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## **Habakkuk 3, Gender, and War**

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### Zusammenfassung:

Auf der Basis bisheriger Forschung zur Beziehung zwischen Genre und Geschlecht lässt sich plausibel die Stimme in Habakkuk 3 als weibliche Stimme identifizieren.

Nichtsdestoweniger gibt es diese weibliche Stimme nicht unter Ausschluss anderer geschlechtlicher Stimmen im Text. In Gestalt einer Hirschkuh, eines Mutterschoß oder “Bauch” und eines Mannes Habakkuk enthält der Text weibliche, androgyne und männliche Perspektiven. Zwei weitere Möglichkeiten, die Geschlechterstimmen in Habakkuk 3 zu (re)konstruieren, werden aufgezeigt und kurz Frauenerfahrungen in antiken Kriegen angesprochen: Im Lichte der multiplen geschlechtlichen Stimmen im Text und seines Genres (Siegeslied) enthält Habakkuk 3 eine nuancierte Reflexion von Krieg, Kriegsoffern und Erlösung.

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### **Introduction**

In a 2007 article in *lectio difficilior*, Mayer Gruber makes a compelling argument that Micah of Micah 6-7 is a woman. Gruber arrives at his conclusion based on the gender of the language in the text and by resisting scholarship that circumvents the conclusion he proposes.<sup>1</sup> Gruber’s work finds corroboration in that of Rainer Kessler, Bebb Wheeler Stone, Sean McEvenue, and Wilda Gafney. Each of these scholars identifies female authorship in prophetic texts traditionally associated with men. Stone and McEvenue focus at length on Second Isaiah.<sup>2</sup> Without citing them, Gafney suggests that the woman prophet of Isaiah 8:3 might have contributed to Second Isaiah material.<sup>3</sup>

This article intends, first, to make a contribution similar to that of Gruber and these other scholars. One can plausibly reconstruct the voice of Habakkuk 3 as a female voice. This voice, however, does not exist at the exclusion of others. The text manifests female, male, and androgynous voices. When considered in light of its many genders and its genre (a

victory hymn), Habakkuk 3 presents a dramatic and nuanced understanding of the realities of warfare and victimization.

### The Gender of Habakkuk 3

This investigation analyzes Habakkuk 3 from two vantage points. First, it identifies Habakkuk 3 as a victory song that, as such, represents a female voice in the Hebrew Bible. This analysis does not necessarily equal a discussion of the prophet named as the psalm's author (Habakkuk 3:1). Rather, it looks at the gender of the text's composer – either an oral or a literary artist. Second, it reads Habakkuk 3 as a male, female, and androgynous text. This discussion concentrates on the fluid and purposeful representation of many genders in the text.

#### *The Female Voice of Habakkuk 3*

The Hebrew Bible names five women as prophets (singular: *nēbî 'â*): Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), the woman of Isaiah 8:3, Huldah (2 Kings 22:14/2 Chronicles 34:22), and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14).<sup>4</sup> Discussions of women prophets in the Hebrew Bible also include the “daughters” in Ezekiel 13:17 (*bēnôt 'ammēkā hammitnabbē 'ôt*) and in Joel 3:1 (*wēnibbē 'û bēnēkem ūbēnôtēkem*). In all of these cases, the Hebrew root *nb* serves as a marker of female prophetic activity. Wilda Gafney has recently made several proposals to expand the number of biblical, women prophets. She argues that the plural noun *nēbî 'im* probably includes women, and she constructs Rebekah (Genesis 25:21-23), the mother of King Lemuel (Proverbs 31), and women in Exodus 38:8 and Jeremiah 9:16 as prophets.<sup>5</sup> As has long been recognized, the Talmud (*Megillah* 14) has its own thoughts on women prophets in the Hebrew canon. It counts seven: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. Like the Talmud, Philo considers Hannah a prophet (*On Dreams* 254) as, more recently, Eunice B. Poethig does.<sup>6</sup> Gruber and others have found female voices in “male” prophetic texts. This study makes a similar case for Habakkuk 3 even though the biblical text names Habakkuk a *nābî* twice (Habakkuk 1:1, 3:1) and the name does not include any female, grammatical markers like an *â*-ending or an infixed-*t*.<sup>7</sup>

The work of Gruber and others who reconstruct prophetic texts attributed to men as female voices must overcome several barriers. First, the common reliance upon the noun *nēbî 'â* or

its verbal root *nb*’ makes the identification of female prophets a seemingly cut-and-dry matter. However, working with such a perspective ultimately limits the number of biblical women possibly identifiable as “prophets.” Scholarly presuppositions also play a role. As a case in point, consider the following comment by David Noel Freedman: “The fact that a person was a prophet and a poet does not in itself rule out the possibility or even the likelihood that *he* spoke occasionally in prose” (italics mine).<sup>8</sup> Important treatments of prophecy by Heschel and Barton also focus on men at the exclusion of women.<sup>9</sup> The assignment of the male gender to the role of prophecy often remains with us. Even when scholars notice the presence of female prophets in biblical Israel, they can still view the phenomenon as exceptional – thereby limiting expectations and results.<sup>10</sup>

The superscriptions of prophetic books contribute to scholars’ assumptions.<sup>11</sup> However, literary critical scholarship does not have to rely on these as accurate indicators of authorship. In his work on Habakkuk 3, Theodore Hiebert questions the authenticity of its superscription.<sup>12</sup> If one regards Habakkuk 3:1 as an unreliable testimony of authorship, one can treat its assignment of the male gender (*nābî*’) as suspect, too.

Scholarship on genre and gender provides a key resource to reconstruct Habakkuk 3 – a victory hymn – as a female voice. Three important works address the victory hymn as a female genre: “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres” by Shlomo Dov Goitein (1957/1988), “The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel” by Eunice B. Poethig (1985), and *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* by Athalya Brenner and Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes (1994). Goitein’s assignment of the victory hymn to women draws upon a comparison of women’s poetry of modern Yemen with biblical poetry. Additionally, he uses the biblical text as a record of women’s creative activity in producing certain genres.<sup>13</sup> The two more recent treatments support his argument. Poethig works with the biblical text and ancient Near Eastern parallels to define and catalog occurrences of victory hymns. To do so, she contributes a detailed assessment of the musical elements, indicated in textual and archaeological sources, which contributed to this genre. She finds that women not only performed these hymns but also traditioned them. Accordingly, one can speak of more women than just those named in the biblical record as responsible for shaping, maintaining, and transmissioning the genre through the ages.<sup>14</sup> Without recourse to Poethig, but drawing upon Goitein, van Dijk-Hemmes places the victory song on the lips of women. She adds the component of “ideocontent” to that

which the historian considers when reconstructing female and male voices. Writing on an F (female) voice, she says: “The ideocontent of women’s texts is unproblematically, conceivably less androcentric than that of the writings of male authors.”<sup>15</sup> Analyzing victory hymns and how they often include a taunt of defeated enemies, van Dijk-Hemmes suggests: “Thus contextualized, they are to be read as “muted” women’s songs that deal with the fate to which women are exposed in times of war, the vindictiveness this arouses in them, and their joy if and when they are spared.”<sup>16</sup> Thus understood, victory hymns do more than celebrate military triumph. They critique male militarism that harms women.

Habakkuk 3 is not unequivocally a victory hymn. By one reading, the text is a lament. Consider its constituent parts:

Verse 1: Introduction

Verse 2: Opening inclusio with verse 16 (Invocation/Petition)

Verses 3-7: Theophany I (Praise)

Verses 8-15: Theophany II (Praise)

Verse 16: Concluding inclusio with verse 2 (Statement of Complaint)

Verse 17-19: Conclusion/liturgical notations (Confession of Trust)

Douglas A. Knight describes the lament genre as “occasioned by threat of enemy invasion, drought, disease, treachery of other persons, etc.,” and he notes how the form includes invocation, complaint, confession of trust, petition, and final praise.<sup>17</sup> With this description at hand, one can speak of Habakkuk 3 as a lament.<sup>18</sup> Other scholars call it a victory hymn, a theophany, and/or a vision report.<sup>19</sup> The present article discusses the text as a victory hymn that includes elements of a taunt song. This determination is not made based on technical descriptions of genres. Rather, it is made based on the motifs and imagery that it shares in common with biblical hymns often identified as victory songs.

Distinguishing F voices from M voices in the Hebrew Bible, van Dijk-Hemmes identifies the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21), the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18), and the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:2-31a) as women’s texts. Furthermore, she identifies these texts as victory hymns based on their locations in narratives about YHWH and the Israelites’ military success.<sup>20</sup> Habakkuk 3 shares many motifs and images in common with these texts. Each of them has either an appearance of YHWH as the Divine Warrior or names the deity

as a warrior (Exodus 15:3, Judges 5:4-5, Habakkuk 3:3-7). They also include imagery of ancient warfare (Exodus 15:4, 21, Judges 5:22, Habakkuk 3:8-15). Finally, all of these texts view water as a destructive element – either as that by which YHWH defeats enemies (Exodus 15:4-10, 21, Judges 5:19-21) or as that which potentially threatens destruction (Habakkuk 3:8).<sup>21</sup> In light of these long-noticed similarities, it becomes all the more curious that Habakkuk 3 has stood outside of the purview of research on women prophets. The major difference between Habakkuk 3 and the other victory hymns is its narrative location. Miriam and Deborah recount victories after prose accounts of military success. Habakkuk 3 occurs within the context of the Book of Habakkuk – a book that locates itself at the time before the destruction of Jerusalem (Habakkuk 1:6).

Habakkuk 3's inclusion of a taunt makes this text even more similar to the victory song tradition described by van Dijk-Hemmes. In her comments on Judges 5:24-27 and 28-30, she sees the text as celebrating not just the defeat of an enemy but also: "Destruction of a man who is perceived as extremely threatening to them [women]."<sup>22</sup> One can read Exodus 15:5 and 21 similarly. While these verses encapsulate the means by which YHWH and the Israelites triumph over Pharaoh, they also berate the defeated male antagonist. Now consider Habakkuk 3:19a: "GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights (NRSV)." It has been suggested that this "deer" reaches a height to which her/his attacker cannot ascend.<sup>23</sup> Commentators often read this verse as an expression of the poet's confidence.<sup>24</sup> However, it also portrays the common prey as conspicuously out-of-reach of its attacker. Furthermore, as it follows a celebration of YHWH the Divine Warrior, this text provides a conclusion that underscores that the enemy meets his (*sic*) match in the god of Israel. Seen in such light, one can understand this portion of verse 19 as the taunt element of Habakkuk 3 – making its location within the genre of victory hymns sung by women all the more appropriate.

#### *"Doe, a Deer, a Female Deer"*

Just as one can gender the genre and voice of Habakkuk 3, one can investigate the text as a gendered entity. Several images make such discussion particularly relevant. First is the "deer" in Habakkuk 3:19a quoted above. NRSV and Tanakh translate the feminine, plural expression *kā'ayyālôt*: "like ... a deer's" (NRSV) and "like the deer's" (Tanakh). While English translations may not permit one to read the text as female, the Hebrew text does.<sup>25</sup>

The poet's reference to *biṭnî* ("my womb/belly") in 3:16 provides another occasion to explore the multiplicity of the text's constructed gender.

Commentators have not made much of the gender of the animal of 3:19a. F. I. Anderson, who translates *kā 'ayyālôt* as female, emphasizes the activity of the does' feet. They trample.<sup>26</sup> J. J. M. Roberts reads the simile in terms of the psalmist's confidence.<sup>27</sup> As these two scholars do, T. Hiebert comments on the parallel for Habakkuk 3:19a in Psalm 18:34//2 Samuel 22:34.<sup>28</sup> O. P. Robertson, similar to Roberts, notes the air of confidence presented by the verse.<sup>29</sup> Based on its parallel attestations, Y. Avishur considers 3:19a an addition intended to provide a "positive conclusion."<sup>30</sup> The issue of gender does not appear in any of these discussions. This seems especially curious because Hebrew has masculine nouns for deer – *'ayyāl* (m. s.) and *'ayyālîm* (m. p.). What does it suggest about the poem/speaker's gender that she/he regards her/his feet like those of does and not male deer?

Historical, literary criticism permits, and possibly requires, one to dispense with 3:1 in order to consider the genre/gender of Habakkuk 3. If one reads the text with 3:1, one should be struck all the more by the use of *kā 'ayyālôt* at the text's conclusion. While the poem starts with a male voice, that of a *nâbî*, it concludes with the speaker embodied as a doe, or, more accurately, does (plural). In effect, the textual voice of Habakkuk 3 manifests multiple genders. The use of *biṭnî* in 3:16 adds another dimension. While the word inflected with a first person singular suffix often has a male speaker as its point of reference (Job 32:18, 19) it also occurs referring to a female speaker (Proverbs 31:2). The word does double-duty in the Hebrew Bible. In light of Habakkuk 3:1 and 3:19a, it can signify a male or female body in Habakkuk 3:16.<sup>31</sup> In effect, the textual voice of Habakkuk 3 inhabits three different sexes – male, female, and androgynous. As a result, we cannot speak of the poem as falling into simply one category of gender; rather, it fluidly moves between and encompasses three.

Habakkuk is not the only multi-gendered voice in the Hebrew Bible. As commentators often highlight, Habakkuk 3:19a represents a modified parallel to 2 Samuel 22:34//Psalm 18:34.

Like Habakkuk 3, 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 include a first verse that states the identity of its purported speaker. 2 Samuel 22:1 and Psalm 18:1 both identify their voices as David's.

Unlike Habakkuk 3, these two texts do not include a reference to “my womb/belly.” Despite this difference, these poems show that Hebrew poetic voices do not limit their self-identification to only one gender. Julia M. Asher-Greve points out that in ancient Near Eastern conceptions of gender and sexuality: “Androgyny is a vision of the ‘perfect man’ with feminine qualities incorporated into the ‘masculine vessel’.”<sup>32</sup> If one considers androgyny the existence of both biological sexes in one person, David of 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 is androgynous. The use of *kā’ayyālôt* in 2 Samuel 22:34/Psalm 18:34 could take advantage of this convention to idealize the king. One could say the same of the speaker of Habakkuk 3. In this case, the carefully crafted poem (a female vessel?), incorporates feminine and masculine not as a testimony of gender, but for self-idealization.

In light of the female/male language, the gender-neutral (or plural, or androgynous) *bitnî* in the second half of the poem’s *inclusio* takes on added significance. In between verses 2 and 16, the text reports the actions of YHWH the Divine Warrior to which the text itself listens. At this juncture, perhaps as a result of its rhetorical construction/performance, the text takes on both female and male characteristics without differentiation to reflect the efficacy of the text’s rhetoric. In doing so, perhaps the text purposefully constructs itself as a multi-gendered entity not for the sake of idealization but to confront possible destruction. This does not mean to suggest that the text moves from male through gender-neutral to arrive at the female. Rather, the text operates rhetorically with three different conceptions of its speaker’s gender – not differentiating between them but aware of all three as constitutive of itself as a whole. By doing so, the text argues for its eventual salvation from enemies.

### **Habakkuk 3, Women, and War**

In the introduction to *On Gendering Texts*, Athalya Brenner writes:

“When looking for women’s texts, one has to refer to two preliminary questions. (a) Is it possible to gender a text or its author, that is, to define one or the other or both, as a product of women’s culture or men’s culture? (b) Is the gendering of texts important, and for whom?”<sup>33</sup>

Neither question has an easy answer. Considering the possibility of retrieving women’s voices in early Christian writings, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza reflects:

“The conjecture of female authorship does not in and by itself suggest a feminist perspective of the author. All early Christian writings, whether written by women or

men, more or less share the androcentric mind-set and must be analyzed and tested critically as to how much they do so.”<sup>34</sup>

By Schüssler Fiorenza’s thinking, the New Testament invariably participates in an androcentric culture – even if one can unearth female contributions to the writings. Van Dijk-Hemmes suggests otherwise. F voices are, by her understanding, less androcentric than M voices, and they are present for recovery. An answer about the importance of gendering texts might depend upon if and how one ascribes authority to the biblical text. For some, especially those who live in text-based communities of faith, such research promotes the greater inclusion of women in traditionally male-led institutions. It also contributes to a greater understanding of women’s role in the history of literature, whether or not one considers biblical literature foundational or normative. This study thinks that texts can be gendered. It also recognizes the activity as important. However, it wants to spend some time considering the question of “important for whom” in light of the implied militarism of the victory hymn genre.

#### *Women and War in the Ancient Near East*

In a 2001 article, Amélie Kuhrt surveys women’s participation in ancient warfare.

Describing war in general, she writes:

“War, one of the most pervasive of human phenomena, serves almost more strikingly than any other social institution to define, classify and uphold traditional gender roles. It seems almost a law of nature that women do not, indeed should not, participate directly in military affairs.”<sup>35</sup>

In this remark, Kuhrt echoes previous scholarship that has addressed the spheres of ancient women’s participation in social life – as far as it concerns women’s involvement in warfare. To reconstruct ancient Israelite women’s participation in social, political and economic life, Carol Meyers draws upon the work of Peggy Reeves Sanday to show how women’s involvement in military affairs would have been exceptional. According to Sanday’s model, procreation, production, and protection represent the three main activities of society. Women regularly participate in the first two, birthing/child-rearing and subsistence activities, but rarely if at all in the third, fighting enemies. While women’s involvement in production rises and falls as protection demands more and more male involvement, women rarely take part in their societies’ military regardless of the need for human resources.<sup>36</sup>



Nevertheless, the common ascription of victory hymns and taunt songs to women finds a place for them in their societies' military endeavors. Women laud victorious men as they return home from war. As evidence of this activity, biblical scholars regularly draw upon not just Miriam and Deborah but also briefer appearances of celebrating women, i.e. Judges 11:34 (Poethig, Brenner/van Dijk-Hemmes) and 1 Samuel 18:6-7 (Goitein, Poethig, Brenner/van Dijk-Hemmes). Kuhrt makes no mention of these performances in her article. When she does find women involved in war, she finds them serving the following functions:

- As a figurative means to describe cowardly men or the worst way a man can die;
- As bearers of sons to supply armies;
- As teachers of the values of military service;
- As family members taken along with ruling elites;
- As camp followers (lower-class women who accompanied armies as non-combatants);
- As producers of textiles necessary to outfit armies;
- As captives and booty;
- As a cause of and means of avoiding/resolving conflicts (e.g., Helen of Troy);
- As unsuspected opponents valued and recognized as such (e.g., Jael);
- As warrior goddesses in ancient literature.<sup>37</sup>

While Kuhrt makes many references to Persian and Greek sources to create this list, she draws upon the biblical text. The work of Goitein, Poethig, and van Dijk-Hemmes could add an eleventh point, or perhaps one could use Kuhrt's list to re-imagine victory hymns not as a public genre but as a domestic one maintained by women for the indoctrination of children into their society's military values.

Van Dijk-Hemmes sees the genre, especially in connection with elements of mockery, as one that articulates "vindictiveness" as a result of women's mistreatment in times of war and "joy" over the downfall of brutal enemies.<sup>38</sup> Poethig reads victory hymns as bearers of a Yahwistic theology that privileges the poor and the powerless over the powerful. By singing these hymns, women not only maintain communal attention to YHWH as Israel's deity but also remind men of the god's ethos that does not allow their subjection by men. Additionally, she places them in the context of early Israel (Iron I-Iron IIA), as expressions of its break with "the dominant religions of the Ancient Near East."<sup>39</sup> When considered in

light of Kuhrt's comments on war, the victory hymn potentially serves baser purposes. Rather than critiquing male aggression, victory hymns potentially legitimate such action.

As Poethig and Kuhrt both note, the victory hymn tradition often includes warrior goddesses (Inanna, Ishtar, and Anat).<sup>40</sup> When they do, the texts do not speak for the powerless in a society. Rather they speak for powerful elites. *The Exaltation of Inanna*, the earliest such text with an identifiable author, was written by a woman, Enheduanna. The text attributed to the daughter of Sargon can be read in light of this monarch's desire to rule Mesopotamia. As such, it uses both martial language and the female deity to proclaim and legitimate Sargon's control over united Sumerian-Akkadian city-states.<sup>41</sup> The text demonstrates how victory hymns can serve not just to celebrate military victory but to argue for such success as a foregone conclusion.

Poethig considers the victory hymn tradition of Israel as "revolutionary" in light of her understanding of early Israelite history. Echoing Carol Meyers' in "Procreation, Production, and Protection" (1983) and *Discovering Eve* (1988), Poethig reads victory hymns against the backdrop of early Israel as an egalitarian community. Consider the following quote from Poethig: "The Victory Songs were part of a women's movement that saw the full partnership of women in the community as essential to its success."<sup>42</sup> Poethig uses the historical situation of egalitarianism to recast Israel's use of a common, ancient literary genre that often expresses a classic, agrarian state ideology. In the different historical setting, the genre revolts against those who want to control and submit others to power. Her reading, while admirable for its intentions, fails to recognize the possibility that the genre served the same interests as other ancient Near Eastern victory hymns. A nascent, inchoate Israelite state would have had to fight for its survival and the defeat of its enemies would have been considered essential. Simply put, the hymns could have served the same ideology of aggrandizement/stabilization as they did for other ancient states. It also bears keeping in mind that the genre's importance in Israel persists, if one think that it has pre-state origins, well into and after the ancient monarchies of Israel and Judah.

Van Dijk-Hemmes reads the "ideocontent" of F voices, including those of victory hymns, as less androcentric than M voices in the Hebrew bible. This position deserves reconsideration based on the roles women when played in ancient warfare, especially as

captives and booty. The Song of Deborah provides a striking literary presentation of this aspect of women's experience of war.

Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice: "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?" Her wisest ladies make answer, indeed, she answers the question herself: "Are they not finding and dividing the spoil? A girl or two for every man; spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera, spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?" (Judges 5:28-30)

While van Dijk-Hemmes reads this as a taunt in Judges 5, the text also speaks to the historical reality that men took women as prizes of war. Furthermore, it demonstrates at least one woman's expectation of this activity as part of her son's activities. Kuhrt discusses how as a result of captivity, women often became enslaved. Additionally, women not taken captive, lacking the security of the male member of their household, often sold themselves into slavery.<sup>43</sup> Considering that warfare commonly led to widowhood and enslavement, one can imagine how women's interests in times of war took the side of their respective society's male warriors. Van Dijk-Hemmes does not take into account that victory hymns do not necessarily express solidarity with women of opposing states. While they might testify to some women's sense of escape from horrible situations, they do not demonstrate a similar concern for the fate of other women. Van Dijk-Hemmes's assessment of victory hymns as F voices is on target. This does not mean, however, that these songs do not re-inscribe androcentric interests. They still affirm the importance of militarism that serves some women's interests at the expense of others, including women.

#### *The Multi-Gendered Text and War*

The ideology and interests of Habakkuk 3 potentially play out differently when considered a multi-gendered text. As discussed above, the use of "doe" as opposed to "deer" and the ambiguous "my womb/belly" are critical for considering the gender(s) of Habakkuk 3. While these words may participate in an ancient Near Eastern conception of the androgynous (male) person as an ideal, they might also reflect an understanding of the realities of war. This present discussion argues that the doe in Habakkuk 3 represents an analogy to women as victims in wartime. As such, the text serves different interests than it does when understood solely by virtue of its genre/authorship.

In the scholarship on cervids in the ancient Near East, scholars rarely differentiate between male and female. Somewhat typically, distinction between the two primarily occurs when discussing birthing, child rearing, and the like. Deer/does as a whole, however, do not escape academic attention. A male deer (“stag”) factors prominently in Hittite religion in league with a lion and a bull as a protective deity. Egyptians and Mesopotamians often depict cervids in association with hunting and the building of zoological parks. Furthermore, we find these animals represented in ancient jewelry arts. In the biblical text, they appear not only in Habakkuk 3:19a and its parallel texts but also in Deuteronomy (as clean animals) and in the Song of Songs (in association with the lovers).<sup>44</sup> The notion of the deer as a protective deity perhaps explains the use of the doe simile in Habakkuk 3’s concluding expression of confidence. The conspicuous use of the female noun, however, makes this option difficult to maintain. The common association of deer with the hunt and with exotic animals provides a more plausible way to make sense of the simile. After the advent of animal husbandry in the Neolithic period, deer did not make up a considerable amount of the ancient diet. As a result, humans became involved with these animals only in so far as they hunted or collected them. They were prize animals. Similarly, men took women as prizes of war. While they no doubt could receive financial benefit and depleted their enemies’ populations by taking women, they took them separately from the primary purpose of their military efforts. When the voice of Habakkuk 3 speaks of being like a doe, the speaker recognizes women as gratuitously mistreated in war and asserts confidence, nevertheless, in her/his salvation. In her list of women’s roles in war, Kuhrt identifies women as a conventional means to speak of men as cowards and as agents of ignoble deaths. Habakkuk 3 might work with these conventions in another way. Instead of fearing death by a woman, the speaker heightens her/his sense of deliverance by imagining her/himself as one of the most mistreated persons in war. In the victory hymn, women do not necessarily assume solidarity with other victims. On the other hand, the multi-gendered text represents a voice that consciously embodies both the perpetrator and victim of militarism.

## **Conclusion**

This article wants to place Habakkuk 3 among texts discussed as female voices in the Hebrew Bible. Additionally, it wants to call attention to the ideological issues at stake in making such a claim. Created with the grim realities of warfare in mind, victory hymns do

not necessarily express a liberating theology for modern women. These songs still place their lots, ultimately, with the interests of militarism and violence. Looking at Habakkuk 3 as a multi-gendered text that enfolds many conceptions of gender, one can potentially say something positive about ancient Israel's views of gender in poetry and prophecy. Ancient thought and literature does not require clear-cut definitions of gender to achieve its purposes. Rather, Habakkuk 3 keeps the interests of many genders in mind to assert an unstable yet ultimately assured confidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Mayer I. Gruber, "Women's Voices in the Book of Micah," *lectio difficilior* (1/2007): 1-12.

[http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/07\\_1/mayer\\_gruber\\_womens\\_voices.htm](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/07_1/mayer_gruber_womens_voices.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Rainer Kessler, "Miriam and the Prophecy of the Persian Period," in *Prophets and Daniel* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Feminist Companion to the Bible [Second Series] 8; London: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 77-86; translation of idem, "Mirjam und die Prophetie der Perserzeit," in *Gott an den Rändern: sozialgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Bibel* (eds. Ulrike Bail und Renate Jost; Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1996), 64-72; Bebb Wheeler Stone, "Second Isaiah: Prophet to Patriarchy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 56 (1992): 85-99; Sean E. McEvenue, "Who Was Second Isaiah?" in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah, Festschrift for Willem A. M. Beuken* (ed. J. van Ruiten and M. Vervenne; Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1997), 213-222.

<sup>3</sup> "Of the anonymous oracles preserved in Isaiah 40-66, it can never be determined which, if any, are hers, although she is as likely a candidate as any unnamed disciple." Wilda Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 107. See also Ernst Axel Knauf, "Vom Prophetinnenwort zum Prophetenbuch. Jesaja 8,3f im Kontext von Jesaja 6,1-8,16" in *lectio difficilior* (2/2000). [http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/00\\_2/v.htm](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/00_2/v.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Ackerman, "Why is Miriam also among the Prophets? (and is Zipporah among the Priests?)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 48-49.

<sup>5</sup> Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 152-164.

<sup>6</sup> Eunice B. Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1985), 192.

<sup>7</sup> I make this comment in light of the cross-reference between Brown, Driver, Briggs (287) and the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (6:13). These resources refer to one another with regard to the similarity between the proper noun, *ḥābakkūk* and the name of a plant or fruit tree, *ḥabbaququ* (*ḥambaququ*).

<sup>8</sup> David Noel Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 22.

<sup>9</sup> Consider the title, a rhetorical question, of the first chapter in Heschel's *The Prophets*: "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" In *Oracles of God*, John Barton writes: "The compromise which treats all Israel's 'prophets' and, in addition, the interpretive tradition that grew up around them, as part of a single phenomenon called 'prophecy,' tends in practice to fudge an issue which for students of the Old Testament a hundred years ago was much more sharply and clearly focused: the question of just what was original and innovative in the work and teaching of men like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah." Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; repr., New York: Perennial, 2001); John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1986), 273.

<sup>10</sup> Ackerman, "Miriam," 50-51.

<sup>11</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi, "Studying Prophetic Texts Against Their Original Backgrounds: Pre-ordained Scripts and Alternative Horizons of Research," in *Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker* (ed. S. R. Reid; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 229; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 125-135. For more discussion on superscriptions, see: Gene M. Tucker, "Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of the Canon," in *Canon and Authority* (ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 56-70; John D. W. Watts, "Superscriptions and Incipits in the Book of the Twelve," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney; Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 110-124.

<sup>12</sup> Theodore Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 129-136.

<sup>13</sup> S. D. Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres," *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 1-33. For a discussion of his methodology, see in particular pages 1-5.

<sup>14</sup> Poethig, "Victory Song Tradition," 170.

<sup>15</sup> Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series 1; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 24.

<sup>16</sup> Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas A. Knight, "Literary Forms: The Psalms" (privately published).

<sup>18</sup> On women's involvement with the lament genre in the ancient Near East, see: Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 36-44.

<sup>19</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, "Habakkuk," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3:4; Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, 118-120.

<sup>20</sup> Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 38-43.

- <sup>21</sup> In my assessment, the rhetorical question of Hab 3:8 rather than ascribing power to Sea and River calls attention the unrivaled power of YHWH.
- <sup>22</sup> Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 46.
- <sup>23</sup> I received this suggestion from a colleague, Anita D. Watts, in informal conversation.
- <sup>24</sup> A fuller discussion of this verse follows in the next section.
- <sup>25</sup> Many English translations do translate *kā ʿayyālôt* as feminine. Surveying English language Bibles using BibleWorks 5, as many as thirteen translations read either “doe” or “hind.”
- <sup>26</sup> Francis I. Anderson, *Habakkuk* (Anchor Bible 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 349.
- <sup>27</sup> J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 158.
- <sup>28</sup> Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, 56.
- <sup>29</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 247.
- <sup>30</sup> Yitzhak Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 201.
- <sup>31</sup> Discussing the conception of gender in the Hebrew Bible, Dorothea Erbele-Küster comments that *bṭn* denotes a “gender neutral conception of the body.” Dorothea Erbele-Küster, “Gender Trouble in the Old Testament,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13 (1999): 138.
- <sup>32</sup> Julia M. Asher-Greve, “Decisive Sex, Essential Gender,” in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East, Proceedings of the 47<sup>th</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2-6, 2001* (ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting; Compte rendu, Rencontre assyriologique internationale 47/I; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 13.
- <sup>33</sup> Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 2.
- <sup>34</sup> Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 21.
- <sup>35</sup> Amélie Kuhrt, “Women and War,” *NIN: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* 2:1 (2001): 1.
- <sup>36</sup> Carol Meyers, “Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1983): 573-575.
- <sup>37</sup> Kuhrt, “Women and War,” 1-25.
- <sup>38</sup> Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 48.
- <sup>39</sup> Poethig, “Victory Song Tradition,” 262-263.
- <sup>40</sup> Poethig, “Victory Song Tradition,” 222.
- <sup>41</sup> William W. Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (Yale Near Eastern Studies 3; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 9-10.
- <sup>42</sup> Poethig, “Victory Song Tradition,” 262.
- <sup>43</sup> Kuhrt, “Women and War,” 14-16.

<sup>44</sup> The best single resource for studying animals in the ancient world is Billie Jean Collins, ed. *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1, 64; Leiden: Brill, 2002). For related discussion, see: Brigitte Lion, “La circulation des animaux exotiques au Proche-Orient antique,” in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien: Actes de la XXXVIIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 8-10 juillet 1991)* (ed. D. Charpin and F. Joannès; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1992), 357-367; Henri Limet, “Les animaux enjeux involontaires de la politique (au Proche-Orient ancien),” in *Les animaux exotiques dans les relations internationales: espèces, fonctions, significations* (ed. Lilliane Bodson; Colloques d’histoire des connaissances zoologiques 9; Liege: University of Liege, 1998), 33-51. Othmar Keel discusses deer as “proverbially” fast and capable leapers. Such characteristics could contribute to the estimation of deer as worthy prize animals. Othmar Keel, *Song of Songs: An International Commentary* (trans. Frederick J Gaiser; Fortress: Minneapolis, 1994), 96.

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