

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Translator's Note	ix
Introduction	x
PART ONE	
Messianic Mothers in the Bible	01
1 Feminine Genealogy and the Lineage of the House of David	07
2 The Type-Scene of "The Birth of the Messianic Hero"	26
PART TWO	
The Messianic Mother in Rabbinic Literature—Sororal Love and "Ethics of Redemption"	71
3 David's Mother(s) in <i>Yalkut ha-Makhiri</i>	73
4 <i>Gedolah Aveirah Lishmah</i> —From Rabbinic Literature to the Messianic Teachings of R. Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto	86
PART THREE	
The Messianic Mother in the Zoharic Literature	112
5 Lot's Daughters and the Zoharic " <i>Ṭiqla</i> "	124
6 The Burning Face of the <i>Shekhinah</i> —Tamar in <i>Zohar Aḥrei Mot</i>	146
7 The <i>Shekhinah's</i> Exile and Redemption in Ruth and Naomi's Journey	173

CONCLUSION	
Gender Reversal and the Poetics of Redemption	210
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EPILOGUE	
The Messianic Mother in Judaism and Christianity	219
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Bibliography	253
Index	272

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Translator's Note

In this work I have had to make use of many rabbinic texts and have relied upon different translations. The biblical text in this book has largely been quoted from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV)*. The Talmudic sections have made use of *The Soncino Talmud*. Midrash Rabbah translations have been mainly from or based on the *Soncino Midrash Rabbah*. The *Zohar* quotations have been selected from the *Zohar Pritzker Edition*, for the available sections. All italics or emphases in these sources have been added by the author. Lastly, works that have originally appeared in Hebrew and were subsequently translated into English are paginated according to the Hebrew edition. The current translation is of the Hebrew title *Qedeshot u-Qedoshot: Imahot ha-Mashi'ah ba-Mitos ha-Yehudi*. This translation was done with the collaboration of the author.

Introduction

The messianic myth has played a central role in Jewish culture for generations. Eschatological concepts and messianic figures left their mark on grand historical processes and constituted a formative power in the areas of religion, cult, theology, and ritual. Messianic wishes and hopes sprouted within the individual and collective soul, echoed throughout midrashic, apocalyptic, and mystical literature, as well as the folkloric tradition. The roots of the messianic idea lie in the Bible, particularly in the descriptions of the Messiah as an elected son and king, in the visions of the prophets, and in the books of Writings. These messianic ideas also influenced Judeo-Christian discourse and attained surprising interpretations in Christology and the theosophic-kabbalah of the Middle Ages.

This book will illuminate the paradoxical roots of the messianic idea and discuss its evolution from the Bible, through the rabbinic Midrashim, and until the Zoharic literature—all canonized corpuses reflecting foundational notions of Jewish culture. I will focus on the narratives of the biblical foremothers of the Davidic dynasty, which is transformed in the Second Temple literature into the dynasty of “the Messiah son of David.” I claim that the mother of the Messiah does not represent a particular figure, but a genealogical continuum of female figures bonded through an entangled, intertextual tale. In contrast to the biblical narrative that portrays the foundations of the messianic myth, rabbinic Midrashim focus on ethical questions, while the *Zohar* reflects mystical interpretations of these antinomian trends. Yet in all these corpuses, the Messiah is perceived as a chosen son through the merit of his foremothers and their extraordinary deeds.

The Davidic dynasty in the Bible presents a recurring pattern: seduction and sexual transgression initiated by the feminine heroines cause the birth of the elected son. Beginning with Lot’s daughters’ incestuous relations with their father, continuing with Tamar masquerading as a harlot and seducing

her father-in-law, and culminating with Ruth going to the threshing floor and seducing Boaz (an act that results in King David's birth), this overall pattern of deviance brings about the Messiah's birth. We may also add here the story of Rachel and Leah, two sisters sharing one husband through ruses and bedtricks, and Bathsheba's story, which begins with illicit relations and ends with the birth of King Solomon (who symbolizes an additional chosen son of the royal dynasty). This feminine continuum is characterized by a unique motherly and seductive "type-scene" that merits divine justification and constructs the House of David. Therefore, I propose that the Davidic redeemer is the Messiah "through the merit of his mothers."

The enigmatic bond between transgression and redemption will be examined from mythical and gender perspectives, using a variety of literary, psychoanalytic, and religious theories. I will discuss the cultural function of the heroines' sins and clarify the manner in which the recurring narratives of harlotry, seductiveness, and forbidden relations were understood throughout generations of Jewish interpretation. The study of the messianic myth will follow Mircea Eliade, C. G. Jung, George Bataille, Michel Foucault, and others who claim that the profane forms the sacred, and that taboo is conditioned upon its violation.¹ These assumptions will be analyzed in conjunction with gender and feminist theory. Questions regarding the tension between motherhood and seductiveness, or feminine freedom and agency in the Davidic dynasty, have been treated separately from the messianic myth. I will discuss the figure of the messianic mother from the ancient period until the Middle Ages from both of these perspectives. In my opinion, Mary's miraculous conception should be analyzed as a reaction to the biblical Davidic stories; in the epilogue I will outline the polemic regarding the mother of the Messiah in Judaism and early Christianity, and its influence on the *Zohar*.

As we shall see, the messianic mothers present a normative-halakhic ideal, imitated by women of the Nasi House in the rabbinic era; they were identified with the figure of the *Shekhinah* in kabbalistic literature, and they commonly served as archetypes of motherhood and fertility in a reality dominated by famine, oppression, and death. These women symbolize the active choice of motherhood, rather than the exploitation of childbearing for patriarchal needs. The Messiah's birth in the Bible, Midrash, and Kabbalah demonstrates

1 As Bataille writes: "The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it...Organized transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is." Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and Taboo* (New York: Walker and Company, 1962), 65.

the centrality of feminine heroines in the founding texts of Jewish culture and their narrow spaces of freedom. The choice to devote a book to the “messianic mother” stems from my personal and intellectual search for figures who contended with the tension between motherhood and femininity without losing their connection to desires of personal and collective redemption. These figures reflect rich and layered worlds in which feminine subjectivity, maternal experience, sin, and fantasy are bound in a polyphonic embrace transcending and traversing the Jewish tradition.

THE LAYOUT OF THE BOOK

The book will present the messianic myth in the Bible, rabbinic Midrash and Zoharic literature. In each section I will discuss the enigmatic relationship between feminine sexual transgression and messianic redemption, and analyze its proposed solutions throughout the generations. The first two chapters will discuss the biblical continuum that develops from the individual story of each heroine and connects to the collective template shared by all the messianic mothers. This continuum mitigates the severity of the feminine sins, sublimating the heroines’ transgressions while simultaneously broadening their liberty; it thereby intensifies the tension between biblical narrative and law, and illuminates the relations between God, the father, the mother, and the son of the messianic dynasty.

In the third and fourth chapter I will explore the adoption of the messianic type-scene in *Yalkut ha-Makhiri* and examine the story of David’s birth in light of his foremothers’ narratives. The sages suggest their own subversive reading based on the biblical myth and propose a unique ethic derived from the Davidic heroines’ deeds, which I have termed an “ethics of redemption.” In the midrash, the sages deal with these figures as a whole but also explore each story individually: Lot’s daughters give birth to Moab and Ammon through “the seed that comes from another place,” Tamar seduces Judah at the “entrance of Enaim” and is presented as a holy harlot, and Ruth exposes Boaz’s feet and is portrayed as the direct cause of David’s birth.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters will deal with the figure of the *Shekhinah* and her link to the messianic mothers in the kabbalistic literature. Lot’s daughters, Tamar, and Ruth, are depicted in the *Zohar* as agents of cosmic salvation whose sexual transgressions represent an encounter with demonic forces that must be engaged for the sake of redemption. The actions of the messianic mother reflect in the *sefirotic* realm the human ability to influence

divinity and bring about its restoration. Their actions are not only vindicated but also transcend moral and judicial judgments while constructing dynamic connections between heaven and earth. For example, the *Zohar* describes a celestial wheel of souls called *Tiqla*, which is propelled initially by the incestuous act of Lot's daughters and continues moving through the power of Tamar and Ruth's harlotry and seduction, transgressions interpreted as reparations for the world of the dead and living. In a different passage discussing Tamar's covered face at the "entrance of Enaim," the *Zohar* focuses on the mystery of feminine sexuality and connects it to Judgment (*Din*) and the destructive and erotic forces of the *Shekhinah*, which must be assuaged. Zoharic passages about Ruth fluctuate between describing her as the *Shekhinah*, rolling in the dust of exile and in need of masculine and divine external salvation, and conceiving of her as a woman who initiates her own redemption. Over the course of these chapters I will discuss central issues in Zoharic literature, such as the editing process of the *Zohar* and the crystallization of kabbalistic views regarding forbidden relations, sexuality, sin, exile, and redemption. Consequently, in the epilogue, I will suggest that the *Shekhinah* in the *Zohar* represents a mixture of Jewish and Christian perceptions of the messianic mother that developed from ancient times until the Middle Ages.

EVOLUTION OF THE MYTH

The Davidic dynasty is well-known for its exceptional stories. It is possible to claim that characteristics of these biblical stories are in line with feminine oral traditions, whereas the weaving of the stories into rabbinic and Zoharic midrashim reflects a transition from the semiotic world and feminine *chōra* to the symbolic language uniting the hermeneutical and exegetical structure of the "father's tongue." Judicial trends that emerge in rabbinic and Zoharic exegesis follow the biblical course and intensify the dominance of the messianic mothers, while at the same time propose a unique narrative for the heroines' multifacetedness.

I define myth as a story interweaving the divine and human across generations. Following the research of Gershom Scholem, Moshe Idel, Yehuda Liebes, and additional scholars who have discussed the messianic myth in Kabbalah, scholars of the "myth of the hero's birth," like Otto Rank, Alan Dundes, and Joseph Campbell, as well as Robert Alter in the biblical context, I seek to construct a scene of the birth of the Davidic Messiah and subsequently discuss the model that characterizes his mothers. The combination of the motifs

of transgression and redemption in the redeemer's figure and in his foremother's stories reveals a model of chosenness that stems from sexual deviancy, which receives vindication through *tiqqun* (reparation) and repentance. These motifs characterize King David in biblical and rabbinic literature. They also emerge in descriptions of Jesus. In contrast, in the Synoptic Gospels, the main features of the Davidic mothers are attributed to Mary. Therefore, I will explore the centrality of the messianic mother in both religions and discuss the polemical perspectives and mutual influence between rabbinic Midrashim and Christian traditions, which attest to the existence of a messianic nucleus shared by Judaism and early Christianity.

The central motif in the Davidic myth is the Messiah's foremothers' sexual subversiveness, a subject that I will examine in consideration of the scholarship of David Biale, Daniel Boyarin, Wendy Doniger, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, Charlotte Fonrobert, and additional scholars who have discussed conceptions of corporeality and sexuality in biblical and midrashic literature. Alongside the feminine ruse and dominance, the covenant between the Davidic mothers and God is prominent and reflected in the ambivalent treatment of sexual transgression. In rabbinic literature these actions are called "sin" (*heit*) and "transgression" (*aveirah*)—yet it is precisely these deeds that are ultimately vindicated. Compared to the women, the men are weak and mostly marginal figures, unaware of the feminine schemes. Other aspects of the myth, such as the perception of the elected son, his connection to his mother, and various motivations for the transgression, change from corpus to corpus and will be discussed throughout the study.

MYTH AND GENDER

This book seeks to present a multilayered picture of the messianic mother, her personality and voice. The prevalent division between the mother figure and the sexual women—between Eve and Lilith, the virgin and harlot—will stand at the base of this discussion. Central questions that I will examine include: the possibility of separating motherhood from seduction in the Davidic stories, and whether these figures are exploited and coerced to use their bodies, or whether they act of their own volition, liberty, and agency. The premise in the ancient world is that an abandoned woman would play the role of a seducer and deceiver in order to survive. However, the Davidic mothers are not marginal or vulnerable figures; rather, in each story their independence is highlighted. The question regarding their freedom, therefore, is not so simple and

can be interpreted in many ways: as the heroines' autonomous choice to use their bodies to accomplish their goals, as an exploitation of men for the sake of pregnancy, as an expression of the divine plan, or simply as patriarchal oppression. From a psychoanalytic perspective, here is a pattern of oedipal relations between the heroines and actual or symbolic father figures. Thus, the forbidden relation between "father" and "daughter" allows the sacred and messianic link between "mother" and "son." In the dynastic stories, illicit relations, harlotry, and seduction constitute the foundation of civilization and correspondingly establish biblical law upon the violated taboo.

The genealogical sequence of the messianic dynasty reflects a paradoxical stance in which each heroine's story presents a discrete deed, yet the conjoined stories form a deterministic chain of sexual transgression defining the boundaries of the law. The dynastic structure offers a solution for the individual feminine figures as free agents and autonomous subjects. The stories' gradual development, mitigating severe sexual transgression, expanding choice, and assuaging dire circumstances, demonstrates the feminine development within reparation. By situating the feminine genealogy at the Book of Ruth's conclusion, the maternal responsibility of the dynastic heroines regarding their "symbolic daughters" is highlighted, as well as the feminine redemption sprouting forth from the ensemble of Davidic stories.

This book is based on central studies in feminist, gender, and psychoanalytic literature. In my opinion, the figure of the messianic mother represents an axis around which foundational topics in gender theory and feminist criticism should be analyzed. Here I follow Adrienne Rich, who discussed the gap between motherhood as a "patriarchal institution" and motherhood as a "private experience" for women; Simone de Beauvoir, who explored the connection between the degradation of the mother and her adoration as a "goddess," and examined the danger that the mother symbolizes for her son as a reminder to him of his mortality; Julia Kristeva, who examined the characteristics of the mother in Christian myth and the mother's symbolic lure and repulsion in both an individual's psyche and the annals of religion and culture; Hélène Cixous, Jessica Benjamin, and Luce Irigaray, who dealt with the uniqueness of the feminine and maternal voice and analyzed the brutal attempts to repress and silence it; as well as Phyllis Tribble, Ilana Pardes, Mieke Bal, Esther Fuchs, and other scholars who illuminated subversive voices and gender critical readings in biblical literature. Following these studies, I seek to depict the messianic mother's figure and discuss her connection to the messianic son, the father, God, and additional women in her world.

Even though the Messiah is the Messiah through the merit of his foremothers, it is impossible to ignore the centrality of the son in the Jewish messianic myth. The perception of the redeemer as an idealized masculine figure fits other cultural myths of the hero's birth in the ancient world. Therefore, besides the emphasis this book places on the motherly figure, I will also examine the son and the means by which his chosenness is anticipated in his foremothers' stories. In many ways, King David represents the pinnacle of the Judean dynasty. Despite his description as the Messiah in the Bible, David is not unequivocally depicted as an eschatological hero, but rather as a chosen king anointed with oil. In rabbinic and Second Temple literature, like Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, and Christian Gospels, the elected status of the Davidic dynasty is developed and the "Scion of David" is presented as both a historical figure as well a transtemporal and eternal mythic symbol. Rabbinic literature hints that David is not only the father of the Messiah, but that he himself will be resurrected in the future and will redeem, as it is written in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds.² Additionally, in the continuation of this messianic discussion in Tractate Sanhedrin, it is said that David symbolizes the "viceroys" who, sitting to the right of the emperor, represents God or the future Messiah.³ David's figure will be analyzed below in light of his birth story in the later Midrash and in connection to his dynastic mothers. The paradox of perceiving him as an actual historical figure—yet also as one who, in the future, will return—signifies a parallel to Jesus' figure. In the epilogue, I will discuss the motif of repentance linked to David and Jesus as well as the hope planted in them both, even before their births. The tense anticipation of the coming of the redeemer is shared by Judaism and Christianity; in both religions it is presented as a paradoxical desire that cannot come to fruition. As Kafka said, "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last."⁴

2 The quotations are: "If the King Messiah comes from among the living, his name will be David; if from among the dead, his name will be David as well" and "The Holy One, blessed be He, will raise up another David for us." *b. Sanhedrin* 98b; *y. Berakhot* 2:4 [13d]; *Zohar* 1:82b. On the concept of David as the future Messiah, see Yehuda Liebes, "Mazmiah Qeren Yeshu'ah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 313-49; Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 79-90.

3 As is written in *b. Hagigah* 14a, "Till thrones were place ... one [throne] for Him, and one for David." In contrast, Rashi in *b. Sanhedrin* 98b interprets that the "new" David is acting as the emperor and the "old" David as the viceroys.

4 Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 81.

By bringing together fields that are generally discussed separately—myth and gender, and more precisely, the research of the messianic myth through a feminine perspective and gender analytic tools—I will analyze the figure of the messianic mother in Jewish culture. By highlighting the antinomian model and sexual transgression of the Davidic heroines, we may illuminate the background from which the Christian messianic myth blooms. I claim that Mary symbolizes a biblical “return of the repressed,” which is not only echoed in the Gospels of Mathew and Luke but also in rabbinic traditions alluding to Jesus’s genealogy, in later Midrashim, and in the *Zohar*. The link between Mary’s model of virginity and the sexual licentiousness of the Davidic mothers is exposed in connection to the figure of the *Shekhinah*, and it stresses the centrality of the redeemer’s mother in Judaism and Christianity. Both religions are engaged in the paradoxical encounter between feminine transgression and redemption.

Messianic Mothers in the Bible

*For surely I know the plans I have for you,
says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm,
to give you a future with hope (Jeremiah 29:11)*

When we examine the royal dynasty in the Bible, starting from the tribe of Judah and continuing until King David, a surprising connection emerges from the stories of the dynastic mothers: Leah gives birth to Judah while entangled between Rachel and Jacob. Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and gives birth to Perez and Zerah with Judah, her husbands' father. Ruth seduces Boaz on the threshing floor and gives birth to Obed, the grandfather of David. Bathsheba gives birth to Solomon through an adulterous relation with David. In addition, we include the stories of Lot's daughters, the foremothers of Ruth, who give birth to Moab and Ammon through incestuous relations with their father, and the later Midrashim from *Yalkut ha-Makhiri*, which state that David was born through an extramarital relationship between Jesse, his wife, and his maidservant.

All of these stories are located on the spectrum between forbidden relations (according to its biblical definition, as in the case of Lot's daughters and Bathsheba), licentiousness and prostitution (as in the story of Tamar), and a problematic feminine seductiveness (evident in the stories of Ruth, Rachel and Leah, and David's mother). Although there are essential differences between forbidden sexual relations and acts of seduction or harlotry, it is still possible to say that all the sons of the biblical Davidic dynasty were born through questionable copulation, embodying the paradoxical connection between transgression, messianism, and redemption.¹

In contrast to claims which marginalize the messianic mother in the Jewish narrative and view her as a myth originating in Christianity, this book wishes to highlight the mother's centrality in the royal and messianic myth of the Bible.

1 David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 13-20.

In order to investigate the development of this figure from the ancient world through the rabbinic exegesis and the *Zohar*, I will focus on the provocative stories of the mothers of the House of David: the tales of the daughters of Lot, Tamar, and Ruth. As we will see, the recurring motif in these stories (Genesis Ch. 19, 38, and the Book of Ruth) demonstrates the crucial influence of the mother on transforming her child into “the chosen son” and messianic hero.

RUTH, TAMAR, AND LOT’S DAUGHTERS

The decision to examine the stories of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, and Ruth is based on considerations of form and content. Lot’s daughters mark the first maternal link of the chain, beginning with Ammon and Moab, whose descendants beget Ruth the Moabite.² Tamar gives birth to Perez, the son of Judah, constituting the first point in the Jewish lineage, whereas the Book of Ruth formulates a conclusion to its predecessors and informs us about the birth of King David. Although Lot’s daughters are not mentioned in the book, they are, however, present in the background of the seduction on the threshing floor, a scene which recalls the sexual act in the cave of Zoar that resulted in Moab’s birth. The stories of these four heroines utilize idiomatic expressions and shared motifs such as disguises, isolated locations, drunkenness, seduction, and concealment, thereby demonstrating the development of the feminine narrative from the Book of Genesis until the era of the kings.

Tamar, Ruth, and Lot’s daughters clearly initiate the messianic birth scenes, for the men “did not know when the women lay or arose.” Unlike these four heroines, Rachel and Leah are traded by men and passed from their father to Jacob, who is now responsible for their fate. Similarly, Bathsheba is portrayed as a dominating mother who worries for her son’s kingship (I Kings 1), yet the portrayal of her being taken by David (II Samuel 11), is utterly dissimilar to her former control.³ While focusing on the connections between Ruth, Tamar, and Lot’s daughters, I will reference Rachel, Leah, and Bathsheba to the extent that they illuminate the feminine and messianic drama in the House of David.

2 Harold Fisch, “Ruth and the Structure of the Covenant History,” *Vetus Testament* 32 (1982): 425-437; Arthur B. Brenner, “Onan, the Levirate Marriage and the Genealogy of the Messiah,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 10 (1962): 701-21; Yair Zakovitch, “The Threshing-Floor Scene in Ruth,” *Shnaton* 3 (1978-1979): 29-33.

3 In spite of Bathsheba’s passivity in II Samuel, 11:4, a later Midrash assigns her both initiative and promiscuity, similar to that of her predecessors. See Louis Ginzberg, *Ginze Schechter* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), 1:166.

1. Intertextuality in the Book of Ruth

Within the academic literature, we can outline three trends exploring the connections between Ruth, Tamar, and Lot's daughters. Many scholars have emphasized the intertextual style of the Book of Ruth, which reworks stories of the past. In the terminology of Harold Fisch, Lot's daughters represent the primitive extreme of the story model, Tamar's actions symbolize the middle component, whereas the Book of Ruth represents a sophisticated variation of a heroine who "redeems" her foremothers and grants legitimization to their actions.⁴ David Biale highlights the potency of the Judean heroines' "subverting sexuality," where they appear to act in service of the patriarchy, even as they disrupt the order with their erotic initiatives. He claims that the positioning of their stories at the closing of the Book of Ruth attests to the centrality of the Davidic narrative to the biblical canon.⁵ Ilana Pardes views the relationship of Ruth and Naomi as an "idyllic writing" of the struggle between Rachel and Leah and an expression of love between two women, uncommon in biblical stories.⁶ Nevertheless, other researchers emphasize the concealed tension between Ruth and Naomi and claim that Naomi exploits the 'foreign woman' for her own purposes.⁷ Mieke Bal draws attention to Ruth's vulnerability at the end of the Book, when she is without the support of other heroines. For Bal, the compilation of the stories of Rachel and Leah, Tamar, Ruth, and Lot's daughters constructs a succession of "bitter stories" which are reflected in each other, a type of *mise en abyme* characterized by irony.⁸ Yair Zakovitch and Avigdor Shinan emphasize the difference between the positive figure of Ruth, on the one hand, and the stories of Tamar and Lot's daughters, on the other hand, which, like the sin of David and Bathsheba, reflect an anti-Judean composition intended to slander the Davidic dynasty.⁹ If their portrayal is

4 Fisch, "Ruth," 425-37.

5 Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 11-32; Amy Jill Levine, "Ruth," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 78-84.

6 Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible—A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 60-70, 98-117.

7 Danna Nolan-Fewell and David Gunn, "A Son is Born to Naomi," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 99-108; Michal Ben-Naftali, *Chronicle of Separation: On Deconstruction's Disillusioned Love* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 15-53.

8 Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 68-103, and specifically 83-5.

9 Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, *The Story of Judah and Tamar* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 1992), 219-28, 240-8. In contrast to "the actual crisis" of Boaz and Ruth, they claim that Lot's daughters use unjustified deceit. Zakovitch, "The Threshing-Floor Scene"; Yair Zakovitch, *Ruth: Introduction and Commentary. Miqra' le-Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv and

meant to be fundamentally negative, why did the author of the Book of Ruth choose to situate these heroines together within the blessing of the elders? This choice attests to the author's fondness for these characters, who unify the split between the positive mother figure (or "the virgin"), and the erotic woman, identified with Tamar and Lot's daughters. A similar rift can be found in the adoration of Mary, mother of Jesus, in the Synoptic Gospels, when compared with the Davidic mothers, an issue that we will return to in the epilogue.

This positive attitude to the stories of Tamar, Ruth, and Lot's daughters is an essential component of the Davidic narrative. The Book of Ruth is designed to complete the missing details regarding the origin of King David, and therefore the linking of these stories is central to understanding his character in the Book of Samuel. Thus, the Book of Ruth constitutes an integral intertextual link in relation to the transmission of the biblical royal dynasty and in relation to its blossoming future. In a structural analysis that focuses on the development of the feminine and messianic model, Ruth assuages the severe sexual transgressions of her ancestors not only in a literary manner, but also on the ethical and moral plane. These stories conduct a challenging dialogue with the biblical law and represent a fertile tension created between the *nomos* and the *narrative* in the tales of the mothers of the House of David.¹⁰

2. The Feminine Ruse in the Mirror of Feminist Criticism

A prominent trend in feminist theory is the inclination to define the feminine ruse of the biblical heroines as a patriarchal tool for the purpose of reproduction. For instance, Athalya Brenner claims that these heroines represent an example of 'positive foreign women' that have dedicated themselves on behalf of the Israelite people, through denying their own volition.¹¹ Esther Fuchs claims that the theme of these stories is older men

Jerusalem: Am Oved and Magnes Press, 1990), 24-33, 112-8; Yair Zakovitch, *David: From Shepherd to Messiah* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1995), 24-35, 181-99.

10 On sublimation of the narrative in the Book of Ruth, see Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 166-96; Mishael M. Caspi and Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road: Ruth, Naomi and the Female Journey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 175-6; Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 80, finds in the Book of Ruth apotheosis of the 'seduction scene.'

11 Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), Ch. 6, 9; Athalya Brenner, *Ruth and Naomi* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1988), 29-48, 51-60.

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