Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud

*Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud* selects key themes in animal studies – animal intelligence, morality, sexuality, suffering, danger, personhood – and explores their development in the Babylonian Talmud. Beth Berkowitz demonstrates that distinctive features of the Talmud – the new literary genre, the convergence of Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian cultures, the Talmud’s remove from Temple-centered biblical Israel – led to unprecedented possibilities within Jewish culture for conceptualizing animals and animality. She shows that the Babylonian Talmud is ripe for reading with a critical animal studies perspective. When we do, we find waiting for us a multilayered, surprisingly self-aware discourse about animals as well as about the anthropocentrism that infuses human relationships with them. For readers of religion, Judaism, and animal studies, this book offers new perspectives on animals from the vantage point of the ancient rabbis.

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Contents

Acknowledgments page vii

1 Introduction: Balaam’s Ass, the Babylonian Talmud, and Critical Animal Studies 1

ORIENTATION TO THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD 31

2 Animal Intelligence: Bava Qamma 34b–35a 37

3 Animal Morality: Sanhedrin 55a–b 63

4 Animal Suffering: Bava Metzia 32a–33a 89

5 Animal Danger: Bava Qamma 80a–b 120

6 Animals as Livestock: Sukkah 22b–23b 153

7 Conclusion: Jewish Animals 180

Works Cited 193

Index 221
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