

Anatomy and the Doctrine of the Seven-Chamber Uterus in Rabbinic Literature

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Introduction

Rabbinic Literature is replete with references to medical and scientific theories from previous centuries. In particular, in the area of anatomy, we find a number of notions that confound the modern reader.¹ For example, the *Mishnah* in *Ohalot* (1:8) enumerates 248 limbs;² the Talmud³ states that there are two passages in the male reproductive organ,⁴ and the *Mishnah* in *Niddah* (2:5) uses a metaphor for female reproductive anatomy that to this day eludes clarification.⁵ Contrary

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- ¹ On the general history of anatomy and anatomical dissection in rabbinic literature, see E. Reichman, "The anatomy of halakha," in Y. Steinberg, ed., *Beracha Le'Avraham: Tribute Volume in Honor of Dr. Avraham Steinberg's 60th Birthday* (Jerusalem, 2008), 69–97.
- ² On the 248 limbs see E. Reichman, "The anatomy of the human body in rabbinic literature," in F. Rosner, H. Goldstein, E. Reichman, eds., *Studies in Jewish Medical Ethics* (Hojers Forlag: Denmark, 2008), 84–91.
- ³ *Bechorot* 44b.
- ⁴ E. Reichman, "The Rabbinic Conception of Conception: An Exercise in Fertility," *Tradition* 31:1 (Fall 1996), 33–63, esp. 50–52.
- ⁵ Rabbi Moses Sofer, in his commentary to *Niddah* 18a, concludes that *Rasbi* and *Tosafot* were mistaken in their anatomical interpretation of the

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to the popular belief that these notions are unique and exclusive to rabbinic literature, many of these notions are based on contemporaneous medical or scientific doctrine. Appreciating the historical context of these statements better enables the reader to analyze these sources. The larger issue—how to deal with passages in rabbinic literature that seemingly conflict with our modern understanding of medicine—has received extensive treatment over the last few years and will not be addressed herein.⁶ Moreover, the present topic does

metaphor mentioned in the *Mishnah*, while Rambam's position is more consistent with known anatomical teachings. For more on this topic, see A. S. Abraham, "Introduction to *Hilbot Niddal*" in his *Nishmat Avraham* (Hebrew) Y.D., pp. 66–69; M. Halperin, "On the meaning of the term 'rechem' in *Chazal*," *Assia* 61-62 (Nissan, 5758), 105–109; M. Halperin, "The terms *lul* and *aliyah* of *Chazal*," letter in *Assia* 65-66 (Elul, 5759), 181–183; Y. Levi, "The terms of female reproductive anatomy according to Rashi in the Talmud," *Assia* 63-64 (Kislev, 5759), 169–176; I. M. Levinger, "The structure of the female reproductive system in the human and in cattle," *Koroth* 4:8-10 (June, 1968), 611–615; D. Malach, "More on the meaning of the term 'rechem' in *Chazal*," letter to the editor in *Assia* 67-68 (*Shevat*, 5761), 206–208; T. Meachum, "Critical Edition of *Masechet Niddal*" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University, 5749), 224–230; J. Preuss, "Female reproductive anatomy," in his *Biblical and Medicine*, trans. and ed. by Fred Rosner (Jason Aronson, 1993), 113–121; M. Halperin, "Female reproductive anatomy: The key to the understanding of *Chazal*," *Assia* 85-86 (Elul, 5769), 105–121.

- ⁶ For treatment of this fascinating and complex topic see A. Steinberg, (F. Rosner, trans.), *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Feldheim, 2003), s.v. "change in nature"; D. Frimer, "Kevi'at Avhut al yedei Bedukat Dam be-Mishpat ha-Yisraeli u-be-mishpat ha-Ivri," in M. Halperin, ed., *Sefer Assia* 5 (Jerusalem, 1986), 185–209; D. Cohen, "Shinny Hateva: An Analysis of the Halachic Process," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 31 (Spring 1996); S. Sprecher, "Divrei Chazal ve-Yedi'ot Mada'iyot," *B.D.D.* 2 (Winter 1996), 2–39; S. Sternberg, "I. M. Levinger, *Ma'or le-Massekhet Hullin u-le-Massekhet Bekhorot*," *B.D.D.* 4 (Winter 1997), 81–102 (English section); Yehuda Levi, *The Science in Torah: The Scientific Knowledge of the Sages* (Feldheim, 2004); N. Slifkin, *Mysterious Creatures* (Targum Press, 2003), 17–41; M. Halperin, "Science and medicine in the Talmud: *kabbalah o actualia*," *Assia* 71-72 (January, 2003), 90–102; S. Z. Leiman, "R. Israel Lipshutz and the mouse that is half flesh and half earth: A note on Torah U-madda in the nineteenth century," in *Chazon Nachum* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 449–458; N. Gu-

not have halakhic ramifications and is therefore less theologically problematic. In this essay, I focus on the history of a curious anatomical notion found in rabbinic literature. This notion, known as the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus, has been previously explored by medical historians and will be reviewed below. The rabbinic sources that incorporate this doctrine, which span roughly eight centuries and many areas of rabbinic literature, will constitute the core of this essay. This exercise serves as another example of how an understanding of medical history can enhance our study of rabbinic literature.⁷

The Doctrine of the Seven-Chamber Uterus⁸

The anatomical composition and function of the uterus was a matter of debate in antiquity.⁹ One of the debated issues was the number of compartments that the uterus possessed. Hippocrates discussed the possibility of multiple chambers or compartments to the uterus, and this notion was espoused by many writers in antiquity. In the Middle Ages a number of physicians espoused a specific belief that the human uterus comprised seven chambers or cells: three on the right, three on the left, and one in the middle. Furthermore, the location of

tal, *Sefer Hishtanut ha-Teva'im be-Halakhah* (Machon Yachdav, Jerusalem, 5758).

⁷ See, for example, E. Reichman, "The Halachic Definition of Death in Light of Medical History," *The Torah U'Madda Journal* 4 (Spring 1993), 148–174.

⁸ On this doctrine, see Fridolf Kudlien, "The Seven Cells of the Uterus: The Doctrine and its Roots," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 39:5 (1965), 415–423; *idem*, "The Legal Aspect of the Doctrine of the Seven Uterine Cells," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 40:6 (1966), 544–546; Robert Reiser, "Der Siebenkammerige Uterus," *Würzburger Medizinhistorische Forschungen* 39 (1986); Christine Boot, "Neufunde Zum, Siebenkammerigen Uterus," *Sudhoffs Archiv Zeitschrift Für Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 71:2 (1987), 233–235. For a review and comments on Reiser's work, see Monica Green in *Speculum* 66:2 (April, 1991), 468–469.

⁹ For an overview of the historical notions of the uterus, see L. Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Clarendon Press, 1994); H. King, *Hippocrates' Woman* (Rutledge: London, 1998); E.M Ramsey "Concepts of the uterus: A historical perspective," in T. Chard, Jurgis Gediminas Grudzinkas, *The Uterus* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

the fetus within the uterus was thought to affect the sex determination of the offspring. The male embryos were believed to develop on the right, the female ones on the left. The embryos developing in the center would be hermaphrodites.

This doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus, which finds its expression in anatomical illustrations of this period,¹⁰ is virtually nonexistent prior to the Middle Ages.¹¹ The obvious question is how such a doctrine could develop when simple visual inspection of the human uterus clearly contradicts it. The short answer to this question lies in understanding the history of anatomical dissection. While human dissection was performed briefly in antiquity, systematic dissection of the human body was not routinely performed until the early Renaissance. Anatomical teaching was primarily based on theory and philosophy, with only occasional limited correlation with anatomical dissection.

Although the exact origins of the doctrine in the aforementioned form remain unclear, it is believed to have historical roots in antiquity, representing a synthesis of the right-left theory¹² of sex determi-

¹⁰ See Christoph Ferckel, "Diagramme der Sexualorgane in Mittelalterlichen Handschriften," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* (1917), 255–264; Alfred Plaut, "Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Uterus," *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* 75:2 (January, 1959), 389–411. For later illustrations of the uterus, see K. Petrucelli, "The misrepresented uterus: The progression of uterine depictions in anatomical atlases between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries," *Journal of Bio-communication* 25:4 (1998), 10–13.

Some attribute the doctrine to Leonardo Da Vinci as well, based on one of his illustrations of the uterus. See C. D. O'Malley and J. B. de C. M. Saunders, *Leonardo on the Human Body* (Dover Publications: New York, 1952), 464. Da Vinci's more elaborate illustrations of the uterus do not seem consistent with the seven chamber doctrine. See J. Playfair McMurrich, *Leonardo Da Vinci the Anatomist* (Williams and Wilkins: Baltimore, 1930), 200–201.

¹¹ On the transmission of gynecological theories from antiquity, see M. Green, *The Transmission of Ancient Theories of Female Physiology and Disease through the Early Middle Ages* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1985).

¹² The right-left theory was adopted in different variations by Hippocrates and Galen, as well as many other Greek authors. See, for example, A. L. Peck, trans., *Aristotle: Generation of Animals* (Cambridge: Harvard Univer-

nation¹³ with the theories of the mathematical significance of the number seven.¹⁴ The source of the seven-cell theory probably lies in the influence of the *De Spermate*, a pseudo-Galenic treatise used from the twelfth century that asserted that parts of the body were divided into sevens.¹⁵ The doctrine of the seven-cell uterus in its completed form was adopted by anatomists at Salerno, as well as by the prominent anatomist of Bologna, Mondino de Luzzi (c. 1270–1326).¹⁶ Singer claims that Mondino must have culled the doctrine from the writings of Michael Scot (1180–1250),¹⁷ astrologer in the court of

sity Press, 1942), 371–374; Owsei Temkin, trans., *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 44–45; Margaret T. May, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1968), 635–638; Sarah George, *Human Conception and Fetal Growth: A Study of Greek Thought from the Presocratics Through Aristotle* (unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 69–96, 109–110; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 195–201. The theory was also partially adopted by William Harvey. See C. D. O'Malley, et al, *William Harvey: Lectures on the Whole of Anatomy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 70 and 138.

¹³ On sex determination, see, for example, G. E. R. Lloyd, ed., *Hippocratic Writings* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1950), 317–346; May, *op. cit.*, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 634–638; George, *Human Conception and Fetal Growth: A Study of Greek Thought from the Presocratics Through Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, 109–119; Lars L. Cederqvist and Fritz Fuchs, “Antenatal Sex Determination: A Historical Review,” *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology* 13:1 (1970), 159–177; Ursula Mittwoch, “Erroneous Theories of Sex Determination,” *Journal of Medical Genetics* 22:3 (1985), 164–170.

¹⁴ See Kudlien, *op. cit.* On the importance of numerology in gynecology in antiquity, see S. George, *op. cit.*, *Human Conception and Fetal Growth: A Study of Greek Thought from the Presocratics Through Aristotle*, 204–226.

¹⁵ Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, Trans., Matthew Adamson. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 34.

¹⁶ Kudlien, *op. cit.*, and Reisert, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ On Scot, see Lynn Thorndyke, *Michael Scot* (London: Nelson Publishers, 1965). Thorndyke also devotes a chapter to Scot in his *History of Magic and Experimental Science 2* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), 307–337; According to J. D. Galinsky and J. T. Robinson,

Emperor Frederick II,¹⁸ although recent historians have advanced different theories. I focus on Michael Scot because of his documented Jewish connections and the likelihood that one of his works was cited by rabbinic sources. The doctrine of the seven-cell uterus is found in the third of Scot's major works, entitled *Liber Physionomiae*,¹⁹ which was also variously called *De Secretis Naturae* and *De Procreatione*.²⁰ The roughly twenty editions of this work that were published before 1500 are testimony to its popularity in the Middle Ages,²¹ and Scot is likely to be at least partially responsible for the wide dissemination of the seven-cell doctrine.

Scot is known to have collaborated with the Jewish philosopher and physician Jacob Anatoli, the son-in-law of Samuel ibn Tibbon, at the Sicilian court of Emperor Frederick II, where they were engaged in translating and disseminating Arabic science and philosophy. During Anatoli's tenure at court, he had close contact with Michael Scot. In fact, Scot mentions a formula in his *Alchemy* that was taught to him by "Rabbi Jacob the Jew," identified as Anatoli.²² Could Scot have been responsible for transmitting his theory of the seven-chamber uterus to the Jewish community through these connections?

Similar to its hazy origins, the doctrine's disappearance cannot be traced to a specific date. Berengario de Carpi (1470–1530) wrote in

"Rabbi Jeruham b. Meshullam, Michael Scot, and the development of Jewish law in fourteenth-century Spain," *Harvard Theological Review* 4 (2007), 489–504, the best up-to-date biography and bibliography on Michael Scott is Charles Burnett's entry on Scot in *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (ed. Ruedi Imbach and Peter Schulthess).

¹⁸ Charles Singer, *A Short History of Anatomy and Physiology from the Greeks to Harvey* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 81.

¹⁹ Michael Scot, *De Secretis Nature* (Lugduni, 1580), 264.

²⁰ Thorndyke, *op. cit.*, *Michael Scot*, 4–8.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 226–228, details the relationship of Anatoli and Scot and identifies "Rabbi Jacob the Jew" to be Anatoli. On how citations from the works of Michael Scot indirectly found their way into the halakhic literature of the Middle Ages through the mediation of Jacob Anatoli, see J. D. Galinsky and J. T. Robinson, "Rabbi Jeruham b. Meshullam, Michael Scot, and the development of Jewish law in fourteenth-century Spain," *Harvard Theological Review* 4 (2007), 489–504.

his *Isogogae* that it is a sheer lie to say that the uterus has seven chambers.²³ In an accompanying illustration, a woman is shown pointing a finger at her non-septated uterus, while symbolically placing her foot on books that have perpetuated the erroneous notion of the seven-cell uterus.²⁴ Vesalius (1514–1564) likewise rejects the seven-cell doctrine in his *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, mentioning Michael Scot by name.²⁵ Parenthetically, this also supports the notion that Scot is responsible for the proliferation of the doctrine. Although two prominent anatomists explicitly rejected the doctrine in the early 16th century, it was still being quoted in the 17th century.²⁶

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²³ Plaut, “Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Uterus,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* 75:2 (January, 1959), 389, quotes Carpi’s words verbatim and discusses the famous illustration. He does not mention that the illustration is found in the *Isogogae*.

²⁴ Carpi himself believed the uterus to be bilocular. See James P. McMurrich, *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Anatomist* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Co., 1930), 200-201.

²⁵ See Lynn Thorndyke, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* 5 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 526; C. D. O’Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 32 and 279. Thorndyke, *op. cit.*, 523, points out that Vesalius makes no reference to Carpi’s earlier rejection of the seven-cell doctrine.

²⁶ Kudlien, “The Seven Cells of the Uterus: The Doctrine and its Roots,” *op. cit.*, 416; *idem*, “The Legal Aspect of the Doctrine of the Seven Uterine Cells,” *op. cit.*, 545-546.

²⁷ This topic of the seven-chamber-uterus doctrine has received scarce treatment in Jewish scholarship. There is no mention of it in H. J. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians and Doctors* (Goldston and Son: London, 1952), which covers medicine in rabbinic responsa from the 12th to 19th centuries. This glaring omission is likely attributable to the fact that the seven chamber doctrine has no halakhic ramifications, and Zimmels’ work encompasses primarily halakhic responsa. The present essay likewise includes no references to the doctrine in halakhic responsa. The doctrine merits brief mention in J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), 188 and 303 (n. 13); M. Brayer, *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature: A Psychological Perspective* (Hoboken, NJ, Ktav, 1986), 304-305. See also R. Margaliyot’s *Mekor Chesed*, notes on *Sefer Chasidim* (Mosad HaRav Kook: Jerusalem, 5717),

The doctrine of the seven chamber uterus is not found anywhere in the Talmud. It is, however, found repeatedly in rabbinic literature spanning from the Middle Ages to pre-modern times. Given that the doctrine was a product of the Middle Ages (see above), its absence from Talmudic literature is understood. The doctrine's first appearance in rabbinic literature follows shortly after its introduction in Medieval medical science. The mention of this distinctly medical doctrine is not restricted to the medically related rabbinic literature. In fact, it can be found in many diverse areas. I specifically present the sources categorized by type of rabbinic literature to illustrate that an appreciation of the medical historical context is not limited to the study of medical halakha and can be of use to all students of rabbinic literature.

Biblical Commentaries

The doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus is first explicitly mentioned in rabbinic literature in the early thirteenth century, where it appears in a number of Biblical commentaries to *Vayikera* (12:2): "If a woman has conceived seed, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days." As the verse speaks of a woman giving birth to a male child, the commentaries take the opportunity to address both female anatomy and sex determination.²⁸ A number of medieval bib-

no. 515, p. 443. I discuss this topic briefly in E. Reichman, "The impact of medical history on medical halakha," in *Medicine and Jewish Law: Volume 3* (Yashar Books; Brooklyn, NY, 2005), 163–176. See also the superb article of Sharon Faye Koren, "Kabbalistic Physiology: Isaac the Blind, Nahmanides, and Moses de Leon on Menstruation", *AJS Review* 28:2 (2004), 317–339, where she discusses the doctrine at n. 34, in addition to addressing the right-left theory, the anatomy of the uterus, and theories of reproductive physiology in rabbinic sources. For a general discussion of notions of female anatomy in the secular and rabbinic literature of the Middle Ages, including brief mention of the seven-chamber doctrine, see R. Barkai, *Les Infortunes De Dinah: Le Livre de la Generation: La Gynecologie Juive au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1991), 35–58. I thank Professor Barkai for his research suggestions.

²⁸ This verse also served as a springboard for discussion of reproductive physiology throughout the ages. See E. Reichman, "The Rabbinic Con-

lical commentators, known collectively as the *Ba'alei HaTosafot*, invoke a version of the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus in their commentaries to this verse. While there are slight variations amongst them, as we will see below, each describes three chambers on the right, from which a male fetus forms, three on the left, from which a female fetus forms, and one in the center, from which either an *androgynos* (hermaphrodite) or *tumtum* (fetus with ambiguous genitalia) develops.

The original doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus mentions that a hermaphrodite is formed from the center chamber, but, to my knowledge, does not mention a *tumtum* as a possible product from this chamber. Although some of the rabbinic commentators cite this doctrine from a medical source, as will be discussed below, it is possible that the rabbinic sources, on their own initiative, added the notion of the birth of a *tumtum*. As many Jewish laws and obligations are gender specific, the rabbis are concerned with determining the legal gender of every individual. As a result, there are numerous discussions in rabbinic sources about individuals whose gender status is ambiguous. As both the hermaphrodite and the *tumtum* are in this category, they are often discussed together.²⁹ It therefore follows that

ception of Conception: An Exercise in Fertility,” *Tradition* 31:1 (Fall 1996), 33–63.

For Jewish references to sex selection and sex determination, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), 188-189 and 303; Fred Rosner, “The Biblical secret for choosing one’s baby’s sex,” *Israel Journal of Medical Sciences* 15 (September, 1979), 784–787. N. Kass, “Sex determination - Medically and in the Talmud,” *Koroth* 7:11-12 (June, 1980), CCLXLIII-CCCI; J. Preuss, *Biblical and Medicine*, F. Rosner, trans., (Hebrew Publishing Company: New York, 1978), 389–391; Yosef Ba-Gad, *Nachalei ha-Eshkolot* 2 (self-publication), 440–449.

No one has yet studied the right-left theory as found in Jewish sources, but it is noteworthy that Rambam (1135–1204) was skeptical of the doctrine in his commentary to Hippocrates. See Suessman Muntner, *Rambam - Kitvei Refuah* 3 (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook Publishers, 1961), 105 and 109.

²⁹ See, for example, *Mishnah Bikurim* 4:5 and Tractate *Yevamot* 81a. On the hermaphrodite and *tumtum* in rabbinic literature see W. M. Feldman, *The Jewish Child* (London, 1917), 130; Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians and Doctors*, *op. cit.*, 214, n. 112; David Margalit, “*Tumtum v’Androgynos*,”

whenever the rabbis discuss the topic of hermaphrodites, *tumtum* is likely to be included.

Four of the commentaries, *Sefer haGan* (13th century),³⁰ *Tosafot* (12th-13th centuries),³¹ the commentary of Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel (c. 1250–1327),³² and the commentary of Rabbi Isaac ben Judah Halevi,³³ cite as the source of this doctrine Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), quoting *Sefer Toldot*, the Book of Procreation.

In fact, no mention of *Sefer Toldot*, nor any explicit reference to the seven-chamber doctrine, can be found in the extant published writings of Ibn Ezra, although it should be noted that not all of his

Koroth 6:11-12 (August, 1975), 777–780; Zvi J. Hachohen Kook, “*Dinei Androginos*,” *Koroth* 7:1-2 (April, 1976), 79-80; Shlomo Y. Zevin, *Encyclopedia Talmudit* 2 (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Publishers, 1990), 55–60; *ibid.*, 19 (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Publishers, 1991), 182–246; J. Preuss, *Biblical and Medicine*, F. Rosner, trans. (Hebrew Publishing Company: New York, 1978), 226–228.

³⁰ Little biographical information exists about the author of this work, who is known simply as Rabbi Aharon. Dr. J. Mitchell Orlan, based on internal evidence from *Sefer haGan*, concludes that Rabbi Aharon lived in northern France in the first half of the 13th century and wrote *Sefer haGan* about the year 1240. See his *Sefer haGan: Text and Analysis of the Biblical Commentary* (doctoral dissertation, Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, New York, 1973), now issued by Mosad HaRav Kook (Jerusalem, 2009). I thank Dr. Orlan for allowing me to view the manuscript prior to its publication. The relevant passage appears on folio 158R (Vienna National Library, Hebrew Codex II, 28, Swartz Catalogue, II, 19:5).

³¹ See *Otzar Perushim* (New York: Shulsinger Brothers, 1950), 48. This commentary is not the work of a single hand, but is ascribed to a group of medieval biblical and talmudic commentators from France and Germany, known as the *tosafists*. See Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopedia Judaica* 15 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 1278–1285.

³² See *Otzar Perushim* (n. 27), 48. This commentary is ascribed to Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel (1259–1327), known as the *Rosh*, but the authorship has been debated. See Menachem M. Kasher, *Sarei haEleph* (Jerusalem: Torah Sheleima Publications, 1984), 67-68.

³³ See his biblical commentary *Pane’ach Raza* (Jerusalem, 1965), 298. The author actually quotes from *Sefer haGan*, who in turn cites Ibn Ezra. *Pane’ach Raza* is replete with references to *Sefer haGan*. See Orlan, *Sefer haGan: Text and Analysis of the Biblical Commentary*, *op. cit.*; Chaim Y. D. Azulia, *Shem haGedolim*, section 2, s.v., *Pane’ach Raza*.

writings have survived. There is, however, an indirect allusion to the seven-chamber doctrine in Ibn Ezra's biblical commentary (see below).

Although the identification of *Sefer Toldot*, apparently mentioned by Ibn Ezra as the source of the doctrine, is uncertain, there are a number of possible contenders. There is a *Sefer ha-Toledet*, which is a Hebrew adaptation of Muscio's Latin version (?6th century) of the *Gynaecia* written by Soranus (2nd century).³⁴ This could not be the *Sefer Toldot* of Ibn Ezra, for two reasons. First and foremost, Soranus, upon whose book this work is ultimately based, did not espouse the seven-chamber doctrine, so Ibn Ezra cannot be referring to this work. In addition, while the exact date of composition of this manuscript is still a matter of debate, it most likely appeared after the era of the Ibn Ezra.³⁵

As mentioned above, Michael Scot appears to be responsible for popularizing the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus. One of the titles used for Scot's work is *de Procreatione*, which could be translated into Hebrew as *Sefer Toldot*. However, as Ibn Ezra died before Michael Scot's birth, he cannot be referring to this version of *Liber Physionomiae*. A possible, though improbable scenario would be that these medieval commentators are referring to Scot's work, and the attribution to Ibn Ezra is erroneous. Perhaps one author attributed the reference to Ibn Ezra, and the other commentators simply per-

³⁴ Soranus' work on gynecology was translated and abbreviated by Muscio (?6th cent.) and translated into Hebrew as *Sefer Toledet*. See Ron Barkai, "Jewish Medical Treatises in the Middle Ages," in Berger, ed., *Jews and Medicine (Beit Hatefutsoth: Tel Aviv, 1995)*, 45–88, esp., 68–71, and *idem.*, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages*, Brill's Series in Jewish Studies 20 (1998). For Soranus' description of the anatomy of the uterus see Owsei Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 8–14. See also R. Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages* Brill's Series in Jewish Studies 20 (1998), 30–31. This is an excellent reference for the history of gynecology in Jewish sources in the Middle Ages. See also the excellent review essay of this book by Gerrit Bos in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series 89:1–2 (July–October, 1998), 101–122. Bos has translated and annotated many Medieval medical texts from the Jewish and Arabic tradition, including the works of Maimonides.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

petuated his error. However, *Sefer HaGan* is one of the commentaries that cite Ibn Ezra, and his other references to Ibn Ezra are reliably found in the latter's extant works. In addition, as discussed below, we find allusion to the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus in the existing works of Ibn Ezra.

Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoach (mid-13th century) omits the reference to Ibn Ezra in his Biblical commentary, *Hizkuni*, and cites the doctrine in the name of *Sefer Toldot*.³⁶ As Rabbi Manoach made use of the commentaries of both Ibn Ezra and *Ba'alei Tosafot* for his work,³⁷ it is likely that he copied the doctrine from one of these two sources and accidentally omitted the attribution to Ibn Ezra. C. D. Chavel, in his edition of Rabbi Hezekiah's biblical commentary, postulates that Rabbi Manoach was likely aware that his predecessors, including the *Ba'alei Tosafot*, quoted this notion in the name of Ibn Ezra, but since Rabbi Manoach did not find it explicitly in the works of Ibn Ezra, he intentionally omitted the attribution out of concern for its veracity, and simply cited the source as *Sefer Toldot*.³⁸

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Lifschutz devotes an article to the references to Ibn Ezra in the *Ba'alei HaTosafot* (including the commentaries discussed above) on the Torah that are not found in the published editions of the Ibn Ezra.³⁹ He discusses our passage, and while he was

³⁶ Chaim D. Chavel, ed., *Chizkuni* (Jerusalem: Mosad haRav Kook Publishers, 1988), 362-363.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 362. Chavel also mentions that *Pane'ach Raza* cites the doctrine of the seven-cell uterus in the name of *Sefer haGan*. Chavel, however, is unfamiliar with this work, as it was never published in his lifetime. See also A. Leibowitz, "Doctors and Medical Knowledge in the Tosafist Circles," *Tradition* 42:2 (2009), 19-34, n. 37, who discusses this passage from *Hizkuni*. I thank David Guttman and Shlomo Sprecher for this reference.

³⁹ A. Lifschutz, "The Ibn Ezra in the commentaries of *Ba'alei HaTosafot*," *HaDarom* 28 (Tishrei, 5729), 202-221 (Hebrew). The author of this article was a high school *Tanakh* teacher of mine. This article, which I came across only recently, was published around the time I attended his class. Had I only then appreciated the extent and breadth of his scholarship! It is also perhaps more than coincidental that Dr. Lifschutz published an article in an earlier issue of *Hakirah*, 3 (Summer 2006), on the topic of Ibn Ezra in the biblical commentary *Or Ha Chaim*.

unable to find any explicit reference to the seven-chamber doctrine in the works of Ibn Ezra, he did discover reference to a related or parallel passage in a journal article by Shmuel David Luzatto (1800–1865), the renowned Italian philologist, poet and biblical exegete, about an unpublished Ibn Ezra manuscript. In an article in 1839, Shmuel David Luzatto states that he found mention of a work of Ibn Ezra not previously mentioned in any Ibn Ezra bibliography.⁴⁰ In a manuscript of the Ibn Ezra, arranged or compiled by Daniel ben Shlomo HaRofeh in 1448, on the *Parsha* of *Ki Tazria*,⁴¹ Daniel HaRofeh cites a comment of the Ibn Ezra from his *Sefer Moladot* discussing the difference in days of impurity observed postpartum by a woman for the birth of a boy (seven) versus that of a girl (fourteen). The quote from *Sefer Moladot* reads as follows:

If a woman lay on her right side it (the seed) will enter on the right and she will give birth to a male. The impurity will rapidly exit. Therefore she is impure for seven days and pure for thirty-three days. If she lay on the left, she will give birth to a girl and the impurity will not rapidly exit. Therefore she is impure for fourteen days.⁴²

Although unknown previously to Luzatto, *Sefer HaMoladot*, an astrological treatise of Ibn Ezra, has been well studied in the modern era. The only resemblance this passage bears to the seven-chamber doctrine is the mention of the right-left theory of conception. There are no anatomical details of the womb or the possibility of the birth of a hermaphrodite as specifically mentioned in the name of Ibn Ezra

⁴⁰ See S. D. Luzatto in *Kerem Chemed* 4 (1839), 137-138. I thank Zalman Alpert of the Yeshiva University Gottesman Library for helping me locate this volume.

⁴¹ This manuscript is described in H. Hirschfeld, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Mss. of the Montefiore Library* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), 4 (manuscript no. 15).

⁴² In a footnote to Luzzatto's article of 1839, S. Y. Rapoport claims that he was in possession of a manuscript of Ibn Ezra entitled *Sefer Molad HaAdam*, also called *Sefer baMoladot*, and that after reading through the entire work, he found no reference to this passage. I consulted Professors Shlomo Sela and Tzvi Langermann, as well as Meira Epstein, author of an English translation of *Sefer HaMoladot*, and all confirmed that there is no mention of this notion or passage in the extant versions of Ibn Ezra's *Sefer Moladot*.

by the *Ba'alei HaTosafot*. Therefore, this cannot be our source of the doctrine from Ibn Ezra.

However, much to my astonishment, when I consulted a copy of the original manuscript of Daniel HaRofeh, I found something quite unexpected—a detailed description of the seven-chamber doctrine.⁴³ This passage, found in the marginalia, simply states the doctrine with no attribution either to *Sefer Toldot*, *Sefer Moladot*, or to Ibn Ezra. In addition, the phraseology and additional details of the doctrine in this manuscript are at slight variance with the statement of the doctrine attributed to Ibn Ezra by the *Ba'alei HaTosafot*. Is this marginal note to be attributed to Ibn Ezra, or is it an interpolation by Daniel HaRofeh, commenting on the text? Could this be the source of the attribution of the seven-chamber doctrine to Ibn Ezra? This is the only known detailed mention of the doctrine in any extant work of Ibn Ezra.

There remain a number of unresolved questions regarding the attribution of the seven-chamber doctrine to Ibn Ezra and the apparent citation by Ibn Ezra of *Sefer Toldot* as the source of this doctrine. While we now know of a manuscript of the biblical commentary of Ibn Ezra that mentions the doctrine, it is not at all clear that this mention is from Ibn Ezra (11th century), as opposed to the manuscript's compiler (15th century). Furthermore, the detailed mention of the seven-chamber doctrine in this manuscript contains no attribution to *Sefer Toldot* or to any other source. In addition, the exact identity of the *Sefer Toldot* still remains a mystery.

If the reference to the seven-chamber doctrine in the manuscript of Daniel HaRofeh is indeed a citation from Ibn Ezra, and if Ibn Ezra, perhaps elsewhere, quotes *Sefer Toldot* as the source of the doc-

⁴³ Jewish National Library manuscript collection, manuscript number F4538, p. 196v. I greatly thank Yael Okun of the JNL for her assistance in locating the manuscript. This manuscript was part of the Montefiore Library manuscript collection in England, which contained many of Shmuel David Luzatto's personal manuscripts, as well as those of Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), the German historian and founder of the modern 'science of Judaism.' Many of the manuscripts from this collection were recently sold at auction by Sotheby's Auction House. Parenthetically, the passage from *Sefer Moladot* described by Luzatto appears in full on the next page of the manuscript (p. 196r) as a separate note in the margin.

trine, this would clearly eliminate Michael Scot as the author of *Sefer Toldot*, since Scot was born some years after Ibn Ezra's death. But as we still have no documented evidence that Ibn Ezra himself quoted the doctrine in the name of *Sefer Toldot*, this possibility cannot be completely excluded.

Another biblical commentary contemporary with the *Tosafists*, known as the *Da'at Zekainim miBa'alei Tosafot* (unknown authorship), cites the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus in the name of *Sefer haTeva*,⁴⁴ and mentions neither Ibn Ezra nor *Sefer Toldot*. As the citation of the doctrine itself is nearly verbatim as that cited in the aforementioned commentaries, *Sefer haGan*, *Tosafot*, and the work of Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel, all of whom attribute the doctrine to Ibn Ezra in the name of *Sefer Toldot*, this likely represents an unintentional error in transmission. Alternatively, *Sefer HaTeva* may be a generic name for a work of medicine and science. However, there is an alternative possibility. Scot's work, as mentioned above, had more than one title. The most popular title was *De Secretis Naturae*. As the Hebrew word *teva* means nature, it is theoretically possible that the *Da'at Zekainim miBa'alei Tosafot* refers to Scot's work, independent of any previous rabbinic tradition. This is, of course, pure conjecture, as we have no other evidence that *Ba'alei Tosafot* had the language skills or cultural orientation to absorb "gentile" wisdom. In addition, Scot's work was entitled "The Secrets of Nature," a translation of which would be something akin to *Sefer Sitrei HaTeva*. It is an interesting coincidence, however, that the books named by the *Ba'alei Tosafot* as the sources of the doctrine—*Sefer haTeva* and *Sefer HaToldot*—are the very two names for Michael Scot's work wherein the doctrine appears, *De Secretis Naturae* and *De Procreatione*.

Although there are differences between the aforementioned medieval commentaries on the verse in Leviticus, and I have suggested possible explanations for the discrepancies, it is more likely that they all derive the version of the seven-chamber doctrine from a common tradition or source.

While the aforementioned biblical commentators mention the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus as part of discussions on female physiology, some biblical commentators use the doctrine in the explication of biblical passages. Based on the verse in Shemot 1:7:

⁴⁴ *Vayikra* 12:2.

“And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them,” a number of rabbinic commentaries state that the Jews in Egypt had multiple gestational pregnancies, sextuplets according to Rashi.⁴⁵ In this vein, Ibn Ezra makes the following comment: “I have seen a woman who gave birth to quadruplets, and physicians explain how a woman could give birth to seven children.”⁴⁶ Although detailing neither the female anatomy nor the right-left theory, Ibn Ezra could possibly be alluding here to the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus, which explains anatomically how a woman could theoretically give birth to seven children. This clearly is not the exact passage in Ibn Ezra referenced by the aforementioned medieval commentators, as neither the language nor the content correlates.

Other commentaries on this verse are more explicit in their reference to the seven-chamber doctrine. Rabbi Issachar Eilenburg (1570–1623) invokes the seven-chamber doctrine in explaining why specifically six children were born to the women in Egypt, neither more nor less.⁴⁷ Based on the doctrine, as a woman had seven uterine chambers, she could potentially give birth to seven children at a time, three males, three females, and one *androgenus* or *tumtum*. The women of Egypt were blessed in that they gave birth to only six children at a time, being spared the curse of bearing an *androgenos* or *tumtum*. The Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel c. 1525–1609) echoes the same approach in his commentary to the verse in *Shemot*, invoking the seven-chamber doctrine in identical fashion.⁴⁸ R’ Yisrael Yaakov Algazi (Jerusalem 18th century) cites the doctrine in the interpretation to this verse in his haggadah, *Magid Devarav L’Yaakov*,⁴⁹ and further expands upon it with linguistic analysis, claiming that one of the miracles in Egypt was that all the Jewish children born in Egypt were themselves fertile, and none was an *androgenus* or *tumtum* conceived from the center uterine chamber.

⁴⁵ Ad loc.

⁴⁶ Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra to *Shemot* 1:7.

⁴⁷ *Tzeda L’Derekh* (Prague, 1623), on *Shemot* 1:7.

⁴⁸ Joshua D. Hartman, ed., *Gur Arye* vol. 3 (Jerusalem: *Machon Yerushalayim*, 1991), 6-7.

⁴⁹ (Izmir, 1767), 167.

Compendia of Prayer and Customs

In the 13th and 14th centuries there was a genre of rabbinic literature consisting of compilations of laws on prayers and customs of the Jewish calendar year.⁵⁰ In one such work we find a reference to the seven-chamber doctrine. Rabbi David ben Joseph Abudraham (14th century), in commenting on the prayer recited daily after the performance of normal bodily excretory functions, launches into a discussion of human physiology, including reproduction.⁵¹ It is in the context of a discourse on sex determination that Rabbi Abudraham cites the seven-chamber doctrine as one theory explaining how women conceive a female fetus versus a male. If a woman lies on her left side, he explains, the woman will conceive from one of the three uterine cells on the left, thereby producing a female child.

Philosophical Works

In 1360, Meir ben Isaac Aldabi (c. 1310–c. 1360),⁵² grandson of R' Asher ben Yechiel (Rosh), completed a philosophical work entitled *Shevilei Emunah* (Paths of Faith). This work, although philosophical in focus, contains a wealth of medical and scientific information, with chapters on anatomy, embryology and physiology.⁵³ The author devotes a chapter to each organ of the body, and the following quote appears in the chapter on the uterus: "...it has seven chambers, three on the right and four on the left. If the woman leans slightly to her right after intercourse she will conceive a female child, and if to her

⁵⁰ Examples of these works include *Sefer HaManbig* by Rabbi Abraham ben Nathan HaYarchi of Lunel, *Shibolei HaLeKet* by Rabbi Zedekiah ben Abraham, and *Kol Bo*, of unknown authorship.

⁵¹ *Abudraham HaShalem* (Jerusalem: Hachiyah Press, 1963), 35–37.

⁵² See Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopedia Judaica* 2 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 551-552.

⁵³ See, D. Schwartz, "Towards the study of the sources of R' Meir Aldabi's *Shevilei Emunah*," *Sinai* 114 (1994), 72–77. Schwartz focuses mainly on the philosophical sources, noting that R. Aldabi borrowed from Gershon ben Shlomo's *Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim* (see below), as well as from Arabic sources. He does not discuss the origin of R' Aldabi's medical information.

left, a male child.”⁵⁴ Although Aldabi does not cite a source for the seven-chamber doctrine, it is clearly not his rabbinic predecessors. It is remarkable that he does not cite the doctrine as cited in the commentary attributed to his own grandfather, R’ Asher ben Yechiel (see above), who mentions the classic version of the doctrine. First, Aldabi counts four chambers on the left instead of three on the left and one in the center, thereby eliminating the possibility of the birth of a hermaphrodite. Second, he deviates from the classic right-left theory, linking female children to the right side of the uterus instead of the left. Some have claimed that Aldabi derived much of his material from the encyclopedic *Sha’ar HaShamayim* of Gershon ben Shlomo of Arles.⁵⁵ He clearly did not borrow this interpretation of the doctrine from this work as another version of the doctrine appears therein.⁵⁶ As this theory likely did not originate with Aldabi, perhaps it is testimony to a variation of the seven-chamber doctrine in the Arabic literature.

Hebrew Medical Works

Although most Hebrew medical works are not classically considered part of the corpus of post-rabbinic literature, there are some such works that may deserve this distinction. While the majority of Hebrew medical works throughout history are devoid of religious con-

⁵⁴ *Shevilei Emunah* (Riva Di Trento, 1559), *netiv* 4. This passage is found in the Jerusalem (5750) edition at page 198.

⁵⁵ This theory was put forth by Moritz Steinschneider in his *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher: Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters; meistens nach Handschriftlichen Quellen* (Berlin, 1893), 9–27. On Gershon ben Shlomo of Arles, see F. S. Bodenheimer, trans., *The Gate of Heaven* (Jerusalem, 1953) and J. T. Robinson, “Gershom ben Solomon’s *Sha’ar Ha-Shamayim*: Its sources and use of sources,” in S. Harvey, ed., *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy* (Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought, volume 7, 2000).

⁵⁶ See *Sha’ar HaShamayim* (Rodelheim, 1801), 47–48, which seems to maintain that there were 3 chambers in the uterus. The one on the right would yield a male child, the one on the left a female and the one in the center a hermaphrodite. This is a variant of the right-left theory, a precursor to the seven-chamber doctrine, but does not resemble the variant of the doctrine as mentioned by R. Aldabi.

tent, a few medical treatises were composed by physicians who were also scholars, and who incorporated Jewish legal discourse into their works. One such example is the medical volume of Jacob Zahalon (1630–1693),⁵⁷ *Otzar HaChaim*. Zahalon was not only a physician trained at the University of Rome, but also the rabbi of the Italian community of Ferrara, where he was known for his homiletic prowess.⁵⁸ The introduction to *Otzar HaChaim* begins with a Jewish legal discussion of the permissibility of practicing medicine and tampering with the divine order.

The penultimate chapter of Zahalon's work is devoted to women's diseases and is introduced with a brief note on female anatomy. Here Zahalon states, "...some say the uterus comprises seven chambers, yet others refute this notion." Despite his medical training at an Italian University, where he undoubtedly read Vesalius' rejection of the seven-chamber doctrine in the *Fabrica*, Zahalon still mentions the doctrine as an acceptable, although disputed, anatomical notion. It is noteworthy that Tobias Cohen (1652–1729),⁵⁹ another Italian trained physician with rabbinic schooling, makes no mention

⁵⁷ On Zahalon and his work see, for example, Harry A. Savitz, "Jacob Zahalon, and his book, 'The Treasure of Life,'" *New England Journal of Medicine* 213:4 (July, 1935), 167–176; Harry Friedenwald, "Jacob Zahalon of Rome: Rabbi, physician, author and moralist," in *The Jews and Medicine* 1 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 268–279; Jonathan Jarashow, "Yakov Zahalon and the Jewish attitude towards medicine," *Koroth* 9:9-10 (1989), 725–736.

⁵⁸ See Henry A. Sosland, *A Guide for Preachers: The Or Ha-Darshan of Jacob Zahalon—A Seventeenth Century Italian Preacher's Manual* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1987).

⁵⁹ On Cohen see, for example, David A. Friedman, *Tuvia HaRofeh* (Tel Aviv: Palestine Jewish Medical Association, 1940); Nigel Allan, "Illustrations from the Wellcome Institute Library: A Jewish Physician on the Seventeenth Century," *Medical History* 28:3 (July, 1984), 324–328; David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 229–255; E. Lepicard, "An alternative to the cosmic and mechanic metaphors of the human body? The house illustration in *Ma'aseh Tuviyah* (1708)" *Medical History* 52 (2008), 93–105.

of the seven-chamber doctrine in his classic treatise *Ma'asei Tuvia*,⁶⁰ which was published roughly twenty-five years after *Otzar HaChaim*.

Talmudic Commentaries

In the book of Samuel,⁶¹ it is recounted that for a short period during the reign of King David the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the house of Oved-edom HaGitti. Oved-edom was rewarded for his efforts, as the verse states, “and the Lord blessed Oved-edom, and his entire household.” The Talmud⁶² elaborates on the nature of this blessing, stating that Oved-edom’s wife, and each of his eight daughters-in-law, gave birth to sextuplets.⁶³ Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761–1837), in his *Gilyon HaShas*, cites Rabbi Eilenburg’s biblical commentary to Shemot, which explains, based on the seven-chamber doctrine, that the Jewish women in Egypt gave birth to sextuplets, having been spared the curse of conceiving a hermaphrodite or *tumtum*. Rabbi Eiger, as is usual for his notes, makes no personal comment, and leaves the reader to apply the citation to the current context. Assumedly, the woman of Oved-edom’s family were also blessed with sex-

⁶⁰ (Bragadin, Venice, 1707-1708). For a comparison of the works of Zahalon and Cohen, see David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 232–239.

⁶¹ 2 Samuel 6:10-12.

⁶² *Berakhot* 63b-64a.


⁶³ The calculation is based on a passage in 1 Chronicles 26:8 that states that Oved-edom had 62 children. To obtain this total, it is suggested that Oved-edom’s wife and eight daughter’s-in-law each had sextuplets, equaling 54 children. To this we add Oved-edom’s own eight sons to achieve a total of 62.

It should be noted that the *Midrash* in *Bamidbar Rabbah*, chap. 4 and in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, chap. 2, as well as the Jerusalem Talmud in Tractate *Yevamot* 22b, postulates a different calculation, without requiring each woman to have had sextuplets. This theory, however, based on a different textual analysis, suggests that each woman was able to conceive two children every month for three successive months, thus also equaling a total of 54 children. Rabbi Aryeh Loeb Jellin (1820–1886), in his commentary *Yefeh Einayim* to the passage in Tractate *Berakhot*, considers this latter theory to be more outside the realm of nature than that described in Tractate *Berakhot*.

tuplets and spared the curse of a child conceived from the central uterine chamber.

However, R' Zecharia Yeshayahu HaKohen Yolles, in his *Sefer HaTorah v'haChochmah* written in the late 19th century,⁶⁴ questions Rabbi Akiva Eiger's application of the seven-chamber doctrine to the Talmud's discussion of Oved-edom's progeny. The Talmudic passage states that the 62 children of Oved-edom were all male (*anshei chayil*), whereas according to the seven-chamber doctrine, half, or 31, should have been female.⁶⁵

Conclusion

In this essay we have discussed a curious anatomical notion found in the history of medicine known as the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus, which is expressed in rabbinic literature from the 12th century through the late 19th century. The *Ba'alei Tosafot* attributed this doctrine to Abraham Ibn Ezra, although it has previously not been found in any of Ibn Ezra's extant works. In this essay, we identified a previously unknown reference to the seven-chamber doctrine in a 15th century manuscript of Ibn Ezra, although it is not clear if the mention of the doctrine is to be attributed to Ibn Ezra himself, or to the manuscript's copyist. The exact source quoted in the early rabbinic literature as the origin of this doctrine—*Sefer Toldot* quoted in the name of Ibn Ezra by numerous *Ba'alei HaTosafot*; or the *Sefer HaTeva*, as cited by the *Da'at Zekainim miBa'alei Tosafot*—remains a mystery. It is possible, though speculative, that Michael Scot, through his Jewish connections, contributed to the dissemination of the doctrine in Jewish circles, especially since the names *Sefer Toldot* and *Sefer HaTeva* correspond to the Latin names for Scot's work, which cites the seven-chamber doctrine. In sum, the appreciation of the medical historical context of the doctrine of the seven-chamber uterus enhances our understanding of the rabbinic literature wherein this doctrine is found. 

⁶⁴ (Vilna, 5673), 381.

⁶⁵ See also R' M. Efrati, "The case of Edom HaGiti," *Neẓer HaTorah (Tevet, 5768)*, 324-325.