

Holiness and Transgression

*Mothers of the Messiah
in the Jewish Myth*

Psychoanalysis and Jewish Life

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*Mothers of the Messiah
in the Jewish Myth*

Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel

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Some of the chapters of this book have already been published as articles. The fourth chapter appeared in the journal *Nashim* 24 (2013), as “*Gedolah Averah Lishmah: the Development of Messianic Thought from Rabbinic Literature to Luzzatto*.” Chapter five appeared partially in three journals: in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 22 (2011) as “Seed from Another Place: Transformation of the Account of Lot’s Daughters,” edited by Rachel Elior, and in *ELN* as “The Enigma of the Term ‘Tiqla,’” which was based on the Hebrew version published in *Kabbalah* 23 (2010). Chapter six was published in *Yehuda Liebes Festschrift* (2012), and chapter seven appeared in *Da’at* 72 (2012). The epilogue has also appeared in a condensed form in *JAAR* 82 (2014), entitled

“The Myth of the Messianic Mother in Jewish and Christian Traditions: Psychoanalytic and Gender Perspectives.” I am grateful to the journal editors for allowing me to reprint these papers here.

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Translator's Note

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LAYOUT OF THE BOOK

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

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

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

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

EVOLUTION OF THE MYTH

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

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

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

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

MYTH AND GENDER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Messianic Mothers in the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

RUTH, TAMAR, AND LOT’S DAUGHTERS

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

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

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

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

1. Intertextuality in the Book of Ruth

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

4 Fisch, "Ruth," 425-37.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. The Feminine Ruse in the Mirror of Feminist Criticism

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

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

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

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

who take advantage of younger women—whether daughters (as with Lot) or daughters-in-law (Judah and Tamar), or relatives (Boaz and Ruth)—for the sake of reproducing sons for the royal house.¹² Similarly, Tikva Frymer-Kensky understands Ruth as “an agent of continuity,” who connects the beginning of the royal dynasty to its end. By disregarding sexual conventions, the Davidic mothers wrest sovereignty from the patriarchal monarchy. The Book of Ruth is an allegory of a people who have returned from exile and are grappling with its past; Ruth not only symbolizes an individual, but also the attitude towards foreign women in the days of the return to Zion.¹³ Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos and Susan Niditch stress that it is only through God’s collaboration with the women that their ruse is successful, for they were predetermined to fulfill the divine plan in which they have no will of their own.¹⁴

In contrast to these readings, I claim that the biblical authors stress the *volition* of Tamar, Ruth, and Lot’s daughters, counterpoising them to men who are portrayed as marginal and weak. In distinction to the stories in which heroines are exploited, these tales are depicted by heteroglossia and polyphony; the women here choose their motherhood while struggling with a reality of annihilation, abandonment, and unwillingness to impregnate (as arises particularly in the actions of Er and Onan, the first husbands of Tamar).¹⁵ These figures have political liberty and they disrupt the “patrilineal succession” in order to actualize their goals. Indeed, towards this aim, they use their bodies and sexuality; nonetheless, the stories emphasize the heroines’ freedom and volition, in contrast to oppressive circumstances that were widespread in the Ancient Near East. This book wishes to examine through feminist criticism the topics of motherhood and seduction, messianism and gender, while also illuminating points of weakness and strength in current theories, in order to express the myth of the messianic mother, which is revealed through the gender-power relations that arise in every story in their own right.

12 Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 44-90.

13 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 238, 264; Claudia V. Camp, *The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 13-35, 331-44.

14 Johanna Van Wijk-Bos, “Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17-22; Ruth 3,” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 37-67; Susan Niditch, “The Wrong Women Righted, Genesis 38,” *Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 1-2 (1979): 143-9; Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1992), 11.

15 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 23-32; Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 1-12, 119-21.

3. Messianism, Motherhood, and Gender

As previously stated, researchers from different disciplines have studied the Davidic stories: biblical literary scholars have clarified the shared motifs of the dynastic mothers, feminist scholars have stressed their weakness and portrayed their dependence on ruses and deception as “the power of the weak,” scholars of myth have grappled with the idea that the Messiah is born of sexual transgression, and scholars of biblical law have discussed them in the context of the laws of forbidden relations in the stories of the Judean dynasty.¹⁶ Generally, research of the messianic myth has abstained from the gender perspectives, while gender scholars have mostly ignored the messianic significance of these stories in the biblical, rabbinic and Zoharic perception of the Davidic dynasty.¹⁷ Therefore, in order to enrich the understanding of the connection between female transgression and redemption, this study explores the messianic myth from within a perspective of gender and psychoanalysis. These perspectives, in their conjunction, impart that the Davidic dynasty was transformed into a sacred and elected dynasty not in spite of the actions of its foremothers, but rather *because* of them.

Situated at the foundation of this book is the premise that the Davidic stories are charged with a messianic tension already present in the biblical literature.¹⁸ In contrast to the prevalent trend of focusing on the figure of the “son,” the redeemer, and the masculine aspects of the messianic narrative, my book focuses on the messianic mothers, who constitute the elective status of the sons. A type-scene of “the annunciation of the messianic hero” emerges from the parallels between the stories of Ruth, Tamar, and Lot’s daughters.¹⁹ In the forthcoming chapters, we will examine the literary content and the characteristics of this scene, the singularity of each heroine, and their common features, as they appear in the genealogical list at the end of the Book of Ruth. We will begin with this list which represents an internal biblical exegesis, portraying David in the background of his mother’s stories of seduction and childbirth.

16 Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 44-90; Israel Knohl, *The Many Faces of Monotheistic Religion* (Tel Aviv: The Broadcasted University, 1995), 28-32; Adin Steinsaltz, *Women in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: The Ministry of Defense, 1983), 53-64; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 59-73.

17 For an exception, see Charlotte E. Fonrobert, “The Handmaid, the Trickster and the Birth of the Messiah,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. Carol Bakhos (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 245-75.

18 As can be seen in the research of Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messianic Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), 155-86, 304-54; Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London: Continuum, 2007), 1-106; Israel Knohl, *Biblical Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), 40-62; Yair Lorberbaum, *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature* (London: Continuum, 2011), 13-39.

19 The origin of the term ‘type-scene’ is in the research of Robert Alter, also see the opening of the second chapter.

CHAPTER 1

Feminine Genealogy and the Lineage of the House of David

*If we are not be accomplices in the murder of the mother
we also need to assert that there is a genealogy of women.*

*Each of us has a female family tree: we have a mother,
a grandmother and great-grandmothers, we have daughters.
Because we have been exiled into the house of our husbands,
it is easy to forget the special quality of the female genealogy...*

*Let us try to situate ourselves within that genealogy
so that we can win and hold on to our identity.*

Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*

The biblical stories of the messianic mothers conclude with a family tree at the end of the Book of Ruth:

Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.' So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son ... Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David. (Ruth 4: 11-22)

Generally, genealogical lists constitute an instrument for granting rewards or disinheritance and fill in the gaps of the biblical narrative.¹ Most of the genealogical lists symbolize reproductive continuity, whereas in the above case the links of the chain are constructed through deviations from the natural order. The conjunction of names in the Judean dynasty exemplifies a form of unexpected procreation, which demonstrates that transgression and forbidden relations cause the birth of the son, the redeemer. The list clandestinely conceals the feminine narrative, which fluctuates on the spectrum between illicit relations, prostitution, and forbidden sexual acts. It illustrates that breaching limitations defines the biblical conception of the sacred and elected.

Scholars suggest that the Book of Ruth represents a polemic concerning foreign women at the time of the return to Zion. Some clarify the layers of editing in the work, while others claim that the text defames King David's descendants. Overall, the book gestures to a pre-destruction era from the position of a later, post-destruction reality.² In addition to these approaches the role of the Book of Ruth in completing David's missing background in the Book of Samuel should be emphasized. The messianic configuration of David, which is developed in the chapters of the Prophets and Psalms, is portrayed for the first time in this genealogical list, which justifies the stories of the dynastic heroines, while simultaneously transforming David into a chosen hero because of his relation to them. The notion of the "Messiah son of David" found in rabbinical exegesis is clarified through the feminine continuum woven into the intertextual ending of the book. In fact, in the Septuagint, the Book of Ruth is situated between the Book of Judges and the Book of Samuel, thereby indicating the direct link between the dynastic mothers and the elected son.

By positioning the Book of Ruth before the Book of Samuel, the Septuagint hints at a radical position: since King David does not have a birth story of his own, his birth scene is embroidered within the story of Naomi and Ruth, Rachel and Leah, Tamar, and Lot's daughters. This exposition portrays David as an outcome of his foremothers and their behavior becomes a clue to understanding his character. Indeed, from the multiple characteristics of David's personality, the Book of Ruth emphasizes his transgressive background, an issue which reappears in the narratives of David's wives and his sin with Bathsheba. Seemingly, the sages

1 Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1996), 14-5; Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9*. Anchor Bible 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 245-65; Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 81-90.

2 Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth*. Anchor Bible 7 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 23-8; Camp, *Wise, Strange, and Holy*, 215-26; Zakovitch, *Ruth* 14-40; Zakovitch, *David*, 24-35; Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*, 254-5; Brenner, *Ruth and Naomi*, 61-84.

transformed sexual transgression into his unique signature and described David as the Messiah, “the man who elevated the yoke of repentance.”³

TWO GENEALOGICAL LISTS AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The Davidic lineage connects the sacred and the profane. I claim that the Book of Ruth ends not with one list, but two, one well known and masculine, the second, by contrast, subversive and feminine. The dialectical relation between these two lists is central to understanding the function of the messianic idea, which emerged through overt and covert biblical polemics. As it is stated in the concluding verses of the book:

Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David (Ruth 4: 18-22)

This is a conventional list, resembling classic biblical and ancient Near East genealogies. It marks the following names: Perez—Hezron—Ram—Amminadab—Nahshon—Salmon—Boaz—Obed—Jesse—David. This line of ten generations focuses on chosen males and disregards others, thereby highlighting the connection between the father and the elected son.⁴ It opens with Perez, son of Judah, mentions the present—with the birth of Obed to Boaz—and concludes with the future of the dynasty: the appearance of David, son of Jesse. In the ascending aspect of the genealogy, David is attributed to the “primordial father,” Judah, whereas in the descending aspect, the birth of David surpasses the narrative of Ruth and Naomi.⁵ According to Frederick Bush’s proposal, the name “David” signifies a dramatic character and a “coda of redemption” in the closing of the Book of Ruth, and it is David who bestows a new meaning to the entire plot.⁶

As a result of the list’s deviation from the plot of the story, some hypothesized that the text in question was copied from Chronicles or added later. Other

3 *b. Mo’ed Qatan* 16b, *b. Avodah Zarah* 5a; for the justification of his sexual transgression, *b. Sanhedrin* 107a; *b. Shabbat* 56a.

4 Bush, *Ruth*, 15. Judah and David are perceived as the extremes of the dynasty in I Chronicles 28:4.

5 This list is similar to the lineage in Chronicles 6:16-17 and Jesus’s relation to Adam and to God in the Gospel of Luke (3:23-38).

6 Bush, *Ruth*, 268; Campbell, *Ruth*, 169.

scholars have even suggested that it constitutes a “masculine” editing of the book which was originally written by a woman.⁷ This reading stresses that the concluding list ignores the feminine heroines of the book, and—like most genealogies in the Bible—marks only the masculine association. In this manner, the true aim of the story is exposed, creating a dramatic saga of King David’s origins.⁸ David provides a justification for all the plots’ entanglements and he symbolizes their zenith; however, concomitantly, he overshadows the feminine heroines’ initiative that made his birth possible. According to Hannah Naveh, this process parallels the disappearance of Tamar at the conclusion of Genesis 38:

In this way they promptly erased the actions of Tamar, Naomi, and Ruth ... The stories’ structure is directed towards their conclusion, in order to join them to the national story in general and the Davidic dynasty in particular, thus showing the reason they were included in the canon. The feminine dramas were included only because they are conceived as links in the middle, and not as foundational stones within the framework of the male narrative. By being like this they are able to be erased once the men return. In both of these family episodes, the women, who initiated the nationalistic history and solved the family crisis, were drowned out and disappeared behind the family curtain.⁹

This process does not only characterize the house of David. It begins in the Book of Genesis, with the Priestly (P) and Judean (J) genealogy and is completed in Chronicles, where the forefathers are presented as “the primary agents of the

7 According to Campbell, the book portrays a unique genre of “Hebrew historical short story,” inspired by Genesis and Judges, transmitted orally and written around 700-950 BCE; whereas according to Bush it discusses a post-destruction priestly source, in which the list is part of the original compilation. According to Rofé, the list is an integral section of the book, which was edited in a later era. Zakovitch also proposes that the story and the genealogical list should not be separated. van Dijk-Hemmes, Fokkelen. “Ruth: A Product of Women’s Culture?” *In Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, edited by Athalya Brenner, 134-9. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999. Campbell, *Ruth*, 170-3; Bush, *Ruth*, 13-6, 265-8; Alexander Rofé, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible* (Jerusalem: Simor, 2009). 91; Zakovitch, *Ruth*, 14-6, 33-5.

8 Knoppers, *Chronicles*, 249.

9 Hannah Naveh, “Heart of Home, Heart of Light: Representation of the Family in Hebrew Literature,” in *The Love of Mothers and the Fear of Fathers*, ed. Aviad Kleinberg (Tel Aviv: Keter and Tel Aviv University, 2004), 131-2. Also, Gen. 38:29-30, “But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, ‘What a breach you have made for yourself!’ Therefore he was named Perez. Afterwards his brother came out with the crimson thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.”

divine blessing,” while the foremothers—the wives and daughters—are forced out of the official genealogical documentation.¹⁰ According to Esther Fuchs, these masculine lists reflect a consistent denial of the feminine and the attempt to naturalize “the patriarchal construction of generational history.”¹¹ The conjoining of the feminine and masculine lists reinforces the hierarchal relations, while simultaneously, the women are assimilated in the lives of the fathers and sons.

Nissan Rubin connects the exclusion of women in the Bible to their physiological fluctuation between purity and impurity; accordingly they belong and are excluded from a society on a periodic basis. This fluctuation also has legal ramifications, inasmuch a woman belongs to her father’s house, then to her husband’s, and finally her sons.¹² This being the case, the laws of menstruation express the unstable status of women in the ancient world. At the time when a woman gives birth she is needed for the communal continuity, but afterwards she is concealed from the lineage’s documentation and is narratively marginalized. Another cause for the absence of women from the genealogical lists may result from the men’s effort to strengthen their paternity, which could not until recently be proven biologically, while motherhood cannot be disputed and does not require proof.

As we will see, this prevalent claim becomes more complex in the Davidic tales, where the identity of the mother is put into doubt. See, for example, the statement “a son was born to Naomi” (even though Ruth is the son’s mother), the declaration that Tamar “is pregnant through prostitution,” after she has been portrayed as a bride, a *qedeisha* (cult prostitute) and her identity is not clear, or the conception of the *Yalkut ha-Makhiri* that David is the son of two mothers: Jesse’s wife and Jesse’s maidservant.

THE FEMININE GENEALOGICAL LIST—EXCLUSION OR REDUNDANCY?

I will now freshly examine the ending of the Book of Ruth and challenge the premise that this genealogical list is the exclusion of the Davidic foremothers. Without deciding the question of list’s dating, let us focus on the final edition,

10 Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 56; Camp, *Wise, Strange, and Holy*, 191-226; Knoppers, *Chronicles*, 250-3.

11 Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 81, 47-9.

12 Nissan Rubin, *The Beginning of Life: Rites of Birth, Circumcision and Redemption of the First-Born in the Talmud and Midrash* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995), 16-8. On the fear caused by female blood, see Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 34-40, 62; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 219.

which clearly includes two different genealogical models, presented alongside each other:

Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like **Rachel and Leah**, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom **Tamar** bore to Judah.’ So Boaz took **Ruth** and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.’ Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to **Naomi**.’ They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of **David**.

Now these are the descendants of **Perez**: Perez became the father of **Hezron**, Hezron of **Ram**, Ram of **Amminadab**, Amminadab of **Nahshon**, Nahshon of **Salmon**, Salmon of **Boaz**, Boaz of **Obed**, Obed of **Jesse**, and Jesse of **David**. (Ruth 4: 11-22)

Shortly before the familiar genealogy, which concludes the book (verses 18-22), there appears a feminine list, which focuses on David’s foremothers (verses 11-17). This list offers an alternative to the dynastic-historic, masculine-linear writing, focusing on a different temporality, chronoscopic and circular, and recording the “great foremothers” of the tribe. This reading strengthens the idea that the Book of Ruth is a feminine work, which describes an actual or symbolic journey “outside of the patriarchal order.”¹³ The tension created between the two lists, demonstrates that the author’s intention to portray a “peaceful construction of a matrilineal tradition within the

13 Michael M. Caspi and Rachel S. Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road: Ruth, Naomi and the Female Journey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 66-9, 53-73, 186-90. According to Fonrobert, the dynastic stories in the Book of Ruth represent a “masculine-scene.” Fonrobert, “Birth of the Messiah.” On feminine writing from gender perspective see Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 29-37; and also Cixous, Gilbert and Gubar, Rattok.