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The Rabbi Who Mistook his Wife for a Loaf of Challah:

Gender, Space & Food in the Mishnah

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Abstract

In the first few centuries of the Common Era, Judaism met the challenge of existing in a post-Temple world.Whether or not this was the lived reality or "rabbinic fantasy" , one can argue that from the narrative of the Mishnah, men ought to be in the public sphere, away from the home, perhaps growing and harvesting food, and women were expected to be in the domestic sphere, responsible for transforming raw food into meals for their families. A key part of this sacred labour and halachic observance is the maintenance of the fitness or spiritual purity of the food prepared and served. Acknowledging that what is dictated in the Mishnah and other texts may be more prescriptive than descriptive, this Capstone seeks to explore the rabbis' use of gender in their writings especially as concerns the construction of the home and sacred space to see if the gendering and regulation of space and items can be expanded beyond the conception of a woman's liminal body to the gathering, preparation and consumption of food, seeking to demonstrate the triangulation between sacrality, gender and space in the world of Mishnah.

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Introduction

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah said:
Where there is no Torah, there is no *derekh eretz*;
where there is no *derekh* eretz, there is no Torah.
Where there is no wisdom, there is no fear/reverence of God;
where there is no fear/reverence of God, there is no wisdom.
Where there is no understanding, there is no knowledge;
where there is no knowledge, there is no understanding.
Where there is no *kemah* [flour/dough/bread/], there is no Torah;
where there is no Torah, there is no *kemah*."
-Pirkei Avot 3:17

In the first few centuries of the Common Era, Judaism met the challenge of existing in a post-Temple world. The early rabbis found ways of preserving and ultimately transforming Jewish practice from Temple cult to what would become the ethno-religious doctrine of Rabbinic Judaism. One method was focusing on prayer and study in lieu of Temple sacrifice. Another was to place considerable focus on home-based rituals. Of course, synagogues had already existed, and they took on increasing importance, but so too, I posit, did the rabbis' use of the home as sacred space. As such, the rabbis of the Mishnah closely legislated domestic space and those associated with it: women.

In her work *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architecture of Gender in Jewish Antiquity*, Cynthia M. Baker demonstrates how the Mishnah's use of gendered language fashions the home and a woman's body to be interchangeable[1]. In *Spinning Fantasies:*

[1] See Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 34-35.

Rabbis, Gender, and History, Miriam Peskowitz demonstrates how professions (i.e., a spinner and weaver) and even the tools of the trade can have a direct association with its practitioner (i.e., a spindle—Peskowitz illustrates—becomes the very symbol of a virtuous woman).[2] Peskowitz also notes, following a discussion of Mishnah Negaim 2:4, that there are a number of tasks that are set in a gender binary: weaving, nursing and baking bread are female tasks, whereas agricultural work is considered to be in the male domain.

In the chapter *Domestic Women: Constructing and Deconstructing a Gender Stereotype in the Mishnah,* Naftali Cohn—taking up Peskowitz' study—demonstrates how a closer inspection of the Mishnah reveals how this seemingly clear division of labour on gendered terms is less monolithic than it appears, due to the fact that "the rabbis knew well that men could bake bread and that women could harvest olives – because they wrote about doing so in their own texts".[3] Therefore, the conception that fieldwork is associated with men while baking is defined as a woman's activity is, in Peskowitz' words "better understood as [a] rabbinic fantas[y] about what Jewish men and women should do".[4]

Whether or not this was the lived reality or "rabbinic fantasy" (most likely the latter), one can argue that from the narrative point of view present in the Mishnah, men ought to be in the public sphere, away from the home, perhaps growing and harvesting food, and women were expected to be in the domestic sphere, responsible for

[2] See Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[3] Peskowitz, 86 as cited in Naftali S. Cohn, "Domestic Women: Constructing and Deconstructing a Gender Stereotype in the Mishnah," in *From Antiquity to the Postmodern World: Contemporary Jewish Studies in Canada*, by Daniel Maoz and Andrea Gondos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 40.

[4] Ibid.,85.

transforming raw food into meals for their families. Though food is one of humanity's universal needs, *what* and *how* one eats is a distinct marker of identity: following the laws of Kashrut is arguably one of the central (visible) signs of traditional Jewishness. For the early rabbis, every aspect of our world was permeated with aspects of the sacred; every action taken, every labour performed was directly linked to it, and food was no exception.[5] In her book *Women as Ritual Experts*, Susan Sered has demonstrated how women's preparation of food for their family's consumption was considered a sacred task. Further, food preparation was and remains a halachically difficult form of labour and knowledge of the laws of *Kashrut* must not be shrugged off as simple, common halachic knowledge.[6] A key part of this sacred labour and halachic observance is the maintenance of the fitness or purity of the food prepared and served.

Under the strictures of the halachic system, food, in its various forms of refinement, is susceptible to taking on ritual impurity (*Tamei*). Food's fitness or purity (*Tahor*) is directly connected with the space it occupies and who has access to it, from its rawest forms to its final forms fit for human consumption. During each step of this process, food may be rendered impure or unfit: not so dissimilarly, as will be illustrated, from the domestic spaces and the female bodies intertwined with it. The processes of food-making mediate between body and space; thus it is not surprising that the tension around food is remarkably similar to the tension and rabbinic anxiety around women's bodies.

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[5] Tamara Or, *Massekhet Betsah: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 28.

[6] Susan Starr Sered, Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88-93.

Acknowledging that what is dictated in the Mishnah and other texts may be more prescriptive than descriptive, this capstone seeks to explore the rabbis' use of gender in their writings—especially as concerns the construction of the home and sacred space—to see if the gendering and regulation of space and items which Baker and Peskowitz identify can be expanded beyond the conception of a woman's liminal and at times problematic body to the gathering, preparation and consumption of food, seeking to demonstrate the triangulation between sacrality, gender and space in the world of Mishnah. I believe it is worth noting how it is that women, in constant flux between ritually pure and impure states, are the ones who provide life through nourishment, and by extension, are the guardians and keepers of the sanctity in the profane world. In other words, through the preparation of food, which itself is life giving, a woman transforms the profane world into a sacred one. The question I put forth is: Are the rabbis attempting to legislate the sacrality of life through their prescriptions of women's bodies?

Chapter 1:Rabbinic Authority

Is anyone listening anyway?

In 70 C.E., the course of Jewish history was undeniably altered by the Roman destruction of the — Jerusalem Temple. What it meant to be a part of the People of Israel was suddenly thrown into question. The situation grew more complicated still in the second century after the Bar Kokhba rebellion, which resulted in the Romans cracking down severely on the Jewish population and giving Judea the new name of Syria Palestina. After this event, the majority of Jews found themselves outside the land of Israel and in communities in the Diaspora: many must have questioned how to preserve a Jewish identity removed from the land and structure that had been integral to their religious and cultural lives. Though there was a multiplicity of voices attempting to articulate an answer to this question, what history has recognized as authoritative are the rabbis of the Tannaitic period.

The Mishnah evinces that the rabbis positioned themselves as legal experts with knowledge of traditional Judean practice, which granted them authority in, and over, Jewish life. These rabbis asserted that they were the true transmitters of Judean culture and thus the guardians of the traditional Judean way of life. Most importantly for this paper, the rabbis believed that all Jews should follow their teachings and judgments, especially where questions of purity and sacrality were concerned.[7]

[7] Naftali S. Cohn, *The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the rabbis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 3.

It is important to note that there is little to no evidence that the rabbis who produced the Mishnah had any particular power or authority within Roman society or even within Roman-controlled Judean society. As Naftali Cohn notes, these rabbis "were not particularly powerful. Romans controlled cultural, political, and legal institutions, and the rabbis had neither place nor power within the Roman system…The rabbis were not, in this interpretation, a powerful group with authority over the Jews of Roman Palestine; but they hoped to be."[8] Historical scholarship has revealed that there is virtually no evidence for the presence of these rabbis in the Diaspora towns of the Greco-Roman world where most Jews lived. Despite this, many scholars continue to rely heavily on the rabbinic sources—especially the Mishnah and the Talmud—for evidence of the way Jews lived, practised, and thought in Late Antiquity, particularly with regard to the role that gender played in this period.[9]

Gender and its distinctions play crucial roles in the writings of the early rabbis. Peskowitz explains how "[i]n forming a new vision of Judaism after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, differences of gender—and what it meant to be a woman or a man—were deemed significant in new ways and were made part of all facets of this new tradition of everyday life and ordinary labour."[10] It is for this reason that the Mishnah is so compelling in its fashioning of space—especially domestic space—and its anxiety surrounding women and the effect they have on the purity and sacrality of the spaces

[8]Cohn, *The Memory of the Temple,* 3.

[9] Ross S. Kraemer, "The Diaspora World of Late Antiquity," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, by Judith R. Baskin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1991), 44.

[10] Peskowitz, 51.

they occupy. Peskowitz writes about the rabbinic anxiety surrounding both gender and male authority:

> If they need to argue for it, masculine authority was not an entirely automatic and naturalized part of life. If it were, it would be an unspoken assumption and not a topic of discussion. The fact that the argument is necessary means that male authority is desired but its details still are under question, a privilege to be actively maintained by those who coveted it.[11]

In their close legislation of the Jewish woman, her place and role in society at large as well as her body, in particular, the early rabbis were able to (or attempted to) bolster their own claims for authority.

When dealing with this material, it is important to acknowledge the difference between the constructions of women in rabbinic literature versus what the lived reality was for Jewish women on the ground in Roman controlled Palestine. Finding any historical evidence in rabbinic literature is a difficult task, in part because the stories told in these texts do not necessarily reflect historical realities, but also due to the fact that these texts were universally authored by men, and thus reflect at best the authors' understanding of the women they are writing about, rather than the subjects direct experience. In Peskowitz' language, what we find in the Mishnah is "better understood as a rabbinic fantasy about what Jewish men and women should do"[12]; thus it is likely more prescriptive than descriptive in nature. However, given the utter dearth of extant evidence available to those of us interested in excavating lost pieces of these womens' history, in Or's words "every little hint that may help us reconstruct women's social

[11] Peskowitz, 33.

[12] Ibid., 85.

reality is vital".[13] In fact, there is little choice but to look to rabbinic literature in this endeavour, for the simple reason that when it comes to Jewish women in antiquity, there are no better sources! As Ross Shepherd Kraemer observes:

> Ironically, outside rabbinic literature, the sources we have tell us nothing about the religious practices we most commonly associate with Jewish women, such as the baking of Sabbath bread, the blessing of Sabbath candles, the maintenance of a kosher household, and the observance of the laws of menstrual purity.[14]

Thus, these are the best sources we have to work with when it comes to the study of Jewish women in antiquity. The texts have not changed in millenia, but the new questions that we ask of them can be fertile soil for further insight into the social realities of these womens' lives. And so I proceed in this line of inquiry, with the above distinction between rabbinic constructions and reality in mind.

[13] Or, 11.

[14] Ross Shepherd Kraemer, "Women in the Diaspora World of Late Antiquity," in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective (Detroit, Mi: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 51-52.

Chapter 2: "'His house'—that is, his wife"

The construction and gendering of domestic space

From the age of obligation being set at thirteen years, to the positive time-bound mitzvot that Jewish men are obligated in, for the rabbis of the Mishnah, men were generally considered to be governed by time. Women, however, were associated with space. Though it is true to say that space and time are both fundamental categories of the human experience, when it comes to their importance and sanctity in Judaism, there is an unmistakable difference between the two. In Tamara Or's words

> In the Hebrew Bible, time was sanctified first. Already in the Book of Genesis sanctity was only mentioned in connection with Shabbat (Gen. 2:3). Time was thereby sanctified by God. Accordingly, celebrating Shabbat and the festivals was considered a sanctification of time. This was followed by the sanctification of the Jewish People and finally of the Land of Israel and the *mishkan* (i.e., Temple), a sacred place for the dwelling of the Divine. In contrast to the sanctification of time by God, the *mishkan* was sanctified by Moses (Num. 7:1). A lesser holiness or value is therefore attached to being connected with "space". The exclusion of women from the "sacred" and their segregation in secular places go hand in hand with their being perceived as inferior.[15]

To her point, it is worth noting that rabbinic Judaism explicitly exempts women from all positive, time-bound commandments.

However—as will be evinced further on in my analysis of various Mishnayot on the subject later in this capstone—women's essential functions in domestic activities and food preparation may well have given them more status in their communities than is

[15] Or, 28.

evident at first glance; as historical research of classical civilizations has demonstrated that "women may have been more powerful than we think, either as the driving force behind their male kin or by exerting influence on public policy in indirect ways."[16] This was perhaps markedly felt in the holistic transformation of Jewish life that occurred in the wake of the Second Jerusalem Temple's destruction. We can see a shift in the importance of the home as it also becomes a locus of religious ritual practice. As my dear teacher, Dr. Norma Baumel Joseph articulates, "Historians have often noted the shift in Jewish ritual practice that took place with the destruction of the Temple two thousand years ago. One shorthand reference claims that the sacrificial altar was replaced by the *shulhan arukh [sic]*, the set table and the eating fellowship."[17] This sentiment is also reflected in rabbinic literature, as BT *Berakhot* 55a expresses:

> רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר דְּאָמְרִי תַּרְוַיְיהוּ: כָּל זְמַן שֶׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קַיָּים — מִזְבֵּחַ מְכַפֵּר עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעַכְשָׁיו, שֻׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מְכַפֵּר עָלָיו.
>
> Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Elazar both say: As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel's transgressions. Now that it is destroyed, a person's table atones for his transgressions (BT *Berakhot 55a*).

With the home being utilised as ritual space, the rabbinic anxiety mentioned above is unsurprisingly heightened. There was the need to maintain a level of purity in the home fit for ritual use, but also the constant struggle of said space being rendered impure by the circumstances of mundane life. Domestic space, by its very nature, is where the comings and goings of everyday life are performed. The problem was that, unlike other

[16] Eireann Marshall and Fiona McHardy, *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization* (LondonNew York: Routledge, 2006), 1 as cited in Or 2010.

[17] Norma Baumel Joseph, "Introduction: Feeding an Identity-Gender, Food, and Survival," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 5 (2002): pp. 7-13, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40326550, 7.

sacred spaces, the home is a liminal space, in constant transition between sacred and profane, or perhaps more correctly stated as being both sacred and profane simultaneously; a sort of Schröndinger's home if you will.

Before fully engaging in the discourse of domestic space and gender, we must first examine the rabbinic constructions and conceptions of the larger category of *space*. To accomplish this, I turn to the work of Charlotte Fonrobert, who has addressed this question in her article "From Separatism to Urbanism: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Rabbinic 'Eruv". Though her work is primarily concerned with the rabbinic innovation of the Eruv and thus dealing with the laws of Shabbat, I find her discussion of neighbourhoods and domestic space to be very helpful to the discussion at hand. To start, Fonrobert makes it clear that the biblical law does not itself provide language that distinguishes the category of space, nor does it name specifically designated spaces, such as houses, courtyards, and tents as possessing their own distinctiveness. Rather, these separate 'domains' are part of a rabbinic legislative vocabulary.[18] Fonrobert clearly demonstrates how the creation of the Eruv is not only about providing forms of leniency on Shabbat but rather is key in the creation of and maintenance of rabbinic Jewish identity:

> The rabbis… constitute their version of Israel, their choice designation of the collectivity their halakhic work constructs, around equivalent poles. The first is obviously the study of Torah, rabbinically reinforced by the concept of oral Torah, which becomes the main constituent factor to establish the rabbinic *verus Israel*. The — pole, I suggest here, similarly constituted by property, that is by the 'eruv and the symbolic merging of individual residential spaces…the rabbis' Israel and its 'eruv is constituted precisely there, in the presence, nay, in the midst of and together with other kinds of Jews of various shades and colors and non-Jews, of apostates and

[18] Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, "From Separatism to Urbanism: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Rabbinic Eruv," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11, no. 1 (2004): 47.

> transgressors. The ‘eruv then becomes a means of maintaining the integrity of the collective identity of Israel.[19]

In this article, Fonrobert clearly identifies the creation of boundaries in Mishnah Eruvin as an identity indicator that marks and reinforces rabbinic authority. It is no wonder that the rabbis—looking to fashion themselves as the heirs and maintainers of “true Judaism”—chose to tightly regulate both the liminal space of the home and bodies of women/wives in a similar fashion. In fact, in Baker’s words, “in a number of rabbinic constructions, a house is not where a woman/wife is, but rather who and what she is.”[20]

One such passage that illustrates this conflation of woman and home comes from *mYoma* 1:1:

> שִׁבְעַת יָמִים קֹדֶם יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים מַפְרִישִׁין כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל מִבֵּיתוֹ לְלִשְׁכַּת פַּלְהֶדְרִין, וּמַתְקִינִין לוֹ כֹּהֵן אַחֵר תַּחְתָּיו, שֶׁמָּא יֶאֱרַע בּוֹ פְּסוּל. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, אַף אִשָּׁה אַחֶרֶת מַתְקִינִין לוֹ, שֶׁמָּא תָּמוּת אִשְׁתּוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ויקרא טז) וְכִפֶּר בַּעֲדוֹ וּבְעַד בֵּיתוֹ. בֵּיתוֹ, זוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ. אָמְרוּ לוֹ, אִם כֵּן, אֵין לַדָּבָר סוֹף:

> For seven days before the Day of Atonement they separated the high priest from his house into the counselors’ apartment, and they made ready for him another priest in his place in case there should befall him some ineligibility. Rabbi Judah says, “Also another wife they made ready for him in case his own wife were to die, as it is said, ‘and he shall atone on his own behalf and on behalf of his house’; ‘his house’—that is, his wife.” They said to him, “If so, there would be no end to the matter!”(*mYoma 1:1*)

Within this passage the rabbis appear to be determining the bare minimum requirement for the high priest to be able to meet the requirement to “atone on behalf of his house”. According to this passage, regardless of the number of members of his household—and even the physical building itself—the absence of a wife means the high priest is lacking

[19] Fonrobert, 57-58.

[20] Baker, 35.

"his house", at least for the purposes of atonement. Though Rabbi Judah's interlocutors reject his position that another wife must be ready for the high priest in case his own dies— "If so, there would be no end to the matter!". With regards to the number of additional wives that would need to be at hand— the identification of woman/wife with house/home is not seen as problematic and in fact remains unchallenged throughout the entirety of the later tradition of rabbinic commentary.[21]

It seems clear that this rabbinic association of woman/wife with house is more of a conflation, where the terms essentially function as synonyms for one another. "In the broadest terms then," Baker argues, "we find [in the passage from *mYoma* 1:1] a general equation of person and place: woman/wife = house/household." Further, she explains how " [p]resent in this equation are aspects of sex and purity, relationship and responsibility…"[22] More evidence for this reading of the text can be found in mNiddah 2:1:

> דֶּרֶךְ בְּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל, מְשַׁמְּשׁוֹת בִּשְׁנֵי עֵדִים, אֶחָד לוֹ וְאֶחָד לָהּ. הַצְּנוּעוֹת מְתַקְּנוֹת לָהֶן שְׁלִישִׁי, לְתַקֵּן אֶת הַבָּיִת:
>
> It is the practice of Jewish women, when they engage in sexual intercourse, to make use of two examination cloths: one for him and one for her; the pious prepare for themselves a third with which to set in order 'the house'.

And *mMikvaot* 8:4:

> הָאִשָּׁה שֶׁשִּׁמְּשָׁה בֵיתָהּ, וְיָרְדָה וְטָבְלָה, וְלֹא כִבְּדָה אֶת הַבַּיִת, כְּאִלּוּ לֹא טָבְלָה.
>
> The woman who has sexual intercourse and then goes down and immerses [in the ritual bath], and she has not [first] cleaned 'the house' [of residual

[21] Ibid., 48-50.

[22] Baker., 49.

> semen, a ritually impure substance], it is as though she has not immersed."[23]

Though the context of these statements is unquestionably one of the regulation and maintenance of ritual purity, the language of "serving her house" is not necessarily exclusive to cultic practice and concerns of purity, but is a broader and distinctly gendered euphemism for the act of sexual intercourse.[24] In Baker's words "it is in Palestinian rabbinic traditions that the familiar [ancient Mediterranean trope] of woman-within-the-house or woman-as-essential-element-of-the-house becomes *the house within the woman."*[25] As such, controlling the ritual purity of the home requires the woman/wife of a rabbinic Jew to be vigilant in ensuring that her body –which becomes the house/home—is itself ritually pure; when it is not, it is imperative that she follows the prescribed steps to return it to a fit, pure state.

The ones legislating how women were to properly [ideally?] maintain themselves were the very rabbis who sought to present themselves as the authoritative heirs of post-destruction Judaism. It is no wonder that the sages chose to utilise the language of purity that had previously been the domain of Temple practice and worship. In shifting many rituals to the domestic sphere, the rabbis appear to have mapped the Temple onto the home in order to create a fit ritual space. However, as discussed above, the home is a space in constant and necessary transition between sacred and profane, fit and unfit. The home is a space where people are continuously coming and going, the locus of a wide variety of activities in a family's life. It is an extremely difficult space to control as a site

[23] As cited in Baker, 52.

[24] Baker, 53. Baker also notes that the gendered term to "serve her house" is one that has no masculine parallel with in *tannaitic* literature.

[25] Ibid., 51-52.

of ritual purity. Similarly, the treatment of space and women's bodies have a distinct resonance in the text: women, ostensibly centred within the home, are by their very physiology in a liminal flux between purity and impurity.

How a woman comports herself has a direct effect on her own status and that of her household. In Cohn's words,

> This connection between the acts of the individual woman and her Judean culture and society is particularly strong because, as Mary Douglas showed nearly five decades ago, there is a cross-cultural phenomenon in which the individual body and its boundaries are associated on a metaphoric level with the body and boundaries of the social group. According to Douglas, it is necessary to "see in the body a symbol of society.[26]

As discussed, within the Mishnah's narrative, the Judean woman—more specifically wife—is not merely associated with the home, but *is* the home, as Baker convincingly argues. The purity of the home is dependent on a wife's proper maintenance of house and body as dictated by the minds behind the Mishnah. This all may belong to the "rabbinic fantasy" Peskowitz discusses, but provides a fascinating window into the construction and conceptions of gender during this period.

[26] Naftali S. Cohn, "What to Wear: Women's Adornment and Judean Identity in the Third Century Mishnah," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, by Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten, 22.

Chapter 3: Food, Space, and Gender

Choosing to follow the discussions of Baker and Peskowitz further, I posit that the gendering of domestic life is expressed not only in the wife/house trope but extends to the realms of food preparation and consumption. In short, within the text(s) being discussed, women are not only extensions of the home (and vice versa) but of food as well. In fact, I would go so far as to assert that food is an understudied key to the narrative. As Norma Baumel-Joseph asserts,

> Consider the ways in which food provides a mechanism for the preservation of tradition. This is more than mere nostalgia. Food contains the language of memory - fully embodied. It seems especially important, considering food's sensory presence, to note that the memory stimulation is not of the mind alone. Eating enables simultaneous participation in the past and the present; it is a strong link between generations. As food is ingested, the eater partakes of all its symbolism instantly, becoming one with a tradition seemingly without effort. Engaging all the human senses, food establishes or confirms social groups and interpersonal guardianship. It is filling and fun, and it can be experienced as a sign of caring and affection. And in most communities, especially those that retain traditional patterns and values, women own it, do it, and glory in it.[27]

Indeed, with the above-noted shift from the sacrificial altar to the dining table, it is clear that many social, economic, political, and ritual functions surround Temple procedure and worship. Thus, the inherited table is not "merely" the location of physical nurture or intake. It is, itself, located within a cultural lexicon of ethnic continuity, gender distinctiveness, and generational patterning. As mentioned above, Susan Starr Sered has demonstrated that food preparation by women was considered a sacred task. *Kashrut*, she argues, “raises food preparation from a task that every woman in the world

[27] Joseph, *Feeding an Identity,* 8.

unthinkingly does in order to put food on her family's table to a religious ritual par excellence .[28] Thus, food makes an excellent and understudied lens to understand rabbinic constructions of gender.

We can find this association of women with food preparation throughout the Mishnah in passages like *mNegaim* 2:4, which describes differential inspection for signs of *nega*, skin disease, for men and women:

> כֵּיצַד רְאִיַּת הַנֶּגַע. הָאִישׁ נִרְאֶה כְעוֹדֵר, וּכְמוֹסֵק זֵיתִים. הָאִשָּׁה כְּעוֹרֶכֶת וּכְמַנִּיקָה אֶת בְּנָהּ, כְּאוֹרֶגֶת בְּעוֹמְדִין לַשָּׁחִי לַיָּד הַיְמָנִית...
>
> How [does the priest conduct] the inspection of a Nega? A man is inspected as if he were hoeing or picking olives. A woman [is displayed] as if she were kneading dough or nursing her child, [or] like a weaver who stands [and displays] her armpit on her right arm [while weaving]...(m*Ketubot* 2:4).

Or further outlined in m*Ketubot* 5:5, where the wife's duties to her husband are outlined:

> אֵלּוּ מְלָאכוֹת שֶׁהָאִשָּׁה עוֹשָׂה לְבַעְלָהּ, טוֹחֶנֶת, וְאוֹפָה, וּמְכַבֶּסֶת, מְבַשֶּׁלֶת, וּמֵנִיקָה אֶת בְּנָהּ, מַצַּעַת לוֹ הַמִּטָּה, וְעוֹשָׂה בַצֶּמֶר. הִכְנִיסָה לוֹ שִׁפְחָה אַחַת, לֹא טוֹחֶנֶת, וְלֹא אוֹפָה וְלֹא מְכַבֶּסֶת. שְׁתַּיִם, אֵינָהּ מְבַשֶּׁלֶת וְאֵינָהּ מֵנִיקָה אֶת בְּנָהּ. שָׁלֹשׁ, אֵינָהּ מַצַּעַת לוֹ הַמִּטָּה וְאֵינָהּ עוֹשָׂה בַצֶּמֶר. אַרְבָּעָה, יוֹשֶׁבֶת בַּקְּתֶדְרָא. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, אֲפִלּוּ הִכְנִיסָה לוֹ מֵאָה שְׁפָחוֹת, כּוֹפָהּ לַעֲשׂוֹת בַּצֶּמֶר, שֶׁהַבַּטָּלָה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי זִמָּה. רַבָּן שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, אַף הַמַּדִּיר אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ מִלַּעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָה, יוֹצִיא וְיִתֵּן כְּתֻבָּתָהּ, שֶׁהַבַּטָּלָה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי שְׁעָמוּם:
>
> These are the [kinds of] work which the woman [is obligated to] do for her husband. She ***grinds***, and ***bakes***, and washes [clothes]. She ***cooks***, and nurses her child [emphasis added]. She makes his bed, and works with wool. If she brought in one maidservant [from her father's home], she does not [need to] grind, bake, or wash. [If she brought him] two [maidservants], she does not [need to] cook nor nurse her child. Three, she does not [need to] make his bed nor work with wool. Four, she may sit in an

[28] Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88-89.

> easy chair. Rabbi Eliezer says, "Even if she brought him a hundred maidservants, he may force her to work with wool, as idleness leads to licentiousness." Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says, "Similarly, one who, by vow, interdicts his wife from doing work, he must divorce her and pay [the amount of] her ketubah [monetary settlement payable to a woman upon divorce or the death of her husband], because idleness leads to dull-mindedness."(m*Ketubot* 5:5)

I would add to this that both women and food are subject to similar strictures as to their fit or unfit, pure or impure status. Women's bodies are porous, in a constant state of flux, and thus vulnerable to impurity. When it comes to the fitness of food, the same purity or 'fitness language' appears, quite often in direct conjunction with the presence of a woman in the same passage.

This can be seen in the following passage from *mSheviit* 5:9 that discusses which kitchen implements the wife of a rabbinic Jew may share with a less-observant/non-rabbinic Jewish woman,[29] in this case specifically with a woman who does not observe the Sabbatical year in their agricultural activities:

> מַשְׁאֶלֶת אִשָּׁה לַחֲבֶרְתָּהּ הַחֲשׁוּדָה עַל הַשְּׁבִיעִית נָפָה וּכְבָרָה וְרֵחַיִם וְתַנּוּר. אֲבָל לֹא תָבוֹר וְלֹא תִטְחַן עִמָּהּ. אֵשֶׁת חָבֵר מַשְׁאֶלֶת לְאֵשֶׁת עַם הָאָרֶץ נָפָה וּכְבָרָה, וּבוֹרֶרֶת וְטוֹחֶנֶת וּמְרַקֶּדֶת עִמָּהּ. אֲבָל מְשַׁתַּטְתִּיל הַמַּיִם, לֹא תִגַּע אֶצְלָהּ, שֶׁאֵין מַחְזִיקִין יְדֵי עוֹבְרֵי עֲבֵרָה. וְכֵן לֹא אָמְרוּ אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי דַרְכֵי שָׁלוֹם. וּמַחֲזִיקִין יְדֵי נָכְרִים בַּשְּׁבִיעִית, אֲבָל לֹא יְדֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְשׁוֹאֲלִין בִּשְׁלוֹמָן, מִפְּנֵי דַרְכֵי שָׁלוֹם:
>
> The wife of a Chaver [status marking those who scrupulously observe tithes and purity laws] may lend to the wife of an *Am HaAretz* [status marking those who are lax in observing tithes and purity laws] a sieve and a sifter and may sort, grind and sift with her. But once she wets [the flour], she may not touch it, as one may not assist transgressors. (m*Sheviit* 5:9)

[29] I use less-observant here rather than un-observant as it is unclear whether the contrast between the *Chaver* and the *Am Ha'Aretz* is the absolute distinction between observant and non-observant, but between punctilious and less punctilious in their respective observance of mitzvot.

Here the wife of a *Chaver* may indeed lend specific tools to the non-rabbinic wife, and even go through the preliminary steps of grain to flour preparation with her. However, as soon as water is added to said flour—bringing it into the realms of dough to be consumed in its final form as bread—it would be inappropriate for the rabbinic wife to continue helping, lest she be assisting in the *Am HaAretz* transgression of sabbatical year prohibitions.

Another interesting passage comes from m*Toharoth* 7:4, which features a discussion of the purity of the home when women are grinding (grain).

> אֵשֶׁת חָבֵר שֶׁהִנִּיחָה לְאֵשֶׁת עַם הָאָרֶץ טוֹחֶנֶת בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתָהּ, פָּסְקָה הָרֵחַיִם, הַבַּיִת טָמֵא. לֹא פָסְקָה הָרֵחַיִם, אֵין טָמֵא אֶלָּא עַד מָקוֹם שֶׁהִיא יְכוֹלָה לִפְשֹׁט אֶת יָדָהּ וְלִגָּע. הָיוּ שְׁתַּיִם, בֵּין כָּךְ וּבֵין כָּךְ, הַבַּיִת טָמֵא, שֶׁאַחַת טוֹחֶנֶת וְאַחַת מְשַׁמֶּשֶׁת, דִּבְרֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר. וַחֲכָמִים אוֹמְרִים, אֵין טָמֵא אֶלָּא עַד מָקוֹם שֶׁהֵן יְכוֹלִין לִפְשֹׁט אֶת יָדָן וְלִגָּע:
>
> The wife of a chaver [one who is meticulous about keeping all his foods pure] who left the wife of an *am ha'aretz* grinding in her house [i.e., the house of the wife of the *chaver*], if the milling stopped, the house is impure. If the milling did not stop, things are only impure as far as to where she could extend her hand and touch. If there were two of them [i.e., two wives of *amei ha'aretz*], the house is impure regardless, because one woman could grind while the other goes around touching [other vessels in the house], according to Rabbi Meir. And the Sages say: [even when there are two of them] things are only impure as far as to where they could extend their hands and touch (m*Toharoth* 7:4).

It is fascinating how the lending of millstones and sieves and indeed grinding grain alongside "transgressors' " is kosher, but adding water to flour is where the line is drawn. Seemingly, once the flour is transformed into dough—thus undoubtedly intended for human consumption—the food item takes on a new status and significance; a significance gained, I would argue, because of its shift from raw material into a state that is recognisably food.

Chapter 4: Reading Behind the Text

Massekhet Betsah

One source that deals in large part with the minutiae associated with food preparation and ritual observances is *Massekhet Betsah*. More specifically, the major focus of *Betsah* is which labours may or may not be performed on festivals, especially in connection with food preparation. Interestingly, despite the subject matter dealing with activities that often get coded as female in the rabbinic system, *Betsah* actually mentions far fewer women than any other tractate in *Seder Moed*, the order of Mishnah in which it is a part. Despite this fact, it is possible to glean insight into women's daily activities, ritual/halachic knowledge base and social power behind the male language put forth in this tractate.[30] As Tamara Or asserts in the introduction of her Feminist Commentary on the text, *Betsah "*sheds light not just on the constraints put on women by the male authorities, but also— and with astonishing consistency— on the ways in which women adapted to social and political conditions, especially in their field of action. Tractate *Betsah* paints a picture not just of control and power, but of trust and knowledge as well."[31]

Tractate *Betsah* contains many examples where women's knowledge was trusted and consulted, yet at the same time this trust was not explicitly transmitted in the text. The trust women gained was therefore a sign both of them being oppressed and of having power.[32] Although *Betsah* also records that women's actions were considered to be

[30] Or, 10-11.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 12.

subject to male supervision and their products to belong to men,[33] women's behaviour was still deemed to be halachically reliable, even while the male rabbi represented the normative behaviour, women's actions served as proof for halachic decisions within the tractate. In Or's words, "Although women in reality were still active and influential agents, the silencing of that agency created—intentionally or not—the future basis for the exclusion of women especially from the sacred realm of Judaism."[34] The cause of this development was, in the words of Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "the rabbinic capacity to project into the future a world that does not yet exist, but which is an authentic amplification of who the rabbis are."[35] In other words, the rabbinic (read: Male) control over the retention and transmission of Jewish law and tradition has painted a picture where men were not only the normative Jewish human, but also the only active subjects in any given sphere of influence. This in turn has led to the erasure of women as active subjects, or deemed passive or perceived as mistaken.[36]

The absence of explicit female subjects where you would expect to find them then becomes the allure for examining Betsah as a part of my project: ineffective, powerless actors need not be silenced, because they would hardly threaten established authority. Rather, as Or notes, " [t]he silencing of women's actions and knowledge can be seen within the tractate, together with the nearly invisible but powerful influence they in fact wielded. Weak and compliant women did not need to be silenced by men wanting to

[33] See *mKetubo*t 6:1.

[34] Or, 13.

[35] Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "Impact of Feminism on Rabbinic Studies," 102.

[36] Or, 12.

maintain their authority…"[37] Thus the curious absence of explicit female subjects in *Betsah* may in fact point to just how much influence they had in food preparation, and thus in the proper ritual observances of various holidays and festivals.

The following pages mark an exploration of an excerpted Mishnayot of Betsah where food and food preparation are explicitly dealt with. The first we encounter is in *Betsah* 1:6:

> בֵּית שַׁמַּאי אוֹמְרִים, אֵין מוֹלִיכִין חַלָּה וּמַתָּנוֹת לַכֹּהֵן בְּיוֹם טוֹב, בֵּין שֶׁהוּרְמוּ מֵאֶמֶשׁ, בֵּין שֶׁהוּרְמוּ מֵהַיּוֹם. וּבֵית הִלֵּל מַתִּירִין. אָמְרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית שַׁמַּאי, גְּזֵרָה שָׁוָה, חַלָּה וּמַתָּנוֹת מַתָּנָה לַכֹּהֵן, וּתְרוּמָה מַתָּנָה לַכֹּהֵן, כְּשֵׁם שֶׁאֵין מוֹלִיכִין אֶת הַתְּרוּמָה, כָּךְ אֵין מוֹלִיכִין אֶת הַמַּתָּנוֹת. אָמְרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית הִלֵּל, לֹא, אִם אֲמַרְתֶּם בַּתְּרוּמָה, שֶׁאֵינוֹ זַכַּאי בַּהֲרָמָתָהּ, תֹּאמְרוּ בַּמַּתָּנוֹת, שֶׁזַּכַּאי בַּהֲרָמָתָן
>
> Beit Shammai say: One may not bring a dough-offering (*Hallah*) or any of the other meat gifts, to a priest on a Festival, though it is permitted to separate them from an animal slaughtered on a Festival. This is prohibited regardless of whether they were separated last evening, i.e., before the Festival, or whether they were separated today. And Beit Hillel permit it. Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel: This *halakha* can be derived by an analogy: *Ḥalla* and the other gifts are both considered a gift to the priest, and likewise *teruma* separated from produce is also a gift to the priest. Just as you agree that one may not bring *teruma* to a priest on a Festival, so too, one may not bring the other gifts. Beit Hillel said to them: No, this analogy is incorrect. If you said that you derive the halakha from *teruma*, where its separation is not allowed on the Festival, how will you say the same with regard to the gifts from an animal or *ḥalla*, concerning which their separation is allowed on the Festival? Since it is not prohibited to separate these gifts, they may likewise be brought to a priest(m*Betsah* 1:6).

This mishnah is a prime example of where one would expect to find a female subject, but only masculine verbs and subjects are to be found; the separating out of the dough-offering or hallah, is a mitzvah that the rabbis name in *mShabbat* 2:6

[37]Or, 12.

as one of three which are tied to women.[38] Interestingly, the text of this mishnah utilises the masculine plural verb-form, which may necessarily be including women in a collective due to the coding of the performance of this particular mitzvah as female in *mShabbat* 2:6.

The next mishnah details how one can go about grinding, or pounding spices for use on festival days, an activity that is kosher so long as the spice preparer goes about the preparation in a slightly different manner than they would on a normal *chol* day:

בֵּית שַׁמַּאי אוֹמְרִים, תְּבָלִין נִדּוֹכִין בְּמָדוֹךְ שֶׁל עֵץ, וְהַמֶּלַח בְּפַּךְ, וּבְעֵץ הַפָּרוּר.
וּבֵית הִלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, תְּבָלִין נִדּוֹכִין כְּדַרְכָּן בְּמָדוֹךְ שֶׁל אֶבֶן, וְהַמֶּלַח בְּמָדוֹךְ שֶׁל עֵץ

> Beit Shammai say: Spices may be pounded on a Festival in a slightly unusual manner, with a wooden pestle, and salt may be pounded only with an earthenware flask or with a wooden pot ladle, in a manner very different from that of a weekday. And Beit Hillel say: Spices may be pounded in their usual manner, even with a stone pestle, and as for salt, although it must be pounded in an irregular manner, a slight modification such as pounding it with a wooden pestle is enough to render the act permitted(*mBetsah* 1:7)

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[38] עַל שָׁלֹשׁ עֲבֵרוֹת נָשִׁים מֵתוֹת בִּשְׁעַת לֵדָתָן, עַל שֶׁאֵינָן זְהִירוֹת בַּנִּדָּה וּבַחַלָּה וּבְהַדְלָקַת הַנֵּר

For three transgressions women are punished and die during childbirth: For the fact that they are not careful in observing the laws of a menstruating woman, and in separating *ḥalla* from the dough, and in lighting the Shabbat lamp (*mShabbat* 2:6).

(Con't)In this passage, the death of women in childbirth is explained through their lack of punctiliousness in observing three mitzvot- the rules of separation during menstruation (*niddah*), separating the sacred portion of dough (*hallah*), and kindling light on *erev* Shabbat. Naftali Cohn notes that it is significant that when enumerating only three ritual practices that are specifically tied to women, one pertains to a woman's body and two pertain to the home and the domestic activities of the home. Naftali Cohn 2011, 42.

A more thorough discussion of separating *hallah* and coding of the "*Hannah Mitzvot* " as female will follow in my treatment of *mHallah* in the later pages of this Capstone.

Here too, we find only masculine verb forms employed. Spices mark an interesting subsection of food preparation, but the following mishnah returns to food proper, detailing the preparation of legumes, where the legume needs to be separated from its pod or stalk:

> הַבּוֹרֵר קִטְנִית בְּיוֹם טוֹב, בֵּית שַׁמַּאי אוֹמְרִים, בּוֹרֵר אֹכֶל וְאוֹכֵל. וּבֵית הִלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, בּוֹרֵר כְּדַרְכּוֹ בְּחֵיקוֹ, בְּקָנוֹן וּבְתַמְחוּי, אֲבָל לֹא בְטַבְלָא וְלֹא בְנָפָה וְלֹא בִכְבָרָה. רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, אַף מֵדִיחַ וְשׁוֹלֶה

> He who sorts out pulses on a festival day, Beit Shammai say: He makes his selection of food and eats it right away; and Beit Hillel say: He makes his selection in the usual way, using his lap, a basket, or a dish; but not using a board, sifter or sieve and preparing large quantities for the next day. Rabban Gamliel says: He also rinses and separates the husks. (*mBetsah* 1:8).

According to Beit Shammai, one ought to select and use the edible sections and place the separated sections aside for use after the festival. However, Beit Hillel holds that one may go about separating them as they usually would during the week, with the caveat that one may not prepare more food than is necessary for consumption during the festival. The Mishnah uses the term בּוֹרֵר ("the one who sorts") here, again employing the masculine singular verb-form. Or notes that this is an interesting choice on the part of the Mishnah, because the picking and sorting of pulses were primarily performed by women. Female subjects might again be implied despite the default of the masculine forms, as when the subject matter is taken up in the Bavli; in *Betsah* 12b-14b, women are explicitly

mentioned, and the gemara draws proof on how this is done based on their actions.[39]

The next chapter opens with the problem of when a festival falls on Erev Shabbat:

> יוֹם טוֹב שֶׁחָל לִהְיוֹת עֶרֶב שַׁבָּת, לֹא יְבַשֵּׁל אָדָם בַּתְּחִלָּה מִיּוֹם טוֹב לַשַּׁבָּת, אֲבָל מְבַשֵּׁל הוּא לְיוֹם טוֹב, וְאִם הוֹתִיר, הוֹתִיר לַשַּׁבָּת, וְעוֹשֶׂה תַּבְשִׁיל מֵעֶרֶב יוֹם טוֹב וְסוֹמֵךְ עָלָיו לַשַּׁבָּת. בֵּית שַׁמַּאי אוֹמְרִים, שְׁנֵי תַבְשִׁילִין. וּבֵית הִלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, תַּבְשִׁיל אֶחָד. וְשָׁוִין בְּדָג וּבֵיצָה שֶׁעָלָיו שֶׁהֵן שְׁנֵי תַבְשִׁילִין. אֲכָלוֹ אוֹ שֶׁאָבַד, לֹא יְבַשֵּׁל עָלָיו בַּתְּחִלָּה. וְאִם שִׁיֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ כָּל שֶׁהוּא, סוֹמֵךְ עָלָיו לַשַּׁבָּת:
>
> When a Festival occurs on *erev* Shabbat, a person may not cook on the Festival day with the intention to cook for Shabbat, but he may cook on that day for the Festival itself, and if he left over any food, he left it over for Shabbat. One may prepare a cooked dish designated for Shabbat [*eiruv tavshilin*] on a Festival eve and rely on it to cook on the Festival for Shabbat. Beit Shammai say: The eruv must consist of two cooked dishes, and Beit Hillel say: One cooked dish is enough. And they both agree with regard to a fish and the egg that is fried on it that these are considered two cooked dishes for this purpose. If one ate the food prepared before the Festival as an *eiruv* and none of it remained for Shabbat, or if it was lost, he may not rely on it and cook with the initial intent to cook for Shabbat. If he left any part of the *eiruv*, he may continue to rely on it to cook for Shabbat (*mBetsah* 2:1)

Since cooking is a prohibited labour on Shabbat, food must be prepared ahead of time. This becomes all the more complicated when a festival day leads into Shabbat; in a time before refrigerators, there was only so much food one could reasonably prepare ahead of time. Thus, the rabbis established the ritual of the *eruv tavshilin*; Normally, cooking is allowed on major festival days, but only for consumption on that day, and not for consumption after the holiday. If such a festival occurs on Friday, cooking for Shabbat is allowed according to Biblical law, but the rabbis forbade this in order to prevent

[39] Or, 40.

confusion on other years unless this ritual of *eruv tavshilin* is performed, which would remind the people of the reasons for the exception, or it is a facilitation continuing from prior preparation.

Here again, there is no explicit mention of women despite the subject matter being very much in a woman's working sphere. Interestingly, the corresponding Tosefta text highlights that women were the ones to perform this eruv labour:

> אין אופין מיום טוב למוצאי יו"ט אבל [ממלא כולה קדרה] בשר אפילו לא [אכל ממנו] אלא דבר מועט וממלא לו מיחם מים אפילו לא שתה [הימנו] אלא כוס אחד אבל האופה אינו אופה אלא כדי צרכו רשב"א אומר [ממלאה אשה את] התנור פת מפני שהפת [יפה כל זמן] שהתנור מלא.

> One does not bake from a festival day for the day after the festival, but one may fill a pot with meat, even if he ate only some small amount of it. And one may fill a kettle with water, even if he drank only a single glass of water. But he who bakes should bake only what he needs. Rabbi Shimeon ben Eleazar says: A woman may fill the oven with bread [for baking], for the bread [bakes] better when the oven is full.(*tBetsah* 2:3)

The ruling that a woman may fill her oven with bread is a legal leniency which holds for anyone who bakes at home. Judith Hauptman, in her book *Rereading the Mishnah,* asserts that because the material of the Tosefta is older than the Mishnah demonstrates that the compiler/redactor of the Mishnah made the conscious decision not to mention women in this discussion.[40] Or further adds that both Bavli and Yerushalmi mention the role of women in baking and in establishing an eruv.[41] This is a particularly strong example of where women clearly possessed ritual expertise and authority, and yet were erased or subsumed by male actors.

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[40] Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Mishnah: A New Approach to Ancient Jewish Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 86.

[41] Or, 50.

The Mishnah then goes on a tangent discussing where Beit Gamliel would hold by the same stringencies as Beit Shammai when it comes to preparation and serving of food on festival days:

שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל מַחֲמִיר כְּדִבְרֵי בֵית שַׁמַּאי, אֵין טוֹמְנִין אֶת הַחַמִּין מִיּוֹם טוֹב לַשַּׁבָּת, וְאֵין זוֹקְפִין אֶת הַמְּנוֹרָה בְיוֹם טוֹב, וְאֵין אוֹפִין פִּתִּין גְּרִיצִין אֶלָּא רְקִיקִין. אָמַר רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל, מִימֵיהֶן שֶׁל בֵּית אַבָּא לֹא הָיוּ אוֹפִין פִּתִּין גְּרִיצִין, אֶלָּא רְקִיקִין. אָמְרוּ לוֹ, מַה נַּעֲשֶׂה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ, שֶׁהָיוּ מַחֲמִירִין עַל עַצְמָן וּמְקִלִּין לְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל, לִהְיוֹת אוֹפִין פִּתִּין גְּרִיצִין וְחֹרֵי:

Rabban Gamliel was stringent about three things in accordance with the statement of Beit Shammai: One may not insulate hot food on a Festival for Shabbat *ab initio*, but rather one ought to do so on the eve of the Festival; and one may not set up a metal candelabrum that fell on a Festival; and one may not bake thick loaves on a Festival but only thin ones, due to the great effort entailed in preparing the former. Rabban Gamliel said: From the days of my father's household they would never bake thick loaves on a Festival, but only thin ones. The Sages said to him: What shall we do for your father's household, who were stringent with themselves but lenient with all of the Jewish people, to allow them to bake thick loaves and cakes baked on coals (*mBetsah* 2:6).

אַף הוּא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים לְהָקֵל, מְכַבְּדִין בֵּין הַמִּטּוֹת, וּמַנִּיחִין אֶת הַמֶּגְמָר בְּיוֹם טוֹב, וְעוֹשִׁין גְּדִי מְקֻלָּס בְּלֵילֵי פְסָחִים. וַחֲכָמִים אוֹסְרִין

Rabban Gamliel also said three things as leniencies, in opposition to the view of most of the Sages: One may sweep the room of the couches on a Festival, i.e., the dining room, where they would recline on couches to eat, as there is no concern that by sweeping the room one might come to fill in the holes and level the ground. And one may place incense consisting of fragrant herbs on burning coals in order to perfume one's house on a Festival. And one may prepare a whole kid goat, meaning a kid goat roasted whole, with its entrails over its head, on the night of Passover, as was the custom when they roasted the Paschal lamb in the Temple. However, the rabbis prohibit all three practices (*mBetsah* 2:7).

Rabban Gamaliel holds that it is forbidden to bake large loaves on festival days, and that only thin loaves are permitted. This is meant to prevent one from making too much bread on the festival, lest they make some for after the festival. Unsurprisingly, Beit Hillel holds the more lenient stance that it is permitted to bake large loaves, since bread cooks better when the oven is full; over all Beit Hillel in general is far more lenient when it comes to cooking on Festivals. The Sages of the Mishnah clearly believe that Beit Shammai and Beit Gamliel took upon extra stringencies for themselves, but that these strictures were not intended to inform the general practice of all rabbinic Jews. Hillel's interpretation that large loaves are permissible seems to echo the *tBetsah* 2:3 text that highlights the permissibility of women filling their ovens, because an oven filled with dough bakes with more ease.

mBetsah 5:1 continues to deal with laws concerning produce set out to dry and things that one may and may not do with this produce on festivals:

> מַשִׁילִין פֵּרוֹת דֶּרֶךְ אֲרֻבָּה בְּיוֹם טוֹב, אֲבָל לֹא בְשַׁבָּת, וּמְכַסִּים פֵּרוֹת בְּכֵלִים מִפְּנֵי הַדֶּלֶף,
> וְכֵן כַּדֵּי יַיִן וְכַדֵּי שֶׁמֶן. וְנוֹתְנִין כְּלִי תַּחַת הַדֶּלֶף בְּשַׁבָּת

> One may lower produce, which had been laid out on a roof to dry, into the house through a skylight on a Festival, in order to prevent it from becoming ruined in the rain. Although it is a strenuous activity, it is permitted to do so on a Festival in order to prevent a financial loss; however, one may not do so on Shabbat. And one may cover produce inside a building with cloths to prevent damage due to a leak in the ceiling over it, and similarly one may cover jugs of wine and jugs of oil for the same reason. And one may place a vessel beneath a leak in order to catch the water on Shabbat, to prevent it from dirtying the house (*mBetsah* 5:1).

This mishnah deals with a person who has put produce up onto the roof to dry out on a festival day and then sees that it is going to rain. The mishnah allows for the

produce to be dropped down through a trap-door in the roof because this is not considered to be a lot of work. The person performing the labour is not allowed to take them down through a window or through the door because this is a greater amount of work. Furthermore, they only allowed this on festivals; on Shabbat, one would just have to suffer the loss of the food.

Importantly, the removal of produce from the roof, or the covering up on it must not be for the produce's consumption on the festival day, but rather to ensure it is not spoiled by the rain. Here again, we find only masculine verb forms utilised, though one can imagine that both the work of preserving produce and ensuring its usability could just as easily be performed by the women of the house. This mishnah also grants us a fascinating window into some of the practices of food preservation that were employed in the rabbinic world.

mBetsah 5:2 deals with three categories of acts that are prohibited by the rabbis on Shabbat and on festivals. They are all considered to be prohibited *d'rabbanan*, by the rabbis and not *d'oraita*, by the Torah:

כֹּל שֶׁחַיָּבִין עָלָיו מִשּׁוּם שְׁבוּת, מִשּׁוּם רְשׁוּת, מִשּׁוּם מִצְוָה, בְּשַׁבָּת, חַיָּבִין עָלָיו בְּיוֹם טוֹב. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן מִשּׁוּם שְׁבוּת, לֹא עוֹלִין בָּאִילָן, וְלֹא רוֹכְבִין עַל גַּבֵּי בְהֵמָה, וְלֹא שָׂטִין עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם, וְלֹא מְטַפְּחִין, וְלֹא מְסַפְּקִין, וְלֹא מְרַקְּדִין. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן מִשּׁוּם רְשׁוּת, לֹא דָנִין, וְלֹא מְקַדְּשִׁין, וְלֹא חוֹלְצִין, וְלֹא מְיַבְּמִין. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן מִשּׁוּם מִצְוָה, לֹא מַקְדִּישִׁין, וְלֹא מַעֲרִיכִין, וְלֹא מַחֲרִימִין, וְלֹא מַגְבִּיהִין תְּרוּמָה וּמַעֲשֵׂר. כָּל אֵלּוּ בְּיוֹם טוֹב אָמְרוּ, קַל וָחֹמֶר בְּשַׁבָּת. אֵין בֵּין יוֹם טוֹב לְשַׁבָּת אֶלָּא אֹכֶל נֶפֶשׁ בִּלְבָד׃

:

Any [activity] from which one is obligated to abstain because of *shevut*, because of reshut, [or] because of a mitzvah on Shabbat one is also obligated to [abstain from it] on a festival day. These are prohibited because of *shevut*: They do not climb a tree, nor ride upon a beast; nor swim in the water, nor clap hands, nor slap the thigh, nor dance. And these are [activities which are prohibited] by reasons of *reshut*: They do not sit in

> judgement, nor betroth nor perform *halitsah* nor perform *yibum*. And these are the activities which are outright mitzvot but were prohibited by the rabbis: One may not consecrate nor make vows nor make a harem nor separate *terumah* or tithes. All these [prohibitions] were promulgated for a festival, surely they apply to the Shabbat. There is no difference between Shabbat and festivals except for the preparation of food (*mBetsah* 5:2).

The three categories are: *Shevut* mandated rest on Shabbat. These are activities that are prohibited because they are generally not in the spirit of the day or because by doing one of them one might come to transgress a biblical prohibition. *Reshut* optional activities. These have some aspects of mitzvah in them but can be done on other days. Therefore one does not perform them on festivals or Shabbat. The main take-away from this mishnah is that only actions which are allowed on festivals but prohibited on Shabbat have to do with food preparation. All other Shabbat prohibitions are in place.

This mishnah is cited throughout rabbinic literature as the primary source for discussions of the permissibility of marriage on Shabbat.[42] In general, rabbinic law speaks of husbands as owners (בעל) and wives as being owned (בעולה).[43] When this mishnah deals with the act of betrothal, it is directly speaking to men as the sole active participants in betrothal. Interestingly, the parallel text in the Tosefta opens with several prohibitions dealing with weaving on Shabbat and festival days, and then goes into an identical discussion of prohibitions around marriage. As mentioned in earlier sections of this capstone, Miriam Peskowitz has demonstrated that weaving was usually an activity performed by women, whereas writing was a distinctly male practice.[44] It is a point of interest that the Mishnah is only directed towards men, whereas the Tosefta parallel

[42] Or, 54.

[43] Ibid.

[44] See Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies*.

could equally be addressed to both men and women by the *shevut* prohibitions. In Tamara Or's words:

> [I]n both tannaitic sources betrothal in general and betrothal on the Shabbat as well as *yibum* in general and *yibum* on Shabbat are only directed at men. Yet, the Tosefta, which speaks impersonally, includes women by addressing them at the beginning and at the end of the discussion, whereas the Mishnah is addressed exclusively to men.[45]

For the second time in this tractate, the later text of the Mishnah erases the presence of women as part of the collective whole that is found in the earlier Tosefta text. This is differences in gendered approach between the Tosfesta and Mishnah continues into the following *mishnayot* as well, with a discussion of distances one can permissible travel on Shabbat and festivals, as well as how far one can take an animal or vessel:

> הַבְּהֵמָה וְהַכֵּלִים כְּרַגְלֵי הַבְּעָלִים. הַמּוֹסֵר בְּהֶמְתּוֹ לִבְנוֹ אוֹ לְרוֹעֶה, הֲרֵי אֵלּוּ כְרַגְלֵי הַבְּעָלִים. כֵּלִים הַמְיֻחָדִין לְאַחַד מִן הָאַחִין שֶׁבַּבַּיִת, הֲרֵי אֵלּוּ כְרַגְלָיו. וְשֶׁאֵין מְיֻחָדִין, הֲרֵי אֵלּוּ כִמְקוֹם שֶׁהוֹלְכִין:

> The status of animals and vessels on Festivals is as the feet of their owner, meaning that one's animals and vessels are governed by his own travel limitations on Shabbat and Festivals. In the case of one who delivers his animal to his son or to a shepherd before the Festival to care for it, these are as the feet of the owner, rather than those of the son or the shepherd. Vessels that have been inherited by several brothers and have not been divided among them but are still owned jointly, if they are designated for the use of one of the brothers in the house and the other brothers have no part in them, these are as his feet, and they are subject to his travel limitations. And as for those that are not designated for any particular brother, these are as a place where they may all go. They are limited by the travel limitations of every one of the brothers, as when one brother made a joining of Shabbat boundaries [*eiruv teḥumin*] and the others did not (*mBetsah* 5:3).

[45] Or, 55.

הַשּׁוֹאֵל כְּלִי מֵחֲבֵרוֹ מֵעֶרֶב יוֹם טוֹב, כְּרַגְלֵי הַשּׁוֹאֵל. בְּיוֹם טוֹב, כְּרַגְלֵי הַמַּשְׁאִיל. הָאִשָּׁה שֶׁשָּׁאֲלָה מֵחֲבֶרְתָּהּ תְּבָלִין וּמַיִם וּמֶלַח לְעִסָּתָהּ, הֲרֵי אֵלּוּ כְרַגְלֵי שְׁתֵּיהֶן. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה פּוֹטֵר בְּמַיִם, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵין בָּהֶן מַמָּשׁ:

> One who borrows a vessel from another on the eve of a Festival, it is at the feet of the borrower rather than the owner, as when the Festival began the vessel established its place of rest in possession of the borrower. However, if he borrowed it on the Festival itself, it is as the feet of the lender, since at the start of the Festival its place of rest was established in the possession of its owner. And similarly, a woman who borrowed spices from another to put in a dish, or water and salt to put in her dough, these foods, i.e., the dish and the dough, which contain ingredients belonging to both parties, are as the feet of both of them; they are limited by the travel limitations of both parties. Rabbi Yehuda exempts one from travel limitations in the case of water, because it has no substance in the mixture and therefore is not considered connected to the original owner (*mBetsah* 5:4).

The rabbis limit the distance the amount one can walk on Shabbat and festival days with a restriction known as the *tehum (תחום),* meaning boundary. This law allows for one to walk 2000 cubits beyond their established dwelling place for Shabbat or the given festival.[46] *mBetsah* adds additional strictures to these laws by addressing the *tehum* movement restrictions even within one's property. Given that carrying utensils and vessels outside of the private confines of one's home is prohibited on Shabbat, *mBetsah* 5:3-5 takes up the question of how far objects may be transported on festival days. The presence of an eruv symbolically transforms public domain into a large private area, thus allowing a person to carry objects outside where they would elsewise only be permissible to carry inside one's house.

In this mishnah, we find an array of examples for this practice, but the last one is specifically singles out female subjects as the actors; Even within the confines of this

[46] For a more complete discussion of the laws of *tehum* please see Yisroel Reisman and Hersh Goldwurm, *Tractate Betsa*h, *bBets* 37a.

massekhet, where women have seemingly been grammatically erased from the vast majority of activities—even those which we know were considered "women's work"—when it comes to the preparation of dough, women are the ones the rabbis have doing the work! Indeed, here we see the rabbis detailing how women are the ones responsible for making the dough and working in concert with their neighbours, borrowing ingredients and sharing cooking implements with each other for the express purpose of preparing dough.[47]

Noting this fascinating departure from the norm, Tamara Or notes that

> [t]here are two possibilities for interpreting the carrying options for women on festival days: (i) The Mishnah fixes general rules about transporting items from one *tehum* to another. These restrictions—like other rules throughout the Tractate *Betsah*—albeit formulated in male language and for male subjects, include women; (ii) By stating that the dough may be carried only within the common *tehum* of both women, the Mishnah rules that women are not included in the above mentioned rulings and are limited in their mobility as a whole.[48]

Here, the dough is presented not as part of a rule specifically pertaining to women, but as an example of an item consisting of various ingredients from two different owners with two different *tehumim*. That the mishnah explains the specifics of a general rule with an item— the dough—so clearly associated with women's working sphere, despite the text usual impetus to subsum female subjects into male, demonstrates the core importance of women's sphere activity to the underlying principle of the entire tractate, which can be summed up as: "There is no difference between Shabbat and festivals except for the preparation of food". The shift in grammar also indicates clearly whose work the baking and cooking for festivals was: The women.

[47] Or, 58-59.

[48] Ibid., 59.

As continues to be seen, besides being identified as the preparers of bread, women in the Mishnah are frequently being imagined to be lending items associated with baking to and from their female neighbours, and the above mishnah is a prime example of this. Other instances include the previously mentioned *mShevi'it* 5:9, where a woman is imagined lending sieves, a millstone, and an oven to her female neighbour, and in a second example she is imagined preparing bread together with her neighbour--who happens to be a non-rabbinic Jewish woman.[49] As Naftali Cohn points out, these examples where women are pictured baking and sharing utensils shows how frequently the normal, typical activity of women is constructed as domestic activity and "how frequently the normal, typical location of women is constructed as the home."[50] Nevertheless, it is impossible not to notice again that the Mishnah records women only in a deviation from the norm. In Or's words, "[w]hile the male verb-forms and the male subjects were recorded when fixing a rule, women were recorded when the Mishnah speaks about exemptions of specifications of rabbinic regulation."[51]

mBetsah provides numerous examples of where we need to read behind the grammar of the text to find the women who likely performed these tasks. When it comes to the preparation of dough, however, even the norm of male as default actor falls by the wayside.For the next part of this exploration, it stands to reason that we would examine the tractate that deals with the subject head on: *Massekhet Hallah*.

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[49] Additionally, women are depicted as borrowing bread in *mShabbat* 23:1, *mBava Metsia* 5:9 and *mToharoth* 7:4.

[50] Cohn, *Domestic Women*, 43.

[51] Or, 59-60.

Chapter 5: When is Dough Really Dough?

Massesket Hallah

The making of dough and the baking of bread is a continuous trope in the Mishnah's imagining of women's lives. As Cohn notes

> Quite frequently – especially in tractate Hallah– the typical woman is pictured in her home baking alone or together with her neighbour. In *Hallah* 4:1, for instance, there are several variations of a case about "two women who were baking two kab-volumes worth of dough and the dough touched … ;" in *Hallah* 2:3, which seems nearly pornographic, a woman is imagined to be baking naked (presumably in her home); and in *Pesahim* 3:4, women are imagined to bake Matzah together before Passover.[52]

Dough and *hallah* are seemingly singled out for legislation beyond that of other foodstuffs. There is even an entire tractate of the Mishnah dedicated to the laws surrounding the ritual separation of dough; Masseket *Hallah*. It is in this Massekhet that we can find evidence of the coding of dough production—for home consumption and use—as female.

What specifically is *hallah* and how does it come to be gendered in this way? According to the Hebrew Bible, anyone who makes bread dough is obligated to separate a portion of it (*hallah*) for the priest (Numbers 15:17-21). Though the word *hallah* simply means a loaf of bread, halachically speaking, it is the separating out of a portion of dough from what is being kneaded and presenting it to the priest. This piece is termed *hallah*. Rabbinic mandates hold that any dough made of wheat, barley, spelt, oat, or rye is subject to the performance of this commandment. The priest and his family would eat the *hallah* while in a state of ritual purity. If *hallah* was not separated from the dough, it

[52] Cohn, *Domestic Women*, 42-43.

had to be separated from the baked loaf. Until *hallah* is separated, one is forbidden from eating either the dough or the baked end product. According to biblical law, *hallah* is only separated within the boundaries of the Land of Israel. However, the rabbis instituted the separation of *hallah* outside the borders of the land of Israel as well (cf BT *Kiddushin* 36b)[53].

Though the Hebrew Bible does not associate this commandment with women, the rabbis of the Mishnah do explicitly state that *hallah* is a woman's *mitzvah*, and come to associate women with its performance. In fact, out of all the commandments that apply to all of Israel, the rabbis single out three that are specifically for women, as seen in M.*Shabbat* 2:6:

> עַל שָׁלֹשׁ עֲבֵרוֹת נָשִׁים מֵתוֹת בְּשָׁעַת לֵדָתָן, עַל שֶׁאֵינָן זְהִירוֹת בַּנִּדָּה וּבַחַלָּה וּבְהַדְלָקַת הַנֵּר:
>
> For three transgressions women die when giving birth: for not being careful with respect to niddah (menstrual purity) and *hallah* and kindling the light (on the eve of Shabbat). (M. *Shabbat* 2:6).

These three commandments being coded as female is also found in the Midrash, as found in *Breishit Rabbah* 17:8:

> וּמִפְּנֵי מָה נִתַּן לָהּ מִצְוַת נִדָּה, עַל יְדֵי שֶׁשָּׁפְכָה דָּמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, לְפִיכָךְ נִתַּן לָהּ מִצְוַת נִדָּה. וּמִפְּנֵי מָה נִתַּן לָהּ מִצְוַת חַלָּה, עַל יְדֵי שֶׁקִּלְקְלָה אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶׁהָיָה גְּמַר חַלָּתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, לְפִיכָךְ נִתַּן לָהּ מִצְוַת חַלָּה. וּמִפְּנֵי מָה נִתַּן לָהּ מִצְוַת נֵר שַׁבָּת, אָמַר לָהֶן עַל יְדֵי שֶׁכִּבְתָה נִשְׁמָתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, לְפִיכָךְ נִתַּן לָהּ מִצְוַת נֵר שַׁבָּת.
>
> Why was the commandment of niddah given to her? Because she shed the blood of Adam, the first [man]. Therefore the commandment of niddah was given to her. Why was the commandment of hallah given to her? Because

[53] Or, 36.

> she destroyed Adam, the first [man] who was the perfected hallah of the world. Therefore the commandment of hallah was given to her. Why was the commandment of kindling the light given to her? Because she extinguished the soul of Adam, the first [man]. Therefore the commandment of kindling the Shabbat light was given to her (*Breishit Rabbah* 17:8)

It is well established that reward and punishment are integral categories in the rabbinic system, which relies on a Deuteronomic worldview.[54] However, in this instance we see a clear difference between men who are blessed through their fulfilment of commandments and women who are given commandments as a form of expiation for Eve's sin. Both the Mishnah and the Midrash clearly view the separation of *hallah* as the domain of women. Despite the fact that both men and women are equally obligated in this commandment, for the rabbis, this was considered a woman's obligation.[55]

This begs the question: Why do the rabbis consider *hallah* a woman's obligation? Here the work of Tamara Or in her *Feminist Commentary on Massekhet Betsah* is invaluable for providing an explanation beyond the rather misogynist one presented in the Midrash above. Or explains,

> We, first of all, have to explore the difference between the taking of *hallah* and several other similar *mitsvot—terumah, ma'aser and biqqurim*—that also involve separating a portion of food from the whole, and giving it away. These latter obligations are related to the harvest, a part of which is given away before it is permitted for general consumption. Terumah, *ma'aser* and *biqqurim* take place outdoors, before the harvested grain is turned into flour and brought into the home. By contrast, the separation of *hallah* comes after the dough is kneaded, at the end of the process that takes place at home. Therefore, it ended up becoming a woman's duty, while the

[54] See Kadushin, Max. "Chapter VI: Normal Mysticism." in *The Rabbinic Mind*, 190–263. New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952.

[55]Or, 37.

> *mitsvot* of the outside world were designated for men. Thus, although the biblical text does not assign to women the responsibility for separating *hallah*, the Mishnah does.[56]

We see then, in Or's analysis, that the rabbis took a commandment that was connected to the Land of Israel and reframed it as a homebound commandment to be performed by women. It is likely, then, that women became the ones chiefly responsible for this commandment sometime after the destruction of the Temple, when many of the mitzvot were transformed from public to private ones by the rabbis.[57] Thus, even when women are not explicitly mentioned in Mishnah *Hallah*, and indeed in Mishnah *Betsah*, when it comes to food preparation and specifically the making of dough and separating of *hallah*, they are implied, because, as the above citation from Mishnah *Shabbat 2:6* demonstrates, the understanding of *hallah* as a women's commandment was already an accepted truth for the rabbis.

mHallah 1:7 introduces its female subjects:

> עַרְבָּתוֹם שֶׁעָשָׂה שְׁאֹר לְחַלֵּק, חַיָּב בַּחַלָּה. נָשִׁים שֶׁנָּתְנוּ לְעַרְבָּתוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶן שְׁאֹר, אִם אֵין בְּשֶׁל אַחַת מֵהֶן כַּשִּׁעוּר, פְּטוּרָה מִן הַחַלָּה:

> A baker who made dough to divide it up into pieces, it is subject to *hallah*. Women who gave flour to a baker to make leaven for them, if there is not in any one of them a [minimum] measure, it is exempt from *hallah* (*mHallah* 1:7).

From this Mishnah, it is clear that women are doing their baking at home, but go to their baker in order to get the starter to make the dough rise. What might this

[56]Or, 38-39.

[57]Ibid., 38.

tell us about daily life for rabbinic Jews? The professional baker in the community is a man, those who bake at home are likely to be women. Or perhaps more accurately, the language of the Mishnah suggests this division of "public" and "private" sphere labour. Whether it is accurate - that is whether "professional bakers" were all men - is unclear. But what is clear is that the rabbis use masculine terms for almost anyone who works outside the home. Or, put differently, men have specific job titles when they work outside the home and women remain merely women who are doing something!

Flour on its own is not the same as dough. The getting of leaven from the baker seems to indicate that the primary bread makers in domestic spaces are women.

The rabbis take their exploration of purity and impurity of the dough to the furthest possible extent with *mHallah* 2:3:

> הָאִשָּׁה יוֹשֶׁבֶת וְקוֹצָה חַלָּתָהּ עֲרֻמָּה, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִיא יְכוֹלָה לְכַסּוֹת עַצְמָהּ, אֲבָל לֹא הָאִישׁ. מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת עִסָּתוֹ בְּטָהֳרָה, יַעֲשֶׂנָּה קִבִּין, וְאַל יַעֲשֶׂנָּה בְּטֻמְאָה. וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר, יַעֲשֶׂנָּה בְּטֻמְאָה וְאַל יַעֲשֶׂנָּה קִבִּים, שֶׁכְּשֵׁם שֶׁהוּא קוֹרֵא לַטְּהוֹרָה, כָּךְ הוּא קוֹרֵא לַטְּמֵאָה, לְזוֹ קוֹרֵא חַלָּה בַּשֵּׁם וּלְזוֹ קוֹרֵא חַלָּה בַּשֵּׁם, אֲבָל קִבִּים אֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק בַּשֵּׁם:
>
> A woman may sit and separate *hallah* while she is naked, since she can cover herself but a man may not. If one is not able to make one's dough in a state of ritual purity he should make it [in separate] kavs, rather than make it in ritual impurity. But Rabbi Akiva says: let him make it in uncleanness rather than make it [in separate] kavs, just as he calls the pure, so too he calls the i; mpure this one he calls hallah with the Name, and the other he also calls hallah with the Name, but [separate] kavs have no portion [devoted] to the Name (*mHallah* 2:3).

Interestingly, the text reverts back to masculine verb forms when discussing the making of the dough. Again, a reversion to male language despite the fact that they are clearly

thinking about women in this situation. One could reasonably argue that for the Mishna to use masculine language is a knee-jerk reaction. Indeed, as Tamara Or asserts "rabbinic literature was obviously written by men and addressed only to men; women were, in fact, often described as virtually powerless creatures…judged to be acting inappropriately or be praised for acting solely according to the ideals of "appropriate halakhic behaviour…Women were not considered "regular" people."[58] In essence, it is no surprise to see verbs revert to masculine forms as a default; for the rabbis, male is the default human being, and female is *other*. Thus, feminine verbs are generally only used for the activities/items that they explicitly associate with women. Also, there seems to be a default to masculine language unless there is an explicit female subject.[59]

2:7 gives us evidence that women regularly prepared dough for sale in the marketplace:

> שִׁעוּר הַחַלָּה, אֶחָד מֵעֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה. הָעוֹשֶׂה עִסָּה לְעַצְמוֹ, וְהָעוֹשֶׂה לְמִשְׁתֵּה בְנוֹ, אֶחָד מֵעֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה. נַחְתּוֹם שֶׁהוּא עוֹשֶׂה לְמֹכֵר בַּשּׁוּק, וְכֵן הָאִשָּׁה שֶׁהִיא עוֹשָׂה לְמֹכֵר בַּשּׁוּק, אֶחָד מֵאַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁמֹנָה. נִטְמֵאת עִסָּתָהּ שׁוֹגֶגֶת אוֹ אֲנוּסָה, אֶחָד מֵאַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁמֹנָה. נִטְמֵאת מְזִידָה, אֶחָד מֵעֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יְהֵא חוֹטֵא נִשְׂכָּר:

> The [minimum] measure of hallah is one twenty-fourth [part of the dough]. If he makes dough for himself, or if he makes it for his son's [wedding] banquet, it is one twenty-fourth. If a baker makes to sell in the market, and so [also] if a woman makes to sell in the market, it is one forty-eighth. If dough is made unclean either unwittingly or by an unforeseeable circumstance, it is one forty-eighth. If it was made unclean intentionally, it is one twenty-fourth, in order that a sinner should not profit(*mHallah* 2:7).

[58] Or, 9.

[59] The most striking instance of this—though not directly pertinent to the subject of food—appears in *mShabba*t 18:3 in connection to midwifery where the verb used is the masculine form מילד despite the fact that women were the ones who delivered children.

There are also some questions about the purity of the dough, and the intention behind those who made it. The entire section regarding intent (or lack thereof) in making the dough is in the feminine. Dough is treated as though it has the very same porousness and susceptibility that the rabbis imagine a woman's body to possess. If a wife is indeed—as Baker suggests—not only associated with the home, but conflated with it, I further assert that food is also a crucial element to be entered into this equation.

Conclusion

The early rabbis were attempting to set themselves up as the guardians of "true Judaism" at a time when Jewish political power had been abolished by the Roman conquest of Judea and the destruction of the Second Temple. In mapping the religious centrality of the Temple onto the home, the rabbis created and legislated sacred space in the sphere which was still subject to their control, the home. Through the strict application of the concepts of ritual purity and impurity in the home, in regards to women's bodies, and, crucially, to the indivisible connection between women and food preparation, the rabbis hoped to gain control of the population. Some of the rabbinic focus on these topics most likely comes from an attempt to establish and solidify the Jewish home. Working and writing at a time when their authority over public and political life had been all but completely usurped by the juggernaut of the Roman Empire, it is no surprise that the early rabbis sought to exercise control where they were able. The examples given in this Capstone show that the same identification between woman and home which is explicitly expressed in the Mishnah is equally applicable to the identification of women with food, and therefore to the concepts of ritual purity and impurity which are central to Rabbinic Judaism. Additionally, the erasure of female subjects in activities or spheres that are usually performed by women, such as in the majority of Massekhet *Betsah*, provides an extra level of intrigue to the construction of rabbinic authority.

Women, food and home occupy the same liminal space, oscillating between sacred and profane, pure and impure. Within the confines of the rabbinic fantasy,

women are centred in the home, and indeed are treated as the domestic space themselves: they are also the primary producers of food within this idealised home. To legislate and control women's (or perhaps more accurately speaking wives') bodies is to ensure the food they produced was fit/pure as well. Thus, women are not only perceived as extensions of the home but of the food as well. To borrow Baker's terminology: if a man mistook his wife for his house, the rabbis seem to mistake wives for a loaf of challah!

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