories about the Rabbis as Evidence for the Composite Nature of the Babylonian Talmud,” *AJS*

that one can speak of this collection of men — living over the course of four to five centuries in both Palestine and Babylonia — as a single “group” or “class”.³ The diversity of rabbinic culture makes it probable that different rabbinic groups in fact operated under very different sets of fundamental assumptions. Hence, comments by one group of rabbis generated by certain cultural assumptions might well have been misunderstood by other groups of rabbis who operated under very different sets of cultural assumptions.

David Weiss Halivni, who helped to pioneer the application of source-critical methodologies to talmudic material, was well aware of the challenges that his application of source-criticism to the Babylonian Talmud brings to the study of rabbinic thought: he places on the historian the responsibility for dividing, dating, and putting into historical context the ideas found within the Talmud.⁴ Halivni offers no guidance, however, as to exactly how this is to be done. How might one apply constructively the gains made in the source-critical study of rabbinic literature to the study of rabbinic history, culture, and thought, while remaining aware of the great diversity of this culture?

An analysis of the rabbinic idea of “wasted semen” (*שכחת זרע לבטלה*) can, I believe, serve as a case-study for how rabbinic literature can profitably be excavated. It is commonly asserted that the rabbis marked as negative the non-procreative emission of semen, and many commentators, both ancient and modern, have attempted to reconcile this principle with rabbinic dicta that seemingly are unruffled by such emissions (see below). In this paper, I argue that the idea that the non-procreative emission of semen is *in itself* bad is a relatively late idea, limited to the period of the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud.⁵ In support of this thesis, I offer three

Review 15(1990) 203–5. A fine application of this skepticism can be seen in Shamma Friedman, “Literary Development and Historicity in the Aggadic Narrative of the Babylonian Talmud — A Study based upon B.M. 83b–86a,” in *Community and Culture: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Founding of Gratz College*, ed. Nahum M. Waldman (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 67–80.

(3) Cf. Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem and New York, 1989); Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 24–25.

(4) David Weiss Halivni, *Sources and Traditions: Shabbat* (New York, 1982), p. 26 [Hebrew].

(5) Throughout this study I employ a source-critical approach to the Babylonian Talmud. For purposes of this study, I initially accept attributions as faithfully reflecting tannaitic or *geographical* provenance, with most unattributed material being classified as redatorial (*stam*), which I assume to be temporally late. The results of this study to some extent argue for the validity of this approach: dicta grouped together by formal criteria (i.e., attribution) exhibit similar *implicit* assumptions. The issue, however, is far from settled. On source-criticism of the Babylonian Talmud and the veracity of attributions, cf. David Halivni, *Sources and Traditions*:

types of arguments: (1) a source-critical analysis of the most important *sugya* on the topic in the Babylonian Talmud; (2) a survey of all other occurrences of the concept in the rabbinic literature of late antiquity; and (3) a comparison of the results suggested by analysis of the rabbinic sources with contemporaneous non-Jewish data.

B. NID. 13A-B: THE LOCUS CLASSICUS

Any examination of the treatment of the non-procreative emission of semen in the Babylonian Talmud must rely heavily on *b. Nid* 13a-b, which contains by far the longest and most comprehensive discussion of the topic in the Babylonian Talmud. The *sugya* is a discussion of *m. Nid.* 2:1: "Every hand that 'checks' frequently — if by a women, it is praiseworthy, but if by a man, it should be cut off".⁶ This *sugya*, I argue, is both polemical and highly stylized. "Polemical" in the sense that as a *sugya* it forcefully and directly argues against non-procreative emission of semen.⁷ "Highly stylized" in the sense that not only does the *sugya* make a single, cogent argument against male masturbation, but also that the editor has distorted the meanings of several of the earlier sources incorporated into the *sugya*.⁸

Shabbat, pp. 5–27, and, "Contemporary Methods of the Study of Talmud," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979) 192–201; Shamma Friedman, "A Critical Study of *Yevamot X* with a Methodological Introduction" in *Texts and Studies: Analecta Judaica*, ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky (New York, 1977), pp. 275–341 [Hebrew]; Jacob Neusner, *The Bavli's Massive Miscellanies: The Problem of Agglutinative Discourse in the Talmud of Babylonia* (Atlanta, 1992); *Sources and Traditions: Types of Composition in the Talmud of Babylonia* (Atlanta, 1992); *The Principal Parts of the Bavli's Discourse: A Preliminary Taxonomy* (Atlanta, 1992); *How the Talmud Shaped Rabbinic Discourse* (Atlanta, 1991), pp. 105–53; Richard Kalmin, "Quotation Forms in the Babylonian Talmud: Authentically Amoraic, or a Later Editorial Construct?" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988) 167–87; *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud: Amoraic or Saboraic* (Cincinnati, 1989).

(6) *m. Nid.* 2:1 (ed. Hanokh Albeck, *The Mishnah* [rpt. 6 vols.; Tel-Aviv, 1988], 6:381). All translations, unless noted, are my own. Abbreviations of rabbinic texts follow the *Journal of Biblical Literature* style sheet, with some minor modifications.

(7) Except where noted, I use this phrase throughout the paper to denote male seed. I discuss below the (non)application of this principle to female seed (*יְנִין*). In most instances, I use the terms "sperm", "semen", and "seed" interchangeably, depending upon the words used in the texts under discussion. For the ancients, however, they are for all intents and purposes equal.

(8) Throughout this discussion I attempt to distinguish between the activities of the editor (*עֲמִיל*), the arranger of the *sugya*, and the redactor (*הַדָּק*), the contributor of the anonymous material. On the need for this distinction, cf. Richard Kalmin, *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud*, pp. 2–3 and the sources cited in pp. 153–4, n. 21. At least in this *sugya*, however, both the arrangement and anonymous strata appear to work toward the same end. It is likely that both the arrangement of the material and the redatorial contribution took place at the same time.

In the following discussion, in which I analyze the individual dicta that comprise this polemic and consider the role of the editor and/or redactor in piecing them together, I refer to the paragraphs of the text as presented in the Appendices (both the Hebrew and an English translation are included). Within the Appendices the strata of the sources are indicated: sources attributed as tannaitic are underlined; those attributed to amora'im are in boldface; and the redatorial contributions are in regular type.⁹ I discuss the reasons for the specific assignments below.

The *sugya* can be outlined roughly as follows:

- (A) : Why the Mishnah differentiates men from women
- (B) – (D) : On touching one's penis generally
- (E) – (H) : On touching one's penis while urinating
- (I) – (L) : On the non-procreative emission of semen
- (M) – (O) : On touching one's penis while urinating
- (P) – (T) : On male self-arousal
- (U) – (V) : Marrying girls who cannot bear children
- (W) – (Y) : Punishment for touching one's penis

As a whole, this *sugya* argues strongly against men arousing themselves (whether intentionally or, as in the case of touching one's penis while urinating, unintentionally) because this will lead to the non-procreative emission of semen. When, however, the individual pericopes that compose this *sugya* are examined, it appears that this idea is found only in the redatorial strata of the *sugya* and in the contextualization of earlier source material. In fact, as will become clear from a detailed examination of the components of this *sugya* arranged by attribution, such a notion is foreign to these earlier sources.

Tannaitic Sources. According to *m. Nid. 2:1*, a woman should frequently check to see if she has begun menstruating, whereas a man who frequently checks (presumably for a seminal emission) deserves to have it (presumably his hand, the subject of the clause) amputated. The mishna does not explain why a man should not check frequently with his hand for genital emissions, although a baraita offers an intriguing parallel:

It was also taught . . . [R. Muna or R. Matyah]¹⁰ used to say, Let the

(9) On using type-face to differentiate strata in the Babylonian Talmud, cf. Friedman, *A Critical Study of Yevamot X*, pp. 37–38.

(10) C. F. Rabinovitz, ed., *Dikduke Soferim* (rpt. 14 vols., Brooklyn and Jerusalem, 1959/60) 2:238. Hereafter abbreviated *D.S.*

hand to the eye be cut off; let the hand to the nose be cut off; let the hand to the mouth be cut off; let the hand to the ear be cut off; let the hand to the vein be cut off; let the hand to the penis be cut off;¹¹ let the hand to the anus be cut off; let the hand to the casket be cut off; [because] the hand [leads to] blindness, [because] the hand [leads to] deafness, [because] the hand causes polyps¹² to rise.¹³

Even if the reference to "the hand to the penis" is a corruption based on our mishna, the argument is here made explicit: one should avoid touching certain parts of one's body because it can lead to ill-health. Medical reasons underlie the stricture. Hence it is possible that *m. Nid.* 2:1 too proscribes men from touching their genitals too frequently for fear that such an activity will lead to health problems.¹⁴

Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, the mishna can be read as condemning a man for sexually arousing himself. Other tannaitic dicta within this *sugya* support this interpretation. For example, according to (D) (paralleled at [E] and [N]): "But isn't it taught: R. Eliezer says, that anyone who holds his penis when he urinates, it is as if he brings a flood unto the world." This baraita, found also in two shorter but similar *sugyot*,¹⁵ suggests that (1) some kind of male sexual transgressions brought about the flood in the time of Noah, and (2) those who continue to do such things threaten the world with another divinely caused flood. Both claims are singular. The idea that the flood was brought about by sexual sins of the people of that generation is foreign to other tannaitic sources.¹⁶ Moreover, no

(11) This phrase is missing in some manuscripts. Cf. *D.S.* 2:238. It may have found its way into our text due to influence from *m. Nid.* 2:1.

(12) These might be specific to the nose. Cf. Julius Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine*, trans. Fred Rosner (New York 1978), p. 296.

(13) *b. Šabb.* 108b–109a. See the version in *Masekhet Kallah* 19 (ed. Michael Higger, *The Treatises Derek Erez* [New York; 1935], pp. 152–154), which seems to conflate *b. Šabb.* 108b–109a and *b. Nid.* 13b.

(14) The prospect of a disease that would render a man sterile would have not seemed trivial to the tannaim. *t. Yebam* 8:4 (ed. Saul Lieberman, *The Tosefta* [4 vols.; New York, 1955–1988], 3.1:24–25), for example, condemns men who endanger their ability to procreate. On this passage, cf. Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* (10 vols.; New York, 1955–1988), 6:68 [Hebrew].

(15) *b. Šabb.* 41a; *b. Nid.* 43a. (D) is imported from the latter.

(16) Connection of sexual sins to the generation of the flood seems to first appear in rabbinic writings attributed to R. Yoḥanan. Cf. *b. Sanh.* 108a, which however, also goes on to impute a wide variety of non-sexual transgressions to the generation of the flood. It is interesting to note that another statement attributed to R. Yoḥanan in *y. Sanh.* 10:3, 29b describes the flood waters as being very hot; only in the Babylonian Talmud is the heat of the water linked to the sexual sinfulness of the people. Cf. *b. Roš Haš.* 12a; *b. Sanh.* 108a; *b. Zebah.* 113b.

other tannaitic source, to my knowledge, threatens sexual transgressions with the communal punishment of flooding.¹⁷ The peculiarity of this source, when compared to other tannaitic material, as well as its lack of attestation in tannaitic documents, thus throws the attribution into question. Regardless of the veracity of the attribution, however, the same tannaitic condemnation of a man touching his penis while urinating is found in (F) – (H) (if tannaitic and not a later addition) and (O.3) in our *sugya*, as well as elsewhere in tannaitic literature.¹⁸ This condemnation is apparently based on the idea of self-arousal: there is no mention in this source of the emission of semen.¹⁹

Several of the other relevant tannaitic sources are paralleled by a toseftan baraita that explicitly comments on *m. Nid.* 2:1:

1. . . . Rabbi Tarfon says, it [his hand] should be cut off on the belly. He [?] said to him, but his belly will split!
2. He said to them, I only intended this: To what is the matter similar? To one who presses his finger hard upon his eye. All the time that he presses tears come out.
3. To what does this apply? To the emission of semen, but for a genital flux every hand that frequently checks is praiseworthy.²⁰

This tosefta is found in a quite different form in our *sugya*. (1) forms the basis for the latter part of our *sugya* (Y); (2) is equivalent to (E); and (3) is the basis for (B). (2) is the only tannaitic source, as I argue below, that might plausibly be read as expressing disapproval of the non-procreative emission of semen. Yet even this source is not as clear as might be hoped. First, (2) might simply suggest natural consequence: if one touches his penis, some natural consequence that is negatively charged

The redactor also connects the non-procreative emission of semen to the generation of the flood at *b. Ned.* 20b.

(17) Although tannaitic sources do occasionally threaten other divinely ordained communal punishments for sexual transgressions. Cf. for example, *Sifra, Ahare* 13:8 (ed. J. H. Weiss, *Sifra* [Vienna, 1862], 85a); *Sifre Deut.* 254 (ed. Louis Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy* [rpt. New York, 1969], p. 280).

(18) See the parallels at *b. Šabb.* 41a, 118b; *b. Nid.* 16b, 43a. Note that in *b. Nid.* 16b this dictum is assigned originally to Ben Sira. While part of the passage attributed to Ben Sira parallels Sir 21:22–3, the clause about touching one's penis while urinating has no parallel in the book. I have been unable to locate parallels to the condemnation of touching one's penis while urinating in tannaitic documents.

(19) See below for the importance of separating condemnation of self-arousal from that of the non-procreative emission of semen.

(20) *t. Nid.* 2:8 (ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman, *The Tosefta* [rpt. Jerusalem, 1970], p. 643).

(erection or the emission of semen) will inevitably follow. Second, (2) is somewhat obscure: what does "I only intended" (*אָנִי לֹא נַחֲשָׁנֵת אֶלָּא*) mean, and how does it fit with the rest of the pericope?²¹ It seems to imply that (1) is an exaggeration intended to emphasize the condemnation of a man who checks his genitals frequently. If this is so, then by splitting up this tradition (if indeed it was before them) the editor/redactor of our *sugya* caused (1) to be read out of context. That is, while in its original context (1) is softened by (2), its citation in (Y) allows it to be read more literally. To R. Tarfon's statement in the *tosefta* is added the threat of divine retribution, of descent into the "pit of destruction". Responding to his students, who complain that cutting a man's hand off on his belly will result in rupturing his stomach, R. Tarfon responds that even that is better than descent into "the pit of destruction". Rabbi Tarfon's threat of descent into the pit of destruction is not found in parallel traditions in either the *tosefta* or the Palestinian Talmud.²² Thus, if the redactor was using the same version of the tradition as is currently found in the *tosefta*, he apparently reworked it, adding a stronger form of rhetoric in order to emphasize the heinousness of the activity.

A clearer case of editorial tinkering with tannaitic sources is found at (T). In its original context, this *baraita* almost certainly referred to different kinds of heterosexual activities: "foot" probably refers to sexual intercourse, and "hand" to some other kind of physical contact.²³ Only the

(21) Elsewhere in the *Tosefta* the phrase only occurs at *t. Nazir* 3:10 (ed. Lieberman, 3.1:132), and here too the sense is somewhat obscure. The *Tosefta* concerns a woman who makes a vow: if another woman heard her and replied, "Me too", the vow is considered binding on her also, even if the husband of the first woman releases his wife from the vow. If, however, the second woman says that she only meant that she should "be like her [the first woman]," then she too would be released when the first woman is released. The ambiguity is whether the second woman makes her stipulation (1) instead of, or (2) later than and in addition to, her declaration, "Me too". If, as is more likely, (2) is meant, then the phrase serves to explain and modify the first statement, as I am interpreting the phrase in its present context.

(22) In *t. Nid.* 2:8, cited above, there is no additional threat. In the version in *y. Nid.* 2:1, 49d, when his students asked if cutting off his hand on his belly will lead to bursting of the stomach, R. Tarfon replies, "death is better than life for him". Both lack any element of divine retribution. The phrase and concept of the pit of destruction, however, are found in tannaitic and Palestinian sources. Cf. *t. Sot.* 3:19 (ed. Lieberman, 3.2:166), 8:6 (ed. Lieberman, 3.2:204–5); *y. Ber.* 4:2, 7d, paralleled with a tannaitic attribution at *b. Ber.* 28b. Cf. also, *b. Erub.* 19a and *b. Sot.* 35b.

(23) If foot *רגל* here is a euphemism for "penis", the exegesis might be that any sexual intimacy with a married woman, even if it does not involve intercourse, can be termed "adultery". The dictionaries do not give this meaning for *רגל* in rabbinic literature, but it is clearly attested in the Bible and rabbinic sources (cf. for example, Judges 3:24; Ezek 6:25; *b. Yebam.* 103a). See also Elliot R. Wolfson, "Images of God's Feet: Some Observations on the Divine

placement of the baraita, immediately after (S), suggests that the “hand” is to be taken as a reference to male masturbation.²⁴

The other tannaitic sources in this *sugya* also show no concern with the issue of the non-procreative emission of semen. (C), an unparalleled baraita, is not even concerned that a man who checks himself with a soft cloth will become aroused. Both (D) and (O) cite mishnas that do not deal with this issue.²⁵ (U), a strange tradition that those who “sport” with children delay the coming of the Messiah, is discussed below.

In sum, no passages attributed as tannaitic in this *sugya*, with the possible but by no means certain exception of the parallel to the tosefta in (D), show disapproval of the non-procreative emission of semen. They do, however, condemn a man who touches his own penis, and self-arousal generally. Why they condemn such a man is not clear from these sources. It also appears that the editor and/or redactor both positioned these traditions in contexts which distort their original meanings, and perhaps even modified traditions in order to reinforce the message of the *sugya*.

Amoraic Dicta. Because Palestinian and Babylonian amoraim appear to share assumptions about self-arousal, I consider the dicta of both together.²⁶

Body in Judaism,” in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany, NY, 1992), p.164; Siegman Schultze-Galléra, *Fuss- und Schusymbolik und-Erotik* (Leipzig, 1909). “Hand” is used to mean penis in 1QS 7 (*The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, ed. Geza Vermes [3rd ed.; London: Penguin, 1990], p. 71). On sexual euphemisms in rabbinic literature, cf. Ezra Z. Melamed, “Euphemisms and Textual Alterations of Expressions in Talmud,” in *Benjamin deVries Memorial Volume*, ed. Ezra Z. Melamed (Jerusalem: Tel-Aviv University Research Authority, 1968), pp. 137–43 [Hebrew]. The opinion of the Tosafist that it means that he rubs his penis with a hand or foot is far-fetched (*b. Nid.* 13b, s.v., *תבנ*).

(24) On this baraita, see Ezra Z. Melamed, *Halachic Midrashim of the Tannaim in the Babylonian Talmud* (rpt. Jerusalem, 1988), p. 123 [Hebrew].

(25) (G): *m. Nid.* 5:2 (ed. Albeck, 6:389), on a priest grabbing his penis to hold back ejaculation for fear of pollution while eating heave-offerings; (W): This is a citation of *m. 'Abod. Zar.* 5:6 (ed. Albeck, 4:342), which discusses under what circumstances wine left within reach of pagan soldiers is permissible for Jews to drink. It is cited in order to draw an analogy between the fear of the troops engaged in battle and therefore their neglect of the Jewish wine and the fear of a man urinating off a roof or at night, and therefore he will not come to arouse himself. This mishnah is also cited at *b. Šabb.* 41a, *b. Ketub.* 27a. The latter citation uses this mishnah to draw an analogy between wine and sex: Rav Mari argues that if the troops are too busy to make libations, they are also too busy to have intercourse with the women in the town.

(26) At the same time, it is important to be alert to differences between the two groups. My assignment of rabbis to Palestine and Babylonia follows Hanoch Albeck, *Mavo l'Talmudim* (rpt. Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1987) [Hebrew]. In the following discussion I indicate the generation of the amora, also per Albeck unless otherwise noted. PA = Palestinian amora; BA = Babylonian amora, followed by the generation number.

Like the tannaim, the amora'im condemn those acts that lead to self-arousal. This can be seen most clearly in (P) through (T).²⁷ These passages condemn the man who brings himself to erection. In (P), Rav (BA 1) threatens excommunication for such a man; in (Q) R. Ami (PA 3) calls him an "apostate",²⁸ and justifies this appellation by suggesting that if one yields to the "evil desire" in a relatively small matter, it will lead one into progressively more serious transgressions, presumably ending with idolatry and apostasy.²⁹ In (R), R. Yosi (PA 3)³⁰ states that one who excites himself with fantasies (perhaps merely synonymous with one who causes himself to have an erection) removes himself from God's presence. The source of this exegesis is a scriptural analogy based on the appearance of the word for "evil" (**עַוְתָּה**) in both Gen 38:10 and Psalms 5:5. The former verse discusses the death of Onan, the latter states that "evil" cannot dwell in God's presence.³¹ According to the Bible, Onan was killed by God when he did not properly discharge his duty as a levirate husband, because, knowing that the child would not be his, he spilled his seed on the ground (Gen 38:9). What Onan did is termed "evil", but his exact transgression is not specified. R. Yosi connects Onan's "evilness" to lustful thoughts, but not necessarily to his non-procreative emission of semen.

Condemnation of self-arousal is also indicated in (S). R. Eleazar (PA 3) applies Isaiah 1:15, "your hands are full of blood", to "those who commit adultery with the hand". This serves as an introduction to the tannaic statement (T), which as shown above probably had nothing at all to do with masturbation. Similarly, there is no compelling reason to interpret R. Eleazar's statement as referring to men who masturbate. Rather, it was most likely a comment on (T), condemning this "adultery by hand", whatever activity that may have been. Only the editorial placement might lead a reader to interpret the unit as referring to male masturbation.

Like the tannaic source, amoraic sources consider the case of a man touching his penis while urinating. These sources, like their tannaic

(27) It is interesting to note that the redatorial comment in (P) adds nothing substantive to the statements of the amora'im. Its phrasing suggests that it is responding to an objection (now lost) made to (O), which (P) is not. Moreover, its meaning is close to (Q), but its language suggests some kind of play on (R).

(28) Note that according to the printed version he is called a "transgressor" **עַבְרִיר**.

(29) Curiously, this reason – in exactly the same language – is found in another place attributed to a different Palestinian amora, in a discussion of an entirely different matter. See b. *Sabb.* 105b.

(30) R. Ami again in the printed version.

(31) Or, following Rashi and the emendation proposed by *Masoret ha-Shas*, evil cannot dwell "in Your dwelling" (**מִגְרָא**), thus more closely paralleling R. Yosi's statement that such a man removes himself from God's presence **מְחִיצָה**.

parallels, appear to be concerned with self-arousal rather than non-procreative emission of semen. (M) relates the story of Shmuel and Rav Yehudah, who are said to be in a synagogue when the latter has to urinate. Because, presumably, it would be awkward for him to do so in this place without using his hands, he asks Shmuel for his opinion. Shmuel disparagingly tells him simply to use his hand and urinate outside. Amoraic and tannaitic dicta are cited in a redactorial attempt to explain, in (O), Shmuel's ruling in (M). None of the reasons given implies a condemnation of non-procreative emission of semen. Note that one of the reasons offered, Rav Nahman's ruling that a married man is allowed to touch his penis when he urinates, does not appear to be based on the idea of non-procreative emission of semen (unless we assume that married men were thought less arousable by touch), but on inciting oneself to sexual transgression. That is, Rav Nahman suggests that a married man, when aroused, will approach his wife rather than looking for another, non-sanctioned sexual partner.

The punishment for male masturbation is discussed in the last part of the *sugya*. In (X), Rav Huna (BA 2) asks, should a man really lose his hand for such an activity, or is it merely a "curse" (*קַוְתָּל*). As mentioned above, the question is odd: *t. Nid.* 2:8, which parallels this section, suggests that R. Tarfon did not intend that this comment be taken literally. Hence, R. Huna (or better, the redactor's use of R. Huna's statement) either distorted the tannaitic tradition, or was unfamiliar with the order in our present *tosefta*.

None of the amoraic dicta surveyed above suggest any concern with the non-procreative emission of semen. The only amoraic dicta, in fact, that do suggest such a connection are (J), (K), and (L). Sections (J), (K), and (L) form a highly stylized unit that associates the wasteful emission of seed with the death penalty, bloodshed, and idolatry, echoing the three rabbinic "mortal sins" of murder, idolatry, and sexual transgressions.³² In (J), Rabbi Yohanan (PA 2) asserts that Onan's sin was the wasteful emission of semen, and that those who waste semen deserve, like Onan, to die.³³ This will be discussed below, but to anticipate, it is important to note that this is the single instance in rabbinic literature (known to me) that the phrase, "wasteful emission of semen" (*שכבה זרע לבטלה*) is attributed to a Palestin-

(32) On the grouping of three amoraic statements generally, cf. Friedman, *A Critical Study of Yebamot X*, pp. 38–43. On the three "mortal sins," cf. Burton L. Visotzky, "Mortal Sins," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 44 (1990) 31–53.

(33) MS. Munich 95 reads זרע עמו שכבת rather than שכבת זרע. Although this reading would further support my thesis (see below), it is, judging from the continuation of the dicta, almost certainly a scribal mistake.

ian rabbi. Rabbi Yitzhak's (PA 3) exegesis in (K) is quite rich. The exegesis is based on the transposition of a letter of a word in Is. 57:5, with the result that the verse is made to apply to those who "cause children to flow in the wadis". Not only is the sin of murder suggested in the transposition alone (the word for "murder" is changed, through the transposition, into "cause to flow"), but it is also suggested in the verse. Semen is seen as bearing potential children, and masturbation thus becomes murder in a very real sense. This exegesis evokes the tannaitic traditions that equate the restraint from procreation with bloodshed (see below). Note, however, both that the statement is qualified with the words "as if", acknowledging that the parallel is not to be taken too literally.³⁴ In (L), Rav Ashi (BA 6) utilizes scriptural analogy to "fill out" the trilogy. Dependent on (K)'s association of masturbation with Isaiah 57:5, Rav Ashi compares similar phrases in Isaiah 57:5 and Deut 12:2. As the latter verse discusses idolatry, masturbation is associated with idolatry.

In sum, *only two or three amoraic statements, (J), (K), and (L), discuss the non-procreative emission of semen*. The remainder of the relevant amoraic statements discuss *self-arousal*. The import of this distinction, as well as the exceptional (J) – (L), are discussed below. Despite the fact that most of these amoraic statements (like the tannaitic traditions) on their own say nothing about the non-procreative emission of semen, their placement in the *sugya* suggests that they in fact do. This further suggests that the editor molded the available materials to form this polemic against masturbation.

Redactorial. As we have seen, the editorial placement of, and perhaps tinkering with, earlier materials distorted the original meanings of those sources. The redatorial molding of and contribution to this *sugya* is even clearer.

The redatorial contribution to the *sugya* begins at the very beginning, with (A). Attempting to explain why the mishna treats males and females differently, (A) asserts that men feel when they have a genital flux (e.g., have an orgasm), whereas women do not (e.g., menstrual bleeding). Hence, a male need not touch himself to ascertain if he has had a flux.³⁵

(34) For examples of the phrase "as if he spilled blood" used in different and unrelated contexts, see *b. B. Mes.* 58b, *b. Sanh.* 35a. The phrase can be used as a threatening association, not fraught with the other implications that our tradition (K) might suggest. The idea that sperm in some way was already the "child" is unparalleled in late antiquity, and will be discussed below. Note that no other contemporary exegesis of Isaiah 57:5 remotely suggests this interpretation.

(35) This interpretation follows Rashi, *ad loc.*; Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (2 vols.; London, 1886–1903) 1:365, s.v., הַמְשֻׁלָּח. See also *b. Nid.* 43a.

The focus on genital emissions, primarily male orgasm, is not found explicitly in the mishna itself, and this interpretation helps to introduce, and direct, the ensuing *sugya*: the discussion will be about male genital emissions.

(B) – (D) is an example of redatorial use and shaping of other sources. Within this unit, transferred from *b. Nid.* 43a, both the redatorial contribution to (B) and the shaping of the argument in (D), imply redatorial concern with the non-procreative emission of semen. Moreover, although the unit as a whole apparently concludes with permission for men to check themselves for genital fluxes with any type of cloth, the *sugya* uses it in order to develop R. Eliezer's statement in (D).

The thrust of the redatorial contribution is clearer in the second half of the *sugya*. (I) is the fulcrum of the *sugya*. According to (H), a man should urinate in certain ways so “he will not make himself wicked for even a moment before God” (presumably referring to self-arousal). This is followed by (I): “What is the point of all this? Because of the non-procreative emission of semen.” The *sugya* turns on this short statement. Not only does it interpret (H) (which says nothing about this issue), but it also (1) puts the entire first half of the *sugya* into this context; and (2) it introduces the strong traditions of (J), (K), and (L), which in turn begin the second half of the *sugya*, which is more direct and forceful than the first half. According to (I), this *sugya*, and the traditions contained therein, *are all about the non-procreative emission of semen*. Were we not told this in (I) through (L), we might well miss this point.

Redatorial misreading of earlier sources continues in (V). In this intriguing comment, the redactor attempts to understand a clause in (U), that those who “sport” with children delay the coming of the Messiah. The redactor offers and rejects two suggestions: that this refers to male homoeroticism or a non-procreative form of sex called *derek ḥavarim*.³⁶ Both are rejected because they already have punishments associated with them, stoning for male homoeroticism and “flooding” for the latter. Why were these two sexual activities suggested? Perhaps because they share, in the eyes of the redactor, the characteristic of non-procreative emission of emission. Yet nowhere else in rabbinic literature is homoeroticism associated with this activity, and elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud, *derek ḥavarim* is neither associated with the non-procreative emission of semen nor is it even really condemned.³⁷ Its association with “flooding” appar-

(36) The phrase is found only in the Babylonian Talmud. Cf. *b. Yebam.* 55b and *b. Sot.* 26b. Rashi interprets this term to refer to an effusion of semen on, rather than in, a woman. It is clearly disapproved of only in our *sugya*.

(37) On homoeroticism, cf. Michael L. Satlow, “They Abused Him Like a Woman”: Homo-

ently derives from within this *sugya*: identified by the redactor here as an activity that involves the non-procreative emission of semen, the activity is compared to (D), similarly interpreted by the redactor. Thus, activities that are regarded as conceptually distinct in the rest of rabbinic literature are here brought under the common rubric of "activities that involve the non-procreative emission of semen." Even having rejected these alternatives, (V) settles on a third intriguing activity, marriage to (or sex with) a female not old enough to bear children. While this activity is prohibited elsewhere in rabbinic literature, it is never linked to the non-procreative emission of semen. Hence, this tradition groups three activities, not otherwise thought of as linked, thus including them in its general polemic.

Finally, as mentioned above, (W) allows for a reshading of the *tosefta*'s interpretation of the last clause in the *mishna*. The *sugya* ends with advocating the physical loss of the hand of the male who masturbates.

Comparing this *sugya* to its parallel in the Palestinian Talmud puts the contribution of the redactor into even greater relief. The passage is short enough to cite in full:

- A. The *mishna* means that [it is like] anyone who frequently puts his hand in his eye tears much.
- B. Rabbi Tarfon says, let it be cut off on his belly.
- C. They said to him, but his stomach will split!
- D. He said to them, Thus I said, because death is better than life for him.
- E. The *haverim* said, R. Tarfon curses him with a curse that touches his body.
- F. Rabbi Yosi [PA 3] said, it [section B] derives [from] the *mishna* [that] it is forbidden to touch from the belly down.
- G. This [teaching] that you said applies to the emission of seed, but in the matter of [checking for] genital flux anyone who frequently checks is praiseworthy.³⁸

The *sugya* continues with an extensive discussion of the first part of the *mishna*, dealing with women checking themselves. Although the Palestinian Talmud's parallel *sugyot* are often much more concise than the Babylonian Talmud's, the striking difference in the tenor of the two *sugyot* further highlights the work of the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud's

eroticism, Gender-Blurring, and the Rabbis," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994) 1–25. On *derek evarim*, cf. *b. Yebam.* 55b and *b. Sot.* 26b.

(38) *y. Nid.* 2:1, 49d.

sugya. (G) condemns those men who check to see if they have had an orgasm, assuming that because one will know there is no need to check. Such checking is condemned, but it is not clear why.³⁹ There is not even a hint of a polemic against the non-procreative emission of semen.

Summary. A source-critical analysis of the *sugya* has shown that the editor and redactor of *b. Nid.* 13a–b actively shaped their materials into a polemic against the non-procreative emission of semen. Most of the tannaitic and amoraic material used in this *sugya* condemns self-arousal rather than non-procreative emission of semen, a difference discussed below. The *sugya* uses material from *t. Nid.* 2:8, but in a way that suggests that the editor either did not know the tradition as it now survives, or distorted it. In almost no source outside of the redatorial strata is there evidence of condemnation of the non-procreative emission of semen *per se*. Those non-redatorial sources that do exhibit this attitude are unparalleled and, as I show below, both are unique within rabbinic literature and incongruent with contemporary non-Jewish thought.

OTHER RABBINIC EVIDENCE

Several other rabbinic sources demonstrate the same conclusion reached in the examination of *b. Nid.* 13a–b, namely that the concept of condemnation of the non-procreative emission of semen is a contribution of the editorial/redatorial strata. Although shorter and less complex, some of these sources have the advantage of having parallels in Palestinian documents.

Example 1: Winnowing and Threshing. In a passage often cited in halakhic discussions of birth-control, the *tosefta* states:⁴⁰

- A. Three women [are permitted to/accustomed to/must] use a *mokh* [contraceptive sponge]: a minor, a pregnant woman, and a nursing woman.
- B. A minor [lest] she conceive and die. Who is a minor? One who is between eleven years and a day old to twelve years and a day old. Less than that and more than that he has intercourse in his regular way (*kēdarko*) and does not fear.

(39) Below I propose that this *sugya* is based on condemnation of male sexual self-arousal rather than that of the emission of semen.

(40) The literature on this passage is voluminous, but for our purposes, largely irrelevant. For a review, cf. David Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law: Marital Relations, Contraception, and Abortion as Set Forth in the Classic Texts of Jewish Law* (New York, 1968), pp. 194–98.

- C. A pregnant woman [lest] her fetus become a *sandal* [i.e., a type of deformed fetus].
- D. A nursing mother [lest] she kill her son [because pregnancy would lead to her cessation of the production of milk],
- E. As Rabbi Meir used to say, all twenty-four months he threshes inside and winnows outside.
- F. The Sages say, he has intercourse in his regular way and God watches over him, as it is written, "The Lord protects the simple . . ." [Ps 116:6].⁴¹

Of interest to us is (E). The Tosefta expresses the fear in (D) that a pregnancy within two years of a birth might result in loss of lactation, hence death for the baby. (A) recommends the use of a contraceptive sponge. In (E), Rabbi Meir advocates *coitus interruptus* (which of course results in the non-procreative emission of semen), and the Sages (F) say that no form of birth-control is necessary. The Babylonian Talmud modifies this tradition:

- A. Rav Bibi [BA 4] taught before Rav Nahman [BA 3]:
- B. Three women use a *mokh*: a minor, a pregnant woman and a nursing woman.
- C. A minor [lest] perhaps she will conceive and perhaps she will die;
- D. A pregnant woman [lest] perhaps her fetus will become a *sandal*;
- E. A nursing woman [lest] perhaps she will wean her son and he will die.
- F. And who is a minor?
- G. From eleven years and a day old to twelve years and one day old. Less than this or more than this she has intercourse as she usually does.⁴² These are the words of Rabbi Meir.
- H. The Sages say, in both cases she has intercourse as she usually does and let Heaven have mercy, as it is written, "The Lord protects the simple . . ." [Ps 116:6].⁴³

R. Meir's statement advising *coitus interruptus* is suppressed.⁴⁴ In the

(41) *t. Nid.* 2:6 (ed. Zuckerman, pp. 642–43).

(42) There are some textual variations of this phrase. Cf. *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings. Tractates Yebamot, Ketubot, Nedarim Sotah*. (Institute for the Complete Israeli Talmud; 4 vols.; Jerusalem, 1977–1991) 3.1:117–118, esp. n. 32 (hereafter abbreviated *Bab. Tal.*). The *tosefta's* masculine reading is found in none of these variations.

(43) *b. Yebam.* 12b. Cf. *b. Yebam.* 10ob; *b. Ketub.* 39a; *b. Nid.* 45a; *b. Ned.* 35b.

(44) Cf. *b. Yebam.* 34b, in which R. Meir's statement is cited (in R. Eliezer's name) only in order to be refuted.

tosefta, Rabbi Meir and the Sages disagree over the preferred mode of intercourse with a woman who is nursing her baby. But in the Babylonian Talmud, the disagreement is over whether a woman between the ages of eleven and twelve should or must use a contraceptive sponge.⁴⁵ It is possible that the Babylonian Talmud modified this baraita in order to bring it into accordance with its views on the non-procreative emission of semen.

Example 2: Er and Onan

The story of Er and Onan is recorded in the Bible:

Judah got a wife for Er his first-born; her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the Lord, and Lord took his life. Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother." But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste (*הצָבֵת נֶאֱשָׁר*) whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. What he did was displeasing to the Lord, and He took his life also.⁴⁶

It is not clear from this account exactly why Onan is killed, although it appears that God disapproves of his shirking his levirate responsibilities. The "spilling of seed" is secondary to the refusal to "provide offspring for his brother".⁴⁷ Er's mistake is nowhere stated.

None of the interpretations of this story that date from the Second Temple period blames Onan (or Er) for the "waste of seed". According to some of these interpretations, Er's fatal transgression was that he refused to have intercourse with Tamar because she was not a Canaanite.⁴⁸ Nei-

(45) So too in nearly every *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud that cites this tradition: in each the discussion is about the *minor*, not the nursing mother. Only *b. Yebam.* 34b cites the phrase concerning "threshing" and "winnowing", and here it is (1) cited totally out of context; and (2) cited only in order to refute it.

(46) Gen 38:6–10.

(47) Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, vol. 1 in *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 266–67; Claude F. Mariottini, "Onan," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; Garden City, NY, 1992) 5:20–21. Cf., J. B. Schaumberger, "Propter quale peccatum morte punitus sit Onan?" *Biblica* 8(1927) 209–12; C. F. DeVine, "The Sin of Onan, Gen. 38:8–10," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 4(1942) 323–40.

(48) *Jubilees* 41:1–6 (in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth [2 vols.; Garden City, NY, 1985], 1:130); *Testament of Judah*, 10:1–6 (ed. Charlesworth, 2:797–8). This version also accuses Onan of not wanting a child by a non-Canaanite woman, on prompting from his mother).

ther the LXX nor the *Targumim* embellish the biblical account.⁴⁹ According to Philo, Onan's transgression is selfishness, "going beyond all bounds in love of self and love of pleasure."⁵⁰ Josephus omits all mention of this story in his *Antiquities*. Later, the Church Fathers too never associate with Er and Onan the "sin" of the non-procreative emission of semen.⁵¹

Although the interpretations of the story of Er and Onan in Palestinian rabbinic sources diverge from those from the Second Temple Period, they too appear not to associate Er and Onan's death with the non-procreative emission of semen. *Genesis Rabba*, for example, seems to condemn Er and Onan for their refusal to procreate with Tamar, rather than for the non-procreative emission of semen *per se*.⁵² One tradition in the Palestinian Talmud associates Er's act with a *woman* deliberately hindering conception.⁵³ Palestinian sources never explicitly associate the acts of Er and Onan with the non-procreative emission of semen.

The account of the acts of Er and Onan in the Babylonian Talmud is more complex. In *b. Yebam.* 34a–b, there is a debate over whether a woman can conceive from her first act of intercourse. Tamar is cited as an example of a woman who did conceive from her first act of intercourse (with Judah, Gen 38:18), at which point the following discussion ensues:

- A. But there were Er and Onan [who had intercourse with Tamar before Judah]!
- B. Er and Onan had [only] anal intercourse (שלא בדרך) [with her].⁵⁴

(49) Cf. for example, *Targum Yerushalmi* and *Targum Neophyti* 1 ad Gen. 38:6–10.

(50) Philo, *Post.* 180 (trans. LCL, 2.435). Cf. *Quod Deus* 16–19. This reasoning is followed by H. Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, vol. 1 of *Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen, 1910), pp. 412–13.

(51) Cf. John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 101–2; A. M. Dubarle, "La Bible et les pères ont-ils parlé de la contraception?" *La vie spirituelle*, Supplement 15 (1962) 608–10; J. A. Pierce, "Onan," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967) 10:695–96. The word "onanism" in English seems to have been used to denote "masturbation" from the early eighteenth century.

(52) *Gen. Rab.* 85:6 (ed. Hanoch Albeck and Judah Theodor, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba* [rpt. Jerusalem, 1965]), pp. 1037–39. This passage is somewhat obscure. Er's transgression, according to this passage, is that, *הנה חורש בגנותה* – Lieberman has linked a phrase similar to this one – *נכבה על הגנותה* – to homoerotic intercourse (*t. Soṭa* 6:6 [ed. Lieberman, 3.2:185–86]). Cf. Lieberman, *Tos. Kip.* 8:670. An alternative manuscript reading, *חרוש בגנשות* (rejected by Lieberman) is hardly more enlightening.

(53) *y. Ketub.* 7:5, 31b: ... או שחאה מלאה שמערה לאשפות שוייציא ויתן כחובה – חמן אמרין The Babylonian Talmud interprets this mishna as referring to a woman who empties buckets of water into a trash heap, thus causing her neighbors to think that she is insane and shaming her husband (*b. Ketub.* 75a).

(54) On *שלא בדרך* meaning "anal intercourse", cf. Michael L. Satlow, *Talking about Sex*:

- C. But there is a contradictory tannaitic source: “All twenty-four months he threshes inside and winnows outside. These are the words of R. Eliezer.”
- D. They [?] said to him, “This is what Er and Onan did!”
- E. This is both like and unlike the acts of Er and Onan. It is like the acts of Er and Onan, as it is written, “[he] let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother’s wife”.
- F. It is not like the act of Er and Onan, because there it refers to anal intercourse and here it refers to vaginal intercourse (*כדרכה*), we understand [the sin of] Onan, for it is written, “he let it go to waste,” but what was [the transgression of] Er?
- G. Rav Nahman bar Yitzḥak said, as it is written, “and He took his life also,” even he [Er] died the same death [i.e., for the same reason].
- H. We understand Onan, because “so as not to provide offspring for his brother”, but what was Er’s reason [for not procreating with Tamar]?
- I. He did this so that [Tamar] should not conceive and her beauty fade.

The *sugya* reads (C) and (D) together, as a tannaitic source that associates *coitus interruptus* with Er and Onan’s fatal transgression.⁵⁵ The only non-redactorial contribution from this point on is (G), a statement that merely seeks to show that Er and Onan died for the same transgression. The redactor, though, is clearly troubled by (C), and seeks to show that both Er and Onan died for the same reason, the non-procreative emission of semen, and then seeks to explain their differing motivations. In sum, only on the redactorial level of the Babylonian Talmud is there an association between the transgression of Er and Onan and the non-procreative emission of semen.⁵⁶

Example 3: Joseph. Another fruitful area of comparison is the account of Joseph. Both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds give accounts of Joseph and his encounter with Potiphar’s wife who, according to the Bible, attempted, unsuccessfully to seduce him. According to the version in the Palestinian Talmud:

Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality (Brown Judaica Series, Atlanta, forthcoming), chapter 6.

(55) (C), as we have seen above, is attributed in the *tosefta* to R. Meir in an entirely different context (*t. Nid. 2:6*). (D) is unparalleled in rabbinic literature. It is likely that (C) was cited out of context, and then the mysterious, post-tannaitic (D) was appended.

(56) The *halakhic* problems inherent in this passage were seen already by the Tosafot. Cf. *b. Yebam. 34b*, s.v., ל'א במעשׂה ער ואונן.

- A. It is written, "[Archers bitterly assailed him (Joseph); they shot at him and harried him.] Yet his bow remained taut, [and his arms were made firm]," [Gen. 49:23–24].
- B. R. Shmuel bar Nahman [PA 3] said, the bow was relaxed and returned [to its natural state].
- C. R. Abun [PA 5] said, his seed was scattered and went forth from his fingernails.⁵⁷
- D. "His arms were made firm" [Gen. 49:24].⁵⁸
- E. Rav Huna [BA 2] said in the name of Rav Matnah [BA 2], he closes his eyes and saw a likeness of our father and immediately he relaxed [i.e., his erection].⁵⁹

Joseph is tempted to the point of arousal, but resists. In (C), a late Palestinian amora even suggests that he did in fact "emit" semen, but this is not condemned. Contrast this to the Babylonian Talmud:

- A. . . . Immediately, "his bow remained taut," [Gen. 49:24].
- B. Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of R. Meir, his "bow" subsided.
- C. "and his arms were made firm," [Gen. 49:24] – he stuck his hands in the ground and his seed came forth from between his fingernails . . .
- D. It is taught: Joseph was worthy to have twelve tribes issue from him like they issued from Jacob, as it is said, "This, then, is the line of Jacob: [at seventeen years of age,] Joseph . . ." [Gen. 37:2].
- E. Except that his seed came forth from between his fingernails.⁶⁰

Both *sugyot* contain a tradition that Joseph scattered his seed from his fingernails rather than have sexual relations with Potiphar's wife. Yet only in the Babylonian Talmud does this become the reason that he was not the progenitor of the twelve tribes. Whether (E) is authentically tannaitic or not is unclear. The entire tradition is unparalleled in tannaitic corpora, and in some manuscripts of this *sugya* "it is taught" (D) is replaced by "they said", a phrase not usually used to introduce tannaitic material.⁶¹ In

(57) Although it appears from the order of the *sugya* that this exegesis derives from the first half of the verse, it only makes sense when connected to the second half: (C) and (D) should be transposed.

(58) Heb: יְפָרֹז וּדְרֹעַ יִדֵּי.

(59) *y. Hor.* 2:5, 46d.

(60) *b. Sot.* 36b.

(61) Cf. *Bab. Tal.* 2.2:136, n. 137.

any case, the difference between the Palestinian and Babylonian treatment of this topic is telling.

Other Examples. Three other arguments can be adduced that the concept of condemnation of the non-procreative emission of semen was contributed by the redactor/editor of the Babylonian Talmud:

(1) Palestinian rabbinic documents (tannaitic, Palestinian Talmud, halakhic, and exegetical midrashic corpora) lack the phrase *שכחה זוע לבטלה* “wasteful/vain emission of semen” used throughout the Babylonian Talmud to designate the non-procreative emission of semen. To my knowledge, the language in the Palestinian Talmud that most closely approximates this phrase is the “waste [of an opportunity] for procreation,” a very different idea.⁶² *Genesis Rabbah*, an exegetical midrash compiled in Palestine close to the time of the redaction of the Palestinian Talmud, also shows no knowledge of this concept.⁶³

(2) Although later literature on non-procreative sexual activity has consistently assumed that non-procreative sexual activities are prohibited to the Jewish man due to the prohibition on the non-procreative emission of semen, several talmudic passages are clearly unaware of such a rationale.⁶⁴ Rabbinic law, for example, clearly allows all forms of non-procreative sex between husband and wife, including intercourse with sterile partners and anal intercourse.⁶⁵ *b. Ned. 20b* explicitly permits all sexual activities be-

(62) *y. Mo^ced Qat. 1:7*, 80d; *y. Git. 4:4*, 46a: ביטול פריה ורבייה.

(63) On the dating and provenance of *Genesis Rabbah*, see Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bokmuehl (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 303–5. For examples from *Gen. Rab.* that virtually mirror the issues expressed in the Palestinian sources above, cf. 26:4 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 246–7); 36:4 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 338–9); 45:3 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 449); 80:2 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 956); 87:11 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 1071–1073); 98:20 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 1270).

(64) For a review of the literature on this topic, see Feldman, *Birth Control*, pp. 109–65; Louis Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 144–47.

(65) Some Palestinian sources appear to disapprove of non-procreative sexual activities, but they nevertheless allow them. Their objections seem to be two-fold: (1) marriage to a sterile woman should be forbidden if and only if it interferes with her husband’s obligation to procreate, and (2) intercourse with a woman not for procreation is considered hedonistic. On (2), see below. Cf. also, *m. Yebam. 6:6* (ed. Albeck, 3:38); *t. Yebam. 8:5–6* (ed. Lieberman, 3.1:25–26); *b. Yebam. 61b*, 64b–65a; *y. Git. 4:8*, 46a; *y. Yebam. 6:5*, 7c. See further, Michael L. Satlow, *The Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality*, chapter 6 (forthcoming). Aside from a few redatorial comments to the contrary, anal intercourse is considered no different from vaginal intercourse, in respect to either permissibility or legal ramifications. See for examples, *m. Yebam. 6:1* (ed. Albeck, 3:36); *t. Ker. 1:16* (ed. Zuckerman, p. 562); *Sifre Num. 13* (ed. H. S. Horovitz, *Sifre Numbers* [rpt. Jerusalem, 1992], p. 19); *Sifre Deut. 239* (ed. Finkelstein, p. 270); *y. Yebam. 6:1*, 7b; *y. Ketub. 3:6*, 27d; *b. Qidd. 22b*; *b. Yebam. 59a–59b*; *b. Ketub. 40b*, 97b–98a; *b. Ned. 20b*; *b. Hor. 4a*; *b. Ker. 11a–11b*.

tween husband and wife. The inconsistency between these dicta and the prohibition on the non-procreative emission of semen is implicitly recognized within the Babylonian Talmud itself, and is explicitly addressed by medieval commentators.⁶⁶ These legal inconsistencies suggest that the condemnation of non-procreative emission of semen was far from universally known or accepted, and that it was incorporated only haphazardly into selected *sugyot*.

(3) Curiously, some tractates that are thought to have been redacted in the Gaonic period in Babylonia, show a concern in the non-procreative emission of semen similar to that of the redactors of the *sugyot* examined here.⁶⁷ It is possible that both groups of redactors, living in similar milieus, shared this abhorrence.

IMAGINING SEMEN

The biblical term for "semen" *zer'a*, is the same as that for "seed".⁶⁸ Emissions of semen, whether voluntary or not, whether in sanctioned or illicit sexual liaisons, were equally ritually defiling (Lev 15:16–18).⁶⁹ Semen itself is not given any special significance in the Hebrew Bible, nor can we glean from the text any sense of the knowledge of embryology of its framers.⁷⁰

The small amount of data on semen in Jewish literature from the Second Temple period appears to follow Aristotle's embryology. According to

(66) Cf. for example, *b. Yebam.* 34b, and the Tosafot there, s.v., *וילא במעשה עיר ואונן*; Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, "Forbidden Intercourse," 21:9.

(67) Cf. for examples, *Mas. Kallah* 18–19 (ed. Higger, pp. 150–5). On the dating of these tractates, cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, pp. 245–53. The relationship of these tractates to the Babylonian Talmud has yet to be adequately addressed.

(68) For *עַיִל* as "seed" or "produce", see for examples, Gen 1:11, 47:9; Lev 11:37; Deut 14:22; Isa 55:10. "Semen" in the Bible is always designated by the term *שְׁכָבַת וּזֶעֲרֵב* or its cognates: Lev 15:16–18, 32, 18:20, 19:20, 22:4; Num 5:13.

(69) The reasons behind this designation of semen as "impure" are not relevant to this paper. Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966), p. 124; G. J. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev 15:18)?", *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95 (1983) 432–34; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus I–XVI: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 3; New York, 1991), pp. 766–68, 927–34.

(70) Cf. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible," *Semeia* 45 (1989) 91. Milgrom argues that the biblical framers (or at least P) had, like the rabbis, a "two-seed" embryology. His arguments, based on linguistic analysis and on later parallels, are strained (*Leviticus I–XVI*, 743–44). Eilberg-Schwartz's thesis that condemnation of masturbation is found within the Bible, and that this negative assessment of the non-procreative emission of semen is integrally linked to more comprehensive purity and social structures, is highly speculative (Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington, IN, 1990), pp. 182–94).

Aristotle, male “seed” is the “froth” produced by the blood when it is agitated (and heated) with passion. To an embryo, the man contributes this “seed” *sperma*, and the female “the material for the semen to work on,” that is, the menstrual blood which is given form by the semen.⁷¹ This same idea is reflected in *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:2: “in my mother’s womb I was wrought into flesh . . . compacted in blood from the seed of her husband and the pleasure that is joined with sleep.”⁷² Philo too echoes this view:

That this [i.e., *to sperma*] is a substance of a very low order, resembling foam is evident to the eye. But when it has been deposited in the womb and become solid, it acquires movement, and at once enters upon natural growth.⁷³

For Philo, as for the early Greek doctors, sperm is a substance of “low order”, it is *potentially* generative, but in and of itself it has little value.

Later doctors and philosophers imagined semen slightly differently. In contrast to Aristotle, who saw semen as arising from the blood, certain Stoic philosophers believed that semen was composed from the entire body.⁷⁴ Galen, who subscribes to this idea of the composition of semen, advances a “two-seed” theory, wherein male and female seed are thought to contribute equally to the formation of the embryo.⁷⁵ Yet even with this increased importance attached to semen, these thinkers too never associate that “waste” of semen with the destruction of (even a potential) life.

The very few sources on rabbinic embryology (mostly of Palestinian provenance) appear to subscribe to this “two-seed” theory. According to one oft-cited tradition, there are three partners in the creation of an embryo: man, woman, and God. The man contributes the “white stuff” (*מזרע הלבן*) of the embryo (e.g., bones, nails); the female contributes the “red stuff” (*מזרע אודם*) of the embryo (e.g., blood), and God animates the

(71) Cf. Aristotle, *De Gen.* 1, chs. 7 and 8; 729a 22. A similar view of the nature of semen can be seen in Hippocrates, *Peri Gones* 125 (ed. Carolus Gottlob Kühn, *Magni Hippocratis Opera Omnia*, vol. 21 of *Medicorum Graecorum Opera* [Lipsiae, 1825], pp. 371–72). Cf. Joseph Needham, *A History of Embryology* (2nd ed.; New York, 1959), pp. 39–43, 52; Erna Lesky, *Die Zeugungs- und Vererbungslehren der Antike und ihr Nachwirken* (Wiesbaden, 1951), pp. 1349–82.

(72) See also Job 10:10. Needham suggests that Alexandrian Jews derived this idea directly from Aristotle (*History of Embryology*, p. 64).

(73) Philo, *De opificio mundi* 67 (trans. LCL, 1:53).

(74) Cf. for example, Diogenes Laertius 7.159. Cf. Lesky, *Die Zeugungs- und Vererbungslehren*, pp. 1387–97.

(75) See, Needham, *History*, p. 78. This “two-seed” theory is close to that of Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 4.1257.

embryo.⁷⁶ Later in the same sugya, it is said that if a man emits his seed (*מזדיע*) first, a girl will be conceived, and if a woman emits hers first (*מזרעתה*), then a boy will be conceived. Both men and women emit "seed", according to the rabbis, and both are necessary for conception.⁷⁷ That no special properties or vitality is attributed to semen can also be seen in another term used by the tannaim to refer to it, "a rotting drop".⁷⁸

Other tannaic and amoraic discussions of semen, following the Hebrew Bible, concern its property of defilement. The mishna, for example, discusses the power of semen to make women and men ritually impure, and devotes an entire tractate to the issue of the status of the *zav*, the man who has had a genital emission.⁷⁹ Tannaic sources, and later commentary on them in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, discuss the propriety of the man who has a seminal emission studying Torah.⁸⁰ None of these sources differentiate between sanctioned and unsanctioned emissions of semen.

Rabbinic sources never discourage male seminal emission on medical grounds, as do some Greek and Roman doctors. Because some Roman doctors believed that sperm, like blood, contained the vital spirit (*pneuma*), too frequent ejaculation was thought to lead to weakness.⁸¹ It was thought, for example, that through ejaculation, men

are drained not just of seminal fluid, but also of their vital spirit for this taken from the arteries along with the seminal fluid. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that those who lead a debauched life be-

(76) *b. Nid.* 31a, attributed as tannaic (paralleled at *b. Qidd.* 30b; *Lev. Rab.* 14:6 [ed. Mordecai Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah* (rpt. New York, 1993), p. 309–10]).

(77) It is interesting to note here that if taken to its logical conclusion, the two seed theory, along with condemnation of the "waste of seed", should lead to a condemnation of female masturbation. Never in rabbinic literature, though, is this charge applied to female masturbation.

(78) Cf. for example, *m. Ḥ. Avot* 3:1 (ed. Albeck, 4:363): *הוּא וְהַזֶּבֶת*. For a brief synthesis of rabbinic embryology, cf. Julius Preuss, *Biblisch-talmudische Medizin* (rpt. New York, 1971), pp. 448–57.

(79) See, *m. Mikv.* 8:3–4 (ed. Albeck, 5:363–64); *m. Zav.* (ed. Albeck, 5:439–53).

(80) *m. Ber.* 3:6 (ed. Albeck, 1:20); *b. Ber.* 21b–22b; *y. Ber.* 3:4, 6b–c; *b. B. Qamma* 82a; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity," in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill, 1991), pp. 282–84; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, pp. 49–52.

(81) See especially Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Family, Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times; New York, 1988), pp. 13–15; Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," *Representations* 14(1986)5–7.

come weak, since the purest part of both substances is removed from their body.⁸²

Too frequent ejaculation is to be avoided for medical reasons. At best, masturbation can weaken a man, and at worst, put him in danger. There is, to my knowledge, no association between emission of semen and male weakness, or danger, within the rabbinic sources.

There is no evidence, then, that either the tannaim or the amoraim saw the emission of semen as in any way physically dangerous, either to the “seed” itself — which, following Aristotle, Philo, and Galen was never seen as “living” or containing any vitality whatever — or to the one who emits it. There are hints that the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud, however, had a different image of semen.

We read in *b. Eruv.* 18b:

- A. R.Yermiah ben Eleazar said, “All those years that Adam was in banishment (*bēniduy*), he bore spirits, demons, and liliths, as it is written, ‘When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot [a son] in his likeness after his image . . . ;’” (Gen 5:3).
- B. It follows that to this point, he bore [children] not after his image!
- C. There is a contradictory source (*מחלוקת*): R. Meir used to say, Adam was very pious, because when he saw that he was punished with mortality he sat in fasting for 130 years and separated from his wife for 130 years and donned garments from the fig tree for 130 years.
- D. That is, when he saw that his seminal emission [bore] hurtful [spirits].

In (A) and (B), attributed to a fourth generation Palestinian amora, Adam is said to have given rise to spirits.⁸³ His “banishment” appears to be from Eden, although it might also refer to his being in God’s disfavor.⁸⁴ How he bore the children is left unstated, although two interpretations suggest themselves. The first, followed by the Maharsha, is that these spirits were due to God’s displeasure, but borne of Eve. A second, more likely, idea

(82) Oribasius, *Med. Coll.* 6.38, trans. in Rousselle, *Porneia*, pp. 14–15. See also, Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 4.1058–1072.

(83) It is possible that (B), and perhaps even the prooftext, is not part of the original source. If, however, the prooftext is genuinely part of this tradition, then the exegesis merely makes explicit the use of the text.

(84) See the interpretations of Rashi and the Maharsha on this text.

upon which this tradition is based is expressed more clearly in *Genesis Rabbah*. In a tradition attributed to R. Simon (third generation Palestinian amora), it is said that for 130 years Adam and Eve separated from each other, and that male spirits were aroused by Eve and impregnated her, and that female spirits were aroused by Adam and were impregnated from him.⁸⁵ Adam's and Eve's lust caused the reproduction of spirits and demons. Neither Adam, nor Eve are criticized for their withdrawal from each other, despite the results. If (A) is based upon this tradition, then the citation might be mangled, referring only to Adam and stating only the conclusion of the tradition, without reference to the activity leading up to it.

Whatever the original meaning of (A) and (B), (C) clearly reads R. Yermiah ben Eleazar's suggestion negatively. Adam separated from his wife, and he is considered greatly pious for doing so. There is little reason to doubt that the attribution is genuinely tannaic, as it reflects other ascetic sentiments found in tannaic sources.⁸⁶ More intriguing is that this source is read as an objection to (A), although there is nothing in (A) to suggest what it is that Adam did wrong! The redactorial resolution, (D) clarifies the logic of the reading: Adam "misused" his semen, probably referring to masturbation, and it gave rise to the demons. When he saw what he had done, he atoned. Based on a "misreading" of earlier sources, the redactor suggests that Adam's "wasted" semen was the primary cause for the generation of demons, and condemns Adam for this activity.⁸⁷

The idea that semen has some special property (e.g., can bear spirits and demons when spilled), that it is wrong to "waste" it, appears to be paralleled in Zoroastrian sources. Although one can speak only sketchily about the sexual attitudes of non-Jews in Sassanian Babylonia, the few sources that are accessible (to me) do condemn the non-procreative emission of semen. According to the *Dēnkard*, "a man who unites with an improper woman is condemned for having wasted his seed."⁸⁸ According to the *Pahlavi Rivayat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, the "waste" of semen is a sin.⁸⁹ It is possible, although admittedly still far from proven, that a

(85) *Gen. Rab.* 20:11 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 195–96); 24:6 (p. 236).

(86) Cf. Steven D. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York, 1986), pp. 253–88.

(87) A superficially similar tradition can be found at *Gen. Rab.* 26:4 (p. 246), in which men spilling their semen on the ground is said to lead to the birth of girls (an exegesis of Gen. 6:1). Here the spilling of semen is seen as a sign of uncontrolled sexual lust, which is punished "in kind" by God. For this attitude, see below.

(88) *Dēnkard* 6.86 (trans. Shaul Shaked, *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages* [Persian Heritage Series 34; Boulder, CO 1979], p. 33).

(89) A.V. Williams, *The Pahlavi Rivayat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (2 vols.; Copenhagen; 1990), 2:23. According to Williams, there is a connection between "man's semen and

special valuation on semen was current in Sassanian Babylonia, and that this view of semen was shared by the redactors of the Babylonian Talmud.

SELF-AROUSAL AND RESTRAINT FROM PROCREATION

Many Greek and Roman sources, like several of the tannaitic and amoraic sources surveyed above, appear to condemn self-arousal and masturbation. A brief examination of the assumptions underlying these roughly contemporaneous sources can help to inform our interpretation of the rabbinic material. Sources from late antiquity written in both Greek and Latin condemn the male who masturbates because: (1) masturbation is a sign of sexual powerlessness and weak character; and (2) masturbation as a sole sexual outlet leads to restraint from procreation.⁹⁰ Both of these attitudes, I argue, better contextualize the relevant tannaitic and amoraic dicta surveyed above than does the fear of the non-procreative emission of semen.

Sexual self-control was valued in antiquity. According to several Greek authors, a man must work continuously to fight his sexual desire.⁹¹ Romans linked sex to other “appetites” and preached an ethic of self-control.⁹² Apollonius, according to Philostratus, in his youth subdued his “maddening” sexual passion.⁹³ Excessive intercourse, even with prostitutes and slaves, was disapproved because it displayed weakness.⁹⁴ Masturbation

the spirit of the sky,” (2:144, n. 5). Cf. Mansour Shaki, “The Sassanian Matrimonial Relations,” *Archiv Orientalni* 39(1971)322–45. These texts come well after the period of the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, but they are thought to reflect the earlier time period.

(90) Latin authors also appear to condemn masturbation due to the “impurity” of semen. Cf. for example, Martial 1.94, Juvenal 6.365 (Bodleian MS. Canonicianus 41). The rhetoric here and elsewhere seems to link semen to pollution. Cf. J. P. Sullivan, “Martial’s Sexual Attitudes,” *Philologus* 123(1979)294; Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality & Aggression in Roman Humor* (rev. ed.; New York, 1992), pp. 26–29. It is unclear if the Roman conception of the impurity of semen is related to the Greek (like the biblical) idea of the ritually defiling property of semen. Cf. Herodotus 2.64 (about the Egyptians); Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 74–79; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (rpt. Cambridge, 1985), p. 87.

(91) Cf. for example, Xenophon *Mem.* 1.2.1; 2.1.1; 2.6.1; 4.5.9; *Oec.* 12.11–14; Lysias 21.19. Cf. further, Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley; 1974), pp. 208–9. Although from an earlier time, the attitudes evidenced here continue in the Roman period.

(92) Cf. Gail Paterson Corrington, “The Defense of the Body and the Discourse of Appetite: Continence and Control in the Greco-Roman World,” *Semeia* 57(1992)65–74.

(93) Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.13.

(94) It must be remembered that prostitutes and slaves were common and easily obtained in the Roman world. Where sex was so easy to obtain, self-restraint was praised. Cf. for exam-

was often perceived by these authors as equivalent to excessive intercourse, demonstrating a certain "softness" of character.⁹⁵ Self-arousal, like other forms of sexual excess, is both a sign of dissolute character and contributes to the formation of such a character.

In several rabbinic passages that deal with the activities of the *yešer ha-ra'*, the "evil inclination", the same logic appears: self-arousal leads a man into sexual transgression, which is not only "bad" in and of itself, but will also lead a man down that slippery-slope of transgression which inevitably ends with idolatry. This argument appears in *b. Nid.* 13a-b, but is by no means unique to this passage. Isolated dicta and extended passages, attributed to Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis, tannaim and amoraim, in nearly all of the rabbinic documents, repeatedly stress the need for sexual self-discipline.⁹⁶ A man's battle with his *yešer* was constant: to yield a little was the first step toward yielding a lot. Seen in this rabbinic context, the condemnation of self-arousal is almost predictable.

The second reason for the condemnation of masturbation, restraint from procreation, is found in Philo as well as in Roman sources. Discussing why a man must avoid sexual contact with a menstruant, Philo writes:

He must . . . remember the lesson that the generative seeds should not be wasted fruitlessly for the sake of a gross and untimely pleasure. For it is just as if a husbandman should in intoxication or lunacy sow wheat and barley in ponds or mountain-streams instead of in the plains, since the fields should become dry before the seed is laid in them. (33) Now nature also each month purges the womb as if it were a cornfield . . . (34) They too must be branded with reproach,

ple, Pseudo-Demosthenes 59; Xenophon *Oeconomicus*. See further, Aline Rousselle, "Personal Status and Sexual Practice in the Roman Empire," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher (3 vols.; New York, 1989) 3:301–333; and *Porneia*, p. 97. Cf. also, Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (New York, 1991), p. 301. Philo and Josephus both strongly disapprove of prostitution. Cf. Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.51; *Jos.* 43; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.244–5. Cf., 1 Cor. 6:15–18. See further, Samuel Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law: The Philonic Interpretation of Biblical Law in Relation to the Palestinian Halakah* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 256–57.

(95) For example, Martial 11.104. See also, Werner A. Krenkel, "Masturbation in der Antike," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität Rostock. Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe* 28(1979) 162–63.

(96) See for examples, *m. ḲAvot* 4:1 (ed. Albeck, 4:368–69); *y. Sanh.* 10:2, 28c-d (parallel *b. Sanh.* 106a); *b. Yebam.* 103a–103b (parallels *b. Hor.* 10b; *b. Naz.* 23b); *b. Kid.* 49b; *y. Šabb.* 14:4, 14d (parallel *y. ḲAvod. Zar.* 2:2, 40d; *b. Sanh.* 75a).

who plough the hard and stony land. And who should they be but those who mate with barren woman? For in the quest of mere licentious pleasure like the most lecherous of men they destroy the procreative germs with deliberate purpose . . . (36) [T]hose who sue for marriage with women whose sterility has already been proved with other husbands, do but copulate like pigs or goats, and their names should be inscribed in the lists of the impious as adversaries of God . . . ⁹⁷

Superficially, Philo's attitude here mirrors the rabbinic polemic: scattering semen on "hard and stony land" is condemned. Yet a close reading of this passage reveals that Philo is really condemning restraint from procreation and dissoluteness rather than non-procreative seminal emission. The man who "wastes" his semen is condemned because he indulged in "gross and untimely pleasure"; because he sought "licentious pleasure". Overindulgence and profligacy are the real causes of condemnation. Just as a farmer who throws away his seed would be condemned for waste, so too is a man who wastes his semen.⁹⁸ That is, the "waste" is that of squandering, be it material resources or semen. There is an implicit fear that when the time comes to "sow" in "fertile fields", there will be no seed left, that masturbation can in some way rob a man of his ability to procreate.

Martial demonstrates a similar concern. Comparing a chronic masturbator who "never has intercourse" (*numquam futuis*) to the mythical Horatius and Mars, he writes:

Both [Horatius and Mars] would have lost the lot if by self-rubbing they had entrusted their dirty joys to the hand. You had better believe that plain Nature (*ipsam . . . naturam*) herself says to you: "Ponticus, what you are losing by your fingers is a human being".⁹⁹

The semen is, unsurprisingly, described as "dirty" or "foul" (*foeda*). Why does Martial condemn masturbation? It appears from context that it is because a man whose sole sexual activity is masturbation does not procreate. Hence, what slips through Ponticus's fingers are not "real" human beings within the sperm, but rather the opportunity for procreation.¹⁰⁰

(97) Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.32–36 (trans. *LCL* 495–7). See also, *Contemplative Life* 62.

(98) On Philo's sexual ethic, cf. Isaak Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung* (Berslau; 1932), pp. 269–73.

(99) Martial 9.41 (trans. Kerr, *LCL*). The last line reads: *Istud quod digitis, Pontice, perdis, homo est.* On this passage, see further Krenkel, "Masturbation," pp. 159–60.

(100) This interpretation is shared by N. M. Kay, *Martial Book XI: A Commentary* (London;

Similar assumptions can be found in early Christian writers, most notably Clement of Alexandria. For several Christian writers, procreation became the only legitimate goal of sexual activity.¹⁰¹ Clement himself discusses the non-procreative emission of semen much as Philo, condemning its "waste" because: (1) such an emission (or any non-procreative emission) "outrages nature", and (2) wasting generative semen does not accord with "reason".¹⁰² Like Philo, Clement marshals those arguments he thinks will be effective — nature and reason — to justify his position that sexual intercourse should be for procreation only. Not surprisingly, then, Clement never explicitly discusses masturbation: his concern is with sanctioned intercourse.¹⁰³

Several rabbinic passages, most notably those in Palestinian documents or attributed to Palestinian rabbis, similarly condemn non-procreative sexual activity *when, and because*, it interferes with procreation. The early rabbinic emphasis on procreation is clear and has been extensively discussed.¹⁰⁴ Non-procreative intercourse is looked upon askance; some

1985), p. 280. Sullivan apparently shares this view, although his explanation is oblique. Cf. J. P. Sullivan, *Martial: The Unexpected Classic* (Cambridge; 1991), pp. 190–1.

(101) Cf. Justin, *I Apol.* 29; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.10.91; *Strom.* 3.7.58, 3.12.79. This attitude is not limited to Philo and the Church Fathers. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 839a; Musonius Rufus 12 (Cora Lutz, "Musonius Rufus: 'The Roman Socrates,'" *Yale Classical Studies* 10 [1947] 84–89). See further, John T. Noonan, *Contraception*, pp. 76–81; Jean-Louis Flandrin, "La vie sexuelle des gens mariés dans l'ancienne société: de la doctrine de l'Église à la réalité des comportements," *Sexualités occidentales*, ed. Phillippe Ariès (Communications 35; Paris, 1982): 102–15; Emiel Eyben, "Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Ancient Society* 11–12 (1980–1) 62–74; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 132–36; James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), pp. 51–123.

(102) "Outraging nature" (*ἐνυβρίζειν . . . τῇ φύσει*): Clem. *Paed.* 2.95.3. According with "reason" (*εὑλογον τῷ ἀποκαθόρματι*): *Paed.* 2.92.1. Cf. A. C. Van Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus and Greek Diatribe* (rev.; Assen, Netherlands, 1962), p. 73.

(103) Some scholars have seen a polemic against masturbation in Matthew. According to Matt. 5:30: "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go to hell." Strack-Billerbeck illustrates this verse with rabbinic sources on masturbation, an approach followed more recently by Deming (Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [rpt. 6 vols.; München: Beck, 1963–1965], 1:302–3; Will Deming, "Mark 9.42–10.12, Matthew 5.27–32, and B. *Nid.* 13b: A First Century Discussion of Male Sexuality," *New Testament Studies* 36 [1990] 130–41). The context, however, suggests that the Matthean passage is intended far more generally than applying to masturbation. Curiously, the Church Fathers do not discuss contraception. Cf. A. M. Dubarle, "La Bible et les pères," pp. 608–10. He notes that this does not necessarily imply that the Church Fathers would have approved of contraception.

(104) Cf. for examples *m. Yebam.* 6:5–6 (ed. Albeck, 3:37–38) (parallel *Sifra Emor* 1:7

rabbis even term it *zēnut* “harlotry”.¹⁰⁵ Disapproval of non-procreative intercourse is clear in a tradition from the Palestinian Talmud:

- A. Rabbi Yehudah ben Pazi said, it is written “Between rows [of olive trees] they make oil, [and, thirsty, they tread the wine-presses],” [Job 24:11] [and, referring to adulterers,] “[May they be flotsam on the face of the water; may their portion in the land be cursed;] may none turn aside by way of their vineyards,” [Job 24:18]. Because his act of intercourse was not for the sake of children.
- B. Rabbi Simon said, it is written, “Truly, they shall eat, but not be sated; they shall swill, but not be satisfied, [because they have forsaken the Lord to practice lechery],” [Hosea 4:10–11], because their acts of intercourse were not for the sake of children.
- C. It is written, “Lamech took to himself two wives: [the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah],” [Gen. 4:19]. “Adah” because he used to be refreshed through her body, and “Zillah” because he would sit in the shade of [her] children.¹⁰⁶

This beginning of this passage, which follows a discussion of whether a priest (or any Jewish man) is allowed to marry a sterile woman, attempts to apply certain prophetic verses to non-procreative sex acts.¹⁰⁷ (C), which is unattributed, suggests by using word-plays on Lamech’s wives’ names that Lamech had one wife to satisfy him sexually, and another to produce children.¹⁰⁸ It appears from the context that the reader is meant to as-

[ed. Weiss, 94b]); *m. Sot.* 4:3 (ed. Albeck, 3:243–44); *t. Yebam.* 5:4 (ed. Lieberman, 3.1:14) (with commentary in Lieberman, *Tos. Kip.*, 8:654–55), 8:7. Cf. further, David Daube, *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh; 1977); and “Johanan ben Beroqa and Women’s Rights,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte-Romanistische Abteilung* 99(1982) 22–31; Feldman, *Birth Control*, pp. 46–56; Jeremy Cohen, ‘Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It’: *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca; 1989), pp. 76–144; Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, pp. 134–66.

(105) Cf. for example, *m. Yebam.* 6:5 (ed. Albeck, 3:37); *y. Yebam.* 6:5, 7c; *b. Yebam.* 61b. It is interesting to note that this term has very concrete legal ramifications, as any woman who engaged in *bē’elat zēnut* is forbidden to marry a priest.

(106) *y. Yebam.* 6:5, 7c.

(107) The verses from Job (E) are nowhere else in rabbinic literature explained in this sexual context. Hos. 4:10 is used in a similar tradition at *b. Yebam.* 61b.

(108) This midrash, unattested in any earlier sources, is not particularly successful because (1) Lamech’s wives’ names are not similar enough to the words being used to explain them, and (2) Adah, the wife who is said to serve his physical needs in contrast to the procreative Zillah, also in fact bears children (see Gen. 4:20–21). A parallel resolves the first problem by switching the roles of the wives. See *Gen. Rab.* 23:19 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 222–3). Cf. Yaakov Elman, “Babylonian Echoes in a Late Rabbinic Legend,” *Journal of the*

sume that this is a mark of wicked men. This condemnatory tone is echoed in another tradition, attributed to R. Zeira, that recognizes that men keep sterile wives because they (i.e., the wives) "satisfy" them.¹⁰⁹ In these traditions, the condemnation of intercourse with sterile women is based only upon (1) the neglect of the duty to procreate, and (2) the licentiousness and profligacy of keeping such a woman.¹¹⁰

Tannaitic and amoraic condemnations of self-arousal and non-procreative seminal emissions are thus grounded in assumptions shared by Greek and Roman sources. Nowhere is there concern that such an emission is, in and of itself, worthy of condemnation. It seems probable to me that the suggestive tannaitic (*t. Nid.* 2:8) and amoraic statements – (J), (K), and (L) – found in *b. Nid.* 13a-b are best understood similarly. The former, as I discussed above, need not be understood as specifically condemning the non-procreative emission of semen. Quite possibly, it just uses this example to demonstrate that touching a penis will lead to arousal.¹¹¹ R. Yohanan, like Martial, may have objected to masturbation as a man's sole sexual outlet. Or, like Philo or Clement, he may have objected to the licentiousness (and hubris) implied in the activity. In either case, there is no compelling reason to interpret these statements as the redactor has, as blanket condemnations of the "waste" of semen.¹¹² The

Ancient Near East 4 (1972) 12–19. Elman sees this text as a vestige of a far older tradition going back to ancient Babylonia, but I find his argument too speculative to be convincing.

(109) *y. Git.* 4:8, 46a. Presumably the satisfaction, *ונתת ישות*, is sexual. "Satisfaction" could, however, be more generally intended, the point being that men prefer good wives, even if they are sterile, to their obligation to procreate.

(110) Such a view *might* also be found in Qumran. According to *4Q270*, a man must not "fornicate with his wife not in accordance with the rule" (יְקַרְבָּן לִגְנֹתָה לְאֶשְׁתָו אֲשֶׁר לֹא כְמַשְׁפֵט). Kister reads this as referring to non-procreative intercourse (Menahem Kister, "Qumran Corner: Notes on Some New Texts from Qumran," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 [1993]: 280–81). Cf., J. M. Baumgarten, "The Cave 4 Version of the Qumran Penal Code," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992): 270; and, "The Qumran-Essene Restraint in Marriage," in *Archeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. L. H. Schiffman (Sheffield, 1990), pp. 13–24.

(111) Another, more speculative, hypothesis is that *t. Nid.* 2:8, as it survives, is a relatively late formulation, perhaps even pieced together under the influence of *b. Nid.* 13a-b. Although Albeck's thesis for the late dating of the tosefta is no longer in vogue, the treatment of this tosefta in *b. Nid.* 13a-b, the way in which the *sugya* (mis)cites it in a different order than it appears in *t. Nid.* 2:8, is intriguing. A revisiting of this issue may be in order. See the summary of the state of the question presented in Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, pp. 174–75.

(112) It is also possible that the attributions are fictions of the redactor. Supporting this possibility are the facts that: (1) (J), (K), and (L) are a unit, yet (L) is attributed to a very different provenance; (2) the statements, or even the very concepts expressed therein, are unattested in any Palestinian document; (3) the redactors demonstrably altered at least one baraita that contradicts their view on this issue (see above).

cultural context of these statements, in fact, argues against such an interpretation. These statements could easily have grown from the common Palestinian disapproval of licentiousness and restraint from procreation, only to be recast (or misunderstood) by the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud. The view that it was wrong to destroy semen was simply not known to Palestinian and earlier Babylonian rabbis.¹¹³

CONCLUSIONS

The rabbis of Roman Palestine, like their non-Jewish contemporaries, condemned self-indulgence and yielding to one's "baser" instincts. This attitude anchors their many statements on male self-arousal: a man who arouses himself sexually in effect yields to temptation, and begins down a path that might lead him, if not to idolatry, at least to actual sexual transgression. Babylonian rabbis too apparently shared this attitude. With very few exceptions, every tannaitic and amoraic statement found in the rabbinic literature of late antiquity can most plausibly be understood in this context.

The concept that the non-procreative emission of semen is to be condemned, then, is relatively late and localized to the redactors and editors of the Babylonian Talmud. Perhaps they adopted this concept from Zoroastrian notions to which, we can assume, they were exposed. In any case, they applied this concept somewhat haphazardly in the Babylonian Talmud, at times constructing highly-stylized polemics against the practice, altering *baraitot*, and questioning earlier traditions that appear not to have been troubled by this concept (as in fact they were not). At other times, they incorporated these earlier traditions into the Talmud without challenge. No wonder the medieval commentators and codifiers who sought to harmonize these sources were flummoxed: the Talmud *appears* to contradict itself because it *does* contradict itself.

The Babylonian Talmud is constructed from sources that arose in at least two major geographical locales (Palestine and Babylonia, not to mention regional variations from within these areas)¹¹⁴ over the course of hundreds of years. One must assume that this material was not homogeneous, that the basic assumptions that grounded these sources were not consis-

(113) It is possible that (J), (K), and (L) do reflect a genuinely Palestinian condemnation of the "waste" of semen which was not accepted within other Palestinian sources. This view, ignored or suppressed, then emerged again centuries later in Babylonia. Such a scenario seems to me to be most unlikely, but it cannot definitively be disproven.

(114) See, for example, David Goodblatt, "Local Traditions in the Babylonian Talmud," HUCA 48(1978) 187–217.

tent. The redactors of the Babylonian Talmud were not always successful in suppressing these differing assumptions. What I hope to have shown in this paper is that careful analyses of rabbinic sources and their placement in larger cultural contexts can serve as powerful tools for the reconstruction of the intellectual histories of the rabbis in late antiquity.

APPENDIX 1

B. *NID. 13A-B* (ACC. MS. MUNICH 95)

מתני': כל היד המרכה לברוק בנשים מושבחת ובאנשים תקצץ.

A. מי שנא נשי' ומאי שנא אנשי'?

- נשי' דלאו בני הרגש' נינייה משבחה. אנשי' דבני הרגש' נינחו תקצץ.

- אי הכי Mai Aiři' מרביה כי לא מרבי נמי

- כי קחני מרב' אנסחים

B. תנא בד'א? לעניין שכב' זרע אבל לעניין זוב אף והוא מושבח כנשים ואפי' לעניין שכב' זרע אם בא לבדוק בצוור או בחודס בודק

- ובטלית לא.

C. והתני' בודק עצמו במטלי' ובכל דבר שירצה

- כרא' אבוי במטלית עבה הכא נמי במטלי' עבה

D. והיכ' איהם דאבי אה דתנע היה אוכל בתרום' והרגיש' שננדענו אבריו אווז באמה
ובולע את התרום'.

- אווז? והתני' ר' אליען או' כל האווז באם' ומשתן כאילו מבוי מבול לעולם.

- א' אבוי במטלית עבה רבא א' אפי' חימי' במטלית רכה כין דעקר עקר

- ואבי חיישי' דילמי' אתי לאוסופי.

- והתני' ומה זה דומי' לנונע אצב' בעין, שכל זמן שאצב' בעין מדמען.

- ורבא כל איחומומי והודר איחומומי בשעה' לא שכית.

E. גוף' ר' אליען או' כל האווז באם' ומשתן כאילו מבוי מבול לעולם.

F. אמרו לו לרי' אליען, והלא ניצוצר' ניתזין לו על רגלו ונרא' כרא' שפכ' ונמצא' שמוציא'
לעו על בניו שהם ממזרים?

G. א' להו, מוטב שיוציא' לעז על בניו ואל יעש' עצמו רשות שע' אח' לפני המקור.

H. תנני' אידך א' להן ר' אליען' לחכמי' אפשר שייעמוד אדם על מקרי' גובה וישתן או
ישתנן בעפר תייחוח ולא יעש' עצמו רשות שע' אח' לפני המקור' . . .

I. וכל כך למה? לפני שמוציא' שכב' זרע לבטלה,

J. דאי' יוחנן, כל המוציא' ש[ככת ז]רעד¹¹⁵ לבטלי' חייב מיתה', שג', וירע בעיני יי' אשר
עש' וגוו', "[כרא' ליה, 10].

K. ר' יצח' דברי' אמי' א' כאילו שופך דמי', שני', "הנחמי' באלים שוחט הילד",
[ישעיה, נז, 5] — אל תקרי "שוחט" אל, "סוחט".

L. רב אשיה, כאילו עובד עז', כתהי הци' "תחת כל עז רענן", וכתחי' הת', "על ההרי'
הרומים וגוו", [דברי' יב, 2].

M. שמוא' ורב יהוד' הו קומי איגר' דברי' ננתה' דשף יתיב בנחרדע'. אל' רב יהוד'
לשמו', צרך אני להשתנן מים. אל, שיננא, אווז באם' והשתנן מים לחוץ.

(115) The mss. reads שם רע.

N. היכי עבד הци?

- והא"ר אליען, כל האוזוד באם' ומושתין כאילו מבוי מבול לשלול.

O. א' אבי,عشואה כבוש' דתנען, בולש' שנכט' לעיר בשע' של' חביר' פתווח' אסורה' טהומו' מותהרו'. בשע' מלחת' אלן ואלא מותהרו', לפ' שאון להם פנאי גנסך.

- אלמן' כיוון דבעתי לא אתני לנוכמי, הци' נמי כיוון דבעתי לא אתני להרהורי.

- והכ' מי' בעותה? איך א' אי' בייעותה' דלילי' ודאייגר', וא' אי' בייעותה' דרביה לא אתני להרהורי.

- והכ' מי' בייעותה' דרבבי?

1. איך' דא' בעותה' דשכני' וא' אי' שאני רב יהוד' דעתת ליה אימת דMRI' עלי' דקי' שמרי' עלי' [דרב יהוד' אין זה ילוד אשה].

2. וא' אי' נשוי היה, דא' רב נחמן', אם היה נשוי מותה.

3. וא' אי' כי הא אוורי ליה דתני' אב' בר' דבר מניזמי בר חזיא אבל מסיע בבצ' שמלטה.

4. וא' אי' כי הא אוורי ליה דא"ר אבhero איד' יוחנן גבולה יש לו מעטר' למיטה מותה, מעטר' למעללה אסורה.

P. א' רב המקשי' עצמו לדעת יהא בנדי.

- ולימ' אסורה משוי' דקא מגהה יציר הרע בנפש'.

Q. ר' אמי' אי' נקר' משומד שכך אומנותו של יציר הרע או' לו עש' כך ולמהר או' לו לך' ועבוך ע"ז והולך ועובד.

R. איך' דא' א"ר יוסי, כל המבוי' עצמו לידי הרהור אין מכניםין אותו במחיצ' של הק"ב. חייב הци', "וירע בעני יי' וגער' וכתח' התה'", כי לא אל חפץ רשות' אה' ולא יגורך וע'.

[תהלים ה, 5].

S. א"ר אלעזר, מי דci, "ידייכ' דמי' מלאו," [ישעיה א, 15]. אלו המנאפי' ביד.

T. תנא דבר ר' ישמען' לא תנאף לא תחר' נואף בין ביד בין ברג'.

U. ת"ה: הגרי' והמשחקי' בתנתקו' ממכבין את המשיח.

V. בשלמי' גרי' כדרא' תלבו, דא"ר חלבו, קשין גרי' לישרי' כספה', אל' משחקי' בתינוקוי' מי' היא?

- אילימ' משכב זבור. בני סקיל' נינהו

- אל' דרך אברוי. בני מבול נינהו

- אל' דנסבי' קטנו' דלאו בני אורלווי' נינהו דא' רב ינסף אין בן דור בא עד שייכלו' נשמרי' דבגיף שני', כי רוח מלפני יעט' ונשמרי' אני עשתית', [ישעיה נז, 16]

W. "באנשׂ" תקצץ" — איבעיא להו דינא תנן או לטוט' תנן?

X. דינא תנן, כי הא דרב הונ' קץ ידא או דילם' לטוט' תנן.

Y. ח"ש דתני' ר' טופון או', תקצץ ידו על טבורה. אמרו לו, ישב לו קוץ בכריסו לא יטלו? אם' להם, לא אמרו לו זה לא כריסטו נפקע' א' לחן מوطב שתפקידן כריסו ואל ירד לבאר שחות.

- אי אמר' דיני' תנן היינו דарамי כריסטו נפקע' אל' אי אמר' לטוט' תנן, מא' כריסטו נפקע'.

- אל' מא' דיני' תנן לא סגי' דלאו אטיבורו אלא הци' קא"ר טופון כל המכenis' ידו למיט' מטיבורו תקצץ.

- אמרו לו לר' טופון יש' לו קוץ בכריסו לא יטלו א' לחן לא והל' כריסטו נפקע' א' לחן מوطב חפק' כריסטו ולא ירד לבאר שחות.

APPENDIX 2

**B. NID. 13A–B (ACC. MS. MUNICH 95):
ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

m. Nid. 2:1: Every hand that frequently checks [for genital fluxes]: in women, it is praiseworthy but in men you should cut [it] off.

A. What's the difference between men and women?

- With women, who are not *bēnot hargasah* [Rashi: men, unlike women, feel their genital flux], it is praiseworthy, but for men, who are *bēne hargasah*, you should cut [the hand off].
- If so, why does [the Mishna] teach “frequently” – is it not frequently as well?
- The “frequently” is for men

B. *It is taught: To what does this apply to? To the case of the emission of semen but for a man emitting a genital flux, even he is as praiseworthy as women; and even in the case of an emission of semen if he checks with a sack or potsherd, he checks, –but with a strip [of cloth], he does not.*

C. *But we learned: One checks himself with a strip [of cloth] and with anything else that he wants,*

- as Abaye [BA 4] said, with a thick strip [it is meant in F], so here too [in E] a thick strip [is meant].

D. Referring to what was Abaye's statement made? *As we learned: A man was eating terumah [i.e., sacred food] and he felt his limbs shaking he holds his penis and swallows the terumah.*

- “Holds”? *But we learned: Rabbi Eliezer says, anyone who holds [his] penis and urinates, it is as if he brings a flood into the world.*
- Abaye said, with a thick strip. Raba (רבה) [BA 4] said, you can even say with a soft strip because since it was uprooted, it was uprooted the emission was unavoidable, so there is no fear of causing an emission].
- Abaye fears lest he brings an additional [seminal emission], but Raba does not fear lest he brings an additional [seminal emission].
- Have we not learned: To what is this thing similar? To one who puts his finger in his eye, that every time that a finger is in an eye, the eye tears. And if he returns [the finger to the eye], the eye tears [again].*
- [What is the response of] Raba? It is not common to “get heated” [i.e., have an orgasm] and then “get heated” again in a short time.

- E. [Reverting to] the text: *Rabbi Eliezer says, anyone who holds [his] penis while urinating, it is as if he brings a flood into the world.*
- F. They said to Rabbi Eliezer, will the spray not splash on his legs, and he will appear as one with a maimed penis and [this will cause] slander about his children that they are *mamzerim* [because he will be thought incapable of procreation, the children will be assumed to have another father by his own wife]?
- G. He said to them, it is better that there be slander about his children that they are *mamzerim* than that he make himself a wicked man before God for even a moment.
- H. Another baraita taught: *Rabbi Eliezer said to the Sages, it is possible that a man stands in a high place and urinates, or urinates in loose earth, and does not make himself a wicked man before God for even a moment . . .*
- I. And what is all this [about]? Because he had a non-procreative emission of semen.
- J. As R. Yohanan [PA 3] said, anyone who emits seed wastefully is liable for the death penalty, as it is said, "What he [Onan] did was displeasing to the Lord, and He took his life also," [Gen. 38:10].
- K. Rabbi Yitzḥak [PA 3] of the School of Rabbi Ami [PA 3] said, it is as if he spilt blood, as it is written, "You who inflame yourselves among the terebinths, under every verdant tree; who slaughter children in the wadis, among the clefts of the rocks," [Is. 57:5]. Don't read "slaughter" (*šoḥṭe*), but "cause to flow" (*soḥṭe*).
- L. Rav Ashi said, it is as if he committed idolatry: it is written here "under every verdant tree", and it is written there "[You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshipped their gods,] whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under every verdant tree," [Deut. 12:2].
- M. Rav Yehudah [BA 2] and Shmuel [BA 1] once stood on the roof of a synagogue of *Shef v'yativ* in Nehardeah. Rav Yehudah said to Shmuel, I have to urinate. He said to him, Moron, take hold of your penis and urinate outside [i.e., over the roof].
- N. How could he do this?
- *Is it not taught: Rabbi Eliezer says, anyone who holds his penis and urinates it is as if he brings a flood to the world?*
- O. Abaye said, he made it like [the case of a] reconnoitering troop, as we learned: if a reconnoitering troop enters the city when there is peace, then open jars are forbidden and closed jars are permitted. But if in a time of war, both are permitted because they [i.e., the soldiers] are not free [i.e., do not have time] to make a libation.
- Thus, because they were frightened they do not come to pour a

libation. So too here, because he was frightened, he did not come to lustful thoughts.

—But here what is the fear? If you like, I could say fear of the night and of the roof. Or, if you like, I could say fear of his master, and he will not come to lustful thoughts.

—And what is fear of his master?

1. Some say, fear of the Lord, but here it is different, for fear of the Lord was upon R. Yehudah, about whom Shmuel said that this one was not borne of a woman.

2. Or, if you like I could say that he was married, and Rav Nahman used to say, if he was married it is permitted.

3. Or, if you like I could say that it was this that he taught him, that which *Abba the son of Rabbi Mineyomi bar Hiyya taught, he can help his testicles from below.*

4. Or, if you like I could say that it was this that he taught him, that Rabbi Abahu [PA 3] said that Rabbi Yohanan [PA 3] said, there is a limit to it, from the corona and below it is permitted, [1gb] from the corona and above is forbidden.

P. Rav said, anyone who willingly causes himself to have an erection will be banned.

—Say [that it is] “forbidden” [instead of “banned”] because he incites his evil inclination against himself,

Q. Rabbi Ami [PA 3] said, he is called a renegade because this is the craft of the evil inclination. Today it says to him, do this, and the next day it says to him, do this, and the day after it says to him, worship an idol, and he goes and worships.

R. Some say, Rabbi Yosi said, anyone who incites himself lustfully is not brought in to the precinct of the Holy One, blessed be He. It is written here, “What he did was displeasing to the Lord, [and He took his life also],” [Gen. 38:10], and it is written there, “For You are not a God who desires wickedness; evil cannot abide with You,” [Ps. 5:5].

S. R. Eliezer said, why is it written, “Your hands are full of blood,” [Is. 1:15]? These are those who commit adultery with their hand.

T. It was taught from the School of R. Ishmael, “You shall not commit adultery,” [Ex. 20:13] — there will be no adultery in you, whether by hand or by foot.

U. Our rabbis taught: Converts and those who play [or sport] with children delay the Messiah.

V. It is fine with converts, as according to R. Helbo [PA 3], as R. Helbo said, converts are as difficult for Israel as a thorn. But what is “one who plays with children”?

- I could say that [this refers to] male homoerotic intercourse, but these are liable for stoning [hence they do not delay the Messiah].
- Rather, [I could say those who practice] *derek evarim*, but they are accounted with bringing the flood.
- Rather, it is those who marry young girls not of child-bearing age, as **R. Yosi said, the Messiah ben David will only come after all the souls in the treasury are exhausted . . .**

W. "But in men you should cut [it] off" – The question was raised, is the Mishnah teaching a law or a curse?

X. "Is the Mishna teaching a law", as in the case of Rav Huna [BA 2] who cut off a hand [see *b. Sanh.* 58b]. Or perhaps it is teaching a curse?

Y. Come and hear what was taught: *Rabbi Tarfon says, one who puts his hand on his penis, you should cut off the hand on his belly. They said to him, but would his belly not split? He said to them, it is better that his belly split and he does not descend into the pit of destruction.*

- It is fine [if] the Mishna is teaching a law, that is, those who say "would his belly not split" [makes sense]. But if you say that "the Mishnah teaches a curse", what does "his belly split" [mean]?
- Rather, is "the Mishna teaches a law" not sufficient that [the cutting of the hand] is not on the belly? Rather, Rabbi Tarfon meant: anyone whose hand goes below his belly, his hand should be cut off. They said to Rabbi Tarfon, if a thorn lodges in his belly should he not remove it? He said to them, no.
- [They said to him], will his belly not split? He said to them, it is better that his belly splits and he does not descend into the pit of destruction.



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