“Kings of People Shall Be of Her:” Sarah, the Hebrew Female God

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Abstract

The article refers to the findings of Kuntillet Ajrud (inscriptions and drawings) in which, according to some scholars, there is evidence that the religion of Ancient Israel incorporated the worship of a female God, as the consort of Yahweh. The evidence shows that the inscription refers to a figure mentioned in the biblical story as Israel's first matriarch, Sarah. The details implied in the biblical text, as well as the narrative intersections and parallels from the Mesopotamian mythology, prove that there is a high probability that the worldly Sarah was in fact originally the symbol of a Hebrew female god figure – the spouse of the male God, Yahweh.

Introduction

“If Asherah were Yahweh's consort, why is she not present in the stories of the patriarchs?”

In light of the archaeological findings discovered in Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom, this question, posed by Baruch Margalit, has also intrigued other researchers in the field of the religion of ancient Israel. These findings, (inscriptions and drawings) dated to 820 – 745 B.C.E., actually provide evidence—at least according to several scholars—of the existence of a female god—a consort for Yahweh in the religion and worship of ancient Israel. The findings have sparked many arguments and discussions among scholars. Some have interpreted the inscription as signifying the name of a female god, while others referred to this inscription as representing a ritual object. Margalit, for example, argues that it was indeed Yahweh's consort, who was considered as a legitimate divine entity of worship in the Mesopotamian region, as well as in Israel. Yet, in the days of the biblical canonization, the editor erased all clear traces of this consort due to internal power struggles—"we are dealing with the worship of Yahweh and not idolatry," he wrote in his essay. Another interpretation is that of Shmuel Achituv, who argues that the Asherah was a sacred ritual object dedicated to the worship of Yahweh, thus rejecting the argument that there was a female god in Israel's religion.

In contrast, Mordechai Gilula completely negates the possibility according to which the meaning of the inscription is a ritual object that is dedicated to the worship of God, and argues that the inscription is either evidence of a female god or an indication of an object that represents the worship of the female god. In opposition to this argument, Kyle McCarter claims that what seems like a name of a Canaanite female god is actually a female name for the physical presence of Yahweh, and that is why it is considered as a divine consort.
If one refers to the drawing featured alongside the inscription, then the drawing reinforces the hypothesis that the inscription whose translation is 'šrt, represented a divine female being—the consort of the male God.

In the drawing, there are two central figures—a bull and a cow, which represent according to Gilula, a male God, and a female god. Gilula notes that while in transcripts of these findings, it seems that the two figures have a penis; in the original drawing, the smaller figure was not drawn with a penis and had round marks on the chest symbolizing female breasts. In a recently published collection of essays presenting the inscriptions and drawings found in Kuntillet Ajrud, it is noticeable that, contrary to other versions, only one bull has a penis.⁸

Despite the biblical presentation that refers to the religion of Yahweh as a religion that has only a male God, research, as Susan Ackerman⁹ claims, has demonstrated that the Hebrew religion has allowed a wider range of religious beliefs and practices than what the editors of the biblical text were willing to admit. Ackermann argues that the Hebrew religion contained a mixture of various rituals, one of which was a ritual that the Queen Mother—who was devoted to the worship of the female god in the king's court—was responsible for. Saul M. Olyan's¹⁰ study also argues that the worship of Asherah took place in the temple in Jerusalem as an ordinary and legitimate part of popular religious life and ritual. Even at the time of King Jehu, when extraneous elements of religious worship and rituals were eliminated, he did not destroy the manifestations of Asherah placed by King Ahab (Kings 2, 13:6). The same applies to the prophet Amos, who was also silent regarding the worship of Asherah and did not denounce it. Olyan contends that the findings prove that Yahweh and Asherah were perceived as a couple in Israel's religion. Lack of reference to this worship in the Bible illustrates the selectiveness in the presentation of the biblical traditions. Gilula¹¹ also reasons that later biblical authors tried to make the worship of Asherah appear as a foreign pagan element, but between the lines it becomes clear that the worshipers did not see a contradiction between serving God in the Temple and worshiping Asherah, the wife of God in the Israeliite religion. The archaeological discoveries essentially confirm the findings of the critical research of the Bible, and provide a glimpse of the true religious and ritualistic nature of the religion of ancient Israel.

And so arose Margalit's question, as quoted earlier: If Israel's religion did include a female god alongside the male God, why is there no mention of Asherah in the stories of the...
Patriarchs in the Book of Genesis? In response to Margalit's question, the name of the female god, the consort, does actually appear in the stories of the Patriarchs, yet as he himself stated, the canonization process has distorted and erased all traces of Asherah as an Israelite female god from the Torah.12

"As monotheism rose to power, the goddesses were dethroned, and their feminine protection was diverted to the human sphere and perceived as part of the role of feminine characters," wrote Ilana Pardes13 in her 1996’s book. The biblical God is one, a father or a groom, with mostly masculine characteristics and the primordial, archaic, and ancient place of the protective female god was occupied by flesh and blood women. Evidence presented in this essay demonstrates that Asherah should be sought in the form of a flesh-and-blood woman, who performs the functions previously fulfilled by a female god.

The argument presented here asserts that this human figure is Sarah, who is described as the first matriarch, and was actually perceived as the Hebrew Asherah. Both her name and the identity of her spouse were obscured, and so, instead of Asherah, the consort of Yahweh, she appears as Sarah, the wife of Abraham.14

Evidence shows that the meaning of the inscription "his Asherah" in the findings of Kuntillet Ajrud may actually refer to the image of biblical Sarah as the Israelite Asherah. The major challenge here is to prove that Sarah was perceived as a female god among the Hebrew people. Indeed, Herman Gunkel15 argues in his critical studies that Sarah, like the other matriarchs, was a name of a female god in what he describes as the mythological legends, which serve as the basis for the biblical stories of the Book of Genesis. However, as suggested by Zeev Weissman,16 the conjecture of the more recent research is that legends do not necessarily deal with mythology, and there is no solid data indicating that Sarah was considered a female god in the Mesopotamian world. In fact, her name, as Gunkel suggests, is very similar to the name of the Harranian female god, Asartum, and in addition, there is a striking similarity to other names of Mesopotamian female gods—the Canaanite Asherah, Babylonian Asratum, Phoenician Aseratu and Akkadian Asirtu/Asuratum. The lack of an explicit appearance of Sarah's name as representing a female god in the Mesopotamian literature, mythology or archaeological findings, however, does not allow the scholars, according to Weissman, to assume this explicit assumption.

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the later editing of the Bible included actions of blurring and deletion of traditions that did not serve the didactic and religious
ideology of the editors. Biblical historiography went against the prevalent tradition, and waged war against the myth. This is why, according to Yair Zakovich, the written version was distanced from the ancient tradition, which was handed down orally from generation to generation. The Bible uproots the Hebrew people from its native land, says Zakovich, although it is quite clear that when it comes to the roots of religion and culture, the Hebrew people drew on the roots of the Canaanite culture and religion. The assumption is that whatever could be interpreted as pagan insinuations were deleted and re-edited to give the biblical religion an appearance of a monotheistic unity.

In addition, if one relies on the arguments of researchers of feminine antithetic voices in the Bible, such as Fokkelien Van Dijk Hemmes and Pardes, then the feminine voice as a major and dominant voice was forced to conceal and encode itself in order to survive the patriarchal conquest and the tendentious, biased and censoring editing. The feminine cultural voice and presence that try to preserve themselves within the male hegemonic text is therefore, a meandering hidden text with a double voice, and consists of visible, as well as concealed, hidden and veiled layers. If one relies on literary critics, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who studied how the feminine voice appears in hegemonic texts, then it is possible to find that the feminine version appears as pamphletistic – as an ancient blurred version, which emerges through the cracks and fissures of the soil of the hegemonic text. In order to uncover and decode this silent version, one has to connect the blurry remnants that have survived the task of deletion and erasure. Furthermore, Pardes adds that it is required to complete the information by crosschecking with other cultural-religious versions, so that despite deletions, the entire text will emerge and be revealed.

Therefore, the premise is that in order to detect evidence that Sarah was perceived as a female god, it is necessary to employ textual and intertextual excavation methods, free of the theological weight of the biblical text, and the narratological and editorial manipulations within it. One should also make use of the findings of researchers of the Ancient Near East relating to typical symbols and iconography to unravel censored levels and religious force fields concealed in the hegemonic text.

Additionally, one should bear in mind that the stories of the Book of Genesis were told and delivered orally, before an audience, and were preserved hybridically, based on the memory of the narrators and listeners, and were affected by the negotiation between the two. Some narratological motifs have been preserved because of popular demand from an
audience, which knew the stories. Others have been changed in accordance with the place, time, and narrator’s preferences. The various components migrated and were adapted to different cultural groups; the names were changed; the exact wording was altered, but the major motifs of the plot were preserved, as were the phonological and semantic motifs that were etched in the memories of the listeners and narrators.

Such an excavation is carried out in this essay, mindful of the conservation and deletion processes that have probably taken place. The evidence will rely on the biblical text itself, as well as the narrative intersections and parallels from the Mesopotamian mythology, in order to show that there is a high probability that the worldly Sarah was in fact originally the symbol of a Hebrew female god figure—the spouse of God Yahweh.

Sarah as a Creator and Founder of the Faith of Israel

Sarah is the first Hebrew matriarch, and she is presented in the Bible primarily as the wife of Abraham. The narrator focuses first and foremost on Abraham, the trials of faith that he undergoes and God's covenant with him. However, a critical examination of the information that the text provides about Sarah discloses much more than what the clear voice of the biblical narrator reveals. Despite Sarah's relative marginality in the overt text, as the founder of the Hebrew faith, according to scholars, such as Zipora Yavin, Sarah was actually perceived, at least at certain times and in certain traditions, as the equivalent of Abraham, in equal stature and prominence.

The fact that there is a parallel between adding the name of God to her name and the formative addition of God's name to the name of Abraham indicates that she was an inspirational key figure in the establishment of the faith and religion of Israel. Changing Abram's name to Abraham symbolizes his closeness to God, the direct relation to Him, and the fact that he was chosen to be the precursor parent of the Hebrew nation and religion. Hence, changing Sarah's name similarly reflects her closeness to God, and her selection by God to establish the faith of the people for generations to come. It indicates Sarah's central role as a chosen founding mother, parallel to Abraham, in the heritage of Israel.

Sarah's name may provide more hints of her superior status. The Hebrew letters of her name: ה.ר.ש mean in Hebrew 'to rule,' 'to govern,' 'to have authority.' The name indicates a high social rank. In Akkadian, 'Siru' means esteemed and exalted. Its Sumerian sign is the equivalent of the sign of 'Elu,' which means a celestial and exalted being. The biblical expression 'chiefs of the priests' ("Then arose Ezra, and made the chiefs of the priests," Ezra...
10:5), or in Hebrew—'Sarei kohanim' describes people holding senior religious positions, further indicates a superior spiritual and religious status.

It is possible to find 'repressed materials,' as named by Fredric Jameson, in the text pointing to specific narrative traditions that were blurred, in which Sarah was perceived as a central and dominant founding mother, at least equal to Abraham. In Isaiah 51, the prophet mentions the analogy between Abraham and Sarah as the ancestors of religion, and the foundation stones from which the Hebrew religion was formed. In his description, Sarah is defined by an expression that reflects a revolutionary act of a new religion. The text reads: "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth" (Teholelhem' in the Hebrew text) (Isaiah, 51,1-2).

As previously stated, the prophet indicates the deep spiritual origin of the people by denoting the names of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is the father. But contrary to the misleading translation in English that refers to Sarah as the one giving birth, the Hebrew text, instead of calling her the mother as expected, actually refers to her as 'מחוללת—from 'meholelet', which in Hebrew relates to starting a revolution and bringing about a tremendous change. According to this reference, she is a revolutionary founder—way beyond the patriarchal role of a mother, who is a uterine vessel used to multiply the male seed.

And so, as a starting point for this study, it could be argued that Sarah, according to certain traditions that were probably partly obscured, was a central leader, and at least Abraham's equal in importance in the establishment of the religion of Israel.

Moreover, there is evidence in various places in the text indicating that Sarah's position exceeded well beyond her being a national leader. The next section presents such evidence as interlocking pieces of a puzzle that together provide strong evidence that Sarah was considered a female god, God's consort, in the popular Hebrew religion, and was the equivalent of the female god in the neighboring cultures.

Sarah as a Theophoric Name Representing a Female Deity

Yavin claims in her research 'Queen Sarai' that Sarah's name is theophoric and attests to a divine element, which, at certain times, may have represented divinity itself. The pantheons of the gods intermingled and were influenced by each other. In the context of Sarah, Yavin argues that the figure of Sarah is equivalent to Mesopotamian and Egyptian female gods. Their characters intertwined and were influenced by each other. She contends that Sarah was
engraved in the Mesopotamian folk traditions as the equivalent of the female gods Asherah/Ishtar—female gods of fertility, birth and protection.

Based on the knowledge of the names of the Mesopotamian female gods, and especially those that are the equivalent of Asherah and Ishtar, one can identify a prominent symbolism of the combination šrt/h in Sarah's name (in Semitic languages, the phonemes "t" and "h" are interchangeable). Firstly, as previously stated, in Mesopotamian languages, the combination siru symbolized sanctity or the temple itself. It is the equivalent of the Akkadian word "Elu," i.e., the equivalent of the name of the male god. According to Frank Moore Cross, the eternal female god was also called Šēru. Her other names were Canaanite Asherah, Babylonian Asratum, Phoenician Aseratu and Akkadian Asiru, or asratum who was also called 'sarat. All of those names, like Sarah, contain the combination šrh't, and they all represent the Great female god of their religion. Avigdor Hurowitz, who states in his research that the use of the inflection of the letters "El" for a female deity in Hebrew (Ella—female god) is a modern invention, points to the Akkadian phrase 'Ilu u Istaratu,' in support of his argument that the word 'Astarte' or 'Ashtoreth' signifies a female deity as the equivalent of the male deity. This observation can indicate that the combination šrt/h (though sometimes in a different order of phonemes), represented a female deity, and its presence in the name implies the theophoric quality of this female character.

The etymological similarity is only the starting point from which it is possible to point to various clues in the text indicating that Sarah was originally the equivalent of a female god in the Mesopotamian world, and beyond. In the following sections, these textual and intertextual references will be presented.

**Sarah as the Image of the Sacred Cow**

The divine cow is found in the Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh, and in the Egyptian mythology as the symbol of Isis and Hathor, the Egyptian female god that have the sun disk set between the cow horns. According to Tallay Ornan, the symbol of the cow and the calf symbolized the blessings of abundance and prosperity. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger describe the cow and the suckling calf as symbols of protective fertility female gods. In their research, which studies the divine images in ancient Israel, they present a prominent icon of the udders of the blessing of fertility and abundance.

The nourishing motif of the cow and calf as well as the tree yielding food for the doe and deer/ram are recurrent motifs in the iconography of the Mesopotamian female god, and it
appears also in the finding of Kuntillet Ajrud.\textsuperscript{38} This nourishing motif appears, according to Martti Nissinen,\textsuperscript{39} in the description of God in various places in the biblical text. For example, in Hosea 11, God is depicted as having a maternal character, and corresponding with the description of the female god Ishtar, as feeding and nurturing in her lap: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I fed them gently." (Hosea 11:4)

This nurturing quality of the Mesopotamian cow female god and of the male God as he appears in Hosea, is also present in the story of Sarah, along with other corresponding features. If one examines the symbol of the cow, they can find that the cow female god was also called 'Rechem Raba.' In the Akkadian mythology, 'Rechem Raba,' according to Jakov Klein,\textsuperscript{40} means the womb of a female god, or 'Sasiru' 'Raba' or rbt (the Great One) was Asherah's epithet.\textsuperscript{41} Raba Athirat, 'walker of the sea' was the name of Asherah as the female god of the sea.

The same epithet 'Raba' appears in the Bible implicitly referring to Sarah. Lamentations 1:1 reads: “How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great ('Rabati' in Hebrew, רבתי) among the nations, and princess ('Sarati' in Hebrew, שevity) among the provinces, how is she become tributary!” The synonymous parallelism between 'Sarati' and 'Rabati' attests to positioning Sarah in parallel to 'Raba.' In other words, Sarah is positioned as the equivalent of the cow female god, the great nurturing womb.

In the context of 'Rechem Raba,' the 'Great womb,' the cow female god emerges from the image of baking in the mythological epos, as symbolizing pregnancy and childbirth. For example, in an Akkadian epic, the female god giving birth is described as follows: “the tenth month has arrived, the period has passed and opened the doors of the womb...the Great Female God kneading the flour for the cakes in preparation for the tidings of fertility and childbirth.”\textsuperscript{42} This image appears in the biblical story in the context of Sarah, baking cakes in preparation for the angels heralding the news of her pregnancy and the birth of Isaac.

The female god symbolized by the cow was called the bearers of kings and the mothers of kings, and Sarah is similarly described in the Bible as follows: “I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.” (Genesis 17:16) The cow is mentioned numerous times in the Mesopotamian literature as a mother giving birth to her son, the calf, as fundamental image for the realization of the blessing of fertility.\textsuperscript{43} Sarah,
despite her advanced age, symbolizes the blessing of fertility bestowed upon her. The cow female god is a milk-nursing mother, and Sarah is also described in the Bible as “Sarah should give children suck” (Genesis 21:7)—this can be very reminiscent of a symbol of a cow female god nursing kings.

These similarities are in all likelihood mythological 'fossils' of images and motifs from the mythological version, which survived in the biblical text and attest to the ancient perception of Sarah as 'Sassiru'—Rechem Raba – the equivalent of the Mesopotamian cow-female god.

**Taking Sarah by Another King as a Mythological Storyline Infrastructure**

According to Shirley Nathan-Yolori, there were many similarities among popular oral tales in the ancient Near East. One can see that some related similar stories in a different guise in different variations with differences in details. Edward Greenstein shows a parallel between the Mesopotamian and biblical stories, and argues that this parallel stems from the influence of these texts on the Israeli narrator.

The above is consistent with Yavin's argument, according to which the story of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt is probably a version of a recurring pattern that tells of the struggle between two men over an exceptionally beautiful woman, being abducted or taken. Yavin claims that the struggle over a beautiful woman is part of a reservoir of motifs and myths of the ancient world: In Greek mythology, it is the most beautiful of all women, Helene, who was kidnapped by Paris from Menelaus, and her husband, who goes into battle to bring her back. In Ugaritic literature it was King Keret who lost his beloved Hariya, with whom he wanted to continue his lineage, and embarked on a military operation to bring her back.

In view of the popular myth, one would assume that the two men fighting over the beautiful woman Sarah are Abraham and Pharaoh. But actually, Abraham did not fight Pharaoh and did not resist him. He is docile and renounces Sarah. The one, who fights Pharaoh for retrieving the wife, is God. In other words, the two patriarchal protagonists fighting each other are God and Pharaoh, who, in some cases, is also regarded as a god in the ancient Egyptian culture. The two gods therefore, fight over the wife – the queen female god.

The second king, with whom the God fights, also possesses divine qualities. The name of the king Abimelech might indicate that he is a mythological figure of a God. 'Avi' means 'My father,' and 'Melech' means 'King.' The epithet 'Avinu Malkeinu' is a sacred description for God—'our Father, our King' in the Jewish traditional prayer. This name
certainly suggests that there were exalted-divine features in Abimelech character, features that may have been overt in other traditions that were kept hidden or secret.

Thus, a new story is revealed – two/three king-Gods fight each other for control over the beautiful female god, who was Yahweh's consort, and her fertility powers. And so, Abraham virtually becomes the accomplice and assistant of the God-King. Being an assistant to God is typical of the hierarchy that characterizes the Canaanite pantheon, where gods are classified hierarchically: There was a supreme God and under him, other gods who were his messengers.47

**Sarah as the Divine Consort – Wisdom**

Consequently, the version hidden beneath the surface of the canonical story presents a different array of forces. Sarah is a female god, the consort of the God Yahweh, and Abraham is the assistant-messenger of God, carrying out his orders. Although a divine spousal relationship in Yahweh's religion is a matter that exists only on a metaphorical level in the Bible, the study of the religion of ancient Israel points out that despite the biblical display, Yahweh's consort was part of the popular religious life and therefore, probably took part in the ancient traditional stories. Scholars claim that the prophetic image of marriage between Yahweh and Israel is the reincarnation of that perception of the consort. Michael David Coogan48 points out in his study that when the prophets Hosea and Ezekiel describe God, they speak of him as a husband, while his wife, Israel, commits adultery. Those descriptions, according to Coogan, are associated with the element of the divine couple in popular religions. He also mentions that the image of marriage that is used by the prophets, and especially the way in which the character of wisdom is described in Proverbs 8, is a manifestation of the concept of the divine couple.49 According to Raphael Patai,50 wisdom is a female spiritual being that is mentioned in the books of Job and Proverbs as God's spouse. Athalya Brenner51 describes the female character in Proverbs as – "Lady Wisdom," and Claudia Camp52 claims: "In Proverbs we are met first by a strong exalted almost defied female figure in personified wisdom.” Roland E. Murphy53 refers to the description of wisdom in Proverbs 31:30 as a woman, known as a woman of valor, who embodies the awe of God and faith in their female form. In addition, Judith Hadley54 argues that the wisdom in Proverbs reflects the process of eradication of the female god "Asherah" from the religion of Israel and from her independent and powerful identity as a separate female god, through her
eventual reduction to one of Yahweh's 'co-workers,' while completely ignoring the fact that she represents an Israeli female god in her own right.

Ackerman\textsuperscript{55} also presents the parallel between Wisdom as a feminine entity called a woman of valor, and Asherah, and concludes that the tasks of the woman of valor – "She seeketh wool and flax" (Proverbs 31:10) – are taken from the worship of the female god Asherah, as expressed, for example in the verse: "where the women wove coverings for the Asherah." (Kings 2, 23:7) In other words, the wisdom in Proverbs is the reincarnation of the Hebrew female god Asherah as God's consort.

On the other hand, Philo and other traditional commentators attributed the woman of valor from the Book of Proverbs to Sarah. Julia Schwartzman\textsuperscript{56} indicates that Philo described wisdom as a mother who nurses and nourishes all, and points out that Philo identified wisdom in the context of Sarah. The same applies to biblical interpreters,\textsuperscript{57} who attributed the verses in Proverbs 31 to Sarah praising her as the woman of valor.

Evidence presented in this article will demonstrate that these observations are complementary, since Sarah is the censored reincarnation of the Hebrew Asherah. It can be seen that the female entity 'wisdom' is the equivalent of the Mesopotamian female god through symbols associated with her in Proverbs’ the tree of life (Proverbs 3:18), and the doe and the nourishing cow udder (Proverbs 5:19). However, it is also possible to identify constitutive details from the story of Sarah embedded in the text of the counsel of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 7:4 reads: "Say unto wisdom: 'Thou art my sister', and call understanding thy kinswoman." This is similar to Abraham's words to Sarah: "Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister." (Genesis 12:13) Wisdom is sought by kings and princes "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." (Proverbs 8:15-16) This is precisely the way Sarah was sought by kings in the Book of Genesis. Proverbs 8:18 says "Riches and honor are with me; yea, enduring riches and righteousness,” and indeed, Sarah gave Abraham great riches and honor awarded to him by the kings, with whom she stayed. Proverbs 5:1 declares "My son, attend unto my wisdom; incline thine ear to my understanding," just as God ordered Abraham to listen to all that Sarah says, that is, to relate to her words as the words of wisdom itself. Usually, the chosen one is ordered to listen to all of Gods' commands, and here, Abraham, the chosen one, is ordered to
listen to all that Sarah commends. This may be a remnant of an ancient and secreted perception, according to which Sarah was perceived as representing divine wisdom.

It is possible to see Sarah's utterance "it may be that I shall be built up through her" (Genesis 16:2) (built or אִבָּנֶה 'ebane' in Hebrew is based on the same letters of בינה 'bina' or wisdom), as a remnant of Sarah being the divine entity of wisdom. There is a clear link between verbs that are associated with building and wisdom in various verses in Proverbs: Wisdom hath built her house (proverbs 9:1) and "Through wisdom is a house built" (proverbs 23:3). Despite the fact that the prevailing interpretation of this phrase is that Sarah will restore her motherhood, or her self-image and value through Hagar. Yet, if one pays attention to the use of the phonemes of the word 'wisdom' or בינה 'bina' in the word 'ebane' – 'built' then this statement can be construed as 'I will be wise through her,' i.e. I will find a solution to the problem through her.

It should be noted that the symbols of the divine female being 'wisdom' that appear in Proverbs: "A lovely hind and a graceful doe," and "let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; with her love be thou ravished always," (5:19) i.e. the doe and nursing cow are also symbols of a female deity that appear as encoded icons in the story of Sarah and Abraham in Genesis (previously elaborated on the cow-female god, and again in the doe/deer/ram in the next subsection).

It is also interesting to note that in the Book of Proverbs – the book of wisdom, Sarah's name, in various variations, appears time and again as a code name: The word "yeshru" in Hebrew appears in chapters 4:14 and 9:6. The phrases "Sarin Yasoru" in Hebrew (princes rule) appears in chapter 8:16. "It shall be health to thy navel" - (Proverbs 3:8), "Happy is the man that finds wisdom" - (3:13), "He that walks in his uprightness fears the Lord" - (14:2) – these are just some of the many examples where Sarah's name appears.

Moreover, it can also be said that Asherah's name, i.e. the name Sarah +a as a prefix appears as well. "Her children rise up, and call her blessed; - (Proverbs 31:28), "but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." - (29:18), "for happy are they that keep my ways." (8:32), "Happy is the man that hearkened to me" (8:32) and "and walk in the way of understanding." (9:6)

It is apparent that the prefix 'a' 'א' in the names of the female god (ג)shera (as well as ג)sratum, ג)seratu and ג)sirtu,) which was probably omitted by the biblical author in Sarah's name as a female god, in order to conceal her mythological identity, returns in the blessings.
of wisdom. Fredric Jameson and Zakovitch who studied this phenomenon of the return of the repressed and denied wrote:

The reconstruction of concealed traditions can be done by different means. The initial one is the identification of twofold traditions in the Bible. Browsing through twofold traditions may detect a clash between ancient lines of the tradition and those designed to confront, blur, or even replace them. Sometimes, we can find in the margins, in the textual outlying areas the tradition that the Bible sought to reject from the main discussion. Sometimes the dual, rejected tradition is found even off the historiographical field and is revealed in another literary genre in the Bible… What the Bible has concealed may continue its life until it emerges to surface again, in a place and a way where there it is no longer a danger to any ideological concept.58

And so, the return of the letter "א" to the phrase "Sarah" in the context of wisdom in Proverbs, is the safe- without danger – place, where Sarah's denied and erased identity as the Hebrew female god, Asherah, can return and rise to the written surface in a way that will not cast suspicion or undermine the canonical ideology.

In fact, additional repressed materials may surface in this way. One also learns from the parallels between Sarah – Asherah – wisdom, about the dual attitude of the author and Yahweh to the wife of God. On the one hand, the Book of Proverbs presents the woman-wisdom (בינה - bina) as admired, wise, beautiful, and beloved, that one strives to be in her company, but on the other hand, it speaks of the foreign beautiful and seductive woman, associated with promiscuity, prostitution, and infidelity. These are supposedly two different women, but in the next section, it is clear that these are actually the two facets of Sarah as they are perceived and presented in the various layers of the text.

"Thou are my sister" as a Reincarnation of the Hittite myth

Savina Teubal adds another facet to the story of the taking of Sara and suggests another variation to the plot.59 She argues that, as was customary in the ancient Near Eastern culture, the main, holy, feminine figure chooses not to have children. Her life is devoted to holy service. Her assistants are the ones providing the continuity of her legacy. According to the biblical text, Sarah, the Great Matriarch, chose Hagar the Egyptian, to take care of the continuity of her legacy. Her son was supposed to be Sarah's heir. The husband was required, according to the custom, to accept this heir, chosen by Sarah. Teubal claims that the biblical text expresses conflicting versions— the matriarchal heritage as opposed to the patriarchal one. The voice of the Patriarchate denies and undermines the matriarchal tradition and the inheritance practices associated with it. Patriarchy, embodied by Abraham, seeks to have an
heir who will establish the male dynasty in place of the female one. The laws of inheritance are undermined, as well as Sarah's status, when apparently, due to Abraham’s encouragement, Hagar becomes the bequeathing mother, and Ishmael the bequeathing son. [Abraham asserts 'Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!' (Genesis 17:18)] Despite the fact that the narrator describes Sarah's relation to Hagar in the context of inter-feminine jealousy and pettiness, what actually transpires here, at least according to Teubal, is a power struggle between a matriarchal heritage and a patriarchal heritage, a struggle that the canonical author prefers to obscure and conceal.

In light of the vague state of inheritance, Sarah needs to become a mother herself in order to find a successor to her spiritual heritage. It is possible to see the reflection of the required move in the change in divine promises: no longer a son from the patriarch's 'own bowels' (15: 4), but a son born from Sarah's womb (17: 17; 19).

According to Teubal, after the covenant of circumcision made between God and Abraham, a covenant of males that essentially excludes mothers from this divine covenant, Sarah realized that her matriarchal spiritual heritage was in danger.\(^6\) Sarah had to conceive away from the influence of the patriarchal covenant. Therefore, Sarah was not passively taken to the foreign king's palace, but rather chose to go with him for a very specific objective.

The version proposed here is indeed more daring and bold in terms of the women involved. Yet, the story of a beautiful woman seducing a stranger to further her own goals is a common and explosive motif in Mesopotamian and ancient Near Eastern literature, which had an undeniable influence on biblical stories.\(^7\)

If one looks for the likelihood of the hypothesis that the story of "thou are my sister" (Genesis 12:13) actually depicts a story according to which the beautiful Sarah seduced Pharaoh and Abimelech and was not passively taken by them, then the ancient literature of the Near East will confirm that this is indeed feasible. In fact, the motif of the beautiful woman, who chooses to seduce a stranger, creates a conflict between the two men, and provokes her husband's rage and urge to punish, is repeated many times. One such example is the "story of the two brothers,"\(^8\) which has many parallels in world literature, including the biblical story of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar. Another version appears in the Hittite mythology, which is extremely relevant to the biblical story of Sarah and Abraham, for several reasons. Firstly, the Hittite/Harranian culture was well entwined in the roots of the
Hebrew culture, and there are many manifestations of this fusion in the Bible. Sarah and Abraham were born in Harran. In addition, the prophet Ezekiel (16:3) mentions that the mother of the people, i.e. the female spiritual-cultural source, is Hittite. In other words, the Hittite/Harranian culture is found in the constitutive roots of the ancient Hebrew religion and culture. The Hittite culture, along with its folk tales, heroes and mythology, were known to Israel, and affected the narratives that accompany the heritage and traditions of ancient Israel.

In the Hittite mythological story, as described by John Day and Yigal Ben Nun, the Female god Asertu tempts the storm God – Baal. He turns to her consort, the God Elkunrisa, and tells him about the temptation attempt. The supreme God is furious. He commands Baal to go back to this woman, sleep with her, and humiliate her by slaughtering her sons.

Noteworthy is the meaning of the name Elkunrisa is God of Heaven and Earth. This name also appears as the God's name, in the story of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 14:19). The fact that the biblical story describes an event that connects Abraham to the Hittite Elkunrisa suggests that the Hittite myth is found at the foundation of Abraham and Sarah's tradition. It is feasible to identify the same narrative elements that are repeated in both stories, the biblical and the Hittite: a married woman in an intimate situation with a stranger, male rage and jealousy, and a traumatic situation brought upon the woman's child and the woman herself. These repetitive motifs of the story, in addition to the appearance of the name of the Hittite god Elkunrisa in the story of Abraham, reinforce the theory that the story of "thou are my sister" originally describes a tradition in which the wife-female god chooses to seduce a foreign king, thus provoking her husband, the god's anger, jealousy and lust.

The Hittite Myth and its Role in Understanding the Censored Connection Between El-Yahweh and Ashera

Oyan and Judith Hadly relied on the Hittite and other similar mythologies, in an attempt to establish that Asherah was the consort of God, and not of Ba'al, as claimed by the biblical author. They assert that attaching Asherah to Ba’al in the biblical text is an act of the narrator designed to revoke the legitimacy of the female god as a consort in Israel's religion. Hadly presents common myths in which Asherah is being unfaithful to El with Ba’al. Martin H. Pope also indicates in this regard that the relations between Asherah and El were estranged, and that she probably lost interest in her husband El, since he did not perform his male sexual duties. Asherah, the myth shows, sought to fulfill her needs with the virile Ba’al.

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Alternatively, these arguments demonstrate that the biblical narrator/editor was aware of and familiar with the Hittite myth about the female god being unfaithful to El, and even challenged it. The numerous repetitions in the text of Ba’al and Asherah in the context of idolatry are, in fact, on a concealed level, references to the female god’ infidelity with God. On the overt level, the Hebrew nation is being unfaithful to God leading to God's wrath, but on the pamphletistic level, the female god is being unfaithful to her husband. This infidelity has a real sexual meaning, and as such also appears in the words of the Prophets as feminine with multiple sexual words related to prostitution and infidelity.

Although this accusation is presented in the words of the Prophets as metaphorical, according to Gershom Scholem mythological materials that were censored from the Bible survived and resurfaced in the text as images, metaphors, and poetic language. Actually, they can be considered as allowing the return of the repressed in the canonical text.

The numerous images dealing with the infidelity of the woman in the discourse of the Prophets are characterized by tangible sexual descriptions that demonstrate an emotional ‘reality’—at least on the level of the narrative reality—of a betrayed and furious husband. For example, in Ezekiel, chapter 16, Jerusalem is described as a neglected girl. The man serves as her patron and husband taking her from her parents' home and nurturing her. Her depiction as a nude woman is very tangible: “and thou camest to excellent beauty: thy breasts were fashioned, and thy hair was grown; yet thou wast naked and bare” (16:7) Her husband is described as having intercourse with her after their wedding: “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, and, behold, thy time was the time of love, I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest Mine.” (16:8) The husband who takes the girl describes meticulously how he washes her blood, rubs her with oil, clothes, and dresses her wounds like a loving consort.

These vivid emotionally charged descriptions might suggest a level beyond the metaphorical one, which probably took place in another version and in other traditions before the later editing and censorship. In this version, the God was a substantial husband, who felt betrayed by his beautiful beloved wife, the female god. This version was accompanied by popular descriptions bordering on pornography, expressing the jealousy and rage of the hot-tempered and jealous husband.
The Implied Similarity Between Sarah and God's Unfaithful Wife According to the Prophets

The biblical author does not use Sarah's specific name to describe the unfaithful wife, and when he mentions the infidelity of idolatry, he uses only Asherah's name or Ashtoret as attached to the name of the Ba‘al. However, the guiding ideology is the elimination of the mythological dimension of the biblical stories. On the other hand, the fragments that survived the censorship and editing and emerge in the text suggest the parallel between Sarah and the whoring woman mentioned by the Prophets. The description of the beautiful woman, whose name is renowned throughout the various nations, echoes inter-textually the story of Sarah that wherever she goes her beauty is known to all and causes the kings to lust for her. The prophets’ descriptions depicting the whore as a 'ruler,' may imply the censored reference to Sarah, whose name in Hebrew means 'ruler.' The prophet Isaiah adds that “for thou shalt no more be called the lady/ mistress of kingdoms” (Isaiah, 47:5) and indeed Sarah was blessed as follows: “I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her” (Genesis 17:16).

Ezekiel describes God's words as follows: "and thou didst wax exceedingly beautiful, and thou wast meet for royal estate. And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect, through my splendour which I had put upon thee… But thou didst trust in thy beauty and play the harlot because of thy renown" (16:14-15). He goes on to say: "Thou hast also played the harlot with the Egyptians, thy neighbours" (16:26). This description matches perfectly the beautiful Sarah that moved to the Egyptian palace, i.e. "wast meet for royal estate," and probably also "played the harlot" in Pharaoh's bed.

Ezekiel's reference to the sister of that unfaithful wife: “and thy younger sister that dwelleth at thy right hand’, is Sodom and her daughters…done after their abominations” (Ezekiel 16:46-47)—reveals the original context of the metaphor as referring to Sarah, when the echo to the plot of Lot's daughters in Sodom is made. Lot's daughters express a prohibited, active seductiveness, and because their story appears in the chapter preceding Sarah's story in Abimelech's palace, it serves as a foreshadowing hint to the feminine seductive story.

As well, when the prophet Isaiah speaks about the ancient origins of the people—who are the father and the mother—he uses the name Israel as the name of the mother that is the equivalent of Abraham. “For Thou art our Father; for Abraham knoweth us not, and Israel
doth not acknowledge us;” (Isaiah 63:16). Indeed, he draws a parallel between the name of Sarah, presented as Abraham's wife and mother of his son, and the name 'Israel.' If there is a parallel between Sarah's name and the name 'Israel' then the attempt to present the descriptions of the prophets concerning the unfaithful woman, 'Israel', merely as a metaphor concerning the people, is misleading. The metaphoric presentation might actually obscure the repressed, silenced, and censored materials, revealing the mythical level in the heritage of ancient Israel – the story of Yahweh and his allegedly unfaithful wife, Sarah.

Returning to the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah, while carefully examining the text, one can identify more textual fragments that may indicate a mythological level of the story concerning the divine couple. In the dialogue between Sarah and God, it seems at first that God quotes Sarah calling herself an old woman. But, a careful look at the words Sarah and God use, reveals that it is not necessarily so. (In order to identify this the Hebrew version must be used because the English version is misleading and disregards the nuances of the original Hebrew text.) In the Hebrew text Sarah asks defiantly whether she will still experience pleasure, as her fertile times are long gone and her husband is old (Genesis 18:12). In response, God answers: “Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying: Shall I of a surety bear a child? And I am old.”

It should be noted that Sarah in the Hebrew original text does not refer to herself when using the word 'old,' but to her Lord, i.e. her husband. When God responds, he repeats Sarah's argument and attributes the word 'old' to himself. This means that God identifies himself in the story as the Lord-husband of Sarah.

An additional fragment from the mythological layer and the version that tells the story of marital relationships and infidelity between Sarah and God is the text focusing on God's obsessive suspicion regarding Sarah's laughter. God's behavior asking helplessly and confused, “Wherefore did Sarah laugh?” (18:13) Insisting that she laughed is probably reminiscent of a fearful interrogation of a jealous husband than of a divine spiritual guidance. The narrator informs the reader that the laughter stems from Sarah's lack of faith, but one should bear in mind that the Book of Genesis uses the word "לצחק" from the root "קָחַץ", which means 'laugh' in Hebrew, in the flirtatious-romantic sense. For example in chapter 26, it reads: "and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife." (26:8) The English translation uses the word 'sporting,' but the Hebrew uses the word 'מצחק' = 'laughing'. When hearing the laughter between the couple Isaac and Rebekah, king Abimelech understands that
they are lovers and not brother and sister, as Isaac claimed. Based on this meaning of the word "laugh" or "צחקה", God's insistence on the fact that Sarah laughed entails accusation of flirtatious and seductive sexual intentions or behavior.

Additionally, the word "denied"/which "ותכחש" describes Sarah's relation to God in the text alludes to conflict and drama much more severe than those reported in overt text. In many instances in the Bible, the deniers are sinners and traitors against God. Joshua 7:11 explains: "Israel hath sinned; yea, they have even transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; yea, they have even taken of the devoted thing; and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have even put it among their own stuff." (In Hebrew, the same word לכחש is used in both verses). Isaiah 30:9 states: "For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that refuse to hear the teaching of the Lord,” i.e., they ignore God's existence and therefore refuse to hear His teachings. Isaiah 59:13 continues: "Transgressing and denying the Lord, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and perverseness, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood." The same applies for Jeremiah 5:12. Job 31:28 and proverbs 30:9: "Lest I be full, and deny, and say: 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God".

The ones who deceive God are not people whose words and loyalty God can rely on. This is why the description of Sarah as 'denying' further reinforces the hypothesis regarding the charged and difficult relationship of betrayal and mistrust.

The obsessive focus on Sarah's laughter, and the choice of the word 'denied' "ותכחש", as presented, probably stem not only from the act of infidelity itself, but also from its potential consequences, which eliminate one of the most predominant elements of divine power, as presented in the Bible – the force of fertility. According to Christian Frevel, the biblical text does not refer to the Canaanite female god as a symbol of fertility, as it appears in Mesopotamian religions. Frevel even underscores that the Bible, and the Book of Chronicles in particular, deliberately rejected any element that would give the female god Asherah the power of fertility and birth. The God Yahweh is the only one that possesses this power according to the Bible. It is also evident that the biblical author deems it important to demonstrate the exclusive dominance of God over the power of fertility when it comes to the founding Mothers of the nation, as their wombs, the most powerful ancient symbol of fertility, are presented as barren and dysfunctional. The womb opens and becomes fertile only when God gives His blessing. One can therefore understand how intimidating the
mythological version could be. According to the version suggested here, Sarah, the female god, actually re-appropriates the power of the female womb and chooses for whom she should open her womb and for whom she should become fertile. This is why her ironic laughter heralding, as claimed, the seductive and treacherous move and its consequences, is so disturbing to God and to the canonical author. So much so, that they keep discussing it suspiciously, and even call Sarah "denier/deceiver" מכהשת with all the treacherous implications associated with this term.

This narrative of betrayal, which is revealed here as a mythological fundamental story in the tradition of ancient Israel, could explain God's ambivalent relation to His chosen ones and the people of Israel, i.e., the descendants of Sarah, as seen in many parts of the Bible. The motif of attempting to kill His messengers-sons, such as Moses, Jacob, and Isaac, may stem from the archaic doubt of paternity due to the betrayal of the wife, the female god. The jealousy of the whoring woman constantly repeated in the words of the prophets may be a reconstruction of the story in a way that processes the trauma of the betrayed God-husband, oscillating between love to his beautiful wife and the desire to avenge her for being unfaithful to him, and killing the 'sinful' children.

The assumption that the story of Abraham and Sarah is a censored version of the Hittite myth about a male god betrayed by his consort, therefore ordering his messenger to kill her children, may shed a different light on the story of the binding of Isaac. When Abraham raises the knife to carry out the orders of God the father, and slay Isaac, the divine voice calls him to stop the killing and directs him to a ram caught in the thicket. Abraham and binds it instead of Isaac. Although the presentation of the ram and the tree seems marginal and incidental in the hegemonic text per se, a study of the ancient Near Eastern symbols indicates the tremendous significance of this icon. Keel, who studied the symbolism of the biblical world and ancient Near East, using the iconographic approach, pointed to clear archeological evidence indicating that the image of the female god was symbolized by horned animals such as the ibex or the ram standing next to tree branches or shrubs. Ornan has also presented evidence that in the ancient Near East the female god was depicted as standing with rams with whom tangled branches coming out of her body intertwine. She introduces in her study archeological findings, which indicate that the tree and ibex signified the religion and adoration of the female god. In fact, the image of the horned animal beside the tree and the spiral branches (the equivalent of the phrase 'ram caught in the thicket' in Genesis 22: 13) are,
according to Ornan, the most common visual themes in ancient Near Eastern art. Ornan claims: “the tree and the ibex symbols replaced the human image of the naked Goddess.”

It turns out then that the ram caught in the thicket during the binding of Isaac in the canonical text of Genesis 22:13 is not a random occurrence, insignificant in itself, as described by the biblical narrator. In the ancient Near East, the rams in which the spiral tree branches intertwine, symbolized the female god and her protection, and usually appear next to her. Consequently, the depiction of the ram caught in the thicket in the hegemonic text is probably a remnant of a parallel mythical tradition. In the version that was silenced and deleted from the hegemonic version, Sarah, the female god, who was probably symbolized iconographically by horned animals and thicket, is most likely involved, maybe through the voice of the angel, in saving her son from being slaughtered.

As initially argued, ancient traditions were first handed down orally in a hybrid way, varying according to the listeners, the narrator and place, but central and much loved themes that were etched in the memory and consciousness could not be completely erased. They have therefore undergone some processing. The memory of the female god involved in saving her son from the binding was probably a constituent and touching scene that was well internalized in Israel's national memory and popular culture for generations, and could not have been totally conceded or deleted. Therefore, what remains in the edited version is the symbol of the female god that was well known in ancient times: the ram and the tree/thicket. In later times, the meaning of the icon faded, and thus, the presence of the female god was removed from such a constitutive scene in the Hebrew culture and religion.

Still, it is interesting to note that to this day the ram's presence remains at least in part, alongside the memory of Sarah in every Jewish synagogue in the customs and rituals of Rosh Hashanah (the Hebrew New Year). On this holy day, the story of the binding of Isaac is read in all synagogues, and according to the tradition, in memory of Sarah's weeping and wailing, the shofar (ancient musical instrument made from a ram's horn), is blown. It is quite possible that this ritual is a relic that survived. A relic that could not be eliminated from the mythical story of the female god Sarah and the binding of her son. Consequently, it is possible that this is where Sarah's religious cult was created for generations to come – a ritual that includes a sacred part of the prayer and the blowing of the shofar while telling/reading the story of the binding of Isaac.
Conclusion

This article presents evidence supporting the claim that Sarah was a Female god in ancient Israel, the Hebrew Asherah, equivalent of the Mesopotamian Female god, and was perceived as the consort of the male God as manifested in the findings of Kuntillet Ajrud. This can be seen through the many biblical and mythological expressions, narratives, and images that might leave a trail of textual fossils, which survived the process of editing, censoring, and other forms of control. These textual expressions, which are drawn from the uncovered intersections of information and parallels, lead to a mythological Hebrew version, which attest to Sarah's mythological status. There is, of course, no way to confirm this study’s thesis with certainty, and the research may have seemed fuzzy and blurred at times because the nature of the attempt to expose versions and voices has undergone processes of censorship and silencing for thousands of years. And yet, the findings of this study strongly indicate that Sarah was indeed perceived as a Hebrew female god, whose divine status was concealed and obscured due to the attempt to give the religion of ancient Israel an appearance of an absolute monotheistic faith, mostly male by nature.

Other questions remain obviously unanswered. For example, the question arises as to the meaning of the Asherim and the Asherah as a ritual object that probably accompanied the worship of Asherah in the context of the biblical Sarah. Another question is whether one can identify further indications of the worship of Asherah-Sarah in the Hebrew religion.

One example proposed in this paper is the custom of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Examination of this ritual and its traditional contexts, in light of the findings of this study, may illuminate new insights and discoveries regarding the meanings of this holiday in Israel's ancient religion. Additionally, examining ways of worship and other rituals and customs in light of the findings presented may raise similar questions and point to hidden and unknown layers in the Hebrew religion and heritage.

Further research is required in this area to examine the issues arising in light of the growing realization that the Hebrew female god was present in the religion of Israel, even in places where it was considered as non-existent, such as in the story of the Patriarchs.
Endnotes:

3 This dating is the result of a recalculation in light of new tests (that in fact confirm the initial dating), reported in 2008. See I. Finkelstein and E. Piasezky, “The Date of Kuntillet Ajrud: The 14C Perspective,” TA 35(2008): 175-185.
10 Saul. M. Olyan, Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel (SBLMS 34; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).
14 I will elaborate further regarding the way in which she is coupled with the god Baal, instead of Yahwah.
19 Pardes, Countertraditions.
21 Pardes, Countertraditions.
24 Gunkel, The Legend.
25 Zipora Yavin, Queen Sarai: The History of an Israeli Queen (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2014).
According to Talia Sutskover, names in the Bible and a change of name in particular indicate a hierarchical importance—status, power relations and level of influence. See her “Name Giving in Genesis and Establishing Authority,” Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World 57 (2012): 33-51.


Fredric Jameson, who studied the role of ideology in cultural products, argues that the political unconscious sprouts out of the crevices in the text, as a symptom of unresolved tension in the reality, in which the text was written. Reading the political unconscious seeks to restore history’s repressed and buried reality to the surface of the text. Inside the literary texts live involuntary “symptoms” that attest to the existence of repressed forces in the social unconscious. See his The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Yavin, Queen Sarai, p. 93.


Elaboration of the subject of phoneme substitution in semitic and proto-semitic languages can be found in Chaim Rabin, Semitic Languages, The Biblical Encyclopedia Library (Jerusalem: Bialik publication, 2006).


Hurowitz, “Portrait,” p. 11.


Othamar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, Gods, p. 238; 241.

As described by Ornan, “Drawings,” p. 44.


Ibid.


Yavin, Queen Sarai, p. 56.

Ibid., p. 52.


Ibid., p. 119.


Athalya Brenner, Israelite Women: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative (Sheffield: Jsot Press, 1985), pp. 41-44.


Buber Midrash Tanchuma, “The Life of Sarah,” *Agadat Bereshit* chapter 34:1 and *Yalkut Shimoni* proverbs. See also Midrash Psalms (Buber) that says: and even the psalm "Eshet hayil" (Woman of Valor – Proverbs 31) was written of Sarah, his wife from beginning to end, as it says: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).


Ibid., p. 33.


The story tells of a young man, a shepherd named Bata, who lived in his older brother’s house. One day Bata helped his brother in the field and was sent home to fetch seeds. His brother’s wife tried to seduce him. This was discovered and the wife was severely punished. The gods then created a new wife for him, so incredibly beautiful that the king of Egypt coveted her and took her to be his wife. Bata took on the form of a bull and found the wife. The treacherous wife slaughtered the bull, but then, from his blood, a cedar tree sprouted. She ordered to cut down the tree, and a fragment of wood penetrated her mouth, causing her impregnation and the re-birth of Bata as her son.

Day, “Ashera”.


Ibid., p. 305.

About the story of the binding of Isaac see p. 34.


Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*.


See Exum’s essay about the recurring tale of handing the beautiful woman to a foreign king as an attempt to process the patriarch’s anxiety due to lack of control over the woman’s sexuality: *Fragmented Women: Feminist Subversions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).


Ibid., p. 79.
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