

# Down the Rabbit Hole with Barnabas: Rewriting Moses in Barnabas 10\*

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ibi jacet lepus  
Rabelais, *Gargantua*

**Barnabas 10 offers an allegorical discussion of *kashrut*. The writer addresses dietary laws in two groups of three: prohibitions against the eating of pig, vulture and eel, followed by prohibitions against eating hare, hyena and weasel. In each case, the allegorical interpretation construes diet as comportment (e.g. one should not behave like a pig, vulture etc.). Concerning the hare, readers are admonished not to emulate its corruption of children – a behaviour linked to its annual acquisition of an anus. Parallel allegorical interpretations of the Jewish food laws can be found in the Letter of Aristeas and Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 4 and similar quasi-scientific observations about animals occur in texts ranging from the rabbis to Physiologus. However, the rabbit poses a particular problem since no known precedent exists for either its behaviour or its physiology. The present investigation thus focuses on the rabbit, attempting to reconstruct the literary and historical background for its unusual characterisation.**

**Keywords:** Barnabas, rabbit, anus, Kosher, Moses, allegory, Pliny the Elder, Varro

## 1. Introduction

The Epistle of Barnabas is among the least studied and understood of the texts comprising the Apostolic Fathers. Of various interpretive conundrums, chapter 10 is perhaps the most intransigent. In this chapter, the writer discusses food laws, cuing an allegorical interpretation by stating that Moses spoke

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ἐν πνεύματι (10.2).<sup>1</sup> He then offers an allegorical discussion of the laws against eating pig, vulture and eel (representing land, sky and sea), followed by hare, hyena and weasel (all three 'cave-dwelling').<sup>2</sup> Psalm 1 interprets the first triad on ethical grounds; the second triad receives no corresponding interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Parallel allegorical interpretations of the Jewish food laws are present in the Letter of Aristeas and Philo, *On the Special Laws* 4. In addition, such quasi-scientific observations about animals can be found in texts ranging from the rabbis to Physiologus. Although much could be said about each animal discussed

1 Cf. e.g. Philo, *Mos.* 1.31 (175), 36 (201), 50 (277).

2 Rabbits represent the somewhat rare group of vertebrate burrowers, whereas hyenas and weasels sleep and breed in dens.

3 Commentaries consulted for this article: P. Prigent, *Les Testimonia dans le christianisme primitif: l'Épître de Barnabé I–XVI et ses sources* (EB; Paris: Gabalda, 1961); R. A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. III: *The Didache and Barnabas* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965); P. Prigent and R. A. Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé* (SC 172; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971); F. R. Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief* (KAV 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). Other literature consulted: A. Hilgenfeld, *Die Apostolischen Väter: Untersuchungen über Inhalt und Ursprung der unter ihrem Namen erhaltenen Schriften* (Halle: Pfeffer, 1853); J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Greek Texts with Introductions and English Translations* (London: Macmillan, 1891; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984); *idem*, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of their Writings* (ed. and rev. M. W. Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992<sup>2</sup>); K. Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912); J. A. Robinson, *Barnabas, Hermas, and the Didache: Donnellan Lectures, University of Dublin, 1920* (London: SPCK/New York: Macmillan, 1920); H. Windisch, *Die apostolischen Väter*, vol. III: *Der Barnabasbrief* (HNT Ergänzungsband; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1920); J. Muilenburg, *The Literary Relations of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929); K. Thieme, *Kirche und Synagoge: Die ersten nachbiblischen Zeugnisse ihres Gegensatzes im Offenbarungsverständnis: Der Barnabasbrief und der Dialog Justins des Märtyrers* (Olten: Otto Walter, 1945); J. A. Kleist, *The Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistles and the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the Fragments of Papias, the Epistle to Diognetus* (ACW 6; New York: Newman, 1948); E. J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation* (London: Independent Press, 1950); K. Bihlmeyer, ed., *Die Apostolischen Väter: Neubearbeitung der Funkschen Ausgabe* (SAQ 2.1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1956<sup>2</sup>); K. Wengst, *Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes* (AKG 42; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1971); J. C. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background* (WUNT 2/64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); R. Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (WUNT 11/82; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); M. W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999); J. N. Rhodes, *The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomical Tradition: Polemics, Paraenesis, and the Legacy of the Golden-Calf Incident* (WUNT 11/188; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); K. Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums: Didache (Apostellehre), Barnabasbrief, Zweiter Klemensbrief, Schrift an Diognet* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2004).

in the two triads, this essay focuses on the rabbit, attempting to reconstruct the literary and historical background for the reference to its annual multiplication of orifices.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. History of Scholarship

A brief overview of the history of scholarship suggests uneven interest in the significance of this section. Robert Kraft (1965) views chapter 10 as a compilation of traditions and commentary.<sup>5</sup> In its comparison of immoral men who obey ritual laws with the ‘half clean’ hare, Kraft identifies T. Ash. 2.8 as an important Jewish parallel to this section. Kraft also notes the alacrity with which later Christian authors (e.g. Theophilus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Novatian, Lactantius, Aphrahat, Chrysostom, Methodius) adopted a similar comparative approach.<sup>6</sup> About the hare, Kraft characterises the following four traits as universal:

- 4 About hares, modern science shows that they differ from rabbits in that they do not dig burrows and their young are born more mature. Rabbit young, or kits, have an approximately 28–31 day gestation. They are born naked and blind and require a period of time to grow in safety before they can run. The hare, on the other hand, is born after a gestation of approximately forty-two days. The young, called leverings, are born fully furred, eyes open, and are ready to run immediately after birth. You can’t necessarily tell a hare from a rabbit just by its common name. The jackrabbit is actually a hare and the Belgian Hare is actually a rabbit. Hares (*Lepus*) have twenty-four pairs of chromosomes while the domestic rabbit (*Oryctolagus*) has twenty-two and the cottontail (*Sylvilagus*), twenty-one. Mating is possible between the different species, but the resulting embryos will die after a few cell divisions because of the differences in the number of chromosome pairs. I acknowledge these differences between hares and rabbits, but make no attempt to distinguish between them in this essay because in the ancient sources it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell which genus is intended and whether that designation is intentional.
- 5 ‘The heart of chapter 10 is the material on “Moses’ three doctrines” in 10:1, 3–5 (and vs. 9?). To it have been added, in various stages: (1) the complementary tradition about David’s gnosis (10:10), which obviously parallels 10:3–5, and might be of equal age with that tradition; (2) the interpretation of Moses’ positive food laws in 10:11, which goes beyond the “three doctrines” idea but otherwise accords well with 10:1–5 (and vs. 9), and is filled with stock ideas from Pseudo-Barnabas’ tradition; (3) the additional “three doctrines” material on sexual abnormalities in 10:6–8, which breaks the continuity of 10:3–5, 9 and is a unity in terms of style, content, and background; (4) various editorial comments that may represent diverse stages in the development of this tradition block – 10:9 sounds like the “original” conclusion (with 10:10e?) to 10:3–5, while 10:2 seems to be an (early?) expansion on the pattern of 10:9. The comments in 10:11e–12 draw the whole matter to a close, and relate back to 8:7 and 9:1, 4a’ (Kraft, *Didache and Barnabas*, 109–10).
- 6 Kraft sees similarities with other Hellenistic Jewish texts as well: ‘Similar ethical interpretations of the negative and positive food laws were well known in Hellenistic Judaism, if the “Epistle of Aristeas” and Philo are representative. The former argues that Moses who had “understanding of all things”, gave these laws as moral lessons for the sake of righteousness (139, 144, 150, 168 f.). Thus certain rapacious birds (cf. 10:4) are forbidden for food as a sign that a righteous person must not tyrannize (145–148), and the “unclean” weasel, which conceives through the

Despite the attempts of Aristotle and others to correct some of these stories, it was fairly common knowledge that the hare (1) adds a new anal opening each year to accommodate its excessive defecation; (2) is hermaphroditic; (3) simultaneously carries different sets of young in different stages of development in its womb ('superfetation'), and thus can conceive when it already is pregnant; and (4) has many exits to its home.<sup>7</sup>

As he adduces no ancient parallels for these points, it is unclear what evidence Kraft would use to support contentions (1) and (4) above.

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ear and gives birth by the mouth (cf. 10:8b), symbolizes informers who transmit hearsay evidence (163–167). The “divided hoof” (cf. 10:11d) signifies discernment between right and wrong, and distinction between God’s righteous people and the immoral nations (150–152); to “ruminate” (cf. 10:11c) means to remember God and to meditate on his creative acts (153–160). Philo elaborates on the positive injunctions in a similar vein, and at one point compares men who indulge their passions to the “unclean” pig (*Agric.* 131–145, *Spec. leg.* 4:100–118) (Kraft, *Didache and Barnabas*, 110–1).

<sup>7</sup> Kraft, *Didache and Barnabas*, 112. Kraft acknowledges that the connotations of such physical observations are not obvious: ‘In the light of such ideas, it is difficult to determine what 10:6 is about – excessive sexual activity? Homosexuality? Abortion? General filthiness? ... In short, the special background of 10:6–8 is popular Hellenistic natural history which has been transformed into moral lessons in association with Mosaic food prohibitions. This process had already begun centuries before in Hellenistic Judaism (see Pseudo-Aristeas, above)’ (*Didache and Barnabas*, 111–12). In turn, such allegorical interpretations of dietary restrictions may also be found in other traditions such as the Pythagorean *akousmata* or *symbola*, e.g. ‘Don’t eat a black-tail [a fish]’ means: ‘Don’t associate with people of bad character.’ I wish to express my gratitude to Johan Thom for that example. Cf. Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 395–7. Kraft also comments on Barnabas’ use of Psalm 1: ‘Early Christian writers found a very congenial base for symbolism in Ps. 1:1. The *ethical* approach of 10:10, however, was not dominant; instead, later interpretations tend to apply these three parts of the quotation to three groups of people classified according to beliefs – for example, Gentiles, Jews, heretics (Clement [in part], Irenaeus; cf. R. Loewe, *TU* 63 [1957] 492 ff.). Similarly, the symbolism of “split-hoof” and “cud-chewing” animals (10:11) also had become doctrinally oriented already in the time of Irenaeus and Clement, so that the true Christians are those who do both, while Jews only “ruminate” (study scripture) and heretics only “part the hoof” (acknowledge Father and Son) – since Gentiles do neither they are totally “unclean”. In these matters again (cf. 2:4–3:6; 9:4–6), Barnabas stands closer to Hellenistic Judaism and the Two Ways approach than to the developing Christian interest in doctrinal distinctions’ (*Didache and Barnabas*, 112–13). Concerning Barnabas 10, James Carleton Paget follows Kraft closely referring to the type of material as learned zoological speculation (*Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background*, 154). Likewise, Hvalvik, *Struggle for Scripture and Covenant*, 187–89 and Rhodes, *Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomistic Tradition*, 59–60 make no new contribution to discussion of the rabbit exemplum. Rhodes interprets Barnabas 10 as one part of the author’s ‘radicalized Christian version of the Deuteronomistic view of history’ that ‘Israel was abandoned as God’s chosen people not at Sinai but only with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE’ (*Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomistic Tradition*, 87).

Working with Kraft, Pierre Prigent contributes to the discussion by acknowledging the possibility of interpretations of παιδοφθόρος different from those of Clement of Alexandria. He reasons that if multiplying anuses refers to illicit couplings, then παιδοφθόρος may signify abortion or refusal to procreate as opposed to sodomy.<sup>8</sup>

Of recent commentators, Ferdinand R. Prostmeier demonstrates most interest in the animal triads. He observes similarities with Physiologus – the didactic Christian collection of moralised animal tales.<sup>9</sup> Prostmeier also emphasises the rhetorical value of the section for the author’s overall ethical argument.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in his treatment of 10.6, Klaus Wengst says little about the specific animals. Focusing primarily on source critical issues of the passage,<sup>11</sup> he sees the chapter as a stockpile of variously reliable traditions.<sup>12</sup>

Although Prigent and Kraft caution that παιδεραστία is not the only possible connotation of παιδοφθόρος,<sup>13</sup> in addition to Clement of Alexandria (e.g. *Paed.*

8 Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 153. ‘Clément allègue d’autres traditions zoologiques et conclut: “Cette interdiction énigmatique nous conseille de nous abstenir des désirs violents et des accouplements qui se succèdent sans interruption, des unions avec des femmes enceintes, de l’homosexualité et de la pédérastie, de la fornication et du libertinage.” Barnabé veut-il suggérer que la multiplication des orifices naturels du lièvre est une preuve de ses copulations fréquentes qui en font le symbole des accouplements stériles et déréglés? Dans ce cas il faudrait comprendre παιδοφθόρος dans le sens: qui fait avorter, qui refuse la procréation’ (153).

9 ‘Die Vv 6–8 folgen dem triadischen Schema in Vv 3–5; die sprachliche Fassung indes hebt sie als Einheit von den Vv 3–5 ab. Gliederungssignal dieser Trias und äußeres Kennzeichen gegenüber dem vorangegangenen Dreierblock sind ἄλλὰ καὶ und einfaches ἄλλὰ. Anstelle der mit οἴτινες angefügten Beschreibungen der ἄνθρωποι τοιοῦτοι ist in diesem Dreierblock zweimal die Sache beim Namen genannt: παιδοφθόρος (V 6b), μοιχὸς οὐδὲ φθορεὺς (V 7b). Nur in V 8b liegt, eingeführt vom Relativum οἴους, eine mit Vv 3b.4b.5b vergleichbare Sequenz vor. Die Begründungsfunktion des Abschnitts über die Physis des Tieres tritt durch ὅτι (Vv 6c.7c) und γάρ (V 8c) deutlicher hervor. Die rhetorischen Fragen πρὸς τί in Vv 6a.7b verraten die Hand des Vf. und seine didaktische Absicht (vgl. 6.17; 7.4–5.9.11; 8.4.6; 9.8b). Dies gilt auch für das καλῶς in V 8a (vgl. V iic.e)’ (Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 394–5).

10 ‘Von dieser rhetorischen Absicht her geht es bei der Physis des Hasen (V 6c), aber ebenso bei jener der Hyäne (V 7c) und des Wiesels (V 8c), vor allem um die Fremdartigkeit oder Absurdität der dem Tier beigelegten Eigenart, auf daß die angemahnte Distanz zur Lebensorientierung der mit dieser Physis umschriebenen Personengruppe sowie der Ernst der Mahnung plausibel erscheint’ (Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 397)

11 Wengst, *Barnabasbriefes*, 121–2; cf. *Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes*, 36–9.

12 ‘Die redaktionellen Bemerkungen in 10,12 ordnen c 10 der Thematik von 8,7; 9,1–3 zu, wodurch die Ausführungen in 9,4–9 als Exkurs ausgewiesen werden. Demnach soll c 10 ein Beispiel für das Unverständnis der Juden und für das durch die Ohren- und Herzensbeschneidung ermöglichte Verstehen der Christen sein. Daß aber dieses Kapitel nicht einheitlich konzipiert ist, sondern daß ein traditioneller Grundbestand Erweiterungen erfahren hat, wird ein Überblick zeigen’ (Wengst, *Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes*, 36–7).

13 Prigent-Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 153. Prostmeier does not see pederasty as a necessary ethical interpretation (Physiologus dedicates no section to rabbits); ‘Der Barn verfährt diesbezüglich

2.6, 10; *Strom.* 2.7; 3.9, etc.) and the Latin version of Barnabas (L: *corruptor puerorum*), T. Levi (17.11.2) supports this connotation.<sup>14</sup> If pederasty is not implied by παιδοφθόρος, the absurdity of a rabbit's annual accrual of a new anal orifice is even more acute. This orifice tradition is examined in detail following a brief exegetical analysis of the passage.

### 3. Text and Context

#### 3.1 Text

Barn. 10.6 has three parts: prohibition, interpretation and rationale. It begins by citing the law (Lev 11.6) proscribing rabbit meat: ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν δασύποδα οὐ φάγη.<sup>15</sup> A question follows: πρὸς τί; 'Why not?' or 'What does this mean?' An answer is provided: 'It means: do not be, or be like, a child-slayer' (οὐ μὴ γένη, φησίν, παιδοφθόρος οὐδὲ ὁμοιωθήσῃ τοῖς τοιούτοις). An explanation is then offered: ὅτι ὁ λαγὼς κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν πλεονεκτεῖ τὴν ἀφώδευσιν· ὅσα γὰρ ἔτη ζῆ, τοσαύτας ἔχει τρύπας. The first phrase states

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wie die Physiologustradition, die sich ebenfalls nicht scheut, die Schrift ihren Bedürfnissen anzupassen' (*Barnabasbrief*, 392); 'Die dreigliedrige Anlage berührt sich eng mit Tiergeschichten und deren christlichen Allegoresen, die erstmals im 2 Jh. unter dem Titel Physiologus gesammelt wurden' (ibid., 382).

- 14 Concerning the debate over the origin of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (whether it was originally a Jewish document that has been interpolated by Christians or a Christian document written originally in Greek but based on some earlier Semitic material), today most who have investigated the question agree that the Greek form in which we have the text is a Christian composition in which Jewish traditions have been used, and that it is impossible to isolate Jewish elements without distorting the whole composition. While true that there existed a Hebrew Testament of Levi and an Aramaic Testament of Naphtali, with which the Greek Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs shares traditions, no evidence suggests that the complete series of twelve Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs existed in a pre-Christian, Hebrew or Aramaic form. The Greek Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs as we have it now is a Christian work, transmitted solely by Christians. I wish to express gratitude to Henk Jan de Jonge for this information. See H. J. de Jonge, 'The Earliest Traceable Stage of the Textual Tradition of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation* (ed. M. de Jonge; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 63–86; M. de Jonge, 'The Main Issues in the Study of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 147–63; *idem*, 'The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Christian and Jewish', *Jewish Eschatology*, 233–43; R. A. Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest: the Levi-Priestly Tradition from Aramaic Levi to Testament of Levi* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).
- 15 The LXX text of this law is as follows: καὶ τὸν δασύποδα, ὅτι ἀνάγει μηρυκισμὸν τοῦτο καὶ ὄπλῃν οὐ διχηλεῖ, ἀκάθαρτον τοῦτο ὑμῖν· καὶ τὸν χοιρογρύλλιον, ὅτι ἀνάγει μηρυκισμὸν τοῦτο καὶ ὄπλῃν οὐ διχηλεῖ, ἀκάθαρτον τοῦτο ὑμῖν. English translations of the Epistle of Barnabas are my own, except where noted.

that the hare accumulates ‘gougings’, ‘holes’, ‘exits’ or possibly ‘droppings’ (i.e. pellets) annually. An exegetical statement clarifies the author’s meaning: ‘for as many years as it lives, it has that many holes’. Τρύπη explicates ἀφόδευσις.

On one hand, the meaning of this passage is clear: Barnabas allegorises the prohibition against eating hare meat from Lev 11.5–6 by arguing that eating refers to being or acting.<sup>16</sup> Eating hare meat refers to behaving like hares – animals that Barnabas characterises as παιδοφθόροι.<sup>17</sup> Clement of Alexandria interprets this expression as παιδεραστία, an association that is understandable given that παιδοφθορέω in Barn. 19.4a clearly refers to pederasty.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in Did. 2.2 this verb probably denotes sexual misbehaviour, since it is mentioned between committing adultery and committing fornication. In Tatian (8.1), too, it suggests a form of sexual misbehaviour, occurring in a list between μοιχεύω ‘to commit adultery’ and γαμέω ‘to marry’ – for the ascetic Tatian, also a sexual sin. Similarly, παιδοφθόροι in T. Levi 17.11 must refer to ‘abusers of children’ because it is paired with κτενοφθόρος, ‘those who commit bestialities by having intercourse with animals’. In Justin, *Dial.* 95.1 the meaning of παιδοφθόροι is less clear, but on a whole, Clement’s interpretation of παιδοφθόρος in Barn. 10.6a as ‘pederast’ is understandable.

That said, this interpretation is not self-evident. The *locus classicus* for corruption of youth is the allegation against Socrates, which Plato describes as διαφθείρει τούς νέους (*Apol.* 9d). Pseudo-Zonaras employs παιδοφθόροι to define παιδολετήρ (‘child-slayer’) in the context of a lexicon.<sup>19</sup> Pseudo-Polemon lists παιδοφθόροι immediately following patricide and matricide, suggesting the meaning parricide or infanticide.<sup>20</sup> And, the Pentateuchal context of

16 In this article, I use the name Barnabas to refer to the author for convenience and without bias as to the author’s actual identity, although I am currently not inclined to equate the author with the early Christian leader mentioned in Galatians 2 and elsewhere in the New Testament. The LXX (Lev 11.5) version is as follows: καὶ τὸν δασύποδα, ὅτι ἀνάγει μηρυκισμὸν τοῦτο καὶ ὄπλην οὐ διχληεῖ, ἀκάθαρτον τοῦτο ὑμῖν (‘The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you’). The hare, like the rock badger, is not a true ruminant, although its sideways jaw movement sometimes suggests it. Chewing food twice offers ample opportunity to view this motion.

17 Cf. Greek χοιρογρύλλιος (‘hare’, Lev 11.6; Deut 14.7; Ps 103 [104].18; Prov 30.26). This animal was most likely the hyrax, the closest living relative of the elephant.

18 Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.10, 83; cf. *Strom.* 2.67, 5.51–2. See P. W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 4; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 250–1. Other Christian authors attesting this meaning postdate Barnabas and are reliant on Clement, including Chrysostom, Novatian, Physiologus *et al.* See J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Boswell assumes that Barnabas is too early to rely on Pliny (139).

19 *Ioannis Zonarae Lexicon* (2 vols.; ed. I. A. H. Tittmann; Leipzig: S. L. Crusius, 1808) II.1496.

20 οἰδοῦντές εἰσι ζηρότεροι, πατροφόνου τε καὶ μητροφόνου παιδοφθόρου τε καὶ φαρμακοὶ καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτων.



the dietary prohibition in Lev 11.5–6 (cf. Deut 14.7) might imply a Jewish biblical context such as Pharaoh's genocidal threat or the tenth plague (Ex 1.4–6, 22; 12.29).<sup>21</sup>

Two source-critical observations further complicate the interpretation. First, v. 1 announces three teachings (δόγματα) of Moses, listing the prohibitions against eating pig, eagle-hawk crow and fish without scales. Reflecting back on v. 1, v. 9 again describes Moses' foregoing teachings as three in number: περὶ μὲν τῶν βρωμάτων λαβῶν Μωϋσῆς τρία δόγματα, after which v. 10 states that David received the same three teachings: λαμβάνει δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν τριῶν δογμάτων γνῶσιν Δαυίδ. If only the teachings in vv. 3–5 are counted, the sum total is three; but if those in vv. 6–8 are included, the total is six.<sup>22</sup> For this reason, some commentators postulate that the second triad represents a later addition.<sup>23</sup>

Second, although v. 10 offers an interpretation of vv. 3–6 (pig, vulture, eel) by means of Psalm 1, vv. 6–8 (hare, hyena, weasel) receive no parallel ethical explanation. It is possible that the author intends Psalm 1 to interpret both triads, but the passage specifies only the animals listed in the first triad (fish, pig, birds) albeit in a different order. Correspondence of these animals to sea, land and sky might further be seen to *exclude* the second triad since the three animals of the second group dwell in caves (i.e. beneath the ground), a distinctly different topographical feature from the three that are listed (i.e. sea, ground, sky vs beneath the ground).<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2 Context

#### 3.2.1 Aelian

A few ancient writers discuss hare physiology and behaviour. In terms of the interpretation of Barnabas, Aelian's account is often regarded as the most valuable. The ostensible correspondence is traced to an emphasis on the rabbit's lustfulness.<sup>25</sup> According to Aelian, rabbits tend to be darker in colour, with smaller tails and heads than hares. They also possess greater libido:

But [the rabbit] is more lustful [or: 'whiter'] than the rest [i.e. hares] ... which causes it to go raving mad when it goes after the female. (*De anim.* 13.15)<sup>26</sup>

21 Barn. 6.1, 9.2 uses παῖς (with meaning 'servant') to refer to Jesus, suggesting the additional possibility that references to 'child-slayer' derive from Heb 6.6 and related passages with the theological meaning of recrucifying Christ. Resurrection may be suggested by the reference to 'holes' (i.e. burial caves). However, these interpretations do not (to my knowledge) arise in the extant tradition.

22 The second triad of teachings also inserts the rhetorical question πρὸς τί twice (vv. 6, 7).

23 E.g. Wengst, *Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes*, 36–9.

24 Phil 2.10; Rev 5.4.

25 English translations of Aelian, Pliny, Varro and other classical literature are taken from the Loeb Classical Library except where noted.

26 λαγνότερος δὲ τῶν λοιπῶν· λασαρὰ διετησίους φύσει, ὑφ' ὧν οἰστρεῖται τε καὶ ἐκμαίνεται, ὅταν ἐπὶ τὰς θηλείας ᾄτη.



At three points, the manuscript is corrupt.<sup>27</sup> According to A. F. Scholfield ‘more lustful’ (λαγνότερος), if correct, may reflect the anthropomorphising (i.e. moralising) tendency of one or more copyists.<sup>28</sup> In place of λαγνότερος, others restore λευκότερος implying that mad behaviour typifies the ‘whiter’ snow hare. In his report about the hare, Barnabas does not mention lust per se, only that these animals annually add an orifice and thus represent child-slayers (or child-abusers). Apart from the assumption that παιδοφθόρος denotes sexual deviance, the connection between Aelian’s testimony and Barn. 10.6 is, at best, general.

### 3.2.2 Pliny the Elder

Pliny the Elder also records information about rabbits.<sup>29</sup> In book 8 of the *Natural History* he discusses land animals. Following a discussion of apes (8.81.217–20), he considers two types of hares. The first type, Alpine rabbits, reportedly change colour seasonally in relation to their diet. Feeding on snow, they turn white during the winter; a shift in diet during the spring produces reddish-colour fur. The second type, Spanish hares, occupy the rest of the discussion. Pliny is particularly interested in their legendary fecundity. At one time, in the Balearic Islands of Spain (archipelago in the western Mediterranean near the eastern coast of the Iberian peninsula), these animals became so prolific, they ravaged local crops to the point of famine. Their fetuses, he next remarks (in either an insensitive or ironic aside), are a popular delicacy:

Their young cut out from the mother before birth or taken from the teat are considered a very great delicacy, served without being gutted; the name for them is laurex.

As for the famine, the Balearic people petitioned (the late) Augustus for military help in reducing their rabbit population. Thinking of population reduction,

<sup>27</sup> In place of λασαρὰ διετησίους φύσει (see n. 26 above), the manuscript records only λαίσθα διετήσιος. The *vox nihili* λαίσθα cannot be correct. The context requires a remark on the sexual greed or lustfulness of hares. A masculine adjective ending in -ος is needed. Since iota and gamma are often confused and the same applies to alpha and the combination of omicron-sigma, λαίσθα is probably best taken as a corruption of λάγνος, ‘lecherous’, ‘horny’. Aelian is then saying that the hare is ‘horny by nature all through the year’, ‘during the whole year’, ‘all year long’, ‘which causes it to go completely crazy with sexual passion when it goes after the female’.

<sup>28</sup> This was a trend present also, if to a lesser extent, in Pliny.

<sup>29</sup> Different from Aelian’s, Pliny’s account most likely predates Barnabas. Those who thought that the historical Barnabas wrote the Epistle argued that it could not rely on Pliny. Not only is that argument no longer salient but the source-critical concerns surrounding the second triad of animals suggest that vv. 6–8 are among the latest traditions in this letter.

Pliny then notes the effectiveness of ferrets for hunting rabbits, describing how, when tossed into a rabbit hole, they immediately drive all inhabitants to the surface. Rabbit warrens, he reports (albeit falsely), account for the etymological derivation of the expression ‘conies’ (*cuniculi*) for rabbits, the Latin word *cuniculum* meaning ‘tunnel’.<sup>30</sup>

As a source on the taxonomic order of Lagomorpha, Pliny next turns to Archelaus of Chersonesus in Egypt (3rd cent. BCE). Surviving fragments indicate that Archelaus recorded quasi-scientific zoological curiosities in the form of epigrams under two different titles, *περὶ θαυμασίων* and *ἰδιοφυῆ*; the former may have comprised epigrams, and the latter prose. Archelaus was part agricultural scientist and part paradoxographer. Both qualities are detectable in a comment he makes about goats cited by Varro:

There is a remarkable thing about these animals, and even Archelaus is authority for the statement: some shepherds who have watched quite closely claim that goats do not breathe, as other animals do, through the nostrils, but through the ears. (*Agr.* 2.3)<sup>31</sup>

According to Pliny, Archelaus (*Nat.* 8.81)<sup>32</sup> makes two comments about the hare: first, it possesses a *caverna ad excrementa* for every *annus* of its life; and second, it is a hermaphrodite, reproducing with or without a sire. The second observation, concerning hare hermaphroditism, has a natural place in Pliny’s discussion, since the primary focus is fecundity. Connection of the observation concerning the rabbit’s age to the discussion is, however, unclear.

Returning to the topic of rabbit as a delicacy, Pliny next expresses gratitude to Nature for both the hermaphroditism and the superfetation of the rabbit, since together they afford an ample supply of delicious meat to humans and other predators. Superfetation, he explains, is the combined result of a brief gestation period and the ability to breed while nursing.<sup>33</sup> He concludes his report with a

30 The word ‘coney’ is probably an Etrurian derivation.

31 Varro explicitly cites Archelaus on two additional occasions: (1) ‘There are also other species not unlike them, such as the teal, coot, and partridge, which, as Archelaus writes, conceive when they hear the voice of the male’ (*Agr.* 3.11; cf. 2.1.19; Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 5.2). This myth may be Egyptian and resembles one the Church Fathers repeated about the vulture. (2) ‘In the first place, bees are produced partly from bees, and partly from the rotted carcass of a bullock. And so Archelaus, in an epigram, says that they are “the roaming children of a dead cow”; and the same writer says: “While wasps spring from horses, bees come from calves”’ (*Agr.* 3.16).

32 Full reference: 8.81.(55.)218.

33 In book 10, Pliny discusses the lifespan of dogs, which he says is 10–12 years, noting also that cats and mongooses are in many respects similar to dogs only with slightly shorter (i.e. six-year) lifespans. Following this comment, he turns to the gestation periods in various animals, addressing rabbits first. ‘Rabbits breed in every month of the year, and superfetate, as do hares; after giving birth they become pregnant at once. They conceive although still

comment on the poor quality of hare fur for garments (i.e. neither soft, nor long enough for comfortable, durable clothing).

In conclusion, Pliny's report has three foci: (1) social-economic disaster (i.e. famine); (2) Nature's beneficence (i.e. rabbit meat as delicacy); and (3) biological mechanisms (i.e. hermaphroditism and superfetation). Discerning a rabbit's age – not least by inspecting its *caverna ad excrementa* – has no discernible relationship to the topic. Why would a farmer, veterinarian or even an haruspex need to know a rabbit's age, let alone count bodily orifices to figure it out? Furthermore, the expected lifespan of most rabbits is only one year.<sup>34</sup> To be sure, paradoxographical reports abounded during the second and third centuries and many of their claims were far more audacious than this one,<sup>35</sup> but Pliny's report bears few of the typical

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suckling their previous litter, but the young are blind (or perhaps “not blind”) (*dasypodes omni mense pariunt, et superfetant, sicut lepores; a partu statim implentur. concipiunt quamvis ubera siccante fetu; pariunt vero caecos*)' (*Nat.* 10.83; trans. Rackham, LCL, with the notable exception of *implentur*, 'become pregnant' (Lewis and Short, s.v. *impleo* B2)). Cf. the variant noted by Rackham in LCL. Although the content is similar, this passage does not appear to shed light on *Nat.* 8.81.

<sup>34</sup> The typical (but not potential) lifespan of a rabbit is one year. Hare lifespans differ.

<sup>35</sup> Important related work on paradoxography includes: B. Baldwin, 'Pliny the Elder and Mucianus', *Emerita* 63/2 (1995) 291–301; O. Wenskus and L. Daston, 'Paradoxographoi', *Der neue Pauly* 9 (2000) 309–14; S. F. Johnson, 'Greek Wonders: Classical Models for Christian Miracle Collections', *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study* (Hellenic Studies 13; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006) 172–220; Y. Lehmann, 'Le merveilleux scientifique dans le *Logistoricus Gallus Fundanius de admirandis de Varron*', *Aere perennius: en hommage à Hubert Zehnacker* (ed. J. Champeaux *et al.*; Paris: Pr. de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2006) 553–62; M. Leigh, 'Counting Lobes on the Liver of a Shrew: Science and Paradoxography in the Ancient World' (paper delivered at Classical Association, South West Branch, 12 February 2009, University of Exeter, (unpublished)); D. Pataricza, 'Father or Mother? Stories of Male Pregnancies in Phlegon's *De mirabilibus*', *Acta classica Universitatis scientiarum Debreceniensis* 45 (2009) 129–33; B. R. Capel, *Filostefano di Cirene: testimonianze e frammenti* (Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2010); D. Pataricza, 'Monsters of Phlegon – Hermaphrodites, Sex-changers and Other Strange Beings in Phlegon's Marvellous Stories', *Orvostörténeti Közlemények* 56 (2010) 153–69; C. G. Guthrie, 'The Creation and Development of an Ancient Scientific “Fact”': Paradoxography in the Peripatos', *Common Sense Geography and Mental Modelling* (ed. K. Geus and M. Thiering; Berlin: Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 2012) 139–44; J. Doroszewska, 'Between the Monstrous and the Divine: Hermaphrodites in Phlegon of Tralles' *Mirabilia*', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 53/4 (2013) 379–92; M. Leigh, 'Polypragmosyne, Periergia, and the Language of Criticism', *From Polypragmon to Curiosus: Ancient Concepts of Curious and Meddlesome Behaviour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 161–94; S. Musitelli and I. Bossi, 'Early Traces of Paleoanthropology and Comparative Anatomy in Ancient Paradoxography', *Research* 1 (2014) 729; K. Geus and Colin Guthrie King, 'Paradoxography: Wonder Stories, Tall Tales, and the Limits of Reason', *Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World* (ed. P. Keyser *et al.*; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, in press).

features of these narratives.<sup>36</sup> Focusing on the details of this brief part of the account may help to clarify its purpose.

### 3.2.3 *Digging Deeper: Rackham's Translation and Astral Biology*

Pliny cites Archelaus' report about the hare as follows:

Archelaus auctor est quot sint corporis cavernae ad excrementa lepori totidem annos esse aetatis: varius certe numerus reperitur. idem utramque vim singulis inesse ac sine mare aequae gignere.

Harris Rackham (LCL, 1940) translates *corporis cavernae ad excrementa lepori* as 'folds in the bowel'.<sup>37</sup> A literal translation of the phrase might be, 'hollows in the rabbit's body for excretion'. Perhaps Rackham's translation is informed by the astral (or lunar) biology of a passage in Plutarch (*Commentary to the Works and Days*, fr. 101),<sup>38</sup> stating that mice acquire a new liver lobule for every day that the moon waxes, shedding them when it wanes:

Everybody says, too, that the eyes of cats and the entrails of mice contract as the moon wanes, and increase as it grows to full moon. If <...> should be taken up at the full moon it still retains its principle of growth and sprouts again at the proper season but if taken up when the moon is waning, it is sterile.<sup>39</sup>

John Lydus (6th cent. CE) traces a similar tradition to Archelaus.<sup>40</sup> In this passage, Archelaus states that mice livers accrue fifteen lobules by the full moon, from which point the process reverses until (by the new moon) the lobules completely disappear.

36 For convenience sake, I refer to both Pliny and Varro (below) as directly reliant on Archelaus, although I acknowledge that Pliny may have had one or more intermediary sources for this information.

37 Whether related to astral biology or not, Rackham's translation 'folds in the bowel' cannot be correct.

38 Plutarch's *Moralia*, LCL xv.211.

39 On astral biology, see A. P. Jiménez, 'Plutarch's Attitude towards Astral Biology', *Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity* (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 14; ed. F. L. Roig and I. M. O. Gallarte; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 159–70, at 162. The point of the passage is to warn against changes occurring *in reverse* of the moon's cycle.

40 Lydus, *Mens.* 3.11: ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἀρχέλαός φησι τὰ τῶν μυῶν ἥπατα λοβοὺς ἔχειν πεντεκαίδεκα, οἵτινες οὐκ ἀθρόοι πάντες ἐγγίνονται, ἀλλ' ἕκαστος καθ' ἡμέραν σεληνιακὴν εἷς ἐπιγινόμενος ἐξ οὐκ ὄντος προστίθεται ἀπὸ τῆς νεομηνίας μέχρι τῆς πανσελήνου, πάλιν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς πανσελήνου εἷς ἐφ' ἐνὶ καθ' ἡμέραν φθίνων λοβὸς πάντες μέχρι τῆς νεομηνίας ἐκλείπουσι. καὶ αὐθις ἐξ ἐκείνης ἄρχονται γίνεσθαι πρὸς τὴν τῆς σελήνης περιόδον καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῆς ἐκείνης ἡμερῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ γινόμενοι καὶ ἀπογινόμενοι καὶ πληθυνόμενοι καὶ μειούμενοι. Cf. 'Archelaos 84', *RE* II.1 (1895) col. 453.

Elsewhere Plutarch alleges that the total number of kittens a female cat brings forth corresponds to the number of days of the lunar month:

For the cat is said to bring forth first one, then two and three and four and five, thus increasing the number by one until she reaches seven, so that she brings forth in all twenty-eight, the number also of the moon's illuminations. (*Is. Os.* 376E)

And, although he decries this cat theory as bunk (τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἴσως μυθωδέστερον), Plutarch agrees that a cat's pupils wax and wane with the moon:

But the pupils in the eye of the cat appear to grow large and round at the time of the full moon, and to become thin and narrow at the time of the waning of that heavenly body. (*Is. Os.* 376 F)

The astral component of Archelaus' and Pliny's hare biology is their reference to the 'cyclical' (*annus*) acquisition of holes.<sup>41</sup> Such statements might reflect straightforward chronological information without any lunar biological overtones. Data adduced from Plutarch is insufficient to make the case. A closer look at the precise language of Pliny's report in its context sheds light on this question.

### 3.2.4 Stylistic Observations of the Natural History

A generation of text critics and commentators exaggerated not only errors in the transmission of the *Natural History*, but the clumsiness of Pliny's prose style.<sup>42</sup> Eduard Norden's comment is representative:

Sein Werk gehört stilistisch betrachtet, zu den schlechtesten, die wir haben. Man darf nicht sagen, daß der Stoff daran schuld war, denn Columella hat vortrefflich, Celsus gut geschrieben, und daß gerade eine Naturgeschichte stilisiert werden kann, hat Buffon gezeigt. Plinius hat es einfach nicht besser gekonnt, so wenig wie Varro, an den er überhaupt erinnert: wer so unendlich viel las, wie diese beiden, der konnte nicht gut schreiben.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Francis Richard David Goodyear writes:

Pliny is one of the prodigies of Latin literature, boundlessly energetic and catastrophically indiscriminate, wide-ranging, and narrow-minded, a pedant who

41 Lewis and Short, s.v. *annus*: 'periodical return', not necessarily one year.

42 J. F. Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 81.

43 *Die antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance* (2 vols.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995 [1898]), I.314.

wanted to be a popularizer, a sceptic infected by traditional sentiment and an aspirant of style who can hardly frame a coherent sentence.<sup>44</sup>

Subsequent scholarship has corrected for exaggeration, explaining how, for example, the Latin language, while rich in the vocabulary of government and war, was deficient in the areas of nature and the universe.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Pliny's style is still at issue in various passages – particularly as regards technical terminology in science and philosophy. Both Seneca and Lucretius comment on their struggles expressing such ideas. The title of Pliny's work (a hybrid) offers the first piece of evidence from his writings.<sup>46</sup> For much of the technical language on agriculture and viticulture, Pliny relies on Cato, Virgil, Varro and Columella – the authors who created the Latin lexicon for these topics.<sup>47</sup> Since Varro also cites Archelaus on rabbits, we turn to his account before drawing conclusions about Pliny's meaning.

### 3.2.5 Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE)

Varro's work *Res rusticae* comprises three books of dialogues about agriculture. The first book primarily treats farm management, the second, sheep and oxen, and the third, poultry and the keeping of other large and small animals, including bees and fish. In the third book (*Rust.* 3.12.4), Varro cites the same passage from Archelaus on the superfetation of rabbits in Pliny's work that is addressed above. The context is construction and development of rabbit warrens. According to Appius, Varro's interlocutor, farmers would be wise to append domestic rabbit warrens (*leporaria*) to their villas wherever possible. With the construction of fences and walls, forest of an acre or two can be cordoned off for exclusive breeding and hunting of rabbits (stags and roes can be incorporated also, space permitting). According to Appius, Quintus Fulvius Lippinus created such a preserve near Tarquinii also incorporating sheep. In Transalpine Gaul, Titus Pompeius had so much land that he dedicated four square miles to an enclosure for raising

44 Both passages are cited from Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology*, 80. Healy relies in turn on R. C. A. Rottländer, 'The Pliny Translation Group of Germany', *Science in the Early Roman Empire: Pliny the Elder, his Sources and Influence* (ed. R. French and F. Greenaway; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1986) 14. The term Pliny uses for rabbit, *dasyypus* (*Nat.* 8.219; 10.179), is a Greek loanword (δάσυπος). As procurator in the province of Hispania Tarraconensis, Pliny also brought words over from Spanish (Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology*, 91). The word *laurex* ('rabbit') comes from the Balearic Islands.

45 Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology*, 81–2.

46 *Naturalis historia* < Lat. *naturalis*, Gk. ἱστορία (Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology*, 83). Horace recommended Latinising Greek words: *Ars* 48–72.

47 He did also, however, invent a number of neologisms including many ending in *-mentum* such as *duramentum* ('hardening', *Nat.* 17.208), *incantamentum* ('charm', 28.10), *nucamentum* (pl.) ('fir cones', 16.49) and *piamentum* ('a means of expiation', 25.30, 107). See Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology*, 95–7.

rabbits and other animals. Appius recommends building high walls around the enclosure to keep out weasels, badgers and foxes. Trees and other brush are necessary to protect the bunnies from eagles.

In book 2, Varro provides a methodological overview of his agricultural treatise. The sequence, he says, of topics to be addressed for each animal – geese, ducks, snails, mice etc. – will be: pasturage, breeding, feeding (e.g. often how they are best fattened up) and issues of overall health.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, after Appius reports on rabbit pasturage, he turns to the subject of fecundity:

Who does not know that if he puts in a few hares, male and female, in a short time the place will be filled? Such is the fecundity of this animal. For place only four in a warren and it is usually filled in a short time; for often, while they have a young litter they are found to have others in the womb. (*Rust.* 3.12.4)<sup>49</sup>

Following this statement, Appius cites Archelaus. The citation is intended to bolster Appius' argument for the establishment of rabbit warrens. Although he usually discusses the age of an animal under the topic of pasturage<sup>50</sup> (since animals should not be purchased if they cannot breed effectively due to age)<sup>51</sup> in the case of rabbits, age arises in the context of breeding:

And so Archelaus writes of them that one who wishes to know how many years should examine the *foramina naturae*, for undoubtedly one has more than another.<sup>52</sup>

Having concluded the section on breeding, Appius offers a comment on feeding. Once your rabbit warren has achieved multiple rabbit litters, some kits can be fattened:

There is a recent practice of fattening these, too, by taking them from the warren and shutting them up in hutches and fattening them in an enclosed space.<sup>53</sup>

48 *alterae partes quattuor sunt, cum iam emeris, observandae, de pastione, de fetura, de nutritu, de sanitate* (*Rust.* 2.16).

49 *quis item nescit, paucos si lepores, mares ac feminas, intromiserit, brevi tempore fore ut impleatur? tanta fecunditas huius quadripedis. quattuor modo enim intromisit in leporarium, brevi solet repleti. etenim saepe, cum habent catulos recentes, alios in ventre habere reperiuntur.*

50 *Rust.* 1.20; cf. 2.13–14.

51 For example, if lambs are too young their babies are weak and parturition weakens the lamb.

52 *itaque de iis Archelaus scribit, annorum quot sit qui velit scire, inspicere oportere foramina naturae, quod sine dubio alius alio habet plura* (*Rust.* 3.12).

53 *hos quoque nuper institutum ut saginarent plerumque, cum exceptos e leporario condant in caveis et loco clauso faciant pingues* (*Rust.* 3.12). Pliny, *Nat.* 11.85 states that hares do not grow fat, and 28.81 that deaf hares fatten more quickly.



### 3.2.6 *Synoptic Comparison of Varro and Pliny*

While Varro's and Pliny's citations of Archelaus share significant similarities, a synoptic presentation highlights three important differences:

<b>Pliny:</b>	Archelaus auctor est quot sint  corporis cavernae ad excrementa lepori totidem annos esse aetatis: varius certe numerus reperitur.	<b>Varro:</b>	Archelaus scribit, annorum quot sit qui velit scire, inspicere oportere foramina naturae,  quod sine dubio alius alio habet plura. <sup>54</sup>
	idem utramque vim singulis inesse ac sine mare aequae gignere. <sup>55</sup>		

First, although both authors cite Archelaus, Pliny preserves two traditions: (1) rabbit *cavernae* as equal to age (literally 'years' or perhaps 'cycles') and (2) rabbit hermaphroditism. Varro preserves only one tradition: Nature's *foramina* as indicative of age. Varro may even explicitly deny the second tradition when he specifies that *both* a female and male rabbit are required for reproduction.

Second, the two writers use different expressions to refer to the object that is being counted. Pliny uses *cavernae* ('hollows' or 'caves', i.e. indentations not holes). Varro refers to *foramina* ('holes').

Third, Pliny emphasises counting and observing variation among rabbits, whereas Varro explains that some rabbits have more than other rabbits.

### 3.2.7 *Pliny's Use of foramen*

Although it is possible that Pliny translates Archelaus from Greek into Latin, it is more likely that he relies on Varro. In this case, he changes *foramina* to *cavernae*. Examining occurrences of these two words across *Natural History*, we see that in all but one instance Pliny uses *foramen* to refer to holes in a human or animal body, such as ears and nostrils.<sup>56</sup> In book 11 with reference to cicadas, Pliny

54 'And so Archelaus writes of them that one who wishes to know how old they are should examine the natural openings, for undoubtedly one has more than another'.

55 'Archelaus states that a hare is as many years old as it has folds in the bowel: these are certainly found to vary in number. The same authority says that the hare is a hermaphrodite and reproduces equally well without a male'.

56 Of fifteen occurrences of *foramen* in the *Natural History*, eight (54%) refer to the presence or absence of holes in a human or animal body: cicada without opening for excretion, 11.32; tribe without noses or mouths having one hole to breathe and suck, 6.35; ear-replacement holes, 1.11 (table of contents); aperture for smelling birds, snakes and fish, 11.59; avoidance of

uses *foramen* together with *corpus* and the prepositional phrase *ad excrementa*.<sup>57</sup> This insect, he says, lives on liquid as proven by the fact that it sweats (or possibly vomits, *reddunt*) only liquid (*umor*) and possesses no aperture of excretion:

excitatae cum subvolant, umorem reddunt, quod solum argumentum<sup>58</sup> est rore eas ali; isdem solis nullum ad excrementa corporis foramen. (*Nat.* 11.32)

When they are disturbed and fly away, they give out moisture, which is the only proof that they live on dew; moreover they are the only creatures that have no aperture for the bodily excreta.

If Pliny's observation first strikes us as false, modern research demonstrates that the fungus *Massospora cicadina* infects a large percentage of cicadas causing their abdomens to split – literally exploding their back ends off their bodies. The burst does not kill them: they continue to fly around as usual. Pliny's statement implies that he observed or relied on a source attesting an infected cicada post-explosion.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2.8 Pliny's Use of *caverna*

Alternatively, Pliny uses *caverna* with three primary meanings: (1) human or animal abodes; (2) bodily orifices; and (3) cavities bored in soil or elsewhere.<sup>60</sup>

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inhalation when burning lead for a medical purpose, 34.50; nomads of India with holes in place of nostrils, 7.2; holes in vertebrae for spinal cord, 11.67; and absence of ears in fish, 10.89. Three occurrences refer to holes in pipe-like instruments: holes in flute, flute-reed and pipe-reed, 16.66 (2x); holes of 'making music' in a marsh reed, 10.44. Two occurrences refer to the boring work of insects: ant hole (to stop up and kill), 19.58; beetles boring holes in hearths at night, 11.34. Two further occurrences refer to artificial holes drilled by humans for some purpose: small hole for air in tall vessel for making butter, 28.35; nard poured in holes to help timber resist decay, 16.79.

<sup>57</sup> *Foramen* refers to ears and nostrils in *Nat.* 11.59; nostrils, 34.50; holes in place of nostrils, 7.2; vertebral holes, 11.67; holes in reed pipe, 10.43 (cf. Servius, *Comm. Aen.* 9.16); absence of ear holes in fish, 10.89.

<sup>58</sup> *solum argumentum* should probably be *solidum argumentum*, i.e. 'strong indication that they live on dew'. I wish to credit Henk Jan de Jonge for this observation.

<sup>59</sup> Contrast the use of *foramen* for the cleft in a rock in the Vulgate – potentially confusing for Barnabas.

<sup>60</sup> Of thirty-five total occurrences of *caverna* in *Naturalis History*, twenty-four refer to a human or animal abode: sea snake, 9.43; jackdaw (stores seeds), 17.22; cricket (home in dirt), 30.32; locust (nest location), 9.74; fox (cave), 11.70; cricket, 29.39; animals hunted by deer, 28.42; hornets (nest location), 11.24 (2x); spider, 11.28; land scorpion, 11.30; gold-digger ants, 11.36; flying maggots, 11.39; weasel, 8.33; squirrel, 8.58; land-dwelling fish (Babylon), 9.83 (2x); woodpecker, 10.20; ant, 28.23; snake, 8.50, 22.46; cave (earthquake), 2.82; Aristotle says pygmies live in caves, 7.2; and mice, 22.32. Six occurrences refer to bodily orifices: owl apertures for hearing, 11.50; hollowed out tooth (causing ache), 22.49; seal, dolphin, viper

Since a majority (69%) of the occurrences refer to animal homes, we turn to these references first.

The context of Pliny's discussion is a mouse habitat. Similar to his passage on rabbits, he discusses the best means of capture. For mice, he advises inserting asphodel root into their hole: *mures eadem fugantur, caverna praeclusa moriuntur* ('the root keeps away mice, which also die if their holes are closed up with it', *Nat.* 22.32).<sup>61</sup> If, in Pliny's passage on rabbits, *corpus* can (metonymically) imply animal colony as opposed to animal flesh,<sup>62</sup> then this evidence on the mouse hole could suggest that, in his passage about rabbits, Pliny uses *caverna* to refer to a rabbit warren. In this case, *ad excrementa* could signal Pliny's (or Archelaus') recognition (accurate) either: (1) that rabbits defecate in their holes and thus, cyclically, dig new ones, or (2) that rabbits give birth in holes, digging a new hole for each new litter. If option 2 were possible then the passage would be coherent: unlike calculating a rabbit's age based on bodily holes for excretion, annual proliferation of warren entrances for each new litter of kits is consistent with Varro's and Pliny's discussion of fecundity.<sup>63</sup> If Varro understood Archelaus as referring to warrens – perhaps Archelaus used a general expression such as τρύπη that is open to more than one translation<sup>64</sup> – then Varro's expression 'foramen of nature'<sup>65</sup> would not denote a hole in the animal, but a hole in the ground.<sup>66</sup> Such an interpretation conforms to Varro's *mise en scène*, namely farmers discussing the benefits of warrens (i.e. how to approximate total warren occupancy of burrow-dwelling animals). Moreover, in the discussion of fattening rabbits (*Rust.* 3.12), Varro contrasts *foramina naturae* with a man-made *cavi*,

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ear aperture for hearing, 11.50; and three occurrences are of a subset 'anus': rabbit, 8.55; hyena, 28.27; lizard, 30.15. Five refer to other cavities, such as those in soil: oak-apples in hollow of a tree, 16.9; in pot to aerate plant during transportation, 12.7; in ground for seed, 19.26; for dung if sowing parsley, 19.36; and hiding place out of sunlight for poultice rag from sunlight, 28.11. Since some animals burrow homes in the ground, overlap may exist between categories (1) and (3).

61 Trans. Jones, LCL, with minor modifications.

62 Lewis and Short, s.v. *corpus* II.

63 'Burrows range in complexity from simple, short tubes to elaborate networks of connected chambers and tunnels' ([www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/burrow/](http://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/burrow/), accessed on 25 June 2017).

64 Cf. LSJ s.v. ὀρύσσω A.III, Aristotle used to describe the underground burrowing of moles.

65 Pliny describes Nature's generosity in making something so delicious as rabbit fetuses so plentiful (i.e. through superfetation).

66 '*Natura* was a widespread euphemism for the sexual parts of either sex. It was neither overtly technical nor vulgar, but generally acceptable in the educated language' (J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth/Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) 59–60). *Foramen* is, however, not attested with sexual meaning and Varro uses neither word with a sexual connotation in the *Res rusticae*.

where rabbits are placed to be fattened up and sold: *cum exceptos e leporario condant in caveis et loco clauso faciunt pingues*.<sup>67</sup> Both *foramina* and *cavi* are used for the breeding and raising of domestic rabbits, but whereas *foramen* denotes a pen or warren, *cavus* indicates a hutch.

Elsewhere Pliny uses *caverna* to refer to one of two enlarged scales beneath the male lizard's tail (*sub cauda unam cavernam*). Here the expression refers to either of two enlarged plates (either single or divided) *posterior* to the anus or cloacal region visible on adult male lizards. These are not holes or indentations, but enlarged scales – cosmetic features of the male lizard.<sup>68</sup> For the present argument, it is important that, in this case, *caverna* indicates an anatomical feature possibly related, but not identical, to an anus and indicative of the male of the species.

In terms of bodily orifices, in addition to ears, Pliny also uses *caverna* to refer to the lowest quadrant of a hyena's rectum. Worn around the neck as an amulet, he reports that it caused women to be attracted to men. Like the auditory canal (i.e. external acoustic meatus), here *caverna* connotes the opening to a constricted space (i.e. anus). Since an opening *qua* opening cannot be worn, question remains as to what was strung around the neck. The female hyena possesses an enlarged clitoris or pseudopenis capable of erection.<sup>69</sup> Through it she urinates, has sexual intercourse, and gives birth. This trait gave rise to the legend that hyenas are hermaphroditic (*Nat.* 8.44, 81).<sup>70</sup> A desiccated pseudopenis could be used as an amulet.

67 The word for rabbit lairs or dens is *leporarium* (domestic breeding place for rabbits) or *cuniculum* (tunnel) (purportedly related to *cuniculus*, 'coney', another name for rabbits. *Vivarium* sometimes replaces *leporarium*, but Varro is clear that this expression is no longer used only for rabbits only, but may refer to the domestic breeding and dwelling location of other animals as well.

68 If these enlarged scales were at one time more than cosmetic features, I have not been able to figure out what their function was.

69 Pliny writes: 'The hyena is popularly believed to be bi-sexual and to become male and female in alternate years, the female bearing offspring without a male; but this is denied by Aristotle. Its neck stretches right along the backbone like a mane, and cannot bend without the whole body turning round. A number of other remarkable facts about it are reported, but the most remarkable are that among the shepherds' homesteads it simulates human speech, and picks up the name of one of them so as to call him to come out of doors and tear him in pieces, and also that it imitates a person being sick, to attract the dogs so that it may attack them; that this animal alone digs up graves in search of corpses; that a female is seldom caught; that its eyes have a thousand variations and alterations of colour; moreover that when its shadow falls on dogs they are struck dumb; and that it has certain magic arts by which it causes every animal at which it gazes three times to stand rooted to the spot' (*Nat.* 8.44).

70 The genitals of the female hyena have a strongly male appearance that can be erected at will. To mate, the male has to insert his penis into her pseudopenis. The pseudopenis is thus a protuberance disguising an opening.

Scientific literature uses *caverna* to refer to a variety of body parts.<sup>71</sup> The metaphor of a cave was not uncommon for the rectum. In a significant majority of references to the anus, Pliny uses either *sedes* ('anus')<sup>72</sup> or *condyloma* ('swelling of the anus').<sup>73</sup> When refuting the claim that hyenas are hermaphroditic (i.e. androgynous), Aristotle refers to the reproductive organs of both genders with the ambiguous term αἰδοῖον ('private parts').<sup>74</sup> It is often translated in Latin as *pudenda*, which Pliny reserves for referring to testicles. Unless Pliny relies on an unknown Latin source for this technical term denoting a hermaphroditic anus, *cavernae* may imitate Aristotelian usage – comparable to 'private parts' and denoting the ambiguous nature of this animal's genitalia.<sup>75</sup>

As noted, Pliny preserves Archelaus' characterisation of the rabbit as a hermaphrodite. Albeit based on superfetation (rabbit) not an enlarged clitoris (hyena), *caverna* with reference to genitalia is the same for both animals.<sup>76</sup> Pliny's translation may even take into account how a hermaphrodite gives birth if *ad excrementa* – widely attested with reference to *any* bodily emission – can be extended to include a litter in the case of hermaphrodites, which technically speaking neither conceive nor give birth.<sup>77</sup>

71 Adams comments, 'The identification of the *cunnus* (or rectum) with a cave is an obvious enough image' (*The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 85); cf. *specus*. Virgil uses *caverna* for 'womb': *insonuere cauae gemitumque dedere cavernae* (*Aen.* 2.54). 'Caverna (of various bodily parts, including that here) achieved some currency in scientific prose' (*The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 85). See also R. J. Penella, 'A Note on (*De*)glubere', *Hermes* 104 (1976) 118–20; *TLL* III.646.41.

72 *Sedes* implies *ad excrementa* and, thus, is not accompanied by this prepositional phrase.

73 Greek and Latin references to body parts, sex organs in particular, are ample, descriptive and often euphemistic. Greek: see J. Henderson, *The Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (Oxford/New York/Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992<sup>2</sup>); Latin: Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*.

74 *Hist. an.* 6.35.

75 Latin tended to borrow directly from Greek on the topic of homosexuality.

76 Aesop uses τρώγλη (or *specus*) to refer to a hole formed by gnawing, i.e. mouse hole or serpent hole), and κατάδυσσις to refer to an underground habitat such as a burrow. Archelaus' word for *caverna* may have been ἀντροῦδος or a related τρωδ-stem noun. It is difficult to say why Pliny avoids *specus* ('cave', 'cavity', 'cavern', 'chasm', even 'canal', 'drain' – natural or artificial). He uses it to refer to the nest or caves of spiders and some animals, although often when applied to the body it refers to the stomach. In Phaedr. 4.6.10, *specus* (pit denoting the weasel's belly) contrasts with *cavus* (the safe mouse home or hole) in 4.6.3.

77 *Excrementum* can refer to any bodily excretion. Columella states: 'Also at the time when the hens cease to lay, that is, from the 13th of November, the more expensive food must be withheld and grape-husks be supplied, which form quite a suitable diet, if refuse (*excrementa*) from wheat is added from time to time' (*Rust.* 8.5). Furthermore, *excrementum* (< *exresco*) refers to a growth or protuberance as for example observable of vertebrae (see Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 1.2.3). Although Pliny may use *excrementum* to refer to animal faeces, his word of choice to denote this meaning is *fimus*. In e.g. 30.39, *fimus* denotes faeces four times (sheep, ewe, mouse, weasel), juxtaposed with *excrementa* (three times) denoting an

It remains to solve the question of what Pliny means by saying that the *cavernae* of the rabbit's body accrue annually indicating its age. According to modern veterinary science, the weight of a rabbit's eye lens predicts its age if it is younger than a year.<sup>78</sup> Certain skull characteristics in young rabbits (under 170 days) and growth lines in the lower jawbones of adult hares and rabbits can also situate these animals in broad age categories. However, these metrics must be obtained from dead specimens, whereas Varro's and Pliny's contexts involve living ones.

Thus far, we have assumed, perhaps correctly, that by *annus* Pliny refers to a 'year'. It can, however, indicate a cycle – such as a season or phase of life.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the referent of *numerus* in the phrase *totidem annos esse aetatis: varius certe numerus reperitur* is not specified.<sup>80</sup> Pliny may wish to communicate that by palpating the hermaphroditic 'private parts' (*qua* womb)<sup>81</sup> of a rabbit during a late phase of pregnancy the number of kits in its litter (usually between one and four) can be predicted. This is advice that – unlike that about a rabbit's age – clearly relates to the *topos* of fecundity and may also reflect astral biological assumptions of the type discussed by Plutarch.<sup>82</sup> This reading admittedly presses hard against the plain senses of the words and phrase, but some level of compromise is necessary given the farcicality of the plain reading.

Summing up, Archelaus preserved two traditions about rabbits. The first most likely conveyed that warren occupancy can be estimated from the number of surface entrances to a burrow ('holes'). Varro adopts this tradition. The second explains lagomorphic fecundity by hermaphroditism. Varro corrects this tradition, specifying that both male and female rabbits are required for breeding. Pliny borrows both traditions, modifying (or misunderstanding) the former based on

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unhealthy growth or tumour that the *firmus* purportedly heals. Belly excrescence aptly characterises the pregnant state in many animals: see, however, Cael. Aurel. *Acut.* 1.114 *excrementa uentris* (*Graeci scybala dicent*). See Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 234–9: 'The derivative *excrementum* is used from Pliny the Elder onwards, of any type of bodily secretion (e.g. at Tac. *Hist.* 4.81, *Ann.* 16.4, of the mouth and nose) (242). Novatian might suggest this interpretation by comparing the rabbit and the hyena (*De cib. jud.* 3.16–17). See Windisch, *Barnabasbrief*, 360.

78 Among arctic hares, this metric can be applied at any age.

79 Lewis and Short, s.v. *annus*.

80 Barn. 10.6 justifies the rejection of rabbits by way of a priestly explanation of their behaviour in relation to the moon. See Jiménez, 'Plutarch's Attitude towards Astral Biology', 162. Thirty-day gestation corresponds to the lunar cycle (hence the 'madness' allegation). Greeks and Romans connected the rabbit to Selene and Artemis/Diana, the moon goddess, a protector of vulnerable animals, as well as the love goddess, Aphrodite/Venus, for its fertility. Aphrodite's son, Eros (Cupid) is often depicted carrying a hare.

81 See Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 103–4.

82 *Annus* and *aetas* can be synonymous indicating a 'phase' or 'period' of time. It is also possible that Pliny reflects a double entendre in which the womb is like a lair.

the latter and thus interpreting what were originally burrow openings as the ‘private parts’ of a hermaphrodite.

### 3.2.9 *Barn. 10.6*

It is impossible to know whether Barnabas relied on Archelaus or Varro directly or through Pliny for his information. Intermediate texts and collections (i.e. Jewish) beyond those mentioned are also possible. That said, on the following four points, Barnabas’ version appears to know a stream of tradition closer to Pliny than Varro.

- (1) The fact that Varro passes over the hermaphroditic tradition and Pliny adopts it (for both hyenas and rabbits) suggests Barnabas’ reliance on Pliny or a tradition close to Pliny.<sup>83</sup>
- (2) Whereas Varro allows the context to dictate the subject, Pliny and Barnabas explicitly denote rabbits (*lepus*, λαγωός).
- (3) Ἀφόδευσις may derive from *ad excrementa*.<sup>84</sup> By this phrase Pliny may have indicated hermaphroditic parturition vis-à-vis the hyena. Nevertheless, Barnabas took it to indicate excrement. Varro does not mention an excretory function of the *foramina*.
- (4) Κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν πλεονεκτεῖ (*Barn. 10.6*), together with the exegetical phrase’s denotation of life (i.e. ὅσα γὰρ ἔτη ζῆ, τοσαύτως ἔχει τρύπας), resembles *quot sint corporis cavernae ... totidem annos esse aetatis* (Pliny) slightly better than *annorum quot sit* (Varro).

Barnabas’ interpretation of the hare as a παιδοφθόρος is not explained by either tradition. However, giving birth in dens may have given the impression that mother rabbits bury (i.e. kill) their young. Each day when a mother rabbit leaves the den she seals off the entrances to prevent predators from entering. When she returns to nurse the newborns, she reopens the entrance. To the

83 Pliny’s general interest in the incredible in nature resembles the Epistle of Barnabas and also lies not far from 1 Clement 25’s treatment of the phoenix. Pliny attributes rabbit licentiousness to its abundance of hair: ‘Shaggy hair grows out of a thick skin, whereas women have finer hair; horses have abundant hair in the mane, lions on the shoulders, rabbits on the cheeks inside and also under the feet, hair in both places being also recorded in the case of the hare by Trogus, who infers from this example that among human beings also the hairy ones are more licentious: the hare is the shaggiest animal there is’ (*Nat. 11.94*). On Pliny’s moralising tendency as a sign of the times see Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology*, 97–9. In the following passage Pliny moralises using the hare: ‘The view is held that dull creatures are those whose heart is stiff and hard, bold ones those whose heart is small, and cowardly ones those in which it is specially large; but it is largest in proportion to their size in mice, the hare, the ass, the stag, the leopard, weasels, hyenas, and all the species that are either timid or rendered dangerous by fear’ (*Nat. 11.70*).

84 Henderson refers to ἄφοδος as ‘more euphemistic’ in terms of scatological humour (*Maculate Muse*, 192); and τὸ ἀφόδιον (‘excrement’) suggests anal intercourse (*Maculate Muse*, 194).



outside observer, this too gives the impression that she is burying her kits alive. This tradition is attested in the Middle Ages.<sup>85</sup> What Barnabas had in mind by qualifying rabbits as ‘child-slayers’ goes beyond the scope of this essay although it should be mentioned that ἀφόδευσις and τρύπημα are both attested as sexual slang (‘anal sex’ and ‘cunt’ respectively).<sup>86</sup> As noted above, Barnabas’ usage may be influenced by subsequent moral castigations in 10.7, 8. Nevertheless, Clement of Alexandria’s view that παιδοφθόρος refers to pederasty should not limit the investigation of alternatives.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.2.10 Rabbits in Egypt

Finally, if, as many presume, Barnabas’ context is Egyptian, interest in the taxonomic order Lagomorpha may have a few additional implications. The Egyptian word for rabbit (*un*) means ‘opening’ or ‘the opener’, indicating that hares are born with their eyes open.<sup>88</sup> This word also refers to a woman’s menstrual cycle. As ‘openers’ hares symbolise both life and afterlife. The goddess Wenet/Wenut (transliteration is usually *wnw.t*) is a minor regional deity about whom not much is known. She is associated with the 15th Upper Egyptian nome – literally the Hare Nome.<sup>89</sup> The root of the word ‘hare’ is *wn*. Because of this, the consonant group *wn* is written with a hare- or rabbit-shaped hieroglyph in unrelated words as well. In Wenut’s name the first sign is the *wn*-bunny followed by some phonetic complements plus the feminine ending plus the snake determinative signalling that she is a goddess. One of the verbs meaning ‘to open’ in Egyptian is also *wn*. It is probably unrelated to *wn* (‘hare’) and presumably the two words were vocalised differently, but it is written with the *wn*-bunny as well.<sup>90</sup>

It is unclear whether Wenut was originally conceived of as a hare-headed goddess. Whether her name was originally meant to signify ‘hare’ or ‘opener’ or

85 John Philoponus, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium* (14.3, p. 138.30), refers to the fact that hares are bad because they reject their offspring as soon as they have given birth. In this sense, a hare or rabbit could perhaps literally be considered a ‘child-destroyer’.

86 Henderson, *Maculate Muse*, 192 and 142 respectively.

87 Clement’s interpretation may correspond to Barn. 19.4 (cf. T. Levi 17.11), which mentions ‘child-slaying’ in the immediate context of sexual immorality: οὐ πορνεύσεις, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις. οὐ μὴ σου ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξέλθῃ ἐν ἀκαθαρσίᾳ τινῶν. οὐ λήμψῃ πρόσωπον ἐλέγξαι τινὰ ἐπὶ παραπτώματι. ἔση πραῦς, ἔση ἡσύχιος, ἔση τρέμων τοῦς λόγους οὕς ἤκουσας, οὐ μὴ μνησικακήσεις τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου. Although it may have given rise to Clement of Alexandria’s interpretation, Barnabas 18–20 is, on most arguments, a later addition. See Kraft, *Didache and Barnabas*, 134–6. I wish to express my gratitude to Clayton Jefford for this suggestion.

88 Rabbits are born blind and hairless (i.e. altricial). Hares are born with hair and good vision (i.e. precocial).

89 It is unclear which came first – the goddess or the nome. Thoth is the primary deity of this nome not Wen.

90 I wish to express my gratitude to Kate Elise Lockhart for the information in this section.

something about 'existence' (the verb, 'to exist', is also *wn* written with the same sign) is likewise uncertain. However, it may not really matter because the Egyptians loved their puns, especially in religious contexts. It is very common for hymns and temple inscriptions to tie together phonetically and/or orthographically similar words in significant ways. I am not aware of any Coptic text about Wenut, and would be surprised if there were any, since as a deity she is minor and localised, but it is possible that one might find a name containing a form of Wenut in Coptic or in Greek texts from the Hermopolis area.<sup>91</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The Epistle of Barnabas (10.6) alludes to a tradition attested in Pliny and Varro of the rabbit's cyclical acquisition of a hole. Commentators allow Clement of Alexandria's interpretation of Barnabas' moralisation of this tradition as pederasty to guide understanding of this passage.<sup>92</sup> Varro and Pliny cite Archelaus as their source. Archelaus probably discussed rabbit superfetation together with its widespread hermaphroditic explanation. Varro adopted the information about superfetation, but rejected hare hermaphroditism. Pliny accepted both traditions with modifications. A dearth of Latin agricultural terminology, a plethora of Latin sexual vocabulary and the conundrum of the hermaphroditic anatomy frustrate a clear solution. If Barnabas' context is Egyptian, his interpretation may be further complicated by a connection to Ut-Wenet, the goddess of 'openings'.

A few overarching observations may be drawn from this study. First, texts of the ancient natural historians are extremely difficult to translate with security. Second, scholars have a tendency to allow the sexiest (often homosexual) interpretations of the most opinionated authors to guide the understanding of a wide variety of texts, to the peril of sound historical interpretation. Third, it remains an open question what Barnabas imagines that possessing multiple

91 There is likewise probably no attested writing of her name in Coptic. Coptic texts mentioning traditional Egyptian deities tend to use Greek names (e.g. Shenoute complains about people worshipping Pan rather than Min). Pagan gods tend to keep their Egyptian forms in their theophoric names.

92 Later the hare's connotation in Christian theology reverses. See I. Dines, 'The Hare and its Alter Ego in the Middle Ages', *Reinardus* 17 (2004) 73–84. In this article, among other arguments, Dines points to an iconographic image from the Douce 88(1) Bestiary of an antelope arriving at the Euphrates and becoming entangled in a thicket – thus threatened by hunters. Meanwhile a rabbit sits safely in a cave at the bottom right corner of the image, safe from harm. The inscription reads: *cave ergo, homo dei, ebrietatem, ne oblikeris luxuriae et voluptati, et interficiaris a diabolo: vinum enim et mulieres apostatare faciunt homines a deo*. Dines notes his temptation to read the warning *cave* ('take heed') as a pun with *cavus* ('cave') ('The Hare and its Alter Ego in the Middle Ages', 83–4).

holes has to do with destroying children. Finally, Clement of Alexandria's opinions on hares may constitute an outlier. Other ancient sources are resoundingly positive. In the *redactio secunda* (Physiologus), the hare is an example for Christians to follow in its tendency to run uphill to avoid hunters (cf. Aelian, *Nat. an.* 13.14). It is entirely within the realm of possibility that the original Epistle of Barnabas intended something different from what later redactions of the letter, Clement and later Christian writers assume.