

Abram a lesson. Abram's focus on his own interests is, to be sure, eventually rewarded, but it is not depicted without criticism.

Sarai appears in this story as the object of men's manipulations. Her position as victim is thus pictured in a penetrating way. The only verbal form of which she is the subject, 'she was taken away', expresses once more the passivity to which she is condemned. Sarai's view, and her word which reaches up to YHWH, are nonetheless withheld from us. The narrator's imagination fails in this respect. To be able to give voice to the *dh*r of women like Sarai, one has first to gather enough courage for 'hearing them to speech'.

SARAH AND HAGAR: MATRIARCHS AND VISIONARIES*

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Hagar the Egyptian (1990) grew out of my work, *Sarah the Priestess* (1984). As I came to realize, significant aspects of Sarah's life are closely intertwined with that of Hagar, her *šiphâ*; it therefore became apparent that Sarah's story is incomplete without an in-depth look at the role played by Hagar and the consequent relationship that existed between the two women.

In fact, *Sarah the Priestess* is based on the premise that the Genesis narratives describe an early tradition in which the matriarchs struggle to preserve a non-patriarchal social system, diametrically opposed to the patriarchal system they encounter in Canaan. Sarah's story, or the Sarah Tradition, in particular is symbolic of woman's struggle against a male culture that finally prevailed and eventually subordinated women.

That non-patriarchal system, I argued, had its roots in the land from which Sarah came. The Bible describes three generations of biblical matriarchs as 'barren'. Was it merely coincidental that these matriarchs were biologically incapable of conceiving? Two of them, Sarah and Rachel, acquired heirs, surprisingly, in the same manner as that of priestesses in Mesopotamia, their homeland. In fact, as I came to see, the matriarchs in the Genesis narratives—Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel—all acted in a manner recognizable as the established, traditional role of Mesopotamian priestesses.

The barren Sarah's need to acquire an heir/ess by means of

* Reprinted from S.J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Traditions of the Matriarchs* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990): 191-200.

her handmaid, and Hagar's inappropriate reaction, as described in Genesis 16 for example, is reflected in section 146 of the Code of Hammurapi. Significantly, this regulation applies specifically to certain priestesses who abstained from becoming pregnant themselves.

We get a fuller picture of the Sarah Tradition with the accounts of the other matriarchs: Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. The preservation of blood ties was all-important to these women also. Rebekah marries a member of her descent group even though she has to leave her homeland to do so; however, she becomes 'disgusted with [her] life' because her son Esau marries women native to Canaan. She insists that Jacob choose a wife from among her brother's daughters.

On the surface it would seem that blood ties have something to do with inheritance; Sarah banishes Ishmael so that he will not share in the inheritance with her son Isaac. Rebekah's mother and brother are told of Isaac's inheritance at the time of her betrothal. Leah and Rachel help pry away their inheritance from Laban as though this were the main conflict between them and their father. However, when Laban pursues them, he is after the *t'rapim*, the family images; no mention is made of stolen wealth. What inheritance were the matriarchs really concerned with?

Sarah's reason for banishing Ishmael is also unclear. Ishmael had been 'mocking' Isaac. What connection did Ishmael's mocking have with inheritance? Ishmael's mocking action must have had a religious connotation. There would have been no necessity for Sarah to banish Ishmael if her purpose was merely to disinherit him from material wealth. (Esau was easily disinherited). Rather, Sarah did not want Ishmael to influence Isaac culturally, and this is why she banished both the boy and his mother. Sarah was a religious woman and a woman of religion, a priestess. Isaac's religious upbringing must have been Sarah's foremost consideration. I do not believe that Sarah's banishment of Ishmael had anything to do with material wealth; it had to do with religious ethics. The rite of circumcision (an Egyptian but not a Mesopotamian custom) enforced new rules of conduct unacceptable to the priestess.

Rebekah and Rachel were also preoccupied with religious

ethics. Why is Rebekah so intent on having Jacob receive his father's blessing, rather than Esau? She is not prepared to allow Esau to succeed in the descent line. Is Rebekah concerned with material wealth?

At Rebekah's betrothal the inheritance discussed had been Isaac's material wealth; later, her son Jacob assures himself a larger portion of the inheritance, that of the firstborn, which Esau had given him in exchange for a bowl of lentils. Rebekah is not interested in that kind of inheritance for Jacob; she is interested in something else, something the blessing provides or represents; she is still 'disgusted with [her] life' even after Jacob has received the blessing. Now she insists on sending him to her brother's house for a wife. Jacob chooses Rachel, who is also concerned with religious culture. Rachel takes the *t'rapim* when they leave. Her father Laban would not have chased halfway across the country after some statuettes he could have easily replaced; these particular *t'rapim* had some important religious significance, and that is why Rachel took them. So Jacob's choice of a religious woman for a wife followed his mother's ambitions for him. It may have been that without the blessing Jacob would not have been acceptable as the husband of a woman of priestly rank, since it is immediately after the blessing that he is sent to be married. It seems evident that the matriarchs were more involved with the perpetuation of their culture and religion in foreign surroundings than their menfolk were.

Nevertheless, the narratives in Genesis certainly trace the genesis of patriarchal religion and culture. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob do indeed represent the patriarchal tradition incipient among the Hebrews. The extension of that tradition is what our present civilization is all about.

The narratives illustrate the increasing influence patriarchy had on the lives of women over a period of three generations, until the death of Jacob, or approximately three hundred years if recorded lifespans are taken into consideration.

Patriarchy's greatest asset in its effort to disrupt the matrifocal establishment was mobility. A man's option to move from one location to another with his women and children forced the family to be dependent on him. Significantly, the proto-historical portion of the Hebrew Bible commences with

the migration of Terah to Haran. Then, as if to emphasize this crucial event, it is sanctified by El Shaddai, who calls Abram with the momentous words *lek lekā*, 'walk, go forth' from your native land. Abram's calling was twofold: leave your matrifocal home; and go to a new land. Once in the new land the deity makes a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your offspring I give this land'. Although Abram is not a conquering hero, he is the follower of a God who leads him away from the established social setting to a new location which promises possessions and power. It is this same mobility which, generations later, allows Jacob/Israel's sons to spread out and take hold of the land Abram was promised.

Ironically, it was Rebekah's decision to break the rule of matrilocality which sealed the destiny of her gens or descent group. Rebekah left her matrifocal home to marry Isaac in Canaan. Abraham sent his servant to bring a wife from the homeland, but he admonished the servant that on no condition must he take Isaac back there. Was this intentional on Abraham's part? Sarah was dead. Had the matriarch made arrangements for the betrothal of her son? Would Sarah have insisted on a matrilocal marriage for her son as Rebekah did? Rebekah was very young when she made the decision to leave her mother. It is possible that neither she nor her mother realized the implications for the young woman of living in patriarchal Canaan. Is this why Rebekah was so distressed, why she insisted on a matrilocal marriage for Jacob, in contrast to the marriages of her husband Isaac and his favorite, Esau?

The wily Jacob did not live up to his mother's expectations. After twenty years of matrilocal marriage, Jacob must convince his wives to return with him to Canaan. His descendants, the twelve tribes of Israel, claim the land promised to their ancestors.

Interestingly, the matriarchs were not totally discounted: a compromise was found. Endogamy was extended to include all circumcised males, but matriliney remained the only authentic path to membership within the group. Thus, circumcision is not the only requirement for Jewish males; they must also be born of Jewish mothers. And whether the man who impregnates a Jewish woman is circumcised or not, her offspring will

automatically be recognized as a Jew, a member of her group.

The narratives of the Sarah tradition represent a non-patriarchal system struggling for survival in isolation in a foreign land. Nevertheless, women of strength emerge from the pages of Genesis, women who are respected by men. Their function in life, though different to that of men, is regarded as equally important to society. Women's participation in society, as described in the narratives, presupposes a system in which women were able to maintain an elevated professional position, into which were incorporated the roles of mother and educator. Just as significantly, these women were in control of their own bodies and their own spiritual heritage.

Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, in identification with a goddess, chose to remain childless for decades. They chose to conceive, late in life, because of the circumstances they encountered in exile. They were venerated during their lifetimes as priestesses and as women. It is not clear whether a priestess who became a mother was forced to relinquish her profession. If her progeny was the result of the sexual component of the *hieros gamos*, was her child regarded as the offspring of a goddess, of a mortal woman, or of someone in between represented by a priestess? In other words, did the fact of conception during the ritual of the Sacred Wedding, or the fact of birth at a later date, establish the status of the mother or the child? In early versions of the ritual the priestess who participated in the *hieros gamos* was thought to be the goddess incarnate; if conception took place, the offspring were regarded as part divine. In much later times, a child born of the sacred union was to be exposed to the elements and left to its fate. Sarah's son Isaac, however, was celebrated at a feast given by Abraham. Does this mean that Sarah lived at a time when the priestess was regarded as goddess incarnate and her son as semi-divine, as was the case with the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh? Or was the son's life spared because the priestess was living in safety in exile? What had become of Sarah's status in exile, in the society in which she was living?

How far did Sarah's vision of the society extend? Did she feel that she had been transported to and isolated in a patriarchal future? Did she long for her non-patriarchal homeland? Or did

she leave because that social system was changing also?¹ Did she, in fact, have a choice?

These questions and many more can be asked but not answered. But Rebekah's expression of anguish would seem to represent the despair and sorrow experienced by all three matriarchs: 'If so, why do I exist?' (Gen. 25:22).

Over four thousand years later, this same struggle is being experienced by women in both social and religious spheres. But we are not alone. Sarah is there, standing on the threshold, waiting to be returned to her rightful place in history. Significantly, the title which could qualify the three mothers of Israel, 'Priestess', has been totally eradicated from the record. The feminine form of the word for priest (*kohen*) does not appear anywhere in the Hebrew Bible, although it has survived in the form *kāhina* in Arabic.

There are still some formidable obstacles to be overcome, but the record of Sarah's life reveals the existence of an alternative system to patriarchy. The social system the three matriarchs defended indicates the presence of a struggle against patriarchy, and of a social structure in which women played a prominent part in religion and culture. Thus, the Sarah Tradition gives us an insight into the potential of women's roles to affirm women.

In *Hagar the Egyptian* I turn to the traditionally subordinate women in the Genesis narratives—the handmaids, characterized as concubines or slaves, and to Hagar in particular—in an effort to recreate their experience.

Two desert sequences in the Genesis narratives are accredited to the life story of Hagar, Sarah's *šiphā*. Nevertheless, my research has led me to believe that only four of the sixteen verses (Gen. 16.7-15; 21.14-21) apply to Hagar. The remainder belong to the story of a figure I have identified as the Desert Matriarch.

1. It is difficult to reconcile the historically patriarchal Mesopotamia with the non-patriarchal system evident in Genesis. Either the stories reflect a pre-historical culture, or the matriarchs were members of an as yet undetermined organization or clan.

The originally separate narrative of the Desert Matriarch is about the miraculous appearance of a well and the mysterious birth of her son, Ishmael. The Desert Matriarch, like Sarah, is (1) a woman blessed with an epiphany, (2) whose son becomes the manifestation of her vision. Like Sarah's son Isaac, who faces death at the hands of his father (Gen. 22), the son of the Desert Matriarch also experiences symbolic rebirth. He, like Isaac after him, is saved from death by divine intervention. The abode of the Desert Matriarch becomes a sacred sanctuary, Beer-lahai-ro'i, as did the grove of the terebinths of Mamre, the abode of Sarah the Priestess.

Perhaps most important, both matriarchs—the Desert Matriarch and Sarah—are recorded as participating in a theophany. Their direct interaction (with life-giving connotations) with the supernatural is the element that gives substance to the events. This exceptional situation is what has given their stories a factor of timelessness and secrecy, as though the revelation were too sacred to be imparted.

Once we have recognized that Ishmael is not the son of Hagar, and that her own child remains unnamed, a direct connection can easily be drawn to her descendants: Hagar is the eponymous ancestor of the Hagarites. There is ample evidence in the biblical texts that the Ishmaelites and the Hagarites were two separate, though contemporary, tribes. The Ishmaelites survived at most into the seventh century BCE; the Hagarites, on the other hand, grew into a powerful tribe that played an important role in the development of Islam.

*The Meaning of the Life of Hagar*¹

'Consciousness of a real and meaningful world is intimately connected with the discovery of the sacred', so wrote Mircea Eliade (1978: I, xiii). 'In short, the "sacred" is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness.' It can also be maintained that the 'sacred' is an element in the structure of religious history and not a stage in the history itself.

1. Teubal 1991: 191-200.

As I see it, the voice of prophecy has been frozen in history: a male voice cried out in the wilderness and that voice was legitimated by making the sacred historical. Whether Hebrew prophet, Jesus or Mohammed, male vision has been affirmed, in linear progression, as the ultimate revelation. In this way female vision, present or ancient, has been undermined.

But visionary experience cannot be rooted to a stage in history: it is 'an element in the structure of [human] consciousness'. Whether ancient or contemporary, female or male, all visionary experience is valid. There is ample evidence, as shown in part in this study alone, that the ancient voice of the female prophet has been silenced. But the message in those silent texts is clamoring for recognition.

In the context of the story of Hagar, the power of the 'sacred' in the text is a constant that requires renewal from generation to generation. The voice in the wilderness is female also: Hagar, the Desert Matriarch, Sarah, Rachel, Miriam, and so on. Their stories have been left to us for a purpose; so that their traditions may serve future generations. The renewal of traditions is what my work is about; this is not to disavow tradition but to allow it meaningful process. To have any significance for us, mythology and legend need to be focused on our own concerns and adapted to our own image.

This process of renewal is not new. 'Even the earliest epic traditions of Israel did not reflect directly the religious milieu of the time of their origin.' (Cross 1973: 3); as we have seen throughout this study, the biblical traditions reflected the religious, cultural and historical milieu of the time in which they were popularized.

The biblical stories are male centered, because they were composed at a time when certain groups of men were attempting to take control of their society in order that it could expand and grow. The military elite were spreading out over rural lands. To reinforce their nationalistic project, the image of the archetypal hero became necessary. Tragically, this archetype was created at the expense of women. Nevertheless, at that time, the image of the archetypal hero was felt to be a dire necessity, because the survival of their group was at stake.

If, during the early monarchy's recompilation of the biblical

material, the powerful tribe of the Hagarites was known to acknowledge the matriarch Hagar as their common ancestress, a problem would have been posed for the androcentric writers who were attempting to highlight the patriarch: descent was to be changed to the male line. At that time the Ishmaelites also had close affiliation to the Israelites. The earliest reference to them is in the story of Joseph, who was sold to a caravan of Ishmaelites by his brothers (Gen. 37.25, 27-28; 39.1). The latest, for the chroniclers, was David's sister Abigail, who was married to 'Jether the Ishmaelite' (1 Chron. 2.17). The Ishmaelites must also have acknowledged the story of their ancestry; the Desert Matriarch and the miraculous birth of her son must have been a familiar tale in the court of the king. But it, too, lacked the force of an absolute and exclusive patriarchal figure. By fusing the story of Hagar to that of the Desert Matriarch, and the birth of the sons to the birth of Ishmael, Abraham would become the progenitor of the Hagarite, the Ishmaelite, and all of their descendants. Finally, under the influence of Babylonians and Assyrians, whose androcentric bias is all too well known (Teubal 1983: 305ff.), redactors would have been sufficiently prejudiced to relegate Hagar's role to that of concubine and slave.

It is therefore essential that we attempt to envision the world of the matriarchs in early Israel as it may have been prior to the androcentric overlay. In the first place, the physical environment in which the matriarchs lived was that of a tribal nature, in small townships.¹ Their intent was the survival of the tribal unit, its religion and its culture. Sarah's tribal unit was establishing itself on foreign soil. Nevertheless, their purpose was to obtain land rights for themselves and their livestock under the auspices of fostering deities, as opposed to conquering for possession of territory and booty in obedience to a father-god, as with the warrior elite of a monarchy. This is clearly illustrated in the

1. Without hard evidence of their existence, it is futile to attempt to date the period in which the matriarchs lived. However, as I have stated elsewhere, the physical nature of their settlements seems similar to that found at the archaeological site of Jemdet Nasr in Mesopotamia. Whether this type of settlement existed parallel to that of the warrior elite is of no consequence, provided the latter's influence was not in evidence in the stories.

peaceful¹ separation of Abraham and Lot, at a point where 'the land could not support them staying together' (Gen. 13.6). These two patriarchs neither bought nor conquered the land they chose; they simply set boundaries with grazing rights for their cattle. The land belongs to the deity who 'gives' it (the rights) to Abraham and his descendants.

Despite the shared responsibilities of women and men in their means of survival and the transmittal of culture and religion, each functioned in distinct spheres. Women controlled every aspect of the propagation of their tribal unit, including the sexual activities of their men. A bonding between the women and their *špāhôt*, their companions, facilitated this condition. I do not envision this situation as that of dominance of one gender over another; but, rather, a condition which permitted women to regulate their pregnancies and sexual activity and avoid any sexual harassment directed at themselves, their daughters, or their companions.

The traditionally understood theme of Hagar's life has resonated deeply over the centuries, serving as a sanction to the enslavement of human beings in the Western world. Hagar's role has been that of the mistreated Egyptian slave, thrust empty-handed into the desert with her son, left to watch her child die of thirst under a bush where she had placed him, and being saved by the appearance of a miraculous well of water provided by the God of Abraham. According to the extant text, the child's life is saved only because he is the seed of Abraham. This has been the basic text. As Phyllis Trible points out, Hagar moves 'from bondage to flight to bondage', and then proceeds 'from bondage to expulsion to homelessness' (1984: 10).

But this story elicits a troubling question: why would any deity perpetrate such cruelty? Moreover, Sarah has been the major cause of Hagar's misfortune. She has been viewed as the haughty (white? Jewish?) slave-owner,² seemingly unconcerned

1. The peaceful factor in the separation is often attributed to the magnanimous nature of Abraham (see Speiser 1964: 98, for instance), but I contend that Abraham's choice had to include consideration of a sacred site for Sarah; and, because of this, he chose to encamp close to the sacred terebinth grove of Mamre (Teubal 1984: 28).

2. As described by Dolores Williams, Claremont, February, 1989.

with her role as victimizer. On a more poetic level, it is tempting to consider that the Hebrews were themselves enslaved by the Egyptians at a later date, as though some form of divine retribution was effected for the enslavement of Hagar.

But the archetypal image of Hagar as slave, concubine and victim, and of Sarah as barren mistress, has denied women Eliade's 'consciousness of a real and meaningful world, intimately connected with the discovery of the sacred' (1978: I, xiii). Furthermore, the focus on their role solely as procurers of male descendants is what has denied women the naming of female experience of empowerment.

In antiquity, events in the lives of prophets, seers and visionaries were not only narrated in oral tradition, they were also re-enacted at seasonal festivals. As we have seen, however, the biblical texts recorded for the benefit of one generation have masked the spiritual experience of the matriarchs, which must have served to empower a previous generation of women. A re-enactment of the *hieros gamos* of, say, Sarah and Abimelech/Yarh, or the Desert Matriarch and El-Ro'i, and the birth of their semi-divine offspring could not have failed to empower generations of women.

Furthermore, the main theme of the stories was neither sexual activity nor the birth of a son. The main theme established the core element that unified the tribal segment: the ancestor of a people. Androcentric obsession with sex and sons has only served to undermine the sacred roles of women.

Looked at anew, Genesis 16 (vv. 1-5) and 21 (vv. 6-12, 14, 17, 18, 20a, 21) describe the matriarch Hagar and her association with Sarah, a priestess. Predicaments concerning the destinies of the matriarchs form the central theme throughout. Although the need of an heir/ess for Sarah is pivotal in the beginning, it also helps elucidate the origin of Hagar's pregnancy and the paternity of her future child. The main theme of the story, however, is derived from Hagar's theophany in the wilderness in which she is designated by divine election the ancestor of a people, the Hagarites. In this way, Hagar's story is much like Sarah's.¹

1. Bakan accurately suggests that not all the offspring of Abraham are

Indeed, Hagar's story parallels Sarah's to a surprising degree:

1. Both Sarah and Hagar are exiles in a foreign land; Sarah came from Ur, Mesopotamia, to the northeast; Hagar came from Egypt, to the southwest.
2. Both women are isolated from their cultures and their kin.
3. Both women spend many (presumably celibate) years in Canaan, before becoming pregnant.
4. Both have the same husband.
5. Each has only one pregnancy.
6. Each woman is singled out by divinity to become the mother of a people.
7. Each has a son.

In fact, the texts give an insight into the nature of these women. Imagery in the stories describes their attributes as though emphasizing their distinct characteristics. Sarah's story, for instance, is associated with voice and hearing; Hagar and the Desert Matriarch's is associated with vision. It is possible that the repetitious quality of the characterization was meant to infer oracular prophecy and visionary faculty, emphasizing the women's spiritual experience.

In Sarah's case we are told that:

1. Abraham *heard* the voice of Sarah (Gen. 16.2).
2. Sarah was *listening* at the tent entrance (Gen. 18.10).
3. Sarah says, 'Everyone who *hears* will laugh at /with me' (Gen. 21.6).
4. And Elohim says to Abraham, 'Whatever Sarah tells you *listen* to her voice' (Gen. 21.12).

Hagar, on the other hand:

1. *Saw* that she was pregnant;
2. and (Sarah was lowered in her sight (*b'ē'zūnē hā'*) (Gen. 16.4).
3. And Sarah says of Hagar, 'I am lowered in her sight' (Gen. 16.5).

Israelites: the Israelites stem only from Sarah. Sarah is more definitely the ancestor of the Israelites than Abraham (Bakan 1979: 37).

And it is the Desert Matriarch who is portrayed as visionary:

1. YHWH said, 'See, you are pregnant'.
2. She said, 'I cannot look on the death of the child' (Gen. 21.16).
3. Elohim opened her eyes.
4. And she *saw* a well of water (Gen. 21.19).
5. She calls the deity 'El-Ro'i', *seeing* or visionary god, by which she meant 'I *saw* after *seeing*' (Gen. 16.13).
6. Therefore the well is called 'Well of the living vision' (Gen. 16.14).

The Desert Matriarch, although nameless, distinguishes herself as *rā'itī alh-rê rō'i* ('I who saw [deity?] after my vision'). Perhaps most impressive in the Desert Matriarch story is the fact that she is the only person in the Bible to devise a name for the god who rescued her and her son: El-Ro'i, the visionary or seeing god.

Because of the identification of the Desert Matriarch as a separate character from Hagar, her story can be appreciated as a distinct unit. As became evident in my study, this story contains elements of Egyptian mythology not apparent in the Hagar account. Features in the lives of the goddesses Neith and Isis permeate the Desert Matriarch text. Although stories of Egyptian goddesses include aspects of female empowerment lacking in their biblical counterparts, efforts were also made to limit their roles exclusively to that of motherhood. Isis, for example, was a childless goddess until, with modification and embellishment from generation to generation, she became the wife of Osiris (Budge 1969: 204). And in the most well-known version of a myth, recorded by Plutarch in the first century of the Common Era, Isis conceived Horus from the body of her dead husband. Isis became a devoted mother and remained the most popular and important of maternal goddesses as mother of Horus. According to Budge (1969: 220),

The pictures and sculptures wherein she is represented suckling her child Horus formed the foundation for the Christian figures and paintings of Madonna and Child...many of the attributes of Isis, the God-mother, the mother of Horus,

and of Neith, the goddess of Sais, are identical to those of Mary the Mother of Christ.

It is nevertheless intriguing that ancient Near Eastern goddesses like the biblical matriarchs are never portrayed in a relationship with a daughter, comparable to that of Demeter and Persephone, although vestiges of these may remain. Isis, who was identified with Persephone (Budge 1969: II, 217), was the dark-skinned daughter of Nut, the sky goddess; she was born at Dendara where a birth-chamber, the *mammisi*, was constructed for a ritual performance of her birth (Budge 1969: 108). It is possible, if not probable, that stories of relationships between goddesses and their daughters became the 'silent texts' of the Egyptians after the appearance of the 'Followers of Horus', founders of the dynastic monarchy of Egypt. Likewise, there are no biblical stories of mother-daughter relationships. Dinah is the only daughter mentioned in the Genesis narratives but, despite her tragic story, there is no account of her mother Leah's reaction to her daughter's experience. Did the court of David silence those texts? The closest approximation to a mother-daughter bonding is in the story of Ruth and Naomi, a mother-daughter-in-law story. But even that beautiful tale was co-opted to serve the monarchy. The last line awkwardly gives Ruth's child a name: 'Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David'! (Campbell 1975: 169).

We must also be careful not to overlook the importance of the goddess in Jewish heritage. Even a cursory reading of Raphael Patai's extraordinary book, *The Hebrew Goddess* (1967), which traces goddess veneration from early Israel to the kabbalistic era of the sixteenth century, is testimony enough to the reality of a non-monotheistic Judaism in which goddess worship played a prominent part in religion. But, even here, there is no bonding between the great goddess Asherah and her daughter Anath.

The biblical stories, then, are not about banal wives or concubines but, in part, of oracular priestesses or visionaries, who acknowledged the female deities of the land and were empowered to prophesy and envision the future through divine inspiration. Furthermore, these matriarchs were empowered, or empowered themselves, to change the social order.

The story of Hagar and Sarah, like that of Abraham and Lot,

is also a story of separation. This new order stresses individualism, as opposed to cooperation. What began as a cooperative effort between Hagar, Abraham and Sarah for the benefit of community, ended with each party concerned solely with his or her own future. Sarah re-orders her life around her one descendant, Isaac; Hagar, the companion of Sarah, is directed to find companionship in her only son; and Abraham renegotiates life with a new wife, Keturah.

A step is also taken toward individual theology; separation in the religious sphere. The god/dess who approved of cooperation is exchanged, in each case, for the guidance of an individual regional deity. Thus Sarah's god admonishes Abraham to 'do as Sarah says'; Hagar's god leads her away to establish her own community; Abraham accepts membership into an order that requires circumcision and obedience to a sole deity. Even the Desert Matriarch envisions her own personal divinity.

Thus Hagar's story is not just the record of change in a social system; it is a re-evaluation of social values, a re-ordering of a philosophy of life. The significance of her life is that Hagar was able to attain both social and spiritual freedom. The biblical account is not explicit as to what extent Hagar was instrumental in severing her career as *šiphā*, whose main responsibility was to care for the needs of the priestess Sarah and provide her with offspring. Her first step to autonomy was in claiming her own child; whether her comportment with Sarah had any influence on the outcome is not clear. But if separation was an element in the new order, responsibility of a mother for her own child was axiomatic. Furthermore, potential freedom of choice for her own sexual relationships is now viable for her.

It is in times of crisis that religious traditions are able to renew themselves. The monarchy is no more, its heritage is being challenged, and a new age is at hand. As Adrienne Rich has wisely noted, 'Women [were] made taboo to women—not just sexually, but as comrades, cocreators, conspirators. In breaking this taboo, we are reuniting with our mothers, in reuniting with our mothers, we are breaking this taboo' (1977: 259). In breaking this taboo we redeem our ancient foremothers as well.

There is no question that Hagar must be redeemed for Muslim as well as Jewish and Christian women. Her courage in the face

of adversity; her faith in herself and in her destiny, guided by her own spiritual power, must be a revelation to all women. Above all, her close relationship with divinity and her inspiration to forge her own community must not be forgotten.

The matriarchs' return to cosmic consciousness offers spiritual guidance that has been denied women for millennia: reject victimization, seek empowerment in community.

READING FOR THE AUTHOR'S SIGNATURE:
GENESIS 21.1-21 AND LUKE 15.11-32 AS INTERTEXTS*

Arie Troost

In biblical texts, as in all ancient texts, the author's gender is by no means clear. Not only are the books of the Bible largely anonymous, they also date from an oral culture in which the concept of authorship is as diffuse as is the notion of text itself. Many layers of verbal production may be perceived in the text, many authors can be presupposed. Even in cases where an author's name is handed down to us by tradition, or where an author seems to refer to 'himself', we have to give account of this diffuseness, apart from the probability of pseudonymity. We have to look more carefully at what is in the text to learn more about its author's gender. But can we? And why should we?

Recent feminist research has proved that we can try to establish biblical texts as products of women's authorship.¹ But in cases where we find that the construction of the biblical texts is

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1. The 'woman author project' in biblical exegesis was initiated by Bekkenkamp and van Dijk (1987: 91-108), and substantially furthered by van Dijk-Hemmes (1991). My essay is intended as a response to this project.