

TORAH

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Society of Biblical Literature



The Bible and Women  
An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History

Edited by Jorunn Økland, Irmtraud Fischer,  
Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Adriana Valerio



The Bible and Women  
Hebrew Bible/Old Testament  
Volume 1.1: Torah

# TORAH

*Edited by*

Irmtraud Fischer and Mercedes Navarro Puerto,  
with Andrea Taschl-Erber

Editor of English Edition: Jorunn Økland

Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta

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## CONTENTS

Preface to the English Edition .....	vii
Introduction—Women, Bible and Reception History: An International Project in Theology and Gender Studies <i>Jorunn Økland, Irmtraud Fischer, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, Adriana Valerio</i> .....	1
PART 1: THE BIBLE AS A DOCUMENT ARISING WITHIN A HISTORICAL EPOCH	
Ancient Near Eastern Pictures as Keys to Biblical Texts <i>Silvia Schroer</i> .....	31
Archaeology—A Window to the Lives of Israelite Women <i>Carol Meyers</i> .....	61
The Status of Women in the Legal Texts of the Ancient Near East <i>Sophie Démare-Lafont</i> .....	109
Torah and Canon: Challenges and Perspectives <i>Donatella Scaiola</i> .....	133
PART 2: WOMEN TEXTS AND GENDER-RELEVANT ISSUES IN THE TORAH	
Genealogy as a Means of Historical Representation in the Torah and the Role of Women in the Genealogical System <i>Thomas Hieke</i> .....	151
Divine Image and Likeness: Women and Men in Genesis 1–3 as an Open System in the Context of Genesis 1–11 <i>Mercedes Navarro Puerto</i> .....	193

On the Significance of the “Women Texts” in the Ancestral Narratives <i>Irmtraud Fischer</i> .....	251
The Female Saviors of Israel’s Liberator: Twelve “Daughters” in Exodus 1 and 2 <i>Jopie Siebert-Hommes</i> .....	295
Zipporah: The Vanishing of a Wife <i>Ursula Rapp</i> .....	313
Miriam, Primordial Political Figure in the Exodus <i>Mercedes García Bachmann</i> .....	329
Gender and Cult: “Pure” and “Impure” as Gender-Relevant Categories <i>Dorothea Erbele-Küster</i> .....	375
Women between Subordination and Independence: Reflections on Gender-Related Legal Texts of the Torah <i>Karin Finsterbusch</i> .....	407
Bibliography .....	437
Contributors.....	473
Index of Ancient Sources.....	475

## PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The current volume is the first in a series published simultaneously in Spanish, Italian, German, and English. Its aim is to present a history of the reception of the Bible as embedded in Western cultural history and to focus particularly on gender-relevant biblical themes, biblical female characters, and women recipients of the Bible.

The first volume of this encyclopedic project in cultural history and exegesis presents the entire project (“Introduction—Women, Bible, and Reception History: An International Project in Theology and Gender Research,” 1–30) and explains the reasons for its layout. In particular, the adoption of the basic structure of the Jewish canon and a strong focus on tradition is defended. This volume also sets the standard for our way of addressing canonicity, social, historical, and legal backgrounds, and iconography.

In a project of this scale, the first volume is exemplary of the further ones; on the other hand, it is also a “practice volume” where the editors learn what will need special attention in future volumes. As examples we could first mention that this English version is published some time after the German version (the editorial language of this particular volume). Second, there is a certain discrepancy between the reality of this volume and the principles of the project as outlined in the introduction, where it is stated aim to include as many nationalities, linguistic backgrounds, genders, and religious/confessional affiliations as possible—not just in the project as a whole but in each volume. The fact that in this volume there are only two scholars outside of Continental Europe, Mercedes García Bachmann (Argentina) and Carol Meyers (United States), and only one male contributor, Thomas Hieke, was not according to plan. We are still grateful that scholars from ten different countries (more than most volumes of a similar size!) have helped us to produce a representative overview over the gender-relevant questions with regard to the Torah and its sociohistorical context, and we want to thank them all for constructive collaboration! It will be clear to readers that the contributors who are present in this volume represent the widest possible range of methodological and hermeneutical approaches. Not all approaches will be equally

familiar within all linguistic contexts. For example, the psychoanthropological-narratological approach to the creation narratives, which also betrays a strong systematic interest, will be less familiar to an Anglophone audience, whereas the liberation theological approach to Miriam may be less familiar to an Italian audience. Such is the nature of a multilingual, multicultural project.

On behalf of all the general editors I want to express also in this English version our deepest thanks and gratitude to the sponsors who have made the project and this volume in particular possible: the Mary Ward sisters in Madrid; the Karl-Franz University of Graz and its vice-rector and the Dean of the Faculty of Theology for hosting the colloquium in preparation of the chapters presented here; the City of Graz and the County of Steiermark, whom we also want to acknowledge; and Fondazione Pasquale Valerio per la Storia delle Donne, who have sponsored most of the translations.

Our deepest thanks also go to the four publishing houses for taking on this project. Through their publishing and sale of the volumes, they further contribute to securing the volumes to follow this one. We want to thank Kohlhammer, represented by Jürgen Schneider, who has advised us along the way and sponsored the launch conference for editors in Naples in 2006. Above all, in this English version we want to thank the Society of Biblical Literature, especially Kent Richards, who championed the project. We also want to thank SBL's publications program, directed by Bob Buller, for help and advice with the English edition.

Dr. Andrea Taschl-Erber, based in Graz, has borne nearly all of the practical organization of this large-scale publication project in a very impressive way since 2008. She has been responsible for contracts, production of style sheets, correspondence with volume editors, general editors, and, for this particular volume, the chapter authors. In addition, she has also put in countless hours in the editorial process. We want to thank Dr. Antonio Perna for translation of information at short notice and for helping us to track the translations.

For the English version, the editorial process and some translation has been sponsored by the University of Oslo's Centre for Gender Research and the Norwegian Research Council. I, Jorunn Økland, would finally like to thank my wonderful assistants, Chantal Jackson and Stefanie Schön, for working extremely hard and diligently on this English version of the volume jointly with me.

INTRODUCTION—WOMEN, BIBLE, AND RECEPTION  
HISTORY: AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT IN THEOLOGY  
AND GENDER RESEARCH

*Irmtraud Fischer – Jorunn Økland –  
Mercedes Navarro Puerto – Adriana Valerio*

The idea of this large-scale project originated in the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR). Irmtraud Fischer and Adriana Valerio have both been presidents of this twenty-five-year-old association of women theological scholars (2001–2003 and 2003–2007, respectively). From the start, the society has had members in America as well as in northern and southern Europe, but it was for a long time dominated by the “northwestern belt” of the German-, English-, and Flemish-speaking regions. In our work, it became increasingly clear that the northwestern belt’s scant reception of gender research conducted in the Romance countries—and vice-versa—was only partly due to a difference in mentality and research tradition.<sup>1</sup> Above all, it was due to a linguistic problem.

In December 2004, on the way to a colloquium on gender research at the Centro per le Scienze Religiose in Trento, Italy, Adriana Valerio and Irmtraud Fischer decided to undertake a reception-historical research project on women that, through the connection of the Bible, history, art history, philosophy, and the letters, would include not only the greatest possible number of women scholars but also establish better connections for theological gender research in Europe. With this intention, an Italian historian (Valerio) and a German-speaking Old Testament scholar (Fischer) asked Mercedes Navarro Puerto, who has published studies on both the Old and the New Testaments

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1. These differences still become evident in the personality differences between the editors, and they can be traced in this introductory chapter. We have attempted to exemplify particular issues from each linguistic context. The various chapters of this volume put in relief the different linguistic domains with their respective horizons of thought and research traditions.

and specializes in the psychology of religion, and Norwegian Jorunn Økland, who was at that time teaching New Testament studies in Sheffield, England, to collaborate as editors for the Spanish- and English-speaking regions. All four series editors, united by their common interest in the Bible and its reception history, came together for their first meeting in Naples in December 2006.

## 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

### 1.1. A VAST NETWORK OF LINGUISTIC DOMAINS AND GROUPS OF RECIPIENTS

This project is ground-breaking not only in its focus on feminist-exegesis-*cum*-reception-history but also in its large scale of international cooperation and multilingual character. The general editors entrust the responsibility for the various volumes to internationally recognized scholars. They, in turn, solicit contributions from researchers who are already distinguished through publications in their respective fields.

Each volume will be evaluated approximately one-and-a-half years before its publication in a dedicated research colloquium, where the contributions will be critically discussed. This will, on the one hand, guarantee their quality and, on the other hand, promote the creation of new networks of scholars working in the field of gender research in scientific communities of different linguistic regions.

The work will appear more or less simultaneously in four languages: English, Italian, German, and Spanish. This decision was a topic of hot discussion because some thought an English publication would suffice. Nevertheless, for several reasons we believe that the translations are useful even though they constitute the most costly aspect of this project.<sup>2</sup> By publishing in four languages, we hope to extend the reception of the scientific literature appearing in each of the four linguistic areas into the other regions. Now, certainly, scholarly literature in English is noted internationally, while this cannot be generally said (any longer) about sound scholarship in the other three languages. Moreover, publications in the *lingua franca* are read more commonly in the scientific context than in the fields where theological research is applied in practice. So, in order to make the results of research on women also truly accessible to the general public interested in theology, translations are necessary.

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2. We thank the Fondazione Valerio per la Storia delle Donne for spearheading the translation of this project.

These four languages represent linguistic communities in which gender research is already well underway. Certainly, it would also be useful to add French or at least one of the Slavic languages. However, it is a sad fact that thus far few scholars doing gender research in theology have published in these languages. The reasons for this situation are found in university systems that relegate the subject of theology almost exclusively to educational institutions (seminaries) supported by religious communities. Be that as it may, we make our best efforts to invite scholars from these linguistic areas to also contribute.

## 1.2. A PROJECT IN THE HISTORY OF THEOLOGY AND CULTURE

Every research project has an academic context, with regional, historical, and sociological limitations. However, this cannot imply that the formulation of the research question is limited to this geographical, temporal, and social space.

### 1.2.1. An *International* Project of *Western* Religious History

From its emergence, this project has been conceived with a focus on European theological research on women but, of course, with an international extension. Yet a research interest centered on Western culture can neither ignore the past five hundred years in North and South America nor exclude women and gender scholars of worldwide significance. The global outlook must above all be present in studies of biblical reception during the past two hundred years. We are conscious that “global” is a magic word that can in reality never be reached in the field of scholarship, since “global” in distinct questions can only be conceived regionally. Whoever is not conscious of this fact runs the risk of promoting a new form of colonialism. Europe has a colonial past and is still privileged in many ways, but the tiny continent of Europe is no longer the center of the world. Thus the mention of “Europe and the West” in this project is a sobering acknowledgement of our own limitations, not a self-celebratory form of universalism. We need to explore new, decentered understandings of what Europe and the West is in a global context where the centers of gravity have shifted to the opposite side of the globe, above all to China. This situation frees us up to think more self-critically about our own history, also in gender terms.

The project was from the beginning envisioned as an ecumenical one, that is, with the possible collaboration of all main Christian denominations as well as Judaism. Given the history of its emergence, *The Bible and Women* is carried on by four Christian theologians from the different linguistic and scientific traditions in whose languages the work will be published. With respect to Judaism, American biblical scholar Adele Berlin is the advisor for

the entire series. Furthermore, there will be three volumes of reception history relative to the Hebrew Bible in Judaism, which also grounds the decision in favor of the canonical distribution and the order of the books as presented in the Hebrew Bible. Certain volume editors come from the Jewish tradition, and the attribution of the articles in the other volumes should, according to the principle of the greatest possible diversity, be made not only with respect to the linguistic regions but also with regard to religious denominations.

Who in the end becomes involved in this project thus depends on factors such as the distribution among different countries, linguistic groups, and religious contexts. Male scholars who openly address the questions of gender research and have conducted pertinent studies are also invited to collaborate. However, should some volumes nevertheless give more importance to a particular region or context or contain only a small number of contributions from men, this may be because of different research specializations or because of refusals due to the impossibility of collaboration within a set time limit.

### 1.2.2. *THE* Book of Western Culture as an Object of Research

The Bible is considered *the* book of Western culture. Undoubtedly, no other written work has so fundamentally influenced this culture as the Bible, which originated mainly in Israelite/Jewish cultures in the southwestern corner of Asia and in the Mediterranean world. From ethics through to legal conceptions to philosophy and art, this book has had an imposing effect. Each generation, region, and epoch actualizes different aspects of the Bible's meaning potential, and these actualizations have in turn accumulated to an extremely variegated reception history. Some of the actualizations may appear to be episodic curiosities, while others have formed the mainstream of biblical exegesis. Nevertheless, for almost all periods and contexts, it is possible to recognize that biblical actualizations by women are numerically few and that, in most cases, women's traditions were marginalized or even interrupted. Even a brilliant biblical exegesis such as that represented by Christine de Pizan's *City of the Ladies* received opposition in its own time, and, although it certainly remained present for a long time in discussions about the history of interpretation and culture, it was finally intentionally forgotten, and feminist researchers had to recover it anew in the modern period.<sup>3</sup>

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3. One of the most outstanding projects in the history of exegesis is the series of volumes edited by Giuseppe Barbaglio, *La Bibbia nella Storia* (Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 1985–), whose most recent volume is Adriana Valerio, ed., *Donne e Bibbia: Storia ed Egesi* (*La Bibbia nella Storia* 21; Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 2006).

### 1.2.3. Women's History is No Independent Chapter but an Integral Part of History

This research project aims to bring to light the reception by women that has either been ignored or marginalized by the malestream history of exegesis or only considered to be of regional significance; it does not, however, intend to write a history that merely compensates for the exclusions of previous malestream scholarship. In fact, that would mean simply adding one distinctive chapter—albeit a long one—to the reception history that has already been established. Biblical interpretation by women and the exegesis of biblical texts concerning women do not represent compensations to a global vision largely developed as “his-story.”<sup>4</sup> Actually, this “reception his-story” excludes large bodies of relevant material and must therefore be fundamentally rewritten: reception history, like general history, may only bear this title if it does not exclude half of the population as a priori insignificant. The present project, therefore, is not satisfied with exploring some niches; it enters into mainstream research discussions, for instance by introducing archive materials that have been neglected for a long time (in part even because access to them was denied), by raising necessary gender-relevant questions and hermeneutic discussions, or by pointing out the areas where religious communities seem to want to avoid inculturation. They are all too frequently the areas that constitute the cornerstones of an egalitarian order with respect to gender, social status, and ethnic background.

### 1.2.4. The Inculturation of the Bible in Societies with Gender Democracy

Until this day, the theological argument for maintaining gender inequality in many religious contexts (especially in the Catholic Church) draws on biblical texts *and* church tradition. It has gradually become clearer, thanks to highly developed hermeneutics and historical research on the Bible, that the Bible cannot be used to legitimize oppression of women and/or marginalization of their concerns. At best, some of its individual texts can be applied to such purposes. Since this is also becoming progressively clear to the churches that reject the equality of the sexes, the legitimization of the prevalence of the

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4. This term, borrowed from feminist historiography, has already been introduced into the discourse of feminist-theological historiography by Charlotte Methuen. See her “Stranger in a Strange Land: Reflections on History and Identity,” in *Feministische Zugänge zu Geschichte und Religion* (ed. Angela Berlis and Charlotte Methuen; Jahrbuch der Europäischen Gesellschaft für theologische Forschung von Frauen 8; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 41–68.

male gender is increasingly based on “the weight of the tradition.” Of course, certain traditions are widespread and in many ways more effective than the biblical texts themselves, for example, the exegesis of the paradise narrative. The entire development of tradition, which is an integral part of divine revelation both in Judaism and in some parts of Christianity, has nevertheless still been insufficiently exposed to critical analysis. In the absence of such in-depth scrutiny and analysis, the formulation of generalizing arguments that apply constantly throughout history in favor of a seamless patriarchal tradition proves very problematic.

The project *The Bible and Women* accordingly understands itself as that contemporary part of reception history that attempts to actualize the Bible and its history of exegesis for societies with gender democracy and to track biblical views of the relation between the genders as well as their cultural development. From this point of view, the project is an attempt at inculturation, which inquires the possibilities of a gender-fair, biblically reasoned theological anthropology, and in the process critically considers Scripture and tradition because each one of them cannot alone eradicate invalid arguments used, especially in ultraconservative circles.

Now, Scripture and tradition certainly do not have the same value in all churches. The Protestant Christian denominations that do not operate with a clear notion of “tradition” (or even reject tradition as authority) still *function* as traditions when analyzed in an etic (i.e., from the outside) perspective. Even when studying reception history in a narrow sense, as a sequence of authoritative biblical interpretations, it is clear that also the authoritative interpreters in the Protestant tradition who all claim to adhere to *sola scriptura* have read this Scripture in radically different ways and that their differences can be partly traced back to reading conventions—that is, traditions for dealing with the text—as well as to the interpreters’ historical contexts.

#### 1.2.5. Without the Pretension of Encyclopedic Exhaustiveness

*The Bible and Women* is not only an ambitious project through its international elaboration of the subject matter but also because it seeks to cover all the periods of reception history primarily in Western culture. Of the projected volumes, following the logic of the distribution of the canon, five in all will deal with the Bible, three with the Hebrew Bible and two with the New Testament. The subsequent volumes will attempt to cover, without gaps, the history of inculturated biblical reception, particularly in the four linguistic regions. This enterprise explains the subtitle “Encyclopedia” present in some versions of this work. It refers to the *integral* and *continuous* nature of the historical treatment of the *subject matter*, not, however, to a pretension to cover every-

thing exhaustively. The separate volumes will assemble neither all the biblical interpretations of a given period nor pretend to study geographically all the centers of exegesis. The term “encyclopedia” expresses the common concept of the volumes, that they are *not* a series of feminist essays on the topic of reception history.<sup>5</sup> The Bible and Women is neither an encyclopedia with entries on individual women of the Bible<sup>6</sup> or individual woman exegetes<sup>7</sup> nor a series aiming at making women of the Bible visible and reading them from a gender-critical perspective;<sup>8</sup> moreover, it is not a feminist commentary on the Bible<sup>9</sup> with an attached *Wirkungsgeschichte*, nor is it a reception history of the female biblical characters<sup>10</sup> throughout different periods. The project indeed intends to present in an *exemplary way* the entire history of the Bible and its interpretation with regard to women and gender-relevant questions for the cultural regions dealt with. While the volumes will cover the first millennium of reception history mainly in the geographical regions of the Mediterranean and to a certain extent Europe, in the course of the second millennium the perspective constantly widens, from the *conquistadores* who in their own particular way brought the Bible to today’s South America, then in the nineteenth century, when European missionary societies brought the Bible to Africa and Eastern Asia. A fully global view is reached with volume 9, which will deal with academic feminist exegesis in the twentieth century.

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5. In contrast to the volumes in the Feminist Companion to the Bible series edited by Athalya Brenner (18 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2001).

6. In contrast to Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

7. The volumes of Elisabeth Gössmann, ed., *Das wohlgelehrte Frauenzimmer* (8 vols. and a special volume; Archiv für philosophie- und theologieggeschichtliche Frauenforschung; Munich: Iudicium, 1984–2004), are devoted to writings of individual women who also commented on the Bible.

8. Collections of this kind exist in all four languages. See, for example, in Spanish, the different volumes of the collection *En clave de mujer*, edited by I. Gómez-Acebo, and *Aletheia*, edited by ATE (Asociación de Teólogas Españolas).

9. In contrast to Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women’s Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition with Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), as well as to Louise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (3rd ed.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Sonderausgabe, 2007), who comment on the biblical books. All these works are invaluable resources for our project.

10. On this, see, for example, Andrea Taschl-Erber, *Maria von Magdala—erste Apostolin? Joh 20,1–18: Tradition und Relecture* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007); and John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

### 1.2.6. The Reception of the Bible Does Not Occur Only in Exegesis

Bible reception does not, however, take place only in theological research. *Reception in art* has been at least as influential as that in exegesis. We are thinking above all of visual arts, paintings and statuary, although also of music and literature. Apart from some particular periods and cultural locations, biblical texts that have formed part of the (often subconscious) cultural code of the West until today have not been directly influential in their own right but rather exercised their influence through their own emulations, interpretations, and configurations in such other media as art, literature, liturgies, and sermons.

Throughout the majority of the history of Christianity, ordinary Christians have not personally owned a Bible or even been able to read the Bible. Even fewer have had the education needed to access the exegetical literature produced by and for the experts. Images, on the other hand, were available everywhere, and they taught illiterate believers the stories of the Bible. Furthermore, if much of the Bible is imaginative and visual, artists have often been better interpreters of such expressive forms than scholars. Some genres and media make certain readings possible that the other genres do not, and on this basis the preferred genres and media have also changed over time.

Accordingly, a section on iconography is planned for each period. For the volumes dealing with the Bible, this section will be predominantly archaeological; from the Middle Ages on, all the volumes contain a chapter about the reception in either art history, literature, or music. American professor of art history Heidi Hornik and Spanish conservator María Leticia Sánchez Hernández have taken on the supervision of art history in this encyclopedia, and, with regard to reception in literature, the project is advised by German literary scholar Magda Motté.

The contributions are conceived with historical and philological precision. They have a scholarly rather than a popular-scientific orientation and consider the relevant research publications, especially in the area of women's and gender research. In order to serve the goal of better networking and facilitate access to the results of gender researchers within the different linguistic fields, the contributions nevertheless aim to be understandable for a larger public and composed in a scholarly rigorous but still accessible style also for readers who are not theologians or biblical scholars.

### 1.3. A PROJECT IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER RESEARCH

Religion is a central factor that has shaped gender relations throughout the centuries and today continues to exert influence even in secular societies. As

the canonical text of once-dominant religion(s), the Bible became a reference text that not only exerted influence on the organization of social relations but also profoundly formed the jurisprudence, moral standards, and philosophical questions of Western culture.

### 1.3.1. The Bible Emerged in a Patriarchal Society

Neither the biblical texts nor their interpretations are unique inventions that fell from the sky. They have emerged in a cultural context. They strive to communicate to the people of their time and hence inevitably have to be “children of their time” themselves. This embeddedness in social conditions will have to be considered throughout the entire reception history. Therefore, various contributions elucidate the living conditions of men and women in the different periods, social contexts, and regions; they will also attempt to shed light on the standard legal norms, anthropological and philosophical concepts, or standards of iconographic representation.

The Bible originated in a patriarchal culture that discriminated not only on the basis of gender but also on the basis of other social characteristics:<sup>11</sup>

CRITERIA FOR THE DEFINITION OF SOCIAL STATUS IN THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES		
Criterion	Positive	Negative
Status of citizen in the ancient Near East	free	slave
Gender	masculine	feminine
Age in the ancient Near East: free	old	young
Age in the ancient Near East: slave	young	old

11. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), has further developed these criteria for biblical studies on the basis of liberation theological concepts. For the following table and explanations, see Irmtraud Fischer, “Was kostet der Exodus? Monetäre Metaphern für die zentrale Rettungserfahrung Israels in einer Welt der Sklaverei,” *JBTh* 21 (2006): 25–44, here 29.

Ecumenical status	rich	poor
Ethnicity	indigenous	foreign
Religion	dominant	foreign/deviant

The most important distinction for the determination of social status in the ancient Near East (and in antiquity in general) was that of freedom versus slavery. This distinction decides whether one has personal rights or whether these rights, in the case of slaves, belong among the possession rights of the master or the mistress. Gender becomes a criterion only to determine priority within the same social class. Women are subordinated as children to their father and, after his death, if unmarried, to their oldest brother or, if married, to their husbands. However, patriarchy did not simply mean male domination; rather, it is to be seen as a pyramid of social hierarchy in which free women naturally were also superior to male members of lower social classes. Old age is a positive distinction, since the elderly have authority over younger individuals. On the other hand, for the role of patriarch within an extended family, age is a relative criterion: the oldest man of the hereditary line is head of the family; upon his early death a twenty-year-old can inherit his position. Only in the case of male and female slaves is age a negative criterion, since they are valued according to their full labor potential. Religion must be mentioned as another criterion for social status. It can be a negative criterion if it is foreign or deviant within the society's own symbolic system. Foreignness, like poverty, is *ipso facto* until today a negative criterion in most societies. Precisely the economic status, which today is probably the most determinant criterion for social status, has throughout history tended to trump all the other criteria and has therefore been considered a positive criterion in itself. In every age, the rich could most easily arrange things to their advantage.

### 1.3.2. Biblical Texts Are Both Descriptive and Prescriptive

In reception history, special attention must be given to the interplay between the theological and ideological positions regarding gender and to the social status of the men and women. It must be supposed that many of the texts dealt with in this project do not describe the living conditions of women but rather aim to present a prescriptive reality.<sup>12</sup> To better understand the texts' correlation to their social environment and real-life conditions, archaeological

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12. This has already been indicated by Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 167–68.

findings will be presented and cross-cultural historical comparisons included (e.g., jurisprudence in the history of the ancient Near East). Furthermore, a sort of comparative control vis-à-vis other cultural products of the respective period will be effected, which may also reveal traces of possible “losses” or radical changes in the tradition (e.g., the *Haustafeln* [household codes] put into circulation in the Roman Empire).

## 2. WHOEVER SAYS A MUST ALSO SAY B: WHOEVER DEALS WITH THE BIBLE MUST ALSO ACCOUNT FOR THE CANON

The Bible and Women is a historical project in as much as it deals with both the emergence and the reception history of ancient texts. So, it would seem reasonable to study and explicate texts of a certain period with respect to their gender relevance. However, the project has decided not to consider the reception of “antiquity” or “the ancient Near East” but rather that of the *Bible*. This implies accepting a canon,<sup>13</sup> a list of writings that a community considers holy, binding, and authoritative.

### 2.1. WHY A FEMINIST HISTORICAL PROJECT ACCEPTS THE CONCEPT OF A (CLOSED) CANON

In feminist theology, the problem of a closed canon of the Bible was discussed early on, since this canon perpetuates an androcentric restriction of which writings are considered holy and binding.

#### 2.1.1. Opening of the Canon: Yes or No?

Research constantly made it clearer that early Christianity was a far more multifaceted movement than hitherto realized. Many small groups or sects existed that also left their traces in writing, and among these groups there were still other texts in circulation with a much more friendly attitude toward women than some of the texts later qualified as “New Testament writings.” There were also works attributed to women that did not find their way into the canon. However, in the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, one particular strand of Christianity was seen as especially useful for that purpose. Consequently, priority was given to the writings

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13. What the “canon” is, the origin of the different forms of canon, and their role in the research of their different periods is presented in detail by Donatella Scaiola in her article in this volume.

of this particular strand when a canon of Christian writings was formed.<sup>14</sup> It could be argued, then, that the selected New Testament texts emerged within a shorter time span and within a relatively narrow strand of early Christianity and that this accounts for its relatively narrow range of gender models compared to the wider variety found in the Hebrew Bible.

A canon concept also refers to the community through whom, up to today, we have continuously received these texts, and thus a modern recovery of them is unnecessary (as in the case of some other ancient texts). As an organizational principle of texts, the canon is certainly not relevant in an equal sense throughout the developing stages of the texts in question. Indeed, at the moment of their redaction it was not yet decided what their rank among the holy texts was and which social group would be able to impose its texts as *holy* texts.<sup>15</sup> The decision for a closed canon, to which nothing is to be added or taken away (see Deut 4:2; 13:1), implies the exclusion of many other texts on the same topic and written at the same time and to which henceforth the highest authority is denied.

Such decisions reflect the constellations of power in the religious communities concerned. Above all, the closure of the Christian canon seems to have been effected in the wake of a reduction of female participation in the leadership of the communities of early Christianity. Therefore, in recent decades Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has urgently called for the opening of the canon, so that, on the one hand, woman-friendly texts would be authorized as holy scriptures and, on the other hand, the further reception of misogynous texts would cease.<sup>16</sup> With respect to the writings of the Hebrew Bible, no similar process of marginalization can be shown; this may be so because the redaction of Hebrew writings cedes in favor of Greek after 300 B.C.E. and thus becomes

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14. See, above all, Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); idem, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

15. On the categorization of holy and canonical texts, see Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), as well as the work by Jan Assmann (very influential in the German-speaking biblical scholarship), *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (2nd ed.; Munich: Beck, 1997), 103–29 (also available in English translation).

16. This wish appears throughout all her writings. See, above all, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1: A Feminist Introduction* (London: SCM, 1994); eadem, ed., *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 2: A Feminist Commentary* (London: SCM, 1995), especially eadem, “Introduction: Transforming the Legacy of *The Woman’s Bible*,” in *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1*, 8–11.

more meager or stops completely. However, certainly even in advanced Hellenistic times the book of Esther does not suggest a similar procedure. On the contrary, the books of women in the Hebrew Bible—Ruth and Esther—are of postexilic origin; as extracanonical continuation, the book of Judith, which is marked by a dominant feminine figure, may also be mentioned here. In conclusion, for the Hebrew Bible the opening of the canon would not have the same effect of offering larger variety of gender models as it would in the case of the New Testament writings.

### 2.1.2. The Whole Is More Than the Sum of Its Parts

The acceptance of the concept of canon is further recommended, since it concerns texts that became important as a *collection* and not only as independent books or texts in the preliminary stages of their emergence. To arrange all the materials of a single period in the temporal succession of its redactional history<sup>17</sup> would imply choosing a hypothesis for categorization that in many cases would not extend beyond a decade<sup>18</sup> and, already for this reason alone, would not be recommendable for a long-term project such as this. So, in the case of the Torah, whose origin is at present envisioned by extremely divergent hypotheses with regard to its redactional history, a historical criterion for the arrangement of the texts would be inconceivable in the present state of research. Even if the same historical contexts are in part discussed in different volumes (e.g., there are Jewish writings from the Hellenistic period both in the canon and in the Apocrypha), it is advisable to afford special treatment to the late canonical writings because they alone became binding as norms and still retain this character today. So, the biblical texts became relevant in the course of history in such a way that a privileged position must be awarded to them in a history of reception—even if they do not need to retain a special status in directly religious contexts.

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17. See Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Handbuch der antiken christlichen Literatur* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007).

18. Thus, for example, the attempt made by Hanns-Martin Lutz, Hermann Timm, and Eike Christian Hirsch, *Altes Testament: Einführungen, Texte, Kommentare* (8th ed.; Munich: Piper, 1992), or the commentary by Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (9th ed.; Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), who arranges the order of the biblical texts according to the sources.

## 2.2. A PROJECT IN A TRADITION OF RESEARCH BURDENED BY ANTI-JUDAISM

Since the international project *The Bible and Women* originated historically in the European Society of Women in Theological Research, it is published by women theologians of Christianity in a university context. So, one would assume that the Bible is defined as the two-part Holy Scripture of Christianity. However, the publishers have made a different decision and base their history of the Bible's reception on the extent, the organization, and—as far as this may be clearly defined<sup>19</sup>—the canonical succession of the different books of the *Hebrew Bible*. This certainly requires a detailed explanation.

Although the project originates in a context shaped by Christianity, it is inevitable that a culturally and historically oriented theological project considers Jewish reception history as well—not only because it substantially influenced Christian cultural history but also because it received insufficient attention in the tradition of historical-critical research during the last centuries, given that such research developed particularly within Christian university theology. When Jewish reception entered into research, it was frequently used as a negative foil for the presentation of an even brighter Christian tradition.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the inclusion of Jewish tradition was frequently made in Christian exegesis from an *anti-Jewish* point of view.

Likewise, the beginnings of feminist exegesis constituted no exception to this more than problematic “use” of Jewish exegesis as “proof” that early Christianity had been much friendlier toward women than contemporary Judaism.<sup>21</sup> However, a painful process of consciousness-raising has led most Christian feminist theologians to a reorientation. In the meantime, in many fields this process of reconsideration and reorientation gave rise to a fruitful dialogue that still remains very delicate due to the excessively long and problematic tradition of research and also because of the power and majority/minority issues involved. *The Bible and Women* considers itself a part of the

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19. Peter Brandt, *Endgestalten des Kanons: Das Arrangement der Schriften Israels in der jüdischen und christlichen Bibel* (BBB 131; Berlin: Philo, 2001).

20. Classic is, for example, Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (4 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922–1928).

21. See Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, *Verdrängte Vergangenheit, die uns bedrängt: Feministische Theologie in der Verantwortung für die Geschichte* (Kaiser Taschenbücher 29; Munich: Kaiser, 1988); Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* (AAR Cultural Criticism Series 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); Judith Plaskow, “Christian Feminism and Anti-Judaism,” *Cross Currents* (Fall 1978): 306–9; eadem, “Blaming the Jews for the Birth of Patriarchy,” in *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (ed. Evelyn Torton Beck; New York: The Crossing Press Trumansburg, 1982), 298–302; Annette Daum, “Blaming the Jews for the Death of the Goddess,” *Lilith* 7 (1980): 12–13.

inevitable and necessary—for Christianity, which has its roots in Judaism—process of reconciliation, and its decision concerning the canon is one element in this process. The dialogue, however, is still like walking a tightrope because during the last two decades Jewish researchers have resisted legitimately against an all-too-violent Christian “embrace.” The attempt to integrate Jewish interpretation into a predominantly Christian context in fact risks collecting once again Jewish elements for Christian interests. *The Bible and Women* is aware of this difficult starting point; nevertheless, it has intentionally chosen this way, which certainly holds some traps in store, and so from the beginning takes the risk of leaving a flank open for criticism. Despite this, the editors believe that the heightened value of a closer dialogue that takes both the temporal and theological historical priority of the Hebrew Bible seriously in its reception as Christian “Old Testament” makes this risk worthwhile.

### 2.3. JEWISH ORDER OF THE CANON IN A PREDOMINANTLY CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

If we commit ourselves, in a context of Christianity, to including the Jewish tradition in a history of biblical exegesis, we actually no longer have a choice regarding the extent of the canon and its order. The decision to include the Jewish tradition, not only as further illustration of the periods of the Christian Bible’s exegesis but as acknowledgement of the independent value that it has retained, necessarily leads to the subsequent decision to give priority to the Jewish canonical order. The latter is characterized by the prominent position of the Torah, which is followed by the two-part Prophets and the Writings. From a theological point of view, the Prophets and the Writings form, as it were, an actualizing commentary on Torah and already thereby represent, in a certain way, its interpretation and/or reception.

#### 2.3.1. Visualization of the Double Outcome of the Hebrew Bible

The choice of a Christian extent and order of the canon, with prophecy at the conclusion and as transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, would leave the Jewish exegetical tradition to perish as just one “special history” in relation to the Christian “regular history.” For *The Bible and Women*, the Hebrew Bible has a “double outcome.”<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew Bible continues to be effective in Jewish exegesis, and emerging Christianity is

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22. Erich Zenger, *Das erste Testament: Die jüdische Bibel und die Christen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1991), 140–44.

understood as part of the latter. Consequently, the writings of the New Testament are, on the one hand and to begin with, Jewish interpretations of the Hebrew Bible; on the other hand, in Christianity, New Testament writings very soon became Holy Scriptures in their own right. However, Christians never abandoned any of the canonized books in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>23</sup> Actually, Christians did receive the latter as the first part of its Bible, as the “Old Testament”—although almost exclusively and for a long time in the Greek translation of the Septuagint, which was originally produced in a Jewish context. The Septuagint’s extended canon also included writings transmitted only in Greek.<sup>24</sup> On this basis, the present project understands the New Testament writings, on the one hand, as reception of the Hebrew Bible and, on the other hand, as new contributions to Holy Scriptures that have reception histories of their own.

The decision in favor of the extent and order of the Hebrew canon makes it possible to demonstrate a twofold exegesis history<sup>25</sup> of one and the same set of biblical writings. It allows a proper space for the continuation of an equally legitimate Jewish reception history within a project that originates in a predominantly Christian context. Therefore, three volumes will be dedicated exclusively to Jewish reception history. With the volume on the Jewish deuterocanonical and pseudepigraphical writings<sup>26</sup> and the three biblical volumes, there are seven volumes in all consecrated to Jewish texts. Some apocryphal writings only became authoritative and efficacious in Judaism, whereas the biblical texts attained this validity in both religions; conversely, some Jewish writings have become substantially more influential within Christian theology.<sup>27</sup>

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23. Although the discussions already began in the second century, when Marcion raised the issue, the Old Testament was never rejected as a part of the Bible by Christianity.

24. This affirmation does not concern the question of a Hebrew original (cf. the book of Sirach, whose text was transmitted in the Greek translation of a Hebrew original, of which fragments have been recovered).

25. Since this project is limited to the Jewish and Christian reception history, initially the third reception line in the Qur’an will not be considered.

26. According to its etymology, “apocryphal” means “hidden, secret,” while “pseudepigraphical” implies that a text is “falsely” attributed to an author. Today’s use of these terms results from the discussions of the Reformation. The Protestant churches use the term “apocryphal” to designate extracanonical writings, while the Roman Catholic Church applies it to the “deuterocanonical” writings. See David Satran, “Apocrypha/Pseudepigrapha. II. Old Testament,” *RPP* 1:308.

27. An example is the book of Jesus Sirach, which received the title “Ecclesiasticus” because in Christianity it was used for learning to read.

### 2.3.2. Separate and Common Paths

The Bible and Women will not, however, follow the entire history of exegesis on the separate paths of Jewish and Christian interpretation, rather only in the formative and authoritative periods of Jewish interpretation. The different traditions will be reunited after the volume dealing with the periods of the Jewish Middle Ages and the early modern period. Each volume will contain at least one article on Jewish exegesis of the particular period. To a certain degree, it makes no sense to separate the Jewish heritage from the Christian one, for instance with regard to the reception of biblical themes in literature and art from the twentieth century until today. At least since the Enlightenment, the prevailing trends affect both Jewish and Christian exegesis; an eloquent example of this is given by the biblical interpretations in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's movements, which discussed the access of women to offices and/or functions in Judaism as well as Christianity.

Choosing the canon of the Hebrew Bible further makes more sense with regard to the reception history in the churches that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. Through their return to the *hebraica veritas*, they have attributed canonical status only to the books transmitted in Hebrew. Consequently, the decision in favor of the Jewish extent of the canon also has analytical advantages for the history of exegesis in Protestant Christianities, since it ensures that the canonical and deuterocanonical books are not mixed.

Thus, in conclusion, the decision in favor of the Jewish extent of the canon both makes sense ecumenically and is also more analytically advantageous when studying the reception of the Bible in Judaism and Protestant *as well as* Catholic Christianities.

### 2.3.3. A Historical Project Chooses a Canonical Form Attested at an Early Period

Even though the three-part division of the Hebrew Bible was not adopted by Christianity, since it did not assume the two-part Prophets,<sup>28</sup> this canon form can be considered the historically original one. Around 180 B.C.E. the prologue of the book of Sirach, only canonical for some Christian churches, mentions a three-part division of the canon: "Law, Prophets and the other Writings."

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28. The Hebrew Bible has a two-part division (Former Prophets: Joshua–2 Kings; Latter Prophets: Isaiah–Malachi), whereas the Christian Bible only considers the books of the "prophetic authors" (Isaiah–Malachi + Daniel) as prophecy.

Naturally, since Christianity only authorized the books attributed to individual prophets as prophecy and placed them toward the end of the Old Testament as “transition” to the New Testament, it did not assume this three-part division, although it does recognize the succession Torah-Prophets in its Holy Scriptures with the designation “the Law and the Prophets.” Since the Writings of the third part of the canon are predominantly more recent than those of the Torah and Prophets and the discussion concerning their canonicity has already been going on for a long time, a two-part designation of the canon without any specification of the third part, the Writings, could leave the canonicity of the latter open to further questioning.

In the course of Christianity’s history, the books of the Former Prophets are, however, received as historical books. The *Luther Bibel*, even in its most recent revision, still places the Torah side by side with the latter and, in this way, perpetuates a historicizing interpretation of those books considered prophetic by the Jewish tradition. This inconsistency in the canon of the Reformed churches, who by adopting the *range* of the Hebrew Bible simultaneously accepted the Catholic *order* of the canon, is exemplified by this abolition of the Torah’s privileged position.

#### 2.4. GENDER-RELEVANT ASPECTS OF THE CANON’S ORDER, FORM, AND LIMITATION

The three-part canon model of the Hebrew Bible is not only historically the earliest attested but is also suggested by the hermeneutical-theological structure of the writings.

##### 2.4.1. The Torah as Connecting Theologoumenon of the Three-Part Hebrew Bible

The Torah, as normative text, shapes the other parts of the Hebrew Bible canon in so far as the understanding of prophecy presupposed in the so-called office law in Deut (16:18–18:22)—as an actualizing interpretation of the Torah—determines the sequence of the books Joshua–2 Kings. According to Deut 18:14b–22, the prophetic office was awarded immediately after God gave the gift of the Decalogue to the people through direct revelation at Mount Horeb (Deut 18:16–18 takes 5:23–33 into account). After this fear-inducing meeting, the people ask for an intermediary, whom God does indeed grant by appointing Moses. Among the offices, only prophecy is directly assigned by YHWH, Israel’s God (18:15, 18); consequently, it is considered the highest office. All prophets are therefore, in some sense, successors of Moses (God will raise up

people with the prophetic gift like Moses; Deut 18:15, 18), the prophet and mediator of divine legislation par excellence.

With the literary connection of Deuteronomy, originally transmitted in the narrative context of Joshua–2 Kings, to the sequence of books from Genesis to Numbers, the canonical sequence of Torah and Prophets is constructed. Deuteronomy, conceived as law for life in the land, where prophecy is considered the most important office, announces that the gift of the land is permanent only if the people, when in the country, let themselves be led by prophecy and so listen to the actualized prophetic word of the Torah and live according to it. The Jewish canon thus structures the writings that Christianity labels “Historical Books” as Prophets. *Historical* is, accordingly, seen as the history guided by prophecy and categorized as a *theological* representation of history. The understanding of the Former Prophets as well as that of the Torah as historical books lends support to the sort of (Christian) fundamentalist interpretation that arose in an era (post-Darwin) when it became clear to most people that the Torah and the Prophets are not history books at all. Law and Prophets are rather hermeneutical categories: they give clues about what we should read these texts *as*. The categories themselves are naturally also to be explained from their historical contexts, but the point is this: their individual texts do not claim to represent primarily historical but theological truth.

Another consequence of the separation between the Former and Latter Prophets in the Christian forms of the canon is that the texts relative to women prophets also became marginalized and removed from the (relatively speaking) more central place that they hold in the Jewish canon. Klara Butting has pointed out that both the first and the last prophetic figures of the part of canon entitled Former Prophets are women. Deborah (Judg 4–5) and Huldah (2 Kgs 22) thus frame this part of the canon, and they are themselves framed or modeled (according to Butting) on the example of the woman prophet Miriam (Exod 15).<sup>29</sup> This literary style figure of inclusion has decisive influence on the understanding of prophecy as a whole, since it means that in all

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29. Klara Butting, *Prophetinnen gefragt: Die Bedeutung der Prophetinnen im Kanon aus Tora und Prophetie* (Erev-Rav-Hefte: Biblisch-feministische Texte 3; Wittingen: Erev-Rav, 2001), 77, 99–100. Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteskünderinnen: Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung des Phänomens der Prophetie und der Prophetinnen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), represents the premise that the feminine figures are also in Moses’ following. This interpretation is suggested precisely by the phenomenon of cross-gender intertextuality in the case of the later female figures, who are modeled after the great male figures of Israel’s narrated history (e.g., Esther as “new Joseph,” Ruth as “new Abraham,” Judith as “new David”). For more details on this and the following presentation, see Fischer, *Gotteskünderinnen*, 16–38.

the books in between, all notes relative to the “prophets” must be understood as referring to “men and women prophets.” Consequently, the grammatically masculine designation “prophet,” and/or the functional indicator “prophet,” must be translated (whenever no concrete male figures are connected with it) as “humans with the gift of prophecy,” since women can be, and were, included everywhere.

#### 2.4.2. The Order and Structure of the Canon Influences the Status of Women in the History of Interpretation

The Jewish concept of canon with its emphasized status of the Torah has further consequences for research on women, in as much as it increases the significance of both the creation narratives and the gender-specific legislation for an anthropology justified by the Bible. The foundation narrative of God’s people, told in Genesis principally through narratives about women, highlights the importance of women as Israel’s mothers, who determine the succession in each generation and thereby decisively influence the fate of the people. Thus the term “patriarchal narratives” is to a large extent avoided here, as the term reinforces patriarchy and conceals the ambiguity found in the texts. It is a fundamental task for feminist biblical interpretation to explore this ambiguity.

Whether biblical women are visible or not, and whether and how they are received in the history of interpretation, thus also depends on the form of the canon agreed upon by the reception community. Some further examples are as follows.

The women in the ancestral narratives have a very high status in Judaism, since they are the founding figures of the people, whereas the Christian tradition frequently received them only as the wives of the founding fathers, without—in contrast to their husbands—attributing any historical importance to them.<sup>30</sup>

There have been many women prophets in the Christian tradition, but they have not necessarily seen themselves as the successors of Deborah and Huldah, since these women in the Christian canon had fallen out of the biblical section of prophetic books. Thus they were often replaced, such as by the Sibyls in the history of art. The Talmud, on the other hand, mentions seven biblical prophetesses (b. Meg. 14a).<sup>31</sup>

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30. Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

31. The number seven indicates perfection, even if the names of the prophetesses do not coincide with those named in the Bible: b. Meg. 14a mentions Sarah, Miriam, Deborah,

A further example in this regard is the very different reception of those passages of the Torah that deal with cultic ability. While the gender-relevant categories of clean and unclean play a central role in Judaism even today, they were very selectively received as primarily moral categories in Christianity, with a clear emphasis on sexuality.

The option for the Jewish canon and the associated elimination of the deuterocanonical books leads to the loss of a woman's book such as Judith. But, on the other hand, it means that misogynistic passages and receptions, as found, for instance, in the book of Sirach, are also excluded. The neutral designation Writings for the third part of the canon better accommodates the diversity of the books in question than the designation frequently used in Christian exegesis: "wisdom books." Furthermore, the explicitly "woman-centered" books, Ruth, Song of Songs, and Esther, are better highlighted within the context of the relatively small collection of the Megilloth,<sup>32</sup> or "scrolls," where they form the largest part.

### 3. SCRIPTURAL EXEGESIS, TRADITION, AND RECEPTION

The existence of a canon distinguishes texts from one another on the basis of their differing degrees of importance. Central to a notion of canon is that nothing should be further added or omitted. This means that the actualization of biblical texts<sup>33</sup> and continued progress of the tradition is possible only outside of the delimited canon. Due to the normative status canonical texts have in religious communities, they need to be continuously interpreted so that in each epoch their significance can be represented anew and accepted. The cultural phenomenon initiated by this process of actualization can be designated as the formation of tradition. According to the different meanings of "tradition" in Catholic and Orthodox contexts, on the one hand, and in

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Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther as prophetesses. For more details on this subject, see Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen*, 35–37.

32. A selection of five Hebrew Bible books (thus a canon extracted from a wider canon) that are used for liturgical purposes.

33. Quotations of biblical texts in later passages, as well as generally intertextual connections, can already be presented as beginnings of a creative exegesis of texts in the Bible; they are to be understood as the expression of a reception process that began within the Bible and, outside of it, continues with the canon. On this subject, see the more detailed presentation in Irmtraud Fischer, "Erinnern als Movers der Schriftwerdung und der Schriftauslegung: Woran und warum sich Israel nach dem Zeugnis der Hebräischen Bibel erinnert und wieso dies für unsere heutige Erinnerung relevant ist," in *Erinnern: Erkundungen zu einer theologischen Basiskategorie* (ed. Paul Petzel and Norbert Reck; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2003), 11–25.

Protestant Christianities, on the other, the term *tradition* plays a more crucial role in feminist discussions of the linguistic areas predominantly shaped by Catholicism (i.e., Spanish, Italian), since in this research context tradition is placed side by side with the Scriptures. What follows thus applies primarily to those contexts.

### 3.1. TRADITION AS RECEPTION HISTORY OF THE FAITH

The category of tradition is very closely tied to that of *reception*.<sup>34</sup> Both must be discussed by *The Bible and Women*. Reception history of the Bible is also a history of *the reception of faith*, which especially in Catholicism is based on the passing on of *the* tradition, whose only legitimate carriers (for a long time) were men.

#### 3.1.1. On the Status of Women in the Formation of Tradition

To transmit does not mean continuously conveying something that is eternally the same; on the contrary, what is passed on is exposed to a necessary process of change. This applies both in terms of the selection of what is passed on and in terms of the direction of the actualization throughout the process, which is driven at all times by the governing forces of the group passing on the tradition.<sup>35</sup> Which perspectives in the Bible and in its interpretation become dominant and which become marginalized is, when it comes to gender relations in religious communities, above all a question of power.

Since women in Western culture were not legal subjects until hundred years or so ago (and in some countries even later), they were hardly able to leave memorable traces in the official historiography or as interpreters of the Bible. Nevertheless, some women did read and interpret the Bible and became focal points for traditions, since they defied the “property right” of men, who as the guardians of orthodoxy selected some traditions that today are seen as *the* tradition. The current editorial project intends to bring to light and analyze the traditions of many women, constructed and passed on at the margins of the official tradition. In biblical studies, *traditio* is understood to be

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34. Tradition, from the Latin *tradere*, composed of *tra* (beyond, the other side) and *dere* (give), replaces the concept *mancipatio* in the Roman law, first in reference to the transmission of property and then to the rights.

35. The fact that the poor do not have a historiography has been considered a problem since the beginning of feminist theology and its adoption of the concepts of liberation theology; see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread, Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 102–4.

an oral and/or written process that passes on, from generation to generation, one's predecessors' fundamental recollections of the faith. This process, with a pretext of faithfulness, always developed within a particular community and its culture. In the meanderings of this process, as in the course of rivers, there are many tributaries, some of which supply while others drain. In the transmission of collective memory, in the narratives and in the habits, there are hidden emotional, political, and ideological aspects that determine what must or must not be remembered and transmitted, who can be responsible for the transmission, what must be done and with what aim, which pieces of transmission should be legally binding and which should remain peripheral. This process carries with it traces of strife and resistance and leads the term *tradition* back to its double meaning: the act of transmission itself and the transmitted contents.

### 3.1.2. The Act of Transmission: Women as Agents

Even when the act of transmission was for a long time officially attributed to men, women in fact also participated in transmission, since the act of transmission is closely related to the psychosocial process of *identity* formation. The patriarchal system considers the act of transmission as *cultural* formation. Accordingly, tradition is identified with the guiding lines of a culture that, until just a few centuries ago, were inseparable from religion. Such a patriarchal understanding of an official transmission hides yet another unofficial aspect of the act of transmission, the one that is carried out by women. In this living process of transmission we find two apparently contradictory lines. According to the first one, the women, as products of a socialization into patriarchy, carry patriarchal culture, identity, and tradition. According to the second one, women *simultaneously* transmit *as tradition* also particular traditions that are usually identified with women. The critical feminist perspective seeks, with great analytical force, to distinguish between these two lines, to relate them to each other, and, in some cases, to oppose them to one another. Feminist biblical exegesis of the past century well accounts for this and, consequently, also of the history of women within the studies of gender and of feminist theory.

### 3.1.3. Who Transmits What? Women as Active and Passive Subjects of Tradition

Exegetes and feminist historians of the Bible have, already for decades, worked hard to identify the traces of women and their resistance in the main traditions and to use these traces against women's invisibility and marginalization

in face of these same traditions. They have sought to analyze critically the processes of transmission and reception that gave the biblical texts the form in which they reached us today. It appears that women have been active agents as biblical texts emerged, as well as in their reception, even if their traces are not easy to recover.

The role of women in the processes from the emergence of the texts, through the process of definition of canonical scriptures, and to the adaptation of traditions into authoritative tradition is today the subject of great controversy. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeliën Van-Dijk-Hemmes have used the distinction of male-voices and female-voices, which appear in the biblical texts, to analyze the social groups passing on biblical materials.<sup>36</sup> With this notion, they have detached the question of the emergence of the biblical texts from questions about particular authors and their gender. We wonder whether such hermeneutical attempts could not also be useful for a larger part of the biblical reception that was not initially conceived as *Autorenliteratur* (literature by authors).

The project *The Bible and Women* is particularly interested in critically analyzing the androcentric processes of the transmission and thereby itself becoming a part of the chain of transmission. The roles of women in the creation and reception of the biblical traditions of Judaism and Christianity should no longer be concealed. The project wants to relate, in detail, the story of women's reception with its bright notes and more obscure dimensions. So, it is meant to be a lucid guide for those who want to see themselves as part of the chain of transmission in which both women and men have participated. We believe that in this way, on the basis of our critical scholarly contribution with its multilingual, international, multicultural, and interconfessional facets, we will contribute to the creation of a more egalitarian tradition and a more complete and adequate reception of our very rich cultural heritage.

#### 3.1.4. Fragile and Strong Traditions

The traditions of a culture, a people, or a religion are certainly part of a collective human capital. Their shared characteristics are their historical conditioning and, hence, their capacity to develop. This capacity, as history shows, is paradoxical. A solid tradition with deep roots is not immobile; it is not a fragile treasure exhibited for passive contemplation and under the protection of those who preserve it from ruin. A solid tradition is, on the contrary, one that

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36. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series 1; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

does not fear the moves that its own historical condition pushes it to make. When we speak about tradition with regard to the Bible, we are referring to this concept of necessary adaptation. In the Bible there is not one unified tradition but rather several great lines of tradition, and the greater they are, the more frequently they have been exposed to—and integrated—modifications and changes. Consequently, a really strong tradition is characterized by its paradoxical nature because it grows stronger as it adjusts to new situations that imply change, and through change it acquires the capacity to stimulate further mutations.

The Bible and Women acknowledges the studies both of women inside the traditions who see tradition as support and also of those who regard the tradition as an enemy and opponent. It analyses those basic elements of tradition that originated with women and that have endured changes because they are, and have been, promoters of further transformations in the Bible as well as in the entire history of reception.

### 3.2. EXEGESIS AS RECEPTION

The interpretation of Scripture was, for a long time, a field for those religious communities who recognized the Bible as authoritative Scripture. Exegesis as scholarship is today, in most cases, still confessionally tied on a personal or institutional level; however, it does not interpret texts primarily according to pastoral needs but according to scholarly, transparent rules.

#### 3.2.1. From the Prehistory of the Text to Its Aftermath

If the Western tradition of research during the past couple of centuries above all dealt with the prehistory of the biblical text, starting from the postulated oral beginnings and ending with the emergence of the final form of the canonical text defined with all the rules of the exegetical art, over the past decades the research questions have shifted more and more toward an area largely neglected for a long time: *reception research*. This research is interested not only in what the biblical texts might have meant in their original context and how they interact with the ideologies of the time of their emergence (historical-critical research) but also in what they have been taken to mean and how they have been used, inculturated—and abused. It is clear that interest in reception history is finally also establishing itself more firmly in biblical studies (after colleagues in literary and art history have been pursuing this approach for a long time), from the emergence of a great many new multivolume reference works and series such as *The Bible through the*

Centuries<sup>37</sup> and *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*.<sup>38</sup> Reflections on the reception history of a text are now regularly included even in mainstream traditional biblical commentary series.<sup>39</sup>

The term that now gradually reaches consensus, “reception history,” is usually understood as wider than the previous notions of “history of exegesis” or “history of interpretation,” which mainly meant the academic understanding and appropriation of the texts in question, something in the direction of “history of research.” The term *Wirkungsgeschichte* (the German term is used even in English, or alternatively “effective history”) presupposed, to a too great extent, that the Bible was the source of clear and identifiable effects in culture and society. With the development of the field in question, it was, on the one hand, gradually realized that if we mean that the Bible has “effects,” then we need measures to pin down and demonstrate the extent to which something is an effect of the Bible rather than of a myriad of other factors. Without such measures, the term will be too slippery to be a useful analytical tool.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, this is a lot to ask if one wants to *understand* the

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37. David Gunn, Judith Kovacs, Christopher Rowland and John Sawyer are editors of the series *The Bible through the Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003–). Since the focus is on historical readings and the uses and effects of biblical texts, this series constitutes a radical departure from the norms of the biblical commentary tradition. Still, typical of a more Protestant Christian tradition, the series is structured like a biblical commentary series, in that one volume is devoted to each of the books of the Bible (with some exceptions for minor books/letters). In other European languages, there is an Italian series with an encyclopedic scope currently being published under the title *La Bibbia nella Storia*, edited by Giuseppe Barboglio for the publishing house Dehoniane in Bologna. In French, already in the 1980s (1984–1989) the publishing house Beauchesne in Paris published the eight-volume encyclopedia *Bible de tous les temps*, structured according to historical periods.

38. Hans-Josef Klauck et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010–).

39. See, e.g., Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament, whose concept was developed over a ten-year period, and whose volumes now appear successively by Herder-Verlag, Freiburg. See also some of the volumes of the Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener), esp. Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (EKKNT 1; 4 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985–2002), and Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT 7; 4 vols.; Benziger: Zürich 1991–2008) and the NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), esp. Anthony Thiselton’s volume on 1 Corinthians.

40. See, e.g., Heikki Räisänen, “The Effective ‘History’ of the Bible: A Challenge to Biblical Scholarship,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 45 (1992): 303; Ulrich Luz, *Mt 1–7* (vol. 1 of *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*; 5th ed.; EKKNT 1.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 106–8; John Sawyer, “The Place of Reception-History in a Post-Modern Bible Commentary.” Online: <http://www.bbibcomm.net/news/sawyer.html>.

workings of authoritative texts in historical societies. Colleagues from disciplines other than biblical studies especially have particularly made it clear that a study of history *as* an effective history of the Bible can easily develop into a rather reductionist historical project. In illiterate cultures, as well as in modern cultural expressions, biblical books are rarely experienced as discrete entities. In a Christian setting at least, it would be extremely difficult to pin down the effects of the book of Genesis as distinct from the effects of the Gospel of Matthew. An adequate reception history must allow for this fact instead of continuing to beg for consistency in messy material. Although the term “reception history” may be analytically less sharp, it is more sensitive to the nuances of the workings of the biblical text in different social and cultural areas, which is probably the reason why the term has been preferred in the most recent and most ambitious reference works, including works also of aesthetic, legal, or representative value. This term is furthermore acceptable to scholars outside the discipline of biblical studies. The term is, finally, particularly apt when working on women’s encounters with biblical texts: since through long periods women have not had access to formal training or formal office, their readings would not then count as “interpretation” or “exegesis.” As women have had limited access to power, their readings would seldom result in measurable social, political, or cultural effects. Still, women have read and used the Bible, and some have been privileged enough to leave traces in print and paint, or otherwise. All of this can be studied under the inclusive concept of “reception history.”

### 3.2.2. On The Multiple Meanings of the Texts and the Role of Readers in the Creation of Meaning

Thus we see how the changing terminological choices reflect developments and an accumulation of knowledge in the field as such. Greater knowledge of the variety of ways historical readers have responded to the biblical texts has expanded our understanding of the history of the texts. Indeed, it has also expanded our understanding of the texts themselves, their meanings, and their workings. First, the more one sees how real audiences have responded, the better guesses scholars will be qualified to make concerning how original audiences may have responded. For this reason, scholars with a primary interest in the origins of the text in question should also pay more attention to its reception history. Second, it has become clearer that the meaning of canonized texts is a result of interaction between the texts and their readers and that even if one operates with a closed concept of canon there can never be a completion or closure of meanings of this canon. When we take all the different things readers and recipients can do to the Bible into serious consideration, it

becomes clear that it is not a closed, separate entity that has had separate and identifiable effects but rather a living text kept alive by the recipients' constant re-creation of it. For this reason, the term "reception history" and the notion of text, canon, and tradition that it entails bring to the fore a range of methodological questions and challenges that will not be consistently pursued in this interdisciplinary project proper, because the challenges will be different according to the disciplinary angle and because the most urgent need is to present the *material*. Instead, the theoretical and methodological questions are relegated to specialized forums associated with the project and further discussed there.<sup>41</sup> Reception history, then, is not an exercise in cataloguing; it is not reductionist and mono-causal history-writing; nor is it merely a descriptive overview of the authoritative readings of particular biblical texts by pillars such as Rashi, Aquinas, or Luther. These obviously deserve a place, but the picture is much larger and far more complicated than that.

Even if reception history gives us a better and more concrete grasp of how the biblical texts have worked to produce meaning historically, we do not see a reception-historical endeavor as primarily a way of getting at what the biblical texts' original intention was. This encyclopedia could rather be seen as a gender-inclusive display room of what the reception history of the Bible might *also* be if we include a focus on the reception of gender-relevant texts and interpretations generated by women. Some of the interpretations considered here might be written off as *exotica* by some, but we maintain that they can contribute to new gender-inclusive syntheses. They represent, in fact, an untapped world that we believe biblical scholars should pay more attention to, rather than continuing to inhabit only a small part of the "museum" and interacting only with a limited range of male interpreters usually considered authoritative.

Thus far, all larger-scale reception-historical encyclopedias, series, and projects have failed to include gender among the basic structuring categories of the project in question<sup>42</sup>—if it has been reflected upon at all. This is partly

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41. See, e.g., the proceedings of the Norwegian Research Council-funded project *Canonicity, Gender and Critique: The Hermeneutics of Feminism and Canon Transformations*, which sponsored parts of the encyclopedia but especially focuses on theory and method: <http://www.stk.uio.no/English/canonicity.html>. See further William John Lyons and Jorunn Økland, eds., *The Way the World Ends? The Apocalypse of John in Culture and Ideology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009). In the introduction to that volume (1–30), Økland expands further on many of the points presented in short form here.

42. A structural exception is the series edited by Giuseppe Barbaglio mentioned above, *La Bibbia nella Storia*, in which a volume edited by Adriana Valerio has appeared, *Donne e Bibbia: Storia ed esegesi* (*La Bibbia nella Storia* 21; Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 2006), to which also the other three general editors of this research project contribute. In

due to the reception historians' sources: through most of European/Western history, it was predominantly men who had access to reading, writing, and positions of interpretive authority. Mainly men's interpretations of the Bible were transmitted, and the result of the elimination of the corrective voice that women might have represented is that the body of preserved interpretations contains an inevitable androcentric focus. This androcentric focus has consequences both for the way reception historians approach "women-texts" (biblical texts with particular relevance for women) and also for if and how they present women as exegetes. A feminist reception history of biblical texts of particular relevance to women has yet to be written, likewise a history of women's biblical readings.

### 3.3. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The Bible does not have a uniform model of sexed human existence, nor has it just one conception of how the relationship between the sexes should be organized. In order to account for different views, can social places be reconstructed in which discussions around gender roles and models took place? How do changes in social conditions affect the reception of such texts? When and under which conditions are egalitarian concepts actualized and when are hierarchical ones? Can the developments of theological anthropologies and their legitimizing reference to the Bible be incorporated into social history? Reception history does not follow a straight course. Some topics are especially popular in certain periods only to then disappear again completely. Particularly eloquent examples are the queen of Sheba in the Middle Ages or the representation of Judith in Italian baroque painting. How do such "fashions" arise, and why do they disappear?

These tasks and questions, to which the project will have to dedicate itself, make it clear that the history of interpretation of biblical texts is not simply the history of influence or tradition but rather a reception history. What is judged relevant and what is left aside, which topics or literary figures are used and which message is to be mediated in each case, all of this depends on the determinations of particular periods and is neither simply an effect of great texts nor the product of a tradition never closed or broken off.

Finally, we are also aware of the ecclesiological and theological consequences of this project. Although the project does not directly address problems of this kind, we cannot ignore that the kind of exploration of the sacred

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this volume, a history of women's biblical interpretation is presented separately from "general" history, and thereby the volume defends a compensationalist claim.

texts and of tradition presented here reopens central questions that should occupy theological research at large: the relation between revelation and history; the issue of a more gender-inclusive liturgical language; ecclesiological questions about the lived relations between men and women within faith communities; delicate and intimate ethical and pastoral matters that in the past have received a biblical justification that is no longer considered a viable answer in today's gender-democratic societies. Finally, even the question of how to adequately "narrate" the biblical God must be posed again if the human as man and woman, with equal worth, was created in God's image.

Through this project, a thematically closed overview of gender-relevant questions with regard to the Bible and its reception history is presented for the first time. We are conscious of the problem that many of the fields on which we depend have in no way been scientifically treated yet and that, as the work progresses, new questions for research arise. But this challenging situation can also be seen in a positive light, in that it can initiate new research projects. We hope that, through the international and interdisciplinary network established, this large-scale project will also recruit many young scholars into theological and cultural historical gender research. We want to close with the Norwegian feminist author Aasta Hansteen, who when faced with the new and vast oceans of possibilities in feminist interpretation exclaimed already in 1870 (lecture published some years later):

I am not a woman of letters, and I do not pretend to be one. I am a settler instead. As a woman forcing myself upon the religious-philosophical terrain ... I therefore possess the settler's great advantage: I can acquire thousands of acres of land, yes, enormous stretches, just by drawing a line in the ground.<sup>43</sup>

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43. Aasta Hansteen, *Kvinden skabt I Guds Billede* (Kristiania: Foredrag i Studentersamfundet, 1878), 4-32, translated by Jorunn Økland.