

Representations of Angelic Beings in Early Jewish and in Christian Traditions

Edited by
AMSALU TEFERA
and LOREN T. STUCKENBRUCK

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Introduction

The idea to convene a joint workshop on Judaic and Ethiopic/Christian Angelology was raised during coffee time in January 2016, and we agreed to bring it to fruition in February 2017. We have retained for the title of this volume the description of the workshop itself: “Representations of Angelic Beings in Early Jewish and in Christian Traditions.” The event took place on 14–16 February 2017 at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU Munich).

In all, thirteen papers were presented at the workshop, with the speakers, women and men, coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and representing a wide variety of perspectives. Participants and those in attendance, for example, came from Ethiopia, Kenya, the United States of America, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Israel, and Italy. In particular, we had the privilege to welcome three representatives of the Authority for Research and Conservation of the Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) of Ethiopia, namely: Mrs. Zenebu Halefom, Deputy Bureau Head of the Tigray Tourism Bureau; Mr. Hailu Zeleke, then Director of the ARCCH Conservation Directorate; and Mr. Ephrem Amare, at that time Director of the ARCCH Cultural Heritage Inventory Inspection and Grading (now Director of the National Museum of Ethiopia). They each gave informative presentations on the respective areas of their work in Ethiopia. Ephrem Amare offered an insightful overview of the inventory and preservation work of his department within the ARCCH, outlining both the opportunities and challenges involved in carrying out work on the country’s precious yet endangered heritage. Hailu Zeleke spoke about “Manuscript Conservation and the Work of the ARCCH in Ethiopia.” (We are immensely saddened by Ato Hailu’s untimely death on 24 July 2020 and extend to his family and colleagues our heartfelt condolences.) Finally, Zenebu Halefom covered work ongoing in the Tigray region with a paper on “The Preservation and Conservation of the Manuscript Heritage in Tigray.” In addition to these papers, the conference benefited from a paper by Dr. Kelley Coblenz Bauth (St. Edwards University, Austin, Texas) entitled “Continuities and Transformations in Second Temple Angelology.” We remain grateful to her, not only for the lecture but also for lending her specialist expertise to discussions throughout the conference.

It became clear to participating guests by the conclusion of the event that the workshop was the first of its kind in having facilitated discussions among scholars of such variety concerning angelology; such was especially so, as Second Temple Jewish traditions were being brought into conversation with

Christian ideas and practices, with particular emphasis on those known in Ethiopia.

The present volume contains nine essays, each of which take up a different aspect of the subject under consideration. In order to illustrate the scope and coherence of the volume, we take opportunity here to outline the arguments and directions taken by each of these contributions.

Loreen Maseno opens the volume with a hermeneutically sensitive study of Hagar's encounter with "the angel of the Lord" in Genesis 16. Entitled "An Angel Indeed! Hagar and the Angel in Genesis 16," Maseno juxtaposes three perspectives emerging from African women's theologies that interpret and highlight Hagar's significant role in the narrative. The first perspective analyzes the impact of the story on how the angel and his message is presented, especially since Genesis 16 is told from Sarah's point of view. The second perspective interrogates the identity of this angel, highlighting the possibility that "the angel of YHWH" in Genesis 16 may be a later insertion. The third perspective builds upon the source-critical contention that the text intentionally blurs the boundaries between deity and angel. To advance these perspectives, African women's theologies bring into sharp focus the powerful place of giving a name, an act that, in turn, is seen in Hagar's naming of the angel. Thus, Hagar's function as one who names demonstrates, inceptively, the dignity with which she copes with her experience of oppression and reflects the working theology of her character.

A different turn is taken by Eshbal Ratzon in "The Heavenly Abode of the Luminaries," in which she focuses on angelology as a feature of cosmology. She notes the reluctance of authors and editors of writings in the Hebrew Bible to speculate about the precise location of the sun and stars in the heavens and explains this as connected to the widespread worship of the sun, moon, and stars among ancient Israelites. In later Second Temple literature, however, these topics are narrated more freely, so that, for example some texts could regard luminaries as minor heavenly beings. Instead of attributing this tendency in some Second Temple writings to a "remythologization" influenced by Hellenism, Ratzon suggests that the traditions about heavenly bodies as living creatures reach back to and develop ideas already present during the First Temple period. Their absence among the earlier scriptures is due to a deliberate exclusion from Hebrew Bible writings by those responsible for the canonization process.

An influential book composed during the 2nd century BCE, *Jubilees* is known for the integration of good and bad angelic beings into its composite retelling of traditions from creation to the Israelites' exodus known from Genesis and Exodus. In "Angelic Authority: Continuities and Transformation in the Angelic World of the Book of Jubilees," Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten offers a reading that is sensitive both to the time of the work's composition and its reception in Ethiopian traditions that regard the book as sacred scripture. After exploring how the angels come into being on the first day of creation, van Ruiten discusses

the angels of the presence and of holiness, who play prominent roles in Jubilees. In particular, *the* angel (singular) of the presence acquires a significance that is later taken up and expounded in the Ethiopian *Maṣṣāfa Milād* and *Maṣṣāfa Bārḥān*. The overview then turns to evil angelic beings who, according to Jubilees, were originally sent by God on a positive mission to earth, but who sinned with the daughters of humanity and were punished by being bound to the depths of the earth. The spirits of their offspring (demons) remain active on the earth after the Great Flood, and are subservient to their leader, called “the prince of Mastema.”

Loren T. Stuckenbruck discusses the honorific position ascribed to some angelic beings in two Second Temple texts that may be related to one another. Entitled “In Praise of Angels: The Case of a Wandering Liturgical Fragment,” Stuckenbruck focuses on the benedictive praise of angels alongside God in the Book of Tobit 11:14 and 11QSefer ha-Milchama (11Q14) 1 ii 2–6. After comparing these texts (including the wide-ranging textual tradition of Tobit itself) with one another and with several other Second Temple texts from the wider tradition-historical context that link angelic beings with venerative motifs, the paper concludes: (1) The passages in Tobit and 11Q14 preserve a liturgical fragment that derives from a common tradition that has been adapted into the respective literary contexts of these works. (2) The more generic and original form of the tradition is preserved in Tobit (while 11Q14 shows a particular interest in “Israel”). (3) Nevertheless, the literary context of 11Q14 is better suited to the praise of angels and likely offers the more original, strictly liturgical context of the benediction. The study, in turn, throws light on a circulating tradition that included angels within the praise of God during the Second Temple period.

The contribution by Matthias Hoffmann on “Systematic Chaos or Chain of Tradition? References to Angels and ‘Magic’ in Early Jewish and Early Christian Literature and Magical Writings” explores links between Second Temple and early Christian angelologies up to medieval times in its focus on “magical” sources. Whereas “magic” could be forbidden in many religious writings, angels could nonetheless serve to legitimize certain practices, such as pharmacological healing. In some early Jewish writings, such as Tobit and the Book of Jubilees, knowledge concerning such healing is transmitted from God to humans via angels. In later ones, such as *Sepher-ha-Razim* or the even later *Sepher Raziel*, one encounters similar attempts to ascribe to angels the transfer of such knowledge to important biblical figures. Similarly, the Greek Magical Papyri and many early Christian magical texts link biblical and para-biblical narratives to angels. The widespread occurrence of angels’ names in spells and grimoires reflects the influence of early Jewish angelology and functioned to enhance their efficacy. Hoffmann demonstrates that magical writings could describe angelic beings in distinct and surprising ways, so that customary names and roles could be creatively reconfigured in service of humans who applied “magic” in order to control them.

Moving squarely into Ethiopian tradition is Amsalu Tefera's review of "Angelology of the Ethiopic Homily on Uriel (*Dərsanä Ura'el*)." Although many traditional works in Gə'əz relate to the topic of angelology, this homily is one of the least studied. It reflects how angelic figures, both in the functions they perform(ed) and in the way they are venerated, relate to many aspects of Ethiopian Orthodox religious life, including the celebration of feast days and the composition of homilies. In this context, the archangel Uriel emerges as significant. The oldest homily in his honor was composed during the 15th century and, in turn, is contained within the longer Homiliary of Angels (microfilmed in EMMML 1835). The longer Homiliary of Uriel transmits various stories and miracles about Uriel, such as his having served as guide to the holy family on their visit to Ethiopia. Additionally, the homily on Uriel presents the archangel in a rich variety of roles: he is the *angelus interpres* who gave "the chalice of knowledge" (ጽዋክ: ልቡና) to Ethiopian saints. In presenting this overview, the discussion reflects on the similarities and differences between the short and long recensions of the homily.

Tedros Abraha's contribution focuses on angelology in another Ethiopian tradition. Entitled "The Place of the Angels in the *Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* (*The Book of Hallowing*) and in its *andəmtas*," Tedros Abraha draws attention to angels' roles and locations within the heavenly hierarchy. The eighty-one canonical books of the Old and New Testament in the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches and their mainly allegorical interpretation known as *andəmta* are of paramount importance for interpreting the *Mäṣḥafä Qəddase's* angelology, as well as traditions known in the canonical 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Apocalypse of Ezra. Outside the biblical sources, an indirect, yet important source for *Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* is the *Hexameron, Mäṣḥafä Aksimaros. De Coelesti Hierarchia* (Περὶ τῆς Οὐρανίας Ἱεραρχίας) by Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite (5th century). Drawing on these and other later sources, the *Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* offers details regarding the creation of angels, their numbers, their organization, and their role as part of the innermost circle of the Holy Trinity. Angels are linked to the founding of churches, which are built wherever drops of the crucified Christ fell or were sprinkled by an angel. Despite the massive presence of angels in all aspects of religious and profane life among Ethiopians and Eritreans, it is striking that in the Gə'əz *Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* as a whole, angels do not play as prominent a role as one might expect.

Dan Levene's study, "Selling Divine Names: 'Divine Names from the Homily of Michael,'" relates specifically to the archangel Michael in Ethiopian tradition. It examines formulae from a section within the Gə'əz Homily of Michael that is frequently picked up in various literary and artefactual contexts: printed amulets, little printed prayer books, magic scrolls, and leaves of the odd codex. An example of each is presented and considered, with detailed analysis devoted to the covers of two market amulets purchased in 2016 under the title "Divine

names from the Homily of Michael” (አስማተ፡መላኮት፡ድርሳነ፡ሚካኤል). The variations among the formulae owe much to the process of transmission. Although the contribution does not aim at a critical edition of the formulae, Levene’s comparison of existing versions and their literary-artefactual contexts leads to salient observations about their respective formats, as well as about their producers and intended users.

Ralph Lee’s discussion of “Little Known Giants Traditions in Ethiopian Literature” brings the volume to a close. Lee notes that, while the Ethiopian Christian tradition is known for preserving the most complete text of 1 Enoch, any connection with other Enochic literary traditions of the Second Temple period, such as the Book of Giants, have not yet been established. In addressing this lacuna, the study offers an English translation and analysis of a giant’s tale from a Pentecost homily, part of the late 14th century compilation known as *C፡ቱዐ ሃይማኖት* (*Rätu’a Haymanot*). Interestingly, this story transmits some features in common with the Book of Giants, while no direct correspondence between the giant in the Pentecost homily and the Book of Giants can be established. The commonalities, however, do not exclude the possibility that the homily’s author had some contact with the Second Temple giants tradition. For instance, the Ethiopic giant’s tale draws on 1 Enoch, but then elaborates with the account of a giant who has great physical prowess and appetite and who hears God’s voice and seeks repentance. In addition, the Ethiopic tale recounts the complete destruction of the giants in Noah’s flood. Despite differences from the ancient Book of Giants, the Gə’əz giants tale is significant for an appreciation of Ethiopia’s literary heritage, while leaving open many questions regarding tradition-historical connections with broader Enochic literature.

It is our great hope that the articles in this volume, both individually and as a collection, will be catalytic to research, given growing scholarly interest in angelology of the Early Judaism and Christian traditions, not least in the neglected area of Ethiopian angelology. We are grateful for all contributors to this volume, as well as to those present at the workshop who enhanced discussions with their questions and comments. For help in preparing the manuscript and indices, we would especially like to thank Theron Clay Mock III, Anja Hötschl and Mirjam Seidler, both doctoral candidates in the Protestant Faculty of Theology at LMU Munich. It must be said that both the workshop and the present volume would not have been possible without sponsorship by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which made possible Amsalu Tefera’s three years of research at LMU Munich, in addition to financial and organizational assistance by the Protestant Faculty’s Chair of New Testament Studies (with emphasis on Second Temple Judaism), including the help of Anna Kellerer, the Chair’s administrator. Finally, we would like to thank the Mohr Siebeck publishing house for recognizing the importance of this volume and for its commitment to managing its publication. In this connection, special thanks go to

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November 2019,
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Loren Stuckenbruck
and Amsalu Tefera

An Angel Indeed! Hagar and the Angel in Genesis 16

Loreen Maseno

Hagar is an Egyptian woman¹ who straddles boundaries geographically, mentally, and spiritually. In the latter, she is said to have had an encounter with an angel, which was not commonplace for women at the time. Summarily stated from Genesis 16, Sarai and Abram were childless. Sarai, having an Egyptian maid, suggests to Abram to lie with Hagar so that she may have children through those whom she bears. Abram complies unquestioningly and has intercourse with Hagar, whom he has as a second wife. After Hagar conceives, she looks down on Sarai who gets upset and calls upon God to judge between her and Abram given the unforeseen developments. Abram relinquishes his say in the matter, placing Hagar squarely at the mercy of Sarai. Sarai decides to humble, afflict, and deal severely with Hagar, until Hagar who is pregnant decides to flee this slave household. While in the wilderness by a spring, Hagar is found by an angel, who identifies her as Hagar, Sarai's maid, and then asks her from where she has come and where she is going. Hagar states that she is fleeing her mistress Sarai. The angel instructs her to return to her place of affliction and humble herself and that her descendants will be multiplied. Further, she is informed that she will bear a son whom she will name Ishmael. Ishmael would be a wild ass and he would be against every man and every man against him. Hagar calls the name of the one whom she encountered as "you are the God who sees," noting that this deity had seen her. Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram named him Ishmael at the age of eighty-six. Having given this summary, I proceed to interrogate this narrative in order to offer a reinterpretation of Hagar's encounter with an angel from three clear vantage points.

¹ Whether Hagar is African or not has been contested on various fronts. Some scholars insist that she remains among the few Africans in the Bible and was the African wife of Abraham, See Anthony Pinn and Allen Dwight Callahan, eds., *African American Religious Life and the Story of Nimrod* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5. However, others conclude that "Egyptian" in Genesis 16 is not related in any way to present day Egypt but to a Bedouin tribe in the South of Palestine. See Hermann Gunkel "The Hagar Traditions," in *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion*, ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 68–84, here 84.

A. Genesis 16 from the Point of View of Sarai

What happens when your story is presented from the point of view of your rival and enemy? How would the story look like to an audience and what would be the best way to try and understand that story? Sarai, an old childless woman has undergone emotional turmoil, seeing that her plans to get children by her handmaid have not gone as perfectly as she had hoped. Things have been upturned and she has even called upon God to judge this situation on her behalf.

Ina Willi-Plein considers the two narratives, Genesis 21 and Genesis 16, noting that both feature the expulsion of Hagar. In her analysis, the focus of Genesis 21 is different, with inheritance as the main motivation. The person to become Abraham's heir, whether it is Isaac, Ishmael, or both, is the central focus. Willi-Plein adds that the differences between Genesis 21 and 16 suggests that the former might be a later rereading of the latter, caused by social and political changes.

Genesis 16, on the other hand, emphasizes the tension between Sarai and Hagar.² To Willi-Plein, Genesis 16:1–2, 4–9, and 11–15 are narrated from Sarai's point of view.³ Clearly Genesis 16 is a loaded chapter which requires unpacking at different levels. If understood as told from Sarai's vantage point, a narrative of the same chapter, as indicated in the above listed verses, generates avenues for a closer examination of its content. It is clear that the story line, told from Sarai's point of view, has chosen to minimize certain aspects while emphasizing others. As a wife, she desires that her position be maintained, regardless of her age and barrenness. This emphasis is illustrated as we consider the text.

First, Genesis 16:1–2 minimizes the huge problem of Sarai's childlessness. It glosses over her barrenness and immediately moves into a way out of this significant problem. Clearly, childlessness was frowned upon and people would seek out possible solutions in order to avert this. That Sarai is old and has tried all other solutions, with nothing previously working, is not pointed out. At the same time, one may note the order in which Hagar the surrogate is introduced; she is first referred to as a handmaid, then as an Egyptian and, finally, by her name. According to Pamela Reis, this order is not a coincidence but indicates her position before her nationality and name because at this sequence, which highlights at the outset her position as handmaid, is of the first importance; it enables Sarai to use her as part of a fertility technique.⁴ On the other hand, in attributing her own childlessness to the Lord, she minimizes the issue at hand, especially since she would not be in a position to say whether it was she or Abram who had

² See Ina Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance: A Constructive Comparison of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21," in *Genesis, Isaiah and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for his Eightieth Birthday*, eds. Katharine J. Dell, Graham Davies, and Yee Von Koh (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 33–44.

³ Ina Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance," 39.

⁴ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Hagar Required," *JSOT* 87 (2000): 75–109, here 77.

the infertility problem. Reis contends that, commonly, the Bible considers only women capable of infertility.⁵

Second, Genesis 16:4–9, if one keeps Sarai’s perspective in mind, implies that Abram and Hagar had a one-time encounter. It minimizes the affection, feelings, and time the two may have spent together. However, how was Abraham to know that he had impregnated Hagar with the first encounter, so that thereafter he never had any further sexual intercourse with her? Any continuing encounters, up until the time of Hagar’s pregnancy would have become certain, are minimized. Some aspects in the text, however, suggest otherwise. It has, for example, been noted that the use of four verbs in the Hebrew of Genesis 16:4 rushes past the moment of conception and pregnancy, and focuses instead on Hagar’s awareness thereof.⁶ Now it is highly doubtful that a one-off encounter would have been sufficient to make Hagar attempt to assert her place in the household. According to Reis, even after her pregnancy was known to the three of them, Abram and Hagar probably continued with their rendezvous; indeed, this is perhaps the only way to interpret Genesis 16:5, according to which it seems that Sarai walks in on the two and addresses them both. But when it comes to the phrase, “May the Lord judge between me and between you,” she is speaking to Hagar, not to Abram.⁷ Furthermore, the only way to explain the same verse is that Abram has robbed Sarai of an opportunity to conceive, has wasted seed through his ongoing sexual relations with Hagar, and has ultimately hurt her feelings. In general, Sarai’s outburst bears undertones of sexual stinginess.⁸

Greatly minimized are the afflictions meted on Hagar by Sarai. These are not elaborated, and the narrator glosses over these in Genesis 16:6 to move on to the next sentence. How can an afflicting mistress detail her own modes of affliction, just as, by analogy, how would one expect oppressors to list explicitly and name their own oppressive schemes? Also, that the angel would address Hagar as Sarai’s maid, is problematic; the angel’s request that she return to her mistress to be afflicted (16:9) raises more questions than can ever be answered.

According to Genesis 16:11–15, told from Sarai’s vantage point, Hagar was not the one who named her son Ishmael. The power to name her son is stripped from Hagar when ultimately, at the end of this passage, it is Abram who names him (16:15).⁹ But, how did Abram know to give the same name that Hagar, in 16:11, was told by the deity to call him? This problem has seemingly been glossed over. The audience that Hagar would have had with Abram in their relationship is

⁵ Reis, “Hagar Requited,” 77.

⁶ Reis, “Hagar Requited,” 82.

⁷ Reis, “Hagar Requited,” 83 and see also Savina Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 79.

⁸ Aviva Zonberg, *The Beginning of Desire* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 54–55.

⁹ According to James Okoye, the text seems to deconstruct itself since Hagar was told which name to give Ishmael in v. 11, but in v. 15 it was Abram who named him. See James Okoye, “Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21” *JSOT* 32.2 (2007): 163–175.

bypassed, so that it would seem this was just Abram's decision to name his child. At the same time, Hagar seems to have seen the Lord, whom she called, "Thou God seest me" (Genesis 16:13 KJV). From Sarai's point of view, however, Hagar did not see God, but rather an angel. Thus, in general, the verses noted from Genesis 16 downplay three things: first, that Sarai's mistreatment of Hagar led her to flee; second, that Abram continued to have sexual relations with Hagar; and third, that Hagar had spiritual encounters – by not using Hagar's own words to name her experience.

Though Genesis 16:10–12 could be seen from the point of view of Sarai, thus being advantageous to her, Brigitte Kahl argues that closer attention to the dynamics of the Sarai and Hagar stories shows that Genesis contains a dialectic. Although it appears that Sarai is victorious, the angel of the Lord denies Sarai's expectation to increase her descendants through Hagar's offspring.¹⁰ In addition, as this essay further argues, the dialectic is more complicated and pronounced, to the extent that the text in its present form deconstructs Sarai's point of view. Hence the need for further plausible interpretations.

Sandra Schneider asserts that interpreters of the biblical texts have never, whether in the past or present, been objective, if by "objective" one means ideologically unbiased. "Everyone interprets from a perspective controlled to some extent by her or his social location, interests, and commitments."¹¹ Consequently, a variety of interpretations are reflected in attempts to understand Genesis 16.

B. An Angel Indeed: Who Is This Angel?

It is important in what follows to examine carefully who this angel, whom Hagar encounters, really is. The identity of this angel is of importance in relation to the message that is then passed on to Hagar. In general, this second perspective shifts its gaze to take a closer look at the identity of this angel and possibilities that "the angel of YHWH" in Genesis 16 is but a later insertion for theological purposes.¹²

According to Michael Hundley, there is little consensus both in popular and scholarly literature on the topic of angels. His work sets out to provide clarity on angels in both Genesis and Exodus. He attempts to do this by situating the texts

¹⁰ See Brigitte Kahl, "Hagar between Genesis and Galatians: The Stony Road to Freedom," in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. Craig Evans (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 219–32, here 227.

¹¹ Sandra Schneider, "Feminist Hermeneutics," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 349–69, here 351.

¹² Michael Hundley, "Of God and Angels: Divine Messengers in Genesis and Exodus in their Ancient Near Eastern Contexts," *JTS* 67.1 (2016): 1–22, here 3.

in their contexts. He states at the onset that other divine beings in Genesis, like the sons of God, the cherub, etc., are not identified as messengers of God and therefore do not form the topic of his investigation.¹³ To him, whereas there have been efforts to make a distinction between the angel of YHWH and ordinary angels, this distinction is not found in Genesis. In other words, in his rendering, wherever an angel is mentioned in Genesis, this remains an angel throughout Genesis. Hundley adds that the presentation of the message in Genesis 16 is especially peculiar due to the lack of an introduction to their messages, like, “thus says the Lord God,” with the exception of Genesis 22:15. In Genesis 16, the angelic form is not indicated, but the angel shows up and finds Hagar by the spring.

Having clarified this, Hundley therefore proceeds to identify three strands of interpretation regarding the identity and function of the angel of YHWH, namely: identity, representation, and interpolation. For the identity theories, God is identical to the angel and is considered a theophanic form of YHWH. Representation has to do with the claim that the angel is distinct from YHWH,¹⁴ and the interpolation theories explain that some texts posit both a continuity and discontinuity in the same text and as such later insertions of the angel of YHWH were made for theological reasons.¹⁵ In general, Hundley seeks to discern who angels are in Genesis and Exodus, and more specifically, how an angel may be related to YHWH himself.

The angel in Genesis 16 draws from non-priestly portions of Genesis and Exodus, traditionally associated with the Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E) sources. Hundley asserts that an angel in Genesis forms a general category whose members differ by way of function and purpose in each context, not by ranks. Further, they are only identified as messengers in a subordinate position to God and appear outside a temple context unexpectedly and in unrecognized forms.¹⁶

According to R. H. Jarrell, the angel whom Hagar encounters is in fact Yahweh. In Genesis 16, the angel is not an intermediary, but a being who has a role identical to that of the one God.¹⁷ Further, she points to both Barker and Irvin who argue that in the context of the Genesis 16 birth narrative, the character who promises a child, predicts the birth, and foretells the future of that child is always

¹³ Hundley, “Of Gods and Angels,” 4.

¹⁴ Traditionally, the angel – God distinction highlights underlying religio-theological and cultural politics of the time. One conviction of Israelite theology was to emphasize the distance between God and humanity (transcendence) with the clear notion that “no one can see God and live.” This pre-existing religio-theological framework influences the naming of the persona that Hagar encounters.

¹⁵ Hundley, “Of Gods and Angels,” 2–3.

¹⁶ Hundley notes that the Hebrew Bible nowhere claims that angels have wings in contrast to the ancient Near East. See Hundley, “Of Gods and Angels,” 8.

¹⁷ Ranald Jarrell, “The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant,” *JSOT* 97 (2002): 3–18, here 8.

without exception a god¹⁸ and that this account in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates Yahweh and the angel functioning not as two separate beings but as one entity.¹⁹ This perspective takes up identity theories and subsequently conflates both the angel and God as one being.

On the other hand, Westermann in rendering Genesis 16:9, 10 and 11 argues that these three occurrences are not possible in an ancient narrative and that the first two phrases may appear to be appendages to the original text.²⁰ This argument depends on the interpolation theories that insist that insertions and additions were made to the text to add clarity and for theological purposes.

Be that as it may, at this level, we have not agreed as to who this angel really is. Yet, if all these perspectives make sense in identifying the angel in Genesis 16, how can we therefore move forward on this subject? According to Revicky, Genesis 16:1–15 defies precise interpretation to date.²¹ Therefore, this opens room for multiple perspectives to inform meaning creation. Indeed, as many other sets of authors who presume their entitlement to the enterprise of biblical interpretation,²² so do African women theologians take their place at the table to add their voices to the meanings of biblical texts.

I suggest that we take the naming episode seriously, as African women theologians would foreground the experiences of women and use these as a plane for interpretation. Certainly, a characteristic of theology from the developing countries, is its multiplicity. According to the theologian Isabel Phiri, on the African continent, Christian women call reflection of their context and the Christian faith “African women’s theologies.” The term is denoted as “African women theologies” to acknowledge the fact that within Africa there is a diversity of women’s experiences due to differences in race, culture, politics, economy, and religions.²³ Therefore, this essay will not strive to conform to previous established interpretations, but summarily stated my reflections will be hinged upon characteristics of women’s theologies on the African continent.

¹⁸ Jarrell, “The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant,” 3–18. See also Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 32 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1978), 91.

¹⁹ Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 33.

²⁰ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. J.J Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1985), 245.

²¹ Bernadette Revicky, “Hagar, Maidservant of Sarai, ‘From what place have you come and where shall you go?’ A Rhetorical Critical Study of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21:8–21” (Unpublished Master Thesis: Andover Newton Theological School, 1980), 40.

²² Adele Reinhartz shows how different Jewish women proceed to write on the Bible, with a special focus on the matriarch Sarah. She traces work written for both academic and non-academic audiences in order to show the variety of biblical interpretations by Jewish women. See Adele Reinhartz, “Midrash She Wrote: Jewish Women’s Writing on the Bible,” *SHOFAR* 16.4 (1998): 6–27.

²³ Isabel Phiriri, “African Women’s Theologies in the New Millennium,” *Religion and Spirituality* 61 (2004): 16–24.

African women's theologies include first replacing hierarchies with mutuality, a "society sensitive" theology marked by emphasis on relations because African culture is very community-oriented and therefore requires all to be sensitive not only to the needs of others, but also to the well-being of the community as a whole.²⁴ Second, it is a consideration of inter-relationship being developed as women emphasize the inter-relationship of women and men as well as that of humans and the rest of creation. Third, it is conscious of multicultural and multi-religious contexts, to endeavor to be culturally sensitive and intentionally dialogue oriented. It undertakes dialogue between cultures as well as within cultures. Fourth, it operates with a developing cultural hermeneutic, to boldly criticize what is oppressive while advocating for the enhancement of what is liberating not only for women but for the whole community.²⁵

But why would exegetes cast doubt on the limited space for expression that the Egyptian slave has in the entire Hebrew Bible? Previously she has been spoken to, of, and was never allowed in the narrative to express herself verbatim. Why then would it be that in this limited arena of expression, it follows that she is underestimated or taken lightly as her experience is downplayed?

Hagar in Genesis 16 names her experience. Being a one-off occurrence, some have decided to term it awkward and Wyatt sees it as difficult.²⁶ Some simply ignore it or perhaps explain that it was never really valued in the tradition.²⁷ Others contend that the text itself is confusing with the themes of sight and seeing used at the same time.²⁸ However, others have taken this rather more seriously and argue that this is the only act of naming by a human to a deity in the Hebrew Bible.²⁹ Jarrell argues that Yahweh's relationship to Hagar in Genesis is integral to women in later Genesis narratives and throughout the Hebrew bible.³⁰ Further it is a power attributed to no one else in the Bible.³¹

I argue that Hagar's naming of the deity³² is key to understanding who the angel really is in three dimensions. The first dimension is that naming within

²⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 17.

²⁵ Oduyoye, *African Women's Theology*, 17.

²⁶ Nick Wyatt, "The meaning of El Roi and the Mythological Dimensions in Genesis 16," *SJOT* 8 (1994): 141–51, here 143.

²⁷ For example, Brueggemann demonstrates how this was insignificant in the traditions and thus not interrogated seriously. See Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 153.

²⁸ See Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 244.

²⁹ Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant," 10.

³⁰ Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant," 4.

³¹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 18.

³² The naming done by Hagar has been contested in different arenas. For some, Hagar's naming of the deity makes her a theologian. See Phyllis Trible, "The Other Woman: A literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honour of Bernard W. Anderson*, ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger (Sheffield:

African cultures is a revered function, when situated religiously. It is not everyone that names and this signifies the religious potency of the action. Naming is often situated within religious frames and not without. Therefore, it attracts good or evil depending on how it is undertaken. According to Mbiti, names are taken seriously in African cultures.³³

The second dimension is cognisance of that which one names it will become. This is in line with many African cultural beliefs surrounding naming, in that by naming a person so will a person be.³⁴ The deity in the encounter was not just named by Hagar for the present, but her words included what this deity should become to her in the future, going forward. In naming this divine entity as one who sees, Hagar is stating whom this deity is going to be to her and is totally convinced that the deity henceforth becomes these to her. This narrative of Hagar's life situates her within the full network of experiences and relationships that define her social location. Here is Hagar, a slave, surrogate, afflicted, misused, and abused African single woman as a resource for theology and her act of naming is worth taking seriously.

The third dimension is naming and social reality – where I look at the way naming is transformative of suffering in social life.³⁵ Whereas both Hagar and Mary are considered the only women a deity spoke to, who were not barren, and had an exchange with Yahweh in the biblical birth narratives,³⁶ I argue that Mary was singing after the encounter and Hagar was naming. This is indeed a powerful act of naming Yahweh, whereas Mary's reaction was to name herself as

JSOT Press, 1985), 221–46, here 244. However, Reis argues that Hagar's naming rather serves as her disservice, for she fails to recognize the Lord as the one all-encompassing God, unlike Abraham and Sarah, and that her name for the deity was as though he were the numen of a particular locality and phenomenon. Consequently, the deity would appear to Hagar and Ishmael only as Elohim and she lost the opportunity to have Ishmael as the child of promise. See Reis, "Hagar Requited," 93–94.

³³ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (London, Heinemann, 1991), 20–30; 82–97.

³⁴ Loreen Maseno-Ouma, *How Abanyole African Widows Understand Christ: Explaining Redemption Through the Propagation of Lineage* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014); Musimbi Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland: Pilgrims Press, 2002); Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*.

³⁵ Maseno-Ouma from empirical studies demonstrates the power of naming among the Abanyole of Kenya. In her work, she shows how widows return to a significant place of power in their lives in their ability to name their grandchildren, and this has religious and spiritual significance. Her study indicates that naming done by widows in rural Kenya is transformative of social life as it grants them the possibility of transporting lineage across space and time when they name their grandchildren and similarly Jesus Christ. See Maseno-Ouma, *How Abanyole African Widows Understand Christ*, 148–50 and 187–90.

³⁶ For a detailed rendering of birth narratives serving as a nexus that mediates between humans and Yahweh, Jarrell notes that in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament there are nine instances of a birth narrative, all of which follows a specific format. Of these nine, only two unmarried (non-barren) females experience a theophany and these are Hagar and Mary. See Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant," 4–8.

the servant of the Lord. Hagar, an individual who inevitably faces multiple conflicting experiences of subordination becomes as Irene Nowell would say, the only person in the Bible to give a name to God.³⁷ Yet Genesis 16 brings us to a significant place of power in her life given her ability to name God and this has religious and spiritual significance.³⁸

In general, Hagar's naming is borne out of a lived reality of oppression and affliction. Whereas others would be in a rejoicing mood after a theophany, she asserts her power to name and this is transformative to her and to what lies ahead. The act of naming by Hagar possesses theophanic significance.³⁹ To answer the question of who this angel really is, from the perspective of naming as highlighted above and as understood in many African cultures, it is my take that Hagar's naming of this deity has a futuristic component, that is to say, whom this deity would be to her and as such at the point of the narrative was yet to be fully actualized. This God who sees to Hagar can see beyond her to her descendants and as such foresee immeasurable generations of Hagar's living.⁴⁰ Yet, from Hagar's statement and noting that it is only God who is known to see all places, see generations of people to come, and see all things at all times, I submit that Hagar saw God, not an angel. However, this God she saw would, going forward, continue to be fully experienced by her.

D. Blurring of Boundaries

The last perspective builds upon the assertion that an angel introduces some element of distance from the divine presence. In Genesis 16, instead of fully articulating the relationship between God and the angel, this text in a way purposely blurs the boundaries, such that it is unclear where YHWH starts and the angel stops,⁴¹ thus providing a dialectic in which Hagar is given her rights and voice.⁴² Whereas Hundley would show that there is a blurring of boundaries between the angel and YHWH, drawing from my readings, I suggest that these are not the only boundaries blurred. They are also blurred between the angel and EL Roi, a tribal god of the Ishmaelites to whom EL was the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon.

It is clear that the story of Hagar makes it difficult to reconcile divine justice and compassion with the declaration from a divine agent to return to ones

³⁷ Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 16.

³⁸ See Maseno-Ouma, *How Abanyole African Widows Understand Christ*; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 105.

³⁹ Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant," 11.

⁴⁰ Reis, "Hagar Requited," 92.

⁴¹ Hundley, "Of God and Angels," 14.

⁴² See Kahl, "Hagar between Genesis and Galatians: The Stony Road to Freedom," 219–32.

afflicting master. This story functions to make God appear in dubious light,⁴³ for which others have insisted it poses a theological challenge which if ignored falsifies faith.⁴⁴ At the same time, outrage and shock is expressed at a God who saw the suffering of slaves in Egypt and delivered them yet who also identifies with the oppressor and orders a servant back to bondage and affliction. Hagar's rights do not count in the matrix of the claim that the blessing belongs only to Isaac and that God is invoked to sanction such a position.⁴⁵

According to Okoye, shall not the judge of the whole world act justly? Taking from Gunkel's argument,⁴⁶ Okoye shows that El Roi was a tribal god of the Ishmaelites whose chief sanctuary was at the spring Lahai-roi. As a founding matriarch of the Ishmaelite Bedouin tribe, Hagar's given name of Ishmael was prefixed on El, the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon. He sums up that the editor of Genesis 16:13 subsumed and subordinated the religious experiences of the Ishmaelites to those of Israel and therefore Hagar's god, a personal God El Roi, heard her cry and that this god who took Hagar's side has vanished to become only a secondary epithet of Yahweh.⁴⁷ What Okoye manages to do is to distinguish between the seemingly unjust god and the god of Hagar who sees her and comes to her aid.

An important norm and source for African women's theologies is African women's experience. Drawing from my ethnographic study of widows in rural Kenya, it was clear that, just like studies in antiquity, widows and orphans were the prime paradigms of the poor and the exploited. Thus, there is a consensus among scholars that widows are one category amongst many other categories of marginal groups. As marginalised and liminal persons, Christian widows in rural Kenya used various descriptions and labels to name divinity and in specific Jesus Christ. In my study, widows' christologies were open ended, ever emerging, and continued their multiplicity.⁴⁸ It was also clear that these christologies were assertions and not definitions. Further, these labels for deity, just like metaphors, shock, surprise, and provide new insight, while at the same time offering the possibility of encompassing the numerous attributes of Jesus Christ as perceived by the widows.⁴⁹

In the same vein, as these widows are expressing their legitimate experience with deity, their labels, such as Jesus Christ as breath or close kin, or medicine or provider, may seem meaningless to someone outside their world. An outsider may simply brush these off as excuses or even lean-on crutches. However, to

⁴³ Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 66.

⁴⁴ Tribble, "The other woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives," 239.

⁴⁵ Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 9–36.

⁴⁶ See Gunkel, "The Hagar Traditions," 73–75.

⁴⁷ See James Okoye, "Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," *JSOT* 32.2 (2007): 173–74.

⁴⁸ See Loreen Maseno, "Unbounded Christologies: The Case of Widows' Christology – 'Jesus Christ is Breath,'" *Scriptura* 114 (2015): 1–12.

⁴⁹ Maseno-Ouma, *How Abanyole African Widows Understand Christ*.

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