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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Most esteemed readers of *Glossolalia*,

Collective academic utterance is that which we, as graduate students, seek most fervently. From the most cloistered corners of our libraries to the disorderly desks of our domiciles, we pursue the scholarship that holds our varied perspectives incontrovertibly united in purpose. We live by the bonds of the academy, and by the shared process of discourse that has kept us together in solidarity since humans first began to teach, and thus began to learn from, one another.

It is this belief in the communal space of the academy that underscored the re-founding of *Glossolalia* at Yale Divinity School in the summer of 2016. Thanks to the gracious interlocution of Nicholas Alton Lewis, a group of editors from the journal's original incarnation approached me with their concerns regarding the danger of *Glossolalia* falling out of the Yale community's collective memory. It was clear from the former editors that the journal had once served a crucial role in fostering the common academic voice of the Divinity School's graduate students, and its rapid descent into time immemorial was an occurrence of the most unfortunate nature.

For the sake of the scholarly community at Yale Divinity School, the path forward was clear. A collaborative effort with Lauren Kane and Chance Bonar – two of the finest editors and friends for whom I could have ever asked – led to the swift reestablishment of *Glossolalia*. The technological expertise of Brock Harmon allowed for us to have our primary platform in Yale's corner of the World Wide Web, and the artistic prowess of Bardia Bararpour gave us our sleek, minimalist cover design. From the time of our first meeting, we aimed high: the new *Glossolalia* would be a multidisciplinary and unequivocally open-access journal of religion, created for the betterment of the graduate academic community not merely at Yale Divinity School, but also around the globe.

Our theme for the Fall 2016 issue, given this trajectory, was necessarily that of “Rebirth, Resurrection, and Revivification.” From locations as far apart as Belgium and Texas, we received a number of submissions that crossed a multitude of scholarly disciplines and eras, ranging from contemporary cultural studies and Biblical exegesis to medieval literary analysis and twentieth-century political studies. With the assistance of a diligent team of anonymous peer reviewers, we were able to select the very best work, and the four articles herein exemplify the academic voice that *Glossolalia* seeks to foster most eagerly, both now and in the future.

It is our humble honor to present the work of these four emerging scholars in published form, most significantly in the name of the collective academic utterance that we all hold so dear.

Wishing you all the very best,

Alexander D'Alisera
Yale University

CARNAL CONSUMPTION, MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE

Saint Margaret and Caesarean Section in the Late Middle Ages

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Saint Margaret of Antioch was one of the most popular saints in late medieval Europe, largely due to her status as patron saint of childbirth. Depictions of Saint Margaret's confrontation with a dragon populated the visual landscape in Books of Hours, birthing amulets, devotional sculpture, and altarpieces. These images most often centered on the moment in which the devil, disguised as a dragon, swallows the saint and then bursts open to release her. The moment of Margaret's miraculous emergence from the dragon's body was understood as a form of metaphorical rebirth, a reading that contributed to the saint's perceived effectiveness as an intercessor on behalf of parturient women.

One representative example of these late medieval representations of Margaret and the Dragon is the oak sculpture from fifteenth-century France that is on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Fig. 1). The saint's body is emphatically vertical as she rises out of the dragon's back, her expression calm though her lower half remains trapped within the beast's abdomen.

Despite the stillness evoked by her posture, the swiftness of



Figure 1

Margaret's release is indicated by the fact that the bottom of her dress still hangs out of the dragon's mouth – this is a moment of simultaneous consumption and deliverance. Margaret's dress fits closely to her body, the folds of her skirt compressed by the sides of the dragon's almond-shaped wound. This wound is clearly visible, and its sharp, smooth edges are remarkable in their neatness.

It is this neatness that is dissonant; where the narratives describe bursting—a violent rupture of the dragon's body—visual representations of the dragon resist hagiographers' descriptions, and are instead united by surgically precise openings instead of ragged wounds. I will argue that Margaret's unnatural emergence from the dragon, along with her intercessory association with birth, leads to the incorporation of caesarean imagery into representations of her miracle. The neat, almond-shaped wounds on the dragons' bodies echo contemporaneous images of the abdominal incisions made during the operation, a connection that is reinforced by narrative parallels between Margaret's experience and that of a child delivered via caesarean section. Specifically, I will explore the ways in which visual allusions to caesarean section in several public devotional sculptures of Saint Margaret from late medieval France and England engender a semiotic chain of signification that prompts viewers to credit Margaret with a broader range of intercessory capabilities and contemplate parallels between the narratives of Margaret and Christ.

The Legend of Saint Margaret

According to the text of the *Golden Legend*, just prior to her martyrdom, Saint Margaret asked that “any woman who invoked her aid when faced with a difficult labor would give birth to a healthy child,” drawing upon her own miraculous delivery to establish herself as an ideal intercessor for women in labor to call upon when concerned for their child's life.¹ Margaret's *Vita* was understood to possess such power that copies were used as amulets to ensure safe and successful labor. This

¹ Jacobus de Voragine, “Saint Margaret” in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 368.

practice was especially popular in late medieval England and France.² The *Legenda Aurea*, or *Golden Legend*, a tremendously popular compendium of medieval saints' lives written by Jacobus de Voragine, will serve here as the standard version of Margaret's narrative. It was one of the most influential texts in the later Middle Ages, with over one thousand surviving copies of the Latin text and about five hundred manuscripts with complete or partial translations in various European vernaculars remaining extant.³ The breadth of the text's audience makes it an ideal standard narrative for Margaret's life because it is the one for which scholars can establish the broadest dissemination.

According to legend, Saint Margaret lived in Antioch during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (284-305 CE).⁴ One day, Margaret catches the eye of a Roman prefect named Olybrius. Margaret rejects Olybrius's marriage proposal, and, upon learning that Margaret is a Christian, Olybrius throws her in jail. Jacobus de Voragine goes on to describe the various and sundry tortures that are inflicted upon Margaret's body, and her willingness to endure such suffering as a demonstration of her faith. On her second night in prison, Margaret pleads for the Lord to reveal her tormentor, and a dragon appears in her cell.

Jacobus recounts Margaret's famed confrontation with this dragon in two versions – one of which he approves and the other of which he dismisses as apocryphal and “not to be taken seriously.”⁵ In the sanctioned version of the miracle, the dragon moves to swallow Margaret, but she makes the sign of the cross and banishes the dragon before it attacks her. In the apocryphal version of the story, the dragon successfully swallows the saint. Margaret then makes the sign of the cross from within the body of the beast, causing “the dragon [to] burst open” and allowing “the virgin to emerge unscathed”

² Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 235-278.

³ Eamon Duffy, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, xi.

⁴ Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of the Saints*.

⁵ Jacobus de Voragine 2012, 368.

from its body.⁶ Despite Jacobus's skepticism, it is this second version of the story that became the source for nearly all visual representations of the saint. This is no doubt because it provides a more visually compelling narrative and because Margaret's status as victor is more readily apparent in her emergence directly from the dragon's eviscerated body.

The following morning, the legend continues, Margaret is stripped naked by her captors and burned with torches. A Roman judge then places her in a tub of water to "increase [her] suffering by varying the pain," but "suddenly the earth shook," the tub was broken, and "the virgin came out unharmed."⁷ Saint Margaret's submersion in a tub of water and subsequent re-emergence are clear references to the Christian ritual of baptism.⁸ Margaret then identifies herself as an intercessor for parturient women who wish to protect their children, and is publicly executed.

Two important elements in Margaret's story – namely entrapment within and violent release from another body, and baptism immediately prior to death – find parallels in the medieval medical practice of caesarean section. In the case of Saint Margaret, both the text's description of her miraculous delivery from the body of the dragon and her role as patron saint of childbirth made her exceptionally well-suited to iconographic allusions to the operation, as Elina Gertsman and Cynthia Nazarian have argued previously in connection to a print of Saint Margaret.⁹ I seek to expand upon their assertion by demonstrating how caesarean operations shed light on the parallels between Margaret's emergence from the dragon and the narrative of Christ's Harrowing of Hell – another

⁶ Jacobus de Voragine 2012, 369.

⁷ Jacobus de Voragine 2012, 370.

⁸ Margaret's miraculous emergence from the tub also results in the instantaneous conversion of the crowd of spectators, furthering the baptismal connotations of the scene. It is possible that a reader would also draw an anachronistic connection between the bursting of the tub and a woman's water breaking during childbirth—the timeline is not entirely consistent since the metaphorical birth out of the dragon occurs the evening before. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 2 and 26-27.

⁹ Elina Gertsman and Cynthia Nazarian, "Performing Childbirth: On the Life of Saint Margaret," NEH Ritual and Ceremony Summer Institute and the Folger Library.

episode involving consumption, miraculous egress, and salvation. Although allusions to caesarean section in images of Saint Margaret appear in various types of media throughout Europe, I will focus specifically on sculptural representations of Margaret and the dragon from late medieval England and France.

Caesarean Section and Medieval Obstetrics

Caesarean sections have an exceptionally long history in the world of obstetrics, albeit in a decidedly different form than their modern iteration.¹⁰ Up until the late sixteenth century, caesarean sections were performed exclusively on the corpses of mothers who had failed to deliver their children while alive. They were undertaken in the hope that the infant might be saved – at least spiritually, through baptism, if not bodily.¹¹ Like Margaret, infants delivered by caesarean section received the sacrament immediately after the operation and just before their (usually imminent) death. Since the primary goal of caesarean section in the Middle Ages was to ensure baptism, the medical procedure came to be inextricably linked to spiritual salvation, and thus became a concern for the Church.¹² For example, Parisian Archbishop Odon de Sully (1196-1208) was the first church official to recommend that a caesarean section be performed to save a child should the mother die before the child's delivery.¹³ Furthermore, the Council of Canterbury in 1236 dictated that, should the mother die during

¹⁰ The oldest allusion to caesarean section comes from the second millennium BCE in Mesopotamia, and the oldest direct evidence dates to 715 BCE, where it appears in legal code. Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 21.

¹¹ Live caesarean sections did not become the subject of debate in medical circles until the late sixteenth-century. Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 2 and 26-27, 38-46.

¹² Not without some anxiety on the part of clergy, however. There was debate over whether midwives should be permitted to perform emergency baptisms, which were supposed to be the exclusive purview of ordained clergy. In the end, midwives were granted the privilege to perform emergency baptisms, and parish priests instructed midwives on the proper procedure. Monica Green, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2000), IV, 57.

¹³ By contrast, the first medieval visual representation of caesarean section does not appear until 1300, and the first explicit mention of the operation in a medieval medical text dates to 1305. Blumenfeld-Kosinski suggests that the relaxation of taboos relating to dissection, dating to the late thirteenth century, may have led to artists feeling comfortable with rendering the body's interior as visible, and thus to illustrate caesarean birth for the first time. France's flourishing university system and medical curriculum may be responsible for the localized nature of these milestones. The first medical text to reference a caesarean operation was Bernard of Gordon's *Practica sive liliū medicinae*. Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 24-30.



Figure 2

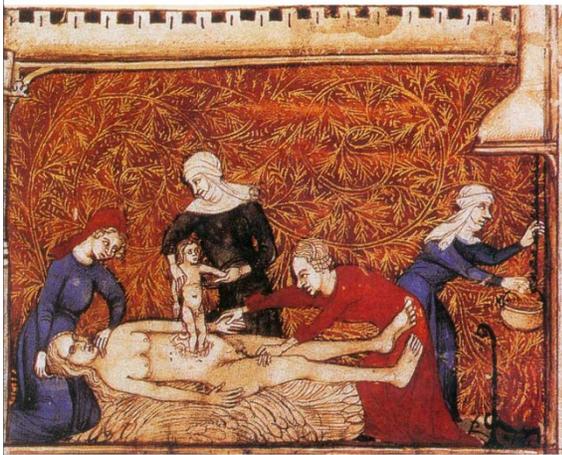


Figure 3

childbirth, her child ought to be extracted. The council also urged women to confess before going into labor and midwives to prepare water for emergency baptisms.¹⁴

Medieval depictions of caesarean operations are most commonly found not in medical texts, as one might expect, but in secular histories of the Roman Empire such as the *Faits des Romains* and French translations of Caesar's *Commentaries*.¹⁵ The inhabited initial from a fourteenth-century copy of the *Faits des Romains*, for example, shows the moment of Julius Caesar's famed surgical delivery from his mother's corpse (Fig. 2). Caesar's mother is nude and reclining, and a midwife holds one of her lifeless arms out of the way of the second attendant, who extracts the child's body from the incision in the mother's

abdomen. The second attendant still holds the surgical knife, which is poised disconcertingly close to the infant's delicate flesh. In both this image and the miniature found in the fifteenth-century version of the *Faits des Romains* (Fig. 3), the caesarean incision is shown as a mandorla, or almond-shaped wound, much like the one out of which Margaret emerges in the fifteenth-century French sculpture (see Fig. 1).

¹⁴ Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 21.

¹⁵ Katharine Park argues that images of Caesar's birth were the only models available of a nude female corpse whose uterus was open for inspection or dissection prior to Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica*. Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 240; Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 54-59, 61-90, and 161.

The primary difference between the two manuscript illuminations is the presence of a male surgeon amongst the midwives in the later miniature (Fig. 3). Births were typically attended solely by midwives unless complications presented themselves, at which point a male surgeon or barber would be called in; surgery, in general, was considered to be a last resort and not a privileged form of treatment, a sentiment that gradually changed in the later Middle Ages.¹⁶ Although birth had long been understood as a private act that took place in interior spaces dominated by women, male doctors and surgeons began to assume a more prominent role in the birthing chamber over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as medical training was increasingly codified at universities.¹⁷ The act of birth no longer resided strictly within the female sphere, and men had increasing intellectual and physical access to birthing chambers and the “secret” workings of female bodies. Thus, the audience who would have been familiar with caesarean operations and capable of recognizing them was expanded.

It is important to understand that, throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, caesarean sections were not understood to be “births” per se. Children delivered via caesarean section were designated as “unborn” or even “not of woman born,” due to the paradoxical and strange nature of their entry into the world.¹⁸ Since caesarean sections bypassed the birth canal – the expected pathway through which a fetus would exit the female body – the operation was seen to subvert the God-given function of female anatomical organs. In this way, the children were not, strictly speaking, born from a woman. Furthermore, as the children were taken from a corpse and their mothers did not *enact* or participate in their birth, it made sense to refer to the infants as “unborn” or “nonborn.”

¹⁶ Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 32, 91-119; Monica Green, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts*, IV, 57.

¹⁷ Monica Green and Daniel Lord Smail, “The Trial of Floreta d’Ays (1403): Jews, Christians, and Obstetrics in Later Medieval Marseilles,” *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 189; see also Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: the Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynecology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 1.

Caesarean operations, then, occupied a liminal zone between surgical operations and childbirth, performed by a surgeon or barber instead of a midwife, that nonetheless resulted in a child's emergence from the body of a woman into the world.

The children delivered via caesarean section were not only given a label that set them apart from the rest of society, but were also thought to be marked for a special destiny. In their work on the monstrous body, Asa Mittman and Susan Kim have commented on the way that Margaret, by placing herself "beside, or within, the body of the beast" ultimately "reminds us of the similarity the saint bears to that creature," as a non-normative body of spectacular power.¹⁹ Both Margaret's ability to survive passage through the dragon and the dragon's ability to perform an unnatural generative act identify them as non-normative bodies with extraordinary capabilities. The legend's iconographic connection to caesarean section, by extension, also identifies children who survive the operation as privileged or non-normative beings. The unique status that these unborn infants were afforded is further manifested in the degree of agency ascribed to them as they issue from their mother's abdomen. In images, the child emerges upright and aware as though actively participating in his or her own delivery, perhaps taking over once the mother is no longer capable of action. The similarity between the rigid verticality of the infant's body in the figuration of caesarian sections is remarkably similar to Margaret's posture as she emerges from the dragon (*cf.* Figs. 1 and 3). These similarities suggest an understanding of the metaphorical kinship between the saint and the unborn infants, who are joined by their miraculous emergences.

Saint Margaret's ability to survive her rebirth from the dragon's body would have resonated with medieval Christians who prayed to her for the safe delivery of their own children. Birth was always a risky venture for mother and child, even before any complications. At stake was the child's spiritual

¹⁹ Asa Mittman and Susan Kim, "Monsters and the Exotic in Early Medieval England," *Literature Compass* 6 (2009): 12-13.

salvation, more so than his or her physical survival. While the imagery of Margaret and the dragon could, and did, serve an apotropaic function during vaginal birth, the allusion to caesarean operations may have provided additional assurance of Margaret's intercession should the mother die during labor and surgical intervention thus become necessary.²⁰

Carnal Consumption: Mother as Monster

Although Elina Gertsman and Cynthia Nazarian have previously argued for identification of the dragon with a male aggressor, for the men and women who recognized the indexing of caesarean operations in the form of the dragon's wound, the implications would be quite different. On the contrary, if we as viewers are to understand Margaret in the role of miraculously delivered child, then the dragon stands in necessary parallel to the mother.²¹ Even as Margaret is upheld as a paragon of feminine virtue – “shining white by her virginity, small by humility” – the imagery of the dragon draws attention to the monstrous aspects of the feminine.²² As Asa Mittman and Susan Kim state:

The language of the monstrous [...] lay at the very heart of constructions of both the hero and the Christian saint. In these constructions we can see clearly the contradiction integral to the figure of the monstrous “other” in the early Middle Ages: the monstrous “other” is not absolute, stable, or firmly outside of the boundaries of the normative...[but] remains recognizable, strange yet familiar, *a possible version of oneself*.²³

The same women who prayed to Margaret for her aid in childbirth were in turn confronted with their own reality as daughters of Eve, cursed to endure dangerous and difficult childbirth.

²⁰ Note that the mother's physical experience is treated separately from the infant's spiritual safety in a fifteenth-century French prayer to Saint Margaret: “You [Saint Margaret] who called many times on God when your head was going to be cut off, especially so that women who are with child might turn to you wholeheartedly and ask for your help so that God might preserve them from peril and come quickly to their aid. I beg you, honored virgin and noble martyr [...] to pray God for me and ask Him sweetly in his mercy to comfort me in the pains that I must suffer without peril to my soul or body. Let my child be born healthy and safe so that I may see it baptized well and joyfully.” *La Vie de ma dame sainte Marguerite vierge [et] martyre avec son oraison*, (A3r-A8r), trans. Cynthia Nazarian (Washington, D.C.: NEH Summer Institute on Ritual and Ceremony and the Folger Shakespeare Library, 2010).

²¹ By contrast, Gertsman and Nazarian focus on the dragon as male aggressor, as identified by its phallic, erect tail in “Performing Childbirth: On the Life of Saint Margaret.”

²² Jacobus de Voragine 2012, 368.

²³ Mittman and Kim 2009, 2. Emphasis is mine.

The state of women as fallen, sexual creatures was reinforced by natural philosophy; according to humoral theory, women were, as a group, understood to be cold and wet, driven by their very constitution to desire the warm/dry character of the male – to desire sex in particular.²⁴ Lust was often described in terms of appetite, a connection only heightened by the conflation of female sexual organs, most obviously the labia, with the mouth. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s description of female anatomical

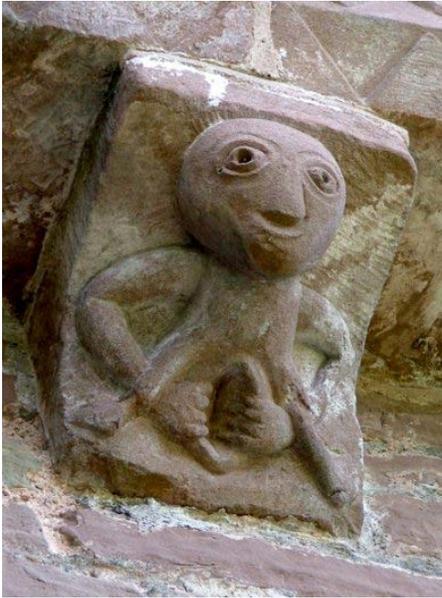


Figure 4

organs relies on similes of appetite and hunger: “Her seed runs out from those organs because of delectation just like saliva runs out of the mouth of a starving person.”²⁵ Martha Easton enumerates a plethora of medieval associations between the mouth and the vagina. These include the writings of physician Henri de Mondeville, who used “*labia*” or “lips” as a means of describing the edges of wounds, and who used the mouth as a model for his descriptions of the vagina.²⁶ An even more instructive example of the predatory nature of this so-called

“hunger” may be found in the fourteenth-century *dit* “*Les Blasme des Fames*” (“The Vices of Women”): “She’s like a roadside watering hole,/ Attracting each and every soul.../ She’s a hell mouth that is cursed/ With an all-consuming thirst” (Lines 89-100).²⁷ The female at her most fundamental and dangerous does not lie back and endure sexual congress but actively seeks it out, and indeed has an insatiable appetite for it. The Sheela na-gigs (Fig. 4) that decorated the

²⁴ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: a Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De secretis mulierum with Commentaries*, ed. Helen Rodnite Lemay. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 62.

²⁵ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus 1992, 62.

²⁶ Martha Easton, “The Wound of Christ, The Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art & Architecture*, ed. Susan L’Engle and Gerald Guest (London: Harvey Miller, 2006), 402.

²⁷ Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer and Mathé Allain, eds. and trans. *Three Medieval Views of Women: La Contenance des fames, Le Bien des Fames, Le Blasme des Fames*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 127.

exteriors of some English churches, with their grotesquely enlarged vaginas with “lips” stretched wide to emphasize the consuming interior of the female sex organ, provide one of the best visualizations of this understanding of the female as driven by appetite to consume—much as the dragon consumes the saint.²⁸

Within the narrative, the dragon’s consumption of Margaret through its mouth stands in parallel to Olybrius’s lusty pursuit. Where Olybrius (the male) fails, the dragon (as female) succeeds by force, taking the necessary material into its body through the mouth (vagina) in order to “birth” Margaret. Ultimately, the dragon enacts the role of lustful woman. Louise Lippincott argues that the “characteristics of Margaret's struggle – seduction, passivity, resistance – seem to have been derived from the archetypal encounter between woman and serpent, Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden.”²⁹ There is a certain poetic irony in the fact that Eve’s consumption of the apple causes Man’s Fall; her desire (her hunger) is responsible for the painful and hazardous nature of childbirth, which Margaret, as the consumed, protects against.³⁰



Figure 5

The connection between female anatomy and the dragon's body is made visually manifest in a fifteenth-century French alabaster sculpture, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 5). A serene Margaret in billowing robes emerges from the dragon’s body via an incision along its spine. The incision bulges

²⁸ For more on Sheela na-gigs, see Catherine E. Karkov, “Sheela-na-gigs and Other Unruly Women: Images of Land and Gender in Medieval Ireland,” in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, 2001), 313-331; Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London, 1986).

²⁹ Lippincott 1981, 11.

³⁰ Gen. 3:16.

around Margaret's body, but its edges are smooth and clearly delineated, resembling not only the vaginal opening during a natural birth, but also, and more emphatically, the surgical abdominal cavity of caesarean operations. The patterned texture of the fabric of Saint Margaret's cloak mimics the scaly texture of the dragon's hide, and the mandorla-like opening in the robe that reveals her body is an echo of the shape of the wound from which she emerges, establishing a compositional parallel between



Figure 6

the body of the saint and the body of the dragon. This same trope appears in another, slightly later, French sculpture of Saint Margaret from the parish church of Saint Germain, near Troyes (Fig. 6).³¹ Once again, a calm Margaret emerges from the dragon's back, her eyes cast down demurely. In this sculpture, however, one of Margaret's feet has already emerged from the dragon's body, emphasizing the saint's imminent freedom and triumph. Although the site of Margaret's release is largely obscured by the dragon's wings and the voluminous folds of Margaret's clothing, the soft, concentric v-forms of the drapery clearly emphasize Saint Margaret's womb, which is further outlined by the

mandorla-shaped opening of her cloak. The emphasis that these sculptures place on the female saint's womb reinforces the generative potential that the bodies of Margaret and the dragon share. But whereas Margaret's potential for procreation is never realized because she is chaste (as any good Christian saint ought to be), the dragon's appetite results in an unnatural act of generation.

³¹ "Saint Margaret," Victoria and Albert Museum; Charles Avery, *Sculpture from Troyes in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1974), 62-70.

Harrowing Emergences

The medieval devotees who viewed these images of Margaret within their parish churches and sought her intercessory favor may have drawn associations between Margaret and other figures who experienced or enacted similar miraculous, non-normative births or rebirths. For example, Margaret's emergence from a reptilian body and explicit association with dangerous deliveries may have brought to mind the unnatural birthing methods of other reptiles, who, according to medieval bestiaries, gave birth in strange and violent ways. There is one reptile in particular whose behavioral characteristics align closely with Margaret's narrative, and establish a parallel between the saint and Christ himself. The creature in question is the hydrus, who purposefully enters the body of its enemy, the crocodile, via its open mouth and then, "tearing open the crocodile's intestines, comes out whole and unharmed."³² Both Margaret and the hydrus are consumed by their enemy, pass through the enemy's body, and enact their own violent release by tearing through the enemy's abdomen. The illustration

of the hydrus's emergence from the crocodile from a thirteenth-century Franco-Flemish bestiary (Fig. 7) shares several elements with sculptural representations of Margaret. The hydrus' rapid passage through the crocodile's body is indicated by the fact that its tail still hangs from the crocodile's mouth, much



Figure 7

like Margaret's robes hang from the dragon's maw in the sculpture from Troyes (see Fig. 6). The hydrus also escapes the crocodile's abdomen through a clean-edged opening in the beast's side, much

³² *Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 69r.

like the wound in the Philadelphia Margaret, and even the caesarean incision in the miniature from a fifteenth-century copy of the *Faits des Romains* (see Figs. 1 and 3).

Moralizing commentaries in medieval bestiaries explicitly likened the hydrus to Christ, and the crocodile to Hell:

For this reason death and hell are symbolised [sic] by the crocodile; their enemy is our Lord Jesus Christ. For taking human flesh, he descended into hell and, tearing open its inner parts, he led forth those who were unjustly held there. He destroyed death itself by rising from the dead.³³

This episode is known as the Harrowing of Hell, or Christ's Descent into Limbo, and its narrative is derived from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus and other early Christian patristic writings.³⁴ According to this narrative, Christ descended into Hell during his three-day interment to free from it those who were deserving of redemption. These individuals were specifically chosen and deemed worthy by God, and distinguished from the rest of those in Hell by their miraculous exodus from the Hell Mouth. Perhaps, by extension, infants born by caesarean section were also thought to survive their ordeal as a result of divine intervention, further establishing their privileged status as souls quite literally saved by God.

The visualization of Hell as an anthropomorphized body that may be entered through a monstrous mouth appears in a variety of media, including manuscript illuminations and sculpture (Figs. 8 and 9). The mouth as the site of entrance to a monstrous body is thus shared by the narratives

³³ The moralizing commentaries from bestiaries, like the one above, were at times incorporated into the vernacular sermons that came after the Latin liturgy, and so could have been familiar to even illiterate members of society, and thus to the broad swath of people who would have seen these images of Margaret in church. Frances and Joseph Gies, *Daily Life in Medieval Times: A Vivid, Detailed Account of Birth, Marriage and Death; Food Clothing and Housing; Love and Labor in the Middle Ages* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal, 1990), 292-93; "Bestiary," Getty Museum. The quoted text is from *Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 69r.

³⁴ "Harrowing of Hell," Encyclopedia Britannica Online. For more on the Harrowing of Hell, see Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 2007); *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. William Henry Hulme, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); John S. Howard, "Dialectic and Spectacle in the Harrowing of Hell," *Essays in Literature* 21, no. 1 (1994): 3.

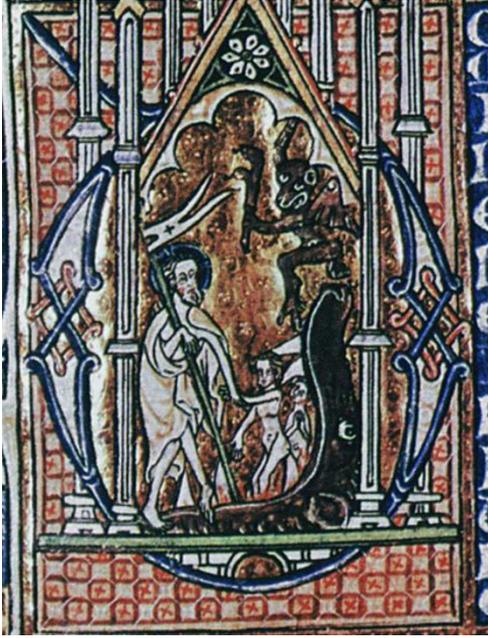


Figure 8



Figure 9

of Margaret and the dragon, the hydrus and the crocodile, and Christ's descent into Hell. Since female sexual promiscuity was associated with appetite and the vagina was conflated with a mouth capable of consumption, the human process of conception (which necessarily preceded a caesarean operation) also involves the entrance of male seed into the female body via a "mouth." As Easton argues, the Hell Mouth in particular was conflated with the vagina, thus rendering Hell itself as a kind of metaphorical womb through which Christ passes before he is resurrected or reborn.³⁵ In fact, the respective environments in which each of the protagonists (Christ, Margaret, and the infant) are subsequently trapped were understood to be toxic and hostile – Margaret is trapped within a demonic body, Christ enters Hell itself, and even the female body was understood to be inherently dangerous to the fetus during pregnancy. Menstrual blood was believed to be extremely poisonous; according to Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, "if menses touch the twig of a green tree it immediately dries up."³⁶ Pseudo-

Albertus Magnus goes on to explain that pregnant women did not menstruate because "two veins lead from the womb to the breasts, and thus the menses are transferred to the breasts, where they are

³⁵ Easton 2006, 395-414.

³⁶ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus 1992, 75.

cooked and receive the form of milk, and carried back through these veins to nourish the fetus in the mother's womb."³⁷ Every fetus was nourished by a substance which was necessarily venomous, precisely because it was produced by the fallen female body. Thus, the experience of children who are freed from their mothers' toxic bodies via caesarean section can be likened to Christ's exodus from Hell and Saint Margaret's miraculous release from the demonic body of the dragon.

The dragon's wound, the Hell Mouth, and caesarean incisions all enable a form of non-normative birth or rebirth, and serve as loci for miraculous events. Their semiotic flexibility enables them to function as wounds, mouths, vaginal openings, and generative exit points.³⁸ The presence of a caesarean-like opening in works like those discussed here may have served more broadly as a visual shorthand for a non-normative generative body – it provided artists with a means of illustrating something that was somehow not-quite-birth. Ultimately, the indexing of caesarean sections establishes Margaret as a Christ-like figure by drawing attention to both Margaret's and Christ's miraculous emergences from toxic environments, much as the unborn infants delivered by caesarean operation were rescued from their mothers' wombs.

³⁷ This view was also held by medieval physician Henri de Mondeville: "woman's 'digestive virtue makes[s] the red color turn to white, so that it becomes the same color as the breasts.'" Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, 77; Mondeville quoted in Martha Easton, 399.

³⁸ Easton comes to a similar conclusion just before her discussion of caesarean incisions: "The perception was that generative acts involved wounding by causing ruptures. A hagiographic parallel is the eruption of St. Margaret from within the belly of the dragon, thus designating her the patron saint of childbirth." Easton, 401.

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Figure 1
Saint Margaret and the Dragon
French, 15th century
Oak
29 x 14 x 9 inches (73.7 x 35.6 x 22.9 cm)
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Accession Number:1929-66-4
Credit Line: Purchased with funds contributed
by Mr. and Mrs. Roland L. Taylor, 1929



Figure 2
Faits des Romains
Initial C, fol. 144r
1325-1349
Princeton Library, MS Garrett 128.



Figure 3
Faits des Romains
fol. 197r: "Birth of Julius Caesar"
15th cent.
Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, ms. fr. 3576.

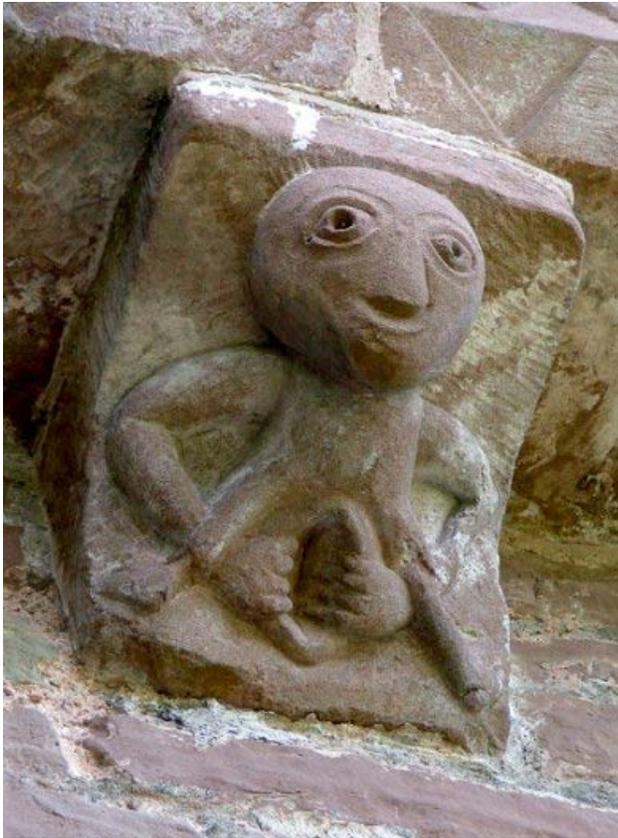


Figure 4
Sheela na-gig
12th century, English
Stone
Church at Kilpeck, Hertfordshire, England.



Figure 5
Saint Margaret
ca. 1475.
French. (Toulouse?)
Alabaster, traces of gilding.
15 3/8 x 9 5/8 x 6 9/16 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of
Anthony and Lois Blumka, in memory of
Ruth and Victoria Blumka, 2000 (2000.641).



Figure 6
Saint Margaret and the Dragon
Troyes, France
1530-1540
carved limestone
Height: 113 cm, Width: 46.8 cm, Depth: 33 cm
Victoria and Albert, A.4-1947
Originally from the parish church of Saint Germain, near Troyes.



Figure 7
“A Crocodile and a Hydrus”
Franco-Flemish
ca. 1270
Tempera, gold leaf and ink on parchment.
Leaf: 19.1 x 14.3 cm (7 1/2 x 5 5/8 in.)
J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig XV 3, fol. 84v.

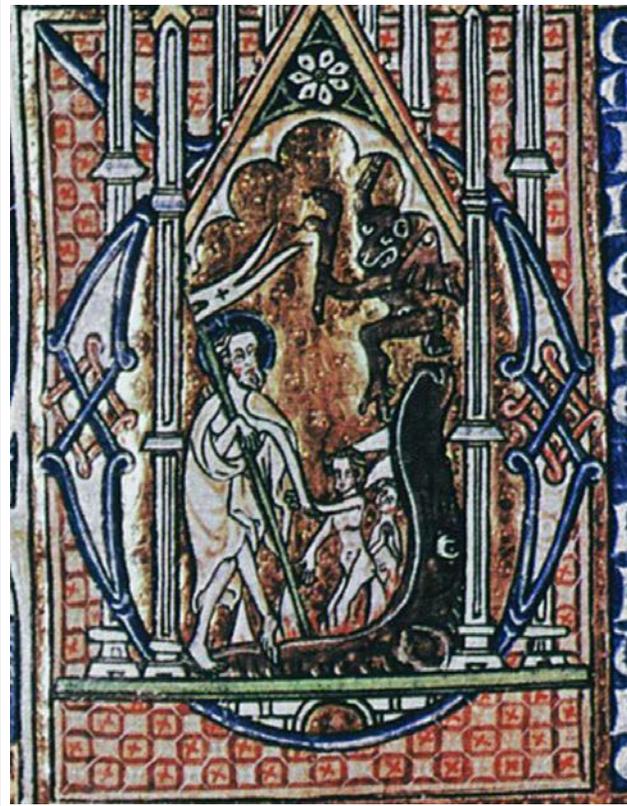


Figure 8
f. 59v-60: "Harrowing of Hell"
after 1318, Saint-Omer
Hours of Marguerite de Beaujeu
British Museum, ms. add. 36684.



Figure 9
The Harrowing of Hell
England, 15th century
Carved, painted and gilt alabaster
Given by Dr W. L. Hildburgh FSA
Victoria and Albert Museum, A.1-1955

A STAR IN TWO LIGHTS

Understanding the Star of Matthew 2 in Jewish and Greco-Roman Literary Contexts

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In Matthew's¹ infancy narrative, when the magi arrive in Jerusalem and speak with Herod, they ask him, "Where is the one born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising, and came to worship him" (Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἦλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ).² This meeting not only fills Herod with questions, but also presents the readers with questions their own: Who are these magi? Who, if not King Herod, is the "king of the Jews" they are searching for? And what is meant by the star that they mention? The magi refer to the star as "*his* star" (αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα) and say that they saw it at its rising.³ Herod, troubled, asks the wise men in Matt. 2:7 for the time at which the star appeared (τὸν χρόνον τοῦ φαινομένου ἀστέρος). The star goes on ahead of the magi after their conference with Herod, eventually stopping over the place where the child Jesus was—an event that causes the magi to "rejoice with very great joy" (ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα) and which enables them to present their gifts.

The goal of this paper is to establish the points of reference ancient readers may have had for understanding the star in Matthew 2. Doing so enables us as modern readers to postulate the significance that this element of Matthew's infancy narrative would have held for its early audience. I

¹ The use of "Matthew" as an identifier for the person(s) responsible for the text of the first gospel is for convenience only. Discussions about the authorship of this gospel, though important, are beyond the scope of this paper.

² Matt 2:2. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

³ ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ can be read as "in the east" or "at its rising," but a stronger case can be made for "at its rising" in this context. See M. Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew" (NIB VIII; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 142.

will first explore relevant literary phenomena from Jewish literature. Readers with exposure to these sources may have understood the star in Matthew 2 as a mark of God's guidance as well as an indication of Jesus's messianic status. I will then examine relevant material from Greek and Roman literature. Readers of Matthew familiar with these texts may have seen the star as a sign of the beginning of a new age or the birth of a ruler.

Matthew's Star and Jewish Texts

This section will examine Jewish texts circulating in the first century CE which may have colored how Matthew's readers understood the star of chapter two. Stars (and other celestial phenomena) are mentioned regularly in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Jewish texts, with a variety of connotations; they are, for example, frequently cited in expressions of plenty⁴ and as a metaphor for prominence.⁵ While there are no Jewish narratives which contain a star comparable to the magi's star,⁶ there are many which help provide a hermeneutical context for Matthew 2. A brief examination of parallels in Jewish literature suggests that the star of Matthew's account parallels Jewish literary motifs of divine guidance and also fits with other astral imagery related to the Jewish messiah.

On a basic level, the magi's guiding star in Matthew mirrors divine guides found elsewhere in Jewish literature. This motif surfaces in texts both inside and outside of the Tanakh.⁷ The most

⁴ Gen. 22:17; see also Gen. 15:5; 26:4; Exod. 32:13; Deut. 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chron. 27:23; Neh. 9:23; Ps. 147:4; Nah. 3:16.

⁵ See Job 22:12; Isa. 14:13; Dan. 12:3; Obad. 1:4.

⁶ The one exception is found in the Book of Jasher, a Kabbalistic text from the seventeenth century. While it is far too late (and problematic) a source to be used as evidence here, an excerpt from the Book of Jasher shows how the significance of stars and celestial signs continued as a theme in Jewish literature. The text describes how, during "the night that Abram was born, that all the servants of Terah, and all the wise men of Nimrod, and his conjurors came and ate and drank in the house of Terah, and they rejoiced with him on that night. And when all the wise men and conjurors went out from the house of Terah, they lifted up their eyes toward heaven that night to look at the stars, and they saw, and behold one very large star came from the east and ran in the heavens, and he swallowed up the four stars from the four sides of the heavens. And all the wise men of the king and his conjurors were astonished at the sight, and the sages understood this matter, and they knew its import. And they said to each other, 'This only betokens the child that has been born to Terah this night, who will grow up and be fruitful, and multiply, and possess all the earth, he and his children forever, and he and his seed will slay great kings, and inherit their lands'" (Jasher 8:1-5).

⁷ For a recent examination of this motif, see Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 25-26.

prominent example of this is the divine pillar/angel which guided the children of Israel through the wilderness: “The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night” (Exod. 13:21). Not only was this a noteworthy event in and of itself, but it is frequently alluded to throughout the Hebrew Bible as an example of God’s care for Israel.⁸ For an ancient reader familiar with the Hebrew Bible, reading about a divine light leading the magi on through the night would likely have brought to mind the divine light that led the children of Israel through their nighttime wanderings in the wilderness.

Other examples of miraculous guidance occur in Jewish writings. This often comes in the form of a guiding angel (figures which are sometimes associated with stars).⁹ In Genesis, two angels guide Lot and his family out of the city of Sodom (Gen. 19:10-23). In the Book of Tobit, the archangel Raphael guides the young Tobias from Nineveh to Ecbatana (Tob. 5–6). In Jewish (and Christian) apocalyptic literature, an angel often serves as a guide and heavenly interpreter for the reader.¹⁰ Without straining the point, it is clear that Matthew’s star and the role it plays would have fit well within the broader context of divine guidance in Jewish writings.

Jewish literature contemporary with the gospel of Matthew also indicates that stars, as symbols, had begun to take on messianic overtones. Some Jews of this era read Balaam’s prophecy that “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17) as a messianic prediction. Such an interpretation is not a great stretch, particularly for someone reading the Septuagint rendition of this text,¹¹ which even more explicitly than the Masoretic text refers to an actual person: “a star will

⁸ Instances include Exod. 13:21; 14:19; 23:20-23; 40:38; Num. 9:15-23; Neh. 9:19; Pss. 78:14; 105:39; Wisd. of Sol. 10:17; 18:1-4. Allison 2005, 26.

⁹ For a persuasive argument about the links between stars and angels in Jewish literature, see Allison 2005, 25-41.

¹⁰ Such angelic guides are present in apocalyptic material in Isa., Ezek., Dan., and Rev.; as well as in extrabiblical texts such as 1 Enoch and 2 Bar.

¹¹ It is probable that Matthew and his audience would have been familiar with the Septuagint, as many of Matthew’s formula quotations often more closely match the LXX versions of verses than they do the Masoretic text.

rise out of Jacob, and a *man* will stand forth from Israel” (ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακωβ καὶ ἀναστήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ Ἰσραηλ).

Messianic interpretations of this text are particularly well-attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The War Scroll, for example, contains a passage reflecting a messianic understanding of Balaam’s prophecy:

Jus[t a]s You told us in time past, saying: ‘There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall crush the forehead of Moab and tear down all sons of Sheth, and he shall descend from Jacob and shall destroy the remnant from the city, and the enemy shall be a possession, and Israel shall do valiantly’ (1QM 11:5).¹²

The War Scroll is not alone in painting these verses in a messianic light. 4QM175, labeled by commentators as “a collection of messianic proof texts,” quotes these verses in the midst of other verses describing what the future Jewish messiah would do. This passage makes clear that, for the author, this statement of Balaam is an authentic prophecy; it is referred to as “the oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man who sees clearly, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty” (4Q175:9-13).¹³ For these writers, the image of a star rising from Jacob brought hope of God’s future anointed one and the deliverance he would bring.

In the Damascus Document, a text which circulated both inside and outside of Qumran, there is a passage which seems to interpret this verse as referring to two messianic figures: one as an Interpreter and one as a Leader: “The star is the Interpreter of the Law who comes to Damascus, as it is written, ‘A star has left Jacob, a staff has risen from Israel’ The latter is the Leader of the whole nation; when he appears, ‘he will shatter all the sons of Sheth’” (CD 6:3-4).¹⁴ While this does not designate the “star” figure as a traditional messianic figure, compare its description of the star as an

¹² Michael Owen Wise, Martin G. Abegg, and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls : A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 160.

¹³ Wise 1996, 230.

¹⁴ Wise 1996, 58.

‘interpreter’ with Matthew’s oft-noted portrayal of Jesus as a ‘new Moses,’ providing new interpretations of the Jewish law.¹⁵

Several other texts place Balaam’s prophecy in the context of messianic expectations. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, largely written in the late centuries BCE,¹⁶ makes an allusion to this prophecy.¹⁷ In the Book of Levi, the aged patriarch shares the following with his children:

When vengeance will have come upon them from the Lord, the priesthood will lapse. And then the Lord will raise up a new priest to whom all the words of the Lord will be revealed. He shall effect the judgment of truth over the earth for many days. And his star shall rise in heaven like a king; kindling the light of knowledge as day is illuminated by the sun (*Testament of Levi* 18:1-3).¹⁸

First-century readers familiar with this description of a new star “ris[ing] in heaven like a king” may have seen special significance in Matthew’s account, where the rising of the star is indicative to the magi of a king’s birth.

Another text which puts hope in a star-related savior is the fifth Sibylline Oracle. In the midst of cosmological judgments, the sibyl declares:

But when after the fourth year a great star shines
Which will destroy the whole earth, because of
The honor which they first gave to Poseidon of the sea,
A great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea
And will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself (5.155-159).¹⁹

¹⁵ The definitive examination of this theme is Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

¹⁶ While most scholars place the origins of *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* during this period, they also recognize that Christian redactors have made some changes to the text. The extent of these changes is a matter of debate. For background on the issue, see James H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 775-781.

¹⁷ The text actually makes two allusions to the prophecy: *Testament of Judah* 24:1 reads “And after this there shall arise for you a Star from Jacob in peace: And a man shall arise from my posterity like the Sun of Righteousness, walking with the sons of men in gentleness and righteousness, and in him will be found no sin.” However, most commentators agree that this passage has either been inserted or substantially modified by Christian redactors, and thus is an unreliable source for understanding Jewish interpretations of this passage. See John Joseph Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 104.

¹⁸ Charlesworth 1983, 794.

¹⁹ Charlesworth 1983, 397.

While somewhat different in character from the other citations given, “[i]t is generally accepted that [this passage] and ‘the coming of the star’ alludes to Num. 24:17 and the messianic semantics of astrological phenomena in ancient Judaism.”²⁰ It reflects the diversity of views pertaining to messianic figures in Judaism, yet further confirms that these figures were often described in relation to stars.

Finally, one of the firmest indications that Jews in the early centuries CE may have seen star imagery as messianic is the case of Simon bar-Kochba, the leader of the final Jewish revolt against Rome. Some contemporaries saw in him a fulfillment of Balaam’s messianic prophecy, as the Palestinian Talmud reports: “Rabbi Akiba interpreted, ‘A star has come forth out of Jacob’ as ‘[Kochba] has come forth out of Jacob.’ When Rabbi Akiba saw bar [Kochba] he said: This is the King Messiah. Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta replied: ‘Akiba, grass will grow out of your cheekbones before the son of David comes.’”²¹ While the bar Kochba revolt postdates Matthew by several decades, the fact that a Jewish leader would interpret this verse messianically reflects beliefs that were likely held as Matthew compiled his Gospel. While we cannot know for certain how widespread Rabbi Akiba’s interpretation of this verse was, both the scope of the revolt as well as the vehemence with which later Jewish writers disavowed the interpretation (referring to Simon as bar-*Koziba*, “son of a lie”) give some indication of its popularity.

All of these excerpts from Jewish literature help to establish the literary environment in which Matthew was read. That Matthew was conversant with at least some of these texts and ideas is clear. Strong links exist between the magi narrative and the Balaam narrative beyond just the rising of a star; most commentators agree that Matthew’s narrative is invoking numerous narrative elements from Num. 22–24.²² The infancy narrative itself portrays Herod as familiar with the messianic implications

²⁰ Stefan Beyerle, “A Star Shall Come out of Jacob: A Critical Evaluation of the Balaam Oracle in the Context of Jewish Revolts in Roman Times,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam*, ed. Geurt Hendrik van Kooten and J. van Ruiten (Themes in Biblical Narrative 11; Boston: Brill, 2008), 183.

²¹ Collins 2010, 72.

²² For both a cogent explanation of this view and an extensive (though slightly dated) bibliography, see Brown 1993, 190–196.

of a new star. When the magi explain to him that they came in response to a star, “after gathering all the ruling priests and scribes of the people he asked them where the Messiah should be born” (συναγαγὼν πάντας τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ γραμματεῖς τοῦ λαοῦ ἐπυνθάνετο παρ’ αὐτῶν ποῦ ὁ Χριστὸς γεννᾶται).²³ Herod immediately interpreted the star as a sign of the Messiah’s birth, and perhaps Matthew, believing that his audience would be familiar with some of the texts and ideas cited above, expected his readers to come to the same conclusions. For these readers, the star in Matthew would have fit with the tradition of God miraculously guiding his people and also indicated God’s (and Matthew’s) endorsement of Jesus as a messiah figure.

Matthew’s Star and Greco-Roman Texts

The record of Greek interest in stars and other astrological phenomena stretches back as far as Homer and continued into the Hellenistic and Roman ages, as documented by numerous authors.²⁴ Modern scholarship has likewise produced a considerable corpus of works addressing the ancient understanding of stars—a topic too broad to examine here.²⁵ But of particular relevance to Matthew’s star are two types of celestial signs described in Greek and Roman literature: those which mark the beginning of a new age, and those which mark the birth of a noteworthy individual. Many accounts detailing signs like these were written during the first century BCE and first century CE, and thus may reflect traditions current at the time that Matthew’s gospel began circulating.

“[Divine] power sends us signs,” wrote Cicero in his first-century BCE *De Divinatione*, “of which history has preserved numerous examples. We find the following ones recorded, when just before sunrise the moon was eclipsed in the sign of Leo,²⁶ this indicated that Darius and the Persians

²³ Matt. 2:4.

²⁴ Outstanding examples of these include Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, Hipparchus’s *On Sizes and Distances*, Aristarchus’s *On the Sizes and Distances*, and Aristotle’s *On the Heavens*.

²⁵ For a survey of this literature, see Olaf Pedersen, *Early Physics and Astronomy: A Historical Introduction* (rev. ed.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁶ An account from the Alexander Romance (dated far later) also emphasizes the importance of the stars at the time of one’s birth. “When the time had come for Olympias to give birth, she sat down on the birth-stool and went into labor. Nectanebo stood by her, measuring the courses of the heavenly bodies...’Sit down now, your majesty, on the chair of

would be overcome by the Macedonians under Alexander, and that Darius would die.”²⁷ Cicero’s comments reflect the belief, common in classical literature, that changes in heaven presage changes on earth. Such a belief is also reflected in an excerpt from Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia* concerning the ascension of Augustus:

His late Majesty Augustus had deemed this comet very propitious to himself; as it had appeared at the beginning of his rule, at some games which, not long after the decease of his father Caesar, as a member of the college founded by him he was celebrating in honour of Mother Venus. In fact he made public the joy that it gave him in these words: ‘On the very days of my Games a comet was visible for seven days in the northern part of the sky. It was rising about an hour before sunset, and was a bright star, visible from all lands’...[P]rivate he rejoiced because he interpreted the comet as having been born for his own sake and as containing his own birth within it; and, to confess the truth, it did have a healthgiving influence over the world.²⁸

Readers familiar with these narratives may have seen in the rise of Jesus’s birth star an indication of regime change: the birth of this “king of the Jews” marked the end of older regimes and ushered in a new kingdom,²⁹ whose beginning was reflected in the stars.

This belief is also reflected in later accounts of the Roman emperor Nero. Tacitus, writing in the early second century CE, noted a heavenly sign and the subsequent reaction of the Roman people. During Nero’s reign “a comet blazed into view—in the opinion of the crowd, an apparition boding change to monarchies. Hence, as though Nero were already dethroned, men began to inquire on whom the next choice should fall.”³⁰ The response of Nero is recorded in Suetonius (also writing in the early second century):

benefaction, and make your labors more frequent and energetic. Jupiter, the lover of virgins, who was pregnant with Dionysus in his thigh, is now high in the clear heaven, turning into horned Ammon between Aquarius and Pisces, and designating an Egyptian as world-ruler. Give birth NOW! And as the child fell to the ground, there were great claps of thunder and flashes of lightning, so that all the world was shaken. Pseudo - Callisthenes and Richard Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 45.

²⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Loeb Classical Library 154; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 355.

²⁸ Pliny, *Natural History Volume 1: Books 1-2*, trans. H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library 330; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 236.

²⁹ Compare this with the well-recognized emphasis in Matthew’s Gospel on Jesus as a king and the Gospel message being the establishment of a kingdom.

³⁰ Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals: Books 1-3*, trans. Clifford H. Moore (Loeb Classical Library 249; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 143.

It chanced that a comet had begun to appear on several successive nights, a thing which is commonly believed to portend the death of great rulers. Worried by this, and learning from the astrologer Balbillus that kings usually averted such omens by the death of some distinguished man, thus turning them from themselves upon the heads of the nobles, he resolved on the death of all the eminent men of the State; but the more firmly, and with some semblance of justice, after the discovery of two conspiracies.³¹

Granted, these accounts date to after the composition of Matthew's gospel, so it is unclear to what extent this particular belief would have been widespread in the ancient world. Nevertheless it is possible that first century readers would have held (or at least been familiar with) such beliefs. For these readers, Herod's response to the news of the star would have been natural; like Nero, Herod would have feared this omen of a regime change and done everything in his power to prevent it.

Another relevant instance of a celestial sign occurs in Virgil's *Aeneid*. As Aeneas and his family frantically debate what path they should take, his father Anchises cries out to Jupiter for a sign:

No sooner said
 than an instant peal of thunder crashes on the left
 and down from the sky a shooting star comes gliding,
 trailing a flaming torch to irradiate the night
 as it comes sweeping down. We watch it sailing
 over the topmost palace roofs to bury itself,
 still burning bright, in the forests of Mount Ida,
 blazing its path with light, leaving a broad furrow,
 a fiery wake, and miles around the smoking sulfur fumes.
 Won over at last, my father rises to his full height
 and prays to the gods and reveres that holy star:
 'No more delay, not now! You gods of my fathers,
 now I follow wherever you lead me, I am with you.'³²

This account, though very different from the appearance of Jesus's star in Matthew, contains several interesting elements. The appearance of this sign inspires the beginning of Aeneas's journey, just as the star's appearance in Matthew inspires the journey of the wise men. The star also serves as a guiding

³¹ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Volume II*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Loeb Classical Library 38; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 145-146.

³² Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006), 99.

star in that marks the first destination on Aeneas's journey; it points the family to Mount Ida, in whose shelter the escaped Trojans take refuge after fleeing their captured city.

Perhaps even more striking are accounts that link astral phenomena with the birth of important figures. Numerous stories exist detailing signs of Augustus's birth, but two in particular bear mentioning. In his *Lives of the Caesars*, Suetonius details several signs that preceded Augustus's birth:

Long ago, when a part of the wall of [Augustus's home town] Velitrae was struck by a lightning bolt from heaven, it was interpreted that a citizen from Velitrae would rule the world someday...Julius Marathus is the authority that, a few months before Augustus was born, a portent occurred in public which warned that nature was about to give birth to a king for the Roman people. The frightened Senate resolved that no boy born that year should be trained [for public life]; those who had pregnant wives, because each applied the prophecy to his own family, took care that the Senate's decree was not really obeyed...Atia herself, before she gave birth to him, dreamed that her womb was carried up to the stars and spread out over all the earth and sky. Octavius, the father, dreamed that the radiance of the sun rose from Atia's womb.³³

While it is not specified what type of "public portent" preceded Augustus's birth, it had a similar result to the appearance of the star in Matthew 2; the Roman elites (like Herod and the Jewish elites) were frightened and took steps to prevent the fulfillment of the sign. The heavenly dreams of Augustus's parents also bear mentioning – both attribute celestial imagery to this future king.

Roman historian Marcus Junianus Justinus recorded heavenly signs accompanying the birth of Mithridates IV Eupator (a first century BCE king of Pontus) in his third-century *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*. While Justinus is writing long after Matthew, the legends he cites about Mithridates were initially recorded by Pompeius Trogus, who (reportedly) wrote during the early first century CE. About the birth of Mithridates, he states that

...the future greatness of this prince even signs from heaven had foretold; for in the year in which he was born, as well as in that in which he began to reign, a comet blazed forth with such splendor, for seventy successive days on each occasion, that the whole sky seemed to be

³³ Suetonius, *Lives*, 287.

on fire. It covered a fourth part of the firmament with its train, and obscured the light of the sun with its effulgence; and in rising and setting it took up the space of four hours.³⁴

An even closer parallel lies in the description of the birth of Severus Alexander in the *Historia Augusta*: “It is said that on the day after his birth a star of the first magnitude was visible for the entire day at Arca Caesarea, and also that in the neighborhood of his father's house the sun was encircled with a gleaming ring.”³⁵ While too late to be of immediate relevance to Matthew’s account (and from a source too fantastic to be much relied on), this description does serve to give a sense for the type of miraculous signs people expected to accompany the births of prominent figures.

While it is far from clear whether Matthew’s readers would have been familiar with all of the specific sources mentioned above, they would have at least been familiar with these types of stories. Readers versed in Greco-Roman writings would have expected, in an account of the life of an important figure, to find examples of divine signs accompanying his birth. As Albright and Mann emphatically assert, “In the minds of the people at that time, it was inconceivable that the birth of an important personage should go unattended by a stellar harbinger.”³⁶ Moreover, most of the signs mentioned above appeared in relation to semi-divine figures; these men came be seen as either the offspring of a god or as gods themselves. Readers attuned to this trend may have seen in the symbol of the star not only a marker of Jesus’s importance and kingship, but perhaps also of his divine heritage.

Conclusion

The above examples help establish points of reference ancient readers may have had for understanding the star in Matthew 2. Being aware of these parallels in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature is useful in that it gives us a glimpse of the significance ancient readers may have found in

³⁴ Justinus, *Epitome of the Phillipic History of Pompeius Trogus*, 37.2

³⁵ *Historia Augusta: Alexander Severus*, trans. David Magie (Loeb Classical Library 140; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 201–203.

³⁶ William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (AB 26; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 14.

Matthew's narrative of the star. For readers familiar with these disparate texts, Matthew 2 could be read as making substantive claims. Readers familiar with the Jewish literary motif of divine guidance would have seen the star as a manifestation of God's direct intervention in history, guiding people and events as he guided them in tales of ancient Israel. Readers familiar with the astral imagery of Jewish messianic prophecies would have clearly recognized Matthew's narrative as a claim that Jesus fulfilled the prophesied prerequisites of Jewish messiahship. Readers who knew of Greco-Roman traditions of celestial signs starting a new age would have been attuned to Matthew's claim that the "kingdom of heaven" was being ushered in through Jesus's birth. And those who were familiar with texts detailing heavenly signs at the birth of a great man would have recognized Matthew's transparent presentation of Jesus as a divinely-appointed king.

Matthew's intention for the star to speak to both Jewish and Greco-Roman literary tradition is even more pronounced when seen within Matthew's broader infancy narrative, which is itself very concerned with showing the importance of Jesus for both Jew and Gentile. The significance of the Hebrew Bible as an underlying text for Matthew's infancy narrative is well documented. In Matthew 1, the text takes pains to emphasize that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and also a son of David (with all of the messianic overtones that accompany that role). The arranging and proclaiming of the genealogy as three sets of fourteen generations is a further appeal to Jewish numerological sensitivities.³⁷ The four explicit quotations of Hebrew Bible prophecies (Isa. 7:14 in 1:23; Mic. 5:2; 2 Sam. 5:2 in 2:6; Hosea 11:1 in 2:15; and Jer. 31:15 in 2:18) should certainly be seen as appeals those who know and believe in the Tanakh; they emphasize that the events of Jesus's birth occurred in fulfillment of revered prophecies. Also of significance for an audience versed in Jewish scripture would

³⁷ "David's name is fourteenth on the list. This is telling. In a genealogy of 3 x 14 generations, the one name with three consonants and a value of fourteen is also placed in the fourteenth spot. When one adds that this name is mentioned immediately before the genealogy (1.1) and twice at its conclusion (1.17), and that it is honored by the title, king, coincidence becomes effectively ruled out." W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1:165.

be the non-explicit yet clear parallels the story shares with Hebrew Bible narratives. Readers familiar with the narratives of Joseph, Moses, and Balaam would have certainly seen parallels in the events of the nativity, and thus would have come to view the new events in Matthew as being divinely orchestrated.³⁸

Elements in the broader infancy narrative also carry significance for readers familiar with Greco-Roman tradition. In the story of Mary being found pregnant through divine means, readers familiar with classical myths likely would have heard echoes of Greek and Roman myths pertaining to the births of demigods, heroes, and kings, thus strengthening the understanding that Jesus had a divine heritage and nature.³⁹ But perhaps the element which would have resonated most strongly with readers familiar with Greco-Roman writings is the Matthew's description of the magi. Their trip to greet the newborn king and deliver tribute would have called to mind the famed state visits of foreign powers at the birth or ascension of Greco-Roman rulers, most notably the Armenian king Tiridates's state visit to pay homage to Nero—an event that may have been fresh in the minds of Matthew's early readers.⁴⁰ The magi also would have served as Gentile role models, particularly in contrast to Herod. While the nominal “king of the Jews” and his Jewish advisors sat in Jerusalem unaware of the messiah's birth, the pagan magi were able to find him and offer him tribute and worship.⁴¹ And, as has been

³⁸ For a brief examination of this view, see Raymond Edward Brown, "Meaning of the Magi: The Significance of the Star," *Worship* 49:10 (1975): 576-578.

³⁹ For comparable accounts of the births of figures like Hercules, Alexander the Great, Pythagoras, and Plato, see David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, (Rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 129-136.

⁴⁰ “Tiridates, king of Armenia...came to Italy with the sons of three neighboring Parthian rulers in his entourage. Their journey from the East (the Euphrates) was like a triumphal procession. The entire city of Rome was decorated with lights and garlands, and the rooftops filled with onlookers, as Tiridates came forward and *paid homage* to Nero. Tiridates identified himself as a descendant of Arsaces, founder of the Parthian Empire, and said, ‘I have come to you, my god, to pay homage, as I do to Mithras.’ After Nero had confirmed him as king of Armenia, ‘the king did not return by the route he had followed in coming,’ but sailed back a different way. It is significant that Pliny (*Natural History* XXX vi 16-17) refers to Tiridates and his companions as magi.” Brown 1993, 174.

⁴¹ “First, the Christological good news draws believers, and those believers, the magi, are Gentiles...Matthew highlights the paradox: those who have the Scriptures and can see plainly what the prophets have said are not willing to worship the newborn king. To the contrary, the king and the chief priests and the scribes conspire against the Messiah, and the wicked king decrees his death...[T]hose who have the Scriptures reject Jesus, while Gentiles come and, with the help of the Scriptures, find and adore him.” Brown 1975, 581-82.

noted, readers of Roman historiography would not have been surprised by the murderous intentions of Herod upon hearing about the sign of the star; his actions mirror those of many Roman rulers upon hearing about an omen.

These broad literary resonances in Matthew, both in this narrative and elsewhere, may help explain the popularity (and eventual primacy) of Matthew as an account of Jesus's life. Readers of various backgrounds, familiar with disparate traditions and literature, may have all found details of significance in Matthew 2. Through these significant parallels, the star "forms something of a hermeneutical bridge, binding together pagan astrological hopes and Jewish biblical promises."⁴² Just as it draws Matthew's magi towards the young Jesus, the star draws readers of Matthew further into his treatise about the life and significance of Jesus.

⁴² Boring 1994, 142.

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JESUS OF NAZARETH, BAD FEMINIST?

A Brief Meta-Analysis of Women within the Jesus Tradition and Feminist Ideology

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A recent trend in historical Jesus scholarship has seen attempts to reconstruct the figure of Jesus as a type of proto-feminist. While this image stems from scholars portraying Jesus as leading an egalitarian social revolution,¹ the role of women has become of special interest. The concept is that Jesus, unlike most of his contemporaries, openly welcomed women to partake in his movement and even join his inner circle of disciples. Both popular and academic works have been produced promoting this seemingly radical image of Jesus, sometimes overtly, such as Sarah Bessey's *Jesus Feminist* and Leonard J. Swidler's *Jesus was a Feminist*.² Thus, the narrative framework produces the idea that the "traditional" Christian understanding of Jesus was the product of misogynistic theology, while the "real" and "historical" Jesus was in fact a radical gender egalitarian. Or more simply, the "Christ of Faith" is a sexist but the "Jesus of History" is a feminist.

¹ For examples of the "egalitarian Jesus", see: Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 133-55; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 261-4; Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 194-200; Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 209-45.

² Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women* (New York: Howard Books, 2013); Leonard J. Swidler, *Jesus was a Feminist: What the Gospels Reveal about His Revolutionary Perspective* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2007).

Yet does this reconstruction accurately reflect the earliest Jesus traditions?³ Is it apt to label the historical Jesus as a “feminist” or as a “misogynist,” and if so, in what sense? What details about the historical Jesus’s relationships and views on women can be analyzed within the earliest Jesus traditions? This paper seeks to examine briefly the idea of the feminist Jesus and evaluate the earliest layers of the Jesus tradition to determine what can be gleaned about the historical Jesus and women.

Before examining the role and views of women within the Jesus tradition, it is important to briefly examine the role of gender in first-century Judea. It must be stated that Judea, Second Temple Judaism, and the ancient Mediterranean as a whole, were patriarchal societies. With Judaism, this patriarchal view was legitimized in multiple ways, such as the Creation story in which God created males first. Thus it was assumed that males, therefore, have the superior position (Gen. 2:7-27; 1 Cor. 11:7-9).⁴ Some scholars have gone further to emphasize the lower status of women within ancient Judea, at which point women almost appear subhuman. One oft-cited example of this is the Talmudic prayer: “Praised be God that he has not created me a Gentile; praised be God for he has not created me a woman.”⁵ Other claims suggest that women were not obligated to recite the *Shema*, men should avoid speaking to women unless they were beholden to do, and that polygamy was still practiced at

³ It is not my goal to determine whether Jesus did or did not say any particular saying or perform any deed attributed to him. The following piece is interested in constructing “the gist” of what the historical Jesus may have said and done. With reference to Dale Allison, this is done to “heed before all else the general impressions that our primary sources,” see: Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (London: SPCK, 2010), 16. While some of the tradition methodological criteria will be employed (*e.g.* multiple attestation, traces of Aramaic, embarrassment, etc.) this is done with knowledge of their limitations, see: *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, ed. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne (New York: T&T Clark, 2012). Most important to this paper is the criterion of historical plausibility, that is, whether or not a particular saying or action of Jesus has coherence within the wider matrix of Judea within the 1st century, see: Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (Trans. M. Eugene Boring; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). The criteria of dissimilarity will not be used in this paper as I find it be of little to no use as historical method. This is because it presupposes the “uniqueness” of Jesus from his wider Jewish background and is rooted in a problematic history of anti-Jewish hermeneutics, see: M. D. Hooker, “Using the Wrong Tool,” *Theology* 75 (1972): 570-81. For more on “post-Third Quest for the Historical Jesus” methodology, see: James Crossley, *Jesus and the Chaos of History: Redirecting the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 35-63.

⁴ Kenneth C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 24. All biblical references in English are sourced from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁵ *Berakhot* 7.8. For examples of scholars citing this, see: Swidler 2007, 18.

the time of Jesus.⁶ According to Josephus, “The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man.”⁷

Scholars following the trend of reconstructing Jesus as a proto-feminist often contrast this grim chauvinist worldview with an image of Jesus. According to these scholars, Jesus’s Galilean ministry has an uncharacteristic focus on women: women appear in his parables as prime examples of faithfulness,⁸ he offers them support by healing variously afflicted women,⁹ and he even allows them to be his disciples.¹⁰ Given this data, Jesus’s acceptance of women is labeled “revolutionary,”¹¹ “radical,”¹² and even “unprecedented”¹³ within the ancient world. Swidler claims, “the feminist character that is found there [in the four Gospels] is ultimately to be attributed to Yeshua himself and not to the church, the evangelists, or their sources.”¹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza sums up the ideological narrative of this historical Jesus by stating that he offered a “discipleship of equals,” welcoming both men and women, rich and poor, healthy and sick to be his disciples.¹⁵

The primary issue with the feminist Jesus is flawed methodology. Swidler’s thesis rests entirely upon the criterion of dissimilarity.¹⁶ The logic goes that “if a saying or action attributed to Yeshua is contrary to the cultural milieu of the time, then it most probably had its origin in Yeshua. In this case the feminism of Yeshua could hardly be attributable to the primitive church.”¹⁷ But this raises an

⁶ See: Swidler 2007, 18-19; Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 8.

⁷ Josephus, *Against Apion* 662.

⁸ Matt. 12:42, 13:33, 24:41, 25:1-13; Luke 4:26, 15:8-10, 18:1-8, 21:1-4.

⁹ Mark 1:29-31; Matt. 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-9, 7:11-17, 13:10-17.

¹⁰ Luke 10:39.

¹¹ Howard Clark Kee, “The Changing Role of Women in the Early Christian World,” *J. Theo. Today* 49.2 (1992): 237.

¹² Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 134.

¹³ Wink 1992, 131.

¹⁴ Swidler 2007, 21.

¹⁵ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

¹⁶ Swidler even states as much: “Basically the ‘principle of dissimilarity’ operates here.” See: Swidler 2007, 21.

¹⁷ Swidler 2007, 21.

obvious counterargument – with such incomplete evidence about Jesus, the early church, and the cultural milieu of the time, how can we make such a judgment? The criterion is particularly fallacious because it assumes Jesus and his teachings *must* have been different from the Judaism of his time and the developing Christian tradition. Of course, it is possible that Jesus was different from the surrounding environment, but as James G. Crossley rightly observes, “a criterion which *assumes* it to be the case shows how loaded the criterion is before we even get started.”¹⁸ In other words, the criterion presupposes that Jesus was different, and thus, scholars (unsurprisingly) produce a Jesus who was “revolutionary,” “radical,” and “unprecedented.”¹⁹

This flawed logic stems from the continuous pattern of scholars to mold the historical Jesus as a “great man of history.” In the case of certain feminist scholarship, the criterion of dissimilarity apologetically functions to separate an egalitarian Jesus from a misogynistic world and a chauvinist religion. Some scholars such as Amy-Jill Levine and Brooks Plaskow have challenged the sinister implications that ancient Judaism was inherently chauvinist and that Jesus’s brand of “proto-Christian feminism” liberated them.²⁰ This apologetic scholarship and methodology has led Kathleen Corley to conclude that the feminist Jesus “functions as a foundational narrative for modern Christian feminism.”²¹

In examining the Jesus tradition a few, but important, details can be gleaned about women and conceptions of gender. According to the Synoptic tradition, Jesus healed multiple women: Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2), a “daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13:10-17), a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), and a woman with a bleeding issue (Mark 5:25-34). Though the Lukan material is from a

¹⁸ Crossley 2015, 36.

¹⁹ For a detailed criticism of the criterion of dissimilarity, see: Dagmar Winter, “Saving the Quest for Authenticity from the Criterion of Dissimilarity: History and Plausibility,” in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, ed. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 115-31.

²⁰ For a survey of the relationship between anti-Judaism and feminist scholarship, see: Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

²¹ Kathleen E. Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2002), 8.

later Jesus tradition, Mark's account of Jesus healing women does endorse these actions as evidence. It is also stated within the Synoptic tradition that crowds bought their "sick, lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others" to Jesus for healing.²² Given the more neutral language of "crowd" (ὄχλος) and Jesus's precedent for healing members of both sexes, it would be safe to assume that women would be among them. But this should not be surprising, as prophetic and magical figures typically healed members of both sexes.²³ Thus, it can be reasonably deduced that Jesus was believed to have healed women of their sicknesses and exorcised demons from them.

From exploring the earliest evidence of Jesus's teachings of divorce, it is clear that Jesus forbade it.²⁴ Mark and Paul's early and independent attestation, as well as the later apologetic attempts by Matthew and Luke to alter the parameters of this teaching, demonstrates its awkward place within the early Jesus movement.²⁵ Almost paradoxically, however, stands the fact that Jesus's teachings on the family unit are far less strict. A recurring pattern within the Synoptic tradition is that Jesus's teachings break up families and cause division between households.²⁶ Like a sword cutting a garment into two pieces, Jesus's teachings are divisive, according to Matt. 11:34-37: he has come "to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one's foes will be members of one's own household." Yet this division is not between the sexes, but rather between the generations, as it is parents and children whom Jesus sets in opposition.²⁷ Corley rightly observes, "there is little evidence that Jesus challenged family solidarity on the grounds that the family was inherently patriarchal or was characterized by the inequality between sexes."²⁸

²² Matt. 5:30; Luke 14:13.

²³ See *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly B. Stratton and Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁴ Mark 10:5-10; 1 Cor 7:9-10. See Matt. 5:32; Luke 16:18.

²⁵ See Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 125-48.

²⁶ For a detailed study of Jesus' family and household teachings, see: Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

²⁷ Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 146.

²⁸ Corley 2002, 71.

Moreover, Jesus's teachings about his family within the Kingdom of God follows a patriarchal model, with God as the father of those who do his will.²⁹

Because this division of the family includes "sisters" against their mothers and doing the will of God as their father, it has been suggested that women also followed the historical Jesus throughout his ministry.³⁰ Still, there is an important distinction to make here between a disciple and a supporter of Jesus. For example, Luke's Gospel presents Mary and Martha as supporters of Jesus, aiding him in his ministry with food and shelter, but they do not accompany him along his travels.³¹ There are also significant moments within the Jesus tradition that feature Jesus interacting with women by name and in a personal setting.³² The other significant textual evidence is Mark 15:40-41, in which the text presumes that women had followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Yet it must be stressed that following Jesus and being a disciple of Jesus are not one in the same. Despite the contradictions in the names of Jesus's inner circle of twelve disciples [do the names, however uncertain, leave their genders ambiguous?], none of them were women.³³ Additionally, nowhere in the Jesus tradition does Jesus summon a woman to follow him. This would suggest that these women were drawn to Jesus's message independently of Jesus himself. Jesus may not have directly called women, but some "women found the apocalyptic proclamation of Jesus, and of Paul after him, liberating."³⁴

Besides the reference to "sisters" among Jesus's followers and women following him from Galilee to Jerusalem, there is the possibility that the disciples' wives also accompanied Jesus throughout their travels. This idea can be drawn from Jesus's comments about the cost of discipleship

²⁹ Mark 3:33-35; Matt. 12:48-50; Luke 8:21; *Thom* 99.

³⁰ Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Edinburg: T& Clark, 1999), 381.

³¹ Luke 10:38-42. Additionally, in John 11, Mary and Martha are also presented as supporters of Jesus but are still stationary within their home.

³² See Mark 1:30-31, 14:3-9; Luke 2:41-52, 10:41-4.

³³ Mark 3:16-19; Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13.

³⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 203.

in Mark 10:29-30.³⁵ What is noteworthy is that, in this saying's earliest form, leaving one's wife is not a condition of discipleship. Whereas in Luke 18:29, it has been altered to include the leaving of wives as well. This might also correlate with Paul's attestation in 1 Cor 9:5 that Peter's wife accompanied Peter during his missionary work. Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann thus argue, "if this was also true for the time of discipleship of the earthly Jesus, then his wife was already among the followers of Jesus."³⁶ Nevertheless, if true, this scenario would still give the agency of following to the husband, not to the wife. It is most likely these wives would have been adjuncts to their husbands, not coworkers in their own right.³⁷

So while we can speculate about whether Jesus did have women followers, we cannot say with any confidence how many women followed Jesus or what their agency was in the matter. It is unclear whether or not some of these women disciples were wives following their husbands and what role they had in making a decision to follow Jesus. When it comes to Jesus's views on and relationships to women, most of the evidence is ambiguous at best. While the Jesus movement was a mixed and diverse group, we cannot say to what extent. Furthermore, it appears that while Jesus did have significant friendships with a few women, none of them were members of his inner circle. The reality is that there is scant evidence to indicate that the historical Jesus "liberated" women in a way that can be correlated with modern "feminism." Perhaps like Mary Daly, Daphne Hampson, and Virginia Mollenkott, we should understand the historical Jesus to be just as patriarchal as the rest of the ancient world.³⁸

³⁵ See Matt. 19:29.

³⁶ Stegemann and Stegemann 1999, 381.

³⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 214. This is not to say that no women were "workers in Christ" in their own right, this is clearly not the case, cf. 1 Thes. 5:12; Rom 16:7. Also see: Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

³⁸ Köstenberger labels these scholars "radical feminists", see: Margaret Elizabeth Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 37-60.

The scholarship of the historical Jesus in relation to women demonstrates that the practice of “history” is never a neutral arbitrator of the past. Despite how confidently proclaimed and popular the feminist Jesus is, this Jesus has been constructed on shaky evidence and flawed methodology. Much like earlier attempts to promote the idea of a matriarchal prehistory, the concept of Jesus as a radical egalitarian feminist is an “ennobling lie.”³⁹ Although it is clear that women played a role in the life and teachings of Jesus, modern concepts of ontological equality cannot be found within the Jesus tradition.

This is not to diminish the fact that the Jesus movement was a mixed movement. The fact that the historical Jesus did attract women followers should not be understated, as not all religious, philosophical, and social institutions in antiquity included them. But neither should it be overstated, because many figures like Jesus did have women supporters and followers. Much like Jesus’s sometimes violently judgmental language, Jesus’s lack of attention to the plight of women is an uncomfortable reality for some readers. The evidence indicates that Jesus was not a feminist, but neither was he a misogynist. While it appears that women were not directly called by Jesus, some women did indeed find themselves called by his message. It would be better for readers of the Gospels not to project back onto the historical Jesus our modern expectations. Historians and theologians should rather reflect on the plight of women throughout the centuries and understand how the image of Christ has been used for both women’s domination and liberation.

³⁹ Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why An Invented Past Will Not Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 68.

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“WOMEN RECEIVED THEIR DEAD”

Resurrection and Reunion in Second Temple Literature

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The Father sent him to earth, but his mother watched him depart. In John 19, Jesus’s mother Mary hovers near the cross as her firstborn bleeds and asphyxiates. To see the lacerated, heaving body of her child – and to hear his suffering mocked – is an almost unbearable sorrow.¹ But Mary was not alone in her grief. Two other mothers lost their children, criminals or not, that day. Child-loss was more than a sword: it was a scythe. It indiscriminately killed babies and adults and sliced through the hearts of thousands of mothers in the ancient world, not least in Palestine. The Jewish and Christian literature of the Second Temple Period (for the purposes of this article, 300 BCE-200 CE) relates numerous accounts of women losing loved ones, typically sons. These women witness the suffering (sometimes torture) of their children or beloved male relatives, yet they endure the grief. Second Temple literature often provides the specific reason for the women’s steadfastness – their hope in the resurrection. No longer resigned to a shadowy afterlife in the Hebrew Bible’s underworld of Sheol, many Second Temple Jewish schools of thought embraced the concept of a bodily resurrection of humanity at the end of days.² But they envisioned this glorious afterlife quite differently from, say, a

¹ Matt. 27:40-44, Mark 15:29-32, and Luke 23:35-38 depict Jesus’ humiliation on the cross. John 19:2-3 describes it occurring during his trial. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical and apocryphal references and quotations are derived from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

² The Pharisees and early Christians espoused this view, whereas Sadducees did not. For further information, see Claudia Setzer, "Resurrection of the Dead as Symbol and Strategy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 1 (2001): 68.

modern Christian conception of eternity. Contemporary ideas about “heaven” and the future of humanity often center upon reunion with loved ones. (Even hell is occasionally joked about as a place to reconnect with family and friends!) In Second Temple Judaism, discussions of the resurrection emphasized ever-elusive immortality, vindication of the righteous, restoration of humanity upon a rejuvenated earth, and vengeance upon the wicked.³ The literature seldom depicts individuals being reunited with loved ones – except for women. Second Temple authors portray bereaved mothers, wives, and sisters as hoping for the day of resurrection. While male authors and characters generally view the resurrection as a triumph of good over evil, female characters are typically portrayed to focus on the aspect of reunion.

Resurrection in the Hebrew Bible

To fully appreciate the Second Temple concept of resurrection, an examination of its literary ancestor is necessary. The Hebrew Bible contains only two (almost) undeniably explicit references to a bodily resurrection of humans: Isa. 26:19 and Dan. 12:2.⁴ Sadly, child-loss is not rare within the Hebrew Bible and afflicts many families, including the first one. In Genesis 4, Adam and Eve’s son Cain jealously murders their other son Abel. The first couple’s response in Gen. 4:25 establishes a precedent for the Hebrew Bible’s remainder: “Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him.’” Eve is depicted to cope with child-loss by bearing another son, and indeed the concept

Also, some variations of opinion apparently existed as to whether or not all humans would be resurrected or only the righteous (compare 2 Macc. 7:14 to John 5:28-29).

³ See Rev. 20-21.

⁴ James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the “Old Testament” and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Jewish-Hellenistic Works* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), xxxiii. Daniel 12:2, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Isaiah 26:19, “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.” Some other passages in the Hebrew Bible (such as the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37) may seem to imply physical resurrection, but the context suggests resurrection is used as a metaphor for Israel’s restoration in the Levant rather than a literal, eschatological occurrence. See, in particular, Ezek. 37:12-14.

of “replacement” children continues throughout the Hebrew Bible.⁵ It even affects King David’s great-great-grandmother. Naomi’s two sons Mahlon and Chilion die while the family sojourns in Moab. Chilion’s widow Ruth later bears a son via her new husband Boaz and allows her mother-in-law Naomi to nurse him. In the eyes of the Bethlehem community, Naomi’s sorrow at losing two sons is assuaged by this “replacement” son. They therefore proclaim in Ruth 4:17, “A son has been born to Naomi.” 1 Kings 3 contains a less happy narrative. Two prostitutes both bear children around the same time. One child perishes in the night, and the bereaved mother swaps her dead son with the other woman’s living son. The anecdote ultimately serves to display King Solomon’s wisdom, and he determines the rightful mother of the living child. Yet, the text viscerally depicts a woman’s stereotypical method of coping with child-loss – replacement. None of the women in the previous examples are hopeful for reunion with their children. Instead, their only consolation is to bear new offspring.

Two other passages, although centered on men, further illustrate the concept of replacement, as well as explain the Hebrew Bible’s notions of the afterlife. In 2 Samuel 12, God punishes David for committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah. As retribution, the child born out of the affair perishes. The heartbroken father mourns in 2 Sam. 12:23, “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” David’s statement might appear hopeful: “I shall go to him.” But the destination is anything but joyous. Biblical and other Near Eastern literature clarifies that the afterlife is situated in a gloomy and sensory-deprived place called Sheol.⁶ Sheol lies

⁵ Jon Douglas Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 133. Levenson expounds upon the concept of “replacement” children, and I am heavily indebted to his work. I provide additional examples of my own (namely the prostitutes and David).

⁶ Ps. 6:5: “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?” Eccles. 9:10: “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol.” Isa. 38:18, “Those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.” According to the “Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld,” the afterlife is the “[house wherein the entrants] are bereft of light, [where dust is their fare and] clay [thei]r food...[they see no light,] residing [in] darkness.” See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Third Edition with Supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 509.

deep within the earth, where the dead exist as shadows (quite literally) of their former selves.⁷ In 1 Samuel 28, the Israelite monarch Saul summons his former mentor Samuel from the dead. The judge arises as a spirit, still tainted with the vestiges of old age and cloaked in a robe—certainly not a glorified body. The spirit then prophesies in verse 19 that Saul (a deranged king) will presently join him (a righteous man) in Sheol. The souls of the good and evil are lumped together in death, a flitting mass of spirits in a pit. Grieving over his son, David surely could not have been anticipating the bleak Sheol as described in Saul's encounter with Samuel. David wanted his son back in *this* world. He longed for a bundle of breathing, joyous life—not a ghost. His (and Bathsheba's) depicted method of coping with the loss can be found in 2 Sam. 12:24: "Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon." Once again, the consolation for bereaved parents is presented to be a new child. Because Solomon would later ascend to the kingship of Israel, he is (in a sense) portrayed as a worthy replacement for David's deceased child. A similar conclusion can be found in Job.⁸ To test Job's love of God, Satan is permitted to afflict the man. After losing his possessions and servants, Job succumbs to the greatest grief of all when a roof collapses upon and crushes his ten children. The righteous man is then subjected to forty chapters of ravaged health, philosophizing friends, and cosmic history lectures. In chapter 42, Job's trials conclude, and God replenishes the man's wealth and blesses him with ten more children. Furthermore, according to Job 42:15, "in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters." As comfort, Job's deceased children are replaced with new, worthy children. But amidst all his monologues, Job expresses little hope in reuniting with his original children, and the book contains grim language

⁷ Aron Pinker, "Sheol," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1995): 172.

⁸ Job's composition between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE places the book right on the cusp of Second Temple literature. See Shmuel Vargon, "The Date of Composition of the Book of Job in the Context of S. D. Luzzatto's Attitude to Biblical Criticism," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 91, no. 3/4 (2001): 377.

regarding Sheol. In all these accounts from the Hebrew Bible, loved ones are lost forever, and the afterlife offers no meaningful chance of reunion.

One woman in the Hebrew Bible was not content with the grim, contemporary worldview. Elijah and his mentee Elisha (prophets operating in the ninth-century BCE Northern Kingdom of Israel) star in roughly parallel stories. For example, Elijah raises the widow of Zarephath's son from the dead in 1 Kings 17, and Elisha does the same for the Shunammite woman of 2 Kings 4. But a major distinction becomes apparent upon a close reading. After her son's death, the widow of Zarephath lashes out in grief at Elijah. Moved with compassion, the prophet raises her child from the dead. In 2 Kings 4, the Shunammite woman's son also dies, and she immediately seeks out the prophet. After locating Elisha, she refuses to return home without him. But why? If she wanted to vent her frustration, the prophet's dwelling would have been suitable. Why compel him to visit her home? What did she want? A healing was out of the question, for the child had already perished and, presumably, entered Sheol. What could the prophet possibly do? Did she have the vaguest hope that Elisha could raise her child from the dead? This story and the Elijah narrative represent a startling departure from ancient Near Eastern literature. Within the entire corpus, they appear to be the only clear and complete examples of mere mortals being drawn from Sheol back into the world of the living.⁹ But the Elisha vignette is even more startling. The Shunammite woman does not request another child. Rather – in a break from Near Eastern precedent – she appears to believe that *something* other than Sheol could have the final say.¹⁰

Resurrection in the Hellenistic Period

By the first-century BCE, the *something* had become institutionalized within certain schools of Jewish thought. Sometime in the future, God would restore Creation to its original paradisiacal form.

⁹ John Levenson interprets (quite convincingly) the fragmentary *Aqhat* epic from Ugarit to imply a resurrection. See chapter 8 of *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, especially.

¹⁰ Levenson 2006, 132.

The souls of the righteous would be returned to their bodies, which would be raised from the dead to inhabit the newly healed world. The afterlife was no longer a bland porridge of floating spirits, but a sensory feast of pleasure – or horror. But how did such a hope rise? After the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of Judah’s inhabitants in 586 BCE, the Persians ultimately gained hegemony over the Middle East and allowed adherents of the Israelite religion to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Unfortunately, the Levant continued to sustain a series of dynasty changes. In 331 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, absorbing their province of Yehud. After Alexander’s death in 323 BCE, his generals and their succeeding dynasties, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, vied for regional domination. The Levant was caught between the superpowers and ultimately fell under Seleucid jurisdiction in 198 BCE. Faced with such uncertainty, the followers of the Israelite religion (by this time called Jews) began to look beyond their current circumstances and hope for divine intervention. This hope, of course, was not new and permeated the Hebrew Bible, but years of exposure to Persian and Greek worldviews offered new ways to conceptualize God’s intervention. Mediated by Greek culture, elements from the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism (such as a bodily resurrection of the dead) appear to have seeped into Judaism.¹¹ Alternatively, ideas such as the resurrection may have been reinterpretations or “reactivations of ancient Canaanite myth.”¹² Jews of the Second Temple period began to believe that their own Yahweh could intervene on Israel’s behalf not only in the present world but in the eschaton as well. Maybe Sheol was not the conclusion of existence. Perhaps God would resurrect the dead. These theological adjustments cracked open a new door of eschatological hope – a hope which would soon be tested.

In 175 BCE, Antiochus IV ascended the Seleucid throne and assumed the name “Epiphanes” or “god-manifest.” Unfortunately for conservative Jews, he accelerated Hellenization (the

¹¹ James Barr, "The Question of Religious Influence: The Case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 2 (1985): 219.

¹² Barr 1985, 206.

implementation of Greek practices) in Judea. It is within this context that the events depicted in 2 Maccabees and its expansion in 4 Maccabees occur.¹³ The original work, 2 Maccabees, portrays the Gentile monarch's attempts to enforce pagan worldviews upon his Jewish subjects. Some Jewish factions violently resisted, and a bloody war ensued. Led by the Maccabee brothers, the revolt gained independence for Judea from Seleucia. But, before the conflict was over, Antiochus had desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem and inflicted a reign of terror upon his Jewish subjects. Observation of the Sabbath was forbidden; mothers were compelled, on pain of death, not to circumcise their children; and pious Jews were forced to consume pork.¹⁴

2 Maccabees 7 and 4 Maccabees 8-12 both narrate an attempt by Antiochus to persuade Jewish captives to eat pork. After torturing the intractable elderly priest Eleazar, the “bloodthirsty, murderous, and utterly abominable” monarch turns his attention to a widowed mother and her seven sons.¹⁵ After whipping them, the king makes an offer; if the lads will merely eat pork, they may live. Rejecting this proposition, the young men are mocked and sequentially tortured to death. Tongues are cut out, limbs are severed, and heads are scalped. One boy is fried alive in oil before the eyes of his own mother. The king then tempts the final son; wealth and a government position will await the Jewish boy if he will consume the pig meat. But the boy withstands even this proposition. Desperate to win this ideological battle, Antiochus turns to the man's mother for help.¹⁶ Regardless of her piety, her maternal love will trump ceremonial law, or so the king assumes. He commands her to encourage her son to apostatize, presuming that the boy will obey his mother. Rather than attempt to spare her

¹³ 2 Maccabees was most likely composed within 124–63 BCE. See J. W. Van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism; v.57. Leiden: Brill, 1997), 51. 4 Maccabees was probably written within 20–54 CE. See Moses Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1953), 97.

¹⁴ 4 Macc. 4:25–26: “Women, because they had circumcised their sons, were thrown headlong from heights along with their infants...he himself tried through torture to compel everyone in the nation to eat defiling foods and to renounce Judaism.”

¹⁵ 4 Macc. 10:17.

¹⁶ Henten 1997, 114.

son, the mother instead steels him in 2 Macc. 7:29 to “accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.” The young man obeys his mother and scorns Antiochus, who promptly executes the lad and murders his mother.

Given the Hebrew Bible’s frequent depiction of women as zealously desiring children, how can this mother be portrayed to bear, and even encourage, her seven children’s decapitations?¹⁷ For that matter, how could any mother handle the sight of her limbless child’s body being burned alive? The mother certainly is in no position to bear “replacement” children. In fact, she perishes at the end of the tale. Yet 2 Macc. 7:20 states that “although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord.” What was this hope? One of her sons clarifies that he looks forward to the resurrection as a day of vindication for himself and of vengeance on Antiochus: “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!”¹⁸ Another son proclaims, “Keep on, and see how his [God’s] mighty power will torture you [Antiochus] and your descendants.”¹⁹ The seventh son shouts before death, “For our brothers...have drunk of ever-flowing life...but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance.”²⁰ The mother, however, hopes for the resurrection as a means to regain her children: “I may get you back again with your brothers.” A subtle distinction can be gleaned from this passage. The “masculine” hope of the resurrection is justice while the “feminine” hope of resurrection is reunion. The young men discuss vindication and immortality. The woman relates her desire to see her children again. Lacking a name, the mother is identified solely (in 2 and 4 Maccabees, at least) by her maternal function, thus making the loss of her children even more poignant. Yet, her anonymity also enables

¹⁷ Rachel in Gen. 30:1 and Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:7 are examples.

¹⁸ 2 Macc. 7:14.

¹⁹ 2 Macc. 7:17.

²⁰ 2 Macc. 7:36.

her to become an ideal for all Second Temple women. If this woman could hope in the resurrection, they will be able to do so.²¹

A dramatic shift had occurred from the composition of the narrative portions of the Hebrew Bible to the Maccabean literature. Mothers now had the hope of seeing their children again, and this hope drove them to instill righteous behavior – the prerequisite for resurrection – into their offspring. The mother proclaims in 2 Macc. 7:23, “The Creator of the world...will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.” The morbidly fascinating tale of the mother and her children had its own afterlife, even garnering a potential reference in the New Testament. Heb. 11:35 appears to discuss the Maccabean martyrs: “Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection.” This statement falls within a list of martyrs, women “get back” their loved ones via resurrection, and “others” refuse release (most likely predicated upon apostasy) so they can inherit the resurrection. These points lead scholars to suggest this passage alludes to the Maccabean martyrs.²² Heb. 11:17-19 contains another link to the Maccabean tradition: “By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac...he considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead – and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” This passage portrays a man willing for his son to die. Why? Because of his belief in the resurrection, at least according to the author of Hebrew’s interpretation of Genesis. 4 Macc. 15:27-28 dubs the mother of the martyred boys, who encourages them to die so she can see them again in the resurrection, a “daughter of God-fearing Abraham.” The author of 4 Maccabees clearly noticed the parallel between Abraham and the mother, while the author of Hebrews attributes Abraham’s faith to the resurrection; indeed, 2 Maccabees, like Hebrews, depicts the mother’s hope as deriving from the resurrection.

²¹ I would like to thank my colleague Caroline Crews for raising the points about the mother’s identity, anonymity, and her potential as a role model.

²² Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 25.

Resurrection in the Gospel of John

Martha of John 11 is perhaps the only individual within history infamous for cooking and cleaning. She and her sister Mary have a brother Lazarus, who contracts a grave illness. As he suffers, Martha takes the initiative and relays the information to their mutual friend Jesus. The author of John portrays Jesus as a mysterious figure. He is often depicted as saying a grammatically simple statement which is loaded with intense meaning.²³ His actions are equally inscrutable. And here inexplicably, he delays his visit until Lazarus, for whom he cares deeply, dies. As they depart, Jesus's disciples are concerned about visiting Bethany, afraid that they might be killed as a result of recent run-ins with the Jewish authorities. Ironically, Jesus's mission to resuscitate Lazarus risks martyrdom.²⁴ Rushing to Jesus as he finally approaches Bethany, Martha both berates Jesus and demonstrates her faith in John 11:21: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus responds with a Delphic answer, "Your brother will rise again." The author of John delights in subtle foreshadowing, and this phrase is no exception.²⁵ Although a modern reader may instantly consider the raising of Lazarus, Jesus's statement was intrinsically a statement of comfort, and Martha takes it as such. For those who believed in the resurrection, Jesus's statement was an equivalent to the contemporary expression, "he's gone to a better place."²⁶ Martha agrees and consoles herself with the fact that Lazarus "will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus then announces, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live." On the surface, Jesus simply claims to be the Messiah who would usher in the end of the world and the resurrection.²⁷ Martha longs to see her brother again, so she decides to believe that Jesus is the resurrection: "You are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one

²³ Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore* (Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series; no. 53. Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 214-215, 218, 252-257.

²⁴ Wendy Elizabeth Sproston North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series; 212. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 138-141.

²⁵ Thatcher 2000, 215.

²⁶ Thatcher 2000, 276.

²⁷ Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series; 69. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 371.

coming into the world.”²⁸ But Jesus surprises everyone and raises Lazarus right *then*. His words acquire a joyous, secondary meaning. Nevertheless, Martha’s dialogue is important for understanding women’s stereotypical perceptions of the resurrection. Within John, Jesus (the principal male figure) frames the resurrection in terms of judgment and immortality. In John 5:28-29, Jesus decrees, “All who are in their graves will hear his [Jesus’s] voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” Jesus’s monologue in John 6 focuses on the blessing of immortality which he, the source of resurrection, can supply. Even in his speech to Martha, Jesus emphasizes eternal life: “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Martha does not discuss vindication, judgment, or reward; rather, she hopes for reunion. In fact, a probable reason for her belief in Jesus (who claims to be the resurrection) is to see her brother again.

John contains a sparse yet poignant account of a mother experiencing the loss of a child. John 19 relates the only explicit reference amongst the Gospels to Mary the mother of Jesus being present at the crucifixion. The Johannine author’s depiction of Jesus’s death alludes to the martyrdom accounts in both 2 and 4 Maccabees. Take, for example, the martyrdom of the priest Eleazar. Before expiring, Eleazar cries in 4 Macc. 6:28-29: “Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs.” In this passage, the elderly priest believes his martyrdom and that of the other captives (including the mother and her seven sons) will atone for the sins of the Jewish people. 4 Macc. 17:22 confirms that “through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel.” Eleazar’s resolute martyrdom spurs Antiochus to torture and kill the mother and her seven sons.²⁹ With macabre irony, Jesus’s death – according to the Johannine author, at least – was also precipitated

²⁸ Davies 1992, 371.

²⁹ 4 Macc. 8:2, “For when the tyrant was conspicuously defeated in his first attempt...he commanded that others of the Hebrew captives be brought.”

by a priest discussing atonement. The high priest Caiaphas confers with the Sanhedrin in John 11:50: “It is better for you to have one man [Jesus] die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” Caiaphas perhaps feared that God would punish Israel for following a pretender Messiah such as Jesus.³⁰ Indeed, 2 Macc. 5:17 attributes Antiochus’ desecration of the Temple to the sins of the people, and the high priest probably wished to avoid a repeat situation with the Romans, even if it meant killing Jesus.³¹ John 11:51-53 continues, “He [Caiaphas] prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.” The Johannine author is invested in presenting the sacrificial nature of Jesus’s death, and Jesus is proclaimed to be the Lamb of God in John 1:29. Yet, rather than a priest dying for the nation as in Maccabees, in John a priest believes Jesus should die for the good of the nation.

Parallels also define the depictions of the two Gentile overlords of Judea: Antiochus IV and Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect during Jesus’ trial. Antiochus dangles release and rewards before those who would apostatize. Pilate questions Jesus in John 19:10: “Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus retorts in the next verse, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above.” Similarly, the seven sons remind Antiochus in 2 Macc. 7:18 that God is simply using him to punish Israel for its sins. However, a role reversal between the two despots become apparent upon a closer reading. In 4 Macc. 9:16, Antiochus orders the killing of the boys, and the torturers try to intervene. In John 19:4, Pilate attempts to *release* Jesus, but the Jewish crowds incite him to crucify Jesus. The details of torture in Maccabees and John reflect each other as well. Both Jesus and the martyrs are flogged and mocked before their “trials” and later

³⁰ Adele Reinhartz, *Caiaphas the High Priest* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 41.

³¹ Reinhartz 2011, 41.

stripped of their garments.³² John does not go into graphic detail about Jesus's death, but the actual facts of crucifixion are nonetheless excruciating. 4 Maccabees graphically describes the boys' limbs being snapped.³³ Jesus's legs, on the other hand, were not broken despite the request of the Jews.³⁴ Tragically, although the brothers in the Maccabean tradition express solidarity with each other, Jesus' brothers are not mentioned as being near the cross. In fact, according to John 7:5, "not even his brothers believed in him."

One of the most interesting connections between John and the Maccabean traditions are the mother figures.³⁵ Like the matriarch of Maccabees, Mary seems to have been a widow by the time of the crucifixion.³⁶ She lingers near the cross as her son dies. Unlike the mother in Maccabees, Mary does not make a declaration of hope or even speak. Contrary to the women before her, she does not recall the resurrection. Perhaps this is intentional on the Johannine author's part. Within the previously examined stories, a woman watches her male loved one die, a conversation about the resurrection ensues (offering a modicum of hope), and she receives her child again. But at the cross, Jesus seemingly bucks this Second Temple pattern and hearkens back to the Hebrew Bible; he gives his mother a "replacement" son. John 19:26 states, "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.'" As previously seen, the Johannine author enjoys foreshadowing and suspense. By giving his mother a "replacement" son, Jesus heightens the tension. His death will be final. He will never return. Someone else must take his place.³⁷ Why else grant his mother a "new" son? The scene is quite grim, and there is no mention of

³² Henten 1997, 112. The same Greek word for "mocking" in 2 Macc. 7:10 is also used in relation to Jesus' humiliation in Luke 18:32 and 23:36. The flogging and stripping can be found in 4 Macc. 9:11-12, and the parallel passages are located in John 19:1, 23-24.

³³ 4 Macc. 10:5-6.

³⁴ John 19:31-33.

³⁵ These parallels have been noted since the Medieval Era. See Joslyn-Siemiatkoski 2009, 145-146.

³⁶ 4 Macc. 16:10. Given the complete lack of references to Joseph and Jesus's apparent responsibility for his mother, it seems reasonable to assume that Joseph had already died (Jesus was by now in his thirties).

³⁷ Who the "beloved disciple" was is somewhat of a mystery. See Urban C. Von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010), 806.

the resurrection. But an informed reader will either know the story's conclusion or recollect the account of Lazarus; Jesus *is* the resurrection. Jesus' "last will" is a red herring. He, in fact, will rise again to be seen by his mother.

Resurrection in Post-70 CE Literature

The hope of resurrection even extends beyond the realm of humanity. In 2 Esd. 3-14 (variously labeled the *Apocalypse of Ezra* or 4 Ezra), a bereaved mother transforms into a representation of a grieved cosmos. The work's author styles himself as the prophet Ezra and recounts the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BCE.³⁸ The work itself, although framed within historical events of the sixth century BCE, actually functions as an allegory for the Roman capture of Jerusalem in 70 CE during the failed Great Revolt.³⁹ The author uses Ezra and the First Temple as a screen onto which he projects his interpretation of the more recent catastrophe. After numerous visions, the angel Uriel commands Ezra in 2 Esdras 9:23 to neither eat nor drink regular substances. Rather, he is to solely consume the flowers of the field. After a week of this restricted diet, Ezra (perhaps unsurprisingly) experiences a vision in which he notices a grieving mother. After a brief conversation in chapter 9, it becomes apparent that she shares many traits with the Shunammite woman of 2 Kings. She was barren but finally bore a son who later perished on his wedding night. Now, out of grief, she is starving herself to death, not even consuming flowers. Unlike Elisha, Ezra shows no compassion for the woman. Instead, he snaps at her in 2 Esd. 10:6, "You most foolish of women, do you not see our mourning, and what has happened to us?" Ezra laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the fate of God's people. One can sense the author's frustration with the events of the Great Revolt and his feeling of life's futility. Why even bother mourning a son when humanity has been ruined? Ezra continues his rant:

³⁸ R.J. Coggins and Michael A. Knibb, *The First and Second Books of Esdras* (Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 100-103.

³⁹ 81-96 CE. See Coggins and Knibb 1979, 76.

Now ask the earth, and she will tell you that it is she who ought to mourn over so many who have come into being upon her. From the beginning all have been born of her, and others will come; and, lo, almost all go to perdition, and a multitude of them will come to doom. Who then ought to mourn the more, she who lost so great a multitude, or you who are grieving for one alone? . . . the earth also has from the beginning given her fruit, that is, humankind, to him [God] who made her.⁴⁰

Here, the earth is personified as a woman and humanity as her children. There are no Jews or Gentiles, no temples or Messiahs – simply the earth, humanity, and, according to verse 14, God. For thousands of years, the earth’s children have suffered, perished, and been condemned to an unknown afterlife. How is this woman’s grief anything in comparison? Such a personification of the earth is extremely rare within the Hebrew Bible from which Second Temple literature arose.⁴¹ But the woman, unimpressed by Ezra’s creative philosophizing, resolves to continue her starvation. Ezra then offers a familiar modicum of hope in 2 Esd. 10:16: “If you acknowledge the decree of God to be just, you will receive your son back in due time, and will be praised among women.” Ezra, a man, seems to believe that the way to comfort a woman during a time of bereavement is to remind her of the resurrection. But one wonders if the statement about resurrection could apply not only to this mother, but to the cosmic one as well. Why restrict hope to this mother? Could the earth receive again her humans?

Suddenly, the woman morphs into a terrifyingly glorious city under construction, and a cowering Ezra calls for the angel Uriel to return. The angel explains the vision to his protégé: the woman represents the physical mountain of Zion.⁴² For thousands of years, she had been a barren outcrop of rock until finally she bore a “son,” the city and Temple of Jerusalem constructed by Solomon, King David’s heir. The “son” perished when the Babylonians (and by extension, the Romans) razed Jerusalem. As the woman-city in the vision is being rebuilt, so is the “mother” receiving

⁴⁰ 2 Esd. 10:9-14

⁴¹ Karina Martin Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom, Debate, and Apocalyptic Solution* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism; v. 130. Boston: Brill, 2008), 72. There are several exceptions within Job.

⁴² Some scholars believe the woman actually represents the heavenly Jerusalem, not the physical Mt. Zion. See Coggins and Knibb 1979, 223.

her “son” back from the dead. The idea that Jerusalem would be rebuilt was, of course, a great hope for the Jewish people post-70 CE. Therefore, the author of Ezra imagines it as a woman receiving her son again from the dead. Within this complex vision, three layers of resurrection can be extrapolated, and all involve women. First, Ezra consoles the woman (whom he initially saw) with the hope of the resurrection. She will one day receive her son again. Second, Ezra sees the female personification of Mt. Zion who lost her Temple and city – she will be rebuilt. Third, there is the earth herself; the concept of a general resurrection (to which Ezra subscribes) would satisfy her longing.⁴³ These three female personalities are all depicted to view the resurrection in terms of reunion with loved ones. But one final layer to the story remains. After another convoluted vision overwhelms Ezra, God himself explains the interpretation. One day, God’s own “son will be revealed...he shall stand on the top of Mount Zion.”⁴⁴ The bereaved Zion will receive not only Jerusalem but God’s son.

A final twist to the story of women and the resurrection can be found in the Greek version of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, a Judeo-Christian work dating from the very end of the Second Temple Period.⁴⁵ Early Christian and Rabbinical sources provide conflicting views about the role of women in the fall of humanity. Several authors, such as Paul, staunchly place the blame in Adam’s court. For example, 1 Cor. 15:21-22 states, “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.” Other works, such as Sir. 25:24, ascribe the blame squarely to Eve: “From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.” Unfortunately, the Christian Patristic writings, Gnostic writings and Jewish Midrashim take the latter stance.⁴⁶ Women, who are depicted to so greatly desire to be reunited with their loved ones, are ultimately responsible for their deaths. Women are the *reason*

⁴³ 2 Esd. 7:32, “The earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the chambers shall give up the souls that have been committed to them.”

⁴⁴ 2 Esd. 13:32-35.

⁴⁵ Vita Daphna Arbel, *Forming Femininity in Antiquity: Eve, Gender, and Ideologies in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5. The work is Jewish or Christian and dates from 100-300 CE.

⁴⁶ Arbel 2012, 63.

a resurrection is needed in the first place. The *Life of Adam and Eve* propounds this view and expands the Genesis account. Eve's sexuality, especially with regards to the serpent, is heightened and aspersions are cast on the legitimacy of her son Cain, who later kills Abel.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in several editions, Eve is allowed to narrate her own version of the Fall.

As Adam finally begins to suffer and die, Eve does not discuss the resurrection but repents for her role in inflicting death itself. Adam, though confident God will not forget him, states, "we shall not know how we shall meet our maker, whether he shall be angry with us or turn to have mercy on us."⁴⁸ Unsure if God will accept him, Adam instructs Eve to "pray to God until I shall give back my spirit unto the hands of the one who has given it."⁴⁹ If God does not accept him, Adam will not have a place in the resurrection, so he asks Eve to intercede. In this case, a woman is being depicted as *helping* her loved one achieve the resurrection. Eve repents until an angel informs her that Adam's spirit is being drawn to heaven. Eve's eyes are opened to the supernatural realm, and she sees that she has not been alone in her intercession: "the angels fell down and worshiped God, crying and saying... 'forgive, for he is your image and the work of your hands.'"⁵⁰ The entreaties succeed, and God commands Michael to "take him [Adam] up to Paradise, to the third heaven, and leave him there until that great and fearful day which I am about to establish for the world."⁵¹ The combined intercession of Eve and the angels reserves a place for Adam in the resurrection. Eve later dies and joins Adam in death and (presumably) resurrection. Although the *Life of Adam and Eve* is misogynistic in its depiction of Eve, the power attributed to the first woman is immense. Despite causing the need for resurrection, Eve is able to help her loved one attain it.

⁴⁷ Arbel 2012, 30-33.

⁴⁸ *Life of Adam and Eve*, 31:4. Unless otherwise noted, the translation of this work is the M.D. Johnson translation derived from Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 249-296.

⁴⁹ *Life of Adam and Eve*, 31:4.

⁵⁰ *Life of Adam and Eve*, 33:5.

⁵¹ *Life of Adam and Eve*, 37:5.

Resurrection as the Hope of Women

Explaining the transition from the Hebrew Bible's ideology to a belief in the resurrection is complicated, and not all Jewish factions (particularly the Sadducees) agreed. Even within pro-resurrection Second Temple literature, nuances exist. In Paul and other New Testament writings, the resurrection is primarily viewed as a vindication of the righteous and as the gateway to a blessed eternal life on a restored earth. The modern preoccupation with the afterlife as a place of reunion with loved ones is practically non-existent, except in depictions of feminine conceptions of the resurrection. The male authors of the literature focused on the stereotypically masculine qualities of the resurrection: justice, immortality, and reward. Women were portrayed as viewing the resurrection as a means to fulfil their stereotypically deepest longing: reconnection with family. Such narrations may reflect an element of truth. Because infant mortality rates were so high in the ancient world, the thought that a mother could meet her deceased children again perhaps was a drawing factor for female converts to Judaism or Christianity. Indeed, Christianity's mother lost her son. She also seems to have lost her husband, as well. The age gaps in marriage between men and women often created widows. Maybe women longed to be reunited with their husbands, and the Jewish and Christian concept of resurrection provided an avenue. Although the portrayals reveal male-generated stereotypes, the mere fact that women's views on the resurrection were related (even if inaccurately) demonstrates that women were acknowledged to have knowledge of and opinions on theological topics. Resurrection – unlike circumcision, the high-priesthood, and the inner court of the Temple – was not a “men-only” phenomenon: it was for all humanity.

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