

THE JEWISH MIDDLE AGES

SBL Press

THE BIBLE AND WOMEN

An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History

Edited by Mary Ann Beavis, Irmtraud Fischer,
Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Adriana Valerio

Volume 4.2: The Jewish Middle Ages

SBL Press



THE JEWISH MIDDLE AGES

Edited by

Carol Bakhos and Gerhard Langer

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Carol Bakhos
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Abbreviations

AB	The Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AJSR	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
‘Arakh	‘Arakhin
‘Avod. Zar.	‘Avodah Zarah
’Avot R. Nat.	’Avot of Rabbi Nathan
b.	Babylonian Talmud
B. Metz.	Bava Metzi’a
Bekh.	Bekhorot
Ber.	Berakhot
BW	Bible and Women
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
‘Eruv	‘Eruvin
Esth. Rab.	Esther Rabbah
Exod. Rab.	Exodus Rabbah
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
Hag.	Hagigah
HBS	History of Biblical Studies
Hor.	Horayot
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
Hul.	Hullin
ITQ	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>

JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LeqT ad Esth	Leqach Tov on Esther
Lev. Rab.	Leviticus Rabbah
m.	Mishnah
Meg.	Megillah
Midr. Ps.	Midrash Psalms
Midr. Song	Midrash Song of Songs
Naz.	Nazir
Nid.	Niddah
Num. Rab.	Numbers Rabbah
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
Pesah.	Pesahim
Pirqe R. El.	Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer
PL	Patrologia Latina
PUSHD	Princeton University Sefer Hasidim Database
Qoh Rab.	Qohelet Rabbah
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RHS	<i>Religionsunterricht an höheren Schulen</i>
RTL	<i>Revue theologique de Louvain</i>
Ruth Rab.	Ruth Rabbah
S. Eli. Rab.	Seder Eliyahu Rabbah
S. Olam Rab.	Seder Olam Rabbah
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
Shabb.	Shabbat
SHB	Sefer Hasidim manuscript in Bologna. Margalio, Reuven, ed. <i>Sefer Hasidim</i> . Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1957.
Shem.	Shemot
Sifre Deut.	Sifre Deuteronomy
SHP	Sefer Hasidim manuscript in Parma. Wistinetzki, Judah, ed. <i>Sefer Hasidim</i> . With an introduction by Jacob Freimann. Frankfurt am Main: Vahrmann, 1924.
SJ	Studia Judaica
Song Rab.	Song of Songs Rabbah
SVTG	Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum
Ta'an.	Ta'anit
TGI	<i>Theologie und Glaube</i>
TSMJ	Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism

<i>TTZ</i>	<i>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Alten und Neuen Testament
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
Yad.	Yadayim
Yebam.	Yebamot
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

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Introduction

Carol Bakhos

Part of an extensive international series exploring the reception history of female characters in the Bible with an eye toward gender-relevant biblical themes, this volume focuses on the different ways in which women of the biblical tradition are treated in Jewish literature of the medieval period. It does so within a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts, paying special attention to literature emanating from Ashkenazic circles.

During the medieval period, Jews were given considerable communal autonomy, affording leaders an opportunity to control the degree to which community members engaged in non-Jewish practices. Like their ancestors who lived under Hellenistic and Roman rule, Jews to varying degrees embraced and adopted the linguistic and cultural trappings of their milieu. Their reaction to the world around them was characterized by symbiosis and synergy, on the one hand, and discord and dissent, on the other. And as in the ancient period, adaptation and appropriation created tension within Jewish communities as Jews negotiated the extent to which they partook in the wider cultural world they inhabited.

While Palestine and Babylonia were the great centers in late antiquity, the focal point shifts in the Middle Ages to the north and west. Jews migrate from Italy to the north as northeast France and the Rhineland become important settlement areas and are called Ashkenaz, after the biblical grandson of Japheth and the son of Gomer (Gen 10:3). The Ashkenazim, whose principal language became the Yiddish that developed from German, clearly differ in culture and language from the Sephardim (from the Hebrew *sepharad*, Spain), who were residents primarily of the Iberian Peninsula (known as al-Andalus in the Islamic period) up until their expulsion in the fifteenth century. They spoke Judeo-Spanish (also referred to as Espanyol, Judezmo, and Ladino), which evolved over time to

include words of Turkish and Greek origin, and, although fewer and fewer people speak Ladino, it is still spoken today, mostly in Israel.¹

For many, the Middle Ages in general evokes a sense of the sinister and brings to mind a world of fear, superstition, and religious fanaticism. With respect to Judaism, one cannot help but recall the Crusades, charges of blood libel, and the desecration of the Host. It is a period marked by persecutions, pogroms, and expulsions. Yet at the same time, the Middle Ages was also a time of lively cultural exchange and heightened creativity not only for Jews but also Christians and Muslims.² When we discuss the lengthy span of the Jewish Middle Ages and the diverse geographic locations under consideration, the picture is rather rich and vibrant.

The great manuscripts of traditional literature originate in the Middle Ages; prayers, feasts, and celebrations find their definitive forms here. Our oldest extant fragments of the Talmud are from the tenth century. Genres stemming from the rabbinic period, such as scriptural exegesis in midrash and *piyyut* (liturgical poetry) are further developed. New genres arise, such as the verse-by-verse Bible commentaries, Talmud commentaries, law codes, organized prayer books (sg. *siddur*; pl. *siddurim*), philosophical treatises, and mystical texts. This is the era of the great commentators, codifiers, philosophers, and poets, including Rashi and Rambam, Ramban and Radak, Ibn Ezra and Ibn Gabirol, Joseph Karo and Yehuda Halevi, to name but a few. Many of modern Judaism's texts, theological ideas, and institutions emerged and blossomed more fully in this period.

In the Middle Ages, the Bible continued to play a prominent role in the flourishing of Jewish literature such as *piyyut*, midrash, mystical texts, and, naturally, commentaries. In addition to the Bible, noncanonical literature made its way into cultural creativity. Moreover, Christian and Muslim scriptural interpretive traditions impacted the course of that creativity. For example, the Judeo-Arabic retellings of biblical and postbiblical narratives

1. Tracy K. Harris, *Death of a Language: The History of Judeo-Spanish* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994); Harris, "The State of Ladino Today," *European Judaism* 11 (2011): 51–61.

2. For examples of the heterogeneity of Jewish life and culture throughout a wide range of geographic locations in the medieval period, see part 2 of David Biale, ed., *Culture of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 305–671; see especially Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judeo-Arabic Culture in the Golden Age of Islam," 315–86 and Ivan G. Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Synthesis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," 449–518.

concerning figures such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, King David and his son Solomon, Queen Esther, and Hannah and her seven sons reflect the medieval crosscultural exchange of Hebrew and Arabic literary traditions.³

Myth and legends permeate Jewish creativity of the period; narratives of the period attach themselves to long-known material and figures but also often to new or *newly*-discovered ones, such as the Maccabees, Josephus, Ben Sira, and Judith. The poems, narratives, and legal texts of the vast and varied medieval Jewish literary tradition take up an array of subjects and concerns from living in the diaspora under unfavorable political conditions to living according to Jewish law, from embracing non-Jewish ways and customs to shunning them. Biblical stories are adapted in the face of crusades and persecutions and pressed in the service of strengthening Jewish identity vis-à-vis the world at large.

The present volume concentrates on the medieval Jewish reception and appropriation of several female biblical figures and narratives pertaining to women. Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Zipporah, Ruth, Esther, and Judith, a figure not present in the Hebrew canon, are treated here as well as the exceedingly popular postbiblical figure Lilith. Several essays also deal with the nameless woman of valor from Prov 31. Zion as a lamenting and yearning woman is also examined, and attention is given to the feminine voice in the Song of Songs.

This volume is far from exhaustive. We are well aware that the treatments of some topics are overshadowed by others and that some are only described cursorily, if at all. For example, while reference is made to the

3. There is a great deal of literature on Jewish-Muslim symbiosis of the period. See, for example, Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993); and Marc S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006). On the Muslim influence on Hebrew poetry, see the classic works of Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel and the Soul* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991); and Scheindlin, *Wine, Women and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986). See also Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); and more recently Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain (950-1492)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

growth of medieval Jewish philosophy and the flourishing of *piyyut*, we have not included a separate essay on either subject.⁴ With this shortcoming in mind, our purpose is nevertheless to illustrate the ways in which biblical women appear in medieval Jewish literature and, in turn, what their presence tells us about medieval Jewish cultural creativity.

Before the individual figures and their reception are analyzed, the chapter by Elisheva Baumgarten offers an overview of the position of women in medieval Ashkenaz.⁵ She uses the example of Dulcia, a learned and enterprising woman who, after her violent death in 1196, is lauded by her husband, Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, in a series of verses based on Prov 31:10–31. Baumgarten shows that medieval women, after all, played an active role in society, business life, and religious affairs. Dulcia supported her husband, was a successful businesswoman, and was active in worship and charitable activities that provided for the needy. During this period Jewish women engaged in lively exchange with non-Jewish women (and non-Jewish men) and shared with them the fate of the increasing

4. The literature on medieval Jewish philosophy is enormous. For a general overview, see Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); for examples of how feminist approaches have contributed to the study of medieval Jewish philosophy, see Sarah Pessin, “Loss, Presence, and Gabirol’s Desire: Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Possibility of a Feminist Ground,” in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 27–50; and Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “Thinking Desire in Gersonides and Spinoza,” in Tirosh-Samuels, *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, 51–77. Material from the Cairo Genizah has greatly impacted studies in *piyyut*. See Shulamit Elizur, “The Use of Biblical Verses in Hebrew Liturgical Poetry,” in *Prayers That Cite Scripture*, ed. James L. Kugel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 83–100; Ezra Fleischer, *Sirat ha-Kodesh ha’ivrit bi-yeme ha-benayim*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007); Laura Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 2010); Aron Mirsky, *Ha-piyyut: Hitpathuto be-Erets Yisra’el uva-golah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990); Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, eds. and trans., *Avodah: An Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). Most relevant to our volume’s interest in biblical women, see Ophir Münz-Manor, “All about Sarah: Questions of Gender in Yannai’s Poems on Sarah’s (and Abraham’s) Barrenness,” *Prooftexts* 26 (2006): 344–74. Münz-Manor examines two poems by Yannai (sixth century) through the lenses of contemporary gender and literary studies.

5. For an excellent treatment of women in medieval Levant, see Eve Krakowski, *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law and Ordinary Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

changes in the areas of marriage and family life as well as in the religious sector. Yet despite their great social, economic, and religious contributions, medieval Jewish women did not occupy communal leadership positions. The essay also demonstrates that while Jews occupied space with Christians and shared similar gendered frameworks, there were distinct cultural differences between them.

The next chapter explores how the biblical heroine Esther is depicted in several medieval midrashic texts: *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, *Yosippon*, *Esther Rabbah*, *Midrash Psalm 22*, and *Midrash Leqach Tov*. Constanza Cordoni shows how each of these texts throws different light on the story of Esther and, in turn, highlights the different concerns of the authors and redactors. The depiction of Esther is amplified in order to attest to her Jewish identity. Through narrative expansion, Esther prays for her own well-being and for her people. In *Leqach Tov*, for example, she is depicted as eating Jewish food as opposed to the food of the kingdom. She is moreover presented as someone who follows her uncle's advice, but also as someone who is capable of acting of her own accord, which aligns with rabbinic halakah.

Whereas Cordoni devotes her analysis to the figure of Esther, Dagmar Börner Klein turns to the figure of Judith in medieval texts. This is especially significant because the book of Judith, preserved in the Septuagint, does not appear in the Jewish Bible (Tanakh).⁶ The work nonetheless enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages in Jewish as well as Christian circles. The first Hebrew version was transmitted by Jacob ben Nissim ibn Shahin in the eleventh century, who lived in Kairouan, Tunisia. In his version, the heroine's identity is anonymous but in other versions, such as the *Ma'ase Yehudit*, Judith herself finally mentions her name. Other renditions include the *Megillat Yehudit*, which makes Judith the daughter of Mordecai and in doing so connects the narrative with the story of Esther. Judith is described as being especially true to the Torah. In the end, the Israelites here are then victorious not only over the Greeks, but also over the Romans under Caligula. A further addition to *Megillat Yehudit* connects Judith with the Maccabees and introduces the motif of the endangerment of brides by means of the exercise of the *ius primae noctis*,

6. For a survey of the textual tradition of the story of Judith, see Deborah Levine Gera, "The Jewish Textual Traditions," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies across the Disciplines*, ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann (Cambridge: Open Book, 2010), 23–40.

that is, the right of the sovereign (or lord of a manor) to consummate a marriage. The authority figure who demands this “first night” is, in each case, killed. As an endangered bride, Judith herself now loses the strength to kill the king; her brother, Judah, must take care of this. The endangerment and salvation of young brides also becomes an important motive for lighting the lights at Hanukkah. According to Rashbam, this miracle was effected through Judith’s deeds, whereby she then assumes a central role in the story of the Maccabees.

Late midrashic narrative expansions such as these addressed seeming contradictions in scripture, filled lacunae in the plot, and answered questions raised by the text’s terse style. At the same time, they afforded far more creative opportunities to amplify scriptural stories and flesh out their characters than the commentary tradition that flourished in the medieval period. The chapters in the next section attest to this difference.

Gerhard Langer opens the section with an analysis of two medieval commentaries on verses pertaining to Eve. One of the most important voices of the Jewish tradition, Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak from Troyes, 1040–1105) mediates between medieval exegesis and late antique rabbinic interpretation. His commentary on the five books of Torah is a verse-by-verse treatment of the most important passages. His terse, running commentary consistently references rabbinic midrashic and talmudic material. Langer illustrates how Rashi draws on earlier traditions selectively and, wherever possible, conveys a less hostile tone toward women. According to Rashi, the woman is not made subordinate to the man. Rather, as a consequence of sin, she will, to be sure, desire the man but will not be able to live out her sexual lust whenever she wishes. This is what is meant by the punishment in Genesis that the man shall “rule” over the woman. The second commentator discussed by Langer is the multitalented Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, d. 1270) from Gerona, who was a master of everything from mysticism to medicine and philosophy. He also took part in a disputation as a representative of Judaism. It is unseldom the case that he takes a critical position over against Rashi. This is true also in regard to Eve. To mention just one example, Ramban develops a special variant of the notion of the androgynous human being; the sexual union has for him, of course, the goal of procreating children, but it also points to the very specific relationship between man and woman. In contrast to the union among animals, the human union is the most meaningful and designed as a permanent bond. “To be one flesh” means to return to the originally intended unity. Langer shows that, despite the

differences between the two exegetes, Rashi and Ramban both highlight the significance of proper conduct.

We see this emphasis on moral conduct in the way in which medieval Jewish commentators considered other biblical stories. Even if the Jewish forefathers and foremothers did not behave in an exemplary manner, we learn from their shortcomings. As evidenced in my own examination of the treatment of Sarah and Hagar in the works of David Kimchi, Nachmanides, Gersonides, and Obadiah Sforno, there is indeed a clear shift from the tendency in classical rabbinical texts to embellish their actions and whitewash their characters. Nachmanides, for example, even fiercely criticizes Abraham, who, in his view, should have stood up for Hagar. Kimchi, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Abraham surely would have reprimanded Hagar if he only would have known how she treated Sarah, thus illustrating a lack of uniformity among the medieval commentators. For comparative purposes, the essay also discusses several medieval Qur'anic commentaries on Sarah and Hagar.

Robert A. Harris's contribution not only provides a wide overview of the development of twelfth-century Jewish interpretations of the Song of Songs but also points to important aspects of the development of medieval Jewish exegesis. He argues that the move from midrash to *peshat* characterizes the twelfth-century northern French rabbinic school, a move from the authority of the classical ancient rabbinic tradition to a more contextualized scriptural interpretation that included a combination of reason and grammar-based readings. Harris, furthermore, investigates these Jewish exegetical methods and concerns against the backdrop of developments taking place among Christian interpreters. In his analysis of commentaries on the Song of Song, Harris focuses on the commentaries of Rashi and Rashi's grandson, Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir). Whereas for Rashi the Song of Songs is a love song by King Solomon who, in the language of a widow, narrates prophetically and thereby comforts Israel in its sorrow, Rashbam reads it as a sustained dialogue between a young woman and her female companions.

Sheila Tuller Keiter explores the rabbinic, medieval, and modern Jewish receptions of the famous poem *Eshet Hayil* in Prov 31. Before doing so, she gives a background to the biblical text and the challenges scholars face with respect to its dating. She observes that by the Middle Ages, Jewish commentators generally accepted the allegorical approach. For example, Saadia Gaon first reads the poem according to its plain meaning and then treats the poem metaphorically, identifying the *'eshet hayil* as the wise

man. Others such as Maimonides note that the woman represents “the healthy body in service of the human equilibrium.” Keiter also points to medieval Jewish commentators such as Abraham ibn Ezra, Joseph Kimchi, and the latter’s son Moses, who read the poem at face value. Keiter ends her essay with a fascinating argument for considering how *Eshet Hayil* is for the rabbis a repudiation of King Solomon’s sinful ways.

Judith R. Baskin’s contribution deals with the representations of biblical women in the writings of the medieval *Hasidei Ashkenaz* (German-Jewish pietists), who were connected with Rabbi Judah he-Hasid (the Pious). This group of writers was active in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Rhineland and expressed their faith and convictions in the texts they interpreted. *Sefer Hasidim*, their most significant work, reflects their attitudes toward women, sin, and sexuality, among other topics. Sexuality is seen basically as positive, and in marriage it is even greatly welcomed. At the same time, however, the masculine lust for women, whether only in sinful thought or lived out in a real way, presents a serious problem. The *Hasidei Ashkenaz* believed that this lust was caused by women. Therefore, pious men must limit their contact with women as much as possible, even in their own families. In the second part of the essay, Baskin explicates the means by which the authors of *Sefer Hasidim* signify specific biblical women and female personifications. Whereas some biblical figures such as Jezebel, Delilah, and Bathsheba serve as outstanding examples of the fact that women tempt men to sin, Ruth embodies commendable feminine qualities such as virtue, modesty, friendliness, reticence, and obedience to male and divine authority. The final section of Baskin’s chapter discusses the extensive exegesis of the *Eshet Hayil* poem of Prov 31:10–31 by Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms.

The volume’s next section focuses on poetry and to some extent *piyyut*. It also turns to another geographical region, al-Andalus, as the Muslims called the region of the Iberian Peninsula ruled by them between 711 and 1492. The two essays in this section highlight the interplay between Arabic and Hebrew poetry, Jewish theology and biblical narratives.

Aurora Salvatierra Ossorio offers an overview of the role of biblical women in medieval Hebrew poetry of the region. The reader is afforded a glimpse into the poetic byproducts of acculturation, particularly led by Jewish elite who imbibed the best of the Arabic literary tradition. Made the object of love and wine songs, the women of the Bible were extolled not for their intellectual acumen but above all for their beauty and allure. Despite their objectification, they exercised a certain power. To illustrate

how Jewish poets integrated Arabic literary styles and genres, Salvatierra Ossorio turns to the consideration of the Song of Songs.

The next chapter also examines the role biblical women play in medieval Jewish poetry of the Iberian Peninsula. Meret Gutmann-Grün explores the theme of the feminine figure of Zion in liturgical literature and pays special attention to the use of the Song of Songs in the poetry of Ibn Gabriol (died 1070) and Yehuda Halevi (died 1141). Zion is an active feminine voice; she speaks but is also the addressee. She is the beloved, the bride of God. Zion is also depicted as the mother of the children of Israel. Guttman-Grün's analysis, furthermore, draws attention to common features of both liturgical and secular songs with respect to love motifs and the yearning for liberation from Exile.

The next section is devoted to kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. We begin with Rachel Elijor's essay on the development and significance of the Shekhinah, the feminine dimension of God, over the centuries. She sketches how the notion of the Shekhinah in the rabbinic period is transformed in medieval works of the kabbalists, who were active between the end of the thirteenth century up until the end of the fifteenth century in southern France and northern Spain. In works such as the *Sefer Habahir* and the *Zohar*, the Shekhinah is depicted in relationship to God instead of just in relationship to the holy city and to the people of Israel. The Shekhinah is moreover placed in the world of the *sefirot*. Toward the end of her essay, Elijor ventures a view of eastern European Hasidism and its founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov (Besht for short). In Hasidism, the hidden divine world of mysticism was carried into the wider community, and its influence is palpable today.

Felicia Waldman also underscores the significance of the Shekhinah in kabbalah, which transformed the rabbinic notion of God's presence in the world into the queenly personification of the Godhead. Like Elijor, she demonstrates the different ways the Shekhinah is depicted, not least of which is the physical embodiment of the exile of the Jewish people. In the second half of her essay, Waldman devotes herself to one of the most colorful female figures in the Jewish tradition, Lilith, who appears in mystical texts. Her depiction ranges from a man-threatening and children-menacing female demon with ancient oriental roots to Adam's first wife to the sexual playmate of God. Lilith was rediscovered in contemporary feminist works and portrayed as a self-assured woman who resists patriarchal rule.

Yuval Katz-Wilfing focuses on the role Ruth plays in the *Zohar*, traditionally attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, who lived in the second

century CE, but according to the scholarly consensus it is a product of medieval Europe. Medieval Jewish mystics build on the rabbinic notion of Ruth as an exemplar of conversion and highlight the role she plays in the future redemption of God's people. The Zohar, as Katz-Wilfing demonstrates, gives voice to the esoteric dimensions of Ruth's conversion and in turn to the conversion process.

Katrin Kogman-Appel concludes this selection of essays with her offering on feminine protagonists in the book art of the Jewish Middle Ages and, in a certain sense, returns to the beginning of the volume and takes up the thread there, namely, the distribution of roles described by Elisheva Baumgarten and the intensive confrontation with Christianity, which also becomes perceptible in book art. Kogman-Appel concerns herself with two biblical characters, Rebekah the wife of Isaac and Zipporah the wife of Moses. Kogman-Appel's comparative analysis shows convincingly that the Ashkenazic and Sephardic representations of both women clearly differ from each other. In Sephardic representations, both women appear in active roles and determine decisively the fate of their people. The models for many of these regional representations are the images of the Virgin Mary, whose significance in the Christian world increases in this period. Just as Mary contributes decisively to the salvation of all Christians, Rebekah and Zipporah now also become central figures in Jewish salvation history in the Iberian haggadah cycles. The Ashkenazic examples, on the other hand, are not as culturally embedded and offer us less insight into the lives of medieval Jews. Rather, they represent values such as motherhood, education, piety, and, not least of all, the martyr's death in the face of the real experience of persecution and the danger of forced baptism. Thus, they become symbols for these central values and also models for religious action.

The essays in this volume attest to the various ways biblical literature is interwoven into the fabric of medieval Jewish cultural and religious production. In particular, we get a sense of how biblical women were depicted, and in turn we glimpse attitudes toward real and imagined women, attitudes that reflect regard for women and maintain traditional roles that privilege patriarchy yet at the same time subvert it. It is striking that the authors of our primary sources are all male and no doubt played a dominant role in Jewish life of the period. We would, however, be remiss to ignore that these images of women present us with a more complicated understanding of their role in medieval Jewish society and culture.