



FIGURE 3. Rafael Rachel Neis, *Personage*. Watercolor on paper, 8.5 in. × 12.6 in., 2019.

Introduction

A COW GIVES BIRTH TO A CAMEL. In the bog, the farmer observes a mouse that is part flesh, part earth. A traveler encounters a wild man along the forest floor, more animal than human. At the local amphitheater, audiences gasp as a four-footed creature bearing spots, with the longest neck they've ever seen, ambles onto the stage. In ancient texts, phenomena like these emerge not infrequently. These sources are philosophical, ethnographic, medical, and religious, from Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* to Pliny's *Natural History*, and from Soranus's *Gynecology* to Mishnah Bekhorot. They attest to a world of reproductive uncertainty, in which one species might deliver a hybrid creature, or even a different species, and in which the lines and overlaps between species were not always clear. This book follows the attempts of one group of learned people—the rabbis—as they tried to make sense of this world.

These creatures, and the ways they emerge, have captivated me for quite some time. Wherein lies this attraction? At first, I wondered whether I was falling prey to a fetish of the fabulous. The tradition of objectifying and operationalizing the “monstrous” or the “wondrous” to entertain, titillate, and instruct, ranges from late ancient Mediterranean “paradoxographies” and traveling menageries, through to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Euro-American cabinets of curiosity and freakshows. However, as my study deepened, I came to realize that these creatures and processes of proliferation resonated precisely for their non-normativity and unexpectedness. Rather than wishing to objectify such beings and events, I was attracted to them in their textured embodiments, even as their textual lineaments are spare. I was drawn to take these creatures and their begettings seriously, because of but also in spite of their “authors”—the rabbis and other ancient thinkers—and the stylized, sedimented textual forms in which their thoughts now reach us.

The very idea that certain creatures seem to defy categories, or that certain reproductive modes challenge expectations, speaks to the ways that “nature” is

supposed—by us—to be “natural.” As a variety of scholars, thinker-activists, and artists have shown, the very idea of “nature” as a distinct realm, one that is subject to rules (or “laws of nature”) whose pattern can be uncovered via very specific knowledge practices (e.g., modern “science”), is itself a product of human ideation.¹ This idea (even) when articulated explicitly, has existed alongside alternate conceptions, and, as such, is susceptible to historical contextualization. Foregoing the assumption that modern concepts of nature and its study as science inhered in antiquity allows a multitude of themes to emerge.

Several key motifs surface in this book. The first concerns the ways that people in late antiquity made sense of their world in terms of patterns of likeness, difference, and multiplicity. The second pertains to how they sought to divide the variety and plenitude of life into units that we might call “species.” Third, we consider how people accounted for life coming into being: what is today often called “reproduction” and what was once known as “generation.” These three inquiries all pertain to the ways that humans (and other beings) craft what they know, or what scholars like to call “the production of knowledge.” This latter phrasing is not only technical academicspeak; it is also a way of conveying how *what* we know is always shaped by *how* we come to know—that is, our context and constraints as we seek to navigate the world with which we are already entangled. What we know is not just “out there” waiting to be discovered but it is in fact, at least partly, “made” by us knowers ourselves. It is also “made” in the sense that what we know is then collected, shaped, arranged, (re)presented or transmitted, often with material consequences, including for the objects of knowledge. For instance, I, as a writer, am presenting my ideas (including my understandings of others’ ideas) to you, my reader. These ideas are partly shaped by the various dimensions of my social location, which are in turn embedded in structures of class, race, religion, dis/ability, sexuality, sexgender, immigration, and so forth. I articulate these ideas as consciously as I can to communicate clearly; I shape them to convince you according to assorted rhetorical conventions; I deploy various devices to authorize my ideas (for instance, by using the word “deploy”) and design them to appear a plausible product of “scholarship.” Scholarship is just one form of “knowledge making.”

Related to the foregoing, this book attempts to use rabbinic sources as a nonexclusive key to treat the previous trinity of questions. As such, it seeks to join these sources to the field of knowledge called ancient science, or to put it less anachronistically, the history of knowledge. In doing so, we consider not just the contents of rabbinic knowledge amid other sources of knowledge circulating in the late ancient world. We also ask about the social and political conditions that shaped the rabbis’ labors as well as how this affects our approaches to their writings.

This introduction will consider “likeness,” “difference,” “multiplicity,” and “knowledge.” First, we will introduce the ways that “likeness” as a homogenizing and mimetic mechanism is laid at the foot of an invented Judeo-Christian tradition.

LIKENESS

God is definitely not queer . . . A little overfocused on keeping kinds distinct, God then got to making man (male and female) in his own image and giving them all too much dominion, as well as the command to multiply out of all bounds of sharing the earth. I think the sixth day is where the problem of joint mundane creaturely kinship versus human exceptionalism is sharply posed right in the first chapter of Jewish and Christian monotheism.

—DONNA HARAWAY, *WHEN SPECIES MEET*, 245

There was a case of a woman from Sidon who three times expelled a likeness of a raven.

—TNIDDAH 4:6

Much has been laid at the feet of the recently invented “Judeo-Christian tradition,” but perhaps the notion of the human as image of God attracts the most praise and blame. The idea of humans made in God’s image has often been understood to sponsor a theory of ongoing human reproduction as a form of mimesis. This is what Donna Haraway, an influential feminist science studies scholar, styles “the sacred image of the same”—after science fiction writer Octavia Butler.² In this way, not only is image-making itself a reproductive mechanism, but humans, as images, resemble one another both in their *likeness* to God and also in their *difference* from nonhumans—who, unlike humans, are created according to their “kinds” (*minim* or species). This difference is marked explicitly in Genesis: humans are created differently from other kinds, and God tells them that they are to rule over other creatures (Genesis 1:26–28). For many, enthusiasts and critics alike, the vaunted image of God inaugurates several world-ordering binaries, including human/animal, man/woman, and likeness/difference. These in turn fan out to still other binaries, such as mind/matter and nature/culture, and even the tendency to erect paired oppositions itself.³

Binaries rarely fail to entail hierarchy: the privileging of one side of the binary over the other. They also flatten variation and multiplicity on both sides (and in between). Thus, to posit the human over and against *the* animal is potentially to level the heterogenous plenitude of nonhuman creatures into an undifferentiated category: “the animal.” This homogenization might efface differences between, for instance, those we dub cats and horses or between individual creatures, like Yomtov and Moishy (the beings to whom I refer as “my” cats). Conversely, the human/animal duality conceals (even as it often subtly or not so subtly enforces) human differences in all their variety, whether these be along the lines of additional categories like race, gender, and disability, or simply again, in the face of the irreducible singularity of particular human beings (commonly referred to as “persons” or by proper names).⁴ At the same time, the human/animal binary can and has been used to animalize people who do not fall within a particular society’s normative definitions of what constitutes a human (in terms of race, gender, disability, or class), while encouraging the anthropocentric treatment of a few specific animals that we value for their humanlike qualities.⁵

Writers, thinkers, scholars, and artists have shown how claims to human distinctiveness, explicitly or implicitly drawing on Genesis 1:26–27 as biblical license, have served to uphold these hierarchies from antiquity to the present. In Haraway's account, it is God's straightness that promotes, or "creates," a world in which human dominion justifies the exploitation of, violence toward, and instrumentalization of nonhumans. She draws a straight line from theological anthropomorphism to the Anthropocene, from Eden to ecological catastrophe, and from human supremacy to multispecies suffering. For Haraway it is the "Judeo-Christian" tradition, with its denigration of all that it deems *not* in its image, which morphs into a form of scientific secularism that seeks to separate nature from culture, and the animal from the human, among other evils.

The potential for human supremacy in its granting of both divine image and dominion over other creatures in Genesis 1 is staged differently in the second creation narrative of Genesis 2. This version makes Adam a man (versus the generic human being of Genesis 1) who names all the other creatures, including Eve after she is extracted and constructed from him. Genesis 2 thus has the potential to germinate narratives in which a human/man sets himself up, through naming, as knower of all the other creatures. The question immediately arises: can the knower stand outside their own knowledge about themselves? Is it only nonhumans who are categorized into "kinds" (*minim*)? Is the *adam* creature not also a species? As Haraway notes, Carolus Linnaeus, the "father" of modern taxonomy, claimed that he was a "second Adam" who restored the names of all creatures to their rightful place in a tightly organized, hierarchical taxonomy that sought to account for all life-forms.⁶ At the same time, it was Linnaeus who first subsumed humans to this taxonomy as animals, inventing and joining *homo sapiens* with monkeys and apes in the primate order. He did not stop there, however, but divided the human into four subspecies: *Homo sapiens americanus* (native American); *Homo sapiens europaeus* (European); *Homo sapiens asiaticus* (Asian); and *Homo sapiens afer* (African). Linnaeus's system was based in "observed" (that is to say, constructed) morphological patterns of resemblance and difference: in the human case his racist descriptions of appearance combine with remarks on disposition and politics.⁷ His taxonomy there rendered the binary (human/nonhuman) into categorical, ordinal groups, with Europeans most human and Africans least. For Haraway, it is this "Christian" taxonomy that spawns the early twentieth century field of primatology: in her words, a "Judeo-Christian mythological inheritance."⁸

I believe that this characterization, articulated by Haraway, and held more widely by a variety of thinkers in contexts related to nonhumans, is deeply problematic.⁹ It takes for granted the notion of a fused Judeo-Christianity, at once synonymous with a relatively unmediated Hebrew Bible (a rather Protestant hermeneutic), as well as with the "secularisms" and sciences of modernity (also a Protestant move, arguably), with their avowed humanisms and patriarchal, omniscient "god trick." This idea, supposedly critical, serves in its own way to flatten and erase.¹⁰

Jewishness is not merely subsumed to Christianity; it is thereby superseded by the latter—an old move in Christian theology. Jewishness becomes an ahistorical hypostasized entity, simultaneously coterminous with an undifferentiated ancient past (that is problematically whitewashed as “Western”) while animating ongoing secular, Euro-American, modern humanisms, in an overtly teleological story. Yet, even as she holds “Judaism” and “Judeo-Christianity” accountable, Haraway hails her Catholic background and its teaching of the “word made flesh” as the basis for her nonbinary understanding of the relationship between language and reality, culture and nature—what she dubs “natureculture” or the “material-semiotic.” Thus, she redeems the Christian component of the indicted “Judeo-Christianity.” I point to this problematic dimension of Haraway’s rhetoric and argument because I am indebted to many of her insights about science, gender, race, and knowledge making in my own thinking. It is important to see that the invented “Judeo-Christianity” is not only a tic of right-wing, conservative Christian, and white supremacist discourse on reproduction, race, and demography—all of which are themes related to this book’s inquiry.

It should come as no surprise that, in contrast to this somewhat caricatured depiction of Judaism, my book presents a rather different picture. Nonetheless, I do not intend this book as a rebuttal to or as apologetics for the image of God or for the late ancient rabbis. Instead, I will expose alternative ways of thinking the human and nonhuman in the writings of the rabbis despite, and also *with*, the deficiencies of *imago dei* theology and anthropology.¹¹ Moreover, while the idea of the image of God is a helpful device with which to begin my account, and although it makes cameo appearances in this volume, I invoke it here less as rhetorical foil than for its intertwining of the book’s themes: likeness and difference, multiplicity and reproduction.

In this book, I will show how the rabbis linked human and animal processes of reproduction and the classification of various forms of life (“life-forms”) and how this linkage tended to both deflate and promote human exceptionalism. Definitely the perception that the human is elevated in Jewish traditions is not without reason. The priestly authored strata of the Hebrew Bible—particularly Genesis 1:1–2:4, describing the creation, and Leviticus 11, outlining the im/purity of animal life—embedded species (*minim*) and their distinctions hierarchically in a divinely created world. And the rabbis of late antiquity certainly claimed these ancient traditions as their heritage. Yet, in contrast with this oft-invoked and idealized scriptural order, I illustrate how rabbinic writings plunge us into a far messier world. For the rabbis, biblical schema, while activated, are always partial; indeed, the creation narrative and the Levitical taxa strain to fully account for the plentitude of life. The rabbis scrutinized the various entities produced by human and animal bodies and enumerated creaturely kinds well beyond the stenographic lists in Leviticus 11, with the latter’s clear distinction between pure and impure. Even while they parsed and elaborated such distinctions, these rabbis grappled with

the *unpredictability* of reproduction, with the *multiplicity* of reproductive modes, and with the curious *resemblances* between supposedly *different* species, including nonhuman and human kinds.

In the course of their writings—scriptural exegeses, narratives, and ritual orderings—the rabbis were intent on classifying creatureliness and exploring the contours of the human. While they may have been implicitly devoted to the notion that the human (and a particular ethnoracialized, gendered, normate human) had a special place in the order of things, they simultaneously blurred the edges of the human.¹² This they did in the context of discussions about reproductive materials and processes, unexpectedly variant offspring, the classification of species, and sorting through the varieties of entities emitted and nested by animal and human bodies. Via these varied disquisitions, the impermeability and intelligibility of the human was, again and again, upset. The human, it turns out, was not only subject to the same kind of reproductive variability as other animals, but it, like other animals, seemingly produced species-variant offspring. Furthermore, again, like other creatures, it was caught up in a web of resemblance that threatened its unique classification. In the face of such phenomena, the rabbis weighed in on how the stuff of life and the making of life could confound expectations about basic questions like who is kin, who is food, and what we owe to those we designate as different.

DIFFERENCE

I look at the term “species” as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other.

—CHARLES DARWIN, ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES, 52

One way to decenter the human is to regard it as one species among many, as Linnaeus did. But the very unit that is the species, that basic and irreducible measure on which taxonomy rests, is itself a matter of convention.¹³ “Species,” as a basic biological concept, enjoys multiple definitions, its criteria being a matter of debate among biologists and philosophers. Key to species definitions, as to any basic classificatory unit, is the grouping together of particulars along the lines of some shared feature—what Darwin describes as “close resemblance.” That there can be *multiple* ways to construe or mark such resemblance, some shared and some opposing, will be a recurring refrain in this book. Such multiplicity within difference, or differentiated differences, often undoes attempts to securely distinguish among creatures. How so? Let me illustrate this with a recent example.

In 2008, a team of ornithologists “discovered” a bird in the eastern Andes of northern Peru. They proposed it as a new species, the Sirá Barbet (*Capito fitzpatricki*). To do so, the team had to show a morphology of *likeness*: “assignable to the genus *Capito* on the basis of strong similarity to the plumage and morphology of *C. wallacei*, as well as to all other *Capito* taxa.”¹⁴ But they also had to show

that the Sirá Barbet was *distinctive* from the scarlet-banded barbet (*Capito wallacei*), despite certain similarities (both being members of the *Capito* genus). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature accepted the new species in 2012. But its similarity to the scarlet-banded barbet caused others to dispute that it was indeed a “new form.” The American Ornithological Society, and the Clements Checklist of Birds of the World instead considered it to be a *subspecies* of the scarlet-banded barbet (*Capito wallacei*). The team scrupulously documented the bird’s plumage and morphology, its location and distribution, its behavior and vocalizations, and its phylogenetics, particularly in relation to *C. wallacei*.¹⁵ The Sirá Barbet’s larger overall size, color, and pattern differences on its breast, thighs, flanks, and lower backs distinguished it from the scarlet-banded barbet, despite its similarities. The team argued that there were significant differences of mitochondrial DNA between the Sira Barbet and other members of the *Capito* genus. The debate was in part about *which* differences matter.¹⁶ This is to say that the *difference* that differences make is construed rather than objective or given.

As various biologists and taxonomists have noted, species concepts are not only multiple, or even conflicting; they also often fail.¹⁷ While certain approaches might apply perfectly well to birds, others can only work with plants. Few operate successfully with micro-organisms and fungi. A “gene-flow community” might cluster organisms that may not share “traits,” and even find greater difference between individual organisms of the same “species” than between individual members of one species and another.¹⁸ Irresolvable contradictions arise between a Linnaean taxonomy, in which morphological traits are viewed as essential to a species and a post-Darwinian evolutionary taxonomy, in which shared genetic material is used to cluster organisms. The idea of “species” is, as Darwin himself acknowledged, a term of convenience. Most recognize that taxonomy’s hierarchical and fixed approaches are conventions, though this is disputed by species “essentialists.” This is an especially good case through which to understand what science studies scholars since the early work of Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, and Sandra Harding have shown: claims of neutrality or objectivity by scientists and experts do not vitiate our need to follow their epistemic, political, and social processes, which are inevitably enmeshed.¹⁹ In fact, as these scholars show, claims of neutrality are themselves ideological.

There are several implications that flow from this brief foray into modern/contemporary species concepts for studying the past. First, contemporary creaturely taxa are at best pragmatic conventions rather than stable essences over and against which premodern ideas can be judged (or ancient animals identified in a naïve way). Second, the signal insight of science studies, that knowledge is created in a complex of contexts—social, political, religious, gendered, racialized, and so on—is as vital in the study of ancient knowledge as it is to that of modernity and the present. Third—and while this is not exactly derived from the foregoing, it is related and important for understanding ancient science—the hierarchical

arrangements of species, genus, families, and orders, which are constitutive of traditional taxonomy, would not have made sense in the ancient sources that we will be visiting in this book.

The concept of “species” in particular, as *the* irreducible taxon, did not obtain in antiquity. While it is true that there is roughly equivalent terminology, such as *min* in Hebrew or *eidos* in Greek, these terms, as we will see, are *logical* rather than *taxonomical* or necessarily biological. Not limited to describing “natural” beings, they simply express the relationship of a group (genus or *genos*) composed of certain individual entities (species or *eidos*) with some feature(s) in common. Thus, cutlery is a genus under which spoon falls, where spoon is a species. On the other hand, cutlery could also be a species that is a member of the genus tableware. The first-century CE philosopher Seneca explains that Aristotle put the human alongside other “species” under the genus of “animal.”²⁰ However, as he goes on to illustrate, the human also is a “genus, in so far as it includes many kinds.” For him, these kinds can be comprised along *multiple* lines—for example, of ethnicity, skin color, or even particular individuals such as Sappho, Babatha, or Tzipporah (Seneca lists Cato, Cicero, Lucretius). Thus, “human” is a genus in some respects, and a species in others. That ancient ideas of species ranged far wider and were used in a far more mobile fashion than modern (that is to say, Linnean) concepts does not mean that people in the ancient world did not struggle to identify, understand, and group sets of creatures along the lines of likeness and difference. Given this, we are tasked with thinking of creaturely life “before species” as we might have thought we knew it.²¹ For these reasons, I will alternate between using “species” and “kind,” the latter being a fine translation of its equivalents (*min*, *eidos*, *species*) in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, respectively. As I will explain, I view the project of equating ancient creaturely terminology with modern species concepts to be a fraught enterprise.

To return to the question of which differences make a difference: the lenses we use to lump and split entities into individual units or groups (or collections of kinds) matter. One measure that is often taken for granted as *the* unstated basic unit of a member of a species is the body. Take the human: its body as a unit or scale of focus is contingent. Within each and every human body live much smaller, and vastly more numerous, “microcosmic” entities: bacteria with histories and lineages and interactions that far predate, outlive, and traffic in and out of, the entity that is the particular human with a proper name. In Donna Haraway’s formula: “To be one is always to become with many.”²² Rather than really being a *de minimus* unit, the human—as both a particular embodied instance (a “person”) and as an abstraction—is always enmeshed with others. It is thus that even the seemingly irreducible, single unit, is plural, breaking down the binaries of likeness/difference that make for divisions between humankind and other kinds. Particularly salutary in the context of this book’s focus is the way such insights not only decenter the human but also reveal the limits of an anthropocentric gaze, allowing us to

perceive the nonhuman that resides in the very center of the human. The rabbinic case of a human gestating a raven is another avenue to an embodied core of such *multiplicity*.

MULTIPLICITY

The divine blessing of *peru u-revu*, which is given to various creatures in Genesis 1—including but not limited to humans—is often translated as “reproduce and multiply” or “be fruitful and multiply; in nominal terms as “procreation.” I will rarely use the latter term, but in this book I will often use the term “generation” to signal what we might think of today as “reproduction.” I do so to introduce a certain discontinuity between modern and ancient or premodern narratives about how life comes into being. At least since the mid-eighteenth century, Euro-Americans have sought to narrow and name accounts of life’s conception and emergence through the concept of “reproduction.”²³ Reproduction is often narrated as a particularly human process involving entities known as men and women engaging in very specific kinds of activity described as sexual, which are then seen as resulting in pregnancy, culminating in birth and delivery of offspring.²⁴ It is important for us to distinguish between these modern legacies of reproductive thinking and ancient ideas of *generation*. As historians have shown, “generation” signified a different semantic and conceptual range than did “reproduction.” Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming, and Lauren Kassell describe how generation referenced “a larger, looser framework for discussing procreation and descent.”²⁵ They remind us that generation was not humancentric, and included “gods, humans, animals, plants, and some minerals.”²⁶

Generation was understood by people in antiquity, including the rabbis, to largely fall along the lines of “like begets like.” This notion, which could be rephrased as “like affects like,” was the basic principle of “cosmic sympathy” thought to govern all things.²⁷ Despite this general principle and its role in understandings of generation, the late ancient world, as we will see in this book, was one in which life could come into existence in a variety of ways and could include *unlike* generative outcomes. People in late antiquity, including the rabbis of Roman Palestine, lived in a world of reproductive unpredictability that not only made for species variability but that also allowed for generative modes beyond dyadic, heterosexual, and same-species reproductive models.

Haraway, however, in her indictment above of “Jewish and Christian monotheism” for elevating “human exceptionalism” and human reproduction over “creaturely kinship,” points to a God who is “definitely not queer.” What can she mean? Haraway decries this divine straightness expressed by the split between “kinds” and especially the cleavage between human and nonhuman. Not only this. She also contrasts “creaturely kinship” and human propagation. Hers is an instructive example of allyship between queer theory and animal studies. Haraway couples

queer theory's alternative models of kin and care and its critiques of normative, heteropatriarchal family together with animal studies' attention to the making of human/animal difference (a link also made in critical kinship studies). One of the key arguments in my book is that ancient rabbinic ideas of generation actually queer our modern model of same-species, two-parent, heterosexual reproduction—including in the making of human.²⁸ This book also shows how attempts to categorize animals, and contrast them with the human, founder. Further, these two arguments are merged in situations in which progeny seems to bear species features unlike those of their parents'. Despite the taxonomic legacy of Genesis and Leviticus, and their expansion by the rabbis', resemblances and dissemblances push back against neat species categories. In sorting out who is whose offspring, especially in a world in which sex and mimesis are not the only means and forms of proliferation, we even confront doubles to the supposedly singular human, along with humans bearing nonhuman animals, and also creatures that arise in queer circumstances. To reiterate, my understanding of the rabbis complicates Haraway's reductive and arguably Christianizing portrayal. As we plunge in the particulars of reproduction and speciation in rabbinic sources, we find that theirs is a far more complex and "queer" creation after all.

An assortment of approaches and disciplinary orientations populates animal studies. I'm aligned with those who, along with Haraway, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Mel Chen, fold in insights from queer theory, critical race theory, and disability studies to elucidate who is considered to be "human" and how. Crucially, these scholars question, rather than reinforce, an animal/human binary.²⁹ Their plural or nonbinary approaches resist and open up alternative analytic and even ethical horizons. With this in mind, I find thinking about creatures as *species* – albeit critically rather than in its European originating scientized taxonomic sense – to be a crucial complement to an animal studies approach focused on more binary makings of animalization and animal/human boundaries. "Species" as a term – in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew – invokes likeness. It comprises the singular unit that is a member of multiples, yet these cuts of difference that slip into similarity. To think critically with and about species is to approach difference and likeness in a way that allows for heterogeneity, variety, and multiplicity beyond dualisms. Even as the precise makings of species boundaries may be as blurred as that between the human and animal, there is a constant sense of their plurality.³⁰

With the rabbis, we find, at times, not only a certain fuzziness at the border of the human and the animal, but also, and more crucially, a realm of *species multiplicity*. *Species*, rather than animality, is a term that is both singular and plural. It connotes both the disciplinary and oppressive force of classification projects, while opening up the as yet unknown, the vague, and the multiple. To think through *species* allows a critical edge that decenters *anthropocentrism* by locating the human as a being that dwells within that multiplicity, while tackling the all-too-human attempts to know and distinguish (themselves!) among species.

Like many human inventions, early modern European “species” concepts did not merely uncover a set apart “nature” or reveal a reality that was prior. Rather, humans often made species cuts via material and violent means (e.g., in zoological collections, theft, specimens, captivity, torture, killing, display, “natural history,” and, more recently, the eliding of indigenous and non-Euro-American human cultures as part of said history). As indigenous scholars have taught us, contemporaneous traditional ecological knowledges often eschewed such binary ways of knowing, instead embedding the human among—or even as—nonhuman beings.³¹ One way of describing this integrated and nondualistic approach is through the neologism of “natureculture.”³²

Just as I draw from animal studies and queer theory, I also summon insights from transgender studies that help me elucidate rabbinic sources. Trans studies offer a generative analytic lens for the ways that they encourage us to suspend assumptions about how bodily configurations inevitably map onto particular classifications. In their treatments of variation in species and reproduction, the rabbis force a similar confrontation. The rabbis conceive of trans-species (i.e., cross-species) sexual interactions and even reproductive relations, some of which are stigmatized, others valorized. While queer theory critically engages sex, sexuality, and desire, and opens up the variability of gender and sexuality, it need not interrogate the binarity of sex (or what I prefer to term sexgender) itself nor the binary between gender and sex. Transgender studies attend to the denaturalizing of categories, most obviously gender, along with coconstituents such as race, class, disability, and animality (or species).³³ At the same time, transgender studies account for the material, bodily, and phenomenological grounds of gender, including the marginalization of nonnormative embodiments and subjectivities.³⁴ I turn to trans theory because it helps us “expose the arbitrary delineation between the normal and defective” and thereby to elaborate “the negative social ramifications of attempts to homogenize humanity.”³⁵ To trace how gender articulations shore up particular models of the human (while marginalizing variation) is therefore also to pry apart the making of *species*. The conjoining of these moves in our sources is not always explicit, but they can be, as in the tractate of Bekhorot (firstborns), which details the “blemishes” (*mumim*) that disqualify both priests from Temple cult officiation and animals from sacrificial offerings, thereby construing “normate” bodies across species and gender lines.

Even if rabbinic sources do not seem to highlight gender and species per se, a transgender studies lens can enrich our approach to rabbinic texts, particularly by adopting its agnosticisms about the significance of embodiment and variation. Trans theory, explains Susan Stryker, “assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being.”³⁶ According to Finn Enke, trans theory equips us to “[suspend] assumptions about how and what gender means, how and what bodies mean, and the significance of both.”³⁷ Along with this awareness of contingency, and the suspension of assumptions, is the

noninevitability of binarity. In this way *to trans* is also to allow for the possibility of multiplicity beyond seemingly fixed binary sex or gender categories such as male/female or man/woman. In other words, gender categories are historically and culturally provisional. So too, as this book suggests, are species.

Biologists and philosophers of science show us how different forms of life push against our attempts to constrain them in our provincial essentialisms of both species *and* gender.³⁸ If, as the wisdom goes, everybody has gender (not just those who are marginalized in some way), then, so too, does everyone (not just those who are nonhuman) have species. As with gender, so too with species assignments: a complex set of variables can, but need not, be read in a binary fashion. A trans-inflected species analysis helpfully illuminates the ways that the rabbis themselves both seek to categorize kinds while confronting the limits of their own attempts to “capture” all creatures as such.

That there were more ways of making life beyond narrow reproductive models was clear to most denizens of the ancient world, from Aristotle and his student Theophrastus in fourth-century BCE Greece to Pliny and the rabbis in the first centuries CE. Ancient people took spontaneous generation, the emergence of living creatures from nonliving matter, such as mud or liquid, seemingly without seed or parents, as “fact,” and, as Daryn Lehoux argues, they did so not without careful observation, experimentation, and explanation. Creatures thus generated were not seen as inferior to those made through sexual reproduction.³⁹ The rabbis referred to the former as those that do not “reproduce and multiply,” and, like many, observed how small flies are generated from wine or oil; and in later texts they recount how snakes emerge from human spines.⁴⁰ Philosophers, rabbis, poets, metalworkers, and others also knew of creatures that were generated in fire (like the salamander) and of parthenogenesis, a process by which female creatures reproduce without the aid of male seed.⁴¹ Interspecies coupling, within certain constraints, might also generate offspring. In the realm of animal “husbandry,” humans not only observed but often instigated such couplings. Last but not least was the possibility of divine or demonic coupling with humans in Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian narratives. For instance, Genesis 6:1–4 relates how the “sons of God . . . came into the human daughters,” resulting in offspring of “mighty ones.” This spawned various late ancient accounts of angelic/demonic-human mating and conception.⁴² Members of the Jesus movement and early Christians argued about the reproductive mechanics by which Jesus was both God and Mary’s son.⁴³ The early rabbis, in turn, understood that God was one of “three partners” alongside a woman and a man in the creation of human offspring. Later rabbis elaborated on human generation, pointing to specific attributes that each member of this threesome contributed to their progeny.⁴⁴ Other accounts of both human and nonhuman generation also sought to parse the progenitors and materials involved, presenting a variety of ideas from the role of “seed” (usually understood as active, often male, sometimes female), “matter” (often gendered female, often passive),

and “spirit” (sometimes but not always related to divinities). Of all these multiple, sometimes overlapping, sometimes contested modes of generation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate a singular, unified, and monolithic “Judeo-Christian tradition” grounded in “nature.”

It is also clear that narrower models of reproduction fail to capture the ways in which even contemporary humans propagate. The increasing visibility of pregnancies among those who are not cisgender women, as well as the growth of assistive reproductive technologies (ART), including IVF, gamete donations and surrogacy, and uterine transplantation, allow for many more players. The cisgender, heterosexual couple is not the only game in town. There are many forms of material and nonmaterial family and kin making, including but not limited to nonmonogamous families, blended families, and adoption. These new and not new realities and technologies configure life making, reproductive material, and kin in complex – sometimes contested – ways. In other types of lab-based generation, meat cultured and tissue from cells are grown into human and animal organs. Such techniques extrapolate from properties observed over centuries: the capacity of skin, organs, and tissue—human and otherwise—to heal and bind. As Myra Hird puts it, “much of the brave new world of reproductive technologies is human mimicry of well-worn bacterial practices that are millions of years old.”⁴⁵ In other words, and along with what medical anthropologists and historians have long shown, heterogenous accounts of reproduction are not unique to our own era. These examples of contemporary biotechnologies demonstrate just a slice of the variety of reproductive processes, materials, actors, and networks of kin and care.⁴⁶

When I juxtapose ancient varieties of generation with contemporary reproductive processes, I do not mean to suggest identity or analogy between the two; nor do I mean to suggest that one set of ideas led to the other. Rather, I mean to highlight the ways in which the weirdness of the past—as Mike Chin puts it—cannot be offset or measured by an appeal to the ordinariness of the present.⁴⁷ While it may seem obvious that we ought to resist explaining the past through the present, even by way of contrast, it can be especially tempting, with matters related to what we think of (today) as nature, science, and religion, to succumb to narratives of progress, teleology, and triumph. Clearly the people of late ancient Roman Palestine were not struggling with the dilemmas and difficulties of today, nor with the material, economic, and cultural conditions that constrain our own thinking and actions. But perhaps by being attuned to how we domesticate the strangeness of our lives, we can cultivate humility as we venture into worlds long gone but secreted into a variety of material and textual residues.

Cultivating awareness about the weirdness of the present is not to exceptionalize our own moment, either. On the contrary, by provincializing prevalent concepts of the moment and by showing up the contingency and nonnecessity of that which we take for granted, we can refrain from rationalizing the past on our terms and better embrace its singularities. Concomitantly—and this is a harder and

different project—by defamiliarizing the present and simultaneously studying other once-presents, now-pasts, we might even become more attuned to the multiplicity of congruities, intricacies, and potentialities nestled within our own present.

KNOWLEDGE

*Upon arriving at his home, he sorted the wheat on its own, the barley on its own, the lentils on their own, and the beans on their own. So Rabbi Akiva did as he made the entire Torah into rings upon rings.*⁴⁸

—AVOT DE RABBI NATAN A18, 34A

In this book, we'll be mostly but not exclusively concentrating on the Hebrew language materials produced by the Palestinian Tannaim, the early rabbis who flourished between the first and late second/early third centuries. The origins of the rabbis are mysterious. It is only after the disastrous first Jewish revolt against Rome, which effectively ended with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE and what was likely the decimation or enslavement of a large proportion of Jews, that the Tannaim emerged. The plural term Tannaim (sing. Tanna) means "teachers," "reciters," or "repeaters" (Aramaic). It refers to these first few generations of rabbinic teachers and their disciples. Composed of sage-disciple circles located in villages in Judea, the Tannaim coalesced into a more visible movement after the second Jewish revolt (132–35 CE). In the aftermath, they moved northward to the more cosmopolitan cities, towns, and villages of the Galilee. With the sponsorship of the wealthy and influential Rabbi Judah (the "patriarch"), the rabbis enjoyed more communal visibility and status. His patronage culminated in the publication of the Mishnah, which in turn became a centerpiece of the rabbinic curriculum. This thematically organized compendium of Tannaitic teachings, organized into six "orders," each composed of multiple "tractates," was edited in the early third century CE.⁴⁹ The Mishnah's contents range across ritual, cultic, liturgical, agricultural, domestic, business, dispute, and punishment-related procedures. Other works edited close in time to or after the Mishnah's redaction include the Tosefta, a collection of teachings organized in parallel order to the Mishnah. Besides these, works of exegesis and commentary on the Bible survive or have been reconstructed, including the Mekhilta on Exodus, the Sifra on Leviticus, and the Sifre on Numbers and Deuteronomy. Central to the early rabbinic project was the working out of ritual: of the sacred (prayer, festivals, sabbath, im/purity, and a significant focus on Temple and sacrificial matters) and the ostensibly everyday (what we might take to be guides for conduct, custom, domestic and economic relations, and "criminal" "law").⁵⁰ Just as crucial was the sacralization of the rabbinic enterprise itself: study and teaching were lionized.

What we know about these people is chiefly from their own writings. Judging by the number of named individuals (itself not easy to ascertain), and even taking into account the underrepresentation of rabbis in their texts, the Tannaim seem to

have comprised a small movement, with 120 or more named rabbis.⁵¹ The number of Palestinian Amoraim has been estimated at 367 by Chanoch Albeck.⁵² These are conservative numbers. But quantifying this further and situating the movement—across generations and settlement patterns—especially in relationship to the broader population of Roman Palestine, is no small task. It is extremely difficult to estimate population numbers in antiquity as demonstrated by the range of arguments regarding the populations of Rome and Italy. Even the questions of how to count the “Jewish” population before, during, and after the two revolts and their deadly consequences and how to qualitatively apply the nomenclature “Jewish” (or is it “Judean”) are entirely fraught.⁵³ What we can surmise is that Palestinian Jews (or *ioudaioi*) were, by the second or third century, largely settled in the Galilee, with particularly major concentrations in the eastern Galilee.

Debates about the rabbis range: Were they continuators of Second Temple institutions, concepts, and rituals? Did they preserve “Judaism” or invent it? What about Jews who were not rabbis? Were they largely indistinguishable from their fellow non-Jewish denizens of Roman Palestine, except for certain linguistic and other faint gestures by which we can sometimes discern their Jewishness? Or were they faithful followers of the rabbis? What were the relationships between rabbis and Jewish or non-Jewish members of the Jesus movement? Ought we think of the rabbis as resisting Roman imperial rule? Or, as a provincial Roman subelite, were they not all that different from others in Asia Minor, Egypt, and the like?

The number of rabbis in relative terms has received particular attention recently, as revisionist accounts try to correct for earlier positivist histories that inflated their influence and roles as leaders of “the” Jewish people. Scholars such as Seth Schwartz, hold that the rabbis were a fragmented, insular group with little authority, who competed for recognition in the early third and fourth centuries in the larger, “paganized,” or “romanized” urban communities in which most Jews lived.⁵⁴ The rabbis’ status rose as a consequence of Christianization, which triggered a concomitant resurgence of Jewish identification among Jews. By contrast, other approaches to the rabbis might accord them more status even during the earlier Tannaitic generations as “holy men” and, beginning in the mid-second/third centuries, as arbitrators, or, going even more maximalist, as community leaders with significant roles in Galilean synagogues.

From the early third century onward, the rabbis do seem to have been consolidated as a movement, at least to some degree. Between the early third and late fourth/early fifth centuries, the Palestinian Amoraim flourished, leaving us the Palestinian Talmud, a commentary on the Mishnah, and homiletical commentaries (*midrashim*) on scripture. In the wake of Rome’s gradual embrace of Christianity in the early fourth century, the landscape of Palestine also changed as it became an object of religious, political, and imperial scrutiny and investment as the “Holy Land.” The Babylonian Amoraim, several generations of whom overlapped with the Palestinian Amoraim, also thrived, albeit for a century or

so longer. Their teachings would culminate in the extended editing process of the Babylonian Talmud (by the anonymous editors who followed the Babylonian Amoraim). Transimperial travel and connectivity allowed for the movement of students and teachings across the rabbinic communities in Roman Palestine and Persian-Sasanian-ruled Mesopotamia (or Babylonia) respectively.

Regardless of how representative rabbinic texts are, either of broader Jewish communities or even of the rabbis themselves, these sources provide us with an invaluable and extensive perspective of a provincial group living in the Roman Empire. It is in this sense that the significance of the rabbis is not determined by their statistical minority or cultural marginality vis-à-vis fellow inhabitants of Palestine, identified as Jewish or otherwise. Rabbinic literature constitutes a remarkable archive to counterpose to imperial-, Roman-, or Christian-centric approaches to the history of late antiquity. In this respect, this study joins those that “center the margins” by investigating provincial cultures and histories from Syria to Egypt, and from Armenia to Mesopotamia. However, relative rabbinic peripherality does not merely provide partial perspectives with which to fill in missing bits of the larger picture of the Roman Empire. While such an approach might ameliorate exceptionalist or myopic approaches to Jewish or rabbinic history, its additive orientation arguably reinscribes a Rome-centric, imperial gaze.

Instead, our reading the rabbis in conversation with other antecedent or contemporary ancient voices allows alternative and different insights to emerge. The rabbis may not have been players in provincial urban councils, had regular audiences with the nearest provincial governor, gone to study Roman law in Beirut, taught undercover Roman agents Torah, or spent extensive time in the synagogues of Asia Minor. If and when they recount such events, owing to the nature of the sources (mostly retrospective tales about earlier protagonists), we cannot use them to reconstruct biographies and events in the same ways that scholars might do for someone like Origen of Caesarea, for instance. Nonetheless, even if it seems obvious to the point of being pedestrian, it is important to recognize that the rabbis existed. This seeming piece of prosaica (or marvel) can be hard to remember, or assimilate, given the highly stylized, multiauthored, and mediated character of their written remains. Tuning into them allows us to revisit and shift what we have hitherto centered.⁵⁵ The hope is that this might even make for a reorientation, introducing a useful cacophony amid the medley of ancient voices we are accustomed to hearing, and thus allowing us to hear otherwise. To paraphrase Mike Chin: reading with the rabbis might grant us new avenues into the past’s weirdness.

Our Sources

The rabbis did not write long-form disquisitions that elaborate a question in a sustained and flowing fashion. Neither did they produce single-authored tracts designed to work out a set of ideas or to engage a central problem. Rather, they generated enigmatic and laconic statements or narratives; or, at the very least, later

editors stitched these together to various genre effects—for instance, as commentaries on biblical texts or on the Mishnah, or as thematically organized texts like the Mishnah itself. Regardless of one's theory about how to understand these processes and their final textual products, the contents and traditions within them remain condensed and terse. A lot of our labor in reading rabbinic sources involves unpacking, unwinding, and unthreading worlds from their words. The textual forms and genres in which these sources reach us necessitate this kind of close, ostensibly petty, reading. Indeed, as mentioned above, the very characteristics that set rabbinic sources apart figure into our analysis. For instance, in chapter 3 I argue that the arrangement and juxtaposition of creatures far and near, prosaic and exoticized, into a “menagerie” is a device found across literary, visual, and embodied forms. Such devices are embedded in the Mishnah and Tosefta tractates of Kilayim (hybrids) and elsewhere and do a particular kind of work when considered in light of the movement, trade, and display of animals in late Roman Palestine.

Before laying out the paths that this book takes, here I will outline the sources I use in this study and why. I focus the Sifra, a Tannaitic midrash on Leviticus (I center on its commentary on Leviticus's regulation of creaturely purity and impurity). In addition, I analyze texts in the tractates of Niddah (menstrual purity), Bekhorot (firstborn cattle, priests, and human firstborns), Kilayim (forbidden mixing of species) and Hullin (noncultic slaughter of animals) in the Mishnah and its parallel Tosefta. Following these sources through successive topics and historical strata, I trace the zoological and reproductive ideas of earlier and later sources (such as the Palestinian Talmud and Genesis Rabbah). In studying sources like Tractate Niddah on women's ritual “gynecological” purity, together with sources in Tractate Bekhorot on firstborn animals, I attend to the ways that human and animal reproductive “sciences” were in many ways inextricable from each other for the rabbis, as they were for other ancient writers.

In presenting the rabbis as part of broader conversations on “natural philosophy or history”—before these topics were subsumed under modern “science”—I turn to a variety of other ancient sources, including authors roughly contemporary with the Tannaim and Amoraim, as well as influential texts like Aristotle's writings, which circulated in late antiquity. I look to sources such as Pliny's first-century CE *Natural History* (itself familiar with Aristotle's *De generatione animalium*.), the medical writings of the second-century/early third-century CE Galen, the second-/third-century Aelian's *On the Nature of Animals*, and the second-/fourth-century Christian *Physiologos*. Some of these writers (e.g., Galen and Pliny) were tightly linked with the imperial center while being well-traveled across the empire, including in the Roman east. Others, like the Egyptian *Physiologos*, represent a view from the provinces.

Aristotle, Pliny, and Galen have been analyzed in their respective imperial contexts, allowing for an assessment of the extractive and imperialist dimensions of their knowledge production in galvanizing human and animal (re)productivity.⁵⁶

Conversely, my analysis of rabbinic knowledge making considers how the rabbis, as inhabitants of the Roman east, produced knowledge in idiosyncratic languages, forms, and contexts. This last commitment is central to feminist science studies with its combination of attention to the sociopolitical and gendered situatedness of knowledge making as well as to the agency and materiality of the “objects” of knowledge themselves (including but not limited to the rabbis, both as subjugated provincials and also as objects of my investigation). Such insights about the situatedness of knowers, the embeddedness of humans within “nature,” and the power of nonhumans, sometimes referred to or grouped under the umbrella of “new materialisms,” have long been crucial to a plurality of indigenous and Black epistemologies and practices.⁵⁷

These insights promote constructive orientations to the rabbis and their texts. They help us avoid the influence/resistance binary that is so tempting in thinking about the rabbis alongside other human communities. Relatedly, they move beyond the implicit culture/nature binary that such interhuman analyses often entail by embedding the rabbis and other humans among all life-forms and entities (not just human or so-called “cultural” ones to the exclusion of so-called “nature”). At the same time, to recognize the agency of human and nonhuman organisms and entities is not to mandate a biological essentialism or materialist determinism. Rather, it is to acknowledge that all beings, with unequal and shifting distributions of and access to power, lived with each other: rabbis, other humans, nonhuman beings. The rabbis were shaped by their various cohabitants and in turn shaped them in multitude manners.

Ancient “Science” or Knowledge

Jack Halberstam writes that “dominant history teems with the remnants of alternative possibilities.”⁵⁸ There is a curious mirroring between the academic construal of what kinds of sources make up the history of certain knowledges, and the patterns of power and hierarchy in the late ancient world. Rabbinic sources offer us a nonobvious path to rendering visible nondominant forms of knowledge making in the Roman—and Christian—Empire. Similarly, we get a glimpse of the alternate histories and knowledges of women and other beings through the writings of the rabbis—writings that are admittedly partial in the sense of not being “representative,” as well as in the sense of being marginal and nonhegemonic themselves.

Avot De Rabbi Natan analogizes knowledge-making to sorting different species of grains: wheat, barley, beans, and lentils. A source in the Sifre similarly compares the Torah student who works with a teachers’ rulings to a sieve sifting flour, bran, and coarse meal into different piles.⁵⁹ These accounts of knowledge as material effects of agricultural labor point to the ways that human-made knowledge for the rabbis was bound up with classification and division: here we vividly see how knowledge was shaped and organized with physical impacts. And, vice versa, we see something like “natural knowledge” as a way of organizing Torah or “sacred

knowledge.” This analogy or relationship between knowing and sorting through “nature” is a curious way to cast a bid for rabbinic expertise. But interestingly—though it must seem like a truism to say that the rabbis valued Torah study as supreme—they also debated its relationship to other ways of doing and being. We see similar claims and debates about knowing within and beyond academic scholarship, not to mention about the relationships between the academy and beyond it. The rabbis also made certain distinctions about what was worth knowing and who had best access to it. I do not wish to flatten or essentialize the peculiarity of rabbinic texts and ideas. To some extent, my juxtapositions of contemporaneous ancient sources and contemporary provocations in the realm of species and reproduction is designed to deflate exceptionalist readings of the rabbis, while paying attention to where rabbinic differences make a difference. At the same time, I will occasionally stretch the ancient “remnants” just a little more than is warranted, in an effort to sketch alternative “subjugated knowledges,” whose very partiality points to the proliferation of multiplicity that was thwarted.⁶⁰

The Path of This Book

In the first chapter, “Difference,” I consider species variation in reproductive contexts. In other words, I treat cases like the one in this book’s title, of one species delivering a creature that looks like a different species. Two pressures exercise the rabbis in such cases. First, as Daryn Lehoux argues, there was a ubiquitous axiom in antiquity that “like affects like,” and concomitantly, that “like begets like.” Second, the biblical legacy of *adam* created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) loomed. What happened, then, if a woman delivered a creature that was a “raven likeness” (tNiddah 4:6)? In answering this question, I compare ideas about humans and animals in the priestly stratum of the Hebrew Bible—including the creation account in Genesis 1 and the animal regulations in Leviticus 11—with those in the early rabbinic compendia of the Mishnah and Tosefta. We follow a set of sources in which the rabbis introduce species instability and reproductive unpredictability into the mix. Considering these together with other ancient understandings of reproductive variation in philosophical and legal texts, we can understand the Tannaim partaking in a broader conversation about reproduction, species, and likeness/difference. Finally, I expose dissension among rabbinic views and demonstrate that the Tosefta softens the Mishnah’s insistence on a minimal degree of human distinctiveness for a variant offspring to count as human.

From likeness and difference we move to “Multiplicity” in chapter 2, which follows the Sifra—the early rabbinic exegetical commentary on Leviticus 11—as it unfurls and expands the biblical bestiary by generating species, criteria, and classes. The Tannaim often patently read *into* the scriptural text by various means. Occasionally, they use morphological criteria of resemblance (*dimyon*) to extrapolate to creatures that look like those named in scripture. They more often deploy exegetical techniques, such as reading a particle or word restrictively (*mi’ut*), and most

often by reading expansively to multiply (*ribuy*) potential referents. I close with an exegesis (*midrash*) by Rabbi Akiva (whose exegetical disposition is famously proliferative and emblematic of the Sifra) toward the end of an extended passage strewn with expansive (*ribuy*) exegeses. The midrash is a paean to multiplication (*ribuy*) in all senses of the term: as an exegetical strategy; and as a mechanism by which a great many (*r-b-h*) kinds are generated (*periyah u-revayah*, fructification and multiplication). This sums up the chapter's argument that it is the rabbinic-exegetical encounter with scripture that generates species in all their multiplicity and variation. This dimension of multiplication is especially pronounced, its tracks laid throughout and culminating in Rabbi Akiva's tribute—"how they are multiple (*rabu*), your creatures!" As such, the rabbinic exegete not only extolls God in enumerating creation but in some ways also joins God.

In chapter 3, "Menagerie," I pursue further paths along which the rabbis sought to cluster and distinguish creatures via the production of likeness and the rendering of difference. These approaches involve a device that I call the menagerie, as well as a territorial theory of animal life that makes likeness a possible ground of difference. The menagerie, as a device for securing the capture, classification, exploitation, and display of animals, flourished in the context of Roman zoological imperialism. The Tannaitic variation of the menagerie offers us a view onto a particular "provincial zoology." The menagerie itself gathers creatures near and far, including parahuman or "exotic" humankinds. I argue that the human plays a blurry role in this mix of creaturely collection and classification and territoriality. This is exemplary of the ways that the marking of difference fails to undo the contagion effect of resemblance. The theory of territorial doubles—which distinguishes between life-forms in settled and wild areas and between dry land and sea—simultaneously explains how different creatures seem to look alike, guarantees species distinctions, and also troubles the singularity of kinds, including the human who confronts its own doubles. Here again, the contagion effect of likeness makes for an "untamed" multiplicity that exceeds classificatory attempts to capture. The animals (including the human among them) always, eventually, escape the menagerie.

The fourth chapter, "Hybrid," treats a creature whose treatment is one of the most overtly moralized in modern and contemporary scholarship: the rabbinic hybrid (*kilayim*). In contrast, I center the specific mechanics of the Tannaitic hybrid, showing that the Tannaim found ways to exploit them while also endowing them with multiple meanings. Rather than castigating *kilayim* as transgressing the order of creation—which is what scholars assume—the Tannaim repudiated the project of seeking a reasoned explanation, embracing hybrids as a peculiar marker of Jewishness, while also extrapolating from their unusual etiology to alternate modes of reproduction (beyond heterosexual dyadic mating). I show that contemporary scholarly readings of *kilayim*—linking them to same-sex sexuality, adultery, bestiality, or even "intermarriage"—are unwarranted. Later, post-Tannaitic texts do moralize *kilayim* in terms of transgression but still don't

do so in ethnoracialized terms to think about the offspring of Jewish and non-Jewish couples. Instead, as I show the Palestinian Talmud juxtaposes the mule as a hybrid to the human as a trihybrid (composed of three kinds). This account of human conception queerly bypasses expected circuits of reproduction, both affirming human exceptionalism, and disrupting expected heterosex generation. Thus, Tannaitic and post-Tannaitic sources show *kilayim* to attract multiple and simultaneous sets of meanings.

Chapter 5, “Generation,” pulls on the thread of generative multiplicity running through the book. It experiments with readings of two later Mesopotamian sources: a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (bBava Metsia 84a-b) and the Aramaic incantation bowls. In each case, I argue that a presumptively cisgender, human-centered, heterosexual, monogamous marriage-based perspective tends to govern our analysis. Instead, I offer nonbinary, species-queer interpretations, arguing that these speak to different generative and erotic possibilities at play in ancient Jewish life-making and kin formations. I do so in part by reading the sources “literally” and in part by highlighting how presumptive nonbinarity and queerness are no less tendentious and are even more appropriate than our usual uninterrogated frames of cisness and binary gender.

Sadly, the ravenlike creature delivered by the “woman from Sidon” has a longer and richer, if tragic, afterlife, than their unnamed mother. The Palestinian Talmud asks whether this creature can be slaughtered and consumed or whether he is obligated to perform levirate marriage (marrying his dead brother’s childless widow). This fraught attempt to cut between the human and nonhuman highlights the contingency of rabbinic/human knowledge making and its potentially grave impacts on life, consumption, kin, and gendered generation.

We ourselves are in what promises to be a long moment that challenges the limits of the conceit (in all senses) of dualistic divides between human and non-humans—whether understood as animals, the “environment,” or “climate”—and between male and female. As the fixity of gender and species is being called into question, reactive movements seek to double down on already entrenched human, (cis)heterosexual, and white supremacies. The quest for human generative agency or reproductive justice is, as Black and indigenous feminist thinkers have long argued, necessarily bound up with struggles for racial and economic justice. Likewise, these struggles are inescapably intertwined with the recognition of how human and nonhuman beings are inseparable in their mutual flourishing.

To reiterate, I do not suggest an analogy between these contemporary stakes and ancient concerns. Nor do I advocate ancient Jewish answers to present and pressing questions. In many ways my project is designed to interrupt the apparent ease with which such creative teleologies—the idea of the Judeo-Christian tradition is just one of these—are engineered. My hope is that confronting the otherwise thinking and being of the past can sometimes stimulate alternate ways of seeing and being in the present and for the future.