



Weapons Upon Her Body: The Female Heroic in the Hebrew Bible

Sandra Ladick Collins

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The biblical stories of Lot's daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba share much in common - singular women who are left to rely upon their own wits to achieve some measure of victory over the men around them. Scholarly interpretation of these women often reduces them to mere stock characters who inform civic notions about Israel, the perennial underdog who, like these women, achieves against great odds. Or, they reflect the trickery and moral ambiguity inherent in their line as ancestresses of the House of David. However, when read for their gender information (and not for what they can tell readers about Israel), one finds women who employ strategies of deception and trickery, motivated by individual self-interest, in order to successfully maneuver within the system to their benefit. Such initiative can be seen as valorous: they save themselves through their own pluck and ingenuity. Thus, a close consideration of these stories finds that heroic biblical women carry their essential weapons upon and within themselves in their drive, their resolve and their cleverness. Using methods from biblical study as well as folklore, this study identifies biblical women motivated by self-interest coupled with deception and an incidence of the bedtrick, an instance of sexual trickery that challenges the text's power and gender dynamics. This identification puts Lot's daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba in league with female heroes from folk tale and legend. By contrasting and comparing common motifs and actions with traits established by other non-biblical female heroic narratives, strong heroic themes are located in all four narratives. This offers a dynamic argument for identifying the female biblical heroic. This work concludes that this new identification of heroic women in the Bible profoundly affects further interpretation of the Bible.

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