

## ▣ ESTABLISHING GENDER CATEGORIES AND HIERARCHIES: THE EVOLUTION OF RABBINIC DISCOURSE ON THE CREATION OF WOMAN

**Katja von Schöneman**  
*University of Helsinki*

This article examines the evolution of rabbinic interpretative discourse on the creation of woman, as depicted in the Hebrew Bible, addressing well-known rabbinic writings from the fifth to the tenth centuries. My feminist and genealogical discourse-analytic exploration illustrates the accumulation of gender-biased elements and the concomitant strengthening of an obvious, all-encompassing patriarchal ethos along this hermeneutical trajectory. I argue that the diachronic development of the rabbinic discourse on the creation of woman took place in three consecutive discursive stages representing self-dependent characteristics. The tradition corpus was first established in Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah, then reinforced in the Babylonian Talmud, and finally it became embroidered with versatile elaborations, as demonstrated in passages from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer, and Alphabet of Ben Sira.

### INTRODUCTION

The formation and development of the religious interpretive tradition can be characterized as transformation through transmission.<sup>1</sup> Later annotations are always built upon earlier accounts and some details are lost, whereas others may be altered. In addition, material can also be added. In the Jewish interpretive tradition, this can be seen within rabbinic literature (e.g. Neusner 1999: 6–7; Kister et al. 2015) in particular, and rabbinic discourse on the creation of woman does not deviate from this fundamental assumption. The biblical passages discussing human creation have been interpreted accordingly – with context-dependent and ever-changing premises – enabling explications creating asymmetry of genders and potentially affecting the status of woman, who has often been seen as subordinate to man based on her derivative creation from his rib.<sup>2</sup> This article tackles the diachronic development of the late-antique rabbinic discourse regarding the matter.

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2 For a closer insight into the reception of woman's creation and the first woman in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, see Kvam, Schearing & Ziegler 1999.

There are two somewhat different kinds of creation narratives in Genesis, Gen. 1:1–2:4a and Gen. 2:4b–24, with their differences probably reflecting their distinct origins. In the first account on human creation (Gen. 1:26–28),<sup>3</sup> God decides to make humankind (*ādām*) in His image and after His likeness, so that *they* will rule the animals on earth (Gen. 1:26).<sup>4</sup> When God creates *hā-ādām* in His image, He creates *them* as male and female (Gen. 1:27).<sup>5</sup> Then God blesses them and encourages them to be fruitful and increase, fill the earth, and master it (Gen. 1:28).<sup>6</sup>

Quite early in the second creation narrative (Gen. 2:7), God forms humanity (*hā-ādām*, ‘earthling’) from dust of the earth (*hā-ādāmā*) and blows the breath of life into its nostrils so that the human becomes a living being. Later on in the same account (Gen. 2:18–24), God realizes that it is not good for the human to be alone, and He decides to make a fitting ‘helper’ (‘*ēzer kə-negdō*’) for him (Gen. 2:18).<sup>7</sup> First, God forms all kinds of animals out of the earth for the human to name them (Gen. 2:19). As he gives names to them, no “help” for the human is found (Gen. 2:20). So, God casts a deep sleep upon the human and takes one of his ‘ribs’ (*šal ʾōtāw*)<sup>8</sup> closing up the flesh at that spot (Gen. 2:21). And He fashioned (*way-yiḅen*)<sup>9</sup> the rib taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man (Gen. 2:22).<sup>10</sup> The man at last recognizes the woman to be bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, and he names her ‘woman’ (*iššā*), for she was taken from ‘man’ (*iš*) (Gen. 2:23).<sup>11</sup>

## RABBINIC SOURCES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines the diachronic development of the exegetic discourse built on rabbinic interpretations of the creation of woman. It aims at identifying consecutive discursive stages with self-dependent characteristics, as I have earlier described in connection with the Islamic interpretive tradition (von Schöneman 2021; 2022), and in consistency with Jacob

3 All biblical quotations throughout the article follow the new English translation of the Masoretic (Hebrew) Bible, published in 1985 by the Jewish Publication Society, except for *ādām* and *hā-ādām* being referred to as ‘human’, ‘humankind’, or ‘humanity’, as proposed by a number of scholars (see below).

4 The indefinite form of the masculine word *ādām* has been suggested to refer to a generic term ‘human’ or ‘humankind’ by numerous scholars (e.g. Heger 2014: 12). It is notable that the word is in a singular form, whereas the pronoun referring to this noun, ‘they’, is in the plural. Similarly, this human creation is referred to with a plural object suffix ‘them’ in the next verse (Gen. 1:27). This is, in fact, one of the most important starting points for a number of rabbinic discussions, as will be shown in this article.

5 Grammatically, *hā-ādām* is a definite form of a masculine singular noun. Due to its definite form, it should most likely be read as a common noun, not as the name Adam. It has frequently been proposed that this phase of human creation should be read as the creation of a non-gendered primal being (e.g. Meyers 1991: 85; Noort 2000: 11).

6 These events are repeated later in Gen. 5:1–2, 9:6.

7 ‘*Ēzer kə-negdō*’ is not a standard Hebrew expression (Teugels 2000: 120) and it has been interpreted in numerous ways in the course of history (Heger 2014: 14; Kvam, Schearing & Ziegler 1999: 28–29; Noort 2000: 12–13). Although the meaning of ‘*ēzer*’, ‘help’, is quite unequivocal, that of the apposition *kə-negdō*, ‘opposite/equivalent to him’, is not. Many scholars have suggested the ultimate meaning of this expression to be a mutual connection between equal beings (e.g. Meyers 1991: 85; Noort 2000: 12–13; Westermann 1990: 227).

8 Except for the narrative understood as the creation of woman, the word *šela* ‘(pl. *šalā ʾōt*)’, encompassing a potential synecdochic – a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part – and meaning a ‘rib’ here, is translated as ‘side’ almost everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible (LaCocque 2006: 117), with the word being most often connected with architecture (Walton 2006: 208).

9 Literally ‘built’, providing a basis for affluent rabbinic discussions, also referred to later in this article. Although the phenomenon is rare in the Hebrew Bible, ‘building’ was a widely used verb for creation in the ancient Near East (Heger 2014: 26; Westermann 1990: 230–231).

10 Due to the new terminology, *iš* and *iššā*, this verse has sometimes been read as the birth of distinct genders, male and female (Noort 2000: 11; Westermann 1990: 233).

11 Later on, in Gen. 3:20, this primal woman is named *hawwā* (Eve).

Neusner's (1999: 6–7) characterization of different stages of rabbinic Judaism.<sup>12</sup> My article focuses on the period of most voluminous rabbinic activity, the timeframe being from the fifth to the tenth centuries, based on the estimated dating of the compilations. The frame was adjusted so that it begins from the first late-antique rabbinic discussions concerning the creation of woman and still encompasses the early medieval processing of the traditions; however, it does not extend to the great Jewish commentaries produced later in the Middle Ages. Due to the nature of the rabbinic texts presenting different traditions on each matter under discussion, it is impossible to trace the exact dating of each piece of religious knowledge present in them. Although most of the traditions are assigned to named rabbis, many of whom seem to have been historical figures, their real roles behind the sayings cannot be ascertained. In addition, most passages have a history of oral transmission before their textual appearance.<sup>13</sup> The compilations, in turn, are not ascribed to any known person. In fact, rabbinic writings can be seen as statements of consensus, and named ascriptions should most likely be understood as exemplary, not as individual or schismatic (Neusner 1995: 93, 110–111). This editorial contribution is connected with the context of each compilation, reflecting various variables.

The texts from the first discursive stage (fifth century) addressed in this article present traditions preserved from the *tannaim* and elaborated upon by the *amoraim*, the chosen accounts being from two well-known Midrashic compilations: Genesis Rabbah, providing verse-by-verse explications of Genesis, and Leviticus Rabbah, focusing on a few biblical keywords and supplementing them with long interpretive discourses. The second discursive stage (sixth century) comprises a great number of traditions collected into the gigantic compilation of the Babylonian Talmud, reflecting the amoraic reinforcement of previous traditions. Third (seventh–tenth centuries), four different kinds of rabbinic writings – Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,<sup>14</sup> Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (version B),<sup>15</sup> Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer,<sup>16</sup> and Alphabet of Ben Sira,<sup>17</sup> containing augmentations from the period of the *geonim* – serve as the last discursive stage addressed in this article.<sup>18</sup>

The theoretical and methodological framework of the present article is best described as feminist discourse analysis, bringing together critical theories and the concept of discourse (Cramer 2009: 326). It has been influenced by social constructionist and post-structuralist thought. According to the former, people understand the categories and concepts of the world in dependence on their historical and socially constructed cultural context (Burr 2015: 1–4), and

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12 Neusner divides rabbinic Judaism into four stages beginning from the Pentateuch, proceeding to the Mishna, then the Tosefta and scriptural exegesis (*midrash*), and finally the Talmud. The last two stages serve as the first two distinguished in the present study.

13 Individual passages can be dated on the basis of redactional-critical and tradition-critical criteria only in a relative sense, and it is worth noting that there are neither external historical nor biographical references to the sages, and the extant fragmentary biographical – or rather, “hagiographical” – information often conflicts with parallel sources (Fonrobert & Jaffee 2007: 2).

14 Targum Yerushalmi (i.e. ‘Targum Pseudo-Jonathan’) is an Aramaic hermeneutic translation of the Pentateuch composed in late Jewish literary Aramaic not earlier than the 7th century.

15 Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (i.e. ‘Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan’) is a Palestinian homiletical exposition of the Mishnaic tractate Avot written mainly in Hebrew. The final redaction took place between the sixth and the eighth centuries, although its earliest version may date back as early as the first half of the third century.

16 Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer (i.e. ‘Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer’) is a Midrashic work composed in Palestine during the first half of the eighth century.

17 Alphabet of Ben Sira is a satirical work written by an unknown author in the Eastern areas of the Jewish settlement between the eighth and the tenth century.

18 In this article, the word “geonic” refers to the time period after the Babylonian Talmud, roughly between 650–900, and not to the origin of the writings introduced here as having been produced by *geonim*; nor does it refer to any specific geographical location.

late-antique Jewish settlements were not an exception to this. Gender, for its part, can be seen as a social construct (Sunderland 2004: 11), and conceptions of gender are fashioned by context-dependent language use, which in turn reflects dominant interpretations of reality (Fairclough 2001: 30–34; Litosseliti & Sunderland 2002: 5–6). This process of meaning-making, representing power structures such as gender hierarchy, also evolves in time (Burr 2015: 61–63; Fairclough 1995: 189). Such plasticity is an essential starting point for my analysis.

There are many ways to construe the concept of “discourse”, one of them being a means to observe the world constructed by language use (Sunderland 2004: 6–7). Discourse can generate and preserve certain understanding of gender in a given context (Butler 1993: 1; Phillips & Hardy 2002: 6; Wodak 2001), and it can be both gendering and gendered (Sunderland 2004: 20–22.). In addition, discourse can establish and sustain inequality and injustice (Cramer 2009: 326), such as hierarchical categories possibly disempowering women (Lazar 2005: 2–10). Language use is always contextual, so that discourses, too, are historically cultivated and conceived (Wodak 2001: 1–13). Furthermore, discourse is intertextual by nature (Wodak 1997), and novel texts are inevitably influenced by previous ones (Fairclough 1995: 2). In the present study, I examine these features through the evolution of rabbinic discourse representing, sustaining, and constructing gender hierarchy within Judaism based on religiously motivated writings.

Discourse analysis encompasses different approaches of the social and cognitive study of language, also combining textual analysis with other modes of social studies (Phillips & Hardy 2002: 19–22). Although it does not offer a concrete set of analytical tools, it provides an interdisciplinary framework to widely examine social and political aspects of language use. Attention is paid to the way in which dominance, discrimination, power, and control – all manifest in language – make seen interconnected matters and the consequentiality of discourse (Wodak 2001: 2, 14–29). Power relations are an important parameter in the present article, which examines the role of language in upholding gender-based social asymmetry among Jews.

Discourse analysis has been used in a wide set of scholarly fields, including the study of religion.<sup>19</sup> It has also been shown to provide a tool for examining how biblical interpretations are compounded, shaped, and negotiated in a given community. The subjectivity of each interpreter has recently gained attention, and exegeses have been increasingly conceived as interaction between the actors of a given context, also shaping the mores of the community (Warhol 2007: 50–72). It is worth noting that the discipline of biblical studies is most often concerned with texts. Thus, the role of discourse analysis in this scholarship is often what Norman Fairclough, a pioneering voice of the approach, calls “textually oriented discourse analysis” (Fairclough 1992: 37–61). Instead of being solely a research perspective, it therefore serves as a *de facto* method in the present article, deeply immersed in textual tradition.

Discourse analysis has been noted to be a valuable framework in exploring gender matters (Fairclough 2001: ix; von Stuckrad 2013: 9). Although the concept of feminist (critical) discourse analysis became more widely known when Michelle Lazar published a pioneering volume on the subject in 2005, many clearly discourse-analytical studies that strongly relate to feminist theory do not specify their theoretical framework as “feminist discourse analysis”. Meanwhile, there is a growing number of studies that openly adhere to it. Discourses can maintain unfair dichotomies, dividing people into hierarchical categories such as “men” and “women” – it has actually been argued that gender should be seen as an ever-present category

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19 For the use of discourse analysis within the discipline of study of religion, see Hjelm 2011.

in all social practice. Feminist discourse analysis challenges this status quo by putting special, even explicit focus on the way in which gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively formed, maintained, negotiated, and questioned in varying situations (Lazar 2007: 142–149).

Besides analysing rabbinic discourse in Late Antiquity from a feminist perspective, this examines the diachronic development of rabbinic interpretations of the biblical passage regarding the creation of woman. As the trajectory is likely to represent a historical lineage, it can be studied using a genealogical approach. Genealogy can be used for reconstruction of historical development, examining the way power has influenced the formation of understanding (Saar 2008: 295). A genealogical ethos can enhance the discourse-analytic approach, specifically in connection with historical-textual sources (Anaïs 2013: 123–135). As a matter of fact, this combination has been successfully used in connection with the Islamic interpretive tradition (Abou-Bakr 2015; von Schöneman 2021; 2022). According to Jacob Neusner (1999), rabbinic Judaism can be divided into consecutive stages; hence, genealogical discourse analysis is likely to provide a salutary tool in assessing the evolution of Jewish interpretive tradition as well.

The present article seeks to reveal the all-out patriarchal ethos of the rabbinic writings composed in Late Antiquity by identifying features which illustrate, generate, and sustain gender inequality. I will expose different linguistic and substantive details representing gendered prejudices in the rabbinic explications discussing the creation of woman, also keeping in mind the fact that each compilation is a careful assortment of earlier material, and hence an interpretive statement as such. Furthermore, my intention is to trace the accumulation of gender-biased elements in the exegetic discourse produced by in the rabbinic writings. This genealogical feature of the rabbinic discourse will be highlighted by pointing out the manner in which strata of explications are constructed on one another and changes – including additions and omissions – occur within the boundaries of the given interpretive community.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the past decades, feminist scholarship has been an exponentially growing field in Jewish studies. A gender-sensitive approach has reached just about all its disciplines, ranging from classical to modern subjects. Likewise, a growing number of scholars have specifically addressed women in rabbinic literature,<sup>20</sup> and various rabbinic accounts on the creation of woman have been examined in scholarly writings. One of the first was Daniel Boyarin's bestseller, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, in which he challenges the field of rabbinic studies, encouraging a shift from the theoretical framework towards novel hermeneutical possibilities. As a part of the discussion on marital sex (Boyarin 1995: 77–106), myths regarding female origin are also tackled.<sup>21</sup> Boyarin (1995: 78–80) suggests that Philo's explication of the two creation accounts served as an essential basis for subsequent rabbinic interpretations.<sup>22</sup> The author also briefly addresses the development of the rabbinic interpretations regarding the matter.

In *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (1994), Leila Bronner covers the stories of several well-known female figures in the Hebrew Bible. She introduces

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20 For a concise review on the beginning of the scholarship, see, e.g., Alexander 2000: 101–118; for the creation of woman in this scholarship, see, e.g., Pardes 1992: 13–38.

21 For Boyarin's later achievements in the field, see Wimpfheimer 2011.

22 For more details on Philo's (d. ~50 CE) interpretation of the creation of the first human, see van den Hoek 2000.

aggadic attitudes towards women, particularly those present in Genesis Rabbah and the Bavli (Bronner 1994: 1–21), also addressing the first woman, Eve. Bronner examines Eve's name specifically in connection with negative connotations and the rabbis' ways of reconciling the two biblical creation accounts. She shows how the rabbinic traditions concerning Eve were used to construct the category of woman, including her ritual obligations and highly valued modesty. The author sketches rabbinic hermeneutics as a harmonization of the two creation accounts pushing interpretations of woman's subordination and providing speculations on the meaning of *šela'* as a starting point for their remarks concerning Eve's physical qualities (Bronner 1994: 22–41). Similarly, Paul Heger investigates Midrashic attitudes towards women in light of the creation narrative. He concludes that potentially favourable portrayals of woman are defined by their relationship to men (Heger 2014: 11–45).<sup>23</sup> These phenomena are also evident in my investigation of rabbinic discourse regarding the first woman.

Rabbinic interpretations regarding the story of Eve and Adam are introduced as part of an anthological work on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim readings of Genesis and gender by Kristen Kvam, Linda Schearing, and Valerie Ziegler. The authors provide a collection of thematically arranged traditions from Midrashic, Talmudic, and Targumic sources (Kvam, Schearing & Ziegler 1999: 54–79). Moreover, within the timeframe of this study, some accounts from Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, and Alphabet of Ben Sira are also given (Kvam, Schearing & Ziegler 1999: 134–136). Kvam and her co-authors attempt to show that the earlier themes appear in medieval collections with significant reworkings. In addition, new themes are introduced in the subsequent interpretive tradition. Similarly, changes over time are also pointed out in Tal Ilan's *Mine and Yours and Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature*, in which she demonstrates the misogynous development of rabbinic writings over time (Ilan 1997: 292–293).<sup>24</sup> These are important premises for the present study as well.

A concise study by Lieve Teugels (2000) examines the creation of humans in rabbinic literature, also providing insight into the creation of woman. She discusses the ways the rabbis used to adjust the two different biblical accounts on human creation, providing rabbinic speculations concerning the concept of a primal androgyne.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Teugels tackles the figure of Lilith, also mentioning the later rabbinic elaboration regarding her, the Alphabet of Ben Sira.<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, the author thematically investigates selected passages from Genesis Rabbah and the Bavli, making short excursions into Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer in connection with Gen. 2:7 (Teugels 2000: 108–119). Many of her observations are noteworthy from the perspective of this article.

Judith Baskin examines femininity in Midrashic context in her groundbreaking work *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (2002). The author comprehensively discusses different female-related themes in rabbinic literature, and most importantly from the perspective of this study, she addresses Midrashic revisions of human

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23 For a comparison between parallel traditions, see, e.g., Raveh 2014: 145–156; Segal 2005: 21–27; Townsend 1994: 9.

24 In addition, Nehama Aschkenasy's pioneering work *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition* (1986) provides a diachronic approach into an archetypal feminine figure, however, addressing the creation of woman in rabbinic literature only sporadically. See Aschkenasy 1986: 10–12.

25 For the primal androgyne, see also Baskin 2002: 44–64; Boyarin 1995: 42–46; Hasan-Rokem & Yuval 2017: 252–256; Reisenberger 1993; Stemberger 2017: 225–226; Visotzky 2012: 587–588.

26 For the Alphabet of Ben Sira and the figure of Lilith in it, see also Bronner 1994: 33–34; Carvalho 2009; Kosior 2018: 122–123; Kvam, Schearing & Ziegler 1999: 134–136.

creation. Baskin's approach is thematic, so that she discusses the 'building' process of the first woman and the concept of the first couple as androgynes through passages from Midrashic literature, primarily Genesis Rabbah and the Bavli. She also makes a short excursion into the concept of "two Eves" in reconciling the two accounts on human creation. Baskin argues that Midrashic justifications of women's subordinate status are based on the inferior nature of female creation, which is used to explain the privileging of men and marginalization of women in the society (Baskin 2002: 44–64).

In *Feminist Rereadings of Rabbinic Literature* (2014), Inbar Raveh assumes that gender identities are cultural products which must be learned somewhere. Indeed, she argues, this is the way rabbinic legends were generated, reproducing the Jewish image of femininity. The author addresses the creation of woman in the last chapter, in which she analyses two parallel versions of the story regarding an event, present in both Genesis Rabbah and the Bavli. She poses an interesting question whether the difference between the versions may be related to their contexts, so that the more polemical and masculine tone observed in the later version actually reflects the stronger political situation concerning the Jewish community (Raveh 2014: 145–156).

Although rabbinic discourse in particular has been discussed in many of the studies mentioned above, it has not – so far – been systematically approached within either the theoretical framework of discourse analysis or the feminist version of that. In addition, its diachronic development has only been addressed in a small number of studies, although the material would potentially enable such analyses. Altogether, to my knowledge this article is the first to specifically address the evolution of rabbinic discourse regarding the creation of woman while also aiming at identifying the consecutive discursive stages of rabbinic interpretations.<sup>27</sup>

## ESTABLISHING THE AGGADIC TRADITION CORPUS: THE MIDRASH RABBAH

The first discursive stage of rabbinic conceptions concerning the creation of woman can be characterized as establishing the corpus of aggadic traditions, particularly in two collections of *midrashim* from the fifth century. Traditions in Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah represent versatile discussions and diverse perspectives regarding the creation of woman, being elaborations built upon tannaitic traditions and consolidated by amoraic notions. Harmonizing the two somewhat different kinds of biblical creation stories concerning human creation, in particular, was a constant bother to the rabbis of Late Antiquity. In fact, one potential solution, the primal androgyne, is already introduced in the beginning of the first section discussing human creation in Genesis Rabbah (8:1),<sup>28</sup> and an equivalent tradition is also given in Leviticus

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27 Some rabbinic accounts describing the creation of woman are introduced briefly or in connection with other matters in a number of studies (e.g. Anderson 1992: 50–54; 2001; Arbel 2005; Brower 2018: 184–187; Fike 2015: 7–8; Flood 2010: 39–45; Hasan-Rokem & Yuval 2017: 250–270; Krygier 2007: 69–71; Meyers 2012: 59–80; Secunda 2012: 62–67; Segal 2005: 21–27; Townsend 1994; Zevit 2013: 101–109). In addition to her creation, the Eve of rabbinic literature has been examined from various other perspectives (e.g. Adelman 2009: 71–108; Andrews 2007; Bellis 2002: 37–56; Kiel 2015; Lachs 1974: 342–345; Lerner 2018; Polzer 2012; Woolstenhulme 2017: 100–101, 310, 317). Furthermore, rabbinic conceptions of human creation in general have been studied with an emphasis on Adam (e.g. Cherry 2007: 40–71; Dulkan 2013: 148; Grypeou & Spurling 2013: 40–50; Kosman 2012: 154–213; Lorberbaum 2015; Smelik 2018; Stemberger 2017: 225–226; Toepel 2012: 316–321). In addition, Carol Meyers (2012: 59–80) uses this biblical figure to construct the ordinary woman of ancient Israel; however, she barely mentions the rabbinic literature.

28 Quotations from Genesis Rabbah follow J. Theodor's critical edition *Bereschit rabba mit kritischen apparat und kommentar* (1912).

Rabbah 14:1.<sup>29</sup> This tradition, attributed to R. Yirmeyahu b. Eleazar (second-century *tanna*), describes God having created the first human as an androgyne (*andrôgînôs*).<sup>30</sup> In Genesis Rabbah 8:1, R. Shmuel b. Naḥmani (third-century Palestinian *amora*) further elaborates on the matter, so that the Holy One created the first human (*hā-ādām hā-rišôn*), who was double-faced (*dī-prôsôpôn*),<sup>31</sup> and split him, making two backs. Similarly in Leviticus Rabbah 14:1, a sage proposes that the first being was created dual-faced (*dû parsûpîn*).<sup>32</sup> These complementary traditions seem to understand the creation of man and woman, as described in the biblical verse Gen. 1:27, as simultaneous. Nevertheless, the setting still alludes to a male primal being (*hā-ādām hā-rišôn*),<sup>33</sup> which is masculine in its grammatical form.

Although the rabbis bring up numerous explications of how the dissociation of genders might have happened, the potential simultaneous birth of both genders already seems to have been a minority view at this discursive stage. The creation of genders was, after all, understood as two consecutive events, most likely indicating that the woman was later formed from the first man. For instance, in Genesis Rabbah 14:2, an account possibly attributable to R. Yose b. Kezarta (unidentifiable) suggests that ‘and [God] formed’ (*way-yîšer*) in Gen. 2:7 is written with two *yods* due to an intention to refer to two acts of creation, one for Adam and one for Eve.<sup>34</sup> The same word, *way-yîšer*, is spelled with only one *yod* in Gen. 2:19, where it refers to the creation of animals. Furthermore, a discussion in Genesis Rabbah 17:7 proposes that there were actually two creations of woman: When Adam saw the first Eve filled with discharge and blood, God had to take her away and create her for the second time whilst he was asleep. A passage in 22:7 also alludes to the “first Eve”, which the rabbis suggest to have returned to dust. Although these traditions do not mention the name Lilith, they certainly concretize her potential existence, giving firm roots for the development of Jewish folklore regarding the matter. The culmination of this concept will be seen in the third discursive stage examined in this study.

The rabbis of the first discursive stage bring up a possible translation for *šela* ‘, often translated as ‘rib’ in connection with Gen. 2:21–22, so that it should be understood as ‘side’ as almost everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in Genesis Rabbah 17:6, R. Shmuel b. Naḥmani

29 Quotations from Leviticus Rabbah follow the online synopsis of the textual witnesses of Leviticus Rabbah, prepared under the direction of C. Milikowsky.

30 From Greek *androgynos*, that is, having both sexual organs. In research literature, the word is sometimes translated as hermaphrodite. The use of this loan word most likely signals the fact that the concept was known mainly from the Hellenistic world (for connections with Greek mythology, see, e.g., Boyarin 1995: 36; Stemberger 2017: 225–226; Teugels 2000: 109). In fact, the idea of the first human being androgynous was already presented by the Greek philosopher Plato (d. 347 BCE) in his *Symposium* (189d–190b), and his thoughts were transmitted into Judaism by the Jewish exegete and philosopher Philo of Alexandria (d. ~50 CE). It can also be found in the early Christian texts of the Nag Hammadi collection (Kugel 1998: 84). For more information on this conception and its implications for feminist theology, see Reisenberger 1993. For an overview of the primordial androgyne, see Boyarin 1995: 35–46. Baskin (2002: 62) argues that the tradition has been perceived, due to its homiletical potential, to teach that only male and female together form a true *adam*.

31 Greek *prosopon*, meaning ‘face’ or ‘person’.

32 The passage uses a linguistic formulation later found in the Bavli (Berakhot 61a).

33 Baskin (2002: 47) argues that this primal being is understood as male due to the fact that a female side is separated from it.

34 In Genesis Rabbah 14:3, the rabbis explain the two *yods* as referring to the creation of creatures both in the upper as well as the lower world, whereas in 14:4 it refers to the creation of good and bad. Furthermore, Genesis Rabbah 14:5 explicates the matter as referring to the formations of this world and the one in the future. The same root consonants, *yyr*, are used in Hebrew and Aramaic for ‘inclination’ so that this might have been the initiation of the well-known rabbinic theme concerning Adam’s creation with two inclinations. For a thorough overview of the two inclinations, see Urbach 1975: 471–483.



specifies that ‘He took one of his ribs’ (*way-yiqqah aḥat miṣ-ṣal ‘ōtāw*) means ‘sides’ (*siṭrōhī*) in Aramaic,<sup>35</sup> being in line with the verse Ex. 26:20 mentioning “for the other side wall (*lā-ṣela*) of the Tabernacle”.<sup>36</sup> The rabbi continues, switching partly into Aramaic, that the biblical passage commented upon holds a meaning of God removing one rib from between every two (*‘il ‘ā ḥādā mi-bēn šātē ṣal ‘ōtāw nāṭal*).<sup>37</sup> In addition, Genesis Rabbah 8:9 quotes R. Simlai (third-century Palestinian *amora*) as saying that Adam was created from earth (*‘ādāmā*) but Eve was created from Adam (*nibrē t hawwā mē- ‘ādām*). Altogether, these accounts reflect a potential consensus opting for both the ‘rib’ as well as Adam as the ultimate origin of woman.

Based on the bony substance of Eve’s creation, women reek and have shrilling voices, some rabbis opined. For example, in Genesis Rabbah 17:8, when people want an explanation for the fact that a woman has to use perfume whereas a man does not, R. Yehoshua (b. Ḥanania, first–second-century *tanna*) explains that man was born from the earth and the earth never reeks, but Eve was created from bone and, by comparison, if one leaves meat for three days without salt, it becomes putrid. Thus, the message of the rabbi seems to be that women would be foul-smelling without perfume. Such dubious female characteristics are present time and again in the rabbinic passages of this discursive stage, and they further strengthen the impression of women’s otherness.<sup>38</sup>

The inborn feebleness of women is only one of the potential justifications for their subordination, on which Genesis Rabbah 18:2 provides a discussion. R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin (fourth-century Palestinian *amora*) interprets that the usage of the verb ‘build’ in Gen. 2:22 indicates that God carefully pondered from what to create her – there is a linguistic similarity between the Hebrew words for ‘building’ and ‘pondering’ (Teugels 2000: 124).<sup>39</sup> God said, using first-person plural, that He would neither create her from the head, lest she be supercilious, nor from the eye, lest she be flirtatious, nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper, nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip, nor from the heart, lest she be envious, nor from the hand, lest she be a thief, and nor from the leg, lest she be a run-about. Thus, he decided to create her from a modest (*ṣānūa*) part of a man so that even when he is standing naked, this spot is covered up (*mākūssē*). The account continues by describing that when God created each limb of the woman, He said to her: [be] a modest woman (*iššā ṣanū ‘ā*)!<sup>40</sup> The passage repeats all the body parts mentioned above with examples of dubious characteristics in connection with stories of female figures in the Hebrew Bible, although it would have also been possible to find positive examples from among biblical women (Bronner 1994: 31–32). The gendered bias of the account is evident, and it demonstrates the sages’ understanding of an ideal woman and her inherent characteristics: passivity, humbleness, and modesty, as Baskin argues (2002: 53). In addition, women are seen as property of their male relatives, as alluded in Genesis Rabbah 17:7, where the creation of woman is compared to commercial affairs (see Raveh 2014: 147).

35 The Aramaic word *ṣaṭar* (det. *siṭrā*) is translated as ‘side’ (Sokoloff 1990: 373).

36 A similar account is also given in Genesis Rabbah 8:1 as an unattributed report. Teugels (2000: 112) observes that this, comparing two verses with the same word, is a common hermeneutic tool in rabbinic explications.

37 The word *‘il ‘ā* (with a variant spelling of *‘il ‘ā*) is ‘rib’ in Aramaic, equivalent to *haṣ-ṣela* in Hebrew.

38 For the otherness of women in rabbinic literature in general, see Baskin 2002: 13–43.

39 Two of the root consonants in the verb ‘ponder’ (*hitbōnēn*), *bet* and *nun*, are in common with those of the verb ‘build’ (*banā*).

40 For closer insight into one of the best-known manifestations of this, covering one’s hair, see Bronner 1993: 465–477.

The purpose of Eve's creation is discussed throughout the fifth-century *midrash*. For example, Eve was given to Adam for his vitality and to serve as his (evil) adviser, as seen in Genesis Rabbah 20:11. Genesis Rabbah 8:12, commenting on Gen. 1:28 and not the creation itself, contains an interesting statement on gender relations based on the first creation story. According to the passage, the first part of the verse, 'be fertile and increase' (*pərū*), is presented in the second-person plural whereas the next part, 'and master it' (*wə-kibšūhā*), could be read as a second-person masculine singular. R. Eleazar (b. Shammua, second-century *tanna*) universalizes this idea into a legal ruling according to which the man, not the woman, is commanded regarding reproduction. Thus, the divine plan to make human in God's own image, as well as the obligation to subdue the earth, is relevant only for men. As the woman is exempted from the duty of procreation and tending the earth, her individual status seems to get minimized along with this notion.<sup>41</sup> Was it perhaps too much for the sages to accept the idea of woman being created in the divine image?

The rabbis of this discursive stage depict the role of woman as mainly domestic and ornamental: she must be entertaining and attractive for her husband. For instance, R. Aivu (fourth-century Palestinian *amora*) states that God decorated Eve like a bride and brought her to Adam. He bases this explication on a notion that people call doing their hair as 'building' in some places, and it has been suggested that this account should be understood so that the concept of building into a woman means fixing one's hair (Neusner 1985: 189). Furthermore, a passage in Genesis Rabbah 18:3, referring to Gen. 2:22, states that God built more chambers in the woman in order for her to hold a foetus. On numerous occasions, the rabbis strongly advocate for marriage as an ultimate perfection of creation; for example, Genesis Rabbah 17:2 accordingly explains various linguistic features of the biblical passage. The man is to insert sperm into the woman and make demands upon her, as probably alluded to in Genesis Rabbah 17:7 by R. Yehoshua.

Based on the biblical text concerning human creation, the rabbis attest that man has to dominate his wife and confine her indoors.<sup>42</sup> In Genesis Rabbah 8:12, R. Yoḥanan b. Baroka (second-century *tanna*) explains the biblical expression 'and master it' (*wə-kibšūhā*) in Gen. 1:28 so that the object suffix *-hā*, a third-person feminine, refers to the first woman – not to the land (*hā- 'āreṣ*, feminine in gender), as conventionally understood. Instead, the rabbi's explication is that a man has to subjugate his wife so that she does not go out to the market. This compulsion is further strengthened by a comment that every woman going out to the market will eventually flounder, as happened to Dinah, who went out on her own in Gen. 34:1 and subsequently got raped.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in Genesis Rabbah 18:1, R. Yirmeya (fourth-century Palestinian *amora*) reports that a woman is to sit at home (*darkāh šel iššā lihyôt yōšebet bəṭōk bēṭāh*), whereas it is the man who goes out to the market and learns human understanding.

In addition to her name being linguistically related to the treacherous serpent (*hiwyā*) of the Garden, as proposed in Genesis Rabbah 20:11, the creation of Eve is juxtaposed with that of Satan, and her creation is linked to the sorrowful turn in the history of humankind. This is done in Genesis Rabbah 17:6 along with R. Ḥanina b. Adda's (third-century Babylonian *amora*)

41 Baskin (2002: 51) argues that such a policy lessens women's legal status and makes them dependent on male control.

42 Interestingly, there is an equivalent narration in the Islamic interpretive tradition where a strong command to confine women, on the basis of the creation narrative, is repeated time and again, as discussed in von Schöneman 2021; 2022.

43 Baskin (2002: 51) argues that this tradition justifies the authority of men based on the inherent sexual unreliability of women.

remarkable elaboration that the letter *samekh* – the first letter in the word for Satan – is not used in the beginning of Genesis until Gen. 2:21; in his opinion, its word ‘closed up’ (*yisgōr*) indicates that when woman was created, Satan was created with her (*kēnān šen-nibrē’t nibrā’ sāṭān ‘immāh*). Notably, the rabbi spells Satan here with a *samekh* even though the word *sāṭān* is conventionally spelled with *šin*. Nevertheless, there is a phonetic connection between the first letter of Satan and the *samekh* used in *yisgōr*. The link between Eve and Satan is actually widely speculated on in many Midrashic contexts (Bronner 1994: 26).<sup>44</sup> Moreover, a similar juxtaposition of the creation of the primal woman and that of the devil is also found in the Islamic interpretive tradition (von Schöneman 2022: 461).

Based on the rabbinic writings from the first discursive stage, women seem to be opposite to the original divine intention. For example, in Genesis Rabbah 17:4, which explains the creation of animals and the first human naming them in Gen. 2:18–20, R. Aḥa (fourth-century Palestinian *amora*) asks why God did not create a partner for this solitary being to begin with. The answer, as is characteristic of rabbinic discussions, is given immediately and explicitly: God foresaw that the man would later complain to God about his wife, so He did not create her until Adam himself had asked for her. It seems that even God had no power over the nature of the end product, as He simply delayed the creation of this baneful figure, the first woman, depicted as derivative, dependent, and concomitantly inferior in relation to the man at so early a stage in the discursive trajectory.

## REINFORCEMENT OF THE INTERPRETIVE TRADITION: THE TALMUD BAVLI

The second discursive stage of rabbinic discourse concerning the creation of woman, perceived through passages of the Babylonian Talmud, took shape in the sixth century. This phase is best characterized as reinforcing previous traditions which was done mainly by the *amoraim*. Although some female-favouring notions may have been made, the outcome of the rabbinic discussions frequently annul them by settling into an androcentric atmosphere. The ‘androgynous’ primal being that was discussed during the previous phase of the rabbinic discourse, for instance, was not mentioned as such during this discursive stage. The harmonization efforts concerning the two distinct narratives of human creation continued, but the result of the lengthy discussions on whether Eve was originally a second face – or just a tail – of the primal *male* being seems to encompass an idea of a minor female motif in him. For example, in Berakhot 61a and Eruvin 18a, the rabbis disagree over the meaning of the word *šēla* ‘mentioned in Gen. 2:22: one says that it means face (*paršūp*), indicating that Eve was originally one face of Adam, whereas the other rabbi interprets it as a tail (*zānāḥ*). Surprisingly, this peculiar detail of a tail is seldom mentioned in research literature concerning the rabbinic passages discussing the creation of woman,<sup>45</sup> although the explication clearly suggests that the first woman was a protuberance. Moreover, this unique theme is not adduced in later rabbinic accounts on the creation of human. It certainly includes a disparaging connotation, probably reflecting deeply rooted rabbinic attitudes towards the secondary gender of women.

In Ketubbot 8a, the *gemara* presents a discussion, once again harmonizing the creation stories and the potential discrepancy between Gen. 1:27 and the later account conceived as the creation

44 Baskin (2002: 56) suggests this passage to be indicative of clear rabbinic ambivalence regarding women.

45 Bronner (1994: 28) denotes this being demeaning, but she does not speculate further on its implications.

of woman.<sup>46</sup> One of the rabbis purports that there was one act of creation in which the man was created. However, another sage holds that there were two formations: one during which man and woman were originally created in one entity and a second one during which the female was separated from the male. The *gemara* then rejects the latter view, arguing that everyone agrees that there was only one act of creation. Here, once again, the conflicting creation accounts are settled by a conclusion that the original human being was male so that the female being was only later extracted out of his body. God's initial idea was to create two entities from which He eventually withdrew, according to R. Abbahu (third–fourth-century Palestinian *amora*) in Eruvin 18a as well as R. Yehuda (b. Ilai, second-century *tanna*) in Ketubbot 8a. Thus, only the man was created in God's likeness. Indeed, the predominant interpretation among the rabbis opted for a solitary man who was created in God's image. This notion may have had a role in the primacy and privileging of men, and it has sustained the asymmetry of genders. According to Baskin (2002: 49–50), the possibility of a simultaneous creation of two separate entities is not addressed in rabbinic literature at all, probably reflecting the sages' fear of a disturbance in their sexual politics.

Advocating marriage and marital sex is continued during the second discursive stage in the development of rabbinic discourse, and it is often used to rationalize the creation of woman. For instance, Niddah 31b first poses a rhetorical question about why a man is constantly looking for a woman, then specifies that this is due to the fact that he is looking for something he has lost, obviously referring to the substance originating in Adam from which the woman was created. Moreover, the sage is asked why the man lies face downwards, most likely referring to sexual intercourse, whereas the woman lies face upwards (towards the man). The answer, attributed to R. Dostai (second-century *tanna*), is that both of them face the material from which they were created. Based on this account, the sages seem to understand the sexual dominance of men, inscribed from the moment of female creation, as part of the divine plan. Zealous encouragement for marriage based on human creation is also seen in Ketubbot 8a. In addition, the famous tradition of Adam's twelve-hour creation, already present in Leviticus Rabbah 29:1, receives a new element – Eve's pairing with him in the seventh hour – in Sanhedrin 38a. During the eighth hour they ascend to bed as two and descend as four; that is, their two sons had been born, hence referring to sexual intercourse.<sup>47</sup>

Adam's need for a wife was realized when the man had sex with animals, as reported in Yevamot 63a. First, the *gemara* describes a meeting between R. Yose (b. Ḥalafta, second-century *tanna*) and the prophet Elijah,<sup>48</sup> with the former posing a question about the way in which a woman is a helper for a man. He continues with several rhetorical questions that provide enlightenment on the matter. R. Eleazar responds by referring to Gen. 2:23, which states: "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." He suggests that the passage encompasses a meaning of Adam first having had intercourse with each animal and beast, but his mind was not at ease until he did it with Eve, which is in accordance with Gen. 2:20: "but for Adam no fitting helper was found". The idea of the primal man having sex with the animals

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46 The term *gemara* associated with the Talmud derives from an Aramaic word for 'studying'. It contains exegetic material from various rabbinic sources, characterized as tannaitic traditions not included in the Mishnah as well as teachings of the *amoraim*.

47 According to Grypeou and Spurling (2013: 40), dividing Adam's first day into twelve episodes is a widely preserved tradition in rabbinic sources. For a thorough comparison of that tradition, see Saldarini 1975: 303–305.

48 According to Teugels (2000: 121), encounters between the Prophet and sages are frequent in rabbinic literature.

is startling, and – more than surprisingly – it has not been specifically tackled in research literature concerning the creation of woman. Although this extraordinary tradition underlays the importance of a wife, it also depicts the man as a sexual being and the role of the wife, in turn, as being an object of his carnal desire.

The purpose of Eve's creation is further speculated on in various Talmudic accounts – and women are even labelled according to their function in male reality. This is evident in Sanhedrin 107a, for example, where a rabbi muses on the meaning of Psalms 38:18: “For I am on the verge of collapse (*lā-šela* ‘) my pain is always with me.” He narrates that Bathsheba was designated as a fit for David from the six days of creation. The rabbi seems to interpret the term *lā-šela* ‘ as ‘earmarking’ – just as Eve was taken from the *šela* ‘ of Adam and designated for him, Bathsheba was that for David. Moreover, owning a wife is set in parallel with possessing land, as seen in Yevamot 63a, which presents R. Eleazar as saying that a man who does not have a wife is not a man, referring to Gen. 5:2. Similarly, according to R. Eleazar referring to Psalms 115:16, a man who does not have his own land is not a man. Here, once again, the *gemara* utilizes intertextual linkage to justify the agenda of the sages.

Sanhedrin 39a mentions Gen. 2:21 in connection with an interesting accusation by a Roman emperor, based on this biblical verse, that God [of the Jews] is a thief as he took one of Adam's sides while he was sleeping. A daughter, supposedly of the emperor,<sup>49</sup> takes part in the discussion by proposing, with an example of a recently experienced larceny, that this was similarly good for Adam: God took a side from him and gave a handmaid to serve him (*wə-nātnū lō šiphā lā-šamšō*). When the emperor questions the timing of God's act, that is, doing this when Adam was asleep, the daughter further points out how repulsive a thing made of raw meat would be. Perhaps the most important difference between this tradition and a similar one in Genesis Rabbah 17:7 is that the creation of woman is directly compared to that of a servant in Sanhedrin 39a. This very well demonstrates the evolution of rabbinic discourse towards more androcentric and patriarchal readings of the biblical texts.

The linguistic features of the biblical account on the creation of woman were used to explain the female shape, ideal for bearing a child. For example, in Berakhot 61a, an explication by R. Hisda (third–fourth-century Palestinian *amora*) provides an alternative explanation for the verb denoting ‘building’ in Gen. 2:22: it could be understood as a description of her basic shape, indicating that Eve was built like the structure of a storehouse (*binyān*), yielded from the same consonantal root of *bny*.<sup>50</sup> Just like a storehouse, built narrow on top and wide on the bottom, the woman was created narrow on top and wide on the bottom in order to hold a foetus. Although this could have been meant as a courtesy, indicating that motherhood is the ultimate goal of female life, as Bronner (1994: 29) suggests, it strongly emphasizes the physical disparity of women. Nevertheless, women are acknowledged for their entertaining potential, as alluded, for instance, in Shabbat 95a, where the rabbis discuss female make-up practices making an association between ‘building’ in Gen. 2:22 and plaiting woman's hair, that is, making herself beautiful, in accordance with the colloquial language of people in the islands (*cf.* Berakhot 61a; Niddah 45b).

49 According to Raveh (2014: 151), there has been a lot of debate whether the daughter, to whom the emperor supposedly poses his question, is that of the emperor or the rabbi. Most scholars support the first option, which is also my personal understanding based on the original text.

50 The consonants are also discussed in connection with ‘understanding’ (yielded from the consonantal root of *byn*) in Genesis Rabbah 18:1.

According to the rabbis of this discursive stage, the woman does not cause harm to her husband if the man is fortunate. In Yevamot 63a, for instance, R. Eleazar speculates about the meaning of “I will make *‘ezer kə-negdō*” in Gen. 2:18, the latter part of which is conventionally translated as ‘a fitting helper for him’. The famous sage interprets that if a man is worthy (*zākā*), his wife helps him, but if he is not worthy she is against him. Furthermore, the root of *ngd* can also contain a meaning of ‘lashing’ if vocalized differently,<sup>51</sup> which is a fairly common hermeneutic procedure in rabbinic literature (Teugels 2000: 121). Thus, if he is worthy, she is suitable for him, but if he is not worthy she lashes him. This is an interesting elaboration on the purpose of the creation of women – and it may be conceived such that the creation of woman was not *per se* a positive event. In fact, the rabbis of the second discursive stage seem to have considered the event unfortunate in many ways.

### AUGMENTATIONS TO RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS

The third discursive stage identified from the rabbinic literature comprises rabbinic interpretations right after the Bavli, dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries. It is characterized by an exponential proliferation of scholarly writings, hence expanding the interpretive tradition. Accordingly, there are several augmentations obviously deviating from earlier interpretations of human creation in particular. For example, in Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 11) and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (2:7), the primal being is created in different colours.<sup>52</sup> The *ādām* of this discursive stage was explicitly created as a single being and not simultaneously with Eve, a possibility upon which earlier sages had elaborated; in chapter 12 of Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer, a passage describes God saying that He is alone in His world and [Adam] is alone in his (cf. Genesis Rabbah 8:1). This detail seems to scotch the centuries-long collective effort of the rabbis trying to solve the discrepancy between the two creation accounts.

The rabbis of this discursive stage concocted new explanations for the creation of woman. According to Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 12), creating woman was actually God’s solution to the problem that if Adam did not reproduce, all other creatures would mistakenly think that it was Adam who created them. This interesting reasoning is novel in rabbinic tradition – and it makes the creation of woman seem both selfish and childish, being far from “perfection”, as human creation is often characterized. Like in an earlier stage of the interpretative trajectory, marriage is one of the most important purposes of female creation; it is actually so important that God finally decided to create Eve, although He knew that Adam would complain about the woman, as specified in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (chapter 8), in which the rabbis give several potential interpretations of the passage “You hedge me before and behind (*āhōr wā-qedem šartānī*)” from Psalm 139:5 in connection with creation.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the possibility of simultaneous creations alluded to a bit earlier in this account is instantly overruled by depicting a consecutive process. God, in fact, hesitated to create the woman to begin with. After all, as elaborated in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan’s chapter 42, she ended up being far from perfect, as she is bad-tempered; among other frailties, she even ages fast compared to men.

51 In Talmudic Aramaic, the meaning of *paēl* stem from *ngd* is ‘to lash someone’ (Sokoloff 2002: 728).

52 Quotations from Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer follow the text edited by Gerald Friedlander (1981) and those from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan follow the text of the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel (1862).

53 Quotations from Avot de-Rabbi Nathan follow the text of S. Schechter’s Avot de-Rabbi Natan (1887).

Based on Targum Pseudo-Jonathan in relation to Gen. 2:21–22, when the Lord God threw a deep slumber upon Adam, and He took one of his ribs (*û-nāsîb ḥădā' mē-'il'ôhî*), it was the thirteenth rib of the right side (*hû' 'ilā'â tālîsrît də-min səṭar yəminā'i*). Thus, the primal woman was definitively made out of Adam's bone and, in addition, flesh taken from his heart. The bone is further specified as the thirteenth rib, supporting the understanding of *šela'* as a substance numerous found in a human being and hence abandoning the previous speculations about its potential meaning as 'side'. This passage clearly takes the anatomical reading of the original terminology for granted. In addition, it introduces a totally new concept of flesh originating from Adam's heart, also mentioned later in Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 12). The Aramaic translation draws upon the connection with the Aramaic word for 'side', utilizing it so that Eve was made from Adam's thirteenth rib on his side. Whereas the rabbis had earlier interpreted the word *šela'* to mean 'side' (*səṭar* in Aramaic; cf. Genesis Rabbah 8:1, 17:6; Leviticus Rabbah 14:1), this passage uses both of the words – *səṭar* and another Aramaic equivalent for *šela'*, *'ilā'â* – albeit with distinct meanings. A previous tradition presented in Genesis Rabbah 17:6 and attributed to R. Shmuel b. Naḥmani had already used the same term – that is, root consonants *'l'* – as an Aramaic word for *šela'*, but this passage finally seems to have settled with the terminology so that *'ilā'â*,<sup>54</sup> referring to the substance of female origin, was strictly different from *səṭar*, representing the location of this substance and being further strengthened by an attribute. In addition to thwarting the earlier tradition containing Aramaic attempts to explain Gen. 2:21, this can also be seen as a notable expansion to the original narrative, consolidating the idea of female origin in the male body.

In addition to being used to justify male dominion, like in earlier discursive stages, the creation account was also utilized to rationalize male supremacy over women in sexual affairs. For example, according to the Alphabet of Ben Sira (chapter 34), the woman's position during intercourse is under the man as she is inferior by nature.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, chapter 9 of Avot de-Rabbi Nathan presents a tradition attributed to R. Yehoshua b. Ḥanania that poses a question about why it is hard to conciliate a woman. According to the passage, this is due to the fact that a woman was created out of a bone, which does not soften if you put it into water. In addition, a woman has to adorn herself, as flesh gets ruined if you do not put spices in it.<sup>56</sup> This applies to the female voice as well: if you place a bone into a pot, the voice travels and people know what is in it (cf. Genesis Rabbah 17:8). The passage further explains that the man deposits his sperm into the woman, not the other way around, and it is the man who makes demands on the woman as he seeks for something that was taken from him. The woman looks at the man since she was created from him. Thus, the passage seems to suggest that a woman is to beautify herself and keep quiet; in fact, women are explicitly understood to be subservient to men. Instead of providing a coherent narrative regarding the female fate, as in Genesis Rabbah 17:8, this passage depicts the subordination of women as axiomatic.

In the writings of the third discursive stage, some stress was put on monogyny, possibly reflecting the fact that it was not self-evident in the Judaism of the time.<sup>57</sup> For instance, a tradition attributed to Yehuda b. Bathyra (first-century *tanna*) and transmitted in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan

54 This is a Targumic form denoting the definiteness of the word.

55 Quotations from the Alphabet of Ben Sira follow the text of J.D. Eisenstein's Alpha Beta Ben Sira (1915).

56 In chapter 8, R. Simeon b. Menasya (second–third-century *tanna*) explicates verse 2:22 so that God adorned the first woman for Adam.

57 For a thorough introduction to Jewish polygyny, see Goldfeder 2014.

(chapter 2) states that if God had intended ten wives for Adam, He would have given them, but He did not do so. However, Adam may well have had two wives, as explicitly portrayed in the thirty-fourth chapter of the Alphabet of Ben Sira. The passage describes that when God created Adam, He also created a woman. She was created from the earth, just like Adam, and called Lilith (*lilit*).<sup>58</sup> The two of them would immediately begin to fight, with Lilith insisting that she would not lie below him, whereas Adam argues he would not lie under her but only on top, as she was only fit to be in the bottom position as he was the superior one. The passage indicates that the man's rank is clearly higher than that of the woman, a supposition consolidating female inferiority as the natural order of human life. Lilith is depicted as a rebellious, even disastrous departure from this normativized concept when she responds that the two are equal to each other, since they were both created from the earth. Although the substance of human creation is given according to Gen. 2:7, this account seems to refer to human creation in Gen. 1:27 and the potentially simultaneous creation of both sexes in it.

Next, Lilith pronounces the unspeakable name (of God) and flies away. Adam, weeping that the woman God had given to him has run away, prays for his Creator to send His three angels to bring her back. God tells Adam that if she does not agree to come back, she has to permit a hundred of her children to die daily. The angels go off to chase Lilith, reaching her in the middle of the sea. They repeat God's words, but she will not return. The angels threaten that they would drown her in the sea, but she refuses, saying that she had been created only to cause sickness to infants. The angels still request her to go back, but Lilith swears by God's name that whenever she sees them, their names, or their forms in an amulet, she has no power over that particular infant. Furthermore, Lilith agrees to a hundred of her children dying every day. Thus, one hundred demons succumb daily, and people write the angels' names on the amulets of their children. When Lilith notices these names, she remembers her oath and the child recuperates.

Naturally, the account provides a rationale for the protective effectiveness of amulets, common at the time of the composition of the Alphabet of Ben Sira. In addition, Lilith offers a distinctive solution to the classical exegetic problem caused by the two different accounts of human creation. However, there seems to be much more to it. For example, the passage goes against many previously common traditions by depicting the figure of Lilith as a hunter of children and their mothers, not the men. It also differs from earlier traditions by reordering the image of Lilith, concomitantly resorting to the mythology of Eve. Wojciech Kosior (2018: 116–122) has compared the portrayals of the first women, Lilith and Eve, concluding that both women are seen as sexual objects, and that their reproductive function is an essential part of the Jewish interpretive tradition. Despite women being easily influenced in general, Lilith was not. Furthermore, her story seems to teach women that by demanding equality she seriously misbehaved, as a consequence of which she ended up as a demon. The price of her freedom was the death of her children – even on a daily basis.

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58 Lilith is already known from ancient Sumerian demonology. The Babylonian counterpart, *lilitu*, was a succubus, seducing men in their sleep (Lesses 2005: 5458). Later, this figure became an essential part of Jewish demonology as well. However, there is only one clear reference to Lilith in the Hebrew Bible, found in Isaiah 34:14, whereas the Talmud mentions the name on a few occasions. For instance, Shabbat 151b portrays her as an evil spirit, and according to R. Hanina, it is prohibited to sleep alone in a house as anyone who does so will be seized by this creature. In Eruvin 100b, in turn, she is portrayed with a female face and long hair – and wings, according to Niddah 24b. However, these Talmudic passages do not connect the figure with the events of human creation. In addition, a Lilith-like creature is already referred to in Genesis Rabbah 18:4 and 22:7, containing two passages describing a concept of “the first Eve”.



## CONCLUSION

This study examined the development of rabbinic exegetic discourse regarding the biblical passages understood as concerning the creation of woman. The evolution of the interpretations was examined within the theoretical framework of discourse analysis with an intention to reveal power structures, specifically gender hierarchies. The investigation of the rabbinic texts was carried out in gender-sensitive terms, identifying bigoted details and the patriarchal spirit characteristic of every phase of the trajectory. I demonstrated that the constitution of gender ideology in the rabbinic discourse of Late Antiquity can be elucidated by utilizing genealogical methodology that tracks the beginnings, developments, and shifts in the exegeses, providing us with a more systematic perspective on the Jewish interpretive tradition, in accordance with earlier observations within the Islamic interpretive tradition.<sup>59</sup>

During the half-millennium-long time period of rabbinic activity addressed in this article, a wide circulation of religious writings was evident. Based on the passages analysed above, there was a Palestinian predominance in Genesis Rabbah so that only a few of the rabbis' names were of Babylonian *amoraim*. However, the situation was not much different in passages extracted from the Babylonian Talmud. This may be interpreted such that in connection with the creation of woman, the main corpus of traditions was established rather early on. This notion strengthens the presumption that after the establishment of the tradition ensemble, mainly reinforcing modifications and preferences were made. Later on, however, abundant elaborations also took place.

There are quite a few traditions which are almost identical in Genesis Rabbah and Bavli, some of them being also transmitted into the geonic period. For example, the word 'built' in Gen. 2:22 is interpreted as adorning the primal woman in Genesis Rabbah, in three passages from the Bavli, and finally in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan. In addition, a discussion in which a noble matron takes part is also present in these three compositions. While the development of the individual traditions cannot be convincingly used to conclude a certain tendency in the process, the diachronic change in both of them may nonetheless be towards intransigence and straightforwardness. In many cases, concepts potentially favourable for women fell into oblivion along with the development of rabbinic discourse.

The three discursive stages of rabbinic discourse identified in this study represent a thorough evolution of traditions and explications regarding the creation of woman. The fundamental assumption which I introduced in the beginning of this article, transformation through transmission, was evident throughout the analysis. After the establishment of the tradition corpus, the traditions were first reinforced, after which these consolidated conceptions were augmented by expanding the concept. The discursive stages most likely reflect changes in the context in which the rabbis compiled their literary compositions, perhaps even showing a general tendency towards patriarchal trajectories in religious interpretive traditions. However, further studies are needed to address such underlying factors and the potential universal features beyond them. In addition, taking rabbinic discussions on the Fall into account would definitely expand the misogynous dimensions of such studies.

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59 Abou-Bakr 2015; von Schöneman 2021; 2022.

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