THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FEMALE PROPHET

Female Prophecy in Second Temple Judaism in the Popular Imagination of the Past and in Contemporaneous Society

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I have recently addressed the loaded question why there are so few female prophets in the Hebrew Bible.[1] As we know from the contemporary comparative material, women were active as prophets; so where are they – according to the Hebrew Bible – in ancient Israel and Judah. An answer commonly found is that the patriarchal editors and gatherers of the Hebrew Bible excluded them. In my view, this answer does not hold, simply because the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in which according the preserved records the majority of prophets were female, was equally patriarchal. My proposed explanation had to do with the gender alignement between deity and prophet; in most cases world wide and throughout history, female prophets tend to speak for male deities/spirits, and male prophets for female deities/spirits and their relationship is often expressed in the language of marriage and/or sexual union.[2] This is entirely absent from prophetic communication in the near East where the tendency is that prophet and deity are of the same gender.[3] Tthus, I contended that Judah's patriarchal monotheism may explain the prevalence of male prophets in Israel's religious literature.

[1] STÖKL (2009). In the following I will mostly follow the generally accepted parlance in scholarly English in which 'female prophet' replaces the term 'prophetess'. The latter of the two terms is now often regarded as downplaying the role of female prophets in the same way that words such as 'actress' or 'princess' are seen as belittling. I would, however, like to point out that being a native speaker of a language which unlike English is gendered, feminine titles can point out the contribution of women just as well as supposedly non-gendered ones. Thus, when I occasionally use prophetess, this is not to be understood as downplaying the historical and literary women I refer to but instead merely for stylistic variety.

[2] This is not to say that other gender arrangements did not exist. The prevalent view that gender ambiguity is very much part of the divine-human communication is, generally speaking, correct.

[3] Such language is occasionally used in medical texts to express possession by a demon.

Having said that I am left with the following question: whither comes the upsurge in female prophecy in Second Temple literature? Why is Miriam called a נביאה – and why is the same title attributed to Deborah? Neither fulfils the 'classical' definition of 'prophecy' which is understood as an intuitive form of divination, which, in turn, is the transmission of a divine message to a human addressee through a (human) intermediary. Why, then, are these women understood as prophets? On first glance, I see two ways out: either they are not prophets and the ancient authors understood the term נביאה differently or the definition of prophecy is wrong. A number of recent interpreters have taken the second route and have attempted to redefine 'prophecy'.[4] While that is a logical way to approach the question, it does not, in my view lead to a satisfactory solution. If we widen the definition of prophecy it ceases to be a useful analytical tool.

At the same time that the number of female prophets increased in the literature that was to become the Hebrew Bible, the opposite problem also existed: according to the Hebrew Bible prophecy as a whole seems to cease to exist in Second Temple Judaism. This picture has long since been rightly challenged.[5] Alex Jassen has recently added his voice to the debate and argued that in Qumran prophecy continued in the form of inspired exegesis of scripture – much in line with Schniedewind's findings for innerbiblical 'prophetic' literature.[6] Additionally, Martti Nissinen has shown how *pesher* literature is not only in name related to Akkadian omen literature but that it is divinatory literature in the similar vein as Akkadian dream omens.[7]

[4] Arriving at what I would refer to as maximalist understandings of 'prophecy', see e.g. BUTTING (2001), FISCHER (2002), and GAFNEY (2008).

[5] See BARTON (1986) and SCHNIEDEWIND (1995). More recent literature can be found in e.g. FLOYD/HAAK (2006), DE TROYER/LANGE/SCHULTE (2009) and EDELMAN/BEN ZVI (2009).

[6] JASSEN (2007 and 2008).

[7] NISSINEN (2009b and 2010).

If both are correct, and I agree with their analyses, it follows that Jewish divination underwent a radical change in the Second Temple period, a change that creates a new model, more akin to Hellenistic than to Mesopotamian divination:[8] in Mesopotamia, intuitive and technical divination appear to be fairly clearly delineated, while Hellenistic divination cannot be classified so neatly – individual diviners perform various forms of divination bridging intuitive and inductive forms, which in Mesopotamia would have been performed by different specialists. Israel's divination which appears to have been organised akin to the Mesopotamian model before the exile seems to become more Hellenised when we reach the Graeco-Roman period. In itself this should not surprise is too much as at least on the surface most Levantine high and written culture became Hellenised in this period.

1 Female Prophets in Israel's Past

Let us now have a short look at the Hebrew Bible's female prophets. As is well known, the Hebrew Bible uses the term נביאה only six times. In canonical order the women to whom the title is attributed are Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, the woman in *Isa* 8 and Noadiah.[9] From an historical point of view a different order should be established. In my view the probably oldest attest female prophet is the prophet of *Isa* 8, followed by Huldah who is, in my view, also already a female prophet before the Exile. It seems likely that Noadiah follows them. Miriam is probably turned into a prophetess because of her connection with the song of the sea and to music.[10] Let us look at these five women in their likely historical order.

[8] For Greek divination see JOHNSTON (2008) and FLOWER (2008).

[9] *Ex* 15:20 (Miriam), *Jud* 4:4 (Deborah), *2 Ki* 22:14 (Huldah), *Isa* 8:3 (the unnamed mother of Isaiah's child), *2 Chr* 34:22 (Huldah) and *Neh* 6:14 (Noadiah). This order is, of course, according to the Jewish canon. In the Christian canon the woman of *Isa* 8:3 and Noadiah would swap places, and the two attestations of Huldah would come next to each other.

[10] It is commonplace in the study of ANE prophecy to assume that music and prophecy is linked, see e.g. LEMAIRE (1996). All this shows is that at the time Miriam was turned into a prophet music and prophecy were

The Prophet of *Isa* 8:3

The only exception to this rule is the prophet of *Isa* 8:3. Part of that may be due to the failure to realise that here was a woman described as a prophet. Most interpreters throughout the history of interpretation have taken her to be 'Mrs. Isaiah the Prophet', rather than 'The female prophet'.[11] To the best of my knowledge it took until well into the 20th century before it was pointed out that feminine titles are not conferred upon women purely because of their husband fulfilling a function in Hebrew.[12] A Judean woman who has a certain title will fulfil the connected function, that is a female carpenter will indeed be a female carpenter, just as a female prophet is a prophet. Even the possible exception מַלְכָּה ('queen') is not an exception at all, as the queen fulfilled an important function in ANE courts organising parts of the palace economy.[13] In my view there is little doubt that the נביאה in *Isa* 8 is a prophet in her own right. However, literary history has made sure that we do not know what she did or said. Considering that in Huldah we have another woman who seems to be acknowledged as a prophet at the Judean court. Personally this does not surprise me much, but in the current research climate it remains important to point this out.[14]

seen to be functionally linked. In fact, the only place where we find music leading to prophecy is in *2 Ki* 3:15 where Elisha asks for the musical support for his prophesying: וְעַתָּה קְחוּ־לִי מְנַגֵּן וְהָיָה כְּנַגֵּן הַמְנַגֵּן וַתְּהִי עָלָיו יַד־יהוה ("'And now, get me a musician!" When the musician was playing, the hand of Yhwh came upon him [Elisha].'). There are two Mari texts, FM 3 2-3 that are often cited in this debate. However, the musicians' actions in the two texts depend on whether the *muḫḫû*/*muḫḫātum* ('cult ecstatics') goes into ecstasy, rather than the other way around. No functional link can be established here. Where the link between prophecy and music in the second temple came is a different question for which we lack the evidence.

[11] As Wilda Gafney pointed out in a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the SBL in New Orleans, 4*QIsa*[a] uses a masculine here.

[12] JEPSEN (1960). Whether or not she was Isaiah's wife is besides the point for the story. It is only later interpreters who are interested in that question. She may have been married to Isaiah, but she may equally well have been a completely different prophet who co-operated in this all-encompassing sign-act. I believe that attempts such as GAFNEY's (2008:103-105) to 'prove' by the use of verbs that she is Isaiah's wife shows more about her own value judgement than about the chapter itself.

[13] See e.g. ZIEGLER (1999).

[14] See also the remarks on this issue in WILLIAMSON (2010).

Huldah

Huldah appears in *2 Ki* 22 || *2 Chr* 34 and validates the newly found laws as correct. In the text she validates the old-new law-book that Hilkiah had found in the temple.[15] We learn that according to the text she lived in the מִשְׁנֶה and that her husband was Šallum, master of the king's clothes. Like a good biblical (dtr) prophet, she starts by giving an oracle of doom. Often her later oracle of salvation is regarded as genuine *because* it was not fulfilled, but recently more and more doubts have surfaced about the literary genesis of the pericope and its deuteronomistic character.[16] Indeed, much of its wording could just as well come from the book of *Jeremiah*. Recently, Michael Pietsch has analysed the literary structure of Huldah's oracles' and links to other biblical texts.[17] He insists that the expression 'to be gathered to one's ancestors' is not used elsewhere in *1-2 Kings* and that the only direct correspondance within the 'Deuteronomistic History' can be found in *Jud* 2:10.[18] While I concur that there are strong links between the Huldah pericope and *Judges* 4 I cannot see why this means that the expression 'to be gathered' must mean 'to be buried' here and cannot mean 'to die'. Such a conclusion would require the *Deuteronomistic History* to be a coherent literary work after all. If the salvation oracle were as e.g. Marvin Sweeney argues the only words probably linked to the pre-exilic female prophet, she would not have had to keep to specific semantics detected by Pietsch.[19] That both *Jeremiah* and *1-2 Kings* have a deuteronomistic flavour to them does not mean that they constantly copy from each other, even where similarities

[15] On the issue of new-old documents at the basis of religious reforms and changes see now the contributions to WASCHKE (2009).

[16] RÖMER (2009:176-177) and PIETSCH (2010). For earlier views see e.g. MONTGOMERY (1951:526.546-547), CROSS (1973:286 nt.46), GRAY (1977:713), COGAN/TADMOR (1988:295) and HALPERN/VANDERHOOFT (1991:223-229).

[17] PIETSCH (2010:75-76). Pietsch misunderstands the socio-historical function of prophecy when he says that Huldah's oracle cannot save the community from the announced doom. As was recently shown by SCHMIDT (1998) and TIEMEYER (2005), prophecy, like all other forms of divination show the consequences for a chosen path *in order* to warn about its outcomes, which in turn can then cause a change in behaviour and with it, hopefully, a change of outcome.

[18] I use the term DH as a shorthand for *Joshua-2 Kings* here rather for the coherent work of one author.

[19] SWEENEY (2007:442).

abound. Therefore, I hold on to the idea that Huldah was indeed a female prophet in Judah and was available to emissaries of the king.

Noadiah

We do not have much information about Noadiah other than that she seems to have been the leader of a group in conflict with Nehemiah.[20] If we want to go futher than this we do not only enter the realm of speculation, something that we are well used to, but speculation without anything to be guided by. All *Neh* 6:14 tells us is that it is very likely that there were women in mid 5th century BCE who used the title נביאה and who were important in society. However, the authors do not provide us with further information as to what Noadiah actually did. Therefore we cannot tell whether the title נביאה is used in its 'prophetic' meaning here or whether it has already acquired the sense of a 'leader who is close to YHWH' as in the case of Abraham or Moses, but as *Ezr-Neh* uses the title 'prophet' only for Haggai and Zecharia (*Ezr* 5:1, 6:14).[21]

Miriam

The singer of the song of the sea is referred to as a prophet in *Ex* 15. That she is best understood as a literary figure rather than as a historical figure is clear and a consensus is forming that she had her most important time in the Persian period.[22] What is specifically 'prophetic' about her? If I apply to her the definition of prophecy which I gave above, I could not call her a prophet – but the text clearly does so. The next logical step, taken particularly

[20] While theoretically possible, SCHUNCK's (1998-:173) attempt to revive GALLING's (1954:228) emendation of נועדיה to מועדיה does not convince. Since the name Noadiah is ambiguous as to gender it may be possible that the spelling in *Neh* 6:14 is an Aramaicised spelling of the masculine (נביאה) as found in *Ezr* 5:1 and 6:14 for Haggai and as LXX understands *Neh* 6:14. However, it seems more likely to me that the translators of LXX would turn a female prophet into a male one than Hebrew scribes mistaking an Aramaic masculine for a Hebrew feminine, and I remain with MT unless better evidence can be found.

[21] Yet, CARROLL (1992) devoted an entire article on her.

[22] KESSLER (1996).

by a number of recent authors on female prophets in the Hebrew Bible is to change the definition of what a 'prophet' is, in order to include people, such as Miriam, whom the text refers to as prophet.[23] That reaction is entirely legitimate, indeed, necessary, when trying to understand the semantics of the term נביא(ה) in the Hebrew Bible in its final form, but it is not helpful when trying to recover how prophecy operated in ancient Judah; and precisely that is necessary for our enterprise here.

Deborah

The most famous of the female prophets in the Hebrew Bible is probably Deborah. 'Her' song is usually understood to be one of the oldest parts of the Old Testament and is regularly dated to the 10th or 9th century BCE. Others date it to the 8th century while some more recent voices will date it to the late Persian or even early Hellenistic periods.[24] Whenever it may have been written, it does not refer to Deborah as a prophet – that title is reserved for her in the prose narrative, and many scholars have commented on the peculiar syntax by which she is introduced:

וּדְבוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אֵשֶׁת לַפִּדוֹת

'And Deborah, a woman, a prophet, wife of Lappidot'[25]

As Charles Echols has shown, the portrayal of Deborah owes much to the epic tradition.[26] She appears as more of a divinely inspired warrior than a prophet whose funcion is to

[23] See e.g. WACKER (1988), BECHMANN (2003) and the three monographs on prophets all of which write as if they used an historical approach but who really present us with a canonical reading of the biblical female prophets: BUTTING (2001), FISCHER (2002) and GAFNEY (2008).

[24] The youngest dating of the text can probably be found in DIEBNER (1995), WALTISBERG (1999) and BERTHELOT/KUPITZ (2007). BECHMANN (1989) dates the text to the 8th-7th century BCE, while SCHULTE (1990) and BLOCK (1999) favour a pre-monarchic dating. On both linguistic and redaction-critical grounds LEVIN (2003) finds a post-exilic date most convincing.

[25] The translation 'wife of Lappidot' has been heavily criticised recently as being the result of a masculine reading of the text. It is true that white male interpreters have – and I apologise for the unintended pun - dominated the history of interpretation, so that this could well be the case. However, the alternatives 'woman of torches/flames/spirit' does not take into account the closest parallel, *2 Ki* 22:14, where Huldah is introduced as 'Huldah, the prophet, wife of Šallum. We may not like it, but the authors of the Hebrew Bible were androcentric and usually described female characters as 'the wife of X'.

transmit divine messages to their human addressees.[27] She is a שֹׁפְטָה and therefore rightly included in *Judges*. In the Persian period she gains title נביאה by virtue of her song. She becomes a prophet at the same time as Miriam and for the same reason: both are women who are important in stories and legends. They are, I submit, so important that they cannot be deleted entirely. So instead of being sidelined entirely they get elevated to the status of prophets. But they are prophets in the past not the present day – and at some level, either within the Hebrew Bible or in early Jewish interpretative tradition, they are blemished prophets, as is Noadiah. In the case of Deborah this has the interesting side effect that the first and last named prophets in the Deuteronomistic history are Deborah and Huldah, and as we have just seen there are some formal links between the two pericopes.

Having reviewed the evidence both for historical and literary prophets in Israel's past, we can identify the following problem: either we follow the picture drawn by the Hebrew Bible assuming that its use of terms such as נביאה corresponds to some form of historical reality, or we assume, as I do, that, with regard to *Ex* 15 and *Jud* 4, the Hebrew Bible's usage of the term reflects a late Achaemenid to Hellenistic Period usage. While the latter assumption has the advantage that the biblical text can be used for reconstructing the political and theological world of late Achaemenid Yehud, it fails to take into account that fossilised terms, expression and traditions may better reflect previous periods than the Persian and Hellenistic periods.[28]

While I must admit to some circularity in my argument, I believe that using extra-biblical data to reconstruct constructs of prophecy in Mesopotamia may provide a corrective when trying to decide whether prophets such as Huldah and Miriam bore the title נביאה already

[26] ECHOLS (2008).

[27] I agree with DAY's (2000:136-138) assessment that Deborah does not simply translated as either Anat or Attart, contra CRAIGIE (1969, 1977 and 1978), DEMPSTER (1978), TAYLOR (1982), ACKERMAN (1998) and TSANG (2006).

[28] With this I wish to raise the vexing question of the relationship between the sociological and the literary phenomena 'prophecy' and where to see Israel's prophecy, see recently NISSINEN (2009a:106-108 and 2009c).

before the Persian period. It is indeed possible that prophecy was understood to work differently in the west, but the consistency over the vast difference in time between 18th BCE Mari and 7th century Assyria regarding the way that prophecy was understood to work, combined with the compatible information from the Transjordanian kingdoms, and the problematic chapter *2 Ki* 22 to me indicate that it is likely that Judean prophecy also worked in more or less similar ways.[29]

We have, thus, three women who probably were prophets in their own lifetimes: the female prophet of *Isa* 8, Huldah and Noadiah. Miriam and Deborah gained that status some time in the Achaemenid period. As we can see from the *Seder Olam Rabba* this literary process did not stop there. In chapter 21 of this 2nd century CE work, seven women are classified as prophets: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther.[30] The first thing we notice is that the number goes up from five to seven; however, only three of the biblical prophetesses are included: Miriam, Deborah and Huldah. Noadiah and the female prophet of *Isa* 8 are simply ignored, presumably because Noadiah was not regarded as a prophet of YHWH and because the female prophet of *Isa* 8 was understood as 'Mrs. Isaiah' by the Rabbis. The 4 women added by the Rabbis to make up the list to seven, Sarah, Hannah, Abigail and Esther, are included because of their relationship with YHWH or because they predict certain events. It is interesting to note that three out of the 'four most beautiful women' are included in this list: Sarah, Abigail and Esther, while the fourth, Rahab, is left out. What we can see at work here is the shift of the meaning of the title נביאה in a process similar to the one posited by many scholars for earlier times.

[29] I am aware of the literary links to *Jer* 36, but I do not believe that they require that *2 Ki* 22 be Persian, as argued by RÖMER (2009).

[30] BRONNER (1991). For the text of *Seder Olam Rabba* see GUGGENHEIMER (1998). The often cited list in *bMeg* 14a goes back to this earlier work.

With this last text that we looked at we are already firmly within the world of the late 2nd Temple period and beyond. What we have seen in the text of the Hebrew Bible itself is a trend to refer to some women as prophets who presumably would not have born that title at the time that the stories about them are set. Let me be clear at this point. I do believe that it is rather likely that in Judah's and Israel's polytheistic past – if I may be allowed to use this term – female prophets were nothing particularly unusual.[31] The fact that the text mentions the female prophet of *Isa* 8 and Huldah as if they were nothing out of the ordinary is a reflex of that reality. The evidence from Mari and Nineveh shows this unequivocally: prophecy was one of the relatively few professions which just used masculine and feminine forms rather than being more strictly gendered.[32]

The trend to refer to women in Israel's mythic past as prophets in their capacity as women who are in a special relationship with their deity, and who therefore have acquired some form of political leadership, may surprise some scholars who would not expect such developments in patriarchal societies. When using anthropological data as a control group we find, however, that female mediums occur in many traditionally patriarchal societies.[33] Anthropological data, however, should not be used without great care, and we have to take into account that anthropological data consists of 'present day' descriptions, i.e. descriptions from the time that they are describing which is fundamentally different to the Hebrew Bible which represents us with a remembered constructed past.[34] Why do the authors women *in the*

[31] *Contra* WEEMS (2003) who thinks that the normal introduction of Huldah indicates that the author ironically showed that a female prophet was not at all common at all.

[32] On this question see e.g. BATTO (1974), but also FLEMING (2004) and STÖKL (2008).

[33] See e.g. LEWIS (2003).

[34] This opens the question what to do with aging anthropological reports. As they, like all scholarship, reflect the concerns, questions and limitations of their times, they should be used with particular care and anthropologists often do not count them as admissible evidence today. An example may be the depiction of Chukchi shamans by BOGORAS (1904), who describes the case of homosexual shamans but does not mention that they are not homosexual by today's standards of gender study, as the 'male homosexual' shamans in question perform a female gender role and the 'female homosexual' ones perform male gender roles, which encompassing all forms of gendered behaviour including the usage of prosthetic sexual organs.

past into prophets rather than women in their own days? I will return to this question later on when drawing the various aspects of this paper together.

2 Prophecy in the Present

Let us now turn to the second question: What about female prophets in the present of Second Temple Judaism? In order to assess that question we have to look at the topic in general – what about prophecy in the late Second Temple period. In order to (re-)construct the construction of prophecy during the late Second Temple period the only sources we can use are written texts, such as the Qumran scrolls, some New Testament writings and some early Rabbinic literature.[35] While I am not a scholar of the New Testament or Rabbinic literature, enough has become clear in the last few years to enable me to draw a picture of their understanding – or construction – of prophecy as far as it is useful for my current enterprise.

Recently Alex Jassen has recently presented a detailed study of prophecy at Qumran.[36] His result is two-fold: the 'Qumran community', whoever they were, did not use the term נביא to refer to their own members. However, they regarded those members of their community who interpreted scripture as the successors of the biblical prophets. This itself is a continuation of the development that starts within the Hebrew Bible itself, away from the socio-historical phenomenon 'prophecy' to the literary phenomenon.[37]

[35] I rely here on the 2009 Gunning Lecture at New College, Edinburgh University, entitled 'Constructs of Prophecy: The Cases of Assyria and Biblical Scholarship' delivered by Martti Nissinen on December 12th 2009. See also NISSINEN (2009c:494-496).

[36] JASSEN (2007 and 2008).

[37] See e.g. RÖMER (2009), NISSINEN (2009a), and the contributions to FLOYD/HAAK (2006).

That means that prophecy as such had undergone a considerable change from what we can see in Neo-Assyrian prophecy, assuming that prophecy in Judah in the first temple period was to some degree similar, to Qumran. The understanding of prophecy as part of the subcategory of intuitive or non-inductive divination put forward among others by Martti Nissinen and myself which works so well for the Mesopotamian texts does not work for this late Second Temple material any longer.[38] What we find instead is that learning and training in the art of reading the divine message which is a normal component of inductive divination as found in the ANE is required in scriptural exegesis in order to be able to read scripture well. It is interesting to note here that the diviner does not read a natural phenomenon, but a text which contains the hidden divine message. However, our interpreter cannot do without divine inspiration – which in Nissinen's and my model corresponds to the non-inductive kind of divination.

As we have already heard, in the two Mesopotamian corpora of prophecy from Mari and Nineveh we find that female prophets are completely accepted and normal. Female technical diviners are by comparison rare but they certainly do exist.[39] The gendered world of Mesopotamia - whether it recognised two, three or more genders does not matter here[40] - did not often have the various genders fulfil the same function under the same title. While learning was not the exclusive domain of men, they represented the by far predominant gender in writing, divination and scholarship at the NA court as well as in OB Amorite

[38] See e.g. NISSINEN (2010). In her comments on the issue SCURLOCK (2010) does not represent well the consensus which uses the term 'Literary Predictive Texts', DEJONG ELLIS (1989), because she wants more comparison between them and biblical books to be made. While it is true that most biblical texts also are part of the general genre of literary texts, they are less concerned with prediction as such, and are themselves the product of inner-biblical *Fortschreibung* and interpretation which led to Qumran-style 'prophetic exegesis', which as Scurlock rightly points out requires both 'science' (training) and 'art' (inspiration), SCURLOCK (2010:277 nt.1).

[39] Particularly the *šāʾiltu*, cf. HENSHAW (1994:141).

[40] Assyriology is discovering gender as a fruitful subject of study as can be seen by the subject of the Helsinki RAI, see e.g. PARPOLA/WHITING (2002). Very interesting in this context is the work of BAHRANI (2001, 2003 and 2008).

Mesopotamia.[41] Second temple Judaism was no kinder in its access to education to women, the necessary pre-condition for becoming an inspired interpreter of Scripture. That means that because prophecy had changed radically from a non-inductive form of divination to a form of divination including inductive and non-inductive elements women were excluded from performing an office which they clearly had performed in biblical times – at least in groups such as the 'Qumran community'.

Another Second Temple Jewish text cites *Joel* 3:1 (2:28), YHWH's promise that:

> 'I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, And your young men shall see visions.' (Acts 2:17)

This indicates that the early church regarded women as capable of prophesying. It is possible that at least at the time that Acts was penned down, learning was not considered as an important pre-condition for prophetic behaviour by Christian groups. As early Christianity shared the Rabbinic believe that Samuel's mother Hannah was a prophet (*Luke* 2), which shows that it had a similar interest in rooting female prophecy in history; unlike Rabbinic Judaism, however, it did not exclude prophecy as a valid form of contemporary form of revelation. That the phenomenon of prophetically gifted people, particularly women, became a problem to Christianity as well is well known, particularly when entering the realm of interpreting scripture.

To sum up this section: for groups such as the community which produced or read the texts found at Qumran, inspired exegesis became the way in which prophecy continued legitimately. This required the interpreter to not only be inspired but also to have access to the necessary education in order to be recognised by the community as an interpreter of

[41] While there is a NA hymn to Gula in which she is referred to as an *apkallatu* that is, to my knowledge the only time that the feminine form of the title is used, HENSHAW (1994:155).

scripture, which excluded women from holding this office. Other groups on the fringes of Second Temple Judaism, such as Christianity, seem to have allowed for men and women to be recognized as prophets, presumably influenced by the expectation that the eschaton was nigh indeed. Naturally, the two phenomena which are both called 'prophecy' do not, as such, appear to be too similar. It may, indeed, be best to distinguish them from a phenomenological point of view, and I think Qumranites would not have agreed with the understanding of early Christian ecstatic behaviour as 'prophetic'.

3 Conclusions

As we have seen in the first section of this paper, pre-exilic Judah presumably recognised female prophets as nothing particularly unusual. As I argued elsewhere, I think that developing monotheism with a predominantly male deity led to the much lower numbers of female prophets that we find in today's Bible.[42] In a movement in partial contrast to this, Second Temple Judaism attributed the title נביאה to women who previously did not bear it, such as Miriam and Deborah, a development which continues until even Sarah, Abigail and Esther become prophets. They bear the title in a changed form, not so much as a professional title, but as an expression of their closeness to YHWH, and for other aspects which had become connected to prophecy but which may not have been previously, such as intercession. However, the title seems to have been used mostly for women in Judah's 'mythic past', rather than its contemporary context. Female prophets thereby became part of the past and not the contemporary present in Second Temple Judaism. The fact that Rabbinic Judaism regarded most of them as not entirely '*kosher*' may well point in the same direction. In the Talmud

[42] STÖKL (2009).

(*bMeg* 14a) we read that Deborah's name means *ziborata* ('hornet') and Huldah's name *kurkušta* ('weasel'). In both cases the name of a prophetess is changed from that of a quite harmless animal, the bee and the mole or, zooologically correct, the blind mole rat, into that of a pest (and of skilful and prolific hunters, but that seems to have been an unintended side-effect).[43] The three woman prophets who might challenge male authority are read in such a way that they become non-threatening for the ruling patriarchal structures. But to the Rabbis' credit we can note that they do not refuse these women the title נְבִיאָה. Further, as Bronner points out, the condemnation is not universal. Targum *2 Chr* 22 interprets the fact that Huldah lives in the מִשְׁנֶה as an indication that Huldah had an academy and was teaching Torah there – one could hardly imagine a higher honour to be bestowed on her. Similarly, *Yalkut Šimoni* has Deborah teach Torah under the palm tree bearing her name, but both of these sources lie well outside the time scale covered in this paper.

Where we have access to Jewish constructions of prophecy in the Second Temple period outside of millenarian movements such as early Christianity, prophecy seems to have turned into the inspired interpretation of scripture – a form of reading biblical texts which is reminiscent of a Lutheran understanding of preaching sermons. While I doubt that many Christians would be happy to refer to sermons as divination, they are remarkably similar in structure. Leaving the critique of divinatory aspects of the Christian sermon to other scholars better qualified for that task let me return to the ancient world.

We have a threefold phenomenon: on the one hand female prophets disappear from the record as the majority of YHWH prophets were quite probably male, and prophets of other gods were excluded by e.g. the *Law of the Prophets* (*Dtn* 18).[44] Secondly, we find the attribution of the title to some women in Israel's past, such as Miriam and Deborah. This

[43] RÜTERSWÖRDEN (1995) comments that the name Huldah does not refer, as commonly assumed, to the mole as the common mole does not exist in the middle East, and that it therefore must refer to the *Stumpfschnauzenmull* or blind mole rat, the *spalax Ehrenbergi*.

[44] This is the subject of my contribution, STÖKL (2009).

expresses that they fulfil the definition of a prophet in the earlier part of the Achaemenid period: someone with a close relationship with YHWH, possibly singing a song which is regarded as divinely inspired. Groups, such as the Qumran community, finally, constructed prophecy in such a way as to exclude women from being recognised holders of the office. The changing construction of prophecy, of modern scholars as well as of ancient scholars and societies, has profound impacts on the way women were perceived as participating in prophecy, and in order to recognise this, it is, in my view, important to pay careful attention to the historical contexts and developments, as I hope to have shown in this paper.

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