a

Feminist Companion

to

Exodus to Deuteronomy

edited by Athalya Brenner

The Feminist Companion to the Bible

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Athalya Brenner

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To the memory of

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*
AOS	American Oriental Series
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
Bib	*Biblica*
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BN	Biblische Notizen
BR	Bible Review
BZAW	Beihefte zur ZAW
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CTM	*Concordia Theological Monthly*
EvTh	Evangelische Theologie
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.E. Cowley
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IDB	G.A. Buttrick (ed.), *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup	*IDB*, Supplementary Volume
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
Int	*Interpretation*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supplement Series

KB	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OrAnt	*Oriens antiquus*
OTL	Old Testament Library
SB	Sources bibliques
SBLSP	Society for Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
UT	C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*
VT	*Vetus Testamentun*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

INTRODUCTION

Athalya Brenner

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy include variations on the multi-dimensional theme of *passage*: a passage through painful transformation from loosely-defined population into ethnicity; a passage from a 'religion of the fathers' (Genesis) to a communal covenant-bound, legally grounded, exclusive monotheism; a passage through the axis of space, from one country (Egypt) to the threshold of another (Canaan); a passage through the axis of time, represented by the typological forty years in the (mythic) wilderness; a passage from disorganization and confusion into institutionalization. The horizontal and vertical transitory passages these four biblical books contain are quite often parallel or analogous. Therefore—disparities of provenance and genre, ideologies, historicity, authorship, chronology, dating and textual criticism notwithstanding—the books can hardly be read in isolation from each other. Hence the inclusion of works pertaining to all four in a single volume of *A Feminist Companion to the Bible.*

The myth which is central to Exodus through to Deuteronomy is an inauguration myth—the inauguration of communal identity, leadership, and specific collective relationship with the divine. The typologies that inform this myth are androcentric, in keeping with the biblical mainstream in general. However, these androcentric typologies are often belied by phenomenologies of woman. Are these phenomenologies to be classified as muted, albeit conspicuous, undercurrents of gynocentrism? Or, on the contrary, are they to be read as if underlined by prevalent patriarchal norms? How is women's portion of the liberation-cum-inauguration myth portrayed? Part of our task here will be

to consider the *motivation* for depictions of women in Exodus to Deuteronomy within the relatively few texts in which they feature. The other part will be to evaluate the *readings* of such texts by contemporary feminist interpreters, since such a body of feminist readings is now available and growing rapidly.

Part I: Daughters

Ilona Rashkow shows in her article, 'Daughters and Fathers in Genesis...Or, What is Wrong with This Picture?', that a textual figure of the *daughter* as subject is almost obliterated from Genesis and, by and large, from the Bible as a whole. A surprising state of affairs, since Genesis—and the rest of the Bible—is preoccupied with family structures and progeny. Her inquiry, which is grounded in psychoanalysis, reveals how the daughter figure is 'repeatedly subjected to erasure, exclusion and transformation'. The daughter–father relationship is suppressed (and, one should add, so is the daughter–mother relationship).[1] This suppression, according to Rashkow, serves the father's interests while ignoring those of the textual daughters.

But the textual situation with regard to daughters changes in Exodus, which begins (chs. 1–2) with a focus on women. In '"You Shall Let Every Daughter Live": A Study of Exodus 1.8–2.10', Cheryl Exum examines the depiction of women in the stories pertaining to Moses' birth. Four groups of women, or individual women, join in the efforts to defy Pharaoh's designs of decimating the Hebrew sons: the midwives, Moses' mothers, his sister and Pharaoh's daughter. The last three are defined by the text as 'daughters'—ironically, those same daughters whom Pharaoh, in his witless miscalculation, has thought to spare. The women are life-giving, wise and resourceful. Their struggle on behalf of the son/sons is presented as the inception of national liberation.

In her contribution, 'But if she be a Daughter...She May Live! "Daughters" and "Sons" in Exodus 1–2', Jopie Siebert-Hommes

1. Unless we exclude Prov. 31.10-31. For the possibility of reading that passage as a mother's instruction to daughter, cf. A. Brenner in A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden Brill. 1993). pp. 127-39.

builds upon Exum's reasoning and expands it. Siebert-Hommes shows how, in the first two chapters of Exodus, *twelve* women are mentioned: the two midwives; 'the daughter of Levi' who is Moses' mother; her daughter, Moses' sister; Pharaoh's daughter; and the seven daughters of Jethro/Reuel. The women's number matches the number of Jacob/Israel's sons (tribes). In her opinion, this numerical correspondence between 'daughters' and 'sons' reflects an authorial/editorial thematic approach. It tells us that the saved 'sons' could not have survived that important juncture of the Israelite [hi]story without the support of the 'daughters'—that integration of female and male efforts is the prerequisite for community survival.

So 'What is Wrong with This Picture' (Ilona Rashkow's subtitle)? According to Cheryl Exum, a re-reading of Exodus 1–2 and other texts shows that the daughters' portrayal is far from gynocentric. 'Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10' is a self-response to Exum's first article as well as a response to Siebert-Hommes's. The women mentioned in this text are defined as daughters, wives and mothers. They are confined to the traditional roles allocated to women in patriarchy. The ideology is androcentric; it perpetuates male interests and exploits females by enlisting women's complicity through the rationale that female nurturing capacities are indispensible to individuals, society and nation. Beyond the initial (private/ personal/domestic/reproductive) stage, beyond Exodus 4, daughters and women in general disappear from the fictive historical stage; it remains for male figurations to effect the actual liberation of the people. Even Moses' sister Miriam is finally and securely deposited into a submissive, male-dictated role (see below, Part III). Gender politics position daughters at the centre of the stage only to whisk them off again at once in order to make place for the 'real' figures of *his*tory—the Fathers, in Rashkow's terminology.

The daughters return in Numbers 27 and 36. Zelophehad's five daughters raise the question of the transference of paternity rights to female offspring. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld[2] lists

2. K. Doob Sakenfeld, 'Feminist Biblical Interpretation', *Theology Today* 20 (1989), pp. 154-68.

three possible feminist interpretations of the daughters' story—gynocentric,[3] androcentric[4] and socio-historical.[5] She concludes that she accepts all three as simultaneously valid. In 'The Will of the Daughters', Ankie Sterring incorporates all three perspectives into her own analysis of the Daughters' story. She analyses the narrative in its genealogical context. Zelophehad's daughters (Num. 27) refer to Korah's assembly (Num. 16) in order to dissociate themselves from the latter as a matter of strategy, in order that their request is not comprehended as rebellion. Their strategy yields divine legitimation for their request. However, the second part of the story (ch. 36) introduces verbose androcentric objections. In this part of the daughters' story the patriarchal laws of lineage, succession and inheritance triumph. Sterring notes that the story does not end there but in Josh. 17.1-7, when the daughters finally secure their inheritance. Their reappearance in Zelophehad's genealogy (1 Chron. 7.14-19) and a rereading of the blessing to Joseph in Genesis 49 direct Sterring to her conclusion: The story can serve as a source of inspiration for women, albeit with a patriarchal sting. An Appendix from *The Woman's Bible* (1895) concerning female and male inheritance is attached to the article.

Part II: Social Status and Female Sexuality

Biblical women are mostly relational figures. Their positions as daughters, wives, mothers or widows determine their social and economic status and control their sexuality. The four articles

3. 'The story as a whole is a story of great celebration of women who inherit the promise, and of their own initiative in securing their future' ('Feminist Biblical Interpretation', p. 157).

4. 'The invisible daughters are little more than pawns in a potential land dispute... Decision-making is represented as Yahweh's, but is culturally attached to the male power figures of the community' ('Feminist Biblical Interpretation', p. 158).

5. Numbers 27 and 36 'offer the possibility of at least four insights into the place of women in Judean culture of the postexilic period' ('Feminist Biblical Interpretation', p. 159). They enable us to assess the following time- and space-bound factors: women's direct access to male authority, their limited option of property inheritance, the inheriting daughters' obligation to keep the property within the family circle, and marriage customs.

that deal with sexual violence, incest, the status of widows, and female blood discharge demonstrate afresh that biblical femaleness and female sexuality are andro-social assets. With the possible exception of widowhood, female sexuality and the social status it entails are not by and large properties regulated by the narrated women themselves. Hence, various aspects of female sexuality are subjects of legislation in a way that male sexuality seldom is.

Carolyn Pressler writes on 'Sexual Violence and Deuteronomic Law'. She finds that in Deuteronomic law, since female sexuality is the possession of a woman's husband or her father, sexual violence per se does not feature. If a woman does not own her sexuality, legally she cannot be violated sexually. Legally, then, the violation of women is a violation of male property rather than of women's own bodies. Thus read, the relevant Deuteronomic laws illuminate anew the biblical so-called 'rape' narratives, such as Genesis 34[6] and 2 Samuel 13. This reading also implies an incompatibility of the Deuteronomic laws with modern categories, which raises the question of the *language* to be used for the laws' interpretation and for uncovering the assumptions that underscore them.

Ilona Rashkow touches on the subject of incest in her article on daughter–father relationships. My 'On Incest' is an analysis of kin- and marital incest in biblical narrative as against juridical texts (and, to a lesser extent, in some prophetic texts). In the narratives incest—be it of a daughter–father, brother–sister or son–mother/father's wife class[7] is less problematized than other aspects of the sexual and social behaviour implied by an incestuous act. However, in the juridical texts (of P and D

6. Cf., e.g., a recent instalment in the ongoing discussion about this story—between Sternberg on the one hand, and Fewell and Gunn on the other hand. D.N. Fewell and D. Gunn, 'Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 193-212; and M. Sternberg, 'Biblical Poetics and Social Politics: From Reading to Counterreading', *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 463-88.

7. Curiously, daughter–father incest in the narrative texts (a category absent from the juridical texts) is presented as initiated by the *daughters*, in contradistinction to other narrative types of incest and to the juridical practice of addressing a *male* subject concerning incestuous relations with the forbidden *female*.

provenance) the formulations, listings and prescribed punishments demonstrate a deep interest in the phenomenon together with the revulsion it presumably generates. I appeal to psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology and social anthropology in order to explicate that seemingly paradoxical state of textual affairs.

Biblical incest interdictions appertain to sexual relations between blood kin *and* marital kin, which emphasizes the primarily social (rather than biological) concern underlying them. Are biblical widows actually included in this primary social concern? In 'Widows in the Hebrew Bible: A Transactional Approach', Frank Frick writes, 'It is common wisdom in comparative ethnology and sociology that kin-based societies characteristically offer a corporate safety net for widows and orphans'. Frick proceeds to examine widowhood as a dynamic process (rather than given factor) in women's life cycle by using modern ethnographic and anthropological studies. His rethinking of widowhood in the Bible, which focuses on *women's* status-related activities rather than their *male* relationality, highlights this facet of ancient Israelite sociology in a manner that more conventional complicity with the biblical text and its gender ideology could not attain.

Vaginal blood discharge must have held great fascination for the [male] authors of biblical as well as post-biblical literature. In 'Blood Discharge: On Female Im/Purity in the Priestly Code and in Biblical Narrative', Ilana Be'er shows how Priestly prescriptions which aspire to regulate menstruation and post-natal blood discharge are best understood in the wider context of im/purity laws.[8] The parallels with incest proscriptions are noticeable. Biblical narratives about both issues seem to differ from the juridical materials on numerous counts. The explicit addressee of juridical proscriptions is almost always a male.[9] Comparable androcentric and patriarchal concerns are much in evidence. Women's anatomy and natural body cycle are treated

8. The relevant Hebrew terms are טמא ('impure') and טהור ('pure'). As Be'er states, she prefers the pair purity/impurity to other renderings of the Hebrew, such as pollute, defile, contaminate, and derivatives thereof.

9. Although this is less so in cases of blood-discharging women than in cases of incest.

as a social property. In addition, the ensuing biologically-determined isolation of women serves male interests as much as, originally, it might have served women's own.

Part III: Miriam: On Being a Sister

Part I focuses on aspects of the social rank, position and life opportunities assigned or denied to biblical daughters. Part II deals with female sexuality and productive cycle, and their implications for a woman's being as a sexual and/or social affiliate (daughter, wife, mother, widow). Part III is addressed to the remaining first-degree blood kin position—that of sister—as emblematized by the figure of Miriam. This section of the volume is constructed as a dialogue in writing.[10]

Phyllis Trible is 'Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows' by piecing together this fragmentary and scattered, in her opinion, woman's story. She traces Miriam's disjointed and suppressed portrait in the Pentateuch: a daughter on the River, a prophetess and musician on the Reed Sea, a prophetess contesting Moses' (male) exclusive stature, her punishment and ensuing silence and death. Thus Miriam's presence, in spite of the patriarchal attempts of erasure, lives on in prophetic discourse: explicitly in Mic. 6.4, as a third member of the Wilderness leading trio, together with Moses and Aaron, and, implicitly, as a musician, in Jer. 31.4.

Gerald Janzen, in 'Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?', critiques Trible's and other feminists' attempts to rescue Miriam's story. Janzen suggests that...'the people's seeing, fearing Yahweh and believing do not follow simply upon the sea-crossing' (and Moses' song), 'but upon that event as celebrated in Miriam's song'. He therefore proposes that Miriam should be read as a Yahwistic liturgical–cultic leader, a helper (by analogy to Gen. 2.25) to Moses. The reading of the text as an analepsis enables Janzen to uphold Trible's conclusion regarding Miriam's leadership, while rejecting her hermeneutics of suspicion.

10. A recent piece on Miriam can be added to the list: cf. M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (JSOTSup, 158; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 196-216.

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes ('Some Recent Views on the Presentation of the Song of Miriam') addresses herself to the foregoing debate, as well as to Martin Brenner's view of the two poems—Moses' and Miriam's—as relatively late cult compositions.[11] She concludes by evaluating the role of the textual Miriam and her women companions as poets, performers, dancers and musicians—a role which, in Exodus 15, is perhaps subdued and suppressed but not altogether repressed.

In 'Miriam the Musician', Carol Meyers proceeds to analyse precisely this cultural facet—poetry, music, musicians, and gendered poetry/dance/music performance in biblical Israel and the ancient world. Her methodology is transdisciplinary and panchronistic. She draws on cross-cultural anthropology, musicology and the interpretation of material (archaeological) evidence. Thus for her, 'Miriam as musician is not an aberration but rather the visible—and audible—representative of her many invisible—and inaudible—sisters'.

Naomi Graetz asks, 'Did Miriam Talk Too Much?'. This deceptively simple question involves positing numerous other queries to Numbers 12, and to the rabbinic passages that are addressed to this biblical text. The midrashim she cites can be summarized as follows. Miriam is extolled when she adheres to a conventional sister/daughter/mother's helper function (as in Exod. 2); she is deprecated when she 'speaks' against Moses. Graetz concludes by examining contemporary rabbinic attitudes to women-who-dare-to-speak in the Bible and outside it, and makes some suggestions towards dealing with those attitudes.

Alice Bach closes this dialogue in writing by responding to all five articles about Miriam in 'With a Song in her Heart: Listening to Scholars Listening for Miriam'. Bach reflects on matters of methodology and ideology that inform the five contributors' positions. She agrees with Naomi Graetz's suggestion that one way of combatting Jewish midrash is to engage in writing conscious feminist midrash in addition to feminist critique. Therefore, and by way of conclusion, she offers a midrash of her own for Exod. 15.21.

In her new book, *Fragmented Women*, Cheryl Exum proposes

11. M.L. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea: Ex 15.1-21* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991).

'(Sub)versions of biblical narratives'.[12] Her subtitle implies a dual meaning. Feminist readings subvert, that is, undermine, the patriarchal disposition of Scripture. On the other hand, they are frequently regarded as sub-versions—secondary, alternative, optional, supplementary—like biblical women-in-the-text are; like women and femininity in the Hebrew language; like an unconscious midrash.

My short Afterword is addressed to the Decalogue (Exod. 20, Deut. 5). I hope that it raises the issue of women's sub-indexing within this code of social norms, thus subverting its much-admired 'universal' character by claiming that even the premises of that basic text are blatantly gendered. I think that no midrash—be it traditional, scholarly or feminist, or all three together—can mask the phallocentric attitude contained in it.

12. J.C. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup, 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1993).

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Part I

DAUGHTERS

DAUGHTERS AND FATHERS IN GENESIS... OR, WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?*

Ilona N. Rashkow

While it is not surprising that biblical narratives depict a definable family structure, what *is* surprising is that conspicuously absent is a figure lurking beneath the text, a figure repeatedly subjected to erasure, exclusion, and transformation. Genesis lacks daughters. Narrative after narrative describes the desire for male children, the lengths to which women would go to have sons,[1] the great joy surrounding the birth of a boy, and father–son relationships.[2] The birth of a daughter, on the other hand,

* An earlier version of this paper was read before the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. This paper also appears in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, edited by D.J.A. Clines and J.C. Exum. An expanded version of this paper is included as ch. 4 in *The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist–Psychoanalytic Approach* (Westminster/John Knox Press). I thank the editors for their permission to use this material.

1. So important were sons that barren women sometimes resorted to having children by their handmaids (Gen. 16.2; 30.3). For the use of concubines and handmaidens in this early period and the legitimacy of offspring from such unions, see L.J. Archer, 'The Virgin and the Harlot in the Writings of Formative Judaism', *History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Historians* 24 (1987), p. 4.

2. This is most obvious in the covenant between the deity and Abraham (Gen. 17.9-10), the implicit symbolism of circumcision powerful in its patriarchal reverberations. A son was regarded as a special blessing, more often than not the direct result of divine intervention in a couple's life. Eve, for example, the first to give birth (significantly, to a boy) triumphantly declares: 'I have gotten a man *with [the help of] the Lord*' (Gen. 4.1); Abraham, convinced of Sarah's sterility, is informed by God: 'And I will bless her, and moreover *I* will give you a son of her' (Gen. 17.15); similarly,

by no means creates such attention. As Archer notes, biblical genealogical tables 'indicate a startling disparity in the ratio of male:female births, a disparity which can in no way reflect a demographic reality'.[3] The tables do, however, reflect the attitude towards daughters. Inscribed within Genesis is something more than a general disregard of women: the *daughter* is specifically absent. Since the daughter's presence is normal and necessary to the biological realities of family, her narrative absence is significant and calls attention to itself. My conclusion is that beneath the surface father–son narration lies a suppressed daughter–father relationship.

Perhaps because I cannot help thinking that Genesis is more ambivalent than a narration of disinterested fathers, I read daughters in a more paradoxical way. Instead of measuring what the daughter may or may not materially contribute to the family, I consider what she threatens to subtract from it. The most obvious answer, of course, is that while yet within her father's house the daughter is the only member of the family who does not participate in extending the patronymic line. But that answer is too superficial. By aligning feminist analyses of Freud's rejection of the seduction theory with the suppressed daughter–father biblical construct, a subtext is uncovered: what makes the nearly absent daughter so central in this otherwise emphatically masculine epic is her potential to determine and expose a threat to the father's power and patriarchal rule.

Many biblical narratives describe a daughter's transgression against and departure from the closure of her father's house.[4] The text in effect becomes a code for what is subliminally the

in Gen. 30.21-24, 'God remembered Rachel and God hearkened to her and *opened her womb*. And she conceived and bore a son.' The passage ends with Rachel's plea for more sons: 'And she called his name Joseph, saying "The *Lord add to me* another son"'.

3. L.J. Archer, *Her Price is beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (JSOTSup, 60; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990). p. 18.

4. See, for example, Jephthah's daughter, whose departure from her father's house is viewed by Jephthah as a transgression against him (Judg. 11.35). Dinah 'goes out', is raped (Gen. 34.1-2), and is then narratively banished from the text (I.N. Rashkow, *Upon the Dark Places: Anti-Semitism and Sexism in English Renaissance Biblical Translation* [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990], pp. 98-100).

father's story of the sins of the daughter. Decoded, the accusations might read: *because* of the daughter's sin against the father, sons must henceforth leave their father's control ('This is why a man leaves his father' [Gen. 2.24]);[5] *because of* the daughter's disobedience, daughters likewise leave the protective enclosure and become maternal figures. Daughters are subsumed as mothers,[6] and the text 'reads itself through a chain-male linkage'.[7] These repeated biblical narratives of a daughter's 'transgression' seem to be prototypical of Freud's narrative of the 'catastrophe' that leaves 'the path to the development of femininity...open to the girl'.[8] Significantly, the 'catastrophe' Freud describes is father–daughter incest. If read from that perspective, the daughter can be seen as locked into a conflicted text of desire and sanction.

Lévi-Strauss's well-known analysis argues that the most significant rule governing any family structure is the ubiquitous existence of the incest taboo which imposes the social aim of exogamy and alliance upon the biological events of sex and procreation. Genesis nearly constitutes a meditation on the questions from where wives for the patriarchy should come, how closely they should be related to 'us', and how 'other' they should be.[9] Within the patriarchal sagas, Abraham twice

5. Northrop Frye's comment on this verse is that 'the chief point made about the creation of Eve is that henceforth man is to leave his parents and become united with his wife. That parent is the primary image...that...has to give way to the image of the sexual union of bride-groom and bride' (N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982], p. 107).

6. When her identity as daughter is exchanged for wife, she is still the alien until she has once again changed her sign to 'mother of new members of the lineage', which by implication means mother to a son.

7. L.E. Boose, 'The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter–Father Relationship', in L.E. Boose and B.S. Flowers (eds.), *Daughters and Fathers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 22.

8. S. Freud, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. XIX. The Infantile Genital Organization* (trans. and ed. James Strachey *et al.*; London: Hogarth and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1965), p. 241.

9. J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem, Or, The Politics of Sex* (Essays in the

acknowledges his wife to be his sister,[10] and his son, Isaac, marries his father's-brother's-daughter. Isaac's son, Jacob, acquires two wives, sisters who constitute a lineal double of each other. That is, Jacob marries two of his father's-father's-brother's-son's-son's-daughters, who are simultaneously his mother's-brother's-daughters and thus again connected back to Abraham. In the next generation, Reuben sleeps with his father's second wife's maid, symbolically violating family purity laws, and Judah sleeps with his daughter-in-law. Is there a pattern here? *Contra* Lévi-Strauss, familial and sexual integrity across Genesis seems to be observed more in the breach than in the maintenance.[11] Why?

While many elements of the conventional vocabulary of moral deliberation (such as 'ethical', 'virtuous', 'righteous', and their opposites) are largely alien to the psychoanalytic lexicon, the concepts of 'guilt' and 'shame' do appear, albeit in technical (and essentially non-moral) contexts.[12] 'Guilt' and 'shame' are described as different emotional responses, stemming from different stimuli, reflecting different patterns of behavior, and functioning in different social constructions, although the two are often related. Their primary distinction lies in the internalized norm that is violated and the expected consequences.

Anthropology of the Mediterranean; Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology Series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 128, 165.

10. Not all scholars view intercourse between siblings as incestuous; see J.P. Fokkelman's discussion of the story of Amnon and Tamar, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel.* I. *King David (II Sam 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 20; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), p. 103. As Landy points out, however, this might be another example of a royal family that 'feels itself too good for the world' (F. Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983], p. 307 n. 63).

11. Within Genesis, Adam–Eve, Noah–Ham, Lot–his daughters, Reuben–Bilhah, and Judah–Tamar are examples of parent–child incestuous congress or exposure; Adam–Eve and Abraham–Sarah are brother–sister unions (as is Amnon–Tamar in 2 Sam. 13); Isaac–Rebekah and Jacob–Leah–Rachel are cousin marriages.

12. J.H. Smith, 'Primitive Guilt', in J.H. Smith and W. Kerrigan (eds.), *Pragmatism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 52.

Guilt relates to internalized societal and parental *prohibitions*, the transgression of which creates feelings of wrong-doing and the fear of punishment.[13] Shame relates to the anxiety caused by 'inadequacy' or 'failure' to live up to internalized societal and parental *goals and ideals* (as opposed to internalized prohibitions), expectations of what a person 'should' do, be, know, or feel. These feelings of failure often lead to a fear of psychological or physical rejection, abandonment, expulsion (separation anxiety) or loss of social position.[14] The person shamed often feels the need to take revenge for his or her humiliation, to 'save face'. By shaming the shamer, the situation is reversed, and the shamed person feels triumphant.[15]

The difference between guilt and shame is subtle but important in the context of this paper. Within the biblical text, 'shame' is a powerful and prevalent emotion and sanction indicated by the number of Hebrew words used to convey the violation of goals and ideals,[16] although in translation the differences in

13. G. Piers and M. Singer, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1953).

14. F. Alexander, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1948), p. 43.

15. K. Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950), p. 103.

16. 'Shame' is expressed in Hebrew by the verb בוש, 'to shame' (and the nouns בושה, בשׁת, 'shame'); the verb כלם, 'to humiliate/shame' (and the nouns כלמה and כלמת, 'humiliation/shame'); the verb קלה (niphal; perhaps a form of קלל, 'to be light', 'to be lightly esteemed or dishonored/shamed') (and the noun קלון, 'dishonor/shame'); the verb חפר, 'to be ashamed, blush'; the verb שׁפל, 'to be low, abased, be humiliated' (and the noun שׁפלה, 'lowliness, humiliation'); the verb מכך, 'to be low, humiliated'; and the nouns נבלות, 'shamelessness', and נבלה, 'disgrace'.

'Shame' words are often accompanied by phrases that express 'shame on the face' (blushing), shame expressed in body position (hanging the head), or a reduction in social position in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others (e.g. Jer. 48.39; 2 Sam. 10.5; Isa. 16.14; Jer. 50.12). The verb חרף, 'to reproach/verbally shame' (and the noun חרפה, 'reproach/verbal shame'); the verb קלס, 'to mock/shame' (and the noun קלס, 'derision/shame'); the verb לעג, 'to mock/shame' (and the noun לעג, 'derision/shame'); the verb לץ, 'to scorn/shame' (and the noun לצון, 'scorning/shaming') denote verbal shaming, taunting, mocking or scorning with insulting words. The main oppositional term to shame is the root כבד (signifying 'honor' or

meaning among these words are often hard to discern. Strikingly, the vocabulary for 'guilt' is far less extensive than that of 'shame'.[17] It would appear that the text is less concerned with the violation of societal prohibitions—in this case, incest—than with the failure to achieve internalized goals, that is, the idealization and perpetuation of patriarchy and family prestige.

It is within this framework that the father–daughter relationship becomes problematic, complex in ways that even the mother–son dynamic is not, despite the same asymmetries of age, authority and gender-privilege that work to separate mother and son. On the one hand, daughters are property belonging exclusively to the father;[18] like Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, they are bartered for economic profit. And as the Genesis narrative of Jacob's daughter Dinah makes clear, rape is not considered a violation of the daughter so much as a theft of property from her father that necessitates compensation to him. On the other hand, although the daughter is clearly regarded as legal property inside the family, she is not a commodity to be bartered in the same way as an ox or an ass. She is explicitly *sexual* property acquired from the father's sexual expenditure and his own family bloodline, not by economic transaction. Her presence as daughter resexualizes the family configuration and necessitates a detailed taboo, codified in

'heaviness'); that is, honor increases 'heavy' esteem, while shame decreases it, causing 'light' esteem (see קלה above) (L.M. Bechtel, 'Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming', *JSOT* 49 [1991], p. 54).

17. 'Guilt' is expressed by the verb אשם, 'to offend/be guilty/commit iniquity' (and the nouns אשם, 'offense/guilt/iniquity', אשמה 'wrong-doing/guiltiness', and the adjective אשם, 'guilty'); the verb רשע, 'to be wicked/condemn as guilty' (and the adjective רשע, 'wicked/guilty'); and the noun עון 'iniquity/guilt/punishment' (Bechtel, 'Shame', p. 55).

18. Since it is the father who controls the exchange of women, the woman most practically available to be exchanged is not the mother, who sexually belongs to the father, nor the sister, who comes under the bestowal rights of her own father, but the daughter. Other anthropological models do exist, however. Among the Nuer, for example, 'fatherhood' belongs to the person in whose name cattle bridewealth is given for the mother (G. Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in R. Reiter [ed.], *Toward an Anthropology of Women* [New York: Monthly Review, 1975], p. 169).

Leviticus 18, which ostensibly defines illicit congress. Virtually every family female (mother, sister,[19] aunt,[20] cousin, sister-in-law, niece, daughter-in-law, granddaughter, and so on[21]) is off-limits. Conspicuously, the only one not included is the daughter. As Judith Herman points out,

> the wording of the law makes it clear that...what is prohibited is the sexual use of those women who, in one manner or another, already belong to other relatives. Every man is thus expressly forbidden to take the daughters of his kinsmen, but only by implication is he forbidden to take his own daughters.[22]

Of all possible forms of incest, that between father and daughter is overlooked. The daughter's presence within the father's house retains a figuratively, if not literally, incestuous option that implicitly threatens the family structure.[23]

19. Lev. 18.9, 11; 20.17. Paternal half-sister prohibition was of special concern to Ezekiel (22.11), and his concern shows that the practice continued.

20. Lev. 18.12-13; 20.19. We might note that Moses and Aaron were both born of such a union (Exod. 6.20; Num. 26.59).

21. The other incestuous relations itemized in Lev. 18 and 20 belong to the category of incestuous adultery (that is, group-wife prohibitions) or pertain to polygamy and are therefore not our concern here. For a full analysis of the incest laws in Leviticus, their function and origin, see S.F. Bigger, 'The Family Laws of Leviticus 18 in their Setting', *JBL* 98 (1979), pp. 187-293; and R. Fox, *Kinship and Marriage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). For a situating of these laws in the wider context of historical shifts in Jewish social structure and the changing position of women, see Archer, *Her Price is beyond Rubies* and L.J. Archer, 'The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual and Cult of Graeco-Roman Palestine', in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 273-87.

22. J.L. Herman and L. Hirschman, *Father–Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 61.

23. In fact, it can even be argued that the relations of biblical daughters and fathers resemble in some important ways the model developed by Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman to describe the family situations of incest victims: a dominating authoritarian father; an absent, ill or complicitous mother; and a daughter who, prohibited from speaking about the abuse, is unable to reconcile her contradictory feelings of love for her father and terror of him, her desire to end the abuse and fear that if she speaks out she will destroy the family structure that is her only security (Herman

Since the text lacks this specific taboo, the father–daughter relationship has no internalized prohibitions (hence no 'guilt'). But because the purity of a wife is the law of first priority upon which patrilineage depends, it is at the juncture of the daughter's marriage and transfer of proprietary rights from father to son-in-law that father–daughter incest would point a finger directly at the character whom the text privileges, the one status role that the narrative repeatedly goes out of its way to exempt from blame of any sort, the father. The biblical daughter becomes dangerous to the father's authority, and her existence within the 'safety' of her family ambivalent. It is in this context that the elaborately detailed punishment for the accused bride in Deut. 22.13-21 makes sense. All of the numerous proscriptions codified in Deuteronomy are essentially purification laws to 'banish evil from Israel'. This one, however, is unique in thrusting the father to the very center of the drama, making him a special actor, *protected* by a formulaic dialogue yet placed in the role of *defendant* against the son-in-law's charges of the daughter's impurity.[24] Implicitly, the husband has accused the father, the man who gave him this woman, of having taken the husband's property (her virginity) in advance. If evidence of virginity exists, the groom is flogged and must pay the father one hundred shekels 'for publicly defaming a virgin of Israel'. But the payment is made to the father, so perhaps we should read 'for publicly defaming a virgin's *father*'. If the bride's virginity cannot be substantiated, 'they shall take her to the door of her father's house

and Hirschman, *Father–Daughter Incest*, esp. chs. 1, 4–7).

24. In the three sex laws that follow this one in Deut. 22, the father is either not mentioned or minimally important. If, for instance, a man forcibly seizes an unbetrothed virgin and 'they are found', he must pay her father fifty shekels and marry her (22.28-29). If a man lies with a betrothed virgin inside the city, the two offenders are to be taken outside the gate of the town and stoned to death, she for not 'crying out' and he for 'violating the wife of his neighbor'. The father is not involved here, but the male violator (as well as the female property that is now 'soiled') must die since the future rights of another man have been stolen. See Mary Douglas's chapter 'Internal Lines' (*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* [London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul/Praeger, 1966]) for an examination of the connections between social pollution and cultural ideas of 'dirt'. Cf. Pressler's article in this volume.

and her fellow citizens shall stone her to death for having committed an infamy in Israel by disgracing her father's house'. This crime is not merely 'an evil' to be 'banished from the midst'; it is 'an infamy in Israel' that disgraces the father's house (the place from which the punishment implies it emanated) by tacitly accusing him of incest. It then masks the accusation by transposing cause and effect: because no hymeneal blood was shed in her husband's house, the daughter's blood is to be shed on her father's door. A threat to the father's reputation (and hence his power) is averted by deflecting blame for sexual misconduct, real or imagined, from the privileged patriarch onto the powerless daughter. The shamed thus shames the victim.

A parallel construct exists in Freud's abandonment of his seduction theory. When Freud first began working with hysterical patients, in every case he found an account of childhood sexual abuse by a member of the patient's own family, and it was almost always the father.[25] On this evidence, Freud developed his 'seduction theory', that hysterical symptoms have their origin in sexual abuse suffered in childhood, which is repressed and eventually assimilated to later sexual experience. Within a year, however, Freud wrote that he 'no longer believe[d] in neurotica'.[26] At this point, Freud founded psychoanalytic theory upon the Oedipus complex.

This change was crucial. As several feminist critics have argued,[27] Freud turned away from the seduction theory because

25. The editors of the *Standard Edition* trace (without critique) the vicissitudes of Freud's acknowledgement of sexual abuse on the part of fathers in a note to 'Femininity' (S. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* XXII. *Femininity* [trans. and ed. J. Strachey *et al.*; London: Hogarth and The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1965 (1933)], p. 120 n.).

26. Quoted in C. Froula, 'The Daughter's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History', in Boose and Flowers, *Daughters and Fathers*, p. 118.

27. See, for example, A. Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child* (trans. Hildegarde Hannum and Hunter Hannum; New York: Farrer, Straus & Giroux, 1984) as well as Herman and Hirschman, *Father–Daughter Incest*, who present clinical evidence; M. Balmary, *Psychoanalyzing Psychoanalysis: Freud and the Hidden Fault of the Father* (trans. Ned Lukacher; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), for a psychoanalytic reading of the 'text' of Freud's life and work; and F. Rush, *The Best-Kept*

he was unable to come to terms with his discovery: the abuse of paternal power.[28] The issue for Freud was credit versus authority—whose story to believe, the father's or the daughter's.

While many analysts have simply followed Freud in rejecting the seduction theory for the Oedipal theory, others have tried to explain and resolve the apparently contradictory ideas of 'seduction-as-fact' and 'seduction-as-fantasy' by means of Freud's concepts of *'psychic* reality' and *'primal* fantasy'.[29] That is, seduction can be a *representation* of the father's repressed and deflected sexual desires, or even a metaphor for power ('primal fantasy'). *Actual* incest ('reality') need not enter the picture, thus bridging the gap between the actual and the imaginary, the very structure of fantasy.

Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1980), for a historical perspective. See particularly David Willbern's examination of the chronological complexities and fluctuations in Freud's theorizing about fathers and daughters, including a discussion of Freud's discounting of the seduction theory and his strangely unprofessional alteration of several case testimonies in which the father had been identified as the incestuous seducer of his daughter (D. Willbern, *'Filia Oedipi*: Father and Daughter in Freudian Theory', in Boose and Flowers, *Daughters and Fathers*, pp. 75-96).

28. The cases of Anna O., Lucy R., Katharina, Elisabeth von R., and Rosalia H., described in *Studies on Hysteria* (S. Freud and J. Breuer, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. II. Studies in Hysteria* [trans. and ed. James Strachey *et al.*; London: Hogarth and The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1965 (1893–95)]), all connect symptoms with fathers or, in Lucy's case, with a father substitute. In two cases, however, Freud represents the father as an uncle, a misrepresentation that he corrects in 1924. His reluctance to implicate the father appears in a supplemental narrative of an unnamed patient whose physician-father accompanied her during sessions with Freud. When Freud challenged her to acknowledge that 'something else had happened which she had not mentioned', she 'gave way to the extent of letting fall a single significant phrase; but she had hardly said a word before she stopped, and her old father, who was sitting behind her, began to sob bitterly'. Freud concludes: 'Naturally I pressed my investigation no further; but I never saw the patient again' (Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, pp. 100-101 n.).

29. See, for example, J. Laplanch and J.B. Pontalis, for whom the daughter's seduction story is a fantasy, its reality 'to be sought in an ever more remote and hypothetical past (of the individual or the species)' (J. Laplanch and J.B. Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49 [1968], p. 17).

Conveniently, this brings us to the creation narrative in Genesis 1–3. While almost all interpretations of this text acknowledge its sexual nature, traditional exegesis has concentrated on 'Adam's Fall'. But the familiar story masks two interwoven subtexts: Freud's sexualized father–daughter narrative in which the Adam material appears merely as a re-narration, and a feminist narrative of an unacknowledged daughter's rebellion by appropriating the forbidden fruit that stands 'erected' at the center of the enclosed garden. Read from this perspective, the father has planted an invitation to transgress (a metaphoric seduction) accompanied by a prohibition against doing so. The ambivalence of the father's part in the 'Fall', the focus of considerable theological commentary, perhaps can be seen as Freud's 'catastrophe', with its dangerous potential inherent in the daughter's 'transition to the father object'.[30] The father desires yet forbids desiring; he simultaneously wants but does not want the transgression he has provoked, a transgression he will deny and punish. This ambivalence is textually revealed by its most psychologically accurate defense. Just as Freud, by abandoning the seduction theory, deflects guilt from the father to (variously) the nurse, the mother, and, by way of the Oedipus complex, the child herself,[31] so the father projects his seduction onto others and thus denies paternal complicity. The seduction is displaced first onto the (phallic) serpent,[32] and then onto the daughter herself in her seduction of Adam. Thus, the chain of deflections to protect the father begins. It was not the father but the serpent who seduced the daughter and, by the end of this narrative, it is the daughter who seduced her father! Once again, the shamed shames the shamer. To effect this,

30. Freud, 'Psychical Consequences', p. 241.

31. J. Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 144-45.

32. The indicator I see for the serpent's phallic symbolism is based less on Freud's association than on two other factors. First, since Hebrew has no neuter gender, nouns must be either masculine or feminine, and the word for serpent is, indeed, masculine. Second, the narrative function of the serpent, and his description as 'the most wily of the beasts of the field which the Lord God had made' anticipates, and seems embedded in, Augustine's famous use of the fall to explain the frustrating unruliness of the male sexual organ.

however, the narrative subjects itself to a labyrinth of self-exposing transformations.

Some feminist biblical scholars see Genesis 1 as a mitigating authorization for women's equality.[33] I disagree. Every authorization of equality in Genesis 1 is subsequently repressed and erased by chs. 2–3. In fact, the juxtaposition of the two accounts of creation exposes the shadowed family construct and highlights the subtext of deflected paternal desire. The syntax in Gen. 1.26-27, which implies that man and woman are created simultaneously and equally, constructs Adam and Eve as son and daughter. Typical of the defense mechanism associated with projection and denial, this narration is an attempt to reconstitute the family into a desired model. However, this makes the deity overtly a father who authorized his children's implicitly incestuous union, and therefore necessitates a re-narration which repeatedly shows the marks of backward erasure and exclusion. When ch. 2 recreates man and woman, it erases the parallelism of the ch. 1 account and dissociates the deity entirely from the parentage of the woman, further distancing the original father–daughter relationship.[34] Adam's paternal parentage remains, and even his maternal parent is implicitly present in the earth from which he is shaped and from which his name is derived, but Eve, who is born from Adam's body, has a lineage lost in ambiguities. No matter how her creation is read, what does seem clear is that the text has tried to detach her genealogy from the father and place it with Adam. Ironically, in an attempt to mask the threat of deflected desire that is posed, the text inadvertently reconstitutes it. Because of the emphasis placed on Eve's derivation from Adam's side, and therefore Adam's implied paternity, the narrative re-enforces the paradigm of a tacitly condoned but overtly disclaimed act between father and daughter. The original father–daughter story that has been so problematic is repressed but remains visible in Adam. Adam, the

33. See, for example, Phyllis Trible, who points out that in Gen. 1 the masculine exists no more than does the feminine (P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978]).

34. Simultaneously, it erases the incestuous implications of the son–daughter union by eliminating the Gen. 1 license for the human children to be fruitful and eat unrestrictedly of all the 'trees with seed bearing fruit'.

acknowledged son, becomes the father, making father and son analogous.

At the same time, the text also contains the subtext of Eve's appropriation of the forbidden fruit, a mythology of the daughter's rebellion into sexual maturity, a 'seizing' of her fruitfulness.

In replacing his seduction theory with the Oedipus complex, Freud explains that a daughter's attachment to the father parallels a son's attachment to his mother; but for the girl, attachment to the father is 'positive', following an earlier 'negative' phase in which she learns that her mother has not 'given' her a penis. She turns in despair to the father, who may be able to give her some of its power.[35] If read from Freud's perspective, the 'seed-bearing fruit' on the father's tree might signify the father's self, the 'father's Phallus', in both its Lacanian meaning as a symbol of paternal authority and its Freudian significance as the physical sign of 'presence' and biological superiority. The taboo on plucking/eating this knowledge of good and evil forbids the daughter from obtaining the father's potency and privilege.

This symbolism becomes clearer if we follow the time-honored exegetical practice of reading the Bible intertextually. Just before the children of Israel are to enter the Promised Land, a recapitulation of 'the Father's original garden',[36] the fruit taboo resurfaces, and, with it, its phallic significance: 'When you enter the land and plant all [manner of] trees for food, you will regard its fruits as *uncircumcised*. For three years it will be to

35. Freud, 'Psychical Consequences', and S. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. XXI. *Female Sexuality*, (trans. and ed. J. Strachey *et al.*; London: Hogarth and The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1965 [1931]), *passim*. René Girard's theory of language and culture explains the marginal situation of biblical daughters in a way that also challenges Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. Girard argues that violence has its roots in 'mimetic desire', an approach/avoidance concept that describes the drive to imitate a respected and feared model. While the desire is to imitate, there is the recognition that a complete reproduction would result in an implicit rivalry, the extreme form of which would be displacement and, ultimately, elimination. On the other hand, if this rivalry is rejected and repressed, the subject then stands in a slave relationship with the master (R. Girard, *The Scapegoat* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986]).

36. Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 72.

you a thing *uncircumcised*, and it *will not be eaten*' (Lev. 19.23). Placed into this context, Genesis 3 seems to narrate the daughter's desire to acquire the father's knowledge and power through the (phallic) sign that has been denied her, and to dramatize the threat to patriarchy that daughters represent. By asserting her desire for the sign that confers exclusive rights to the male, the daughter symbolically challenges the privilege of the gender system that the phallus signifies.

Since the text is confronted with a daughter's desires that have no legitimate place in its patriarchal order, it mutes them by denial and displacement. By reasserting the primacy of the father–son relationship, the story represses the more threatening material of its father–daughter text. Thus, Eve gives the 'seed-bearing fruit' to Adam and becomes the medium through which this symbol of potency and privilege (the Phallus in both Freudian and Lacanian meanings) is passed from father to son. Once Eve has transferred the fruit to Adam's possession, she transfers also her narrative centrality. Eve as *daughter* disappears into the margins of the story. Eve as *mother* effectively banishes the female transgressor of the father's garden. Her denied desires are perpetuated into a frustrated 'yearning'—what Freud would have called 'penis envy', or the daughter's 'recognition of absence'. But it is also a recognition of what Freud's feminist interpreters have defined as another kind of knowledge, the knowledge of the way that 'cultural stereotypes have been mapped onto the genitals'.[37] If in the 'phallic phase', as Freud asserts, 'only one kind of genital organ comes to account—the male',[38] then Eve's act of aggression is a representation of her desire to get beyond the prohibitiveness of the Phallus, its rule as standard, what Irigaray calls 'the reign of the One, of Unicity'[39]: the Father.

Eve's choice to give fruit, the conventional symbol of female sexuality, to another male may represent the daughter's ultimate dispossession of her father, and reveal this family member as *the*

37. Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women', p. 195.

38. Freud, *Infantile Genital Organization*, p. 142.

39. L. Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit; trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke as *This Sex Which Is Not One* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977]), p. 43.

dangerous threat to paternal power, the reason for narrative absence. The daughter's act is a violation cursed by the father and resulting in a permanent barrier of separation. At the daughter's instigation, the son has cast aside perpetual security, in an outright rejection of the father and his authority. It is at this junction that the two interwoven subtexts merge.

The original commandment to be fruitful and multiply is transformed into the structures of taboo, transgression and punishment. Adam is now a laborer, and Eve is ordered into the *creation* of family, her presence as daughter permanently eliminated. Significantly, from now on (with the exception of the anomalous story of Ibzan [Judg. 12.9]), biblical fathers assiduously avoid ever giving daughters away. In fact, the Hebrew Bible avoids daughters almost altogether. Indeed, a father and daughter do not re-enter Genesis until the incestuous tale of Lot.[40] By then, however, the text has rationalized deflected desire: Lot is 'blamelessly' seduced by his daughters, just as Adam was unwittingly seduced by the woman he fathered.

40. Another mention of 'daughter' precedes that of Lot, but it is the 'collective catastrophe' of Gen. 6.4 brought about by the '[generic] daughters of men'. In this odd (and obscure) fragment, the 'sons of God' are seduced by desire for the 'daughters of men', and their corrupt but heroic offspring provide the motive for God's decision to destroy humanity by the flood. Here, as elsewhere, the problem revolves around a woman positionally coded as 'daughter'.

'YOU SHALL LET EVERY DAUGHTER LIVE': A STUDY OF EXODUS 1.8–2.10*

J. Cheryl Exum

'Every son that is born you shall expose on the Nile, but every daughter you shall let live' (Exod. 1.22).[1] With these words, an Egyptian pharaoh hoped to check the uncanny growth of the Hebrews. P. Trible remarks that had Pharaoh anticipated the effectiveness of women in thwarting this decree, he might better have commanded that all female infants be killed.[2] The present study seeks to illuminate the role of women in Exod. 1.8–2.10, the story of events surrounding the birth of Moses. It investigates the narrative in its present form on the premise that an understanding of its literary contours will aid us in perceiving its meaning. Analyses that divide the material between the pentateuchal sources, J, E and P, and discussions of the growth of the tradition are available in the commentaries, and it is not my intention to delve into these matters here There are, to be sure, logical inconsistencies and tensions in the narrative which bear witness to a long and complicated process of development. As they meet us in the narrative now, however, they contribute to

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1. This study was completed during a research leave, 1980-81, at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and was presented in somewhat different form as a paper for discussion in the Women and Religion/Liberation Theology section at the 1981 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

2. P. Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation', *JAAR* 41 (1973), p. 34.

its richness, its irony and its humor, and, as in the case of Moses' sister, who appears suddenly out of nowhere, they surprise us by giving the story a new direction. The present analysis likewise does not endeavor to elucidate the historical background of the narrative. The value of the early chapters of Exodus for historical reconstructions is a much debated issue, and one about which I am highly skeptical. I am interested rather in the Israelite view of events which finds expression in Exodus 1 and 2.

Discussion of women in Exod. 1.8–2.10 requires consideration of their place within the total configuration of the narrative—a narrative that does not become a woman's story until 1.15, and, even then, has as its goal the birth of a *son* who will become the leader of his people. Though space does not permit an adequate analysis of it, we must keep in mind as well the larger context, Exod. 1.1–2.25, the prologue proper to the exodus.[3] As the book of Exodus opens, part of the promise to the patriarchs has been fulfilled (Israel has become a great nation), and interest is aroused concerning that part of the promise which has yet to reach consummation (that Israel will possess the land of Canaan). The prologue has three parts. (1) Exod. 1.1-7 points back to Gen. 46.8-27, 47.27 and 50.22-26, and provides the transition from the patriarchal period; (2) Exod. 1.8–2.10 sets forth the problem of Egyptian oppression and recounts the birth of the hero, Moses, who will be instrumental in its resolution; and (3) Exod. 2.11-25 deals with events that occur later, when Moses is an adult. Exod. 1.8–2.10 is thus the centerpiece of the prologue. It is set off from its surrounding context by

3. See M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), pp. 57-59; Cf. G.W. Coats, 'A Structural Transition in Exodus', *VT* 22 (1972), pp. 129-42; C. Isbell, 'Exodus 1–2 in the Context of Exodus 14: Story Lines and Key Words', in D.J.A. Clines, D.M. Gunn and A.J. Hauser (eds.), *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (JSOTSup, 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), pp. 44-53. For verbal and thematic allusions to the patriarchal and prepatriarchal periods and to the deliverance from Egypt, see esp. J.S. Ackerman, 'The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2)', in K.R.R. Gros Louis with J.S. Ackerman and T.S. Warshaw (eds.), *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), pp. 74-119; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, pp. 18-66; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary of the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 7-21; Coats, 'A Structural Transition', pp. 134-37.

temporal notices, each of which accomplishes a major time transition in a single verse: 'there arose a new king' (1.8) places us suddenly in a new era only minimally prepared for in v. 6 by the death of the old generation; 'when Moses had grown up' (2.11) takes us from Moses as a child (ילד, נער) to Moses as a young man (איש).

Exodus 1.8–2.10, the center of the prologue and our primary concern here, displays a pattern of organization of two parts with three movements. The two parts deal with a threat to the Hebrews as a people (1.8-22) and a threat to one particular Hebrew, Moses (2.1-10). The three movements (1.8-14; 1.15-21; 1.22–2.10) correspond to three solutions of Pharaoh to the problem of Israelite proliferation. Verse 22 functions as the end of the first part and as the beginning of the third movement, producing an overlapping structure.[4] The command, 'every son that is born you shall expose on the Nile, but every daughter you shall let live', rounds off the story of the midwives and forms an inclusion with v. 16, 'if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she may live'. At the same time that it closes the preceding unit, v. 22 opens the following unit by providing the necessary introduction to the birth account. Not only does it contribute the setting (the Nile), but without it the story of Moses' exposure would make no sense. Let us consider first the configuration of the parts, then the movements.

The two parts begin in a similar narrative fashion: summary

4. No doubt to be attributed to the history of the tradition, see B.S. Childs,'The Birth of Moses', *JBL* 84 (1965), pp. 117-18; B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp.10-11; H. Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit* (FRLANT, 18: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), pp. 2-5; cf. the criticisms of G. von Rad, 'Beobachtungen an der Moseerzählung Exodus 1–14', *Gesammelte Studien*, II (Munich: Kaiser, 1973), pp. 191-93. T. Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 76, in a discussion of narrative embedding, describes precisely the type of narrative situation we find here: Exod. 1.22 supplies 'something excessive' to the story of the midwives, 'a supplement which remains outside the closed form produced by the development of the plot. At the same time, and for this very reason, this something-more, proper to the narrative, is also something-less. The supplement is also a lack; in order to supply this lack created by the supplement, another narrative is necessary.'

statements set the stage by describing events that will have momentous consequences.

> There arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph (1.8).
>
> A man from the house of Levi went and took (as a wife) the daughter of Levi (2.1).

Neither the new king of 1.8 nor the man of 2.1 is identified. Though they stand at the beginning of the action, it is not their actions but rather the actions of women which will constitute the narrative's primary concern. Indeed, the man of 2.1 disappears immediately from the story. The situation described in 1.8 will lead to Egyptian oppression of the Israelites, 1.8-14, and an attempt to check the ever-increasing Hebrew population through the murder of male babies, 1.15-22. The notice of 2.1 introduces the birth story in which the child's rescue defies the new pharaoh's command to kill male babies. Here the daughter of the pharaoh appears as a counterfoil to her oppressive father. Whereas the oppression theme introduced in 1.8-14 is not resolved until later in the book of Exodus, when the Israelites actually leave Egypt, interestingly, the theme of Egyptian attempts to check Israelite increase is never really resolved. By the time we reach the goal of the narrative, the birth of Moses, the problem of Israelite proliferation is all but forgotten. Having provided the backdrop for the birth account of Moses, the theme of Pharaoh's attempt to counter Israelite proliferation drops from the remainder of the exodus account.

The dominant theme of 1.1–2.10 is the growth of the Hebrew population, in accord with the blessing of Gen. 1.28 ('Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land and subdue it'; cf. 9.1, 7) and the promise of numerous descendents to the patriarchs (Gen. 17.4-8; 35.11-12 *et passim*). The theme finds expression in part one of our story in the motif of the multiplication of the people, already prepared for by the introduction, v. 7, 'And the Israelites were fruitful and increased greatly and multiplied and became very, very strong, and the land was filled with them'. In v. 9 the pharaoh recognizes the incredible expansion and captures it picturesquely, if not hyperbolically, in his outcry, 'Look, the Israelite people is greater and stronger than we are!' Then, 'lest

they multiply' (v. 10), he schemes to limit their growth through affliction and hard labor. However, 'the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied' (v. 12). A second plan, involving the cooperation of the midwives, is likewise unsuccessful, and 'the people multiplied and became very strong' (v. 20). The second part of our story, 2.1-10, contains a variation of the multiplication motif. It shows the increase of the people by one, who, though only one, is the most important of all.

The theme of proliferation is sounded again in the strategically placed references to sons and daughters: sons (בן) and daughters (בת) determine the course of events. The term בן appears throughout the story within an increasingly narrow frame of reference and delineates the structural units. The phrase בני ישראל (literally, 'sons of Israel') forms an inclusion around the introduction, 1.1-7. Its appearance in v. 1 with reference to the twelve sons of Jacob and in v. 7 to all the Israelites achieves a skilful transition from the story of Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 37–50) to the present situation of the Israelites in Egypt. In 1.8-14 בני ישראל refers to Israelites as a people (עם), whom Pharaoh fears precisely for the reason that they have become a people (v. 9). In vv. 15-22 the semantic range of בן is limited to male babies. בת appears for the first time in 1.16, and together the pair בן/בת forms an inclusion which marks off the story of the midwives' defiance (v. 16 and v. 22). In 2.1-10 the focus narrows as far as possible, with בן referring to one particular child, Moses. Here, too, we have an inclusion formed by the pair בת/בן: the story begins with the birth of a son (בן) to the daughter (בת) of Levi (v. 2), and ends with his becoming a son (בן) to the daughter (בת) of Pharaoh (v. 10).[5] By means of this narrowing of focus, the text turns our attention away from the multitude with which it began ('the sons of Israel were fruitful...and the land was filled with them') and directs it to the one who will play an instrumental role in attaining the freedom of Yhwh's 'first-born son' (4.22), Israel. But before this famous son takes center stage, his story yields, as we shall see, to a story of daughters.

5. Between 2.2 and 10 Moses is consistently referred to as a child (ילד, vv. 3, 6[bis], 7, 8, 9[bis], 10) and once as a boy (נער, v. 6). Between the occurrences of בן in 1.16 and 22, the term ילד is used for male infants.

Turning to the three movements of the story, we find the narrative flow dictated by three attempts of pharaoh to stem the growth of Israel. The attempt accounts follow a pattern of increasing concentration, as Pharaoh repeatedly undertakes a course of action, only to have it meet with failure at each turn. In two of the three cases his failure results from disobedience on the part of women. We shall begin with an overview of the pattern, after which we shall investigate more closely each of the attempt stories, with a view, in particular, toward illuminating the portrayals of women.

The following outline summarizes the pattern's distinctive features.

	Initiative	*Solution*	*Response of those addressed*	*Result*
Exod. 1.8-14	Pharaoh speaks to his people	deal wisely	obedience (affliction, service)	Hebrews increase
Exod. 1.15-21	Pharaoh speaks to midwives	kill male babies; let females live	disobedience	Hebrews increase
Exod. 1.22–2.10	Pharaoh commands all his people	kill male babies; let females live	disobedience (on the part of Moses' mother, Pharaoh's daughter)	the future leader of the Hebrews is spared

A directive of pharaoh introduces each attempt account. In 1.(8)9-14 Pharaoh speaks to his people. His solution to the Israelite problem is to deal wisely with them, and this 'wise dealing' takes the form of affliction and hard service. As a result, the opposite of what he expected occurs: the Hebrews increase (v. 12). Next, 1.15-21, Pharaoh speaks to the midwives. His solution is to kill male babies, but again the result is the same: the Hebrews increase, v. 20. In the first case, the directive was carried out by the people, but the solution was unsuccessful. In the second case, the directive was not carried out, and the effectiveness of the solution was thus not adequately tested. Consequently, in the third attempt account, 1.22–2.10, Pharaoh tries the same solution (the murder of male babies), but turns

again to the people to carry out his plan.[6] Now the solution is overt, whereas in the case of the midwives it had been covert; and this time the verb is stronger: he no longer simply speaks (אמר), he commands (ויצו, v. 22).[7]

The story has gone full circle, from the Pharaoh speaking to the people, to the midwives, and again to the people. The situation, however, is by no means the same, and pharaoh, though still issuing directives, yields to women his role as the moving force behind events (we should assume also the hidden activity of God). Pharaoh determined the action in 1.8-14. He spoke; his people obeyed. In 1.15-21 the midwives determine the action. Pharaoh speaks, but so do the midwives. They share the stage and, in fact, engage in dialogue in which they have the last word. In 1.22–2.10 Pharaoh gives the directive, but thereafter a mother, a sister and a daughter determine the course of events, and Pharaoh does not appear again in the story. This increasing concentration on women invites us to consider the significance of the fact that ancient Israelite storytellers gave women a crucial role in the initial stages of the major event in the nation's history.

The First Solution: Exodus 1.8-14

The first attempt to deal with the problem of Israelite proliferation sets the tone for the rest of the chapter. Pharaoh is portrayed humorously, his speech is ironic, his solution not wise, and the very thing he seeks to prevent ('lest they multiply...and go up from the land') will come to pass. As Pharaoh describes the situation, Israel already has the advantage: they are 'more numerous and stronger' than the Egyptians. A frightful scenario looms in Pharaoh's mind: in the event of war Israel might fight against Egypt and 'go up from the land', a phrase which the biblical tradition characteristically uses for the exodus. We have, therefore, in these words a foreshadowing of the exodus event,

6. The midwives pericope forms a bridge between 1.8-14 and 2.1-10 by sharing the problem of Israelite increase with the former and the solution of killing male infants (which provides the background to the birth account) with the latter.

7. Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 16.

and, ironically, the first person to consider such an idea is the pharaoh of Egypt!

Pharaoh proposes to 'deal wisely' with the Israelites.[8] Commentators have traditionally pointed out logical inconsistencies in the problem and the solution of vv. 8-14. Overpopulation is a problem, yet the pharaoh is afraid the Israelites will leave. He wants to check the population growth, yet the fact that he puts the people to work on his building projects suggests that he needs them as slave labor. Explanation of the incongruity is often sought in source-critical theories, but as the story now stands, the absurdity of the solution is only one example of the folly of Phäraoh's wisdom. It is seen again (vv. 15-22) in the decision to kill male babies, a solution that neither alleviates the *present* problem nor represents the logical way to control overpopulation, which would be to kill females.

Following the voicing of the problem by Pharaoh, the Egyptians undertake the solution. It takes two forms, affliction (vv. 11-12) and service (vv. 13-14).[9] These two variations on the

8. See Childs, 'The Birth of Moses', pp. 119-22, on wisdom motifs in these chapters. The root חכם in the hithp. occurs elsewhere only in Qoh. 7.16.

9. Scholars have debated whether we have in vv. 13-14 a second solution to the problem of Israelite increase, representing different treatment altogether from vv. 11-12, or whether these verses are simply a variation or intensification of the first solution. That the latter is the case, i.e., that we have in Exod. 1.8–2.10 three solutions to the problem of proliferation and not four, seems clear from the structure outlined above, where, each time, a solution is introduced by a speech of Pharaoh. Greenberg (*Understanding Exodus*, pp. 33-34) suggests taking vv. 13-14 and vv. 15-21 as two aspects of the second stage of countermeasures. In my opinion vv. 11-14 display a balanced structure which argues in favor of seeing vv. 13-14 as another aspect of the first countermeasure.

v. 11	a	They set over it taskmasters in order to *afflict* it with their burdens
	b	and it built store cities for pharaoh, Pithom and Raamses.
v. 12	a′	But the more they *afflicted* it, the more it multiplied and the more it burst forth.
	x	And they were in dread before the Israelites.

oppression theme are separated by the notice about Israelite increase and the statement that the Egyptians are in dread before Israel (v. 12). Set off and surrounded by reports of the hardships the Egyptians inflict upon the Israelites, v. 12 stands out as witness both to the futility of Egyptian measures against the chosen people and to the evil effects of oppression on the oppressors themselves. Affliction and service[10] fail to solve the overpopulation problem, and again Pharaoh speaks. This time he relies on two women to implement his plan, Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives to the Hebrews.

The Second Solution: Exodus 1.15-(21)22

The scope narrows. Attention centers on two women who give life in a double sense: by profession they are midwives, and through their action they defy the death edict of Pharaoh. The midwives let the boys live (חיה, vv. 17, 18). When asked for an

v. 13 a And the Egyptians made the Israelites serve with rigor,

v. 14 b and they made their lives bitter with hard service, with mortar and bricks, and with all service in the field,

a' all their service which they made them serve with rigor.

Verses 11-12a form an inclusio in which references to affliction (ענה) frame the report that the Israelites labored to build Pithom and Raamses. Verses 13-14 also display a balanced structure, with references to the conditions under which the Israelites labor (בפרך, 'with rigor') surrounding a more specific description of the tasks assigned to them, service with mortar and bricks (of which we hear more in 5.6-21) and labor in the field. The response of dread on the part of the Egyptians (v. 12b) receives special attention by virtue of its position at the center.

10. As Cassuto (*Exodus*, p. 12) and Ackerman ('Literary Context', pp. 83-84) point out, the fivefold repetition of עבד in vv. 13-14 suggests the severity and tediousness of the Israelites' service and also balances the use of five verbs for the increase of the population in v. 7. The root עבד is used frequently of cultic service; thus we have another foreshadowing in 'the recurrent leitmotif that the God of Israel has liberated his people from the "servitude" of Egypt in order to take them into his own "service"' (M. Buber, *Moses* [Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1946], p. 34).

explanation, they reply that Hebrew women are חיות. Although the precise meaning of this word is not certain, the context makes clear that it refers to the ease with which the women bring life into the world. Even baby females are associated with life, not death, for they are singled out to be spared from the death edict, 'if it is a daughter, she may live' (חיה, v. 16); 'every daughter you shall let live' (חיה, v. 22).

The story begins by introducing the characters: the king of Egypt, Shiphrah (whose name means something like 'beauty')[11] and Puah ('girl').[12] In a narrative that shows virtually no concern for names (Pharaoh, Pharaoh's daughter, Moses' mother and father and sister remain unidentified), the names of these two women are recorded, thus assuring that they will be remembered throughout generations for their important contribution. The only other name that appears in Exod. 1.8–2.10 is that of Moses. Moses delivers the Israelites in one way; the midwives, in another. Not only do they save countless Hebrew babies (because of them the people increase, v. 20), but perhaps Moses, too, owes his life to them.

The two midwives appear two times before the king of Egypt.[13] Beginning with their second audience, the major themes of the account occur in reverse order.[14]

11. J.J. Stamm, 'Hebräische Frauennamen', in B. Hartmann *et al.* (eds.), *Hebräische Wortforschung* (FS W. Baumgartner; VTSup, 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 323. W.F. Albright has identified the name on an eighteenth-century Egyptian list; see 'Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century BC', *JAOS* 74 (1954), p. 229.

12. The name is to be connected with Ugaritic *pġt*, 'girl' (Stamm, 'Hebräische Frauennamen', p. 327; cf. Gordon *UT* §2081.

13. Why are there two midwives? The story does not say. The number has been taken as a sign of a different literary source, since two midwives would suggest a very small Hebrew community, a contradiction of the tradition that the Hebrews are too numerous. Some commentators have argued that the two are representatives of a guild (e.g. B. Jacob, *Das zweite Buch der Tora: Exodus* [University Microfilms, 1953], p. 21); others consider the choice of two a feature of the storyteller's art (e.g. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 16; Cassuto, *Exodus*, pp. 13-14). The latter alternative seems best. The many owe their increase (v. 20) to the few.

14. In a recent study ('The Literary Structure of Exodus 1.2–2.10', *JSOT* 24 [1982], pp. 99-107), D.W. Wicke notes the chiastic structure but divides it somewhat differently.

Exodus 2.15-16

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the second was Puah,

A 'When you serve the Hebrew women as midwife, and see the birthstool,[15] *if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she may live.*'

Verse 17

B But the midwives feared God,

C ***and they did not do*** (עשו) ***as the king of Egypt commanded*** (דבר) ***them, but let the male infants live.***

Verses 18-19

So the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them,

C′ ***'Why have you done*** (עשיתן) ***this thing*** (הדבר) ***and let the male infants live?'***

The midwives said to Pharaoh,

'Because (כי) the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for (כי) they are vigorous; before the midwife comes to them they are delivered'.

Verses 20-21

So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people

B′ increased and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he made (ויעש) them houses.

Verse 22

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people,

A′ *'Every son that is born you shall expose on the Nile, but every daughter you shall let live.'*

The outer members of the chiasmus (A and A′) portray Pharaoh as the source of death; the inner members (C and C′) focus on the midwives as the source of life.[16] Between them stands the fear of God—as a motivating factor (B) and as an attitude of faith which reaps its reward. Themes C′ and B′ appear in conjunction with other elements, the midwives' clever response to Pharaoh and the action of the deity, both of which stand out in the story since they appear without counterparts in v. 17 (themes B and C).

15. The meaning of the word אבנים is uncertain; often suggested is either 'birthstones/birthstool' (cf. Jer. 18.3) or 'genitals' (on the basis of the context). For proposals and literature, see W.H. Schmidt, *Exodus 1–6* (BKAT, II/1; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), pp. 1-2, 5-6.

16. Ackerman explores the life versus death theme; see 'Literary Context', pp. 84-88 *et passim*.

A and A'. Pharaoh issues his decree of death first to the midwives (A, v. 16) and, when this covert method proves unsuccessful, to all his people (A', v. 22). Verse 15 confronts us with one of the most nettling ambiguities of the text. Does Pharaoh speak to the Hebrew midwives or to the midwives of the Hebrews? In other words, are the midwives Hebrew or Egyptian? Whereas the Masoretes construed the word 'Hebrew' as an adjective, the consonantal text is ambiguous. The Septuagint and the Vulgate read, 'the midwives of the Hebrews'. No amount of scholarly ingenuity has been spared in marshalling evidence for one side or the other. The names Shiphrah and Puah are Semitic, but this fact does not constitute a conclusive argument.[17] It has been maintained that Pharaoh would not have trusted Hebrew women to carry out his command; on the other hand, reliance on Hebrew women might be taken as another example of Pharaoh's lack of wisdom, which he demonstrates with remarkable consistency.[18] Whether or not Egyptian midwives would have been accepted by the Hebrew women or Hebrew midwives by the Egyptians (v. 19), or whether the retort of v. 19 would make more sense in the mouth of Egyptians or Hebrews remain moot issues. The ancient listener may have known what we cannot now recover with certainty. Our present inability to be specific enables us to emphasize larger possibilities of meaning. If Hebrew, the midwives, like Moses later, are deliverers of their own people. In that case it is important to note that their reason for defiance is 'fear of God', and not simply their loyalty to their people. If Egyptian, their fear of God leads them to defy their pharaoh, considered divine by the Egyptians. Thus the midwives would belong together with the daughter of Pharaoh as examples of 'righteous gentiles' who follow the dictates of conscience and compassion rather than the mandate of a despot. In its very ambiguity, the text

17. See Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, p. 27.

18. Cf. Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 21: 'Von diesem Pharao soll [?] man gerade das Unvernünftige erwarten'. Childs (*Exodus*, p. 16), however, posits that it should come as a surprise to the listener that the midwives do not carry out the command, which is not as likely to be the case if they were Hebrew. For a different view, see Ackerman, 'Literary Context', p. 86, who submits that pharaoh depends on the demoralized position of slaves.

moves beyond nationalistic concerns to bear witness to the power of faith to transcend ethnic boundaries.

After the midwives defy the command to kill male babies and spare females (A, v. 16), Pharaoh issues the directive again, this time to 'all his people' (A′, v. 22). The command is varied to fit the situation: 'Every son born you shall expose on the Nile, but every daughter you shall let live'. Exposure[19] was in ancient times a common means of disposing of unwanted children. We should understand 'every son born to the Hebrews' here; the phrase is witnessed by the versions (Samaritan Pentateuch [SP], LXX, T, TJ). Its omission in the Hebrew text produces the humorous result that, in his anxiousness to include 'all' (כל: *'all* his people', *'every* son', *'every* daughter'), the pharaoh forgets the most important thing of all, to exclude Egyptian male infants.[20]

B and B′. The text provides only one motivation for the midwives' defiance. Nothing is said of loyalty to the Hebrews or of anticipation of a reward from God. Indeed, their fear of God leads them to take a considerable risk. To 'fear God' does not mean simply to be afraid of God or God's punishment; it is, on the contrary, a far broader theological concept, having at its center the element of *mysterium tremendum* and extending to conduct that is guided by basic ethical principles and in harmony with God's will.[21] We may recall from Proverbs that 'the fear of Yhwh is the beginning of knowledge' (1.7), and that 'in the fear of Yhwh is strong confidence, and for one's children it will be a refuge' (14.26). If the midwives are Hebrew, S. Plath's observation that 'fear of God' prevents interference with God's promise of numerous descendents to the patriarchs seems especially fitting, as it connects the midwives' motive with the proliferation theme which plays so large a part in the

19. Following M. Cogan, 'A Technical Term for Exposure', *JNES* 27 (1972), pp. 133-35, in rendering השליך as 'abandon, expose'.

20. Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 25. The demand to kill male infants is a foreshadowing of the final plague, the death of the first-born, which causes Pharaoh finally to permit the exodus from Egypt.

21. See S. Terrien, 'Fear', *IDB*, II, pp. 258-59; J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament* (AnBib, 25; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), pp. 193-94, 196 *et passim*; H.W. Wolff, 'Zur Thematik der elohistischen Fragmente im Pentateuch', *EvTh* 29, pp. 59-72 (ET 'The Elohistic Fragments in the Pentateuch', *Int* 26 [1969], pp. 158-73).

narrative.[22] On the other hand, fear of God is not the exclusive prerogative of the Israelites (Gen. 20.11; 42.18; cf. Deut. 25.18).[23] It may be that the narrative attributes fear of God to the Egyptian midwives just as it later attributes to the Egyptian princess a knowledge of Hebrew. If so, the text again scores an ironic point against the Egyptians: their own midwives fear God (that is, the god of Israel) and not Pharaoh (the god of Egypt).

The proper theological attitude receives a divine blessing. Verses 20-21 record the only action of God in Exod. 1.8–2.10. Unfortunately, the sense of these verses is not altogether clear. The text reads literally,

v. 20 So God dealt well with the midwives
and the people increased (sg., but pl. in SP, S^{AL}, TJ)
and grew very strong (pl.).
v. 21 And because the midwives feared God,
he made them (m. pl.) houses.

The house refers to progeny, a blessing traditionally conferred upon men (Exod. 1.1; 20.17; 1 Sam. 25.28; 2 Sam. 7.11; 1 Kgs 2.24; Rachel and Leah are credited with building up the house of Israel, Ruth 4.11). A problem arises with regard to the second verb in v. 21 and the antecedent of 'them'. The Septuagint reads the verbs of v. 21 as plural, 'they made for themselves houses'. Most interpreters take the reference in v. 21 to God's bounty toward the midwives: God gives them a reward that corresponds to their deed. In spite of the difficulty of the pronouns, it is clear that the growth of the Hebrew people has been made possible by the midwives. The proliferation theme which we met in vv. 7, 9, 10 and 12 appears again in v. 20, and the reference in v. 21 to houses presents us with another variation of it (as well as a pun on בת, 'daughter').

C and C'. In C and C' the midwives appear as givers of life; they 'let the male infants live' (vv. 17 and 18). Defiance takes the form of non-compliance: they did not do (עשׂה) as the king of Egypt commanded (דבר). Pharaoh's response sets their deed (הדבר) in sharp contrast to his command (דבר) as a direct action

22. S. Plath, *Furcht Gottes: Der Begriff* יראה *im Alten Testament* (Arbeiten zur Theologie, II/2; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1962), pp. 49-50.

23. See the discussion of Plath, *Furcht Gottes*, pp. 50-52.

against him: 'Why have you done (עשיתן) this thing (הדבר)?' He does not ask out of curiosity; his words take the form of an accusation found in juridical contexts.[24] The midwives face a serious charge. They respond with a defense that would strain the gullibility of any pharaoh, and they manage at the same time to poke fun at Egyptian women: unlike Egyptian women, Hebrew women are vigorous and give birth before the midwife arrives. Frustrated a second time in his effort to control Hebrew increase, the pharaoh once again (v. 22) turns to his people, who had earlier cooperated in his plan (vv. 8-14).

The Third Solution: Exodus 1.22–2.10

Exodus 1.22 provides the introduction to this account. It sets the scene for the main action, the Nile, and presents the background against which the mother's unusual behavior in 2.2-3 becomes comprehensible. Moreover, since Pharaoh addresses 'all his people', the introduction makes unmistakably clear that Pharaoh's daughter knowingly acts in defiance of her father's order.

Irony pervades the account. The pharaoh's last recorded words (he dies, 2.23, without having uttered another) are 'every *daughter* you shall let live', and immediately (2.1) the story introduces a *daughter* of Levi and soon thereafter (v. 5) the *daughter* of Pharaoh himself, both of whom undermine the success of Pharaoh's plan. Their actions relate ironically to pharaoh's decree. At first glance, Moses' mother seems to be following the command to expose male infants upon the Nile. Is she being a model subject (or even more, since 'all his people', v. 22, appears to mean only the Egyptians)? Or is she, like the midwives, ostensibly obeying Pharaoh while in reality defying him? Whereas Pharaoh had commanded that boys be *exposed* on the Nile (1.22), Moses' mother *places* him there (2.3). Her ותשם stands in contrast to Pharaoh's תשליכהו as an indication of the care she lavishes on her child—this is no exposure story.[25] The

24. See H.J. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament* (WMANT, 14; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964), pp. 30-31, 66-67; Schmidt, *Exodus*, p. 44.

25. Cogan, 'A Technical Term for Exposure', pp. 133-35. For extra-biblical parallels to the exposed child motif, of which there are many, see

irony reaches its zenith in the action of Pharaoh's daughter, who does precisely the opposite of Pharaoh's command: *she* takes the baby out of the Nile (מן המים משיתהו).

Many women appear in this tale, all without names,[26] but variously identified: Moses' mother (בת, אשה מינקת, אם), his sister (אחתו, עלמה), the daughter of Pharaoh (בת פרעה) and her maids (אמתה, נערתיה). Men are strikingly absent (Moses' father disappears from the story after v. 1) or passive (Moses cries, v. 6, and grows up, v. 10; otherwise he is the object of the actions of women). It is a women's story insofar as their action determines its direction. But while narrative attention focuses on the activity of women, their attention centers on Moses. Referred to as a בן, a ילד and a נער, at the end of the story *he* is given a name. Thereafter he becomes the central character of the exodus. An inherent narrative irony presents itself: without Moses there would be no story, but without the initiative of these women, there would be no Moses!

The speech and action of women shape the contours of the story. Moses' mother acts but, interestingly, does not speak. In contrast, his sister and Pharaoh's daughter both act and speak. The story begins with a detailed account of the action of one woman, a daughter of Levi (vv. 2-3). A small but significant role is assigned to Moses' sister (v. 4). Next we hear of considerable activity on the part of yet another woman, the daughter of

esp. D.B. Redford, 'The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (cf. Ex. ii 1-10)', *Numen* 14 (1967), pp. 209-28; Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit*, pp. 4-13; B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (ASOR Dissertation Series, 4; Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980), pp. 149-272; T.L. Thompson and D. Irvin, 'The Joseph and Moses Narratives', in J.H. Hayes and J.M. Miller (eds.), *Israelite and Judean History* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 180-202 (Irvin); on the differences, see Childs, 'The Birth of Moses', pp. 115-18.

26. Moses' mother is identified as Jochebed in Exod. 6.20; Num. 26.59; the name may be theophorous; see Stamm, 'Hebräische Frauennamen', p. 315. His sister, Miriam, plays an important role in the exodus; on Miriam in biblical and later tradition, see R. le Déaut, 'Miryam, soeur de Moïse, et Marie, mère du Messie', *Bib* 45 (1964), pp. 198-219. Tradition has bestowed upon Pharaoh's daughter many names, e.g., Thermuthis (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.9.5), Mērris (Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.27.3). Tharmuth (*Jub.* 47.5), Batyah (*Exod. R.* to 2.10), Bithia (Talmud, cf. 1 Chron. 4.18).

Pharaoh (vv. 5-6), followed by the vital speech of the sister (v. 7). Though she has little action and only one speech, the sister is crucial to the development of the story. She has the critical linking role between the two daughters (vv. 4, 7). Once all three women are involved, narrative attention moves quickly back and forth between them (vv. 7-10), until finally an unnamed daughter gives our hero his identity: 'she called his name Moses'.

Verses 2-3. Moses' mother, called here simply 'the woman', is the subject of a series of verbs (Moses is the object). The first two deal with procreation (she *conceived* and *bore* a son); the next two, with her response to the child she bears (she *saw* how goodly he was[27] and *hid* him three months). A negative situation is introduced: she is *able* to hide him no longer. Her reaction takes the form of increased activity: she *takes* a papyrus ark, *'bitumens'* it with bitumen and pitch, *places* the child in it, and *places* it in the reeds along the edge of the Nile. All this activity on her part underscores the mother's concern for her child and her resourcefulness in caring for him. Amid her activity, the text affords us little psychological insight, and I should not wish to contribute to scholarly speculation on this point. Whether she acts 'eher aus Verzweiflung als aus Berechnung',[28] whether she knows the habit of Pharaoh's daughter to bathe in the Nile or simply hopes for a miracle to save her child[29] are details that the text does not reveal. What it does reveal is her determination to act rather than to leave things to fate (the deity), and we might note as well that she proceeds without the counsel or assistance of her husband.[30]

Her decision to prepare for her child a תבת נמא has significant associations, for the only other appearance of the word תבה in

27. כי טוב recalls the refrain of Gen. 1; see W.F. Albright, 'The Refrain "and God Saw *kî ṭôb*" in Genesis', in *Melanges bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de André Robert* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1957), pp. 24-26; cf. J.L. Kugel, 'The Adverbial Use of *kî ṭôb*', *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 433-35; J.G. Janzen, 'Kugel's Adverbial *kî ṭôb*: An Assessment', *JBL* 102 (1983), pp. 99-106.

28. Schmidt, *Exodus*, p. 68.

29. H. Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels von 2. Mose bis Richter und Ruth* (SAT, 1/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), p. 21: 'Mutterliebe hofft alles...'.

30. LXX apparently felt the need to supply him; the verbs in v. 2b and the first verb of v. 3 are plural.

the Bible refers to Noah's ark (Gen. 6–9). Commentators have not failed to note the connection and draw a parallel between Noah and Moses as deliverers who are rescued from death by drowning; a further parallel may be drawn between Noah who builds the ark that saves humanity and Moses' mother who builds the ark that saves the future deliverer of Israel. The mother prepares the ark with care: she 'bitumened it with bitumen and pitch', v. 3. The verb חמר is a hapax legomenon. The noun appears only here and in Gen. 11.3 and 14.10. A related word, חֹמֶר 'clay, mortar', is used in 1.14, with reference to the kind of work done by the Hebrews. What for them is associated with toil is for her a labor of love. She places the ark with the baby in it among the reeds. One can scarcely miss here an allusion to the famous deliverance at the Sea of Reeds and thus find a hint of Moses' approaching rescue.

Verse 4. Out of nowhere, a sister appears. The text had not mentioned her before, and indeed v. 2 gives the impression that Moses was his parents' first child. Whereas her appearance comes as a surprise, her presence is essential: it is she who 'joins the introductory theme of the mother and child with that of the princess and child. Moreover, the sister tempers the harshness of the exposure by keeping watch at a distance.'[31] She stations herself nearby 'to learn what would happen to him'. Matters are now in the hands of the deity.

Verses 5-6. As if by design, pharaoh's daughter comes down to bathe in the Nile. Since her maids are walking beside the Nile, she, and not they, sees the ark among the reeds. A series of actions is attributed to her: she *goes down* to bathe in the river, she *sees* the ark among the reeds, she *sends* her maid to fetch it,[32] she *opens* it and *sees* the child. Observing his tears, she *has compassion*. Surmising the situation, she *says*, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children'. The detailed attention to her activity recalls the elaborate consideration given to the preparations of Moses' mother in vv. 2-3. Her words which culminate her actions are all important. They show that she knowingly ignores her father's command when she accepts the suggestion, soon to

31. Childs, 'The Birth of Moses', p. 18; cf. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 115.

32. Or *she* takes it, but the context favors attributing this action to the maid.

be proffered by Moses' sister, to keep the child as her own.

Verses 7-10. Without hesitation the infant's sister addresses the royal bather. Her daring proposal, ostensibly offered as a helpful suggestion, affords in fact the perfect solution to her brother's plight:[33] 'Shall I go and call for you a nurse from the Hebrews to nurse this child for you?' By suggesting a nurse from the Hebrews, she prepares the way for the reunion of mother and child. Her careful phrasing, 'shall I call for *you*... to nurse for *you* the child', provides the idea that the princess keep the infant, and the repetition of 'for you' creates the impression that she makes the proposal for the sake of the princess.[34] By virtue of her quick thinking and persuasive recommendation (the text says nothing about mother and sister having worked out a plan beforehand, though some commentators are inclined to think so), the sister deserves as much credit for saving Moses as her mother or the princess.

The princess accepts the suggestion as readily as it has been offered ('go', v. 8), and the young woman goes to get the child's mother. Two actions of the sister (keeping watch, v. 4, and fetching the mother, v. 8) and her single speech determine her brother's future. Having made her inestimable contribution to the story, she drops out of the picture. With a propitious outcome assured, events draw quickly to a close. In offering to pay wages to the child's mother (v. 9), the princess makes an important addition to the sister's proposal. Whereas many commentators have pointed out the irony of Moses' mother being paid to nurse her own son, there may be even more to the idea than this. B. Childs presents evidence from extra-biblical sources that suggest that paying wages to a wet nurse may be a way of attesting the right of possession to a child.[35] If this be the case, the princess accentuates (note the emphatic אֵת) what the sister had only intimated: she claims the child as her own, taking upon herself responsibility for its welfare.

The response of the mother in v. 9, like that of the sister in v. 8, is reported as simple action without discourse. Nothing

33. Childs compares her role to that of the counselor in wisdom literature ('The Birth of Moses', p. 120).

34. Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 20; cf. Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 31-32.

35. Childs, 'The Birth of Moses', pp. 112-14; Schmidt, *Exodus*, p. 71.

more is necessary to indicate their accord with the princess's requests. Verse 10 summarily reports the growth of the child and the fact that his mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter. This event probably occurred sometime after the weaning, which usually took place about three years after birth. In what appears to be some form of adoption,[36] the child 'became a son' to the princess. Thus secured from any further attempts of Pharaoh to deal with the Hebrew population problem, the future liberator grows up in the house of the oppressor.

The story ends with the naming of the child by the princess, another sign perhaps of her claim to the child. Customarily the mother named the child; here the unusual fact that Moses was not named at birth by his mother may be attributed to narrative necessity. 'She named him Moses' (משה). Scholars are generally agreed that the name Moses is Egyptian, belonging to the same type as Thutmoses, Ahmoses, and Ramoses, but lacking the theophorous element (the god X is born or has borne him).[37]

36. Whether one may speak of adoption in a strict sense is questionable. No laws pertaining to adoption appear in the biblical legal corpus, and the examples often brought to bear are all interfamilial (Gen. 30.3; 48.5, 12; 50.23; Ruth 4.16; Est. 2.7, 15; cf. Ps. 2.7; 2 Sam. 7.14). Note, however, that we have here a foreign context. H. Donner, 'Adoption oder Legitimation? Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament auf dem Hintergrund der altorienalischen Rechte', *OrAnt* 8 (1969), p. 104, concludes that the situation of 2.10 is the 'Begründung eines Pflegschaftsverhältnisses mit einem Findelkind, dessen Eltern zwar bekannt sind, aber vor der Prinzessin geheimgehalten werden: ein einseitiger Rechtsakt also, ganz zweifellos ohne Vertrag mit den früheren Gewalthabern'. Cf. H.J. Boecker, 'Anmerkungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament', *ZAW* 86 (1974), pp. 86-89. Childs ('The Birth of Moses', p. 114) thinks the position of the naming after the weaning may be a part of the traditional sequence in the act of adoption, but admits that this is not certain. There is no evidence later in the exodus account of Moses' having any special relationship to the house of Pharaoh.

37. J.G. Griffiths, 'The Egyptian Derivation of the Name Moses', *JNES* 12 (1953), pp. 225-31; S. Hermann, 'Mose', *EvTh* 28 (1968), pp. 303-304; S. Hermann, *Israels Aufenthalt in Ägypten* (SBS, 40; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwork, 1970), pp. 66-67 and 66 n. 6 (ET *Israel in Egypt* [SBT, II, 27; London: SCM Press, 1973], pp. 43-44, 77-78 n. 6); Schmidt, *Exodus*, pp. 73-75; for different evaluations, cf. W. Helck, 'Tkw and die Ramses-Stadt', *VT* 15 (1965), pp. 43-47; J.M. Sasson, 'Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative', *VT* 18 (1968), pp. 380-87.

But the text has the princess explain it with a Hebrew etymology, 'I drew him (מְשִׁיתֻהוּ) out of the water'. M. Noth is of the opinion that the Egyptian origin of the name was unknown to the Hebrew storyteller, who, otherwise, would have used it.[38] This conclusion does not leave room for the possibility that the storyteller wanted to give an alternative etymology to the Egyptian one. 'Es ist nicht daran zu rütteln, dass die Tora den Namen als einen *hebräischen* verstanden wissen will...'[39] The verb משה means 'to draw out'; מֹשֶׁה is the active participle, 'the drawer out'. Commentators point out that for the princess's explanation, 'for I drew him out of the water', to fit, the name should be מָשׁוּי, 'the one drawn out'. That the aetiology be etymologically precise is neither necessary (this is seldom the case in the Bible)[40] nor desirable (the irony which results from the allusion to Moses' role in the exodus can scarcely be missed). Since one's name and personality are intimately connected, to give a name is, in a sense, to chart a destiny. In a way, then, the princess contributes to the exodus not only by saving Moses' life, but also by designating him 'the drawer out'.

J.S. Ackerman takes a different view of the naming and, in fact, of the portrayal of the princess altogether. He believes that the story makes fun of the princess's inadequate command of Hebrew: she means to give a name which designates Moses as passive recipient but ironically bestows upon him an active name.[41] Ackerman's contention that 'there is all the difference in the world between the clever Hebrew midwives and the dumb Egyptian princess'[42] is based on his assumption that the princess is unwittingly controlled by the clever sister. He takes her one word response to the sister's proposal ('go') as a sign of

38. M. Noth, *Exodus* (OTL; trans. J.S. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 26; cf. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 19; D.B. Redford, 'Exodus 1.11', *VT* 13 (1963), p. 415; cf. also Y. Zakovitch, 'Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations', *HAR* 4 (1980), p. 173.

39. Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 37, italics his.

40. The pun here, like many biblical aetiologies, is based on sound association. On early and later derivatory methods, see Y. Zakovitch, 'A Study of Precise and Partial Derivations in Biblical Etymology', *JSOT* 15 (1980), pp. 31-50.

41. Ackerman, 'Literary Context', pp. 94-95.

42. Ackerman, 'Literary Context', p. 86.

'supreme authority, a brusque manner in dealing with underlings, and perhaps some relief in having the problem so quickly resolved'.[43] While he makes so much of her simple response, Ackerman has little to say about her compassion, suggesting only that its source may be the same power which hardens Pharaoh's heart. But surely due emphasis should be given to the princess's reaction upon viewing the weeping child. The root חמל means 'to spare', 'to have pity', 'to have compassion'. Lack of compassion is contemptible. Incensed upon hearing Nathan's story of the poor man and his ewe lamb, David condemns the rich man precisely 'because he had no compassion' (2 Sam. 12.6). Just as the midwives' fear of God provides the explanation of their conduct, so the princess's compassion furnishes the motivation for hers. She is not *duped* but simply *prompted* by the sister's recommendation. Her acceptance of it is made possible by her compassion, without which it is unlikely that any amount of persuasion on the part of the sister would have accomplished the desired result. Note that compassion and recognition are linked: 'She had compassion on him, and she said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children"' (v. 6). B. Jacob has observed that the remarkable thing is not that, upon seeing the crying infant, she had compassion, but that she had compassion for a Hebrew child.[44] She knows that in rescuing the child she is openly defying her father's decree. Such flagrant disobedience on the part of a daughter is certainly no small matter. Moreover, she follows the sister's proposal to its logical conclusion by taking upon herself responsibility for the child.

With regard to the naming of Moses, Ackerman's thesis that the narrative ridicules the princess's inability to handle Hebrew encounters difficulties. If one insists on a scientific etymology, then on the basis of numerous examples (Cain, Noah, Abraham, Samuel, to name a few), one might conclude that the Hebrews could not speak their own language very well. Even Moses

43. Ackerman, 'Literary Context', p. 96. Similarly, he takes the words of the princess to the mother in v. 9 as harsh and condescending (p. 93); cf. Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 20, who sees in the brief reply of v. 8 a sign that the princess is 'deeply moved'. I view it as no more, or less, than ready assent.

44. Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 31.

names his son with an etymologically inappropriate explanation (2.22).[45]

The paralleling of characters in the story seems to me to offer an additional narrative clue in favor of a positive view of the Egyptian princess. At two points the narrative pace slows to describe in detail the actions of women, the daughter of Levi and the daughter of Pharaoh. The attention they give to the child is comparable, and in fact some of the same terms are used (לקח, ראה). By the end of the story, the two daughters have something more in common—a son. Thus I follow the majority of commentators, ancient and modern, in viewing Pharaoh's daughter as an example of the 'righteous gentile'. She recognizes the child as Hebrew, saves him from the Nile in spite of her father's decree, determines to keep him, and even hires a Hebrew woman to nurse him. She gives her Hebrew 'son' a Hebrew name, one, in fact, which promises great things for him. Her compassion transcends ethnic distinctions. Appropriately, such distinctions are also set aside as Israelite tradition recounts her important contribution to the nation's history.

Concluding Observations

Pharaoh's three attempts to influence the course of history fail. First (1.8-14) the Israelites continue to increase in the face of oppression, a result that can only be attributed to behind-the-scenes activity of the deity. Next (1.15-22 and 1.22–2.10) women prevent the realization of Pharaoh's plan. God acts through women to free the chosen people. Women—at least one of whom is non-Israelite—are credited with the preservation both of the nation and of its greatest leader. In contrast to Pharaoh's people, who act en masse to carry out his will (1.8-14), women respond as individuals who act according to dictates of conscience and compassion. Their stories (1.15-22; 1.22–2.10) are stories of defiance. The defiance of the midwives is subtle: they act by choosing not to act in accordance with Pharaoh's edict. That of Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter is open: in direct opposition to Pharaoh's command, they save the child Moses from death by exposure on the Nile. All the women

45. The root is משׁה, but Moses explains it as if it were נשׁה.

knowingly take positions over against the king of Egypt; all make choices for life, and not death. They do not appear to think of the consequences their disobedience might have for themselves. Fear of God, which takes precedence over allegiance to Pharaoh, motivates the midwives. Pharaoh's daughter is moved by compassion, an emotion that extends to a people despised by her father and dreaded by her people. The midwives' fear of God, the princess's compassion, the resourcefulness of Moses' mother, and the quick thinking of his sister, all work together to overcome the evil designs of the king of Egypt. In the refusal of women to cooperate with oppression, the liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage has its beginnings.

The prologue to the exodus (Exod. 1.1–2.25) ends with a story about Moses. The repetition of the word 'man' (אִישׁ) eight times in this account alerts us to its male-centered emphasis. Now Moses, who himself had been rescued by daughters, rescues daughters. Moses, who had been given a name symbolic of his destiny by Pharaoh's daughter, now *gives* a name, symbolic of his status as a sojourner, to his son.[46] While these reversals remind us of the patriarchal context of our narrative, they do not supersede what has gone before. Even here, it is through daughters that Moses finds a home, albeit a temporary one.

What are we to make of the considerable role given to women in the prelude to the exodus? To say that the story shows that God uses the weak and lowly to overcome the strong is to give only a partial answer. The question is not *why* does a story of daughters form the prelude to the exodus, but rather: what effect do these stories about women have on the way we read the exodus story as a whole? Exodus begins with a focus on women. Their actions determine the outcome. From its highly positive portrayals of women to its testimony that the courage of women is the beginning of liberation, Exodus 1.8–2.10 presents the interpreter with powerful themes to draw on: women as defiers of oppression, women as givers of life, women as wise and resourceful in situations where a discerning mind and

46. For analysis of this part of the prologue, see esp. Ackerman, 'Literary Context', pp. 96-106; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, pp. 54-59; Isbell, 'Exodus 1–2', pp. 48-56.

keen practical judgment are essential for a propitious outcome (the midwives' response to Pharaoh, 1.19; the sister's suggestion to Pharaoh's daughter, 2.7). But this is only the beginning.

We should not stop with the prologue. It remains for future study to shed further light on the role of women in the remainder of the exodus account; Miriam, in particular, deserves careful attention for her role as leader along with Moses and Aaron (cf. Mic. 6.4, which places her on equal footing with them). At least once more in the story a foreign woman, the resourceful Zipporah, intervenes to save Moses' life (Exod. 4.24-26). As the exodus account continues, Moses, as well as the deity, takes on female attributes, providing for the people on their journey from Egypt to Canaan (see especially Num. 11.11-14 for explicit feminine metaphors). Reassessment of our traditional assumptions about women's roles in the biblical story is in order. The present study has sought to provide some contribution to this task.

BUT IF SHE BE A DAUGHTER...SHE MAY LIVE! 'DAUGHTERS' AND 'SONS' IN EXODUS 1–2*

Jopie Siebert-Hommes

Biblical accounts in general throw less light on *daughters* than on *sons*. Sons are perceptibly in the foreground, whereas daughters are relegated to the wings. This is especially true in the Genesis accounts of the patriarchs. In these stories the son is the bearer of the promise. It is on him that continuation of YHWH's history with Israel depends. Thus, the birth of a son is a significant event. Sometimes it is questionable whether the son really will be born, or not.

By way of contrast, the daughter has a far less dominant place. She is hardly visible and—if mentioned at all—has only a minor role to play. She is almost never the *subject* of a story. More frequently she is the *object*. Sometimes she is even the object around which the sons' negotiations revolve.[1]

There are scarcely 'birth accounts' of daughters. The expression *wtld bn* ('she bore a son') occurs frequently. But there are only two parallel expressions concerning the birth of a daughter (Gen. 30.21 and Hos. 1.6). The birth of daughters is, to be sure, frequently mentioned, but always as a collective and as an

* This is a new version of my article, 'Twelve Women in Exodus 1 and 2: The Role of Daughters and Sons in the Stories concerning Moses', in K.A. Deurloo *et al.* (eds.), *Amsterdamse catiers voor Exegese en bijbelse theologie*, IX (Kampen: Kok, 1988), pp. 47-58.

1. An example of this is Dina, Lea's daughter. Although she is a principal character in Gen. 34, she makes no contribution whatsoever. Her opinion is not asked. What happens to her serves merely as an introduction to the actions undertaken by the 'sons'.

addition to the birth of sons: *wywld bnym wbnwt* (and he begat sons and daughters).

It is all the more remarkable that, in the opening chapters of Exodus, *daughters* occupy a special position alongside the *sons*. It can even be said that both lexemes are used as key words. This is most clearly demonstrated in 1.15-22 and 2.1-10. The words *bn* (son) and *bt* (daughter) determine the structure of the text. This constitutes an exception to the rule stated above, whereby sons are dominant and daughters are in the background. In Exodus 1 and 2 daughters have a special function. Although it remains true that the promise is made manifest through the son, he is no more than the passive object in these accounts: the negotiations revolve *around* him. The daughter, on the contrary, is *subject*: she fulfils an active role. Daughters appear to be of decisive significance for the continuation of the promise.[2] Let us examine how *sons* and *daughters* function in the text of Exodus 1 and 2.

Twelve 'Sons'

At the very outset, the text makes it clear that the sons fulfil an essential role in the story. This is made apparent in the opening verse:

> Now these are the names of the sons of Israel (1.1).

Then, all the names are listed. The concept of the 'name' is of major importance in the Old Testament.[3] A person given a name is also accorded a function. Naming signifies endowment with the role the named person has to play in history. The fact that the sons' names are explicitly mentioned means that they fulfil the function of 'sons of Israel'.

The precise nature of this role becomes clear in subsequent stories. These describe a struggle between Egypt's Pharaoh and the people in question. The prize to be won is the son who

2. 'The female principle of life-giving triumphs over the male prerogatives of threatening and death-dealing' (E. Fox, *Now These are the Names* [New York: Schocken Books, 1986], p. 16).

3. Cf. K.A. Deurloo, 'De Naam en de Namen', *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie* 2 (1981), p. 35.

happens to be the bearer of the promise. The storyteller expresses this in Pharaoh's words,

> If he be a son, put him to death (1.16).

It is through the *son* that God—this chapter displays a deliberate policy of not speaking of YHWH—will carry out his plans. This is the very reason why Pharaoh seeks to kill the sons. Lacking sons, this people's history will have no future. The sons of Israel are not only powerless, but do not even have a chance: having been brutally forced into servitude (1.13-14), their sons are to be killed at birth (1.16).

The central position is given to the one son who will be the saviour: Moses. The story of his birth constitutes the focal point in the structure of these two chapters of Exodus, which can be divided as follows:

1. *Israel becomes a nation* (1.1-7)
   (Introduction to Exodus and references to Genesis).
2. *The measures taken by the Pharaoh* (1.8-22)
   2.1 Servitude (1.8-14)
   2.2 The midwives (1.15-22)
3. *The birth of the saviour* (2.1-10)
   and the giving of his name: Moses.
4. *Moses prior to his vocation* (2.11-22)
   4.1 Moses in Egypt (2.11-15)
   4.2 Moses in Midian (2.16-22)
5. *Reversal of Israel's fortunes* (2.23-25)
   (Conclusion of the initial accounts and referral to the rest of Exodus).

In these accounts, everything focuses on one person: Moses. But—even before his birth—he is the object of mortal threats:

> Every son that is born
> throw him into the river (1.22).

In Exodus 2, the progress of history is incorporated into the life of the son. It so happens that he is the one threatened with drowning in the deadly water of the river. And, should he drown, the role of all the sons of Israel would terminate and the history of this people would come to a dead end.

Twelve 'Daughters'

But this history does not come to a dead end. Why not? The answer to this question is somewhat surprising: the continuation of history here depends on daughters. And they are twelve, too!

These daughters are the subject of the story in Exodus 1–2. Their actions are decisive for the unfolding events. They determine the progress of history. Although the accounts pivot on Moses, although his birth story gets a central place, it is not he who determines how things will turn out. Cheryl Exum is right in stating that the narrative focuses on the activity of women. She notes the inherent irony: 'Without Moses there would be no story, but without the initiative of these women, there would be no Moses!'[4]

The actual birth of this son is recounted in an extremely sober fashion and does not constitute the core of the account. Central to the pericope is a *daughter*:

> She saw the child...
> and she had compassion with him (Exod. 2.6)

This is the very instant that things begin to take a new direction. It is *Pharaoh's daughter* who, at the decisive moment, stirs events onto the right course. Because of her intervention, the son remains alive.

But this daughter is not alone. She has eleven 'sisters'. The text of Exodus 1 and 2 makes it clear that Moses owes his very existence to the twelve women who support him. They ensure that he can live; that he can be born and grow up; that he is led into Midian, where YHWH will call him. He is the one who will lead Israel—represented by the twelve sons at the beginning of the book—out of Egypt. All that will become a possibility precisely thanks to the mediation of twelve women. Their active intervention ensures that history does not come to a fatal end.

Who are these twelve women? They are two midwives, Moses' mother, his sister, Pharaoh's daughter, and, finally, the seven daughters of the priest of Midian. Some remarks will be made concerning each of these individual and collective figures.

4. J.C. Exum, 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live', in this volume, p. 52.

The Midwives

The first two women are named in Exodus 1: Shifra and Pu'a. It is worth noting that the pharaoh is left unnamed. Many commentators have made attempts to discover his name,[5] assumed to have been lost because of a defective writing of a-historical records. Yet it is more likely that the monarch's anonymity is a narrational device. Has not his name been omitted on purpose, in contrast to the explicit naming of the midwives? Why are the names of simple midwives recorded? They are the ones who ensure that 'the children live'. In contrast, the king 'has them killed'. At the same time he is shown to be powerless. His actions do not make his name. But the midwives make their name by dint of their deeds.

The midwives' acting is introduced by a phrase indicating the framework within which they perform their task:

> The midwives feared God (1.17; also 1.22).

Just as in Genesis, it is shown here that 'fearing God' and 'having them killed' cannot possibly go together.[6] This fact will become clear to Pharaoh. He orders the midwives to *see (wy'ytn)*:

> See the (supporting) stones[7] (1.16).

But instead of seeing, they fear (*wtyr'n*): they fear God. In Hebrew the words for 'seeing' and 'fearing' are written with the same letters, but in a different order. Here the text offers a marvellous phonetic wordplay[8] which serves to underline the point of the story: the midwives literally turn the whole affair inside out and upside down. What is the point of the narrative?

5. C. Houtman has an extensive survey of various names of Egyptian rulers identified by experts as the pharaoh of Exodus (*Exodus 1.1–7.13* [Kampen: Kok-Pharos, 1986], pp. 170-75).

6. See Gen. 20.11: 'The *fear of God* is not in this place and they will slay me'; Gen. 42.18: 'This do and live, for I *fear God*'.

7. 'sachlich und erzähltechnisch kommt nur eine Bedeutung wie "Gebärstuhl" in Frage' (I. Willy-Plein, 'Ort und literarische Funktion der Geburtsgeschichte des Mose', *VT* 41/1 (1991), p. 114 n. 11).

8. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary of the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), p. 14.

Pharaoh draws a sex distinction with regard to the newborns:

> If he be a *son*, put him to death,
> but if she be a *daughter*, she may live (1.16).

By contrast, the midwives make no distinction. They deal only with *yldym* (children):

> They let the children live (1.17).

Pharaoh then responds with question formulated to show that the midwives' lack of distinction has not escaped his notice:

> Why have you done this thing,
> you have let the *children* live! (1.18).

It seems to me that the word *yldym* anticipates the subsequent story (2.1-10) in which, at the most decisive moment, it is said of Moses:

> One of the Hebrew's *children* is this! (2.6).

The midwives fear God—and that is the decisive factor that enables the children to remain alive. For them, there can be no question of killing the son.

The Daughter of Levi

Moses' mother is one of the most important figures who promote the progress of history. She is introduced into the account with a somewhat surprising epithet—as 'daughter of Levi'. Her name is not mentioned, nor is that of child's father.[9] The purpose is evident: the storyteller wants only the name of Moses to stand out.

It is remarkable that the *'yš* (man) of the house of Levi does not take unto himself an *'šh* (wife) but a *bt* (daughter). Commentators have trouble with the fact that Moses' mother is not called 'a woman of the house of Levi' but 'daughter of Levi'.[10] Yet, is it not likely that she is so described here, because of her special role in the story? She is analogous to the

9. Yet the Bible knows their names; cf. Exod. 6.20.

10. E.g. Rashi for Exod. 2.1. See also B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 6; W.H. Schmidt, *Exodus 1–6* (BKAT, II/1; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), p. 49-51.

'daughter of Pharaoh' who ends up as 'mother of Moses'.[11]

The particular role of the 'daughter of Levi' is to bring the saviour into the world. But when she has done so, the story does not proceed as the reader might expect. The saviour's name is not disclosed yet—although the same series of words which elsewhere accompany announcements of a birth are present: *wyylk, wyyqḥ, wtthr, wttld bn* (he went, he took, she became pregnant, she bore a son). However, the regular continuation of this phrase: *wyyqr' (wttqr') šmw*, 'he (she) called his name' is missing. It is noticeable that Moses is not given a name until he has 'grown up' with his mother (2.10). And he is named not by the biological mother who gave him birth, but by the daughter of the Pharaoh. At the usual formal place of the name-giving, we read the following:

> She saw him—that he was goodly (*ṭwb*) (2.2).

It can be assumed that these words contain more than a simple comment on Moses' appearance. Some rabbis suggest an association with the Creation account.[12] In that case the text indicates, to some extent, Moses' future function. His mother has the *ṭwb* (goodly) attribute in mind when she decides to conceal him[13] till concealment is no longer possible. Then she cannot escape Pharaoh's command:

> Throw him into the river (1.22).

And this is what the daughter of Levi does. Nevertheless, she does it in such a way that the threatening waters of death become a source of salvation. Like Noah, she makes an 'ark' (*tbh*) and places this ark of reeds in the rushes,[14] so that her son may survive.

11. Brenner points out the particular literary device of the 'two mothers' pattern which can be found in various biblical accounts: 'The two mothers complement each other' (A. Brenner, 'Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the "Birth of the Hero" Paradigm', *VT* 36/3 [1986], p. 260 [repr. in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 204-21]).

12. See Midrash Rabbah for Exod. 2.2.

13. *ṣpn*: to hide, shelter, from the threat of enemy attack in order to preserve one's life. See Josh. 2.4; Pss 27.5, 31.21.

14. *swp* has two meanings, both of which fit here: 1. To come to an end

Moses' Sister[15]

Storytellers and illustrators of biblical accounts frequently present Moses' sister in a romantic light. The dramatic images they draw show her hiding at a distance, to see that nothing goes amiss with her baby brother who lies among the bullrushes (2.4). But is this the image the text wishes to convey?

One answer to the question can be found by examining the meaning of the word *mrḥq*, usually translated by a concept of spatial signification, for example, 'at a distance'.[16] However, a comparison with other texts containing the same concept shows that *mrḥq* has an additional dimension of meaning, namely 'unattainable, far away'.[17] Zuurmond argues that the term does not signify quantitative but, rather, qualitative separation.[18] Lying in the bullrushes, the child has been delivered up to death and is unavailable for human aid. The delicate connotations of qualitative unattainability are not captured by the phrase 'at a distance'. The King James Bible rightly opts for the translation 'afar off'.

> His sister stationed herself afar off (2.4).

It seems legitimate to infer that the author intends to suggest that Moses' sister stood there in order to see how God would deal with the matter. This inference is confirmed by the use of the verbal form *wtttṣb*, an imperfect *Hithpael* of *yṣb*. This verb

to destroy; 2. reed, rush. In Exodus 13 the same word is used to indicate the Sea of Reeds (*ym swp*). There too a situation is described where human aid is unavailable. The saving of Moses from the *swp* in Exod. 2 reads like a prefiguration of what will happen to the whole people in Exod. 14.

15. Some commentators consider the appearance of Moses' sister as a later insertion. See Schmidt, *Exodus 1–6*, pp. 52-54. Yet Brenner regards Moses' sister as 'a third maternal figure who links the real and surrogate mothers together' ('Female Social Behaviour', p. 269).

16. E.g. *The New English Bible.*

17. See Exod. 23.7: 'Keep thee far from a false matter'; Ps. 38.12: 'My kinsmen stand afar off'; and Ps. 38.22: 'O my God, be not far from me'.

18. R. Zuurmond, 'Het bijbelse verhaal: verteller en vertaler', *Mededelingen van de Van der Leeuw Stichting* 41 (Amsterdam: private edition, 1970), p. 2511.

has two meanings: 1. to take one's stand, 2. to stand one's ground.[19]

Not only in Exodus but also in Numbers and Deuteronomy this verb is used almost exclusively within a special context. In these three books the verb's meaning is linked with a particular aim, namely taking up a position in order to observe how YHWH will intervene.[20] A striking example is Exod. 14.13. Israel is in a totally hopeless situation on the shores of the Sea of Reeds. In this situation Moses says,

> Fear not, *station yourselves*
> and see the salvation of YHWH (14.13).

The same obtains in Exod. 2.4. Moses' sister 'stations herself' in order to witness YHWH's action.

YHWH's mighty deeds are described in the subsequent chapters, where extensive accounts are given of how Israel finally escaped from Egypt thanks to the Lord's tenfold intervention. The story *begins* at the river, where Moses is found in a hopeless situation in the midst of the reeds (*swp*, 2.5). The story *ends*—for the present—at the Sea of Reeds (*ym swp*), when the whole people, all the sons, have been saved from a hopeless situation (15.19).

Moses' sister is witness to both beginning and end. At the beginning she *stations herself,*

> to know what would be done to him (2.4).

At the end we find her yet again, on the opposite shore of the Sea of Reeds. Now she *knows* what has been accomplished. She takes her tambourine and sings her response, turn and turn about *with the other women* (!):

> Sing to YHWH
> For he has triumphed gloriously (15.21).

Pharaoh's Daughter

The daughter of Pharaoh occupies a central position in the story of Moses' birth. Her role is exceptional. At the greatest crisis

19. See KB.

20. In Exod. 8.16; 9.13; 14.13; 19.17; Num. 11.16; 23.3, 15; Deut. 31.14 (twice).

point in the story, when the child is given up to the water and he has become unattainable for his mother, even for his sister, it is Pharaoh's daughter who descends into the depths and shows pity.[21]

Like a *midwife* 'who lets the children live' (1.17), she pulls Moses out of the river, out of the deadly power of the waters. And then, like a *mother*, as if she herself had borne him, she names him and he becomes a son to her (2.10).

The text is constructed in an extremely balanced fashion. It posits the *son*, the *mother*, and the *sister* concentrically around Pharaoh's *daughter*:

Introduction: the man, the daughter, the Levi tribe (1.1).

A birth of the *son* (no name) (1.2)
B *mother* lets child go (1.3)
C *sister* (passive) (1.4)
D Pharaoh's *daughter*—seeing (1.5)
E the child (1.6a)
D' Pharaoh's *daughter*—compassion (1.6b)
C' *sister* (active) (1.7-8)
B' *mother* gets child back (1.9)
A' adoption of the *son* (name) (1.10)

In this textual structure the phrase *bt pr'h* (daughter of Pharaoh) serves as a closed framework around *hyyld* (the child). The daughter of Pharaoh is the one to see the tiny ark and to open it. She sees—right in the middle of the pericope—'the child'.

The importance of this narrated moment is underlined not only by the structure but also by the number of words in the text. The pericope consists of 141 words: 70 + 1 (*hyyld*) + 70. The word count shows that it can hardly be a coincidence that *hyyld* (the child) is exactly in the middle of the pericope, in which the phrase 'the child' happens to be a *leitwort*[22] which occurs seven times.[23]

21. Exum, 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live, p. 58: 'Just as the midwives' fear of God provides the explanation of their conduct, so the princess's compassion furnishes the motivation of hers'.

22. See M. Buber, 'Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs', *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1936), pp. 211-38.

23. Likewise, in the preceding pericope *hmmyldt* (the midwives) feature seven times.

The Seven Daughters of the Priest

Finally we meet the *seven daughters* of the priest of Midian. In contrast to the first five women they have neither motherly nor sisterly concern for Moses. Care of this type would no longer suit the story's content. Moses has reached manhood. The seven daughters are here to lead him into a new phase. They introduce Moses into the house of their priest father, an event of great significance for Moses' future.

At the moment of his meeting with Moses, the 'priest of Midian' is called Reuel (2.18). Yet in all the rest of Exodus—Exodus 3 (once), Exodus 4 (twice), Exodus 18 (seven times)—his given name is Jethro. Cassuto[24] is of the opinion that we are faced with two different traditions here. I will presume that the use of the name *rw'l* (Reuel) in this instance has narrative significance. Reuel means 'friend of God' and so his name emphasizes his role in the story, that is, the opposite figure to Pharaoh who is the 'enemy of God'. In fact, the story is about the battle between Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) and YHWH (the God of Israel). Yet YHWH remains the 'Hidden One'. As 'Hidden One', he is made manifest in Reuel, the friend of God, in whose house Moses finds refuge after leaving the 'house of Pharaoh'.

Up to this moment Moses has been an Egyptian, the son of Pharaoh's daughter. In that capacity he has been given a name, which is repeated seven times. As the son of Pharaoh's daughter he functions in Exodus 2. The daughters of Reuel call him 'an Egyptian man' (2.19). And he remains an Egyptian until YHWH himself calls his name, an event marked by the repetitive:

> Moses, Moses (3.4).

And Moses responds:

> Here I am (3.4).

This calling is decisive. At this very instant Moses becomes the man with a calling, and his name assumes its full significance, 'he who pulls out' (rather than 'he who is pulled out').

24. Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 30.

The seven daughters of the priest introduce Moses into their father's house. The twelve daughters have accomplished their mission. From now on Moses' life will continue to make history independently.[25]

Final Remarks

The text of the stories dealing with Moses' birth places daughters in a special position, which can also be discerned in the formulation of Pharaoh's command:

> If he be a *son*, put him to death
> but if she be a *daughter*, she may live (1.16).

Pharaoh might have confined himself to half the command, namely that any *son* should be killed. Yet in two places (1.16 and 1.22) the storyteller makes him say most emphatically that the daughters shall live. The first time Pharaoh 'speaks' to the midwives. But in the second instance he 'commands', and addresses himself to 'his whole people':

> Every son that is born, throw him into the river[26]
> but let every daughter live (1.22).

It is worth noting that in v. 22 the verb *ḥyh* (live) is in the Piel. GKC argues that the Piel may also have a causative sense (like Hiphil), *ḥyyh*: to cause to live. 'The eager pursuit of an action may also consist in *urging* and *causing* others to do the same' (GKC's italics).[27]

25. Here Moses names his own son, which is a hopeful sign (2.22).

26. Some scholars are of the opinion that we should read 'every son born *to the Hebrews*', in accord with the text of various versions (SP, LXX, Targumim). Exum rightly concludes: 'Its omission in the Hebrew text produces the humorous result that, in his anxiousness to include 'all' (*kl*, 'all his people', 'every son', 'every daughter'), Pharaoh forgets the most important thing of all, to exclude Egyptian male infants' (p. 49). Exum, 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live', cites the suggestion made by B. Jacob that this command 'is a foreshadowing of the final plague, the death of the first-born (p. 49 n. 20). I presume that the formulation of Pharaoh's command might also foreshadow the events in Exodus 14, where it looks as if YHWH is executing Pharaoh's command: 'YHWH shook the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned... no one of them remained' (Exod. 14.27-28).

27. GKC §52g.

Under conditions of oral transmission the sentence would thus have to be read with emphasis, which is why I would advocate that this emphasis be indicated in the written text by an exclamation mark at its end:

> But let every daughter live![28]

Such an insistence on letting the daughters live is completely compatible with the role played by 'daughters' in these chapters of Exodus. It should be noted that, through Pharaoh's intercession—but contrary to his intent—the daughters are the ones who enable history to progress at this crucial stage.

The fate of the *twelve sons* of Israel depends on the one son who was born and remained alive thanks to the intervention of *twelve 'daughters'*. Literally and figuratively, the daughters hold the saviour's head above water.

28. Note that in vv. 17-18 the verb *hyh* is in the Piel formation too.

SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT SECONDARY CHARACTERS: WOMEN IN EXODUS 1.8–2.10

J.Cheryl Exum

I never particularly liked my article, '"You Shall Let Every Daughter Live": A Study of Exodus 1.8–2.10', which is reprinted in this volume, and I am therefore grateful to Athalya Brenner for giving me the opportunity, some ten years later, with the benefit of hindsight, to indicate what I think is wrong with it and what I would do differently if I were to write a feminist critique of this text today. I say I never liked the article, but it would be more accurate, and more honest, to say that I never liked the text. A story of five women and a baby. Women, it is true, are very important in these opening chapters of Exodus, but the subject of their activity is a male infant, Moses, who soon takes over the story and dominates it, while women fade into the background. His mother, his sister and the pharaoh's daughter (accompanied by women servants) are directly involved in preserving the infant Moses' life; and although the midwives do not interact with him directly, by implication they save his life when they do not obey the pharaoh's command to kill male babies. We never hear of Shiphrah, Puah and the pharaoh's daughter again after Exodus 2, and Moses' mother appears again only in his genealogy (Exod. 6.20; Num. 26.59). Of the many active female characters in Exod. 1.8–2.10, only Moses' sister has a role in the subsequent narrative, one that, apparently, the biblical writers felt the need to suppress (cf. Exod. 15.21 with 15.1–18) or discredit (Num. 12).

Exod. 1.8–2.10 was not a text that I would have chosen of my own accord. My article was a revision of a paper I was invited to write on the role of women in Exod. 1.8–2.10. That paper

and others were discussed at a joint symposium of the Women and Religion Section and the Liberation Theology Group of the American Academy of Religion at its 1981 Annual Meeting. The existence of a special joint session on the topic, 'The Feminist Hermeneutic Project', was an indication of the attention feminist interpretation was beginning to receive in the field of Religious Studies, and I believe the Exodus text was selected as a topic not only because of the important role female characters have in it but also because of the traditional association of the exodus theme with liberation theology. At that time, one of the goals of the emerging feminist biblical criticism was to uncover positive portrayals of women in the Bible—as if one could simply pluck positive images out of an admittedly androcentric text, separating literary characterizations from the androcentric interests they were created to serve.[1]

A few years later, in a short essay that discussed a number of biblical 'mothers', I turned again to Exod. 1.8–2.10, this time using the opportunity to express my dissatisfaction with my earlier work. My conclusion bears citing here as much for what it does not say as for what it does say.

> I have dealt at length in another study with the women in the prologue to the exodus, which in part justifies my brevity here. I must confess that I was never satisfied with the results. The reason, I believe, has to do with disappointment that the narrative quickly and thoroughly moves from a woman's story to a man's story. While a feminist critique might want to seize onto the affirmative dimension of our paradox [without Moses there would be no exodus, but without these women there would be no Moses], accenting the important consequences of women's actions for the divine plan, it must also acknowledge that being mothers of heroes—albeit daring, enterprising, and tenacious mothers—is not enough; acting behind the scenes is not enough.[2]

Whereas I recognized the limitations of the portrayal of women in Exodus 1–2, I had nothing to offer by way of response

1. P. Trible's groundbreaking *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* appeared in 1978 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).

2. J.C. Exum, '"Mother in Israel": A Familiar Figure Reconsidered', in L.M. Russel (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 82.

beyond an objection, and thus was left with disappointment. I now see that what was needed was an exposé and critique of the ideology that motivates this presentation. In what follows, I would like to indicate the direction in which a feminist critique attentive to gender politics could go. In doing so, I will address two major problems with my 1983 article: (1) because I used a literary method that remained within the ideology of the text, I was able only to describe the view of women expressed in the text and not to critique it, and (2) although I mentioned the problem of the absence of women in the narrative after one moves beyond the first few chapters of Exodus, an absence as striking as the presence of so many women in the first four chapters, I did not investigate the relationship of this absence to the noticeable presence of women in the opening chapters in terms of gender politics.

Literary Analysis and the Ideology of the Text

The approach I used to analyze the text in 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live' was essentially that of close reading or rhetorical criticism, which 'investigates the narrative in its present form on the premise that an understanding of its literary contours will aid us in perceiving its meaning'.[3] Such a literary approach was, and still is, very useful. I would still not question its conclusions that the women in Exodus 1 and 2 are portrayed positively, that they are active and enterprising, and that their actions are important for the future of the Israelite people. The sustained focus on women, the subtle comparisons created by paralleling characters, the ironic twists, the artistic use of the *bat/ben* contrast to make a point—all these things contribute to a striking affirmation of the role of women in the opening chapters of Exodus. Jopie Siebert-Hommes, in articles published in 1988 (reprinted in a different form in the present volume) and 1992,[4] describes further artistic details that highlight the

3. J.C. Exum, '"You Shall Let Every Daughter Live": A Study of Exodus 1.8–2.10', *Semeia* 28 (1983), pp. 63-82 (reproduced in this volume, pp. 37-61).

4. J. Siebert-Hommes, 'Twelve Women in Exodus 1 and 2: The Role of Daughters and Sons in the Stories Concerning Moses', *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie* 12 (1988), pp. 47-58 reprinted pp. 62-74 above; and *idem*, 'Die Geburtsgeschichte Mose innerhalb des Erzählzusan-

women's roles. When, for example, her analysis reveals that the twelve tribes owe their deliverance to *twelve daughters*, she shows that this method's potential for drawing out new insights from significant textual details is far from exhausted. Siebert-Hommes's essays and mine demonstrate, quite persuasively I believe, how positively women are portrayed in Exod. 1.8–2.10.

The problem with this kind of literary analysis is that it places logocentric constraints on feminist criticism. By focusing solely on the surface structure of the text, on the ways literary devices and structures serve as guides to meaning, it limits us to describing, and thus to reinscribing, the text's gender ideology. I now see this method as confining, and as representative of the phallocentric drive to control and organize reading (and reality) into clearly defined categories. If we read according to the ideology of the text available to us in the surface structure, and stop there, we are left with the ancient (male) authors' views of women, which, in the case of Exodus 1–2, happen to be affirmative. But to see how the positive portrayal of women in Exod. 1.8–2.10 nevertheless serves male interests, we need to interrogate the ideology that motivates it. Granted that women are given important roles here—and indeed, precisely because women are given such important roles here—we need to ask, what androcentric interests does this positive presentation promote? Key questions that a feminist critique of these chapters needs to consider are, what is it about the women in Exod. 1.8–2.10 that makes them characters with whom women in ancient Israel might have wished to identify?[5] And what is it about them that makes those responsible for maintaining the social and symbolic order want to manipulate them?[6] I shall only begin to address these questions here.

imenhangs von Exodus i und ii', *VT* 42 (1992), pp. 398-404. As R.J. Weems points out ('The Hebrew Women are not Like the Egyptian Women: The Ideology of Race, Gender and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1', *Semia* 59 [1992], pp. 25-34), the text does not question but only reinscribes the ideology of difference.

5. I speak here of women in ancient times, for whom texts like this served as a means of social control. To the extent that modern women might wish to identify with these biblical models, the Bible still serves as means of social control.

6. J. Kriesteva, 'Stabat Mater', in S.R. Suleiman (ed.), *The Female Body in*

Stepping Outside the Ideology of the Text

As feminist critics have pointed out, even though men and women share in the making of history, symbolic production has been controlled by men.[7] Even if the Bible's authors were not all males, the dominant male world view is the world view that finds expression in the biblical literature. I begin, therefore, with the assumption that the biblical literature was produced by and for an androcentric community. I understand women in the biblical literature as male constructs. They are the creations of androcentric (probably male) narrators, they reflect androcentric ideas about women, and they serve androcentric interests. What Esther Fuchs observes about biblical mothers applies to other female characters as well: they 'reveal more about the wishful thinking, fears, aspirations, and prejudices of their male creators than about women's authentic lives'.[8] Since as long as we remain within the androcentric ideology of the text we can do no more than describe ancient men's views of women, a feminist critique must, of necessity, read against the grain. It must step outside the text's ideology and consider what androcentric agenda these narratives promote.

Why are women allowed to play such an important role in the early chapters of Exodus? A traditional way of understanding the focus on women in Exodus 1–2 is to connect it to a familiar biblical theme: God (behind the scenes, in this case) uses the weak and lowly to overcome the strong and powerful. The inferior, but clever, women successfully defy the powerful Egyptian pharaoh. If there is a positive side to this characterization, there is also a negative one. This particular pharaoh, as I argued in the 1983 article, is exceedingly foolish—so foolish that even women can outwit him! Another way of looking at the important role women play in these chapters is to consider it a

Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 113-14.

7. See, e.g., G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 5-6, 199-211, 231-33 *et passim.*

8. E. Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers in Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', in A. Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 118.

consequence of the focus on infants: it is only natural that women should appear in an account where babies are concerned. Both these explanations appeal to women's subordinate position and traditional domestic role to account for the emphasis on women in the opening chapters of Exodus, but neither interrogates the text's androcentric motivation.

In order to maintain and perpetuate itself, patriarchy depends on women's complicity.[9] Force, threat and fear are often relied upon to keep women in their place.[10] But rewarding women for their complicity is one of patriarchy's most useful strategies, because it can often achieve a level of cooperation that force or threat cannot guarantee. The honor of playing a decisive role in the future deliverance of the Israelite people is the reward the women of Exodus 1–2 receive for acting in the service of male power (the real contest in Exodus is, after all, between 'males'—between the Egyptian pharaoh and the [male-identified] Israelite god, or between Pharaoh and Moses). Women, Exodus 1–2 tells us, are important; without the courage and ingenuity of women, Israel might not have survived as a people. In Exod. 1.8–2.10, the women are accorded recognition as national heroes; their bravery, cleverness and initiative are instrumental in the founding of a nation. The risks they take to preserve the lives of male babies, especially Moses,[11] guarantee that these women will be honored for generations to come; thus the names of the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, are recorded, and the story later supplies the names of Moses' mother Jochebed and sister Miriam.[12]

9. See Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, pp. 5-6, 233-35.

10. I examine these various ways of controlling women in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1993).

11. The women risk punishment for disobeying the pharaoh. As I pointed out in 1983, the midwives disobey Pharaoh's edict to kill male babies by not carrying it out; Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter openly defy the command to expose male infants on the Nile.

12. This means that only the woman who is clearly non-Israelite, Pharaoh's daughter, is not given a name. On whether the midwives are Hebrew or Egyptian, see the discussion in Exum, 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live', p. 48. Miriam is not identified as Moses' sister in Exodus, but only as Aaron's sister; she is identified as Moses' sister in

The text tells women how important mothers are and proposes that the domestic sphere can be a place of valor, where a woman's mettle is tested. Honor and status (the two are related) are rewards patriarchy grants women for assent to their subordination and cooperation in it. One of the few roles in which women can achieve status in patriarchal society is that of mother. Motherhood is not only patriarchy's highest reward for women, it is also presented as something women themselves most desire (witness the many biblical accounts of barren women who desperately desire and finally give birth to a long-awaited son)—and this, as Fuchs points out, is a powerful ideological strategy.[13] The women in Exod. 1.8–2.10 perform traditional female, and especially motherly, activities, activities focused on children—though, of course, they give new meaning to their nurturing and protective roles. The midwives not only assist in birth, they save lives. As a reward for their defiance of the pharaoh's command to kill male babies, God builds them 'houses'; that is, he gives them families.[14] Figuratively speaking, the midwives, Moses' mother, Moses' sister, and Pharaoh's daughter are all mothers of the exodus.[15]

What about the women in Exod. 1.8–2.10 makes them characters with whom women might wish to identify? They exhibit admirable qualities, such as heroism, fear of God (1.17), compassion (2.6), determination (2.2-4) and cleverness (2.7), and they show that women can contribute significantly to the life of their people. The story praises women in the spirit of the old adage that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. In essence, its message to women is: stay in your place in the domestic sphere; you can achieve important things there. The public arena belongs to men; you do not need to look beyond motherhood for fulfilment. In Exodus 1–2, Hebrew women do not need to kill Egyptians (fighting is men's work or the work of their male-identified God: Exod. 12.29; 15.24-31) but only to keep Hebrew males alive.

Num. 26.59 and 1 Chron. 6.3.

13. Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers', p. 130.

14. See the discussion of the difficulty of v. 21 in Exum, 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live', p. 50.

15. Exum, 'Mother in Israel', p. 80.

Sayings like 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' and 'behind every great man is a woman' are meant to make women feel important, while in reality such sayings serve an androcentric agenda by suggesting that women should be satisfied with their power behind the scenes. Exod. 1.8–2.10, where women actively determine Israel's future, serves a similar agenda. It compensates women on the domestic front for the role denied them in the larger story of the exodus and journey to the promised land. But like its modern counterparts in the sayings above about women's indirect power, it has something to hide: its fear of women's power that makes it important to domesticate and confine it.

The Subversive Female Presence and its Suppression

The women in Exodus 1 and 2 are literary creations, male constructs—and they are powerful. They outwit and overcome men. Patriarchy fears women's power and seeks to circumscribe and control it. Precisely because women have power that they can use to subvert authority, they present a threat to patriarchal society. It is therefore in the interest of those who maintain the social and symbolic order to represent women characters as using their power in the service of patriarchy.

Historically patriarchy has relied on class divisions and ethnic divisions among women to prevent women from forming alliances that might further the cause of their sex. Women do not often interact or speak to one another in the Bible, yet here in Exodus 2 we find Moses' mother, his sister, an Egyptian princess and the princess's women servants all engaged in protecting the infant Moses from the pharaoh's death edict. Whereas the text offers a glimpse of the formidable threat posed to male authority when women cooperate across class and ethnic lines, it co-opts women's power for its own ends: it uses an alliance between women to defy the foreign authority that oppresses the Hebrew people. Moreover, the text describes a fairly unlikely alliance; that an Egyptian princess would openly defy her father's command to expose male babies on the Nile by taking the infant out of the Nile, and that she would adopt a Hebrew baby, could be considered 'providential'.

Indeed, by having the sister appear suddenly to put the idea of adopting Moses in the princess's mind, the narrator suggests that the deity, rather than any decision by women to work together, is responsible for the propitious outcome.

One way of dealing with women's power is to diffuse it. In Exodus 1–2 this is accomplished by having three (or five) 'mothers' rescue Moses, rather than one. Imagine the power one woman would have had if she alone had saved Moses.[16] Diffusing the influence of women, I believe, is also the reason Moses' mother and sister are anonymous in this account; by withholding their names until later in the narrative, the narrator accords them less recognition and renders them less imposing.

The role the women play in the birth of the nation is comparable to the role usually played by mothers in the Bible: they yield their power, and their stories, to their husbands and sons.[17] Like a child dissociating itself from its mother, Moses must separate from his 'mothers' and exchange his passive role for an active one. Thus, almost immediately after he is rescued by *daughters* (recall the meaningful use of *bat* in Exod. 1.8–2.10), Moses rescues *daughters*. In Exod. 2.16-22, Moses—who in the space of five verses has grown up, killed an Egyptian, and fled the country—delivers seven daughters from shepherds who threaten them when they come to water the flock of their father Reuel (Jethro), the Midianite priest. He marries one of these daughters and has a son of his own (the contrast between *ben*, 'son', and *bat*, 'daughter', continues throughout the chapter). But the reversal of roles is not complete. In Exod. 4.24-26, a foreign woman again saves Moses' life: Zipporah, Moses' wife, prevents the divine Father from killing her husband, through a rite of circumcision that makes him her 'bridegroom of blood'.[18]

16. See A. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Biblical Seminar, 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 99-100.

17. See Exum, *Fragmented Women*, ch. 3, 'The (M)other's Place'.

18. This is a strange text that has posed numerous problems for interpretation. It is interesting that a woman here performs the rite of circumcision. For suggestive comments on this passage, see I. Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 84-93.

Typically, she drops out of the picture, and is not mentioned again until Exod. 18.2-5, where we learn that Moses had sent her away.[19] Perhaps we might view the reappearance of a woman to deliver Moses violently as an instance of women refusing to be written out of the text without a struggle; in other words, as a symptom of a guilty narrative conscience.[20] In any event, Moses, unhampered by the woman's presence, moves on to deliver not just women again, but rather a whole people.

After Exodus 4, women are conspicuously absent in much of the narrative of the exodus and journey to the promised land in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.[21] The feminine, however, resurfaces in another form. Patriarchy seeks to diffuse, or suppress, or appropriate female power, as the Bible's classic illustration of womb envy dramatically demonstrates: in Genesis 2, the creative power of women is assumed by the prototypical Man who—like Zeus who gave birth to Athena from his head—symbolically gives birth to woman with the help of the creator god (and with no creator goddess involved). 'Womb envy' is perhaps behind the application of female metaphors to God and Moses later in the exodus story. In Numbers 11, when the people complain to Moses about not having meat to eat, Moses complains to God about his responsibilities:

> Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child, to the land which you swore to give their

19. Jethro brings her and her two sons with him to meet Moses after the exodus from Egypt, but Zipporah is not mentioned in the reconciliation scene.

20. I suggest something similar about the reappearance of Michal's name in 2 Sam. 21.8; see Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 38.

21. Exod. 19 indicates that the covenant at Sinai is made with men; the people are addressed with the command, 'Do not go near a woman' (v. 15). That the ten commandments, for example, are addressed to men is clear from the second person masculine singular pronouns and a command such as, 'You shall not covet... your neighbor's wife (v. 17). On women's general invisibility in the laws, see P. Bird, 'Images of Women in the Old Testament, in R.R. Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), pp. 48-57. Cf. also the Afterword to this volume, pp. 255-58.

> fathers?'... I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is to heavy for me (Num. 11.12-14).

Moses, cast in a nurturing, maternal role, finds it too hard, and his rhetorical questions imply that it is God who conceived the people of Israel and who is not doing an adequate job of mothering them. God and Moses are imaged as mothers and midwives—the important female roles in Exodus 1–2—not so much because they are better at women's roles (here they seem to have problems, but their difficulties will be resolved), but because male figures in these roles do not threaten the status quo. Applying maternal imagery to the deity and the human hero of the story is a way of appropriating maternal power. Patriarchy does not have to worry that God and Moses, acting as mothers and midwives, will subvert androcentric interests and undermine the social order because they are the guarantors of the patriarchal social order.

I suggested above that Exod. 1.8–2.10 serves as a kind of compensation for the fact that women are not given a role in the bulk of the account of the exodus and wanderings. When Miriam, the one woman from Exodus 2 to reappear later in an important role, does speak out for herself—claiming a position of leadership—she is put in her place. In Num. 12.1-2, we learn that Miriam (and Aaron)[22] speaks out against Moses 'because of the Cushite woman he married'. It is noteworthy that here Miriam is set over against a foreign woman, whereas Exodus 1–2 showed the cooperation between women across ethnic boundaries. Perhaps it is because such a level of cooperation cannot be tolerated that Miriam is used to speak out against a foreign woman in Numbers 12. The complaint shifts abruptly from an objection to the woman to the issue of leadership: 'Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?' (v. 2). The strange account has baffled commentators, not the least because only Miriam is punished for challenging Moses' authority.[23] She becomes leprous and must

22. The verb is third person feminine singular, suggesting either that Aaron is a later addition to the story (if one takes a historical-critical approach) or that the story is primarily concerned with making only Miriam look bad.

23. It is not without significance that this story appears just after

be 'shut up outside the camp seven days', after which she is brought in again.

Miriam's punishment of being quarantined outside the boundary of the camp is suggestive of the position that feminist critics have argued is occupied by women in the phallocentric symbolic order.[24] Women are at the boundary of the symbolic order, the border between men and chaos. As borderline figures, women partake of the properties of a border: they are neither inside nor outside. When women are viewed as inside the border, they are seen to have protective qualities (as in Exod. 1 and 2); when viewed as outside, they are dangerous (as here in Num. 12). Miriam's claim to a position of authority comparable to Moses—and the rhetorical questions imply that God has spoken through her also—threatens to blur the distinction between Moses' role and hers. Her claim challenges male hegemony. Punishment is swift and devastating. For threatening to disrupt the social order, Miriam is put outside the boundary of patriarchal order, symbolized by the camp, where she becomes, literally, the outsider, the other—until she is allowed to come back *inside* the camp/symbolic order in her proper, submissive role. Some commentators have argued that Aaron does not share in Miriam's punishment because he is a priest, and the Priestly writers would not have been willing to dishonor him by portraying him as leprous and having him put outside the camp. Gender politics are also at work, I suggest: as a man, Aaron poses no threat to the symbolic order. On the contrary, his proper place is inside it; he remains within the camp. While leaving Aaron unblemished and unpunished, Numbers 12 effectively humiliates and eliminates the woman.

The case of Miriam in Numbers 12 offers but one example of the way women's experience, in the biblical text as in other patriarchal texts, is expressed but has been displaced and

the account in which female imagery is used for Moses and God. In Num. 11.16-30 the problem of nurturing the people is resolved by allowing seventy men, elders of the community, to share the task. There Moses said, 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets'; here Miriam's role as prophet (cf. Exod. 15.20) is undermined.

24. For this discussion, see T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 167.

distorted. To be sure, much work remains for feminist criticism of the exodus and wandering traditions. But attempting to account for the distortion or absence or suppression of female presence after the opening stories in Exodus 1 and 2 in terms of biblical gender politics, rather than treating it as if it were unmotivated, is, I think, a step in the right direction.

THE WILL OF THE DAUGHTERS*

Ankie Sterring

Towards the end of my last college year I expressed the wish to write my final paper about the Daughters of Zelophehad. Responses to my wish were neither enthusiastic nor encouraging. One of the reactions I remember best was, 'That theme is so stale. De Vaux has already written everything worth knowing about this subject in his book on "Ancient Israel"!'.[1] Fortunately such reactions did not deter me from setting out to critique the story. Fortunately indeed, because not everything about this topic had been adequately considered; and not all the relevant questions had been asked, let alone answered.

Zelophehad's daughters do not belong to the dossier of biblical celebrities. They do not even belong to the collection of renowned biblical women. The story in which they feature has not captured the imagination of the common reader. For example, no children's bible recounts it. And yet this story, despite or perhaps because of its strikingly lacklustre ordinariness, is one of the most fascinating women's stories in the Bible.

Rebellion and Strategy

The story of Zelophehad's five daughters takes place at an important juncture: near the end of the journey through the desert undertaken by the Israelites, just before they are about

* This article appeared first in Dutch, as in S. De Jong (ed.), *Het testament van de dochters* (Kampen: J.H. Kok).

1. I here refer to the Dutch translation of R. de Vaux's book *Les Institutions de l'ancient testament*, I (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1958), pp. 104-107.

to enter the promised land. Numbers 26 narrates how God orders Moses to assemble all males aged twenty years and older, who can be enlisted as army-worthy (26.1-4). The males are to be counted, because the new country will be apportioned to each one of them. Verse 33 of this name-and-number list mentions the daughters for the first time and gives us their names: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.

After this listing and counting of the Israelite males, the daughters themselves enter the action in Numbers 27. They line up in front of Moses and Eleazar the priest, the chieftains and the entire assembly. According to Num. 26.51 this gathering consisted of 601,730 men, excluding the Levites who—as temple servants—would get no part of the land. Again the daughters are defined by their names as well as by their lineage (from Manasseh, Joseph's oldest son). Then and there they state their petition to Moses and the whole assembly:

> Our father died in the desert
> and he was not among the gathering that gathered themselves
> against YHWH, in the gathering of Korah.
> But he died for his own sin
> and he had no sons.
> Why should the name of our father be removed[2]
> from among his family
> because he has no son?
> Give unto us a possession among our father's brothers!
> (Num. 27.3-4).

The repetitions in their plea, with which they emphasize the importance of some of their arguments, are worth noting. Twice they allude to the death of their father as well as the fact that he did not have even a single son. Apparently they want to emphasize that they are not motivated by their own personal interest but by the wish to preserve their deceased father's name and to cherish his memory. Their assertion that their father did not belong to Korah's assembly is heavily underscored by the thrice-repeated use of the root יעד ('gather') in two formations (נועדים and עדה). According to them, their father has never belonged to the wrong עדה ('assembly', 'party'). Had he been alive, he should have been among the counted males;

2. Hebrew יגרע, 'be belittled', 'diminished' or 'discounted'.

he should have received a 'possession', a 'hold' (אחזה) on the land.

The way Zelophehad's daughters use the motif of Korah's assembly suggests that the people belonging to that party had lost their right to have a share in the land. Most commentaries understand the allusion precisely in this manner. The story about Korah and his adherents is narrated in Numbers 16.[3] Korah was a Levite who was dissatisfied with the central position of power held by Moses and Aaron. He opposed that state of affairs by referring to the holiness of the whole congregation. This challenge of God's own established order was severely punished. Korah, his adherents and their families had to pay for it with their lives. However, nowhere in this pericope or elsewhere are we told that the explicit result of the rebellion was an exclusion from the right to a share in the land. Korah himself, being a Levite, was as such not entitled to a share: the heritage of the Levites was to consist in the tithes that the Israelites had to pay to the temple and its personnel. It is nevertheless possible that this exclusion of a share in the land was viewed as the logical consequence of the Korah story—so much so that the author did not deem it necessary to mention the reasons for it.

On the other hand, it is also feasible that Zelophehad's daughters had a more implicit motive for referring to Korah's assembly. The challenge made by Korah and his assembly was understood as a rebellion against the divinely established order, hence the severe penalty. A comparable situation occurs in Numbers 12. Here it is Miriam, Moses' sister, who is punished with leprosy, when she and Aaron attempt to place their position on a par with that of Moses. Similarly, the request for a heritage made by Zelophehad's daughters may have been construed as a rebellious act too—for, according to God's will, the land should be divided among the males only.

3. For the textual and compositional complexity of Num. 16, cf. the commentaries for the passage, such as: M. Noth *Numbers* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968); N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1967); C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1980). Our concern here is with the Korah element, since this (not the Reuben element) is relevant to the daughters' speech.

By dissociating themselves from Korah's party and by emphasizing their father's death and the fact that there is no son to lay claim to the father's rights, the daughters effectively preclude the fate of Korah or Miriam from becoming theirs. The way they present their argumentation can be regarded as an appropriate example of indirect female strategy. Nowhere do they mention their own investment in this situation, although, for them, much is at stake. Being single women in a patriarchal society meant having to make do without any adequate securities for existence or survival. The destitute status of widows and orphans is well attested in the Old as well as the New Testament. Nonetheless, they do not ask for charity; they ask for their father's lawful inheritance.

When they have finished their plea, Moses puts their question to YHWH, and YHWH replies:

> Rightly the daughters of Zelophehad do speak.
> Give, you shall give to them a hereditary possession among their father's brothers (v. 7).

The daughters' words are legitimated: God pronounces their words are 'right', 'correct' (כן). Moses gets an emphasized injunction to give land to them. By divine decree they get more than they have asked for, for God tells Moses that the daughters' estate shall be hereditary. Moreover, their case will assume the rank of legal precedent. After commanding Moses what to do concerning Zelophehad's daughters themselves, YHWH orders Moses to move from their particular case to a general inheritance law for all the sons of Israel (vv. 8-11). This law settles the order of succession after a man's death. According to this new law, the daughters' position in the line of paternal inheritance is secondary to the sons' position, but precedes that of other male relatives. With respect to the formulation of this law of succession, a distinction is made between daughters and other heirs. In all the other cases the text instructs to 'give' (from the root נתן) an inheritance (נחלה); in the case of the daughters, it orders to 'transfer' (והעברתם) the inheritance.

Other categories of women, like for instance a female spouse, are not mentioned in this regulation of the inheritance line. Nor is there any mention of the order of succession with regard to daughters' or anybody else's inheriting a legacy from a spouse

or a mother. The juridical precedent remains limited to this case: daughters' inheritance is valid in the absence of sons.

After God delivers this double injunction, it remains unclear at first whether Zelophehad's daughters and the other parties concerned are informed of the divine decree by Moses right away, if at all. There is no reference to the effect that the message was relayed, and v. 12 introduces a totally different topic.

Reflections

Nevertheless, to surmise from the second sequence to this first part of the story, it appears that people are familiar with God's reply. In Numbers 36 the (male) chieftains of the family of Zelophehad's daughters are galvanized into action. When we consider its framework, this second story looks like a somewhat distorted reflection of Numbers 27. Still, there are great differences between the two narratives; and the interests at stake here are completely dissimilar to the daughters' previously stated and unstated interests. When the chieftains initiate their action there are no huge masses assembled. Rather, the occasion is a top-level meeting between Moses, the family chieftains of the other Israelite tribes, and the Gileadite chieftains. With abundant verbosity, they expound what is on their minds:

> To my lord (Moses) YHWH has commanded to give the land as inheritance by lots to the sons of Israel
> and my lord was commanded by YHWH to give the land of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters.
> But if they become wives of any of the sons of the tribes of Israel
> and their inheritance will be taken off from the inheritance of our fathers
> and it will be added unto the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong
> then it will be taken off from the lot of our inheritance.
> And when it be a jubilee year for the sons of Israel
> and their inheritance will be added unto
> the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong
> then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers (36.2-4).

It is obvious that the chieftains are distressed by the prospect that the daughters will get an estate. Suppose they marry some-

one from a different tribe, then that tribe could come into possession of the land the chieftains already regard as belonging to their own group. This statement seems to point to the actuality of a prevalent arrangement, according to which a husband became the owner of his wife's possessions and, eventually, also her heir.

As stated above, the general law of succession in Num. 27.8-11 does not deal with the question of a wife's heirs. On the face of it, the chieftains' anxiety is relevant. However, it is not at all certain that a woman owning an estate could actually marry into another clan or tribe. Possibly, in such a situation, a man had to marry into the woman's tribe or clan; this was the custom, for instance, according to the Saxon inheritance and heredity laws. In such cases the man assumed his wife's family name, and their children received that name too. In the Bible itself there is more than one reference to sons being considered members of their mothers' source group. An example of this can be gleaned from Ezra 2.61 and its parallel, Neh. 7.61-64. These texts mention 'the sons of Barzillai, who had taken one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite as wife and was named after her'. While it is true that these texts are not preoccupied with matters of inheritance, they nevertheless list male persons according to their traced genealogies. Within this framework they do mention a (problematic) case in which sons are reckoned to belong to their mothers' lineage. This is a remarkable circumstance: we note that, according to the lineage drawn, the sons of Barzillai are actually presented as the kin relatives of Zelophehad's daughters.

A Gentlemen's Agreement

In answer to the chieftains' appeal concerning the daughters' inheritance, Moses responds with a judgment which, according to the narrator, is a reported divine ruling:

> Rightly speak the tribe of the sons of Joseph.
> This is the word YHWH has commanded to the daughters of Zelophehad, so saying:
> They may become the wives of the best one in their eyes
> if only they become the wives of someone from the lineage of the tribe of their father.

> And an inheritance of the sons of Israel shall not circulate from tribe to tribe, because every man, the sons of Israel, will cleave to the inheritance of the tribe of their fathers.
> And every daughter to acquire an inheritance of the tribes of the sons of Israel shall be wife to one of the lineage of the tribe of her father
> so that every son of Israel will take possession of the inheritance of his fathers.
> And an inheritance shall not circulate from one tribe to another tribe;
> on the contrary: every man of the tribes of the sons of Israel shall cleave to his inheritance.
> (vv. 5-9).

Remarkably, in this passage the verb 'cleave' (דבק) is used twice in connection with the (inherited) land. This verb evokes an association with Gen. 2.24, where the same verb is used:

> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave (דבק) unto his wife...

The social and physical unity that the Genesis text ascribes for man and wife turns in Numbers 36 into a command for the man only, and with respect to his land. By means of this statement the relationship between a male and his land becomes the primary relationship, whereas his relationship with his wife is in effect subordinated to that primary relationship.

The action that the family chieftains have undertaken results in a general law too: heiresses to real estate have to marry inside their paternal tribe. A veritable gentlemen's agreement has been reached. Such a reaction-formation to an achievement of women's rights is typical of patriarchal society. Whenever menfolk feel threatened and fear that their safety is undermined one way or the other, they try to minimize the imagined damage as much as they can by way of instituting countermeasures.

The difference in formulation between the command Moses gives to Zelophehad's daughters and the one concerning heiresses in general is significant. In the command to Zelophehad's daughters there is the addition that they are allowed to marry the male who is 'best in their eyes' (טוב בעיניהם, v. 6). This or a similar statement is absent from the general law (v. 8). In the Babylonian Talmud (*B. Bat.* 120a) this apparent contradiction is explained as follows. The commandment to

marry inside the tribe does not hold in the case of Zelophehad's daughters. For them the general ruling is meant as a piece of advice rather than a binding rule. By making the case of Zelophehad's daughters unique, the limits set to daughters' inheritance become even more emphatic.

It remains unclear what this arrangement implies for Zelophehad's daughters. In the matter of their choice of partner, did the authorization to inherit mean an improvement of their lot or, on the contrary, a deterioration in status? Would they have been able to choose their partners freely had they not been heiresses?

According to Num. 36.10-12 Zelophehad's daughters behave as all heiresses are supposed to behave. They conform to the rules. They marry the sons of their father's brothers in order to keep their future inheritance inside the tribe.

Strong Women

But the story is not finished yet. Only in Josh. 17.1-7 does it finally come to an end, when the daughters' names are mentioned one last time. Only now are we told that Zelophehad's daughters actually get their inheritance, albeit not before they have asked for it once more. This time they do not use any argument. Instead, they refer to the promise made by Moses. It is strange, however, that they should have to express their request anew. The other, male heirs get their allotments right away. Apparently the presence of so many witnesses (as stated in Num. 26 and 27), including Eleazar the priest, is in itself not sufficient to let the procedure run smoothly. They have to fight again for their rights.

How many portions of land do Zelophehad's daughters receive? There is mention of ten portions as the allotment to the whole tribe. Apart from the sons of Hepher, among whom Zelophehad is listed, there is mention of four other tribesmen together with their sons. Hence I am inclined to understand the situation as follows. Justice was done. Five of these shares were distributed to the sons, and five to the daughters. But contrary to my understanding, Mishna *B. Bat.* 8.3 tells us that, altogether, Zelophehad's five daughters got three shares. This number of

shares is explained by claiming that Zelophehad himself was entitled to one share. As the firstborn son of Hepher, who died in the desert, he was also entitled to a double share of his paternal portion. Thus the Sages make sure that the daughters' share is their father's rightful share, hardly given to them for their own sake.

One more text in the Hebrew Bible alludes to Zelophehad and his daughters, although the latter are not named: 1 Chron. 7.14-19. The commentaries for this pericope point out that this genealogy is intricately complex. Nevertheless, even this text offers some fascinating perspectives. Thus some versions of the Septuagint refer to Zelophehad, who is named in this genealogy, as if it were a woman's name. In v. 15 we read:

> And Machir took a wife for Huppim and Shuppim
> and the name of his sister: Maachah
> and the name of the second:[4] Zelophehad
> and Zelophehad had daughters.

Moreover, v. 18 has a sister of Gilead, Machir's son, who is called הַמֹּלֶכֶת, 'she who reigns'. This name is formed from the same root (מלך, 'rule, be king') the name Milcah derives from; and Milcah is one of Zelophehad's daughters. We are told about this *hammōleket* that she bore three sons. The text names neither father nor children. They are related through their mother's name to the tribe of Manasseh. It is possible to surmise that Zelophehad's daughters have managed to remain in charge of their own lives. If this Chronicles text means anything at all, it might indicate that at least one of the women of Zelophehad's family has succeeded in letting her name survive independently. At any rate, this obscure genealogy names her as 'She who reigns', she who has control.

In Genesis 49 we find no additional intertext for this image of strong women in Zelophehad's family. The Genesis pericope tells about Jacob's 'blessing' for his sons when he lies on his deathbed. The 'blessing' Jacob bestows on Joseph, the textual

4. The whole passage is hopelessly corrupt, as even a cursory glance in the *BHS* will reveal. The word 'second' in the Hebrew is in the masculine singular (השׁני), however. The vatican Codex has a feminine singular here; cf. commentaries *ad loc.*

progenitor of Zelophehad and his daughters, differs from the 'blessings' to the other sons. Some other sons are associated with animals.[5] But as for Joseph, the imagery associated with him may be read as fruit and fertility imagery.[6] In v. 22 he is designated a young fruit tree at a water source.[7] In v. 25e he receives specific 'blessings of breasts and womb'. By these words, the tribe of Joseph is amply provided with female symbolism, in contrast with all the other tribes.[8] This is perhaps an indication of, and reference to, a tradition that still remembers the important part women played within this tribe.[9]

A Source of Inspiration

The story of Zelophehad's daughters can be read as an inspiring narrative for women. It demonstrates that seemingly rigid social structures can be modified. Even a command estab-

5. Simeon and Levi mutilate oxen in their rage (49.6). Judah is associated with a lion cub (v. 9) and the asses he rides (v. 11). Issachar is an ass himself (vv. 14-15). Dan is a snake who bites a horse (v. 17). Naphthali is a gazelle (v. 21). Benjamin is a wolf (v. 17).

6. Similarly the 'blessing' to Judah, as dominant an eponym as Joseph, also includes strong elements of fruitfulness imagery (vv. 11-12).

7. If the Hebrew בן פרת is understood as equivalent to, or corruption of, בן פרי ('son of the fruit [tree]'); or else בן פ[א]רה ('son of the [tree] top). I do not refer here to the popular practice of emending the MT פרת to פרה ([son of a] cow). It does not make sense to attribute this imaged maternity to a son of Rachel, the 'sheep'.

8. Even if the emendation of פרת to פרה is retained, a basic difference between the Joseph imagery and that applied to the other eponyms is retained. In that case the פרה, 'cow' is the only female animal to be mentioned (apart from Naphthali's 'gazelle'); certainly the only female animal to denote fertility (because of the immediate association with עין, '[water] source'.

9. A connection between Zelophehad's daughters and Gen. 49.22 obtains also in the Midrash Rabbah to Numbers. The phrase בנות צעדה עלי שור is decoded into 'the daughters stepped over the wall'. 'Wall' (שור) is said to allude to the Jordan river, which became a wall to Moses and prevented him from entering the land. The midrash has Jacob say to Joseph that they, the daughters, will receive portions on this side (of the Jordan, the 'wall') and on the other side (Pinehas 21.12). In Genesis Rabbah the daughters are mentioned too. Here, however, it is their portion in the Torah, not their land portion, which is referred to.

lished by God proves apt to be altered through speaking the right word at the right time. The story also exhibits the backlash of women's achievement, the reaction of patriarchy when it suspects its existence is threatened.

Indeed, during the first wave of feminism this story of Zelophehad's daughters was a source of inspiration for women. In the United States Elisabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), among others, used the daughters' story to criticize policy and custom concerning women's affairs in *The Woman's Bible*.[10] When women married they lost the right to manage their property to their husbands. She summoned her contemporaries to manage their own possessions and financial affairs, and to accept the responsibilities involved. She sharply criticized women who declined these ideas.

It is important for our own [hi]story that we do not forget our foresisters, their achievements and their struggle. Their story, which is our story too, should be told again and again. It is part of the heritage that our foresisters legislated to us. We must continue to remember their names: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, Tirzah.

Appendix

PHEBE A. HANAFORD ON NUMBERS 27 AND 36 (IN *THE WOMAN'S BIBLE*, I).

The account given in this chapter of the directions as to the division or inheritance of property in the case of Zelophehad and his daughters shows them to be just, because the daughters are to be treated as well as the sons would be; but the law thereafter given, apparently suggested by this querying of Zelophehad's daughters in reference to their father's possessions is obviously unjust, in that it gives no freedom to the owner of property as to the disposition of the same after his death, *i.e.* leaves him without power to will it to anyone, and leaves unmentioned the female relatives as heirs at law. Only 'brethren' and 'kinsmen' are the words used, and it is very plain that only males were heirs, except where a man had no son, but had one or more daughters. 'The exception proves the rule' [pp. 108-109].

10. E. Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing House, 1895), I, pp. 107-108, 123-24. See also Appendix to this essay for Phebe A. Hanaford's critique of Num. 27 and 36 (pp. 108-109, 124).

Moses gave what appears to be, in the light of this Christian era, a just judgment when he decided that the daughters of Zelophehad should inherit their father's property, but he gave as the law of inheritance the direction that 'if a man die, *and have no son*, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass onto his daughter', thus, as I think, unjustly discriminating between women who have brothers and women who have none, and he goes further on to deal unjustly with women when he directs that the daughters of Zelophehad marry so that the inheritance justly awarded them should not go out of the family of the tribe of their fathers.

'Let them marry to whom they think best', and those words seemingly recognize their righteous freedom. But immediately he limits that phrase and informs the five women they must only marry in their father's tribe, and were limited also to their father's family. The result was that each married her own cousin. If this was contrary to physiological law, as some distinguished physiologists affirm, then they were compelled by the arbitrary law of Moses to break the law of God [p. 124].

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Part II

SOCIAL STATUS AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND DEUTERONOMIC LAW*

Carolyn Pressler

Introduction

This essay examines the view of sexual violence found in Deuteronomic law. We must begin, however, by saying that it is anachronistic to speak about the Deuteronomic view of sexual violence. With one possible exception, Deut. 25.11-12, a case where a woman seizes a man's genitals, the Deuteronomic laws do not treat sexual violence as a legal category.

Two Deuteronomic laws are commonly described as 'rape laws'.[1] Deuteronomy 22.25-27 discusses the case of a violated betrothed woman; Deut. 22.28-29 presents the case of a violated unbetrothed woman.[2] These laws do deal with forcible

* This essay was first presented as a paper at the Women in the Biblical World session of the Society for Biblical Studies, November, 1992.

1. Recent studies that refer to these passages as 'rape laws' include R. Westbrook, 'Punishments and Crimes', *ABD*, V, p. 552, and T. Frymer-Kensky, 'Sex and Sexuality', *ABD*, V, p. 1145.

2. Deut. 21.10-13 is commonly interpreted as having to do with sexual violence. Commentators often translate 21.11-12, 'if you see among the captives a beautiful woman and desire her then you shall take her as your wife and bring her into your household and she shall shave her head...'. The law is then understood as a prohibition against rape on the battlefield. The verses are better translated 'if you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry and bring into your household, then she shall shave her head...'. I have argued elsewhere that the purpose of the law had nothing to do with sexual violence. Rather, it was intended to provide a legal means for a man to marry an attractive captive woman if he should choose to do so. Such a special provision would be necessary because marriage in the ancient Near East normally involved

sexual intercourse. It is clear, however, that they are not concerned with 'rape' as modern legislation would define the offense.

In modern legal and dictionary definitions of rape, the essence of the crime is that the victim has not consented to the sexual act. In the two Deuteronomic cases, the woman's lack of consent is irrelevant to the nature and the gravity of the offense.

Indeed, in the Deuteronomic law, the offense is not against the woman at all. As is widely recognized, Deuteronomic law (in common with most biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts) views female sexuality and reproductive capacity as a male possession. A woman's sexuality belongs first to her father, then, later, to her husband.[3] Violation of her sexuality is in the first place an offense against her father or husband's claims. The nature and gravity of the offense are determined by which male's claims are being violated. The offense is not 'rape' according to modern definitions of that term.

And that is the point. Marie Fortune describes the heart of sexual violence as negation of the violated person's 'power to decide, to choose, to determine, to consent or withhold consent in the most concrete bodily dimensions'.[4] An examination of the Deuteronomic laws treating forcible violation of women leads to a sobering conclusion: these texts do what rape does. They eliminate women's will from consideration and erase women's right to sexual integrity.

a contractual arrangement between the groom or his family and the agent of the bride. In the case of a captive woman, there would be no one legally competent to enter into a contract on her behalf. See my monograph (C.J. Pressler, *The View of Women Found in Deuteronomic Family Law* (BZAW; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 10-12.

3. This view is cogently stated by D.R. Mace (*Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* [London: Epworth Press, 1953], p. 227). Mace writes that the Older Testament regards 'the woman's sexuality as the property of the man under whose *potestas* she was. In the case of her father, this involved the exclusive right of disposal; in the case of her husband, the exclusive right of use'.

4. M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), pp. 6-7.

The Laws

The law of the violated betrothed woman, Deut. 22.25-27, treats a case where a man 'overtakes, seizes (Hiph. of *ḥzq*) and lies with' a betrothed woman. The case concerns a woman who has not consented; the drafters of the law make this clear by describing the man as overtaking her in a field where her cries could not be heard. The man alone is held liable and is to be put to death. The young woman is to be held blameless.

The law of the violated unbetrothed woman, Deut. 22.28-29, concerns a case where a man 'overtakes, takes hold of (*tpś*) and lies with' an unbetrothed woman. Force is implied in this case also. The only other time that the verb *tpś* is used with reference to sexual intercourse in the Hebrew Bible it clearly signifies forcible violation. According to Num. 5.13, a woman suspected of adultery was required to invoke a curse upon herself if *lō' nitpāśâ: lō' nitpāśâ* likely means 'if she was not forced'. Indeed, the verb *tpś* has to do with coercion or violence whenever its direct object is a human being.[5]

Deut. 22.28-29, then, has to do with the forcible violation of an unbetrothed girl. It rules that the violator must pay the young woman's father fifty shekels and that he must marry her; he may never divorce her.

The fifty shekels should be understood as a set price for the young woman's bridewealth.[6] The violation of his daughter is a potential economic loss for the father. Because she is no longer a virgin, he will not be able to collect bridewealth for her. The violator must compensate him for this financial injury.

5. M. Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], p. 286) argues that *tpś* means 'hold' in the sense of 'fondle'. The verb *tpś* can mean 'hold' or 'handle' in a nonviolent way when the direct object is inanimate. When its direct object is a human being, however, it refers to such actions as capture, seizure, ensnarement, entrapment or arrest.

6. The violation of an unbetrothed virgin is also treated by a law in the Book of the Covenant, Exod. 22.15-16 (Eng. 22.16-17). There a man who seduces a girl is required to pay her father the 'bridewealth of virgins', probably a customary sum. In the Deuteronomic law, the amount of the bridewealth has been fixed.

The violator is also required to provide the young woman whom he has violated with the security of marriage. An Israelite woman's social status, economic welfare and honor were secured through marriage. There are some indications in the Hebrew Bible that a woman who had been defiled by illicit sexual relations may not have been eligible for marriage:

1. The importance that the drafters of Deuteronomic law attached to the virginity of a young woman entering her first marriage is indicated by Deut. 22.20-21, which calls for stoning to death a bride who is not virgin.
2. The story of the violation of Tamar may also indicate that a woman who had been sexually defiled was disqualified from marriage. After Amnon had forced her, Tamar lived in Absolom's house *šōmēmâ*, a 'desolate woman' (2 Sam. 13.20); elsewhere, *šōmēmâ* is used to describe a woman who is unmarried or childless (Isa. 54.1; 62.4). That Tamar was rendered unmarriageable by the rape is also suggested by her cry that Amnon's rejection of her after having violated her was a greater wrong than the violation itself (2 Sam. 13.16).
3. The story of David's concubines further suggests that sexually defiled women were ineligible for marital relations. After Absolom had slept with David's concubines, David continued to provide for them. The text specifically notes, however, that he never again had sexual relations with them (2 Sam. 20.3).

A violated woman may well have been ineligible for marriage. Even if that were not the case, her chances of a good marriage would surely have been greatly reduced. The law, recognizing this injury to the young woman, requires the man to marry her and prohibits him from divorcing her. At the same time, the violation is a potential injury to her father who might have to provide for an unmarriageable daughter. The violation also creates a social problem. What is to be done with such defiled maidens? The forced marriage protects the young woman, her father and society.

The Laws in Context

The two cases belong to a tightly structured redactional unit, Deut. 22.13-29. The unit is comprised of six laws:

1. Deut. 22.13-19, a case where a man has slanderously accused his new wife of not being virgin at the time of their marriage;
2. Deut. 22.20-21, a case where the husband's accusations are true; the bride is not virgin;
3. Deut. 22.22, the basic adultery law, prescribing capital punishment for an adulterous married woman and her lover;
4. Deut. 22.23-24, a case of sexual intercourse with a consenting betrothed woman;
5. Deut. 22.25-27, the case under consideration, where the betrothed woman does not consent; and finally,
6. Deut. 22.28-29, the other case under consideration, that of violation of an unbetrothed woman.

Together, these laws define what is and is not adultery, and underscore the gravity of that offense.

The six laws revolve around two variables: first, the marital status of the woman, and second, her consent or lack of consent. The woman's marital status is clearly defined in each of the laws. The first two cases specify that the woman is newly married. The third case has to do with a *bᵉ'ulat ba'al*, a woman who is under the authority of a master/husband. The next two cases explicitly describe the woman as *mᵉ'ōrāśâ*, betrothed, or, more precisely, inchoately married. That is, the woman's marriage has been contracted but not yet consummated.[7] The final case concerns a young woman who is not yet betrothed, *lō' 'ōrāśâ*.

The second variable, the woman's consent or lack of consent, is found in the two cases having to do with an inchoately married woman. If a man has sexual intercourse with the young woman in a city, she is presumed to have consented to the act, and is liable. Both the man and the woman are to be put to

7. The term *mᵉ'ōrāśâ* indicates that the bridewealth has been paid for the girl.

death. If the man seizes her and lies with her in the countryside, she is presumed to have resisted to no avail. Only the man is to be killed.[8] The laws do not explicitly consider the case of an unconsenting married woman; the hearer would be expected to reason from the case of an inchoately married woman to the case of a woman whose marriage had been consummated.

That the laws revolve around these two variables is well recognized.[9] What is important for this study is that only the first variable—the woman's marital status—defines the nature of the offense and the severity of the penalty. These laws presuppose that sexual intercourse with a married or betrothed woman violates her husband's claims to exclusive possession of her sexuality. Such violation is a capital offense whether or not the woman has consented.[10]

In contrast, the laws regard the violation of an unbetrothed woman as a relatively minor offense. It is a financial injury to her father, and is treated like a property case; that is, the father is to be compensated. It is also a social problem, and an injury to the young woman. The injury, however, is not treated as assault. Rather, in the view of this law, the injury lies in the fact that her chances of marriage and thus of social and economic security are greatly reduced. The man responsible for her condition must make reparation by marrying and never divorcing her.

The second variable, the woman's consent or lack of consent, is irrelevant in terms of defining the nature of the offense or the severity of the punishment. Rather, in the case of a betrothed (and presumably a married) woman, her consent or lack of consent determines whether she is guilty or innocent. The burden of the law of the unconsenting betrothed woman is that the

8. Hittite law §197 (in ANET, p. 196) also uses the site where the offense takes place as a criterion for determining the woman's consent or lack of consent.

9. See J.J. Finklestein, 'Sex Offenses in Sumerian Laws', *JAOS* 86 (1966), pp. 355-72. Finklestein has charted cuneiform and biblical sex laws according to these two variables.

10. Similarly, according to the case of the unchaste bride, Deut. 22.20-21, a woman who enters into a first marriage as a non-virgin violates her husband's claims to her sexuality, claims that are retroactive. Her lack of virginity is a capital offense, tantamount to adultery.

woman should not be held liable for adultery since she has resisted. Five separate clauses stress that the man alone is liable and the young woman is to be held blameless: (1) the man *alone* shall die; (2) you shall do nothing to the young woman; (3) there is no guilt deserving death in her; (4) the case is comparable to murder; and (5) there was no one to help her if she cried out.

The clause that compares the case to murder has been taken to mean that the offense was rape, and that rape was regarded as a 'crime of aggression and violence'.[11] The context of the clause makes this interpretation unlikely. The clause is one of a string of clauses emphasizing the young woman's innocence. Moreover, it is followed by a case that clearly does not consider the forcible violation of an unbetrothed woman a 'crime of aggression and violence'. This suggests that the function of the clause is not to compare the act of sexual violation to the act of murder. Rather, it is to compare the innocence of the woman who is violated to the innocence of the murder victim. Like the murder victim, the violated woman was overpowered by someone stronger than herself; she therefore cannot be held liable for the offense.

In the case of the violation of an unbetrothed woman, her consent or lack of consent appears to be legally immaterial. The wording of this case does suggest force. The man 'overtakes, takes hold of and lies' with her. The verb *tpś*, 'takes hold of', implies coercion. The element of force, however, is not a relevant factor in the case.

If the redactors of this passage had wanted to distinguish between the case of an unbetrothed woman who consents to sexual relationships and an unbetrothed woman who resists, it is likely that they would have included the alternate case as they did in cases of the betrothed woman.[12] The irrelevance of the unbetrothed woman's consent or lack of consent is also seen when we compare the Deuteronomic law with its parallel case in

11. T. Frymer-Kensky, 'Sex and Sexuality', p. 1145.

12. The drafters of the Middle Assyrian laws also presented the forcible violation and the seduction of an unbetrothed girl as alternative cases (MAL A §§55–56, *ANET*, p. 185) as did drafters of Sumerian cases YBC §2177, pars. 7–8 (*ANET*, p. 526).

the Book of the Covenant. Exodus 22.15-16 (Eng. 22.16-17), which also deals with the violation of an unbetrothed woman, describes the man's behavior as seduction. The verb used is *pth*, to seduce or entice. The penalties for seducing an unmarried woman set forth in the Exodus law are essentially the same as the penalties for forcibly violating an unmarried woman in the Deuteronomic case. Both laws require the violator to marry the woman and to compensate her father. There are minor differences in the two laws; however they do not seem to correlate with the difference between seduction and coercion.[13] It does not seem to matter whether the young woman was seduced or forced.

The laws are not oblivious to the woman's welfare. They do offer her certain protections. A married or betrothed woman who resists sexual intercourse with someone other than her husband is considered innocent of adultery and is protected from execution. An unbetrothed woman who is sexually violated is provided with the protection of marriage—a protection vital for her social status, economic security and honor. The laws do not show concern for her sexual integrity, however. They do not treat sexual violation of a woman as sexual assault against her.

With one possible exception, the Deuteronomic laws do not

13. The penalties of the Exodus and Deuteronomic versions of the law differ in three ways. First, Exod. 22.16 requires the man to pay the 'bridewealth of virgins' while Deut. 22.29 fixes that sum at fifty shekels. Second, the Exodus law explicitly states that the father may withhold his daughter from her seducer while the Deuteronomic law has no such clause. It is unlikely, however, that the difference reflects the lawgivers' differing appraisals of seduction and coercion. As Weinfeld argues (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, p. 287), it is not plausible that a father would have the right to withhold his daughter from a man who had seduced her but would not be able to withhold her from a man who had forcibly violated her. Third, while both the Exodus and the Deuteronomic versions of the law require the man to marry the woman whom he has violated, the Deuteronomic law also explicitly prohibits him from ever divorcing her. The prohibition against divorce may have been assumed by the drafters of Exod. 22.15-16; alternatively, the inclusion of the prohibition in the Deuteronomic case may reflect an increase in the frequency of divorce in the Deuteronomic period.

reflect a concept of sexual assault. That possible exception is Deut. 25.11-12, a law Alexander Rofé rather euphemistically entitles 'improper interference by a woman into a brawl'.[14] In this case a married woman intervenes in a fight between her husband and another man by seizing the genitals of her husband's opponent. The penalty laid down for the woman is that her hand is to be amputated.[15] It is the only biblical law apart from *lex talionis* which prescribes physical mutilation.

Defense of her husband in a fight would be considered a noble motive—a most extenuating circumstance. That the law requires the woman's hand to be cut off in spite of her virtuous motive underscores the heinousness of a woman seizing male genitals under any circumstances.

There are two possible rationales for this law. First, it may be that the woman's action was considered a breach of modesty. This rationale is suggested by the euphemism used in the law to refer to male genitals: *mᵉbušāyw*, which BDB takes as an allusion to causing shame.[16]

Second, the woman's action may have been considered an assault against her husband's opponent. This is suggested by (1) the fact that the offense takes place during a brawl, and (2) possibly by the verb used. The verb translated 'seizes' is the Hiph. of *ḥzq*—the same verb used in the case of the unconsenting betrothed woman to describe the man forcibly seizing the young woman. The case of improper interference does not have to do with physical injury; there is no indication that the woman physically harmed the man. Rather, the case underscores the high priority placed on male sexual inviolability. As Frymer-Kensky writes, in Deuteronomic law men's 'genitals, the

14. A. Rofé, 'Family and Sex Laws in Deuteronomy and the Book of the Covenant', *Henoch* 9.2 (1987), p. 132.

15. L. Eslinger ('The Case of an Immodest Lady Wrestler in Deuteronomy 25.11-12', *VT* 31 [1981], pp. 269-81) argues that the Hebrew word, *kap*, normally translated 'hand' or 'palm' can refer to any hollow body part, and here refers to female genitalia. His argument is possible but not compelling. None of the cuneiform or biblical laws prescribe female genital mutilation as a punishment. Many of them prescribe the amputation of the offender's hand.

16. BDB, p. 102.

emblem and essence of their manhood, are sacrosanct'.[17] For a woman to seize them violates his manhood and potentially threatens his capacity to father children. If the latter interpretation is correct, this law, which punishes female aggression, comes close to defining the offense as sexual assault. It is the only Deuteronomic law that does so.

Implications

To summarize: The Deuteronomic laws regard female sexuality as the possession of the woman's father or husband. The father's claims are akin to property claims; the husband's claims are more extensive. It follows that the woman has no claims over her own sexuality; she therefore cannot be sexually assaulted. The only Deuteronomic law which may possibly refer to sexual assault is the law that punishes a woman for grabbing the genitals of a man.

The view of sexual violence found—or rather not found—in Deuteronomic law suggests three implications for further study. First, these laws may shed light on the supposed 'rape narratives'. For example, the Deuteronomic laws suggest that the question of whether Shechem raped or seduced Dinah (Gen. 34) is moot. If the same assumptions are operating in the Deuteronomic laws and in the Dinah story, then the offense in the story is not that Shechem had sexual intercourse with Dinah without her consent. It is that Shechem had sexual intercourse with Dinah without her father or brothers' consent. They control her sexuality. Their rights are violated.[18]

Secondly, consideration of the Deuteronomic laws raises questions about the kind of language one should use when modern and ancient categories do not correspond. What we regard as sexual violence or rape these laws regard as involuntary adultery in the case of a betrothed woman or as a financial injury in the case of an unbetrothed woman. To use the word 'rape' to describe forcible sexual intercourse in the

17. Frymer-Kensky, 'Deuteronomy', in C. Newson and S. Ringe (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 62.

18. See T. Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible', *Semeia* 45 (1989), pp. 89-102.

Deuteronomic laws may suggest that the laws are concerned with the woman's sexual integrity or her will when they are not in fact thus concerned.

This is not to say that it is inappropriate to bring modern categories to the biblical texts. It is appropriate to ask how Deuteronomy views acts that we consider acts of sexual violence. Indeed, the third implication of this study is that it is important to analyze and criticize these and any 'texts of terror'. This becomes apparent when one considers the values and assumptions that underlie the Deuteronomic laws:

1. sexual violation of women is an invasion of male legal and social claims;
2. the woman's guilt or innocence is a major issue;
3. a raped woman or girl is damaged goods; and
4. underlying all: female sexuality is male property.

These values and assumptions extend through and beyond the biblical texts; they are not unfamiliar today.

It is vital to analyze and criticize the assumptions in these texts because such assumptions have woven their way into contemporary western cultures, and because the texts and the assumptions underlying them do what rape does: they negate women's will, deny women's right to sexual and physical integrity and erase women's personhood.

ON INCEST

Athalya Brenner

Definitions

In this study, 'incest' is defined as:

a. Sexual (heterosexual) intercourse
b. performed by mutual consent, or through unilateral coercion/trickery
c. between sexually mature persons,[1] who are related
d. either as blood kin, or else
e. as marriage kin.

In view of modern conceptions and colloquial usage, some elaboration seems necessary. Biblical notions of incest do include marital situations (e). However, biblical incest notions are broader than specific marriage prohibitions—in fact, marital ties are seldom mentioned explicitly. Consent (b) and maturity (c) draw attention to the fact that the coercion or trickery factors, primary in the relevant biblical narratives, are absent from the juridical texts;[2] and that, in general, biblical (narrative)

1. I refer to 'sexually mature' rather than 'adults' in the chronological/juridical sense, since the age factor is not mentioned in the biblical passages cited.

2. In the biblical narratives cited, coercion (rape) is primary in the Tamar–Amnon story; and indeed, this story is classified by most commentators as a rape rather than incest story. In the other stories female trickery and male gullibility are thematically privileged over incest notions. This goes to show, among other things, that the link between violence (physical or verbal/intentional, or both) is presented in that order: social disorder breeds social ills, one of which is incest. In modern lore incest is viewed as a

reports of incest differ from their modern counterparts. Pointing out that both blood (d) and marriage (e) kin are included illuminates the dual nature of biblical incest prohibitions: the inclusion requires an interpretation that takes into account psycho-sociological factors rather than biological (blood) ones.

My aim is to consider the stylistic features and ideo-moralistic strategies concerning incest in narrative, juridical and prophetic texts; and to illuminate them by some modern theories of incest—sociological, anthropological, psychological and, above all, feminist approaches. I hope that the transdisciplinary approach employed will constitute a contribution towards the sociological knowledge of ancient Israel.

The preliminary results of reading biblical incest texts are surprising. It will be seen that attitudes towards incest found in the narrative texts differ considerably from their counterparts in the juridical and prophetic texts. The reasons for this discrepancy probably appertain to the ambiguous emotive contents of incest, as evidenced by myth and hero legends.

The Narrative Texts

Incest is implied by the plot of the wife-sister narratives (Gen. 12.10–13.2; 20; 26.1, 6-12). It is an overt theme in the stories about Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam. 13.1-22) and about Lot's daughters and their father (Gen. 19.30-38). It appears covertly as an underlying but sublimated and gradually fading motif in two other narratives—those of Tamar and Judah (Gen. 38), and Ruth and Boaz (the Ruth scroll); and is also present in the story of Absalom's uprising against his father David (2 Sam. 15.16, 16.21-23, 20.3).

In the narrative texts cited, incest does not feature as a dominant theme. On the contrary: it is mostly subordinate to a

potential cause rather than outcome of social anarchy. Modern sociological research is greatly concerned with incest practised on children by their elder kin (usually male); instead of classifying this phenomenon as an instance of rape, it is the incest content that is strongly stressed. So much so that 'incest' may immediately conjure up this coercive picture. See, for instance, A. Imbens and I. Jonker, *Christianity and Incest* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1992).

stronger, superordinate theme. Another feature is the occasional assignment of incest initiative to female figures, whereas the male figures involved are its objects. This stands in contrast to the positing of male addressees as the subjects of incest in the juridical texts. Another lack worth noting is the absence of specific incest terms in the narratives which represent the phenomenon.

In the first wife-sister narrative (Gen. 12–13.2), the immoral ruse Abram initiates by naming Sarai his sister is not overtly censored.[3] Abram makes a request, Sarai apparently obeys. Neither the incest contents nor the lie seem scandalous. The chief themes are survival by trickery in a foreign land and the competition between two males (Abram and Pharaoh), the first of whom is backed up by YHWH.

By contrast, the moralistic version of the next edition of the story (Abraham and Sarah in Gerar, ch. 20) is concerned with the ethical problem of Abraham's cheating. Once more incest is subordinate to the establishing of male hierarchy: it seems that incest in this case is preferable to plain cheating! One of the defensive strategies deployed for cleansing Abraham's image is the claim, delivered by Abraham in the direct speech mode and not refuted by the narrator, that Sarah is his paternal sister (20.12-13).[4] Whether Abimelek is convinced or not, his speech act to Sarah seems to take this flimsy excuse into account (v. 16). According to this narrative, then, paternal sisters are not included in the incest categories. Or are they, but allowed in certain cases, insofar as certain (male) individuals are concerned?[5]

The possibility of excepting the paternal sister category is further hinted at by Tamar's words to Amnon, her paternal brother.

3. For another opinion, building on Sarai's silence-in-the-text, see F. van Dijk-Hemmes, 'Sarai's Exile', in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 222-34.

4. Other strategies are God's direct intervention with Abimelek; Abimelek does not touch Sarah, which, among other things, prevents Abraham from losing face and honour; Abraham is named a 'prophet'.

5. E.A. Speiser's commentary (*Genesis* [AB, 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964]) can be read as an example of male complicity with the text: consciously or otherwise, and in the name of scholarship, he supplies the textual Abraham with a perfectly good, comparative-cultural reasoning for his blatant lie (pp. 91-94).

Why rape me, she asks, if we can marry (2 Sam. 13.13)?[6] Her whole speech seems to imply that the נבלה she refers to, the 'abomination' of Amnon's behaviour, is his intention to *rape* and the ensuing loss of virginity for her rather than the incestuous relationship entailed (vv. 12-13). The link between power politics and rape hardly requires elaboration—the modern view of rape as a violent offense aimed at establishing the rapist's control over the raped person and what s/he symbolizes is widely acknowledged nowadays. Indeed, the formulation of the exposition to this story—'...and Absalom, son of David, had a good-looking sister whose name was Tamar; and Amnon, son of David, loved her' (2 Sam. 13.1)—indicates that Tamar is but an object/pawn in the paternal brothers' bid for power and eventual inheritance, which is borne out by the ensuing episodes up to and including Absalom's revolt (see below). The incest component, be it acceptable or otherwise, is certainly present but secondary to the theme of fraternal competition for the father's position.

While Lot's daughters (Gen. 19.30-38) undoubtedly initiate incest with their father, their motivation—although erroneous—is neither sexual gratification nor competition but the survival of the species. One gets the impression that their lack of respect for Lot, expressed in their willingness to make him drink and to play the same trick twice, is as immoral as their incestuous behaviour, if not more so. Following Gunkel in his commentary to Genesis,[7] one suspects that the incestuous origins of Moab and Ben Ammi are derived from an extrabiblical myth, where divine incest is the prerogative of the gods. Therein lies one of the paradoxes biblical literature subscribes to. Incest is attributed to pagan goddesses and gods, and to humans of royal or similar descent and social status; myths and legends from Mesopotamia, Canaan, Ugarit, and Egypt are replete with such incestuous stories which are far from pejorative in tone. The biblical narratives, to distinguish from the legal materials, seem

6. The juridical material states otherwise: both maternal and paternal sisters are prohibited (Lev. 18.9; 20.17; Deut. 27.22).

7. H. Gunkel's commentary, *Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1918), *ad loc.*

to recognize this attitude in a matter of fact manner.[8] Other issues, such as filial [dis]respect and female trickery, seem more important for the dominant ideology than the incest involved.

Let us consider the narratives about Lot's daughters, Tamar and Judah, and Ruth as three instalments in one series. The series supplies a genealogy for King David. The first story narrates the birth of his forefather Moab. The second narratives the birth of his forefather Perez. The third brings together Ruth the Moabite and Boaz of Perez's line. In the first story, the incest motif blatantly depicts blood-kin incest of daughters and father by the daughters' initiative; in the second, a daughter-in-law initiates incestuous intercourse with a marriage kin, her father-in-law, for the same reason—the survival of a male line. In the third, a daughter figure initiates a demand for marriage delivered to a father figure.[9] Viewed in the light of their results, all three attempts are successful: a son (sons) is (are) born. But the further away we get from mythological origins, the closer we come to 'historical (in the biblical sense) facts', the more sublimated the incest motif becomes, until in Ruth it becomes hardly tenable, almost negligible. It is as if a human desire for incest is acknowledged, albeit relegated to far off, once-upon-a time situations.

A curious case of ritualized incest obtains in 2 Samuel 15–16 and 20. When King David leaves Jerusalem to escape Absalom's revolt he leaves ten of his wives (פילגשים) to guard the house (2 Sam. 15.16). Absalom follows the advice of his adviser Ahithophel and publicly, symbolically, takes sexual possession of his father's wives (16.21-23). When David returns, the wives remain within his household as unmarriageable 'widows' (20.3).

8. Cf. E. Leach, *Structural Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 33-66, including plates; and esp. pp. 56-57 for the 'mytho-logic' that determines representations of incest.

9. Interestingly, in all three narratives the initiator of the incestuous act is a woman figure, whereas, in the related Pentateuchal juridical material, only males are addressed as subject-in-the text. The implications of the narrative female-initiated incest for biblical notions of female morality are far from clear, especially when the possibility of echoed Goddess imagery is understood to inform these stories. If the latter possibility be accepted, then the stories should be considered (with Gunkel's commentary, *Genesis*, for Gen. 19.30-38) as originally complimentary to goddess/woman.

It would seem that Absalom's intention is to consolidate his rule by forcibly inheriting his father's harem, thus stressing not simply his manly virility but mainly the political authority and power that virility symbolizes. Although the brief note about Reuben's lying down with Bilhah, his fathers פילגש (Gen. 35.22) is cryptic, it seems that the fictive Reuben too is accused of an ambitiion to consolidate his seniority of inheritance. Like Absalom, Reuben acted too hastily and before his father's demise, thus forfeiting his birthright as successor.[10]

Absalom's institutionalized instance of incest, the likes of which are known also from other sources in the ancient Near East, is an important clue. While in myth and epic incest is the prerogative of gods and privileged individuals (so in the narratives), it is forbidden to the rest of humanity (so in the Law). This double standard reflects the ambiguity incest phenomena inspire: attention on the one hand, hence the licence projected onto the privileged; and aversion on the other hand, hence the prohibitions. In addition, the deed attributed to Absalom highlights two other significant factors. One is the subordination of incest themes in the narratives to other superordinate themes, in this case filial disrespect (see Lot's daughters) and quest for power; and two, the possible origins of male-initiated incest patterns in a male quest for establishing sexual and social authority over the world, a quest symbolized by the sexual appropriation of their womenfolk.

Finally, Jacob's marriage to two blood sisters stands in contrast to an explicit incest prohibition in Leviticus (18.18); but this has no echo in the Jacob narratives themselves, be their source constituency as it may.

To summarize so far. In narratives which feature incest situations, the initiative may be assigned to either males or females. Male motivation in such texts may be personal survival, but always contains a strong component of competition against other

10. Cf. Gen. 49.3-4. The anti-Reuben (and pro-Judah) polemics in the Joseph cycle looks like another stage in the campaign to explain (away) the degradation and defamation of the eponym and the kin/social group 'he' emblematizes. Sexual shaming, as I.N. Rashkow notes in this volume ('Daughters and Fathers in Genesis', pp. 22-36), is a sure means for vilifying a rival.

males. Female motivation for incest is presented as guardianship of social survival. Thus the incest theme is always narratively subordinated to another theme/concern, be it power or continuity. Both blood kin and marriage kin are involved in such narratives. Either sexual intercourse or marriage are invoked. Patriarchs and royals seem to enjoy mythic privileges which override incest considerations. One has to turn to biblical 'Law' to find explicit incest prohibitions addressed to ordinary persons.

The Juridical Texts (and a 'Prophetic' Text)

Specific incest terminology per se is to be found in three juridical texts only: Leviticus 18 and 20,[11] where incest prohibitions are formulated in the strongest possible language; and also in Deuteronomy 27 (vv. 20, 22-23). A prophetic text which briefly alludes to incestuous practices (Ezek. 22.10-11) contains one specific incest term[12] and some rape terminology.[13]

The three relevant juridical texts are exclusively addressed to males. Thus, the juridical formulations conceive of males as subjects of incest prohibitions and of females as their objects. In all three, a mixture of blood-kindered and marriage-kindered females is cited as forbidden to the relevant males.[14]

The list of Leviticus 18 is the most unified. Following an

11. On the apparent contradiction between incest prohibitions and the law of levirate marriage (Deut. 25.5-10), see below.

12. ערות אב, 'nakedness of the father' = incest with father's wife. For ערוה, 'nakedness' as technical term, see, repeatedly, Lev. 18 and 20.

13. ענה, 'torture, in numerous instances a euphemism for 'rape'.

14. The lack of distinction in classification into blood and marital kin proves difficult for interpreters. The terminology, and the punishments in the various cases, are not consistent enough to be of value. Neither is there a strict movement from female next-of-kin to further next-of-kin to marital kin. For the terms and the other difficulties of interpretation see, for instance: C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr., 1980), pp. 411-18, 426-28; J.R. Porter, *Leviticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 143-65; N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1967), pp. 123-25, 136-41. I shall here confine myself to general principles, not to comments on the terms themselves. A consideration on the critical positions adopted by interpreters will be presented below.

introduction which attributes sexual ignominies to Egypt and Canaan (vv. 1-5) and a superscription (v. 6), a list of *twelve* categories of forbidden females is presented (vv. 7-18).

1. mother (v. 7);
2. father's wife (v. 8. Cf. Absalom and his father's wives);
3. maternal and/or paternal sister, from the household or outside it (v. 9. Cf. the Tamar and Amnon story, the wife-sister motif);
4. son's or daughter's daughter (v. 10);
5. stepmother's daughter by the same father (v. 11);
6. paternal aunt (v. 12);
7. maternal aunt (v. 13);[15]
8. uncle's wife (v. 14);
9. daughter-in-law (v. 15. Cf. the Tamar and Judah story);
10. brother's wife (v. 16; in contrast to the Levirate law, Deut. 25.5-10; Ruth 1);
11. woman and her daughter, and their female descendants (v. 17);
12. woman and her sister (v. 18. But cf. the Jacob narratives).

Other sexual prohibitions follow (vv. 19-23: of intercourse with menstruating women; adultery; sacrifice of 'seed' to Moloch; male homosexuality; bestiality of male and female[16]).[17] Finally, an

15. Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, p. 412, count both maternal and paternal aunt as one category. In view of the terminology and the formulaic numerical arrangement of the other lists, I have retained the number of categories indicated by the biblical text. The distinction often found by anthropologists between the social taboos concerning paternal as against maternal kin (so also in the biblical narratives cited above, and upheld by the biblical practice of referring explicitly to both lineages) justifies this distinction too. On the other hand, the separation of the category 'aunt' into two, in contrast, for instance, to the unification of the 'sister' category (v. 9), might have resulted from the wish to schematize the list into twelve items.

16. This additional list is again of a formulaic number, seven this time. A wish to achieve this numerical framework might have informed the presentation of woman as separate subject of the bestiality prohibition, in a style absent from the rest of the chapter.

17. Whether the additional list is originally independent (see its formulaic number of items), or part of an expanded original list of sexual prohibitions (see ch. 20 and Deut. 27), here it is contextualized inside the

exhortation in the style of vv. 1-5 concludes the pericope (vv. 24-30). As Rashkow points out, the absence of an explicit prohibition about daughter-father incest (exactly the type of incest present in the narratives of David's genealogy) is conspicuous.[18]

The list of Leviticus 20 is of a somewhat different nature. Again, a short introduction precedes the list (vv. 7-8) and an exhortation concludes it (vv. 22-24).[19] Again, there obtains no consistency in the listing of female blood kin and marital kin. Again, the premise of addressing males in the matter of forbidden females is retained. However, the terminology differs slightly and so do the punishments prescribed for the various categories of incestuous liaisons. The *seven* categories of forbidden females do not form a unified list but are positioned within other categories of sexual transgressions.[20] Nevertheless, the ground covered by this list basically corresponds to that of ch. 18, which raises the problem of understanding the editorial policy—why the inclusion of both within such a short contextual span?[21]

The seven categories of forbidden females in Leviticus 20 are:

1. father's wife (v. 11 = Leviticus 18, nos. 1, 2. See also Deut. 23.1);
2. daughter-in-law (v. 12 = Leviticus 18, no. 9;
3. woman and daughter (v. 14 = Leviticus 18, no. 11);

exhortation frame, and the significance of the arrangement should be dealt with as such.

18. Rashkow, 'Daughters and Fathers', pp. 22-36 in this volume.

19. A short paragraph on dietary laws, or rather on the distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean' meat follows (v. 25), once more with its own concluding formula (v. 26). Thus the conclusion of the incest passage (vv. 22-24) also serves as an introduction for the next section. We shall have to come back to the associative principle that underlies the editorial arrangement at this point.

20. The number of items, however, perhaps points to the existence of an original incest list which was disbanded and expanded to allow for a larger socio-sexual context. Once more, if we exclude the reference to parental disrespect (v. 9) on grounds of theme, a twelve-item list emerges in this passage too.

21. See commentaries. However, no convincing answer—literary, source critical, etc.—for this textual state of affairs is supplied.

4. maternal and/or paternal sister (v. 17, Leviticus 18, no. 3);
5. maternal or paternal aunt (v. 19 = Leviticus 18, nos. 6, 7);
6. uncle's wife (v. 20 = Leviticus 18, no. 8);
7. brother's wife (v. 21 = Leviticus 18, no. 10).

Unlisted here—by comparison to Leviticus 18—are a man's granddaughter (18.10, no. 4); his stepmother's daughter by the same father (18.11, no. 5); a woman and her sister (18.18, no. 12). Once more, the daughter figure is absent from the list.

Deuteronomy 27.14-26 contains a set of *twelve* 'commandments', ostensibly to be recited by levites and answered by the community at the entrance to Canaan. The prescribed ceremony defines the passage as a declaration of faith, a covenant undertaken by the whole (male) community, partly parallel in situation and content to the Sinai tradition. Each item is introduced by the term ארור, 'cursed be [the man who]'... The 'commandments' range from a prohibition on visual representations of the divine (v. 15) to a binding obligation to fulfil the oath undertaken (v. 26), with a spectrum of religious, social, and economic issues in between. Interestingly, this most solemn credo includes *three* items of forbidden incestuous relationships, with the following categories of females:

1. Father's wife (v. 20 = Leviticus 18 nos. 1 and 2, Leviticus 10 no. 1);
2. paternal or maternal sister (v. 22 = Leviticus 18 no. 3, Leviticus 20 no. 4);
3. mother-in-law (v. 23; presumably a part equivalent to the Leviticus category of 'mother and daughter', ch. 18 no. 11 and ch. 20 no. 3).

Curiously, the short list of Ezekiel 22 (a so-called 'prophetic' text) also cites *three* categories of forbidden females within an accusation addressed, as usual, to males:

1. Father's wife (22.10);
2. daughter-in-law (v. 11);
3. sister (v. 11).

The two three-item lists share two categories; the third, although a female in-law features in both, differs.

It is worth noting at this point that the law or custom of יבום, levirate marriage (prescribed in Deut. 25.5-10; reflected in Genesis 38 and Ruth 1.11-13), contradicts the incest prohibition of sexual intercourse with a sister-in-law (Lev. 18.16 and 20.21). This contradiction can be explained away by citing the different source provenance of the Leviticus and Deuteronomy passages. Might it also be narrowly accommodated by interpreting the incest prohibition as referring to a brother's wife while he is still alive, whereas the levirate prescription refers to the situation after the brother's childless demise? This second solution seems improbable because of the terms used in Lev. 20.22: 'And a man who takes (יקח) his brother's wife...they shall be childless'. לקח, 'take' a woman, often signifies 'in marriage'; hence, this verse looks like a polemic against the levirate law. Nonetheless, within the broader biblical context levirate relations override the relevant incest prohibition, probably because they arrange for lineage preservation, demarcation of family property, continuation of human memory, and social survival in general. The overriding concerns the prescription for יבום represents constitute additional pointers towards the partly fluid nature of incest prohibitions, which is to be expected when religious morality facilitates social order.

The juridical sources undoubtedly exhibit a horror of incestuous relations, in contradistinction to the narrative passages cited. This horror, well expressed in the terminology chosen and the punishments prescribed for the relevant offenses, makes no distinction between blood kin and marital kin forbidden females, as attested by their mingled listing together. The greatest taboos seem to attach to a biological mother and/or a father's wife, a barely differentiated category which obtains in all three lists. The next place goes to the blood sister, be she paternal or material (again in all three). These two broad categories could be explained as reaction formation to pagan myths and practices of royal inbreeding. The mother-son union is characteristic of Goddess myths, as well as of Oedipus-type ones; the sister-brother union is quite common too. The emphasis on these categories can be understood as covert religious polemics.[22] How

22. Examples of incorporating pagan myths linked with incest while ostensibly rejecting them is to be found in Ezek. 16 and 23. The hyperbole

ever, the insistence on other categories such as various in-law females should be taken into account as a determinative signifier for the biblical system of incest prohibitions. But before the discussion can continue, a brief survey of some modern theories about incest seems to be in order.

Theories about Incest

The origin of incest taboos is much debated. Although commonly believed to be universal, even a cursory anthropological survey shows graded variations in the horror, prescription, and classification of the incest attitudes various societies adopt.

The biological and sociobiological explanations which cite incest taboos as a 'uniquely human',[23] instinctive safeguard against the consequences of inbreeding can hardly be taken seriously. Such genetic knowledge was not available to ancient or so-called 'primitive' societies; the suggestion that deductive observation rather than proper knowledge might have motivated the taboos is offset by statistical considerations[24] as well as two other factors: the lack of universality in attitudes towards incest—for instance, classifications in numerous societies concerning a paternal vs. maternal sister differ;[25] and the extension of the taboo from blood (consanguineous) to marital kin. It is therefore

presenting God as a loving husband and Samaria–Israel/Jerusalem–Judah as an adulterous wife contains strong incestuous elements. In ch. 16, YHWH adopts a metaphorical 'foundling' then weds her—the text, especially vv. 6 onwards, is strongly reminiscent of a birth as well as a defloration scene. In ch. 23, God's two 'wives', Samaria and Jerusalem, are presented as maternal sisters (v. 2; cf. Lev. 18.18).

23. For recent refutations of the 'uniquely human' character of human incest prohibitions, see, however, studies of animal behaviour and social organization in the wild—especially primates—cited in W. Arens, *The Original Sin: Incest and its Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press 1986), pp. 85-95. Such refutations have obvious implications for the alleged nature/culture ambiguity of incest prohibitions; see also below.

24. 'The economic systems of some primitive or archaic societies severely limit population size, and it is precisely for a population of such a size that the regulation of consanguineous marriages can have only negligible genetic consequences' (C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1965-69], p. 16).

25. Cf. the biblical wife-sister motif, and the Tamar and Amnon story.

preferable to regard incest as a *cultural* phenomenon—indeed, the cultural phenomenon par excellence, a link between nature and culture, thus within the realm of psychology, anthropology, and sociology rather than the realm of biology or sociobiology.[26]

Psychological explanations which go beyond the notion of a deep-rooted, common human revulsion supposedly caused by incest, broadly fall into two categories. The psychoanalytic (Freudian) approach and its offshoots cite a primary incest scene (the Oedipal situation) whose successful resolution is mandatory for mental development. This approach, and the reading of incest myths and ancient literature according to it, shares the phallologocentric bias of the biblical juridical tradition. An incest situation which necessitates resolution and breeds taboo as its safeguard is interpreted by positing male development at its centre and relegating females to the status of object or, at the very least, an other.[27]

Another psychological view cites familiarity, social and/or sexual, as a serious obstacle for maintaining a positive sexual tension and therefore reproduction; hence, according to it, the tendency—in the animal as well as human world—to outbreed. This would explain the inclusion of both blood and marital kin females within the taboo. But this theory, for examples, does not explain why the biblical sister taboo extends in Lev. 18.9 to sisters born and bred outside the household. In general it seems that the biblical (juridical) relational categories are undifferentiated by blood, marital, or familiar oppositions: a female kin is

26. See also Arens, *The Original Sin*, pp. 102-21.

27. Some feminists believe that the bulk of Freudian and Lacanian teachings can be redeemed for feminists, in spite of their inherently androcentric bias. My own view is that the banishment of woman from the symbolic order, along with her imaged position as a parallel or outsider/other, excludes such a possibility. Hence, I would prefer a theory of subject–object relations, equally if differently applicable to the emotional and mental development of both genders: see, for instance, M. Klein, *The Selected Melanie Klein* (ed. J. Mitchell; New York: Free Press, 1987) whose perspective appeals to me much more. Cf. N. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); K. Horney, *Feminine Psychology* (ed. K. Helman; New York: Norton, 1967); and C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). See also Rashkow, 'Daughters and Fathers', pp. 22-36.

classified by her relatedness to a male, be that relatedness of whatever nature, biological or social. For other insubstantialities of this second psychological theory the reader is referred to Lévi-Strauss[28] and Arens.[29]

Sociological theories usually take into account the inclusion of non-consanguineous kin within taboo prohibitions. Some derive their arguments from observations of exogamy/endogamy rules (Durkheim and others, as cited in Lévi-Strauss[30]). These explanations are illuminating albeit ultimately unsatisfactory in their quest to establish a universal/historicized account for a disparate albeit widely distributed phenomenon. The problem is complex: given the inherent ambiguity of incest situations (see the psychological theories), it is not easy, to quote Lévi-Strauss, 'to discover what profound and omnipresent causes could account for the regulation of the relationships between the sexes in every society and age'.[31]

Lévi-Strauss himself commences to discuss the socio-economic regulatory force of incest prohibitions which enables the economic survival of societies by balancing them as units of exchange, whereby male wife-donors and wife-takers can pursue their activities without socio-sexual interference.[32] The biblical texts, however, do not confine incest prohibitions to marriage between kins but extend them to sexual intercourse between those same kins; the socio-economic theory does not apply as successfully to those extra-marital situations. Nonetheless, this approach certainly explains, among other things, why biblical texts focus on male-initiated incest, since this textual phenomenon can now be related to an act of establishing male authority instead of being evaluated as merely deviant, sexually motivated male behaviour.

An interim understanding which, at this juncture, seems to fit the assumptions underlying biblical prohibitions makes socio-psychological sense concerning male-initiated vs. female-initiated

28. Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structure*, pp. 16-19.
29. Arens, *The Original Sin*, pp. 80-84.
30. Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structure*, pp. 19-23.
31. Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structure*, p. 23.
32. In Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structure*. Also C. Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 88-97.

incest too. When biblical female figures commit incest, they allegedly do it for the survival of their social unit, in order to breed a son. The situation is different in the case of males, as addressed by the juridical formulations. Incest taboos addressed to males may thus be understood as a collective male sanction against other aggressive, power-seeking males who might attempt to seize power over society's basic commodity/currency (women), beginning with their own female relatives. Such an understanding might also explain further the bias of mythology and royal legends in favour of incest, as gleaned from ancient and modern sources (including the biblical narratives cited). In Arens' view, which seems attractive because it establishes a correlation between sex and power,[33] one has to look for the 'relationship between the forbidden sexual act and the exercise of power'.[34] Similarly Gerda Lerner, who asks why women, and not men or young children, became the social commodity to be exchanged,[35] concludes:

> Sometime during the agricultural revolution relatively egalitarian societies with a sexual division of labour based on biological necessity gave way to more highly structured societies in which both private property and the exchange of women based on incest taboos and exogamy were common. The earlier societies were often matrilineal and matrilocal, while the latter surviving societies were predominantly patrilineal and patrilocal... The more complex societies featured a division of labor no longer based only on biological distinctions, but also on hierarchy and the power of some men over other men and women. A number of scholars have concluded that the shift here described coincides with the formation of archaic states...[36]

However, Lerner does not go beyond this general linkage of women's oppression and incest taboos.

Evelyn Reed's approach[37] contests the view that incest taboos constitute the primary foundations of human culture and social

33. See the discussion concerning Amnon's raping of Tamar above.

34. Arens, *The Original Sin*, pp. 140-49; the quotation is from p. 148.

35. G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 24-25.

36. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, pp. 24-53; the citation is from p. 53.

37. E. Reed, *Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), pp. 3-26.

organization. She commences from the hypothesis that matriarchy preceded patriarchy, and that in the matriarchal clan all females were forbidden to a male as mothers; therefore, any male member of a clan had to outbreed. The development of incest taboos is thus assigned to the institution of the family, whose development is linked with patriarchy. In Reed's view, 'The oldest and most important taboo prohibitions are the two basic laws of *totemism*: namely not to kill the totem animal, and to avoid sexual intercourse with totem companions of the other sex'.[38]

Reed's approach is helpful in linking sexual taboo, exogamy, and dietary taboos, a linkage which we shall come to later. It is also conducive to understanding the biblical address of males in the juridical texts. However, the trend of social evolution she delineates—from matriarchy to patriarchy, from clan to family—remains unsubstantiated. In addition, the argument for an implied primal incest prohibition involving mother-figures and son-figures weakens her case considerably.

Sociological theories of incest clearly contribute to our understanding of the biblical incest prohibitions. But they do not adequately explain the sense of moral aversion attached to biblical incest. The functional role of the aversion, together with the repetitious proximity of incest lists in Leviticus 18 and 20, are not accounted for by sociobiology either. Freudian-inspired psychoanalytic theories, centered as they are on male development, imply a basic ambiguity in human attitudes; this is helpful for the understanding of the human/mythic and royal contrast but unhelpful in its marginalization of woman, presented in proscriptive biblical sources as the object of incest. Cultural, especially structural-cultural, approaches contribute some principles of organization (the inclusion of both blood and non-blood kin, exogamy, mytho-logic) but do not explain specifics of the biblical system.[39] Reed's theory of a secondary male-invented incest taboo is attractive, but rests on the unprovable premise of primal matriarchy. Lerner's hypothesis of tying the

38. Reed, *Woman's Evolution*, p. 23.

39. Although, to be sure, Lévi-Strauss's remark that laxity in incest prohibitions on the paternal side is characteristic of male-dominated societies (*View from Afar*, pp. 88-97) illuminates, for instance, Gen. 20 and 2 Sam. 13.

inauguration of incest taboos with the shift from matrilineality/locality to patrilineality/locality and to changes in economy, demography and organization patterns is more balanced than Reed's and will be useful for the discussion later. Nonetheless, it too does not account for specific features of the biblical prohibitions. By and large, the socio-anthropological hypotheses here reported are valuable for positing biblical attitudes towards incest within a broader framework. However, a more specific principle of organization for those proscriptive biblical attitudes still remains to be supplied. The question raised by Lévi-Strauss—Since the universal nature of incest specifics is questionable, what is its function in any given society?—breeds a question specific to the biblical passages. What, within their verbal and literary contexts, are the function and significance of those incest 'laws' for the social system they reflect?[40]

Back to the Juridical Texts

Mary Douglas writes, in connection with the Leviticus dietary laws: 'We can conclude that holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused'.[41] Her remark seems equally applicable to the Leviticus and Deuteronomy incest prohibitions. Some of her positions in *Purity and Danger*[42] and *Implicit Meanings*[43] will be adopted here and used, together with the theories listed above, for rereading biblical incest prohibitions.

The moral aspects of social regulation of sex and related issues are but one facet, admittedly a most significant one, of the manner in which society organizes itself into coherent, practicable sets. Ambiguities mostly lead to compartmentalization

40. 'Reflect', of course, in a complex rather than a simple, one-to-one correspondence of texts to extratextual reality.

41. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 53.

42. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

43. M. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

and confinement of what is perceived as its source. A split between the psychological and social aspects of 'reality' often occurs. The question rephrased is, then: against the backdrop of other data concerning biblical Israel,[44] what is the structural social function of the incest prohibitions cited?

Biblical writings set great store by emphasizing the *differences* between the community in which they originate and other communities. This insistence is perhaps the product of insecurity; the similarities rather than dissimilarities to contiguous communities are considered a serious threat to social (inclusive of religious, ethnic, cultural, and other aspects) identify. Attempts to define the community's ideological and practicable boundaries, both outwards and inwards, are therefore extremely pronounced. External boundaries are delineated by exhortations to be unlike the foreign Others. Internal boundaries divide—first and foremost—the two human genders and, concurrently, classes of entities and things. Ironically, there is no clear differentiation in the texts between the concern for external boundaries and the concern for internal boundaries: both appear together within the same contexts, perhaps because they are experienced as the two sides of the same coin.

The society described in the Bible is by and large patriarchal, with the בית אב, the 'father's house' as its basic family unit.[45] This nuclear kin unit typically encompasses two to three generations of blood kin, marital kin and dependants; eventually it splits off into new 'houses'.[46] In accordance with the principle of setting boundaries described above, there is great concern with paternal linearity (genealogies!) and preservation of paternal inheritance. That concern is amply expressed in all biblical genres but, especially, in juridical texts. And among the juridical texts,

44. Which is not synonymous with 'ancient Israel', that is, the actual historical Israel outside the biblical sources, of which our knowledge is scant indeed. Cf. P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

45. But see C. Meyers, 'To her Mother's House', in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1993), pp. 85-114 for the alternative though rare בית אם, 'mother's house'.

46. Cf. S. Bendor, *The Bet Ab in Israel from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy: The Social Structure of Ancient Israel* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Afik and Sifriat Po'alim, 1986).

the preservation of paternity and ensuing issues is particularly evident in the Priestly writings (of which Leviticus, of course, is a prominent part).

In that society, whose extant literature habitually defines it as male dominated, woman is indeed the basic social currency without whom economy and hierarchy can be neither established nor regulated (as in Lévi-Strauss's analyses of other societies). Simultaneously, women and female sexuality are often perceived as stereotypically ambiguous, hence threats to the desirable social order. Male sexual approbation of dependent and other females can therefore be interpreted as a socially-conditioned response, a reaction formation designed to exercise control over those female ambiguities; hence the designation of incest prohibitions as addressed to males (whereas, in the narratives, female figures commit incest in the service of patriarchal linearity).

The concern with paternity can be viewed as a component of attitudes towards women in biblical literature, especially in genres which attempt to regulate social behaviour. Synchronously, it can also be viewed as a component of a set which indeed includes gender issues but, at the same time, has a much broader scope and further ramifications. Seen thus, incest belongs to a set of rules and prescriptions whose concern is to delimit and fix the internal boundaries of descent.

There are numerous examples within biblical Law and outside it for this underlying concern with social boundaries and their regulation outside the incest sphere and, moreover, outside the sexual sphere. Such concern is evident in varied arenas of life. The relevant 'laws', irrespective of the problem of their enactment or its absence, can mostly be understood by referral to the issue of establishing formal distinctions, an issue which was apparently perceived as more urgent the closer the entities to be delineated were deemed to be (as in incest prohibitions). For instance, the recurrent admonitions against intermarriages with the land's inhabitants can now be reinterpreted in the light of the fluid ethnic-cultural identity of the so-called 'Israelites' and 'Judahites' during the late Bronze age and the Iron age. Attempts to define the fluid borderlines between the sacred and the profane abound; ambiguities and fluidity apparently accentuate

the need for specific regulations concerning the enforced separation of similar entities. The recommended boundaries, it seems, are mandatory safeguards for the desired cultural identity of the community which sought to publish them.

Biblical Prohibitions of Admixtures (שעטנז, כלאים)

The life loci of biblical regulations concerning admixtures of similar entities vary. However, in the case of explicit prescriptions[47] the textual loci are similar and/or identical with that of incest. This is particularly apparent wherever other sexual matters, apart from incest prohibitions, are referred to.

Within the agriculture field, *domestic animals* should not be inbred: as we learn from Lev. 19.19, a horse and an ass should not be mated. How this regulation accounts for the widely spread use of פרדה, פרד, 'mule' is perplexing. Domestic animals of similar function should be separated into distinctive classes: Deuteronomy 22.10 forbids the working of an ox and ass together. Various 'commonsense' explanations can be forwarded at this point. Nevertheless, ox and ass can be used together and must have been so used, otherwise why attempt to reject the phenomenon? It seems reasonable to assume that the domestic beasts' similarity, offset by their obviously different identities, is the key to the separation. The same principle is applied to *cloth* in general (Lev. 19.19) and to wool and linen in particular (Deut. 22.11). *Agricultural produce* (Lev. 19.19, Deut. 22.9) should be cultivated separately.

Within roughly the same contexts of agricultural mixture distinctions some sexual offenses are listed: *the wearing of transsexual clothing* (Deut. 22.5), *homosexuality* (male; Lev. 20.13), *bestiality* (committed by male and female; Lev. 18.23, 20.15-16; Deut. 27.21). The textual contiguity of such general sexual offenses and incest seems obviously motivated by the extratextual referent (sex). I would like to suggest an additional criterion for their inclusion within incest contexts or—as is the case in Leviticus 20—as a framing context for incest prohibitions. From the perspective of hierarchy and social control, both

47. To distinguish from implicit deductions gleaned from other biblical genres, like narrative prose and poetry.

requiring the establishment of strict social boundaries, incest is a component among others—and not always the most important. I would also suggest that the moral horror expressed of homosexuality, transsexuality, and bestiality serves the same ideological purpose of avoiding mixtures in the interest of social order and stability. Thus incest and non-heterosexual practices are both constituents of a larger set of prohibitions.

We now come to the sphere of *food/eating*. The principles behind the dietary laws concerning eatable ('clean') and uneatable ('unclean') animals (Leviticus 11, 20.28; Deuteronomy 22) have been and still are much debated. No attempted interpretation should, of course, account for all of them; governing principles are nonetheless necessary so that some sense can be made of the seemingly arbitrary list. I here adopt Mary Douglas's interpretation, namely, that an animal (be it fowl, fish or mammal) is eatable when it is not a borderline case. In her phrases, '...the underlying principle of cleanness in animals is that they shall conform fully to their class. Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class membership confounds the general scheme of the world'.[48] Once more, the governing principle seems to be that of boundaries or their lack—especially significant in the case of ambiguous, related but hardly differentiated entities.[49]

Coming back to matters of gender and socialization, the separation and confinement of women in general and especially those prescriptions concerning menstruation, female genital discharge and postnatal condition,[50] again betray the same informing principle: precisely when women are at their most ambiguous (after a birth, during a period), when their life force seems to clash irreconcilably with their socially inferior status, they are confined and any transaction with them suspended until the ambiguity is temporarily contained by time and ritual. Like in other instances, a confusion of similar elements perceived

48. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 55.

49. I suggest that, in addition to its presumed religious polemic value, the injunction against eating 'a kid in its mother's milk' (Exod. 23.19; 34.6; Deut. 14.21) belongs to same set of boundary-drawing.

50. Cf. I. Be'er's article, 'Blood Discharge: On Female Im/purity in the Priestly Code and Biblical Narrative', in this volume, pp. 155-68.

to be related but simultaneously contradictory calls for the stringent measures.[51] Such measures are especially required whenever the fluid borderlines between the sacred and the profane are experienced as potentially threatened.[52]

In Conclusion

I subscribe to Mary Douglas's rule: in the investigation of social phenomena psychological motivation should be separated from sociological motivation. The two might certainly coincide or partly overlap. While the one may be conceived of as subtext for the other, their affiliations are complex, which does not allow for direct correspondences between potentiality and actuality.

From the psychoanalytical perspective, incest is a deep-rooted human fantasy, especially a male one. In that fantasy, desire for sex and control are intermingled. But in the enactment of this fantasy, to distinguish from the fantasy's primary nature, there seems to occur a shift in balance between the two components. Like in other forms of sexual practices, incest behaviour may constitute a bid for acquiring social domination through sexual stamping. Women may make sexual bids for social power too; however, male use of sexual subordination is encouraged by social mores and praxis. Psychology, including individual psychology, is culture bound. And individual sexual bids for power, be their gender constituency as it may, are prohibited by society when judged disruptive. In that respect, incest is no different from other forms of social behaviour which are considered dangerous for the accepted social order and therefore morally and ideologically deviant. Furthermore, incest may

51. See Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, pp. 47-82.

52. Cf. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper, 1961). A case in point are the marriage rules prescribed for the priests, much tougher than ordinary exogamous and endogamous practices. Another example is that of the 'good looking [female] prisoner' of war (Deut. 21.10-14). Her period of waiting, like any period of mourning, is designed to make the difference between her former and present state of existence total. Other instances concern rituals of transition at the appropriate life junctions, and so on. The point of these examples is that, as in the cases of incest and (especially priestly) marriage, the concern with paternity is an important factor.

thus be considered a form of sexual violence: although both partners might consent, the social gain for the socially dominant partner (in our culture, usually the male) far exceeds the inferior partner's profit (even when that partner is the initiator of incestuous behaviour, see the biblical incest narratives initiated by female figures).

Admixtures of similar yet different entities are prohibited; these prohibitions are structurally and motivationally similar to incest prohibitions. A social concern for establishing boundaries and well-defined identities[53] links these two series of prohibitions to the extent that both appear to be constituents of a broader set. Lerner's placing of the emergence of incest taboo at a transition from nomadity to settlement, from one kind of economy to another, and from one social organization to a new one, comes to mind. It can perhaps be applied to the situation of the ancient Israelites/Judahites. Lerner also connects women's oppression with (prehistoric) socio/economic transition. The same principle can be related to historical transition. Thus, the concern for biblical boundaries is particularly noticeable in the ever-elusive endeavour to safeguard paternity. Hence, it is energetically applied to the ordering of various sexual phenomena. Incest is obviously included within those phenomena—as are adultery (Lev. 18.20, 18.20; Ezek. 22.1), homosexuality, transsexuality, and bestiality,[54] all phenomena deemed worthy of preemptive proscription.[55] The anxiety concerning the paternity problem further explains why biblical incest language has

53. The same priestly concern is projected onto the world in the priestly material contained in Gen. 1–11. God's first step is to separate *before* he creates the world. In the Flood, the differences between heaven and earth are obliterated, something never to recur by divine will. The J account contributes its consent to the definition of boundaries through the tower/city story, ch. 11.

54. The return to the inclusion of cursing a father and mother injunction within the incest contexts (Lev. 20.9; Deut. 27.16) can be explained by its perception as a symbolical act of overturning authority. As such, this too is an instance of overstepping basic boundaries that are mandatory for the preservation of social order.

55. A truism but seems in order here: the preemptive preoccupation with incest should be regarded as solid evidence for its widespread practice within ancient Israelite society.

the male as addressee and subject-in-the-text in most juridical cases. That care invested in the prescriptive formulations first and foremost betrays a male worry over the continuation of the male line, that is, social organization as constructed by males. It also reflects male worry over the control of insurgent, ambitious other males.

Ultimately, incest should not be debated in isolation from other social measures and institutions but within the structural paradigm of a given society—in the present case ancient Israel and its mores, as present within the biblical texts (juridical and narrative) and behind them. Paradigmatic shifts rather than universal generalizations seem to underlie transcultural differentials of incest, as of other socio-moral institutions. Intertexts from comparative ancient cultures provide helpful illumination for such *cultural differences*. The two examples I would like to cite are, respectively, the relevant sections in the Hammurabi Code and the Hittite Laws.

In the Hammurabi Code, four categories of 'forbidden females' are listed; the addressee, like in the biblical juridical material, is the male, presumably the initiator of the incestuous act.

1. Daughter. A father/daughter incest does feature here, (section 154), while this category is missing from the biblical juridical (although not the narrative) material. The punishment the prohibition entails is far lighter than any biblical punishment for incest: he has to leave the city.[56]
2. Daughter-in-law, before (section 156) or after (section 155) her union with the son is consummated. In the first instance, she is dismissed from the family with a small payment, so that she can marry another; in the second, the male offender undergoes the water ordeal.
3. Mother, after the father's death (section 157); both offenders will be burnt to death.
4. Stepmother who has borne the father children, after the father's death (section 158); the man will be cut off from the parental home.[57]

56. Hammurabi Code §154; cf. T.J. Meek's translation in *ANET*, p. 172.

57. Meek in *ANET*, pp. 172-73. Cf. also Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 116.

The Hammurabi Code deals with two types, a male's daughters and mothers, be they blood kin or marriage kin. (Other categories mentioned in the biblical texts are missing). A clear distinction is drawn between the two types of relatedness, a distinction well-expressed in the punishments prescribed. Considerations of ownership override those of paternity or boundaries, although the latter are present too. This is evidenced by the relatively moderate punishment for incest with daughter, or with daughter-in-law. The single red boundary, perhaps the only one morally horrifying,[58] is intercourse with a blood mother, which entails a death sentence. Obviously, incest in early second-millennium Mesopotamia, as indicated by the Hammurabi Code, exhibits social concerns that are far removed from the biblical ones.

The Hittite laws are similarly addressed. The categories of forbidden females are:

1. Blood mother (section 189).
2. Blood daughter (189).

Curiously, in this section intercourse with a blood son is mentioned too, following two sections on bestiality. All three are capital offenses.

4. A stepmother is forbidden only during the father's lifetime (section 190).
5. Blood-related females (sisters, or mothers and daughters) can be taken as co-wives as long as they live in separate localities (section 191); but otherwise intercourse with kindred, alive blood females—mothers and daughters—is forbidden (section 195).
6. A wife's sister is allowed in marriage after the wife's death (section 192).
7. A sister-in-law is permitted to her dead husband's brothers (section 193), but while the brother is alive that is a capital offense (section 195).

58. Since it is formulated in such a way ('after the father's death') as to pretend that its occurrence during the father's lifetime is inconceivable.

8. No blood kin limitations obtain in sexual relations with slave girls, be the subjects (males) or the objects (females) involved related among themselves (section 194).[59]

It would seem that in Hittite incest laws blood relatedness is the most significant principle; and even that principle fades after the blood relative's death. One can speculate as to the reasons for this emphasis on biological kinship. A concern for boundaries of biological kinship implies interest in the *ownership* of females per se and in paternal transmission of property. Unlike the biblical material, the extension of the incest concern to marital kinship is minimal. The difference in categories and emphasis between the Hittite society, as it wishes to present itself through the laws, and the biblical (Israelite?) society and its incest laws, are considerable. The *phenomenon* of incest probably occurs in all or most human societies; but the formulations, regulations and taboos associated with it are *not* universal. Thus, reading our modern definitions of incest into the relevant biblical texts—or any other culturally different text—may not always be helpful.

59. Cf. A. Goetze's translation in *ANET*, p. 196.

WIDOWS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: A TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH

Frank S. Frick

Widows in the Ethnographic Record

It is common wisdom in comparative ethnology and sociology that kin-based societies characteristically offer a corporate safety net for widows and orphans. Such societies usually reabsorb a widow by allowing her to marry within her husband's lineage, or they coerce her into doing so by means of the levirate or another form of remarriage.[1]

In a transactional approach such as is being proposed here, the focus is on *process* as opposed to the emphasis on the kind of structured group relationships that is typically found in the functional-structuralist type of anthropological analysis. A transactional approach to the investigation of widowhood in ancient Israel can help us understand the important modifications that women's relationships, rights and powers undergo during the course of their life cycle. Such an understanding of the transformation in women's roles in the development of the life cycle has been conspicuously lacking both in ethnographic and biblical studies. Too frequently, discussions of a woman's position in society have been synchronic rather than diachronic, focusing almost exclusively on the adult married wife and mother. Scholars have seldom made life cycle observations, and when present they have not always integrated them into their analysis. Yet it is obvious that principal role relationships in women's lives

1. M.K. Slater, 'Foreword: Sons and Levirs', in B. Potash (ed.), *Widows in African Society: Choices and Constraints* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. xv-xxii.

change over the course of their lives.

The neglect of and distortions about widows in the ethnographic literature stem from three primary distorting biases:

1. The concentration by anthropologists on widow remarriage may come from an unconscious ethnocentrism of Westerners, who live in a conjugally structured society. The levirate should *not* automatically be understood as marriage. This type of relationship between a widow and her dead husband's relative may, from an *emic* point of view, be distinguished from marriage. In many groups it is the deceased, not the levir, who is regarded as the woman's husband. *Etically*, the levirate can manifest important differences in rights and obligations from those pertaining to the original husband and wife. By grouping such practices with other forms of marriage, we ignore the fact that often widows involved in such relationships live alone and may have greater independence and responsibility than wives have.
2. A second distortion is created by androcentric interpretations of the role of women in general, and widows in particular, in the economic and political life of their societies. Little attention has been paid to the economic role of widows, whom anthropologists often consider to be simply dependents who must be provided for. On the contrary, as the ethnographic record shows repeatedly, widows may control adequate resources to support themselves.
3. The treatment of widows also suffers from the approach of structural functionalism, which stresses the rights of kin groups in marriage and typically treats widows as the passive pawns of these groups.[2]

Recent ethnographic studies, especially those focusing on African societies, have shown that, in reality, widows are not simply totally at the disposal of others, but make important decisions about their own lives. Often they have the freedom to

2. B. Potash, 'Widows in Africa: An Introduction', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, pp. 1-43.

live alone and manage their own affairs, or to form relationships with consorts; or, in some systems, to marry again. The range of options available to widows varies, but widows in most societies do have choices and exercise them. The availability of options depends on a configuration of rules, including rights to residence and access to productive resources, custodial rights over children, and rules of remarriage. One option available to widows in some societies is the possibility of returning to their natal group. An important variable affecting the options and power of women is the extent to which natal group ties offer alternatives to marital and affinal ties. If women have rights to return to their kin and are welcome there, they have increased leverage as wives and are, consequently, less subject to their husbands' control. Widows with this right can also be in a good negotiating position, requiring inducements to remain in the husband's community.

Surprisingly, a consistent finding in ethnological research is the degree to which widows are economically self-reliant. Since African women, who are the subjects of this ethnological research, generally contribute substantially to the household economy and often provide most or all of the support for themselves and their children, this should not be surprising. It does, however, run counter to the common perception of widows as dependents who, in preindustrial societies, are provided for by communal kin institutions.

Contrary to such a commonly held view, generally there is *no* communal support for widows.[3] On the contrary, many widows appear in the African ethnographic record as self-reliant, living alone, and heading their own households. The much-touted ideas of communal support and corporate group responsibility, which appear so often in discussions of widows, are apparently more a Rousseauian ideal than an ethnographic reality. Such discussions fail to consider the importance of women's economic activities and disregard the large number of societies in which women are not economically dependent. Thus a kind of oral tradition has developed among many anthropologists that interprets the levirate and widow inheritance, at least in part, as

3. Potash, 'Widows in Africa', p. 4.

mechanisms that are designed to provide for the support of widows and their children.

Neither Marxist anthropologists nor symbolic structuralists deal extensively with widows per se. Functionalists are interested almost exclusively in the institutional arrangements governing the 'inheritance' of widows. Their emphasis is on how these institutions contribute to a maintenance of the social system, and the focus is on corporate group rights. Since marriage is seen as an arrangement made by men, which transfers rights over women from the woman's natal group to the husband and his group, such institutions as the levirate and widow inheritance are, accordingly, interpreted as enabling the husband's group to retain these rights, that is, to preserve the patrimony. The ethnographic record shows, however, that the situation is a good deal more complex than a simple notion of communal support suggests. There are variations in the amounts and kinds of assistance from various support sources that are available to widows.

A social process approach to widows is interested in examining the options available to widows, the interests that influence the decisions they make about their own lives, and the consequences of such decisions. A social process, or transactional, approach, recognizes that similarity of structural form does *not* necessarily indicate similarity of content—for example, with reference to the levirate. Regina Oboler's work among the Nandi, a patrilineal people of western Kenya, shows that with them the levirate is a social ideal that is seldom practiced. Widows typically reside alone or with adult sons and take over the management of their husband's estate.[4] By contrast, the levirate is widely practiced among the Luo, a patrilineal people in western Kenya. Luo widows also reside alone and manage lands transmitted through the house property mode of inheritance. They choose levirs from their husband's lineage.[5] Enid Schildkrout's analysis of the Hausa in northern Nigeria shows how widows' choices depend not only the options available in a

4. R. Smith Oboler, 'Nandi Widows', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, pp. 77-83.

5. B. Potash, 'Wives of the Grave: Widows in a Rural Luo Community', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, pp. 44-65.

given society, but also on the widow's life cycle stages.[6]

Many aspects of social organization look different when examined from the perspective of widows themselves, and many concepts and methods used in biblical scholarship accordingly warrant rethinking. The nature and extent of kin group solidarity, patterns of affinal and consanguineal relationships, variations in household and community organization, the relative importance of female and male economic contributions, the significance of natal group rights, and the nature of marital alliances, are but a few of the issues that can be illuminated when examined from the viewpoint of widows. Accounts that merely discuss *where* widows are domiciled or *how* consorts are chosen are simply inadequate. We need to know how the allocation of rights and responsibilities changes when widows head their own households, attach themselves to those of natal or affinal kin, or reside with children. We need to ask such questions as: Do widow heads of household play the same role as male heads in representing domestic group interests to other households and to the community? Are the allocation of responsibilities and patterns of authority between brother and sister or consort and widow similar to those between husband and wife when they form a household?

Widows in the Bible

As in the ethnographic literature, so in biblical studies, widows have been considerably understudied. Even in the comprehensive new *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, there is, surprisingly, no separate entry on widows, but only a few references to them here and there.

As Paula Hiebert observes in her significant article on widows in the Bible, most work done to date on the biblical widow (*'almānâ*) has consisted in assembling and commenting on those texts in which the word *'almānâ* occurs.[7] There has been no

6. E. Schildkrout, 'Widows in Hausa Society: Ritual Phase or Social Status?', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, pp. 131-52.

7. P.S. Hiebert, '"Whence Shall Help Come to Me?" The Biblical Widow', in P. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 126.

attempt thus far to delineate a holistic picture of the Hebrew *'almānâ*. Many questions arise; for example, just who is this *'almānâ*? Is every widow designated by this term? In a society where the levirate is legislated, why is an *'almānâ* considered so vulnerable and alone, so liminal? Where are the kin who are obliged to provide for her? What is her financial situation? Why is she grouped with the fatherless and the client? Why is she in need of YHWH's special protection?[8]

The Hebrew term *'almānâ* possesses cognates in other Semitic languages, but its etymology is uncertain. The Akkadian equivalent of *'almānâ, almattu*, occurs in earlier Mesopotamian texts, but it is with the Middle Assyrian laws that a definition of, and pertinent information about, the *almattu* emerges.[9] The most immediately informative law with respect to the *almattu* is A §33, which is cited by Hiebert as follows:[10]

> [If] a woman is still dwelling in her father's house, (and) her husband is dead and [she] has none, [she shall dwell in a] house [belonging to them where she chooses. If] she has no [son, her father-in-law shall give her] to whichever [of his sons] he likes...or, if he pleases, he shall give her as a spouse to her father-in-law. If her husband and her father-in-law are [indeed] dead and she has no son, she becomes (in law) a widow (*almattu*); she shall go whither she pleases.

According to the last few lines of this law, it appears that to be called an *almattu* both a woman's husband and father-in-law must be deceased, and there is no son remaining to provide for her. An *almattu* is thus a woman without males who are responsible for supporting her.

Hiebert elects to look at a few texts within one corpus in which *'almānâ* occurs as a means of focusing attention on certain aspects of the *'almānâ*. She examines five references in the Psalms and observes that four of them illustrate a phenomenon that occurs in over half the biblical references to *'almānâ*, namely, that the widow is grouped with the fatherless (*yātôm*), and the client

8. Hiebert, 'Whence Shall Help Come to Me', pp. 126-27.

9. Hiebert, 'Whence Shall Help Come to Me', p. 127.

10. From G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles (eds.), *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 403-405.

(*gēr*).[11] She goes on to observe that the fact that the *'almānâ* is so often linked with the fatherless and the client suggests that these three groups shared something in common.

The Hebrew *'almānâ*, like the *gēr*, existed on the fringes of society. Hiebert does not, however, develop an adequate sociological mode for examining the widow in the Hebrew Bible. While she cites the theoretical framework of Helena Lopata's work in which the support systems and lifestyles of widows are examined in various areas, she does not cite the more comprehensive social process theoretical perspective set forth by Betty Potash and her colleagues in their work among African widows. In the balance of this essay, some aspects of the transactional model developed from the study of African widows will be applied to but two aspects of widows in ancient Israel: the levirate and the inheritance rights of widows.

The Levirate

The levirate clearly was an important Jewish institution. Levirate marriage is a principal subject of the tractate *Yebamot* of the Babylonian Talmud. Belkin thinks the rabbis valued the institution because it protected the widow and helped compensate the family for the loss it sustained.[12] Susan Niditch thinks the rabbis shared the biblical view of levirate marriage as a socially constructive institution.[13] Ancient Jewish society allowed a young woman only two proper roles. She was either an unmarried virgin in her father's house or else a faithful,

11. For this translation of *gēr* see L. Stager, 'Archaeology, Ecology and Social History: Background Themes to the Song of Deborah', in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* (VTSup, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 229-32. The *gēr*, commonly translated 'sojourner, stranger, resident alien', but more properly 'client', was one who was dwelling outside the geographical area of his or her own kin. The *gēr* was, therefore, in need of protection that was not, owing to his or her geographical dislocation, available from his or her own family. The *gēr* thus needed to be attached to a patron for protection and for economic assistance.

12. S. Belkin, 'Levirate and Agnate Marriage in Rabbinic and Cognate Literature', *JQR* 60 (1970), p. 293.

13. S. Niditch, 'The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38', *HTR* 72 (1979), p. 149.

child-producing wife in her husband's or her husband's family's home. Through the institution of the levirate, society could avoid a sociological misfit, the young childless widow. The levirate not only continued the line of the deceased, it also reaffirmed the young widow's place in the home of her husband's family.

In the Hebrew Bible the levirate is dealt with in Deut. 25.5-10, Genesis 38 and Ruth 4. The law in Deut. 25.5-10 provides legal sanctions for a marriage between a widow whose husband died without offspring and the brother of the deceased. When the brother-in-law chose not to marry his brother's widow, the ceremony of the removal by the widow of the brother-in-law's sandal took place,[14] and the widow spit in his face as well. The practice of spitting in the face is a point of special interest, for this law is the *only* one in the Hebrew Bible that includes in its statement of penalty an act of humiliation against the offending party. The removal of the shoe by the woman is not an additional part of the insult. Rather, in removing the brother-in-law's shoe, with the town's elders as witnesses, the woman assumes the right to her freedom and full control of her destiny.[15]

Besides this legislation, two stories in the Hebrew Bible portray levirate marriage in operation: Genesis 38 and Ruth 4. However, when either one of these stories is measured against the law in Deuteronomy, significant differences appear. In Deuteronomy and Genesis 38 the levirate is compulsory; in Ruth it is not. Deut. 25.5-10 limits the levirate to brothers 'who dwell together'. In Genesis 38, however, the levirate is extended to the father-in-law, and in Ruth to a distant relative. Genesis 38 appears to agree with Middle Assyrian Law A §33, which mentions the brother as the normal partner, but allows his father this function as well. Another inconsistency appears in the fact that Deut. 25.7 makes it clear that the levir's responsibilities are 'to raise up a name for his brother'. In the genealogy at the end of Ruth, however, it is Judah and Boaz, that is, the real/biological fathers, who are mentioned in the genealogies of

14. Mentioned in Ruth 4.9, but an otherwise unattested form of release from responsibilities in the Hebrew Bible.

15. V.P. Hamilton, 'Marriage: Old Testament and Ancient Near East', *ABD*, IV, p. 567.

Perez and Obed, not Er and Mahlon.[16]

The latter point suggests that levirate marriage in the Hebrew Bible is not simply concerned with the protection of patrimony by producing a male child, nor with bringing forth an heir to the dead man's property. Hamilton suggests, and a transactional approach would support the suggestion that it is concerned just as much, if not more, with the support and protection of the widow as it is with the perpetuation of family property within the immediate family.[17]

This assessment of the economic aspects of the levirate is at odds, however, with much of the data collected by Potash among the Luo and Oboler among the Nandi. Among the Luo, the levir has few responsibilities to the widow. His role is primarily sexual. He is expected to visit the widow regularly for purposes of sex and procreation. The absence of economic responsibilities of the levir is striking, and the main responsibility for support rests with the widow herself.[18] There is also the common assumption that the levirate is a continuation of marriage. Although both anthropologists and biblical scholars typically treat the levirate in this manner, and regard the consort as the husband's successor, among the Luo such relationships are different from marriage, and suggest some different ways of considering the levirate in ancient Israel. Among the Luo, the levir is usually a married man who lives in his own home. His responsibilities and interests are directed primarily to his own wife or wives and legal heirs, who are part of his descent line. These sons will inherit from him and carry on his name. By contrast, the widow's children, including natural offspring sired by the levir, belong to the deceased husband's line and will inherit there. The widow is interested in safeguarding her children's property and must provide for their economic support. Leviratic relationships are thus characterized by separate residence and widows will typically continue living in their deceased husband's home. Widows have no domestic responsibilities to the levir; the levir has no responsibility for support or socialization. Duolocal residence and the separation

16. Hamilton, 'Marriage', p. 567.
17. Hamilton, 'Marriage', p. 567.
18. Potash, 'Wives of the Grave', pp. 57-62.

of sexual-procreative functions from other responsibilities is striking.[19]

Inheritance Rights of Widows

While other ancient Near Eastern societies describe widow inheritance in varying detail, scholars are divided about whether widows in ancient Israel could inherit property. The book of Ruth is cited by some as evidence for assuming the practice of inheritance by widows. D.R.G. Beattie argues from Ruth 4.3 that 'a childless widow would, taking precedence over her husband's lateral male relations customarily inherit her husband's estate'.[20] This is precisely the situation that maintains among the Luo and Nandi in Africa.

Others, however, assert that widows did *not* have inheritance rights. E.W. Davies says:

> In Israel [in contrast to the ancient Near East] there were no provisions enabling the widow to inherit the property of her deceased husband. If the widow had children of her own, her husband's estate would have passed to them, and if she had no children then the nearest kinsman of the husband would have succeeded to the estate (Num. xxvii 8–11). It is clear, therefore, that the plight of the childless widow in Israel must have been particularly distressing, since she would have lost all claim to her husband's property.[21]

That the situation in ancient Israel may not have been as Davies describes it is perhaps suggested by the book of Judith, in which Judith is pictured as a young, apparently childless widow, wealthy and well respected, the very antithesis of the traditional picture of a biblical widow. It is said that she remained at home, and there is no mention of her returning to her natal group. It is also explicitly said that she inherited 'gold and silver, men and women slaves, livestock and fields' from her husband, and that she managed his estate (Jdt. 8.4, 7). Here then is a picture of an

19. Potash, 'Wives of the Grave', pp. 44-55.

20. D.R.G. Beattie, 'The Book of Ruth as Evidence for Israelite Legal Practice', *VT* 24 (1974), p. 256.

21. E.W. Davies, 'Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage', *VT* 31 (1981), pp. 138-39.

ancient Israelite woman who is *not* 'inherited' by one of her husband's kinsmen, is *not* pitied as an object of charity as the childless widow often is, and who *does not*, out of either desperation or duty, return to her father's house. Here is a widow who is *not* reabsorbed in society through remarriage to one of her husband's lineage and has *not* been forced to do so by means of the levirate, widow inheritance, or another form of remarriage. Judith is a widow who lives alone and has independent control of her estate. The story of Judith also points to the importance of considering where in her life-cycle a widow may be and what options might be available to her. The idea that options were available for a resourceful widow is also illustrated by the widow Babatha, whose legal records have been discovered among documents dating to the second century CE. Near the end of the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135 CE), Jews from Ein Gedi took refuge in a cave on the cliffs above the Dead Sea, which has come to be known as the 'Cave of Letters'. Among these refugees was a widow named Babatha. Babatha brought with her to the cave at Ein Gedi a packet of legal documents, among which were transcripts of the actions that she had filed in courts of law between 93 and 132 CE.[22]

Babatha's files reveal much about her personal history, her family and its business dealings. But perhaps, most of all, Babatha's records are a remarkable testimony to the legal recourse open to a widow. Babatha was born into a wealthy family of farmers in the village of Mahoza near Zoar, south of the Dead Sea. She was married twice. She and her first husband Yeshua had one son. After the death of Yeshua, Babatha remarried. Her second husband, Yehudah, also died, leaving her a widow for the second time. After the death of Babatha's first husband, the senate of Petra appointed two guardians for her son. This action follows the legal tradition that a widow's care lay in the hands of the inheritor of the estate or his guardians.[23] Several of Babatha's records document her legal

22. Y. Yadin, 'The Life and Trials of Babatha's Archives', in *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Revolt against Rome* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 222-53.

23. B.B. Thurston, 'The Widows as the "Altar of God"', *SBL Seminar Papers* 24 (1985), p. 279.

battle against Egla and Illoutha for control of her deceased husband's land. For example, on one occasion Babatha filed suit against Yohanan Egla and charged him with failing to pay her child support. Babatha wanted the land held in trust by her son's guardians to be turned over to her and, in return, she would pay her legal guardians a higher rate of interest on it than the guardians could get in the open market.

The Luo in Africa provide us with some interesting ethnographic examples of the widow who, like Judith and Babatha, is not disinherited; indeed, it is the woman who chooses a consort, and she may, if she wishes, refuse to form such a relationship, and remain a widow, as did Judith and Babatha.[24] Similarly the Luo and the Nandi provide us with examples of patrilineal societies in which the widow is not left destitute and a ward of charity.

In Western societies with common conjugal funds, the death of a husband sometimes leaves the widow in reduced circumstances. This does not necessarily happen in African societies; widows continue to produce goods much as they did before. Among the Nandi and Luo, the widow acquires effective managerial control over the husband's estate. Whether widows experience economic difficulties depends on the nature and importance of the husband's contribution. The position of Nandi widows is much the same as when their husbands were alive. Even where widows have rights to property in their husband's community, however, such rights do not always go unchallenged. Although property rights are secure among the Nandi, Obbo provides several examples from other East African societies where widows find it necessary to protect themselves from affinal exploitation.[25] Land conflicts between widows and affines are also reported for the Beti[26] and the Akan.[27] One wonders to what degree affinal exploitation might account for

24. Potash, 'Wives of the Grave', p. 45.

25. C. Obbo, 'Some East African Widows', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, pp. 95-100.

26. J.I. Guyer, 'Beti Widows Inheritance and Marriage Law', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, p. 214.

27. D.D. Vellenga, 'The Widow among the Matrilineal Akan of Southern Ghana', in Potash, *Widows in African Society*, pp. 230-31.

the difficulties of widows in the Hebrew Bible.

This preliminary attempt to explore the biblical widow through the lens of social process is only meant to be suggestive, suggestive of an approach that focuses not on male dominance as reflected in biblical norms relating to widows but on the use of anthropological studies. Comparative anthropology might help us infer what actual practice was in biblical societies, leading to a kind of systematic investigation of biblical widowhood that is necessary, both for understanding the important modifications that women's relationships, rights and powers undergo during the course of their life cycle, and for approaching a more *emic* view of their situation.

BLOOD DISCHARGE: ON FEMALE IM/PURITY IN THE PRIESTLY CODE AND IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Ilana Be'er

The biblical prescriptions concerning the discharge of vaginal blood are best understood when examined within the framework of which they form a part—the framework of purity and impurity regulations.[1] It is impossible to read them in isolation from their literary context and reflected social framework. Therefore, I shall begin by describing these context and framework, then proceed to discuss female blood discharge itself—first in the Priestly code and then in biblical narrative. It will be shown that the pictures gleaned from each of the two literary genres examined are hardly interrelated: they stand in sharp contrast to one another.

Priestly Concerns, Israelite Society, and Im/Purity

The proscriptive 'laws' concerning menstruating women, women after childbirth and women with irregular blood issue are included among the laws of purity and impurity in the book of Leviticus (chs. 11–15). The prohibition of intercourse with a

1. The terms pure/purity and impure/impurity, widely used for rendering the technical Hebrew terms *ṭāmē'/tum'â* and *ṭāhôr/ṭoh'râ* respectively, are used although it is recognized that the linguistic equivalence of the Hebrew and English terms is far from satisfactory. Hence, they should be regarded as if enclosed by inverted commas. An alternative term for the root *ṭhr* and its derivatives is clean/liness. The alternative terms unclean/liness—as well as defile/ment, pollute/pollution, and contaminate/contamination—are occasionally used as parallels but, again, with similar reservations.

menstruating woman reappears in the list that prohibits incest and other forms of illicit sexual intercourse (Lev. 18.19), and is repeated again within the list of holiness laws (20.18).

The Levitical code furnishes legal and practical expression to values constructed in priestly circles from the early days of the formation of the Israelite cult around local shrines and temples, up to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (586 BCE) and beyond it. The priests' views about God's nature and wishes, the modes by which he governs the world and his relations with his chosen people, are the principles that inform these laws and underlie them.

The priest's position as mediator between community and God is exemplified by the many laws that describe his central role in sacrificial and cleansing rituals. The social superiority of priestly families was—still is—perpetuated by the divine status claimed for and by these laws. The priests' role was to distinguish 'between holy and unholy and between clean and unclean and to teach the laws of God' (Lev. 10.10-11). Priests invested themselves with the authority to examine and decide whether a person or an object was unclean, and to prescribe the means by which personal and cultic purity could be attained or restored. In addition, they played an important role in performing the actual purification ceremonies that were enacted in the temple(s). They gained social control by claiming and implementing the power to decide whether a person was allowed to participate in religious ceremonies or be banned from such ceremonies. They also had the power to banish any member of a community from home, friends and relations and to force her or him into isolation on the account of being pronounced impure (Lev. 13.46). This kind of control, together with the economical advantage acquired by the gifts brought by those who required their services, eventually rendered the priests an influential class (or classes) in Israelite society. The superiority of the priests and their families is exemplified, among other things, by the demand that they follow an even stricter code in respect to their own purity and impurity than 'ordinary' Israelites (21.1-15). However, we have no knowledge as to how widespread a following their teachings, as preserved in biblical literature, commanded during the monarchical era.

Im/Purity Proscriptions in their Literary Context

The laws of purity and impurity basically fall into two categories: those chiefly concerned with the temple and its sacred status (Lev. 2–15); and those related to the daily conduct of individuals (chs. 11; 17–18). The distinction between the two was upheld by Jewish interpretive traditions. For instance, The Rambam (Maimonides) writes on the first group in his book of *ṭoh'râ*, while the second group is discussed in his book on *q'dûšâ* ('holiness').

The laws that relate to the temple and its sanctity constitute an introduction to ch. 16, in which directives are given concerning sources sources of impurity (chs. 18 and 20).[2] The root *ṭm'* ('render impure, unclean') is used in the description of the result of incest too (Lev. 18.20, 24–25, 27–28). For instance, sexual intercourse with a sister-in-law is compared to intercourse with a menstruant woman, whose blood (like that of eatable animal/s?) is impure (20.21; see also 18.20). By including intercourse with a menstruant woman within the list of incest and illicit intercourse (18.19; 20.18), the priests revealed that they considered illicit intercourse to be a source of contamination that is similar to the contamination suffered as the result of intercourse with a menstruating woman. Thus, the contextualization of proscriptions concerning vaginal discharges defines them as analogous to other blood prohibitions and to the grave transgression of incest.

Incurable Impurities

Impurities may be permanent or, conversely, temporary. When do they fit into the one category or its opposite? How and when can alleged impurities be cured?

It may seem somewhat paradoxical that humans lack the means to purify themselves from defilement which comes upon them by their own illicit (voluntary) acts. This statement, however, acquires logic if and when we consider that humans are punishable for the wrong choices they make rather than for the condition of defilement itself. The impurities caused to a person

2. See A. Brenner, 'On Incest', in this volume, pp. 113-138.

who deliberately violates the laws concerning forbidden food and sexual practices cannot be cured. There is no reprieve for a person who, by exercising free choice, transgresses these prohibitions. This apparent paradox is rooted in the belief that free choice is a human prerogative. But one important reservation is in order here. Free choice, as exercised in the society described, is attributed to males by using male address. Nonetheless, a woman who participates in illicit sexual practices is to be equally punished although—taking social mores into account—she was most likely a passive partner. At any rate, the lawgivers allow ways of recovery for those unintentionally involved in illicit practices.[3]

The characteristic features of incurable (voluntarily induced) impurities are:

1. Deliberate action must have been committed by a person and, as a result, he/she is contaminated by any of these impurities. In other words, it is within human control to avoid such contamination.
2. They affect only the culprit but are not transferable to other persons or objects.
3. However, the damage caused by the contaminated individual may affect the whole 'camp of Israel' (18.24-30; 20.23-24).
4. The culprit is punished either by the divine (Num. 19.13) or by the authorities, as in the case of incest (Lev. 20).

Curable Impurities

Six curable impurities are mentioned with regard to the temple and its sanctity (chs. 12–15). These are impurities caused by:

a. Childbirth (ch. 12).
b. Skin disorders and 'leprosy' of cloth and houses (chs. 13–14).
c. A male's genital discharge (15.1-15).
d. An uncontrolled issue of semen (15.16-18).
e. A menstruating woman (15.19-24).
f. A woman who has irregular bleeding (15.25-30).[4]

3. See the Ramban (Nachmanides) to Lev. 11.40 and 17.16; and both the Ramban and Ibn Ezra to 15.24.

4. The body of a dead person, which is a major source of impurity, is

Females, female blood and femininity account for half the causes (a, e, f); causes related to male sexuality (genital discharge—c, d) constitute a third of the list only. Clearly, women potentially are a more serious source of pollution than men.

The characteristic features of curable impurities are:

1. They are beyond a person's control, either because they may be unavoidable—such as in the case of skin disorders or a woman's blood flow. No human intention can be attributed to their occurrence.
2. They are mainly discussed in relation to the temple and sacred entities. The laws do not require an avoidance of such defilements. However, a person defiled by any of them is not allowed to touch the sacrifices within the family circle (Num. 9.6; 1 Sam. 20.26), the tribe or the whole community (Lev. 12.4; 1 Sam. 21.5).
3. They are transferable in several ways, mainly by contiguity—touching, carrying, and the like. For instance, the contaminating essence of death is transferred to the living through remaining with a human corpse under the same roof.
4. They can be contained by setting their source apart, either for a predetermined duration or else until the impurity is over, that is, cured. In some cases the source object has to be physically destroyed by breakage (Lev. 14.45; 15.12) or fire (13.52).
5. Their degree of severity varies. The severity of each impurity can be assessed by observing the way it is transmitted, its effect on objects and people, and the means required for purification. For example, emission of semen requires one day of impurity which ends at sunset by washing (15.16), whereas a woman after giving birth to a girl remains in an impure state for eighty days (12.5).

not mentioned in this list. It is, however, discussed in Num. 19. As mentioned above, forbidden animals are also considered unclean, and the same applies to their carcasses (Lev. 11.24-38). The verb *ṭm'* ('defile', 'contaminate') is used to describe their state and effect on humans and objects. Anyone who touches their carcasses or carries them is required to purify by immersion in water (vv. 24-28).

6. Washing is the essential, sometimes the only, act in the process of purification.
7. Severe cases of contamination require a priest's participation in the process of purification, as defined by the Priestly code. The gifts to be paid by the cured person to the officiating priest are specified.
8. A person who does not follow the cleansing ritual is punished for causing contamination to the sanctuary (Num. 19.3, 20; Lev. 15.31).

Toward a Priestly Ideology of Im/Purity

There is no systematic exposition of the priests' ideology in regard to purity and impurity and their influence on communal welfare. Nevertheless, from the few sparse statements available we can sum up as follows. Purity and sanctity are interrelated: 'You shall not make yourself abominable with any creeping thing... For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy. For I am holy' (Lev. 11.43-44). Impurity, like sin, damages the sought-after state of holiness and distances Israel from its God (Num. 5.1-4).

Proscriptions concerning sexual practices are designed as means for setting Israel apart from other nations (Lev. 18.1-5; 20.26). Non-Israelite societies are considered impure on the account of abominable acts (Lev. 18.25-30; Amos 7.17; Ezra 9.11). On the other hand, as far as the related food prohibitions are concerned, although they became a historically proven method for instituting social separation between Jews and non-Jews, there is no statement in the Priestly code to the effect that they were meant to cause such a separation.

An offense committed by an individual can affect the whole 'camp of Israel'. This ideological principle probably served as the rationale par excellence for social control of individual conduct.

Within the sphere of worship, impurity and sin are interrelated. Sin offerings and guilt offerings are required both from persons who have committed a sin and from those rendered unclean. The logic underlying this demand may be twofold: sin defiles the temple, as does impurity (Lev. 16.16, 19, 21); and defilement can imply a hidden sin, particularly with regard to

skin disorders (14.12, 21).[5]

So far, general principles of defilement, uncleanliness and cultic-personal im/purities have been discussed. Women have been mentioned only in passing. What are the ramifications of these contexts and framework and the ideologies they embody for female im/purities?

Blood Discharge in a Woman: The Laws

Genital discharge is the source of five of the curable impurities. Three of them are of female bleeding: regular and irregular blood issue and the blood after birth. Any other vaginal discharge is considered clean, including discharge that might be symptomatic of venereal disease. This observations cancels out the hypothesis fondly entertained by many that the im/purity laws have hygienic connotations.

In the priestly laws menstruation is described as any flow of blood that lasts up to seven days. The Bible does not mention how often it might have occurred. Scientifically, monthly (every 26–28 days) menstruation is considered normal. However, sociological and ethnographic studies provide ample evidence for shifts and variations in menstrual patterns related to changes in diet, physical activity, health conditions, birth rates and lactation. Thus, in cultures other than ours and at other times, menstruation might have perhaps been a relatively rarer occurrence, 'the rarity of which may indeed inform the great potency attributed to it and the stringency of ritual prohibitions by which it is so often surrounded'.[6]

Considering the large number of pregnancies a fertile woman must have gone through, and the lactations which could have lasted up to two or three years, menstruation was perhaps a less frequent occurrence in the life of a woman in biblical times. The many prohibitions concerning a menstruating woman should be viewed in this light. It seems that, otherwise, menstruation regulations—and we do not know what portion of them, if any, were observed in ancient Israel, and by whom—would have

5. See Num. 12 and 2 Chron. 26.16-21.

6. T. Buckley and A. Gottlieb (eds.), *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 44-45.

been impracticable as well as unreasonable, too disruptive for an ongoing social life. Such a view can be supported by the fact that semen issue, which occurs frequently, is a source of minor impurity only and requires a single day of purification.

The laws concerning menstruating women belong to both categories—the curable and the incurable impurities. An unintentional pollution of menses is a curable impurity. Its effect and cure are described in Lev. 15.19-31. However, deliberate intercourse with a menstruating woman is an incurable pollution and, similarly to other illicit sexual practices, is subject to death penalty for both the man and the woman involved (Lev. 18.20).

A woman with a blood flow that lasts up to seven days is called *niddâ*. If the blood issue lasts for more than seven days she is considered *zābâ*. The word *niddâ* is a euphemism for 'menstruant': no explicit technical term is available. The word derives either from the root *ndh* (set apart, cast out, ban, separate); or from the root *ndd* (move away).[7] Both meanings describe the social position of the bleeding woman in regard to her family and society.

Both the *niddâ* and the *zābâ* defile everything they sit or lie upon. Any male person who accidentally touches a menstruating woman, her bed or her seat, is impure for a day and has to take a purification bath at the end of that day. Intercourse with the *niddâ*, without prior knowledge of her condition, will transfer impurity equal in degree to the impurity of the *niddâ* herself. But whereas the *niddâ* purifies herself at the end of seven days, the *zābâ* can only purify herself at the end of seven clean days, that is seven days after the bleeding has stopped. The latter completes her purification process by giving a sin offering and a burnt offering to a priest.

It has already been noted that the term *niddâ* suggests that a menstruating woman was separated from her regular community until her 'recovery', although this is not required by the law.[8] Mary Douglas points out that such an implied separation has social significance and cultural meaning for conceptions like

7. Cf. *BDB, ad loc.*

8. Cf. M. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 60-82; also M. Douglas on ritual uncleanliness (*Purity and Danger* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966], pp. 7-28).

blood, woman, fertility, and barrenness, and, in addition, serves to manipulate interpersonal relations. To quote, 'beliefs which claim that women are dangerous while menstruating... give rise to rituals which seclude women or require them to be purified before return to mixed societies'.[9] Such beliefs can be put to use for:

a. Asserting male superiority and female inferiority
b. asserting separate spheres for female and male activity
c. attacking a rival
d. laying claim to a special relationship, since both females and their male kin are involved.[10]

It would seem that the priestly regulations reflect these or similar functional uses of ancient beliefs concerning female bleeding, rather than simply fear or (male) disgust (and see below). Corresponding arguments can be adduced for understanding the regulations concerning a woman's post-natal bleeding and her ensuing social status within the community.

In the case of women after birth, a distinction is made between a woman who has given birth to a boy and a woman who has given birth to a girl (Lev. 12). The former is unclean for the first seven days, much like the *niddâ*; for the next thirty-three days she is considered unclean in regard to the temple and sacred things only. After seven days she is considered clean for sexual intercourse with her husband even if she is still bleeding. This presents a problem to any who suggest that the *niddâ*/bleeding laws represent a primeval, deep rooted fear of blood. A woman after the birth of a girl is unclean for the first fourteen days and impure in regard to the temple and sacred objects for the next sixty-six days.

No explanation is given for this distinction between a woman after the birth of a boy, and a woman after the birth of a girl. Some medieval Jewish commentators suggest that it takes longer for the body to clean itself after a birth of a girl than after the birth of a boy (Ramban to Lev. 12.4; and see also Rashbam for the same passage). It is difficult to comprehend what pejorative or positive values of femalehood and malehood inform these

9. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, p. 61.
10. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, p. 62-64.

statements. Other Jewish commentators suggest that the period of cleansing after the birth of a daughter is doubled in order to allow the woman time to prepare herself for her role as an educator of her daughter. The purifying effect, by contiguity, of a boy's circumcision on the eighth day after his birth is also suggested as an explanation for this difference. These and other explanations attempt to fill the obvious gap in the Bible itself, while simultaneously obliterating the discriminatory sense of the edict. The biblical text remains arbitrary and without argument.

Blood in a Woman: The Priestly Ideology

Menstrual blood, like blood discharged during and after birth, has negative associations. To begin with, it is considered a major source of defilement. Sexual intercourse with menstruating women is included in the list of heinous sexual offenses. The euphemism *niddâ*, used to describe a menstruating woman, reflects her social isolation and deprivation. A woman who is menstruating is also described as *dāwâ*, 'ill' or 'unwell'.[11] Within the realm of metaphor, menstruation is associated with sin (Lam. 1.8, 17; Ezra 9.11) or even with murder (Ezek. 36.17-18).

Menstruation in Biblical Narrative

A measure of difference between prescriptive and narrative texts can—indeed, even should—be expected, and the same applies to the picture of social 'reality' and mores reflected in the different genres. We now turn to the narrative texts in order to assess the correlation or degree of corroboration they supply for the priestly texts discussed. In fact, the three biblical stories which may account for popular beliefs and practices about menses are hardly related to the legal literature.

In the first narrative Sarah, Abraham's wife, was an old woman past her menopause when she heard that she was about to bear a child. She is reported to have said in amazement, 'After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure?' (Gen. 18.12). The expression 'waxed old' is a free translation of the noun *bᵉlôt*, from the verb *blh*, 'wear out, be worn out, wasted' (also used to describe an old cloth or garment, Josh. 9.13). It is also stated

11. Cf. *BDB, ad loc.*

that Sarah was past 'the manner of women' (Gen. 18.11). The latter expression is a euphemism for menstruation which, unlike the priestly euphemism *niddâ*, bears no pejorative or negative connotations. In this story menses, young age and fertility are interrelated. No negative judgment is attached to menstruation, no word about it being a source of pollution. On the contrary, menstruation is linked to fertility and the joy of bearing children, and considered the height of female fulfilment. Thus, menstruation here is a positive value, neither neutral nor pejorative.

The second reference to menstruation is contained in the story of Rachel and the household idols (Gen. 31). Rachel, who has stolen her father's idols, prevents him from searching the camel's seat where she is sitting over the stolen idols by claiming that she is menstruating. The same euphemism is used as in the Sarah story: Rachel has the 'manner of women'.

The claim of having 'the manner of women' is used by Rachel for manipulating Laban and in order to control his rage. Laban, who sounds aggressive and argumentative in his discussion with Jacob, leaves his daughter alone without speaking a word. The textual gap, once more, facilitates more than a single, authoritative reading. Why does Laban leave Rachel alone after hearing her claim? It can be argued—by referring to the Priestly texts (cited above) as intertexts—that he did not search her because he was deterred by her impurity, and did not want to be defiled by it. However, it can also be argued that father and daughter followed an honoured custom according to which a menstruating woman was not required to stand up even in the presence of her father. The first suggestion is weakened by the narrated fact that Laban kissed *both* his daughters on his departure. It is not stated that he avoided physical contact with Rachel on account of her alleged 'impurity'. Thus the second suggestion is more plausible. A menstruating woman was exempt from certain obligations that required her to move about.

There are several similarities between Rachel's story and the story of Michal daughter of Saul (1 Sam. 19), although no allusion to menstruation is to be found in the latter. Both women are depicted as barren. Both lied to their fathers in order to protect their husbands. Their lies were linked to the household idols, if indeed this should be the meaning ascribed to the

obscure *t^erāpîm*.[12] The connection between the two barren women and these 'household idols' needs further clarification. The *t^erāpîm*, if indeed household idols they were, may represent popular family religion, about which only a tiny amount of information is available in the written (biblical) sources. We do not know their shape, size or function. In Rachel's story they seem to be a small item that can be hidden inside a camel's saddle. In Michal's story it seems that the idol was the size of a grown up person, since it was used to look like David lying in bed (1 Sam. 19.13-16). From Laban's words it seems that he worshipped the idol as a god (Gen. 31.30). However, judging from his speech, it is possible that he exaggerated the importance of the *t^erāpîm* because his whole speech is an exaggeration. From other biblical references it seems that they were consecrated objects used in religious rites, often for telling the future (not unlike the *'ēpôd* (Judg. 17.5; 18.15; 1 Sam. 15.23; Hos. 3.4; Zech. 10.2; Ezek. 21.26). As for the unwritten sources, hundreds of small female figurines from the monarchical period provide evidence for some popular family cult. C. Meyers suggests that they were some sort of votive objects expressing the quest for human fertility.[13]

If the term *t^erāpîm* is used as a collective name for consecrated objects of popular family religion, it might be possible to assume that at least some of them were votive objects used by barren women in their quest for pregnancy. This may be the explanation as to why Rachel and Michal are linked with them. In the story of Rachel menstruation is associated with *t^erāpîm*, a quest for fertility, and femininity. No negative suggestion is attached to menstruation as a source of impurity.

The third and last narrative is Bath Sheba's story (2 Sam. 11): 'And David sent messengers, and took her, and she came unto him and he lay with her; and she was purifying from her uncleanliness [*ṭum'ātāh*]; and she returned unto her house' (11.4). We do not know why she was cleansing herself and when. Most commentators suggest that she was purifying

12. The word always appears in the plural (cf. the concordances), hence no singular form or the entity it connotes can be reconstructed.

13. C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 162.

herself from the impurity caused by her menses *before* she was summoned to the palace, not after the event; the phrase 'and she was purifying herself from her uncleanliness' is interpreted as an enclosure in the past perfect tense. Hence, the child she becomes pregnant with is definitely David's. Such a reading is certainly tendentious. Moreover, if the passage be read sequentially, another possibility emerges. It is possible that Bath Sheba was purifying herself from the pollution of her sexual intercourse with David, not from her menses—and if so, a connection obtains between Leviticus 15 and actual practice, as reflected by this narrative instance. The act attributed to her might have been designed to bring to a finality the affair in which she was a passive partner only. At any rate, her consent was not sought by David and is not commented upon by the storyteller either.[14]

Summary

The three biblical narratives cannot provide a full picture as to how menstruation was regarded among lay Israelites of both genders and how it was dealt with by them. It is nevertheless obvious that menstruation was closely linked to fertility and femininity. Outside the Priestly code menstruation is not considered a punishment for a woman, or a cause for her social inferiority. It is defined as the 'manner of women', a term free of sinister connotations. The stories were obviously developed independently from the legal literature of the Priestly code, and were not influenced by the latter. Nevertheless, attitudes towards menstruation, as embodied in the Priestly code, influenced later generations and especially sectors, sects and circles that maintained ritual purity in their daily existence.

To judge by the extant narrative material, there is no reason to assume that viewing menstruation and female blood discharge as dangerous and polluting was widespread in ancient Israel, although it seems normative in the Priestly code. In time, beliefs in the danger and pollution of female blood discharge gradually gained the ascendancy until they became more and more acceptable in early post-biblical and later Judaism.

14. Although most non-feminist interpreters attribute to her either cooperation or even seductiveness.

Part III

MIRIAM: ON BEING A SISTER

BRINGING MIRIAM OUT OF THE SHADOWS*

Phyllis Trible

Buried within Scripture are bits and pieces of a story awaiting discovery. It highlights the woman Miriam. To unearth the fragments, assemble them, ponder the gaps and then construct a text requires the play of many methods but the dogmatism of none.[1] This enterprise welcomes all lovers of Scripture who seek to redeem life from patriarchal death.

At the Bank of the River

Hints and guesses begin the search. A text hints, and the reader guesses. The setting is parlous: Egypt, an alien land; the king, a tyrannic ruler, his edict, a death decree. Disobeyed by two midwives who have refused to kill Hebrew sons, the Pharaoh extends his order to all the people: 'Every son that is born—into the Nile you shall cast him, but every daughter you shall let live' (Exod. 1.22).[2] In Pharaoh's land, sex determines life and death for Hebrew babies.

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1. For a comprehensive investigation of the Miriamic traditions (excluding Exod. 2.1-10) see R.J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (SBLDS, 84; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987). For a wide-ranging structuralist reading, see E. Leach, 'Why did Moses Have a Sister?', in *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), pp. 33-67.

2. In this article, Bible translations are by P. Trible or are adapted by P. Trible from the Revised Standard Version (RSV). A few translations come directly from the RSV and are so identified.

Although the royal decree sets the stage for the advent of Moses, the text (Exod. 2.1-10) focuses on three unnamed females.[3] Like the midwives, they too defy the oppressor. In the first section of the story, narrated discourse permits us to see but not to hear these women (Exod. 2.1-6). Each is independent although connected to another. First appears a married woman identified only as a daughter of Levi. A host of active verbs secures her presence: she conceived and bore a son; she saw how good he was; she hid him until she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket, sealed it, put him in it and placed it at the river's bank. Her actions move between life and death. In cradle or coffin the living son waits on the waters decreed to drown him. Opposing the daughter of Levi, in artistic symmetry, is the second woman, the daughter of Pharaoh. A multitude of active verbs also establishes her presence. She came to bathe at the river, saw the basket, sent her maid to fetch it, opened it, saw the foreign child, had compassion on him and hailed his identity. '"One of the Hebrew babies is this!" she said' (Exod. 2.6). The princess, unlike the daughter of Levi, we hear as well as see.

Two women counter each other. One Hebrew, the other Egyptian. One slave, the other free. One common, the other royal. One poor, the other rich. One relinquishing, the other finding. One silent, the other speaking. One is one; the other, the other. Who will bring the twain together?

The answer introduces the third woman. Narrative structure locates her in the middle of the other two women, just as content makes her their mediator. Between the placing and the discovering of the newborn child 'stood his sister at a distance to know what would be done to him' (Exod. 2.4). Although she too is a daughter, she is identified as a sister. The designation sister seems odd, however, because a preface has already implied that the son is the firstborn. It reports a marriage. 'A man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi' (Exod. 2.1). Immediately follows a birth announcement: 'The woman conceived and bore a son' (Exod. 2.2 RSV). These statements effect the elevation of Moses at the expense of his sister.

3. Cf. R.B. Lawton, 'Irony in Early Exodus', *ZAW* 97 (1985), p. 414; J.C. Exum, 'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live', in this volume, pp. 37-61.

Yet apart from the preface, nothing in the narrative requires that the son be the firstborn. To the contrary, his sister's appearance shows that he is not. Thus, the siblings begin their lives together in narrative tension.

'And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him' (Exod. 2.4 RSV). References to water surround her. The Hebrew woman has placed her son at the river's bank (Exod. 2.3), and the Egyptian princess has come down to the river to bathe (Exod. 2.5). From afar, not yet approaching the water itself, the sister waits to know what will happen. Though the narrator's phrase may suggest a passive watch, it foreshadows the opposite. His sister, not the daughter of Levi or the daughter of Pharaoh, will take initiative to shape the destiny of the child.

In the second half of the story the yet unnamed sister moves into closer view. She speaks to Pharaoh's daughter: 'Shall I go and call for you (לָךְ [*lāk*, to rhyme with Bach]) a woman nursing from the Hebrews so that she nurses for you (לָךְ) the child?' (Exod. 2.7). By putting the phrase 'for you' immediately after the verbs *call* and *nurse*, the sister expresses solicitude and offers servitude. She also shapes the future by defining the need of Pharaoh's daughter to secure a Hebrew nurse. Skilfully crafted, her words propose a perfect arrangement for the one and for the other, thereby bringing the twain together.

The royal command, 'Go', is but the desired reply to the sister's question. To report the sister's action, the storyteller plays with vocabulary repeating crucial verbs and introducing new nouns. 'Shall I go and call for you a woman nursing...?' the sister has asked, but now 'the young woman'—not 'his sister'—'went and called' (Exod. 2.8). An independent description has replaced a derivative identity. As the one in charge, 'the young woman went and called the mother of the baby'. The maternal noun makes explicit the beautiful irony of her proposal. 'A woman nursing from the Hebrews' is the child's own mother. Thus the story comes swiftly to a climax. The daughters meet to work out a plan. Nursed by his natural mother, the child grows to become the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter and receives from her the name of Moses. If Pharaoh had recognized the power of women, he might well have reversed his decree and

had daughters killed rather than sons. But God moves in mysterious ways.

Central to the happy solution is the unnamed Miriam. She enters Scripture obliquely. No lineage, birth announcement or naming ritual proclaims her advent. Only silence gives her birth. Her first appearance is from afar. She stands 'at a distance'. With speech, she moves closer to unite two daughters for the sake of a male child. Having succeeded, she then fades from the story. Model of discretion and timing, the sister negotiates, mediates and leads. She initiates the plan that delivers her brother. Humanly speaking, the Exodus story owes its beginning not to Moses but to Miriam and other women.

In the Midst of the Struggle

Yet the body of the story develops with scant recognition of its female origin. Moses, at times assisted by his brother Aaron, dominates the struggle against Pharaoh. The received tradition turns away from the women who began it. In quiet, secret and effective ways, these women, Hebrews and Egyptians, have worked together. By contrast, Moses makes noise, attracts attention and becomes *persona non grata* to both Hebrews and Egyptians. For many chapters, the text exalts him and ignores his sister. If silence gave birth to Miriam, it also contains her during the bondage and the battle. Patriarchal storytellers have done their work well. They have suppressed the women—yet without total success. Bits and pieces from the buried story surface at the conclusion of the Exodus narrative.

At the Shore of the Sea

These fragments have survived amid jumbled reports about events at the sea. But when the strife is o'er and the battle done, Israel summarizes the victory won:

> So the Lord saved on that day Israel from the hand of the Egyptians.
>
> ....
>
> The people feared the Lord and they trusted in the Lord and in Moses, God's servant (Exod. 14.30-31).

Here the elevation of Moses increases as he appears in parallelism to the deity. At this point, the Israelites having crossed the sea dry-shod and the Egyptians having drowned, the narrative ends. A poetic section then begins. Moses becomes musical leader of the sons of Israel.

> Then Moses sang—and also the sons of Israel—this
> song to the Lord (Exod. 15.1).

An opening stanza sets the tone for a lengthy poem of celebration:

> I will sing to the Lord
> Most glorious deity!
> Horse and rider
> God has hurled into the sea!' (Exod. 15.1).

The poem continues by proclaiming the power of God to lead the people, and it culminates with the affirmation, 'The LORD will reign for ever and ever' (Exod. 15.18 RSV). Literarily and theologically, this long litany of triumph climaxes and closes the Exodus story.

How puzzling, then, is the narrative text that follows (Exod. 15.19). In capsule form, it recapitulates the struggle at the sea thereby returning to the event that preceded the closure. The recapitulation jars. It seems awkward, repetitious and misplaced. An attentive reader begins to suspect tampering with the text, and, as she reads on, the suspicion intensifies. A subsequent unit, ever so small, focuses on Miriam and the women of Israel:

> Then Miriam the prophet, the sister of Aaron, took timbrel in her hand. And all the women went out after her, with timbrels and dances. And Miriam answered them: 'Sing to the Lord most glorious deity! Horse and rider God has hurled into the sea'! (Exod. 15.21).

After Miriam's brief song, the text moves from sea to wilderness (Exod. 15.22). Thus her words become the definitive ending for the Exodus account. And yet they provoke discussion rather than closure.[4]

4. See recent commentaries, e.g. M. Noth, *Exodus* (OTL; trans. J.S. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); U. Cassuto, *A Commentary of the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967);

In this passage Miriam receives her name for the first time. She also has a title, 'the prophet'. Indeed, she is the first woman in all Israel to bear the title, and she acquires it before her brother Moses does. That sibling relationship is not even acknowledged here. Instead, Miriam is called 'the sister of Aaron'. Earlier Aaron bore the title prophet (Exod. 7.1), though with the specific meaning of spokesman before Pharaoh. As applied to Miriam, the title remains undefined and its meaning open. Altogether the line 'Miriam the prophet, sister of Aaron' introduces her in a special way. Music also signals her importance. She 'took a timbrel in her hand'. Joining her are all the women with timbrels and dances; the text says that Miriam sang responsively to 'them'. Yet, the Hebrew pronoun 'them' is masculine, not feminine, gender, yielding an ambiguous referent. Perhaps, under the leadership of Miriam, the ritual involved all the people, though the major participants were women.

The song Miriam chants repeats with variations the first stanza of the long poem (Exod. 15.1-18) earlier attributed to Moses. The repetition suggests that her contribution is derivative and his original. Further, though he can sing an entire song, she can cite, and then not perfectly, only the first stanza. By comparison, her performance seems deficient, as does this entire small unit that awkwardly follows the grand Mosaic ending. As a second closure, it is anti-climactic, no more than an afterthought, a token of the female presence.

Divergent in length, content and emphasis, the two endings work in tension, not in tandem. The Mosaic conclusion so overpowers the Miriamic as to raise the question of why the latter ever survived. Ironically, scholarly answers to this question (and they cannot be accused of a feminist bias!) diminish Moses and highlight Miriam.[5] They hold that the very retention of a Miriamic ending, in the presence of a Mosaic avalanche, argues both for its antiquity and authority. So tenacious was the tradition about Miriam that later editors could not eliminate it

B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

5. See especially F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam', *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 237-50. Cf. M.-S. Heister, *Frauen in der biblischen Glaubensgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 49-50.

altogether. In fact, once upon an early time, before editors got jobs, the entire Song of the Sea, not just the first stanza, was ascribed to Miriam and the women of Israel. Later, redactors (editors) who were intent upon elevating Moses took the song right out of her mouth and gave it to him—to Moses, the inarticulate one—in company with the sons of Israel. Thus they constructed an ending for the Exodus story that contradicted the older tradition. Unable to squelch the Miriamic tradition altogether, the redactors appended it in truncated form (Exod. 15.20-21) to their preferred Mosaic version. So they gave us two endings: their preferred Mosaic version (Exod. 15.1-18) and their truncated version (Exod. 15.20-21) of the original Miriamic conclusion.[6] To separate these two endings (as well as to introduce the Miriamic section), the redactors placed between them a narrative that recapitulated the struggle at the sea. It reported again the drowning of the Egyptians and the passing of Israel dry-shod (Exod. 15.19). This entire exercise ended up both preserving and destroying the women's story. It kept Miriam but diminished her importance. And it heightened the apotheosis of Moses.

Though carefully done, the redactional work does not yield perfection. The juxtaposition of endings creates muted tension. By retaining the tension, Scripture provides, even if inadvertently, a critique of itself. While destroying the power of Pharaoh, the Exodus narrative also turns inward to challenge the dominance of Moses. But the challenge is subtle, and in the saga of faith few among the chosen have detected it.

Like the beginning, the ending of the Exodus story belongs to women. They are the *alpha* and *omega*, the *aleph* and *taw* of deliverance. Providing continuity between the two groups and times is the figure of Miriam. At the bank (*śᵉpat*[שְׂפַת]) of the river we first meet her (Exod. 2.4); at the shore (*śᵉpat*) of the sea we

6. In scholarly literature, Exod. 15.1-18 is most often called the 'Song of the Sea' and Exod. 15.21 the 'Song of Miriam'. Following Cross and Freedman, 'Song of Miriam', pp. 237-50, many scholars now attribute the Song of the Sea to Miriam (not to Moses, as tradition holds) and thus designate both Exod. 15.1-18 and Exod. 15.21 the Song of Miriam. By contrast, the Song of Moses is Deut. 32.1-43, and the Blessing of Moses is Deut. 33.2-29.

find her again (Exod. 15.20-21). The mediator has become percussionist, lyricist, vocalist, prophet, leader and theologian. In both places, narrated, not direct, discourse reports tension between her and Moses. It advances from sibling references to competing portraits of leadership. Between these narratives of beginning and ending, Moses, along with the men of Israel, has ruled over the Exodus account.

Within and behind the text conflict mounts. The female voice struggles to be heard; a Miriamic presence counters Mosaic bias. What began as a cloud the size of a baby's hand rising out of the River Nile and grew into a man's hand stretched over the Reed Sea (Exod. 14.21) will in time burst forth in a storm of controversy about authority. To that we now turn.

In the Wilds of the Wilderness

The story moves to the Book of Numbers, which in Hebrew is called *b'midbar* (במדבר), 'in the wilderness'. Wilderness symbolizes complaint, confusion and conflict. Moving from site to site, the people of Israel murmur, indeed rebel. Their deity replies with ambivalence. Gracious acts mingle with kindled anger. Nothing happens in an orderly way. Entangled in the wilderness, multiple layers of tradition defy source analysis and internal coherence to become much like the chaos they report.[7] The task of the interpreter is to discern Miriam's story amid the muddle.

The portrait of Miriam lodges in controversies about leadership, authority and prophecy. Moses is overwhelmed. Caught between the demands of the people and the blazing anger of the Lord, he protests. After all, he is not the mother of Israel. God is. 'Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth that you should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries the suckling child...?" I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me', asserts Moses (Num. 12.1). So he seeks a new kind of leadership, a shared responsibility. At first, the deity appears to consent, ordering him to choose 'seventy elders' upon whom some of Moses'

7. On the theme of rebellion and the difficulties of source analysis, see G.W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1968).

spirit will rest that they too may bear the burden of the people (Num. 11.16-25). Moses complies, though ironically his choosing the seventy and receiving private revelation yet affirms his unique role. The elders are subordinate to him. Moreover, the entire plan comes to naught. Given some of Moses' spirit, they prophesy, 'but they did so no more', says the text (Num. 11.25 RSV). Shared responsibility and shared authority there is not. The leadership of Moses remains supreme.

Another incident pursues the issue. Two men, not of the seventy, begin to prophesy. Rather than partaking of Moses' spirit, they are independently endowed and thus approach equality with Moses. While some Israelites oppose them, Moses himself welcomes the news: 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put the divine spirit upon them!' (Num. 11.29). But the matter is far from settled. The elders no longer prophesy; some among the people seek to outlaw the independent prophets; and the deity remains ominously silent.

As the people journey to a new site, the power struggle rages.[8] Miriam enters the fray, and for the first time she lacks the company of women. Aaron is her companion, yet in a supporting role. Once prophetic and kinship language linked these leaders (both are called prophets and she is identified as his sister); now prophetic and priestly issues unit them. To be sure, nowhere in the received tradition does Miriam, or any other female, hold the title 'priest' or perform cultic functions. Nevertheless, a few clues scattered in the book of Numbers attest to priestly connections for her. They await further attention.

As for Aaron, some traditions proclaim him outright the first priest, even the founder of the priesthood. Altogether the historical picture is exceedingly complex and far from certain. Biblical narratives tantalize us with scant data and mammoth conflict. In the story at hand, Miriam and Aaron join forces against Moses. Miriam leads and Aaron supports her—in rebellion against Moses' authority.

When she speaks out, a confused text makes difficult the hearing of her words. The two problems, priestly and prophetic,

8. On the wilderness controversies, cf. M. Newman, *The People of the Covenant* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), pp. 72-101.

emerge in jumbled fashion.[9] Narrated discourse reports the first challenge. 'And Miriam spoke, and Aaron, against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he married. "He married a Cushite woman"' (Num. 12.1). The information and charge appear *in media res*. We know nothing specific about the matter and can only speculate. Who is this Cushite wife—Zipporah, as Moses' wife is named elsewhere, or a different woman? Why does the rest of Scripture not mention the Cushite woman? If she is Zipporah, is the issue a priestly struggle based on her own lineage as daughter of Jethro the priest? Whoever the woman is, is the attack racist, suggesting opposition to black Cushite skin? Why does the narrator set woman against woman? Is the conflict an ideological resistance to foreign marriages? Are the concepts of cleanliness and uncleanliness being violated by the marriage? Are the priestly credentials of Moses being challenged? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the text implicates Miriam in cultic affairs.

Cited only once, the problem of the Cushite wife yields quickly to a prophetic matter. If the cultic purity of Moses can be criticized, then his supreme authority can be disputed. Unlike the first, the second challenge occurs in direct discourse. Miriam and Aaron ask:

> Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?
> Has the Lord not also spoken through us? (Num. 12.2a-b)

For Miriam the prophetic task centers not upon a single male (Moses) but embraces diverse voices, female and male. Her questions seem to harmonize with Moses' own wish that 'all the LORD's people were prophets' (Num. 11.29 RSV). But Miriam makes clear what Moses' words did not, that 'all the Lord's people' includes women. After all, as 'the prophet', she has already spoken for God at the sea, even though the Mosaic bias would drown her voice there. So now in the wilderness she

9. G.W. Coats argues that the received text focuses on Moses ('Humility and Honor: A Moses Legend in Numbers 12', in D.J.A. Clines, D.M. Gunn and A.J. Hauser [eds.], *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* [JSOTSup, 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982], pp. 97-107). R.R. Wilson argues that prophecy was the original focus (*Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], pp. 155-56).

seeks an equal sharing of prophetic leadership. Hers is a commanding word, and the 'Lord hears it' (Num. 12.2c).

Alas, the price of speaking out is severe. Breaking ominous silence, the Lord summons Moses, Aaron and Miriam to come forth (Num. 12.4). In this context, the ordering of their names hints at the diminution of Miriam. The deity addresses her and Aaron; the divine explanation comes with the power of poetry and the exclusivity of grammatical gender. It speaks to the prophetic issue but not the priestly:[10]

> Hear now my words:
> If there be a prophet among you.
> In a vision to him I make myself known;
> In a dream I speak with him.
> Not so (with) my servant Moses
> In all my household he (alone) is faithful.
> Mouth to mouth I speak with him
> In clarity and not in riddles;
> The form of the Lord he beholds (Num. 12.6-8).

The divine speech requires little commentary. It answers the issue of leadership and authority by declaring a hierarchy of prophecy. Moses stands peerless at the top. While not denying a prophetic role to Miriam, it undercuts her in gender and point of view. It also undermines Moses' wish for egalitarian prophecy. As if the declaration were not itself sufficient, the deity rebuffs Aaron and Miriam: 'Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?' (Num. 12.8 RSV). Though Moses may attack God, even accuse the deity of oppression unto death (Num. 11.11-15), God decrees that no one may attack Moses. Concluding with an intimidating question, the Lord speaks to Miriam for the first and only time. She has no opportunity to reply. Instead, to the crushing power of the divine words the narrator adds a seething conclusion: 'And the nostril of the Lord burned against them and God left' (Num. 12.9). While the mouth of the Lord glorifies Moses, the nose attacks Aaron and Miriam. This divinity is made of stern stuff.

Yet the kindled anger of the divine does not treat its targets equally. Instead it separates Miriam from Aaron to make her the

10. The translation comes from F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 203-204.

true antagonist. When the divine anger departs, we behold Miriam alone stricken with scales like snow (Num. 12.9-10). Red hot anger becomes a cold white disease. A searing emotion produces a scarred body. The punishment relates to the priestly issue of the Cushite wife. She who opposed Moses because of his marriage to the black woman stands condemned in diseased white. By the irony of the implied contrast, the text would seem to set female against female, native against foreigner, white against black, power against powerlessness. But these opposites merge as the irony folds in upon itself. If the Cushite woman stands outside a system of ritual purity, Miriam belongs with her. She too has became an outcast, a rejected woman without voice or power. While her prophetic authority has only been limited, making her no different from any other prophet save Moses, her cultic connections have been irreparably severed. Yet no such punishment has visited Aaron. The male is spared, the female sacrificed.

Miriam has become leprous, not with the raw flesh of uncleanliness but with dead flesh, aftermath of the all-consuming disease.[11] Divine anger has run its course on Miriam. Turning toward her (Num. 12.10), Aaron beseeches Moses, rather than the Lord, not to 'hold against us the sin that we were foolish and that we sinned' (Num. 12.11-12). In spite of efforts to disassociate this priest from the woman, Aaron pleads on her behalf:[12]

> Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb (Num. 12.12).

While repulsive, the imagery is also poignant, recalling metaphors used by Moses when he implored the deity to be a responsible mother to the children of her womb. Those reflections led Moses to propose death for himself unless God changed. Now Aaron unites birth and death in describing

11. See D. Jobling, 'A Structural Analysis of Numbers 11–12', in *The Sense of Biblical Narrative* (JSOTSup, 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), pp. 32-33 (2nd edn 1986, pp. 37-38).

12. Cf. A. Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), pp. 150-51, who argues against a priestly identification of Aaron in Num. 12.

the horror God has inflicted upon Miriam.

Long ago at Sinai the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent (Exod. 33.10f.), and Moses would enter to speak with God. When Moses came out, the skin of his face shone (Exod. 34.29ff.).[13] The people were afraid, but they came near. Moses incarnated the divine glory. Now in the wilderness the pillar of cloud descends again and stands at the door of the tent. Aaron and Miriam come forward to hear God speak. When the deity departs, Miriam's skin is scaled like snow and her flesh half-consumed. She is separated from the people. Miriam incarnates the divine anger.

So Aaron seeks a miracle: the restoration of Miriam to her pre-leprous condition. After all, such a miracle has once been visited upon the hand of Moses (Exod. 4.6-7), though in a different context. By appealing now to Moses, Aaron bows to his supremacy in the hierarchy. Moses complies with Aaron's request: 'O God, please, heal her now!' (Num. 12.13). Whatever tensions exist between Miriamic and Mosaic points of view, they have not destroyed sibling affection. Having once been saved through his sister, Moses petitions here to save her from living death. In a cryptic reply that perhaps tempers but does not remove the punishment, the Lord confines her outside the camp for seven days. That period of time verifies her cleanliness but does not restore her to wholeness. Miriam remains marked woman, indeed, a warning for generations to come: 'Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way as you came forth out of Egypt' (Deut. 24.9 RSV).

The vendetta continues unto her death. By silences and juxtapositions the tale unfolds from her punishment on. Miriam never speaks nor is she spoken to, in fact, for a time she vanishes from the wilderness narrative. Then, just preceding her obituary comes a lengthy section of ritual prescriptions (Num. 19.1-22).[14] Its content as well as placement indicts Miriam. The first prescription concerns preparation of a special water for impurity. To the burning of a cow the priest adds 'cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet' (Num. 19.6). Though this text fails to specify the

13. But see W.H. Propp, 'Did Moses Have Horns?', *BR*, February 1988.

14. See M. Noth, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 138-43.

meaning of the three ingredients, we know from Leviticus (14.4) that they are used in the cleansing of a leper—truly a reminder of Miriam's punishment. At the appropriate time, running water is added to the mixture. Its use awaits a second prescription that pertains to those who become unclean through contact with the dead (Num. 19.11-13). Seven days are required for their purification, the same time period needed for the cleansing of a leper. In addition, this ritual involves sprinkling the unclean with the water for impurity.

Immediately following the two prescriptions, the one alluding to leprosy and the other emphasizing the uncleanliness of the dead, comes the announcement of Miriam's death.

> And the people of Israel, the whole community, came into the wilderness of Zin (*sin*) in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh, and Miriam died there and was buried there (Num. 20.1 RSV).

No ordinary obituary is this but rather the culmination of the vendetta against Miriam.[15] If reasons for the attack are difficult to discern, the threat that she represented to the cultic establishment is abundantly evident. And that threat testifies to her prominence, power and prestige in early Israel. So important was this woman that detractors tabooed her to death, seeking to bury her forever in disgrace.

From Here and There

But detractors do not have the final word. Miriam emerges through fragments embedded in the very Scripture that would condemn her. The first fragment appears in the Exodus and wilderness traditions. From the start Miriam works on behalf of the people. Her role in delivering one of them, Moses, expands to leadership of all Israel at the sea. Thus a certain poignancy attends the closing narration of the leprosy account. She has been excluded from the camp for seven days. And 'the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again'

15. For a helpful analysis of the priestly ascription of ritual purity to the deity, with its concommitant rejection of women, see N. Joy, 'Throughout your Generations Forever: A Sociology of Blood Sacrifice' (unpublished dissertation for the Department of Sociology, Brandeis University, 1981).

(Num. 12.15 RSV). No matter that the Lord has decreed the supreme leadership of Moses; no matter that the divine anger has already shown its power against the will of the people; no matter that the white-scaled Miriam stands before them as proof of divine indictment and continuing intimidation; no matter. The people do not set out on the march till Miriam is brought back again. Those whom she has served do not forsake her in the time of tribulation. They wait. Never do they assail her as on various occasions they attack Aaron, Moses and God. And their allegiance survives unto her death. Three references in Num. 20.1—'the people of Israel', 'the whole community' and 'the people'—emphasize their presence when she dies and is buried in Kadesh. The steadfast devotion of the people to Miriam indicates a story different from the regnant one.

The symbol of water also supports Miriam. First seen at a distance, she soon moves to the river's bank. In a triumphal appearance she sings at the shore of the Reed Sea. No life-giving waters emerge, however, when in the wilderness authorities conspire to punish her. Leprous flesh bespeaks arid land. In the ritual prescriptions (Num. 19.1-22) preceding her obituary, the symbol reappears with ambivalence. 'The water for impurity' mediates between cleanliness and uncleanliness. Miriam dies, becoming thereby unclean. Yet at her death no water for impurity is invoked. Instead, the wells in the desert dry up. In Kadesh 'Miriam died and was buried there. Now there was no water for the community' (Num. 20.1-2). Nature's response to Miriam's death is immediate and severe. It mourns, and the community suffers. Miriam, protector of her brother at the river's bank and leader in the victory at the sea, symbolized life. How appropriate, then, that waters of life should reverence her death. Like the people of Israel, nature honors Miriam.

After Miriam's burial, the lack of water introduces a long narrative (Num. 20.2-29) critical of Moses and Aaron.[16] In structure, it balances the ritual prescriptions (Num. 19.1-22) preceding her obituary. In effect, the narrative critical of Moses and Aaron

16. See K. Doob Sakenfeld, 'Theological and Redactional Problems in Numbers 20.2-13', in J.T. Butler *et al.* (eds.), *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson* (JSOTSup, 37; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

counters the vendetta against her. If the ritual prescriptions implicitly demean Miriam, the account subsequent to her obituary explicitly debases Moses and Aaron. Once again the people attack their leaders because of overwhelming miseries. The two men appeal to God, who instructs them to secure water from a rock (Num. 20.6-13). Though they are successful, the deity is so displeased that God decrees neither man shall lead the people into the land.[17] Miriam's death has initiated their demise. And soon thereafter, when the congregation has journeyed from Kadesh to Mount Hor, Aaron dies. In time, Moses will follow. If Miriam never reached the Promised Land, neither did her brothers. Indeed, efforts to discredit her have backfired in the censure of them. Juxtaposition of texts dramatizes the point. After the death of Miriam, the wells in the desert dry up, the people rebel again, God censures Moses and Aaron, Aaron dies, and the days of Moses are numbered. However much the detractors of Miriam have tried, they do not control the story. There are more interpretations than are dreamed of in their hermeneutics.

Beyond the Exodus and wilderness accounts, fragments of a pro-Miriamic tradition surface still later in the Hebrew Scriptures. If the priesthood has repudiated Miriam forever, prophecy reclaims her. In fact, it states boldly what others worked hard to deny, that in early Israel Miriam belonged to a trinity of leadership. She was the equal of Moses and Aaron. Thus the prophetic deity speaks in Mic. 6.4 (RSV):

> For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
> and redeemed you from the house of bondage;
> and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

Here prophecy acknowledges the full legitimacy of Miriam, its own ancestor, who was designated 'the prophet' even before Moses. The recognition undercuts a hierarchy of authority with a male at the top.

17. See W.H. Propp, 'The Rod of Aaron and the Sin of Moses', *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 19-26; J. Milgrom, 'Magic, Monotheism, and the Sin of Moses', in H.B. Huffmon (ed.), *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 251-65; M. Margaliot, 'The Transgression of Moses and Aaron—Num. 20.1-13', *JQR* 74 (1983), pp. 196-228.

As the first woman to be called 'the prophet', Miriam represents a class of females in Israel about whom we know little. From Exodus beyond Exile, their erratic and infrequent presence hints at a lost history. In the twelfth century BCE Deborah arises to judge Israel, lead in battle and sing a song of triumph (Judg. 4–5). In the eighth, the unnamed woman of Isaiah gives birth to a prophetic oracle (Isa. 8.3). In the seventh, Huldah validates the book of the law to initiate a canon of Scripture (2 Kgs 22.14-20). And in the fifth, Noadiah opposes Nehemiah during the restoration (Neh. 6.14). Each of these prophets witnesses to a heritage rooted in Miriam. If Moses be the archetype of the male prophetic tradition, Miriam leads the female.

Yet another allusion to her is tucked away in the prophecy of Jeremiah.[18] Envisioning the restoration of defeated Israel after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah evokes the vocabulary of the Exodus to portray an era of grace and joy. The deity addresses the people as female.

> Again I will build you, and you will be built, O virgin Israel!
> Again you will adorn yourself with timbrels,
> and will go forth in the dance of the merrymakers (Jer. 31.4).

The imagery may be read in two directions. It recalls Miriam at the Reed Sea, and it forecasts her restoration. Returned to her rightful place, she, along with other females, will again lead with timbrels and dancing. She participates in the eschatological vision of Hebrew prophecy.

Miriam also animates the musical life of Israel. If Jubal be its mythical father (Gen. 4.21), she is its historical mother. She inaugurates a procession of women who move throughout Scripture, singing and dancing in sorrow and joy. In the days of the judges, the unsuspecting daughter of Jephthah 'comes out to meet him with timbrels and dances' (Judg. 11.34). Later, the virgin daughters of Shiloh 'come out to dance in the dances' (Judg. 21.21 RSV). In the days of the Monarchy, when warriors return victorious from battle, 'the women come out of all the cities singing and dancing...with timbrels, songs of joy and

18. See B.W. Anderson, 'The Song of Miriam Poetically and Theologically Considered', in E.R. Follis (ed.), *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup, 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 284-96.

instruments of music. And the women sing to one another as they make merry' (1 Sam. 18.6-7; cf. 1 Sam. 21.11; 29.5). From these narrative texts the musical legacy of Miriam passes into liturgical traditions. Though rejected by the priesthood, this woman nevertheless resounds in the cultic experience of the people. A psalm describes a parade entering the temple with

> the singers in front, the minstrels last,
> between them maidens playing timbrels (Ps. 68.25 RSV).

Another psalm, based on Exodus and wilderness memories, echoes Miriam:

> Raise a song, sound the timbrel (Ps. 81.2 RSV).

Similarly, a third proclaims:

> Let Israel praise God's name with dancing, making melody with timbrel and lyre (Ps. 139.3-4).

And in the grand finale of the Psalter, where everything that breathes is called upon to praise God, the woman Miriam breathes in the line:

> Praise the Lord with timbrel and dance! (Ps. 150.4).

Buried within Scripture are bits and pieces of a story awaiting discovery. Unearthing the fragments and assembling them, we have crafted a mosaic for Miriam. Stepping back to view the whole, we see a story beginning at the bank of the river, moving to the shore of the sea, continuing in the wilds of the wilderness, disappearing in the new land and recovering there through prophecy and song. From overlays of patriarchy, Miriam's true portrait begins to emerge. Lo, the fragments that the builders have rejected have become tesserae in a mosaic of salvation. Let all women and men who have eyes to behold this mosaic join Miriam in singing an updated version of her song of deliverance.

> Sing to the Lord, most glorious deity!
> Patriarchy and its horsemen God has
> hurled into the sea.

Appendix

Exodus 15.1-21 (RSV)

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is a man of war;
the LORD is his name.

Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea;
and his picked officers are sunk in the Red Sea.
The floods cover them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.
Thy right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,
thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.
In the greatness of thy majesty thou overthrowest thy adversaries;
thou sendest forth thy fury, it consumes them like stubble.
At the blast of thy nostrils the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.'
Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

'Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?
Thou didst stretch out thy right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

'Thou hast led in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed.
thou hast guided them by thy strength to thy holy abode.
The peoples have heard, they tremble;
pangs have seized on the inhabitants of Philistia.
Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
the leaders of Moab, trembling seizes them;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of thy arm, they are as still as a stone,
till thy people, O LORD, pass by,
till the people pass by whom thou hast purchased.
Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them on thy own mountain,
the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thy abode,
the sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established.
The LORD will reign for ever and ever.' For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing.

And Miriam sang to them:

Sing to the LORD, for he has
triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has
thrown into the sea. (RSV)

Numbers 12.2-14; 20.1-2 (RSV)
And they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' And the LORD heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, 'Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting'. And the three of them came out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. And he said, 'Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed; and when the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said to Moses, 'O my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb'. And Moses cried to the LORD, 'Heal her, O God, I beseech thee'. But the LORD said to Moses, 'If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again.' So Miriam was shut up outside the camp seven days, and the people did not set out on the

march till Miriam was brought in again. After that the people set out from Hazeroth (חצרות), and encamped in the wilderness of Paran (פארן).

And the people of Israel, the whole congregation came into the wilderness of Zin (צין) in the first month, the people stayed in Kadesh (קדש); and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

Now there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

SONG OF MOSES, SONG OF MIRIAM: WHO IS SECONDING WHOM?*

J. Gerald Janzen

Modern scholars have long been fascinated by the repetition in Exod. 15.1 and 15.21 of the poetic couplet:

> (I will) sing to the LORD for he has triumphed gloriously;
> the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

For those concerned to reconstruct the literary prehistory of the text, this repetition has been of at least twofold interest. In the first place, it has been taken as possibly reflecting the fusion of two forms (J and E) of the old epic tradition; and in the second place it has entered into discussions of the history of Israelite poetry, whether as indicating the earlier and shorter form from which the later hymn in 15.1 was developed, or as reflecting a practice of referring to longer poems by a 'title' consisting of their opening lines.[1]

More recently, this repetition has been studied under the aegis of a concern to reconstruct a history in which women occupied more prominent positions in Israelite society than appears in the final form of the Hebrew Bible. As Phyllis Trible asserts,

> Patriarchal storytellers have done their work well. They have suppressed the women—yet without total success. Bits and pieces

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1. For summary discussion and reference to previous literature, see R.J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (SBLDS, 84; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 11-40.

from the buried story surface at the conclusion of the Exodus narrative.[2]

Though the focus of the concern here has shifted, the method remains the same: (1) to identify telltale features of unevenness, awkwardness, and difference in linguistic usage and point of view, amounting at times to tension or outright contradiction between parts of the text; (2) to construe these features as evidence for multiplicity of sources behind the final form of the text; (3) to reconstruct the history and character of these sources; and (4) to reconstruct the social and religious history reflected in the production of these diverse sources.

The studies of Exod. 15.20-21 by Rita Burns and Phyllis Trible contribute fresh perspectives on a host of topics, and will be pondered carefully by any who seek to move behind the present form of the text. In the present article, however, I will concentrate on the text as it stands, in an attempt to see just what it is that the final 'storytellers have done'. In reference to 15.1-18 Brevard Childs has written, 'Although it is a legitimate task of the traditio-historical method to trace...earlier stages before the development of its present literary role, an equally important and usually neglected exegetical task is to analyze the composition in its final stage'. He goes on to say, 'regardless of its pre-history, the fundamental issue is to determine the effect of joining the poem to the preceding narrative'.[3] Curiously, Childs does not consider the effect of joining 15.19-21 to that narrative. Nor, for that matter, does Burns, who focuses only on vv. 20-21 and ignores their present introduction in v. 19.[4] I shall begin with the question of the relation of the latter verse to the larger narrative.

2. P. Trible, 'Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows', in this volume, p. 169.

3. B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 248

4. In the preface to *The Books of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), T.W. Mann notes that he will attempt 'to understand the Pentateuch both in terms of its final form... and its internal complexity', where by 'internal complexity' he refers to compositional history. His treatment of Exod. 13.17–15.21, as of the Pentateuch as a whole, is exemplary; but (perhaps for reasons of space) he leaves 15.19-21 unremarked.

The exodus story comes to its climactic conclusion in ch. 14 as follows:

> [26]Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen'. [27]So Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its wonted flow when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled into it, and the LORD routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. [28]The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the hosts of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained. [29]But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

This narrated climax is followed by a summary statement of what the LORD thus accomplished (v. 30a); and this summary in turn is followed by an indication of what Israel 'saw' physically (v. 30b) and meaningfully (v. 31a*a*), and how Israel responded to this seeing (v. 31 a*b*, b). Thus, whereas a short while ago their seeing had led them to fear Pharaoh (14.10), their two-dimensional seeing led them now to fear the LORD; and they 'believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses'. In passing, we may note the shift from 14.31 to 15.1 in the presentation of Moses. In 14.31 the people are on one side of the verb 'believed in', while Moses stands alongside the LORD as second object of the people's belief (compare 19.9). In 15.1, however, Moses stands alongside the people on one side of the verb 'sang', while the LORD is the sole object of that action of worship. Whereas elsewhere in the Book of Exodus there is no hesitation in attributing the deliverance of Israel from Egypt to Moses as well as to the LORD (e.g. 3.10; 32.1, 7; cf. 3.8, 17; 32.11), in the song of 15.1-18 there is no reference to Moses' actions, for the focus is entirely on the actions of the LORD. If Moses is present in the song at all, it is as one of the people who respectively refer to themselves as 'I' in the seven first person singular pronouns of vv. 1-2.[5]

5. In 3.10 and in 32.1, 7, Moses' involvement in Israel's deliverance is identified as his 'bringing them out of Egypt'. The seven pronouns in the Hebrew text of 15.1-2 are made up of the pronominal element in the three first person singular. verbs *'āšîrâ/'anwēhû/'ᵃrōmᵉmenhû* ('I will sing/I will

Immediately after the hymn, the narrative continues (v. 19):

> For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; *but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea.*

While the first two clauses clearly are built out of (or resume) elements in 14.26-28, the italicized third clause exactly repeats part of 14.29. Noting this, Phyllis Trible writes, 'The recapitulation jars. It seems awkward, repetitious and misplaced. An attentive reader begins to suspect tampering with the text.'[6] Here we face one of the dilemmas that confronts the reader sensitized to narrative technique in the Bible—a sensitization to which Trible has contributed greatly in other studies. The dilemma is whether the textual feature that has snagged the attentive reader's eye is or is not part of the narrative technique employed in giving the text its final shape. Assuming the present form of the text to have been constructed out of a variety of earlier sources, we are left to wonder in a given instance whether a so-called 'jarring' effect is a telltale sign of imperfectly edited materials, and thereby of the limitations of the (final) narrator's art, or whether it is part of what the narrative seeks to do to us. In the present instance I propose that the recapitulation in 15.19 should not jar us so much as arrest us, and indeed, that it should throw us back behind the hymn to position us once more at 14.29.

Taken in this way, what we have here is the narrative device sometimes called 'analepsis'—the temporary withholding of vital information in favor of its belated introduction later for one effect or another.[7] For an example that is similar in the way it is

praise him/I will exalt him'), plus pronoun suffixes in the following four expressions: *'ozzî wᵉzimrat/wayᵉhî lî lîšû'â/'ēlî/ 'ᵉlōhê 'ābî* ('my strength and song/my salvation/my God/my father's God').

6. Trible, 'Miriam', p. 170.

7. As A.R. Culpepper tells us, an analepsis is an allusion to a previous event, more precisely, 'any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment' (A.R. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* [FFNT, 1; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983], p. 56, quoting G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980], p. 40).

introduced into the narrative, one might compare the story of Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 20. The crisis there arises when Abimelech takes Sarah into his household (v. 2). When God appears to Abimelech in a dream and tells him, 'you are a dead man' (v. 3), this king answers, 'wilt thou slay an innocent people?' (v. 4). It is not until the crisis of Sarah's captivity is resolved that we are told in an analepsis precisely what God had meant by saying, 'you are a dead man'. The analepsis reads, 'For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife'. Not surprisingly, but for our purposes still noteworthy, the analepsis is introduced by the particle, 'for'. I propose that the same particle 'for' at the beginning of Exod. 15.19 likewise introduces an analepsis.[8] The effect of this particle, introducing as it does the summary of 14.26-28 and the exact quotation from 14.29, is to reposition us at 14.29 and to provide us with additional information as to what happened then. What actually happened at that point is now supplied in 15.20-21.

The NRSV translation of 15.20, by the way it begins with 'then', allows the possible inference that v. 19 by itself recapitulates 14.26-29, and that Miriam's action is to be understood as following chronologically from 15.1-18. But in the Hebrew text the conjunction and verb that open v. 19 continue the *waw*-consecutive syntactic pattern by which narrative normally flows unbroken.[9] The effect may be represented by the following rendition of the verbs in vv. 19-20: 'For the horses of Pharaoh went in...and the LORD brought back...but the children of Israel walked...and Miriam...took'. This presentation of consecutive action suggests that we are to read 15.20-21 in unbroken sequence upon 15.19. But by the way in which 15.19 recapitulates 14.26-29, we are belatedly bidden to appreciate

8. Compare also Jon. 1.10 where the narrator informs the reader, in an analepsis introduced by 'for', that at some earlier point Jonah had told the sailors that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD. Shimon Bar-Efrat cites this passage in a section devoted to what he calls 'flashback' (*Narrative Art in the Bible* [JSOTSup, 70; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989], pp. 175-83). On p. 166 he begins to discuss 'the relation between the order of narrated time and that of narration time in biblical narratives'.

9. See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 166.

that the next thing to happen at that earlier point was the action of Miriam now finally presented:

> And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing.
> And Miriam sang to them [m. pl.]:
> 'Sing [m. pl.] to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
> the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

It seems clear, then, that the song of Moses and the people of Israel, in 15.1-18, comes in response to the song of Miriam and the other women. In such a case, three elements in the text come into a new focus.

1. As Rita Burns recognizes, the pronoun in 'Miriam sang to *them*' is a masculine plural. This would most naturally indicate a plurality of male—or male and female—addressees. But Burns appeals to the fact that in biblical Hebrew on occasion a female noun is referred to by a masculine pronoun,[10] and on this basis she takes Miriam to be calling upon the women with her to sing to Yahweh. Such a reading is certainly plausible but, as we shall see, is not compelling.
2. The plural imperative that opens Miriam's song likewise is masculine in gender, normally signifying that the people thereby summoned to worship are either male, or male and female. Again, one might invoke the above-mentioned occasional Hebrew usage to maintain that nevertheless Miriam still is calling upon the women who follow her. But it should be noted that the linguistic practice Burns refers to is only occasional, and that routinely, explicitly female addressees are indicated by the use of appropriate feminine markers. Methodologically, it may be suggested that one can be sure of identifying an instance of the occasional use only where the context provides no plausible masculine plural antecedent. Such an antecedent, however, is not far away: 'the people of Israel' (literally, 'the sons of Israel') in 15.19//14.29. How

10. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, pp. 12-13 n. 4, referring to GKC §135o.

shall one decide, then, whether Miriam is calling to the women who follow her, or to the children of Israel in whose presence she leads these women? If 15.19-21 is indeed an analepsis, positioning us at 14.29, then the people's response in 14.31, and especially in 15.1-18, suggests that it is the people as a whole to whom Miriam sings and whom she bids sing.

3. One may contrast the narrative rubrics in 15.1 and 15.21 in two respects: (1) Whereas Miriam sang 'to *them*', Moses and the people of Israel 'sang this song *to the LORD*'. (b) Whereas in 15.1 'sang this song' translates verb and noun cognates of *šyr* (the verb with which the song itself opens), in 15.21 'sang' translates the verb *'nh*. As Burns notes, the latter verb, by its apparent connection to the Hebrew verb *'nh*, 'answer', may indicate antiphonal singing. She notes further, in agreement with some other scholars, that 'the fact that Miriam's part in the celebration is clearly distinguished from that of the rest of the women might well reflect an antiphonal recitation of the song'.[11] Burns has in mind, of course, that such antiphonal recitation goes on between Miriam and the other women. In my view, it is Moses and the children of Israel—led by the dancing women—who are called upon to respond antiphonally to Miriam's lead. In such a reading, one may suppose that Miriam led the congregation through the whole hymn in the fashion explicitly indicated for its first two lines. Thus, for example, her opening call to 'sing' is met by the responsive 'I will sing'.

Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman titled their ground-breaking study of 15.1-18 'The Song of Miriam', on the ground that '[i]t is easy to understand the ascription of the hymn to the great leader. It would be more difficult to explain the association of Miriam with the song as a secondary develop-

11. In addition to the scholars Burns cites (*Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 13 n. 7), see F.I. Anderson's similar analysis of this verb in Exod. 32.18 ('A Lexical Note on Exodus 32:18', *VT* 16 [1966], pp. 108-12), and also my discussion in Janzen, 'Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?' *CBQ* 54 (1992), pp. 211-20 (reprinted in this volume, pp. 187-199).

ment.'[12] If, however, 15.19-21 is an analepsis, the present form of the text does not after all ascribe the hymn to Moses, but to Miriam. Thus by any analysis—diachronic or synchronic—the Song at the Sea is the Song of Miriam, and its performance as narrated in 15.1-18 comes as Moses and his fellow Israelites 'second' her hymnic initiative.

This hymnic celebration of Yahweh's act of deliverance displays a hymnic pattern that we may exemplify from Ps. 40.2-4 (Eng. 1-3):

> [2]I waited patiently for the LORD;
> he inclined to me and heard my cry.
> [3]He drew me up from the desolate pit,
> out of the miry bog,
> and set my feet upon a rock,
> making my steps secure.
>
> [4]He put a new song in my mouth,
> a song of praise to our God.
> Many will see and fear,
> and put their trust in the LORD.

The formal correspondence between these lines, and elements in the exodus story, is striking and yet after all not surprising. One might indeed wonder whether the narrator has not shaped Exod. 2.23-25 and 14.10–15.21 on the basis of the sort of liturgical form instanced in Ps. 40.2-4 and traceable elsewhere in the Psalter. The correspondent elements are: (1) the cry to God (*šaw'â*, v. 2; cf. Exod. 2.23-24); (2) God's saving response (v. 3, esp. the verb *he'ĕlâ*, 'he drew me up', which occurs frequently in connection with the exodus, as in Exod. 3.8; 32.1, 4, 7); (3) the celebration of God's deliverance in songs of praise (v. 4a; cf. Exod. 15.19-21); and (4) the effect upon those who hear the praise: 'many will *see* and *fear*,/and *put their trust in the LORD*' (v. 4b). Once the recognition of the analepsis allows us to appreciate that Exod. 15.19-21 lies behind 14.30-31, the correspondence in the latter passage becomes particularly striking: 'Israel *saw* the great work which the LORD did against the Egyptians, and the people *feared* the LORD; and they *believed in the LORD*...'

12. F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, 'Song of Miriam', p. 237.

The pattern thus instanced in Exodus 14–15 and Psalm 40 invites reflection on what one might call its revelational logic. In the psalm, the song of praise is not simply the psalmist's response to God's action, but, as the three *waw*-consecutive verbs suggest, at the same time a continuation of God's saving action: 'He drew me up...He set my feet...He put a new song in my mouth'. The song that arises in the throat is experienced by the singer as part of the very energy of deliverance that is the action of God. In this sense, divine action and human hymnic response are dimensions of one and the same complex event of divine redemption and revelation, in which the human response has the character of entry into and participation in the divine action. When, then, others hear the hymn, they too may be drawn by its mediation into the event, making in their turn the perceptual responses to that event enabled by the hymn. Thus the meaning of the event is disclosed in the language of response that the event evokes. That is to say, 'seeing' and 'fearing' and 'trusting in the LORD' are occasioned by divine actions which include the new song that those actions evoke. What all this may suggest is that the women's celebration of the LORD's triumph is what gives Israel's eyes their discernment (contrast Isa. 6.9), so that, seeing the Egyptians dead on the seashore, the people see this as the great work that the LORD did, fear the LORD, and believe in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

The general point I am making is perhaps reflected also in Ps. 68.12 (Eng. 11): 'Yahweh gives the word; the women who bear the tidings are a great host'. Commenting that 'victories were commonly celebrated by the Israelite women with song and dance', A.F. Kirkpatrick takes it that the divine word is the sovereign command that issues in the victory: 'It is a less satisfactory explanation to regard *the word* as the song of triumph which God puts in the mouth of the singers'.[13] But he overlooks Psalm 40 (see also Ps. 4.8 [Eng. 7]). If Ps. 68.12 has a characteristic celebratory practice in view, this only underscores my suggestion that the song of praise in response to God's beneficent action is itself a gift of God and as such is part of that action.

13. A.F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 383.

What the song does is to focus the meaning of the event through words that are part of the event.[14]

This relation between saving event and its cultic celebration, in which the celebration is not merely a response to the event but part of the event itself—the part of God's action that provides the meaning of the event—is reminiscent of the way the first Passover is part of the event of the deliverance and departure from Egypt. Commenting on the theological significance of this redactional placement, Terence Fretheim writes, '*[R]edactionally the passover is represented as shaping the event itself... The historical event is at one and the same time a liturgical event...* Liturgical material flows into the event and away from it.'[15] To be sure, the Passover in ch. 12 does not relate to the departure from Egypt in precisely the same way that the hymn in ch. 15 relates to the event of the sea-crossing; for the observance of the Passover, at least in its initial stages, precedes the death of Egypt's first-born and the Israelite's hasty departure, while the singing of the hymn follows immediately after the sea-crossing and the drowning of the Egyptians. Nevertheless, by virtue of the above-identified analepsis, the people's seeing, fearing Yahweh, and believing do not follow simply upon the sea-crossing, but upon that event as celebrated in Miriam's song. As Fretheim implies, in both instances the liturgical celebration is so closely interwoven as part of the total event that it cannot be separated from it without changing the experienced character of the event. In each instance the liturgical aspect of the event gives Israel the means to understand its meaning.

All this may help us to appreciate in part the significance of

14. For a modern secular analogue, compare these lines from W. Stevens' poem, 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' (*The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* [New York: Knopf, 1954], p. 473):

> The poem is the cry of its occasion,
> Part of the res itself and not about it.
> The poet speaks the poem as it is,
> Not as it was: part of the reverberation
> Of a windy night as it is, when the marble statues
> Are like windy newspapers blown by the wind.

15. T.E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), pp. 133, 136 (italics in original).

Miriam's presence in Mic. 6.4: 'For I brought you up (*he'ĕlîtîkā*) from the land of Egypt,

> and redeemed you from the house of bondage;
> and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

If, as noted above, God's redemptive action can include Moses' action of 'bringing the people up', it can include also Miriam's action of singing the song that God has put in her mouth and that she calls upon Israel to sing. Her participation in the total event gives redemption its revelatory voice.

Whereas, then, Trible's hermeneutics of suspicion leads her to seek Miriam buried under the work of patriarchal storytellers, I propose to have come to her conclusion concerning Miriam's role in the celebration of the Exodus by taking the narrative at face value. To be sure, by its unexpected use of analepsis the ostensibly straight-faced narrative suddenly winks over its shoulder, provoking the attentive reader to do a double-take.

But why the initial narrative silence, and the belated impartation of this information through the analepsis in 15.19-21? Here I believe Trible is right in observing (apropos chs. 1–2) that 'humanly speaking, the Exodus story owes its beginning not to Moses but to Miriam and other women', and that 'like the beginning, the ending of the Exodus story belongs to women. They are the *alpha* and *omega*, the *aleph* and *taw* of deliverance'.[16] In terms of narrative structure, 15.19-21 forms an 'inclusion' with the stories in Exodus 1 and 2 that feature the strategic role of various women on behalf of the Hebrews. To have placed 15.20-21 immediately after 14.29 and before 14.30–15.1-18 would have obscured this pattern. As it is, the girl who was instrumental in Moses' rescue from the waters of the Nile now instrumentally and vocally leads Moses and Israel in celebration of their rescue through the waters of the sea; and, like the women who served as midwives at the birth of Hebrew children in Egypt, she and her sisters bring to birth Israel's new exodus-centered hymnody.

But if 15.19-21 looks backward to chs. 1–2, it also looks forward to a later episode in the Exodus story—or at least may in retrospect be seen to do so. In her discussion of cultic dancing

16. Trible, 'Miriam', pp. 169, 172.

with timbrels and singing. Rita Burns draws attention to the parallels between 15.20-21 and what goes on in Exodus 32. The burden of her discussion at this point is to suggest that '[t]he celebration before the calf,...like the one which Miriam led, commemorated Yahweh's victory over the Egyptians'.[17] I have previously argued toward a similar conclusion—that the cultic activity in Exodus 32 is not (as has been widely held) a fertility ritual, but centers on the divine warrior—and I am happy to think that our analyses support each other.[18] In the present context I would only underscore the one fateful respect in which the celebrations in chs. 15 and 32 are *not* alike: the introduction of the calf in the latter instance. As is well known, the presence of this calf in the cult of the northern kingdom came to be viewed as a grave and chronic symptom of the limits of loyalty to Yahweh.[19] Indeed, allowing for the difference in scope of the two narratives, the one encompassing all humankind and the other encompassing only Israel, Exodus 32 may be taken to be analogous to Genesis 3 as an etiology of sin.[20]

In view of the amount of attention that has been given to the role of Eve, as a woman, in Genesis 3, and in view of Trible's concern for the *Tendenz* of the 'patriarchal storytellers' in Exodus, the following interpretative proposal is perhaps not amiss: if the narrative arising in Genesis 1 and 2 is abruptly derailed by an action in Genesis 3 attributed in the first instance to a woman, in the Book of Exodus the story of liberation, covenant, and entry into the promised land (cf. 6.3-8) is abruptly derailed by a cultic action presided over by a man the character of whose leadership throws Miriam's definitively Yahwistic cultic leadership into bold relief, as, so to speak, a true *'ēzer kᵉnegdô* (or 'fit help', Gen. 2.25) to Israel. If we view

17. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 20.

18. J.G. Janzen, 'The Character of the Calf and Its Cult in Exodus 32', *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 597-607.

19. See 1 Kgs 12.28-30 and frequently thereafter; also Hos. 8.5-6; 10.5.

20. For discussion of rabbinic commentary on the golden calf at Sinai as analogous to the eating of the fruit in Eden, see J.S. Ackerman, 'The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John', *HTR* 59 (1966), pp. 186-91, also H. Neyrey, 'I Said "You Are Gods": Psalm 82:6 and John 10', *JBL* 108 (1989), p. 658.

synoptically these two portrayals of the rise of sin—each in its own way primal—we may take it that the biblical narrative tradition is capable of assigning primal sin to leading characters of both genders.

Moreover, if Miriam and Aaron are the first two cultic leaders in Israel's celebrations of the exodus, then Israel's centuries-long tendency to accommodate cultic idolatry is given its exemplar in Aaron the priest, while the countervailing impulse for true worship of the God of the exodus is given its exemplar and prototype in Miriam, who in such a context is, significantly, identified as 'the prophetess'. If the prophetic word that comes to Israel thereafter in critique of its cult is conveyed in the main through prophets, it is intriguing that the Deuteronomistic History has a final such word come through a prophetess, Huldah (2 Kgs 22.11-20). Whatever editorial intention may lie behind this fact, the reader cannot help reflecting on the possible significance of the way these two prophetesses 'bracket' the exodus from Egypt and the history in the land of the community that celebrates it.

SOME RECENT VIEWS ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE SONG OF MIRIAM

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes

The song that Miriam and the women sing after the passage through the Sea (Exod. 15.20-21) is presented as an answer to the Song of Moses and the Sons of Israel (15.1-18). According to Goitein[1] we should not let ourselves be misled by the order of this presentation. He is of the opinion that Miriam's song was the initial one and 'the root from which the entire song at the Sea sprouted'. This opinion, which Goitein does not substantiate by any further argument, is justifiable on the basis of the song's text. The beginning of the Song of Moses, apart from the opening phrases, is identical to Miriam's song. Moses' opening words, 'I will sing', can be understood as a reply to the imperative 'Sing', with which Miriam begins her song. In other words, the Song of Moses and the sons of Israel is in fact an elaborate answer to the Song of Miriam and the women. But if this indeed were the case, why did the author/s of Exodus 15 reverse the order of the songs? Or should we perhaps read the introductory words of Miriam's song as 'And Miriam sang them this refrain'?[2]

Athalya Brenner[3] opposes this last suggestion. She gives the following feasible explanation for the problematic relation

1. S.D. Goitein, 'Women as Creators of Biblical Genres', *Prooftexts* 8 (1988), p. 7.

2. For this opinion cf. e.g. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary of the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967).

3. A. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Biblical Seminar, 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

between the two songs. Miriam was once regarded as the original author/singer of the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15.1-18). However, later a tradition developed, according to which this song was ascribed to Moses. Faced with this problem the author of Exodus 15 found a way out by harmonizing the two traditions, 'thus making Moses the author and Miriam his female echo'.[4] Brenner finds a clue to support this hypothesis in Numbers 12 where, once again, clear traces are to be found of two competing traditions: the tradition that conceives of Miriam as a leading figure whose stature equals Moses' (cp. Mic. 6.4[5] to traditions that emphasize the unique position of Moses). According to Brenner, another important argument is that Miriam, like Deborah, fits into the literary model of the 'ideal leader' of pre-monarchical Israel.

In her reconstruction of the practically 'submerged' Miriamic tradition that she detects 'within the present, male-oriented framework of the text', Brenner pays no attention to the verse that precedes the performance of Miriam and the women. Phyllis Trible[6] points out how odd it is that the Song of Moses is followed by a narrative text, Exod. 15.19, in which the story of the passage through the Reed Sea is once again recapitulated in a nutshell. Together with the Song of Miriam, this passage actually constitutes a second ending of the story about the passage through the sea and, as such, is an anti-climax, 'no more than an afterthought, a token of the female presence'.[7] With reference to Cross and Freedman,[8] Trible ascribes Exod. 15.19, 'a narrative that recapitulated the struggle at the sea', to editorial activity which had become a requirement since the redactors put the Song of the Sea, originally accredited to Miriam, in Moses' mouth. 'Unable to squelch the Miriamic tradition altogether, the redactors appended it in truncated

4. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, p. 52.

5. In this text Miriam, together with Moses and Aaron, is depicted as someone who marched out in front of the people during the exodus from Egypt.

6. P. Trible, 'Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows', in this volume.

7. Trible, 'Miriam', p. 171.

8. F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam', *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 237-50.

form (Exod. 15.20-21) to their preferred Mosaic version'.[9]

How plausible are the reconstructions suggested by Brenner and Trible, according to which the voice of Miriam was reduced in an almost malicious way to an echo of Moses' voice? They are based on the assumption that the Song of the Sea—mistakenly ascribed to Moses—was the 'original' poem and therefore the oldest, from which the so-called Song of Miriam, a later addition, has been derived. According to Cross and Freedman,[10] the Song of the Sea is indeed very old. However, there are strong arguments for a (much) later dating of this song.[11] Hence it would be more plausible to assume that the Song of Miriam belongs to an older tradition and that the Song of the Sea is a later amplification thereof.[12] Trible's assumption that the 'redactors (editors) who were intent upon elevating Moses took the song right out of her [Miriam's] mouth and gave it to him' should then be rectified as follows. By inserting the Song of the Sea within the story about the exodus and by putting it in Moses' mouth, the redactors of Exodus 15 caused the drowning out of the Song of Miriam by the Song of Moses and the sons of Israel.

Despite this intervention the passage that has the Song of Miriam has been handed down to us. The tradition according to which Miriam was the one who, after the exodus, broke into a song proved ineradicable. This does not imply that the Song of Miriam, in contrast with the Song of Moses, is 'authentic'. We can claim no certainty for that. On the basis of the passage

9. Trible, 'Miriam', p. 172.

10. Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam'.

11. Cf. e.g. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 50; M.L. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea: Ex 15:1-21* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991); J. Wagenaar, '"Is tegen de rivieren uw toorn ontbrand?" Het principe van profestische mythologie in Exodus 15, Jesaja 51 en Habakuk 3', *Amsterdamse cahiers voor exegese an bijbelse theologie* 7 (1986), pp. 55-69.

12. According to M. Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus* (ATD, 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); A. Ohler, *Frauengestalten der Bibel* (Wurzburg: Echter Verlag, 1987); R. de Vaux, *Histoire ancienne d'Israel: La periode des Juges* (Paris, 1973) and many others, the Song of Miriam is even very old: the 'älteste biblische Zeugnis vom Auszug aus Ägypten' (Ohler, *Frauengestalten*, p. 74).

about her that has been transmitted, we can only establish that a tradition existed according to which Miriam 'the prophetess' headed the women in choral dance and gave voice to the public opinion in a song. As I have already indicated, this tradition may have been older than the tradition according to which Moses and the sons of Israel were the ones who initially sang YHWH's praise after the exodus. Androcentric motives may account for the fact that the Song of Moses, a premature answer, has been placed before Miriam's song. Besides, compositional considerations may have played their part as well. The Song of Miriam concludes the story about the exodus from Egypt. In Exod. 15.22 the crossing of the desert commences. Thus, the performance of women determines the *beginning* (Exod. 1 and 2.1-10) and the *end* of the story about the exodus.[13]

My reconstruction, inspired by Brenner and Trible, of the relation between the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam, is severely put to the test by recent research. In his dissertation on Exod. 15.1-21, Martin Brenner[14] reaches quite different conclusions in regard to the origin and date of the two songs. He considers Exod. 15.1-21 a single unit, a 'unified composition' in which v. 19 functions as an 'explanatory verse'. He is of the opinion that Exod. 15.1-21 is 'wholly the product of Levitical cult personnel of the Second Temple'.[15] The text has been composed as a victory song for the purpose of the celebration of the Passover liturgy in the Temple and needs to be sung by two choirs, a male choir and a choir of women dancing in chorus.

> The head of the men took the part of Moses, and the head of the women took the part of Miriam. These were probably soloists because the Song begins in the first person singular, v. 1b, 'I will sing', and continues in the first person through v. 2.[16]

As v. 21a 'only speaks of her singing to the men', writes M. Brenner, Miriam's song must have functioned as a refrain and was perhaps repeated several times during the performance.

13. Trible, 'Miriam', p. 169.
14. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*.
15. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*, p. 19.
16. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*, p. 40.

M. Brenner considers it a typical feature that Miriam, when she makes her appearance as a singer and dancer, is referred to as 'prophetess'. He associates this with other biblical data concerning prophetesses (Judg. 4.4; Isa. 8.3; 2 Kgs 22.14 = 2 Chron. 34.22; Neh. 6.14) and with Numbers 12, which contains a tradition according to which Miriam exercised prophetic functions (Num. 12.2 and 6). But, according to Brenner, it is even more significant that the Levites, during the Second Temple period, considered themselves the ones who were carrying on the prophetic tradition (1 Chron. 25.1-3; 2 Chron. 35.15).

> In the text of 1 Chron. 15.1-7 the three groups of temple singers are described as prophets. Within the clan of Heman his daughters are also mentioned as forming a performing choir, and they, like their brothers, are placed at the side of their father, who is styled a prophet, 25.5f.[17]

Furthermore, it is striking that Miriam is explicitly called 'Aaron's sister'. This too, says M. Brenner, is an argument in favour of the Levitical origin of the text. After all, the Levites describe themselves as brothers of the Aaronic priests to emphasize their common origin and to enhance their status (cf. e.g. 1 Chron. 23.32; 24.31).

M. Brenner considers the two terms that introduce Miriam in Exod. 15.20a to be arguments in favour of a post-exilic dating of the text. He also thinks that the same is true inasmuch as the Song of Miriam is concerned. In his opinion there is no convincing evidence either for the hypothesis that it is a very ancient text or for the assumption that the song existed separately from its present context.[18]

If we accept Brenner's hypotheses about the postulated *Sitz im Leben* of Miriam's song, then this passage must be read not as a relic from a distant past but, conversely, as a recollection of that past—a recollection put into words centuries later, a recollection that also bears witness to a tradition which was kept alive by a choir of women in the temple.[19]

17. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*, p. 45.

18. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*, pp. 80-84.

19. For a recent analysis of the participation of women in the activities in and around the temple during the Second Temple period, cf. C. Safrai, *Women and Temple: The Status and Role of Women in the Second Temple of*

The text of the victory song ascribed to Miriam shows the formal characteristics of a hymn.[20] The call to sing unto YHWH is followed by the motivation: 'for high, high exalted is he'.[21] YHWH's exaltedness is then specified in the description of his deed: 'the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea'. The song, like the song in honour of Saul and David, gives a pithy summary of the preceding account of the events and at the same time expresses its own specific view. The Egyptian military supremacy is aptly personified as 'man and horse'. The liberation from the hands of this oppressor is 'mytho-poetically'[22] interpreted as the work of JHWH who triumphed by exalting himself as did the sea, in which he threw 'the horse and his rider'.

In conclusion, we can say that in Exodus 15 Miriam emerges as the foundress of a women's song tradition. After all, she is the first woman in the Bible to break into a victory song. Through the performance of Jephthah's daughter (Judg. 11.34) and of the women in 1 Sam. 18.6-7, 'the musical legacy of Miriam passes into liturgical traditions. Though rejected by the priesthood, this woman nevertheless resounds in the cultic experience of the people'.[23] In this connection Trible refers to Pss 68.26; 81.2; 149.3-4 and 150.4. Moreover, the memory of Miriam has been kept alive in the prophetic tradition as well. In Jeremiah 31, where the liberation of Israel from the Babylonian exile is described as a new exodus, YHWH addresses the people as a woman who, like Miriam, 'shall adorn herself with tambourines and shall go forth in the chorus of the dancers' (Jer. 31.4).[24] However, this positive conclusion regarding the presentation of Miriam does not alter the fact that, in the interpretations

Jerusalem (Diss. Amsterdam: KTUA, 1991).

20. B.W. Anderson, 'The Song of Miriam Poetically and Theologically Considered', in E.R. Follis (ed.), *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup, 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p. 288.

21. Alter translates the figura etymologica *g'h g'h* into: 'Who surged, oh surged', in order 'to retain the clear suggestion in the Hebrew of a rising tide of water' (Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 50, 52).

22. G.W. Coats, 'The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif', *VT* 17 (1967), p. 13.

23. Trible, 'Miriam', p. 183.

24. Anderson, 'Song of Miriam', p. 294; Trible, 'Miriam', p. 182.

discussed so far, her performance in Exodus 15 has been placed in the shadow of Moses' performance. In the 'solemn procession of God' the singers go in front (cf. Ps. 68.26). They sing the Song of the Sea. The 'girls who beat the tambourine' join in with the refrain.

Or is this reading based upon an inadequate reading convention as far as this text is concerned? Are we, despite Goitein's warning, simply being misled by the sequence of the presentation of the sons? According to Gerald Janzen this is indeed the case. In his discussion with Burns[25] and Trible[26], Janzen says that Exod. 15.19, 21 functions as an analepsis, a 'flashback', which transports the reader back to the ending of Exodus 14. In that case Miriam and the women do not sing the refrain but are the ones who call Moses and the men/people to sing songs of praise to God. They take the lead.

25. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken only through Moses.*
26. Trible, 'Miriam', pp. 166-86.

MIRIAM THE MUSICIAN

Carol Meyers

Perhaps nothing epitomizes the range of ways that scholars have sought to understand the Exodus more than their attempts to grasp the role of Miriam in the seminal events of Israelite experience and in the biblical traditions that provide our imperfect and incomplete knowledge of Israelite beginnings. Issues of historicity, of literary presentation, of redactional bias, of editorial impositions—all of these concerns characterize attempts to reconstruct the flight from Egypt and to comprehend what place, if any, a woman held in the foundational drama of Israel's story.

In the search for information about early Israel, the poetic passages of Exod. 15.1-21 are generally considered to be of exceptional value. Because of their archaic language and style, they are often thought to be among the earliest examples of Hebrew poetry and perhaps even to constitute an eye-witness record of the escape from Egypt, thereby antedating the prose narratives that describe the Exodus.[1] Because the poetry of Exodus 15 is connected with Miriam, she is inextricably linked with one of the most powerful and perhaps earliest piece of Hebrew literature and with the experience of liberation that apparently gave rise to this extraordinary outburst of poetic emotion. Considering the relationship of Miriam to the Exodus 15 materials thus touches upon the very core of Israelite history and literature.

1. See P.K. McCarter Jr, 'Exodus', in J.L. Mays *et al.* (eds.), *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 146; cf. M. Noth, *Exodus* (OTL; trans. J.S. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 121-26.

Decades ago, driven by new appreciation of Hebraic modes of poetic expression, some scholars attributed the long and ideologically programmatic poem of Exod. 15.1-18 to Miriam.[2] Now, in the burst of feminist biblical study of more recent years, other scholars have asserted an essential if not primary participation of Miriam in the historical and/or literary origins of Israel.[3] These claims for an authentic role for Miriam are complicated by the difficulties in sorting out the literary history of the poetic and prose traditions and in assessing the relationship of Miriam's appearance in Exodus 15 with the other scriptural materials mentioning her (Num. 12.1-15; 20.1; 26.59; 1 Chron. 5.29; Deut. 24.8-9; Mic. 6.4). In addition, the possible influence of other accounts of women singing out in celebration of a military victory (as in Judg. 11.34 and 1 Sam. 18.6; see below) lead to questions of primacy. Are these other traditions retrojected onto the Miriam material of Exodus 15? In short, is Miriam truly a musician? And if so, what might that designation signify in terms of Iron Age Israelite culture? And what might it contribute to an assessment of the historical role of a woman at the time of Israel's emergence in the east Mediterranean?

Although it may not be possible to provide definitive answers to these questions, in this case the circularity of argument that can hamper efforts to deal with these issues on the basis of the biblical evidence alone may be diminished thanks to the availability of extra-biblical, extra-textual evidence. That is, working from the description of Miriam in Exod. 15.20, in which she is said to engage simultaneously in three activities—dance, drum-playing, and song—the cultural context of such activities with respect to gender can be established. If there is good reason to associate this trio of performance acts with women, then the likelihood of their authentic connection with Miriam is increased.

2. F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam', *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 237-50.

3. A. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Biblical Seminar, 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 51-56; R.J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (SBLDS, 84; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987); J.G. Janzen, 'Song of Moses, Song of Miriam' in this volume; and P. Trible, 'Bringing Miriam out of The Shadows', in this volume.

The interconnectedness of these three performance acts must first be acknowledged. In western thought, music and movement associated with the sounds of that music are usually conceptualized as being distinct aspects of performance. Such is not the case in many non-western performance traditions,[4] in which body movement is considered an integral part of the production of vocal and/or instrumental sound. In such traditions, dancers and musicians (vocalists and/or instrumentalists) would be the same individual; 'the dance is the music and the music is the dance'.[5] Certainly in ancient Israel, music and movement were typically two interrelated aspects of performance in both secular and religious contexts.[6] Similarly, the music of ancient Israel involved an integral connection between its vocal elements and the instrumental carrier of its rhythm. The nature of Hebrew music was such that the beat and the song worked together to create a musical production.

Given the three-fold nature of Miriam's role as performer, her identity as musician can be informed by extra-biblical evidence bearing upon any one of the three aspects of her musicianship. In this case, the relevant evidence lies in the realm of archaeologically recovered artifacts depicting *drummers*. Examining these objects entails considering questions of gender with respect to players of percussion instruments. Whereas the mention of drummers in today's world inevitably conjures up the image of male musicians, was this the same for biblical antiquity? Certainly female percussionists exist in the late twentieth century; nonetheless, whether for rock combos or symphony orchestras, we tend to think of men, not women, sitting with drum sticks in hand. Has it always been this way? And is it that way in other cultures?

Such questions are evoked by feminist considerations of gender roles. Investigating the roles of women and men in society involves discerning which tasks become identified in

4. See, e.g., D. Wilson, 'The Association of Movement and Music as a Black Conceptual Approach to Music-Making', in I.V. Jackson (ed.), *More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 10-11.

5. Wilson, 'The Association of Movement and Music', p. 12.

6. See V.H. Matthews, 'Music in the Bible', *ABD*, IV, pp. 930-34.

specific cultures primarily with one gender rather than the other and determining whether there are any cross-cultural patterns in such identification. It also means seeking to understand the significance of gendered behavior and establishing the meaning of specific activities for the lives of those who perform them.

In the case of ancient Israel and of Miriam's putative musicianship, such issues arise specifically because of data that conflict with our contemporary notions of percussionists and gender. The archaeologically retrieved materials relevant to Miriam's musical role are Iron Age terracotta figures depicting women drummers. These artifactual materials have long been known to the archaeologists, just as biblical scholars have long been aware of the biblical references to Miriam and other women as drummers. However, examining these two bodies of data in light of recent scholarship that explores the dynamics of performance in relation to the gender of the performers provide a new source of information about women's lives in biblical antiquity and also about the authenticity of Miriam's leadership.[7]

The Terracottas

Long before pottery was invented at some point in the Neolithic period, figures of clay were being produced at widely scattered sites in the ancient Near East. The tradition of fashioning terracotta figures—of animals and humans and, probably, of deities—was evidently such a familiar aspect of life in antiquity that the biblical imagery of creation includes God forming a human figure from a lifeless earthen lump. The ancient art of coroplasty (the modeling of clay figures or statuettes) seems to have flourished in Palestine in the biblical period. Although an up-to-date catalogue of Palestinian terracottas does not exist, the discovery of small terracotta figures from virtually every site with Iron Age settlements has long been noted.

Among the corpus of ceramic renderings of humans from

7. A somewhat different version of this paper appeared as 'Of Drums and Damsels: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel', *BA* 54 (1991), pp. 16-27; see also C. Meyers, 'The Drum-Dance-Song Ensemble: Women's Performance in Biblical Israel', in K. Marshall (ed.), *Rediscovering the Muse: Women's Musical Traditions* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).

Palestinian sites, figures of females dominate. The identity of these figures is difficult to establish. Many archaeologists have been quick to label them as fertility figures; others see that as speculative.[8] The fact is that within the general category of small clay statues of females, there are wide variations of manufacture, style, decoration, pose, accompanying objects, and other aspects of form. Subtle differences in any of these variables must be taken into account in analyzing these artifacts. The issue of identity—calling them deities, priestesses, female votaries, or ordinary women—as well as that of function is far from being resolved for the gynomorphic terracottas unearthed in Palestine and elsewhere in the ancient world.

Within the plethora of terracottas depicting females, one particular type is notable in light of the biblical passage mentioning women as drummers. These statuettes (see Fig. 1), like almost all of the terracottas in the larger group to which they belong, are small objects, ranging from eight to twenty centimeters in height. They feature a standing female figure holding a disc-shaped object in front of her, usually perpendicular to her body. The object rests on one of her hands, and her other hand is pressed against the flat side of the disc.[9]

8. J.B. Pritchard, *Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known through Literature* (AOS, 24; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1943), who himself is wisely cautious in his study of the figurines, cites numerous examples of the propensity of archaeologists to associate these objects with a mother-goddess. See also the cautionary statements of B. Fagan, 'A Sexist View of Prehistory', *Archaeology* 45 (1992), pp. 14-16, 66 and M. Lefkowitz, 'The Twilight of the Goddess', *The New Republic* 3 (August 1992), pp. 9-33.

9. For photographs of a classic example of this type, and references to other examples, see C. Meyers, 'A Terracotta at the Harvard Semitic Museum and Disc-Holding Figures Reconsidered', *IEJ* 37 (1987), pp. 116-22. There are also illustrations of this type and related ones in J. Myres, *Handbook of the Cesnola Collection of Antiquities from Cyprus* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1914).

Figure 1. Example of a terracotta depicting a female playing the hand-drum. This example is 25 cm in height and was recovered from the coastal Palestinian site of Shiqmona by Y. Elgavish. The figure has the characteristic braided hair of many of the female drummers represented in Iron Age statuettes. Otherwise, she bears no adornment. The woman is holding the hand-drum in her left hand and is striking it with the flat palm of her right hand (photograph published by permission of the Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem).

Because many very similar terracotta figures (of both females and males) hold a recognizable musical instrument, such as a lyre or double flute, the females holding discs in the manner described can be identified as musicians with considerable certainty. The discs represent a kind of percussion instrument known as a membranophone, the term for instruments, commonly known as drums, made of stretched hides that produce sound when struck.[10] Because these statuettes show a woman holding a small disc in one hand, the instrument can most accurately be called a hand-drum, that is, a hand-held version of a frame-drum. The latter term designates a percussion instrument made by stretching a hide or skin (membrane), or two parallel hides, over a frame or hoop made of metal or wood.[11] A frame-drum, as a type of membranophone, is thus distinguished from a tubular or vessel drum, which is made by stretching a skin over a hollow body of any shape or size.

The hand-drum represented in the terracottas should also be distinguished from a tambourine, which is in fact a combination membranophone and idiophone. (The latter is an instrument, such as a rattle or bell, that produces sound by itself when moved.) None of the hand-drums represented in these statuettes show any renderings of the small metal plates that would indicate a tambourine. Indeed, such attachments would not be expected, since the tambourine apparently cannot be authenticated as a musical instrument before the thirteenth century CE.[12] Furthermore, in these terracottas the woman's hand is shown flat against the circular drum to indicate that she is striking the instrument with her palm or fingers. This pose could not signify the playing of a tambourine, which is typically played by striking it or by hitting it with the knuckles. Although many excavators and art historians refer to these terracottas as 'woman (or goddess) with tambourine', such labels are technically incorrect. Similarly, the term timbrel, insofar as it designates a type of

10. M. Gorali, *Music in Ancient Israel* (Haifa: Haifa Music Museum, 1977).

11. C. Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1940), pp. 31-33; A. Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), p. 262.

12. Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, p. 373.

tambourine, is also a misnomer when it is used in reference to these ancient terracottas.

The handheld frame-drum is quite uniformly depicted in these figures, but the renderings of the women holding the instruments vary significantly. The variations include the way the figure is made, the kind of decoration that has been applied, and the style of dress or hair. In addition, there is a noticeable range in the level of artistry, with some figures being rather crude and unattractive, and others being quite finely modeled. The individual differences among the existing examples are critical for questions of provenance, of origin, even of function. However, questions other than those are of concern here; hence, the variations can be set aside and a general description of the type will suffice.

Most examples of Iron Age terracottas of women frame-drum players are constructed of a wheel-made base, which forms a sort of trumpet-shaped skirt/pedestal, to which is attached either a hand-modeled or mold-formed head. The figure's arm, hands and musical instrument are all formed by hand. Some small, rather crude examples are entirely hand-made; but most feature the rather sophisticated composite technique (which may be an indication of workshop production).

The hand-drummer terracottas are made of the typical buff- or reddish-colored clays of the east Mediterranean. Some examples are undecorated; others show evidence of simple black and/or red painted lines to indicate stripes or patterns on the skirt, sleeves, or bodice of the woman's dress. Her face is often colored red, as is the drum. The hair, which is sometimes painted black, may be braided; or it may be loose, full, and shoulder-length. Typically the bangs fall evenly across the forehead. The hairstyle is quite simple, probably indicating that the woman's own locks and not a headdress or hairpiece are being represented.

The simplicity of the woman's garment is also noteworthy, the few painted stripes notwithstanding. There are apparently no flounces, ruffles, pleats, appliques, bangles, or any other elaborate drapings or embellishments in the rendering of the hand-drummer's dress. Similarly, there is a marked absence of other decoration. These women musicians do not wear hats,

wreaths, crowns, or other headpieces. Nor do they wear bracelets, earrings, necklaces, or any other items of personal adornment. The stripes painted around the necks of some examples are probably meant to depict the collar or neckline of the woman's dress rather than any piece of jewelry.

The rather plain costume and hairstyle of the hand-drummer constitute a reasonable basis for supposing that these terracottas represent humans and not goddesses, for it is the elaboration of such aspects of adornment that distinguish plastic renderings of deities from those of humans. Furthermore, the almost total absence of adornment suggests that these musicians (like many other figures represented in the small terracottas) are meant to be ordinary people and not members of an elite group, such as royalty or other officials, who would apt to be rendered with some decoration to signify the status of the individual being represented.

This focus on the simplicity of the terracottas depicting females with frame-drums is helpful not only in understanding their relationship to biblical references but also in clarifying some of the confusion that exists in the attempts to identify various other terracottas. A very closely related group of figurines shows a female (or sometimes a male) figure holding a disc-shaped object, often erroneously identified as a 'tambourine'.[13] However, that object is clutched against the chest or rib-cage; it is parallel, rather than perpendicular, to the body. Sometimes it is decorated with a series of pebble-like impressions, painted dots, or scalloped edges; and the women who hold such discs are themselves adorned, or else they are nude though bejeweled. Nothing in the woman's pose or in the object's design suggests that the woman is playing or holding a musical instrument. Still the identity of the object in her grasp—a loaf of bread? a plate? a sun disc?—is difficult to establish. In any case, these figurines, which perhaps are meant to depict deities, elite women, or

13. E.g. D.H. Hillers, 'The Goddess with the Tambourine', *CTM* 41 (1970), pp. 606-19; A. Chambon, *Tell el Far'ah.* I. *L'Age du Fer* (Mémoire, 31; Paris: Editions Recherches sur les Civilizations, 1984); cf. J. Rimmer, *Ancient Musical Instruments of Western Asia in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities* (London: British Museum, 1969), p. 23.

priestesses, constitute a separate category of terracottas and are not to be merged with the hand-drummers.[14]

Figure 2. This rather crude terracotta from Cyprus resembles those depicting a woman with a hand drum. Yet it differs in that the figure, probably male, holds the disc-shaped object between his hands with his fingers outstretched. The object, often mistakenly identified as a tambourine, is probably a pair of cymbals being struck. This example is decorated with black paint, except for red paint at the mouth, and stands 8.6 cm high. It is part of the Cesnola Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and was acquired by purchase (acquisition number 71.51.1674).

Another closely related group, which also tends to be confused with the group showing women playing the hand-drum, depicts very similar, simple figures holding disc-shaped objects perpendicular to the body (see Fig. 2). These objects look very much like the frame-drums. However, the position of the figure's hands involves a significant difference: instead of one hand holding the disc/instrument and the other shown striking it, each hand is held against the side of the disc. These discs, therefore, should be identified as cymbals, which belong to the idiophone category. Since other terracotta figures hold lyres (chordophones) and flutes (aurophones), the basic four-fold repertoire of ancient Near Eastern instruments would be incomplete without the cymbal.

Like the frame-drummer terracottas, the figures holding the cymbals are rendered quite simply; but they are noticeably different in some respects. They tend to have some sort of hat or cap, they do not have long hair, and some have beards; almost certainly they depict male musicians. Yet, much of the archaeological literature, in not noting the position of the hands of these figures, lumps them together with the women hand-drummers (e.g. V. Karageorghis),[15] so that it appears that there are terracottas of both men and women playing frame-drums. While it has not been possible in this study to examine all

14. Meyers, 'A Terracotta at the Harvard Semitic Museum', pp. 117-19; cf. B. Bayer, *The Material Relics of Music in Ancient Palestine and its Environment* (Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 1963), p. 36.

15. V. Karageorghis, 'The Terracottas', in V. Karageorghis and O. Picard (eds.), *Etudes Chyporiotes IX. La Nécropole. L'Amathonte. Tombes 113-367* (Nicosia: Service des Antiquités de Chypre, Ecole Française d'Athènes, and Fondation A.G. Leventis, 1987), pp. 1-54, deals with Cypriot examples, of which there are huge numbers; see below. One of the several enormous groups of terracottas from Cyprus is in the Cesnola collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The catalogue prepared by Myres, *The Cesnola Collection*, includes a group he identifies as males playing various musical instruments, including the 'tambourine'. The publication does not have photographs of all the objects, but, through a grant from Duke's Research Council, I have been able to examine the terracottas in the MMA stores. In checking the catalogue references to males playing tambourines, I discovered that the hands of these figures have different poses than do the women and so concluded that the instrument held by males is a set of cymbals.

excavated examples, removing the largely male cymbal-players from the corpus underscores the already clear gender pattern of the terracottas: *a preponderance of females as hand-drummers*. It would be going too far to state categorically that all figurines with membranophones depict women; but it is certainly legitimate to emphasize the dominance of women in this aspect of musical performance as preserved in the ancient coroplast's art.

A word about provenance as well as date is in order at this point. As indicated above, female figures in general have been widely found—in both sacred and domestic contexts—at Palestinian sites. The specific type under consideration here, however, is not as ubiquitous at Iron Age sites as are the well-known plaques or figures of nude females. Indeed, for the women hand-drummers, it is quite difficult to determine any pattern of either their date or place of origin. Many of the known examples have entered museum collections through the antiquities trade and not from legitimate excavation, and hence the place of their discovery is not known. Even the excavated examples tend to come from the older field projects—those with less reliable stratigraphy and chronology than more recent ones. Nevertheless, it can be suggested that the Levantine examples of female hand-drummers come mainly from Phoenician or coastal sites (such as Tyre, Achzib, Shiqmona, Kharayeb) and that they begin, in their classic form, some time in the Iron Age and continue well into the Hellenistic period.

The paucity of Palestinian examples of these figurines stands in marked contrast to the hundreds that have been recovered from sanctuaries, tombs, and country shrines in Cyprus. Enormous groups of terracottas depict both women and men in a variety of costumes and poses and holding a rich array of objects. Apparently expressing the island's extensive native tradition,[16] the Cypriot repertoire of terracottas flourished in the Cypro-Archaic period (700–475 BCE), especially in the seventh and sixth centuries.

Although many more terracottas have been found in Cyprus than in the Levant, there is reason to believe that many aspects

16. J.B. Connolly, 'Standing before One's God: Votive Sculpture and the Cypriot Religious Tradition', *BA* 52 (1989), pp. 210-18.

of the Cypriot tradition originated in the east. For one thing, some of the Palestinian examples[17] apparently pre-date the flouruit of Cypriot production, terracottas being relatively rare in the Cypro-Geometric period (1070–700 BCE). In addition, the use of the mold for parts or all of the terracottas seems to have been introduced to Cyprus by the Phoenicians.[18] The mold, long known in the Near East, had not been part of the age-old Cypriot terracotta industry until after the Phoenicians founded colonies on the island. Also, the appearance of new types—the erroneously designated female tambourinist is one of the most popular among them—into the Cypriot repertoire apparently coincided with and can be attributed to the Phoenician influence.[19] Finally, some specific stylistic features of the terracottas are said to be of 'Syrian' or 'Egypto-Phoenician' mode.[20] This last fact may be related to the apparent appearance of the hand-drum, played by female musicians, in New Kingdom Egypt (at approximately the time of Israelite origins; see below).

In short, despite the voluminous quantities of female hand-drummer terracottas from Cyprus, this particular form as well as the technique of manufacture may be the result of Phoenician colonization. Though it found exceptionally fertile ground in the indigenous coroplastic and religious tradition of Cyprus, the thematic as well as technical inspiration for many of the Cypriot

17. J. Elgavish, 'Tel Shiqmona', *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (English edn; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Massada Press, 1978), IV, pp. 1102-1103.

18. F. Vandenabeele, 'Phoenician Influence on the Cypro-Archaic Terracotta Production and Cypriot Influence Abroad', in V. Karageorghis (ed.), *Acts of the International Symposium 'Cyprus between the Orient and the Occident'* (Nicosia: Department of Antiquities, 1986).

19. F. Vandenabeele, 'Has Phoenician Influence Modified Cypriot Terracotta Production?', in E. Peltenburg (ed.), *Early Society in Cyprus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press in association with the National Museum of Scotland and the A.G. Leventis Foundation, 1989); cf. Karageorghis, 'The Terracottas'.

20. J. Karageorghis, *La grande déesse de chypre et son culte* (Collection de la Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéan Ancien, 5, Série Archéologique, 4; Lyons: Maison de l'Orient, 1977), p. 210; Vandenabeele, 'Phoenician Influence', p. 268.

forms seems to have originated in Syria-Palestine early in the Iron Age.

Biblical References

The possible Syro-Palestinian origins of the terracotta renderings of women playing the hand-drum finds support in biblical materials that link precisely this instrument not only with Miriam but also with a female musical tradition. Just as virtually all the terracottas of hand-drummers depict females, so too the biblical references to membranophone-playing exhibit a distinct connection with women.[21]

The intrinsic connection between women and percussionists in Israelite music can be seen by examining the type of musical instruments mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, which has a rich vocabulary for musical terms. Dozens of different musical instruments are referred to in the Bible; and these can readily be classified according to four categories of ancient instruments.[22] At least nine kinds of stringed instruments (chordophones) are mentioned; a dozen or so wind instruments (aerophones) appear; and five shaking, scraping or rattling types (idiophones; this would include cymbals) are named.

What is unexpected in the lexicon of biblical musical instruments is the fact that only one word for membranophones, or drums, is found. The word for drum is the onomatopoeic term *tōp* (plural *tuppîm*), which is related to other Semitic words for drum (Assyrian *tuppu*, Aramaic *tuppa*, Arabic *duff*; cf. Sumerian *dup* or *tup*) as well as to Greek *tupanon* (or, later, *tumpanon*) and Latin *tympanum*. English versions of the Bible render the term variously as timbrel, tambourine, tabret, timbre, drum. Although the first four of these words are lexically related to *tōp*, from the

21. This connection was first pointed out to me by Eunice Poethig, who graciously shared with me her discussion of this subject in an excursus to 'The Woman of Israel as Oral Traditioner', her 1975 unpublished MDiv thesis at McCormick Theological Seminary. She also provided me with a typescript version of her PhD dissertation (E.B. Poethig, 'The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel' [PhD dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1985]).

22. Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, pp. 262-63.

perspective of the technical classification of musical instruments, they are not accurate translations of *tōp*. Indeed, the commonly found 'timbrel' and 'tambourine' are blatant mistranslations.

'Drum' is the best of the English renderings, but 'hand-drum' would be preferable since all sixteen biblical usages of this noun in reference to a musical instrument almost certainly refer to only one kind of membranophone: the small, hand-held frame drum. This is somewhat surprising, for it contrasts with the fact that other types of instruments are represented in considerable variety in the Bible. Furthermore, the range of drums known in the ancient Near East, as depicted in art and as mentioned in texts, was considerable in both Egypt and Mesopotamia.[23] Similar variety with respect to other instrument categories was present in ancient Israel. But, although the ancient monuments show entire families of drums, the Bible mentions only one type.

The texts in which 'hand-drum' appears fall into two groups.[24] One set, eleven references in all, mentions *tōp* along with one or more other musical instruments, most prominently the lyre (as in Gen. 31.27; Isa. 24.8; 30.32) but also with as many as six or seven different instruments (as Ps. 150.3-4). These passages together reflect a performance tradition which, when examined in reference to artifactual evidence from Syria-Palestine, can be called the 'Canaanite Orchestra'.[25] The gender of those playing the hand-drum is not specified in any of these texts, although in several of them the context (such as the association with bands of prophets in 1 Sam. 10.5 or David's entourage in 2 Sam. 6.5, 11; 1 Chron. 13.8) would seem to indicate male musicians. Similarly, the archaeological evidence shows both men and women playing the various instruments of the Canaanite ensemble (see Fig. 3). Thus the contention[26] that the hand-drum was exclusively a woman's instrument cannot be substantiated.

23. Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, pp. 40, 97; M. Gorali, 'Musical Instruments in Ancient Times', *Ariel* 29 (1971), p. 70; Sachs, *History of Musical Instruments*, p. 74.

24. See Poethig, 'Victory Song Tradition, pp. 19-30.

25. Poethig, 'Victory Song Tradition, pp. 19, 23-27.

26. E. Werner, 'Jewish Music, Liturgical', in S. Sadis (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), VII, p. 619.

Figure 3. A group of female musicians, often called a 'Phoenician (or Canaanite) Orchestra', as depicted on a silver bowl found on Cyprus and now in the British Museum. From left to right, the musicians are playing a double-flute, a lyre, and either a hand-drum or cymbals. This drawing is adapted from F. Behm, *Musikleben im Altertum und frühen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1954), pl. 33, no. 76.

Nonetheless, in contrast to the unspecified gender of the drum-players in the first set of references, the second set, in which is found the text depicting Miriam as musician, reveals a distinct musical tradition in which only women are the instrumentalists. These five other uses of *tōp*—Exod. 15.20, 20; Judg. 11.34; 1 Sam. 18.6; Jer. 31.4—not only indicate that females are playing the drums but also present these women in a performance context that is distinct from the Canaanite Orchestra tradition. In these texts, the women playing drums are associated with dances (*mᵉḥôlôt*) and also with song (explicitly in four of the passages; implicitly in Judg. 11.34). In each case the context involves celebration of the victory of the Israelite warriors and/or God over the enemies.

This configuration of features, absent from the first set of *tōp* references, is consistent in the second. Furthermore, there are

other texts, such as the Song of Deborah in Judges 5, in which music, a woman, and victory appear together and for which the use of a *tōp* can be inferred, given the rhythmic form of Hebrew poetry and song and the close association in folk tradition of both dancing and singing with a percussion instrument to establish the beat.

Taken together, the features of the second set of texts mentioning 'hand-drum' reflect a distinct tradition of women's performance. A group of women are depicted singing, accompanied by drum-beat, with their celebration expressed in movement (dance) as well as in song. Although it is not certain that all the women in these performance groups are doing all three musical acts—singing, dancing, drum-beating—studies of the way traditional songs are composed and performed[27] suggest that the biblical women singers/drummers were part of a composition-performance tradition in which small groups of performers did in fact sing, dance and drum, using traditional choruses or refrains and also developing texts in response to the specific occasion. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that performance and composition were inextricably linked in Semitic musical tradition, as they are in many pre-modern societies.[28]

Both the biblical passages and the Syro-Palestinian terracottas depicting women holding the frame-drum reveal a distinct woman's performance tradition. There are no other ancient textual references to such a woman's musical genre, but the distribution of the terracottas would indicate that this genre should not be viewed as an exclusively Israelite phenomenon. Perhaps it can be called a Canaanite women's musical tradition.[29] Such a designation would account for the biblical references, insofar as the Israelites are to some extent the inheritors and transmitters of Canaanite economic, social and cultural forms. It would also account for the apparent dissemination in the material culture of a female drumming tradition, via the

27. E.g. A.B. Lord, *A Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

28. E. Werner, 'Music', *IDB*, III, p. 466.

29. Cf. H.L. Ginsberg, 'Women Singers and Wailers among Northern Canaanites', *BASOR* 72 (1938), pp. 13-15.

Canaanites/Phoenicians, to Cyprus. A similar tradition may have spread, also via the Canaanites/Phoenicians, to Egypt, where women dominate in depictions of frame-drum players from the New Kingdom onward.[30]

Although the textual and artifactual materials are compelling in suggesting that this women's drumming and singing (and dancing) musical tradition originated in ancient Syro-Palestine, the evidence is not entirely conclusive. The flourishing of votive terracottas in Cypro-Archaic art, in which female hand-drummers are a popular subject, may indicate a separate, indigenous Cypriot folk music tradition of women performers. In such a scenario, the Phoenician influence would have brought technological and stylistic innovations that capitalized on already existing cultural forms.

The difficulty in proving place of origin, course of development, and direction of dissemination should not detract from the fact that these artifacts and texts together can provide other kinds of information about ancient society. There can be no doubt that a distinctive women's performance tradition existed in the East Mediterranean in antiquity. Indeed, such a musical tradition associated with women was evidently widespread throughout the ancient Near East and persists in the Semitic world until this very day.[31] For ancient Israel, because of the survival of several biblical references to distinctive women's musical groups, something of the nature of that performance, and its meaning for the community and for women's lives, can be ascertained. In so doing, something of the nature and authenticity of Miriam's leadership can be suggested.

Women's Performance

Artifacts and texts together establish the existence of a women's performance genre of drum-dance-song. In addition, the texts that refer to this genre contain information that allows for an understanding of its context and thus of the social dynamics

30. Sachs, *History of Musical Instruments*, p. 97; P. Gradenwitz, *The Music of Israel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949), p. 40.

31. Cf. R. Lachemann, *Jewish Cantillation and Song in the Island of Djerba* (Jerusalem, 1940).

involved. Implicit in the biblical passages mentioning women drummers, dancers, and singers are two salient features of the performance act. First, the Israelites expected that, following a military victory, the returning forces would be met by women who had the musical skills to regale them in a specific way. Second, the biblical texts present the ensuing performance as taking place in a public context, before the leaders of Israel—Moses, Jephthah, Saul—and probably some of the returning warriors ready for joyous celebration. Each of these facts about the performance context can tell us something about women's lives and Miriam's role when considered in light of recent trends in folklore research and in musicology.

Western values have tended to consider women's expressive forms non-legitimate, or at least less important than men's forms. The aesthetic productions in both art and music that have been formally and publically valued have been virtually all the works of men; it has been exceedingly difficult for women to achieve public recognition for expressive skills.[32] Thus the investigation of art forms in pre-modern, pre-industrial societies, whether in the west or elsewhere, had all but ignored women's expressive forms. Being less visible, and being considered less legitimate, women's artistic endeavors were accorded scant attention.

However, the emergence in recent decades of scholarship with feminist concerns—that is, research that recognizes the existence and validity of women's experience and investigates aspects of gender cross-culturally and historically—is beginning to provide insights into women's performance that had never before been available.[33] Studies of women and music in various cultures are still not plentiful, but some pioneering efforts[34] have appeared. It is clear that women's performance needs to be examined as such.[35]

32. M. Weigle, 'Women as Verbal Artists: Reclaiming the Daughters of Enheduanna', *Frontiers* 3 (1978), p. 2.

33. C. Robertson, 'Power and Gender in the Musical Experiences of Women', in E. Koskoff (ed.), *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), p. 227.

34. Koskoff, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective.*

35. R.A. Jordan and S.J. Kalcik, 'Introduction', in R.A. Jordan and

At the same time, the character of ethnomusicology (the systematic study of the total music of the world) has changed from that of a largely descriptive enterprise to one that also examines music as an expression of social values. It is now recognized that music and society are cultural phenomena that are complementary and interdependent, so that investigating musical forms—and especially women's performance genres—should not be distinct from analyzing social structures and values.[36]

These two developments in the academy have led to the recognition that the expressive spheres of women and men are distinct though not necessarily separate or self-contained. Rather, they are two different and equally legitimate halves of music culture.[37] Feminist ethnomusicology, as it moves beyond the purely descriptive, thus investigates the relationship between music behavior and gender behavior. The nature of a society's gender structure impacts upon women's expressive forms, and those forms in turn reflect and symbolize gender structures.[38] That is, a feminist ethnomusicological perspective addresses the question of relationships between music, gender, and social roles and status.

The two features of Israelite female performance mentioned above can now be considered in light of this analytical perspective. The fact that returning warriors and/or leaders expected the drum–dance–song welcome has as its concomitant that groups of women performers had to be prepared to respond. Preparedness demands a level of competence that could be achieved only if the women met (sporadically or regularly) to compose and rehearse, even if such preparations were flexible enough to accommodate the element of spontaneity involved in the celebratory response to a particular Israelite victory. In short, the evidence for female percussionists is also testimony to

S.J. Kalcik (eds.), *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture* (Publication of the American Folklore Society New Series, 8; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. ix-xiv.

36. C. Seeger, *Studies in Musicology 1935–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 51, 182.

37. E. Koskoff, 'An Introduction to Women, Music, and Culture', in Koskoff (ed.), *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, p. 1.

38. Koskoff, 'Women, Music, and Culture', pp. 2-4.

the fact that at least some women had regular contact with their female peers. The Bible provides no direct information about women's groups; but the texts describing female performers provides indirect evidence that such groups existed.

Who these women were or whether or not their age or marital status affected their ability to be part of a performance group cannot be ascertained. Yet, the drum–dance–song genre, like the equally significant lament genre associated prominently if not exclusively with women, bespeaks the existence of women's groups. Anthropological research provides significant information about such groups. Women with no access to female groups often enjoy a status little better than servitude, with their lives circumscribed by the parameters set by male authorities. But women who do have social ties with other women—who work with them in groups—have much greater possibilities for enhanced status.[39]

Those possibilities can be realized especially if the womens' groups transcend household or domestic life and operate in the public sphere, which clearly was the case for the drum–dance–song genre of ancient Israel. The opportunity for the elevation of female status also occurs in women's groups in terms of the internal dynamics of such groups, which typically have their own structures, values and hierarchies, thus affording prestige to the participants in relationship to their competence and accomplishments within the group itself as well as in public activity. If Miriam in fact was a dominant figure in such a group, her leadership abilities would easily have transcended the female context and exerted themselves in other community settings.

In general, when women group together for whatever purpose, and if they are recognized in this activity—as were the women performers in ancient Israel—the status of women within the society tends to be relatively high.[40] Despite general male domination, at least in public matters, women participating in gender-specific groups are able to exercise control of themselves and their worlds and thus enjoy a sense of power

39. M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Women Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 36-37.

40. P.R. Sanday, 'Female Statue in the Public Domain', in Rosaldo and Lamphere, *Women Culture and Society*, pp. 192-93.

rather than powerlessness.[41] That power may not translate into all social relations, but it is nonetheless real and contributes both to the richness of the cultural expression of the group—performers in this case—and to the sense of worth of the members of that group.

Recognizing the interlocking nature of music, gender, and power can also be the key to understanding other implications of the public context of the drum–dance–song performance genre. Current concepts of performance involve consideration of performance as a two-part entity: it involves an artistic action—the creating or doing of an aesthetic production; and it also involves an artistic event, that is, a complex of performance context comprising performer(s), expressive genre, setting, and audience.[42] The audience, no less than the performers, is critical for evaluating the meaning of the expressive act; for performance is in fact a mode of communication as well as an activated instance of an expressive form.

The notion of performance as communication involves an acknowledgment by the audience of skill and competence on the part of those who are performing. The leaders and/or members of the community of ancient Israel who expected female ensembles to validate their victories in an artistic form and who watched their performance were thereby acknowledging the expertise of the women as well as their essential part in concluding the series of events that constituted victorious warfare. The women performers would thus have been accorded a high measure of status; for performance has the capacity, at least for the moment of the communicative and professional activity, as well as in the anticipation of the event, to transform social structure.[43]

Women performers could exert this kind of control vis-à-vis the audience not only because of the social function of the performance situation but also by virtue of the intrinsic appeal of expressive events. Successful performance enhances the sense of connection between the audience and the performer, since the

41. Jordan and Kalcik, 'Introduction', p. xii.

42. R. Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1977), p. 4; Weigle, 'Women as Verbal Artists', p. 5.

43. Bauman, *Verbal Art*, pp. 4, 16.

expressive act arouses the attention and thus the energy of those who witness it. Because this interraction derives from a communicative flow from performers to audience, a measure of control over the audience, and concomitant prestige, is experienced by the performers. That is, performance entails a general rhetorical power, as ethnomusicologists have demonstrated.[44]

Miriam and the other female musicians of the Israelite drum–dance–song genre thus would have experienced a significant measure of both control and prestige, of an indeterminate duration, insofar as performance has the possibility to subvert existing hierarchies. Their public moments of power can only have enhanced or intensified the value already accorded to their expressive acts through the interaction of the women with each other within their specialized music groups, however informal such groups may have been.

How often these public moments occurred cannot be estimated. The biblical passages describing them cluster in texts dealing with the premonarchic period, a time when women had considerable social power.[45] However, the absence of references coming from later periods need not be taken as an indication of the disappearance of women's performance groups during the monarchy but rather perhaps only of the increasing androcentrism of the biblical writers. And even if the non-regular performances of drum–dance–song ensembles did diminish over time, there is evidence of other women's performance groups, such as the women keeners mentioned above and also the groups of women temple singers (Ezra 2.41; Neh. 7.44; cf. 1 Chron. 25.5) in the late biblical period.

However, to consider again the archaeological data, the Iron Age date of the terracottas of women drummers points to a tradition of women's performance, with the drum as a major component, that continued throughout the monarchic period and beyond. Indeed, in a musical tradition such as that of

44. E.g. R.D. Abrahams, 'Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore', *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (1968), pp. 143-48; cf. T.B. Joseph, 'Poetry as a Strategy of Power: The Case of Riffian Berber Women', *SIGNS* 5 (1980), pp. 418-34.

45. C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 173-81.

biblical Israel and of the ancient Near East, in which music was rhythmical rather than melodious or harmonious,[46] the drum provided the rhythm and so was the most important musical instrument. Women as drummers thus played a central role in Israelite musical tradition and probably throughout the East Mediterranean. Evidence in artifacts and in texts of women in association with membranophones spans the biblical period. It reveals the prominence of women in performance and thus of on-going opportunities for female prestige and power.

The role of women as drummers and performers/composers thus gains visibility through the archaeological witness. The few places in which the biblical silence about women's activities and leadership is broken perhaps can thereby be seen as indicative of a much more extensive and important realm of female activity than would otherwise be acknowledged. Miriam as musician is not an aberration but rather the visible—and audible—representative of her many invisible—and inaudible—sisters. The drum–dance–song tradition of Hebraic and east Mediterranean performance provides the context of and dynamic for Miriam's leadership at the period of Israelite beginnings.

46. S.B. Finesinger, 'Musical Instruments in the Old Testament', *HUCA* 3 (1926), p. 23; E. Werner 1968??: 466.

DID MIRIAM TALK TOO MUCH?*

Naomi Graetz

At the beginning of Numbers 12 we read: 'Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married' (Num. 12.1). The rabbis wonder why the Hebrew word used for 'spoke', *watt^{e}dabbēr*, is in the singular form, rather than *wayy^{e}dabb^{e}rû*, in the plural form, since the text says that Miriam *and* Aaron spoke. They also ask why Miriam, a woman, precedes Aaron, since 'ladies first' was not a principle in ancient times. The chapter is problematic, and many questions can be raised upon studying it. First let us consider it:

1. When they were in Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married:
2. 'He married a Cushite woman!'
3. They said, 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?' The Lord heard it.
4. Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth.
5. Suddenly the Lord called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, 'Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting'. So the three of them went out.
6. The Lord came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, 'Aaron and Miriam!' The two of them came forward;
7. And he said, 'Hear these My words: When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream.

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7. Not so with my servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household.
8. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!'
9. Still incensed with them, the Lord departed.
10. As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales [leprosy].
11. And Aaron said to Moses, 'O my lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly.
12. Let her [Miriam] not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away'.
13. So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'O God, pray heal her!'
14. But the Lord said to Moses, 'If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted'.
15. So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.
16. After that the people set out from Hazeroth and encamped in the wilderness of Paran.[1]

Some of the questions that arise about this text are the following:

1. Who was this Cushite woman to whom Miriam and Aaron referred?
2. Why was Moses silent when accused by Miriam and Aaron?
3. Why did God have to defend Moses' honor in such a drastic way?
4. Why was only Miriam punished and not Aaron?
5. Why 'leprosy'?
6. Does the Bible downplay Miriam's importance to keep the focus on her brother, Moses?
7. Finally, did Miriam and Aaron pose a real threat to Moses?

I suggest that Miriam was punished with leprosy because women in the biblical world were not supposed to be leaders of men, and that women with initiative were reproved when they

1. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

asserted themselves with the only weapon they had, their power of language: a power which could be used viciously and was, therefore, called *lāšôn hārā'*, literally, the evil tongue.

Miriam is recalled in Deuteronomy where it is stated: 'Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way as you came forth out of Egypt' (Deut. 24.9). She is 'a marked woman, a warning for generations to come', a woman so important 'that detractors tabooed her to death, seeking to bury her forever in disgrace'.[2] Yet she is also a woman whom the rabbis chose to see as a positive role model: an advocate of the biblical command to mankind to 'be fruitful and multiply', specifically, in criticizing Moses for not having sexual relations with his wife, and in encouraging the Israelite males to marry while in Egypt despite Pharaoh's decrees against Jewish male babies.

Examples of Praise

First, let us look at the many examples of the Miriam whom the rabbis admire. One instance is their explication of Num. 12.14-15, where it is written clearly that it was *the people* who did not journey until Miriam was returned to them. The rabbis, however, say it was the Lord who waited for her. Not only that, but the 'Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I am a priest, I shut her up and I shall declare her clean" (*Deut. R.* 6.9)'. If God, portrayed as a concerned doctor, intervenes in Miriam's case and personally treats her illness, surely it follows that Miriam was someone to be reckoned with.

There are many midrashim that have to do with Miriam's 'well', which is said to have been one of the ten things created during the twilight before the first Sabbath of the creation (*b. Pes.* 54a). One of the few songs of the Bible, an obscure fragment of an ancient poem, is read by many rabbis as referring to this well:

> Spring up, O well—sing to it—
> The well which the chieftains dug,
> Which the nobles of the people started
> With maces, with their own staffs (Num. 21.17-19).

2. A. Trible, 'Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows', p. 179.

Since the verse that comes after Miriam's reported death (Num. 20.1) is followed by a statement that there was no water for the congregation (20.2), the rabbis write that Miriam's gift to us after her death was *her* song, which could cause the waters of her well to flow. The proviso was that the right person had to know how to address the well to get it to give water. Moses, who knew only how to hit the rock, was not that person; clearly a woman's touch was needed. The rabbis actually located her well in Tiberias, opposite the middle gate of an ancient synagogue that lepers go to in order to be cured (*Deut. R.* 6.11).

Miriam is called a prophet in Exodus 15. Though the Bible does not relate any examples of her prophecies, the rabbis interpret the passage 'And his sister stood afar off' (Exod. 2.4), to mean that she stood afar 'to know what would be the outcome of her prophecy', because she had told her parents that her 'mother was destined to give birth to a son who will save Israel'. That prophecy, they say, is the meaning of: 'And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel' (Exod. 15.20).[3]

A fifth midrash concerns the virtuous midwives who saved the Israelite babies from the wicked Pharaoh. The rabbis decided that the Hebrew Midwives, Shifrah and Puah, were none other than Yocheved and the very capable five year old Miriam. In this guise she performed pleasing (*šaprâh*) acts to God and lifted (*hôpi'â*, from *pû'â*) her face against Pharaoh, whereupon Pharaoh became so angry that he sought to slay her. In this same midrash her father, Amram, is shown as a coward who stopped having intercourse with his wife, and even divorced her because of Pharaoh's decree to kill the baby boys who were born to the Israelites. In this story, Miriam pointed out to him that 'your decree is more severe than that of Pharaoh; for Pharaoh decreed only concerning the male children, and you decree upon males and females alike'. As a result, Amram took his wife back, and his example was followed by all the Israelites (*Lev. R.* 17.3). In this midrash, Miriam is praised for outsmarting her father, and for encouraging the people to be fruitful and multiply so that they will survive.

To the rabbis, Miriam is a perfect role model, except for one

3. *Deut. R.* 6.14.

thing; she is not married and does not have any children. So, to fix that, the midrash explains that the meaning of the passage, 'And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He built them houses' (Exod. 1.21), is that 'they were founders of a royal family'. They show that Miriam founded a royal family, with David descending from her. The genealogy is a bit complex but, essentially, Miriam marries Caleb, who begets Hur, who has Uri who begets Bezalel, leading ultimately to King David (*b. Soṭ.* 12a and *Exod. R.* 1.17).

Many problems are solved by this marriage: Amram's line is continued; Caleb, the faithful spy, is rewarded; and Moses' children (sons of a black woman) are written out of Jewish history. But, most important, Miriam is not an anomalous, unmarried spinster anymore; rather, she is a happily married mother and wife whose offspring bring fame and glory to her. Were it not for the incident when Miriam asserts herself and attacks Moses (God's choice), Miriam would be one of the few women in the Bible about whom the rabbis have nothing bad to say (*b. Ber.* 19a). That this is not the case, we see in the examples of castigation concerning her punishment by 'leprosy'.

Examples of Castigation

In Numbers 12, it is not clear who is the Cushite woman, and whether Miriam's case against Moses is just or not. Both she and Aaron claim that God speaks through them as well as through Moses. They both speak up against God's chosen leader. Yet, the popular interpretation is that Miriam was behind it. God, the father figure, reprimands them both, but punishes only Miriam with a skin disease. The fact that Miriam is punished and Aaron is untouched is a discriminatory decision against her, and has the effect of ending Miriam's 'legitimate public aspirations'.[4]

To see this we must look at the story's textual context, which deals with the people's discontent and their questions concerning authority. We see this in the texts both before and after ch. 12. Chapter 11 depicts the people's popular rebellion based

4. E.R. Zweiback Levenson, 'Sexegesis: Miriam in the Desert', *Tikkun* 4/1 (1989), p. 96.

on general dissatisfaction and, in particular, over the boring daily menu of manna. Moses has trouble handling the people and, right after this episode, God tells Moses to share the burden of his leadership with the seventy elders. During this period, when God's spirit has descended on the elders, Eldad and Medad also experience God's spirit and, unlike Aaron's sons (Nadab and Abihu, who were punished with death on a similar occasion), these latter-day prophets (possibly Moses' half-brothers according to one midrash)[5] are rewarded with Moses' protection and the famous statement, 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!'

In ch. 13, we read the story of the twelve spies or scouts who go out on a reconnaisance mission to study the Land of Canaan, ten of whom come back with slanderous comments about the Land. The midrash connects the two texts (chs. 12 and 13) in its exposition of the passage, 'Send thou men, that they may spy out' (Num. 13.2).

> First we read, 'And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses' (12.1) and after that, 'Send thou men'. What reason had Scripture for saying, after the incident of Miriam, 'Send thou men?' The fact is that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that the spies would utter a slander about the Land. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'They shall not say, "We did not know the penalty for slander"'. The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore placed this section next to the other—for Miriam had spoken against her brother and had been smitten with leprosy—in order that all might know the penalty for slander, and that if people were tempted to speak slander they might reflect on what had happened to Miriam. Nevertheless the spies did not want to learn (*Num. R.* 16.6-7).

It is actually possible to connect the three texts (on Miriam, Eldad, and the spies), since anyone who speaks badly of God or his chosen is guilty of slander. According to the midrash (*Sifre Zuta* 12.1), it is through casual gossip that Miriam finds out from Zipporah, Moses' wife, about the high price (Moses' failure to engage in marital relations) of being married to a public figure and, thus, there is a connection between slander and rebellion. At any rate, there are clearly others besides Miriam who

5. D. Steinmetz, 'A Portrait of Miriam in Rabbinic Midrash', *Prooftexts* 8 (1988), pp. 35-65. Eldad and Medad prophesy in the camp in contrast to Moses, who prophesies in the Tent of Meeting.

prophesy together with Moses, or criticize him. Some of them are not punished but praised (like Eldad and Medad), while others, like the spies, are punished in that none of them (except for Caleb and Joshua) gets to the Promised Land. But this still does not explain why Miriam, and not Aaron, comes in for most of the criticism.

Let us recall the midrash where Miriam's father, Amram, is portrayed as a coward who stopped having intercourse with his wife, and divorced her after Pharaoh's decree to kill all the baby boys born to the Israelites. As a result of Miriam's advice, Amram took his wife back, and his example was followed by all the Israelites (*Exod. R.* 1.13). In this midrash, Miriam was praised for her assertiveness. Yet, in a midrash that has the same theme, and starts by portraying Miriam 'as one who is concerned about the observance of the commandments and Jewish survival...',[6] Miriam is punished for the same act of assertiveness. In this midrash, Zipporah complains to Miriam that, since her husband Moses was chosen by God, he no longer sleeps with her. Miriam consults with her brother, Aaron, and it turns out that although they, too, have received Divine revelations, they—unlike Moses—did not separate themselves from their mates. Furthermore, they claim that Moses abstains to show that he is better than they are and, in Miriam's view, Moses, rather than serving as a 'model of the observance of the commandment concerning procreation',[7] abstains from conjugal joys out of pride.

Why did the rabbis go along with Miriam in the case of Amram her father, yet punish her here? The rabbis themselves ask this question. The answer has to do with R. Judah b. Levi's saying:

> Anyone who is so arrogant as to speak against one greater than himself causes the plagues to attack him. And if you do not believe this, look to the pious Miriam as a warning to all slanderers (*Deut. R.* 6.9).

In other words, one can stand for procreation as long as one does not attack the leader for not procreating! The leader is

6. N.J. Cohen, 'Miriam's Song: A Modern Midrashic Reading', *Judaism* 33 (1984), p. 185.

7. Levenson, 'Sexegesis', p. 96.

different; there are other criteria by which he is to be judged. Devorah Steinmetz,[8] in an important article, argues that the rabbis excused Moses from the commandment of 'be fruitful and multiply', and agreed that it was correct for him to dedicate himself totally to God; and that to be an effective leader he had to separate himself from the people.

That is not Miriam's and Aaron's concept of what leadership should be, and, if one reads the Bible carefully, there are enough hints that Moses' distancing himself from the people may ultimately have been the cause of his downfall. However, the rabbis do accept the justice of punishment by leprosy, for that is what is ordained for those who speak ill of their neighbors. Presumably it would have been proper, or less objectionable, if Miriam had spoken about her concerns to Moses directly, rather than about him, behind his back.

According to the rabbis, Aaron became leprous as well, but only for a moment, because his sin was not as great. Why was Aaron's sin not considered as great a sin as Miriam's? Because Miriam was behind it all. On *that* the rabbis all seem to agree.[9] The rabbis explicate the passage, 'Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses...' in such a way that Aaron is a passive accessory rather than an active co-agent. They reason that malicious gossip is to be associated with women, who have nothing better to do with their time, as we see in a very revealing midrash:

> R. Isaac said: It is like the snake that bites everyone who passes by and it is surprising that anyone is willing to associate with it. So Moses said: 'Miriam spoke slander against me, that I can understand since women as a rule are talkative...(*Deut. R.* 6.11).

Another example of this bias against women is the saying of R. Levi:

> Women possess the four following characteristics: they are greedy, inquisitive, envious and indolent... The rabbis add two

8. Steinmetz, 'A Portrait of Miriam'.

9. This may remind the reader of the 'temptation' of Adam by Eve. Aaron, like his 'brother' Adam, seems unable to say no. This is borne out by the text, since Aaron was the one who was 'dragged' into the episode of the Golden Calf. In all fairness to the rabbis, Miriam is depicted in some midrashim as refusing to give over the gold jewelry to Aaron, saving it for the creation of the Mishkan.

> more characteristics; they are querulous and gossips. Whence do we know that they are gossips? For it is written, 'And Miriam spoke' (*Deut. R.* 6.11).

The usual punishment associated with slander is leprosy because leprosy is also associated with quarantine, and lepers must be removed from the camp or city. One is in isolation—husband from wife, child from parent, friends from each other. This is also the effects of *lāšôn hārā'*, the evil tongue, which cause separation. *Lāšôn hārā'*, done often in secrecy, has the effect of isolating the victim from the rest of society, often without her or him even knowing why.

This sin was so egregious that the rabbis inserted two prayers about it into the daily silent recitation; one, at the conclusion ('Keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile') and one, a curse ('There shall be no hope for those who slander'). The rabbis think of slander as worse than rape, and equivalent to murder: the rapist must pay 50 *sela'* to the victim, whereas whoever slanders must pay 100 *sela'* to the slandered person (*m. 'Arak.* 3.5).

One might think that here is a case of over-reaction: surely the punishment for slander is not to be more severe than for rape. However, in the eyes of the rabbis, since the rapist also has to marry the victim and cannot ever divorce her, there is some kind of closure, whereas one never knows what the ripple effects of slander may be. The rabbis recognized the power of the spoken word to build or ruin human relationships, and considered the tongue the 'elixir of life' (*Lev. R.* 16.2) and the primary source of good and evil (*Lev. R.* 33.1).

The rabbis tell us that the blame for *lāšôn hārā'* falls equally on those making their decisions on the basis of what they hear. And *lāšôn hārā'* is prohibited even when the remarks are true (Lev. 19.16). It is written about those who utter slander: 'They begin by speaking well of one and conclude by speaking ill' (*Num. R.* 16.17).

The effects of slander (or what we might want to call, today, character assassination) are deadly. They are like that of the 'serpent who bites into one limb and whose poison travels to all the limbs. *Lāšôn hārā'* slays teller, listener and subject' (*Lev. R.* 26.2).

Character assassination of leaders or of God's chosen is, therefore, surely very serious—just how serious can be seen in this final midrash, based on the passage, 'Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt' (Qoh. 5.5).

> R. Manni interpreted the verse as alluding to Miriam... Miriam spoke slander with her mouth, but all her limbs were punished. R. Joshua learnt: A word for a sela, but silence for two selas. Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi said: Best of all is silence; as we have learnt in the Ethics of the Fathers: All my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence (*Qoh. R.* 5.1).

Perhaps here lies the clue. Silence is a virtue; yet to women is attributed the gift of speech. It is said that of the ten measures of conversation that were given to the world, nine were given to women (*b. Kid.* 49b).[10] If silence is the supreme virtue, surely the nine measures of conversation are a dubious gift at best!

The punishment for *lāšôn hārā'* ('evil tongue') does not distinguish between men and women. However, the rabbis stack the decks against women. They predict that 90 per cent of the time women will be doing the talking. This, then, leads the rabbis to expect the worst from women—even to assuming that when the Bible says that Miriam and Aaron spoke, it was principally Miriam who was at fault. Thus women's talk was viewed at best as worthless, at worst as dangerous. If women are naturally talkative, then silence, by contrast, will naturally be considered golden.

The rabbis glorified Miriam when she asserted herself to defend the values of nurturance and motherhood, but disparaged her when she stepped out of line and spoke up to challenge Moses' authority.

Are rabbinic attitudes different today? Let us examine a fairly modern interpretation of the text, which glosses over the inequity of Miriam's punishment by minimizing it. Rabbi Gunter Plaut,[11] in his commentary on the Torah, writes that it was Aaron who was more severely disciplined than Miriam. Though,

10. The context in the Talmud makes clear that this is a negative association.

11. G. Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981).

to the ordinary reader of text, this goes against the grain of the *peshat* (the self-evident meaning), Plaut points out that Miriam is only punished corporeally, whereas Aaron is punished mentally, a suffering that is more intense. How so?

1. First, because Aaron suffers guilt when he sees Miriam disfigured hideously, while he is let off free. Plaut writes: 'The hurt of seeing a dear one suffer is often far greater than one's own physical agony'.[12]
2. Secondly, because Aaron has to humiliate himself before his younger brother by begging Moses' forgiveness, and by asking him to intercede with God on Miriam's behalf.

Plaut asserts that Miriam's pain is short-lived and, like most physical ailments, quickly forgotten once she is healed, whereas Aaron's punishment probably leaves deep scars. He agrees that Miriam's leprosy is a warning to the people that slander and rebellion are evil, but argues that the sight of Aaron, the High Priest, bowing down before Moses and begging his pardon is a warning that was equally potent and 'surely more memorable'.[13]

I am not arguing that Plaut's reading is wrong or even narrow-minded, but I hope it is clear that in emphasizing Aaron's pain it is minimizing Miriam's. Like all the jokes about the poor expectant father in the hospital waiting-room, who suffers so from the traumatic experience while his wife is calmly going through the process of childbirth, Plaut's reading takes the limelight away from Miriam.

This type of modern interpretation assaults our sense of the meaning of the text by smoothing over the injustice inherent in the original story to make an apologetic statement. Can men and women who experience a conflict with those who continue to interpret the biblical text in such a biased manner do anything about it? I think, yes! We can insist that the partnership model be considered as the traditional Jewish midrashic approach to text. Its starting point is that the Bible is a 'sacred' text, but there is no monopoly on its interpretation. New insights are welcome, and the more diverse they are, the more enrichment

12. Plaut, *The Torah*, p. 1101.
13. Plaut, *The Torah*, p. 1102.

and understanding of God's purpose.

We must start imaginatively to re-engage with our sacred texts by writing midrash.[14] Only in that way can *all* voices, not only a few, be part of the partnership. Then, we hope, different views will be voiced and will not be dismissed as just gossip or as *lāšôn hārā'* but welcomed as the 'beginning of moral inquiry... [and] self understanding'.[15]

14. See my collection of midrashim, *Male and Female S/He Created Them* (Proffesional Press, 1993), available from the author.

15. P. Rose, *Parallel Lives* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 9.

WITH A SONG IN HER HEART: LISTENING TO SCHOLARS LISTENING FOR MIRIAM

Alice Bach

Three of the articles about Miriam in this collection are concerned with establishing the relation of her song to the song attributed to her brother Moses (Exod. 15.1-18). Is Miriam's song (Exod. 15.19-21) a female echo to the song of Moses?[1] Or is Miriam's finale, as Trible argues, all that remains of her story after the patriarchal redactors have inserted their man Moses into the text? Janzen also wants to find a priority of the Miriamic version, but argues differently from Trible to reach a similar conclusion. Beginning with the assumption that the Song of Moses is 'an elaborate answer to the Song of Miriam and the women', van Dijk-Hemmes reviews much of the literature in which Miriam's song is understood to be the initial version. These articles are attuned to the best historical and redactional theories associated with contemporary biblical scholarship and engage the gendered concerns of their authors. All three scholars have the same agenda: 'to seek Miriam buried under the work of patriarchal storytellers'.[2] Trible similarly refers to Miriam's fragmented story as 'buried within Scripture', and understands her own task to be 'unearthing the fragments, assembling them, pondering the gaps and constructing a text'. The figure of the narrator/redactor as constructed by these

1. A. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Biblical Seminar, 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), p. 52.

2. J.G. Janzen, 'Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?', in this volume, p. 197.

biblical scholars holds all the cards. The implicit assumption that redactors in their eagerness to suppress the story of Miriam carelessly overlooked a few signs of the powerful female prophet presents difficulties for me.

To focus the concern on the priority of Miriam's narrative reflects the contemporary interpreters' desire to return some importance to the female literary figure. However, by concentrating upon the ancient redactors, whose political and theological programs are well known, one ignores the narrative as it appears in final form. Further, one creates another story, one in which the battle is between a female-authored/performed Song of the Sea and the redactors who have set about to drown it in the shifting undercurrents of patriarchy. This analytic strategy, founded on the binary oppositions so dear to the hearts of structuralist interpreters, is an accepted way to argue for a suppressed story beneath the one that presents ideological difficulties for the reader. As such I do not intend to disable or discredit the scholars who employ such a method. Nor do I imply that my reading should displace the earlier ones upon which mine draws. What I want to suggest is that we cannot simply replace an old authority with a new authority, but that new alignments need to be made across borders, types and scholarly disciplines. Instead of a song that is attributed either to Moses or to Miriam, I hear one that is contrapuntal. Hearing a song of lament in these scholarly arguments, a song that mourns the diminished voice of the female prophet Miriam, I want to understand that melody and how it results in a new song of Miriam. Then, I would like to suggest a hybrid strategy, heterogeneous and unmonolithic, that interweaves the textual analyses of Trible, van Dijk-Hemmes and Janzen, the cultural perspective of Meyers and the midrashic portrait presented by Graetz, togehter with a midrash of my own.

The articles about Miriam in this volume attest to the fact that the story of Exodus 15 has not eradicated Miriam. Clearly Miriam could have disappeared with a stroke of the scribal stylus, but Exodus 15 reflects not annihilation, but an answer to the question of who has won the battle of narrative voice. At least for a time. Clearly the main battle in the Exodus story is a national one, not a gendered one. In my reading, the story in

the first half of the book focuses on the struggle of a subjugated people to overthrow their oppressors; the book of Exodus in its final form reflects the effort of a people to write their own history and establish their identity. The difficulty for contemporary readers, as evidenced by our three textual scholars, is that they are looking for signs of another struggle, the contested and gendered position of the primary leader in the celebration of Israel's victory at the Sea.

Who holds the power to narrate is in my view what is truly at issue in the three articles concerned with the narrative qualities of the biblical text. Since scholarly interpreters have consistently awarded this power within the Exodus text to the figure of the redactor, for the moment I shall center the power to narrate within the redactor. If he holds the power to narrate, he also has the power to block other narratives from forming or emerging. He can erase the memory of versions that have predated his own. To maintain the scholarly position that a suppressed text lies beneath the redacted one requires some skill at re-visioning. And, I would add, a willingness to examine the question of who holds the power in the text. The reader simultaneously must fix one eye on each of these two texts while fighting to keep in view a third narrative, the scholarly reconstruction that will reflect power for its ideological position.

Trible refers to her theological program as 'an enterprise [that] welcomes all lovers of Scripture who seek to redeem life from patriarchal death'.[3] A brief analysis of this description is remarkable for its clues to the interpretation that follows. Lovers of Scripture, I would imagine, are those people who read the Scripture sympathetically, with an eye to preserving it. But is that Trible's enterprise? I think her statement quoted above needs emendation. She is a lover of her *interpretation* of Scripture. What she understands to be the diminution of Miriam in the redacted text has stirred Trible to shine a light on the Scripture, to bring Miriam out of the shadows. The interpreter states that her reading is life-giving; the patriarchal one is death dealing. Perhaps I am begging the question, but Trible's claim

3. P. Trible, 'Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows', in this volume, p. 166.

that her enterprise restores life to Scripture seems too positivistic a statement to leave unexamined. If her reading restores life, then those who prefer the traditional interpretation in which Moses is the leader of the Song have chosen to embrace death. Neither interpretation can make universal claims for the correct meaning of the biblical text. Trible's unexpressed agenda is as clear to me as that of the redactors who consigned women to the dusty creases of the Bible. While Trible's analysis of the biblical discourse presents a stirring picture of the female prophet, it is, in my opinion, a new mosaic of Miriam, not one that was waiting to be uncovered. Although arguing from the settled position of 'us' reading 'them', Trible's provocative reading can be seen as more fluid than its overt intention. Resisting Trible's fixed position of reading, another interpreter can use Trible's literary mosaic of Miriam as a midrashic compilation, understanding that it is as ignited by ideological considerations as any rabbinic midrash.

Van Dijk-Hemmes negotiates between the shoals of Trible and Janzen, turning their questions of priority and dependence into a statement about the authenticity of the Sea narrative. After presenting M. Brenner's argument that Miriam's song is actually a Levitical composition of the Second Temple Period that reflects an earlier tradition, rather than the early composition desired by Trible and Janzen, van Dijk-Hemmes concludes from a reading of the Sea narrative that Miriam is the founder of a women's literary song tradition. I would agree with van Dijk-Hemmes's suggestion that these various textual considerations of Exodus 15 are 'based upon an inadequate reading convention'.[4] It seems to me that the inclusion of Meyers's and Graetz's articles in this collection points toward a possible interpretative strategy that challenges the convention of reading through one method or discipline. Borrowing from Bal's idea of reading through transdisciplinary codes, demonstrated in *Murder and Difference*,[5] allows new alignments that avoid reading from univocal perspectives.

4. F. Van Dijk-Hemmes, 'Some Recent Views on the Presentation of the Song of Miriam', in this volume, p. 206.

5. M. Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (trans. M. Gumpert; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

Accepting that Miriam is at the very least within the tradition of women producing celebratory ritual songs brings us to questions about the position of female musicians during the early Iron Age in Israel. Such questions are examined by Carol Meyers in her article 'Miriam the Musician'. Working from a feminist perspective Meyers combines archaeologic, ethnomusicologic and anthropologic insights to view the gendered roles related not only to the musicians but also to the instruments they play. Meyers's article is a splendid example of the benefit of moving outside the borders of biblical studies, refusing the structures of time and location, to enrich one's cultural perspective. One of her conclusions is that there existed during the early Iron Age a women's performance genre of drum–dance–song within a variety of Near Eastern and Mediterranean locations. Most noteworthy for me is Meyers's application of Rosaldo's research on the status of women within groups, suggesting that the women of Israel singing at the Sea, under the leadership of Miriam, would have been connected as a community of female performers, and as such accorded a high measure of status.

The image of women being connected in musical communities allows room for a midrashic method of reading, a sort of literary nomadism that wanders outside the borders of nation and time and imagines Miriam and the female drum–dance–singers of Israel dreaming of their own liberation while performing for the people of Israel at their defining moment at the Sea. If one looks at the musical artifacts described in Exod. 15.20 as part of a gender code, the song that Miriam sings can be understood as a triumphant voice celebrating female emancipation.

Following Meyers's adaptation of anthropologic methods to biblical concerns, let us try on briefly the ethnographic strategy of what James Clifford and George Marcus have termed *writing culture*. In the text of Exodus 15 the elements of warfare—the horses, the riders, their armor and their shields, the chariots—point toward a male culture. If as Meyers argues, there were communities of female performers, might they not have been rejoicing in the destruction of the dominant male culture, exemplified by and encoded within the language of warfare?

A classical echo of a lyric that appeals to the elements of women's culture over militaristic ideals is attributed to Sappho:

> Some say the cavalry corps
> some infantry, some again
> will maintain that the swift oars
> of our fleet are the finest
> sight on dark earth; but I say
> that whatever one loves, is.[6]

There is general agreement among contemporary classical scholars that Sappho was a choral personality, a leader of a community of women that excluded men from its number and performed music together on the island of Lesbos in the seventh century. There is not agreement on the nature of this ancient community, whether it was a *paideia*, a community in which young women were educated, or a *thiasos*, a community of a cultic nature, most probably connected to the cult of Aphrodite.[7] According to Bowra, the members of Sappho's *thiasos*

> were bound to each other and to their leader by ties of great strength and intimacy, and Maximus of Tyre was not far wrong when he compared the relations between Sappho and her pupils with those between Socrates and his disciples. But while Socrates held his young men together by his personal influence and the glamour he gave to the quest for truth, Sappho was bound to her maidens by ties which were at least half religious.[8]

Positing the existence of the classical *thiasos* parallels Meyers's idea of the powerful connections among women drum–dance–singers of ancient Israel, celebrating the festival commemorating the Exodus. Bowra argued that the women's *thiasos* associated with the cult of Aphrodite composed the music that was essential to the cultic ceremonies, and 'in song her [Aphrodite's]

6. M. Barnard, *Sappho: A New Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), p. 41.

7. For an argument against the religious nature or cultic association of the women within Sappho's institution, see D.L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955). For an elegant analysis of Sappho's poetry that examines traces of Sappho's consciousness in the face of masculine norms of behavior, see J. Winkler, 'Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics', in *Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 162-87.

8. C.M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 187-88.

devotees were trained by Sappho'.[9] There may have been other *thiasoi*, companies of young women musicians who performed at Mitylene, controlled by female rivals of Sappho, Gorgo and Andromeda. For the purposes of this discussion the distinction between secular and sacred etiology of Sappho's community is not important. The comparison that interests me is between Sapphic communities and the drum–dance musicians of ancien Israel. Both choral groups provide evidence from the ancient Mediterranean world of communities of women performing lyrics of their own composition, lyrics that embed codes of women's culture. Whether the community was cultically based or secularly constructed, 'these compositions presuppose or represent an interaction, offstage, as it were, with a choral aggregate'.[10] The view that women's language slips through the dominant language of the lyric or song, as is so clear in the Sapphic lyric quoted above, is as compelling in my opinion as the view in the articles under consideration which imagine Miriam's song being deflected or silenced by biblical redactors.

Meyers pushes her anthropologic argument further, claiming that a group of female performers could exert a transformative influence over their audience 'not only because of the social function of the performance but also by virtue of the intrinsic appeal of expressive events'.[11] This argument, connected to Meyers's central argument in *Discovering Eve* that women enjoyed considerable status and social power during the premonarchic period, supports the views of Trible and Janzen that once upon a time Miriam was a powerful figure in Israel. Such claims of social power for the women of premonarchic Israel, Miriam among them, seem to me to be overstated on behalf of feminist values. I do not want this statement to be misunderstood. I am not in any way advocating a retreat from feminist analyses or theories. Certainly recent changes in the field of biblical studies have stimulated the kinds of interpretations and research about women in Israel that are found in this volume. Choice of method does in some ways predetermine the range of

9. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, p. 189.

10. G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of the Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 370-71.

11. C. Meyers, 'Miriam the Musician', in this volume, p. 228.

results, as can be seen by the articles that use source theory to unearth a text behind the final one. My own reading reveals my interests in comparing the differences between the literary figures as created by the biblical authors and the world of women, private, away from the gaze of men. From this perspective the fragment of Miriam's song (Exod. 15.19-21) reflects allusions to that private female reality in which women's culture develops.

Ironically the position of women as marginal, the starting point of recent scholarly research, has been relocated as feminist criticism has gained acceptance in academic circles. Whatever one's particular term(s) of definition, it seems indisputable that feminist critics are more central, gaining in power and acceptance. As feminist biblical investigations are discussed and reflected upon, they are becoming normative, as in Janzen's building upon both Trible's and Burns's feminist literary analysis of Exodus 15. What needs to be remembered, I think, is that this change in perspective has more to do with the political location of the interpreters than with uncovering some historic, suppressed truth about ancient Israel woven into the fabric of the biblical narrative. As Emory Elliott has observed, 'the historian is not a truthteller, but a storyteller...and a nation's official history is ultimately no more than a story about which there is widespread agreement'.[12]

Naomi Graetz does not remain within the literary borders of the Bible, but rather she looks at the extended midrashic expansions of the biblical narrative as providing an integral piece of Israel's epic history. Examining various rabbinic midrashim, both ancient and modern, Graetz concludes that contemporary rabbinic midrashim are no more sympathetic to Miriam, or to a woman's perspective, than classical ones. Graetz recognizes the confining nature of reading through the *peshat* of the text, but she does not acknowledge that one person's *peshat* is another's *derash*, that while the authors of rabbinic midrash make claims for providing the plain or self-evident meaning of a text, in actuality all reading is interpretative and reflects the ideology of the reader. She rightly shines a light on the problem of Jewish

12. E. Elliott (ed.), *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 'Introduction', p. xvii.

feminists trapped between the desire to remain within their religious interpretative tradition and the frustration with the rabbinic blindness toward women's concerns. Her conclusion that 'there is no monopoly on interpretations' seems indisputable. But the article itself suffers from a timidity at confronting the rabbinic interpretations as patriarchal products. Even though she does a fine job of pointing out the weaknesses of the rabbinic interpretations for feminist readers, Graetz allows these rabbinic interpretations to dominate the focus of the Miriamic retellings she presents. She is caught in the desire to maintain a unifying vision of a Jewish identity rather than to allow Miriam's song to be heard as one of discord.

In conclusion I would like to accept Graetz's challenge that 'we start imaginatively re-engaging with our sacred texts, by writing midrash'. Midrashic storytelling, revisioning the biblical narrative from one's own perspective, points toward a contrapuntal, nomadic style of reading. Such a reading eludes the borders of accepting reading conventions and certainly makes no claims for historical truth. My midrashic model wanders between dual horizons, synchronically from within various locations within the biblical narrative and midrashically from an interpreter's filling of narrative gaps.

Miriam's Song

The battle had roared around them.

Pressing close to Miriam at the shore of the Sea were the women of Israel. As dawn broke across the seamless sea, they had turned from the signs of death floating toward them. As the tide washed onto the land, shields and broken weapons cluttered the beach. A few young men picked among the tangled metal, shouting with triumph when they found the empty helmet of an Egyptian soldier.

'YHWH has indeed answered our prayers. The Egyptians have sunk like lead into the sea. We have been delivered'. Moses and Aaron had gathered the men to pray on an outcropping of rocks not far from where the women stood together. 'Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods of the heavens?'

'YHWH has brought us a miracle', Zipporah said, and adjusted her veil over her sea-damp hair.

Not a single Israelite had been lost when the walls of water collapsed over the pursuing Egyptian army. Miriam bent to dip her fingers into the pooled water gently lapping at her feet. She let the water fall in rivulets over her upturned soil-smeared face. The rage had gone out of the water. The fear had gone out of the bodies of the men standing at the shoreline. Backs that had been stooped from years of work had become straight with pride. YHWH had indeed performed a miracle. In the name of Israel. The sea had been stopped. In the name of YHWH the sea had been split. Now in the name of the Song the Sea stroked the shore.

Miriam picked up her circular drum and struck it with the flat of her hand. 'The rulers of Canaan shall melt away. Their weapons shall melt with them. YHWH will plant us, his people, on the mountain of God'. Timbrels shook in the hands of the dancing women. Miriam struck the drum with the palm of her right hand. 'Sing to the Lord', she cried. 'YHWH has triumphed gloriously'.

Other women reached for their lyres and drums and began to sing softly. 'We shall sing to the Lord', they repeated, taking comfort in the familiar words, 'YHWH has triumphed gloriously'.

Small children sat on the shore and listened to the songs of their mothers and sisters. It had happened just as Moses had promised them. The Pharaoh had been swallowed by the sea; his angry soldiers would never threaten the Israelites again.

'Will there be a day when we sit and spin our thread in the sunlight without remembering the shields of our enemy, lying useless and unclaimed upon the shore?', a young woman wondered.

Zipporah cradled her lyre. 'The strength of YHWH is more than the strength of chariot and lyre. YHWH will let the earth bring forth plants of all kinds'. She touched the hair of her son sitting nearby. 'Instead of war, we shall have music to fill our days'.

The men raised their arms in honor of YHWH. 'The earth has swallowed our enemies. Even now Moab trembles and the clans

of Edom dread the Lord God of Israel. Glory to YHWH, the great Warrior'.

Miriam shook her head at the women, who let their instruments fall silent. 'Do not become downcast. God will give us wings of doves. We shall fly over the wars of men. We shall fly with the power of YHWH high above this sea of death'.

Believing her words, the music began again.

> Sing to the Lord,
> for YHWH has triumphed gloriously.
> Horses and riders YHWH has cast into the sea.

When the celebrations and prayers had ended, the people began their journey to Canaan. Miriam walked before the people with Moses and Aaron. They talked about living in the sight of YHWH when they got to the land of Canaan. A land of milk and honey. 'Your music shall end our days of work and bring joy to our nights', Moses told her.

But as the months passed, Moses spent more of his time in the company of the elders and Miriam found herself walking behind the men, in her old familiar place with the women, telling stories to the children, wondering when the journey would end. The people began to murmur, to fear that God might drown them in a sea of dusty earth, that their days were no better now than they had been in Egypt.

As they waited for the sign from God that their journey was nearing its end, they scanned the sky for signs from YHWH. The cloudless sky reminded the travelers of their dependence on YHWH, for wisdom, for direction, for the precious water of life. Not the foaming swirls of water YHWH had sent to swallow their enemies, but gentle water, a gift from YHWH to bathe their salt-creased faces and soothe their parched throats.

The women told stories to their children as they bathed their small bodies. 'Feel this cool water, sweet water drawn from the well which follows the people of Israel wherever we go; the well is named for the leader of the Song, for our prophet Miriam'.

Their number was smaller. God had been angered at the greed of the people and had sent a plague to kill the teasing taste of meat within them. From the cloudless sky had rained down

quail to drown the people in their own desires. While the people gathered in small groups, whispering in fear and praying that YHWH would forgive their dreams of meat, Miriam approached her brother Moses. 'We must be strong so that the people can continue the journey. They have lost heart. They have become frightened as they were before God tossed the horse and the chariot into the sea. Even Zipporah has said that the song has dried up in her heart.'

'I cannot care for this people all alone', Moses cried out.

'I can raise my voice to the Lord as well as you. With singing to remind the people that God has sent to the bottom of the sea weapons and oppressions.'

'God will allow us to triumph over all our enemies', Moses reminded her. 'With horse and chariot we shall triumph gloriously. The men of Israel shall return the Philistines into the sea.'

Miriam laughed. 'Has the Lord YHWH indeed spoken only through Moses, my brother?'

Suddenly God appeared in a pillar of cloud. 'I have spoken to Miriam in dreams. But to Moses, and only to Moses, do I speak without words.'

'Praise to YHWH the warrior who wins all our battles', cried Moses, falling on the ground before God.

Miriam spoke no words. Could YHWH allow the sword to silence the timbrel?

Miriam looked back towards camp, where the people waited for her. Enfolded in a disease that could be cured only by the touch of YHWH, she waited. She could hear the women singing, tuneless melodies that reminded her of childhood and the closeness of her mother. Day and night their music wound around her, as though to fill her time of punishment with the power of songs. Wordless the sweet melodies soothed her like the soft breath of women, reminding her of their joy at the Sea. Their dream was fading like the timbrels, now silent.

With tears in her eyes, she sang softly,

> Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed
> A Horse, a rider, He once hurled into the sea.

AN AFTERWORD: THE DECALOGUE—AM I AN ADDRESSEE?

Athalya Brenner

I find it difficult to be subcategorized as a matter of course by *language*. This symbolic male order affects to address me and my ilk as if I were sub-indexed as male. Thus language habitually excludes me. Indeed, as I am informed by Lacanian theory, the symbolic (male, language) order will never be mine by definition. Hebrew has two grammatical genders only: masculine [m] and feminine [f]. To give but one example. I drive a car. In my daily life, I am appealed to as Driver! [m], Stop! [m], Slow down! [m], Wait! [m], and so on. Modern Hebrew usage decrees that whenever a male is anticipated to be part of an audience, be it comprised of a majority of females, the decorous manner of address will use the m. grammatical gender. The alternative option is nowhere taken seriously. And the same applies to biblical Hebrew, of course. Now, this linguistic usage does not turn me into a male [M]; it teaches me, however, that my position as a female [F] is bound up with and reflected by my daily language as well as the language of my literary roots. The difficulties of reconciling myself to this state of affairs are always present. They are especially exacerbated every time I reread the Decalogue.

The so-called Ten Commandments are extant in two versions: one in Exodus 20, the other in Deuteronomy 5. Minor variations are numerous, albeit not too numerous to mask the shared identity of the two passages. Major differences obtain too: for instance, in the case of the motivation supplied for the Sabbath in each version (Exod. 20.8-11; Deut. 5.12-15). But, beyond

those more and less significant disparities, the two lists share an important premise. In both versions of the Ten Commandments the community of my gender and I seem at first glance to be ostensibly subsumed, so in the textual praxis as well as by interpretative andro-consent, under a generic subheading. It is the '[m] you' to which the commanding imperatives, be they formulated in the negative or the positive modes, are addressed. Am I, a female reader, to view myself as unproblematically included in that form of address? Clearly, the text endows me and my like with hardly any measure of subjectivity. The lack of female subjectivity in the text is usually matched by its suppression into a non-problem by lay and scholarly exegesis alike. A notable exception to this state of affairs is David Clines's 'The Ten Commandments: Reading from Left to Right',[1] in which the address of gender issues in the two Decalogues receives a critical treatment alongside the treatment accorded other social, economic, theological and religious issues.

Am I being a little too sensitive, in the spirit of the times? I do not think so. The lack of sensitivity in a document conceived of as exhibiting universal applicability, as Clines says, is surprising—so surprising, in fact, as to undermine the document's validity by self-deconstruction.

Furthermore, I find myself excluded by that document from functioning as a subject in most of the story line (to differentiate from the commandments themselves) too. Prior to the theophany on the holy mountain, a preparatory measure of refraining from coming near a woman for three days is required (Exod. 19.15). Since hetereosexual:ty is the biblical norm, this command presumably concerns persons of my gender as objects. This strongly implies that only males are the subjects of the precaution, the true members of the receiving community. Therefore, *their* own ritual purity is to be effected and protected. They, in fact, are העם, 'The People' cited as receptor of the divine communication. It would thus seem that women are excluded: to include them in the address to the textual '[m] you' by drawing upon linguistic praxis would be misleading and less than naive.

1. Delivered in the Winter Meeting of the British Society for Old Testament Study (January 1993).

What about the contents and formulations of the Commandments themselves? The self-definition, exclusivity, warning against paganism, and proscription against illegitimate pronouncements of God's name, attributed to his own voice (Exod. 20.2-7; Deut. 5.6-11), overtly implicate an all-male audience. Thankfully the likes of me, daughters and female slaves at least, are cited as participants in the Sabbath rest together with other inferiors and dependents (Exod. 20.10; Deut. 5.14). It is gratifying that respect and support are due to mothers (in the second place, after fathers; a bound collocation that hardly raises an eyebrow) as well as fathers, although, once more, the collective addressee enjoined so to act is denoted by linguistic usage to be an m/M [masculine/male] addressee (Exod. 20.12; Deut. 5.16). The prohibition of adultery is m/M oriented (Exod. 20.13; Deut. 5.17), and logic be hanged. And so are the prohibitions concerning killing, theft and perjury. The last Commandment prohibits envy—covetousness of a male's material possessions: *his* house, *his* male and female slaves, *his* domestic animals, *his* whatever (Exod. 20.14; Deut. 5.18). And what about *his* wife? There she is, between 'house' and 'slaves' in Exodus, positioned first as the prize possession in Deuteronomy. Female envy and its possible outcome is not referred to—unless female readers (for there are no female recipients in this text) consent to adopt this prohibition as their own.

The Ten Commandments—as most readers will probably agree—is a manifesto that expresses some of the indispensable religious, moral and social norms required for the survival of human communities.[2] It presents a vision of divinely regulated social order, hence is widely acclaimed as universally valid. But to judge by its language and content, that vision is far from egalitarian: it accepts slavery, perpetuates the otherness of social inferiors (including the otherness of the גֵּר, the 'sojourner' or 'client'), and promotes gender discrimination. A reflection of its time and space, no doubt. Nonetheless, insight into the historical circumstances hardly masks the obvious. This manifesto of

2. I agree with Clines, however, that the social ordering implied by the Decalogue is time-, class- and place-bound. The vested interests that inform some of the edicts, however, do not detract from the potentially wide applicability of most.

religious and social obligations and prohibitions relates to females either as objects in language or/and social inferiors.

Within the tradition of interpretation, women are affected by the Decalogue, in spite of the fact that their participation (as receptors within the story) is non-existent. Interpretation decrees that women are expected to be silently obedient, bound by the Commandments as implicitly subcategorized addressees.

Am I exempt, then, from heeding the Commandments? Not so, I suppose—since it is largely agreed that I am by proxy a subgenre of the m/M 'you', indirectly implicated albeit never explicitly addressed. My protestations that such language does not bind me, that my absence from language constitutes an exemption from transforming reported speech into a reality, are hardly ever taken seriously. At best, feminists are likely to be reprimanded for their uncalled for over-sensitivity.[3]

3. This short piece was originally written at the request of Rabbi Dr Jonathan Magonet, Principle of the Leo Baeck College in London. I am grateful to Dr Magonet for his permission to use it here.

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