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Jael: Intertextuality allows to see the Goddess 'Anat winning the battle of Yahweh in Jdg 4-5

Jael: Intertextualidade permite
ver a Deusa 'Anat vencendo a
batalha de Yahweh em Jz 4-5

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Resumo

Após uma breve análise a respeito da figura de Débora, com este artigo, propomos uma caracterização da personagem Jael nos dois textos (em prosa e em verso) de Juízes 4 e 5, bem como as possíveis relações intertextuais de sua figura com imagens e contextos específicos da época que remontam às memórias destes textos, uma vez que estes são formados por variadas multicamadas. Apesar de se tratar de uma narrativa polifônica nos termos de teorias de análise narrativa moderna, não deixamos de considerar as memórias incrustadas nos textos analisados, e que constituem papel fundamental na resistência de grupos marginalizados no contexto de sua redação. Para tanto, utilizamos a teoria de Bakhtin de Heteroglossia e também suas ideias sobre a presença da pluralidade de vozes em uma narrativa, também utilizamos as pesquisas em torno da mitologia cananeia e a análise do imaginário contextual em torno de termos específicos utilizados nesses textos. Tudo isso propomos com o fim de construir a imagem da personagem Jael da maneira mais

explícita possível, desafiando novas pesquisas e aprofundamentos a respeito dessa imagética para a desconstrução do processo de silenciamento de vozes que grupos sofreram através da produção desses textos.

Palavras-chave: Jael. Deusa. Bakhtin. Juízes. Intertextualidade

Abstract

After a brief analysis regarding the figure of Deborah, with this article we propose a characterization of the figure Jael in the two texts (prose and verse) of Judges 4 and 5, as well as the possible intertextual relations of her figure with specific images and contexts of the time that go back to the memories of these texts, since they are formed by varied multilayers. Despite being a polyphonic narrative in terms of modern narrative analysis theories, we do not fail to consider the memories embedded in the texts analyzed, and which constitute a fundamental role in the resistance of marginalized groups in the context of their writing. To this end, we use Bakhtin's theory of Heteroglossia and also his ideas about the presence of plurality of voices in a narrative, we also use research around Canaanite mythology and the analysis of contextual imagery around specific terms used in these texts. All this we propose in order to construct the image of the character Jael in the most explicit way possible, challenging new research and deepening regarding this imagery for the deconstruction of the silencing process of voices that groups suffered through the production of these texts.

Keywords: Jael. Goddess. Bakhtin. Judges. Intertextuality

Introduction

In the texts of the book called 'Judges' in the Hebrew Bible, it is possible to identify the time of tribal society - before the monarchy - in Ancient Israel, following the Deuteronomistic point of view, according to numerous researchers, among them Martin Noth (1981). Most scholars suggest that the original sources were collected and edited into the canonical book of Judges after the Assyrian captivity of the north in 722 B.C.E., around the time of the exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E. (EVES, 2002, p. 128).

In this article it is offered a theoretical approach that is interested in

history and takes seriously the idea that Judges includes material that would have been meaningful in some form to Israelite audiences in times pre-tenth century B.C.E., as Judges is multilayered and multivoiced, its material has been preserved and it reflects various periods and resonated in those settings (NIDITCH, 2008).

Judges 5, the “Song of Deborah,” belongs to this trajectory and for reasons of texture, text, and context may date to the twelfth century B.C.E., a very early date. It speaks in a particular stylized register that may have been available to composers in early Israel. Most of the book of Judges, however, reflects the influence of later receivers, preservers, and transmitters of the early tales. One of the most important is the voice of the theologian. (NIDITCH, 2008, p. 9-10).

The judges are frequently regarded as epic heroes. Folklorist Richard Dorson notes that many of the works that might be regarded as epic are “stirring traditional narrative(s) of perilous adventure, daring, and manhood”. He observes that heroes manifest human qualities such as bravery or physical might, that they often have divine helpers, and that they may use “guile” as well as strength to vanquish enemies, “the hero of history attracts splendid legends and the hero of fiction assumes a realistic and historical dimension, so that they tend to converge over the course of the epic and saga process” (1978, p. 1-6).

Whether one uses the term epic or not, the Israelites produced a literature entirely comparable to those of the many cultural traditions explored by Dorson. Such narratives had their appeal within ancient Israel as elsewhere and were employed in culturally specific ways as a deeply expressive means of asserting and declaring national and ethnic identity. Also relevant to a discussion of judges as “epic heroes” is the character of international folklore that Eric Hobsbawm (1969) dubs the “social bandit.”

Judges does not perpetuate a triumphalist view. According to Niditch, “within Judges, three major voices are discernible: the epic-bardic voice, the voice of the theologian, and the voice of the humanist” (2008, p. 9),

which are characterized by considerable overlaying and intertwining as would be expected in a traditional corpus of literature that has been made and remade many times orally and in writing.

According to Bakhtin's theory, it is possible to identify numerous narrative voices dialoguing with each other, such as the narrative voice in the introduction in dialogue with the voice of the individual stories throughout the book. According to the philosopher, all speech utterances are heteroglot and polyphonic in that they partake of different-languages" and resonate with "many-voices." Heteroglossia (other-languagedness) and polyphony (many-voicedness) are the base conditions "governing the operation of meaning in any utterance." (HOLQUIST, 1981, p. 428). By "other-languagedness," Bakhtin does not mean only national languages (though a national language determines, in part, the meaning of any utterance). More generally, heteroglossia refers to the ideologies inherent in the various languages to which we all lay claim as social beings and by which we are constituted as individuals: the language and the inherent ideologies of our profession, the language and inherent ideologies of our age group, of the decade, of our social class, geographical region, family, circle of friends, etc.¹

Thus, we have a polyphonic narrative reflected in many singular figures not very connected to the pre-modern society (not individualistic) but aligned in a concern with what these figures have to offer the community. In the three areas of the general structure of characters - corporeality, psyche, and sociality - the features that characters are ascribed can be either stable (static) or changeable (dynamic) (EDER; JANNIDIS; SCHNEIDER, 2010, p. 13). The definition of characterization includes all

1. For Bakhtin, an individual's inner life, or consciousness is directly dependent on one's social self. As he notes, "ideological differentiation, the growth of consciousness, is in direct proportion to the firmness and reliability of the social orientation. The stronger, the more organized, the more differentiated the collective in which the individual orients himself, the more vivid and complex his inner world will be." See, V. N. Volosinov/Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik, (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 88. As Volosinov's authorship is disputed, and there is growing evidence that Bakhtin wrote the book, we attribute the statement to Bakhtin.

information associated with a character in a text, and it includes information about time, place, actions, and events connected to the character (EDER; JANNIDIS; SCHNEIDER, 2010, p. 31).

In the sequence of narratives in the book, there is no ideal image of a judge, a liberator, but several individual characters sharing a single activity: fighting for their people (GILLMAYR-BUCHER, 2009). Although the numerous narratives in Judges surround the figures of the deliverers used by Yahweh, some characters seem to highlight themselves in the story, such as Jael, the woman who put into action the deliverance prophesied by Deborah in chapters 4 and 5 of Judges. The biblical book of Judges devotes two chapters, one in prose and one in verse, to Deborah's victory over the Canaanites. Jael plays an important role in both versions of the story (BRONNER, 2001, p. 108). In chapters 4 and 5, we find a single narrative transmitted in two texts (prose and verse). The relationship between them, as far as this study is concerned, is precisely this: literary more than historical, a matter of narration more than different versions (BRENNER, 2001b, p. 123-124).

With this article, we propose a characterization of the figure of Jael in the two texts (prose and verse) of Judges 4 and 5, as well as the possible intertextual relations of her figure to specific images and contexts of the time that go back to the memories of these texts.

1. Characterization

In Judges 4 we have an army led by Deborah and Barak which disperses the enemy (the Canaanites). Sisera is the leader of the rival army equipped with nine hundred iron chariots, which are providentially immobilized by heavy rains. Sisera escapes from the battle and comes across the tent of Jael, introduced as the wife of Heber the Kenite. She comes out of the tent and invites him in (Jdg 4,17). Once inside, he asks for water to drink, but she gives him milk. The way Jael kills Sisera is described in two versions, the prose account being more detailed than the poetic

version, which is more dramatic. The biblical text suggests that she takes a sledgehammer and with it drives a tent stake through Sisera's skull, after he falls asleep in the tent.

The biblical description of Jael seems to be entirely positive. Although she is a Kenite woman, she is presented as a savior of the people of Israel and is seen acting very independently and courageously. That Deborah blesses Jael "among all the 'women in the tent' (Jdg 5,24) - a definition that alone is enough to question the stereotypical image of a woman passively locked up in private spaces" (AVANZINELLI, 2005, p. 24). She takes on the formidable task of eliminating a fearsome general and accomplishes this great feat. The meaning of her name, "wild goat," indicates her audacity, which is evident when she challenges a warrior and defeats him. Many modern scholars, however, do not see her as a heroine, but rather as cruel and disloyal and note that she violates the laws and ethics of hospitality - a fundamental principle at that time. It is a flawed moral judgment because the Bible does not criticize Jael's actions (BRONNER, 2001, p. 109-110). Even so, of all the female figures in Judges, of those described as intruding on the narrator's community, only Jael is a "positive" foreign figure. This statistic is an indication of the androcentric tendency of the book (BRENNER, 2001, p. 17).

From the beginning, the narrative creates numerous false expectations as to the identity of the savior: would it be Deborah? Was it Barak? Is it really Deborah (the woman)? Would it be the transcendent through Deborah? (AMIT, 1987, p. 93). As Assis (2005) names it, salvation would come through Deborah's hand: Jael. With that, we wish to propose that Jael's function in the story is meant to shed light on Deborah's prophetic image since Jael's action are predicted by Deborah.

Deborah predicts that the victory will not belong completely to Barak, since he wanted a woman to accompany him in battle, that is, in a non-female sphere of social activity. However, the emphasis is on the consequences, on the fulfillment of God's words through Jael, rather than on

Barak's humiliation. The sociosexual² element, therefore, appears in ch. 4 as it contributes to the advancement of the plot. Its limited presence foreshadows the great importance given to it in the second text (ch. 5). Moreover, gender-determined role definition is indeed present in the imagery of ch. 4 in its natural state, so to speak (BRENNER, 2001b, p. 126). In the course of the plot another aspect of the prophecy that a woman will kill Sisera becomes obvious. The weaker sex will overcome the stronger one by exploiting the weakness of men for women (ASSIS, 2005).

Jael does not demonstrate submission to male authority. Her behavior suggests that she uses her sexuality to achieve her purposes, but through a man who is not her husband. Furthermore, she breaks the code of the host in the observance of hospitality to a guest. At first, Jael seems to observe the code: she thoughtfully covers her exhausted guest and brings him a drink other than the water he had asked for. In the prose version, it is milk that she offers; but in the older poetic version (5,25), it is *hem'â*, curds: delicious, but soporific. Offering such a drink seems befitting a good host, but it has elements of treachery. It reassures him, but she kills him as soon as possible. In fact, Jael guarantees victory for Israel by transgressing social and ethical codes, by performing forbidden actions: she is seductive outside her marriage, she takes the initiative and acts without the intermediation of the male figure. Jael acts and the Lord is silent (KLEIN, 2001, p. 37-38).

2. Detailing within the narrative

In Judges 4, the information concerning Jael's belonging with Heber the Kenite relates to v. 11 which introduces him as having a close ethnic connection with Israel but forming part of a separate group concentrated around the Israelite center in Kedesh. That fact produced the impression of cooperation and identity of interests between that group and Israel. But

2. Writing from a tradition history perspective, Yair Zakovitch (1983) suggests that an earlier rendition of the story was all about sex, but in its present state, most of the explicit references have been censored.

the information in v. 17b - 'there was friendship between King Jabin of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite'- obscures the link between this group and the Israelites and adds some neutralist or even pro-Canaanite tinges. Given this evidence it is hard for the reader to attribute to Jael initially any political motives encouraging her to intervene in the war in favor of one of the sides. On the other hand, the text contains no intimations of any personal motivation on her part. If Sisera's flight to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite (descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law and settled near Kedesh), encourages the assumption that Jael will be the woman who will kill Sisera, the peaceful relations between King Jabin and Heber the Kenite and the absence of any suggestion of personal motive on Jael's part operate to discourage it. The background information (v. 17b) prevents the reader from suspecting that Jael is planning the murder of Sisera, or that she is the woman referred to in Deborah's prophecy (AMIT, 1987, p. 97).

The author suddenly changes the pace of the narrative to a slow description abounding in details. That technique suits the situation. The reader feels the confidence and calmness with which Jael imbues Sisera, thus making the murder scene more realistic (AMIT, 1987, p. 96). Jael addressing Sisera, 'Come in, my lord, come in here' (v. 18) is taken as ordinary politeness by him, but the alliteration in Hebrew suggests that Jael knows who her guest is. Jael confronts a strong warrior, a general; physically she is inferior to him, so she uses her femininity to defeat him.

In the same verse, the fact that Jael says to Sisera "do not be afraid" - coming from a woman's mouth and meant for a man - indicates that the rules have changed here. "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me." - Her words, with an alliteration of sibilants in the Hebrew (surah, 'adoni, surah 'elay), are soothingly reassuring, almost seductive (ALTER, 2019, p. 96). Jael's greeting and invitation parallel the call of a prostitute in the Book of Proverbs: "calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 'You who are simple, turn in here!'" (Prov 9,15-16; see also Prov 7,5-23). A woman's tent is a private space, and this space prefigures the

female womb.

In Jdg 4:9, the hand metaphorically stands for power: “The Lord will deliver Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Judges 5:26-27 describes the murder of Sisera using many body parts that can be understood as sexual euphemisms, for example, the feet/legs of Jael. An example of a lexicalized use of a body part occurs in Judges 4:23 with the expression ינפל, literally, “before the face of,” thus “before” (VERMEULEN, 2017, p. 804).

In Jdg 4,19, Jael opened the skin of milk and gave him to drink. Sisera has asked for water; she in a gesture of hospitality offers him milk. The fact that Jael voluntarily substitutes water for milk may constitute a transfer of male symbolism to its female counterpart (BRENNER, 2001b, p. 126-127). The detail picks up a line from the poem (5,25), but whereas the poem, in an epic flourish, has her offering the milk in a “princely bowl,” the prose narrative turns this into the homey realistic receptacle of a skin bag. It also highlights, as the poem does not, the ironic suggestion of Jael’s playing a maternal role toward the man she is about to kill: first she covers him with a blanket, then she gives him milk to drink and readjusts the blanket (ALTER, 2019, p. 96).

The multiple references to Jael covering Sisera in bed (v. 18-19) have a sexual connotation. It is reasonable to assume that Jael’s seduction of Sisera lulls him into false confidence (ASSIS, 2005, p. 9-10). The blanket and milk, previously taken as tokens of surpassing hospitality, now appear as a stratagem aimed at ensuring that Sisera will sleep deeply. Jael’s statement to Barak, ‘Come, I will show you the man you are looking for’ (v. 22), also shows that she recognized her guest, and all her actions were planned (AMIT, 1987, p. 98). The blanket was not meant to warm him, but to make it easier for her to approach him unnoticed.

Jael is kind, hospitable, consoling and motherly, while even in his extremity he acts as the dominant male to a woman alone and defenseless. Then, in the helplessness of his exhausted sleep, Jael bangs a tent peg through his temple. Tent-pitching was women’s work, and she

knew well how to use the stone tent peg and hammer. "And he died!" and it sunk into the ground. This grisly detail indicates that Jael has driven in the sharpened tent peg with terrific power (ALTER, 2019, p. 96). As for the manner used to kill the Canaanite general, it is considered that Jael chose to use a nail and hammer instead of a sword because it was inappropriate for a woman to wield a man's weapon (UNTERMAND, 1992, p. 130). Merchant (1998) also concludes that the indignity of dying at Jael's hands deprives Sisera of his manhood. A defenseless, statusless, weaponless female becomes the victor over the erstwhile commander of "nine hundred chariots of iron." Jael's ambiguity lies in the fact that she saw the opportunity and used it - was this a sign of Yahweh's Spirit? There is no explicit text that Yahweh was behind it at all.

Jael is the heroine of the last scene of the narrative, v. 17-22. Her words open (v. 18) and end the scene (v. 22). In her first sentence she approaches Sisera and in her last she approaches Barak; in both instances the men respond positively (ASSIS, 2005, p. 2). Just as the reader is convinced of Barak's victory over Sisera, Jael comes to overshadow both Sisera and Barak. She controls both men; she decides who will be defeated and who will be victor. Contrary to the reader's expectation, Barak does not complete the victory over his enemy; it is Jael who defeats Sisera; he foolishly believes that her invitation is genuine and that she wishes to show him hospitality (ASSIS, 2005, p. 7). Jael is seductive, sexual, protective, maternal, cunning, murderous.

Another way to understand a text is to examine how its metaphorical and symbolic content relates to its structure, such as hitting or striking whether it is slightly abstract (God strikes Sisera and the Canaanite army, v. 15) or concrete (Jael strikes Sisera with a tent stake, v. 21). Such imagery hardly provokes surprise considering the circumstantial context of a battle. There is no doubt that striking is a symbol of masculinity. Commander Barak pants up, a late arrival who finds himself overtaken at the finish line by a mere female. This sadistic murder of a defenseless man is heightened in effect by the incongruity of a woman, a mother figu-

re, acting with such savagery.

Commentators typically label Jael as a woman, despite sometimes recognizing this character's performances of masculinity, thus grounding Jael's gender in dominant discourses of binary gender and heteronormativity. Since binarized notions of gender present only two mutually-exclusive options (masculine or feminine, man or woman), those who interpret Jdg 4–5 with such binary assumptions is restricted in how they can label Jael's gender. Julia M. Asher-Greve (1997) comments that a binary framework presents gender using an "either/or model," which dictates the attribution of a single gender from only two valid possibilities, presented as oppositional. Hence, if an individual is not a man, they must be a woman. Instead, we understand non-binary as encompassing any form of gender that is not restricted to an either/or model of gender where masculinity or femininity are the only options.

Asher-Greve notes that the practice of commentators approaching the biblical text with binary gender assumptions is widespread. She admits that much of her own work was similarly laden with this bias before she systematically reexamined it. Many of her interpretations concerned individuals from ancient Sumer, supposedly women, who did not fit neatly into a binary gender category. She interpreted them as women regardless, and in doing so pressed them into a two-sex system, thus erasing their non-binary gender. Asher-Greve argues that the binary model is problematic because it restricts interpretive outcomes. By rethinking her use of this model, she was able to recognize a number of images that depicted people whose dress and features were ambiguous. Consequently, she notes that gender-ambiguous individuals have always been present in the materials she studied, but they were forced into binary categories and thus escaped. This, we assert, is also true of many characters in the Hebrew Bible. The implication of the text is that the failure of the male leader to fulfill his normal task may have forced women to push beyond the boundaries of the contemporary Israelite role and fulfill the divine purpose. This is not to try to imply that women who have been given power will

always push the boundaries. But neither is it a case of imposing modern binarized categories crystallized to the ancient text.

3. Deepening through poetry

Deborah's Victory Song (Jdg 5:1-31), this ancient piece of poetry, is in the genre of a triumph song. In this song, three special matriarchs gain mention: Deborah (Jdg 5:7). Jael (Jdg 5:6,24-27) and Sisera's waiting mother (Jdg 5:28-30), a foil to triumphant Deborah and Jael (EVES, 2002, p. 133-134). In Deborah's song, Jael is praised for her act, and considered a heroine (ZABATIERO, 2006). Jael's episode goes beyond the roles assigned to women in the heroic and epic tradition, such as the first two tablets of the Epic of Gilgamesh. Take the case of Enkidu, a prostitute who plays many roles: she is seductress, wise counselor, mother, and servant. Having fulfilled these roles that fulfill male desires, the woman disappears.

The narrator of Judges overcomes epic convention. As seductress, Jael invites Sisera into her tent and assures him that he needs not be afraid. As a mother, she covers him with a blanket and gives him milk. Sisera orders Jael to stand guard and disguise his presence. These are actions that correspond to the expected behavior of a woman as a lover, counselor, mother, and loyal servant. However, in Judges 4, the typical scene is now reversed: "Jael, Heber's wife, took a stake from the tent, picked up a hammer, and approached him meekly and drove the stake into his temple until it penetrated the earth. He slept soundly, overcome by weariness, and so he died" (4,21). It is a doubly ignominious death for a hero, for being defenseless and for being murdered by a woman (BLEDSTEIN, 2001, p. 50-51).

With a different emphasis from the narrative, Deborah's song turns the scene of Sisera's death into a parody of the warrior who rapes a woman in the tent (ALTER, 1981, p. 56, 59). "Between his feet he collapsed" (5,27) is said twice. The fearful Canaanites are cursed, while Jael, the

murderous woman, is blessed. Then, contrasting the woman in the tent with the women of the palace, Deborah describes Sisera's mother and her wiser maidens as they await the return of the conquering hero: they attribute their delay to the sharing of the spoils, a 'womb' or 'vulva' (רַחֵם) or two for each man, and embroidered cloth to adorn the neck. Little do these arrogant women know that one of these 'wombs' or 'vulvas' had pierced the back of their hero's head (ALTER, 1981, p. 40). The unmistakable sexual connotations have an additional echo: they are reminiscent of a natural birth scene, in which the woman sits on her hips and the baby needs to be supported by someone, lest its fall to the ground (see Gen. 30,3). Thus, Jael embodies aspects of both Deborah and from Sisera's mother: she is a "good" mother to the Israelites, a "bad" mother to Sisera; sexually desirable, like Sisera's expected Israelite spoils, but active, not passive. Alter points out, "the Ugaritic cognate [for רַחֵם] is sometimes an epithet for 'Anat, the warrior goddess, which would support a more decorous connotation and might even interpret Jael as an allusion to the fierce goddess." (ALTER, 1981, p. 40).

Through this window of intertextuality another line of biblical interpretation reads Jael in relation to Near Eastern goddess traditions, or alternatively, to cult sanctuaries. There are several literary renditions present Jael as a goddess or priestess figure. The biblical scholarship on cultic associations in Judges 4– 5 links both Deborah and Jael to the Mesopotamian goddesses of war and sexuality, 'Anat and Astarte. In her study of women in Judges, Susan Ackerman (1998) draws on this work to argue that Jael should be understood as a cult functionary whose tent represents a sanctuary and thus safe haven for Sisera.³ Readings such as these provide an answer to why Sisera fled to Jael's tent in particular, and why a woman might have her own tent seemingly apart from her husband. In some cases, they also provide an alternative to the erotic in-

3. Ora Brison (2013) suggests that Jael be read from a cultic perspective considering biblical figures such as the medium of Endor (1 Sam. 28,5–25) and the prophet/diviner Balaam (Num. 22– 24), who unwittingly advised kings of future defeats. In this case, Sisera fled to Jael's tent to seek advice from her because she was a cultic diviner.

terpretation of the story, moving the scene from profane to sacred space. Of course, if Jael is linked with the goddess of love, the scene remains erotically charged, as will be evident in one twentieth-century play we will see later.

Regarding the evocation of images referring to female deities in the narrative, many elements introduced from the beginning of Deborah's narrative onwards refer to the worship of other deities (besides Yahweh), such as the fact that Deborah prophesied and judged under a tree - an element taken as a mark of sanctuaries of fertility cults, celebrating the earth, a place of offering to the gods (and goddesses), of seeking divine advice, among other things. This relation of the story of Deborah and Jael as an analogy of other divinities is pointed out by Craigie (1977) for Deborah and the Ugaritic warlike goddess 'Anat, by Taylor (1982), who pointed the epic tale of Aqhat (from Ugaritic tradition) in which Deborah would represent the Goddess 'Anat and Jael the Goddess Athtart, and in same ways by Avanzinelli (2005).

Although little is known about Athtart's specific function, in the Ugaritic texts it is apparent that Athtart has earned a reputation as the one who "crushes the crown" of an enemy (TAYLOR, 1982, p. 101). The point of similarity between Athtart and Jael in the Song of Deborah is to be found by noting the manner in which Jael, the tent dwelling loyalist of Yahweh, is said to destroy Sisera, the leader of the Canaanite forces, as she smashed his head (5,26). Thus, the role which makes Jael famous in the Song of Deborah is the same as that for which Athtart is well known in the Ugaritic texts. Both figures are described as "smashing the head" of an enemy and as a result, they both represent a challenge of male dominion (TAYLOR, 1982, p. 102).

Other authors relate Jael directly to the Goddess 'Anat for her warrior drive in bloodily killing the dominating male enemy. In 5,6, for example,

we have a parallelism, a feature of Hebrew poetry, that relates Shamgar⁴ and Jael: “In the days of Shamgar ... in the days of Jael.” Shamgar, the first of the Judges, is represented as chronologically overlapping with Jael, the heroine of the poem. Israelite caravans, according to the poem, were unable to journey safely because of the danger from Canaanite warriors (ALTER, 2019, p. 98). Shamgar is described as the son of ‘Anat (3,31; 5,6), the Ugaritic goddess of love, sex and war. In a narrative full of images and echoes of an imaginary rich in seduction, gender roles are subverted and used to construct the scandalous notion that through Jael, it seems that the goddess ‘Anat is helping Yahweh win the war.

Conclusion

The characterization of a narrative figure is a thorough one, considering its description, expectations, desires, obligations, and interactions with the world around it. It is not always an easy task to distinguish these elements, especially when considering the analysis of ancient texts in a complex redactional context like the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, with the help of numerous researchers and current data regarding the history and elaboration of biblical texts and linguistic studies, one can gain insight into the various possibilities of interpreting a character. From this, we have tried to present a summary of what there is about the figure of Jael in Deborah’s narrative in Judges chapters 4 and 5.

As Deborah’s hand (not Yahweh’s), intertextual considerations reveals that Jael embodies the goddess of love and war in order to crush skulls and challenge the masculine structures of her time, bringing libe-

4. The name accompanying Jael’s, Shamgar, appears elsewhere only briefly in Judges 3,31. There he appears as a Samson- like figure who kills 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Some argue Shamgar was an oppressor of Israel who is here contrasted with Jael. In this case, the days of Shamgar and Jael would represent the beginning and end of a period of oppression. The editor responsible for the earlier reference in 3,31 assumed Shamgar was a deliverer because of his association with Jael in the poem. Alternatively, because Shamgar and Jael share an uncertain ethnic identity, perhaps they both represent foreigners who came to the aid of Israel. It’s possible that the two figures may be symbolic of a period when Israel lacked its own strong leadership.

ration to a people who were supposed to reject her. In a story full of surprises and evocations of the imagery of ancient cultures, the narrative of Judges 4 and 5 brings the figure of Jael as woman, mother, seductress, warrior, ally, enemy, and goddess, a female icon that subverts expectations and becomes the protagonist in a world dictated by men. As a complex character, much research remains to be done regarding Jael and the entire narrative surrounding her characterization. We hope we have contributed to ensuring that this complexity is not silenced by narrative voices subordinated to dominant patriarchal interests.

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