Immah Shalom: The Controversial Role Model

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Abstract

This article analyzes the representations of Immah Shalom (lit. mother of peace) [late 1st - early 2nd century CE] as a case study of female representation in the Babylonian Talmud and the position of the women of her time in society. The methodology comprises of critical and close reading of certain narratives in the Babylonian Talmud, an analysis of their contexts and of their place and function within the Talmudic discussion. Attention will also be paid to language and structure in their relation to the aforementioned ideas and tendencies. Immah Shalom is described as compassionate, assertive, wise, brave, bold, and knowledgeable in Halakha and Jewish Tradition. Close reading demonstrates that the Talmudic sources about her illustrate atypical and even controversial attitudes in matters pertaining to women’s social exclusion, denial of their inheritance rights, and the way husbands treated their wives.

Introduction

Rabbinic literature does not shy away from depictions of women. It does, however, refrain from letting these female characters fully express themselves. Scholars agree that Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Other” (l’autre) is applicable to the way women are portrayed in the Talmud. By distancing women from the spotlight, the redactors of the Talmud were able to express controversial opinions that may have been too significant to remain unspoken.

This paper explores the remarkable character of Immah Shalom, as the herald of unique and controversial opinions. Despite her unconventional stances, she participated in the discourse of the Sages and is considered a favorite member of their community. Immah Shalom is used as a case study for investigating the role of women in the discourse of the Sages of the Babylonian Talmud.

When Immah Shalom is mentioned, she is depicted as acting out of concern for the welfare of her husband Rabbi Eliezer b. Hyrcanus [circa 75 CE] and her brother Rabban Gamliel II (called also Gamaliel of Jabneh, to distinguish him from his grandfather, Gamaliel I.) [d. 138 AD, Lod, Israel], placing their needs before her own. She does not impose herself on the area of study, nor does she attempt to achieve the place of an equal among the Sages. Her characteristics reveal a gender-based, positive
perception of a wise and assertive woman, who nevertheless does not try to use her wisdom to pave her way into the world of Torah and of judicial judgments.

Like in the cases of Beruria, Yalta and Martha bat Baitus, one may conclude that the level of female inclusion—or lack thereof—in the world of the Sages had much to do with the spheres in which women operated, the manner they operated, and towards whom their actions were directed. iv

This study employs critical readings of Tannaitic and Amoraic sources in an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of Immah Shalom's character. This type of discussion, focused on a unique female character, serves as a valuable case study for an in-depth analysis of the various dimensions of feminine existence as manifested in the texts. The questions concern the context in which Immah Shalom appeared, her role in Talmudic discourse, the balance of power between men and women, her role within the family and the public sphere, the complex fabric of interpersonal relations, the ways in which women were included in society, and the mechanisms that distanced them from it.

As is customary in Talmudic studies, the paper considers how these narratives compare with parallel narratives in Eretz-Israel Tannaitic and Amoraic sources to determine whether and how her appearances and ideas were influenced by the historical time and geographic location.

The present study adds a layer to already existing studies on the place of women in the age of the Mishnah and the Talmud. Existing studies have explored the halakhic sources explicitly pertaining to women, discussing mainly the gender ideology expressed therein, such as the Niddah and the Sotah. Others have analyzed gender related texts, emphasizing the ways of structuring the female character that guided the creators of these texts.v

What is lacking is a broad discussion of the ways in which a female character is shaped, as well as a comparison between the formation of prominent female characters and the orientations reflected in the way the Babylonian Talmud adapts Eretz-Israel Tannaitic and Amoraic sources concerning female characters of the Mishnaic period. This will lead to an examination of the differences in the views on women specific to changes in historical time and geographic location.
Immah Shalom is mentioned four times in the Babylonian Talmud, in each instance she is referred to by name (Shalom) and by title (Immah), in addition to her genealogy. Four Eretz-Israel sources introduce her as the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, and two of them mention her as the sister of Rabban Gamliel II, thus ascribing her the role of arbitrator between the two Sages.

In all her appearances, Immah Shalom expresses controversial ideas that, to a certain extent, challenge the sayings of notable sages, namely Rabban Gamliel II and Rabbi Eliezer. According to one source, she even goes as far as to appeal to the Jewish court. She is, nevertheless, respected and viewed positively. These favorable traits are never acknowledged in the Eretz Israel sources, where she is mentioned only by title and by name, without any depiction of her actions or words. It seems that the relatively flat character of Immah Shalom, as reflected in the Eretz Israel sources was intentionally re-fashioned by the Babylonian redactors to reflect their own worldview.

During the Second Temple period, the name Shalom was one of the most popular female names, second only to Miriam. The title Immah for a woman was the equivalent of Abba for a man, a term often associated in Talmudic literature with people of high moral stature – for example, Abba Hilkiah or Abba the Surgeon, or notable Tannaim such as Abba Shaul. The analogy between the feminine Immah and the masculine Abba shows that a woman known as “Immah Shalom” was likely to have been perceived as a person of highest moral stature, since it is unlikely that she could have been (or perceived as) a talmid hacham (scholar).

In the following passage, Immah Shalom reveals her most controversial stance by contradicting the law of the Torah itself: advocating inheritance by daughters, even in cases where the sons are still alive and eligible to inherit.

Shabbat 116b

Imma Shalom, R. Eliezer's wife, was R. Gamaliel's sister. Now, a certain philosopher lived in his vicinity and he bore a reputation that he did not accept bribes. They wished to expose him, so she brought him a golden lamp, went before him, and said to him, 'I desire that a share be given me in my [deceased] father's estate.' 'Divide,' ordered he. Said he [R. Gamaliel] to him, 'It is decreed for us,
Immah Shalom and her brothers stage an inheritance controversy intended to expose and ridicule the judge, whom the story designates 'a philosopher,' and provoke a Jewish-Christian debate. Rabban Gamliel and Immah Shalom offer the judge a bribe, each demanding their own portion of the family inheritance. The designation 'philosopher' denotes a person who loves wisdom, who is drawn towards the light. But the judge in this story does not love wisdom, but bribe, i.e., darkness. This motif of siblings quarreling over inheritance is based on the Christian interpretation of Jacob and Esau’s quarrel over the birthright. Christians, who considered themselves the descendants of Jacob, inferred that Isaac preferred him over Esau, his elder brother – just as God had eventually preferred the Christians, *Israel Spiritualis*, over the Jewish people – since election does not depend on birthright, but rather on the will of God (Epistle to the Romans 9:6-9).

Immah Shalom speaks first, offering the judge a lamp. The judge then determines that she and her brother should split the inheritance. Rabban Gamliel objects, claiming that according to the Torah, a daughter is not entitled to inherit her father if a son is alive (Numbers 27: 7-8; Mishnah Bava Batra 8:2).

The judge responds that since the Exile, the Jews have been ruled by Christian law rather than by the laws of the Torah, thereby nullifying the Sages. The next day, Rabban Gamliel appears before the judge again, offering him a Libyan donkey – a bribe considerably superior to the one offered by Immah Shalom. Consequently, the judge rules Rabban Gamliel to be the sole heir. Immah Shalom then mocks the judge: “may your light shine as the light of the lamp.” L. Burton Visotzky understands her words as referring to Matthew 5:16: “let your light shine before others…” comparing Jesus to light, and his disciples to bringers of light.

Immah Shalom's use of the verse reflects the idea that the light of the Christian Scriptures will lighten up the darkness of the non-Christian world, including Judaism.
With this verse, Immah Shalom stresses that the judge who chose the Jewish *halakhah* will disseminate this truth to the entire world. It is obvious that she is referring to the lamp that she offered him as a bribe, implying that the judge is in need of light, since he is trapped in moral darkness. Rabban Gamliel II quips that a donkey had come and kicked the lamp. His words mock the Christian philosopher’s judgment, finding him to be shallow for having preferred the donkey to the light.

Although Rabban Gamliel II and Immah Shalom share a similar role in the tale – both pretend to quarrel over an inheritance to mock the judge and are thus equal in the eyes of the gentile judge – Rabban Gamliel is perceived by the storyteller as being of higher stature than Immah Shalom. He has the final word in the story, wherefore he seems superior to her. Moreover, it is his bribe that tips the scale.

The editor of the narrative, therefore, chose Rabban Gamliel to represent the Jewish perspective, whereas Immah Shalom was chosen to represent the position that is opposed to the central position of the Sages, according to which a woman does not inherit. It should be stressed that the story hints at the Sermon on the Mount, as a way to contest Christian ideals,xi and also preserves the rabbinic interpretation of the biblical law, which denies daughters any rights. A viewpoint that is opposed to the laws of the Torah appears less threatening when expressed by a woman than when expressed by a man. It is also more reasonable to have a woman speak out against legislation that discriminates against women.xii

The opposition to the law of the Torah concerning daughters' inheritance, which the story attributes to Immah Shalom, reflects doubts that arose in the beginning of the Mishnaic period within the Jewish community.xiii It is feasible to assume that the Stamaim, the redactors of the Talmud, were influenced by the Persian-Sasanian culture, where women had the right to inherit.xiv

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The next passage, 'The Oven of Akhnai' in *B. Bava Metzia 59b*, recounts a conflict between Rabbi Eliezer and the Talmudic Sages that had escalated to the point of Rabbi Eliezer's excommunication. Immah Shalom is caught in a bitter debate between her brother, who represents the majority of the Sages and the House of Hillel,
and her excommunicated husband, who usually advocates the position of the House of Shamai.\textsuperscript{XV}

Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, was the sister of Rabban Gamaliel. After that event, she never allowed him to fall on his face. That day was a new month and a poor man came and stood at the door. While she was giving him bread she found that he [Rabbi Eliezer] had fallen on his face. She said: stand up, you have killed my brother. Meanwhile the shofar went out from the House of Rabban Gamaliel. He said to her How did you know? She said to him thus I have received a tradition from my father’s house, all the gates are locked except the gates of verbal wrongdoing.

This account on Immah Shalom is part of a story on the halakhic controversy between Rabbi Eliezer and the Sages (which has its origin in Tannaitic sources, in the question whether the oven of Akhnai is pure or impure), and connects the behavior of the Sages during the controversy to a discussion of the concept of Ona’ah (lit. 'Deceit'), which stands at the center of the Talmudic discussion. The Gemara determines that Ona’ah refers to causing financial damage, theft, deceit, and also insulting and deceitful speech.

Rabban Gamliel, who presided over the Sanhedrin, feared that the Torah might lose its status or unity in the wake of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Temple destruction, and therefore believed that a uniform halakha ought to be preset, and that controversial halakhot should be settled by predetermined specific decision-making. He waged a fierce battle against those who did not accept the uniform halakha.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Rabbi Eliezer was not willing to compromise because these decisions contradict what he considered the will of God. He therefore performed miracles to prove that Providence was on his side, wherefore causing the Sages to excommunicate him. Rabbi Eliezer was furious with Rabban Gamliel as the head of the Sages, and prayed Tefilat Tahanun ('prayer of supplication'), which resulted in a sea storm, which capsized Rabban Gamliel’s ship. Rabban Gamliel, who realized that this calamity happened due to Rabbi Eliezer’s remorse. It is unclear whether Rabbi Eliezer forgave Rabban Gamliel or not.

Immah Shalom is depicted as acting out of emotion and a desire to protect her family, in contrast to the Sages who acted out of a struggle for power and honor. Recognizing the profound injustice done to Rabbi Eliezer and afraid of what he might do, she tried to prevent him from falling upon his face during his prayer and harm Rabban Gamliel II.
The narrator connected this incident to a different one where the attention of Immah Shalom was distracted and drawn away from Rabbi Eliezer, introducing two traditions on how this happened. According to the first one, it happened at the dawn of the New Moon when Immah Shalom mistook a full month for an incomplete one. Rashi claims that she thought the month to be incomplete and that kiddush hachodesh (Sanctification of the Month), when no ta'anit is allowed, falls on the thirtieth day, while in fact it was a full month of thirty one days (Rashi Bava Mezia 59b sv "That day was a new month"). Therefore, believing it was a day of kiddush hachodesh, she didn't keep an eye on her husband. According to the second tradition, a beggar appeared at her doorstep and distracted her attention away from her husband.

One moment of distraction was sufficient for Rabbi Eliezer to perform Tefilat Tahanun. According to the narrator, until this incident Immah Shalom had been successful in preventing her husband from falling upon his face, at least for a short period. Rabbi Yom-Tov b. Avraham ibn Asevilli (Haritba; in 'Hidushei Haritba, Bava Metzia 59b sv "she never allowed him to fall on his face"), explained that Immah Shalom held a continuous conversation with her husband and in this way prevented him from praying.

When she found him praying, she cried out: “Arise, thou hast slain my brother all the gates are locked except the gates of verbal wrongdoing.” The sound of a horn was then heard from the house of Rabban Gamliel, announcing his death and confirming her words.

In several Babylonian beraitot, this expression is attributed to Rabban Gamliel himself, for example in Tractate Rosh Hashana 25a. However, the narrative in Bava Metzia 59b indicates that she was well versed in the Oral Law, according to which Heaven does not forgive one who has wronged his fellow man, but rather punishes him for it. Hence, it appears that Immah Shalom implicitly criticizes the actions of her brother, Rabban Gamliel, and admits that he has wronged Rabbi Eliezer, causing anguish to another person through an argument or a quarrel, proven to be no less severe than deceiving and lying.

Immah Shalom is a loyal and sensitive woman, but also knowledgeable and meticulous regarding the observance of the mitzvot (commandments). She is imbued
with masculine attributes: she struggles to prevent her husband from falling upon his face, going as far as assertively demanding: “Arise, thou hast slain my brother.” Her public image binds her to the world of the Sages. xx Nevertheless, her character remains mostly feminine, attested by her loyalty to her husband and compassion to the beggar at her doorstep.

The description of a female character defending her husband against her brother—and defending her brother against her husband as well—reflects the Sages' perception of women, according to which one of the roles ascribed to a woman is guarding the family, keeping it whole, and preserving life. Portrayed positively by the narrator, Immah Shalom has no part in the scholarly world of her time. A similar description of women is found elsewhere in the Talmud. Another woman who attempts to solve a dispute between the Sages is the sister of Rabbi Yochanan, but she too fails when one of the sages (Resh Lakish) dies (Bava Metzia 84a) as a result of the quarrel.

Imma Shalom’s designation reflects her dedication to Rabban Gamliel and her moral capacity to mediate between the members of her family, but her ultimate failure shows that it is unfeasible to prevent a determined fate. Just as Immah Shalom was unable to protect her brother Rabban Gamliel by preventing the prayer of Rabbi Eliezer, so were the people headed by Rabban Gamliel unable to carry out halakhic decisions such as the Sanctification of the Month.

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In BT Nedarim 20a–b, Immah Shalom adopts a position that opposes the extreme behaviors of Rabbi Eliezer – asceticism with regard to intimate relations:

_Thy children so exceedingly beautiful? She replied: [Because] he [my husband] 'converses' with me neither at the beginning nor at the end of the night, but [only] at midnight; and when he 'converses', he uncovers a handbreadth and covers a hand breadth, and is as though he were compelled by a demon. And when I asked him, what is the reason for this [for choosing midnight], he replied, so that I may not think of another woman, lest my children be as bastards._

The anecdote about Rabbi Eliezer’s behavior, as told by Immah Shalom, appears after a discussion on the position of Yohanan ben Dahabai, who speaks on behalf of celestial angels about the connection between what they perceive as sinful sexual acts – such as “turning the table” – and giving birth to defective offspring. xxi
The narrative is brought as a critique of her husband’s behavior. According to Immah Shalom, her husband 'converses' with her, yet their children were born healthy and without defects. The narrator emphasized this contrast by ascribing the ambivalent verb לְסַפֵּר to Immah Shalom twice, which can both mean 'verbal speech' (as in Eruvin 41b) or serve as a metaphor for a sexual intercourse (as in Shabbat 33b), similarly to the verb לְשַׁמֵּש. This verb, which is attributed to Immah Shalom, presents her as speaking about sexual intercourse euphemistically, and as someone who has taken part in it.

As stated by Immah Shalom, the intimate relations between her husband and herself are ascetic and, as far as her husband is concerned, even forced. Rabbi Eliezer explains his behavior as deriving from the need to prevent himself from coveting other women, so that his children will not be born bastards.

Halachically, a bastard is someone who is born from forbidden liaisons, such as a married woman with someone other than her husband. The words of Rabbi Eliezer raise a problem – how could intimate relations with one's legal wife make and fantasies about other women turn one's children into bastards? There are several possible explanations. One is that Rabbi Eliezer fears that if he becomes accustomed to talking and staring, his Yetzer Hara—evil inclination—will intensify and he may desire conjugating with other women, and thus father bastards. Another option is that he also believes that by enjoying sexual intercourse, he will be driven to imagine other women during the act, which may also result in the birth of a defective offspring. Rabbi Shlomo Aiidls understands "bastards" as a metaphorical expression for spiritual harm done to the child through the impacts of one's soul and thoughts, but not through a sexual act.

Since Rabbi Eliezer fears the consequences of what he perceives as a sinful sexual act, Immah Shalom’s explanation of her husband’s behavior is comparable to the sayings of Rabbi Yohanan ben Dahabai when he speaks on behalf of the angels. Compared with the stance of the angels, who are analogous to the Sages, Rabbi Eliezer seems to have been overly austere regarding sexual relations, even though the angels do not recommend asceticism.
Rabbi Eliezer is exceedingly pious and takes extreme measures in order not to
stare at other women, even to the point that he does not even glance at his own wife.
Rabbi Eliezer’s behavior is offensive to his wife inasmuch as he relates to her body as
no more than a means to carry out a *mitzvah* ('commandment'), neglecting to show her
love and affection during the sexual act. It is very likely that his behavior causes
Immah Shalom unease and perhaps even offends her. His behavior echoes the
common practice adopted by the Romans and Stoics of the time, who abhorred sexual
behavior intended only to obtain pleasure.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

Immah Shalom epitomizes several contradictions. When she describes their
intercourse and explains his motives, she appears to support the ascetic behavior of
Rabbi Eliezer. However, at the same time she is portrayed as representing the
opposite idea, the craving for physical love, for she asks Rabbi Eliezer to explain his
motive, a question that implies that she is essentially critical of his behavior.

A dual reading of the narrative reveals another covert criticism of Rabbi Eliezer’s
behavior. It should be noted that his conduct is extreme and counteracts the relatively
permissive teachings of the Babylonian Sages concerning intimacy between married
people. Thus, for example, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi claims that the Torah permits a
husband to perform acts of pleasure with his wife. It appears that the Babylonians,
too, viewed passionate and loving intimacy favorably – unlike the prevalent *Tannaitic*
asceticism that was a means to control the Evil Inclination. Perhaps it is this
conceptual change in the Babylonian period that left the criticism of Rabbi Eliezer's
actions implicit, while supporting them explicitly - his behavior is commendable since
it indeed produced beautiful sons.

This aversion to Rabbi Eliezer’s attitude towards intercourse—which is the
aversion of the narrator — presents Immah Shalom as a legitimate character who is
not to be offhandedly dismissed. Her opinions on intercourse as an act that should
include love and emotion is justifiable, albeit different from that of Rabbi Eliezer
and—seemingly—the redactor of the Talmudic passage.

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The next passage, the Babylonian expansion of *Eretz Israel* sources, describes the
awe felt by Immah Shalom before her husband's seemingly supernatural powers:
Eruvin 63a

R. Eliezer, furthermore, had a disciple who once gave a legal decision in his presence. ‘I wonder’, remarked R. Eliezer to his wife, Imma Shalom, ‘whether this man will live through the year’; and he actually did not live through the year. ‘Are you’, she asked him, ‘a prophet?’ ‘I’, he replied: ‘am neither a prophet for the son of a prophet, but I have this tradition: Whosoever gives a legal decision in the presence of his Master incurs the penalty of death’.

This anecdote deals with two related issues: the issue of a student being prohibited from giving legal decisions in the presence of his rabbi, and the likely incurrence of the death penalty on a student who does it. The account takes the form of a dialogue between Immah Shalom and Rabbi Eliezer, in which the latter tells her that he believes that a certain student will not live for long, but will die either by the end of the year, or even by the end of the week. Once the student had passed away, Immah Shalom reacts by asking Rabbi Eliezer “are you a prophet?”

Her use of the term “prophet”—a person gifted with the ability to predict the future—reveals that she believes Rabbi Eliezer knew that the student would die as a result of divine intervention. Her question shows both her amazement at her husband’s supernatural abilities, and her lack of knowledge of a tradition, clarified by Rabbi Eliezer’s citation of a verse from the Book of Amos, “I was no prophet” (Am 7:14). The inclusion of this verse stresses that the Rabbi knew the student would die— not because of his ability to predict the future, but rather because of his knowledge of the tradition that states that a student who dispenses rulings in front of his rabbi incurs the death penalty. The redactor of the Talmudic passage reveals that Immah Shalom is a partner in a halakhic discussion, yet as a woman she is not supposed to be concerned with such matters. Immah Shalom expresses the tension between the prophecy and supernatural powers. The Talmud contains several narratives about sages who prophesied, as in Hullin 95b. But it also refers to accounts that give voice to a negative attitude towards the use of prophecy, such as in Bava Batra 12b. It thus appears that prophecy constituted a competing culture to the culture of Torah study, but at the same time, it existed within the house of study itself.

This anecdote has several Eretz Israel parallels, all of which present Immah Shalom as a passive figure and the confidant of Rabbi Eliezer. However, in these parallels, the other students are the ones who ask him if he is a prophet following the
death of the student, and not Immah Shalom, who remains silent. The *Eretz Israel* sources depict her as a passive figure of secondary importance in the conversations between her husband and his students. In the Babylonian versions, on the other hand, it is Immah Shalom, rather than the students, who participates in the discussion.

The reason for this, perhaps, stems from a contradiction within the *Eretz Israel* sources, where Rabbi Eliezer was speaking to his wife, but the students asked the questions. If that is the case, how did they know which question to ask? The Babylonian redactor resolves this issue by eliminating the students from the anecdote altogether. A similar level of consistency could have been achieved by removing Immah Shalom from the discussion, and yet the editor chose to keep her even at the cost of turning her into a more prominent and active figure. Perhaps the reason for this is that the editor found it more reasonable to depict a woman as being unaware of the traditions, since women did not study and their lack of knowledge would therefore be considered more authentic.

The shaping of the character of Immah Shalom as someone excluded from learning in the house of study and lacking *halakhic* knowledge, reflects a conception in favor of the exclusion of women from formal scholarly discourse. She is an outsider, which is why she is permitted to criticize the system. Despite being excluded from the world of study, Immah Shalom is described as seeking knowledge and understanding, and as being the sole confidant of Rabbi Eliezer who shares his innermost thoughts with her.

**Summary**

An examination of the Babylonian descriptions of Immah Shalom reveals that three out of four anecdotes use her character to provide a contrary viewpoint which calls into question various positions or modes of behavior. The tractate of Bava Metzia uses her to criticize the belligerent and devastating conflict between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabban Gamliel. Traditionally, in several narratives about the Sages, female characters were expected to solve conflicts and family feuds.

Two other Babylonian accounts use Immah Shalom’s character to express opposition to the unjust treatment of women, such as the lack of egalitarian principles in the laws of inheritance (in Tractate Shabbat), and the ascetic behavior of the Sages during sexual intercourse with their wives (in Tractate Nedarim). In addition, in
Tractate Eruvin, her character exposes the relationship between prophecy and supernatural powers, which apparently lived side by side in the scholarly world of the Talmudic tradition. As an integral part of the Sages’ world and discourse and despite of her controversial opinions, she is depicted as a respectable figure, even though the redactor does not praise her explicitly. And the relative distance from the discourse, which is due to her gender, allows her to express contradictory opinions.

The use of Immah Shalom to express controversial positions reflects moral and halakhic tensions within the world of the Sages and the instability of hegemony in their culture, especially in matters related to women.

It is also feasible to recognize the portrayal of Immah Shalom as a powerful figure who expresses controversial messages for two reasons: the first, is her appearance in the Eretz Israel sources with both name and appellation, in addition to her unique genealogy, and the possibility of interpreting her name as meaning ‘mother of peace,’ which implies a positive character. The second reason is her ties with Rabbi Eliezer, her husband, famous for his extreme views on women. Perhaps the Babylonian Talmud describes her as opinionated and controversial precisely because she married a great sage known for his extremist attitudes.

This narrative role of expressing controversial positions is associated with additional female figures in the Babylonian Talmud, such as Beruria and Rabbi’s maidservant, and hence it can be inferred that the sages used women to reflect upon and undermine their world and their positions. Their characterization, as persons who communicate controversial ideas, does not necessarily reflect a view of women having independent ideas (since the ideas attributed to them are contained in texts written by male scholars). It seems that the positions attributed to them reflect instability in the hegemony and tension concerning central norms. In general, the Talmud, gives expression to multiple voices and presents ideological, moral, and halakhic controversies through different characters. The Talmud contains several stories about male scholars who held controversial views, like Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Rabbi Meir, but it must be stressed that while this is a central characteristic of female characters, it is only sporadic with regard to male characters.
An examination of the representations of Immah Shalom, and other dominant female characters, reveals a gendered worldview, according to which a woman who is close to the world of the Sages must necessarily be compassionate, opinionated, wise, brave, bold, and knowledgeable in *halakhah* and the Jewish traditions. She uses these attributes only within her family and home, but not in the temple or in the world of the Torah, and she does not perceive herself as being equal or even nearly so to the Sages themselves. This worldview is reinforced through the positive representation of other notable female characters, such as Rabbi’s maidservant or Rav Hisda's daughter. Both participate in the continuous study process in the home, or in *halakhic* discourse as part of their daily routine, yet remain excluded from the Sages’ areas of legislation and government. This idea is further validated by the critical representation of other female characters such as Beruria, Martha bat Baitus, and Yalta, who were versed in fields traditionally appropriated by the Sages, and acted contrary to the norms and consent of the Sages. These figures evoked a negative response from their counterparts, as well as from the editors of the respective narratives.
Notes

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3 In the Tannaitic and Amoraic sources, both the Eretz-Israel and the Babylonian ones, the term 'philosophers' refers to a gentile scholar – an heretic, whether Christian or pagan, who has a dispute with a Jewish scholar concerning the Torah and its ideas. Mishna Avoda Zara 3:4, Avoda Zara 54b.
5 Burton L. Visotzky, ’Overturning the lamp,’ Journal of Jewish Studies 38, 1(1987), pp. 75-78.
7 In the Tannaitic and Amoraic sources, both the Eretz-Israel and the Babylonian ones, the term 'philosophers' refers to a gentile scholar – an heretic, whether Christian or pagan, who has a dispute with a Jewish scholar concerning the Torah and its ideas. Mishna Avoda Zara 3:4, Avoda Zara 54b.
10 See above n. 10.
11 See above n. 10.
13 Mishna Bava Batra 8:5, Tosefta Yadayim 2:20 and "decree concerning male children" (Mishna Ketubot 4:10). The "decree concerning male children" determines that every child receives the ketubah ('marriage contract') of its mother in addition to the inheritance, the purpose of this being that the
money which the wife brought into the marriage as dowry, which becomes part of her ketubah, be returned to her sons following the death of her husband, and not to his children from other women. It seems that the necessity for this decree reflects a social view according to which the disinheritance of women constitutes a problem, wherefore it was considered important to provide also the daughters with a part of the family's property.


It is possible that the idea of a mistaken determination of the time of the new moon as the reason for Immah Shalom's distraction, integrated into this story, echoes the story in Mishna Rosh Hashana 2:8-9, which describes a clash between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabban Gamliel on the issue of the sanctification of the month. Rabban Gamliel fights for his authority against Rabbi Yehoshua, that he made a mistake when determining the time of the new month, relying on an incorrect testimony.


Rashi and the Tosafists understood that the table is a metaphor either for a woman or for the act of intercourse, and from here it appears that the expression refers either to sexual intercourse when the woman is on top or to anal cohabitation. Rashi Nedarim 20a sv "overturned their table." Tosafot Nedarim 20a sv "overturned their table").

Rashi understood the verb במסוג in this story as referring to intercourse. Rashi, Nedarim 20b. Boyarin, in contrast, asserted that the meaning of this verb in its first appearance is to speak, since the story is brought as an objection to the words of Rabbi Yohanan ben Dehabai. David Biale holds that the reductor of the discussion understood the verb במסוג, spoken by Immah shalom, as a verb that denotes dialogue, and the creator of the story put it in the mouth of Immah Shalom as an euphemism for intercourse, and not as a verb that denotes speech. David Biale, Eros and the Jews: from Biblical Israel to Contemporary America (New York, 1992), p. 249 n.110. Daniel Boyarin. Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp.121-123.

Deuteronomy 23:1-9: No man shall marry his father's former wife, so as to remove his father's garment. No man whose testes are crushed or whose member is cut off shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord. No mamzer shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of his descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord.

Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History (Brill, Leiden, 2014), pp. 431-453.

Rabbi Shlomo Aiidls, PA A, "Innovations Legends," Nedarim 20b sv "sons be found to be bastards."

In the continuation of the discussion, the Amora Amiamic utters a stance according to which the expression "שלא אמרו" ("the ministering angels"), which appears in the story and in the Talmudic discussion, is a metaphor for the Sages. He brings proof for this from the fact that the story is followed by a halakhic discussion, on the basis of which Rabbi Yohanan determines that the words of Rabbi Yohanan ben Dehobai do not constitute a halakhic argument. Amaimar argues that if שלא אמרו is referring to the angels of God, then the halakha would be decided in accordance with their words, since they are greater experts the way children are created than humans are.


In MS Vatican 109 and Palestinian textual parallels, the expression "ל לא יאשע" ("he shall not exhaust his sojourn"), which carries the same meaning: he shall not live for long. See: Sobolev-Mandelbaum, (2014), pp. 228-229, 235-236.


See above n. 29.

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Babylonian Talmud, women, female character, Representations, Immah Shalom, Rabbi Eliezer, Rabban Gamliel II.

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Bava Metzia 59a-b: The Oven of a Snake:
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