5-2023

To Have Sex or Not to Have Sex: An Exploration of Medieval Christian and Jewish Sexual Values

Rachel Zaslavsky
William & Mary

To Have Sex or Not to Have Sex:

An Exploration of Medieval Christian and Jewish Sexual Values

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from
William & Mary

by

Rachel Celia Zaslavsky

Accepted for High Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Lu Ann Homza, Director

Randi Rashkover

Philip Daileader

Mary Kiish

Williamsburg, VA
May 3, 2023

An Introduction

The notion that religion is averse to sexuality is a misunderstanding of different religious traditions. Generalizing about religion as a whole erases the diversity of religious traditions. It is the fallacy of "Judeo-Christian values" that projects inaccurate conclusions about religion and sex, which originate in Christianity, onto Judaism.

One claim leveled against Judaism is that it is a prudish religion. Yet Judaism is anything but prudish. Jewish religious texts discuss sex down to the last nitty gritty detail, with no hesitation. The Babylonian Talmud, a central Jewish text found in any Jewish religious home, relates an interesting story. Rav Kahana decides to hide underneath his teacher's bed, to listen to his teacher engage in sexual relations with his wife. Upon being discovered, Rav Kahana exclaims that "this too, is Torah", this too, is Jewish law and practice.[1]

In this thesis I will compare Christian and Jewish medieval sexual morality to dispel two myths: all of medieval society was opposed to sexuality for purposes other than procreation and Christianity and Judaism have the same conception of sex. My comparison will track how and why different ideas about sexuality and sex practices developed in Judaism opposite Christianity. The goal is to correct misinformation and add nuance to conversations about religion and sex, especially in the medieval period.

The Medieval Era refers to approximately the thousand year span between the sixth century and the sixteenth century. My discussion of Christianity is limited in scope to Western Europe and the Catholic Church. I will not consider the Eastern Christian tradition nor ideas linked to the Protestant Reformation. My discussion of Judaism is based on primary sources from prominent Jewish figures and religious works of the era.

An analysis of sexuality in Christianity and Judaism requires each tradition's religious texts: for Christianity, the New Testament, and for Judaism, the Hebrew Bible and the compilation of Jewish Oral Law known as the Talmud. In the centuries before and during the Medieval Era, religious thinkers in both traditions produced important works that examined sexuality. Early Church Fathers Jerome and Augustine introduced key ideas that would shape two different medieval Christian approaches to sexuality. At the same time, the Talmud was written. In the latter half of the Middle Ages, prominent canon jurists and theologians Gratian, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas grappled with sex in Christian theology. The Medieval Era also produced brilliant Jewish rabbis, some of whom were masters of both secular and religious subjects. These rabbis produced commentaries on the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Noteworthy medieval rabbinic commentators include Rabbi Moses ben Maimonides and Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac. In their writings, both rabbis detailed laws about sex. Jewish mystical works in this period, *The Zohar* and *The Holy Letter*, introduced mystical ideas about sex.

My use of religious texts requires a disclaimer. There are a few failings in using religious texts to describe medieval sexuality. Religious writing depicts ideal practices, but normative practices may have been different. Furthermore, the existence of a text warning against a certain type of behavior may imply that medieval individuals were engaging in that behavior.

Another failing of medieval religious texts is the lack of female voices. In both Christianity and Judaism, these texts were produced by men. Those consuming the texts were also likely to be male. The content of religious works, their interpretations and ideas, was influenced by the fact they were written by men for men. They provide a biased account of sexuality.

The relevant edited volumes I found in my research were very Christian-centric. The *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, edited by Vern Bullough and James Brundage, contains

eighteen chapters, only two of which are about Judaism and Islam: “A Note on Research Into Jewish Sexuality in the Medieval Period” and “A Research Note on Sexuality and Muslim Civilization”, written by the same author. *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Adrian Thatcher, boasts forty-one chapters. Twelve chapters are explicitly about Christianity. Two chapters are dedicated to Judaism. One chapter each is given to Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. A sourcebook with useful translations, *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe*, has eight sections. Seven are about Christianity. One is entitled “Jewish, Muslim, and Heretic Women”. These volumes were incredibly helpful in my research for both Christianity and Judaism. But the lack of Jewish chapters suggests a gap which can easily be filled. There is existing research. Considering how greatly Judaism and Islam contributed to Medieval Europe in all spheres, including theology, it is ludicrous to maintain that this gap is justifiable. While I have limited my thesis to Christianity and Judaism, and do not discuss Islam, it is necessary to emphasize lack of attention in the literature to non-Christian medieval theologies.

A secondary source which does consider both Christianity and Judaism is Ruth Mazo Karras’ *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*. Mazo Karras argues that in the medieval period, sex was considered something done by men to women; men were the active partner and women the passive. Her investigation into medieval sexuality is thorough and does account for both similarities and differences between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. While Christianity is her primary focus and the source of her conclusions, by considering Judaism and Islam, Mazo Karras contributes necessary ideas to an analysis of medieval European sexuality.

Each chapter in James Brundage’s *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* focuses on Christian views about sexuality in a specific point in time. An expert in canon law,

Brundage tracks the development of marriage, consummation, divorce, fornication, prostitution, and clerical celibacy through the ancient world to the 16th century Reformation.

Pierre Payer's *Sex and the Penitentials* analyses different sexual topics from a selection of medieval confession manuals, called penitentials. Payer discusses the prominence of abstinence and the condemnation of nonmarital sex in the penitentials.

Chief among secondary sources for sexuality in Judaism are David Biale's *Eros and the Jews* and Daniel Boyarin's *Carnal Israel*. Biale traces Judaism's view on sex. He argues Judaism holds value in both procreation and pleasure, and was influenced by Greco-Roman and Christian societies' high esteem of celibacy. Boyarin explains how the rabbis of the Talmudic Era, the first to sixth centuries C.E., legitimized sex through religious law. He maintains that Babylonian Judaism took a different approach to sexuality, in opposition to both Hellenized forms of Judaism and Christianity.

Jewish edited volumes proved crucial to my research, providing general concepts and introducing primary sources. Judith Baskin's essay "Jewish Private Life: Gender, Marriage, and the Lives of Women", is a groundbreaking work in the field and set the stage for my subsequent inquiries. Baskin explores the impact of menstruation, pleasure, and mysticism within Jewish sexuality and sex practices. Baskin's chapter in *Judaism in Practice*, "Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz", further elaborates on the medieval stringencies of menstrual ritual impurity. *Women and Water*, edited by Rahel Wasserfall, also emphasizes the high regard for ritual purity in Judaism.

Secondary sources are helpful texts for understanding either medieval Christian sexual morality or medieval Jewish sexual morality. Secondary sources fail to offer a side-by-side comparison of both traditions. These sources also do not dedicate an appropriate amount of time

to Judaism in their discussions of medieval sexuality. By contrast, my thesis focuses on a comparative analysis of sex in medieval Christianity and Judaism.

I argue the values which frame sexuality in each religion were not the same. Medieval Christianity restricted sex on the basis of abstinence and chastity, whereas medieval Judaism restricted sex on the basis of ritual purity. Medieval Judaism encouraged sexuality for both procreation and pleasure as both were legitimized by two separate commandments in the Torah. This opened a space for rabbis to entertain discussions about foreplay and sex positions since at least the first couple centuries C.E.. In chapter one, I will trace how over time, Christianity considered the conditions for licit, marital sex for the sole purpose of procreation, even if Christian theologians continued to restrict sexuality and any accompanying notion of sexual pleasure. In chapter two, I will review Jewish foundations of sexuality and explore how the need for ritual purity restricted sexual relations. Finally, in chapter three, I will examine the two major means by which Judaism promoted sexuality: procreation and pleasure.

Medieval Christian Conceptions of Sexuality

Medieval Christianity upheld chastity and abstinence as main values, resulting in a negative view of sexuality. Sexuality was limited to the marital bed for the purpose of procreation. This explains Christianity's aversion to sexual pleasure during the Middle Ages in Western Europe.

Beginnings

Christian interpretations of the Fall from Paradise contributed to a damaging understanding of sexuality. Theologians, canonists, and clergymen ascribed negative features to sexuality based on the story of Adam and Eve. They argued once Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge and were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the nature of sex changed. Medieval Christian thinkers believed that post-lapsarian sex, sex after Adam and Eve's Fall from the Garden, was tainted on account of their sin of eating the Forbidden Fruit. It was understood that pre-lapsarian sexual pleasure differed from post-lapsarian sexual pleasure. How it differed spurred a debate with two sides: either sexual pleasure was greater in Paradise or sexual pleasure was lesser in Paradise. It was clear to both sides, however, that sex in Paradise before the Fall would have been under the control of natural reason. Accordingly, sex after the Fall was a result of lust and disorder and a loss of control.[2]

If sexuality was negative, then abstinence was positive. Medieval Christianity sought to restrict sex on the basis of chastity. Especially in the early Middle Ages, maintaining virginity was supreme. The Christian ideals of chastity and virginity originated in the Bible. In the New Testament, the champion of virginity and abstinence was Paul. An

analysis of 1 Corinthians 7 is key to understanding medieval beliefs about sexuality. Consider this excerpt:

> Now I will move on to the matters about which you wrote. Yes, it is a good thing for a man to refrain from touching a woman. However, to avoid the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. A husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise a wife should fulfill her conjugal obligations to her husband. For a wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, a husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by mutual consent for a specified time so as to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you by taking advantage of your lack of self-control. [3]

In these verses, Paul asserted chastity was best, but that marriage was a necessary alternative to protect from greater sins; marriage was the appropriate space for sexuality. From these passages came the concept of the marital debt, the requirement that spouses make each other sexually available to one another. The marital debt ensured spouses did not stray and give into temptation by having a sexual outlet available through one's spouse.

Marriage was the way to keep sex within licit grounds. In 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, Paul emphasized abstinence as the ideal condition, writing, "[t]o the unmarried and to widows, I say that it is a good thing for them to remain as they are", but if abstinence was not possible because "they are unable to exercise self-control", Paul conceded, "they should marry, for it is better to be married than to burn with passion".[4] Later in the chapter, Paul repeated himself a third time: "[i]n regard to virgins, I have received no instructions from the Lord, but…a man should remain in his current state". [5] According to Paul, if one was a virgin, they should remain so.

By the end of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul provided a negative perspective on marriage, calling it a distraction from G-d. Only "[the] unmarried man devotes himself to the Lord's affairs and is concerned as to how he can please the Lord", and only "[the] unmarried

woman or a virgin is concerned about the affairs of the Lord and strives to be holy in both body and spirit". [6] Those who were married gave their minds to the affairs of the world.[7] To "devote yourself to the Lord free from distraction", it was best to be unmarried or a virgin.[8] By associating chaste individuals with closeness with G-d, with holiness, Paul promoted abstinence. Marriage was conceived as lesser and as a solution to those unable to control their sexual passions and impulses. Only through the marital relationship would it be licit, under certain circumstances, to engage in intercourse.

Sexual immorality is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. New Testament writers shared a concern about sexual behavior and sought to limit it in ways which they found holy and righteous. 1 Corinthians 7:2 reads, "to avoid the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband", implying that marriage saves from sexual immoralities. This is furthered by Hebrews 13:4, which proclaims, "[l]et marriage be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed kept undefiled, for those who are immoral and adulterers will have to face G-d's judgment". The sexual immorality mentioned in these verses was defined to include pre-marital sex.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, prominent Christian figures continued grappling with marriage and virginity. Early Church Father Jerome (d. 420) extolled virginity at the expense of marriage.[9] He did not find theological issues with virginity, believing the commandment to be fruitful and multiply to have been "fulfilled after the expulsion from Paradise".[10] He praised those who committed to lifelong virginity, claiming, "so the reward is great for those who have persevered", while taunting those who "marry for the sake of children", calling it the "height of stupidity".[11]

Augustine (d. 430), a bishop and theologian, saw marriage as good in its own right, not as a lesser evil.[12] According to him, marriage was good because sexual feelings were "brought unto an honest use in the begetting children"; "out of the evil of lust the marriage union may bring to pass some good".[13] While upholding marriage, Augustine reaffirmed the idea that marriage was a container for lust. However, he attributed a positive merit to married sexuality: procreation.

Paul, Jerome, and Augustine viewed and discussed sexuality through the lens of either chastity on the one hand, or marriage and reproduction on the other. Reproductive sex in marriage was a concession. It was the only valid exception to chastity. Attempting to have children seemed to excuse the sex act. Unsurprisingly then, medieval Christianity took a hard stance against fornication, any sex which was not between husband and wife, and against sexual pleasure. If procreation justified the sex act, sex for pleasure only was then condemned.[14]

Early Medieval Implications

New Testament and early Christian promotion of chastity, virginity, and abstinence impacted medieval life as these ideals continued to be upheld. Manifestations of these values included chaste marriages, periods of marital abstinence, and clerical celibacy.

Chaste marriages achieved a high level of popularity among the pious. As the Church Fathers' negative views of sex permeated medieval society, some devout Christians sought to avoid sex altogether.[15] A paradigm of chaste marriage is found in the tale of the Two Lovers, penned by Gregory of Tours in his sixth century *History of the Franks*. A man, Injuriousus, is wed to an unnamed girl. After the ceremony, "the pair, according to custom, were placed in the same bed". But the girl was distraught, revealing she "'had

resolved to keep [her] poor body for Christ, pure from the contact of man'", and cries, "'woe is me'".[16] She tells her new husband, "'[l]oathed are thy chambers when I behold the Lord seated above the stars'".[17] Her husband replies, "'[t]hrough this thy sweetest eloquence, eternal life hath shone upon me, as it were a mighty radiance'" and agrees to join his wife in her resolve to "'abstain from fleshy desires'".[18] The couple is described to live together for many years in "laudable chastity".[19] Upon their deaths, the two are entombed by different walls. Yet come morning, their tombs are found side by side, showing that they are united in heaven.[20] This story presented a positive view of chaste marriages, linking them with holiness. The negative connotations of "fleshy desires" is clear: the bedchamber was "loathed" but chastity was "laudable" and kept one "pure". While these chaste lovers were of the laity, most instances of chaste relationships were martyrs or celibate clergy.[21]

For those for whom a chaste marriage was unattainable, penitentials created periods of abstinence within marriage.[22] In the first few centuries of the Middle Ages, penitentials provided a comprehensive code of sexual behavior for everyday practice. Penitentials were confession manuals used up to the twelfth century.[23] They aided priests by outlining different sins and their corresponding penances.[24] In *The Penitential of Finnian*, c. 525-550, abstinence in marriage was advised, as "marriage without continence [sexual restraint] is not lawful, but sin, and [marriage] is permitted by the authority of G-d not for lust but for the sake of children".[25] Here reappeared the idea of marriage as a vessel for occasional acts of desire and reproduction. The "lustful concupiscence of the flesh" was not allowed.[26] The penitential continued that married couples "must mutually abstain during three forty-day periods in each single year" so "that they may be able to have time for prayer for the

salvation of their souls".[27] If abstinence was required for prayer, sexuality was then a barrier to spirituality.

The Penitential of Cummean, c. 650, presented the idea that sexual matters were polluting. Men could be polluted by their "evil word or glance", their "violent assault of the imagination", and even during sleep.[28] Cummean then listed out periods of abstinence: "the three forty-day periods and on Saturday and on Sunday, night and day, and in the two appointed week days, and after conception, and during the entire menstrual period", and after the birth of children.[29] *The Penitential of Theodore*, c. 668-690, also defined periods of abstinence and enumerated the penances for engaging in intercourse during them.[30]

Penitentials condemned fornication. *The Penitential of Finnian* outlined penances for different types of fornication.[31] *The Penitential of Cummean* had a whole section titled "Of Fornication". Cummean outlined similar types of fornication as Finnian, and even stated he "who merely desires in his mind to commit fornication, but is not able, shall do penance for one year".[32] Merely thinking, and not acting, warranted a punishment.

Periods of abstinence and condemnations of fornication appeared in many other pentitentials. In his book, *Sex and the Penitentials*, Pierre J. Payer analyses medieval penitentials. Out of the fourteen pre-813 penitentials Payer uses in his analysis, twelve discussed fornication, suggesting there was a deep concern about extra-marital sex. A further eight discussed periods of abstinence, emphasizing its positive value.[33]

Medieval Christian couples were encouraged to be abstinent as much as they could.[34] Using penitentials, medieval historian James A. Brundage constructs a chart outlining when it would be permissible to have sex (Figure 1).[35] Based on these limitations, statistical models found that an observant couple which had sex at every available opportunity, and where the wife had a regular cycle of menstruation and ovulation and was maximally fertile, would have sex slightly more than forty-four times a year, or slightly less than four times a month.[36] The penitentials' promotion of chastity reinforced negative views about sex and sexual pleasure.

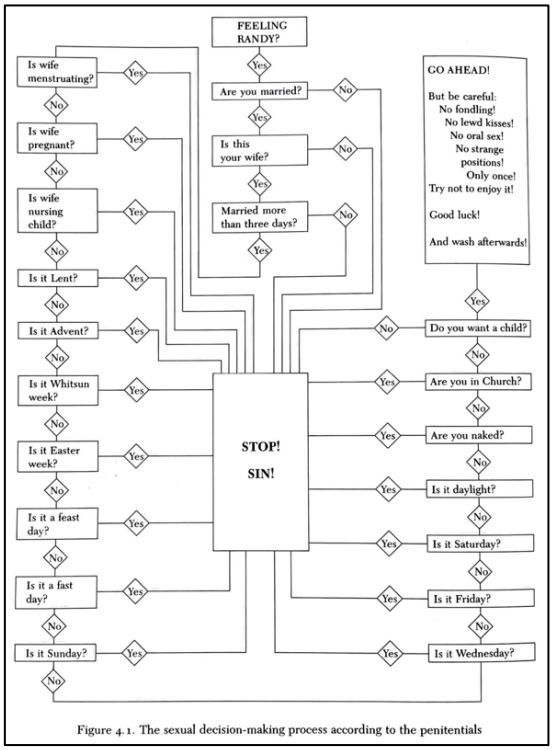

Figure I

Calls for clerical celibacy, which began in the third and fourth centuries, exhibited the enduring values of abstinence, virginity, and chastity among medieval Christians. It was believed sexual purity was necessary for worship, and that mystically, virginity allowed one to more closely approach the divine essence. Thus abstinence was deemed appropriate and necessary for the clergy. [37] Only in the twelfth century was clerical marriage turned into a canonical crime and clerical celibacy institutionalized.[38] This was a result of the canons of the First Lateran Council, in 1123, and the Second Lateran Council, in 1139. The First Lateran Council forbade clerics in major orders from marrying, and decreed, "in accordance with the definitions of the sacred canons, that marriages already contracted by such persons must be dissolved".[39] The Second Lateran Council went even further,

isolating married clerics. Those in the subdiaconate and higher orders who had married or had concubines, were "deprived of their office and ecclesiastical benefice…since they should be called the temple of G-d, the vessel of the Lord, the abode of the Holy Spirit, it is unbecoming that they indulge in marriage and in impurities".[40] The Council commanded, "no one attend the masses of [clerics] known to have wives or concubines".[41] Married bishops, priests, deacons, subdeacons, canons regular, monks, and professed clerics were to be separated from their wives. If nuns, "G-d forbid, [attempted] to marry", they too would be separated from their spouses.[42] The individuals closest to G-d, the holiest people, their position in religious institutions demanded celibacy. There was a clear link between chastity and holiness and closeness with the Divine.

The first half of the medieval period saw abstinence and chastity institutionalized into Christian law. Penitentials prescribed abstinence for married couples, and clerical marriage became a canonical crime. Chaste marriages were practiced among some laity. However, theologians in the second half of the medieval period would hold a more tolerant view of sexuality.

Thought of the High Middle Ages

The High Middle Ages set the groundwork for the rest of the medieval age. In the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries, the popularity of the Augustinian view of sexuality and the consummationist model of marriage increased. However, the elevation of abstinence and marital procreative sex at the expense of sexual pleasure persisted. While some thinkers believed sexual pleasure was a natural and good by-product of sex, it was never separated from the mission to procreate.

The debate over the models of marriage was most intense in the twelfth century. There were those who argued for the consummationist view, that consummation was necessary to establish a marriage. Canonist Gratian was party to this view. Others believed only consent was necessary for marriage.[43] The newer, consummationist theory gained much traction. Thus chaste marriages declined. But as sex became necessary in marriage formation, there remained concern about what sex within a marriage should look like.

Procreative sex was the main condition for sexual relations to be licit, the second being the couple engaged in the sex act was husband and wife.[44] Anything potentially not reproductive was considered illegitimate.[45] For instance, twelfth century theologian Peter Lombard held that if a couple used contraception, they were "fornicators".[46] Interestingly, while many theologians continued to denounce sexual pleasure, some began to develop more favorable views, and even suggested that sexual pleasure was present in Paradise.[47] However, pleasure was still limited only to the marital context of procreation.

Two particularly important voices in the twelfth and thirteenth century debate about the nature of sex and sexual pleasure were Gratian and Thomas Aquinas. Gratian's *Decretum*, c. 1140, revealed the negative views held about sexuality in the Middle Ages. The *Decretum* provided canonists with a reasoned, analytical textbook and remained the basis for teaching canon law through the Medieval Era and into the twentieth century. Canonistic treatments of sexual behavior were grounded in ideas in the *Decretum*.[48] The *Decretum* compiled conciliar canons, papal decretals, citations from Scriptures, writings of the Church Fathers, penitentials, Roman law, and other authorities.[49] Gratian also relied on Ivo of Chartres, Anselm of Lucca, conciliar decrees, and papal letters.[50] He added his own analyses and conclusions in an attempt to reconcile differences among legal rules and to

resolve inconsistencies.[51] The *Decretum* became the standard canon-law textbook, studied into recent times, and became the basis for later canonical literature.[52] While not officially adopted by Rome, papal judges and the papal chancery used it as a standard legal reference.[53]

Gratian subscribed to the idea that sexual pleasure distracted from the goal of salvation. To him, sexual pleasure was a disturbing element. He thus upheld the limiting of sex in the marital bed; sex played a subordinate role in marriage. Sex was contained to the begetting of children, the avoidance of the temptation to be unfaithful, and the paying of the marital debt.[54]

According to Gratian, the proper function of marital sex was procreation, which explained his condemnation of "unnatural", that is nonprocreative, sex.[55] Gratian wrote, "childbirth is the sole purpose of marriage for women" and, "unnatural acts are more filthy and disgraceful than fornication or adultery".[56] Sexual pleasure could not be the motivation for intimacy. Gratian declared, "having relations with one's spouse is sinless only when done for the procreation of children and not for the satisfying of desire".[57] Gratian categorized marriage into three classes. One could marry for a positive reason, to reproduce, for a negative reason, to avoid sexual temptation, or for a sinful reason, for sexual passion and physical pleasure. Gratian branded those who married for the third reason "fornicators", a serious offense prohibited by Scriptures.[58]

Like earlier authorities, Gratian sought to restrict marital sex. He condemned sex excessive in frequency or indulgent in "extraordinary sensual pleasures" or "whorish embraces".[59] Gratian echoed the opinion of Jerome that a husband who loved his wife too

passionately was an adulterer.[60] His *Decretum* supposed sex was permitted only within marriage, and then primarily for procreation, never for sheer pleasure.[61]

Thirteenth century friar and theologian Thomas Aquinas argued a more positive view of sexual pleasure. While he still held that sex was permissible only for procreation, he also contended married sexuality was good because it was implemented by a good G-d to sustain his good creation. Couples could merit through married sex.[62] Sexual pleasure was natural and could be rightly employed by married couples.[63] Aquinas broke away from typical views by recognizing sensual appetite was an aspect of human nature.[64]

Aquinas maintained key beliefs about the relationship between procreation and pleasure and about the sinfulness of pre-marital sex. He affirmed that the purpose of sex was to create children.[65] In 1277, the belief that simple fornication between two unmarried persons was not a sin was officially condemned as heresy. Aquinas was part of this debate, and held that fornication was prohibited by natural law. Sex itself was not evil, but sex outside marriage was a sin.[66]

In his works, Aquinas outlined his belief that sexuality was a positive in the context of a marriage for begetting and raising children. He wrote in his *Summa Theologiae*, "the end of matrimony is the begetting and upbringing of children: the first of which is attained by conjugal intercourse; the second by the other duties of husband and wife, by which they help one another in rearing their children".[67] In the *supplementum* to the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas again emphasized the primary purpose of marriage as generating and educating children. He stated "the principal end" of marriage is "the good of offspring. For nature intends not only the begetting of offspring, but also [their] education and development".[68] For Aquinas, marriage was directed towards reproduction.

Aquinas believed chastity was important and thus couples had to act properly and in accordance with reason during sex.[69] When sex was channeled in procreating and upbringing children, it was meritorious. Only when one preferred pleasure over the intention to procreate was sex lustful and a sin. This overcoming of reason by pleasure was the punishment of the original sin.[70] In the *supplementum*, Aquinas argued, "[the] end which nature intends in sexual union is the begetting and rearing of the offspring; and that this good might be sought after, it attached pleasure to the union". Perhaps pleasure generated in the efforts to procreate was not so dangerous after all. But to "make use of sexual intercourse on account of its inherent pleasure, without reference to the end for which nature intended it", Aquinas said, "is to act against nature".[71]

An significant distinction between Aquinas and previous theologians was that he did not believe sex was inherently sinful. He explained that sex for the aim of children made "a marriage honest and holy…in the actual intention, [couples] make the marriage act honest".[72] When married couples "come together for the purpose of begetting children, or of paying the [marital] debt to one another, they are wholly excused from sin".[73] It was only the presence of lust which tainted the marital act. Even if a man was "too ardent a lover of his wife", this "ardor carries him away from the goods of marriage" and the sex was a sin.[74] Aquinas was important as one of the first figures to claim the marital act itself did not corrupt virtue, but he maintained that reproduction was valued over pleasure.

Conclusion

Medieval Christianity began to accept marriage and marital sexuality as neutral or even a positive good. Nevertheless, the values of chastity were brought into marriage. Engaging in marital intercourse without restraint, excessively, or with too much passion

was not sanctioned by religious authorities. Some thinkers aligned more closely with the positives of sexual pleasure, but pleasure could not be sought independently of procreation. In my analysis of Jewish attitudes towards sexuality, I will explore how in Judaism, chastity and abstinence were not motivating factors in limiting sexual relations, and how Judaism more readily separated procreation and pleasure.

Medieval Jewish Conceptions of Sexuality: Restriction

Unlike medieval Christianity, medieval Judaism did not endorse chastity or abstinence. Rather, Judaism limited sexual activity due to a concern for ritual purity.

Beginnings

In the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, and throughout later Jewish literature, marriage and sexuality were often portrayed positively. The Song of Songs, an erotic poem in the third section of the Tanakh, likened the relationship between G-d and Israel, the Jewish people, as one between two lovers.[75] The relationship between a husband and wife was seen as a metaphor for the intimate bond between G-d and humans.[76] The Jewish mystical tradition that emerged in the eleventh century, further emphasized the holiness of sex. In medieval mystical texts such as *The Holy Letter* and *The Zohar*, sex between husband and wife was identified as a means by which the feminine and masculine aspects of the Divine could be reunited.[77] This idea was derived from the Babylonian Talmud, where the Divine Presence was said to rest between a man and a woman.[78]

In the Hebrew Bible, Adam and Eve were portrayed as a positive model of sexuality. Given the first commandment, to be fruitful and multiply, Adam and Eve were given license to have sex by G-d.[79] Within this monogamous marital structure, sex was positive and licit; the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise could not be a punishment for discovering sexuality.[80] Rather, the expulsion was a punishment for disobedience, and thus human intercourse carried no stain for the rabbis of the Talmud.[81] The commandment to procreate, first given to Adam and Eve, was deemed binding upon Jewish men, rendering any prospect of abstinence or chastity impossible under Jewish law.

Adam and Eve set the precedent for companionship through the institution of marriage. In Genesis 2, G-d declared, "it is not good for man to be alone".[82] No fitting counterpart for Adam was found among the animals G-d made. Adam only accepted Eve as his companion.[83] The famous eleventh century biblical and Talmudic commentator, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), commented on this verse, saying, "Adam endeavored to find a companion among all cattle and beasts, but found no satisfaction except in Eve".[84] A similar dynamic was exemplified by the patriarch Isaac and his wife, Rebecca. The sex life of the couple was one of many recounted in the Tanakh. Their first sexual encounter was described in Genesis 24:67 as "and he loved her", and their intimacy gave Isaac comfort after the death of his mother. In another scene, a king saw "Isaac fondling Rebecca, his wife".[85]

The Babylonian Talmud is an authoritative body of Jewish law and commentary accumulated over several centuries. The Talmud stressed the importance of having a wife as a companion: "Any man who does not have a wife is left without joy, without blessing, without goodness".[86] He is also "without Torah" and "without peace".[87] The Tanakh and the Talmud both emphasized the idea that it was not good for a man to be without a wife, and supported sexuality as a means to bond with one's partner.

Judaism's understanding of sex is related to its understanding of the two sides of human nature. According to Judaism, human beings possess a "good inclination", the *yetzer hatov*, and an "evil inclination", the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* is not simply evil, but a necessary part of the world order. It has the potential for destruction and wickedness, yet is also productive and vital. A Talmudic story illustrated the duality of the *yetzer hara* as both good and bad. In the story, the personification of the *yetzer hara* was imprisoned.

Had it have been killed, the world would have been destroyed- killing the *yetzer hara* would kill the desire for licit sexuality, which is necessary for the continuation of the world. Even when the *yetzer hara* was imprisoned, procreation stopped: "people searched for a fresh egg throughout all of *Eretz Yisrael* and could not find one. Since the inclination to reproduce was quashed, the chickens stopped laying eggs".[88] As a solution, the *yetzer hara* was blinded, eliminating illicit desires, and set free.[89] While some manifestations of the *yetzer hara* are negative, the positive expressions are needed for existence.

No doubt, it would be impossible to claim that the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, does not restrict sexuality. Many famous ideas regarding sexual mores come from the Torah. In Leviticus 18:19, the prohibition against having sex with a woman in *niddah* is introduced. *Niddah* refers to the state of ritual impurity women are in during their menstrual period. Ritual impurity was understood to be a consequence of death or of bodily functions which were associated with death.[90]

According to the laws of *niddah*, a woman could only become ritually pure again and be able to resume sexual relations once they immersed in a *mikveh*, a ritual bath. This prohibition against having sex with a *niddah* concerned many Jewish scholars, as the punishment was quite severe. In Leviticus 20:18, it stated that persons involved in sex with a *niddah* are "cut off from among their people". Scholars dedicated book-length sections to discuss the implications of this prohibition in the Mishna, the compilation of Jewish oral law, the Talmud, and other Jewish legal works. Interestingly enough, a prohibition against pre-marital sex does not exist in the Tanakh.

Judaism considered sex to be holy. The author of *The Holy Letter* exclaimed, "[n]o one should think that sexual intercourse is ugly and loathsome, G-d forbid!".[91] Sex was a way to partner with G-d in creation and build a relationship with one's partner.[92] Yet

sexuality was not always appropriate. The prohibition to not have sex with a woman in *niddah* spurred concerns about improper sexuality.

Restriction of Sex on the Basis of Niddah

Before he died in 1357, Eleazar of Mainz composed a will for his family, imparting moral wisdom. A pious Jew, he advised his daughters "should carefully watch for the signs of the beginning of their periods and keep separate from their husbands at such times" and that they be "very punctilious and careful with their ritual bathing".[93] Eleazar counseled his daughters on the importance of the commandment to refrain from having sex with a menstruating woman, *niddah*. Eleazar was not a rabbi, he was a common member of the Jewish community. That he included guidance on *niddah* in his final advice, suggests the ordinary existence of *niddah* and a high regard for this commandment in medieval Jewish life.

Eleazar was not alone in his concern about *niddah*. Entire swaths of Jewish literature are devoted to *niddah* laws. The Mishna and the Talmud both have a tractate on *niddah*, and later compilations of Jewish law devote the same intense attention to *niddah*. According to religious historian Evyatar Marienberg, "the most significant way in which the rabbis of the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods influenced the frequency of sexual relations" were through *niddah* laws.[94] In the Torah, women were impure only during their menstrual period. The Talmudic rabbis added seven clean days after the cessation of bleeding, during which a woman continued to be impure and relations forbidden, and made ritual immersion mandatory to remove impurity.[95] This resulted in a twelve to fourteen day separation between couples each month.[96] Within Jewish traditional sources, there were

stories about the tragic consequences for not observing *niddah*. This lore was repeated and expanded upon in later medieval texts.[97]

Niddah rules became even stricter in the Medieval Era. The aim was to protect couples from transgressing and having sex during the forbidden time. One could not touch a woman in *niddah*, pass items between oneself and a woman in *niddah*, or even eat from the same plate as a woman in *niddah*.[98] The early medieval text, *Baraita de-Niddah*, enlarged the scope of *niddah* restrictions. It expanded how the ritual impurity could be spread, writing that a woman in *niddah* could not enter a synagogue or come into contact with sacred books, that the dust of her feet could cause impurity to others, and that people could not benefit from her handiwork. The *Baraita de-Niddah* influenced rabbinic works that featured increasingly restrictive *niddah* laws.[99]

In the thirteenth century, Rabbi Elazar of Worms proposed harsh *niddah* stringencies in his *Sefer ha-Rokeah*. He wrote, "[a] woman in a state of *niddah* may not wear eye makeup or jewelry. A woman who observes her state of *niddah* properly will not cook for her husband, she will not bake, she will not dance, she will not prepare the bed, and she will not pour water from one vessel to another".[100] These acts were all forbidden until the woman immersed. Rabbi Eleazar then recalled a story about a scholar who died. Not even ten men followed the coffin of the scholar. Why? G-d explained, "[the scholar] never sinned in his life except that one time his wife passed him while in a state of *niddah* and he touched her garment. This is why a punishment was exacted from him".[101] This story demonstrates the gravity of *niddah* laws and the severity of the prohibition in medieval life. Touching a garment of a woman in *niddah* was enough to exact divine punishment.

A woman was required to immerse to become ritually pure. Even if she had finished menstruating and had counted her clean days, she remained ritually impure and unable to have

sex with her husband until after immersion.[102] In a story in the Babylonian Talmud, a scholar dies young because "[he] ate with [his wife], and drank with [her], and slept with [her] with bodily contact" during her clean days.[103] The popularity of this story in the Middle Ages reflects medieval concern about the proper observance of *niddah*, during clean days and by way of proper immersion.[104]

Improper immersion would fail to render a woman ritually pure. One Tosafist, a twelfth century disciple and follower of the great scholar Rashi, was worried about women who would take a warm bath once their menstruation ended but before the end of their clean days. Having already bathed, these women might not have washed before their ritual immersion. According to this Tosafist, "[because] all [the women's] scales and scabs have dried on to them", without washing again, these "scales and scabs" would "block the water of immersion from reaching their skin, and thus their immersion is not valid".[105] The Tosafist's primary concern was that couples could have sex on the assumption that the immersion was valid, without knowing their sex was a transgression.[106]

The same Tosafist was also concerned that women had a tendency to behave more leniently and draw closer to their husbands during their clean days. When menstruating, "[women] change[ed] their clothing and dress[ed] in dirty clothes so as to be repulsive to their husbands, and thus they would not come to intimacy that might lead to sin". However, during their clean days, women would "wash and dress in nice clothes".[107] Women would also "serve their husbands…even though it is prohibited to do so" on their clean days.[108] This behavior could potentially lead to wrongdoing. The Tosafist's condemnations of bathing and leniency during clean days illustrate the strict nature and importance of *niddah* laws in the Medieval Era.

To truly understand the level of compulsion concerning relations with a woman in *niddah*, one can analyze prominent philosopher and physician Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon's (the Rambam) book *Issurei Biah*, *Forbidden Relations*. The punishment he prescribed in his *Issurei Biah* for sex with a *niddah* was lashes and *kerait*, being cut off from the community.

Characteristic of Jewish legal works, Maimonides presented extreme situations and explained how to resolve them according to Jewish law. For instance, what should be done if a "man was in the midst of relations with a woman who had been ritually pure and she said: 'I became impure'" as she began to menstruate? The man "should not separate himself [from her] immediately while he is erect", because "withdrawing is as pleasurable for him as entry"; if he "withdraws while he is still erect, he is liable for *kerait*, like one who enters into relations with a *niddah*".[109] The man was to wait to remove himself until he was no longer erect, so that he would not transgress.

To check themselves to see if they were menstruating and thus impure, women used a certain type of cloth. Women were instructed to give the cloth to an authoritative rabbi who would analyze it for the bloodstain's location on the cloth and color. This Mishnaic practice became more common during the Middle Ages.[110] If a woman checked herself, put the cloth under her pillow, and then later "blood was discovered upon it", what could be done? According to Rambam, if the discovered stain "is rounded, she is pure", since it was most likely that the blood was that of a louse killed under her pillow.[111] In a following chapter, Rambam described in vivid detail the five colors of blood that render a woman ritually impure: "red, black, bright saffron, muddy water, and diluted wine".[112] If these names were not descriptive enough, Rambam also provided a detailed explanation for how to verify each color. For bright saffron, "[f]resh saffron should be brought together with the

clod of earth from which is it growing. From the better stalks, one should take the middle stalk that is entire a stem. In each one, there are three stalks and each stalk has three leaves. One should bring the stain next to the middle leaf on the middle stalk and compare it".[113]

Whether couples went to the prescribed lengths to observe *niddah* is difficult to assess, but the attention *niddah* had in rabbinic works reveals the pervasiveness of *niddah* laws. Rabbinic safeguards aimed to thwart transgression resulted in practices that impacted relationships beyond the realm of sexuality. The importance of *niddah* cannot be understated. It was this concern for ritual purity that determined which sex practices were permitted and when. Whereas in Christianity, periods of abstinence kept husband and wife away from the marital bed, in Judaism, the demand for ritual purity restricted sexual behavior. Even outside marriage, *niddah* limited sexual relationships.

Opening for Pre-marital Sex

The rabbinic concern with sexuality had more to do with *niddah* and ritual purity than with sexuality itself. This is clear in rabbinic discussions of pre-marital sex. There is no explicit commandment in the Torah forbidding pre-marital sex and in compiled codes of Jewish law, the forbidden relationships mentioned did not include those between unmarried individuals. Yet pre-marital sex was highly condemned by medieval rabbis.[114] Some rabbinic sources that forbade nonmarital sex did so on the basis of the Torah commandment to not be a harlot.[115] However, it was *niddah* that created a fence around pre-marital relations, curbing such sexuality.

One minimally tolerated form of pre-marital sex was betrothal through intimate relations. This practice had been done away with by medieval times, and had a couple carried it out, there would have been a punishment but the betrothal would remain valid.

Rambam described how to betroth by way of intercourse in his *Book of Women*, detailing the process and the words to be recited. The consummation had to be in mind in order to fulfill the betrothal; this was by no means a casual sexual encounter. While the betrothal would be valid on the authority of the Torah, Rambam explained it was the custom to no longer betroth by way of intercourse.[116] The betrothal would be legitimate, but the man would be liable for rabbinic flogging for disobedience. This was so "the Children of Israel should not become wanton in this manner".[117] The *Shulchan Arukh*, a mid-sixteenth century code of Jewish law based on prior legal rulings, was in accordance with Rambam. It explained, "[a] woman is betrothed in 3 ways; with money, a document or with intimate relations, as learned from the Torah" but that the sages "prohibited betrothal by having relations because of impropriety".[118] If a man "betrothed [a woman] with relations, he receives rabbinically decreed whiplashes and she is still betrothed".[119] The permissibility but condemnation of the pre-marital sex practices was a repeating trend.

To be sure, immodesty and harlotry were not the primary concerns of the rabbis in regards to pre-marital sex. To prevent unmarried people from having sex, the rabbis discouraged and stigmatized the going of unmarried women to the *mikveh*.[120] By barring unmarried women from purifying themselves, unmarried women effectively could not engage in sexual relations without transgressing the laws of *niddah*.

Niddah became the barrier to pre-marital sex, harnessed to create a prohibition of pre-marital relations where there had not been one. In following rabbinic discussions, a concern about *niddah* and *mikveh* were cited as the reason for preventing pre-marital sex. In effect, anxieties about pre-marital sex were less about sex itself and more about ensuring that women were still immersing in the *mikveh*. The *Shulchan Arukh* conceded that an

unmarried woman "is not forbidden as an *ervah*," a person with whom sexual relations are forbidden in Torah law.[121] In a supplementary commentary on the *Shulchan Arukh*, Rabbi Moses Isserles of Krakow (the Rema), claimed that an unmarried woman "would be considered an embarrassment for immersion in a *mikveh*".[122] Thus, as the unmarried woman did not immerse, her partner would "lie with her in ritual impurity [*niddah*]".[123] The issue with premarital sex was the probability that unmarried women were not immersing due to shame or rabbinic pressure, and were therefore engaging in forbidden relations.

The medieval rabbis' discussion of *pilegesh* emphasized how the Torah left open the possibility for nonmarital sex; certain pre-marital sexual relationships could function within the bounds of Jewish law. A *pilegesh* is a half-wife, a non-marital sexual relationship. The *pilegesh* and her male partner had responsibilities to one another without being married to each other. The Rema argued, "there are those who would say that [the *pilegesh* relationship] is allowed…and there are those who say that this is forbidden…as they have transgressed the precept 'don't be a harlot'".[124] Thirteenth century Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Ramban), explained why *pilegesh* was permissible. He wrote, "[c]asual sex, after all, was not forbidden but by the teaching of Rabbi Eliezer [that a man should not have a relationship with different women in separate locations]".[125] However, there is no question regarding the permissibility of the *pilegesh*, for "she [the *pilegesh*] is certainly permissible because she is in an exclusive relationship with him [the man]".[126] Twelfth century Rabbi Abraham Ibn Daud agreed.[127]

The hesitation regarding *pilegesh* was in part linked to the worry that a *pilegesh* would not go to the *mikveh* because of cultural stigma. Without immersing, the *pilegesh* would be impure and thus relations with her would be a transgression. Even the great proponent of

pilegesh, eighteenth century Rabbi Yaakov of Emden, understood why most rabbis "forbade the permitted out of fear that the ignorant and nonobservant would be thereby led to actual transgressions, such as sexual relations during the woman's menstrual state [*niddah*]".[128] The concern with *pilegesh* was actually a concern with *niddah*; *niddah* was the defining value.

While there were differences in opinion about the permissibility of pre-marital sex, a recurring theme appears. Issues of *mikveh* and *niddah* were the reason to bar such sexuality, not abstinence. As long as a couple was in an exclusive relationship and following *niddah*, the Torah was silent. An ideal of chastity was not used to justify constraining pre-marital sex. It was through *niddah* that rabbis effectively legislated away much of the space the Torah allowed for pre-marital sex.

Conclusion

Everyone, married or not, was obligated to not have sexual relations with a menstruating woman. The Rema was quoted in the *Shulchan Arukh* on this point, explaining there was no distinction between a married and an unmarried woman in the laws of *niddah*.[129] Christianity used marriage to properly channel sexuality, but the Jewish barrier to sexuality was not the marriage ceremony, it was *niddah*. For instance, if a bride was ritually impure on her wedding day, the custom was to notify the groom about her impure status to prevent transgression.[130] The couple could be married, but could not engage in relations until the newly wedded wife had ceased menstruating, counted her clean days, and immersed.

Niddah was the impetus for restricting marital and pre-marital relations in medieval Judaism. This is in contrast to medieval Christianity, which while also did not allow sex with a menstruating woman, encouraged abstinence altogether. It was *niddah* that restricted

Jewish sexuality more than any value of abstinence, chastity, or marriage. As I will explore in the next chapter, Judaism is at odds with chastity: the Torah commands sexuality for procreation and pleasure.

Medieval Jewish Conceptions of Sexuality: Openings

Medieval Christianity's concern with abstinence did not translate into medieval Judaism. Medieval rabbis sought to delineate valuable sexual activity within the boundaries created by *niddah*. The values of procreation and pleasure dominated medieval Jewish thought. Because of both the obligation to procreate and the legitimization of sexual pleasure, the medieval Jewish sex ethic was drastically different from the dominant medieval Christian sex ethic. Unlike Christianity, life-long virginity would be impossible under Jewish law.

Beginnings

Two commandments in the Torah created the requirement for couples to have sex. One is the first commandment: "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it". Jewish law developed to outline the specifics of this commandment. The Talmud recorded arguments about whether woman were obligated in procreation, if one was transgressing if he had no children by age twenty, and whether one must have two male children or a male and female child to fulfill the obligation.[131] Even after one finished his duty to procreate, chastity was not a feasible option. The Talmud related that if a man "has children in his youth, he should have children in his old age, as it is stated: 'In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both alike shall be good'".[132]

Independent of the commandment to procreate, another commandment in the Torah created an obligation for sexual relations: if a man was to take another wife, he may not diminish the first wife's "food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights".[133] The commandment of *onah* was derived from this verse. *Onah* is the right of a wife to sexual maintenance; it is the husband's duty to provide sexual satisfaction to his wife. This commandment

recognized and allowed sex solely for the sake of pleasure.[134] *Onah* was as valid a precept as procreation. Transgressing *onah* was a serious violation of Jewish law. In the Babylonian Talmud, it was proclaimed,"[w]hoever knows that his wife fears Heaven [and she desires him], and he does not visit her is called a sinner".[135]

By commanding sexual relations, the Torah erased the possibility of prolonged abstinence in Judaism and deemed sex for procreation and sex for pleasure equally legitimate. Accordingly, rabbis grappled with how to fulfill the commandments of procreation and *onah*.

Requirement of Procreation

Medieval rabbis considered the failure to procreate a great sin, and thus sought to define how to fulfill their legal obligation. After centuries of debate, the *Shulchan Arukh* posed, "[e]very man is obligated to marry a woman in order to be fruitful, and to multiply".[136] If a man did not try to fulfill this commandment, it "is as if he spills blood", causing "the Divine Presence to depart from [the people] Israel".[137] In fact, it "is incumbent on every man that they should marry a woman at the age of eighteen".[138] If one passed the age of twenty and had not taken a wife, it was considered a transgression.[139] Only once a "man has had a son and a daughter, he has fulfilled the obligation to be fruitful and multiply".[140]

Rambam believed that men must continue to procreate "[e]ven if a man has already fulfilled the commandment to be fruitful and multiply".[141] In his view, a man was "still obligated by Scribal enactment not to cease being fruitful and multiplying as long as he has the power to do so, because whosoever adds one soul to Israel has as much as builded a

whole world".[142] Procreation was so highly valued that despite fulfilling the commandment, a man would not be exempt from continued efforts to procreate.

When providing legitimate motivations for sexual relations, medieval rabbis never failed to mention procreation. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, of twelfth century Spain, claimed sexual intercourse had three purposes: procreation, improving the health of the body, and satisfying desire.[143] Twelfth century Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières outlined four intentions of sex in his book *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh*. He explained the "first one is for procreation, and it is the most correct of all".[144] In his commentary on Mishna Tractate Sanhedrin, Rambam wrote, "the clear aim of intercourse is to propagate the [human] race and not only for pleasure".[145] These three figures considered procreation to be a most valuable intention for sexual intimacy.

The mystical tradition took a strict stance regarding procreation. *The Zohar*, a famous thirteenth century mystical text, regarded celibacy as one of the worst sins: "Whoever refuses to procreate diminishes, as it were, the image that comprises all images, stops the waters of the river from flowing, and damages the holy covenant on all sides".[146]

Any potential Jewish ideal of abstinence was wiped away by the necessity to procreate. All men, rabbis and lay people alike, were required to produce children. Christianity exempted chaste individuals from procreation, holding the ideal of chastity above that of procreation. Such a debasement of procreation would be inconceivable in Judaism.

Requirement of Onah

The Jewish emphasis on procreation did not invalidate a space for desire or pleasure in sexual relations. Rooted in the commandment of *onah*, a majority of medieval Jewish

texts were not averse to sexual pleasure, and encouraged it. The dialogue about *onah* began in the Mishna, compiled in the third century. The Mishna described the set interval of a husband's conjugal obligation to his wife according to his occupation and proximity to home. It also established that if a husband wanted to leave home for an extended period, he had to obtain permission from his wife to shirk his husbandly duties. To learn Torah, a husband needed permission to leave for longer than thirty days, and a laborer needed permission for an absence longer than a week.[147]

The discussion about what entailed a woman's rights to *onah* continued into the Medieval Era. In his *Book of Women*, Rambam expounded the wife's conjugal rights of *onah*. *Onah* was "obligatory upon each man according to his physical powers and his occupation".[148] Men who are healthy and live comfortably, their "conjugal schedule is every night".[149] For laborers, "their conjugal schedule is twice a week if their work is in the same city, and once a week if their work is in another city".[150] Rambam continued to list out professions and their schedule. According to Rambam, a wife was within her right to "restrict her husband in his business journeys to nearby places only" so that he "would not otherwise deprive her of her conjugal rights".[151] A wife could even prevent her husband from changing occupations to "one involving an infrequent [conjugal] schedule".[152] To withhold *onah* was a severe a violation of the Torah, such that if a husband became "ill or enfeebled, so that he is unable to have sexual intercourse, he may wait six months", but if he does not recover, he must obtain the consent of his wife to continue to withhold *onah* from her.[153] Without her permission, he would have to divorce her.[154]

Rabbi Abraham ben David may have put procreation as the "most correct" intention of the sex act, but the third intention was reserved for when a woman yearned for her

husband. He described it as "when the woman desires [her husband] and pleases him and beautifies herself in front of him so that he might be interested in her. And also when he is about to go on his way, when surely she desires him".[155] He explained that in this sex act, "there is also a merit" because "this is the commandment of *onah* that the Torah spoke about".[156]

The commandment of *onah* recognized a woman's desire and deemed it legitimate. The medieval rabbis upheld the importance of this commandment. That a wife could restrict her husband's movement or his employment prospects because it would decrease her access to sexual pleasure, reveals *onah*'s high standing. If a husband was unable to fulfill his obligation, it could be grounds for divorce. This is a contrast to medieval Christianity's opposition to sexual pleasure, especially when separate from procreation.

Pleasure Separate or Part of Procreation

Lack of medical knowledge in the Medieval Era linked procreation with pleasure. Conception was understood through the two-seed theory: when both men and women would orgasm, they would release some kind of "seed". These two "seeds" would combine to create a baby. Thus mutual pleasure in sex was thought to be somewhat necessary as it promoted procreation.[157] Working within this medical theory, Rambam argued, "pleasure was introduced only to motivate the created beings toward that ultimate goal [of procreation]".[158] His proof was "that desire and pleasure cease after ejaculation; this was the entire goal for which our instincts were aroused".[159] Similarly, medieval Jewish sex advice claimed that making one's wife orgasm first would beget the culturally desired male child, such as in *The Holy Letter*.[160] Sexual pleasure seemed to aid procreation.

Yet it would be incorrect to claim that Judaism only allowed pleasure for procreation. *Onah* was separate from procreation. Wives had a right to *onah* regardless of their procreative status. Pregnant women and menopausal women, both unable to conceive, were still owed *onah*.[161]

Pleasure has a clear value in Judaism; a commandment separate from procreation is devoted to it. The rabbis even came to permit, with limitations, non-procreative sex practices, such as non-vaginal intercourse.[162] There was something special about sex beyond procreation. The Talmud reads, "[j]ust as a lion tramples and devours and has no shame, so a boorish man strikes and copulates and has no shame".[163] Human beings are not animals engaging in sex solely for procreation. Humans engage in sex for pleasure as well.

Increasing Pleasure: Foreplay

Most medieval rabbis took a tolerant approach to sexual pleasure, and thus approved of foreplay and nonvaginal sex.[164] Some rabbinic literature contained explicit instructions for sexual foreplay.[165] Rambam was more restrained in his approach to foreplay, stating that sex should occur with the couple's "mutual consent and joy".[166] He advised that a husband should "converse and dally with her [his wife] somewhat, so that she be relaxed".[167] Rashi seemed to write more for the female perspective. His commentary on a scene in the Talmud where Rabbi Hisda gives advice to his daughters about intimacy, is one of the most commonly used.[168] To demonstrate the importance of modesty, Rabbi Hisda "held a pearl in one hand and a clod of earth in the other. The pearl he showed [his daughters immediately], and the clod of earth, he did not show them until they were upset [due to their curiosity], and then he showed it to them".[169] The lesson of the story is waiting, suspense, makes things more exciting; the concealed object is more attractive

even if it is less valuable. In his commentary, Rashi guided women on what they should reveal first when engaging in intimacy with their husbands:

> When your husband is stroking you— in order to arouse his desire for intercourse— and he is holding your breasts in his hand and the other hand [moves] toward that place [the vagina], then you should give him the breasts to multiply his desire, but the place of intercourse you should not make available to him too quickly, in order that his desire and his affection should so increase that he is pained [by denied desire]. Then turn and reveal it to him.[170]

Rabbi Elazar of Worms, a thirteenth century mystical personality, taught that after a wife immersed and was then ritually pure, her husband "should make her joyful, hug her, and kiss her… he should delight her with touching, with all forms of embraces, to gratify his own desire and her desire. He should not think about anyone but her, for she is his bosom wife, and he should show her affection and love".[171]

The mystical tradition includes beautifully written works about foreplay and arousing one's wife. *The Zohar* instructed, "when a man wishes to lie with his wife he must first of all coax her and persuade her with words, and if he is unsuccessful he should not lie with her, for they must share the same desire and there must be no compulsion".[172] This was brought down from Adam and Eve. When Eve was created, Adam declared, "'This one at last, is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from a Human [Adam] was she taken'".[173] These were beautiful words full of love for Eve, "pleasant coaxing words, to arouse love in her and to persuade her to share his desire".[174]

The Holy Letter counseled husbands to arouse their wife "with words that will placate her and inspire desire in her".[175] It was fitting for a husband to "calm his wife's mind, cause her to rejoice, and prepare her with joyous things that delight the heart so that she shall be drawn with pure and fitting thoughts".[176] He should begin the sex act "by speaking to her in a manner that will draw her heart to [him], calm her spirits, and make her happy"; his words should aim to

"provoke desire, love, will, and passion, as well as…reverence for G-d, piety, and modesty".[177] They are "charming and seductive" words of "erotic passion" and "fear of the Lord" to "warm her heart".[178] *The Holy Letter* assured that the sense of touch nor the genital organs were shameful because G-d created them and His deeds are perfect.[179]

Medieval rabbinic encouragement of foreplay testifies to the role of pleasure in sexual relations being no small one. Husbands were encouraged to use their words and their touch to relax and arouse their wives. Rashi's commentary suggests male pleasure was also valued, as he advised wives on how to arouse their husbands. In recognizing male sexual pleasure, rabbis turned their attention to pleasurable, non-vaginal sex acts.

Increasing Pleasure: Positions

The permissibility of nonprocreative sex acts legitimized male desire for sexual pleasure. Medieval rabbinic authorities sanctioned occasional anal and oral sex on the basis of the Talmud.[180] The Talmud held, "whatever a man wishes to do with his wife he may do".[181] It is "like meat that comes from the butcher": he can eat it with salt, roasted, cooked, or boiled.[182] To cement this idea, the Talmud related a conversation between Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and a woman. The woman described that she "set [her husband] a table" but that "he turned it over", that is to say, she lay before her husband to have relations and he turned her over. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi assured her that the Torah permits this, that couples are able to engage in sex in the "atypical manner".[183]

In *Issurei Biah*, Rambam supported the Talmudic conclusion that a "man's wife is permitted to him".[184] He wrote, "a man may do whatever he desires with his wife. He may engage in relations whenever he desires, kiss any organ he desires, engage in vaginal or anal intercourse or engage in physical intimacy without relations".[185] Rambam added a

caveat that these non-vaginal acts were only permissible if a husband "does not release seed in vain".[186] In his *Book of Women*, Rambam advised women not to deny themselves to their husbands to torment them, rather a wife "should submit to [her husband] whenever he desires".[187] In his discussion on betrothal via intercourse, Rambam disclosed that the betrothal would be valid regardless of if the intercourse was performed in the normal, vaginal, or the abnormal, anal, manner.[188]

The permissibility of anal and oral sex, as well as non-missionary sex positions, suggests male pleasure was viewed as significant and legitimate. However, it was necessary to prove how Jewish law allowed such unconventionalities. Twelfth century French Talmudist Rabbenu Isaac, the great-grandson of Rashi, sought to justify why anal ejaculation, and other nonvaginal ejaculation, was not forbidden. The sin of Er and Onan in Genesis was that they wasted their "seed" intentionally to avoid impregnating Tamar; they shirked their duty and avoided the commandment to procreate. Thus, Rabbenu Isaac concluded, nonvaginal sex was only prohibited if a husband "intends to destroy seed and practices [nonvaginal ejaculation] constantly".[189] But if "[nonvaginal intercourse] occurs randomly and he desires to come into his wife anally, it is permitted".[190] Provided the practice was not habitual, nonvaginal intercourse was sanctioned. A few centuries later, the Rema supported Rabbenu Isaac's conclusion, writing a husband "may have intercourse whenever he wishes, he may kiss any part of [his wife's] body that he desires, and he may have vaginal or anal intercourse, or stimulate himself with other parts of her body, so long as he does not ejaculate outside the vagina", and that some "are lenient and say that he may even ejaculate [outside the vagina] during anal intercourse, if it is occasional and not his habit".[191]

Medieval rabbis defended non-procreative sex acts through Jewish law. Despite the commandment to procreate and an anxiety about "spilling seed", rabbis justified expressions of both male and female sexuality outside of the realm of procreative, vaginal sex.

Conclusion

The role of procreation and pleasure in medieval Judaism proves there was a massive difference between medieval Christianity and Judaism. Medieval Christianity condemned sex for the sole sake of pleasure and all sex acts which were not missionary, nor did it regard procreation as mandatory for all adults. By contrast, Jewish men were obligated to procreate and sex for pleasure was not taboo.

Medieval Judaism created a space for sexuality which met human desires and needs within its own religious moral framework. The Torah, by commanding *onah*, introduced sex for the purpose of female pleasure. The Talmud, by permitting nonvaginal sex, opened the door for male sexual pleasure. Medieval rabbis continued to endorse both female and male sexual pleasure, evidenced by their encouragement of foreplay and authorization of nonprocreative sex acts.

A Conclusion

In his *Sacred Secrets*, Gershon Winkler claims "[m]ost of us are passive beneficiaries of so-called Western civilization, accustomed to a code of sexual ethics we glibly call 'Judeo-Christian,' a code that is essentially far more Christian than it is Judeo. Judaism absorbed much of sexual taboo only after centuries of subjection to host relations and cultures that all but squelched the notion of sensuality, often by pain of death".[192] I agree the term Judeo-Christian is a modern construct that leads to a false representation of Judaism and Jewish values, especially when applied to sexuality. Yet Judaism did not absorb the sexual taboo- this taboo is imposed externally, a false taboo. My research concludes Judaism did not incorporate Christian values into its sex ethic in the Medieval Era.

The concept of a Judeo-Christian value system is misapplied onto sexuality. This misusage of Judeo-Christian values motivates my research and deems my project necessary to dispel inaccurate assumptions. It is easy to apply a catch-all sticker to medieval religion, but medieval ideas about sexuality were not uniform across religious traditions. Peter Brown, one of the leading modern interpreters of the Church Fathers, holds that the fundamental difference between Christianity and Judaism has to do with the body and sex in each tradition.[193]

While Christians were taught to refrain from having sex on holy days, Jews were encouraged to engage in intimacy on the holiest day of the week, the Sabbath. While Christian leaders were barred from having sex, Jewish religious leaders most certainly engaged in sexual activity. While Christians were not supposed to have sex naked, Jews were not supposed to have sex clothed. Christianity and Judaism restricted sexuality, but how they restricted sexuality reveals a difference in values and concerns.

Christianity's sexual philosophy emphasized the importance of chastity, abstinence, and virginity. Marriage was seen as an acceptable space for procreative, licit sexuality. Even within marriage, periods of abstinence were encouraged. Judaism's concern about sex was ritual purity; the Torah prohibition of sex with a menstruating woman received much attention by the medieval rabbis. Within a marriage, sexual separation was not a result of ideals of abstinence, but due to the observance of *niddah*. Both traditions restricted pre-marital sex, but on different grounds. Christianity was more opposed to the sex act itself while Judaism was disturbed by a possible disregard for ritual purity. Unlike Christianity, Judaism mandated marriage and praised sex for the purpose of procreation and pleasure. The promotion of both male and female pleasure led to rabbinic writings about foreplay and the permissibility of different sexual positions- this was not to be found or allowed in Christian works.

There is more work to be done in the study of medieval sexuality. Many more primary sources, especially those not translated from Latin and Hebrew, require analysis. Attention must be devoted to Islam, which was a huge presence in the medieval world and Moorish Iberia. There are also questions raised about the differences between Christianity and Judaism. What theological ideas, at the core of each tradition, resulted in such different sexual moralities? Judaism has consistently been understood as a "here-and-now" tradition, holding the notion that the kingdom of G-d is realizable in the present created order. In contrast, Christianity focuses on the repair of creation in a future era and anticipates the destruction of the world. Is Christian abstinence towards a greater goal of redemption while Judaism seeks to enjoy sexuality and populate G-d's created order now? It is unclear if these different accounts of the kingdom of G-d lie at the heart of the two competing formulations of sexuality.

Some experts propose differences arise because Judaism's conception of a person is embodied, whereas Christianity posits a separation between the body and the soul. Rabbinic Judaism "invested significance in the body which in other [religious] formations was invested in the soul".[194] As Brown writes, "Christian notions of sexuality had tended to prise the human person loose from the physical world".[195] To Jews, a human being is a body animated by a soul. To Christians, a human being is a soul housed in a body.[196]

Perhaps there are mutual influences and interactions between Christianity and Judaism, especially in another point in time. This thesis is very historically specific, and my conclusions may be unique to the medieval period. Hellenistic Judaism of the early centuries bears much resemblance to early Christianity. There were great similarities between the teachings of the apostle Paul and Philo, first century Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, who were active at the same time in different places.[197] The Early Church's ascetic movement "lacked the clear and orderly profile later associated with the Benedictine monasticism of the Latin West. Even the notion of perpetual virginity…came into clear focus only in fits and starts".[198] It is possible Jewish traditions of the ancient world had more in common with their contemporary, early Christianity than in later eras.

Questions like these occupy our attention and will likely continue to do so. Nonetheless, the first step towards developing future studies is the appreciation of the significant differences between Christianity and Judaism in the Medieval Era. The two myths, that medieval society had a disdain for non-procreative sexuality and that Christianity and Judaism share a sexual morality, must be called into question.

Bibliography

Barnes, Corey. “Thomas Aquinas on the Body and Bodily Passions.” In *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, edited by Margaret D. Kamitsuka, 83–98. 1517 Media, 2010. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22h6t7g.10.

Baskin, Judith R.. “Jewish Private Life: Gender, Marriage, and the Lives of Women”. In *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, edited by Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, 357–380. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Baskin, Judith R.. “Jewish Traditions About Women and Gender Roles: From Rabbinic Teachings to Medieval Practice”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Women & Gender in Medieval Europe*, edited by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, 36–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Baskin, Judith R.. “Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Sexual Politics of Piety”. In *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, edited by Lawrence Fine, 131–142. Princeton University Press, 2001.

Biale, David. *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*. New York: BasicBooks, 1992.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. Columbia University Press, 1988.

Brundage, James A.. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Brundage, James A.. “Sex and Canon Law”. In *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, edited by Vern

L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, 33–50. Garland Publishing, 1996.

Cohen, Shaye J.D.. "Purity, Piety, and Polemic: Medieval Rabbinic Denunciations of 'Incorrect' Purification Practices." In *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, edited by Rahel R. Wasserfall, 82–100. Brandeis University Press, 1999.

Elliot, Dyan. "Gender and Christian Traditions". In *The Oxford Handbook of Women & Gender in Medieval Europe*, edited by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, 21–35. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Finn, Thomas M.. "Sex and Marriage in the Sentences of Peter Lombard." *Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2011): 41–69.

Fonrobert, Charlotte Elisheva. "Yalta's Ruse: Resistance against Rabbinic Menstrual Authority in Talmudic Literature." In *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, edited by Rahel R. Wasserfall, 60–81. Brandeis University Press, 1999.

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. "Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible". In *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, edited by Jonathon Magonet, 3–16. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995.

Gratian. *The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) with the Ordinary Gloss*. Translated by Augustine Thompson and James Gordley. Catholic University of America Press, 1993.

Gregory of Tours. *The History of the Franks*. Translated by O. M. Dalton. Vol 2. Hants: Gregg Press Limited, 1967.

Kamitsuka, Margaret D.. "Sexual Pleasure". In *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Adrian Thatcher, 505–522. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Karo, Joseph. *Shulchan Arukh*. https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Halakhah/Shulchan%20Arukh.

Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah*. Translated by Eliyahu Touger. Moznaim Publications, 1993. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682956/jewish/Mishneh-Torah-Rambam.htm.

Maimonides. "Sanhedrin 7:3." In *Commentary to the Mishna*. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/960669/jewish/Issurei-Biah-Chapter-Twenty-One.htm.

Maimonides. *The Book of Women*, edited by Leon Nemoy, Saul Lieberman, and Harry A. Wolfson. Translated by Isaac Klein. Yale University Press, 1972.

Marienberg, Evyatar. *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance: A History*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022.

Mazo Karras, Ruth. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

McGlynn, Margaret and Richard J. Moll. "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: 'It Were to Hire a Greet Merite' ". In *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, edited by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, 103–122. Garland Publishing, 1996.

McNeill, John T. and Helena M. Gamer. *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A translation of the principal libri poenitentiales and selections from related documents*. New York: Octagon Books, 1979.

Meacham, Tirzah. "An Abbreviated History of the Development of the Jewish Menstrual Laws." In *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, edited by Rahel R. Wasserfall, 23–39. Brandeis University Press, 1999.

Meirowitz, Sara N. S.. "Not Like a Virgin: Talking About Nonmarital Sex". In *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, edited by Danya Ruttenberg, 169–181. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

New Catholic Bible. https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Catholic-Bible-NCB-Bible/#booklist.

Payer, Pierre J.. *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150*. University of Toronto Press, 1984.

Payer, Pierre J.. *The Bridling of Desire: View of Sex in the Later Middle Ages*. University of Toronto Press, 1993.

Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary, edited by Morris Rosenbaum and Abraham M. Silbermann. London: 1929–1934. https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis.2.23.2?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en.

Petri, Thomas. "Marriage and the Conjugal Act According to Thomas Aquinas." In *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body*, 273–308. Catholic University of America Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d8hbhf.13.

Sachs Zion, Noam. *Sanctified Sex: The Two-Thousand-Year Jewish Debate on Marital Intimacy*. Jewish Publication Society, 2021.

Schroeder, H. J.. "The Canons of the First Lateran Council, 1123." In *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*. 177–194. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran1.asp.

Schroeder, H. J.. "The Canons of the Second Lateran Council, 1139." In *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*. 195–213. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran2.asp.

Steinberg, Theodore L. *Jews and Judaism in the Middle Ages*. Praeger Publishers, 2008.

The Contemporary Torah. Jewish Publication Society, 2006. https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1?ven=The_Contemporary_Torah,_Jewish_Publication_

Society,_2006&lang=bi&aliyot=0

The Holy Letter. Translated by Seymour J. Cohen. New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1967.

The New Encyclopedia of Judaism, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder, Fred Skolnik, and Shmuel Himelstein. 2nd ed. New York University Press, 2002.

The Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem. https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud.

The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts, edited by Isaiah Tishby. Translated by David Goldstein. Vol 3. The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991.

Winkler, Gershon. *Sacred Secrets: The Sanctity of Sex in Jewish Law and Lore*. Jason Aronson Inc., 1998.

Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook, edited by Emilie Amt. Taylor & Francis Group, 2010.

---

[1] B. Brakhot 62a.
[2] Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: View of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (University of Toronto Press, 1993), 32–34.
[3] 1 Corinthians 7:1–5.
[4] 1 Cor 7:8–9.
[5] 1 Cor 7:25–26.
[6] 1 Cor 7:32–34.
[7] 1 Cor 7:32–34.
[8] 1 Cor 7:35.
[9] Dyan Elliot, "Gender and Christian Traditions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women & Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.
[10] Jerome, "Letter to Eustochium," in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt (Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 17.
[11] Jerome, "Against Jovinian," in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt (Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 18, 19.
[12] Elliot, "Gender and Christian Traditions," 26.
[13] Augustine of Hippo, "On the Good of Marriage," in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt (Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 20.
[14] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 154–155.

[15] Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: 'It Were to Hire a Greet Merite'," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Garland Publishing, 1996), 107.
[16] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. O. M. Dalton, vol. 2 (Hants: Gregg Press Limited, 1967), 27.
[17] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, 28.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, 29.
[21] McGlynn and Moll, "Chaste Marriage," 109.
[22] Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150* (University of Toronto Press, 1984), 118.
[23] Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 3.
[24] Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 7–8.
[25] John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A translation of the principal libri poenitentiales and selections from related documents* (New York: Octagon Books, 1979), 96.
[26] Ibid, 96.
[27] Ibid, 96.
[28] Ibid, 104.
[29] Ibid, 105.
[30] Ibid, 208, 184–185, 197.
[31] Ibid, 94–95.
[32] Ibid, 104.
[33] Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 125–126.
[34] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 155.
[35] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 162.
[36] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 160.
[37] McGlynn and Moll, "Chaste Marriage," 105–106.
[38] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 220.
[39] H. J. Schroeder, "The Canons of the First Lateran Council, 1123," in *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran1.asp.
[40] H. J. Schroeder, "The Canons of the Second Lateran Council, 1139," in *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran2.asp.
[41] Schroeder, "The Canons of the Second Lateran Council."
[42] Ibid.
[43] Thomas M. Finn, "Sex and Marriage in the Sentences of Peter Lombard," *Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2011): 54–55.; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 93.
[44] Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 80.
[45] Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 168.
[46] Finn, "Sex and Marriage in the Sentences," 63.
[47] Payer, *The Bridling*, 33.
[48] James A. Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Garland Publishing, 1996), 39.
[49] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 229.
[50] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 230.
[51] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 229.
[52] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 232.; Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law," 39.
[53] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 232.
[54] Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law," 235, 240.

[55] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 240.
[56] Gratian, "Canon Law on Marriage," in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt (Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 37, 38.
[57] Gratian, *The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) with the Ordinary Gloss*, trans. Augustine Thompson and James Gordley (Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 51.
[58] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 240, 247.; Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 92.
[59] Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law," 40.
[60] Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law," 40.
[61] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 255.
[62] Elliot, "Gender and Christian Traditions," 30.
[63] Margaret D. Kamitsuka, "Sexual Pleasure," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 507.
[64] Corey Barnes, "Thomas Aquinas on the Body and Bodily Passions," in *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, ed. by Margaret D. Kamitsuka (1517 Media, 2010), 83.
[65] Kamitsuka, "Sexual Pleasure," 507.; Barnes, "Thomas Aquinas," 94.
[66] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 459.
[67] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, in "Marriage and the Conjugal Act According to Thomas Aquinas" (Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 288, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d8hbhf.13.
[68] Thomas Aquinas, *supplementum to the Summa Theologiae*, in "Marriage and the Conjugal Act According to Thomas Aquinas" (Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 280, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d8hbhf.13.
[69] Thomas Petri, "Marriage and the Conjugal Act According to Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body* (Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 296, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d8hbhf.13.
[70] Ibid, 296–297.
[71] Aquinas, *supplementum to the Summa Theologiae*, 300–301.
[72] Ibid, 301.
[73] Ibid, 300–301.
[74] Ibid, 302–303.
[75] Judith R. Baskin, "Jewish Traditions About Women and Gender Roles: From Rabbinic Teachings to Medieval Practice", in *The Oxford Handbook of Women & Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 47.
[76] Judith R. Baskin, "Jewish Private Life: Gender, Marriage, and the Lives of Women", in *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 369.
[77] Baskin, "Jewish Private Life", 369.; Judith R. Baskin, "Jewish Traditions About Women and Gender Roles", 47.; *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Isaiah Tishby, trans. David Goldstein, vol. 3 (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991), 1355.
[78] B. Sotah 17a.
[79] Genesis 1:28.
[80] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible", in *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, ed. Jonathon Magonet (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), 6.; David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 41.
[81] Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 82.; Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 41.
[82] Gen 2:18.
[83] Gen 2:23.
[84] "Rashi on Genesis 2:23:1", in *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*, ed. Morris Rosenbaum and Abraham M. Silbermann (London: 1929–1934), https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis.2.23.2?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en.
[85] Gen 24:67.
[86] B. Yevamot 62b.
[87] Ibid.

[88] B. Yoma 69b.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 28.
[91] *The Holy Letter*, trans. Seymour J. Cohen (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1967), 72.
[92] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 30.; *The Holy Letter*, 92.
[93] "Eleazar of Mainz: A Moral instruction for his family", in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt (Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 238.
[94] Evyatar Marienberg, *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance: A History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 16.
[95] Judith R. Baskin, "Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Sexual Politics of Piety", in *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, ed. Lawrence Fine (Princeton University Press, 2001), 132.
[96] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 55.
[97] Baskin, "Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz", 133.
[98] Baskin, "Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz", 134.; Theodore L. Steinberg, *Jews and Judaism in the Middle Ages* (Praeger Publishers, 2008), 156.; Maimonides, *Issurei Biah*, trans. Eliyahu Touger, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/960644/jewish/Issurei-Biah.htm.
[99] Baskin, "Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz", 134.; Tirzah Meacham, "An Abbreviated History of the Development of the Jewish Menstrual Laws", in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Brandeis University Press, 1999), 32.
[100] Rabbi Elazar of Worms, *Sefer HaRoqueah HaGadol*, in *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, 140.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic: Medieval Rabbinic Denunciations of 'Incorrect' Purification Practices", in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Brandeis University Press, 1999), 82.
[103] B. Shabbat 13b.
[104] Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic", 86.
[105] excerpt in Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic", 84–85.
[106] excerpt in Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic", 85.
[107] excerpt in Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic", 84.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Maimonides, *Issurei Biah*.
[110] Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, "Yalta's Ruse: Resistance against Rabbinic Menstrual Authority in Talmudic Literature", in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Brandeis University Press, 1999), 61, 62.
[111] Maimonides, *Issurei Biah*.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Sara N. S. Meirowirz, "Not Like a Virgin: Talking About Nonmarital Sex", in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 170, 173.
[115] "The Responsum of Rabbi Yaakov Emden", in *Sacred Secrets: The Sanctity of Sex in Jewish Law and Lore* (Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 106–107, 110, 112, 114.
[116] Maimonides, *The Book of Women*, ed. Leon Nemoy, Saul Lieberman, and Harry A. Wolfson, trans. Isaac Klein (Yale University Press, 1972) 15–16, 21.
[117] Ibid, 21.
[118] Joseph Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 26:4.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Meirowirz, "Not Like a Virgin", 173.
[121] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 22:2.
[122] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 26:1.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Gershon Winkler, *Sacred Secrets: The Sanctity of Sex in Jewish Law and Lore* (Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 110.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid, 115.

[128] The Responsum of Rabbi Yaakov Emden", in *Sacred Secrets*, 133.
[129] Joseph Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, YD 183.
[130] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 61:2.
[131] B. Yevamot 65b.; B. Kiddushin 29b–30a.; B. Yevamot 62a.
[132] B. Yevamot 62b.
[133] Exodus 21:10.
[134] Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 105.; Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 54.
[135] B. Yevamot 62b.
[136] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 1:1.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 1:3.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 1:5.
[141] Maimonides, *The Book of Women*, 97.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 90.
[144] Rabbi Abraham ben David, *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh*, in *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance: A History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 54.
[145] Maimonides, "Commentary of Mishna Sanhedrin", in *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance: A History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 65.
[146] Marienberg, *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance*, 98; *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, ed. Isaiah Tishby, 1383–1384.
[147] M Ketubot 5:6.
[148] Maimonides, *The Book of Women*, 86.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid, 87.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid, 88.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Rabbi Abraham ben David, *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh*, in *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance*, 54.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 64.; Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 54.
[158] Maimonides, "Sanhedrin 7:3", in *Commentary to the Mishna*, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/960669/jewish/Issurei-Biah-Chapter-Twenty-One.htm.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Marienberg, *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance*, 37.; *The Holy Letter*, 3, 6.
[161] Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 105.; Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 54.
[162] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 56.
[163] B. Pesachim 49b.
[164] Noam Sachs Zion, *Sanctified Sex: The Two-Thousand-Year Jewish Debate on Marital Intimacy* (Jewish Publication Society, 2021), 131.
[165] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 80.
[166] Maimonides, *De'ot*, trans. Eliyahu Touger, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/910314/jewish/Deot.htm.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Marienberg, *Traditional Jewish Sex Guidance*, 36.
[169] B. Shabbat 140b.
[170] Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, "Commentary on Shabbat 140b", in *Sanctified Sex: The Two-Thousand-Year Jewish Debate on Marital Intimacy* (Jewish Publication Society, 2021), 87.
[171] Rabbi Elazar of Worms, *Sefer HaRoqueah HaGadol*, in *Sanctified Sex: The Two-Thousand-Year Jewish Debate on Marital Intimacy* (Jewish Publication Society, 2021), 58–59.
[172] *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, ed. Isaiah Tishby, 1389.
[173] Gen 2:23.
[174] *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, ed. Isaiah Tishby, 1389.
[175] *The Holy Letter*, 176.

[176] Ibid, 140.
[177] Ibid, 172.
[178] Ibid, 174.
[179] Ibid, 74.
[180] Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 80.
[181] B. Nedarim 20b.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Maimonides, *Issurei Biah*.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Maimonides, *The Book of Women*, 98.
[188] Ibid, 16.
[189] Rabbenu Isaac, "On Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 34b", in *Sanctified Sex: The Two-Thousand-Year Jewish Debate on Marital Intimacy* (Jewish Publication Society, 2021), 135.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, EE 25:2.
[192] Winkler, *Sacred Secrets*, 3–4.
[193] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 2.
[194] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 5.
[195] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 432.
[196] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 5.
[197] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 4.
[198] Brown, *The Body and Society*, xv.