

## THE RISE AND FALL OF RABBINIC MASCULINITY

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### **The Late (and Sorrowful) Marriage of Masculinity and Rabbinic Studies**

In the formative years of women's and gender studies in the field of rabbinics, inquiries into the Talmudic concept of gender took the shape of liberal feminist readings. These studies concentrated on rabbinic attitudes toward women, and had titles such as *How the Rabbis Liberated Women*, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period*, and *The Status of Women in the Mishnah*.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of these studies was to quantify and qualify the rabbis' approach toward women, concentrating solely on the attitude to or images of women in the Talmud. Even when men are referred to in these works, their function is usually to provide a mirror

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<sup>1</sup> J.R. Wegner, *Chattel or Person: The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); L.L. Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstruction of Biblical Women* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994); J. Neusner, *How the Rabbis Liberated Women* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); J. Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); S. Valler, *Women and Womanhood in the Talmud* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); idem, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000 [Hebrew]); J. Baskin, *Midrashic Women: The Formation of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Hannover: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 2002); A. Kosman, *Femininity in the Spiritual World of the Talmudic Story* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2008 [Hebrew]). For a comprehensive summary of this school and its critics see I. Rosen-Zvi, "Misogyny and its Discontents", *Prooftexts* 25 (2005), 198-208. For a somewhat different view on the field see E. Shanks Alexander, "The Impact of Feminism on Rabbinic Studies", J. Frankel (ed.), *Jews and Gender: The Challenge to Hierarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 101-118.

image of women, emphasizing the low status or offensive representation of the latter group. Judith Baskin's comments on a series of homilies in the Babylonian Talmud (Niddah 31b) discussing the physiological differences between men and women are a classic example:

Males are said to come into the world well equipped to function fully in society and to leave progeny after them. Women, in contrast, come into the world with nothing. They are dependent upon male largesse for their very survival and, as empty womb, they must wait for male agency in order to become bearers of children (15).

Men were hardly an issue in this type of studies, which struggled to escape the male-centeredness of classical rabbinic research. This seemed to be true both for studies discussing the status of "real" women,<sup>2</sup> and for those dealing with representations and images.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On the attempt to reconstruct the life of real women from rabbinic literature see C. Fonrobert, "Review: M. Bar-Ilan, *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity*," *AJS Review* 25 (2000/2001), 101-104; and D. Stein, "Review: T. Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature*," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 20 (2001), 314-318.

<sup>3</sup> The word "masculinity" itself does not appear in most of the indices of the works cited above. Let me illustrate this point further, by using a different passage from Baskin's *Midrashic Women*. In a section entitled "Woman as Temptress" in the middle of the first chapter, Baskin cites two texts from the Bavli. Each text lists a series of biblical heroes or heroines who have some trait in common, and arranges them according to their growing (in the first case) or declining (in the second) magnitude: "R. Jonathan said: Joseph's strong temptation [by Potiphar's wife, Gen. 39:7-13] was but a petty trial compared to that of Boaz [Ruth 3:8-15], and that of Boaz was small in comparison with that of Palti son of Layish [...] R. Jonathan said: What is meant by the verse, 'Many woman have done well/But you surpass them all' (Prov. 31:29)? 'Many women' refers to Joseph and Boaz; 'But you surpass them all' refers to Palti son of Layish" (B. Sanhedrin 19b-20a). "Rahav whored by her name; Yael by her voice; Abigail by her memory; and Michal, daughter of Saul, by her appearance" (B. Megillah 15a). After discussing the background of these passages and noting the irony of the "transgendered reading of Proverbs 31:29-30," Baskin concludes: "Here, as elsewhere in Midrashic exegesis, biblical women of courage and action are objectified and reduced to their imagined sexual impact on men" (31). One cannot but agree with Baskin's statement that these texts objectify the biblical female figures (not

During the 1990s,<sup>4</sup> a shift in Talmudic research brought issues of body and sexuality to the fore.<sup>5</sup> Sophisticated studies on gender identities replaced previous questions of the “status” of women in society and literature.<sup>6</sup> This shift may be illustrated by comparing two almost contemporaneous studies of the laws of *niddah* (menstrual impurity). The priestly law of Leviticus 15 makes no distinctions based on color or origin of emissions when determining a menstruating woman’s impurity. According to the Mishnah, it was Rabbi Akiba who introduced a halakhic innovation whereby a distinction should be made between the blood discovered while it is actually being issued from the body and a bloodstain found on clothing or body (כהן). The Mishnah, atypically, even describes how this innovation came into being, by telling a story of Akiba, who declared a woman with a bloodstain pure, to the

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“women”). However, Baskin ignores the fact that the same rabbinic discourse that reduces “women” to “their imagined sexual impact on men,” reduces “men” to their (in)ability to resist it. Rabbinic discourse of the *yetzer* forms both masculine and feminine identities.

<sup>4</sup> Much later, needless to say, than most other fields (even adjunct Jewish disciplines, like Bible or Jewish mysticism). Such delay in absorbing new methods is not untypical of Talmudic research. On a similar shift in the Classics see John Winkler’s introduction to D. Halperin et al., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3-20.

<sup>5</sup> This new trend was marked by three books which were published in the beginning of the 1990s: H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: an Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); and D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in the Talmud* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). One should also note S. Gilman’s *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), which, however, deals mostly with the modern period. On the ‘Corporeal Turn’ in rabbinic studies see N. Seidman, “Carnal Knowledge: Sex and Body in Jewish Studies”, *Jewish Social Studies* 1 (1994), 115-141; C. Fonrobert, “On Carnal Israel and the Consequences: Talmudic Studies Since Foucault”, *JQR* 95 (2005), 462-469.

<sup>6</sup> A classic example is M. Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), analyzing the influence of *halakhot* regarding spinning and wool-craft on the construction of gender differences in early Rabbinic literature.

astonishment of his disciples (and, it seems, of the woman who approached him):

A story of a woman who came before R. Akiba. She said to him: “I saw a bloodstain.” He said to her: “Perhaps there was a wound in you?” She said to him: “Yes, but it healed.” He said to her: “Perhaps it is possible that it tore open and exuded blood.” She said to him: “Yes,” whereupon R. Akiba declared her pure.

He saw his students glancing at each other. He said to them: “Why is this matter difficult in your opinion? For the sages did not lay down the rule [of bloodstain] in order to stringent but to be lenient, as it is said: ‘when a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood on her body’ [Lev. 15:19] – blood, not a stain.”<sup>7</sup>

Judith Hauptman cites this case in a section entitled “Akiba’s Intentional Leniencies”, celebrating the far reaching implications of his ruling, and framing it as part of “the attempt to minimize the number of cases in which the dry bloodstain a woman sees – not at the time of her regular period – renders her impure.”<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Fonrobert frames the story quite differently. Being less impressed by the halakhic result—whether lenient or stringent—she reads Rabbi Akiba’s revolutionary innovation in terms of the power/knowledge relations that it establishes.<sup>9</sup> In a brilliant move, Fonrobert shifts the critical glance from Akiba’s lenient decision to the very situation in which it was made: a woman coming, for the first time, to a rabbi to seek a ruling about a bloodstain. The laws concerning bloodstains, as well as those distinguishing between different colors, produce a new kind of science of blood. While the Levitical laws of *niddah* do not require any outside authority (being dependent on time and duration alone), the sages transformed these laws into a complicated taxonomy of shapes, locations, and colors, which demands external expertise. New kinds of knowledge engender new kinds of experts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> m. Nidd. 8:3.

<sup>8</sup> Hauptman, *Rereading*, 153.

<sup>9</sup> C. E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstruction of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 112-115.

<sup>10</sup> In the Hebrew Bible the priests are the experts, as can be seen in the case of leprosy (Lev. 13-14); see M. Balberg, “Rabbinic Authority, Medical Rhetoric, and Body Hermeneutic in Mishnah Nega‘im”, *AJS Review* 35 (2011), 323-346, 328.

Questions of legal attitudes toward women were reframed into issues of constructing gender differences. The subject, however, remained female identities. Masculinity continued to be the ‘unmarked’, natural, side of the coin; “begotten, not made.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, for example, while Tractate Niddah was studied thoroughly in recent years, its masculine counterpart, Tractate Zavim, which discusses male genital emissions, remained neglected.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, several studies on women’s *tvila* (ritual bathing) have been published, discussing the *mikva* as an institution in which feminine identities are studied and negotiated. But almost none about the way in which bath-houses functioned as a place where Jewish and Roman men alike exercised, presented, and contested their masculinities.<sup>13</sup>

In a shrewd study Cynthia Baker analyses the spatial aspects of gender division in Jewish society of Roman Palestine: the house, the courtyard and the market.

For the authors of these early rabbinic traditions, it seems, the phrase “in the market”, when applied to woman, carries with it the connotations of “on the market” – that is to say, a woman’s identity, body, sexuality, and worth are all, in some sense, “up for grabs”.<sup>14</sup>

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Balberg shows that in Tractate Nega'im the rabbis become the carriers of bodily knowledge (due to their textual expertise) while “the priest is relegated to the function of a rubber stamp” (339; based on m. Neg. 3:1). On the new blood expertise evolving in the Bavli see Shai Secunda, “Talmudic Text and Iranian Context: On the Development of Two Talmudic Narratives”, *AJS Review* 33 (2009), 45-69.

<sup>11</sup> See V. Burrus, *Begotten Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> For one important exception see n. 48 below. Cf. Balberg, “Rabbinic Authority”, who learns from m. Neg. 2:4 that “the rabbinic quest for close supervision of bodies was not limited to female bodies” (336).

<sup>13</sup> Y.Z. Eliav studied the status of the bathhouse in Jewish society and rabbinic literature of late antiquity, but concentrated on ethnic identities. See e.g., idem, “The Roman Bath as a Jewish Institution: Another Look at the Encounter between Judaism and the Greco-Roman Culture”, *JSJ* 31 (2000), 416-454.

<sup>14</sup> C. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 100. For a specific application of this insight see I. Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual: Temple, Gender and Midrash* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 42-45.

And men? Although the chapter is named “Men, Women and the *Shuk*”, men appear, in what seems to be an unintended mirroring of the rabbis’ own conception, as simply and naturally belonging there; forgetting that they too are formed and fashioned exactly by their assumed “belonging” to the market.

Michael Satlow brought masculine identities to the fore in a series of essays which prompted an important shift in the field. In one study Satlow claims that the Babylonian Talmud transformed the concept of masturbation from a mental phenomenon of sexual arousal to a mere physical act of “wasting seed”.<sup>15</sup> In another article he shows that while the rabbis condemn both male and female nakedness, they relegate the two phenomena to very different realms. While female nakedness is conceptualized as a temptation directed toward men, male nakedness interferes with engaging the holy, and is thus conceived as directed toward God.<sup>16</sup> In his study of homoeroticism as effeminacy in the Palestinian Talmud, Satlow demonstrates how “Roman” rabbinic attitudes could be “when in Palestine”.<sup>17</sup> In another essay he claims that for the rabbis, just as for their Hellenistic contemporaries, masculinity

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<sup>15</sup> M. Satlow, “‘Wasted Seed’, the History of a Rabbinic Idea”, *HUCA* 65 (1994), 137-175. For an (almost diametrically) opposed thesis see my “The Evil Impulse, Sexuality and *Yichud*: A Chapter of Talmudic Anthropology,” *Theory and Criticism* 14 (1999), 55-84 [Hebrew].

<sup>16</sup> M. Satlow, “Jewish Construction of Nakedness in Late Antiquity”, *JBL* 116 (1997), 429-454.

<sup>17</sup> M. Satlow, “‘They Abused Him like a Woman’: Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994), 1-25. This study has a special significance in light of Foucault’s glaring omission of Jews in his comprehensive study of sexuality. See D. Boyarin, “Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality’?” *JHS* 5 (1995), 333-5. Studies such as Boyarin’s and Satlow’s show that the rabbis regarded hetero- and homosexuality as a question of practice rather than as an issue of essential qualities and that they thus shared at least some of the Hellenistic discourse of sexuality. For a debate with Boyarin’s minimalistic approach, limiting rabbinic conceptualization of homosexuality to anal sex alone, see A. Kosman and A. Sharbat, “‘Two Women Who Were Sporting with Each Other’: A Reexamination of the Halakhic Approaches to Lesbianism as a Touchstone for Homosexuality in General”, *HUCA* 75 (2005), 37-73.

was an achievement rather than a given identity.<sup>18</sup> While the theses themselves were debated and questioned (including by the undersigned), one cannot underestimate the importance of the shift they facilitated.

Two studies of Israeli scholars were dedicated to rabbinic masculinity in a manner that combined and blurred between scholarship and midrashic creativity. In 1990 Ari Elon published *Alma Di*, a personal journey accompanied by midrashic readings of rabbinic narratives.<sup>19</sup> Admiel Kosman dedicated a monograph to the analysis of rabbinic masculinity in Talmudic narratives, using literary as well as psychoanalytic tools.<sup>20</sup>

In my own *Demonic Desires* I have tried to show how the Babylonian Talmud's "hyper-sexualized" reality transformed the image and roles of both women and men: the former become perpetual seductresses while the latter are cast as struggling sex-maniacs. Rabbinic literature forms – in very different ways – both women and men.<sup>21</sup>

Daniel Boyarin's 1997 *Unheroic Conduct* is undoubtedly the most comprehensive attempt to deal with rabbinic masculinity.<sup>22</sup> This book's originality lies first and foremost in its ability to break the dichotomy between liberal women's studies and research of the rabbinic body and gender economy. The book deals with the formation of gender differences, not by discussing sexual or bodily regulations, as expected, but by focusing on the house of study itself. Like *Carnal Israel*, this study strives to present Judaism as an alternative to the Western cultural myth, which sees maleness as "active spirit", and femaleness as "passive

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<sup>18</sup> M. Satlow, "'Try to be a Man': The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity", *HTR* 89,1 (1996), 19-40. For this thesis and its problems see further below.

<sup>19</sup> A. Elon, *Alma Di* (Shdemot, 1990 [repr. Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2011]).

<sup>20</sup> A. Kosman, *Men's World: Reading Masculinity in Jewish Stories in a Spiritual Context* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2009 [originally in Hebrew: Keter: Tel Aviv, 2002]). Cf. his *Women's Tractate: Wisdom, Love, Faithfulness, Passion, Beauty, Sex, Holiness* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2007) [Hebrew]).

<sup>21</sup> I. Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: Yetzer Hara and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Penn. Press, 2011), 102-119. See also idem, "Sexualizing the Evil Inclination: Rabbinic Yetzer and Modern Scholarship", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 60 (2009), 264-281; idem, "Hyper-Sexualization in the Bavli: An Initial Survey", L. Teugels & R. Ulmer (eds.), *Midrash and the Exegetical Mind* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 181-205.

<sup>22</sup> D. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

matter” (10). *Carnal Israel* describes the rabbinic Jew as entirely and blatantly “carnal”.<sup>23</sup> *Unheroic Conduct* is dedicated to examining the other element of this equation: the active/passive, masculine/feminine one. Taken together, these two books present a figure of a feminized, yet carnal, rabbi; one who offers an alternative to the hegemonic discourse of masculinity, but remains within the sexual order; or, in Boyarin’s words, one who is “unmanned but not desexualized” (2). This combination is crucial for Boyarin’s thesis, as it breaks the Christian dichotomy between the feminine ascetic monk and the virile knight, making room for a “fully sexualized male who is not active, powerful and aggressive” (25). This figure functions in Boyarin’s book as a “masculinity of resistance” not only to the Roman or Christian models, but, first and foremost, to the modern, heterosexual, homophobic, and chauvinistic male hero. In what follows I will use *Unheroic Conduct* to think with the near abandoned field of rabbinic masculinity. I have chosen this fifteen-year-old study as a case-study not only because of its innovativeness (still worth arguing with) but also due to the fact that not much has happened in the field since. A closer look at its theses may thus uncover some intrinsic deficiencies in this field, which may, in turn, help account for the fact that it is still nearly deserted.

The book concentrates on three defining moments in the development of the image of the Jewish sissy: its origins in the Babylonian Talmud, its maturation in the figure of the Eastern European *yeshiva bocher* (defined by the ethos of *Edelkayt*), and ultimately its modern rejection, represented in the book by two Jewish movements: Zionism and psychoanalysis. The Talmudic readings in the first half of the book are crucial for Boyarin’s claim in the later chapters that the Ashkenazi *mentsh* is a fulfillment of an old Jewish tradition, a “possible (and for me highly desirable) realization of Talmudic culture” (23), rather than a modern creation. Throughout the book the Bavli appears as a synecdoche

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<sup>23</sup> In his study of Paul, Boyarin relates this carnality to the rejection of the Pauline spiritualization of Jewish identity, effectively annulling it: “They have been allegorized out of real historical existence, and their concrete, separate existence and cultural difference were now vestigial” (D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994], 156).



for a trans-historical rabbinic ethos (just as the Roman *vir* is presented as the emblem of the European culture of masculinity).<sup>24</sup>

Taken together, the three parts of *Unheroic Conduct* present a metanarrative of a long (and unique) tradition of the feminized Jewish male, lost only with the assimilationist ethos of 19th-century Europe. Boyarin does not try to conceal his agenda to revive this diasporic model of the soft *mentsh* (though without the patriarchal dominance that accompanied it), abandoned by both Zionism and the Reform movement. This ideological campaign becomes most explicit when, in the last chapter, Boyarin discusses the life of Bertha Pappenheim (a.k.a. Anna O.). Freud's famous patient survived the psychoanalytic reductionism to become the first Jewish social worker. Her career as a radical feminist activist while remaining an orthodox Jew, and her rejection of both nationalism and Reform, make her the exemplar of the Judaism that Boyarin hopes to recover, and the uncontested heroine of his book.<sup>25</sup>

As reviews of the book concentrated solely on its second, modern part,<sup>26</sup> let me briefly summarize its first part, which deals with the

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<sup>24</sup> This assumption is evident in the way the terms “rabbinic” and “rabbinic culture” appear in the book. Boyarin uses these terms in two different ways: first, as reference to a specific Jewish culture in late antiquity, marked by the two Talmuds and their historical contexts in Roman Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia; and second, as a general trans-historical term describing the Jewish cultures nourished by the Talmud and its study, from late antiquity to this very day. Sometimes it is unclear which of these meanings is referred to, as for example: “rabbinic Jewish culture thus refuses prevailing modes through which the surrounding cultures represent maleness as active spirit” (10). In what follows I shall use these terms only in their historically concrete meaning, thus addressing only the first of the three defining moments discussed in Boyarin's book: the birth of the feminized male in the Babylonian Talmud of late antiquity.

<sup>25</sup> The explicitness of the book's agenda makes the charges that the book “more often reads like a polemical tract rather than a work of history” (Judith Baskin, “Review of *Unheroic Conduct*”, *Criticism*, 41, 125) somewhat superfluous. Whatever preset assumptions a scholar operates under – “reading is reading – looking through a window, not just peering into a mirror – or at any rate it can be such” (*Carnal Israel*, 19).

<sup>26</sup> See H. S. Decker, “Review of *Unheroic Conduct*”, *Journal of Social History*, (Summer 1998), 1003-1006; A. Lavender, “Review of *Unheroic Conduct*”, *American Anthropologist*, 100 (March 1998), 215-216; B. Hoffert, “Review of *Unheroic Conduct*”, *Library Journal* (June 1997), 120; Baskin, “Review”, 124-

Talmudic roots of the Jewish *mentsh*. Boyarin first engages with the extensive *aggada* on the adventures of Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Simeon (Baba Metsia 83b-84a). The story tells of the rabbi's effort to atone, through physical suffering, for his previous collaboration with the Roman authorities. The detailed, plastic description of Elazar's grotesque body was already treated by Boyarin in his *Carnal Israel*.<sup>27</sup> However, while his earlier work concentrates on the carnality of the rabbis, here he presents the rabbinic suffering, penetrated body as a "critique of male power through a mimesis of femaleness." (92) Boyarin cites several rabbinic texts on martyrdom, stressing their unequivocal feminine imagery. He then goes on to claim that physical pain and political suffering function in these texts as an alternative to Roman imperial power, a move in which femininity appears as a central trope.

In the next chapter, Boyarin discusses the subsequent *aggada* that describes Rabbi Johanan and Resh Lakish's fateful encounter at the Jordan River. This formative event transformed Resh Lakish in such a radical way that, according to the story, he abandoned his former occupation as a gladiator and became Johanan's companion in the house of study. Boyarin reads this *aggada* as emblematic for the distinct type of masculinity performed in the rabbinic academy. In a homosocial (and, at least here, also homoerotic) environment, intellectual perfection replaced physical strength. For the rabbis the study of Torah became "the quintessential performance of rabbinic Jewish maleness," (143) a practice deemed unmanly, even "feminized" from an imperial perspective. Boyarin thus argues for a rabbinic "masculinity of resistance" from two complementary angles: the discourse of suffering and martyrdom, and the intellectual ethos of the house of study.

Rabbi Johanan and Resh Lakish's narrative was reread by Boyarin in his 2009 *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* as an exemplar of the dialogical effect of "the grotesque and harshly self-critical biographical legends, when read together with the 'serious' incorporated genres of halakhic dialectic [...]."<sup>28</sup> Recently he offered a more comprehensive reading of

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128. As far as I can tell no scholarly effort has been made to evaluate or critique Boyarin's thesis on the Talmudic roots of Jewish (counter) masculinity.

<sup>27</sup> D. Boyarin, "(Re)Producing Men: Constructing the Rabbinic Male Body", *Carnal Israel*, 197-226.

<sup>28</sup> D. Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 191.

this story, analyzing the (Socratic, yet again) tension articulated in it between marriage and male bond.<sup>29</sup> While *Carnal Israel* uncovered the tension between marriage and total dedication to the Torah (itself conceptualized as a woman to whom the sage is “married” and with whom he copulates), *Unheroic Conduct* concentrates on the gender transformation encoded in the transfer into the house of study; in his most recent reading of the story Boyarin examines the homo-social bond (and the spiritualization of the Eros it entails) generated in the study house. Boyarin thus keeps returning to this witty narrative to uncover the most basic tensions of rabbinic culture.

Finally, in chapter four, Boyarin addresses the most unheroic part of the rabbinic ethos of Torah study: its exclusion of women. Whatever complex relationship may exist between the figure of the womanly male and real women throughout Jewish history, Boyarin does not fall into the trap of confusing representation for reality. A feminized ethos does not guarantee a better attitude toward women. In our case the opposite is true: processes of feminization play a significant role in women’s marginalization, as in the case of the banning of Torah study for women and their exclusion from the *beit midrash*, which has become the mark of the Jewish kind of maleness. The gender anxiety caused by the fact that men now occupy the feminine private sphere of the *beit midrash* sets up the tension that produced the extreme exclusion of women from the practice of the study of Torah (144). The metaphoric woman does not leave much space for the real one.

In what follows I wish to reexamine this narrative of the birth of a unique rabbinic counter-masculinity. First, I will survey the image of the rabbinic *beit midrash* as a quasi-feminine space, then analyze the concept of the “feminized male” itself. Finally, I wish to question the dichotomy presented by Boyarin between rabbinic culture and its gentile (Roman, Christian, or Sasanian) surroundings.

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<sup>29</sup> D. Boyarin, “Friends Without Benefits; or, Academic Love” in Mark Masterson (ed.), *Sex in Antiquity* (forthcoming). I thank Daniel Boyarin for sharing this fine paper with me.

### Exactly How Sissy is the Rabbinic *Beit Midrash*?

An early rabbinic source cites a debate between the sages in Yavneh at the beginning of the second century, regarding a purity law:<sup>30</sup>

A cow which drank purification water and was slaughtered within twenty-four hours – This was the case and R. Jose Haglili declared it clean and R. Akiba declared it unclean. R. Tarfon supported (סייע) R. Jose Haglili. R. Simeon b. Nanas supported R. Akiba. R. Simeon b. Nanas dismissed (סילק) [the argument of] R. Tarfon. R. Jose Haglili dismissed R. Simeon b. Nanas. R. Akiba dismissed R. Jose Haglili [and thus won the debate].

After a time he [R. Jose] found a refutation (תשובה) to him [R. Akiba]. He said to him: Am I able to reverse myself? He said to him: Not anyone [may reverse himself] but you, for you are Jose Haglili. He [R. Jose] said to him: Behold, Scripture states “and they shall be kept for the congregation of the people of Israel for the water for impurity” – just so long as they are kept, they are water for impurity, and not when the cow has drunk them. This was the case and thirty-two elders voted in Lydda and declared it clean (וטיהרוהו).<sup>31</sup>

This is one of the few detailed descriptions of procedures of debate in the Tannaitic study house. Even without examining the technical terminology of this text,<sup>32</sup> the overall impression is clear: a totally rational debate, in which only arguments matter and thus even a younger, unknown sage can

<sup>30</sup> These laws continued to be observed even after the destruction of the Temple. See A. Oppenheimer, *The Am Ha-Aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 42-49, and E. Regev, “Pure Individualism: The Idea of Non-Priestly Purity in Ancient Judaism”, *JSJ* 31 (2000), 176-202.

<sup>31</sup> Tosefta Mikvaot, 7.11 (ed. Zuckerman, 660-661).

<sup>32</sup> תשובה (a counter-argument); סייע (an argument supporting a colleague’s position); סילק (a refutation of this support which removes the competing sage from the debate); לחזור (bringing a second argument after a first one was refuted) etc. See I. Rosen-Zvi, “The Protocol of the Court at Yavne? A New Reading of Tosefta Sanhedrin 7”, *Tarbiz* 78 (2009), 447-477 [Hebrew]. On procedures of debates in Tannaitic literature see M. Kahana, “The Styling of the Debate in the Mishnah”, *Tarbiz* 73 (2004), 51-81 [Hebrew].

defeat Rabbi Akiba, the great master.<sup>33</sup> Had the text stopped here, it would seem to be depicting a situation of a Habermasian “ideal rational communication”. The Tosefta, however, continues with a reflection on the debate, which presents a very different description of the *beit midrashic* reality:

At that time R. Tarfon recited this verse: “I saw the ram goring westward and northward, and all the animals were unable to stand against it, and none afforded protection from its power, and it did just as it liked and grew great” (Daniel 8:4) – [this is] R. Akiba. “As I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground, and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes” (idem 5) – this is Jose Haglili and his answer. “And he came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the river and he ran at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come close to the ram and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns” (idem 7) – this is R. Akiba and R. Simeon b. Nanas. “And the ram had no power to stand before him” (idem) – this is Akiba, “but he cast him down to the ground and trampled upon him” (idem) – this is R. Jose Haglili, “And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power” (idem) – these are the thirty-two elders who voted in Lydda and declared it clean.

This is a multifaceted, fascinating text.<sup>34</sup> Here I will discuss only one of its aspects – the conceptualization of the debate as a war; indeed, as a

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<sup>33</sup> The debate is between unequal powers. On the one hand stands Rabbi Akiba, the major sage of the academy in Yavneh in its late period, and on the other Rabbi Jose Haglili, a younger sage and (as his name betrays) one from the periphery (Galilee), just entering the central academy at Yavneh. Nonetheless, Jose offers an argument (in this case, a homily) which Akiba cannot refute, and thus, according to the rules, wins the debate.

<sup>34</sup> One can detect here rabbinic opposition to military activism against Rome (appearing only a few years before the Bar-Kokhba revolt of 132). Note also the unique way in which history and eschatology (dis)appear in this text. The great eschatological wars, allegorized in the book of Daniel, are used here to describe a normal halakhic debate in the academy. The great battles between Persia and Alexander the Great are replaced here by verbal, mundane debates of the sages. I cannot think of a stronger illustration of rabbinic retreat from history.

terrifying, merciless, violent, beastly war. The sages substituted the external Roman world with that of the *beit midrash*, but while doing so they adopted its deeply agonistic ethos. While Boyarin sees the retiring from politics to the private spaces as a “symbolic enactment of femaleness” (6), it seems here that the retreat from the world of political power was accompanied by its profound imitation. The Roman soldier, the *hoplite*, is brought into the *beit midrash* itself; not with his weapons, to be sure, but with all his agonistic ethos and rules of warfare. The Dyadic Wars *are* replaced by the wars of Torah, but they remain wars just the same.<sup>35</sup>

It thus should not surprise us that the most basic terminology of the house of study is that of war. The sages are shield holders (בעלי תריסים), they attack (מתקיף) and defeat each other (מנצחים זה את זה). Many rabbinic sources describe the agonistic atmosphere in the *beit midrash*: a place of winners and losers, anger, insults and shame, and sometimes even physical violence. One may thus question Boyarin’s conclusion that “The rabbis [...] did not regard violence as enhancing or definitional for masculinity” (8) or his marking of rabbinic discourse as “resistance to the dominant fiction of an inexorable association of male gender and sexuality with power and violence.”(13)

Moreover, as Jeff Rubenstein convincingly shows,<sup>36</sup> the most violent descriptions appear in the context of the Babylonian Talmud. At the beginning of a chapter simply titled “Violence” he writes: “Readers of the Bavli are often struck by the hostile and threatening manner with which the sages address one another [...] The brief comparison with the Palestinian versions of many of these sources suggest that hostility among sages was predominantly a Babylonian issue.” (54-55)

This is the very same Bavli celebrated by Boyarin as *the* locus of the birth of the feminized *yeshiva bocher*.<sup>37</sup> The sources cited by Rubenstein

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<sup>35</sup> One may compare this to Glen Bowersock’s thesis regarding the place of agonistic culture in the second sophistic, in which debates between rhetors replaced actual politics and warfare (G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1969], 89-100).

<sup>36</sup> J. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> Note that the *goy*, the non-Jewish “other”, is, throughout the entire book, exclusively Roman (or his European “offspring”) while the Talmudic texts discussed are all Babylonian.

present something quite different from Boyarin's ethos of *Edelkayt*, or gentleness. (25) Far from being the ultimate sphere of the feminized *mentsh*, *nebech*, or sissy, the *beit midrash* is conceptualized as an extremely manly and agonistic sphere. But exactly how metaphoric is the violence inside the *beit midrash*, and how distant is this "alternative" violence from the Roman one? As Boyarin himself asks, based on Resh Lakish's own accusation of R. Johanan: "Perhaps our vocal combat is not so different from theirs after all." (147)

### **How to Identify a Feminized Male When You See One?**

In a dictionary entry on "Gender", Boyarin contrasts the early Christian attempts to "erase gender through celibacy" (125) with the rabbinic presentation of gender distinctions as both steady and neutral, rooted, as it were, in creation itself.<sup>38</sup> In light of this one should ask which meaning can we attach to a concept like "feminized male"? Beyond the question of the adequacy of this concept when discussing Talmudic culture, we should ask whether such a concept is at all possible in the Talmudic world of fixed gender divisions. Could the rabbis think in these terms? Was it even conceivable in their discourse of gender differences?

We can talk about all sorts of behavioral designations and gender roles,<sup>39</sup> but in *Unheroic Conduct* Boyarin wants more than that: he strives for a diffusion which penetrates the very distinction between the sexes. This is clear, for example, when, in the middle of his discussion of the alleged *cultural* femininity of the *beit midrash*, he mentions the Talmudic description of Rabbi Johanan's feminine *physical* traits (namely, his lack of a beard), after which he concludes: "Here we can locate almost explicit evidence for my claim that certain textual/ideological strands, particularly within the Babylonian Talmud, were at pains to construct their ideal male figures as androgynous or as feminized men." (130)

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<sup>38</sup> D. Boyarin, "Gender" in Marc C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 117-153. Cf. R. S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 196-198.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g.: "One of the arguments against any simplex assumption that ascetic women are rendered men, is that ascetic men can also be represented as women" (Boyarin, "Friends Without Benefits" [n. 29 above], n. 45).

The difficulty with such claims can be demonstrated with a recent comparative study on eunuchs in rabbinic and Roman literature.<sup>40</sup> Eunuchs appear in Roman discourse not only in medical contexts but also in legal and political oratory. They function there, as Maud Gleason meticulously showed, as part of a whole semiotic system of the body, detecting the opponent's "gender temperature" with the help of external signs.<sup>41</sup> The most basic assumption behind this type of text is that gender identity is relatively independent of anatomical sex. In the prevalent Hellenic "one sex model",<sup>42</sup> gender differences are fluid and unstable, and so the fact that a person has a penis does not necessarily betray his real identity. One may look like a man but the true nature can only be determined by experts. A developed semiotic system is thus needed in order to detect signs of femininity invisible to untrained eyes. Thus, for example, Dio Crysostom talks of "those who violate nature's law in secret but whose true character is revealed by their voice, glance, posture, hairstyle and gait."<sup>43</sup> This is the discursive context in which Greek and Roman discussions of eunuchs take place. Since the eunuch's true physiological condition is invisible, it has to be detected through external signs (voice, gait, look etc.), which reveal his true feminized nature. Such detection could be crucial in the oral, interpersonal context of rhetorical or court debates, where accusation of femininity could defeat a rival.

Rabbinic literature has its own list of external signs which characterize eunuchs (סריס),<sup>44</sup> and some of the signs are surprisingly similar to those

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<sup>40</sup> C. Fonrobert, "The Semiotics of the Sexed Body in Early Halakhic Discourse", Matthew Kraus (ed.), *Closed and Open: Readings of Rabbinic Texts* (New York: Gorgias Press, 2006), 69-96.

<sup>41</sup> M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self Representation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Cf. T. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 95-131.

<sup>42</sup> This is Thomas Laqueur's name for the Galenic anatomical theory which presents sexual difference as a matter of gradation, measured with relation to one basic male type: "Galen [...] demonstrated at length that women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat – of perfection – had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in males are visible without" (T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 4).

<sup>43</sup> *Orations* 33.52, cited in Barton, *Power and Knowledge*, 116.

<sup>44</sup> Tosefta Yevamot 10:6 (ed. Lieberman, 32-33)



found in Roman sources. Charlotte Fonrobert has shown, however that rabbinic semiotics seem to share none of the above physiological assumptions. Their signs simply detect his ability to reproduce (a matter of vast importance for the laws of marriage and divorce). There is nothing to indicate that the rabbis saw *saris* as effeminate or not genuinely masculine. A *saris* is simply a sterile man (just like an *aylonit* is a sterile woman), and with the help of the rabbinic list one can tell this even without a physiological examination. There is no question that the *saris* and the *aylonit* are normative men and women, and being a *saris* or an *aylonit* has no consequences apart from his or her marital status (thus a *saris* must wear *tefillin*; and an *aylonit* is not welcome in the house of study). Fonrobert thus concludes that the rabbis did not share the “one sex model” and the gender dimorphism it implies.

I reached a very similar conclusion from an analysis of a very different topic: the list of priestly bodily blemishes (מומים) in Mishnah Bekhorot 7.<sup>45</sup> This is a detailed list of physical defects that render a priest unfit for service in the Temple. Unlike the biblical list that contains only twelve blemishes – all visible defects and handicaps – the Mishnah lists more than a hundred details. It contains numerous visible and invisible defects, as well as various criteria of proportional, mental and functional normality, any deviation from which renders the priest unfit. The Mishnah considers cases like “his breasts hang down like a woman’s breasts” or “a midget, a deaf, an imbecile, [and] a drunkard” as part of its list. I claimed that the operative criterion here is not, as in the Torah, handicaps or deficiencies alone, but rather a deviation from what the Mishnah assumes to be a standard body.

However, this long and developed representation of a normative body has not one gender criterion! Although the priests under discussion are certainly males, this fact is expressed only in the appearance of defects of the penis and testicles. There is no demand that their appearance or functioning be “masculine”; no criteria of voice, beard, manner of walking, musculature, or any other attribute that might be considered masculine. In contrast, such criteria are indeed widespread in the

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<sup>45</sup> I. Rosen-Zvi, “Temple of the Body: The List of Priestly Blemishes in Mishnah *Bekhorot* and the Place of the Temple in Tannaitic Discourse”, *Mada’ei Ha-Yahadut* 43 (2005-2006), 49-87 [Hebrew].

contemporary Greek literature.<sup>46</sup> The Mishnah shows no parallel to second sophistic physiognomic techniques for deciding *true* manhood, for it does not share the assumption that there is “no certainty as to the true nature of individuals.”<sup>47</sup>

Both the issue of eunuchs and of bodily defects suggest that categories of a “feminine man” and a “masculine woman” were foreign to the rabbis, and that sexual identity was for them not a hidden mystery to be disclosed by means of the science of physiognomy, but the product of a simple distinction between sexual organs. The whole project of defining levels of feminization based on a model of gender fluidity was foreign to their gender economy.<sup>48</sup> The irony of finding a deeply Hellenized concept of gender at the very heart of a book which strives to present the rabbis as an alternative to (Roman) Hellenistic gender economies should be a warning against assuming any kind of simple binary division between resistance and imitation of colonial cultures. It is with this point I would like to conclude.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The complete lack of gender norms in this list accounts for its easy transition from men to women. Mishnah Ketubot, chapter 7, deals with ramifications on the personal status of women whose husbands detected previously unknown defects on their body: “He who betrothed a woman on the condition that she does not have defects and was found to have defects—she is not betrothed. If he married her without specifications and she was found to have defects—she is discharged without [the monetary value of] her ketuba.” This mishnah, however, does not enumerate the defects that render a woman unfit, but rather states that “all the defects that invalidate for the priesthood, [likewise] invalidate for women.” This statement is possible only due to the fact that priestly defects are not deemed as *masculine*, but rather as *human* defects, and upon eliminating those defects related directly to the penis, are considered asexual.

<sup>47</sup> T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32.

<sup>48</sup> This casts some doubt on Mira Balberg’s analysis of the laws of *zavim* (male genital discharge). Balberg interprets the analogy made by the Mishnah between *zavim* and *niddot* (both must examine themselves daily) as assuming a feminization of the *zav* due to his uncontrollable, woman-like discharges. “The association of the abnormal genital discharge with a loss of masculinity and virility stems from the notion that a penis that emits uncontrollably when it is flaccid is ‘dead’ in essence” (M. Balberg, “Recomposing Purity: Body and Self in the Mishnah” [Ph.D. Dissertation; Stanford University, 2011], 211).

<sup>49</sup> In a recent paper (n. 29 above) much of the above critique – especially the inability to assume any sharp border (not to mention dichotomy) between

### How Jewish are Jewish Masculinities?

As far as I can tell, *Unheroic Conduct* is the first systematic attempt to apply postcolonial methods to rabbinic studies. Boyarin employs Homi Bhabha's "mimicry" – a combination of imitation, inversion and resistance – to problematize the common scholarly notion that the image of the feminized Jew is a simple result of antisemitic stereotypes. "For Jews" writes Boyarin, "one can neatly reverse this picture. Jewish society needed an image against which to define itself and produced the 'goy' – the hypermale – as its countertype, as a reverse of its social norm." (4) Feminization is not simply a one-sided effect of the way rulers represent the ruled; for "even for those men 'on the bottom', being there was indeed interpreted as feminization, but feminization itself was transvalued and received at least some positive significance." (86)

The book nonetheless describes the relationships between Jews and Gentiles in classic dichotomous terms; the former appears as the idealized and romanticized cultural alternative to the latter. The ideal Jewish masculinity is presented time and again as a direct opposition to a prevailing non-Jewish one. The rabbis present as masculine exactly what their Roman/European phallic contemporaries saw as the mark of femininity. The texts cited above disrupt this neat picture. The terminology of the *beit midrash* is taken from the battlefield, and significant differences exist between the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, in accordance with their respective cultural contexts.

Michael Satlow questioned the existence of the distinctive institution of a "Jewish marriage".<sup>50</sup> The concept of marriage in Roman Palestine was quite Hellenistic, focusing on the *oikos* (household), while the Babylonian Talmud conceives of marriage as a means of personal

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Rabbinism and Hellenism – is articulated by Boyarin himself: "In the past and especially in *Carnal Israel* I tended to lift up only the positions that seemed most antithetical to 'Christian' or 'Hellenistic' ones. I now would see those very positions as always mixed and conditioned by the presence within the Talmud itself of positions much closer to those of contemporary Others in the Mediterranean world." The implications of this move, the roots of which are to be found in *Dying for God* and *Borderlines*, on rabbinic masculinity have yet to be articulated fully.

<sup>50</sup> M. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

salvation (especially from sexual desires), in a manner similar to contemporary Zoroastrian conceptions of marriage.<sup>51</sup> Similarly we may question the trans-historic spirit of *Unheroic Conduct*, and ask whether there was ever something like “Jewish masculinity”, over and above its various manifestations in different cultures and places.

The distinctions become even less clear when moving to the Christian side of the argument. Boyarin presents the Jewish sage as a middle ground between the Roman warrior and Christian monk. Like the latter he is non-phallic, but, unlike him, he is fully sexualized. The Jewish sage, unlike his Christian counterpart, is never exempt from the obligation to marry and procreate: “Within Judaism, in contrast to much of Christianity, feminized men were not read as emasculated or desexualized. They thus occupied a space in the erotic economy of Jewish culture, that monks, quite obviously, never could.” (26) The project of “re-eroticizing the sissy” (19) thus creates a dichotomous contrast between the rabbinic figure and his Christian contemporary. Such opposition, however, holds true only with regard to the realm of legal obligations and social practices, not for the ideological and anthropological models behind them. We need go no further than *Carnal Israel* to see how ascetic ideas played a central role in rabbinic discourse itself, so much so that it created an institution of “the married monk” – a sage who marries very young, only to leave his bride soon after for many years of study abroad.<sup>52</sup>

Another area of proximity between rabbinic and Christian sexual ideologies is the popular genre of temptation narratives. Rabbinic literature contains many anecdotes on rabbis resisting female temptations.<sup>53</sup> In some of those stories the rabbi manages to resist the temptation while in others he surrenders to it. Common to all, however, is

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<sup>51</sup> For comparisons between the rabbinic and Zoroastrian concepts of marriage see Y. Elman, “Marriage and Marital Property in Rabbinic and Sasanian Law”, C. Hezser (ed.), *Rabbinic Law in its Roman Near Eastern Context* (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2003), 227-276.

<sup>52</sup> Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 134-166.

<sup>53</sup> Two series of such anecdotes appear in the Babylonian Talmud (Kiddushin 80b-81b) and Avot deRabbi Natan (A 16). On the first see my “The Evil Impulse, Sexuality and *Yichud*: A Chapter of Talmudic Anthropology”, *Theory and Criticism* 14 (1999), 55-84 [Hebrew]; on the second see J. Schofer, “The Redaction of Desire: Structure and Editing of Rabbinic Teachings Concerning *Yeser* (Inclination)”, *JJTP* (2003), 19-53.

the idea that the very presence of a woman, any woman, is sufficient to serve as a trap for men. No special act of seduction is needed. A similar storyline is found in the eastern monasteries at approximately the same time:

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the ascetic literature of Egypt became a repository of vivid anecdotes concerning sexual seduction and heroic sexual avoidance. In this new monastic folklore, the body leapt into sharp focus. Women were presented as a source of perpetual temptation to which the male body could be expected to respond instantly. For a nun simply to pat the foot of an elderly, sick Bishop was considered enough provocation to cause [both] of them to fall instantly into fornication.<sup>54</sup>

Since temptations and resistance are some of the basic material masculinity is made of, one may ask how far apart late ancient rabbinic and Christian masculinities are after all.<sup>55</sup>

And so we conclude: rabbinics has a history, much longer than adjacent fields, of ignoring masculinity altogether. This is true not only for the liberal stage of “attitude to women” kind of scholarship, but even for the recent, more sophisticated, “gender construction” studies, which, by and large, do not go beyond exploring feminine identities. In light of this, Boyarin’s *Unheroic Conduct*, is a unique, indeed heroic, attempt to reconstruct a distinct Jewish discourse of masculinity, claiming for a unique type of manhood produced in the rabbinic academy. The extraordinarily large scale of this project, along with its trans-historical

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<sup>54</sup> P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 242. For a brilliant attempt to place an anecdotal narrative from the Bavli in a Christian context see S. Naeh, “Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background”, J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 73-89.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed comparison between the rabbinic *yetzer* and patristic *daimones* see my *Demonic Desires*, 36-43, which concludes thus: “This very partial list of comparisons [...] serves as a reminder of the proximity between rabbinic and monastic anthropologies – over and above the differences in their attitudes toward sexual morality and ascetic practices – a proximity scholars tend too often to play down” (42).

objectives, however, obscures the distinctive character of the Talmudic gender economy, with its specific similarities to and differences from the contemporaneous surrounding cultures as well as later Jewish discourses.

In the years that have passed since *Unheroic Conduct* no new synthesis has been offered, but several detailed studies have been conducted with regard to different sites, real as well as conceptual, in which masculine identities were studied, expressed, negotiated and contested: the house of study, laws of purity, bodily defects, evil inclination. Many other textual studies are needed, not very different from those undertaken in the context of women and femininity, before we can offer another generalization. Rabbinic masculinity remains, by and large, a field waiting to be ploughed.