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Volume 19, numéro 1, 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1101369ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/wij.v19i1.41336>

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Éditeur(s)

Women in Judaism, Inc.

ISSN

1209-9392 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Kedar, D. (2022). Can a Woman's Medical Tradition Flourish in the Midst of the Babylonian Talmud? *Women in Judaism*, 19(1), 1–23.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/wij.v19i1.41336>

Résumé de l'article

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Can a Woman's Medical Tradition Flourish in the Midst of the Babylonian Talmud?

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Abstract

The Babylonian Talmud offers a very limited glimpse into women's voices, words, and writings, and only seldom quotes them. In contrast, the woman Em is quoted by Abaye twenty-seven times, always in the context of medicine and always in an authoritative formula – "Em told me." Abaye's *amra li Em* (אמרה לי אם) opens a window into a unique healing tradition transmitted to the Talmud by a woman. This article will examine Em's expertise through a gendered and cross-cultural prism. In addition, the article will explore Em's substantial body of work in the medical field, and the similarities of some of her prescriptions to Greco-Roman healing techniques and to Mesopotamian magical practices.

Introduction

The Babylonian Talmud offers a very limited glimpse into women's voices, words, and writings, and only seldom quotes them. Most of these women are the daughters and wives of rabbis who received a broad education, and they are also associated with the world of the scholars.¹ Three examples are Beruriah, Yalta and the daughter of Rav Hisda. Beruriah, a woman from the land of Israel, the wife of the Tanna Rabbi Meir and the daughter of Hananiah ben Teradion is described as studying three hundred *Halakhot* in one day (*bPes* 62b). Yalta, the daughter of the exilarch Abba-Mari and wife of Rav Nahman, is mentioned seven times demonstrating knowledge in *halakhic* wisdom.² She might even have given public lectures on matters of Torah.³ The daughter of the head of the Sura yeshiva, Rav Hisda, is mentioned eleven times and demonstrates knowledge in theoretical and legal matters.⁴

To these three women we could add the woman Em,⁵ who is mentioned twenty-seven times in the Babylonian Talmud,⁶ more times than any other woman. She is quoted by Abaye, the head of Pumbedita *yeshiva* (c.280-339 C.E.), in a unique formulation, "Em told me" (אמרה לי אם) which expresses authority on the one hand, and expertise on the other. Surprisingly, Em's multiple quotations introduced in the midst of the masculine corpus of the Babylonian Talmud, demonstrate an extraordinary and exceptional woman's healing tradition.

It is important to mention at this juncture, that the Babylonian Talmud, being a legal corpus, seldom includes medical information. *Materia medica* is random and scattered among the Talmudic corpus pages within *halakhic* discussions. Abaye, although not a physician, often

discusses matters of medicine and magic. According to him, a great deal of his expertise is based on Em's healing tradition.

This article analyses through a gendered and a cross-cultural prism, the phenomenon of woman's transmission of a healing/medical tradition, through the masculine realm of the Babylonian Talmud, and examines Em's obscure occupation.

Who is Em?

The woman, Em, is mentioned by Abaye twenty-seven times, always in the context of medicine and always in an authoritative formula: "Em told me."⁷ In rabbinic literature, chains of authority are constructed in order to give more authority to the knowledge that is being passed from a teacher or a rabbi to the next generation. The chain of traditions creates an accumulated communal knowledge passed from one generation to the next. Indeed, Abaye's "Em told me," presents a different formulation than the usual "Rav X said in the name of Rav Y" formulation. It looks as though it is not part of a chain, yet it might be the first link in a developed chain of knowledge, adopted by Abaye, which according to Charlotte Fonrobert, echoes the voice of an authority figure.⁸

Based on Abaye's unique formula, the general consensus in scholarly research is that Em was the foster and/or adoptive and/or nursing mother of Abaye. It is most important to add to this consensus two more assumptions that might shed light on Em's obscure identity. Markham Geller emphasizes Em's skills. He suggests based on Akkadian terminology, that the word *'m* is an abbreviation for the word "expert" (*wmn*), corresponding to Akkadian *ummānu*, an ancient Mesopotamian medical expert.⁹ Geller originally refers to Em as a male expert; despite the Hebrew text that correctly identifies Em as a woman.

Tal Ilan emphasizes Em's identity as a transferee of a healing tradition. Based on the Hebrew formula, אמרה לי אם, when correctly translated from Hebrew is "Em told me." Usually, the translation of these words is "my mother told me." However, neither *my*, nor *mother* as a parent, exists in Abaye's text. Em, according to Ilan, as seen in the original text in Hebrew, is a proper name, documented frequently on contemporary Jewish incantation bowls. The derivatives of the name Em – *Immai*, *Imma*, *Immay* – was a popular personal name for Jewish women in Sasanian Babylonia.¹⁰ The name Em itself – Hakham son of Em – appears on a jug.¹¹ In addition to the mistaken reading of a noun instead of a name, Ilan points out that often, the modern translation of professions from ancient texts is gender-biased in translation. In Greek,

for example, the masculine form of the word for doctor – *iathros* – meant male doctor while the feminine form – *iathrine* – meant midwife.¹² In the Talmud we find the same phenomenon. In Aramaic the masculine word – *marbina* (מרבינא) – means teacher and educator while the feminine version – *marbinta* (מרבינתא) – means nurse or foster mother.¹³ If indeed that is the case, it is reasonable to consider treating Em's healing abilities not only as those of a mere midwife, but those of a skilled and experienced physician. In that respect, despite the reluctance of some scholars to accept the fact that women were capable of serving as “real doctors,” one should ask: what are the odds that Em was a physician?

Em's Medical Lore

The most detailed medicinal corpus assigned to Em's tradition is revealed in tractate Shabbat (*bShab* 134a) of the Babylonian Talmud.¹⁴ This is an anthology on care for newborns. Em transmits her expertise on difficulties that occur in the first few hours after birth.

- **In the case of a newborn that cannot suckle** – “One should bring a bowl with live coals and hold it opposite its mouth so that the mouth becomes warm and it can suckle.”
- **In the case of a newborn that does not cry** – “One should bring the afterbirth placenta of its mother and glide it over it and it will cry.”
- **In the case of a newborn that is too small** – One should cover him with his mother's placenta.
- **In the case of a newborn that is too red** – One should cover him with his mother's placenta.
- **In the case of a newborn that does not breathe** – “One should blow on him with a fan and he will breathe.” Monika Amsler suggests an alternative reading. the sentence “blow with a fan” should be read as “swing with a fan.” In a cuneiform text on the birth of kids and lambs, swinging is described as a method that induces breathing by clearing the lungs of mucus.¹⁵
- **In the case of a circumcision** – one should postpone the circumcision in two cases – “If an infant is too red, so that the blood is not yet absorbed in him ... If he is green, so that he is deficient in blood,” The green color might refer to pallor of the skin probably due to anemia or jaundice.¹⁶

- **In the case of a circumcision wound** - “a wound dressing requires seven parts fat and one part wax” (*bShab* 133b). Abaye mentions the benefit of wax in a different context – “gangrene how can it be cured? By aloes, wax and resin” (*bBQ* 85a).
- **In the case of safely bandaging a circumcision wound** – “The side-selvedge of an infant’s *haluk* [bandage] should be uppermost [not facing the wound] lest a thread thereof stick ...” (*bShab* 134a).
- **In the case of a blockage of a baby’s anus** – one should undertake a surgical procedure. The treatment Em prescribes for opening of a blockage of a baby’s anus is an operation to correct an anomaly that in today’s medical terminology is termed an *Imperforate anus*.¹⁷ Em’s surgical instruction is: “The newborn whose anus is not discernible ... where it is transparent one shall tear it crosswise with a barley-corn” (*bShab* 134a). Or, in other words, one should perform a warp and weft incision to prevent the tissue from re-attaching. In addition to the detail about the incision, Em recommends avoiding conventional surgical equipment such as a lancet, and instead recommends using organic material. One may assume that this is in order to prevent the inflammatory effect of iron tools.¹⁸ Em suggests using barley (שערתא), a means which is mentioned only once more in the Babylonian Talmud by Abaye, also to prevent infection (*bYeb* 76a).
- **In the case of keeping the baby’s body healthy** – “The proper treatment for a baby consists in [bathing in] warm water and [rubbing with] oil” (*bYom* 78b).
- **In the case of a wasp’s sting** - one should use “the creepers of a palm-tree in water” (*bKet* 50a).¹⁹ This concoction should be rubbed in, and the baby (one-year-old) must also drink it.
- **In the case of a scorpion’s sting** – Em prescribes the intake of “the gall [gallbladder] of a white stork [a bird or a bitter plant] in beer” (*bKet* 50a). This also should be rubbed into the wound and the child (a six-year-old) must drink the potion as well.
- **In the case of weaning a baby** – Em recommends a special diet: “If he has grown a bit, (one feeds him) an egg with *kutha* [sour milk, bread-crusts and salt].” Em is also quoted mentioning *kutha* in *bEruv* 65a. Abaye says there that when Em offers him *kutha*, he is instructed and distracted and cannot study due to this heavy meal.

Interestingly, some of Em's healing tradition has similarities to Greco-Roman healing techniques. This phenomenon is not surprising: healing traditions, remedies and medications travelled across boundaries of civilizations, languages, and religions.²⁰ For example, in the case of keeping the baby's body in good health, Em recommends bathing and massaging it. The Greek physician and philosopher Galen (129 – c.216 C.E.) recommended that babies' bodies should be rubbed with sweet oil.²¹ He also recommended cereals as the basic initial weaning food. Soranus of Ephesus, a Greek physician who preceded Galen, suggested a "heavy meal" similar to Em's prescription.²² While Soranus recommended feeding infants initially bread mixed with milk, honey and diluted wine, followed by porridge made from spelt (a species of wheat) or an egg,²³ Em's porridge contained sour milk, bread-crusts, salt and an egg. Soranus and Em also prescribed a similar remedy in case of a circumcision wound/baby rash. While Em prescribed "plenty of fat and a little wax," Soranus recommended "plenty of ointment made of refined olive oil to which a little wax is added."²⁴

Parallels also exist between Em's healing traditions and ancient Mesopotamian texts. For example, in Em's technique of healing a scorpion's sting, one might trace similarities from the pharmacopoeial handbook, *Šammu Šikinšu*, which provides an explanation for the use of medicinal plants. While Em suggests the white stork of a bitter plant mixed with beer, the ancient Mesopotamian formula includes "drinking the *šunāzi*-plant which has milky sap, with beer."²⁵

- **In the case of children fasting** – "one of thirteen, for a full twenty-four-hour fast, and, in the case of a girl, [one who is of] the age of twelve" (*bKet* 50a). From a child-healthcare and gender perspective, according to Em, a thirteen-year-old boy may begin participating in the twenty-four hour fasts instituted by the Jewish religion, and girls a year earlier. Younger children cannot withstand such an ordeal.²⁶

Em's expertise extended beyond the treatment of newborns and children, and the Babylonian Talmud demonstrates more of her ability to diagnose signs and symptoms of illness as part of her healing tradition for adults as well. Below is more of Em's therapeutic knowledge which at times appears to be original in the Talmud. However, her traditions are also marked by ancient medical and magical wisdoms from Byzantine and Mesopotamia.

- **In the case of an earache** – Em recommends some potion made of kidneys, since "kidneys were only made to [heal] the ear" (*bAZ* 28b).

- **In the case of a light fever** – “a jug of water.”
- **In the case of a serious fever** – one should “let blood” (*bGit* 67b). Fluids and bloodletting also formed the basis of Greco-Roman medicine, maintaining the body in its proper balance.²⁷ Galen believed that the proper way to treat most diseases was to remove blood from the patient. According to the Galenic theory, human health requires an equilibrium between the four main bodily fluids, or humours – blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Therefore, too much heat in the body may result in a fever. In Galen's system all fevers are pathological dyscrasias of the Hot. Bloodletting should restore the balance of the humours in the body and prevent inflammation.²⁸ In contrast, the terms fever and shivering were often caused, according to the Mesopotamian beliefs, by a witch, a spirit or a demon. Various forms of fever and some kind of infection with a high body temperature were connected to the rageous demoness Lamaštu. Those were cured by amulets and incantations.²⁹
- **In the case of a severe and constant fever** – Em suggests a magical approach. Abaye quotes Em:

For a chronic heat stroke, he should bring a black hen and tear it lengthwise and crosswise and shave the middle of his head and put the bird on it and leave it there till it sticks fast. Then he should go down [to the river] and stand in water up to his neck till he is quite faint, and then he should swim out and sit down (*bGitt* 67b).

This healing tradition, according to Geller, resembles a version of *Namburbî* ritual to undo a bad portent which occurs in the river.³⁰ The applying of a hen to the patient's head is parallel to the part of the ritual in which a pig is laid upon a sick patient. In the Akkadian magical ritual this procedure ought to transfer the evil from the patient to the pig, while Em's method should cure the fever.³¹

- **In the case of a one day fever** – in Em's healing repertoire one finds two more magical remedies influenced by Akkadian magical recipes:

For a one-day-old fever let one take a pale [newly minted] dinar and go to the salt pools, and weigh its weight in salt against it, and let him bind the salt to the opening of the neckline of his garment with a thread made of hair. And if this remedy [dinar and salt] is not effective, let one sit at the cross-roads, and when he sees a large ant carrying something, let him take and throw it into a brass tube and close it with lead, and seal it with sixty seals. Let him shake it, lift it up and say to it, ‘Thy burden be upon me and my burden be upon thee’ (*bShab* 66b).

This remedy is parallel to an Akkadian formula which one finds in the lexicon “The Diagnostic and Prognostic Handbook.”³² Em adopts (with some alteration) from this

handbook, a unique magical technique intended to cure a woman who suffers from miscarriages. The text consists of a collection of three rituals in which the woman lies down under a pregnant sheep seven times. Every time she rises, she whispers this prayer in the sheep's ear: "may she receive from me (my) inability to give birth right away and give me her ability to give birth right away." On the seventh round she comes out from under the sheep, spits into the sheep's mouth and leaves the place. This procedure is³³ defined as "exchange of fortunes."³⁴ It is important to emphasize that this specific remedy is founded on the Mesopotamian conception that fate is fluid rather than fixed;³⁵ therefore, the fortune designated for one person can be exchanged for that of another person, or an animal, or even a plant, a spirit, or an inanimate object. In this concept, in order to maintain the cosmic state of equilibrium, the diseased fortune that leaves one body, has to be moved into another, and vice versa – the good fortune in the other body has to move into the first body and fill the void created in it by the removal of the disease. Accordingly, in Em's formula, the burden of the fever is exchanged with the "cargo" that the ant is carrying, similar to the Akkadian formula, in which the infertile pregnancy is exchanged with the healthy pregnancy of the sheep.³⁶ The similarities of the two formulae are expressed in both the wording and the magic activity: chanting a spell; the use of an animal (ant/sheep); repeated performance of the activity (rocking and lifting/bending and spitting); and the use of metallic materials (brass and lead /copper thread). Additionally, both rituals are performed at a cross-road.³⁷ The first part of Em's formula is also an exchange of fortunes version with an inanimate object, in our case, a pale dinar in exchange for a small portion of salt taken from the pools, to be bound as an amulet, which should be worn as a hair-thread necklace. Salt is also a part of an anti-witchcraft substance in the Mesopotamian *Maqlû* ritual against witches and witchcraft. It appears as a "salt incantation" which attempts to remedy affliction.³⁸ Regarding the dinar – using a coin as an apotropaic implement or as a part of a healing method is well attested in antiquity throughout the ancient world.³⁹

- **In case of burning in the bones** - Em recommends:

After one has eaten and drunk and relieved himself and washed his/her hands, they must bring him a handful of *shatitha* [a kind of sauce made with flour and honey] with lentils, and a handful of old wine, and mix them together, and he must then eat it and wrap himself in his cloak and sleep, and he must not be disturbed till he wakes of himself. When he wakes he must remove his cloak, otherwise the illness will return (bGitt 70a).⁴⁰

Burning in the bones might imply the aching of limbs.⁴¹ It is important to note that many of Em's recipes are based on home ingredients similar to the kind used in Greco-Roman medicine.⁴² It is possible to identify similarities between this recipe and one of the recipes mentioned in the *Hippocratic Collection Diseases* against fever. Both recipes use honey, lentils, wine and vinegar. Both recipes recommend eating, washing and resting: "Give him heads of garlic dipped in honey. Then let him drink a decoction of lentils, mixed with honey and vinegar. After he has filled himself, let him vomit. Then let him wash himself with warm water..." If that does not help, the formula offers – "put him to bed and cover him with many blankets so that he sweats."⁴³ It seems that Em recommends the same therapy; in her words, the person in question should: "wrap himself in his cloak and sleep."

- **In the case of indigestion** - Em warns that "dates before a meal are as an axe to the palm tree and after a meal, as a bar to the door" (*bKet10b*). Or in other words, eating dates after a meal might cause indigestion and make one throw up, or have constipation. Here it is described metaphorically as "a bar to the door" with "door" being a euphemism for the anus.⁴⁴ Galen also dwells on the harmful effects of consuming excessive numbers of dates, which according to him, can block the liver and spleen and cause flatulence.⁴⁵
- **In the case of "weakness of the heart"** or digestive problems – Em has a nutritional recommendation:

Let him fetch the flesh of the right flank of a male beast and excrements of cattle in the month of Nisan, and if excrements of cattle are not available let him fetch some willow twigs, and let him roast it, eat it, and after that drink some diluted wine (*bEruv 29b*).⁴⁶

One of Em's ingredients is excrements of cattle. Among the Talmudic ingredients, one finds *Dreckapotheke* or "dirty remedies," which are therapeutic components based on animal and human urine and excrement, menstrual blood, bones, and genital parts of animals.⁴⁷ Galen does not agree with the idea of using feces in medicine. Nevertheless, he includes bodily secretions in prescriptions of magical amulets.⁴⁸ In Mesopotamian medicine, according to Geller, this kind of ingredient masked secret plant names.⁴⁹

It is noteworthy that Em's remedy using feces may seem grotesque. However, using feces in medicine has been recently rediscovered, and is being successfully utilized in modern medicine today as a fecal transplant.⁵⁰

- **In the case of relaxation** - according to Em "roasted grains are good for the heart and drive away worrisome thoughts" (*bEruv* 29b).
- **Regarding the intake of medicine** – Em's instructions are that they "all must be taken on an empty stomach." In addition – "all medicines are to be taken either three days or seven or twelve, but with this he must go on till he is cured" (*bGit* 70a).
- **Concerning female pain** – in a discussion of pain during first intercourse and defloration, Em compares the pain to "hot water on a bald head" (*bKet* 39b). It is most interesting that for this sensitive feminine moment, Em chooses to transmit her tradition by using a metaphor derived from the masculine realm. This conceptualization allows the rabbis to better understand this issue as they are placed in a familiar sphere.⁵¹
- **In the case of amulets** – According to Em's healing tradition, amulets as healing apparatus have the power to heal if they include three elements: (A) a matronymic name, (B) accuracy and (C) apotropaic knots.
 - A. **A matronymic** – "All incantations which are repeated several times must contain the name of the patient's mother" (*bShab* 66b). In the mythic and magical cosmos of amulets, charms, spells and liturgical texts, the beneficiaries are mentioned with their matronymic, unlike patronymics, which were the standard way of identifying people socially.⁵² Hence, the matronymic is present in magical texts from antiquity – in Jewish amulets,⁵³ in texts from the Babylonian Talmud (e.g. *bYoma* 84a), as well as in the vast majority of the Jewish incantation bowls.⁵⁴ It is important to note that the same rule appears in Greek magic; it was common in magical practices in cultures and religions in diverse parts of the world in antiquity.⁵⁵ It may have been considered safer to use the matronymics, as the identity of the mother is never questioned, and thus preferred in areas involving supernatural entities.⁵⁶
 - B. **Accuracy** - "all incantations, the number of times they are to be repeated, is as stated; and where the number is not stated, it is forty-one times" (*bShab* 66b). Em's instructions are mentioned in relation to the prohibition of carrying an amulet on the Sabbath, unless its medical efficacy had been established (*mShab* 7:2).⁵⁷

C. **Apotropaic knots** - “all knots tied for the purpose of healing are tied on the left.” Em specifies the number of times that incantations should be repeated and the preparation of the amulet contains apotropaic knots. If the number of knots was accurate, as specified in the formula, the person would heal. “Three arrest [illness], five cure [it], seven are efficacious even against witchcraft” (*bShab* 66b). It should be mentioned that the Hebrew/Aramaic term for an amulet is *qame'a* (קמיע), derived from the Aramaic root to bind, which points to the manner in which the amulet was worn, attached or tied to the arm.⁵⁸ Thus, Em's observations fit with what we already know from elsewhere about Jewish amulets. In Akkadian recipes we also find knot-tying prescriptions. When amulet preparation prescriptions contained knots, the recitation was delivered as each knot was tied.⁵⁹

Finally, it is interesting to note that Abaye also includes non-medical information among Em's quotations:

- **In the case of Education** – Em was concerned with the optimal age to start reading and studying from the perspective of a young person's ability as well as from the *halakhic* one: “A child of six [is ripe] for scripture; one of ten, for Mishnah” (*bKet* 50a). It should be noted that according to the Mishnah, the right age for a child to start learning to read is a year earlier - “at five years of age the study of Scripture” (*mAv* 5:21). Em also raises the question; at what age are children fit to learn and analyze more sophisticated material? “One of ten, for Mishnah,” she determines.⁶⁰
- **In the case of toys for children** - Em states: “If he grows up still more, the breaking of clay vessels [is recommended]” (*bYom* 78b). This kind of recommended activity is followed by an anecdote about the Babylonian *amora* Rabbah, who bought slightly damaged clay vessels for his children to break. Em's advice seems logical, if we explore children's game in the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity. Certainly, pottery shards from broken tableware were popular artifacts to play with. Children used to gathered up shards and dust and build toys. Then they used to tear them down and assemble a different toy.⁶¹
- **In the case of preserving beer** - For the health safety of consuming beer, “Better [a container] of six *se'ah* and sealed than of eight *se'ah* and not sealed” (*bMQ* 12a). Beer

should be stored in sealed small containers, therefore, according to Em, it justified sealing beer barrels also on *hol ha-mo'ed*.⁶²

- **In the case of the collective well-being of community members** - "Local rumors last a day and a half" (*bMQ* 18b; cf. also *bYev* 25a). In the context in which the rabbis discuss spreading rumors about unfaithful women, Em suggests that shorter-lasting rumors should not be taken seriously.⁶³

In conclusion, Em's pharmacological collection of remedies and medical prescriptions is impressive. Her expertise embraced the health of babies, children and adults, and also, as seen from her last suggestion, the health of the community. Her knowledge exceeded that of Talmudic medicine, and included the wisdom of Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian medicine and magic.

The Existence of Female Physicians

It is significant to stress that inquiring about who Em is, can't be explained only from an emic perspective. Searching only in the pages of the Talmud as shown above, is not sufficient. However, there is no doubt that Em was an eminent expert. Generally, most medical data is scattered throughout the Babylonian Talmud in various contexts. Among these, there is a tendency to attribute medical observations to certain sages. Most of them are presented as experts in secular knowledge like medicine. According to Lennart Lehmhaus and Markham Geller, this association holds especially true for those rabbis who are known as important, having served as head of a renowned school or an academy.⁶⁴ Obviously, Em's tradition does not have the same status as *halakhic* discussion. Still, from a medical perspective, Em can be included among these expert rabbis who are mentioned by name and whose medical knowledge has been canonized. After all, Em's healing tradition was quoted twenty-seven times by Abaye. Thus, within the above framework, the Talmud provides a significant role for Em. In addition, it might be fruitful to shift the viewpoint from this emic prospective, and examine her image through a cross-cultural exchange prism by presenting female physicians in the contemporary Roman Empire.

According to Holt M. Parker, there are two kinds of sources that prove the existence of women physicians: medical literary sources – books and letters, and epigraphic sources – tombstones and dedicatory inscriptions.⁶⁵ The latter is the most common source and in it the female physician's expertise extends well beyond childbirth and associated matters. In his

study, Parker lists forty female physicians from late antiquity. To his list may be added thirteen epigraphic testimonies referring to female physicians that were cataloged by Évelyne Samama.⁶⁶

In those times, medical training was based on an apprenticeship system. Most female physicians received informal education at home, taught to them by their fathers, or husbands, who were themselves physicians, and, according to the fragments mentioned by Parker, these female physicians excelled in their work. Gemina is commemorated as a “savior of all through her medical art;” Domnina “protected her fatherland from disease,” and Antiochis received official honor from her city Tlos, “for her achievement in the medical art.”⁶⁷ This female physician, Antiochis, is also known through literature, as several of her recipes are mentioned by Galen. Finally, Eftichiani should be emphasized. She didn't have the title of *ιατρίνη* – “female physician,” that was mentioned thus far; rather, she gained the title of *ἀνδρῶν ἰητήρ* – “doctor of men.”⁶⁸

Indeed, female physicians provided various treatments to women, which were not covered by the narrow definition of a midwife. In his writing, Soranus includes conclusions based on the existence of “women's doctors” who treat “women's ailments.”⁶⁹ Moreover, he includes some information relevant to this article. He links literacy and the proficiency level of a midwife, and argues that the ability to read and write was one of the attributes crucial to a woman's high performances as a midwife, because it enabled her to gain knowledge of medical theory and practices described in professional literature. Learning midwifery included going through theoretical and practical books.⁷⁰ If midwives could write, it is all the more so for female physicians. This information is most important regarding Em, because unlike the consensus that women could not write, physicians in antiquity did not “only” invent and concoct their own recipes, but also wrote them down.⁷¹ It is likely that Em was no different.

Evidence of female physicians, who put their medicine and prescriptions in writing, is mentioned by Galen. In his book, “The Composition of Medicines by Type,” a pharmacologic collection with an abundance of medical prescription and remedies, he lists the names of eight female physicians.⁷² According to Parker, “For Galen, it is clear, women counted as experts along with men.”⁷³ Additionally, women's prescriptions and opinions are quoted in later writings, like that of the seventh century Paul Aegineta, who composed a medical encyclopedia with an assortment of summarized treatment methods and selected prescriptions by male and

female physicians, specializing in various areas.⁷⁴ Very important to note that women's names have been associated with remedies of general application suitable for both genders.⁷⁵

This list of female physicians, some of whom recorded in writing their treatments and medicine, should be concluded with Metrodora, (second-third century) a female physician who wrote a manuscript entitled, "On the Suffering of Mothers as Women." She discusses in her book a variety of women's diseases affecting the uterus, the kidneys and the abdomen. Metrodora also treated obesity and contraception.⁷⁶ Indeed, the title of her book seems contemporary and so are the themes about which she wrote.

Finally, going back to the Talmud, one realizes that the phenomenon of the female physician is well known to the rabbis, who do not treat it as unusual. In the case of the female physician Timtinis, who treated Rabbi Yohanan for *şifduna* (*yAZ* 2:2, 40d), there is no distinctive comment regarding this female doctor. This silence regarding the gender of the physician evokes the assumption that it was not an anomaly for a woman to serve as a doctor. In addition, it appears from the *sugiya* that Timtinis was not "just" a doctor, rather an expert one (רופא אומן).⁷⁷ At the end of this anecdote, the female physician shared her prescription with Rabbi Yohanan for his benefit. She specifically asked him not to reveal her formula. The Rabbi ignored her request for confidentiality, revealed her information to the public, and in doing so, signed her death warrant. Based on this version of the narrative, in which Timtinis committed suicide, it could be hypothesized that this extreme action occurred because she was a member of an esoteric guild sworn to secrecy of its professional knowledge.⁷⁸ Such was the guild or community of female healers verified by the *amora* Ameimar, who encountered the *chief of sorcerous women* (רישתינהי דנשים כשפניות) (*bPes* 110b). This chief/head of the alternative healer's guild, taught Ameimar a spell against witches. It is most interesting to note that the term *the chief of sorcerous women*, is mentioned one single time in the Talmud, and that the expression *sorcerous women*, appears on only two occasions (*bPes* 110a-110b; *bYoma* 83b). Ameimar does not define this group of women as witches, in contrast to the rabbinic discourse in it: "mostly women engage in witchcraft."⁷⁹ Rather, he uses this rare and unique definition which reinforces the fact that the sorcerous women were indeed an organized guild.

Conclusions

Abaye's *amra li Em* opens a window into a unique healing tradition transmitted to the Talmud by a woman.

Concealed between the pages of the Talmud are more phenomena of traditions being passed on to the sages by women. Beruriah, famous for learning three hundred ritual laws in one day, also transmitted her tradition on the subject of ritual purity, accepted and approbated by the rabbis,⁸⁰ and in Rabbi Joshua's words: "Beruriah has spoken well" (*tKel BM 1:6*). Yalta prioritizes a purity tradition in which she stresses a Mishnaic *halakha* and rejects a *baraita* (*bNid 20b*). Her *halakhic* statement and argument were accepted,⁸¹ and she was praised by Rav Nahman: "Yalta was different"⁸² (*bBetsah 25b*). The same praise for excellence in *halakhic* matters is given to the daughter of Rav Hisda by Rava: "The daughter of Rav Hisda is different" (*bHag 5a*). In her case, Rava, her husband, a master of *halakhic* exegesis, had great trust in her and made legal and juristic decisions based on her judgment. It seems that she had *halakhic* wisdom in ethical and kosher matters.⁸³

According to Sarit Kattan Gribetz:

women who were part of rabbinic households and communities were often the recipients of rabbinic traditions and that, as inadvertent audiences of these traditions, they not only became unwitting consumers of it, but also transmitters of it – through the food they prepared and the revisions to rabbinic food laws that their embodied practices demanded.⁸⁴

Indeed, in texts scattered throughout the Talmud, one finds women discussing *halakha* with men, and according to Judith Hauptman, based on anecdotal evidence, women transmitted tradition, and "occasionally tweaked the rules in order to accommodate them to real-life circumstances."⁸⁵ Hauptman collected fifteen narratives in which wives, sisters, or daughters of rabbis challenged a rule, and produced a new tradition based on practical experience.⁸⁶

The woman Em, kinsman of Abaye, passed on a general healing tradition concerning men and women. Her coherent and reliable *materia medica* exceeded the feminine fields of midwifery, obstetrics and gynecology. The range of her expertise was extensive, and her pharmacologic collections, remedies and medical prescriptions were vast and diverse. Some of her remedies seem to be original, and others have similarities to Greco-Roman medicine, including systematic procedures for diagnosis, prognosis and treatment. In addition, Em was well acquainted with the magical methods and the secretive Akkadian formulae.

The Talmud presents therapies as finished products with presumed efficacy and seldom offers insight into the background behind them.⁸⁷ Therefore, there is no way to know how Em acquired her traditions, from where they were derived, and how they were transmitted to her. The essence of Em's wide medical body of knowledge and her expertise indicate that her knowhow was not a simple replication. It was a learned body of knowledge derived from oral

texts and recipe books. There is also no way to know whether Em was the name of a skillful midwife or an expert physician. Nevertheless, based on Em's skills, her systematic healing tradition and the cross-cultural exchange of evidence, there is a strong likelihood that Em was an extraordinarily talented female physician. Even if one concurs with the scholarly consensus that Em was nothing more than a midwife, an overwhelming fact still remains evident: Em conceived and created a substantial body of work in the medical field of her time, as practiced and documented in the Babylonian Talmud. Em's signature and medical lore from the vantage point of a woman, make her stand out boldly and visibly in the midst of her authoritative male-dominated rabbinic counterparts.

Notes

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Prof. Tal Ilan for her invaluable contribution to this article. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Naomi Nakao for her insightful comments. I would also like to offer my special thanks to Sari Schimek for hunting down all the hidden mistakes which no other eye could spot.

¹ Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 196.

² (1) *bBer*51a-b; (2) *bShab*54b; (3) *bBets*25b; (4) *bGit* 67b; (5) *bQid* 70b; (6) *bHul*109b;(7) *bNid* 20b.

³ For more about Yalta's public lectures see Tamara Or, *Massekhet Betsah: Text, Translation, and Commentary - Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010), 119-134.

⁴ (1) *bBer*56a; (2) 62a; (3) *bShab*129a; (4) *bEruv* 65a; (5) *bHag*5a; (6) *bYev*34b; (7) *bKet*39b; (8) 65a; (9) 85a; (10) *bbb*12b; (11) *bHul*44b.

⁵ The major publications include: Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(or)cising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Society of Late Antiquity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001), 343-375; Tal Ilan, "Salome's Medicinal Recipe and Jewish Women Doctors in Antiquity," in Lennart Lehmhaus et al. (eds.) *Female Bodies, Female Practitioners* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming); Markham J. Geller, "Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud," *Max Planck Institute for the History of Science* (2004), 1-60; Monika Amsler, "Babies or Goats?! A Critical Evaluation of *bShab* 134b and the Question of the Relationship Between Veterinary and Human Medicine in the Talmud," in L. Lehmhaus and C. Salazar (eds.) *Female Bodies and Female Practitioners in the Medical Traditions of the Late Antique Mediterranean World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming) I would like to thank Monika Amsler for sending me her unpublished text.; Samuel Kottek, "Amra Li Em: The Transmission of the People's Medicine by the Women in the Talmud," *Revue des Études Juives* 169 (2010), 419-437; Sara Ronis, "Gender, Sex, and Witchcraft in Late Ancient Judaism," in N. Koltun-Fromm and G. Kessler (eds.) *A Companion to Late Ancient Jews and Judaism, Third Century BCE to Seventh Century CE* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 391-404.

⁶ (1-4) *bShab* 66b (4x); (5) 133b; (6-12) 134a (7x); (13-14) *bEruv* 29b (2x); (15) 65a; (16) *bYoma* 78b; (17) *bMQ*12a; (18) 18b; (19) *bYev* 25a; (20) *bKet* 10b; (21) 39b; (22-23) 50a (2x); (24) *bGit* 67b; (25) 70a; (26) *bQid* 31b; (27) *bAZ* 28b.

⁷ It is important to know that the formula "Em told me" appears three more times by two other people in a different meaning. When Em does not involve Abaye, the word Em should probably be understood as "Mother" and not as the name of a woman who transmits her healing tradition. One of these three quotes of "Em told me" is attributed to Yehudit, the wife of Rabbi Hiyya. She informs her husband: "Em told me: Your father accepted betrothal money on your behalf when you were little" (*bQid* 12b). Here Yehudit's mother transmits an early family narrative. Ravina uses the formula "Em told me" twice. One quote concerns the recitation of the blessing over bread: "Em told me: Your father acted as prescribed by Rabbi Hiyya; for Rabbi Hiyya said: The bread should be broken with the conclusion of the blessing" (*bBer* 39b). The other quote focuses on the prohibition against eating

new produce from the spring harvest, before the *omer*: “Em told me: Your father did not eat new produce until the night of the seventeenth, the dawn of the eighteenth. He held the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah and was concerned about uncertainty” (*bMen* 68b). Both quotes are food-related and they refer to Ravina’s mother. None of the three quotes has anything to do with healing and medicine. For more see Dvora Weisberg, *Massekhet Menahot* (*FCBT* V/2; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 184-187.

⁸ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 152-153.

⁹ Geller, “Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud,” 1-60 esp. p.8.

¹⁰ Tal Ilan and Kerstin Hünefeld, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity Part IV: The Eastern Diaspora 330 BCE-650 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011), 47.

¹¹ Émile Puech, ‘Cruche Magique en Araméen Babylonien,’ *Semitica et Classica International Journal of Oriental and Mediterranean Studies* 5 (2012), 249-259 esp. p. 249.

¹² Holt N. Parker, “Women doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire,” in Lilian R. Furst (ed.) *Women Physicians and Healers: Climbing a Long Hill* (University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 131–151 esp. pp. 140-146.

¹³ Tal Ilan, “Salome’s Medicinal Recipe and Jewish Women Doctors in Antiquity,” in Lennart Lehmhaus et al. (eds.) *Female Bodies, Female Practitioners* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021) forthcoming 2021; Ilan, *Massekhet Hullin*, 184.

¹⁴ For more see Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 104-128.

¹⁵ Amsler, “Babies or Goats?!” forthcoming.

¹⁶ For more see Julius Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (New York: Jason Aronson Inc, 2004), 164-167.

¹⁷ Amsler, “Babies or Goats?!” forthcoming.

¹⁸ Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine*, 192.

¹⁹ For more see Shulamit Valler, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period*, (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad 2000), 165-166 [in Hebrew].

²⁰ For more see Lennart Lehmhaus and Matteo Martelli (eds.) *Collecting Recipes: Byzantine and Jewish Pharmacology in Dialogue* (De Gruyter, 2017), 1-2.

²¹ For more see Andrée Marie Bagley, *Roman Children in the Early Empire: A Distinct Epidemiological and Therapeutic Category?* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Birmingham, 2016), 122.

²² I will restrict myself mostly to Galen and Soranus as representatives of Greco-Roman medicine.

²³ For more see Bagley, *Roman Children in the Early Empire*, 133; Tracy L. Prowse et al, “Isotopic and Dental Evidence for Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 137 (2008), 294–308 esp. p. 305.

²⁴ Bagley, *Roman Children in the Early Empire*, 271.

²⁵ For more see M. J. Geller “Some Remarks on Babylonian Pharmacology,” in L. Lehmhaus and M. Martelli (eds.) *Collecting Recipes: Byzantine and Jewish Pharmacology in Dialogue* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 33; Valler, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period*, 165-167.

²⁶ A curious fact is that Em’s tradition might be older than that of *mAvot*. Although the Mishnah is without doubt older than the Babylonian Talmud, scholars agree that this mishnaic list is a late addition to the ancient mishnaic tractate. For more see Gilat, *Studies in the Development of the Halakhah* 21-29; Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (Yale University Press, 1996), 13.

²⁷ According to Geller, bloodletting in the Babylonian Talmud is unlikely to have been influenced by Graeco-Roman medicine see Geller, “Bloodletting in Babylonia,” 309-11.

²⁸ On Galen’s three works on phlebotomy see Peter Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 127.

²⁹ For more see András Bácskay, The Natural and Supernatural Aspects of Fever in Mesopotamian Medical Texts, in Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider (eds.) *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period* (Boston : Brill, 2017), 39 – 52.

³⁰ For more see Geller, “Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud,” 46.

³¹ Geller, “Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud,” 23.

³² The “Diagnostic and Prognostic Handbook” is a Mesopotamian guide collecting some 15,000 ailment symptoms, organized by subject, which was written in the second millennium B.C.E., and copied over and over again until 100 C.E. For more see JoAnn Scurlock, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 8-10.

³³ Scurlock, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine*, 690.

³⁴ For a discussion see Dorit Kedar, *Who Wrote the Incantation Bowls?* (Ph.D. Diss., Freie Universität, Berlin, 2018) 48-50.

³⁵ Francesca Rochberg, *In the Path of the Moon* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 30.

- ³⁶ Scurlock, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine*, 690.
- ³⁷ The location of the Mesopotamian ritual is implied in the first ritual of this series, but is not mentioned specifically in the third version of the ritual. For more see Kedar, *Who Wrote the Incantation Bowls?*, 52-54.
- ³⁸ For more about the *Maqlû* salt incantation see Jeffrey Stackert, "The Variety of Ritual Applications for Salt and the *Maqlû* Salt Incantation," in Jeffrey Stackert et al. (eds.) *Gazing on the Deep: Ancient Near Eastern and Other Studies in Honor of Tzvi Abusch* (CDL Press, 2010), 235-252.
- ³⁹ Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge University Press 2008), 383.
- ⁴⁰ For more see Valler, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period*, 171-172. For this remedy as an influence of Akkadian medicine see Geller, "Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud," 23-24.
- ⁴¹ For bones interpreted as limbs see Lennart Lehmann, "Bodies of Texts, Bodies of Tradition – Medical Expertise and Knowledge of the Body among Rabbinic Jews in Late Antiquity," in J. Althoff, D. Berrens and T. Pommerening (eds.) *Finding, Inheriting or Borrowing? The Construction and Transfer of Knowledge in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Bielefeld Transcript Verlag, 2019), 123-166 esp. p. 132.
- ⁴² Laurence M. V. Totelin, *Hippocratic Recipes: Oral and Written Transmission of Pharmacological Knowledge in Fifth and Fourth Century Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 123.
- ⁴³ Totelin, *Hippocratic Recipes*, 108-109.
- ⁴⁴ Geller, "Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud," 19-20.
- ⁴⁵ Lennart Lehmann, "Beyond Drekapotheke, Between Facts and Feces: Talmudic Recipes and Therapies in Context" in *Collecting Recipes*, 221 – 254 esp. 243.
- ⁴⁶ For more see Valler, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period*, 168.
- ⁴⁷ In the *Hippocratic Collection of Gynecological Treatises*, *Drekapotheke* are regarded as magical ingredients. see Totelin, *Hippocratic Recipes*, 3.
- ⁴⁸ Caroline Petit, "Galen, Pharmacology and the Boundaries of Medicine: A Reassessment," in *Collecting Recipes*, 51- 79 esp. p. 74.
- ⁴⁹ Geller, "Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud," 27.
- ⁵⁰ Dr. Naomi L. Nakao, Associate Professor of Medicine and Gastroenterology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, explains that treating today's patients with an ingestion of stool is a new, and well accepted method used in modern medicine today. A fecal transplant is the remedy for a dangerous and often fatal infection of the colon called pseudomembranous colitis caused by the pathogenic bacteria *Clostridium Difficile*. The infection occurs after a patient is treated with antibiotics, which eradicate the normal bacterial flora of the colon, allowing *Clostridium Difficile* – a dangerous pathogen, to take over and cause an infection so severe that it may be fatal by causing colonic inflammation, pseudo membranes, deep colonic ulcers, subsequent colonic perforation, and death. By treating the patient with a fecal transplant - transplanting the stool of a healthy individual into the colon of the patient, a life is often saved. I would like to thank Dr. Nakao for sending me this information. For more see Severine Vermeire et al., "Donor Species Richness Determines Faecal Microbiota Transplantation Success in Inflammatory Bowel Disease," *Journal of Crohn's and Colitis* 10/4 (2016), 387-394.
- ⁵¹ In addition to Em, two other women transmit their knowledge on the same subject. Rav Hisda's daughter uses a medical parable: "It is like the prick of the blood-letting lancet" (*bKet* 39b). The daughter of Abba of Sura uses a parable entailing food: "It is like hard crust in the jaws" (*bKet* 39b).
- ⁵² Shaul Shaked, "Form and Purpose in Aramaic Spells: Some Jewish Themes (The Poetics of Magic Texts)" in Shaul Shaked (ed.) *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1-30 esp. p. 19.
- ⁵³ Shaked, "Form and Purpose in Aramaic Spells," 19.
- ⁵⁴ See discussion in Kedar, *Who Wrote the Incantation Bowls?*, 69-70.
- ⁵⁵ Lesses, "Exe(or)cising Power, 363.
- ⁵⁶ Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 116.
- ⁵⁷ For more about the Talmudic amulet see Yaakov Elman, "Saffron, Spices, and Sorceresses: Magic Bowls and the Babylonian Talmud," in K. B. Stratton and D. S. Kalleres (eds.) *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 365-385.
- ⁵⁸ Hans H. Spoer, "Notes on Jewish Amulets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 23 (1904), 97-105 esp. pp. 97-98.
- ⁵⁹ JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 38.
- ⁶⁰ For more see Yitzhak D. Gilat, *Studies in the Development of the Halakhah* (Hebrew; Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1992), 21-29.

- ⁶¹ Fanny Dolansky, "Roman girls and boys at play: realities and representations" in Christian Laes and Ville Vuolanto (eds.) *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World* (Routledge, 2017), 119.
- ⁶² For more see Gail Labovitz, *Massekhet Mo'ed Qatan* (FCBT II/11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 209-212.
- ⁶³ For more see Labovitz, *Massekhet Mo'ed Qatan*, 299-302.
- ⁶⁴ Lennart Lehmann and Mark Geller, "Strategies of "Canonising" Medical Knowledge in Talmudic Discourse," in *Episteme in Bewegung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 208-217 esp.p. 211.
- ⁶⁵ Parker, "Women doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire," 140-146.
- ⁶⁶ Évelyne Samama, *Les médecins dans le monde grec: Sources épigraphiques sur la naissance d'un corps médical* (Genève, 2003), 14-18.
- ⁶⁷ Rebecca Flemming, "Women, Writing and Medicine in the Classical World," *The Classical Quarterly* 57 (2007), 257-279 esp. 259.
- ⁶⁸ Dimitrios N. Theocharis, "Women in medicine: an epigraphic research," *CHS Research Bulletin* 8 (2020). 1-40 esp. p. 29. Available at <https://research-bulletin.chs.harvard.edu/2020/09/30/women-in-medicine-an-epigraphic-research/>
- ⁶⁹ Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the making of Roman women* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 247.
- ⁷⁰ Flemming, "Women, Writing and Medicine in the Classical World," 261.
- ⁷¹ For more about Jewish women writing in late antiquity see Tal Ilan and Dorit Kedar, "The female authorship of Babylonian Jewish incantation bowls," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 73/2 (2022), 288-304 esp. p. 292-293.
- ⁷² For a discussion of books and medical prescriptions composed by women see Holt N. Parker, "Galen and the Girls: Sources for Women Medical Writers Revisited," *Classical Quarterly* 62 (2012), 359-386.
- ⁷³ Parker, "Galen and the Girls, 383.
- ⁷⁴ Parker, "Women doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire," 137.
- ⁷⁵ Flemming, "Women, Writing and Medicine in the Classical World," 268.
- ⁷⁶ Gregory Tsoucalas, Marianna Karamanou and Androutsos Georgios, "Metrodora, an Innovative Gynecologist, Midwife, and Surgeon," *Surgical Innovation* 20:6 (2013), 648-649.
- ⁷⁷ For more about Timtini see Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 168 - 172 esp. p. 170; for more about Timtini's medicine see Lehmann, "Beyond Drekapotheke," 241-247.
- ⁷⁸ The body of evidence regarding women's communities is too substantial to disregard. In the contemporary Roman Empire, for example, in Egyptian monasteries around the city of Oxyrhynchus, lived 20,000 nuns, see Andrew Cain, *The Greek Historia monachorum in Aegyptio: Monastic Hagiography in the Late Fourth Century* (Oxford University Press 2016), 187. Most important is the fact that in order to enter the Pachomian monastic community, or the "White Monastery" community in this area, reading was a prerequisite. In addition to the community living in monasteries, there was a community of women called "domestic virgins" living in the city. They stayed out of public view and lived modest lifestyle of fasting and studying scriptures, see AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Twenty Thousand Nuns: The Domestic Virgins of Oxyrhynchus" in Gawdat Gabra and Hany Takla, (eds.) *Christianity and Monasticism in Middle Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press 2015) 57-67, esp. p. 58. It is safe to assume that some of these women could also write, based on 1,800 letters that were written to Shenoute (348-466 CE), head of the "White Monastery," by women who lived in the monastery and in the surrounding community, see Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute & the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press 2002) 3.
- ⁷⁹ *bSanh* 67a; see Simcha Fishbane, "Most Women Engage in Sorcery": An Analysis of Sorceresses in the Babylonian Talmud," *Jewish History* 7 (1993), 27-42.
- ⁸⁰ Daniel Boyarin, "Reading Androcentrism against the Grain: Women, Sex, and Torah-Study," *Poetics Today* 12/1 (1991), 29-53 esp. p. 41; See discussion Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 57.
- ⁸¹ Or, *Massekhet Betsah*, 130.
- ⁸² For Yalta as a participant in rabbinic legal discourse see Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Illinois: Varda Books, 2001), 53 – 59.
- ⁸³ For a discussion regarding the daughter of Rav Hisda by Rava see Tal Ilan, *Massekhet Hullin*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 232-237.
- ⁸⁴ Sarit Kattan Gribetz, "Consuming texts: women as recipients and transmitters of ancient texts," in A.J. Berkovitz and Mark Letteney (eds.) *Rethinking 'Authority' in Late Antiquity* (Routledge, 2018), 178 – 206 esp. p. 185.
- ⁸⁵ Judith Hauptman, "The Talmud's Women in Law and Narrative," *Nashim* 28 (2015), 30-50 esp. p. 33.
- ⁸⁶ Hauptman, "The Talmud's Women in Law and Narrative," 33-44.
- ⁸⁷ Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Medicine in The Talmud: natural and supernatural therapies between magic and science* (University of California Press, 2022), 107.

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