The Levite’s Concubine: The Story That Never Was

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Abstract

The present paper explores the narrative structure, details and vocabulary of Judges 19. The inspiration derives from Martin Buber who wrote of its distorted details in and ‘ahistorical and atypical’ nature. More recently Mieke Bal described Judges as “a book that problematizes languages by proposing uncanny kinds of speech-acts to challenge language as purveyor of meaning.” Not only the ‘problematizing’ nature of language in Judges 19 (and 20-21), but the near silence of biblical referents to this tale, the silence of rabbinic sources and the Church Fathers until the Medieval Period, together create an aura of suspicion and uneasiness that begs for a re-interpretation of this text as a metaphor of dire, not gentle, admonition, pieced together by allusions, of what Israel's destiny might become, what women's position might become, how brethren might become enemies and how this might all be (wrongly) accomplished in the name of the Lord.

Introduction

Scholarship traditionally sees the story of the Levite’s Concubine in Judges 19-21 and the preceding story of Micah’s Shrine (chapters 17-18) as belonging to a supplement appended to the book of Judges. The primary function of this supplement was to vividly relate the depravity to which Israel had sunk by the end of the period of the Judges, a depravity whose very existence served as the justification for the establishment of kingship in Israel. The absence of this institution is repeatedly brought to our awareness in the refrain: "In those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

More recently scholarship has redirected its treatment of Judges 19-21, not in challenging that this story belongs to the supplement, but rather (a) in exploring unique elements that illuminate this story and contribute to larger issues; and (b) by reconsidering the editorial process as related to Judges 19-21. Yairah Amit’s, The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing, in particular, reconsidered the editorial process of the book of Judges, concluding that while chapters 19-21 are part of this supplement, they are not of the same nature as Chapters 17-18. Rather chapters 19-21 represent the story of a post-exilic author whose intent was to make a political statement that, Israel, though clearly dealing with events not ordinary, works together as a unity. Such a vision of a unified political organization could only be conceived of by a post-exilic author.

The present paper seeks to draw on the spirit of current redirections – exploring the narrative structure, details and vocabulary of Judges 19, and evaluating this evidence in light of Amit’s post-exilic hypothesis. The inspiration for this study derives from Martin Buber who wrote of this story (and Judges 17-18) as “temporally undetermined” and “put together from a baroque, overspread elaboration of a legendary theme ... in a loquacious style ... an accumulation of happenings reported circumstantially and unclearly, though apparently, in essence, authentically”. Buber recognized, as did C.F. Burney (1918) and Phyllis Trible (1984), parallels in vocabulary and elements of plot in this story with passages in Genesis, I Samuel, and within the book of Judges itself. More recently Mieke Bal described the book of Judges as “a book that problematizes
languages by proposing uncanny kinds of speech-acts to challenge language as purveyor of meaning.”6 Not only the ‘problematising’ nature of language in Judges 19 (and 20-21), but the near silence of biblical referents to this tale (one reference to the ‘crime of Gibeah’ in Hosea 10:9), 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, together create an aura of suspicion and uneasiness that begs for a re-interpretation of this text as a metaphor of dire, not gentle, admonition. These allusions of Israel’s past and near future history, pieced together like the tessarae tiles of a mosaic, present an image of what Israel's destiny might become, what women's position might become, how brethren might become enemies and how this might all be (wrongly) accomplished in the name of the Lord.7

A Mosaic of Biblical Allusions

The Prologue (Judges 19:1-2) begins with the refrain "in those days there was no king in Israel," a refrain that occurs four times within the supplement to the book of Judges (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), twice in the story of Micah and twice in our present narrative. Moreover, in this narrative, the refrain frames the entire story of rape and revenge, being placed strategically at the beginning of the narrative (19:1) and at the very end (21:25). As readers, we are introduced to the two main characters in this prologue: the Levite and his concubine. Neither Levite nor concubine is acknowledged formally by name. Not even rabbinic legend, so often inclined to provide a name derived from the characters circumstances, has deigned to provide names to our leading characters.8 Though unnamed our characters are distinct, created by the contrast of their gender (‘ish/’ishah "man/woman") followed by a term of status (Levite/concubine).9 The designation 'Levite' allows us to connect our present story with the preceding one of Micah, who had procured a Levite to initiate at his shrine.10 Levite as male protagonist also leads us complacently into a false sense of security. A Levite as a member of the priestly line should be above reproach. Our other protagonist, the concubine, is introduced with the terminology of marriage "and he took for himself a woman," which is then, however, qualified by the noun pilegesh concubine. The Levite bears a place of honor in Israelite society; the concubine's place is ambiguous.11 Ackerman is well to point out that subsequent references (vv. 4, 7, 9) indicate that the concubine is the Levite’s secondary wife.12 Mention of the word ‘concubine' evokes for readers mixed feelings. It is the concubine Hagar, however, despised, rejected and cast aside who shares the most with the Levite's concubine and who, as we will later see, will subtly be alluded to through action and a familiar idiom.

The residences of our protagonists are also contained within this first verse, providing contrast and allusions. The Levite is from the hill country of Ephraim, the same setting of Micah's home and shrine (chapter 17), through which the Danite spies and then the Danites marched in their migration and invasion of the northern city of Laish (chapter 18). The region is recorded as taken by the tribe of Judah in Judges 1:19 and the very same region in which Joshua was buried (Judges 1:9; Joshua 24:30). Looking forward, Elkanah, the father of Israel’s last judge, Samuel, was from the hill country of Ephraim (I Samuel 1:1) and the ancient sanctuary of Shiloh, where Samuel remained to minister to the Lord, was in this same region (I Samuel 2). In the hill country of Ephraim, too, a tall...
handsome young man would pass through in search of the straying donkeys of his father, Kish (I Sammuel 9:3-4). Saul is this young handsome man destined to be the first ‘tentative’ king of Israel. We will find other allusions to Saul, allusions subtly pushing Israel toward kingship.

By contrast, the concubine is from Bethlehem of Judah, a city that most notably brings to mind the setting of the book of Ruth and begs an allusion to David. Ruth the Moabite would settle in Bethlehem and become the great-grandmother of David who was likewise from Bethlehem (I Samuel 16) and under whom kingship as an institution flourished in Israel. The Levite's home in the hill country of Ephraim distinctly evokes the settings of past biblical stories, while that of the concubine projects us into the future. But it is not only the mention of Bethlehem of Judah that projects us into the future world of Ruth and David rather the concubine herself flees back to Bethlehem to her father's house in verse two of our Prologue.

The concubine’s flight also brings to mind the flight of another famous concubine, Hagar. Hagar flees not once but twice from the contempt of her mistress. Once she returns by command of the angel of the Lord (Genesis 16:9); the second time she does not return. The Levite's concubine likewise flees; the cause is controversial. Though the Massoretic text states: “and his concubine played the harlot against him” (19:2), most translations follow the Septuagint’s (A) reading “and she was angry”, suggesting a consonantal confusion of Heh/Het in the final radical of the Hebrew root. The proposed emendation of the MT is reflected in rabbinic literature, which both implies that the concubine did ‘play the harlot’ and that Levite was harsh and abusive toward her. Josephus likewise records that 'his wife,' did not return his feelings, which in combination with her beauty, aroused his passions even more. Their relationship turned to quarrelling and her departure.

As we move from Prologue to Scene One (Judges 19:3-10) we discover that unlike Abraham who did not go after Hagar, the Levite goes after her "to speak tenderly to her", lit. "to speak upon her heart." Hagar sought refuge in a barren desert, returned safely, fled again to the barren desert and flourished; the concubine sought refuge where one would expect refuge, her father's home, and later as a protected guest by the old man of Gibeah, but she did not return safely and was never given an opportunity to flourish. The allusions to Hagar are present, but the irony lies in the distortion of details.

In "speaking to her heart" the Levite is using an idiom that connotes "reassurance, comfort, loyalty, and love." The biblical allusions of this idiom have not gone unnoticed. Trible notes its parallel use in the story of the rape of Dinah, where after raping Dinah, Shechem "loved the young woman and spoke to her heart" (Genesis34:3). The same words are also spoken in Hosea to his wife Gomer (Hosea 2:14).

Our Levite proceeds on his journey with his servant and a couple of donkeys. The presence of donkeys is a subtle motif used within and beyond this story. Within our story ‘the donkeys' appear at critical junctures, indicating a change in scene is about to occur. And so here (v. 3) he sets out on his journey with his donkey. When our Levite reaches his father-in-law's house the text records: "the girl's father saw him and came with joy to meet him." The image of a greeting of happy relief brings to mind another story in the book of Judges, in that story, however, it is a young girl who comes out to meet her victorious father, the judge Jephthah, "with timbrels and with dancing" (Judges 11:34). Our image is distorted for it is the father-in-law not the concubine who comes out in
welcome. The end result is the same in both stories. Jephthah's daughter will be sacrificed by her father in accordance with his vow to preserve his status and honor (Judges 11:31); the Levite's concubine will be sacrificed by her master to protect himself and his honor. But the concubine's father is not innocent of guilt, for his over-extension of hospitality precipitated the delay that cost the concubine her life. The Levite enjoys the hospitality of his father-in-law's household with the noted repetition of two idioms involving the heart "fortify yourself," (lit. sustain your heart) [19:5, 8] and "enjoy yourself" (lit. let your heart be well) [19:6, 9]. The heart, to which the Levite wished to speak in v. 3, namely his concubine's, has not been spoken to, rather it is the Levite's heart that has been addressed. Perhaps the only tenderness the concubine has experienced in her father's house is that not once is she called 'concubine.' She is called 'the young woman' in the phrase 'the father of the young woman.' Her status as concubine perhaps is delicately avoided out of respect for her father.

As we move into Scene Two, the Levite, after five days, has refused any further hospitality. With saddled donkeys (signaling the scene change) and his concubine (once outside of her father's home we have returned to this epithet), the entourage moves on, but the day is drawing to an end. Jebus, a city of foreigners, is not deemed acceptable. This non-acceptance is ironical because Jebus is the future city of Jerusalem, taken by David in II Samuel 5. The entourage must move on to the safety of an Israelite city. Their sights are on Gibeath, which belongs to the Benjaminites (19:14, 16). The mention of Gibeath and Benjamin leads the reader into a false sense of security. Benjamin, the very name evokes kindly and sympathetic thoughts of past biblical history. It connects us initially with the youngest son of Jacob and Rachel, the son with whom Rachel died in childbirth (Genesis 35:16-20), a son who took no part in the jealousy of his elder brothers against Joseph, a son who was in no way involved in their brother Jacob's sale into slavery, a son whom Jacob - with greatest reservations - sent to Egypt to reclaim Simeon. (Genesis 35, 37, 42-45). In Moses' final blessing on Israel it is said of Benjamin (Deuteronomy 33:12): "The beloved of the Lord rests in safety - the High God surrounds him all day long - the beloved rests between his shoulders."

We as readers are not prepared for the transformation in character of the Benjaminites in this chapter and in the following two, but perhaps Benjamin's character was hauntingly foretold in Jacob's last words of testament (Genesis 49:27): "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil." The mention of Benjamin takes us most clearly back to Genesis, but moving forward in time the Benjaminites of the Conquest become a vague entity, one tribe among many. The mention of Benjaminites also has one very prominent tie with the institution of kingship. Saul, the first 'tentative' king of Israel was "a man of Benjamin" (I Samuel 9:1-2). The mention of the Benjaminites' city of Gibeath, in our story, likewise, connects us to the future, toward the much-desired institution of kingship, for Gibeath would later become the temporary capital of Saul.

As Scene Three opens (Judges 19:16-21), we find our entourage inside the city of Gibeath, in the open square, without an offer of hospitality. Worries of hospitality are fleeting, as an old man appears who, though presently residing in Gibeath, happens to be from the Levite's region, the hill country of Ephraim. This identification is perhaps to alert the reader that the old man is not a Benjaminite, for once again an editorial note reminds us that Gibeath was peopled by Benjaminites (v. 16). The old man questions the
Levite in language strikingly similar to Hagar's questioning by the angel; Hagar is asked, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:8), the Levite is asked just the reverse "Where are you going and where do you come from?" (Judges 19:17). The Levite makes mention of his predicament, noting he has fodder for his ‘donkeys' and provisions for his ‘amah maidservant (not concubine) and his young man. All he requires is a place to rest. Hospitality is offered with a warning, "do not spend the night in the square." This phrase is hauntingly reminiscent of Lot's warning to the two angelic visitors to Sodom: "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night … They said, ‘No, we will spend the night in the square.' But he urged them strongly." (Genesis 19:2-3). Lot made them a feast and washed their feet; so too does the old man of Gibeah (vv. 19-21). But the old man also fed the ‘donkeys.' If we as readers have not picked up the allusion to Lot's story as a warning against complacency, the donkeys at the end of this scene should have signaled a warning.

Our Final Scene (Judges 19:22-28) opens with an idiom of the heart, "they were enjoying themselves" [lit. making their hearts good] (v. 22), immediately sending the reader's thoughts back to the hospitality of the Levite's father-in-law where ‘making good' and ‘fortifying' their hearts was overflowing. The scene that follows not only disrupts their enjoyment, but also bluntly forces the reader to recall the story of Lot and the Sodomites in Genesis 19. This allusion to the story of Lot and the Sodomites perhaps is the most noted and obvious of all allusions in the story of the Levite's concubine. In Judges 19:22-23 we read:

While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may know him.' And the man, the master of the house, went out to them, and said to them, 'No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing'.

In Genesis 19:4-7 we similarly find:

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.' Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.'

The texts are similar, but not identical. The old man of Gibeah specifically emphasizes the issue of hospitality; one does not harm a guest. It is the host's duty to provide protection. The men of the city are also specifically described as perverse, lit. 'sons of Belial, worthless men.' At Sodom, the literary concern is focused on the inclusiveness of the men, that is from youngest to oldest, an all-encompassing statement. The objective in both cases is to have relations with 'the male guest/guests.' The irony is in our expectation of what will ensue in the Levite's story given the response in the Sodom story.

In Genesis 19:8 Lot offers his two virgin daughters; in Judges 19:24 the host likewise offers two women, his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. The host himself offers to bring them out and then adds, 'humiliate/ravish them and do what is good in your eyes to them' (Judges 19:24). 'Humiliate' or 'ravish,' derived from the
Hebrew root ‘nh, is the same verb used of Shechem in Genesis 34:2 when he took Dinah and lay with her and raped her. 'Do what is good in your eyes,' too, is a phrase reminiscent of Lot's words to the men: "do to them as that which is good in your eyes" (Genesis 19:8). It is a phrase that echoes the affliction of another woman, Hagar, of whom Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your handmaid is in your hand, do to her what is good in your eyes" and "so Sarai humbled/afflicted her" (Genesis 16:6). Blindness prevented the men of Sodom from any further advances. Our expectations are that similar salvation will prevail for virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. The virgin daughter of the host is spared, but the Levite himself "seized his concubine and put her out to them" (19:25). The contrast of the expected with reality add to our shocked reaction. The violent abuse follows through the night. When dawn breaks in Lot's story, Lot, his wife and daughters are led out of the city to safety; when dawn breaks for the Levite's concubine she is released and returns to the host's house, only to collapse.

This scene concludes with perhaps the most disturbing action, reaction and words in the entire narrative:

In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. 'Get up,' he said to her, 'we are going.' But there was no answer. (Judges 19:27-28)

Indifference is the response of the Levite to the lifeless form of his concubine, her hands in a death-grip on the threshold of the door. This is the door through which she had earlier walked for refuge and out of which she had been thrown. His response is unconscionable. But the horror of indifference is magnified many times if the reader is careful to notice the biblical allusions in his truncated two curt words "arise (qum) and let us go (bo')" with that of the rustic lover in the Song of Songs "arise (qum) my beloved, my fair one, and come (bo')" (2:10,13). Our passage leaves out those tender words "my beloved, my fair one," words the text initially implied when the Levite went after his concubine "to speak tenderly to her" (Judges 19:3). Bereft of words of tenderness, all that remain are commands that pay no heed to the abuse she has suffered. She does not respond. The Greek text specifically states she is dead; the Hebrew alludes to it with “and there was no answer.” His words "get up and let us go," however, are not words that call for response but for action.

As this final scene closes HE fulfills the action. Our donkey once again appears to carry her lifeless body home. A striking irony presents itself with this last appearance of the donkey carrying the abused and dead body of the concubine on her return trip home. It is an image that so hauntingly brings to mind the image of another young woman in chapter 1 of the book of Judges, Achsah, who rode alone by donkey from her home in the Negeb to her father's home in Hebron to procure springs of water for her household. Achsah's image is of a woman riding into a future bright with possibilities; the lifeless body of the Levite's concubine draped over the donkey has no future, save dismemberment that leads to further atrocities. 

The Resolution of our story is found in Judges 19:29-30. The Levite returned home and "he took the knife" just as "Abraham took the knife" in Genesis 22:10 to offer Isaac as a sacrifice at the Lord's request. The angel stayed the hand of Abraham; no one stays the Levite's hand. The Levite "grasping his concubine cut her into twelve pieces,
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limb by limb” (Judges 19:29). The Levite distributes (nth) these pieces amongst the tribes of Israel just as Saul had cut up an oxen and distributed the pieces (nth) throughout Israel as a call to war (I Samuel 11:7). The message is clear. The Levite has suffered an affront. What will Israel do about it? His concubine, his possession, has been damaged. Retribution must be wrought. He asks Israel to "consider it, take counsel and speak out" (Judges 19:30). The expression 'consider it' in Hebrew is literally "to place the heart” sim leb; however, in our verse the idiom has been truncated simu- the word 'heart' leb has been omitted. The Levite has most subtly omitted his heart, his compassion, his love for his concubine.

A mosaic of allusions exists not only in Judges 19, but continues in Judges 20-21 when Israel responds to the Levite's cry for vengeance. Most noteworthy are allusions to the cities of Mizpah, Jabesh-gilead, dismemberment into twelve pieces as a call to war and the Lord's support during battles of conquest. The manipulation of these cities and the way in which the Lord demonstrates support during battle once again connects the ensuing chapters of vengeance with past events in Genesis, Joshua and Judges, and future events in I Samuel.

The Story That Never Was

Reading this story as metaphor of admonition, concurs with Amit’s suggestion that the events in Judges 19 and the retribution, which follows in chapters 20-21, are not ‘ordinary’. Seeing this story as a post-exilic composition appended to the book of Judges if not to the supplement in Judges 17-18 likewise concurs with Amit’s editorial research. Where this analysis parts with Amit’s analysis is in locating the chronological referent to our story. Amit, as earlier noted, sees Judges 19-21 as a post-exilic composition made to reflect the period of the Judges itself, based on the political unity demonstrated in tribal response to the demise of the Levite – a type of unified political organization that could only be described as such after the fact. The present analysis of language and narrative style in Judges 19 alone suggests the opposite, favoring the traditional understanding of Judges 19-21 as representative of the utter depravation at the end of the period of the Judges. The distortion of biblical passages in Judges 19 represents the hypothetical apex of woman's oppression that could be wrought. If the story horrifies us, it is because it was designed to do so. If its distorted allusions to other biblical phrases and events upset our expectations, then they have achieved their purpose. They have weighted our souls with a sense of foreboding that all is not well. They have surreptitiously informed us that all was not right with the world of Israel at the end of the period of the Judges. The acts of retribution that ensue likewise reflect society in all its manifestations needed to be reordered. ‘Mob rule’ is not the equivalent of a unified political organization that solves the problems, as Amit suggests.

Read as a metaphor of admonition, however, the tale of the Levite's Concubine delivers a much more powerful message. Israel has gone astray, far more than in the earlier period of the Judges when a charismatic leader imbued with the spirit of the Lord could deliver Israel from its external oppression and bring her back to God. But a judge was not enough, even if the spirit of the Lord descended upon him or her, because the enemy that oppressed Israel was not Cushan-risathaim of Aram-naharaim,
Moabites, not the forces of Sisera or the Amalekites, not the Midianites or the Philistines. The enemy was from within, Israel herself; she was her own oppressor.

A dynamic, horrific tale was crafted to save Israel this time, not a judge, and so 'the story that never was' was created, fashioned by the distortion of the very phrases and details of a text held so sacred. The allusions may have been quite apparent to those centuries closer to the text's formation; they would have seen through the literary veil and understood the moral of this tale. Millennia later we, too, can see through this veil and reclaim this story, viewing it not as a historical text of terror, but 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!

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2 Contributions to the first category, for example, include K.G. Bohmbach’s (1999) analysis of Judges 19 in respect to the ‘public-private construct,’ private, as generally accepted, relates to woman’s sphere and her safety – clearly our text challenges this gender stereotype (“Conventions/Contraventions: The Meanings of Public and Private for the Judges 19 Concubine.” *JSOT* 83 [1999]: 83-98). Don M. Hudson (1994) focused on anonymity in Judges 19-21 as a literary technique that “symbolizes and epitomizes the gradual, downward spiraling disintegration that is occurring increasingly throughout the narrative until the community faces radical anarchy in chs. 17-21” (“Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19-21.” *JSOT* [62]: 66). Feminist interpretation likewise has seen in this story the most horrendous period of oppression of women in the Hebrew Bible; women as possessions, as objects to be acquired and thrown aside, to be used at will, without consideration, would find no lower period within the panorama of biblical history (Carol A. Newsom & Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women’s Bible Commentary*. Westminster/John Knox, 1991). W. Janzen (1994) focused on the demonstration of hospitality in Ch. 19: the Levite’s father and the old man of Gibeah as positive models, the man of Gibeah as negative. Furthermore, that this “paradigm of behavior is broadly human” is borne in the servant’s suggestion to seek hospitality in Jebus (*Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*. Westminster/John Knox, 1994: 38). One final example is M. Bal’s analysis (1997) of the Levite’s concubine in light of Rembrandt’s etching of the concubine collapsed at the threshold at the feet of the Levite. Though depicting her death, “the moment when the woman is no longer able to speak her truth of life and death” (222), she does speak. Through the subtle shadings below her hands – shadings that cannot be shadow because the Levite and the house block her from the sun - Rembrandt suggests ‘movement’ (225). The concubine, “the victim at the threshold of the house, thus is forever positioned as “a liminal figure, as the embodiment of transition” (221), who “never stops dying” (222). (“A Body of Writing: Judges 19.” In Athalya Brenner & Carole Fontaine, *Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*. A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible. Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997).

3 (Leiden: Brill, 1999: 342). The distinction that Amit notes of Ch. 17-18 and Ch. 19-21 clearly echoes Martin Buber’s conclusion that the two stories are distinct (*Kingship of God*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 66, though Buber is more inclined to see this story as a monarchical creation designed to advocate for the creation of kingship.

The analogy of this story’s components to that of the individual tiles (tesserae) of a mosaic was inspired by the image of the “Mona Lisa of the Galilee” featured in the article, “The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic”, in the September/October issue of Biblical Archaeology Review (2000). [This mosaic of the lady of Sepphoris can also be viewed at http://www.tfba.org/projects.php?projectid=11.] Pardes’ use of *tessera* (borrowed from Harold Bloom who in turn took the term from Jacques Lacan) in her analysis of the joining of the Book of Ruth with the stories of Rachel and Leah. Pardes and her precursors use the term as derived from early mystery religions “where fitting together again the two halves of a broken piece of pottery was used as a means of recognition, a password of sorts, by the initiates” (101). Thus, the reference to Rachel and Leah is not only retained in the book of Ruth but revised in its new setting in relation to the story of Ruth. (*Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Harvard University Press [Cambridge, Mass: 1992], 100-101). Whether derived from mystery religions or in the creation of a mosaic, the use of tessarae suggests that a first or ‘parent-text’ is conjoined with further texts, while simultaneously retaining the significance of the first meaning yet contributing to a new meaning.

8 Classical rabbinic commentaries, usually quite prolific for many biblical stories, is oddly scarce in the present case. See the online essay by David Richter, “Farewell, My Concubine: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Outrage of Gibeah” which acknowledges that “the number of references in the aggadic midrash to Judges 19-21 is vanishingly small and those few are merely tangential to the main issues of the story, but there are several versions of ‘rewritten bible’ in the classical period, such as Josephus and [Pseudo-]Philo, and the text is annotated by most of the important medieval commentators” (n. 2); see also references in Richter’s note 49 (http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/ENGLISH/Staff/richter/concubine.html). Consider, too, that further reference to ‘the crime of Gibeah’ in the biblical text itself is lacking. Even Louis Ginzberg’s retelling and comments on this story focus more intensely on the excessiveness of the battle fought to avenge the crime of Gibeah and to connect the story of Micah’s idol (Judges 17-18) with that of ‘the crime of Gibeah’ and ‘vengeance against the Benjaminites’. The concubine seems to be forgotten, mentioned but briefly in Ginzberg’s footnotes (*The Legends of the Jews*. JPS. IV (1913), 51-53; VI (1928), 211-212, n. 134; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. 5.2.8. Lack of any “sustained comment on Judges 19” is noted regarding the Church Fathers. As Thompson is well to note this silence might be expected from those Church Fathers whose attention was not directed towards Judges, but the same explanation does not suffice, as for example, with Augustine and his students, unless “these epigones of Augustine simply refused to rush in where their master feared to tread.” (John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation*. Oxford University Press, 2001: 190).


11 Concubines, like Zilpah and Bilhah, who bore sons for Jacob, held a position of respect (Gen. 30:1-13); Hagar, by contrast, on bearing Ishmael became despised (Gen. 16). Other concubines were women used for sexual purposes, like Saul’s concubine Rizpah (II Sam 3:7).

12 Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*. Doubleday, 1998: 236. Understanding the Levite’s concubine as secondary wife negates her “as having any ability to act independently and autonomously” (237). Ackerman’s focus is clearly on the element of ‘male hegemony’ in this story.

13 See BT Gittin 6b, where R. Hisda, in commenting that “a man should never terrorize his household,” references that because ‘the concubine of Gibea’ was terrorized by her husband many thousands were slaughtered in Israel. The implication in the preceding paragraph is that the concubine was guilty of ‘playing the harlot’; R. Abiathar comments that the Levite found a fly in is food, but R. Jonathan found another’s hair on the concubine.

14 Thompson explores our story in comparison with that of Lot’s daughters in Medieval Patristic and rabbinic Sources where exegesis though present is still not extensive and tends to emphasize the MT’s
reading as blatantly referring to committing adultery rather than the suggested emendation to “and she became angry.” Moving forward to Protestant readings, the concubine as adulteress becomes even more emphatic, raising the question, why wasn’t she stoned or, as the wife of a Levite, burned to death. (Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation. Oxford University Press, 2001:190).

15 Trible, 67.