CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN LIGHT OF THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE JEWISH FAMILY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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Summary
The demography of the Jewish family is indispensable for the study of the nature of Jewish childhood in late antiquity. Demography in this context refers to the probable mortality rate, fertility rate and average age of first marriage for the Jews of our period. Together these demographic factors create a model of the duration and rhythm of the life-course; a model of the skeletal structure of the ancient Jewish family. We explore below the nature of Jewish childhood in late antiquity in light of the portrait of the family that emerges from a study of ancient family demographics.

A society's notions of childhood as well as the social structure of parent-child relations within a society change and develop over the course of time. Human biology certainly establishes constraints, but these biological constraints do not determine all the intricate details of family life. Instead, biology delineates the external boundaries of a wide channel that allows much room for maneuver and, as a result, notional ideas of childhood and the texture of children's lives vary widely from group to group and from period to period.[1] This variety is generated

[1] Physical anthropologists have demonstrated how human growth, biological development and aging vary according to one's socio-economic position in society and thus, in some instances, biology itself is at least partially determined by the social and familial setting (see Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* [London and New York: Routledge, 2002], 13-15). Such variations, however, are still constrained by the basic limits dictated by genetics (see N. Howell, "Toward a Uniformitarian Theory of Human Paleodemography," in *The Demographic Evolution of Human Populations* [eds. R. H. Ward and K. M Weiss; London, New York and San Francisco: Academic Press, 1976], 26-27; E. E. Maccoby and C. Jacklin, *The*

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in no small part by the wide array of possible familial and social constellations. Thus in order to shed light on ancient Jewish childhood, the current inquiry explores Jewish family demographics in late antiquity[2] and the ramifications of this demographic regime for the lives of children and ideas of childhood.

The demography of the Jewish family in the context of late antiquity refers to the probable mortality rate (i.e. the rate at which individuals passed out of the population), fertility rate (i.e. the rate at which individuals were born into the population) and the average age of first marriage for the Jews of the period. Together these demographic factors create a model of the duration and rhythm of the life-course; a model, in other words, of the skeletal structure of the ancient Jewish family. Such a model is of critical importance for our purposes because it portrays the family setting that served as the ambient environment within which Jewish children lived and the central backdrop for the creation of ideas of childhood amongst Jews in late antiquity.

Jewish Childhood in late antiquity has not been studied to date in light of demography and, moreover, a demographic model of the family has only been partially formulated. While the age at first marriage for Jewish men and women has been extensively investigated,[3] the relevance of mortality and fertility for the structure of the Jewish family has not received much attention. Thus, in order to discuss childhood in light of family demographics, we must first construct a demographic model (or models) of the Jewish family in late antiquity.

The demographic picture, in recent years, has become an important facet of the historical backdrop in studies on family history.[4] In attempting

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Psychology of Sex Differences [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966]; Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* [London and New York: Penguin, 2002], 372-399) and thus conceptions of childhood in any period emerge from a synthesis of culture and biology (see Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Medievalists and the Study of Childhood," *Speculum* 77.2 [2002]: 441-443, 457-458).

[2] Late antiquity in the Jewish context refers roughly to the period spanning from the first to the sixth century C.E. For this period, rabbinic literature, archaeological remains, inscriptions and ancient documents provide the most important sources for Jewish social history and rabbinic literature in particular serves as the primary focus of the current study.

[3] See Adiel Schremer, *Male and Female He Created Them: Jewish Marriage in Late Second Temple, Mishnah and Talmud Periods* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2003), 73-125 [Hebrew]; Nissan Rubin, *The Joy of Life: Rites of Betrothal and Marriage in the Talmud and Midrash* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), 35-72 [Hebrew]; and their references to earlier literature.

[4] See Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 210.

to construct models of past societies, family historians will usually consider a host of factors such as adult mortality rates, infant and juvenile mortality rates, age at first marriage for both men and women, fertility rates, sex ratio, divorce rates and rates of remarriage.[5] The ancients, however, did not produce any demographic studies and therefore historians of ancient societies have sought various ways to approximate some of these demographic factors.

Roman historians, for example, have attempted to employ literary sources, legal writings, funerary inscriptions, skeletal remains, Ulpian's life table (which provides a list of life expectancies for different age cohorts), Egyptian household census data, and model life tables extrapolated from better documented pre-industrial populations in order to ascertain demographic patterns.[6] Historians of ancient Jewish society, in contrast, are in a far less enviable position since ancient Jewish texts and inscriptions do not offer the same wealth of information. The best we can do is to reconstruct an impressionistic picture from the Jewish evidence and then judiciously compare our findings to the conclusions derived from the contemporary non-Jewish evidence and the most relevant model life tables. Demographic factors, of course, are also subject to ecological and cultural forces and therefore there is no reason to presuppose that the demographic pattern of any ancient, modern or hypothetical non-Jewish population will offer a precise model of the Jewish population of the early Common Era. Nonetheless, the pattern derived from contemporary and comparable pre-industrial populations should be similar enough to enable us to reconstruct, in very broad strokes, a demographic picture of the Jews in late antiquity.

Geographically, the primary foci of this paper are Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Sassanian Persia and the rabbinic texts cited were produced within these settings. Scholars today agree that rabbinic texts should not to be taken at face value since the laws and ethos they prescribe may not have been widely practiced or shared[7] and the stories they

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[5] See Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 4.

[6] See Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, property and death in the Roman family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12-22. On the album of Canusium as a potential source for information on life expectancy see Richard Duncan Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 101-103; Tim G. Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[7] The manifest overlap between rabbinic law and the practices of the Jews attested in legal documents found in the Judean desert demonstrates, however, that rabbinic

tell are often fictitious. Nonetheless, rabbinic texts have much to reveal about childhood in antiquity. The rabbis were embedded within the demographic reality of their times and therefore their texts inevitably reflect this environment. Regardless of the ideological dimensions of rabbinic literature, inadvertent comments and implicit presuppositions in rabbinic texts often shed light on the broader social reality of late antiquity.[8] In addition, rabbinic texts convey their authors' explicit ideals and expectations in reference to children. Many of the ideas and values expressed in rabbinic literature were probably limited to the educated rabbinic elite, but scholars now recognize that rabbinic literature also preserves folk elements and popular literary motifs that apparently represented the ideas of a far larger segment of the Jewish population.[9] Consequently, though rabbinic literature was produced by an educated elite, it nonetheless illuminates the ambient social reality of late antiquity and, at times, it expresses popular norms and common conceptions representative of a wider Jewish population.

The earliest rabbinic composition, the Mishnah, was edited in Palestine during the early third century C.E. though it includes much earlier

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law was intimately related to more popular Jewish practices and should not be viewed entirely as a creation of the rabbis themselves. See Hayim Lapin, "Maintenance of Wives and Children in Early Rabbinic and Documentary Texts from Roman Palestine," in *Rabbinic Law in its Roman and Near Eastern Context* (ed. C. Hezser; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 191; Martin Goodman, "Josephus and Variety in First-Century Judaism," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, VII:6 (2002), 208-213; idem, "Josephus, the Pharisees and Ancestral Tradition," *JJS* 50 (1999): 17-20; Hannah M. Cotton, "The Rabbis and the Documents," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (ed. M. Goodman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 167-179.

[8] The social and economic status of the rabbis is still a matter of dispute amongst scholars. While Hezser supported Urbach's view that Palestinian *tannaim* and *amoraim* came from all levels of society, others have argued that the rabbis grew into an urban elite during the early third century (see Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997), 23-36; Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 93; Hayim Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities in Later Roman Palestine: The Literary Evidence," *JJS* 50 (1999): 187-207; idem, "Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco-Roman Environment," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, II (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000), 51-80; Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 20.

[9] See Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (trans. Batya Stein; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Even though rabbis, and especially those in Babylonia, may have sought to distance themselves from their non-rabbinic neighbors (see Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* [London and New York: Routledge, 1999], 5-14), they were still intimately familiar with the ambient social and cultural setting, or as Hasan-Rokem put it, they "were concerned with the comprehensive ethnographic recording of their culture" (Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life*, 2). See also n. 7.

material. The latest rabbinic compositions of Palestinian provenance regularly cited in this study were edited in the fifth century and the Babylonian Talmud was edited as late as the sixth or seventh century, though all these compositions include earlier materials. Due to the span of time covered by this corpus, some have tried to reconstruct a history of social change or development, that is a diachronic account of family demographics in the early centuries of the Common Era.[10] For the most part, however, the nature of the evidence precludes such an attempt. As Richard Saller noted in a related context, "To trace change in social relations with confidence requires a series of comparable evidence over time. The uneven preservation of material from antiquity largely frustrates the historian's search for a time series of evidence of tolerable quality."[11] For our purposes, rabbinic literature simply does not provide sufficient evidence of changing demographic patterns over time and consequently diachronic arguments encounter serious methodological difficulties. Instead, a synchronic approach that constructs a heuristic model of the demographics of the family and focuses primarily on the similarities between our sources shows more promise.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate changes in ancient Jewish demographic patterns over time, this does not suggest that these patterns were identical in every period or even in every region of the same period. As we shall see below mortality and fertility rates apparently varied in accordance with numerous factors, yet they were probably sufficiently similar throughout late antiquity that all our sources reflect highly similar demographic regimes, at least from the point of view of our radically different modern regime. Other aspects of family demographics, such as the age at first marriage, are consistently portrayed differently in Palestinian and Babylonian sources and these portrayals apparently reflect different social practices. Thus, although we may not be able to offer a diachronic account of changing demographic patterns, the Babylonian Talmud is sufficiently similar to the Palestinian Talmud that recurring differences between these sources reveal how certain aspects of the demography of the family in the two regions differed significantly.

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[10] See the section below entitled 3.3: Common Family Structures.

[11] Saller, *Patriarchy*, 4. See also Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); cf. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1-16.

1 *Mortality*

1.1 *Rabbinic Literature*

Life expectancy is by no means an important or recurring theme in rabbinic literature, yet certain rabbinic texts reveal assumptions about longevity which were apparently part of the standard way of thinking in rabbinic circles and perhaps more widely amongst Jews of late antiquity.[12] Thus, for example, the Babylonian Talmud cites a *baraita* that relates a story about a cursed family, the descendants of the high priest Eli, who were destined to die young. According to 1 Sam 2:22-26, when Eli was very old and his sons ran the Temple they violated the trust placed in them and took advantage of their powerful office. A man of God visited Eli in reaction to his sons' shameful activities and informed him that God would punish his family by ensuring that "all the increase in your house shall die as [ordinary] men."[13] The meaning of this phrase is uncertain and our *baraita* interprets it to mean that Eli's descendants shall die in the prime of their life.

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[12] One might have thought that the rabbinic version of the "ages of man" in *m. 'Abot* 5:21 might be helpful for this discussion since it traces what it considers to be the stages of the human (male's) lifespan. That text, however, is unhelpful for our current purposes since in relating to the nature of life at certain ages rather than the nature of death at these ages, it does not shed light on rabbinic notions of longevity. See Dov Zlotnick *The Tractate "Mourning"* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), 109; cf. David Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 2. For some other ways of dividing the life-course found in Jewish literature, see *Sir* 42: 11-14; *b. Sanh.* 100b; Philo, *Creation*, 103-105; *Lev. Rab.* 4:7 (ed. M. Margulies [Jerusalem, 1953-60], 94-95); *Eccl. Rab.* 1:2 (ed. Marc G. Hirshman [Jewish Theological Seminary of America (Ph.D.), New York, 1983], 3:17); *Tanḥ.* Pekudei 3 (Reprint, Jerusalem, 1962-3, 133b). See also Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 155-171); David Kraemer, "Images of Childhood and Adolescence in Talmudic Literature," in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory* (ed. David Kraemer; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76-77.

[13] 1 Sam 2:33 (trans. *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999). One may question why the *baraita* chose to employ this difficult phrase when there are more explicit phrases in the previous biblical passages which state unequivocally "there shall be no elder in your house" (2:31) and "there shall never be an elder in your house" (2:32). Presumably the author of this *baraita* understood the term "elder" in the previous passages to refer to officiating leaders rather than the elderly. (For evidence of this view in rabbinic literature, see the position attributed to R. Samuel b. Nahman in the name of R. Jonathan in *b. Sanh.* 14a.) Notwithstanding this understanding of the term "elder," the suggestion that the term "[ordinary] men" refers to youths would never have arisen without the presence of the more explicit preceding passages.

> The Rabbis taught: There was a certain family in Jerusalem whose youths would die at the age of eighteen. They came and told Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. He said to them, perhaps they are of the house of Eli, as it is written, "and all the increase in your house shall die as [ordinary] men." Let them go and study Torah and they shall live. They went and studied Torah and lived, and they used to call them the family of Yohanan after his name.[14]

The original goal of this story must have been to encourage Torah study by illustrating how it prolongs life. The story is significant for our purposes, however, because it reveals that when its anonymous author sought a youthful age as a contrast to the old age unattained by the members of the house of Eli, he chose the age of eighteen years old. This choice demonstrates that he considered death at eighteen to be highly premature and the tragic outcome of a curse.

The story of this Jerusalemite family appears within a pericope which discusses under what circumstances a divine final sentence, such as the curse upon Eli's house, might be rescinded. Immediately prior to the story, the anonymous voice of the Talmud comments that Rabbah[15] and Abbaye belonged to the house of Eli, but since Rabbah devoted himself to Torah he lived until forty while Abbaye who devoted himself both to Torah and to deeds of righteousness lived until sixty. The moral of the disparity between Abbaye and Rabbah's age of death is surely that Torah study and deeds of righteousness are superior to Torah study alone. In light of this moral, perhaps all the ages employed in this pericope may be viewed as rough indicators of rabbinic conceptions regarding age of death. While death at forty was considered untimely but not as tragic as death at eighteen, death at sixty was considered a natural death.

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[14] *b. Roš. Haš.* 18a (according to MS Munich 95). See also *b. Yebam.* 105a; *b. Pesaḥ.* 57a and the comments of D. Schwartz, "To Join Oneself to the House of Judah' (Damascus Document IV, 11)," *RevQ* 39 (1982): 438-439, and M. Beer, "The Sons of Eli in Rabbinic Legend," *Bar Ilan* 14-15 (1977): 79-93 [Hebrew]. Translations of rabbinic texts are my own unless otherwise stated.

[15] As often happens, some manuscripts refer here to "Rabbah" while others refer to "Raba" (see R. Rabbinovicz, *Diqduqe Soferim: Variae Lectiones in Mischnam et in Talmud Babylonicum: Rosh Hashanah* [Munich, 1867-1881], 38 n. 30; *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings, Tractate Yebamoth (IV)* [Jerusalem: Institute for the Complete Israeli Talmud, 1996], 120 n. 82), but "Rabbah" appears to be the preferred reading (Shamma Friedman, "Ketiv ha-shemot 'Rabbah' ve-'Rava' be-Talmud ha-Bavli," *Sinai* 110 [1992-1993]: 157-158 [Hebrew]). See also Avinoam Cohen, *Ravina and Contemporary Sages: Studies in the Chronology of Late Babylonian Amoraim* (Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat-Gan, 2001), 70 n. 29 [Hebrew].

In a similar vein, we find in the Jerusalem Talmud the following story which indicates that death at twenty-eight years of age was viewed as premature by certain sages in Palestine.

> When R. [A]bun b. R. Hiyya died [young], R. Zeira came and eulogized him: "A worker's sleep is sweet, [whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich man's abundance doesn't let him sleep" (Eccl 5:12).] "[Whether] he sleeps [much or little]" is not written here, but rather "whether he has much or little to eat."[16] To what may R. [A]bun b. R. Hiyya be likened? To [the parable of] a king who hired many workers and one worker performed his work exceedingly well. What did the king do? He took him and strolled with him in all directions. Towards evening, the workers came to take their wages and he [the king] gave him [the excellent worker] full wages like them. The workers were disgruntled and said, "We labored all day long and this one labored only for two hours and he gave him full wages like us." Said the king to them, "This one labored in two hours more than you labored all day long." So labored R. [A]bun in Torah for twenty eight years, [and learned] more than a senior student could learn in one hundred years."[17]

Of course, this story differs from the Babylonian pericope in that premature death in this case is the sign of being God's beloved rather than an outcome of a curse. Nonetheless, in stating that death at twenty-eight years of age is premature, this story corroborates the Babylonian pericope's position regarding premature death, at least up until a person's late twenties.

Each of the sources just discussed sheds some light upon rabbinic attitudes to age at death, but none offers an explicit analysis of the range of the possible ages at death or a division of these ages into categories. Such an analysis does appear, however, in the following *baraita* located in *y. Bik.* 2:1, 64c:[18]

> [The preceding discussion] is in keeping with that which is taught: He who dies at fifty years, dies of divine excision; at fifty two [dies the] death of Samuel the prophet; at sixty [dies the] death stated in the Torah; at seventy [dies the] death of love; at eighty [dies a] death from old age, from hereon after life is misery.

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[16] In other words, R. Abun will sleep well in the world to come because he ate, i.e. studied well, in this world.

[17] *y. Ber.* 2:8 5c. See also Tzvee Zahavy, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Berakhot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 103-104.

[18] See parallel texts in *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28a; *Sem.* 3:8.

This *baraita* opens with a definition of death at fifty years of age as death through divine excision ("*karet*"), that is the divine punishment of being "cut down" before one's time. Since death at the age of fifty is described as premature, death at any age younger than fifty would certainly have been considered premature. The second stage in the *baraita*'s list of ages is fifty-two, the age at which Samuel the Prophet died.[19] It is not clear why Samuel the Prophet is discussed here but perhaps his inclusion is supposed to teach that death at fifty-two does not reflect badly upon the deceased since the pious Samuel the Prophet also died at fifty-two. Offering an alternative explanation for Samuel's inclusion, the Babylonian Talmud suggests that death by excision actually applies up until sixty years of age but the *baraita* chose not to state this fact out of deference to Samuel.[20] After referring to Samuel's age of death, the *baraita* states that the age of sixty is the "death stated in the Torah," or according to the Babylonian Talmud, "the death of every person."[21] Sixty, in other words, is the natural age at death for a person who has lived a full life and was not cut down prematurely. Since death at sixty is considered a natural death, death at seventy and eighty are viewed as blessed deaths, the former being described as the "death of love" and the latter as the "death from old age."[22] The *baraita* concludes with the portrayal of eighty as the outer limit of a blessed life since after eighty, "life is misery" and one apparently would be better off dead.

For our purposes, the most revealing feature of this *baraita* is that while death at the age of fifty is considered premature, sixty years of age is the pivotal point at and after which death is considered to be natural. One might argue, however, that this reading of the *baraita* is incorrect since the Jerusalem Talmud itself takes the *baraita* to mean

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[19] Scripture does not explicitly state at what age Samuel died and in its analysis of the *baraita*, the Jerusalem Talmud explains how to deduce that Samuel died at the age of fifty-two.

[20] See *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28a.

[21] On the preferred reading of this phrase in *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28a, see Rabbinovicz, *Diqduqe Soferim*, *Mo'ed Qaṭ.*, 101 n. 300; Rabbenu Hananel, *ad loc.* The manuscript evidence (MS Oxford Opp. Add. fol. 23 [366]; MS Vatican 108; MS Vatican 134 with homoioteleuton; MS Munich 95; MS Munich 140 [all according to *The Sol and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank*]) consistently reads "the death of every person" rather than "death by the hand of Heaven" as found in the printed edition of the Talmud. In addition, the proof-text subsequently cited from Job (5:26) does not refer to "death by the hand of Heaven," i.e. divine excision, but rather to a natural death.

[22] Alternative characterizations of old age found in *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28a, *m. 'Abot* 5:21 and *Sem.* 3:8 are based on Ps 90:10.

that death at sixty is a form of divine punishment akin to divine excision.[23] Yet notwithstanding the interpretation offered in the Jerusalem Talmud, there are good reasons to think that the Talmud's interpretation was not the original meaning of the text. First, the *baraita* characterizes death at the age of sixty as the "the death stated in the Torah" and there is no a priori reason to think that this phrase denotes death by divine punishment. In fact, the Talmud itself offers two derivations of this characterization and neither necessarily refers to premature death.[24] Second, the preferred reading[25] in the Babylonian Talmud's version of our *baraita* reads "the death of every person," a phrase that connotes a natural as opposed to premature death. Third, a related *baraita* appears in the continuation of the pericope in *y. Bikkurim*[26] and it seems to corroborate the notion that death at sixty is a natural death.

> R. Halafta b. Saul taught, he who dies in the first [day of an illness], in the second, or in the third, [dies] through divine excision; in the fourth or in the fifth, [dies a] hurried death; in the sixth, [dies a] death in the way of the land; in the seventh, [dies a] death of love. From hereon after, [he dies a] death through suffering.

This *baraita* shares a few themes with our *baraita* such as the reference to divine excision, the connection between seven (or seventy) with love and the portrayal of the final stage of life as a state of anguish. This common ground indicates that the *baraitot* are probably related and perhaps depend on a shared tradition. Moreover, the similarity between these two *baraitot* begs the comparison between death at sixty and death after six days of illness and since the latter unequivocally denotes a natural death it is likely that the former does so as well.[27] Thus,

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[23] This interpretation is also reflected in the erroneous reading found in the printed edition of the Babylonian Talmud which states that death at sixty is "death by the hand of heaven."

[24] The Talmud's first derivation is based on the longevity of the generation of Israelites who were prohibited from entering the land of Israel and therefore remained in the wilderness until their deaths. These Israelites were not punished with premature death, but rather were forced to live out the entirety of their lives without entering the land of Israel, their ultimate destination since the exodus from Egypt. However, we must concede that it is possible that the Talmud might have viewed a shortened lifespan as part of the Israelites' punishment even though it never states so explicitly. The second derivation relates to the *gematria* of a word from Job 5:26, a passage that discusses the age of a natural death at the end of a full life.

[25] See n. 21 above.

[26] See also *Sem.* 3:9 where this second *baraita* is juxtaposed to our *baraita* which appears in 3:8.

[27] Moreover, Jacob Neusner suggests that the units of time in R. Halafta ben Saul's

despite the interpretation assumed in the Jerusalem Talmud, the original meaning of our *baraita* was that a death that occurred from the age of sixty and up was considered to be natural and not the outcome of divine punishment.

In sum, this group of early rabbinic texts portrays a consistent rabbinic attitude to age at death. In particular, the texts suggest that the rabbis felt that death at eighteen, twenty-eight, forty and even fifty years of age was premature. Sixty years old, it seems, was the watershed in their thinking and only sexagenarians or those even older were considered both to have lived a full life and to have died a natural death.

Interestingly, sixty was not merely a watershed in rabbinic thinking, it was also a watershed in Roman law. According to Ulpian's life table,[28] life until the age of sixty is legally divided into eight groups and the life expectancy of an individual under sixty is determined according to the life expectancy assigned to his age cohort. Sixty marked a pivotal point in Ulpian's life table's calculations of life expectancy since at the age of sixty or older, a person was always assigned a life expectancy of five years. In a similar manner, sixty also functioned as a turning point in the cruder formula replaced by Ulpian's life table although according to that formula, a life expectancy of zero was assigned to anyone sixty or over. The legal applications of these life tables are not clear[29] yet the tables nonetheless demonstrate that sixty was perceived in Roman law as a watershed in the human life course. In light of these Roman life tables, it seems that rabbinic attitudes towards aging were in tune with widespread conceptions regarding aging in the Roman world.[30]

Although rabbinic texts certainly reflect ancient notions regarding age at death, it is worth stressing that, just like Roman life tables, these

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statement refer to decades (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Bikkurim*, [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991], 162) and if his interpretation is correct, then R. Halafta b. Saul would also be asserting that death at sixty is natural. It should be noted, however, that the decade is not a common temporal unit in rabbinic discussions.

[28] Justinian, *Digest*, 35.2.68. The table is excerpted from Aemilius Macer and ascribed to Ulpian.

[29] See Parkin, *Demography*, 27-41; Saller, *Patriarchy*, 13-15.

[30] See Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 150, for a discussion of some other indications, such as retirement from the Roman senate, which reflect the Roman conception that old age began at age sixty. See also Walter Kirkpatrick Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 106-107; Tim Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 15-26, 36; Karen

texts are not based on empirical or statistical analyses. Jews, like Romans, would not have had the requisite data or quantitative skills to produce a realistic life table, and therefore the rabbinic texts discussed are not of much demographic value.[31] They are important nevertheless since they portray a qualitative dimension of rabbinic life that is relevant to our investigation. Jewish notions of childhood as well as the experience of childhood in Jewish communities were influenced not only by the demographic reality, but also by contemporary conceptions of what constitutes a full and natural life-course. These qualitative ideas contributed to the cultural atmosphere of the period within which children lived and ideas of childhood developed. Consequently, both the qualitative analysis of rabbinic hopes for the life-course as well as the quantitative demographic analysis of Jewish society are relevant to our study of childhood as is the relationship between these two dimensions. Let us therefore consider now the probable mortality rate amongst Jews in antiquity and then reflect upon the relationship between rabbinic thinking and the demographic reality.

1.2 *Epitaphs and Model Life Tables*

In the only attempt to reconstruct the average age at death for Jews during the Graeco-Roman period, Pieter W. van der Horst analyzed five hundred and forty surviving ancient Jewish epitaphs that record the age of death of the deceased. He found, on the basis of this evidence, that "the average age at death turns out to be 28.4 years, that is, for men ca. 29 years, for women ca. 27 years."[32] There are numerous problems, however, with deriving mortality rates from these epitaphs. The epitaphs are spread over a vast geographical area and certain critical factors that influence mortality would not have remained constant throughout this area. Different altitudes, ecological settings, levels of urbanization and cultural practices related to nursing and nurturing which vary from place to place would have weakened the link between an all-inclusive average and any particular locale. Similarly, the distribution

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Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

[31] See Parkin, *Demography*, 35-38; Saller, *Patriarchy*, 15; Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 2.

[32] Pieter W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millenium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 B.C.E.-700 C.E.)* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991), 73.

of the epitaphs over a long period of time ignores the many changes in demography that occur over time as a result of natural growth, wars, climactic changes etc. Yet even if we were to limit the analysis to one particular region, we would still have to wonder whether the epitaphs reflected the local population alone or also included migrants and to what extent the ages cited on the epitaphs were reliable and not stylized or based on ignorance.[33] Moreover, funerary inscriptions reflect "the statistics of commemoration" rather than "the statistics of mortality"[34] and in the case of the ancient Jewish epitaphs, the cultural factor prompting the decision to commemorate is evidenced by the under-representation of infants, little children and women.[35] Finally, even if we imagined that the epitaphs truly provided the random or near random sampling necessary for a statistical analysis, the ancient Jewish epitaphs are simply too few in number to be of significant statistical value. For these and other reasons, it would seem that "we have to drop the whole enterprise of drawing demographic conclusions from our small corpus of data."[36]

More generally, the literary and physical evidence from antiquity traditionally used to determine mortality rates in the Roman Empire are now being questioned anew.[37] Even the use of model life tables based on well-documented modern high mortality regimes in the reconstruction of age structures for ancient societies has recently weathered a severe critique. Walter Scheidel has emphasized that Ansley Coale and Paul Demeny's model life tables (which are generally used by Roman historians) were designed to reflect stable populations and confounding variables such as natural growth and migration simply cannot

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[33] See van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 73-84; Saller, *Patriarchy*, 15-18; Walter Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure: Evidence and Models," *JRS* 91 (2001): 11. Van der Horst argues that gross age exaggerations common in Roman epitaphs were not common in Jewish ones (82-83).

[34] See Keith Hopkins, "Graveyard for historians," in *La mort, les morts, et l'au-delà dans le monde romain. Actes du colloque de Caen* (ed. F. Hinard; Caen Cedex: Université de Caen, 1987), 124. The propensity to erect an epitaph was dependent on many factors such as the social class, age and gender of the deceased as well as the availability of kin to commemorate.

[35] Van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 75-76, 81.

[36] Van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 80. (After citing this conclusion, van der Horst, 84, maintains nonetheless that there are some reasons to think that "Jewish indications of age are in some respects more to be credited than pagan ones.")

[37] See, in particular, Walter Scheidel, "Progress and Problems in Roman Demography," in *Debating Roman Demography* (ed. W. Scheidel; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1-81; idem, "Roman Age Structure," 1-26.

be accounted for quantifiably in the ancient context. Moreover, he notes that Coale and Demeny's model life tables were extrapolated from societies that post-date the epidemiologic transition which was "a tidal shift in the causes of death from infectious to chronic and degenerative diseases."[38] Since these modern societies were not plagued by wars, famines, malnutrition, and infectious diseases and since these factors were highly influential in the ancient setting it is likely that ancient demographic statistics are often beyond the range covered by model life tables. In addition, since mortality rates also vary according to altitude and type of settlement, that is rural or urban, it is likely that there was a wide variety of mortality rates even in the ancient world.[39] In short, Scheidel's presentation of confounding variables demonstrates why there is no reason to expect model life tables to accurately reflect the demographic reality of any ancient society.

Yet despite his critique, Scheidel does not conclude that the gap between model life tables and the ancient world is so dramatic that the use of these tables in demographic studies of the ancient world is entirely undermined. Rather the model life tables of high mortality regimes are apparently similar enough to the high mortality regimes of the Roman world that even Scheidel agrees that "hypothetical 'one-fits-all' averages can still be useful for schematic calculations."[40] In addition, despite the imperfect nature of our empirical data from antiquity, no study has given "the slightest reason to doubt the standard view of an average life expectancy at birth between twenty and thirty years."[41] Thus, even given the many problems with van der Horst's data, it is probably no accident that his biased and insufficient data assigns an average life expectancy at birth for Jews that roughly coincides with the statistical counterpart for gentiles. We may therefore

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[38] Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 5.

[39] Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 1-26. In reference to Scheidel's arguments against the application of uniformitarian theory to ancient societies, see n. 53 below.

[40] Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 26.

[41] Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 25; Saller, *Patriarchy*, 20; Parkin, *Demography*, 84; idem, *Old Age*, 49; Keith Hopkins, "On the probable age structure of the Roman population," *Population Studies* 20 (1966): 264. This consensus view, however, "rests less on ancient evidence, which is sparse and poor in quality, than on the reasonable conviction that, granted the general social and economic conditions prevailing in the Roman empire, its life expectancy is likely to have lain near the lowest levels attained for premodern populations" (Bruce W. Frier, "Demography," in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume XI The High Empire, A.D. 70-192* [2nd edition; eds. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey and Dominic Rathbone; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 788. See also Parkin, *Demography*, 84).

conclude that the average life expectancy at birth for Jews during late antiquity was between twenty and thirty years which corresponds on average to death rates of approximately forty per thousand per year.[42]

This statistic for Jewish life expectancy, however, should be viewed only as a rough estimate and we must keep in mind that it would have varied significantly with social, cultural, regional and temporal factors. The following are just a few examples of the variables that would have influenced mortality. The poor may have had a higher mortality rate since the impoverished masses of the Roman Empire suffered chronic malnutrition as well as shortages in food, clothing and shelter,[43] and their dire economic plight would have supplied an important motivation to expose infants which would have been less relevant to wealthy parents.[44] Women would have died from complications in childbirth and from exhaustion more frequently than they do in the western world today.[45] The maintenance of girls would have probably been neglected before the maintenance of boys[46] and if the Roman model is appropriate, female babies would have been exposed more often than male babies.[47]

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[42] See Parkin, *Demography*, 92, 145.

[43] See Peter D. A. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); idem, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[44] See *b. Qidd.* 73b. See also Mireille Corbier, "Child Exposure and Abandonment," in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World* (ed. Suzanne Dixon; London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 61; Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 15. More generally, wealth may influence mortality rates in various ways. In modern times, wealth usually is linked to better health but in the ancient world wealth was no protection against infectious diseases since no life-saving medicines were there to be purchased (Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 15). In addition, it is precisely the well-to-do who had latrines in their homes (*b. Šabb.* 25b) and since the latrines were not hooked up to sewage systems and were often located next to the kitchen, they eased the spread of disease and the contamination of food by insects and rodents. See A. Scobie, "Slums, sanitation and mortality in the Roman world," *Klio* 68 (1986): 399-433.

[45] See Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 116-119; Rawson, *Children and Childhood*, 103-104.

[46] See Lapin, "Maintenance of Wives and Children," 194-195. Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 94; Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 100-101, Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 10-11; Ilan, *Integrating*, 202-205.

[47] See Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (ed. Beryl Rawson; London: Routledge, 1986), 18; Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Mothers and Daughters in the Greco-Roman World," in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* (ed. S. J. D. Cohen; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993), 107-108. On the similar state of affairs in Athens see Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 87; and in later periods, see Hanawalt, "Medievalists," 451-453. Cf. Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 47-48 (n. 6); Beryl Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships in Roman Society," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (ed. Beryl Rawson; Canberra and Oxford: Humanities Research Centre and Clarendon Press, 1991), 11. "Whether infanticide and abandonment were more

Epidemics would have wreaked havoc[48] and altitude and the type of settlement would have influenced the spread of infectious diseases with higher altitudes and rural settlements experiencing lower rates of mortality (due to less traffic and lower population densities).[49] Thus people in villages in the Galilee and even in a city like Sepphoris may have had higher life expectancies than those in Tiberias and Caesarea. One may also suppose that temporal changes such as the devastation inflicted by the three Jewish wars of the first two centuries C.E., the migration of Jews from Judaea to Galilee in the second century C.E.,[50] the gradual urbanization of Palestine during the first few centuries of the common era and the demographic growth during this period[51] would have all had profound effects upon Jewish mortality. In short, there was no single mortality rate for Jews during the course of late antiquity, yet the approximation of life expectancy at birth between twenty and thirty years is nonetheless roughly accurate and therefore of use.[52]

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frequent for girls than for boys is still debatable" (Rawson, *Children and Childhood*, 117). More generally, on exposure amongst Jews see Lapin, "Maintenance," 183; John Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History* (Northvale, NJ and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 35-44; Catherine Hezser, "Slaves and Slavery in Rabbinic and Roman Law," in *Rabbinic Law in its Roman and Near Eastern Context* (ed. C. Hezser; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 142-145; eadem, "The Exposure and Sale of Infants in Rabbinic and Roman Law," in *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines/Judaistik zwischen den Disziplinen* (eds. K. Herrmann, M. Schlüter and G. Veltri; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 3-28; Daniel R. Schwartz, "Did the Jews Practice Infant Exposure and Infanticide in Antiquity?" *Studia Philonica Annual* 16 (2004): 61-95.

[48] See Richard P. Duncan-Jones, "The Impact of the Antonine Plague," *JRA* 9 (1996): 109-111.

[49] See Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 15-16.

[50] See Goodman, *State and Society*, 32-33; S. J. D. Cohen, "The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society of the Second Century," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. L. I. Levine; New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 160; Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities," 77.

[51] See Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure*, 158-159; Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities," 75-77; A. Jones, "The Urbanization of Palestine," *JRS* 31 (1941): 78-85; Yoram Tsafrir, "Some Notes on the Settlement and Demography of Palestine in the Byzantine Period: The Archaeological Evidence," in *Retrieving the Past: Essays on Archaeological Research and Methodology in Honor of Gus W. van Beek* (ed. Joe D. Seger; Mississippi: Cobb Institute of Archaeology, 1996), 269-283; Hayim Lapin, *Economy, Geography and Provincial History in Later Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 68, 77 n. 97. Scheidel suggests that urbanization in the Roman period must have accelerated the dissemination of tuberculosis and other diseases ("Roman Age Structure," 8-9, 18).

[52] See Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 110. Cf. Schremer, *Male and Female*, 82 n. 36; 100-101, nn. 86, 87. Although Schremer observes that mortality rates were not constant throughout the Roman Empire, Satlow demonstrates how one may carefully apply model life tables similar to the Roman evidence to Jewish antiquity. In addition, though one might be tempted to elicit information on mortality rates from ancient authors, their testimony

1.3 *Infant Mortality*

An average life expectancy at birth between twenty and thirty years does not imply that most people died in their twenties. Rather, according to the uniformitarian theory of human paleodemography, this average life expectancy was lowered by high mortality amongst infants and children. "The shapes of mortality curves of different populations, though different, fall into the same essential pattern: mortality rates are relatively high among newborns, then decline through the weeks and months after birth as the infant survives the period of highest vulnerability to disease; mortality rates reach a low point around age ten, then increase gradually until the later forties, when they begin to increase significantly."[53] Infant mortality rates, that is the mortality rates of infants who die before their first birthday, is less than ten deaths per thousand births in the modern developed world. On the basis of comparisons to other pre-industrial societies, however, Tim Parkin estimates that infant mortality was closer to three hundred deaths per thousand births in the ancient Roman world.[54] Although we must allow room for much variation amongst Jewish populations in different locales and periods, a very high infant and child mortality, not too different from Parkin's estimation, probably also remained constant throughout Jewish antiquity and skeletal remains from burial sites in Palestine seem to corroborate this point.[55]

"must always be considered suspect unless they can be verified" (Frier, "Demography," 787).

[53] See Saller, *Patriarchy*, 22; Howell, "Toward a uniformitarian theory," 33-35. Walter Scheidel has contended, however, that this uniformitarian principle may often be inapplicable to ancient societies for numerous reasons ("Roman Age Structure," 6-11). Infectious diseases, for example, can modify the shape of the mortality curve by targeting a specific age group and adult mortality rates do not necessarily correspond with infant mortality rates. Nonetheless, even Scheidel agrees that "a substantial share of all deaths must have been concentrated in the first few years of life" (7) and that "hypothetical 'one-fits-all' averages can still be useful for schematic calculations" (26). Thus, despite the well-warranted skepticism involved in applying model life tables based on uniformitarian theory to ancient societies, even Scheidel would agree that we are justified in applying model life tables to ancient Jewish society in a rough and schematic way.

[54] See Parkin, *Demography*, 93. See also Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 12; Rawson, *Children and Childhood*, 104.

[55] See Patricia Smith, Elizabeth Bornemann and Joseph Zias, "The Skeletal Remains," in *Meiron Excavation Project, Volume III: Excavations at Ancient Meiron, Upper Galilee, Israel 1971-72, 1974-75, 1977* (eds. Eric M. Meyers, James F. Strange and Carol L. Meyers; Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1981), 110-118; Ilan, *Integrating*, 199-202.

Rabbinic literature certainly gives the impression that death in infancy[56] and youth was a major concern amongst the Jews of the period. In legal contexts, the death of nursing babies is discussed in a manner that suggests that it was a common and usual occurrence.[57] Confirming this perception, the goals of the fasts for Wednesday and Thursday ascribed to the men of the Ma'amad imply that croup and the death of nursing children (perhaps due to nursing complications) were particularly worrisome.

> It has been taught: The [Israelite] men of the priestly watch would fast every day. On Monday they would fast for those who were going on an ocean voyage. [And they would say in prayer,] "And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters'" (Gen 1:6). On Tuesday they would fast for those who make land voyages: [And they would say in prayer,] "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear'" (Gen 1:9). On Wednesday they would fast so that children would not get croup. [And they would say in prayer,] "And God said, 'let there be lights [*me'orot*] in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years'" (Gen 1:14). [Instead of "lights,"] "curses [me'erot]" is written. On Thursday they would fast for pregnant women, that they not miscarry, and for nursing mothers, that their children not die: [And they would say in prayer,] "And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens'" (Gen 1:20).[58]

In a similar vein, the Tosefta cites a law and two cases heard by the rabbis which demonstrate how the surgery of circumcision placed male infants in mortal danger and, at times, even claimed their lives.

> [If a woman] should bear males who when circumcised die; if she circumcised the first [son] and he died, [and if she circumcised] the second and he [also] died, she should circumcise the third; the fourth, [however,] she should not circumcise. [There is] a story of four sisters in Sepphoris. When the first circumcised [her son], he died; [when the] sec-

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[56] Miscarriages and deaths during delivery must have also been quite common. See, for example, *m. 'Ohal.* 7:4-6, *b. Šabb.* 63b and the prayer for Thursday cited below.

[57] See, for example, *m. Nid.* 1:4; *t. Nid.* 2:1; *t. Parah* 4:7.

[58] *y. Ta'an.* 4:3 68b (trans. J. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Taanit* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See parallel versions in *Lam. Rab.* 1: 434-446 (Reprint, ed. S. Buber; Georg Olms: Hildesheim, 1967 [Vilna, 1899], 87-88); *b. Ta'an.* 27b; *Sop.* 17:4.

> ond [circumcised her son], he died; [when the] third [circumcised her son], he died. The case came before the sages and they said, "the fourth should not circumcise." R. Nathan said, "When I was in Mazaca of Cappodocia, there was one woman there who would bear males who when circumcised died. She circumcised her first [son] and he died; the second [son] and he [also] died; [so] she brought the third before me and I saw that he was jaundiced. I examined him and did not find the blood of circumcision in him. They said to me, "Shall I circumcise him?" I said to them, "Wait until blood enters into him." They waited and [then] circumcised him and he lived, and they called him Nathan the Babylonian in my name."[59]

More generally, rabbinic literature reports many stories, some supposedly based on real events and others purely hypothetical, in which children are said to have died young or to have predeceased their parents.[60] Dreams were interpreted to refer to the life expectancy of the dreamer's children thereby demonstrating how both dreamers and dream-interpreters alike presupposed that child-mortality was a likely concern to appear within the dreams of parents.[61] The following parable, although fictional and hyperbolic, employs a core motif of predeceasing children that clearly reverberated in a community keenly attuned to this sort of tragedy.

> "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: Listen! Summon the dirge singers" (Jer 9:16) . . . The rabbis said, "[This may be compared] to [a parable of] a king who had twelve children. [When] two died, he began to find

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[59] *t. Šabb.* 15:8. See also *b. Ḥul.* 47b; *b. Yebam.* 64b; *b. Šabb.* 134a. See Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 156-7, 279 n. 63; Nissan Rubin, *The Beginning of Life: Rites of Birth, Circumcision and Redemption of the First-born in the Talmud and Midrash* (Israel: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1995), 93 [Hebrew]; Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta: Shabbat* (10 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955-88), 250-251.

[60] See, for example, *Lam. Rab.* Petihta 24:17 (ed. Buber, 25); *Gen. Rab.* 96 (eds. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck [Reprint, Jerusalem, 1996 (Berlin, 1912-1936)], 1196); *y. Sanh.* 6:10 23d (R. Abbahu lost a son); *b. Šabb.* 136a (R. Dimi lost a son); *b. Šabb.* 151b (R. Hanina lost his daughter); *b. Ta'an.* 13a (R. Yose b. Hanina lost sons); *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 20a (R. Ahiyya lost a son), *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 20b (Amemar lost a grandson); *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 21a (R. Yose of Sepphoris lost a son; Rabbi lost a daughter (MS Munich 95); R. Judah b. Ilai lost a son); *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 21b (R. Akiva lost two son); *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28b (R. Ishmael lost sons); *b. Ketub.* 8b (R. Hiyya b. Abba lost a child); *b. B. Qam.* 80a (Hoba's children died from neglect); *b. B. Bat.* 116a (R. Johanan lost ten sons); *'Abot R. Nat. A* 14 (ed. S. Schechter; Vienna, 1887, 58: Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai lost a son).

[61] See *y. Ma'aś. Š.* 4:6 55c.

> consolation in [the remaining] ten. [When] another two died, he began to find consolation in [the remaining] eight. [When] another two died, he began to find consolation in [the remaining] six. [When] another two died, he began to find consolation in [the remaining] four. [When] another two died, he began to find consolation in [the remaining] two. Once they all had died, he began to lament over them, "Alas! Lonely sits the city [Once great with people!]" (Lam 1:1)."[62]

Although members of every age-group and class in antiquity were "liable to succumb to sudden epidemics to an extent which the development of water supply, sanitation, and pharmaceuticals in the last two centuries has made it difficult for us today to imagine . . . when a Roman listed the characteristics of different age-groups, it was vulnerability—*infirmitas*—that was characteristic of children."[63] In a similar manner, rabbinic literature consistently portrays children as a vulnerable group susceptible to all kinds of dangers. The many illnesses which threatened children encouraged people to pray and give charity on their behalf as well as to employ amulets and magic to protect them.[64] In addition, children might die in war and persecutions, starve, fall into pits, drown, have doors lock them into houses, perish in collapsing homes, and get trampled or burned.[65] Demons, the evil eye, insects and animals might hurt or kill children[66] and even adults posed a seri-

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[62] *Lam. Rab.* Petihta 2 (2) (ed. Buber, 4). See parallel in *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 15: 4 (ed. B. Mandelbaum [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962], 252-253).

[63] See Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 11.

[64] See *b. Pesaḥ.* 8a-b; *b. B. Meṣi'a.* 52a. Compare Harlow and Laurence's discussion of the number of protective deities for children called upon by pagans (Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 39-40). Rabbinic literature also offers evidence for the use of astrology to predict whether a certain person would have a child, for the changing of a name to outwit a horoscope and for the use of talismans and prayers to assist in impregnation (see *Gen. Rab.* 44:10, 45:1-2 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 432, 447-448)).

[65] For children falling into pits and doors locking children into homes see *t. Šabb.* 15:13; *b. Yoma* 84b; for drowning see *y. Soṭah* 3:4 19c, *y. Šabb.* 13:6 14b; *b. Menaḥ.* 64a; for collapsing homes see *b. B. Meṣi'a* 37b; for starvation see *t. B. Meṣi'a* 8:2; for trampling see *b. B. Qam.* 26a; for burning see *'Abot R. Nat. B* 30 (ed. Schechter, 63); *Sipre Zuta* 27:18 (ed. H. S. Horowitz; Reprint, Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1966 [Leipzig, 1917], 321). See also Rubin, *Beginning*, 56-61.

[66] See *t. Sol.* 13:1-4; *m. Ta'an.* 3:6; *m. Kelim* 26:5; *Lev. Rab.* 5:1 (ed. Margulies, 98-102); *Lev. Rab.* 26:7 (ed. Margulies, 606); *b. Ketub.* 50a; *Gen. Rab.* 34:15 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 327-328). See *Mek.* Beshalah 4 and *Mek.* Jethro 2 (*Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, eds. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin [Frankfurt, 1931], 101, 208) for the parable of a father who protects his son from robbers, wolves, heat, hunger and thirst.

ous danger. Adults might sell,[67] kidnap,[68] expose,[69] murder,[70] kill unintentionally,[71] bewitch,[72] sexually abuse,[73] step on and neglect children[74] thereby making the world of childhood an even more perilous place.

In short, the many references to the death of infants and children in rabbinic literature as well as the portrayal of the young as particularly vulnerable to countless life-threatening dangers reflect the demographic reality of a high infant and child mortality. This plague of high child mortality troubled the rabbis and led them to explore its theological ramifications. On a national level, some rabbis suggested that the tragic burial of one's sons and daughters was a specifically Jewish calamity, perhaps reflecting a sense of national tragedy in the wake of the destruction of the Temple and the loss of Jewish autonomy.[75] On an individual level, various justifications for youthful mortality were offered. Children were said to die early as atonement for the sins or indiscretions of their parents,[76] and children (of great individuals) were thought to pass away as atonement for the sins of the generation.[77] In addition, children were

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[67] See *m. Ketub.* 3:8; *m. Soṭah* 3:8; *m. Giṭ.* 4:9. See also Hezser, "Exposure," 3-28

[68] See *t. B. Qam.* 7:13; *Mek. de Rashbi* 21:16 (*Mekhilta de Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai*, eds. J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melammed [Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1955], 172); *b. B. Meṣi'a* 39b; *b. Sanh.* 85b.

[69] See *m. Qidd.* 4:2; *m. Makš.* 2:7; *t. Makš.* 1:8 (ed. M. S. Zuckermandel [Pasewalk, 1880], 674); *Gen. Rab.* 51:1 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 532); *b. Qidd.* 73a-b.

[70] Adele Reinhartz deduces from Philo that neglect of family members and infanticide "were not unheard of among Jewish adults and their offspring," since Philo expounds on these issues at length while the biblical text he discusses does not warrant such a digression ("Parents and Children: A Philonic Perspective," in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* [ed. S. J. D. Cohen; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993], 87). See also Patricia Smith and Gila Kahila, "Identification of Infanticide in Archaeological Sites: A Case Study from the Late-Roman-Early Byzantine Periods at Ashkelon, Israel," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 19 (1992): 667-675.

[71] See *t. Mak.* 2:6 and *b. Ketub.* 60b for infanticide and *t. Mak.* 2:4 for unintentional killing.

[72] *t. Beşah.* 16a.

[73] See, for example, *2 En.* 10:4; Ps-Phoc. 207-217. See also Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), 89-97.

[74] See *b. B. Qam.* 80a.

[75] See, for example, *Sipre Deut* 43 (ed. L. Finkelstein [Berlin, 1939], 99); *Gerim* 1:1.

[76] See *y. Ketub.* 7:6 31b in reference to death owing to unfulfilled vows and *b. Šabb.* 32b for death owing to unfulfilled vows and neglect of Torah study; *y. Šabb.* 7:2 9d and *b. Yebam.* 55a in reference to illicit relations; (*b. Sanh.* 97a in reference to lying); *b. B. Meṣi'a.* 102a in reference to taking the mezuzot when leaving a rented house; *Kallah* 8 in reference to senseless hatred; *Kallah* 20 in reference to unfulfilled vows and neglecting the mitzvoth of mezuzah, zizith and Torah study; *Gen. Rab.* 85:3 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 1034) in reference to not completing a religious duty.

[77] See *b. Ketub.* 8b; *b. Šabb.* 33b.

said to expire because their parents did not mourn the deaths of worthy or learned men, and students who rebelled against their teachers, interrupted their study of Torah or minimized their study after the fifteenth of Av, were said to have caused their own deaths.[78] In contrast, an alternative stream in rabbinic literature does not attempt to interpret youthful mortality as a punishment or atonement, but categorizes it instead as a chastisement of love.[79] The Babylonian *amora* Raba, however, rejected both of these interpretations of youthful mortality claiming that death, whether of children or of adults, is simply insusceptible to explanation.

> Raba said: [Length of] life, children and sustenance depend not on merit but [rather on] *mazzal*. For [take] Rabbah and R. Hisda. Both were saintly Rabbis; one master prayed for rain and it came, the other master prayed for rain and it came. R. Hisda lived to the age of ninety-two, Rabbah [only] lived to the age of forty. In R. Hisda's house there were held sixty marriage feasts, at Rabbah's house there were sixty bereavements. At R. Hisda's house there was the purest wheaten bread for dogs, and it went to waste; at Rabbah's house there was barley bread for human beings and that not to be had.[80]

Regardless of any particular rabbi's theological bent, the harsh reality in which great sages died young and childless led the rabbis to liken youthful death to the picking of an unripe pomegranate and to the untimely expiration of a lantern.[81]

In light of the severity of ancient Jewish infant and child-mortality rates, one may better understand how the rabbinic conception that sixty was the natural age for death emerged in a society with an average life expectancy at birth between twenty and thirty years.[82] According to the uniformitarian theory of human paleodemography discussed

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[78] See *b. Ḥag.* 5a; *b. B. Bat.* 121b; *'Abot R. Nat. A* 26 (ed. Schechter, 82). See also *Sipre Deut* 280 (ed. Finkelstein, 297) where sons are said to die for their own sins and not for the sins of their fathers.

[79] See *b. Ber.* 5a-b. The first stream in rabbinic thought discussed here which views premature death as a punishment or an atonement is akin to the curse of the house of Eli discussed above, though in that case the sins took place many centuries in the past. In a similar vein, the second stream is akin to the claim that God's beloved die early as discussed above in reference to the death of R. Abun b. R. Hiyya though in Berakhot, the chastisement of love is directed toward the father, not the deceased. For a discussion of these issues see David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 200-207.

[80] *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28a (trans. H. M. Lazarus; London: The Soncino Press, 1938).

[81] See *Gen. Rab.* 62 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 673).

[82] See Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 2.

above, high infant and child mortality lowers the average life expectancy and therefore members of high mortality regimes who survived into their teens, had a decent chance of living into their forties and beyond. As Tim Parkin explains, "average life expectancy at birth in the United Kingdom and the United States today is something approaching 80 years for females and is more than 70 for males, and it continues to rise. But it must be stressed that this does not mean that people are living significantly longer lives today than people did 2,000 years ago, only that *more* are surviving into old age because of a lowered rise of mortality in earlier years."[83] Like their modern counterparts, plenty of Jews during late antiquity also lived to sixty and even if they did not represent the statistical norm, they were sufficiently numerous to serve as the basis for an ideal. Thus the rabbis were well aware of the good chances that any particular individual would not survive childhood, but the rabbinic conception of the life-course was not disturbed by this fact since it terminates in an ideal longevity, not a statistical reality. Rabbinic texts, in other words, never suggest that most Jews reached the age of sixty, but claim rather that the ideal life is completed only once one attains the age of sixty. Although the tragedy of a dead child in this rabbinic conception is the missed experience of the full life-course, it is precisely the reproduction of children and grandchildren which serves as the sign of a complete and blessed life. In this vein, the *Mekhilta* states that, when exiting Egypt, the Israelites were thrilled to hear they were destined to see their children and grandchildren.[84]

1.4 *Children, Death and Parental Affection*

Before turning to the two other demographic factors of concern here, namely the average age at first marriage and the fertility rate, let us

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[83] Parkin, *Demography*, 71. See Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 8-11; Cokayne, *Experiencing*, 3.

[84] *Mek.* Bo 12 (eds. Horovitz-Rabin, 41). See also *Mek.* Mishpatim 18 (eds. Horovitz-Rabin, 315); *Gen. Rab.* 45:2 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 448); *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 25b regarding the story of R. Honin who prayed for a child and died the day the child was born. The rabbinic conception of premature death seems not unlike the Graeco-Roman idea of *mors immatura*. The Greeks and Romans assumed that a life was not complete without the experience of marriage and parenthood (see Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 41-43), or as Dixon put it: "Human history is full of examples of unfilial children and of children who predecease the parents, but that fundamental hope remained: that children would survive to bring pride, prosperity, and material and emotional support to the parents in due course, to produce children in their turn and thus confer a kind of immortality" (*Roman Family*, 115).

consider some of the ramifications of the high mortality of ancient Jewish society for childhood. First and foremost we should recognize the extent to which the common presence of death with its particular prevalence amongst the young is alien to our modern western demography. Since death was so common in infancy and childhood, adults viewed childhood as a particularly precarious and hazardous period of life and as children became aware of the fears of their caretakers and learned of the tragedies which inevitably struck their friends and siblings, they must have sensed the countless hazards endangering their lives.

A related issue is the extent to which the high mortality rate influenced the affection adults felt for children. One group of historians believe that when infant mortality rates are high, parents reduce their emotional investment in their children as a defense mechanism and thereby develop a callous attitude to children, at least in comparison to modern sensibilities. In this vein, Philippe Ariès suggested that "people could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a probable loss"[85] and Lawrence Stone argued that the omnipresence of death reduced "the amount of emotional capital available for prudent investment in any single individual, especially in such ephemeral creatures as infants."[86] The exposure of infants, infanticide, the sale of children, brutal discipline, indifference to the deaths of children, grieving over a dead child as a lost investment, the lack of a specific word for baby, the under-representation of children in funerary epitaphs[87] and the use of caretakers (which supposedly minimized emotional attach-

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[85] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (trans. Robert Baldick; New York: A. A. Knopf, 1962), 38-39.

[86] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 651-652.

[87] A much higher percentage of the Jewish epitaphs in Rome commemorate children in comparison to gentile epitaphs. Bernard Blumenkranz concluded from this disparity that Jews had greater paternal love for their children than pagans, while van der Horst supposes that the difference is probably due to Jewish beliefs or values. See B. Blumenkranz, "Quelques notations démographiques sur les Juifs de Rome des premiers siècles,"*Studia Patristica* 4.2 (1961): 343, van der Horst, *Jewish Epitaphs*, 81. (It is worth noting here that certain Jewish epitaphs refer to the "great grief" that parents suffered when their children died; see, for example, David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, I [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993] nos. 67, 86; William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], nos. 35, 40, 83). Cf. Beryl Rawson, "Death Burial, and Commemoration of Children in Roman Italy," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (eds. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek; Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003), 278-279.

ment) have all been adduced as indicators of callousness to children in various high mortality regimes including Roman antiquity.[88]

Other historians have questioned this approach by seeking sources that reveal the caring and loving side of ancient parenthood or by offering alternative interpretations of the historical evidence. Mark Golden, for example, has argued that various factors in ancient Greece, such as widespread confidence in traditional child-rearing practices, the diffusion of grief among a greater web of relatives and the psychological efficacy of mourning rituals, may have moderated the mourning experience for parents and thereby misled the modern historians who interpret this moderation as parental indifference. In addition, he suggests that perhaps a rigorous division between practicality and sentimentality is inappropriate in the ancient context and therefore the expectations of parents that their children would support them in their old age may have increased, rather than decreased, the tenderness of parental affection.[89] Similarly, Linda Pollock argues that a high rate of infant mortality may have operated to increase, not decrease, parental anxiety[90] and Shulamith Shahar has noted that Guatemalan Indian mothers love and nurture their children despite very high infant mortality rates.[91] Beryl Rawson highlights evidence that suggests that parent-child relations in Rome could often be warm[92] and Suzanne Dixon stresses that some Roman parents were "desolate at the death of small children."[93] More generally, the notion that certain behaviors, such as exposure, infanticide and the Roman tendency not to commemorate small children in funerary epitaphs, indicate that parents were indifferent to the deaths of their children has been questioned by various scholars.[94]

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[88] See Ariès, *Centuries*, 39; L. de Mause, "The Evolution of Childhood," in *The History of Childhood* (ed. L. de Mause; London: Souvenir Press, 1976), 1-73; Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 16-17; Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 29, 64.

[89] Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 82-94. See also Ralph W. Mathisen, *People, Personal Expression, and Social Relations in Late Antiquity, Volume 1* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003), 71-75.

[90] Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 127; Hanawalt, "Medievalists," 457-458.

[91] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-7.

[92] Rawson, "Adult-Child," 7; eadem, *Children and Childhood*, 220-221.

[93] Dixon, *Roman Family*, 130.

[94] See, for example, Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 85-87; Dixon, *Roman Family*, 99-100. On infanticide in particular, see Leigh Minturn and Jerry Stashak, "Infanticide as

While the former group of historians thought to link demography to widespread sentiments, the latter group belongs to a recent trend in historiography which has weakened the correlation between high mortality and parental callousness.[95] Yet even according to current thinking, it would still be a mistake to equate the feelings of parents in antiquity with those of their counterparts today. As Dixon stresses, even though there is substantial evidence for "love of children" in the Roman world,[96] "the young child in the Roman Empire, whatever his or her social standing, assumed none of the importance of the modern counterpart in Western society, with its massive production of toys, books, and visual entertainment for young children, and literature, conferences, and media time devoted to the study of the welfare and development of the young child."[97] Thus, in a high mortality regime so alien to our own, parental feelings may have had a different texture and potency than do their counterparts in the modern western world. Without acceding to the claim that parents love their children today more than they did in the past, it seems reasonable to suppose that the affection they did feel was somehow qualitatively different from the affection experienced today although, as Moses Finley stated, "I confess that I know no way to measure or even to identity the differences."[98]

In addition to the arguments cited above for questioning the notion that parents love their children less in high mortality regimes, we should also bear in mind the following considerations which further hamper our ability to reconstruct the nature of affections in Jewish late antiquity.

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a Terminal Abortion Procedure," *Behavior Science Research* 17 (1982): 70-85; Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide* (New York: Aldine, 1988), 43-59.

[95] When discussing whether parents in the past loved their children, Hugh Cunningham states, "the question as posed is impossible to answer, partly because we simply do not know, and can never know, very much about the intimacies of relationships between parents and children, and partly because it assumes that we would recognize love if we saw it, and record its absence it if was not there, as though it were a material object like a table; in fact of course, it may have expressed itself in very different ways in different societies" (Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* [London and New York: Longman, 1995], 2-3). See also Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children over Three Centuries* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 11-12; Pomeroy, *Families*, 11; Suzanne Dixon, "The 'other' Romans and their family values," in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World* (ed. S. Dixon; London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 14-15.

[96] Suzanne Dixon, "The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family," in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (ed. Beryl Rawson; Canberra and Oxford: Humanities Research Centre and Clarendon Press, 1991), 99.

[97] Dixon, *Roman Family*, 108. See also Bradley, *Discovering*, 140.

[98] Moses Finley, "The Elderly in Classical Antiquity," *Greece and Rome* 28 (1981): 159.

First, "the extremes of loving devotion and cruel abuse can be found in many societies" and therefore the goal of an historical study of trends in affection, as Richard Saller explains, is to identify patterns within the extremes. This goal is unattainable for antiquity, however, since our evidence simply does not enable us to "document broad behavioral *patterns* of family affection or abuse."[99] A group of quotations from rabbinic texts or other sources do not reflect patterns of affection or behavior and the most they can do is supply us with the raw materials for a reconstruction of a Jewish sentimental ideal. Second, demography alone does not determine sentiments and other factors such as class and culture must have also influenced Jewish affection. For example, unlike average folk who would have viewed their children as an economic investment for their old age, the wealthy might have treated their children more like "pets" and delighted in their antics.[100] Thus, high child mortality almost certainly contributed to the formation of Jewish affection for children, but it was probably only one factor amongst many. Third, we are served well in this context by considering the opinion of an anthropologist whose familiarity with many foreign cultures has led him to discourage historians from attempting to trace the delicate nuances of the history of affections. "Mourning behaviour, like affection is universal and it is only the crudest history of mentalities combined with an overpowering and ignorant ethnocentrism that suggests otherwise. Once again there are differences of emphasis, but emotions are poor material for historians who are likely to make untold mistakes in assessing them."[101] Thus, though parental affection amongst Jews in late antiquity was probably somehow different than parental affection amongst moderns, defining and assessing these differences seems to be beyond our abilities.

Two final implications of high mortality worth mentioning here are the disincentive created for investment in formal education[102] and the fate of orphans. Although wealthy families might have been able to afford to educate all their children, the average Jewish family would have probably hesitated to hire a tutor or send their sons to school (whether Greek or Jewish) since scarce resources would have been

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[99] Saller, *Patriarchy*, 7.

[100] See Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 26; Dixon, *Roman Family*, 108-109.

[101] Jack Goody, *The European Family: An Historico-Anthropological Essay* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 4.

[102] See Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 1.

wasted if the child should die. In addition, the minimal economic return on the investment in primary education would have led many families to decide that formal education could not justify the expense of the tuition or the loss of the value of child labor.[103] Consequently, the tendency of rabbis, beginning in the third century C.E., to encourage Jews to educate their children in primary schools[104] apparently reflects the rabbinic conception that the religious and cultural value of primary education is more than worth the risk of a likely financial loss. Moreover, the belief that all boys should attend school indicates that the rabbis felt that before entering the world of adults, boys needed to be socialized, disciplined and initiated into Jewish culture.[105]

The high mortality rate would have also created many orphans whose lives would have become very difficult without the constant aid and support of their parents. Even the lucky orphans whose parents had the financial means to provide for them after they passed away would sorely miss the warmth and psychological support of parental affection.

2 *Fertility*

The fertility rate of a population is affected by many variables. The reproductive life-course of a woman who survives until menopause, conventionally taken to be a mean of twenty-nine years from age fifteen to fourty-four, determines the basic biological limitations on fertility.[106] In the ancient Jewish world, the large majority of children must have been born within marriage due to severe social pressures and cultural ideals and therefore marriage serves as a further constraint on fertil-

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[103] For scribes who learned their trade in school or for those who gained social prestige through education, the social and financial advantages of a primary education might have been obvious. However, for future farmers and artisans these advantages were far less obvious.

[104] See David Goodblatt, "The Talmudic Sources on the Origins of Organized Jewish Education," *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel* 5 (1980): 83-103 [Hebrew]; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 39-68.

[105] See Ariès, *Centuries*, 411-413; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 35-36. The political dimension of this rabbinic idea, however, should not be overlooked. Schools enlarged the numbers of potential rabbis while instilling within the impressionable future population a respect for the mainstays of rabbinic power, namely, Jewish tradition and lore.

[106] It should be noted, however, that even biological developments such as the onset of menarche and menopause vary according to a person's socio-economic situation and therefore should not be considered constant over history. See Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 13-15; Rawson, *Children and Childhood*, 96-97.

ity.[107] More generally, fertility levels are affected by "the age at first marriage of both males and females, the "spacing" of children," the use and efficacy of contraceptive and abortive techniques, the extent of breast-feeding,[108] the level of natural sterility in the society, and the social "rules" governing celibacy, nonmarriage and remarriage."[109] Although the Jewish evidence from late antiquity does not permit us to determine the nature or extent of most of these variables, the average age of first marriage for women as we shall see below was sufficiently young to allow women to take advantage of most of their productive years. Thus the most that our limited evidence can suggest is that women married early enough to have a high level of marital fertility.

2.1 *Fertility and Mortality*

Despite the paucity of our evidence, one can gain an impression of the likely fertility of ancient Jewish society on the basis of general demographic patterns. As Scheidel notes, "In the long term, average life expectancy is the principal determinant of fertility. Poor chances of survival trigger high birth rates to ensure genetic survival."[110] In other words, high fertility rates correlate with high mortality rates and since mortality was very high in antiquity, fertility was high as well. As Parkin notes, "A population in which mortality and fertility levels are consistently high is referred to as a "high pressure" regime. To generalize, we are working with a stable population model where birth and death rates are both around 40 per 1,000 per year, with only short term fluctuations; average life expectancy at birth is in the region of 25 years, and the gross reproduction rate is about 2.5 to 3 (i.e., on average each woman bore five or six children)."[111] In other words, each

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[107] As Bruce Frier notes in reference to Roman fertility, "although non-marital fertility (including births to slaves) was not insignificant, free married women undoubtedly had considerably higher fertility rates than unmarried women, evidently because of the strong and enduring cultural link between marriage and procreation" ("Demography," 798).

[108] Breast-feeding is one possible contraceptive device though if wet-nurses were employed it is not a relevant factor. See Rubin, *Beginning*, 22-24; Parkin, *Demography*, 129-132.

[109] Parkin, *Demography*, 111. The probable presence of polygyny (see Schremer, *Male and Female*, 193-218) would have also affected fertility.

[110] Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 1. Fertility, however, may also influence mortality though in the long term the two probably remained "at closely similar levels" (Parkin, *Demography*, 92).

[111] Parkin, *Demography*, 92. In addition, agriculture was the central pillar of the ancient

woman who lived through her reproductive years would on average have given birth to (two to three girls or) five or six children in total although it is worth noting that most of these children would usually not have reached adulthood due to the high infant and child mortality rates. "Generally a family with more than two adult children would have been considered remarkable."[112]

This relationship between high fertility and high mortality did not pass unnoticed by the rabbis and it plays an important role in rabbinic prescriptions for fertility, or in other words, in the rabbinic understanding of the commandment to procreate. By highlighting a recurring theme in the Babylonian Talmud's discussion on the duty of procreation, we hope to reveal the close link between mortality and fertility in rabbinic thinking.

The locus classicus for the commandment to procreate is *m. Yebam.* 6:6, a text which opens with the categorical assertion, "a man shall not abstain from the commandment to procreate unless he has children."[113] The mishnah then cites a dispute between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel over the precise requirements of this law with Beth Shammai arguing that one is required to beget two sons and Beth Hillel arguing that one is required to beget a son and a daughter. Different versions of this dispute are recorded in *b. Yebam.* 62a, and in one of these versions,[114] Beth Shammai requires one to beget two sons and two daughters. In order to have two sons and two daughters one would have to have had at least four children and in many cases five, six or more. Perhaps this version of Beth Shammai's position was concerned with the high mortality rate and reasoned that if people

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economy and birthrates have been shown to be high in intensive agricultural societies with heavy workloads perhaps because of the benefits the family accrues from additional laborers. See Moni Nag, Benjamin N. F. White and R. Creighton Peet, "An Anthropological Approach to the study of the Economic Value of Children in Java and Nepal," *Current Anthropology* 19 (1978): 293; Candice Bradley, "The Sexual Division of Labor and the Value of Children," *Behavior Science Research* 19 (1984-1985): 160-164; Carol R. Ember, "The Relative Decline in Women's Contribution to Agriculture with Intensification," *American Anthropologist* 85 (1983): 291-297.

[112] Parkin, *Demography*, 112.

[113] On the question of whether this commandment applies only to men or to women as well see the dispute at the very end of the mishnah. See also Hauptman, *Rereading*, 132-136.

[114] See also *t. Yebam.* 8:4; *Deut. Rab.* Devarim 12 (ed. S. Lieberman [Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1940], 9-10); *Tanḥ.* Gen. 26 (ed. S. Buber; [Vilna: Romm, 1885], 19-20).

would produce five children or so, there would be a good chance that one or two would survive to fulfill the biblical call to inhabit the earth.[115]

In the continuation of this pericope, the Talmud questions if a person fulfills his duty to procreate when his children predecease him.[116] In a similar vein, the Talmud also wonders whether grandchildren count towards fulfilling this duty in the absence of living children. These two issues are raised because the Talmud realizes that, in a world in which children often predeceased their parents, a meaningful legal conception of procreation must take both fertility and mortality into account.

This link between mortality and fertility, moreover, is perhaps best captured in the following stance which appears in the continuation of our pericope.

> Our Mishnah cannot represent the opinion of R. Joshua. For it was taught: R. Joshua said, If a man married in his youth, he should marry again in his old age; if he had children in his youth, he should also have children in his old age; for it is said, "In the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest now which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they shall both be alike good."[117]

The Talmud understands Rabbi Joshua's position as a rejection of the Mishnah's assertion that one may abstain from procreation under certain conditions, arguing that one must continue to have children all one's adult life since one does not know which children "shall prosper." "Prosperity" in this context clearly denotes survival[118] and R. Joshua's position reflects the recognition that the fulfillment of one's duty to procreate and populate the world could always be hindered by the premature death of one's children. Realizing the drastic effects of antiquity's high mortality regime, the position attributed to R. Joshua argued that one could only make fertility meaningful by attempting to beat the odds by producing as many children as possible.[119]

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[115] See Gen 1:28; Isa 45:18. The Mishnah (*m. Giṭ.* 4:5; *m. ʿEd.* 1:13) takes the passage from Isaiah "He did not create it a waste, but formed it for habitation," as the central rationale for the precept of procreation.

[116] A similar question is raised in the interpretation of Augustan's marriage legislation regarding procreation. See Parkin, *Demography*, 115-119.

[117] *b. Yebam.* 62b (trans. I. W. Slotki; London: The Soncino Press, 1936). See also *Gen. Rab.* 61:3 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 659-661).

[118] See Rashi ad loc.

[119] See the argument between Rav Alfasi, Baal Hamaor and Nahmanides (Rav Alfasi 19b-20a) on whether R. Joshua's position was considered a binding biblical or rabbinic law.

2.2 *A World Full of Children*

In addition to the relationship between fertility and mortality, perhaps the most striking implication of antiquity's high-pressure regime was that "the young greatly outnumbered the elderly."[120] Living today in a western demographic regime with low fertility and low mortality, many moderns may have difficulty imagining what it was like to live in a world full of children. Although the magnitude of the children's population did not necessarily translate into a higher public visibility for children, the sheer numbers of young people must have influenced society in various ways. Children in urban areas probably enjoyed large peer groups consisting of many potential friends while adults would have been forced to constantly consider the needs of the younger generation as well as the challenges they might pose to the traditional order. In addition, not all children were valued alike and high fertility contributed to a central division in adult attitudes toward children. High fertility "is negatively correlated with the status and well-being of women and constrains female participation in economic and public affairs,"[121] so women and girls in antiquity usually were not accorded the same status as men and boys within the male-dominated public sphere. Thus the overriding preference for male progeny in rabbinic literature is probably, at least in part, an expression of this attitude.[122]

3 *Average Age at First Marriage*

3.1 *First Marriage in Roman Palestine and Sassanian Persia*

Considering the high mortality rate, one would expect Jews of late antiquity, or Jewish women at the very least, to have married early in order to maximize their reproductive capacities. Studies on the age of first marriage in the Graeco-Roman world and in Babylonia for both men and women corroborate this expectation but also demonstrate some of the possible variations in marital strategies within high-pressure regimes. On the basis of rabbinic sources (and ancient documents), scholars suggest that the average age of first marriage in Palestine and

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[120] Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure," 1.

[121] Ibid., 1.

[122] See, for example, Sir 22:3, *Sipre Num* 133 (ed. H. S. Horovitz; Reprint, Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1966 [Leipzig, 1917], 176); *Sipre Zuta* 28 (ed. Horovitz, 237); Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 44-47; Kraemer, "Jewish Mothers," 108-110; but cf. *Gen. Rab.* 26:4 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 246); *b. B. Bat.* 141a.

the Western Diaspora was in the late teens or early twenties for women and around thirty for men. In Babylonia, however, the average age at first marriage was apparently younger with women marrying in their early or mid-teens and men marrying closer to the age of twenty.[123]

The disparity between the age at first marriage amongst Jews in the Graeco-Roman and Persian orbits was apparently due to economic, social and cultural factors. From an economic perspective, it is likely that the material constraints in Palestine and the Mediterranean world were severer than those in Babylonia. In contrast to the Jews of the Roman Empire, Babylonian Jews enjoyed a superior agricultural setting as well as lower taxes and less inflation and in all likelihood these material differences made early marriages viable in Babylonia while hindering them amongst Jews living under Rome.[124] Socially, the structure of the household in Babylonia was more conducive to early marriage. In both Babylonia and Palestine marriage was virilocal, that is a wife moved into her husband's home upon marriage. However, since men on average married about ten years earlier in Babylonia than in Palestine, the fathers of bridegrooms were considerably younger than their Palestinian counterparts and therefore patrivirilocal marriage was probably far more common in Babylonia than in Palestine. In this setting, Palestinian couples inherited the home of the husband's deceased father or established their own homes,[125] while Babylonian newlyweds

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[123] See Schremer, *Male and Female*, 73-125; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 40, 104-111; 105-109; Rubin, *Joy of Life*, 35-72; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (North Ryde, Australia: Macquarie University, 1987), 4:221-227. If women married in their early teens in Babylonia and in their late teens in Palestine, fertility may have been higher in Babylonia. As Sarah B. Pomeroy argues in reference to women in ancient Greece, "a woman who married at 14 would be likely to have at least two more babies than a woman who married at 19, and would produce quite different demographic figures for the society as a whole" (*Families*, 6). Tim Parkin argues, however, that this age differential would probably not have translated into a significant difference in fertility due to the likelihood that the experience of childbirth for a mother in her early teens would lead to deleterious effects that would eventually decrease her fecundity. See Parkin, *Demography*, 124-125. In a similar vein, Rawson argues that "fecundity was low for very young women, and children did not usually come until the late teens and beyond" (*Children and Childhood*, 96).

[124] See Salo Baron, A *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (18 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 2:221; Isaiah Gafni, "The Institution of Marriage," in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory* (ed. David Kraemer, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 20; idem, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A Social and Cultural History* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1990), 268 [Hebrew].

[125] See *t. Soṭah*. 7:20; *Gen. Rab*. 9:7 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 71-72). See also Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 16; Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 141.

joined the husband's father's household where they were supported and contributed in turn to the welfare of the household.[126] On a cultural level, the early age for marriage in Babylonia accords with the Babylonians' "strong cultural model of the necessity of sexual activity for post-pubescent men"[127] and fits in with the age at marriage for Iranian gentiles and Nestorian Christians. In a similar vein, the strong link between marriage and procreation asserted by Jews in the Roman Empire as well as their relatively late ages at first marriage agree with widespread sentiments and practices of the Graeco-Roman world.[128] For our purposes, these marriage patterns are of critical importance since they hold weighty ramifications for both children and childhood.

3.2 *Marriage, Childhood and Growing Up*

Most men would have married sufficiently late that we would no longer consider them to have been children, yet many women (particularly in Babylonia) married so young that today we would consider them to have been girls, not women. The goal of maximizing fertility in particular must have lowered the age at first marriage and the price of this goal is the early, we might say premature, end of girlhood. For many girls, adolescence was not a time for fun, education, experimentation or professional training, rather it was a time when one was already expected to assume the full responsibilities of a mature woman, as wife and mother. In addition, the young age of women and men at marriage

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[126] In addition, the young couple would usually have a not insubstantial dowry given by the wife's parents. See Schremer, *Male and Female*, 261-292. For discussion of a case wherein a mother provided a dowry for her daughter, see Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Women in the Diaspora World of Late Antiquity," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (ed. Judith R. Baskin; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 60.

[127] Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 165 (140). See also Gafni, "Institution," 20-21. Some patristic authors also argued that one should marry off one's son early because of his youthful passions (Emiel Eyben, "Fathers and Sons," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (ed. Beryl Rawson; Canberra and Oxford: Humanities Research Centre and Clarendon Press, 1991), 135. Cf. Adiel Schremer, "Men's Age at Marriage in Jewish Palestine of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *Zion* 61 (1996): 65 [Hebrew]. Satlow suggests that Babylonian rabbis and their Sassanian neighbors thought one accrued individual merit through marriage and procreation (*Jewish Marriage*, 26-36).

[128] See Schremer, "Men's Age," 45-66; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 12-21. Consider also Philo's argument that procreation justifies sexual intercourse which should be performed in the context of marriage (Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.113; Reinhartz, "Parents and Children," 69-70).

in Babylonia seems to indicate that the choice of a spouse was usually in the hands of the bride's and groom's parents. Through marriage, the family propagated its name, enhanced its status and transmitted its wealth to the future so when choosing a spouse for one of its members, families were more likely to consider criteria such as social status and financial viability rather than mutual attraction or romantic love.[129] The conjugal union in Babylonia, accordingly, was apparently not marked by a great measure of romantic sentimentality. In Palestine, the older ages of the bride and groom suggest the possibility of a higher measure of romance in marriage since the choice of spouse would have often been in the hands of the couple themselves. However, the rather large age gap between the couple leads one to suspect that married life in Palestine would have had its own share of obstacles to romantic love.[130]

The age structure of the family would have had various other ramifications for the young. A very young wife might have often become the object of paternal feelings from her much older husband. The potential paternal role of a husband vis a vis his wife is illustrated clearly in the case of R. Eliezer who is said to have married his niece whom he himself had raised.[131] Children, in many cases, would have been far closer in age to their mothers than to their fathers and this temporal proximity may be part of the reason why the rabbis suppose that a child prefers his mother to his father.[132]

More generally, tensions between parents and children would have been heavily influenced by the combination of ancient family structures and a high mortality rate. However, before we consider why this might

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[129] Although marriages may not have been arranged on the basis of romantic affection, marital affection may have often developed within the course of the marriage. See Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1975), 91-92. Indeed, the rabbis were concerned that married couples should be compatible and therefore they cautioned that the age gap between husband and wife should not be exceedingly great. See *Sipre Deut* 290 (ed. Finkelstein, 309); *b. Sanh.* 76a.

[130] See Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 239-240.

[131] *y. Yebam.* 13:2 13c. Cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 1:16; 8:10-11; Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 18. On endogamous Jewish marriages, see K. C. Hanson, "The Herodians and Mediterranean Kinship, Part I: Marriage and Divorce," *BTB* 19 (1989): 142-151; cf. Schremer, *Male and Female*, 159-176.

[132] Interestingly, the sexual tension assumed to persist in certain rabbinic sources between a husband and his mother-in-law may very well be the outcome of a situation in which older husbands were often close in age to their wives' mothers. See, for example *b. B. Bat.* 98b, which states that it is improper for a son-in-law to live in the house of his in-laws.

have been the case, let us consider two sorts of parent-child tensions which persisted in ancient Jewish families. First, Jewish children were obligated to honor and serve their parents and even support them if necessary. The rabbis deemed these demands to be very strenuous, so strenuous in fact that the Talmud records that R. Johanan stated "happy is he who did not see them (i.e. his parents)."[133] Second, as sons matured into adults and sought to command the wealth, social status and political roles of their fathers, many naturally came to resent fathers who continued to hold the reins in their own hands. The financial dimension of this conflict is clearly present in a *baraita* which states that upon hearing that one's father whom one is destined to inherit has passed away, one recites the blessing designated to be said upon the hearing of good news immediately after one recites the blessing reserved for bad news.[134] The conflict's social and political dimensions are present in the following complaint attributed to Nadav the son of Aaron the high priest. "Said Nadav to Avihu, 'when will those two old men (i.e. Moses and Aaron) die so that you and I might lead the generation?'"[135] In a similar manner, the social dimension of the conflict also appears in the final line of the following story, though in this case the context is explicitly rabbinic.

> When he was about to pass on, Rabbi said to him [R. Joshua b. Korha], "Bless me". He said to him, "May it be God's will that you attain to half my days". [Rabbi exclaimed,] "not to their entire length?" He said to him, "shall those who come after you [i.e. your children][136] shepherd cattle [rather than inherit your office]?"[137]

In short, the notion that a son might long for his father to die so that he might be released from his servile responsibilities and come into his own was certainly familiar to the rabbis.

In my opinion, however, the high mortality rate would have killed off fathers relatively early and thereby eased father-son tensions since most sons in Palestine would not have had to wait too long to inherit their fathers' tangible and intangible wealth. Just to get a rough idea of the state of affairs, let us consider how many people would have had living fathers at ages ten, twenty and thirty if we employ Coale and

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[133] *b. Qidd.* 31b.
[134] See *y. Ber.* 9:2 14a; *b. Ber.* 59b.
[135] See *b. Sanh.* 52a.
[136] See Rashi ad loc.
[137] *b. Meg.* 28a.

Demeny's Level 3 Female model life table and assume an average age at marriage for men of thirty and for women of twenty. As Richard Saller's microsimulation demonstrates, one would have a 76 percent chance of having a father at age 10, a 49 percent chance at 20 and only a 25 percent chance at 30.[138] Though one should not consider these percentages as anything approaching a precise measurement, the exercise clearly demonstrates that a high percentage of Jewish women in Palestine and an even higher percentage of men (who would have married a decade older) would not have had parents by the time they married. This statistic would have also been significant in Babylonia but less so since the age at marriage for men was roughly ten years younger than it was in Palestine.

3.3 *Common Family Structures*

Three additional features of ancient Jewish childhood emerge when one considers the high mortality rate together with the average age at first marriage. First, even though men on average probably lived longer than women, fathers would usually die before mothers because men married much later. Thus, a child would lose a father more often than a mother and although most children would not have any grandparent for long, it would have been more common to have a grandmother than a grandfather. Second, the high mortality implies that many spouses died prematurely and therefore many families would undergo numerous twists and turns in the course of their children's lifetimes. Although certain rabbinic texts envision a sentimental ideal in which a man remains married to the same woman his entire adult life, the reality was often quite different. Divorce[139] and untimely death would often terminate marriages and therefore the real world had a good share of orphans, widows and serial marriages.[140] The lives of children, accordingly, would often be disrupted by the death of a parent or by divorce. Many children would experience the loss of a parent, the remarriage

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[138] Saller, *Patriarchy*, 49 (I have used the model table for females since the differences between the sexes in modern life tables is not relevant to the ancient world). See also Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 110; Dixon, *Roman Family*, 145-146.

[139] See Kraemer, "Jewish Mothers," 102-103.

[140] On the serial marriages and complex families of Josephus, Berenice and Babatha, see Ross S. Kraemer, "Typical and Atypical Jewish Family Dynamics: The Cases of Babatha and Berenice," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (eds. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek; Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK, 2003), 142-145. (Cf. Cooper, *Child*, 66).

of the remaining parent, the introduction of stepbrothers and stepsisters and the birth of drastically younger siblings. All this implies that childhood could be an emotionally difficult time with serious disruptions and dislocations which might trouble the sensitive psyche of a child. In addition, these new relations formed new support groups and opened avenues to social networks hitherto unavailable, yet the new relations may have also functioned as unwelcome sources of competition vying for both parental attention and material resources.

Third, the high mortality rate together with the average age of marriage have important ramifications for whether the average Jewish family was nuclear, in which case parents and unmarried children lived together, or extended, in which case parents lived with unmarried children as well as married sons. Certain scholars assume that the Jews of Roman Palestine lived primarily in homes inhabited by their extended families. As Shmuel Safrai put it, "the extended family often lived together in one house, including the father and the families of his married sons."[141] The extended family, however, does not consistently fulfill a clearly defined role in rabbinic law and in its stead, the nuclear family, consisting of a conjugal couple with their children, pervades rabbinic law. On the basis of this and other considerations, other scholars have concluded that the nuclear family was the standard family in the Jewish home of the rabbinic period.[142]

It is often argued that the extended family served as the primary family structure in early Jewish history and that the demise of the extended family went hand in hand with the weakening of ties between small landholders and the land. This shift has been dated alternatively to the rise of the First Temple monarchy,[143] to the early Second Temple

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[141] S. Safrai, "Home and Family," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (eds. S. Safrai, M. Stern. D. Flusser and W. C. van Unnik; Assen/Maastricht and Philadelphia: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1987), 732. See also Shimon Dar, "Agriculture and Agricultural Produce in Erez-Israel in the Roman-Byzantine Period," in *Man and Land in Eretz Israel in Antiquity* (eds. A. Kasher, A. Oppenheimer and U. Rappaport; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1986), 144 [Hebrew].

[142] See, for example, Goodman, *State and Society*, 35-36; Santiago Guijarro, "The Family in First-Century Galilee," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London and New York, Routledge, 1997), 57-61. (Grandparents rarely appear on Jewish epitaphs which usually were dedicated by parents or children for members of the nuclear family [see Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, 113].)

[143] See discussion and critique in S. Bendor, *The Bet-Ab in Israel from the Settlement to*

period[144] and to the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[145] Population increase, growing urbanization, persecution, heavy taxes and the division of patrimonies in inheritance have all been adduced as factors which decreased the ties of the small landholders to the land and enhanced the role of the nuclear family.[146] Indeed, it has even been suggested that the rise of the nuclear family in the early rabbinic period is the Jewish counterpart to the high profile of the Roman nuclear family during the first few centuries of the Common Era.[147]

In truth, the developmental scheme in which the extended family in an ancient agrarian context makes way for the urban nuclear family is familiar from other fields as well. Greek historians used to argue that the historical society of the polis was preceded by a society based on clans (i.e. extended families), Roman historians viewed the extended family run by the *paterfamilia*s as the predecessor to the nuclear family and social scientists employed an abstract evolutionary model of family history which posited the shift from extended to nuclear family structures.[148] However, this evolutionary view of family history has been convincingly refuted. On textual grounds, it has been shown that historians mistook legal authority and kinship terminology for social roles. Legal and cultural definitions do not necessarily reflect household structure.[149] More importantly, the demographic limitations of ancient preindustrial regimes severely limited the possible structure of the family.

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the End of the Monarchy: The Social Structure of Ancient Israel (Israel: Oranim, Poalim and Hakibutz hameuchad, 1986), 11, 40, 81-2 [Hebrew].

[144] E. E. Urbach, "Inheritance Laws and After-Life," *Fourth World Union of Jewish Studies*, vol. 1 (1967): 133-141 [Hebrew].

[145] See David A. Fiensy, *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1992), 121-146, 178; N. Rubin, "For Whom Does One Mourn? A Sociological Analysis of Talmudic Sources," *Bar Ilan* 10 (1972): 111-122 [Hebrew]; idem, *The End of Life: Rites of Burial and Mourning in the Talmud and Midrash* (Israel: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1997), 11-22, 87-102 [Hebrew].

[146] See Urbach, "Inheritance Laws"; Rubin, "For Whom Does One Mourn?"; Ze'ev Safrai, "Family Structure during the Period of the Mishna and the Talmud," *Milet* I (Tel-Aviv: Universitah Petuhah, 1983): 129-156 [Hebrew] (who argues for the predominance of the nuclear family in the tannaitic period and the resurgence of the extended family in the amoraic); Cooper, *Child*, 58-70.

[147] See Schremer, *Male and Female*, 336-338.

[148] See Cynthia B. Patterson's overview in *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5-26.

[149] See P. Laslett, *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 6; Parkin, *Old Age*, 53; Dixon, *Roman Family*, 4; Richard P. Saller, "Roman Kinship: Structure and Sentiment," in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (eds. Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver; Canberra and Oxford: (Humanities Research Centre and Clarendon Press, 1997), 142. In this vein, it is worth noting that even

The nature of the ancient demographic regime was such that a three generational family with co-resident married brothers could never become the standard family structure. The high mortality rate (along with the late age of marriage for men in some cultures such as Jews in Roman Palestine) ensured that three generations of a family would only live together in a home for a limited period of time.[150] Even if we assume that people preferred to live within homes inhabited by extended families, the high child mortality rate made a family with more than two adult children uncommon[151] and if, on average, at least one of the family's adult children was female, it is clear that most families would not have produced two married brothers to live together. In short, the notion that the pre-industrial family was usually large, multi-generational and composed of co-resident married brothers is simply a myth.[152]

In place of the large extended family, the average Jewish family in late antiquity was apparently comprised of four to five members[153] and was more closely related to the model of the nuclear family as it progressed through the life-course. Typically, the family was nuclear (married couple and children), sometimes with an aged (grand) parent, and would change as its children grew up and left for work or marriage.[154] As noted above, many complex variations on the nuclear family were bound to appear due to high mortality rates, divorce and remarriage.

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though the biblical term *bet av* has been understood to imply that households were commonly structured around extended families, it more likely reflects a biblical conception of kinship. Cf. Bendor, *The Bet-Ab*, 17-57.

[150] See Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, *The European Family* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 34; Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985), 20. Cf. Bendor, *The Bet-Ab*, 82-84. In places with a relatively early age at first marriage, e.g. Babylonia (Schremer, *Male and Female*, 91-101), the average period in which three generations could have lived together would have been longer than in places with a relatively late age at first marriage.

[151] Parkin, *Demography*, 112; Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family," 18-20; J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 122-127.

[152] Mitterauer and Sieder, *European Family*, 24-47. It is therefore to be expected that grandparents (as well as aunts and uncles for that matter) rarely appear on Jewish epitaphs (see Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, 113). It seems that burial inscriptions were usually dedicated by parents or children for members of the nuclear family.

[153] See Nathan Schur, "The Numerical Relationship between the Number of Households and the Total Population in the Cities of Eretz Israel During the Ottoman Period," *Cathedra* 17 (1980): 102-106 [Hebrew]; Israel Finkelstein, "A Few Notes on Demographic Data from Recent Generations and Ethnoarchaeology," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 122 (1990): 47-52; Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family," 18-20.

[154] See Dixon, *Roman Family*, 6; Bradley, *Discovering*, 171; Kraemer, "Jewish Women in the Diaspora World," 61.

Thus, most Jewish families in the rabbinic period, as in earlier eras, were variations on a nuclear theme. Despite this, it bears stressing that extended families certainly existed even though they were not the norm.[155] Moreover, values such as filial piety and laws that bolstered patriarchal authority demonstrate that even though elderly grandparents were not all that common, their cultural weight and legal status were not in proportion to their numbers.

4 *Conclusion*

Let us conclude this analysis of the Jewish childhood in light of ancient Jewish family demographics with the following two rabbinic stories which highlight some of the prominent themes discussed above. The first story, which appears in *Gen. Rab.* 26:3, relates two short dialogues between Rabban Gamaliel and his daughter.

> R. Gamaliel gave his daughter in marriage. 'Father,' she requested, 'pray for me.' 'May you never return hither,' said he to her. When she gave birth to a son she again begged him, 'Father, give me your blessing.' 'May "woe" never leave your mouth,' replied he. 'Father,' she exclaimed, 'on both occasions of my rejoicing you have cursed me!' 'Both were blessings,' he replied. 'Living at peace in your home, you will not return here, and as long as your son lives, "woe" will not leave your mouth; "woe that my son has not eaten," "woe that he has not drunk," "woe that he has not gone to school."'[156]

In the first scene of this story, Rabban Gamaliel is marrying off his daughter and she requests that he pray for her, perhaps with the trepidation and anxiety typical of a young woman at her wedding. His response that she should never return to his home seems exceedingly harsh and then when she gives birth to a son and asks him once again to pray for her, his response that she should always say "Woe" also seems rather callous. Rabban Gamaliel's daughter takes her father's responses to be curses but she as well as the reader soon learns that in fact they are riddles. Perhaps the riddle literary topos with misunderstanding at its core appears in our setting as a symbol of the generation gap between father and daughter. The daughter looks to her

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[155] See Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63; Dixon, *Roman Family*, 7-8.

[156] *Gen. Rab.* 26:3 (eds. Theodor-Albeck, 247) (*Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman; London: The Soncino Press, 1961).

father for assistance and sympathy and, in return, she believes that her father lets her down.

In order to rectify his daughter's misunderstanding, Rabban Gamaliel explains the true meaning of his blessings. The first blessing, which clearly presupposes virilocal residence, states that Rabban Gamaliel's daughter should never have cause to return to her father's house, implying that she should enjoy a happy and peaceful marriage. The second blessing presupposes the precariousness of childhood and highlights the heartfelt worries that a mother has for the material and spiritual welfare of her child. For the author of this story, the concerns addressed in these prayers were the central wishes a father might have for his daughter and in a world within which these wishes would have been frustrated frequently, they must have resounded all the more loudly.

The second story, which appears in *b. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 9a-b, features R. Simeon b. Yohai and his son and follows a plotline not unlike that of the first story.

> Said he to his son, 'These are men of countenance, go along with them that they may bless you'. He went . . . Then [turning to him] they said: 'What is your business here?' He replied: 'Father told me, "Go along with them that they may bless you".' Said they to him: 'May it be [Heaven's] pleasure that you sow and mow not; that what you bring in go not out; that what goes out you bring not in; that your house be desolate and your inn be inhabited; that your board be disturbed and you behold not a new year'. When he came home to his father, he said to him: 'So far were they from blessing me that they [even] distressed me sorely'. His father asked him: 'What did they say to you?'—They said thus and thus. Said the father to him: 'Those are all blessings. That "you sow and mow not" [means], that you beget children and they do not die. That "what you bring in go not out" [means], that you bring home daughters-in-law and your sons do not die, so that their wives need not leave again. "What goes out you bring not in" [means], that you give your daughters [in marriage] and their husbands do not die so that your daughters need not come back. "That your house be desolate and your inn be inhabited" [means], that this world is your inn and the other world is a home . . . "That your board be disturbed" [that is], by sons and daughters and "that you behold not a new year" [means] that your wife do not die and you have not to take you a new wife.'[157]

In this story, R. Simeon b. Yohai sends his son to ask certain important men for a blessing and the dutiful son obeys but mistakes the riddles

[157] Trans. H. M. Lazarus; London: The Soncino Press, 1938.

he is told for curses. As in the first story, perhaps the child's misunderstanding is symbolic of a general measure of misunderstanding between fathers and children where children are often unable to understand why their parents believe that certain things, such as the words of these important men, are good for them.

As in the first story, the blessings in this story also address a number of issues which were prominent in our analysis of Jewish demography above. High mortality is a central concern that reappears throughout the blessings in this story and the very first blessing highlights the ever-present threat of child mortality. In turn, high fertility (with its battle against high mortality) is reflected in the penultimate blessing, "let your table be played upon by sons and daughters."[158] The fear that one's spouse might pass away and the recognition that one may experience a series of marriages over the course of a lifetime is reflected in the final blessing of the story. Patrivirilocal marriage in this Babylonian text is reflected in the welcoming of brides into the home of their father and in the transfer of daughters from their father's home to the home of their husbands. Yet despite the patrilineality of ancient Jewish society, the ties between a married daughter and her parents could remain strong and a daughter who had to leave the home of her in-laws as a widow or divorcee, naturally returned to the home of her father, a place she could always call home if necessary. For children, the mother's continuing relationship with her natal family would have supplied them with a second network of social connections in addition to their father's natal family. Through these two networks, children might access a large network of people who could help them navigate the vicissitudes of their lives and share with them their joys and triumphs.[159]

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[158] It is worth noting here that ancient Jews (like modern orthodox Jews) did not believe that procreation was simply a matter of individual choice. The religious duty of procreation turned having children into "a culturally induced social obligation" (Bradley, *Discovering*, 171). As a result, it is quite possible that some children were born into families who did not really desire them (see M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome A.D. 66-70* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], 60-62).

[159] Rabbinic literature clearly assumes that a married woman will maintain strong ties with her parents' home and will want to return home to visit. See also Dixon, *Roman Family*, 4; Lacey, *Family*, 44; Goody, *European Family*, 2. (Some scholars argue, however, that the parent-daughter relation would have been strained by the daughter's removal from the home at an early age and parental supervision over their single daughter's virginity. See Kraemer, "Jewish Mothers," 104-106.) On the importance of a girl's virginity to the rabbis, see Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person: The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20-28.

In sum, I believe that a skeletal model of the setting for Jewish childhood in late antiquity emerges from the preceding analysis. This model is not a mirror image of an ancient reality (or realities) or even a perfect reflection of the ancient evidence. Instead, it is an impressionistic portrayal of the demographic setting for childhood yet also a portrayal which takes into account that demographic conditions fluctuated according to class, location, type of settlement, gender etc. The model is useful since it highlights salient features of the demography of Jewish late antiquity that have great bearing on the conception and experience of childhood in this ancient Jewish world. I therefore conclude with a short outline of this skeletal model.

Childhood in Jewish late antiquity was precarious and often short. Children were surrounded by so many dangers, real and imagined, that the primary function of the family during their early years was protection. Families produced many children in the hopes that some would survive, so the young both were the largest segment of the population and were intimately familiar with the presence of death. Biological ties were central in family life, probably even more so than the conjugal union, and although high child mortality somehow influenced parental affection, there is no reason to suppose that parents did not love their children deeply.[160] High child mortality discouraged investment in formal education, which most Jewish children were probably not lucky enough to enjoy, and the high fertility rate contributed to the reduction of the status of girls, and women more generally, in this ancient patriarchal society. The lesser status of females probably indicated that boys received better nourishment than girls amongst the impoverished masses and the early age at first marriage for women, particularly in Babylonia, indicates a premature termination of childhood at least in the eyes of modern westerners. The ages at first marriage and virilocal (or patrivirilocal) residence created family structures with many ramifications for children such as the age difference between child and parent, the centrality of the nuclear family, the potential for greater or lesser tension between the generations and a child's relationship with the families of both of his or her parents. Death, divorce and remarriage disrupted the lives of children and often robbed them of a parent, or even two,

[160] It is possible, however, that there was a difference between the affection felt by mothers and fathers, or at least in the manner in which they expressed their affection (see Goody, *European Family*, 2). See also *b. Šabb.* 151b (in reference to R. Hanina whose wife reprimanded him when he did not weep for their deceased daughter).

at young ages. In addition, the complex families generated by serial marriages linked children to more social networks while confronting them with new siblings and relatives who might compete with them for the family resources. In short, children had to navigate through a hazardous environment and a mutable family order if they were to survive, let alone enjoy, the years of their childhood.