

SEARCHING FOR SARAH IN THE SECOND TEMPLE ERA:
PORTRAITS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND SECOND TEMPLE NARRATIVES

by

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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Abbreviations	ix
CHAPTER 1. STUDIES OF SARAH AND WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE BIBLE AND BEYOND	
Introduction	1
The Portrait of Sarah in the Masoretic Text	5
The Portrait of Sarah in the Septuagint	28
The Portrait of Sarah in the Genesis Apocryphon	32
The Portrait of Sarah in Josephus	35
Portraits of Sarah throughout Second Temple Literature	46
Some Contributions of This Study	48
CHAPTER 2. APPROACHES AND METHODS	
Introduction	52
Theoretical Concerns: Character, Criticism, and the Reader	53
Practical Concerns: Characterization and Its Means	76
CHAPTER 3. SARAH IN THE MASORETIC TEXT	
Introduction	99
To Have and to Have Not: Origins, Family, Power, Possessions, and People (Gen 11:26–12:9)	104
Egyptian Traffic (Gen 12:10–13:2)	112
Silence, but Reflected Light (Gen 13:2–15:21)	121
Sarai, Hagar, Abram—and a Son (Gen 16:1–16)	127
Years of Silence, More Promises—and a New Name? (Gen 17:1–27)	141
Sarah Chortles (Gen 18:1–15)	144
Destructive Interlude (Gen 18:16–19:38)	155
“Asylum” Redux in Gerar (Gen 20:1–18)	155
The Arrival of Isaac, and the Departure of Hagar, Ishmael—and Sarah (Gen 21:1–14)	161
“The Life of Sarah” (Gen 23:1–20)	169
Sarah in the MT	172

CHAPTER 4. SARRA IN THE SEPTUAGINT

Introduction	177
Sara, Muted (Gen 11:26–12:9 LXX)	185
Passive and “Pretty-faced” in Egypt (Gen 12:10–13:2 LXX)	190
Silence and Stress (Gen 13:2–15:21 LXX)	198
Broken Inertia, Blurred Gender, and Misused Agency (Gen 16:1–16 LXX)	199
Different Name, Different Prospects? (Gen 17:1–27 LXX)	213
Volition and Restriction (Gen 18:1–15 LXX)	215
More Imitative Agency—and Questions of Consistency (Gen 20:1–18 LXX)	225
Who Will “Rejoice with” Sarra? (Gen 21:1–14 LXX)	230
The Death of Sarra (Gen 23:1–20 LXX)	235
Sarra in the LXX	236

CHAPTER 5. SARAI IN THE GENESIS APOCRYPHON

Introduction	242
A Fragmentary Beginning (GenAp 19.7–10)	247
Famine and Entry into Egypt (GenAp 19.10–13)	249
Abram’s Dream (GenAp 19.14–23)	252
Abram and Sarai’s Three Visitors (GenAp 19.23–31)	269
In Praise of Sarai (GenAp 20.2–8)	274
Sarai Uprooted, Abram Spared (GenAp 20.8–11)	283
Abram’s Prayer (GenAp 20.12–16)	286
Response to Abram’s Prayer (GenAp 20.16–21)	289
Herqanosh’s Errand, and the Revelation of the Truth (GenAp 20.21–23)	291
Report and Rebuke; Healing, Payment, and Return to the Land (GenAp 20.24–21.4)	292
Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon	296

CHAPTER 6. SARRA IN JOSEPHUS

Introduction	300
Beginnings (<i>Ant.</i> 1.148–160)	305
Egypt (<i>Ant.</i> 1.161–168)	310
Separation and War (<i>Ant.</i> 1.169–182)	319
Child and Sacrifice (<i>Ant.</i> 1.183–185)	320
Sarra, Hagar, Abraham, and Ishmael (<i>Ant.</i> 1.186–190)	320
Another Child, and Circumcision (<i>Ant.</i> 1.191–193)	330
Angelic Visitation (<i>Ant.</i> 1.194–206)	331
“Just Like Before”—but Now in Gerar (<i>Ant.</i> 1.207–212)	335
Birth and Banishment (<i>Ant.</i> 1.213–221)	342

Isaac's Sacrifice (<i>Ant.</i> 1.222–236)	354
Sarra's Death (<i>Ant.</i> 1.237)	359
Sarra in Josephus	360
CONCLUSIONS	
Sarah in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Tradition	368
Some Contributions of This Study	377
BIBLIOGRAPHY	380

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But I dedicate this work to my wife, Caroline. It is a well-worn scholarly custom to append an apt, learned citation to a dedication to one's spouse. However, conventions are only trite in the absence of real feeling, and in this case, the sentiment is keenly felt (and absent any of the cautions I express in my discussion of this passage in Chapter 5!):

יעם כול שפרא דן חכמא שגיא עמהא

Along with all this beauty, much wisdom is hers.

(Genesis Apocryphon 20.7)

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
Ant.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
AS	<i>Aramaic Studies</i>
ASV	American Standard Version
ATTM	Beyer, Klaus. <i>Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten</i> . Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BK	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BW	Bible and Women
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014
DJBA	Sokoloff, Michael. <i>A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods</i> . Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002

DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DJPA	Sokoloff, Michael. <i>A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period</i> . 2nd ed. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
DSGA	Machiela, Daniel A. <i>The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13–17</i> . STDJ. Leiden: Brill, 2009
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
EstBib	<i>Estudios biblicos</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FJTC	Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary
GA	Fitzmyer, Joseph A. <i>The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1 (1Q20): A Commentary</i> . 3rd ed. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2004
GELS	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Takamitsu Muraoka. Leuven: Peeters, 2009
GenAp	Genesis Apocryphon
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JA	Feldman, Louis H., translation and commentary. <i>Judean Antiquities 1–4</i> . Edited by Steve Mason. FJTC 3. Leiden: Brill, 2000
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version
<i>LASBF</i>	<i>Liber Annuus Studii Biblici Franciscani</i>
<i>Laur</i>	<i>Laurentianum</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NABR	New American Bible, Revised Edition
NETS	<i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007

NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OG	Old Greek
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PSTJ</i>	<i>Perkins (School of Theology) Journal</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RelEd</i>	<i>Religious Education</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTL</i>	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSPS	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Series
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
Smythe	Smyth, Herbert Weir. <i>Greek Grammar</i> . Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
SSS	Semitic Study Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica

T. Ab.	Testament of Abraham
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>Text</i>	<i>Textus</i>
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

CHAPTER 1

STUDIES OF SARAH AND WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE BIBLE AND BEYOND

Introduction

Questions about the characters that people the Bible have long absorbed its readers and hearers. Without a lively interest in the doings of their legendary forebears, the ancient writers who composed the works that are the subject of this study would likely never have begun efforts to tell and retell their stories. In our era, too, even scholars immersed in traditional historical-critical paradigms display a curiosity about the personalities that live in these narratives.¹ Until relatively recently, however, as Alice Ogden Bellis notes, “virtually all biblical scholars and interpreters were white males, and rarely did any of them think to ask questions about women’s roles” in the Bible.² The 1974 publication of Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Religion and Sexism*, which features several chapters on women in the Bible, signaled the beginning of a shift in this regard, and the intervening decades saw a dramatic proliferation of scholarly studies that focus on women in biblical texts and contexts.³ Yet female characters still draw less attention than their male counterparts in mainstream biblical studies, a disparity that is even more marked in investigations of the retellings of biblical stories.⁴

1. An example is Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), who often makes perceptive remarks about the characters in these stories.

2. Alice Ogden Bellis, “Feminist Biblical Scholarship,” in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 28.

3. See, for example, Phyllis Bird, “Images of Women in the Old Testament,” in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 41–88, and Constance F. Parvey, “The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament,” in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 117–49.

4. Indicative of the general trend of absorption with male characters in scriptural rewritings is Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren, eds., *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press

This study aims to contribute to the redress of this imbalance by fixing its attention on the varied portraits of Sarah in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Genesis Apocryphon, and the *Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus, employing a narrative-critical methodology centered on characterization that both incorporates and reacts to aspects of “rewritten Bible” approaches.⁵ I detail Sarah’s depiction as a woman who has and has not in the Masoretic Text (MT) of Genesis, Sarra’s faded portrait in the Septuagint (LXX) version of Genesis, the intriguing but ultimately disappointing trajectory of the wise Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon (GenAp), and the complicated presentation of Sarra in Josephus’s *Antiquities* (*Ant.*), where narratorial efforts to polish her character’s image often end in obfuscation and moral hazard. In the end, I suggest that one of Sarah’s trans-narrative or “deep traits” is a certain resemblance to the character of Abraham, though I argue that she cannot be reduced to this role. Instead, Sarah is a complex and

International, 1998): in thirteen chapters focused on different figures, only Eve, among female characters—and then only in connection with Adam—is examined. Some examples of studies that do focus on women characters in the Hebrew Bible and retellings or versions include Linda Day, *Three Faces of a Queen: Characterization in the Books of Esther*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); Joan E. Cook, *Hannah’s Desire, God’s Design: Early Interpretations of the Story of Hannah*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); and Sara M. Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba? A Study in Characterization*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). But the figure of Abraham alone, inside and outside the Bible, has been the subject of a great many studies, only a few of which include: Eugène Tisserant, et al., *Abraham, père des croyants*, Cahiers sioniens (Paris: Cerf, 1952); Samuel Sandmel, *Philo’s Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature*, augmented ed. (New York: Ktav, 1971); Géza Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, StPB 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 67–126; Bruce E. Schein, “Our Father Abraham” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1972); John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith*, Studies of Personalities of the Old Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007); Annette Yoshiko Reed, “The Construction and Subversion of Patriarchal Perfection: Abraham and Exemplarity in Philo, Josephus, and the Testament of Abraham,” *JSJ* 40 (2009): 185–212; Pernille Carstens and Niels Peter Lemche, eds., *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham*, Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011); and Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

5. “Rewritten Bible,” though a contested term, is arguably still the most common descriptor for a variety of antique compositions that retell, or in some way draw inspiration from, the authoritative writings that came to be collected in the Bible. Other designations include “rewritten Scripture,” “parabiblical” texts, “narrative midrash,” and the like, but the aptness, sufficiency, and precise referent(s) of these terms are matters of frequent debate; see, for example, the discussion in Moshe J. Bernstein, “The *Genesis Apocryphon*: Compositional and Interpretive Perspectives,” in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 164–65. As will be repeatedly noted below, one of the most common approaches to this material involves isolating the distinctives of the text thought to be derivative by comparing it point-by-point with the text considered to be original. While I value the cautious philological work that is a hallmark of this approach, and share an interest in the distinctives of each tradition insofar as these may illuminate the development of the Sarah tradition in antiquity, I argue that the comparative and atomistic tendencies of much “rewritten Bible” work can prevent a reader from engaging fully with a text in itself.

sometimes contradictory character whose individuality still occasionally escapes the various pressures—human, divine, and narratorial—that are ranged against her in an androcentric tradition. Throughout my investigation, I also contend, more broadly, that the preoccupation of rewritten Bible studies with the juxtaposition and contrast of retold narratives and their scriptural precursors can hinder basic, linear readings of the rewritten works, thus obscuring important facets of their internal narrative effects.

There are many narratives that retell and expand on Sarah's story. Some of these are of great intrinsic interest, such as the Testament of Abraham, a darkly comedic work in which Sarah outlives her spouse, or the *Palaea Historica*, a medieval composition that reconceives Abraham's lie about his and Sarah's relationship as the clever initiative of Sarah herself.⁶ Other narratives that would repay future work on Sarah include the targumim and later rabbinic, Islamic, and Samaritan treatments.⁷ Among other Second Temple literature, Jubilees and Philo's *On the Life*

6. Sarah is still alive at the end of Recension A of the Testament of Abraham; the less colorful Recension B (ch. 12) preserves the traditional order of events. A new translation of the interesting *Palaea Historica*, or "The Old Testament History," a Greek composition of the ninth century CE or later that draws upon traditions also contained in Jubilees and Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, can be found in William Adler, "*Palaea Historica* ('The Old Testament History'): A New Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 585–672. I would note that crediting Sarah for this "clever solution" (28.2, Adler's translation) is not a simple plus for her character. This move increases Sarah's agency, but simultaneously relieves Abraham of moral dubiety and casts Sarah as a woman who gladly sacrifices herself for her husband.

7. A large number of haggadic stories involving Abraham and Sarah are collected in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2nd ed., trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin, reprint, 1909–38 (Philadelphia: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), especially 167–250. For Sarah specifically, David J. Zucker, "Sarah: The View of the Classical Rabbis," in *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham: Essays in Honor of Marvin R. Wilson*, ed. Stephen A. Hunt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 221–52, provides an overview of her treatment in the Talmud and midrash; Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), especially chapter 3, "More than the Stars of the Heavens: Critical, Rabbinical, and Feminist Perspectives on Sarah" (85–131), supplements her own work on Sarah with constant reference to rabbinic stories; Naomi M. Hyman, ed., *Biblical Women in the Midrash: A Sourcebook* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), 15–29, collects a number of rabbinic references to Sarah and Hagar, in addition to several modern reflections; and Joshua Levinson, "Bodies and Bo(a)rders: Emerging Fictions of Identity in Late Antiquity," *HTR* 93 (2000): 343–72, gives a methodologically diverse analysis of *Genesis Rabbah's* interesting tradition that "God-fearers" are descended from those who partook of Sarah's superabundant milk supply. Riffat Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and Her Family," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 149–67, discusses traditions about Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham in both the Qur'an and the *hadith*. The Samaritan *Asatir* contains a number of haggadic retellings of Pentateuchal traditions, including a few treating stories of Sarah and Abraham; a text and translation can be found in Moses Gaster, trans. and ed., *The Asatir: The Samaritan Book of the "Secrets of Moses": Together with the Pitron or Samaritan Commentary and the Samaritan Story of the Death of Moses* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1927).

of *Abraham* both contain significant retellings of the story of Sarah.⁸ Others, such as the *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, the New Testament, and a few Hellenistic or Greco-Roman works, also feature relatively brief mentions of her.⁹ It is with some regret that I leave these works for future investigations, but a balance had to be struck between comprehensiveness and practicality. I do not, then, analyze these other texts at length, but mention significant contrasts and parallels where these contribute to the discussion at hand.

Before more fully describing the approaches of this study in Chapter 2, I survey here the principal scholarly contributions to an assessment of the portraits of Sarah in my four primary

8. I define the “Second Temple period” broadly, as in Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds., *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2013), xv, which speaks of “the period between the end of the Babylonian exile (538 BCE) and the transmission of the Mishnah (200 CE).” For work on Sarah in Jubilees, see especially Betsy Halpern-Amaru, “The Portrait of Sarah in Jubilees,” in *Jewish Studies in a New Europe*, ed. Ulf Haxen, Hanne Traudner-Kromann, and Karen Lisa Goldschmidt Salamon (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1998), 336–48; Betsy Halpern-Amaru, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); and Betsy Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits of Women in Pseudo-Philo’s Biblical Antiquities,” in *“Women Like This”: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, E.J.L. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 83–106. Halpern-Amaru’s contention that Jubilees features “a particular concern for the characterization of Sarah” (Halpern-Amaru, “Portrait of Sarah,” 341) is contested by Maren Niehoff, “Mother and Maiden, Sister and Spouse: Sarah in Philonic Midrash,” *HTR* 97 (2004): 415, who finds instead that “the author of the *Book of Jubilees* . . . took no interest at all in the figure of Sarah, but was overwhelmingly concerned with Abraham’s image.” As for Philo, he employs “Sarah,” sometimes at considerable length, in a dozen or more treatises, but almost all of these discussions reduce her to an analogue of “virtue,” “wisdom,” or “philosophy,” among other abstractions, and subsequently deploy this analogue in allegorical schemes virtually devoid of plot. For example, *On the Preliminary Studies* contains what is likely Philo’s most extended meditation on “Sarah,” but solely as “she” represents the kind of higher inquiry that a man can only approach after having mastered the lower liberal arts, identified here with “Hagar,” such as grammar or music. The only truly narrative material concerning Sarah in Philo is in *On the Life of Abraham*; scholars who reflect on her “literal” portrait here include Judith Romney Wegner, “The Image of Woman in Philo,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers*, SBLSPS 21 (1982), 551–63; Dorothy Sly, *Philo’s Perception of Women*, BJS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); and, most significantly, Niehoff, “Mother and Maiden.” Note also the recent contribution of Atar Livneh, “The Figure of Sarah in *Abr.* 245–254,” a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, Nov. 24, 2014.

9. The *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (LAB) of Pseudo-Philo mostly reworks the traditions of Sarah and Abraham by omitting them. Pseudo-Philo is far more interested in Deborah, for instance, than Sarah: Deborah’s story forms the backdrop for four lengthy chapters (30–33), while Sarah merits only brief mentions in 8:1–3 and in Joshua’s retelling of early Israelite history in 23:4–8. Of the New Testament passages that refer to Sarah (Rom 4:19; 9:9; Gal 4:21–5:1; Heb 11:11; 1 Pet 3:6), that of Galatians has probably received the most scrutiny, including Jeremy Punt, “Subverting Sarah in the New Testament: Galatians 4 and 1 Peter 3,” in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality*, vol. 2: Exegetical Studies, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 155–74, and Ulrike Bechmann, “Rhetorische Figuren der Entgrenzung: Abraham, Sara und Hagar bei Paulus,” *BK* 66 (2011): 9–14. In my opinion, however, there is little to be gleaned from a narrative perspective here. Other minor references from roughly the same period include brief mentions in the Testament of Levi, the Joseph and Aseneth novella, and a fragment of Pseudo-Eupolemus.

texts—the MT, the LXX, the Apocryphon, and the *Antiquities*—considering relevant work on each in turn. After this, I briefly collect the few investigations that mention Sarah in connection with more than one extrabiblical narrative. The following review shows that my work here, both in its constituent studies and in its broader synthetic project, can make a contribution to this ongoing conversation.

The Portrait of Sarah in the Masoretic Text

Many have noted that the secondary literature on Gen 11:27–25:10, which concerns the founding of the family line that will give rise to the Israelites, is overwhelming in extent.¹⁰ And while the female characters of these chapters have traditionally been relatively neglected, Sarah’s depiction here in the MT of Genesis, of all her varied portraits in antiquity, has received by far the most scholarly attention.¹¹ However, the following discussion, which highlights key contributions that feature significant reflection on the figure of Sarah, shows that ample room remains for the kind of narrative-critical character study that I perform here.

Nearly all work on Sarah in the MT can be profitably divided into a few, largely distinct categories. The first consists of studies that focus their analysis on a single episode or a pair of closely related episodes; work here tends to cluster around the “sister-wife” scenes, the relationship of Sarah and Hagar, and, interestingly, the binding of Isaac. A second category is comprised of investigations that employ data from Sarah’s story in the service of a thematic, often typological approach to the text of Genesis or to the biblical text more generally. A third group, the largest but most homogeneous of those treated here, is made up of efforts that look at

10. See, for example, Tammi J. Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 4. The episode of the binding of Isaac alone has generated a “staggering” volume of commentary (Phyllis Trible, “Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah,” in *“Not in Heaven”: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr. [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], 249 n. 2).

11. Indeed, it often seems as if the curious opinion expressed by Rafael Patai in his foreword to Savina J. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1984), ix, is widely shared: “The only source in which Sarah is mentioned is the Book of Genesis.” Throughout this section, I will refer to “Sarah” when speaking in general terms of the character whose change of name, from Sarai to Sarah, is announced to Abraham by God in Gen 17:15.

Sarah as part of a broader survey, most often a systematic consideration of “women in the Bible” or a relevant, usually feminist commentary on Genesis.

The varied emphases of these approaches lend strengths to each. Studies focused on a pericope can bring close attention to linguistic and structural detail, while those that draw out motifs and interrelationships can demonstrate a narrative coherence that illuminates each instance of textual connection. But these strengths of the works in each category mirror their shortcomings when it comes to drawing a portrait of Sarah that is both comprehensive and clear. Those in the first, episodic group treat only a portion of Sarah’s story in the MT, while those in the third, survey group usually subordinate their readings of her to a broader thesis, often on women or mothers in the Bible. Those in the second, thematic or typological group combine these characteristics and weaknesses, which is why their treatment occupies the middle position in this discussion: studies here are both focused narrowly on certain aspects of Sarah’s story and use her narrative data as evidence in larger arguments.

In what follows, I will first consider significant contributions within each of these three broad categories. Then, in a final section, I will examine those extended investigations that, by virtue of their adoption of the larger trajectory of the figure of Sarah in Genesis as their organizing principle, stand outside my basic organizational scheme. Despite the volume of work detailed below, these amount to only two: Savina Teubal’s *Sarah the Priestess*, which takes an approach informed by ancient Near Eastern contexts, and the literary and feminist reading of Tammi Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations*.¹² I leave out of account the numerous dictionary-style entries on Sarah.¹³ While these can be useful starting points, they tend to be brief, favoring summary and paraphrase over analysis, and although this is wholly in keeping with their

12. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*; Schneider, *Sarah*.

13. Representative examples of the many relevant dictionary-style entries include Gale A. Yee, “Sarah,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 981–82; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Sarah 1/Sarai,” in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 150–51; and Alice Ogden Bellis, “Sarah,” in *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 107–8.

introductory function, it limits their value for an extended study such as this one. I also do not treat novelistic or other primarily creative efforts of the modern era, but confine my interest in the reception and retelling of Sarah's story to the Second Temple period.¹⁴

It is plain that many of the studies discussed below are excellent contributions within their respective spheres. Very few, however, present a full and detailed portrait of the character of Sarah. Beyond the common restrictions in focus and scope just mentioned, often the obstacle here is methodological: even the "literary" readings among those studies that attempt to read Sarah's whole story rarely offer explicit interaction with narrative-critical approaches focusing on characterization. Throughout this discussion, too, it will be clear that very little of the work considered here, regardless of theme or approach, betrays much awareness of the character of Sarah as reimagined in the Second Temple documents treated in this study. It is at this little-visited intersection of approaches, where character-driven narrative critique meets the ancient rewriting and reception of the tradition surrounding Sarah, that I wish to locate my own work.

Episodic Treatments

The "sister-wife" narratives. Although many studies have been devoted to these three similar episodes (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:1–16), extended reflection on the character of Sarah here is not as common as one might think. Most investigations have adopted approaches

14. One of several popular English novels centered on Sarah is Orson Scott Card, *Sarah*, Women of Genesis, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Desert Mountain, 2000); see also Mona Körte, "An den Rändern der Fiktion: Die Suche nach Sara in der Literatur der Moderne," in *Sara lacht: Eine Erzmutter und ihre Geschichte*, ed. Rainer Kampling (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 279–88, for a survey of mostly German literature over the last few centuries. Somewhat more difficult to categorize than Card's work is the offering of poet Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God: Abraham's Dilemma and the Birth of Three Faiths* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009). While conversant with rabbinic materials, Gordon's account is largely a highly imaginative expansion or retelling of the Genesis account (55: "By the time Sarai was brought to Pharaoh's chambers, she would have looked just foreign enough to titillate his jaded palate . . ."). Also resisting easy categorization is the desultory and essaylike compendium by Jean Vanel, *Le livre de Sara*, Lire la Bible, vol. 67 (Paris: Cerf, 1984). Lire la Bible is a series aimed at a lay audience, and Vanel divides his treatment into three parts: the first offers a string of reflective pieces on Sarah in both Christian Testaments; the second, "Un bouquet pour Sara," is a broad sampling of translated extrabiblical texts, presented without analysis, in which Sarah appears (including targumim, the Genesis Apocryphon, and Philo, in addition to writings of the church fathers, Kierkegaard, children's poems, and still others); the third, presented "en guise de postface," is a poem by Vanel, "Petite princesse dans le grand château de la Bible."

absorbed with source-critical or historical-anthropological questions.¹⁵ Others have employed a more synchronic, literary perspective, but without showing much interest in Sarah.¹⁶ Only a few have really addressed her role here, and while most of these share a governing occupation with gender, they employ quite disparate methodologies. Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes, asking questions prompted by the narratology of Mieke Bal, was likely the first to self-consciously “place Sarai at the center of attention” in the Egyptian episode, finding that she is oppressed and silent, embodying “the lot of all those who are the victims of the trade in women.”¹⁷ Cheryl

15. These episodes are, of course, frequently cited in support of the documentary hypothesis of the composition of the Pentateuch; see E. A. Speiser, “The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives,” in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann, Studies and Texts, vol. 1 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963], 16–17; reprinted in E. A. Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies: Collected Writings of E. A. Speiser*, ed. J. J. Finkelstein and Moshe Greenberg [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967], 62–82). Speiser’s article, which contends that acceptance of the documentary hypothesis is irrelevant to its argument (17, in the original printing), is well-known for its discussion of supposed parallels between these episodes and practices among the Hurrians of antique Mesopotamia (see especially 18–24, and the conclusions in 24–28, original printing). Mark E. Biddle, “The ‘Endangered Ancestress’ and Blessing for the Nations,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 599–611, provides a more recent but still very traditional reading in terms of approach, which is much concerned with questions of source. See also Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 23–69, who employs the findings of folklore theorists to question, among other things, the assignment of these various episodes to their traditional “documents.” Historical concerns continue to dominate much even quite recent work, such as Bob Becking, “Abram in Exile: Remarks on Gen 12,10–20,” in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition: Festschrift für Matthias Köckert*, ed. Anselm Hagedorn and Henrik Pfeiffer, BZAW 400 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 35–47, which contains a section titled, “Did Gen 12,10–20 Really Happen?” A more methodologically eclectic study than that of Biddle or Becking is Barry L. Eichler, “On Reading Genesis 12:10–20,” in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 23–38, who, after debunking Speiser’s Hurrian sister-wife argument, provides a survey of what he calls “realistic” readings of the text, drawing on narrative, feminist, and especially rabbinic interpretations (24–33). Contending that “knowledge of the ancient sociolegal setting of the narrative remains crucial” to a “modern critical realistic reader,” Eichler turns to ancient Near Eastern and modern anthropological data in arguing that Abram’s purpose in this episode includes the “protection” of Sarai (33–38). For a different perspective, the volume of Matthieu Arnold, Gilbert Dahan, and Annie Noblesse-Rocher, eds., *La sœur-épouse (Genèse 12, 10–20)* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), contains a series of articles on the reception of this passage. Most of the offerings concern readings in the church fathers and later interpretations, though there are a few scattered references to Second Temple materials in Jan Joosten’s *Abram et Sarai en Égypte: Composition et message de Genèse 12, 10–20* (11–25), and a brief passage on Josephus’s interpretation in Marie-Odile Boulnois’s *Les péripécies de Sara « sœur-épouse » (Gn 12, 10–20 et Gn 20, 1–18) chez les Pères grecs* (27–66; see 29–33).

16. Robert Polzin, “‘The Ancestress of Israel in Danger’ in Danger,” *Semeia* 3 (1975): 81–98, is a self-consciously synchronic take focused on narrative “transformations,” such as the change in Abram’s wealth brought about by the “adulterous situation” of Gen 12:10–20 (85, 88); Peter D. Miscall, *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 11–46, is an early biblical narrative effort (Miscall simply terms it “close reading,” 1) that emphasizes the text’s ambiguity and plurivocality; neither has much comment on Sarah.

17. Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes, “Sarai in Exile: A Gender-Specific Reading of Genesis 12:10–13:2,” in *The Double Voice of Her Desire*, ed. J. Bekkenkamp and F. Dröes, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 137, 143, 145. Van Dijk-Hemmes’s method is non-technical and simply sketched in a series of questions (138). Interestingly, the author is very sympathetic to the figure of Abram here, “who finds himself in a scarcely enviable

Exum, on the other hand, takes a “psychoanalytic-literary” approach to the three versions of the tale, reading through the categories of Freud and Girard to uncover a series of stories driven by a male, unconscious fantasy “that the wife have sex with another man.”¹⁸ In this interpretation, Sarah can be “both accomplice and object,” because she is a character engendered by a patriarchal fantasy that has no interest whatsoever in a woman’s perspective.¹⁹ André Wénin, from a broadly narrative-critical angle, also characterizes Sarai as complicit in the greed and lies of her husband when she passively allows his duplicitous scheme to go forward.²⁰ However,

position as an economic refugee” (141; compare 145). This article, which was originally published in Dutch in 1989, is also found (in a different, unattributed translation, perhaps by van Dijk-Hemmes herself) in Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “Sarai’s Exile: A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 12:10–13:2,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 1/2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 222–34. See also Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “And Sarah Laughed: Exegetical Thoughts on the Biblical Story of Sarah,” in *The Double Voice of Her Desire*, ed. J. Bekkenkamp and F. Dröes, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 45–51, originally published in Dutch in 1981, for a brief, feminist, and modern-contextual read of Sarah’s story that, however, evinces almost no scholarly interaction.

18. J. Cheryl Exum, “Who’s Afraid of ‘The Endangered Ancestress?’” in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 100. Also found in J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 148–69, and Alice Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 141–56. Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 88–93, adopts most of Exum’s conclusions in her analysis of these passages. For another, more self-consciously technical application of psychoanalytic theory to these episodes, see Ilona N. Rashkow, “Intertextuality, Transference, and the Reader in/of Genesis 12 and 20,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 57–73, which draws parallels between the Freudian concept of “transference” and the act of reading. A reworked version of this chapter is also found in Ilona N. Rashkow, “Intertextuality and Transference: A Reader in/of Genesis 12:10–20 and 20:1–18,” in *The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist-Psychoanalytic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 26–48, which contains a much clearer account of “transference” itself (26; compare 59–60 in the Fewell volume). In neither case is the portrait of Sarah the main focus. See also Relora Elizabeth Joyce, “Sarah, the First Matriarch of Genesis: A Hermeneutic Exploration of Her Legend and Its Impact on the Vocation of Wife” (Ph.D. diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2005), which uses the depth psychology of Jung, Hillman, and others to explore the influence of the Sarah stories on modern notions of being a wife.

19. Exum, “Who’s Afraid?” 107, in the Exum and Clines volume. On the obsession with uncovering the source history of these tales, mentioned above, see 95: “Now what happens in Genesis 12, 20, and 26 is very disturbing. A man practically throws his wife into another man’s harem in order to save his skin. Yet the questions one most often encounters about this text are generally along the lines of: What is the oldest form of this story?” See, too, Irmtraud Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled with God: Biblical Stories of Israel’s Beginnings*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 2: “Studies of the textual complex Genesis 12–36 for the most part show interest in the “women texts,” when at all, only because they are double or even triple traditions in which . . . one can demonstrate the postulated sources of the Pentateuch. Scarcely any attention is paid to what it means that women are at the center of these stories.”

20. André Wénin, “Abram et Sarai en Égypte (Gn 12, 10–20) ou la place de Sarai dans l’élection,” *RTL* 29 (1998): 447–48.

Wénin goes on to argue that Sarai's agency and power to preserve Abram and his election is implicit in his plea to her in Gen 12:13, and that when her active and truthful "word" as "wife of Abram" (v. 17) prompts the resolution of the plot, she is shown to be at least his equal in the fulfillment of God's promises.²¹ Howard Wallace argues even more strongly for the centrality of Sarai in the Egyptian narrative, contending that "all the other characters" act as they do "on account of Sarai"—though it seems a strain to apply the normal meaning of this phrase in English to Abram's actions in this episode.²² More recently, Michael Carden employs an approach that emphasizes the relationship of these tales to one another in their broader context and also appeals to ideologies of gender in the ancient world. In this scheme Sarah represents a return to the "androgynous ideal" of Eden, conceiving Isaac with the deity alone. For Carden, this sounds a kind of anti-patriarchal note in the Genesis narrative, along with providing an important type for later Christian ideas about Mary the mother of Jesus.²³

Hagar and Sarah. As with the "sister-wife" tales, a good deal of scholarship that focuses on the episodes involving Hagar (Gen 16:1–16; 21:1–21) is bound up with questions of source,

21. Wénin, "Abram et Sarai en Égypte," 449, 452–54, 455–56. As Wénin notes, taking על־דבר שרי (Gen 12:17) as referring to a speech-act is a minority position among modern exegetes (450–51; compare RSV and NRSV, "because of Sarai"); however, see van Dijk-Hemmes, "Sarai's Exile," 231–32, and Amy-Jill Levine's contribution in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: URJ Press; Women of Reform Judaism, 2008), 78. Wénin emphasizes the story's ethical polarities such as desire or greed and self-sacrifice, lying and truth-telling, and fear and courage, in many cases linking these themes to the garden of Eden narrative (438–45 and throughout). Reading the Sarah cycle as a response to the garden story is a move also made in Judy Klitsner, "Forbidden Fruit and the Quest for Motherhood: *Havvah* and Sarah," in *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2009), 111–33, and Susan Ann Brayford, "The Taming and Shaming of Sarah in the Septuagint of Genesis" (Ph.D. diss., Iliff School of Theology; The University of Denver / Colorado Seminary, 1998), which are both mentioned below. In insisting on the key role of Sarah in the election, Wénin anticipates in some ways the conclusions of Schneider, *Sarah*, discussed below.

22. Howard Wallace, "On Account of Sarai: Gen 12:10–13:1," *ABR* 44 (1996): 37. Wallace contends that commentators' failure to acknowledge Sarai as the "centre of attention" here is prompted by patriarchy and sexism (41). But his own analysis, which speaks repeatedly not of Sarai but of her "role," shows that this centrality is almost entirely instrumental.

23. Michael Carden, "Endangered Ancestress Revisited: Sarah's Miraculous Motherhood and the Restoration of Eden," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1, no. 3 (2005): 18.1–2, 7–12. Carden's proposals are interesting but sometimes lacking in clarity. If Isaac is engendered not by Abraham but by "a special act of the deity," what can be the significance of Sarah and Abraham being "one flesh" (as non-uterine siblings, reading with Gen 20:12) according to the "monogenetic perspectives of the ancient world" (18.11)? Some of the themes in Carden's work resemble those in Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, treated below, and Niehoff, "Mother and Maiden," mentioned below in the Josephus section.

or with interpreting the passages in the light of ancient Near Eastern data.²⁴ Wénin offers another narrative reading here, centered on 16:1–6, but dwells largely on structural and thematic correspondences between Sarah’s offer of Hagar to Abraham and Sarah and Abraham’s Egyptian journey.²⁵ Most studies that concentrate on the characters of Hagar and Sarah in these tales differ rather markedly from those cited above in connection with Sarah’s stints in captivity, in that they display significant methodological agreement and render a generally negative evaluation of Sarah.²⁶ Phyllis Trible’s liberationist close reading in *Texts of Terror*, where Sarah is depicted as

24. Even early literary efforts take the various documents as their point of departure. For example, Sean E. McEvenue, “A Comparison of Narrative Styles in the Hagar Stories,” *Semeia* 3 (1975): 64–80, employs a “stylistic analysis” to characterize the disparities between the strata of J, E, and P (65, 76–77). Jo Ann Hackett, “Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 12–27; Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); and Savina J. Teubal, “Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 1/2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 235–50 (excerpted from Savina J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990], 191–200, which was republished as Savina J. Teubal, *Ancient Sisterhood: The Lost Traditions of Hagar and Sarah* [Athens, OH: Swallow Press; University of Ohio Press, 1997]), all take a comparative ancient Near Eastern approach to the narratives. On Teubal’s rather idiosyncratic reading of the Sarah and Hagar traditions, see below. Monika Egger, “*Hagar, woher kommst du? Und wohin gehst du?*” (*Gen 16,8**): *Darstellung und Funktion der Figur Hagar im Sara(i)-Abra(ha)m-Zyklus (Gen 11,27–25,18)* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011), provides an example of a recent extended study of Hagar that combines feminist concerns with significant engagement with the occupations of traditional historical-critical scholarship.

25. André Wénin, “Saraï, Hagar et Abram: Une approche narrative et contextuelle de Gn 16, 1–6,” *RTL* 32 (2001): 24–54. Wénin emphasizes the parallels between Abraham’s actions in Egypt and Sarah’s offer of Hagar, underlining both characters’ fear, grasping desire, and lack of confidence in the divine promises (33–35, 51–52); for a similar evaluation, see Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 45. Wénin also takes up a contention of “Abram et Saraï en Égypte,” that the relationship of the couple is key to the fulfillment of the blessing that is to flow through Abraham to the people of the earth (Gen 12:3), but limits his remarks here to structural suggestions: when the couple ceases to interfere with the divine plan, it leads to the birth of Isaac, a scene notably framed by Abraham’s interactions with Abimelech, which result in a covenant between the two (53; Gen 20:1–18; 21:22–34). How Hagar and Ishmael may fit into this scheme is less clear.

26. Mayer Gruber, “Genesis 21.12: A New Reading of an Ambiguous Text,” in *Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2/1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 172–79, provides a rare example of an essay centered on Sarah and Hagar where Sarah is evaluated sympathetically. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 225–37, also treats both characters with generosity, noting that Hagar is ultimately freed of her slave status. Laurene Beth Bowers, “Narrative Dynamics of Power in the Stories of Eve, Sarah, and Rebekah,” unpublished master’s thesis (Andover Newton Theological School, 1998), goes even further, contending that the narrator has “an investment in projecting [Sarah’s] intentions as negative” and offering a “counter-reading” where Sarah actually “shares her power with Hagar to enable Hagar to break free from the patriarchal system that enslaves her” (40, 45, 53; compare 67–68). Holly Elaine Horn, “Hagar and Sarah: Three Essays and a Poem” (Ph.D. diss., Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, 1997), is more nuanced as she reads “Hagar and Sarah trans-canonically,” emphasizing issues of “female subjectivity, voice, and agency” in essays on Genesis, Galatians, and the Qur’an (4, 91; compare i, 1, 14, and elsewhere; for Genesis, see 8–91; Galatians, 92–119; Qur’an, 120–48; these sections are followed by a liturgical poem that reimagines the women’s relationship,

an abuser backed by God's authority, has proved highly influential in terms of both approach and conclusions.²⁷ More recently, in a revisitation of a number of themes that characterize her earlier scholarship, Tribble provides a somewhat softer picture of Sarah in a close reading of the Genesis narratives that center on her family.²⁸ Several other essays in the same volume draw out aspects of the relatively rich history of reception of these episodes. Of particular relevance for the broader interests of this study is the effort of Adele Reinhartz and Miriam-Simma Walfish, which briefly discusses some ancient retellings of the Sarah and Hagar stories in the course of a survey that includes ancient and medieval rabbinic interpretations along with modern treatments, both

154–98). Horn argues that both characters are “objectified, marginalized, and silenced” in Genesis, but that their relationship forms a context where their agency evolves (88–89). In the end, however, although both serve as oppressed and oppressor, this “inversion” of roles “becomes an occasion for moral transformation that goes unrealized” (91).

27. Phyllis Tribble, “Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection,” in *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 13, 28. Renita J. Weems, “A Mistress, a Maid, and No Mercy,” in *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988), 1–21, emphasizes issues of wealth, slavery, ethnicity, and the context of employment in characterizing Sarah as an exploiter who humiliates and dehumanizes her slave (10, 14), while noting, however, that both women are subject to patriarchy (12). Megan McKenna, “Sarah and Hagar: Who is Our Mother in Faith?” in *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 169–89, also provides a contextual, theological, and liberationist reading which concludes that “perhaps we do have a mother in faith, but not Sarah, the bitter, unbelieving, and cynical woman driven by jealousy and fear” (183). See also Cynthia Gordon, “Hagar: A Throw-Away Character Among the Matriarchs?” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers*, SBLSPS 24 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1985), 271–77; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Sarah and Hagar: Power and Privileges,” in *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 7–25, which, as it also considers a number of other women in the Bible, could also be classified comfortably under the survey-style treatments outlined below; and Hemchand Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative*, 2nd ed., Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 1–24. The first edition of this work appeared in 1995. Gossai's liberative readings, which are at times motivated by openly confessional and Christian concerns, take care to avoid implicating the deity in oppressive or unjust contexts. For example, Gossai blames the destruction of Sodom on Abraham's failure to push Yahweh to spare the city “for the sake of one” (52–54). Different approaches, such as the “midrash” performed by Danna Nolan Fewell, “Changing the Subject: Retelling the Story of Hagar the Egyptian,” in *Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2/1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 182–94, also often depict Sarah as an abuser (182, 187). Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 59–60, goes further than most by characterizing Sarah as a rapist.

28. Phyllis Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing,” in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 33–69. This essay incorporates insights originally developed in works such as Tribble, “Desolation,” and Tribble, “Sacrifice of Sarah,” on which see just below. The broader context of “Ominous Beginnings” accounts for much of the softer portrait of Sarah, as Tribble needs to deal more fully with episodes such as Sarah's time in Pharaoh's household. Even so, Sarah is “both tool and tyrant,” “object of patriarchy” and “abused wife” but “afflicter of slaves, possessive mother,” and “cruel matriarch” (59). Abraham comes off little better, here memorably dismissed by Tribble as “wimp and pimp” (59). For a sampling of other essays on Hagar and Sarah, many of which take Tribble's earlier work as a point of departure, see 64–65 n. 21.

scholarly and popular.²⁹

The binding of Isaac. Perhaps surprisingly, the absence of the character of Sarah in the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1–19) has excited a fair degree of comment throughout the history of interpretation: as Wendy Zierler notes, the text's silence on the role of Sarah in this episode was recognized already by the rabbis.³⁰ The most influential modern treatment is again that of Tribble, who juxtaposes two "rhetorical-critical" readings of Genesis 22, one "patriarchal" and one "feminist." In the latter, Tribble argues that to test Abraham here "defies the internal logic" of the narrative, as the call for Isaac's sacrifice is about "nonattachment,"

29. Adele Reinhartz and Miriam-Simma Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 101–25. Jubilees, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, and Philo's allegorical interpretations are briefly treated (102–05); for a survey of modern works, see 115–21. Dan W. Clanton, Jr., *Daring, Disreputable, and Devout: Interpreting the Bible's Women in the Arts and Music* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 28–64, also discusses modern interpretations, with special consideration for Jewish readings, of the Sarah-Hagar materials. Despite his book's subtitle, Clanton does not treat Sarah and Hagar in art, citing "a decided paucity of aesthetic renderings" (29). For a treatment that does deal with the reception of these stories in visual art, see Phyllis Silverman Kramer, "The Dismissal of Hagar in Five Art Works of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2/1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 195–217, who contrasts the positive image of Sarah "in the Bible and in interpretive literature" with her negative portrayal in the paintings and engravings discussed (216). If she is correct, it seems that artists such as Jan Steen (ca. 1626–1679) anticipated many of the modern evaluations mentioned above (see 200–203 for Kramer's discussion of Steen's *The Dismissal of Hagar*). See also Zefira Gitay, "Hagar's Expulsion: A Twice-Told Tale in Genesis," in *Abraham and Family: New Insights Into the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2000), 73–78, 87–91; and the work of J. Cheryl Exum, "Toward a Genuine Dialogue Between the Bible and Art," in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen, VTSup (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 473–503, which examines visual renderings of Hagar and Ishmael's banishment (476–83) and Sarah's presentation of Hagar to Abraham (483–94). For a broader, summary treatment of the reception of Sarah and Hagar in images and literature, see Dorothee Sölle, et al, *Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature*, trans. Joe H. Kirchberger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 32–47; originally published as *Grosse Frauen der Bibel in Bild und Text* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993). Eberhard König, "Zur bildlichen Darstellung Saras: Beispiele aus der spätmittelalterlichen Buchmalerei," in *Sara lacht: Eine Erzmutter und ihre Geschichte*, ed. Rainer Kampling (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 217–37, discusses representations of Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham in late medieval manuscript illumination.

30. Wendy Zierler, "In Search of a Feminist Reading of the Akedah," *Nashim* 9 (2005): 11. For late antique Jewish and Christian homiletic reception of the story of the binding of Isaac with special consideration for the absence of Sarah, see especially Sebastian P. Brock, "Reading Between the Lines: Sarah and the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis, Chapter 22)," in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria Wyke (New York: Routledge, 1994), 169–80, and several related studies cited in that volume's bibliography (274). Besides the works discussed more fully below, other contributions include W. Lee Humphreys, "Where's Sarah? Echoes of a Silent Voice in the Akedah," *Soundings* 81 (1998): 491–512; David J. Zucker, "The Mysterious Disappearance of Sarah," *Judaism* 55, no. 3–4 (2006): 30–39; and Dvora Yanow, "Sarah's Silence: A Newly Discovered Commentary on Genesis 22 by Rashi's Sister," *Judaism* 43 (1994): 398–408, which is an imaginative midrash attributed to a fictive sister of the medieval Torah commentator.

which is something that Sarah, not Abraham, struggles to achieve. By denying Sarah a role in this story, Tribler argues, patriarchy also denies her a chance at “redemption” from the attachment that mars her character and leads to her ill-treatment of Hagar.³¹ Zierler’s article is in part a significant response to Tribler’s effort, critiquing in particular the latter’s “wholesale acceptance of the high spiritual merit of the *Akedah* exercise,” and disputing her evaluation of Sarah’s “attachment” as a negative quality.³² In contrast, Zierler argues that Sarah’s very absence from the story allows her to “endure as an alternative to the Abrahamic model of God-encounter through interpersonal detachment,” as a “model of love” that competes with Abraham’s theology of fear.³³

A number of the studies treated above offer significant contributions to the interpretation of the episode or pair of episodes with which they are concerned. However, for the task of generating a portrait of Sarah in the MT they share the signal weakness of largely ignoring her character’s broader trajectory in the Genesis narrative. This point is underscored by a consideration of the disparate ethical evaluations of Sarah on display here, which often seem dictated by the episode chosen for analysis. Theoretically informed work on characterization is also generally lacking, even in those studies conversant with narrative-critical principles, and contact with later Sarah traditions is very limited.

31. Tribler, “Sacrifice of Sarah,” 182–91, esp. 182, 188–89. The title refers to patriarchy’s “sacrificing” Sarah by “eliminating” her from this story (190); it is interesting that the only narrative in my study that includes mentions of Sarah in the telling of the *Akedah* is the *Antiquities* of Josephus, who is (probably correctly) almost universally pilloried as a misogynist (see *Ant.* 1.222, 225, 236). Tribler’s essay is reprinted in Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 271–90. In both of these versions the first footnote claims that it is “an abridgment of a forthcoming study,” but it is not clear that this ever appeared. There is also a slightly different, somewhat earlier version published in booklet form as the 1989 Gross Memorial Lecture (Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University Press, 1990).

32. Zierler, “Feminist Reading of the *Akedah*,” 17–19. See Tribler’s note 33: “Genesis 24:67 suggests that the *problem* of mother-son bonding continued even beyond Sarah’s death” (emphasis mine).

33. Zierler, “Feminist Reading of the *Akedah*,” 21. Zierler argues that Isaac as an adult seems to follow his mother’s example, rather than his father’s, when he seeks “solace not in detachment, but rather in love and connection” (19).

Thematic and Typological Treatments

In distinction to the episodic treatments discussed above, efforts in both the second and third broad categories of studies that treat Sarah in the MT consider her as an exemplar of a larger group. The greater portion of these fall into the third, survey-style category, addressed below, and usually approach her as a woman among other women in the Bible. A significant minority of investigations, however, takes a more abstract, structural or topical route. Some of these mention the figure of Sarah in the course of treating a larger biblical theme, most commonly motherhood or its counterpart, childlessness.³⁴ Others employ Sarah's narrative data in methodologically-focused studies, which are frequently driven by interest in anthropological kinship theories or literary type-scenes.³⁵ Of the latter, the most influential has been the work of Esther Fuchs, who argues in an early discussion of a number of "annunciation type-scenes" that

34. Childlessness or infertility is usually, and archaically, termed "barrenness" in discussion of the biblical materials. Mary Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*, SBLDS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), which was completed in 1978 (ix), uses ancient Near Eastern contexts with contributions from source critique, concluding that the "motif" of barrenness emphasizes the role of Yahweh in fertility while serving a narrative function as an obstacle to the divine promises (32). More recently, Joel S. Baden, "The Nature of Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, ed. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13–27, uses a disability studies perspective to complicate the notion of biblical barrenness as a "disability," arguing that fertility is often characterized as a blessing rather than a "normal" state from which sterility deviates (14–17). Other approaches include Hemchand Gossai, *Barrenness and Blessing: Abraham, Sarah, and the Journey of Faith* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008), whose theological essays here evince very little scholarly interaction, and Rachel Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," *BibInt* 16 (2008): 154–78, who displays affinities with the typological works mentioned below in using folk-tale categories to isolate a seven-step "female hero pattern" for characters such as Sarah who "overcome barrenness through a combination of articulation and initiative" (157, 159).

35. Several scholars take as their point of departure the kinship theories of Lévi-Strauss, such as Mara E. Donaldson, "Kinship Theory in the Patriarchal Narratives: The Case of the Barren Wife," *JAAR* 49 (1981): 77–87, who argues that the relationships of the matriarchs and patriarchs are presented in Genesis on a continuum from incest (as in the case of Sarah and Abraham) to exogamy (Hagar and Abraham), with Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel constituting an ideal match between "matrilateral cross-cousins" (84). See also Ann Marmesh, "Anti-Covenant," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 43–60. Two investigations by Exum are also driven by kinship concerns, but in a less technical way. J. Cheryl Exum, "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 73–85, is a brief survey, while J. Cheryl Exum, "The (M)other's Place," in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 94–147, is a discursive and multi-faceted work that argues that while the matriarchs are second-class entities often characterized most by their absence from the story, their role in Genesis is to "differentiate" what develops into Israel from its neighbors. However, this crucial function of women in definition of Israel from the "other" must be downplayed, lest the patriarchal text undermine itself (96–107, 145–47).

biblical mothers such as Sarah are generally flat, colorless, secondary characters whose roles are completely circumscribed by a patriarchal text.³⁶ Fuchs continues her occupation with types in a later, much expanded work, where she contends, for instance, that even the seeming-agency and “positive” portrayals accorded to mothers in the Bible serve merely to reinforce patriarchal ideology.³⁷ A more optimistic view is advanced in the discursive and erudite work of Lori Hope Lefkowitz, who suggests that the “eavesdropping” and laughter of Sarah may offer an alternative to the Jewish feminist consensus that women are defined by alterity or absence: Sarah, instead, is an “outsider looking in, with powers and privileges that accrue from a distance.”³⁸ Shula Keshet

36. Esther Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 117–36. Even the emphasis on a mother’s role in an announcement of conception, pregnancy, and birth is only apparent, Fuchs argues, as all the “scenes” begin with a father and result in the birth of a son (135). This influential article has been reprinted in *Semeia* 46 (1989), 151–66, and Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 127–39. Fuchs’s work both builds on and critiques that of Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic, 2011), first published in 1981. Other typological readings include James G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982), who treats Sarah as an instance of the “arche-mother” type (42–66), and, less technically, Phyllis Silverman Kramer, “Biblical Women That Come in Pairs: The Use of Female Pairs as a Literary Device in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2/1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 218–32, who emphasizes the contrasts between Sarah and Hagar, especially as developed in rabbinic commentary (220–23). Mignon R. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion: The Genesis Narratives and Contemporary Portraits* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 73–102, 129–55, also treats character pairs such as Abraham-Sarah and Sarah-Hagar, in addition to others, in a study that focuses on relational power dynamics and gender in the Bible and the modern world. She concludes that the use and abuse of power is “domain specific,” that is, within contexts of particular relationships, and that its exploitation is not limited to one gender. However, Jacobs contends that power is always shared in a relationship, however lopsided: “there is no such thing as powerlessness, only the perception of it” (71, 129, 154–55; compare 211–12, 215–18). A rather different approach is taken by Klitsner, “Forbidden Fruit,” who develops a reading of Sarah’s story as a two-fold narrative subversion of the events of Eden: while most of Sarah’s relationship with Abraham constitutes a kind of “negative reversal” away from the complementarity that Klitsner sees reflected in Genesis 2, Abraham’s eventual “heeding” of Sarah represents a positive subversion of the woman’s subordination in Genesis 3 (117–21, 129–32). Juxtaposition of the stories of Eve and Sarah is also found in the work of Wénin, mentioned above, and Susan Brayford, discussed in the section on the Septuagint below.

37. Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Bible as a Woman* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 44–49. Fuchs makes an important point here by complicating the issue of “positive” narrative portrayals of female biblical characters, which have been, as she notes, often evaluated as counter-patriarchal in some way. According to Fuchs, even though the “valorization” of mothers grows as the Bible progresses narratively, to the point of a mother becoming “a protagonist and a heroine,” this “valorization is not aimed at the mothers but rather at their instrumentality to the perpetuation of patriarchy” (62, 64–65).

38. The chapter on Sarah and other biblical wives and mothers in Lori Hope Lefkowitz, *In Scripture: The First Stories of Jewish Sexual Identities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 31–46, is a reworked version of Lori Hope Lefkowitz, “Eavesdropping on Angels and Laughing at God: Theorizing a Subversive Matriarchy,” in *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. Tamar Rudavsky (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 157–67. Lefkowitz, who trained in the fields of English and psychoanalysis, offers an impressively interdisciplinary (psychoanalytic, gender-symbolic, and typological) look at selected parts of the matriarchal

extends her typological reading of the sister-wife episodes far beyond the biblical material, suggesting that this “recurring story” represents a “trans-individual” paradigm that expresses the “tension between seclusion and intercultural contact” that defines Jews as a community.³⁹

While the episodic studies surveyed above are limited by their selective narrative windows, many of these thematic and typological efforts are rather narrowly circumscribed by topic, which similarly complicates the construction of a comprehensive portrait of a character such as Sarah. A hallmark of this kind of work, perhaps naturally, is an emphasis on the similarities between the stories of the biblical women considered; to a degree, such an approach represents the converse of the enthusiasm for juxtaposition and contrast that characterizes the method typically employed to discuss the retellings and expansions of the Sarah materials treated below.⁴⁰ But a converse problem also emerges: to schematize and categorize the attributes of these female characters is often to flatten their individual portraits, and perhaps in some cases to obscure them by shoehorning a character into a type. I wonder, for instance, whether the “flatness” Fuchs perceives as typical of many biblical women is not due in part to her own typological lens, where a character like Sarah seemingly never appears outside of type-scenes: if she is not the future mother in an annunciation type-scene, she is the “coveted wife” in the narratives.

39. Shula Keshet, *‘Say You Are My Sister’: Danger, Seduction and the Foreign in Biblical Literature and Beyond*, trans. Anthony Berris, *The Bible in the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 41, 135, 138, and throughout; first published in Hebrew in 2003. After discussing the biblical versions of the story, Keshet treats Joseph and the wife of Potiphar (the “masculine model” of the sister-wife tales), in addition to the book of Esther, before tracing the paradigm through twentieth-century works by Nobel laureate Shai (Shmuel Yosef) Agnon, director Ingmar Bergman (not Jewish, of course, but raised Lutheran), and Semadar Herzfeld, an Israeli novelist.

40. This is, of course, a simplification of the approach of Fuchs, who recognizes that elements of variety deployed within a set framework are as important to constructing meaning as those elements that remain constant (Fuchs, “Literary Characterization,” 119); indeed, it seems that one cannot be defined except with reference to the other. Further, the development of the mother’s role in the annunciation type-scenes is essential to her argument here. But it remains true that Fuchs employs the type-scene as the fundamental heuristic device in her effort to “identify the ideological investments of the biblical narrative” (Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 31), and that similarities in theme or event guide one to designate scenes as representative of types in the first place. This grouping, too, is unavoidably circular, as the attributes of a type must be generated from the constituent members of the type itself, with the members meanwhile being fed back into the type and used as evidence of its existence and frequency.

“adultery type-scene,” or the “barren wife” in a “contest type-scene,” and in all of these cases merely one instantiation of a common type.⁴¹

Survey-style Treatments

Women in the Bible. The third and final broad category of studies touching on Sarah in the MT is comprised primarily of efforts that consider her in the course of a broader survey of women characters in the Bible. Although works of this kind make up what is likely the majority of all treatments of Sarah, this group as a whole is more homogeneous than the episodic and typological categories considered above. The survey-style study traces its origins at least to Grace Aguilar’s *Women of Israel*, first published in 1845.⁴² A large number of similar surveys, marked by a broadly literary, feminist, and often popular tone, have appeared in the past few decades.⁴³

41. Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 118–25, 150–52. See also the typological read of Athalya Brenner, “Female Social Behavior: Two Descriptive Patterns Within the ‘Birth of the Hero’ Paradigm,” *VT* 36 (1986): 259, who argues that Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, and Hannah and Peninnah are all “depicted as individual manifestations of the same model of behaviour, conventionalized stereotypes whose conduct is predictable from the fact that they are female.”

42. Grace Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, reprint, 1845 (New York: D. Appleton, 1851); see 44–76 for Sarah. This work has been reissued with a contribution by Mayer Gruber, *The Women of Israel by Grace Aguilar: Two Volumes in One with a New Introduction and Commentary* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011). One of the most familiar popular volumes in this style is Edith Deen, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955); see 8–16 for Sarah. Efforts of this type are often characterized by a kind of hagiographical paraphrase of the biblical account with some reflection on contemporary life-application for the reader; indeed, taking a “rewritten Bible” approach to this material might prove interesting.

43. A few of the many in this category are Janice Nunally-Cox, *Foremothers: Women of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 5–9; Jon L. Berquist, *Reclaiming Her Story: The Witness of Women in the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1992), 41–53; William E. Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women*, Contributions in Women’s Studies, vol. 128 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 9–17; Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women’s Stories in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 34–61 [note: title as listed in colophon, but cover reads *Women’s Voices*]; Hannelis Schulte, *Dennoch gingen sie aufrecht: Frauengestalten im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 30–36; Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 3–13; Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 5–11, 13, 21–22; Vanessa L. Ochs, *Sarah Laughed: Modern Lessons from the Wisdom and Stories of Biblical Women* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 105–19. A more idiosyncratic path is adopted by Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, mentioned above in connection with the Sarah and Hagar episodes, who largely eschews sustained focus on individual women for a more synthetic and thematic look at “woman” in biblical texts. A further outlier here is Catherine Chalié, *Les Matriarches: Sarah, Rébecca, Rachel et Léa* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 17–78, who reads these figures through a twin lens of Lévinas and rabbinic traditions while foregoing interaction with biblical scholarship almost entirely. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), first published as *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1995), shares some affinities with both of these latter works in its discursive approach and pervasive recourse to rabbinic materials.

A smaller number of studies, while bearing some formal resemblance to these surveys, build on more explicit methodological frameworks and exhibit a greater degree of scholarly interaction.⁴⁴ A few make significant contributions to the study of women in the founding narratives of the Hebrew Bible without, however, interacting with the kind of narrative-critical work on characterization central to my investigation. Sarah Sheckman, for instance, seeks to combine the findings of source and redaction critique with feminist approaches, considering the patriarchal narratives and other women's stories as presented in P and "non-P" from a feminist and ultimately historical perspective.⁴⁵ She concludes that women in non-P have more detailed, active roles, while in P women "are primarily important for genetic reasons," connecting this shift to a historically progressive cultic and societal centralization of Israel that led to diminished status for women.⁴⁶ Irmtraud Fischer has also made several contributions to the analysis of

44. In a survey of women in the Bible that is also a survey of scholarship, Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroines: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 60–62, plus the relevant portions of the bibliography on 271–77, performs a useful service by summarizing and evaluating the efforts of feminist and womanist interpreters on Sarah. The first edition of this work, Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroines: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 70–74 (bibliography on 95–98), is still useful, as some earlier works were necessarily cut in the revision.

45. Sarah Sheckman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009). "Non-P," as is usual, refers here to the combined "material traditionally attributed to J and E," without implying that this material is a historical unity (8, 55). See the methodological remarks in her introduction, 1–8, and especially at the beginning of the body of her own analysis of the patriarchs outside of the P tradition: though Sheckman will necessarily "treat the narrative details," her main object is to read "within a historical context," and she specifically foregoes contact with "the methodological trends of postmodern or new literary criticism" (55).

46. Sheckman, *Women in the Pentateuch*, 170–78. She acknowledges that this distinction between non-P and P is a relative one, and that non-P is also a patriarchal tradition (170, 178). Sheckman's analysis of the Sarah traditions outside of P is largely subsumed under a thematic (she also employs the word "genre," 71–74) treatment that considers childbirth narratives (56–74), the sister-wife scenes (74–79), and genealogical material (79–83), with a brief reading of the Sarah-Hagar complex, where Sarah is characterized as "bitter and hypocritical" (83–84). In the non-P tradition more broadly, Sheckman argues, Sarah is a "major character" in that she is present in the narrative even when passive, and that "concerns about her motivate much of the action" (84). Here Sheckman makes the interesting and suggestive contention that the recurring doubt about Sarah's role in the wider promise narrative makes her a "primary figure," even as it underlines her subordination to Abraham. Sheckman's methodological commitments may prevent her from making explicit comments on the role of the reader here, but the point is well-taken nonetheless: Abraham's role seems clear from the beginning, but the uncertainty over Sarah's part in the promise contributes much to the suspense and interest of the story. In the P material, Sheckman contends, Sarah is marginalized, along with other women characters, and seen as valuable only as a wife and as the "right" mother who helps give rise to the nation Israel. Sarah's seeming-prominence in the MT of Gen 17:16, where it is pledged that she will "turn into nations," is rejected as not original by Sheckman on versional and syntactic grounds; thus Sarah, in Sheckman's reading, is "excluded from the covenant" (137–140, 147, 178). As I argue in Chapter 3, however, even the text as it stands focuses on Isaac as the human party in the covenant; Sarah is his conduit, but no more.

“women texts” in the Pentateuch and elsewhere, primarily from a theological, even confessional and feminist perspective that is nonetheless fully immersed in diachronic, source- and redaction-critical methodologies. Fischer advocates a “gender-fair” exegetical approach devoted to the recovery of biblical women’s stories, and underlines the key roles played by women in the ancestral narratives, contending, for instance, that the divine promise of offspring is given to Sarah and Abraham as a couple.⁴⁷

47. Sarah is thus “the bearer of the promise,” who even ends up the “first heir of the promise of the land” by virtue of her burial there: Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 7, 27, 46. See the similar conclusion of Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar’s Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 29. Fischer’s volume, translated from the second revised edition of *Gottesstreiterinnen: Biblische Erzählungen über die Anfänge Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000 [1995]), is a survey-style treatment of women in Genesis and Exodus, in addition to the figures of Naomi and Ruth. Although it strikes a more popular, accessible tone, much of the material on Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham here is based on her *Habilitationsschrift*, published as Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36*, BZAW 222 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994). This work is a response to the tendency of male, German scholars to downplay the significance of the women in these narratives (1–4), but, unlike many of the efforts by American feminist interpreters with similar motives, Fischer plays mostly within the methodological rules set up by these men. After discussing the socio-cultural status of women in these accounts, as revealed, for example, in birth narratives and depictions of legal institutions such as slavery and marriage (7–116), Fischer performs extremely detailed redaction-critical analyses of several texts dealing with Sarah, Hagar, and Rebekah, discerning multiple layers and determining authorial intention in each stratum (119–258 for the sister-wife narratives; 259–337 for Hagar). In general, Fischer characterizes the “original” layers as “rescue narratives” whose import is altered, usually in a patriarchal direction, by redaction or juxtaposition with other traditions (see, for instance, Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 12, 18–21). See also Irmtraud Fischer, “Das Geschlecht als exegetisches Kriterium: Zu einer gender-fairen Interpretation der Erzeltern-Erzählungen,” in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. André Wénin (Leuven: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 2001), 135–52; Irmtraud Fischer, “Sara als Gründerin des Volkes Israel: Zur Befreiung einer aus männlichem Blick gezeichneten Erzählfigur aus dem Korsett des gender-bias in der Exegese,” in *Sara lacht: Eine Erzmutter und ihre Geschichte*, ed. Rainer Kampling (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 11–26; Irmtraud Fischer, “On the Significance of the ‘Women Texts’ in the Ancestral Narratives,” in *Torah*, ed. Irmtraud Fischer and Mercedes Navarro Puerto, BW 1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 251–93; and Irmtraud Fischer, “Genesis 12–50: The Story of Israel’s Origins as a Women’s Story,” in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 15–32. In view of my broader interests here, it should be noted that Fischer, in *Die Erzeltern Israels*, briefly treats the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the sister-wife episodes in the Genesis Apocryphon and Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*, in addition to Philo’s *On the Life of Abraham* (247–49; 252–54; 254–55), Jubilees (245–47), and Genesis Rabbah (249–52). Here, Fischer briefly compares each retelling to these episodes in Genesis: the Apocryphon displays both Abraham and Sarah in a better light, for example, employing a cautionary dream that supposedly justifies Abraham’s fear, and later emphasizing Sarah’s integrity in the house of Pharaoh; the versions in the *Antiquities*, meanwhile, both burnish Abraham’s image, though to different degrees. In general, Fischer finds, these extracanonical materials are patriarchally focused and idealize both Abraham and Sarah (255–58). In the case of Abraham in particular, Fischer contends, the process of glorifying Abraham that she identifies here reaches its apex in his portrayal in the Testament of Abraham, where he is characterized as sinless (255–56); however, this seems to overlook a basic tension in this work between description or epithet and dramatic portrayal.

Just a few of these efforts approach their surveys from a narrative-critical perspective. Sharon Pace Jeansonne takes the unusual step, among those who claim to take such an approach, of actually discussing her method in some detail.⁴⁸ Schneider, in a more recent survey of women in Genesis, is also more methodologically forward than she is in her earlier monograph on Sarah, treated below.⁴⁹ Both scholars evaluate Sarah positively, in part by emphasizing divine support of the eventual banishment of Hagar.⁵⁰ However, both also subordinate discussion of Sarah to a broader argument. For Jeansonne, Sarah is an example of the Genesis narrator's unapologetic penchant to involve women characters in the story of God's promissory covenant, while Schneider contends in this work that Sarah's identity as mother reflects the "main role and function of women in Genesis."⁵¹

Narrative and feminist commentaries. There are also a few commentary-style treatments of Genesis in the Masoretic text that treat the figure of Sarah at some length in the course of larger analyses. The first—and, so far as I know, still the only—relevant, explicitly narrative-critical offering in the traditional commentary genre is David Cotter's volume in the Berit Olam series, which includes a "quick primer" on narrative analysis before moving through Genesis chapter by chapter.⁵² Cotter devotes much attention to structural matters and discerns a consistent "leitmotif" wherein women, including Sarah, are freed from oppressive situations or relationships by God.⁵³ Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn also treat Sarah in the context of

48. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 3–13. Jeansonne treats characterization, setting, perspective, typing, and other methodological considerations. More typical is Bronner, *Biblical Mothers*, xiii, who claims to take a literary- and narrative-critical approach but instead offers a string of reflections.

49. Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), describes her "new approach," which she calls "verbing the character." This means drawing attention to the characters when they are subjects or objects of verbs, among other narrative moves such as description (11). Unlike Jeansonne, Schneider does not interact with any narrative theorists.

50. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 28; Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 40. In Schneider's case, at least, this verdict may be colored by apologetic motives; see the discussion of her monograph below.

51. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 116; Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 217.

52. David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), xxv-xxxviii.

53. Sarah's Egyptian captivity is the "first instance" of this "important biblical motif": "When a woman is trapped inside a building or a relationship, she is unfree and God acts to save her" (Cotter, *Genesis*, 92; compare 133). For Hagar, see 104, 138–139; and see 329–37 for an attempt to extend this thesis beyond the book of Genesis.

broader projects on Genesis and narrative criticism in the Hebrew Bible, finding that she is “expendable” and of less worth to her husband than his nephew Lot, but also that Sarah imitates Abraham’s cavalier disposition of her sexuality in her own treatment of Hagar.⁵⁴ A number of scholars also provide reflections on Sarah and other women characters in a mostly linear commentary format in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*.⁵⁵ Here, the readings of Sarah vary, sometimes sharply, with the commentator.⁵⁶ The juxtaposition of these competing evaluations foregrounds the roles of reader and approach in interpretation, occasionally at the expense of broader coherence. While several methods are on display, narrative-critical approaches are not explicitly employed, and Second Temple retellings are not engaged.

The “germ” of Cotter’s inside / outside dichotomy is found in the work of Bal (330 n. 2).

54. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 43–45. Abraham’s backward priorities are also underlined, they contend, by his solicitude for the Sodomites in the face of his willingness to sacrifice both of his sons (52–54). This volume, which eventually ranges out of Genesis through the Former Prophets, takes a nontechnical narrative or literary approach within a broader gendered perspective, whereas David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), aims to introduce and demonstrate narrative critical methods. The latter volume analyzes the Sarah and Abraham narrative as an illustration of a theoretical discussion of characters and narrators (90–100), but the reading itself is very similar to that of the former, down to verbatim agreement in many places. Both are partly based upon an earlier lecture published as Danna Nolan Fewell, “Divine Calls, Human Responses: Another Look at Abraham and Sarah,” *PSTJ* 41, no. 4 (1988): 13–16. Other works, such as Hugh C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), provide piecemeal observations on characterization in the context of commentary on one or another episode in which Sarah appears.

55. Eskenazi and Weiss, *Torah*. This work is divided by parashah, or weekly Torah portion according to the Babylonian tradition; for each, a primary author offers a line-by-line commentary, which is followed by a brief, usually methodologically distinct response (“Another View”) and short sections on “Post-biblical [that is, rabbinic] Interpretations” and “Contemporary Reflection,” in addition to various related poetic efforts (“Voices”).

56. Tamara Eskenazi argues that the issue of Sarah’s childlessness becomes “the pivot” of Gen 12–21 (51–52), while Susan Niditch emphasizes themes familiar to readers of her earlier work by characterizing Sarah as a trickster and by underlining the significance of type scenes (59, 63–64, 70–73), concluding that Sarah is “necessary for the covenant and its blessings,” albeit due to her “capacity to procreate” (76; see also Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], esp. 15–19; this work has recently been reissued in a third edition: Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012], esp. 32–36). Tammi Schneider’s reading in *Torah* draws on her arguments in *Sarah: Mother of Nations*, discussed below, and likewise strikes an apologetic tone, contending, for instance, that the object of Sarah’s fear in Gen 18:15 is Abraham, not Yahweh (89). A number of bracketed insertions into Schneider’s parashah (*Vayeira*, 85–104) seem to reflect a contentious editorial process here (see especially 89, where a dissenting opinion from Tikva Frymer-Kensky is placed after Schneider’s statement that Sarah’s laughter is not “derisive”). See also contributions from Carol Meyers (53), Amy-Jill Levine (78), and Esther Fuchs (105).

Two Treatments Devoted to Sarah in the MT

The great majority of treatments of Sarah in the Masoretic text, as detailed above, either deal with a portion of her story or examine her as one instance among others, whether as an instantiation of a type or as an example of a biblical woman, wife, or mother. Only two extended investigations, that of Teubal and that of Schneider, take the story of Sarah as their motive force and strive to render a portrait of her. The following discussion shows, however, that a theoretically informed narrative-critical approach to Sarah that foregrounds characterization, especially as contextualized with refractions of her portrait in Second Temple literature, remains a desideratum.

Teubal's *Sarah the Priestess* takes an idiosyncratic, often speculative approach founded in ancient Near Eastern contexts.⁵⁷ Building on various textual silences, and elements of the narrative such as Sarah's childlessness and Abraham's claim that Sarah is his sister in Gen 20:12, Teubal constructs a picture of Sarah as a (mostly) celibate Mesopotamian priestess who dwells in a sacred precinct at Mamre.⁵⁸ Teubal goes on to cast Sarah's interactions with Pharaoh and Abimelech, as well as her reception of the visitors in Gen 18, as performances of the *hieros gamos* in which the Queen of Heaven, with Sarah as conduit or avatar, joins sexually with earthly rulers.⁵⁹ Teubal's contentions have not garnered broad scholarly support.⁶⁰ Moreover, Teubal's

57. *Sarah the Priestess* began as Teubal's dissertation. Her other, related effort in this line is *Hagar the Egyptian*, excerpted in Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar," and reprinted as Teubal, *Ancient Sisterhood*, as noted above. A much shorter, more mainstream work likewise concerned with ancient Near Eastern contexts is Adrien Janis Bledstein, "The Trials of Sarah," *Judaism* 30 (1981): 411–17, where, among other considerations, the narrative of Sarah's captivity in Egypt is compared with the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers." Even Bledstein's own summary of this narrative shows that it is far more complexly plotted than the laconic Genesis account, however, and her primary aim is to establish that the Egyptian tale is misogynist in order to compare it unfavorably with the biblical record (413–15). Bledstein's ultimate goal is apologetic, as she concludes that, in contrast to the benighted theology underpinning Egyptian and Babylonian myths, "[b]elief in YHVH enabled man to view without fear woman as an equal" (417).

58. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 96–106.

59. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 110–22, esp. 121, and 123–28. Sarah's marriage to Abraham, by Teubal's account, would have been sexless, and the father of Isaac likely Abimelech, or rather the deity whom he represented during the *hieros gamos* ritual (126–28).

60. Many studies that touch on Sarah mention Teubal's work, probably as it is one of the two monograph-length studies of Sarah that exists, but those that do not simply dismiss it out of hand often take a line similar to that

aim, which is the reconstruction of traditions buried deeply behind the text, is very different from mine here.

The only other scholarly work of monograph length devoted to a consideration of Sarah's portrait throughout the MT Genesis account is Schneider's *Sarah: Mother of Nations*, which takes a literary and feminist approach informed by ancient Near Eastern contexts.⁶¹ Here Schneider argues, self-consciously against the grain of traditional interpretation, that "Sarah is as much chosen by the Deity as is Abraham," and that she, more than her husband, fulfills God's demands and helps realize God's promises in the narrative.⁶² A contributing contention is that Abraham is routinely depicted as more concerned with his own fate and that of others, even strangers, than he is with that of his wife, and thus that he consistently leaves Sarah's protection

of Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "More Than the Stars of the Heavens: Critical, Rabbinical, and Feminist Perspectives on Sarah," in *Far More Precious Than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 121–22: "fascinating, highly imaginative," and "suggestive at points," but often founded on "sheer speculation." Some of the connections made by Teubal are very interesting, such as her discussion of a paragraph in the code of Hammurabi that seems to bear a strong resemblance to the situation of Sarah and Hagar described in Gen 16 (33–37; but see the treatment of Schneider, *Sarah*, 51–52, who denies the passage's relevance without interacting directly with Teubal's arguments). However, as Darr notes, the collection of ancient Near Eastern texts that Teubal seeks to bear on the biblical account ranges too widely in date and provenance, resulting in a study that is "haphazard and methodologically problematic" (Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "More Than the Stars," 122).

61. Schneider, *Sarah*, 2–5. As noted earlier, Schneider also treats Sarah in her survey-style volume *Mothers of Promise*, 15–40, and in Eskenazi and Weiss, *Torah*, 85–104, where she comments on the parashah *Vayeira* (Gen 18:1–22:24).

62. Schneider, *Sarah*, 3, 5, 129. Traditional readings, on the other hand, routinely defend Abraham as "the faithful one," as Schneider shows in her discussion of commentators' treatments of the episodes in which Abraham and Sarah individually "laugh" at the news that they will produce a son (Gen 17:17; 18:12). Speiser, for example, renders Abraham's action as a "smile" on the grounds that a "derisive attitude" is inappropriate in his case, whereas Sarah is free to "laugh"; this despite the text's employment of the same root, קחצ, in both cases (Schneider, *Sarah*, 58–59; compare E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed., AB 1 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982], 128). On the matter of Sarah being chosen, note, however, the conclusions of Wénin, mentioned above; Schneider does not seem to be aware of his work. As discussed below, a problem in Schneider's exposition is that her main conversation partners are these "traditional" commentators, which tends to give the misleading impression that Schneider's conclusions are somehow unprecedented.

in the hands of God.⁶³ In the end, Schneider maintains that Sarah's dedication to and election by God is strongly attested throughout the text, and that this is why, in distinction to Abraham, "Sarah does not need to be tested."⁶⁴ This identification of Sarah's deeds and sympathies with the agenda of God, coupled with the natural results of her mistreatment by Abraham, help to soften her image for Schneider, especially in the Hagar episodes.⁶⁵

Although Schneider's work offers what is probably the most extended and detailed portrait of Sarah in the MT to date, several lacunae and weaknesses in her approach leave broad openings for the relevant part of my study. One shortcoming is an apologetic agenda, noted also above in discussion of Schneider's efforts in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, that seeks to protect the image of God, as well as that of Sarah, in the narrative. For instance, Schneider justifies actions of Sarah that commentators often find morally dubious, such as her treatment of Hagar, by identifying her conduct with the will of "the Deity," which is left unquestioned; both characters are thus summarily let off the hook. So "Sarai's actions may not seem 'nice,'" when she "humbles" Hagar in Gen 16:6, but as she's not said to be "out of line" with God's plans, no critique of either character is possible.⁶⁶ This is a perspectival issue that Schneider could have

63. Schneider, *Sarah*, 18. Abram is selfish in Gen 12, while dealing with Sarai in Egypt, but selfless in Gen 13 when negotiating with Lot (37–38); Abraham tries to protect (apparently nonexistent) righteous people in Gen 18, after having failed to defend his wife earlier, where (on Schneider's reading) he criticizes Sarah for her laughter at the news of Isaac's nativity despite having reacted the same way himself (73–76); Abraham abandons Sarah to Abimelech in Gen 20, and raises no protest when directed to sacrifice their son, Isaac, in Gen 22, leaving both to the mercy of God, though he displays concern over the fate of Ishmael in 17:18 and 21:11 (86–89, 104). Only after Sarah's death in Gen 23 does Abraham seem to act with any consideration for her (117). Some of the conclusions here resemble those in Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, mentioned above.

64. Schneider, *Sarah*, 106. This argument is explicitly built against Tribble's contentions in *Sacrifice of Sarah*.

65. Schneider, *Sarah*, 48, 53, 94–95, 107.

66. Schneider, *Sarah*, 53. In the same vein, while Schneider acknowledges that the final banishing of Hagar in Gen 21 "has many problems for feminists," the plans and preferences of "the Deity, or Elohim," who "has a clear goal and carries through with it," are simply a "painful reality" in the text, and as Sarah "acts to protect the Deity's wishes" here, she, too, is doing the right thing—hard as all this may be "for a modern audience to handle" (101–02). The message throughout is that God's plans are inscrutable and unfair, but that they, along with anyone who forwards them, must remain beyond criticism. As in Schneider's later writing in *Torah*, which is based upon her work here, her apologetic tendencies are also found in her reading of Gen 18, where she insists that the character who "catches" Sarah's lie about her laughter (which Schneider asserts doesn't indicate "questioning of the Deity's plans" but "joy," 72) must be Abraham, contending that "it is hard to imagine that Sarah would fear the Deity," given that the Deity delivered her before and will do so again (73). However, Schneider seems to overlook her own

ameliorated by simply owning her bias; other problems, however, are methodological in nature. While Schneider professes to adopt a “literary” approach, she only hints at her methodology here and is almost completely innocent of interaction with narrative-critical theory, although such studies, especially those focusing on characterization, would seem to be natural resources in a project that “evaluates the character of Sarah and her role in the text.”⁶⁷ This lack of interaction, curiously, extends to previous work on Sarah generally. A glance at Schneider’s rather brief bibliography shows that over a third of her sources deal with ancient Near Eastern data and the archaeological record, and while she cites efforts by major contributors such as Exum, Fewell and Gunn, Fuchs, Jeansonne, and Tribble, this is only a fraction of the relevant work, as shown in the survey and notes above.⁶⁸ Further, even more puzzlingly, her stated primary conversation partners are not those, such as Fewell and Gunn or Jeansonne, who have taken a narrative or “literary” approach to the Sarah materials, but the older, more traditional commentaries of Brueggemann, Speiser, and von Rad.⁶⁹ Schneider’s specific contributions to a “literary” reading

sensible caution that “the text gives no indication that Sarai knows” that it was the Deity who intervened in Egypt (50), and to adduce events yet to come in the story in support of an evaluation of Sarah’s interior feelings here makes no narrative sense. These efforts to protect God’s image in the text are all the more curious given Schneider’s explanation of her consistent use of “the Israelite Deity” or “the Deity” as circumlocutions for Yahweh (6 n. 16; see also Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 10 n. 1). She frames this as a device that “distances” the character of Yahweh from the “God” with whom many modern readers may have a relationship, thus putting the character “on a footing more similar to the others in the book” (*Sarah*, 6 n. 16). However, as Schneider never substantively questions the actions of “the Deity” as a character, the actual effect of this circumlocution on me as a reader is to reinforce the identification of this character with the God of the universe.

67. Schneider, *Sarah*, 2. As noted above, Schneider’s *Mothers* has a bit more methodological discussion; however, this is not framed with reference to any other narrative contributions. Schneider does comply here with some of the canons of narrative criticism, such as a general principle of linearity, and she displays great concern to consciously set limits on, and justify connections between, biblical episodes. An idiosyncrasy of Schneider’s approach here, however, is that she depends throughout on what she calls the Masoretic “blocking,” especially the division markers delimiting פרשות, or weekly readings according to the one-year Babylonian liturgical cycle, and the פרשיות markings noting “open” (פתוחא) or “closed” (סתומא) paragraphs: “the Masoretic division of the text will not be secondary but will be integral in terms of dividing and, therefore, interpreting the text” (3). She rightly notes that these demarcations can provide valuable perspective as an antique (medieval, really) “form of commentary” (3), but it is unclear why this kind of textual division should have greater intrinsic relevance to a “literary” reading of the Bible than, for example, modern editorial paragraphing in versions. Also, Schneider’s apparent desire to avoid overly technical discussion here tends to telescope a process of development of considerable geographical and temporal complexity into a monolithic “Masoretic tradition.” For more on these paratextual elements in the MT, see Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 155–56, 167, 169–70.

68. The bibliography is found on 134–37. Most of the secondary literature on ancient Near Eastern sources is from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

of Sarah are thus all the more difficult to discern. It is not enough to argue against “traditional approaches” as if these still dominated the field; again, the survey above shows that there are many other options. Finally, in further distinction from my broader study, Schneider does not discuss later transformations of Sarah’s portrait.⁷⁰

In summary, a number of studies treating Sarah in the MT focus on one episode, or on a closely related pair of episodes, and thus cannot offer a comprehensive portrait. Others privilege a theme or typology and likewise fail to consider elements that fall outside their particular scheme. Readings of Sarah within broader surveys are numerous, but often brief and popular in tone; only a few have affinities with the kind of narrative-critical project envisioned here, and these also subordinate Sarah’s story to a reading of women in Genesis. Only two extended studies, those of Teubal and Schneider, take Sarah’s narrative trajectory in Genesis as their organizing principle; the former, as noted, is speculative and aimed at traditions behind the text, while the latter possesses several shortcomings, detailed just above. Finally, regardless of form, focus, or approach, the studies that also consider Sarah’s other portraits from Second Temple literature amount to a mere handful, and none of the works treated above interacts with other narratives in depth. The project of my investigation, then, has a real opportunity to contribute to the broader conversation, both in its new, narrative-critical character study of Sarah in the MT and in its larger synthetic aims, which concern subsequent portraits of Sarah in Second Temple literature.

69. Schneider, *Sarah*, 4–5.

70. Schneider does make occasional reference to rabbinic interpretation, as in her treatment of the fallout from Sarah’s laughter (70–71). However, here she is simply quoting Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, “More Than the Stars,” 103 (who is, in turn, quoting Ginzberg’s *Legends of the Jews*), and there seems to be some confusion in Schneider’s statement that the “rabbis even comment that the Deity’s response in 18:15 (assuming it is the Deity speaking to Sarah) is a distortion of Sarah’s actions” (70). But the reference must be to Gen 18:13, where Sarah’s note of Abraham’s advanced age is omitted in reportage, and here there can be no “assumption” of speaker, as the explicit subject of יהוה is ויאמר.

The Portrait of Sarah in the Septuagint

Aside from work on figures such as Judith and Susanna, who lack an extant Hebrew precursor, extended studies of women characters in the Septuagint (LXX) or Old Greek (OG) are not common.⁷¹ As a perhaps natural corollary of their basic approach, which entails contrasting the MT and the LXX in order to analyze their differences, what investigations do exist tend to concentrate on narratives that feature significant discrepancies in the text histories of their respective Hebrew and Greek traditions. The most comprehensive example of this is Linda Day's monograph on Esther's disparate characterizations in the MT and the two major Greek versions of her story.⁷² Other, briefer treatments include Michael Legaspi's discussion of the relatively lengthy speech of Job's wife in the OG version of that book (Job 2:9 LXX) and Stanley Walter's detailed comparison of the characters "Hannah" and "Anna" in 1 Sam/1 Kgdms 1.⁷³

The consideration of women in the Greek text of Genesis provides a partial exception to this general trend. However, most treatments here concentrate on the figure of the woman eventually named Eve. Others favor a gender-studies approach, emphasizing competing ancient

71. For these terms and their sigla, see my notes at the beginning of Chapter 4. For Judith and Susanna, see for example Toni Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, SBLDS (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), and Amy-Jill Levine, "'Hemmed in on Every Side': Jews and Women in the Book of Susanna," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 303–23. An interesting article that considers the relationships of Judith, Susanna, and the book of Tobit's Sarah with their respective female slaves is that of Jennifer A. Glancy, "The Mistress-Slave Dialectic: Paradoxes of Slavery in Three LXX Narratives," *JSOT* 72 (1996): 71–87. Her work is partly prompted by the relatively greater attention paid by scholarship to the relationship between the Sarah of MT Genesis and Hagar (86). On the general dearth of studies on "women in the translated books of the LXX," compare Jennifer M. Dines, "What If the Reader is a She? Biblical Women and Their Translators," in *The Reception of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint and the New Testament: Essays in Memory of Aileen Guilding*, ed. David J. A. Clines and J. Cheryl Exum (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 57.

72. Day, *Three Faces*. See also Kristin De Troyer, "Septuagint and Gender Studies: The Very Beginning of a Promising Liaison," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 338–43.

73. Michael C. Legaspi, "Job's Wives in the *Testament of Job*: A Note on the Synthesis of Two Traditions," *JBL* 127 (2008): 76–79 (see also Katherine Low, "Domestic Disputations at the Dung Heap: A Reception History of Job and His Wife in Christianity of the West" [Ph.D. diss., Brite Divinity School, 2010], 72–73, and Caitlin Norton, "A Clever Twist to a Classic Tale: A Fresh Perspective on Job's Wife in Job 2:9," in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, vol. 2, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011], 52–65); Stanley D. Walters, "Hannah and Anna: The Greek and Hebrew Texts of 1 Samuel 1," *JBL* 107 (1988): 385–412.

sociologies of gender and their mutual interplay in Mediterranean societies, rather than engaging a narrative perspective that foregrounds characterization.⁷⁴

The only sustained discussion of the depiction of Sarah—here eventually called Sarra—in LXX Genesis is found in the work of Susan Ann Brayford.⁷⁵ Brayford foregrounds the influence of the Mediterranean code of honor and shame on the Alexandrian translators of Genesis, contending that their absorption of the “social values” of their Hellenistic environment resulted in a Septuagint Sarah who is recast as a “model, i.e., shameful, Hellenistic wife.”⁷⁶ After arguing on historical and philological grounds that divergences between LXX Genesis and its *Vorlage* are interpretive and attributable to the Alexandrian Jewish community’s attempt to ally with the city’s Greeks against its native Egyptians, Brayford tries to show that some of these disparities amount to an effacement in the LXX of what she contends is the MT’s more frankly sexual portrayal of women, including Sarah.⁷⁷ Finally, Brayford seeks to demonstrate that this positive

74. Examples include Ma. Maricel Seña Ibita, “What is This You Have Done? A Characterization of the Woman in the Trial of Genesis 3 in MT and LXX,” in *Florilegium Lovaniense: Studies in Septuagint and Textual Criticism in Honour of Florentino García Martínez*, ed. Hans Ausloos, Bénédicte Lemmelijn, and Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 223–43; Stefan Schorch, “Hellenizing Women in the Biblical Tradition: The Case of LXX Genesis,” *BIOSCS* 41 (2008): 3–16; and Helen Kraus, *Gender Issues in Ancient and Reformation Translations of Genesis 1–4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 3, “The Story of Andrew and Zoe,” 40–66.

75. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming”; see also Susan Ann Brayford, “To Shame or not to Shame: Sexuality in the Mediterranean Diaspora,” *Semeia* 87 (1999): 163–76, which, in addition to summarizing her dissertation’s arguments on Sarah (169–72), considers several other Pentateuchal texts from the perspective of the Mediterranean code of honor and shame; Susan Ann Brayford, “Feminist Criticism: Sarah Laughs Last,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 311–31; and Susan Ann Brayford, *Genesis*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Piecemeal comments on Sarah are also found in the only other commentary devoted to Genesis in the LXX, Marguerite Harl, *La Genèse*, La Bible d’Alexandrie, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1986). Both Brayford and Harl provide a translation along with running commentary.

76. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 51, 153. Brayford argues that Alexandrian Jews adopted this “Mediterranean variant of the honor/shame social value system (i.e., libidinized social reputation)” (146), which is to be distinguished from a Palestinian variant that is less concerned with restricting women’s sexuality; see below. “Shameful” in this context is not pejorative, denoting rather a woman possessed of positive “shame,” meaning “modesty, virginity, seclusion” (130): “a woman of shame is the status equivalent of a man of honor” (Brayford, “To Shame or not to Shame,” 163).

77. By this reading, the translators of Genesis “transformed Sarah from a sexual Jewish matriarch into a shameful Hellenistic wife” (Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 155; see also 17, 48–50, 96–97, 146–50, 178–79, 185–87, 211–12). Brayford’s treatment of Sarah turns largely on the Septuagint’s failure to render the possible sexual connotations of עַדְנָה (which, however, is *hapax legomenon*) in Gen 18:12 (182–87). In addition to Sarah, Brayford discusses Eve (168–75, 179–82) and Rebekah and Rachel (200–203), contrasting all these with the translators’ treatment of Potiphar’s wife (204–10). Some of these analyses are more convincing than others; the

“shaming” of Sarah in the LXX is the foundation of her depiction in Hellenistic Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus, while other translations and rewritten biblical accounts, supposedly influenced by a more “Palestinian” ethos characterized by “more liberal attitudes about female sexuality,” lack such an amplification of Sarah’s shame.⁷⁸

Brayford’s work is relevant to my study not only because it is the sole extended consideration of Sarah in the LXX, but also because it considers, albeit relatively briefly, her “postbiblical literary afterlife” in a number of other narratives, some of which are to be treated below.⁷⁹ Brayford’s approach and concerns, however, are very different from those pursued here. Foremost for Brayford is the lens of honor and shame, which informs her entire presentation. This results in a selective reading of the LXX, in ways that echo the respective restrictions in scope of the episodic and typological studies treated above in the MT section. Only parts of Sarah’s story contribute to an examination of the code of honor and shame as Brayford defines it, and so only certain pericopes—especially that containing Gen 18:12, which is the linchpin of her larger argument—are considered at length. Sarah’s complex interaction with Hagar, for instance, certainly a major facet of Sarah’s characterization in both MT and LXX, is mostly left out of the discussion. In addition, Brayford’s occupation with honor and shame means that she approaches Sarah primarily as a representative of a category, that of “shameful” Hellenistic matron, within this sociological scheme. Thus, for Brayford’s argument, Sarah as a character is less important than Sarah as the most pronounced example of a theme that is also revealed in the LXX portraits of Rebekah and Rachel. In contrast, I employ narrative-critical approaches that foreground

section on the “shaming” of Rebekah and Rachel, which seems to equate a naturally Greek hypotaxis with “obfuscation” (200–203), is particularly thin.

78. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 213–58, 272. “Hellenistic” and “Palestinian” are more cultural than geographical terms here (272). Brayford contends that a Palestinian text informed by these more “liberal” values, such as Jubilees, may still “tame” the figure of Sarah insofar as it downplays aspects of sexuality in general. This is to be distinguished, however, from the “shame” Brayford attributes to the influence of the “Mediterranean” honor/shame code (228). Again, this “shame” has culturally positive connotations in its context.

79. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 215. Brayford looks at the treatment of Sarah, at least in the context of Gen 18:12 and occasionally in the broader narrative, in Aquila and Symmachus (217–18), the targumim (218–20), Jubilees (224–28), the Genesis Apocryphon (229–31, 33), Pseudo-Philo (235–37), Philo (241–45), and Josephus (251–55), and cites her mentions in the New Testament (257–58).

characterization to pursue a portrait of Sarah as an individual actor in the LXX, in addition to the other narratives, in each instance considering the full arc of her story and declining to subordinate my reading to thematic concerns.

Brayford's handling of the versions of Sarah's story beyond the LXX provides another distinctive, as these are supplementary, sometimes even peripheral, to Brayford's central project of comparing the MT and LXX narratives. I strive not to privilege any of these versions, including that in the MT. In every case, too, in keeping with her selective reading of the LXX, Brayford's analysis of the other Second Temple texts is limited to the questions prompted by her honor and shame perspective.⁸⁰

Finally, perhaps even more fundamental to Brayford's procedure than her sociological framework is her consistent juxtaposition and contrast of the MT and the LXX.⁸¹ As will be noted throughout the remainder of this chapter, this is characteristic of the great majority of work on "rewritten Bible" broadly conceived, and it is at variance with the basic concerns of narrative-critical reading, pursued here, which emphasize the simple necessity of considering the full and

80. Brayford's primary concern in this section is to determine whether the attitude of each text or author considered resembles or differs from that which she identifies as characteristic of the Alexandrian Septuagint. For example, Brayford, who generally adopts an author-centered approach, concludes that the composer of the Genesis Apocryphon "most likely would have allowed Sarah" her sexuality, that is, not "shamed" her, if more data about her had survived in the text (233; this seems to assume both that the extant episode of the Egyptian sister-wife tale has nothing to say on the matter, and that the original text contained the episode of Sarah's laughter). Thus Brayford's evaluation of the Apocryphon places it in a category with other "Palestinian" texts such as Jubilees, LAB, the revisions of Aquila and Symmachus, and the Palestinian targumim—as distinguished from efforts (supposedly) from the diaspora such as Onqelos—in that it does not "shame" Sarah or other women. Philo and Josephus, however, according to Brayford, follow the Alexandrian translators' lead by emphasizing issues of shame. Brayford's discussion of Philo centers on his allegorical material, where, she argues, he continues this tendency of the LXX to make Sarah "shameful" by casting her as an asexual being, and even "goes further by claiming that Sarah was a virgin" (245; it is unclear, however, why virginity should be conceived of as a "further," apparently more extreme state than asexuality, or, even more basically, why the two concepts should be even partially identified: being "shameful," in Brayford's own exposition, indicates not a lack of sexuality, but a culturally appropriate channeling of sexuality, and virginity seems to be scarcely definable outside of a sexual scheme). Josephus, for Brayford, also continues the process begun in the LXX, perhaps occasionally even by simple paraphrase, in showing Sarah to be an "appropriately shameful Hellenistic wife" (252, 254).

81. See the first sentence of the abstract appended to her dissertation (unpaginated, following the bibliography): "In this dissertation, I examine the differences between Sarah's portrayal in the Hebrew Bible and her representation in the Septuagint."

linear rhetorical sweep of a narrative in its interpretation.⁸² The plain dependence of the LXX on the MT does generate theoretical obstacles for my project, as I note at the outset of Chapter 4, below. Yet my primary aim is not to isolate and discuss the differences between these traditions, but to perform a reading of Sarra that respects the integrity of the LXX as a narrative in its own right, with its own idiom and internal coherence. A tangible opportunity still remains, then, for my study's examination of the portrait of Sarah as she appears in the LXX.

The Portrait of Sarah in the Genesis Apocryphon

A significant amount of research in the area of “rewritten Bible” concerns the retelling of the antediluvian and “Abramic” sections of Genesis in the Genesis Apocryphon (GenAp).⁸³

82. Translations such as the Septuagint are usually excluded from all but the most broad definitions of “rewritten Bible,” though Géza Vermès included the “Palestinian Targum” (really a group of targumim such as Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan) in his description when he coined the term: Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition*, 95. See the critique of Vermès on this matter in Moshe J. Bernstein, “‘Rewritten Bible’: A Generic Category Which Has Outlived its Usefulness?” *Text 22* (2005): 174–75, and Vermès’s pointed response in Géza Vermès, “The Genesis of the Concept of ‘Rewritten Bible,’” in *Rewritten Bible After Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Géza Vermès*, ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 8: “And this may be the bee in my bonnet, the works gathered under the umbrella of the Palestinian Pentateuch Targum are ideal sources for the study of the ‘Rewritten Bible.’” See also the further discussion of the definition of “rewritten Bible” in the notes to the Genesis Apocryphon section just below.

83. On the name of this work, and abbreviations for it, see my comments at the beginning of Chapter 5. Relatively recent major contributions to research on the Apocryphon include Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1 (1Q20): A Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2004); Daniel K. Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts: Strategies for Extending the Scriptures in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Companion to the Qumran Scrolls (London: T & T Clark, 2007), chapter 2, “The Genesis Apocryphon”; and Daniel A. Machiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13–17*, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 2009). It should be noted here, in connection with the discussion of the first work treated in this study that is often termed “rewritten Bible,” that the scope and basic utility of this term are matters of fractious debate. Other, often overlapping categories, each with their partisans, include “revised Bible,” “reworked Bible,” “rewritten Scripture,” and “parabiblical” compositions, and it is frequently unclear just what these labels are meant to define. Are these genres, interpretive postures, or something else? Or are all of these simply modern taxonomic descriptors influenced by an anachronistic canonical perspective? On these general issues, see Bernstein, “‘Rewritten Bible’”; Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 9–15; Erkki Koskenniemi and Pekka Lindqvist, “Rewritten Bible, Rewritten Stories: Methodological Aspects,” in *Rewritten Bible Reconsidered*, ed. Antti Laato and Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, Studies in Rewritten Bible, vol. 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 11–39; Antti Laato, “Gen 49:8–12 and Its Interpretation in Antiquity: A Methodological Approach to Understanding of the Rewritten Bible,” in *Rewritten Biblical Figures*, ed. Erkki Koskenniemi and Pekka Lindqvist, Studies in Rewritten Bible, vol. 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 1–26; Molly M. Zahn, “Talking About Rewritten Texts: Some Reflections on Terminology,” in *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, ed. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila, BZAW 419 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 93–119; Molly M.

However, while her husband comes under some scrutiny, the character of Sarah, here called Sarai, is largely passed over in the literature.⁸⁴ Sarai features prominently only in work on the so-called *wasf* or description poem of GenAp 20.2–8, which details her physical and mental charms,

Zahn, “Genre and Rewritten Scripture: A Reassessment,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 271–88; and Jonathan G. Campbell, “Rewritten Bible: A Terminological Reassessment,” in *Rewritten Bible After Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Géza Vermès*, ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 49–81, along with the other essays in that volume. For the Apocryphon specifically, Bernstein argues elsewhere that it is best conceived as “multigeneric,” a “*Mischgattung*,” given its apparently composite nature, although he still characterizes the “book of Abram” section, with which this study is partly concerned, as “rewritten Bible”: Moshe J. Bernstein, “The Genre(s) of the *Genesis Apocryphon*,” in *Aramaica Qumranica*, ed. Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 332–34, 336–38. Given my discussion of typical scholarly approaches to “rewritten” material in this chapter, it is worth noting that Bernstein is one of the few who advocates reading the Apocryphon on its own terms: Moshe J. Bernstein, “Is the Genesis Apocryphon a Unity? What Sort of Unity Were You Looking For?” *AS* 8 (2010): 133–34; see also Moshe J. Bernstein, “Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Looking Back and Looking Ahead,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Contemporary Culture: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (July 6–8, 2008)*, ed. Adolfo D. Roitman, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Shani Tzoref (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 156 n. 44, and his many presentations, such as Moshe J. Bernstein, “Can We Really Read the *Genesis Apocryphon* Without the Book of Genesis?” a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, IL, Nov. 19, 2012, on this topic. For another view on the nature of this text, see Hans Debel, “Editions, Reworkings, and the Continuity of Tradition: Some Experimental Considerations on the *Genesis Apocryphon*,” in *The Scrolls and Biblical Traditions: Proceedings of the Seventh Meeting of the IOQS in Helsinki*, ed. George J. Brooke, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 102–5, who contends that the Apocryphon is best understood as a “variant literary edition” of Genesis. In my work here, I employ the appellation “rewritten Bible” as a pragmatic, umbrella term that is focused more on scholarly reception than ancient generic categories.

84. For fairly recent examples concentrating on Abraham, similarly only named Abram in the extant text of the Apocryphon, see Reinhard G. Kratz, “‘Abraham, mein Freund’: Das Verhältnis von inner- und ausserbiblischer Schriftauslegung,” in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition: Festschrift für Matthias Köckert*, ed. Anselm Hagedorn and Henrik Pfeiffer, BZAW 400 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 115–36; Beate Ego, “The Figure of Abraham in the Genesis Apocryphon’s Re-Narration of Gen 12:10–20,” in *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited: Texts from Cave 1 Sixty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Sixth Meeting of the IOQS in Ljubljana*, ed. Donald W. Parry, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 233–43; and Michael Becker, “Abraham in the Genesis Apocryphon,” in *Rewritten Biblical Figures*, ed. Erkki Koskeniemi and Pekka Lindqvist, Studies in Rewritten Bible, vol. 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 89–108. For Sarai, part of the problem is that the Apocryphon breaks off near the beginning of the “covenant between the parts,” which corresponds to Gen 15, and thus the stay in Egypt is the only surviving episode where she is explicitly involved. However, this tale is much expanded. The more extensive treatments among the literature, such as those of Fitzmyer, Falk, and Machiela, mentioned above, occasionally deal with Sarai in a piecemeal fashion (for example, Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 85–87, 93–94), but she does not appear as the focus of much extended comment.

and even here her characterization is not usually the primary object of analysis.⁸⁵ Indeed, sustained study of any female characters in the Apocryphon is not easy to find. In a paper composed in the late 1990s, Eileen Schuller wrote that George Nickelsburg's article "Patriarchs Who Worry About Their Wives" was "the most comprehensive study that I know of the women in the Genesis Apocryphon." However, as she notes, the article in question is a wide-ranging treatment of many themes in this narrative, only some of which have relevance to the characterization of the women in the text.⁸⁶ Among a number of lines of inquiry, Nickelsburg notes a "psychologizing" interest in the emotions of characters such as Bitenosh, Lamech, Sarai, and Abram, and points up significant parallels between the stories built around Noah's birth and Sarai's captivity, suggesting that miscegenation is a social concern for the composer of the Apocryphon.⁸⁷ Some of Nickelsburg's conclusions here seem less than complementary. Although

85. See especially Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Beauty of Flora and the Beauty of Sarai," *Helios* 8 (1981): 41–53; Sebastian P. Brock and Simon Hopkins, "A Verse Homily on Abraham and Sarah in Egypt: Syriac Original with Early Arabic Translation," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992): 87–145; and J. F. van Rensburg, "Intellect and/or Beauty: A Portrait of Women in the Old Testament and Extra Biblical Literature," *Journal for Semitics* 11 (2002): 112–25. Other contributions on the description poem include James C. VanderKam, "The Poetry of 1 Q Ap Gen, XX, 2–8a," *RevQ* 10 (1979–81): 57–66; Sara Japhet, "The 'Description Poems' in Ancient Jewish Sources and in the Jewish Exegesis of the Song of Songs," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 216–29; and Peter Y. Lee, "Aramaic Poetry in Qumran" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011), 342–80.

86. Eileen Schuller, "Response to 'Patriarchs Who Worry About Their Wives: A Haggadic Tendency in the Genesis Apocryphon'," in *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 201. Schuller says here that the title of this article "may suggest that the essay is to be aligned primarily with that substantial body of scholarship from the last twenty years or so that explores how biblical women are portrayed—or not portrayed—in biblical retellings from the Second Temple period," before showing that the piece's interest in women is merely one strand in a complicated presentation. But even the grammar of its title betrays more interest in the "patriarchs" than in their "wives." See George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Patriarchs Who Worry About Their Wives: A Haggadic Tendency in the Genesis Apocryphon," in *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*, vol. 1, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 177–99; originally published as George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Patriarchs Who Worry About Their Wives: A Haggadic Tendency in the Genesis Apocryphon," in *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12–14 May, 1996*, ed. Michael E. Stone and Esther G. Chazon (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 137–58. Schuller has a more recent chapter—"Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Research in the Past Decade and Future Directions," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Contemporary Culture: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (July 6–8, 2008)*, ed. Adolfo D. Roitman, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Shani Tzoref (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 571–88—which, however, does not address women characters.

87. Nickelsburg, "Patriarchs Who Worry," 183–84, 188, 190–93, 196, in his Festschrift volume. On the interest in the emotions of the characters, compare Yair Zakovitch and Avigdor Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt: Gen 12:10–20 in the Bible, the Old Versions and the Ancient Jewish Literature* (in Hebrew), Research Projects of

he contends, for instance, that Bitenosh and Sarai are each “brought to the foreground as a viable character,” and that the Apocryphon in its erotic interests “does not evidence a misogynistic or an ascetic, anti-sex bias,” these aspects are hard to square with his finding that the “sexuality of Israelite women is a clear and present danger” in the text.⁸⁸ In the years since the appearance of these essays, exegetes have not displayed any concentrated interest in the stories of the women of the Genesis Apocryphon from any perspective, let alone from a narrative or literary approach.⁸⁹ This neglect leaves a broad opening for a narrative inquiry into the portrait of Sarai here.⁹⁰

The Portrait of Sarah in Josephus

It is surprising, given the breadth of primary material available, that scholarship has devoted only relatively sporadic attention to Josephus’s characterizations of women in his retellings of biblical narratives (chiefly, that is, in the *Jewish Antiquities* [*Ant.*] 1.27–11.296).⁹¹

the Institute of Jewish Studies Monograph Series, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1983), 148–49.

88. Nickelsburg, “Patriarchs Who Worry,” 192–94. It is curious that the erotic concerns of the Apocryphon, notably Bitenosh’s protestations about the genuine nature of her orgasms and the *wasf* or description poem in praise of Sarai—which Nickelsburg describes as lingering “in delicious detail” over her attributes, 187—are thought to be necessarily incompatible with misogyny.

89. The recent study of Dan Rickett, “Creating an Unrighteous Outsider: The Separation of Abram and Lot in Early Scriptural Retellings,” *CBQ* 76 (2014): 611–33, while not concerned with women, does consider Lot’s characterization in the Genesis Apocryphon, making it a rare narrative-critical reading of this text.

90. Of some interest, but not treating Sarai or her characterization at any length, are Moshe Weinfeld, “Sarah and Abimelech (Genesis 20) Against the Background of an Assyrian Law and the Genesis Apocryphon,” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Mathias Delcor*, ed. A. Caquot, S. Légasse, and M. Tardieu (Kevelaer, Germany: Butzon & Bercker, 1985), 431–36, originally published in Hebrew as Moshe Weinfeld, “Sarah in Abimelech’s Palace (Genesis 20): Against the Background of Assyrian Law and the Genesis Apocryphon,” *Tarbiz* 52 (1982/83): 639–42; James C. VanderKam, “The Granddaughters and Grandsons of Noah,” *RevQ* 16 (1993–95): 457–61; Moshe J. Bernstein, “Re-Arrangement, Anticipation, and Harmonization as Exegetical Features in the Genesis Apocryphon,” *DSD* 3 (1996): 37–57; and Thierry Legrand, “Exégèses targumiques et techniques de réécriture dans l’*Apocryphe de la Genèse* (1QapGen ar),” in *Aramaica Qumranica*, ed. Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 225–52.

91. Part of the issue is that the volume of scholarship devoted to this section of the *Antiquities* has, until fairly recently, remained “surprisingly small,” despite the generally high level of interest in Josephus’s works: Louis H. Feldman, translation and commentary, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, ed. Steve Mason, *FJTC* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), xxxvii. For Josephus on women outside his biblical retellings, see for example Shelly Matthews, “Ladies’ Aid: Gentile Noblewomen as Saviors and Benefactors in the Antiquities,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 199–218; Jan Willem van Henten, “Blaming the Women: Women at Herod’s Court in Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities 15.23–231,” in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 153–75; and the work of Tal Ilan, discussed below. The

Louis Feldman notes this dearth of interest in the 1998 update of his 1986 article on Deborah in Josephus, mentioning in this connection only the very brief treatment of Evelyn Stagg and Frank Stagg in the late 1970s, in addition to the efforts of Betsy Halpern-Amaru and Cheryl Anne Brown, which are discussed below.⁹² Feldman's own anthology of comparative character studies in Josephus, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, considers the historian's portraits of Ruth and Esther, in addition to that of Deborah, but these three investigations are sprinkled among the thirty-one articles that concentrate on male characters.⁹³ In the cases of both Deborah and Ruth,

detailed work of Bärbel Mayer-Schärtel, *Das Frauenbild des Josephus: Eine sozialgeschichtliche und kulturanthropologische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995), should also be mentioned here. Among other testimony, Mayer-Schärtel does utilize data from Josephus's depictions of biblical women (for example, 112–16, 143–44, 218–21, 264–66, 272–74, 280–82), but always in the service of her larger cultural-anthropological inquiry.

92. Louis H. Feldman, "Deborah," in *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 153, n. 1. Originally published as Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Deborah," in *Hellenica et Judaica: Hommage à Valentin Nikiprowetzky*, ed. André Caquot, Mireille Hadas-Lebel, and Jean Riaud (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 115–28. See Evelyn Stagg and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 45–48. As Feldman notes, the Staggs do not concentrate on Josephus's narrative developments of biblical women; where these are mentioned, they serve only to highlight various editorial remarks of Josephus in order to reveal his perspective on the question of "woman" (45). It is unclear whether Feldman's omission here of any mention of the work of Bailey, which appears in a volume that Feldman himself edited and is discussed below, is a simple oversight or a tacit dismissal of the latter's treatment. The former might be more likely, as Feldman does cite Bailey's evaluation of Sarah in his subsequent commentary on the *Antiquities*, and this with seeming approval: Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 71 n. 589; see below. Other, earlier efforts occasionally mentioned in the secondary literature as relevant to the investigation of Josephus's portrayal of women characters are those of Braun, van Unnik, and Franxman. Martin Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), treats parts of Josephus's version of the episode of Potiphar's wife and Joseph in passing, but his primary concern here is to demonstrate the adoption of motifs from the Phaedra legend (as developed, for instance, in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides) by the Testament of Joseph. The portion of this work concerned with Joseph and Potiphar's wife builds on Martin Braun, *Griechischer Roman und hellenistische Geschichtschreibung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1934), which details Josephus's incorporation of novelistic and erotic elements into his retelling here. Neither shows much interest in the characterization of the wife. The study of W. C. van Unnik, "Josephus' Account of the Story of Israel's Sin with Alien Women in the Country of Midian (Num. 25:1ff)," in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Professor M. A. Beek on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss, Ph. H. J. Houwink ten Cate, and N. A. van Uchelen (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 241–61, is not primarily concerned with Josephus's treatment of biblical women, either, but concentrates on the oblique commentary on contemporary apostasy that Josephus's version of this story may provide. Finally, Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), provides a linear comparison of the *Antiquities* and Genesis, and as such includes cursory discussion of the women characters as they appear in the narrative. Aside from an occasional remark (Sarah is shown as "both kindly and reasonable," for example, 154, and Josephus displays "a certain sympathy" for the wife of Potiphar, 233), however, their characterization is not of central concern.

93. This fact is perhaps more interesting given Feldman's contention that analysis of "relatively minor figures" can be revelatory of Josephus's "approach," an argument that would seem to advocate for close examination of his depictions of biblical women: Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), xix. See also Feldman's brief treatment of Josephus's version of the episode of the rape of Dinah, which, however, demonstrates little interest in the title character beyond contending that Josephus "arouses more sympathy"

Feldman highlights Josephus's systematic "depreciation" of their biblical roles, which he attributes to Josephus's "general misogynistic attitude."⁹⁴ And while Josephus's version of the story of Esther is relatively expansive, Feldman shows that his additions here are novelistic and apologetic.⁹⁵ In his general remarks at the end of the volume, Feldman concludes that Josephus's "condescending" treatment of these and other women is simply revelatory of his "misogyny." If Esther is a partial exception this is due only to her royal status and the fact that she, "like Josephus, has made the realistic adjustment to subservience to a superpower in the Diaspora."⁹⁶ Sarah herself is the focus of little extended comment in Feldman's work, although she is occasionally considered as a matter of course in his detailed commentary on books 1–4 of the *Antiquities*. Here, interestingly, and in substantial contrast to his larger conclusions on Josephus

for her than is found in the biblical account (Louis H. Feldman, "Philo, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, and Theodotus on the Rape of Dinah," *JQR* 94 [2004]: 262). How Josephus's clarification that Dinah was the only daughter of Jacob increases "sympathy" for her is unclear; it seems, rather, that this comment evokes sympathy for her father.

94. Feldman, "Deborah," 153, 156–57, 160, 162; most telling for Feldman is Josephus's omission of Deborah's song from Judges 5 (160–61). Note the critique of Feldman's work here in the article of Mark Roncace, and the subsequent response from Feldman, discussed below. On Ruth, see Louis H. Feldman, "Ruth," in *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 193–95, 202; here, in addition to a general curtailing of Ruth's story, Feldman argues that Josephus eliminates most references to her virtuous qualities (195). Originally published as Louis H. Feldman, "Reflections on John R. Levison's 'Josephus's Version of Ruth,'" *JSP* 8 (1991): 45–52. Levison's essay is found in the same issue: John R. Levison, "Josephus's Version of Ruth," *JSP* 8 (1991): 31–44. Ruth in Josephus also attracts the attention of Gregory E. Sterling, "The Invisible Presence: Josephus' Retelling of Ruth," in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives*, ed. Steve Mason, *JSPSup* 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 104–71, though specifically from a redaction-critical perspective (107; more than half of this lengthy chapter is a synoptic "pentapla" of five versions of Ruth). Sterling's work is not without reflection on Josephus's portrayals of Ruth and Naomi, however, as he notes that Josephus depicts them "in the care of a male rather than as independent women" near the beginning of the narrative (124), and that they are generally "lowered" while Boaz is "elevated" in Josephus's account (129). But the significance of these moves is downplayed by Sterling, who recommends that we "realize that our frustrations" with such patriarchal motives "would not have occurred to most ancient readers" (129).

95. Louis H. Feldman, "Esther," in *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 513, 516–31, 537. Originally published as Louis H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' Version of Esther," *TAPA* 101 (1970): 143–70. It is clear, despite some revision and addition of footnotes, that this early article is not intended primarily as a character study of Esther, but as a more general examination of the book that bears her name. On expansions and contractions of the biblical account, evaluations of which often preoccupy analysts who follow the rewritten Bible approach that Feldman helped develop, see the sensible but often unheeded caution of Brenner, whose article is discussed below: "on several occasions [Josephus] actually expands biblical women's roles. . . . The question is, when this occurs, whether the female figure is enhanced or, on the contrary, may be further weakened in some way by the expansion." Athalya Brenner, "Are We Amused? Small and Big Differences in Josephus' Representations of Biblical Female Figures in the *Jewish Antiquities* 1–8," in *Are We Amused? Humour About Women in the Biblical Worlds*, ed. Athalya Brenner (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 94.

96. Feldman, *Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, 564–65.

and women, Feldman's piecemeal evaluations tend to align with those of Bailey, detailed below. In general, Feldman says, Josephus casts Sarah in a "more favorable light" as compared to her portrayal in Genesis, depicting her as both less harsh in her dealings with Hagar and more faithful in her response to the divine promise of offspring.⁹⁷

Most other work on Josephus's depiction of biblical women closely resembles that of Feldman in approach, and is broadly analogous in its conclusions: the basic paradigm of "rewritten Bible"—with its sustained, central concern to compare Josephus's text to that of his scriptural sources—dominates, and most evaluations of Josephus's treatment of female characters are negative. In some cases, Josephus is employed as a foil to more favorable estimations of other ancient authors' depictions of women. Brown, for instance, compares the portraits of several biblical women in LAB and Josephus's *Antiquities*, concluding that Pseudo-Philo paints them in a more positive light on the whole.⁹⁸ Maren Niehoff, too, takes Josephus as a negative "benchmark" in her investigation of Philo's more "sympathetic" treatment of Sarah. When Josephus does not simply write Sarah out of his account, Niehoff argues, he consistently limits her agency and initiative, forming her, for instance, into an "altogether passive tool" in the first episode with Hagar.⁹⁹

97. For example, Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 71 n. 589, 81 n. 654, 82 n. 661, 83 n. 666. Whether the resulting characterization might be more "positive" because drained of all color is not considered; compare the evaluation of Bailey to those of Niehoff and Halpern-Amaru, discussed below.

98. Whereas Pseudo-Philo is "clearly sympathetic to women," Brown contends, Josephus most often "depreciates" and "downgrades" their roles: Cheryl Anne Brown, *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women*, Gender and the Biblical Tradition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 12. Indeed, according to Brown, Pseudo-Philo's work is a source of "fresh air" wafting through a "previously hidden window into the life of women in early Judaism" (218). Brown argues that Josephus and Pseudo-Philo's retellings of the stories of Deborah, Jephthah's daughter, Hannah, and the "witch" of Endor diverge widely, sharing only a basic outline inherited from the Bible, and that only the last of these receives a more favorable treatment in the work of Josephus. Brown explains this anomaly by noting Pseudo-Philo's abhorrence of idolatry, and by contending that for Josephus's audience "the occult was fashionable." Perhaps more convincing is her argument that for Josephus the "character and conduct" of the "witch" "accord with the highest of Greco-Roman ideals," and that his positive evaluation thus serves his apologetic purposes (204–05). Presumably Brown omits discussion of Sarah as the author of LAB demonstrates little interest in her, as noted in the introduction to this chapter.

99. Niehoff, "Mother and Maiden," 416–18. In slight contrast to the findings of Brown and Niehoff, Eileen Schuller concurs with Feldman in noting a "misogynist attitude" in Josephus, but characterizes the latter's work in this regard as simply reflective of a general trend in Second Temple literature: Eileen Schuller, "Women of the Exodus in Biblical Retellings of the Second Temple Period," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 187, 189–90. Schuller compares the depictions of women in Exodus with

James Bailey also adopts a rewritten Bible approach in the style of Feldman in his discussion of the “Josephan modifications of the Genesis stories involving the matriarchs,” and concedes general agreement with most commentators’ evaluations of Josephus’s “misogynistic” predilections.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he evaluates Josephus’s portrait of Sarah, among other women characters of Genesis, as “rather positive.”¹⁰¹ For Bailey, this “apparent contradiction” between Josephus’s misogyny and his idealized and “favorable” portraits of the matriarchs as “strong and attractive heroines” can be explained by his differing attitudes toward “aristocratic” and “common” women.¹⁰² However, it is difficult to reconcile Bailey’s conclusion that Josephus has “enhanced the portrayals” of these women with his appended lists of Josephus’s modifications to the biblical accounts: a quick glance at these shows that the most common word employed to characterize Josephus’s editorial activity here is “omitted.”¹⁰³

those in the retellings of Jubilees, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus’s *Antiquities*, concluding that the significant roles of women in the biblical text are “muted” in every case. She finds that Josephus downplays the importance of the Hebrew midwives, Moses’s mother, Zipporah, and Miriam, while expanding the role of Moses’s father. Only royal, foreign women, such as Pharaoh’s daughter and Moses’s “Cushite wife” (the king of Ethiopia’s daughter, in this reading), receive any extensive treatment, which Schuller attributes to Josephus’s contact with women at the Roman imperial court and his erotic, novelistic interests (187–89).

100. James L. Bailey, “Josephus’ Portrayal of the Matriarchs,” in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 155–57, 175–76.

101. James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 161. In this, he partly anticipates Feldman’s remarks in his commentary on the *Antiquities* 1–4, as noted above. Reinhartz and Walfish, “Conflict and Coexistence,” 103, also agree, at least within the contexts of the Sarah and Hagar stories, that Josephus “maintains and even enhances the positive evaluation of Abraham and Sarah”; however, their analysis here is very brief. Troy A. Miller, “Surrogate, Slave and Deviant? the Figure of Hagar in Jewish Tradition and Paul (Galatians 4.21–31),” in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality*, vol. 2: Exegetical Studies, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 146–47, also contrasts Josephus’s “exceedingly positive” depiction of Sarah with his “decidedly negative characterization” of Hagar. Birgit van der Lans, “Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham’s Household in Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae*,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, ed. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 188, likewise concurs with Bailey that Sarah’s image is softened in Josephus’s portrayal of her interaction with Hagar. See also the brief remarks of Christopher T. Begg, mentioned below.

102. James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 175–76, 179 n. 54. These remarks on class may depend partly on his conclusion that Josephus Hellenizes Sarah (170), which finding partially resembles that of Halpern-Amaru, discussed below. As noted above, Niehoff sees a similar disjunction between Philo’s generally negative views on women and what she characterizes as his sympathy to Sarah in his works of literal exegesis.

103. James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 170–71. The word “omitted” occurs eighteen times in these lists of “biblical details altered or excised by Josephus.”

The work of Christopher T. Begg likewise bears a strong methodological resemblance to that of Feldman, but Begg's evaluations of Josephus's treatment of women characters are more generous.¹⁰⁴ However, even in articles centered on narratives involving women, Begg displays only an occasional concern for their characterization, and that mostly in the service of his primary occupation with Josephus's rewriting techniques.¹⁰⁵

Halpern-Amaru's work, while still firmly part of the conversation on Josephus's rewritten Bible, goes further than most efforts utilizing this approach in its attempt to describe a general

104. In several essays—out of scores of articles that deal with biblical episodes “according to Josephus”—Begg treats female biblical characters as interpreted in the *Antiquities*. For Begg, Abigail is favored with an “unqualifiedly positive depiction”: Christopher T. Begg, “The Abigail Story (1 Samuel 25) According to Josephus,” *EstBib* 54 (1996): 33. Begg notes that Josephus's portrait here is “all the more remarkable given his general tendency to denigrate and downplay women's roles.” Another outlier in this regard, according to Christopher T. Begg, “Josephus' Rewriting of Genesis 24 in *Ant.* 1.242–255,” in *Rewritten Bible After Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Géza Vermès*, ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89, is Josephus's presentation of the “enhanced role” of Rebekah and other women in his retelling of Gen 24. Begg also finds Tamar to be “more rounded”: Christopher T. Begg, “The Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) According to Josephus,” *EstBib* 54 (1996): 498. Despite Begg's aligning of this article as “relevant” to the “broad current in contemporary scholarship” concerned with Josephus's “treatment of women figures” (465–66), it cannot be said that the figure of Tamar here is more than one topic of interest among many. The Levite's concubine, in Begg's opinion, “receives heightened (and positive) attention”: Christopher T. Begg, “The Retellings of the Story of Judges 19 by Pseudo-Philo and Josephus: A Comparison,” *EstBib* 58 (2000): 47. Begg details this “positive” attention, which he connects with Josephus's emphasis on the “psychological and erotic dimensions” of this story: the female character is cast as “the Levite's legitimate wife,” instead of a concubine, and “her beauty is twice noted . . . she is the object of intense desire . . . while her feelings following her rape are rehearsed at length.” However, to my reading, her beauty and desirability seem to be primarily noted by Josephus in order to justify the male characters' behavior, and both her marital legitimacy and her “feelings” after being raped underline her husband's probity, not her own: for example, one reason she dies at the door of the house is rooted in the shame that she realizes her rape will bring her husband (*Ant.* 5.147). Deborah, Begg argues, may be somewhat “reduced” in her complexity but is “accentuated” in her role as “prophetess” and general, while Jael is “less ‘perfidious’”: Christopher T. Begg, “The Exploits of Deborah and Jael According to Josephus,” *Laur* 48 (2007): 25–26. In part, this article is a response to the debate of Feldman and Roncace, discussed below, in which Roncace downplays the “misogyny” that Feldman detects in Josephus's retelling (3, n. 2). Begg is equivocal, but his reading generally aligns him with Roncace. Hagar, in Begg's view, though her “(initial) insolence” is underlined, is “more complex (and more positive)” than in the biblical account: Christopher T. Begg, “The Flight of Hagar According to Josephus,” *Hermenêutica* 8 (2008): 19; compare 17–18. In a brief note in this article on Hagar, Begg also argues that Sarai “emerges as a somewhat diminished—albeit more sympathetic and ‘godly’—character” in the presentation of Josephus (17). Begg is here concerned only with the characters' depictions in the portion of the *Antiquities* that corresponds to Genesis 16 (*Ant.* 1.186–190). Begg's evaluation of Sarai resembles his assessment of Rahab, who is “more respectable” in Josephus but somewhat in “eclipse as compared with the biblical figure”: Christopher T. Begg, “The Rahab Story in Josephus,” *LASBF* 55 (2005): 128.

105. Other essays by Begg, such as Christopher T. Begg, “Josephus' Retelling of Genesis 34,” in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. A. Wénin (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 599–605, and Christopher T. Begg, “The Josephan Judge Jephthah,” *SJOT* 20, no. 2 (2006): 161–88, whose subject matter might lead one to assume otherwise, contain almost no reflection on the women in these narratives.

framework for Josephus's treatment of women characters. With most of the commentators discussed above, Halpern-Amaru agrees that in some cases Josephus opts merely to "diminish and deflate" the characterizations of women in his rewritten scriptural accounts. However, she argues that in a number of instances Josephus chooses rather to "reconstruct" these figures, employing recurring "idealized abstractions" evocative of typologies built around relatively important female characters to characterize more minor biblical women.¹⁰⁶ Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel provide typologies of the "heroine" in this scheme, while the wife of Potiphar and the Midianite women provide patterns for the "villainess." In the case of each of the "heroines," Halpern-Amaru contends, Josephus recasts a "problematic" aspect of the biblical characters into an essential virtue, which then serves as a partial signal of the emergence of a given character's typology later in the narrative.¹⁰⁷ In Halpern-Amaru's view, for example, the ambiguous testimony to Sarah's chastity in the biblical account of her stay in Pharaoh's house is so thoroughly reworked by Josephus that he can define sexual continence as a prominent aspect of her character.¹⁰⁸ Halpern-Amaru strains, however, to trace this typology through Josephus's rewritten biblical account. Her identification of Moses's mother Jochebed as representative of the

106. Betsy Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' Antiquities," *JJS* 39 (1988): 143–44, 168. This "reconstruction" may still involve diminishing a character's prominence, as she notes in her treatment of Sarah (145). Halpern-Amaru's name appears both with and without a hyphen in her publications; as the more recent feature a hyphen, I take this to be clarificatory and cite all her material accordingly.

107. Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits in Josephus," 144.

108. This continence, as Halpern-Amaru describes it, is not an abstract character trait, but serves primarily to contribute to Sarah's fitness as a spouse to Abraham. Sarah in Josephus, Halpern-Amaru argues, is a beautiful and submissive wife, lacking any flaw but also devoid of initiative or, indeed, direct speech in the narrative. Marked throughout by a "striking passivity" apart from her maternal advocacy for her male offspring, Josephus's Sarah evokes the "hellenistic ideal of the traditional wife," embodying "traditional virtues which define her femininity and bring honour to her spouse." Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits in Josephus," 145–48. Heather A. McKay, "Eve's Sisters Re-Cycled: The Literary *Nachleben* of Old Testament Women," in *Recycling Biblical Figures: Papers Read at a NOSTER Colloquium in Amsterdam, 12–13 May 1997*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten (Leiden: Deo, 1999), 176, in a brief evaluation, similarly concludes that the Sarah of Josephus, like that of Philo, "is idealised and made out to be something more (or perhaps less) than human." William Loader, *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in the Writings of Philo and Josephus and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Judaism and Christianity in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Era, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), also concurs with Halpern-Amaru here (276). Due to its overriding concern with sexuality, Loader's work features a somewhat different approach to Josephus than the investigations outlined in the rest of this section; however, its survey-style procedure means that its analyses of individual characters and episodes are often necessarily somewhat cursory.

“Sarah typology,” for instance, fails to convince because she demonstrates no connection between this character and the virtue of chastity, which she claims is Sarah’s primary trait.¹⁰⁹ In the end, Halpern-Amaru’s typological superstructure, like similar attempts catalogued above in the MT section, has a reductive and flattening effect on the women in these narratives that is not completely dissimilar from the practice she identifies as characteristic of Josephus.

An article by Athalya Brenner, while maintaining a fundamentally comparative approach, partly resembles that of Halpern-Amaru in its efforts to go beyond simple narrative juxtaposition to the suggestion of larger themes in Josephus’s presentations of biblical women. More convincing than Brenner’s suggestion that Josephus’s portraits may have been aimed at provoking amusement in his male audience is her contention that his modifications to the biblical account serve to “deconstruct” and reveal his own stereotypes.¹¹⁰ Without focusing on Sarah, Brenner argues that women are depicted by Josephus as overly interested in adornment, susceptible to flattery, competitive, curious, sexually unreliable, and childlike, among other negative attributes, and agrees generally with most exegetes discussed here that Josephus was “a difficult man who didn’t appreciate women.”¹¹¹

A critique that is implicit in the work of Halpern-Amaru and Brenner—that this dominant comparative paradigm, established at least in part by Feldman and reinforced by most of the scholars considered here, should be used as part of a more sophisticated approach—becomes explicit in the efforts of a few commentators on women in Josephus. These counterproposals are of varying worth and uneven execution, and none considers Sarah directly. Perhaps the most successful is that of Tal Ilan, though it succeeds in part by abdicating on the question at hand, as her critique leads her to eschew consideration of Josephus’s biblical women altogether. In a

109. Other examples of the “Sarah typology” are said to be the wife of Manoah and the Levite’s concubine of Judges 19: Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits in Josephus,” 156–59. Halpern-Amaru’s applications of the “typologies” of Rachel and the “villainesses” (164–68) are similarly thin; her tracing of Rebekah’s “assertiveness” (159–64) is more convincing.

110. Brenner, “Are We Amused?” 95.

111. Brenner, “Are We Amused?” 105.

significant challenge, Ilan contends that much of the scholarly work on Josephus's "attitude to women" disappoints because the fundamental question asked—whether Josephus's evaluation is "positive" or "negative"—is sorely lacking in sophistication. Further, the method usually employed, which, as has been often noted above, is a point-by-point comparison of Josephus's narrative with the biblical account, is not only susceptible to contradictory assessments but also fails to consider the possible role of other sources in Josephus's composition.¹¹² In consequence Ilan leaves all the rewritten biblical material out of account, instead comparing Josephus's independent treatment of women to the attitudes that surface in those sections of the *Antiquities* and the *Jewish War* where he depends more heavily upon the work of Nicolaus of Damascus.¹¹³ Ilan finds that whereas in the latter passages prominent Hasmonean and Herodian women are portrayed as "the root of all evil" (the "'*cherchez la femme*' syndrome"), Josephus himself "totally ignored women *qua* women" when left to his own devices as an author.¹¹⁴ While Ilan is careful to note that her purpose is not to "acquit Josephus and lay the burden of misogyny on someone else's doorstep," she does suggest that this complete disinterest in women may be preferable to Nicolaus and others' emphasis on the crafty, even "demonic" influence of highly-placed women on public affairs.¹¹⁵

Another significant challenge to the dominant comparative paradigm established by the work of Feldman on Josephus, and one that maintains focus on biblical women in Josephus, is leveled by Mark Roncace, who, however, fails to realize the promise of his proposal. Roncace

112. Tal Ilan, "Josephus and Nicolaus on Women," in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 1: Judentum, ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996), 224–25.

113. As Josephus could have used "no historiographic or aggadic sources" in his *Life* and the "latter parts" ("beginning from the middle of the second book") of *J.W.*, Ilan probes these sections for data on his independent attitude. These are compared with the depictions in *J.W.* 1–2 and *Ant.* 13–17, for which period of Hasmonean and Herodian history he is "principally dependent on Nicolaus of Damascus" (225, 234).

114. Ilan, "Josephus and Nicolaus on Women," 224–25, 262.

115. Ilan, "Josephus and Nicolaus on Women," 223, 262. This conclusion glosses over the fact that Nicolaus's misogynistic work has only been made available to posterity by its apparently uncritical adoption by Josephus. See the similar sentiment of Brenner, who notes that "even if and when Josephus draws on post-biblical (early 'rabbinic') midrash, his modifications still imply a *choice*" indicative of his worldview: Brenner, "Are We Amused?" 100 (emphasis in original).

contends that Feldman's consistent application of a "redactional and comparative approach . . . is of limited value for character analysis." In its place, Roncace advocates a "literary/narrative" methodology that better takes into consideration "basic literary (surface) features" too often ignored in analyses concerned only with the disparities between the accounts of Josephus and his biblical source material.¹¹⁶ However, most curiously, in his attempted application of his proposed method to Josephus's treatment of Deborah, Roncace's very first remarks have to do with the "distinctive features" of Josephus's retelling as compared to the biblical original, and he maintains, with a consistency that rivals that of Feldman himself, a fundamentally comparative posture throughout.¹¹⁷ On Roncace's reading, the Deborah of Josephus is "strong, assertive," and "the most positively depicted figure in the story"; there is "no evidence of misogyny" here.¹¹⁸ As Feldman himself notes in a detailed rebuttal of Roncace's article, however, this is merely a different evaluation of the perceived differences between Josephus's version of the story and the biblical original. Roncace, then, critiques Feldman's approach only to replicate it faithfully.¹¹⁹

116. Mark Roncace, "Josephus' (Real) Portraits of Deborah and Gideon: A Reading of Antiquities 5.198–232," *JSJ* 31 (2000): 247. As noted above, Bernstein, "Unity," 133–34, has in recent years consistently advocated a similar approach to the Genesis Apocryphon.

117. It is very puzzling, given Roncace's introductory critique of Feldman's comparative procedure, that literally every page of his analysis of Josephus on Deborah betrays concern with its departures from the biblical account; indeed, his argument depends on these "distinctive features" almost exclusively. If Roncace is not considering how something is "unlike the biblical story," he is detailing how Josephus "expands," "upgrades," "omits," "enhances," or "downplays" one facet or another of the Judges narrative: Roncace, "(Real) Portraits," 249–59.

118. Roncace, "(Real) Portraits," 259.

119. Louis H. Feldman, "On Professor Mark Roncace's Portraits of Deborah and Gideon in Josephus," *JSJ* 32 (2001): 218. Of particular interest here are Feldman's remarks in defense of his evaluation of Josephus's misogyny in the story of Deborah, which Roncace finds overblown (197–200). G. J. Swart also disparages the method employed by scholars such as Feldman and Begg as "one-dimensional," "speculative," and "subjective," advocating instead a "more nuanced intertextual approach": G. J. Swart, "Rahab and Esther in Josephus: An Intertextual Approach," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 17 (2006): 50–52. In practice, however, just as in Roncace's article, by far the majority of Swart's analysis focuses precisely on the kind of textual disparities—here between Josephus's versions of the stories of Rahab and Esther and their biblical antecedents—that occupy scholars in the Feldman mold. Just how Swart's "multi-dimensional" approach will result in "more valid interpretations" lacking the speculation and subjectivity of the work of others is not detailed; puzzlingly, this is Swart's "assumption" (51). Only in briefly considering the possible intertextual links between these narratives within the context of Josephus's work itself does Swart's method distinguish itself, and these findings are not convincingly integrated into the rest of his argument (61–63). Moreover, Swart's conclusion that Josephus displays a "marked tendency to highlight the predicament of women as marginalized individuals" can only be characterized as highly unusual among exegetes (64).

This review of scholarly treatments of Josephus's renditions of biblical women reveals broad openings for the aims of this study. The most plain is a basic lack of interest in the portrait of Sarah. Sustained discussions of her character are noticeably few, with only Bailey, Halpern-Amaru, and Niehoff providing much beyond cursory remarks. Each of these contributions, moreover, subordinates its analysis of Sarah in Josephus to a broader argument, somewhat like the typological and survey-style studies detailed above in the MT section: Sarah is an instance of the category "matriarch" for Bailey, and a type of a Josephan biblical heroine for Halpern-Amaru, while Niehoff is interested in Josephus's portrayal primarily as it illuminates that of Philo.

These exegetes' evaluations of Josephus's portrait of Sarah vary. Bailey is favorably impressed with her "softened" depiction here, while Halpern-Amaru, and even more so Niehoff, see Josephus's Sarah as a hollow character, transparent in her passivity. However, all three efforts share a deeper affinity in their basic approach, which echoes that of most studies of Josephus and women more generally: nearly all of the relevant secondary literature adheres at root to the kind of synoptic comparative program associated with the work of Feldman. Even efforts that directly challenge this dominant paradigm, such as that of Roncace, seem to find its centripetal pull irresistible; perhaps this is due in part to the derivative nature of the primary evidence, or to the necessity of interacting at length with exponents of the dominant paradigm in order to critique their contentions. But only Ilan successfully avoids simply reproducing this approach, and this by declining to consider Josephus's rewritten biblical material.

My work here, then, has a real opportunity to make a contribution, not only in its focus on Sarah in Josephus but also in its adoption of a narrative-critical approach that takes the literary integrity of Josephus's composition seriously.¹²⁰ This approach avoids the facile question, pointedly critiqued by Ilan, of whether Josephus is "better" or "worse" than the biblical tradition.

120. On narrative inquiry in Josephus, note the recent, exploratory effort of Jan Willem van Henten, "Characterization in Josephus," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, Nov. 22, 2014.

Even more specifically, it takes up the unrealized challenge of Roncace, whose initial argument, despite a basic failure in execution, is well-taken: to focus solely on differences between the Bible and its literary offspring risks losing the forest for the trees, as it can leave “basic literary (surface) features” of the descendant text lying completely “unobserved.”¹²¹

Portraits of Sarah throughout Second Temple Literature

As is plain from the surveys above, treatments of Sarah in Second Temple narratives, even considered as a group, are substantially fewer than those that discuss her in the context of the MT.¹²² Efforts that examine her in more than one of these extrabiblical texts, even briefly, are yet more rare. Most of these works have already been noted above, in connection with their primary concern, but the project of this study, which reads Sarah in the MT and in several retellings, makes it worthwhile to collect them in a summary treatment here.¹²³

121. Roncace, “(Real) Portraits,” 247.

122. In part, this is reflective of the fact that the number of studies on characters in post-biblical texts is considerably smaller than that of those concerned with the Bible proper, but it is also indicative of the propensity of commentators on post-biblical literature to neglect women characters. As an illustration of this latter point, see the bibliographies in the second part of Lorenzo DiTommaso, “Pseudepigrapha Notes I: 1. *Lunationes Danielis*; 2. Biblical Figures Outside the Bible,” *JSP* 15 (2006): 116–44. Female characters have far fewer entries than those of male characters, and the figure of Sarah here only merits a “q.v. Abraham” (143). Presumably the earlier studies that I note just below are not included in DiTommaso’s work because its “focus is on the secondary studies that address the biblical figures in the full range of the extra-biblical texts and traditions” (126). This “full range” is not defined, but apparently studies that examine a character in two or three traditions do not qualify. Compare Stone and Bergren, *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*, which, as noted at the outset of this chapter, devotes very little space to female characters.

123. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, and in a number of places in the survey above, there is a fair amount of work that treats Sarah in rabbinic and later materials, but these efforts are beyond the scope of my study. Examples include Zucker, “Sarah,” and Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, “More Than the Stars,” who, as mentioned previously, reads Sarah’s story in the MT with constant reference to rabbinic interpretation, mostly as paraphrased in Ginzberg’s *Legends of the Jews*. The volume edited by Rainer Kampling, *Sara lacht: Eine Erzmutter und ihre Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), several constituent essays of which have been noted in various places above, contains beyond these a number of efforts that treat the reception of Sarah in the New Testament, rabbinic and Jewish mystical literature, patristic works, and medieval commentators. Tribble and Russell’s *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), also mentioned above and just below in connection with Reinhartz and Walfish’s work, also features essays on these characters’ reception in the NT, as well as in the patristic, Islamic, and modern African-American traditions. Catherine Conybeare, *The Laughter of Sarah: Biblical Exegesis, Feminist Theory, and the Concept of Delight* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), examines Sarah’s laughter at the birth of Isaac in the “literal interpretation” of early Christian texts, the work of the rabbis, and commentaries on the Qur’an; then considers allegorical treatments from Philo onward (15–24, 29–37).

Nearly all of the relevant investigations track one episode or theme from Sarah's presentation in the Bible through later retellings. Fischer and a couple of others, for example, have surveyed the "sister-wife" episodes through several post-biblical interpretations.¹²⁴ Reinhartz and Walfish trace the retellings of the Sarah and Hagar episodes from the ancient period through modern political allegorical readings, providing a brief survey of treatments in Jubilees, LAB, Josephus, and the allegorical readings of Philo.¹²⁵ Elaine Phillips examines a range of post-biblical interpretations of the reactions of Sarah and Abraham to the prediction that they would have a son.¹²⁶ Brayford, too, focuses on Gen 18:12 and its retellings in her reading of Sarah in the LXX through the lens of honor and shame.¹²⁷

Aside from these works, barring the occasional incidental reference, there is very little beyond the anthology of Vanel, or the short summary of Josephus's Sarah used as a foil in Niehoff's analysis of Philo.¹²⁸ Every treatment is relatively brief, and all except the article of Reinhartz and Walfish, and that of Phillips, are ancillary to the primary aim of the study in question. Finally, none of these works adopts a narrative-critical perspective. In both scope and approach, then, my studies here, considered individually and together, can advance the dialogue on Sarah and women in Second Temple narratives.

124. Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels*, 247–49, 252–55; Eichler, "On Reading Genesis 12:10–20"; and Jan Joosten, "Abram et Saraï en Égypte: Composition et message de Genèse 12, 10–20," in *La sœur-épouse (Genèse 12, 10–20)*, ed. Matthieu Arnold, Gilbert Dahan, and Annie Noblesse-Rocher (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 11–25, also treat this episode's afterlife in passing. See also Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*.

125. Reinhartz and Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence." See also Elaine James, "Sarah, Hagar, and Their Interpreters," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 51–55, which briefly traces interpretations of Sarah and Hagar's relationship from Philo to modern artistic renderings.

126. Elaine A. Phillips, "Incredulity, Faith, and Textual Purposes: Post-Biblical Responses to the Laughter of Abraham and Sarah," in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, SSEJC (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 22–33. Phillips looks at the LXX, the targumim, Jubilees, Josephus, Philo, the New Testament, and Genesis Rabbah. All of these traditions are treated very briefly, and there is no effort to draw synthetic conclusions beyond noting that each interpretation is governed by its own concerns: "the agenda of [each] text determined whether and how the incidents were addressed" (33).

127. Brayford, "Taming and Shaming."

128. Vanel, *Le livre de Sara*, as mentioned above, provides a chronologically diverse compendium of texts, innocent of commentary, with bearing on Sarah; Niehoff, "Mother and Maiden," 416–18, as noted, briefly contrasts Josephus's treatment of Sarah with that of Philo.

Some Contributions of This Study

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, most scholarly work touching on the characters of the Hebrew Bible, regardless of approach, has centered on the men in the text. In studies of Second Temple literature, this trend is even more pronounced. On a fundamental, motivational level, I wish to ally my work here with the efforts of those who focus on women in the Bible and in later retellings, and to help achieve some of the goals of these readers, such as the recognition and rediscovery of marginalized figures. In my readings of Sarah here, then, I would like to pursue portraits of a character who has been relatively neglected, especially in her Second Temple incarnations, and I believe that this in itself represents a contribution to the broader discourse on the Bible and other ancient Jewish literature. But I would also like to push the conversation forward in more specific ways, both in the individual studies that comprise my project and in their synthetic dialogue.

One of the more basic ambitions of the following chapters of this investigation is to employ a character-driven, narrative-critical approach to seek individual portraits of Sarah in the MT, the LXX, the Apocryphon, and the *Antiquities*. The preceding series of reviews has shown that the realization of even this relatively modest aim can contribute to the conversation on the depiction of Sarah and women characters in the Bible and Second Temple literature. While Sarah's image in the MT has drawn a fair amount of attention, nearly all of the relevant studies concentrate on a portion of her story, on her role in a typological scheme, or on her place among other women in the Bible, and those that engage narrative-critical approaches constitute a minority in any event. The only extended effort that both takes Sarah as its primary subject and claims to adopt a literary approach, that of Schneider, interacts with almost no narrative-critical work. In the other primary texts considered, the figure of Sarah has received far less scrutiny, and has not yet been approached with narrative-critical concerns in mind. In fact, except in the MT and a few studies in the LXX, women in these texts generally have attracted very little substantial

attention from a narrative perspective. In the case of the Apocryphon, there is almost no sustained examination of women at all. In my individual readings of Sarah in each of these works, I hope to offer something new that not only sheds light on her characterization in each case, but also provides inspiration for other readers to examine other characters in these texts from a literary standpoint.

If one elemental aim is to offer readings of Sarah in *each* of these narratives, however, a further basic impetus for the remainder of this study is a desire to read Sarah in *all* of these narratives. I believe that this will provide not only what I hope will be a broad and representative, if not fully comprehensive, look at the character of Sarah in the literature of the Second Temple period, but also what I think may be a profitable and perhaps new way to approach “rewritten” biblical material and other literature inspired by the Bible.¹²⁹ As was repeatedly observed in the surveys above, there are some almost universal characteristics of the scholarship that examines figures such as Sarah in these works. One positive instance of these qualities, and something that could be adopted with advantage in every approach to the Bible and its related literature, is an exceptionally careful and minute attention to philological detail. This laudable microscopic method, however, is nearly always employed in the service of an even more basic approach, which, when it is not so unconsciously operative as to escape being named at all, is usually called “comparative”: that is, a text thought to be derivative is compared, point by point, with its assumed “parent” text, the Bible. Insofar as the goal of this approach is the discovery of a text’s distinctive features, however, a more precisely apt term for this process might be “contrastive.” Further, this contrast and its attendant conclusions are often achieved by a kind of mechanical juxtaposition, sometimes to the point of synoptic, tabular apposition of verses, cola, and even individual words.¹³⁰

129. I am not suggesting, of course, that this is completely uncharted territory. As is plain from my discussion of work on Josephus, above, there are other readers, such as Roncace, who have reacted against the dominance of the “comparative” model in rewritten Bible studies. Bernstein, too, in his studies of the Genesis Apocryphon, has repeatedly stressed the need to move beyond a focus on “its sources or relationship to the Bible,” in favor of considering “the work itself”: Bernstein, “Unity,” 133.

130. See Koskenniemi and Lindqvist, “Rewritten Bible, Rewritten Stories,” 27: “The decisive phase of the

It is not my aim to dispute the basic utility of this “contrastive juxtaposition,” which has patently paid handsome dividends in the biblical disciplines, and this not only in the field of “rewritten Bible,” but also in Synoptic Gospel studies, to name only the most obvious example. My argument, rather, which I will attempt to support throughout this project, is that such a contrastive, oppositional approach, especially when used as the point of departure in a reading, can predispose a reader to overlook the interaction of elements in a narrative that may be critical to its operation. An emphasis on disparities may lead a reader to ignore the ways in which parts of narratives that are not thrown into high relief by the contrast of versions may still vitally contribute to the overall picture of each version considered in itself; how elements intrinsic to a narrative might inform one another, that is, risks being lost in the glare of the spotlight of another text. I want to argue, further, that this not only results in insufficient readings of individual texts, but also that it is apt to skew the enterprise of charting the development of the tradition of a character such as Sarah. An undue concentration on the differences between related narratives can even lead, I would contend, to neglect of the narratives in themselves, and to their replacement by a kind of meta-narrative, a hybrid version constructed mostly from the disparities between the narratives concerned, which is then the subject of a reader’s analysis. This may be especially likely in the investigation of a so-called “daughter” version of a parent text such as the Bible, which stands as an authoritative given, a standard from which deviation is easily measured; the daughter text, in the end, may never be fully read in itself, but only considered in its differences from its norm. In this way, paradoxically, a predilection for isolating contrasting elements can prevent a reader from forming a complete picture of one of the objects to be compared, thus necessarily flawing the description of a tradition’s evolution. In my readings of Sarah in the MT, the LXX, the Apocryphon, and the *Antiquities*, then, I advocate a more conscious consideration of these texts as texts, in keeping with the canons of narrative criticism,

work is to scrutinize the similarities and dissimilarities between the original and the rewritten version. If it is possible to produce a synopsis, one can only recommend the manner developed by Jacques van Ruiten . . .” The authors proceed to detail typographical conventions for elements that are unique to one of the texts, common to both, rearranged, and so on.

and not just as deviations from something else. Perhaps here, too, my work could suggest an alternative way forward for others interested in the reception and transformation of biblical stories and characters.

This project's aspirational contributions, then, are rooted in a desire to raise the profile of Sarah, a relatively neglected character in modern critique of ancient literature. One effort to aid in this goal's pursuit is the performance of new, theoretically-informed narrative-critical readings of Sarah in several ancient texts, some of which have never been approached from a narrative perspective or, indeed, only seldom been queried as to the role of women in their pages. Another step in the realization of this aim is the employment of these individual readings in a synthetic examination that strives to avoid some of the pitfalls associated with the approach of juxtaposition and contrast that characterizes much "rewritten Bible" analysis. Along the way, in both the constituent studies and their synthetic conversation, I would like to suggest an alternate model for reading such rewritten material.

This project's core is comprised of its narrative-critical readings of the figure of Sarah in its four primary texts, which will be presented in chapters 3–6. To move most effectively to this core, however, it is necessary to map a path forward. This task, which includes practical and theoretical methodological considerations, is the focus of the following chapter, where I will outline my study's approaches.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACHES AND METHODS

Introduction

In this study, I examine portraits of Sarah in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple narratives in an attempt to trace the development of presentations of her character in this literature. This aim, however, first demands the definition of several key elements in my approaches to these works. Foremost among these is an appraisal of character itself, a task that includes both theoretical and practical considerations. The relevant theoretical questions have to do with definitions, assumptions, and ground rules for my procedure, or with “character” in the abstract: the “what,” perhaps, of my analysis. The practical questions, on the other hand, have to do with the “how,” with “characterization” in its concrete manifestations. Although these questions overlap to some degree, and are necessarily mutually informing, it makes sense to start here with the “what” and move on to the “how.” After outlining my conception of the nature of literary characters, I turn to the related issues of story and discourse, character and plot, and the role and identity of the reader, treating questions of the applicability of these theoretical constructs and distinctions along the way. Subsequently, I consider how the traits that are the building blocks of character construction are realized, examining the relative weight of different kinds of narrative information, discussing direct and indirect means of characterization, and offering an integrated view of character based on the notion of relationality.

Theoretical Concerns: Character, Criticism, and the Reader

“People or Words?”

What is a “character”? Something real, or a figment of textuality? Baruch Hochman speaks of the “paradox” at the center of any fictional character, who is “at once an extremely vivid entity . . . and a highly delusive one,” something that can be both more real than people we know and completely existentially absent.¹ In the early 1960s, these two poles were described by Marvin Mudrick as constitutive of the “realistic” and the “purist” conceptions of character, respectively, and although these disparate views go by a number of different monikers, their basic distinction has endured for several generations of literary critics.² Sara Koenig, for example, in her 2011 study of Bathsheba, self-consciously adopts a “predominantly purist approach” to characterization, primarily seeking meaning in “the text itself” in an attempt to respect its “internal field of reference.”³ In contrast, I found my conception of character

1. Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 32–33, here treating the discussion of Rawdon Wilson, “The Bright Chimera: Character as a Literary Term,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1979): 725–49. I follow Robert Alter’s contention that “prose fiction,” or, more specifically, “historicized prose fiction,” “is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative” (Alter, *Art*, 27–30), and I conceive of Sarah and the other characters—whether human or divine—in the works under consideration here as fictional constructs. This makes no comment on the “historicity” of any character’s possible antecedents; Tolstoy’s Napoleon, for example, is fictional in the same way.

2. “One of the recurring anxieties of literary critics concerns the way in which a character in drama or fiction may be said to exist. The ‘purist’ argument—in the ascendancy nowadays among critics—points out that characters do not exist at all except insofar as they are a part of the images and events which bear and move them, that any effort to extract them from their context and to discuss them as if they are real human beings is a sentimental misunderstanding of the nature of literature. The ‘realistic’ argument—on the defensive nowadays—insists that characters acquire, in the course of an action, a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and that they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context.” Marvin Mudrick, “Character and Event in Fiction,” in *On Culture and Literature* (New York: Horizon, 1970), 150–51; originally published under the same title in *Yale Review* 50, 1961, 202–18. The “realistic” position is also frequently called “mimetic,” while that of the “purists,” often associated in widely varying concentrations with New-Critical, formalist, (some) structuralist, semiotic, deconstructive, and post-modern approaches, goes by several different names, including “autonomic” (the preferred term of W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965], 11–12, and throughout) and derivatives of the “school” names just mentioned. The term “autonomy” in this context refers to the supposed self-sufficiency of a work of art, and should not be confused with the relative autonomy of a character in some mimetic theories. The distillation of these two positions into “people or words,” the title of this section, is adopted from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), 31, which was issued in a (substantially identical, but containing a new retrospective final chapter) second edition by Routledge in 2002.

3. Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba?* 22–25. Koenig is clearly cognizant of nuances of the purist and realist discussion, and is not dogmatic in her “predominantly purist” approach. However, respect for the text, as I will argue

substantially on the realist, or “mimetic” view, which emphasizes the constructed reality of literary characters as human analogues with whom we may become acquainted.⁴ The case for such a mimetic approach has been convincingly propounded by William Harvey, Seymour Chatman, and, most forcefully, by Hochman.

The roots and development of this theoretical divide are discussed in many places, but one helpful point of entry is provided by Harvey. An important thread of the debate has its origins in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criticism of Shakespeare, where a mimetic enthusiasm for the bard’s characters led to inquiry by inference into aspects of the characters’ lives that were not explicitly detailed in the texts of the plays. This mode of reading is closely associated with its foremost exponent, A. C. Bradley, and came to be caricatured as the “D.N.B. approach,” after the British *Dictionary of National Biography*.⁵ L. C. Knights memorably

below, is by no means foreign to mimetic conceptions of character. Part of Koenig’s theoretical preference likely comes from her employment of the work of Mieke Bal, who comes down on the purist side of the debate. For Bal, while she admits that literature is about and for human beings, characters are “not real people” but “paper people,” and she suggests that it is proper to investigate “only those facts that are presented to us in the actual words of the text.” Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 113–14. Koenig’s “internal field of reference” language comes from Benjamin Harshav, “Fictionality and Fields of Reference: A Theoretical Framework,” in *Explorations in Poetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 7–8, 12–18, which was originally published under the same title in *Poetics Today* 5 (1984): 227–51. At that time Harshav published under the name Hrushovski.

4. Unlike Koenig’s book, most recent studies of characterization in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament do not spend a great deal of effort outlining a position with respect to these divergent approaches. Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1–11* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 6–9, begins with “techniques” instead of definitions, though her sympathies seem to lie with mimetic portraiture, at least for Joshua (9); Ling Cheng, *The Characterisation of God in Acts: The Indirect Portrayal of an Invisible Character* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011), 5–15, also moves directly to character classifications and techniques, although she adopts two of James Phelan’s three components of character (“mimetic” and “thematic,” leaving aside “synthetic”) in arranging her argument (13–14); Bonnie J. Flessen, *An Exemplary Man: Cornelius and Characterization in Acts 10* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 11–12, makes brief reference to the purist / realist divide, but is primarily interested in denying that Cornelius is a mere agent. Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?* Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 24–27, however, provides a succinct overview of the issues and proposes a “middle ground,” taking “the best of both” from the purist and realist approaches. It should be noted that Skinner’s proposal, although explicitly formed in response to the discussion of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, is in fact very similar to her solution here. Rimmon-Kenan’s question as to whether both approaches should be rejected is strictly rhetorical, and she too offers a reconciliation of these competing views, as I note below (compare Skinner, 27, and Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 33). Coleman A. Baker, *Identity, Memory, and Narrative in Early Christianity: Peter, Paul, and Recategorization in the Book of Acts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 21–22, too, briefly outlines aspects of the debate and adopts a mimetic view alongside Seymour Chatman and Hochman.

5. Harvey, *Character*, 201–2: according to its critics, in this approach “characters are assumed to be exactly like historical personages, autonomous beings with a life independent of the plays that contain them. They are seen

skewers this school of criticism in his article “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?”⁶

Harvey replies, however, with an argument for a nuanced approach to character that “allows speculation and inference” on the analogy of our human interest in other human beings.⁷

Chatman picks up this same thread, responding directly to the caricature of the mimetic position by critics such as Knights: “because one question is idle, does it mean that all questions concerning characters are idle?”⁸ Speculation on the connection between Hamlet’s “scholarly interests and his general temperament,” for example, need not be inimical to the critical enterprise. In fact, this is the kind of inquiry that engaged readers have always made of stories. To restrain this impulse to inference, Chatman argues, is nothing less than “an impoverishment of aesthetic experience,” for the “reading out” of implications regarding character is as vital to understanding and enjoying a story as inferring elements of its plot or theme.⁹ Chatman also

as beings living before and beyond the time sequence of the dramatic action. This private life is seen as a proper object of speculation; such speculation may be relevant to the play in that the private life may provide motives for actions which are otherwise inexplicable in terms of the play itself.” See also the rehabilitation of Bradley’s “simple and effective” method in Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 134–37. Compare the literary efforts of “Sherlockians,” whose speculative scholarship treats Holmes and Watson as “historical rather than fictional figures,” filling in “gaps, contradictions, and inconsistencies” in the work of Arthur Conan Doyle (Laura Miller, “A Study in Sherlock: How the Detective Escaped His Creator,” *Harper’s Magazine*, May 2014, 91). This kind of exegetical activity, which, among other things, involves “theorizing about the undisclosed background of the characters and events,” not only presages the rise of modern “fan fiction,” as Miller notes; it also provides a fair analogy to the kind of interpretive activity that resulted in much of the “rewritten” scriptural material of antiquity.

6. Knights’s essay, whose title is “more telling and more vividly remembered by most readers than his argument” (Hochman, *Character*, 16), can be found in L. C. Knights, “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), 1–39. It originally appeared in 1933.

7. Speaking of the work of F. R. Leavis, Harvey says: “This is certainly not speculation of the what-did-Hamlet-study-at-the-university-variety. But it *is* a regard for an interest in a character, a human being, as something more than a creation of language or a function in the total context of the play. ‘He is the sort of man who in such-and-such a situation would do so-and-so’—this is the kind of remark we constantly use in real life, when discussing somebody’s character.” Harvey, *Character*, 204.

8. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 117.

9. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 117. See also Wolfgang Iser, “Indeterminacy and the Reader’s Response in Prose Fiction,” in *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. J. Harris Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 12, and the section on the role of the reader below: “The indeterminate sections or gaps of literary texts . . . are a basic element for the aesthetic response.” “Gap-filling” and inference are thus integral, not optional, to reading. “Reading out” (or “retrieval”) of character is a phrase especially favored by Hochman, *Character* (59, for example), though the distinction of “reading out” from “surface” reading is that of Chatman (41–42; see 132 for an example specifically tied to character). To avoid any confusion with my remarks on “ordinary reading” below, I should note that Chatman also uses the phrase “ordinary reading” synonymously with

follows Harvey in appealing to the anthropological analogy, contending that “the construct ‘Hamlet’” is no less justified an object of inference than “the construct ‘Samuel Johnson’,” and, even further, that we read characters as we read human beings we know. With “new acquaintances,” for instance, “we read between their lines . . . we form hypotheses on the basis of what we know and see; we try to figure them out, predict their actions, and so on.”¹⁰

Hochman, finally, pursues this common ground between characters and people most avidly, contending that Chatman, by staying “more bound . . . by the verbal surface of the text,” doesn’t go far enough. Hochman argues for an even more “profound congruity” in our apprehension of literary characters, historical figures, and real embodied people “of whom we have what we think of as direct knowledge in life.”¹¹ Crucially, Hochman’s argument is about perception, not abstract identity: fictional characters and flesh-and-blood people are clearly not the same, but the methods and tools we employ to get to know the former are largely built and honed in our experience with the latter.¹² In short, “life” itself is the “source of the whole spectrum of characters in literature,” and it is this human-character analogy that lends meaning to our reading of fictional character constructs.¹³

this “surface or manifestation level” reading, while defining “reading out” as the process of “decoding from surface to deep narrative structures” (41–42). But I would submit that any kind of narrative reading that leads to understanding performs this “decoding” or, perhaps better, construction, though clearly a reader can pursue these narrative depths to greater or lesser degrees, as Chatman shows in his four-page dissection of a Sunday comic strip (37–41). Again, see the fuller discussion of the role of the reader below.

10. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 118.

11. Hochman, *Character*, 36.

12. Hochman, *Character*, 36: “the clues that we take in and use to construct an image of a person are virtually identical in literature and in life.” Hochman acknowledges that formal and generic constraints on texts affect the way we read characters, too (81–83, for example). The elemental source of our reading of fictional figures remains our knowledge of human beings, however: as humans ourselves, “we tend to conceive of people in essentially psychological terms, and the task of inferring character (again, in literature as in life) from behavior is a psychological-interpretive labor that we perform instinctively and without reflection, all the time.” Hochman, *Character*, 53. See also Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 137–38.

13. Hochman, *Character*, 58. Hochman admits that postmodern fiction often self-consciously “eschews people” altogether, but denies efforts to push “such neutralization backward in history,” which has importance for a project that attempts to read character in ancient narrative (27; see also 28–29; and my section on the relevance of modern literary theory for reading the Bible, below). Compare Robert Alter, “Literature,” in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald Hendel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17, who argues alongside Erich Auerbach that regarding a biblical figure as a “fictional character,” and not as an “eponymous prototype” or “typological token,” is essential not only to a character’s existential relevance but also to her religious meaning.

Story and discourse. Two important subsidiary points of theory both support and elucidate a mimetic conception of character. The first, discussed by many but perhaps most identified with the work of Chatman in Anglophone criticism, is the distinction between “story” and “discourse,” which he terms the only two “necessary components” of a narrative. The former is the “what,” “the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting),” while the latter is the “how,” “the expression, the means by which the content is communicated.”¹⁴ These two elements are always interdependent in practice, because access to a story, which is an abstraction constructed in the mind of the reader, can only be gained by means of a discourse. However, these components are conceptually separable. The plainest evidence of this lies in the “transposability” of a story, which may be communicated in any number of media—a play, a film, a novel, even a verbal report of one of these to someone who has not experienced it personally—while remaining recognizably “the same” story.¹⁵

The recognition and maintenance of this story / discourse distinction is vital to a mimetic or realistic conception of character such as the one adopted here, for it shows that the very

14. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19. A full discussion of these and other, partially cognate terms is too complex to attempt here. “Story and discourse,” the *histoire* and *discours* of the structuralists, correspond generally with the *fabula* and *sjužet* of the formalists. Rimmon-Kenan, following Genette, isolates two elements of what Chatman calls the “discourse” to arrive at three “basic aspects” of narrative: story (*histoire*), text (*récit*), and narration (*narration*). In my work I will generally adopt Chatman’s terms for the sake of simplicity; as his own discussion plainly shows, however, both of these two “necessary components” are easily further subdivided in a number of ways. Compare, for example, Chatman’s initial diagram on 19 with its “redrawing” on 26; see also Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 3–4, 133 n. 2.

15. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 20, 101. As Rimmon-Kenan explains, “the text is the only [aspect of narrative fiction] directly available to the reader. It is through the text that he or she acquires knowledge of the story (its object) and of the narration (the process of its production). On the other hand, however, the narrative text is itself defined by these two other aspects: unless it told a story it would not be a narrative, and without being narrated or written it would not be a text. Indeed, story and narration may be seen as two metonymies of the text, the first evoking it through its narrative content, the second through its production.” Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 4. The concept of transposability has been challenged, with its critics charging that it gives too little weight to generic and formal influence on the story level of a narrative. However, this seems to be a question of emphasis, as Rimmon-Kenan’s remarks on metonymy show. Recent critiques extend to encompass the story / discourse distinction itself, but largely within the context of experimental, postmodern, and antimimetic literature. See David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), 77–78 (section by Brian Richardson); compare H. Porter Abbott, “Story, Plot, and Narration,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41.

question of “people or words?” is founded upon a confusion of these two “necessary components” of a narrative. A critic adopting a purist stance may emphasize the fragility of a character’s existence as “words on the printed page”—and a reader who takes a realist position concurs, for this is to search for a character where she cannot be found.¹⁶ Characters “live,” rather, in a metonymy of the text, within the “story-space” of a narrative.¹⁷ And just as a story is transposable, so are its constituents, such as character: as Chatman asks, if characters are “mere words,” how can it be that we frequently “recall fictional characters vividly, yet not a single word of the text in which they came alive”?¹⁸ Characters, curiously, often outlive their media, an observation that is of pointed relevance to an investigation that seeks portraits of a character such as Sarah through a number of discursive refractions.¹⁹

Character and plot. The second subsidiary point is also a distinction, this time between character and plot. The relationship and relative primacy of these narrative elements has exercised the critical imagination at least since Aristotle, who subordinates character to the exigencies of plot, at least in the context of tragedy.²⁰ In the modern era, this debate became

16. Rimmon-Kenan proposes a characteristically sensible reconciliation between the two views based precisely on the distinction between story and discourse (part of which makes up her “text”): “the two extreme positions can be thought of as relating to different aspects of narrative fiction. In the text characters are nodes in the verbal design; in the story they are—by definition—non (or pre-) verbal abstractions, constructs” (33). But it seems that Rimmon-Kenan’s own discussion of “character” and “characterization” is elsewhere concerned exclusively with the latter (59, for example).

17. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 107, 116–18. See also 138: “Characters exist and move in a space which exists abstractly at the deep narrative level, that is, prior to any kind of materialization, like . . . the projected space of the mind’s eye.”

18. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 118. The issue of translation also raises an interesting question here: how many readers “know” Raskolnikov, not only without recalling “a single word” from the text, but, in fact, without ever having come into direct contact with a single word in the original text? Clearly questions such as this one are also relevant to much modern reading of ancient literature; perhaps, indeed, all modern reading of ancient literature. Even “expert” readers with some command of the languages in question still approach these texts in a strikingly mediated way, through a formidable battery of lexica and grammars that are often accorded an almost unquestioned authority.

19. See also Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 7, on Esther’s appearance in several different works.

20. The passages usually cited are in chapter 6 of the *Poetics* (§§ 1450a–b): “you can’t have a tragedy without an action (*praxis*), but you can have it without [clearly defined] characters. . . . The first principle of tragedy—the soul, in fact—is the plot, and second to that the characters” (Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Poetics: Translated and with a Commentary by George Whalley* [Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997], 73, 75). Indeed, most of the work as it stands is absorbed with discussion of plot. However, the *Poetics* presents a difficult text that is

another thread in the broader theoretical dispute between “purists” and “realists” over the nature of character, with formalists and some structuralists going further than Aristotle in arguing that characters are purely functional and at the service of a narrative’s action. To inquire into what characters “do” is meaningful, then—but to ask what they “are” is not.²¹

While such a view is clearly opposed to the construction of a mimetic or realist conception of character, the task does not demand a counter-argument for the primacy of character over action. Both Chatman and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan appeal to Henry James in laying out a middle path here, arguing that plot and character are so tightly interwoven that questions of subordination are ultimately not helpful: “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?”²² Rimmon-Kenan also highlights significant aspects of the “interdependence” of these elements, noting not only that narratives vary between themselves as to the foregrounding of action or characters, but also that the reader’s predilections and interests play a key role in varying emphases on people or plot.²³

corrupt and lacunose, and which defies easy systemization in any event. Classicists tend to be less confident than literary critics in pronouncing on Aristotle’s views here; see Whalley’s *The Aristotle-Coleridge Axis*, reprinted in the volume just cited, 166–67 (originally published in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 1973), and Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 138–39, 149–57, who says that influential critics such as E.M. Forster uncritically conflate ancient and modern terminology (139 n. 1). Compare the discussion in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 108–10; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 34. What is often lost in these debates is the fact that Aristotle is in many ways the progenitor of mimetic theories as well: see David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory*, 111–12 (James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz section).

21. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 111–13, and Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 34–36. See further Chatman, 113–16, on the move of some structuralists away from purely functional models of character.

22. Henry James, “The Art of Fiction,” in *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays*, introd. by Morris Roberts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 13 (originally published in 1888). Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 113, says “to me the question of ‘priority’ or ‘dominance’ is not meaningful. Stories only exist where both events and existents occur.” Compare Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 35.

23. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 35–36. Rimmon-Kenan is most intriguing on this last point, where she invokes Harshav (at this time publishing as Hrushovski) in emphasizing the role of the reader in “reversing” these narrative hierarchies (36): “Depending on the element on which the reader focuses his [*sic*] attention, he [*sic*] may at various points subsume the available information under different hierarchies. Thus characters may be subordinated to action when action is the centre of attention, but action can become subordinate to character as soon as the reader’s interest shifts to the latter. Different hierarchies may be established in different readings of the same text but also at different points within the same reading. The reversibility of hierarchies is characteristic not only of ordinary reading but also of literary criticism and theory. Hence it is legitimate to subordinate character to action when we study action but equally legitimate to subordinate action to character when the latter is the focus of our study.” Interestingly, Rimmon-Kenan seems to be speaking here of a “real,” flesh-and-blood reader, though she later defines her “reader” as “implied” or “encoded” in the text, as discussed below (119). See also the remarks of Iser,

What is important to a mimetic understanding of character, then, is not the relative dominance of either plot or character over the other. Rather, as with the story / discourse distinction above, what matters is the conceptual separability of these narrative elements. Chatman's enduring idea of character as a "paradigm of traits," which will receive further nuance in conversation with Wolfgang Iser, Hochman, and Rimmon-Kenan in a fuller treatment below, is especially helpful here. Briefly, for Chatman a "trait" is simply an adjective in ordinary language—"sincere," "callous," "timid," or the like—that describes a persistent aspect of a character. Often these adjectives can only be inferred from the discourse, which shows that they exist at the story level of a narrative. But there is a further distinction between "traits" and "events," as well, for traits endure outside the linear temporal progression to which events must submit. Since these trait-adjectives are not bound to the chronological sequence of events that comprise the plot, then, neither are characters, which are sets, or paradigms, of traits, so bound.²⁴ As much as "incident illustrates character," then, perhaps by suggesting a trait in this scheme, this interdependence does not preclude discussing character in abstraction from plot.

To summarize briefly, my conception of character in my pursuit of portraits of Sarah is substantially mimetic, or realist. I am convinced by the theorists treated above, and, no less importantly, by my own experiences as a reader of narrative fiction, that my interest in characters is a facet of my human interest in other people, and that the methods I employ to "get to know" characters—usefully if loosely defined as "concrete semblances of real men and women"—are genetically related to those I use in social interaction.²⁵ This means that in reading character I

"Indeterminacy," 12–13, on second readings and the role of the reader, in addition to the section on the reader below. On "ordinary reading," see my note above on Chatman's use of this phrase, in addition to further remarks to follow.

24. My summary here merely highlights aspects of a complex and nuanced discussion in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119–31. Although he maintains that traits are not subject to the temporal limitations of events, Chatman does not suggest that the timing of a trait's revelation is inconsequential: "The relative position of a stasis statement of a trait may turn out to be significant at the event-level as well" (130). It may be useful to emphasize here that character and plot are both story-level elements, which, however, differ in their relationship to the story's "chrono-logic" (128–29).

make inferences, form and reform hypotheses, try to reconcile incongruous actions or speech, empathize, and wonder about motive, among many other mental and emotional moves, just as I do with people I know.²⁶ This process, however, is not uncontrolled, any more than my suppositions about an acquaintance are uncontrolled: “there are limits. . . somehow we know when to stop speculating.”²⁷ In fact, a mimetic approach such as the one I have outlined here, no less than any “purist” method, must remain deeply committed to wrestling with the discourse, the text in its expression, for it is only through these signs that the story, and the characters such as Sarah who live there, may be known.

25. “Concrete semblances” is the language of Ronald Crane, quoted in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 137. I understand “concrete” to evoke something substantial as opposed to something fixed or immobile.

26. See also my remarks on linearity at several points below. I would venture that reading such as I describe here is characteristic of what Rimmon-Kenan calls “ordinary reading” in, for instance, her discussion of Harshav’s reversible hierarchies (36, here cited by his earlier publication name Hrushovski; again, compare the treatment of Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 41–42, and my notes above). An example of what I mean by this can be found in the television series *Shakespeare Uncovered*, whose premiere episode, “Macbeth with Ethan Hawke” (originally aired on PBS in the United States on January 25, 2013), follows the efforts of the actor to gain insight into the title character in preparation for the role. What is of interest to me here is the near-universal attitude toward character revealed in interviews with various experts Hawke consults, which can only be described as solidly realist or mimetic. Whether Ivy-League Shakespeare scholar, veteran actor, or researcher on homicide and its aftermath, the perspectives taken are startlingly congruent: of course the text must be respected; perhaps looking into historical data may help; but the central questions these readers ask are things such as: what’s Macbeth’s motive? Do the witches plant his ambition, or do they merely cultivate a native drive? How much did his wife have to do with it, really, and why does she act as she does? It is clear, moreover, that these characters speak to these readers because the characters are conceived of as people, or, at least, that they are people-like to the degree that the insight gleaned from contemplation of Macbeth or his wife is about the condition of being a human being. Indeed—I would ask—how else can it “mean” at all? Nor do I believe that this attitude is owing simply to the nature of drama. The story-gaps that give rise to the questions characteristic of this “ordinary reading” of Shakespeare do not differ in kind from those that prompt the inference of motive, for instance, by ancient or modern readers of Genesis. Compare the somewhat startling assertion of Monika Fludernik, “Histories of Narrative Theory (II): From Structuralism to the Present,” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 48, that drama was “a genre formerly excluded from narratology by nearly everyone.” This is surprising given the amount of critical ink spent on analysis of Shakespeare alone, as partly shown by the discussion above—unless the text of the plays is somehow conceived as distinct from “drama” as a performed event.

27. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119–20. He continues: “Did Ernest smoke? What was the color of Eveline’s hair? There is obviously a line that separates the worthwhile from the trivial. (But if we must choose, let us risk irrelevancy rather than exclude potentially rich inferences and speculations about characters.)” Compare Robert Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 47: “as readers we will sometimes run the risk of inventing a connection in the text where there is only a gap. For the most part, however, the dangers of overreading are far outweighed by the dangers of underreading.” See also Hochman, *Character*, 41–42, on “the traditional conception of responsible reading,” which pointedly does not include “losing oneself in fantasy about the characters one harbors in one’s head.”

Tools of Reading: Too New? Or Too Old?

But are the theoretical distinctions and conceptual tools that I have been describing relevant to the project at hand? This question, moreover, cuts two ways. First, despite the ancient roots of some threads of the realist / purist divide, it is clear that the conceptions of character of the theorists engaged above are modern ones, formed largely in interaction with fiction that is almost wholly post-Renaissance, mostly post-Enlightenment, and often simply to be identified with the European novel, especially in its classical nineteenth-century forms. So is it useful to apply these new ideas to ancient narrative? The second side of the question is also chronologically bound, but in the opposite direction, as it is also clear that these theorists' ideas of character were forged some time ago, with the outlines of what I have laid out above largely set by the mid-1980s. So is it useful to apply these old ideas to ancient narrative?

Both sides of the question, I believe, can be answered in the positive. On the first, although it is not enough simply to note that modern narrative theory has usefully engaged biblical materials in the work of many commentators, neither is it irrelevant. The efforts of Robert Alter, David Gunn, Mieke Bal, and others whose names appear elsewhere in this chapter have influenced a generation of critics precisely because they offer novel and often convincing readings born in interaction with such theory. And while it is by no means universal, many biblical scholars who adopt a narrative approach offer some justification of their procedure, even if it is simply to note that a great deal of the Hebrew Bible is narrative and thus presumably fair game for narrative analysis. It is also true, however, that nearly all of these commentators focus very closely, and usually exclusively, on material within the canon—often, indeed, emphasizing their impression of the unique qualities of these narratives that came to be collected in that larger, sacred assemblage—whereas some of the literature discussed in this study, regardless of genetic relationship, is not “Bible” at all.²⁸

28. The work of Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), for example, illustrates what she views as the distinctive nature of biblical narrative by a comparison of the story of Samson in Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, and Judges, concluding that “the

It is just as well, then, that it is the “secular” critic Hochman who speaks most directly and eloquently of the relevance of an admittedly Western, modern literary reading to an appreciation of the literature, and especially the characters, of other times and places. Hochman states the problem baldly, allowing that “the question of how far it is legitimate to bring anachronistic notions of character to bear on texts, and how to bring them to bear” is “one of the more vexed historical issues in the reading of character.”²⁹ Its resolution, however, is bound up precisely with the psychological implications of Hochman’s broader mimetic theory, and is thus rooted in the role of the reader.³⁰ While Hochman does not dispute the basic necessity of learning what we can about the language and world in which a work was produced, he insists that we can still only “retrieve figures from older literatures in terms of our own perception of character and

biblical story follows rules of its own” (4–10). It is not clear whether the use of the singular “the biblical story” is germane to the argument here, as she also uses the plural at times (10, 13, 14, and elsewhere). Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, BLS (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 19–21, while declaring that a poetics of biblical narrative must not be simply “imported from some other, perhaps quite alien, literature,” sensibly notes that “some grounding in the broader aspects of literary study” is helpful to the task. Alter, *Art*, too, though his project throughout is occupied with highlighting the distinctive features of biblical narrative, gives a lengthy and balanced treatment to the question of the legitimacy of employing the terms and tools of modern literary study in biblical analysis (chapters 1 and 2 throughout, especially 15–19, and the concise statement of the question on 25–26). Also note, however, Alter’s blanket dismissal of much of “the new narratology” (xiv). Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, BLS (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 7–11, is more explicit in his emphasis on the “universal components and techniques” characteristic of all narratives.

29. Hochman, *Character*, 54. In addition to my remarks here, see the section on the role and identity of the reader below.

30. Hochman argues that it is in fact purist theories that have the greater trouble with anachronism. Critics who deny personhood to characters might do so with justice in reference to postmodern fiction (Hochman, *Character*, 26–27), but to do the same for antique works would be to deny that “the canonical texts of the Western literary tradition have seemed to readers to deal with people and to project powerful images of discrete human beings” while adopting “the view that the critical consensus of virtually all preceding epochs of literature was based on a delusion” (28). On ancient interpretation of Homer and the Bible, he contends that “human behavior, as reported in the sacred texts, was seen to invite interpretation and understanding on common-sense as well as theological grounds. Such grounds always involved questions of motivation and the assumption that the agents in any action had, or should have had, the coherence of identity and intention that we expect of people in real life” (29). Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar,” in *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 17–18, in some contrast, argues for a sharp distinction between these two bodies of literature, contrasting the static and typed Homeric characters with what he contends are the individualized and developing characters of the Old Testament. Under this scheme it would appear that the stories of Genesis are especially—even foundationally, as they represent for Auerbach a “basic type,” opposed to that of Homer, which echoes down through Western literature—susceptible to interpretation in mimetic or realist terms. As conducive as that may appear to my argument here, and despite the crushing erudition on display in Auerbach’s book, I think that the contrast between these two ancient bodies of literature is somewhat rhetorically overdrawn, and, more seriously, unhelpfully tied to essentializing purported moral and intellectual disparities between their cultures of origin.

of our perception of motives operative within character.”³¹ The mechanics of this “retrieval” are invariably influenced by the story / discourse distinction explored above: “character construction . . . is guided by the signs that we take from the text about the traits that belong to each character,” but “the image that we derive is not wholly governed or determined by those signs.”³² The derivation of this image, in other words, can only be finally accomplished within the consciousness of the reader. The fact, then, that “the modern conception of character,” speaking broadly, is only a few centuries old, is ultimately not relevant to the task of reading ancient characters because we have no other—no authentic way to adopt, say, a Homeric conception of personhood, even if this could be reliably defined. While it would be a mistake to fail to “acknowledge the otherness” of such conceptions, in the end we can only read through ourselves: there is literally “no alternative but to construct our images of character in terms of our own knowledge and experience.”³³ Because we are people, therefore, and our reading of character is governed by our ideas of “what people are and how people work,” Hochman maintains that “the patterns of behavior projected in earlier texts, all the way back to Homer and Bible, lend themselves to interpretation along lines congenial to us.”³⁴

The second side of the question—whether the distinctions and categories of critics such as Chatman, Hochman, and Rimmon-Kenan can still be fruitful as their work begins to enter

31. Hochman, *Character*, 54.

32. Hochman, *Character*, 56.

33. Hochman, *Character*, 55–56. Compare Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, 73–74, who argues, in some contrast, for the essential continuity of human experience. Speaking of the era of Homer and the Bible, he says, “with all that has changed, some things have not changed. . . . Sufficiently powerful continuities persist in the literary representation of human realities to make us feel when we read that writers then and now are engaged with many of the same fundamental objects of representation.” Along the same lines, Stuart Lasine, *Weighing Hearts: Character, Judgment, and the Ethics of Reading the Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 24–55, concludes with classicist Stephen Halliwell that “‘fundamental factors in human experience’ are universal,” and thus that ancient works possess a “‘human intelligibility’” that makes them comprehensible to us (53; compare 19). See, however, the further nuance in Lasine’s note on Halliwell’s perspective, which shows clear sympathies with that of Hochman: “Halliwell contends that we *have to* presuppose certain fundamental factors in human experience or there will be no basis on which to identify and comprehend significant cultural traits and distinctions in the interpretation of character” (53, n. 85; emphasis in original).

34. Hochman, *Character*, 56–59. Hochman adds that the “possibility—indeed, the necessity—of such reading seems to me so vital that the only limit I can see to its application arises when writers—usually postmodernist writers—deliberately try to prevent it” (57).

middle age—also involves both practical and theoretical considerations. Again, here it is not out of place, if perhaps not enough in itself, to note that the ideas of these theoreticians and their predecessors, albeit usually filtered through the work of “classical” narrative-critical analysts of the Bible such as Alter, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Adele Berlin, or Meir Sternberg, are still in heavy rotation among biblical scholars who adopt a narrative approach.³⁵ If this work is somewhat less visible than it was in its heyday of the 1980s and 1990s, this is, I would argue, due in part to the growing profusion of other contextual methodologies, but also to the fact that scholars of the Bible often lean heavily on other biblical narrative critics for their theoretical foundation. As will be mentioned below in more detail, the enduring influence of Alter’s *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, first published in 1981 and issued in a revised edition in 2011, can hardly be overstated, especially when considering issues of character and characterization.

But neither is it that biblical character reading has simply ossified and been left behind by its “secular” counterparts. Although parts of the field have fractured into an array of

35. Alter, *Art* (first published 1981); Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art* (first published in 1979, translated into English 1989); Berlin, *Poetics* (1983); and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), but substantially comprised of earlier material. As noted below, Alter does not consider his debt to previous narratologists to be particularly significant (xiv). A sampling of work on characters in biblical literature since the turn of the millennium, let alone previous work, shows the continuing impact of these four scholars. Alter is mentioned everywhere, and helps guide the discussion in Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 75–76; W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 8–13; Cotter, *Genesis*, xxxvi; Amelia D. Freedman, *God as an Absent Character in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Literary-Theoretical Study* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 33–34; and James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 130–32; on the dominance of Alter’s scale of means of characterization, see further below. Bar-Efrat and Berlin, who can be considered together as the latter’s treatment of characterization is based partly on that of the former, inform the more recent work of Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 18–19, and are discussed in many of the works cited just above. Sternberg also frequently appears, prominently in Hall, *Conquering Character*, 6–7, and is mentioned in a number of eclectic works that reference the theories of some or all of the other three critics: Gina Hens-Piazza, *Nameless, Blameless, and Without Shame: Two Cannibal Mothers Before a King*, Interfaces (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 5; John Petersen, *Reading Women’s Stories: Female Characters in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 31–32; Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 18; Cornelis Bennema, “A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature,” *BibInt* 17 (2009): 380–82. Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba?* 21–22, as mentioned above, is notable for her use of the work of Bal; however, she is clearly aware of the efforts of these other four critics. Another outlier, as discussed in Chapter 1, is Schneider, *Sarah*, who, beyond occasional reference to Alter’s translation of Genesis (Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* [New York: Norton, 1996]), exhibits virtually no interaction with any of these theorists. In Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 22–23, she has a brief conversation with Bar-Efrat.

“postclassical” approaches informed by a variety of scientific and philosophical work, the realist / purist theoretical divide yet endures in many quarters, even as its resolution is frequently urged and attempted. In their 2012 roundtable-style book *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz begin their contribution on character with a sentence that could have stood as an epigraph for my chapter here: “Two of the persistent questions about character in fiction are how seriously we should take its mimetic potential and whether character or plot is the more important element.”³⁶ On the first question, Phelan and Rabinowitz recommend the simple acknowledgement that characters have multiple “components,” some mimetic, some “synthetic,” and some “thematic.” As for the second, they suggest that “it depends on the nature and purpose of your inquiry,” tying the solution to the aim of the reader. However, these sensible positions are virtually identical to those of Rimmon-Kenan, writing in 1983, which I detailed above.³⁷ Nor has character as a concept been the subject of intense critical inquiry in every quarter since Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan noted the dearth of work in this area.³⁸ In fact, it is not difficult to find similar sentiments published more recently, and even critics who adopt decidedly postclassical approaches to narrative often employ aspects

36. David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory*, 111. The body of this work is a series of chapters on various narrative elements to which each of four scholars (or team of scholars, in the case of Phelan and Rabinowitz) have contributed a section approaching the topic from their particular theoretical stance. Phelan and Rabinowitz call their approach “rhetorical,” while Robyn Warhol, David Herman, and Brian Richardson respectively employ “feminist,” “mind-oriented,” and “anti-mimetic” approaches. Compare the remarks of Warhol on character: “remembering that characters are not people is crucially important. Characters are marks on the page They have no psychology, no interiority, no subjectivity. Characters are the representational effects the novelist creates” (119).

37. David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory*, 111–12; compare Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 33, 36. Especially on the latter point, as noted above, Rimmon-Kenan looks back to the work of Hrushovski (Harshav), writing in the mid-1970s.

38. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 107: “It is remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism.” Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 29: “Whereas the study of the story’s events and the links among them has been developed considerably in contemporary poetics, that of character has not. Indeed, the elaboration of a systematic, non-reductive but also non-impressionistic theory of character remains one of the challenges poetics has not yet met.” Rimmon-Kenan goes on to note that she will not remedy this lack. Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba?* 3, says that Chatman’s statement quoted above is “somewhat laughable” in retrospect. However, her quotation of Chatman here is incorrect, dropping “the theory of” and thus implying that Chatman is under the impression that characters themselves have been neglected in criticism (her page citation, Chatman 105, is also wrong). So while Koenig may be correct to note that “there seems to be no end to the making of many books, or articles, or monographs exclusively devoted to the topic of character,” Chatman’s statement concerns only the theoretical underpinnings of such work.

of the work of these “classical” scholars.³⁹

Ultimately, however—and this is partly to anticipate, again, the following section on the role of the reader—my adoption, selection, synthesis, and expansion of the categories and distinctions of theorists such as Rimmon-Kenan, Chatman, and Hochman remains a personal process rooted in how clearly these critics speak to me, and how profoundly their explanations resonate with my own hunches and questions about how characters work.⁴⁰ Moreover, the literary works that I am choosing to analyze here remain well-served by the discussions of these “classical” narrative theorists, whose work is grounded in the analysis of literature and literary characters. This is in partial distinction to the efforts of some postclassical schools to expand the theory of narrative to encompass discourse of almost any kind (the “narrative turn”), or to

39. See Fludernik, “Histories,” 43, who notes that one “area of narratology that has remained somewhat underresearched is that of setting and character,” though she mentions a few exceptions. Herman’s complex and eclectic approach, which “focuses on the nexus between narrative and mind,” explores how producers and interpreters of texts create “storyworlds” in which interpreters can “take up imaginative residence.” For this task he draws on Wittgenstein, psycholinguistics, philosophy of mind, discourse analysis, and other fields. However, when addressing “how interpreters construct profiles of fictional persons,” he bases his discussion on Chatman’s paradigm of traits (David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory*, 14–18, 128–29; see also David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* [Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009], esp. 137–60).

40. In a field that positively savors the invention of argot and byzantine line-diagrams, these scholars communicate with an engaging lucidity that yet avoids simplification. I find Rimmon-Kenan’s discussion to be especially succinct and clear. In the final chapter appended to the second edition of her work, she specifically acknowledges this critique of narratology’s “metalinguage” and “jargon” (Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. [London: Routledge, 2002], 144). The often broadly interdisciplinary nature of much “postclassical” narratology has ensured the continued currency of this issue. Compare Alter’s dismissal of “the new narratology that has flourished in France and America over the last decade” (that is, the 1970s). Alter deems its “usefulness limited” as he is “particularly suspicious of the value of elaborate taxonomies and skeptical as to whether our understanding of narrative is really advanced by the deployment of bristling neologisms like *analepsis*, *intradiegetic*, *actantial*” (Alter, *Art*, xiv). See also his pointed remarks, followed by examples, in Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, 15–19. As will be discussed below, however, Alter is not averse to the creation of hierarchies and taxonomies when they suit his purposes. Among biblical critics, Sternberg is notable not only for digressive and prolix prose, but also for his detailed hierarchy of no fewer than “fifteen rhetorical devices . . . through which the Bible shapes our response to character and event.” Sternberg’s general attitude toward the reader’s contribution to the interpretive process can also be seen in this statement (Sternberg, *Poetics*, 475–81; compare, for example, 50). It may be objected that Hochman is guilty of just such schematic zeal in his famous “sequence of eight categories that describe aspects of characters in literature,” each of which is further paired with “its polar opposite,” thus creating a complex series of mutually informing continua within which a character can theoretically be located (Hochman, *Character*, 88–140). To this critique I can only agree, while noting that Hochman’s signal value for me lies elsewhere, in the theoretical underpinnings of his mimetic scheme, as discussed above. Chatman, too, indulges in the occasional “bristling neologism” or diagram (Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 54, and see his “diagram of narrative structure” on 267, as examples; but see also 41–42). Usually, however, these terms are not his coinages, and they are couched in what is to me a largely perspicuous presentation.

increase narratology's contribution to the empirical sciences (the "cognitivist turn").⁴¹ Without disparaging these or other developments, I will simply note here that the application of narrative theory to twenty-first century United States legal discourse, for example, is not particularly congruent with my literary interests in this study.⁴²

The Role of the Reader

Although the importance of the reader to the construction of character, among other narrative elements, has been touched on several times in the discussion above, it is vital to underline it firmly here because it is a matter that sometimes lacks emphasis in "classical" narrative work.⁴³ This is especially true in biblical narrative criticism of the classical variety, and particularly in the influential work of Sternberg, who operates on an assumption, roughly put, that readers of requisite levels of "education" or "skill" will draw similar conclusions about a

41. Given time and space enough, these claims could be almost endlessly nuanced. Chatman, for example, although steeped in the Western literary canon, was instrumental in expanding the narratological conversation to include motion pictures, and his presentation of "textual" narrativity is frequently enriched by discussion of cinematic phenomena. Chatman's work was thus a catalyst in the "narrative turn," which witnessed the "generalization of the term 'narrative' within a wide spectrum of the social sciences, resulting in the application of narratological paradigms to legal, medical, psychological, or economic discourses" (Fludernik, "Histories," 46; see also her remarks on Chatman, 42). This led in turn to an increasing "dilution" and "loss of precision" in "narratological terminology," not least in the employment of the word "narrative" itself (46–47; compare David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 23–32; see also Thomas Frank, "Broken English," *Harper's Magazine*, April 2013, 9, who includes the word "narrative" among the clichéd, "tired phrases" employed by mass-media pundits such as himself). The "cognitivist turn," associated with the work of Herman and Fludernik, among others, forwards the contributions of cognitive linguistics (which apparently include the "lexicalization of color terms and spatial reference" and the "analysis of constitutive body schemata as they affect metaphoric and conceptual thinking") to narratology in a bid to effect a "much closer companionship" between narrative analysis and empirical scientific inquiry (Fludernik, 48–51). See also, for example, David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*: "it is possible to use the tools of science . . . to work toward a principled account of what makes a text, discourse, film, or other artifact a narrative," which account may in turn "help create more dialogue" between fields as diverse as "creative writing" and "clinical medicine" (2; see also 4, 159–60, and throughout).

42. On the coexistence of classical and postclassical narratologies, and the prospects for their "mutual modification" in dialogue, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 2nd ed., 149–54.

43. As the discussion above has shown, however, there is much congenial material on the role of the reader to be found in Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan, Hochman, and even Harvey, whose work antedates that of Iser, to be treated below. While this contention may be tempered by an acknowledgement that some of the language that these critics use is excavatory and seems to emphasize the uncovering of objective phenomena—"reading out," for instance, or, even more clearly, "retrieval"—this is not necessarily incompatible with Iser's theories, which depend precisely on the interaction of text and reader.

given narrative or narrative element.⁴⁴ I generally reject this premise, and I believe that the role of the individual reader—in this case, me—is implicit in and inseparable from a mimetic view such as the one I have outlined here. My reading of a character such as Sarah is based upon my reading of people, and this can only come from me: I have no access to a store of such personality-reading knowledge that is divisible from myself.⁴⁵

The work of Iser still provides one of the most persuasive accounts of the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. In an early article, Iser contests the modern notion that meaning is a kind of hidden entity simply awaiting discovery within a text. Rather, “meanings in literary texts are mainly generated in the act of reading.”⁴⁶ On a theoretical level, this has partly to do with a literary text’s “performative” nature, meaning that it seems to constitute or create things. However, unlike the real-life effects of a similarly constitutive text such as that of a law, for instance, these constituted literary things, or “objects,” are somehow less than fully real.⁴⁷

44. The levels of education and skill required correspond closely to those of Sternberg himself. See the critique on this score in Freedman, *God as an Absent Character*, 30–32, and the debate between Sternberg and Fewell and Gunn referenced there. See Sternberg, *Poetics*, 50–57, for his description of the “foolproof composition” of the Bible: “difficult to read, easy to underread and overread and even misread, but virtually impossible to, so to speak, counterread,” barring, “of course,” certain “wonders of distortion” brought on by “ignorance, willfulness, preconception, tendentiousness.” With characteristic vitriol, Sternberg characterizes those who may disagree as interpreting “in bad faith.” Freedman also takes Alter to task here, contending flatly that he “never acknowledges the possibility that the biblical text can mean different things to different readers” (30). However, Freedman’s reading of Alter is not particularly broad, as her bibliography shows; see chapter 6 of Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, “Multiple Readings and the Bog of Indeterminacy,” 206–38, for his direct and nuanced treatment of the issue.

45. As detailed above, this assertion is fundamental to Hochman’s entire presentation. Chatman’s description of a character as a “paradigm of traits,” mentioned above and to be discussed more fully below, is likewise inseparable from a reader’s social knowledge of the massive set of human traits that is drawn upon in constructing a character (*Story and Discourse*, 125).

46. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 4. If it were true that meaning need only be “found” by readers, Iser says, “one cannot help wondering why texts should indulge in such a ‘hide-and-seek’ with their interpreters; and even more puzzling, why the meaning, once it has been found, should then change again, even though the letters, words, and sentences of the text remain the same.” This essay provides the foundation for Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); see xi. Elsewhere, Iser notes that the basic insight that text and reader collaborate to create a “literary work” is “no new discovery,” citing the example of Sterne’s remarks in *Tristram Shandy*: “no author . . . would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to halve this matter amicably.” Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 126; first published in *New Literary History* 3 (1972), 279–99.

47. A “literary text” is thus distinguished not only from a text that describes a real object, such as the Statue of Liberty, for instance, but also from a text that creates a real object, in this legislative case compliance to a principle, perhaps, or a new bridge. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 6–8.

Moreover, these things can never be fully identified with a reader's personal experience.⁴⁸ This two-fold "lack of identification"—that literary things are neither real objects nor within the experience of the reader—creates an "indeterminacy" that can only be resolved in the mental action of the reader. Thus a literary text occupies a liminal place, a "peculiar halfway position between the world of real objects and the reader's own world of experience. The act of reading is therefore a process of seeking to pin down the oscillating structure of the text to some specific meaning."⁴⁹

Iser also speaks on a practical level of the formal means that create conditions for this indeterminacy and its resolution by the reader. Underlying all of these means is the idea that literary objects can only be shown or constituted in a series of "schematized views" that necessarily leave intervening "gaps," or "blanks."⁵⁰ A simple example of this might be the presentation of two successive discourse-level scenes that evoke temporally disparate events in the story. It is impossible for the discourse to bridge the gap that remains; only the reader can fill it, and this by "a free play of meaning-projection" that "repairs the unformulated connections between the particular views."⁵¹ In Iser's scheme, these gaps are basic to the act of reading—the indeterminacy that they generate is in fact "the fundamental precondition for reader participation"—and they are unavoidably present in a literary text. Indeed, as Iser points out, the

48. This is because a literary text "offers views and opens up perspectives in which the empirically known world of one's own personal experience appears changed." Iser, "Indeterminacy," 8.

49. Iser, "Indeterminacy," 9–10.

50. "Schematized views," defined as "views which constitute the 'object' in stages and at the same time give a concrete form for the reader to contemplate," is based upon a concept of philosopher Roman Ingarden (Iser, "Indeterminacy," 10; see also Iser, *Act of Reading*, 170–73, and elsewhere). "Gaps" and "blanks" are often used interchangeably in translations of Iser; this concept also has its roots in Ingarden's work, whose "*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*" has been rendered "spots" or "places of indeterminacy" (Iser, *Act of Reading*, 169–70; Iser, "Indeterminacy," 13–14, n. 8). It is clear from Iser's discussion that he employs these terms in ways that differ significantly from Ingarden's own presentation (see, for example, *Act of Reading*, 182). Rimmon-Kenan has a summary of the relevant aspects of Ingarden's work that is characteristically brief and clear (*Narrative Fiction*, 118): "Ingarden distinguishes between autonomous and heteronomous objects. While autonomous objects have immanent (i.e. indwelling, inherent) properties only, heteronomous ones are characterized by a combination of immanent properties and properties attributed to them by consciousness. . . . Since literature belongs to this category, it requires 'concretization' or 'realization' by a reader." Compare "autonomic," which, as noted above, is Harvey's preferred term for purist conceptions of character: Harvey, *Character*, 11–12 and throughout.

51. Iser, "Indeterminacy," 12.

more determined or “precise” such a text may be, that is, the more “schematized views” that are presented, the more gaps that necessarily open between the views.⁵²

What is especially attractive about Iser’s presentation is that it itself “bridges a gap” between text and reader, striking a balance that avoids overburdening either extreme. For as much as “a text can only come to life when it is read,” there is yet a structure that inheres in the text itself, as the key term itself reveals: these “views” are “schematized,” each presenting its object “not in an incidental or even accidental way, but in a representative manner.”⁵³ Thus it remains justified to speak of “techniques,” as Iser himself goes on to do, discussing among other examples the practice of “cutting” a serialized novel just at the point of highest tension.⁵⁴ Moreover, Iser allows that texts vary in terms of the “performance” required of the reader—that is, not all texts are equally indeterminate.⁵⁵ Meaning, then, arises out of a kind of symbiosis that develops between an individual literary text and an individual reader, and is a construct “conditioned by the text itself, but only in a form that allows the reader” to realize it.⁵⁶ A literary

52. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 11–14. Iser uses the example of Joyce to illustrate how “the overprecision of the presentation” paradoxically “gives rise to a proportionate increase in indeterminacy” (11–12; see also Iser, *Act of Reading*, 206–7). Perhaps this would be better expressed as an “increase in spots of indeterminacy,” as it is not clear that the overall level of indeterminacy, if such could be measured, necessarily rises with such “overprecision.” The consideration and “repair” of gaps is clearly relevant to the reading of biblical narratives, which, as is commonly observed, are often laconic to a startling degree. Approached on Iser’s terms, it would seem that Pentateuchal narrative, at least, is marked by gaps whose profundity far exceeds their number. On character specifically, it is instructive on several levels to compare here the evocative remarks of Alter, *Art*, 158, who speaks of how a biblical narrator “leads us through varying darkneses that are lit up by intense but narrow beams, phantasmal glimmerings, sudden strobic flashes. We are compelled to get at character and motive, as in Impressionist writers like Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, through a process of inference from fragmentary data, often with crucial pieces of narrative exposition strategically withheld, and this leads to multiple or sometimes even wavering perspectives on the characters. There is, in other words, an abiding mystery in character as the biblical writers conceive it, which they embody in their typical methods of presentation.” While Alter’s observations are characteristically focused on the author’s design and intention, the general impression that they leave of the biblical reader’s experience tracks very closely with my own.

53. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 2–3, 10.

54. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 14–17.

55. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 21–22.

56. Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 43. Compare Iser, *Act of Reading*, 169: “the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text.” In “Reading Process,” 133, Iser employs the useful metaphor of a constellation to illustrate the point: “two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper. The ‘stars’ in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.”

character such as Sarah, too, as a “concrete semblance” of a human being, is constructed in just such a symbiosis of discourse structure and readerly consciousness.

The question of audience. However, the fact that Sarah, a character in narratives composed two millennia and more ago, is the person of interest in this investigation—and not, say, Robert Jordan of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, or even Don Quixote—presents a special set of problems regarding the role and the identity of the reader. It is plain that these narratives were created by and for real human beings whose cultures differ greatly from my own. Questions of orality, literacy, and performance, semantic concerns and the comprehension of idiom, and uncertainties about a host of other cultural assumptions that may never be fully reconstructible are only some of the quandaries that arise as a result. Moreover, several narratives are in view in this study, and their individual contexts, where these may be ascertained with any confidence, vary sharply from one another. These issues are complex when I, as an Anglo-American of the United States, read contemporary fiction such as that of Gabriel García Márquez; they are positively daunting when considering several ancient narratives written in three different dead languages.

Although individual efforts range over a wide spectrum, biblical narrative critics have responded to this situation in two primary ways. The first, which may be described as ahistorical, is that adopted in much “classical” biblical narrative work.⁵⁷ This movement was prompted not only by biblical narrative critique’s New-Critical and structuralist roots, which emphasized the “text-in-itself,” but also by a deliberate revolt against the unrelenting historical focus of

57. The term “ahistorical” is here descriptive, not pejorative, and describes a tendency rather than a kind of strict ideology of reading. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 7–12, for example, do not disparage historical-critical inquiry in itself, although they completely reject the epistemological confidence that characterized much of such scholarship. Rather, for Gunn and Fewell here, historical criticism is “a distinctly secondary line of inquiry” and not “a necessary major precondition” of reading ancient texts. This does not mean that they never draw on ancient material or literary data, however (11). Compare the sharper language of J. P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 206–7, who calls speculation on historical context one of the “biggest traps” lying in wait for those seeking to read biblical narrative “properly.” Another, more recent example of a largely ahistorical reading is that of Humphreys, *Character of God*, who, among other concerns, is broadly skeptical of historical reconstructions of the communities in which the narratives of Genesis–2 Kings were produced (19).

traditional biblical criticism.⁵⁸ Roughly put, then, this first kind of reading asks what a narrative *means*, in the present tense: “in itself,” perhaps, but often implicitly “to me,” or “to a reader like me,” or “to my reading community.”⁵⁹ The second, which might be broadly termed historical-contextual, was, in turn, partly a reaction against this ahistorical posture, and emphasizes the reconstruction of an audience or reader loosely contemporaneous to a work’s composition.⁶⁰ This reconstruction is partly the work of external historical investigation, but is also cued by elements of the text itself, which are mined to discover what kinds of cultural knowledge were assumed in its writing.⁶¹ Roughly put, again, this second kind of reading asks what a narrative *meant*, in the past tense, to its original auditors or readers.⁶²

As a number of critics have recognized, neither of these extremes is fully sustainable. The chief weakness of any attempt to take a strictly ahistorical approach to ancient narratives is that these are exclusively manifest in written texts whose culturally-bound means of expression are alien to our own. To learn the meaning of ancient words in their syntax, to puzzle out their idioms, euphemisms, and figures, which is not to mention higher-level phenomena such as type-scenes, typed characters, or generic conventions—this is already historically-focused cultural investigation of a profound sort. And yet, as John Darr observes of New Testament narrative investigations, virtually no scholar, however ahistoricist in sympathies, is “willing to abandon the Koine texts for *Today’s English Version*.”⁶³ On the other hand, reconstructions of an “original

58. John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 13; compare Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 7–12.

59. This does not imply that ahistorical criticism is a postmodern free-for-all—indeed, Alter, whose approach is largely ahistorical in the terms of my discussion here, assumes that a competent reader can be persuaded of the validity of his generally author-centered readings. This is to say that the distinction I am making here is conceptually separate from, if necessarily related to, the question of the locus of meaning in literature.

60. John A. Darr, *Character Building*, 13–14, 23–29. In aim, then, if not in procedure, this kind of narrative work displays distinct sympathies with form-critical efforts to postulate a text’s *Sitz im Leben*.

61. See John A. Darr, *Character Building*, 23–29, who reconstructs a “text-specific” reader while, however, criticizing “specific reconstructions” of the Lukan *Sitz im Leben*.

62. This is not to say that the interest of these critics is strictly or even primarily antiquarian; audience reconstructions are also part of arguments meant to inform how we read ancient narratives today.

63. John A. Darr, *Character Building*, 14. The use of a translation would, of course, only put the burden of this necessary cultural investigation on someone else. Compare Sternberg, *Poetics*, 11: “Nobody is likely to regard

reader” or audience frequently stumble on a dearth of evidence and end in speculative proposals that vary sharply from critic to critic.⁶⁴ What is difficult in the narratives of the NT, moreover, approaches the impossible in much Pentateuchal material.⁶⁵ Of the narratives in view in this study, only the compositional context of the *Antiquities* can be specified with reasonable confidence, and even here there is much uncertainty as to Josephus’s intended, let alone actual, audience.⁶⁶

For my project here, then, I readily admit to a complicated, hybrid identity as the reader of these ancient narratives.⁶⁷ I consider close work with original languages and means of expression to be indispensable to quality narrative-critical readings; for this and other reasons, which include a deep respect for the real human beings who created them, I would never claim that the historical context of the composition of the narratives in question is irrelevant. However, the highly mediated fashion in which I comprehend these languages impels me at once to recognize the cultural distance that separates me from these narratives’ original composers and consumers, and to confess the difficulty that lies in their postulated reconstruction. Nor do I see a satisfactory solution in the detection or assembly of an “implied reader,” which, as its name indicates, is a function of a text.⁶⁸ I respectfully decline to identify with a text-function, and I assert my freedom

the grammar and semantics of biblical Hebrew as irrelevant to a literary approach.” See the similar sentiment in Ronald Hendel, “Introduction,” in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald Hendel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4. However, contrast the approach of Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 8, who, at least in this effort directed at a “broad readership” lacking experience with the relevant ancient languages, defends a translation as a “valid text in its own right,” and works with “familiar translations” in an effort to identify more fully with his readers.

64. See John A. Darr, *Character Building*, 23–25, for examples from work on Luke-Acts.

65. Humphreys, *Character of God*, 19: “It is difficult to describe specific contexts in which texts like Genesis were produced and first heard and read, and it is therefore even more difficult for us to imagine ourselves back into them in more than approximate and hypothetical ways.”

66. See Feldman, *JA 1–4*, xvii–xx, for a balanced consideration of these matters.

67. See the formulation of John A. Darr, *Character Building*, 26, who “images” a “*hybrid* reader, part ancient, part modern, part reader, part critic” (emphasis in the original). However, Darr still attempts a reconstruction of an original audience member, albeit with significant “gaps” plugged by his own identity and context (25, 27).

68. Narratologists exhibit little agreement on this extremely complex matter of defining “the reader.” See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 118–19, on the welter of terms used in narratological discussions: is the reader the “‘Actual Reader’ (Van Dijk, Jauss), the ‘Superreader’ (Riffaterre), the ‘Informed Reader’ (Fish), the ‘Ideal Reader’ (Culler), the ‘Model Reader’ (Eco), the ‘Implied Reader’ (Booth, Iser, Chatman, Perry), or the ‘Encoded

to ask questions of these narratives, prompted by my social location and personal concerns, that may never have occurred to their ancient writers, auditors, or readers. At the same time, I contend, as detailed above, that my task of reading character is not separable from my reading of human beings, and I believe that there is an irreducible humanness expressed in these ancient stories that I am able to comprehend.

With Hochman, again, then, I “acknowledge the otherness” of these ancient narratives’ cultures and ideas of personhood, and affirm the necessity of historical and cultural investigation into the meanings of the words that depict the worlds of their stories. However, my construction of character, though “guided by the signs” of a given text, is finally actualized in its gaps, which I can only fill by drawing on my own experience and perception of what a person is.⁶⁹ I, at last, am “the reader” here, a man, in my thirties, a practicing if critical Roman Catholic with a justice

Reader’ (Brooke-Rose)?” Rimmon-Kenan herself explicitly adopts something along the lines of the latter two categories, an “implied” or “encoded” reader, an “it” that is “a metonymic characterization of the text,” in Perry’s words. The advantage, Rimmon-Kenan says, of speaking of an implied reader, as opposed to something like “textual strategies,” is that this “implies a view of the text as a system of reconstruction-inviting structures rather than as an autonomous object.” This construct, then, can partially mitigate an overly text-centric focus. It is less attractive from my mimetic point of view, as “the relevance of the psychology of readers is fairly limited” to its description; as I argue throughout this chapter, however, my construction of character is not separable from my reading of people. It is interesting to note, as well, that Rimmon-Kenan herself sometimes speaks as if “the reader” in view is a flesh-and-blood individual, as in her discussion of the reversibility of the hierarchies of character and plot, mentioned above (*Narrative Fiction*, 36). See, too, Herman’s thoughtful critique of the use of “reader constructs,” which, he argues, runs the danger of “losing sight of the heuristic status of these models and reifying or hypostatizing the entities they encompass.” Thus these constructs can be used to present an interpretation as if it were that “called for by the text itself,” when in fact an “implied” reader can never be anything but an interpretation of an actual reader (David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory*, 151–54). In any event, what Rimmon-Kenan calls the “plethora of appellations” for the reader, which seems partly a symptom of the narratological enthusiasm for jargon, can lead to confusion, as in the article of Hyun Chul Paul Kim, “Reading the Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50) as a Diaspora Narrative,” *CBQ* 75 (2013): 219–38, who consistently employs the term “implied readers” where “real (historical) readers” or “original audience” is meant. In this formulation “implied readers,” whose identity is not gleaned from the text but assumed from a postulated historical context, are thus “living” Jews with “ongoing struggles,” able to “learn” and “transform” under the influence of the supposedly hortatory and didactic narrative (221–222, 227, 235, 237).

69. Hochman, *Character*, 54–57, is, in my estimation, thoroughly convincing on these matters. Our distance from others’ conceptions of personhood, though variable and relative, is undeniable. “Yet our retrieval of character from other epochs, from other cultures, and even from works that were the products of sensibilities different from our own rests upon a construction of the elements in the work on the model of the notions and responses available to us. . . . We must factor [our conception of a character’s motive] in terms comprehensible to us, even when we are intent on understanding and explicating it in historically grounded terms.” Even in the extreme, possibly entirely hypothetical case of a literature and culture lacking a “conception of the human individual,” we simply cannot avoid constructing a character “in terms of our own conception of person, motive, and action”—we have nothing else to go on.

orientation, of northern European descent and North American origin with, however, significant cross-cultural experience and a love for old languages and stories, straight, able-bodied, married, a father.

Practical Concerns: Characterization and Its Means

A Fluid or Relational Paradigm?

How, then, speaking practically, is this “concrete semblance” of a human being—a character—formed? I will detail particular means or cues of characterization that I interact with in my construction of character below. First, however, as a tie between the foregoing theory and the following guide to application, it is useful to summarize Chatman’s conception of character as a “paradigm of traits,” which was briefly mentioned above. This conception, complemented by Iser’s emphasis on the linearity of the reading process and tempered by a sensible caution urged by Rimmon-Kenan and Hochman, is helpful here because of its clarity and specificity.⁷⁰ These qualities aid in anchoring the sometimes necessarily abstract answers mooted above to the question “what is a character?” to my practical procedure in reading Sarah in the variety of narratives under discussion.

A “trait” in Chatman’s scheme, again, is simply an adjective in ordinary language that describes a relatively enduring, individuating quality of a character: brave, shy, unfeeling, cruel, or the like. These adjectives are story-level elements that may, but often do not, appear directly in the discourse.⁷¹ A character’s traits may conflict with one another, and they may arise or pass away during the course of a story, but they are persistent in a way that “more ephemeral psychological phenomena” such as thoughts, moods, and even habits are not. Considered as a set or “paradigm,” usually distilled into a proper name, these traits are constitutive of a character, a

70. Describing the reading process as “linear” does not, in my conception, imply that its every aspect is unidirectional, as the following discussion makes plain. See Menakhem Perry, “Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meanings [with an Analysis of Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’],” *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 58.

71. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 38, adds that a textual adjective may well clash with a reader’s inference of traits by other means.

story-level entity that, while obviously fictive, transcends a story's plot and can endure indefinitely in a reader's memory.⁷²

Describing Chatman's conception in such a bald way risks making the process of trait "assembly" seem mechanical, or, at best, a specifically literary enterprise. However, it is this core concept of "trait" itself that indissolubly ties the reading of literary characters to the experience of real-life human intercourse. What Chatman calls the "transaction between narrative and audience" depends precisely upon the latter's familiarity with the "enormous" thesaurus of traits culturally available to social human beings.⁷³ And just as the knowledge of these traits is primarily absorbed through human interaction, so too are the skills required to piece them together into a semblance of a whole. As readers of literary characters we evaluate traits we infer from actions or happenings against a trait "paradigm" we have established through earlier inferences, integrating, adding, revising, and puzzling out conflicts as we go—a process that Chatman argues does not meaningfully "differ in kind from our ordinary evaluations of human beings."⁷⁴

72. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 121–31. Chatman repeatedly defends the use of "trait-names stored by history in ordinary language," and, indeed, the use of the word "trait" itself, in the description or construction of character (123–26). To employ adjectives such as "cold-blooded" or "fatuous" in characterization is not to insist that these terms exhaust or are coterminous with the traits they represent; of course these are "socially invented signs" that capture the essence of an idea less than perfectly (124). But it is equally clear that there is no other lexicon of traits to access, and the use of such "trait-names stored by history" is perfectly apt in a mimetic conception of character: "The repertoire of names exactly suits a genre addressed to an audience that analyzes persons in cultural (hence language-bound) terms, that is, verisimilarly" (124). It is interesting to note that a recent study of "chimpanzee character" or "personality" relies precisely on the observation and inference of traits, expressed as English adjectives ("stingy," "bold," "equable," and so on), to identify the "dimensions" of chimpanzee "personas." What is significant here, of course, is what this reveals about the human evaluators' perspectives on character. See "Planet of the apes," *The Economist*, 15 June 2013, 79 (no byline). The interplay of traits also allows Chatman's "open structuralist" scheme here to interact with E. M. Forster's durable idea of "round" and "flat" characters: a flat character has one trait, or one very dominant trait, while a round character has a variety of traits that are sometimes in conflict or even contradiction, which leads to unpredictable behavior (*Story and Discourse*, 131–32).

73. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 125.

74. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 127–28. Chatman quotes Percy Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction* here: "Nothing is simpler than to create for oneself the idea of a human being, a figure and a character, from a series of glimpses and anecdotes. Creation of this kind we practise every day; we are continually piecing together our fragmentary evidence about the people around us and moulding their images in thought." Interestingly, Chatman notes that human aesthetic experience, such as might be had in reading literature, is also a source of knowledge of traits and their assemblage: in the case of characters, "we are not dealing with psychological realities but artistic constructs, yet . . . we understand these constructs through highly coded psychological information that we have picked up in ordinary living, including our experiences with art" (126). Although he does not develop this final

Iser's insistence on the reciprocal, linear nature of this "transaction" in which meaning is constructed between reader and narrative provides a helpful complement to this "constitutive" aspect of Chatman's character model.⁷⁵ Indeed, Iser's scheme would be better described as an almost uncountable series of such transactions, with each drawing influence from what has gone before and, in turn, affecting what comes next:

We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their non-fulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation [of a work of art].⁷⁶

Once again, Ingarden's concept of "schematized views" provides the foundation for Iser's ideas here. Because realities such as a person's existence can never be fully represented in any medium, the literary presentation of character must proceed in a series of such schematized views, each necessarily incomplete but "supplemented by the next so there gradually arises the illusion of a complete representation."⁷⁷ Every "blank" or gap between views is met by the reader's construction of an image formed partly in reaction to images already generated in response to earlier blanks.⁷⁸ In this reciprocating fashion, an ever more comprehensive image of a

point, it may provide some nuance to these often counterpoised ideas, expressed loosely, of "real-life" experience versus that gained in "reading." The human experience accessed in reading literary character comes not only from body-to-body meetings on Earth, but also from the reading of other literature; what is more, knowledge gained by reading literary character likely informs our evaluations of human beings.

75. Interestingly, although Chatman's arguments about character and other aspects of narrative are at many points compatible with Iser's theories, Iser is not mentioned in *Story and Discourse*. Chatman turns to Ingarden's "phenomenological aesthetics," on the other hand, to help distinguish "real" from "aesthetic" objects early in his presentation. In the case of literature, the real object is often a "pile of printed pages," while the aesthetic object is the reader's "construction," none other than the "story" of his book's title (Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 26–27). The construction of the aesthetic object is the primary topic of Iser's final chapter in *Act of Reading* ("How Acts of Constitution Are Stimulated," 180–231), of which the following remarks are a partial summary.

76. Iser, "Reading Process," 139. The use of "recreation" here refers to John Dewey's discussion of the attempt of a "beholder" or reader to order a work of art in a way construed as that which the "author meant." This does not seem to imply that this precise meaning is retrievable, but merely that some formal correspondence must occur in order for communication to take place.

77. Iser, *Act of Reading*, 180. The brain's construction of a "motion picture" from what is actually a series of stills on film may provide a helpful analogy here.

78. Although my interest in character leads me to concentrate on the parts of Iser's discussion that illuminate this "aspect" of narrative, these "images" and "blanks" are not so restricted, applying equally to aspects such as plot and, indeed, to the interactions of these disparate aspects: "In the time-flow of reading, segments of the various perspectives move into focus and take on their actuality by being set off against preceding segments. Thus the segments of characters, narrator, plot, and fictitious reader perspectives are not only marshaled into a graduated sequence, but are also transformed into reciprocal reflectors. The blank as an empty space between segments enables

“feature of the aesthetic object,” in this case a trait of a character inhabiting the story world, is shaped by the reader’s imagination.⁷⁹

When considered alongside Chatman’s paradigm of traits, Iser’s work valuably emphasizes character construction as a process rooted in the activity of the reader. Past “views” cannot change, but an image generated by the reader in response to a blank may partly represent, as it were, a new look at an old view. Thus in characterization a previously inferred trait may be modified or even discarded as new perspectives come to light. This insistence on the evolutionary nature of the process, however, sometimes seems curiously limited to the apprehension of the reader, whose image of an “object” becomes more “comprehensive.” The “object” itself can seem essentialized, even static, something to be uncovered. This is an odd charge indeed to lay against Iser, whose broader contribution has been in part to shake the modern conviction that meaning lies latent and awaiting discovery in narratives. However, his discussion of Squire Allworthy in *Tom Jones*, for example, is strongly essentializing: initial ideas about the character prove to be “wrong” as his true nature is revealed.⁸⁰ Chatman’s idea of our process of sizing up others, mentioned above, faces the same objection, as it can imply that discrepancies encountered in the process of constructing a character, whether human or literary, are merely apparent and in need of resolution. No doubt this is sometimes the case; but the possibility of change and evolution within a character is thus downplayed.

them to be joined together, thus constituting a field of vision for the wandering viewpoint” (Iser, *Act of Reading*, 197).

79. Iser, *Act of Reading*, 186, 203, 205. The linear nature of the process of reading arguably undergirds nearly all of Iser’s presentation; see remarks on “redundancy and innovation” (93), temporal aspects of the “wandering viewpoint” (116–18 and elsewhere), “expectation and memory” (135), and so on. In Iser, “Reading Process,” 127–33, he speaks of “expectation” or “anticipation” and “retrospection” in the course of reading. Links between sentences “form an expectation,” providing a place for the reader to “climb aboard” the text.” These expectations “arouse interest in what is to come,” while their later revision has a “retrospective effect on what has already been read.” It is this “process of anticipation and retrospection” that creates a literary reality. See also Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 11, and 39–40, where he describes a “feedback” effect. Compare Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 120, on “primacy” and “recency” effects as discussed by Perry, “Literary Dynamics”; see also my remarks on this below.

80. Iser, *Act of Reading*, 186–87.

This, in fact, is the central critique of both Rimmon-Kenan and Hochman, who regard Chatman's concept of character as "paradigm" as too "static."⁸¹ As the brief outline of Chatman's theory given above indicates, at certain points this may be more a critique of an infelicitous term than an objection to the substance of his idea. For example, the persistence of traits in Chatman's scheme is relative, and these may both "emerge" and "disappear" in a character's narrative trajectory.⁸² At the same time, Chatman does not discourage an impression of fixity when he speaks, for instance, of a trait-set, and thus a character, as a "vertical assemblage" intersecting the plot.⁸³ Rimmon-Kenan's point is well-taken, then, especially in a mimetic conception of character, that "discussion of the 'directional' dimension of character (development, 'biography')" must be an integral part of character reading.⁸⁴ Particularly valuable in Hochman's critique is his insistence on conflict, both "intrapsychic" and social, as a catalyst for character development.⁸⁵ This informs my formulation of a key rubric in my own scheme of means of characterization, that of relationality, which I detail below.⁸⁶ While adopting Chatman's basic conception of character as a paradigm of traits, then, and emphasizing alongside Iser the linear, reciprocal, and participatory nature of its construction, I take the caution of Rimmon-

81. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 39; Hochman, *Character*, 50.

82. See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 126: "I argue—unoriginally but firmly—for a conception of character as a paradigm of traits; 'trait' in the sense of 'relatively stable or abiding personal quality,' recognizing that it may either unfold, that is, emerge earlier or later in the course of the story, or that it may disappear and be replaced by another. In other words, its domain may end."

83. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 127. Chatman is explicitly speaking "metaphorically" here, but, again, the choice of metaphor lends itself easily to a static interpretation.

84. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 39.

85. Hochman, *Character*, 50–54: "Any adequate conception of character must include some conceptualization of the kinds of conflict that are experienced by people in life and by their analogues in literature." The centrality of conflict to Hochman's presentation is owing explicitly to the work of Hegel, Marx, and Freud. No endorsement or dismissal of the larger systems of these thinkers seems required to acknowledge from human experience that conflict profoundly shapes a person's "character." On the other hand, the influence of Freud, in particular, on modern Western consciousness is deeply and likely unquantifiably pervasive. In any event, as Hochman goes on to note, whatever the factors in the construction of our idea of "what a person is," that idea exists, and there is no way to set it aside in our reading of literary characters or other people (54–57).

86. The work of Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization*, SBLDS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), is also valuable to my discussion here, as will be noted below. Conway, likewise partly in interaction with Hochman, also emphasizes relationality in her treatment of characterization.

Kenan and Hochman and soften the edges of Chatman's metaphor. This allows for conflict and development without denying that a mimetic conception of character demands some level of structure and coherence: a paradigm that is yet progressively fluid, organic, and relational.

Means or Cues That Help Generate Such a Fluid or Relational Paradigm

The “weighing of claims” in characterization. So these “narrative adjectives” or “traits” that readers infer to form characters are story-level elements that often do not appear directly in the discourse. But how, then, speaking very practically, are these inferences triggered? What is the raw material upon which the reader's consciousness goes to work? Rimmon-Kenan, as noted earlier, points out that the text is the only aspect of narrative fiction that is directly accessible to the reader.⁸⁷ Clearly it is here, then, where these triggers or cues to inference—what are usually called the “means” of characterization—are to be found.⁸⁸

While the “secular” critics discussed to this point generally avoid detailed rubrics or lists of means of characterization in literature, many biblical narrative critics generate them with enthusiasm.⁸⁹ By far the most influential in this sphere has been the weighted scale of Alter, which is adopted or adapted by a majority of scholars engaged in narrative critique of characters in the Bible, and at least referred to by nearly all who have set to work since the publication of *The Art of Biblical Narrative* in 1981. The elements of this scale, given in “ascending order of explicitness and certainty,” are actions, appearance, comments of another character, direct

87. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 4.

88. The term “means” need not imply a text-centric approach. It is enough, I think, to emphasize the notion of instrumentality, which underlines the fact that nothing is finally built or formed apart from the agency of the reader. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59 and elsewhere, uses the term “indicator” or “character-indicator,” which may be slightly more satisfactory as it implies that these textual elements point to, or serve as signs for, character traits. See, however, 137–38, n. 1b.

89. See, for example, Harvey, *Character*, 30–31, who notes that he is interested in the “elements” or “raw material” of character rather than “techniques of characterization.” However, Harvey also acknowledges that such elements and techniques are not ultimately separable (30). Hochman's complex schemata, referred to above, concern abstract qualities of characterization such as “wholeness” or “fragmentariness” rather than its means (Hochman, *Character*, 89). Sternberg's fifteen-point “spectrum,” also noted previously, on the other hand, represents the extreme of a tendency toward a taxonomy of means that is reflected more generally in biblical narrative work (Sternberg, *Poetics*, 475).

speech, thought, and narratorial remarks about motivation.⁹⁰ Alter goes on to explain his hierarchy, asserting that actions and appearance leave a reader “substantially in the realm of inference”; that speech about and by a character “lead us from inference to the weighing of claims”; that thought or “inward speech” enters “the realm of relative certainty about character”; and, finally, that “we are accorded certainty” in statements made by the reliable narrator.⁹¹

Alter’s scale has a number of strengths, not least of which are its simplicity and utility. It is likely that these qualities have played a role in its adoption by so many biblical scholars, who often come to the discipline of narrative analysis at a relatively late stage of their formation. As Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell note, it can be useful to have such a weighted scale as a provisional, practical guide, as it helps the reader begin to sort the claims and perspectives of the text into a sensible arrangement.⁹² There is also little doubt that the sheer verve and perspicacity of Alter’s own readings contribute to the enormous influence that he, and his “scale of means,” have had upon a generation of critics. His performance of these readings, moreover, demonstrates that the distillation and employment of lists of means need not lead to lifeless criticism: if others have applied his rubric mechanically, this is certainly not owing to close observation of Alter’s own practice. However, it is the very principle upon which this hierarchical scale is founded that begins to cause problems for the reader who is not willing always to be guided by the narrator.

It is one thing that the definitions and distinctions of Alter’s scale often lead only to further questions. Isn’t speech, for instance, as much an “action” as anything else a character may

90. Alter, *Art*, 146. As discussed more fully below, the weighting of this scale is based upon Alter’s contention that the Bible is a “reliable third-person narration.” In such works, Alter argues, there is “a scale of means . . . for conveying information about the motives, the attitudes, the moral nature of characters.” Here is Alter’s own description: “Character can be revealed through the report of actions; through appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character’s comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations.” Compare Sternberg’s “fifteen rhetorical devices,” the spectrum of which is similarly bound to narratorial authority (Sternberg, *Poetics*, 475–81).

91. Alter, *Art*, 146–47.

92. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 54. See, however, their significant critique of the organizing principle of Alter’s scale, detailed below.

do? Or why should speech be intrinsically more reliable as an indicator of character than nonverbal actions? Common wisdom, of course, which makes a similar distinction, would have it the other way around. The more basic issue, however—and the reason that simple rearrangements of Alter’s categories, such as that of Amelia Freedman, following W. Lee Humphreys, fail to satisfy—is the spectrum’s underlying ordering principle of narratorial authority.⁹³

Gunn and Fewell contend that Alter’s assumption of an “all-knowing and also perfectly reliable” biblical narrator “cannot be sustained without significant modification.”⁹⁴ They lodge two objections here. The first hearkens back to “literary criticism” in its older sense, noting that flat discrepancies in fact between various biblical narratives make it impossible to maintain the idea of a single, always-reliable narrator without positing numerous textual divisions in the style of source criticism. The second, more significant critique is that a grant of absolute narratorial reliability precludes consideration of ironic exchange between narrator and reader. Arch narratorial evaluations such as that concerning David—who “did not turn aside from anything that [Yahweh] commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”—prove “inherently destabilizing” to the narrator-reader relationship.⁹⁵ Gunn and Fewell

93. Freedman, *God as an Absent Character*, 33, contends that Alter’s scale is internally inconsistent. For example, description of a character’s actions can only come from the narrator, who is conceived of as absolutely reliable. On what grounds, then, Freedman asks, does Alter consign such description to the category of “least reliable”? Freedman accordingly follows Humphreys, *Character of God*, 8, in boosting description of actions from least reliable to “third least reliable,” that is, just under direct speech in her hierarchy of means. It strikes me that this objection may be confusing the simple occurrence of an action with its potential significance: what is at stake is not whether a character acts, but rather what this action means to the construction of the character’s traits. In any event, this kind of rearrangement of Alter’s hierarchy also seems to raise as many questions as it answers. The reader’s only source of information is the ostensibly reliably narrated text, and the description of a character’s appearance is also therefore presumably reliable. Why would this necessarily be less revelatory than other characters’ testimony, for instance? Particularly for biblical narrative, which is famously reticent about physical attributes, it seems that the very rarity of such description would lend it weight. Compare the discussions of Berlin, *Poetics*, 34–37, and Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48–53, who both argue that personal description in the Bible is never incidental. And this example is merely symptomatic of a larger difficulty with the hierarchical organization of Alter’s scheme, as similar questions can be posed about other points on the scale.

94. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 53–56; quotation from 54. Sternberg’s “absolutely and straightforwardly reliable” narrator is also included in this critique. Alter’s characterization of the biblical narrator is found in *Art*, 228, and throughout.

95. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 55; 1 Kgs 15:5. They note that Solomon is favored with a similarly backhanded compliment in 1 Kgs 3:3, where his enduring and central flaw—“going after” other

conclude that a reader may conceive of one narrator or many, but that absolute reliability cannot be claimed in either case: a single narrator's account must be less than reliable due to factual contradictions and ironic evaluations that may be at variance with other narrative elements, whereas numerous biblical narrators are necessarily subject to mutual subversion.⁹⁶

Alice Bach, likewise partly in response to the formulations of Alter and Sternberg, also levels a significant challenge to notions of narratorial reliability, but from a feminist angle. In her rereading of the Bathsheba narratives, Bach takes on the role of a reader or “narratee” who is “irritable” and “suspicious” of the narrator's projected transparency and honesty.⁹⁷ This leads her to view the narrator not as a disinterested entity floating above the storyworld but as another kind of character, a “storyteller with whom the reader must contend,” and one who is often “telling it slant” in the tones of patriarchy.⁹⁸ What Bach calls “authorial” narrators clearly have a “stronger voice” than that of the characters whom they describe, and as such their evaluations are harder to resist, especially when a reader's theology, gender, and politics mesh with those of the narrator.⁹⁹ However, Bach argues that by hypothesizing narratees who are not wholly compliant with the narrator's values, a reader can begin to realize the outlines of the narrator as a “figure possessing gods—is mentioned as the one “exception” to his great love of Yahweh.

96. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 56.

97. Alice Bach, “Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible,” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 352, 362. Bach details Gerald Prince's description of the “narratee-character, a construct created by the author” on 352. She suggests that we as readers shift our “readerly identity” from “ideal reader” to “suspicious narratee,” though the line between such a suspicious narratee and a suspicious real reader such as Bach herself is sometimes not well defined (see 355). Moreover, as Bach's own characterization of Prince's idea just quoted shows, his “narratee,” as an authorial construct, while surely a topic of debate and susceptible to various reconstructions, is presumably not open to strategic modification at the reader's design. Bach is clearer on this score when she speaks of “[i]magine various types of narratees” as a way to get at the “character” of the narrator (355): posited entities, then, whose resistance to the narrator's tale reveals properties of the narrator that might remain obscure in a more compliant reading.

98. Bach, “Signs,” 351, 353, 356. On the narrator as a character, see also Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 52–53.

99. Bach, “Signs,” 353, 356. In Bach's view, these sympathies make critics such as Sternberg and Alter “eager to please the father narrator” (355). Bach's discussion of “authorial narrators,” which is influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin, seems to define these as narrators who have no overt role in the story (that is, narrators who are both “extradiegetic” and “heterodiegetic” in the influential language of Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980], 228–31, 244–45; originally published as “Discours du récit,” part of the author's *Figures III*, in 1972).

various attitudes” and traits much as a character does. This allows a reader to break out of the narrator’s “fixed gaze” in order to “surreptitiously glance around the fictive landscape to pick up clues about the story that didn’t tempt the narrator.”¹⁰⁰ Bach’s suggestions are of particular value to a project, such as this one, that seeks readings of a female character in androcentric literature.¹⁰¹

These critiques strengthen the case that I began to build above in discussion of the internal inconsistencies of Alter’s graduated scale: the reader cannot escape the “weighing of claims” at any point in the hierarchy. When an account of an action of a character is juxtaposed with an account of that character’s internal monologue or thought, for example, there can be no automatic subordination of the former to the latter. Unless mimetic qualities are denied completely, it should be enough here to ask of any human reader whether confusion or self-deception in thought has ever played a role in her or his life. Further, Gunn and Fewell show that even the evaluations of the narrator, on the extreme upper end of Alter’s scale of reliability, cannot simply be taken at face value but must be delicately weighed with other narrative features. Friction between reported events and narratorial evaluations may indicate the play of irony. Finally, Bach demonstrates that narrators have qualities, even personalities, that may come into view under questioning, and that these qualities can and should influence a “weighing of claims,” particularly when a narrator’s subject is an “other.”

As this conversation has developed in a specifically biblical context, it is worth highlighting that this study also reads other narratives, and that these feature a diverse cast of narrators. The relevant section of the Genesis Apocryphon is narrated retrospectively, in the first

100. Bach, “Signs,” 356, 362. A simple but effective example of this is Bach’s discussion of the bathing scene, where she employs the metaphor of “narrator as filmmaker” to illustrate how clearly the “scene has been constructed for a male spectator” who joins his voyeuristic gaze to that of David (360–61). This begins to flesh out the male, patriarchal identity of the narrator, which in turn helps the reader start to consider alternative perspectives from which to view this and subsequent scenes.

101. The point holds more broadly in readings that seek to illuminate members of the “supporting cast” of a narrative: Gina Hens-Piazza, “The Major Importance of Minor Biblical Characters,” a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA, August 4, 2013, observes that the reader must play a more vital role in the construction of characters that are of little interest to their narrator—in part, crucially, by “refusing the narrator an unearned status of importance.”

person, by the character of Abram himself. Josephus, as an author and a real human being, cannot be uncritically identified with the narrator of his retelling in the *Antiquities*, but occasional references to real-world intentions and plans—such as the composition of Josephus’s never-completed work *On Customs and Causes* (*Ant.* 4.198 and elsewhere)—can blur the distinction somewhat. Even the LXX of Genesis offers a subtly different narrator from that of its *Vorlage*, for the expression and formulation of the discourse, its generally “literal” quality notwithstanding, is irreducibly distinct.¹⁰²

To insist that the weighing of claims between various means of characterization is always necessary is not to deny that practical hierarchies are often established—merely that the activity of weighing must always be engaged. When Sarai is introduced in Gen 11:29–30, the narrator gives her no lineage, although the notice is surrounded by painstakingly drawn genealogies of the other characters. Instead, she is said to be “infertile,” “with no child.” As a reader, I provisionally grant that these flat indicative statements are essentially reliable, or at the least more initially trustworthy than, for instance, Abram’s evaluation of Sarai’s beauty in 12:11. The latter statement is couched in persuasive, even wheedling speech, which throws its transparency into doubt; to be skeptical at once of the former, however, may raise the question of whether the narrative is even worth reading. To ask whether the character is “really” infertile seems, here at least, as pointless as asking whether she is “really” named Sarai. But, reading on, I see that the narrator and other characters agree with Abram that Sarai is beautiful (12:14–15); what is more, I see that Sarai is not, in the final analysis, infertile (or named Sarai!—21:2; 17:15). All of these claims bear weighing, in prospect and retrospect, and as a reader I do so out of my own experience with people, the world, and other literature, if always as cued by the text immediately to hand.

102. See Naomi Seidman, “Translation,” in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald Hendel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162–63: a “translation is also in some sense ‘an original.’ Translators inevitably create new texts in incorporating cultural meanings available in their own language.”

In my view, then, the utility of Alter's graduated scale comes at too high a price. I will adopt in its place a sort of "soft-model" structure of means of characterization, drawing on the discussions of Rimmon-Kenan, Bar-Efrat, and Berlin, that is somewhat more fluid, and less rigidly hierarchical. Again, as will be plain, this is not to claim that narrative elements do not feature relative values, but simply to insist that comparative appraisal of value is always necessary.¹⁰³ Finally, in addition to the following categories of means, I will suggest a more gestalt approach to characterization that centers on the idea of relationality.

Kinds of means and their features. Rimmon-Kenan, partly following Joseph Ewen, divides means of characterization or "textual indicators of character" into two basic kinds: "direct definition" and "indirect presentation."¹⁰⁴ This distinction, which is adopted in one form or another by a broad range of narratologists, corresponds roughly to the durable critical division of narrative information into the categories of "telling" and "showing."¹⁰⁵ Direct or "told" indicators in this scheme explicitly name or describe a character trait in the discourse, while indirect or "shown" indicators cue a process of inference that leads to the construction or shaping of a trait in the mind of the reader.¹⁰⁶ Despite areas of significant ambiguity both within and

103. Rimmon-Kenan herself, for example, speaks of levels of authority from the start: Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60.

104. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59.

105. The language of "telling" and "showing" is indelibly associated with the discussion of Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), though the critical distinction is older. Part of Booth's task, however, is to complicate the distinction in response to those who had argued for the aesthetic superiority of showing over telling in literature. Booth argues that "the author's judgment is always present," whether in the "most obtrusive direct comment" or simply in the decision to set pen to paper: what is shown "tells" also (20). To acknowledge the truth of Booth's remark that "the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one," however, is not to admit that this is a distinction entirely without a difference. The division remains at root a useful heuristic and is perhaps particularly suited to the discussion of premodern literature, which generally does not consider direct definition to be an aesthetic defect. On indirect and direct characterization in Greco-Roman literature, see Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 18–22. Compare the presentations of Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, and Berlin, *Poetics*, who both base their discussions of means of characterization on the distinction between telling and showing. Their schemes, however, rarely correspond in detail with one another or with that of Rimmon-Kenan, as shown below. See also the work of Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, which analyzes the characters in Ruth primarily by comparing what is shown with what is told, with a special emphasis on naming (19–31). For an alternative approach, see Bal, *Narratology*, 124–27.

106. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59–60. In my conception, as discussed more fully below, this does not imply that the reader has no role in the construction of directly indicated traits, nor that such indicators are always more reliable than their indirect counterparts.

between these categories, the direct / indirect division has heuristic value, and its provisional adoption lends structure to a discussion of means of characterization.

Direct Indicators. As trait descriptors that appear in the discourse, direct indicators usually take the form of adjectives or nouns in the text, though other parts of speech may also serve: Esau is “hairy” (Gen 27:11); David is a “youth” when he faces Goliath (1 Sam 17:42); Job “avoids evil” (Job 1:1).¹⁰⁷ As these examples show, direct indicators can define aspects of a character that are to some degree “supra-temporal” and “static.”¹⁰⁸ This may overstate the case somewhat, however, as the “domains” of even these explicitly defined traits, to use the language of Chatman, can and do end. Sarah is not “infertile” forever, nor does David remain a “youth.” Further, the “focalization”—often called “point of view”—of direct indicators is not uniform.¹⁰⁹ Although David is noted to be young elsewhere in the near context of his fight with Goliath (1 Sam 17:14, 33), in the example noted just above he is specifically a “youth” who is “flushed and handsome” in the eyes of the Philistine who “looks at” and “sees” him (1 Sam 17:42; but compare 16:11–12).¹¹⁰ This kind of subjectivity also complicates blanket claims of “supra-temporality” for traits indicated directly.

The issue of focalization or point of view, moreover, raises questions that recall the substance of the discussion of Alter’s scheme above: whose words count, and for how much? Rimmon-Kenan states plainly that “naming of a character’s qualities counts as direct

107. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59–60; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48, 51, 53.

108. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 89–90, also contrasts “static” direct characterization with the “mobile” nature of indirect means.

109. On the relative merits of these terms, see the discussion of Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 71–85. As discussed just below, Rimmon-Kenan maintains that direct indicators need to come from “the most authoritative voice in the text” (60). Even under this restrictive definition, however, the identity of this voice varies, certainly between disparate narratives and occasionally within one narrative. Examples of the latter include modern novels in which chapters alternate between various character narrators—which bears some similarity to the sections of the Genesis Apocryphon narrated by Lamech, Noah, and Abram—and the book of Tobit, which begins in the first person and moves to the third. Extended examination tends to complicate these questions of voice even further: Abram, the narrator of the Apocryphon from 19.7 to 21.22, lapses into something like omniscience in 20.2–8.

110. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 72, conveniently summarizes the distinction between focalizer and narrator as “‘who sees?’ v. ‘who speaks?’” The import of David’s youth and fresh appearance is focalized through the consciousness of Goliath here. These attributes cause Goliath to think little of David’s martial prowess, whereas the similar language of 16:12 seems to point to David’s fitness to be Yahweh’s anointed.

characterization only if it proceeds from the most authoritative voice in the text,” while Bar-Efrat and Berlin hold that the speech of both narrator and characters may contain direct or “told” indicators.¹¹¹ Further complications arise when the cumulative and repetitive style of much biblical and biblically-inspired literature is considered: Jacob calls Esau “hairy,” but this is borne out not only by the advancing plot but also by the earlier, narratorial description of Esau’s appearance at birth (Gen 27:11–12, 16, 21–23; 25:25).

The quandaries only multiply when examining proposed critical subdivisions of the direct means of characterization, as these schemes display broad disagreement in their details. Bar-Efrat and Berlin, for example, both isolate description that reflects on a character’s personality or “inner life.”¹¹² But Bar-Efrat, who distinguishes this kind of direct characterization from that concerning “outward appearance,” further divides such information about personality into descriptions of “character traits” and “mental states,” while Berlin includes moral and intellectual traits under the general category of “description,” reserving “inner life” for phenomena such as thoughts and emotions.¹¹³ What is more, the critics do not always agree on whether a certain means of characterization is to be conceived of as direct or indirect. In addition to the divergences over the problem of authority mentioned just above, the means of “appearance” is classified as “indirect presentation” by Rimmon-Kenan, while Bar-Efrat and Berlin both count it as direct; mental and audible speech are treated as one, indirect means by Rimmon-Kenan, while Bar-Efrat and Berlin consider thoughts or “inner speech” to be direct presentation and thus distinguished from indirect, reported oral utterance.¹¹⁴

111. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, distinguishes between a character’s characterization of another that supports the “author’s opinion,” and one that does not (54, 64). Berlin, *Poetics*, merely notes that both narrator and characters “tell” (34, 38).

112. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 53–64, speaks of “inner personality,” while “inner life” is the term of Berlin, *Poetics*, 37–38. Rimmon-Kenan does not subdivide her “direct definition” category (60–61).

113. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48–53; Berlin, *Poetics*, 37–38. The distinction between Bar-Efrat’s “character traits” and “mental states” or “traits” is particularly unclear. The former seems to be “moral” in reference, such as “righteous” or “wicked”; but why should the description of Jonadab as “crafty,” or that of the woman from Tekoa as “wise,” be treated under the separate category of “mental traits”? (53–54).

114. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 63–66; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48–53, 63–77; Berlin, *Poetics*, 34–39. Rimmon-Kenan’s decision to treat description of “external appearance”—which is invariably replete

These examples, which could easily be multiplied, support the formulation of a fluid conception of means of characterization and emphasize that these categories are not exclusive, nor, indeed, ultimately separable. As Berlin notes, all means of characterization, whether direct or indirect, are mutually informing, and almost never stand alone in a narrative.¹¹⁵ Of course, this raises the question of just what, then, the proposition of such disparate groups of uncertain boundaries contributes to the reading of a character, who, especially in a mimetic scheme, is no bundle of fragments but a potentially evolving, personal unity. My answer is simply that such provisional demarcation is methodologically profitable. Considering what adjectives are predicated of a character, who is doing the predication, whether the traits that are named are physical or mental or moral or something else, how they may be resonant and reinforcing or dissonant and fragmenting among themselves and other means of characterization—all these queries are useful heuristics and help to initiate the process of weighing of claims. But what is found and weighed is shaped, by the reading process and in the consciousness of the reader, into a character who, as an organic whole, is more than the sum of her or his parts.

In my conception, then, direct character indicators are discourse elements that name a trait, which by my earlier definition is a story-level narrative element constitutive of a character. As noted above, these trait-names may not exhaust the abstract realities of the traits themselves; but such names in ordinary language are the tools we have at our disposal. These indicators may name physical attributes, social locations, moral predilections, emotions or mental states, or any other human phenomenon that can be described directly, and there is no set hierarchy among these kinds of descriptors. That direct indicators are parts of speech, often adjectives or substantives, implies a speaker, whether an author, narrator, or character. The testimony of these speakers must be weighed against other testimony, spoken or otherwise, and there is no

with just the kind of adjectives that she says are characteristic of “direct definition”—as indirect is initially somewhat puzzling. However, she notes that some of these kinds of description can “function as disguised definitions,” and her parade examples show that much reader inference of traits is required even in the face of detailed physical description (66). The ambiguities here reinforce the argument, made just below, that these categories ultimately coalesce in the construction of a character.

115. Berlin, *Poetics*, 41.

mechanical way to do this. Again, however, this is not to say that these indicators do not have relative value, but simply that this cannot be predetermined in every case. Characters and narrators may be more or less reliable, and their testimony may agree or clash.¹¹⁶ These literary situations are addressed just as they are addressed in life, by an informed weighing of claims in the light of experience.

Indirect indicators. Much of the theoretical ground covered to this point also applies to indirect textual indicators of character, and thus their treatment can be accomplished relatively briefly. Foremost among these indicators that “show” traits without directly naming them in the discourse are a character’s depicted actions and speech. As with direct means, fine distinctions within these categories can serve heuristic purposes. In general, these distinctions correspond, in mimetic fashion, to those employed by social human beings to infer traits of others. For example, as Rimmon-Kenan notes, a trait may be shown by “habitual” actions, “one-time” actions, and acts of commission and omission, in addition to actions contemplated but not undertaken.¹¹⁷ In every case, however, actions in these subcategories are mutually informing and often overlapping. As mentioned above, even the distinction between “action” and “speech” is not always self-evident; Berlin, for instance, does not insist on separating the two.¹¹⁸

Some indirect indicators have qualities that are more obviously literary. Access to the interior speech or thought of others, for example, can only be granted in fiction.¹¹⁹ Other

116. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 51–53.

117. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 61–62.

118. Berlin, *Poetics*, 38–39.

119. This is likely the reason Bar-Efrat and Berlin treat thought as a direct or “told” indicator. The matter is far from simple, but Rimmon-Kenan’s presentation of characters’ thought as a kind of speech seems more logical. In general, the element of inference in evaluation of reported thought resembles that required of reported speech. In any case, fiction does not give access to “thought,” but can only represent this phenomenon mediated through words whose expression is usually obedient to the syntax of speech, and are often, indeed, presented precisely as first-person discourse “voiced” internally. The complexity of these issues may be illustrated by comparing two phrases attributed to Judah with the word אָמַר in Genesis 38. Verse 11—“lest he, too, die, like his brothers”—although apparently “internal,” or, perhaps, “aside,” demands a good deal of contextual inference on the part of the reader, and contains no directly defining adjectives or the like. However, Judah’s seemingly audible declaration in v. 26, “She is more righteous than I,” amounts to a two-fold direct definition, even if this is subject to qualification on grounds of focalization and reliability.

indicators that take their strength from a “relation of spatial contiguity,” such as the “trait-connoting metonymies” of personal appearance and environment, are likewise more dependent upon literary and generic conventions.¹²⁰ While these latter techniques are developed extensively in the modern novel, they are not foreign to ancient literature. As Bar-Efrat notes, for example, Absalom’s beauty and lush growth of hair help to connote his “vanity and self-love” (2 Sam 14:25–26).¹²¹ Trait-reinforcing personal names and environments, which Rimmon-Kenan discusses, are also common in biblical narrative, as in the cases of Jacob “the supplanter” or Hagar’s desolation in the wilderness (Gen 25:26; 16:7–14).¹²²

While direct indicators of character usually appear in the discourse as adjectives, then, indirect indicators manifest most often as verbs of action, or “fientive” verbs in language systems where such a distinction is meaningful.¹²³ As a trait in Chatman’s scheme is a narrative adjective, indirect indicators thus require a varying but generally higher degree of inference to resolve a trait. Er, Judah’s firstborn, is “evil” (Gen 38:7). But what trait or traits are indicated by Abraham’s flurry of activity—running about, prostrating himself, speaking politely, ordering and serving refreshments—when he sees the three men near his tent (Gen 18:1–8)? The ancient and traditional inference is that Abraham is “hospitable,” but a reader may wonder whether self-interest is also indicated, especially given Abraham’s own abuse of hospitality for gain elsewhere (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18). In addition to such verbs of action, other textual elements can serve to

120. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 65–67. On description of appearance as direct or indirect, see the discussion above; Bar-Efrat and Berlin both differ with Rimmon-Kenan here.

121. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 50.

122. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 67–70, makes a distinction between such “analogous names” and “analogous landscapes” and direct or indirect means of characterization, saying that analogy operates as a reinforcing element to a trait already established. It seems, however, that the priority of these elements is not always easy to determine, and that many “direct” or “indirect” means of characterization are also most valuable in a cumulative or reinforcing way. Further, the utility of Rimmon-Kenan’s distinction between “environment” (an indirect means of characterization) and “landscape” (a reinforcing analogy), on the grounds that the former is shaped by humans while the latter is not, is less than plain (66, 69).

123. That is, mechanics such as the part of speech of a given indicator are not strictly associated with direct or indirect means. In Hebrew, a so-called stative verb such as כבד will usually require an adjectival rendering in English, while copulatives such as “to be,” though clearly verbal, often merely enable the expression of direct indicators. As noted above, other verbal phrases may be direct, as well, as in Rimmon-Kenan’s example: “he loves only himself.” Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60.

indirectly characterize, sometimes even as they operate as direct indicators as well: a character's wasted appearance, for example, could indicate a serious illness.

Weighing kinds of means and reader participation. Two interrelated points are worth clarifying before treating relationality as a prism for characterization. The first concerns the relative weights of direct and indirect means. Direct indicators are generally rarer than indirect; in some late modern and postmodern literature, in fact, direct means of characterization are almost completely submerged.¹²⁴ This is an aesthetic preference that is not displayed in most premodern literature, including the Bible. Even here, however, indirect indicators are more numerous than their direct counterparts, which leads critics such as Bar-Efrat to lay the “burden of characterization” on indirect means.¹²⁵ In my work here, however, I will not prejudge this matter; all claims must be weighed. Moreover, some of the literature under consideration is not “biblical”—an anachronism in any case—and these principles and categories will necessarily have to be flexibly applied to each narrative. Josephus displays a greater predilection for direct definition, for example, and the extended physical description of the so-called *wasf* of column 20 of the Genesis Apocryphon, idealized though it may be, is foreign to the economy of expression that marks Genesis.

The second point regards relative levels of ambiguity or dissonance, and thus readerly construction, between direct and indirect means of characterization. Again, direct indicators explicitly name a trait, while indirect indicators require the inference of a trait unnamed in the discourse. I contend, however, that the proportion of readerly involvement and liberty in the recognition or construction of traits indicated cannot be determined in advance in either case. Indirect means of characterization can afford a reader more or less freedom in inferring a trait. When Ezra tears his clothes and pulls his hair out at the news of the people's marriage practices, it is difficult not to infer a trait such as a strong regard for the letter of the law, or, less charitably,

124. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60–61. Compare Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 3–9.

125. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 64, 89–90. Bar-Efrat maintains that “direct ways of shaping the characters” are also valuable, however, due to their “quality,” which is bound up with his estimation of the authority of the narrator.

xenophobia (Ezra 9:3). But the opacity of an action such as Yahweh's disdain for Cain's offering demands a higher degree of inference, shading into speculation (Gen 4:5). Even in the case of a seemingly-straightforward direct indicator of a physical attribute, such as the hairiness of Esau, the reader plays a prominent role, for the indicator may help point to more than one trait.

Alongside other narrative information, Esau's hairiness may contribute to his characterization as an uncouth rustic ruled by animal appetites.¹²⁶ In short, the manner of character construction and the degree of readerly freedom may vary between direct and indirect categories, but also within each category.

Relationality in character construction. As mentioned at several points above, the isolation of various textual indicators of character has heuristic value. Deliberately examining a variety of direct and indirect indicators in the abstract, reflecting on their origins and implicit perspectives, and considering their mutual relationships—all this helps the reader, first, simply to notice these narrative elements and, second, to begin to sift and weigh their testimony. In this final section on practical concerns touching characterization, however, I want to suggest a more gestalt perspective on character distilled from an examination of the work of many critics, both secular and biblical, that might be broadly defined as “relationality.” In my readings of Sarah through a variety of biblical and Second Temple works, I will explore the ways in which she relates—to other characters and narrative elements, including the narrator, but also to herself—as a kind of holistic rubric. I do this not in pursuit of yet another heuristic category, but partly in response to the taxonomic enthusiasm that marks many discussions of means of characterization. Relationality as an organizing concept also has strengths that dovetail well with my larger mimetic understanding of character construction, and may be especially helpful in a reading that

126. This is in contrast to the contention of Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48, who claims that “the outer aspect of a character” does not “give us any indication of the personality”; the example of Esau follows immediately, but in support of Bar-Efrat's view that physical description in the Bible only serves the plot. However, Bar-Efrat soon contradicts himself, in an example cited above, noting that Absalom's beauty and abundant hair help to characterize him as vain (50).

both admits the potential of a character to develop and regards gender as a significant aspect of character construction.

The plainest way that relationality affects characterization is in a character's relationships with other characters. Harvey contends that this "human context," "the web of human relationships" of literary characters, is "by far the most important of contexts" in characterization: "characters do not develop along single and linear roads of destiny but are, so to speak, human cross-roads."¹²⁷ Other critics of diverse perspectives concur, at least, that it is essential to consider characters' relationships. It may be no surprise that Hochman emphasizes the impossibility of "reading out" a character in isolation, but even Bal's "paper people" are built in part by "relations with others."¹²⁸

An important facet of this kind of relationality is contrast and conflict between characters. As mentioned above, conflict is central to Hochman's presentation, though he primarily focuses on inner, psychological struggles.¹²⁹ Berlin also treats contrast as a major technique of biblical characterization, as where characters such as Jacob and Esau are depicted as poles who may be defined against each other.¹³⁰ Such questions of contrast and conflict have clear resonance with a project that considers the character of Sarah, whose life as described in the Bible, at least, is marked by strife with Hagar, Ishmael, Abraham, foreign rulers, and, arguably, the deity.

These specific conflicts raise another issue of interpersonal relationality, that of gender, which includes but transcends personal relationships to encompass social assumptions and norms. Conflict or compliance with "the reader's expectation" or "the expected norm" can be a potent technique of characterization, as Berlin notes.¹³¹ Within the stories of which Sarah is a

127. Harvey, *Character*, 52, 69.

128. Hochman, *Character*, 65, speaks of character relationships not only with "all the other characters in the work," but also with "the elements that both generate and illuminate the characters," such as overarching themes. See the treatment of Hochman's work, with examples from the Gospel of John, in Conway, *Men and Women*, 56–58. Compare Bal, *Narratology*, 127, and see also, among others, John A. Darr, *Character Building*, 41–42; Day, *Three Faces*, 25; Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 27–28.

129. Hochman, *Character*, 50–54.

130. Berlin, *Poetics*, 40. Compare Conway, *Men and Women*, 62.

part, issues of gender affect nearly all of her relationships—not only that between her and Abraham, or that between her and Pharaoh or Abimelech, but also, emphatically, her relations with Hagar, their sons, God, and, even more broadly, with her absent family of origin and wider social structures as depicted in the narrative.¹³²

With Gunn and Fewell and Bach, as treated at greater length above, I will not exempt the narrator from consideration in discussion of these aspects of relationality. A narrator can be profitably regarded as a character-like element in a narrative, as a storytelling voice who exhibits perspectives and so possesses an identity. This is significant when evaluating issues of conflict and gender: narratorial information and perspectives can clash with those of a character, and a narrator may, under questioning, reveal values about gender that are relevant to the reading of gendered characters in relationship.¹³³ Each narrative necessarily differs on these matters.

In addition to her relationships with other characters, a character also relates to herself in several important ways, all of which are bound to what Rimmon-Kenan calls the “‘directional’ dimension of character (development, ‘biography’).”¹³⁴ There may be significant contrast between a character’s traits at various points along the narrative arc. Speech may clash with deeds, or later actions conflict with earlier, leading to dissonances that must be resolved by the reader.¹³⁵ “Intrapsychic” conflict, conscious or otherwise, may motivate characters in a mimetic scheme just as it does human beings.¹³⁶ Conversely, a character may transform or develop in a

131. Berlin, *Poetics*, 41. Compare the examples from the Sarah and Hagar stories in Cotter, *Genesis*, xxxv-xxxvi, who, however, focuses on status.

132. Conway, *Men and Women*, 65–68, most effectively foregrounds the issue of gender as it pertains to Hochman’s ideas of relationality. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 15–16, 73–102, 129–55, also uses relationships and gender as major organizing principles in her treatment of Abraham and Sarah, and Sarah and Hagar, among other character pairs. However, Jacobs’s presentation does not draw significantly on narrative-critical theories. For other treatments, see Bal, *Narratology*, 124–25, who discusses gender as one of the primary “limits” on a character (others include description and generic constraints, 125). Compare Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba?* 22.

133. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 51–53; Bach, “Signs,” 351–53.

134. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 38–39.

135. Berlin, *Poetics*, 40; see also Cotter, *Genesis*, xxxv-xxxvi.

136. Hochman, *Character*, 50–53. See my discussion above and the wider context of Hochman here, especially 54–57, on reading ancient characters through modern conceptions of personhood.

way that exhibits such intrapsychic relationality in a broad sense, without, however, being as clearly driven by inner conflict. This is simply to say that motive cannot be discussed in the absence of memory and experience.

This notion of development, finally, reemphasizes the concept that undergirds and binds this entire discussion of characterization—and, indeed, much of the preceding treatment of character in the abstract—which is linearity. In the reading of narratives, a linear orientation is inescapable, simply because “language prescribes a linear figuration of signs and hence a linear presentation of information about things.”¹³⁷ *Process* could thus be described as the heart of the fluid model of character outlined above with the help of Chatman, Iser, Hochman, Rimmon-Kenan, and others: the construction of a character such as Sarah is effected by an organic accretion of traits, cued by the discourse but sorted, weighed, assembled, taken apart, and put back together again in the mind of the reader.¹³⁸

As suggested several times in the discussion above, the reading process itself is thus key to the central question raised in this section: what gives shape and proportion to a character under construction, if claims, perhaps individuated by the heuristic categories detailed above, cannot be weighed automatically? Certain artifacts of the linear process of reading—put simply, that narrative elements must come in a fixed order—can have a profound effect on the task of weighing. Trait information appearing first in a narrative tends to endure and color later impressions, a phenomenon Rimmon-Kenan, after Menakhem Perry, calls a “primacy effect.” This, in turn, can clash with a “recency effect,” as information just absorbed often requires a

137. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 119.

138. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 127–28; Iser, “Reading Process,” 127–33; Hochman, *Character*, 49–50; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 36–39.

reconciliation or balancing of prior data.¹³⁹ The structure of the text, then, is not without power to shape character construction; but neither is the reader bound to follow its directions slavishly, for unfilled gaps or blanks always remain. The process of reading is thus also a “continuous process of forming hypotheses,” of making and acting upon “hunches” while attempting to integrate earlier and present data, of examining a character’s past and guessing about her future.¹⁴⁰

I now move to engage this process with the four narratives under consideration, pursuing a portrait of the character of Sarah in each. Rooted in a mimetic conception of character, and thus admitting my key role in her construction, I will weigh the direct and indirect claims of each narrative, with a special concern for the issues of relationality discussed above, and seek to form a character paradigm in each case that is substantial yet fluid and open to development. Throughout, I acknowledge with Iser that in these, as in “all literary texts,” “the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations.”¹⁴¹

139. See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 119–21, for a summary of Perry’s work, which is based on psychological studies concerned with the “significance of the order of presentation of a message” (Perry, “Literary Dynamics,” 53–58). The correct term for the first of these phenomena is “primacy effect”; Rimmon-Kenan’s first mention of it on 120 contains a typographical error (“primary effect”), which went uncorrected into the second edition (124).

140. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 37–39, 121–22.

141. Iser, “Reading Process,” 131.

CHAPTER 3
SARAH IN THE MASORETIC TEXT

Introduction

Having sketched what might be called a poetics of character and characterization in Chapter 2, I now move to apply these principles to several ancient texts featuring Sarah, beginning with Genesis in the Masoretic Text (MT). I intend to provide a reading, by which I mean an interpretation, of the character of Sarah in this narrative—not a step-by-step account of my experience of reading the narrative.¹ Although the effects of primacy and recency, as discussed in Chapter 2, are important to the construction of character, and linearity is intrinsic to modern and pre-modern narrative, I do not restrict myself to narrative data already presented, or adopt the posture of a “first-time” reader. I am not a first-time reader of this narrative, and I am not convinced that such a pose confers a substantive advantage, even if I believed it possible to achieve in an authentic way. To reach my interpretation of Sarah here, I will, among other things, assemble her traits—in the language of Seymour Chatman—as I find them revealed in the narrative.² A catalogue of traits is merely a list, not a reading; but the collection, revision, and integration of traits provides a kind of focusing lens to attach to the spotlight my work seeks to shine on Sarah (to adopt the fine metaphor of Sara Koenig in her work on Bathsheba).³ A narrative such as this one is practically inexhaustible, due to the partnering of the text and its gaps and the consciousness that strives to fill them, and any of the episodes treated below could

1. See Berlin, *Poetics*, 15–21, for a useful discussion of the relationship between poetics and interpretation. “Poetics . . . is not an interpretive effort—it does not aim to elicit meaning from a text. Rather it aims to find the building blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled. . . . If literature is likened to a cake, then poetics gives us the recipe and interpretation tells us how it tastes” (15).

2. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119–31.

3. Koenig, *Isn't This Bathsheba?* 26.

be approached from a broad variety of angles. More could always be said, about other characters, about the narrator, about the plot, setting, focalization, and so on; but Sarah will draw the light here.

While typological interpreters such as Esther Fuchs emphasize Sarah's functions in conventional patterns in the text, I read Sarah as a "concrete semblance" of a human being, in keeping with my mimetic understanding of fictional character as laid out in Chapter 2.⁴ As discussed more fully there, this means that I do not avoid inferring Sarah's traits and motives—prompted by clues in the discourse, but always supplemented with and filtered through my own experiences trying to understand other human beings—any more than I avoid drawing such conclusions about people I know. What I have discovered in my reading has sometimes surprised me, and I have rarely found occasion to agree with those, such as Martin Noth, who dismiss Sarah in the MT as "colorless," a mere "construct created for the purpose of the Abraham narratives."⁵ But this too is a testament to the power of perspective and the vital role of the reader.

My reading of Sarah in the MT of Genesis illuminates her as a complex but ultimately coherent figure whose development over the course of the narrative is most clearly revealed in her relationships with others. In distinction to interpretations that emphasize Sarah's divine election—such as that of Tammi Schneider, who maintains that God's enduring "support" of Sarah shows that she is "chosen by the Deity"—I argue that any sense of Sarah being "chosen" is analogous to the selection of a tool: she is used, by Abraham and by God, and discarded when

4. See Fuchs, "Literary Characterization," and my discussion in Chapter 1. "Concrete semblance," as noted in Chapter 2, is the language of Ronald Crane, quoted by Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 137. As I say there, "concrete" does not, in my conception of character, imply fixity, but heft and tangibility.

5. As I note in Chapter 4, the situation in the LXX is somewhat different in this regard. See Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, Scholars Press Reprint Series, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), 151 (first published as *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* in 1948): "Even more colorless than Rebekah alongside of Isaac appears Sarah at the side of Abraham. Actually she is thought of only for her dignity as the wife of Abraham and the mother of the heir promised to him. Her name clearly means 'mistress, gentlewoman.' Like the figure Sarah, the name itself is a construct created for the purpose of the Abraham narratives." Fuchs, "Literary Characterization," also characterizes Sarah as flat and colorless.

her utility is exhausted.⁶ While there are notes of “blessing” for Sarah in Gen 17:16, I contend that she is blessed merely as an instrument or vessel for the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham and his son, Isaac—a point supported by the context of this blessing, which is a colloquy between Abraham and God alone. Abraham’s use and abuse of Sarah, which is only abetted by the deity, plays an important, catalytic role in her own use and abuse of her slave Hagar. This abuse, which is also not only countenanced but encouraged by God, represents a stage in Sarah’s emotional evolution that features a progressive hardening in her character, which, in turn, finds curious expression in Sarah’s increasing resemblance to Abraham.

Many readers of Sarah in the MT seek to defend or damn her. Often, the decision turns on the episode chosen for analysis: Sarah is an oppressed and silent victim in Egypt for Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, but in Phyllis Trible’s influential reading in *Texts of Terror* the suffering of the “tortured” and “exploited” Hagar only underlines Sarah’s relative “privilege and power,” albeit “within the confines of patriarchal structures.”⁷ As my reading will show, I do not disagree with either of these interpreters; but I do seek a broader view that strives to integrate such polarities. As part of this effort, I contend that Sarah is characterized throughout the narrative by a recurring pattern of possession and lack, or gain and loss, most notably in her connections with other characters. This motif of Sarah as a woman who both has and has not finds its climactic expression at the birth of Isaac, where the reversal of Sarah’s most enduring significant trait—her

6. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 40; Schneider, *Sarah*, 5, 129, and throughout. See also Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 7, 27, 46. Compare Wallace, “On Account of Sarai,” 32, 36–37, 40–41, who argues strongly for Sarai’s centrality in the Egyptian episode, without, however, demonstrating that this is expressed in anything but an instrumental way.

7. Van Dijk-Hemmes, “Sarai in Exile”; Trible, “Desolation,” 9, 13, 28. It is important to note that Trible also regards Sarah as a “victim of patriarchy” (31 n. 17). As I mention in Chapter 1, Trible’s reading here has had tremendous influence, paving the way for readings that are even more explicitly critical of Sarah, such as that of Weems, “A Mistress, a Maid, and No Mercy,” 10, who says that Sarah “took advantage of her status over Hagar. She knew that the way to enslave a slave—all over again—was to humiliate her, to destroy her (new found) sense of self-worth, to dehumanize her.” Weems too, however, recognizes that Sarah’s power is relative and circumscribed by patriarchy (12). My broader point—that a reader’s evaluation of Sarah is partly guided by the particular scenes treated in their investigation—is, I think, borne out by Trible’s later work in “Ominous Beginnings,” where her reading of Sarah is necessarily softened by the inclusion of episodes, such as that of Egypt in Gen 12:10–20, in which she is the victim, not the perpetrator. For Trible here, Sarah is an “abused wife,” but also a “cruel matriarch”: “both tool and tyrant” (59). With this language, too, Trible at least partly underlines Sarah’s instrumentality in the MT.

childlessness—is overshadowed by an acute sensitivity to her appearance in the eyes of others. In the end, the Sarah who emerges from my reading does not evoke condemnation for her misdeeds, but sympathy—even pity.

Practical Preliminaries

In performing this reading, my main conversation partners have been those who operate within a narrative-critical framework in their own readings of Sarah, such as Schneider, Sharon Pace Jeanson, Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, and Robert Alter, though I have not hesitated to harvest the insights of others where appropriate.⁸ My interaction with these interpreters is mostly confined to the footnotes, as my working method has been primarily to produce my reading organically, in close dialogue with the text. Naturally, this does not mean that my reading is unique in every or even most particulars; a reader of these much-read MT tales must be content with small connections and insights, and with a whole that, by virtue of being his or her own—it is hoped—throws some new light on the subject at hand.

Unlike some of the other texts discussed elsewhere in this study, the Hebrew Bible, which is in view here, needs little introduction. For my analysis I have relied upon the MT of Genesis as represented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*) and as clarified, or not, by its apparatus.⁹

8. Schneider, *Sarah*; Jeanson, *Women of Genesis*; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 39–55; Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 90–100; Alter, *Genesis*.

9. Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977). Genesis was edited by Otto Eissfeldt in 1969. In general, as will be clear, I do not give much weight to versional evidence, which is primarily a methodological consideration given my subsequent analysis of Genesis in the Septuagint (LXX). I do not dispute that the text of Genesis represented in *BHS* is likely comprised of originally disparate sources or traditions woven together. It is difficult to read Gen 11:26–23:20, for example, without observing a number of discontinuities, of varying significance, in language, plotting, and other narrative elements. Without supporting in detail one or another proposed scheme of sources or “documents,” I think that the hypothesis that we are not dealing with a unity has good explanatory power with regard to these discontinuities. But I am interested in the character of Sarai or Sarah as she appears in the first book of the Pentateuch as it stands, so I have made a conscious decision not to consider reconstructed sources in my reading. This is not only consistent with one of the primary canons of narrative criticism, but makes sense given the other narratives under consideration, which mostly have a stronger claim to be unitary compositions than does the MT. As a question of method, it would be hard to justify treating the MT as a pastiche while examining the rest as coherent wholes. For a view that does “advocate for a literary approach that interprets each source individually,” speaking only of Genesis, see Robert S. Kawashima, “Literary Analysis,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 88–89.

The episodes or sections that I examine most closely are Gen 11:26–12:9; 12:10–13:2; 16:1–16; 18:1–15; 20:1–18; and 21:1–14, though I also treat intervening material, such as 13:2–15:21; 17:1–27; 18:16–19:38; 23:1–20; and 24:67, at a level of detail in keeping with my estimation of each portion’s contribution to Sarah’s characterization.¹⁰ Other minor mentions in Genesis such as 24:36; 25:10, 12; and 49:31, do not, in my judgment, materially affect Sarah’s portrait here, so I have left these to the side. The interesting reference to Sarah in Isa 51:2 (and see vv. 1, 3) is, to my reading, part of an analogical illustration in a homily, and thus not of direct relevance to the “concrete semblance” of the character of Sarah revealed in Genesis.

After much internal debate, I have decided to reprint, in block format, the text of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) for the longer, more significant episodes listed above. This is intended as an aid to memory for the reader, and to ease reference during the discussion. The literal quality of the RSV, which often extends even to wooden replication of word order, recommends it over the syntactically smoother New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) for its limited functions here in a narrative-critical study. This is no endorsement of the RSV’s lack of gender-inclusive language for human beings, which makes it unfit for many other contexts.¹¹ The renderings in the body of the discussion are my own, unless otherwise noted.

10. As detailed in Chapter 1 and mentioned just above, most treatments of Sarah do not consider this broader narrative context at all. A notable exception is Schneider, *Sarah*, 3–4.

11. The NRSV does not extend its preference for gender-inclusivity to forms for the deity—see also my note on Yahweh’s gender below—and cannot be simplistically regarded as a feminist translation, despite its notable strides in some areas. See the nuanced essay of Carole R. Fontaine, “The NRSV and the REB: A Feminist Critique,” *ThTo* 47 (1990): 273–80, which is generally approving of the NRSV’s changes while raising cautions over potential whitewashing of the text’s undeniable androcentricity (276–278). I had originally intended to offer my own translations for the purposes stated here, but these inevitably revealed some tendentiousness before I could attempt to justify it; and to print an anodyne rendering of my own with a view to arguing against it in the discussion made little sense. Translation always necessitates choices that may impoverish the meaning of the original, and any text is infrequently reducible to one-to-one equivalents. Nearly every verse here offers problems of nuance: pondering whether a *vav* may be conjunctive or disjunctive; rendering words that cover a generally broader semantic range in the original versus the target language, such as *נשא*; or weighing knotty interpretive cruxes and possible textual irregularities on whose solutions there is no scholarly consensus. As a compromise, then, I print the RSV. As noted, its sometimes stilted, imitative syntax makes it preferable to the NRSV—whose mandate included, at least informally, rearrangement for fluid oral proclamation—for its function here. See Arthur O. Van Eck, “The NRSV—Why Now?” *RelEd* 85 (1990): 166–67; Robert Duke, “Public Worship and the Use of the NRSV,” *Prism* 6 (1991): 40. In other venues, again, its occasional archaisms—a vestige of its ancestor, the so-called King James Version (KJV)—and the connected issue of its lack of gender-inclusive language make it unsuitable.

To Have and to Have Not: Origins, Family, Power, Possessions, and People (Gen 11:26–12:9)

Gen 11:26 When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. 27 Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. 28 Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. 31 Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. (RSV)

Few readers of Sarai's story devote much analysis to her life before her descent into Egypt.¹² But even the introduction to the narrative complex centering on Sarai, Abram, and Lot in the MT (Gen 11:26–32) sheds a surprisingly strong light on Sarai: her definition here arguably exceeds that of Abram, and she is far better formed than Lot. Sarai, first, is female, a woman, a wife. Abram's first act "takes" (לָקַח) her as its object, and she is immediately a "woman of"

12. As is conventional, I refer to Sarah as Sarai until God clarifies her name to Abraham in Gen 17:15. Schneider, *Sarah*, who discusses these verses at great length without, however, always maintaining focus on Sarai (8–30), represents a significant exception to the usual neglect of this material.

(אשתו), possessed in her earliest mention (v. 29). That Abram “takes” her shows that he is the more powerful; he is also more connected in relationship. The narrator professes much precise genealogical knowledge about the descent of Abram’s family, noting, for example, the paternity of Milcah, the sister-in-law of Sarai and Abram, who barely figures in the narrative to come (but see 22:20–23).¹³ Even Iscah, Milcah’s sister, has a lineage, though she remains a name only in the text as it stands. Shula Keshet makes the intriguing suggestion that Iscah’s role is to “allude to an unfulfilled possibility”: that Abram might have “taken” a woman from inside his family circle instead.¹⁴ Sarai, in any case, neither daughter nor sister, is descended from no one worth mentioning.¹⁵ Abram represents her only human tie, though it is a significant one, with implications of cohabitation and sexual involvement. From the verse in which she appears, then, Sarai is defined: female, married, likely sexually mature and active; not as well connected to others as those in her near context, and less powerful than the one to whom she is most closely bound (11:29).

She also has a name: שם אשת-אברם שרי—“the name of the woman of Abram was Sarai.” שרי is connected to the root שרר, which denotes dominion and mastery and so carries connotations of ownership; a near synonym is מלך, to be “king” or chief.¹⁶ Other relatives of שרר

13. The scholarly consensus is that בת-הרן אבי-מלכה ואבי יסכה is the genealogy of Milcah: Speiser, *Genesis*, 78; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 276. Contrast, however, Cynthia R. Chapman, “‘Oh that you were like a brother to me, one who had nursed at my mother’s breasts.’ Breast Milk as a Kinship-Forging Substance,” *JHebS* 12 article 7 (2012): 27, which states that this phrase refers to Sarai. As Chapman does not support her contention, perhaps this is a simple error.

14. Keshet, *Say You Are My Sister*, 18; compare 46. As Keshet notes, the *Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus seems to identify Iscah with Sarai (*Ant.* 1.151), a move also made by the rabbis (b. Meg. 14a and elsewhere); see the discussion in Chapter 6.

15. Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 39, suggest that Sarai’s genealogy might be omitted in an effort to avoid contradiction with Abraham’s claim, in Gen 20:12, that the pair are actually non-uterine siblings.

16. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, reprint, 1906 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 979a (hereafter BDB), regards the verb שרר as denominated from the noun שר; for שרי see 979b. Compare D. J. A. Clines, ed., *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2011), 8.192b (hereafter *DCH*); for מלך as synonym of שרר, see 8.199a. I resist the common rendering of שרי as “princess” (see, for example, von Rad, *Genesis*, 202) for the same reason I prefer to call Sarai Hagar’s “master,” not “mistress,” in Gen 16. The diminution of the English feminine form “princess” likewise gives a female role a benign veneer that is not justified by any intrinsic difference in the way that women and men exercise power over others.

in classical Hebrew include שר and שרה, male and female nobles or rulers, and משורה, which describes government, or power over people and resources.¹⁷ Sarai's name thus reinforces, in one respect, an image of her as isolated, without peers. However, its implication of mastery and ownership beats against the fact that she is "taken" from the first, a "woman of." Sarai appears fixed in a minor contradiction, set apart, in her apparent lack of family ties, but not, clearly, therefore more free.

In 11:29, Sarai was contrasted with Milcah, whose family of origin is at least partly specified; in v. 30, Sarai continues to be defined by her lack with emphatic and mutually reinforcing direct textual indicators: Sarai is עקרה, "infertile"; "she had no child" (אין לה ולד).¹⁸ That she is of childbearing age and sexually active is confirmed here, as a state of "infertility" demands a sexual relationship from which one could otherwise expect a child.¹⁹ The narrator explicitly attributes this lack to Sarai; nothing is mentioned about Abram's ability to engender a child, and his ancestors' proven potency underlines his presumed virility (vv. 10–26).²⁰ This prominent mention of Sarai's infertility and childlessness in such a laconic narrative defines an implicit conflict with unmet social expectations in the story world, and it may be justified to consider whether Sarai's perceived lack thus leads to conflict with Abram. That a signal goal of Abram's "taking a woman" in v. 29 is offspring and the continuation of a lineage seems clear

17. The form משורה, probably meaning "government" or "dominion," appears in 1QIsa^a VIII, 23 (9:5) and VIII, 25 (9:6). See DCH 5.501b; Eugene Ulrich and Peter W. Flint, eds., *Qumran Cave 1, II: The Isaiah Scrolls, Part 1: Plates and Transcriptions*, DJD 32 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010), 16–17. See also שרה, a word of the same meaning, which appears in the Bible (in the MT of Isa 9:5–6) and the Dead Sea materials and is probably derived from שרה (II), itself a by-form of שרר: Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 641a–b, 1354b (hereafter, HALOT). As the pagination in the original 5-volume English edition, which appeared over the period cited here, and the 2001 2-volume "Study Edition" are identical, I have omitted volume numbers in these and following citations. Compare DCH 5.505b, which advises "cf. שרר rule" under שרה.

18. See Chapter 2 for discussion of "direct" and "indirect textual indicators."

19. Contrast the reading of Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 128, which, as noted in Chapter 1, casts Sarai's marriage as "sexless"; see also 37, 98. Teubal is often operating at several removes behind the text, however, and it is not always clear if she is referring to a hypothetical historical situation, to a stage in the tradition, or to the narrative as it stands.

20. As a reader, this strikes me as a first clue to the gender of the narrator-character. This may, however, raise complex diachronic issues; in its compositional context, for instance, it seems unlikely that a female narrator would have drawn a different conclusion.

from the detailed list of fathers and children that immediately precedes this notice (vv. 10–28). Without ancestor or descendant, then, this “Sarai,” whose name, in a mild irony, suggests the exercise of power and ownership, is possessed but does not possess.

Sarai is again “taken” in 11:31, by Abram’s father Terah, but with a different force, as she shares her identity as object here with Abram and Lot. She is also depicted as somewhat more connected in relationship, for in addition to being Abram’s “woman,” she is, by implication, Lot’s aunt, and she is here explicitly called Terah’s כלה or daughter-in-law. Sarai’s initial lack of stated ancestry is, perhaps, partly remedied here, albeit through the agency of Abram. This sense of slowly increasing connection is bolstered by Sarai’s presence as part of the collective subject of the following verbs here. Sarai, Terah, Abram, and Lot “went out together . . . in order to go to the land of Canaan,” and as a group “they went as far as Haran and settled there.”²¹ Sarai is a part of a collective whose members seem, at this point, to possess nothing but each other; she is a wife and daughter-in-law, a migrant who settles with those to whom she is connected. After an uncertain amount of story time, but straightaway in the discourse, however, one of these relational strands is cut, as her father-in-law Terah dies at their new home in Haran (v. 32). Sarai’s circle becomes smaller by one, and her tenuous connection to the previous generation is severed. What is more, the modest sense of increasing belonging that is initially evident here is further undercut by a consideration of other, possible relationships that are passed over in silence in the discourse. If Sarai had an unmentioned family of origin, back in “Ur of the Chaldeans,” then she has been separated from them, forever, by her migration. This pattern of possession and lack, or gain and loss, will continue to appear as the narrative progresses.

A new chapter in the life of Sarai and her small family begins in the narrator’s unadorned description of the first instance of Yahweh’s personal communication with Abram (12:1–3).²² It

21. ללכת ארצה כנען ויבאו עד־חרן וישבו שם. ויצאו אתם. . . . Eissfeldt in *BHS* suggests reading “he [Terah] brought them out” for ויצאו אתם (“they went out together” or “with one another”) on the strength of versional evidence. See the relevant discussion in Chapter 4.

22. Although intimations of Yahweh’s identity as something more than human are contained within the pledges of this speech, which assume a power beyond mortal ability, I also recognize that I bring to my reading of Yahweh’s character a host of cultural data that inform my notion of what a “god” is. This knowledge seems almost

is almost impossible to draw conclusions about the story context of this message; it is not clearly a visitation, a dream, or a vision, unlike events to be described later, but simply a reported direct address out of the void. This brief speech, which is a curious amalgam of command and pledge—with the latter not explicitly contingent upon fulfillment of the former—is emphatically in the singular, directed to Abram alone.²³ It is Abram’s land, Abram’s relatives, and Abram’s father’s house that Abram must leave behind to “Go!” (לך-לך) to another land that Yahweh will show Abram (v. 1). Yahweh promises to turn Abram “into a numerous people” (לגוי גדול), to bless Abram, and, in what reads like a small jest, to “enlarge” Abram’s name, to “cause it to grow” (ואגדלה שמך, v. 2; compare 17:5). Yahweh further orders Abram to “be a blessing!” and pledges to “bless” Abram’s “blessers” and to “curse” the “one who calls [Abram] damned,” while predicting that “all the clans of the soil” will “bless themselves”—again, “by” Abram alone (12:2–3).²⁴ The simple occurrence of this speech directed to Abram, not to mention its content,

impossible to set aside—no easier than reading a human character while discounting my experiences with people—even if it were thought to be desirable to do so. At the same time, it seems that a god can only be comprehended insofar as it has some analogue with a human being, or, perhaps better, that it can only be conceived in human terms, whether or not this results in real understanding. In my reading of Sarai’s character, I do not assume that the Yahweh who appears in the narrative is identical with the God of later Jewish or Christian confession. However, I do read with the cultural knowledge that gods have superhuman awareness and abilities, and with a narrative knowledge of the earlier appearances of this character: Yahweh is “God,” who “made” the earth, sky, and human beings (Gen 2:4, 7). It should also be noted that, for the purposes of my reading here, I treat the character Yahweh as identical with the character “God” (אלהים), who does not appear in Sarai’s narrative until Gen 17:3. The gender of this character is a complex issue. On the one hand, Yahweh is consistently referred to with grammatically masculine forms, at least in the narrative in view here; also, I confess that Yahweh “seems male” to me as a reader, at least in general, and at least in the broad scope of the Hebrew Bible. To treat Yahweh differently than other characters as regards gender seems too, in some way, to rest uncomfortably with the ethos of narrative criticism. On the other hand, how Yahweh seems to me may be informed by essentialist stereotypes that I carry, which may be nonsense; further, the identification of the character Yahweh with the God of twenty-first century humans, whether this be a practice that seems sensible to me or not, remains commonplace, and referring to this character / being with masculine forms can and does reinforce notions of God as male. As the father of a young girl who has told me in a matter-of-fact manner, despite what I consider to be my own careful speech on the matter, that “God is a boy,” I know that this message is still broadcast widely. Even for adults—even for scholars—who may “know better,” I would argue that the weight of repeated reference to the deity, even as a character, as male tends to catalyze a mental construction of God as a superhuman man. In my work in this study, then, I leave this question open in my discussion and translations; I have not, however, redacted my citations of the RSV, a practice that would have opened its own set of sticky questions. As noted above, citing the NRSV confers no advantage here, as that version retains masculine pronouns for the deity.

23. I do not assume that Sarai knows anything of the content of Yahweh’s message, here or in later epiphanies delivered by a variety of means to Abram alone. As argued below, however, I believe that she may generally be assumed to accompany him in his travels, even when his verbs of movement are singular.

24. והיה ברכה: ואברכה מברכך ומקללך אאר ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה. והיה is pointed in the MT as a 2 msg imv (“be a blessing”), though Eissfeldt in *BHS* suggests reading it as 3 msg pf with *vav*-conversive, apparently “[your

marks Abram, again, as more significant and powerful than “his woman” Sarai. When Abram complies with Yahweh’s first command to “Go!” it is not even initially clear on the discourse level that Sarai accompanies him, though after a narratorial remark on Abram’s age she is again “taken” along (vv. 4–5). Despite Sarai’s consignment to the murky background behind Abram’s epiphany, however, there is a barely submerged tension between the second person singular form of Yahweh’s address and one of Yahweh’s pledges in particular. The multiplication of Abram into a “numerous people” or “great nation” carries an implicit biological demand that Abram cannot fulfill alone, yet Abram’s apparently sole sexual partner is not privy to Yahweh’s address. What is more, she has been indelibly marked by a flat narratorial assertion as unable to give birth (11:30).

The remainder of 12:5 contains a small series of surprises that are little remarked in readings of Sarai: Abram “takes” not only “Sarai, his woman, and Lot, his brother’s son,” but also “all their acquisitions that they had acquired” (כל־רכושם אשר רכשו). This is the first hint that this itinerant group possesses portable assets; more interesting, however, is the fact that they own them in common. These are not Abram’s possessions, but theirs, and they are not only held by all but obtained by all (רכשו). Sarai, possessed from the first, has become a possessor, at least of things: רכוש refers to durable goods and, often, property on the hoof.²⁵ But this is not all that is brought along to the land of Canaan: in addition to “all their acquisitions that they had acquired,” the group brings הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בַחֲרֹן, literally, “the people that they had ‘made’ in Haran.” As in the English idiom “to make money,” Sarai and the others have acquired a slave or slaves, which

name] will be a blessing.” Rendering מקללך as “one who calls you damned” is an attempt to avoid using “curse” to render both קלל and ארר as, for instance, both the RSV and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) do. Alter, *Genesis*, 51, does something similar (“those who damn you I will curse”). See further the discussion of קלל in the treatment of Gen 16, below.

25. The New Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* translation (NJPS) simply renders “wealth” here. See 13:2, 5–6, where Abram and Lot’s רכוש seem to include מקנה, כסף, and זהב (livestock, silver, and gold), along with צֹן וּבָקָר (flocks, herds, and tents), unless “tents” is here employed as a metonym for people. In 14:11, רכש (defectively written) is distinguished from אכל, or food, implying that רכוש are durable goods. See also 14:16, where רכוש is distinguished from “women” and “people.”

they transport to their new home along with their other possessions.²⁶

Sarai, then, who was introduced as possessed and defined by her lack, makes significant gains and becomes a possessor, an owner of things, and a slaveholder, too. It would be grammatically unjustified to read the subjects of “acquired” and “made” here as only Abram and Lot, although certainly their possessions also figure later in the narrative (13:6; 14:12, 16; and so on). The simplest reading is that Abram, Sarai, and Lot are, collectively, the subject of these plural verbs, as well as the antecedent of the plural pronominal suffix on רכוש. Nor is a historical-contextual appeal to gendered norms of ownership in the ancient world relevant, for as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that Sarai is fully capable of owning a slave in her own right.²⁷ Moreover, the reading of a female character in patriarchal literature demands an assumption of her participation in plural verbs in the absence of other evidence; otherwise, she is effaced even more fully from a narrative that already primarily fixes its gaze elsewhere.

When Sarai first appeared, her name, which evokes images of mastery and ownership, seemed little more than a sad joke. Here, although she emphatically remains and is directly defined as a “woman of,” repeatedly “taken” and clearly of lesser power in her relationship with

26. See BDB 795a (עשה *qal* II 7): “acquire property of various kinds (cf. ‘make money’),” citing this verse among others. Compare *DCH* 5.732a (נפש 8d), which also references this verse: “perh. specif. slave.” *DCH*’s authority is G. R. Driver, “Hebrew mothers (Exodus i 19),” *ZAW* 67 (1955): 248 (cited as 1956 in *DCH* 5.912a, which date also appears on the journal’s title page; but it appears that its first publication was in January 1955; the page citation in *DCH*, 249, is also incorrect): “This use of נפש [as ‘slave’] is well-established, not only in the plur. (Gen. xxxvi 6) but also in the sing. (Gen. xii 5) form used in a collective sense.” Driver also notes a Syriac cognate. This meaning is asterisked in *DCH*, which means that it is conceived of as a “‘new’ word,” that is, a word or definition that “did not appear in the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon of 1907” (5.11; incidentally, my printing of BDB bears a date of 1906). However, BDB’s definition of עשה just cited suggests a similar meaning. Cassuto, *Genesis*, first published in Hebrew in 1949, follows the rabbis in contending that נפש here refers to proselytes converted by Abram. However, Cassuto admits that it can refer to “male and female slaves,” and he assumes the presence of slaves here in the “possessions” the family has gathered (320–21). נפש does seem to be a collective here, as in 14:21, where it is also distinguished from רכוש (defectively written); compare Alter, *Genesis*, 51, who renders “the folk they had bought in Haran.” If the word is semantically as well as morphologically singular, it is interesting to consider to whom this may refer: perhaps the mysterious דמשק אליעזר (“Damascus Eliezer”) of 15:2, or even “Hagar the Egyptian” (16:1 and following). Of course, by the time these characters are introduced, members of the itinerant family have visited these regions (12:10–20; 14:15). Note that the referent of נפש in 14:21 appears to be more general (likely הנשים and העם, “the women” and “the people” of 14:16) than it is here in 12:5. As Driver, “Hebrew mothers,” notes (248), compare 36:6, which employs the plural of נפש (“all the people of [Esau’s] house[hold]”) but clearly distinguishes these נפשות from Esau’s “wives,” “sons,” and “daughters.”

27. See 16:1: “she had a (female) slave” (לה שפחה); and Sarai’s personal ownership of Hagar is emphasized repeatedly in vv. 2–5.

Abram, Sarai is also an “owner of,” master of the human being or beings that she and Abram and Lot “made,” by means that can only be guessed at, during their time in Haran.²⁸ The question of Sarai’s relationality broadly construed becomes much more complicated here, and conflict between owner and owned, though not yet specified in the discourse, lies just below the surface. Sarai occupies a medial position: clearly lower in status than Abram, who takes her; she is quite literally “his woman”—but these נפש are hers, too, and this fact suggests a status differential perhaps even more profound.

As with their move to Haran (itself a journey apparently intended to end in the land of Canaan, 11:31), Abram, Sarai, and Lot are all subjects of the verbs that detail their departure from Haran and their entrance into Canaan (12:5). Then, curiously, Abram appears to be utterly alone, except for a second communication from Yahweh, as he proceeds through the land visiting or establishing cultic centers (vv. 6–8). Even as he travels toward Egypt, where Sarai, at least as a physical object, will figure prominently in the narrative, the verbs continue in the masculine singular (vv. 9–11a). However, this fact is not a reliable indicator of Sarah’s absence from the events and places detailed, and I generally assume her presence.²⁹ As with the earlier speech from Yahweh (vv. 1–3), though, it is not clear that Sarai is aware of the occurrence or content of this divine appearance (וירא יהוה אל-אברם, v. 6) in which “this land” is pledged to Abram’s offspring. But Abram’s religious observances—the construction of altars and execution of the cult of Yahweh (vv. 7–8)—are unlikely to have escaped Sarai’s notice.

28. I employ “master” here and elsewhere, though strictly English continues to maintain a gender distinction between the related forms “master” and “mistress.” The difficulties with “mistress” are clear. For one, it is a derivative term that morphologically implies inferiority to its masculine counterpart, though it is not at all obvious that a female slave owner is ontologically different from her male analogue. To the contrary, their respective positions seem to be precisely the same with reference to a slave. Calling the female owner of another person “mistress” (as, for example, *HALOT* 173a does in reference to Gen 16:4, 8–9) or, worse, “lady” (compare the tonal disparity between this and its masculine counterpart, “lord”) obscures the issue and gentrifies a woman’s exercise of human ownership by implying that it is somehow soft or benign. Another problem, of course, is that “mistress” in present parlance more often refers to a female extramarital partner than to a woman with authority.

29. Abram, for instance, is the only character explicitly said to enter Egypt in Gen 12:14, though he has just spoken extensively to Sarai, and she attracts the notice of the Egyptian men “right when Abram entered Egypt” (ויהי כבוא אברם מצרימה ויראו המצרים את-האשה). For examples not involving Sarai, see 14:14, where Abram’s pursuit of Lot’s captors is noted in the singular despite his 318 lackeys, or 22:3, where he gets up and goes in the singular with, however, two of his “boys” and Isaac in tow.

As early as this, a surprisingly complex image of Sarai in the MT has begun to emerge. She is defined from the first by what she does not have: a family of origin, complex social ties, fertility, a child, and power in comparison with Abraham. That she is taken and possessed while possessing so little seems to give the lie to her regal name; but straightaway Sarai makes gains, acquiring both goods and the power of a slaveowner. Many of these characteristics, and the themes they help to outline, including those of want, acquisition, and possession or ownership, are only emphasized in the following episode—where, however, Sarai’s recent advancement in the hierarchy of power will suffer a total reverse.

Egyptian Traffic (Gen 12:10–13:2)

Gen 12:10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.” 14 When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels. 17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone.” 20 And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had. 13:1 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. 2 Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. (RSV)

The established theme of lack is immediately reinforced here, as a scarcity of food leads Sarai’s household to seek refuge in Egypt. גור (12:10), often rendered by the archaic and rather colorless “to sojourn,” as in the RSV, seems better understood here as “to seek asylum.” This is especially apt given its immediate context, which notes twice in the space of a few words that

there is a “famine” and that it is “severe” (כבד הרעב), and also considering the close of this episode, where Abram and Sarai are “deported” or, at the least, “escorted out” (וישלחו) as *personae non gratae* after angering Pharaoh (v. 20). Later notes on the fertile abundance of the Jordan valley, however, the “entirety” of which is said to be “saturated with water . . . like the garden of Yahweh—like the land of Egypt” (כגן יהוה כארץ מצרים) (כלה משקה . . . 13:10) prompt retrospective questions about the combination of motives driving this move. Calculation and deception mark this tale from the start, as Abram, in his first direct speech in the narrative, tries to persuade Sarai to lie about their relationship (12:11–13). Abram’s supposed fear of violent death at the hands of his hosts, moreover, would also have been more credible in the Jordan basin, as the later narrative shows (v. 12; 13:13; 19:1–11). The result of his scheme here—that Abram becomes “positively rich” (כבד מאד, 13:2)—provides not only a neat *inclusio* with the episode’s inception (כבד הרעב), but also raises further suspicions that a supply of food, which may have been available closer to home, is not the only advantage Egypt offers.

The brief scene between Abram, who speaks, and Sarai, whose reply, if any, is left unreported, reveals something about Sarai even as it contributes to significant ambiguity in her characterization (12:11–13). Abram’s wheedling and flattering tone here, mostly lost in the RSV, leaves some initial doubt as to the sincerity of his direct description of Sarai as “lovely to look at” (יפת־מראה).³⁰ However, his evaluation is soon emphatically reinforced by narratorial assertion (v. 14) and further underlined by the reported estimations of other, bit characters (v. 15).³¹ What

30. The RSV’s rendering of Abram’s address here, printed above, is predictive and imperative, with a persuasive force only hinted at by the double employment of “that” in v. 13. The persuasive tone of his speech, however, is suggested not only by its content but also by the use of particles. Abram says, “Look . . . I know[, if anyone does,] that you are a woman who is lovely to look at” (הנה־נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת־מראה את), offers dire predictions that follow from this fact, then suggests a solution and alternative, positive predictions: “Just say you are my sister! That way it will go well for me” (אמרי־נא אחתי את למען ייטב־לי). As has been frequently noted, this first direct speech of Abram has substantial parallels with Sarai’s first direct speech in 16:2, which is also clearly persuasive; see the discussion on this passage below. My rendering of הנה־נא as emphasizing what follows is supported, for instance, by HALOT 1.252a–b, 2.656b–657a; compare Takamitsu Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 137–40, and C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 56; this consideration may also prompt the NRSV’s translation of 12:11, “I know well.” Of course, this combination of particles also reflects entreaty, further adding to the speech’s persuasive tone (BDB 244a; DCH 2.578b, 5.577a–b).

31. Each of these evaluations, notably, is focalized through the consciousness of a man or men, which may

is more, the stated motive and eventual success of Abram's rather sketchy plan turns precisely on Sarai's ability to attract. This dramatic "loveliness" is the only direct physical description of any kind, of any character, in the entire narrative about Sarai's family.³² That it is repeatedly emphasized early in the narrative, and particularly here, in such a laconic tale, lends it considerable characterizing force, with a primacy similar to her condition of infertility. Though intangible, Sarai's bodily beauty is something that she possesses, a physical state that markedly affects other characters. Such a singular quality, it is not too much to surmise, may also affect Sarai's self-conception, a possibility which may, in turn, help to elucidate her feelings and deeds later in the narrative.³³

For Sarai's beauty contributes to an element of her characterization that will grow in significance as her story proceeds: in the eyes of the other characters, Sarai, in Egypt, is *worthy of* _____ provide another clue as to the gender of the narrator-character.

32. This is not to say that a number of physical attributes of various characters cannot be inferred, or, significantly, that these are trite or incidental to the action. Characters have bodies that are ambulatory and dextrous, can see, hear, and speak, have and use sexual/excretory and other mammalian body parts, some of which are even ritually surgically altered, and so on (see Gen 11:31; 12:7; 13:10; 15:4; 16:2; 17:23; 18:10, 12; and 21:8, among many others).

33. Sarai's own regard for her beauty may be further developed if ידעה is indeed an archaic feminine: "Look, you know well that you are a woman who is lovely to look at." See, among others, Alter, *Genesis*, 52. There is some angst expressed in the scholarly literature about a perceived discontinuity between Sarai's age and the fact that she is "lovely to look at" and thus the object of the admiring and covetous gaze of the Egyptian men. The issue is even used as ammunition for source theories, as in the venerable Cuthbert A. Simpson, introduction and exegesis, Walter Russell Bowie, exposition, "The Book of Genesis," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952), 582 (the observations of Simpson): "The representation that Sarah was a beautiful woman and still physically desirable is of course at variance with vs. 4b, according to which Abraham was at the time seventy-five years old, and Sarah therefore (cf. 17:17) sixty-five, and is an outstanding indication of the use of different source documents." Nor are such remarks the exclusive province of older, androcentric criticism; compare Exum, "Who's Afraid?" 95, who wonders, in reference to Gen 20, "why Abraham thinks other men would take such an interest" in Sarah. Purely from a narrative perspective, however, it is not clear to me that this is a problem that demands a solution. For one, interpreters who find it incredible that an older woman is "lovely to look at" may be revealing more about their own cultural values than they are illuminating this tale. But even if it were self-evident that it is impossible for an older woman to attract the amorous attention of men, this fact would seem to rest comfortably in the events and tone of the broader narrative. There are a number of supernatural elements in Sarai's story, the most salient of which is precisely tied to her advanced age and presumed physical inability to conceive. The drama of her eventual pregnancy, which leads to her birthing and nursing a young child, is not separable from the fact that this is an extremely unlikely sequence of events, as her incredulous response to Yahweh's prediction shows (18:12; compare Abraham's similar reaction in 17:17). When this is considered alongside the general atmosphere created, for instance, by frequent divine visitations to the family, I am led to conclude that Sarai is simply "lovely to look at," regardless of her age. Compare the reading of Cassuto, *Genesis*, 347.

notice. I say this simply as a statement of what seems to me to be a narrative fact, without lending any moral weight to the reason why she is notable, which, after all, appears to be unconnected to her intrinsic worth as a human being. In the wake of Abram's declaration that Sarai is "lovely to look at" (12:11), she is "noticed" by the Egyptian men in v. 14, a good translation here of ראה due to the כי that explains why this is so: they "noticed"—not just "saw"—"the woman *because* she was very lovely" (ויראו המצרים את־האשה כִּי־יפה הוא מאד). These men take note of Sarai, as do Pharaoh's nobles in the following verse, where it is likewise clear that a special kind of approving and covetous "seeing" is going on: "they noticed her . . . and they sang her praises to Pharaoh" (ויראו אתה . . . ויהללו אתה אל־פרעה). Again, for Sarai to be noticed in these ways is not a simple positive, or an advantage that she holds; it is an objectification that sits seamlessly in a narrative that sees her bought and sold as a valuable item.³⁴ But it may help to explain her reaction to the chain of events recounted in 16:4–5, where Hagar "sees" or notices that she is pregnant and, as a result, "overlooks" her master, Sarai; it may aid, too, in unpacking Sarah's cryptic pronouncement in 21:6, with its concern over the reaction of others to her delivery of Isaac. Both of these scenes will be treated at greater length below.

The initial revelation of Sarai's beauty on the threshold of Egypt, however, is tempered by the ambiguity that lies in the utter silence of the discourse on Sarai's response to Abram's persuasive speech. Nothing is recorded here: no physical reaction or shift in posture, no vocal reply, no interior view. As some of the goals expressed in his address are realized—Sarai is thought, at first, to be Abram's sister, and things certainly do "go well" for Abram due to this deception—it seems unlikely that she actively works to thwart his plan from the start. But as a reader I am left to speculate as to Sarai's attitude here, and the range of possibilities is complex. Is she fully persuaded, a willing participant, a "trickster" who cynically enjoys a lucrative profit

34. Contrast Wallace, "On Account of Sarai," 36–37, who says that her beauty is "a quality which singles Sarai out in a positive way." Wallace argues that Sarai's attractiveness may mark her as a "character of great significance." To my reading, however, at least in this episode, this would mean significance without agency: a valuable object.

for her family by misrepresenting her relationship with Abram and renting out her body?³⁵ Or does she reluctantly agree, driven by fear brought on by Abram's threat that she will be deprived of him but "kept alive" for purposes left ominously unexpressed (12:12)? Or, finally, is Sarai simply tractable, understandably cowed by a man whose power over her, indeed ownership of her, is shortly confirmed by his ability to bargain her away in exchange for security and prosperity?³⁶

Though their firm resolution remains permanently elusive, this evolving sketch of Sarai cannot proceed without worrying these questions. For their answers deeply affect the reader's ongoing construction of Sarai's character and her development, or lack thereof, as the narrative progresses: if Sarai is here merely calculating, a full even if silent partner in Abram's deceit, then her bitter, ungenerous behavior toward Hagar and Ishmael is simply in line with what would seem to be her covetous, utilitarian—and unchanging—nature. But if Sarai is a pawn here, browbeaten, tricked, or simply physically forced into Pharaoh's harem, then this episode may instead be read as a catalyst for some of her features that emerge later in the narrative: used and abused as a possession for gain here, she becomes hardened, a user and an abuser herself, suspicious, grasping, and protective of what she has gained.

The measure of sympathy granted to Sarai by the reader certainly influences his or her responses to these questions. But the narrative also features strong indicators that Sarai, while valuable, is almost entirely lacking in power here: a costly article. Concepts of possession, ownership, and trade bind this entire episode and further emphasize the importance of these themes to the broader narrative. Sarai, despite appearances, remains a "woman of" Abram

35. As noted in Chapter 1, the description of Sarai as a "trickster" here is especially associated with the work of Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters*. In this book Abram is more clearly the trickster, Sarai his "tacit accomplice"; however, Niditch considers that they "undertake the trick together" (45, 59). This is even more explicit in Niditch, "Genesis," 36, where Sarai and Abram are characterized as "cotricksters" and "con artists" in Egypt. Niditch is quick to clarify, however, that this does not mean that this is a "woman-affirming tale." The work of Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), on the other hand, does not mention Sarai in its chapter on the "trickster matriarchs" of Genesis. On Sarai's supposed complicity here, see also Wénin, "Abram et Sarai en Égypte," 447–48.

36. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 17, for example, concludes that Sarai's "silence is not an indication of complicity, but rather a testimony to her powerlessness."

(12:11–12, 17–20, especially v. 17), “taken” from Abram, who in turn “takes” her back (vv. 15, 19); and when they are sent away she appears alongside his baggage: “his woman and all that he owned” (וְאֵת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת־כָּל־אֲשֵׁר־לוֹ) (v. 20; compare 13:1). Moreover, the assumption that Sarai, as a woman, is the rightful, valuable possession of only one man is integral to the plot. Some of the evidence for this claim is peripheral in that it only confirms this convention as a social norm in the story world. Abram’s concern for his safety, whether real or feigned, depends for its justification on this principle (12:12), and it is implied that the belief that Sarai is unmarried is the reason that Pharaoh and his courtiers do not scruple to covet and take “the woman.” In the account of her abduction, אִשָּׁה is notably lacking its customary possessive suffix (vv. 14–15), and Pharaoh’s implicit claim is that he never would have acted the way he did if he had known the truth: “Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for myself as a wife?” (vv. 18–19).³⁷ Neither Abram nor Pharaoh inspires confidence in this regard, however: the boundaries of his marriage, both here and later, are obviously negotiable for Abram, while Pharaoh’s indignation follows suspiciously hard upon his being “diseased . . . with severe diseases” (וַיִּנְגַע יְהוָה אֶת־פַּרְעֹה נֹגְעִים גְּדֹלִים) in apparent punishment for his act.³⁸

But it is this pivotal event, in which Yahweh intervenes “because of Sarai the woman of Abram” (עַל־דְּבַר שְׂרַי אִשְׁתׁ אַבְרָם), v. 17), that most clearly highlights not only that Sarai is powerless here, but also that she belongs to Abram and that this is the reason for Yahweh’s action. The plain fact of the intervention emphasizes that Sarai lacks the power to alter her situation.³⁹ And

37. Although this sequence lacks a specialized conjunction implying result, the *vav* (or better, perhaps, simply its paratactic juxtaposition of the two clauses) in *וְאֵת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת־כָּל־אֲשֵׁר־לוֹ* communicates a causal force. The RSV and NRSV both render it similarly.

38. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 17, is more sanguine as regards Pharaoh’s rectitude, characterizing him as “shocked that Abram would exploit his wife” in this way.

39. The suggestion that *עַל־דְּבַר שְׂרַי* refers to a plea voiced to Yahweh (“on” or “because of the word” or, by extension, “prayer of Sarai”), thus attributing some agency to the captive and burnishing the image of the deity somewhat, seems a strained reading of a rather common idiom; compare Wallace, “On Account of Sarai,” 38. However, it has attracted some support: see van Dijk-Hemmes, “Sarai in Exile,” 143; Wénin, “Abram et Sarai en Égypte,” 450–51; Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings,” 37; and Amy-Jill Levine’s contribution to Eskenazi and Weiss, *Torah*, 78. The simplest reading here, though, corresponds with that of the only other occurrences of *עַל־דְּבַר* in the narrative of Sarah, in Gen 20:11, 18. In v. 11, a rendering of *וְהָרְגוּנִי עַל־דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי* as “they will kill me on the word of my wife” would make little sense; presumably this is why Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings,” 65 n. 16, only mentions v.

while the narrative is laconic in the extreme, it is shown by the resolution of the matter that Yahweh's punishment is aimed at restoring Sarai to Abram, and the only clue in the discourse as to Yahweh's motive references Abram's possession of her: "because," again, she is "the woman of Abram."⁴⁰ This cannot be simply "because of Sarai." If Yahweh's move were prompted by a kind of abstract, humane indignation at her plight, it is hard to see why Abram, as the architect of this sordid situation, escapes all censure. And despite the insistence of a range of commentators—such as Schneider, David Cotter, and van Dijk-Hemmes—that Sarai is somehow "liberated" by Yahweh here, it is even harder to see how she is benefitted by being restored to the man who traded her away.⁴¹

The notion of Sarai as a durable good suitable for trade may be further underlined by Abram's language in 12:13, where he urges her to say she is his sister "so that it will go well for me בַּעֲבוּרִי." This word, here used as a preposition, is employed throughout a nuanced range in biblical texts, often with a basic force of "because of."⁴² This can shade into a meaning of "for

18 in her discussion. However, v. 18, which is topically and lexically very similar to 12:17 (Yahweh has afflicted Abimelech's household שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲבִימֶלֶךְ), seems contextually even less likely than its earlier counterpart to hint at some kind of submerged, story-level petition, as the episode of Gen 20 is much more explicit about a variety of communications between the characters—including prayers. Compare Gen 43:18 (עַל־דְּבַר הַכֶּסֶף, "because of the silver") and Exod 8:8 (עַל־דְּבַר הַצְּפַרְדִּיעִים), "because of the frogs"). For the several other occurrences of this combined form, none of which seem to deal specifically with speech, see Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1990), 866 (3094–3104), 868 (3975).

40. Compare Trible, "Ominous Beginnings," 37, who similarly concludes that "the appositive 'Abram's wife'" indicates that Yahweh "saves Sarai as Abram's possession."

41. Schneider, *Sarah*, 35, asserts simply that this is the "first of many situations where the Deity comes to Sarai's aid" after Abram endangers her. But what "aid" is it to be reunited with the man who is responsible for the peril? Cotter, *Genesis*, 92–93, as noted in Chapter 1, sees this episode as the "first instance" of "an important biblical motif" where God frees women "trapped" in a relationship. Van Dijk-Hemmes, "Sarai in Exile," 143, 145, uses language of liberation and the redress of "injustice" to describe Yahweh's action here. Even Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 43–44 (compare Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 92–93), who reliably raise issues of justice in their readings, characterize Yahweh's action here as a "rescue." They also raise the interesting possibility that Abram is in fact *not* expecting to see Sarai returned; but this would only show Yahweh's restoration of their relationship in a bleaker light.

42. See *DCH* 2.234b–235a; *HALOT* 778a; *BDB* 721a. Another translation of בַּעֲבוּרִי—"for your sake," meaning "for your benefit"—is perhaps not an impossible rendering here, especially given Abram's dark note just before: "they will kill me, but you they will keep alive" (12:12). This seems at least partly to be the force of its employment in Gen 18:26, 29, 31–32, mentioned below. Here, then, Abram would be promoting his capacity to protect Sarai, if only his life is maintained. However, the preservation of Abram's life is not the specified result in this clause, but that "it will go well" for Abram—the strictly pecuniary definition of which is shortly confirmed in 12:16. It is simpler to regard this expression as parallel with the particle בְּגִלְלִי ("on your account," or "because of

the price of” in a context of barter or sale, as in Amos 2:6, where the Israelites are condemned “because of their sale” of “the poor for [the price of] a pair of sandals” (על-מכרם . . . אביון בעבור) (נעלים; compare 8:6). The possibility that this could be part of the sense of the phrase in Gen 12:13 is strengthened by its appearance in what is clearly a transaction in v. 16, where בעבורה could be rendered “for the price of her,” or “in exchange for her,” without strain: “And [Pharaoh] treated Abram well in exchange for her: [Abram] got flocks and herds and jacks and male slaves and female slaves and jennies and camels.”⁴³

There seems to be little hint here in Egypt, then—unlike, perhaps, in the similar episode to follow in Gerar in Gen 20, treated below—that Sarai possesses the capacity for self-determination, let alone that she is a collaborator in Abram’s plan. The absence of any justification for his ostensibly motivating fears suggests that his scheme is cynical; indeed, all that the narrative confirms is that it does “go well” for Abram “for the price of” Sarai. Rather, she is here a victim, virtually without agency, degraded into a costly object swapped for other property. Among the many details of this story that remain hidden in gaps is the matter of how the truth of the couple’s relationship becomes known to Pharaoh (12:17–18); it is just possible

you”) that appears in the following clause, where Abram’s survival is explicitly mentioned; see *DCH* 2.93a, where these are cited as parallel, indeed synonymous, expressions. The contrast between the phrases, then, is not a benefit for Sarai balanced with a benefit for Abram, but two separate if necessarily related advantages for Abram: “it will go well” for him, and he will remain alive. Contrast the reading of Eichler, “On Reading Genesis 12:10–20,” 38, who contends, on different grounds, that Abram intends by his ploy both to save his life and to protect Sarai. The work of Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham*, 37–39, also seeks to defend Abram against the charge of being a “cad,” contending that the “deepest challenge to the negative view of Abram’s stratagem” is the question: “How would Sarai have been better off with her husband dead?” But this rather credulously assumes a condition in the story world—that Abram’s stated fear is justified—that not only lacks further support in the narrative, but is positively undermined by the actual response of Pharaoh to the truth (vv. 18–20).

43. See van Dijk-Hemmes, “Sarai in Exile,” 141, for a similar reading, which is also noted by Schneider, *Sarah*, 34. Compare the pointed remarks of Keshet, ‘*Say You Are My Sister*,’ 35: “The feeble attempts of commentators to interpret this statement [Gen 12:13 in light of v. 16] as if Abram did not really intend to get anything but only to save his own life . . . fail the test of attentive reading. . . . The recurring expression presents Abram as a sort of procurer, and the marriage price as his payment.” It is interesting that all the other appearances of בעבור as a preposition in the broader narrative of Sarai and Abram are within the context of Abraham and Yahweh’s haggling over the fate of the residents of Sodom (18:26, 29, 31–32). Here, too, a bargain is being struck. Curiously, the context of the only other occurrence of בעבור in this narrative, in 21:30, is also a transaction that involves the transfer of domestic animals (vv. 25–31). However, its grammatical function here more closely resembles that of an English conjunction (בעבור תהיה לי לעדה, “in order that you serve as a witness for me”). Moreover, the narrative frequency of negotiations, covenants, purchases, and so on in these tales may dilute the significance of these correspondences. On the matter of rendering עבדים and שפחה, see my notes below in the section on Gen 16.

that Sarai reveals this, which could indicate the exercise of some initiative.⁴⁴ But this is a blank whose profundity resembles that of the gap of the scene between Sarai and Abram (vv. 11–13): whether Sarai ever follows Abram’s cajoling instructions to lie, even by omission of the truth, also continues to be obscure. It is demeaning to be sold, however, whatever the circumstances, and when Sarai reifies Hagar later, it is, perhaps, partly because she was turned into chattel here.

By the time Sarai and her family are deported from Egypt, a number of elements of her characterization have been reinforced and deepened. She continues to be possessed, which extends here to becoming an object of acquisition in a trade that resembles nothing so much as what is now called trafficking in persons, in its crossing of borders, deceptive and coercive methods, and sexual context.⁴⁵ In being so possessed, traded and repeatedly “taken,” Sarai proves to be of great value—worth herds of domestic animals and a number of enslaved humans—but only, again, in a completely objectified capacity, and as the “woman” or “wife of” a man. Here, in fact, she is serially the wife of two different men, with the strong implication of sexual activity, willing or not, with both (especially 12:19).⁴⁶ Tied in complex ways to all of this is Sarai’s striking beauty, a trait that makes her the object of the “noticing” gaze of the men who covet her.

Sarai also continues to be defined, in many ways, by a state of lack. First, her family’s security is threatened by a dearth of food; soon thereafter she is taken, bodily, her personal security completely stripped from her. In her abduction and captivity—even in her release, which only results in her return to the man who sold her—Sarai is powerless, seemingly without

44. Compare *Ant.* 1.165.

45. See van Dijk-Hemmes, “Sarai in Exile,” 136–37, 143, for a reading that explicitly ties Sarai’s experiences to those of trafficked sex workers in van Dijk-Hemmes’s native Netherlands.

46. Compare the language of 12:19 (ואקח אתה לי לאשה, “so that I took her for myself as a wife”) and 16:3 (ותתן אתה לאברם . . . לו לאשה) (ותקח שרי . . . את־הגר . . . ותתן אתה לאברם . . . לו לאשה), “Sarai took . . . Hagar . . . and gave her to Abram . . . as a wife for him”). In the verse just following, of course, Hagar and Abram’s union is explicitly consummated. Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 85–93, partly following Exum, “Who’s Afraid?,” describes the narrative of 12:10–20 as a “marital rape fantasy.”

volition; the discourse, in which she is utterly voiceless, lacks even a hint of any exercise of her will. And despite her alternating spouses Sarai remains, as she was in the beginning, childless.

However, Sarai may also be said to be incrementally, if implicitly, developing, especially from the perspective of the narrative's evolving theme of gain and loss. While she "made" slaves in Haran, she is sold in Egypt; but this wild swing in status, in turn, paradoxically leads to tremendous financial gain for her family. While the wealth resulting from this sordid trade is specified as Abram's (12:16, 20; 13:1–2), in contrast to the earlier, more inclusive note in 12:5, the standard of living for his entire household seems likely to have increased. As is clarified by later events, then, Sarai, so lately powerless and owned, here regains a certain level of power and ownership, albeit always as relative to the power of Abram. These contradictions and conflicts, both social and personal, may also lay the ground for Sarai's later development as a character. Interpersonal conflict with men, and with Abram in particular, bubbles just beneath the surface of the discourse, while social contact with women, suggested only obliquely in Sarai's stay in בית פרעה (v. 15), is consigned to the deep background. But it is her treatment by those who have power over her that is most suggestive here. Callously abused and traded for gain, Sarai, perhaps, begins to take steps toward the use and abuse of those over whom she has power.

Silence, but Reflected Light (Gen 13:2–15:21)

Sarai, having been unceremoniously dumped back with Abram in Gen 12:19, sets out for Canaan again as part of his retinue (12:20–13:1). Somewhere in the Negeb desert, however, she disappears from the discourse until 16:1–6, where she proposes what proves to be a disastrous liaison between Hagar and Abram. This intervening silence serves to strengthen the link between Sarai's actions there and her treatment in Egypt, as nothing in the discourse interferes with the narrative recency of her formative experiences there. The several episodes in between are not therefore without value for Sarai's characterization, however, for as noted in Chapter 2,

characters are “human cross-roads,” necessarily affecting each other, and there are a few elements here that still shed light on the process of her character’s construction.⁴⁷

The Loss of Lot (Gen 13:2–13)

This episode is closely bound to that of the family’s stay in Egypt, with the possessions and people obtained there serving as a catalyst for a conflict that results in Lot’s household breaking from that of Abram and Sarai. In fact, 13:2, with its note of Abram’s great riches, serves the two tales as a hinge, both reporting the outcome of the Egyptian deception and setting up a comparison with Lot’s wealth in v. 5.⁴⁸ Acquisition and possession continue to be dominant themes in the life of Sarai’s family, and the social conflict that this engenders leads directly to another personal loss for Sarai, this time of her nephew, Lot: “the land could not bear them living together, because their acquisitions were many. . . . And they parted, each from his brother” (ויפרדו איש מעל אחיו) ולא־נשא אתם הארץ לשבת יחדו כי־היה רכושם רב. . . . (vv. 6, 11). Gain is again answered by loss.

Although the discourse is reticent on the ties between Sarai and Lot, a poetics of characterization that emphasizes mimesis and human relationships, as detailed in Chapter 2, invites responsible speculation on this score.⁴⁹ The two seem to have lived and traveled in close proximity for years, at least since their departure from Ur, when they were both “taken” by Terah, then Abram, to foreign lands (11:31; 12:5). Moreover, neither appears to possess any other family connections, apart from a common link to Abram. Sarai, of course, is “without child,” and introduced absent any reference to a family of origin, while Lot, whose mother is never mentioned, is apparently orphaned at the death of his father Haran in Ur, where his sisters are

47. Harvey, *Character*, 69; compare 52. Schneider, *Sarah*, 42–46, also recognizes the importance of considering this intervening material (and compare 3–4), though she focuses on Abram’s development as a character here.

48. Compare the Masoretic blocking: 12:10–13:18 is one “open” (פ, *petuhah*) section.

49. As noted there, see Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, 47: “as readers we will sometimes run the risk of inventing a connection in the text where there is only a gap,” but “the dangers of overreading are far outweighed by the dangers of underreading.” Compare Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119–20; Hochman, *Character*, 41–42.

also left behind (11:27–31). Lot’s wife and daughters, further, do not appear in the narrative for what may be as long as two decades or more in story time.⁵⁰ Given this relational vacuum, and Sarai and Lot’s enforced togetherness in unfamiliar contexts, it is not too much to surmise that this fissure between Abram and Lot’s groups may have a negative emotional impact on Sarai. It may, indeed, be worth considering whether Sarai’s feelings towards Lot might verge on the maternal.⁵¹ I do not think that this line of inquiry is idle, given the narrative centrality of Sarai’s lack of a child and this trait’s eventual reversal. Moreover, Sarai is repeatedly shown to be ambivalent towards motherhood as her story proceeds; if an infertile Sarai is wounded here by the loss of someone she regards as a son, this could help to explain her later equivocation. Following the trauma of Egypt, this loss of Lot, which is similarly partly prompted by acquisitiveness, may also add to a hardening of Sarai’s personality, increase her protectiveness of what is hers, and contribute to the development of a jaundiced attitude toward possessions, relationships, and their mutual effects.

Unfulfilled Promises and a Nighttime Raid (Gen 13:14–14:24)

Emphasis on possession and possessions continues throughout the remainder of Gen 13 and all of Gen 14. Yahweh, having promised Abram “the whole land” along with “offspring” to occupy it, urges him to survey this future gift (13:14–17); Abram, however, settles down instead, pitching his tent at “the terebinths of Mamre” and erecting another altar (v. 18).⁵² The incongruity noted above in Yahweh’s first communication (12:1–3)—just how Abram will turn into a “great nation” with an infertile wife who is not privy to these revelations—not only

50. The chronology, as often, is not entirely clear. However, Abraham is almost one hundred years old by the time of the events of Gen 19, where Lot’s wife and daughters appear (17:1; 21:5); here, Abram is probably closer to eighty, on the evidence of 12:4; 16:3, 16.

51. Compare Josephus’s *Antiquities*, where Abraham formally adopts Lot, making Sarra, as she is called there, not only Lot’s sister, but also his stepmother (1.151, 154). The relative ages of Sarai and Lot in the MT are no clearer than the broader chronology, but it seems likely that she is a generation older than he. Haran, Lot’s father, appears to be the youngest brother of Abram, and Sarai, as shown later, is only about ten years younger than Abram (Gen 11:26–27; 17:17). In any event, closer proximity in age would be unlikely to make Sarai and Lot less close.

52. Mamre seems at first to be a personal name, not a toponym, to judge by Gen 14:13, 24; however, it seems to be so fixed later in the narrative, as for example in 23:17, 19; 25:9, and so on.

remains unresolved but is exacerbated here by the passage of time in the story world. Yahweh, speaking again out of the void, continues to address Abram alone, even repeating the phrase “your [sg.] offspring” (זרעך) three times (13:15–16). Yet this presumes a biological process that Abram simply cannot complete in isolation; one, moreover, whose prospects seem ever dimmer, as the repetition of these pledges in the absence of discernible intervening action does not contribute to their credibility. Sarai, meanwhile, remains offstage, perhaps unaware of Abram’s recurring epiphanies but watching him conduct Yahweh’s cult, possibly occupied by the kind of domestic tasks that are suggested as her province later (18:6), likely visited at night, fruitlessly, by Abram. Of her other relationships, especially with women, there is only frail, mostly retrospective evidence, limited to the implied presence of Hagar and other slaves and household retainers—which are, however, incredibly numerous by now, to judge by the 318 vassals Abram leads forth in 14:14—and, just possibly, the wives and retainers of Abram’s Amorite allies (vv. 13, 24).

Abram’s swashbuckling expedition in Gen 14 casts only a faint reflected light on Sarai, who continues to wait in the wings. Sarai is the wife of a man who is increasingly rich and powerful, able and willing to defend members of his extended family and, importantly, their “acquisitions” (רכש). The possession, theft, restoration, and exchange of these acquisitions constitute a major theme in this section—the word רכש itself appears five times in vv. 11–21—which further reinforces the importance of this motif to the wider narrative.⁵³ This martial episode may be read as evidence that Abram places little value on Sarai: as Gunn and Fewell note, Abram’s concern for a captive family member and proud refusal to be further enriched by a foreign potentate provide a disquieting contrast with his earlier conduct in Egypt.⁵⁴ Given his profit there, however, and his tidy gains to come, in Gerar and Machpelah (20:14–16; 23:4–20),

53. The opposing kings take “all the acquisitions of Sodom and Gomorrah,” in addition to those of Lot, and abscond with them (14:11–12); these are then recovered by Abram’s night raid and brought back (v. 16). Abram apparently gives a tenth of them to Melchizedek (v. 20), and returns the rest, but for his confederates’ share of the spoils, refusing to take any for himself (vv. 21–24).

54. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 93.

it might be more precise to say that Abram knows Sarai has some value—but only as an instrument, not as a person.

Still Only Promises (Gen 15:1–21)

Somewhat later, Abram receives yet another communication from Yahweh, this time in a series of revelations in which דבר־יהוה initially comes in a kind of ecstatic “vision” (מחזה, 15:1).⁵⁵ Themes of acquisition and possession, now familiar from earlier epiphanies, continue to define the content of Yahweh’s pronouncements, and pecuniary language is sprinkled throughout.⁵⁶

A new note emerges here as well, though, as the tensions implicit in the contexts of Yahweh’s former oracles come at least partly into the open. Abram’s sequential responses to Yahweh’s pledges and commands, in fact, suggest a waning enthusiasm for the deity’s plans. From Haran, Abram “went as Yahweh told him” (12:4), but in Canaan, perhaps “between Bethel and Ai,” he quietly ignores Yahweh’s order to survey the land, settling instead at the “terebinths of Mamre” (13:3–4, 12, 17–18). Here, Abram’s reply is, at least initially, almost derisive, as he talks back to Yahweh for the first time: Yahweh says, “Do not be afraid, Abram—I am your shield; I will make your wages great!” But Abram said, ‘My lord Yahweh, *what* will you give me, with me dying childless?’ . . . ‘Look—you have not given me offspring!’” (15:1b–2a, 3a).⁵⁷ For

55. As this uncanny, multi-part encounter wears on, however, there is some suggestion of Yahweh’s physical manifestation, foreshadowing what is apparently a bodily visitation to Sarah and Abraham in Gen 18. After drawing Abram out into the open (ויצא אתו החוצה), “[Yahweh] brought him outside”), Yahweh commands: “bring me a three-year-old heifer” (קחה לי עגלה משלשת), in addition to several other animals for sacrifice (15:5, 9). Abram complies, gathering the animals into the divine presence (ויקח לו את־כל־אלה), “and he brought [Yahweh] all of these,” (v. 10).

56. This begins already at the end of Gen 15:1, where Yahweh refers to Abram’s שכר, or “wages,” which the RSV renders with the more abstract “reward” here. See, however, the context of the same form in 30:28, where Laban haggles with Jacob, and its feminine counterpart in Exod 2:9, where Pharaoh’s daughter promises to pay the mother of the baby to be named Moses, among many other examples. Concern with inheritance binds the entire chapter (Gen 15:2–4, 7–8, 18), while the predicted outcome of Abram’s offspring’s service in a foreign land is that “they will emerge with great acquisitions” (יצאו ברכש גדול), (v. 14). With this now-familiar word in its immediate context, further, the best translation of שלום in the following verse may well be “prosperity.”

57. אל־תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך שכרך הרבה מאד ויאמר אברם אדני יהוה מה־תתן־לי ואנכי הלוך עריירי . . . הן לי לא נתתה. זרע ארבה is apparently an infinitive absolute; I have taken the suggestion of the *BHS* apparatus and read ארבה, which is the reading of the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). הלך as “dying,” in the sense of “going on towards death” (RSV reads “continue”), is not only suggested by the context but supported as a possibility by BDB 234a, הלך (*qal* II.1). The remainder of v. 2, which I have elided here, is a famous *crux* featuring the *hapax* ביתי משק, which may mean something like “the son of the acquisition of my house,” a rendering based solely on the near context, or, as Mitchell

reasons that remain obscure, Abram is soon said to regain confidence in Yahweh's predictions (v. 6); but, just as quickly, he seems to retreat into skepticism, employing the same honorific as in his first statement of doubt: "My lord Yahweh, *how* will I know?" (אדני יהוה במה אדע, v. 8). Promises of inheritance, and the offspring required to make this concept concrete, provide a ground note sounded over and over in this series of rituals and proclamations (vv. 2–5, 7–8, 13–14, 16, 18–21); but the emotional stress over their lack of fulfillment, only intensified here by a pledge that emphasizes Abram's genetic, sexual connection to his eventual heir (v. 4), seems to have reached an unsustainable pitch.⁵⁸

This stress, founded in the biological conundrum referred to several times above, could partly anticipate that of Sarai in Gen 16. Perhaps, indeed, Abram's newly-revealed disquiet about "dying childless" contributes to or even prompts that of Sarai, which may be implied there. I have noted that there is no explicit indication in the discourse that Sarai is aware of the content of Yahweh's by-now numerous pledges of offspring, and this gap endures here. However, I have also suggested that Abram's performance of Yahweh's cult would likely have been plain to her, for the simple reason that such ritual observance—or, at a minimum, certain components of it, such as the construction of altars—has a public element. Similar considerations imply that Sarai would at least have had knowledge of the turmoil created by this most recent series of revelations. For the events of Gen 15, and the sacrifices in particular, when taken seriously as a narrative and not regarded merely as a collection of similar oracular episodes, push far beyond

Dahood argued, "the one who pours libations on my grave"; in either case, the meaning appears to be that of "heir" to Abram (see *DCH* 5.565a, and 886a for bibliography; *BDB* 606b). That this was obscure in antiquity seems indicated by what reads like a gloss playing on *משק* near the end of v. 2 (הוא דמשק, meaning "that is, Damascus"; see Eissfeldt's apparatus in *BHS*); in fact, much of v. 3, as well, seems aimed at clarifying what comes before. See also the relevant discussion in Chapter 4.

58. The language of Gen 15:4 is bowdlerized in the RSV, which renders "your own son shall be your heir" for *כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמְעִיךְ הוּא יִירָשְׁךָ*. Why this should be is unclear, as *מעיה* (strictly a lexical form for a word that never appears in the singular), which generally refers to the lower belly, is already a euphemism. Our archaic "loins" might serve; the NRSV's "your very own issue," which at first seems even more insipid than the RSV, may also make the point in a sly manner. What matters here is that Abram's heir is predicted to "come out" of his own sexual equipment. Compare, among other places, 2 Sam 7:12, which displays significant lexical similarities, and Gen 25:23, where, employed in parallel with *בטן מעיה*, clearly means "uterus."

private, interior illumination.⁵⁹

If, as I have argued, Sarai's physical proximity to Abram can usually be assumed on the story level, at least to this point in the narrative, even when only he is mentioned in the discourse—leaving aside, perhaps, an episode such as the nighttime raid on the hostile kings' camp—it does not seem too much to infer that this sequence of events would have attracted Sarai's notice and interest. While the reader's knowledge gap about what she knows remains, the possibility that she may have heard or sensed something of Abram's newly-voiced angst over the lack of an heir might be strengthened by the scene that immediately follows, where Sarai may make this worry her own. Many familiar themes—possession and lack, ownership, abuse, disposal of another's sexual resources for personal gain, and a variety of desires, including a simple hunger for acknowledgment—now mix together, with explosive results.

Sarai, Hagar, Abram—and a Son (Gen 16:1–16)

Gen 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar; 2 and Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" 6 But Abram said to Sarai,

59. After a clear temporal indicator ("after these things," אחר הדברים האלה, 15:1) that separates these events from those of Gen 14, Abram—apparently at home, in his tent, near the terebinths of Mamre—receives a vision in which Yahweh speaks to him, and to which he replies, perhaps audibly (15:1–3). Shortly thereafter, he is led outside by his divine interlocutor to look at the night sky and "count the stars" (ספר הכוכבים, v. 5). Another verbal exchange follows (vv. 7–8), after which Abram obeys a command to collect several fully-grown domestic animals, which he slaughters and cuts in half, meanwhile fending off opportunistic carrion birds for what appears to be the full day following his nocturnal stargazing (vv. 9–11, followed in v. 12 by "the sun went down," ויהי השמש לבוא; compare v. 17, where it seems to have become fully dark again). Subsequently, the narrator's performance urges further visualization: "a trance fell upon Abram—see it! A terror, a great darkness, was falling upon him" (ותרדמה נפלה) ותרדמה נפלה עליו (v. 12). Shortly thereafter, another attention-arresting והנה marks a final, striking image of "a smoky brazier and a fiery torch" that seem to levitate, somehow, "between these pieces" of dead, mature animals (הנה תנור עשן ולפיד אש אשר עבר בין הגזרים האלה, v. 17). A closing temporal note, "on that day" (ביום ההוא, v. 18), seems to confirm the basic chronological continuity of the entirety of Gen 15 as it stands.

“Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. 7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her.” . . . 15 And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (RSV)

Following the relentless talk of offspring in Gen 15, the initial *vav* of this episode is likely better rendered as an adversative that sharpens the quandary of the plot: “Yahweh cut a deal with Abram: ‘To your offspring I give this land.’ . . . *But* Sarai the woman of Abram did not bear a child to him” (15:18; 16:1).⁶⁰ Another nuance lost in the translation and punctuation of the RSV is the partial mirroring of the two halves of this first verse, which not only establishes the poles of the narrative’s conflict, but also neatly encapsulates one of Sarai’s central characteristics:⁶¹

וּשְׂרַי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ / וְלֵהּ שְׂפָחָה מִצְרִית וְשָׂמָה הַגֵּר

Sarai, still the “woman of” Abram, has yet to bear a child “to him” (לוֹ); however, “to her” (לֵהּ) belongs an “Egyptian slave” named Hagar.⁶² The names of the episode’s principal antagonists bookend the verse, and Sarai’s quality as one who both lacks and possesses finds succinct expression here even as it defines the germ of the plot: Sarai has no child, but she does have a

60. כרת יהוה את־אברם ברית לאמר לזרעך נתתי את־הארץ הזאת. . . . וּשְׂרַי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ is the only verb in the latter verse, and its morphology has no certain temporal indicators. It seems that this perfect form could be read as an English past perfect: “But Sarai had not given birth [to this point in the narrative].” Compare the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABR): “Sarai had borne him no children.” However, the context may recommend a durative sense: the promises of offspring continue to pile up, “but Sarai [still] did not give birth.”

61. See Tribble, “Desolation,” 10, for another reading that emphasizes the architecture of this verse; compare Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings,” 38.

62. שְׂפָחָה, of which more will be said just below, is another word whose translation is problematic, not least due to English language gender norms. “Slavewoman” might work, but, it seems, only if its masculine counterparts (עַבֵּד, עַבְדָּה, or the like) were rendered “slaveman”; otherwise, again, the feminine is forever the derivative of a “given” masculine perspective. Simply using “slave” for nouns of both genders may not always be preferable, either, as it flattens what may be real differences between various nouns, and may serve to hide status distinctions between enslaved women and men; compare the remarks of Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16. This clearly applies all the more in lists such as that of Gen 12:16, where עַבֵּד and שְׂפָחָה appear together (compare 20:14; 24:35). However, in the context of Gen 16, it seems that the gender and sex of Hagar are amply illustrated by the narrative itself, and thus that “slavewoman” for שְׂפָחָה would be no more necessary or appropriate than “Egyptianess” for מִצְרִית.

slave. Her lack, indeed, is here made more pronounced by the grammar, which frames Sarai's childlessness in terms of her failure to produce for Abram. Sarai's possession of Hagar, however, is thus the more emphasized, and this fact is only further cemented as the story develops. What was revealed in 12:5, that Sarai is a slaveowner, is now reconfirmed. Whether or not שפחה is limited to a meaning of "slave" in the broader lexicon, the immediate context here shows that the RSV's "maid" is far too weak.⁶³ The repeated possessives of the narrator and every character bar the infant Ishmael strongly suggest that Sarai owns Hagar, and the role in counterpoint to Hagar as שפחה is Sarai as גברת, or "master."⁶⁴ Word-studies, moreover, are superfluous in the face of the plot here, which shows Sarai possessed of sweeping authority over Hagar, whose sexuality and

63. The NRSV (1989) updates this language to "slave-girl." While "girl" has the advantage of conveying Hagar's subordinate status, the plot shows that it is not strictly accurate. However, the employment of "slave" is laudable: with words whose semantic domains cover situations of ownership of humans, biblical translators must, in my opinion, err on the side of revealing these associations to those who do not have the advantage of the source languages. Part of the problem in the present case seems to be the evolution of the English "maid," a word most often used today to mean something like "cleaning-lady." When BDB (1906) defines שפחה as "maid" or "maid-servant," however, this is immediately clarified as one "belonging to a mistress" (1046b). An interesting example is that of Exod 11:5, which features שפחה as the inferior term in a merism with "Pharaoh who sits upon the throne": the lowest end of the spectrum of social worth, mentioned just before livestock. Yet reasonably contemporary versions such as the New American Bible (NAB; 1970, but the Revised Edition of 2010—NABR—remains unchanged), the New International Version (NIV; 1984), or the English Standard Version (ESV; 2001) persist in rendering "maidservant" or "female . . . servant" in Gen 16. That all these nevertheless allow something like "slave girl" in Exod 11 hints at an apologetic motive here. Compare Alter, *Genesis*, 67, who uses "slavegirl" in Gen 16: "The tradition of English versions that render this as 'maid' or 'handmaiden' imposes a misleading sense of European gentility on the sociology of the story. The point is that Hagar belongs to Sarai as property, and the ensuing complications of their relationship build on that fundamental fact. Later on, Hagar will also be referred to as 'amah [Gen 21:10, 12–13]. The two terms designate precisely the same social status." That there is "no general distinction in meaning" between the two words has recently been supported in detail in Edward J. Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave: אמה and שפחה in the HB," *JHebS* 12 article 2 (2012): 18, 21. For a dissenting view, see Ina Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance: A Constructive Comparison of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21," in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms*, ed. Katharine J. Dell, Graham Davies, and Yee Von Koh (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 35–37.

64. See my note on "master" and "mistress" above. The instances of גברת outside this passage, as BDB reckons them (150b), are mostly in contexts that suggest great power, or a vast power differential. See, for example, Isa 47:5 (גברת ממלכות), "master of governments"; NABR "sovereign mistress of kingdoms"; compare v. 7), or 2 Kgs 5:3, where גברת is the feminine counterpart of אדון. In any event, the context in which this word is employed most densely is the present one (Gen 16:4, 8–9). The narrator's possessives focalize Sarai and Hagar's relationship both ways: Sarai has Hagar as a slave in 16:1 (לה שפחה) and v. 3 (שפחתה), while Hagar has Sarai as a master in v. 4 (גברתה). Furthermore, Sarai calls Hagar "my slave" twice (שפחתי, vv. 2, 5); Abram calls her "your slave" (שפחתך, v. 5); Hagar calls Sarai "my master" (גברתי, v. 8); and Yahweh's proxy (מלאך יהוה), in speech to Hagar, refers to Sarai as "your master" (גברתך, v. 9), having opened their exchange with a vocative "Hagar, slave of Sarai" (הגר שפחת שרי, v. 8). Compare 25:12, where Hagar, as Ishmael's mother, is still recalled as שפחת שרה.

fertility are Sarai's to allocate (16:2–3, 5).⁶⁵ When her scheme produces unforeseen results, Sarai abuses Hagar with impunity, regarded as within her rights here not only by Abram (v. 6), but by Yahweh's messenger, who urges Hagar: “submit yourself to abuse under her hand” (הַתְּעִי תַחֲתֶיהָ, v. 9; see further below). Sarai, then, is the owner, Hagar the owned.

Sarai's address to Abram in Gen 16:2, which is her first recorded direct speech, is interesting in content but even more intriguing in tone. Nothing explicit about Sarai intervenes in the discourse between this episode and that of Egypt. This silence is only emphasized by a striking formal resemblance, not reflected in the RSV or the NRSV, between Abram's speech there—also his first direct utterance—and Sarai's here.⁶⁶ She adopts Abram's very syntax, opening her persuasive address by drawing attention to a perceived problem with the particle pair הַנְּהִינָה, then moving to propose a solution with an imperative followed by הִנְּהִינָה. Finally, as Abram did, she closes with a mention of the desired result, which involves personal acquisition.⁶⁷ Where Abram had previously said, “Look . . . I know[, if anyone does,] that you are a woman who is lovely to look at. . . . Just say you are my sister! That way it will go well for me” (הַנְּהִינָה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי הַנְּהִינָה יִטְבֵּלִי, 12:11, 13), Sarai urges, “Look . . . Yahweh [not you, Abram!] has stopped me from giving birth. Just ‘go into’ my slave! Perhaps I will be built up out of her” (הַנְּהִינָה עֲצַרְנִי יְהוָה מִלְּדוֹת בְּאִנָּה אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלַי אֲבִנָּה מִמֶּנָּה, 16:2). Sarai, it seems, has learned from Abram how to wheedle and scheme.

These parallels, which represent only a portion of the ties between these episodes, immediately prompt questions about Sarai's sincerity and motives. Abram's speech at the edge of Egypt, after all, was a murky mix of seeming-truths and duplicitous, self-serving exaggeration.

65. In some contrast, see the assertion of Alter, *Genesis*, 51: “As subsequent stories in Genesis make clear, this was not the sort of chattel slavery later practiced in North America. These slaves had certain limited rights, could be given great responsibility, and were not thought to lose their personhood.” He seems to admit that the present story does not in fact make this distinction “clear,” and I wonder if such statements are not directed at readings such as that of Weems, “A Mistress, a Maid, and No Mercy,” 7, who does not hesitate to compare Hagar's treatment and that of black slave women in the United States.

66. Compare Wénin, “Saraï, Hagar et Abram,” 33–35.

67. Compare the emphasis on desire in Wénin, “Saraï, Hagar et Abram,” 51–52.

The formal likeness of Sarai's persuasive talk here suggests that it, too, be read with caution. Is she wholly ingenuous in her emphatic attribution of her childlessness to Yahweh? Or could her seemingly artless suggestion—"why don't you just 'enter' my slave?"—be prompted by something more complex? If Sarai's stratagem were a ruse designed to expose Abram's impotence, for instance, her coming rage, thus partly prompted by the plan's failure, might be more easily understood.⁶⁸ Or perhaps she has tired of Abram's amorous visits—again, these notes of lack of reproductive success make little sense if their sexual activity has ceased—and uses her power over Hagar to provide him with a surrogate partner. Either of these hypotheses, further, might illuminate Sarai's chortle and aside in 18:12, where she thinks or mutters, "After my being worn out, there is pleasure for me, huh? With my husband as old as he is!"⁶⁹

Moreover, inquiries into Sarai's candor in her final statement in this first speech end inconclusively. "Perhaps," she says, "I will be built up out of her"—a punning use of בנה that seems to refer to Sarai's establishment as a mother of a son through Hagar.⁷⁰ But does Sarai want to be a mother, by her own body or otherwise? Her desire is not strong enough to keep her from abusing a pregnant Hagar until she flees, and she certainly shows no affection for Ishmael later (16:6; 21:10). Her response to the eventual birth of her own son (21:6) is also deeply ambiguous, as I argue below. Sarai's proposition and statement here, though, could also reflect a real anxiety over her lack of offspring, similar to that exhibited by Abram in 15:2–3, as I suggested above. Essentializing appeals to Sarai's "biological clock," or to a supposedly natural desire for women to have babies, do not satisfy here. But the narrative primacy of her childlessness has prepared

68. A similar hypothesis is developed by Burton L. Visotzky, *The Genesis of Ethics* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1996), 44–45.

69. אחרי בלתי היתה-לי עדנה ואדני זקן. By this point, Sarai has been noted to be postmenopausal (18:11). However, here in Gen 16 that does not yet appear to be the case: the verb that she uses to describe Yahweh's "stopping" her from giving birth, עצר, is the same used to describe God's "stopping" of "every uterus of the house of Abimelech" in 20:18, where it refers to a temporary bar to birth in otherwise fertile women (v. 17).

70. *DCH* 2.229a suggests "become mother of sons." See also Alter, *Genesis*, 67: "I will be sonned through her." The clearest parallel is in Gen 30:3, where Rachel uses the same forms—אבנה . . . ממנה—in her proposal of Bilhah's surrogacy. There the desired outcome is even more explicit: "let her give birth on my knees" (תלד עלי-ברכי) (תלד עלי-ברכי). Compare Ruth 4:11.

the reader from the start for just such a conflict (11:30); indeed, the immediate recency of the similar note in 16:1 recalls and underlines this fundamental datum, emphasizing its complicating role in the plot. The drumbeat of promises of offspring to Abram, moreover, coupled with their lack of fulfillment, implies a level of stress over this disjunction that could easily, it seems, have spilled over into Sarai's consciousness after a decade in the land (v. 3). The centrality of the themes of acquisition and possession to this narrative, too, makes it difficult to dismiss the possibility that Sarai wants to obtain offspring, and this by any means available.

These means, unlike their ultimate motives, lie open for inspection—and they are clearly abusive, despite the efforts of interpreters such as Schneider to justify them.⁷¹ Disturbing echoes with the Egyptian episode multiply here, and this scene comes to resemble nothing so much as an arranged rape.⁷² Sarai, as the party in power, casually disposes of a voiceless subordinate's sexual resources—just enter my slave!—and uses her as an instrument for personal gain (16:2).⁷³ On one level, Sarai's proposal is even more troubling than Abram's, as it does not include the object of the scheme as an interlocutor. Further startling is Sarai's adoption of a role formerly played by those with power over her own body: "Sarai, woman of Abram, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave . . . and she gave her to Abram" (v. 3).⁷⁴ Taken so often in the past (11:29, 31; 12:5, 15, and twice in v. 19), Sarai evokes the meaning of her powerful name by becoming a taker here, giving Hagar to Abram "as a wife" (לְאִשָּׁה, 16:3; compare Pharaoh's statement in 12:19).⁷⁵

71. The interpretation of Schneider, *Sarah*, 48, is characteristic of her penchant to defend Sarai's actions by showing that "the Deity" approves of them. Rejecting the influential contention of Trible, "Desolation," that Sarai is abusive, Schneider asks: "are Sarai's actions really so bad?" She goes on to excuse Sarai's disposal of Hagar by noting that Abram did something similar in Egypt, and, after all, there is "nothing in Sarai's plan that counters anything promised by the Deity"—therefore, apparently, all is well. Contrast the readings of Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 43–45, and Trible, "Ominous Beginnings," 38, who also comment on the similarities between Sarai and Abram here.

72. Compare Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 58–59, who does not hesitate to identify Gen 16 as a rape narrative. See further below.

73. מִמֶּנָּה, in addition to rather crudely evoking Sarai's potential drawing of children "out of" Hagar, also has an instrumental feel well rendered by the RSV's "by her." Compare the NABR's "through her," which is also how the RSV translates the same phrase in Gen 30:3. The broader plot also clearly supports an instrumental reading here.

74. ותקח שרי אשת-אברם את-הגֵר חמצרית שפחתה . . . ותתן אתה לאברם. This play with לקח is frequently noted; see, among others, Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 138.

All this does not mean that Sarai has emerged from Abram's power over her, which was so clearly depicted in Egypt. Indeed, her imitation of him here merely underlines the profound and lasting effects of his domination there. To the narrator, moreover, she is still the "woman of" Abram, evaluated by her failure to produce "for him" (16:1). The note in v. 2, that "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" (וישמע אברם לקול שרֵי), does not imply that his is the inferior position, which a consideration of the parallel scene in Gen 12 shows.⁷⁶ To mention that Abram agrees is to assume that he has a choice in the matter; to raise the concept of his response at all suggests that he has an agency that Sarai was not afforded on the threshold of Egypt. However, the language of 16:3 might hint at the beginning of a subtle realignment in power between Sarai and Abram. Here, Sarai is referred to by the familiar epithet אִשְׁת־אֲבָרָם at the opening of the verse; but Abram, after receiving Hagar from Sarai, is also so qualified near the end of the verse, and this for the very first time in the narrative: he is "her man" or "husband" (אִישָׁהּ). From here on, Sarai will act before and speak to Abram in considerable freedom, and never as one cowed (v. 5; compare 21:10).

Abram's scheme in Egypt may have had some unintended consequences; but Sarai's plan here seems to unravel almost totally. Whether Sarai's true motive is to get Hagar with child or not, her slave conceives with no intervening detail in the discourse: "[Abram] 'went into' Hagar, and she conceived" (ויבא אל־הַגֵּר וְתָהָר, 16:4). Just as rapidly, Hagar is said to notice her condition (וְתָרָא כִּי הָרְתָהּ). Here, as I suggested briefly in treating the Egyptian episode, there may be some play with the concept of "noticing" that helps to tie Sarai's reaction here to her treatment in Egypt. The usually inconspicuous word רָאָה, radically "to see," serves to link Sarai's reception in

75. Schneider, *Sarah*, 49, argues that Hagar is thus "promoted" socially by Sarai. Conversely, the NAB seems to tip an ecclesial hand in rendering the second אִשָּׁה in 16:3 as "concubine," having translated the first, referring to Sarai, as "wife"; this is rectified in the NABR, which reads "wife" for both.

76. שמע and a preposition plus קול can mean something close to "obey," as the phrase seems to in Yahweh's address to Abraham in Gen 22:18; alternately, it can simply indicate acknowledgment of a sound, as in its two appearances in 21:17, where God hears the cries of Ishmael. Abraham is indeed urged, by God, to "heed" or "obey" Sarah later, in 21:12 (שמע בקלה). There, however, Abraham initially resists her demands (v. 11), which fact, along with the divine source of the supplementary order, justifies a stronger rendering: "whatever Sarah tells you—do it." Here in 16:2, however, with no indication that Abram is even remotely distressed at the prospect of "going into" Hagar, a simple "Abram agreed" suffices.

Gen 12 with Hagar's apparent motive here, and notes of "seeing" and "eyes" are rapidly forming motifs that grow in importance as the narrative progresses. The seeing of Sarai in Egypt was something of great power: it was the predicted trigger for the purported, covetous homicidal impulses of the Egyptians in 12:12, and the actual catalyst for the praise of the courtiers that resulted in Sarai's being "taken" by the ruler of that land (vv. 14–15). As I clarified above, this "noticing" is not therefore something that contributed to Sarai's self-esteem in a positive way. Rather, in a manner wholly congruent with the rest of that tale, it was predatory and objectifying, and it culminated in her abuse. But negative attention can somehow be, if perversely, preferable to none at all; and here, after Hagar "sees" or "notices" her pregnancy, Sarai—so "lovely to look at"—is "insignificant in her eyes" (בעיניה . . . ותקל, 16:4): simply "overlooked."⁷⁷

The verbal root קלל most often appears in the *piel*, where it carries the strongly negative meaning "to curse."⁷⁸ In the *qal*, however, as in Gen 16:4–5, קלל never means "curse," but rather something milder, despite Schneider's claims to the contrary: to be "trifling," "of little account"—simply not worthy of notice or thought.⁷⁹ In 1 Sam 2:30, for example, the *qal* of קלל is

77. ראה is here again aptly rendered by "notice": a new fact appears and is recognized. While the verse is strictly paratactic (ויבא אל־הגר ותהר ותרא כי הרתה ותקל גברתה בעיניה), literally "And he went into Hagar and she conceived and she saw that she had conceived and her master was insignificant in her eyes"), the logical subordination keyed by the order of the phrases is clear, and English translations usually begin with "when" after the *atnah*. The NABR captures the sense well: "As soon as Hagar knew she was pregnant, her mistress lost stature in her eyes." While its production-centered perspective differs from my focus here, the thought-provoking question of Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 58–59, is noteworthy: she asks "whether Hagar's response represents a realistic description of an enslaved woman who was raped by her owner's husband or whether v. 4 should be read as part of an androcentric strategy that legitimates the rape by stressing her newfound agency as the result of the pregnancy."

78. The *piel* participle appeared in Yahweh's first pledge to Abram in Gen 12:3, where Yahweh promises to "curse" (ארר) "the one who curses" or "damns" (מקלל) him; there, the two terms are roughly synonymous, as shown by the rendering of the RSV and many other versions, which use "curse" for both. Another example of the same form is in Exod 21:17, which features the dictum "the one who curses (מקלל) father or mother shall be killed."

79. See BDB 886b. Schneider, *Sarah*, 49–50, glosses over the varied meanings of the *binyanim* here in order to argue that Hagar's action is extremely serious. For these verses *HALOT* offers "to be insignificant in the eyes of, meaning count as nothing to" (3.1103b). See also *DCH* 7.256b; *DCH* tentatively reads קלל meaning "to be swift" as a different root (7.258a–b), in distinction to BDB and *HALOT*, which narrows the range of the *qal* קלל, "be lightly esteemed," even further. For bibliography, see *DCH* 7.600b. Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible*, Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature & Exegesis, 1963), 18, 118, whose work is cited by *DCH*, simply notes that the occurrences of קלל in the *qal* are of peripheral interest to his study as they do not mean "curse." This is not to say, however, that there is no semantic connection between the varied stems (118–19). Of course, the very name of the *binyan* "*qal*" is an adjective, קל, meaning something like "light," derived from this root.

employed in contrast to the *piel* of כבד, meaning “to honor.”⁸⁰ The point is that Sarai, having been ותקל in Hagar’s eyes, has not been overtly outraged or abused, but ignored.⁸¹

This is not to say that it is not wounding to be treated as unworthy of notice; experience tells me that it is. That Hagar’s attitude is an inversion of the customary hierarchy in the story world is only emphasized, too, by the subject situated in the center of the phrase: not merely the character Sarai, but “her *master* became insignificant in her eyes” (ותקל גברתה בעיניה). Hagar, the Egyptian slave, is clearly the one who should be invisible, overlooked. But Sarai explodes into hyperbole and rage out of all proportion to this slight. In fact, she first responds with something that itself reads like a curse.⁸² Sarai, who, in an act of reciprocal overlooking, never speaks to Hagar in the discourse—here or later—tells Abram, in a highly compressed phrase suggestive of strangling anger: חמסי עליך (Gen 16:5).⁸³ The RSV’s “May the wrong done to me be on you!” communicates the curse-like feeling well; but חמס, which literally means “violence,” demands something stronger. Even the NABR’s “outrage” may fall somewhat short: another context featuring חמס plus על is Jer 51:35, where amid images of martial brutality the curse “the חמס done me . . . be upon Babylon” is paired with “my blood be upon those who live in Chaldea.”⁸⁴ The

80. The more concrete meanings of these words are also antonyms (“to be light” versus “to be heavy”); here, of course, these are employed metaphorically.

81. It is curious that this “overlooking” or ignoring has extended to eliminating Sarai’s subjectivity here in many English translations. In 16:4, גברתה, Hagar’s feminine “master,” whose referent is Sarai, is the subject of ותקל: “her master was insignificant in her eyes.” In v. 5, Sarai is again the subject of ואקל, as she herself reports “I became insignificant in her eyes.” But the RSV, NRSV, NAB (rectified, however, in NABR), NIV, and others make Hagar the subject in both verses. The KJV retains Sarai as subject: “her mistress was despised in her eyes”; “I was despised in her eyes.”

82. In his digest and, in some cases, translation of the work of Koehler and Baumgartner, William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 109a, specifically calls Sarai’s speech here a “curse.”

83. That Sarai is angry here strikes me as beyond question, but see the cautious language of Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*, Siphut, vol. 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 154–55, who takes pains to justify his statement that “Sarai/h appears angry, even if the text does not specifically say that she is.” Apparently, however, Schlimm’s hedging was prescient, given Wilma Ann Bailey, “Review of Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 801, who seems to want a narratorial confirmation along the lines of “Sarai was angry when she said . . .”

84. חמסי ושארני על-בבל . . . על בבל. ודמי אל-ישיבי כשדים; חמסי . . . על בבל. The first curse in full is חמסי ושארני על-בבל, with a radical meaning of “flesh,” could be anatomical (compare NRSV’s “my torn flesh”) or relational (RSV’s “The violence done to me and to my kinsmen”).

only other occurrences of the noun in the broader narrative of Genesis, furthermore, are in the exposition to the flood, where God is led by the *חַמַּס* of humanity to put an “end to all flesh” (קִץ כְּלֵי-בָשָׂר, 6:13; compare v. 11), and in Jacob’s curse of Simeon and Levi, where the phrase *חַמַּס* כְּלֵי-בָשָׂר is tied to their vicious slaughter of the Shechemites (49:5; compare 34:25–26). “Savagery,” then, may come closer to the mark.

This cry of “savagery!” may lead a reader to wonder what the narrator has left out. But Sarai offers no new evidence, instead underlining her own disposal of Hagar’s sexuality before recounting the provocative events in language that resembles that of the preceding narration very closely. “I gave *my* slave into your lap,” Sarai begins, employing a transparent euphemism for Abram’s genitals, “and when she noticed that she had conceived I became insignificant in her eyes” (אֲנֹכִי נִתְּתִי שֶׁפַחְתִּי בַחִיקְךָ וְתָרָא כִי הִרְתָּה וְאִקְלָב בְּעֵינֶיהָ), 16:5; compare vv. 3–4).⁸⁵ Sarai’s report both confirms the narrator’s account and emphasizes her own outsize reaction. The slave—Sarai never refers to her by name, now or later—is *hers* to give, a note that highlights Sarai’s identity as a possessor, and Sarai’s evaluation of her slave’s offense of indifference corresponds in every particular with what has been described. That Hagar became pregnant, which was, after all, Sarai’s own stated plan (v. 2), and as a result overlooked her master—this Sarai calls “savagery,” invoking Yahweh to support her claim: “Yahweh find for me or you!” (יִשְׁפֹּט יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ), v. 5).⁸⁶

85. “Lap” is the evocative offering of *HALOT* 312b. Compare Speiser, *Genesis*, 116, 118; Alter, *Genesis*, 68.

86. This is another instance where modern translations grammatically subordinate Sarai beyond the dictates of the Hebrew: RSV, NRSV, NABR, and NIV all reverse the pronouns in this sentence. If the motivation for this is the English custom—so far as I can tell, mostly uncodified—that a first-person pronoun should come last in polite speech, it stands in egregious violation of the context. Again, the KJV is more literal (“me and thee”). Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “Hagar Requited,” *JSOT* 87 (2000): 75–109, following Rashi and Savina Teubal, proposes that *בֵּינֶיךָ* is a feminine spelling; thus the clause after the *atnah* is spoken to Hagar, whom Sarai has just discovered “[*in flagrante delicto*]” with Abram (84–85). This has the effect of mitigating Sarai’s later actions in Reis’s eyes (86). But this solution assumes that Hagar’s status as *אִשָּׁה* of Abram (16:3) is strictly temporary, and thus that Hagar, after becoming pregnant, no longer has the right to have sex with Abram, which Reis concludes by noting that Hagar doesn’t bear other children later (79–80); and it ignores Sarai’s complaint as directly recorded in the discourse, which cites Hagar’s indifference, not a discovery of an illicit coupling. Moreover, *בֵּינֶיךָ*, a *hapax legomenon*, is regarded as corrupt by the Masoretes (the second *yod* being marked by one of ten Pentateuchal puncta extraordinaria) and by modern authorities (Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, third reprint of the second edition, with corrections (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), § 103 n; compare

But the only obvious savagery in this scene is that of Sarai herself. This is foreshadowed in literal fashion in Abram’s reply to Sarai’s curses: “Here—your slave is in your hand” (הנה בידך, 16:6). יד is a frequent biblical metonym for power, and this is plainly a context of transfer of “power over” a subordinate that echoes that of 12:19, where Pharaoh returns Sarai with a similar implied gesture: “Here—your woman! Take her and go!” (הנה אשתך קח וילך). But Sarai’s “hand” here is also, it seems, a weapon. After Abram caps his abdication of responsibility with a closely packed phrase that both continues to play on the episode’s absorption with seeing and anticipates Lot’s cowardice in Sodom—“do to her what is good in your eyes” (עשי־לה הטוב) בעיניך, 16:6; compare 19:8)—Sarai acts: ותענה שרי.⁸⁷ If her description of being ignored as חמס was hyperbolic, her response here is completely unmeasured. ענה, especially in the *piel*, as here, is a strong word often employed in contexts of tremendous suffering and violation: it is what Egyptian slavemasters do to the captive Israelites (Exod 1:11–12; compare Yahweh’s prediction to Abram in Gen 15:13); it is what the Israelites are warned never to do to the powerless widow or orphan (Exod 22:21–22); and often, when women are the object of this verb, it denotes sexual humiliation and rape. The rapes of Dinah (Gen 34:2), Tamar (2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32), the nameless “concubine” (פלגש) of a Levite (Judg 19:24; 20:5), and the women of Zion (Lam 5:11) are all described with ענה.⁸⁸ Sarai, then, having characterized Hagar’s indifference as “savagery,” herself responds with brutal, humiliating abuse of her slave who, it should not be forgotten,

Harry M. Orlinsky, “The Biblical Prepositions *TĀḤAT*, *BĒN*, *BĀ’AD*, and Pronouns *’ANŪ* [or *’ANŪ*], *ZŌ’TĀH*,” *HUCA* 17 [1942–43]: 280–81, cited there, who argues that the second *yod* is an artifact of “erroneous application of the plene orthography,” or simply a scribal error [279]. In the absence of any other morphological or syntactical clues, then, ביניך is best regarded as an error for בִּינֶךָ, the normal masculine form; the clause thus simply continues Sarai’s speech to Abram.

87. Lot’s phrase in 19:8, as he offers his “two daughters who have not ‘known’ a man” to the men of Sodom gathered outside his door—and ironically preceded by “don’t do evil, my brothers” in v. 7—is ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם “do to them what is good in your eyes.”

88. Other examples are Deut 21:14; 22:24, 29; Ezek 22:10–11. See *DCH* 6.497b–498a, *HALOT* 2.853b, and *BDB* 776a (which rather disturbingly defines these rape citations with “*humble*, a woman by cohabit.”) for even further examples. A number of roots share radicals with ענה; the one in question here is the second-most common, by far, after ענה “to answer,” and thus is ענה II in *DCH* and *HALOT*. *BDB*’s differing principles of order make this ענה III, however.

carries an unborn child.⁸⁹ That this abuse may even contain an element of sexual violence cannot, it seems, be easily dismissed, and the list of citations just mentioned offers only one consideration here.⁹⁰ Even more important is the immediate context of the episode at hand, which has already shown that Sarai can do whatever she wants with the sexuality of “her slave”: “I put my slave in your lap!” And the verbal link between Lot’s attempted sacrifice of his daughters to the men of Sodom and Abram’s surrender of Hagar to Sarai may do more than show Abram in a bad light: Lot’s neighbors, after all, are bent on sexual violence (Gen 19:4–11, especially v. 5). The troubling possibility remains, then, that “Sarai violated her” so that “[Hagar] fled from her” (וּתְעַנֶּה שָׂרַי וּתְבַרַח מִפִּינָה) 16:6; compare v. 8).

Hagar’s flight and epiphany in the desert have many interesting and puzzling features, such as a continuation of the motif of seeing (16:13–14; and note the play with עֵין in v. 7) and a divine promise that a first-time reader might well identify with those already given to Abram (v. 10)—thus giving rise to the assumption that Sarai has no part in the pledges of offspring at all. Most startling, however, is that Yahweh, by way of a character, מְלֹאךְ יְהוָה, whose identity seems to waver between a divine messenger and the immanent deity, does “find for” Sarai here (compare v. 5). This is not despite Sarai’s violent mistreatment of Hagar; instead, it is an endorsement of their abusive relationship: “Return to your master and submit yourself to abuse under her hand” (שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבוּרְתְּךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַחַת יְדֵיהָ) v. 9).⁹¹ This does more than emphasize, by the

89. Schneider, *Sarah*, 53, while admitting that Sarai’s action is “harsh,” and “may not seem ‘nice,’” excuses it as “consistent with ancient Near Eastern and biblical tradition,” citing as an example of the latter the rather repellent Prov 30:21–23. Again, Schneider points out, without qualm, that Sarai’s abuse of Hagar is “not out of line” with “the Deity.”

90. See Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 59–60, for a reading that characterizes Sarai’s action as rape, while arguing for its function in an “androcentric strategy” seemingly designed to deflect blame from the male characters.

91. Compare the reading of Tribble, “Desolation,” 16, who calls 16:9 a “divine word of terror”; see also Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings,” 40–41, and Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 60–61; compare 57. Contrast, however, Weems, “A Mistress, a Maid, and No Mercy,” 13, who attributes the command of the “angel” to Hagar’s failure to alter her own self-conception. The use of עָנָה here in v. 9 makes almost incoherent the following pledge to Hagar regarding Ishmael, where it seems to be claimed that the child’s name (יִשְׁמָעֵאל) is connected to Yahweh’s “listening to” Hagar’s “condition of abuse” (כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־עֲנִידָךְ), as the final word is also most likely derived from עָנָה, “to mistreat” (v. 11). The only response Yahweh has had to Hagar’s “state of being abused,” however, is to order it be renewed (v. 9). This dissonance seems to be the motivation for the emendation offered in *DCH* 6.506b, “El has answered you,” though it is difficult to see why this should necessarily fit more comfortably in the context.

reappearance of עַנָּה and יָד, the brutal edge to Sarai's conduct. It is also revealing of Sarai's relationship with the deity, which is taking shape as a kind of strange, utilitarian alliance where any means are acceptable but the ends remain unclear. For it is also the second time in this narrative where divine direction or influence has restored an abusive relationship. Liberative interpretations such as that of Cotter fail to recognize the paradox inherent in their readings here: Yahweh rescues a woman from her distress in harem or desert—but only to return her to a situation potentially as dangerous.⁹² Both times, Sarai has been a party to the arrangement, but in opposite roles: in Egypt, she was given back to the man whose scheme had placed her in harm's way (12:17–19), where here she is poised to receive back the slave whose sorry state is a direct result of her own scheme. These restorations of rightful possessions only emphasize the contribution of the narrative's underlying rhythm of loss and gain to Sarai's characterization.

Sarai's proffer of Hagar and its aftermath have shined a light on a character of increasing complexity. Some of Sarai's traits and qualities have been reinforced. She is still seemingly infertile, lacking a child despite effort, which deepens an ongoing conflict with the divine promises, and thus, perhaps, with Abram, and even herself—all of which may account for some of her motives in this dark episode. Have the passage of years, accompanied by the accumulation of dissonant pledges, built up to a breaking point? Sarai is still a slaveowner, too, and the depths of what that means have been illuminated to a disturbing degree here.

Sarai also remains a “woman of” Abram, though holes have perhaps begun to wear in his authority. This latter fact is partly shown, moreover, by Sarai's transformation into a “woman of” Abram in another sense entirely: she has become like him, following his example in scheming, taking, and abusing. This, in turn, throws much into doubt. Does she really believe that she has been the faulty link in the couple's failure to produce? Does she even want a child, even if “built up” by a surrogate? The progression of the episode does not return certain answers to these

92. Cotter, *Genesis*, 104, contends that God somehow “frees” Hagar in this episode; this is another instance of his “motif” in which God saves “trapped” women (92).

questions, but it does depict Sarai—so “lovely to look at”—as someone who is highly sensitive to her appearance in the eyes of others, someone who repays a slight with rage and unrestrained violence.

Much of this, finally, further illuminates Sarai’s relationships with Abram, with Hagar, with Yahweh, and with herself in her development as a character. In Sarai’s imitation of Abram she shifts the balance of power between them. Sarai’s relationship with Hagar may be a sad commentary in microcosm on her broader ties with women. While much of the story content of these connections remains in the deep background, it seems that Sarai’s relationships with women are of two primary kinds: some she owns (12:5, for example), and some she shares a sexual partner with (if *בית פרעה* of 12:15 implies, as most conclude, the king’s harem).⁹³ These categories, of course, are united in Hagar, and it is perhaps unsurprising when this arrangement erupts so spectacularly. Yahweh proves to be an ally to Sarai’s worst impulses, and is again complicit in the restoration of an abusive relationship. As for Sarai’s own development, the many similarities and echoes between this episode and that in Egypt cement, for me, the notion of a direct tie between her treatment there and her actions here. In a sad evolution—all the worse for being so commonplace—the abused becomes the abuser.⁹⁴ Dehumanized in Egypt, Sarai dehumanizes Hagar here; and when Hagar’s response itself channels this degradation by demeaning Sarai, Sarai snaps, responding even more basely in violence.

All this shows Sarai ever more clearly as someone “with” and “without,” characterized by gain and loss. Without a child, Sarai gives away the slave she has, ostensibly to gain a child; given back the slave who is with child, she drives her away through brutality. Here, at last, Sarai may lose slave and child alike. For although Hagar comes back, it remains ambiguous whether

93. Sarai may, as I speculated above, have relationships with other women, such as postulated wives of Abram’s Amorite confederates (13:18; 14:13, 24); but these are even further submerged and inconclusive.

94. See, for instance, Elizabeth Mayfield Arnold, J. Chris Stewart, and C. Aaron McNeece, “Perpetrators as Victims: Understanding Violence by Female Street-Walking Prostitutes,” *Violence and Victims* 16 (2001): 154, which concludes for its subjects that “the best predictor of . . . later violence,” among other negative factors, is “a history of physical abuse.” Disclosures about the self-perpetuating cycle of bullying in the South Korean military also support this general idea; a recent case of death by abuse has been linked to the perpetrators’ own abuse at the hands of their superior: “Blood, sweat and tears,” *The Economist*, 27 September 2014, 42 (no byline).

she follows Yahweh's messenger's directive to "submit" to "abuse" under Sarai's hand. After Hagar's implied return in 16:15, she is never called the "slave of" Sarai while Sarai is alive; and Ishmael is certainly never Sarai's son.⁹⁵

Years of Silence, More Promises—and a New Name? (Gen 17:1–27)

A yawning gap in story time now opens up in the space of fewer than twenty words in the discourse: in the final verse of Gen 16, at the birth of Ishmael, Abram is said to be eighty-six years old; he is noted to be ninety-nine when he receives yet another communication from Yahweh in the first verse of Gen 17. So much is passed over in silence here; and while the narrative has never pretended to be a complete chronicle of events, this chronological gap is more profound than any that has come before. It is wider, that is, it spans more time, than any except the primary blanks in Ur, and possibly Haran, at the very beginning; indeed, it is longer than the story time of the entire narrative arc from the family's emigration from Haran to Ishmael's birth, as Abram is said to be seventy-five at their departure (12:4).⁹⁶ But this gap also feels deeper than any other thus far, for the end of Gen 16 draws a large number of relational tensions together and leaves most of them unresolved. How does Sarai receive Hagar when she returns? For whom does Hagar slave? Are these years of uneasy détente between Sarai and the others, perhaps made easier by the small shifts in power implied in 16:5–6, or are they marked by further open, even violent confrontation?⁹⁷ Or has Hagar simply been cowed and broken by her master's abuse and

95. Hagar is only later called שפחה שרה in retrospect, at the beginning of a list of Ishmael's descendants (25:12). There, the relevant clause could with justice be rendered, "Hagar the Egyptian, [once] Sarah's slave." When spoken of in Gen 21, Hagar is "that slave" (האמה הזאת, 21:10), "your slave" (that is, Abram's; אמתך, v. 12), or simply "the slave" (האמה, v. 13). See Alter's remarks on שפחה and אמה, noted above.

96. The stated age of Abram on leaving Haran does not sit easily with his father's chronology: in 11:26 Terah is said to be seventy at the birth of his sons, but he dies at 205, which seems to be before Abram leaves (v. 32; 12:1–4).

97. Compare the similar questions of Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 47, who suggests that the subsequent scene in Gen 21 implies that the gap here is filled with "great tension."

its subsequent divine endorsement? How does Sarai engage, if at all, with Ishmael, the son she once felt was possible for her to have, as he grows from infancy to adolescence?

These and other questions remain open—some, at least, for good. While these narrative elements go into suspension, thirteen years of silence ends with Abram’s depiction in a familiar situation, as God speaks of the man’s role as “father of a crowd of nations” (אב־המוֹן גוֹיִם, 17:5) who will possess the “whole land of Canaan” (כָּל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, v. 8).⁹⁸ One significant factor, however, is different this time: “Abraham,” his name now “enlarged” (compare 12:2), actually has a son on the cusp of adulthood. This may still fall short of the grandiosity of some of God’s promises—such as “I will make you fruitful beyond measure” (וְהִפְרֵתִי אֹתְךָ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד, 17:6)—but it is a start. The discursive recency of Ishmael’s birth suggests that he is the “seed” of Abraham’s offspring with whom Yahweh’s covenant will be established (v. 7); indeed, Abraham clearly shares this reasonable assumption when he laughs at God’s prediction that he will become a father once again (v. 17). Ishmael, for Abraham, is enough: “Would that Ishmael live in your presence!” (לֹא יִשְׁמַעְאֵל יִהְיֶה לְפָנַיךָ, v. 18).

It is rather a deep surprise, then, when God, having gone on at some length about the removal of male foreskin as a “sign” (אֵימָתָה, 17:11; see vv. 10–14) of the covenant, abruptly begins to talk to Abraham about his “woman”—and not, oddly, referring to Ishmael’s mother.⁹⁹ “Sarah,” rather, is the object of a divine pronouncement where she is prospectively characterized in ways that partly recall earlier forecasts about Abraham: God will “bless” Sarah, who will “turn into nations; kings of peoples will come from her” (וּבִרְכַתִּיהָ וְהִיטָהָ לְגוֹיִם מְלָכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יֵהְיוּ, v. 16;

98. The noun אֱלֹהִים first appears in the broader narrative of Sarai/Sarah and Abram/Abraham here in 17:3. For my narrative purposes I take this to be another descriptor or name for the character called Yahweh. Yahweh has just self-referred using yet another name or epithet (אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי, “I am El-Shaddai”) in v. 1. Other names for what I assume to be the same character have been “El-Elyon” (אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן, 14:18–20, 22), “Lord Yahweh” (אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה, 15:2, 8), and “El-Roi” (אֵל רֹאֵי, 16:13).

99. All this talk of circumcision makes the exhortation of Yahweh in 17:1 read like another little jest: Abram is told there to be תָּמִים, literally, “intact.” This was marked already in the Mishnah, which, however, gives the pun a pious spin: Abraham is “whole only when he had circumcised himself” (m. Ned. 3:11; Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988], 412). Other notes, such as the pronouncement that one uncircumcised will be “cut off” (כָּרַתָּה, v. 14) from the people, add to the mildly salacious tone here.

compare 12:2–3, and especially the similar language in 17:6).¹⁰⁰ The announcement of her name, שרה, also partly evokes the message of v. 5, where Abram is told “your name will not be ‘Abram’ any longer, but your name will be ‘Abraham’” (ולא־יקרא עוד את־שמך אברם והיה שמך אברהם). There is a strange divergence between the two pronouncements, however, for while Abram’s is clearly a name change (עיד . . . והיה), this reads like simple revelation: “don’t call her Sarai—for her name is Sarah” (לא־תקרא את־שמה שרי כי שרה שמה, v. 15). The significance of this clarification is not immediately plain.¹⁰¹ Lexically, there seems to be no distinction of importance between שרי and שרה: both are related to שרר, which means “to rule” or “dominate,” as detailed above.¹⁰² However, the revision or revelation of Sarah’s name does mark a momentous shift that reverberates in the plot and in her characterization. The primacy of her infertility, so often reinforced throughout the narrative, is here predictively reversed by simple fiat, and in a way that places a bold line under the basic meaning of her name: “kings of peoples will come from her” (v. 16). Sarai “had no child,” but Sarah will “turn into nations” (11:30; 17:16).

The genuine magnitude of this change must be immediately tempered, however, by a consideration of what remains the same. It is not necessary to reject the text of the MT in Gen 17:16b, as Sarah Sheckman does, in order to conclude that the character Sarah is not the focus of God’s promises here.¹⁰³ “Sarah” doesn’t even know her name—because God’s

100. The similarities between 17:4–6 and vv. 15–16 would appear to be the reason for designating Sarah “mother of nations” in v. 16 in the RSV, although this language does not appear in the MT there: Abraham is “father of a crowd of nations,” as noted above, in vv. 4–5. In the KJV, *mother* is italicized in v. 16, according to the convention for supplied words in that version; the RSV adopts this language without noting that it is supplied. The NRSV, however, drops “mother” for “she shall give rise to nations.” There is nothing in the *BHS* apparatus—which, however, often leaves much to be desired—that indicates any support for “mother” here; in fact, it manages to rewrite the second half of the verse, after versional evidence, to be about the as-yet unborn Isaac: “I will bless him, and he will turn into (וּבְרַכְתִּיו וְהָיָה) nations; kings of peoples will come from him (מִמֶּנּוּ).” The NAB reads similarly, perhaps under the influence of the Vulgate; this is changed in the NABR.

101. This disparity is also noted by Schneider, *Sarah*, 57–58, who similarly struggles to make much of it.

102. See *DCH* 8.191–92, 199, and my discussion and notes in the section above on Gen 11:26–12:9. The broad consensus is that there is no discernible difference between the meanings or derivations of these two names; characteristic is the remark of von Rad, *Genesis*, 202: “Linguistically, ‘Sarai’ is only an archaic form of the later formation ‘Sarah.’”

103. Sheckman, *Women in the Pentateuch*, 138–39; compare 178. As her title indicates, Sheckman’s analysis aims at isolating the particular concerns of Pentateuchal sources, here P.

revelation is not to Sarah. It is about Sarah; and it is about her only in a very narrow way that primarily emphasizes her function as a vessel for Abraham's offspring. God's first declaration in 17:16 saws back and forth a bit, hinting first at a blessing that might be truly hers: "I will bless her; *and what is more*, I will give you a son through her" (וּבְרַכְתִּי אֶתְּךָ וְגַם נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לְךָ בֵּן). What directly follows, however, clarifies that her "blessing" and her birthing are one in the same, in a line that could with justice be rendered, "I will bless her *so that* she will turn into nations" (וּבְרַכְתִּיהָ וְהִיְתָה לְגוֹיִם).¹⁰⁴ After Abraham punctures the solemnity of the scene, falling on his face and laughing as he soliloquizes about the absurdity of "a man of one hundred" fathering a child—"or 'Sarah!' As if a woman of ninety could give birth!"—God reiterates not only that Sarah is Abraham's, but also that the child, with whom God will establish a "perpetual covenant," will be Abraham's, too: "Sarah your woman will give birth to a son for you" (v. 19).¹⁰⁵ Isaac is the true focus of these oracles, and thus "Sarah" emerges from a blank of thirteen years only to be shown again as one who has and has not: at last, she will give birth, but not to be "built up" herself. Rather, her blessing is to be an instrument that will "bear for" Abraham, and for God's promised covenant.

Sarah Chortles (Gen 18:1–15)

Gen 18:1 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." 7 And

104. Compare the rendering of Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch*, 138.

105. תלד לך שרה; compare 17:21, "Sarah will give birth for you," שרה אשתך ילדת לך בן. The internal objections of Abraham are somewhat hard to understand. He fathered a child at eighty-six; why is one hundred unbelievable? And surely the primary narrative obstacle to Sarah's conception is not her age, which has not been mentioned before this point, but her enduring infertility.

Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. 9 They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” 10 The LORD said, “I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” 13 The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son.” 15 But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.” (RSV)

This episode begins in a manner wholly familiar: “Yahweh appeared to him” (וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו) (יהוה, 18:1; compare 12:7; 17:1). Vital differences immediately distinguish this encounter from earlier epiphanies, however. Where most of those contained only bare hints about the bodily dispositions of the characters, here the sequence of scenes is ceaselessly physical, almost blocked as for a drama: “sitting in the opening of the tent at the time of the heat of the day,” Abraham glances up—“look! Three men standing near him” (18:1–2).¹⁰⁶ He then scrambles about in an almost comic manner, running to and prostrating himself before the visitors, hurrying back towards the tent to urge Sarah to haste, running out again to the herd, and hovering over their guests while they eat (vv. 2–8).¹⁰⁷ Physical presence and the needs of the body—refreshment, rest, food and drink—dominate the narrative matter. Sarah’s central part in this play, too, depends on her senses and her bodily presence, precisely recalling Abraham’s position in the “opening of the tent” (פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל, v. 10; compare v. 1) as she listens to one of the visitors make predictions about her reproductive biology.

106. יֵשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כַּחַם הַיּוֹם. . . . וְהָגָה שְׁלֵשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו. As noted above, the means of Yahweh’s communications to Abraham have ranged from a disembodied voice (12:1–3) to speech and implied gestures that suggest an almost-physical presence (15:5, 9–10; compare 17:22, “God went up from Abraham,” וַיַּעַל אֱלֹהִים מֵעַל (אֲבֵרָה)).

107. For a reading that emphasizes the comic in this pericope generally, see Gina Hens-Piazza, “New Historicism,” in *New Meanings for Ancient Texts: Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and John Kaltner (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 64–72.

And it is the presence of Sarah, albeit somewhat obscured by the tent, that most distinguishes this visit from the others. Sarah has never been a direct party to any of Yahweh's communications, and whether she has subsequently become aware of their content has been a matter of hypothesis and guesswork in the discussion above. Here, too, the evidence is mixed, but tends to support the notion that Sarah is generally ignorant, even now, a quarter century after the first divine address to Abraham, of most of what has been revealed. In fact, her lack of confusion at being called "Sarah" is the only clear indication that any part of God's promises and revelations have trickled down to her. Sarah's response to what she hears does not suggest that she is aware even of God's recent prediction of her pregnancy to Abraham, and much of the most important content of the earlier pledges is notably absent here. Sarah hears that she will have a son—and that is all. Other information, such as the extreme fecundity of Abraham's descendants, their possession of the land, and their involvement in a special covenant with the deity, so often repeated by now as to have become almost banal to the reader, is omitted here. This is true even though Sarah herself has been implicated, if only as a vehicle, in at least the fertility and covenant aspects of the promises (17:16, 19, 21). All this, further, is particularly odd if the proximate motive for this visit, as seems possible, is to let Sarah in on the secret of her coming child.¹⁰⁸ The other characters, human and divine, seem agreed that Sarah ought to know only the bare minimum, even where her body and offspring are concerned.

However, much interesting if sometimes ambiguous information about Sarah may be gleaned from this episode. She is first mentioned in 18:6, in a novel context: "Abraham hurried towards the tent, to Sarah; and he said, 'Hurry! Three *seahs* of flour, the good stuff—knead and

108. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 95, for example, argue that the visit is "God's move to include Sarah" in knowledge of the promise after Abraham fails to relay her role in it. And it does seem as if an important part of the agenda of the visitors is this communication within her hearing; it seems more plausible than desire for refreshment, certainly, and it is the content of their only significant verbal communication at the terebinths of Mamre. Yahweh's later revelation of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the subsequent bargaining over the fate of their residents, however, may also provide a motive here (18:17–33); though Yahweh's dithering at the outset of this scene suggests that the plan is being made up as things go along. The account of vv. 1–16a in Hens-Piazza, "New Historicism," 68–69, which highlights structural issues, is more convincing on the matter of the narrative's focus on Sarah. But any claim that Yahweh is including Sarah here should acknowledge that this inclusion is partial at best. See also the further discussion below.

make loaves!”¹⁰⁹ Sarah’s sphere, it seems, is domestic, her position subordinate and akin to that of the “boy” (נער) who helps Abraham with the main course (v. 7). But reflection on just how little is shown here leads to much uncertainty. This is Sarah and Abraham’s first discourse-level communication since the disaster of Hagar, many years ago, and it partly evokes their very first explicit verbal encounter on the border of Egypt. There, too, Abraham does all the talking, urging a course of action—but does Sarah comply, or even reply? Abraham does not clearly enter the tent here, and there is no indication that Sarah acknowledges or even hears his order, which in any event is comically overblown: “Hurry! make ‘several hundred pita breads!’”¹¹⁰ It is difficult to imagine the Sarah of thirteen years ago, who curses Abraham and attacks Hagar (16:5–6), assiduously obeying Abraham’s passing cry to bake for an army—and “several hundred pita breads” are notably absent from the menu in 18:8.

When the visitors ask Abraham, “Where is Sarah your woman?” (איה שרה אשתך, 18:9), the thrust of the question is opaque. Have they been saving room for the promised “bit of bread” (פת־לחם, v. 5)? And after Abraham indicates that she is “there, in the tent” (הנה באהל, v. 9), one of the guests—apparently Yahweh in human form, to judge by vv. 13–14—takes the opportunity to inform Abraham, in the singular, of what he already knows: “Watch: your woman Sarah will have a son” (והנה־בן לשרה אשתך, v. 10; compare 17:16, 19, 21). Is this prediction, then, still not intended for Sarah’s ears? On the one hand, the language suggests an audience that is subtly different from that of the revelations in Gen 17. There, the “son” is emphatically for Abraham (לך in all three verses: 16, 19, and 21); here, he belongs to Sarah (לשרה, 18:10, 14).¹¹¹ And the visitors seem to have no agenda beyond relaying this information, which, as just mentioned, is

109. ומהר אברהם האהלה אלי־שרה ואמר מהרי שלש סאים קמח סלת לושי ועשי עגות. The comic effect is blunted here by the RSV’s obscuring of the repetition of מהר, which also appears in the following verse. See also the note on the quantity of flour just below.

110. This rendering is from the amusing summary of Stephen Mitchell, *Genesis: A New Translation of the Classic Biblical Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), xxv, who assumes that Sarah’s bread makes it to the table (compare 32). Estimates of the size of a *seah* vary; BDB’s guess is “12.148 *litres* (=10.696 qts.),” making Abraham’s suggested recipe call for about 8 pounds of flour (684a).

111. Compare Hens-Piazza, “New Historicism,” 70.

known to Abraham, and which, perhaps, could be expected to be heard easily through the tent's impermanent structure. But on the other hand—why not summon Sarah outside if the object is to inform her? Why address Abraham alone, here and even after Sarah's chuckle (vv. 10, 13–14)—at least until the rebuke of v. 15?

Whether it is obliquely aimed at her or not, Sarah does hear the guest's prediction, as she is “listening in the opening of the tent” (שמעת פתח האהל, 18:10). While she is clearly out of the sight of the visitors, who are unsure where she is (v. 9), there seems to be no need to conceive of Sarah as hiding, “eavesdropping”—as some, such as Lori Lefkowitz, have characterized her activity—or even showing undue curiosity here.¹¹² Her posture in the tent door may be prompted by the same desire for cool that seems to have motivated Abraham's identical position earlier, and she is presumably no less visible than he was then, with a clear line of sight to the outside (compare v. 1). The speaker of v. 10 is merely behind the tent, or is seated with back turned to it.¹¹³ After hearing her new (or clarified) name spoken in v. 9, perhaps, Sarah's attention to the following prediction is simply to be expected.

Just now, the narrator retreats slightly from the scene to offer a key bit of exposition that raises the stakes for the predicted event. After noting that “Abraham and Sarah were elderly, far along in days” (ואברהם ושרה זקנים באים בימים, 18:11), which is not news, this complication receives a concrete illustration: “the way of women had stopped for Sarah” (חדל להיות לשרה ארחה, כנשים, v. 11). This note, which is almost universally taken as referring to menopause, reemphasizes the narrator's conception of Sarah's role as the broken link in the family's chain of descent, and seems render permanent her well-established trait of infertility.

112. Lefkowitz, “Eavesdropping”; this chapter was reworked for Lefkowitz, *In Scripture*, 31–46. Unlike earlier androcentric treatments, Lefkowitz characterizes Sarah's “eavesdropping” positively, as a “survival strategy” undertaken by a woman to navigate a world dominated by gods and men (“Eavesdropping,” 160; *In Scripture*, 37).

113. The MT's והוא אחריו is ambiguous here: “and it/he was behind him/it,” apparently referring to the guest and the grammatically masculine noun אהל, “tent,” but in uncertain order. The SP reads והיא for the independent pronoun: “she” was behind either the visitor or the tent. As the text of the Pentateuch of what became the MT generally displays no consonantal difference between the third person singular pronouns, it is possible that the feminine is the original reading here. In this case, describing Sarah as “behind the tent” seems the less likely reading, as her position in the doorway has just been noted.

Sarah's reaction to the visitor's prediction is utterly sensible, and entirely in line with the hardening arc of her character to this point: she simply scoffs at such a ridiculous notion. "Sarah chortled," or "laughed in her chest" (ותצחק שרה בקרבה), "thinking, 'After my being worn out, there's pleasure for me! And 'my lord' as old as he is!'" (לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה-לי עדנה ואדני זקן) (18:12). I cannot read this as a note of hope, or wonder, as some such as Schneider would have it; the tone, to me, is one of sarcastic mirth, a skeptical remark delivered with rolling eyes.¹¹⁴ The RSV obscures Sarah's metaphor by rendering בלתי as "I have grown old," meanwhile associating Sarah's evaluations of her and Abraham's physical conditions more closely than her language justifies. Abraham, Sarah says, confirming the judgment of the narrator in v. 11, is "old" (זקן); but she characterizes herself as "worn out," using a verb most often associated with tattered clothing and other fabrics.¹¹⁵ It is possible that this refers to being post-menopausal, and thus that the pronominal suffix on בלתי is subjective and intransitive: "after my wearing out," in a simple process of entropy. But this robs the image of something essential: clothes, after all, do not wear themselves out. What is more, Sarah's most closely associated thought here is not about infertility, which might, given its narrative primacy, be expected to be the most salient fact of her menopause, but of the unlikely prospect of her achieving sexual pleasure (עדנה) with Abraham.¹¹⁶

114. Schneider, *Sarah*, 72, considers that Sarah's "response contains no explicit questioning of the Deity's plans; to the contrary, her laugh expresses joy"; compare 69. The near-universal English rendering of this verse as a question is interesting, given its lack of explicit syntactic markers. The tonal possibilities seem similar, however, whether it is a question or exclamation, as I prefer here. Speiser, *Genesis*, 128–29, splits the difference: "Withered as I am, am I still to know enjoyment—and my husband so old!"

115. Deut 8:4 (compare Neh 9:21); 29:4; Josh 9:4–5, 13; Isa 50:9; 51:6; Ps 102:27; Job 13:28.

116. Most lexical authorities and commentators consider עדנה to mean the sensual pleasure of sexual activity (BDB 726b; von Rad, *Genesis*, 207; Robert Alter, "Biblical Imperatives and Literary Play," in *Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr. [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], 20–21; compare Alter, *Genesis*, 79). Certainty is difficult to obtain, however, not least because עדנה is *hapax legomenon* in the MT. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan renders "conception" (עכרי) here (see A. A. Macintosh, "A Third Root עדה in Biblical Hebrew?" *VT* 24 [1974]: 472), and it may be possible, given certain ancient hypotheses about the utility of the female orgasm to conception, that the two concepts are not unrelated. See further Pieter W. van der Horst, "Bitenosh's Orgasm (1QapGen 2:9–15)," *JSJ* 43 (2012): 625–27, on the Aramaic cognate עדינתי ("my pleasure" or "orgasm"), which Bitenosh, the wife of Lamech, adduces as evidence of her conception of Noah during intercourse with her husband (Genesis Apocryphon 2.9, 14); van der Horst does not, however, for reasons that he does not fully explain, think that Gen 18:12 refers to conception in the same way (626 n. 42). Contrast Ida Fröhlich, "Medicine and Magic in Genesis Apocryphon: Ideas on Human Conception and Its Hindrances," *RevQ* 25 (2011): 185, who says that Sarah cites the unlikelihood of her "pleasure" as yet another obstacle to her conception. On this and connected issues, see also Brayford, "Taming and Shaming," 158–68, who

Sarah scoffs here, then, having been “worn out” by Abraham’s fruitless and unsatisfying attentions, and incredulous at the thought that Abraham could even perform—“With ‘my lord’ as old as he is!”¹¹⁷

It is worth underlining what is absent from Sarah’s aside, which is any explicit mention of a child. Sarah hears that she will have a son, but her incredulity does not even arrive at the potential product of a sexual encounter; the absurdity of Abraham rising to this occasion is object of mirth enough. As noted above in the discussion of Sarah’s taking and giving of Hagar, this contributes to the question of whether Sarah demonstrates any actual desire to bear children, which is a matter further complicated by the ambiguity of her reaction to Isaac’s birth in 21:6.

This absence of concern is only highlighted by Yahweh’s erroneous, if politic, report of Sarah’s soliloquy (18:13).¹¹⁸ Still, remarkably, speaking only to Abraham, which underlines Sarah’s conceptual, if not literal, invisibility in this scene, Yahweh says, “Why on earth did Sarah laugh? ‘How could it possibly be true that I will give birth? But I’m old!’ she says. As if it were too hard for Yahweh!” (vv. 13–14a).¹¹⁹ Being too hard was scarcely the issue, however, as Sarah’s cynical amusement turned on Abraham’s sexual incapacity and advanced age; she made no plain remark about either giving birth or her own age.

After Yahweh reiterates the prediction in 18:14b—again, addressing Abraham alone—in language that recalls both v. 10 and the previous private revelation to Abraham in 17:21, there

strongly argues for a meaning of sexual pleasure in the MT of Gen 18:12; compare Brayford, “Sarah Laughs Last,” 320–21. Insofar as עֲדָנָה is linked with a state of “moisture,” the fact of Sarah’s menopause may not be irrelevant here, either. But the primary connotation would still seem to be sexual excitement as expressed by an attendant physical response.

117. The tone of this אָדָנִי seems to turn entirely on that of its context, and thus it can easily be read as a sarcastically applied title here. For a much different view, see 1 Pet 3:6, which relates this verse to Sarah’s obedience to Abraham. Of course, in Genesis it is Abraham who is said to obey Sarah (16:2; 21:12–14), not the other way around, and the remainder of the 1 Peter verse is even more insensitive to the context here: “You become her children when you do good and fear no intimidation” (ἢς ἐγενήθητε τέκνα ἀγαθοποιούσαι καὶ μὴ φοβούμεναι μηδεμίαν πτόσην).

118. Given its level of inaccuracy, it is curious that commentators take Yahweh’s pronouncement here as proof of supernatural knowledge; see, for example, von Rad, *Genesis*, 207.

119. למה זה צחקה שרה לאמר האף אמנם אלד ואני זקנתי היפלא מיהוה דבר. About the only thing captured adequately by Yahweh’s quotation is Sarah’s incredulous tone, well rendered with the particles האף אמנם: “Will I really?” or “Can it be true?”

follows a cryptic exchange, seemingly cast by the narrator as a nervous attempt at deception followed by a rebuke: “But Sarah denied it: ‘I didn’t laugh!’—because she was afraid. But he said, ‘No, you did laugh!’” (ותכחש שרה לאמר לא צחקתי כי יראה ויאמר לא כי צחקת) (18:15). There seems to be little grammatical or lexical obscurity here, and the lack of a more explicit subject for ויאמר does not generate significant ambiguity. Contrary to Schneider’s unusual reading here, Yahweh, not Abraham, as the one who first mentioned Sarah’s laugh in v. 13, is the most natural speaker of this rather childish comeback: “Did too!”¹²⁰ But the meaning of the exchange, and thus its function in the larger web of plotting and characterization, is unclear, and this verse provides an odd and somehow unsatisfying close to this episode. Yahweh has spoken to Abraham so many times, and often about significant future geopolitical developments; Sarah is directly addressed only this once, and about an issue that struggles to deserve to be termed tangential.¹²¹ The justice of Yahweh’s pique—if that is what this is—is another issue, and often remarked: Abraham, of course, had the same reaction to a very similar prediction, but God’s reply was nothing harsher than “on the contrary” (אבל, 17:19; compare vv. 16–17).¹²² Gender bias provides one explanation

120. That Yahweh is the subject of ויאמר in 18:15 is the traditional scholarly consensus, which is reflected in translations such as the NJPS: “But He replied . . .” As noted in Chapter 1, Schneider, *Sarah*, 73, contends that Abraham is the speaker here, partly on the grounds that Sarah would not be afraid of “the Deity” given that character’s deliverance of her in Egypt. But there is no indication in the narrative that Sarah is aware of Yahweh’s role there, as Schneider acknowledges elsewhere (50); and employing examples of Yahweh’s favor from later in the narrative arc to ascertain Sarah’s emotional state here is simply confusing (73). On the other side of the coin, it is not particularly convincing—at this stage of the narrative—to postulate that Sarah is afraid of Abraham (73). The shameful abuse of Sarah in Egypt, some quarter-century in story time before this divine visit, is Schneider’s strongest argument here; that Sarah would fear Abraham because he was “prepared to let Hagar treat Sarah with disrespect,” however, is a very curious reading of 16:5, and Schneider’s other examples are, by her own admission, things that Sarah “probably does not know” (73). How these things of which she is ignorant could possibly affect her feelings is unclear. Rather, Abraham’s abdication of responsibility in the matter of Hagar (16:5–6), only to be emphasized later (21:10–12), depicts him as compliant with Sarah’s directives, which are backed by Yahweh. In the near context, it remains to be explained why Abraham, silent since indicating Sarah’s whereabouts in 18:9, should suddenly jump in here to insist upon something that seemingly had to be revealed to him earlier by Yahweh (v. 13). And this childish bluster of “No, you did laugh!” fits seamlessly with Yahweh’s third-person self-aggrandizement in v. 14: “Is anything too hard for Yahweh?”

121. Schneider, *Sarah*, 73, in arguing that Abraham is the subject of ויאמר in 18:15, also notes that “the Deity” does not speak to Sarah elsewhere. However, there seems to be no reason, narrative or otherwise, for supposing that an event cannot occur only once. Furthermore, if such divine communication were going to take place, it would seem natural that it happen here, where, according to Schneider, the visitors “may have the intention of directly informing Sarah of the events that would transpire” (71).

122. Source critique has one, rather lame answer, which is that צחק means different things in 17:17 (P) and 18:12 (J). Speiser, *Genesis*, 123, 125, 128, 131, thus considers that Abraham “smiled” benevolently, whereas Sarah

for both: Sarah, as a woman, is not worthy of receiving revelation beyond what she strictly needs to know, and her subordinate station makes her disbelief sting the proud deity more: “Is anything too hard for Yahweh?” At first, this may seem to sit uneasily in the broader context of the narrative, where Sarah’s abuse of her slave receives divine warrant, and where God backs Sarah, against Abraham, in her desire to banish Hagar and Ishmael (16:9; 21:12). But events to come may not exhibit divine favor for Sarah as much as they show her utility to the execution of God’s purposes.

What, though, leads Sarah to “dissemble” (כחש, 18:15) and deny her laughter, which, after all, is the only part of her response that Yahweh described accurately in v. 13? And if the answer is as the narrator says—“because she was afraid”—why is she afraid? If she were merely said to be afraid, her fear might be most easily attributed to the dramatic uncertainty surrounding the thought of giving birth, for the first time, in a tent, at age ninety—certainly a life-threatening proposition. Equally, if Sarah were simply to lie about her laughter, other motives might be mooted. But the narrator ties her fear to her disavowal of her laughter most clearly: “Sarah denied it: ‘I didn’t laugh!’ (This was because she was afraid.)”¹²³ This is the first and last explicit narratorial remark reflecting on Sarah’s motive for any action. Elsewhere, her motives must be inferred, whether from her inaction or action, silence or speech: perhaps she passively complies with Abraham’s scheme in Egypt because he completely dominates her at that point in her life; perhaps she suggests Hagar’s surrogacy to show that Abraham is himself impotent. Even when Sarah ventures to explain her own rage in 16:5, much must still be inferred, as shown in the discussion above. Here, though, the reader seems to be faced with a thorny, either/or choice—one denied completely by some biblical narrative theorists, as detailed in Chapter 2—to accept or reject the motive ascribed to Sarah by the narrator.¹²⁴

“laughed” in derision. The argument seems to be that the “character” of P precludes a depiction of the patriarch as flippant before the deity, while the “earthy” J is comfortable with such effrontery from Sarah (125).

123. ותכחש שרה לאמר לא צחקתי כי יראה.

124. The theoretical difficulties in such a choice—how can anything a narrator says be trusted, if any aspect of her or his presentation comes into question, for example—are ameliorated by adopting a view of the narrator as a

I confess that I find this choice very difficult to make. If Sarah is afraid, it seems that she is alarmed by the uncanny psychic penetration of the visitor, whom she may or may not recognize as Yahweh. Again, however, Yahweh's insight is limited and inaccurate, at least as relayed in 18:13. Alternatively, some action or nonverbal communication might be postulated in the gaps of the discourse: a turn of the head, an intimidating stare, a tone of voice that conveys the supernatural power of what had seemed like a human guest with a ridiculous and presumptuous prediction. If Sarah intuits something of Yahweh's violent power, so soon to be on display down in Sodom, then a response of fear and attendant confusion makes good sense—better sense, in fact, than Abraham's largely futile haggling over the fate of the valley's residents in the remainder of Gen 18. All the same, the motive of fear seems somehow anomalous in a character who shows none, for instance, in her dramatic confrontations with Abraham (16:5; 21:10); and if Sarah's "dissembling" carries connotations of "feigning obedience," as in some other occurrences of this root, the clash may be highlighted further.¹²⁵ Perhaps, however, it is possible to split the difference here, and to postulate Sarah's fear as yet another step in the hardening of her character. Made afraid by intimations of supernatural power and a growing dread of her own ability to survive an unnatural and unlooked-for pregnancy that so recently seemed impossible, Sarah makes a show of acquiescence, denying her initial reaction in the hope of avoiding something even worse. This practice in dissembling may even serve Sarah in her next major episode, where she and Abraham collaborate in re-staging the Egyptian transaction, this time in a new venue.

special kind of character, as discussed in Chapter 2. That the narrator in this case has a unique kind of insight is clear in this very episode, where Sarah's thoughts are exposed to view (18:12). However, this is a kind of speech, even so marked in the discourse (לאמר), and the observation and reporting of even internal speech is arguably of a different order of penetration than specifying the motives that prompt it. In other words, the narrator's discernment is a privilege that may not extend to omniscience, and his or her evaluations, which emanate from a perspective that the reader may not share, may be challenged. Again, as shown in Chapter 2, this entire debate operates outside the systems of poetics of major figures such as Alter and Sternberg.

125. See BDB 471a; *HALOT* 469b–470a; *DCH* 4.382a–383b. For this particular reference, however, each of these authorities suggests something more straightforward: "deceive," "deny, disavow," and "tell lies," respectively.

When Sarah last occupied the stage, in 16:6, she was a childless but sexually active woman, a slaveowner whose own abuse seemed to have contributed to her adoption of the role of abuser. This was a transformation that made Sarah more like Abraham, and its operation in the plot helped point to shifts in their relationship and in its balance of power. Here, as partly prefigured in Gen 17, some of these traits change, even to the point of reversal, and in unexpected ways. Sarah's infertility, most strikingly, is somehow deepened here, as she has entered menopause and herself alludes to a cessation of sexual activity (18:11–12); but at the same time all this is lifted, at least in divine pledge, and what seemed most sure about Sarah is thrown into doubt. Other aspects of this issue, such as the question of whether Sarah desires a child at all, remain as opaque as before. Her relationships with slaves, and particularly Hagar, also hang suspended in the background. Sarah's curious resemblance to Abraham, however, is reinforced here, as she adopts his position in the opening of the tent (vv. 1, 10) and rehearses his incredulous response to the news of her son (v. 12; 17:17). Sarah's reactions in this episode may further underscore a modest realignment in power: Abraham's bizarre request for a bushel of bread goes unheeded, and Sarah privately complains of being "worn out" while doubting Abraham's sexual potency (18:6, 12). These power shifts should not be overstated, however, for Sarah remains inside the tent and, at least in the main, outside the promises, made aware—and this as a third party—only of the prediction of her birth of a son.

Sarah's relationship with Yahweh, just now made personal, whether she fully knows it or not, has also grown in its dark complexity. In the Hagar episode, where Sarah invoked Yahweh's judgment, Yahweh abetted Sarah's violent abuse, thus contributing to the process of her hardening. This evolution seems illustrated by Sarah's cynicism here, which, however, is also—strangely—the pretext of Yahweh's indignation and rebuke (18:13–14). If Sarah is indeed made afraid here, feigning submission for self-preservation, then this, too, may help cement this process of hardening, and in a way that oddly recalls Abraham's catalytic role earlier. After being abused in Egypt by Abraham, and now intimidated into stammering fear in her own home by Yahweh, Sarah will betray no further vulnerability.

Destructive Interlude (Gen 18:16–19:38)

Although the episodes of Abraham’s bargaining on behalf of the residents of Sodom (18:16–33), the city’s subsequent destruction by two “messengers” (מלאכים, 19:1–29), and the sorry struggles of what remains of Lot’s family (19:30–38) are not without a number of interesting links to the broader narrative in which Sarah appears, none of these reflects much light on her as a character.¹²⁶ The ruin of the Jordan valley may, however, provide a pretext for Abraham and Sarah’s journey to Gerar, where the couple reenacts the transaction of Egypt—but with even greater and more lasting success.¹²⁷

“Asylum” Redux in Gerar (Gen 20:1–18)

Gen 20:1 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. 2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man’s wife.” 4 Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, “Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people? 5 Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” 6 Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now then restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours.” 8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, “What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against

126. Just a few of the rich connections include similarities between the depictions of Lot and Abraham (compare, for example, 19:1–3 with 18:1–8; 19:19 with 18:3 and 12:3; or 19:22 with 18:6–7). Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham*, 59, argues that some of these function to distinguish the two characters; but the echoes must be recognized before the disparities can emerge. For one example that may obliquely illuminate Sarah, see the ties between 19:8 and 16:6, mentioned above.

127. There seems to be a loose but plausible connection between Abraham’s observation of the result of the destruction of the “whole land of the valley” (כל-פני ארץ הכר) (עלה קיטר הארץ כקיטר הכבשן), 19:28), and his abrupt departure “from there” (משם) in 20:1. Schneider, *Sarah*, 83, also ponders this as a possible motive.

you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.” 10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?” 11 Abraham said, “I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. 12 Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.’” 14 Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.” 16 To Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted.” 17 Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. 18 For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. (RSV)

If the outcome of Abraham’s taking refuge in Egypt raised retrospective doubts about the gravity of the famine that reportedly drove him there, the verbal echoes displayed here prompt similar questions immediately. Once again, Abraham, spoken of in the singular, “travels on” (נסע) to the Negeb (נגב) and “seeks asylum” (גור) in the territory of a foreign potentate, this time Gerar of King Abimelech (20:1; compare 12:9–10). The marked density of this set of key words, each elsewhere connected with Abraham only in the near context of his sale of Sarah in Egypt, provides a trigger to recollection that the reader cannot ignore.¹²⁸ This episode, it is suggested, will closely parallel that, in motive, process, and outcome—a hint that is partly confirmed as the action proceeds. There is, however, a serious counterweight to this apparent predictability: contrary to readings such as that of Fewell and Gunn, which emphasize the characters’ stasis here, Sarah herself now bears only a passing resemblance to the powerless pawn of Egypt.¹²⁹

This is so despite a number of patent similarities between these episodes. Here, as in Egypt, Sarah is given no opportunity for direct speech; she is once again “taken” (לקח) by a

128. Compare Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, 39, who observes that “in literature . . . any thematically marked term is in principle reusable, and often becomes part of an internal feedback system in which as we read we will observe it appearing in new contexts, generating new meanings that double back on the earlier ones. The literary text may indeed be thought of as a formally structured catalyst of memory.”

129. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 49.

foreign ruler (20:2–3; compare 12:15); and the root complication here, as there, is not any attendant danger to Sarah—or, indeed, to her potential offspring—but that she is the rightful property of another man (20:3; compare 12:17).¹³⁰ Further, basic injustice, abetted in part by the deity, similarly forms the foundation of this tale in Gerar: those actually responsible for this “great sin” (חטאה גדולה, 20:9) are greatly rewarded, while the deceived and innocent, perhaps even those unborn, suffer (vv. 3–10, 14–18).¹³¹ But there are also key differences that go beyond what is often regarded as the main disparity between these episodes, which is that Sarah is apparently not forced into a sexual relationship with Abimelech.¹³² Despite the assertion of Jeansonne, for example, no persuasive colloquy between Sarah and Abraham is detailed here, which may suggest a greater unanimity of purpose between them from the beginning.¹³³ The king’s transfer of human slaves and wealth on the hoof to Abraham, further, is not given in exchange for Sarah’s conjugal services, as Pharaoh’s similar payment was (20:14; 12:16). There, the closest analogy

130. The notion of stolen property is clearest here, where God visits Abimelech in a dream and says, “Look at you! A dead man on account of the woman whom you’ve taken! For she is a wife of a husband,” or “one owned by an owner” (הנך מת עליהאשה אשר-לקחת והוא בעלת בעל) (20:3). Compare Keshet, ‘*Say You Are My Sister*,’ 37 n. 33, who names “property” as one of the connotations of בעלה here; see BDB 127a. The RSV, among many others, likewise appropriately renders the ו as introducing a supplementary and exegetical causal phrase: “for she is a man’s wife.” The element of transaction is only emphasized in this episode by the absence of any noted motive of attraction, which more firmly suggests that the interests of all parties to the exchange are financial or dynastic.

131. It may be implied that pregnancies in the house of Abimelech were held in suspension by Yahweh’s action—not merely that the women were temporarily infertile. “God healed Abimelech”—of what?—“and his woman and his slaves, and they gave birth, because Yahweh had completely sealed up every womb” (וירפא אלהים את-אבימלך ואת-אשתו ואמהתיו וילדו כי עצר עצר יהוה בעד כל-רחם, 20:17–18). Compare 16:2.

132. The significance of this is usually tied to a posited narrative need to show that Isaac is not the son of Abimelech, given the suspiciously close series of events detailed in Gen 20–21; often, too, the supposedly prim nature of the Elohist is cited here. See, for example, Kawashima, “Literary Analysis,” 99. In Gen 20 itself, however, there may be a few grounds for doubt on this matter. The narrator notes that Abimelech “had not come near her” (לא קרב אליה, v. 4); when God summarizes the situation in v. 6, however, the language may be slightly ambiguous. לא-נתתיך לנגע אליה could simply mean “I did not allow you to touch her,” but the root נגע strongly recalls Yahweh’s “afflicting” of Pharaoh in 12:17, which is the only other verse in this entire narrative complex where it occurs. Perhaps, then, “I did not allow you to harm her,” which leaves the possibility just slightly open, is a better rendering here. Further, Abimelech’s transfer of “a thousand silvers” to Abraham as a “covering of eyes” (כסות עינים, 20:16) for those around Sarah does not prompt the thought that there is nothing to hide here. The mere repetition of these assurances, moreover, makes me wonder whether the narrative doesn’t “protest too much” on this front. Finally, to the more general point of the supposed importance of Isaac’s paternity, as noted just above, God’s stated reason for why Abimelech is a “dead man” is not because Sarah is to carry the child of the promise, but because she is “a wife of a husband” (v. 3). Compare the discussion in Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 90–91.

133. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 24.

was prostitution, with Abraham serving as pimp; here, with the truth already known and the situation's remedy in the hands of one who set the trap in the first place, extortion is a better model.¹³⁴ And while the content of the king's address to Sarah is steeped in patriarchy, the bare fact that he speaks to her directly about rehabilitating her reputation may indicate that she is more than a pure object here (v. 16).¹³⁵

The most significant difference, however, is indicated by the reported speech of Sarah in Abimelech's attempted self-exoneration in v. 5. After rhetorically asking God whether Abraham hadn't misrepresented the facts in declaring Sarah to be his sister, Abimelech plaintively notes: "And she, even *she* said, 'He is my brother'" (והיא-גם-הוא אמרה אחי הוא). Abimelech's transcripts are implicitly confirmed by God, who concurs with the king's self-evaluation of his "integrity of heart" (תם-ללב, vv. 5–6).¹³⁶ Here, then, in potent distinction to the Egyptian episode—where the question of Sarah's active connivance remained open—there is an explicit claim that Sarah herself helped perpetrate a deception for gain that results in emotional and physical suffering for the couple's hosts. Revelation, as the flip side of deception, may also mark an important difference between these tales. In Pharaoh's house, the means by which he was made aware of the truth was lost in a gap that was never subsequently filled (12:17–18). However, there was a possibility that Sarah somehow revealed the reality of her relationship with Abraham in the wake of the afflictions visited on Pharaoh and his household, which could suggest a humane motive aimed to alleviate suffering. Here, there is no question as to the manner of revelation: God tells Abimelech the truth, which both Abraham and Sarah had deliberately concealed all the while.

134. Compare the characterization of Abraham in Tribble, "Ominous Beginnings," 59. Abimelech's possession of Sarah, regardless of motive or culpability, constitutes an objective violation of the story world's norm that a "wife of a husband" be "taken" by no one else; rectifying the situation simply requires Sarah's return (20:3–7). Abraham only acts, however, after the deal is sweetened considerably (vv. 14–17).

135. I do not argue that Abimelech regards Sarah as an equal party to the transaction. His speech, rather, shows that Sarah is "justified" (יכה) under a system that assigns her worth in terms of her being appropriately possessed by one man. But addressing her directly is a step further than Sarah herself ventures, for example, in her trading and disposition of Hagar.

136. Contrast Keshet, 'Say You Are My Sister,' 36, who does not address the question of indirect speech in contending that the matriarchs in the "sister-wife" tales are all "silent object[s]."

More than simply hinting at the similarities between the tales, then, the key words at the outset of Gen 20 invite a reading of this episode in the light of the earlier one. Even if the narrative data featuring Sarah in Genesis were limited to these two episodes in immediate sequence, relatively detailed hypotheses about her character's trajectory might still be offered: Sarah, a victim of Abraham's abusive sexual trafficking in Egypt, becomes inured to her degradation and joins her oppressor, with God's complicity, in a cynical reenactment of a deception that harms the innocent while it enriches her family. As it is, however, these clues to Sarah's development found within the episode in Gerar only supplement and underline the evolution that she has displayed in the roughly twenty-five years of story time that have elapsed since the deportation from Egypt.¹³⁷ Sarah has already channeled her abuse and loss into a scheme that disposed of a powerless subordinate's sexuality, already cursed Abraham to his face and scoffed at his potency behind his back, already erupted in violence that threatened the life of a slave and her unborn child—and it is not credible that this figure reprise the role of voiceless victim in Gerar, even if the discourse of this episode were substantially identical to that of Egypt. This older, harder Sarah, rather, only further displays her growing resemblance to Abraham by acting as his junior collaborator here in a deal that brings, in precious metal and land for settling, even more profit than that of Egypt.¹³⁸

But do the similarities between Abraham and Sarah stem from a blood tie? A reading that takes note of Sarah's traits, finally, must deal with Abraham's stammering claim in 20:12: “. . . and anyway, actually, she *is* my sister, the daughter of my father—only not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife” (וגם־אמנה אחתי בת־אבי הוא אך לא בת־אמי ותהי־לי לאשה). If this were true, it would constitute a startling, interesting twist that might force a reexamination of a number of conclusions drawn to this point, especially in a reading that foregrounds relationships

137. Abraham is about eighty-five at the opening of the action in Gen 16, as v. 16 implies, which is about ten years after the Egyptian episode (v. 3); shortly after these events in Gerar, Abraham is noted to be one hundred (21:5).

138. Again, I do not contend that Abraham and Sarah are equal partners here. See the observation of Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 96, who notes that while Sarah is “an active participant in the ruse,” as confirmed by Abimelech's report to God in 20:5, Abimelech's public blame is reserved for Abraham.

in characterization. While such a revelation might thus display some aesthetic appeal from a narrative perspective, however, Abraham's claim here has nothing to recommend it. The primacy of Sarah as Abraham's אִשָּׁה was established at her very first mention at the outset of this narrative (11:29), and this concept has been repeatedly reinforced since.¹³⁹ But the idea that Sarah is truly Abraham's non-uterine sibling never receives any credible support.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, when the concept first arises in the discourse, in 12:11–13, it is clearly proposed as part of a deceptive ploy—"they will say, 'this is his woman.' . . . Just say you are my sister!"—as the remainder of that episode only confirms (vv. 18–19). That this exhortation is Abraham's first direct speech establishes him as a deceiver, a characterization that his halting reply to Abimelech does nothing to dispel. After seeming at a loss for words, as the king must demand an answer twice (20:9–10), Abraham's avowal in v. 11 that he feared for his life rings hollow, given how unjustified this same supposed concern proved in Egypt, and Abraham's account of his initial persuasion of Sarah in v. 13 does not track with other narrative data.¹⁴¹ His declaration of blood kinship with Sarah in v. 12, then, embedded in lies and lacking corroboration elsewhere, is incredible.

The outward resemblances between this episode and that of Egypt cannot obscure Sarah's own transformations over the nearly quarter-century that has elapsed since her captivity in the house of Pharaoh. Moreover, surface similarities fail to mask significant differences between

139. This only continues in this episode. At the crucial point of the initial deception here, the narrator defines Sarah as Abraham's wife: "Abraham said about Sarah his woman, 'She is my sister'" (וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־שָׂרָה) (אִשְׁתּוֹ אֵתְחִי הִוא, 20:2; compare vv. 14, 18). The marital relationship is also the only one referenced here by God, who calls her אִשָּׁה and בַּעֲלָה (vv. 3, 7). Even Abraham's own explanation of his reasoning turns on his marriage: "they will kill me on account of my wife" (וְהָרְגוּנִי עַל־דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי, v. 11).

140. Compare Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 26: Abraham's claim is "confirmed neither by the narrator nor by any other dialogue or genealogical source either before or after this scene." This can be clarified by noting that Sarah's reported claim in 20:5 is part of the deception; and when Abimelech refers to Abraham as Sarah's "brother," in v. 16, this is merely an example of the king's extreme credulity: fooled once here (v. 2), he will fail even to suspect Isaac's similar ploy later (26:6–16).

141. More than one difficulty may be noted here. In 20:13, Abraham's account seems to refer to the story time represented in 12:1–4, which is prior to his recorded exhortation, clearly a first-time pitch, at the edge of Egypt in vv. 11–13. Furthermore, his reference to "every place to which we come" (אֵל כָּל־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִבְּוֵא שָׂמָה, 20:13) implies a trick pulled more often than once every twenty-five years. But nothing of the sort is suggested elsewhere, and Abraham is depicted as able to form alliances with other foreigners by different means (13:18; 14:13, 24).

these tales—most importantly Sarah’s own implication here in a deception that trades suffering for gain. These considerations preclude reading her as a victim in quite the same way here. This is not to deny that Sarah, as compared with Abraham, bears the brunt of the risk in this episode, or that Abraham is not the prime human mover in this extortionary scheme, as even he admits (20:13). On the contrary, Sarah, even in her collaboration, is used here, and she remains possessed, a “woman of,” in the final words of the episode (v. 18).¹⁴² But the real victims are her erstwhile fellow-wives and their unborn (vv. 17–18). Sarah is related to Abraham here, not by blood, but by imitation of his lack of care for the lives of others.

The Arrival of Isaac, and the Departure of Hagar, Ishmael—and Sarah (Gen 21:1–14)

Gen 21:1 The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me.” 7 And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.” 8 And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. 10 So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” 11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.” 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. (RSV)

This episode, the last in which a living Sarah explicitly figures in the MT, is naturally remarkable for its revision of what has been a trait of great primacy and endurance: her

142. Compare the caution of Niditch, “Genesis,” 36, noted above, in reference to her characterization of Sarah as a “con artist” in Gen 12: Sarah’s posited collaboration in either event does not imply that the episode in question is thus “woman-affirming.”

childlessness. More significant, however, is what remains unchanged, even deepened, as Sarah's hardening character is here cemented with cruelty. Her final actions in the discourse, though—surprisingly, even to me—do not end by evoking aversion, but pity.

A relatively lengthy exposition that sets up the decisive scene at Isaac's weaning party reinforces Sarah's ambivalent feelings about motherhood, as discussed above in connection with Gen 16 and 18. Her conception and birth of a son are apparently at least partly the result of a follow-up divine visitation that merits only the barest description: "Yahweh visited Sarah" (וַיְהוָה וַיִּבְרַךְ אֶת־שָׂרָה), and "Yahweh did to Sarah" (וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה), as Yahweh had said (21:1)—seemingly a reference to declarations made during the stopover of the three men at Mamre (18:10, 14).¹⁴³ The details of this subsequent visit are left almost entirely to the reader's imagination, in some distinction to the narrations of Abraham's numerous theophanies. However, despite the hypotheses of Savina Teubal and others, there is no convincing evidence, at least in the narrative as it stands, that Sarah is somehow impregnated by the deity. That Sarah's conception has a supernatural element is plain, but Isaac is emphatically Abraham's son, here and elsewhere; and Isaac as a character evinces only divine favor, not descent.¹⁴⁴ Yahweh's visit does underline

143. There, Yahweh had pledged: "I will return without fail" (שׁוֹב אֲשׁוּב, 18:10; compare v. 14). Despite this clear narrative justification for translating פָּקַד in 21:1 as "visit," a common meaning of this root, a number of English renderings seem concerned to forestall questions about the mechanics of Sarah's conception. The NRSV, for example, abandons the RSV's simple "visited" (which itself follows the KJV), preferring the abstract "dealt with"; compare the rendering of both NABR and NJPS, "took note of." However "visit" might play in English, פָּקַד does not seem to be a euphemism for sex in biblical Hebrew. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 126, following C. H. Gordon, suggests that the verb is "used for a husband visiting his wife for coitus in Judges 15:1." But here פָּקַד is most simply explained by the fact that Samson is indeed "visiting" from elsewhere (Judg 14:19b; 15:1), and in any event his subsequent attempt to "enter" his wife is expressed with the common euphemism בּוֹא.

144. As noted in Chapter 1, Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 126–31, has a complex of theories that suggest that layers of tradition behind these tales included accounts of Sarah as an incarnate deity consummating a *hieros gamos* with human men and a later, patriarchal stratum where she is impregnated by a (male) deity. Teubal also concludes that Isaac would therefore have been "regarded as part divine" at some stage of the tradition (130). As these hypotheses are claims about reconstructed source materials, they are not particularly relevant to the task at hand here. In the immediate context, Sarah is said to bear a son לְאַבְרָהָם (21:2), a claim that is rehearsed in various ways in vv. 3–5 and recalls the promises to Abraham in 17:16, 19, 21. If 21:2–5 is discounted as a later, Priestly addition, as Teubal proposes, other notes become more ambiguous, such as Abraham's distress "because of his son" in v. 11, and God's pledge in v. 12, which might be rendered, a bit tendentiously, as "in Isaac offspring will be attributed to you," or "called yours" (בִּיצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ זֵרַע). But a reading that accepts the text as it is must not only deal with 21:2–5, which, as Teubal says, is a succinct statement of "all the requirements of patriarchal succession" (130), but with later notes such as 22:2, where Isaac is emphatically Abraham's son; compare 24:36. Note, too, that scholars are not agreed on the division of this section into sources; Speiser, *Genesis*, 153, for example, regards 21:1–2a, which

Yahweh's direction of events, however, and thus foreshadows a continuing divine complicity in the disturbing action to come.

The developments in Sarah's relationships here appear at first profound: she receives what seems to be a solo divine audience, and—having revived what had been a moribund sexual relationship with Abraham—conceives, experiences a full-term pregnancy, labors, and gives birth to a son (21:1–2). She shares with this son, Isaac, the deep bond of nursing (vv. 7–8), and, presumably, a host of other small intimacies that accompany the care of a helpless infant.¹⁴⁵ What a shift, it seems, from the childless victim-turned-abuser portrayed earlier. But Sarah's own evaluation of these developments is thoroughly ambiguous, and any thought that her relationship with Isaac has mellowed her is soon dismissed.

What Sarah says or thinks in reaction to her pregnancy and delivery is of uncertain context. It could be a soliloquy, rehearsed alone, or perhaps spoken over a cradled, nursing Isaac; there is no explicit addressee. What is certain is that her expression admits of conflicting interpretations. צחק עשה לי אלהים כל־השמע יצחק־לי (21:6) could be a statement of joy, as Irmtraud Fischer takes it: “God made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me!”¹⁴⁶ Equally plausible, however, is a rather darker reading: “God turned me into a joke; everyone who hears will laugh at me!”¹⁴⁷ Appeal to Sarah's following utterance does not make matters appreciably

includes a statement of Abraham's paternity, as belonging to J. For a different take on Isaac as engendered by the deity, see Carden, “Endangered Ancestress Revisited.” Of the postulated divinity of Isaac, finally, there is to my reading no vestige remaining in the MT.

145. Chapman, “Breast Milk,” 28–30, suggests that 21:7 is a later redactor's addition aimed at clarifying that Hagar was not Isaac's wet nurse. As Chapman recognizes, however, there seems to be no question in the text as it stands that Sarah nurses Isaac.

146. See Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 34; compare Schneider, *Sarah*, 92–93, who concludes that Sarah is “thrilled with the joyous news”; Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 27, also describes Sarah's response as “one of joy and personal triumph.”

147. צחק is an uncommon noun, appearing only here and in Ezek 23:32, where it is paralleled with לעג, an object of mocking or derision. Some authorities regard this phrase in Ezekiel as a later addition, as it does not appear in early Old Greek witnesses (BDB 541b, 850a–b; compare the *BHS* apparatus); but it is not clear that the matter of its originality has any impact on its meaning. Compare *DCH* 7.112b on this verse: “God has brought me laughter” or “God has made me into an object of laughter.” The verb יצחק here is less ambiguous, and seems most simply read, especially with the preposition ל, as “laugh at.” See BDB 850a; *HALOT* 1019a; compare *DCH* 7.112a, whose initial references undermine its first suggestion with the preposition: “laugh (mockingly) in disbelief (Gn 17:17[;] 18:12, 13, 15, 15); with ל, laugh (joyfully) with, or perh. laugh at someone (Gn 21:6).”

easier, as E. A. Speiser claims, for if v. 6 reveals embarrassment, v. 7 could be a rueful comment highlighting the absurdity of the situation: “Who would have declared to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? And here I bore a son in his old age!”¹⁴⁸ The whole may, indeed, as Alter says, be construed as a finely ambiguous pronouncement that captures the thrill of first-time motherhood while admitting that the accompanying circumstances are ridiculous.¹⁴⁹ It is difficult, however, to forget the lack of clarity that attended the concept of Sarah becoming a mother earlier in the narrative. Her apparent desire to be “sonned” through Hagar did not result in concern for an unborn Ishmael, and her response to the prediction of her own pregnancy makes no mention of a child (16:2; 18:12). Neither of these elements finds meaningful resolution in Sarah’s ambiguous aside here. Moreover, Sarah has proved to be sensitive to slights and to her position in the eyes of others (16:4–5); her last appearance on the stage of the narrative, in fact, regarded the safeguarding of her reputation in the wake of the deception of Abimelech (20:16). It is possible, here, then, that Sarah is shown most starkly as a woman who has, but has not: even the birth of her son, whom she nurses and cares for, is clouded by worry over appearing absurd before others.

A number of narrative threads are pulled together in the climactic encounter at Isaac’s weaning party: themes of acquisition and possession, abuse of the powerless and the young perpetrated with divine complicity and abetted by human cowardice, and the sad cruelty of a woman who seems warped by her own suffering. The scene is set with economy, but much may be inferred about its social context in the story world, which is one of celebration and revelry centered on the happy fact that a child has thrived and negotiated a significant rite of passage: “the child grew up and was weaned; and Abraham staged a great drinking-bout on the day of

148. Speiser, *Genesis*, 155, argues that the “derisive ‘laugh at’” in 21:6 is “ruled out by the tenor of vs. 7.” But why the tonal influence can only be read backwards is not clear. In any event, v. 7 only reinforces Sarah’s occupation with the opinions of others.

149. Alter, *Genesis*, 97. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 231, splits the difference in another way, concluding that the first phrase of v. 6 is a “laugh of joy” that communicates “devout thanksgiving,” while the second reflects “embarrassment.” Conybeare, *Laughter of Sarah*, x, 14, 41, acknowledges the “complicated undertow” of Sarah’s laugh, but still takes it primarily as a “cry of joy,” founding her wide-ranging meditation on the “laughter of delight” on this episode.

Isaac's weaning" (21:8).¹⁵⁰ Amid abundant feasting and drinking, in a crowded, noisy environment, something arrests Sarah's tipsy attention: she notices "the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom Hagar bore to Abraham, מצחק" (v. 9). While this final participle is clearly a play on צחק, "to laugh," which has been so prominent in this narrative, its precise import is obscure and has invited a number of proposals. The provocative idea that some kind of sexual abuse is meant, which takes its cue from Isaac's own "toying" (מצחק) with Rebekah in 26:8, is difficult to sustain in the MT as it stands: מצחק in 21:9 is unaccompanied by any clarifying prepositional

150. ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את־יצחק. I render משתה—derived, after all, from שתה, "to drink"—as "drinking-bout" to press a point that is somewhat submerged in the roughly fifteen mainstream English translations that I consulted on this verse. Nearly all, whether scholarly or popular, rendered by committee or individual, offer "feast," or, in the case of the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), the nearly synonymous "banquet," for משתה. Only Everett Fox, *Genesis and Exodus: A New English Rendition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 83 (the Genesis portion of which was first published in 1983 as *In the Beginning*), translates "drinking-feast." Perhaps, in the estimations of these translators, heavy drinking is thought to be a natural component of a feast; compare BDB's definition of משתה (1059b): "feast, banquet (occasion for drinking, drinking-bout)." But this element seems worth stressing, especially in Bible translation, which can tend to apply a puritanical veneer to events involving the traditional heroes of the narrative. Here, moreover, the drunkenness of the characters has legitimate explanatory power as regards motive. The only other occurrence of משתה in the narrative complex featuring Sarah is found in Lot's welcome of the two strangers in 19:3; Lot, of course, is closely associated with intemperate imbibing elsewhere (vv. 30–38). Examples further afield include 1 Sam 25:36, where Nabal is "dead drunk" (שכר עד־מאד) at his משתה; compare Job's concern for his children's morals after their days-long debauches (Job 1:4–5). See also Isa 5:12, Jer 51:39, Est 7:2, and others. For another interpretation that emphasizes drunkenness in this scene, see Reis, "Hagar Required," 95–97. In distinction to my reading, however, Reis hypothesizes that Ishmael is drunk—this is Reis's "new definition" of מצחק, a word that I discuss just below—and thus angers Sarah. In favor of Reis's idea, it may be said that such an understanding of מצחק works well in Gen 19:14, where it refers to Lot; but it is less convincing in 26:8, where Isaac's מצחק with Rebekah alerts Abimelech to their sexual relationship. Moreover, it is unclear why drunkenness should be offensive at an event where drinking is central—as Reis herself points out. Finally, portions of Reis's argument are inconsistent. As distinguished from Lot's drunken feast in 19:3, Abraham's non-alcoholic offerings in Gen 18 are supposedly paradigmatic for hosting parties; thus Ishmael is ejected as a "bad influence" who "takes after his cousin, Lot" (96–97). But it is Abraham who throws this משתה (21:8).

phrase, the RSV's "with her son Isaac" being supplied by the LXX.¹⁵¹ But a number of other renderings are plausible and offer solid readings. The simplest is also perhaps the most disturbing: that Ishmael, still a young man here, is just "playing," joking around in the festal atmosphere, and that the sight of his innocent fun reignites in a drunken Sarah a hate that had smoldered since the humiliating events detailed in Gen 16.¹⁵² Other interpretations, however, may demonstrate closer ties to the immediate context. If, for instance, Ishmael is "mocking" or "ridiculing" someone or something here, this could be read in the light of Sarah's demonstrated sensitivity to slights and concern for public appearance.¹⁵³ Her dread of being laughed at (21:6) is perhaps realized here, and intolerably so, given Ishmael's status as the son of "this slave" (הַאִמָּה הַזֹּאת, v. 10).¹⁵⁴ Then, too, the obvious derivation of מִצְחָק strongly suggests a connection with the proper noun יִצְחָק, which fits well with Sarah's stated concern that Ishmael not inherit with Isaac (v. 10). Ishmael is thus spotted "Isaac-ing," as Alter has it, playing the heir, at least in the eyes of Sarah.¹⁵⁵ The nature of such punning, finally, may recommend holding multiple meanings in tension here: Sarah's sensitivity is inflamed by Ishmael's mockery, while his perceived usurpation of what is hers and her son's multiplies the insult.¹⁵⁶ Fueled by drink and old

151. This idea of Ishmael "fondling" Isaac is not, as might be suspected, of recent vintage; nor is it "simply too hot for most scholars to handle," as claimed in the lurid article of Jonathan Kirsch, "What Did Sarah See?" in *Abraham and Family: New Insights Into the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2000), 109. In fact, von Rad, *Genesis*, 232, and Speiser, *Genesis*, 155, both refer to the hypothesis, albeit decorously, and Alter, *Genesis*, 98, associates the theory with "[s]ome medieval Hebrew exegetes" (but see David J. Zucker, "What Sarah Saw: Envisioning Genesis 21:9–10," *JBQ* 36 [2008]: 61 n. 8, who, perhaps referring instead to late antique compositions, claims that "such an explanation does not appear in the midrashic literature," while, however, suggesting that the rabbis may have "excised" such an inflammatory reading in the face of the rise of Islam). Regardless, as noted, the proposal turns on an assumption of the loss of a prepositional phrase that appeared in the *Vorlage* of the LXX; a simpler explanation might be that the translators of Genesis found the text confusing and supplied μετὰ Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς on the strength of the following verse. It is interesting to consider that while the proposal of Ishmael as a sexual abuser aims to justify Sarah's reaction in 21:10 (see Speiser, 155; Kirsch, 109–110), Sarah is the only primary character in this narrative complex who is the subject of a verb—עָנָה (16:6), as discussed above—that plausibly carries such a connotation.

152. See, for example, BDB 850a, which simply suggests "sport, play" for Gen 21:9, a meaning close to that of 19:14, where Lot is regarded "as a jester" (כַּמְצַחֵק) by his sons-in-law after his predictions of destruction.

153. See *DCH* 7.112a, "mock, ridicule, make fun of, make sport of"; *HALOT* 1019a, "make fun of."

154. On שִׁפְחָה and אִמָּה, see the discussion above, and Alter, *Genesis*, 67.

155. Alter, *Genesis*, 98.

156. See, again, the reading of Alter, *Genesis*, 98, which is difficult to improve.

resentments, Sarah adds a last, callous deed to her sad repertoire, urging Abraham: “Expel this slave and her son!” (גרש האמה הזאת ואת־בנהָ) (v. 10).

What follows raises once again the issue of the relative power of Sarah, Abraham, and God. Has Sarah, in part by imitating and collaborating with Abraham, completed a trajectory begun in powerlessness in Egypt to arrive, finally, at ascendancy over Abraham? After all, Sarah’s command is “abominable in the eyes of Abraham” (וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם) (21:11), yet God tells him to “obey” Sarah in “everything she says” (כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה) (v. 12). But Sarah clearly demonstrates here only her power over Hagar and Ishmael, which endures mostly unchanged from Gen 16, and, as there, is refracted and channeled through the potencies of Abraham and God. Contrary to Tribble’s characterization of Abraham as “dominated,” his reluctance and need for a second opinion shows that he is able to refuse to comply with Sarah’s order; indeed, his reaction suggests that he actively considers alternatives (21:11–12).¹⁵⁷ That he is initially disturbed, however, hardly absolves Abraham of his cowardice here, which echoes his washing of his hands in the matter of Hagar and the unborn Ishmael in 16:6. Abraham can argue at length for the lives of the residents of Sodom—“shouldn’t the judge of the whole earth do what is right?” (18:25; see vv. 22–33)—but his son, and his son’s mother, do not merit a word here.¹⁵⁸ Abraham’s dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael with a snack for the road in 21:14 is another surrender of an opportunity to do the right thing, not a indication of powerlessness; and there is no indication that his “obedience” to Sarah lasts beyond the immediate event.¹⁵⁹ But God is strongest here. What Sarah urges Abraham to do, to “expel” or “banish” (גרש) Ishmael and his mother, is a divine prerogative elsewhere in Genesis, describing both the ejection of humanity from Eden and Cain’s sentence to wander the earth (3:24; 4:14). And it is God who orchestrates the task here, too, which merely confirms the deity’s direction of the entire sequence of events

157. Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings,” 60.

158. Ishmael’s survival was, however, the subject of Abraham’s petition in 17:18. Compare with all these scenes Abraham’s wordless acquiescence in the matter of the ritual slaughter of Isaac (22:2–3).

159. Contrast Klitsner, “Forbidden Fruit,” 129–32, who reads Abraham’s acquiescence as a reversal of the gendered subordination of Gen 3.

(compare 21:1–2, 4, 6).¹⁶⁰ Abraham’s cowardly acceptance of God’s casuistry in v. 13 leads him to implement the plan: he sends his slave Hagar away, along with their son, Ishmael (v. 14).

Hagar and Ishmael’s stories continue, even in exile. Oddly, however, their departure marks the end of Sarah as a living and active force in the narrative. The reader is left to guess at Sarah’s response to Hagar’s flight and eventual return in Gen 16; here, too, the discourse maintains a permanent silence over Sarah’s reaction to Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion. Is she grimly triumphant, watching from the opening of the tent as a hungover Abraham sends the pair away with inadequate provisions (21:14)? Or does she come to regret her drunken haste, perhaps not in the morning after, but sometime, over the more than three decades of life that remain to her? The uncertainties of the earlier gap compound those here, but the duration of story time between the narrated explosions of conflict between Sarah and Hagar—perhaps as much as eighteen years or so—suggests that they had found some way of living alongside each other in the interim.¹⁶¹ As discussed above, too, the narrative is utterly quiet on the relationship of Sarah and Ishmael. It remains possible, however, that Sarah’s attitude towards the son she once may have desired, and now has helped send away, was not one of unremitting enmity for all of his formative years.¹⁶²

160. Contrast the reading of Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 97, which characterizes God’s response largely as a concession to the human limitations of Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham. The formulation in Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 51, however, is less sympathetic to the deity. It is remarkable how frequently this passage is read as an “emancipation” of Hagar. See, among others, Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 235; Cotter, *Genesis*, 139; Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 116–18, 219. It is interesting to note, however, that in all three of the cases of expulsion cited, God makes some provision for the protection of the banished: clothes for the man and the woman (3:21); Cain’s “sign” (אֵית) that defends him from murder (4:15); and a well in the wilderness for Hagar and Ishmael (21:19).

161. Sarah, who is said to live to be one hundred and twenty-seven (23:1), is presumably here a few years older, perhaps ninety-three, than her approximate age of ninety at Isaac’s birth (17:1, 17; 21:5): a difference of thirty-four years. Given that Abraham is eighty-six when Ishmael is born (16:16), the initial conflict between Sarah and Hagar seems to have occurred when Sarah was seventy-five or so: a difference of eighteen years.

162. Compare the narratorial claim in Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities* that Sarah “was accustomed to show affection for Ishmael” as he was growing up (*Ant.* 1.215). As the discussion in Chapter 6 indicates, however, this assertion is of uncertain credibility.

Final resolution of these aspects of Sarah's character remains somewhere out of reach. But it can be noted that Sarah, soon after she gains Isaac, loses Ishmael and Hagar. These losses are permanent, just as her separation from Lot has proved to be; this time, however, it is Sarah's own covetousness and rash actions that are partly to blame. Nor does the narrative give the impression that Sarah and Abraham are brought together in mutual affection by these events. Even Sarah's possession of her son proves to be temporary: as Gen 22 shows, Isaac is really Abraham's—and God's—to control.

At the close of Sarah's last appearance as a living character, then, she is a mother, a caregiver to a small boy; but she demonstrates a continuing ambivalence towards this role, and is preoccupied with her appearance in the eyes of others. On the surface, Sarah seems favored by God, receiving both divine visitation and vindication for her urged course of action; but God's support here is for an undertaking that is morally suspect, and of God's favor to Sarah there is not even a whisper more in this narrative. Sarah appears jealous and defensive of what is hers, through the agency of her son; but this grasping only leads to a last act that is intemperate, cruel, and weak. As a reader I am, finally, moved to pity for Sarah. Used by her husband, debased in bondage, a hard and violent master whose insecure and retributive acts only leave her more alone—even her crimes do not, in the end, elicit outrage in me. Rather, Sarah, at the close of her time on-stage in the MT, strikes me as pathetic and sad. If this is divine election, as some such as Schneider would have it, count me out.¹⁶³

“The Life of Sarah” (Gen 23:1–20)¹⁶⁴

As noted in Chapter 1, there is considerable interest among commentators, both ancient and modern, in Sarah's disappearance from the discourse of the MT following Hagar and Ishmael's departure. What happens to Sarah in the more than thirty years that remain to her—a

163. See Schneider, *Sarah*, 5, and throughout, for emphasis on Sarah's election. Compare Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 40, 219: “Sarah is chosen by the Deity.”

164. חיי שרה is the traditional, ironic name for the *parashah* running from Gen 23:1–25:18.

span greater than that between her Egyptian abduction and her weaning of Isaac? What does she think as Abraham further consolidates his political and financial positions with Abimelech (21:22–34)? How does God’s perverse “assay” (נסה) of Abraham, in which he is asked to murder his son (22:1–19), affect the woman who bore and nursed the boy?¹⁶⁵

One answer can serve all of these questions, I think, and it is simple and grim. Sarah has been used up—by Abraham, certainly, but also by the deity, whose covenantal promises required her body—and she is discarded as soon as her utility is exhausted. After Isaac is born and nursed through his vulnerable first years, after Sarah sets the elimination of a rival heir in motion, her fellow characters—Abraham, God, and the narrator, too—lose all interest in her. Having been hardened and schooled in cruelty by abuse, perhaps the better to do a dirty job, Sarah completes the tasks set and is abandoned. She may, indeed, suffer a final loss here, of the relationship that has dominated most of her narrative life, as it is not clear that she even continues to stay in Abraham’s camp: while he lives at Beer-sheba (21:31–34; 22:19; compare 21:14), she dies in Kiriath-arba, apparently another name for Hebron or Mamre (23:2; see 13:18), to which Abraham must “come” (בוא) to mark her mourning rites.¹⁶⁶ It is thus plausible that Sarah dies in ignorance of Isaac’s mortal peril at the hands of Abraham and God; but her story life is all but irretrievable after Hagar and Ishmael are expelled.

This reading of Sarah as expedient instrument is only supported by her final appearance, as a corpse, where she is used once more as a mechanism for acquisition. Having lived out her

165. The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, however, partly recalls Sarah’s own willingness to put Ishmael at risk, both in and out of the womb (16:6; 21:10); of course, Abraham was complicit in these situations, as well. As I note in Chapter 6, this particular similarity between Sarah and Abraham becomes more explicit in Josephus’s *Antiquities*. The most original reading of Sarah’s absence from the *Akedah* episode is surely that of Tribble, “Sacrifice of Sarah,” reprised in Tribble, “Ominous Beginnings.” Based upon Zen concepts (“Ominous Beginnings,” 68 n. 60), Tribble’s argument faults Sarah for her “attachment” to Isaac, which somehow borders on “idolatry,” suggesting that she, not Abraham, deserved to be tested in Gen 22. Tribble’s disapproval extends to Isaac, who is a “mother’s boy,” puzzlingly described on the force of 24:67 as one who grieves for his mother in “less than a healthy way” (“Ominous Beginnings,” 53–54, 59–60).

166. The RSV and NRSV avoid raising the issue of Abraham’s whereabouts at Sarah’s death by rendering “went in” here, seemingly implying that he merely needed to enter her tent; others, such as NJPS and NABR, take בוא as a kind of finite auxiliary verb to the infinitives describing the mourning. Compare the remarks of Schneider, *Sarah*, 115. See, however, the KJV: “Abraham came.”

127 years, she dies, and Abraham arrives “to ululate for Sarah and to bewail her” (לספד לשרה) (ולבכתה, 23:2). Whether these rites are perfunctory or heartfelt is hard to say; if the latter, this could serve as a final reminder of how Sarah came to be molded in Abraham’s image as the narrative drew on.¹⁶⁷ But Abraham wastes no time or tenderness in turning the event to his advantage.¹⁶⁸ After rising “from alongside his dead” (מעל פני מתו, v. 3)—Sarah’s body, of course, still “his”—and citing his legal status as an “alien” (תושב), Abraham urges the local inhabitants: “give me real estate from what is yours for a tomb, so I can entomb my dead away from my presence” (תנו לי אחזת-קבר עמכם ואקברה מתי מלפני) (v. 4). When the residents urge him to use “the most exclusive of our tombs” (מבחר קברינו, v. 6) free of charge, it emerges that Abraham has his eye on a particular plot—and that he wants to own it, free and clear (vv. 8–9). After further haggling, Abraham gets his wish; and he entombs Sarah, “his woman” to the end, on his new property near Mamre (v. 19). In her death, then, Sarah’s body is used to acquire a holding (אחזה) in the land of Canaan, the first concrete step towards fulfillment of the deity’s promise to make over the entire land to Abraham and his descendants “as a perpetual possession” (לאחזת עולם), 17:8; compare 23:4, 9, 20). This may, as some such as Jeansonne have suggested, underline the importance of Sarah to the realization of God’s plans; but it is Sarah as instrument, not agent, that is used here.¹⁶⁹

167. The traditional scholarly consensus, based on Near Eastern contexts, is that Abraham is complying with social norms here and that his personal feelings are wholly unrelated and indeterminate: Speiser, *Genesis*, 169; von Rad, *Genesis*, 247; compare the NAB: “Abraham performed the customary mourning rites for her” (made more neutral in NABR, “proceeded to mourn and weep for her”). This is followed by Schneider, *Sarah*, 115–16, but rejected by Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 29, who considers that his actions show “Abraham’s genuine loss.” A survey of the more technical of the relevant terms, ספד, tends to support the former view. It is often employed in public, official expressions of mourning (1 Sam 25:1), though this does not, of course, preclude real feeling; an interesting case is that of Abner in 2 Sam 3:31, where there seems likely to be a mix of emotions, given that Abner’s murderer is among those ordered to mourn him.

168. See Schneider, *Sarah*, 127, who notes that Sarah’s death is largely a “bracket for an extended account of Abraham buying land”; compare 117.

169. Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 29. Compare Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 46: “Sarah, by her death, becomes the first heir of the promise of the land.” But an “heir,” surely, is a *living* beneficiary of what was formerly possessed by the dead.

Sarah in the MT

Sarah in the MT is a figure of considerable complexity. Despite the occasional ambiguities that my reading has exposed, however, she does not devolve into incoherence, but traces an arc within her story world that is as plausible as it is sad. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, a list of traits does not constitute a reading, and I will not merely enumerate Sarah's many and varied qualities here. Rather, in keeping with my discussion in Chapter 2, which described character in terms of a softened "paradigm" that is relational and fluid, I will consider how Sarah is revealed through her relationships, broadly conceived: with Abraham, with God, with Hagar and Ishmael, and with herself as she develops over the course of her story.

Sarah's most important relationship is with Abraham. She is first and last defined as his—not his sister, but "his woman"—and nearly everything that happens to her, nearly all that she does, leaves a trail that leads back to him. This connection is marked throughout by acquisition, use, abandonment, and a certain dark mimicry. Sarah, in her first mention, is "taken" and possessed by Abraham (11:29), and he exploits her lack of power to trade her away for valuable animals and slaves in Egypt, only to take her back when his bargain is successful (12:10–20). This trauma contributes to Sarah's own use and abuse of Hagar (16:1–6), which is Sarah's first step in a curious process, continued in the couple's reactions to predictions of Isaac's birth and their reception of the visitors (17:15–22; 18:1–15), where she grows to resemble Abraham. This evolution, and the subtle gains in power that it suggests, culminates in Sarah's collaboration in a restaging of the Egyptian deception in Gerar (20:1–18). However, the similarities of this scheme generate echoes of Sarah as object of use and abuse in Egypt, which help to expose the true balance of power between her and Abraham. This is bolstered at the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael (21:8–14), where Sarah's power is more apparent than real—a fact only underlined by Abraham's subsequent desertion of Sarah in her waning years. The bleak tenor of their relationship is emphatically confirmed, finally, when Abraham uses Sarah's body, one more time, as an object in pursuit of gain (23:1–20).

Sarah's relationship with the deity—Yahweh, or God—displays several depressingly similar themes. Most significantly, God uses Sarah for God's own ends, and as a corollary actively cultivates what is worst in her. Though the end of Sarah's captivity in Egypt is hastened by divine intervention, Yahweh's motive is not to protect or rescue Sarah herself, but to give her back to Abraham, who has traded her for profit (12:17–20). In converse fashion, Yahweh abets Sarah's transformation into an abuser by restoring, by proxy, the escaped object of her violence (16:9). That Sarah is most important to God as an instrument of the divine promises is shown when God reveals her role in the plan—to Abraham alone (17:15–22). This is confirmed when Yahweh communicates only the bare minimum, and that indirectly, to Sarah in the tent, and closes their encounter with blustering intimidation (18:9–15). In Gerar, two established themes combine as the deity restores Sarah to Abraham for the sake of their relationship and aids the couple in a scheme that enriches them while bringing suffering to the innocent (20:3–7, 14–18). Yahweh finally visits Sarah to achieve Yahweh's purposes, and explicitly supports her—but again, in a cause that is unjust and ultimately degrading to Sarah's humanity (21:1–14). In the end, too, Abraham's employment of Sarah's body in acquiring land is only part of the fulfillment of the divine promises (23:1–20).

Sarah's relationship with Hagar resembles her tie with Abraham, marked by possession, use, loss, and desertion, but in the negative. Sarah's acquisition of slaves in 12:5 provides a counterweight to her possession by Abraham and foreshadows her brutal conduct later, when Sarah reinscribes her own employment as instrument in her disposition of Hagar's sexuality. Sarah uses Hagar's body for her purposes, and abuses her violently when slighted; in the process, Sarah loses, in prospect, both "her slave" Hagar and the son she once said might be hers (16:1–15). This loss is complete when Sarah contributes to the callous banishment of Hagar and Ishmael, which, in a small paradox, marks not their but her own final effacement from the narrative (21:8–21; 25:7–18). However, this note only strengthens the sense that Sarah's possession of Hagar must, in the last analysis, be admitted to be a derivative and relative power:

both of the key incidents between the pair are countenanced and catalyzed by Abraham and by God.

Each one of these relationships plays a significant role in Sarah's "directional" dimension," or development over story time.¹⁷⁰ Much of her evolution can be usefully considered under the general rubric of gain and loss, or possession and lack, that was so prevalent throughout the discussion above. Sarah is often a woman who has, but has not: possessed of a powerful name but possessed by Abraham, owning a slave but herself traded as an object, lacking a family of origin but repeatedly gaining and losing human connections. Her childlessness is a parade example of this motif. This lack, underscored from the beginning, seems to provide part of the motive for Sarah's scheme with Hagar, but just as she is "built up" in potential by the plan's success, she violently abuses her pregnant surrogate, and Ishmael is never Sarah's son (16:1–6, 15–16; 17:18–21; 21:8–10). When Sarah does give birth, her gain is tragically undercut by the consistently ambiguous attitude that she expresses towards motherhood (21:6–7); and Isaac, despite Sarah's labor and care, is, from his first predictive advent in Sarah's absence, "for Abraham," and for the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (17:16–21; 21:1–2).

Each of these relationships—even, perhaps, that of Isaac—also contributes in its own way to the gradual hardening of Sarah's character that can be observed over her narrative arc in Genesis. In the cases of Abraham and God, this hardening is sanctioned, even promoted, as an aid to their own ends. Related in various ways to these themes, finally, is the curious and sad recurring note of Sarah's increasing sensitivity to her position in the eyes of others. So "lovely to look at," worthy of notice as an object, Sarah is prompted to violence by being overlooked, and is perhaps goaded into her final urging of banishment by a boy's ridicule (12:11, 14–15; 16:4–6; 21:9–10). Even the reversal of her childlessness, her most fundamental and enduring trait, is

170. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 39.

overshadowed by the suspicion that others will find her new state absurd: “everyone who hears will laugh at me!” (11:30; 21:6).

For me, at last, this morbidly sensitive Sarah evokes sympathy, even pity. A good face cannot be put on the use and abuse of her slave, Hagar; but this is part of a sad cycle of use and cruelty where Sarah is sometimes the victim, sometimes the perpetrator. In her first and last major appearances in the narrative, in Egypt and in death, Sarah is an object used to gain wealth and advantage for Abraham in a foreign land (12:10–20; 23:1–20). In between, both her body and her developing capacity for cruelty prove their utility to the prosecution of the deity’s plans. I cannot agree with the central contention of Schneider, that Sarah is “as much chosen” as Abraham.¹⁷¹ Sarah’s “election,” rather, evokes the selection of a tool, and Mignon Jacobs’s evaluation of Sarah’s worth in the eyes of the narrator could, in my reading, stand for her value to Abraham, and to God: “intermittently useful but clearly dispensable.”¹⁷²

I said above that Sarah’s story life after the banishing of Hagar and Ishmael is “all but irretrievable.” There is, however, one further significant note on Sarah in Genesis, one that might contain a small seed of hope.¹⁷³ Although Gen 22 suggests that Isaac is Abraham’s, and God’s, to do with as they will, Isaac’s actions as an adult may imply that Sarah had forged a meaningful relationship with her son after the narrator and the other characters had lost interest in her. When Isaac weds Rebekah, he brings her “into the tent of Sarah, his mother” (האהלה שרה אמו) (24:67).¹⁷⁴ In this tent, and in his love for Rebekah, Isaac is “consoled” (נחם) “after his mother” (אחרי אמו).¹⁷⁵

171. Schneider, *Sarah*, 5.

172. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 102.

173. After Gen 23, Sarah is mentioned by name in 24:36; 25:10, 12; and 49:31, but none of these has much relevance for her characterization. Outside of Genesis, she is only referred to in the interesting Isa 51:1–2(–3?).

174. האהלה שרה is grammatically irregular, but it is difficult to see how it could be rendered differently, unless an emendation were accepted; see, for example, the rearrangement of the NAB (altered in NABR), which tracks with the hypothesis of Speiser, *Genesis*, 182, that שרה אמו is somehow displaced from its original spot at the end of the verse. The RSV eliminates Sarah’s name from the verse altogether. Against this emendation, see Alter, *Genesis*, 123.

175. Most English translations render “after his mother’s death.” נחם seems to refer here to comfort after emotional bereavement. Although it is used in situations, such as that of Gen 38:12, where it may simply denote an end to a formal period of mourning, it is also employed in contexts of obvious grief, such as Jacob’s lamentation of

Perhaps, then, in the end, Sarah in the MT is characterized not by something she lacked, but by someone she had.

I will now proceed to a consideration of the portrait of Sarah—there eventually known as Sarra—in the LXX of Genesis.

the lost Joseph in 37:35. Moreover, emotional language occupies the immediate context in 24:67, where Isaac's "love" (אהבה) for Rebekah is cited.

CHAPTER 4
SARRA IN THE SEPTUAGINT

Introduction

Having discussed Sarah in Genesis of the Masoretic Text (MT) at some length, I intend now to offer a reading of her character—first called Sara (Σάρα), then Sarra (Σάρρα) after 17:15—as she appears in the narrative of Genesis in the Septuagint (LXX).¹ My basic approach and concerns remain as defined by the poetics of character and characterization that I outlined in Chapter 2. Just as in my reading of Sarah in the MT, I will attempt to focus a spotlight on Sarra in the LXX by gathering and integrating her traits, always with an eye on other narrative data such as the trajectory of the plot, thematic elements, and the construction of other characters. I do not pretend to be a first-time reader of this LXX narrative, and I have felt free to anticipate later narrative developments when it seemed that the discussion at hand would benefit.

My reading of Sarra in the LXX of Genesis reveals a complex, sometimes erratic figure who faces a variety of narrative pressures that persistently work to limit her individuation. In the

1. The precise spelling of her name varies slightly throughout the tradition; here and throughout I follow the text of John William Wevers, *Genesis, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974). As in the case of the MT, there seems to be no ideal way to handle every reference to a character whose name changes over the course of a narrative. In this chapter, therefore, I have adopted the following practices, which generally parallel my choices in Chapter 3. Here, in the introduction, I call her “Sarra,” referring to her character as a gestalt, while in the body of my discussion she is “Sara” until Gen 17:15, “Sarra” thereafter, in keeping with the text of Wevers. I have retained “Sarah” or “Sarai” as appropriate in references to her character in the MT, to help clarify the version under discussion; but I consider all of these names to refer to one recognizable human analogue. The same principles govern my references to Abram, whose name is changed to Abraam in 17:5. See further my note at the outset of the body of my analysis below. “Septuagint” is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous collection of ancient translations of sacred Hebrew literature into Greek (as well as some material composed in Greek). Often the word and its standard siglum LXX are restricted to description of the translations of the books of the Pentateuch, with “Old Greek” or OG serving to indicate translations of other materials; without imagining that it is free of theoretical difficulties, I hold to this convention throughout this chapter. See Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 30–33, for one account of issues of nomenclature; see Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 1–3, for another.

narrative's early stages, Sarra is portrayed as passive, inert, and powerless, even inanimate, if occasionally of use to the attainment of Abraam's divinely supported aims. When she does break free of this inertia, moreover, in the first episode involving Hagar, Sarra's agency comes at a steep price. Here, in what is only the first instance of what will become a major theme, Sarra's initiative is undermined before she can exercise it, as her actions prove to be largely derivative of those of Abraam. As the narrative moves on, other elements also accumulate that oppose Sarra's volition and contribute to an impression of a narratorial strategy that aims at her restriction.

While Sarra is intermittently useful to Abraam throughout the narrative, her programmatic role as an instrument in the fulfillment of the deity's promises to Abraam and his descendants emerges most clearly after 17:15–21, where God informs Abraam—in Sarra's absence—that she will bear him a son to be favored with a divine covenant. Sarra's utility is explicitly underlined in a variety of ways, as she catalyzes the banishment of a competing heir, or as her corpse provides a pretext for Abraam's first permanent acquisition of territory in the land pledged to him. Equally, however, Sarra's value as a tool in God's broader scheme is emphasized the more her individuation is curbed. When Sarra isn't passive and inert, she is portrayed as imitating Abraam; and when she finally acts in a way that doesn't recall the actions of Abraam, it is only to express delight at the accomplishment of God's plan in the birth of Isaac. What is left of Sarra in the LXX is a washed out, faded figure whose occasionally erratic activity is explained best not by any exercise of her will, but by the narrator's myopic focus on Sarra's utility—in bearing an heir, in eliminating the heir's competition, or in exchanging her body for wealth and land—to the establishment of the relationship between the deity and the men in her family.

Practical Preliminaries

Before I can go on to relate my analysis in detail, a few preliminary matters call for brief discussion. First, I acknowledge some obstacles to the performance and presentation of a reading of Sarra in the LXX. After noting the paucity of other readings of Sarra with which to engage, I treat several related issues that arise from the origin of the LXX as a translation, considering the

quantity and quality of the agreement between the LXX of Genesis and the proto-MT; the effect of narrative continuities across the tradition on my production of this chapter, particularly as regards its place in my broader investigation; and the influence of the demonstrably uneven distribution of such narrative continuities on my approaches to various episodes. Finally, I discuss the critical text that underlies my reading and mention the English translation that I have provided as an aid to the reader.

Other readings of Sarra in the LXX. The contextualization of my reading of Sarra in the LXX is both eased and complicated by the scarcity of scholarly works that address her character in any depth. My findings pose a clear challenge to the conclusions of some studies that neglect to consider the full scope of Sarra's story. Stefan Schorch, for example, employs a tiny piece of Sarra's narrative data in the LXX in the service of his thesis that "LXX Genesis tends to present women as more active" than their counterparts in the MT.² Jennifer Dines similarly bases her claim that "[b]y and large, LXX maintains, and even enhances, Sarah's independent spirit" on brief analyses of a few verses.³ Whether the description of Sarra as *συνωκηκυία ἀνδρί* in 20:3 really "avoids . . . the association of marriage with the relation between an owner and his property" implicit in the MT's *בעלת בעל*, as Schorch contends, may be a legitimate topic of debate.⁴ Likewise, the assertion of Dines that the pronoun switch in 21:7 (*לזקניו*, "his old age," as opposed to *ἐν τῷ γήρει μου*, "my old age") makes Sarra "the centre of attention" may be correct, as far as it goes, within its very near context.⁵ But my analysis, which examines Sarra in detail throughout the narrative, shows that Sarra's passivity is in fact more pronounced in the LXX, and

2. Schorch, "Hellenizing Women," 16.

3. Dines, "What If the Reader is a She?" 61. Dines does note that "there are also moments where her interests are subordinated to Abraham's or her speech is toned down."

4. Schorch, "Hellenizing Women," 11–12, is probably correct to claim that the connotation of mastery or ownership is stronger in *בעלת בעל* ("mistress of a master," or, as Schorch has it, "ruled / owned by a lord"). But this is to abstract the issue from its context. The function of the note in 20:3 that Sarra is a "woman in wedlock with a man," or simply "married to a man," as Schorch renders *συνωκηκυία ἀνδρί*, is no different from that of its MT counterpart: she belongs to someone else, and Abimelech will die for his presumption in (unwittingly) stealing her.

5. Dines, "What If the Reader is a She?" 62. As I argue below, Sarra's depiction in this section does little to individuate her; rather, it underlines her subordination to the narratorial interest in the divine promises.

that her actions, when they do occur, are actually more often derivative of those of Abraam. This is, of course, partly a commentary on methodology. As I state elsewhere, I contend that “comparative study that proceeds from a collection of differences between the MT and the text of the LXX,” as Schorch describes his approach, must often founder on its lack of attention to the horizontal interplay of elements within each strand of the tradition.⁶ Schorch and Dines not only isolate small trees for comparison, but draw conclusions about their respective forests without examining their ecosystems in detail.

Although Susan Ann Brayford’s evaluation of Sarra has more in common with my own, her work exhibits some of the same problems found in that of Schorch and Dines. As noted in Chapter 1, Brayford’s dissertation, completed in the late 1990s, represents the most concentrated engagement with the figure of Sarra in the LXX to date.⁷ Yet Brayford, too, argues that Sarra is “recharacterized” in the LXX primarily on the basis of narrative data contained in two verses (Gen 18:12 and, to a lesser extent, 16:2).⁸ This seems to be a corollary of Brayford’s central contention that women in the LXX of Genesis, and especially Sarra, are transformed in translation into Hellenistic matrons who exhibit a degree of positive, sexual “shame” that is appropriate to the translators’ social milieu: Sarra’s treatment of Hagar and Ishmael, or her victimization in Egypt, or her collaboration in Gerar, or her reaction to Isaac’s birth, to cite only a few examples, apparently have less to offer Brayford’s thesis. As I note at a few points below, Brayford’s conclusion that Sarra in the LXX was “domesticated, her sexuality was suppressed, and her significance in the family diminished” is, as a thumbnail sketch, not incompatible with

6. Schorch, “Hellenizing Women,” 3. The method of Dines, “What If the Reader is a She?” 58, is the same, founded on “examining differences between LXX and MT . . . and asking what these differences reveal.”

7. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming.” This work was never published, but some of her conclusions are abstracted and summarized in Brayford, “To Shame or not to Shame,” 169–72, and Brayford, “Sarah Laughs Last,” 317–28; others find their way, piecemeal, into Brayford, *Genesis*, as noted below. See also discussion of Susan Ann Brayford, “The Denial of Female Sexuality in the LXX of Genesis,” unpublished paper (1998), in Leonard Greenspoon, “Hebrew Into Greek: Interpretation in, by, and of the Septuagint,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 99.

8. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming”: 155–58, 163–68, 176–79, and especially 182–87 for 18:12; 187–96 for 16:2. Other episodes, such as those of Gen 12 and 20, come under discussion at times (196–200), but these are not treated with a view to illuminating Sarra. For language of “(re)characterization,” see 13.

my reading of Sarra as a muted figure whose individuation is stymied by the consistent portrayal of her actions as derivative.⁹ However, my investigation of Sarra offers substantially more breadth, depth, and nuance. This is not a claim to special literary acumen on my part, but a natural result of an approach that pursues Sarra as she develops through her entire trajectory in the LXX narrative. Moreover, my reading is not restricted to the sociological axis of sex and shame that occupies Brayford; rather, as elsewhere, I seek Sarra as a “concrete semblance” of a human being—even when narrative forces seem ranged against this aim.¹⁰

Aside from Brayford’s dissertation, there is a decided lack of studies that treat Sarra in the LXX at any meaningful length. Brayford’s own translation and commentary on LXX Genesis in Codex Alexandrinus, which incorporates some of the arguments advanced in her dissertation, is necessarily broader in scope, but also less focused on Sarra.¹¹ The commentary accompanying the translation of Marguerite Harl also pays relatively cursory attention to Sarra, limited here not only by its format but also by its general occupation with the history of interpretation, especially work of the patristic age.¹² John Wevers, finally, offers piecemeal remarks relevant to a reading of Sarra in his *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*.¹³ This work, however, whose body runs to 853 pages, does not attempt a general commentary, but rather offers discursive, verse-by-verse notes on the translator’s renderings of the Hebrew. While each of these projects is helpful in various ways, none offers a sustained reading of Sarra; and while I have consulted all in my writing of this chapter, and mentioned small but significant distinctions with my work in the body of my discussion and its notes below, often there has been little enough to engage.

Narrative continuities and their effects. Especially in the context of my larger project, my reading of Sarra in the LXX is complicated, both theoretically and practically, by the origin of

9. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 9.

10. See Chapter 2 for Ronald Crane’s “concrete semblance,” quoted in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 137.

11. Brayford, *Genesis*.

12. Harl, *La Genèse*. Harl consults both Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935), and Wevers, *Genesis*, in her translation (Harl, *La Genèse*, 22).

13. John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SCS 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

the text. The narratives of Genesis in the MT and the LXX often display substantial agreement, which is unsurprising given that the latter is patently an attempt to render into Greek the content of something close to a precursor of the former.¹⁴ At points this agreement may approach identity, or as close as this may be in very different language systems, where the lexical range of translated words is very close to that of the original, and the syntax, *mutatis mutandis*, communicates much the same idea. Such seems to me to be the case—to take a small example more or less at random—in Gen 16:15, where the LXX reads *Καὶ ἔτεκεν Ἀγάρ τῷ Ἀβράμ υἱόν, καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Ἀβράμ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὃν ἔτεκεν αὐτῷ Ἀγάρ, Ἰσμαήλ* for the MT *וַתֵּלֶד וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמֹתוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל הַגֵּר לְאֲבִרָם בֶּן וְיִקְרָא אֲבִרָם שֵׁם-בְנֵוֹ אֲשֶׁר-יָלְדָהּ הַגֵּר יִשְׁמָעֵאל*. Composition Greek might have sought a different connector than the initial *καί*, employed a greater degree of subordination, and deployed the words in a different order, but none of these issues amounts to a violation of idiom.¹⁵ The meanings of the common nouns overlap almost perfectly, and the semantic ranges of *τίκτω* and

14. See Wevers, *Notes*, xiii, for a series of strongly worded statements in support of this: “the parent text being translated was in the main much like the consonantal text of MT; in other words, the extant textual tradition must be taken seriously. The age of rampant retroversion and wild emendations is over. . . . one must begin with a prejudice toward the text which we actually have.” A text that differs from consonantal MT, Wevers avers, should be posited “only after all other avenues of understanding have been explored.” Compare the similar sentiments of J. A. L. Lee, “A Note on Septuagint Material in the Supplement to Liddell and Scott,” *Glotta* 47 (1969): 238 n. 9. Not all agree with this assessment; see Brayford, *Genesis*, 12–16, for a summary of some of the competing arguments. Although the precise relationship between these text traditions is not central to my analysis in this chapter, my own close work with MT and LXX leads me to concur generally with Wevers on the basic similarity of consonantal MT and the *Vorlage* of the LXX—at least in Gen 11–23.

15. The Greek of the LXX—speaking here specifically of the Pentateuch, in acknowledgment that heterogeneity is the rule across the Greek Bible—is best regarded, in the main, as ordinary Greek of its time; its various oddities and calques can be mostly attributed to the fact that it is a translation, and a translation of a group of religious works that were socially significant at the time of their rendering. It may be helpful to conceive of the Greek of the Pentateuch as a “variety” of literary Greek, a “kind of Greek clearly differentiated by phonetic, grammatical and lexical peculiarities, and bound to a specific genre,” such as that employed in Attic tragic dialogue (Georg Walser, “The Greek of the Bible: Translated Greek or Translation Greek?” in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo*, ed. Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 449 n. 1, 450, 456–59). However, reductive and essentializing arguments that feature remarks on a species of “Jewish-Greek” or, worse, the “Semitic mind,” common in older works, should be rejected. See J. A. L. Lee, *A Lexical Study of the Septuagint Version of the Pentateuch*, SCS 14 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 11–52, for a sustained dismantling of such ideas; see also appendices on 150–54. Compare the remarks in the Introduction to Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), ix (hereafter, *GELS*), and his n. 14 there, which provides a bit of bibliography and the memorable opinion of Harl: “le grec de la LXX est un vrai grec, non pas un grec bâtard.” Compare Harl, *La Genèse*, 71; see also Robert J. V. Hiebert, “Textual and Translation Issues in Greek Genesis,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 408–9.

καλέω are very similar, respectively, to ילד and קרא, especially when their objects are considered.¹⁶ The ἀντῶ, then, represents the only real textual disparity, and it is difficult to make too much of this. Just possibly, the LXX goes a bit further here in its insistence that Ishmael is Abram's; but this is hardly a novel element if the MT represents the essentials of the Greek's *Vorlage* (בנו, לאברם).¹⁷ In short, the LXX offers a literate if not elegant rendering of (proto-)MT's Gen 16:15 that communicates a close approximation of its content.

Naturally, one effect of these kinds of similarities, which are found throughout the narrative, is that a number of themes, motifs, and character traits in the LXX resemble their analogues in the MT. Where these continuities are plain, I have felt that to rehearse them in full would unduly try the patience of my reader, as I assume her or his familiarity with my analysis of the MT in Chapter 3. This does not mean that I have adopted an exclusively synoptic view of the traditions, or that I have made an effort to catalogue the disparities between them.¹⁸ On the contrary, I have striven to develop a reading of Sarra in the LXX that possesses an integrity grounded in internal criteria. But the extent of the material, and its qualities as a translation, have left me, it seems, with two choices that are honest. The first would be to fully draw out all of my observations on Sarra's character, even when these correspond very closely with those made in Chapter 3; the second is simply to evoke these versional continuities, in a somewhat compressed form, whenever they are relevant. For the sake of readerly interest, I have consistently opted for the second strategy. This is a practical concession; but I would like to emphasize that discontinuities, considered across the tradition, do not necessarily carry more intrinsic weight in

16. The aorist of τίκτω is used in precisely the same way as ילד here—τεκεῖν τινά τιτι—and this is perfectly idiomatic. See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon*, ninth ed. with a revised supplement, rev. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1792a (hereafter, LSJ). Moreover, both verbs are clearly related to a noun for “child” (τέκνον, ילד) in their respective tongues. In addition to substantial overlap in other usages, both καλέω and קרא are employed idiomatically with a double accusative (ὄνομα or ἄν plus a proper noun in apposition) in contexts of naming: LSJ 866b; BDB 896a.

17. Contrast Brayford, “To Shame or not to Shame,” 171, who says that the “LXX translation of this story accentuates Abraham's paternity.” See also Wevers, *Notes*, 227.

18. Wevers, *Notes*, provides detailed discussion of most of the significant textual developments in the LXX.

their native narrative contexts.¹⁹

A connected issue that affects the presentation of my analysis is that developments in the tradition that reflect on Sarra are unevenly distributed throughout the narrative: one episode or scene may be somewhat divergent, another nearly identical, to its presumed *Vorlage*. An observation of this phenomenon in practice has convinced me that an attempt to apply a schematic and uniform approach to each episode in turn would be a disservice to the narrative. Hence, at times my discussion of a particular section begins with a consideration of significant versional continuities or discrepancies; in other cases, the narrative at hand seemed to demand substantial engagement before disparities or similarities could be named as such. In any event, I believe that what is vital to an understanding of Sarra in the LXX is found, first, within the LXX, and I have tried to respect the narrative's integrity without pretending that it is a wholly independent entity. This is a fine line, however, and difficult to tread adroitly at all times.

Notes on texts. My reading depends on Wevers's Göttingen edition of LXX Genesis, supplemented by its first apparatus and Wevers's own subsequent *Notes*, where he occasionally advocates a revision of the critical text.²⁰ This text is a theoretical reconstruction of a putative original ancient translation that went on to have its own extended life in tradition—and is itself deduced through this tradition.²¹ An alternate approach—exemplified by Brill's Septuagint Commentary Series, to which Brayford's commentary belongs—focuses on a single manuscript

19. My primary aim in this chapter is to produce a reading of Sarra in the LXX, not to attempt a firm resolution of the variety of theoretical issues that arise in its generation. However, many of the problems are complex and, I think, highly interesting, and may repay future engagement. Even these seemingly concrete concepts of “similarity” and “difference” can break down under scrutiny. For example, proper nouns were generally simply transliterated by the translators of LXX Genesis (compare Brayford, *Genesis*, 26, who notes a couple of exceptions among the toponyms: Σαθηαί for סכּוּת, and Αἰγυπτος for מצרים). But this apparent identity actually conceals significant disparity, as the punning etiologies that enrich many Hebrew names, and thus the construction of the characters they describe, are thereby rendered meaningless in the Greek. In its broader context, then, LXX Gen 16:15—to return briefly to the example treated above—is in this respect a slightly paler version of its *Vorlage*, lacking as it does the reverberation of the play on ישמעאל, or “God hears,” just introduced in v. 11.

20. Wevers, *Genesis*; Wevers, *Notes*. For an example of a revised reading, see *Notes*, 170, 295, 764; his proposed changes to the Göttingen text are also listed in an appendix on 855–56. For references to LXX and OG texts other than Genesis, I have been content to consult the edition of Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*.

21. Compare Wevers, *Notes*, xvii.

in an effort to analyze a “text that actually existed in a particular reading community.”²² I have seen no advantage, however, in depriving myself of the immense amount of information arrayed in Wevers’s edition, which remains, forty years after its appearance, the standard scholarly text. Even if compositional context were my primary concern, the provenance of Alexandrinus, for instance, is hardly a settled matter, and its production lies well outside the Second Temple period in any event.

For the more significant, extended episodes treated below (Gen 11:26–12:9; 12:10–13:2; 16:1–16; 18:1–15; 20:1–18; 21:1–14), I have prefaced my discussion with the text of *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS). This is intended simply as an aid to the reader, and is not an endorsement of the methodology of NETS.²³ Other renderings my own, unless otherwise noted.

Sara, Muted (Gen 11:26–12:9 LXX)

Gen 11:26 And Thara . . . became the father of Abram and Nachor and Harran. 27 . . . And Harran was the father of Lot. . . . 29 And Abram and Nachor took wives for themselves; Abram’s wife’s name was Sara, and Nachor’s wife’s name was Melcha, the daughter of Harran, the father of Melcha and the father of Iescha. 30 And Sara was

22. Brayford, *Genesis*, 24. Notably, no attempt is made here to define this “particular reading community.”

23. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Robert J. V. Hiebert is responsible for Genesis. I have chosen NETS simply because there is no alternative published within the last century and a half; the rendering of Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament with an English Translation and with Various Readings and Critical Notes*, reprint, 1844 (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1870), widely distributed with software programs such as BibleWorks, is able, if sometimes archaic in expression, but based upon sparse manuscript evidence. This is not the place for an extended critique of the NETS project, but I have reservations about the adequacy of the principle of “interlinearity” as an explanation for the creation of the LXX. See Wolfgang Kraus, “Review of Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright III, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title*,” *RBL*, June 2009; Jan Joosten, “Reflections on the ‘Interlinear Paradigm’ in Septuagintal Studies,” in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo*, ed. Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 163–78; and, from a lexicographical angle, Takamitsu Muraoka, “Recent Discussions on the Septuagint Lexicography with Special Reference to the So-Called Interlinear Model,” in *Die Septuaginta—Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten: Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 20.–23. Juli 2006*, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus, with the assistance of Martin Meiser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 221–35. At any rate, it seems to me that scholarship still waits for a “new English translation” of the LXX, as NETS, for reasons the editors attempt to explain on xiv–xvi, is an adaptation of the text of the NRSV rather than a fresh rendering.

barren, and she was not bearing children. 31 And Thara took his son Abram and his son's son, Lot son of Harran, and his daughter-in-law Sara, his son Abram's wife, and he brought them out of the country of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Chanaan, and he came as far as Charran and settled there. . . . 12:1 And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country and from your kindred and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be one blessed. 3 And I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse, and in you all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed." 4 And Abram went, as the Lord had told him to, and Lot left with him. . . . 5 And Abram took his wife Sara and his brother's son Lot and all their possessions that they had acquired and every person whom they had acquired in Charran, and they departed to go to the land of Chanaan, and they came to the land of Chanaan. 6 And Abram passed through the land in its length as far as the place Sychem, at the high oak. . . . 7 And the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "To your offspring I will give this land." And Abram built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. 8 And from there he withdrew to the mountain to the east of Baithel and set up his tent there . . . and there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. 9 And Abram set out, and as he traveled he encamped in the wilderness. (NETS)

The opening of the narrative featuring Sara and her family in the LXX depicts her as a largely passive figure who is primarily defined in the negative.²⁴ Oddly, however, what is revealed here about her biology has greater impact on the broader plot of the story, and more enduring thematic significance, than the narrative data of any other character in these introductory verses (11:26–32). Sara first appears as one constituent of a collective object: "And Abram and Nahor took women for themselves; the name of Abram's woman was Sara, and the name of Nahor's woman was Milcah, daughter of Haran, father of Milcah and father of Iscah" (v. 29).²⁵ In parallel with Milcah, Sara is a woman, taken in marriage, and necessarily less powerful than the man who takes her. But an important personal deficit is also highlighted by Sara's juxtaposition with Milcah. In distinction from everyone else in vv. 10–29, Sara lacks a

24. See my note above on Sar(r)a's name. In the discussion below I follow the Greek in referring to her as Sara (Σάρα) until 17:15, Sarra (Σάρρα) thereafter; the same principle is operative in my references to Abra(a)m. For other familiar characters and toponyms I have generally favored spellings consistent with the English tradition of which the RSV is a part, rather than Hellenizing them as NETS does—that is, "Terah," "Pharaoh," "Ishmael," and "Sodom," not "Thara," "Pharao," "Ismael," and "Sodoma." I cannot see a particular advantage in pressing this convention, which in any case is not uniformly employed in NETS: if Abram flees a famine in "Chanaan" (12:5), by rights he should go to "Aigyptos," not "Egypt," in v. 10.

25. καὶ ἔλαβον Ἀβράμ καὶ Ναχώρ ἑαυτοῖς γυναῖκας· ὄνομα τῆς γυναίκης Ἀβράμ Σάρα, καὶ ὄνομα τῆς γυναίκης Ναχώρ Μελχά, θυγάτηρ Ἀρράν, πατήρ Μελχά καὶ πατήρ Ἰεσχά.

father and thus, by implication, a family of origin; she possesses only her sexual-social marriage connection with Abram.

Sara’s absence of ancestors quickly finds an analogue in her lack of descendants: “And Sara was sterile and was not bearing children” (καὶ ἦν Σάρα στειρά καὶ οὐκ ἔτεκνοποίει, 11:30).²⁶ Sara’s subjectivity here, a grammatical privilege she will not again exercise alone in a meaningful way until her conflict with Hagar in Gen 16, is almost purely negative: she is “sterile,” wanting and empty by definition, while the only dynamic verb of which she is subject paradoxically describes merely what she has never done and continues not to do.²⁷ However, this particular want and lack of action will undergird, and at times dominate, the narrative matter of a substantial number of episodes to come.

It is plain at a casual reading that the LXX of 11:26–12:9 is, in general, strikingly similar to the relevant text of the MT. Even at this early point, though, minor distinctions can be felt. Already, Sara’s childless state has been described by the narrator in terms that may convey a feeling of permanence. That Sara “was not bearing children,” “could not bear children,” or even “kept on not bearing children” (οὐκ ἔτεκνοποίει, 11:30), as the imperfect verb might be variously rendered, augments the force of the flat adjective “sterile” to emphasize her enduring condition.²⁸ This is perhaps less obvious in the MT’s corresponding, matter-of-fact noun phrase, “she had no child” (אין לה וילד), which likewise reinforces the Hebrew term for “infertile” or “sterile” (עקרה), but without a similar implication of continuation or story-time futurity. The Greek’s verbal formulation, too, necessarily personalizes the concept in a way that may add moral heft: “she had no child” in contrast with, perhaps, “she continued to fail to give birth.” These are small

26. In this context, rendering στειρά as “sterile” seems justified given that the words are related; in others, the somewhat less clinical “infertile” might be preferable. Either are better than NETS’s “barren,” an unfortunate biblicalism that, in NETS, is a legacy of the KJV-ASV-RSV-NRSV tradition.

27. While Sara technically serves as the grammatical subject of several verbs in Gen 12, the only one that is not a form of the copulative εἰμί is the imperative εἶπον (correctly so accented; see note below) in v. 13—hardly an expression of agency. Furthermore, two of the three instances of εἰμί are actually spoken by Abram (vv. 11, 13); the other (v. 14) is narratorial.

28. Compare Brayford, *Genesis*, 289. See Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), § 1889–1909.

contentions, operating within the realm of possibility; οὐκ ἔτεκνοποίηι could also simply mean “she had not borne a child.” But the latitude I claim here is not taken by force; rather, it is granted by the grammar and idiom of the medium of the narrative.

Another small versional crack opens up in Sara’s name itself. As noted in Chapter 3, the MT’s שָׂרַי evokes dominion and mastery. At times, juxtaposed with Sarai’s powerlessness, this regal name provoked only a sad irony; at others, however, its connotation of domineering ownership proved especially apt. But this entire interplay is more than absent here: it is not even a thought. Sara’s name in the LXX is a small agglutination of syllables with no meaning beyond its immediate referent: Σά-ρα.

Sara’s passivity, too, while certainly not lacking in the MT’s presentation, is just slightly more thorough here. Her enduring failure to give birth gives an impression of inertia from the start. Then, instead of exercising subjectivity alongside her family members at their departure from “Chaldean” territory, as in the MT—“they went out together . . . and they went as far as Haran and settled there” (ויצאו אתם . . . ויבאו עד-הרן וישבו שם)—Sara in the LXX forms part of a collective object “led out” by Terah, Abram’s father, who is also the sole subject of the following verbs: “he led them out . . . and he went as far as Haran, and he settled there” (ἐξήγαγεν αὐτούς . . . καὶ ἦλθεν ἕως Χαρράν, καὶ κατώκησεν ἐκεῖ, 11:31). Naturally, this means that Abram is here depicted as more passive, as well; but very soon in the discourse Abram’s importance is underlined, as he is favored with the first of a series of direct divine revelations (12:1–3).²⁹ In response to the Lord’s command and pledge here, Abram adopts the role formerly played by his father, journeying on and taking Sara along (vv. 4–5). While Sara may still be plausibly postulated as a constituent of the plural subjects in the verbs that follow (ἐκτίσαντο twice; ἐξήλθοσαν; ἦλθον), her complete lack of subjectivity in the family’s travels up to this point—as distinguished from Abram and Lot, who both feature as solo subjects of finite verbs of movement in v. 4—suggests, to my reading, that she is somewhat less convincing as a key, active agent in

29. In story time, the situation is quite different, as Terah’s time in Haran before his death is given as 205 years (11:32). In the MT this figure is Terah’s entire lifespan.

this corporate acquiring, departing, and arriving. As in the MT, too, the discourse goes on to feature Abram as the singular subject of a relative flurry of verbs, as he travels through the land, builds altars, settles here and there, and invokes the Lord's name (vv. 6–9).

In the introduction to Sara's story in the LXX, then, there is indisputably much that is familiar from her characterization in the MT. She is a "woman of," a wife taken and lacking in power and family connections. Though sexually possessed she is apparently infertile; she is thus defined from the start by what she does not have and what she has failed to do. These deficits are answered to some degree by Sara's gains in 12:5, where she seems to be accorded possessions (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα) and slaves (ψυχὴν) alongside Abram and Lot.³⁰ This ownership of humans and its attendant implied conflicts anticipates Sara's treatment of Hagar later.

But certain discontinuities also begin to emerge. The suggestion that Sara's reproductive dysfunction is an indefinitely enduring state heightens the drama of this element going forward, and raises the issue of her utility to God's plans, a theme that will come to greater prominence later; immediately, though, this note ratchets up the tension between the Lord's promises of descendants to Abram (12:2, 7) and the seemingly limited biological potential of his and Sara's sexual relationship. Sara's responsibility for this shortcoming is likewise underlined by her role as personal subject of the failure: "she kept on not bearing children" (11:30). In general, however, what disparities exist seem rooted in a kind of subtle muting of Sara's character. Her agency is virtually nonexistent, at least until 12:5, and her portrait is the poorer for lacking entirely the delicate and multivalent play with her name that is possible in the Hebrew.

Two points, both touching on narrative primacy and recency, are worth mentioning here. First, it is notable how thoroughly Sara's initial character indicators are bound to those of other characters. Even the direct narratorial assertions of infertility and ongoing failure to give birth

30. As noted in Chapter 3, it is not clear whether the Hebrew שפנ should be taken as a collective; the Greek, however, with its repetition of πᾶς, seems to make this explicit: "all their possessions . . . and every person" (πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτῶν . . . καὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν). While disputing that a "new sense" of ψυχὴ as "slave" is established by its usage here, J. A. L. Lee, "Note," 234–35, concedes that "household slaves" is what is meant.

can only be comprehended with reference to her social ties. As the narrative moves on, however, these notes, which might be taken for signs of connectedness, may begin to look more like early intimations of Sara's lack of individuation. Second, all these early elements—continuities no less than discontinuities—matter, to reiterate a larger point about narrative meaning, because they initiate the reader into contact with a character and thus prepare the ground for later interaction. When considered together, these elements suggest traits that subtly shift the burden of proof in the detection or construction of traits later. Sara is a “woman of,” in the power of Abram, which helps to explain her powerlessness in Egypt. Again, this is not less central to Sara's characterization in the LXX because it precisely echoes the MT; however, it is hardly news. But Sara's slightly increased passivity in the LXX combines with this lack of power to make it just a little less likely that she exercise any agency in the gaps of the Egyptian tale. Later gaps, in turn, are just that much less likely, to my mind, to be plausibly filled with resolute action; on the flip side, however, a discourse-cued break in this inertia, such as appears in Sara's first conflict with Hagar in Gen 16, is all the more startling. Thus discontinuities that are tiny within themselves—and especially those that open in the beginning of the linear course of a narrative—may have exponential, rather than simple arithmetic, effects.

Passive and “Pretty-faced” in Egypt (Gen 12:10–13:2 LXX)

Gen 12:10 And a famine occurred upon the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine prevailed upon the land. 11 And it came about when Abram drew near to enter into Egypt that Abram said to his wife Sara, “I do know that you are a woman beautiful in countenance; 12 it will be, therefore, that should the Egyptians see you, they will say ‘This is his wife,’ and they will kill me, but you they will keep for themselves. 13 Say, therefore, ‘I am his sister,’ so that it may go well with me because of you, and my soul will live on your account.” 14 And it came about when Abram entered into Egypt—as the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful— 15 that then the rulers of Pharaoh saw her and praised her to Pharaoh and brought her into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake they dealt well with Abram, and he had sheep and calves and donkeys, male and female slaves, mules and camels. 17 And God tried Pharaoh and his house with great and grievous trials because of Sara, Abram's wife. 18 Now when Pharaoh had called Abram he said, “What is this you have done to me, that you did not tell me that she is your wife? 19 Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?”

And I took her to myself for a wife. And now here is your wife before you; take her; hurry off.” 20 And Pharaoh commanded men concerning Abram to join in escorting him and his wife and all that he had and Lot with him. 13:1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that was his and Lot with him, into the wilderness. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock and in silver and in gold. (NETS)

The decision of Abram to go down to Egypt “in order to take refuge” or “seek asylum” (παροικῆσαι) may not have been hastily taken. Although matters are perhaps not improved by his earlier choice to camp “in the desert” (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, 12:9), a “famine” (λιμός) that had developed “held fast,” or “only grew in strength” (ἐνίσχυσεν), apparently forcing a move for Abram—and, by natural extension, for “Sara his woman,” who continues to display almost no agency in this episode (v. 10; compare v. 11).³¹ However, it becomes clear that Abram’s mind is not idle during this journey, and that hunger, even if the proximate cause for the family’s descent, is far from Abram’s central concern; in fact, want of food merits no mention in the rest of the tale. When he is “just about to enter” (ἤγγισεν . . . εἰσελθεῖν) this place of refuge, Abram pulls aside Sara, “his woman,” and addresses her in a brusque, businesslike manner:

*I know that you are a pretty-faced woman. This fact means that as soon as the Egyptian men catch sight of you, they will say “This is his woman,” and they will kill me; but you they will save—for later. Accordingly, say “I am his sister,” in order that it accrue to my advantage because of you, and I will go on living in return for you.*³²

Abram’s speech does not aim to persuade. It is ruthlessly if only formally logical and delivered in the expectation of compliance: a superior relaying to his subordinate a decision that has already been taken. That this pronouncement receives no reply is unsurprising, as it

31. On the evidence of 12:20, Lot also accompanies Abram to Egypt. Although he plays no apparent role in Egypt, v. 20 seems to attribute more agency to Lot than Sara shows throughout the episode; see further below. See *GELS* 239a for ἐνισχύω as “to grow in intensity and severity, gain strength.”

32. Γινώσκω ἐγὼ ὅτι γυνὴ εὐπρόσωπος εἶ· ἔσται οὖν ὡς ἂν ἴδωσίν σε οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι, ἐροῦσιν ὅτι Γυνὴ αὐτοῦ αὕτη, καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσίν με, σὲ δὲ περιποιήσονται. εἰπὼν [should read εἶπον, see Wevers, *Notes*, 170] οὖν ὅτι Ἄδελφὴ αὐτοῦ εἰμι, ὅπως ἂν εὖ μοι γένηται διὰ σέ, καὶ ζήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕνεκεν σοῦ (12:11–13). Contrary to the rendering of NETS, ὡς is best understood as a temporal conjunction, as Wevers, *Notes*, 170, correctly points out. See also *GELS* 749a; LSJ 2038b; and Smyth §§ 2383, 2399, 3000. Smyth’s emphasis on the construction’s rarity seems due to his classical focus; LSJ cites a third-century BCE papyrus and 1 Cor 11:34 here. The construction of the latter, ὡς ἂν ἔλθω διατάξομαι, is an excellent parallel to Gen 12:12 LXX. Incidentally, the 1 Corinthians passage also shows that the modal force of the subjunctive is overdone in NETS (“should the Egyptians see you”). There is no uncertainty, only futurity, expressed in either subjunctive.

anticipates none. Sara’s part in this deception is already scripted, and delivered as an order, not a suggestion or a request: “Say ‘I am his sister.’” Even the implied expectation of derivative action here—that Sara will parrot the line Abram gives her—is not fulfilled, however, as Sara remains silent throughout the episode.

In keeping with the practical tone of his address, Abram’s direct assertion that Sara is “pretty-faced” (εὐπρόσωπος) reads less as flattery than as an admission of an initial operational hurdle. This is underlined by his inferential connection of this evaluation to the events that he forecasts: “You are pretty-faced; therefore (οὖν) . . .” The deceptive context is subtly filled out by Abram’s employment of this adjective, which occurs just this once in the whole of the LXX and the OG. Εὐπρόσωπος or “pretty-faced” can mean just that—an outward, surface charm that may hide something false within—and the word is employed elsewhere as a metaphor for specious display.³³ The subsequent evaluations and actions of other characters in this scene, however, tend to confirm only the aesthetic component of Abram’s description. The Egyptian men are soon said to note that “the woman” is “exceedingly beautiful” (καλή . . . σφόδρα, 12:14), and the praise of Pharaoh’s retainers, as well as their implied motive for abducting her, likewise follows directly upon their setting eyes on her (v. 15). Indeed, this latter adjective frequently extends to virtues of personality, emphasizing, in direct contrast to εὐπρόσωπος, the identity of outward form and inward excellence.³⁴ This could anticipate the poem in praise of Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon (20.2–8), where she is lauded not only for her beauty, but also for her wisdom and fine handiwork.³⁵ In any case, again, there is no evidence here that Sara voices the false script that

33. Compare Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.168: “While [the Corcyraeans] replied in this way, with outward charm” (ὑπεκρίναντο μὲν οὕτω εὐπρόσωπα), when their help was needed they betrayed their promise. See LSJ 728b. Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 22, hesitantly suggest that the rendering of יפת־מראה as εὐπρόσωπος reflects a concern for Sara’s modesty: Abram remarks on Sara’s “face” because that is her only exposed feature.

34. Although καλός can be employed ironically to indicate its opposite, this is a sarcastic rhetorical trope, not the metaphorical extension that marks the use of εὐπρόσωπος referred to above. See LSJ 870a; a good example from their list is Demosthenes, 9.65 (3 *Philip*): καλήν . . . χάριν, referring sarcastically to the “fine thank-you” those of Oreus received for throwing their lot in with supporters of Philip.

35. See the relevant discussion in Chapter 5.

Abram writes for her. Pharaoh, significantly, mentions only Abram's deception in his later interrogation: "What is this you did to me—namely, you did not inform me that she is your woman? Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" (vv. 18–19).³⁶ Abram's characterization of Sara as "outwardly fair," then, seems to speak only to his estimation of her worth in his plan here, and need not imply any overt collaboration on her part.

The remainder of Abram's short speech is marked, first, by coercion, which combines a veiled threat with an implied benefit to Sara. This element is curiously undercut by a second, however, in which Abram admits, with startling candor, that only he stands to gain from his proposed scheme. If their true relationship is known, Abram claims, Sara's pretty face will prompt the Egyptians to "murder" (ἀποκτείνω) him; "but you," he says, "they will keep alive" (σὲ δὲ περιποιήσονται, 12:12). That "to let live" is part of the meaning of περιποιέω here is confirmed by its contrast with ἀποκτείνω, as in some other LXX instances of the word, such as Exod 1:16: "if it is male, kill it; if female, preserve it alive."³⁷ In the circumstances, according to Abram, even Sara's putative survival implies hazard. This tacit message is further underlined, however, by the semantic range of περιποιέω, which, especially in the middle voice, as here, often means "to acquire," or "preserve for oneself"; the other two occurrences of the word in Genesis refer to the acquisition and possession of movable property.³⁸ Abram's attempt at coercing Sara's lie thus suggests that the alternative is to invite abduction; in a bald irony, of course, this is precisely the outcome of his machinations.³⁹

36. Τί τοῦτο ἐποίησάς μοι, ὅτι οὐκ ἀπήγγειλάς μοι ὅτι γυνή σου ἐστίν; ἵνα τί εἶπας ὅτι Ἀδελφή μου ἐστίν; The first ὅτι is epxegetical; compare Smyth § 2577.

37. ἐάν μὲν ἄρσεν ἢ ἀποκτείνετε αὐτό ἐάν δὲ θήλυ περιποιεῖσθε αὐτό. Compare Num 22:33. Brayford, *Genesis*, 67, 291, pushes too hard here for an exclusive meaning of "you they will keep for themselves" (compare NETS). This is a fine rendering where a decision has to be made, but Brayford's emphasis on its "contrast" with the MT is overstated, as the citations noted here demonstrate. See also Brayford, "Taming and Shaming," 198–99, where, however, her discussion is more balanced.

38. See Gen 31:18, where its objects are τὰ ὑπάρκοντα, "possessions," and τὴν ἀποσκευήν, "gear"; compare the similar 36:6.

39. Brayford, *Genesis*, 291, seems to miss this in stating that "Abram's predictions," including that of Sara's abduction, "come true"; his oblique prediction of Sara's captivity, rather, is conditional and based upon the truth of their relationship being known. In the event, however, Sara is returned to Abram precisely because of Pharaoh's apprehension of this truth (12:19).

That Abram's proposition is no miscalculation, but rather cynical from the start, however, is shown by its stated desired results. Abram neatly turns the supposed complication, Sara's pretty face, into a strategic advantage by advocating an outward revision of their relationship: "Say 'I am his sister.'" This script is urged "in order that" (ὅπως) two related outcomes occur. Dropping any pretense of benefit to Sara, Abram's hopes are that events "turn out" to his "advantage," "because of" her (εὖ . . . γένηται διὰ), and that he continue to live "in return for" her (ἔνεκεν, 12:13). This last preposition may help to underline the transactional nature of Abram's proposal. In what seems to be a semantic extension dating from about the time of the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, ἔνεκεν, radically "on account of," or "for," comes to be used in contexts of frank exchange, such as Isa 5:23, where a "woe" is spoken to "those who vindicate the impious in return for gifts" (οἱ δικαιούντες τὸν ἀσηβῆ ἔνεκεν δώρων).⁴⁰

What is Sara's reaction to Abram's order, so replete with efficient selfishness? Does she reply? Does she offer silent consent, or quietly resist? The outcome makes it unlikely that she voices opposition from the start, and her passivity to this point in the broader narrative does not encourage the supposition of decisive action; but the discourse here offers no clues whatsoever. And what motives may be operative for Sara, whether she acts or does not? To consider only the coercive arguments Abram adduces for her compliance, Sara may tacitly agree, in the hopes of saving his life, or that "an advantage accrue" to his account; or perhaps she goes along out of fear of being "kept," alive and in the possession of the Egyptians. The possibility of the former may be strengthened by Sara's demonstrated interest in advancing Abram's prospects later, in her disposal of Hagar (16:2). If, on the other hand, the latter consideration induces her to voice or assent to the lie, this can only add to the rude shock of being treated exactly as Abram predicted she would be in the absence of such deception. For after the Egyptian men notice this apparently unattached "woman," due to her remarkable attractiveness, Pharaoh's courtiers praise her to their

40. See also Amos 2:6; the usage of ἔνεκεν in Mark 10:29–30 and parallels (Matt 19:29; Luke 18:29–30) also suggests reciprocity. According to *GELS* 237a, this extension of meaning is not attested before the OG / LXX materials; compare xiii; LSJ 563a.

superior and summarily bring her “into Pharaoh’s house” (12:14–15).⁴¹ These actions are likewise presumably tied to Sara’s beauty, and undertaken with the aim of making her sexually available to Pharaoh. That this plan succeeds is later confirmed when Pharaoh declares, “I took her for myself as a woman” or “wife” (ἔλαβον αὐτήν ἐμαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα, v. 19).⁴² The discourse is, again, permanently silent on Sara’s reaction to being used in this way. Easy to surmise, however, are Abram’s feelings subsequent to being “well used” (εὖ χρᾶομαι) by the Egyptian rulers “because of her” (δι’ αὐτήν), as he comes into a lengthy list of valuable domestic animals and slaves (12:16).⁴³ After all, such an outcome was part of the projected result of his ploy: “Say ‘I am his sister,’ in order that it accrue to my advantage because of you” (v. 13).

Others are not so fortunate, however: “in connection with Sara the woman of Abram” (περὶ Σάρας τῆς γυναικὸς Ἀβράμ), “God tested Pharaoh with serious and painful tests, along with his household” (ἤτασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν Φαραῶ ἐτασμοῖς μεγάλοις καὶ πονηροῖς καὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ, 12:17).⁴⁴ How Pharaoh comes to the conclusion that these divine “tests” are the result of his being taken in by Abram’s deception, and thus that the restoration of Sara to Abram is the necessary remedy, is completely submerged; in fact, that Pharaoh’s action rectifies the situation, from his perspective and that of his dependents, is only implied. But Sara, having been taken, physically and sexually, by Pharaoh, is taken back by Abram, and is suitably counted among Abram’s assets when Pharaoh’s men escort him out “along with his woman and everything that was his” (καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἦν αὐτῷ, v. 20). Sara’s passivity and

41. The syntax of the early part of this section is awkward: ἰδόντες οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τὴν γυναῖκα ὅτι καλὴ ἦν σφόδρα, καὶ εἶδον αὐτήν οἱ ἄρχοντες Φαραῶ καὶ ἐπῆνεσαν αὐτήν πρὸς Φαραῶ καὶ εἰσήγαγον αὐτήν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Φαραῶ. Compare 21:9–10.

42. εἰς here seems to indicate the purpose for which the action was taken; see LSJ 492a (A.V.2). However, Wevers, *Notes*, 173, suggests that this is simply an attempt to render πῶς precisely, and that the omission of the preposition in other strands of the Greek tradition shows that it is superfluous to the sense, which is as easily reached by apposition. Compare 16:3, where the same Hebrew idiom is rendered without a preposition, according to Wevers’s text—but note that the Greek tradition is divided here, too.

43. The near context makes it clear that these παιδες and παιδίσκαι, numbered among domestic animals, are slaves (compare 20:14). *GELS* 519b–520a arranges various words indicative of servile status in a hierarchy, claiming that παιδίσκη is socially superior to δούλη. While this may hold in other contexts, neither δούλη nor its masculine counterpart appear in LXX Genesis. Hagar is consistently described as παιδίσκη in Gen 16 and 21.

44. See *GELS* 545b, 576a; LSJ 700a–b (compare Supplement 135a), 1447b. Note ὁ θεός for MT יהוה here.

subordination are only emphasized by Lot's relative agency here: "and Lot was with him" (καὶ Λὼτ μετ' αὐτοῦ). Abram's state at his ascent from Egypt (13:1) provides a stark contrast to the want that prompted his descent: as a direct result of the trade of Sara's person, so "exceedingly beautiful" (καλή . . . σφόδρα, v. 14), Abram has become "exceedingly wealthy" (πλούσιος σφόδρα, 13:2; compare 12:16).

There are a number of versional continuities between Sara's characterization here, and that of Sarai in the relevant portion of the MT. As I have emphasized, these elements are not therefore less important to the construction of Sara in the LXX, but their relative familiarity means that they need not be rehearsed at length here. Sara in Egypt continues to be a "woman of," here further defined as a valuable object taken and possessed physically and sexually by two men in turn. She is notable for her beauty, though in the event this is nearly all to her detriment. There is no indication that Sara collaborates in Abram's deception; rather, her role is that of a trafficked and traded victim, and she lacks both security and freedom, along with power, volition—and a child. Having acquired slaves previously (12:5), Sara is sold here; but her family, at least in the person of Abram, makes huge gains as a result. Used and abused in Egypt, Sara may find that the use and abuse of her own subordinates come more easily.

But the tradition also features what seem to be developments. Sara here is brusquely ordered about, her passive compliance assumed; she is not the object of persuasion, however deceptive, as in the MT, but the focus of blunt, imperative coercion. That she is not portrayed as needing to be persuaded, or, perhaps better, as being worthy of the effort, points to a figure with a very low degree of agency. This reinforces an image of Sara first built in the introductory section of the narrative, where, except for 12:5, Sara is almost entirely passive. This is further underlined in the event of God's intervention in Egypt. Here, as in the MT, the deity's action cannot be described simply as a rescue of Sara. Again, these "tests" (v. 17) must be a response to Pharaoh's objective violation of Abram's rightful ownership of Sara; that this is not a story of liberation is proved by the outcome, which sees Sara restored to the man who originally traded her for gain

under false pretenses (v. 19). Likewise, the bare fact of divine intervention suggests, with the MT, that matters are out of Sara's control. But the lexical content and syntax of the LXX also preclude, at least at the discourse level, even the remote possibility of Sara's agency in the house of Pharaoh, which some maintain may be hinted at by the MT's *על-דבר שרי אשת אברם*.⁴⁵ God's tests here are *περι Σάρας τῆς γυναικὸς Ἀβράμ*, "in connection with Sara the woman of Abram": her relationship to Abram is the significant datum here, and she could just as easily be an inanimate object as a sentient actor. Proposals for any kind of agency on the part of Sara in Egypt in the LXX would have to float, *ex nihilo*, purely in the narrative's gaps. Without even a hint of her volition in the discourse to this point, however, this seems a dubious enterprise. In short, the passivity of Sara in the LXX indicates not only that she is less likely to be a collaborator with Abram in his scheme, but also that she is less likely to be in any way instrumental to her release from Pharaoh's house.

It may also be useful to suggest, in prospect, two related aspects of Sara's characterization in the LXX that achieve what might be called inverse traction as compared to the MT narrative. Although the element of Sara being "worthy of notice" in Egypt remains salient here, the broader motif of her sensitivity to the opinions of others may have somewhat lower valency in the narrative to come. Notably, her reaction to Isaac's birth lacks the kind of morbid attention to this matter that is suggested in the MT. However, Abram's description of Sara as "pretty-faced" may lay the foundation for another minor motif going forward. In distinction to the MT, Abram's remark here anticipates later notes about Sara's "face," and its implication of deception may help to illuminate the outwardly similar episode in the court of Abimelech.

45. See, among others, van Dijk-Hemmes, "Sarai in Exile," 143, and the relevant discussion in my Chapter 3. As I argue there, I think the simplest reading of this Hebrew phrase is "because of Sarai the woman of Abram," which, incidentally, is supported by the LXX version here. But the suggestion that *על-דבר* refers to an act of speech or prayer is at least a possible reading, and the proposal has attracted the support of several careful scholars.

Silence and Stress (Gen 13:2–15:21 LXX)

As in the MT, Sara vanishes from the discourse of the LXX after the ascent from Egypt in 13:1, only reappearing in 16:1, in the first episode featuring Hagar. This suspension and resumption of a discourse-level role for Sara invites inquiry into connections that may exist between her treatment in Egypt and her subsequent disposition of her slave, though, as discussed below, these links are constructed rather differently in the LXX. However, a number of details in the intervening narrative that may have relevance for the characterization of Sara are best described as versional continuities, and thus can be briefly summarized here. The departure of Lot and his dependents, whose presence is suggested by σκηναί (13:5), is precipitated by the kind of acquisitions highlighted in the Egyptian episode: “their possessions were numerous, and they could not live together” (ἦν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτῶν πολλά, καὶ οὐκ ἐδύναντο κατοικεῖν ἅμα, v. 6). The narrative data and gaps that permitted restrained speculation on Sarai’s potential surrogate maternal feelings for Lot in the MT may obtain, to some degree, for Sara in the LXX. However, her pronounced inertia to this point makes it difficult to conceive of significant story-level activity for Sara here. In any event, the trajectory of this note would be rather different, as Sara’s reaction to giving birth to Isaac is markedly less ambiguous in the LXX. As detailed below, Sara displays relatively uncomplicated pleasure at her delivery of her son; any angst at the loss of Lot here, then, might whet her appetite for motherhood, rather than sour her on the possibility.

Acquisition, whether of land, possessions, or offspring, remains a significant motif throughout a second divine pledge to Abram (13:14–18) and Abram’s military expedition (14:1–24), just as in the MT. In Gen 15, Abram’s complaints and demands for assurance finally give voice to the enduring tension between the content of the pledges and the biological conditions essential to their realization: “Master, what will you give me? *I am dying childless!*” (v. 2; see also 3, 8).⁴⁶ For Sara, who continues “not bearing children” (οὐκ ἐτεκνοποίει, 11:30), a point to

46. Δέσποτα, τί μοι δώσεις; ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπολύομαι ἄτεκνος. The usage of ἀπολύομαι for one’s “departure” into death is found, if infrequently, in the classical materials; see *GELS* 79b, and the speech of Creon in the *Antigone* of Sophocles, cited there (1268); compare Harl, *La Genèse*, 163, who, however, gives no references.

be taken up again immediately upon her return to the discourse (16:1), this emotional stress may spill over into her consciousness. While Sara's awareness of the content of the promises remains a matter of speculation, the open and public nature of Abram's responses to divine revelation (12:4–5, 7–8; 13:18; 15:5, 10–11, and perhaps 17) may suggest that her ignorance is not total.

Broken Inertia, Blurred Gender, and Misused Agency (Gen 16:1–16 LXX)

Gen 16:1 Now Sara, Abram's wife, was not giving birth for him. She, however, had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sara said to Abram, "See, the Lord has shut me off from giving birth; so go in to my slave-girl in order that you may beget children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sara. 3 And after ten years of Abram's living in the land of Chanaan, Sara, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her own slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife for him. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And she saw that she was pregnant, and her mistress was dishonored before her. 5 Then Sara said to Abram, "I am being wronged due to you! I have given my slave-girl into your bosom, but when she saw that she was pregnant, I was dishonored before her. May God judge between you and me!" 6 But Abram said to Sara, "See, your slave-girl is in your hands; treat her as it may please you." And Sara maltreated her, and she ran from her presence. 7 But the Lord God's angel found her by the spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Sour. 8 And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sara, where are you coming from, and where are you going?" And she said, "I am running from the presence of my mistress Sara." 9 But the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and humble yourself under her hands." . . . 15 And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore him, Ismael. 16 And Abram was eighty-six years of age when Hagar bore Abram Ismael. (NETS)

This episode marks a significant transition for Sara in the LXX, as she appears to shed the torpor that has previously held her suspended. In the presentation of her seemingly abrupt and resolute actions, moreover, themes quietly emerge that will grow in prominence as the narrative moves on. These themes, however, will actually work to limit Sara's definition. Here, for the first time, Sara demonstrates what looks like agency—but, as will be seen repeatedly, the price of Sara's agency seems to be that it be primarily exercised in imitation of Abram. Sara's individuation is also stymied here, and not for the last time, by a related motif that sees her potential for initiative undermined. To explore these and other elements of these laconic but

dense scenes, I will first look back to discuss a note from Gen 15, unique to the LXX among the narratives considered in this study, that suggests that Sara’s idea of obtaining an heir for Abram from a slave is in fact derivative of an earlier impulse of Abram himself. Subsequently I consider the quality of other connections between this episode and prior narrative data, concluding that a number of these ties also point to Sara’s growing resemblance to Abram. This note of restriction to Sara’s individuation is underscored further in the following section, where I treat several instances of gender ambiguity in the characters’ speech, suggesting that this also serves to blur the distinctions between Sara and Abram. Finally, I examine Sara’s relationship with Hagar in these scenes; again, a central theme is Sara’s adoption of a role previously associated with Abram, as she reinscribes her own treatment at his hands in Egypt.

An Heir from a Slave?

The friction between the repeated pledges of Gen 15 and the initial complication of the episode in Gen 16 is plain. The Lord may promise the land from Egypt to Mesopotamia to Abram’s offspring (15:18)—“but Sara, Abram’s woman, kept on not giving birth for him” (Σάρα δὲ ἡ γυνὴ Ἀβραὰμ οὐκ ἔτικτεν αὐτῷ, 16:1a). The imperfect here reinforces the enduring nature of Sara’s infertility, first established in 11:30.⁴⁷ Now, though, Sara’s ongoing deficit is balanced by a significant possession: “However, she had an Egyptian slave, whose name was Hagar” (ἦν δὲ αὐτῇ παιδίσκη Αἰγυπτία, ἧ ὄνομα Ἀγάρ, v. 1b).⁴⁸ The implication that the fertility of her female

47. The occasion of these imperfects may help to illustrate one of my basic contentions, which is that the complexion of a derivative or rewritten narrative is revealed not only by comparison or contrast with its inspiration, but also by what might be called the horizontal play of elements within the derivative narrative itself. The imperfect here is not less significant to an analysis of the character of the LXX because it represents a verbal construction in the MT that may be also best rendered in a durative sense (as I suggest in a note in Chapter 3); rather, it is more significant due to its recollection of the imperfect in 11:30. This is a simple point, but not, I think, an entirely simplistic one, as the nature of the task prompted by the material can encourage a more limited synoptic view. Compare Brayford, *Genesis*, 289, 301, who ably notes the force of the imperfect in both contexts but does not explicitly tie them together (though perhaps her “still not bearing,” 301, is meant to imply this). Harl, *La Genèse*, 151, 167, makes no comment in either location. Contrast Wevers, *Notes*, 159, 217, who does mention the connection.

48. As noted above, the question of whether παιδίσκη may occupy a slightly different place than that of δούλη in a slave hierarchy in the broader Greek lexicon is not helpful here, as δούλη does not appear in Genesis. Hagar is uniformly called παιδίσκη in the LXX, and her treatment in the present episode is evidence enough that she is no “maid” or “servant,” but the slave of Sara.

slave might be thought to constitute part of the solution to Sara’s problem is confirmed soon enough, as Sara urges Abram to “enter” Hagar in order to obtain the offspring that the Lord has prevented Sara from bearing (v. 2). However, even before Sara speaks here, for the first time in the discourse, this notion may generate a small tug of familiarity—for Hagar, in the LXX, is not the first slave proposed as a surrogate mother to Abram’s heir.

Some time after Abram’s military raid, the deity communicates verbally with Abram yet again—this time, somehow, in a “vision” (ὄραμα, 15:1). In this instance, however, Abram talks back for the first time:

But Abram said, “Master, what will you give me? *I* am dying childless; but the son of Masek, my houseborn female slave—he is Damascus Eliezer.” And Abram said, “Since you didn’t give me offspring, my houseborn male slave will be my heir.” (15:2–3)⁴⁹

What is interesting here is the abrupt birth in translation of the minor character Masek, a woman among the household’s οἰκογενεῖς, or “houseborn slaves.”⁵⁰ Faced with the perplexing בן־משק ביתי, the translator has apparently taken משק as a proper noun, then construed ביתי as descriptive of this person’s role, probably under the influence of בן־ביתי in the following verse.⁵¹

49. λέγει δὲ Ἀβράμ Δέσποτα, τί μοι δώσεις; ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπολύομαι ἄτεκνος· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς Μάσεκ τῆς οἰκογενεοῦς μου, οὗτος Δαμασκὸς Ἐλιέζερ. καὶ εἶπεν Ἀβράμ Ἐπειδὴ ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔδωκας σπέρμα, ὁ δὲ οἰκογενῆς μου κληρονομήσει με. λέγει is a historical present; compare Wevers, *Notes*, 202. Κληρονομέω plus an accusative of the person seems to have been rare in earlier Greek (LSJ 959b). Σπέρμα, on the other hand, is used of offspring in classical poetry (LSJ 1626).

50. The same individual is also mentioned, in the same context, in at least the Ge’ez tradition of Jubilees (14:2), which is thought to have been rendered from a Greek translation of the original Hebrew (O. S. Wintermute, trans., “Jubilees,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth [New York: Doubleday, 1985], 41–43). Unfortunately this passage is not extant in Hebrew, leaving open questions of the influence of the LXX tradition on the *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic here. 4Q225 (4QPseudo-Jubilees^a) 2 I, 3 seems to omit the problematic בן־משק ביתי altogether, reading [עזר] ואלי [עזר] בא עררי ואלי [עזר], or “my Lord, I am continuing childless and Eli[ezer] . . .” (James C. VanderKam and J. T. Milik, eds., “225. 4QPseudo-Jubilees^a,” in *Qumran Cave 4, VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 1*, Harold Attridge, et al., DJD 13 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994], 145). “The sons of Masek” are mentioned in the Testament of Abraham 2, Recension A. With reference to the οἰκογενεῖς, these slaves, also mentioned in 14:14 and 17:12–13, 23, 27, often appear in parallel with those “money-bought” (ἀργυρωνήτοι); there is no clear indication of a distinction in status between these groups. Οἰκογενῆς is always employed as a substantive in the LXX and OG. Compare Exod 12:44; Lev 22:11; Eccl 2:7, Jer 2:14. See GELS 488a–b and the evidence from Oxyrhynchus cited there; compare LSJ 1203b.

51. בן־משק ביתי, while involving a root that is “wholly dubious,” in the memorable evaluation of BDB (606b), seems to mean “the son of the acquisition of my house,” or “the one who pours libations on my grave”; in either case, something like “my heir.” The immediate context weighs heavily in both of these proposals. See the relevant note in Chapter 3. The translator’s solution here does not eliminate all ambiguity, as the connection between

As Wevers notes, however, the “use of the feminine term [τῆς οἰκογενοῦς] is striking,” and may cast this little bit of dialogue as a prospective “analogue” to Sara’s offer of Hagar.⁵² The fraught theme of the offspring of a slave potentially serving as a son and heir to Abram is thus anticipated by Abram himself, in the first of a series of interconnected stair-steps: Abram’s idea is that his heir will be the son of his slave Masek, not his own; but God denies this, proclaiming that Abram’s heir “will come out of” Abram himself (ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ σοῦ, 15:2–4).⁵³ Subsequently, Sara’s idea is that Abram can obtain children—his own, but not hers—from her slave Hagar (16:2); again, the deity will reject this, at least in terms of inheritance, later predicting that the heir to the covenant will come “out of” Sara, too (ἐξ αὐτῆς, 17:15–21). When Sara herself conceives, she places an exclamation point on the entire, halting process, in language that partly recalls that of 15:2–4: “the son of this slave will not inherit with my son Isaac!” (οὐ . . . κληρονομήσει ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης ταύτης μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαάκ, 21:10). Finally, God confirms this arrangement, and the succession is cemented (v. 12).

The emergence of this theme may be an aesthetic gain for the LXX narrative. For Sara, however, and for her character’s definition against her story context, the foreshadowing contained in the mention of Masek represents a loss. The conceptual content of Sara’s first discourse-level utterance, where she notes the deity’s role in her reproductive quandary and

vv. 2 and 3 is still less than completely clear, and the reference to “Damascus Eliezer” still jars. Compare Wevers, *Notes*, 203–4, who comments on this last point that the LXX “has simply incorporated the Hebrew difficulty holus bolus into the Greek”; see also Harl, *La Genèse*, 163: “La dernière proposition de ce verset n’est pas plus claire en grec que dans le TM.”

52. Wevers, *Notes*, 203. The correspondence may be noted, I would contend, whether or not it were “intended,” as Wevers suggests. Given her interest in gender issues, it is somewhat surprising that Brayford, *Genesis*, 297–98, makes almost nothing of the mention of Masek. Kevin Christopher Poe, Jr., “Genesis 12–20: A Translation with Commentary,” B.A. Thesis (University of Georgia, 2009), whose title obscures the fact that his work is a rendering of the LXX (1), notes that Abram’s “statement foreshadows Sara’s giving of her maidservant Hagar to Abram” (16). Somewhat puzzlingly, this is a comment on the end of 15:3, but perhaps Abram’s entire speech is meant. Poe offers no citation here, although he is familiar with Wevers’s *Notes* (7, 16, 46).

53. It seems impossible that ὁ . . . υἱός in Wevers’s text of 15:2 express any kind of possessive force (that is, “my son Masek”), given the near context (ἄτεκνος, v. 2; ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔδωκα σπέρμα, v. 3; Οὐ κληρονομήσει σε οὗτος, ἀλλ’ ὃς ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ σοῦ, οὗτος κληρονομήσει σε, v. 4). However, see the interesting variants noted in the apparatus: instead of Μάσεκ in v. 2, several late manuscripts give μου εκ or μου ο εκ, hence ὁ δὲ υἱός μου [ὁ] ἐκ τῆς οἰκογενοῦς or “my son by the female slave,” a reading that anticipates later narrative developments even more explicitly.

suggests that a female slave's offspring might remedy the situation, is strongly reminiscent of Abram's remarks in 15:2–3. This simultaneously casts Sara in Abram's mold and robs her of an opportunity to demonstrate initiative. These connected phenomena, which will recur with frequency in coming episodes, work to erode Sara's individuation just as she begins to exercise some agency in the story.

Questions of Connections

If the device of a slave woman as surrogate casts Sara in the image of Abram, however, the ties between her speech here and that of Abram on the cusp of Egypt are somewhat less pronounced. While the MT features tonal echoes triggered by formal similarities here, the correspondences are less plain in the LXX, especially as it does not uniformly render the MT's initial particle pair הַהֲנִיחַ , found in both 12:11 and 16:2. Instead, where Abram began without preamble ($\Gamma\iota\nu\acute{\omega}\sigma\kappa\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\omega}\ \acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$, “*I know that . . .*”), Sara first calls for Abram's attention: $\text{Ἴδοὺ συνέκλεισέν με κύριος}$, “*Look,*” or “*Listen: the Lord closed me up . . .*” While both addresses are more direct than their MT counterparts, and share, for example, an inferential οὖν with an imperative (12:13; 16:2), the absence of formal agreement in their opening phrases means that the reader is not cued to the speeches' similarities in quite the same way. Moreover, minor details of the surrounding syntax, such as the narrator's introduction of each character's direct speech, differ between the episodes.⁵⁴

These formal differences could indicate a less overt connection in the LXX between Sara's disposition of Hagar and Sara's own experience of ill-treatment in Egypt. The establishment of this link in the MT doesn't depend entirely upon psychological factors, though these play a role, as in any mimetic scheme. Rather, the tie is first cued by lexical and syntactical

54. εἶπεν Ἀβρὰμ Σάρᾳ (12:11) as compared to $\text{εἶπεν . . . Σάρα πρὸς Ἀβρὰμ}$ (16:2); the Hebrew features the same construction in both places, אָל plus אָמַר . The purpose clauses following the imperatives differ in their construction, as well: ὅπως ἄν plus a subjunctive, then a future in 12:13, contrasted with ἵνα plus a subjunctive in 16:2. Again, that this latter disparity also holds in the Hebrew's constructions (לְמַעַן in 12:13, אֲלֵי in 16:2) doesn't mean that the Greek's differences are less significant here. Rather, the internal impression of distinction is strengthened. Note that all of these examples are according to Wevers's text; various late readings differ.

sympathies between the initial discourse-level utterances of Abram and Sara. The intervening mention of Masek, which anticipates Sara’s proposal to a degree, could also be construed as making the connection to Egypt just a bit more tenuous: the concept of utilizing the sexuality or reproductive capacity of a subordinate is thus not solely confined to, first, Abram’s scheme in Egypt and, second, Sara’s plans here.

But this is a complicated set of problems. Small suggestive connections, such as Sara’s use of συγκλείω, which hints at imprisonment, retain their force, and the thematic echoes remain distinct.⁵⁵ There may even be lexical play between the episodes that is peculiar to the Greek, as proposed below. Moreover, Sara’s strange resemblance to, or imitation of Abram, familiar from the MT, begins to be suggested here through avenues that do not exist in the Hebrew. Sara’s idea of obtaining an heir through a female slave in 16:2 recalls Abram’s thought in 15:2–3; her description of Abram’s generative potential uses the same word, τεκνοποιέω, as was first used to describe her lack of such potential (16:2; compare 11:30); and this note, as well as others treated below, participates in a curious minor motif of gender indeterminacy that may blur the lines between Sara and Abram’s expected roles.

It seems, indeed, at least at first, that Sara’s resemblance to Abram in the LXX may be just another aspect of her subtle but persistent effacement from the narrative. Interestingly, the most obvious disparity between the Hebrew and the Greek traditions in this episode illustrates this tie in more than one way. Whereas Sarai speculates that she herself may be, in a pun, “built up” or “sonned” out of Hagar’s body (אולי אבנה ממנה), Sara’s proposal in the LXX is explicitly aimed at producing children for Abram alone (εἴσελθε . . . πρὸς τὴν παιδίσκην μου, ἵνα τεκνοποιήσης ἐξ αὐτῆς, 16:2).⁵⁶ Not only, then, is Sara’s initiative softened by the rather

55. κλείω, naturally related to κλείς, “bar,” or, later, “key,” means to shut, close in, or confine; συγκλείω, too, can mean to “coop up” or “enclose,” even “imprison”; its cognate noun refers to the concept of locking something away. As such it is a fine rendering of עָצַר. The absence of another object, such as μήτρα, or uterus, which appears in the similar 20:18 (συνέκλεισεν κύριος . . . πᾶσαν μήτραν), leaves some interesting ambiguity in 16:2. See LSJ 957a–b, 1665a; compare W. Bauer, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 546b, 952a.

56. See below for more on the force of τεκνοποιέω. The reading τεκνοποιήσης (-σεις in Alexandrinus and elsewhere) is not the majority reading, which is first singular; first plural also appears in the tradition. Wevers

derivative flavor of her idea; not only does she decline to advocate for her own dynastic interests; but Sara also imitates Abram here, not in self-concern, as in the MT, but precisely in concern for Abram. Sara's first discourse-level utterance thus aims at Abram's benefit, just as his did (12:11–13). Even if the relative lack of formal agreement between these speeches in the LXX suggests, for example, that Sara's proposal is not aimed to deceive, as Abram's was, this too somehow points to a character with less volition, and thus more limited individuation. In the MT, one may question the candor of Sarai's stated desire for a child; but this at least implies an active if concealed self-interest. Here, Sara's tone evokes resignation and self-abnegation, and a first-time reader might well wonder whether her role in this story will dwindle even further.

Gender Ambiguities

But all this, coupled with Sara's decided inertia to this point in the narrative, makes it just that much harder to understand her sudden, resolute action here. That her plan will benefit Abram doesn't soften her summary disposal of Hagar's sexuality, as Sara reinscribes her own treatment at the hands of Abram and other men, "taking . . . her own slave" (λαβοῦσα . . . τὴν ἑαυτῆς παιδίσκη) and giving her to Abram (16:3; compare 11:29, 31; 12:5, 19). This abrupt adoption of what has been a male role, too, prompts consideration of this episode's unusual motif of indeterminacy in matters of biology and gender. This motif is especially prominent in characters' speech to or about others. After Sara tells Abram that the Lord has kept her from giving birth, for example, she urges Abram to "enter" her slave, assigning him a penetrative, male role; but her stated reason—ἵνα τεκνοποιήσῃς—would, in most extant Greek, mean "so that you can bear children" (16:2). When employed in the active, as here, τεκνοποιέω typically refers to the generative power of women; the middle is usually reserved for male subjects.⁵⁷ The evidence

reasonably suggests that the later preponderance of witnesses to the first singular reflects a recension back towards the Hebrew (Wevers, *Notes*, 218; see also apparatus in Wevers, *Genesis*).

57. See LSJ 1768a–b. Note that LSJ's text of LXX Genesis reads, with the majority text, a first-person middle here; but this reading, found in many minuscules, is not original and may be another recension back towards the Hebrew. See text and apparatus in Wevers, *Genesis*, 172–73; compare Wevers, *Notes*, 218. Strabo's employment of the verb is typical: τὸν δ' Ἰκάριον . . . τεκνοποιήσασθαι τὴν τε Πηνελόπην ἐκ Πολυκάστης ("Icarius fathered Penelope by Polycasta"; *Geogr.* 10.2). As LSJ notes, however, Diodorus Siculus reverses the usual arrangement; see

from the LXX and OG is mixed, but when Sara herself was the subject of this verb, in 11:30, the narrator's form was also active (οὐκ ἔτεκνοποίει, "she was not bearing children").⁵⁸

This would be easy to discount were there not other spoken biological ambiguities in the near context, as when Sara says to Abram, "I gave my slave into your 'lap'" (ἐγὼ δέδωκα τὴν παιδίσκην μου εἰς τὸν κόλπον σου, 16:5). This not only reemphasizes Sara's new, startlingly active role as "taker" and "giver" of a woman's sexuality, first seen in v. 3, but also associates Abram with a term evocative of female anatomy. For while κόλπος can mean a person's "lap" (rendered in NETS by the archaic biblicism "bosom"), it is also suggestive of other concavities and hollows.⁵⁹ In poetry, κόλπος can refer to the uterus, as in the *Helen* of Euripides, which refers to the title character's origin "in Leda's womb" (ἐν κόλποις . . . Λήδας, 1145–46); in later medical literature, κόλπος is simply a term for "vagina."⁶⁰ Aristophanes, too, puns on the multiple possibilities of κόλπος in a section of the *Lysistrata* that is replete with bawdy double entendre. In their meditated negotiation of peace, the Athenians and Spartans settle their territorial disputes with winking, lascivious references to the anatomy of a nude female "map" that stands before them; an Athenian lays claim to her "Maliac Gulf" (τὸν Μηλιᾶ κόλπον, 1169–70).⁶¹ The notion of Sara claiming to "give" or "put" something "into" Abram's κόλπον, and the

Bibliotheca Historica 1.73 for the active with male subjects, 4.29 for the middle with female subjects.

58. In its only other occurrence in the Pentateuch, Rachel is the subject of what reads like a true middle usage of the verb (τεκνοποιήσομαι κάγω ἐξ αὐτῆς, Gen 30:3; see LSJ 1768b). Isa 65:23 and Jer 12:2 feature the active verb with grammatically masculine subjects, but both seem to be collectives; in Jer 36:6, the subjects of the active verb are more clearly biologically male. The verb in the following v. 8 (τεκνοποίησῃ) is morphologically ambiguous.

59. See LSJ 974a. It is not clear why the NRSV's "embrace," unchanged from the RSV, was necessarily dissatisfactory to the editors of NETS; and it is still less plain why it should be replaced by a rendering that evokes the KJV and ASV. Surely κόλπος was not thought to be an archaizing translation of רִיב? None of the primary reasons for offering a text that differs from the NRSV, enumerated in NETS, xvi, seems to apply here.

60. In the *Gynecology* of Soranus, ὁ κόλπος is distinguished from ἡ μήτρα, or uterus, and is used interchangeably with τὸ αἰδοῖον (1.16–18 and elsewhere). This is a technical usage, not slang: τὸ δὲ γυναικεῖον αἰδοῖον καὶ κόλπος ὀνόμασται γυναικεῖος (1.16).

61. See 1162–74. The Maliac or Malian Gulf is a gulf of the Aegean. See LSJ 974a, 1126b; see also Aristophanes, *Four Comedies*, trans. Douglass Parker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 94 n. 80; compare 80; and Aristophanes, *Birds; Lysistrata; Assembly-Women; Wealth*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 137. For more on the "map," personified "Reconciliation," see Bella Zweig, "The Mute Nude Female Characters in Aristophanes' Plays," in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 73–89.

immediate obstetrical context of Sara’s accusation here (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχει, v. 5), only heighten the lexical ambiguity.⁶²

Sara, too, is associated by other characters in this episode with terms that seem to clash with her gender. When Abram surrenders Hagar back into Sara’s power (ἐν ταῖς χερσίν), he says, in what reads like an attempt at mollification, “use her however you like” (χρῶ αὐτῆ, ὡς ἂν σοι ἄρεστόν ᾖ, 16:6).⁶³ Χράω is a lexeme of very broad application, its employment extending from contexts of oracular proclamation to service as a kind of auxiliary verb.⁶⁴ In the middle, as here, its meanings generally orbit around the theme of “use”; when its object is a human being, χράομαι means “to treat” in a certain way.⁶⁵ By extension, the verb is often indicative of intimacy, and in particular of sexual intercourse, regarded from a penetrative, male perspective, as in Demosthenes’s *Against Neaera* (59:67): καὶ ὠμολόγει μὲν χρῆσθαι τῇ ἀνθρώπῳ, “he confessed to having sex with the woman.”⁶⁶ This sense also appears occasionally in the LXX and OG materials, though with a darker, more violent cast. In Gen 19:8, for example, Lot urges the men of Sodom to “use” his daughters however they like; in 34:31, Simeon and Levi rhetorically ask whether the indigenous inhabitants of the land “should use our sister like a prostitute.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Sir 26:22, employing a rather clumsy metaphor, opines that “a married woman will be reckoned as a tower of death to the men who use her” (τοῖς χρωμένοις)—that is, to those who have extramarital sex with her.⁶⁸

62. δίδωμι for ἵη in the sense of “put” may be a “Hebraism” (J. A. L. Lee, “Note,” 238), but it seems to me to reflect only a modest extension of the verb’s meaning; compare LSJ 422b–423a; *GELS* 165a–167a, esp. 166b.

63. Although J. A. L. Lee, *Lexical Study*, 51, lists χεῖρ as a term often used in a “Hebraistic” manner in the LXX, the word as a metonym of power seems to be native Greek idiom: LSJ 1983b–1984a. In the present context, of course, the physical reality of “hands” and their capabilities may also be relevant.

64. See LSJ 2001a–2002b.

65. LSJ 2002a–b. In the abstract, the contract χρῶ is morphologically ambiguous; in the context of Gen 16:6, however, it can only be read as a second singular present imperative middle. Compare the middle in 12:16, τῷ Ἀβράμ εὖ ἐχρήσαντο: “they treated,” or, in an older English idiom, “used Abram well”; for a similar sense, see 26:29.

66. Compare Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.181, and LSJ 2002b (IV.2, “esp. of sexual intercourse”) for other examples.

67. χρήσασθε αὐταῖς, καθὰ ἂν ἀρέσκη ὑμῖν (Gen 19:8); ὡσεὶ πόρνη χρήσονται τῇ ἀδελφῇ ἡμῶν; (34:31). See *GELS* 735a.

When the Lord’s messenger urges Hagar to return to her master, Sara is again tied in speech to a word that can indicate a man’s sexual violation of a woman: ταπεινώθητι ὑπὸ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῆς (16:9). Ταπεινώω could often, throughout the LXX and OG, be fairly rendered “rape,” as in the narratives featuring Dinah (Gen 34:2), the host’s daughter and the Levite’s concubine (Judg 19:24; 20:5), and Tamar (2 Kgdms [2 Sam] 13:12, 14, 22, 32); in legal material, such as Deut 22:24, 29 (compare 21:14); and in prophetic contexts, where the surrounding imagery is particularly horrific (Lam 5:11; Ezek 22:10–11), even implicating the deity in acts of sexual violence against the women of Jerusalem (Isa 3:17; Lam 2:5).⁶⁹ “Submit yourself,” the deity’s intermediary tells Hagar, “to violation by [your master’s] hands.”

Other narrative data, however, beat steadily against these gender ambiguities. As the reader has known from the very beginning, Sara remains a “woman of Abram” who continues to “fail to give birth” (16:1). She herself explicitly underlines this biological evaluation, albeit with a significant disclaimer of responsibility: “the Lord has closed me up in order to prevent me from giving birth” (v. 2).⁷⁰ Moreover, in the narrated action Sara does not “use” or “violate” her slave, even if she “harms,” “hurts,” or “abuses” her (ἐκάκωσεν αὐτήν Σάρα, v. 6). Hagar’s flight in the immediate context shows that this is a serious, likely violent action, and the employment of κακόω elsewhere, such as in Lot’s conflict with the men of Sodom (19:9) and the enslavement of the children of Israel in Egypt (Exod 1:11; compare Gen 15:13), supports this reading. But κακόω simply does not appear in the contexts of male sexual violence against women where ענה appears in the MT (again, Gen 34:2; Judg 19:24; 2 Kgdms [2 Sam] 13:12; and so on); thus the unsettling image of Sarai in the MT as an active rapist or violator (ותענה שרִי) is somewhat muted here. In fact, in this scene Sara describes herself as being “wronged” by Abram, employing a

68. ὕπανδρος δὲ πύργος θανάτου τοῖς χρωμένοις λογισθήσεται. For this generally repugnant section in Sirach (26:19–27, often excluded from translations on text-critical grounds), see Joseph Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum, vol. 12.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 249.

69. See *GELS* 670b; *LSJ* 1757a. On Gen 34:2, see Wevers, *Notes*, 558.

70. συνέκλεισέν με κύριος τοῦ μὴ τίκτειν; see Smyth §§ 1408, 2032 e.

word, ἀδικοῦμαι, that can refer to a woman’s sexual “ruin” by a man (Gen 16:5).⁷¹ Abram, too, is hardly depicted solely in terms that evoke gender ambiguity, as he amply demonstrates his virility by entering and impregnating Hagar (v. 4).⁷²

Some of this complex of uncertainties may be profitably channeled into a discussion of the construction of Sara’s character in the LXX, I think, by relating it to the subtle realignment of the balance of power between Sarai and Abram noted in the treatment of this episode in the MT. As there, Sara has by no means shaken Abram’s basic power over her. She is and will remain the “woman of Abram” (16:1, 3), and Abram’s assent to her plan, reception of her complaint, and return of her property (vv. 2, 5–6) are plot points that presume his authority. Yet Sara, partly by mimicking Abram’s taking and giving of the sexual services of an underling, also exercises considerable power here, and some kind of shift seems to be marked at this very point: when Sara, as ever ἡ γυνὴ Ἀβράμ, takes Hagar and gives her to Abram, he, too, is branded, and this for the first time, as “her man” or “husband” (τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς, v. 3). As in the MT, Sara demonstrates little deference, especially in speech, after this moment. Her next utterance, in fact, is a direct accusation: “I am being wronged by you!” (ἀδικοῦμαι ἐκ σοῦ, v. 5; compare her preemptory speech in 21:10). The gender ambiguities in the LXX version of this episode, to my reading, also contribute to a blurring of the roles of Sara and Abram that helps to soften the otherwise sharp contrast between the inert, agency-free Sara of the preceding narrative and the resolute but volatile woman who emerges here. Once again, though, Sara’s resemblance to Abram suggests that she must cede individuation in exchange for volition.

71. Compare *The Farmer* of Menander (*Georg.* 29–30): “Should this scumbag marry [another woman] after wronging our girl?” (γαμεῖ // ὁ μισθὸς οὐτος ἡδίκηκώς τὴν κόρην;).

72. Brayford, *Genesis*, 302, is probably broadly correct in claiming that Sara’s ἵνα purpose clause in 16:2 is less tentative than the MT’s לְיָאֵם—and thus that the LXX ameliorates any implied doubt about Abram’s virility. But here, as elsewhere, Brayford is too schoolish on the topic of the subjunctive, which need not always be rendered with some variety of modal, as if it introduces radical contingency (here, “might bear,” or the like) wherever it appears. Moreover, her distinction between the functions of the subjunctive and the future indicative (the reading here of her primary manuscript, Alexandrinus) in such clauses is overdrawn. The latter seems merely to reflect a later idiom, and does not alter the fundamental meaning of the purpose clause. Compare Smyth § 2193 a; F. C. Conybeare and St. George Stock, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek with Selected Readings, Vocabularies, and Updated Indexes*, reprint, 1905 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), § 106.

The Disposition of Hagar

Sara's relationship with Abram, of course, is only one thread of this tale, and her conflict with Hagar demands discussion as well. The broad outlines are familiar from a reading of the MT. Sara's lack of fertility, underlined by the narrator and by herself (16:1–2), is answered by her firm possession of "her own slave," Hagar, whom Sara dominates to the extent that she can allocate her body, sexuality, and reproductive potential as she sees fit—and this precisely in response to her own childlessness (vv. 1–3). That Sara's infertility is cast as an enduring, perhaps permanent condition (v. 1), effected by God (v. 2), or that Sara's motive is not explicitly self-interested (v. 2), cannot soften the brutal and abusive means by which she attempts a resolution: in effect, Sara proposes and arranges Abram's rape of her slave (vv. 2–4).

With Hagar's conception, Sara's stated goal for Abram moves toward its fulfillment (16:4). But an unintended consequence also occurs: Hagar "saw that she was pregnant" (εἶδεν ὅτι ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχει), and, apparently as a result, ἡτιμάσθη ἡ κυρία ἐναντίον αὐτῆς. As argued in Chapter 3, the corresponding expression in the MT (ותקל גברתה בעיניה) is best understood as "her master became insignificant in her eyes": Sarai is simply "overlooked" or "ignored" by her slave. Here, the specific force of the phrase, which is echoed quite precisely in Sara's own reportage in v. 5, depends on the strength of the word ἡτιμάζω and the implications of ἐναντίον in the story context. Wevers is probably correct in claiming that ἡτιμάζω is a "stronger term" than the MT's קלל, though the latter can also serve as an antonym of כבוד, thus similarly connoting "dishonor."⁷³ This rendering, also followed in NETS, may lend an unjustified, implicitly public flavor to this narrative development, however—an understanding made more explicit in translations such as Brayford's "was shamed," or, even more plainly, Takamitsu Muraoka's "lost face," which suggests humiliation before others.⁷⁴ But ἐναντίον plus the genitive is probably best understood radically as "in the presence of"; thus, even if the passive of ἡτιμάζω indicates "suffering

73. Wevers, *Notes*, 220; see 1 Sam 2:30.

74. Brayford, *Genesis*, 75; *GELS* 101a. Muraoka's rendering of ἐναντίον αὐτῆς here, "on account of her," only reinforces the impression; but contrast *GELS* 233b.

dishonor,” or “being insulted,” the forum seems to be private, not public.⁷⁵ Hagar, then, does not somehow subject her master to widespread social opprobrium; rather, Sara loses status “in the estimation of,” or in the opinion of, Hagar alone.⁷⁶

In the story world, however, this private insult is more than enough to provoke Sara, who is explicitly and by common consent Hagar’s κυρία, “master,” or “owner,” a title cognate to that of the deity—a fact hard to miss especially in the close juxtaposition of these titles in 16:7–9.⁷⁷ Contrary to Brayford’s assertion that the Greek “slightly improves Hagar’s status vis-à-vis Sarai” by neglecting to attach a superfluous possessive pronoun to κυρία in v. 4, Hagar remains, at a basic level, the property of Sara.⁷⁸ This is only underlined by the fact that Sara does not bother to exaggerate the charge against Hagar, as she does in her claim of “savagery” (סמך) in the MT, being content merely to echo the narrator’s assessment of the offense (v. 5). Such is nonetheless enough for Abram to return Hagar—now pregnant with his child—to Sara, in order that she be free to “use” her slave as she likes; enough for Sara to abuse Hagar, probably violently, as noted above; and enough that no one, including God, find fault with Sara’s conduct (vv. 6, 9).

In fact, the deity proves to be an active collaborator in Sara’s abusive relationship with Hagar. In response to Brayford’s claim that this narrative casts “the Hebrew God” as a

75. See LSJ 555a; Smyth § 1700; compare J. A. L. Lee, *Lexical Study*, 152, which indicates that ἐναντίον plus the genitive meaning “in the presence of” is also attested in contemporaneous (third-century BCE) papyri.

76. Compare *GELS* 233b for the sensible “in the estimation of,” accompanied by several examples that clearly show mental evaluation on the part of an individual; for some reason, however, Gen 16:5 is still rendered “I lost face in relation to her” just under this heading.

77. For κύριος as “owner,” compare J. A. L. Lee, *Lexical Study*, 83. “Mistress,” as I argue in Chapter 3, is not a suitable rendering for several reasons, but primarily because it implies, unjustifiably, that a slaveholder’s power differs somehow when a woman exercises it.

78. Sara’s ownership of Hagar is explicitly stated in 16:1–3, 5–6; twice in v. 8; and again in v. 9. Brayford, *Genesis*, 303, contends that the LXX’s simple ἡ κυρία lacks the possessive force of the pronominal suffix on גברתה (v. 4). However, the Greek article can and often does serve as a possessive (Smyth § 1121: “The article often takes the place of an unemphatic possessive pronoun when there is no doubt as to the possessor”; and see the clear example from Xenophon cited there). It is unusual that Brayford, who typically follows Wevers closely on philological matters, should not have done so here, since Wevers, *Notes*, 220, says that the translator of Genesis omits the suffix of the Hebrew as it is “obvious to any reader.” Some general editorial confusion seems indicated by Brayford’s following statement, as well, which asserts that Hagar “is no longer defined as Sarai’s mistress” (303). A stronger argument for a temporary shift in status for Hagar might have referenced her description as “woman” or “wife” of Abram in v. 3; Wevers may assume this in his remarks on 221. As just noted, though, Sara’s ownership of Hagar continues to be specified even during Sara’s “donation” of her slave to Abram (vv. 4–6).

“benefactor of the marginal and oppressed,” I can only quote again what the Lord’s messenger actually says to this runaway slave: “Return to your master and submit yourself to violation by her hands” (16:9). Again, *ταπεινῶω* in the context of the LXX and OG is a word that is even a few shades darker, in its implications of sexual violence, than *κακῶω*, used to describe Sara’s conduct in v. 6. Far from an illustration of the saving action of Brayford’s “God-in-the-margins,” then, this resolution recalls nothing so much as God’s restoration of Sara to Abram, who sold her, in Egypt.⁷⁹

The relative stasis of Sara prior to this episode emphasizes her startling development here. Though partly introduced with notes that exhibit continuity with her demonstrated passivity and lack of volition—her infertility, the derivative nature of her proposed solution to this problem, and the fact that she initially advocates only for Abram, not for herself—other elements show that Sara’s inertia is at an end. Her enduring infertility is balanced by her enduring control of her slave, Hagar, and Sara’s allocation of her underling’s sexual resources is only one of several details in which she begins to exhibit a strange resemblance to Abram. Indeed, unusual ambiguities in traits of biology and gender contribute to a kind of blurring of the roles of Sara and Abram; this indeterminacy, in turn, helps to explain and illustrate subtle shifts in the balance of power between the two characters. Most important for an evaluation of Sara is what all these factors reveal about her apparent newfound agency and openness in speech—freedoms that she uses, however, only to dominate and to abuse her slave, in a divinely-sanctioned restaging of her own ill-treatment in Egypt. Once again, when Sara acts, her conduct often echoes that of Abram.

One minor but interesting detail here may provide further evidence of Sara’s abrupt change in these scenes, even as it furnishes another tie, unique to the LXX among the narratives considered in this study, to the Egyptian episode. Abram characterized Sara there as “pretty-faced” (*εὐπρόσωπος*, 12:11), an adjective that can imply a disparity between outer appearance

79. See Brayford, *Genesis*, 303, for her reading of this episode as a liberatory tale.

and inner motive. His evaluation seemed confirmed, at least on an aesthetic level, when the Egyptians subsequently took notice of Sara's beauty (vv. 14–15). While her face once inspired attraction, however, here it prompts flight: in the wake of Sara's abuse, Hagar ἀπέδρα ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτῆς—literally, “ran away from her face,” an account explicitly supported by Hagar herself in her response to the messenger in the desert (16:6, 8).⁸⁰ This modest motif centered on Sara's πρόσωπον may find further traction in an interesting note in the speech of Abimelech, discussed below.

Different Name, Different Prospects? (Gen 17:1–27 LXX)

The disparities between Gen 17 in the LXX and the MT that are relevant to a portrait of Sara are few; therefore, a summary of the continuities will largely suffice here. There is a huge gap in story time, as about thirteen years pass in total silence (16:16; 17:1), which raises a number of mostly unanswerable questions about the development of the characters' relationships during the interim. When the tale resumes, Abram is presented as receiving yet another extended revelation from God in which the fate of his descendants plays a prominent part (17:2, 4–15); this time, however, the promises would seem to find focus in the son whom Hagar, in accordance with Sara's plan, bore to Abram at the close of the last episode (16:2, 15–16). This is a presumption shared by “Abraam,” as he will now be known (17:5), which his reaction in vv. 17–18 makes plain.

All the stranger, then, when God begins speaking not of Hagar's offspring, but of Sara's:

Gen 17:15 And God said to Abraam, “As for Sara your wife, her name shall not be called Sara, but Sarra shall be her name. 16 And I will bless her, and I will give you a child by her. And I will bless her, and she shall become nations, and kings of nations shall be from her.” 17 And Abraam fell face down and laughed and spoke in his mind, saying, “Shall a

80. Here, ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτῆς is clearly a rendering of מפניה (and compare v. 8); but it is not entirely clear to me that this is solely a “Hebraistic use” of the Greek term, as J. A. L. Lee, *Lexical Study*, 51, seems to imply. A glance at LSJ 1533a furnishes a few examples in composition Greek that seem to communicate something quite similar; see the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, 720: οὐδ' ἐς πρόσωπον Θησέως ἀφίξομαι, or “nor will I go into the presence of Theseus.” In any event, the broader play with πρόσωπον that I am proposing here is not an element that is pronounced in the MT: 12:11 reads יפת־מראה, while 20:16 gives כסות עינים.

son be born to a hundred-year-old, and shall Sarra who is ninety years of age give birth?”
 18 And Abraam said to God, “As for Ismael, let him live before you!” 19 But God said to
 Abraam, “Indeed; see, your wife Sarra shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name
 Isaak, and I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant and for his
 offspring after him. 20 Now concerning Ismael, see, I heard you. . . . 21 But my covenant
 I will establish with Isaak, whom Sarra shall bear to you.” (NETS)

Sara’s name, too, is here “amplified” (compare 12:2), meaninglessly in a Greek context,
 into “Sarra” (Σάρρα). This is another note that emphasizes her resemblance to Abraam, a theme
 which at first also seems to be highlighted in the promises, partly reminiscent of those given to
 Abraam earlier, that are spoken about her here (compare, for example, 17:16 with 12:2 and 17:6,
 or 17:19 with 17:7). But a key difference is exposed in these prepositions—“to” and “about”—
 and Sarra’s prominence here is more seeming than actual. The revelation of her name may not
 evoke Abraam’s perspective, as in the MT; as Wevers notes, the passive construction of the
 Greek makes the announcement of her new name “a general statement of fact,” not a correction
 of what Abraam calls her.⁸¹ But this remains a statement, however “general,” that only Abraam is
 privileged to hear. Moreover, the blessing with which God pledges to favor Sarra is immediately
 restricted to her production of a child—for Abram (v. 16).⁸² Sarra’s blessing is to be the initial
 conduit for Abram’s “seed” (σπέρμα), which is supposed to enjoy a “permanent covenant”
 (διαθήκη αἰώνιος) with the deity (v. 19). Given the primacy and endurance of Sarra’s infertility,
 the reversal of this trait, even in pledge, is no small development; her name change, then,
 however phonetically meaningless, may help to represent this shift. But the promise of blessing

81. Wevers, *Notes*, 236. Where the MT reads *כי שרה שמה שרי* in 17:15, the Greek reads *οὐ κληθήσεται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς Σάρα, ἀλλὰ Σάρρα ἔσται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς*.

82. Compare Wevers, *Notes*, 237, who observes that the clause after the first *εὐλογῆσω* clarifies the nature of the blessing. The majority text here, followed by Rahlfs’s edition, and by Brayford, *Genesis*, due to her commentary’s focus on Alexandrinus, reads *αὐτόν* and *αὐτοῦ* for *αὐτήν* and *αὐτῆς*, apparently making Sarra’s son the one who will “turn into nations” and serve as a catalyst for the emergence of “kings of nations.” Compare Harl, *La Genèse*, 170–71. Wevers, 237, effectively torpedoes this tradition by pointing out that the only masculine antecedent here is Abraam, the promised child having been being rendered with *τέκνον*. Brayford’s counterargument—that the “divergence of the major Greek witnesses from the MT does not make them incorrect”—unfortunately responds to a point that Wevers does not make (309). It can be noted, however, that Wevers does not help his case by confusing statements such as “the only masculine referent in this section is Abraam who is not referred to at all”! (237). In any event, the retention of the feminine pronouns makes no great difference, to my reading, to the “gender related aspects” of the narrative (Brayford, 309); Sarra is still merely an instrument here.

and covenant only funnels through Sarra. As an instrument in the broader and more important web of relationships between Abraam, Isaac, and their God, Sarra has no more say in the deity's plan than did Masek in Abram's, or Hagar in Sarra's own.

Volition and Restriction (Gen 18:1–15 LXX)

Gen 18:1 Now God appeared to him near the oak of Mambre, while he was sitting at the door of his tent at midday. 2 And looking up with his eyes he saw, and see, three men stood over him. And when he saw them, he ran forward from his tent door to meet them and did obeisance upon the ground 3 and said, "Lord, if perchance I have found favor before you, do not pass by your servant. 4 Do let water be taken, and let them wash your feet, and you cool off under the tree. 5 And I shall take bread, and you will eat, and after that you will pass by on your way—inasmuch as you have turned aside to your servant." And they said, "so do, as you have said." 6 And Abraam hurried over to the tent to Sarra and said to her, "Hurry, and mix three measures of fine flour, and make loaves baked in ashes." 7 And Abraam ran to the cows and took a little calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, and he hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took butter and milk and the little calf that he had prepared and set it before them, and they ate, and he stood by them under the tree. 9 And he said to him, "Where is your wife Sarra?" And he said in reply, "There, in the tent." 10 And he said, "I will come to you, when I return, during this season next year, and Sarra your wife shall have a son." And Sarra, who was behind him, listened at the tent door. 11 Now Abraam and Sarra were old, advanced in days, and menstruation had ceased to happen to Sarra. 12 And Sarra laughed within herself, saying, "It has not yet happened to me up to the present, and my lord is rather old." 13 And the Lord said to Abraam, "Why is it that Sarra laughed within herself, saying, 'Shall I then indeed give birth? But I have grown old.' 14 Can it be that a matter is impossible with God? In this season I will come back to you next year, and Sarra shall have a son." 15 But Sarra denied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And he said, "No, but you did laugh." 16 And when the men had set out from there . . . (NETS)

Though Sarra, at least as a device in the advancement of the divine plan, served as the absent object of Abraam and God's thought and discussion in Gen 17, she has not played a bodily role in the narrative since her harming of Hagar in 16:6, many years ago in story time (v. 16; 17:1, 24). Instead her part in the story has been almost totally concealed from the reader's mental eye. As the episode of Hagar's surrogacy depicted Sarra's emerging—if always subordinate and often derivative—agency while hinting at subtle realignments in the power relations of the characters, Sarra's story activity in the interim might be supposed to exhibit

continuations of these trends. This expectation is not entirely dashed by the details of the divine visit in Gen 18; Sarra does show flashes of volition here, though some of these seem derivative, too, if not necessarily consciously imitative of Abraam. But other aspects of the narrative push back against any potential displays of initiative. The persistent scenic element of the “tent” (σκηνή, vv. 1–2, 6, 9–10), for instance, appears almost contrived to restrain Sarra’s developing agency by keeping her from view. Even when the narrator describes her actions, in vv. 10, 12, and 15, the broader narrative perspective or focalization remains with the characters outside the tent; Sarra, insofar as she is shown, is exposed in glimpses, through a kind of cutaway, or cross-section of the tent that screens her.⁸³ This confinement is reminiscent of her captivity in Egypt, where she is taken inside Pharaoh’s house (12:15), and partly recalls her earlier attribution of her infertility to the Lord, who, she says, “closed me up,” or “enclosed me” (συνέκλεισέν με, 16:2).

Several of these narrative aspects come together in connection with Sarra’s first mention in this episode: “Abraam hurried to the tent, towards Sarra, and said to her, ‘Hurry! . . . make heartcakes!’” (18:6).⁸⁴ There is no explicit indication that Abraam enters the tent; his almost comical haste, in fact, makes it plausible that he simply blurts out his orders as he runs past on his way to the herd (v. 7).⁸⁵ Sarra thus remains obscured from every eye, a point that is emphasized by the indeterminacy of her response to Abraam’s command. As there is no hint that “heartcakes” ever appear before the visitors (v. 8), it is reasonable to suspect that Sarra takes no

83. These matters, variously discussed under the rubrics of focalization, point of view, or narrative perspective, are the subject of much debate and competing schemes of classification, each seemingly more complicated than the last; for overviews, see Jean Louis Ska, *“Our Fathers Have Told Us”*: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives, 2nd ed., SubBi 13 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2000), 65–81, or Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1998), 72–74; see also Berlin, *Poetics*, 43–82. Here I operate within a loose, cinematic metaphor and speak in a non-technical manner of “focalization” as if it were the lens of a camera; compare Berlin, *Poetics*, 43–46. My point is simply that the center of gravity of this scene, conceived visually, seems to me to be located outside the tent, with Abraam and the visitors. A systematic exploration of focalizations in this episode would, I think, be extremely complex, and would need to account for the narrator’s aside in v. 11, Sarra’s possibly inaudible remark in v. 12, and so on; but here I am interested in matters of perspective only insofar as they may contribute to Sarra’s characterization.

84. ἔσπευσεν Ἀβραάμ ἐπὶ τὴν σκηνὴν πρὸς Σάρραν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Σπεῦσον . . . ποιήσον ἐγκρυφίας.

85. This impression is remedied in a few traditions that read εἰσηλθεν for ἔσπευσεν, or εἰς τὴν σκηνὴν. See apparatus in Wevers, *Genesis*, and Wevers, *Notes*, 248.

action at all here.⁸⁶ Interestingly, even while this inaction calls to mind Sarra’s inertia in the first parts of her narrative, it also, somewhat paradoxically, shows initiative, even defiance—a reading that may be bolstered by accounts of Sarra’s deceptions to come.

A number of these motifs and tensions endure as the episode nears its climax. After one of the guests—apparently the Lord, on the evidence of 18:13—asks after Sarra’s whereabouts and learns that she is “in the tent,” the visitor predicts the reversal of her infertility (vv. 9–10). Pointedly directed to Abraam alone (v. 10), and couched in language that partly recalls that of his last divine interview (17:19, 21), this is a reminder rather than a revelation. But Sarra overhears: *Σάρρα δὲ ἤκουσεν πρὸς τῆ θύρα τῆς σκηνῆς, οὐσα ὀπισθεν αὐτοῦ* (18:10). Questions come out at once here: does the speaker intend for Sarra to hear? She is not addressed, which may make the question as to her location read like an attempt to communicate something not for her ears; however, the entire episode seems wanting in motivation if the purpose of the visit is simply to reiterate what Abraam knows already. And is Sarra “listening,” that is, trying to follow the conversation, which implies initiative, or does she simply “hear”? The former possibility seems recommended by the fact that *ἤκουσεν* lacks an explicit object, while the likelihood of the latter may be bolstered by the verb’s aspect.⁸⁷ The exegetical flavor of the trailing participial phrase, however, counts in favor of happenstance: “Sarra heard [his remark] near the door of the tent—seeing as she was behind him,” or “behind him as she was.”⁸⁸ Again, then, Sarra appears both

86. Contrast Wevers, *Notes*, 249, who, however, gives no reason for his presumption that the cakes are on the menu.

87. The force of the aorist indicative is, however, not as mechanical as Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 184, seems to imply in her contention that “the aorist . . . suggests a one-time completed action on her part, not the on-going state implied by the MT participle.” The aorist carries no indication as to the duration of the action detailed; it reflects a perspective on the action that regards it as an event. One part of the tradition employs the imperfect *ἤκουε(v)* (see apparatus in Wevers, *Genesis*), which might put the reader more in mind of “listening” here; similarly, however, the imperfect makes no comment on the absolute duration of an action, but communicates a perspective that can emphasize its continuation. Compare Smyth §§ 1908–09, 1923. In short, the aspect of the verb here is not conclusive in itself.

88. Compare the remarks of Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 183–84, who, however, believes that the MT implies that Sarah was “intentionally eavesdropping.” The final clause of the MT here (והוא אחריו, “and it/he was behind him/it”) is more ambiguous, though perhaps the independent pronoun should be pointed as a feminine; compare the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), and see my discussion and note in Chapter 3.

hidden and inactive, her subjectivity merely receptive of the volition of another.

But this only makes the next development more startling. After a narratorial aside that underlines Abraam and Sarra’s advanced age and even notes that “Sarrah’s menses had ceased” (18:11), Sarra reacts with a healthy skepticism that is entirely appropriate to the absurdity of overhearing a stranger make predictions about her reproductive chances: “Sarrah laughed internally saying, ‘Not yet has it happened to me, all the way until now—and my lord [or ‘husband’] is old!’” (v. 12).⁸⁹ The word order elegantly leaves open the question of the audibility of Sarra’s laugh and comment: does ἐγέλασεν δὲ Σάρρα ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγουσα mean that she laughed “in herself,” spoke “in herself,” or both?⁹⁰ Sarra’s sentiment, regardless, is wholly credible, and humanizing, I think, after the report of her brutality in Gen 16. Notably, she makes no comment about her own age or her menses—really, no remark about her personal condition at all. Indeed, Sarra’s first statement, apparently referring to the guest’s prediction that “she will have a son” (ἔξει υἱόν, 18:10), is simply a sensible, factual observation, formulated impersonally: “it,” she says, “hasn’t happened to me yet” (v. 12).⁹¹ Sarra gives no indication of thinking that she is too old. Abraam is old, though, and Sarra’s lifelong experience recommends against credulity here—the thought of a child, now, is simply laughable.

So Sarra’s laugh and soliloquy seem to point to a woman who is nobody’s fool—someone who has the will and the mental freedom to form her own skeptical, private evaluation of events. However, this image begins to pale at the recognition that it is built, at least in part, of elements that have already been associated with Abraam. Sarra’s laugh (ἐγέλασεν . . . Σάρρα)

89. ἐγέλασεν δὲ Σάρρα ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγουσα Οὐπω μὲν μοι γέγονεν ἕως τοῦ νῦν, ὁ δὲ κύριός μου πρεσβύτερος. The μὲν . . . δὲ construction need not indicate opposition or subordination (LSJ 1102a), and no contrast seems implied here; logically, the points appear to be cumulative. The “rather old” of NETS here seems completely unjustified; any external lexical arguments notwithstanding, πρεσβύτεροι has just been rendered simply “old” in 18:11. τὰ γυναικεῖα, also in v. 11, is quite vague, but the verb and the general context recommends something like τὰ καταμήνια or “monthly things,” a euphemism for menses; LSJ 363a, 901a.

90. On the evidence of the lexicons—and even a limited survey of such a common word would be daunting—it does not appear as if λέγω is routinely used of thought (LSJ 1034a–b; GELS 427a–b). Perhaps, though, the prepositional phrase is clear enough—if it is to be taken with the participle.

91. Compare Wevers, *Notes*, 252, on the referent of “it” in the impersonal verb.

precisely recalls Abraam’s initial reaction to the same news (Αβραάμ . . . ἐγέλασεν); her observation about Abraam’s age likewise echoes part of his internally expressed doubts there (compare 18:12 and 17:17). Moreover, her position by the tent door resembles, to a degree, that of Abraam at the start of this episode. While the parallel is less exact than that of the MT, this is so in a way that actually serves to decrease Sarra’s physical prominence in the scene. While the Hebrew describes Abraham and Sarah’s respective attitudes with a participle followed by a simple פתח האהל, unmodified by a preposition, here the expressions are formally completely distinct: Abraam is sitting “in the door” (ἐπὶ τῆς θύρας, 18:1), presented in the context of a genitive absolute, while Sarra, as the subject of a finite verb, heard the stranger’s remark “near the door” (πρὸς τῆ θύρα, v. 10). Wevers imprecisely takes these expressions as equivalent, but surely the other prepositional phrase in v. 1 supports this understanding of πρὸς plus the dative here—unless God is conceived of as perched up “in the oak” (πρὸς τῆ δρυϊ).⁹² The bodily senses associated with Abraam and Sarra might clarify their respective positions: Abraam need only glance up to see out (v. 2), while Sarra can only overhear (v. 10).

To call these echoes imitative would not be quite correct. Sarra’s laugh is derivative to the reader, on a discourse level, much as her proposal of a child by a slave was; there is, however, no evidence in either case that she is aware of Abraam’s earlier speech or conduct. But these similarities in presentation begin almost to look like a persistent narratorial tendency to hamstring Sarra’s initiative, to strip her of opportunities to demonstrate color and vitality. Other narrative elements may start to coalesce around this idea of curbing Sarra’s originality, or combating her ability to surprise. Certainly other restrictions on Sarra’s prominence here contribute to a broader, suppressing effect: the shrouding device of the tent—specified in the Greek, notably, as belonging to Abraam (τῆς σκηνῆς αὐτοῦ, 18:1)—hiding her from view; the

92. Wevers, *Notes*, 244, 251. Of course, prepositions are notoriously slippery; but the case disparity also argues for distinguishing the expressions. For ἐπὶ plus the genitive, “rarely used of mere proximity in . . . standard prose,” see Smyth § 1689 a; contrast πρὸς with the dative, “denoting proximity” (§ 1695.2). Incidentally, this varied rendering of the same expression in Hebrew bolsters the argument of J. A. L. Lee, *Lexical Study*, 29, that “the translators do not consistently reproduce the idiom of their original. They are in fact often at pains to avoid it.”

fact that this message about her reproductive biology is not addressed to her at all; or the deity's intimidating rebuke that aims at Sarra's silence (vv. 13–15).

This general paling of Sarra's character is bolstered by the most plain disparity between the MT and the LXX here, which is in her response to the stranger's prediction. Whereas Sarah reacts by thinking, sarcastically, "After my being worn out, there's pleasure for me!" (אָהָרִי בִלְהִי (הִיתָה־לִּי עֲדָנָה), Sarra says "Not yet has it happened to me, all the way until now" (Οὐπω μὲν μοι γέγονεν ἔως τοῦ νῦν, 18:12). In the MT, her thought communicates exasperation at the idea of more fruitless sex with Abraham, and shows incredulity at the possibility of her pleasure in intercourse; in the LXX, however, she emphasizes the logical improbability of conception in the light of experience. Both responses are completely skeptical, to my reading, but the MT's earthy imagery—Sarah being "worn out" like a rag, rolling her eyes at her chances of finding moist "pleasure" in sex with the elderly Abraham—yields, in the LXX, to a cool and sober appraisal, formulated impersonally, of the merits of the proposition.⁹³

As noted in Chapter 1, this disparity is the linchpin of Brayford's argument that the LXX casts Sarra as a "shameful" Hellenistic matron more appropriate to the sensibilities of the translators' Alexandrian milieu. The absence of notes that evoke the mechanics of intercourse, and the oblique reference to conception and childbirth, Brayford says, depict a woman who models a social ideal by avoiding "impure thoughts" while focusing on her sanctioned reproductive role.⁹⁴ While it seems too much to conclude that Sarra's remark here means that she "reflects on her spousal duty of producing the required heir" for Abraam, Brayford's analysis in this context is basically sound.⁹⁵ I would emphasize, though, that Sarra's literary character seems somewhat diminished in proportion to her alignment with these social norms, a process that Brayford argues is intended to "improve" Sarra's "moral character" in the eyes of the original

93. For a fuller discussion of 18:12 in the MT, see the relevant section in Chapter 3.

94. See Brayford, "Taming and Shaming," 184–87; her arguments are also summarized in Brayford, "To Shame or not to Shame," 169–70, and Brayford, "Sarah Laughs Last," 324–25.

95. Brayford, *Genesis*, 313; compare Brayford, "Sarah Laughs Last," 324.

audience of Greek Genesis.⁹⁶ Brayford also makes a significant broader point here about intentionality in translation.⁹⁷ Motive is ultimately irretrievable. But even if a rendering represents a simple misunderstanding, as Wevers convincingly argues is the case here, the resulting text still reflects its compositional environment.⁹⁸ I would only add that such details of the circumstances of a text's generation, insofar as they are recoverable, have no effect on the impact of an element in its context. The importance of Sarra's remark to her character's construction is weighed in the mind of the reader alongside innumerable other narrative data. Mistranslation or not, Sarra's logical response to the visitor's prediction becomes just one more narrative element that drains some of her color away.

The disputatious close of this scene can also be read as a short series of responses that undermine Sarra's agency in a variety of ways. Sarra's rational assertion of skepticism, whether overheard or supernaturally detected by the Lord, is twisted in reportage in both content and tone (18:13). Sarra's indirect reference to reproduction becomes explicit, and the whole is imbued with doubt about her own physical fitness—not Abraam's advanced age. The interrogative particle ἄρα, very infrequent in the LXX or OG, contributes a note of anxious concern to the misquotation: “Is there any way I can give birth? But *I* have grown old!” (Ἄρα γε ἀληθῶς τέξομαι; ἐγὼ δὲ γεγήρακα).⁹⁹ Sarra's laugh clashes somewhat with this attributed worry, which emphasizes the report's inaccuracy. Moreover, that the Lord disdains a direct address here, continuing to speak to Abraam alone, only strengthens the impression that Sarra's volition is something to be ignored or denied.

96. Brayford, from her personal perspective, clearly does not regard “the domesticated Sarah of the LXX” as an improvement (Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 187). Her primary concern, however, is with the relationship of Sarra's depiction to the compositional context of the LXX.

97. Brayford, *Genesis*, 313; Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 185–86.

98. Brayford, “Taming and Shaming,” 185–86; compare Brayford, *Genesis*, 26. See Wevers, *Notes*, 252, for his persuasive explanation of the misreading. In brief, he proposes that בלח was read not as the first person of the verb בלה but as the particle of negation with the same consonants (BDB 115a versus 116b), hence οὐπω, “not yet”; the unusual עדנה was construed, Wevers suggests, as עד הנה, or ἕως τοῦ νῦν, “until now,” or “up to this point.” Compare Harl, *La Genèse*, 175.

99. See LSJ 233a for interrogative ἄρα “implying anxiety or impatience”; compare *GELS* 89a. The γε makes the whole more definite, without affecting the force of the ἄρα (LSJ 233a).

Sarra, interestingly, declines to be ignored, and asserts her initiative. Despite being a third party to the Lord's lecture of Abraam, Sarra interrupts with a flat denial of her earlier, frank response (18:15). In fact, the flow of the discourse teases the reader with the prospect of Sarra rejecting the deity's entire project: the Lord declares to Abraam, "'Sarra will have a son.' But Sarra denied it . . ." (ἔσται τῆ Σάρρα υἱός. ἠρνῆσατο δὲ Σάρρα . . .). Immediately, however, Sarra's interjection is specified: "I didn't laugh" (Οὐκ ἐγέλασα). Though small in scope, this claim, apparently aimed at deceiving one or more of the characters outside the tent, still shows a vigor foreign to the inert woman who floated through the early portions of this narrative. But the Lord has the final word: "No—not at all, but you laughed" (Οὐχί, ἀλλὰ ἐγέλασας).

In my analysis of the MT, I raised the rather knotty question of narratorial candor in the explanation of Sarah's attempt at deception. This direct attribution of motive, the only comment of its kind concerning her in the entire narrative, could hardly be clearer in either version: her denial of her laughter is offered, the narrator clarifies, "because she was afraid" (פֶּחַחָא; ἐφοβήθη γάρ).¹⁰⁰ But why this should be so is left wholly to the reader's inference; contrast the relatively prolix explanation of Abraam's lie in Gerar (20:2), on which more will be said just below. Here, some menacing, undisclosed story-level event might be posited; otherwise, it seems that Sarra must somehow have intuited the alarming, divine power of the visitor, soon to be demonstrated down in Sodom. If so, her earlier laugh and present denial both point to a character with more sense than Abraam displays in 17:17. But Sarra's unexplained fear here leaves me uneasy; for one thing, as in the MT, it seems to jar with her character's activity in Gen 16, when she last occupied the stage. In my discussion of the Hebrew narrative, I left this problem of narratorial honesty short of full resolution; in the LXX, though, I wonder if there isn't enough other evidence of a tendency to rob Sarra of initiative to tip the scales—and reject the narrator's

100. Brayford, *Genesis*, 81, inexplicably renders this in the first person ("But Sarra denied saying, 'I did not laugh; for I was afraid.'"). But Brayford's text of Alexandrinus, printed on the facing page, reads ἐφοβήθη, in agreement with the critical text in Wevers, *Genesis*. The first person does appear in the tradition, according to Wevers's apparatus; but sparsely, and not in Alexandrinus.

explanation here.¹⁰¹

For it is almost as if opportunities for Sarra's assertion and individuation are undermined before they can arise. Sarra's ill-treatment of a subordinate is prefigured in her own experience in Egypt; her idea of providing an heir by a slave, after Abraam's remarks about Masek, lacks the capacity to surprise; Sarra's laughter echoes Abraam's. Other aspects, such as the scenic device of the tent, or the deity's harsh response to Sarra where Abraam's identical reaction went unremarked, contribute to a general impression of restriction. Later, Sarra's collaborative action in Gerar is effectively merely a paraphrase of Abraam's script for her in 12:13, while Sarra's final act of initiative, where she urges Hagar and Ishmael's banishment, is followed by her own complete disappearance from the discourse until the note of her death. Naturally, many of these elements are familiar from the narrative of the MT. But a number of little tweaks in the LXX contribute to a persistent enervation and paling of Sarra's character: her somewhat more pronounced inertia in the opening chapters; the mention of Masek; Sarra's slightly more explicit shrouding in the tent; and her markedly less colorful remarks at hearing of her impending conception, which will find an analogue later in what might be described as her more conventional reaction to Isaac's birth. Finally, there is the matter of the narratorial explanation of Abraam's subsequent deception (20:2). Interestingly, this is also a note peculiar to the LXX; the fact that it was almost certainly copied from the similar passage in 26:7 has no bearing on its function in its context.¹⁰² What seems significant is that there, too, the narrator names fear as the motive for a character's lying speech (ἐφοβήθη γάρ, 20:2). But the full explanation—"he said . . . 'She is my sister' (because he was afraid to say 'She is my wife,' lest sometime the men of the

101. As noted in Chapter 2, I generally resist the arrangement of various kinds of narrative data in a fixed scale of reliability. In the scheme of Robert Alter, discussed there, the narrator's remark on Sarra's emotional motive here would presumably be considered perfectly reliable; any elements that clashed with the narrator's evaluation would thus be suspect. But it is too credulous to assume that the narrator, as a quasi-character, has no agenda of his or her own; as I mention just below, the narrator's presentation of Abraam's fear in Gerar, for example, is not credible. Certainly there is some theoretical stickiness to this enterprise, as the narrator's presentation of the discourse is the only way into the story for the reader. Yet narrative elements can and do push against each other: after Egypt, how can the reader accept the narrator's assertion that Abraam's lie about Sarra is prompted by his fear of death? Something must give.

102. See the discussion of this verse in Wevers, *Notes*, 289.

city kill him on account of her)”—is patently incredible after the events of Egypt.¹⁰³ I am all the less inclined, therefore, to trust the narrator here, and for me the motive behind Sarra’s denial of her laughter remains murky. But her attempt at deception can still be seen as an assertion of will and initiative, now restricted not only by the Lord’s rebuttal, but also by the narrator’s obfuscation.

The range of the discussion just above makes it useful to review Sarra’s trajectory to this point in the narrative. When Sarra as an actor last appeared in the discourse, so long ago in story time, she surprised, a bit, by breaking free of the torpor that had previously kept her inert and free of agency. Her newfound volition was exercised in cruelty; but even this seemed to aid in the definition of Sarra as a human character in opposition to the “pretty-faced” object that occupied the earlier narrative. The edges on this development were blunted, however, by a recognition of the derivative nature of Sarra’s proposal, and by an odd gender-blurring motif that softened the distinctions between her and Abraam.

Here, this oscillation between volition and restriction develops, not least under the influence of the scenic enclosure of the tent. While Sarra’s burst of will in Gen 16 apparently occurred in the open, here she is explicitly contained and hidden; yet she may still show defiance, even in inaction, over the matter of the bread for the visitors. Moreover, although Sarra betrays no ambition to overhear the conversation outside, she startles with a skeptical laugh—at least until it creeps in that here, too, Sarra’s action merely echoes Abraam’s. Indeed, looking across the tradition, Sarra’s soliloquy in the LXX reflects a figure just a bit paler, a bit drained of vigor. In response to her laughing but sober reaction, the deity twists her words, declining to speak to her directly—until she again asserts herself, interrupting with a bold lie, and is rebuked back into silence. Sarra’s utility to the fulfillment of the divine promises, which was first specified in her absence in Gen 17, continues to be defined very narrowly. “Sarra will have a son” (ἔξει υἱὸν

103. εἶπεν . . . Ἀδελφή μου ἐστίν· ἐφοβήθη γὰρ εἰπεῖν ὅτι Γυνή μου ἐστίν, μήποτε ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτὸν οἱ ἄνδρες τῆς πόλεως δι’ αὐτήν.

Σάρρα, 18:10). But Sarra will not, apparently, be invited to emerge from isolation in order to receive this remarkable news face to face, nor allowed to demonstrate any real initiative, nor permitted even to speak, let alone asked to offer an opinion on her appointed role. As elements accumulate that restrict Sarra, that show her actions to be derivative, that allow her little originality and narrow her capacity to surprise, I, at least, begin to wonder about a suppression collaboratively effected by Abraam, God—and the narrator.

More Imitative Agency—and Questions of Consistency (Gen 20:1–18 LXX)

Gen 20:1 And from there Abraam moved to the land toward the southwest and lived between Kades and between Sour and resided in Gerara as an alien. 2 And Abraam said of his wife Sarra, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say, “She is my wife,” lest perhaps the men of the city kill him on her account. Then Abimelech king of Gerara sent and took Sarra. 3 And God came in to Abimelech in his sleep during the night and said, “Look, you are about to die by reason of the woman whom you have taken, whereas she is married to a man.” 4 Now Abimelech had not touched her, and he said, “Lord, will you destroy an unwitting and righteous nation? 5 Did not he himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said to me, ‘He is my brother.’ I did this with a pure heart and righteousness of hands.” 6 Then God said to him during his sleep, “I too knew that you did this with a pure heart, and I was the one who spared you so that you did not sin in regard to me. Therefore I did not allow you to touch her. 7 And now return the woman to the man, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. If, however, you do not restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours.” 8 And Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and spoke of all these matters in their hearing; then all the men were very much afraid. 9 And Abimelech called Abraam and said to him, “What is this you have done to us? Surely we have not committed some sin in regard to you, that you have brought great sin on me and on my kingdom? You have done a deed to me that no one shall do.” 10 And Abimelech said to Abraam, “What did you observe that you did this?” 11 And Abraam said, “Because I said, It appears there is no piety in this place, and so they will kill me because of my wife. 12 For indeed, she is truly my sister by my father, but not by my mother, and she became a wife to me. 13 Now it came about when God brought me forth from my father’s house, that then I said to her, ‘This righteousness you shall do for me: in every place, there where we enter, say about me, He is my brother.’” 14 Then Abimelech took a thousand didrachmas, sheep and calves and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraam and restored his wife Sarra to him. 15 And Abimelech said to Abraam, “Look, my land is before you; settle where it may please you.” 16 And to Sarra he said, “Look, I have given your brother a thousand didrachmas; these shall be to you for the honor of your person and to all those with you, and tell the whole truth.” 17 Then Abraam prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his female slaves, and they gave birth. 18 For the Lord had, in shutting off,

shut off from the outside every womb in the house of Abimelech because of Sarra, Abraam's wife. (NETS)

Much of the narrative data concerning Sarra in Gerar is familiar, not only from the similar scene in Egypt, but also from the MT. While the initial ties between Gen 20 and 12:10–20 in the LXX are somewhat less marked, with *παροικέω* representing the only significant lexical link (20:1; 12:10), Abraam's first words here—"She is my sister," 20:2—instantly recall the Egyptian episode. Close parallels with the themes of Egypt, moreover, continue throughout: Sarra never speaks directly, but is taken bodily in a cynical exchange, partly aided by God, that sees the innocent harmed and those responsible enriched. Sarra's role in the central deception, however, is much different in Gerar. Although theirs is hardly an equal partnership, as Sarra remains subordinate to Abraam and absorbs nearly all of the plausible risk in this scheme, Sarra does help convince Abimelech that she is Abraam's sister: "She told me"—the king protests—"He is my brother!" (*αὐτή μοι εἶπεν Ἀδελφός μου ἐστίν*, 20:5).¹⁰⁴ This claim of connivance is implicitly affirmed by God (v. 6). Abraam's explanation that Sarra is actually his non-uterine sister (v. 12), on the other hand, is not credible at all. Sarra has been *ἡ γυνή Αβρά[ά]μ* from the start; the false claim is introduced in this episode as being *περὶ Σάρρας τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ* (v. 2); and Abraam's first direct speech in the broader narrative (12:11–13), considered alongside subsequent events, established him as a deceiver on this very matter. Sarra's resemblance to Abraam here, then, is not based in a blood relationship, but in her continuing adoption of his callous lack of regard for others.

There are, however, a few interesting developments between the traditions; one of these stems from the plainest textual disparity between the MT and the LXX that pertains to Sarra.

Abimelech, in the Hebrew, winds up his short speech to Sarah by merely explicating or

104. Against the rendering of NETS, this *αὐτή*, like the preceding *αὐτός*, seems to be merely an unemphatic third-person pronoun, a usage common in postclassical Greek; see Conybeare and Stock, *Grammar*, § 13. Perhaps it was felt, under the "interlinear paradigm" of NETS, that there was not enough warrant here to alter the NRSV, which renders the emphatic independent pronouns of the Hebrew with English reflexives. Brayford, *Genesis*, 87, who translates Alexandrinus, uses only simple personal pronouns.

reinforcing what he has already said. After speaking of his payment to Abraham as a “covering of eyes” (כסות עינים), he reassures Sarah: “you are justified before everyone” (ואת כל ונכחת, 20:16).

As I indicated in my discussion in Chapter 3, the simple fact that the king addresses Sarah marks a small distinction between the object of Egypt and the junior collaborator of Gerar. But here, in the LXX, Abimelech adds a startling remark to his mention of the money he has paid to Abraam, issuing what reads like a moral rebuke to Sarra: “just tell the truth in every respect!” (καὶ πάντα ἀλήθευσον).¹⁰⁵ This implicit accusation of deception underlines Sarra’s active agency in the plot of the episode to this point, while the assumption that she has the power to make ethical decisions presumes moral initiative going forward. However, the king’s chiding of Sarra here also recalls not only his own scolding of Abraam (vv. 9–10), but Pharaoh’s upbraiding of Abraam, as well (12:18–19). Thus, once again, it seems as if part of the price of Sarra’s agency is to play Abraam’s role; in a small paradox, then, Sarra’s actions sap her character of originality and initiative.

This same address also picks up the minor motif of Sarra’s “face.” Interestingly, the deceptive connotation of Abraam’s description of Sarra as “pretty-faced” (εὐπρόσωπος, 12:11), which gained no traction in Egypt, is most apt here, where, in a similar situation, Sarra actively works to misrepresent her relationship with Abraam. Several relevant themes are raised as Abimelech turns to Sarra and says: “Look—I have given 1000 didrachmas to your ‘brother’; this will be for you as a τιμὴν τοῦ προσώπου σου” (20:16; compare v. 14).¹⁰⁶ Under the circumstances, τιμή is a bit ambiguous at first. It is possible to construe this, as Wevers does, as “esteem,” as in “honor” or “dignity,” especially given the following clause, “and for all those

105. For this καὶ in imperative clauses, see Smyth § 2873; compare the example there, from Plato’s *Apology* (25a): καὶ μοι ἀποκρίναι, “Just answer me!” Its force is disjunctive; other good renderings, in Plato or in Gen 20:16, might be “only” or “but.” On ἀλήθευσον for נכחת, see Wevers, *Notes*, 297. For πάντα, the flavor of “in every respect,” “totally,” or “in everything” seems preferable to the “whole truth” of NETS, which may imply that Abimelech is taken in by Abraam’s story—that is, that he believes that Sarra merely failed to mention the key piece of information. Compare Wevers’s remark on the “obvious ironic intent” of Abimelech’s calling Abraam Sarra’s “brother”—this last clause, where he rebukes Sarra, shows that the king knows it is a lie (296–97). See LSJ 1345b; but compare *GELS* 25b.

106. Ἴδου δέδωκα χίλια δίδραχμα τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου· ταῦτα ἔσται σοι εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ προσώπου σου . . .

with you” (καὶ πάσαις ταῖς μετὰ σοῦ, presumably referring to female slaves).¹⁰⁷ The payment is thus a restoration of honor for Sarra’s “face” in the wake of her irregular relationship with the king. But the only other occurrence of τιμή in Genesis is in 44:2, where it refers to the “price” Joseph’s brothers paid for grain (τὴν τιμὴν τοῦ σίτου).¹⁰⁸ Moreover, not only is the general context here one of frank exchange, just as in Egypt, but the referent of the subject pronoun in the clause in question can only be this sum of “1000 didrachmas”: this is the “value,” then, of Sarra’s “face,” or “person.”¹⁰⁹ Attracting if inanimate before Pharaoh, repelling to Hagar, Sarra’s face represents a commodity here. Again, Sarra’s more prominent role in the plot points to an agency more apparent than real; for all the years that have passed since Egypt, she is still an item rented to rulers by Abraam.

In my analysis of this episode in the MT, I argued that Sarah could not be as thorough a victim in Gerar as she was in Egypt. This is so not only due to the differences between the episodes, though these are significant—the question of Sarah’s connivance in Egypt in the MT remains open, while her collaboration in Gerar is explicitly claimed by the king, for instance—but also because Sarah’s broader narrative arc makes a precise reprise of her former role less than credible. Sarra’s trajectory in the LXX, considered over the same span, traces a more extreme course. In keeping with her passive depiction in the introduction to the narrative, Sarra in Egypt was almost completely inert, her involvement in Abraam’s scheme ordered and scripted. However, in the event, she did not demonstrate even a mechanical obedience, but remained silent and free of agency, almost as if she were inanimate. It was difficult, in fact, to posit any credible story-level action for Sarra at all. This alone would make her active role in the seemingly very

107. Wevers, *Notes*, 296–97, acknowledges the ambiguity referred to below, but finally favors “esteem” here.

108. Compare, among other examples, Exod 34:20, or Lev 27 throughout.

109. Compare Brenton, *Septuagint*: “for the price of thy countenance.” NETS, while rendering “honor” in the main text, as quoted above, also includes a note indicating that “price” is possible here. Compare LSJ 1793b–1794a.

similar situation of Gerar more pronounced; as noted above, however, the rebuke of Abimelech in the LXX further underlines Sarra's participation here, which pushes these poles in her character even further apart.

These swings may begin to intimate the kind of contradictions in Sarra's character that emerge in the episode to follow, where her behavior grows increasingly erratic. I do not believe, however, that these apparent inconsistencies strike at the basic coherence of Sarra's character, even when considered alongside the often derivative species of action that seems to be her specialty in the LXX. As a theoretical matter, it seems to me that a mimetic understanding of character can cede an assumption of integrity in personality only as a last resort. Moreover, I recognize on an experiential level that human capacities for vacillation and contradiction are vast. Most of us, I think, maintain a number of traits that are strictly incompatible; and this is not even to consider personalities that are so far from the mean as to be judged abnormal.

A consideration of Sarra's programmatic role in the broader narrative of God's promises to Abraam and his descendants, a narrative element only to be emphasized in the coming scenes, may also provide some insight here. As seen throughout this discussion, there are several related, recurring factors that combat Sarra's individuation in the LXX. Sarra's early passivity and lack of agency eventually give way, but only to specially limited varieties of activity and agency, as her initiative is persistently undermined—most often by casting her actions as imitative of Abraam's—and her attempts at self-assertion are met with restriction. To my reading, part of the effect of this consistent counterpressure on Sarra's individuation is to underline firmly the primary perspective from which she is regarded by the narrator, by Abraam, and by God: Sarra is useful to the fulfillment of the divine pledges. As will be seen in the next episode, Sarra's utility forms a common thread that may help to explain the depictions of her seemingly incompatible actions.

Who Will “Rejoice with” Sarra? (Gen 21:1–14 LXX)

Gen 21:1 And the Lord visited Sarra as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarra as he had spoken, 2 and when Sarra had conceived, she bore Abraam a son in his old age at the appointed time, as the Lord had spoken to him. 3 And Abraam called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarra bore him, Isaak. 4 And Abraam circumcised Isaak on the eighth day, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraam was a hundred years of age when his son Isaak was born to him. 6 And Sarra said, “The Lord has made laughter for me, for anyone who hears will congratulate me.” 7 And she said, “Who will report to Abraam that Sarra is nursing a child? For I have borne a son in my old age.” 8 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraam made a great banquet on the day his son Isaak was weaned. 9 But when Sarra saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, who had been born to Abraam, playing with her son Isaak, 10 then she said to Abraam, “Cast out this slave-girl and her son; for the son of this slave-girl shall not inherit together with my son Isaak.” 11 Now the matter seemed very hard in the sight of Abraam on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraam, “Do not let the matter be hard in your sight on account of the child and on account of the slave-girl; whatever Sarra says to you, obey her voice, for in Isaak offspring shall be named for you. 13 And as for the son of the slave-girl, I will make him also into a great nation, because he is your offspring.” 14 Then Abraam rose in the morning and took bread loaves and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar and put them on her shoulder, along with the child and sent her away. And when she departed she began wandering about the wilderness over against the well of the oath. (NETS)

At last, Sarra’s most enduring trait is reversed completely, as she conceives and bears a son after a divine visitation (21:1–2). The Lord’s presence and activity, as well as a reference to the advanced age of either Abraam or Sarra, attest to supernatural influence on her pregnancy and birth; but there is no indication here of divine parentage.¹¹⁰ Sarra’s bearing is “to” or “for Abraam” (τῷ Ἀβραάμ, v. 2), and that Isaac is “his son” is underlined repeatedly in the verses that follow. This tracks completely with Sarra’s concern for Abraam’s posterity in 16:2. Indeed, Sarra has demonstrated virtually no interest in bearing a child for herself. Her scheme with Hagar was

110. There seems to be no sexual connotation that attaches to ἐπισκέπτομαι (21:1); compare *GELS* 279b–280a. As in the parallel case of the MT, Sampson’s visit to his wife in Judg 15:1 does nothing to suggest that this verb is used euphemistically; the Lord’s visit to Hannah or Anna in 1 Kgdms [1 Sam] 2:21 is perhaps more ambiguous, but hardly conclusive. Whether τὸ γῆρας (“old age,” Gen 21:2) modifies Sarra or Abraam here is unclear, despite the confident rendering of NETS. Wevers, *Notes*, 299, suggests “in (her) old age” as contextually most appropriate, especially in light of v. 7. However, the relative proximity of Ἀβραάμ, and the trailing αὐτῷ, may point toward Abraam; and see 24:36, which, against the MT, refers to Abraam’s age rather than Sarra’s.

explicitly for Abraam (16:2), while her laughing response in the tent, as clarified by her soliloquy there, reflected skepticism, not delight at the possibility of bearing a child at ninety (18:12).

But this makes Sarra's response to Isaac's birth all the more unexpected. In distinction to the MT, where her comments appear to reflect deep ambivalence, partly rooted in a concern for her appearance before others, Sarra's remarks in 21:6–7 seem prompted by a genuine feeling of happiness, even joy. Their story context is almost completely undetermined, and it is impossible to tell whether Sarra is speaking to herself, perhaps in the presence of a cradled or nursing Isaac, or in a broader social venue. Her first statement, too, might initially seem to be of uncertain force: "the Lord," Sarra says, "made a laugh," or "an occasion of laughter for me" (Γέλωτά μοι ἐποίησεν κύριος, v. 6).¹¹¹ The syntax, unlike that of the Hebrew, precludes the idea that Sarra has herself been made into a "joke" here. But γέλως, as a prompt for laughter, is naturally not always positive; compare Jer 20:7 or Job 17:6, where it evokes an object of scorn and ridicule. However, Sarra's following explanation excludes such an understanding entirely. The Lord has made laughter for her, she clarifies, "because anyone who hears will rejoice with me," or "congratulate me" (ὅς γὰρ ἂν ἀκούσῃ, συγχαρεῖται μοι, Gen 21:6).¹¹² The employment of σύν in composition, alongside the first-person pronoun, demands Sarra's own emotional involvement here; that this relative clause is inferentially bound to Sarra's first statement removes any lingering ambiguity.¹¹³ The Lord's visitation, her conception and birth of Isaac: all this is a "cause of [happy] laughter" that Sarra expects to share with others. In this context, the tone of Sarra's next rumination can hardly be other than one of wonder and quiet pride: "Who would have expected to tell Abraam, 'Sarra is nursing a child'? Because I bore a son in my old age!" (v. 7).¹¹⁴

111. See LSJ 342b: "occasion for laughter, food for laughter." Compare *GELS* 126b, 570a.

112. LSJ 1668a; *GELS* 644a.

113. In a few places in the tradition, γάρ is omitted here, which could be a recension back towards the Hebrew. The reading συγχαρεῖται μοι, however, appears to be universal; see apparatus in Wevers, *Genesis*.

114. Τίς ἀναγγελεῖ τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι θηλάζει παιδίον Σάρρα; ὅτι ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἐν τῷ γήρει μου. See Wevers, *Notes*, 300–301, for this future "of expectation." Philologically noteworthy here, as Wevers points out, is the Greek's rendering of three Hebrew perfects with a future, a present, and an aorist—demonstrating both "the neutral character of the Hebrew affix stem" and the translator's "full understanding" of this quality (301).

The scene that follows on these joyful moments, however, raises a question of its own: who, precisely, “will rejoice with” Sarra? At first, the context seems wholly appropriate to this kind of shared emotion, as Abraam gives a “big reception” or “great banquet” (δοχήν μεγάλην) on the occasion of Isaac’s weaning-day (21:8).¹¹⁵ But Sarra herself puts an end to the only happiness that is implied here: “when Sarra saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, who was born to Abraam, playing with Isaac her son, she said to Abraam, ‘Cast out this slave and her son; because the son of this slave shall not inherit with my son Isaac’” (vv. 9–10).¹¹⁶ As in the MT, Ishmael’s offense is ill-defined; παίζω can mean “to play,” whether a game or an instrument, “to dance,” or “to jest” in action or word.¹¹⁷ The term’s possible sexual connotations are perhaps stronger here in the Greek, as the relevant clause, with its clarifying prepositional phrase added to the Hebrew’s laconic קָרַח, is precisely equivalent to the description of Isaac “toying with Rebekah his wife” in 26:8—conduct that leads Abimelech to deduce that the two are sexually involved.¹¹⁸ Moreover, such connotations for παίζω are native to Greek.¹¹⁹ However, this is still not the simplest reading of this scene here: the root meaning of παίζω—derived from παῖς, as is even clearer in its Doric orthography, παῖσδω—is simply “to play as a child does,” and Sarra makes no

115. This term, used elsewhere in the LXX and OG only of parties involving royalty, might imply a more decorous celebration than the πότος or “drinking party” thrown by Lot in Gen 19:3. The MT features נְהַשֵּׁם in both locations, which may suggest an attempt to disassociate Abraam’s activity here with that of his intemperate nephew; δοχή has no direct tie to a verb for drinking, as is the case with both other nouns (πίνω and נהשׁ, respectively). But Abraam’s δοχή is unlikely to have been a dry affair, to judge from other occurrences of the word (Gen 26:30; 1 Esd 3:1–3; Dan 5:1). Moreover, δοχή and πότος freely alternate, perhaps for purposes of style, as renderings of נהשׁ in Esther, which suggests that they were regarded as near-synonyms (see in particular Est 1:3, 5; 5:4–6).

116. ἰδοῦσα δὲ Σάρρα τὸν υἱὸν Ἀγάρ τῆς Αἰγυπτίας, ὃς ἐγένετο τῷ Ἀβραάμ, παίζοντα μετὰ Ἰσαάκ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς, καὶ εἶπεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ Ἐκβαλε τὴν παιδίσκην ταύτην καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς· οὐ γὰρ κληρονομήσει ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης ταύτης μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαάκ. I have omitted the awkward first καὶ in my translation as adding nothing to the sense; it seems to be the oldest reading, however (Wevers, *Notes*, 302; compare the apparatus in Wevers, *Genesis*).

117. LSJ 1288b.

118. In 26:8, Isaac is spotted παίζοντα μετὰ Ῥεβέκκας τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ; here, in 21:9, Ishmael is seen παίζοντα μετὰ Ἰσαάκ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς. The parallel is also strengthened by the fact that the Greek doesn’t uniformly render קָרַח. In the MT, the tie between 21:9 and 26:8, despite their identical forms, is somewhat watered down by the relative frequency of derivatives of קָרַח elsewhere in the narrative; but these two verses contain the only instances of παίζω in LXX Genesis.

119. See παίζονται πρὸς ἀλλήλους near the end of Xenophon’s *Symposium* (9.2), cited in LSJ 1288b. The following sections, especially 9.7, remove any possible ambiguity over the sexual connotations of παίζω there.

reference to sexual matters in her declaration about these two youngsters. Rather, the key element is that Ishmael is playing *with* Isaac; and the denotation of μετά, which is “participation” and “community of action,” is what Sarra cannot abide.¹²⁰ Ishmael “shall not inherit . . . with” Isaac (οὐ . . . κληρονομήσει . . . μετά), a decree prompted by the sight of his “playing with” Isaac (παίζοντα μετά). The LXX’s addition of “with Isaac her son” in 21:9, then, as Wevers contends, adroitly makes the best of a bad job in communicating the force of the untranslatable pun on Isaac’s name contained in קִצְמָ, and is sensibly informed by the context of v. 10.¹²¹ In fact, I might go further than Wevers and suggest that it is possible to read παίζοντα as a truly inspired choice here: as the MT features Ishmael קִצְמָ, or “Isaac-ing,” perhaps the LXX sees Ishmael “kidding” around, “acting the child”—and as Sarra, supported by God, makes clear, there can be only one child to inherit. In any event, the implication of togetherness as Ishmael “kids with Isaac” only increases the sad irony of this scene in the broader episode, which pictures Sarra both anticipating communal rejoicing and advocating the fracture of her household.

Sarra, with her expression of joy at the conception and birth of Isaac, has finally generated true surprise. Her reaction is difficult to anticipate on the evidence of her actions in Gen 16, seems unusual given her response in Gen 18, and is flatly strange in the wake of her participation in the ruse of Gerar—which occurs, after all, sometime not long after Sarra overhears the prediction of the event that will bring her such happiness. Moreover, her emotional outcry here is an act that has not been prospectively robbed of its force by association with a previously related idea or action of Abraam’s, as was the case with her provision of Hagar, her laugh, and her collaboration in the duping of Abimelech. But I confess that this “surprise” strikes me as rather unsatisfying in its conventionality—Sarra, so often derivative, at last demonstrates her originality by hewing closely to what seems to be a rather stereotyped and predictable script

120. See Smyth § 1691.

121. See Wevers, *Notes*, 302: the “plus” of μετά Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς is “not textual in origin but rather due to the translator’s attempt not only to translate קִצְמָ but also to interpret the point of the Hebrew word play.”

of the overjoyed new mother. This may be a mere value judgment on my part; but it is hard for me to see how her reaction here can be a significant step towards real individuation. In fact, the narrator's emphases here seem to reveal more about Sarra's role as an instrument than they illuminate her as a character. Sarra's production of the heir to the promises doesn't satisfy any deeply-held desire of her own, if her narrative data to this point is any guide; rather, it completes a crucial link in the broader divine plan. Surely the woman who scoffs at her predicted pregnancy and goes on to collaborate in her own sale to Abimelech experiences a rather complex mix of emotions, both at once and over time, as radical developments in her postmenopausal body culminate in her delivery of a son at ninety. That the narrator relates only Sarra's simple joy at these events casts her as a cipher for a narratorial perspective that subordinates her completely to the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraam, Isaac, and their descendants. In this way, Sarra's image is washed out even as her oldest trait is transformed.

Similar considerations can help to explain Sarra's urging of the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael in the wake of her anticipated shared joy over Isaac, which at first seems not so much surprising as flatly contradictory, even incoherent. The hardening arc of her character in the MT, which was well expressed in her ambivalence, rooted in self-regard, over Isaac, and which culminated in the pursuit of her and her son's interests in the slaves' dismissal, is replaced here with a less credible wavering between joy and cold calculation. No one "will rejoice with" Sarra here; rather, at the same event's ostensible celebration, Abraam will find her order "cruel" (σκληρόν), and Hagar and Ishmael will meet harsh exile the following morning (21:11, 14). And while Sarra's demand may appear to show initiative, however callous, once again this impression is somewhat weakened—here by a recollection of whose interests are truly being served. Sarra is, first, a tool in the resolution of the divine pledges to the men in her family, and with this final act her utility, at least as a sentient actor, is at an end. The responsible speculation of a sympathetic reader might posit motives of jealousy here, or unresolved resentment, or any compound of a range of familiar human feelings. But the narrator's interests, as noted above, are far too narrow to encompass any complexity of emotion in Sarra; instead, what the narrator highlights is Sarra's

function in the final establishment of the divinely ordained succession from Abraam to Isaac (vv. 10–12). In the end, in keeping with restrictive responses to her volition elsewhere, Sarra’s advocating of Hagar and Ishmael’s disappearance ironically seals her own permanent departure from the discourse as a living person. Now the narrator sends Sarra away, not into a tent but apparently to the “city of Arboch” (πόλει Ἀρβόκ), from which she will emerge only as a corpse (23:2).

The Death of Sarra (Gen 23:1–20 LXX)

Little enough distinguishes the accounts of Sarra’s death in the LXX and the MT. So thorough is her effacement from the intervening discourse that almost nothing can be said about the thirty-plus years that pass in the story between the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael and Abraam’s now-familiar use of Sarra’s body as a bargaining chip for gain in Gen 23. Sarra remains hidden away, interestingly, in the LXX, “in the hollow” (ἐν τῷ κοιλώματι, v. 2), a note that evokes one of the Greek words for “womb” (κοιλία) and recalls Sarra’s other concealments or captivities, whether in the house of Pharaoh, in the “enclosure” of her fertility by the Lord, or in Abraam’s tent. It is perhaps clearer in the LXX that Abraam is living elsewhere at the time of Sarra’s death, as he must “come” (ἔρχομαι) to perform the rites of mourning; but his emotional investment in these observances is equally indeterminate (v. 2).¹²²

Sarra’s inertia and passivity, so marked in the beginning of the LXX narrative, is perfected here; once virtually inanimate and objectified, she is now a pure object, Abraam’s corpse (τοῦ νεκροῦ αὐτοῦ, 23:3; and compare throughout, vv. 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 15). Though

122. Wevers, *Notes*, 331, communicates his distinct lack of interest in Abraam’s whereabouts with an uncharacteristically inane remark: “presumably he came from wherever he was”—a statement difficult to contest. As with the MT, there is no conclusive evidence either way about the presence of genuine feeling in Abraam’s actions here; κόπτομαι, literally “to beat oneself,” often describes public observance of mourning, but real emotion can operate under socially-ordained forms. Compare LSJ 979b; Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata* 396, cited there, where a drunk woman cries out “mourn Adonis!” (κόπτεσθ’ Ἀδωνιν), referring to public rites; Gen 50:10; 1 Kgdms [1 Sam] 25:1; and Luke 8:52, also mentioned by LSJ. Πενθέω can also describe formal observance, as in Gen 50:3; see, however, Jacob’s public but obviously heartfelt grief for Joseph in 37:34–35.

she is finally referred to as a human being here, this is only to note that she remains Abraam's woman, as in the very beginning (τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, v. 19); and her burial is one last device in the accomplishment of God's pledges to Abraam. Sarra may be entombed in this cave, but it is "for Abraam as a possession" (τῷ Ἀβραάμ εἰς κτήσιν, vv. 18, 20).

Sarra in the LXX

In my treatment of Sarah in the MT, I argued that she is complex but coherent, invoking the metaphor of an "arc" to speak of her character's progress through the narrative. This relative stability, even in development, allowed me to frame my summary discussion largely in terms of Sarah's relationships. In the LXX, however, Sarra's portrait, while still complex, is drawn with strokes that at times seem erratic, and her trajectory describes a rather more jerky, halting line. Without losing focus on the relational aspects of her characterization, therefore, it seems better here to take a mostly linear view of Sarra's construction.

In the scenes that lead up to her family's descent into Egypt (11:26–12:9), Sarra in the LXX is almost wholly passive and defined in the negative. Her childlessness is described in terms that suggest an enduring condition, which both adds to the general impression of Sarra's inertia and increases the impact of this trait's eventual reversal. Sarra's powerlessness and lack of connections, familiar from the MT, combine with her slightly increased passivity and the meaninglessness of her name to form a character who appears somewhat muted in comparison. While nearly every character indicator here is relational, this, too, especially considered retrospectively, begins to look like just another aspect of this muting, as Sarra will go on to be repeatedly and derivatively defined in Abraam's image. When brought into Egypt (12:10–20), Sarra continues, inert, on a course predicted in part by her earlier trajectory. She needs no persuasion here; her role is ordered and scripted. But she displays no hint of agency, not even in mouthing the words Abraam forms for her, and remains completely passive, even inanimate: a medium of exchange, no more.

When Sarra, after the ascent from Egypt, disappears from the discourse for some time (13:2–15:21), she hovers, undeveloping in the background, for her passive portrayal to this point discourages much speculation as to her story activity. The interesting note of Masek, Abraam's slave and, he supposes, mother of his heir (15:2), prospectively robs Sarra of some initiative in her coming offer of Hagar. This reinforces Sarra's lack of individuation and marks an occasion where Sarra's actions are undermined—echoed, as it were, before they can occur. Although Sarra does demonstrate a sudden break from the inertia that has held her fast up to this point, other elements work to tame the novelty of what she does in 16:1–6. A curious motif of gender ambiguities in the characters' speech blurs distinctions between Sarra and Abraam, helping to suggest subtle shifts in their balance of power but also smudging the edges of Sarra's character. This lack of clarity is only underscored by the derivative nature of Sarra's "taking" and disposal of a subordinate's sexuality (v. 3), which recalls her own treatment in Egypt; the stated aim of Sarra's scheme, moreover, in her first direct speech in the narrative (v. 2), is not her benefit, but Abraam's—precisely recalling his first discourse-level communication in 12:11–13. If Sarra does show glimpses of true agency here, its end is merely the exercise of cruelty, abetted by the deity who will employ and then discard Sarra as an instrument in the divine plan. The first clear intimations of this follow shortly in the discourse, as God symbolizes the predicted reversal of Sarra's enduring infertility by changing her name—just slightly, and without intrinsic meaning in a Greek context—and specifying her role in the promises that have been given repeatedly to Abraam since Haran (17:15–21). But Sarra herself does not merit an audience here, and it is her son and his descendants who will truly enjoy the fruits of God's pledges. Sarra is a vital conduit, but only that; just as in Egypt, she is an object used towards an end.

In the following episode of Abraam's entertainment of the strangers (18:1–15), elements emerge that appear almost calculated to combat Sarra's volition. With Hagar, Sarra demonstrated some developing agency and relatively increased power; here, she may first show defiance in inaction, by refusing to prepare the bread (vv. 6, 8), but remains throughout shrouded from view, hidden in Abraam's tent. When she overhears the visitor's prediction, her laugh at first startles—

but just as soon recalls the identical, earlier response of Abraam (v. 12; 17:17). When laid alongside developments such as the mention of Masek, this kind of echoing may start even to suggest a narratorial strategy that aims to preempt Sarra's initiative. Other aspects of the narrative contribute to this feeling of restriction, or paling of Sarra's character. Considered across the tradition, Sarra's logical reply in 18:12 drains her of some vitality. Moreover, as Sarra's words are twisted and she is spoken of in the third person, she attempts to assert herself with a plain lie (vv. 13, 15). This, however, earns her not only a divine rebuke, but the narrator's untrustworthy evaluation of her motivation (v. 15).

A number of these themes continue in Gerar, where Sarra exercises agency—but only, in a fulfillment of the deceptive connotations of Abraam's earlier description of her as “pretty-faced,” to help Abraam restage his Egyptian scheme (20:1–18). Here she receives another rebuke, this time from Abimelech, who urges her to tell the truth (v. 16). Once again, however, this merely casts Sarra in the mold of Abraam, whose scolding by rulers is by now a familiar motif. Sarra's active collaboration here, moreover, only highlights her character's dramatic shift away from the inert object that featured in the similar situation of Egypt. These erratic swings in activity, especially when set alongside the derivative nature of much of her behavior, may start to trouble a reader seeking a coherent image of Sarra's character. Here as elsewhere, however, contradiction or instability in her characterization might be, at least in part, an artifact of the narrator's basic interest in Sarra, which begins and ends in her utility to the divine promises.

The prominence of this theme of instrumentality endures in Sarra's final scenes as a living actor, where her persistent childlessness is reversed (21:1–10). As Sarra had never explicitly betrayed interest in a child of her own, her delight at Isaac's birth (vv. 6–7) is a true surprise, if a somewhat frustratingly conventional response, and Sarra's course seems increasingly erratic and difficult to understand as the episode continues. In the wake of her remark about “rejoicing with” others over Isaac, Sarra urges the “cruel” and final banishment of Hagar and Ishmael at a celebration—of Isaac (vv. 6, 8–14). However, the depictions of her puzzling joy and sudden vindictiveness are both at least partly explained by Sarra's

programmatic role in the narrator's broader project: her seeming contradictions resolve in their contribution to the achievement of the purposes of the deity, as the provision of emotional motive nuance to Sarra's actions completely fails to engage the narrator's curiosity. As in Gen 16 and 20, what agency Sarra exercises here is in the interest of the injury of others; and in what reads like a last underlining of the theme of restriction on Sarra's volition, and a penultimate confirmation of her identity as a narrative tool, this act precipitates her own disappearance—not that of Hagar and Ishmael—from the discourse. Hidden away in a “hollow,” Sarra will reappear only as a corpse, representing the ideal of her passive, inert characterization in the opening of the narrative: as a true object at last, her body becomes a perfect pawn in the realization of part of Abraam and God's plans (23:1–20).

The elements I have drawn out in this summary do not exhaust the figure of Sarra in the LXX, as I think the body of the discussion above shows. Aspects of her characterization that were prominent in the MT, such as the theme of gain and loss, or possession and lack, are by no means absent here. But even this is a little weaker, robbed of elements such as the subtle play with her regal name, or her ostensible hope to be “built up” out of Hagar, or her ambiguous response to giving birth at last. Other familiar themes are also less prominent. As shown just above, Sarra's character doesn't precisely describe a hardening arc, but moves somewhat erratically, especially near the end, from collaboration in the sale of her body, to frank joy at Isaac's birth, to urging the cruel ejection of Hagar and Ishmael. Sarra's sensitivity to her image in the eyes of others, to take another example, simply never achieves the traction that this motif obtains in the MT. A partial analogue might be sought in the notes about Sarra's “face” in the LXX, but this element primarily illuminates her external features and offers relatively limited penetration into questions of motive.

What strikes me as being most indelible about Sarra's portrait in the LXX, however, is amply brought out above: when she is not passive or mute, a virtual or actual object, what she does is so frequently and unambiguously derivative of Abraam's actions that her individuation

suffers. This is, of course, not an entirely new theme; interestingly, too, it is a significant facet of her characterization in both the Apocryphon and the *Antiquities*, though mostly in novel ways. But here, when notes such as the mention of Masek or Abimelech's rebuke of Sarra accumulate on top of familiar elements such as Sarra's laugh, or her treatment of Hagar, the effect is not merely additive but geometric. Moreover, when these derivative echoes are laid alongside Sarra's erratic swings in activity in the LXX, her character's definition can appear further blurred.

But I do not think that Sarra ends in incoherence; nor do I believe that her complexity makes her "psychotic," as Adele Berlin memorably claims of another erratic character, Saul.¹²³ Rather, Sarra in the LXX is dialed back from the beginning, prospectively washed out, subtly but insistently, by the narrator. Mimicry on the story level does not account for most of Sarra's derivative activity. Instead, her initiative is often stolen before she can exercise it, and her attempts at agency are met with restriction. The cumulative effect of the notes of passivity and narrowly limited subjectivity that work to compress Sarra's individuation is to emphasize her utility to the narrator's overriding interest in the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraam. This is proven in the breach when Sarra finally and genuinely surprises, for her joy at Isaac's birth only sanctions the deity's plan by delight at its accomplishment. It seems unfair, given her struggles to individuate herself, that I should find Sarra here to be slightly less sympathetic than her incarnation in the MT; but sympathy requires knowledge and understanding, and the small but telling changes to Sarra in the LXX seem almost calculated to prevent the acquisition of these.

I noted above that Sarra's disappearance from the discourse after the banishing of Hagar and Ishmael makes it almost impossible to speculate about the final thirty-plus years of her life. But a final little surprise waits in 24:67, where Isaac is said to have "entered his mother's house," there to be "comforted"—apparently by his love for Rebekah, whom he takes as a wife—"about

123. Berlin, *Poetics*, 40.

Sarra his mother.”¹²⁴ This occurs just a few years after Sarra’s death, as Isaac is now forty (25:20). Sarra’s relationship “with Isaac her son” endures, then, in some fashion, over the decades of story time in which Sarra is lost to view. Just why Isaac needs to be comforted is not immediately clear. While the MT’s אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ is terse, its most likely meaning seems to be “after his mother[’s death],” which implies grief; *περὶ Σάρρας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ*, however, is at once plainer and even less specific.¹²⁵ It is just possible, recalling Sarra’s history of anger and cruelty, to wonder whether Isaac’s new, loving relationship helps to heal scars from his mother’s abuse. But there is no indication that Sarra’s joy at Isaac’s birth was feigned, even if this simple feeling fails to encompass the full range of Sarra’s emotional response, and the discourse contains no hint that Isaac had anything to fear from his mother—something that cannot be said about Abraam after Gen 22. Moreover, the employment of *παρακαλέω* in 37:35 and, perhaps to a lesser degree, 38:12, suggests a context of bereavement here. Isaac, then, obtains comfort for his grief at the loss of his mother. Perhaps here, finally, there is a little something more “about Sarra” that is not derivative, not an echo from elsewhere. For while Isaac may fulfill his filial duty by entombing Abraam after his death (25:7–10), he betrays no sign of grief there; but in Isaac’s long mourning of Sarra’s passing, there is an implication of love.

I will now move to examine the figure of Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon.

124. εἰσηλθεν δὲ Ἰσαὰκ εἰς τὸν οἶκον τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν Ῥεβέκκαν, καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτοῦ γυνή, καὶ ἠγάπησεν αὐτήν· καὶ παρεκλήθη Ἰσαὰκ περὶ Σάρρας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ.

125. Compare Wevers, *Notes*, 376.

CHAPTER 5

SARAI IN THE GENESIS APOCRYPHON

Introduction

Now I proceed to a reading of the character of Sarai (שרי) in the Genesis Apocryphon (GenAp), which is the only substantial non-biblical text found at Qumran that reflects on the figure of Sarah known from Genesis.¹ As in the preceding two chapters, my approach relies on the poetics of character and characterization developed in Chapter 2, and seeks to train a light on Sarai in her connections to a variety of other narrative elements. Central among these is the figure of Abram, who is not only a character in the story, but, most significantly, also the narrator of the discourse. This situation, which is unique among the works considered in this study, means

1. In Martin G. Abegg, Jr., “Concordance of Proper Nouns in the Non-biblical Texts from Qumran,” in *The Texts from the Judaean Desert: Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*, ed. Emanuel Tov, DJD 39 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 281–82, the only references to שרי are in the Genesis Apocryphon. 4Q364 1a–b, 3 and 4Q365 1, 1, both copies of 4QReworked Pentateuch, feature the name שרה in lines that correspond to Gen 25:19 and 21:9, respectively; the other instances in the Scrolls refer to the Sarah in Tobit. Compare Sidnie White Crawford, “Sarah,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 2, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 826–27. The Hebrew remains of Jubilees at Qumran do not contain any references to Sarah. There is a reconstructed reference in James Kugel’s translation of 4Q225 (4QPseudo-Jubilees^a) 2 I, 11, in the context of the Akedah: “Take your son Isaac, [your] only on[e] from Sarah” (James L. Kugel, “Pseudo-Jubilees,” in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2013], 467). The edition of 4Q225 by VanderKam and Milik (DJD 13) does not venture so far. “Non-biblical” is an obvious anachronism here, and open to debate in any case: Debel, “Experimental Considerations,” 102–5, argues that the Genesis Apocryphon might best be described as a “variant literary edition” of Genesis. Convention is about the only thing in favor of calling this highly interesting and varied document the “Genesis Apocryphon,” but this vague name is now so firmly established as to be unalterable. The most popular alternative, ספר אבות (or כתב אבהתא in Aramaic), “Book of the Patriarchs,” seems rather ungenerous given the prominence of women in certain key parts of the remains. See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 16—hereafter, *GA*. This text is also variously abbreviated (1Q20; 1QapGen; 1QapGen^{at}; 1QGenAp), and is represented by a variety of shorthand notations used with column and line numbers. Of these, I have adopted GenAp (compare the practice in Daniel A. Machiela, “Genesis Revealed: The Apocalyptic Apocryphon from Qumran Cave 1,” in *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited: Texts from Cave 1 Sixty Years After Their Discovery*, ed. Daniel K. Falk, et al., STDJ [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 206–21), which seems more appropriate to a discussion in English than “apGen,” the official abbreviation in DJD 39 (449). I also refer to the text by its full name, or simply as “the Apocryphon,” another usage with substantial scholarly precedence.

that Abram's perspective must be constantly engaged: everything is "according to Abram," and his reliability, or lack thereof, needs frequent scrutiny. As in my previous work, I do not adopt the posture of a first-time reader here, but draw observations from across the narrative as needed to illuminate my discussion. While there may be minor tension, some perhaps unconscious, between my knowledge of Genesis and the Apocryphon's recognizably analogous narrative components, this does not raise the kind of theoretical obstacles that complicated my analysis of the Septuagint. Instead, I try in the main "to read the Apocryphon on its own," as Moshe Bernstein has urged, in my pursuit of Sarai's portrait here.²

My reading of Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon emphasizes her unusual, mercurial trajectory. After a slow start, Sarai's depiction grows rapidly in definition and complexity, revealing an inquisitive, clever, vocal, and emotional woman whom Abram seems to value as a companion. Indeed, as Abram relates it, the two are similar in a number of ways. Sarai demonstrates agency and initiative after Abram describes an unsettling, seemingly predictive dream, and subsequently somehow so impresses visiting Egyptian nobles that they return to court and regale Pharaoh with a lengthy poem devoted to her striking beauty, profound wisdom, and impressive manual skill. Inflamed, the king apparently abducts Sarai and attempts to kill Abram, who is saved by Sarai's opportune lie—"he is my brother"—but is nonetheless distraught at his loss. But here, just when Sarai's image has gathered fine color and detail, and just as her centrality to the plot is clearest, she is reduced abruptly and permanently to the status of a

2. See Bernstein, "Unity," 133–34. Bernstein argues that such reading better approximates the perspective of the narrative's ancient reader or auditor. However, his program is entirely congruent, it seems to me, with narrative-critical priorities: "Once it is acknowledged that the Apocryphon is more than a series of narratives from Genesis strung together *seriatim* . . . we can, and should, focus our attention on the work itself, and not only on its sources or relationship to the Bible. The next step . . . is to study the work as a literary entity, divorced as far as is possible from its biblical model, analyzing it as if we had discovered it without having a biblical original before us." As Bernstein notes, however, it is "impossible and actually unproductive" to maintain this posture absolutely (133 n. 65), and I have not hesitated to draw on Genesis where it might contribute to the question at hand. Compare the methodological remarks of George J. Brooke, "From Bible to Midrash: Approaches to Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls by Modern Interpreters," in *Northern Lights on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Nordic Qumran Network 2003–2006*, ed. Anders Klostergaard Petersen, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 18–19, who points to the potential advantages of "such reading strategies as post-colonialism, spatial approaches, reader-response analysis, etc.," to the historical project of Qumran critics.

disputed object. Similarities and apparent mutuality notwithstanding, it becomes plain that Abram values only Sarai's sexual exclusivity; her liberty is of no concern by comparison. Moreover, Sarai's objectification—by Abram, Pharaoh, and God—coincides precisely with the disappearance of her subjectivity. After her timely words save Abram's life, Sarai is virtually drained of humanity, and her role from this point onward could as easily be played by a lovely, locked treasure chest.

At least in the case of Sarai, then, Sidnie White Crawford's claim that the Apocryphon features "strong female characters," though common enough among scholars, needs significant qualification.³ Sarai does seem to display genuine definition and an engaging roundness until she vanishes into Pharaoh's house; but then her image is so empty that story-level speculation seems positively idle. Her varied traits prove to have disappointingly little endurance, and her ultimate worth to the narrative and its narrator, Abram, is almost entirely mechanical. Moreover, Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon is curiously well-illuminated, yet hard to make out with full confidence, for she is only and ever filtered through Abram. This effacement is different in kind than that which confronts the reader of Sarra in the Septuagint, but it is perhaps no less serious: instead of an outside party, however prejudicial, describing all of the characters, here one, Abram, holds nearly complete power over his depictions of himself and Sarai. Relationality, always a vital component of characterization, becomes the point of departure for almost every observation about Sarai here.

Practical Preliminaries

I note a few preliminaries before beginning my discussion in detail. First, I identify the primary editions that I have consulted to establish the text for my reading, then indicate some of

3. Sidnie White Crawford, "Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 364; compare White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 118. The work of Nickelsburg, "Patriarchs Who Worry," 192 (first published in Michael E. Stone and Esther G. Chazon, eds., *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 137–58) has been influential in this regard. Compare Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 80, 93–94.

the challenges posed by the condition of the manuscript of the Genesis Apocryphon. Next, I address the divisions between the episodes treated in my interpretation, making a few remarks on the proportion of the discussion devoted to various sections. Finally, I mention the English translation that I have included as an aid to the reader.

There have been a number of editions of the Genesis Apocryphon since Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin issued the *editio princeps* in 1956; for my discussion here, I primarily employ the recent and generally well-regarded work of Daniel Machiela, though other efforts, especially those of Joseph Fitzmyer and Klaus Beyer, are taken into account as appropriate.⁴ In my citations of columns and lines, I follow the convention of Machiela, using Arabic numerals separated by a period (19.18, for example) rather than that of Fitzmyer (who uses a colon, as in biblical citations); this seems sensible given that the respective textual divisions—columns and lines versus chapters and verses—are almost entirely different in kind. For clarity, I typically cite column and line for each reference.

As opposed to the texts of the other narratives under discussion to this point, that of the Genesis Apocryphon poses no text-critical difficulties arising from divergent manuscript traditions, as the remains from Qumran's Cave 1 represent the only known copy of this Aramaic composition. However, perplexities resulting from the scroll's advanced state of deterioration more than make up for this. Although the columns relevant to Sarai (19–20) are coincidentally found among those best preserved, and successive editions have pushed what remains here very

4. See Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1956), for the first significant publication of the contents of this “fourth scroll” from Cave 1. It makes good sense to adopt the text of Daniel A. Machiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13–17*, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 2009)—hereafter *DSGA*—as a working standard, as his textual notes function as a virtual apparatus of earlier readings. The work of Fitzmyer, *GA*, also contains a good text and remains indispensable for its extensive commentary, which includes detailed lexical and syntactic notes along with comprehensive coverage of the history of relevant scholarship. I consult the edition of Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984)—hereafter *ATTM*, and comprising two additional volumes, cited below, issued in 1994 and 2004—as he offers, with some frequency, readings that are a bit out of the mainstream. Particularly for references to text in columns other than 2, 19–22, older editions need to be used with care, as significant portions of the scroll remained essentially unpublished until the 1990s. See Machiela, *DSGA*, 21–26, for a history of the major editions.

close to what Machiela calls a “final form” of the text, this is still badly damaged in places.⁵ As will be plain from the discussion below, the condition of the manuscript adds a special layer of ambiguity that is absent from the other ancient texts under consideration here. In addition to the conceptual gaps that are intrinsic to any narrative, the Genesis Apocryphon features material gaps, holes, wrinkles, disappearing ink, and entire sections simply dissolved into dust, which leads to scores of uncertainties.

In this chapter I closely examine the Apocryphon from the beginnings of the remaining text in column 19 through the large *vacat* in 21.4, which finds Abram, Lot, and (presumably) Sarai back home in Bethel after a number of years spent at various points south, most notably Egypt. Often features of the manuscript provide fitting demarcations for episodes and scenes, though I divide the text otherwise when scenic, thematic, or temporal shifts justify this.⁶ I also unapologetically devote much more space to discussion of those parts of the narrative that illuminate Sarai most directly, namely 19.14–23 (Abram’s dream and its immediate aftermath), 20.2–8 (the courtiers’ praise of Sarai), and the lacunose and fragmentary scene in 19.23–31 (the courtiers’ visit) that lies between these key episodes. As illustrated below, Sarai’s final exercise of subjectivity is her saving lie to Pharaoh in 20.9–10; after this, her reduction to an object is startlingly abrupt.

5. Machiela, *DSGA*, 26. At least one aspect of this finality is most unfortunate. According to Machiela, even columns 2 and 19–22, which had been relatively legible when the scroll was unrolled in the mid-1950s, were in “far worse condition” when he inspected them personally in 2006, such that to “the naked eye the manuscript is now almost completely unreadable” (29–30). As the deterioration particularly involves the chemical breakdown of the ink against the leather, Machiela is not optimistic that advances in technology will aid in the retrieval of any further text.

6. The most important instances are the following. I take 19.14–23 as one episode, despite the *vacat* in 19.17, due to chronological and thematic continuities; moreover, the five-year gap noted in 19.23 justifies treating the remainder of the column separately, although no *vacat* appears until line 31, at which point the text is almost completely destroyed. Further, I treat the poem in 20.2–8 as a self-evident unity, though there is no *vacat* until line 11. In addition, the relation of Abram’s prayer (20.12–16) seems sensibly divided from his report of the prayer’s aftermath, which covers a span of two years (20.16–21), though no manuscript feature suggests this. Finally, while there is a *vacat* at the beginning of 20.33, for my purposes there is little reason to devote a separate discussion to Abram’s return to the land, as Sarai has, by this time, disappeared from the discourse for good. For discussions of textual divisions in the Apocryphon see Stephen A. Reed, “The Use of the First Person in the *Genesis Apocryphon*,” in *Aramaic in Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from the 2004 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar at Duke University*, ed. Eric M. Meyers and Paul V. M. Flesher (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 196, and the bibliography cited there; Becker, “Abraham,” 95, 107; and Rocco Bernasconi, “A Literary Analysis of the *Genesis Apocryphon*,” *AS* 9 (2011): 143.

In my previous chapters, I provided an English translation at the head of each section of text under examination as an aid to the reader. The relative unfamiliarity of the Apocryphon's details makes this practice especially desirable here. Since critical texts vary in their particulars, my choice of Machiela's Aramaic transcription means that it is sensible to use Machiela's English rendering for this purpose. Translations in the body of the discussion are mine, unless otherwise noted.

A Fragmentary Beginning (GenAp 19.7–10)⁷

GenAp 19.7 [] I called there on the na[me of G]o[d], and I said, “You are 8 God and King of Etern[i]ty.” [And] he spoke with me in the night “. . . and take strength (?) to wander; up to now you have not reached the holy mountain.” So I set out 9 to [g]o there. I was going to the south of Moreh . . . , I went until I reached Hebron—now I b[u]ilt Hebron for that region—and I lived 10 [the]re for [two] years. *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 69–70)⁸

What remains of the narrative featuring Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon stutters to life here, near the top of the relatively well-preserved column 19. The text as it stands begins *in medias res*, with an as-yet undefined narrator relating his or her own past actions and speech in an unspecified location. Later internal clues show, however, that the narrator is Abram himself—he repeatedly self-identifies as אַבְרָם, ”I, Abram” (19.14; twice in 20.10–11; 20.33; and 21.15)—and that the scene of his invocation of God's name is likely Bethel, to which he returns in 21.1. The beginning of Abram's account is unfortunately lost, likely somewhere within the almost completely illegible column 18. However, extant portions of these initial fragments

7. The modern numbering of the lines in column 19 is off by one, as compared to the actual remains of the scroll; line 7 is really line 6. This error was introduced into the original edition of Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*; see transcription in unpaginated center section, and compare 41 in the English section and לָה (35) in the Hebrew section. For the purposes of clarity, however, it is a universal convention to retain Avigad and Yadin's numbering: Beyer, *ATM*, 171 n. 2; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 179; Machiela, *DSGA*, 69.

8. For this and following block quotations of Machiela's English translation, I have generally not sought to render his varied spacing precisely. Such would likely require photographic reproduction, and would not, in my judgment, substantially contribute to the function of the quotations, which is merely to apprise the reader of the general content of the text under discussion.

coincidentally reveal *inclusios* with the close of Abram, Sarai, and Lot's time in Egypt, related in 20.33–21.4. Here, as there, Abram speaks of his “building” (בני) activities (19.9; compare 21.1); moreover, his mention of his calling upon the divine name neatly ties the two scenes together (19.7; 21.2).⁹

Little enough about Sarai—whose existence is not indisputably indicated until 19.17—can be deduced from these few broken lines. Although the text of Beyer in the first edition of his work *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, which appeared in 1984, contained a reference to Sarai in 19.7, his transcription gained little scholarly traction; and while Beyer allowed the lines to stand in 1994's *Ergänzungsband*, by the issue of *Band 2* in 2004 he had revised Sarai out of his text.¹⁰

There are, however, a couple of elements worth noting here. The first is the profundity of the filter through which the reader must infer the story: the entire discourse proceeds from the mouth—or even, perhaps, the pen, as it seems to be suggested in 19.25 that he can read and write—of the character of Abram himself. He is speaking from the very beginning of the relevant textual remains, not only in his narration but also in his own self-reported actions, calling (קרי) on the divine name and speaking (אמר) to God (19.7). This fact raises the issue, to be discussed at

9. Machiela, *DSGA*, 26, employs the diacritical conventions of the DJD series: dots indicate “relatively sure” reconstructions of “partially missing or obscured” letters, while circlets mark “tentative” readings of letters often best regarded as “educated guesses.” In 19.9, Abram mentions his building or founding of the town of Hebron (בניח . . . מדבחה ובניחה תניאני) (ב[נ]יח הברון); in 21.1, he refers to the altar he had built before, and rebuilds it (ובניח תמן] . . . ובניח תמן ב[שם] אל[הא] ואמרת בשם) at the beginning of 19.7, though this is rejected by Machiela, *DSGA*, 69. Note that Fitzmyer, in contrast to Machiela, uses only one kind of diacritical dot to indicate uncertain letters; its application is thus necessarily broader, which can make comparison between the two texts difficult. Of course, this example and that which follows (וקרית) both point up the circularity that is an inevitable part of the reconstruction of a fragmentary text. I think my reading of *inclusio* in the latter case, for instance, is reasonable and likely correct; but it needs to be acknowledged that the reading of 19.7 here is, in part, itself based upon the more certain reading of 21.2. Compare Fitzmyer, *GA*, 179.

10. Beyer, *ATTM*, 171, reads אָרְאָה לְשָׂרַי וְאָמַרְתָּ for the relevant portion of 19.7 (“und auch die Sarai. Und sie sagte . . .”; note that the circlet is Beyer's only diacritical mark, and functions similarly to Fitzmyer's dot). However, Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten*, Band 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 101, reads אָרְאָה לְשָׂרַי וְאָמַרְתָּ, or “Und ich rief dort Gott an und sagte,” which is very close to the texts of Fitzmyer and Machiela. Machiela, *DSGA*, 25, characterizes Beyer's work generally as “creative, but erratic.”

various points below, of the impact of Abram’s perspective on his narration of the events in which he participates.

The second notable element—which, of course, cannot be entirely untangled from the first—is that Abram is here reputedly the beneficiary of direct divine revelation “in the night” (בליליָא, 19.8).¹¹ This not only implies that Abram enjoys God’s special favor, an impression that Abram’s narration will reinforce throughout his tale, but also helps to suggest a divine source for Abram’s subsequent dream, which likewise comes בלילה (19.14, 17; compare 21.8, where Abram claims another night vision from God). Abram’s dream thus may be cast as a kind of divine warrant for his later suggestion that Sarai claim: “He is my brother” (אחי הוא, 19.20); indeed, most criticism of the Apocryphon assumes that the dream is a communication from God.¹² As will be seen below, however, the dream’s message is curiously ambiguous and incomplete.

Famine and Entry into Egypt (GenAp 19.10–13)

GenAp 19.10 *vacat* Now there was a famine in all of this land, but I heard that there wa[s] w[h]eat in Egypt. So I set out 11 to go . . . []to the land that is in Egypt . . . [] . . . and there was []I[reached] the Karmon River, one of 12 the heads of the River, [I] sai[d] “Enter (?) [] . . . [until] now we have been within our land.” So I crossed over the seven heads of this river, which 13 af[terwards en]ters [int]o the Great Sea [o]f Salt. [After this I said], “Now we have left our land and entered the land of the sons of Ham, the land of Egypt.” *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 70)

11. Compare Machiela, “Genesis Revealed,” 217. This claim of divine revelation only holds, of course, if Machiela’s transcription is correct; there is much debate over the correct rendering of 19.8, but Machiela, *DSGA*, 69, says that “every reconstruction to date” is shown by the photos to be “untenable.” Fitzmyer, *GA*, 180, denies that God is speaking here, noting that there is no evidence of such an event at Bethel in Genesis or other Second Temple literature; but this seems a very curious argument given the other unique features of the Apocryphon. Beyer, *ATTM*, 171, and still in Beyer, *ATTM Band 2*, 101, translates “zu träumen” for למחלם (from חלם, “to dream”), which would tie the two episodes even more clearly. However, Fitzmyer, *GA*, 179, argues on contextual grounds that mention of a dream here is “unlikely,” while Machiela, *DSGA*, 69, reads וְחַלְמָא, construing it as derived from a root of the same radicals but meaning “to be well, sound, firm” (273); hence, “and take strength (?)” Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, reprint, 1903 (New York: Judaica, 1996), 471a, seems to assume a semantic relationship between the two roots.

12. See, for instance, Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 80, 83, who also speaks of a “divine warrant,” and White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 118. See also the relevant discussion below.

Abram's reference to the "hunger" (כפן) that arises "in this land" (בארעא דא), prompting his journey south, anticipates his eventual return "to this land"—this time, however, "in prosperity"—after some years in Egypt (לארעא דא בשלם, 21.4).¹³ The demonstrative, used with ארע in Abram's direct narration only in these two places (19.10 and 21.4), helps to emphasize the foreignness of "the land of the sons of Ham" (19.13).¹⁴ The phrase also raises an interesting, if largely unanswerable, question about Abram's conception of his narratee: who is listening to or reading this tale, in Abram's perception? In any event—as Abram relates it—the rumor of abundance in Egypt, probably of some kind of grain crop, provides the proximate cause of Abram's departure and foreshadows his acquisition of wealth there.¹⁵ These elements also provide provocative intertextual links with the Joseph and Jacob cycle, as Bernstein and Michael Segal have noted: a heard report of grain prompts the descent to Egypt of the family of the patriarch, which will endure oppression but, with the help of God, best its oppressors and emerge the richer for the ordeal (Gen 42:1–2; Exod 12:35–36).¹⁶

13. שלם naturally implies physical security, as well, and this is likely its primary force in 21.19. In the context of 21.2–4, however—where Abram gives thanks for "all the flocks / possessions and the goods" (כול נכסיה) (וטברא) that God has granted him, a reference to his financial security does not seem out of place.

14. The instances in 21.10 and 12 are in the reported speech of God to Abram.

15. Both Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98–99, 181–82, and Machiela, *DSGA*, 70, agree that "grain" or "wheat" (עבור; compare Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, 2nd ed. [Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002], 393a—hereafter, *DJPA*) is likely referred to in 19.10. Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, unpaginated transcription in the center section, read אַבְרָם, which, in their translation, amounts to the same ("corn," likely employed in its British English sense, 41); their edition indicates degrees of uncertainty in readings with one or two bars above the letters in question. See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 181, who argues that Avigad and Yadin's reading, if correct, would be better rendered "prosperity."

16. See Bernstein, "Re-Arrangement, Anticipation, and Harmonization," 48; compare Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 7, who note that parallels between Gen 12 and the exodus story are already present in the biblical materials (139–40). See also Moshe J. Bernstein, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Biblical Interpretation in Antiquity: A Multi-Generic Perspective," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls at 60: Scholarly Contributions by New York University Faculty and Alumni*, ed. L. H. Schiffman and S. L. Tzoref (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 75, for another connection, also mentioned below, where Pharaoh summons "wise men" and "magicians" (GenAp 20.18–19 and Gen 41:8). See also Bernstein, "The *Genesis Apocryphon*: Compositional and Interpretive Perspectives," 173–74. Compare Michael Segal, "The Literary Relationship Between the *Genesis Apocryphon* and Jubilees: The Chronology of Abram and Sarai's Descent to Egypt," *AS* 8 (2010): 76–79, who mentions these and two other links: Abram's departure from Hebron to Egypt parallels Jacob's family's later descent (GenAp 19.9–11; compare Gen 37:14 in light of later events), and Abram's two-year stay in Hebron followed by five years in Egypt during the famine parallels Jacob's family's arrival after two years of famine, with five remaining (GenAp 19.9–10, 23; compare Gen 45:6).

Questions of Abram's addressee(s) also arise in his two brief accounts of his direct speech in this episode; here, a first possible hint of the existence of Sarai in the narrative emerges. In 19.12 Machiela reads [אמר] [רת], followed eventually by כען אנהנא בגו ארענא [עד], which might be rendered "I said, ' . . . up till now we have been in the midst of our land.'" The plural pronouns offer a mild surprise, as nothing in Abram's first-person singular narration to this point has implied the presence of human traveling companions. Shortly thereafter in the discourse, moreover, the impression of plurality is reinforced, as Abram relates that he said: "Look—now we have gone out of our land and we have entered . . . Egypt" (הא כען הלכנא ארענא ועלנא . . . מצרין) (19.13).¹⁷ Abram's geographic delimitation of "our land" here may reflect the sociopolitical concerns of the Apocryphon's compositional context; compare the detailed description of Abram's inspection and tour of the land in 21.8–19, which considerably increases the specificity of the account in Gen 13:14–18.¹⁸ From a narrative perspective, however, these brief explanatory speeches, whether their motive be admonition or simple courtesy, seem to imply a certain mutuality, and point to some level of respect for Abram's interlocutor(s). That Sarai alone is in view here may not be as certain as Beyer, who supplies "[. . . Und ich sagte zu Sarai:]" before both statements, assumes; it is possible that the figure of Lot, who appears suddenly in the discourse in GenAp 20.11, is also part of Abram's audience.¹⁹ But Sarai's active presence, and

17. Despite the deteriorated state of the text, which now lacks any unambiguous markers of direct speech or specified addressees, these first-person plural references seem most sensibly taken to indicate Abram's speech to other characters. The reconstruction of [אמר] [רת] in 19.12 is highly probable given the context and the frequency of this lexeme in the text (there are at least seven other occurrences of אמר in this column alone, not counting the reconstruction in the lacuna of 19.13); if the relevant portion of 19.12 is correctly understood as direct speech, the lexical and semantic relationship between 19.12 and 13 suggests that the latter be understood in the same way; moreover, the presentative particle הא in 19.13 is consistent with such an understanding. Beyer, *ATM*, 172; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 99; and Machiela, *DSGA*, 70, all regard these phrases as two examples of Abram's direct speech. For another view, see B. Jongeling, C. J. Labuschagne, and A. S. van der Woude, *Aramaic Texts from Qumran*, SSS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 89, who take these phrases as simple narration: "so we left our land and entered the land of the sons of Ham," and so on.

18. See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 219–28, especially 221: "More than likely the details were those in current use as the boundaries of the 'Promised Land,' and concretely recall the boundaries of the Davidic kingdom." It seems, too, that Abram's detailed itinerary in GenAp 21.15–19 addresses the embarrassment of his apparent failure to follow Yahweh's instructions in Genesis (see 13:17–18). See also Daniel A. Machiela, "Each to His Own Inheritance": Geography as an Evaluative Tool in the Genesis Apocryphon," *DSD* 15 (2008): 61–62, 65; and Philip S. Alexander, "Geography and the Bible: Early Jewish Geography," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 977–88.

importance to the plot, are established the very night of Abram's second utterance—which, with its reference to the “sons of Ham” (בְּנֵי חָם, 19.13), is thematically linked to Abram's dream (19.14–21), and to the later, central complication of Sarai's abduction—making her presence among Abram's listeners here highly probable.²⁰ This provisional thread of mutuality between Sarai and Abram, a novelty in the tradition, will in fact be drawn out as the narrative proceeds, but only to snap conclusively when Abram reveals what he truly values in Sarai: her sexual exclusivity.

Abram's Dream (GenAp 19.14–23)

GenAp 19.14 *vacat* Now I, Abram, dreamt a dream in the night of my entry into Egypt. I saw in my dream that there was a single cedar and a single date 15 palm, having sprout[ed] together from [one] roo[t]. And m[e]n came seeking to cut down and uproot the [ce]dar, thereby leaving the date palm by itself. 16 But the date palm cried out and said, “Do not cut down the cedar, for the two of us are sp[rung] from o[ne] root!” So the cedar was left on account of the date palm, 17 and they did not cut me down. *vacat* Then I awoke in the night from my sleep, and I said to my wife Sarai, “I dreamt 18 a dream, (and) on acco[unt] of this dream I am afraid.” She said to me, “Tell me your dream, so that I may know (about it).” So I began to tell her this dream, 19 and I said to [her], “. . . this dream that they will seek to kill me, but to spare you. Therefore, this is the entire kind deed 20 th[at you] must do for me: in all cities (?) that [we will ent]er s[a]y of me, ‘He is my brother.’ I will live under your protection, and my life will be spared because of you. 21 [{significant lacuna—JM} t]hey [will s]eek to take you away from me, and to kill me.” Sarai wept because of my words that night 22 . . . when we en[ter]ed into the dist[ri]ct of E[gypt] And Pharaoh Zoa[n] . . . t[he]n . . . Sarai to turn toward Zoan 23 . . . [and] she worried herself [g]reatly that no man should see her (for) [fiv]e years. (Machiela, *DSGA*, 70–71)

19. Beyer, *ATTM*, 172; these lines stand in his two later volumes. Compare Machiela, “Genesis Revealed,” 220.

20. The likelihood of Sarai being at least one of Abram's interlocutors here seems even more firmly established if the original reading in 19.14 of Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, מַעֲלִינָא, meaning “our entering,” is correct (unpaginated central section; compare 41 in the English section). Machiela, *DSGA*, 70, guesses that the reading should be מַעֲלִי, or “my entry,” though “the end of the word is badly damaged.” Compare Fitzmyer, *GA*, 184. An infinitive without a ל prefix is not uncommon in temporal expressions, according to Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Qumran Aramaic* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 105 (§ 24 pa).

The length of the following discussion of this very significant section of the Apocryphon makes it sensible to outline it briefly here. After a consideration of the content of Abram's dream as he relates it, I note a number of problems with the dream's conceptual adequacy, which leads me to a brief but important excursus on Abram's narratorial reliability and perspectival limitations. Next, I treat Abram's interpretation or interpretations of his dream, consider Sarai's reactions to his explanations, and, finally, summarize my findings on Sarai and her story to that point.

The Dream and Its Conceptual Adequacy

References to dreams, and the relation of their content and interpretation, feature prominently in the remains of the Genesis Apocryphon.²¹ The related, broader theme of sight, which first appears here in the narrative about Sarai and Abram, also provides a substantial thread that links much of the narrative action and motivation going forward. As a result, apparently, of what Abram sees in his dream (וְהִזִּית בַּחֲלֵמִי, 19.14), Sarai is said to live in fear of being seen by men for five years (לֹא יִחֻזְנָה כּוֹל בֶּרֶ אֲנֹשִׁים [חַמַּ] שְׁנַיִן, 19.23); when this nevertheless occurs, a lengthy, mostly visual description of Sarai (20.2–8) entices Pharaoh to lay eyes on her himself (וַחֲזָהָא, 20.9), and he marries her immediately as a result; finally, Abram prays that God make God's hand "be seen" (וַאֲחֻזִּי, 20.14) in punishment of Pharaoh, and the fulfillment of this request eventuates in the king's sight of Abram in his dream (בְּחֵלֶם חֻזְּנִי, 20.22), which sets the resolution of the entire episode in motion.²² Thus the first and last references to "seeing" (חֻזִּי) in this Egyptian episode appear the context of dreams: Abram's relaying of his own here, and the

21. See, at least, columns 7 and 14–15 outside the Abram, Sarai, and Lot cycle; in 14.9 and following, which refers to a dream of Noah, the symbol of a cedar (אַרְז) also appears. Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, suggests that some of the revelations in the early, very poorly preserved columns of the scroll may also be dreams (77; compare 31), and that the relation and interpretation of Noah's dream may extend from the end of column 12 through 15.20 (32).

22. Though it is syntactically ambiguous, it seems that the dream in 20.22 is that of Pharaoh; see my remarks below. Note that I employ the terms "Pharaoh" and "the king" interchangeably in my discussion, following the practice of the Apocryphon itself (20.14). See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 203, for a treatment of וַאֲחֻזִּי in 20.14. Despite the form's morphological ambiguity Fitzmyer argues for reading an *aphel* imperative here: "show forth," or literally "cause to see."

courtier Herqanosh's mention of Pharaoh's in 20.22.²³ Both dreams have distinct impacts on the plot, even as both leave substantial doubts as to the adequacy of their communication.

The scene from 19.14–21, neatly bound by temporal references to the night on which Sarai and Abram enter Egypt (19.14; resumption after the *vacat* in 17; and near the end of 21), is unlikely to contain poetry, as James VanderKam has noted; nonetheless, this passage exhibits considerable literary appeal.²⁴ Abram's initial description of his dream begins וחלמתי . . . חלם בלילה ("I dreamed a dream in the night," 19.14); as he details his waking and informing Sarai of the dream, he reverses the word order: חלם חלמתי . . . בליליא (19.17–18).²⁵ A similar device is found in Abram's exposition of the scene in the dream and the date palm's protest: Abram notes the origin of the two trees, "sprouted from one root" ([שְׁרֵשׁ חֵד] מִן מְצֻמְחֵהוּ [ו], 19.15), while the date palm cries מן שרשֵׁהוּ [ד] צִמְחֵהוּ [נָא (19.16).²⁶ Alternating play on the concept of "sparing," or "leaving behind" (שָׁבַק) also weaves the episode together: the men in Abram's dream first seek to leave the date palm behind (וְלִמְשָׁבֵק, 19.15), but the date palm's intervention results in the cedar being left behind (וְשָׁבִיק, 19.16); and compare 19.19, where Abram predicts that Sarai will be left behind in the absence of action (לִמְשָׁבֵק), with 20.10, where he notes the actual, eventual result: "I, Abram, was left behind" (וְשָׁבִיקָה אֲנִי אֲבֵרָם). Further lexical play may be suggested by the etymological links of בטלל to words for "shadow" in various Semitic languages, including the Hebrew צל: the cedar, perhaps, is spared "in the shade" cast by the date palm (וְשָׁבִיק אֲרֹזָא בַטְלַל תְּמָרְתָּא, 19.16).²⁷

23. Herqanosh has been vocalized many different ways; as I reproduce his translation periodically throughout my discussion, I adopt the rendering of Machiela, *DSGA*. See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 197–99, for a lengthy discussion of the name. For my narrative purposes here, I am happy to accept Fitzmyer's assertion that "הַרְקָנוֹשׁ is clearly a proper noun," and to leave aside any speculation as to its allusive properties. See also Daniel A. Machiela, "A Brief History of the Second Temple Period Name 'Hyrcanus'," *JJS* 61 (2010): 117–38.

24. VanderKam, "Poetry," 57.

25. Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 33, note the similar formulations in the Joseph cycle (Gen 40:8; 41:15).

26. Naturally, these remarks depend on the accuracy of Machiela's transcription and reconstructions; see the fuller discussion on 19.15 below. For 19.16, this portion in particular has been much debated, but both Fitzmyer, *GA*, 186, and Machiela, *DSGA*, 71, consider the above reading, first offered in its essentials by Beyer, *ATTM*, 172, to be well established.

27. See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 186–87, on the etymology of this "Babylonianism"; compare *HALOT* 1024b–1025a, 1884a–1885a. This is supported by Takamitsu Muraoka, "Notes on the Aramaic of the Genesis Apocryphon,"

Moreover, Abram as narrator displays a fine rhetorical sensibility, from my readerly perspective, as he first delays revelation of the dream's interpretation, then refrains from reiterating the substance of the dream's plot even as he assuredly relates it to Sarai on the story level (19.18–19): “I began to tell her this dream. And I said to her”—then presumably beginning to unpack the dream's supposed significance somewhere in the lacunose remains of the first half of 19.19.

This scene also begins to reveal something of Abram's presentation of Sarai. His interpretation of his dream makes it clear that he conceives it, or at least characterizes it, as a prognostic and admonitory allegory, with himself represented by the cedar and Sarai by the date palm.²⁸ Noah is also depicted as a cedar in the context of a dream in the Apocryphon (14.9, 11, 14, and perhaps line 27, according to Machiela's text), and Esther Eshel points out that both of these dreams share notes of “prediction and warning,” in addition to their employment of arboreal symbols.²⁹ However, the remains of the interpretation of Noah's dream in column 14 contain no mention of a date palm. And while this pairing of a cedar and a palm has some rough parallels in the wider tradition, these are only of partial help in explaining the dream's imagery. Ps 92:13, which asserts that “the righteous one sprouts like the palm tree (כתמר), grows like a cedar (כארז) in Lebanon,” is explicitly if rather tenuously linked by the rabbis to the biblical

RevQ 8 (1972–74): 40, commenting on the first edition (1966) of Fitzmyer's commentary (compare Muraoka, *Notes*, 43, “Postscriptum”). Muraoka's remarks reference a parallel Japanese expression that employs the word for “shadow” in an idiom meaning “by the protection of”; neither Muraoka nor Fitzmyer, however, seems to connect this idea to the concrete image of a tree casting protective “shade.”

28. If Machiela's proposal is correct, Abram's identity as the cedar is also explicitly noted in his relation of the dream (ולא קצצונית, “and they did not chop me down,” 19.17). See Machiela, *DSGA*, 71, and Fitzmyer, *GA*, 187, for discussion of the reading here. The allegorical mapping of the cedar and the date palm is likewise encouraged by the respective genders of the nouns; compare also the potential fate of the date palm (ולמשבך, 19.15) with the predicted fate of Sarai (ומשבק, 19.19).

29. Esther Eshel, “The Dream Visions in the Noah Story of the Genesis Apocryphon and Related Texts,” in *Northern Lights on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Nordic Qumran Network 2003–2006*, ed. Anders Klostergaard Petersen, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 46–48, 51.

episode of Abram and Sarai in Egypt.³⁰ As Marianne Gevirtz points out, however, none of the relevant passages maps the two species to Abram and Sarai, respectively; a somewhat better parallel in this regard might be that suggested by Eva Osswald, who notes the similar imagery in the Song of Songs, where the male's appearance is likened to cedars (5:15) and the female's attributes are compared to the features of a date palm (7:8–9).³¹ Still, this sheds relatively limited light on the symbolism of Abram's dream, lacking as it does any hint of danger, or mention of a personified tree's speech. Both of these elements do appear in the tradition, as Gevirtz notes: felled trees function as metaphors for disaster and death, and speaking trees and plants feature in disputation proverbs common in the ancient Near East.³² While all these may be common motifs, however, Abram's dream seems to aggregate them in a novel manner. Gevirtz contends merely that the differing human uses of cedars and date palms—cedars must be cut down to be of use, while a felled date palm's primary utility is at an end—prompt the choice of imagery in a natural, pragmatic way.³³ This may help to illuminate the action of the dream, though the metaphors in question mostly disintegrate in the plot to come, as shown below. What can be safely said about Sarai's figurative identity as the date palm, I think, draws on some of the rough parallels cited above and common human knowledge: a date palm possesses both beauty and utility.³⁴ This utility, moreover, is closely bound up with the tree's fertility. Interestingly, the trait of Sarai's

30. See Gen. Rab. 41.1; Tanḥ., *Lekh* 5; and the Zohar to Gen 12. Some of the relevant portions of these are printed in Marianne Luijken Gevirtz, "Abram's Dream in the Genesis Apocryphon: Its Motifs and Their Function," *Maarav* 8 (1992): 238, though she mistakenly cites Gen. Rab. 40.1. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 185, also mentions these three, though he mistakenly cites Tanḥ., *Lekh* 4. Eshel, "Dream Visions," 50–52, suggests that the Apocryphon "provides the missing link" in the rabbis' association of Gen 12:17 and Ps 92:13, but I think that her own presentation shows that the complexity of what tradition is extant significantly complicates arguments about influence.

31. Gevirtz, "Abram's Dream," 238–39; Eva Osswald, "Beobachtungen zur Erzählung von Abrahams Aufenthalt in Ägypten im 'Genesis-Apocryphon'," *ZAW* 72 (1960): 21 n. 17. The suggestive image of the lover climbing the palm in Song 7:9 is reminiscent of Gen. Rab. 41.1, where Pharaoh's activity with Sarai is related to the danger of recklessly climbing to the top of a tree.

32. Gevirtz, "Abram's Dream," 234–37. For biblical examples, see Dan 4:10–15; Judg 9:8–15.

33. Gevirtz, "Abram's Dream," 232–33, 237, 239.

34. The aesthetic element is explicit in the reading of Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98–99, 185: "a date palm, (which was) [very beauti]ful" (יָאִירֵי אֶשְׁבֵּי). ותמרא חדא; 19.14–15). Machiela, *DSGA*, 71, however, says that Fitzmyer's reconstruction "fits neither the available space nor the ink remains." Machiela's own reading, which describes the trees' common root, is essentially the proposal of Beyer, *ATTM*, 172. See further below.

beauty dominates the poem delivered in praise of her in GenAp 20:2–8, while her usefulness, which is eventually narrowed to the question of her sexual availability, serves as a kind of shorthand for her ultimate value to the other characters in the narrative.

Nevertheless, Abram's relation of his dream to the narratee raises serious questions about its explanatory power—or, on the other hand, about Abram's candor. A close consideration of the dream in its broader context makes it difficult to accept White Crawford's contention that "there can be no doubt to the reader that [the dream] is sent by God and foretells future events."³⁵ Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether Abram's exposition asserts that the cedar and date palm are actually "sprouted from one root" (19.15), it is curious that the action of the dream as related maps rather poorly against the plot of the rest of his tale. When the three powerful men of Egypt seek Abram out, according to his later account, they are after his profound learning, not his death (19.24–26).³⁶ Moreover, by the time Pharaoh reportedly does seek to kill Abram, the king has already sent men and taken Sarai away (20.9)—an order of events that fits with Abram's second attempt at explicating the contents of the dream in 19.21, but not with his initial recounting here in 19.15. In the event, Sarai, the "date palm," not Abram, is the primary focus of the men. Even further, while the date palm is spontaneous in its defense of the cedar in the dream (19.16), Sarai's intervention on Abram's behalf was scripted years before (19.20; 20.10). But the central difficulty with Abram's relation of his dream is that he wakes up entirely too soon.³⁷ The failure of the cedar tree to say anything in its own defense seems to track with Abram's later presentation of the scene in which he is "spared," or "left behind," due to Sarai's voicing of the script Abram sets for her in 19.20: Sarai says *אחי הוא*, "he is

35. White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 118; see also Gevirtz, "Abram's Dream," 241. Compare Eshel, "Dream Visions," 52: "God sends the dream of the cedar and the palm tree as a warning and as a means of prompting Abram to seek a solution."

36. On Fitzmyer's reading here—"and concerning my wife," *ועל אנתתי*, meaning that the men already know Sarai by reputation—see the relevant discussion below.

37. Here, it is interesting to wonder whether the literal force of *ואתעירתי* ("I was awakened," 19.17; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 187) could imply an untimely return to full consciousness. Compare the translation of Martin G. Abegg, Jr. and Michael O. Wise, "1Q20 (1QapGen ar)," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, Part 3: Parabiblical Texts, ed. Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 25, "Then I started from my sleep while it was still night."

my brother,” in 20.10, while Abram is apparently the silent beneficiary of her intervention. Yet Pharaoh’s rebuke of Abram in 20.26–27, with its periphrastic הוי plus participle, implies Abram’s active and ongoing participation in the ruse: “why did you keep saying to me that ‘She is my sister?’” (בדיל [מא] הוית אמר לי די אחתי היא).³⁸ What is more, Abram and Sarai’s encounter with the men of the land is not resolved with the sparing of Abram, the “cedar,” as his relation of the dream suggests; instead, Sarai, the “date palm,” is herself uprooted (compare 19.15) and taken away, where she will languish in captivity for two years (20.8–11, 17–18).

And what of the dream’s implication, at least in the editions of Beyer and Machiela, that Sarai and Abram are truly “sprouted from one root”? By this text, the men who seek to chop down and uproot the cedar are understandably fooled by above-ground appearances; the date palm’s cry that the two are grown from the same root merely makes the hidden truth plain. But there are no other indications in the text as it stands that Abram and Sarai are actually brother and sister. Abram’s first extant reference to her is as “Sarai my woman” or “wife” (שרי אנתתי, 19.17), an epithet that he repeats twice in his later speech to God (20.14–15), and a description of Sarai echoed by Lot (20.23), Herqanosh (20.25), and Pharaoh (20.27). Further, Abram’s proposal for Sarai’s speech doesn’t assert that what she is to say is true, and in fact it makes more sense if it is a lie—by Abram’s admission, it’s a “kindness,” or “favor” (טבו), after all, that she pronounce these words for him (19.19–20). Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, Abram does not report that he protests when he is upbraided by Pharaoh for lying about his and Sarai’s relationship (20.26–28).³⁹

38. See Muraoka, *Grammar*, 175 (§ 55 f) on this “syntagm explicitly designed to indicate a durative, habitual, repetitive or iterative *Aktionsart*.” Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, unpaginated center section, read [שר] י והאמר instead here—so the broader thought is “what have you done to me for the sake of Sarai, so that you told me ‘She is my sister?’”—which has been followed by several others. However, Machiela, *DSGA*, 76, notes a difficulty with the verb form (a converted imperfect otherwise unattested in the Qumran materials) and spacing issues in his advocacy of the above reading, also favored by Beyer, *ATTM*, 176, and Fitzmyer, *GA*, 102.

39. This is somewhat puzzling to me, given the influence of other motifs reflected in Gen 20 on this account; see Bernstein, “Re-Arrangement, Anticipation, and Harmonization,” 49–52, and various points in the discussion below. As Bernstein notes (51), the Apocryphon anticipates Abraham’s report to Abimelech of the favor he supposedly had asked Sarah (Gen 20:13) by working it into Abram’s plea to Sarai in GenAp 19.19–20: “wherever we are, say regarding me that ‘he is my brother’” (Bernstein’s translation). But Abram in the Apocryphon does not assert, as he does in Gen 20:12, that he and Sarai are actually non-uterine siblings.

Does this mean, then, that the text of Abram's relation of his dream is unlikely to contain the first mention of "sprouted from one root" (19.15) and that the reading of Fitzmyer—"a date palm, (which was) [very beauti]ful"—or some other, is to be preferred?⁴⁰ It might make more sense if Abram's initial exposition of the dream situation did not contain the claim, and that the date palm's cry is an innovative lie to help the cedar. Thus the date palm's conduct becomes practical if devious advice to Abram, the dream's interpreter, who, in an interesting twist, recommends to Sarai the course of action suggested to him by her dream analogue. But at least in this case, any textual argument based upon narrative logic must end inconclusively—for, as will be clear at a few places further along, too, Abram cannot be assumed to be consistent in his telling of this tale.

Abram's Reliability and Perspectival Limitations

The question of Abram's reliability as narrator dogs his entire presentation. Various inconsistencies, as noted in the discussion of Abram's relation of his dream, for example, are important clues; but these comprise only part of the problem here. A more basic issue is Abram's identity as a first-person narrator who claims to have been intimately involved in most of the events that he is relating: he is a "narrator-character" not as a theoretical construct, but in fact.⁴¹ I am prone here simply to disagree with the assertions of George Nickelsburg and Stephen A. Reed, who both say that the first-person narration of the Apocryphon lends it "reliability," or "credence."⁴² Rather, as Rimmon-Kenan demonstrates, "personal involvement" in a story is one

40. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98–99.

41. On the narrator as a character, see Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 52–53; Bach, "Signs," 351, 353, 356; and my discussion in Chapter 2.

42. Nickelsburg, "Patriarchs Who Worry," 197–98; Stephen A. Reed, "First Person," 213. Perhaps, though, Nickelsburg and Reed, neither of whom expressly take a narrative-critical approach, intend their remarks to bear on the compositional context: thus the first-person account tends to lend authority to the narrative's interpretive expansions on the biblical account, at least in the eyes of the narrative's ancient audience. This may be the force of the remarks of Stephen A. Reed, "First Person," 213; on 204, however, where he speaks of a "first-person account" having "a certain authority" for the reader "that a third-person account cannot have," he seems to be referring to direct as compared to indirect character speech. Compare Nickelsburg, "Patriarchs Who Worry," 197–98, with its references to the Hellenistic context of Jubilees and the Apocryphon.

of the “main sources of unreliability” in a narrator, and narrators who “are also characters in the fictional world” are “on the whole more fallible.”⁴³

Besides Abram’s personal involvement in most of the events he describes, he exhibits another, rather converse indicator of narratorial unreliability, as defined by Rimmon-Kenan, which is a “limited knowledge” of some affairs that he nonetheless undertakes to relate.⁴⁴ This is, in part, a simple artifact of the kind of restrictions that naturally operate on any person’s perspective; but Abram’s confidence in his telling raises questions of candor and credibility, as well. Reed hits upon this phenomenon, too, noting with reference to 20.16–21 that “no explanation is given about how [Abram] knows what is happening in the court and even the bedroom of Pharaoh.”⁴⁵ I would think that the problem is more acute in, for instance, Abram’s relaying of the lines of verse spoken by Herqanosh and his fellow courtiers in 20.2–8; most of the action at Pharaoh’s household might plausibly have been related to Abram by Herqanosh, who clearly gives a number of story-level details to Abram and Lot in 20.21–22, or, later, by Sarai. Alternatively, such a remarkable sequence of events might well have made its way into the common gossip of the realm over a span of two years (20.18). On the specific point of Abram’s assertion that Pharaoh was never successful in having sex with Sarai (20.17), Abram could be

43. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 100, 103. Her comment on 103 pertains specifically to “intradiegetic” narrators, and especially those who are also “homodiegetic” (in the terms of Genette). Abram in the Genesis Apocryphon is certainly homodiegetic, that is, he takes part in the story he relates. As the text stands, he seems to be extradiegetic, “superior to the story he narrates” by virtue of his retrospective autobiographical reflection—“intradiegetic” being reserved for narrators in the “second degree,” that is, characters such as Conrad’s Marlow, who are introduced by a superior narrator (94–96); Jesus as parable teller is such an intradiegetic narrator in the New Testament (Ska, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*,” 46–47). The deteriorated state of the scroll, however, leaves the question unresolved, and the succession of first-person narrators (Lamech, Noah, and Abram, at least) plus the third-person narration from 21.23 onward may suggest that there was some larger frame to the narrative—indeed, some “higher” narrator—that is now lost. See, too, what seems to serve as a heading in GenAp 5.29, “book of the words of Noah.” Bernasconi, “Literary Analysis,” 146, 149–51, 161–62, while not employing Genette’s terminology, reflects on just this matter. He concludes that, while the state of the text means that the original presence of a “higher order voice” cannot be ruled out, the hypothesis of “pure juxtaposition” and resulting “tacit” structure among complementary but separate parts makes the fewest historical assumptions (161). Regarding the alternate hypothesis—that “connective material” originally stood in what are now lacunae—Bernasconi makes an interesting distinction between a composition presenting “sources” in the manner of a scholarly chronicler, and a narrative frame that allows for characters’ lengthy direct speeches (161–62). At any rate, I think Rimmon-Kenan’s remarks on character-narrator fallibility are very apt here.

44. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 100–103.

45. Stephen A. Reed, “First Person,” 204–5.

extrapolating back from the king's oath to that effect in 20.30—or merely protesting too much. But this general line of questioning exposes what, at root, Abram is about here: in his every utterance, he is making claims. And Abram, as a human character within the tale he's telling, is at all times potentially subject to all of the limitations—of perspective, knowledge, and descriptive power, among others, not to mention a weakness for portraying oneself in a favorable light—common to humans telling stories about themselves.

The Dream's Interpretation(s)

After Abram wakes up, according to his account, he speaks to Sarai, who here starts to take on more flesh as a character. What Abram says first reads like a simple confidence, even a confession, whose halting repetitions nicely evoke the stammer of someone rudely awakened: “A dream I dreamed—from which I am afraid—from this dream” (חלם הִלַּמְתָּ מִן [ד] אֲנִיָּה דְחַל מִ[ו] הִלַּמְתָּ) (19.17–18).⁴⁶ Sarai's response is to speak in return: “Tell me your dream, and I'll know it” (אֲשַׁתְּעִי לִי הַלְמַךְ וְאֲנִדַּע) (19.18), an innovation in the tradition that anticipates at least one later reading, a Christian Syriac homily in which Sarai and Abram converse before entering Egypt.⁴⁷ It is no small matter that Abram records Sarai's direct speech, especially here, in what is her first appearance in the discourse as the text stands.⁴⁸ Their verbal interchange contributes to the development of a tone of mutuality in this sparsely but credibly sketched scene: a person awakes, disturbed, a bit confused by an alarming dream—and it is still night. The person's partner seeks a remedy, perhaps aiming to explain away the fear, or at least to lessen its weight by sharing it: “Tell me about your dream, so that I'll know about it, too.”⁴⁹ Sarai's urging betrays no deference,

46. See Machiela, *DSGA*, 71, for a discussion of the variety of proposals that have been offered for the beginning of 19.18.

47. See Brock and Hopkins, “Verse Homily,” 106, 110, 112, 114. Note in particular Sarah's solicitous questioning of a distraught Abraham (108, 110). In their broader interaction, Sarah's initially servile response (“Let your will be done, for you are the head and I the heel . . .”) gives way to frank disagreement with Abraham's plans, as I also note below. I owe van Rensburg, “Intellect and/or Beauty,” 119, 122, for the reference.

48. On the significance of primacy and other artifacts of linearity, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 119–21, and my discussion in Chapter 2.

49. Compare the rendering of Abegg and Wise, “1Q20,” 25, “Tell me your dream so I may understand.” On the tone generally, see the remarks of White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 118, who says that Abram and Sarai's

merely concern; her engaged courtesy partly recalls Abram's informative travelogue notes of 19.12–13.

Abram reports that he acquiesces immediately: “tell me your dream,” Sarai says—“so I began to tell her this dream” (וּשְׂרַיִת לְאִשְׁתּוֹ עֵינֵי לֵה חִלְמָא דְן . . . אִשְׁתְּעִי לִי חִלְמֵךְ, 19.18). He has seemingly recovered his wits very quickly, for after relating the dream's content, Abram offers an initial interpretation, recommends a response, and predicts its result in rapid succession. The dream signifies, says Abram,

that they will seek to kill me, but you to leave behind. But this is the whole favor that you need to do for me: in every city that we come to, say about me that “He is my brother.” And I will live with your help, and my life will be saved because of you. (19.19–20)⁵⁰

The saving cry is scripted here, which lends it a kind of preemptive function, and there is no indication that Sarai and Abram are really from one family of origin. However, most of this explanation fits the rough outlines of the initial narration of Abram's dream reasonably well. Michael Becker goes too far, though, in maintaining that Abram's understanding of his dream “distinguishes him as a person of extraordinary and God-given wisdom”—for events to come will expose Abram's interpretation as completely inadequate, or at least shortsighted.⁵¹ The phrase “the whole favor” or “kindness” (כּוֹל טְבוּתָא, 19.19), for example, implies something like “this is all you need to do”; and Abram's double expression of the expected benefit to him, coupled with the reader's knowledge of the content of the dream, suggests that the preservation

conversation here is “like the dialogue between Lamech and Bitenosh in that the female partner actually speaks and has a recognizable character”—presumably meaning that she is somewhat “rounded”—and, further, that “the dialogue is emotionally charged.” That it likewise “has an erotic element” is not as clear to me, however.

50. די יבעוון למקטלני ולכי למשבק ברם דא כול טבוּתָא דְ[ת] עֵבְדִין עֵמִי בְכוּל עֲרוֹתֵי דִי [נתה] לְ[הן] אִמְ[ר] עֵלֵי דִי אַחֵי הוּא וְאַחֵי. On בטליכי as “with your help,” “by your protection,” or the like, see my remarks above and Fitzmyer, *GA*, 186–89; compare Machiela, *DSGA*, 72, “under your protection.” Curiously, however, Machiela renders בטלל as “on account of” in 19.16 (71).

51. Becker, “Abraham,” 99. Becker partly draws on Gevartz, “Abram's Dream,” 231, 239–41, one of whose main contentions is that the Apocryphon burnishes Abram's reputation as a “wise man” in this dream scene. Compare John H. Choi, *Traditions at Odds: The Reception of the Pentateuch in Biblical and Second Temple Period Literature* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 148–49; and Ego, “Figure of Abraham,” 235, 242, who speaks of Abram's “mantic competence.”

of Abram's life will mark a happy end to the matter.⁵² But Sarai's deceptive testimony to Pharaoh is only the beginning, for her, of a deeper stage of oppression, as she moves from living in fear to bodily captivity. Sarai will not be "left behind," but abducted with violence—according to Abram's later account, anyway (20.9–11). However this may be, Sarai's imprisonment will also serve as an analogical signal of her effacement from the narrative. And though Sarai eventually emerges from detention (20.27–32), she never comes out of this narrative obscurity, or regains any of the subjectivity or human definition that occasionally marks her character in these earlier episodes.

At the beginning of 19.21, there is a sizeable lacuna, extending at least a third of the line.⁵³ It seems just possible that the missing text noted Sarai's initial reaction to Abram's interpretation, or even recorded her brief reply, as occurs in the Syriac homily mentioned above.⁵⁴ Abram as narrator is not averse to relaying such information in this section of the narrative: Sarai speaks to Abram in 19.18, and the description of her tearful response occupies the latter third of line 21. Her mental state and behavioral changes resulting from Abram's predictions, further, are detailed at some length in the following two lines. Moreover, what does survive after the lacuna represents a somewhat different reading of the content of Abram's dream than that offered in 19.19. It is almost as if he is having another go at it: "they will seek to take you away from me," he says—employing עֲדָר, "to remove," instead of שָׁבַק, "to spare" or "leave

52. Compare the translation of Jongeling, Labuschagne, and van der Woude, *Texts*, 91: "This is the only favour . . . that you must do for me" (emphasis indicating reconstructed text removed).

53. Here the remark of Machiela, *DSGA*, 26, is shown to be apt: "the spacing and relative line length of the manuscript are not adequately reflected in any of the previous publications, save that of Avigad and Yadin." Without recourse to photographs, no reader of Beyer, *ATTM*, 172; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98; or Abegg and Wise, "1Q20," 24, could possibly guess at the extent of the lacuna here. Like many of the lacunae in this manuscript, it seems, unfortunately, to have been catalyzed at least in part by the chemical composition of the ink itself; the surrounding leather is frustratingly intact. That this process has only accelerated since the manuscript's discovery is clear from the relative legibility of the photos in Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, unpaginated center section, as compared to, for instance, those of Gregory Bearman and Bruce and Ken Zuckerman, taken in 1994; see an example in Machiela, *DSGA*, 235. For detailed information on the scroll's condition and various photographic records, see 27–30; as noted above, according to Machiela, virtually none of the text remained legible to the naked eye in 2006.

54. See Brock and Hopkins, "Verse Homily," 114. Here, Sarai initially refuses to go along with Abram's proposal.

behind”—and, only then, “to kill me.”⁵⁵ Notably, in its verbal conception and in its order of events, this explanation fits the later plot, as Abram relates it, quite well (20.8–9); on the same two counts, however, it functions rather poorly as an interpretation of his dream as recounted in 19.14–17.⁵⁶ The disparities between Abram’s two readings could suggest that an interjection of Sarai, now lost, once lay between them.

In any event, Abram’s second attempt at explanation proves to be little more perspicacious than his first. Indeed, its significant flaw is similar in kind. The broader context leaves it somewhat unclear—and this is not helped by the lacuna—whether the force of Abram’s final remarks here is “if you don’t pronounce this lie, they’ll try to take you away, and kill me,” or “when they attempt these things, you can save me by saying this.” The false statement seems to serve as a prophylactic in 19.20, while the content of the dream in 19.16 suggests that the lie be produced in an emergency. The complex of predictions implies, then—at least as the text stands now—either that the whole mess can be avoided by concealing the truth, or that Abram can be protected by Sarai’s well-placed falsehood. The latter more closely forecasts the plot to come; but both options fail utterly to foretell the consequences for Sarai. “They” will still “seek to remove” her; they will, in fact, succeed; and, what is more—in a rather sharp irony—it is only the revelation of the truth that finally resolves the matter (20.8–9; 22–32). Once again, the adequacy of the dream’s message, perhaps even its basic congruence with the truth, is in doubt.

Sarai’s Reactions

Sarai may or may not have had the opportunity to offer an initial response to Abram’s dream interpretation in the now-lost opening of 19.21. Remarkably, however, the extant text for about two lines following his final predictions is mostly absorbed with describing Sarai’s

55. יב[עוֹן לֹא־עֲדִי־וֹתְכִי מִנִּי וְלִמְקַטְלִנִי, 19.21. יב[עוֹן לֹא־עֲדִי־וֹתְכִי מִנִּי וְלִמְקַטְלִנִי] reappears in Pharaoh’s angry order to Abram in 20.27–28: “Get out of [literally, remove yourself from] every region of Egypt!” (וְעֵדִי לֶךְ מִן כּוֹל מְדִינַת מִצְרָיִם).

56. This is somewhat obscured in the translation of Abegg and Wise, “1Q20,” 25, who have essentially the same text as that of Machiela but render “[they will attempt] to sepa[ra]te us and to kill me.” The paraphrase of the 2 fsg and 1 csg suffixes (לֹא־עֲדִי־וֹתְכִי מִנִּי, in their text) by the first plural almost suggests an effort to harmonize Abram’s interpretation here with the relation of his dream in 19.14–17.

reactions.⁵⁷ First, Abram says, “Sarai wept because of my words that night.” (ובכת שרי על מלי) (בליליא דן, 19.21). Abram attributes no precise emotional motive to Sarai here, though it seems that his fear, noted in 19.18, has been contagious.⁵⁸ Her reluctance, or fear “to turn toward Zoan” may be referred to at the end of 19.22; somewhat less ambiguously, Sarai is next said to have been “afraid, very much so, in her inner self, lest any man see her—for five years.”⁵⁹ As will be seen below, the basic mechanics of the plot for some time going forward will turn principally on Sarai, an outcome foreshadowed by her prominence in the discourse here: aside from Sarai’s desire to evade notice, all significant story-level activity, for half a decade, remains a matter of conjecture.

The extraordinary acceleration of the narration here—the following words, with barely a discernible space on the leather between, read “and at the end of those five years,” ולסוף חמש שניא אלן—may partly obscure several interesting revelations about Sarai and her characterization. Whereas Abram had urged her to lie “in every city” they enter, Sarai seems to avoid taking this advice for as long as she can, concealing herself from view instead (19.20, 23).⁶⁰ Why, though, does Sarai cloister herself? The dream as narrated can give no warrant for this, as the sight of the

57. Compare Osswald, “Beobachtungen,” 21.

58. Compare Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 41, who note that the reason for Sarai’s weeping is unclear.

59. Machiela reads שרי למפנה לצען at the end of 19.22, proposing from the context that the first word might be “a verb meaning something like ‘be reluctant, fear,’ referring to Sarai’s reluctance to go to Zoan.” Zoan is apparently both a toponym and an epithet or name for Pharaoh in this text. See Machiela, *DSGA*, 72; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 189; and Beyer, *ATTM*, 172–73. Machiela’s reading at the beginning of 19.23 (ו, דחלה [י] תירא), “and she was very afraid,” or the like), which is based on Fitzmyer’s suggestion, is also a guess; but the ink remains, Machiela says, support the proposed position of the *lamed*, without contradicting the rest. Moreover, the later, more certain portions of the line make good sense in the light of this reconstruction.

60. Becker, “Abraham,” 99, misses this in attributing Sarai’s isolation to Abram’s initiative: “he tells his wife of his dream and the feasible way out of their troubles. It seems to work for five years . . .” But, at least as the text stands, Abram says nothing about a need for Sarai to avoid the male gaze. Machiela’s reading of “cities” (ערוה) is conjectural, but fits the context well and, according to him, the badly damaged remains here. In any case, the immediately preceding reading of בכול may be regarded as assured, from Avigad and Yadin onward, and other proposals such as Fitzmyer’s [אתר], “place”—compare Beyer, who translates “An jedem Ort” for בכול אתר—give essentially the same meaning: Sarai is urged to lie “wherever we go.” See Machiela, *DSGA*, 72; Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, unpaginated center section; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98; and Beyer, *ATTM*, 172–73. The force of all these suggestions is plainly influenced by Abraham’s claim to Abimelech in Gen 20:13 that he had asked Sarah to lie “in every place to which we come” (אל כליהמקום אשר נבוא שמה).

date palm is not a motivating force in the men's actions. And Abram doesn't tell Sarai to hide; in fact, he says that she should lie everywhere. Despite Daniel Falk's assertion to the contrary, the "only favor" requested by Abram must assume that Sarai will be seen, indeed, that she will be in a position to speak directly with those who wish Abram harm.⁶¹ The original contents of the lacuna in 19.21 are, of course, open to broad conjecture; but an instruction to stay out of sight fits rather poorly with a request to engage in repeated verbal defense of another—and, again, such a sentiment hardly follows as an explication of the dream. Could it be, then, that Sarai intuits something of what proves to be the real danger: that the male gaze, coupled with the apparently limitless entitlement of its subjects, could easily result in her abduction and imprisonment? In this understanding, Sarai formulates an alternate plan, ignoring Abram's advice until an extreme situation arises. Again, the late tradition represented in the Syriac homily provides a potential parallel here, as Sarah balks at Abraham's scheme and attempts to hide her beauty beneath rags and dust instead.⁶²

Any agency or independence that might be posited here, however, is undercut by a consideration of how thoroughly Sarai's life appears to have been dominated by the uncertain implications of a single dream of Abram, imperfectly interpreted: she staves off imprisonment by holding herself captive. But how long can one be ruled by fear of a vaguely defined event that fails to happen? Perhaps, indeed, this question has some bearing on one of the story's central gaps, to be treated in the next section: how, after taking such successful care for years to avoid detection, is Sarai finally revealed to the courtiers who come calling in 19.24?

61. The broader point of Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 86—that the exegetical problem addressed by the Apocryphon here is that, in Genesis, Sarai's ready visibility suggests that she does not behave like a "virtuous woman" of antiquity—is persuasive, especially in the light of similar devices in other parts of the tradition, such as the box in which Sarai is concealed in the telling of this story in Gen. Rab. 40.5, or Sarah's attempt at disguising herself recorded in Brock and Hopkins, "Verse Homily," 114, mentioned just below. But the rewriting here does not avoid the implication of Gen 12:12 that "Abram expected the Egyptians to see her," as Falk suggests; rather, it shows that Sarai made every effort to conceal herself despite Abram's assumptions.

62. Brock and Hopkins, "Verse Homily," 114.

Sarai, and the Story So Far

Before moving on to this next scene, which is unfortunately very poorly preserved, it is worthwhile to gather some of the findings thus far about Sarai, about Abram and his dream, and about an incipient motif that connects some of the traits of these two main characters. Although Sarai's presence as Abram's "woman" or wife (19.17) may be assumed, retrospectively, from the first relevant textual remains in 19.7, the first discourse-level hint of her role in the story is in 19.12–13, where Abram apparently speaks to his travel partner(s), offering simple observations on their whereabouts that nonetheless imply at least a modicum of respect for his listener(s). Sarai comes to some prominence, though, in the relatively lengthy and complex scene constructed around Abram's dream (19.14–21). Here, she is represented as a lithe date palm whose timely verbal intervention saves Abram's cedar—supposedly rooted, somehow, with the palm—from destruction. Sarai's relationship with Abram is thus depicted as close, and this feeling of mutuality is reinforced as she prompts him to share the burden of his alarming dream (19.18). That she exercises direct speech establishes Sarai as something of an agent; the mere fact that she speaks, as Abram speaks, contributes to the note of mutuality even as it suggests a similarity between their characters. That speech is Sarai's first discourse-level act as a subject, moreover, may lend credence to proposals of other potential acts of her speech lost in and around the text's lacunae, such as in the beginning of 19.21. In Abram's response to Sarai's urging, his interpretation or interpretations suggest that both of them are in danger, to which Sarai responds by weeping, and by fearfully concealing herself for a number of years (19.19–23). This latter act suggests some agency, as well, as Sarai seems to resist Abram's direct recommendation that she lie about their relationship everywhere they go; but the idea of cowering behind doors for years on the force of an enigmatic dream mitigates against ideas of strength or independence.

While this study seeks to sketch a portrait of Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon, a consideration of Abram's role here is unavoidable. This is not due merely to factors of relationality that affect characterization in any fictional work, but because Abram's words here

form the filter through which the story—and thus Sarai, who lives there—must be at least partly distilled. Abram as narrator is a talker from the start; in his speech he exhibits some courtesy to his interlocutors in the narrative, and some skill in his artful relation of the tale as apprehended by me, the reader. However, perhaps counterintuitively, this ability does not contribute to Abram's credibility, which is thrown into question by a number of inconsistencies in his relation of his dream as compared to his interpretations, and as compared to the later plot as he recounts it; what is more, as a narrator-character Abram faces perspectival challenges to his reliability that are intrinsic to the role.

That the dream and its interpretations are so rife with problems raises difficult questions about what I have termed its conceptual adequacy—questions that are particularly pointed if the dream's source is implied to be divine. Why, if God sends the dream, is it so poorly predictive of events to come? Is the dream's communication deliberately incomplete? Does Abram relay it faithfully, but bungle its interpretation? Gevirtz offers a nicely nuanced reading that suggests that the dream's indirect, allegorical style of communication mitigates Abram's responsibility for later events without explicitly shifting the onus to the deity.⁶³ Neither misjudgment nor being misled are precisely to blame, then; and indeed, in Abram's presentation, the ploy he suggests does not seem entirely cynical. There is no noted benefit to him, pecuniary or otherwise, beyond the preservation of his life; on the other hand, he mentions this twice, and any benefit to Sarai remains implied only in the threat that “they will seek to remove you” (19.20–21). In this, as in everything, however, a recollection of Abram's control of the discourse is instructive; and, as will be seen more fully later, the value of Sarai, to Abram and to God, is rather narrowly defined.

Finally, especially in view of some narrative developments later, it is useful to note a few connections between Abram's depictions of himself and Sarai. If the text of Machiela, following Beyer, is correct, the initial portrayal of Sarai as her dream analogue suggests that her relationship with Abram approaches identity: “together, they sprouted from one root” (19.15).

63. Gevirtz, “Abram's Dream,” 241; compare Becker, “Abraham,” 99.

Sarai's first independent action, both in her allegorical representation and as a woman, is utterance, just as Abram's was (19.7, קרי and אמר; 19.16, 18, כלי and אמר); moreover, her cry as the date palm includes a reiteration of the claim of partial identity just mentioned. Sarai's tearful reaction to her discussion with Abram anticipates his own weeping, both over Sarai and over Lot (19.21; 20.10–11, 16; 22.5, all בכי; plus compare 20.12), while the fear that leads her to hide herself away recalls that of Abram in the wake of his dream (19.18, 23, both דחל, if the latter reading is correct).⁶⁴

Abram and Sarai's Three Visitors (GenAp 19.23–31)

GenAp 19.23 . . . Now at the end of those five years 24 to me, and three men from the nobles of Egypt . . . his[] . . . by Phara[oh] Zoan because of my words and my wisdom, and they were giving 25 m[e many gifts They as]ked scribal knowledge and wisdom and truth for themselves, so I read before them the book of the words of Enoch 26 []in the womb in which he had grown. They were not going to get up until I would clearly expound for them the words of 27 [] . . . with much eating and much drinking . . . [] . . . the wine 28 . . . [] . . . [] . . . to you, I . . . [] . . . [] 29 [he wa]s entering . . . and I said to . . . I . . . to Zoan, by . . . [] a[l]l the words of Enoch 30 [] . . . [] 31 [] *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 72–73)⁶⁵

The poor preservation of the text of this episode is especially regrettable for an investigation of the figure of Sarai, for the lost or garbled scene(s) here represent what is probably the key gap in the Apocryphon's Egyptian narrative—and she is right in the middle of it. Sarai has apparently been successful at evading the notice of men for the five years preceding the pilgrimage of the three courtiers (19.23), one of whom turns out to be Herqanosh; but after

64. The proposal of דחלח in 19.23 is that of Fitzmyer, followed, cautiously, by Machiela. For some reason, both obscure, somewhat, the common root in their translations. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98–99, renders “frightened” in line 18, but “feared” in line 23; Machiela, *DSGA*, 71–72, offers “afraid” and “worried herself” respectively. This general concern with the emotions of the characters is part of what Nickelsburg, “Patriarchs Who Worry,” 188, terms the “psychologizing interest” of the Apocryphon (and compare Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 148–49); one of the narrative effects of this, however, is this suggestion of similarity between characters.

65. The text becomes very fragmentary towards the end of column 19; several lines at the bottom are missing completely. As elsewhere, I have made no attempt to reproduce the spacing of Machiela's edition here.

their visit, her body and talents are claimed as the objects of their intimate knowledge (20.2–8).⁶⁶ It is clear from what survives that this intervening episode functions in part as an opportunity for Abram to polish his credentials as a sage, and it is possible that this informs Herqanosh's later request that Abram heal Pharaoh in the wake of the failure of the native wise men to do so (20.19–22). However, the proximate motive for Herqanosh's appeal is a dream, not a sudden recollection, after a lapse of two years, of Abram's wisdom. Moreover, the broader plot demands that the central development of all the lacunose remains of 19.23 through the end of the column be that Sarai is encountered: nothing of the rest of the tale, until Abram, Sarai, and Lot depart Egypt in 20.32–33, is comprehensible otherwise.⁶⁷ Despite the significance of this event, however, most commentators venture very little here.⁶⁸ Naturally, any conclusions about this fragmentary section must remain somewhat tentative; but the task of reading Sarai in this narrative calls for the advancement of a few responsible hypotheses.

The entire episode, naturally, reflects Abram's presentation and perspective; but the two essential elements mentioned above seem relatively certain. First, Sarai has sought to keep out of sight for years on end—efforts that have not been in vain, as the stated motive of the nobles' visit shows. The three arrive not in search of a beautiful woman who has been the topic of rumors, but on a quest for sapiential knowledge: they come, Abram says, “on account of my speech and on account of my wisdom,” asking for “scribal learning and wisdom and truth” (על מלי ועל חכמתי . . .).⁶⁹ The nearly universal reading of the object of the second

66. Although his name does not appear in the remains of this scene, a comparison of 19.24 and 20.8 shows that Herqanosh is one of the “three men from the great ones of Egypt” (הלוא גברין מן רברבי מצרין) who seek out Abram.

67. Compare the division of the text in Beyer, *ATM*, 173, who treats the latter part of 19.23 through the first word of 20.8 (that is, the visit of the courtiers and their subsequent poetic tribute to her) as one section, titled “Sarais Schönheit.”

68. The remarks of Fitzmyer, *GA*, 193, are typical; his entire treatment of this central question reads: “Unfortunately we are not told how the Egyptians learned of Sarai's beauty. Did they somehow see her during their visit?” Compare Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 88.

69. ספרא could refer to a book, as the word of the same consonants apparently does towards the end of line 25. However, alongside “wisdom” and “truth,” it seems better to construe it abstractly, as a related skill: “book learning, scribal wisdom, erudition,” as Machiela, *DSGA*, 73, has it; compare Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 87, who offers “writing” or “reading.”

preposition was, until recently, אַנְתְּתִי: thus, the men call not only to hear Abram's "words," but also, he says, "on account of my wife." However, both Falk and Machiela, working independently, read הַכְּמָתִי with a high degree of confidence.⁷⁰ The narrative logic probably supports this latter reading: Abram's note of Sarai's extreme apprehension at being seen would jar with a matter-of-fact statement, produced with virtually no intervening narrative data, that a few powerful men came partly on her account. It might be possible to postulate a curiosity piqued by Sarai's concealment, but there are no hints of this in the extant text. Moreover, "my [learned] words" and "my wisdom" are a conceptual doublet, a common rhetorical feature in the Genesis Apocryphon that is also found, in triplet form, in the men's request, quoted just above; "my words" and "my wife," on the other hand, have little notional coherence.⁷¹

Second, Herqanosh and his companions meet Sarai. More than this—unless they fashion their poem celebrating Sarai (20.2–8) solely out of the formal conventions of its hyperbolic genre—they must pass some meaningful time with her. In fact, as discussed below, the poem breaks its generic constraints, for its composers praise more than her physical beauty. Not only do the courtiers see Sarai's face and body, but somehow, too, they witness her "profound wisdom" (הַכְּמָא שְׂגִיָּא, 20.7). It seems that more than a fleeting, accidental glimpse of a hidden Sarai is assumed here.

So despite years-long efforts to avoid just such an event, Sarai has a significant encounter with three strange, powerful men. Why does this happen, and how? Perhaps the long span of time elapsed, during which none of the dire portents prompted by Abram's dream have occurred, has led to a relaxation of vigilance. That five years pass in a breath in the discourse, with no action specified beyond Sarai's fearful concealment, hardly implies a stimulating existence (19.23);

70. Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 87–88; Machiela, *DSGA*, 72, says that the reading is "amazingly plain" on the 1994 photo of Bearman and Zuckerman, though here I must bow to his paleographical expertise. "Here is an instance," Machiela says, "where a mistaken reading (without any critical marks!) has been passed along for some time without being noticed." Compare Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, unpaginated center section; Beyer, *ATTM*, 173; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98.

71. Moshe J. Bernstein, "Stylistic Features in the Narrative of the Genesis Apocryphon," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Baltimore, MD, Nov. 24, 2013, cites dozens of these. See also the brief remarks of Jonas C. Greenfield, "Early Aramaic Poetry," *JANES* 11 (1979): 48.

likely the dream's power over her and Abram's behavior has waned. Furthermore, the context of Abram's entertaining seems conducive to the suspension of caution. In what little is preserved here, there is a reasonably clear reference to immoderate imbibing (בְּמֵאֵכֶל שְׂגִי וּבְמִשְׁתֵּה שְׂגִי, "with a lot of food and a lot of drink," 19.27), and the plain word חמרא ("the wine") occupies the end of the line.⁷²

The beginnings of another clue may be found in the apparent errand of the nobles, who are seeking "wisdom" and cognate skills (19.24–25). According to Abram, they find it in him—as he reads them "the book of the words of Enoch" (סֵפֶר מְלִי הַנְּזִיךְ, 19.25; compare line 26, and possibly 29; but see just below). But they likewise claim, later, to find it in Sarai (20.7); somehow, it seems, she also demonstrates her sapiential qualities. Perhaps she, too, with inhibitions lowered as proposed above, offers her own wisdom, even reciting "the words of Enoch," in response to the quest of Herqanosh and his companions? Importantly, this hypothesis need not float wholly in the gaps of the narrative. The final few lines in which Machiela transcribes anything in this column (19.28–30) are even more sketchy than the translation printed above indicates; in fact, the only full word transcribed without any diacritical caveats is וְאָמְרָת, in the first third of line 29.⁷³ Machiela renders "I said" here, and with good reason: Abram is the narrator throughout; he introduced his own direct speech with just this form in his first appearance in the extant text (19.7); and the final occurrence of this form also precedes Abram's speech (20.12). But this is not the only acceptable construal of וְאָמְרָת, especially in such a murky context—for the first common singular form is consonantly indistinguishable from the third feminine singular.⁷⁴ Indeed, the same form introduces Sarai's first actions in these episodes, both

72. Note also the reading of Fitzmyer, *GA*, 98, in 19.30: אֵלְלַן. Machiela reads nothing in this part of the line, however.

73. Neither Beyer nor Fitzmyer read anything here, and Machiela offers no express comment in his apparatus. Based upon his prefatory remarks in Machiela, *DSGA*, 26–27, however, it seems fair to assume that the lack of diacritical marks on וְאָמְרָת indicates a high degree of confidence in the reading.

74. The 2 msg is also the same: אָמְרָת, as in 11Q10 (11QtgJob) VI, 7; XXII, 2; XXX, 8. But while the broader context of the Apocryphon contains several examples each of אָמְרָת as 1 csg and 3 fsg—apart from the episodes featuring Sarai and Abram, discussed here, see Lamech and Bitenosh in 2.3, 9—there is no instance where it may be sensibly read as 2 msg. In Pharaoh's accusation of Abram the periphrastic הָיָה plus participle is used instead

as her dream analogue, the date palm, and as a human character (19.16, 18); moreover, her final act as subject in the narrative is the same, as she speaks to Pharaoh on Abram's behalf (20.9). Sarai's speech thus displays not only discourse-level primacy and frequency, but also story-level significance. That *ואמרת* here in 19.29, then, refers to an act of speech of Sarai—"and she said"—is both morphologically possible and narratively plausible. If this is accepted, it is even conceivable that the mention of "all the words of Enoch" (כָּל־דְּבָרֵי־הַנְּבוֹנִים) at the end of the line points to Sarai's own exposition of Enochic wisdom, as opposed to Abram's reiteration of his recital in line 25.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the theme of Sarai possessing special discernment is found in later tradition, where her prophetic abilities are said to eclipse those of Abram.⁷⁶ In the Apocryphon, this would provide yet another link between Abram's portrayals of himself and Sarai. Most importantly, however, Sarai's verbal engagement here would offer narrative justification for the pronouncement of the nobles in 20.7. How do they know about her "great wisdom"? Perhaps because she reveals it to them here, in speech, in reply to their questions.

One further line of responsible speculation might also be useful here. A curious feature of the text of the Genesis Apocryphon as it stands is that there seems to be no clear narrative function for all "three men" (תְּלָתָא גְבוּרִין), 19.24; compare 20.8) who come to visit. It is worth considering, I think, whether this section may contain allusive elements that recall the events of Gen 18:1–16 (and compare v. 22, 19:1).⁷⁷ There, too, of course, three men call on Abraham

(מֵאָה הָיִיתָ אֹמֵר), בדיל [מֵאָה] הָיִיתָ אֹמֵר, "why have you been saying," 20.26), according to Beyer, Fitzmyer, and Machiela; in any case, the alternate proposal, first read by Avigad and Yadin, is not *ואמרת* but a converted imperfect (*והאמרת*).

75. Such a proposal need not founder on the pronoun "I" (אֲנִי), which Machiela reads in the middle of the line. The uncertainties of the readings cut both ways: my suggestions must remain tentative, but the text, as indicated by its diacritical marks, is an "educated guess" to begin with (Machiela, *DSGA*, 26). It seems that the construal of *ואמרת* as 1 csg—completely reasonable, as I note above—would naturally inform the difficult guesswork that follows; perhaps a reading of 3 fsg would prompt a different reconstruction. Again, as far as I know, Machiela is the only critic who offers any reading at all for this line.

76. Exod. Rab. 1:1; compare b. Meg. 14a: Aaron Rothkoff, "Sarah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, ed. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 868; van Rensburg, "Intellect and/or Beauty," 122. Note also her introductory epithet, "sagacious," in Brock and Hopkins, "Verse Homily," 106; and her implied direct communication with God in *Ant.* 1.187, discussed in Chapter 6.

77. As far as I know, no one has proposed an allusion to Gen 18 here except for Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 61, who note the number of visitors and the feasting motif. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 190, speculates about the influence of Isa 19:11 (and following, presumably), where the "princes of Zoan" are mocked for their lack

(18:2), enjoy his hospitality (vv. 2–8), and engage him in dialogue (vv. 9–14). Moreover, there is some numerical ambiguity, or uncertain role division, in the account of the MT, as when the three visitors speak as one in vv. 5 and 9.⁷⁸ Compare this with GenAp 20.8, where Pharaoh hears “the report of Herqanosh and the report of his two friends—because the three of them were speaking with one mouth” (מלי הרקנוש ומלי תרין חברוהי די פם חד תלתהון ממללין). As for Sarai, it is interesting that she begins this fragmentary scene in hiding (19.23), while Sarah in the MT is likewise sequestered in the tent, out of sight of the men (18:6, 9).

If any of this is plausible, it is worth noting that Sarah plays an essential role in the plot of the visit in Genesis. Although Abraham initially absorbs the limelight, the episode pivots on an encounter with Sarah, who eventually speaks after her presence is revealed (18:9, 12, 15). I claim nothing conclusive here, but the parallels, I think, are suggestive. Perhaps, then, this is another note that hints at Sarai’s presence, even her verbal interaction, in the original exposition of this scene in the Genesis Apocryphon.

In Praise of Sarai (GenAp 20.2–8)

GenAp 20.2 . . . [] [] . . . how irresistible and beautiful is the image of her face; how 3 lovely h[er] foreh[ead, and] soft the hair of her head! How graceful are her eyes, and how precious her nose; every feature 4 of her face is radiating beauty! How lovely is her breast, and how beautiful her white complexion! As for her arms, how beautiful they are! And her hands, how 5 perfect they are! Every view of her hands is stimulating! How graceful are her palms, and how long and thin all the fingers of her hands! Her legs 6 are of such beauty, and her thighs so perfectly apportioned! There is not a virgin or bride who enters the bridal chamber more beautiful than she. 7 Her beauty surpasses that of all

of wisdom; compare Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 92. Abram’s entertainment of three men may even be a motif particularly prominent in the tradition reflected in the Apocryphon: compare 21.21–22, where the Amorite brothers Mamre, Arne, and Eshkol eat and drink with Abram. As noted by Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, 33 in the English section, though the names stem from Gen 14:13, this particular feast “is not mentioned in the other sources” (MT, SP, LXX, *Jubilees*, and so on).

78. These ambiguities are often remarked. While Yahweh appears to Abraham in v. 1, three individuals meet Abraham’s eyes in v. 2; Abraham’s address in v. 3, אדני, is pointed as a plural, but probably has a singular meaning, “my Lord,” and the pronominal suffixes are singular; yet the relevant forms in vv. 4–5, 8–9 are plural; meanwhile, though the three speak collectively in vv. 5 and 9, an initially unidentified “he” begins to speak in the singular in v. 10.

women, since the height of her beauty soars above them all! And alongside all this beauty she possesses great wisdom. Everything about her 8 is lovely! (Machiela, *DSGA*, 74–75)

Sarai's reactions to Abram's dream and its interpretations dominated the narrative matter just before the visit of the three nobles, and their encounter with Sarai constituted the primary development of the fragmentary end of column 19. Here, in a unique and dramatic advance in the tradition, Sarai forms the sole focus of a relatively lengthy descriptive poem replete with a variety of adjectives and other evocative parts of speech.⁷⁹ The sheer number of narrative adjectives and the amount of detail on display in 20.2–8 would seem a certain boon to a reading that seeks to collect and evaluate Sarai's traits; however, much of the poem, at least until its conclusion, operates in a very circumscribed semantic realm. The repetition—ten times by my count—of adjectives, nouns, and verbal forms derived from שפר, referring generally to “beauty,” even grows monotonous towards the end of the poem, and many of the other adjectives are near synonyms: ניצח, “irresistible” (20.2); נעים, “pleasant” or “attractive” (20.3); אי, “fair” or “graceful” (20.3, 4, 5 [and 8, though this may not describe Sarai herself, as discussed below]); רגגי, “desirable” (20.3); כליל, “perfect” (20.5); and המיד, “enticing” or “stimulating” (20.5).⁸⁰ In this context, other, slightly more definite adjectives or descriptive nouns lose some of their specificity, too: Sarai's hair may be “soft” (רקיק, 20.3), her skin unmarked in “whiteness” (לבן,

79. That Sarai is the subject of the poem as it stands is clear from 20.8–11; indeed, I would speculate from the abundance of unreferenced feminine singular pronouns in lines 8 and 9 (שרי only appearing as the very last word of line 9) that her name originally stood somewhere in the lost line and a half at the top of column 20. That these lines constitute poetry (at least until 20.7; see Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 367) is now the broad scholarly consensus; on the genre of this composition, often rather loosely called a *wasf* (Arabic “description”) after the identification of Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, “Philologische Miszellen zu den Qumrantexten,” *RevQ* 2 (1959–60): 46–48, see, among others, Japhet, “Description Poems,” 217–19, and Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 360–62. Lee also provides an “exhaustive” review of the work of scholars who have dealt with this section as poetry (344–59). Whether the poem may have been an originally separate composition, as Fitzmyer, *GA*, 193, seems to suggest (and compare Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 367, 378), has no bearing on its function in its current context.

80. According to Machiela's text, derivatives of שפר appear in 20.2, 3x in 20.4, 2x in 20.6, and 4x in 20.7; compare 20.9. The force of the repetition may be felt in the translation of Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 365 (for part of line 7: “Her beauty is beautifulness // And her beautifulness is the highest,” and so on). Note in comparisons of their work, however, that the composition of Lee's dissertation (submitted 2011) must have overlapped with Machiela's production of his own (2007), which became *DSGA* (2009), for Lee does not refer to Machiela's work at all. Fitzmyer and others have הניצח, “splendid,” or “bright,” for Machiela's ניצח, but the difference in meaning is rather slight here. For renderings of the rest, see Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 204b, 233a, 260a, 354b, 523a; compare VanderKam, “Poetry,” 62, and Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 365.

20.4), her fingers “long and dainty” (קטיין, אריד, 20.5), and her thighs “full” (שלם, 20.6), but none of this seems to provide much additional definition of her character.⁸¹ Even the poem’s sole metaphor—“the whole blossom of her face” (כול נץ אנפיהא, 20.3–4)—strikes me, anyway, as a rather conventional trope.⁸²

This is not to say that this revelation of Sarai’s beauty is unimportant. This knowledge is a net gain in an investigation of her character in the Apocryphon, as her loveliness, interestingly enough, is not explicitly mentioned before this point—though her self-awareness of this quality and its potential effects could be implied in her concern to secret herself away from “every son of man” (19.23). Nor do I suggest that Sarai’s beauty is an insignificant attribute, or that it is necessarily subordinate, in the terms of some vague moral calculus, to her traits of personality. On the contrary, her physical allure is no less a feature of her character than her propensity for speech, both of which prove to be important engines of the plot to come. Moreover, as I discuss below, at least one scholar has proposed that Sarai’s attractiveness also points to mental or moral qualities in rough accord with Hellenistic physiognomic conventions. But to my reading, the superfluity of synonymous descriptors of bodily beauty in 20.2–7 adds relatively little material detail to Sarai’s portrait here.

Despite the poem’s embarrassment of traits, then, its sum seems to fall somewhat short of its parts. Yet the climax of this recitation is a surprise, by both internal and generic criteria. “Pulchritude is the sole concern of descriptive songs,” as Shaye Cohen notes, and the poem to this point has dealt almost exclusively with attributes that are apprehended visually.⁸³ But here is a word of praise for what seems like an intellectual or spiritual property: “along with all this beauty, much wisdom is hers” (ועם כול שפרא דן חכמא שגיא עמהא, 20.7).⁸⁴ The text is clear thus far, though it has been argued that the particular force of חכמה here is influenced by the final clause of

81. Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 74b, 487b, 524b, 554a.

82. See Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 358b. Compare Japhet, “Description Poems,” 218, on the dearth of metaphor in this poem.

83. Cohen, “Beauty,” 47.

84. Compare van Rensburg, “Intellect and/or Beauty,” 121; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 196–97.

the poem, ודלידיהא יאא (20.7–8). The transcription of the letters ודלידיהא is agreed upon universally, but its meaning has been the focus of some debate; at primary issue is whether this is one word or two. If it is read ודלידיהא, it consists of the relative ד followed by the preposition ל and the noun יד, an unusual combination apparently meaning “whatever is in her hands”: hence Machiela’s somewhat paraphrastic “Everything about her is lovely!” If, however, the end of line 7 is taken as two words, ודל ידיהא, as Avigad and Yadin transcribed it originally, דל can be construed as related to the Akkadian *dullu* (“labor,” or “work”), a loan word found in the Babylonian Talmud in this same formulation: דויל ידיה, meaning “handiwork.”⁸⁵ Neither reading is free of difficulties, and major commentators are divided here, but arguments from Semitic parallels, in addition to notes in the near context, lead me to favor the latter.⁸⁶ As Lee points out, the poem dwells at length on the qualities of Sarai’s hands (20.4–5), which meshes well with a mention here of the fineness of her manual craft.⁸⁷

But it does not necessarily follow, as Muraoka would have it, that a note about Sarai’s accomplishments at weaving, spinning, or the like indicates that חכמה means “skill” here.⁸⁸ The

85. See b. Pesah. 28a (twice there); compare Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1985), 175a–b (3f). My discussion here is a bit of an oversimplification, for דל has also been taken to mean “tip” (Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, 43, English section) or “daintiness” (“die Kleinheit,” Osswald, “Beobachtungen,” 13). Beyer originally offered “die Zartheit” (“delicacy” or “tenderness”) in Beyer, *ATM*, 174, supplemented by “(oder: das Werk)” in Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten*, Ergänzungsband (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 70. See Fitzmyer, *GA*, 197, for a few others.

86. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 101, 197, following a tentative suggestion of Franz Rosenthal, “Review of Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*,” *JNES* 18 (1959): 84 (“Could *dlydyh*’ be one word and mean: ‘All she possesses is beautiful?’”) favored the former reading from his first edition; Machiela, *DSGA*, 74, concurs. In his commentary, Fitzmyer does venture an alternative, instrumental understanding of ודלידיהא as “whatever is done by her hands” (197), which splits the difference somewhat, but this does not seem to have won much support (compare Muraoka, “Notes,” 41). Reading דל as a separate word meaning “work” is advocated by, among others, Muraoka, “Notes,” 41 (though see Takamitsu Muraoka, “Further Notes on the Aramaic of the Genesis Apocryphon,” *RevQ* 16 (1993): 45, where he retains the meaning “handiwork” but transcribes the letters without spaces); Greenfield, “Poetry,” 50; VanderKam, “Poetry,” 61–62, n. 16; and Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 364–65, 378–79. Several of these discussions, and in particular that of Fitzmyer (197), also contain brief histories of the debate.

87. Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 377–79. I would quibble with Lee’s contention that Sarai’s hands are “not described as ‘beautiful,’” however (378). That they are “long” and “delicate” (in his translation) does indeed fit well with a mention of fine handiwork, but surely these adjectives also have positive aesthetic associations. Part of the issue is that Lee does not entirely accept the reading of חמיד (363 n. 36), suggested by Fitzmyer and others and adopted by Machiela, near the beginning of 20.5. With this, the sensual component is further emphasized: “every glimpse of her hands is enticing” might be a fair rendering.

word may well have a “practical” component, as the root does in biblical Hebrew; but it hardly seems justified to regard Abram’s חכמה (19.24–25) as the abstract quality of a sage while Sarai’s חכמה (20.7) means that she is good at loomwork.⁸⁹ In fact, of the Apocryphon’s characters said to have “wisdom” it may well be Sarai of whom the noun, in its intellectual sense, is most credibly predicated. While her first utterance as a human character, significantly, aims at the acquisition of knowledge—“Tell me your dream, and I’ll know it” (19.18)—Abram’s wisdom, like that of Noah earlier (6.4, 6), is mentioned only in self-evaluation, and his interpretation of his dream is no evidence of perspicuity. Alternatively, the pragmatic aspects of Abram’s own “wisdom” might be emphasized: likely Abram’s attraction for the courtiers involves some real-world advantage for them, and Abram’s reading and writing have practical utility. Either way, it is notable that it is a report of Sarai’s חכמה, not Abram’s, that reaches the ears of the king. But the central question is perhaps best informed by a recollection of the various parallels already noted between Abram’s depictions of himself and Sarai. These other similarities strongly suggest that the חכמה of Sarai roughly encompasses whatever intellectual or sapiential qualities are displayed by Abram earlier. If my earlier proposals about Sarai’s speech to the nobles, perhaps even extending to a recitation of “the words of Enoch,” are plausible, the point is doubly underlined: this would not only be another similarity to Abram, but a patent display of sapiential prowess. Thus Sarai’s manual dexterity is unlikely to define Sarai’s “great wisdom,” but is an additional, if possibly related, skill. The poem’s final stanza, by my reading, then, contains three reasonably distinct thoughts: “But along with all this beauty, much wisdom is hers, and her handiwork is fine.”⁹⁰

88. Muraoka, “Further Notes,” 45: “with all this beauty she has plenty of skill and all her handiwork is pretty.” Compare Greenfield, “Poetry,” 50.

89. Compare Muraoka, “Notes,” 41. The reading of חכמה in 19.24 had not been proposed at this time. Muraoka says that this “special signification” of חכמה is “missed by the Talmud lexicographers,” though Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 463, gives “wisdom, learning, art,” the last of which might extend to cover the “manual skill” that Muraoka points to; Jastrow’s examples, however, tend to the intellectual or spiritual.

90. Compare the translation of VanderKam, “Poetry,” 62: “But with all this beauty [//] she possesses great wisdom, [//] and her handiwork is lovely.” According to Peter Y. Lee, “Poetry,” 366–68, these lines are prosaic if “elevated” and “like poetry” (emphasis his), but the distinction seems mostly moot from the perspective of making

Some caution may be called for here. One issue, centered on the limitations of perspective, is narratorial.⁹¹ It is unclear how Abram, as a character in this tale, is apprised of the precise content—let alone the form—of this lengthy poetic composition spoken in Pharaoh’s court. It is impossible to resolve this question completely, but it is significant, I think—and I detail this further below—that much of what is said about Sarai in this poem dovetails nicely with her narrative data elsewhere, in Abram’s first-person account. In any event, as remarked throughout, the questionable reliability of Abram provides the uncertain foundation for the whole; yet to craft a reading, claims must still be weighed, and hypotheses responsibly advanced. Another issue regards the substance and heft of what is revealed about Sarai here. In my interpretation, Sarai is said, by Herqanosh and his companions, to possess not only beauty but also “much wisdom” and dexterity. I think it is certain that they encounter Sarai in the story sketched by the lacunose discourse at the end of column 19, and I believe it makes good narrative sense to posit, as I did above, that *וּאִמְרָתָהּ*, and possibly even *כִּי[ו] לְמַלְיָהּ הָנִיף*, may represent the traces of Sarai’s verbal offering of her wisdom (19.29). Moreover, I consider it methodologically justifiable to push, within reason, what evidence remains: nothing ventured is nothing gained, and it seems an “impoverishment of aesthetic experience,” as Chatman says, not to make such suppositions when they may enrich the reading of a character.⁹² But it must be admitted that these notes of her wisdom and fine handiwork come after an avalanche of almost purely physical descriptors; it could be argued that these represent something of an afterthought, rather than

meaning; note, too, that the presentation of his own stichometry and translation arranges the lines in cola that precisely match those of VanderKam: “And along with all this beauty / Much wisdom is with her / And her handiwork is lovely //” (364–65).

91. I think that Abram must be assumed to be the superior, extradiegetic, narrator of this section, as it is clear that he is still narrating in 20.9. Thus Herqanosh is the second-degree, intradiegetic narrator; unless, as discussed above, Abram, in a larger, now lost, literary frame, is already intradiegetic, and Herqanosh thus hypodiegetic (third-degree). See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 94–95. For the relationship between Abram and Herqanosh as narrators, it seems that the distinction would be purely academic.

92. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 117, and compare his remark on 120: “if we must choose, let us risk irrelevancy rather than exclude potentially rich inferences and speculations about characters.” See also my discussion near the beginning of Chapter 2. As I note there, there are limits to this process; one of them, for Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon, will be reached shortly below, as she becomes essentially inanimate after pronouncing her lie in 20.10.

constituting, as I suggested above, the climax of this paean to Sarai. From this perspective, Herqanosh's citation of "wisdom" might be better described as a hyperbolic flourish indebted to a stereotypical ideal of a "worthy woman," such as that depicted in Proverbs 31; this might imply, in turn, that the encounter between the men and Sarai was merely visual.⁹³

Elements of the broader tradition are of relatively limited help in untangling these issues. The description poems of the Song of Songs, frequently cited as clear parallels to, or even the inspiration of, GenAp 20.2–8, lack any clear mention of the beloved's wisdom.⁹⁴ Muraoka notes several links with Proverbs 31, including the emphasis on the woman's work with her hands (vv. 13, 19, 31); so, too, I would add, this ideal woman exhibits wisdom, and specifically in speech (פיה פתחה בחכמה, "she opens her mouth with wisdom," v. 26).⁹⁵ But here is a converse problem: while the Song of Songs graphically extols the virtues of the attractive female form, Proverbs actually disparages feminine beauty, or at least subordinates it clearly to piety and good behavior, as defined by the masculine circles that generated it (31:30; compare 11:22). Ben Sira praises the beauty and domestic ability of the good wife (26:13–18), but pointedly excludes speech, of any kind, from her desirable qualities: "a silent woman is a gift of the Lord" (δόσις κυρίου γυνή σιγηρά, v. 14). If the poem of GenAp 20.2–8 were considered in abstraction, as in the work of all the commentators cited here, the comparison might seem more apt. However, Sarai's talkativeness in Egypt is one of her most salient characteristics in the Apocryphon, and an

93. Compare Cohen, "Beauty," 47, who likewise mentions the texts treated just below; see also van Rensburg, "Intellect and/or Beauty," 122–23, and Muraoka, "Further Notes," 45–46.

94. See, for example, Hindy Najman, "Early Nonrabbinic Interpretation," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1838, who says that the "language of praise used here is from the Song of Songs." However, Cohen, "Beauty," 47, notes that the Song of Songs "says nothing" about the woman's "intelligence, skill, erudition, or piety." Japhet, "Description Poems," 218, cites Song 4:3, which refers to the woman's "speech" (מדבר), as a possible allusion to wisdom. But "speech" can be "lovely" (נאוה) without being wise, and the typical English rendering of *hapax* מדבר here as "mouth" (NJPS, NRSV, and many others) makes good sense in the near context, which also mentions teeth, lips, and cheeks (vv. 2–3). In any event, Japhet correctly names the most important difference between the poems of Song and that of the Apocryphon, which is the latter's almost complete lack of metaphor (218).

95. Muraoka, "Further Notes," 45–46; compare Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 62. Muraoka doesn't mention the spoken wisdom of the woman in Prov 31, perhaps due to his insistence that Sarai's חכמה in 20.7 refers to domestic skill.

important development in the tradition. The prominent female figures of Hellenistic Jewish literature, such as Esther, Judith, and Susanna, also mentioned by Cohen, are perhaps a better fit.⁹⁶ While these characters exhibit beauty alongside positive mental or spiritual qualities, though, I struggle to relate their overt piety—in the case of Esther, referring particularly to her Greek incarnation—to the depiction of Sarai in the Apocryphon.

So while its elements, both formal and thematic, have clear parallels elsewhere, the poem as a whole seems to be something of an innovation.⁹⁷ Muraoka and J. F. van Rensburg both tacitly admit this, but consider its notes of wisdom and skill to be corrective additions to an imbalanced and not quite decorous concentration on the physical: Sarai's mental qualities are an afterthought, then, even from a compositional perspective.⁹⁸ More appealing is the solution of Cohen, who argues that GenAp 20.2–8 is a Hellenization of the Near Eastern descriptive song, influenced by the physiognomic canons of the era, which assumed the interrelationship of physical and moral or intellectual attributes.⁹⁹ These principles would here be rather simplified; it is too much to suppose that each attribute of Sarai's appearance points to some inner quality, as in the detailed *Physiognomonica* attributed to Aristotle.¹⁰⁰ But the basic connection could help build a more gestalt conception of Sarai's character: her extraordinary beauty is thus a symbol of

96. Cohen, "Beauty," 47.

97. This is so, I think, even if the traits of wisdom and skill are judged to be stereotypical afterthoughts, for these still function extra-generically in their context here: again, the suggestion of qualities other than physical beauty is not a typical feature of descriptive poems.

98. Muraoka, "Further Notes," 45, seems to picture the author of the Apocryphon guiltily bringing to mind the equivocal attitude of Proverbs 31, after having gone somewhat overboard in praise of Sarai's beauty. Van Rensburg, "Intellect and/or Beauty," 123, likewise detects a moralizing impulse as the author "adds a reference" to Sarai's metaphysical charms.

99. Cohen, "Beauty," 42, 48. Van Rensburg, "Intellect and/or Beauty," 120, doesn't go quite as far, but contends with reference to the MT that Sarai's beauty "probably implied more than appearance," perhaps constituting "an attribute of rank and importance." Compare Wallace, "On Account of Sarai," 36, whom van Rensburg cites; I wonder, however, if biblical literature yields a large enough sample size to claim that beauty is most often predicated of those of "great importance" (36)—given that "importance" is both a motive for and a result of being featured in the biblical narratives. At any rate, Cohen also raises the interesting possibility that the rhetoric of the poem—with its repeated exclamations of "How beautiful!"—owes more to "Greek-style (Ciceronian?)" conventions than those of the ancient Near Eastern descriptive poem ("Beauty," 49; see also 53 n. 27). This would, at least, explain the absence of the "exotic images," as Cohen puts it, and metaphors so characteristic of the poetry of the Song of Songs.

100. Cohen, "Beauty," 42.

her remarkable mental or moral gifts of wisdom and skill. This general line of thought could even be profitably related to the note in the Septuagint that Sarai is found by the Egyptian men to be καλή . . . σφόδρα (Gen 12:14 LXX). As mentioned in Chapter 4, καλή often encompasses both physical and moral qualities. Philo’s evaluation in *On the Life of Abraham*—that Abraham “had a wife distinguished greatly for her goodness of soul and beauty of body, in which she surpassed all the women of her time”—may also resonate with this particular trend; the element of surpassing all others, too, is reminiscent of GenAp 20.6–7.¹⁰¹

Yet to my reading the text of the Apocryphon does not sit completely comfortably with any of these options. Although the mention of Sarai’s fine handicraft may complement the poem’s partial focus on her hands, Sarai’s “wisdom” does not seem to be deeply interrelated with her physical beauty. Herqanosh presents it precisely as a bonus, not as something that follows naturally: “yet,” or “but along with (ועם) all this beauty, much wisdom is hers” (20.7). Sarai is depicted as not only beautiful, but also wise. The events that ensue firmly underline the separability of these qualities: as will be seen below, the “wisdom” and “handiwork” of Sarai do not, apparently, provide much draw for Pharaoh (20.8–9)—and it is not the potential loss of her wit and needlepoint that irk Abram (20.15). This points up, once again, the chief weakness of the analyses noted above: remarkably, none considers the broader context of the Apocryphon. But it also pulls the discussion back to the question that lies beneath most of the issues considered earlier: how much can the reader trust what is proclaimed by Herqanosh, according to Abram?

Although the abundant, even microscopic attention to her features may promise rather more than it delivers, that Sarai is physically beautiful seems assured, given the mere fact of the courtiers’ report, the sheer weight of its relevant adjectives, and the confirmation of Pharaoh’s subsequent, no doubt expert, appraisal (20.9). For Sarai’s wisdom and fine handiwork, each mentioned only once, the evidence may at first seem somewhat more tenuous. The testimony

101. Philo, *Abr.* 93 (F. H. Colson, LCL); here the relevant terms are ἀρίστη and περικαλλεστάτη. Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition*, 113, also mentions Philo in connection with the Apocryphon here. Compare Muraoka, “Further Notes,” 45, on the theme of an ideal woman surpassing all others, which he notes is also present in Prov 31:29.

here is at one remove from Abram's narration, and almost nothing in the narrative to come contributes to the further definition of these traits. Looking back, however, Sarai demonstrates curiosity, or desire for knowledge (19.18); correctly divines where the real risk to her and Abram lies, and keeps her own counsel as to the appropriate course of action (19.23; compare line 20); and evinces several other similarities to Abram's depiction of himself (19.18, 23; 19.21, 20:10–11, for example), which suggests that her "wisdom" be taken no less seriously than his (19.24–25; 20.7). When these elements are considered alongside the certainty of Sarai's encounter with the courtiers at the bottom of column 19, the motive of their quest, the possibility of her speech—even exposition of Enochic lore—in 19.29, and their eventual apparent praise of her sapiential qualities in 20.7, I think it is appropriate to conclude that the absence of any further mention of Sarai's intellect is owing to the values of the men through whom the story is filtered, not to her lack of wisdom and skill. In characterization, all claims must be weighed, and a consideration of the narrative data beyond that contained within the poem of 20.2–8 indicates that these notes are not mere nods to convention, but of a solid piece with the rest of Sarai's portrait in the Apocryphon.

Sarai Uprooted, Abram Spared (GenAp 20.8–11)

GenAp 20.8 Now when the king heard the words of Herqanosh and his two companions—that the three of them spoke as one—he greatly desired her, and sent someone 9 to be quick in acquiring her. When he saw her he was dumbfounded at all of her beauty, and took her for himself as a wife. He also sought to kill me, but Sarai said 10 to the king, "He is my brother," so that I would benefit on account of her. Thus I, Abram, was spared because of her, and was not killed. I, 11 Abram, wept bitterly—I and Lot, my brother's son, with me—on the night when Sarai was taken from me by force. *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 75)

Here again a report "heard" is crucial to the trajectory of the plot: as Abram finds a remedy to his lack when he hears about Egypt's grain supply in 19.10, thus setting this entire chain of events in motion, so Pharaoh's desire for Sarai is kindled as he hears his courtiers' poem of praise. While it seems fair to assume that the king hears the entirety of Herqanosh and his

companions' report (20.2–8), it appears that his attention has wandered near the end, for Sarai's great wisdom and fine handiwork do not exercise his imagination. Instead, he “wanted her badly and sent someone in haste to take her” (שגי רחמה ושלח לעובע דברהא) (20.8–9).¹⁰² Any lingering doubt as to Pharaoh's motive is dispelled as soon as Sarai is brought in: “he saw her and was stunned by all her beauty, and he married her himself, as a wife” (חזקה ואתמה על כול שפרהא ונסבהא) (20.9). The repetition here of כול שפרהא (compare 20.7) underlines which of the three qualities mentioned in the poem's peroration resonates with the king, while נסב, “to take” or “marry,” seems, at least at first, to carry an explicitly sexual force, especially in this context.¹⁰³

Much, however, is submerged, unclear, or confused in Abram's telling of these events. That Sarai is violently abducted is implied by Pharaoh's covetous “haste” to “take” her, an impression strengthened by Abram's later description of the event as having occurred “by force” or “under compulsion” (באונס) (20.11; compare 14).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Pharaoh's alleged designs on Abram's life, apparently aligned with some of the implications of Abram's dream, punctuate the atmosphere with sudden violence (20.9). Yet the precise circumstances under which Pharaoh seeks to kill Abram, but is restrained by Sarai's production of the line Abram wrote for her so long ago—“He is my brother!” (אהי הווא) (20.10; compare 19.20)—are very fuzzy and shot through with ambiguously commercial undertones. Language evocative of transaction may begin with Abram's description of Pharaoh's “marriage” of Sarai, for the meaning of נסב can extend to acquisition by purchase.¹⁰⁵

Likewise at issue is the meaning of Abram's statement immediately following Sarai's exclamation. Both Fitzmyer and Machiela, along with many others, take כדי הוית מתגר על דילהא as

102. The lexicographers are not much help with the nuances of רחם; neither Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 521a–b, nor Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1467a–b, document any sexual connotation to the word—though note “desire,” citing Jewish Aramaic and the Dead Sea Scrolls, in *HALOT* 1981a. Despite the assertion of Nickelsburg, “Patriarchs Who Worry,” 188, the context makes clear that a rendering of “love” here would be out of place in contemporary English; see also his somewhat different formulation on 191. Compare Fitzmyer, *GA*, 199.

103. Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 352b–353b; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 915a–b.

104. Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 40b; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 29a–b.

105. See y. Šeb. 35b(23), cited in Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 353a.

a kind of purpose or result clause: “so that I would benefit on account of her.”¹⁰⁶ But this would be an unusual function for כּדִי, which routinely means “when,” as it does elsewhere in the near context: “when the king heard” (20.8); “on the night when Sarai was taken from me” (20.11).¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the durative periphrastic construction here, חַיִּי plus the participle, would seem ideally suited to follow a temporal adverb.¹⁰⁸ The precise derivation of the participle (מִתְגַּר) is also a matter of debate, although the roots in question, תִּגַּר and אָגַר, occupy similar semantic territory: significantly, both are found elsewhere in contexts of trade or employment.¹⁰⁹ It seems to me, then, that the proposal of Muraoka, first advanced in 1972, is still the best: Sarai voices her saving lie, Abram says, “while I was negotiating about what concerned her.”¹¹⁰

It might be objected that such a reading makes little sense in light of what follows, where Abram weeps with “strong weeping” (בְּכִי תְקִירָה, 20.11), characterizes Sarai’s transfer to Pharaoh’s house as having been achieved “by force” (20.11, 14), and maintains that he was given “gifts” only after his healing of the king (20.30). The order of the near context seems odd, as well:

106. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 101, 200; Machiela, *DSGA*, 75. Compare Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, 43, English section; Géza Vermès, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (New York: Penguin, 1995), 295; Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 233.

107. Muraoka, *Grammar*, 262 n. 151, flatly states that “no Aramaic idiom attests to such a usage.” His gloss elsewhere of כּדִי meaning “so as” in 5/6Hev 7, 34 (94, § 22d) might initially seem to contradict this; but the word there does not introduce a purpose clause (כּדִי כְתִיבִין, “as written”), and in any event is part of a lengthy reconstruction. See Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic, Hebrew and Nabatean Documentary Texts from the Judaean Desert and Related Material*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zion Dinur Center, 2000), 97 (incorrectly referenced in DJD 39 [104] as page 297). Of all the instances of כּדִי listed in the concordance of Machiela, *DSGA*, I can find no other example that does not clearly mean “when,” which is also his gloss here (277). Neither Machiela nor Fitzmyer, *GA*, 200, explain their rendering here. Compare Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 250b, and Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 613a–b, neither of whom offer any examples of כּדִי in purpose clauses; nor does the usage here seem to be a Hebraism, judging from *HALOT* 219a–b; compare 98b, 1852a. For an example of a translation that may retain at least a quasi-temporal force for כּדִי, see Jongeling, Labuschagne, and van der Woude, *Texts*, 95: “whereupon I was benefitted because of her.”

108. Muraoka, *Grammar*, 175–79, especially 177, § 55 fa.

109. See Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 575b, for תִּגַּר as “to trade, do business”; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1646b, similarly offers “to travel about, trade.” *DJPA* defines אָגַר, on the other hand, as “to hire, rent” (35a–b); Jastrow, again, is very similar: “hire, employ, rent” (14a).

110. Muraoka, “Notes,” 42–43. Muraoka has held to this interpretation through the appearance of his *Grammar* in 2011; see 9, § 5b; 177, § 55 fa; 262, § 88Bb and n. 151. It should be noted that he seems to regard this “negotiation” as a moral positive for Abram (“It would have been too ungentlemanly of Abram just to grin at his good fortune without putting in a single word of protest,” 262 n. 151); however, this is far from clear to me. Muraoka derives the participle from תִּגַּר. Compare García Martínez, *DSST*, 233, who renders a purpose clause but includes the notion of transaction: “so that I could profit at her expense.”

Pharaoh has Sarai taken, marries her, then tries to kill Abram, who is saved by Sarai's intervention—while Abram negotiates on her behalf? But just as the textual question in 19.15—“sprouted together from one root” versus “very beautiful”—proved difficult to resolve on the grounds of narrative logic, so too these quandaries cannot simply be explained away on the assumption that Abram is consistent. Abram's deeply personal implication in the events he relates necessarily raises doubts about his candor, as noted above, and these little inconsistencies may suggest that his story-level motives are rather more complex than his narration implies.

What emerges most clearly about Sarai in this episode is her great value—and how narrowly this is defined. Although her production of her lie to the king may suggest some timely wit, no further mention will be made of her wisdom and craft. What Pharaoh values is Sarai's physical beauty, which is a transparent cipher for her sexuality, as his actions make plain. As will be seen just below, this is also her primary value to Abram. Although his “strong weeping” (20.11) recalls Sarai's tears of long ago, shed in prospect of the very events that have just now come to pass (19.21), his emotion proves to be generated not by empathy for his abducted and captive wife, companion of his journeys and partner in his fears (19.18, 23), but by much more practical, even mechanical, concerns.

Abram's Prayer (GenAp 20.12–16)

GenAp 20.12 That night I prayed and entreated and asked for mercy. Through sorrow and streaming tears I said, “Blessed are you Most High God, my Lord, for all 13 ages; for you are Lord and Ruler over everything. You are sovereign over all the kings of the earth, having power to enact judgment on all of them. So now 14 I lodge my complaint before you, my Lord, concerning Pharaoh Zoan, king of Egypt, for my wife has been taken from me forcefully. Bring judgment against him on my behalf, and reveal your mighty hand 15 through him and all of his house, that he might not prevail this night in rendering my wife unclean for me! Thus, they will come to know you, my Lord, that you are Lord over all the kings 16 of the earth.” So I wept and was deeply troubled. (Machiela, *DSGA*, 75)

Further tears bookend Abram's relation of his prayer, delivered in response to Sarai's abduction (20.12, 16).¹¹¹ It is hard to agree with White Crawford, however, that “we find Abram

weeping and praying to God on Sarai's behalf" here.¹¹² In fact, Abram directly solicits divine judgment "on my behalf" (20.14), as Machiela renders, and self-referentiality is one of the prayer's most salient characteristics: El Elyon is repeatedly "my Lord" (מרי, 20.12, 14–15), in Abram's formulation, and Sarai—only referred to as "my wife" (אנתתי, 20.14–15)—is not merely "taken," but, more importantly, taken "from me" (מני, 20.14). In fact, Abram's central demand involves Sarai only insofar as her objective state of "cleanness" affects him: "may [Pharaoh] not have power this night to make my wife unclean for me" (20.15).¹¹³ The basic theology of his prayer only emphasizes Abram's self-interest. He invokes God as "master over all the kings of the earth" (שליט . . . בכול מלכי ארעא, 20.13), a king of kings who can force Pharaoh to the divine will on Abram's behalf (compare Ps 2:10–12), not God as defender of the oppressed, such as his defenseless, imprisoned wife (compare Ps 68:6–7).

The underlying conception of Abram's primary request—that Sarai not be defiled "for me," or "away from me"—is completely mechanical: if Pharaoh has sex with Sarai, she can never be sexually accessible to Abram again.¹¹⁴ The parties' roles in this dispute are clear. In explicitly legal language, God is invoked as judge in the plaintiff Abram's suit: "Now I am lodging a complaint with you, my Lord, against Pharaoh Zoan, king of Egypt, because my wife has been taken away from me" (20.13–14).¹¹⁵ The king, named more fully here than in any extant

111. Compare Ego, "Figure of Abraham," 238.

112. White Crawford, "Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls," 364. She goes on to note Lot's "favorable" portrait here, too, but it is not clear to me how Lot can be characterized as "praying with Abram" in this episode. On Abram's supposed solicitude, compare Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition*, 125: "The Patriarch prayed for the deliverance of his wife and his tears flowed." See also Ego, "Figure of Abraham," 238, who maintains that Abram's tearful prayer shows that he "releases Sara [to Pharaoh] out of acute self-defence and deep pain."

113. ואל ישלט בליליא דן לטמיה אנתתי מני (20.15). plus מן literally means something like "defile away from"; see Muraoka, "Further Notes," 47, on this "striking and pregnant use of the preposition," which "connotes distancing." Compare Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 226b. Note also here the play on the root שלט, "to have power" or "mastery," used twice as a substantive of God in Abram's opening address (line 13).

114. See Muraoka, "Further Notes," 47: "The Pharaoh's sexual association with Sarai would have removed her away from her husband, rendering her inaccessible or inapproachable to him and preventing him from למקרב בהא [approaching or touching her]."

115. ובען קבלתך מרי על פרעו צען מלך מצרין די דברת אנתתי מני (20.13–14). According to Fitzmyer, *GA*, 202, קבל has a "definite legal meaning, known from various Elephantine and Egyptian Aramaic texts," and is here employed in syntax recognizable from these documents: plus על plus the "object of complaint," here Pharaoh, with the "judicial authority," here God, represented by the direct object (verbal pronominal suffix). Compare Sokoloff,

portion of the Apocryphon, is the defendant, while Sarai, who is not called by name at all in this section, is the property under dispute. Strangely, however—though it may be implicit in his plea that she not be spoiled for him—Abram does not ask for Sarai’s return. As will become clear, the initial divine response is apt.

This forensic reification of Sarai signals a deeper shift in her depiction in the Genesis Apocryphon. Just this abruptly, Sarai is no longer an actor in this narrative. After uttering her lie in 20.10, Sarai displays virtually no volition or subjectivity, playing only the part of an almost inanimate object, a valuable chest, perhaps, that rightfully belongs to Abram: as long as Pharaoh cannot spring the lock, all will be well. This is a puzzling and frankly dissatisfying outcome after Sarai’s relative prominence earlier in the narrative. Spoken to (19.12–13), looked to for comfort (19.17–18), a captivating presence who displays curiosity (19.18), presence of mind (19.23), “great wisdom” and skill in craft (20.7–8), a clever beauty whose speech, as observed above, has primacy, frequency, and outsize impact on the action (19.16, 18, 29[?]; 20.10), Sarai is henceforth a mute object of trade. Her female humanity is presumed, of course, in the narrative’s principal element of suspense, which turns on the possibility of Pharaoh having sex with her, but Sarai’s most significant subsequent reemergence from obscurity is arguably in the context of the king’s gifts to her in 20.31–32. Barring Hagar, this reception of money and clothing evokes, for me at least, nothing so much as the image I just suggested: a fine chest or trunk to put things in. Perhaps Sarai’s bloodless depiction in the discourse from this point on need not mean that nothing can be hypothesized about her story-level existence while captive to Pharaoh; maybe her relatively multifaceted characterization to this point could feed some speculation about her feelings and actions over this span of two years. For me, however, what Abram as narrator offers about Sarai from this point on is so bland, when it is not completely blank, that such an effort would resemble less an act of criticism than a further attempt at rewriting the tradition. The

DJPA, 473b. Unless דברת (3 fsg) is a mistake for דבר, apparently די serves a causal, not relative function here, though the latter (“who took my wife from me”) would seem more satisfying after Pharaoh’s name and title. See Fitzmyer, 202, for discussion; compare Muraoka, *Grammar*, 152 (§ 42a).

importance of what ensued after the literal gap in the text at the courtiers' visit (19.23 to the end of the column) positively demanded speculation: what they purport to know about the previously-hidden Sarai is the fulcrum of the entire plot—how do they know it? As concerns Sarai, however, the gap here is so profound as to be unbridgeable, for all the manuscript's clarity, because what issues from her captivity (20.27–32) is an inert shadow, promptly to pass away completely, of what she was.

Response to Abram's Prayer (GenAp 20.16–21)

GenAp 20.16 During that night the Most High God sent a pestilential spirit to afflict him, and to every person of his household an evil 17 spirit. It was an ongoing affliction for him and every person of his household, so that he was not able to approach her, nor did he have sexual relations with her. She was with him 18 for two years, and at the end of two years the afflictions and hardships grew heavier and more powerful over him and every person of his household. So he sent 19 a message to all the wise me[n] of Egypt, and to all the magicians, in addition to all the physicians of Egypt, (to see) if they could heal him and (every) person 20 of his household of this affliction. But all of the physicians and magicians and all of the wise men were not able to succeed in curing him, for the spirit began afflicting all of them (too), 21 so that they fled the scene! *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 75–76)

God proves to be particularly detail-oriented in response to Abram's tearful prayer. Abram's disproportionate request that the king's entire household (כול ביתה, 20.15) be punished is fulfilled extravagantly, for example: the sufferings of "every man of his house" (כול אנש ביתה) are described in nearly every line (20.16, 17, 18; compare lines 19–20), and even outsiders who come to help are afflicted (20.20). As Bernstein and others have pointed out, several details here recall biblical narratives that feature elect descendants of Abram besting ineffectual Egyptian savants.¹¹⁶ In Gen 41:8, another Pharaoh "sends for" (שלח) and "calls" (קרא) "all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men" (compare GenAp 20.18–19), who fail to comprehend the dreams that

116. Bernstein, "Multi-Generic Perspective," 75; Bernstein, "The *Genesis Apocryphon*: Compositional and Interpretive Perspectives," 173–74. Compare Fitzmyer, *GA*, 206; Zakovitch and Shinan, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt*, 90.

Joseph will interpret in vv. 25–36.¹¹⁷ Likewise, in Exod 7:11 yet another Pharaoh “calls” (קרא) “the wise men and the sorcerers,” collectively referred to as “the magicians of Egypt,” whose conjuring is showed to be inferior to that of Moses and Aaron; compare the failure of the magicians to “stand” (עמד) because of a plague of boils, facilitated by the Israelite brothers, that afflicts the magicians as well as the people (Exod 9:11; קרום in GenAp 20.20).¹¹⁸ These intertextual links, along with Abram’s eventual success at healing the king (20.28–29), firmly underline God’s identity here as “Lord over all the kings of the earth,” as Abram pronounced in his prayer (20.15–16; compare line 13). Disturbingly, this display of power does nothing to rescue Sarai from captivity—but, again, that isn’t one of the requests of Abram, who merely wants to keep her from being sexually spoiled for him (20.15). That God permits Sarai to languish for two years (20.17–18) confirms the alignment of the deity’s appraisal of her worth with that of Abram: the salient issue is her sexual inviolability, and the king’s low-grade, chronic harassment by a “spirit of striking” (רוח מכדש) is enough to ensure, Abram claims, that Pharaoh “wasn’t able to touch her—and he didn’t ‘know’ her, either” (20.17).¹¹⁹

Sarai here is practically inert and referred to only by pronouns. Except for the verbless clause that notes her physical presence “with” Pharaoh for two years, “she” is defined only by what cannot be done to her (20.17–18); again, an image akin to an uncrackable safe comes to mind. Two ironies arise here. The first is that Sarai, though unnamed, has emerged as the key figure in this entire drama, the middle term of the equation between Abram and Pharaoh; but just as her value is established most plainly, her character becomes an object, virtually drained of humanity. The second, which will be clearest in retrospect, is that the deception first spoken by

117. The verbal ties are partially obscured by Machiela’s rendering of קרא ושלה (20.18–19) as “he sent a message.”

118. See also Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition*, 114, who notes this connection in passing. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 206, provides still other examples of this “motif of the failure of the non-Jewish experts to aid the king,” such as Dan 2; 4; 5:7–8.

119. וְלֹא יָכַל לְמַקְרֹב בָּהּ וְאֵף לֹא יִדְעָהּ (20.17). On וְלֹא יָכַל plus בּ as “touch,” see Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 502b; compare the examples in Muraoka, “Notes,” 33.

Sarai (20.10) and perpetuated by Abram (20.26–27) in order to forestall disaster is, in fact, the chief obstacle to their quandary’s ultimate resolution.

Herqanosh’s Errand, and the Revelation of the Truth (GenAp 20.21–23)

GenAp 20.21 *vacat* At this point Herqanosh came to me asking that I come pray over 22 the king and lay my hands upon him, so that he would live. This was because he had seen [me] in a dream . . . But Lot said to him, “Abram, my uncle, cannot pray over 23 the king while his wife Sarai is with him! Now go and tell the king that he should send his wife away from himself to her husband; then he (Abram) will pray over him so that he might live.” 24 *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 76)

The pronouns in the telling of this scene give rise to some interesting instability. Who “saw” Abram “in a dream” (בְּחֵלֶם הַחֹזֵן, 20.22)—Herqanosh, or Pharaoh? The pronominal elements immediately preceding might suggest Pharaoh is the dreamer, and this seems bolstered by external considerations, such as the narrative’s probable adoption of other motifs from Gen 20, where King Abimelech sees God in a dream (v. 3).¹²⁰ I would also suggest that the context of Gen 41:1 might have something to contribute to this question: there, too, the release of a captive from a two-year imprisonment is catalyzed by a dream of Pharaoh.¹²¹ The ambiguity around whose “woman” or “wife” Sarai is, exactly, is somewhat deeper, and neatly captures the narrative’s central tension.

But Sarai’s function in the plot, however important, only reinforces the mechanical conception developed earlier. Here, it seems that her continued possession by Pharaoh would

120. Abimelech does not “approach” (קָרַב) Sarah in Gen 20:4, a detail missing in Gen 12; compare ולא יכל בהא למקרב בהא, “he was not able to approach her” (GenAp 20.17). For this and other examples from Gen 20, see Bernstein, “Re-Arrangement, Anticipation, and Harmonization,” 49–52; compare Bernstein, “Multi-Generic Perspective,” 73–75; Fitzmyer, *GA*, 208; and White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 122–23. That Gen 12 and 20 are “intimately linked” in the Apocryphon’s retelling was noted already by Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition*, 115.

121. As noted above, there are a number of other links between the Apocryphon and the Joseph/Jacob/exodus cycle of the Pentateuch. Segal, “Literary Relationship,” 76–79, as mentioned, provides a summary of several; see also Bernstein, “Re-Arrangement, Anticipation, and Harmonization,” 48; Bernstein, “Multi-Generic Perspective,” 75; Bernstein, “The *Genesis Apocryphon*: Compositional and Interpretive Perspectives,” 173–74. Jubilees also indicates that Sarai was held captive for two years (compare Jub. 13:11 and 16), as Fitzmyer, *GA*, 206, and others have noted, but dreams play no part in that text’s abbreviated version of Gen 12:10–20, and the tradition behind Gen 20 is omitted.

create a spiritual obstacle to Abram’s prayer, jamming the transmission of his intercession: Abram, Lot says, simply “cannot pray over the king while Sarai” remains “with him” (. . . יכול לא יכיל . . . עמה . . . לעמה, 20.22–23).¹²² Lot’s abrupt adoption of the role of intermediary does nothing to suggest that Abram has Sarai’s interests in mind. That Lot understands the mechanics of the situation, and thus the elements of its solution, suggests that Abram does, too; that Lot is the one finally to reveal the truth, further, implies Abram’s continued reluctance on this score (compare 20.26–27), and his decided willingness to allow Sarai’s captivity to continue.

Report and Rebuke; Healing, Payment, and Return to the Land (GenAp 20.24–21.4)

GenAp 20.24 *vacat* Now when Herqanosh heard the words of Lot, he went (and) said to the king, “All these afflictions and hardships 25 that are afflicting and troubling my lord the king are due to Sarai, the wife of Abram. Just return Sarai to Abram her husband 26 and this affliction and the spirit of foulness will depart from you.” So the [k]i[ng] called me and said to me, “What have you done to me?! Why were you saying 27 to me ‘she is my sister’ when she was your wife, so that I took her as a wife for myself?! Here is your wife. Take her, go and get yourself out of 28 every district of Egypt! But now pray over me and my household, that this evil spirit may be driven away from us. So I prayed over [hi]m, that I might heal 29 him, and I laid my hands upon his [h]ead. Thus, the affliction was removed from him, and the evil [spirit] driven away [from him]. The king recovered, rose up, and gave 30 to me on t[hat da]y many gift[s], and the king swore to me by an oath that he did not have sexual relations with her, [nor] did he [de]file her. Then he returned 31 Sarai to me, and the king gave to her [m]uch si[lver and g]old and much clothing of fine linen and purple, which [] 32 before her, as well as Hagar. Thus he restored her to me, and appointed for me a man who would escort me [from Egypt] to [] . . . to your people. To you [] 33 *vacat* Now I, Abram, grew tremendously in many flocks and also in silver and gold. I went up from Egy[p]t, [and] my brother’s son 34 [Lot wen]t with me. Lot had also acquired for himself many flocks, and took a wife for himself from the daughters of Egy[p]t. I was encamping [with him] 21.1 (at) every place of my (former) encampments until I reached Bethel, the place where I had built the altar. I built it a second time, 2 . . . and offered upon it burnt offerings and a meal offering to the Most High God, and I called there on the name of the Lord of the Ages. I praised the name of God, blessed 3 God, and gave thanks there before God because of all the flocks and good things that he had given to me, and because he had worked good on my behalf and returned me 4 to this land in peace. *vacat* (Machiela, *DSGA*, 76–78)

122. See the response of Fitzmyer, *GA*, 208, to Muraoka, “Notes,” 8, on these lines.

The mechanical effect of Sarai's physical position is even more simply conceived here, in Herqanosh's report to the king: "Just return Sarai to Abram her husband and this striking will depart from you" (יְתִיבוּ נָה לְשָׂרַי לְאַבְרָם בַּעֲלָהּ וַיִּתְּרוּ מִכְתָּשָׁא דִן, 20.25–26). As Abram relates it, the actual procedure is slightly more complex. After Pharaoh rebukes Abram, revealing that Abram has himself persistently verbalized the lie about his relationship with Sarai, the king presents her to him: "Here is your wife! Take her, go, and get yourself out of any region of Egypt!" (הָא אֲנַתְתָּךְ דְּבָרָהּ אִזֵּל וְעַדִּי לָךְ מִן כּוֹל מְדִינַת מִצְרַיִן, 20.27–28). Now, apparently, with Sarai back in hand, Abram can pray over Pharaoh, which seems to fit with Lot's earlier evaluation to Herqanosh (20.22–23, 28–29), and the king, at least, is healed—no mention is made of his household's health.

It is curious to note, however, that Abram narrates Sarai's return to him, her rightful owner (compare בעל, 20.25), three times. As mentioned, Pharaoh seems to give her back in line 27—"Here is your wife!"—and the fact of Abram's successful intercessory prayer, in the light of Lot's statement in 20.22–23, implies that he has taken possession of her. But after the king's recovery, Abram accepts "many gifts" (מִנְתָּנָן [שְׂגִי'אָן], 20.30) and solemn assurances that his earlier request by prayer was met, as the king swears that "he did not make her impure" (וְלֹא וְאִתְּיָב לִי, 20.30; compare 20.15)—and then, Abram says, Pharaoh "returned Sarai to me" (וְאִתְּיָב לִי, 20.30–31). Even now, however, the king gives precious metals, clothing, and at least one slave to Sarai (וְאִתְּיָב לִי, 20.31), after which Abram remarks, "he handed her over to me" (וְאִתְּיָב לִי, 20.32).¹²³

123. In the context, it is perhaps suggestive that שלם can also mean "to pay" (compare 7.5), although not, apparently, in the *aphel*, which this appears to be if the reading is correct. I note, however, that most of the relevant *aphel* examples in Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), 1151a—hereafter, *DJBA*—feature transfer of money or property. Machiela's temporal and modal-adverbial subordination of the second and third "returns" ("Then he returned Sarai to me," 20.30–31; "Thus he restored her to me," line 32) reads like a sensible attempt to impose some order on this repeated information: the first note of return ("Here is your wife," line 27) is merely a presentation; the second describes Sarai's physical transfer; and the third is a summary statement of the whole transaction. But this conceptual subordination is purely contextual; there is no independent adverbial modification in either case, only a *vav* (וְאִתְּיָב לִי, וְאִתְּיָב לִי). Naturally, the flexible *vav* may extend to cover these functions; I simply note the role of the engaged reader in drawing out these possible nuances.

This puzzling series of returns may betray a mercenary tendency in Abram, similar to that implied in Gen 12, that is routinely viewed as rectified by the Apocryphon's temporal displacement of Pharaoh's largess: White Crawford, for instance, expresses a common sentiment in her contention that the change in sequence means that "Abram does not benefit from Sarai's narrowly averted defilement."¹²⁴ But the picture is not so clear if this scene is read instead as a provisional, even reluctant acceptance of Sarai's return that unfolds in stages. She is presented to Abram, which frees him to heal the king; but Abram seems to hold out, while Pharaoh sweetens the deal with gifts and guarantees that Abram's property is undamaged, and attempts to give her back once again; finally, after a full line devoted to the king's substantial payment to Sarai, Abram relents and takes her back, ratifying the deal. I am not as sure as Fitzmyer that "Abram's wealth is independent of" these gifts to Sarai; in fact, it seems to me likely that at least some of these blandishments find their way into Abram's own coffers, as he soon notes—after the *vacat*, but before he leaves Egypt—how he has "grown" in "a great many possessions and, in addition, silver and gold" (וגבלת אנה אברם בנכסין שגיאין להדא ואף בכסף ודהב) 20.33; compare Sarai's reception of [ש]גיא [וד]הב [ש]גיא in line 31).¹²⁵ Interestingly, as Machiela notes, the verb גבל seems to be used elsewhere of "growth" only in describing the increase of a parasite.¹²⁶ When set alongside the ambiguously pecuniary undertones of Abram's description of the night of Sarai's abduction, these notes of acquisition at her restoration may suggest, again, that Abram is not entirely forthcoming about the complex of motives that drive his conduct in this self-related tale. The Apocryphon's project of "renovating the character of Abram," as Falk puts it, remains

124. White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 123. There seems to be some confusion in this section, as White Crawford implies that only Sarai receives gifts from Pharaoh; but the text of Fitzmyer, *GA*, 102, which White Crawford apparently uses (106 n. 6), contains a clear reference to the king's gifts to Abram (20.29–30).

125. Fitzmyer, *GA*, 214. I note that the extant text features כסף and דהב outside of these two lines only in the context of a dream of Noah (13.9), and there in the reverse order. On the verb here, Fitzmyer, 102, along with pretty much everyone else after Avigad and Yadin, reads ואזלת, from אזל, "to go," at the beginning of 20.33. Machiela, *DSGA*, 77, however, correctly says that the *gimel* and the *bet* in וגבלת are "starkly obvious" on Bearman and Zuckerman's photo of the mid-nineties (BZ20B, reproduced in Machiela, *DSGA*, 242).

126. See Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 207a, who renders "(of parasite worms) to grow." Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 258a, offers "to be spontaneously generated, created"; presumably this is related to the sense "create," cited in Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 119b. Both lexicographers cite b. Hul. 67b(19).

incomplete, and in this way anticipates the much more ambitious attempt at apologizing for Abraham in the *Jewish Antiquities*.¹²⁷ Although Abram, in the Apocryphon, presents himself in a light that is more positive than that cast by the biblical narrator on his analogue in Genesis, there may yet be bits of less savory traits peeking through the fabric of his self-justifying narration.

As for Sarai, she disappears without a sound from the discourse of the Genesis Apocryphon, at least as the text stands, for good. Her last action, only implied, is merely receptive, and her collection of Pharaoh's money and goods provides a final parallel with Abram's depiction of himself, recalling as it does his own acquisition of gifts (19.24–25; 20.30)—and, as noted, anticipating his sudden possession of money just before his departure from Egypt. Against the background of the broader tradition, Sarai's reception of "Hagar," introduced with no further definition in 20.32, suggests that Sarai might still re-emerge from her state of inert but inviolate receptacle; in a different way, too, Abram's concern to keep Sarai sexually "clean" for him may imply the divine promise of offspring, made explicit in 21.8–14 (and compare 22.33–34, after which the text breaks off), which makes it likely that other episodes familiar from their presentation in Genesis filled the columns that once stood to the left of those that remain.¹²⁸ However—barring the welcome, chance discovery of another manuscript of this highly engaging text—the historical accidents of the Apocryphon's preservation unfortunately admit nothing but vague speculation about Sarai's trajectory in the remainder of the narrative. Might her penchants for speech and independent action have returned in her response to her predicted pregnancy, or when she gave birth? Could her sapiential qualities have affected

127. Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*, 80–85.

128. That the narrative continued past the end of column 22 is certain: 22.34 ends mid-sentence, and photos clearly show a cut edge to the left of a stitched seam that once attached another sheet to that which contains columns 17–22. Naturally, column 22 occupied the innermost rolls of the scroll as discovered, so the cut is ancient. See Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, 37 in the English section, plus unpaginated plates; Machiela, *DSGA*, 81, 226, 243, 249–51. See Schuller, "Response to 'Patriarchs Who Worry,'" 209–11, for a brief review of proposals on the scroll's original length. The most surprising is that of Matthew Morgenstern, "A New Clue to the Original Length of the Genesis Apocryphon," *JJS* 47 (1996): 347, who suggests that the remains from Qumran's Cave 1 are "only the tail-end of an enormously long scroll"—longer, in fact, than the great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) or the Temple Scroll (11Q19). Morgenstern's hypothesis—based on his chance discovery of the letters ϑ , $\var�$, and $\var�$, respectively, in the top right-hand margins of the final three sheets of the manuscript, as if they functioned as sheet numbers (345–46)—has not met with broad acceptance.

her later interaction with Hagar, or her relationship with Ishmael? Or do Sarai's relative prominence and definition in GenAp 19.14–20.11 express a short-lived, creative aberration that gives way permanently to the object-like Sarai classified as property in Abram's legal complaint in 20.12–16?

Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon

Sarai in the Genesis Apocryphon is a complex and evolving character who grows in prominence and definition until she is abruptly reduced to an object in Abram and Pharaoh's dispute over her sexual availability. The state of the text consigns the course of her trajectory before and after Egypt to fragile guesswork, and Abram's narration constitutes a substantial filter that must always be wrestled with, but a remarkably full and interesting image of Sarai can still be constructed from what remains. Sarai's emergence takes some time: there is no certain mention of her existence until 19.17, though a reasonably sure hint is implicit in Abram's brief travelogue in lines 12–13. His remarks there assume and imply togetherness, at least, and even some respect and mutuality between the characters, an impression that is initially reinforced by their interaction after Abram's dream. Sarai and Abram's similarity, which even approaches metaphorical identity in their growth "from one root" in the imagery of his dream, is only strengthened by parallels that trace throughout the narrative: as Abram speaks and is defined by his speech, whether truth or lies, so is Sarai (19.7, 18, 24–29; and compare 20.9–10 and 26–27); as Sarai reacts to events with significant emotion, weeping and exhibiting fear, so does Abram (19.18, 21, 23; 20.10–12, 16); and Abram claims wisdom, while Sarai demonstrates forethought and is celebrated for her sapiential qualities (19.23–24; 20.7). Even Sarai's last, pale implied action in the narrative resonates with an activity Abram has associated with himself, as she receives gifts (19.24–25; 20.29–32). Paradoxically, however, these important symmetries do not lead Abram to appraise Sarai's value in holistic, human terms; her worth is ultimately assessed

very narrowly, even mechanically, as a sexual receptacle that must remain exclusive to Abram in order to retain its utility.

Sarai's representation as a date palm in Abram's dream presages this motif of utility at the same time as it suggests her beauty, subsequently so firmly underlined in the courtiers' poem of praise (19.14–17; 20.2–8; compare 19.23). Her usefulness is not only implicit in the image of a fruitful tree, but also distinctly expressed in the tree's verbal intervention on Abram's cedar's behalf, a first virtual action that anticipates Sarai's last real act as subject (19.16; 20.9–10). Speech, in fact, constitutes a vital expression of Sarai's subjectivity until this final utterance. Her first statement as a character aims at the acquisition of knowledge, which accords with the courtiers' later testimony as to her great wisdom (19.18; 20.7). Sarai seems to offer an illustration of this sagacity as she intuits the true threat to her person, avoiding Abram's advised course and implementing an alternate strategy that apparently keeps her safe for five years (19.20, 23). However, this seeming demonstration of agency is undermined not only by the fear that is its motive force, but also by its result, which is a self-imposed captivity not so different in kind from that which awaits her in Pharaoh's house.

Sarai's relative prominence in the discourse before the poorly preserved episode with the three nobles (19.14–23) foreshadows her vital role in the plot to come. The primacy, frequency, and significance of her speech, moreover, coupled with the nature of the courtiers' quest in search of wisdom and their eventual, credible citation of her great wisdom and fine handiwork (19.16, 18, 20, 24–25; 20.7, 9–10), makes it narratively plausible that Sarai once offered wise speech in what is now the regrettably lacunose end of column 19. What remains of the text, further, admits formal evidence (ואמרת) and maybe even כְּ[ר] לְ מַלְיָהּ הַנְּזֹרָה (19.29) that can be construed in support of this hypothesis. However this may be, it seems certain that Sarai's encounter with Herqanosh and his companions is the crucial pivot of this entire complex of Egyptian episodes in the Apocryphon. The men return to court deeply impressed with her physical, intellectual, and manual charms, mentioning nothing of their dealings with Abram, and

their report triggers the central crisis that had been vaguely intimated in at least one of Abram's interpretations of his dream, so long ago (19.21; 20.8–9).

But here the primary irony of Sarai's story in the Genesis Apocryphon comes suddenly into view. Just as her portrait reaches an intriguing fullness, the varied traits of this garrulous, resourceful, beautiful, wise, and dextrous woman are funneled down to one quality that is identified with her beauty (20.9), but, in reality, is even narrower: her mechanical sexual receptivity. And just when it becomes clearest that Sarai is the central entity in the conflict that drives the plot, her humanity seems to collapse, leaving in her place an object to which legitimate access is disputed. Abram's relation of his prayer crystallizes this transformation, as he names himself as the injured party and petitions not for his wife's rescue from captivity, but for her maintenance in a sexually clean state—for him (20.13–15). Though Sarai, by Abram's own testimony, has just saved Abram's life (20.9–10), any mutuality that was evident earlier in the narrative has disappeared, and the similarities that have emerged between Sarai and Abram do not urge his sympathies. From this point onward, Sarai is inert, primarily defined not even by what is done to her, but what cannot be done to her, or what cannot be done because of her physical presence (20.17, 22–23).

This sketch of Sarai's mercurial trajectory in the Genesis Apocryphon only adds to the doubts that have surrounded Abram's narratorial reliability throughout. Why is her relative complexity distilled into pure functionality? What can be believed about her earlier, fuller depiction when it becomes plain that Abram values her, above all else, as an inviolate object? Again, Abram as narrator is a talker from the beginning, and certain elements of his tale seem not to add up. He comes off well in his own telling: he can divine the meaning of dreams, for example, and is a sought-after sage. But Abram's relation of his dream and its interpretations, especially as compared with his description of later events, provides more questions than answers, and no one mentions his wisdom later. His staging of events seems calculated to allay any concern about his improperly benefitting from Sarai's imprisonment: five years pass before his predictions begin to be realized, however imperfectly, and his gifts from Pharaoh are implied

to be given in gratitude for his healing powers. Yet Abram's dealings with Pharaoh, both at Sarai's abduction and at her release, may hint at mercenary motives. What is he "negotiating" about in 20.10? Why does he seem to narrate Sarai's return only in stages punctuated by the reception of wealth (20.27–32)? Set against the context of Abram's prayer, in which he exhibits no clear concern for Sarai as a human being, these notes of transaction make Abram's purposes seem murky indeed.

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, it is something of a scholarly commonplace to remark upon the "strong" female characters in the Genesis Apocryphon. My study here has supported this contention to a degree, but also shown that, at least for Sarai, this representation needs considerable qualification. Sarai's crucial function in the plot should not be confused with an enduringly round and nuanced characterization, for any definition, agency, or self-determination deflate entirely after her abduction and production of the lie Abram scripted for her, and her role shrinks to that of a contested, valuable box. Sarai's value as a wise, beautiful, and skillful woman proves irrelevant to the other characters in the end, for her true worth to Abram, Pharaoh, and God is ultimately located in her attractive anatomy. And there is no redemption or return from this state for Sarai in the Apocryphon, now or in antiquity: after Abram takes her and her new wealth back, she sinks without a trace, and the text soon ends at a cut in the leather, mid-sentence.

I will now proceed to my final reading of Sarah in the Second Temple tradition, treating her character, there called Sarra, as depicted in the *Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus.

CHAPTER 6

SARRA IN JOSEPHUS

Introduction

I now turn to a consideration of the figure of Sarra, as she is named here, in the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus.¹ My poetics of characterization remains as outlined in Chapter 2, and I attempt throughout to shine a light on Sarra in her narrative context. Of necessity, this includes Abraham, whose status as the primary character in this narrative is plain from the earliest scenes, where the narrator employs a long excursus to extol his many fine qualities in detail (*Ant.* 1.154–160). As before, I have eschewed the pose of a first-time reader, preferring where possible to call on the full range of the narrative to clarify the question at hand. Theoretical issues stemming from the relationship of the *Antiquities* to its source tradition are relatively few; despite its explicit claim to render the “precise” (ἀκριβῆ) details of the Scriptures, “adding nothing nor taking anything away” (οὐδὲν προσθεὶς οὐδ’ αὖ παραλιπὼν, 1.17; compare 10.218),

1. In keeping with my practice elsewhere, I refer to Sarra according to the spelling of her name throughout this narrative (Σάρρα). However, I have not adopted Hellenized spellings of other character names, including that of Abraham (Ἀβραάμ here), or place names. The best English title for the work abbreviated as Ἰουδαϊκῆς ἀρχαιολογίας, literally “ancient lore of the Jews,” or “Judeans,” is a matter of debate. The Brill Josephus Project has not insisted on uniformity in the rendering of Ἰουδαῖος in its series of translations and commentaries, of which Feldman, *JA 1–4*, frequently cited below, is a part (see the Series Preface, xi–xii). I tentatively prefer *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant.*) not only because it is better established in Anglophone scholarly usage, but also because “Judean” strikes me as unduly geographically restrictive for this expansive work. However, in this chapter I will, in general, duck the issue entirely by referring simply to the *Antiquities*, a convention with ample precedent. Sarra also appears in the *Jewish or Judean War* (*J.W.*) of Josephus, in the context of a speech delivered by the character Josephus to the defenders of Jerusalem, urging their capitulation to the besieging Romans under Titus (5.379–381). The passage is of interest as it preserves a very different tradition of Sarra’s abduction by Pharaoh (compare Gen 12:10–20), in which the king invades Canaan at the head of a massive army and kidnaps her; a day later, Pharaoh, “trembling from visions in the night” (τρέμων ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν νυκτὶ φαντασμάτων), restores Sarra “undefiled” (ἄχραντος) and flees after giving riches to the “Hebrews” (5.381). However, Sarra is barely defined here beyond the titles of “queen” (Βασιλίδα, 5.379; βασίλισσα, 5.381) and “the mother of our race” (τὴν μητέρα τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν, 5.379). Moreover, the reference to this legend, which the character Josephus seems to assume is known to his listeners, serves only the immediate rhetorical need of emphasizing the futility of military action absent God’s sponsorship—incidentally, a rather poor service, given that there is no suggestion anywhere in the speech that the Romans will simply give the Jerusalemites money and return home. For these reasons, I omit discussion of this episode here.

the narrative here is actually quite distinct from that of the Masoretic Text (MT) or the Septuagint (LXX), precluding any need for minute reference back and forth. Indeed, the narrator's palette is limited, in some ways, in comparison with the other narratives surveyed here; for example, there is a marked dearth of direct character speech in this section of the *Antiquities*.² Coupled with the narrator's enthusiasm for explanatory commentary, this can contribute to an impression of an interesting tale dully told. Yet the *Antiquities* is interesting for other reasons, unrelated to its turgid style, at least as concerns the figure of Sarra.

Nearly all treatments of Sarra in the *Antiquities* compare her point-by-point with her analogue in the MT. Most choose to highlight her more "positive" depiction here, while a few underline her contracted and weakened role.³ Both of these emphases capture a part of Sarra's image in the *Antiquities*, but neither can be consistently sustained without significant qualification. Her portrait is considerably more complex, with both greater moral ambiguity and more displays of agency, than these thumbnail sketches allow.

In the *Antiquities*, Sarra's linear "biography" proceeds in fits and starts. My reading of her here accordingly emphasizes three interrelated motifs that are, in my estimation, central to her characterization. First, and most simply, Sarra is often—but not always—diminished in the retelling of the *Antiquities*. This attenuation has already been observed in brief treatments by Betsy Halpern-Amaru and Maren Niehoff, who both point to departures from the MT in concluding that the narrator of the *Antiquities* limits Sarra's role and initiative.⁴ My discussion

2. God's commendation of Abraham in 1.183 is possibly the only clearly marked direct speech in this part of the *Antiquities* (though see Abraham's half-direct reply in 1.183, and Abimelech's one first-person verb in 1.209). In a recent, initial exploration of the poetics of characterization in Josephus, van Henten, "Characterization," noted the primacy of narratorial speech in Josephus's characterization. In personal conversation afterward, van Henten said that his survey of Josephus's works confirmed that direct character speech is a relatively unimportant means of characterization for Josephus, especially in the sections of the *Antiquities* that retell biblical stories.

3. James L. Bailey, "Matriarchs," 161, argues for the "rather positive portrait" of Sarra in the *Antiquities*. He is joined in this evaluation by Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 71 n. 589, 81 n. 654, 82 n. 661, 83 n. 666; Reinhartz and Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence," 102–3; Troy A. Miller, "Surrogate, Slave and Deviant?" 146–47; and van der Lans, "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household," 187–88. Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits in Josephus," 145–48, emphasizes Sarra's diminishment, as does Niehoff, "Mother and Maiden," 416–18; compare the very brief remarks of McKay, "Eve's Sisters Re-Cycled," 176, and Begg, "Flight of Hagar," 17.

4. Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits in Josephus," 145–48; Niehoff, "Mother and Maiden," 416–18.

also points to many instances of this dynamic that are perceptible in the narrative itself, while not ignoring the occasions where the Sarra of the *Antiquities* actually gains in prominence in comparison with the tradition. In Egypt, for example, Sarra reveals the truth about her and Abraham's relationship in an intimate audience with Pharaoh (1.165); after Isaac is born, Sarra participates in his circumcision (1.214); and when Abraham leads Isaac away to sacrifice him, he takes pains to conceal his intent from Sarra, concerned that his plans might be thwarted if she finds out (1.225).

Second, Sarra's image is often conformed to that of Abraham in the *Antiquities*. As seen in the other narratives read in this study, this is a quality of Sarra that may also be witnessed elsewhere. However, the ways in which these resemblances are expressed are almost always unique to this narrative, lending support to the emerging idea that Sarra's similarity to Abraham represents a kind of "deep trait" that demands expression in a variety of ways in the different narratives that tell her story.

Third, and finally, Sarra's portrait in the *Antiquities* is considerably complicated by the persistent desire of the narrator to show the main characters in a positive light. It is an item of broad consensus that Josephus, or the narrator in my view, "improves" the characters of the heroes of the biblical stories, eliminating or apologizing for compromising behavior and engaging in laudatory direct definition, probably best described as *encomia*, on their personalities. Louis Feldman has pointed to this phenomenon with regard to several male figures in the *Antiquities*, including Abraham, while James Bailey has done the same for Sarra and the other matriarchs of Genesis.⁵ What is not usually noticed, however—perhaps due in part to commentators' fundamentally comparative methodology—is how often these attempts at character-polishing stumble on their own lights, as the narrator's solutions spawn further

5. Louis H. Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher in Josephus," *TAPA* 99 (1968): 143–56; Louis H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 133–53; see also, among others, Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Saul," *HUCA* 53 (1982): 45–99; and James L. Bailey, "Matriarchs."

problems. So Sarra is indeed made to look “better” in the *Antiquities*, at least on the surface; but the renovation is hasty, and some unattractive features still show through the new paint.

Importantly, these incomplete cover-ups are detectable not only by synopsis with the rest of the tradition, but also, as here, through patient probing of the narrative itself.

Practical Preliminaries

A few preliminaries remain to be mentioned, regarding the extent of the narrative under discussion; the identity of the narrator of the *Antiquities*; the critical text used; and the translation offered for ease of reference.

When I make references to “the narrative,” or “this narrative,” I do not mean to refer to the entirety of the *Antiquities*, a sprawling work that runs to twenty ancient volumes, but only to those sections of the first book that primarily concern the story of Sarra and Abraham, 1.148–256.⁶ Sarra first appears in 1.151, while her death is recorded in 1.237; Abraham lives on until 1.256, though much of the intervening material is devoted to obtaining Rebekah as a wife for Isaac. I treat all of the relevant episodes within this span (*Ant.* 1.148–160; 1.161–168; 1.186–190; 1.194–206; 1.207–212; 1.213–221; 1.222–236; 1.237), plus connecting material as appropriate.

The completely anonymous nature of the other works analyzed in this study makes speculation about their author(s) mostly moot. In the case of the *Antiquities*, however, we know quite a lot about its composer, especially for an ancient author, even though much of the information that he relays in, for example, *The Life*, is undoubtedly tendentious. But this does not mean that Josephus is the narrator of the compositions that bear his name. Most scholars make no distinction here, but the voices speaking in the works of Josephus—even, or perhaps especially, when the character of “Josephus” speaks directly, as in *J.W.* 5.376–419 and elsewhere—are not

6. According to Abraham Schalit, *Namenwörterbuch zu Flavius Josephus*, Supplement 1 to *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus*, ed. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 108a, Sarra’s name only occurs outside of this range once in the *Antiquities*, in 1.289, where Jacob rehearses his lineage; and once in *J.W.* 5.379, in the strange retelling of Pharaoh’s abduction of Sarra noted above. This also tracks precisely with the proper noun index in vol. 7 of Benedict Niese, *Flavii Josephi Opera* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885–95), 73. She is also mentioned, but not by name, in *Ant.* 2.213 and 3.87.

identical to that of the man eventually named Flavius Josephus, their “real author.”⁷ This is a basic tenet of most mainstream work on narrative poetics, and requires no detailed defense here.⁸ When referring to the storytelling voice in the *Antiquities*, then, I use the word “narrator,” in keeping with my practice elsewhere; in the main, I reserve “Josephus” for references to that man’s broader body of work.⁹

In my discussion of Sarra in the *Antiquities*, I use the text of Benedict Niese, which has remained the standard critical edition for over a century.¹⁰ I also follow Niese’s numbering scheme in my citations (*Ant.* 1.154–157, for instance), in preference to the older, less precise system of book, chapter, and paragraph (*Ant.* 1.7.1, for example, comprises the whole range just noted). When citing a range, I follow the second edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style* in noting all unit numbers in full.

As an aid to the reader, I have provided the relatively recent translation of Feldman for each major section of the *Antiquities* discussed.¹¹ In terms of style, this work falls short of the rendering of Henry St. John Thackeray, the original translator of the works of Josephus in the

7. Even the identity of the “real author” here is more complex than it might seem, especially if Thackeray’s (now generally rejected) hypothesis about Josephus’s “assistants” has any merit. See Henry St. John Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1929), 100–124; Henry St. John Thackeray, trans., *Jewish Antiquities, Books 1–4*, vol. 4 of *Josephus*, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1930), xiv–xvii; but see the critique of this theory in R. J. H. Shutt, *Studies in Josephus* (London: SPCK, 1961), 59–75; for some additional bibliography, see Feldman, *JA 1–4*, xv. In any case, the production of an antique book was not a solitary enterprise (xvii–xviii).

8. See, for instance, Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 86–89.

9. Some of the “I” statements, for example those that refer to other, projected works of scholarship that could have existed in the real world, given enough time and inclination (*Ant.* 1.25, 29), or to works, such as the *Jewish War* (*Ant.* 1.4, 203), that we actually have, trouble this stance a bit. These issues would repay further narratological investigation. But the basic insight of the theoretical separation of the real author from his or her narrator—simply, as I see it, that the voices in the text are always a projection of a limited slice of the full personality of the human being responsible for recording them—is sound, and I will refer consistently to the “narrator” throughout my discussion here.

10. Niese, *Flavii Josephi Opera*; references to this text will be limited to the editor’s last name. See the discussion of this edition in Feldman, *JA 1–4*, xxxvii–xxxviii. Contrast, however, the critique of Niese’s editio maior in Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, ed., *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), xv; compare Shutt, *Studies*, 113–14. In my judgment—depending upon an admittedly small sample size, relative to the whole—the much more widely available edition of Thackeray, *Jewish Antiquities, Books 1–4*, which is itself based on that of Niese (xvii), is more than adequate for most work with the *Antiquities*.

11. Feldman, *JA 1–4*.

Loeb Classical Library, as Feldman and his editor Steve Mason both admit.¹² Despite a few infelicities, however, its “determined literalness” and relatively wooden diction make it a better choice for my purposes here, and Josephus, at least in this work, is no great stylist.¹³ Compared to the other narratives under consideration here, the *Antiquities* is positively verbose, making it somewhat cumbersome to reproduce a full translation of all the sections discussed. However, in comparison with the biblical material, the precise details of the *Antiquities* are less well known, and the reader is less likely to have a copy to hand. I have tried, therefore, to provide as much text as is necessary, without overwhelming the chapter with block quotations. Occasionally I have provided summaries, enclosed in brackets and marked with my initials, instead of quoting Feldman’s translation in full. Bracketed character names, supplied for clarity, are mostly original to Feldman’s text, though I have silently added a few myself. All translations in the body of the discussion are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Beginnings (*Ant.* 1.148–160)

Ant. 1.148 I shall speak about the Hebrews. . . . Therros. . . . was the father of Habramos, who was the tenth from Nochos and was born in the 992nd year after the Flood. 149 For Therros begat Habramos in his seventieth year. . . . 150 [Further genealogical data.—JM] 151 Habramos had brothers, Nachores and Aranes. Of these Aranes, having left behind a son, Lotos, and daughters, Sarra and Melcha, died among the Chaldeans in a city called Oures of the Chaldeans, and his tomb is shown unto the present day. Nachores married a niece Melcha, and Habramos a niece Sarra. 152 Because Therros came to hate Chaldaia owing to his grief for Aranes, they all emigrated to Charran in Mesopotamia, where Therros also died and was buried after living 205 years. . . . 153 Nachores had eight

12. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, x, xxxviii. Feldman himself completed the final volume of the *Antiquities* in the Loeb series (vol. 9 of *Josephus*, containing books 18–20) in 1965, though he indicates there (ix) that Thackeray left a “rough draft” of even these portions of the *Antiquities*. In any case, the material in question here was seen through to the press by Thackeray himself before his death in 1930 (Thackeray, *Jewish Antiquities, Books 1–4*). On occasion I have also consulted William Whiston, trans., D. S. Margoliouth, ed., *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (London: Routledge, 1906), a translation first published in 1737 (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, xxxviii) and still widely distributed in print and in electronic helps such as BibleWorks. I have limited references to these three translations to the translator’s last name; all such references may be easily found by consulting the place under discussion.

13. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, x. Aside from a few mistranslations, which I have noted in the discussion below, most of the infelicities are solecisms that do not interfere materially with understanding. On a related matter, the use of the capitalized, masculine pronoun for the deity (1.208, for instance) is a puzzling choice for a work published at the turn of this century.

legitimate children. . . . 154 Habramos, lacking a legitimate son, adopted Lotos, the son of Aranes his brother and the brother of his wife Sarra; and at the age of seventy-five he left Chaldaia when God bade him to move to Chananaia, in that he dwelt and that he left to his descendants. He was clever in understanding all matters and persuasive to his listeners and not mistaken concerning matters about that he might conjecture. 155–156 [Habramos infers and declares the unity of the deity by observation of the heavenly bodies.—JM] 157 Since, for these reasons, the Chaldeans and the other Mesopotamians fell into discord against him, he, having decided to emigrate in accordance with the will and assistance of God, settled in the land of Chananaia. . . . 158–160 [Summary of records of Habramos in the works of historians.—JM] (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 53–59)

Although Sarra’s name does not appear in the *Antiquities* until 1.151, the narrator details what turns out to be her paternal family line, all the way back to Shem, son of Noah, in 1.148 (and see 1.143–147). Her father, Haran (here spelled Ἀράνης), is one of the brothers of Abraham (1.151), who is the clear focus of the narrator’s interest in this section.¹⁴ This focus, and the general level of detail here, help to camouflage some potential loose ends in the narrator’s account. Abraham, for instance, who is specified as “tenth after Noah” (δέκατος . . . ἐστὶν ἀπὸ Νώου), and whose birth is reckoned in years after the flood, seems to be the first son of Terah (Θέρρος) in terms of both importance and chronology (1.148). Yet his brother Haran must father Sarra when Abraham is all of ten years old (compare 1.198), and Haran is by far the first of the brothers to die (1.151).¹⁵

Haran’s death apparently makes Sarra an orphan, despite her lengthy lineage, the instant she enters the discourse: along with her siblings, she’s “left behind” or “abandoned” by her father before her name is even mentioned (Ἀράνης . . . υἱὸν καταλιπὼν Λῶτον καὶ Σάρραν καὶ Μελχὰν θυγατέρας . . . ἀπέθανεν, 1.151). Seemingly straightaway, however, Abraham marries Sarra, an

14. See above on the spellings of character names and toponyms. As in Chapter 4, on the Septuagint, I see no real benefit, for the purposes of my discussion, in using the transliteration of the Greek nominative of these familiar names. These “Hellenizing” schemes, moreover, are invariably inconsistently applied; for example, as I said in Chapter 4, if “Canaan” is “Chananaia,” as Feldman has it, properly “Egypt” should be “Aigyptos”; but no one, Feldman included (see 1.163), seems interested in pressing the convention that far.

15. The narrator does not mention the death of Nahor (Ναχώρης), but he apparently lives long enough to father eight sons with Milcah (Μελχά; plus four more by his παλλακή, or concubine, Ῥοῦμα: 1.153), Sarra’s sister, after Haran’s death. Nahor, however, seems to die some time before Abraham, as Laban, Nahor’s grandson, is the head of his branch of the family by the time Abraham’s servant is negotiating for the hand of Rebekah (1.248).

act that could carry implications of adoption, even rescue, in its context. Their brother only recently dead, then—if the depth of their father Terah’s grief, mentioned next in the discourse, can be taken as a reliable indicator of the event’s freshness—Abraham and his brother Nahor each take one of their “abandoned” nieces under his wing. Some time later, moreover, Abraham will formally “adopt” Sarra’s brother, Lot (“Αβραμος . . . Λῶτον . . . εἰσεποιήσατο, 1.154).¹⁶ The stated reason for this last move, however, hints at another possible reading of Abraham’s speedy marriage, this one rather more mercenary, perhaps even predatory. In clear distinction to Nahor’s eventual generation of no fewer than eight “legitimate children” (παῖδες γνήσιοι, 1.153) with Milcah, Sarra’s sister, Abraham adopts Lot as he “lacks a legitimate child” (γνησίου παιδὸς ἄπορον, 1.154). The sexual and reproductive aims of Abraham and Nahor are thus expressed, or clearly implied, in the narrative; a motive of care for their recently orphaned, younger female relatives would demand a good deal more inference. That the brothers so swiftly move to wed and bed their “abandoned” nieces—women or girls presumably at least as grieved by their father’s passing as their brokenhearted grandfather is—may owe as much to sexual opportunism as it does to avuncular concern. In any case, the genuine blood tie between Sarra and Abraham, the first note of such a relationship that is narratively credible in the tradition examined to this point, gives a first hint of an interesting facet of the *Antiquities*. As frequently noted, a salient feature of Sarra throughout the works surveyed is her resemblance to Abraham. The *Antiquities* also displays this feature; however, more often than not, the particular cases of likeness are unique to this narrative. This may suggest that the quality of Sarra’s similarity to Abraham is a kind of deep trait, a characteristic that consistently emerges regardless of her story’s varied narrative trappings.

Sarra soon moves along with the rest of the extended family to Haran (Χαρράν) in Mesopotamia—“since Terah had come to hate Chaldea because of grief for [his son] Haran”

16. LSJ 497a. According to Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 118 n. 60, the adoption of Lot is found elsewhere only in the medieval *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (35.1); Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 55 n. 494, adds that this work likely drew this plot point from the *Antiquities* itself.

(Θέρρου δὲ μισήσαντος τὴν Χαλδαίαν διὰ τὸ Ἄράνου πένθος, 1.152). Questions of narratorial knowledge or candor continue to nettle here: who buries Terah, when he dies in Haran? Both Feldman and Thackeray obscure the problem by rendering θάπτουσιν as a passive; but the natural subject here is πάντες: driven by Terah’s grief, they “all migrated to Haran . . . where they also buried Terah after he died” (μετοικίζονται πάντες εἰς Χαρράν . . . ὅπου καὶ Θέρρον τελευτήσαντα θάπτουσιν, 1.152).¹⁷ Yet Abraham, fathered by Terah when the latter was 70 (1.149), must be 135 when Terah dies at 205; and Abraham, apparently along with Sarra and Lot, leaves for Canaan, never to return, at 75 (1.154).

The narrator’s various remarks about this departure, moreover, only add to a vague sense of confusion over the precise order and nature of events in the plot. In his family’s migration to Canaan, Abraham “leaves behind” (καταλείπει) Chaldea, not Haran (1.154), though these places are distinguished earlier (1.152).¹⁸ Did he, Sarra, and Lot move back to Chaldea, temporarily? This vagueness with regard to character movements, especially as concerns Sarra, will develop into a minor motif as the narrative draws on. And what prompts this more dramatic migration? In the event’s first mention, Abraham leaves Chaldea “because God ordered him to move to Canaan” (τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος εἰς τὴν Χαναanaίαν μετελθεῖν, 1.154), a simple if cryptic motivation. Yet after an encomium on Abraham’s scientific and scholarly prowess (1.154–156), the narrator claims that “the Chaldeans and the other Mesopotamians rose up against him” (Χαλδαίων τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Μεσοποταμιτῶν στασιασάντων πρὸς αὐτόν) due to Abraham’s revolutionary theological conclusions, and that Abraham accordingly “thought it best to move”—albeit “in accordance with the will and help of God” (μετοικεῖν δοκιμάσας κατὰ βούλησιν καὶ βοήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ, 1.157). Much later, God claims in an address to Jacob to have led Abraham to Canaan “when,” or perhaps “because,” “he was driven away by his relatives” (ἐλαυνόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν συγγενῶν, 1.281).¹⁹

17. The only variant cited by Niese is the same form lacking moveable v.

18. Compare Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 120.

19. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 55 n. 476, 58–59 n. 505.

These uncertainties add to the difficulty of resolving a clear or detailed image of Sarra in these early parts of the narrative. In marked contrast to Abraham, who is the subject of many lines—some, indeed, purportedly taken from the work of published historians—that characterize him directly (1.154–160), the narrator’s method of characterizing Sarra is quite indirect.²⁰ In a first in the tradition surveyed so far, Sarra’s lineage can be easily inferred, though the reproduction of the family tree of the “Hebrews” obviously aims primarily at the definition of Abraham (1.148–150).²¹ That Sarra and Abraham are actually related marks a unique instance of the familiar motif of Sarra’s similarity to Abraham. Despite these familial ties, however, Sarra is introduced as a woman or a girl left behind, along with her two siblings, by her father’s death (1.151). Almost immediately, though, she is married by Abraham, her near-contemporary paternal uncle, someone who is said to be a renowned figure of acute perception and, apparently, political or military power: that his fellow Chaldeans and Mesopotamians were “revolting against him” (στασιασάντων πρὸς αὐτόν, 1.157; compare the στάσις in Egypt in 1.164) suggests as much, as does the report of Nicolaus of Damascus, cited by the narrator, that Abraham was an “outsider with an army” who “reigned” in that city before moving on to Canaan (ἐβασίλευσεν ἔπηλυσ σὺν στρατῷ, 1.159).²² Abraham’s wedding of his niece Sarra may be prompted by motives of protection or predation. Either way, their sexual relationship fails to produce a “legitimate” child; interestingly, Sarra is ascribed no blame, at least at this point, for this lack.²³ But the situation leads Abraham to adopt Lot—making Sarra, it seems, her brother’s stepmother

20. It should be noted that—in my poetics anyway—direct means of characterization do not necessarily provide a more credible portrait of a character than indirect means.

21. As Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 117 n. 57, points out, Sarra is apparently taken as identical to Iscah of the MT (Gen 11:29), just as she is in the rabbis; for these references, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 177–78, 178 n. 38, 180 nn. 43, 44.

22. Compare Louis H. Feldman, “Abraham,” in *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 234–37; Louis H. Feldman, “Abraham the General in Josephus,” in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn, Earle Hilgert, and Burton L. Mack (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 43–49.

23. Compare Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 117. Contrast, however, the summary statement in Amram’s divinely-sent dream in *Ant.* 2.213, where Sarra’s life is essentially reduced to the dynamics of her fertility.

(1.154). As discussed more fully below, this attempt of Abraham to solve their problem of childlessness partly anticipates Sarra's later effort, through the means of Hagar's body, to address the same issue. Neither endeavor will ultimately succeed.

Sarra migrates, apparently, from her ancestral and now marital home in Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran of Mesopotamia, driven by her grandfather's grief; she may bury him there, or move back to Chaldea (1.152). She migrates again, apparently, from Chaldea to Canaan, driven by her uncle and husband's unquestioning obedience to God, or, perhaps, by his decision to avoid the civil strife caused by his theological innovations, or, maybe, because the rest of their family drove him away (1.154, 157, 281). Much of this must be simply inferred. Sarra is the subject, and that only partly, of μετακίζονται, referring to her first move—and, only possibly, of θάπτουσιν, which confuses rather than clarifies in any case (1.152). Otherwise she is acted upon: left behind, married, but mostly just left out. Sarra never speaks, directly, indirectly, or by implication; that she even accompanies Abraham to Canaan is not confirmed until 1.162, when she leaves the place, “brought along” (ἐπαγόμενος) by Abraham to Egypt. In fact, on a first reading the only certain companion of Abraham's move to Canaan would seem to be Lot, just adopted and thus the most likely source of Abraham's future “descendants” (ἀπογόνους, 1.154).

Egypt (*Ant.* 1.161–168)

Ant. 1.162 Some time later a famine having taken hold of Chananaia, Habramos, learning that the Egyptians were prosperous, was eager to betake himself to them in order both to participate in their abundance and to be a listener to what their priests say about gods. For he said that either he would become their disciple if they were found to be better or he would convert them to a better mind if his thoughts should be better. 162 And taking Sarra along with him and fearing the frenzy of the Egyptians, lest the king kill him because of the beauty of his wife, he devised the following scheme. He pretended that he was her brother and instructed her that she should feign this, for it was in their interest. 163 And when they arrived in Egypt, it turned out for Habramos just as he had suspected. For his wife's beauty became well known, wherefore Pharaohes, the king of the Egyptians, not being content with what was said about her, but seized with zeal to behold her, was on the point of laying hands on Sarra. 164 But God thwarted his unjust desire with a disease and civil strife; and the priests revealed to him, when he sacrificed to find deliverance, that the calamity had come to him because of the wrath of God, since he had

wished to outrage the wife of the stranger. 165 And he, frightened, asked Sarra who she was and who was this man whom she had brought with her. And when he had learned the truth he apologized to Habramos. For thinking that she was his sister, not his wife, he had coveted her, wishing to enter into a marital alliance with her but not to outrage her driven by lust. And he showered him with many treasures, and he associated with the most erudite of the Egyptians, whereby it happened that his virtue and his reputation for it became more illustrious. 166–168 [Abraham confounds the views of the Egyptians, gains renown for his persuasive teaching, and exposes the Egyptians to arithmetic and astronomy, of which they were previously ignorant.—JM] (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 60–64)

A fair amount of time lapses, unnarrated, between Abraham’s settling in Canaan (1.154, 157) and the famine that eventually grips that region: contrary to the renderings of both Thackeray and Feldman, χρόνοις ὕστερον probably means “long afterwards,” or “much later.”²⁴ When Abraham learns that the Egyptians are, in contrast, “well-off” (εὐδαιμονεῖν), this seems to provide him with a pretext to engage in an investigation, rather on the Socratic model, into Egyptian religious beliefs. To be sure, he is “eager to depart to them in order to share in their plenty”—but also “to be a pupil of their priests, as to what they would say about the gods.”²⁵ The narrator is careful to note that Abraham will keep an open mind in these colloquies; however, in the event, unsurprisingly, it is the Egyptians who benefit from Abraham’s tutelage (1.161, 166–168).

Perhaps in the pursuit of the first of his two goals, Abraham also “brings along” Sarra, whose presence seems to present both risk and opportunity. The theology of the Egyptians may require some investigation, but their libidinous nature, apparently, can be taken for granted:

Since he brought Sarra along, too, and feared the madness of the Egyptians for women—lest the king do away with him because of the shapeliness of his woman—he conceived the following stratagem: he pretended to be her brother, and he taught her, too, to act this out, for it was profitable to them (1.162).²⁶

24. See LSJ 2008b for precisely this formulation. Niese’s text reads τὴν Ἰουδαίαν here, though χαναναίαν appears in a number of manuscripts of lesser value; Thackeray adopts the latter, majority reading.

25. μεταίρειν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἦν πρόθυμος τῆς τε ἀφθονίας τῆς ἐκείνων μεθέξων καὶ τῶν ἱερέων ἀκροατῆς ἐσόμενος ὧν λέγοιεν περὶ θεῶν, 1.161.

26. ἐπαγόμενος δὲ καὶ τὴν Σάρραν καὶ φοβούμενος τὸ πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐπιμανές, μὴ διὰ τὴν εὐμορφίαν τῆς γυναίκος ὁ Βασιλεὺς αὐτὸν ἀνέλη, τέχνην ἐπενόησε τοιαύτην · ἀδελφὸς αὐτῆς εἶναι προσεποιήσατο κάκεινην τοῦθ’ ὑποκρίνασθαι, συμφέρειν γὰρ αὐτοῖς, ἐδίδαξεν.

The narrator's aversion to reproducing direct speech in this part of the *Antiquities* makes it somewhat unclear whether the phrase συμφέρειν γὰρ αὐτοῖς is a narratorial gloss, or part of Abraham's "teaching." Its position, prior to the verb, probably suggests the latter: Abraham's assurance that the scheme is beneficial or profitable to them is part of his argument for Sarra to "act this out," or "play the role" (ὕποκρίνασθαι).²⁷ This is only one instance of Abraham's persuasive personality in the *Antiquities*.²⁸ At the beginning of the excursus on Abraham's excellent qualities in 1.154–156, he is said to be πιθανός τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις, "plausible" or "persuasive to his hearers."²⁹ The evidence for this is rather slim in Mesopotamia, where Abraham seems to have little luck persuading anyone of his monotheistic doctrine (1.157).³⁰ In Egypt, though, Abraham proves to be remarkable to the learned Egyptians precisely for his "persuasive ability concerning whatever he chose to teach" (πεῖσαι λέγων περὶ ὧν ἂν ἐπιχειρήσειε διδάσκειν, 1.167).³¹ Here, too, on the edge of Egypt, it seems likely that Sarra is convinced by what Abraham "teaches" her: she need not even directly lie, merely "play along" with the fiction, and coming events suggest that she does so, at least for a time.

Abraham's fear for his life is supposedly founded in the "madness" or "passionate lust for women" (τὸ πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας . . . ἐπιμανές) that is said to be characteristic of Egyptians in general.³² That Pharaoh forms the focus of his concern, however, is telling: once again, Abraham

27. Thackeray makes this explicit: "he pretended to be her brother and, telling her that their interest required it, instructed her to play her part accordingly."

28. Compare Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher," 153.

29. It is tempting to toy with another nuance of πιθανός, which is "specious"; this reading would have to operate on a certain level of irony, as the narrator of the *Antiquities* would never, it seems, criticize the heroic and learned Abraham. To a suspicious reader or narratee, however, such a reading might define quite neatly Abraham's misleading implied speech here, as well as that in Gerar.

30. Note, too, Abraham's failure to persuade God (or the angels?) to spare the people of Sodom, 1.199.

31. Compare, as well, the later characterization of Lot as a μαθητῆς τῆς Ἀβράμου χρηστότητος, or "student of Abraham's open-heartedness," 1.200.

32. It is not clear to me why Feldman omits the modifying prepositional phrase (πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας) from his translation. This "madness" (ἐπιμανής / ἐς) for members of the opposite sex is almost a stock phrase in later Greek, found in descriptions of both men (Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.6.8) and women (Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 8.1); LSJ 644b. In the case of Pausanias, the man so described is Ptolemy I ("Soter"), so there is an (adoptive) Egyptian connection; however, the geographer speculates that Ptolemy's "madness" in this regard might owe to his supposed

is presented as a kind of royal figure, a peer of kings whose entourage, including “his woman,” can expect to be noticed in the highest quarters. Naturally, the appeal of this woman also contributes to the action. She has “beauty of form” or “shapeliness” (ἡ εὐμορφία), a quality that she shares in the *Antiquities* with handsome figures such as Joseph (2.41) and Moses (2.231); soon, this trait is described more generally as τὸ κάλλος, referring to bodily beauty (1.163).³³

Several ambiguities impact possibilities for Sarra’s characterization here. The movement of the plot suggests that she is initially convinced to “play her role”; but does she share in Abraham’s knowledge of the likely repercussions? For the narrator notes that “when they entered Egypt, it turned out for Abraham just as he guessed it would” (ὡς δ’ ἤκον εἰς τὴν Αἴγυπτον, ἀπέβαινε τῷ Ἀβράμῳ καθὼς ὑπενόησε, 1.163). It is even possible that ἀποβαίνω carries a basically positive force, as it often does: everything “turned out well,” or “succeeded for Abraham.”³⁴ But to what does the narrator refer? Abraham is only on record fearing that the king, being an Egyptian, will murder him out of lust for Sarra—and, if συμφέρειν γὰρ αὐτοῖς represents Abraham’s speech at some remove, predicting that playing his trick will benefit the two of them. Here, in brief, however, is what happens, according to the narrator: Sarra’s

true father, Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, and the source consulted may have been one “specializing in Macedonian sexual musical chairs” (Daniel Ogden, “The Birth Myths of Ptolemy Soter,” in *Belonging and Isolation in the Hellenistic World*, ed. Sheila L. Ager and Riemer A. Faber [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013], 185). In the work of Achilles Tatius, himself a Greek from Alexandria, Leucippe is falsely accused of this kind of lust; although she and Cleitophon spend some time in Egypt, neither is Egyptian. It is tempting to add this description of the Egyptians in *Ant.* 1.162 to the evidence for Josephus’s “introduction of erotic elements reminiscent of the Hellenistic novels” so notable in this episode (Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 61 n. 520; Feldman, “Abraham,” 258–61), as *The Adventures of Leucippe and Cleitophon* is one of the five works generally so named. One of Niese’s primary witnesses, abbreviated as codex Oxoniensis (O; see Niese 1.x) preserves here the interesting ἐπιμηχανές, referring to the “craftiness” or “deviousness” of the Egyptians towards women—a somewhat ironic reading given Abraham’s actions here and elsewhere.

33. Τὸ κάλλος is also used of characters such as Rachel (1.288). It is an interesting question whether Sarra’s beauty is strictly an object of discovery in Egypt, or a more generally acknowledged quality; the passive of ἐκβοάω here may admit both understandings (LSJ 502a). Feldman and Thackeray both render τὸ γὰρ κάλλος ἐξεβοήθη τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ in an ingressive or inceptive sense: “For his wife’s beauty became well known,” and “his wife’s beauty was noised abroad,” respectively. It is not clear that this is the only possible force of the verb, however; also just plausible might be that Sarra’s beauty was “famous,” “renowned,” or “notorious,” leaving open the option that her reputation preceded her. Abraham’s reported fear of the king himself, notably, might make more sense if Sarra’s beauty were renowned (1.162); yet this would likely mean that her true identity would be known to the king, as well, and this does not seem to be the case (1.165).

34. LSJ 192b.

reputation for bodily beauty spreads, making Pharaoh eager to see her for himself; having apparently achieved this aim in a suitably private venue, he is “just about to grab,” “attack,” or “have sex with Sarra” (οἶός τε ἦν ἄψασθαι τῆς Σάρρας) when God “checks his unjust lust with plague and civil discord” (ἐμποδίζει δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁ θεὸς τὴν ἄδικον ἐπιθυμίαν νόσῳ τε καὶ στάσει τῶν πραγμάτων, 1.163–164).³⁵ Did all this happen “just as [Abraham] surmised”? After the truth about Sarra is confirmed, further, the narrator reports that Pharaoh “presented [Abraham] with a lot of money” (δωρεῖται τε αὐτὸν πολλοῖς χρήμασι), which fulfills Abraham’s first goal of “sharing in the plenty” of the Egyptians; moreover, Abraham is able to begin his association with the learned Egyptians, thus achieving his second goal (1.165).³⁶ Is this, too, “just as he thought it would be”? After all, this is a man “quick to understand about everything” (δεινὸς ὢν συνεῖναί τε περὶ πάντων), and, significantly in the present context, “not at all wrong about things he conjectures” or guesses about (περὶ τε ὧν εἰκάσειεν οὐ διαμαρτάνων, 1.154). Here, it seems, there is a crack in the narrator’s aim—widely noted by commentators—to lionize Abraham at every turn.³⁷ If he is so perspicacious and preternaturally accurate in his conjectures, surely Abraham can deduce what will occur in Egypt; indeed, this is implied by the report that all falls out “just as he guessed it would,” and by the fact that both his goals are achieved as a result of his

35. For ἄπτομαι as a euphemism for sex, see 1 Cor 7:1, and several other examples listed in LSJ 231b. That this is at least part of its force here is suggested, I think, by two factors that seem to pull in somewhat opposite directions. On the one hand, the narrator exhibits an interest in “erotic elements reminiscent of the Hellenistic novels,” in this episode and in others (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 61 n. 520); on the other, these elements are often related with a delicate pudeur that borders on prudishness, as in the barely-suggested sexual encounter of Abraham and Hagar in 1.187. Compare Henry St. John Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, *A Lexicon to Josephus* (Paris: Geuthner, 1930–55), 79b, which cites this occurrence of ἄπτομαι for the meaning “have intercourse with a woman,” and the legal material in *Ant.* 4.257. See also Whiston’s translation here: Pharaoh “was preparing to enjoy her” (1.163).

36. The reading of RO, συνεῖναι, which Niese does not follow in this instance, seems to make more sense than the finite συνῆν (with Abraham as subject) here: Pharaoh grants Abraham both “a lot of money” and “association with the most learned of the Egyptians.” It is not entirely clear, however. In either case, the narrative implies that Abraham conducts his scholarly disputations with the Egyptians after the matter of Sarra and Pharaoh is resolved.

37. Compare Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 131; Carl R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 73–74; and Louis H. Feldman, “Hellenizations.” As Harold W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 109–19, shows, this treatment of Abraham is representative of a much broader trend in the *Antiquities*. See also Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Saul.”

trick. But Abraham’s remarkable insight, at least here in Egypt, can only be exercised at the expense of his moral standing: Abraham’s role as a victim of circumstance depends on his ignorance of the actual results of his ploy. As it is, the events that “turn out” so well for Abraham—“just like he thought”—include the apparent abduction and near-rape of Sarra, in addition to divinely-sponsored plague and political upheaval. This may color the reader’s impression of the narrator’s eulogy at Abraham’s death, where he is lauded as a “man tops in every moral excellence” (ἀνὴρ πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ἄκρος,” 1.256). Sarra, on the other hand, has received no encomium praising her powers of inference; moreover, at least so far, one of the more prominent of her limited traits seems to be a certain tractability, as she migrates at the instigation of others and is taken along on journeys (1.152, [154], 162). It seems unlikely, then, that Abraham labors over the details in his persuasive coaching of Sarra; and it seems particularly improbable, if a modicum of self-interest can be assumed for Sarra, that his explanation of his stratagem included the prospect of her threatened sexual assault.

At any rate, Sarra, now a famous beauty, must be taken somehow into the presence and power of the king, in order that he see the truth of the reports and be on the point of “touching” her (1.163). The misrepresentation of her relationship with Abraham must also be known to Pharaoh, whose later questioning of Sarra shows that he is aware of Abraham’s existence, but not, apparently, his true identity (1.165). Sarra’s stay in court seems likely to have been of significant duration.³⁸ God’s intervention on behalf of Abraham’s true tie to Sarra—Pharaoh’s crime being his desire “to outrage the woman of the stranger” (ὕβρισαι τοῦ ξένου τὴν γυναῖκα, 1.164), not Sarra as an individual—may prevent Sarra from being “touched,” but the divine remedies do not resolve the situation immediately. In particular, the στάσις, or political unrest,

38. Contrast the reading of Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 129–30, whose assumption of a “summons” to Sarra to inquire after the truth in 1.165 seems to presuppose that she is resident elsewhere (with Abraham?) during the king’s troubles. This is not an impossible reading on the narrative data, which is admittedly sparse, but it seems odd that the punishments for Pharaoh’s behavior should continue in the absence of their catalyst, which is the threat that his actions pose to Abraham’s relationship (1.164). Moreover, Pharaoh’s interview with Sarra is not prefaced with any kind of character movement; he simply begins asking her questions. Compare Franxman’s reading of the episode in Gerar (148–51), where he is even more certain that Sarra “was never taken from Abraham to begin with” (149), and my notes on this below.

that God creates seems to demand a substantial period in which to unfold; but the νόσος, too, even if it is isolated to the person of Pharaoh, taken alongside the rest of Pharaoh's fact-finding, must absorb some time. Pharaoh falls ill, and his capital is in an uproar; while giving orders to deal with the disturbance, Pharaoh summons priests, offers sacrifices to find a remedy, and waits for the signs to be interpreted; upon learning that his troubles are "owing to the wrath of God" (κατὰ μῆνιν θεοῦ) at his unwitting violation of the laws of hospitality, he cross-examines Sarra, learns the full truth, and soothes Abraham (1.164–165). Only at this point, it seems, might Sarra be released—though the reader can only guess at this, as the narrator has since lost interest in her.

The brief narration of Sarra's private time with Pharaoh contains a number of interesting elements as concerns her characterization. She must be under his power for a substantial period, and in his physical presence at least part of this time: he obviously does "take a look" at her, and is on the verge of taking a good deal more than that (1.163). Moreover, in what proves to be a notable feature of the narrator's storytelling, the physical movements of the characters are almost entirely submerged: after the ill omens are read, Pharaoh interviews Sarra by simply beginning to speak to her, as if she has never left his side (1.165). This sudden appearance of Sarra in a colloquy anticipates her surprising and undetailed emergence from "inside" in the episode of the angelic messengers (1.197–198). That Pharaoh explicitly speaks to Sarra at all is significant; that he asks her to confirm or elucidate the truth of what was revealed to him by his priests about these grave matters of health and state, even more so. Both elements represent novel developments in the tradition here.

But the content of what he says, reported indirectly, might be even more noteworthy, given Sarra's portrait thus far: Pharaoh, "out of fear, asked Sarra who she was, and who this was she had brought along" (ὁ δὲ φοβηθεὶς ἡρώτα τὴν Σάρραν, τίς τε εἶη καὶ τίνα τοῦτον ἐπάγοιτο, 1.165). Remarkably, Pharaoh, whose emotional state recalls Abraham's supposed fear at the outset of this episode (φοβούμενος, 1.162), neatly inverts the previous roles of Abraham and Sarra. Abraham, according to the narrator, brought Sarra along to Egypt (ἐπαγόμενος δὲ καὶ τὴν Σάρραν, 1.162); in Pharaoh's question here, Sarra assumes the dominant, subject position, having

brought Abraham along, almost as if she is his chaperon. This constitutes another instance of an interesting phenomenon in the *Antiquities*, in which the theme of Sarra's resemblance to Abraham, so prominent in the broader tradition, is reinforced—but in a manner that has no precise parallel elsewhere.

In a continuing development in the tradition, it is plainly implied that Sarra more clearly explains the finding of Pharaoh's sacrifice, which only refers to his offense against "the woman of the stranger" (τοῦ ξένου τὴν γυναῖκα, 1.164); Sarra herself must be the source of his "learning the truth" in full (πυθόμενος . . . τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 1.165). Abraham, apparently, isn't the only one who can teach the Egyptians something they don't know (compare 1.166–168)—another minor, unique tie between the two characters. Sarra's actual speech here is buried deep in the discourse, though Pharaoh's questions suggest that she first reveals, remarkably, "who she is" (τίς . . . εἶη, 1.165). If only the narrator had seen fit to detail her response! What does she say? And, for that matter, just "who is this one she had brought along" (τίνα τοῦτον ἐπάγοιτο, 1.165)? Plainly the relationship of these two mysterious figures is part, but perhaps not all, of "the truth" that Pharaoh learns from Sarra; importantly, Pharaoh's response (1.165) shows that this particular truth is manifestly not that the pair are brother and sister, which helps to evaluate claims made later, in the similar episode in Gerar (1.211; compare 1.208). But the primary revelation of this scene for a reading of Sarra is her relative independence—not forgetting, of course, that her presence here owes to abduction and imprisonment that nearly leads to sexual violation—and importance to the action. Apparently alone with the king, Sarra seizes the initiative to speak the truth, revealing her identity by dropping "the part" assigned her by Abraham, and, in fact, catalyzing the achievement of Abraham's goals as laid out at the outset of this episode (1.165; compare 1.161).

This last note, however, clarifies whose interests are truly being served here, and the tale's denouement tends to reimpose the characters' previous roles. Pharaoh may have referred to Abraham as the man Sarra "had brought along," but he placates Abraham, not Sarra, with his apologies (1.165); and later, in Gerar, in an episode that echoes this one in many particulars,

Abraham will once again “bring along” Sarra, this time with no subsequent swapping of roles (1.207). Pharaoh may have learned “the truth” from Sarra, but he responds with lies of his own: he claims to Abraham that he had never been “eager to outrage [his woman] owing to lust” (ἐνυβρίσαι κατ’ ἐπιθυμίαν ὠρμημένος, 1.165), yet “unjust lust” (ἄδικον ἐπιθυμίαν) is exactly how the narrator has defined his motive, and the divine response to Pharaoh’s sacrifice specifically referenced his desire “to outrage the woman of the stranger” (ὕβρισαι τοῦ ξένου τὴν γυναῖκα, 1.164).³⁹ In the end, Pharaoh gives Abraham “a lot of money” (πολλοὺς χρήμασι) and permission to engage the learned Egyptians in dialectic, just as he had wanted, and it is Abraham’s “virtue” (ἀρητὴν αὐτῷ), not Sarra’s, that increases in renown as a result of this adventure (1.165). Sarra’s minor emergence into agency here, then, in her private interview with Pharaoh, is not sustained through the end of the episode. In fact, as with the first move to Canaan, Sarra’s accompanying presence must be simply assumed at Abraham’s grammatically solo return to that land (Ὦς δ’ εἰς τὴν Χαναναίαν ἀφίκετο . . . , 1.169).

“Left behind” at her first appearance in the narrative, Sarra is “brought along” to Egypt, convinced by a persuasive Abraham to “play her part” in a scheme that is meant to be “profitable to them” (1.162). But Abraham receives all the profit here, while Sarra, despite Abraham’s ostensible fear for his own safety, takes all of the risks (1.163, 165). Given the outcome of Abraham’s plan, which apparently includes Sarra’s abduction, near-rape, and imprisonment at court for a substantial period of time, it seems unlikely that Sarra is apprised of all that may come of her play-acting. Abraham, however, must either be “not at all wrong about things he conjectures” (1.154), or innocent of placing Sarra’s body and life at risk—but not both. Given that everything “turned out for Abraham just as he guessed it would” (1.163), it seems that the former is more likely. This is only the first instance of the narrator’s penchant for creating

39. This is contrary to the argument of Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 78–79 n. 639, who claims that Pharaoh, in distinction from Abimelech, is portrayed absent “lustful intent.”

narrative problems by attempting to apologize for the main characters, a phenomenon that will also affect the depiction of Sarra in scenes to come.

Sarra is portrayed here as a notable beauty; Abraham and the narrator seem to agree as to her εὐμορφία, while her κάλλος is instrumental to the plot, the likely subject of the “reports” (τοῖς . . . λεγομένοις) that stimulate the king to his predatory moves (1.162–163). This quality has little traction beyond this episode, though it may be assumed to fire the “lust” of King Abimelech, just as it does Pharaoh’s here (ἐπιθυμία, 1.163–164, 207–208). Sarra’s period of captivity that results paradoxically gives her an opportunity to demonstrate a kind of independence. In a new development in the tradition, Sarra, seemingly alone with Pharaoh, advises the king on a matter vital to monarch and state, shedding the role that Abraham wrote for her and revealing “the truth” about “who she is” (1.165). She, from the king’s perspective, is the one who “brought along” Abraham, and she proves as capable as Abraham of “teaching” an Egyptian something he didn’t know (1.165–168). Yet her relative prominence is short-lived; as Abraham collects his riches, Sarra disappears from the discourse for nearly 100 lines.

Separation and War (*Ant.* 1.169–182)

The reader, then, must simply assume that Abraham has “brought along” Sarra on his return to Canaan (1.169). There is no hint of her presence in the discourse of this rather lengthy section of the *Antiquities*, which contains correspondingly little that enhances an understanding of the character of Sarra. In a retelling of the traditions represented in Gen 13, Abraham divides the land with Lot, who lives apart from him from now on (1.169–170). This separation seems relatively amicable, and Abraham will see Lot again, when, in a retelling of the story of Gen 14, he rescues him and others from the clutches of the “Assyrians” (1.179). Abraham’s martial prowess reinforces his image as a kind of potentate and military leader.⁴⁰ But the narrator has, it seems, completely forgotten Lot’s supposed role as Abraham’s son: Lot is only referred to

40. Feldman, “Abraham,” 235–36; Feldman, “Abraham the General.”

somewhat vaguely as Abraham's συγγενής, or relative (1.176, 179), and in the next small section Abraham is disgruntled at his lack of an heir (1.183).

Child and Sacrifice (*Ant.* 1.183–185)

Sarra continues to inhabit the deep background of the narrative here, as Abraham, in a scene that corresponds generally to Gen 15, receives a divine message and offers a large sacrifice.⁴¹ However, the note of Abraham's concern for his continued childlessness (1.183) lays the ground for Sarra's reemergence in the following episode, where she will make an attempt, at God's command, to remedy the situation. This anxiety, and God's promise of a great posterity for Abraham—the first such pledge in this narrative—also foreshadow Sarra's own birth of Isaac. This connection, however, takes longer to rise to the surface, and for a time it seems that Sarra will play only a mediating role in the production of a child for Abraham.

Sarra, Hagar, Abraham, and Ishmael (*Ant.* 1.186–190)

Ant. 1.186 Habramos was dwelling near the oak called Ogyges (it is a place in Chananaia not far from the city of the Hebronites), and being distressed at his wife's not becoming pregnant, he besought God to grant him offspring of a male child. 187 When God encouraged him to be confident, as in all other things he had been led from Mesopotamia for his wellbeing, so also he would have children, Sarra, at God's command, caused him to lie down⁴² with one of her handmaidens, Agare by name, who was an Egyptian by race,

41. It is interesting that this passage implies that Abraham does, in fact, keep the spoil from his adventure, contrary to the account in Gen 14–15: after Abraham refuses the offer of the king of Sodom, God says “But (ἀλλά) you will not lose . . . the rewards (μισθοῦς) that it is right for you to receive for such services” (*Ant.* 1.183). That these “rewards” are not to be identified with a child is clear in Abraham's response: ““And what gratification can there be from these rewards? (τούτων τῶν μισθῶν),’ there not being anyone who could succeed after him” (1.183). The narrator's strong aversion to direct discourse is illustrated here, partly in the breach: God's brief pledge here is one of the very few examples of directly recorded speech in this narrative, while Abraham's reply seems to begin in the same way before trailing off, at a point that is hard to determine, into indirect discourse. Compare Niese's text, which begins Abraham's speech with opening quotation marks, but never closes them. The confusion is also reflected in the variety of solutions adopted by English translators: Whiston and Thackeray silently extend Abraham's first-person speech, while Feldman renders his entire reply indirectly. See also Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 137; and compare the anomalous, apparently first-person speech of Abimelech in *Ant.* 1.209.

42. This rendering is quite misleading to a reader interested in the precise interactions between the characters here. The direct object of the verb translated “caused to lie down,” ἐπικλίνει, can only be “one of her

so that he might procreate children by her. 188 And becoming pregnant, the maidservant dared to show insolence to Sarra, assuming queenly airs, as though the rule would pass over to her son about to be born from her. And when Habramos handed her over to Sarra for punishment, she planned flight, being unable to endure her hardships, and she besought God to take pity on her. 189 But as she went forth through the wilderness, an angel of God met her, bidding her to return to her masters. For she would attain a better life through being self-controlled (for, indeed, she was in these troubles because she had been thoughtless and stubborn toward her mistress): 190 he said if she disobeyed God and went further on her way she would perish whereas if she returned she would be the mother of a son who would be king of that land. She obeyed this and returning to her masters she obtained pardon. Not long afterwards she gave birth to Ismaelos; someone might render it “heard by God,” because God had listened to her entreaty. (Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 70–72)

An uncertain amount of story time later, Abraham again vents his displeasure over his lack of an heir, this time imploring God “to provide him with offspring of a male child” (γονήν αὐτῷ παιδὸς ἄρσενος παρασχεῖν). Here, however, Abraham is specifically “frustrated,” “impatient,” or “angry at his woman not conceiving” (δυσφορῶν . . . ἐπὶ γυναικὶ μὴ κούσῃ), the first explicit mention of Sarra’s role in their childlessness (1.186).⁴³ At this point, a modest flurry of interesting notes begin to fill out Sarra’s portrait in the *Antiquities*. To start, God encourages Abraham on the matter of children, noting that everything else had worked out in his favor since “he was led from Mesopotamia” (ἀπὸ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἡγμένον, 1.187). This divine invocation of Abraham’s journey to Canaan recalls the context of his departure, where Abraham’s “lack of a legitimate child” (γνησίου παιδὸς ἀπορῶν) was also at issue; moreover, Abraham was there said to move from his ancestral homeland “having been ordered by God”

slaves, named Hagar” (my translation); there is no masculine pronoun in the near context. Sarra forces Hagar, not Abraham, to lie down. See further below.

43. Again, however, it is instructive to compare the summary treatment of Sarra later reported as part of a divinely-sent dream of Amram, the father of Moses: “[Abraham’s] woman, once unfruitful with regard to childbearing, later became sound in this regard in accordance with [God’s] will” (τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτῷ πρὸς γονήν ἀκάρπως ἐχούσης πρότερον ἔπειτα κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ βούλησιν ἀγαθῆς πρὸς τοῦτο γενομένης, 2.213). Moses’s own remark later is perhaps fairer, if more oblique, mentioning only God’s hand in Isaac’s birth from elderly parents (3.87). Whiston’s rendering of what follows in 2.213 (τεκνώσαι παῖδας) as “and bare him sons” might seem at first to hint at a tradition in which Sarra had more than one child, which would be interesting indeed. But τεκνώω in the active, the reading of all manuscripts here, is usually used of the male role in procreation (LSJ 1768b); all the other infinitives in the near context have Abraham as subject, while the material concerning Sarra here is well demarcated with genitive participles; and Ishmael, the sons of Keturah, and Isaac are all mentioned straightaway. Thackeray’s punctuation, then, with a comma after γενομένης, is undoubtedly correct.

(τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος, 1.154). Here, in a novel development in the tradition, it is Sarra who acts τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος: “Sarrah, having been ordered by God, made one of her female slaves (an Egyptian named Hagar) lie down so that [Abraham] could father children by her” (Σάρρα τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος ἐπικλίνει μίαν τῶν θεραπεινίδων Ἀγάρην ὄνομα γένος οὖσαν Αἰγυπτίαν ὡς ἐξ αὐτῆς παιδοποιησομένην, 1.187).

These thematic and verbal similarities point to a small web of links between Sarra and Abraham. What Sarra does here is important; so much is plain, of course, from the immediate context, for Sarra’s act is “ordered by God.”⁴⁴ But this explicitly-stated divine motive also invites the appraisal of her act in the light of what Abraham does earlier, which serves to underline its significance even further: in being “ordered by God,” what Sarra does to Hagar is thus roughly equated, perhaps, with Abraham’s migration—a signal narrative event indeed.⁴⁵

Some of Abraham and Sarra’s character traits are also brought into alignment here. Sarra, just like Abraham, is favored by direct divine communication, a note that may anticipate her rabbinic portrayal as a prophet.⁴⁶ Moreover, Sarra is shown to be obedient to God’s command, which not only further associates her response with that of Abraham, but also ties her to what is arguably one of Abraham’s chief characteristics in the broader tradition. That the near contexts of these commands involve the key issue of childlessness is further intriguing. The specific force of

44. Compare Feldman, “Abraham,” 225.

45. Abraham and Sarra are the only humans directly commanded by God in this narrative. Of all the uses of κελεύω in this narrative, moreover, these are the only examples with identical syntax (the first instance in 1.184, τῷ θεῷ κελευσθεῖς, only appears similar at first glance; in fact, these elements operate in separate clauses: θυσίαν προσφέρει τῷ θεῷ κελευσθεῖς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, or “he offered a sacrifice to God, as commanded by him”). God “orders” Abraham several times: in 1.154, in the command to move to Canaan; twice in 1.184, in the context of Abraham’s sacrifice, seemingly offered in gratitude for God’s pledge of a son; in 1.191, with reference to the name, Isaac, by which Abraham is to call his promised son by Sarra; and in 1.224, where he is ordered to sacrifice this son. Sarra, here in 1.187, is apparently ordered by God to make Hagar “recline” in order to address the problem of childlessness. Hagar is ordered by an angel twice: once to return to her masters (1.189), once to save Ishmael from death (1.219). The other instances of κελεύω in this narrative are: God to celestial objects (really a substantival use, “the commander,” 1.156); Abimelech to Abraham (1.209); and Abraham to Hagar (1.217).

46. See Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 138–39 n. 12; Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 71 n. 587. The instance most clearly tied to this episode seems to be that of Gen. Rab. 45.2, where Rabbi Jose is said to gloss “And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai” (Gen 16:2) with “To the voice of the Holy Spirit” (H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Genesis, The Midrash Rabbah*, vol. 1 [London: Soncino, 1977], 380. See also b. Meg. 14a, cited by both Franxman and Feldman, and a number of other references in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 178, 178 n. 38, 180 nn. 43, 44.

the earlier command, naturally, was that Abraham should move to Canaan, but it is closely bound in the discourse to Abraham's adoption of Lot ("Abraham adopted Lot . . . since he lacked a legitimate child, and left Chaldea behind . . . having been ordered by God to move to Canaan," 1.154); here, the command itself is aimed directly at the production of a child. Interestingly, too, the attempt of the character in each instance to solve this problem of childlessness ultimately fails despite apparent initial success: Lot is adopted, but moves further and further away as the narrative draws on, ending up living "miserably, due to his isolation from humanity and want of food" (ὕπὸ τε ἀνθρώπων ἐρημίας καὶ τροφῆς ἀπορίας ταλαιπώρως, 1.204; compare 1.154, 169–170, 202–204); Ishmael is conceived, but his life is in danger even here, before he is born, and he, too, is eventually sent away from the family of Sarra and Abraham (1.188–190, 215–221). Elements of this particular motif are reminiscent of the Masek-Hagar connection in the LXX. But this broader complex of links is particularly significant, it seems to me, because it is not only congruent with a major theme of the narratives featuring Sarra studied so far—that she often resembles Abraham—but also an example of this theme without precise parallel elsewhere.

Another new piece of intelligence here regards Sarra's status as a slaveowner. To this point, there have been a few clues as to the size of Abraham's household: he has shepherds who belong to him (1.169), and he owns 318 οἰκέται, or household slaves (1.178). Here it is explicit that Sarra also owns slaves; Hagar, in fact, is only "one of her female slaves" (μίαν τῶν θεραπαινίδων, 1.187). Against the renderings of both Thackeray and Feldman, who each offer two variants of some kind of "maid" or "servant" here—despite the lexical identity of θεραπαινίδων (1.187) and θεραπαινίς (1.188)—there is no question that Hagar is a slave.⁴⁷ Even if she were not plainly referred to as Sarra's δούλη later (1.215), Sarra's power over Hagar's body here, and her violent response to her slave's insubordination in just a few lines, make the point clear.

47. Thackeray renders "one of her handmaidens" and "this servant," Feldman "one of her handmaidens" and "the maidservant."

The expression used here of Sarra's act apparently aims at euphemistic delicacy. Sarra merely "caused Hagar to incline" (ἐπικλίνει . . . Ἀγάρην), a verbal usage that does not seem to have had any currency as a periphrasis for "to make have sex."⁴⁸ Abraham's role, meanwhile, is almost completely submerged: in the near context, his part in the transaction is only suggested by the implied pronoun in παιδοποιησομένῳ. Thus Hagar is not even made to lie "with" Abraham, but simply made to recline, as if in anticipation of a much-deserved nap.⁴⁹ But all this indirection cannot entirely mask the brutality at the core of Sarra's action here, despite Heather McKay's assertion that she is "completely innocent" in this scene.⁵⁰ Just how does Sarra make Hagar lie down? There is a kind of physical, even manual color to the clause that is emphasized by the stark power differentials between the characters: "Sarra, on God's orders, 'laid' one of her slaves," or perhaps even "held one of her slaves down"—"so that [Abraham] could make children out of her" (1.187).

The fundamental violence of Sarra's response to God's command will soon be underlined. First, however, the narrator begins to open one of the central holes in Sarra's characterization in the *Antiquities*. After "the slave"—she goes unnamed for the remainder of this section—becomes pregnant as a result of being "laid" by Sarra, the narrator sniffs that this slave "dared" (ἐτόλμησε) "to display insolence" (ἐξυβρίζειν) to her master, "playing the queen" (βασιλεύουσα, 1.188). In distinction to the role-playing of Sarra in Egypt (1.162), or that of Abraham in Gerar to come (1.207), the narrator clearly disapproves strongly of Hagar's play-acting here, which is based on the patently false notion that her child might inherit Abraham's authority: Hagar is playing the queen "as if the rule would devolve upon the [male] one to be

48. As noted above, Feldman's translation obscures this interaction even further by introducing Abraham, with no warrant in the Greek, as the direct object. The use of Feldman's translation by van der Lans, "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household," 186, has also led her astray on this point. See LSJ 639a; for this citation (*Ant.* 1.187), they refer to ἐπικατακλίνω (636b), where this passage (introduced, confusingly, as if the manuscripts read ἐπικατακλίνω here) is the only representative of the meaning "introduce as a concubine." According to Rengstorff, *Concordance*, 2.163a, this is the only occurrence of ἐπικλίνω in the *Antiquities*.

49. Contrary to the gloss of Rengstorff, *Concordance*, 2.163a, "to cause to lie down with." The case of the participle may contain a very submerged hint here; perhaps this is best understood as a dative of interest.

50. McKay, "Eve's Sisters Re-Cycled," 176.

born from her” (ὥς τῆς ἡγεμονίας περισησομένης εἰς τὸν ὑπ’ αὐτῆς τεχθισόμενον, 1.188). The tone is almost scornful—“she dared,” “playing the queen,” “as if”—and such presumption will shortly get its due. But here there is the seed of a rather large problem with the narrator’s presentation. For Hagar’s impudent idea here is precisely what the narrator will claim had, in fact, been in store for Ishmael—“the one to be born” from Hagar—in the scene following the birth of Isaac. There, Sarra is said to have been “accustomed to show affection” (ἔστειργεν) to Ishmael, just like he were her very own child, and specifically “because he was being raised,” or perhaps “groomed for succession to the rule” (ἐτρέφετο γὰρ ἐπὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας διαδοχῆ, 1.215).⁵¹

But here, while Ishmael is still in the womb, Sarra treats his mother with a complete lack of tenderness. It is hard to agree with Bailey that Sarra is “clearly pictured as the victim of severe abuse” here, and almost impossible to concur that she “does not deal harshly” with Hagar, for Sarra’s implied action towards her pregnant slave is disturbingly violent.⁵² Hagar, the narrator notes, “decided on flight after Abraham handed her over to Sarra πρὸς αἰκίαν” (1.188).⁵³ The

51. The precise meaning of this clause in 1.188 is sufficiently important to my reading of this narrative as to merit a fuller discussion here. The particle ὥς, after all, actually a group of at least five different words eventually represented homographically (LSJ 2039b–2040a), operates in a correspondingly wide variety of ways, functioning as an adverb of extremely varied application, a conjunction, and an “improper” preposition, in addition to a number of other idiomatic uses (LSJ 2038a–2040a; compare Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§ 2988–3003; and see its two different uses in the section of the *Antiquities* just preceding, 1.187). A cursory glance at a lexicon may lead a reader to wonder whether ὥς here in 1.188 couldn’t be rendered “inasmuch as” or “since,” for example (a kind of factual causal force, LSJ 2039a, B. IV.), meaning that these two evaluations of Ishmael’s prospects are, in fact, not in conflict: in 1.215 Sarra’s behavior is explained by Ishmael’s original destiny (“because [γάρ] he was being raised for succession to the rule”), while here in 1.188 Hagar’s behavior is owing to the same reason (“since [ὥς] the rule would pass to the one to be born from her”). However, the syntax here—ὥς plus a participle, and a future participle in particular—points to a very specific but not uncommon usage where ὥς signals “the ground of belief on which the agent acts, and denotes the thought, assertion, real or presumed intention, in the mind of the subject of the principal verb or of some other person mentioned prominently in the sentence, without implicating the speaker or writer” (Smyth § 2086; compare §§ 2240b, 2241, on causal clauses, in which ὥς carries a similar nuance). Importantly, as Smyth explains, this “ground of belief” may be genuine or feigned—that is, Hagar may truly believe that her son will succeed, or she may be pretending as much—but this usage “implies nothing as to the opinion of the speaker or writer,” here the narrator of the *Antiquities* (§ 2086). This narratorial opinion, however, is often clear from the broader context, as shown in Smyth’s many examples, and here I think it is plain that the narrator does not regard the actions of “the slave,” who “dared to act insolently, playing the queen,” to be well-founded in fact; note, as well, that Hagar’s conduct is described as “arrogant and stubborn” when the angel criticizes her lack of “self-control” (1.189). The three major English translations, then, are correct in their renderings: Hagar in 1.188 acts “as if” (Whiston) or “as though” (Thackeray and Feldman) her unborn son is to inherit the rule—an unwarranted assumption that leads to actions that result in severe punishment.

term *αἰκία* is much stronger and more specific than Feldman’s rendering of “punishment” implies, commonly referring in the *Antiquities* to an act of physical torture leading to death (7.52; 13.232–233; 15.289), or standing in parallel with *βάσανος* (“torture” or “torment”: 10.115; 16.389); compare the lexis and syntax of *J.W.* 2.246, where Claudius orders a certain “Keler the chiliarch” to be “handed over to the Judeans for torture” (*παραδοθῆναι Ἰουδαίοις πρὸς αἰκίαν*), an ordeal that is to culminate in his being dragged bodily around Jerusalem and beheaded.⁵⁴ The context here, moreover, supports the reading of *αἰκία* as severe physical abuse. Sarra’s willingness to fulfill her aims with force has been demonstrated already, when she “made Hagar lie down” (1.187); Hagar’s response to Sarra’s act is telling, too, as the slave, “unable to endure her sufferings” (*οὐχ ὑπομένουσα τὰς ταλαιπωρίας*), determines that running away, pregnant, to an uncertain fate, is preferable to remaining with her master.⁵⁵ Whatever violence Sarra perpetrates, then, it must be very bad for Hagar; and it cannot be good, either, for “the one to be born from her”—the child that Sarra will supposedly treat as her own, for thirteen years or so, until her own son is finally born (compare 1.191–193, 215).

Perhaps the fact that Hagar eventually “obtained pardon” (*συγγνώμης ἔτυχε*) for having been “arrogant and stubborn” (*ἀγνώμονα καὶ αὐθάδη*)—after being convinced by an angel’s

52. James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 159, who also says that “Josephus casts a favorable light” on Sarra by his modifications to this scene. Compare McKay, “Eve’s Sisters Re-Cycled,” 176, who claims that it is at Abraham’s “suggestion” that Sarra hurts Hagar, and thus that Sarra bears no responsibility for the event.

53. Ἀβράμου . . . αὐτὴν πρὸς αἰκίαν παραδιδόντος τῇ Σάρρα δρασμὸν ἐπεβούλευσεν.

54. The verbal form *αἰκίζω* is also commonly used in these contexts: *Ant.* 7.161; 12.255–256; 13.4; 15.71. Compare 2 Macc 7:42, where *τὰς . . . αἰκίας* is used to summarize the treatment of the seven martyred brothers and their mother; the verb *αἰκίζω* also appears in vv. 1, 13, and 15. In the broader lexicon, there are a few related nuances to *ἡ αἰκία*, including “assault” in legal contexts, “suffering” generally, and “insulting treatment” or “outrage” in tragedy (though the first example of this in LSJ, 38a, referring to the title character’s predicament in Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* [179], would seem to be a paradigmatic instance of torture—and torture for presumptuous behavior, no less). *GELS* 14b offers only one definition for the Old Greek materials: “act of torture.” Compare Thackeray and Marcus, *Lexicon*, 12b, “outrage or usu. torture,” and Rengstorff, *Concordance*, 1.33b, “ill-treatment, torture—defacement, disfigurement—humiliating treatment.”

55. Given the correspondences between Sarra and Abraham, here and throughout the tradition, it is interesting to note a similarity between Hagar and Abraham: here, Hagar is said to have “beseeched God” (*τὸν θεὸν ἰκέτευεν*, 1.188), just as Abraham had at the beginning of this episode (*ἰκετεύει τὸν θεόν*, 1.186). Compare Abraham’s (unsuccessful) petition of God, on behalf of the residents of Sodom, in 1.199 (*τὸν θεόν . . . ἰκέτευσεν*). These are the only instances of *ἰκετεύω* in this narrative.

threat of death to return to her masters—could be read in such a way as to mitigate the tension between these two competing descriptions of Ishmael’s role in the family (1.189–190; compare 188 and 215). Sarra and Hagar’s reconciliation was so complete, then, that what the narrator once presented as obviously false grounds for a slave’s impertinence transformed into a fact accepted by all: Ishmael would, after all, inherit Abraham’s authority. If so, though, this important process is passed over by the narrator, and in the only other scene where Ishmael is mentioned before his expulsion (1.191–193), it does not seem to be assumed that he is part of the “stock” (τὸ . . . γένος) of Abraham whose members are to be circumcised “on the eighth day” (ὀγδόη ἡμέρα): Ishmael is already thirteen years old at this point, and the birth of Isaac, from whom “great nations and kings” (ἔθνη μεγάλα . . . καὶ βασιλεῖς) will spring, has just been announced (1.191–192; compare 214).⁵⁶ In any case, Hagar’s “pardon” is not permanent, and eventually her attempt at flight to escape her “sufferings” will be actualized by Sarra’s order (1.188, 217).

That Sarra now, for the first time, forms the focus of Abraham’s frustration at their lack of a child (1.186) presages the relative wealth of information that can be gleaned about her character in this section. An important cluster of notes relate Sarra’s portrayal to that of Abraham. That her act with Hagar is “ordered by God” (τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος, 1.187) likens its significance to Abraham’s migration, precisely so “ordered” earlier (1.154). Sarra, like Abraham, receives direct divine communication; Sarra, like Abraham, is obedient to God’s orders; Sarra, like Abraham, attempts to solve their problem of childlessness in the near context of God’s command—an endeavor that will eventually fail, just as Abraham’s did. Interestingly, these connections between Sarra and Abraham provide a thematic echo of the kind of tie that is prominent in the broader tradition, while constituting, in themselves, unparalleled examples of

56. To be sure, Ishmael is circumcised along with Abraham, and is also predicted to become the “father of great nations” (1.193), but this proves to be an almost entirely parallel development (1.220–221; see, however, the mention of Esau’s third marriage, to a daughter of Ishmael, 1.277). Consider, too, Abraham’s reaction to the message that “his stock” should be circumcised: he inquires “*in addition* about Ishmael—whether he would live” (καὶ περὶ τοῦ Ἰσμαήλου, εἰ ζήσεται, 1.193).

this motif. This phenomenon, which was also seen in association with Sarra and Abraham's blood relationship, and with their role-swapping in Egypt, may suggest that the resemblance of Sarra to Abraham plays an almost archetypal role in their story as it finds expression in a variety of ancient narratives. That Sarra is like Abraham, it seems, is one fundamental aspect of her character—not the only, and not necessarily the most important aspect, but a fundamental one—something felt so deeply that it bubbles up, in different narratives, in ways that are in themselves sometimes unique and unpredictable.

Sarra's identity as a slaveholder is also revealed and cruelly underscored here, as Sarra treats Hagar with a brutality that is ill-disguised by the narrator's attempt at delicacy. Especially in the light of coming events, the description of Sarra "making Hagar recline" so that Abraham can make children out of her (1.187) fails miserably as a euphemism, suggesting nothing so much as Sarra holding Hagar down during her rape. Sarra's implied act after Abraham "hands over" an insolent and play-acting Hagar *πρὸς αἰκίαν*, moreover, is a disturbing and inhumane event that seems to encompass at least severe physical abuse, if not simple torture, of an underling who is pregnant at least partly by Sarra's own doing (1.188).

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, to look across the tradition, there seems to be some connection between Sarra's treatment in Egypt and her own subsequent treatment of Hagar. This tie is particularly tight in the MT, with its verbal correspondences that suggest reading the latter episode partly in the light of the former; although the links are not as prominent in the LXX, their presence is still clear. For the *Antiquities*, I do not want to claim that Sarra's experiences in Egypt, which I suggested included abduction, near-rape, and imprisonment, have no bearing on what she does to Hagar here. But the association must depend mostly on psychological factors. However appropriate these may be in a mimetic reading scheme, the connection cannot help but be more tenuous in the absence of significant verbal parallels; that Hagar is "an Egyptian by race" (*Ant.* 1.187) seems to be the most substantial here. In distinction from some other cases, such as that to be discussed directly, this situation does not seem to be caused by deliberate narratorial meddling; rather, the narrator's assiduous avoidance of direct character speech, to

name one factor, eliminates the link between Abram and Sarai's first speeches as recorded in the MT (Gen 12:11–13; 16:2). But the end result for Sarra in the *Antiquities*, I think, is that she is somewhat less sympathetic in her exploitation of Hagar here, for even the conscientious reader's attention is drawn less readily to Sarra's own trials in Egypt.

Finally, the narrator has laid the ground for a rather vexing problem with Sarra's characterization, to be compounded later. Here the idea of her son succeeding to Abraham's rule is explained as Hagar's misguided motive for the way she acts towards Sarra (1.188). The narrator, it seems clear, regards this slave's idea as fantasy, not fact: it would be difficult to understand describing Hagar as "daring to show insolence" and "playing the queen" if her grounds for confidence were considered simply true. Hagar, then, acts, unjustifiably, "as if" (ὡς) her son were to inherit Abraham's authority (ἡγεμονία). But a key moment in the narrator's presentation of Sarra's character later, as it is perhaps the most direct characterization of Sarra in the entire narrative, claims that Sarra's initial if temporary affection for Ishmael is prompted by this very understanding: Hagar's son, now thirteen, has been groomed to claim Abraham's authority (ἡγεμονία, 1.215). It seems to me that the best way to explain this contradiction lies in the often-noted penchant of the narrator of the *Antiquities* to cast the story's heroes in the best possible light—though I would suggest that the narrator's efforts on this score are not always successful even in their own near contexts, as the example of the failed euphemism of ἐπικλίνει shows. The narrator's partiality, I think, emerges in the attempt to justify Sarra's actions here—she was pushed beyond all reasonable bounds!—by portraying Hagar's ridiculous presumption in assuming her child would inherit.⁵⁷ The same partiality emerges in the attempt to justify Sarra's actions there—Ishmael's banishment had nothing to do with her personal feelings!—by explaining that the child would inherit. Abraham faced a similar quandary in Egypt, where the narrator's earlier attempts to extol Abraham's perspicacity and farsightedness undermined his

57. Van der Lans, "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household," 187, emphasizes that the narrator's citation of Hagar's ὕβρις—a quality followed reliably by divine retribution in Josephus—contributes significantly to this apologetic aim. But the motive force for this "insolence" is still Hagar's mistaken impression of her son's destiny.

potential for moral integrity in his scheme with Sarra. Nor does the character of God escape the fallout from this narratorial inclination; the divine prescription for Hagar's impregnation in the *Antiquities* makes a minor puzzle of God's motive, considered within the narrative and across the tradition.⁵⁸ As Bailey and Feldman both note, the attribution of this plan to God helps shield Sarra from criticism for her unconventional, possibly immoral solution to the quandary.⁵⁹ However, this tinkering also vitiates the logic of God's actions. In the MT, Ishmael's conception in Gen 16 is a human response to the problem of Abraham's childlessness, an ultimately defective initiative of Sarah that is corrected by the deity's action with Isaac. Here, God commands Ishmael's conception—but to what purpose? This move, after all, is eventually superseded by God's own initiative with Sarra and Isaac, in parallel with the rest of the tradition (1.191). Noticing this interplay, in turn, tends only to undermine an initial impression of the importance of Sarra's being "ordered by God" here (1.187). All these complications lead to some frustration on the part of the narratee, as it makes it hard to know what to trust; better, however, to know that caution is advised, than simply to be duped unawares.

Another Child, and Circumcision (*Ant.* 1.191–193)

This brief section of the *Antiquities* is a highly abridged account of parts of the tradition reflected in Gen 17. Thirteen years after the events just described, God predicts Isaac's birth by Sarra in an appearance to Abraham, and institutes the command to circumcise Abraham's descendants. There is no mention of covenant, no name changes, no favorable predictions for Sarra, and no laughter, on Abraham's part, at the promise of Isaac. God's announcement comes out of nowhere, and appears somewhat illogical, as it would seem that the issue of Abraham's childlessness has been addressed, by God's own command, in the previous section; this

58. Compare van der Lans, "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household," 192, who approaches this issue from a perspective concerned with the legal context of the time of the writing of the *Antiquities*: "Josephus seems to have a problem: in Roman law . . . children born to concubines were not considered legitimate In this context, there is really no point using a concubine to resolve the problem of childlessness."

59. James L. Bailey, "Matriarchs," 159; Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 71 n. 587.

revelation's narrative utility, moreover, proves to be uncertain, as visiting angels will make a very similar prediction in the episode that follows. The prescription to circumcise Abraham's stock on the eighth day (1.192) does set up a later scene that shows an interesting facet of Sarra in the *Antiquities* (1.214). Other than this very modest contribution, and despite the direct reference to Sarra in 1.191, this episode aids little in constructing a reading of her character.

Angelic Visitation (*Ant.* 1.194–206)

Ant. 1.194–195 [The residents of Sodom behaved outrageously to humans—hating strangers especially—and acted impiously towards the deity. God therefore decided to destroy their city.—JM] 196 After God had issued this judgment concerning the Sodomites, Habramos, noticing three angels—and he was sitting near the oak of Mambre before the door of his courtyard—and thinking that they were strangers, stood up and welcomed them and leading them within his home⁶⁰ invited them to enjoy his hospitality. 197 And when they agreed, he ordered loaves of bread to be made immediately from finest wheaten flour, and, sacrificing a calf and cooking it, he brought it to them as they were lying down under the oak. And they presented to him the appearance of eating. Moreover, they inquired about his wife as to where Sarra was. And when he said that she was within, they said that they would come in the future and would find that she had already become a mother. 198 But when his wife smiled at this and said that child-bearing was impossible, since she was 90 years old and since her husband was 100, they no longer disguised themselves but revealed that they were messengers of God and that one of them had been sent to make a disclosure concerning the child, and the other two to destroy the Sodomites. 199–206 [Abraham's attempted intercession on behalf of Sodom fails, and God eventually destroys the city with a lightning bolt. Some of Lot's family escape, only to eke out a wretched and isolated existence.—JM] (Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 73–78)

The narrator's description of Abraham's solicitous gestures towards these three angels, whom he takes to be strangers (νομίσας εἶναι ξένους), draws a wincingly obvious distinction between Abraham and the residents of Sodom, whose reputation as μισόξενοι, or xenophobes,

60. Although the movements of the characters in this passage are rather vague, they are probably not quite as confused as this rendering would imply. The passive of κατάγω plus παρά τινι is an idiom meaning "to turn in and lodge" with someone (LSJ 888a). The visitors aren't physically "led inside"—note their subsequent position "under the oak," *Ant.* 1.197—but encouraged to stay: "he urged them to stay with him and share his hospitality" (παρ' αὐτῷ καταχθέντας παρεκάλει ξενίας μεταλαβεῖν, 1.196).

has just been reported to contribute to God’s decision to destroy their city (1.194–196).⁶¹ The sincerity of Abraham’s hospitality is underlined by his personal efforts at entertaining his guests; except for the hint in his command that “loaves be made immediately” (ἄρτους . . . εὐθύς . . . γενέσθαι), Abraham might be home alone (1.197). Abruptly, however, after Abraham serves the strangers as they are “reclining under the oak” (ὕπὸ τῆ δρυὸς κατακειμένοις), the narrator brings Sarra’s name into the discourse in an almost comical non sequitur: “they gave him the impression of eating, and besides they also inquired about his woman, just where Sarra might have gotten off to” (οἱ δὲ δόξαν αὐτῷ παρέσχον ἐσθιόντων, ἔτι δὲ καὶ περὶ τῆς γυναικὸς ἐπυνθάνοντο, ποῖ ποτ’ εἶη Σάρρα, 1.197).⁶² The fame of Abraham’s cooking has not drawn these strangers here, clearly; but what, precisely, is their errand? For it seems at first that their question is aimed at ensuring that Sarra not hear their message, as it is when they hear that Sarra is “inside” (ἔνδον) that they announce that they will return at some point and “find that she has already become a mother” (εὐρήσειν αὐτήν ἤδη μητέρα γεγεννημένην, 1.197). Yet the basic thrust of this is not news to Abraham, to whom the deity has, and rather recently, personally relayed very similar information (1.191; compare 1.194, 198). Suddenly, however, in a puzzling development that recalls her unexpected appearance in the scene of her private interview with Pharaoh (1.165), it is clear that Sarra is not only within earshot, but even in plain view.⁶³ For “when the woman smiled at this and said that childbearing was impossible, she being ninety and her husband one hundred,” the strangers seemingly react to her directly, dropping their pose and revealing both their angelic

61. Lot proves to be a shining exception: he, too, urges the angels to share his hospitality, “for he was very humane towards strangers” (λίαν γὰρ ἦν περὶ τοὺς ξένους φιλόανθρωπος), a quality that he is explicitly said to have picked up from Abraham, being “a student of Abraham’s open-heartedness” (μαθητὴς τῆς Ἀβράμου χρηστότητος, 1.200).

62. Thackeray, 97 note “c,” notes that this “docetic” conception of the incorporeality of the visiting angels is paralleled in Philo, *Abraham* 118, and the Palestinian Targum. The Testament of Abraham develops this notion into an extended comic subplot in which the archangel Michael feigns the need to urinate in order to consult privately with God about how to appear to eat Abraham’s food (T. Ab. 4, Recension A; interestingly, T. Ab. 4–5, Recension B, displays no such unease—here the archangel, at God’s command, simply eats and drinks with Abraham and Isaac). The general theme also appears in other Second Temple narrative contexts such as Tobit (12:19 in both versions). Compare, as well, the rather different strategy of the angel fed by Manoah and his wife in *Ant.* 5.283–284, who lights his food on fire with a rod and rides the smoke to heaven.

63. Compare Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 143.

nature and their mission “to tell about the child” (1.198).⁶⁴ Sarra’s smile, at least, must be visually apprehended: μειδιάω, “to smile,” is specifically distinguished from γελάω, “to laugh aloud.”⁶⁵ But her startling, apparently physical translation from “inside”—the “courtyard” (αὐλή, 1.196), perhaps, or an assumed γυναικεία, or women’s quarters—adds to the almost uncanny feeling first prompted by the offhand description of angels pretending to eat.

Sarra’s undetailed, spectral motion, here something like the movement of a knight on a chessboard, also contributes to an impression of a story told rather hastily. The tale of Sodom’s destruction provides a heavy frame for this brief scene (1.194–195, 199–206), casting the angelic visit to Abraham and Sarra as a kind of aside; even the proportions of the angelic assignments—one to proclaim Sarra’s future child, but two to destroy Sodom (1.198)—add to a sense of the relative insignificance of this nativity announcement. That this detail is actually contradicted by the narrative, as angels, in the plural, have already pronounced the prediction (ἔφασαν, 1.197), only adds to the general sense of a tale evading the full control of its teller.⁶⁶ For Abraham, as well, the message about Sarra’s impending motherhood, which he allows to pass without comment, is less affecting than the news about Sodom’s imminent destruction, as he grieves over the fate of its residents and attempts to intercede on their behalf (1.199). The pledge of the angels “to come in the future” (ἥξειν . . . εἰς τὸ μέλλον, 1.197), moreover, is never fulfilled. In fact, the narrator seems to forget that the angels ever came at all, claiming later that Abraham names his son Isaac “because Sarra smiled when *God* told her she would bear” (1.213).⁶⁷ Sarra’s response here, too, prepares the ground for confusion later, for Isaac “means laughter” (γέλωτα σημαίνει), as the narrator is careful to note (1.213)—not “a smile.” As discussed below, this seems to be

64. τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς ἐπὶ τούτῳ μειδιασάσης καὶ ἀδύνατον εἶναι τὴν τεκνοποιίαν εἰπούσης αὐτῆς μὲν ἐνενήκοντα ἔτη ἔχούσης τοῦ δ’ ἀνδρὸς ἑκατὸν . . . σημανῶν περὶ τοῦ παιδός.

65. LSJ 1092b; μειδιάω is a later form of μειδιάω, under which it is listed. The sketchiness of the narrator’s presentation in the near context may leave the possibility open that Sarra’s “smile” is something only the narrator is privy to. However, her reaction is (seemingly inappropriately) later cited as the reason Abraham names his son Isaac, meaning “laughter” (1.213).

66. Compare Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 143–44.

67. Compare Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 80 n. 653; Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 153. See also below.

another example of a narrative difficulty created by the narrator's tendency to trim sharp edges from the personalities of the main characters.

The narrator, then, treats this scene as if it were rather insignificant; but there are a few details about Sarra that may still be gleaned here. This is the first explicit mention of Sarra's advanced age; at ninety, she turns out to be a near-contemporary of her uncle and husband, Abraham. Her smile, formed in direct reaction (ἐπὶ τούτῳ) to the audacious claim that she will yet become a mother, seems in keeping with someone who has reached a sober and knowing old age; but here, too, the narrator's stubborn refusal to let the characters speak for themselves means that it is not entirely certain how far Sarra's reported thoughts extend. Surely she says that "childbearing is impossible" (ἀδύνατον εἶναι τὴν τεκνοποιίαν εἰπούσης). But is the note of their ages that follows—αὐτῆς μὲν ἐνενήκοντα ἔτη ἐχούσης τοῦ δ' ἀνδρὸς ἑκατόν—Sarra's own elucidation of her categorical declaration, or a narratorial gloss?

Sarra does appear to exercise a modicum of power here, in that she seems directly responsible for provoking the angels to drop their disguise. The description of Sarra's smile and remarks about childbearing is a long chain of clauses subordinate to the verbs detailing the angels' direct revelation, and could even be rendered causally: "Because the woman smiled . . . and said . . . they no longer continued incognito but made themselves known as angels of God" (1.198). These messengers showed no such consideration for Abraham, who might have held off on dinner had he been aware of his guests' incorporeality. Sarra's apparent emergence from "inside," too, might seem to carry some liberating force, read across the tradition: in contrast to the MT, Sarra is "brought out into the open," as Franxman notes.⁶⁸ Yet once this perspective is engaged, all that is stripped from Sarah of the MT in exchange for Sarra's tour of the yard in the *Antiquities* must also be brought out into the open. Bailey points out, with some justification, that the abridgement of Sarra's role here is mostly due to the omission of "apparently negative references to her" in the corresponding scene in Gen 18.⁶⁹ But I disagree that such omissions

68. Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 143. The same seems to be true in Philo, *Abraham* 110–113.

69. James L. Bailey, "Matriarchs," 159–60.

mostly “enhance” Sarra’s portrait in the *Antiquities*, as he later claims; from a narrative perspective that even flirts with a mimetic view, these kind of textual minuses cannot help but subtract from the “concrete semblance” that is Sarra in this story.⁷⁰ If Sarra is subtly washed out in this scene in the LXX, as I argued in Chapter 4, she is a threadbare outline here. The flow of the narrative at hand, moreover, rather enervates the modest note of power that may be implied by the angels’ capitulation, and the mild suggestion of freedom contained in Sarra’s presence outside. The entire episode seems somewhat poorly integrated, a bit of an afterthought; and Sarra displays neither power nor freedom in the next scenes in which she figures, in Gerar.

“Just Like Before”—but Now in Gerar (*Ant.* 1.207–212)

Ant. 1.207 And Habramos migrated to Gerara in Palestine, taking with himself Sarra, in the guise of a sister, making a pretense similar to the previous one because of fear. For he had feared Abimelechos, the king of the inhabitants, who also himself having fallen passionately in love with Sarra, was capable of seducing her. 208 But he [Abimelechos] was prevented from his lust by a painful disease that befell him from God; and when the physicians had abandoned hope, he saw in his sleep a vision in a dream that he should do no violence to the wife of the stranger; and when he felt better, he pointed out to his friends that God had inflicted this disease upon him in retribution for the stranger to protect his wife from violence, for it was not his sister that he had brought but his lawfully married wife, and that He promised that He would show himself well disposed in the future if he [Habramos] would be secure with regard to his wife. 209 Having said this, he [Abimelechos] sent for Habramos, upon the counsel of his friends, and bade him to have no further fear with regard to his wife, that she would suffer something shameful, for God was looking after her,⁷¹ and through His alliance that had remained standing, he would bring her home free from outrage, with both God and the conscience of the woman being witnesses. And he said that he would not have desired her in the beginning if he had known that she was a married woman, but since he had brought her as his sister he had not done wrong. 210 And he entreated him to be indulgent with him and to make God well-disposed, and [said] that if he wished to remain with him, he would grant him every abundance; but if he preferred to depart he would obtain an escort and all things such as he desired in coming to him. 211 When he said this, Habramos said that he had not lied

70. James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 170–71. As I have noted before, this evocative description of characters as “concrete semblances” of human beings is the language of Ronald Crane, quoted in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 137. In my conception this implies an entity of substance, not fixity.

71. This is a simple mistranslation; God is said to be looking after Abraham (αβραάμ), not Sarra. See further below.

about the relationship of his wife, for she was the child of his brother, and that without such dissimulation he would not have supposed that the visit would be safe. And to show that he was in no way responsible for his sickness but that he was zealously eager for his recovery, he kept asserting that he was ready to remain with him. 212 And Abimelech apportioned him both land and riches, and they made a covenant that they would conduct themselves without guile, taking an oath over a certain well that they call Bersoubai, that is to say, “well of an oath.” It is thus still even now named by the inhabitants. (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 78–80)

This episode opens with a welter of implicit and explicit ties to earlier narrative events. Abraham is said to “move” again, using one of the terms used previously to describe his migration to Canaan (μετοικέω, 1.207; compare 157, 160). No reason is provided for this move, though the king’s later statements imply that Abraham had a definite agenda in mind: after assuring him that “every kind of plenty would accrue” to him (πάσαν ἀφθονίαν ὑπάρξειν) if he stayed in Gerar, the king also declares that Abraham would obtain at his departure “everything he had desired, too, in coming to him in the first place” (πάντων ὅσων καὶ χρήζων πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφίκοιτο, 1.210). This note of “plenty” (ἀφθονία) directly recalls Abraham’s first goal in visiting the Egyptians earlier (1.161), and many lexical and thematic links immediately bind this journey to Gerar to that of Egypt. Abraham is once again “bringing along” Sarra, just as he did in Egypt (ἐπαγόμενος, 1.207; compare 1.162), pointedly “in the role of sister” (ἐν ἀδελφῆς . . . σχήματι, 1.207). This is the language of drama: Sarra is “starring as the sister”—in the event, a rather limited role—an understanding bolstered by the report of the narrator that Abraham is “playing the part” or, perhaps better here, “staging the play” (ὑποκρινάμενος, 1.207).⁷² This is yet another lexical tie between these two episodes, and another example of a similarity between these two characters: on the edge of Egypt, Abraham also taught Sarra “to play the part” (ὑποκρίνασθαι, 1.162).⁷³ And just in case the reader nodded off during the Egyptian adventure, the narrator makes it even more plain: all this playacting is done “just like before” (ὅμοια τοῖς πρὶν), and, just like before, it is supposedly done “out of [Abraham’s] fear” (διὰ τὸν φόβον, 1.207; compare

72. LSJ 1745a–b; 1885b–86a.

73. These are the only instances of ὑποκρίνομαι in the first six books of the *Antiquities*.

1.162). This fear is said to be justified straightaway, when the local king, Abimelech, “who himself likewise came to lust after Sarra,” is “just about to destroy her” (ὄς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐρασθεὶς τῆς Σάρρας φθείρειν οἴος τε ἦν, 1.207).⁷⁴ The καί here—“also,” or “likewise”—seems aimed specifically at the recollection of Pharaoh’s very similar conduct, and if the notion of a monarch being “just about to” (οἴος τε ἦν) ruin Sarra is not enough to cement the association, the frustration of the king’s “lust by a nasty disease” (ἐπιθυμίας ὑπὸ νόσου χαλεπῆς) sent by God surely will be (1.207–208; compare 163–164). Nor are these the last of the correspondences between these episodes; Abimelech’s offense, to take one further example—intending “to outrage the woman of the stranger” (ὕβριζεν τὴν τοῦ ξένου γυναῖκα, 1.208), is the same as that of Pharaoh (ὕβρισαι τοῦ ξένου τὴν γυναῖκα, 1.164).

But what is the effect of all these echoes? Feldman, from an author-centered perspective, suggests that Josephus “anticipates” the “objection” of the reader to the relation of such a similar incident “by stating quite openly . . . that Abraham here practiced the same dissimulation as before, and from the same motive, namely fear.”⁷⁵ How, though, can the narrator’s declaration about Abraham’s motive be considered credible? If the rationale is the same, then Abraham must be afraid that Abimelech will do away with him on account of his shapely wife, as he is supposed to have feared in Egypt (1.162). Yet Abraham, in distinction to Sarra, Pharaoh, and those Egyptians caught up in civic unrest, faced no apparent danger in Egypt, and certainly none that accrued due to the revelation of his marriage to Sarra. Rather to the contrary: the resolution of the matter owed solely to the emergence of the truth, and—at least on the testimony of Pharaoh—the entire sequence of events was triggered by Abraham’s scheme (1.165). Importantly, Abimelech makes this same claim: “he said, with God and the conscience of the woman as witness, that he would never have longed for her in the first place, if he had known she was married; but since

74. It is unclear why Thackeray and Feldman choose to translate φθείρειν οἴος τε ἦν in 1.207 differently than the identical idiom (οἴος τε ἦν ἄγασθαι) in 1.163. Feldman notes that Abimelech “was capable of seducing,” while Pharaoh “was on the point of laying hands”; Thackeray’s Abimelech “was prepared to seduce,” but his Pharaoh “was . . . on the point of laying hands.” Either nuance may be possible (LSJ 1209b), but surely the idiom should be rendered similarly in situations that are so closely parallel. On the specific force of φθείρειν, see below.

75. Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 78 n. 638; Feldman, “Abraham,” 287.

[Abraham] had brought her as a sister, [Abimelech] had done no wrong” (1.209).⁷⁶ In the Egyptian episode, it was already difficult to reconcile Abraham’s remarkable capacity for inference (1.154) with a presumption of his innocence in the matter of Sarra’s abduction and near-rape; here, such harmonization seems simply impossible. How could a man so “quick to understand about everything” and “not at all wrong about things he conjectures” (1.154) fall prey to the same unfounded fear, or fail to conclude that the same ruse, deployed “just like before” (ὅμοια τοῖς πρίν), would have the same outcome? Far from burnishing Abraham’s character, the complex set of correspondences between these two episodes decreases his credibility even further. Abraham’s high regard for hospitality (1.196), moreover, begins to look rather one-sided given his lack of regard for his own hosts.

In the *Antiquities*, Sarra is better defined in Egypt than she is here in Gerar, where Abimelech, interestingly, at least judging by the extent of his indirectly-related speech and his involvement in the plot, could fairly be called the main character. This is in puzzling contrast to the tradition as depicted in the MT and the LXX, where Gerar represents—to differing degrees, and not without significant cost in either case—something of an advancement in agency, or at least in action, for Sar(r)a(h).⁷⁷ Here again, Abraham goes to the region “bringing Sarra along in the role of sister,” language that probably implies at least a passive willingness on her part to “play along.” Yet it is Abraham who is “putting on the drama” (ὑποκρινάμενος, 1.207), taking from Sarra one of her few opportunities for subjectivity, albeit prompted by Abraham himself, in the earlier episode, where “he taught her, too, to act this out” (κάκείνην τοῦθ’ ὑποκρίνασθαι . . .

76. τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ μάρτυρος ὄντος καὶ τοῦ τῆς γυναικὸς συνειδότος ἔλεγε μηδ’ ἂν ὀρεχθῆναι τὴν ἀρχήν, εἰ γαμετὴν οὖσαν ἠπίστατο, ὡς ἀδελφὴν δὲ ἀγόμενον ἦν οὐκ ἠδίκουν. The syntax at the end is not particularly clear; ἠδίκουν is apparently a 1 sg impf ind act, representing Abimelech’s direct speech, a significant oddity in this narrative. Whiston supplies another “said he” and renders “I was guilty of no offense”; Thackeray and Feldman both maintain the indirect discourse in their translations. Niese supplies no quotation marks here, as he does in, for example, 1.183—yet there, too, there is some ambiguity: note the second opening mark, which is never closed. I suspect the problem in both cases is one of syntax outrunning the composer, a phenomenon found in better stylists than Josephus.

77. In the MT, Sarai is a victim without volition in Egypt; in Gerar, although she is still used by Abraham, Sarah is more clearly implicated in the deception. This swing is greater in the LXX, where Sara is positively inert in Egypt, but a more active agent in Gerar, as implied by Abimelech’s rebuke of her dishonesty (Gen 20:16). This rebuke, however, also points to yet another similarity between Sarra and Abraham (compare 12:18–19; 20:9–10).

ἐδίδαξεν, 1.162). What Abimelech is “just about” to do here, especially as interpreted by both Thackeray and Feldman, might seem to leave open a very small gap in which to posit Sarra’s involvement; translating φθείρειν as “to seduce” (1.207) suggests at least a measure of reciprocation, even if coerced or obtained under false pretenses.⁷⁸ Some examples of the term in the *Antiquities* are equivocal, as in parts of the re-presentation of the Pentateuch’s legal material, where it seems to be used of a “corrupter” of the willing as well as the unwilling (4.251–252). The basic force of φθείρω, however, is to “destroy,” and the narrative sections of the *Antiquities* offer better parallels, such as that of Dinah, whom Shechem φθείρει δι’ ἀρπαγῆς or “defiles by means of abduction” (1.337), and that of Tamar, whose rape by her brother Amnon is described by φθείρω and other terms of brute violence (βιάζομαι, ἡ βία, ἡ ὕβρις, 7.168–172).⁷⁹ Sarra’s experience here, then, as the parallels with Egypt also suggest, is not a brush with illicit romance but another near-rape: as I rendered above, in the king’s “lust after Sarra,” he is “just about to destroy” or “ruin her” when God’s regard for Abraham’s marriage prompts another divine intervention (1.207–208). That Sarra’s person is only incidental to God’s primary concern is even clearer here in Gerar. The problem is first characterized in language nearly identical to that of Egypt: Abimelech is “not to outrage the woman of the stranger”—the possessive, once again, being the key to the offense. Then, however, Abimelech underlines the fundamental issue more than once, explaining to his friends “that God brought this sickness on him in the service of the satisfaction of his guest, by safeguarding his woman undefiled,” and, moreover, that God would prove “kindly in the future given that [Abraham] remain free of anxiety concerning his woman” (1.208).⁸⁰ Although Feldman’s mistranslation obscures this, as noted above, the king’s subsequent explanation to Abraham makes the point even more succinctly, as he reassures his guest that his woman will be maintained free of shame “because God cared for him,” that is,

78. Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 148, also uses the word “seduce”; but his paraphrases often seem to adopt the language of Thackeray.

79. LSJ 1928a.

80. ὡς ὁ θεὸς ταύτην αὐτῷ ἐπάγει τὴν νόσον ὑπὲρ ἐκδικίας τοῦ ξένου φυλάσσων ἀνύβριστον αὐτῷ τὴν γυναῖκα . . . εὐμενῆ τὸ λοιπὸν ἀδεοῦς ἐκείνου περὶ τὴν γυναῖκα γενομένου.

Abraham (θεὸν γὰρ αὐτοῦ κήδεσθαι, 1.209).⁸¹

Yet the most interesting notes about Sarra in the Egyptian episode are without echo here in Gerar, and these other correspondences merely serve to highlight their absence. There, for example, uniquely in the tradition as surveyed to this point, Sarra, clearly unaccompanied by Abraham, engages in an intimate verbal exchange with Pharaoh. Though her speech is deeply submerged, as usual in this narrative, she plainly must reveal or confirm “the truth” in this conversation: not only the truth about who Abraham is—“the one she’d brought along”—but also “who she is” (τίς . . . εἴη) herself (1.165). No such scene is in view at all here in Gerar, despite the fact that Sarra is, once again, resident with the local monarch for a substantial period of time. Abimelech must have her in his power to be “just about to destroy” her, and, quite a bit later—after the king falls ill, is treated ineffectually by his physicians, receives a revelatory vision in his sleep, partly recovers, confers with his friends, and summons Abraham for an interview—he pledges that Abraham will, at some point, “get her back undamaged” (ἀνύβριστον κομίξασθαι, 1.209). Franxman claims that Sarra “was never taken from Abraham to begin with” in this episode, and thus that her promised return is a “contradiction” and an oversight in the account.⁸² This seems by far the harder way to resolve the issue. Instead, this is simply another instance of the now-familiar motif of the indeterminacy of Sarra’s movements, providing yet another link between this episode and that of Egypt, as well as a tie to Sarra’s ambiguous physical disposition in the scenes with the angelic visitors. Here, however, Sarra’s stay with the king yields very little additional information about her. There is a bare hint, in Abimelech’s invocation of “the woman’s conscience” (τοῦ τῆς γυναικὸς συνειδότος, 1.209), that Sarra could testify about her time in the palace; but this, too, comes to nothing.

81. According to Niese, αὐτοῦ, representing the usual genitive object of the middle/passive of κήδω, “to be concerned, care for,” is the reading of all manuscripts here; Feldman’s “for God was looking after *her*” must be a simple mistake. Compare Whiston, “for that God took care of him”; Thackeray, “for God was watching over him”; and Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 150.

82. Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 148–50.

As for Sarra and Abraham's relationship, the account of Gerar in the *Antiquities*, in distinction to those in the MT and LXX, offers no new information. Once again, the narrator seems caught out by efforts to improve the moral standing of the main characters. As many have noted, the stated relationship between the two in the *Antiquities*, a marriage between uncle and niece, is licit under the laws of Moses, while the relationship claimed by Abraham in Gen 20:12 of the MT and LXX—that the two are actually married, non-uterine siblings—is not.⁸³ In the tradition reflected in Genesis, there is no direct narratorial claim about their blood tie. While to my reading Abraham's contention is not credible, it remains just possible, then, that he is telling the truth in Gen 20:12. But here in the *Antiquities* the narrator is painted into a corner by the earlier, precise specification of Sarra and Abraham's blood relationship: Sarra is in fact not Abraham's sister (ἀδελφή) at all, but his niece (ἀδελφιδῆ, *Ant.* 1.51). The story of the pair as siblings, moreover, was plainly introduced as a "trick" or "scheme" (τέχνη) in which Abraham "pretended to be her brother" (ἀδελφὸς αὐτῆς εἶναι προσεποιήσατο, 1.162). So Abraham's claim here in Gerar—that he did not, in fact, lie about their relationship—relies explicitly on verbal slight of hand: ἀδελφιδῆ versus ἀδελφή (1.211). That "the latter can be used loosely" to mean "kinswoman," as Thackeray rightly notes, only underlines the fact that this is a gambit relying on a disingenuous use of language; even Abraham, by referring to his "pretense" (ὑπόκρισις), admits as much in the same context (1.211).⁸⁴ Abimelech thought, then, and quite reasonably, that ἀδελφή meant what it usually meant. In the king's reported speech to his friends, he declares after his admonitory dream that "she is not his sister" (μή . . . ἀδελφὴν οὖσαν . . . αὐτῷ, 1.208); that Abraham and Abimelech later agree to deal with each other "without guile" (ἀδόλως, 1.212) only underlines the trickery that has marked much of their interaction. The narrator's attempt to rectify the legally awkward possibility of Sarra and Abraham's half-sibling relationship in the broader tradition, then, only reinforces the reality of their deception: one moral "improvement" leads directly to an ethical failure.

83. See, for instance, the lengthy note of Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 54 n. 475.

84. Thackeray, 104–105 note "a."

The ties in the *Antiquities* between Gerar and Egypt include a few significant connections for Sarra. Again, Abraham “brings along” Sarra, which anticipates the numerous explicit correspondences between the episodes that are mentioned (1.207; compare 1.162). In fact, things are said to be “just like before”: Sarra, again, becomes a royal captive as a result of a lie about her relationship with Abraham, and is “just about to” be assaulted when God, ever protective of Abraham and his possessions, intervenes (1.207–208; compare 1.162–164).

Yet all is not actually the same. The carefully drawn similarities between the episodes, for example, paradoxically reveal that Abraham’s motive of fear is incredible here. Sarra, for her part, is more sketchily drawn in Gerar, in a development that runs counter to the traditions reflected in MT and LXX. Abraham, instead of Sarra, “is playing the part” (ὕποκρινόμενος) here, another association of these characters that has no precise parallel in the tradition; Abraham’s adoption of Sarra’s earlier implied act is just one example of her lack of definition in these scenes. Even the supposed revelation about Sarra and Abraham’s blood relationship is missing here, from the reader’s perspective, anyway, as the narrator has long ago anticipated its implicit moral quandary—while creating a new one in the process. Most importantly, however, Sarra in Gerar has no private, solo audience with Abimelech in which she is defined as the one who “brought along” Abraham, and thus engages in no truth-telling, no teaching, no implied speech at all (compare 1.165).

Birth and Banishment (*Ant.* 1.213–221)

Ant. 1.213 Not long afterwards a son was born to Habramos from Sarra, as had been foretold to him [Habramos] by God, whom he called Isakos. This signifies laughter. He was called thus because Sarra had smiled when God said that she would give birth, since she did not expect it, being too old for childbirth. For she was 90 years old, and Habramos was 100. 214 The child was born in the latest year for both. Immediately after the eighth day they circumcised him, and from that time on the Jews have a custom to perform circumcisions after so many days. And Arabs do so after the thirteenth year. For Ismaelos, the founder of their race, born of a concubine to Habramos, was circumcised at

that time. Concerning this I shall expound the entire subject with much exactness.⁸⁵ 215 Sarra at first used to feel affection towards Ismaelos, who had been born from her servant Agare, showing no less affection than if it were her own son, for he was being nurtured for the succession to the rule; but when she herself gave birth to Isakos she did not deem it proper for Ismaelos, who was older and was able to cause him harm after his father had died, to be reared with him. 216 She, therefore, kept persuading Habramos to send him away with his mother and to settle elsewhere. He, at first, did not grant his consent to the proposals that she had pursued with zeal, considering it the most cruel of all things to send away a child and a woman destitute of the necessities of life. 217 But later, for God also approved of the things decreed by Sarra, having been persuaded, he handed over Ismaelos, who was not yet able to go by himself, to his mother, and bade her to carry water in a skin and bread and to depart using necessity as a guide. 218 And when the necessities of life had been exhausted as she went away, she was in distress, and with the water being scarce she placed the child who was at his last gasp under a certain fir-tree and proceeded further on in order that he might not give up his soul while she was present. 219 But an angel of God met her and told her of a spring nearby and bade her to look after the nurture of her child, for great blessings awaited her through the preservation of Ismaelos. And she took courage through these promises, and meeting shepherds escaped her misfortunes because of their attention. 220–221 [Details about the descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs, and their territory.—JM] (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 80–83)

After ending the previous section with another travelogue-style note, this one about the meaning and persistence of the name of a well in Abimelech’s land, the narrator treats the meaning of the name of Abraham and Sarra’s son, Isaac. The transition is very casual—“not much later” (μετ’ οὐ πολύ, 1.213)—and there is no indication that the household has moved on from Gerar, where Abraham has only recently declared his readiness to remain (1.211). At first, Abraham is the focus of the discourse: “A child was born to Abraham (Ἀβράμῳ) by Sarra, as had been foretold to him (αὐτῷ) by God, whom he named (ὠνόμασε) Isaac” (1.213). The significance of this name, however, is supposedly due to the action of his mother: Isaac “means ‘laughter’” (γέλωτα σημαίνει), and Abraham “called his son so because Sarra smiled when God told her she would give birth—not expecting pregnancy any longer due to old age, for she was ninety and Abraham one hundred” (1.213).⁸⁶ But this explanation makes little sense.⁸⁷ On the face of it,

85. This apparently refers to the projected but never-written work *On Customs and Causes*, also referred to elsewhere (1.25, 29, 192, and so on; the title seems to come from 4.198, τὴν περὶ ἐθῶν καὶ αἰτιῶν ἀπόδοσιν or “the explanation about customs and causes”). See Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 73 n. 599, 81 n. 659; Thackeray, 95 note “c.”

86. διὰ μέντοι τὸ τὴν Σάρραν μειδιάσαι τέξεσθαι φήσαντος αὐτὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μὴ προσδοκῶσαν ἤδη τοκετοῦ

γέλως or “laughter” has only an associative semantic relationship, not a lexical tie, to the verb used of “smiling,” μειδιάω. Moreover, the narrator has already revealed why Abraham should name his son “Isaac”: a year or two ago, God simply commanded him to do so, without offering any kind of justification, etymological or otherwise (1.191). Even further, God is not the speaker of the prediction referred to here, while Sarra does not seem to be its intended addressee; and though she does respond to the claim, it is to call it flatly “impossible” (ἀδύνατον), not merely unexpected (1.197–198).⁸⁸ These inconsistencies, and especially the disparity between Sarra’s reported action and the meaning of Isaac’s name, do not strike me as symptomatic of a narrator who is simply, or only, careless. Rather, they hint at a narrator with something to hide. A reader with an awareness of the broader tradition, naturally, knows that what is concealed is not only Sarra’s skeptical laugh in the tent and its aftermath (Gen 18:12–15), or her deeply ambiguous remarks about laughter after Isaac is born (MT Gen 21:6), but also Abraham’s own derisive laughter at the first prediction of Isaac’s birth (Gen 17:17).⁸⁹ This desire to smooth the edges of Sarra’s character, in particular, will continue to shape the narrator’s account in this episode.

Interestingly, Abraham’s initial domination of the narrative matter does not continue here, and the narrator’s attention soon shifts to Sarra. First, though, the language bridges this gap. Isaac’s birth is reckoned with reference to both of his parents, though the precise meaning of τίκεται δὲ παῖς ἐκατέρων τῷ ὑστάτῳ ἔτει (1.214) is not clear; its plain sense, “a child is born in the last year of both of them,” as if Abraham and Sarra were both about to die, seems untenable even in the face of other examples of narratorial confusion. Thackeray’s solution here, that

πρεσβυτέραν οὖσαν τὸν υἱὸν οὕτως ἐκάλεσεν. It is not clear to me that αὐτήν can only function as the subject of τέξεσθαι, as seems to be assumed by the translations of Feldman and Thackeray, who both render “when God said that she would give birth.” Not specifying an object for φήσαντος may help to harmonize 1.213 with 1.197–198, but, as discussed just below, there are already several discrepancies between these accounts.

87. Compare James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 160.

88. The narrator’s lapse here—the visiting angels, not God, had relayed the prediction about Sarra’s impending motherhood in 1.197—is frequently noted (Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 153). I would only add that the ambiguity is also present in the earlier scene, where Abraham gets up from dinner with the angels, yet speaks to God directly about the imminent destruction of Sodom (1.199).

89. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 73 n. 602, 81 n. 654.

ὑστατος is standing in for ὑστερος, as in other idiomatic late-Greek uses of temporal superlatives for comparatives, may offer the best hope of leaving the text unemended: something, then, like “a child is born of the both of them in the next year.”⁹⁰ What seems significant, and a material shift from the language at the beginning of 1.213, is the mutuality implied in ἐκατέρων—Isaac is not only Abraham’s child here, but Sarra’s too—a concept that is reinforced, quite remarkably, in what follows, where “they circumcise” (περιτέμνουσι) the boy after eight days (1.214). The natural referent here is Sarra and Abraham, not some indefinite “they”; in this way, the narrator implicates Sarra personally in the foundational myth of one of the fundamental markers of male Jewish identity, noting “and from that [time], the Jews have a custom to perform circumcision after so many [days]” (κάξ ἐκείνου μετὰ τοσαύτας ἔθος ἔχουσιν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ποιεῖσθαι τὰς περιτομὰς).⁹¹ This is truly surprising, at least to this reader, and is certainly not inspired in full by Gen 21:4, where it is simply said that “Abraham circumcised Isaac his son when he was eight days old” (וימל אברהם את־יִצְחָק בנו בן־שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים). Sarra’s participation in this rite anticipates her prominence in much of the remainder of this episode, where her feelings and actions will receive a sustained focus so far unparalleled in this narrative.

Indeed, after a few more ethnographic remarks, these on the circumcision practices of the Arabs, descended from Ishmael, the narrator reflects in some detail on Sarra’s conduct and motives, even venturing to offer what might be called an internal view:

90. Thackeray, 106–07 note “a.” His rendering in the body of his translation reads a possessive pronoun for ἐκατέρων: “Their child was born in the year after (that prediction).” Naturally, the verb is a historical present, as is περιτέμνουσι to come. See also Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 81 n. 655; Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 153.

91. Of course, this is not the first mention of circumcision, the earliest instance of which was detailed in 1.193 and involved Abraham, Ishmael, and Abraham’s household. The divine instruction to circumcise Abraham’s future “stock” on the eighth day appears in the same context, and is closely tied to the announcement of Isaac’s birth (1.191–192). But this event in 1.214, where “they” actually circumcise Isaac, is both the first fulfillment of the entirety of God’s earlier command to perform infant circumcision, and the archetypal example for what was, by the time of Josephus, one of the most distinctive and well-known cultural markers for male Jews. Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 153–54, considers the earlier mention, based on Gen 17, to be in conflict with the claim here that it was from this time forward that the practice was followed; but surely this is the first instance of the specific “practice” of circumcising a male infant on the eighth day. That Josephus himself (assuming, for the purposes of this immediate discussion, that the “I” in these passages may be reckoned to reveal the motives of the “real author”) considered the custom worthy of explanation and defense seems clear from its intended inclusion in his (never completed) work *On Customs and Causes* (1.192, 214; see Thackeray, 95 note “c”).

Now Sarra was accustomed to show affection to Ishmael after he had been born of her slave Hagar, at least at first, not lacking in the kind of goodwill she would have had for her own son, because he was being raised for succession to the rule; but after bearing Isaac herself she didn't think it right for Ishmael to be raised alongside him, [Ishmael] being older, and capable of hurting him after their father's death.⁹² (1.215)

In another example of the narrator's rather ham-handed efforts to polish the portraits of the primary characters, Sarra's reason for supposedly showing affection for the son of her slave "at first"—"because he was being raised for succession to the rule" (1.215)—seems to fall somewhat short of admirable. If *στέργω* carries a stronger force than "affection," as it sometimes does, and refers to the "love" between parent and child, the dissonance between feeling and motive is even greater.⁹³ Perhaps other, less mercenary motives may also have been operative. This, however, is the only one mentioned; and the fact that Sarra's affection dries up so precipitously when she gives birth to a son of her own—there are no discourse clues, at least, to suggest that Isaac is much older than a week here—might throw the depth of her feeling into doubt.⁹⁴

But the chief issue that affects the portrayal of Sarra here is that raised above in the discussion of her treatment of Hagar. There, the idea of Ishmael inheriting Abraham's authority (*ἡγεμονία*) was Hagar's motive for "playing the queen," insolent behavior that seemed to justify, in the narrator's conception, Sarra's brutal treatment of her slave. The way Hagar acted was unwarranted, apparently, because her perception of the situation was not based in fact: with intolerable presumption, she played the queen "as if" her unborn son would succeed to the rule (1.188). Yet here this is precisely what is presented as fact, and, once again, as a kind of apology

92. Σάρρα δὲ γεννηθέντα τὸν Ἰσμαῆλον ἐκ τῆς δούλης αὐτῆς Ἀγάρης τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἔστεργεν οὐδὲν ἀπολείπουσα τῆς πρὸς ἴδιον υἱὸν εὐνοίας, ἐτρέφετο γὰρ ἐπὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας διαδοχῆ, τεκοῦσα δ' αὐτὴ τὸν Ἰσακὸν οὐκ ἤξιου παρατρέφεσθαι τούτῳ τὸν Ἰσμαῆλον ὄντα πρεσβύτερον καὶ κακουργεῖν δυνάμενον τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῖς ἀποθανόντος.

93. LSJ 1639b.

94. Contrast the assumption of Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 82 n. 662, that Isaac's weaning still sets the timeline of Ishmael's expulsion, as in the account of the MT, despite this event meriting no mention in the *Antiquities*. In fact, the explicit temporal note in the text reads merely "after she herself bore Isaac" (τεκοῦσα δ' αὐτὴ τὸν Ἰσακὸν, 1.215).

for Sarra's ethically dubious behavior. The result, I think, is a small jam in the works of Sarra's characterization. Does she, in fact, show "affection for Ishmael," "not lacking in the kind of goodwill she would have had for her own son"? If the narrator offered any other explanation here, or none at all, this might seem credible; but Sarra is said to do it explicitly on the grounds of Ishmael's role as presumed heir, an idea previously discredited by the narrator. Or again, if Hagar had simply displayed her insolence having bested her master in the realm of fertility, Sarra's fondness for Ishmael, perhaps even prompted by an ulterior motive, might strike a welcome, humanizing note here. As it is, however, the narrator's explanations seem to collide head-on, and the resolution of the matter isn't as easy as choosing one over the other, for these competing reports both serve the same function: to soften the sometimes violent and callous edges of Sarra's character. In any case, this portrayal of Sarra as acting against Ishmael despite her affectionate feelings towards him anticipates the depiction of Abraham's competing feelings and actions in the episode of Isaac's near-sacrifice—another interesting and unique tie between Sarra and Abraham in the *Antiquities*.

As for the stated reason for Sarra's apprehension over Isaac's safety, which Feldman finds "very plausible," the evidence, to my reading, is inconclusive.⁹⁵ If Ishmael has in fact been groomed his entire life "for succession to the rule," being summarily cast aside for an infant might understandably chafe. Yet the status of this claim is, I think, as uncertain as Ishmael's actual claim to Abraham's authority turns out to be. And the image of Ishmael as "capable of hurting" Isaac is somehow difficult to square with the pathetic descriptions of this "infant child" (παῖδα νήπιον) who will soon lie abandoned by his mother under "some fir tree . . . gasping his last" (ὕπ' ἐλάτη τινί . . . ψυχορραγοῦν, 1.216, 218). Is Ishmael "able to hurt," or "act maliciously to" Isaac (κακουργεῖν δυνάμενον, 1.215), yet "not yet able to go by himself" (μῆπω δι' αὐτοῦ χωρεῖν δυνάμενον, 1.217)?⁹⁶ Noting that Ishmael is supposed to be about fourteen at this point

95. Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 81 n. 660; Feldman, "Abraham," 243. Compare James L. Bailey, "Matriarchs," 160, who says that Sarra's "motive seems more reasonable" in comparison to the biblical account.

96. Reading δι' αὐτοῦ with Thackeray; Niese's text reads δι' αὐτοῦ, but see his apparatus.

(1.193)⁹⁷ contributes little to a resolution of the matter, as this merely raises further questions about the narrator’s candor or level of knowledge. One thing, however, is certain: in this narrative, there is no suggestion that Ishmael has ever hurt anyone—something that cannot be said for Sarra (1.188).

After this, the narrator moves from claims about Sarra’s interior motives to the action that they prompt. Sarra, supposedly, fears the future capability of Ishmael for violence; “therefore” (οὖν)—despite the deeply genuine maternal affection she’d long been accustomed to show him—“she kept after Abraham to send him away, along with his mother, εἰς ἀποκίαν” (1.216).⁹⁸ This brief sentence contains a relative wealth of material bearing on Sarra’s character. Sarra’s urging of this course goes on for a significant period of time; the description of Abraham’s subsequent dithering (“at first . . . but later,” 1.216–217) confirms the suggestion of duration in ἔπειθεν, which Feldman appropriately renders “She . . . kept persuading.” That this ongoing process of persuasion apparently includes Hagar in its focus from the beginning may throw some doubt on the later justification for her to accompany the boy—simply that Ishmael is “not yet able to go by himself,” as if otherwise Hagar would be welcome to stay. But the bare fact that Sarra eventually succeeds in her persuasion here forms yet another tie between her character’s traits and those of Abraham, who has been significantly defined by his convincing rhetoric (1.154, 162, 166–167).⁹⁹

Just where Sarra persuades Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar, or for what purpose, is far less clear, which is why I have left εἰς ἀποκίαν untranslated above. Feldman argues that Sarra’s image is improved by this phrase, in comparison with the tradition reflected in the MT, as “she seeks here merely to have [Ishmael], in the fashion familiar from Greek history, found a

97. Again, this is contrary to the estimation of Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 82 n. 662, that Ishmael is “at least” sixteen, which conflates the biblical account, and its mention of Isaac’s weaning, with that of the *Antiquities*.

98. ἔπειθεν οὖν τὸν Ἄβραμον εἰς ἀποκίαν ἐπέμπειν αὐτὸν μετὰ τῆς μητρός.

99. Again, however, there are suggestions that the narrator’s claims about Abraham’s persuasiveness are somewhat overblown: Abraham’s arguments for the unity of God seem to make a less than favorable impression upon his Mesopotamian neighbors (1.155–157), while his attempted intercession on behalf of Sodom fails to dissuade God from destroying it (1.199).

colony (εἰς ἀποικίαν).”¹⁰⁰ This reading is lexically plausible. While the term is not used with great frequency in Josephus, ἀποικία is sensibly rendered “colony” in several other contexts, including, most tellingly, that of Isaac’s marriage to Rebekah. Several parallel themes emerge there, where Isaac is said to have come into sole possession of Abraham’s estate “because the sons of Keturah,” likewise offspring of Abraham by a different woman, “had left for their colonies” (οἱ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς Κατούρας εἰς τὰς ἀποικίας ἐξεληλύθεισαν, 1.255).¹⁰¹ Moreover, Thucydides employs a very similar phrase to *Ant.* 1.215 (ἀποικίας ἐξέπεμψε, *Hist.* 1.12) to describe the initial colonizing activity of Greece.¹⁰² Yet surely the founding of a “colony” entails the reasonable provision of the colonists, at least some hope of success, perhaps even an intended destination—all of which are lacking here. Abraham’s scruples indicate that he suspects that this course of action amounts to a death sentence: “at first” (κατὰ . . . ἀρχὰς), he refuses to consent, “considering it the most cruel thing of all to send away an infant child and a woman bereft of [life’s] necessities” (πάντων ὀμώτατον ἡγούμενος εἶναι παῖδα νήπιον καὶ γυναῖκα ἄπορον τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐκπέμπειν, *Ant.* 1.216). Here, Abraham’s celebrated quality of being “not at all wrong about things he conjectures” (1.154) happens to be confirmed by subsequent events, as Hagar, “using necessity as a guide” (ὀδηγῶ τῆ ἀνάγκῃ χρωμένην) nearly meets her end along with Ishmael in some deserted place (1.217–218). Looking further into the narrative, finally, it seems worth noting that a “colony” is difficult to define apart from some kind of sustained relationship with its “mother city,” or μητρόπολις.¹⁰³ From this point on, however, the only significant

100. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 82 n. 661; compare van der Lans, “Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham’s Household,” 194. This is Feldman’s commentary on this sentence; in the body of his translation, as printed at the head of this section, he simply renders “to settle elsewhere,” just as Thackeray does. In Gen 21:10, Sarah tells Abraham to “cast out” or “banish” (שׂרַג) the pair.

101. Abraham’s aid in establishing these “colonies” is mentioned in 1.239. Thackeray renders 1.255 even more explicitly: “for his sons by Katura had departed to found their colonies.” The other uses of ἀποικία in Josephus are mostly concentrated in the episodes related to the tower of Babel (*Ant.* 1.110–112, 120), where “colony” seems a reasonable translation; it also appears with reference to Jews and other captive peoples settled by Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon (*Ant.* 10.223), and, in *Against Apion*, to describe the Jewish community in Alexandria (*Ag. Ap.* 2.38).

102. See this and other examples in LSJ 200a.

103. LSJ 200a; 1130b. See, though, van der Lans, “Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham’s Household,” 194, who notes that the establishment of colonies in the *Antiquities* seems sometimes to be aimed at separating groups with the potential for conflict.

contact between the lines of Isaac and Ishmael, beyond the half-brothers' joint burial of Abraham (1.256), is Esau's third marriage, to a daughter of Ishmael (1.277).

It seems to me that there are two primary possibilities here. The first is that what Sarra "kept persuading" Abraham to do is simply to send Ishmael and Hagar away εἰς ἀποικίαν, "to settle elsewhere," as Thackeray, and Feldman's primary text, have it; the tone here could range from "send to look for a new place to live" to "send into forced exile," a usage supported by Nebuchadnezzar's reported practice of settling "captive Jews" (τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους Ἰουδαίων) and others in ἀποικία in Babylon (*Ant.* 10.222–223). The second, and perhaps more interesting option, probably supported by Birgit van der Lans's detailed investigation of this and related terms in the Abraham narrative of the *Antiquities*, is that the narrator is reporting that Sarra's repeated argument was in fact "to send [Ishmael] out to found a colony, along with his mother."¹⁰⁴ In this case, too, there are a range of possibilities. This could be a ploy, a piece of play-acting not so different from those perpetrated in Egypt (1.162) and Gerar (1.207): here, Abraham realizes, correctly, that the prospects for Ishmael and Hagar are less rosy than Sarra's repeated suggestion implies. Alternatively, this could be yet another attempt by the narrator to soften the main characters' edges, one that, as usual, proves to fit rather imperfectly with the rest of the narrative data. Sarra, the narrator claims, makes the best of a bad situation by finding a solution amenable to all: Ishmael and his mother could just found a colony elsewhere. But Abraham's doleful reaction, and the exiles' ill-provisioned, patternless wandering that almost ends in death, show that this is a narratorial cover-up, incompletely patched over a darker story. For a reader who casts an eye on the broader tradition, sympathy may even be in order for the overworked narrator of the *Antiquities*, for the tasks set are complex, and difficult to balance: improve Abraham's character, here by emphasizing his initial refusal to send Ishmael and Hagar away; improve Sarra's character, here by implying that her resolution is even contrary to her

104. Van der Lans, "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household," 192–98.

motherly affection for Ishmael; yet manage, somehow, to avoid wholly eviscerating the story.¹⁰⁵ Complete success, here as elsewhere, proves elusive.

Whatever the details, it is clear that Franxman's claim that Sarra appears "both kindly and reasonable" in this scene needs to be revised significantly.¹⁰⁶ What does seem beyond dispute, and an important note for Sarra's characterization, is that this plan to send Ishmael and Hagar away is formed on Sarra's initiative alone. Sarra's earlier scheme involving Hagar was "ordered by God" (1.187); interestingly, however, its issue proves to be impermanent, and ultimately not entirely successful, in large part due directly to Sarra's scheme here, which she launches on her own. In fact, Sarra's persistent persuasion of Abraham, described as "that which Sarra had so fervently pursued" (οἷς ἡ Σάρρα ἐσπουδάκει, 1.216), is ultimately convincing to Abraham because it is convincing to God: "but later—for even God was pleased with what Sarra had commanded—having been persuaded, [Abraham] handed over Ishmael to his mother . . ." (ὑστερον δέ, καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἠρέσκειτο τοῖς ὑπὸ τῆς Σάρρας προσταττομένοις, πεισθεὶς παρεδίδου τὸν Ἰσμαήλον τῇ μητρὶ, 1.217). There is even an outside chance that ἠρέσκειτο refers to God's entrance into a state of approval. This is suggested not only by the capacity of the imperfect to express such an "inchoative" or inceptive nuance, but also by the temporal adverb; it may be worth noting, too, that ἀρέσκω belongs to the so-called inceptive class of verbs, those ending in -σκω, though most of these do not by nature clearly imply a "beginning."¹⁰⁷ Just possibly, then, the narrator says "but later—for even God came to approve . . ." Either way, earlier God's command (τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος, 1.187) determined Hagar's fate; now, Sarra's command (τοῖς ὑπὸ τῆς Σάρρας προσταττομένοις, 1.217) does, and for Ishmael, too. Abraham, on the other hand, perhaps, betrays Ishmael (παραδίδου, 1.217) just as he did Ishmael's mother (παραδιδόντος, 1.188). It is possible, however, to find a positive here. Once, Hagar, "unable to

105. On the heightened compassion of Abraham, and the narrator's "defense" of Sarra, see Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 81–82 nn. 660–62; compare van der Lans, "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household," 188.

106. Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 154.

107. Smyth §§ 526–27; 1900.

endure her sufferings” (οὐχ ὑπομένουσα τὰς ταλαιπωρίας, 1.188), determined to run away from Sarra; now, finally, forced to leave by Sarra’s resolve, Hagar “escapes” these sufferings (διαφεύγει τὰς ταλαιπωρίας, 1.219).

After a brief, initial concentration on Abraham, the focus of this episode begins to shift to Sarra. Isaac is not only Abraham’s son, but Sarra’s, too, and apparently named after her reaction to the prediction of his birth. Moreover, Sarra is involved, somehow, in Isaac’s circumcision, which, as the narrator notes, serves as a founding myth for this important sign of male Jewish identity (1.213–214). Her emerging role here forecasts her central part in the scenes to come, as the narrator offers—for the first and only time—something that approaches direct definition and an internal view of Sarra, detailing her supposed affection for Ishmael and fear for Isaac (1.215).¹⁰⁸ Despite the former feeling, the narrator implies, and prompted by the latter, Sarra moves into resolute and persistent action, repeatedly urging Abraham to send away Ishmael, her once-beloved adopted son, and Hagar, her slave, εἰς ἀποικίαν (1.216). Sarra is ultimately persuasive, a note that ties her depiction, once again, to that of Abraham. Yet this entire initiative is Sarra’s alone, and she finally convinces Abraham to act when it becomes clear that God approves of her plan (1.217). Interestingly, Sarra’s success here makes a partial failure of God’s own initiative with Hagar, an enterprise that depended on Sarra’s compliance, or at least reveals that earlier provision of “offspring of a male child” to have been a merely temporary fix (1.186).

Much of Sarra’s relative prominence and power here, however, is systematically undercut by the narrator’s increasingly obvious struggle to maintain a balance between the logic of the narrative and a kind of hagiographic imperative. The unsatisfying explanation of Isaac’s name

108. The note about Sarra being “accustomed to show affection” seems to inhabit something of an intermediate space between the categories of “direct definition” and “indirect presentation” in the poetics of Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59–63. In my scheme, anyway, these two categories do not necessarily possess a different level of influence on characterization; thus the significance of this description is not due to its place in a hierarchy of means of characterization, but to the relative rarity of this kind of statement as compared with the rest of the narrator’s presentation. Interestingly, however, the data provided is immediately called into question, in more than one way, by the motive it cites, and the reader is left at an impasse.

hints at characters' concealed impieties, while Sarra's depiction as a loving adoptive mother jars not only with her subsequent urging of Ishmael's exile, but also with her affection's seemingly Machiavellian motive. The narrator's note on this motive, moreover, leads to a jam in Sarra's depiction that appears insoluble. Something is concealed, somewhere, for Ishmael is either originally destined to be raised to the rule, or not. So is Sarra's violent behavior with the pregnant Hagar even more inexplicable, as she attacks or tortures the bearer of Abraham's heir? Or is Sarra's resolution to expel Ishmael even more simply conceived than it is said to be, as Sarra rids the family of a rival, slave-born son, for whom she perhaps naturally has little native affection? This quandary is of the narrator's own making: in both cases the issue of Ishmael's status is an amplification of the tradition, or at least employed in a novel way.¹⁰⁹ The same is true of Sarra's supposed reason for advocating Ishmael's banishment: her fear of his latent violence mitigates the apparent harshness of her move, yet the narrator's retention and even extension of the pathetic descriptions of Ishmael's plight in the tradition directly undermine the plausibility of her motive.¹¹⁰ Finally, yet another similar problem lies in the potential force of *εις ἀπουκίαν*. If Feldman is correct that Sarra "is here depicted . . . as not so harsh in the penalty she recommends for Hagar and Ishmael," that is, in proposing they settle a colony elsewhere, or something similar, then the other narrative data shows that this depiction is a rather shabby front for a command that results in suffering and near-death.¹¹¹ It is unfortunate, if perhaps not surprising, that all of these

109. The question of Ishmael's inheritance is raised, by Sarah, in Gen 21:10. It seems plausible that this note has been read back into the scene in the *Antiquities* (1.186–190) that corresponds to Gen 16:1–16, just as God's approval of Sarah's plan in 21:12 may be the source of the portrayal of Sarra as a prophet in *Ant.* 1.187 (on the latter point see Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 138 n. 12). Yet the idea of Ishmael being groomed for the rule, or not, is still an extension of this note on inheritance that is inserted into *Ant.* 1.188, and used for a new purpose, namely the illustration of Sarra's once-tender feelings, in 1.215.

110. Witness, for example, the allusion in the narrator's description of Hagar's abandonment of Ishmael to the *Madness of Hercules* of Euripides, where Amphitryon begs King Lycus to kill him and Amphitryon's daughter-in-law Megara before the king kills her children, "so that we don't have to see the perverse sight of children gasping their last and calling on their mother" (ὥς μὴ τέκν' εἰσίδωμεν, ἀνόσιον θεῶν, // ψυχορραγοῦντα καὶ καλοῦντα μητέρα, 323–24). Here, Ishmael also lies "gasping his last" (ψυχορραγοῦν) while Hagar moves on in order not to have to watch him die (*Ant.* 1.218). See Thackeray, 108 note "a," and Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 82 n. 664, who, however, has not treated the source carefully, incorrectly stating that Amphitryon is the children's father, and, most puzzlingly, implying that "the last gasp" is that of the adults, which would rather enervate the allusion; his quotation of Euripides should also feature an ellipsis. Part of the problem is that this note is taken largely verbatim from Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus as a Biblical Interpreter: The *Aqedah*," *JQR* 75 (1985): 221, where the same errors are made.

narratorial issues come to a head just when a more dynamic Sarra has drawn the storyteller's focus.

Isaac's Sacrifice (*Ant.* 1.222–236)

Ant. 1.222 His father Habramos exceedingly loved Isakos, who was his only child and who had been born to him on the threshold of old age, as a gift from God. And the child, practicing every virtue and showing attention to his ancestors and exhibiting zeal for the worship of God, won even more the affection and the love of his parents. 223–224 And Habramos put his own happiness solely on the hope that on departing from life he should leave behind his son unscathed. He attained this, to be sure, by the will of God, who, wishing to make trial of his piety toward Himself, appeared to him and . . . asked him himself to offer [Isakos] . . . as a burnt offering. For thus he would demonstrate his piety toward Himself if he valued what was pleasing to God above the preservation of his child. 225 Habramos, judging it just to disobey God under no circumstances . . . concealing from his wife the command of God and the resolution that he had concerning the slaughter of the child, and, on the contrary, revealing it not even to anyone of his household, for he would have been hindered from rendering service to God, took Isakos with two servants and loading a donkey with the things needed for the sacrificial rite departed to the mountain. 226–235 [Abraham leads Isaac to what later becomes the Temple Mount, sets up an altar, and explains to Isaac that it is better for him to die in this fashion than to suffer a more pedestrian fate; plus, it seems, Abraham will benefit from having Isaac as a heavenly intercessor. Isaac is overjoyed at the plan and rushes to the altar; but God steps in, halts the sacrifice, and predicts great things for the pair.—JM] 236 Having said these things, God brought forth a ram from obscurity for them for the sacrifice. And they, having borne themselves beyond their hopes and having heard promises of such blessings, embraced one another and, having sacrificed, returned home to Sarra and lived happily, with God supporting them in all that they wished. (Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 84–94)

This is not the place for a full analysis of this lengthy episode, which Franxman calls the “most elaborate effort in the whole series of Abraham stories.”¹¹² However, interestingly for an investigation of Sarra, the narrator of the *Antiquities* seems to have felt the same dissatisfaction at the complete absence of Isaac's mother from this tale as those exegetes, mentioned in Chapter 1, who have made this issue a minor theme in investigations into the MT of Gen 22. Sarra plays

111. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 82 n. 661; Feldman, “Abraham,” 244.

112. Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 156.

only a small role here, limited mostly to potentialities, but the fact that she does not disappear entirely from the discourse between the expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar (*Ant.* 1.217) and the mention of her death (1.237) constitutes a new note in the tradition. Indeed, although she is kept mostly in the background, small reminders of Sarra's continuing presence bookend the episode (1.222, 236).

In a pattern that recalls the opening of the episode featuring Isaac's birth, the narrator initially focuses on Abraham before shifting to language that acknowledges the roles of both parents:

“His father Abraham loved Isaac beyond measure, seeing as he was his only child and was born to him as a gift of God ‘on the threshold of old age.’ For his part, the boy attracted the goodwill and love of his parents all the more by his pursuit of every virtue, dedication to his forebears, and zeal in the worship of God” (1.222).¹¹³

Here, the “goodwill” (εὐνοια) that Sarra was once supposed to have exhibited to Ishmael (1.215) is directed at Isaac, provoked in her and in Abraham partly by Isaac's own dedication to them.¹¹⁴ Against the background of the tradition, one item of interest here is the implied duration and consistency of Sarra's relationship with her son, now twenty-five years old (1.227), as he has grown to adulthood. This might be inferred from Gen 24:67, where Isaac is “consoled after his mother,” a note omitted in the *Antiquities*, but here their relative intimacy is placed in its logical narrative frame. But this “goodwill,” too, provides a lexical tie to the episode of Ishmael's banishment that points to a further thematic link between Sarra and Abraham. Earlier Sarra,

113. Ἰσακὸν δὲ ὁ πατήρ Ἀβραμὸς ὑπερηγάπα μονογενῆ ὄντα καὶ ἐπὶ γήρως οὐδῶ κατὰ δωρεάν αὐτῷ τοῦ θεοῦ γενόμενον. προεκαλεῖτο δὲ εἰς εὐνοίαν καὶ τὸ φιλεῖσθαι μᾶλλον ὑπὸ τῶν γονέων καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ παῖς ἐπιτηδεύων πάσαν ἀρητὴν καὶ τῆς τε τῶν πατέρων θεραπείας ἐχόμενος καὶ περὶ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ θρησκείαν ἐσπουδακῶς. (Niese's section number 223 should, I think, be placed one line down; all the material just quoted belongs in § 222.) The expression ἐπὶ γήρως οὐδῶ, “on the threshold of old age,” is a stock phrase from Homer, used for instance of the pitiable Priam (*Il.* 22.60), that passed into proverbial use as expressive of “the height of the pathetic in life”; see the detailed and interesting note of Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 84 n. 677, as well as Feldman, “*Aqedah*,” 215–17, and Feldman, “Abraham,” 267–69. The pathos of Abraham, already well-developed by other means in this context, is thus underlined.

114. Assuming that style motivates the lexical variety, I take both τῶν γονέων and τῶν πατέρων as referring to Isaac's immediate “parents,” that is, Sarra and Abraham; this is also the solution of Whiston and Thackeray. Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 85 n. 681, argues that the plural of πατέρων means that Josephus, in an attempt to gain the approval of his pagan audience, is evoking “Isaac's reverence for his ancestors generally and not merely for his father.” But it seems that there is another “ancestor” much closer to hand.

despite her sincere motherly feelings for Ishmael, did what had to be done, sending him to his death, but for mediated divine intervention, in some distant place (1.215–219). Here Abraham, despite his overwhelming fatherly feelings for Isaac, does what needs doing and leads him to his death, but for divine intervention, in another distant place (1.222–236). This is an interesting instance of Sarra’s resemblance to Abraham, for considered narratively it is she, unusually, who anticipates his portrayal and actions. However, considered as a development in the tradition, it is Sarra’s supposed affection for Ishmael that is the new note; thus in the history of the tradition it is she, once again, who is conformed to Abraham’s image.

After Abraham receives another command from God, this time, of course, to offer his beloved Isaac as a whole burnt offering (1.223–224), there is another intriguing note that reflects on Sarra’s depiction in the *Antiquities*. Abraham, after deciding that nothing could justify his disobedience, takes Isaac, two household slaves, and a donkey on a journey to the specified place of sacrifice (1.225). But the manner in which Abraham packs for his trip suggests that not all parties would have approved of the plan: Abraham acts “having concealed from his woman both God’s instructions and his own intentions regarding the slaughter of his boy” (ἐπικρυψάμενος πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν τε τοῦ θεοῦ πρόρρησιν καὶ ἣν εἶχεν αὐτὸς γνώμην περὶ τῆς τοῦ παιδὸς σφαγῆς, 1.225). That Abraham is specifically noted to have felt the need to disguise his true purpose from Sarra hints at a good measure of power on her part, and a fair bit of reciprocal caution on his. It seems that more is in play here than a general notion of maternal protectiveness. This is still the same woman, albeit twenty-five years older, whose initiative and persistence won the day in the episode dealing with the aftermath of Isaac’s birth. If she had found out, what would have happened? The narrator implies that the entire enterprise might have been scuttled: Abraham concealed his design from Sarra, and divulged it “not even to one of his household slaves” (μηδὲ τῶν οἰκετῶν τι), “because he would have been prevented from serving God” in this perverse manner (ἐκωλύετο γὰρ ἂν ὑπηρετῆσαι τῷ θεῷ, 1.225). There is a small range of options in understanding this last clause; κωλύω could mean “hinder,” or the like, meaning that Abraham’s aims would have been complicated, but not completely stymied, by knowledge of his

plan getting out, while the force of ἄν could indicate mere potential, that is, what might have happened had events taken a different path.¹¹⁵ Then, too, Sarra is not the only one mentioned as a possible obstacle, as the household slaves, even the two who accompany Abraham on his errand, are also kept in the dark. Yet Sarra, the character from whom Abraham specifically “conceals” the truth, is Isaac’s mother, whose at least ostensible concern for her son’s safety has already affected the plot in a fairly dramatic way (1.215–217). Moreover, as there is nothing to suggest how these slaves might have thwarted their master’s will alone, it might be more reasonable to assume that Abraham’s general silence is aimed at preventing the news from reaching Sarra’s ears.

It is a provocative exercise to speculate on the possibilities here. Does the *Antiquities* suggest that Sarra could have prevented Abraham’s ultimate success, if that is the right word, in the “experiment” (διάπειραν, 1.223) that God conducts on him here?¹¹⁶ The “obedience” supposedly underlined so decisively by Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of his son is, of course, one of his defining traits in the pious tradition that comments on his story. Would Abraham’s devout willingness to do the deed (1.225) have been enough, had he been deprived, by Sarra, of the opportunity to actually lift the knife (Gen 22:10)? But this last dramatic detail is, in fact, elided by the narrator of the *Antiquities*, whose decorousness sometimes borders on cowardice (1.233); and in the event, Sarra is kept from finding out about Abraham’s plan, her potential acts left permanently in the realm of the theoretical. Sarra is not taken along this time; rather, as in her introduction in this narrative, she is left behind (compare 1.151; 1.162, 207).

In fact, the preposterous continuation of events here suggests that the ventured sacrifice would still have gone forward, even in the face of Sarra’s maternal objections. For after the altar

115. LSJ 1017a–b. See Smyth §§ 1784–87 on the “past potential” and the “unreal indicative” uses of the past tense indicative with ἄν, in particular. It is not easy to draw out all the various gradations here with confidence, but it appears to me that a spectrum of meanings is possible: “he might have been hindered” to “he would have been prevented,” with several options in between. Other English translations reflect something of this range: “otherwise he should have been hindered,” Whiston; “lest haply he should have been hindered,” Thackeray; “for he would have been hindered,” Feldman.

116. “Experiment” is the memorable rendering of Whiston; see also LSJ 406b.

is ready, Abraham reveals the necessity of Isaac's death to him, emphasizing the advantages that will accrue to the both of them from this act (1.228–231). The priggish description of Isaac quoted above (1.222) now descends into absurdity, as Isaac listens to Abraham's speech "with pleasure" (πρὸς ἡδονήν), pronounces himself ready to die even if it were only Abraham's whim that he do so, and rushes to the altar of his own accord (1.232). It is hard to say why Feldman calls this a "glorious scene"; Franxman is closer in noting, in understated fashion, that Isaac's response is "unrealistic."¹¹⁷ I might prefer to characterize Abraham and Isaac's interaction as farcical, and in a repellent way: pure nonsense that is somehow offensive. The biblical account, which is ethically troubling on a variety of levels, both human and divine, at least evokes the extreme gravity of its central conceit; here, a father's divinely-sanctioned murder of his son forms only a pretext for a kind of humorless spoof.

This air of unwitting satire continues unabated through the end of the episode, which literally ends "happily ever after," God having intervened in the human sacrifice and pledged great rewards in return for obedience to "even such a command" (καὶ τοιαῦτα προστασόμενος, 1.234): "And they—with [Isaac] having been restored beyond expectation, and with [both of them] having heard tidings of such good things—embraced each other and, having sacrificed, returned home to Sarra and lived happily," or "prosperously," "God coming to their aid in everything they wanted" (1.236).¹¹⁸ One wonders, in vain, whether Abraham, Isaac, and God continued to "conceal" what had happened from Sarra; for in the narrator's next breath, twelve unreported years later, Sarra is dead.

117. Feldman, *JA 1–4*, 92 n. 720; compare Feldman, "Abraham," 226; Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 160.

118. I read αὐτοῦ κεκομισμένου with Niese's text: οἱ δὲ παρ' ἐλπίδας αὐτοῦ κεκομισμένου καὶ τοιούτων ἀγαθῶν ἐπαγγελίας ἀκηκόότες ἠσπάζοντό τε ἀλλήλους καὶ θύσαντες ἀπενόστησαν πρὸς τὴν Σάρραν καὶ διήγον εὐδαιμόνως ἐφ' ἅπασιν οἷς ἐθελήσειαν τοῦ θεοῦ συλλαμβάνοντος αὐτοῖς. Thackeray reads αὐτοὺς κεκομισμένοι (compare Niese's apparatus), which has the advantage of consistency in number with the rest of the verbals and pronouns in the near context; however, it seems to me that Isaac is properly the only one "restored beyond expectation" here.

Sarra's Death (*Ant.* 1.237)

Ant. 1.237 And not long afterwards Sarra died after living 127 years. They buried her in Nebron, with the Chananaians granting her burial ground at public expense. But Habramos bought the place for 400 shekels from Ephraimos, someone from Nebron. And Habramos and his descendants built tombs in that place. (Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 94–95)

Strangely, Sarra's death is said to occur “not long after” (οὐ πολὺ ὕστερον) Abraham and Isaac's return to their shared life of bliss; however, some dozen years have passed (compare 1.213, 227, 237). Had the note of the family's happy reunion not immediately preceded, the effect might have been to tie her death more closely to the trauma of Isaac's near-sacrifice, as in a variety of rabbinic traditions.¹¹⁹ The event itself is reported in rather cursory fashion, and Sarra is not favored with the kind of brief valedictory homage that Abraham receives at the mention of his death in 1.256. The circumstances of her interment, however, seem to reflect Sarra's importance, with “the Canaanites even conceding a plot for her tomb at the public expense” (συγχωρούντων . . . τῶν Χαναναίων καὶ δημοσίᾳ χοῦν αὐτῆς τὸν τάφον, 1.237). In the Greek materials, funerals δημοσίᾳ, an adverbial usage meaning “by public consent” or “at the public expense,” are usually reserved for civil heroes, such as Tellus, the man Solon names “most fortunate of all humans” in his interview with Croesus in the *Histories* of Herodotus.¹²⁰ Yet this proposed honor for Sarra is immediately rejected, with no explanation: “but Abraham purchased the spot for 400 shekels” (Ἀβράμου δὲ ὠνησαμένου τὸ χωρίον σίκλων τετρακοσίων (*Ant.* 1.237).¹²¹ One more time, perhaps, the narrator is caught between competing demands,

119. See Franxman, *Genesis and the Antiquities*, 158 n. 9, for some of these traditions. It is interesting that all three of the texts that he mentions (Qoh. Rab. 9.7; Pirq̄ R. El. 32; *Sefer ha-Yashar* 23) link Sarah's death directly to Isaac's near-sacrifice, but in different ways: in the first, when she learns the truth from Isaac, after the fact; in the second, when she hears a lie from “Sammael” about the event, before Abraham and Isaac return; and in the third, after she hears a lie, and then the truth, from the devil, at which point she dies from relief.

120. After Tellus died a glorious death aiding the Athenians in a battle with the Eleusinians, Solon reports, “the Athenians buried him, at the public expense, right where he fell, and honored him greatly” (καὶ μιν Ἀθηναῖοι δημοσίῃ [the Ionic orthography] τε ἔθαψαν αὐτοῦ τῆ περ ἔπεσε καὶ ἐτίμησαν μέγᾳλως, *Hist.* 1.30.5). See LSJ 387a; Feldman, *JA* 1–4, 94–95 n. 732.

121. Feldman, “Abraham,” 225, seems to miss this in his remark that the “final proof” of Sarra's “importance comes when she dies and is buried at public expense.” He is correct to note that “only select individuals received such a burial”—but Sarra is not among these.

attempting to burnish the depictions of the main characters while maintaining some fidelity to the underlying traditions. In Gen 23:6, the offer of free land for a burial site is meant as an honor for Abraham, the “mighty prince” (נשיא אלהים); his reasons for refusing it, after lengthy negotiations, are not completely clear, though a sentiment similar to that shown in Gen 14:21–24, where Abraham is wary of entering the debt of the king of Sodom, may be in play. Here, it is Sarra’s importance that is emphasized by the willingness of the locals to give her a state funeral. But Abraham’s refusal of this tribute in the *Antiquities*, transplanted almost free of context from its source, not only undermines the apparent aim of this development by implying that Abraham’s own estimation of Sarra’s worth does not match that of the Canaanites; by painting Abraham as rather churlish and mean, it also further weakens the narrator’s case for Abraham as a “man tops in every moral excellence” (1.256).

Sarra in Josephus

It is a challenge to make a linear account of Sarra’s characterization in the *Antiquities* cohere, as her path is often hard to trace. Her image is fuzzy in the beginning, as she is acted upon—left behind, scooped up, protected or preyed upon—but only rarely acting, and mostly an object of inference. The lack of literary ties between the episode in Egypt and that of Hagar’s forced pregnancy contributes to a sense of disconnection in the progression of Sarra’s depiction; on the other hand, the intricate literary links between Egypt and Gerar illustrate almost nothing about her development. The visit of the angels, meanwhile, reads like a narrative afterthought, wedged between scenes the narrator is keener to relate. Suddenly, when Isaac is born, Sarra emerges as a figure of some power and initiative, and her expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, unlike elsewhere in the tradition, does not spell her own dismissal from the discourse; yet she remains only as a figure of potential, not action, and Sarra’s death comes just the same.

A tradition that could already be fairly described as fundamentally episodic thus seems to atomize even further in the telling of the narrator of the *Antiquities*, forming a series of short

vignettes that feature some interconnections, of varying strength, between them. The trajectories of the “biographies” of the characters, however, offer only weak support to these links. In describing Sarra’s portrait in this narrative, then, I will treat her character as revealed—or concealed—by three related, sometimes overlapping motifs that seem to me to be most significant to her depiction. First, Sarra is often, but not always, diminished in the telling of the *Antiquities*, whether considered in the context of the tradition or in the narrative itself. Second, Sarra’s image is frequently conformed to that of Abraham, an element familiar from the tradition but expressed here in mostly novel ways. Third, Sarra’s characterization is complicated by the narrator’s urge to burnish the presentations of the main characters; again, this phenomenon is noticeable not only in comparisons with other tellings of this story, but also within the narrative itself.

Sarra’s Diminishment

That Sarra in the *Antiquities* is somewhat shrunken, in comparison with her portrayal in the MT, has been observed in broad terms by scholars such as Halpern-Amaru and Niehoff.¹²² Bailey, too, despite his insistence that Sarra’s image is improved in the *Antiquities*, inadvertently highlights the relative poverty of her depiction by noting how often narrative data about her in the MT is “omitted” in the retelling here.¹²³ Sarra never speaks directly, for example, and her movements are of such little interest to the narrator that her presence sometimes comes as a surprise (1.165, 198). That these elements are typical of the narrator’s rather dull presentation generally makes little difference to an evaluation of Sarra, whose characterization, laid alongside her portraits elsewhere, is still less vivid. There are moments that cut against the grain: her implied speech in Egypt, her background appearances in the episode of Isaac’s near-sacrifice, and, most significantly, her relative dynamism as the object of the narrator’s focus in the wake of Isaac’s birth (1.165, 213–217, 222, 225, 236).

122. Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits in Josephus,” 145; Niehoff, “Mother and Maiden,” 416. Compare Begg, “Flight of Hagar,” 17, with specific reference to Sarra’s role in the episode of Hagar’s pregnancy (*Ant.* 1.186–190).

123. James L. Bailey, “Matriarchs,” 170–71.

Yet any advances that Sarra makes in the *Antiquities* are mostly undermined elsewhere, sometimes in comparison with other tellings of her story, but often simply in the course of the narrative itself. She demonstrates a little independence in Egypt, but the episode ends by reinforcing her insignificance relative to Abraham (1.165–168). Her agency regresses further, with respect to both tradition and narrative, in her mostly inert appearance in the similar tale in Gerar (1.207–212). Sarra’s action with Hagar must be significant, as God directly tells her to do it; but in a number of small ways, including being commanded by God, what Sarra does is an echo of what Abraham has already done (1.154, 187). In her emergence from house and courtyard during the angelic visit, Sarra may display just a little power (1.198). Her minor liberation here, though, is at the expense of much personal color, considered across the tradition. After Isaac is born, Sarra is vigorous at last, and the center of the action for just a little while: she participates in her son’s circumcision, the mythic origin of an important cultural rite; her feelings are purportedly revealed; she is persistent and persuasive in action, perhaps convincing even the deity to support her initiative (1.213–217). But so much of this is thrown into doubt even as it unfolds by the collapse of various narratorial façades; and as Halpern-Amaru correctly points out, Sarra’s advocacy here is on Isaac’s behalf, not her own.¹²⁴ Again, a bit of power may be suggested by Abraham’s caution in concealing from Sarra his intent to kill his son; yet this comes to nothing, and, once more, this power, and her presence in this episode, are really still all about Isaac (1.225). At the end of her life, too, after Sarra’s social significance seems to be underlined by the offer of a funeral at the public expense, Abraham’s abrupt refusal of this honor cuts her reputation back down to size, and she disappears as a character for good (1.237).

Sarra’s Resemblance to Abraham

Sarra resembles Abraham in the *Antiquities* in a number of ways. On the most basic level, the two are actually related by blood: Sarra is Abraham’s niece (1.151, 211). But their traits and

124. Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits in Josephus,” 148, argues that Sarra’s conduct here is “assertive,” but properly characterized as merely “‘maternal’ as opposed to ‘female’ action.”

actions also display important correspondences. Abraham “brings along” (ἐπαγόμενος) Sarra to both Egypt and Gerar, which is suggestive of her mostly subordinate role in these episodes (1.162, 207); yet Pharaoh frames their relationship the other way around, asking Sarra “who this was she had brought along” (τίνα τοῦτον ἐπάγοιτο, 1.165). In this same scene, too, it is implied that Sarra teaches Pharaoh “the truth” (τὴν ἀλήθειαν), much as Abraham, after showing that the beliefs of the learned Egyptians “contained nothing true” (μηδὲν ἔχοντας ἀληθές), teaches them things of which they had previously been “ignorant” (ἄμαθῶς; 1.166–168). In their playacting, as well, Sarra and Abraham resemble each other: she is taught “to play her part” (ὑποκρίνασθαι) in Egypt, just as he “plays his part” (ὑποκρινάμενος), in a restaging of the same drama, in Gerar (1.162, 207). The plot shows that their acting is persuasive; indeed, this is another trait that the two share. Abraham is defined early as “persuasive to his hearers” (πιθανὸς τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις, 1.154), and his “persuasive ability” (πείσαι λέγων, 1.167) is also demonstrated among the Egyptians, while Sarra’s persistent and successful persuasion on the topic of Ishmael and Hagar’s banishment convinces Abraham, and perhaps even God, to yield to her initiative (ἔπειθεν . . . Ἄβραμον. . . πεισθεὶς [Ἄβραμος], 1.216–217). In this latter episode, moreover, Sarra is depicted as willing to send away Ishmael to an uncertain fate, despite her once-strong maternal feelings for him, described in part as “the kind of goodwill she would have had for her own son” (οὐδὲν ἀπολείπουσα τῆς πρὸς ἴδιον υἱὸν εὐνοίας, 1.215); Abraham, too, some years later, is willing to lead away Isaac to his death despite his deep love for him as his “only child” (μονογενῆ), and the “goodwill” (εὐνοίαν) that Isaac engenders (1.222). Perhaps most significantly, finally, there is a small but meaningful web of connections between Sarra and Abraham that centers on God’s commands to them. Both act having been “ordered by God” (τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος), which emphasizes the importance of what they do; both are worthy of direct communication from the deity, and both show obedience to God’s command (1.154, 187). Both, too, take steps to remedy their childlessness in the near context of these commands—and both efforts eventually fall short.

Interestingly, all of these correspondences, small and large, are essentially unique to the *Antiquities*, at least in the tradition as surveyed in this study. The tie between the moves of the characters to address the lack of a child may bear a passing thematic resemblance to the connection between the putative slave mothers of an heir for Abraham, Masek and Hagar, in the LXX (Gen 15:2–3; 16:1–2), but the likeness is not very close. Instead, both links may represent different expressions of the same deep trait: Sarra resembles Abraham. To approach the question from the other side, there are many important links between these characters in the rest of the tradition that do not appear here at all, for one reason or another: in the MT, for example, Sarah’s first speech partly mimics Abraham’s first speech, as her subsequent action with Hagar echoes her own treatment by Abraham in Egypt (Gen 12:10–20; 16:1–6); both are renamed, and laugh at the announcement of Isaac’s predicted birth (17:5, 15, 17; 18:12); both appear, in this last episode, in identical positions in the opening of their tent (18:1, 10). These connections, and others from the rest of the tradition, are elided in the *Antiquities*, but new ones have risen to take their places.

So what do these correspondences say about Sarra’s depiction in the *Antiquities*? In Chapter 4, I showed that Sarra’s portrait in the LXX is even more closely conformed to the figure of Abraam than is the case in the MT, and argued that this is symptomatic of the narrator’s broader penchant to compress her individuation. This process, in turn, helps to highlight Sarra’s true value to the narrator in the LXX, which is her utility to the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraam. Here, the question is perhaps more complicated, not least because so many of the relevant instances of Sarra’s conforming to Abraham in the wider tradition are left out; the new examples of resemblance do not accumulate on top of the old, but simply replace them. Abraham himself, moreover, is depicted quite differently in the *Antiquities*. The narrator’s encomiastic descriptions of Abraham are not all credible, as seen repeatedly in the discussion above; yet, as nearly all agree, the narrative clearly aims at “improving” Abraham’s image and casting him as a great man.¹²⁵ This tendency is also seen, to a lesser degree, in the depiction of Sarra, whose

questionable acts in the tradition are the object of attempted cover-ups by the narrator of the *Antiquities*. So does Sarra's resemblance to Abraham here merely hollow her out, as seemed to be the case in the LXX—or does it honor her by association? Abraham is claimed to be a “man tops in every moral excellence” (1.256), deserving of accolades from both God and human; if Sarra is like him, perhaps this only shows her in a positive light. Moreover, at least one example of their resemblance, their willingness to sacrifice children despite their personal feelings, seems to cast Sarra as the type, and Abraham as the imitator. Yet the issue of Abraham's glorious reputation cuts both ways. He is clearly the hero of this part of the *Antiquities*, and Sarra's own supposed virtues, and her resemblance to him, may simply contribute to his stature: such a great man must “bring along” a worthy woman.¹²⁶ And an important objection to this line of thinking has already been raised: the narrator's repeated attempts to polish the images of both Abraham and Sarra buckle so frequently under their own weight as to throw the entire project into doubt.

“Improvements” to Sarra and Others

One of the most distinctive features of this narrative, finally, is the narrator's stubborn desire to cast the main characters in a favorable light—and the inadvertent narrative fallout that results from this ambition, which often creates as many problems as it attempts to solve. At points, the narrator's inclination leads even to minor crises in characterization. The phenomenon appears in the presentations of both Abraham and God; interestingly, most of these instances also touch on the portrayal of Sarra. Abraham's moral standing is jeopardized in Egypt by the narrator's prior insistence on his perceptive intelligence (1.154, 163): how could such a perspicacious man have failed to foresee the danger Sarra would face? The question is yet more pointed in Gerar, where things happen “just like before,” and Abraham only looks worse due to the narrator's initial definition of his and Sarra's true blood relationship (1.151, 207–211).

125. See, among others, Louis H. Feldman, “Abraham the Greek Philosopher”; Louis H. Feldman, “Hellenizations.”

126. Compare the evaluation, reached by different means, of Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits in Josephus,” 145, 148. See also van der Lans, “Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household,” 188, and the remark of Feldman, “Abraham,” 225: “Abraham benefits . . . from the aggrandizement of his wife”; compare 238, 243, 288.

Sarra's honor at her death, too, ends up being of no interest to the supremely virtuous Abraham (1.237, 256). God's initiatives regarding Abraham's heir(s), meanwhile, are hard to understand, as the narrator apparently protects Sarra from an indecorous suggestion in the matter of Hagar, which makes God's later motive with Isaac a puzzle (1.187, 191).

But it is a similar effort to burnish Sarra's character that leads to one of the most complex problems with her characterization in the *Antiquities*. Sarra's action with Hagar is partly justified by emphasizing Hagar's insolence, which is motivated by her presumptuous, seemingly flatly wrong expectation that Ishmael will inherit Abraham's rule (1.188). Yet Sarra's action with Ishmael and Hagar later is partly softened by underlining Sarra's affection for Ishmael, which is said to be prompted by his original destiny as heir to Abraham's rule (1.215). The narrator's credibility, here specifically with reference to the image of Sarra in the story, is thus strained: what can be trusted? Which one of these apologies is really a cover-up? Picking at this knot only loosens other threads in the near contexts of these two incompatible moves to soften Sarra's edges. That she "makes one of her slaves lie down" aims at euphemism, but ends up hinting at a brutality that only seems confirmed by her implied torture of Hagar (1.187–188). And more: did Sarra really show affection for Ishmael "at first"? Did she really fear for Isaac's life? Did she really recommend a humane solution to the quandary posed by competing heirs (1.215–216)? It seems important, in the broader context of this study, that the generation of these questions does not depend on synoptic comparison alone. Such comparison may draw out significant elements of Sarra's character here; but much distinct data can also be collected as a result of deliberate, careful prodding of the narrative itself.

That the episode after Isaac's birth is the point at which these narratorial problems bite most uncomfortably may serve to bind the major points of this summary of Sarra in the *Antiquities*. The dynamics of her diminishment is amply illustrated by these scenes, which feature Sarra at her most prominent, yet most dramatically undercut by this persistent narratorial tendency to polish her depiction. The narrator's desire to apologize for Sarra, moreover, combined with the troubling relics left behind by this strategy, seems to offer yet another unique

way in which she resembles Abraham. Sarra's portrait in the *Antiquities* has indeed been "recolored in favorable tones," as Bailey claims of Sarra, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah.¹²⁷ But the job was left undone, at least in Sarra's case, partly obscuring her image in some areas, while leaving a few old flaws to show through.

127. James L. Bailey, "Matriarchs," 175.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude my work on Sarah in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature, I will first consider her character as revealed in the narratives treated in my analysis, reflecting on her depictions both individually and taken together. Then I will briefly mention some of the contributions of this study.

Sarah in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Tradition

Each of the following sections—on the Masoretic text, the Septuagint, the Genesis Apocryphon, and the *Jewish Antiquities*—looks both inward, into its subject narrative itself, and outward, into the broader tradition as represented in this study. I refer throughout to her character as “Sarah” due to the synthetic nature of the discussion.

Sarah in the Masoretic Text

My reading of Sarah in the MT demonstrated her complexity and coherence, even as it emphasized her utility to Abraham and the deity, who both use her for their purposes and discard her afterward. Abraham’s abuse and sale of Sarah in Egypt catalyzes her own abuse and disposition of Hagar, which is only the first example of Sarah’s increasing resemblance to Abraham, a feature that both exposes and contributes to a gradual hardening of her personality over the course of the narrative. Throughout, Sarah is characterized by a recurring motif of gain and loss, or possession and lack, a theme that is finally underlined after the birth of Isaac, where her reaction to the reversal of her childlessness is one of deep ambiguity and sensitivity to her image in the eyes of others.

This sketch of Sarah in what seems to be the earliest narrative that has come down to us contains themes, features, and traits that endure in the tradition, as well as others that wane in significance, or simply disappear. Her complexity, for example, is one aspect that is amply brought out in all of the readings that make up this study. Perhaps surprisingly, this feature coexists with Sarah's utility to others throughout most of the tradition surveyed. If Sarah is "chosen" in the MT, she is chosen as an instrument, and her instrumentality in the realization of the divine promises, at least as the focus of the narrator, only grows in the LXX. She is also ultimately valued for her utility in the Apocryphon, despite the relative richness of her characterization before her abduction into Pharaoh's house. Here, however, it is her sexual use that is emphasized; the regrettable state of preservation of the Apocryphon's single manuscript means that her utility to the promises must remain mostly an open question.

Sarah's hardening trajectory in the MT seems to contribute to her instrumentality: she is sharpened by abuse and the divine encouragement of her worst impulses, the better to obtain wealth by the deception and harm of others, or to banish competing heirs. Yet this hardening arc itself does not perceptibly endure in the tradition. Sarah's abuse of Hagar in the LXX is less well-linked to her own experiences in Egypt, while Sarah's remarks at Isaac's birth are uncomplicated and conventional in their joy; in the *Antiquities*, Sarah is barely a character in Gerar, and thus cannot credibly play the kind of junior collaborator role that she fills elsewhere. However, Sarah's resemblance to Abraham in the MT grows as her hardness does, and this particular trait does get significant and very interesting traction, often in novel ways, everywhere in the tradition surveyed. A brief list of Sarah's similarities to Abraham in the MT would include her learning from Abraham how to scheme, and how to dispose of the sexuality of subordinates; the similar language of blessing (for Sarah, specifically as a conduit for Isaac) and their renaming; their identical positions in the tent door; their laughing responses to the prediction of Isaac's birth; and their cooperation in the restaging of the Egyptian episode in Gerar, which shows, in further detail, Sarah's adoption of Abraham's willingness to hurt others in the pursuit of gain.

A similar phenomenon, where part of a complex of motifs falls away, while another part remains in the tradition, can be noted with reference to Sarah's sensitivity to her appearance in the eyes of others in the MT. Sarah's being worthy of notice in Egypt contributes in a complicated and subtle way to a series of developments in the plot that center on the perspectives of others: Sarah's dramatic reaction to Hagar's "overlooking" of her after Hagar conceives; Sarah's ambiguous reaction to Isaac's birth, which seems to acknowledge and rue the absurdity of the situation; and perhaps even Abimelech's "covering of eyes" that he pays to Abraham on Sarah's behalf. This theme essentially vanishes in the tradition; but one of its contributing and complicating factors, Sarah's beauty, exhibits profound staying power. The broader point is expressed with some precision in the Apocryphon, where her beauty is the primary subject of a lengthy descriptive poem, but Sarah herself is afraid to be gazed upon, and hides out of sight for years on end.

The motif of possession and lack, finally, which has both heuristic and explanatory power in a reading of Sarah's development in the MT, also fades as the tradition progresses. Vestiges remain in the LXX, but the absence of notes such as the delicate play with Sarah's name in the Hebrew, her urging of Hagar's impregnation for her own "building up," and her ambivalence at Isaac's birth weaken this motif. In the other retellings considered, it did not contribute to her depiction in a meaningful way.

Sarah in the Septuagint

My reading of Sarah in the Septuagint revealed a complex character whose path is more extreme and, at times, erratic, as compared to her smoother, perhaps more plausible and sympathetic arc in the MT. When she is not more inert than her MT counterpart, Sarah in the LXX is more derivative of the figure of Abraham. Thus her agency is often bought at the price of imitative action, as in her vaguely familiar scheme with Hagar, or in her slightly expanded but more emulative role in Gerar. All of this reveals narrative pressures on her individuation, which help to emphasize her programmatic function in the fulfillment of the divine promises. The scene

in Gen 21 again expresses a central theme of this narrative. As her oldest malleable trait, infertility, is revised, she finally surprises with an uncomplicated joy that is not derivative of an emotion of Abraham; yet her reaction is not entirely credible, alongside other narrative data, and to my reading is a unsatisfyingly conventional response that simplistically supports the purposes of the deity. Thus Sarah is shown to be partly a cipher for a narratorial perspective that emphasizes her utility to Abraham, and to God's plans for Abraham. In the LXX it is not Sarah's hardening but her general effacement and paling, shown for example in her colorless reaction to the Lord's prediction of Isaac's birth in Gen 18, and her conformity to the deity's purposes, that contribute to her utility. A general diminishment of Sarah's character is also on view in the *Antiquities*, but with less plain effect on her instrumentality, partly because issues of covenant are often elided there.

Sarah's beauty remains a salient feature of her character in the LXX, but instead of sharing in a complex of plot points that revolve around her appearance in the eyes of others, it contributes to a minor motif tied to her "face." While Sarah's face is attractive in Egypt, it leads Hagar to flee. Abraham's initial description of Sarah as "pretty-faced" (εὐπρόσωπος), moreover, which can imply concealed deceptive intent, proves apt in her contribution to the deception and injury of Abimelech and his household, as is underlined by the king's scolding of Sarah.

Sarah, on balance, actually resembles Abraham more in the LXX than in the MT. Material familiar from the MT is mostly retained: Sarah's disposition of Hagar is still similar to her own disposal in Egypt; Sarah and Abraham's names are both changed, if to even more uncertain effect than is the case in the MT; both characters laugh and remark on Abraham's age when hearing about Isaac's advent; and Sarah embraces Abraham's disregard for others in Gerar. To these notes, however, are added Abraham's thematic undermining of Sarah's initiative with Hagar by his mention of the potential motherhood of his household slave, Masek; the way in which both Abraham and Sarah's first speeches aim at the benefit of Abraham; the blurring in speech of the pair's gendered depictions in the episode with Hagar; and the way Sarah is chided by Abimelech, which recalls both the king's own and Pharaoh's prior criticisms of Abraham.

Another interesting case is that actions of both Sarah and Abraham are explained by the narrator, less than credibly, with reference to their fear: Sarah's lie in the tent, familiar from the MT, is so interpreted, but so also is the attempted justification for Abraham's restaging of the wife-as-sister scheme in Gerar. This may partially anticipate some of the notes of emotion in the Apocryphon, where both characters also show fear.

Given the other narrative operations that combine to restrict Sarah's individuality in the LXX, her increased resemblance to Abraham here seems to contribute to an undermining of her agency, which in turn, again, helps to emphasize her utility to the achievement of the divine promises. This may be partly contrasted with the operation of these characters' similarities in the *Antiquities*, where Sarah's resemblance to Abraham seems to be another way in which his reputation is burnished, at least in attempt, by the narrator. A worthy man must "bring along" a worthy woman—and what worthier woman than one whose traits are, in part, refractions of those of the man?

Sarah in the Genesis Apocryphon

The Genesis Apocryphon is something of an outlier in this study, due not only to the sole surviving manuscript's unfortunate truncation and state of decay, but also to Abraham's role as narrator, which is unique among the works considered. Yet its image of Sarah still offers much of interest, and displays both continuities and developments with the rest of the tradition. Here, my reading reveals a woman who grows swiftly in complexity, evolving over a brief and mercurial trajectory. Sarah in the Apocryphon is inquisitive, vocal, emotional, and shows agency and initiative, as when she initially ignores Abraham's advice to lie about their relationship. Her beauty, familiar from the tradition, is the object of extended meditation in Herqanosh and the other courtiers' verses of praise, but other, new traits are also revealed in the same context, such as her great wisdom and manual dexterity. It is plausible that Sarah's wisdom is revealed in some kind of sapiential exposition to the visiting nobles, and it is possible that this extends to the exhibition of Enochic lore. In any event, although the nobles seek out Abraham due to reports of

his sagacity, it is a report of Sarah's wisdom alone that is relayed to the king in the manuscript remains. But all Sarah's richness here is abruptly and unsatisfyingly distilled into a very limited species of utility: her mechanical sexual receptivity. The central plot development in this section of the Apocryphon is the lacunose encounter between Sarah and the courtiers, but after she voices her lie to save Abraham, Sarah becomes nothing but a disputed object whose worth, as agreed by Abraham, God, and Pharaoh, is coterminous with her sexual inviolability.

Before her reduction to inanimacy, the Apocryphon, interestingly, again, in the voice of Abraham, presents what is perhaps the most appealing portrait of Sarah among the works surveyed. Yet this image is still drawn at least partly with elements that also characterize Abraham himself. The primacy, frequency, and significance of Sarah's speech recalls that of Abraham, and may partly evoke these characters' tie in the MT, especially, that stems from the similarities between their first discourse-level addresses (Gen 12, 16). But much is rather new, or at least expressed in novel ways. The metaphoric image of Sarah and Abraham springing from "one root" is a new formulation of an old idea, though their relationship as brother and sister is still not credible here. The characters' displays of emotion also extend the idea of Abraham and Sarah's fear, first expressed in the LXX, and add weeping to their list of shared reactions. Yet another extension in similarity is Sarah's own reception of gifts in the aftermath of her lengthy stay in Pharaoh's house. But most important is the novel idea of Sarah's great wisdom, a significant advance in the tradition that is also a unique link between Sarah and Abraham here.

Sarah in the *Jewish Antiquities*

In the *Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus, Sarah's character, while still complex and developing, endures some familiar indignities. Her general diminishment here recalls that of the LXX, though it is worth emphasizing that this phenomenon is not uniform throughout the narrative. In fact, her important implied speech and relative independence in Egypt, her participation in Isaac's circumcision, and her background presence in the episode of Isaac's near-

sacrifice, where it is hinted that she could have forced matters to take a different course, are all examples of advances in her character's agency and color.

Her conformity to Abraham, clearly expressed here, has also become an almost routine observation. In the *Antiquities*, however, most of the characters' similarities are new twists on this old theme, lending credence to a growing suspicion that Sarah's resemblance to Abraham is something of a deep trait, a story-level archetypal quality that demands expression in narratives as varied as the ones discussed here. In the *Antiquities*, the characters' similarities are first suggested in their genuine blood tie, the first credible narratorial assertion of such a relationship in the tradition. Lexical play hints at Sarah and Abraham's role-swapping, literally in Egypt, where Sarah is taught to "play her role," as compared to Gerar, where Abraham does the same; likewise in Egypt, Abraham and Sarah are both said to have brought the other along, while Sarah's informing Pharaoh of the truth suggests ties with Abraham's teaching role among the Egyptian savants. This latter note emphasizes Abraham's persuasive power, a mostly new note in the tradition that is heavily emphasized in the *Antiquities*, and this is also a novel addition to Sarah's traits—or at least a significant, explicit extension of something implicit in the accounts of the MT and LXX—in the episode of Ishmael and Hagar's banishment. That the couple share in Isaac's circumcision may also suggest some similarity in purpose; just afterward, too, Sarah is shown to be willing to put Ishmael, a boy she had supposedly treated as her own, at risk, while Abraham counters later with his willingness to kill his son, Isaac, for whom he has special affection. Again, this may be read into the gaps of the MT-LXX tradition, but here it lies much closer to the surface, awaiting collection. Most significantly, I think, Sarah is ordered by God, just as Abraham was; both receive direct divine communication, both are obedient to God's command, and both are shown in the near context of these revelations to be initiating or catalyzing doomed schemes to rectify their childlessness.

A final kind of similarity may be implied in the narrator's treatment of the reputations of Sarah and Abraham, who are both the object of attempts at polishing their qualities, or apologizing for their shortcomings. Many of these endeavors stumble over themselves as they

create further narrative problems, or somehow undermine their goal by inadvertently revealing a different flaw in the character. For Sarah, two of these narratorial efforts result in a plain dilemma in her characterization, as her behavior with Hagar and her treatment of Ishmael are both justified by appeals to Ishmael's purposed role in the family—appeals that seem to be factually contradictory. This feature may serve as one shorthand summary of Sarah's character in the narrative of the *Antiquities*: she is a focus of narratorial “improvements,” though these often break down under close inspection. Both these attempts at renovation and the newly-developed or expanded similarities between her and Abraham combine with other narrative elements, such as the repeated lionization of Abraham, to suggest a narratorial strategy that aims at bolstering Abraham's profile by means that include the retouching of the portrait of “his woman.”

My finding that one of Sarah's deep or archetypal traits is a kind of similarity to Abraham is a discovery that is not entirely welcome—a fact that likely contributes to the probability of its genuine presence in the tradition as surveyed. Does this mean, then, that Sarah is reducible to a shadow of Abraham, even a figment composed as an afterthought for the Abraham narratives, as suggested by Martin Noth with reference to the traditions underlying the text of the MT?¹ I think that the answer, as borne out by the intricacy of the narrative features that contribute to her characterization as revealed in the discussions above, is certainly not. This deep trait is an important, trans-narrative link among these shifting perspectives on Sarah, but to name it as her ultimate distillation would be to commit an act of reductionism at least as blameworthy as those perpetrated by some of the narrative voices engaged in this investigation. It is interesting to note, too, that the phenomenon of Sarah's resemblance to Abraham serves different functions in some of the Second Temple narratives considered. In the LXX, this feature helps to reveal her worth to the narrator, which is her utility to the promises; in the *Antiquities*, it helps to bolster Abraham's

1. Noth, *History*, 151.

stature. The trait's role in the Apocryphon is less clear, but this is also likely the most vital, if sadly broken, retelling of Sarah's story among the narratives treated here.

Another global finding of my study of Sarah is that she is everywhere a complex character, filled with evolving, competing, and sometimes contradictory traits, both within individual narratives and in their synthetic contribution to her enduring image. In the same way, while her utility to Abraham—whether to generate wealth, protect his life, or provide a sexual partner or an heir—alongside her utility to the deity's promises, are undeniable features of Sarah's depiction in the tradition, she cannot with justice be simply flattened to fit these functions. Her individuality in complexity, I think, still sometimes succeeds in escaping the strictures of her narrators' service of an androcentric and patriarchal tradition. Sarah does not mimic Abraham in her rage at being overlooked, and her bold speech and initiatives in the episodes dealing with Hagar and Ishmael actually show Sarah and Abraham at partial cross-purposes. Sarah's skeptical reaction in the tent, though laced with elements that recall Abraham's own responses and disposition, also exhibits her independence by its critique of Abraham and its frank reflection on the unlikelihood of her achieving sexual pleasure. Sarah's birth and nurture of Isaac, while a complex of events that ultimately contributes to patriarchal ends, are acts that could never be anticipated by the doings of Abraham; and her responses to these happenings, whether shame, joy, or some combination of these, are not derived from Abraham's reactions, either. In the Apocryphon, Sarah's initial rejection of Abraham's proposed strategy shows that she is not merely his dim reflection; and though her wisdom is something that identifies her with Abraham, it is a report of her sagacity, not his, that reaches the ears of the king. Even in the *Antiquities*—perhaps the hardest to like of the narratives under consideration here—Sarah surprises as the confidant and revealer of the truth to Pharaoh, and possesses enough latent power and self-will that Abraham is careful to conceal his murderous resolution from her.

Some Contributions of This Study

On a fundamental level, my project focuses on a female character as revealed in the Bible and in ancient retellings of Scripture. Similar investigations, especially those of significant length, are rare; perhaps my work will help to prompt ventures with broadly parallel goals. In the course of my work, I performed careful readings of Sarah in each of her representations in the MT, the LXX, the Apocryphon, and the *Antiquities*. My interpretation of Sarah in the MT joins an ongoing conversation, though, I think, in a narratological register that has not received much play recently. My discussions of the Second Temple retellings of Sarah's story have a greater claim to have helped begin new conversations, at least in hopeful prospect. I think this is especially plain in my treatments of the Apocryphon and the *Antiquities*, but my reading of Sarah in the LXX is also, I believe, the most thorough that has yet been attempted.

A related contribution is implicit in the approach I have taken to these retold materials. My methodological considerations are drawn omnivorously from the work of a number of what might be called classical narrative critics, and make no express claim to novelty, though I have tried to distill these insights into a clear and credible poetics of character and characterization. While this work's primary significance was internal, as it laid a foundation for my examinations of Sarah in these narratives, it may also be conducive to the efforts of others who wish to take a narrative-critical approach to the characters of biblical and cognate literature. More certainly, I think, I have attempted a kind of reading of these Second Temple narratives that can fairly be said to be in its infancy. Again, especially for the Apocryphon (not to mention other Dead Sea narrative materials) and the *Antiquities*, and despite occasional calls for a broadening of methodological perspectives in inquiries into these bodies of literature, there are very few, if any, relevant studies that engage narratological points of view. I will be gratified if my work at least shows the potential rewards of employing a different approach towards these works.

An important feature of narrative criticism is a perspective that highlights the internal operations of a narrative: structural, thematic, rhetorical, and other ties and movements that

contribute to a narrative's aesthetics and its effects on its readers. These are, after all, some of the primary reasons that human beings value narratives in the first place, and I believe that my analysis has shown that regarding these retellings—even a translation—as works with their own integrity is an approach that can pay interpretive dividends. Evidence for this is, I hope, apparent in the discussions above. In my analysis of the LXX, for example, I demonstrate that careful attention to the horizontal interplay of narrative elements reveals a vitiated portrait of Sarah, a reading that challenges the findings of commentators who select one or a few disparities in the tradition as the basis of their interpretations. In my work on the Apocryphon, I show that questions about the degree of influence of gender conventions in other ancient verse on the descriptive poem celebrating Sarah's beauty, wisdom, and skill are better answered when the broader depiction of Sarah in the Apocryphon is considered. In my reading of the *Antiquities*, finally, I establish that the narrator's desire to paint the primary characters in a positive light often founders precisely on the unintended effects of these tweaks to the tradition—a finding to which I am led not by any extraordinary interpretive acumen, but by a simple desire to read the narrative, start to finish, as a narrative, and not only as a deviation from its scriptural precursor.

Much text-critical work has yet to be done on the literature of the Second Temple period, and “higher-level” critique can only be as good as its textual foundations allow. But our texts are certainly the best that they have ever been in the modern era, and they should be explored with all of the methodological tools available to biblical studies, and to the humanities more broadly. Moshe Bernstein has called for reading the Apocryphon as a composition in its own right.² George Brooke has advocated bringing approaches that are well-established outside Qumran studies to bear on the Scrolls.³ Jan Willem van Henten has signaled the possibilities of reading Josephus narrative-critically.⁴ In another venue, I have also argued for a recognition of the

2. Bernstein, “Unity,” 133–34.

3. Brooke, “Bible to Midrash,” 18–19; specifically, these include “post-colonialism, spatial approaches, reader-response analysis, etc.”

4. Van Henten, “Characterization.”

Septuagint's narrative worth on its own terms.⁵ To these efforts I would like to add the contributions of this study. Surely the time has come for serious and sustained narratological (and other) forays into the vast array of early Jewish and Christian literature that eventually found itself outside the canon.

5. Joseph McDonald, "Rewriting the Matriarch: Reading Sarra in the LXX," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, San Diego, CA, Nov. 22, 2014.

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