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A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price: Part 11: The Sacrifice of Sarah

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The Sacrifice of Sarah

By Dr. Hugh Nibley

A Fateful Journey: The history of Palestine has been to a remarkable degree a story of "boom and bust," from prehistoric times down to the present; and that happy and unhappy land has never had a greater boom or a more spectacular bust than occurred in the days of Abraham. Hebron was a brand new city, bustling with activity, when Abraham and his family settled there.⁹⁷ Just to the east were the even more thriving Cities of the Valley, to which Lot migrated to improve his fortune. Preliminary rumblings and prophetic warnings of things to come went unheeded by a populace enjoying unprecedented prosperity (today this is called "nuclear incredulity"), but nonetheless, the area was hit hard by a famine that forced Abraham to move out of Hebron after he had lived there only two years. Everybody was moving to Egypt and settling in the area nearest to Canaan and most closely resembling the geography and economy of the Jordan depression, namely, "the land of Egypt, as thou comest to Zoar," in the eastern Delta, where there had always been camps and villages of Canaanites sojourning in the land. Abraham settled in Zoan, the local capital, a city of Asiatic immigrants that was even newer, by seven years, than Hebron—practically a tent city. There the family lived for five years before they attracted the dangerous interest of Pharaoh.⁹⁷

The story of how Sarah ended up in the royal palace is now available in the recently discovered Genesis Apocryphon, and the account is a thoroughly plausible one. Pharaoh's regular title in this document, "Pharaoh-Zoan, King of Egypt," shows him to be one of those many Asiatics who ruled in the Delta from time to time while claiming, and sometimes holding, the legitimate crown of all Egypt. The short journey from Canaan into his Egyptian domain is described in sig-

nificant terms: ". . . now we passed through our land and entered into the land of the sons of Ham, the land of Egypt," as if the family was definitely moving from one spiritual and cultural domain to another.⁹⁸ This is interesting because the Book of Abraham lays peculiar emphasis on the Hamitic blood of this particular Pharaoh as well as his anxious concern to establish his authority—always a touchy point with the Delta-Pharaohs, whose right to rule was often challenged by the priests and the people of Upper Egypt. In his new home, Abraham, an international figure in the caravan business, entertained local officials both as a matter of policy and from his own celebrated love of hospitality and of people.

One day he was entertaining "three men," courtiers of "Pharaoh-Zoan," at dinner (G.A. XIX, 24, 27). Abraham would host such special delegations again, in Canaan: there would be the three heavenly visitors whom he would feast "in the plains of Mamre" (Gen. 18:1ff), and the "three Amorite brothers" whom he would have as guests (G.A. XXI, 19-22; Gen. 14:13). The names of these last three were Mamre, 'irmn, and Eshkol. Mamre and Eshkol are well-known place-names, and if we look for 'irmn it is a place-name too, for in the Ugaritic ritual-epic tale of Aqhat, it is "the man of Hmmy" who hosts "the Lords of Hkpt" who come from afar.⁹⁹ If this seems to put Abraham's party in a ritual setting, its historicity is vindicated by the name of the leader of the palace delegation, who is called HRQNWSH. B. Z. Whacholder explains this as "an early transliteration of *archones*," designating its bearer as "the archon, the head of the household," and obviously indicating Hellenistic influence.¹⁰⁰ But *Archones* is neither a name nor a title, and the "early transliteration" leaves much to be desired. On the other

hand, we find in Pharaonic times, in the employ of *Sshmt.t*, the divine lady of the Eastern Delta, the very district where our little drama is taking place, a busy official and agent bearing the title of Hr-hknw, "the Lord of Protection," whose business was to police the area and keep an eye on foreigners, with whom he was Pharaoh's contact man; he is, in fact, according to H. Kees, none other than our old friend Nefertem, the immemorial frontier guard of the northeastern boundary, the official host, border inspector, and watchdog (or rather watch-lion) of the foreigners coming to Egypt—especially from Canaan.¹⁰¹ Nothing could be more natural than to have this conscientious border official checking up on Abraham from time to time and enjoying his hospitality. And since it was his duty to report to Pharaoh whatever he considered of interest or significance on his beat, it is not surprising that a report of HRQNWSH and his aides to the king contained a glowing account of Abraham's dazzling wife. Her beauty had already caused a sensation at the customs house, according to a famous legend.¹⁰² If nothing else, her blondness would have attracted attention among the dark Egyptians: the Midrash reports, in fact, that Abraham had warned her against this very thing: "We are now about to enter a country whose inhabitants are dark-complexioned—say that you are my sister wherever we go!"¹⁰³ This admonition was given as the family passed from Abraham's homeland in northern Mesopotamia (Aram Naharaim and Aram Nahor) into Canaan—clearly indicating that the people of Abraham's own country were light-complexioned.¹⁰³

In reporting to Pharaoh, his three agents, while singing the praises of Sarah's beauty in the set terms of the most sensuous Oriental love-poetry (G.A. XX, 2-8), make a special point

of mentioning that "with all her beauty there is much wisdom in her" (XX, 7), lauding her "godbness, wisdom, and truth" even above her other qualities (XIX, 25). They went all out in their description not only because the subject was worthy of their best efforts, but because they hoped to put themselves in good with the king by both whetting and satisfying his desire.¹⁰⁴ The royal reaction was immediate. Asiatic Pharaohs were polygamous and aggressive: "Sarah was

taken from me by force . . ." (XII, 14; XX, 11); without further ado the king "took her to him to wife and sought to slay me" (XX, 9). Josephus says that this Pharaoh deserved the punishment he got "because of his high-handed manner towards the wife of a stranger" (Ant. I, 8, 1). But as we all know, Abraham was saved when Pharaoh was assured by Sarah herself that he was her brother and would thus not stand in the way of their marriage; instead of being liquidated,

he was therefore, as the brother of the favorite wife, "entreated . . . well for her sake." (Gen. 12:16.)

Sarah on the Lion-couch: Abraham was saved and Pharaoh was pleased and everything was all right except for poor Sarah. It was now her turn to face the test of the lion-couch! As we have seen, not only the royal altar but also the royal bed was a lion-couch. And this was to be more than a test of Sarah's virtue, for should she refuse, the king would be mortally offended—with predictable results for the lady. His unhesitating move to put Abraham out of the way had made it clear enough that His Majesty was playing for keeps. After all, three princesses of the royal line had already been put to death on the lion-altar for refusing to compromise their virtue (Abr. 1:11), and there was no indication that Sarah would be an exception.

The story of Sarah's delivery from her plight follows the same order as the stories of Abraham and Isaac. First of all, being brought to the royal bed "by force," she weeps and calls upon the Lord to save her, at which time Abraham also "prayed and entreated and begged . . . as my tears fell." (XX, 12.) As he had prayed for himself, so the Patriarch "prayed the Lord to save her from the hands of Pharaoh."¹⁰⁵

And though experience may have rendered *him* perfectly confident in the results, it was the less experienced Sarah who was being tested.¹⁰⁶ The prayer for deliverance closely matches that on the first lion-couch: "Blessed art thou, Most High God, Lord of all the worlds, because Thou art Lord and Master of all and ruler of all the kings of the earth, and of whom thou judgest. Behold now I cry before Thee, my Lord, against Pharaoh-Zoan, King of Egypt, because my wife has been taken from me by force. Judge him for me and let me behold Thy mighty hand descend upon him. . . ." (XX, 12-15.) Even so Abraham had prayed for deliverance from the altar of "Nimrod": "O God, Thou seest what this wicked man is doing to me . . ." with the whole emphasis on the king's blasphemous claims to possess the ultimate power in the world: in both cases Abraham is helpless against the authority and might of Pharaoh, but still he will recognize only one king, and he calls for a showdown: ". . . that night I prayed and begged and said in sorrow . . . let thy mighty hand descend upon him . . . and men shall know, my Lord, that *Thou* art the Lord of all the kings of the earth!" (XX, 14f.) This is exactly the point of Abraham's prayer in the *Maase Abraham* and Abraham 1:17, where God says, "I have come

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"When your heart tells you things
your mind does not know"

By Richard L. Evans

There is this phrase, cited by a thoughtful friend: ". . . when your heart tells you things your mind does not know."¹ All of us have impressions, promptings, a sense of warning sometimes; an intuition, an awareness, the source of which we do not always know; and we often have to trust our hearts, along with the facts we face. Life isn't merely a mechanical calculator or a slide rule situation. There is the spirit; the feelings; conscience, convictions; things we know are there; things we know are real; things we can't put in a test tube. Love is one of them. Faith is another; a sense of right and wrong; sometimes a sense of urgency; sometimes a sense of assurance. There is so much that can't be physically touched, so much that can't be mechanically calculated. Parents often have impressions pertaining to their children. And children often tease parents to let them do things that had better not be done: "Why can't I do this? Why can't I go there? Why? Why?"—questions that parents often cannot answer with full satisfaction, except that they feel it, they know it, with an inner sense of certainty. As we live for it, wisdom comes from many sources, both within and outside ourselves. And children often have to trust parents, and know that their hearts tell them things their minds do not know. Parents are not perfect, not infallible, but overall, the inspiration, the guidance that comes with prayerful pleading, brings warnings, promptings, impressions from beyond our sight and sound, which no one should stubbornly ignore. Beyond books, beyond all that we can weigh and measure, beyond all the tangibles that we can touch, there are influences and forces within and outside ourselves that we well would pay attention to. As Shakespeare said it: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."² And so, beloved young people, be patient with parents when they counsel, when they are concerned—when the heart tells them things the mind does not know.

¹Harold B. Lee.

²Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act i.

down . . . to destroy him who hath lifted up his hand against thee, Abraham, my son. . . .”

So while “all that night Sarah lay upon her face calling upon God, Abraham “without the prison” also prayed¹⁰⁶ “that he may not this night defile my wife.” (G.A. XX, 11-14.) It was, as one might by now expect, just at the moment that Pharaoh assayed to seize Sarah that an angel came to the rescue, whip in hand: “As Pharaoh was about to possess Sarah, she turned to the angel who stood at her side (visible only to her) and immediately Pharaoh fell to the ground; all his house was then smitten with plague, with leprosy on the walls, the pillars, and furniture. . . .”¹⁰⁷ Whenever Pharaoh would make a move toward Sarah, the invisible angel would strike him down.¹⁰⁸ To justify such rough treatment of the poor unsuspecting Pharaoh, the Midrash explains that he was not unsuspecting at all: “. . . an angel stood by with a whip to defend her, because she told Pharaoh that she was a married woman, and he still would not leave her alone.” (Gen. Rab. 41:2.) According to all other accounts, however, that is exactly what she did not tell him, having her husband’s safety in mind. The almost comical humiliation of the mighty king in the very moment of his triumph is an exact counterpart of the crushing overthrow of “Nimrod” at the instant of his supreme triumph over Abraham. “His illicit lust was checked,” says Josephus, “by disease and stasis—revolution” (Ant. I, 8, 1), suggesting that his kingly authority was overthrown along with his royal dignity and prowess.

What saved Sarah, according to the Genesis Apocryphon (XX, 16), was the sending by El Elyon, the Most High God, of a *ruach mkdsh* or *ruach bisha*, which Avigad and Yadin render “a pestilential wind” and “a wind that was evil,” respectively. Other scholars, however, prefer “spirit” to “wind,”¹⁰⁹ and while *mkdsh* is not found in the dictionary, *miqdash*, which sounds exactly the same, is a very common word indicating the dwelling place of God, so that *ruach maddash* suggests to the ear “the angel of the presence,” such as came to rescue both Abraham and Isaac on the altar. *Ruach b-isha* in turn suggests to the ear “the spirit in the fire,” reminding us of a number of accounts of a mysterious being who stood with Abraham in the flames when he rescued him from the altar. The confusion of the rescuing angel with the wind is readily explained if our Aramaic text was written from dictation, as many ancient documents were.

The smiting of all of Pharaoh’s

house simultaneously with his own affliction is insisted on by all sources and recalls the “great mourning in Chaldea, and also at the court of Pharaoh” in Abraham 1:20. And just as the king in the Abraham story, when he is faced with the undeniable evidence of a power greater than his own, admits the superiority of Abraham’s God and even offers to worship him, so he tells the woman Hagar when Sarah is saved, “It is better to be a maid in Sarah’s house than to be Queen in my house!”¹¹⁰ The showdown between the two religions is staged in both stories by the king himself when he pits his own priests and diviners against the wisdom of the stranger and his God, the test being which of the two is able to cure him and his house. An early writer quoted by Eusebius says, “Abraham went to Egypt with all his household and lived there, his wife being married to the king of Egypt who, however, could not approach her. And when it came about that his people and his house were being destroyed he called for the diviners (*manteis*), who told him that Sarah was not a widow, and so he knew that she was Abraham’s wife and gave her back to him.”¹¹¹ The first part of the statement is supported by the Gen. Apocr. XX, 17-18, which says that Sarah lived two years in Pharaoh’s house, during which time he was unable to approach her. During that time she was in no danger of his wrath, however, since as far as Pharaoh was concerned it was not her reluctance but only his illness that kept them apart.

Though Pharaoh’s doctors and soothsayers gave him useful advice, as they do “Nimrod” in his dealings with Abraham, it is the healing that is the real test: “And he sent and called of all the wise men of Egypt and all the wizards and all the physicians of Egypt, if perchance they might heal him from that pestilence, him and his house. And all the physicians and wizards and wise men could not heal him, for the wind [spirit, angel] smote them all and they fled.” (G.A. XX, 18-20.) Just so the host of wise men summoned by Nimrod to advise him on how to get rid of Abraham were forced to flee ignominiously in all directions by the miraculous fire which left Abraham unscathed. All the wisdom and divinity of Egypt having failed, Pharaoh’s agent HRQNWSH went straight to Abraham “and besought me to come and to pray for the king and to lay my hands upon him that he might live.” (XX, 20f.) To this request Abraham magnanimously complied: “. . . I laid my hand upon his head and the plague departed from



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him and the evil [wind-spirit] was gone and he lived." (XX, 29.) When the healing power of Abraham's God, in contrast to the weakness of his own, became apparent, Pharaoh forthwith recognized Abraham by the bestowal of royal honors—even as "Nimrod" had done when Abraham stepped before him unscathed.¹¹²

That these stories are more than belated inventions of the rabbinic imagination is apparent from the significant parallels with which Egyptian literature fairly swarms. A veritable library of familiar motifs is contained in the late Ptolemaic Tales of Khamuas. They begin with "Ahure's Story," telling how an aging Pharaoh, in order to assure the royal succession, forces the princess Ahure to renounce marriage with her beloved brother Neneferkaptah and wed the son of a general, contrary to "the law of Egypt" but consistent with the practice of the Asiatic Pharaohs.¹¹³ The damsel goes weeping to her wedding (III, 3), but at the last moment the old king changes his mind, the princess marries her true love, and the couple is showered with royal gifts and honors (III, 5-6). They have a child, but Neneferkaptah in his zeal for knowledge steals a heavenly book from Thoth and, as a result, first the child, then the mother, and finally the father pay for the guilt of Neneferkaptah by falling into the Nile, all duly ending up "in the necropolis-hill of Coptos."¹¹⁴ Years later the scribe Setne-Khamuas comes to the tomb of the lady Ahure to get the book for himself, but Neneferkaptah, rising from his couch, says he shall not have it unless he wins it in a game of "Fifty-two."¹¹⁵ Setne wins the book but is undone by another Lady of the Underworld and can only save himself by finally returning the book to Neneferkaptah.¹¹⁶ This Setne has a young son, Si-Osiris, whom he told of his marvelous visit to the other world—an adventure astonishingly like that of Abraham in the Apocalypse of Abraham.¹¹⁷ When an Ethiopian ambassador arrived in Memphis and challenged Pharaoh to read a letter he brought with him, without opening the seal, all the wise men of Pharaoh were abashed and Setne immediately went to fetch his 12-year-old son Si-Osiris to the palace, even as the wonder-child Abraham was taken by his father to the palace of "Nimrod." The boy read the letter with ease: It told of a time long ago when three lords of Ethiopia by magic brought three years of blight on the land of Egypt, for which Pharaoh was punished nightly by being beaten with 500 lashes. The king's wise men were at a loss to help him, and the beating

was administered by Hor, the Son of the Lady of Ethiopia. At Pharaoh's court, however, was another Hor, the son of the librarian Pa-neshe. He turned the tables and forced the Viceroy of Ethiopia to receive the 500 blows each night instead of Pharaoh.¹¹⁸ In desperation the false Hor, "the son of the Sow" (the pig being the Seth animal), undertook a mission to Egypt, being warned by his mother beforehand that he would never be able to match the magic of the Egyptians, though she promised to come personally to his aid if it was necessary to save his life. So the two Horuses confronted each other in a duel of magic at the court of Pharaoh, opening with the cry of the Egyptian Hor: "Ho thou impious Ethiopian, art thou not Hor . . . whom I saved . . . when ye were drowning in the water, being cast down from upon the hill east of On?"—recalling an earlier ritual contest at a "Potiphar's Hill" in Heliopolis.¹¹⁹ The contest begins when Pharaoh in great distress calls upon the good Horus to save him (63)—a reminder that Horus is always a hawk and that the rivalry of the two hawks goes back to very early dramatic texts. (Coffin Text, Spell 312.) Finally the Lady of Ethiopia has to come and rescue her son, who in return for his life swears an oath to Pharaoh that he will not return to Egypt for 1500 years.¹²⁰ Such was the contest of the sealed letter, and having read it Si-Osiris announced that the 1500 years was now up and that he himself was the good Horus, son of Pa-neshes, while the ambassador who brought the letter was none other than the evil Ethiopian Horus returning for vengeance: "I prayed before Osiris in Amenti (the underworld) to let me come forth to the world again, to prevent his taking the humiliation of Egypt to the land of Nehes (Ethiopia)"; his mission accomplished, he returns to the other world.¹²¹

In these episodes one can hardly fail to recognize the legends of Abraham in Egypt: the true lovers separated by Pharaoh only to be reunited; father, mother, and son as sacrificial victims; the king paying for the blight on the land until a foreign substitute can be found; the humiliation of Pharaoh, whipped all night by an unseen hand; the rival kings and the final overthrow of the impostor; the two Horuses; the super-boy putting the king's diviners to shame, etc. Most significant, perhaps, is that these are consciously recurring motifs, with the same characters turning up in a succession of episodes centuries apart. And the fictitious situations are not without historical parallels. Thus when the luxurious and much-married

Amenophis III took to wife the beautiful Nefertiti, a princess of one of the tribes bordering on Abraham's homeland, she brought with her to Egypt the image of her patron goddess Ishtar of Nineveh to heal the old king of an ailment that had baffled the best Egyptian doctors. When the king's health actually improved (albeit for a very short time), the report of the miraculous healing powers of the foreign lady's goddess quickly spread throughout Egypt, opening the way for the successful propagation of her religion throughout the whole land.¹²² Here we have a well-attested historical account of a Pharaoh who married a fabulously beautiful princess from the north who thought of herself as a missionary, and to whose religion the king was converted by a miraculous healing, showing us at the very least the sort of thing that *could* have happened in Sarah's time. The healing of Pharaoh by the laying on of hands described in the Genesis Apocryphon is a thing which appears absolutely nowhere else in any of the known records dealing with Abraham and should be studied with great care. Without the evidence of the New Testament, we should never suspect that there was any ancient and established tradition behind it: "The healing of the sick by expelling with the laying on of hand the evil spirits," writes Vermes, ". . . is unknown in the Old Testament, but a familiar rite in the Gospels. . . the nearest Old Testament parallel is 2 Kings VI, 11."¹²³

That we are dealing here with ritually conditioned events rather than unique historical occurrences is apparent from the complete repetition of Sarah's Egyptian experience with *another* king many years later. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, a small state lying between Canaan and Egypt, also took Sarah to wife and would have put Abraham to death had she not again announced that he was her brother.¹²⁴ Again Sarah prayed and again an angel appeared, this time with a sword, to save her.¹²⁵ At the same time, according to one tradition, "the voice of a great crying was heard in the whole land of the Philistines, for they saw the figure of a man walking about, with a sword in his hand, slaying all that came in his way. . ."¹²⁶ This was "on the fatal night of the Paschal feast," i.e., at the time of the drama of the Suffering Servant, and the king became so ill that the doctors despaired of his life.¹²⁷ Just as Pharaoh had done, the king summoned all his wise counselors and again they were helpless and abashed (Gen. 20:8); again Abraham's wife was restored to him (14), and again "Abraham prayed

unto God: and God healed Abimelech." (Gen. 20:17.)

What is behind all this is indicated in the nature of the illness that afflicted the houses of both Abimelech and Pharaoh. As to the first, "the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife." (Gen. 20:18.) The legends elaborate on this: ". . . in men and beast alike all the apertures of the body closed up, and the land was seized with indescribable excitement."¹²⁸ In short, every creature was rendered sterile until Abraham administered to Abimelech, whereupon "all his house were healed, and the women could bear children with no pain, and they could have male children"; at the same moment, Sarah, barren until then, became fruitful, "the blind, deaf, lame, etc., were healed, and the sun shone out 48 times brighter than usual, even as on the first day of creation."¹²⁹ To celebrate the birth of Isaac, all the kings of the earth were invited to Abraham's house, and during the festivities Sarah gave milk to all the Gentile babies whose mothers had none, and "all the proselytes and pious heathen are the descendants of these infants."¹³⁰ As for Pharaoh, the common tradition is that the plague which smote his house, whether leprosy or some other disease, rendered all the people impotent and sterile.¹³¹

That this was the nature of the complaint is implied in the tradition that Abraham's powers of healing the sick by prayer were especially devoted to the healing of barren women. (Midr. Rab. 39:11.) By emerging victorious from the contests with Pharaoh and Abimelech, both Sarah and Abraham by their mutual faithfulness reversed the blows of death, so that they became new again and had children in their old age.¹³² As the Zohar puts it, Abraham received a new grade of knowledge and henceforth "begat children on a higher plane."¹³³

Here Sarah appears as the central figure in that ritual complex that marks the New Year all over the ancient world, and has been noticed in these studies in its form of the Egyptian Sed-festival. The theme of Sarah's royal marriages is not lust but the desire of Pharaoh and Abimelech to establish a kingly line. Sarah was at least 61 when she left the house of Pharaoh and 89 when she visited Abimelech. Pharaoh's only interest in Sarah, Josephus insists, was to establish a royal line; or, as B. Beer puts it, "his object was rather to become related to Abraham by marriage," i.e., he wanted Abraham's glory, and that was the only way he could get it.¹³⁴ Abimelech's interest is completely dominated by the fertility motif, for he

contests with Abraham over "a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away" (Gen. 21:25), even as Sarah had been violently taken away; and just as Abimelech surrendered and pleaded his innocence in the case of Sarah (20:9), so he pleads ignorance also in the case of the well and even chides Abraham again for not enlightening him: "I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day." (Gen. 21:26.) To complete the scene, Abraham concludes the episode by planting one of his groves in the land of the Philistines. (Gen. 21:33.) If Sarah is the bounteous and child-giving mother, Abraham no less presides over the life-giving waters.

That this is the ritual setting of the Abimelech episode is confirmed by documents probably as old as Abraham that describe the goings-on among the Canaanites on the coast to the north of Gerar. These are the famous Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra, and the best-known of them is the story of Krt. The latest critical study of the Krt drama maintains that it is both a ritual and a historical document, "the subject of the first tablet" being "the rehabilitation of the royal house after disaster, with the wooing of Krt," while the second tablet describes the royal wedding and in the third we have "the illness and threatened eclipse of Krt (the ritual king), when his eldest son Ysb seeks to supplant him."¹³⁵ The drama has a definite moral and social object, according to Gray, "such as the securing of a legitimate queen and the establishment of a royal line."¹³⁶ In the Krt story the powers of the old king are failing, and he is told by his youthful would-be successor: "In the sepulchral thou wilt abide. . . . Sickness is as thy bedfellow, Disease as thy concubine. . . ."¹³⁷ Just so Abimelech is told that if he takes Sarah to wife, "thou art a dead man!" (Gen. 20:3-4.) After three months of sickness (Abraham spent three months in the palace of Pharaoh, according to R. Eliezer), "Krt is passing away, yea . . . in the sepulchral chamber, like a treasure with a gate"—it is so much like the lion-couch scene in the Sed-festival that we are not surprised to learn that Krt is first frantically mourned and then revived by two ladies.¹³⁸ The cure is effected by the lady Qudshu, whom we have already learned to know as the common hierodule of Egypt and Canaan.¹³⁹ First she arrives weeping at the house of Krt, "shrieking she enters the inmost chambers"; but then she starts to revive the king, who is not completely dead yet,¹⁴⁰ and finally "she returns, she washes him. She has given him a new appetite for meat,

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a desire for food."¹⁴¹ The king rises from his bier, victorious: "As for Death, he is confounded; as for Sh'tqt, she has prevailed!" So of course there is a great feast as the king "returns to sitting upon his throne, even on the dais, the seat of government."¹⁴¹ It is the lion-couch drama all over again, but the Abimelech elements are prominent too, as when the king's wise men and counselors all are summoned and asked, "Who among the gods will abolish the disease, driving out all the sickness?" Seven times the challenge is put, but "there is none among the gods who answers him"—the doctors are abashed; they must yield to the true god, El the Merciful, who says, "I myself will do it"—and he does.¹⁴² Of course, it rains and everything grows at last (Mot, the name of the adversary, means both death and drought); Krt on his bier is even called "Sprouts"—a vivid reminder of the Egyptian "Osiris beds."¹⁴³

The Ugaritic Krt Text gives strong indication that the adventures of Sarah with Egyptian and Palestinian kings follow the common ritual pattern of Palestine and Egypt; indeed, the point of both stories is that Sarah and Abraham resist and overcome powerful and insidious attempts to involve them in the very practices of the idolatrous nations which Abraham had been denouncing since his youth. It would be impossible to avoid coming face to face with such practices in any comprehensive account of either Abraham or Sarah, and one of the best and most vivid descriptions of the rites is contained in the Book of Abraham. We are dealing here with a worldwide ritual complex of whose existence no one dreamed in 1912 and which is still largely ignored by Egyptologists.^{143a} It is not only the idea of romantic love that is one of the special marks of the Patriarchal narratives, as Gordon points out; even more conspicuous is the repeated recurrence of a ritual love triangle in which a third party threatens to break up a devoted couple. Such is the story of Hagar, who sought to supplant Sarah in Abraham's household and was turned out into the desert to perish of thirst—always the water motif! Being in imminent danger of death, Hagar prays, "Look upon my misery"—which happens to be the opening line of Abraham's prayer on the altar—¹⁴⁴ whereupon an angel appears and tells her, "... God has heard your prayer," promising her a son. (Gen. 16:6-11.) So here, to cut it short, we have Hagar praying for deliverance from a heat death, visited by an angel, and promised the same blessing in her hour of crisis as was given to Sarah and Abraham in theirs. There

is a difference, of course: by "despising" and taunting her afflicted mistress and then by deserting her, Hagar had *not* been true and faithful, and the angel sternly ordered her back to the path of duty, while the promises given to her offspring are heavy with qualifications and limitations. The issue is as ever one of authority, for as Josephus puts it, Hagar sought precedence over Sarah, and the angel told her to return to her "rulers" (*despotas*) or else she would perish, but if she obeyed she would bear a son who would rule in that desert land.¹⁴⁵ She too founded a royal line.

In maintaining that "Abraham's marriage with Keturah (Gen. 25:1-6) can have no historical foundation,"¹⁴⁶ scholars have overlooked the *ritual* foundation of the story, clearly indicated by the name of Keturah, which enjoys a prominent place in the Adonis ritual cycles of Phoenicia and Syria.¹⁴⁷ As Gray points out in his study of Krt, these ritual events could very well become history as well when the sacrifices and marriages were repeated "at the accession of each new king" and "at royal weddings."¹⁴⁸ The ritual content of the thing, far from discrediting it as history, is the best possible evidence for some sort of historical reality behind it. The ritual triangle is repeated when Bethuel the King of Haran tries to take the beautiful Rebecca (who, we are told, was the exact image of Sarah) away from Isaac's agent, Eliezer (who, we are told, was the exact image of Abraham); the wicked king was slain by his own treachery and the noble couple departed laden with royal gifts.¹⁴⁹

The Humiliation of the King: In this last story the real hero is Eliezer, while the bridegroom-to-be, Isaac, lurks ignobly in the background. Abraham likewise in the affairs with Pharaoh and Abimelech not only takes a back seat but appears in a rather uncomplimentary if not actually degrading position. This is an indispensable element of the year-drama everywhere: the temporary humiliation of the true king while a rival and substitute displaces him on the throne and in the queen's favor. We have seen both Abraham and Isaac in the roles of substitute kings or "Suffering Servants," and now we must make room for Sarah on the stage, for the play cannot take place without her. The "Suffering Servant" is the true king during the period of his ritual humiliation, representing his death; at that time his place is taken by a pretender, an interrex, tanist, Lord of Misrule, etc., who turns out to be the *real* substitute when the time for his death arrives. Both are substitutes but in different capacities:

the one king sits on a real throne but suffers a make-believe burial; the other sits on a make-believe throne but suffers a real burial. As we saw in the Sed-festival, the main purpose of all this shuffling is to spare the real king the discomfort of a premature demise: the true king is always vindicated in the end. If Abraham was rudely thrust aside by his royal rivals in Egypt and Palestine, and if Sarah was made the unwilling victim of their kingly arrogance, it was only to show who the real king was—*they*, as it turned out, were for all their pride and power the pretenders, claiming the divine honors that really belonged to Abraham. Abraham is the rival of Pharaoh and Abimelech, both of whom are ready to put him to death in order to raise up a royal line by Sarah.¹⁵⁰ That he is the real king, restored to his rightful queen in the end, is made perfectly clear in the almost comical complaints of the two kings that they, who had contemptuously thrust the helpless Abraham aside, were actually the victims of his power: "And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is that that *thou* hast done unto *me*?" (Gen. 12:18; italics added), while Abimelech echoes his words: "Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? . . . thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." (Gen. 20:9.) The roles of victim and victor are almost ludicrously reversed. And just as Pharaoh-Nimrod complained that Abraham had escaped the altar by a trick, so does Pharaoh-Zoan complain that Sarah has escaped his couch by a ruse: ". . . why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? . . . now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way." (Gen. 12:18-19.)

The Sarah story starts out with Abraham and Sarah alike at the mercy of the triumphant and irresistible king, and it ends up with the king humiliated by pain and impotence, humbly suing Abraham for succor and then acknowledging that superior power and priesthood of his rival. There is no injustice here: Abraham does not invade their kingdoms or seek their thrones, but the other way around—they coveted his rightful domain and were properly rebuked.

While the humiliation of the rightful king before his return to the throne is a central episode of the great Year-Rites throughout the Ancient East,¹⁵¹ the queen plays quite a different role: she is ageless and immortal, the Mother Earth itself, taking a new spouse at each cycle of renewal and disposing of the old one.¹⁵² This makes her the dominant figure of the rites, which have a distinctly matriarchal back-

ground—as is clearly indicated in the Book of Abraham, where, moreover, the tension between the old matriarchal and rival patriarchal orders is vividly set forth: While Abraham is completely devoted to the authority of “the fathers . . . even the right of the first-born . . .” (Abr. 1:3), Pharaoh was put on the throne by his mother (1:23-25), so that though he “would fain claim” patriarchal authority (1:27), “seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers” (1:26), the importance of the female line still outweighed that of the fathers, as it always did in Egypt. The conflict between Pharaoh’s would-be patriarchal rule and the claims of the matriarchy is further reflected in the putting to death of three princesses of royal blood who refused to play the game Pharaoh’s way and compromise their virtue. (Abr. 1:11-12.) Abraham opposed the royal claims that his father ardently supported, in secure possession of “the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood,” which records “God preserved in mine own hands. . . .” (Abr. 1:31.) And in return Terah volunteered his own son as a victim in the sacrificial rites. (Abr. 1:30.) This should be enough to explain how Sarah and Abraham get involved in all these very pagan goings-on.

Recently Cyrus Gordon has demonstrated the singularly close parallelism between the stories of Sarah and Helen of Troy, the main theme of both being the winning back of the captive queen by her rightful husband: In turn each of the rival husbands is made to look rather ridiculous as the lady leaves first one and then the other.¹⁵³ In the earliest Babylonian depictions of the year-motif we see the bridegroom hiding ingloriously in the mountain from which the bride must rescue and revive him,¹⁵⁴ even as Isis rescues and revives her husband and brother Osiris in the Egyptian versions. And so we have Abraham in an oddly unheroic role, gratefully accepting the presents and favors that Pharaoh bestows upon him as the *brother* of Sarah, the king’s favorite wife!¹⁵⁵

Brother and Sister: Still less heroic is the supposed subterfuge by which Abraham got himself into that undignified position. The best biblical scholars in Joseph Smith’s day as well as our own have found nothing to condone in what is generally considered an unedifying maneuver on the part of Abraham to save his skin at the expense of both Sarah and Pharaoh. “Abram appears to have labored under a temporary suspension of faith,” wrote the most learned commentator of Joseph Smith’s time, “and to have



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stooped to the mean and foolish pre-
varication of denying his wife . . . and
had not the Lord miraculously inter-
posed . . . Abram must have sunk under
his timidity, and forfeited his title to
the covenant."¹⁵⁶ How they all missed
the point! Far from denoting a suspen-
sion of faith, the turning over of his
wife to another required the greatest
faith yet, and that is where the Book
of Abraham puts the whole story on a
meaningful and edifying footing. For
it was God who commanded Abra-
ham: ". . . see that ye do on this wise:
Let her say unto the Egyptians, she is
thy sister, and thy soul shall live."
(Abr. 2:23-24.) As to the "lie" about
the family relationship of Abraham
and Sarah, a number of factors must
be considered. Technically, the Bible
explains, Sarah was indeed Abraham's
half-sister on his father's side. (Gen.
20:12.) To this physical relationship,
the Zohar adds a spiritual, reporting
that "Abraham always called her 'sister'
because he was attached to her inseparably. . . . For the marital bond
can be dissolved, but not that between
brother and sister"—so by an eternal
marriage that the world did not under-
stand they were brother and sister.¹⁵⁷
More to the point, in Syria, Canaan,
and Egypt at the time it was the com-
mon custom to refer to one's wife as
one's "sister," and "Abraham's life re-
flects both the Semitic and the Hur-
rian cultural and legal patterns," so
that "Sarah was . . . a 'sister-wife,' an
official Hurrian term signifying the
highest social rating."¹⁵⁸ On the other
hand, everyone knows that it was the
custom for Pharaohs of Egypt to marry
their sisters, and in the Egyptian love
songs the non-royal lovers regularly
address each other as "my sister" and
"my brother." The same custom ap-
pears in Canaan and even in the
Genesis Apocryphon, the opening frag-
ments of which show us the mother
of Noah berating her husband Lamech
for suspecting her virtue, but address-
ing him throughout the scene as "my
Brother and my Lord." Indeed, in
Abraham's day "both in Egypt and
Canaan," according to Albright, "the
notion of incest scarcely existed. In
fact, Phoenicia and Egypt shared a
general tendency to use 'sister' and
'wife' simultaneously."¹⁵⁹

But whatever the *reservation mentale*
behind the statement that Abraham
and Sarah were brother and sister,
the point of the story is that it was
meant to convey to the kings that the
two were *not* married—the sophistry
of the thing would only render it more
unsavory did we not have the real
explanation in the Pearl of Great
Price.

Sarah on Her Own: By telling

Pharaoh and Abimelech that Abraham
really was her brother, Sarah put the
two kings in the clear. From then on
they, at least, were acting in good faith.
The Bible makes this very clear: the
moment Pharaoh learns the truth, he
lets Sarah go, saying to Abraham,
". . . why didst thou not tell me that
she was thy wife? Why saidst thou,
She is my sister? so I might have taken
her to me to wife. . . ." (Gen. 12:18-19.)
"I did what I did," says Abimelech,
"with perfect heart and pure hand,"
to which the Lord replies in a dream,
"I knew that, and I forgave thee."
(See Gen. 20:5-6.) So it is made per-
fectly explicit that it is not the kings
who are being tested—God honors and
rewards them both for their behavior,
which is strictly correct according to
the customs of the times.

It must be Abraham and Sarah who
are being tested then. But Abraham
too is out of it, for, as we have seen,
the Lord *commands* him to ask Sarah
to say he is her brother, and he obeys.
But no one commands Sarah—the
whole thing is left up to her as a
matter of free choice. It is she and
she alone who is being tested on the
lion-couch this time. It is incorrect to
say with Graves that "Abraham gave
Sarah to Pharaoh,"¹⁶⁰ for he was in
no position to do so: he was completely
in Pharaoh's power—he had already
taken Sarah by force—and Pharaoh
was listening only to Sarah! The Rab-
bis who knew the ancient law say that
only unmarried women were taken into
the harem of Pharaoh, and that these
could not be approached by the king
without their own consent.¹⁶¹ It might
mean death to her if she refused, but
still to refuse was within her power,
while Abraham was helpless to save
her and Pharaoh was acting in good
faith—throughout the story every cru-
cial decision rests with Sarah and
Sarah alone.

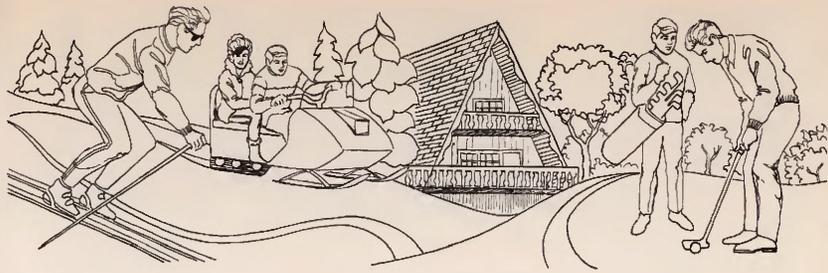
Why do we say that no one com-
mands Sarah? God commanded Abra-
ham to propose a course of action to
Sarah, but Abraham did not command
Sarah—he asked her humbly for a
personal favor: "Therefore say unto
them, *I pray thee*, thou art my sister,
that it may be well with *me* for *thy*
sake, and *my* soul shall live because of
thee." (Abr. 2:25; Gen. 12:13. Italics
added.) He explained the situation to
her—"I, Abraham, told Sarai, my wife,
all that the Lord had said unto me"—
but the decision was entirely up to her.
According to the Midrash, on this oc-
casion "Abraham made himself of
secondary importance . . . he really
became subordinate to Sarah." (Midr.
Rab. 40:4.) Everything was done for
her sake: ". . . the Lord plagued
Pharaoh and his house with great

plagues because of [Sarah]" (Gen. 12:17; Gen. Apoc. XX, 24f); Abraham was given both life and property "for Sarah's sake," and the king "entreated Abraham well for her sake" (Gen. 12:16). Sarah was legally and lawfully married to both kings and was thus the legitimate recipient of their bounty. Pharaoh, according to Rabbi Eliezer, "wrote for Sarah a marriage deed, giving her all his wealth including the land of Goshen. . . ."162 He "took her to him to wife and sought to slay me," says Abraham in the Genesis Apocryphon (XX, 9), ". . . and I, Abraham, was saved because of her and not slain" (10). From this Vermes concludes that "Abraham is indebted to Sarah for his life but not for his prosperity," having received riches in return for healing Pharaoh.¹⁶³ But the verses on which he bases this view may be more easily interpreted as meaning that it was to Sarah rather than Abraham that the Pharaoh gave the treasures, the badly damaged lines reading:

31. . . . And the King gave him a large the gift (?) much and much raiment of fine linen and purple [several words missing]

32. before her, and also Hagar [several words obscured] . . . and appointed men for me who would escort out [several words missing].

Now the Jewish traditions are quite explicit that it was to Sarah that Pharaoh gave the royal raiment and the maid Hagar. Since Abraham is writing in the first person, it is not absolutely certain who the "him" is in line 31, but the "her" in the next line is certainly Sarah, and there is no indication that the gifts and Hagar were not for her. The Bible clearly states that Abraham came into possession of Hagar only later when Sarah "gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife" (Gen. 16:3), i.e., Sarah gave more than permission to marry—she actually handed over her property to him, for Hagar was her personal maid (Gen. 16:1). And when Hagar behaved badly, Abraham, to keep peace, gave her back to Sarah again: "Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee." (Gen. 16:6.) When Sarah sent Isaac forth to school (as she thought) or to the rites on Mt. Moriah, "she dressed him in the royal garments and crown that Abimelech had given her."¹⁶⁴ Everything indicates that she was a princess in her own right—the gifts of her royal husbands did not so much bestow as recognize her royalty, for which they eagerly sought her hand in the first place, hoping to raise up kingly lines by her. Before her name was changed to Sarah, "Princess of all people," it



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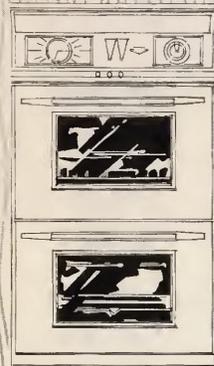
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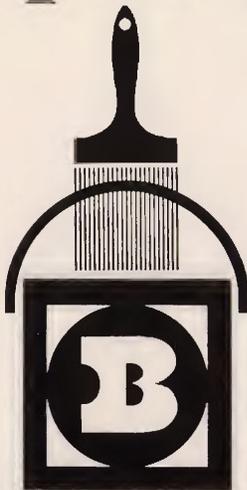
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had already been Sarai, "Princess of her own people," according to the Midrash; and before she ever married Abraham she was well-known by the name of Jiska, "the Seeress," either because she had the gift of prophecy or because of her shining beauty, or both.¹⁶⁵

The Rabbis have resented the superior rating of Sarah with its matriarchal implications, and attempted to cover it up. Granted that everything that Pharaoh gave to Abraham was for Sarah's sake (Gen. Rab. 45:1), the doctors must conclude that Pharaoh acted unwisely, and they hold up as a proper example the case of Abimelech, who, according to them, gave his gifts to Abraham rather than Sarah. Yet these same authorities report that this same Abimelech "gave to Sarah a costly robe that covered her whole person . . . a reproach to Abraham that he had not fitted Sarah out with the splendor due his wife"—it would seem that Sarah has her royal claims after all.^{166*}

Actually the idea of rivalry between Abraham and Sarah is as baseless as that between Abraham and Isaac when we understand the true situation, in which neither party can fulfill his or her proper function without the other. Having been commanded of the Lord, Abraham explained the situation to his wife and asked her whether she would be willing to go along. (Abr. 2:25.) According to the Genesis Apocryphon, he did not like the idea at all—it was a terrible sacrifice for him: "And I wept, I Abram, with grievous weeping." (G.A. XX, 9-10.) Would he have wept so for his own life, which he had so often been willing to risk? Why, then, did he ask Sarah to risk her person to save him: ". . . say unto them, I pray thee, thou art my sister . . . and my soul shall live because of thee"? Plainly because nothing else would move Sarah to take such a step. There was nothing in the world to keep her from exchanging her hard life with Abraham for a life of unlimited ease and influence as Pharaoh's favorite except her loyalty to her husband. By a special order from heaven Abraham had stepped out of the picture and Pharaoh had been placed in a legally and ethically flawless position, and Sarah knew it: "I Abraham, told Sarai, my wife, all that the Lord had said to me." Why is the brilliant prospect of being Queen of Egypt never mentioned as an inducement or even a lightening of Sarah's burden? Sarah apparently never thinks of that, for she was as upset as Abraham: "Sarai wept at my words that night." (G.A. XIX, 21.) Still, the proposition was never put to her as a command, but only as a personal request from Abraham: "Please say you

are my sister for the sake of my well-being, so that through your ministrations I shall be saved, and owe my life to you!" (see Gen. 12:13); and so with Abimelech: "This will be a special favor which I am asking of you in my behalf. . . ." (See Gen. 20:13.) Abraham is abiding by the law of God; the whole question now is, *Will Sarah abide by the law of her husband?* And she proved that she would, even if necessary at the risk of her life. It was as great a sacrifice as Abraham's and Isaac's, and of the same type.

The Cedar and the Palm, a Romantic Interlude: Some famous episodes are associated with the crossing of the border into Egypt, such as Abraham's beholding Sarah's beauty for the first time as they wade the stream—"a beauty in comparison with which all other beauties are like apes. . . ."169 It was under like circumstances that King Solomon is said to have first beheld the beauty of the Queen of Sheba.¹⁷⁰ Again, Abraham concealed his wife's beauty by trying to smuggle her across the border in a trunk, on which he was willing to pay any amount of duty provided the officials would not open it; of course, they could not resist the temptation and were quite overpowered by this Pandora's box in reverse.¹⁷¹

But the story of the cedar and the palm has the most interesting parallels of all: "And I Abram dreamed a dream in the night of our going up into the land of Egypt, and what I beheld in my dream was a cedar tree and a palm-tree . . . [words missing] and men came and tried to cut down and uproot the cedar while leaving the palm standing alone. And the palm tree called out and said, 'Do not cut the cedar! Cursed and shamed whoever [words missing]. So the cedar was spared in the shelter of the palm.'" (G.A. XIX, 14-16.) We have seen that Abraham was often compared with a cedar, and that the palm could be either Sarah or the hospitable Pharaoh.¹⁷² But when we read in the Genesis Apocryphon that "for the sake of the palm the cedar was saved" (XIX, 16), we recall the unforgettable image of the mighty Odysseus, clad only in evergreen branches, facing the lovely princess Nausicaa, as in an exquisitely diplomatic speech he compares her with the tall sacred palm standing in the courtyard of the temple at Delos. In return for the compliment, the princess dresses the hero in royal garments and conducts him to the palace. Later, when the two meet for the last time, the damsel makes good-natured fun of the way she had saved the mightiest man alive, but in return Odysseus solemnly tells her that it was no joke: "For you really did save

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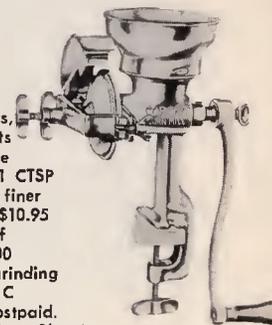
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my life, lady, and I shall never forget it!"¹⁷³ Here, then, the palm again saved the cedar. If scholars are now inclined to compare Sarah with Helen of Troy, it is pleasanter and even more appropriate to compare her with the chaste and clever Nausicaa, the most delightful of ancient heroines.

The humiliation of Odysseus, who appears first supplicating the princess while covered with dirt and leaves and then trails after her wagon publicly dressed in women's clothes, is a moment of matriarchal victory, as is the humiliation of Abraham. The meeting ground of the two stories is appropriately Egypt, for in the Tale of the Two Brothers, in which scholars have discerned the background of a wealth of biblical motifs, especially those of the Patriarchal stories, we meet the same strange combination of elements: the hero as a cedar tree threatened with destruction, the royal laundry ladies by the river, the trip to the palace, the humiliation of the king and his ultimate restoration, and all the rest.¹⁷⁴ The felling of the cedar is also the fall of Adonis in the Attis-Adonis cult, related in turn to the Osiris mysteries and the cult of Sirius, according to C. Autran.¹⁷⁵ Already in the Pyramid Texts Osiris is the king "who takes men's wives from them"—why should not Pharaoh be an Osiris in this as in other dramatic situations?¹⁷⁶ What might be called "the palace scandal" occurs repeatedly in the Patriarchal traditions. Rebecca, like Sarah, was rescued from the clutches of a king, leaving the palace laden with treasure while her true spouse lurks ingloriously in the background.¹⁷⁷ Abimelech, who tried to take Sarah for wife, later attempted to take Rebecca in the same way.¹⁷⁸ When Sarah died "hospitality ceased; but when Rebecca came the gates were again opened."¹⁷⁹ In all these operations Rebecca, we are assured, "was the counterpart of Sarah in person and spirit," the living image of Sarah.¹⁸⁰ Sarah is thus the ageless mother and perennial bride: the whole point of the birth of Isaac is that she becomes young again—"Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:11-15.) Firmicus Materus informs us that the early Christians saw in the Egyptian cult of Serapis, the last stage of the Osiris mysteries, the celebration of the Sarra-pais, "the son of Sarah," with Sarah as the mother of the new king.¹⁸¹ Which may not be so farfetched, since that was exactly Pharaoh's intention in taking her to wife, according to Josephus. The story of the testing of the bride's moral fiber and the humiliation of the arrogant bridegroom is carried on down through the line of Abraham's female descendants: There

was Tamar and her strange affair with her two half-brothers, ending with the death of both and her marriage with her father Judah;¹⁸² and then another Tamar, daughter of David, who carried on with her half-brother (2 Sam. 13:13)—a reminder that Abraham and Sarah were half-brother and -sister.

Here it is in order to note that the legends of Abraham's birth and childhood are dominated by the conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy, with Abraham's mortal foe and rival, Nimrod, as the arch-defender of the matriarchy. To forestall the birth of Abraham, foretold by the stars, he first attempts to bar all contact between men and women; then he orders all expectant mothers shut up in a great castle: when a girl baby is born, she and her mother are sent far from the castle showered with gifts and crowned like queens, while all boy babies are immediately put to death.¹⁸³ And while Abraham's father supports Nimrod and tries to destroy the infant, his mother saves him by hiding him in a cave: her name, Emtelai, is a reminder that this is the age-old Amalthea motif.

Breaking the Mold: Facsimile No. 1 and the explanation thereof admonish the student not to be too surprised to find Father Abraham deeply involved in the abominable rites of the heathen. This, admittedly, is not a healthy situation, but then the point of the whole thing is that Abraham is fighting the system, and his is a life-long struggle. In the process of meeting the foe on his own ground he finds himself in one unpleasant situation after another—unpleasant and strangely familiar. The familiarity of the setting, as we have insisted all along, vouches for the authenticity of the tradition. The Abraham stories are poured into an ancient mold—but Abraham cracks the mold. One of the most striking examples of the shattered mold is the famous romance of Joseph and Asenath, a reediting of the story of Abraham and Sarah in an authentic Egyptian setting.

Everything in this romantic tale reverses the order of the conventional Near-Eastern Romance. True, it begins with the maiden locked up in her tower, the proud heiress of the matriarchy disdaining all men and rejecting all lovers, according to the standard fairy-tale formula going back as far as the Egyptian romances of the Doomed Prince and the Two Brothers. But presently she falls desperately in love with Joseph, of whose love she feels abjectly unworthy. G. von Rad insists that the Joseph stories are the purest fiction, "durch und durch novellistisch," and have no place in the Patriarchal histories.¹⁸⁴ But he overlooks the all-important ritual element

that places Joseph and Asenath in the long line of holy couples: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zippora, Aaron and Elisheba, etc.¹⁸⁵ The undeniable link between the Abraham and the Joseph romances is the key name of Potiphar; for just as the testing of Abraham takes place at Potiphar's Hill, so the triumph of Joseph over the practices of the heathen and the wicked Prince of Egypt takes place at Potiphar's castle, Potiphar being none other than the father of Asenath. While the Prince of Egypt attempts to seize and marry Asenath against her will (the Sarah motif), Joseph is so moved by her tears that he refuses even to kiss her and instead puts his hand on her head and gives her a blessing, telling her that in spite of her Egyptian parentage she is of the true blood of Abraham, "for whom she was chosen before the world was." (Joseph & Asenath 8:8-9.) So here then is the basic issue of the rival dynasties.

Weeping all night on her royal couch in the depths of humiliation amid sackcloth and ashes, the damsel prays for death, since she feels utterly unworthy of marrying Joseph. Just as she is at the point of death an angel appears and greets her as he had once greeted Abraham and Sarah in a like situation (14:11)—it is the old delivery-by-an-angel motif. Instead of defending the lady's honor with sword or whip, the angel orders her to remove the veil from her head, because, he tells her, "thy name is written in the Book of Life; from this time on thou art created anew, formed anew, given a new life; thou shalt eat the bread of life and drink of immortality, and be anointed with the oil of incorruptibility, and then become the bride of Joseph for all eternity." (15:4-6.) As the lady prayed on the bed that was to be her funeral couch, "the Morning star rose in the East . . . a sign that God had heard her prayer" (14:1); it was the precursor of the sunrise and the resurrection, as well as the ruling luminary (the Shagreen) of the rites of the sacred marriage (the hieros gamos) throughout the ancient world. The angel instructed Asenath to change her black garment of death to a pure white wedding dress, "the most ancient, primal Wedding-garment," whereupon she kisses the feet of the heavenly visitor (who, incidentally, is in the exact image of Joseph!), who takes her by the hand and leads her "out of the darkness into the light." (15:10-11.) The two then sit upon her undefiled bed to partake of bread and wine supplied by the bride while the angel miraculously produces a honeycomb for a true love-feast in the manner of

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the primitive Christians. (15:14, 16:1.)

If one compares this with the "Setne" romance or the Tales of the Two Brothers of Foredoomed Prince, or with the stories of Aqhat or Krt, or numerous Greek myths, one will recognize at every turn the same elements in the same combination—but what a difference! The heathen versions are full of violence and bestiality, with one brother murdering another and the lady deceiving and destroying her lovers: there is no better example of both the ritual and historical situation than the account in the eighth chapter of Ether where the throne is transmitted after the manner of "them of old" by a series of ritual murders supervised by the queen. In the Sed-festival, Moret points out, the king's wife represented the unailing fecundity of the earth, while the Pharaoh was one whose failing powers were arrested by a sacrificial death, effected since the middle of the 4th Millennium B.C., by the use of a substitute.¹⁸⁶ This is the sort of thing in which Abraham and Sarah become unwillingly involved—a desperate perversion of the true order of things. The first Pharaoh, being a good man who "judged his people wisely and justly all his days," had tried hard to do things right, would "fain claim" the right of the priesthood, and was always "seeking to imitate that order established by the fathers." (Abr. 1:26-27.) But the best he could come up with was an *imitation*, being "cursed . . . as pertaining to the Priesthood." Abraham, possessed of the authentic records (1:28), knew Pharaoh's secret—that his authority was stolen and his glory simulated—and refused to cooperate, turning to God instead for the knowledge and the permission necessary to restore the ancient order (Abr. 1:2). For this he was rewarded and received the desire of his heart, but only after being put to the severest possible tests. Forced against his will to participate in the false ordinances, he resisted them at every step, even to the point of death. What breaks the mold is the sudden, unexpected, and violent intervention of a destroying angel, which puts an end to sacrificial rites and in their place restores an ordinance of token sacrifice only, looking forward to the great atonement. Neither Abraham, Isaac, nor Sarah had to pay the supreme price, though each confidently expected to, and was accordingly given full credit and forgiveness of sins through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord. In them the proper order and purpose of sacrifice was restored after the world had departed as far from the ancient plan as it was possible to get.

In their three sacrifices the classic

rivalry and tension between father and son, patriarchy and matriarchy are resolved in a perfect equality. On Mt. Moriah, Isaac showed that he was willing to suffer on the altar as Abraham had been; in Egypt it was made perfectly clear that Sarah was Abraham's equal, and that he was as dependent on her for his eternal progress as she was on him. The two kings knew that without Sarah they could not attain to the glory of Abraham, but she knew that without Abraham her glory would be nothing, and she refused all substitutes. "Do this," says Abraham to his wife at the beginning of the story, "for the sake of benefitting me, [and] for your own advantage"—[*le-ma'an yitavli ba'avurekh*]. (See Gen. 12:13.) "Abraham and Sarah," says the Midrash, "kept the whole law from Alef to Tav, not by compulsion but with delight."¹⁸⁷ They kept the law fully and they kept it together. Why is it, asks the archaeologist A. Parrot, that we never read of the God of Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachael, but only of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The answer is given in Abraham 2:22-25, where Abraham obeys a direct command from God, though he is free to reject it if he will, while Sarah receives it as the law of her husband, being likewise under no compulsion. It is indeed the God of Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel to whom they pray directly, but they covenant with him through their husbands. "If he guards the holy imprint," says the Zohar, speaking of the ordinances of Abraham, "then the Shekhinah does not depart from him"—but how can he be sure he has guarded it? "He cannot be sure of it until he is married. . . . When the man and wife are joined together and are called by one name, then the celestial favor rests upon them . . . which is embraced in the male, so that the female is also firmly established." (Lech lecha, 94a.) It was by their mutual faithfulness, according to rabbinic teaching, that Abraham and Sarah reversed the blows of death, so that they became new again and had children in their old age.¹⁸⁸ Just so, when Asenath was anointed with the oil of incorruptibility, and then became the bride of Joseph," she was told, "from this time on art thou created anew, formed anew, given a new life. . . ." (Jos. & Asen. 15:4-6.) When Sarah had passed through the valley of the shadow in order to save her husband's life, Abraham received "a new grade of knowledge," after which he "begat children on a higher plane." (Zohar, Veyerah, 103b.) This is that measure of exaltation promised in Abraham 2:10-11: ". . . for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and

shall be accounted thy seed . . . and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel . . . even of life eternal." It was this doctrine that led to the discussions among the Jewish doctors on whether Abraham and Sarah were actually given the power to create souls.¹⁸⁹ "Abraham obtained the possession of both worlds," says an ancient formula, "for his sake this world and the world to come were created."¹⁹⁰ Abraham's covenant, as J. Morgenstern observes with wonder, "appears to be outside of time and space."¹⁹¹ Or as the Prophet Joseph Smith put it, "Let us seek the glory of Abraham, Noah, Adam, the Apostles," naming Abraham first of all.¹⁹²

And Abraham earned his glory: "The sacrifice required of Abraham in the offering up of Isaac, shows that if a man would attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life, he must sacrifice all things."¹⁹³ But Isaac was in on it too—the stories of Isaac and Sarah teach us that salvation is a family affair, in which, however, each member acts as an individual and makes his own choice, for each must decide for himself when it is a matter of giving up "all things," including life itself, if necessary. But "when the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards," only then "the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him," as they were to Abraham, "and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God."¹⁹⁴ If Abraham knew that "God would provide a sacrifice," Isaac did not; if he was perfectly sure of his wife, she was not and prayed desperately for help—husband, wife, and son, each had to undergo the terrible test alone.

But every test is only a sampling: as a few drops of blood are enough for a blood test, so, as Morgenstern points out, the rite of circumcision demanded of Abraham expressed the idea that a token shedding of blood "redeems the remainder."¹⁹⁵ Circumcision, then, is an arrested sacrifice. When one reaches a critical point in an act of obedience at which it becomes apparent that one is willing to go all the way, it is not necessary to go any farther and make the costly sacrifice. Abraham called the spot where he sacrificed Isaac "Jehovahjireh," signifying that God was perfectly aware all the time of what was going on and knew exactly where Abraham stood: "For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son. . . ." ¹⁹⁶

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He knew that Abraham would certainly carry out the sacrifice, and he let him go as far as possible for the sake of his instruction, and then he had him complete the ordinance with a token sacrifice, which was to be repeated by his progeny in the temple.¹⁹⁷ For since it is an individual as well as a family thing, each of the descendants of Abraham is required to make the same token sacrifice as Isaac.¹⁹⁷ Cyril, the last "primitive" Christian bishop of Jerusalem, has left us a report on how the early Christians thought of this token sacrifice. The first step in becoming a Christian, he says, is to renounce all the idols (as Abraham did); next, one must escape the power of Satan, described as a ravening lion; then come baptism, anointing, and the receiving of a garment;¹⁹⁸ the candidate is then buried again three times in water, to signify Christ's three days in the tomb. "We do not really die," Cyril explains, "nor are we really buried, nor do we actually rise again after being crucified. It is a token following instructions (*en eiponi he mimesis*), though the salvation is real. Christ was really crucified and buried and literally rose again. And all these things are for our benefit, and we can share in his sufferings by imitating them while enjoying the rewards in reality. O how overflowing is God's love for man! Christ received the nails in blameless hands and feet, while I may share in the suffering and reward of salvation without the pain or suffering!"¹⁹⁹ He goes on to note that one then becomes "a Christ," an adopted but nonetheless a real son of God, "receiving the very form of the Christ of God."²⁰⁰

He describes the priesthood standing a circle around the altar ("leave the altar if thy brother hath aught against thee!"), the mutual embracing "which signifies a complete fusion of spirits," and then "that thrilling hour when one must enter spiritually into the presence of God."²⁰¹ Throughout this ancient and forgotten discourse the emphasis is on the token or mimetic nature of the ordinances along with the quite real and necessary part they play in achieving salvation. Julius Maternus, describing the same rites, says that they match the Osirian mysteries very closely and he accuses the Egyptians of stealing their ordinances from Israel back in the days of Moses.²⁰²

The important thing in the early Christian rites is that every individual must imitate the suffering and burial of Christ; this is the great essential of the ordinances, as it is the fundamental principle of all Jewish sacrifice as well. This we learn

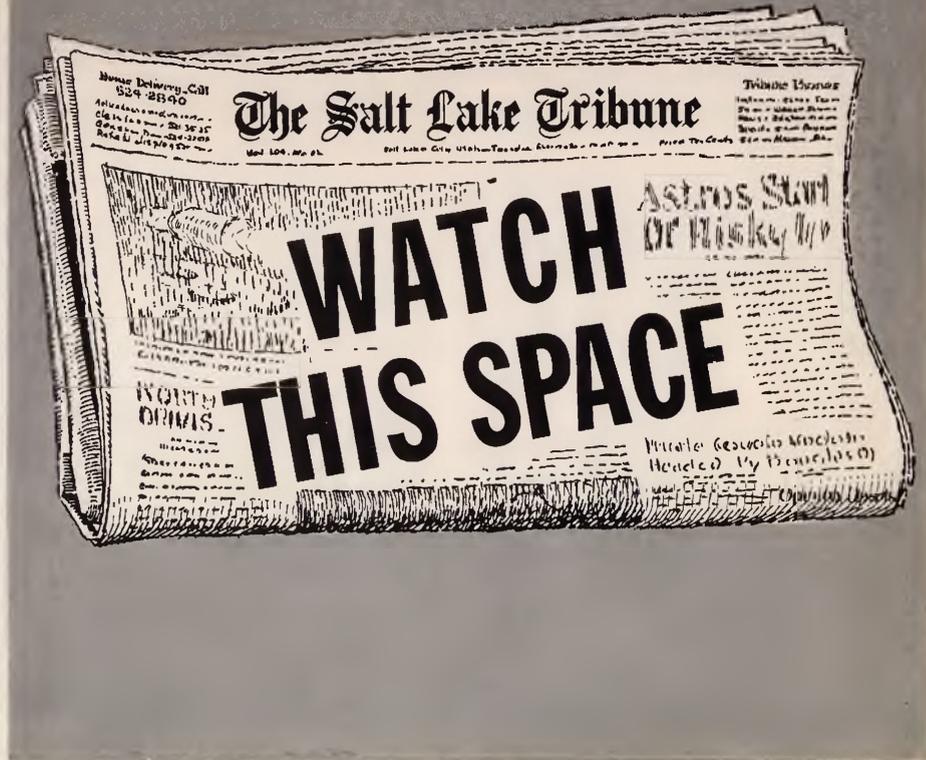
from the sacrifices of Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah; each was interrupted and by the providing of a substitute became a token sacrifice, acceptable to God because of the demonstrated intention of each of the three to offer his or her life if necessary. The perfect consistency of the three sacrifices is a powerful confirmation of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham.

(To be concluded)

FOOTNOTES

- 97 Jubilees, 13:10; Genesis Apocryphon 19:23.
98 Gen. Apocr., 19:13.
99 C. Gordon, *Common Background*, etc., pp. 159f.
100 B. Z. Wacholder, in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 34, pp. 110f.
101 H. Kees, cited in *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 53 (1958), p. 311, and in *Aeg. Ztschr.*, Vol. 57, pp. 117-19.
102 The story of Sarah in the trunk, *Midrash Rab.*, LL 40:6.
103 *Ibid.*, 40:4.
104 They held an auction, each trying to buy her in order to make a gift of her to Pharaoh, *ibid.*, 40:5.
105 S. ha-Yashar, 51-52; in Vermes, p. 113.
106 *Midr. Rab.*, 41:2.
107 Beer, p. 25, discussing sources on p. 128.
108 P. R. Eliezer, Ch. 26; S. ha-Yashar, pp. 51f.
109 So E. Osswald, in *Ztschr. f. A. T. Wiss.*, Vol. 71 (1959), pp. 15, 19.
110 Bin Gorion, II, 158.
111 Eusebius, *Praeparatio evang.*, IX, 17.
112 Gen. Apocr. XX, 30-34, cf. Ginzberg, Vol. 1, p. 203; bin Gorion, II, 97; Maase Abraham in Beth ha-Midrash, I, 35, 41; Tha'labi, *Qissas*, p. 55; S. ha-Yashar, in Vermes, p. 73; Beer, pp. 18, 113.
113 F. L. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis* (Oxford, 1900), pp. 16-19.
114 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
115 *Ibid.*, p. 31. The theme is the same as that of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. On the antiquity and importance of the Fifty-two game, H. Nibley, in *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 2 (1949), p. 337.
116 Griffith, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-40.
117 *Ibid.*, pp. 45-50; the moral tone of the Egyptian account is even higher than that of the Jewish version.
118 *Ibid.*, pp. 60ff.
119 *Era*, March 1969, pp. 80, 82.
120 Griffith, pp. 64f.
121 *Ibid.*, pp. 65f.
122 H. Ranke, in *Studies for F. L. Griffith* (Oxford, 1932), pp. 412ff.
123 Vermes, p. 115, n. 2.
124 N. Avigad and Y. Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1956), p. 26, note that the Genesis Apocryphon version of the affliction and healing of Pharaoh "is actually much closer to Genesis xx, dealing with Sarah and Abimelech."
125 Bin Gorion, II, 250.
126 Ginzberg, Vol. 1, p. 258.
127 Beer, p. 45.
128 Ginzberg, *loc. cit.*
129 Beer, pp. 46-47.
130 Ginzberg, Vol. 1, pp. 262-63.
131 Beer, p. 128; Ginzberg, Vol. 1, p. 224.
132 F. Weber, *System der altsynagog. Theologie*, p. 256.
133 Zohar, I, *Vayerah*, 103b.
134 Josephus, *Jew. Ant.*, I, 165. Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham. Cf. Beer, p. 25.
135 J. Gray, *The Krt Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), p. 2.
136 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
137 Tab. 4, Col. 5, lines 25, 33.
138 Tab. 4, Col. 3, lines 83, 87.
139 *Era*, Sept. 1969, p. 92; see J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), p. 25, n. 5.
140 *Krt Text*, Tab. 4, Col. 5, lines 1-8, 10-13.
141 *Ibid.*, line 19.
142 *Ibid.*, line 21a. The word for "do" is here *ehtrsh*, meaning to perform an ordinance.

143 *Ibid.*, Col. 4, lines 4ff.
 143a See C. J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), pp. 37-43.
 144 Ginzberg, *L.J.*, Vol. 5, note 308; *Maase Abraham*,
 145 Josephus, *Ant.*, I, 188-90.
 146 So F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *Biblical History of the Hebrews*, p. 25, noting at the same time that Isaac "is not more than a tribe-name."
 147 W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (University of London, 1968), p. 128.
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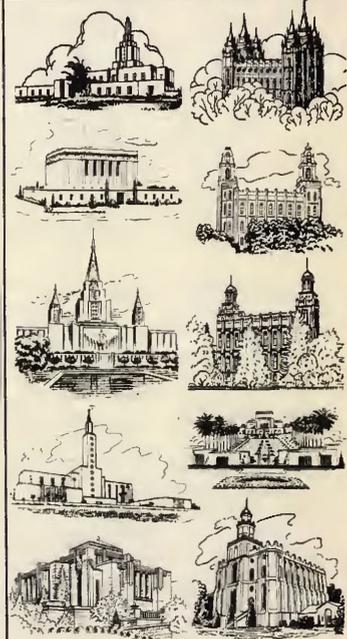
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