In the first twenty years of WIJ, indeed from the very first issue onwards, biblical studies have been an area of interest. In its two decades, fifteen articles were devoted to this general category. They ranged in approach from a formal academic approach to a more general methodology. The presentations are featured as both articles and essays. The authors were women and men, academics and independent scholars, Christians, Jews and secularists.

Quite a variety of topics are covered. All three parts of the Jewish Bible are represented, *Torah* (Teaching), *Neviim* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). A cluster of articles center on Genesis, and in particular the Matriarchs and Patriarchs (five examples); the book of Judges also was an area of specific interest (three examples). In terms of the book of Exodus, two articles took a close look at Zipporah, Moses’ wife.

There is great diversity in the interest and approaches of the authors. For example, when considering Zipporah, the two different authors consider very dissimilar aspects of her life. Karen Strand Winslow’s “Ethnicity, Exogamy, and Zipporah” (Vol. 4:1; 2006) makes a strong case for the idea that even in the Second Temple period there were different approaches to the questions of ethnicity and endogamy. Unquestionably, the position articulated by Ezra and Nehemiah, strongly urged in-marriage (Ezra 9:1-2; Nehemiah 13:23-28). Yet, at this same general period the Redactors (editors) of the Torah included – or perhaps allowed – examples of exogamy without attendant criticism in the case of many of the biblical heroes (Judah to the local Canaanite Tamar, Joseph to the Egyptian priest’s daughter Asenath, and Moses to the Midian priest’s daughter Zipporah). She compares the tensions and double-dealing with “in the family marriages” in the Jacob/Laban/Rachel/Leah narratives with the Moses/Jethro/Zipporah narratives. By contrast, the latter are an example of good family relations. In the case of
Zipporah, she is praised for her quick action in the matter of circumcision (Exod 4). It is just this point that is the centerpiece of the essay that highlights her, namely “Zipporah and the Brit Milah: A Woman Circumciser” written by Moshe Reiss (Vol. 9:2; 2012). Reiss, who for a time had taught as a visiting fellow at the Katholik University of Leuven, focuses on a number of issues. The short passage in Exodus 4:24-26 is filled with ambiguities. Whose life is in danger? Moses’ or his son’s? Is God angry with Moses for marrying out of the family? Reiss, however makes a case that Jethro (Zipporah’s father) may be a descendant of Midian, one of Abraham’s children and therefore she would be “in the family” and so an acceptable marriage partner for Moses. Further, why would God threaten the life of the person just chosen to free the Israelites? Yet, why threaten the son, who clearly was innocent of wrongdoing in terms of not being circumcised? Or is Moses having an identity crisis? Why does Zipporah do what she does? Perhaps she was making a sign of protection similar to the sign on the doorposts, a matter which will take place in Exodus 11. As the blood of the lamb will protect the Hebrews so will the blood of the circumcision protect Moses. Reiss praises Zipporah’s quick feat in the matter of the Bridegroom of Blood, suggesting that she was the active one and Moses passive. Reiss draws on traditional Jewish commentators and Midrashim, and linguistic analysis. He offers the thought that the circumcision was in some ways apotropaic, perhaps to save Moses’ life.

Not all of the articles praise women. In “‘Do Not Reject Your Mother’s Teaching?!’ - The Function of Micah’s Mother in Judges 17” (Vol. 4:2; 2007), the author Heidi M. Szpek explains clearly, caveat lector, "let the reader beware." The advice offered in Proverbs 1:8-9 “Do not forsake the instruction of your mother; for they are a graceful wreath upon your head” is singularly inappropriate when it comes to the maternal recommendation offered to the character Micah from the tribe of Ephraim in the book of Judges. The biblically unnamed mother there (in Rabbinic Midrash she is named and associated with Delilah, of Samson fame) is portrayed as scheming, avaricious, and syncretistic: she pays for the casting of an idolatrous image. Her son is a thief, who stole from his own mother, and who flaunts the religious norms of his time; he
arbitrarily sets up his son as priest despite the fact that he is not a Levite. These characters are not positive role models for us to follow. Rather, as the author explains, the “characterization of Micah and mother reflect the deconstruction of this most special parental bond. Placed in the context of other ‘mother-child’ relationships in the biblical text, an even more poignant image of deterioration obtains. No other mother-son relationship depicts such outright disrespect of child for parent or parent for child.” The book of Judges reflects a pattern imposed on the material by a theologically informed redactor. It features a configuration of people's rebellion, followed in turn by oppression, penitence, and then deliverance by a judge, a military hero who brought some sort of cohesion into the scattered people, and gave them “rest” for twenty, forty, or eighty years. The narrative of Micah’s mother and his own action demonstrate religious rebellion.

Women do not fare well in Judges, perhaps most egregiously depicted in the narrative in Judges 19. In her article “The Levite’s Concubine: The Story That Never Was” (Vol. 5:1; 2007), Heidi M. Szpek, explores this difficult text. She takes note that there is a “near silence of biblical referents to this tale (one reference to the ‘crime of Gibeah’ in Hosea 10:9), [there is also] the scarcity of classical Rabbinic comments, as well as the brevity of the Church Fathers until the Medieval Period, specifically relating to the abuse and murder of the Levite’s concubine.” She also shows how many of the themes and specific wording of this gruesome tale consciously reflects both past and future biblical history, as she describes it, it is “a mosaic of biblical allusions.” Szpek concludes that the events portrayed actually never happened, they were to be read “as a metaphor of admonition…a horrific and effective metaphor of warning...for such a thing has never happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day!...but it could!”

The narrative of Jephthah’s (again, unnamed) daughter is featured in Judges 11. As noted above, women do not fare well in this book. In her article “The Origins of the ‘Arbaat Yamim’ - The Four Days” (Vol.4.1; 2006), Aviva Goldberg creates a feminist modern Midrash based on the arcane line that ends the chapter: “the maidens of Israel go every year for four days and chant
dirges for [other translations, to bewail, or to tell the tale of] the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite” (Judges 11:40). Goldberg begins with various definitions of Classical Midrash. She explains that in fact little is written about Jephthah’s daughter in Midrashic or Talmudic texts, an exception being Midrash Tanhumah, Behukotai. In like manner, the traditional commentators pretty much ignore the story of Jephthah’s daughter. Goldberg then suggests that “the commentators’ silence is an example of a rabbinic, patriarchal stance which understood women’s activities as insignificant and, thus, unworthy of comment. Thus, the purpose of my midrash is to reclaim not only the nameless daughter of Jephthah and her companions ‘the daughters of Israel’ but, as well, to present a new Jewish women’s legend and propose through metaphor a future annual four-day festival for Jewish women.” She then offers an “original utopian and imaginative tale of a revisioned women’s Judaism. It contains references to tradition and Torah text as well as new women’s rites, liturgies, and theological understandings.” The physical layout of the pages of Goldberg’s Midrash appropriately mimics a rabbinic Bible, with commentaries set in juxtaposition with the actual text. NB: Over the twenty years of Women in Judaism there have been several examples of modern Midrash.

Ruth and Esther are the only examples in the Hebrew Scriptures, or if one includes in the term Bible, the Christian Scriptures as well, where books are named for a woman. In her article, “The Trauma of Otherness and Hunger: Ruth and Lot’s Daughters” (Vol.5.1; 2007), Ruth Tsoffar traces “the narrative dynamic of the book of Ruth and demonstrate[s] how it effectively delivers an important moral lesson about the rewards of inclusion and belonging, setting an important cultural model of adoption and appropriation of otherness.” Tsoffar compares Ruth the Moabite’s situation with that of one of her literal forebears the unnamed elder daughter of Lot, who in her desperation flaunts conventional understandings of sexual morality and of incest in particular. Ruth has multiple claims to otherness, explains the author. “Ruth is more than just a woman and a widow; one could label her a pariah. As a Moabite, she belongs to one of the most symbolically ‘polluted’ of biblical peoples. She is constructed as a foreigner in the book of Ruth,
a status that puts her outside of the purview of the legal system, where she has no national and political rights.” Tzoffar explores broad themes of hunger/famine hunger “(be it physical, sexual, metaphysical or epistemological)” as it connects to Ruth and then also to Lot’s daughters who believed that they and their father were the last humans on earth, therefore faced with a famine of semen and the threat of annihilation. “What mobilizes the plot and guides the depiction of the characters and their resolutions in the book of Ruth is the extreme pathological trauma which itself covers or reenacts an older trauma reactivated by the experience of hunger and famine. The radical act of inclusion and incorporation that the book teaches becomes a testimony of survival against the reality of total annihilation.”

Where this exploration of Ruth is very cerebral and densely argued, the essay on Esther takes a lighter touch, one indicated by its very title, “Entertaining Esther: Vamp, Victim, And Virtuous Woman” (Vol. 9.2; 2012) by David J. Zucker. Esther is one of the strangest works in the biblical corpus. It has a cast of characters unmatched in any other of the Bible’s library. There are male heroes, female heroes, villains, fools, fops, knaves, plodders, plotters, and schemers. There are vivid descriptions of events, written in a style virtually unknown in other biblical narratives, perhaps with the possible exception of the post-exilic book of Daniel. On the surface, Esther purports to be an historical work, although most scholars challenge the book’s historicity. Nonetheless, there are important messages in Esther, not the least being that tyrants arise, and that the community is well served to organize itself and to fight against such oppressiveness. Zucker addresses three aspects of the character Esther. In the Vamp and Virtuous Woman sections, he highlights rabbinic/midrashic interpretations of Esther; in the Victim section, he points out that Esther, as a victim is clear from the biblical text; her life patently is in danger as part of the threatened Jewish community. Another sense of Esther-as-victim is that as a woman in a very male-dominated, patriarchal world, she has to be very careful about what she does or does not do, much less in for what she seeks to achieve. In the first chapter of Esther, Queen Vashti is banished because she challenged the request of her husband (cf. Est. 1:10-15, 19-20).
Zucker refers to material suggesting that Esther is a victim of institutional rape.
The issue of the prevention of institutional rape is at the centre of an article by Pearl Elman that
appears in the first issue of *Women in Judaism*. The article “Deuteronomy 21:10-14: The
Beautiful Captive Woman” (Vol 1.1; 1997) is well structured. After setting the biblical scene,
she spends a great deal of time presenting the attitude of the post-biblical sages on the matter of
the permissibility (or not) of sexual relations with the beautiful captive described in
Deuteronomy. She considers the question whether the conversion of the captive woman was
mandatory or optional, as well as the rules regulating the release of the captive woman. Although
the *Yerushalmi* (the Jerusalem Talmud) is sympathetic to the plight of the beautiful woman, the
*Bavli* (Babylonian, and more authoritative Talmud) does not understand this section of
Deuteronomy in the same way as the *Yerushalmi*. Rather we see in BT *Kiddushin* 21b the
general agreement that a soldier is allowed one act of intercourse with a captive, but not on the
battlefield. Whether he is allowed to have intercourse with her again before he brings her home
is a matter of divided opinion. As the *Bavli* allows the soldier this one act of intercourse, what
was biblical anti-rape legislation for soldiers after a battle can no longer be perceived as such.
In her essay “The Goddess, Syncretism, and Patriarchy: Evolution and Extinction of the Goddess
during the Creation of Patriarchy in Ancient Israel” (Vol. 8.2; 2011), Ramona Wanlass explains
that an alternative goddess tradition functioned from the period of pre-Israelite culture until the
early years of the postexilic period (early Judaism). The shift from a goddess-based religion to
Yahwism had serious implications for the eventual development of Judaism. It took several
hundred years to root out goddess worship. It lasted into the early years of Judaism’s Diaspora:
the change to Yahwism affected perceptions about women and their roles directly. When
Yahwism was introduced, a patriarchal system emerged and became dominant.
Drawing upon the scholarship of among others, Raphael Patai and Tikva Frymer-Kensky,
Wanlass explains that the eclipse of the goddesses witnessed a concomitant decline in the public
role of women in society. She supplements her essay with numerous helpful photographs and illustrations.

Six articles or essays centre on the book of Genesis, with a preponderance of them featuring the Matriarchs and Patriarchs. Anat Koplowitz-Breier focuses on the figure of Leah as portrayed in Israeli poetry. Her article, “Giving Voice to a Matriarch: Leah in Contemporary Israeli Dramatic Monologues” (Vol. 9.2; 2012) suggests that contemporary poetry can serve as a kind of “modern Midrash” imagining and re-imagining the received biblical text. Quoting Malka Shaked, Koplowitz-Breier suggests that

“when the poet writes directly about himself [/herself] or expresses his [/her] mood and stance in relation to the world with the help of the Bible, but also when he [/she] writes about subjects and figures from the Bible, and even when such figures are presented as speaking in the first person—the poet is dealing with something he [/she] regards as central, important, fundamental, and symbolic, the apprehension of which, regardless of whether its expression in the poem is indirect and covert or direct and open, is what sheds fresh, new light on the Bible itself” (brackets mine).

Unquestionably, contemporary writing, poetry or prose, often seeks to shed fresh, new light on the Bible. In that sense, contemporary writing may echo classical Midrashim, yet there is a fundamental disconnect which Koplowitz-Breier does not mention. For the writers of the classical rabbinic Midrashim, the Jewish Bible was uniquely sacred. As Gary Porton points out in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, “Midrash is a type of literature, oral or written, which has its starting point in a fixed canonical text, considered the revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, and in which this original verse is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to” (Porton, “Midrash,” 4:819). Most writers of modern Midrash do not begin with that same understanding, nor do most of their readers. To offer context for her ideas, Koplowitz-Breier does refer to a clarification offered by Wendy Zierler:

“Over the past few decades, it has become a commonplace to look at Midrash as a form of imaginative literature or poetry and, at the same time, to read Hebrew poetry that reworks or re-imagine episodes from the Bible as a form of modern midrash. While students of rabbinic Midrash have taught us to view it in term of literary critical notions of intertextuality and interpretive subjectivity, students of Hebrew poetry have trained us to be alive to the similarity between midrashic and poetic invention.”
This article concentrates on five Israeli poets who wrote about Leah. The poets give Leah a voice in crucial points of her life, thus closing the gaps of her silence in Genesis. The five poets are Polish born Anda Amir-Pinkerfeld (1902-1981), Ukrainian born Shimshon Meltzer (1909–2000), Yakov Azriel (1950-), Rivka Miriam (1952-), and Rena Lee (1932-2013). These contemporary poets who use the dramatic monologue genre to give Leah a unique voice have attempted to fill the gap in the biblical text in order to add their own insights to the biblical characters. While recognizing the lack of emotions in the laconic biblical narrative, the poets convey Leah’s intensive feelings and depict her as the "under-dog" in the Jacob-Rachel-Leah triangle. In reacting to different points in Leah’s life, these poets give her an added new voice. They add their own interpretations to the account in Genesis, bestowing Leah with opinions and feelings that are missing from the original text. Anda Amir-Pinkerfeld is able to re-create Leah as a modern woman, one who chooses her destiny and who consciously affects her future. Shimshon Meltzer enhances the "mandrakes’ episode” and enables Leah to express her agony, which is somewhat downplayed in the Genesis account. Yakov Azriel takes an approach similar to that of Meltzer, yet adding dialogue between Leah and Rachel. Rivka Miriam, on the other hand emphasizes Leah’s position as Jacob’s hated-wife. In the monologue by Rena Lee, Leah is identified as "worthless merchandise," first by her father and then by Jacob. These dramatic monologues provide new and enhanced ways of understanding the lives of biblical women.

Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, or rather the post-biblical writings addressing that subject are the concern of Vered Tohar in her article “Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20): Sexual Transgressions as Apologetic Interpretations in Post-biblical Jewish Sources” (Vol. 10.1; 2013). Tohar explains that in the post-biblical world from ancient times until today, there have been dozens of adaptations of the original biblical narrative. She explains that even a partial list of works that contain later versions of this biblical story would include Josephus’ Antiquities of the Jews (first century), Midrash Genesis Rabbah (fifth century), Midrash Tanhuma (seventh century), Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer (eighth century), Yalkut Shimoni (thirteenth century), Midrash
Hagadol (fourteenth century) Midrash Hahefez (fifteenth century), Sefer Hayashar (sixteenth century), Kol Aggadot Yisrael (nineteenth century), and Aggadot HaYehudim (twentieth century). Although each is based on the biblical narrative, in many cases there are major changes and adaptations of the original plot. Tohar also draws upon some of the classical commentators on the text such as David Kimhi (1160–1235) and Isaac Abrabanel (1437-1508). The Abraham/Sarah/Egypt narrative is constructed around three word groups: those dealing with vision, those with speech, and finally with family relations. As she writes, the “large concentration of these linguistic components in the framework of a short narrative story, a mere ten verses long, indicates that its meaning derives from what these words allude to—sight, speech, and social status.” Tohar addresses the Egyptians themselves, how they saw Sarah, Sarah in the Pharaoh’s palace, and The Use of Erotic Expansions. The biblical text is troubling because it hints that Sarah may have been violated in Egypt and that Abraham in effect brought this about, or at least he allowed it to happen. The post-biblical versions are less ambiguous. They spell out what did, or perhaps what did not take place in the Pharaoh’s palace, and suggest Sarah’s innocence was not violated. Many of these expansions or commentaries on the biblical text also seek to exonerate Abraham of wrongdoing.

As Tohar focused on certain word groups in the Genesis narrative, so did an earlier article in Women in Judaism. David J. Zucker in “Seeing and Hearing: The Interrelated Lives of Sarah and Hagar” (Vol. 7.1; 2010) centers on the crucial words “see,” “hear,” and “eyes/sight” in their various forms as they are found in the relevant chapters dealing with Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 12, 16, 18, and 21. The choice of words and the actions of these two characters are complex; they have multiple motives for what they do. Sarah’s no less than Hagar’s frustrations are unspoken subtexts, and both women make difficult and sometimes unfortunate choices. Quoting Amy-Jill Levine, Zucker notes that “Hagar is a complex character: not simply victim and not simply heroine. The same diversity of interpretation, of course, holds for Sarah.” Although the see/hear/eyes/sight words begin in chapter 12, it is chapter 16 that “Abram heeded [literally
“heard”) Sarai’s request” (verse 2). In this instance, Abraham heeds Sarah’s request to bring Hagar into his life in a noteworthy fashion. Ironically, nearly two decades later, Genesis will specify that Abraham again heeds [literally “hears”) Sarah’s request, but this time it will be to banish Hagar (cf. Gen. 21:12).

Whether Abraham reluctantly or eagerly took Hagar into his bed, he did so because he heeded Sarah’s voice. One can only wonder whether it was sardonic humor, purposeful punning, or mere chance that the result of this union will be Ishmael, a name that can translate as God heeds/hears, or possibly as one who heeds/hears God. When Hagar becomes pregnant and “she saw” that she was bearing a child (Gen. 16:4), she thinks less of Sarah. Sarah quickly notices this lack of respect and berates Abraham, saying, “The wrong done me is your fault!...now that [Hagar] sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem” (Gen. 16:5). Mixed in with all these “seeing” words are the additional phrases “in her eyes/in your eyes.”

On the surface of the Biblical text, Sarah and Hagar are cast as rivals both for the attention of Abraham, and for the right to bear an heir for him. Their lives – and the language to describe their actions – contain clear similarities. A close reading of the relevant biblical texts, Genesis 12, 16, 18, 21, where Sarah and Hagar (and Abraham) appear – or where their presence is felt – feature many parallels in language in the narratives dealing with these characters. Of special note is the repetition of the words “seeing” and “hearing” in one form or another. In particular, Sarah and Hagar each see and are seen, hear and are heard in important ways that move along their narrative, together and separately.

It is Hagar and her son Ishmael who are at the centre of Aron Pinker’s article, “The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:9-21)” (Vol. 6.1; 2009). Pinker’s well-reasoned and well-noted article raises a dozen relevant questions about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. To begin, what was the nature of Ishmael’s “playing” (metzaheq) that triggered such a strong reaction from Sarah? Further, how was this related to the inheritance that Sarah mentions? In her speech, Sarah refers to Hagar, not by her name, but by her status, that Hagar was a “slave-woman” (‘amah) and
Ishmael the son of a slave (ben ‘amah). What was the legal ground for Sarah’s demand? Why did God validate Sarah’s claim that Hagar’s status was that of a “slave-woman,” and further why does God depersonalize Hagar and Ishmael by calling them “slave-woman” and ”lad” rather than by their personal names? Pinker draws on Midrashim, medieval commentators, and modern scholars as he traces out the back story of what is going on in Genesis 21, and its earlier iteration in Genesis 16. He introduces the notion that Hagar was not an Egyptian, but rather part of a local tribe in the Negev, the Muzrim (sometimes, incorrectly connected with the Mitzrim/Egyptians). Pinker’s view of Hagar is that of an angry and defiant, scorned woman, who has been ill-treated by Abraham and Sarah. That Abraham only provided her with scant provisions suggests that she had a nearby destination (the Muzrim tribe). He suggests that the “perilous venture into the desert was of Hagar’s making. What prompted Hagar to do so would obviously remain unknown. However, the context suggests that she acted on an impulse generated by the typical state of mind of a scorned woman.”

The special relationship between Sarah and Hagar is the focus of the joint essay by David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss, “Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar as a Blended Family: Problems, Partings, and Possibilities” (Vol. 6.2; 2009). Blended families are families where after divorce or death, and then through remarriage, at least one parent and one child (children) are not biologically connected. The dynamics of blended families are infinitely more complicated than in more traditional family configurations. When following many years of marriage, Sarah appears unable to become pregnant, she offers Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate womb for the family. Abraham acceded to Sarah’s request, and in time, Ishmael is born. Since “blended family” is a modern expression, Sarah does not use this term. Yet, Sarah’s inviting Abraham to acquire a concurrent second wife creates the phenomenon of a blended family. The blended Abraham-Sarah-Hagar family is even more complicated than most blended families, because there has been no divorce: everyone is living in the same household, and further, wife number one has some considerable power over wife number two. The dynamics of the interplay between Abraham, Sarah, and
Hagar (Abraham with Sarah, Abraham with Hagar, Sarah with Abraham, Sarah with Hagar, Hagar with Abraham, and Hagar with Sarah) are mindful of the interchanges that one finds in blended families. Adding the children Ishmael and Isaac, the dynamic quickly becomes exponentially more multifaceted. With the presence of Ishmael and Isaac, interactions become more intricate. There now is an additional Sarah-Hagar-Ishmael dynamic, an Abraham-Hagar-Ishmael, an Ishmael-Isaac dynamic, and many other permutations as well. In the rabbinic midrashic tradition and commentaries, the weight of opinions is sympathetic to Sarah, but no less a figure that Ramban ( Nahmanides, 13th cent., Spain) criticizes Sarah for her actions against Hagar. Sarah’s response to Hagar, Sarah’s abusing her maidservant might be explained (though not excused) by seeing this as her delayed reaction to the abuse she suffered in Egypt. Abraham had turned her over to Pharaoh. Some contend that in effect, Abraham pimped her for his own personal gain. Sarah was forced into having sexual relations with Pharaoh, or at the least, she had to ward off his advances. Hagar, as an Egyptian, represented all that was hateful and hurtful in that land. For feminists, male or female, this perpetuation of abusive behavior, and especially an abused female abusing another female, is painful to encounter. As Judith Plaskow has written, the “violence that is practiced by Abraham against Sarah, she now recapitulates in relation to the most vulnerable person in her own household. Thus, the cycle of abuse goes on…” The Torah…makes clear that our ancestors are by no means always models of ethical behavior that edify and inspire us. On the contrary, often the Torah holds up a mirror to the ugliest aspects of human nature and human society.” On the surface, the relationship between Sarah and Hagar is fraught with ongoing tension, resulting in Hagar first leaving the encampment (Gen 16) and then nearly twenty years later being expelled (Gen 21). While there are evident tensions, it is not at all clear that it is between the two women. Each has good reason to be distrustful of Abraham and fearful for her son and stepson. The essay offers possibilities that the women not only reconcile, but that they form a household of their own without the presence of Abraham. This is their resolution for the conflicts that they experience as a blended family.
The final biblically connected essay deals with the unnamed wife of Potiphar the Egyptian noble, or perhaps eunuch, whose narrative appears in Genesis 39. In his essay “Madam Potiphar’s Boy Toy: No Laughing Matter” (Vol. 8.1; 2011), David J. Zucker centres his attention on the crucial verb letsaḥeq which is the word which Madam Potiphar twice uses to describe Joseph’s behaviour in that crucial scene where they both appear. First she describes Joseph as that Hebrew man who Potiphar brought “to __ [letsaḥeq] us” (verse 14), and then she refers to Joseph as “the Hebrew whom you [Potiphar] brought “to __ [letsaḥeq] me” (verse 17). Different Bible translations vary enormously on this point. The verb letsaḥeq at this point is translated variously as toy, dally, sport, play around, make love, have his play, insult, or mock. (In other Bible contexts it can mean laugh, dance or engage in blasphemous revel.)

It is easy to dismiss Madam Potiphar as a systematic scheming and seductive figure. She fits the negative stereotype found in Proverbs, which warns against the smooth tongue of a foreign woman (Prov 6:20, 23). Yet, there may be more to this plot. Is it possible that Madam Potiphar’s interest in Joseph may not be driven by lust, much less by love, but rather more practically by her desire to have a child, something unlikely if Potiphar is a eunuch. Zucker concludes that Madam Potiphar uses letsaḥeq as “to insult” and not as some variation on sexuality. She understood that if she used it with its sexual connotations, a) it would draw attention to her earlier attempts at seducing Joseph – where she “cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, ‘Lie with me’” (verse 7). In addition, b) she understood the irony of accusing Joseph of desiring her, when it was she who desired him. Further; c) she still desired him, and hoped he would return to the household chastised; and d) if accused of sexual impropriety, Potiphar would have little choice but to have Joseph sent away, possibly castrated, and/or executed. That letsaḥeq has other possible meanings, specifically that of a sexual nature, and which really speak to Madam Potiphar’s desire for Joseph, highlight the craft of the narrator’s art. Madam Potiphar would have liked Joseph to be her Boy Toy. When that did not happen, she was angry and wished to punish Joseph, and perhaps as well to punish Potiphar for his inattention.
In its two decades of publication, *Women in Judaism* has featured articles, essays, and book reviews on a wide variety of subjects. Biblical women too often were marginalized, ignored, or anonymized. Over ninety percent of those named in the Bible are men. Through these offerings, especially in the category of biblical studies, the subject of the too often unnamed biblical women has found a potent and powerful expression. These articles and essays are a way to give voice to these women and to their narratives where they flourish. The essays and articles cover all parts of the Tanakh, with a preponderance centering on Genesis. This may be explained because there are more examples of women featured speaking in those fifty chapters than in any other biblical book. Much has been done. Much remains to be explored. The next score of years, no doubt, will provide additional opportunities to give voice to biblical women, both to those named and to those unnamed.