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Loveliness Far Above Them All: Women and Wives of the *Genesis Apocryphon*

The women portrayed in parabiblical texts of the Qumran library comprise a wide spectrum of representations. They are sometimes wise, often beautiful, at other times erotic, and even treacherous. By examining the women in one of the library's texts, the feminine presence of a particular literary moment can be contextualized. This is a study of the two women that the *Genesis Apocryphon*, 1QapGen, represents in depth—Batenosh and Sarai. When these women are viewed together, it becomes clear that themes of travel and exoticism construct them as erotic subjects, even as they are still considered important matriarchs and ancestors of the community that eventually wrote their stories in 1QapGen. These texts use geographical location in order to identify a woman as "the other." Batenosh and Sarai are displaced in physical and literary terms—their lives are characterized by movement and travel, which provides them with varying identities that can seem to be in conflict. Changing identities contribute to an"otherness" that appears in conjunction with positions as a wife and eventual mother.[1]

Paleography points to a date of composition between 25 BCE and 50 CE for 1QapGen; the scroll itself has not been carbon-14 dated.[2] For the most part, scholars agree that 1QapGen is not a sectarian composition—even though it is the only known copy of the *Genesis Apocryphon*, and quite possibly the autograph, it does not contain the sectarian elements that define scrolls like 1QM (*The War Scroll*) and 1QS (*The Rule of*

[1] For more on the process of using geography to "otherize" someone, see Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Simone de Beauvoir also speaks to the relationship between the eroticized woman and her "otherness" in *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953).
[2] Joseph A. Fitzmyer S. J., "Genesis Apocryphon," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence Schiffman and James VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 302-304.

the Community).[3] In addition, 1QapGen is composed in Aramaic, while all the other texts that have been identified as sectarian are in Hebrew. Aramaic texts are considered to predate sectarian texts.[4]

The women of the *Genesis Apocryphon* are the women that time and the text's decomposition have left behind, because there is simply no way of knowing if there are any other significant female characters in this document. The scroll is a type of literature known as "rewritten bible," a text that tells stories from the Hebrew bible, but does not produce the recognized language of the biblical text itself. The text is written in Aramaic, but is not one of the various *targumim*, or literal Aramaic bible translations, found in the caves. According to Michael Segal, the rewritten biblical texts contain "textual variation but also…further literary development of the composition".[5] The *Genesis Apocryphon*, as its name suggests, holds many stories from Genesis in its twenty-three extant columns, but develops and in many ways rewrites them. Most of these episodes deal with two important biblical patriarchs—Noah and Abram. The two women I will examine are both connected to these men, Batenosh as Noah's mother and Sarai as Abram's wife. The ways in which their stories change from the stories in the biblical book of Genesis constitute a retelling and a reinterpretation of the role of the patriarch's wife.

Batenosh and Sarai are both portrayed as highly eroticized women in 1QapGen. There is, however, an element of morality and chastity to their eroticism, which is highlighted and underscored by themes of location and travel. By displacing these

[3] Fitzmyer, "Genesis Apocryphon," 303.
[4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer S. J., "Aramaic," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence Schiffman and James VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48-51.
[5] Michael Segal, "Between Bible and Rewritten Bible," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans , 2005), 10-28.

women with respect to their physical surroundings, the author of the text allows for them to encompass identities normally denied them, even as they are still morally unambiguous as befits the legendary matriarchs of a people.

Batenosh appears once in 1QapGen, in column 2. Her husband, Lamech, is wondering whether or not the child that she has conceived is his, or the child of one of the Watchers.[6] He accuses her of infidelity, and her response is rightly indignant, as well as surprisingly graphic and specific. She attempts to remind him of the exact sexual encounter during which their child was conceived. "O my brother and my husband, recall for yourself my pleasure…[ ] in the heat of the moment, and my panting breath!" (1QapGen 2.9-10).[7]

1QapGen's portrayal of Batenosh differs greatly from the Genesis account—indeed, there is absolutely no mention of Lamech's wife, either named or unnamed, in the traditional Genesis narrative. Genesis 5:28-29 introduce Lamech and his son, Noah, but there is no mention at all of a mother, or any sort of scandal surrounding Noah's birth. Why might Batenosh be mentioned in 1QapGen then, and what does the text gain from her highly erotic presence? The answer lies at the juncture of three features of the narrative: Batenosh's name, the passage's relation to Genesis 6:1-4, and the actions of Lamech in 1QapGen 2.19-26.

[6] The Watchers were a group of heavenly beings, important in Enochic literature (like Jubilees, to which 1QapGen bears much resemblance).

[7] Daniel A. Machiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13-17* (STJD 79; Boston: Brill, 2009), 35-36. All subsequent translations are from Machiela's volume unless otherwise noted.

Batenosh's name is a simple construction, coming from the Hebrew word *bat*, meaning daughter, and *Enosh*, meaning either "man" or "Enosh" (the proper name).[8] It is likely that her name carries both meanings, identifying her as both a human, as well as the daughter of Enosh. Enosh was one of Lamech's ancestors, the grandson of Adam and Eve through Seth, their third son (Gn 5:6). Tal Ilan states that the naming of nameless biblical heroines was an important feature of certain types of Second Temple literature.[9] This tradition included the naming of women who were mentioned, but never given appellations, as well as the creation of new women and names to go along with them.[10] Some names are taken from other sources, and some were common names at the time, but some—and I posit that Batenosh's name falls into this category—were in fact a play on words in some way connected to the life story of the woman herself.[11] As the "Daughter of Enosh," she is a relative of Lamech on his father's side, and thus a suitable bride for him.[12] As the "Daughter of Man," she is the counterpart to the "sons of God" of Genesis 6:2.

This part of the narrative, concerned as it is with the co-mingling of human and divine races, is clearly constructed in parallel with Genesis 6:1-4.

> [1]And it happened that man began to grow great on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them. [2]And the sons of God saw the daughters of man that they were good, and they took for themselves wives from all they chose. [3]And YHVH said, "My spirit will not always be reckoned

[8]'Bitenosh' is the conventional spelling but there are diverging transcriptions of the name. The spelling variations do not signify a semantic difference. For a discussion of the variants in vocalization see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J., *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1(IQ20): A Commentary*, 3rd ed. (BibOr 18/B; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2004), 127.
[9] Tal Ilan, "Biblical Women's Names in the Apocryphal Traditions," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 6, no. 11 (1993): 3-67.
[10] Ilan, 4.
[11] Ilan, 5.
[12] For more on biblical marriage, endogamy, and betrothal norms, see Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, "Marriage," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1996), 410-412.

> with man's, for he is also flesh," and their days become one hundred and twenty years. [4]And the Nefilim were on the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came into the daughters of man and they gave birth to them heroes, who were the old men of renown.[13]

According to these verses, human women are so beautiful that the "sons of God" decide to mate with them. Their children are known as the "*Nefilim*," or "fallen ones." Writers in the Second Temple period, particularly the authors of Jubilees and Enoch, associate these semi-divine beings with the generation that God decides to destroy by flood in Genesis 6:7, and call them "Watchers." In Second Temple literature, they are angels and humans, responsible for the great deluge that is soon to come.

Why is this significant? From the text of 1QapGen that survives, it seems that the author is taking great care to dissociate Batenosh from the Watchers. She does not have an adulterous relationship with them, and her son, Noah, is entirely human. "I swear to you by the Great Holy One, by the King of He[aven]/that this seed is from you, and from you this conception, and from you the planting of this fruit[ ]/and not from any stranger, nor from any of the Watchers, nor from any of the sons of Hea[ven" (1QapGen 2:14-16).[14] This text constructs Batenosh with two conflicting identities: she is the pure and chaste mother of Noah, remaining loyal to her husband and refraining from any sort of inappropriate contact with the *Nefilim*, but she is also the highly eroticized wife of Lamech, defending her purity with an admission of the carnality and sexuality with which her son was conceived. She is simultaneously an erotic object of the reader's gaze and scrutiny, and a noble ancestress and mother of Noah, who saves humanity from the flood.

In her study of male-female relationships in Hellenistic Jewish apocryphal novels, Adele Reinhartz makes an interesting point about the tension between chaste and

[13] The translation is my own.
[14] Machiela, 36.

unchaste relationships that occurs so frequently.[15] She says of adultery that, ultimately, "narrators studiously avoid such options and did not allow extra-marital relationships to disrupt prior marriage bonds".[16] Though 1QapGen is not an apocryphal novel it is a contemporaneous composition wherein Batenosh (and later, Sarai) shares features with the heroines Reinhartz discusses. Depicted as blameless in life and action, like Esther, Judith, Susanna and Sarah, Batenosh may be portrayed erotically because there is no danger of immoral behavior.

The theme of travel and movement provides the final explanation for the text's presentation of coexisting erotic and non-erotic identities. After accusing his wife of adultery, Lamech runs to his father, Methuselah, to relate the story, who in turn travels to his father Enoch "through the length of the land of Parvain, and there he found the end of [the] ea[rth]" (1QapGen 2:23).[17] As both Esther Eshel and Daniel Machiela point out, the portrayal of geography in the *Genesis Apocryphon* is an important source for understanding the worldview and cosmology of Second Temple Judaism.[18] We learn, in columns 12-13, how the world is divided amongst the sons and grandsons of Noah. Themes of travel and search define the *Genesis Apocryphon*'s tales of Lamech, Noah, and Abram, painting them all as liminal characters in the mythic history of Judaism. Noah spends forty days and nights wandering in an ark (Gn 6-9), and Abram journeys

[15] Adele Reinhartz, "Chaste Betrayals: Women and Men in the Apocryphal Novels," in *Heavenly Tablets: Interpretation, Identity, and Tradition in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Lynn Lidonnici and Andrea Lieber (Boston: Brill, 2007) 227-242.
[16] Reinhartz, 240.
[17] Machiela, 37.
[18] Esther Eshel, "The *Imago Mundi* of the *Genesis Apocryphon*," in *Heavenly Tablets: Interpretation, Identity, and Tradition in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Lynn Lidonnici and Andrea Lieber (Boston: Brill, 2007), 111-132. Machiela, 87-91

from his homeland to Canaan (Gn 11-25)[19]. It is this idea of travel, and the presence of a people without a specific place on the face of the earth that creates space for the dual identities of Batenosh, a woman who is closely associated with these characters through both marriage and blood. As shown in Esther Eshel's article, it is especially difficult to discern exactly where characters who lived before the earth's division dwelled, and under whose rule they subsisted.[20] Batenosh and Lamech are figures in a liminal, exotic landscape, and it is this landscape that provides room for Batenosh's dual eroticism and nobility.

Sarai, the only other woman whose narrative survives in 1QapGen, is, like Batenosh, doubly constructed as an erotic figure and chaste ancestress.[21] The narrative in which she appears was clearly written as a parallel to the narrative of Lamech and Batenosh. In both, the women are erotic and chaste, and themes and tales of travel and geography characterize both. Dreams involving trees figure into each of the two narratives (Noah, Lamech's son, has a dream in which he is a cedar tree and his sons are three shoots, and Abram dreams that he is a cedar and Sarai a date palm). These dreams are both additions to the biblical tales, and help to link the two accounts together in the reader's mind. Sarai differs from Batenosh in that she is not a created figure—her name appears in the Hebrew bible, and she has several chapters dedicated to her narrative. The author of the *Genesis Apocryphon*, therefore, had less room to create and develop stories around her actions and name, and had to eroticize her using different methods.

[19] Chapter 17 of Genesis contains the etiology of the name changes, Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah. The *Genesis Apocryphon* lacks reference to this and the original names Abram and Sarai persist throughout.
[20] Eshel, e.g. 118 ff.
[21] There is another woman mentioned in passing in 1QapGen 6:7: Emzera, Noah's wife. Her only appearance is in the text "I went and took Emzera his daughter as my wife. She conceived by way of me and gave birth to th[r]ee sons." Machiela, 44.

The first instance of Sarai's name is in 1QapGen 19:17. She is presented in a retelling of Genesis 12:10-20, in which Abram and Sarai journey to Egypt because of a famine. In the biblical narrative, Abram tells Sarai to act like his sister, as a preventative measure against the Pharaoh of Egypt killing him in order to claim Sarai as his wife. She does this, and both are taken to Pharaoh and lavished with gifts. Pharaoh becomes sick and realizes that Sarai is actually Abram's wife and sends them on their way, along with all the wealth they have accrued.

The *Genesis Apocryphon* relates these events in much the same manner, but with more embellishment. One of the reasons for this expansion is the difficulty that a reader may have with Genesis 12:15—"and [Sarai] was taken into his palace." The author of 1QapGen amplifies the statement and makes it clear that, even though Sarai lives as Pharaoh's wife for two years, she is never unfaithful to Abram. Here too we may read with Reinhartz that erotic heroines are still portrayed chastely.

When Abram and Sarai enter Egypt, he has a dream of a cedar tree and a date palm sprouted from the same root (1QapGen 19:15). Men attempt to cut down the cedar, leaving the date palm upright—but the date palm manages to stop this by crying out that it has sprung from the same root as the cedar. Both trees are saved in the end. Abram relates this dream to Sarai, interpreting it as an allegory for what will soon happen in Egypt. Events unfold as they do in Genesis, and messengers from Pharaoh's court bring news of Sarai's beauty to Pharaoh.

The text is fragmentary at this point, but where we are next able to read fully, it seems that the messengers are describing Sarai to Pharaoh, body part by body part. This is an addition to the biblical narrative, and almost seems out of place in the more linear

form of the *Genesis Apocryphon*. The messengers' description to the Pharaoh is composed as a *wasf*, a style of Near Eastern poetry in which the narrator describes their lover, moving down his or her body.

"…How irresistible and beautiful is the image of her face; how lovely h[er] foreh[ead, and] soft the hair of her head! How graceful are her eyes, and how precious her nose; every feature/of her face is radiating beauty!" (1QapGen 20:2-3).[22] The description continues in this manner, moving down Sarai's body, eroticizing each individual part and eventually comparing her to all other women and lauding her superiority. The *wasf* in praise of Sarai directly parallels Song of Songs 4:1-5. The Song of Songs, as a part of the Hebrew bible, is a well-known erotic text. Many different forms of love are celebrated within its verses, physical love being present among them. It is clear that Sarai's body in the *Genesis Apocryphon* is erotically charged, just as is the woman's body is Song of Songs 4.

After this lengthy description of her physical charms, Pharaoh takes Sarai and Abram (who Sarai claims is her brother) into his house, and attempts to live with Sarai as his wife. At this point, the text clarifies something not in the Bible: the plague that God sends to the Pharaoh disables him from having sexual intercourse with Sarai. "It was an ongoing affliction for him and every person of his household, so that he was not able to approach her, nor did he have sexual relations with her" (1QapGen 20:17).[23] The *Genesis Apocryphon* is making it quite clear, as it does with Batenosh, and as the apocryphal novels do with Susanna, Judith, Sarah, and Esther,[24] that Sarai's relationship with Pharaoh was entirely chaste and in no way sexual. She did not cheat on Abram, and

[22] Machiela, 74.
[23] Machiela, 75.
[24] Reinhartz, 227.

her marriage to him remains intact, as does her ability to be the first true matriarch of the Jewish people. Eventually, Pharaoh's courtiers realize that Sarai and Abram are married, and that they need to be sent home before Pharaoh and his household can be cured of the plague. Sarai is released from her pseudo-marriage to Pharaoh, and the couple heads back to the land of Canaan.

At this point, there is another departure from the biblical text. After a brief description of Abram's cousin Lot (1QapGen 20:33-34) and a sacrifice of thanksgiving (1QapGen 21:1-4), God appears to Abram and instructs him to tour the land of Canaan. "Lift up your eyes and look to the east, to the west, to the south, and to the north, and see this entire/land that I am giving to you and to your descendants for all ages" (1QapGen 21:9-10).[25] Abram obeys, and wanders from region to region, city to city, and mountain to mountain.

This episode of wandering again underscores the liminality of the male character that allows his wife to be portrayed both erotically and heroically. Sarai is highly eroticized by the messenger's description of her beauty, and yet her chastity and purity are emphasized by the fact that Pharaoh is not able to approach her, even though she lives as his wife for several years. Her presence in Egypt, away from both her ancestral home in Mesopotamia and her new home in Canaan, enables her to become an erotic figure in the text. Her husband's need to wander opens her up to the possibilities of adultery that she entirely rejects, just as Batenosh's presence in an unknown land, and her husband's own travels do the same for her.

It is not a coincidence that all these narratives appear in a retelling of Genesis. As elements in the cultural origin myth of the Israelites, they represent crucial notions of

[25] Machiela, 78-79.

ancestry and self-identity. The very word *Hebrew*, by which they were known, likely comes from a root meaning "to cross over, to pass"[26]—a reference to the ancestors who crossed the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in order to reach Palestine, and intimately related to the idea of travel. Literature like the *Genesis Apocryphon* utilizes these ideas to create space for multiple identities, which both Batenosh and Sarai exhibit. It is also possible, and I think ultimately more in keeping with the nature of 1QapGen as a "retold bible" story, that the exotic and erotic natures of Batenosh and Sarai are a reinterpretation of their characters. Perhaps it is the liminal space of the world, and of the *Genesis Apocryphon* itself, that allows Batenosh and Sarai display erotic bodies as an essential component of their ancestral and maternal identities.

[26] F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 716 (עבר).

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