Fictional Women

A Study in Stereotypes

by

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> We all create images of things we fear or glorify. These images never remain abstractions: we understand them as real-world entities. We assign them labels that serve to set them apart from ourselves. We create "stereotypes".
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> *Sander Gilman*[1]

> One who increases women [or wives] increases witchcraft; one who increases female slaves increases lewdness; one who increases male slaves increases theft.
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> *M. Avot 2:7*

Scholars have long recognized the dual functions of stereotypes. On the one hand, as Sander Gilman suggests, stereotypes are individual projections, necessary strategies of the self that help to order the outside world. On the other hand, they are also markers of collective identity: "we" create the "other" in order to define "us". Stereotypes, that is, are less about "them" than they are about "us", revealing our own deepest, and least articulatable, fears and aspirations.

In this essay, I will attempt to show that the notion of the "stereotype" can help us to gain leverage on Palestinian rabbinic narratives. The rabbinic literature of antiquity is peppered with a variety of characters. These characters – rabbis, their families, ordinary Jews, boors, women, Roman dignitaries, and ordinary Gentiles, among others – appear both as objects of rabbinic speculation and legislation and as subjects of stories. Yet they are also stereotypes. As my second epigram illustrates, the rabbis freely stereotyped those who were not part of the rabbinic "us". This "us", especially for Palestinian rabbis, is relatively easy to identify: a male, property owning, rabbi or rabbinic disciple.[2]

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[1] Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 15.

[2] Cf. Hayim Lapin, *Early Rabbinic Civil Law and the Social History of Roman Galilee* (BJS 307; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 119–235.

When the rabbis discuss any other character, we must ask to what degree they are reporting a "real" incident, and to what degree they creating a fantasy, a projection that serves some ulterior motive of self-definition. When, for example, the rabbis link the increase of women to the increase to witchcraft, are they basing themselves on some grain of truth, or are they stereotyping, and thus engaged in cultural work that has little, or nothing, to do with women?

This question takes on a heightened importance when we confront rabbinic stories. Within Palestinian rabbinic literature there are many stories, or case reports, that involve non-rabbis. Traditionally, scholars had taken these stories almost literally, as windows into the material reality in which the rabbis lived. Moshe David Herr, for example, used rabbinic reports of dialogues between rabbis and Roman officials in order to recover Roman-Jewish relations, and Tal Ilan attempted to reconstruct the lives of Jewish women in Roman Palestine from the stories that the rabbis told about them.[3] Yet, obviously, if these stories are rabbinic fantasies then such attempts at reconstruction become methodologically suspect.

In this essay, I will address two related problems. First, I will investigate the stereotype of women found in Palestinian rabbinic literature. I will argue that nearly every Palestinian rabbinic story (or case) about a woman builds upon, or plays off, the rabbinic stereotype of women. *When a woman appears in a rabbinic story, her appearance as a woman is almost never incidental; her character is not interchangeable with a male one.*[4] This simple fact should alert us that rabbinic stories, especially those that center on the Other, are far from clear descriptions of the past.

Rabbinic stories do, however, provide insights into rabbinic self-definition. The second issue that I will address is the specificity of stereotyped descriptions and their communal goals. Stereotypes do not lump the Other into a single category; they parcel out fears and fantasies into different groups. In my second

[3] Moshe D. Herr, "The Historical Significance of the Dialogues between Jewish Sages and Roman Dignitaries," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, ed. Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy (vol. 22 of *Scripta Hierosolymitana*; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971) 123–50; Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1995), esp. 41–43.

[4] Galit Hasan-Rokem has argued for an ethnographic approach to rabbinic narratives ("Narratives in Dialogue: A Folk Literary Perspective on Interreligious Contacts in the Holy Land in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arieh Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa [Jerusalem: Yad Izhak ben Zvi, 1998] 109–29). I do not see our approaches as mutually exclusive. Similarly, Christine Hayes has argued for one particular narrative in the Bavli that, in fact, "heretics" and Romans expound opinions that in other places are attributed to rabbis ("Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of Mînîm and Romans in b. Sanhedrin 90b-91a," in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. Hayim Lapin [Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture V; Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 1998] 249–89). The Palestinian stories that focus on women do not lend themselves to such a reading.

epigram, for example, three groups are labeled with three distinct stereotypes.[5] To fully understand the way a group defines itself against the Other would require a taxonomy of stereotypes, a charting of all of the group's stereotypes. Such an enterprise is well beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, after describing how Palestinian rabbis stereotyped women, and how these stereotypes function in their stories about women, I will attempt to explain the function that this particular stereotype may have played in Palestinian rabbinic society. In fine, I argue that Palestinian rabbinic stereotypes have little to do with real women, but much to do with men, and how rabbinic men defined themselves as *men*. This strategy of self-definition finds many parallels within contemporary pagan and Christian literature.

Female Stereotypes

Although the focus of this essay is on rabbinic stories about women, these stories were neither produced nor read in a vacuum. In order to provide a background for the female stereotypes found in these stories, I will first survey briefly the primary stereotypes of women found in the prescriptive and moralistic writings of the Palestinian rabbis. Within this literature I have identified five dominant stereotypes, or groups of stereotypes, about women.

Magic. As my second epigram clearly states, women were linked to magic. Another tannaitic source makes a similarly global statement, that "most magic [or witchcraft] is found in women."[6] After stating that the penalty for a male and female magician is equal (death), the Yerushalmi tries to explain why Exodus 22:17 prescribes the death penalty only for a female magician: "The Torah teaches you the common way (דרך ארץ), because most women are magicians."[7] A story about Shimon ben Shetah hanging eighty female witches in a day (see below) is repeated several times throughout tannaitic literature as well as within the Yerushalmi itself: one version emphasizes that Shimon ben Shetah's action was extreme but necessary because "the hour demanded it."[8] While obscure, this comment might reflect a belief that dangerous numbers of women were practicing magic. While these few traditions do not suggest that Palestinian rabbis saw all women as magicians, they do indicate that this was a live stereotype that could be deployed at will.[9]

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[5] For an outstanding example of a list of stereotypes, see Y. Qidd. 4:11, 66c.

[6] Mek. d'Rashbi *ad* Exod. 22:7 (ed. Epstein 209). Cf. Y. Qidd. 4:11, 66c for a similar sentiment attributed to R. Shimon bar Yohai.

[7] Y. Sanh. 7 :19, 25d.

[8] M. Sanh. 6: 4 (ed. Albeck 4:188); Sipre Deut. 221 (ed. Finklestein 253); Y. Hag. 2:2, 78a; Y. Sanh. 6:9, 23c.

[9] Cf. Ludwig Blau, "Das altjüdische Zauberwesen," *Jahresbericht der Landes-Rabbinerschule in Budapest* (Budapest, 1898) 23–36; Ilan, *Jewish Women* 221–25.

Licentious. According to M. Avot 2:7, slave women increase licentiousness. In part, this assertion is based on the assumption that a man had easy sexual access to his female slaves, and that he would use it. Behind this social assumption, however, lies a pervasive stereotype that women generally are licentious. The Mishnah encourages women to view the punishment of the suspected adulteress (*sota*) who is found guilty in order to teach them; men are never thought to need the same lesson.[10] Women are discouraged from learning Torah for fear that they will think that their knowledge will make them immune from the *sota* ritual, and will thus be encouraged to commit adultery.[11] "Rabbi Yehoshua says, 'A woman wants a [single] measure [of food] and sex (תפלות) more than nine measures and abstinence.'"[12] Women in the Temple, according to a tannaitic tradition, became frivolous when they were allowed to see the men during the Water Drawing ceremony.[13] Tannaitic law forbids a man to remain alone with two women, although a woman may remain alone with two men, for fear that the women could not sexually control themselves or each other.[14] One tannaitic tradition links a woman's jewelry to her sexual lure or activity.[15] Another tannaitic tradition illustrates the biblical prohibition of cross-dressing with the example of a woman bearing weapons and a man wearing jewelry.[16] One reason for this prohibition, according to the tradition, is that each will be able to circulate among those of the opposite sex and thus have easy sexual access. At the same time, this tradition implies a contrast between the male activity of war and female sexual allurements. If a man and a woman have been placed in prostitution, the man should be redeemed first, "because the woman, her way is for this, and the man, his way is not for this."[17] Palestinian literature frequently portrays women as temptresses, or even seductresses.[18]

Domestic. A woman's primary sphere of activity is doing household tasks. Spinning is seen as a woman's primary, and exemplary, activity.[19] Women are seen as homebodies: "It is the way of a man to go abroad. It is not the way of a

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[10] M. Sot. 1 :6 (ed. Albeck 3:235). Cf. Sipre Num. 8 (ed. Horovitz 15).

[11] M. Sot. 3:4 (ed. Albeck 3:240–41).

[12] Ibid.

[13] T. Suk. 4:1 (ed. Lieberman 2:272). The term *kalut rosh* has a strong, but not exclusive, sexual sense.

[14] M. Qidd. 4: 12 (ed. Albeck 3:328–29).

[15] Sipre Num. 99 (ed. Horovitz 98). Cf. Y. Shab. 6:1, 7d, in which women are called "vain" (שחצניות).

[16] Sifre Deut. 226 (ed. Finklestein 258). Cf. Midrash Tanaim *ad* Deut. 22:5 (ed. Hoffman 134–35).

[17] Y. Hor. 3:4, 48b.

[18] Cf. Michael L. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (BJS 303; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 158–69.

[19] See, for example, Y. Ber. 8:7, 12c. Cf. Miriam B. Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 77–108; Ilan, *Jewish Women* 187.

woman to go abroad."[20] At the same time, "it is not the way of a woman to sit idly in his [!] house." Thus, a woman should sit in the house, but should always be active in domestic activity.[21] Rabbinic sources assume that women do the household baking, cooking, cleaning, and are concerned about the laundry.[22] Echoing classical sources, the rabbis understand a woman's place as in private, or domestic, space.[23]

Social Difficulties. Women are thought to meddle, gossip, and to be crafty. One tannaitic law bases itself upon a legal presumption that women are gluttonous or meddling, an attribute clearly seen in this source as negative.[24] Palestinian rabbinic sources relate a myth of Eve that is somewhat similar to that of Pandora, in which the first woman releases evil into the world through her vanity and curiosity.[25] Even less generous is a rabbinic tradition that states that, "four characteristics were said about women. They are gluttonous, eavesdroppers, lazy, and jealous."[26] Similarly, one tradition explains why God created Eve from Adam's rib rather than any other part of his body:

> She was not created from the head so that she not become haughty, and not from the eye so that she not become a coquette, and not from the ear so that she not become an eavesdropper, and not from the mouth so that she not become a gossip, and not from the heart so that she not be [always] jealous, and not from the hand so that she not be thievish, and not from the foot that she not be restless, but from a modest place in Adam – even when Adam stands naked that place is covered.[27]

Lest the reader be too quick to read this as praise, the author goes on immediately to say that despite God's best intentions, women turned out to have all of these negative qualities. The assumption of female thievishness is written directly into the law: a man is not allowed to buy most things from a married woman because

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[20] Y. Yev. 10: 8, 11a.

[21] Y. Ket. 5 :6, 30a; Gen. Rab. 18:1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 160–61).

[22] Baking: M. Shab. 2:6 (ed. Albeck 2:23); T. Pes. 3:7 (ed. Lieberman 2:152); Y. Shab. 1, 4b. Cooking: Y. Maas. 4:6, 51c. Cleaning: Y. Shab. 2, 5c (with parallels). Laundry: Y. Shab. 3:2, 5d: "R. Mana was lenient for the women, [allowing them to] spread their garments over the hollow of the oven."

[23] Cynthia Baker argues that the rabbis see a woman's place as in the house, but "that a house is not so much *where* a wife/woman is, but rather, a house is, in part, *who* and *what* she is" (Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Gendered Bodies and Domestic Politics in Roman Jewish Galilee c. 135–300 C.E.* [PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1997] 42). Whether or not this assertion is correct, Baker agrees that the rabbis divided space along a private (domestic)/public axis, and gendered this division.

[24] Women are גרגרניות. M. Toh. 7:9 (ed. Albeck 6:324); T. Toh. 8:16 (ed. Zuckermandel 669).

[25] Gen. Rab. 19:10 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 179–80). The relation of this story to the myth of Pandora is unclear. Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (The New Historicism 25; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 84–88.

[26] Gen. Rab. 44:5 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 452–53).

[27] Gen. Rab. 18:2 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 163); Gen. Rab. 80:5 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 955).

she is assumed to have stolen her husband's property.[28] Smart women are seen as especially dangerous, for they use their knowledge to deceive men.[29]

Piety. Women are not thought to be involved in the study of Torah, but they can nevertheless be pious. While the evidence for this idea is scanty, what little that remains is intriguing. Tannaitic sources assume that women are not engaged in the study of Torah. Interpreting Deut. 31:12 ("Gather the men, the women, and the children"), a homilist assumes that the men will go to learn Torah, the women will get the reward for passive listening, and the children will allow those who bring them to accrue merit.[30] Although themselves exempt from the obligation to learn Torah, women are exhorted to bring their sons to the synagogue to learn.[31] More intriguing is the assumption behind the daily blessing in which a man thanks God that he was not made a woman. Why does a man say this? "Because women are not obligated for the commandments. A parable: To what is the matter similar? To a king of flesh and blood who says to his servant, 'Cook me a dish,' and he [the servant] had never cooked that dish. In the end, he spoiled the dish and annoyed his master."[32] The statement that women are not obligated to perform the commandments is not precisely true. Elsewhere the rabbis specify that women are obligated to perform at least some of the commandments.[33] More interesting, however, is the parable used to explain this statement. The reason a man regularly performs the commandments is so that should God call upon him, he – unlike the king's servant – will be ready. Women, on the other hand, will never be called upon; hence they need not prepare themselves through practice of the commandments. This tradition, which might represent an extreme view, assumes that women are somehow distanced from the divine. In fact, although rabbinic stories contain alternative modes of female piety, the prescriptive and moralistic rabbinic literature appears to assume that women are far from God.[34]

These individual stereotypes do not add up to a whole. The stereotypes are discrete, not the product of a single ideological understanding of Woman. At the

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[28] T. BK 11:5, 7 (ed. Lieberman 4.59). Cf. M. BK 10:9 (ed. Albeck 4:50), which also talks of other classes of people who are not to be trusted.

[29] See, e.g., T. Ed. 1:6 (ed. Zuckermandel 455).

[30] T. Sot. 7: 9 (ed. Lieberman 3.2:193–94); Y. Sot. 3:4, 11d-12a; Y. Hag. 1:1, 75d.

[31] On the female exemption from Torah study, see Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halakhic Sources* (New York: Schocken, 1984) 29–36; Ilan, *Jewish Women* 190–97. On their responsibility (but not legal obligation) to bring their sons to the synagogue, see Y. Hal. 1:1, 57b.

[32] T. Ber. 6:18 (ed. Lieberman 1:38).

[33] Cf. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder: Westview) 221–43.

[34] Another example of this distancing can be seen in rabbinic attitudes toward nakedness. The rabbis condemn male nakedness because a man should not be naked in the sight of God. They condemn female nakedness purely on social grounds. See Michael L. Satlow, "Jewish Constructions of Nakedness in Late Antiquity," *JBL* 116 (1997): 429–54.

same time, a common theme runs through several of these stereotypes, that of weakness and lack of control.[35] Without pushing this too far, I suggest that what is explicit about female weakness in rabbinic discussions of licentiousness is implicit in rabbinic understanding of female involvement with magic, their social difficulties, and perhaps even their piety. What separates male from female characteristics is self-discipline, which, according to these rabbis, men have and women do not. I will return to this issue below.

It is important to note that the rabbis themselves were well aware that these were stereotypes that did not actually apply to all individual women. They knew, and acknowledged, that women took part in public activities, both commercial and religious.[36] Most likely, they would have been hesitant to assume without reason that their daughters and wives were licentious. For these rabbis, as for us, stereotypes (sometimes) stopped at the individual.

Rabbinic Stories about Women

Understanding these female stereotypes helps us to understand, and appreciate, the Palestinian rabbinic stories about women. These stories and cases, we now recognize, are not mere stenographic reports; they are literary creations. Catherine Hezser has demonstrated the extent to which rabbinic editors used particular literary conventions to shape their stories.[37] Before asking about the material realities behind these stories, we must deal with their literary, and fictive, characteristics.

In this section I focus on a particular set of stories found in Palestinian rabbinic literature, those that put women at their center. The Yerushalmi contains around 250 cases prefaced with the Hebrew formula *ma'ase b'*, and close to another 275 cases prefaced with the Aramaic equivalent, *'uvda ata*, or something similar. Out of over 500 cases, not to mention the scores of other stories reported in the Yerushalmi and other Palestinian rabbinic literature, only a relative handful feature women as their central characters. The vast bulk of these cases feature a Jewish male protagonist: women, minors, gentiles, and heretics appear infrequently.

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[35] On assumptions of female weakness, see Ruth Rab. 7:2. An assumption of female weakness informs many Roman laws. See Suzanne Dixon, "*Infirmitas Sexus:* Womanly Weakness in Roman Law," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 52 (1984): 343–71. Cf. Zola Packman, "Undesirable Company: The Categorisation of Women in Roman Law," *Scholia* n.s. 3 (1994) 94–106 for a very suggestive exploration of the ways in which Roman law understands women.

[36] For sources, see Ilan, *Jewish Women* 184–90.

[37] Catherine Hezser, *Form, Function, and Historical Significance of the Rabbinic Story in Yerushalmi Neziqin* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1993).

Thus, when a woman does appear as a protagonist in a rabbinic story, she cries out "*darsheni*", interpret me. Why a woman? Why did the storyteller chose in a particular place and on a particular topic to include a story about a woman rather than a (rabbinic) man? That is, the appearance of women in these stories functions as a kind of flare for the reader. The presence of a woman alerts the reader that something will be different about this case or story, and signals her or him to break out an appropriate set of interpretive tools.

Before discussing the characteristics of these stories generally, I want to consider one example that illustrates this approach:

> Once there was a woman who would fight with her neighbor. She sent [an object to establish a courtyard] *eruv* [to this neighbor] with her son. [The neighbor] took him, hugged him, and kissed him. When he returned he told this to his mother. She said, 'In this manner she loved me and I didn't know.' And because of this they made peace.[38]

On its surface, this story appears to be an unproblematic and relatively transparent account of an actual historical incident. If read in this way, we might learn that women who shared a courtyard were prone to argue. They interacted with each other by means of their children. They, rather than their husbands, would erect the communal *eruv*, the legal fiction that allowed the transportation of an object within a given domain on the Sabbath. "[T]he logical explanation for this," Tal Ilan writes, "is that the *erub* had to be set while the man would normally still be out of the house at work, and so the task fell on the women."[39]

Perhaps this is all true. Yet this story is not primarily *about* the role of women in constructing an *eruv*. The story is introduced by the statement that it is cited to support: "Rabbi Yehoshua said, 'Why do they make *eruv*s in courtyards? Because of "ways of peace."'" The story then illustrates how the communal maintenance of an *eruv* can help to bring peace between neighbors, concluding with the peroration, "This is why it is written, 'its ways are ways of pleasantness and all of her paths are peace' [Prov. 3:17]." By "commanding" the maintenance of an *eruv* in a courtyard, the Torah – as understood by the rabbis – promotes peace between neighbors.

Following Ilan, we might suspect that the function of women in this story is to highlight domesticity; the presence of women, according to this logic, signals that the courtyard is to be seen as female space. Indeed, the presence of two other stories in the Yerushalmi that portray women arranging their *eruvim* supports this interpretation.[40] Yet there is at least one other story in the Yerushalmi, in close proximity to this one, that portrays a *man* making the *eruv*.[41]

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[38] Y. Eruv. 3:1, 20d (par. Y. Eruv. 7:10, 24c–d).

[39] Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women* 183.

[40] Y. Eruv. 6:3, 23c (involving the wife of a "Parsi" who rents courtyard without knowledge of her husband); Y. Eruv. 7:10, 24d (woman made *eruv* for her mother-in-law without her knowledge). The latter tradition is loosely paralleled at B. Eruv. 80a. On the similarities, see Ilan, *Jewish Women* 183, n. 12.

Rather, I think that the key motif here is that of feuding. We have seen the stereotype that women have social difficulties; several Palestinian rabbinic stories about women reinforce this stereotype.[42] When read with this stereotype in mind, this story takes on a new hue The Torah's ability to make peace – indeed, even the Oral Torah's ability to make peace – is so great that it can *even* reconcile women. Using men in this story in place of women would have caused the story to lose force, not because the domestic scenario would seem implausible, but because it is the particular cultural assumption about feuding women that emphasizes the healing power of Torah. The story both reinforces a stereotype and uses it to make its point more effectively.

By this reading, the fact that women are at the center of this story is not arbitrary. Indeed, the presence of women generally in Palestinian rabbinic stories is rarely arbitrary.[43] Most commonly, Palestinian rabbinic stories feature women because they are dealing with legal problems that uniquely concern women. Jacob Neusner has argued that the Mishnah discusses women only at the points at which they enter the lives of men.[44] The small number of cases in the Mishnah that feature women by and large support this claim, as do virtually all cases about women reported in tannaitic literature.[45] Similarly, the vast bulk

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[41] Y. Eruv. 3:1, 20c. The tradition is attributed as tannaitic, and is paralleled, in the name of R. Shimon b. Eleazar, at B. Eruv. 29a.

[42] See, for example, M. Sot. 6:1 (ed. Albeck 3:247) (women spinning and gossiping: cf. Y. Sot. 6:1, 20d); Gen. Rab. 17:3 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 152–55) on the evil wife of R. Yosi who would mock him (parallel Lev. Rab. 34:14 (ed. Margulies 802–9); Y. Shab. 6:1, 7d, on the jealousy of Rabban Gamaliel's wife.

[43] For tannaitic examples, see n. 45. Cf. Y. MS 5:2, 56a, which relates a story about the "women of Sepphoris" returning from the Temple: the fact that they are women seems irrelevant to the issue under discussion.

[44] Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnaic System of Women,* vol. 5 of *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980).

[45] Cf. M. Yev. 6:4 (ed. Albeck 3:37); M. Yev. 16:4 (ed. Albeck 3:72); M. Yev. 16:6 (ed. Albeck 3:73); M. Yev. 16:7 (ed. Albeck 3:74); T. Yev. 6:8 (ed. Lieberman 3.1:21); T. Yev. 4:5 (ed. Lieberman 3.1:11–12); T. Yev. 13:5 (ed. Lieberman 3.1:47); T. Yev. 14:7 (ed. Lieberman 3.1:53–54); M. Ket. 1:10 (ed. Albeck 3:92); M. Git. 4:7 (ed. Albeck 3:284); T. Git. 1:3 (ed. Lieberman 3.2:246); T. Git. 5:4 (ed. Lieberman 3.2:265); M. Qid. 2:7 (ed. Albeck 3:319).

Cases dealing with oaths: M. Ned. 9:10 (ed. Albeck 3:177–78); M. Naz. 3:6 (ed. Albeck 3:202–3); T. BQ 8:16 (ed. Lieberman 4:40).

Cases dealing with marriage payments and marital relations: M. Ned. 9:5 (ed. Albeck 3:176); M. Git. 7:5 (ed. Albeck 3:294); T. Ned. 5:1 (ed. Lieberman 3.1:113–14); T. Ned. 9:5 (ed. Albeck 3:176).

Cases dealing with purity: M. Naz. 6:11 (ed. Albeck 3:214–15); T. Kelim BB 1:2, 3 (ed. Zuckermandel 590); M. Nid. 8:3 (ed. Albeck 6:399); T. Nid. 1:9 (ed. Zuckermandel 642); T. Nid. 4:3–4 (ed. Zuckermandel 644); T. Nid. 5:14 (ed. Zuckermandel 646).

Cases involving modesty: M. BQ 8:6 (ed. Albeck 4:42); M. Sanh. 7:3 (ed. Albeck 4:190). Sacha Stern argues that for the tannaim, modesty for women was functionally equivalent to the covenantal commandments for Jewish men, serving as practice that makes an individual part of "Israel" (*Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* [Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 23; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994] 237–47).

of cases about women that the Yerushalmi cites require a woman because they are dealing with legal issues that pertain to them. Most of these cases deal with the legal problem of marital permissibility: given any number of circumstances (e.g., a disappearing husband, rape of a wife) are a husband and wife allowed to resume cohabitating?[46] Women also commonly appear in cases that discuss economic issues between spouses, especially the settlement of a woman's dowry and marriage portion (*ketubah*) after her divorce or husband's death.[47] Predictably, the rabbis cite cases that involve women when dealing with legal matters that pertain to women. Thus there are several rabbinic stories and cases that concern a woman's marital rights and responsibilities (including her chastity)[48]; her ability to make and annul vows[49]; and her menstrual purity.[50]

In addition to citing stories about women for their legal relevance, Palestinian rabbis use stories about women, and that draw upon female stereotypes, in order to make moral or other points. These stories often do not merely repeat stereotypes, but use them creatively. One set of two stories, for example, illustrates this complexity:

> Soldiers entered into the city, and a woman came and said, "A soldier hugged me and left semen between my knees," and he [the rabbi] allowed her to eat *terumah*.
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> A case came before R. Yitzhak bar Tablai of a woman who said, "My stableman seduced me." He said to her, "Isn't the stableman forbidden?" And he forbade her.[51]

According to a mishnah at the beginning of this *sugya*, a woman who says that she is impure to her husband (i.e., that she has had sex with another man) must bring corroborating proof, after which she is divorced with the loss of her marriage settlement.[52] Both of these cases, cited as examples of this problem,

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I have been able to identify only four tannaitic cases in which a woman appears but in which a man could plausibly be substituted: M. Naz. 2:3 (ed. Albeck 3:198; drunk woman making herself a nazir); T. Toh. 8:15 (ed. Zuckermandel 669; case of woman mixing pure and impure liquids); M. Yad. 3:1 (ed. Albeck 6:480; rabbi overhears woman telling her father that she thinks she may have dipped her hand into an impure vessel); T. Kelim BM 1:6 (ed. Zuckermandel 578–79; Beruriah has a legal opinion about door hinges). Note that in a parallel to this last tradition, T. Kelim BQ 4:17 (ed. Zuckermandel 573–74), a woman's legal answer shames her brother. On shaming function of these stories, see below

[46] Cases involving levirate marriage are also of this type. For both, see Y. Yev. 8:2, 9a–b; Y. Yev. 8:2, 9b; Y. Yev. 12:6, 13a; Y. Yev. 12:7, 13a; Y. Yev. 13:1, 13c; Y. Ket. 1:10, 25c–d (with another on 25d); Y. Sot. 4:5, 19d; Y. Git. 4:3, 45c; Y. Qid. 4:6, 66b.

[47] Y. Yev. 6:6, 7c; Y. Ket. 4:14 29b; Y. Ket. 4:15, 29b; Y. Ket. 5:2, 29d; Y. Ket. 10:5, 34a; Y. Ket. 112, 34b; Y. BB 8:7, 16b (parallel Y. Pe. 3:7(8), 17d); Y. BB 8:8, 16c (parallel Y. Ket. 9:1, 32d); Y. BQ 9:7, 7a (woman declares on her deathbed that a ring belongs to her daughter).

[48] Y. Ket. 1:1, 25a (two cases of women thought not to be virgins at marriage).

[49] Y. Ned. 9:9, 41c.

[50] Y. Hag. 3:2, 79a; Y. Nid. 1:1, 48d (parallel Y. Nid. 1:4, 49b); Y. Nid. 2:1, 49d; Y. Nid. 2:7, 50a–b; Y. Nid. 3:2, 50c.

[51] Y. Ned. 11:13, 42d.

[52] M. Ned. 11:12 (ed. Albeck 3:185).

share the plot of a woman consulting with a rabbi about her permissibility to her husband. The first story is relatively simple: the woman reports that she was raped and the rabbi allows her to return to her husband, a priest, and resume full marital relations. She remains pure enough to partake of the holy priestly portion, the *terumah*.

The second case is less straightforward. Here, a woman comes to the rabbi with the claim that she has been seduced, not raped. The two cases are obviously different. In rabbinic law, as in nearly every other law, rape, or forced sex, has different implications from voluntary sex, releasing the woman from legal responsibility.[53] The author of this case is, I think, assuming that we, the readers, clearly know that rape is different from seduction. Thus the case, as a literary fiction, promotes the stereotype of the oversexed woman. Moreover, the editorial juxtaposition of these two cases implies that this woman is tricky; she sees the rabbinic leniency given to the first woman, and thinks that she can take advantage of this leniency by bringing her own case before the rabbi. The cases are thus both drawing on two female stereotypes and reinforcing them.

Indeed, rabbinic stories about women reinforce each of the stereotypes surveyed above. In the story above, the woman is so oversexed that she falls prey even to the lowly non-Jewish stable boy. Other stories present variations on this theme. In one story, a woman lewdly recites biblical verses at passers-by whom she wants to seduce. Sexually speaking, women are trouble.[54]

Domesticity is the single stereotype for which women are praised. In these stories, women spin, weave, and cook for their fathers and husbands. They stand to the sides of their rabbinic husbands: in one story a woman silently watches her husband's disciples debate his greatness. In these stories that emphasize female domesticity, women are never judged harshly.[55]

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[53] Cf. Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 124–30. On the boundaries between rape and seduction in Greek literature, see Susan Deacy, "The Vulnerability of Athena: *Parthenoi* and Rape in Greek Myth" and Karen F. Pierce, "The Portrayal of Rape in New Comedy, " both in Susan Deacy and Karen F. Pierce, eds., *Rape in Antiquity* (London: Duckworth) 43–63 and 163–84, respectively. Cf. Judith Evans Grubbs, "Abduction Marriage in Antiquity: A Law of Constantine (*CTH* IX.24.1) and its Social Context," *JRS* 79:59–83.

[54] See Y. AZ 2:2, 40d, which portrays a woman's beauty as the cause of a man's downfall. Cf. Y. Sanh. 10:2, 28d. On women luring men with biblical verses, see Y. Sot. 3:4, 20a. Dinah is said to have seduced Shekhem (Gen. 34:2): Gen. Rab. 80:1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 952–53).

[55] Cf. Y. Shevi. 6:1, 36c (Ima Shalom stands quietly by as her husband's students debate his greatness); Y. Shab. 4:1, 6d (daughter of R. Yannai brings him hot food on Sabbath); Y. Shab. 6:9, 8c (woman involved with lighting and extinguishing lamps); Y. Shab. 7:2, 10a (woman preparing food); Y. Shab. 7:2, 10c (woman working on loom); Y. Eruv. 6:3, 23c (Parsi woman renting out courtyard with knowledge of her husband); Y. Eruv. 7:10, 24d (woman erects *eruv* without knowledge of mother-in-law); Y. Bes. 4:4, 62c (daughter of R. Hiyya baking). Y. Ber. 3:4, 6c and Y. MS 4:7, 55c attribute to women a particular interest in procreation.

Mostly, however, these stories draw upon the stereotype that women do not get along well with others. A munificent gift from Rabbi Akiba to his own wife provokes Rabban Gamliel's wife's ire and jealousy.[56] Two rich women curse the Sages despite the latter's generous allotment of wine and perfume to them.[57] Women squander their husbands' money, or, after they have died, the money of their estates.[58] In one story a woman's family defends her against a charge of adultery, allowing her to collect half of her dowry despite her infidelity.[59] With the connivance of a rabbi, another woman was able to extract from her husband the cost of a medical treatment for which she should have been responsible.[60] Trajan's wife is depicted as cruel and bloodthirsty.[61]

The signal motif that draws on the stereotype of women as socially difficult is that of the nagging and grasping wife. At the beginning of a story in Leviticus Rabba, Hadrian gave a basket of gold to an old, hard-working man for his basket of figs. The story continues:

> The wife of [the old man's] neighbor was a daughter of bad stock [*pahin*]. She said to her husband, "Son of the dark ones! See how this king loves figs and exchanges [them] for *dinars*." What did he do? He filled his large basket with figs, and went before the palace. They said to him, "What is your business?" He said to them, "I have heard that the king loves figs and exchanges them for *dinars*." They went and said to the king, "An old man is standing at the entry to the palace bearing a basket full of figs and we asked him 'What is your business?' and he said to us, 'I have heard that the king loves figs and exchanges them for *dinars*.' [The king] said, "I order that you secure him in front of the entrance to the palace and all who enter and leave should throw at his face [those figs]." In the evening they released him, and he went to his house and said to his wife, "I owe to you all of this honor." She said, "Go tell your mother that they were figs and not etrogs, that they were ripe and not unripe."[62]

Here is the epitome of the evil wife. She insults her husband, and then sends him on a dangerous mission in quest of money. When he returns utterly humiliated, she mocks him, calls him a "momma's boy" and tells him he should feel lucky that he returned with his head. If the wife is portrayed as bad, the husband, the storyteller suggests, is a fool for listening to her. I will return to this image of the husband.

Clearly one function of a story like this is to reinforce a certain stereotype, and thus to reinforce and reproduce gender expectations. This wife is almost a caricature of the classical – Jewish and non-Jewish – image of the bad wife.[63]

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[56] Y. Shab. 6:1, 7d (parallel Y. Sot. 9: 15, 24c).

[57] Y. Ket. 5:13, 30b and 30c.

[58] Y. BB 9:1, 16d (parallel Y. Sot. 3: 4, 19a); Y. BB 10:9, 17d (parallel Y. Naz. 5: 1, 54a).

[59] Y. Ket. 7:6, 31c.

[60] Y. Ket. 4:10, 29a (parallel Y .BB 9:4, 17a).

[61] Y. Suk. 5:1, 55b.

[62] Lev. Rab. 25:5 (ed. Margulies 578–79). Cf. Eccl. Rab. 2:20.

[63] The true rabbinic nightmare is the evil wife with a dowry so large that her husband cannot afford to divorce her. See, for example, Y. Kid. 4:4, 66a, and the next note. For lists

Such a trope can also be found in an extended description of the way that Rabbi Yosi Hagalili's wife would gleefully deceive her husband about the dinner menu.[64] The portrait of the husband draws no less on traditional tropes, this time the man who allows himself to be ruled by a woman.[65] Whether told in the study house or the synagogue, a story like this warns men to be wary of their wives and wives to avoid "characteristic" female behavior. At the same time, however, stories that incorporate such stereotypes reproduce them, defining the expectations of female behavior.

Stories of female piety also reinforce the stereotype found in the prescriptive literature. Women are never praised for participating in traditional forms of rabbinic piety: although stories occasionally portray women attending synagogue and (in one case) putting on phylacteries, these activities never earn them praise.[66] In fact, these stories condemn, or at least express unease about, women who participate in such traditional forms of rabbinic piety.[67] One story even criticizes the biblical Hannah for drawing out her prayers to such a length that it killed the prophet Samuel.[68]

Unlike the prescriptive literature, however, Palestinian rabbinic stories about women do contain models of female piety. These stories sometimes call specific women righteous, often praising them for their modesty or their charitable nature.[69] One story that criticizes a woman for publicizing her fast implies that fasting could be another characteristic of a righteous woman.[70]

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of classical parallels to this theme, see Pieter van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978) 243–44; A. A. Halevi, *Gates of the Aggadah* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1982) 212–14.

[64] Gen. Rab. 17:3 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 152–55, par. Lev. Rab. 34:14 [ed. Margulies 802–9]).

[65] Cf. Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999), esp. 84–88.

[66] See Y. Sot. 1:4, 16d (parallel Lev. Rab. 9:9 [ed. Margulies 190–93]), in which a woman who attended synagogue provokes her husband's ire.

[67] In Y. Ber. 2:3, 4c (parallel Y. Eruv. 10:1, 26a), for example, the Sages are said to have objected to Mikhal bat Kushi's wearing of phylacteries. Cf. T. Suk. 1:1 (ed. Lieberman 2:253) (parallel Y. Suk. 1:1, 51d), in which the rabbis quietly debate whether Queen Helene needed to erect a sukkah. At Y. Ber. 2:3, 4c Rabbi Yonah's wife's reward for a pilgrimage is to be kidnapped. Note also a set of stories at Y. Shab. 6:1, 8c, in which rabbis overhear various people reciting biblical verses. These people include otherwise ignorant Jews and children. The women whom they overhear, however, are talking about domestic affairs instead of reciting Scripture.

[68] Y. Bik. 2 :1, 64c.

[69] E.g., Y. Ter. 8:5, 45c (parallel Y. AZ 2:3, 41a); Y. Hor. 3:4, 48a (parallel Lev. Rab. 5:4 [ed. Margulies 111–13]); Y. BM 4:1, 9c (implied); Ruth Rab. 7:15 (14). For some women called righteous, see Y. Sanh. 2:6, 20c; Y. Hor. 3:4, 48a; Gen. Rab. 20:6 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 188); Gen. Rab. 45:4 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 451); Gen. Rab. 63:4 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 680–81); Gen. Rab. 63:5 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 681).

[70] Y. Hag. 2:2, 77d.

One final example illustrates how these stories can combine female stereotypes, while at the same time raising issues of gender definition and expectation. According to a mishnah, Shimon ben Shetah hung eighty witches in a single day. A legend in the Yerushalmi explains how:

> One stormy day, [Shimon ben Shetah] took eighty young men, dressed [in] clean garments, and they took with them eighty new pots. He said to them, "When I whistle [?][71] once, put on your garments. When I whistle twice, come in." When he arrived at the cave of Ashkelon, he said, "Ho, open for me, [for] I am one of you [i.e., a witch]." When he entered, one [woman] said what she said, and bread came forth. [Another] one said what she said, and a cooked dish came forth. [Another] one said what she said, and wine came forth. They said to him, "What will you do?" He said to them "What will I do? Whistle three times and eighty young men, dressed in clean garments, will come up to here, [who are] happy and will make you rejoice." They said to him, "We want [this]." When he whistled they put on clean clothes. When he whistled twice they all entered, as one. He motioned to each one of them to take one [woman] and lift her off the ground and what is done [would] not be successful [i.e., their magic would not work]. And he said to one woman, "Bring forth bread." [She said,] "Bread" but it did not come forth. He said "Bring forth the pole [for crucifixion]." [He said to another,] "Bring forth a cooked dish." [She said,] "Cooked dish" but it did not come forth. He said "Bring forth the pole [for crucifixion]." ... And thus did he do to all of them.[72]

This story draws upon stereotypes of women as magicians, gluttons, and oversexed. These witches want little more than sensuous delight, using Shimon ben Shetah's entrance as an excuse to have a party. The party is clearly meant to end in an orgy; "happy" and "rejoice" here have a clearly sexual nuance. The underlying problem with these witches, however, is their lack of discipline. They are contrasted to the young men, all (presumably) dressed alike, who enter "as one," each efficiently doing his job. They lack control over their own bodies, and have thus slipped away from true piety into the anarchic and libertine world of magic.

Although this story draws upon existing female stereotypes, it does so creatively and with a purpose. By emphasizing the contrast between the witches and Shimon ben Shetah and his men, the story is highlighting gender. The witches in this story could not have been male; the story takes its force from the fact that they are female. Ultimately, this story needs to use women in order to discuss what it means to be a man. I will return to this idea below.

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[71] This is Jastrow's translation of צפר (Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York, 1903] 1298). The meaning, however, is unclear. See Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990) 469, s.v. צפר.

[72] Y. Sanh. 6:8, 23c (parallel Y. Hag. 2:2, 77d).

Shaming Men

The story of Shimon ben Shetah and the witches is far from being the only Palestinian rabbinic story that plays women against men in order to emphasize gender. Several Palestinian stories contain an element of shaming: the woman in some way bests the man, who is thus shamed, having been beaten by a woman. One purpose of the story of the man whose wife sent him to Hadrian with figs, for example, is to shame such male behavior. Men should rule, not be ruled. In another story, a female slave from Rabbi Judah the Patriarch's household is able to answer the halakic queries of a group of "associates." This story is most likely meant both to shame the associates and to elevate the status of Rabbi Judah's household: even the female slaves are learned.[73]

Palestinian use of a female character, "a matrona", frequently function in this way.[74] The matrona is an intriguing figure because she has a double alterity, she is both a non-Jew and a woman. Almost always, then, she plays the foil for rabbinic men. For reasons of space, I will offer here a discussion of only one example:

> Rabbi Yudah be Rabbi Eliezer drank four cups of wine on the eve of Pesah and wrapped his head until Sukkot. A matron saw that his face was shining. She said, "Gramps [*saba, saba*], you must have done one of three things. Either you drank wine, you loaned on interest, or you raised pigs." He said to her, "May the bones of this women be blasted! I did not do any of these three things, but I was frequent in learning, as it is written, 'The wisdom of man makes his face shine' (Eccl. 8:1)."
>
> Rabbi Abbahu went to Tiberius. The students of Rabbi Yohanan saw that his face was shining. They said before R. Yohanan, "Has R. Abbahu found a treasure?" R. Yohanan said to them, "Why?" They said to him, "His face was shining." He said to them, "Perhaps he has heard a [tradition of] Torah." They came before him and said to him, "Have you heard a [tradition of] Torah?" He said to them, "An ancient tosepta." And they applied to him the verse, 'The wisdom of man makes his face shine.'"[75]

These two stories generate a neat hierarchy. At the top are the rabbis whose learning makes their faces shine. At the same level, or perhaps slightly lower, is Rabbi Yohanan, who knows why their faces shine. Below him are his students, who know that R. Abbahu possesses something good, but need to consult with their teacher to discover what it is. And finally at the bottom is the matrona. Not

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[73] Y. Shevii. 9:1, 38c.

[74] Tal Ilan has argued that there is a historical kernel in at least some of these stories, at whose center lies a real Jewish woman named Matrona ("Matrona and Rabbi Jose: An Alternative Interpretation," *JSJ* 25 [1994]: 18–51). Whether or not this is correct (in my opinion it is not), even she admits that the amoraim themselves no longer knew this: "[T]hey, like modern scholars, took it [i.e., the term matrona] to mean 'Roman matron'" (49). Beruriah, who does not appear in the Yerushalmi, serves a similar function in the Bavli.

[75] Y. Shab. 8:1, 11a; Y. Pes. 10:1, 37c. Cf. Y. Shek. 3:2, 47c.

only does she neglect to consider that knowledge of Torah might be the cause of his shining, but she assumes the worst. She is an ignorant and foolish woman, whose presence in the story buttresses the authority of the men to whom she is playing the foil.

Another way to approach the presence of matrona in this story is to ask whether her presence, as a woman, is arbitrary. That is, would the story have worked as well for the author if a man, instead of matrona, had challenged R. Yudah be R. Eliezer? Here a comparison with a parallel tradition in the Bavli is instructive. After attributing Rabbi Yehudah's yellow complexion to his diet, the *sugya* continues:

> A certain matrona said to Rabbi Yehudah, "You are a teacher and a drunk?" He said to her, "My word in the hand of this woman [that] I do not taste [wine] except for kiddush, havdalah, and the four cups of Passover, and I wrap up [my head] with my scarf from Passover to Atzeret. Rather, 'The wisdom of man makes his face shine.'"
>
> A certain Sadducee said to Rabbi Yehudah, "Your face shines. Either you are like one who loans on interest or like one who raises pigs." He said to him, "For Jews, both are forbidden, but I have 24 toilets from my house to the Study House and every hour I use each one."[76]

In this rendition of the tradition, the matrona's question is not as sharp.[77] Accordingly, Rabbi Yehudah's reply lacks the curse found in the Yerushalmi's version. The Bavli's tradition, however, next attributes to a Sadducee (a heretic generally?) the substance of matrona's comment in the Yerushalmi. His accusation is far sharper. Thankfully, Rabbi Yehudah's response detailing his bathroom habits is beyond the scope of this paper.

For the Bavli, then, a man can indeed replace the woman of the Yerushalmi's version, but only a man who is even lower down on the hierarchy, a heretic. The Bavli contains a number of stories that in some way juxtapose, or puts directly into dialogue, a woman and a heretic. In these stories, the heretic always comes out the worse, bested by a woman. Even in the case I just cited, the heretic appears crasser than the woman. This rhetorical strategy of degrading the heretic through a kind of feminization is, to my knowledge, unique to the Bavli. Yet even though this Babylonian version replaces a woman with a man, it continues to highlight the essential function that a woman, as a stereotype, plays in both this and the Yerushalmi's version.

In her literary role as a foil, the matrona, along with other women, also serves as a didactic device. In another story, for example, a matrona asks R. Eleazar a relatively good question. He scorns her: "A woman's wisdom is only for the

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[76] B. Ned. 49b.

[77] Cf. B. Ber. 55a, in which the Yerushalmi's version is more faithfully produced. There, like here, Rabbi Yehudah is not actually accused of loaning on interest or raising pigs, but of being *like one* who does.

spindle."[78] After she departs, though, his students acknowledge the validity of her question. In this case, as in several others, the woman functions didactically.[79]

Interpreting Stereotypes

I have argued that we can learn little about real women from the Palestinian rabbinic stories that purport to be about real women. Female stereotypes suffuse these stories, and thus undermine our confidence in their historical veracity. These stories are stories, told with an eye toward goals other than archival preservation.[80]

These stories and their stereotypes, however, still have something to teach us about the rabbis and their cultural world. Stereotypes, as Gilman says, are psychological projections, constructions of an other that, nonetheless, reflects the projectors' own deep fears, desires, and anxieties.[81] When a group creates a stereotype, it reifies a set of its own concerns. Recovery of stereotypes can thus provide a window into these deeper psychological complexes.

What, then, do rabbinic stereotypes of women reveal about the rabbis? Throughout this paper I have suggested that when these rabbis stereotyped women, they did so with an eye on their own masculinity. That is, *rabbinic stereotypes of women reveal rabbinic understandings of, and anxieties about, their own masculinity.* Unlike women, rabbinic men do not engage in magic. Unlike women, rabbinic men are able to, and actually do, exercise sexual restraint. Unlike women, it is the way of rabbinic men to work in public space, outside of the house. Unlike women, rabbinic men get along with others; they are not jealous, meddlesome, grasping, or thieving. And unlike women, rabbinic men are called upon by God, and can establish a unique relationship to God through performance of the commandments. If I am correct that underlying these stereotypes is an issue of control, then rabbinic men would also be defined as those who can exercise control over all their appetites.[82]

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[78] Y. Sot. 3:4, 19a.

[79] For some other examples of a matrona functioning didactically, see Gen. Rab. 4:7 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 30), 17:7 (ed. Theodor and Albeck 158).

[80] Galit Hasan-Rokem argues that at least some folklore preserved in rabbinic literature (her examples are all from Lam. Rab.) preserves a true feminine voice (*Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* [trans. Batya Stein; Contraversions; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000] 108–29). Her argument does not appear to me to apply to these stories in the Yerushalmi.

[81] As Homi Babbha correctly emphasizes, stereotypes are by their nature ambivalent. See his *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 66–84.

[82] I develop this idea in more detail in "'Try to Be a Man': The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity," *HTR* 89 (1996): 19–40.

In their use of female stereotypes, these Palestinian rabbis were very much part of the Graeco-Roman world in which they lived. The five primary female stereotypes that I identified above (magic, licentiousness, social problems, domestic, and unusual pietistic practices) are all well attested in contemporary Greek and Latin literature.[83] Pagan and Christian literature used women to "think with", that is, work through problems that had little to do with women, and much to do with men.[84] Greek romance novels, for example, were using female virgins as symbols of the integrity of the *polis*.[85] Kate Cooper argues that the Acts of the Apostles, in which women are frequently protagonists, is really about Christian self-definition vis-à-vis the established civic order, and not at all about women.[86] Like the rabbis, the church fathers used women, in their literary depictions, to shame men.[87]

While there are unmistakable correspondences between the ways in which pagans, Christians, and the rabbis used female stereotypes, this similarity should not be pushed too far. In part, this is an issue of genre. Our knowledge of the pagan and Christian uses of female stereotypes derive from extant novella. A few extended compositions on gender by the rabbis survive, but all are in the Bavli.[88] From the Yerushalmi we have only short, disjointed stories and cases, each embedded in technical discussions. Perhaps the pagan and Christian use of female stereotypes to think with seems much more developed than that of Palestinian rabbis simply due to the eclectic preservation of the rabbinic literature. On the other hand, perhaps Palestinian rabbis never did develop extensive or extended discussions that think with women. Our sources do not appear to allow us to decide between these alternatives.

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[83] Cf. Natalie Boymel Kampen, "Between Public and Private: Women as Historical Subjects in Roman Art," in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 218–48; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta* 84–88, 90–91; Robin Osborne, "Law, the Democratic Citizen and the Representation of Women in Classical Athens," *Past & Present* 155 (1997): 3–33 (on the emergence of the domestic representation of women in Athens).

[84] Cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 153; Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67 (1998): 1–31.

[85] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representations in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1994) 41–76.

[86] Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride* 45–67.

[87] Cf. Elizabeth Clark, "Sex, Shame, and Rhetoric: En-gendering Early Christian Ethics," *JAAR* 59 (1991): 221–45.

[88] Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 81–150.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have made two primary arguments. First, I have argued that the "real" women of Palestinian rabbinic stories and cases cannot be considered to be accurate historical accounts. Real women are not to be found in these stories, only essentialized Woman. In rabbinic stories that feature a female protagonist rarely can the woman be replaced with a man with no loss of meaning. This simple fact points toward the essentialized use of women in these stories. My second argument is that the stereotypes that the rabbis applied to women were not random. Stereotyping women, or more likely adapting prevalent stereotypes, helped the rabbis to define themselves as men. In this respect, Palestinian rabbis were very much part of the same cultural world as their pagan and Christian counterparts.[89]

In addition to making a specific argument about ways in which Palestinian rabbis constructed and deployed the trope of the woman, this paper also attempts to enrich our understanding of rabbinic self-definition. Rabbinic literature contains many Others: the matrona, gentiles, Roman dignitaries, Greek philosophers, Samaritans, Arabs, etc. To arrive at a richer understanding of rabbinic self-definition, we need to develop a taxonomy of stereotypes. The rabbis, as Sacha Stern argued, constructed their own identity, in part, by constructing the Other.[90] The rabbis, this study suggests, used different Others, each for a distinct purpose of self-definition. Understanding how Palestinian rabbis "used" women is but one piece of this larger problem.

[89] The full extent of the Graeco-Roman context on the Yerushalmi's literary presentation of women can be better appreciated when compared to that of the Bavli. Although I have not attempted such a comparison here, it seems to me that there are significant differences between the Yerushalmi and Bavli's presentations of women, which are most likely attributable to different wider cultural contexts.

[90] Cf. Stern, *Jewish Identity*, esp. 1–50.