

Was the Ancestress of Israel in Danger*1?

Did Pharaoh touch (ענין) Sarai?

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When a grievous famine plagues the Land, Abram and Sarai go down to Egypt. Somewhere along the way Abram says to his wife: »Please say that you are my sister« (Gen 12, 11); Abram fears that if it is known that she is his wife: »They [the Egyptians] will kill me and let you live« (v. 12). We do not know how Sarai responds to her husband's request. Neither does the narrator tell us what specifically happens to Sarai as a result. The reason for Abram's request, however, is clear: »that it may go well with me because of you« (v. 13).

The depiction of Abram's character in this story raises difficult moral questions: he lies; behaves selfishly, abandoning his wife to the mercy of others²; and does not even try to justify himself and his motives to Pharaoh when the latter eventually confronts him: »Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say »she is my sister« (v. 18f.).

When Abram and Sarai arrive in Egypt, the Egyptians see »how beautiful the woman³ Sarai was« (v. 14) »and praised her to Pharaoh«

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¹ The title »Was the ancestress of Israel in Danger?« expresses the viewpoint of this article. Cf. Ruth Fidler, *The Dream Theophany in the Bible, Its Place in the History of Biblical Literature and Israelite Religion*, A Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Submitted to the Senate of the Hebrew University, 1996, 109–120; Also see: K. Koch, *The Ancestress of Israel in Danger, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*, 1969; R. Polzin, »The Ancestress of Israel in Danger« in *Danger, Semeia*, 3–4 (1975), 81–97.

According to Cassuto: »The triple repetition of the saving of the ancestresses emphasizes the value and constancy of the Deity's assistance to those loyal to him.« (See U. Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 2, 1964, 232.)

² Regarding the idea that »Abraham wishes to prevent Sarah from being raped« see G. Hepner, *Abraham's Incestuous Marriage with Sarah a Violation of the Holiness Code*, VT 53 (2003), 143–155.

³ »The woman« appears nine times as a *leitwort* in the story; it apparently points out the centrality of Sarai in the story.

(v 15). As a result, we are told that: »and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace« (v. 15). What happened, if indeed anything did, between Pharaoh and Sarah the Ancestress of Israel? This question has intrigued generations of old and new commentators.

The repetition as an »inner-biblical« interpretation:

Before attempting to clarify this issue, I should like to call attention to a story of a similar meeting between Sarah and Abraham and a foreign king, this time Abimelech, king of Gerar (Genesis 20). The similarity between these two stories, and the similarities, both in content and language, between these two and a third story – that of Isaac and Rebeka in Gen 26 – make comparisons inevitable. How can the repetition of this theme be explained?

There are a number of possible answers. Supporters of the source criticism⁴, for example, attribute the story in Chap 12 to source J, the story in Chap. 20,1–18 to source E, and the story in 26,1–14 to source J. According, however, to Zakovitch and Shinan⁵ – scholars identified with the school of »inner-biblical« interpretation – Chap. 12 contains the earlier story, while the two stories in Chaps. 20 and 26 are later interpretations of the earlier version. Within the framework of this article I propose to accept their suggestion that Chap. 12 contains the earlier version, while the stories in Chaps. 20 and 26 were meant to interpret and improve the moral characters of the major figures of Chap. 12.

Two examples should suffice to justify my decision:

First of all, there is the handling of the moral issue raised by Abram's lie when he asks Sarai to say that she is his sister (in Chap. 20). This problem is solved elegantly in 20,12 when Sarah is shown in very fact to be Abraham's half-sister, as is made clear when Abraham says to Abimelech: »And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's; and she became my wife« (v. 12).

⁴ J. Skinner, Genesis, ICC, 1930; H. Gunkel, Genesis, 1964. For more about the scholarly attention devoted to the so-called »wife-sister« texts see: D. Lipton, Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis, Ph. D. Dissertation, Cambridge University, 1996, 31–47.

⁵ Y. Zakovitch, A. Shinan, Abraham and Sarai in Egypt, Gen 12,10–20, in: The Bible, in Early Translations and in Early Jewish Literature, 1983 (Hebrew).

Secondly, and more pertinent to my claim: The story as found in Chap. 12 does not state clearly that the king »touched« נגע Sarah, but rather that he took her for his wife. There is, on the other hand, no direct denial that he touched her, and the ambiguous formulation in Chap. 12 allows us to conclude that Pharaoh King of Egypt did indeed touch Sarai. In Chap. 20, on the other hand, there is a clear statement that Abimelech king of Gerar took Sarah (v. 2). But we are immediately informed that God intervened in time: »But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night« and told him: »You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, because she is a married woman«. As a result, and in order to free us of all doubt and concern, we are told that: »Now Abimelech had not approached her« (v. 4)⁷.

At this point I should like to note that the juxtaposition between Sarah's stay in Abimelech's house (Gen 20) and the birth of Isaac (Gen 25) led to Rashi's interpretation of the verse: »This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac« (Gen 25,19). Again we wonder what purpose is served by the repetition. Why didn't the narrator content himself with: »This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham«?⁸ Rashi's answer is that: »When it is written ›Isaac son of Abraham‹, there is an

⁶ In this article the use of the verb ›touch‹ נגע bears a sexual nature. Three of the eight occurrences (3,3; 12,17; 20,6; 26,11; 26,29; 28,2; 32,26; 32,33) of the Hebrew verb נגע in Genesis are used in the ›wife-sister‹ stories. Lipton (1996, 44–47) points out the different use in each of the texts (12,17; 20,6; 26,11). I would like to point out their common denominator.

The common denominator, in my opinion, is the extent to which the verb contains sexual connotations. Since this verb does not of necessity bear sexual connotations (see, for example, Ps 105,15, where the parallelism indicates that the ›touch‹ is equivalent to ›harm‹), the narrator can create tension/ambivalence around the question of whether the touch is soft, though neutral, or whether it is physical and sexual, i.e. bearing a sexual intention. This is even more explicit in the third story: »whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death« (26,11).

In his discussion of this verse Van Seters differentiates between Isaac and his wife Rebecca: see Abraham in History and Traditions (1975, 181). Van Seters sees word-play based on the dual usage of נגע: »there is an interesting use of the verb נגע since for a man it means ›to inflict bodily injury‹, but for a woman it means ›to approach sexually‹.

⁷ Regarding this phrase and the next one: »... That was why I did not let you touch her« (Gen 20,6) Lipton (above, n. 4) 44 n. 35 points out: »The pairing of these two phrases may explain the unusual use of the preposition אל, as opposed to the more common ב, in v. 6. It is possible that *el* may indicate the sexual nature of Abimelech's intended ›touch‹ here.«

⁸ See also in Chap. 21,3: »Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac«

implication that ›Abraham begot Isaac‹, lest contemporary wise-guys say that Abimelech got Sarah pregnant. Sarah, after all, had lived with Abraham for many years without becoming pregnant; for this reason God made Isaac resemble Abraham in his looks, as a sign that ›Abraham begot Isaac‹. Thus it is written ›Isaac son of Abraham‹ to show that ›Abraham begot Isaac‹⁹.«

What happened to the woman – Rebekah – in the third story (Gen 26)? In this case there is no cause for concern or for Divine intervention, since Rebekah was not brought to the king's house, as we learn in verse 8: ›When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah‹. Yet although Rebekah was not taken to the king's house, from what the king says to Isaac we may conclude that there IS cause for worry. Abimelech asks Isaac: ›What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us‹. It is in the context of the verb ›lie with‹ that Abimelech commands his people: ›Anyone who molests¹⁰ this man or his wife shall be put to death‹ (v. 11). The verb ›touch‹ is used in this story, too, but it has been softened. The ›touching‹ of Sarah has been played down, and is referred to in passing as an afterthought to the touching of Isaac.

In this context we may recall an even more attenuated reflection of this motif in Ps 105,12–15: ›They [Abraham and Isaac and Jacob] were then few in number ... wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He [God] allowed no one to oppress them ... Do not touch my anointed ones, do not harm my prophets‹. The verb ›touched‹ appears in the plural and applies to the Patriarchs – to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – rather than to the Ancestresses. The verb ›touch‹ נָגַע is herein synonymous with ›oppress‹ and ›harm‹, but does not bear a sexual connotation¹¹.

In spite of this tendency of attenuation, and in the face of the clear statement in Chap. 20 that nothing ›happened‹ between Abimelech and Sarah, our concern remains, and with it the need to find out

⁹ Rashi, *The Torat Chaim Chumash*, 1990, 1. In the Midrash Tanhuma, Toldot A, we find: ›When Sarah was being thrown back and forth between Pharaoh and Abimelech and became pregnant with Isaac, the peoples of the world would say: ›Can one who is a hundred years old father a son? (Gen 17,17) Perhaps she is pregnant by Abimelech or Pharaoh.‹‹ (Jerusalem: Levin Epstein, 1964).

¹⁰ I prefer Everett Fox's (*The Five Books of Moses*, Schocken Books, 1997) translation: ›whoever touches‹

¹¹ See above, n. 6.

whether Pharaoh had indeed touched her, as told in Chap. 12. Moreover, in the light of the narrative in Chap. 20, with its clear statement that Abimelech neither touched Sarah nor even came near her, the lack of any reference to this question in Chap. 12 is even more surprising. We cannot help but wonder whether anything happened, and suspect that something did!

Close reading of the story in Chap. 12:

I shall now attempt to deal with the question of whether Chap. 12 contains clues as to what »really happened« in Pharaoh's palace. This necessitates a close reading of the story, beginning with: »and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace« (12,15). It is important to note that Sarai was taken »to Pharaoh's palace«, rather than »to Pharaoh.« This formulation is meant to comfort the reader who fears for Sarai. Support for this assumption is found in the »and« (וְ) in the verb »and she was taken«, which can, however, also be understood linguistically in terms of »but« (אבל). In other words, although Pharaoh's ministers praised her beauty »to Pharaoh«, Sarai was fortunately not taken to Pharaoh, but merely brought »to his palace.«

In verse 16 there is continued cause for concern as to the fate of Sarah; the Ancestress of Israel may indeed be in danger. At this very point Sarai's fate hangs in the balance, as it were. Yet instead of telling us what happened, the narrator abandons her for the time being in Pharaoh's palace and transfers the focus of the verse to Abram, whose situation was signally improved when he allowed his wife to be taken from him. The creation of suspense is, of course, a common literary-dramatic device.

The next verse opens with וַיִּגַּע »and he was plagued/touched.« Who plagued/touched whom? If the subject of the previous verse was Pharaoh, the reader who is worried about Sarai might understand that the subject of the current verse is also Pharaoh¹². At this stage in the process of reading, the suspicion arises that what we feared would happen

¹² Note a similar word-order, aimed at increasing tension, in the second story (Chap. 20). Immediately after we learn that Abimelech »ויקח את שרה« (20, 2), the verb »ויבוא« appears (v. 3a). Various uses of the verb »ויבוא« in the Bible indicate that in addition to its »innocent« meaning – to enter – this verb can bear a sexual connotation. At this point in the process of reading, the sensitive reader may be confused; how should Abimelech's »entrance« be understood? How relieved we are to discover once again (as in 12,17) that the subject of the sentence is God, who appears to Abimelech in his dream!

to Sarai has taken place, that Pharaoh has indeed touched her. Fortunately, however, the continuation of the passage reveals to us that Pharaoh did not touch her, but rather »was touched/ plagued« by God: »But afflicted Pharaoh with mighty plagues« (12,16a). Sarai, moreover, is the reason for these plagues: »on account of Sarai the wife of Abram« (v. 17).

Why did the biblical composer choose the root נגע, and then repeat it twice (verse 17)? His literary genius is revealed in his use of the root נגע as one of the hidden literary tools which hint at the Exodus from Egypt, as Cassuto¹³ and others have noted. The root נגע does, of course, serve as one of the words for the »plagues« of Egypt (Ex 11,1). But even if it is true that the narrator wished to hint at these plagues, why did he choose the term נגעים (plagues)? He could have employed other terms, such as מופתים (wonders) or אותות (signs), which are used repeatedly to signify the plagues visited on Egypt, as in Ex 12, 3: »But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt«. (also Ex 10,1,2; 11,9,10). On the other hand, נגע as in the combination: נגעים גדולים appears only once in the stories of the Exodus, moreover in the masculine gender: »And the Lord said to Moses: ›I will bring but one more plague [עוד נגע אחד] upon Pharaoh' ...« (Ex 11,1).

It is may claim that נגעים, bearing as it does a double meaning, was chosen to denote the punishment visited on Pharaoh by God, in order to hint both at the plagues visited on Egypt and Pharaoh's sin against Sarai. Since I shall explore this claim further, this may be as good a time as any to note that there is no exact, specific description of Pharaoh's sin. Did he sin by taking Sarai [to his palace], or by what he did to her after she was brought to his house? Did he, in other words, sin against her feminine purity? The verb נגע hints at this. The result is that the reader swings back and forth between hope and fear for Sarai during her stay in Pharaoh's house – this pendulum effect appears to reflect Sarai's own feelings as well. Just when the phrase »to Pharaoh's palace« would enable us to relax, the verb נגעים renews our fears. Pharaoh's words to Abram: »so that I took her as my wife« (Gen 12,19) then strengthen our suspicion that there was indeed »something« between the king and the Ancestress of Israel. The opening phrase »and I took her« may sound innocent enough in that it recalls the previous use of the verb לקח – »and

¹³ U. Cassuto, Commentary on Genesis, vol. 2, 1964 (Hebrew), 228: »The story of Abram's and Sarai's descent into Egypt surprisingly parallels the later stories – at the end of Genesis and the beginning to Exodus – of the descent of the children of Israel into Egypt.«; »Miscall terms the story found in Gen 12,10–20 »a Mini-Exodus.« See P. Miscall, Working of Old Testament Narrative, 1980, 42–45.

the woman was taken¹⁴ (verse 15) merely to his palace. Yet the conclusion »for/as my wife« raises our suspicions and fears¹⁵.

In the context of biblical usage, the combination: »took + her + for/as his wife« indicates a formal relationship between the two¹⁶, even if, as medieval interpreters argue, the woman is married against her will¹⁷. The relationship between Abram and Sarai, for example, is described: »Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives« ... (Gen 11, 29 – see also 25, 20). Let us note that in the language of the Second Temple period the verb ויקח is synonymous with וישא (אוֹתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה) see: IChr 23, 22; IIChr 11, 21; 13, 21; 24, 3; Esr 9, 2, 12; 10, 44; Neh 3, 2)¹⁸. In modern Hebrew, by the way, the verb נשא refers to marriage.

The formulaic phrase לקח אֹתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה appears in other places in the Bible. In Ex 6, 20–25 we find an abridged formulation: »Amram took to wife his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and

¹⁴ In the second story (Chap. 20, 2) it says: »So the King Abimelech of Gerar had Sara brought ויקח to him« Note that she is brought not »to his palace« but »to him«, and without the conclusion »for/as my wife«.

¹⁵ In his interpretation of this passage in Torat Hayim Ibn Ezra notes: »She was taken to be his wife« means that »he lay with her«, even though in his interpretation of the words נָשָׂא גְדוּלִים he writes: »the נָשָׂא גְדוּלִים impaired Pharaoh's male potency, and he was therefore unable to touch her.«; The Torat Chaim Chumash, 1990.

¹⁶ BDB = The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1981, 542–543: »be taken in marriage«; Wenham J. Gordon, Genesis, Word Biblical Commentary, V. 1, 1987, 176–183; H. See: bas, *Laqah'*, TDOT VIII, 19; F.

¹⁷ Traditional interpreters, who were apparently aware of this, tried to deal with this meaning by claiming that Sarai was taken against her will. See, for example, Rada"q, The Torat Chaim Chumash, 1990, 158: »Our teachers say that Sarai was taken against her will because she was married to another man. This contrasts with what they said about Esther; she was taken willingly ... she was unmarried and was taken to be the wife of a king.«

¹⁸ Examples of the combination of »נשא« + (himself) + wife« from the Second Temple period can be found in: IChr 23, 22; IIChr 11, 21; 13, 21; 24, 3; Esr 9, 2, 12; 10, 44; Neh 3, 25; See also: Ben David, *Leshon Mikra and Leshon Chachamim A*, 1967, 121, 179, 208 (Hebrew); R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Towards an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, 1976, 146; J. M. Sasson, *Ruth*, 1979, 20; J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, 1967, 40; Athalya Brenner (*Ruth and Naomi, Literary, Stylistic and Linguistic Studies in the Book of Ruth, Sifriat Poalim*, 1988), 132. Brenner discusses this combination: »They married (וישא) Moabite women« (Ruth 1, 4). Brenner claims that this is a later combination, and adds: »The earlier parallel expression is לקח לאשה (Jud 21, 22, etc.). Perhaps the earlier לקח was replaced by נשא because the latter had come to bear the meaning of »purchasing.«« See H. Ringgren, *nasa'*, TDOT, X, 28–29; See Joseph Fleishman, »Socio-Legal Aspects of Genesis 39«, Shenaton, X, 111. Ed. Sara Japhet, 2002, 150.152.

Moses« (v. 20), according to which the woman's giving birth is contiguous with, and a direct result of, her being »taken to wife.« This short version of course omits certain necessary steps in the process, such as his »lying with her« and her conceiving a child by him¹⁹.

In the light of this abridged formulation (Pharaoh uses the phrase »I took her as my wife« – 12,19) we might have expected to learn that this »taking« resulted in Sarai's bearing him a son. Are we, then, justified in concluding that because Sarai did not become pregnant nor bear Pharaoh a son, he had not »touched« לָא נָגַע her? This is counterindicated, however, by the very first expository statement relating to Sarai in the Bible, from which we learn that she is barren: »Now Sarai was barren, she had no child« (Gen 11, 30).

At first this description of Sarah as the barren Ancestress of the People sounds both tragic and absurd. It is, to be exact, an oxymoron: the barren mother. The original statement of Sarai's barrenness was apparently intended to hint at events to come. Her barrenness serves as the background for Chap. 16, in which the inability to conceive is again noted: »Sarai, Abram's wife' had borne him no children« and Sarai then pleads with Abram: »Look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid, perhaps I shall have a son through her« (16,2). We know how the story ends: »The Lord took note of Sarah as He promised, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham« (Gen 21,1, 2).

The fact that Sarai's barrenness is the first information which we receive about the Mother of Israel is highly significant in interpreting the story of her stay in the house of the foreign king, and especially in answering the question of what happened between Pharaoh and Sarah the Matriarch. If Sarai is indeed unable to conceive, she would not have become pregnant even if Pharaoh had lain with her (whether she was a willing partner or not). The fact of Sarah's barrenness makes it possible to leave unanswered the question of what happened to her in Pharaoh's house, thereby protecting the honor of the first Ancestress of Israel. Perhaps it is just as well. At the same time, Sarah's inability to conceive may remain a source of concern for the reader who follows her adventures in

¹⁹ »So Boaz married (וַיִּקַּח) Ruth, she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son« (Ruth 4,13). The same order of events is found in Isaiah, with the use of the verb קָרַב: »I was intimate (וַיִּקְרַב) with the prophetess and she conceived (וַתַּהַר)« (Isa 8,3). The two verbs – וַיִּקְרַב and וַתַּהַר – appear not only one after the other, but clearly bear a cause and effect relationship. In other words, the use of the verb וַיִּקְרַב caused her to become pregnant. This is important re the second story, in chapter 20. In addition to the use of the verb נָגַע (v. 6) we find the expression: »Now Abimelech had not approached (לֹא קָרַב) her« (Gen 20, 4). He had, in other words, not lain with her.

Pharaoh's house. To sum up this section of my argument: The reader continues to swing back and forth between hope and fear as to Sarai's fate.

*The »measure for measure« principle is couched in the form
»word for word«:*

I should now like to propose a new argument, one which I previously hinted at, and which supports the hypothesis that Pharaoh did indeed touch Sarah. We will now look at the second story – in Chap. 20 – and use it to clarify the first story as to the question: Did Pharaoh touch Sarai or not?

First of all, let us recall that the verb נגע appears in both stories. We have already noted that in Genesis 12 נגעִים describes the punishment visited by God on Pharaoh, while in Genesis 20 the verb נגע describes the sin which Abimelech almost committed. נגע in the sense of »sin« is reflected in Abimelech's dream, in God's answer to Abimelech's complaint that: »And God said to him in the dream, ›I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against me. That was why I did not let you touch her« (Gen 20,6). From this we learn that, had Abimelech touched Sarah in very fact, it would have been a sin in the eyes of God (אָפּאָר = נגע).

Let us now focus on God's behavior in both stories. As I've already noted, the Deity's intervention in Chap. 20, which prevents Abimelech from sinning, i.e. from »touching« Sarah, focuses attention on the lack of Divine interference in Chap. 12. Why didn't God prevent Pharaoh from sinning, as he later did with Abimelech? Moreover, why did a Deity known as the Righteous Judge punish Pharaoh? God's punishment of Pharaoh is a sign that the king had sinned. What, we may ask, was his sin? The narrator does not provide a clear answer. The answer can be found in the punishment itself, on the principle of »measure for measure.«

In order to clarify my argument I shall refer to this important literary device, about which I have recently written. In the Bible, the »measure for measure« principle is, I have claimed, couched in the form »word for word«:

In the familiar term »measure for measure« the same word – measure – was chosen in order to express the connection and mutual suitability, both in content and in form, between the act (the sin) and its results (the punishment).

In the Bible, the expression of the »measure for measure« principle is the literary use of the same word in describing both the sin and its punishment.

If we describe this principle of reward as a mathematical equation, we can discern the identical »word« which appears in both sides of the equation (this »word«, moreover, can represent an identical number, identical place, or common object, etc.)²⁰.

Three examples of this literary device should suffice:

1) The use of the word רעה (evil) in Jeremiah 26, 3:

»It may be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way; that I may repent Me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings«²¹. The word רעה (evil) expresses both the sin and its punishment. We find a similar usage in Jonah 3,10²²; the use of the word רעה in both Jeremiah and Jonah serves as a convincing literary device for expressing the linkage, the mutuality, as it were, between the sin and its punishment.

2) The role of חרב (sword) in the prophet Nathan's speech to King David (II Sam 12,9–10):

»You have put Uriah the Hittite to the sword ...« (חרב = the sin)

»Therefore the sword shall never depart from your House« (= the punishment). It is important to note that in the depiction of David's sin in Chap. 11 חרב in the sense of »sword« is not mentioned as the means of Uriah's death. In the parable of the poor man's ewe-lamb in Chap. 12 Nathan carefully selects the same word – חרב – as a literary device for expressing the sin and its punishment in order to emphasize the linkage between the two.

3) The verb אכל (to eat) in the story of the Garden of Eden describes the sin and its punishment. Adam's and Eve's sin is depicted: »She took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband and he ate« (Gen 3, 6), and its punishment: »By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat« (3,19). The use of אכל both for the sin and its punishment emphasizes the linkage between the two.

²⁰ Yitzhak (Itzik) Peleg, The »Measure for Measure« Principle – By Means of »Word for Word«, Beit Mikra Quarterly, no. 158, 1999, 357–360.

²¹ According to the translation of The Holy Scriptures, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955.

²² See: Yitzhak (Itzik) Peleg, »Yet Forty Days, and Nineveh Shall be Overthrown« (Jonah 3,4): Two Readings (שתי קריאות) of the Book of Jonah«, Beit Mikra Quarterly, no. 158, 1999, 231, n. 18. The double meaning of *ra'a*, indicating the sin and its punishment, also appears in II Reg 14,9–10.

On the basis of the above, the reader concludes that if Pharaoh's punishment was נגעים, then his sin also lay in his נגיעה (touching) of Sarai. Moreover, the description of the sin which Abimelech »almost« committed by means of the verb נגע supports my hypothesis.

In the context of the »measure for measure« principle as seen in the use of נגע let us turn to Rabbi Berachia's²³ commentary on Genesis 12, 17: »because he dared to touch the matriarch's body«. Lieberman then adds that »Rabbi Berachia was one of the most famous scriptural expounders of his time, and his contention that God נגע – plagued – Pharaoh because he dared to touch – נגע – the Matriarch's body was surely intended to clarify the matter for his listeners.« It seems to me, moreover, that the expounder sensed the phenomenon of »measure for measure« by way of »word for word«, though not its formulation and definition, as herein presented.

One last comment before I conclude. The biblical narrator appears to face a most difficult dilemma: Whose honor should he protect – Sarah's, or that of God the righteous judge? In order to protect Sarah's honor he should state that Pharaoh did not touch her. If, however, the king did not touch her, why would a just God punish him (with נגעים)? Conversely, in order to protect the Deity's reputation as a righteous judge, it would have made sense to state openly that Pharaoh sinned against Sarai, thus justifying the punishment visited upon him.

It seems that this dilemma encouraged the narrator to intentionally employ an ambiguous, even »cloudy« lexicon, thereby maintaining the honor of Sarah as our Ancestress and God as the Righteous Judge.

If my suggestion has indeed revealed what »really« happened between Sarai and Pharaoh, the Deity retains his status as a just God who punishes Pharaoh (בנגעים) according to the principle of »measure for measure« for the sin of touching (נגע) Sarai; while Sarah, the Ancestress of Israel, is portrayed as a woman tainted (Heaven forbid!), albeit unwillingly.

To sum up:

If Pharaoh's punishment is revealed by means of the verb נגע then his sin should also be revealed through the use of נגע.

I hope that I have shown how the use of the literary device which I call »word for word« (based on the »measure for measure« principle) reveals that Pharaoh did indeed touch Sarai!

²³ In S. Lieberman's translation from the Aramaic; see: Saul Lieberman, *Greek and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 1962, 30. Also see the discussion of the question: What sin led to Pharaoh's being punished? (p. 31).

Because of the grievous famine which plagued the land, Abram and Sarai went down to Egypt (Gen 12,10). The question naturally arises: What happened, if indeed anything, between Pharaoh and Sarah the Matriarch? In this article I suggest a new line of reasoning which may lead to a conclusive answer to this question. My claim is that »something« did occur between the two. In the familiar term »measure for measure« the same word »measure« was chosen in order to express the connection and mutual suitability, both in content and in form, between the act (the sin) and its results (the punishment). A good example is the word '*āchal*' in the story of Eden, which describes both the sin and its punishment. Adam's and Eve's sin was that »she took of the fruit thereof, and did *eat*, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did *eat*« (Gen 3,6). The punishment is, of course: »In the sweat of thy face shalt thou *eat* bread« (3,19). It is therefore possible to claim that since Pharaoh's punishment is described by means of the verb *nāga'* (נָגַע'), his sin was that he touches (*nāga'*) Sarai. The use of *nāga'* for the sin which Abimelech (in Gen 20) almost committed in the second story supports this claim.

Suite à la famine qui a frappé le pays, Abram et Sara sont allés en Egypte (Gen 12, 10). Une question surgit tout naturellement: que se passa-t-il entre le pharaon et Sara, la matriarche? L'A. suppose que »quelque chose« se passa entre les deux. Selon le principe: »mesure pour mesure«, le terme de »mesure« permet d'exprimer le rapport et la correspondance, aussi bien en termes de contenu que de forme, entre l'acte (le péché) et ses conséquences (le punition). Le terme '*āchal*' – »manger« dans le récit du jardin d'Eden en fournit un bon exemple puisqu'il désigne aussi bien le péché que sa punition. Le péché d'Adam et d'Eve consista en ce qu'»elle en prit un fruit dont elle *mangea* et elle en donna aussi à son homme, qui était avec elle, et il en *mangea*« (Gen 3, 6). La punition en est: »À la sueur de ton visage tu *mangeras* le pain« (3,19); il est ainsi permis d'affirmer, pour Gen 12, que la punition du pharaon est décrite par le verbe *nāga'* (נָגַע'), son péché étant qu'il ait touché (*nāga'*) Sara. Dans le second récit (Gen 20), l'usage de *nāga'*, pur désigner le péché qu'Abimélèk était sur le point de commettre, confirme cette affirmation.

Infolge der großen Hungersnot, die das Land plagte, zogen Abram und Sarai nach Ägypten (Gen 12,10). Die Frage, die sich naturgemäß stellt, lautet: Was hat sich zwischen dem Pharaon und Sarah, der Erzmutter, ereignet? In diesem Aufsatz soll der Beweis erbracht werden, dass es »irgendetwas« gegeben hat, was zwischen beiden geschehen ist. Bei dem Prinzip »Maß für Maß« wird das gleiche Wort »Maß« gewählt, um den Zusammenhang und die Entsprechung, sowohl in Inhalt als auch in Form, zwischen der Handlung (die Sünde) und ihren Folgen (die Strafe) auszudrücken. Ein gutes Beispiel hierfür bietet in der »Paradies«-Erzählung das Wort '*āchal*', welches sowohl die Sünde als auch die Strafe beschreibt. Adams und Evas Sünde bestand darin, dass »sie von seiner Frucht nahm und *aß* und auch ihrem Mann gab, der bei ihr war, und er *aß*« (Gen 3,6). Die Strafe ist bekanntermaßen: »Im Schweiß deines Angesichts wirst du Brot *essen*« (3,19). Die Schlussfolgerung lautet deshalb: Da die Strafe des Pharaon durch das Verb *nāga'* (נָגַע') beschrieben wird, bestand seine Sünde darin, dass er Sarai berührt hat (*nāga'*). Die Verwendung von *nāga'* zur Beschreibung der Sünde, die Abimelech nach der zweiten Erzählung (Gen 20) beinahe begangen hätte, stützt diese Behauptung.