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Gender and Iconography from the Viewpoint of a Feminist Biblical Scholar¹

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Texte und Bilder sind verschiedene Medien mit je eigener Agenda, weshalb sie über dieselben Gestalten, Institutionen etc. nicht dieselben Aussagen treffen (können). Der Beitrag zeigt dies an Beispielen der verschiedenartigen Beziehungen zwischen biblischen Texten und den Bildern aus Palästina/Israel und seinen Nachbarkulturen. Bilder können, wo die biblischen Texte ganze Sphären der religiösen Wirklichkeit ausblenden (Beispiel Göttinnenverehrung), die fehlenden Informationen liefern, so dass eine Rekonstruktion von Religionsgeschichte möglich wird. Umgekehrt können biblische Texte (Beispiel Mobilität von Frauen) Licht auf Frauenleben im Alten Israel werfen, das aufgrund der ikonographischen Stereotypen überhaupt nicht erschließbar wäre. Biblische Texte und Bilder können auch in komplexer Weise konvergieren, wenn beispielsweise in den Prophetenbüchern die öffentliche Klage der Frauen über den Untergang einer Stadt in ähnlicher Weise zur Drohbotschaft für die verantwortlichen Männer wird wie auf assyrischen Reliefs. Feministische Exegese und genderbezogene Ikonographie profitieren in jedem Fall wechselseitig voneinander.

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For the last twenty years, I have worked at the intersection of biblical texts and ancient oriental iconography, using a feminist-hermeneutic approach. Biblical texts are ambivalent in a particular way when it comes to questions of Women or gender. Being a feminist biblical scholar, I generally read these texts with a “hermeneutics of suspicion”.² They are important documents of the (frequently opposing) history and the beliefs of women, but they are also documents of patriarchy and of androcentric perspectives.

On the one hand, as a biblical scholar and theologian, I cannot do without images as sources, because while the Bible is an important, but insufficient base for the reconstruction of ancient Israelite or early Jewish and early Christian women’s history, for some periods, there are virtually no extrabiblical textual sources from Palestine/Israel, but there are image sources. On the other hand, biblical texts, with their own and particular intentions and perspectives, can question, complement or elucidate

the pictures and their symbolism. For the different points of touching points or distances between bible and image, image and bible, I would like to introduce three examples: goddess worship, mobility and lamentation of the dead, which are, in my opinion, especially elucidating with regard to gender research.

Since this article is the result of work processes which cannot be fully documented here, the impression might arise that iconography is degraded to an ancilla of exegesis and is only examined in view of biblical texts. Such an impression would be wrong. Only a well-grounded knowledge of the iconography of Palestine/Israel in the context of the picture programmes of Israel's great neighbouring cultures allows for highlighting of the relations between images and texts (Schroer & Keel 2005). If the methodical and hermeneutic treatment of images and texts can vouchsafe for their autonomy, this connection is a very fertile and, for gender research, particularly worthwhile.

I. Images inform where biblical texts fade out: Goddess worship in Palestine/Israel

The First (Old) Testament has come into being in a very long process of tradition that went on for several centuries and was increasingly influenced by monotheistic options and viewpoints of prophetic groups in ancient Israel. One consequence of that development is the lack of neutral and substantial information about the goddess cult in Palestine/Israel (see Wacker & Zenger 1991; Keel & Uehlinger 1998). There are no non-polemical Old Testament notes about goddess cults in Israel. Only in the transference of the image of goddesses onto Israelite women or onto the image of the post-exilic (divine) wisdom have their positive aspects been preserved.

Virtually every hint as to the cults of Asherah, Astarte and the Queen of Heaven in the Bible is loaded with their rejection, problematising, distortion and defamation – which then had negative repercussions on real women. The central argument of these polemics reveals itself to be the fact that there was a vital cult of the Goddess Asherah until the Exile (see latest Frevel 1995), and that this cult was by no means limited to the common people and to familial religiosity, but could be found as high up as the circles of government and the functionaries in the Jerusalem Temple, and that it had been connected to the worship of sacred trees, the so-called *āšerim*.³

Other goddesses, such as Anath or Astarte, are only mentioned in the Bible by name or in seemingly archaic formulas. Texts such as the significantly older myths from Ugarit,

in which goddesses such as Anath or Atirat occur, do not help much in reconstructing what took place in Palestine/Israel in the first century B.C.

More revealing are some of the inscriptions from Palestine/Israel itself (9th/8th century B.C.), which prove the proximity of Asherah to the worship of JHWH in the form of blessings, but even with regard to these many questions remain unanswered.⁴

Much more informative is the iconography, with the help of which the image of goddesses in Palestine/Israel since the Neolithic Age can be traced and recorded with regard to its particularities compared to its neighbouring cultures.⁵ In combination with archaeological findings, the following general picture emerges: since the Neolithic Age, a continuous tradition of the motive of women and goddess images in Palestine/Israel can be detected.

Whereas the beginning is dominated by images of sitting voluptuous female figures, standing juvenile smaller figures are the majority from the 4th millennium onward. In the 3rd millennium, in Palestine/Israel, there is a special interest in erotic images of women or goddesses, who, for example, present their breasts. Only as late as the Middle Bronze Age IIB (1750-1550), which, in Palestine/Israel, is taken to be the time of origin of Canaanite culture in a constitutive way for later epochs, does the image of the goddesses gain profile. Of central importance is a goddess of soil and vegetation, responsible for the growing of plants and animals and partnered with the regional weather god. Numerous stamp seals prove the significance of that goddess for the population of an agrarian society.

In the late Bronze and the Iron Age, things begin to shift. On the one hand, the goddess images of the urban upper classes during the Egyptian occupation are distinctly more Egyptian and especially militarised, such as the Canaanite-Egyptian Qudshu on a warhorse or Anat/Astarte as a goddess on horseback. On the other hand, the original combination of goddess and plants, animals and erotic appeal (presenting of breasts) recurs until the Iron Age, if frequently in the form of substitutions in lieu of the full depiction of the goddess with her attributes. Additionally, during Persian times, we encounter the mother goddesses or sitting pregnant women and women with children which, before, occurred only sporadically.

With iconography as its background, some polemic biblical texts can be understood in the light of the widespread goddess worship in the country.

On every high hill and under every green tree you sprawled and played the whore. (Jeremiah 2:20)

[T]hat faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there. (Jeremiah 3:6)

For you shall be ashamed of the oaks in which you delighted; and you shall blush for the gardens that you have chosen. (Isaiah 1:29)

[...] you that burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree [...] (Isaiah 57:5)

For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing odors, and there they poured out their drink offerings. (Ezekiel 20:28)

[T]hey (the Israelites) set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree; there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. They did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger[.] (2 Kings 17:10f)

Iconography provides a better understanding as to why the prophets and especially the deuteronomists reacted aggressively against sacred poles and against the goings-on under large green trees on the hills⁶ and why they saw these practices as the greatest threat to the God of Israel, JHWH, and as a threat to the entire country. There obviously was a hard confrontation between the local Canaanite religion and the younger worship of JHWH supported by influential groups.

After the destruction of the country, the capital city and the central shrine in Jerusalem, there was also the question of how all of it could have been avoided and which wrongful behaviour had led to the downfall, which, according to the deuteronomists, JHWH himself had decided upon.⁷ What appears to be positive in the goddess images, especially the relation of eroticism, and growing vegetation to the goddess (**fig. 1-3**), is either described in constantly negative terms in the texts of the Old Testament, such as whoring and as breaking away from the right belief, or simply goes unmentioned.

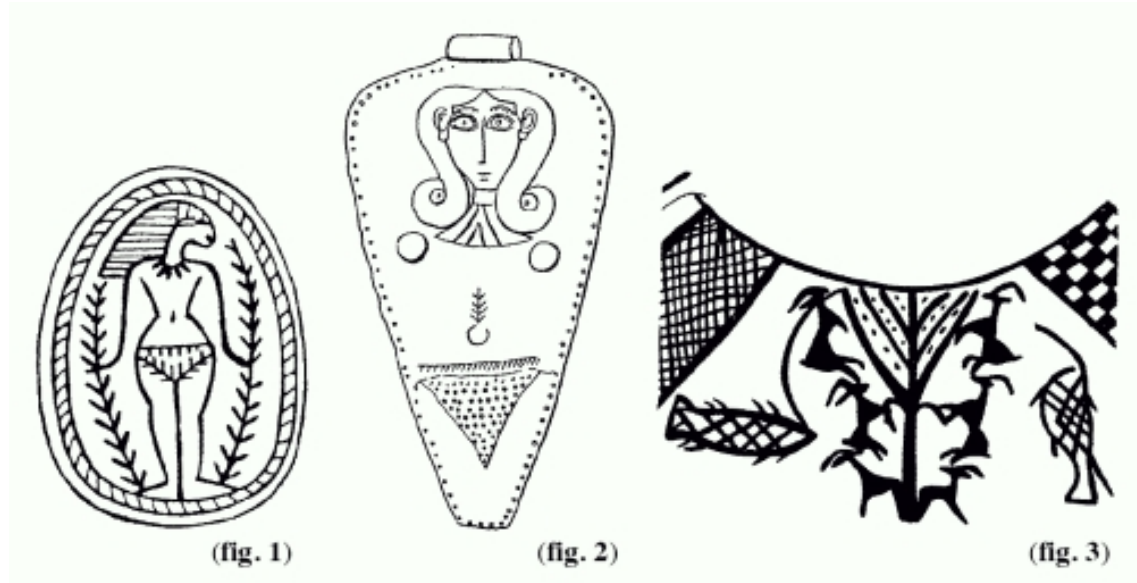


fig. 1: Erotic ‘branch goddess’ with branch-like rendered pubis on a scarab from Gezer (16th century B.C.). The time between 1750 and 1550 B.C. is formative for cultural development in Palestine/Israel. Part of the emerging image repertoire is a nude erotic goddess standing amidst branches or holding them. On this piece, too, her pubis is depicted in the likeness of a branch. [Giveon 1985: 114f No 16; drawing after Keel 1986: fig. 135,1]

fig. 2 Goddess on a gold pendant from Tell el-Aggul (16th century B.C.). The combination of branch and pubic triangle shows that the perception of the forces of vegetation and female eroticism were perceived as having something in common. The Canaanite goddess of soil and plants was first of all an erotic apparition. Her sex appeal guaranteed the fertility of the land. [Mackay & Murray 1952: Pl. 6,12; drawing after Keel 1986: 165 fig. 97a]

fig. 3 Goats at the sacred tree in a ceramic painting from the Tell el-Far‘a South (14th/13th century B.C.). The motive, in the Late Bronze Age, stands as a substitute for the image of a full-figured goddess or the female guide of the animals who also feeds them. Fish underline the tree’s life-giving quality. The stippling of the stylized tree is striking, but not singular. It denotes an association with the goddess’ pubic triangle. [drawing after Keel 1978: fig. 181]

The images from the Middle Bronze Age IIB show us, as it were, the bright contrasting foil of the sombre Old Testament criticism. About the so-called pillar figurines presenting their large breasts (**fig. 4**), that were found in Judah by the thousands and that date back to the Iron Age, there is nothing at all to be learned from biblical texts. The images, however, leave their fair share of unanswered questions. We often know very little about who made them or for which purpose, and what the people who placed them in their houses expected of them (see Keel & Schroer 2004: esp. 8-25). The images,

however, especially the seals and terracotta figurines, constitute in any case more immediate proof of the piousness of a large part of the populace than are the biblical texts, which, in a complex process of selection and validation, emphasize excerpts of religious reality.

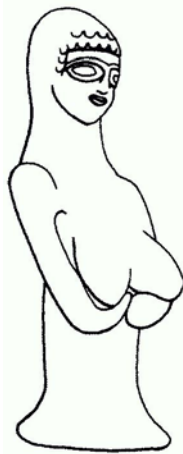


fig. 4 Pillar figurine from Jerusalem (8th century B.C.). Terracotta of this type, found in great numbers in Judah, show a woman with voluptuous breasts held or presented by her. Full breasts can be found frequently in the biblical texts as a metaphor for blessing; the Old Testament, however, does not mention the Terracotta figurines in any way. [Avigad 1970: Pl. 30B; drawing after Winter 1987: fig. 33]

II. Biblical texts inform where the images fade out: women and mobility

Mobility is a value, one of today's greatest values in a highly industrialised and mechanized world. It is everyone's endeavour to partake in global mobility, even if only a small percentage of the global population can afford to travel by car or by plane to any given location at any given time. The hierarchy of 'means of transport' from donkey, horse, camel and the first vehicles like carts and boats to railway, bus, ship, car and plane is also a hierarchy of status and gender for mobile people. Who can afford to be mobile, and by which means? Even in a country such as Switzerland, with its relatively broadly coordinated public transport network, the high percentage of women and children as well as the socially disadvantaged as passengers of public transport strikes the eye. Mobility is based on animal power and/or technical achievements. The motivation for new inventions were, even in antiquity, mostly the needs of the military or of commerce. Eventually, broader circles were able to use it, but mobility remained related to status.

It is thus not surprising that, in art from Egypt and the Near East, there are pre-eminently gods, sometimes goddesses (**fig. 5**), often also kings, princes or their aide-de-camps, riding a cart – in the Egyptian Amarna time, also the queen is frequently shown in the cart.⁸ Neo-Assyrian reliefs show the deportation of the population of conquered cities etc. in open carts.



fig. 5 Group of bronze figures, probably from the Phoenician-Syrian coast 14th/13th century B.C.). The original cart was replaced as early as the 8th to 4th century B.C. The taller figure might depict a goddess (Anat?), the shorter one a king as the charioteer, who goes to battle under the goddess' protection or lets himself be hailed as victor. [Negbi 1976: No 22; drawing after Winter 1987: fig. 212]

In Palestine/Israel, the donkey is the oldest and simplest means of transport for persons and goods. From the 3rd millennium onwards, not only the donkey as a beast of burden, but also its rider are depicted (**fig. 6-7**).⁹

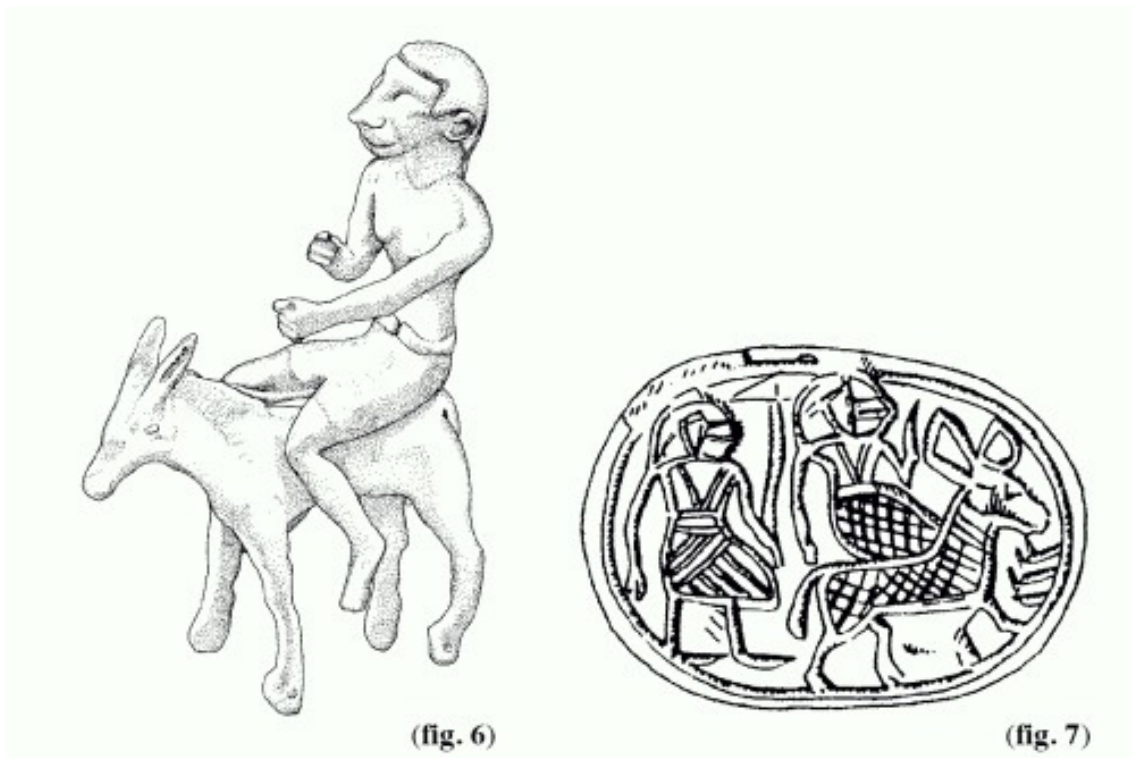


fig. 6 Bronze plastic of a rider on a donkey from Syria (2000-1900 B.C.). [Treasures of the Bible Lands 1987: No 101; drawing: Ulrike Zurkinden-Kolberg]

fig. 7 Scarab in Berlin (1750-1550 B.C.). The nomadic ruler on a donkey is accompanied by a donkey driver. [Drawing after Keel 1995: fig. 380]

Riding on a donkey in Palestine/Israel was taken to be a respected way of travelling and reserved for the nobility. In Egypt, however, the donkey was valued more as a beast of burden and less as a mount. Donkey riders are always male, also on the famous Sinai pillars which, very obviously, do not depict an Egyptian, but a local ruler accompanied by a driver (**fig. 8**).¹⁰



fig. 8 Pillar from Serabit el-Chadim from the time of Amenemhat III (1853-1806 B.C.)

From the Late Bronze Age onwards, the donkey is no longer to be encountered in the iconography of Palestine/Israel. A horse or warhorse takes its place. Exceptionally Goddesses can stand or ride on it as an exception.¹¹ The pictures do not tell us anything about the mobility of the common people and the habits of men and women to ride a donkey in their everyday life. The biblical texts, however, prove that the donkey was still the most favoured means of transport in the 1st millennium. Even King David rode a donkey (2 Samuel 16:2), while his sons started importing horses and carts (2 Samuel 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5). According to biblical tradition, Solomon initiated the expensive horse keeping and breeding at court (1 Kings 5:6).¹² After the dromedary's widespread domestication at around 1000 B.C., richer people were allowed to undertake longer journeys on a saddled camel. Women were their riders, too, such as Rebecca and her maids in Genesis 24:61,64.¹³

Donkeys were self-sufficient, and indispensable for field work. To own several donkeys and to have a donkey for riding, was certainly unaffordable for many people (see, however, the description of the royal court in 1 Samuel 8:16). Only the wealthy rode donkeys (Abraham in Genesis 22:3; Balaam in Numbers 22:22-23; Judges 5:10). Interestingly enough, well-to-do women rode as well.¹⁴ Stories mentioning women riding donkeys show that they were able to expand their scope of action through a swift ride and that it was perfectly normal for wealthy women to make use of the donkeys in their household for that specific purpose. They used the donkey to get from their house to an any place in a fast manner.

These were all women from wealthy tribes. Achsah, Caleb's daughter, asks her father for water sources as a dowry (Joshua 15:18; Judges 1:12-15), while she is sitting on a donkey. Abigail rides towards David on a donkey just in time to stop his vengeful rampage against her house (1 Samuel 25). The woman of Shunam rides to the prophet

Elisha in an emergency, in order to save her son from death (2 Kings 4). In all these texts, description of a riding woman constitutes a narrative strategy to uphold her superiority over men. Mobility is thus related to status. It is based on it and corroborates it. In all these texts a woman riding is a narrative strategy to demonstrate her superiority.

The texts, but not the images, take respected women's mobility to be something perfectly normal. This is due to the function of the narrative. The stories of Achsah, Abigail and the woman of Shunam are embedded in narrative contexts that reveal the women's smartness and wish to show them as active agents in the history of God and Israel. Riding on a donkey is a handy narrative device to underline their superiority. The images from Palestine/Israel are completely disinterested in this kind of image building; they are only concerned with male donkey riders representing certain forms of public power.

Another possibility must be pondered: Could the conception of a woman riding on a donkey really only become viable during the time of the above narratives when, at the same time, the men had started riding horses and camels? Such a pattern (he drives the Mercedes, she drives the small Fiat) would be familiar to us. The evidence, however, suggests that, before and in the early days of the state, the Old Testament narratives tell about renowned donkey riders such as Abraham and Balaam.

III. Biblical texts and images converge: the women's lament for collective catastrophes

Lamentation of the dead is an element of those social customs that deal with death and burial. It exists alongside other customs about death, such as self-affliction rites or rituals of comforting. Sorrow and sadness are individual and more or less biology-based affects, but dealing with them is governed by social conventions which are only partly related to the emotion triggering them. Lamentation of the dead was strongly ritualised in antiquity. It remained so until the last century in the Mediterranean region and until today among Muslim Arab men and women.¹⁵

For the Egyptian, the Near East and Greek antiquity, iconography can prove that, to a large degree, but not exclusively, lamentation of the dead was a women's affair, not only for female family members, but also for professional female mourners.¹⁶ Whereas male family members also displayed sorrow and were present at the funeral procession

in Egypt as well as in Greece, there is no male counterpart to the female mourners. The artistic image, in a purely quantitative way, sets emphasizes the femininity of expressive mourning. Typical gestures are falling over forwards, tearing of hair, wringing one's hands over one's head, dousing with dust, baring one's breast and and scratching one's cheeks. The context in which the mourners are depicted is mostly about the death of an individual. Images of female mourners from Palestine/Israel and the Levant are few and are all from the end of the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. They bear witness of Egyptian and Aegean influence (proof in Schroer 2002).

The biblical texts show a multifaceted but incomplete range of mourning in as far as it concerns normal familial bereavement. Loud ritualized mourning symbolized status and was highly public. There is also a definite political dimension to mourning. David ostensibly takes part in Abner's funeral (2 Samuel 3:31-39) to show that he had no part in his assassination. The mourning by women could also turn very political, as the story of Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21:10-14 shows in an impressive way. For weeks, this woman holds vigil for the unburied bodies of her sons who are the victims of a political assassination. She achieves recognition on the part of King David, who is the assassin, who orders a proper burial and is thus at least able to give the dead and their family members human dignity.

In the Old Testament, there is a striking frequency of mourning over a collective catastrophe similar to the lamentation of the dead or based on it. The respective contexts tell of the imminent destructive blow for Israel, Judah, Jerusalem or Rabbath Ammon. It means death for many, and deportation for the survivors. Everybody is summoned to mourn a catastrophe:

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord: In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, "Alas! alas!" They shall call the farmers to mourning, and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing; in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord. (Amos 5:16f)

Especially frequently, though, is the call for mourning for women or collective female groupings such as the daughters of Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 6:26; Lamentations 1; Ezekiel 32:16) or the daughters of Rabbah, i.e. the Ammonites:

Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice; you complacent daughters, listen to my speech. [...] Tremble, you women who are at ease, shudder, you complacent ones; strip, and make yourselves bare, and put sackcloth on your loins, Beat your breasts [...] (Isaiah 32:9-12)

Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah! Put on sackcloth, lament, and slash yourselves with whips! For Milcom shall go into exile [...] (Jeremiah 49:3)

An important hint as to the existence of professional female mourners is in Jeremiah 9:17-21:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider, and call for the mourning women to come; send for the skilled women to come; let them quickly raise a dirge over us, so that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids flow with water. For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: “How we are ruined! We are utterly shamed, because we have left the land, because they have cast down our dwellings.” Hear, O women, the word of the Lord, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth; teach to your daughters a dirge, and each to her neighbour a lament. “Death has come up into our windows, it has entered our palaces, to cut off the children from the streets and the young men from the squares.” Speak! Thus says the Lord: “Human corpses shall fall like dung upon the open field, like sheaves behind the reaper, and no one shall gather them.”

The women mentioned here had a know-how that they did not share with anyone; they were thus considered “wise.” It becomes clear that the women in Jeremiah 9, which tells of the greatest bereavement imaginable, mourn by public decree and as representatives of the public. They have the function of a catalysts, they are supposed to induce weeping. They lament loudly and as spokeswomen of their collective: “*We are shamed!*”

Beside the familial lamentation of the dead, the lament of imminent capitulation and fall of cities is pre-eminently a women’s affair. Like the biblical texts, Neo-Assyrian depictions emphasize this. Whereas Egyptian reliefs with their depictions of the conquest of Syrian-Palestinian city states show the entire population supplicating and lamenting on the city walls (see Keel 1975), Assyrian reliefs show pre-eminently women in a typical gesture of lament on the city’s battlements or (in temporal sequence) during deportation. Reliefs from the time of Assurnasirpal II (883-859a) in Nimrud

reveal both variations. Women also lament on the battlements of a city while the men are still trying in vain to defend it against Assyrian soldiers (**pl. 1**). Or the women of the conquered city are already led away by soldiers, holding their hands to their heads in lament. The bare breast, too, is a sign of utmost desperation (**pl. 2**). The men on the city wall, on the other hand, are depicted as in battle, whether as victors or as defeated.

Women who were deemed fit for military service are practically nonexistent,¹⁷ although they may have been frequently called to the defence and, for example, may have thrown rocks down onto the attackers. In the bible, the book of Judges tells of Abimelech dying of a rock thrown by a woman (Judges 9:50-57) and mentions the great shame caused by such a way of dying for a warrior.

Women stand on the city wall which sometimes might already be burning (**pl. 3**),¹⁸ they lament, they seem to comment on the goings-on by talking or shouting to each other. They also lament when they are led away by the victors, while the defeated men line up in formation without comment (**pl. 4**).¹⁹ In these pictures, women proclaim the condition of the collective. Their gestures express everyone's concerns and everyone's condition. There are, as a consequence, not only lamenting women; occasionally, the women on the city walls also seem to cheer the victors.²⁰

Neo-Assyrian art depicts the superior power of the Assyrian forces over uprisings or resisting cities and peoples. It perpetuates Ashur's triumph. If this context includes the women's wailing, it captures the unconditional surrender and hopelessness of the defeated: the men defenceless, their women lamenting – an image of complete degradation, and of destruction. The image of a woman lamenting on the city wall is a threatening image. Interestingly enough, in the texts of the Old Testament, the female mourner is also functionalised as a threatening image, but here it is mostly the God of Israel himself who proposes destruction to his own peoples. The image that the Assyrian victors propagated of the subjugation of cities takes on a new context. Not the imperialistic great power Ashur, but JHWH announces his actions by means of the image of lamenting women. Male prophets such as Jeremiah take up the female lament and therein quote the (female) voices of Jerusalem.²¹

Because of the broad agreements between several kinds of image and text sources, there is almost no doubt that mourning and lamentation of the dead can be ascribed to the women in Palestine/Israel as well as in other cultures of antiquity. The question remains, however, how the gender sign of wailing in the prophetic texts mentioned and

in the reliefs is functionalised. Fear is instilled: the appearance of female mourners is supposed to spread loathing, or it is a sign of loathing. Texts and images give weight and high status to those wailing. They are in public, on the city walls, and are taken to be “wise.”

While the sender of the image embodies aspects of female power and status, the receiver of the image, the signified, is definitely negative: imminent defeat, destruction, lost honour. Is it possible that the image of female mourners was diminished in its positive meaning through the context of the political message of threat? If so, its functionalization as an image of imminent danger could be interpreted as an androcentric reflex on the actual power of female mourners. They indeed instilled fear because they had access to areas of life and death which were inaccessible to men. In ancient Israel, if not in the entire ancient orient, birth and death were women’s domains. In these domains, central aspects of antique religiousness and their expression in rituals unfolded, even if they went unmentioned in connection with divine worship and certain temple cults and thus are difficult for us to grasp today.

IV. Conclusion

These three examples should have shed light on the very different intersecting points and relationships between biblical texts and images with regard to gender-specific questions. The biblical texts do not differ significantly from other ancient oriental literatures that have their own, frequently narrow, points of view on the social environments of women, men and children. Three possible kinds of relations between text and image have become apparent:

1. The ideologies of the (biblical) texts are imposed upon by (other) ideologies of the images, but they are also more understandable. What the images show in a positive light is precisely the target of those texts which reveal themselves as having the point of view of literate, well-educated, influential groups and thus representing a relatively narrow part of religious understanding of a country’s population. Images and texts refer to the same subject, but present completely different assessments of the issues at hand.

2. Images and texts can evoke entirely different conceptions of the past because they are about different subjects. Mobility limited to the riding of a donkey, is evoked in iconography only as an attribute of male status whereas the biblical stories strive to emphasize the status of self-reliant and smart women in that they let them ride on a donkey. The question as to how it must have been from the point of view of social history can be answered better by means of a comparison between the findings of image and of text: of course women from wealthy families were wont to ride on donkeys of their own volition, but that image never turned to be an icon, it never contained any additional symbolic value.
3. Biblical texts can relate to icons of political propaganda of neighbouring countries. The example of the lamentation of the dead has shown how strongly the biblical prophecy is coined by the images of Neo-Assyrian power propaganda and how it nevertheless functionalizes those images for its own ends.²²

This article has not discussed all of the relations between text and image, nor can the chosen examples claim to be comprehensive. Christoph Uehlinger's hermeneutically and methodically groundbreaking article about the relationship between image sources and the history of Israel is indispensable in this context.²³ I hope, however, that it has become clear that the perception of texts and images as two media in their own right and with their own characteristics, agendas and objectives and the careful correlations of the findings are of enormous help for answering gender-specific questions and for the reconstruction of the many layers and facets of 'history.'



Pl. 1 Relief of Ashurnasirpal II., from the northwest-palace in Nimrud (883-859 BCE).
Assyrian attack on a city (Orthmann 1975: Abb. 202b).



Pl. 2 Relief of Ashurnasirpal II., from the northwest-palace in Nimrud (883-859 BCE). Three lamenting women and one child are discharged by an Assyrian soldier (Barnett & Lorenzini 1975: Taf. 27).



Pl. 3 Bronze doors of Balawat, Shalmaneser III. campaign of Khazazu in Phoenicia (858 BCE). (King 1915: Pl. 16)



Pl. 4 Bronze doors of Balawat, Shalmaneser III. campaign of Khazazu in Phoenicia (858 BCE). Captives of a city in north-east Mesopotamia (858 BCE). (King 1915: Pl. 46)

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² This term dates back to New Testament scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (in German first in 1988), who developed a fundamental hermeneutics of the feminist treatment of Biblical texts. See also Schottroff & Schroer & Wacker 1998 about the objectives and methods of a feminist exegesis.

³ See Winter 1987: 479-656; Schroer 1987: 21-45; Schroer 1994; Keel 1998: 16-57.

⁴ There is a virtually boundless ongoing debate about the inscriptions of Kuntillet Aḡrud and Chirbet el-Qōm in southern Palestine, which features in all the preceding and the subsequently mentioned publications at length.

⁵ For the following see especially Schroer 1987a; 1989; Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Keel & Schroer 2004; Schroer & Keel 2005.

⁶ Hosea 4:13ff; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6; Isaiah 1:29; 57:5; Ezekiel 6:13; 20:28; Deuteronomy 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10.

⁷ See Jeremiah’s dispute with worshippers of the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah 44.

⁸ Nefertiti accompanies Akhenaten on his ride to the temple, sometimes in the same, sometimes in her own cart (see e.g. Davies 1903: Pl. X and X A).

⁹ See the donkey as beast-of-burden and rider from the Early Bronze Age in Schroer & Keel: 2005: Nos 97f. For the donkey depictions of the Middle Bronze Age see Keel 1995: 201f § 553.

¹⁰ All in all four of these pillars were found (Gardiner & Peet 1952: Pl. 37.39.44.85).

¹¹ See as examples Keel & Uehlinger 1998: fig. 71f. 110.

¹² In the literature of ancient Israel, the horse has an almost entirely negative image because of its status as a luxury item. Thus it symbolizes the imperial behaviour and military power of the large neighbouring countries (see Schroer 1987: esp. 292f).

¹³ The camel as a sign of wealth is projected back to the ancient times of Israel in the patriarchal and matriarchal narratives at a time when there is as yet no historical evidence of camel domestication.

¹⁴ See also Exodus 4:20, where Moses returns to Egypt with his family Zipporah and Gerschon, and sets them both on a donkey. There are uncertainties in the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19. Since he has not only his wife and servant with him, but also a pair of saddled donkeys, the conclusion might be that on further travels, and maybe alternating, men, women and children rode on those donkeys.

¹⁵ About the burial rituals of Israel and its environment see already Jahnow 1923; Quell 1925; Wächter 1967.

¹⁶ About Egyptian iconography of the female mourners see Werbrouck 1938. An excellent overview of Greek iconography of mourning is Huber 2001; see also Killet 1996: 8-44; van Wees 1998.

¹⁷ The only exception known to me is a relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh (645 B.C.), depicting the Assyrians' attack against the Elamitic Hamanu (London, BM 124931-2), where a woman has a great rock at the ready to throw it from the wall (Barnett 1976: Pl. 17)

¹⁸ See maybe also the women on the battlements during the expulsion of the inhabitants of a southern Babylonian city (King 1915: Pl. 63; see Pl. 79). Comparable scenes in Paterson 1915: Pl. 40f; Orthmann 1975: fig. 214.

¹⁹ See similar scenes during the conquest of Syrian cities in King 1915: Pl. 75f.

²⁰ See an ivory from Nimrud (Mallowan & Davies 1970: 18 Pl. 5,6). The women welcoming the victorious returning warriors with hand-drums and joyous shouting are a frequent feature of biblical texts as well (Exodus 15:19-21; Judges 5; 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:7; see also Schottroff & Schroer & Wacker 1998: 153).

²¹ This bears the consequence that, in some textual passages, the diverse first person voices (the prophet, the city as a female mourner) meld into one voice or into a babble of voices (e.g. Jeremiah 4:19-21; 10:19-20). See Maier 1998.

²² About comparable processes between Neo-Assyrian image propaganda and biblical reception in prophetic texts see already Uehlinger 1987 and 1997.

²³ Uehlinger 2001 (the article is not geared toward answering gender questions, but can be applied to them to a large degree). See also Knauf 1991.

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