

## Page 1 Summary

- "Wasted Seed/" The History of a Rabbinic Idea MICHAEL L. (Page: 1 #Sentence: 0)
- SATLOW University of Virginia 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. (Page: 1 #Sentence: 1)
- 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 con-demned is limited to the redactorial strata of the Babylonian Talmud. (Page: 1 #Sentence: 2)
- 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 pro-creation were areas of concern, not semen per se. (Page: 1 #Sentence: 3)
- Nid. i3a-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. (Page: 1 #Sentence: 6)
- 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.<sup>1</sup> Study of rabbinic literature over the last decade has led to serious challenges to the historical use of rabbinic literature.<sup>2</sup> Recent reappraisal of the "rabbis" has challenged the very notion \* This paper was originally presented at the 1993 meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies. (Page: 1 #Sentence: 7)

## Page 2 Summary

- 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.<sup>4</sup> Halivni offers no guidance, however, as to exactly how this is to be done. (Page: 2 #Sentence: 3)
- 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? (Page: 2 #Sentence: 4)

- An analysis of the rabbinic idea of "wasted semen" (Tolb 3 nV) can, I believe, serve as a case-study for how rabbinic literature can profitably be excavated. (Page: 2 #Sentence: 5)

- 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). (Page: 2 #Sentence: 6)

- 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.<sup>5</sup> In support of this thesis, I offer three Review 15(1990)203-5. (Page: 2 #Sentence: 7)

- 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 (Page: 2 #Sentence: 14)

- (5) Throughout this study I employ a source-critical approach to the Babylonian Talmud. (Page: 2 #Sentence: 18)

### **Page 3 Summary**

- 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! (Page: 3 #Sentence: 1)

- procreative emission of semen.<sup>7</sup> "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? (Page: 3 #Sentence: 12)

- Dimitrovsky (New York, 1977)> PP 2 75~34 1 [Hebrew] ; Jacob Neusner, *The BavWs 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 Bavls Dis-course: 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

## Page 4 Summary

- 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. (Page: 4 #Sentence: 3)

- When, however, the individual pericopes that compose this sugya are examined, it appears that this idea is found only in the redactorial strata of the sugya and in the contextualization of earlier source material. (Page: 4 #Sentence: 4)

- 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. (Page: 4 #Sentence: 5)

## Page 5 Summary

- [5] "WASTED S E E D , " T H E HISTORY OF A R A B B I N I C IDEA 141 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! (Page: 5 #Sentence: 0)

## Page 6 Summary

- SATLOW [6] 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. (Page: 6 #Sentence: 1)

- 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.<sup>18</sup> This condemnation is apparently based on the idea of self-arousal: there is no mention in this source of the emission of semen.<sup>19</sup> Several of the other relevant tannaitic sources are paralleled by a toseftan baraita that explicitly comments on m. (Page: 6 #Sentence: 2)

- To the emission of semen, but for a genital flux every hand that frequently checks is praiseworthy.<sup>20</sup> 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. (Page: 6 #Sentence: 12)
- 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 (Page: 6 #Sentence: 14)
- I have been unable to locate parallels to the condemnation of touching one's penis while urinating in tannaitic documents (Page: 6 #Sentence: 29)

## Page 7 Summary

- 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.<sup>22</sup> 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. (Page: 7 #Sentence: 8)

## Page 8 Summary

- SATLOW [8] placement of the baraita, immediately after (S), suggests that the "hand" is to be taken as a reference to male masturbation.<sup>24</sup> The other tannaitic sources in this sugya also show no concern with the issue of the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 8 #Sentence: 1)
- 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. (Page: 8 #Sentence: 4)
- They do, however, condemn a man who touches his own penis, and self-arousal generally. (Page: 8 #Sentence: 5)

## Page 9 Summary

- The

former verse discusses the death of Onan, the latter states that "evil" cannot dwell in God's presence.<sup>31</sup> 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). (Page: 9 #Sentence: 7)

## Page 10 Summary

- SATLOW [IO] parallels, appear to be concerned with self-arousal rather than non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 10 #Sentence: 1)
- None of the reasons given implies a condemnation of non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 10 #Sentence: 6)
- 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. (Page: 10 #Sentence: 7)
- None of the amoraic dicta surveyed above suggest any concern with the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 10 #Sentence: 16)
- 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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" (7W21? (Page: 10 #Sentence: 18)

## Page 12 Summary

- SATLOW [12] 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. (Page: 12 #Sentence: 1)
- Nid. 43a, both the redactorial contribution to (B) and the shaping of the argument in (D), imply redactorial concern with the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 12 #Sentence: 4)
- Because of the non-procreative emission of semen." (Page: 12 #Sentence: 11)
- According to (I), this sugya, and the traditions contained therein, are all about the

non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 12 #Sentence: 14)

- The redactor offers and rejects two suggestions: that this refers to male homo-eroticism or a non-procreative form of sex called derek Devanm6 Both are rejected because they already have punishments associated with them, stoning for male homoeroticism and "flooding" for the latter. (Page: 12 #Sentence: 18)
- Perhaps because they share, in the eyes of the redactor, the characteristic of non-procreative emission of emission. (Page: 12 #Sentence: 20)
- Yet nowhere else in rabbinic literature is homoeroticism associ-ated with this activity, and elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud, derek Devarm is neither associated with the non-procreative emission of semen nor is it even really condemned.<sup>37</sup> Its association with "flooding" appar-(36) The phrase is found only in the Babylonian Talmud. (Page: 12 #Sentence: 21)

### Page 13 Summary

- [13] " W A S T E D S E E D , " T H E H I S T O R Y O F A R A B B I N I C I D E A 149 ently derives from 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. (Page: 13 #Sentence: 0)
- 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." (Page: 13 #Sentence: 1)
- While this activity is prohibited elsewhere in rabbinic literature, it is never linked to the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 13 #Sentence: 3)
- 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.<sup>38</sup> The sugya continues with an extensive discussion of the first part of the mishna, dealing with women checking themselves. (Page: 13 #Sentence: 22)
- Although the Palestin-ian Talmud's parallel sugyot are often much more concise than the Baby-lonian 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. (Page: 13 #Sentence: 23)

### Page 14 Summary

- Such

checking is condemned, but it is not clear why.<sup>39</sup> There is not even a hint of a polemic against the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 14 #Sentence: 3)

- **A source-critical analysis of the sugya has shown that the editor and redactor of b.Nid. i3a-b actively shaped their materials into a polemic against the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 14 #Sentence: 5)**
- **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. (Page: 14 #Sentence: 6)**
- In almost no source outside of the redactorial strata is there evidence of con-demnation of the non-procreative emission of semen per se. (Page: 14 #Sentence: 9)
- Those non-redactorial 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. (Page: 14 #Sentence: 10)
- Nid. i3a-b, namely that the concept of condemnation of the non-procreative emission of semen is a contribution of the editorial/redactorial strata. (Page: 14 #Sentence: 12)
- (39) Below I propose that this sugya is based on condemnation of male sexual self-arousal rather than that of the emission of semen (Page: 14 #Sentence: 23)

## **Page 15 Summary**

- A pregnant woman [lest] her fetus become a sandal [i.e., a type of deformed fetus]. (Page: 15 #Sentence: 1)
- A pregnant woman [lest] perhaps her fetus will become a sandal; E. (Page: 15 #Sentence: 19)
- A nursing woman [lest] perhaps she will wean her son and he will die. (Page: 15 #Sentence: 20)

## **Page 16 Summary**

- 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. (Page: 16 #Sentence: 3)
- 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." (Page: 16 #Sentence: 5)
- But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste ( nntth) whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. (Page: 16 #Sentence: 6)

## **Page 17 Summary**

- Later,

the Church Fathers too never associate with Er and Onan the "sin" of the non-procreative emission of semen.<sup>51</sup> 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. (Page: 17 #Sentence: 1)

**- 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.<sup>52</sup> One tradition in the Palestinian Talmud associates Er's act with a woman deliberately hindering conception.<sup>53</sup> Palestinian sources never explicitly associate the acts of Er and Onan with the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 17 #Sentence: 2)**

## **Page 18 Summary**

- said to him, "This is what Er and Onan did!" (Page: 18 #Sentence: 7)

- This is both like and unlike the acts of Er and Onan. (Page: 18 #Sentence: 9)

- It is like the acts of Er and Onan, as it is written, " [he] let it go to waste when-ever he joined with his brother's wife". (Page: 18 #Sentence: 10)

- It is not like the act of Er and Onan, because there it refers to anal intercourse and here it refers to vaginal intercourse (HDTTD), we understand [the sin of] Onan, for it is written, "he let it go to waste," but what was [the transgression of] Er? (Page: 18 #Sentence: 12)

- We understand Onan, because "so as not to provide offspring for his brother", but what was Er's reason [for not procreating with Tamar] ? (Page: 18 #Sentence: 16)

**- The sugya reads (C) and (D) together, as a tannaitic source that associates coitus interruptus with Er and Onan's fatal transgression.<sup>55</sup> The only non-redactional contribution from this point on is (G), a statement that merely seeks to show that Er and Onan died for the same transgression. (Page: 18 #Sentence: 19)**

- 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. (Page: 18 #Sentence: 20)

**- In sum, only on the redactional level of the Babylonian Talmud is there an association between the transgression of Er and Onan and the non-procreative emission of semen.<sup>5</sup>**

**6 Example 3: Joseph. (Page: 18 #Sentence: 21)**

## **Page 19 Summary**

- Except



that his seed came forth from between his fingernails.<sup>60</sup> Both sugyot contain a tradition that Joseph scattered his seed from his fingernails rather than have sexual relations with Potiphar's wife. (Page: 19 #Sentence: 23)

## Page 20 Summary

- 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 5 rODUJ TibOlB "wasteful/vain emission of semen" used throughout the Babylonian Talmud to designate the non-procreative emission of semen. (Page: 20 #Sentence: 3)
- **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.**<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> (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.<sup>64</sup> Rabbinic law, for example, clearly allows all forms of non-procreative sex between husband and wife, including intercourse with sterile partners and anal intercourse.<sup>65</sup> b. (Page: 20 #Sentence: 4)
- (65) Some Palestinian sources appear to disapprove of non-procreative sexual activities, but they nevertheless allow them. (Page: 20 #Sentence: 23)

## Page 21 Summary

- 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.<sup>66</sup> 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 (Page: 21 #Sentence: 1)
- (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.<sup>67</sup> It is possible that both groups of redactors, living in similar milieus, shared this abhorrence. (Page: 21 #Sentence: 3)
- IMAGINING

SEMEN The biblical term for "semen" *zerca*, is the same as that for "seed".<sup>68</sup> Emissions of semen, whether voluntary or not, whether in sanctioned or illicit sexual liaisons, were equally ritually defiling (Lev 15:16-18).<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> The small amount of data on semen in Jewish literature from the Second Temple period appears to follow Aristotle's embryology. (Page: 21 #Sentence: 4)

- "Semen" in the Bible is always designated by the term *3 123* or its cognates: Lev 15:16! (Page: 21 #Sentence: 16)

- 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. (Page: 21 #Sentence: 29)

## Page 22 Summary

- 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.<sup>71</sup> 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."<sup>72</sup> 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. (Page: 22 #Sentence: 2)

- **In contrast to Aristotle, who saw semen as arising from the blood, certain Stoic philosophers believed that semen was composed from the entire body.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> Yet even with this increased importance attached to semen, these thinkers too never associated that "waste" of semen with the destruction of (even a potential) life. (Page: 22 #Sentence: 5)**

- The very few sources on rabbinic embryology (mostly of Palestinian provenance) appear to subscribe to this "two-seed" theory. (Page: 22 #Sentence: 6)

## Page 23 Summary

- Both men and women emit "seed", according to the rabbis, and both are necessary for conception.<sup>77</sup> 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".<sup>78</sup> Other tannaitic and amoraic discussions of semen, following the He-brew Bible, concern its property of defilement.

(Page: 23 #Sentence: 1)

- 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.<sup>79</sup> Tannaitic sources, and later commen-tary on them in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, discuss the propriety of the man who has a seminal emission studying Torah.<sup>8</sup> None of these sources differentiate between sanctioned and unsanctioned emis-sions of semen. (Page: 23 #Sentence: 2)

## Page 24 Summary

- R.Yermiah ben Eleazar said, "All those years that Adam was in ban-ishment (beniduy), he bore spirits, demons, and liliths, as it is writ-ten, 'When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot [a son] in his likeness after his image . . . , ' " (Gen 5:3). (Page: 24 #Sentence: 7)

- In (A) and (B), attributed to a fourth generation Palestinian amora, Adam is said to have given rise to spirits.<sup>83</sup> His "banishment" appears to be from Eden, although it might also refer to his being in God's disfavor.<sup>84</sup> How he bore the children is left unstated, although two interpretations suggest themselves. (Page: 24 #Sentence: 15)

## Page 25 Summary

- 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.<sup>85</sup> Adam's and Eve's lust caused the reproduction of spirits and demons. (Page: 25 #Sentence: 2)

- There is litde reason to doubt that the attribution is genuinely tannaitic, as it reflects other ascetic sentiments found in tannaitic sources.<sup>86</sup> 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! (Page: 25 #Sentence: 8)

- 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. (Page: 25 #Sentence: 9)

- **Based on a "misreading" of earlier sources, the redactor suggests that Adam's "wasted" semen was the primary cause for the gener-ation of demons, and condemns Adam for this activity.<sup>87</sup> 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 par-alleled in Zoroastrian sources. (Page: 25 #Sentence: 11)**

- 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. (Page: 25 #Sentence: 12)
- According to the Dnkard, "a man who unites with an im-proper woman is condemned for having wasted his seed."<sup>88</sup> According to the Pahlavi Bivayat Accompanying the Ddestn Dng, the "waste" of semen is a sin.<sup>89</sup> It is possible, although admittedly still far from proven, that a (85) Gen. (Page: 25 #Sentence: 13)

## **Page 26 Summary**

- **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 mas-turbation. (Page: 26 #Sentence: 2)
- **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) masturba-tion as a sole sexual outlet leads to restraint from procreation.<sup>90</sup> 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. (Page: 26 #Sentence: 4)**
- According to several Greek authors, a man must work continuously to fight his sexual desire.<sup>91</sup> Ro-mans linked sex to other "appetites" and preached an ethic of self-control.<sup>92</sup> Apollonius, according to Philostratus, in his youth subdued his "maddening" sexual passion.<sup>93</sup> Excessive intercourse, even with prostitutes and slaves, was disapproved because it displayed weakness.<sup>94</sup> Masturbation the spirit of the sky," (2:144, n. 5). (Page: 26 #Sentence: 6)
- Sullivan, "Martial's Sexual Atti-tudes," Philobgus 123(1979)294; Amy Richlin, The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality & Aggression in Roman Humor (rev. ed.; New York, 1992), pp. 26-29. ^ \*s 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. (Page: 26 #Sentence: 18)

## **Page 27 Summary**

- 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! (Page: 27 #Sentence: 4)
- 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! (Page: 27 #Sentence: 9)

- The second reason for the condemnation of masturbation, restraint from procreation, is found in Philo as well as in Roman sources. (Page: 27 #Sentence: 13)
- 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. (Page: 27 #Sentence: 14)
- See further, Aline Rousselle, "Personal Status and Sexual Practice in the Roman Empire," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. (Page: 27 #Sentence: 18)

## **Page 28 Summary**

- 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. (Page: 28 #Sentence: 3)
- Yet a close reading of this passage reveals that Philo is really condemning restraint from procreation and dissoluteness rather than non-procreative seminal emission. (Page: 28 #Sentence: 4)
- The man who "wastes" his semen is condemned because he indulged in "gross and untimely pleasure"; because he sought "licentious pleasure". (Page: 28 #Sentence: 5)
- Just as a farmer who throws away his seed would be condemned for waste, so too is a man who wastes his semen.<sup>98</sup> That is, the "waste" is that of squandering, be it material resources or semen. (Page: 28 #Sentence: 7)

## **Page 29 Summary**

- For several Christian writers, procreation became the only legitimate goal of sexual activity.<sup>101</sup> 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".<sup>102</sup> 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. (Page: 29 #Sentence: 1)

- Not surprisingly, then, Clement never explicitly discusses masturbation : his concern is with sanctioned intercourse.<sup>103</sup> 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. (Page: 29 #Sentence: 2)

### Page 30 Summary

- "Adah" because he used to be refreshed through her body, and "Zillah" because he would sit in the shade of [her] children.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup> (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.<sup>108</sup> It appears from the context that the reader is meant to as"fed. (Page: 30 #Sentence: 8)

- (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). (Page: 30 #Sentence: 34)

### Page 31 Summary

- Zeira, that recognizes that men keep sterile wives because they (i.e., the wives) "satisfy" them.<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> Tannaitic and amoraic condemnations of self! (Page: 31 #Sentence: 2)

### Page 32 Summary

- The view that it was wrong to destroy semen was simply not known to Palestinian and earlier Babylonian rabbis.<sup>113</sup> C O N C L U S I O N S The rabbis of Roman Palestine, like their non-Jewish contemporaries, condemned self-indulgence and yielding to one's "baser" instincts. (Page: 32 #Sentence: 3)

- 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.

(Page: 32 #Sentence: 7)

- 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). (Page: 32 #Sentence: 9)

- 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. (Page: 32 #Sentence: 12)

- One must assume that this material was not homogeneous, that the basic assumptions that grounded these sources were not consistent (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. (Page: 32 #Sentence: 13)

### **Page 36 Summary**

- It is taught: To what does this apply? 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, - b u t with a strip [of cloth], he does not. (Page: 36 #Sentence: 12)

### **Page 37 Summary**

- [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. (Page: 37 #Sentence: 1)

- 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] ? (Page: 37 #Sentence: 3)

- 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. . . (Page: 37 #Sentence: 7)

- 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. (Page: 37 #Sentence: 25)

### **Page 38 Summary**

- 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, [13b] from the corona and above is forbidden. (Page: 38 #Sentence: 12)

- Some say, Rabbi Yosi said, anyone who incites himself lustfully is not brought in to the precinct of the Holy One, blessed be He. (Page: 38 #Sentence: 19)

### **Page 39 Summary**

- 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. (Page: 39 #Sentence: 11)

- - I t is fine [if] the Mishna is teaching a law, that is, those who say "would his belly not split" [makes sense]. (Page: 39 #Sentence: 14)

- -Rather, is "the Mishna teaches a law" not sufficient that [the cutting of the hand] is not on the belly? (Page: 39 #Sentence: 16)

- Rather, Rabbi Tarfon meant: anyone whose hand goes below his belly, his hand should be cut off. (Page: 39 #Sentence: 17)