Re-creation of Creation: A Rebirth of Lilith

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RE 99 Religion Senior Thesis

Gustavus Adolphus College

7 May 1992

Preface

I was first introduced to Lilith almost two years ago while reading Penelope Farmer's novel Eve: Her Story, in which the story of the Garden of Eden is told from Eve's perspective. Farmer weaves her novel around the actions of Adam, Eve, the Serpent, and this mysterious woman named Lilith. I recognized the other characters, but never before had I come across the name Lilith in relation to the Garden of Eden. In fact, my only previous knowledge of a character named Lilith was the wife of Fraiser Craine on the television sitcom *Cheers*. (Only later did I find out that Professor Ellie Beach has a cat named Lilith.) Farmer portrays Lilith as much older and wiser than Eve, suggesting that Eve was not the first female created. I found this idea extremely provocative, with potentially many worthy implications.

Thus, I was curious to investigate the mythological background, if any, of this character's name Lilith. Never did I anticipate the significant, multifarious, and recurring influence that Lilith's characters have bore in the religious sphere. I began this search with the simple question "Who is Lilith?" and have therefore tried to shape the development of my thesis around this initial inquiry.

As the focus of folklore and supernatural belief, Lilith's many roles stem out of and are connected to issues of religion, sexuality, and power. The Jewish literary tradition is especially rich in offering scholars the ability to

> trace the evolution of a single legend from its biblical inception to its recounting in the Talmud, and from there to the version found in the Midrash and then retold in the Middle Ages in medieval folklore and echoed as

> well in some Hasidic tales . . . for in no other culture is it possible to trace the evolution of legends in written form throughout the ages. (Schwartz, 4-5)

Were it not for this, I would not have been nearly as capable of tracing Lilith's development throughout the vast history of myths and legends. My attempt has been rewarding; it offers but a small addition to the much needed comprehensive resources on this die-hard mythological demon-goddess.

Introduction

Everyone is likely to be familiar with stories about Adam and Eve, the first humans in the Garden of Eden. But few are familiar with the story of Lilith's role in such myths about the Garden.

> In the beginning "male and female created he them." God formed Lilith, the first woman, just as he had formed Adam, from pure dust. Adam and Lilith never found peace together because Lilith contested Adam's claim to be supreme. They were created simultaneously from the same dust, she reasoned, and were therefore equal. (Rivlin, 92)

Among the sources I have encountered which offer only limited information on Lilith, it appears that this mythological figure is best known for her role as first wife of Adam in a rabbinical interpretation of the Genesis accounts of humans' origins. I refer to the plural form "accounts" because many scholars believe that the first chapters of Genesis recount two qualitatively different versions of the creation of the universe.

> A greater difficulty confronting literalism is the impossibility of reconciling the two accounts of creation in Genesis itself--if they are understood as offering chronologies of creation. (Hyers, 40)

Not only is there controversy over the two accounts of universal creation, but scholars also disagree about their specific accounts of the creation of humans. Those interpreters specifically interested in the creation of humans potentially find difficulty in reconciling the two accounts of Genesis according to a literal interpretation. Those who recognize two accounts of human creation in Genesis argue that the first chapter of Genesis suggests that both man and woman were created simultaneously, whereas the second and third chapters of Genesis detail human creation as sequential,

as woman coming after and out of man (Schwartz, 5).

Those who interpret the first three chapters of Genesis as containing two accounts of creation are faced with two potentially incongruent versions of the same event. Seeking to make these accounts congruent, some commentators interpret these chapters as unified, developing more and more specificity; the first chapter is understood to be more general and the following chapters more descriptively fine-tuned. Those for whom the general to specific explanation does not satisfy may cease trying to find unification in these two accounts of the same event--human creation. Instead, some commentators attempt to make the two versions of human creation congruent by interpreting them as detailing two different events of creation. One may extend the attempt to make the Genesis accounts congruent by positing that the woman created in the first chapter is not the the same woman who is created in the later chapters.

The midrash of the Jewish tradition reveals this extension, this approach to interpretation of Genesis, in The Alphabet of Ben Sira. The Alphabet is the earliest known text in which the Adam and Eve story explicitly names Lilith as Eve's precursor (Trachtenberg, 37; Schwartz, 5). Scholars disagree about whether the Alphabet, as a midrashic source, is the work of one author or multiple authors. They also disagree about the date(s) of its sections. It is generally agreed, however, to be of Persian or Arabic origin sometime before the year 1000 C.E. (Trachtenberg, 37; Schwartz, 5). This rabbinical text is also the "earliest version of the legend that portrays all the essential aspects of Lilith" (Schwartz, 5). Thus, despite lack of agreement over its

origin, the Alphabet is of extreme importance to any study of Lilith, and is cited in practically every source on Lilith.

Drawing from his understanding of biblical commentary, midrash, and Lilith, Howard Schwartz, author of Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural, claims that the multifaceted legend of Lilith "came into being as a commentary on one passage of the Bible, 'Male and Female He created them' (Gen. 1:27)" (Schwartz, 5). Operating on the interpretation that Genesis depicts the creation of two different females, the midrash commentator(s) of The Alphabet of Ben Sira expanded the Garden of Eden story to include Lilith--a name and character which would have been widely recognized and feared by those acquainted with Jewish folk-lore and superstition--as the woman to which the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis refers. Thus, Lilith's name was ascribed to the woman understood to be created at the same time as, and equal to, Adam. The author of the Alphabet writes:

> God then formed Lilith, the first woman, just as He had formed Adam, except that He used filth and sediment instead of pure dust. From Adam's union with this demoness . . . sprang innumerable demons that still plague [hu]mankind . . . Adam and Lilith never found peace together; for when he wished to lie with her, she took offense at the recumbent posture she demanded. 'Why must I lie beneath you?' she asked. 'I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal.' Because Adam tried to compel her obedience by force, Lilith, in a rage, uttered the magic name of God, rose into the air and left him. (Rivlin, 93, as quoted from the Alphabet in The Book of Genesis, by Robert Graves and Raphael Patai)

The conflict between Adam and Lilith as depicted in the Alphabet has recently attracted the attention of many feminists.

Feminists interpret Lilith's refusal to be subordinate to Adam as a depiction of a female's refusal to allow her equality to be oppressed. That her equality, as one of her many characteristics, has been recognized and preserved in the recounting of her myth makes Lilith an extremely attractive legendary figure to feminists. Contemporary feminist circles, especially among Jewish women, have begun to revitalize and reclaim Lilith as a positive figure for feminism and modern society. Lilith, a Jewish feminist magazine first published in 1976, is an example of such attempts to reclaim and extol Lilith's myth. Many of Lilith's characteristics as described in the Alphabet are undoubtedly attractive to someone with a concern for women's equality.

Yet, Lilith's character is not entirely one of equality; nor does the importance of her character originate in the Middle Ages with the rabbinical text. Lilith is a multifaceted, protean image, and her depictions have been both positive and negative throughout the millenniums. Just because the Alphabet is considered to be the first source in which all of Lilith's diverse depictions are drawn together, does not mean that the way in which it synthesizes her many facets or different myths is comprehensive. That feminists draw almost solely from this one source/account on Lilith's qualities does not mean that they comprehend the variability or even the significance of Lilith.

As a legendary character, Lilith subscribes various motifs such as succubus, child-killer, and hater of mothers, which appear to be more than a image of equality. If these characteristics must be unified, it would be better to claim that they are facets of a more general image of female sexual power. I, myself,

approached this research with the intent to focus on Lilith as unified image of equality. Furthermore, I assumed that Lilith, despite variation, was a single mythical character who developed from her earliest known Sumerian form; however, it has become clear that in each historical period we see extensive variations of Lilith which call into question whether we are dealing with one Lilith. Although I will continue to cite Lilith in the singular (except when the plural form is necessary for clarity,) my research has led me to conclude that her diverse embellishment necessitates the acknowledgement of multiple Liliths.

When dealing with such an extended length of time to which Lilith's development can be traced, the methods of communication, cultures, values, periods, and perpetuators of Lilith's myth are subject to change. Because of all these varying factors, it is evident that the myth will also be changed. So we expect to see change in the depictions of Lilith over the many periods and millenniums. We also expect to see gradual change or progression within the different periods of time.

What I did not expect to find is the large degree of change in the myths and depictions of Lilith evident within the later periods of Lilith's psycho-social importance. Although the historical evolution of Lilith's character maintains modifications of its earliest elements, later tales of Lilith vary substantially and thus magnify our need to question the singularity of that which is named Lilith. When looking merely at medieval Jewish folklore and later Hasidic sources it is clear that Lilith's legendary development does not even remain within the specific intentions set forth by earlier rabbinical commentators of this

same time period. Schwartz concludes that these sources consequently reveal considerable "imaginative freedom."

> This process of embellishment has a pronounced tendency to bring together as many previous themes and motifs as possible, yet at the same time the new tale takes on a life of its own.
>
> In this fashion the archetype of Lilith became imprinted on Jewish folklore, and she reappears with a thousand names, among them Obizuth, Agrat bat Mahalath, and the Queen of Sheba, in early apocryphal, talmudic, and midrashic sources, as well as in medieval folklore and the later Hasidic tales. (Schwartz, 6)

Schwartz further explains that rabbinical literature--the talmudic and midrashic texts--were more authoritative than later apocryphal texts since the latter had the seal of rabbinical authority. Since the rabbinical lore is that on which Jewish feminists have based their reclaim to Lilith, it is this version of Lilith which must be introduced before proceeding further.

Lilith: The Jewish Women's Magazine takes its name from the rabbinical account in The Alphabet of Ben Sira. On the first page of every issue is written:

> Lilith is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam. "After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Adam said, 'You are fit to be below me and I above you.' Lilith said, 'We are equal because we both come from the earth.' (From the Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23A-B, as quoted in Lilith)

According to this cited rabbinical source, Lilith takes offense at Adam's demand for sexual control; she insists that, being his equal, he should not be the only one to lie on top--believed to be the superior position--during sexual intercourse:

> When he asserted he was to be her master, she insisted there was no justification for his supremacy. When he wished to lie with her, she took offense at having to lie beneath him. Adam tried to force her obedience. (Rivlin, 92)

Asserting her power, she utters the name of God and rises up into the air. She escapes from the Garden of Eden and flees to the shores of the Red Sea. "Rather than accept subjugation, Lilith chose to leave Adam and live alone by the Red Sea" (Rivlin, 92). Adam summons God's aid in her absence, and God sends three angels to retrieve Lilith. Lilith again asserts her power and refuses to return to the Garden. She is therefore portrayed as a demoness, who has become sexually active with the demons at the Red Sea. "She found peace there on the hard-rock-sand lining the deep blue Gulf of Aqaba, making love with satyrs, minotaurs, and centaurs" (Rivlin, 92).

As a punishment for her insubordination and/or refusal, she is threatened with death and must suffer the deaths of 100 of her children daily. As revenge, she vows to bring harm to all mothers and infants, unless they are protected with an inscription of the three angels' names. The Alphabet of Ben Sira tells of her response to the angels:

> "How can I die when God has ordered me to take charge of all newborn children: boys up to the eighth day of life . . . girls up to the twentieth day. Nonetheless, if ever I see your three names or likenesses displayed in an amulet above a newborn child, I promise to spare it." To this they agreed; but God punished Lilith by making one hundred of her demon children perish daily. (Alphabet, as quoted by Rivlin, 96)

In this Jewish myth, Lilith is developed into a promiscuous demoness seeking to seduce men in efforts to reproduce her demon

offspring, such that no man should sleep alone lest Lilith tempt him. Nor should any man spill any sperm on the ground lest Lilith create her offspring from it. Infants' lives were believed to be in danger of her destruction, until the time of a boy's eighth day--the day of his circumcision rite--and of a girl's twentieth day (Patai, 210). Females were susceptible to harm by Lilith during many periods of their sexual lifecycle such as before defloration and during menstruation. Mothers in child-birth were believed to be especially vulnerable to Lilith's power such that they had to be protected (Patai, 212). Amulets were commonly used for this purpose of keeping Lilith away.

The fact that Lilith's myths address such issues of folklore is not unusual; myths often touch on such crucial points in the human lifecycle. The consummation of marriage, for example, evoked customs based on folklore. One such Jewish medieval custom entailed placing four coins on the marriage bed, "which was to say 'Adam and Eve' and 'Avaunt thee, Lilith!'" (Facts En, 410).

> times of stress, such as birth, marriage, and death, inevitably become the focus of rituals, superstitions, and folklore . . . a stillbirth could be interpreted as the destructive powers of the demoness Lilith, or a sudden death as the punishment of vengeful spirits.These explanations, in turn, eventually became embodied as tales that were often retold in both the written and oral traditions. (Schwartz, 1)

Because Lilith's power is most often characterized by destruction or harmful acts, it is important to question the source or rationale which underlies her power when evaluating the influence a re-imaging of Lilith may have today. It is worthwhile to investigate the process/development of Lilith's character in

history. Did Lilith originate in the rabbinical midrash, or was her name significant in earlier periods? Was she always an image of negative power?

Lilith's name was a powerful image prior to the writings of rabbis. One reference to Lilith is found in the Bible, in the book of Isaiah. Features of Lilith's mythical biography go as far back as the Sumerian culture, to about the middle of the third millennium B.C.E.(Patai, 207). Her development continues after her failure as Adam's first wife as well. Raphael Patai, in The Hebrew Goddess, writes of the changes in belief about Lilith:

> No she-demon has ever achieved as fantastic a career as Lilith who started out from the lowliest of origins, was a failure as Adam's intended wife, became the paramour of lascivious spirits, rose to be the bride of Samael the demon King, ruled as the Queen of Zemargad and Sheba, and finally ended up as the consort to God himself. (207)

It is clear that Lilith is a complex and evolving image in history.

> Among the legends with biblical origins and rabbinic and folk elaborations, none had a greater influence than that of Lilith. It is not an exaggeration to say that much of the demonic realm in Jewish folklore grew out of this multifaceted legend. (Schwartz, 5)

Since assertiveness and sexual power are not the only characteristics of Lilith, I will attempt to trace the development of Lilith and explore both her procreative as well as destructive depictions. If feminists want to embrace an image of equality and power, and adopt the midrashic interpretation of Genesis, then it is important to all of us, whether feminist or anti-feminist, to better understand the basis for their reclamation. We should also

investigate the implications of the feminists' re-creation of Lilith's myth.

Finally, we must consider what residual characteristics from Lilith's past modern feminist portrayal are omitting, as well as those they embrace. For feminists who are reclaiming Lilith, what effects will be produced from adopting a mythical character with a dark shadow, even if Lilith's negative characteristics originated from fear or from patriarchal attitudes? What are the pros and cons of reclaiming the rabbinical interpretations of Lilith given the attitudes and status of women in the period during which such interpretations were written? If there are negative consequences to such adoption, is it possible to accept parts of Lilith's character and leave other parts behind? When Lilith is understood for her diversity and evolving influence, perhaps her initial attraction will no longer appear fruitful. This, in fact, would go along with her legend; for some of the myths about Lilith describe her as a symbol of all that is enticing and destructive.

Early Development of Lilith

Scholars have been able to trace Lilith's name as far back in history as the Sumerian culture. Describing the significance of the Sumerian culture, historian Samuel Noah Kramer writes: "In more than one respect, Sumer may justifiably be designated the 'cradle of civilization'" (Wolkstein, 115). Great urban centers first originated in Sumer, and the cuneiform system of writing was developed in its cities and dispersed throughout the ancient Near East. Sumerian thought, achievements, and methodology in religion, education, literature, and law impacted both its neighbors and later descendants.(115)

Raphael Patai, who provides the most documented referential source on Lilith, is thorough in his description of Lilith's background. He claims that the earliest recorded reference to a she-demon whose name is similar to Lilith dates back to ca.2400 B.C.E.; It is a reference to a *Lillu*-demon, found on the Sumerian king list. Furthermore, many of the long-lasting qualities ascribed to Lilith are linked to her name as early as the Sumerian culture. For instance, Lilith's image as a female demon who seduces sleeping men can be traced to this Sumerian reference to a Lillu-demon. According to Patai, the Lillu comprised one of four types of demons which make up a vampire or incubi-saccubae class. *Lilitu* (Lilith) made up the she-demon, or second type of demon within this class. The third type was *Ardat Lili* (Lilith's handmaid) who made visits to men in order to "[bear] them ghostly children" (Patai, 207). The fourth type, the *Irdu Lili*, is believed to have been a male counterpart of the Ardat Lili--to have made visits to women in order to beget children by them. All

four of these types of demons were originally storm-demons. Later they adopted the image of night-demons which may have been due to etymological errors (Patai, 207).

Patai's claim that these demon types were storm-demons rather than night-demons brings to mind a plausible connection between Lilith as storm-demon and Lilith as wind-spirit. Lilly Rivlin, who has done research and has written about Lilith's mythological evolution, has supported this connection by tracing Lilith to the Assyrian culture of ancient Mesopotamia. Rivlin cites the Assyrian belief that "Lilith is a wind spirit, wild-haired and winged" (115). Rivlin further describes a Lilith of early Mesopotamia:

> In Babylonian and Sumerian demonology of the third millennium B.C., 'Ardat Lilith' appears as a 'maid of desolation,' one of several 'harmful spirits' occupying mythological space. She is a demon of waste places who preys on males. (115)

Patai explains that although Lilith's epithet was "the beautiful maiden," she was described as a harlot and a vampire "who, once she chose a lover would never let him go, without ever giving him real satisfaction" (Patai, 208). In addition to her image as succubus, Lilith's sexual relations with men are also recognized in the early Mesopotamian culture as sacred. Merlin Stone discusses ancient and sacred sexual customs in When God was a Woman. Stone cites evidence from the early Sumerian period which connects Lilith to the goddess Inanna: "One interesting Sumerian fragment recorded the name of Lilith, described as a young maiden, as the 'hand of Inanna.' We read on this ancient tablet that Lilith was sent by Inanna to gather men from the street, to bring them to the temple"(158). Stone confirms that the

name appearing on this Sumerian tablet is that which later resurfaces in Hebrew mythology as Lilith.

Lilith's direct association with Inanna supports Lilith's role in sacred sexual practices, for we have evidence that the Sumerians made sexual offerings to Inanna. Stone cites the Sumerian legend of Inanna and Enki, in which Inanna is recognized as the one who brings many gifts to civilize the people of Uruk. Among these gifts were sacred sexual customs. (158)

Kramer provides us with a better understanding of Sumerian belief in deities and the culture's sacred practices. Settlers are believed to have first occupied this Mesopotamian area during the fifth millennium B.C. Later, in about 3000 B.C.E., it was called Sumer. Sumer's great urban centers included Ur, Eridu, Adab, Isin, Larsa, Kullab-Uruk, Lagash, Nippur, and Kish. Each city was believed to belong to its ruling deity to whom it erected an elaborate main temple. These temples were the centers of Sumerian religious cults and the place of sacrificial offerings to the gods and goddesses. "The [deities] were lords, owning the cities and the temples, which they governed through their human representatives" (Lerner, 62). While offerings were made daily, the Sumerians also celebrated monthly feasts and annual ceremonies.

Kramer describes the goddess Inanna, deity of Uruk, as being the focus of the most significant annual ceremony in Sumer's temples: "Most important was the prolonged New Year celebration, culminating in the sacred marriage rite: the marriage ceremony of the reigning monarch to Inanna" (Wolkstein, 124). Kramer also illuminates the important characteristics of Inanna as "the

Goddess of Love and Procreation, which was believed to ensure the fertility of the soil and the fecundity of the womb" (Wolkstein, 124).

Because Inanna was believed to be a deity, it seems logical for her to request an offering of her handmaid, Lilith. Furthermore, given the wide-spread belief in Inanna's control over fertility, as well as in her gift of sacred sexual customs, it appears that Lilith's offering to Inanna would have been intended to be in the form of a sexual custom. In fact, we have evidence that sexual offerings were commonly made to deities, and, more specifically, that such offerings were commonly made in the temple.

Lerner, in Creation of Patriarchy, claims that prostitution originated in the temple as a sexual service to the gods and goddesses who were believed to control fertility. Lerner explains the significance of temple prostitution in the ancient Mesopotamian culture. The people regarded fertility as sacred and essential to their survival. Hence, a separate class of men and women acted specifically as prostitutes in the temple; these prostitutes acted on behalf of the deity for the benefit of the civilization (Lerner, 124-125).

Lerner also provides evidence that the ancient Sumerians believed the temple harlot was also the tamer of wild men; she cites an example of a temple harlot found in the ancient poem "The Epic of Gilgamesh." The early Sumerian version of the epic is recorded on twelve tablets dated from the second millennium B.C.E. The epic describes a harlot who brings Enkidu to the temple and who tames him (Lerner, 132).

> The temple harlot is an accepted part of society; her role is honorable--in fact, it is she who is chosen to civilize the wild man. The assumption here is that sexuality is civilizing, pleasing to the gods . . . She possesses a kind of wisdom which tames the wild man." (Lerner, 132)

The information Lerner provides us about temple prostitution in early Mesopotamian culture, as well as the evidence we have to connect Lilith to Inanna, leads me to believe that the ancient Sumerian tablet is depicting Lilith as a temple harlot. Lilith, therefore, was recognized in the Sumerian culture as one who was associated with a deity, as one who Stone calls a "sacred wom[a]n" (When God Was a Woman, 158). Thus, although Lilith was recognized as a succubus in Sumer, her sexual relations with men were not solely associated with the demonic. Stone concludes that later tales of Lilith "may well have been developed in reaction to the original Lilith, so closely associated with the sexual customs of the worship of the Goddess" (When God Was a Woman, 159).

Lilith's character has been associated with other deities as well. For example, Stone not only compares Lilith to Inanna, but in Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood she also compares Lilith to another Sumerian goddess: Ninlil, the ancient Air Goddess of the city of Nippur. Visually, it is easy to spot the similarity of their names which share the root "lil," I believe it is this root of Lilith's name which transforms her recognition from a storm-demon to a night-demon because of its closely associate with the Hebrew "lilah" meaning "night" or "darkness" (Patai, 207; also Umansky, 193). But the connection between Lilith and Ninlil expands beyond this etymological similarity. According to Wolkstein's depiction of divine lineage, Ninlil is Inanna's

paternal grandmother. Stone describes Ninlil as the goddess

> who gave the gift of grain, [the]keeper of the divine Dukug grain chamber of the heavens, She who birthed the moon, in the darkness of the Netherworld, [and] She who chose the lad at the holy Tummal Shrine in sacred Nippur, Ninlil alone appointing him as shepherd. (127)

Stone inquires whether it is possible that the female figure which we have come to know as Lilith stemmed out of Ninlil. She suggests an affirmative answer: "The Sumerian accounts may be linked to the Goddess [Lilith] as She was known in the Sumerian city of Nippur--as Ninlil" (127). In this quote she only accounts for the possibility--"may be linked"--of such a connection. However, Stone declares a more definite affirmation to her initial question as she closes her argument; she summarizes the ancient characteristics of Lilith as "she who brought the gift of agriculture, transformed into a demon" (128).

Reading Stone's depiction of Ninlil's characteristics as quoted above, I am struck by Ninlil's choice of a lad at the temple, and appointment of him as shepherd. How does this compare to Inanna's appointment of Lilith as tamer of wild men--as one to bring men to the temple?

Contemporary authors' descriptions of Lilith's relation to Sumer's deities certainly help us to ascertain the significance of Lilith's character in this early period. In addition, we have archaeological evidence which supports the claim that Lilith was not only a prominent image in this period, but more specifically, an image of power. Images depicting a female figure with the characteristics associated with Lilith reveal her connections to the divine.

Several artifacts from the Sumerian and Babylonian periods have been found which illustrate the features commonly ascribed to Lilith. One Sumerian terra-cotta relief (commonly called the Burney relief,) dated at ca. 2000 B.C., depicts a partially anthropomorphic goddess figure (See Figure 1):

> She is slender, well-shaped, beautiful and nude, with wings and owl-feet. She stands erect on two reclining lions which are turned away from each other and are flanked by owls. On her head she wears a cap embellished by several pairs of horns. In her hands she holds a ring-and-rod combination. (Patai, 208)

This figure's stance as well as her position upon lions symbolizes position of power. As Patai indicates, this figure is associated with the divine: "Evidently, this is no longer a lowly she-demon, but a goddess who *tames wild beasts* and as shown by the owls on the reliefs, rules by night" (Patai, 208, emphasis added). I have already argued that one Sumerian record depicts Lilith as a temple harlot. Lerner pointed out the temple harlot's role in ancient Sumer as the tamer of wild men. Patai describes the figure of the Burney relief as tamer of wild beasts. This alone suggests a possible connection--albeit indirect--between Lilith and the figure depicted in the Burney relief.

Other scholars add further support for the connection between the qualities ascribed to Lilith in ancient Sumer and this Sumerian depiction of a goddess. Henri Frankfort initially identified the figure in the Burney relief as Lilith. He recognized the Burney relief figure as an image of power, and, unlike Patai, believed the powerful image to be demonic. He based this identification on "his assumption of an Old Babylonian origin and what he thought to be demonic images in the relief" (Trombley,

4). Plates of the Burney relief are depicted in both Erich Neumann's The Great Mother and Raphael Patai's The Hebrew Goddess. Neumann, a scholar on archaeology, and Patai, a recognized scholar on Lilith, both claim that the Burney relief represents Lilith. Patai asserts that this relief displays the form which Lilith was believed to appear to human eyes.

Despite both Neumann and Patai's confidence, the identity of the goddess figure in the Burney Relief is still the subject of debate as highlighted in Stephen Trombley's 1985 article "Lilith or Inanna: What Difference does it make?" In 1983, the renowned Sumerian scholar Thorkild Jacobsen argued for the goddess figure in this relief to be identified as Inanna. Support for his re-identification rests upon evidence in the texts relating to the myth of 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld,' "the latest [version] of which is derived from comparisons of clay tablets now deposited around the world, from Istanbul to the Ivy League" (Trombley, 4). Many of the characteristics of the relief are consistent with the mythic characteristics of Inanna:

> The figure sports the four tiered crown of the gods and objects imported by Inanna to the netherworld--her "lapus lazuli" necklace, builder's measuring stick and coiled plumbline and wig. The mountains depicted at the base and the lions are traditional to Inanna. (Trombley, 4)

However, the nakedness of the goddess figure does not fit other depictions of Inanna. So Jacobsen posits that this relief must have had pride of place in a brothel. Or, perhaps this could have had pride of place in a temple. Indeed, the elaboration of the

main temples in Sumer included decorative frescoes and geometric

motifs.

As for Jacobsen's claim that nakedness is not characteristic of Inanna, I understand this to be based on his comparison of other artifacts that have been identified as representing Inanna. However, I read the record of Inanna's command to Lilith to go out in the streets and bring men to the temple as Inanna's request for a fertility offering from Lilith, her handmaid. If Inanna was the deity to whom the sacred marriage rite was offered, and if Inanna was "the Goddess of Love and Procreation...believed to ensure the fertility of the soil and the fecundity of the womb" (Wolkstein, 124), then it is difficult to believe that Inanna could not have been portrayed naked--that her nakedness would be reason enough to speculate that the Burney relief must have been placed in a brothel, especially when the temple was the place where, according to Lerner, prostitution originated.

Furthermore, the Sumerian texts which relate to Inanna include more than the myth of "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld." For instance, Diane Wolkstein, co-author of Inanna who worked with the writings of Thorkild Jacobsen, has translated/recreated the Sumerian "The Huluppu-Tree," keeping to the actual Sumerian verse line of the ancient text. In "The Huluppu-Tree," Inanna "appears to us as a young woman in search of her womanhood" (Wolkstein,xviii), but it specifically includes repetitive references to Lilith.

> And the dark maid Lilith built her home in the trunk.
> The young woman who loved to laugh wept.
> How Inanna wept.
> (Yet they would not leave her tree.)
>
> . . .
>
> And the dark maid Lilith built her home in the trunk.

I wept.
How I wept!
Yet they would not leave my tree. (Wolkstein, 7-9)

Wolkstein illustrates the first reference to Lilith with a plate of an ancient baked clay plaque from Mesopotamia dated c. 2000-1600 B.C. (See Figure 2). Elizabeth Williams-Forte, in her annotations on this art piece, titles the clay plaque "Lilith." She describes this Old Babylonian piece:

> A nude, winged, bird-footed goddess wears a crown composed of multiple horns. Her gaze directly engages the attention of the viewer as she stands frontally, with both hands uplifted, palms facing outward. Beneath her taloned feet appear two horned animals back to back.
>
> A demonic composite being, part-bird, part-human, is represented on this clay plaque. Her delicately modeled nude body is juxtaposed with powerfully clawed bird feet and wings that fall behind her like an open veil. She has been identified as the dark maid Lilith, called 'screech owl' in a biblical passage (Isaiah XXXIV:14). Like that nocturnal bird, Lilith makes her home in the trunk of a tree, the *huluppu*-tree of Inanna. (Wolkstein, 179)

This plaque is strikingly similar to the image in the Burney relief. Comparing the two artifacts visually, I suspect that they contain enough of the same elements to be considered the images of the same mythic character. Whether this character should be labeled Lilith or Inanna is beyond my expertise to claim, however the texts give us evidence that Lilith was indeed a character known to the Sumerians, and who was often cited in connection with Inanna. That many scholars have identified the archaeological image as Lilith convinces me that this image indeed depicts many

of the characteristics attributed to Lilith in that period. That the image also has characteristics attributed to Inanna strengthens the textual evidence of the Sumerian connection between Lilith and Inanna around 2000 B.C.E.

Another Mesopotamian artifact from the Old Babylonian period has been identified with Lilith (See Figure 3). This cylinder seal called "Goddess from the Other World" has been interpreted as yet another link between the images of Lilith and Inanna. Williams-Forte writes, "This goddess with bird features...identified with Lilith...may represent the chthonic aspect of Inanna/Ishtar derived from her association with the demonic and frequently bird-like creatures and gods that inhabit the underworld" (Wolkstein, 189).

Williams-Forte describes this naked goddess image as having a horned head, bird-feet, and wings, posed in a frontal stance. These characteristics are identical to those of both the relief and clay plaque. The cylinder seal image also differs from these others; the cylinder seal figure stands with empty hands clasped in front of her, rather than with raised arms with palms displaying objects. This different feature is significant because part of the controversy over whether the Burney relief depicts the image of Lilith or Inanna focuses on what the figure is holding in her hands.

The Biblical Lilith

Lilith's name survived the millenniums from ca. 2400 B.C.E. and spread geographically to become popularly associated among the Israelites with the demonic, for her name is mentioned, but only once and without elaboration on her identity, in the Old Testament. Isaiah 34 describes Yahweh's day of judgment, when the land will be made into a desolate wilderness.

> The wild-cat shall meet with jackals
> And the satyr shall cry to his fellow,
> Yea, Lilith shall repose there
> And find her a place of rest. (Isaiah 34:14)

In order to determine the meaning of this mention of Lilith, it is important to understand the contextual framework surrounding this verse. Edward J. Kissane, scholar of biblical theology, outlines the thirty-fourth chapter of Isaiah in eight strophes: (a) Announcement of a world judgment, (b) Destruction of the oppressor, (c) Desolation of the land, (d) Ruin of the enemy's capital city, (e) Permanence of state of ruin, (f) The glad tidings to Sion, (g) Changed condition of people and land, and (h) The blessings of Sion with renewed covenant. (Kissane, 380)

Kissane places verse 14 at the end of the strophe depicting the ruin of the enemy's capital city. He describes the message of this strophe: "The enemy's capital, with its palaces and fornications, will be destroyed, and wild beasts, or the demons of folk-lore, will disport themselves amid its ruins" (380). In a closer examination of verse 14, Kissane explains the debate over whether the creatures mentioned in this verse refer to animals or to "fabulous demons of Hebrew folk-lore" (380). "Whether animals or demons, they are always associated with the desert places." In

regard to Lilith, he adds, "[her] name occurs only here," and "may refer to an animal that prowls at night, or to a night-demon" (389).

Old Testament scholar Edward J. Young supplements Kissane's claim of the desert image by suggesting a connection between this verse in Isaiah and a verse in Matthew.

> When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. (Matthew 12:43)

According to the annotation on Matthew 12:43 in the Oxford edition, "'waterless places' or deserts are supposed to be the favorite abode of demons." The annotation specifically invites the reader to compare this verse in Matthew to Isaiah 34:14. Young points out the similarities between the place without water which attracts spirits which are unclean and the place of Lilith's rest and repose. Joshua Trachtenberg, a scholar of Jewish folklore describes the popular belief that "demons frequented uninhabited places, deserts, and forests and fields, as well as unclean places" (32). He makes this general claim in reference to medieval superstition, but it appears to be in accord with these biblical references in Isaiah and Matthew.

Matthew 12:43 provides an example of the unclean spirits, or demons which seek rest in a place where nothing else would survive. Lilith is cited in Isaiah in this same regard. She is a demon who "wanders about through the desert places," and whose name "simply means 'Nocturnal'" (Young, 440-441). In response to other commentators' claims that the mention of Lilith as a demon in Isaiah 34:14 would be out of place among a list of animals, Young argues, "it is probable that the 'sa'ir' does actually refer

to a demon in goat form" (441). A later source also connects Lilith to satyrs and a place of "hard-rock-sand": "She found peace there on the hard-rock-sand lining the deep blue Gulf of Aqaba, making love with *satyrs*, minotaurs, and centaurs" (Rivlin, 92, emphasis added).

Young explains that the word choice and literary style of the poetic chapter in which Lilith's name is cited emphasizes the magnitude of the desolation of Edom; only the powers of evil can find rest amidst the destruction of the city (440-441). Like Young, Otto Kaiser identifies the deserted place in Isaiah 34 as Edom. Kaiser claims that the poet conceived of the end of Edom in a similar manner to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Kaiser compares the author of chapters 34 to the apocalyptic author of chapter 30, verse 33.

> For a burning place has long been prepared; yea, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it. (Isaiah 30:33)

Whereas the latter verse maintains the stream of brimstone simile, the author of the chapter 34 temporarily abandons this simile to create a reality:

> the streams of the country are turned into pitch and the ground to sulphur. And the country at once bursts into flames . . . the fire of Edom will not go out, but will go up to heaven for ever. (Isaiah 34:9-10, as quoted from Kaiser, 358)

Kaiser's analysis of verse 14 agrees with those of Kissane and Young. Kaiser highlights the poet's earlier introduction of "plants hostile to men and animals" to emphasize the desert scene. Such plants perhaps grow needles rather than broad leaves, to

reduce surface area and thereby reduce the loss of their water due to evaporation. This image belongs in a place without water, a desert place. Kaiser highlights this image in order to contrast it to the poet's harsher depiction of the scene in verse 34:14. The poet not only introduces into the country all sorts of "hostile" plants, but in verse 14 describes it as a dwelling place of "an army of particularly unclean and unpleasant animals and demons" (358-359). Kaiser concludes that the "much feared Lilith" is part of this evil army, and increases the threat of this land to be avoided.

Unlike Young and Kaiser, however, Kissane questions the identification of this place as Edom, and extensively examines chapters 34 and 35 in light of their historical context, authorship and date. Kissane boldly claims that not even the most conservative scholars subscribe to the belief that these chapters originated from the hand of Isaiah. Rather, he asserts, "It is regarded as certainly post-exilic, and the only difference of opinion is as to the exact date 'after' exile" (Kissane,380).

Hypotheses regarding the exact date of these chapters range from the beginning of the work of Deutero-Isaiah to just prior to the reign of John Hyrcanus who conquered the Edomites around 128 B.C.E. Kissane explains that the first part of the poem's description of the desolation of Edom is taken by some scholars to be reflective of the bitter hostility felt toward the Edomites, which would be consistent with the affect of the post-exilic period. However, Kissane also points out that there remains uncertainty over whether the name "Edom" in verse 34:5 is original, thus positing doubt on the certainty of the post-exilic

character. Doubt over whether these chapters are pre-exilic or post-exilic remains. Therefore, scholars are not in agreement of the specific period, let alone the date, of this referential source (Kissane, 380-382).

Without knowledge of the author, period, or historical context of this text, it is difficult to ascertain the originality or the intention behind the single biblical reference to Lilith. Even Patai recognizes that the authenticity of this reference is questionable. Patai writes, "One brief reference to Lilith, and a doubtful one at that, is all that is found in the entire Bible" (Patai, 209). Some translations omit "Lilith" and replace it with names such as "the night-hag," "the screech-owl" (Facts En, 410), or "scritch-owl." A "Scritch-owl" refers to "a mother who had died in childbed and wailed her grief nightly in solitary places." She is believed to appear in monstrous form and slay wayfarers (En. Occultism, "Babylonia"). Lilith is even specifically identified as the scritch-owl in this same reference. Lilith's bird-like and nocturnal features described in many of her myths make "scritch-owl" a logical pseudonym, or at the very least a descriptive substitute, for Lilith. Although these substitutions may be viewed as descriptive characteristics of Lilith, they make it difficult for us to clearly identify the image in this verse as Lilith.

As for Lilith's suitability to the text, Patai argues that this prophetic allusion to Lilith depends on Lilith's background in Mesopotamia and North-Syria. He writes,

> Evidently, Lilith was a well-known she-demon in Israel of the 8th century B.C.[E.], whose name only had to be mentioned to conjure up the beliefs current about her. That she is said to find a place of rest in the desert

> seems to tie in with the episode recorded in the Sumerian Gilgamesh-fragment: after Lilith fled into the desert, she evidently found repose there. (Patai, 209)

As Patai points out, Lilith flees to the desert in order to find repose. Such an image of flight appears to be operating elsewhere in the Old Testament. David flees from Saul into the wilderness, and Hagar escapes Sarai by fleeing into the desert. Each of these accounts seem to be working with a motif similar to that found in Isaiah 34. This perhaps strengthens Lilith's suitability to her questionable biblical reference; it does not, however, solve the question of the accuracy regarding this biblical citation of Lilith.

Unlike the ancient Sumerian Lilith, the image presented in the sole biblical reference to Lilith, if it is accurate, is not associated with a deity. Yet, in that the biblical Lilith is associated with the wilderness, she is not unlike the ancient Sumerian Lilith whose name belonged with images of the wild. The biblical Lilith is no longer a "tamer" of wild men or animals, but she does maintain a certain degree of recognition for her power in the wilderness and her place amidst destruction. The biblical Lilith is removed from the realm of the deity to assume her place among the demonic.

The Talmudic and Rabbinic Lilith

"The Bible, and predominantly the Talmudic and Geonic tradition, exercised a profound and determining influence upon medieval Jewish life" (Trachtenberg, ix). Historians do not even agree in their designations of the main time periods of Jewish history. Nevertheless, they do agree that the roughly defined time lines are qualitatively distinguishable. The biblical period is treated as stemming from the beginnings and continuing to the time of the Maccabees, when it is conventionally supposed that the Talmudic period begins. Trachtenberg claims that the Talmudic period is commonly considered to have extended to about 500 C.E.; however, Neusner asserts that it clearly extends to the seventh century C.E. He marks its end in the seventh century with the Moslem conquest of the Middle East, at which time, he claims, medieval Judaism begins (Neusner, 2-3). However, Trachtenberg proposes that the Talmudic period was followed by the Geonic period which ended around the eleventh century. Despite the conflict in agreement, the period from the eleventh century through the sixteenth century is usually referred to as the medieval period and "the Middle Ages" in the history of Judaism (Trachtenberg, viii).

The Talmudic period provides little information about Lilith. Patai describes the amount of Talmudic material on Lilith as "relatively scanty," and introduces this section of his research on Lilith by writing: "The information about Lilith contained in the Talmud and the Midrashim of the Talmudic period is meager" (209). However, Patai does cite two references to Lilith found in

the Talmud; B. Nidda 24b states that Lilith has wings, and B. Erubin 100b describes Lilith's hair as being long.

Patai then focuses his attention on the commentaries on the Talmud which give the rabbinical period its name. On the basis of these two Talmudic references to Lilith, Rashi, (Shlomo Yishaqi, 1040-1105, a medieval commentator on the Talmud) "concluded that the 'Lilin' (masculine plural of 'Lili,' whose feminine singular is 'Lilith'), have human form, except they have wings, in contrast to the demons who have completely human form and eat and drink like humans, and the spirits who have neither body nor form" (Patai, 209).

Trachtenberg, in Jewish Magic and Superstition, describes the medieval understanding of the demons' forms. Myths told of the origin of demons (since there existed no scripture on the subject). One suggested that Eve interrupted Yahweh's creative process just after Yahweh had created the demons' spirits, thereby causing them to be left unfinished and without bodies. This could explain why most demons were believed to possess only a spirit. In contrast, Lilith and other demons were believed to possess both body and spirit. The origin of this type of demon was explained by one rabbi as offspring from Adam's relations with female demons during the 130 years after the expulsion from Eden, while he had parted from Eve (Trachtenberg, 27-29).

Such explanatory myths are typical of the rabbinical writings and this midrashic period. Many different, and often contradictory or incongruent, explanations such as the one above make up much of the rabbinical commentaries. Rabbinic scholar Jacob Neusner defines this period as the "mode of Judaic religion

created by the rabbis of the early centuries of the Common Era and eventually embodied in the laws and doctrines of the Talmud." It is also "a single, seamless, all-encompassing religious structure, continuing essentially in its classic form from its very beginnings to the present day" (Neusner, 1). The distinguishing concept of rabbinic Judaism is belief that the ancient Scriptures constituted only part of divine revelation.

> At Sinai, God had handed down a dual revelation: the written part known to one and all, but also the oral part preserved by the great scriptural heroes, passed on by prophets to various ancestors in the obscure past, finally and most openly handed down to the rabbis who created the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. (Neusner, 7)

Therefore, the complete Torah consisted of both the written and the oral parts. Midrash refers to "a type of rabbinic literature involving the interpretation and elaboration of biblical texts and forming a running commentary on particular books of the Bible" (Plaskow, Standing, 270).

In the rabbinic period Lilith is identified as Adam's first wife of the creation account(s) of Genesis. The most complete source for this rabbinical identification of Lilith as first wife of Adam is found in the Alphabet of Ben Sira. However, I have not been able to obtain a copy of this primary source. Virtually every source I have come across in my search for finding out who Lilith is/was has cited the Alphabet as the primary source for this depiction of Lilith. Unfortunately, few of these sources offer substantial, let alone comprehensive, information on Lilith. The limited scholarship that deals with Lilith to any degree of depth do cite the Alphabet and affirm its importance. Only one of

these sources actually offers bibliographic information for the Alphabet, namely Patai, who mostly summarizes it and includes only fragmentary quotations. Aviva Cantor Zuckoff has published a lengthy quote from the Alphabet in "The Lilith Question." Since she provides no bibliographic entries and is a member of the editorial board for Lilith, a feminist magazine, I am leery of a possible bias in her treatment of the quotation (possible exclusions, etc.) Since it is my aim to try to evaluate the historical information on Lilith in order to better evaluate the feminists' methodologically, I need to pay attention to her potential feminist bias in evaluating her poorly documented article. Comparing Patai's limited quotes, as well as his summarization of the Alphabet's treatment of Lilith to Cantor Zuckoff's lengthy quotes from the Alphabet, I am convinced that Cantor Zuckoff's quotes are indeed accurate; I am unable to ascertain whether there have been significant omissions from the original text, since I have no way of obtaining it.

Cantor Zuckoff cites the Alphabet:

> After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He said: "It is not good for Adam to be alone." He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilith.
>
> They quarreled immediately. She said: "I will not lie below you." He said, "I will not lie below you, but above you. For you are fit to be below me and I above you."
>
> She responded: "We are both equal because we both come from the earth."
>
> Neither listened to the other. When Lilith realized what was happening, she pronounced the Ineffable Name of God and flew off into the air.

> Adam rose in prayer before the Creator, saying, "The woman you gave me has fled from me." Immediately the Holy One sent three angels after her.
>
> The Holy One said to Adam: "If she wants to return, all the better. If not she will have to accept that one hundred of her children will die every day."
>
> The angels went after her, finally locating her in the sea, in the powerful waters in which the Egyptians were destined to perish. They told her what God had said, and she did not want to return....Alphabet of Ben Sira 23a-b. (Cantor Zuckoff, 5)

It is my understanding that Lilith is not depicted as the first wife of Adam, nor as the first woman created, nor the woman created equal to male, until The Alphabet of Ben Sira depicts her in all of these roles (Schwartz, 5). Therefore, it is important to look at the significance this commentary has had within the Jewish heritage in order to better evaluate its contribution to the Jewish feminists' who reclaim and re-create Lilith.

The Encyclopaedia Judaica claims that The Alphabet of Ben Sira is "a narrative, satirical work. . . [and] one of the earliest, most complicated, and most sophisticated Hebrew stories written in the Middle Ages" (548). The Jewish Encyclopedia claims that the Alphabet is "a small book containing a double list of proverbs--twenty-two Aramaic and twenty-two Hebrew--alphabetically arranged, and a haggadic commentary on them, enriched with fables and legends" (678). Even though I have not managed to obtain a copy of The Alphabet of Ben Sira--which likens my thesis to many other written material on Lilith--I have gained an appreciation for the lack of understanding and consensus surrounding this medieval text. First of all, The Alphabet is a pseudepigraphal

work; it was not written by Ecclesiasticus, the author of the Apocryphal "Wisdom of Ben Sira." Secondly, "it is impossible to fix even the approximate date of this work" (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 549). Thirdly, over 50 extant manuscripts have been located, many of which are only partial or "contain different versions of and additional stories" in the texts (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 548). Despite the attempts to justify the unification of the many different versions of the Alphabet, I am left to question whether there is a single Alphabet of Ben Sira--to question whether or not the Alphabet should be considered unified.

In response to this concern over the unification of the Alphabet, the two encyclopedic sources quoted above disagree. One encyclopedia suggests that the unity of the work need not be doubted "despite the fragmentary character of the versions," since "All the versions share a special, satirical, and even heretical, character, [which] indicates that they all were written by a single hand." This source attributes the differences in the versions to "varying degrees of censorship on the part of editors and copyists." (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 548) Moreover, this source treats the Alphabet as having originated from roughly a single place and time period.

> It seems likely that the author did not belong to any organized group or definable ideological movement, but was merely a writer with an anarchistic tendency who used satire to ridicule all the institutions of established religion in his day. (549)

In contrast, The Jewish Encyclopedia claims that the Alphabet contains more than one source of origin. Unlike the Encyclopaedia Judaica, The Jewish Encyclopedia maintains that the linguistic differences within the Alphabet correspond with its differing

contents and origin; "consequently the two collections must be treated separately" (678). Therefore, this source treats The Alphabet of Ben Sira as containing two separate alphabets.

> The so-called second Alphabet of Ben Sira is quite different in character from the other, and belongs to a much later period. It consists, as stated, of twenty-two Hebrew proverbs with a commentary upon them. Half of the proverbs are borrowed from the Talmud . . . But the proverbs themselves are of secondary interest for the author, whose main purpose is to use them as a basis for the legends which he not unskillfully groups about the person of Ben Sira. . . . The commentary on the second Alphabet is really nothing more than a collection of legends and fables common among the Jews of the Middle Ages. It is to be expected that such a book should be full of absurdities . . . [which] stigmatize it as an intentional "mockery of Jewish literature." Oriental popular books--and the second part of Ben Sira [which] came from Arabia or Persia--contain much that is vapid together with good specimens of popular wit and charming fables. (Jewish Encyclopedia, 679-681)

Despite the lack of information or agreement surrounding this source, the Alphabet has popularly been treated, undoubtedly, as the most authoritative material on Lilith. Feminists' wish to treat it as an authority on the origin of humanity, for the rabbinic Lilith is equal to man and assertive; she is unwilling to be threatened by Adam or, even, by the wrath of Yahweh upon receiving orders to return to the Garden in the form of an annunciation. She boldly stands up for her opinion, and receives her punishment. The rabbinic Lilith does not stay completely free from error, however; she becomes promiscuous and vengeful. By the end of the myth, the rabbinic Lilith is portrayed as being solely demonic.

Later, in the Jewish mystical writings of the Kabbalah and Zorah, Lilith's myths depict her as a powerful demoness. However, the demonic Lilith is also regarded as capable of associating with the divine. Patai offers a nice comparison of the ancient Lilith of Sumer and the medieval Lilith of the Kabbalah.

> . . . in ancient Sumer and in Kabbalistic Judaism Lilith's career ran very similar courses. She started out in both faiths as a lowly she-demon, whose activities were confined to the nether realms of existence, who was associated with impure nocturnal animals and who pulled [hu]man down to her own base level. Then, in both religions, she succeeded in working herself up, as it were, to higher rungs on the scale of numina, until she became an undoubted goddess in Sumer and the consort of God in Kabbalism. (Patai, 242)

Although Patai's evaluation is interesting and valuable to a comprehensive study of the mythologies of Lilith, I urge readers who are interested in Kabbalistic mysticism and its treatment of Lilith to consult the writings of Gershom Scholem. It is beyond the scope of my thesis to expand on the development and sustenance of myths about Lilith during the Kabbalistic period, since it is from the rabbinical period of Lilith's diverse mythologies that modern feminists' base their reclamation of Lilith. Still, Patai's above comparison leads to what I find to be an even more significant observation and evaluation of Lilith:

> Yet with all these advances in [Lilith's] career, the basic qualitites of her personality never changed: she remained the beautiful seductress who joined lonely men in their nocturnal unrest, enjoyed their sex and bore them demonic offspring . . . play[ed] her lethal games with children, causing them to laugh happily in their sleep and then strangling them mercilessly so as to get hold of and array herself in, their innocent souls. There can be little doubt that a she-demon who accompanied [hu]mankind--or at least a part of

> [hu]mankind--from its earliest antiquity to the threshold of the Age of Enlightenment must be a projection, or objectification, of human fears and desires . . . (Patai, 242)

The Modern Feminist Lilith

In the previous chapters I have attempted to provide support for the multiple, sometimes opposing, depictions of Lilith(s) throughout millenniums. Lilith may indeed maintain many of her core qualities which Patai suggests compose her "basic personality," however, even this "basic personality" is split between the earthly realm and the nether realm, between the divine and the demonic. Given Lilith's extensive variations both within and between different historical and cultural periods, it is necessary to first identify in which account of Lilith modern feminists are interested in order to begin to understand the modern feminists' Lilith. Thus, my observation is worth repeating: modern Jewish feminists base their interest in and claims to Lilith on the rabbinical commentary of the creation account(s) in Genesis--specifically, that found in The Alphabet of Ben Sira. Next, since many modern Jewish feminists call for and actualize a feminist claim to Lilith, it is important to examine those feminists who have documented such claims. By far the most influential of these has been Judith Plaskow, as is evidenced by others feminists' heavy reliance on Plaskow's publications.

Feminist efforts to re-create Lilith seem to have been initiated in the early 1970's. In 1972, Plaskow participated in a week-long Feminist Theologizing Conference at Grailville in Loveland, Ohio. There, with help from Karen Bloomquist, Margaret Early, and Elizabeth Farians, these feminists participated in dialogue culminating in the re-creation of a myth about Lilith. This myth was first published in a Church Women United packet, "Women Exploring Theology at Grailville," in 1972 (as cited in

"Coming of Lilith," 198). By 1974, Plaskow published this collective's myth in an extended essay, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology," in Rosemary Radford Ruether's Religion and Sexism. This essay has since been republished in several other feminist anthologies. Its influence evoked a response that necessitated its author to publish an explanation of the her rationale for both creating and upholding the modern Lilith myth. Through her essay on Lilith, Plaskow claims in a much more recent publication that she attempted to

> expose the patriarchal perspective of the midrash, at the same time exploring the question it leaves open: What would happen, what is happening, as women's power begins to be freed and defined by women? (Sinai, 55)

In "The Coming of Lilith" itself, Plaskow provides a thorough explanation of the communal efforts used to re-create the story of creation which called for a rebirth of Lilith. The Grailville conference enabled the women to "move beyond defining 'others' and, instead, to find those others in [themselves]" ("Coming of Lilith," 204). Plaskow argues that the collective's main, constructive efforts to include their theological process in their theology necessitated the abandonment of the systematic form.

> We considered what it would mean to write a systematic theology that affirmed the experiences we had been discussing--choosing a philosophical framework, our texts, our rabbis, or our saints. But we were worried about the disappearance of the four of us sitting there, our coming together, behind the framework we would create. We clearly needed a form that would grow out of the content and process of our time together. ("Coming of Lilith," 205)

Realizing that no single event or symbol was capable of expressing all of their theology as well as their personal experiences, these

women focused instead on the variety of mythical elements within their discussions of feminist theology. Having shared their own stories and rejected the systematic forms of theology, they returned to the story form with the hope that it would "grow naturally out of [their] present history" (205).

Plaskow acknowledges the many challenges that these collaborationists faced in "inventing" a myth that was both old and new. "We . . . felt the need for using older materials that would carry their own reverberations and significance even if we departed freely from them" (205). Despite or, perhaps, because of these challenges, this group of women chose to reclaim the rabbinical Lilith.

> We chose, therefore, to begin with the story of Lilith, demon of the night, who according to rabbinic legend was Adam's first wife. . . Through her story, we could express not only our new image of ourselves, but [also] our relation to certain of the elements of our religious traditions. Since stories are the heart of tradition, we could question and create tradition by telling a new story within the framework of an old one. (205)

Plaskow and her group began with Lilith's rabbinical story, but in order to stress the necessity of sisterhood--the communal gathering of women--they required more than the rebirth of Lilith alone. Just as each of these women came together to do theology, the collective's story required both Lilith and Eve to jointly return to the Garden in order to rebuild it.

> We try to express through our myth the process of our coming to do theology together. Lilith by herself is in exile and can do nothing. The real heroine of our story is sisterhood, and sisterhood is powerful. (206)

These feminists re-created the rabbinical account of Lilith, downplaying and, sometimes, omitting her demonic activities which are so prevalent in the rabbinical accounts of Lilith. The modern Lilith is depicted not as child-killer, enemy of mothers, or temptress of men. She initially wages war against her oppressor, Adam, and his helper, Eve, until Eve becomes like Lilith and leaves the garden. When Eve comes to Lilith, she disobeys Adam, acting on her own authority and curiosity. Lilith and Eve recognize that they are sisters; their sisterhood enables each to return to the garden "bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together" ("Coming of Lilith," 207).

In this modern account of Lilith, feminists are selective in choosing Lilith's attributes; they seem to highlight only Lilith's past attributes which feminist find valuable while neglecting those which are negative or destructive to feminist ideologies. Adopting parts of the rabbinical Lilith, the feminists attempt to ground their story within their literary tradition; they re-create this creation account, portraying Lilith as blameless. They also begin with the assumption that the garden needs to be rebuilt; that Adam is to be blamed, if not also God. They remold Eve into one who disobeys Adam, for Adam is interpreted as the oppressor.

The feminists' new interpretation of Lilith's role in the Garden is undoubtedly pragmatically fruitful; yet, it calls to question the basis for myth-making and of authority. It calls my attention to the selectivity of the modernists' treatment of Lilith, Eve, Adam, and God. As accurate as their re-creation of Lilith's myth might be at conveying these feminists' temporal

experiences, I cannot ignore my suspicion that their interpretation, although based on the rabbinical texts in order to remain attached to Judaic heritage, misuses the rabbinical intentions to serve their own aims. In re-creating their account of this rabbinical legend, the feminists interpret Adam, Eve, Lilith, and Yahweh much differently than would have been understood or intended by the medieval rabbinical authors. This alone is not enough to incriminate the feminists for their re-creation of Lilith, but it sets the foundation for further misuse.

"The Coming of Lilith" myth also brings to question the agency of Lilith's power in its focus on allied forces. She is depicted as respectable for putting up a long, hard battle with Adam and his helper; yet, Lilith's attempts to join the human community are undoubtedly destructive. "[Lilith] stormed the garden's main gate, and a great battle ensued between her and Adam in which she was finally defeated" (206). Lilith only acquires the human companionship she seeks when Eve comes to her, and is only able to re-enter the garden through the gift of Eve's alliance. How positive is this Lilith who is not directly shown to care about rebuilding the garden, but only desiring companionship through war? Is this Lilith necessarily different from the demoness of the Alphabet? She may not be described as seducer or harmer of mothers and infants, but can this shadow be cast onto their myth? Lilith's demonic qualities have, for the most part been completely omitted in the modern myth, but there remains room for these attributes to be read into the modern myth. One could argue that the modern Lilith is still a demoness who seeks human companionship in order to seduce Adam, make her demon-

children, and harm Adam's helper. One could argue that Lilith tricks Eve into helping her back into the Garden, and that once inside, Lilith will rebuild the Garden by first destroying it.

The story does include references to the demonic portrayals of Lilith, but refutes the validity of such portrayals by blaming them on Adam's efforts to keep what is "his" wife and helper ignorant. Thus the negative depictions of Lilith which the feminists do not omit from their myth are blamed on the male who is trying to maintain his position of power by keeping the two women separated. Painting the male negatively, the myth favors a positive reading of Lilith, who continually tries to rejoin the human community, and of Eve, who distrusts Adam and openly offers Lilith companionship.

In Standing Again at Sinai, Plaskow testifies why she re-created and values the Eve and Lilith story.

> My retelling of the Eve and Lilith story attempts to mine the ambiguity of the traditional midrash that, seeking to reconcile the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, describes Lilith as Adam's first wife. I retain the rabbinic idea that Lilith was banished for demanding equality with Adam but refuse to judge her as an evil demon, perceiving in that label the whole history of male naming of women who refuse to yield to male authority. (Sinai, 54-55)

Plaskow has received much attention and response for her initiation of the rebirth of Lilith among feminist circles. Ellen Umansky, scholar of Judaism, summarizes the significance and influence of Plaskow's re-creation of Lilith.

> In her myth, Plaskow places Lilith and Eve within the framework of their traditional setting. Eve is still in the garden with Adam, Lilith is Adam's ex-wife. Combining their myths, Plaskow retains much of the traditional content filtered through her own

> experience of self and of sisterhood with other women. Thus, she transforms, at first subtly, then radically, Eve and Lilith's relation to Adam and to God and describes the ways in which each woman views herself and the world around her. She imagines what it might have been like had Eve and Lilith met one another and heard each other's story and at the end of the myth envisions a powerful Eve and Lilith returning to the garden to rebuild it together. ("Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology," 195)

Ruether also evaluates and explicates Plaskow's attempts to reclaim Lilith.

> In Judith Plaskow's 'midrash' on the rabbinic commentary on Genesis 1-3, we see a contemporary Jewish feminist drawing out the latent message of the Lilith story. Lilith represents the banished power and autonomy of women, which have been driven out beyond the boundaries of the patriarchal world. Even the very thought of it is repressed by labeling it a fearsome demon. Lilith is the banished potential of Eve herself, the subordinate and despised wife. The return of Lilith means the reclaiming of women's own wholeness of personhood. Lilith and Eve share their experiences and thereby conduct the world's first feminist consciousness-raising session. (Womanguides, 64)

Other feminists who have documented their claim to Lilith include members of Lilith's editorial board, especially Aviva Cantor Zuckoff who significantly contributed to the magazine's premier issue with her article "The Lilith Question." In this article Cantor Zuckoff examines the modern feminist rationale, and makes an effort to justify to readers why humanity needs to embrace Lilith. Cantor Zuckoff willingly acknowledges the multiplicity of qualities in Lilith. Regarding the historical evolution of Lilith(s), Talmudic scholar Judy Weinberg contributes to Cantor Zuckoff's article in this issue. Weinberg

considers Lilith's character "a maze of contradictions, interweaving a variety of legends and traditions" ("Lilith Question," 38). Weinberg addresses the complexity of Lilith's many depictions, and argues that they culminate in the rabbinical account of Lilith as the first Eve which feminists wish to identify. Yet, Weinberg raises questions of validity concerning naming the first Eve "Lilith."

> If we isolate all the strands of demonology, separating the various interpolations of Lilitu, the wind-spirit; Labartu, the child-slayer, Lamashtu, the Greek Lamia; Lilith, the night demon, we are left with the story of the first Eve who may or may not have claim to the name Lilith in the first place. ("Lilith Question," 38)

Cantor Zuckoff also posits the need to evaluate the validity of the different depictions of Lilith.

> Finally, we must ask ourselves: which Lilith is closer to the spirit of the first account in Genesis, the account that tells us how God first created human beings--the female who accepts the idea of equality and fights for it, or the female who has lost sight of the original struggle and persists in seeking revenge? ("Lilith Question," 38)

Not surprisingly, Cantor Zuckoff clearly prefers the first of the two females; "There is no doubt that the Lilith who claimed her equal birthright with Adam is closer in spirit to both the original Biblical account and to Jewish women of today" ("Lilith Question," 38).

Unlike Weinberg who evaluates Lilith's validity by tracing it from earlier traditions to the rabbinical account, Cantor Zuckoff starts with the assumption that the valid "Lilith" is the rabbinical Lilith, and then applies this criteria to her validation of Lilith. Cantor Zuckoff places authority on the

Torah's account of creation, interpreted according to the Alphabet's passages on Lilith.

Cantor Zuckoff is not alone in her preference for the assertive first woman; Lilith is valued by feminists as "an independent spirit." Weinberg even goes as far as to hypothesize what might have facilitated an earlier openness to Lilith's positive characteristics:

> Had [Lilith] succeeded in her battle with Adam for equal rights, Lilith might today represent that spark of original creativity in whose image women could retrace and recreate their history. Instead history plunged her into the depths of demonhood. Only in twentieth century, which has no use for 'sheydim,' may the Lilith, who has been obscured by the mists of demonology these thousands of years, be revealed today as the first woman on earth, equal to man and a free spirit. ("Lilith Question," 38)

Cantor Zuckoff's argument reveals the rationale for feminists' positive depiction of Lilith despite the abundant negative attributes which have in the past been associated with Lilith.

> The traits attributed to Lilith after she lost her struggle for equality are tainted with male bias and fear. Moreover, Lilith's post-revolt 'character' cannot be accepted because it is not a character at all but a hodge-podge of negative traits that contradict each other (seductive/frigid; mother of demons/sterile) and thus cancel each other out. ("Lilith Question," 10, 38)

Such feminist arguments are not extremely convincing, however, they are used in order to justify the feminists' selective adoptions of biblical caricatures. They claim that this rationale is not uncommon in the Judaic heritage; these Jewish feminists justify their selectivity based on the precedence of similar

selectivity within Judaism's past. Cantor Zuckoff boldly reasons:

> [Feminists] can thus do what Jewish tradition does with King David: accept the essence, glorify the essence, and reject the later additions as contradictory, contaminated by fear and distrust, and not central to the intrinsic nature of the character of Lilith. ("Lilith Question," 38)

Cantor Zuckoff reasons that the efforts of feminists, like Plaskow and her collective, to "return to the source" is an approach well known throughout Jewish history. Cantor Zuckoff argues that the modern feminists' reclaim to Lilith and claim to gender equality belong to and in the Jewish tradition and its history--upholding and maintaining its struggle to "[return] to the source and building from its pure, uncontaminated foundation" ("Lilith Question, 38).

In evaluating the various feminists' claims to Lilith, it appears that each author is selectively embracing the qualities of Lilith, old or new, bravely fighting or fleeing the oppressor, which enhances his or her own, specific objectives. Lilith is interpreted according to the goals of the interpreter. Even Plaskow is described by Umansky as selective in her molding of Lilith into an personally desirable image:

> Thus, while [Plaskow] accepts the rabbinic image of Lilith as the who claimed equality with Adam (an image that speaks to her own experience of selfhood), she rejects the portrayal of Lilith as night demon . . . Plaskow . . . move[s] beyond the biblical and rabbinic materials completely" (195).

Plaskow, herself, acknowledges the selective and open-ended process feminism utilizes in choosing its role models.

> Feminist midrash shares the uncomfortable self-consciousness of modern religious experimentation: elaborating the stories of Eve . . . we know that the text is partly an occasion for our own projections, that our imaginative reconstructions are a reflection of our own beliefs and experiences. (Sinai, 53-54)

Within feminism, those who wish to maintain rooted in the Jewish tradition turn to the midrashic sources. "The open-ended process of writing midrash--simultaneously serious and playful, imaginative, metaphoric--has easily lent itself to feminist use" (Sinai, 53). Plaskow reasons that the feminist midrash is a valid part of the Jewish tradition.

> It stands on the rabbinic insistence that the Bible can be made to speak to the present day. If it is our text, it can and must answer our questions and share our values; if we wrestle with it, it will yield up meaning. (Sinai, 54)

In looking at these modern feminists' emphasis on Lilith, it is clear that the documented pleas for re-imaging and reclaiming Lilith are grounded in the Jewish women's desire to remain connected to their heritage. In 1972 feminists who initiated a return to Lilith in their "The Coming of Lilith" story expressed their need to come together, to make the Torah speak to them in their present experiences today, but also to have their theology emerge out of what is historically important to the tradition within which they seek to identify themselves. They valued maintaining a relationship between the new image they were helping to create and the elements of their tradition. ("Coming of Lilith," 205).

Are these feminists' reclaims of Lilith too selective? They came together with their own stories and experiences which led

them to value gender equality. They found a legendary figure within their Jewish literary heritage who has been depicted as the first wife of Adam, created equal and unsubmissive, and they re-create it to their own discretion. They depart "freely" from the older depictions of Lilith, ignoring the protean and multifarious qualities associated with Lilith's name--omitting or buffing out those qualities which do not fit the present feminist or the Jewish goals. How can those wishing to resuscitate Lilith justify adopting the rabbinical account of her as the first wife of Adam when, first, there exist so many other accounts of Lilith, and second, this specific account of Lilith is not widely understood or a major part of Jewish midrash?

Lilith has received different treatments or characterizations not only within the last millenniums, but more specifically, just within less than the last two decades, having gained recognition from modern feminists. Hence, what is most alarming is the wide-spread citation of Lilith by feminist authors as an example of a traditional figure who is proof for, or somehow related to, whatever topic they wish to address. Such topics typically include the origin of humanity, power relations between genders, sexual relations between genders, and sisterhood between women. A number of feminists are including Lilith in their publications, as a source of supporting evidence.

It seems especially problematic that Lilith is being cited as historical proof for what modern authors wish to claim as truth according to their present experiences. For instance, Mary Daly, in Gyn/Ecology cites Lilith as if she was a literal part of the Garden scene. Referring to the dialogue between Adam and Lilith,

as quoted from the Alphabet, Daly argues:

> Any Crone-ographer , of course, can recognize this as a watered-down version of what Lilith really might have said, which would hardly have been an argument for mere "equal rights.". . . it was Lilith who persuaded Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge . . . Lilith was a Hag. (86)

Daly then extends Lilith's mythological influence in order to create a connection between Lilith as "wind-spirit" and the "Holy Spirit."

> Finally, when considering Lilith, Hags should note that this name is said to be derived from the Babylonian-Assyrian word *lilitu*, meaning a "female demon, or wind-spirit.". . . This is interesting in view of the fact that the name of the "Holy Spirit," who is believed to have impregnated the Virgin Mary, is derived from the Latin *spiritus*. Is the holy spirit trying to copy Lilith? Also fascinating is the thought that since, as we have seen, Yahweh is a derivative and reversal of the Goddess, one of whose primary names is Lilith, he is exposed as an imposter, a female impersonator, and a transsexed caricature of that Great Hag herself. (Gyn/Ecology, 86)

It appears that Lilith's multifarious characterizations allow her to be fit into just about any argument. If Lilith is treated as a mythical character with a singular identity, as much of the feminists' treatments of Lilith, like Daly's, suggest, then I am concerned that such treatment of Lilith as supporting evidence to feminist goals could potentially weaken the authors' credibility, rather than strengthening their arguments. I, myself, feel less willing to take Daly's writing seriously, knowing what I do about the complexity of Lilith and Daly's simplified, far-stretched treatment of Lilith.

Lilith should be recognized not just as the sum total of qualities which each particular author emulates, or wishes to use to his or her best interests. Certainly, we cannot completely disregard the value of pragmatism; selective treatments of Lilith may be, in fact, pragmatically beneficial. Reclaiming only selective depictions of Lilith's myths, and re-creating this mythological figure to meet present day concerns, is not completely inappropriate. Cantor Zuckoff does have a point when she argues that feminists should not be judged on stricter criteria that the rest of the Judaic tradition. Just as selectivity is not new to Judaism, nor does it appear to be new to Lilith's mythology. Lilith has received this kind of selective portrayals during most of her mythological recognition throughout historical periods and different traditions. Furthermore, it is not as if the modern feminists are re-creating completely new qualitative elements of Lilith's character which were unrelated to those qualities already set forth in earlier depictions. Feminists have successfully rooted their depiction of Lilith in older material.

Still, feminists are highly selective in "drawing out the latent message of the Lilith story," and "departing freely" from the older materials--actions which Plaskow willing acknowledges that feminists have done. It is this selective embellishment which weakens my ability to see their efforts as scholarly complete or, even, completely appropriate. I would like to see feminism acknowledge all--or at least prove their awareness of the full range--of Liliths' qualities, especially when they cite her as supporting evidence in their essays. To treat Lilith as a

single, unified, positive image of female equality is to do injustice to the complex and contrasting elements of Liliths' images as both goddess and demoness; such partial treatment also does injustice to the complexity of the feminists' experiences, of human experience.

The Alphabet of Ben Sira is merely one book in all of the Jewish midrash. The interpretation it contains about the origin of humanity and about Lilith are merely a few verses within a much larger content, context, and purpose. I see the feminists' heavy reliance on this single commentary as both reasonable, and unreasonable. It is reasonable in that this passage is unique; obviously there are few sources within the Jewish midrash which offer feminists both an attractive and authoritative myth on gender equality. Because what the Alphabet provides is unique, it seems reasonable that it be valued, cited, and made accessible to many, no matter what the intention of its originator(s). This is not to negate the importance of the author(s)' intent, it merely acknowledges that making the Torah speak to us today, as the Jewish tradition upholds, necessitates a continual process of interpretation.

Ellen Umansky addresses the controversy regarding whether it is possible to create a Jewish feminist theology which harmonizes both personal experience and tradition.

> On the one hand Judaism holds out a set of symbols for the Divine and demands that all Jews accept them; on the other hand, it expects us to see these symbols as personally meaningful even though they are not the products of our imagination. ("Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology," 193)

Umansky willingly acknowledges the subjective bias in the feminists' re-creation of the Lilith myth, asserting: "The theologies (or possible theologies) that I have discussed all seek to revive traditional images of the Divine by viewing them through the lens of personal experience" (193). Umansky, however, challenges her readers with a set of significant questions:

> Yet when does a personally experienced image become Jewish? And what if this image cannot be reconciled with traditional Jewish visions of the Divine? Is the Jewish theologian (feminist or not) free to claim *all* personally experienced images as Jewish simple because she or he is a Jew? Or might there be certain kinds of *a priori* restraints that need to be imposed? (193-194)

Umansky continues to challenge her skeptical readers by offering her responses in favor of viewing Jewish feminist theology as responsive, rather than normative theology.

> Unlike normative theology, responsive theology does not begin with a set of norms delineating what is authentically Jewish. Rather, it begins with the "subjective response of the theologian to a set of experiences," encouraging, therefore, a "more fluid view of Judaism and the Judaic experience" itself. (194)

Umansky suggests that Jewish feminist theology rightfully "emerges *in response to* Jewish sources and Jewish beliefs" (194-195). Umansky then centers her argument on Plaskow's treatment of Lilith as an example of responsive theology, as "an outstanding example of how traditional Jewish myths *as received by women* can be transmitted and transformed" (195).

Although I am indeed challenged by Umansky's questions, and somewhat persuaded by her argument calling for an appreciation, even a validation, of this type of theology, I cannot ignore the

feminists' heavy reliance on the Alphabet which I find unreasonable. Whether the Alphabet's passages on Lilith are being cited, directly quoted, or merely used as a basis for elaboration, too often the feminists' treatment of its words as authority make the Alphabet serve as a "proof-text," interpreted, and fitted into already adopted assumptions and values, larger purposes and ideologies. How are the feminists' uses of the Alphabet's verses different from Christian "fundamentalists'" recitations of selected biblical verses which support specific interpretations of Christianity? For example, Cantor Zuckoff concludes her essay with a quotation from the first chapter of Genesis, claiming that the equality of humans is embodied in the words of its verse: "And God created the human species . . . man and woman created He them" ("Lilith Question, 38). Furthermore, these two groups share similarities in that the feminists' use of Lilith too often seems to interpret the cited passages in the Alphabet or specific verses in the Torah as literally true.

This last criticism of the feminists' tendency to interpret Lilith's mythological roles literally cannot be justified by pragmatism. Because many feminists' attempts seem to be more concerned with what works than with what is valid--I do not see Plaskow trying to claim that Lilith is truth or wrestling with concerns about validity--perhaps my criticism concerning literalism would not bother them. Still, danger remains for those limitedly acquainted with the diversity of Liliths' qualities; such novices may be likely to see Lilith, or the invention of "The Coming of Lilith" myth, as something to be labeled true or false, especially since it is based on authoritative religious documents

which are often revered as containing validity. If this happens, surely this will concern Plaskow and her followers. She may, herself, be aware of the dangers of literalism, but her writing , as well as others,' may not express Lilith's myth clearly. Conrad Hyers, in The Meaning of Creation, explains the danger in interpreting the creation accounts of Genesis--but here I would include rabbinical and feminist midrash as well--on the literal level:

> . . . to dwell on the historicity of the accounts, even on the historical core, is to stray from the primary purposes of the writings. They were not aimed at providing a "truer" descriptive account of human history, let alone *the* only true picture, in the modern, historical sense of truth. . .One of the many ironies of biblical literalism is that in its consuming passion to be faithful to the Scriptures, it turns attention away from the central religious concerns of the biblical authors and focuses it on issues that are largely modern and secular. It exchanges its spiritual and symbolic birthright for a mess of tangible pottage. (102)

Figure 1, (as shown in Patai, 93)

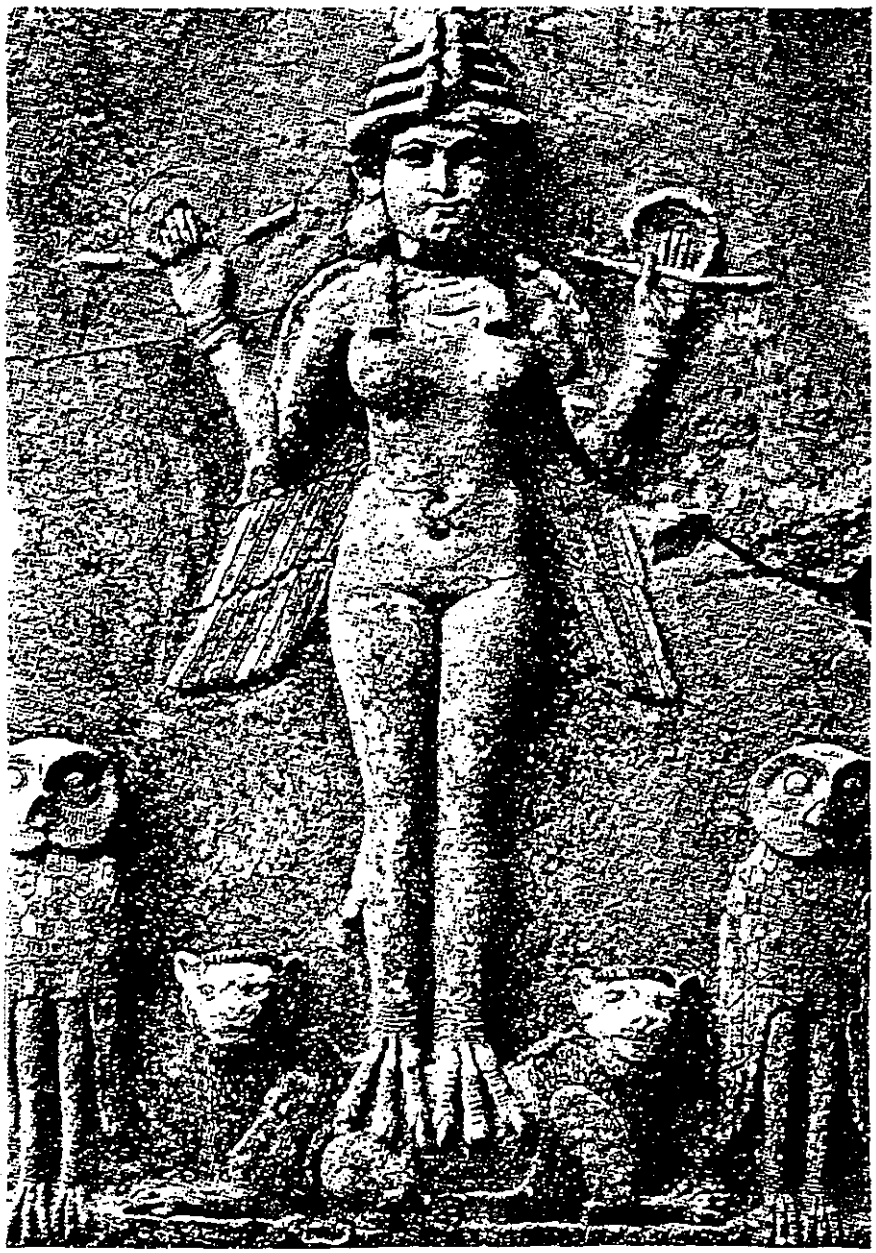
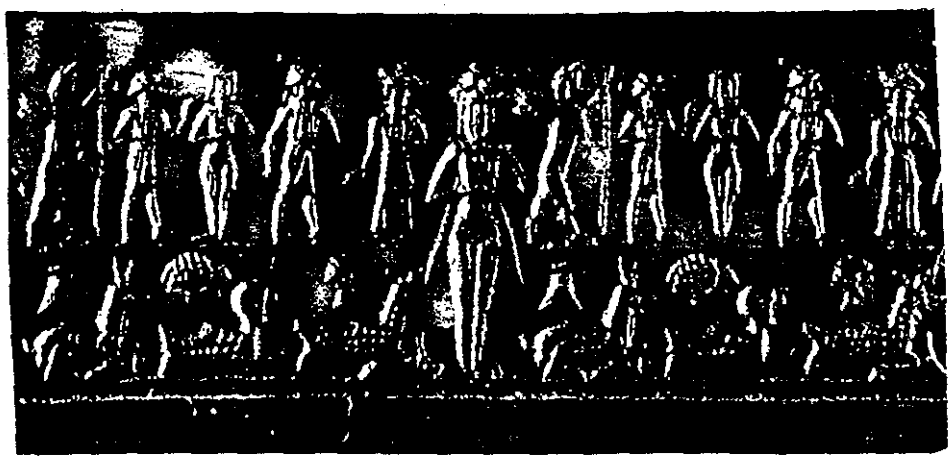


Figure 2, (as shown in Wolkstein, 6).

Figure 3, (as shown in Wolkstein, 51).



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