Meals in the Early Christian World
Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table

Edited by
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learn the secrets of God (cum secreta Dei saecularis agnouerit), let the reading be taken from some other book, if the abbot so please, so that the secret of the monastery and the established norms for leading a life of sanctity may not be learned by scoffers. In this case let him read another text, first making a mark in the Rule. If the nonmonk admitted to the monastic meal is such that the abbot is certain he not only is capable of appreciating the divine ordinances but is even so religious that he could follow this manner of life and could be drawn to godly ways, when such a one comes to the table the reader will continue the Rule. For those who are capable of observing it as it should be [observed] should hear the Rule of the monastery" (Reg. Mag. 24.20–25).

22. Cf. Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 47–65; Taussig, In the Beginning was the Meal.

23. Thanks to Hal Taussig for initial conversation about the shape of such generative discourse.

24. In the Dialogues, Gregory the Great recounts the Life of Benedict. Within this frame, he also tells the story of “how Benedict wrote a rule for his monks” (2.36).

25. In introducing Colm Luibhead’s English translation of John Cassian’s Conference, Owen Chadwick suggests that over the course of five centuries, Cassian’s “ideas could hardly be escaped by the monks of the Western world,” 29.

26. Taussig. In the Beginning was the Meal, 67–68.

27. Here intersections with Matthias Klinghardt’s work on the utopian aspects of meal practice invite further analysis.

CHAPTER 18

Inclined to Decline Reclining? Women, Corporeality, and Dining Posture in Early Rabbinic Literature

Jordan D. Rosenblum

I imagine it is the year 209 CE. You are a disciple in a rabbinic circle located in a city in Palestine. Your rabbinic mentor invites you to a banquet that he is hosting in celebration of his son’s wedding. Do you bring your wife?

In essence, this is the question that I seek to answer in this essay. Were women present at such commensal encounters? And, if so, were they reclining? In the process of asking this question, we learn about early rabbinic (or tannaitic)1 concepts of corporality because, as is also the case in ancient discussions of dining posture in the larger Greek and Roman milieu, to talk about women at the table is to talk about the issues associated with female bodies: sex, power, procreation, etc. Throughout, I continually ask the question: with regard to women at the table, were the Tannaim inclined to decline reclining?

In order to answer this question, I turn to linguistic evidence: namely, when the Hebrew verb "to recline (on a dining couch)" (shb) appears, do women appear? And, if so, are they reclining? This approach provides a clear litmus test. As we shall see, the evidence is meager. The very paucity of evidence, in fact, is suggestive. For these reasons, I am inclined to argue that the early rabbis were, indeed, inclined to decline reclining.
The Verb "To Recline" in the Tannaitic Corpus

The Hebrew verb *sbb* can mean "to recline (on a dining couch)" in both *piel* and *hif'il* conjugations.² This verb is used to describe the act of reclining while eating several times in the tannaitic corpus. For example, rabbis are often depicted as reclining at a meal (usually on festivals), discussing various facets of *halakhab* (rabbinic law).³ Perhaps unsurprisingly, several of these reclining scenes feature food blessings as the topic of conversation.⁴ However, while the verb *sbb* refers to the commensal practice of reclining in a variety of contexts—from the *halakhab* of purity⁵ to funeral banquets⁶—only once is a woman present.⁷ This text deserves our attention.

According to *t. Yevamot* 13:1:⁸

At first, they would write writs of protest:⁹ "she is not suitable for him; she does not desire him; and she does not want to be married to him."¹⁰ The House of Hillel says: "In a court or not in a court—but on the condition that there should be three [witnesses]."¹¹ R. Yose b. R. Yehudah and R. Lazar¹² b. R. Shimon say: "Even before two [witnesses]." How is the duty of protest [affected]?¹³ She testified: "I do not want So-and-So, my husband. I do not want the betrothal that my mother or brothers made on my behalf." Even if she is sitting in a litter¹⁴ and went to the one who betrothed her to him, and she said to him: "I do not want So-and-So, my husband, this [man]"—there is no protest greater than this. R. Yehudah says: "Even if she went to buy something from a storekeeper,"¹⁵ and she said to him [i.e., the storekeeper]: "I do not want So-and-So, my husband, this [man]"—there is no protest greater than this. [Even] more than this, R. Yehudah said: "Even if there are guests reclining [in her husband's house, and she is standing and giving drink to them],"¹⁶ and she said to them: "I do not want So-and-So, my husband"—there is no protest greater than this.

In the midst of a *halakhab* discussion about a woman protesting a betrothal made on her behalf while she was a minor, the dining couch and the verb *sbb* make an appearance. However, is the woman reclining while protesting her marriage?

In *t. Yevamot* 13:1, the woman talks to reclining guests. Yet, she is not explicitly depicted as reclining. The contrast of postures is even starker in the parallel *bara'ita* on *b. Yevamot* 108a, which unambiguously describes the woman as standing ('omedet) and serving the guests. She is not reclining and eating; she is standing and serving. Therefore, the one instance in which a woman appears in a tannaitic text in which the verb *sbb* means "to recline (on a dining couch)" does not depict the woman as participating in the communal practice of reclining.

Of course, our examination of the verb *sbb* in the tannaitic corpus does not definitively prove that women did not recline at tannaitic meals. All it does show is that women are not explicitly described as doing so in extant literary contexts.¹⁷ Is this an absence of evidence or an evidence of absence? To answer this question, perhaps it would help to expand our data set. Therefore, as a means of comparison, let us now turn to the significantly larger amoraic corpus.

The Verb "To Recline" in the Amoraic Corpus

While I had initially intended to confine my analysis to the tannaitic corpus, I have decided to survey the occurrences of *sbb* in amoraic texts for two reasons.¹⁸ In addition to expanding our data set, this also offers us the opportunity to explore the possibility of change over time: namely do women appear in a reclining posture in later rabbinic texts?¹⁹ For the most part, the amoraic data accord with the tannaitic data.²⁰ However, there are three texts in which women recline. These texts deserve our attention, as neither case provides unambiguous evidence for the presence of respectable women (or women in general) on the dining couch.

In the midst of a (most likely) scholastic²¹ discussion about the status of wine on a table shared between Jews and idolaters, *b. Avodah Zarah* 69b-70a states:

Raba said: "[If] an idolater whose [zohanah 'ovedet kohavim] and a Jewish man [yisra'el] were reclining beside each other,²² the wine is permitted because, [while] the desire for transgression²³ would be strong in them, the desire for libated wine [yayn neshak] would not be strong in them. [If] a Jewish whose [zohanah yisra'el] and an idolater were reclining, the wine [belonging to her] is prohibited. Why? Because she would be held in contempt by them and be influenced to follow after them."

Several assumptions pervade this text: men have one thing on their mind when sharing a table with women (and it most certainly is not pouring wine as a libation!);²⁴ women are more influenced by men than men are by women;²⁵ and the desire to libate wine is so strong that one can never trust a non-Jew around wine unless the non-Jew is heavily supervised.

What, if anything, do we learn about women and men reclining together from this text? Unfortunately, the answer is not very much. In each scenario, the woman involved is quite explicitly a whore (zohanah). This is not a coincidence; it is clearly meant to convey the association with idolatry and a violation of the covenant with Yhwh that exists already in biblical texts.
Thus, women function as literary foils here. Further, even if real women are the subject at hand, these are by no means “respectable” women. For these reasons, the extent to which these reclining scenes can be utilized to make larger comments about women, corporality, and dining posture is limited.

The second and third appearances of women reclining on the dining couch occur in the midst of discussions concerning the proper observance of commensal practices relating to Passover.

_y. Pesahim_ 10:1 (37b):

R. Simon [said] in the name of R. Yehoshua b. Levi: “That [i.e., Matzah] olive-sized portion with which a man fulfills his obligation on Passover must be eaten while reclining.” R. Yose came before R. Simon [and asked]: “Even a slave before his master? Even a wife before her husband?” He [= R. Simon] said to him: “Great man, until here I have heard.”

_b. Pesahim_ 108a:

A woman in her husband’s house need not [lo’ be’a] recline; but if she is an important woman she must [tsrikha] recline.

The question being answered (or, possibly, avoided) in these texts is whether women are obligated to recline on the Passover. In both texts, it seems that women (and slaves) are a curious case because, while the head of the household—the husband—must recline, there is an ambiguity vis-à-vis women (and slaves, both of which must tend to the needs of the head of the household): Must they also recline or do they stand and serve them?

While women are included in amoraic literature in other Passover practices that involve preparation and consumption of food, they are not required to perform these acts in public while reclining. This is not the case for men—whether free or slave. Marjorie Lehman has offered a compelling argument for why women are not obligated to recline on Passover. In sum, dining posture is used to maintain a desired social hierarchy. Since I could not state it any better, I quote Lehman at length:

This exemption attests to the fact that legal decisions can concretize sociocultural anxieties. In other words, by exempting wives and daughters from the ritual of reclining, the rabbis may be exhibiting their discomfort with wives who perform the same rituals as they do. Reclining symbolizes the freedom of the Israelites from slavery; to abstain from reclining signifies that “freedom” does not mean the same thing for everyone. Wives who do not recline willfully acknowledge their secondary status in relation to those who are required to participate fully in Passover rites (i.e. men). Indeed, it seems that the Amoraim are encouraging wives to adhere to a particular familial-social pecking order rather than choose to embrace rituals designed to commemorate biblical events that also have meaning for them. Hence, the active participation of wives in Passover ritual can be tempered by their refusal to recline at the table of their husbands. Indeed, this legal position maintains the male-topped familial hierarchy and highlights the fact that husband/wife and father/daughter relationships are central to sustaining this social structure.

Lehman admits that there are two potential complicating factors for her argument. First, an “important woman” is required to recline. However, an “important woman” is clearly a different case from an average woman. The precise meaning of this phrase is unclear. Many scholars understand the issue to be that an “important woman” is able to afford slaves who can serve her, thus freeing her from that duty and allowing her to recline. In addition, an “important woman” could be an independently wealthy woman who is single, divorced, or widowed. Outside of the patrilineal family structure, this woman would represent a different case and, in Lehman’s opinion, would “pose far less of a threat” to the (desired) status quo. In either case, an “important woman” is not the average woman and, as such, should not be used to extrapolate about women, dining posture, and corporality at the Passover table.

Second, Lehman reminds us that women are exempt—not prohibited—from reclining. The differences between exemption and prohibition have been hotly debated, especially given their ramifications for the place of women in modern Jewish law (halakhah). However, I believe that Lehman is correct to point out that the rabbinic language of exemption is one of tentativeness. The early rabbis are attempting to configure the world as they wish it to be, and women’s place in that world is still being negotiated. What roles should women play? Where in the hierarchy should they be placed? These issues sometimes result in tentative language in much the same way that inchoate ideas in this essay are bracketed with semantic strategies (e.g., passive voice, modifiers). Nevertheless, while these texts do not explicitly prohibit women from reclining, they neither obligate women (writ large) to do so, nor do they seem to assume that the average woman appears reclining on the dining couch.

Once again, when talking about the act of reclining on a dining couch, women are noticeably absent. None of the three exceptions to this broad statement provide much information in support of woman’s ability to function as active subjects of the verb _sbb_. In _b. Avodah Zarah_ 69b-70a, if the women present were not literary foils, then they certainly were not “good
texts to uncover data about women, the original producers and consumers of these texts did not share our modern concerns. For them, so it would seem, meals were about men. Women might have produced them, consumed them, and (most likely?) partaken of them with men, but this is not the point. For the early rabbis, meals were about men.

The early rabbinic table served as a locus of identity negotiation. Who was and was not able to engage in commensality therein defined who was and was not a rabbinic Jew. The borders of the Tannaim and Amoraim, like so many groups, began at the borders of the table. The presence of women in the rabbinic world was inchoate, as these early rabbis debated the role that women would play in the nascent rabbinic movement. Reclining is but one way that the early rabbis used a practice (commensal or otherwise) to establish hierarchy. In this way, the early rabbis were like so many of their Mediterranean contemporaries: more than simply a commensal practice, reclining was an action with enormous social, cultural, and political repercussions.44

Notes

I thank Chris Jones for fastidiously fact-checking this essay and Israel Haas for proofreading it. Any omissions or misrepresentations that remain should be credited to the author.

1. The Tannaim (singular: Tanna) lived from 70 CE to roughly 250 CE in Roman Palestine. Following the Tannaim are a group of rabbis known as the Amoraim (singular: Amora), who lived from roughly 250 CE to 500 CE in both Palestine and Babylonia.

2. See Jastrow, Dictionary, 948–949. The usual meaning of verbs derived from the root *sbb* is “to go around,” “surround,” or “turn.” The semantic range of *sbb* in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (which probably borrowed this verb from Hebrew) is more limited, only meaning “to recline.” See Sokoloff, Dictionary, 365. This root provides the modern Hebrew word for “party” (*mesibah*; present in classical rabbinic Hebrew, as well).

3. For example, t. Berakhot 4:15 (= b. Berakhot 37a), 16; 5:2 (= y. Pesahim 10:1 [37b]; b. Pesahim 100a); t. Pisha 10:12; t. Yom To‘a 2:12; t. Sukkah 1:9; MeKidash Rabbi Ishmael Amalek 3 (= MeKidash Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai at Exodus 18:12; Sifre Deuteronomy 38, 41 (= Midrash Tannaim 11:13; b. Qiddushin 40b); b. Qiddushin 32b; Midrash Tannaim 11:10; baraitot on b. Sanhedrin 11a (= b. Sota 48b). A baraita (plural: baraitot) is a reputed tannaitic statement that appears in a later rabbinic document. It may, or may not, appear in the tannaitic corpus and it may, or may not, be tannaitic in origin.

5:3, 5 (≈ y. Ta'anit 4:2 [68a]; b. Berakhot 46b); baraitot on b. Berakhot 51b; b. Pesahim 102a-b.

For example, m. Negaim 13:9 (≈ t. Negaim 7:10; t. Terumat 10:9; Sifra Mesora' pereq 7:5; b. Berakhot 41a; b. Erubin 4a; b. Sukkah 6a; b. Hullin 71b).

6. For example, m. Sanhedrin 2:1 (≈ y. Mo'ed Qatan 3:5 [83a]; y. Sanhedrin 2:2 [19d]; b. Sanhedrin 18a), 3 (≈ b. Mo'ed Qatan 27a; b. Nedarim 56a; b. Sanhedrin 20a).

7. Rather than bog down the text in details, I will simply note here the other instances in which the verb sbb, meaning “to recline (on a dining couch)” appears and women, at least explicitly, do not: m. Pesahim 10:1 (≈ t. Pisha 10:1; Exodus Rabbah 20:18; even the poor recline on Passover); m. Nedarim 4:4 (vows and sharing a dining couch); m. Sanhedrin 2:4 (≈ Sifre Deuteronomy 161; king reads Torah scroll while reclining); t. Berakhot 5:20 (= Genesis Rabbah 91:3; the possible effects of changing dining posture from sitting to reclining on the recitation of grace after meals); t. Demai 3:7–8 (cf. y. Demai 2:2 [22d]; tithing issues with regard to fellows and associates eating together which, at one point, explicitly mentions a son); 5:7 (tithes and left-over food); Mekilta d'Raβbi Ishmael Nezikin 2 (a master should give his slave the same food, drink, and haseba, which here probably means bed; however, it could refer to reclining, so I include it in this list); Sifre Deuteronomy 53 (= Midrash Tannaim 11:17; a banquet parable about Israel being happy with its divinely ordained inheritance, where the recliners are called bene mesiba, literally “sons of reclining”); a baraita on b. Berakhot 11a (= Midrash Tannaim 67; rules for reciting the benediction); a baraita on b. Sanhedrin 23a (some cautious?) Jerusalemites would not engage in commensality unless they knew their fellow recliners. A reputed baraita on b. Berakhot 43b states that it is unbecoming of a scholar to recline with “peoples of the land.” However, as Shaye Cohen has argued, this reflects a later development in rabbinic literature; as such, it is most likely amoriac—and not tannaitic—in origin. See Cohen, Place of the Rabbi, 165–168, especially pp. 166–167.


9. A writ of protest is written when a woman wishes to protest a marriage contracted while she is still a minor.

10. The wording of the writ of protest is written in Aramaic.

11. The first part of this quote (in quotation marks) appears in m. Yevamot 13:1.


13. The rest of this text appears, albeit in a slightly different order and with some slight variations, in a baraita on b. Yevamot 108a. For a technical discussion of the differences between these two sources, see Lieberman, Tosefta Ki-fshutah, 6:151–153.

14. Frequently, the term for litter (appiryon) signifies the litter that carries a bride in a wedding procession. For example, see t. Sotah 15:9. On the wedding procession in rabbinic literature, see Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 170–173 (the appiryon is discussed on p. 172).

15. In the baraita on b. Yevamot 108a, the woman’s husband explicitly sends her to the store to buy something for him. Perhaps this better explains why the person to whom the woman disavows her marriage is a storekeeper?

16. Emphasis added. The words in square brackets appear only in the baraita on b. Yevamot 108a. I discuss the differences between these two versions, below. In both versions, however, the commensal setting is most likely a wedding banquet. There are two types of wedding-related meals mentioned in tannaitic literature: betrothal meals and wedding banquets. On betrothal meals, see m. Pesahim 3:7 (= t. Pisha 3:12); m. Ketubbot 15:3; m. Bava Batra 9:5; t. Megillah 3:14–15. The betrothal meal apparently involved the recitation of a “betrother’s blessing.” On this blessing (the text of which actually appears for the first time on b. Ketubbot 7b-8a), see Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 63–65, 164. On the wedding banquet (often called a mishleb), see m. Hulah 2:7 (= Sifre Numbers 110); m. Nega'im 3:2 (= Sifra Taasria pereq 5; Mesora parashu 5); Sifra Behuqotai pereq 5; t. Shabbat 7:9; t. Bava Metz'ia 8:28. For additional references, see Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 339–340 n. 107. An inscription from the Horbat Susiya synagogue mentions a rabbi making a donation vow at the wedding feast (mishleb) of his son. This mosaic inscription, which is roughly contemporary to the tannaitic period, provides extra-rabbinic evidence for both this event and this terminology. On this inscription, see Naveh, On Stone, no. 75 (pp. 115–116; Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 179–180. For nonrabbinic evidence for the wedding banquet, see John 2:1–5; Tobit 7:10; Joseph and Aseneth, 21:6; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 5:289.

17. However, other evidence does call women’s participation in tannaitic commensal activities into question. See Rosenblum, Food and Identity, 103–137.

18. On rare occasions, the verb rba can also mean “to recline on (a dining couch).” For example, see y. Berakhot 8:5 (12b), which discusses the rules of blessings and dining etiquette by recounting an interaction between three reclining rabbis (compare the somewhat similar etiquette snafu that occurs, with different rabbis and with the verb sbb, in Midrash Mibhei 9:5). In this essay, I have decided to focus on the verb sbb because it is by far the most common technical term for rabbinic dining posture. Perhaps a future, more expanded, version of this essay would (should?) include a fuller treatment of the term rba. In the meantime, it should be noted that, in the one instance in which I have encountered rba as having this meaning, the dining experience depicted therein simply buttresses my argument vis-à-vis sbb, in that we once again observe a commensal interaction between reclining, male rabbis.

19. Since the amoriac corpus includes both Palestinian and Babylonian texts, one should always look for variations due to different cultural and physical environments. However, I did not find any such relevant difference in regard to women, dining posture, and the verb sbb.

20. While I will not discuss these texts in detail, I provide here the amoriac references to sbb (meaning “to recline [on a dining couch]”; when the subject is simply guests [mesubbann = "recliners"] or a dining party [mesibba], I only cite
with a feminine pronominal suffix (literally: "beside her"). As such, one could render this line in a variety of ways, including some combination of the following: "If idolatrous whores and Jewish men were reclining besides one another"; "If an idolatrous whore was reclining beside a Jewish man"); etc.

23. Obviously, the "transgression" of which they speak is sexual in nature. On the connection between commensality and sexual relations with non-Jewish women, see Rosenblum, "From Their Bread." For another example of reclining as a metaphor for sex, see b. Shabbat 62b-63a, in which the "vulgur" (shabatz) men of Jerusalem talk about enjoying their "meal" (= sex) on either a "wide couch" (meseb) or a narrow couch." Included within a series of food and consumption metaphors, this list ends with the proclamation: "Rav Hisda said: It was all for prostitution (zenus)." Obviously, women would be present here, "reclining" alongside men on these couches. However, the heavy metaphorical language implies that the context here is not the kitchen but the bedroom, an observation that does not escape the notice of Rashi (as the verb meseb can also mean "to lie [on a bed]", e.g., b. Bava Qamma 113a). On women as food metaphors in rabbinic literature (including a brief discussion of this text), see Weingarten, Gynaecophagia.

24. The fact that men have only one thing on their mind when dining with women is reinforced by another text, in which the innuendo of sex appears in the midst of a potential reclining scene. Maasekhet Kallah 1:3 (cf. Kallah Rabbati 1:5) discusses interactions with the bride of another Jewish man. In this text, Rabbi Eliezer is asked about "drinking from the hand of the bride"—a phrase that clearly has a sexual valence. In this case, the husband is described as both present and reclining; however, the bride's posture is in question: namely does "the husband recline with her" mean that she is reclining? The verb (meseb) is singular and masculine and refers to the husband, but it could also be read to include the woman's dining posture. In either case, the actions are not to be seen as positive, since Rabbi Eliezer concludes that, "whoever drinks from the hand of a bride, it is as if he drinks with a whore ([zona])." Whether the husband and wife are actually reclining together, the focus is on the inappropriate actions of the other men. (Contrast b. Shabbat 88b [= b. Gittin 36b], where the focus is on the inappropriate actions of the bride who plays the harlot beneath her wedding canopy; the condemnation of her actions is derived from Song of Songs 1:12, in which a king reclines [mesibba] at his table, though the gender [and number] of his guests is unspecified therein.) Thus, it is difficult to reach a firm conclusion for our purposes based on this text. Further, this text presents at least two other difficulties. First, the commensal scene in question seems to be a wedding banquet, at which women's presence is (it would seem) expected. Yet, finding explicit evidence for women's presence at wedding banquets is quite difficult (see Rosenblum, Food and Identity, 126-128; and Susan Marks' excellent essay in this volume). Second, the date of Maasekhet Kallah might be too late for our considerations. While many date the text to Geonic times (e.g., Strack and Stemberger, Introduction, 229), some date it earlier (e.g., Brodsky, Bride,
34–86). Since this text does not alter my argument, I have decided to "pass the buck"—i.e., to note it, discuss it, but not to take a direct (or indirect) stance on this issue. I thank David Brodsky for discussing this text with me (he also briefly treats this text in Bride, 120).

25. On the notion of self-restraint as a masculine attribute in rabbinic literature in general, see Satlow, Try to be a Man.

26. Women of ill-repute often make appearances in Greek and Roman banquet scenes (although this subject has been much discussed and nuanced, especially to allow for change over time with regard to the presence of respectable women in later Roman texts). For a discussion, see, for example, Corley, Private Women, 24–66; Roller, Dining Posture, 96–156; Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 42–44.

27. This phrase is difficult to render. In this translation, I have done my best to be faithful to the original Hebrew. A looser translation, but which better conveys the meaning of the words, would be: "Matzah [unleavened bread] that is equivalent to an olive's amount of food . . . ." or "An olive-sized portion of matzah . . . ." An olive is a standard measure for the minimum amount of food needed to be consumed/prepared for certain things to take effect/be fulfilled in rabbinic literature.

28. I render 'adam here as "man" because, as we shall see, the assumption in this text is that free men are being referred to, and that slaves and women are deviations from the norm that must be explained on a case-by-case basis.

29. The meaning of this final phrase in Hebrew (‘ad ka‘an shama’ti) is ambiguous, in that it can be understood to either acknowledge or dismiss the problem detected by R. Yose. See Lehman, "Women and Passover Observance," 65 n. 54.

30. However, it must be stated that both texts speak only about wives. The extent to which women who are single, divorced, or widowed could recline at Passover is not discussed. One could assume that these women are allowed to recline (e.g., Lehman, Women and Passover Observance, 54) or that these women are somehow included in the discussion at hand. Either way, this is unclear in these texts and, for this reason; I do not believe that one can extrapolate much information about women and reclining from them.

31. Similarly, see Hauptman, "From the Kitchen," 111–112; Hezser, "Passover and Social Equality," 103–104.

32. For references and discussion, see Lehman, "Women and Passover Observance," 53–55. On women in tractate Pesahim in general (although not with regard to reclining), see Hauptman, "Women in Tractate Pesahim."

33. The obligation of a male slave to recline is discussed later on b. Pesahim 108a. For a discussion, see Hauptman, "From the Kitchen," 111–112; Hezser, "Passover and Social Equality," 103–104.

34. Lehman, "Women and Passover Observance," 54.

35. For example, see Hauptman, "From the Kitchen," 111–112; Hezser, "Passover and Social Equality," 103–104. However, Hauptman and Hezser appear to differ on whether this indicates that an average woman could (Hauptman) or could not (Hezser) recline. As I will discuss further below, I am in agreement with Hezser on this matter. The difference between women of means and average women is not a concern in y. Pesahim 10:1 (37b). There is precedent elsewhere in rabbinic literature for treating women of means differently than less wealthy women. For example, see m. Ketubbot 5:5, which discusses the effect of personal wealth on a wife's required duties. This text is often mentioned in discussions of gender in rabbinic literature (e.g, Peskowitz, Spinning Fantasies, 97–101; Wegner, Chattel or Person?, 76–77; Weigarten, "Magiroth", 291–292).

36. Lehman, "Women and Passover Observance," 54. Here, I combine two of Lehman's points. She suggests that nonwives (single, divorced, or widowed women) are allowed to recline because they are less of a threat when discussing b. Pesahim 108a in general (and not in her discussion of the "important woman"). While this may be correct—since both texts only talk wives, as I discussed above—I believe that this observation can be further applied to the exceptional case of the "important woman."


38. For concise but informative discussions (with additional references), see Lehman, "Women and Passover Observance," especially pp. 47–49, 54–55; Lehman, "The Gendered Rhetoric," especially pp. 333–335. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Conservative movement in America justified counting women in prayer quorums and ordaining female rabbis based on this passage and others, which exempt—but do not prohibit—women from these obligations. For a brief discussion, see Satlow, Creating Judaism, 48–49.

39. This observation also applies to the Stammain, the "anonymous" group of rabbis who follow the Amoraim and redact (and provide anonymous comments on) the Talmud. See Lehman, Women and Passover Observance, 55–56.

40. Similarly, see the brief (and minimally substantiated) remark by David Noy that, "[w]hen rabbis dined together, their wives were not expected to be present" ("Sixth Hour," 138).

41. On reclining in the ancient world, see the scholarly sources cited in n. 26 and the essays in Part IV of this volume. Other ancient Jewish evidence exists for women and dining posture, which I do not treat here. For example, while discussing a monastic community of male (therapeutics) and female (theraepetrides) philosophers, Philo notes the order of their reclining (katablasis): men on the right and women on the left (On the Contemplative Life, 69). Of course, basing any argument on this evidence is always tricky, as Philo's description of the Therapeutae/Therapeutrides is a notorious crux: Are they a real community or a product of his fertile imagine? On this debate, see Taylor, Jewish Women Philosophers. However, since my concern here is to understand rabbinic attitudes toward women and dining posture, these data lay beyond the purview of this essay.

42. In addition to Lehman's arguments cited above, one could cite a myriad of secondary sources that attest to this phenomenon in rabbinic literature
encountered in extra-commensal evidence. To cite but one of the many examples, see Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage in Judaism*, 229–234, which argues that Torah study functions as a nonsexual form of procreation between male rabbi and male rabbincic disciple (cf. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*).

43. Of course, this is in contrast to another contemporary movement that was imagining an ideal world in which women shared an uncertain place: early Christianity, wherein women’s presence at the table was “notable but not unique” in comparison to its milieu (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 208). However, when women appear at banquets in Greek and Roman texts, they are sometimes depicted as sitting (as opposed to reclining, like the men) or characterized as prostitutes. For references and discussion, see Corley, *Private Women*, 26–34; Roller, *Dining Posture*, 96–156; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 42–44, 208–209. Sexual innuendo perhaps underlies tannaitic texts regulating certain commensal interactions between men and women, as we have already seen (e.g., *m. Ketubbot* 5:9; *t. Shabbat* 1:14). Further, in the book of Judith, when Judith reclines in the presence of Holofernes, the scene is highly sexualized (12, especially 12:15–20).

44. On their Mediterranean contemporaries, see various other essays in this volume.

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**Bibliography**


