TAL ILAN

Silencing the Queen

Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 115

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115



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Silencing the Queen

The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Shlomit and Amitzur Ilan, may they live long and happily.

Acknowledgement

This book is about the silencing of Jewish women from post-biblical antiquity in a long transmission process, down to our times. It traces the methods used to accomplish this end, and while doing so, throws light on some obscure historical episodes, and suggests new readings for some well known (and other less known) texts.

This book has been a long time in the making. When I first began thinking about the kind of questions I address in it, I did not know it would turn out to be a book. In fact, it was not even clear to me that all the topics discussed therein are aspects of the same phenomenon. Therefore, most of chapters and subchapters in this book have, since 1992, appeared in various forms as independent articles. Yet in order to fit the program of this volume some of them have been so thoroughly reworked, that aside from some of the ideas voiced in them, they are hardly recognizable as descendents of the old articles. I give here a list of the previous publications where these issues were discussed. Obviously, the old publications should now be considered redundant.

- Introduction: "Learned Jewish Women in Antiquity," in H. Merkel and Beate Ego (eds.) *Religiöses Lernen in der biblischen frühjüdischen und frühchristlichen Überlieferung* (Tübingen 2005) 175–90.
- Chapter 1: "Queen Salamzion Alexandra and Judas Aristobulus I's Widow: Did Jannaeus Alexander Contract a Levirate Marriage?" *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 24 (1993) 181–90.
- Chapter 2: "Shelamzion in Qumran-New Insights," in D. Goodblatt, A. Pinnick and D. Schwartz (eds.), *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 27–31 January 1999; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 57–68.
- Chapter 3: "Folgenreiche Lektüren: Gender in Raschis Kommentar zum babylonischen Talmud," in Christiane Müller and Andrea Schatz (eds.), *Der Differenz auf der Spur: Frauen und Gender in Ashkenas* (Berlin 2004) 21–49.
 - "Rabbinic Literature and Women Studies: A Response to Shulamit Valler, Hannah Safrai and Judith Hauptman," in Renée Levine Melammed (ed.),

- "Lift Up Your Voice": Women's Voices and Feminist Interpretation in Jewish Studies (Tel Aviv 2001) 51–2 (Hebrew)
- "Paul and Pharisee Women" in Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach and Esther Fuchs (eds.), On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds. Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York, London 2003) 82–101.
- Chapter 4: "Patriarchy, The Land of Israel and the Legal Position of Jewish Women," *Nashim: Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 1 (1998) 42–50.
- Chapter 5: "Daughters of Israel Weep for Rabbi Ishmael' (mNedarim 9:11): The Schools of Rabbi Aqiva and Rabbi Ishmael on Women," Nashim: Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues 4 (2001) 15–34.
 - "The Wife of Tinius Rufus and Rabbi Akivah," *Massekhet* 3 (2005) 103–12 (Hebrew).
- Chapter 6: "Stolen Water is Sweet': Women and their Stories between Bavli and Yerushalmi," in P. Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Greco-Roman Culture* 3 (Tübingen 2002) 185–223.
- Chapter 7: "A Witch-Hunt in Ashkelon," in A. Sasson, Z. Safrai and N. Sagiv (eds.), Ashkelon: A City on the Seashore (Tel Aviv 2001) 135–46 (Hebrew).
 "Cooks/Poisoners; Healers/Killers; Religion/Witchcraft: Jewish Women's Religious Life at Home" in Elmer Kinger, Stephanie Böhm and Thomas Franz (eds.), Haushalt, Hauskult, Hauskirche: Zur Arbaitseilung der Geschlechter in Wirtschaft und Religion (Würzburg: Echter, 2004) 107–23.
 - "In the Footsteps of Jesus: Jewish Women in a Jewish Movement," in Ingrid Rosa Kitzberg (ed.), *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-Viewed* (Leiden 1999) 115–36.
 - "Man Born of Woman ...' (Job 14:1): The Phenomenon of Men Bearing Matronymes at the Time of Jesus," *Novum Testamentum* 34 (1992) 23–45.

In addition, many of these pieces were written as papers to be presented at various conferences.

Introduction: "Jewish Women in Eretz Israel" – Bar Ilan 2003.

- "Judaism as Wissenschaft, Wissenschaft as Judaism." Berlin 2003.
- "Religiöses Lernen im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum" Osnabrück 2003.
- "Social Sciences and the New Testament" section at the SBL Atlanta 2003.
- Chapter 2: Fourth International Symposium of the Orion Center Jerusalem 1999.
- Chapter 3: "How have Women Studies Influenced Jewish Studies" Jerusalem 1999.
 - "Women and Gender in Ashkenaz" Duisburg 1999.

SBL Annual Meeting – Orlando 1998.

"Gospels and Rabbinic Literature" seminar of the SNTS – Bonn 2003.

Chapter 6: "Finding a Home: Jewish Women's Studies in the Academy" – New York 1999.

"The Yerushalmi" - Princeton 2000.

Chapter 7: "Haushalt, Hauskult, Hauskirche: Zur Arbeitseilung der Geschlechter in Wirtschaft und Religion" – Würzburg 2002.

"The Beginnings of Christianity" – Tel Aviv 1996.

Chapter 8: Sixth International Conference on Jewish Names – Bar Ilan 2003.

I take this opportunity to thank the organizers of all these events (Friedrich Avemarie, Michael Brocke, Aaron Demski, Beate Ego, Andreas Gotzman, Judith Hauptman, Esther Hazon, Birgit Klein, Renée Levine-Melamed, Peter Schäfer, Margalit Shiloh, and others far too numerous to name) for giving me the opportunity to air my views on these topics and respond to comments and ideas raised by fellow scholars.

As always, the entire manuscript was carefully read and meticulously corrected by my friend and mentor, Judith Romney Wegner, to whom I am eternally grateful for saving me again and again from my own failings and inadequacies. I also wish to thank my student, Kathleen Kahn for producing the indices for this book. All errors in style and judgment that remain in the manuscript after her careful reading are, of course, entirely my own.

The translations of rabbinic texts throughout are my own. For biblical texts I have used the Revised Standard Version translation. Translations of classical texts are quoted from various editions mentioned throughout. I am grateful to Prof. Deborah Gera of the Hebrew University for assisting me in translating several Greek texts quoted in the Introduction, for which no published translation exists.

Finally I wish to explain a phenomenon the reader will notice throughout the text. Since this book is all about silencing techniques, in the margins I have placed signposts, instructing the reader at which point a certain form of silencing is being revealed. For those interested in using this study as a reference book for such processes, these signposts will be most useful.

The publication of this book follows close on my appointment to professor for Judaism at the Institut für Judaisitik at the Freie Universität, Berlin. I take the opportunity to thank the university and its administration, and especially Professor Giulio Busi, the head of the institute, for choosing me for the job.

Tal Ilan Berlin 2005

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Only once in Jewish history did the Jews have a legitimate queen. Her name was Shelamzion (Alexandra), she was the widow of the late king, Alexander Yannai and she ruled the Jewish people in the kingdom of Judaea between 76 and 67 BCE. If one takes this indisputable fact in one's stride, it is easy to produce inconsequential studies of her reign, as it was clearly short and relatively uneventful. Brief paraphrases of Josephus' description of her reign abound. Her reign, according to this assessment was, in fact, so uninteresting that one major twentieth-century historian saw fit to skip over her reign altogether. Thus wrote W.W. Tarn over this period: "The twenty years after Jannaeus' death were merely years of war between his sons Hyrcanus II, the High Priest, and Aristobulus II." Yet for scholars interested in women and politics and women and power, who are aware that, throughout Jewish history, the story of women is one of powerlessness, the very existence of the queen is astounding. As a unique event, the rule

¹ It is true that the Bible relates the rule of Athaliah in the Kingdom of Judaea as a dangerous precedent. On her rule see e.g. Nancy R. Bowan, "The Quest for the Historical *Gĕbîrâ*," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63 (2001) 606–8; Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in the Biblical Narrative* (JSOT Supplement Series 21; Sheffield 1985) 28–31 and see below, Chapter 1.

² See only recently S. Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judaean State* 1 (Philadelphia 1968) 337-42; J. Klausner, "Queen Salome Alexandra," in Abraham Schalit (ed.), The World History of the Jewish People VI: The Hellenistic Age (London: 1972) 242-254; E. Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135) 1, eds. G. Vermes and F. Millar (Edinburgh 1973) 229-32; J. Goldstein, "The Hasmonean Revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty," in W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein (eds.), The Cambridge History of Judaism 2 (Cambridge 1989) 343-6; L.L. Grabbe, Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian I: The Persian and Greek Periods (Minneapolis 1992) 304-6. I include under this rubric also the recent article of E. Baltrusch, "Königin Salome Alexandra (76-67 v. Chr) und die Verfassung des Hasmonäischen Staat," Historia 50 (2001) 163-79, even though he is much more aware of these pitfalls than other scholars, for he writes: "[Sie ist] von der Forschung recht stiefmütterlich behandelt" (p. 163). He is also aware of cases where other scholars are taken in by Josephus' or the rabbis' rhetoric (e.g. pp. 176-7 against Zeitlin) but he himself is taken in by the same rhetoric, e.g. on p. 164, where he writes that "[Alexandra] übernahm die Herrschaft, obwohl sie zwei erwachses Söhne, Hyrkan und Aristobul hatte" which is a direct citation of Josephus AJ 13:407, without actually citing his sources, indicating that he too is of this opinion.

³ W.W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization* (Third edition 1952; copied from the paperback version Clinton MA 1974) 236. I wish to thank Etka Leibowitz for drawing my attention to this.

of a woman over the Jews raises a range of questions hitherto unexplored. This study takes as its starting point the reign of Shelamzion.

However, this book is not only about this Jewish queen. Rather it is a book about reading practices. Texts are literary compositions, most of them highly rhetorical, and their compilation, composition, editing, copying, and transmission took place through a long process in which they were reviewed, reread, corrected and corrupted. The reading practices I wish to highlight here are not new to feminists. I wish to show how, when reading for women and gender, we must always keep in mind that women, and a fortiori much more so queens, are anomalous for all the texts we consult. In the process of texts passing from one hand to the other, even all the way down to modern scholars, anomalous women have been treated as textual mistakes which need to be eliminated or manipulated or interpreted so as to fit into the reader's limited concept of what women could and did achieve through history. In other words, even before women were written into a text, someone was already writing them out. Yet no one is ever satisfied with the work of his predecessor. Women who had survived the earliest critical approach of an author were regularly silenced in the work of the next scholar who used his work. Often the original work has not survived; only the thoroughly edited version of the second author has come down to us. What this process failed to uproot, well-wishing copyists deleted. What they missed, Medieval commentators reviled. What they failed to notice, modern scholars have systematically dismissed and corrected. When I first set out on this expedition into gender country I thought that this elimination phenomenon, which I designated "censorship," was marginal and amusing, evident occasionally in the texts, and deserving a footnote here and there, or a short publication at most.4 Today I have become convinced that, in studying women and ancient texts, this is the most dominant and decisive feature, which scholars should seek out relentlessly. This study is a compilation of many studies I have undertaken over the last few years, and the silencing phenomenon stands out as the characteristic they all share.

In the preface to my second book *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden 1997): I had written: "This book is a second in a trilogy on Jewish women in Greco-Roman antiquity and in the methods which should best be used in order to uncover their history. When I wrote my Ph.D., which was the first of the planned trilogy (*Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* [Tübingen 1995]) I did not know that it was only going to become Part I of a larger work. I thought the issue of Jewish women could be tackled, mastered and then removed, in order to make way for other (probably more important) topics of research. In this I had been in error. Studying women's

⁴ See Tal Ilan *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden 1997) 51–84.

history is dissimilar to the study of any given issue in history, excluding history itself. Writing women's history is, in fact, most similar to writing the other half of the existing historical corpus. It is, as feminists would have it, writing Herstory. The trilogy, of which this book is a respected second, is in fact a preparation for a planned magnum opus, a textbook of the complete Jewish history of the Greco-Roman period which will consciously relate the story of both Jewish women and men. Thus, my aim in this book, as well as in the previous one and the ones to come, is first and foremost to relate history – certainly feminist history, but history nevertheless." Reading my own writing as a text to be interpreted. I am not quite sure how to understand these words. Do I mean here that my third book in the trilogy will also be part of the preparation for my magnum opus or is the third book itself intended to fulfil that function? I think I had meant the latter, but as it stands in print this is not, by any means, certain. In any case, a third book, Integrating Women into Second Temple History (Tübingen 1999) did follow, and it was certainly not the magnum opus as I had imagined in my preface, but rather a collection of loosely connected studies on Jewish women and gender. I had compiled that book at a time when I was producing much additional research on Jewish women. I felt that this research needed to be collected together, occasionally to demonstrate how some of the methodology of the second book can be applied and occasionally so as to demonstrate where reading more sources and adding more data into our corpus on Jewish women can enrich our knowledge on the topic. The present book began as an additional collection of the same order. However, meanwhile I have noticed how the issue of silencing has come to pervade every aspect of it, and I have also noticed what a major role Queen Shelamzion Alexandra occupies in my thinking on this period. In this respect it is closer in character to my second book, which was both about methodology and used the character of Rabbi Akiva's wife as thread on which to string all my beads of methodology. The topic of the present study is women and power. Its methodological underpinnings will be ways of silencing women, and Queen Shelamzion will take up the role of the common thread. In any case, this too is not the magnum opus I had promised.

To highlight my intentions, I will dedicate the remainder of the introduction to three short studies on women in power, on the silencing of women and on Shelamzion as a representative of this process. In all three I will analyze texts of major importance for the understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

⁵ Ibid., xi.

1. Women and Power: Subordination as Defining the 'Natural' Gendered Order

The question of women's power and of women in power has been the subject of many philosophical debates and treatises in antiquity as well as in later times. The Jews too had their share in this debate. In a previous study I discussed three Jewish compositions, one biblical (Esther) and two apocryphal (Judith and Susannah) and showed how they can be viewed as partaking in this debate. I suggested that all three were composed in support of the queenship of Shelamzion Alexandra in the first century BCE and concluded that "Esther Judith and Susanna are contributions to the theoretical debate on the nature of women and their competence as political leaders. The books do not openly promote women's leadership, nor are they revolutionary in nature. Yet they do question some of the suppositions of their day on the 'natural order', in which men should rule over women."6 Aside from a short note, on one of the wisdom utterances in the Letter of Aristeas,7 I did not discuss the texts, which actually formulate what this natural order should be. In this chapter I will refer to two Jewish texts that present the common worldview on the topic. As befits a book that covers Jewish history from the Hellenistic conquest to the Byzantine period. they will be two stories, which date from the very beginning and the very end of the period under discussion in this book. The earlier is from the apocryphal Book of Ezra (henceforth 3 Ezra), usually identified as the oldest composition in the Apocrypha, and somewhat older than some of the books in the Bible.8 The second is an episode recorded in the *Bavli*, which should probably be dated to the sixth or seventh century CE. They are separated one from the other by almost a thousand years. Yet, as is also fitting for a book that concentrates on a Jewish woman of the late Hellenistic period, the two present themselves as describing an earlier period – the period of Persian domination and its aftermath. This is an epoch that inspired most of the court narratives in the Jewish as well as the surrounding world of many generations. The story from 3 Ezra refers to the time of King Darius (perhaps Darius I, 522-485 BCE) and the Talmud is interested in Alexander the Great, who put an end to the Persian Achimaenid Empire (332–323 BCE), both having predated Shelamzion by at least two and a

⁶ Tal Ilan, Integrating Women into Second Temple History (Tübingen 1999) 153.

⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁸ See J.M. Myers, *I and II Esdras* (The Anchor Bible; New York 1974) 8–15 who dates the book to the 2nd C CE. For attempts to date the particular episode under discussion here see C.C. Torrey, "The Story of the Three Youths," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 23 (1906) 179–85; A. Schalit, "Date and Place of the Story about the Three Bodyguards of the King in the Apocryphal Book of Ezra," *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* 13 (1947/8) 119–28 (Hebrew).

⁹ L.M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (Harvard Dissertations in Religion 26; Minneapolis 1990) 39–74.

half centuries. Also, the two show a pronounced interest in the power of women over and against the power of kings, both are compositions that fall within the genre of wisdom literature, and both approach the topic from the point of view of literary irony. I shall, however, first present and discuss the later of the two texts, not because it in any way chronologically predates the other, but because it formulates most completely the division of power and powerlessness between the sexes in Jewish antiquity. I shall then present the earlier text, because, while completely endorsing the first text's outlook, it also defines the shortcomings of these assumptions, particularly with reference to royal women, among whom the king's wife is paramount.

a. bTamid 32a-b

This text relates the meeting of Alexander the Great of Macedonia with a nation composed solely of women. It is related within the context of a series of stories about this great Gentile king, in which he tests the wisdom of the Jews and becomes a convert to their ways of thinking. There is little doubt that these stories belong to the grand "Alexander Romance" traditions, which developed in countries that had formerly been conquered by Alexander. The Alexander Romance is probably the rightful heir, in the late Hellenistic and early Roman period, to the court legends of Persian and Hellenistic times. It also belongs to the wisdom genre, in that it relates conversations between the king and his subjects, in which the latter, who are obviously weaker, excel. The Jews also took part in this great literary project, and according to scholars, left a lasting imprint on the genre. Aside from their universal contribution to the Alexander novel, they also preserved their own unique strand of these compositions, whose origins go back to Josephus and continue into the middle ages, and of which a vital link is rabbinic literature, and at its pinnacle the *Bavli*.

¹⁰ On these texts see R.A. Freund, "Alexander Macedon and Antoninus: Two Greco-Roman Heroes of the Rabbis," in M. Mor (ed.), *Crisis and Reaction: The Heroes in Jewish History* (Studies in Jewish Civilization 6; Omaha 1995) 22–47; R. Stoneman, "Jewish Traditions on Alexander the Great," *The Studia Philonica Annual* 6 (1994) 45–51.

Wills, Court of Foreign King, 70-4.

¹² On the Jewish redactor of the C recension of the Alexander Romance, see F. Pfister, "Alexanders Heiligung durch das ägyptische Judentum," in *Alexander der Grosse in den Offenbarung der Griechen, Juden, Mohammedaner und Christen* (Deutche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin: Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft 3; Berlin 1956) 24–35. On the non-Jewish character of recension B see T. Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans* (Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophische-historische Klasse 38; Wien 1890) 25–7. This was obviously written in answer to an earlier claim that that recension is Jewish too.

¹³ In the Middle Ages, Hebrew Alexander Romances abounded, see W.J. van Bekkum, *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS London, Jews College, no. 145* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 47; Leuven 1992) 1–34.

The text we are viewing runs as follows:

And [Alexander of Macedonia] went to that region where only women [reside]. He wanted to make battle against them. They said to him: If you kill us, they will call you "a king who slays women." If we kill you, they will call you: "A king slain by women." He said to them: Bring me bread. They brought him gold bread on a golden table. He said to them: Do people eat gold bread? They said to him: If you had [simply] wanted bread, had you no bread in your country that you left and came here? When he left he wrote on the gate of the region: I, Alexander of Macedonia, was a fool, until I came to the African country of women and was advised by women (bTamid 32a-b).

The source of this story is clearly found in the Alexander Romance. Already the earliest sources on Alexander the Great relate his meeting with Amazons – a race of women warriors. ¹⁴ Arrian, considered the most reliable of the Alexander sources, relates how the satrap of Media, who paid homage to the Alexander, presented him with one hundred female warriors, whom Arrian identified as Amazons. Alexander released the women and "bade them announce to their queen that he was coming to see her in hope of offspring" (Arrian, *Annabasis*, 7:13). Arrian doubted the veracity of this report, writing: "this neither Aristobulus nor Ptolemaeus nor any other reliable author on such matter has recorded. I do not myself think that the race of Amazons survived so long" (*ibid.*). Arrian's doubts notwithstanding, in the next generation of Alexander histories, the Amazon story is related as a well-known fact. Quintus Curtius informs us that Alexander was met by the Queen of the Amazons, Thalestris, who asked him for a child, and he complied by cohabiting with her thirteen days (*History of Alexander* 6:5:25–32). This story has all the qualities of a romance.

Curiously, this romantic tale is not mentioned as such in any of the recensions of the Alexander Romance. Instead, Alexander's meeting with the Amazons is portrayed already in the early A version of the composition as hostile. When Alexander's train reached the lands of the Amazons, the latter approached the king with a threat. They boasted that they were great warriors, devoted to the defense of their country, and had never been defeated. They ended their speech by stating that:

If we conquer the enemy or put them to flight, that is regarded as a humiliation for them for the rest of time. But if they conquer us, it is only women that they have defeated.¹⁵

Disappointingly, despite the women's wise claim, the story ends with the Amazons submitting to Alexander's benevolent terms of surrender and paying him an annual tribute.

The *talmudic* rendition of the Amazon story is a literary reworking of this episode, mingled with other material associated with the Alexander Romance,

¹⁴ I have previously discussed the Amazons within the context of Jewish literature, see my *Integrating Women*, 129–32.

¹⁵ Translation by R. Stoneman, The Greek Alexander Romance (London 1991) 144.

and is developed in such a way as to present a strong anti-colonial argument. While Alexander retains his benevolent character of the Alexander Romance literature, he at the same time also represents the ultimate manifestation of pursuit of power and conquest. This development is particularly important within the literature of the peoples subdued by Alexander. The women of this episode play a vital role in this reworking, because they come to represent the ultimate weakness of conquered peoples. Their story is incorporated in the Bavli, almost in the middle of a chain of stories about Alexander, most of which have parallels in the Alexander Romance and elsewhere in the Alexander tradition. However, the stories have undergone a subtle process of conversion to Judaism. The first story is a long encounter between Alexander and the sages of the Negev (south). As has been shown by many, 16 this is a reworking of the story of Alexander's encounter with the Indian sages – Brahmins or Gymnosophists. Arrian already relates a similar episode (Anabasis 7:5-6), also containing an anti-colonial diatribe. The Brahmins are reputed to have said to Alexander: "each man possesses just so much of the earth as on which we stand; and you, being a man like other men ... not so long hence you will die and will possess just so much of the earth as suffices for your burial." Obviously these words include criticism of Alexander's design to possess the entire world, and of the great journeys of conquest intended to carry out his plan.

The story of the Gymnosophists receives additional coloring and flavoring in its reworking by Plutarch (Alexander 64). There they are described as people who had supported an Indian rebellion against Alexander and thus deserve to die, for they adhere to a subversive, anti-colonial point of view. Before their execution, however, they engage with Alexander in a contest of questions and answers. In this competition, the Indian sages expand on the anti-colonialist sentiments voiced by the Gymnosophists of Arrian. One of them is asked why he supported the rebellion against Alexander, to which he replied "Because I wished (the leaders of the rebellion) either to live nobly or to die nobly." According to this sage, living under occupation is ignoble. Another sage, asked how a man could be most loved, answered with the words: "If he is most powerful and does not inspire fear." Fear, in this answer, probably refers to a reign of terror, and is a form of advice to Alexander not to carry out his design to execute the elders. As in most wisdom accounts, the wise men win the day. Alexander is dissuaded from his earlier plans and instead bestows gifts on them and sends them away.

The Jewish version of Alexander's conversation with the sages (of the Negev) is no less subversive and anti-colonial. The sages of the Negev (or south), as has been shown by Freund, could, of course, refer to sages of India. However, since the word "Negev," aside from meaning 'south' in general, also connotes

¹⁶ See primarily in Freund, "Alexander Macedon," 22-47.

a region in Land of Israel, the rabbis have most likely converted these Indians into Jews. 17 This becomes evident because some of the questions that Alexander asks them (Who is wise? Who is brave? Who is rich?) receive answers quoted directly from the mishnaic tractate Avot. These answers, already in their original context, have an obvious character of subversive wisdom, by exalting weakness and meekness. He who is brave controls his desire. He who is rich is content with what he possesses (mAvot 4:1). Both answers are critical of Alexander's project. Putting them in the mouth of the sages of the Negev strongly suggests that these are the sages of Israel. This is further supported by their response to his question, which was created first, light or darkness? The rabbis refrain from answering Alexander, not because they do not know, but because rabbinic law requires that matters of creation not be discussed with people who are not initiated into a specific circle of elect (mHagigah 2:1). From our point of view it is important to note that the question Alexander asked in Plutarch's version. about how to gain the people's love, is repeated in an almost exact parallel in this version. The rabbi's answer, however, is even more subversive than the one in Plutarch - "he should hate kingship and sovereignty." This, like some of the previous answers alludes to a saying in the mishnaic tractate Avot: "love the worship [of God] but hate [earthly] power, and do not get involved with the authorities" (mAvot 1:10). Since these sentiments are much stronger than those voiced by the Gymnosophists in criticism of Alexander's colonial project, it is left to Alexander to challenge them with the words of the Indian sages: "he said to them: my (answer) is better than yours. He should rule mercifully and do good to (his) people." Further on, we also learn that the Sages of the Negev, like their Gymnosophist counterparts, resist Alexander's rule, for he inquires of them, much like Plutarch's Alexander, "Why did you refuse to receive me" - to which they reply, "Satan has won." This answer could mean either that they were overcome by an evil power, when they refused to accept him, but it could also mean that Alexander himself is compared to Satan. Thus the discussion with the sages ends with Alexander's rule being viewed as, if anything, problematic.

Alexander, impressed with the sages' wisdom, rewards them and then asks them to guide him to Africa. He follows their instructions and comes to the land of women described above. When he leaves that country he visits the gate to the Garden of Eden and receives a gift which he does not understand – an eyeball, which is heavier than gold and silver. He then approaches the rabbis, who explain to him its significance: it is men's eyes, which are forever greedy for more gold and silver. Again the answer alludes to Alexander's insatiable appetite for more wealth, which has led him on in his conquests. The wise men

¹⁷ Freund, "Alexander Macedon and Antoninus," 35–6. Freund's synoptic review of this question-answer session between Plutarch, the Alexander Romance and the *Talmud* (pp. 36–45) is very instructive.

he approaches are no longer designated "Sages of the Negev" but simply rabbis. Their conversion to Judaism has been completed.

The story of Alexander's encounter with the women is placed in the middle of Subordination this literary unit, after his long encounter with the sages of the Negev, and before his renewed appeal to rabbinic wisdom. 18 The women are described as residing in Africa, and so obviously are not Jewish; yet their dialogue with Alexander is the most blatantly anti-colonialist in the entire composition. Between the two sections in which the sages of Israel best Alexander in their wisdom, and point out the futility of his quest, we find women besting him as well. If the idea embedded in the stories of Alexander's encounter with foreign sages is to show how the king could learn wisdom from his weaker subjects, it is further enforced by his confrontation with women. For if the sages of Israel can be presented as weak yet wise, how much more so can a nation of women, who are even weaker, and obviously at the bottom of the ladder of power? Israel might be in a weak position vis a vis Alexander but they are nevertheless in a stronger position than women. Many scholars have recently argued for the position that the rabbis often feminize themselves in their fantasies, whether vis-à-vis God or vis-à-vis Rome and its might. Yet they also agree that this feminization quickly develops alternative ways of subjecting and subordinating women.¹⁹ The irony of our

¹⁸ In another part of this book I discuss in detail the feminist implications for the development of stories from the Land of Israel to the Babylon setting. This story too originated in the Land of Israel, but its development follows another pattern. As has been shown above, one of the sources of this story is found in the texts of the Alexander romance, reflecting Alexander's encounter with the Amazons. The other part, however, the one in which the women feed Alexander with golden bread, is influenced by two stories from the Land of Israel - one in the Yerushalmi and one in the early midrash Leviticus Rabbah, both predating the Bavli. In the Yerushalmi we are informed of Alexander meeting an anonymous king of a place called Kazia. The king dispenses justice between two of his subjects who dispute the ownership of some money by suggesting that they marry their son and daughter to each other and they will thus share the disputed property. Alexander remarks that in his country such a dispute would have ended with the king executing both parties and taking the money for himself. On this the King of Kazia remarks to himself, that Alexander must indeed be very fond of gold (yBM2:3, 8c). This theme is further developed in Leviticus Rabbah. Here Alexander goes to the King of Kazia in Africa where he encounters a land completely ruled by women. These women seem to be subjects of the King of Kazia. Their dialogue is similar to the one in the Bavli. After commending their wisdom, he goes to another country in the region and is served with gold bread. Then he views the King of Kazia dispensing justice. The story does not end with the king's comment on Alexander's love of gold, because that issue has been taken care of in the previous anecdote. Rather it ends with the King of Kazia's condemnation of Alexander's land, because of its injustice (Leviticus Rabbah 27). This combination of stories already contains a grain of anti-colonial criticism. The women mock Alexander for his desire to conquer their land and he rewards them by declaring them wiser than he is. The people of Africa feed him gold bread, because, had he wanted plain bread, he could have stayed at home. And the King of Kazia demonstrates to him how 'real' justice is dispensed. It remains for the Babylonian rabbis to combine all the elements into one story.

¹⁹ The idea of the rabbis' self-feminization, and consequently, the problematization of their relationship $vis \ avis$ women as weak, or weaker has been well developed by H. Eilberg-

story is that the weak may enter a wisdom contest and that the weakest may yet win it. And it is precisely their weakness card that the women play in this game. They are women, they claim, and a victory over them will bring no glory, since it will be a victory over an inherently weak opponent. Glory is attained only by overcoming insurmountable odds. On the other hand, a defeat (if such could be imagined) would immediately bring shame to the king, since it is to the weakest enemy possible that the king had succumbed – women. This answer is in itself a victory. Unlike the Alexander Romance, in which Alexander acknowledges the truth of the Amazons' claim, but nevertheless threatens them and cajoles them so that they succumb to him, in our story the women's victory of wisdom is not snatched away. A truce is celebrated in the form of a banquet. In this scene the women's wisdom is enhanced and they become the most blatant anti-colonialists in the entire story chain. Alexander's entire project, according to their approach, is pointless and foolish. If it is not for their golden bread that he had come so far, he should leave, because other bread he could also have found in his country. Their victory is complete. Without shedding a drop of blood Alexander leaves their country crowning them as his most successful teachers. Yet their victory is pyrrhic because it does not empower them but rather celebrates their subjugation and subordination.

b. 3 Ezra 3-4²⁰

Chapters 3 and 4 in 3 Ezra comprise a famous interpolation into an otherwise almost biblical account of the exploits of Ezra and his contemporaries. It tells of the three bodyguards of King Darius who set up a contest in rhetoric, in which each was expected to try and persuade the audience, and particularly the king, which thing, in his opinion, is the strongest in the world. The winner of the contest, the third speaker, was Zerubbabel, and in reward for his wisdom he was allowed to bring the temple utensils back to Jerusalem. As many have shown, this interpolation is a commonplace folktale, of no unique Jewish character, inserted into a Jewish composition.²¹ Whether it is Greek,²² Aramaic²³ or perhaps

Schwartz, God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism (Boston 1994) 163–96; J. Neusner, Androgynous Judaism: Masculine and Feminine in the Dual Torah (Mcon GA 1993) 125–55 and D. Boyarin, Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man (Berkeley 1997) 81–150.

²⁰ This section I presented as a lecture in a conference in Berlin in September 2003 entitled: "Judaism as Wissenschaft, Wissenschaft as Judaism."

²¹ Myers, *I and II Esdras*, 53 with some bibliography. The most complete treatment of this issue is found in the unpublished doctoral dissertation of W. R. Goodman, *A Study of I Esdras* 3:1–5:6 (Duke University 1971). Others also endorse this view, and see below.

²² So according to R. Laqueur, "Ephoros: 1. Die Proömien," *Hermes* 46 (1911) 168–72 (footnote).

²³ So C.C. Torrey, "The Nature and Origin of 'First Esdras'," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 23 (1906) 123–35.

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