RIGHTEOUS GENTILE AND DIVINE DAUGHTER: AN ANALYSIS OF BAT PHARAOH'S CHARACTER AND IDENTITY IN ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL, AND MODERN TIMES

By

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To Shaul Aryeh and Cole Yehudah
For making this a journey of exploration and joy

לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות, להלל, לשבח, לפאר, לרומם, להדר, לברך, לעלה ולקלס, למי שעשה לאבותינו ולנו את כל הניסים האלו. הוציאנו מעבדות לחרות, מיגון לשמחה, ומאבל ליום טוב, ומאפלה לאור גדול, ומשעבוד לגאולה. ונאמר לפניו שירה חדשה. הללויה:
--הגדה של פסח

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

DEDICATION……………………………………….…………………………………………ii

ACKNOWELDGEMENTS…………………………………………………………………iii

Chapter

I. SHAPING IDENTITY THROUGH MYTH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOSES BIRTH NARRATIVE IN JUXTAPOSITION TO THE ANCIENT SARGON LEGEND……………………………………………………………………………..1

Introduction……………………………………………………………………..1
A Brief Overview of Myth in Ancient and Modern Cultures….………..………..4
The Sargon Legend………………………………………….……..……..…6

II. BAT PHARAOH IN FEMINIST JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP………….............……….8

An Overview of Exodus 2:1-10……………………………………………..……..8
Bat Pharaoh and Jewish Feminist Scholarship…………………..…………...…10

III. FORSAKEN LEPER OR SELFLESS SAINT?..21

Bat Pharaoh's Descent to the River in the Biblical Account……………………..…24
Bat Pharaoh's Descent to the River in the Midrash, the Talmud and the Biblical Commentaries……………………………….…...…………25
Bat Pharaoh's decision to save Moses in Biblical Account…………………..….28
Bat Pharaoh's decision to save Moses in the Midrash, the Talmud and the Biblical Commentaries………………… ………………………………...…28

IV. BAT PHARAOH AND MOSES IN THE PALACE……………………………………37

Bat Pharaoh's Relationship to Moses and the Palace in the Biblical Account………………………………………………………………………..37
Bat Pharaoh's Relationship to Moses and the Palace in the Midrash, the Talmud and the Biblical Commentaries……………………………...……38

V. THE QUESTION OF MOTHERHOOD……………………………............….….…44

The Question of Motherhood in the Biblical Account……………..............……44
The Question of Motherhood in the Midrash, the Talmud and the Biblical Commentaries……….……………………………………..….........45

VI. A DIVINE RELATIONSHIP……………………………………………………………..55

Bat Pharaoh's Relationship to God and Israel in the Biblical Account………….56
Bat Pharaoh's Relationship to God and Israel in the Midrash, the
Talmud and the Biblical Commentaries………………..…………….………59

VII. CONCLUSION ……………………..…………………………..…………..…….68

EPILOGUE……………………………...……………………………..……….….……73

BIBLIOGRAPHY……………………………………………………………..……..…75

CHAPTER I

SHAPING IDENTITY THROUGH MYTH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOSES BIRTH NARRATIVE IN JUXTAPOSITION TO THE ANCIENT SARGON LEGEND

Introduction

> Does the text have a voice of its own, which can be heard only if one suppresses one's own; or, is the text itself capable of being heard only through the diverse voices of those who read it? Though the two sides in the debate may have clear if divergent responses to this question, to my mind, the answer is not an 'either/or.' Rather, it requires a more complex model of the relationship between interpreter and text.
>
> – Adele Reinhartz[1]

In his address to the State of Israel on Yom HaShoah, Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day, Rabbi Meir Lau referenced Exodus 2:1-10. Speaking in Jerusalem, at Yad Vashem during the Central Ceremony, he states:

> The first selection took place 3,400 years ago. "Let us deal shrewdly with them," says Pharaoh "so that they do not increase." The decision was if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live. And a baby that was just three months old, the first child of the Holocaust, Moshe, (he hadn't been yet given that name) is found in the wicker basket in the Nile. The first among righteous gentiles, Bat Pharaoh opens the Tevah [the ark]…She saw his spasm, she didn't hear a voice, and she understood and she took pity on him and said, "This must be a Hebrew child." A Jewish child is crying here. [2]

Regarding the section where Moses is born and sent down the river, Rabbi Meir Lau proclaims Pharaoh's daughter, also known as Bat Pharaoh, the first righteous gentile in history. After

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[1] Adele Reinhartz, "Feminist Criticism and Biblical Studies on the Verge of the Twenty-First Century," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible* Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine, eds. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 34.

[2] Rabbi Meir Lau, the former Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Israel is a Holocaust survivor and the current director of Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial. To view this address, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8KqIsk9rJc .

Pharaoh decrees that all Jewish boys be drowned in the Nile, Bat Pharaoh defies her father's command and the law of the land to save a life that otherwise may not have been saved.

There are two significant aspects of Rabbi Meir Lau's speech that should be addressed. The first is his decision to call Bat Pharaoh by the name Batya, a name that is not used in the biblical sources but is referenced in the Midrashic and Talmudic sources. The second significant aspect is Rabbi Lau's decision to cast Pharaoh's daughter as the "first righteous gentile." Important to take note is the choice by both ancient and modern thinkers and leaders to continue writing and rewriting, interpreting and reinterpreting myths, stories and legends of old to bring meaning to modern times. The ancient words of the Talmud become sources that, when reinterpreted, provide meaning and purpose in changing cultures and circumstances. In other words, not only did the earlier thinkers attempt to make scripture more relevant but modern thinkers also re-imagine and retell the stories of old to create meaning and to demonstrate lessons and values for today's world.

This thesis focuses on the story of and characterization of Pharaoh's daughter in the Exodus 2:1-10 narrative and the interpretations of this story in traditional Jewish scholarship. It will analyze myths as dynamic and changing, dependent on the societies that creates and/or helps promulgate their variations. The goal will be twofold: 1. To unearth how earlier traditions, including biblical commentators, the Talmud, and the Midrash, serve to create and perpetuate the social and cultural expectations of their time. 2. To observe how myths and particularly foundational myths function to create identity for the societies and cultures in which they are imagined.

My goal in this project is not to uncover the historical truth behind the Exodus 2:1-10 narrative but rather to consider how cultural ethos, myth, and ideology impact the reading of this

myth, especially in light of changing views of one's self in relation to the "other." In the case of the Moses birth narrative, I will investigate how the legend of the birth and its retellings are used to fashion identity for each group, while contemplating the intent of each narrative. As Amy-Jill Levine asks, "Do the documents address the way the authors perceive things to be?"[3]

Speaking specifically about rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, Judith Hauptman writes, "Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture is socially motivated and tendentious. And therein lies its importance."[4] Hauptman's words must not only apply to rabbinic interpretation of Scripture but can possibly apply to the Scripture itself, as well as the earlier traditions from which and by which Scripture and its later commentaries developed. When Hauptman charges the reader to find how writings (in her case, specifically Talmudic writings) are socially motivated, we are provided with an opportunity to analyze *how* (and perhaps why) the writers of the biblical narrative and its later commentaries worked to fashion newer stories by coupling their aspirations and imaginations with earlier ideas and values from their cultural and ideological underpinnings.

In "The Strange Biography of Sampson," Yair Zakovitch challenges the reader to question *how* specific narratives made it into the *Tanakh* in the first place. In the course of investigating how earlier mythological stories were transformed in order to attain entrance into the canon, Zakovitch writes:

> [The mythological traditions and narratives] underwent a process of demythologization before they could be included in the Holy Scriptures. Stories

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[3] Amy Jill Levine, ed. *"Women Like This" New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco Roman World* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991), xiii.

[4] Judith Hauptman, "Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture," in Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine, eds., *A Feminist A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 486.

> were disentangled from their mythological origins and made to conform to a monotheistic belief system."[5]

While I do not agree with Zakovitch's conclusion, he influences the reader to question how a myth's altered state can reflect the values and ideological goals of the newer text.

In the following chapters, I will address four main inquiries relating specifically to the Moses birth narrative, stemming from an overarching question: how do the layers and variations in these texts and their commentaries serve to teach us about the values and traditions these cultures hold dear? Zakovitch identifies this linear/historical process of questioning as an aspect of "literary archaeology."[6] As such, I aspire to not only find and understand the aspirations of the newer narratives but also to find the layers of the older ones that may have influenced the newer formations.

A Brief Overview of Myth in Ancient and Modern Cultures

The Moses narrative is not the first of its kind and follows numerous foundational myths whose *topos* revolves around babies in baskets flowing down rivers and heroes being saved in the water.[7] Pertinent to this discussion is the question of how the Moses narrative was originally shaped against other extant versions of this story. The Sargon legend is one such example of this tradition and, according to Donald B. Redford, may "find its closest parallel" the Exodus 2:1-10

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[5] Yair Zakovitch, "The Strange Biography of Sampson," in *From Bible to Midrash: Portrayals and Interpretive Practices* (Lund: Arcus, 2005), 14.
[6] Yair Zakovitch, "The Strange Biography of Sampson," in *From Bible to Midrash: Portrayals and Interpretive Practices,* 14.
[7] For an overview of these literary motifs, see Donald B. Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," *Numen* 14.3 (1967), 225.

narrative."[8] One of the oldest known transmitted hero myths, the Sargon legend provides the history behind the birth of Sargon the 1st, the King of Agade.[9]

In order to address the various voices and layers that both Hauptman and Zakovitch refer to in their writings, I will analyze the Sargon legend as a possible layer, and or tradition next to or into which the Exodus 2:1-10 narrative was born. According to Redford, the Exodus 2:1-10 narrative and the Sargon Legend model two of the earliest examples of the motif of the "exposed child."[10] I will use similarities between the Sargon legend and the Moses birth narrative to build a template to evaluate some of the changes that occur as stories are passed down from generation to generation.

The earliest myths functioned to help shape religious truth and an understanding of the universe for the cultures and traditions in which they were created and passed down. In defining myth, Jacobus van Dijk writes,

> [A myth is] a statement that seeks to explain social reality and human existence in symbolic terms by referring to a world outside the human world and to events that happen in a time outside human time but that makes the present situation meaningful and acceptable and provides a perspective on the future.[11]

Myth functioned and functions to help provide meaning and purpose to a culture. There is an understanding that these stories must not be considered "true" or historically accurate in any way. Additionally, because these stories were passed down orally (at least at first) from

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[8] Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," 224.

[9] Sargon, the King of Akkad reigned in the 24th and 23rd centuries. In Akkadian, his name means, "the king is legitimate," and the Sargon legend functions to solidify this legitimacy. Benjamin R. Foster, transl., "The Birth Legend of Sargon of Akkad" in William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World*. 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 461. This is an example of one of the later versions of the Sargon legend.

[10] Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," 227.

[11] Jacobus van Dijk, "Myth and Mythmaking in Ancient Egypt" in Jack Sasson, ed. *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East.* 4 vols. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 1699.

generation to generation, the multitude of versions even within single cultures and traditions was vast. Thus, the precise details are not always of importance but can be of interest when attempting to look at the variations between divergent cultures. As myths were told and retold throughout the generations, the original purpose of the myth was transformed as well as combined and merged with other myths to create new ones. W.G. Lambert writes,

> Originality involved not fundamental innovation but reusing old motifs, combining them into longer wholes or giving them a new twist to make them more relevant to the author's time.[12]

Thus, in understanding the transformation of a myth through time, it is crucial to remember that the original purpose or message behind the myth was often retold to apply to the new culture or time. The driving force behind these stories is a desire to teach a message, moral or a reality without having to address historical truth in creating identity for the society in which the myth circulates.

The Sargon Legend

The myth, narrated in first person by Sargon reads:

> I am Sargon the great king, king of Agade. My mother was a high priestess. I did not know my father. My father's brothers dwell in the uplands. My city is Azupiranu, which lies on Euphrates bank. My mother, the high priestess, conceived me, she bore me in secret. She placed me in a reed basket, she sealed my hatch with pitch. She left me to the river, whence I could not come up. The river carried me off, it brought me to Aqqi, drawer of water. Aqqi, drawer of water, brought me up as he dipped his bucket. Aqqi, drawer of water, raised me as his adopted son. Aqqi, drawer of water, set (me) to his orchard work. During my orchard work, Ishtar loved me. Fifty-five years I ruled as King.[13]

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[12] W.G. Lambert, "Myth and Mythmaking in Sumer and Akkad" in Jack Sasson, ed. *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East.* 4 vols. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 1826.
[13] Benjamin R. Foster, transl., "The Birth Legend of Sargon of Akkad" in William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture*, 461.

This earlier tradition exhibits several of the themes or motifs present in the Exodus narrative: an abandoned baby cast into the river, a foreign adoption, and the "foreign" baby's rise to status in a new society. While Sargon is of royal descent, a commoner saves him. In the Exodus narrative, Moses comes from the Levite family and is taken in by royalty.[14] In a partial reversal of roles, instead of a member of the royal family being raised by commoners, Moses is a commoner who is raised by the daughter of Pharaoh. Both the river, which was considered a god, and Aqqi are saviors in the Sargon myth, whereas, Bat Pharaoh, Moses' mother and sister, the midwives, and God take part in saving Moses in the biblical narrative. The collaboration of divine and human action is the focus of both the Sargon legend and the biblical narrative. Both stories require divine intervention. In addition to the textual similarities, the process by which these myths circulate is comparable: the heroes, Moses and Sargon, are mythologized years after the actual individuals lived.

[14] Exodus 2:1. Michael Carasik, ed. *The Commentator's Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot on Exodus* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 8. All biblical translations from this point forward will be the JPS commentary unless otherwise specified.

CHAPTER II

BAT PHARAOH IN FEMINIST JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP

> The rapprochement between feminism and tradition must take a different tack, conflating the distinction between original traditional assumptions and the need to respond to changing circumstances. This approach…builds upon a feminist propensity for dissolving binary opposites by blurring distinctions between them.
>
> -- Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah*[15]

An Overview of Exodus 2:1-10

Exodus 2:1-10 reads:

א וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת-בַּת-לֵוִי. ב וַתַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֵּרֶא אֹתוֹ
כִּי-טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יְרָחִים. ג וְלֹא-יָכְלָה עוֹד הַצְּפִינוֹ וַתִּקַּח-לוֹ תֵּבַת
גֹּמֶא וַתַּחְמְרָה בַחֵמָר וּבַזָּפֶת וַתָּשֶׂם בָּהּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד וַתָּשֶׂם בַּסּוּף עַל-שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר. ד
וַתֵּתַצַּב אֲחֹתוֹ מֵרָחֹק לְדֵעָה מַה-יֵּעָשֶׂה לוֹ. ה וַתֵּרֶד בַּת-פַּרְעֹה לִרְחֹץ עַל-הַיְאֹר
וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ הֹלְכֹת עַל-יַד הַיְאֹר וַתֵּרֶא אֶת-הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת-אֲמָתָהּ
וַתִּקָּחֶהָ. ו וַתִּפְתַּח וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה-נַעַר בֹּכֶה וַתַּחְמֹל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר
מִיַּלְדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה. ז וַתֹּאמֶר אֲחֹתוֹ אֶל-בַּת-פַּרְעֹה הַאֵלֵךְ וְקָרָאתִי לָךְ אִשָּׁה
מֵינֶקֶת מִן הָעִבְרִיֹּת וְתֵינִק לָךְ אֶת-הַיָּלֶד. ח וַתֹּאמֶר-לָהּ בַּת-פַּרְעֹה לֵכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ
הָעַלְמָה וַתִּקְרָא אֶת-אֵם הַיָּלֶד. ט וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ בַּת-פַּרְעֹה הֵילִיכִי אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה
וְהֵינִקִהוּ לִי וַאֲנִי אֶתֵּן אֶת-שְׂכָרֵךְ וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּנִיקֵהוּ. י וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד
וַתְּבִאֵהוּ לְבַת-פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי-לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן-הַמַּיִם
מְשִׁיתִהוּ.

A certain man of the house of Levi and went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew

[15] Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 163.

> child." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter answers, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman too the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

In summary, this text is about a young boy who is born to a woman and man during a time when the Pharaoh has decreed that all Israelite boys be cast into the river.[16] Upon the birth of the boy, the unnamed father disappears from the picture and the unnamed mother and sister take over. The mother creates an ark for the child, places the boy in the ark and sends it down the river. The unnamed sister takes it upon herself to watch the unnamed child from behind the reeds and takes part in saving his life by suggesting that she find a wet nurse to assist the unnamed Pharaoh's daughter. The narrative quickly shares that the sister uses the boy's mother as a wet nurse and the boy is sent to the palace to be raised once he is weaned. This is the first time that a character in the narrative is named: Pharaoh's daughter names the boy Moses.[17] On the most basic level, this story demonstrates the ultimate power of human compassion to save lives. The birth mother cannot see her son die and circumvents Pharaoh's plot to kill every male born by sending him down the river in an ark. Moses' sister watches from afar to ensure his safety and security and Pharaoh's daughter's pity leads her to save the boy.

The Moses birth narrative is the first instance where the author exposes the audience to the character of Moses in the Bible. Because Moses becomes the first leader of the Israelite

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[16] Exodus 1:22.

[17] Exodus 2:10. Interestingly, when Bat Pharaoh names Moses, the biblical narrative explains that she names him מֹשֶׁה (Moshe) because she "drew him out of the water," as if Pharaoh's daughter knew the biblical etymology of the verse. It is more likely that Moses is an Egyptian compound found in many Egyptian names. James S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1-2)" in K.R.R. Gross Louis with J.S. Ackerman and T. S. Warshaw, eds., *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1974), 86.

nation, it is important to analyze how this foundational myth functions to shape and to create possible future self-identity for the Israelite nation. The nuances of the text emphasize that the man is מִבֵּית לֵוִי ("from the house of Levi"), the woman is a בַּת-לֵוִי ("daughter *of Levi*"), and the daughter who saves Moses is a בַּת-פַּרְעֹה ("daughter of Pharaoh"). The three characters are described by a small portion of their lineage but remain unnamed. This emphasis on lineage most obviously points out that the person responsible for raising the future leader of the Israelite nation is not a daughter of Levi but the daughter of Pharaoh. Thus, Cheryl Exum argues, this story is about "the power of faith to transcend ethnic boundaries."[18]

Bat Pharaoh and Jewish Feminist Biblical Scholarship

In this section, I hope to challenge the reader to think about the biblical narrative differently. There are many goals that commentators, Jewish thinkers, and scholars have and continue to have as they analyze biblical narrative for meaning. In this thesis, I have chosen to focus on traditional Jewish scholarship in conjunction with Jewish feminist scholarship. While the first half of this thesis serves to uncover some of the mythological underpinnings and themes seen in earlier traditions, the second half of this thesis challenges the reader to ponder ideology and culture further. That is, the practice of interpretation does not just require an uncovering of an agenda, ideology, or narrative based on social and historical norms and traditions. Rather, a significant aspect of Jewish scholarship embodies the urge to explain inconsistencies, gaps and differences in a manner that is meaningful to the nation for which this book constitutes the foundational scripture.

[18] Cheryl Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live" *Semeia* 28 (1983), 72.

In *The Bible as it Was,* James Kugel attempts to reconstruct the Bible, as it was understood in the closing centuries B.C.E. up to the start of the Common Era. While he recognizes agenda as a significant factor in truly understanding the Bible "as it was," he also directs us to recognize other active principles. Kugel writes:

> Scholars have tended to assume that if an ancient author deviated from the biblical narrative in his retelling of it, that deviation must somehow have been motivated by the reteller's political allegiance or religious agenda or some other matter of ideology or it must have at least have been an attempt (if only an unconscious one) to retroject the realities of the reteller's own time to the time of the biblical narrative…but to these factors should be added another extremely significant one, the desire to explain the biblical text, to account for its particulars in one fashion or another.[19]

Kugel's words teach us to find a balance between ideology and the drive to understand why or how an idea was recorded as a major goal for many of these interpretators is to bring meaning through myth to their communities. Even agendas and ideologies become motivated by the human desire for meaning. It is with these thoughts that I begin the second half of this thesis.

Commentaries on Exodus include ones that focus on social and psychological aspects, feminist, religious, modern and post modern studies, and many others. This thesis will focus on three main groupings: ancient commentators, medieval commentaries and modern commentaries, specifically focusing on Jewish feminist scholarship. The ancient sources will include: Pseudo Philo (1st century Jewish philosopher), Josephus (1st century Jewish historian), the *Midrash Rabbah* on Exodus and Leviticus (200-500 C.E.), and Tractates *Sotah* and *Megillah* in the Babylonian Talmud (200-500 C.E.).[20] Medieval and modern biblical commentaries I will use

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[19] James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25-26.
[20] M.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York: Ktav, 1971); C.D. Yonge, transl., "The Life of Moses" in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993); Steve Mason and Louis H. Feldman, eds. *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary* on *Judean Antiquities* vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on Exodus* (London: The Soncino Press, 1961); H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds. And J. Israelstam, transl., *Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus*

include: Rashi (11th century), Ibn Ezra (12th century), Ramban (13th century), Abarbanel (15th century), Seforno (15th-16th centuries), Or HaHaim (18th century) and Cassuto (19th-20th centuries).[21] Feminist scholars include: Cheryl Exum, Charlotte Fonrobert, Pamela J. Milne, Esther Fuchs, Tal Ilan, Kathryn Pfisterer Darr and Betsy Halpern Amaru.[22]

I am interested in addressing Jewish feminist scholarship specifically because one of one of its main goals is to better define the agenda of the earliest writers of these texts in order to bring meaning to the more modern culture. While I view this goal to be profoundly crucial, what it often lacks is the author's interest in or intent of bringing his/her lens into a discussion with

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(London: Soncino Press, 1983); A. Cohen, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Sotah* (London: The Soncino Press, 1994); Maurice Simon, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Megillah* (London: The Soncino Press, 1984).

[21] Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban and Abarbanel are translated in Michael Carasik, ed., *The Commentator's Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot on Exodus* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999); Isaac Abravanel, *Perush HaTorah* (Hanau, 1710); Mordechai Leb Katzenellenbogen, ed., *Torath Haim: Hamishah Humshei Torah* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1993); Nosson Scherman, transl., *The Stone Edition Chumash* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2006); Umberto Cassuto with Israel Abrahams, transl. *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967); Abraham Yitzchak Friedman, ed., *Miqra'otGedolot: Hamishah Humshei Torah* (New York: Abraham Yitzhak Friedman, 1971).

[22] Cheryl Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live" *Semeia* 28 (1983), 63-82; Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters," in Athalya Brenner, ed. *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 75-87.; Charlotte Fonrobert, in "Feminist Interpretations of Rabbinic Literature: Two Views" in Renee Levine Melammed, ed. *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues,* no.4 (2001), 7-14; Pamela J. Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism" in Brenner and Fontaine, eds., *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 39-60; Esther Fuchs, "Jewish Feminist Scholarship: A Critical Perspective" in Leonard J. Greenspoon, Ronald A Simkins and Jean Axelrad Cahan in *Studies in Jewish Civilization* 14 (Nebraska: Creighton University Press, 2003), 225-245; Esther Fuchs, "Literary Characterizations of Mothers," in Alice Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 127-140; Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women* (Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1991); Betsy Halpern Amaru, "Portraits of Women in Pseudo Philo's Biblical Antiquities" in Amy Jill Levine, ed. *"Women Like This" New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco Roman World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 83-95.

traditional ancient and medieval commentaries. These commentaries are often ignored, dismissed, or not addressed because of their patriarchal or androcentric views.

Jewish feminist scholarship of the Bible is multi-faceted with many different approaches to women and their relationship to men, other women, and the society at large. Some feminist scholarship looks to retrieve women's voices that have long been suppressed. Often, this scholarship suggests alternative readings of the text so that the women can serve more prominent roles. As Esther Fuchs writes, "Feminist theory and praxis are based on a continued commitment to a political position in which knowledge is not a goal in itself, but rather is meant to bring about a change in perception and evaluation."[23] Other forms of Jewish feminist scholarship seek to highlight the patriarchal nature of the text or some writers' unsympathetic or hostile roles towards women. This line of scholarship can serve its best purpose when discussing how an admitted patriarchal element in a text influences future identity formation. In other words, how do women and men construct their own identities through their understanding of the text? As such, the question of who Bat Pharaoh or Moses' sister were, is not only significant with regard to the *author's* perspective of her but for how later generations will view her as a female role-model. Charlotte Fonrobert points out that we need to ask the question in a gender specific manner and "not merely in terms of a generic "Jewish identity" by questioning how Talmudic literature "contribute[s] to what it means to be Jewish as a woman, or a woman as a Jew today?" Fonrobert explains that both questions need to be addressed. [24] Feminist compendiums divide feminist scholarship in various ways. Some divide the scholarship

[23] Esther Fuchs, "Jewish Feminist Scholarship: A Critical Perspective," 225.
[24] Charlotte Fonrobert, "Feminist Interpretations of Rabbinic Literature," 7.

according to common themes or methods in the scholarship,[25] while others focus more on the division of time and how the times affected the transition in themes and methods. In this thesis, I will focus on the latter rather than the former. In *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* Pamela J. Milne provides an overview of feminist studies from the perspective of a timeline with its roots in the late 18th century, focusing on the 1960's and beyond. In doing so, she divides the field of feminist biblical studies into three main eras. These eras are often referred to as "first wave," "second wave," and "third wave" feminist scholarship. The first is that of the pre-19th century. The second is the late 60's and 70's and the third is the 1990's.[26]

Milne explains that first wave scholars tended to find positive role models for women in the Bible by reinterpreting texts that were used in the past to prove women's secondary status. In the second wave, scholars demonstrated their knowledge of linguistics, and related historical, critical and literary theory to the text. Their work attempted to reread the portrayals of women in the text and demonstrate ways to read the text in "less women hostile ways."[27] The third and current wave, according to Milne, examines how feminist biblical studies fit into the larger

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[25] In her essay entitled, "The Feminist and the Bible," Carolyn Osiek, for example, divides feminist biblical critics into 6 categories including: rejectionist, revisionist, liberationist, sublimationist, inclusivist, and loyalist. For the purpose of this discussion, Osiek explains that the loyalist understands the bible to be good to women and that the rejectionists reject the Bible. The revisionists recover parts of the bible that value women and the sublimationist retrieves positive feminine images in the Bible. The liberationist has a tendency to universalize the Bible's salvation of men and the inclusivist provides an inclusive analysis of all texts that refer to women, stating that women were involved in the production of the Bible and it was not produced exclusively by males. To read Osiek's more developed thoughts on these categories, see Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in Adela Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on the Biblical Scholarship* (Chico CA: Scholars Press: 1985), 103.
[26] Pamela J. Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism," 43.
[27] *Ibid*, 53.

picture. This phase aims to understand how the Bible impacts and shapes women's lives throughout the centuries.

For Milne, this third wave encourages scholars to "consider the political and social implications of biblical gender ideology not only as it affects women characters in the text but as it has affected women in society through the millennia and in our own time."[28] According to Milne, our awareness, analysis and study of the arguments from multiple perspectives provides us with the potential to articulate the work's past and present relevance.

Utilizing Milne's divisions regarding the phases or trends of feminist biblical studies as a guide, it becomes apparent that Jewish feminist scholarship often lacks an important element of the third phase: the ability to address and find meaning in tradition Jewish thought coupled with the interest in making the myth relevant and meaningful for our times. Most of the Jewish feminist scholars I will discuss below fit into the second and third waves of Milne's study. They analyze the Moses narrative from the perspective presented in the second phase with their analyses geared towards the third phase. Thus, even those scholars who present their scholarship from the viewpoint of the second lens, by highlighting the patriarchal nature of the text, may be working towards the third phase of which Milne speaks, helping to bring change and an awareness of the relevance of these studies on the past and the present.

Tal Ilan, Esther Fuchs, Cheryl Exum, Kathryn Pfisterer Darr and Betsy Halpern Amaru all highlight the patriarchal nature of the biblical text and Talmudic commentaries, highlighting the hostile roles that the text has towards women.[29] Ilan argues that, in Midrashic and Talmudic commentary, women are silenced using four repeated techniques: the woman is a man, the

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[28] *Ibid*, 48.
[29] See note 22, p. 13.

woman is a gentile, the woman is a biblical heroine, and the woman is an allegory.[30] According to Ilan's divisions, Bat Pharaoh would fit into the second category because she is perceived as "other." While the biblical text itself may be somewhat vague regarding the type of "other" that she is, the text does highlight some differences, at the very least those of class and social status. The question of whether Bat Pharaoh is "type-cast" is relevant not only with regard to her character but also insofar as her character has the potential to affect other women in society throughout history. Only in this way can we truly account for the political and social implications related to biblical criticism and gender ideology.

As a member of the Egyptian royal family, Bat Pharaoh's reality, from the perspective of the biblical writer, is different than that of Israelite daughters. For example, many of the stories in the Bible that feature daughters also feature incest and rape, as well as issues dealing with inheritance and marriage and portray women with less power in society.[31] Ironically, even with Bat Pharaoh's privileged and potentially powerful status in the Egyptian royal family, she, too, is compelled to challenge the authority by refusing to heed her father's decree. The biblical text itself never tells of Bat Pharaoh's marriage to any man; in this way, she is free from the social constructs of marriage. The fact that marriage is not a concern in the text tells us that it was not a

[30] Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women,* 19-20.

[31] A close parallel to Bat Pharaoh would be found in a royal daughter. In 2 Samuel 13:1-22, Tamar, the daughter of King David, is tricked and seduced by Amnon, her half brother. An example that is more difficult to compare is presented in Judges 11:35, Jephtah's daughter suffers the fate of a father who unknowingly condemns her to death (or excommunication) as he vows that the next person to walk through his house will be a burnt offering to God. For women in the Bible, see Barbara L. Thaw Ronson, *The Women of the Torah: Commentaries from the Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah,* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999) and Shelomoh Aviner, *Women in the Bible: Woman of Courage,* (Montreal: Jewel Publications, 2004).

necessary condition of her becoming an adoptive mother.[32] One might assume that her position in royalty affords her the freedom to raise Moses. After all, no other character in the narrative is given that freedom or permitted to demonstrate that success due to her father's decree. Furthermore, her success is not presented as a result of her beauty or outward deceit as is the case with other powerful women in *Tanakh*.[33] While it is clear that she deceives Pharaoh, this is not the focus of the text. If the text focuses on anyone's deceit, it is that of the midwives to Pharaoh.

According to the פְּשָׁט ("literal translation"), Pharaoh's mother wants to save Moses because he is her son, the text mentions that the midwives cannot kill the male babies because they fear God, and Bat Pharaoh saves Moses because she hears him cry and pities him.[34] Whether or not these individuals knew they were saving the future of a nation is not the focus of this myth. All, however, had to acknowledge that they were defying the King's decree and all potentially take risks to save another life. For these reasons, it is imperative to ask the question of the narrator's intent in sharing the heroic acts of Bat Pharaoh, the midwives, and Pharaoh's mother.

Much of the scholarship in this regard is representative of second wave feminist scholarship: it showcases the narrators' desires to present model female behavior. In "Literary Characterizations of Mothers," Fuchs argues that the biblical narrative is a reflection of the

[32] Although the Exodus biblical does not make mention of a marriage, Chronicles 1:4 tells of a marriage between Bat Pharaoh and a man named Mered.
[33] See, for example, the story of Yael and Sisera in Judges 4:17-24. Yael is a woman who kills Sisera, the captain of the army of Jabin. She deceives him by inviting him into her tent, allowing him to believe her hospitality. Yael serves Sisera warm milk, he lies down to sleep and she puts a tent peg in his temple to kill him.
[34] Exodus 2:3, 1:17 and 2:6.

narrator's desire for how women should act and behave.[35] In the case of the Moses narrative, many Jewish feminist scholars could argue, as Exum does, that the bravery of women is featured, but the focus is on the male that they all strive to save. Pfisterer Darr eloquently states this perspective when she writes, "What men most want from women, the biblical authors depict as what women most want for themselves."[36] Thus, one could argue that while the goal in Exodus 2:1-10 is saving Moses, the future of the Israelite nation, the narrator makes it seem as if all of the women involved want nothing but to save Moses of their own volition. This is not a seamless argument in the cases of Bat Pharaoh or the midwives, as the text does not present them to be self-serving. The biblical text does not mention their interest in children, as is the case with numerous other women in the Bible. Significantly, even if Bat Pharaoh may not have been initially interested in motherhood, her noteworthy presence in the story is wrapped up in motherhood. Thus, Halpern Amaru argues, "all strong female characters are associated in one way or another with motherhood."[37] On the other hand, Bat Pharaoh plays an extremely prominent role when compared to the other characters in the story— especially the other male characters. Moses' father is mentioned once. His mother is mentioned in that she places him in the ark and the sister watches. The two characters that continue to be described are Bat Pharaoh and Moses' sister.

Another idea representing second wave feminist thought is that even if women are not tightly associated with motherhood, they serve as the agents or tools through which God acts. Exum asks whether Exodus 1:8-2:10 is a woman's story? The answer for her is a resounding no. She clarifies that the message of the story is the idea that the public arena is for men and that

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[35] Esther Fuchs, "Literary Characterizations of Mothers," 130.
[36] Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women*, 74.
[37] Betsy Halpern Amaru, "Portraits of Women in Pseudo Philo's Biblical Antiquities" 106.

women must not look past motherhood for fulfillment.[38] As a second wave feminist, her understanding emphasizes patriarchy and politics about women.

Heather A. McKay explains that the fact that so many women must take part in saving Moses is a result of the writer's interest in diffusing women's power.[39] Interestingly, with regard to this question, Exum specifically demonstrates a move toward third wave feminist thought. In problematizing the diffusion of women's power, Exum questions women's future sense of self-respect and their perceptions of themselves as a result of this story. She explains that the problem with the Exodus narrative is that it teaches women to be happy or satisfied with the power that they have behind the scenes, one that is completely domesticated and confined. Thus, women that work to maintain order are seen to have positive or "protective" qualities, whereas those outside these boundaries are perceived as "dangerous."[40] Ilan takes this idea further when she states, "if the woman is important and if her contribution is worthwhile, she cannot be Jewish, since Jewish women were particularly oppressed and ignorant."[41] Exum does not see the text as "unmotivated" and challenges readers to address the biblical gender politics involved in order to create a new version of the story for future generations.[42]

Exum is the only feminist biblical scholar who has written extensively on the Moses narrative and her points are well-taken and poignant; they not only challenge the reader to look beyond the apparent roles given to each character but they ask the reader to think about the greater implications of the messages within these canonical texts.

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[38] Cheryl Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live," 66.

[39] Heather A. McKay, "On the Future of Feminist Biblical Criticism," in Brenner and Fontaine, eds., *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) *81.*

[40] J. Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters," 86.

[41] Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women*, 25.

[42] J. Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters," 86.

Taking into account all of the arguments made by the aforementioned feminist scholars, I am still challenged to ask why Bat Pharaoh ultimately saves Moses in the text and what models of womanhood we can model from her brave actions. The Midrash and Talmud take note of Bat Pharaoh's small presence in the biblical text and seize numerous opportunities to expand this lacuna.[43] It is perhaps due to the elaborations of the biblical text that so many parents name their children Batya, after Pharaoh's daughter, based on the Talmud's renaming of her character.

While one could argue that the women in Exodus 1 and 2 are only featured because they take part in nurturing and raising the future of the Israelite nation, there is no question that this is one of the few stories in the Bible with so many women participating so actively in history formation. With this in mind, Exum reminds the reader to question the value and "effect" that "these stories about women have on the way we read the Exodus story as a whole."[44] Thus, while the second wave feminist scholars emphasize patriarchy and women's powerlessness, third wave feminists direct their writings towards women's empowerment and agency. While acknowledging the patriarchal nature of the biblical, Midrashic and Talmudic texts, third wave traditional Jewish feminists must struggle to find meaning and relevance in even those texts whose value systems seem archaic. The goal is not a critique or a commendation of the past but an analysis of how this critique or commendation potentially influences identity formation for the present and the future.

[43] See *Midrash Rabbah* on Exodus 1:23-36, Talmud *Megillah* 13a and Talmud *Sotah* 12b.
[44] Cheryl J. Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live," in *Semeia*, 82.

CHAPTER III

FORSAKEN LEPER OR SELFLESS SAINT?

> Against your will you are born, and against your will you die, but you live of your own free will.
>
> --Joseph B. Soloveitchik[45]

Just as feminist scholars have differed in their interpretation of the Exodus narrative, depending on their view of patriarchy and the degree of female agency they espouse, earlier thinkers also reinterpret this myth with regards to their historical, cultural, and religious context. In this chapter, I will focus on traditional Jewish scholarship whose goal is a traditional understanding of the biblical text. For Jews, the written and oral law is part of a continuous commentary that continues to be just as relevant to the Jewish community today as it was many years ago. Kugel cites four beliefs or assumptions regarding the reasons underlying interpreters' statements about texts: 1. The text is cryptic and its teachings are not clearly stated. 2. Scripture "constitutes one great Book of Instruction and as such is a fundamentally relevant text." 3. There should be harmony between the Bible's different sections and 4. "All scripture is divinely sanctioned, of divine provenance or divinely inspired."[46] Kugel's main idea is that the text with which these scholars work with is one that has profound relevance in their lives and in the lives of the community around them. Traditional commentaries may seek to explore scientific or historical truth at times but much of the commentaries center on a desire to explain and analyze

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[45] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny*: *From the Holocaust to the State of Israel* (New Jersey: Ktav, 2000), 6.
[46] For further analysis of these 4 beliefs, see James Kugel in *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17-23.

each section of the text for its greater universal meaning, whether it is literal, technical, psychological or sociological.

Rabbinic literature is, in many ways, quite similar to the medieval commentaries, although it engages in greater freedom regarding the narrative under discussion. Adele Reinhartz and Miriam Simma Walfish write, "This genre of literature exists in the gray area between pure commentary and original creative composition."[47] In this form of commentary, there is an awareness and acceptance of multiple and divergent interpretations, as opposed one correct version. In, "Why Did God Kill Abel? How Did God Kill Abel?," Chaim Milikowsky writes,

> Each Midrashic moment is thus completely independent and there is no larger aesthetic entity against with each independent component must be measured. Varying—and even contradictory—trajectories with regard to story, plot and motivation are all eminently acceptable.[48]

The search for one truth is, therefore, no longer a meaningful one; rather, the search is for diverse and even dissimilar interpretations, all feasible interpretations of God's message.

While the original thoughts of the biblical narrator may be less certain, perhaps we can be more certain regarding the thoughts of the Midrashic and Talmudic commentaries, as their deviations from the original narrative can be more clearly analyzed. Every interpreter has the opportunity to demonstrate how he or she feels the myth should be transmitted in his/her own time and place. This provides incredible opportunity for those interested in suggesting alternative readings to texts and alternative modes of self-identification. Elaine Wainwright points out that a retelling can help facilitate the reshaping of "the self-identity of a community

[47] Adele Reinhartz and Miriam Simma Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation," in Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, eds., *Hagar, Sarah and Their Children: Jewish Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2006), 105.

[48] Chaim Milikowsky, "Why Did God Kill Abel? How Did God Kill Abel?" in Hanne Trautner Kromann, ed., *From Bible To Midrash: Portrayals and Interpretive Practices,* (Lund: Arcus, 2005), 80.

whose locus is on the margins of Judaism, itself a deviant community or a resistant community needing a counter-story."[49]

In this thesis, I will delineate key themes in the Exodus 2:1-10 narrative and present the questions that stem from this narrative; each question will be understood through the greater lens of how each culture or community transformed these myths to better define its community, and sometimes more powerfully, those who were not considered a part of the community. I have made the decision to address these questions, specifically, because the majority of commentators (ancient, medieval and modern) reference these ideas and queries in their commentaries. In analyzing these questions, I will investigate how the narrator or narrators of the myths retell the stories to provide meaning and identity for their cultures. The themes I address reflect some of the similarities and differences I briefly explored between the Sargon legend and the Exodus birth narrative. They fall into four main categories: 1. The reason behind Bat Pharaoh's presence at the river and why she saves the child. 2. Bat Pharaoh's relationship to her father and how this affects Moses' relationship to the palace 3. The meaning and/or definition of motherhood and, more specifically, Bat Pharaoh's relationship to Moses. 4. Bat Pharaoh's relationship to God. These four themes most clearly outline some of the ambiguities surrounding Bat Pharaoh's character and function to problematize the question of her seminal role in history.

The process by which I will answer these questions is threefold: I will first present the reader with the manner in which the biblical narrative answers the questions, if at all. The second step will be to expose the commentaries' responses to the question and the third step will include an analysis of how each author uses myth to convey a deeper meaning or message to

[49] Elaine Wainwright, "Rachel Weeping for her Children: Intertextuality and the Biblical Testaments—A Feminist Approach," in Brenner and Fontaine, eds., *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2007), 467.

his/her audience. While I will briefly address the chronological development of the commentators and how history and context may shape the retellings, crucial to this discussion is the opportunity to honestly and critically juxtapose both ancient and modern commentaries. This juxtaposition proves to be an effective tool in helping to define Bat Pharaoh's character in the biblical narrative and the development of her character in relation to the authors' aspirations in imagining her identity.

Bat Pharaoh's Descent to the River in the Biblical Account

The first question is the most poignant, as it forces the reader to address why or perhaps how Bat Pharaoh met up with Moses in the first place. According to the פְּשָׁט of the text, Bat Pharaoh went down to the river to bathe. There is no further analysis of the reason for her bathing. Was she aware of the healing powers of the Nile? Was this a ritual washing or one of cleansing? Was there no closer river to her palace? These questions are not addressed by the text but are developed in the later commentaries. The text does not confront the question about why Bat Pharaoh saves Moses either, with the exception of her decision to pick him up because of her pity for him. Bat Pharaoh takes him and utters: מִיַּלְדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה ("This must be a Hebrew child").[50] She is aware of Moses' heritage and decides to pull him up from the river and save him anyway. In the biblical account of this hero birth myth, Bat Pharaoh's presence at the river and her motivations for saving the boy are not relevant.

[50] Exodus 2:7.

Bat Pharaoh's Descent to the River in the Midrash, the Talmud, and the Biblical Commentaries

In the commentaries, there are 4 main explanations given with regards to the reason for Bat Pharaoh's descent to the river: 1. She was playing at the river. 2. This was an Egyptian custom. 3. She had seen this in her dream and 4. This was a physical or spiritual cleansing.[51]

Josephus depicts Bat Pharaoh's presence at the river as a very natural occurrence when he presents Bat Pharaoh playing at the river.[52] This is very youthful version of the young maiden that doesn't necessarily explore why she went down in the first place but it does deviate from the biblical version as it emphasizes her youth. Additionally, it is possible that Bat Pharaoh "playing" at the river is perhaps a reflection of her royal status. According to Ibn Ezra, it was perfectly natural for Bat Pharaoh to go down to the river as it was an Egyptian custom.[53]

In his *Biblical Antiquities*, Pseudo Philo does not directly deviate from the biblical narrative by stating that indeed, Bat Pharaoh descended to the river to bathe but adds that the reason for her doing so was the result of a dream. According to the unknown author, Bat

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[51] Note that some commentators are not concerned with why Bat Pharaoh went down to the river. Ramban, Seforno and Rashi all hold this view and therefore need not address the strangeness of the presence of a member of the royal family in a plebian place. Ramban questions the meaning of why she had to "go down," as the text states, וַתֵּרֶד עַל ("she came onto") vs. "וַתֵּרֶד אֶל." ("she came to"). He is commenting on the nuance of the text, which explains that she came "on" to the river instead of simply to the river. Ramban explains that presumably the river had מעלות ("levels"). She descended from Pharaoh's castle to the first level but she would have never entered the שִׁבּוֹלֶת הַנָּהָר ("shibboleth of the river"), the part of the river inhabited by the lower social class. This explains why she had to send her maidservant to fetch Moses as he was floating in the lower level of the river. A similar view is held by Seforno who articulates that Bat Pharaoh would never have gone to the river with the rest of society; rather, she was still in the King's house, which was adjacent to the river. Ramban, Seforno, and Rashi on Exodus 2:5 in Michael Carasik, ed., *The Commentators Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot,* 10.

[52] Steve Mason and Louis H. Feldman, eds. *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary* on *Judean Antiquities*, 195.

[53] Ibn Ezra on Exodus 2:5. I have not found any other commentaries that cite this tradition. Michael Carasik, ed. *The Commentators Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot,* 10

Pharaoh comes to bathe, "as she had seen in a dream." There are no further details provided as to what this dream was or why she decided to follow her dream. The dream motif is one that is extremely prevalent in the Midrash and occurs frequently in Pseudo Philo's discussion of this story, but this seems to be the only retelling/commentary on the story that posits a dream as the reason for Bat Pharaoh's decision to bathe by the river and thus the manner in which she is led to Moses.[54]

The aforementioned commentators seem to have no stake as to why Bat Pharaoh is led to Moses. Josephus and Ibn Ezra's interpretations of Bat Pharaoh's presence at the river at most serve to describe a bit more about her character: she becomes more youthful or more Egyptian. Pseudo Philo's rendition is a bit less lucid as dreams were often interpreted as messages from God.

The fourth and most provocative understanding of why Bat Pharaoh goes down to the river is explored in the Midrash and the Talmud. These explanations most clearly deviate from the פְּשָׁט of the text and most closely connect to the second half of this section: the question of why Bat Pharaoh saves Moses. Both commentaries communicate a sort of physical and/or spiritual cleansing as the reason for Bat Pharaoh's entrance into the river.[55]

Sotah 12b showcases a debate as to the reason why Bat Pharaoh travels down to the river. R. Johanan teaches in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai that when Bat Pharaoh went down to the river, she was doing so to "cleanse herself of her father's idols."[56] This was a symbolic act to mark her decision to move away from her father's idolatrous behavior. What is so fascinating about this text is that Bat Pharaoh no longer travels down to the river for simply a physical

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[54] M.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, 103.
[55] *Sotah* 12b and *Exodus Rabbah* 1:23.
[56] A. Cohen, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Sotah*, 24.

cleansing, as presented in the biblical version but rather, her presence is extremely deliberate and not visceral or banal. Her bathing was not one of physical cleansing but a *spiritual cleansing*. The Talmud presents Bat Pharaoh as an Egyptian that denies idolatry and thus potentially worships God. Certainly one could question whether there was a defined Judaism that one could convert to at the time of the biblical verse. But the question of historic accuracy is not of immediate concern or interest. It is compelling to recognize that the Talmud had difficulty with the possibility that the person who raised Moses could be an Egyptian and not an Israelite. The new myth transforms Bat Pharaohs behavior to one that relates more closely to Israelite values and ideology.

Exodus Rabbah 1:23 depicts Bat Pharaoh coming down to the river because she has leprosy.[57] While the focus of this text is an explanation as to why she was coming down to the river in the first place, the specific reason she goes down to the river is unclear. Perhaps she viewed the Nile as a healing force for those who were ill and she was attempting to heal herself of her ailment. Importantly, according to traditional Jewish sources, leprosy in the Talmud is viewed as a physical disease that was caused by a spiritual deficiency; it was a person's outward sign for one's involvement in a sin.[58] Thus, similar to *Sotah* 12b, the river becomes a place of spiritual healing. Whether or not this is the intent of *Exodus Rabbah* is unclear; the Midrash portrays *Moses* healing Bat Pharaoh of her leprosy and makes no mention of the *river's* healing powers. *Sotah* 12b and *Exodus Rabbah* 1:23 are examples of retellings that attempt to strengthen Bat Pharaoh's connection to Moses and the Israelite nation Moses would come to lead.

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[57] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on Exodus*, 29.

[58] The Talmud in Erkhin 16a lists seven possible causes for צרעת ("leprosy"): לשון הרע ("evil tongue"), murder, vain oath, illicit relations, haughtiness, theft, and stinginess. Yisroel Simcha Schorr and Chaim Malinowitz, eds., *The Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud on Arachin* (New York: *Artscroll*/Mesorah, 2004), 16a.

Bat Pharaoh's Decision to Save Moses in the Biblical Account

The second half of this section is more complicated as it addresses why Bat Pharaoh decides to save Moses—thus providing the commentators with a tool to gauge her character. The commentators display three main positions regarding Bat Pharaoh's motivation in saving Moses: selfless, self-serving or a random act. Admittedly, not every case falls perfectly within one of these three categories as some texts possess qualities of two at the same time. The cases where Bat Pharaoh's motivation does not seem to be relevant most closely reflect the biblical version.

The biblical narrative delineates three main details with regards to Bat Pharaoh's motivations: Bat Pharaoh has the basket retrieved before she is certain of its contents, she hears the child crying, and takes pity on him.[59] The biblical text prescribes the reason for her motivation as pity and does not explore her motivation further; this may not be a relevant detail for the writer of the biblical text if Bat Pharaoh is simply seen as a trigger for Moses' salvation.

Bat Pharaoh's Decision to Save Moses in the Midrash, the Talmud, and the Biblical Commentaries

Much of the commentaries fall into either the second or third categories and perceive Bat Pharaoh's actions to be self- serving or do not analyze her motivations. Interestingly, those commentaries that do not analyze her motivations often strive to highlight God's influence on the story. Very few commentators understand Bat Pharaoh's actions to be entirely selfless or based

[59] Exodus 2:5-6.

on intrinsic motivation. Ramban, Seforno and Or HaHaim are in the minority of commentators who struggle to draw attention Bat Pharaoh's selfless character.[60]

According to Ramban, Moses was crying as powerfully as a boy. This is the reason that Bat Pharaoh takes pity on him. Ramban writes, "[Bat Pharaoh] realized [Moses] must have been put there either to save him or as not to look on as the child dies."[61] In Ramban's view, Bat Pharaoh saves Moses thinking that it is her duty to do so; she is not aware of a reward to come and this is simply her responsibility. One could question whether responsibility can truly be defined as altruistic but her decision to save him is definitely not motivated or influenced by the potential of reward.

Seforno elucidates the perfection that Bat Pharaoh sees in Moses. Prophetically, Bat Pharaoh sees that he will be great and she takes pity because she has difficulty understanding how something of such perfection could be cast into a river. Taking on Bat Pharaoh's voice in Exodus 2:6, Seforno asks,

שיהא ולד נאה ומוכן לשלמות כזה נזרק ליאור

"[How can it be that] a child so pleasant and ready for perfection as this [child] could be cast into a river?"[62]

According to Seforno, Moses has nothing to do with a vision that Bat Pharaoh has of *her* greatness; rather she saves him for the potential that *he* seems to embody. Furthermore, Seforno

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[60] Ramban on Exodus 2:6 in Michael Carasik, ed. *The Commentators' Bible*: *JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot, 10;* Seforno on Exodus 2:6 in Mordechai Leb Katzenellenbogen, ed., *Torath Haim*, *Hamishah Humshei Torah,* 16; Or HaChaim on Exodus 2:6 in Abraham Yitzhak Friedman, ed., *Miqra'otGedolot: Hamishah Humshei Torah*, 19.

[61] Ramban on Exodus 2:6 in Michael Carasik, ed., *Miqra'ot Gedolot*, 10.

[62] Seforno on Exodus 2:6 in Mordechai Leb Katzenellenbogen, ed., *Torath Haim: Hamishah Humshei Torah*, 16. *Translation mine.*

explains that she calls him Moses not because she drew him from the water, as indicated in the biblical verse, but because he would save others.[63]

Or HaHaim is the only commentator to point out how and why Bat Pharaoh should be seen as virtuous and explains that Bat Pharaoh saw a big light upon Moses and God made this light shine on Moses to increase the boy's favor in her eyes.[64] The most compelling aspect of his argument comes later when Or HaHaim further addresses the question of Bat Pharaoh's pity for the child by explaining the importance of the order in which the story is presented. First, the text writes of Bat Pharaoh's pity; this is followed by Bat Pharaoh's realization that the child is an Israelite.

Or HaHaim clarifies that on the day Bat Pharaoh meets the child, Pharaoh had not only made the decree to throw all Israelite males in the Nile but all Egyptian boys as well. For this reason, explains Or HaHaim, Bat Pharaoh's initial pity on Moses comes from her *personal* connection to him; she thinks the boy is Egyptian. Thus, the moment she finds out that the boy is Israelite and *still* decides to save him is the moment which best defines her character. Or HaHaim states, ובזה גלתה דעתה ("and with this, her intention was revealed").[65]

According to Or HaHaim, Bat Pharaoh steps completely out of the boundaries of comfort and expectation when she reaches out to a nation other than her own. The narrator does not depict Bat Pharaoh as having any type of relationship with God nor does he describe her engaging in prophecy. Her beliefs mirror her Egyptian ancestry and yet she saves the young

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[63] Seforno on Exodus 2:6, *The Stone Edition Chumash*, 412.
[64] Or HaChaim on Exodus 2:6 in Abraham Yitzhak Friedman, ed., *Miqra'otGedolot: Hamishah Humshei Torah*, 21.
[65] *Ibid,* 20. *Translation mine.*

Israelite.[66] As compared to Seforno and Ramban, Or HaHaim provides the closest understanding as to what Bat Pharaoh's selfless act may have resembled though it seems the biblical text itself may be the best example for the most purely selfless act.

The remaining commentaries fall within the second and third categories mentioned: an act that is self-serving or an act that is greatly influenced by divine intervention. For the writers, it may have been unlikely that pity alone could have enough force to overcome her father's decree. Alternatively, the commentators viewed more probable or believable the notion that Moses was saved because he healed this disease stricken woman and that pulling him out of the water was the least she could do as an expression of thanksgiving. In this way, Pharaoh's daughter is not viewed as a rebel but a disease stricken woman who attempts to save herself and to pay back her savior. While this does not completely eliminate the problems associated with the commentators' interest in diminishing the impact of natural pity on Pharaoh's daughter, it does address the equally challenging question of how an Egyptian member of the royal family could save an Israelite boy of her own volition.

Josephus delineates two reasons for Bat Pharaoh's decision to lift Moses from the river. First, when Bat Pharaoh sees the child, she falls in love with it "because of its size and beauty." [67] Second, Josephus reports that Bat Pharaoh picks up Moses from the river because she "was not gifted by fate with her own offspring."[68] There is no mention of whether Pharaoh recognizes

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[66] Or HaHaim does mention the possibility that Moses cures her of her leprosy but does not emphasize this as the major reason behind her actions, though it may have been a minor motivator. Or HaChaim on Exodus 2:6-7 in Abraham Yitzhak Friedman, ed., *Miqra'otGedolot: Hamishah Humshei Torah*, 21.
[67] Steve Mason, ed with transl. Louis H. Feldman, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 195.
[68] *Ibid,*198.

that the child is a Hebrew or even whether this is a concern at all. With regards Bat Pharaoh's attraction to the child, Josephus explains that Moses' beauty was an act of God.

Josephus writes,

> God exhibited such great concern for Moyses that he was deemed worthy of nurture and care by the very ones who because of his birth had decided to bring about the annihilation of the others from the race of the Hebrews.[69]

It seemed that no one could turn Moses away because of the intense attraction that God caused him or her to have towards Moses. Thermuthis, as Josephus calls her, was no exception. One wonders whether Josephus would interpret Bat Pharaoh's decision to save Moses as "defiant" of her father's command, as her ultimate goal in this case was to have offspring.

The irony of this text is palpable; the moment Bat Pharaoh thinks she is promulgating the future of her nation, she is in fact helping to grow the future of the Israelite nation. Josephus' version makes no mention of pity but rather alludes to both a physical attraction and a deep personal desire that leads Bat Pharaoh to defy her father.

The Midrash presented in *Exodus Rabbah* 1:23 functions to justify the reason that Bat Pharaoh saves Moses. The text explains that as soon as Bat Pharaoh touches the ark, she is healed of her leprosy. "For this reason did she take pity upon Moses and loved him with an exceeding love."[70]

On the one hand, there is a desire to draw her closer. This is reflected in the claim that she came down to the river to cleanse herself spiritually of her father's idolatry. At the same time, the rabbis are resistant to allowing Bat Pharaoh's natural pity to be the sole reason for her decision to save Moses. This is not a pure act of loving kindness because she makes the decision to save him only *after* he saves her of her leprosy. In fact, this interpretation leads the reader to

[69] *Ibid,* 195.
[70] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on* Exodus, 29.

assume that had Moses not cured her of her leprosy, his hopes of being saved by the Pharaoh's daughter would have decreased, if not dissipated completely.[71]

It is possible, however, to view this commentary in a less extreme way. Instead of assuming that Bat Pharaoh's character was completely self-serving, one could view this action as the least a person could do as an expression of thanksgiving by a disease stricken woman who attempts to save herself and to pay back her savior.

In Pseudo-Philo's does not mention pity and no discussion as to the motivation behind Bat Pharaoh's decision to pick up the child. In *Biblical Antiquities,* he states:

> And when she saw the child and looked upon the covenant, that is, the testament in his flesh, she said: He is of the children of the Hebrews. And she took him and nourished him and he became her son, and she called his name Moyses.[72]

Bat Pharaoh knows Moses is an Israelite child because he was born circumcised and she still decides to save him. [73] Pseudo Philo retells the myth of the hero birth without focusing on the motivations for any of the savior's actions. Interestingly, Pseudo Philo clearly decides to strip away the power and presence in the story from all of Moses' birth relatives. There is no reference to his mother or sister after Bat Pharaoh enters the scene.[74] Pseudo Philo's version is different than the commentaries that follow not only because of his complete disinterest in

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[71] RaDaK (Rabbi David Kimhi), a 12-13th century commentator, differentiates between two acts of loving-kindness. The first is defined as *hesed*, an act of loving kindness that is done in return for another's good deed. This is separated from an act of אמת ("truth") or חסד של אמת ("righteousness of truth"), the act of doing something for another without having received anything from that person prior to the act. It is assumed to be a completely selfless act that saves or greatly helps the other party. One of the most famous examples of "emet" in the Tanakh is that of Rahab who saves the spies before they perform any acts of goodness towards her or her family. RaDaK on Joshua 2:12 in P. Oratz, A.J. Rosenberg and S. Shulman, *Judaica Books of the Prophets: The Book of Joshua* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1980), 12.
[72] M.R. James, transl. *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, 103.
[73] This is also a tradition cited by R. Jose b. Hanina. See *Sotah* 12b.
[74] M.R. James, transl. *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, 103.

motivation but also because he does not outwardly connect any of Bat Pharaoh's actions to a divine plan.

The Midrash in *Exodus Rabbah* 1:24 comments on the shift in the language of the biblical text when it first states, וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד ("she saw that it was a child") and then states, וְהִנֵּה-נַעַר בֹּכֶה ("and behold, a boy that wept"). The Midrash questions why there is a change from the word יֶלֶד ("child") to that of נַעַר ("boy") in the same sentence in reference to Moses. The text states:

> והנה נער בוכה ילד היה ומנהגו כנער, בא גבריאל והכה למשה כדי שיבכה ותתמלא עליו רחמים,
> ותחמול עליו, כיון שראתה אותו בוכה חמלה עליו

> Though he was a child, he behaved like a grown-up boy. Gabriel came and smote Moses so that he should cry and she [the princess] be filled with compassion on Him. When she saw that he was crying, she had pity on him.[75]

According to the Midrash, God causes the baby to cry to hasten the process of Moses' salvation.[76]

Sotah 12b explains the that when Bat Pharaoh saves Moses, she does so not only against her father's will but also against the will of the maidens that traveled with her that morning. Explains the Midrash, Bat Pharaoh's handmaids try to convince her not to "preserve" the child by explaining that although not everyone in a town would follow a king's decree, at the very least, the children of the kingdom were expected to obey it. In the midst of the handmaids' discussion with Bat Pharaoh, the angel Gabriel strikes the handmaids to the ground.[77]

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[75] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on* Exodus, 30.
[76] One obvious question arises from this commentary. First, why must Bat Pharaoh see a child crying to have pity? Would she not have pity at the sight of a boy in the river? Cassuto suggests the possibility that had Moses not been crying, the child might never have been taken from the river on the assumption that he was dead. Umberto Cassuto with Israel Abrahams, transl. *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 19.
[77] A. Cohen, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Sotah,* 24-25.

While Gabriel's presence here does not eliminate the question of why Bat Pharaoh had pity in the first place, it can potentially work to accomplish two goals. First, by placing Bat Pharaoh in a situation where she is forced into conversation with her handmaids, the Midrash complicates Bat Pharaoh's decision because the biblical text never presents any individual challenging her decision to save Moses.

On the one hand, this angel takes away the power that Bat Pharaoh could have, had she been forced into a discussion with her handmaids; however, this might also be the Midrash's way of demonstrating that God was indeed on the side of Bat Pharaoh, though not necessarily leading her decisions. In other words, Bat Pharaoh needed to express interest in saving Moses first, and only then would an angel hasten the process such that she would not have to deal with resistance from the kingdom. This Midrash illuminates a human element and a silent strength in Bat Pharaoh that is not perceived as easily in the other commentaries or the biblical text. It suggests the possibility that Bat Pharaoh was expected to engage and respond to those around her and that repercussions may have existed for her decision to take in Moses.

In conclusion, although the rabbis of the Talmud, Midrash, and later commentaries do not take interest in creating the character of Bat Pharaoh as purely selfless, most struggle with the possibility that she was completely self-serving. Ultimately, the majority of traditional commentators who discuss the question of Bat Pharaoh's decision to save Moses view her in a positive light and laud her as an early example of a righteous gentile. Those that hint at her selfless nature undoubtedly must explain how a member of the Egyptian royal family could be so close to Moses and ultimately end up dealing with potential influences on the young Israelite boy. For this reason, it seems clear that the closer Bat Pharaoh's character comes to that of

Moses,' the greater the rabbis' interest in strengthening either her connection to God or her connection to the Israelites.

CHAPTER IV

BAT PHARAOH AND MOSES IN THE PALACE

> R. Judah said in the name of Rav: When Moses ascended to heaven [to receive the Torah] he found the Holy One sitting and fashioning coronets for the letters. [Moses] said to Him: "Master of the world, who requires you [to do this]?" [God] replied: "There is a person who will come to be after many generations, called Akiva the son of Joseph; he will one day expound heaps upon heaps of laws from each and every horn."
>
> -- Talmud Menahot 29b[78]

Bat Pharaoh and Moses in the Palace in the Biblical Account

This chapter will address the question of Bat Pharaoh and Moses' relationship to her father and the palace. For the traditional biblical commentators, the answer to this question represents the extent to which Egyptian influences impact Moses' character and identity. Inevitably, those who struggle to define Judaism and Jewish identity reflect back on the leader of the earliest Israelite nation. The uncertainties surrounding the manner in which Moses was raised and the societies that influenced him are valuable to helping us define and characterize the values and decisions of today. Exodus 2:10-11 states,

> י וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבִאֵהוּ לְבַת-פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי-לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה
> וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן-הַמַּיִם מְשִׁיתִהוּ. יא וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אֶחָיו
> וַיַּרְא בְּסִבְלֹתָם וַיַּרְא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מַכֶּה אִישׁ-עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו.

> When the child grew up, [Miriam] brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses explaining, "I drew him out of the water." Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

[78] Abba Zvi Naiman, *Artscroll Tractate Menachos* (New York: Mesorah, 2003).

The biblical text does not mention Bat Pharaoh's relationship to her father or the palace. There are no discussions between them and only a miniscule glimpse of Moses' upbringing after he is taken from the river. We see that, once Moses is adopted, Bat Pharaoh names him. At this point, the biblical version immediately fasts forward to the next phase of his life—a young man on his own, just having left the palace. Thus, the biblical text does not describe Moses' experience in the palace and, unsurprisingly, there is no discussion between Bat Pharaoh and her father regarding a new addition to the family.[79]

Bat Pharaoh and Moses in the Palace in the Midrash, the Talmud, and the Biblical Commentaries

In the following section, I will present an overview of those commentators who imagine Moses' presence in the palace. I will then discuss those commentaries that demonstrate broader observations on Moses' relationship to the two nations into which he was born: Egypt and Israel. Few medieval biblical commentaries make any observations on these passages. One possible reason is that the medieval commentators view this as part of the divine plan and the "inner logic" of the story.[80]

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[79] This lacuna is especially exaggerated when this compared to Exodus 1:18-21, where Pharaoh engages in a discussion with the מְיַלְּדֹת ("midwives") because he is angered by their decision to keep the Israelite children alive. No parallel discussion takes place between Pharaoh and his daughter in the biblical text when Bat Pharaoh makes the decision to let Moses live.

[80] Interestingly, Abarbanel is one of the few exceptions and wonders how one of the most obvious roots of tension in this story is overlooked. He asks how Pharaoh is not suspicious of a Hebrew child in his home. Abarbanel on Exodus 2:10 in Michael Carasik, ed., *The Commentators' Bible on Shemot,* 11. Furthermore, in the discussion of the motivation behind Bat Pharaoh's decision to save Moses, I referenced the struggle between Bat Pharaoh and her handmaids, as seen in *Exodus Rabbah* 1:23 and *Sotah* 12b, where the handmaids try to convince her not to keep the child. One could argue that this struggle is representative of Bat Pharaoh's

On more than one occasion, the Midrash provides an account of the discord between the handmaids and Bat Pharaoh and between Moses and Pharaoh. In other words, for the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash, defining the tension present in a text, did not necessarily define a lack of trust in the divine plan but an interest in finding meaning in the silence of the text. The manner in which this silence is expanded upon becomes an avenue to further separate Moses from his Egyptian upbringing.

The Midrash in *Exodus Rabbah* 1:26 depicts young Moses growing up in Pharaoh' home. The Midrash reads:

> Pharaoh's daughter used to kiss and hug him, loved him as if he were her own son and would not allow him out of the royal palace. Because he was so handsome, everyone was eager to see him and whoever saw him could not tear himself away from him. Pharaoh also used to kiss and hug him, and Moses used to take the crown of Pharaoh and place it upon his own head as he was destined to do when he became great…and even so did the daughter of Pharaoh bring him up who was destined to exact retribution from her father.[81]

This Midrash showcases a markedly different approach to Bat Pharaoh's relationship to her father and the palace. Besides mentioning the idea that Moses was akin to a son to her, the Midrash also notes everyone else's love for Moses. Everyone is eager to see Moses because of his beauty but Pharaoh kisses and hugs him as well. The Midrash depicts a playful relationship between Moses and Pharaoh, the vision of a grandchild sitting on his grandfather's lap being snuggled and hugged as the playful toddler grabs the cap from his head. Obviously this image is

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tenuous relationship to the palace, as her handmaids represent the palace. While Midrash does not reference a direct conversation between Pharaoh's daughter and her father, it is the only text that seems to showcase any potential confrontation between Bat Pharaoh and her father. One might argue that this is expected as realistically, Bat Pharaoh would not engage in a leadership struggle of power with her father but it is noteworthy that no such interaction is recorded. Michael Carasik, ed., *The Commentators' Bible on Shemot,* 11.

[81] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on Exodus*, 33.

not as innocent as just presented. After all, Moses is not simply taking a cap off of his pseudo-grandfather's head but the crown from the King of Egypt.

This Midrash continues by stating that Pharaoh's counselors were disturbed; some suggested that Pharaoh should kill Moses while others advised Pharaoh to burn him.[82] It concludes with a test proposed by Jethro, Moses' future father-in-law. Jethro advises Pharaoh to present a platter with burning coal and gold before young Moses. The test would determine the child's sensibilities. The angel, Gabriel, directs young Moses' actions and leads him to place the burning coal in his mouth.[83] On some level, the Midrashic retelling presents Pharaoh as a more passive leader than he is portrayed in the biblical narrative. He creates the decrees but does not have the will or the skill to enforce them. His power as the King of Egypt seems to be his only force—so much so that even *young* Moses can easily take the crown off his head. Pharaoh does not sense the defiance looming in the child Moses and must wait for his advisers to initiate his next step. The Midrash explores tensions of leadership and what expressions of leadership we see in Moses early on, even though he is not being raised by his birth family.

This theme is also explored in Josephus' writings. It is probable that Josephus is commenting or expanding upon this older tradition cited in the Midrash. Josephus writes of a young Moses who, as a young child, drops Pharaoh's diadem after Pharaoh has just taken it and placed it on Moses' head. Just as a scribe is about to kill Moses, Bat Pharaoh steps in and takes him away.[84] The divide is only presented between her and Moses and other members of the palace. Josephus' only words about the King's reaction are that the King was not quick to kill

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[82] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on Exodus*, 33.
[83] This Midrash also functions to explain why Moses had a lisp and therefore challenged God when God proposed that he be the leader of Israel. *Ibid,* 33.
[84] Steve Mason and Louis H. Feldman, eds. *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary* on *Judean Antiquities*, 199.

Moses and that Moses was protected by divine providence.[85] Most unusual in Josephus' commentary is his ambivalence towards Pharaoh: he does not depict Pharaoh trying to save Moses; neither does he depict Pharaoh trying to kill him. Josephus' entire version of the hero myth is predicated on the notion that Bat Pharaoh brings Moses into the palace in the first place to be her son. The entire story reflects this theme.

For the rabbis of the Midrash and later commentaries, Moses' allegiance to Israel is in question in the biblical reading. Their retellings suggest a conflict of interest between Moses' Egyptian upbringing and his Israelite roots. The first time that the biblical text depicts Moses leaving the Egyptian palace, he enters into an altercation with an Egyptian. The most stressed term in these passages is the word, אָח ("brother"). It is present two times in one verse: אֶחָיו ("his brothers") and מֵאֶחָיו ("from his brothers"). Moses goes out to his brothers and sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers. According to the biblical text, Moses does not know the reality that the Israelite is one of his brethren. Yet, as a grown man, Moses feels a natural kinship to this man and his nation. In commenting on Moses' observation of the Israelites' labors as slaves, Rashi writes, "[Moses] saw himself in their labors, empathized with them, and grieved for them." Rashi does not ponder the possibility that Moses could feel conflicted when presented with the altercation between the Egyptian and the Israelite.[86] Rather, his interpretation fall in line with the biblical understanding: Moses feels a natural connection to the Israelite.

Ramban, by contrast, explains how Moses knew to grieve for an Israelite. In his comments on the question of Moses going out to his "brothers," Ramban states: "[Moses] had

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[85] Steve Mason and Louis H. Feldman, eds. *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary* on *Judean Antiquities*, 199.
[86] Rashi on Exodus 2:11 in Michael Carasik, ed., *The Commentators' Bible,* 11.

been told he was a Jew and he wanted to see them because they were his kinsfolk (brothers)." Ramban further explains that Moses could not bear the sight of the Egyptian beating the Jew and thus killed him.[87]

Exodus Rabbah 1:32 questions why the story of Moses and the Egyptian taskmaster is juxtaposed to the story of Moses helping the seven daughters of the Midianite Priest.[88] It explains that the stories should be viewed as symbolic of Moses' relationship to Israel and the other nations. Moses observes two nations in conflict and the Midrash asks whether Moses strikes the Egyptian taskmaster because he identifies with the Israelite or simply because he morally disagrees with the taskmaster. The Midrash insinuates the former. Although the Midrash does not explicitly explain why Moses helps the seven shepherdesses, the implicit assumption is that he identifies with their plight and does not save them because he identifies them as kin.[89]

The Midrash posits that Moses' innate loyalty to the Israelites is the more powerful loyalty of the two, despite the fact that he has not grown up with them. Otherwise, there would be no reason for the biblical text to present both scenarios. Additionally, one cannot overlook the set up that the Midrash and the biblical text circuitously present: the notion that if Moses had not been fleeing from the Egyptian taskmaster, he would not have had the opportunity to save the seven Egyptian shepherdesses.

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[87] Michael Carasik, ed., *The Commentators' Bible,* 11. Ibn Ezra is the only commentator that flirts with the possibility that "one of [Moses'] kinsmen" could have been referring to an Egyptian. Some commentators explain that this is simply a mistake for "the Hebrews and others explain that Ibn Ezra was really referencing the Israelites who were living in Egypt vs. those living in Goshen. See footnote 11 on Ibn Ezra. Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible,* 11.
[88] Exodus 2:11-20.
[89] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on Exodus*, 36.

In conclusion, it becomes apparent that few medieval commentators address any discomfort between Moses and his Israelite brethren. The fact that he has been raised in the Pharaoh's palace does not affect his understanding of who he is and he quickly identifies with his Israelite brothers. In exploring Moses' cultural affiliation, the Midrash questions the effect of dual identities on a person's actions and decisions. In this case, the Midrashic myth favors one's moral decisions over familial obligations but without presenting a case where the two must completely disagree. The Midrash expresses Moses' decision to help the Israelite not only *because* he was a member of his family but because it was simply the morally responsible decision.[90]

The notion that the Midrash addresses this problem exposes the anxiety that the rabbis felt with the biblical version's simple depiction of Moses raised in the Egyptian palace, influenced by members of the royal family because they felt compelled to explain how Moses could still embody the values of an Israelite leader despite his surroundings. The stories and retellings that they provide regarding Moses' upbringing in the palace function to elucidate the uncertainty and discontent that the rabbis had in simply relegating Moses' upbringing entirely to Egyptian influence. And still—the fact that some influence is allotted points out the Midrash's sophisticated ability to valorize the complex decisions and actions that Moses had to take even as a young leader of the Israelite nation.

[90] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on Exodus*, 36.

CHAPTER V

THE QUESTION OF MOTHERHOOD

שַׁלַּח לַחְמְךָ, עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם: כִּי-בְרֹב הַיָּמִים, תִּמְצָאֶנּוּ.
קהלת פרק יא:א

"Send your bread forth upon the waters; for after many days you will find it."

--Ecclesiastes 11:1

The Question of Motherhood in the Biblical Account

This section will explore the question of motherhood as related to Moses' mother and Bat Pharaoh and ultimately who between them "gets the credit" for Moses. The biblical text provides two potential definitions for motherhood: birth mother and adoptive mother. Exodus 2:1-2 tells of the woman who gives birth to Moses and in the biblical account, she does not name nor raise him. All we are told is that his mother sends him down the river and her daughter sets up a situation whereby the birth mother is able to nurse the child until he grows up, presumably, until he is weaned.[91] Furthermore, there is no mention of the child's relationship to his birth mother after he is weaned.

At this point, he is brought to Pharaoh's daughter who makes him her son and names him Moses.[92] The second mother presented is not biologically related to Moses, she does not nurse him and she is of the Egyptian royal family. This is not the only time in the *Tanakh* that

[91] Exodus 2:3 and Exodus 2:7-9.
[92] Exodus 2:10.

adoption is presented as an alternative form of motherhood.[93] The biblical text, in turn, is ambiguous about the child's mother. The difference between the two texts is noteworthy: the first is a direct relationship—Moses' mother gives birth to him. There is no need to qualify her connection to Moses as it is understood but the second is one step removed as Bat Pharaoh makes him her son.

The Question of Motherhood in the Midrash, the Talmud, and the Biblical Commentaries

The commentaries pick up on the ambiguities presented in the biblical version of the Moses birth narrative and even comment on those passages that seem less ambiguous. Exodus 2:1-10 does not address any other possibilities for motherhood other than birth mother and adoptive mother. In this section, I will reflect on those commentators that deal with the relationship between this powerful duo. In doing so, I will analyze how or why these commentaries are so interested in rewriting the myth to more concretely develop Bat Pharaoh's character and her relationship to Moses.

The first texts I will explore reflect the possibility that Bat Pharaoh is a mother to Moses. A crucial aspect to understanding this first proposition is the commentators' concern as to how it is possible that the daughter of the Pharaoh could become the mother of the Israelite nation. The sources that provide Bat Pharaoh with the status of a mother, to varying degrees, seize the opportunity to define who Bat Pharaoh was, rather than allowing this definition to be created by other nations or beliefs. These variations will be analyzed as well.

Before I discuss the later commentaries, I need to point out that even within the *Tanakh*, there is already an attempt to address this issue. Chronicles 1 4:18 states:

[93] See 2 Samuel 7:14, Ruth 4:16-17 and Esther 2:7, 15. In the cases mentioned, there is a character that takes on the role of parent even though they are not the birth parent.

יח וְאִשְׁתּוֹ הַיְהֻדִיָּה יָלְדָה אֶת-יֶרֶד אֲבִי גְדוֹר וְאֶת-חֶבֶר אֲבִי שׂוֹכוֹ וְאֶת-יְקוּתִיאֵל אֲבִי זָנוֹחַ וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי בִּתְיָה בַת-פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מָרֶד.

> And [Mered's] wife, Hajehudijah (the Jewess) bore Jered the father of Gedor, and Heber the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel (this is another name for Moses) the father of Zanoah--and these are the sons of Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh whom Mered took.[94]

If one were to read this passage as independent of Exodus 2:1-2, one might assume that Bat Pharaoh actually gave birth to Moses. The text lists Moses as one of her 3 sons and makes no differentiation between the three. There are three main ideas quoted in this text that are unusual, if not blatantly controversial. The first is that Bat Pharaoh is understood to be the birth mother of Moses. The second is that she is defined as הַיְהֻדִיָּה ("the Judean"), and the third is that she is understood to be Mered's wife. The reality that the narrator presents in Chronicles is that Bat Pharaoh is Moses' *birth* mother and a Judean. This is not surprising as Chronicles is a much later, post-exilic text that is more concerned with cultural identity and ethnic boundaries than is Exodus.

The Talmud in *Megillah* 13a attempts to explain Chronicles and, in doing so, creates a new understanding of Bat Pharaoh. As previously stated, the Talmud expounds that Bat Pharaoh was called a Judean because she "repudiated idolatry."[95] The Talmud explains that just as Caleb rebelled against the suggestions of the spies, so too, Bat Pharaoh rebelled against her father's household. In this retelling, the Talmud uses a play on words as the word מֶרֶד ("Mered") comes from the root "to rebel."[96] Finally, in analyzing whether or not Bat Pharaoh is truly the "birth

[94] *JPS Pocket Tanakh* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 1898.
[95] Maurice Simon, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Megillah*, 24-25.
[96] *Ibid,* 24-25.

mother," the Talmud explains that "whoever raises an orphan boy or girl in his house, scripture considers it as if she gave birth to him."[97]

Reading this text alone could lead one to assume that the rabbis are interested in giving Bat Pharaoh credit for being a good person, thus granting her the status of an honorary Judean. Bat Pharaoh the honorary status of Judean for being a good person. She made a positive choice to help raise Moses and from her we learn the value of raising orphan children. However, in retelling the story, the Talmud demonstrates an interest bringing Bat Pharaoh closer to by presenting her as Moses' birth mother, as a convert, and the wife of Caleb, a member of the Israelite community.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:15, only mentions Moses' birth mother as Johebed and does not mention Bat Pharaoh.[98] The text states:

> רבי היה יושב ודורש ונתנמנם הציבור בקש לעוררן אמר ילדה אשה אחת במצרים ששים
> רבוא בכרס אחת והיה שם תלמיד אחד ורבי ישמעאל ברבי יוסי שמו אמר ליה מאן הות כך אמר
> ליה זו יוכבד שילדה את משה ששקול כנגד ששים רבוא שהם כל ישראל
>
> Rabbi was in session and expounding, but the community's attention wandered, so he wanted to wake them up. He said, "A single woman in Egypt produced six hundred thousand at a single birth." Now there was present a disciple, named R. Ishmael b. R. Jose, who said to him, "Who was this? He said to him, "This was Johebed, who produced Moses, and he was numbered as the equal to six hundred thousand Israelites. [99]

In this text, Johebed receives the credit for providing for and on some level sustaining the future of the Israelite nation. There is no mention of Bat Pharaoh or any of the other women in the biblical text who work to save Moses. It seems that the writer of this text struggles with the

[97] *Ibid,* 24-25.
[98] While the text in Exodus 2:1-10 does not provide Moses' mother with a name, she is identified as Johebed in Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59. Because she remains unnamed in our primary text, I have thus far not mentioned the name she is given in Numbers. When referencing the commentaries that refer to Moses' mother as Johebed, I will use this name as well.
[99] Jacob Neusner, transl. *Midrash Rabbah on Song of Solomon* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 138.

notion that Bat Pharaoh was an appropriate fit for this honor and grants Johebed the honor because she physically bears and gives birth him.

Cassuto's commentary assigns the mother role to Moses' birth mother, Bat Pharaoh, and Moses' sister. Commenting on the interaction between Moses' sister and Bat Pharaoh, Cassuto doubts that Bat Pharaoh would have taken on the role of providing a wet nurse and saving Moses on her own without Moses' sister's intervention. Furthermore, Cassuto explains that it is as if Moses' sister makes Moses *her* son when she states, "Shall *I* get for *you* a wet-nurse?"[100] According to Cassuto, Bat Pharaoh acts based on Moses' sister's cues and not based on her own feelings or perceptions.[101] What Cassuto adds to the story is the potential that Moses' sister becomes his mother and the possibility that while Moses was indeed adopted by Bat Pharaoh, the adoption was not as "strong," innate, or natural as one might intuit. By the time Moses is weaned, he has *three* different mothers.[102]

The commentaries that follow continue to represent views in which Bat Pharaoh becomes an adoptive mother but all of these texts comment on the greater picture of what this means for Moses' upbringing and influence. Pseudo Philo emphasizes the impact that Bat Pharaoh has as a mother to Moses in distinct contrast to that of Moses' birth mother's influence. In *Biblical Antiquities* IX.15, there is no exchange between Bat Pharaoh and Miriam such that Moses' birth

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[100] Exodus 2:7.
[101] Israel Abrahams, transl., in Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* 19-20.
[102] Reinhartz and Walfish introduce a possible comparison or foil between Moses' birth mother and Bat Pharaoh to that of Sarah and Hagar. They explain that because Hagar and Sarah do not share a son, they have the freedom to disagree. Moses' birth mother and Bat Pharaoh, however, need to get along, as the text presents a moment where they are *forced to share a son* to save his life. Reinhartz and Walfish's commentary posits a scenario not mentioned in any of the aforementioned texts: a sort of "shared custody" of Moses between Bat Pharaoh and Moses' birth mother. Adele Reinhartz and Miriam-Simma Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation," 102.

mother has the opportunity to nurse him. In an interesting retelling of the story, Pseudo Philo writes,

> And [Bat Pharaoh] took him and nourished him and he became her son, and she called his name Moyses. But his [birth] mother called him Melchiel. And the child was nourished and became glorious above all men…[103]

While the text clearly mentions Bat Pharaoh *nourishing* him (which does not necessarily mean that she nursed him), the person who nourishes Moses in the second verse is unclear. In fact, it seems that Pseudo Philo purposely places Moses' birth mother in the middle to emphasize how much Moses' birth mother has lost. It is obvious that Pseudo Philo takes interest in rereading the text because of the unparalleled similarity that his text presents to the biblical account—with one distinct difference. Pseudo Philo states, "and she took him and nourished him" as compared to Exodus 2:9 which states, "…so the woman took the child and nursed it." In the biblical text, "the woman" is clearly Moses' mother as we have just witnessed the interchange between Pharaoh's daughter and Moses' sister whereupon they agreed that Moses' mother would nurse him. In the text in Pseudo Philo, however, the verse before the nourishing reads, "and he became her own son," implying that Moses became Bat Pharaoh's son.

In retelling the Moses birth narrative, Pseudo Philo works to more quickly assert the role of Bat Pharaoh as Moses' mother. Reading the text in this way quickly associates Pharaoh's daughter with Moses. Not only does she nourish him but there is a tight association between the fact that she has taken him as his own son and the subsequent statement that he becomes "glorious above all other men."[104] It thus appears probable that the author desired to strip Moses' mother of any connection that may have endured with her biological son. Both Moses'

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[103] Harry M. Orlinsky, ed. *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo,* 103.
[104] Harry M. Orlinsky, ed. *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo,* 103.

mother and sister are out of the picture the moment Pharaoh's daughter enters. Moses' rise to glory is directly related to Bat Pharaoh's rearing of the child.

In Josephus' version of the biblical story, Bat Pharaoh names Moses, just as she names him in the biblical version. Interestingly, Josephus records the story of Bat Pharaoh naming Moses and directly follows it with a genealogy as if to remind the reader of Moses' "real" ancestry. This is not a coincidence. In fact, Josephus' retelling of why Bat Pharaoh adopts Moses is very "matter of fact." She adopts him because he is "remarkable" and because she has no son of her own. She does not explain to Pharaoh that he is a Hebrew child and Pharaoh never asks.[105]

Ezekiel the Tragedian is a text in the Old Testament Pseudepigripha and is assumed to be based on the Septuagint text.[106] The text is written from Moses' perspective. In the text, Moses says, "…For the period of my youth, the princess gave me a royal upbringing and education *as if I were her own son*."[107] *Ezekiel the Tragedian* purports that from Moses' viewpoint, Bat Pharaoh treated him *as if* he were her biological son in that she provided all that he needed as he was raised. That said, Moses still identifies her as "other" as an adult. Thus, this text functions to increase the gap between Bat Pharaoh and Moses even as it acknowledges her adoption of him.

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[105] Steve Mason, ed. *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 199.
[106] This is assumed to be a text from the 2nd century B.C. from Alexandria.
[107] Ezekiel the Tragedian, The Exagogue 36-38, *emphasis mine*. See Howard Jacobson, transl. *The Exagogue of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 53.

The Book of Jubilees describes an angel retelling the Moses birth narrative to Moses. The text claims that when Moses had grown up, he was brought to Pharaoh's daughter and became a son to her.[108] In an incredibly bold and interesting twist, the text continues:

> But Amram, your [Israelite] father, taught you writing. And after you completed three weeks [of years, that is, twenty one years] he brought you into the royal court.[109]

In this version, although Bat Pharaoh is given credit for becoming his "mother," Moses' education is still left to his Israelite father and for 21 years he is under direct Israelite male influence. This is a powerful retelling that demonstrates the writer's interest in providing Bat Pharaoh with *some* of the credit for mothering Moses but none of the credit for educating him; this is given to his Israelite father, Amram. What is fascinating is the author's addition of 21 more years in which Moses is in Pharaoh's court. It is feasible that this text attempts to set up an equal structure between time spent under Israelite influence and time spent under Egyptian influence. There is no question, however, that the years in which Moses is most easily influenced occur under his father's tutelage.

Philo's *Life of Moses* also functions to illustrate the influences on Moses' upbringing. In this account, neither Bat Pharaoh nor Moses' are praised, thus presenting another different, albeit balanced alternative. Philo does not make Bat Pharaoh a contributing member to Moses' early upbringing. While there is an acknowledgement that Moses, indeed, grew up in the Pharaoh's house, there is no reference to Bat Pharaoh in any aspect of Moses' rearing or grooming for the future. In *The Life of Moses* 1:23, Philo writes:

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[108] O.S. Wintermute, transl. "Jubilees" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 138.
[109] *Ibid,* 138-139.

> [Moses] speedily learnt arithmetic, and geometry, and the whole science of rhythm and harmony and metre, and the whole of music…and lessons on these subjects were given him by Egyptian philosophers.[110]

In Philo' text, all of Moses' early education is left to his Egyptian surroundings. Not only does this text make no effort to include Bat Pharaoh in Moses' upbringing, it also makes no effort to include anyone of Israelite origin. While it is unclear why Bat Pharaoh is absent from the text, what becomes understood is the author's intent to separate Moses from the numerous women in the biblical text that took part in his upbringing. The focus of Philo's *Life of Moses,* can hinge on the author's understanding of a balanced upbringing: the combination of math, science and literature. Admittedly, because so many different nations are responsible for rearing Moses, there does not seem to be an underlying agenda to claim Moses as one's own but a continued emphasis on the value of a broad education.

The *Zohar*, a 14th century mystical commentary, provides Bat Pharaoh with the status of a blood relative. This commentary radically changes what we know about Pharaoh's daughter from the text. The *Zohar* explains that Batya, the name given to her in the Talmud, was not actually Pharaoh's birth daughter. She was Tziporah's twin sister. Tziporah eventually becomes Moses' wife in the biblical text. The *Zohar* expounds that both Tziporah and Bat Pharaoh were orphans and that Pharaoh took in Batya as his daughter.[111] This text is incredibly provocative. Not only does it attempt to provide a closer connection between Moses and Bat Pharaoh but it ultimately transforms Moses' aunt into his wife and imagines his mother as an adoptee. It is probable that the writer of this myth not only wanted to strengthen the ties between Bat Pharaoh

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[110] C.D. Yonge, transl. on "The Life of Moses" in *The Works of Philo,* 461.
[111] Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul P. Levertoff, transl., *The Zohar* vol. III (London: The Soncino Press, 1970), 34.

and Moses but also wanted to weaken those between Bat Pharaoh and her father. Even so, Batya remains "other," as noted in the altercation between Moses' sister and Tziporah.[112]

In creating one's self-identity, it becomes important to define who a person is and who s/he is not. In this case, the author could not imagine the mother of Moses truly representing another culture or tradition and therefore had to create a situation in which the two were actually related and therefore of the same nation. The *Zohar* may have been weary of the complications that could naturally arise when the leader of the Jewish nation is the son of the daughter of a powerful other and opposing nation, in this case, Egypt.

The overarching theme with which these traditional commentators grapple is the notion that the person who is responsible for mothering Moses is significantly responsible for not only bearing the future of the Israelite nation but for influencing that person. There is a difference between helping that person survive on the most basic level and teaching that person their morals, ethics and lessons for the future, the building blocks for that individual's identity.

The question of "motherhood" and Bat Pharaoh's relationship to Moses is rife with a desire to draw boundaries as to how much of a "mother" Bat Pharaoh was to Moses and whether or not the commentators could grant her this honor at all. While most of the commentaries presented provide Bat Pharaoh with the adoptive status, the nuances of their understandings reflect their perceptions of the manner in which Moses needed to be raised to become a successful Israelite leader.

Thus, in imagining their self-identity as a people and as a nation, the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash wished to protect educational upbringing and to magnify the importance of keeping

[112] In Numbers 12:1, Moses' sister and brother speak negatively about Moses because of the Cushite woman he married. Rashi and Ibn Ezra identify this Cushite woman as Tziporah. See Rashi and Ibn Ezra on Numbers 12:1 in Mordechai Leb Katzenellenbogen, ed., *Torath Haim: Hamishah Humshei Torah,* 96.

Moses' education within the purview of *their* belief system, thereby taking away Bat Pharaoh's educational responsibilities towards Moses as a mother. They confine her influence as a mother to Moses to his physical well being. By contrast, those authors who had nothing to lose by acknowledging the possibility that Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace and solely influenced by the Egyptian culture or even other cultures incorporated these thoughts into their imaginative understanding and struggled less with defining the limits of Bat Pharaoh's role as a mother.

CHAPTER VI

A DIVINE RELATIONSHIP

> Every day for thirty years a man drove a wheelbarrow full of sand over the Tijuana border crossing. The customs inspector dug through the sand each morning but could not discover any contraband. He remained, of course, convinced that he was dealing with a smuggler. On the day of his retirement from the service, he asked the smuggler to reveal what it was that he was smuggling and how he had been doing so. "Wheelbarrows; I've been smuggling wheelbarrows, of course."
>
> -- Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*[113]

The Moses birth narrative seems to be open to the idea of a woman with numerous identities and has no problem blurring both class and cultural divisions where Bat Pharaoh is concerned. As mentioned previously, these demarcations may not have been as lucid at the time the story was written or imagined.

As early as Midrashic and Talmudic times, however, it seems that the rabbis and writers of these texts were no longer as content with the possibility that one woman could straddle so many roles in such a comfortable and straightforward manner. If Bat Pharaoh, a member of the royal family, saves a boy who is not royal, the rabbis feel compelled to explain how or perhaps why she could perform such an act. The rabbis of Midrash and Talmud must struggle to define how

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[113] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1. Boyarin uses this anecdote to explain the possibility that maybe the early division between Judaism and Christianity was not a "parting of ways," as has so often been described but "a *partitioning* of what was once a territory without border lines." I understand the transformation of the Exodus birth narrative to be similar in many ways as those who worked to define their boundaries needed to do so at a time when perhaps there were few boundaries or fewer boundaries that we might expect.

she is different or other than her Egyptian counterparts and can therefore be responsible for rearing the future of the Israelite nation.

In this final chapter, I hope to explore Bat Pharaoh's relationship to God and the nation, Israel, as presented in the biblical text and its commentaries, followed by an analysis of how this relationship to God reflects the goals of the texts and writers of the divergent time periods.

Although one could argue that the goal of the biblical narrative is not to discuss the "power of faith to transcend ethnic boundaries," as Exum argues,[114] but rather to demonstrate the power of faith itself, or more specifically, the worship of one God, as Zakovitch attests,[115] I argue that a more nuanced response is necessary. In fact, I think it is limiting and irresponsible to assign only one goal to the Exodus narrative, a text which has the capacity to hold such rich and divergent interpretation.

The conflicts embodied in these final texts reflect the authors' desires to better define the character of Bat Pharaoh and to more effectively handle her anomalous, powerful, and sometimes threatening character.

Bat Pharaoh's Relationship to God and Israel in the Biblical Account

In the biblical text, the merit of worshipping one God is represented in the characters of the midwives and Pharaoh's daughter. From the beginning of Exodus, Pharaoh attempts to deal cleverly with the Hebrews and his plans are repeatedly foiled. The text in Exodus 2:1-10 is couched in the larger narrative of Pharaoh's decree to kill all Israelite males, as a consequence of

[114] Cheryl Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live," 72.
[115] Yair Zakovitch, "The Strange Biography of Sampson," in *From Bible to Midrash*, 14.

his inability to control their numbers with affliction and hard labor.[116] In an attempt to prevent the nation from multiplying, Pharaoh speaks to the midwives. Exodus 1: 15-21 reads:

> טו וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לַמְיַלְּדֹת הָעִבְרִיֹּת אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאַחַת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם
> הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה. טז וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַלֶּדְכֶן אֶת-הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל-הָאָבְנָיִם אִם-בֵּן הוּא
> וַהֲמִתֶּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם-בַּת הִוא וָחָיָה. יז וַתִּירֶאןָ הַמְיַלְּדֹת אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ
> כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם וַתְּחַיֶּיןָ אֶת-הַיְלָדִים. יח וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם
> לַמְיַלְּדֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מַדּוּעַ עֲשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתְּחַיֶּיןָ אֶת-הַיְלָדִים. יט וַתֹּאמַרְןָ
> הַמְיַלְּדֹת אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי לֹא כַנָּשִׁים הַמִּצְרִיֹּת הָעִבְרִיֹּת כִּי-חָיוֹת הֵנָּה בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא
> אֲלֵהֶן הַמְיַלֶּדֶת וְיָלָדוּ. כ וַיֵּיטֶב אֱלֹהִים לַמְיַלְּדֹת וַיִּרֶב הָעָם וַיַּעַצְמוּ מְאֹד. כא
> וַיְהִי כִּי-יָרְאוּ הַמְיַלְּדֹת אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים. כב וַיְצַו פַּרְעֹה לְכָל-עַמּוֹ
> לֵאמֹר כָּל-הַבֵּן הַיִּלּוֹד הַיְאֹרָה תַּשְׁלִיכֻהוּ וְכָל-הַבַּת תְּחַיּוּן.

> And the king of Egypt spoke to the midwives of whom the name of one was Shifrah and the name of the other Puah. And He said, “Whenever you deliver the Hebrew women, observe the laboring: If it is a son, you shall kill him and if it is a daughter, she shall live. The midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but they kept the [male] children alive. The midwives replied to Pharaoh: “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are lively and they give birth even before the midwife can come to them.”

Until the midwives are presented, God is not overtly stated in the Exodus narrative. The text states that the Hebrews were fruitful and multiplied despite their afflictions.[117] While the narrator seems to present an inherent understanding that God influences this paradox, the text does not outwardly describe God’s involvement in this miracle. The first time that God is mentioned in the Exodus narrative is the moment at which the midwives enter the scene. Their decision to save the males is textually related to their fear of God. Their fear of God, which leads to their decision to save the Hebrew children leads to both personal and collective reward: “The midwives feared God and He set up homes for them” and “the people multiplied and became exceedingly strong.”[118] With regard to the midwives, the text clearly demonstrates a connection between the fear of God and its reward.

[116] Exodus 1:9-14.
[117] Exodus 1:7,11.
[118] Exodus 1:21, 20.

The writers of the Septuagint, by contrast, do not make mention of midwives' reward; the midwives make their own houses and are not rewarded by God in the same way as they are in the biblical narrative. The text of the Septuagint states,

> Now God was dealing well with the midwives, and the people kept on multiplying and becoming very strong. Because the midwives were fearing God, they made families *for themselves*.[119]

The Septuagint stresses the notion that the midwives make their own families or "houses." While the text states that God dealt well with them, the text is unclear about what this means and the reward from God that is so present in Hebrew version of the Bible is absent from the Greek Version. The possible connection between those who fear God and reward quickly becomes apparent in the biblical text.

I argue that this is not the case with regard to Pharaoh's daughter. There is not one place in biblical narrative that demonstrates her belief in or worship of one God nor should we expect there to be. In describing Bat Pharaoh's initial response to Moses, the text states, וַתַּחְמֹל עָלָיו ("she had pity on him"). Bat Pharaoh recognizes that he is a Hebrew child and saves him without an affirmation of her fear of God.

One could argue that she does not need to acknowledge God or the worship of one God, as she is not identified as a member of the Israelite nation. On the other hand, there are examples of gentiles in the *Tanakh*, besides the midwives, who are lauded for their recognition of God,[120] even as this recognition does not lead to conversion in the biblical text, as was the case with Ruth

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[119] Larry J. Perkins, transl. "Exodus" in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 52. *Emphasis mine.*

[120] In the story of Rahab and the spies in Joshua 2:9-13, Rahab acknowledges the power of the God of Israel when asking the spies to spare her in their destruction of Jericho. See Joshua 2:9-13.

and Rahab, for example.[121] If we view Bat Pharaoh as a foil to the characters of the midwives, there is a striking silence when the text does not mention a reward for *her* actions.

The question of why Bat Pharaoh ostensibly receives no reward for her actions is may not be a meaningful one for the biblical narrative. Still, a fundamental question remains: what is the function of Bat Pharaoh's character in the narrative? She is a daughter, an adoptive mother, and an Egyptian member of the royal family. When we observe her actions, she can be characterized as rebellious and kind, resourceful and gutsy, and powerful and weak. In collaboration with Moses' mother, sister and the midwives, she may represent of the power of a collection of individuals to make meaningful change by combining individual will and divine providence. In the biblical myth, Bat Pharaoh functions as a vehicle or a catalyst for Moses' salvation and ultimate Israel's redemption from Egypt.

Bat Pharaoh's Relationship to God and Israel in the Midrash, the Talmud, and the Biblical Commentaries

All commentaries that follow refuse to ignore Bat Pharaoh's act of courage and bravery and yet, some have difficulty assigning her the same identity she is given in the biblical narrative. The majority of commentators to be discussed here reflect the late Mishnaic and Talmudic time period—an era that was characterized by the development and ultimate formation of what is now known as rabbinic Judaism.

Numerous scholars attempt to understand the boundaries and/or lack thereof presented between those members of the Israelite community who are "in" and those who are cast out.[122]

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[121] Ruth 1:16 and Joshua 2:9-13.
[122] For example, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and George W.E. Nickeslburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins,* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

These discussions are often reflected in the Talmud's depictions of those characters that are classified as apostates or at least those who challenge the emerging boundaries between Jewish identity and developing Christian beliefs. Two such characters, which, at times fall into the apostate role, are *Akher,* also known as Elisha ben Abuya, and Jesus.

In a covert discussion of Jesus and other apostates, the Talmud provides a glimpse into a community's responsibility towards them. The Talmud in *Sotah* 47a states,

> תנו רבנן לעולם תהא שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת לא כאלישע שדחפו לגחזי בשתי ידיו ולא כיהושע בן פרחיה שדחפו לאחד מתלמידיו {להנוצרי} בשתי ידיו.

> Our Rabbis have taught: Always let the left hand thrust away and the right hand draw near. Not like Elisha who thrust Gehazi away with both his hands (and not like R. Joshua b. Perahiah who thrust one of his disciples [the Christian] away with both hands.) [123]

In this passage, the rabbis delineate the work that must be done within a community to interface properly or justly with those members of the community who blur the "borderlines." They present a delicate balance between completely separating an outsider from a community and working to pull the outsider in. In highlighting R. Joshua b. Perahiah, Jesus' teacher, the Talmud insinuates that on some level, the rabbis are also responsible for Jesus' ultimate departure from "Judaism." In guiding Jesus, R. Joshua b. Perahiah failed to "pull him in with one hand and push him out with the other."[124] Rather, Jesus was completely rejected. The Talmud's somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Jesus demonstrates the anxiety presented in a society when an individual challenges the precise boundaries that society attempts to find and better define.

It is quite fascinating that in many ways, the Talmud treats Bat Pharaoh with a similar ambiguity—though to a lesser degree. The biblical text is unambiguous in its depiction of Bat

[123] Older editions of this text substitute "one of his disciples" with Jesus the Nazarene. A. Cohen, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Sotah*, 92.
[124] *Ibid*

Pharaoh as a woman of Egyptian origin. In addition to this, it is clear that Moses is of Israelite origin. There is never a question as to either of their allegiances. At a time when these rabbis challenge themselves to better define the boundaries which separate them from their surrounding cultures, Bat Pharaoh's actions separate her from her Egyptian origins and connect her to the Israelite child she comes to adopt. However, the Midrashic and Talmudic narratives are still not certain of Bat Pharaoh's character and therefore feel compelled and/or pressured to connect her more close to the divine or to the nation, Israel.

It is worth noting that the biblical, Midrashic, and Talmudic narratives never overtly state that Bat Pharaoh was a convert, as is the case with other women in *Tanakh*. For example, Pfisterer Darr writes that "[Ruth] was, to [the rabbis'] minds, the paradigmatic convert to Judaism." She becomes a "God fearing Jewess—loyal daughter in law, modest bride, renowned ancestress of Israel's great King David."[125] Both Ruth and Bat Pharaoh have had to reject their familial and potentially their religious past, whether they directly reject idols or directly reject their father's decree. While Ruth struggles for her own survival in a patriarchal environment, Bat Pharaoh struggles to save Moses in an anti-Israelite environment. Many feminists argue that Ruth is simply a tool through which the narrator demonstrates how all women should behave. Fuchs writes:

> Ruth…is not merely extolled for her ability to survive physically in adverse circumstances or for her initiative and energy in general…but for her success in finding and marrying a direct relative of Elimelekh, her father in law, and giving birth to children who would carry on the patrilineage of her deceased husband.[126]

Bat Pharaoh, by contrast, could be argued to be the vehicle, or at least one of the major vehicles, through which God saves Moses, the future of the Israelite nation. This could is similar to the

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[125] Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels*, 72.
[126] Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterizations of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," 130.

story of Ruth, a Moabite woman, who not only redeems her family but also redeems the future of the Israelite nation. Still—the text in the *Tanakh* clearly mentions Ruth's belief in God when, in speaking to Naomi, Ruth states, עַמֵּךְ עַמִּי וֵאלֹהַיִךְ אֱלֹהָי ("Your nation is my nation and your God is my God.")[127] For this reason, Ruth is often referenced as a convert.

In the case of Bat Pharaoh, however, there is no mention of her fear of God or relationship with God. If she is a vehicle through which Moses is saved, we must understand the relevance of her womanhood and her identification as the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh for the myth. Those who work to rewrite this myth for their communities must consider value system and sense of identity they will to promulgate in deciding how to transform Bat Pharaoh's character.

The following three sources valorize Bat Pharaoh without directly connecting her to God or Israel. *Derekh Eretz Zuta* 1:18 states:

> תשעה נכנסו בחייהם בגן עדן. ואלו הן: חנוך בן ירד ואליהו ומשיח ואליעזר עבד אברהם וחירם מלך צור ועבד מלך הכושי ויעבץ בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא ובתיה בת פרעה וסרח בת אשר. ויש אומרים הוצה מלך צור והוכנס ר' יהושע בן לוי.
>
> Nine entered the Garden of Eden alive, and they are: Enoch the son of Yered, Elijah, the Messiah, Eliezer the servant of Abraham, Hiram, king of Tyre, Ebed—melech the Cushite, Jabez, the son of R. Hudah the Prince, Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, and Serah the daughter of Asher. Some say: Also R. Joshua b. Levi [instead of the King of Zor].[128]

This text places Bat Pharaoh in an assorted collection of insiders and outsiders to the Israelite community and this division does not seem pertinent to the message of the text. There is no

[127] Ruth 1:16.

[128] This text is understood to be a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud that was not made into part of the canon. Note that the Soncino translation does not include the notion that the King of Zor is traded with R. Yehudah b. Levi, an idea that is very clear in some versions of the Hebrew text. Abraham. Cohen, ed. transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Minor Tractates* (London: The Soncino Press, 1984), 115.

obvious connection between any of the names referenced. Bat Pharaoh is one of only two women referenced. The text is unclear regarding Bat Pharaoh's cultural affiliation but she merits entry into the Garden of Eden as a result of her actions.

The second text that references Bat Pharaoh in a list of "good women" is the *Midrash Tadshe* 21:8, also known as the *Baraitha de-R. Pinkhas b. Yair*. The Midrash mirrors a question presented in a section of *Mishnah Avot* that asks, "Who is wise?" The answer in the Mishnah is those who are wise are those that learn from their actions.[129]

Commenting on this line, the *Midrash Tadshe*, states:

> Twenty-three good women in Israel and nine belonging to other nations are mentioned in the Bible; the women of Israel are: Sarah Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Johebed, Miriam, Deborah, the wife of Manoakh, Hannah, Abigail, the Wise Woman of Tekoah, the Widow whom the Prophet Elijah helped, the Shunamite woman, Huldah, Naomi, Jehosheba, the Wife of One of the Prophets whom Elisha helped, Esther, and the 5 Daughters of Zelophad. Those of other nations are: Hagar, Osenath, Ziporah, Shifrah, Puah, Bathya- the daughter of Pharaoh, Rahab, Ruth and Yael.[130]

The first and most obvious observation is that this source delineates the "good women" only after *highlighting* the division between those who are of Israel and those who belong to other nations. Understood in this division is an inherent otherness or at least a nuance in the way that we are to view the second category. While they are all "good women," only 23 of them belong to the nation Israel. The rabbis of the Talmud are deliberate in delineating the 9 "good women" of *other* nations in juxtaposition to the 23 "good women" belonging to the nation Israel.

Another aspect of the text to point out is the insertion of Shifrah and Puah, the midwives, as members of another nation. While the biblical text does not clarify their ethnic affiliation, it

[129] *Mishnah Avot* 3:1.

[130] Barbara Thaw Ronson, *The Women of the Torah: Commentaries from the Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah*, xxxvii.

does mention their fear or awe of God and their reward.[131] Still—the midwives are considered "other" enough by the rabbis writing this text that they are placed in the category of those women belonging to other nations.

And yet, this text and the previous one very clearly honor and respect Bat Pharaoh and the midwives for the actions they take to save Moses. While it is clear that Bat Pharaoh does not convert in many of the Talmudic interpretations of her character, the Rabbis work incredibly hard to ensure that they pull her in with their right arm while pushing her out with their left, the careful manner in which they must deal with those who fall on uncertain, less defined or unchartered territory.

The authors of the final collection of texts strive to connect Bat Pharaoh to God or to the Israelite community. The Talmud *Sotah* 12b explains that when the text states, וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד ("and she saw *it,* the child"), the text is unduly repetitive. The text could have stated, "and she saw the child."[132] The Midrash explains that this repetition teaches us that Bat Pharaoh didn't only see the child but the particle "אֶת" in the verse actually refers to the *Shekhina* next to the child.[133] What is compelling about this text is the continuing interest that the rabbis have in connecting Bat Pharaoh to God or at least bringing her beliefs closer to those of the Israelite community. In this text, Bat Pharaoh sees the divine presence, an opportunity afforded to very few characters in *Tanakh*, let alone women!

The following text connects Bat Pharaoh to God by engaging her in a discussion with God. The Midrash in *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3 expounds on a dialogue between God and Bat Pharaoh. The text reads:

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[131] Exodus 1:17 and Exodus 1:21.
[132] Exodus 2:6 and *Sotah* 12b.
[133] Note that the particle אֶת functions in Hebrew as a marker of the direct object.

אמר לה הקב״ה לבתיה בת פרעה ׳משה לא היה בנך וקראתו בנך אף את לא את בתי ואני קורא אותך בתי׳

> The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh: 'Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. You, too, though you are not My daughter, yet I will call [you] My daughter.[134]

In this conversation, God compares Himself to the Pharaoh's daughter by stating that just like she took Moses as her own child, even though Moses was not her biological offspring, so too, God would call her His daughter even though she is not one of God's people. While the objective of the text is *not* a literal translation of the statement, this should not overlook the compelling and unusual message presented in this text. This is a grandiose proposal wherein God claims Pharaoh's daughter as God's own daughter *because* of the way that she cares for Moses. Consequently, the rabbis are successful at divorcing Bat Pharaoh from her human component. She is unlike her father, the Pharaoh, and she is unlike Moses. In strengthening her connection to God, the Midrash provides her with a genealogy of her own. As previously mentioned, the Talmud *Megillah* 13a explains that Bat Pharaoh is referenced as a Judean in Chronicles because she cleansed herself of her fathers idols. [135]

Additionally, *Exodus Rabbah* 1:26 explains that while Moses was given many names, the name that is most often used to reference him is the one that Bat Pharaoh gave to him. In commenting on the verse, "And she called him Moses," the text states:

> From here you can infer how great is the reward of those who perform kind acts; for although Moses had many names, the name by which he is known throughout the Torah is the one which Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, called him, and even God called him by no other name. [136]

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[134] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds. And J. Israelstam, transl., *Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus*, 6. The name Batya is a name imagined only in the Midrash and Talmud and never referenced in the Tanakh, although the *Book of Chronicles* uses the closest variation in Judah's genealogy: Bithya.

[135] Maurice Simon, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Megillah,* 24-25.

[136] H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on* Exodus, 38.

Furthermore, the text emphasizes the notion that the name Bat Pharaoh presents him with is the one used by God. Perhaps the rabbis of the Talmud insist on using the name that most closely identifies Pharaoh's daughter with God and not the King of Egypt.

Thus, Bat Pharaoh's reference in Chronicles and her references in the Talmud and the Midrash try to separate her from her Egyptian roots by either bringing her closer to God or by inferring her entrance into the Israelite community. Note that this could also be the case in the *Zohar* where Bat Pharaoh is defined as Tziporah's sister and one who was adopted into the Pharaoh's family, thus making her a blood relative to Moses.

In analyzing the Talmudic and Midrashic understanding of Bat Pharaoh, what becomes quickly apparent is the ambivalence with which the rabbis view Bat Pharaoh. In some cases, she is clearly a gentile, honored with distinct accolades for her decision to save Moses.[137] In other cases, she is understood to weaken her connection to her Egyptian upbringing by rejecting the worship of idolatry.[138] And yet, in other cases, she becomes God's child—to varying degrees.[139] An overarching theme is the decision by the rabbis of the Gaonic and Amoraic periods to appropriate Bat Pharaoh into *their* vision of greatness for *their* community.

Historically, the rabbis of this time labored to define their belief system and their relationship to God in the period following the destruction of the Temple. Thus, many sections in both the Midrash and the Talmud function to define and redefine Jewish identity. In forming their myths, these rabbis work to both explore and better define what constituted "Jewish" behavior and what would be considered, "out of the fold." They yearned to understand what life

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[137] *Midrash Tadshe* 21:8, quoted in Barbara Thaw Ronson, *The Women of the Torah,* xxxvii.
[138] Talmud *Megillah* 13a in Maurice Simon, transl., *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Megillah,* 25.
[139] *Exodus Rabbah* 1:26 in H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabba on* Exodus, 38.

in the Babylonian exile would look like and how the Jews would perpetuate their belief system in a world in which God was less obvious, less accessible, and perhaps less compelling. In addition to this, in the absence of one gathering place, the rabbis needed to process how the Exile would influence their cohesion as a nation.

Importantly, whether or not Bat Pharaoh completely converted or rejected parts of her past is debatable but less debatable is the rabbis' positive, courageous, and passionate depictions of the woman who saved Moses. Perhaps, as Tal Ilan highlights, "this very positive attitude to this Egyptian woman downplays her foreign background."[140] In all cases presented, the rabbis are compelled to both recognize how Bat Pharaoh differs from the Israelite community as well as to emphasize her ties to it. The desire to bring the adoptive mother of the future of the Israelite nation closer is transparent but the manner in which each individual text delineates this decision is fascinating and telling of the narrators' struggles with and desires for not only Bat Pharaoh's character but for the communities they hoped to shape.

[140] Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women,* 325. It is important to note that there is a difference between taking foreign women as wives, a generally accepted custom and a foreign women as the mother of the future of the Israelite nation, as the text never makes clear her specific allegiance to the Israelite community—as would be the case with a wife.

CHAPPTER VII

CONCLUSION

> The ancient listener may have known what we cannot now recover with certainty. Our present inability to be specific enables us to emphasize larger possibilities of meaning.
>
> —Cheryl Exum[141]

In this thesis, I explored the purpose of myth in ancient cultures and the way in which myths are transformed over time. Van Dijk reminds the reader that one of the main functions of myth is to present a story in which the present situation is "meaningful" and "provides a perspective on the future."[142] In the same way that Kugel charges the reader to find a balance between ideology and the drive to understand how or why an idea was recorded,[143] Van Dijk and Lambert recognize both the impact that history and context have on the development of myth, as well as our obligation to recognize that the writers of all of these stories strive to bring meaning, purpose, and identity to the communities of which they are a part.[144]

It is of no surprise then, that this is one of the main motives of third wave feminists. While first and second wave biblical feminists were involved in highlighting and defining patriarchy and empowering women, respectively, one of the main motives of third wave feminists is to decipher how to take these ideas and to make them relevant to and purposeful for

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[141] Cheryl J. Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live" 72.
[142] Jacobus van Dijk, "Myth and Mythmaking in Ancient Egypt," in Jack Sasson, ed. *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East,* 1699.
[143] James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 25.
[144] Jacobus van Dijk, "Myth and Mythmaking in Ancient Egypt," 1699 and W.G. Lambert, "Myth and Mythmaking in Sumer and Akkad" in Jack Sasson, ed. *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 1826.

modern times. In many ways, feminist scholars strive to use their texts as myth. That is, even if the original purpose of the myth is altered based on numerous variables, the myth is transformed again once it provides new meaning for the community it serves. As long as the new tradition or recreated myth finds resonance in the culture in which it is created, the storyteller has in part, succeeded. The second half of this success comes when the moral or ultimate teaching that the writer hopes to convey is understood.

The drive for third wave feminists is precisely this delicate balance between truth as perceived in the texts they grapple with and the reformation of this "truth" to make it not only pertinent to the more modern audience but perhaps even inspirational and worthy of emulation. It becomes acceptable to highlight a woman's shortcomings in a text and laudable to recognize her strengths. In this wave, however, it is crucial to be able to both distinguish the shortcomings and the strengths presented, independent of their historical accuracy and ultimately to present the reader with a meaningful and relevant understanding despite and perhaps in light of the earlier texts' shortcomings. It is no longer acceptable to praise or degrade. As Fuchs highlights, knowledge cannot be a goal but a means to "bring about a change in perception and evaluation."[145]

In highlighting more recent understandings of this story in Jewish feminist scholarship, I observed that the manner in which a story is told and retold often reflects the writers of that era and the era itself, the questions, doubts and aspirations of the leaders and thinkers of that time. I analyzed the shifts and changes between the biblical narrative and its retellings in commentators ranging from Midrashic, Talmudic and medieval times.

[145] Esther Fuchs, "Jewish Feminist Scholarship: A Critical Perspective," 225.

With regards to Bat Pharaoh's presence at the river and the motivations behind her decision to save Moses, I pointed out that although the rabbis of the Talmud, Midrash, and later commentaries do not take interest in creating the character of Bat Pharaoh as selfless, it is just as difficult for them to characterize her as self-serving. While the biblical account does not discuss the time elapsed between this episode and Moses as a young adult, I analyzed how biblical commentators deal with this lacuna. The discussion of Bat Pharaoh and Moses and their relationship to the palace demonstrates the extent to which the rabbis and thinkers of Midrashic, Talmudic and medieval times were concerned with the influences on Moses' upbringing. The lack of interest on behalf of the medieval commentaries should not be overlooked. I defined two possibilities (that have the potential to be interwoven) as to the reason behind this silence: the divine plan or the inner logic of the story and their relative comfort with their position in society.

Perhaps the presentation of Bat Pharaoh's relationship to God and Israel include some of the most compelling questions with regards to who Bat Pharaoh is and what her relationship is to her surrounding culture. They most vividly demonstrate some of the major complications and obstacles that the commentators had to address in trying to make the Moses birth narrative meaningful, purposeful and relevant to their time. The ease with which the biblical text presents Bat Pharaoh as a mother to Moses is of grave interest for many of the commentaries as this is no longer a discussion of a tenuous relationship between an Egyptian woman and an Israelite child but the proposition of a potentially impenetrable relationship between a mother and her son. This is the concept that presents the most possibilities as to Bat Pharaoh's relationship to Moses, God, and Israel.

While I recognize that there are some exceptions, my analysis of these commentaries reveals overarching themes. The writers of the Talmud and Midrash continuously present a

struggle between Bat Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Moses, God, and Israel. They depict Bat Pharaoh's decisions and interactions as wrought with tension and struggle between the interests of Egypt and her son, between an Egyptian culture and an Israelite one, and between a close relationship to God and little or no relationship to God. While some of the rabbis of the medieval time period quote the earlier Midrashic and Talmudic traditions, they are less willing to address the conflicts presented in the Midrashic and Talmudic narratives and more interested in viewing the textual ambiguities as part of the divine plan or the inner logic of the story.

By contrast, while the medieval time period was inextricably linked to the rabbinic texts, as the rabbis had an incredible command over them and, in many ways, they were the last era of Jewish scholarship to innovate and create in a traditional manner. These commentaries became a bridge between the traditional texts and more modern thought. Whereas the Tannaim were preoccupied with Bat Pharaoh and her identity, Judaism had reached a stronger sense of identity by medieval times. These rabbis had reached a greater sense of perspective with regards to their position in relation to the cultures and societies that surrounded them.

Significant in the analysis of these commentaries is the reminder that while these decisions may reflect agendas or ideologies, the main goal for many of these commentaries was "the desire to explain the biblical text, to account for its particulars in one fashion or another."[146] Even agendas and ideologies are motivated by the human desire for meaning. In many ways, this idea presents the question that Fonrobert reminds us to acknowledge. How does Talmudic literature, and I will add Midrashic and medieval literature, contribute to what it means to be Jewish as a woman or a woman as a Jew today? [147] Third wave feminists acknowledge that

[146] James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 25.
[147] Charlotte Fonrobert, "Feminist Interpretations of Rabbinic Literature: Two Views" in *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues,* 7.

because the Bible shapes humanity's lives throughout history, we must strive to not only delineate that which we learn from the text but investigate how this information becomes purposeful in our lives. In the case of Bat Pharaoh, the comfort or discomfort that the commentaries display with her character is nothing short of intriguing and fascinating but this information is more powerful when coupled with the question that the myth's retellings teach us about the values and concerns in the communities in which these myths took and continue to take shape. Thus, these myths help us define those characteristics that are less crucial and those that are vital in creating the boundary lines for our existence and our self-identification as a nation.

In concluding this thesis, I would like to highlight two main ideas that empowered my decision to first explore the character of Bat Pharaoh. The first idea is the importance of recognizing the need to bring about a change in perception and evaluation regarding Bat Pharaoh's character which can prove to be representative of any culture or religion's relationship with any other culture, religion or nation. In remembering Bat Pharaoh, Rabbi Jonathan Saks charges the reader to rethink of Bat Pharaoh as Hitler's daughter and to imagine the courage it must have taken to make the decisions she made.[148] In remembering Bat Pharaoh, Rabbi Lau asks the listener to think of her as one of the first heroes in Jewish history—the first righteous gentile and the woman who would precede numerous righteous gentiles in the wake of the Holocaust.[149] Thus, Bat Pharaoh is not only a complicated character who successfully straddles two worlds, two nations, and two faiths but she becomes a character that continues to be relevant and meaningful for her time and for ours.

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[148] Jonathan Sacks , "The Light at the Heart of Darkness" in *Covenant and Conversation: Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from the Chief Rabbi,* 17 Jan. 2010. http://www.ethicsassurance.org/files/bomoshul/shemot5769.pdf

[149] Rabbi Meir Lau, the former Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Israel is a Holocaust survivor and the current director of Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial. To view this address, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8KqIsk9rJc .

EPILOGUE

> We cannot live without these words…but while we are living with them, we are keenly aware that we are short of perfect, that along the historical path, we have substituted our voice for the divine voice.
>
> -David Weiss Halivni, *Revelation Restored*[150]

In "Women of the Exodus in Biblical Retellings of the Second Temple," Eileen Shuller reminds the reader that when we think about how stories have touched communities who have considered the narratives to be foundational and sacred, "it is essential to recall that reading the book of Exodus is not the only way that people have "heard" these stories."[151] Will future generations approach these stories responsibly in their movies, books, hymns and paintings? Almost every time I worked on this thesis in a public space and was asked about the topic of my research, the most common response to my brief explanation of Bat Pharaoh would be, "Oh Pharaoh's daughter…I always thought she was so beautiful in the pictures I saw as a child." Responses like this make Shuller's words even more pressing and pertinent. What we teach and how we teach it is crucial to what our students learn and what they remember. The characteristics, attributes, and explanations that we focus on have the potential to impact generations of thinkers and thinking. But we must also remember to consider the underlying messages that we find in our homes, in our places of worship, and in our sacred texts as we realize the strength and influence that they have on our generation and future generations. How will future generations share the character of Bat Pharaoh? Will she be more than a symbol of

[150] David Weiss Halivni, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 89.
[151] Eileen Shuller, "Women of the Exodus in Biblical Retellings of the Second Temple," in Peggy L. Day, ed. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 181.

beauty? Will her character be multivalent and complex? Will she be a symbol of thinking and acting beyond one's faith or ethnicity? It is my sincere hope that the answer to all these questions will be a resounding yes. I dream of the day when all religious leaders do not fear valorizing the acts of individuals from other communities and belief systems, as Lau did so eloquently in his address to the Jewish people on the Day of Holocaust Remembrance. It is also my firm desire that people will learn how to value their own and others' sacred texts while recognizing the need for these texts to be interpreted and reinterpreted to respond to, change with, challenge, and grow with new contexts and situations. With our flexibility to the interchange of acceptance, resistance, challenge and growth helps us view our sacred texts and their later commentaries in a manner that can continue to be relevant and valuable to our changing world.

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