Dedicated to Chava,
with honor and gratitude
for twenty-five years of intimate friendship
Karen King has remarked that generally when male cultural products speak of women, it is sexuality that is the subject and not women. Men often think “with women” as a tool for thought about men’s own bodies and their affect—fears, desires, and ideologies about sexuality. Accordingly, a misogynistic representation of woman must necessarily include at least a component, if not more, of negation of the male body as well, a negation that in effect stigmatizes it as female. Such disavowal of the body may indeed be the dominant factor in misogynist discourse, and misogyny often goes together historically with misogamy—hatred of marriage—as, notoriously, in Juvenal and throughout the Middle Ages (Bloch 1987; Wilson and Makowski 1990). I propose to test this historical thesis here by comparing two complexly related cultural formations, that of Hellenism and that of rabbinic Judaism, which operates primarily as a sort of resistance movement against Hellenism. I will try to demonstrate some fairly intricate cultural negotiations between the Rabbis and the circumambient culture around ideologies of sexuality as signified in accounts of the first woman. In the course of the discussion I will propose that the accepted characterization of rabbinic gender discourse as monolithically misogynistic is imprecise and in serious need of nuancing.

There were two types of androcentric social formations in late-antique Judaism: Hellenistic Judaism(s), in which the flesh was abhorred and women and sexuality were feared as a central theme of the culture, and rabbinic Judaism, in which the flesh was greatly valued and women and sexuality were controlled as highly prized essentials.1 Hatred and fear of women, as

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1. The distinction between Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism is, in my view, not geographical (i.e., not Palestine versus the Diaspora) so much as chronological. I see the rabbinic movement as in large part a rejection movement against the Hellenization of much of first-century Judaism, including that of Palestine. This Hellenization, unlike the Seleucid one, did not involve the adoption of the “hedonistic”
such and as a central theme of culture, develop in Hellenistic Judaism out of a disposition toward procreation that can be traced to certain Greek cultural sources fundamentally different from the biblical one. Although contending forces were also present in Greek culture itself, the themes represented and canonized in Hellenism—primarily the story of Pandora—seem to emphasize the negation and disavowal of reproduction and the creature of women.3

PHILO’S EVE

A crucial key to all interpretations of the biblical account of the origins of the sexes is the realization that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 have contradictory accounts, as shown above in Chapter 1. The former suggests that humanity was male and female from the beginning, while the latter seems to suggest that the first human was male, and the female came later. Most early commentators attempt to resolve this contradiction in one fashion or another, and the resolutions are ideologically significant to high degree. Philo opines that there are two different beings that the Bible calls “human,” corresponding exactly to the two descriptions of creation or another, and the resolutions are ideologically significant to high degree. Philo opines that there are two different beings that the Bible calls “human,” corresponding exactly to the two descriptions of creation in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. The first is purely spiritual and androgynous in its incorporeal nature, while the second has a body and a gender that is male.4 This second, corporeal male human being required that a female counterpart be created for it to assuage its loneliness and provide for continuation of the species. It is this very relationship of secondariness which is so important for Philo, for in his platonistic thought secondariness in time is a figure for lower ontological status. Accordingly, the corporeal female is twice-fallen, once from the first Adam of pure spirit and once more from the male, who in Philo’s scheme represents “mind.” And all this takes place, as Bloch emphasizes rightly, before the “apple” is eaten. The very coming into being of woman is already the Fall.4 Describing the existence of the second man, Philo says:

But since no created thing is constant, and things mortal are necessarily liable to changes and reverses, it could not but be that the first man too should experience some ill fortune. And woman becomes for him the beginning of blameworthy life. For so long as he was by himself, as accorded with such solitude, he went on growing like to the world and like God, and receiving in his soul the impressions made by the nature of each, not all of these, but as many as one of mortal composition can

Philo does write, “And when Moses had called the genus ‘man,’ quite admirably did he distinguish its species, adding that it had been created ‘male and female’, and this though the individual members had not yet taken shape” (1952b, 61). I think that Wegner has slightly misread Philo here. By “species” and “genus,” I think he means logical genus and species and not biological ones. Although it is still not identical to the passages I have cited above, this interpretation renders the passage less of a contradiction of Philo’s explicit claim that the first human, in the image of God, was androgynous, owing to the analogy of souls, which are both male and female because they are neither male nor female. This minor disagreement, however, does not materially affect my total agreement with the thesis of Wegner’s paper.

5. As Bloch formulates it (not specifically with reference to Philo, but appropriately applied to him):

Adam’s chronological priority implies a whole set of relations that strike to the heart not only of medieval sign theory, but to certain questions of ontology that make it apparent that the Fall, commonly conceived to be the original sin—-the cause and justification—of medieval antifeminism, is merely a fulfillment of logical conclusion of that which is implicit to the creation of Adam and then Eve. For the woman of the Yahwist version, conceived from the beginning as secondary, derivative, supernumerary, and supplemental, assumes, within the founding articulation of gender of the first centuries of Christianity, the burden of all that is inferior, debased, scandalous, and perverse.

(Bloch 1991a, 25)

I would emphasize, however, that what Bloch leaves out here is the necessity of an interpretation for this set of values to be internalized. The text of the Bible itself certainly does not automatically give rise to either the ontological or the axiological notions Bloch lists. I shall be dealing with this point more fully in a forthcoming article in

Paragraph. See also n. 6.
find room for. But when woman too had been made, beholding a figure like his own and a kindred form, he was gladdened by the sight, and approached and greeted her. She, seeing no living thing more like herself than he, is filled with glee and shamefacedly returns his greeting. Love supervenes, brings together and fits into one the divided halves, as it were, of a single living creature, and sets up in each of them a desire for fellowship with the other with a view to the production of their like. And this desire begat likewise bodily pleasure, that pleasure which is the beginning of wrongs and violation of the law, the pleasure for the sake of which men bring on themselves the life of mortality and wretchedness in lieu of that of immortality and bliss.

(Philo 1929b, 123; emphasis added)

Two themes are combined in this passage of Philo, the two ingredients I identify as endemic to the discourse of misogyny. The first is woman as misfortune, not merely after the fact—contingently, as it were—but necessarily—essentially—misfortune. The second is the ontologically secondary status of the gendered human, and "woman" as the name for that entity which produces gender. Both of these motives are absent from the Bible, and indeed from subsequent rabbinic literature, but have antecedents in canonical Greek texts and notably in Hesiod.

THE RABBIS' EVE

The rabbinic portrayals of woman's origin and role are quite different from that of Philo and also quite varied internally. For much of the midrashic tradition, Genesis 1:27 is interpreted as a literal statement of the first human's creation as male and female. The first human is portrayed as physically androgynous, and what we are caught in Genesis 2:22 is that the androgyne needed to be split into the two sexes.8 Perhaps one of the most elegant ways of focusing on the difference in the hermeneutics of Eve between the Philenic and rabbinic formations has to do with the role assigned to the snake. In Philo, the snake stands for pleasure embodied, especially the carnal pleasure that the male has in intercourse with the female.9 Philo actually refers to the snake as "Eve's snake" (Philo 1929, 275); she is not his victim, but rather he is her agent, indeed her inevitable retinue.10 For once Eve was created, it was inevitable that the snake (= pleasure) would threaten Adam's bliss ("it could not but be that the first man too should experience some ill fortune") and entrap him ("that pleasure which is the beginning of wrongs"). Woman, whom Philo equates with sexuality, is an ill fortune.11 When notions such as these were combined in Philo with platonic dualism, and woman as the sign of corporeality was thereby committed to the realm of the senses, indeed construed as the realm of the senses, the scene was set for the production of the systematic misogyny which has plagued Western cultures ever since.

Philo had an overwhelming effect on the formation of early Christian...

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8. Bloch comments that "the suppression of the story of the simultaneous creation of man and woman has far reaching implications for the history of sexuality in the West. Who knows! If the spirit of this 'lost' version of Creation had prevailed, the history of the relation between the genders, beginning for example with the Fall, might have been otherwise. Yet the primary Genesis has been all but forgotten except for recent attempts among feminist biblical scholars to apply the force of what is seen as an original egalitarian intent" (1991a, 23). He thus portrays an occlusion as complete and original, the occlusion of the woman and the story of equal origin for the sexes. I mean, of course, the occlusion of the Yehaddi and Jewish hermeneutic discourse from "the history of sexuality in the West."

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7. As Philo says explicitly (1929a, 271). Dorothy Sly has pointed out that the standard translation there elides the clear sense of the Greek that it is the pleasure of the male with the female which is being spoken of (Sly 1990, 109).

8. Note that even the midrashic text cited below does not indicate that the snake is an essential attribute or companion of Eve but only that she functioned in the moment as Adam's temptress just as the snake had tempted her. The second text quoted, to the effect that Satan was created together with the woman, is much closer to Philo.

9. It should be noted, however, that since in the biblical text itself, Eve is positively evaluated as the "Mother of All Living," Philo does not assign her or sexuality only a negative value. Moreover, the term "helpers," for all of its connotations of subservience, is one that he can only read as having a positive valence, because help itself is clearly positively marked. On this, Dillon writes, "It seems true to say that in Philo's thought there is present the recognition of a female life-principle assisting the supreme God in his work of creation and administration, but also somehow fulfilling the role of mother to all creation. If this concept reveals contradictions, that is perhaps because Philo himself was not quite sure what to do with it" (1977, 164). Similarly, for Philo in his allegorical interpretation, "woman" is the sense, and the import is that sense is something that cannot be done without, something that has a positive role to play, however disturbing, in human life. This understanding on the allegorical level has its parallel on the literal level and even in practice, for in Philo, I think, literal women have about the same status as their signified, the senses, do in the allegorical meaning. That is, in Peter Brown's words, they are "an irritable but necessary aspect of existence" (1987, 266-67). For Philo on women in general, see Sly 1990. In this, as in other ways, Philo represents a relatively moderate position that would later be radicalised. Thus, while he ascribes spiritual meaning to the commandments, he also requires their observance and berates those who substitute the allegorical entirely for the literal observance, and while he approves highly the celibate life of the Therapeutae, nowhere does he argue against procreation as a necessity.
thought. It is in Hellenized Judaism such as Philo’s that the origins of Europe’s Eve are to be found.\textsuperscript{10}

In the midrashic texts, Eve is nearly always presented as the victim of the snake and not the victimizer of the man.\textsuperscript{11} According to the midrash, the snake did not seduce Eve to have sex with Adam—she had already had intercourse with Adam, as we shall see—but rather, he seduced her to commit adultery with him. Thus a thrice-repeated saying of Rabbi Yohanan has it that “at the time that the snake had intercourse with Eve, he introduced filth into her. When the Israelites stood on Mount Sinai, their filth was removed” (Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 103b). Although this saying sounds like a version of Original Sin, it is such with an enormous difference. The woman is portrayed as the victim of the snake’s sexual aggression, which renders her and all of her descendants temporarily impure. This impurity, however, had nothing to do with licit sexuality. According to the midrashic tradition, Adam had sex with Eve both before and after she had sex with the snake. He was not contaminated by it. In the midrashic texts, Eve’s descendants are not that of sex but only of the lust for sex but even that no longer obtains for those who stood at Sinai, both male and female and their descendants. As xenophobic as this tradition is, with its implication that those who did not stand at Sinai are still impure, it is not misogynistic.\textsuperscript{12} “Woman,” in Bible and midrash, is almost never essentialized as something evil and dangerous, as a snare to man.\textsuperscript{13}

According to the Rabbis, there was no Fall into sexuality in the Garden of Eden. On the rabbinic readings, Adam had had intercourse with Eve from the beginning. Their intercourse is not associated in any way with the snake, the “forbidden fruit,” or a Fall or expulsion from the Garden (Anderson 1989 and Parades 1989). Licit-sexuality, the intercourse of married couples, belongs not to the demonic realm of the snake but to the innocent realm of the Garden of Innocence itself. Indeed, according to Genesis Rabba 18:6 (Theodor and Albeck 1965, 168), the snake became inflamed with lust for Eve because he saw Adam and Eve having intercourse with each other, and according to 19:3 (171–72), “‘Adam knew Eve his wife’ means that Eve and Adam about sex in imitation of the animals interpretations that assimilate sexuality to the bestial and fallen (Brown 1988, 94 n. 43). This interpretation is in line with my understanding of rabbinic culture as in part a resistance movement to forces within the dominant Hellenistic formation. There is, indeed, explicit evidence of this reversal, for in another passage of the same midrashic text, we are told that the verse “Adam knew Eve his wife” means that he and she taught the animals causing them to know about sex (204–05). The snake is the aggressor. While there is illicit sexuality involved—“the snake had intercourse with Eve”—it is not female sexuality itself that is identified with the snake, as it was in Philo.

\textsuperscript{10} That is, not in an ‘easy’, almost self-evident, step from, say, the ‘Yahwist’ version of Creation,” pace Bloch (1971a, 33). A critical hermeneutic intervention was necessary to make that step. In fact, for all of the subjugated status of women in rabbinic culture, I know of no rabbinic text whatsoever in which that status is derived directly from the Torah, although earlier texts, such as the Pentateuch, may have implied it. The Torah is not explicit in this regard. As an example, when the woman was created, there is no mention of her subjugation. However, in Philo specifically in On the Nature of Things, parts 1 and 2, he makes a clear distinction between the status of women and men.

\textsuperscript{11} Verna Harrison informs me that there are Patristic texts that hold such views as well.

\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, I am tempted to suggest that the statement by the third-century Palestinian Rabbi Yohanan is in response to the doctrine of Original Sin, as if to say, you believe in it, you have it. Alternatively, it might represent a triumphalist claim on the part of the Rabbi that Pagans are more given to sexual immorality than Jews are—a fairly frequent rabbinic charge. In support of this latter interpretation is the fact that the Talmud cites Rabbi Yohanan’s statement to support a claim by Mar Ukba bar Hannama that Pagans frequent the wives of their neighbors, and when they don’t find them, they find an animal and have intercourse with it (Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 22b. See also Romans 1).

\textsuperscript{13} For other views, see Bal 1987. See also Mordechai A. Friedman 1990.
Pandora's Jar in Midrash: Eve as Victim

Although several rabbinic texts (some of which we shall see below) put the blame for the sin and its punishment on the woman, equally as many say the exact opposite. The most interesting of these is a text that is apparently an allusion to the Pandora story of the jar, but it assigns the role of Pandora not to Eve—but to Adam. A comparison of the story in Hesiod (the ostensible model or source of our text) with the midrashic story will provide rich material for analysis. The salient elements of the Pandora story as narrated in Hesiod's Theogony and Works and Days

14 are: Zeus becomes angry at Prometheus, whereupon Zeus hides the celestial fire. Prometheus steals fire from Zeus and brings it to men. In order to punish men for having received this illicit gift, Zeus counters with the creation of anti~pyros, anti-fire, a "beautiful evil," who is a continuous source of harm to men (pēma mega thnētois) (Th. 561-91). In Works and Days she is called Pandora (All Gifts), because the gods give her gifts to make her a beautiful pitfall and deception to men. "Her beautiful exterior, enhanced by those adornments which in Greek thought are externalized tokens of sexual allure, proves only to be a snare and a delusion" (Zeitlin 1990). Then, reports the Works and Days, she is sent to Prometheus's brother Epimetheus (Hindsight), who foolishly accepts her as a gift from Zeus. She opens up the jar of evil, "releasing all the evils and diseases that now silently and invisibly wander over the earth" (WD 56-104). Only Hope (Elpis) is left behind. Here I will compare the last part of the Works and Days version with its midrashic parallel. I will read the Hesiodic original first:

And Epimetheus took no heed of Prometheus's advice not to receive any gift the Olympian Zeus might send him but to reject it lest some evil should happen to mortals. So he received it and learned by experience the evil he had. For the tribes of men had previously lived on the earth free and apart from evils, free from burdensome labor and from painful diseases, the bringers of death to men.

14. There is an entire scholarly literature devoted to the "contradictions" between these two accounts—typically for nineteenth-century scholarship, much of it is devoted to proving that one is authentic and the other spurious—but as Zeitlin remarks, "Although the two versions differ in some important details and are used to serve the differing purposes of each text, . . . they can and have been taken together as forming two halves of a single extended narrative, each providing a gloss on the other" (Zeitlin 1990). My summary, then, is a conflated version.

In the power of these evils men rapidly pass into old age. But then woman, raising the jar's great lid in her hands and scattering its contents, devised anguishing miseries for men.

(Frazer 1983, 99)

The text seems to manifest an internal contradiction. On the one hand, the narrative states openly that the woman is herself an evil:

Son of Iapetos, you who surpass all others in planning, you rejoice in your theft of my fire and in having deceived me, being the cause of great pain to yourself and men in the future. I shall give them in payment of fire an evil which all shall take to their hearts with delight, an evil to love and embrace

(Frazer 1983, 98)

But on the other hand, the last part of the narrative implies that Pandora loosed evils upon the world only because she opened the jar, not because she herself is evil. Furthermore, one might ask whether Epimetheus, by accepting the gift he has been warned against, is just as culpable as Pandora herself in bringing evil upon men. This elision provides strong support for the reading (Sissa 1990, 154-55; Zeitlin 1990) that the jar is Pandora—or rather Pandora's womb/vulva—the opening of which is the event that brings all evil into the world.15 In Zeitlin's persuasive reading of the text, opening of the jar is breach of Pandora's virginity, and she is made wholly responsible, as it were, for this act as well. The text refuses to record the first sexual act between a man and a woman, because by doing so it would have to reveal that which it seems determined to suppress, the simple fact that men are also agents in the performance of sex and thus at least equally responsible with women for whatever baneful effects sex is held to have.

Female sexuality is, on this reading, the root of all evil. The fact that it is Pandora who opens the jar and not Epimetheus is only a further displacement of any possible guilt or responsibility for "the human condition" from the male to the female. The preamble in the midrash seems to depend either on the Pandora story itself (Lachs 1974), or if not directly on it, then on similar folkloristic motifs of the woman as source of evil in the world. There are, however, crucial incongruities in the relationship of this story to its intertext:

15. For a similar interpretation arrived at by other means, see Sissa (1990, 154-56).
Different Eves

"And he said, I heard Your voice, and I was afraid for I am naked and I hid. And he said, who told you that you are naked?" [Gen. 3:9–10]

Rabbi Levi said, This should be compared to a woman who comes to borrow vinegar, who enters into the house of the wife of a colleague. She [the borrower] asks her [the wife], "How does your husband treat you?"

She [wife] said to her [visitor], “Everything he does with me is good, except that there is this jar, which is full of snakes and scorpions, which he does not let me control.”

She [visitor] said, “All of his jewels are in there. And he plans to marry another woman and give them to her.”

What did she [wife] do? She stretched out her hand into the jar. They began to bite her.

When her husband came, he heard her voice crying out, and said, “Perhaps you touched that jar?”

Similarly [God said to Adam]: "Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you?" [Gen. 3:9–10]

(Theodor and Albeck 1965, 179–80)

Let us compare this text to its "model." As a rendering of Pandora, which the jar theme suggests that it is, or even as a parallel to it, it certainly presents some startling inconsistencies. Where Luchs sees a corruption of the Greek myth (Luchs 1972), I find a parodic subversion of that text. When we look just at the parable itself, it seems that we have a fairly close copy of the Greek exemplar. The wife, who equals Pandora, is tempted to open the jar and does so, thus releasing an evil. However, once the parable is applied to scripture, the picture changes entirely, for the equivalent to the wife of the parable is not Eve but Adam!

A midrashic parable (masal') typically comes to fill in a gap in the biblical narrative with a plausibly analogous situation and especially with an exemplary one drawn from the cultural intertext. In this case, the exegetical problem is the motivation for God’s accusative questioning of Adam, “How did you know that you were naked?” and its continuation, “Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you not to eat of it?” The masal’ suggests that God’s proof of Adam’s malfeasance was precisely the fact that he was ashamed of his nakedness, thus connecting the two halves of the verse. The "Pandora" story is produced as the model for this interpretation. Just as in that story the husband accused the wife because he knew that her crying out meant she had disobeyed him, so God accused Adam because he knew that Adam’s being ashamed and afraid meant he had disobeyed God. The Pandora figure of the parable is compared to Adam of the application. This interpretation is guaranteed by the statement within the midrashic text that “Similarly [God said to Adam]: ‘Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you?’” The word similarly in a midrashic parable sets up the analogy between the parable story and the biblical narrative. The question of the husband in the parable: “Did you open the jar that I asked you not to?” is a figure for God’s question to Adam, “Did you eat?” By equating this statement with the verse addressed to Adam in the Bible, the midrash says that it was he who opened the jar and was bitten, thus revealing his disobedience to the husband—God. By thus equating Adam and not Eve with the Pandora figure of the parable, the text subverts the myth of essential, female demonic evil that the Pandora story projects explicitly. Moreover, it signals that for this midrashic writer at least, Adam’s attempts to deflect blame for his behavior to his wife are not accepted. Of course, this does not exonerate Eve of her own sin, only of the blame for Adam’s. On the other hand, this text provides a powerful example of androcentrism at the same time that it subverts misogyny, for it emphasizes that the culturally significant moment is Adam’s eating of the fruit and not Eve’s. That is, by shifting the Pandora figure from the woman to the man, at the same time that the midrash is disabling a reading that “puts the blame” on Eve, it renders her agency in the story entirely invisible. This could almost be a paradigm for rabbinic gender relations which, while generally patronizingly solicitous toward women (as opposed to cultures which are violently misogynistic), at the same time marginalize them utterly.

There is, however, a parallel version of this midrash, in which the gender roles are not so completely subverted. After telling the parable in more or less the same terms as in the version of Genesis Rabba, the midrash then concludes: "She put forth her hand and opened the jar and the scorpions bit her and she died. The [husband] is Primeval Adam and the wife is Eve, and the borrower of vinegar [whose gender also shifts from version to version] is the snake, for it says, ‘And the snake was slyer than any beast of the field’" (Schechter 1967, 7). What is crucial to note is that

16. It should be noted that even in this text, there is a version in which the Genesis Rabba inversion is maintained and the foolish wife is Adam and not Eve. I find it astonishing that when Aschkenasy cites this text she remarks on “the rabbis’ attempts to reduce the stature of Eve to that of an empty-minded, jealous housewife” and does not pay attention to the fact that in most versions it is Adam who is so portrayed and not Eve (1986, 43). Aschkenasy’s whole account, however, is more balanced than many in that it recognizes explicitly how rare it is to find “woman” identified as “evil incarnate” in rabbinic texts (ibid.). In contrast to Carol Meyers.
even in this version of the story, which assimilates it more closely to the Pandora model, the burden of the woman's role is still entirely different from her role in Hesiod. Like Pandora, she is the victim of her curiosity and the victim of the snake, who is portrayed as having evil intent, but unlike Pandora she is not the victimizer of her husband and the world, because only she gets bitten. She does not unleash evil in the world. Adam's "self-defense" of blaming it all on Eve (in the biblical text) is not accepted. She got punished for her curiosity, but he alone is responsible for his malfeasance. Indeed, according to one passage in Genesis Rabba, his attempt to blame things on Eve is cited by God later as a classic example of the ungrateful quality of human beings (Theodor and Albeck 1965, 359). In another classical midrashic text, this lack of gratitude is given as the reason that God drove him out of the Garden (Mandelbaum 1962, 284), and Rashi comments, "Because it is a shameful thing that he tries to shift the blame onto the gift that God gave him" (Rashi Ad Genesis 3:13; emphasis added). Both in Hesiod and in the Rabbis, the first woman is a divine gift to man; in one, however, the gift is a snare and in the other a true benevolence.

Misogynistic Midrashim on Eve

Other midrashic texts take a different view of Eve's complicity or guilt. Some of these are indeed quite virulent, though with few exceptions they do not ascribe to Eve the kind of evil and demonic aspect that we see in Philo's absolute equation of Eve with sexuality, the source of all evil from the very start. The only exceptions that I know of in early rabbinic texts are from a single context in Genesis Rabba, where Rabbi Aha explains the name Eve (Hebrew Hawwah) as being related to the Aramaic Hathah, snake. He has Adam say to her, "The snake was your snake, and you were my snake," as the justification for her name (Theodor and Albeck 1965, 195). In a similar vein we find, in the same context, "Rabbi Haninah the son of Rabbi Ida said, 'From the beginning of the book and until now, there is no letter s. When the woman was created, the Satan was created with her'" (ibid.). These exceptions to the cultural pattern, while not insignificant, only draw further attention to the much more common discourse that opposes them. The most extended piece of contempt for women produced in the midrash is from Bereshit Rabba, and even here the discourse is complicated; despite the open misogyny of the passage, once it turns to procreation, the emphasis is positive:

They asked Rabbi Yehoshua, "why is the male born face down and the female is born face up?" He said to them, "the male looks to the place from which he was created [the earth], and the female looks to the place from which she was created [the rib]."

"And why does the woman have to perfume herself, and the man does not have to perfume himself?" He said to them, "Adam was created from the earth, and the earth never smells rotten, but Eve was created from a bone. If you leave meat for three days without salt, it will smell bad."

"And why does the voice of a woman carry but not that of a man?" He answered, "It's like a pot which if you fill it with meat, its voice will not carry, but if you put one bone in it its voice carries."

"Why is it easy to pacify a man, but not a woman?" He said to them, "Adam was created from the earth, once you put on it a drop of water, it immediately swallows it up. Eve was created from a bone; even if you soak it for several days, the water will not be absorbed."

"Why does the man pursue the woman, and the woman does not pursue the man?" He answered, "To what is the matter similar, to a person who has lost something; he seeks the lost object, but the lost object does not seek him."

"Why does the man deposit seed in the woman, but the woman does not deposit seed in the man?" He answered, "it is like one who had a valuable object; he searches for someone who is reliable to deposit it with."

(Théodor and Albeck 1965, 158–59)

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20. It would be a mistake, however, to read this last passage in the light of later notions of the Satan. I thank Ilan Budes, who reminded me of this last passage.

21. For the persistence of these misogynistic topoi, cf. the medieval French text quoted by Bloch (1987, 16), "Why are women more noisy, full of foolish words, and more garrulous than men? Because they are made of bones and our persons are made of clay; bones rattle louder than earth."
Up till here, Rabbi Yehoshua’s remarks, while obnoxious in tone, do not necessarily depict vicious contempt for the female. Indeed, the last of the sentences is generally consonant with the argument of this chapter to the fact that rabbinic essentialization of women was owing to their desire to ensure that their procreative role not be compromised in any way. Rabbi Yehoshua’s diatribe, however, continues:

“Why does the man go out bare-headed but the woman with her head covered?” He said to them, “it is like one who has committed a sin, and he is ashamed in front of others; therefore she goes out covered.”

“Why do they go first to the dead?” He said, “since they caused death in the world, therefore they go first to the dead.”

“And why was she given the Commandment of menstrual separation?” “Because she spilled the blood of the First Adam, therefore she was given the Commandment of menstrual separation.” “And why was she given the Commandment to sacrifice the first portion of the dough?” “Because she spoiled the First Adam, who was the first portion of the world, therefore she was given the Commandment to sacrifice the first portion of the dough.” “And why was she given the Commandment of lighting the Sabbath candle?” “Because she extinguished the soul of the First Adam, therefore she was given the Commandment of lighting the Sabbath candle.”

(ibid; cf. Schechter 1967, 117)

Open misogyny like that of Rabbi Yehoshua is rare indeed in the rabbinic corpus, certainly by comparison with Philo, on the one hand, or Patriotic culture on the other. This sort of misogynistic catalogue would become, however, endemic in medieval Judaism, as it was in medieval culture generally (Bloch 1987). Moreover, even this text does not project a conceptualization of female sexuality per se as dangerous and threatening, though it certainly suggests that possibility lurking in the background.

“The Three Sins for Which Women Die in Childbirth” and Rabbinic Dissent

Rabbi Yehoshua’s nascent idea that Eve is the origin of death is amplified in the Palestinian Talmud’s reading of a famous mishnaic passage: “There are three sins for which women die in childbirth: a lack of care with regard to menstrual separation, the separation of the dough-sacrifice, and the light of the [Sabbath] candle” (Shabbat 2:6). These are precisely the commandments to which Rabbi Yehoshua refers, suggesting a genetic tie between the two utterances, one that makes these three “female” commandments a sort of punishment rather than privilege. In the Palestinian Talmud’s interpretation of this Mishna, this ascertainment of the Mishna is associated with a midrash similar to Rabbi Yehoshua’s. “The First Adam was the blood of the world . . . and Eve caused him death; therefore the commandment of menstrual separation was given to the woman. Adam was the first pure dough-offering of the world . . . and Eve caused his death; therefore she was given the commandment of the dough-offering. Adam was the candle of the world, for it says ‘the soul of Adam is the candle of God,’ and Eve caused him death; therefore the commandment of lighting the candle was given to the woman” (Palestinian Talmud Shabbat 2:6 8b). However, even though this tradition blames the entire sin and its consequential death on Eve, it does not project that sin as owing to her sexuality. Eve’s act was indeed a sin, and it created the need for her “daughters” to have a means of atoning it, but there is no hint, whatsoever, that the sin is repeated or continued in the sexual life. Moreover, the fact that the three commandments are linked together in this way shows something else of importance. The menstrual separation is not given special emphasis here nor treated differently in any way from the two commandments of the dough-sacrifice and the lighting of Sabbath candles. If there were an a priori opportunity to identify women’s sexuality with death, danger, or demonic powers, it would have been here, and even in the misogynistic text we are reading here, that option is refused.

The Babylonian Talmud goes much further by completely undermining the gender-asymmetric force of the Mishna and by rejecting Rabbi Yehoshua’s misogynistic midrash. The Talmud begins by raising the possibility of a sexual interpretation of the Mishna—the very interpretation that seems, at first glance, to be so obvious:

For [not being careful] about menstrual separation, what is the reason? Rabbi Yitzhaq said, “She spoiled things with her sexuality [i.e., her inner parts]; therefore she will be smitten by her inner parts.”

regard to menstrual separation, the separation of the dough-sacrifice, and the light of the [Sabbath] candle.” (Shabbat 2:6). These are precisely the commandments to which Rabbi Yehoshua refers, suggesting a genetic tie between the two utterances, one that makes these three “female” commandments a sort of punishment rather than privilege. In the Palestinian Talmud’s interpretation of this Mishna, this ascertainment of the Mishna is associated with a midrash similar to Rabbi Yehoshua’s. “The First Adam was the blood of the world . . . and Eve caused him death; therefore the commandment of menstrual separation was given to the woman. Adam was the first pure dough-offering of the world . . . and Eve caused his death; therefore she was given the commandment of the dough-offering. Adam was the candle of the world, for it says ‘the soul of Adam is the candle of God,’ and Eve caused him death; therefore the commandment of lighting the candle was given to the woman” (Palestinian Talmud Shabbat 2:6 8b). However, even though this tradition blames the entire sin and its consequential death on Eve, it does not project that sin as owing to her sexuality. Eve’s act was indeed a sin, and it created the need for her “daughters” to have a means of atoning it, but there is no hint, whatsoever, that the sin is repeated or continued in the sexual life. Moreover, the fact that the three commandments are linked together in this way shows something else of importance. The menstrual separation is not given special emphasis here nor treated differently in any way from the two commandments of the dough-sacrifice and the lighting of Sabbath candles. If there were an a priori opportunity to identify women’s sexuality with death, danger, or demonic powers, it would have been here, and even in the misogynistic text we are reading here, that option is refused.

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22. When baking bread, a portion of the dough is set aside as an offering for the priests. Since such offerings to priests are always from the first of the fruit of the dough, and Adam was the first human, he is compared to the first of the dough.

23. To the best of my knowledge, the two texts cited here from a single place in Genesis Rabba are the only examples of such misogynistic diatribe in all of the classical rabbinic literature. See also below for a catalogue of other misogynistic expressions in the texts. I hope that I have not missed anything significant.

24. This text may even be simply a citation of Rabbi Yehoshua’s midrash.
This view would of course canonize Rabbi Yehoshua's misogynistic reading. The Talmud, however, immediately rejects such an interpretation—because it does not square with the other commandments mentioned, namely the dough-offering and the lighting of Sabbath candles—and offers another reading. Indeed, this hegemonic commentary deflects the issue from one of gender entirely:

As a certain Galilean interpreted: I have put into you a portion of blood; therefore I have given you a commandment having to do with blood. I called you the "firstling"; therefore I have given you a commandment having to do with the first [dough]. The soul which I have given you is called a candle; therefore I have given you a commandment having to do with candles. If you keep them well and good, but if not I will take away your soul.

(Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31b–32a)

These commandments, according to the Babylonian Talmud, like any others belong in principle to the whole people, male and female alike. But these are particularly given to women because they belong particularly to women's sphere as understood by the rabbinic culture, to her body, cooking, and the comfort of the house, just as other commandments, which belong to the "male" spheres of public life and worship, are restricted to men. The Talmud then asks, "Why then at the time of giving birth?" to which the answer is that the time of danger is when a person is tested for righteousness. The text next asks when men are tested, and the answer is given that they are tested when passing over and in similar moments of danger. For the next two pages, the Talmud goes on to list commandments that fall on men and women alike and punishments that result from laxity with regard to them. Thus, even a potential discourse positing an essential relationship between women's sexuality and death is countered by the classical culture text, the Talmud, and precisely where it could have been expected to be activated, with regard to menstruation.

Nor was this contestation only Babylonian; the Palestinian midrash on Ecclesiastes also "emends" the text, as it were, to read "For three things women die in childbirth, and for three things men die" (Kohelet Rabba 27).

27. At least in the classical rabbinic period, this was not understood as an essential manifestation of demonic evil associated with blood, death, birth, or sexuality and was certainly not an association of woman per se with impurity or contamination, pace Wegner (Shaye J. D. Cohen 1991, 261). Other evidence cited by Wegner for her claim that rabbinic Judaism manifests an atavistic fear of women also seems to me to be misread, or at least to allow for another reading. Wegner's argument from the prohibition of a man from being alone with two women when a woman is not prohibited from being alone with two men simply does not establish her point that "the sages' androcentric perspective blames the dangers of private encounters between the sexes on women's moral laxity rather than on men's greater susceptibility to arousal" (Wegner 1988, 159–61). The same argument can be made with reference to other rabbinic sexual "hedges," for example, the prohibition on a man hearing a woman singing if she is not his wife. Here again, there is no reason to assume that moral laxity of women rather than arousability of men is at all at issue. Indeed, this latter interpretation can be strengthened considerably when we remember that men are not supposed to look at the colored clothing of women on the clothesline, lest they be aroused by it, a situation in which moral laxity of women could hardly be the issue. These rabbinic practices do propose some essential difference between men and women, and presuppose a social hierarchy, but they do not provide compelling or even persuasive evidence for a perception of women as dangerous and contaminating.

Similarly, I do not think that the evidence cited by Nehama Aschkenasy supports her claim that in rabbinic culture, "Woman is seen primarily as a sexual being whose moral weakness is coupled with sexual power which she puts to evil use" (1988, 40), still less for her suggestion that "woman in general is condemned by the Midrash as immodest and voluptuous, especially in connection with the story of Creation" (ibid., 74). Aschkenasy gives three references to support this claim for what "the Midrash" holds. As for the evidence from Genesis Rabba, it is apposite but not typical. I have already cited it above and evaluated its extent there. I see nothing on Sota 19b that supports such a claim at all and assume that the reference must be misprinted. The third text cited is The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan 1. A careful reading of that entire passage supports only an argument that Eve was more susceptible to being deceived by the Serpent than Adam, no more than that. Moreover, the text explicitly blames this on Adam, when it says, "What led to Eve's touching the tree? It was the hedge that Adam put around his words"—that is, his exaggeration in reporting God's interdiction on eating from the tree caused Eve to be deceived. God had said not to eat, but Adam's report that he had said not even to touch the tree enabled the snake to fool her (Goldin 1955, 9–10).
shall see below.

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These rabbis are not willing to consider either woman per se or sexuality a negative or threatening element in the world. But any social hierarchy, however "benign," seems to carry within itself the seeds of a potential discourse of contempt, and such discourse was likely hovering just below the surface of the rabbinic attempt to produce a discourse of female confinement that was not misogynistic in character. Indeed, as many critics have argued, and as Bloch has shown most recently, any male discourse that essentializes women and their roles, whether "negatively" or "positively," ultimately leads to misogyny. But Bloch himself would formulate this differently; he argues that any predicition of the form "women are" or "woman is" is already misogynistic (Bloch 1991, 4-5). I am impressed by his argument. This approach has the salutary effect (in my opinion) of completely cutting out the ground from a certain kind of apologetic discourse that I am also trying to avoid, namely, a discourse that argues that rabbinic Judaism was not sexist because it often "praised" women, but it makes it harder to see and describe real cultural differences in the representation of women, body, and gender in different cultures. So I prefer to weaken the formulation somewhat by suggesting that any "positive" predication of this form easily slides into its opposite, that "putting women on a pedestal," for instance, as in the Victorian period, leads easily to violence against women, and that the rabbinic discourse of great valuation of sexuality and the female body leads just as easily and naturally into the genuine and open misogyny of much of medieval Jewish discourse, as we shall see below.

The "Other Woman":

Lilith and Woman’s Sexuality as Demonic

In what were almost his last words Foucault said: “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 232). Virtually any cultural practice can have multiple social meanings.28 A similar point has been made with regard to menstrual taboos by the anthropologists Buckley and Gottlieb:

In much of the literature, when women have been described as being prohibited from contact with something in the male domain—a man’s hunting gear, say—it has been interpreted as an indication of male dominance manifested by women’s exclusion from prestigious activities. Conversely, however, when it is forbidden for men to have contact with something in the female domain—such as menstrual blood—it has been interpreted in an opposite manner, as a sign of female inferiority. The two kinds of actions, or taboos, would seem parallel, yet the anthropological interpretation of them has been binary. (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988, 14)

Only specific analysis of specific historical situations reveals the specific meanings of a practice within the particular formation, and, of course, even within a given cultural formation the same practice can have multiple and contradictory meanings. If I have argued, then, that within rabbinic Judaism of the talmudic period, even menstrual taboos did not constitute an essentialized fear and hatred of women as defiling, such interpretations and understandings were certainly latent and easily derived from the practices.

In another set of Jewish myths about the origin of woman we do find representation of the woman as demonic figure. I am referring, of course, to the Lilith myths, which appear in literature only after the rabbinic period, first being attested in the Alpha-Beau d’ben Sirah, a text of the eighth century (Yassif 1984). This story tells of a first wife created for Adam who wanted to “be on top” and whom he divorced. She lives on as a succubus, sleeping with men at night (her name means “Night Demon”) and producing demon children from their nocturnal and masturbatory emissions. As Yassif points out, the classical midrashic texts know of a to- motif of a “First Eve,” who “returned to her dust” (Theodor and Albeck 1965, 213). This may be the trace of a longer narrative that contained the entire story of a woman who was created and rebelled, demanded sexual parity, and lives on as a demon. But the evidence for such a construction is meager indeed. Genesis Rabba does, in fact, mention the sexual demons who come in the night, but in a context that completely

28. I wonder what the limits of this claim are. Instinctively, I put them at practices that cause death or grave bodily harm.
undermines the story's later cultural valence. When Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, in mourning they refrained from sex for one hundred and thirty years. During that time, he was visited by succubi and she by inwbi, and both produced demon children (Theodor and Albeck 1965, 195). And indeed, the Talmud refers to the very ancient (see Milgrom 1988, 226–29 and cited literature) "Lilin and Lilith," both male and female demons of the night—both male and female in incantations from the period as well (ibid., 231). By the Middle Ages, this motif has become, "Know and understand that when Adam separated himself from Eve for one hundred and thirty years and would sleep alone, the first Eve, that is Lilith, would find him and she lusted after his beauty, went and slept with him, and from here there went out demons, spirits and night demons" (Yassif 1984, 65 and literature cited there). A gender-neutral statement of how demons exploit celibates has become by a subtle shift a representation of demonic female sexuality.

In the rabbinic period, such legends, fears, and terrors of women's sexuality apparently persisted below the consciousness of the official textuality and culture. The evidence for the existence of such legends in the rabbinic culture comes only, however, from their denial or repression in the "official texts." The rabbinic culture (understood strictly here as the culture of the Rabbis themselves) did not countenance them. But from the early Middle Ages on, they become well entrenched in rabbinic culture and official religion, paralleled exactly by similar changes in the discourse of menstruation from cultic disability to near-demonic contamination (Shaye J. D. Cohen 1991, 281 and 284–85). The development of such demonized images of women and demonization of menstruation is, moreover, paralleled by a growing anxiety about sexuality itself in the Jewish Middle Ages (Biale 1992). We could argue, then, that misogyny was a latent and predictable effect of the disenfranchisement of women and even more so of the menstrual taboos themselves. We must not, however, read the texts of classical rabbinic literature through the fear and hatred of women characteristic of the later period, running the risk, by doing so, of further canonizing that misogynistic position. In this domain it seems clear that the Rabbis are much closer to the biblical than to the Hellenistic worlds. Once again, comparison of myths of female origins—this time, between Hesiod and the Bible—provides an important key.

Eve and Pandora

Although Pandora is occasionally referred to as the "Greek Eve" (Séchan 1929), the comparison is somewhat misleading. The difference between these two myths goes back to the beginning, for as Froma Zeitlin has shown in a recent paper (Zeitlin 1990), the narrations are already sharply differentiated in the biblical version itself of Eve's origin. Zeitlin has analyzed well the differences between this myth and the biblical myth of Eve: In the Hesiodic myth, woman is not a natural being, nor consubstantial with man, but an artificially constructed creature, "a technical invention, the result of a premeditated action, an artisanal product and even a work of art—in short, an artifice in every sense of the word" (Zeitlin 1990). Next, "Woman is not created as a companion to assuage man's loneliness, as for example, the Biblical account of Adam and Eve tells us, but rather as a punishment." Third, woman is not presented as a partner in the "conduct of mortal existence," but as a drone and a drain on the man, sitting "within the house, filling their bellies up with the products of the toils of others" (Th. 599) (Zeitlin 1990). This contrast between the production of Pandora and the creation of Eve extends to the respective representations of sexual life. Thus:

We note that in Hesiod, far from "cleaving together and becoming one flesh" as the Biblical account tells us, or even "mingling in love -\(\phi i l o i t i s\)," as the canonical euphemism in Greek texts (and elsewhere in the Theogony) would have it, man and woman remain distinctive and disjointed entities, engaged in an unequal transaction by which woman actually steals man's substance, both alimentary and sexual, and by her appetites even "roasts man alive and brings him to a premature old age" (WD 705). Her beautiful exterior, enhanced by those adornments which in Greek thought are externalized tokens of sexual allure, proves only to be a snare and delusion... . The dangers of sexuality as encroachment on the autonomous male body and the potential imbalance of its hormones, the limitations/qualifications set to its unrestricted enjoyment, its separation from a specified love object, and the

29. As a case in point, I would cite the notoriously misogynistic modern Hebrew poet, H. N. Bialik, who in his anthology of rabbinic lore on marriage cited extensively the most misogynistic texts and virtually nothing else (Bialik 1951, 480–99).

30. I am grateful to Zeitlin for sharing a copy of this paper with me.
Zeitlin makes another very significant point. The Hesiodic text manifests an extraordinary ambivalence even about the role of woman as producer of children. Nothing in the text suggests that woman has the function of fecundity, as would be found, for instance, in "orthodox Greek representations of fertility" (Loraux 1981). Perhaps the clearest marker of this difference in the stories is that Eve is referred to as "The Mother of All That Lives," while Pandora is only the ancestress of the race of women (genos gynaiden). As Zeitlin remarks, Hesiod even reverses the meaning of her name from "Bestower of All Gifts," an epithet of Gaia, to "Recipient of All Gifts." Finally, there is no recognition of the woman's painful productivity in the bearing of children.1

Zeitlin emphasizes that in the biblical story, for all of its gender asymmetry, the picture is entirely different. There, once the expulsion from the Garden has been enacted, there is a certain complementarity (if not equality) of the positions of the man and the woman. They are presented as partners, each toiling and suffering to continue human life. This distinction between Genesis and Hesiod becomes even clearer when the Genesis story is read in accordance with some important feminist interpreters, who have taught us that even Genesis 2, with its creation of Eve out of a part of Adam, is not necessarily a myth of origin to justify female subordination.3

Zeitlin's argument is an important corrective to a tendency to elide the fact that while all known ancient Mediterranean societies were thoroughly androcentric, there was nevertheless a wide range of gender ideologies in them. These different ideologies do not necessarily indicate differences in other categories of social practice, however. I am not going to make any claim for essential differences in social practice between the represented cultures "in the background of" particular literary works, still less between entire social formations. Thus, to claim that one or the other culture's canonical texts construct woman as evil, scary, weak, gentle, nurturing, etc., while those of the other do not, teaches us very little about how women lived in the cultures. As the late John Winkler wisely remarked, such representations may be only "male palaver." Caroline Bynum has also made the point that we cannot take what texts say about women's position in society at face value (Bynum 1986, 258). Nevertheless, what the canonical texts themselves say is an important social practice in its

31. Carol Meyers (1988, 100-109) disagrees with interpretations of Genesis 3:16 that see it as mentioning the pain of childbirth; however, I remain unconvinced by this argument. I think that the man and his travail in bringing forth agricultural fruit from the earth is opposed as analogous to the woman's travail in bringing forth reproductive fruit. I do not believe that this slight disagreement significantly changes the meaning of Meyers's overall corrective to the traditional misreadings.

32. See Trible 1978, Bel 1987, Meyers (1988, 85 and especially 114-17), and Boyarin 1990d.
own right, and it is that practice which I seek here to understand. There are major differences between the Bible and the texts of Greek culture that were canonical, or at any rate were transmitted as canonical to the world of late antiquity, especially the Pandora story (Panofsky and Panofsky 1956, 3–13).

The role of women in biblical literature is subordinate, dominated, and non-autonomous, but the functions of women, whether social or sexual, productive or reproductive, are valued highly and represented not as an evil that has befallen “man” but as a mark of God’s benefice to man. In Hesiod’s version of Greek culture (which, while not universal there, was the one transmitted to late antiquity and the Middle Ages), woman is a mark of evil and a source of danger for man and indeed essentially evil in her very nature. The economy is male in both cases; the difference is the place of woman in that economy. I argue, then, that in rabbinic literature this biblical cultural pattern and ideology were essentially retained, while in Hellenistic Judaisms the essential components of the Hellenistic ideology of women were accepted and even abetted. I postulate that at the root of Western ideologies of woman lies Pandora superimposed on Eve.

Women’s Ornaments: Divine Gift or Divine Trap?

The distinction between Eve and Pandora as the signs of two different configurations of androcentrism can be delineated sharply in the contrast between the Rabbis and Tertullian on clothing and cosmetics. In contrast to the categorical denunciation of feminine adornment typical of the Fathers, in the rabbincic culture, ornamentation, attractive dress, and cosmetics are considered entirely appropriate to the woman in her ordained role of sexual partner. Thus a bride even in mourning is permitted to use makeup, for otherwise she might become unattractive to her husband. Women are also permitted to put on makeup on holidays, although painting and drawing are forbidden, because the use of cosmetics is considered a pleasure for them and not work (Babylonian Talmud Moed Katan 9b). In the view of Rabbi Akiva, even a menstruant may wear her makeup and jewelry. That is to say, her sexuality and the external signs of her sexual allure are not suppressed even when menstruating. This is hardly a discourse of “atavistic fear of women,” as a recent writer has characterized it, but it is one of subordination of women almost entirely to the needs of men.

According to legend, the same Rabbi Akiva wishes to give his beloved and self-sacrificing bride a “golden tiara in the shape of Jerusalem” as they lie together in a hay-barn (see Chapter 5). Almost as if in direct contradiction, Clement of Alexandria—the most “pro-marryage” of all of the early Fathers—writes, “Just as the serpent deceived Eve, so, too, the enticing golden ornament in the shape of a serpent kindles a mad frenzy in the hearts of the rest of womankind, leading them to have images made of lampreys and snakes as decorations.” The opposition between the discourses could not be clearer. In the Father’s view, the jewel is identified as having the shape of the very noxious beasts that are the symbols of Eve’s allure, while in the rabbinic formation that exemplary female ornament is the Holy City.

A passage of the Palestinian midrash on Genesis, Genesis Rabbah, brings this out elegantly, as it provides an almost exact analogue for a Hesiodic (in fact, generally Greek and Hellenistic) motif and yet, once more, reverses its valences. I will begin by quoting the Hesiodic text:

And the goddess gray-eyed Athena girdled and dressed her in a silver-white gown and over her head drew a veil, one that was woven with wonderful skill, a marvel to look at; and over this a garland of spring flowers, bright in their freshness. Pallas Athena set on her head, a lovely adornment, and a gold crown, encircling the brow, she put in its place which had been made by the famous Lame-legged One himself. Using the skill of his hands, gladly obliging Zeus Father.

When he had finished this beauty, this evil to balance a good, Hephaistos brought her among the other gods and men, glorifying in her adornment by the gray-eyed daughter of Great Zeus. Then the gods and mortals were struck with amazement when they beheld this sheer inescapable snare for men.

(Frazer 1983, 66; emphasis added)

We have in the midrash exactly the same motif that is found in Hesiod’s Pandora story, divine adornment of the first woman:

R. Abb and some say it in the name of R. Banaya and some in the name of R. Simeon the son of Yohai, “He ornamented her like a bride and brought her to him. There are places where the braid is called a
“construction.” Said R. Hama in the name of R. Hanina, “Do you suppose, that he simply placed her under a carob or a sycamore tree, rather he ornamented her with twenty-four ornaments and then brought her to him, as it says, ‘When you were in Eden, the Garden of God, every precious stone was your decoration: carbuncle, chrysoberyl, emerald, beryl, topaz, jasper, sapphire, turquoisè, and gold’” [Ezekiel 28:3].

(Theodor and Albeck 1965, 161)

Although there is no reason to assume that the midrash here is in any way dependent on Hesiod, the comparison of the treatment of the motif of women’s ornaments gives us a very neat contrast in the cultures. We can easily see that the valence of the motif is exactly turned on its head here. God does not adorn the woman in order to trap the man but in order, rather, to enhance the beauty of the first wedding night, of the first erotic encounter between husband and wife. Once more, as in the motif of the divine gift, we see the same narrative element but with its values precisely overturned.

As Zeitlin has remarked in a passage quoted above, there can be little doubt that these adornments are “externalized tokens of sexual allure.” Thus, the opposite values that they are assigned in the two discourses represent the diametrically opposed valuations of women’s sexuality in the two cultural practices. The Hesiodic text reflects a discursive practice of contempt for clothing, cosmetics, and jewelry, which was a commonplace current in rabbinic culture, but it does appear in a Jew like Philo, in such erotic encounters. The Hesiodic text reflects a discursive practice of contempt for clothing, cosmetics, and jewelry, which was a commonplace current in rabbinic culture, but it does appear in a Jew like Philo, in such erotic encounters between husband and wife. Once more, as in the motif of the divine gift, we see the same narrative element but with its values precisely overturned.

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34. [= הָנֶבֶרַך]. In other words, when the Torah says “And he constructed a woman,” it can be read as “And he braided the woman’s [hair].”

35. For women are evil, my children, and by reason of their lacking authority or power over men, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks. And whenever they cannot enchant by their appearance they conquer by a strategy. Indeed, the angel of the Lord told me and instructed me that women are more easily overcome by the spirit of promiscuity than are men. They contrive in their hearts against men, then by dressing themselves out they lead men’s minds astray, by a look they implant their poison, and finally by the act itself they take them captive.

Accordingly, my children, flee from sexual promiscuity, and order your wives and your daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men’s sound minds. (Kee 1983, 764)

in Christians like Tertullian and Clement. In the midrashic text, not only are Eve’s ornaments a positive gift of God to the man but they are invested with the most positive symbolism that the culture can muster. The “you” in the verse from Ezekiel is Israel herself, here identified with Eve, and the time in the Garden is referred to as a sort of honeymoon period of God’s relations with Israel. Female ornaments—i.e., sexuality—are thus represented in a manner almost identical to the way that they were depicted above in the story of Rabbi Akiva, as, for the Rabbis, the very symbol of their sancta, the exact antithesis of their value in Hellenic and Hellenistic Jewish cultures. For the rabbinic text, female sexuality is the image of Jerusalem, while for Clement, it is the image of a snake.

In Tertullian, as in Jerome and many others in the Patristic tradition, Woman is identified with all that is artificial and merely decorative and thus counter to the purpose of God (Bloch 1987, 11–12; see also Lichtenstein 1987):

That which He Himself has not produced is not pleasing to God, unless He was unable to order sheep to be born with purple and sky-blue fleeces! If He was able, then plainly He was unwilling: what God willed not, of course, ought not to be fashioned. Those things, then, are not the best by nature which are not from God, the Author of nature. Thus they are understood to be from the devil, from the corrupter of nature: for there is no other whose they can be, if they are not God’s; because what are not God’s must necessarily be His rival’s.

(Tertullian 1989b, 17)

Familiar by now is the association of women’s decorations with the devil. For Tertullian, indeed, the evil of women’s adornment lies precisely in that it is inappropriate to the “ignominy of the first sin” (Tertullian 1989b, 14), that is, for her who is after all “the devil’s gateway” (ibid.).

36. Tertullian seems aware of the contested nature of the topos, which he cites from the Enoch books and then remarks: “I am aware that the Scripture of Enoch, which has assigned this order (of action) to angels, is not received by some, because it is not admitted into the Jewish canon. . . . By the Jews it may now seem to have been rejected” (Tertullian 1989b, 15–16).

37. Indeed, stimulated by a question of Froma Zeitlin’s, I am led to speculate whether the number twenty-four for the jewels is not an allusion to the twenty-four books of the Bible or to the jewels on the High Priest’s breastplate, which were arrayed in rows of twelve, corresponding to the twelve tribes.

38. Cf. the similar remark of R. Yehoshua quoted above who (alone among the Rabbis) also relates aspects of women’s dress to the “sin of Eve,” however, paradoxically
Most important for my argument is Tertullian's insistence that female ornamentation is the gift to women of the fallen angels:

For they, wothal, who instituted them are assigned, under condemnation, to the penalty of death—those angels, to wit, who rushed from heaven on the daughters of men, so that this ignominy also attaches to woman. . . . they conferred properly and as it were peculiarly upon women that instrumental mean of womanly adornation, the radiances of jewels wherewith necklaces are variegated, and the circlers of gold wherewith the arms are compressed, and the medicaments of orchil with which wools are colored, and that black powder itself wherewith the eyelids and eyelashes are made prominent. What is the quality of these things may be declared meantime, even at this point, from the quality and condition of their teachers; in that sinners could never have either shown or supplied anything conducing to integrity.

(Tertullian 1989b, 14–15)

I think that I am not unjustified in seeing in these fallen angels a powerful echo of the gods and goddesses who in Hesiod decorated Pandora as a trap for man. The discourse of contempt for women's adornments and their deceptive nature is, of course, endemic throughout Greek thought, but the specific narrative element of the jewelry as a deceptive gift from divine beings is particular, I think, to the Pandora story.

A similar but even more powerful reversal of values is shown in a parallel to the above midrashic text, in which we are told that God led Eve by the hand to Adam, to which can be compared 'the leading of the midrashic text, this is referred to as a proof of God's steadfast love for Epimetheus in the Tanhuma Buber Hayye Sarah), while in Hesiod, the human couple!, and 'Happy is the citizen who has seen the king ing his [the citizen's] bride by the hand and leading her to his [the citizen's] house to him' (Tanhuma Buber Hayye Sarah), while in Hesiod, "when he had completed this sheer inescapable snare, Zeus Father had her led off as a gift to Epimetheus" (Frazer 1983, 98–99). Once more, I think that the midrashic text is an allusion to the motif in the Pandora version of the story. However, in the midrashic text, this is referred to as a proof of God's steadfast love for the human couple!, and "Happy is the citizen who has seen the king taking his [the citizen's] bride by the hand and leading her to his [the citizen's] house to him" (Tanhuma Buber Hayye Sarah), while in Hesiod, "when he had completed this sheer inescapable snare, Zeus Father had her led off as a gift to Epimetheus" (Frazer 1983, 98–99). Once more, I think that the midrashic text is an allusion to the motif in the Pandora myth of the woman given to the man by the god as a trick, a trap, and a punishment. But in the midrashic text, the valence is explicitly reversed; God is not a trickster, and his activities are only benevolent. In the androcentric economy of the midrash, the woman is God's greatest gift to the man, not his revenge. The midrash emphasizes over and over that the creation of sexuality and God's participation in the wedding, as it were, signify his "steadfast love" for humans both male and female—steadfast love, as opposed to the anger and jealousy manifested by Zeus. The very excessiveness of this repetition serves, I would suggest, as an index to the energy that is being mobilized to reverse the meaning of the Hesiodic motif. Moreover, in the midrash, both man and woman are subjects, and both recipients, of God's graciousness to them in the marriage relationship.

Woman exists only to be a marriage partner, but as such, her attractiveness and pleasure are warmly appreciated, not reviled as snares and deceptions, and her ornaments and decorations are also positively valued. God himself acts the bridesmaid and prepares her for the nuptial night. Woman is not a deviation from humanity but rather its completion, for as the Rabbis proclaim, "One who is not married is not a whole human." Sin and its punishment, according to the Rabbis, initiate not sexuality but sexual shame. In describing the rabbinic ideology of sex and gender an important set of distinctions made by anthropologist Sherry Ortner in a classic paper will be very useful (1974). She identifies three different versions of female inferiority in different cultures:

1. elements of cultural ideology and informants' statements that explicitly devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products, and their social milieu less prestige than are accorded men and the male correlates;
2. symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation; and
3. social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside. These three types of data may all of course be interrelated in any particular system, though they need not necessarily be.

(1974, 69–70)

My claim is that an ethnography of rabbinic culture would find that the first two categories are not dominant in this formation, i.e., that explicit devaluation of women, while certainly present in the texts, is not in them a key symbol (Ortner 1973). Moreover, as I have tried to show here, even practices such as menstrual defilement do not necessarily reflect a general attribution of defilement to women or female sexuality and that within the classical rabbinic period—as opposed to medieval Judaism—they, in fact, do not. If, however, Ortner's first two categories of female inferiority—
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devaluation of women and attribution of essential defilement—do not prominently obtain for the rabbinic culture, the third category—"social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside"—does so with a vengeance.

In summation, then, rabbinic culture is gender-asymmetric. Women are imagined as enablers of men by providing for their sexual and procreative needs (which is not to deny women's independent subjectivity or rights as persons in many areas, including the right to pleasure). Such androcentric (and indeed egocentric) constructions of gender roles, however, do not imply demonization or a view of women as impure and contaminating, as I hope to have shown here. Marriage and sexuality accordingly are seen in this formation as wholly positive, as they were not, of course, in either Philo or the patristic and medieval church. The Rabbis continue a biblical sense of the essential good of sex and procreation, while the negative valence given to sexuality, the body, and in particular the woman's body, in Hellenistic Judaism and its Christian successors, continues and transforms the classical Greek ambivalence about sexuality and procreation. The rabbinic tradition rejects the characteristic ontological move of western gender discourse by which "the masculine pose[s] as a disembodied universality and the feminine get[s] constructed as a disavowed corporeality" (Butler 1990, 12). Because the Rabbis do not disavow their corporeality, they do not construct it as feminine. In the next chapter, I shall attempt to analyze something of the discourse of sexual desire and interaction in marriage, particularly as it affects the differential power of men and women in the culture.