

*Thalia Gur Klein*

## Some like them Iconised On the Mystification, Elevation and Sainthood of Jewish Women

### 0 Sainthood as a mediation of binary categorisation

#### 0.1 *The Mimetic Model.*

Aristotelian mimetic theory perceives reality<sup>1</sup> as a given data that may be imitated by means of representation. Mimetic representation can be thus defined as a reflective vision. Vision implies that a space is left open for mimetic variation in the form of subjective interpretation and imagination. Reflective implies that there is a relationship to reality. Imitation implies expressions that have to be performed by means of verbal forms, movements, shapes or sound, the nature of which is reflective in relation to the object of description (through imitation and repetition), and is bound to history, society and culture. While related to the heritage of texts, collective memory and tradition, expressions are subject to structural formulae. This implies that ‘elevation’ of humans can be analysed in relation not only to texts accumulated in earlier periods but also to other expressions. Sainthood – a performance with religious aspects – recurs in literature, music and art, but is unavoidably related to history, society and culture.

Aristotle describes the mimetic representation of objects in terms of action and being.<sup>2</sup> In his *Poetics*, characterisation by action can be seen in his definition of ‘men in action’ (mimesis praxeos: 49b24).<sup>3</sup> Mimetic characterisation by ‘being’ can evaluate personae on a scale of ‘better or worse’ than average human beings.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arne Melbreg, “Aristotelian Order,” in his *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 1-50.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Gerald F. Else (Michigan: Anne Arbor, University of Michigan Press/Rexdale: Ambassador Books 1967), 19; on characterisation by being and doing/acting see Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love* (Indiana: Indiana University Press 1987), 107.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 17

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 17-19.

The mimetic model stresses characterisations common to both religious and literary systems. It offers a comparative matrix by which genre, mode, and historical, biographical and theological context may be evaluated. Based upon degrees of elevation, the mimetic model may be utilised to bridge discrepancies between literary and non-literary, fictional and non-fictional characters in literature, theology or other forms of expression, such as oral tradition, live interviews and the modern media. The mimetic model may thus implicitly offer a common structure spanning the discrepancy between the elevation of literary characters and that of theological figures, and be utilised to approach conflicting creeds and dogmas found in the theologies of religions such as Christianity and Judaism, analytically treating them “like a patient etherised upon a table.”<sup>5</sup>

Northrop Frye draws upon Aristotle’s mimetic assumptions in setting out his ‘Theory of Modes’.<sup>6</sup> For Frye, a character’s mimetic degree of elevation is assumed to be founded on ‘power of action’<sup>7</sup> which is measured in relation to other human beings on the one hand, and to their natural environment on the other. Differences in works of fiction can be measured in terms of the mimetic degrees of elevation of isolated human beings in action, who are elevated in relation to the reality of other human beings, and are represented accordingly in the various forms of fiction. Reality thus serves on the one hand as a given data of mimetic representation, while on the other hand it functions as the matrix for the variety of mimetic elevation and forms of fiction. Variation in degree of elevation measured against the perceived reality of all human beings determines the differences in genre of those works of fiction in which characters play a role, and allows them to be categorised as myth, romance, epic, tragedy, comedy, and irony.

Frye’s mimetic model of modes can be developed as follows: 1. **High mimesis** is perceived in myth, and presents divine characters who are classified as superior to both human beings and to their natural environment. 2. **Mid-high mimesis** is applicable to characters figuring in the mode of romance and legend. These characters are superior to other human beings and to their natural environment only in degree. 3. **Mid mimesis** will be applied to the epic or tragedy, in which the hero is superior only in degree to other

<sup>5</sup> T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of Prufrock,” *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, (New York: Richard Ellman and Robert Oclair, W.W. Norton & Company 1973), 449.

<sup>6</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1973), 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-52.

human beings but not to his natural environment. 4. **Mid-low mimesis** is perceived in figures who are neither superior to other human beings nor to their natural environment; this is found in comedy and realism. 5. **Low Mimesis** conceives figures who are inferior in relation to other human beings and to natural environment; it is found in the ironic and pathetic modes.

The leading idea of the mimetic model is the character's degree of elevation as derived from his relative power of action and his relational position of being. The ground of comparison of these concepts is human beings and their environment on the mid-low mimetic elevation. Crossing characteristics of different categories may imbue a character with a new metaphorical aspect.

0.2.1 The intermediary category – a structural analysis: Lévi-Strauss approaches myth as a structure with a system of its own. His concept of myth brings it closer to mythology and tales of genealogy and origin, and is not entirely compatible with Frye's concept of myth as part of the mimetic system. Both scholars understand myth as a formula in its own right, creating a self-evidential reality systematically built by metaphorical language.<sup>8</sup> Frye sees the intermediary category as lying within a formal scale on the spatial classification of modes: "Myth, then is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance."<sup>9</sup> For Lévi-Strauss the intermediary space is part of the dialectical structure within the myth. Thus the intermediary category is generated as part of an internally structural formula.<sup>10</sup> Myth therefore operates by presenting a structure of opposites that seeks an intermediary resolution: "two opposite terms with no intermediary always tend to be replaced by two equivalent terms which admit a third one as a mediator; then one of the polar terms and the mediator become replaced by a new triad, and so on."<sup>11</sup> The basic principle of binary opposites<sup>12</sup> relies on a dualistic view of the world that will polarise values such as corporeal and spiritual, feminine and masculine, earthly and divine. Within a dualistic framework, these values are presented as self-evidential truth. Paradoxically, the intermediary category enters here. Myth, as a structural framework, recurrently introduces irreducible oppositions that require a

<sup>8</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 136; and Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in his *Structural Anthropology*, (New York: Basic Books 1963), 210-215.

<sup>9</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 138.

<sup>10</sup> Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 210-215, 224-227.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Leach, *Genesis as a Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape 1971), 8.

third category to mediate between them, until the irreducible opposites are reduced and a desirable resolution is obtained.

Levi-Strauss's thesis was developed further by Edmund Leach. In Leach's typology, the intermediary category opens a space of imagination for the anomalous and the marvellous. In this category one finds incarnated gods in earthly appearance and human beings possessing divine qualities; figures of duo-sexual qualities; virgin mothers; half-animal, half-human creatures; the transgression of feminine and masculine characteristics (masculine birth); fabulous monsters, demons, fairies, and the living dead.<sup>13</sup> The intermediary space qualifies these figures as anomalous in that they cross the boundaries between different categories, thus 'confusing' the characteristics of these categories. Nature itself thus becomes anomalous: the physical intermingles with the metaphysical, so that the environment becomes semi-magical. The figures continue to be in some degree subordinate to natural laws, but are elevated above their natural environment in other respects. Nature, while abiding by its physical rules, may be bent at the crucial moment to allow the hero to be saved. Such an anomalous environment can be found in folklore (e.g., Puss-in-Boots) but also in the Bible: the Red Sea is split by divine power but the water remains wet and deep (Ex. 14). Mixing the characteristics of different categories, such as the physical and metaphysical, allows the creation of a new metaphorical organisation and accounts for the symbolic impact inherent in the intermediary category. As such, these hybrid figures admit a wide metaphorical imagery.

The intermediary position is reappraised by Julia Kristeva.<sup>14</sup> In her view, the intermediary category is materialising reduced characteristics combined from irreducible opposites. This move creates a space of literary ambivalence. A figure of ambivalence is not defined as  $x$  vs.  $\text{non-}x$ ; instead, ambivalence may present a subject as a combination of  $x + \text{non-}x$ .<sup>15</sup> A double signification may multiply the meaning of a sign instead of limiting it exclusively to a one-to-one relationship in which one signifier accounts for one signified, and one sign accounts for one meaning. The intermediary category can be thus seen as literary ambivalence, characterised by hybrid characterisation. In the mimetic sense, romance and legend embody the intermediary category in ambivalent figures which cross boundaries and combine the qualities of irreducible qualifications into reduced characteristics. Saints are righteous like angels, yet

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-11.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1981), 36-64.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

must be born human if their elevation is to be meaningful. In their reality, saints are thus ambiguously neither divine nor human, while being paradoxically both.

0.2.2 Sainthood as the mediation of binary categorisation: In Northrop Frye's understanding, the intermediary space of the romance may be differentiated into the secular form, dealing with chivalry, and the religious form, which is the locus of the legends about saints.<sup>16</sup> Sainthood can thus be positioned as an intermediary category between high mimesis of myth and low mimesis of the pathetic and the ironic modes, and it can be evaluated as the mid-low mimetic elevation of romance in relation to the low mimesis of natural humanity and its environment.

Like the high mimesis of myth, the mid-high mimesis of religious romance and legends about saints creates a world of marvels that waives the natural rules of reality. Religion, like myth and legends, may seek a compromise between irreducible opposites. A mediating resolution between the high and the low creates a desirable world of marvel and miracles that may allow rules of nature to be waived in favour of a wished-for reality. The mimetic reality of religious romance mediates between divinity and humanity, good and evil, life and death, or between the imperfect state of this world and visions of utopian perfection.

As a intermediary category, sainthood may modify the undisplaced properties of extremes materialised in the highest mimesis and the lowest mimesis. Placed between categories, sainthood becomes an intermediary point of crossing, relational to all other categories, and transcending the boundaries of the category above it and the category beneath it. As a crossing category, sainthood contains a double signification that multiplies meanings by drawing qualities from the categories between which it mediates; it is thus most effective when it mediates between irreducible oppositions. Categorising sainthood as the mid-high mimesis of romance and legend suggests that iconisation evolves from the dualistic signifying systems which are common to the recurrent dialectical opposites of good and evil, powerful and vulnerable, victim and victimiser, holy and profane and earthly and divine. Sainthood provides intermediary resolutions to these dialectical structures.

Within the mimetic model, sainthood, in the sense of elevation and mystification of humans, is thus conceived as an intermediary category. Elevated

<sup>16</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 34.

and mystified men and women embody hybrid cases and incorporate qualities which compromise the categories of high and low mimetic elevation and their associated modes. These figures touch divinity yet remain mimetically human and thus mediate between the human and the divine realms. They do not replace divinities or angels, a-priori divine, but may connect to and evoke them. Elevated above humanity, they are born like all human beings and yet bound to their natural environment only in degree. Posthumously they are elevated into beings possessing both the metaphysics of the world of the dead and the animation and humanity of the living. Saints who are both engineers of miracles in their life-times and posthumously beatified spirits may be categorised as figures encompassing mid-mimesis of epic and folk-tales in their lifetimes, while death elevates them to the mid-high mimesis of romance and legends. As such, they mediate between human beings of low mimesis and entities of higher modes.

From the viewpoint of a collective heritage, saints transpose popular heroes of folk tales into folk religion. At the same time, saints embody the cumulative tradition of venerated examples upon which dogmatised religions build their authority. In all their variants, saints may therefore be seen as mediating not only between categories (i.e. between the modes of myth, romance and realism) but also between dogmatised and authoritative traditions on the one hand and religious sub-culture and folk religion on the other. The lexicon of sainthood may thus transpose mythical metaphors into theological symbols and religious dogmas into the icons of folk imagination, and vice versa.

*0.3 Female sainthood.* Women represent vulnerability and often occupy marginal positions. But when they are elevated from the underprivileged status of womanhood, canonised or venerated by folk religion, female saints validate 'feminised' values as positively universal and socio-ideologically acceptable. This may be accounted the strength as well as the weakness of female sainthood. Female saints may compromise the validity of femininity by yielding to the pressure of gender politics. However, feminisation of sainthood may lead to humanisation of militant and socio-religious values.

## **1 Female Holy Personae Amongst Eastern Jews: The Holy Woman or *Keddosha* and her *Zaddika* or Mimetic Acolyte.**

*1.1 The Mimetic Theory in Judaic Perspective.* The mimetic model creates a neutral space for a comparative study of elevation and mystification of characters beyond theological difference. Judaism applies perfect holiness, the

highest mimesis, to the Hebrew God as an all-inclusive pantheon, embodying fertility and death, judgement and compassion, or the national and the personal, all in one Godhead. If the Jewish mysticism of the *Cabalah* is included, these characteristics are seen to be personified in gendered figures: judgement and the river of souls are masculine, whereas the *Shekhina* (God's feminine spirit on earth), the *Matronit* (God's consort), and the *Shabbat* (His holy bride) are feminine.<sup>17</sup> Mid-high mimetic elevation appears to be applicable to a wide range of Judaic messianic figures including Moses, Queen Esther, the Leper Messiah, Messiah Ben Joseph and the final redeemer, Messiah Ben David.<sup>18</sup>

1.2.1 The *Kaddosh*: The Hebrew term *Kaddosh* implies holiness in the wider sense and may refer to divinity or to a martyr, a holy person, a saint or a sacred place. The title *Kaddosh* may refer to beatification posthumously ascribed to certain people, i.e. to sainthood in the conventional sense. According to a survey of 614 holy personae amongst the Moroccan Jews conducted by Issachar Ben-Ami,<sup>19</sup> the title *Kaddosh* in the sense of a saint is not usually given to persons in their lifetime,<sup>20</sup> while the title *Kaddosh* in the sense of holy may be applied to a living person.<sup>21</sup> The cult of the *Kaddosh* may be either personal or communal; it may be practised in a domestic context or centre around holy graves; it is generally conducted away from the ceremonial rules and territory of the synagogue.<sup>22</sup>

1.2.2 The *Zaddik*: The *Zaddik* is a classical Judaic mystification and elevation. The figuration may project a spectrum of mimetic variation.<sup>23</sup> The *Zad-*

<sup>17</sup> Figures of Jewish divine feminisation are discussed at length in Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (Jerusalem: Daf-Khen 1976), and Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York: Ktav Publishing House 1967).

<sup>18</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1979).

<sup>19</sup> Issachar Ben-Ami, *Saint Veneration among the Jews in Morocco* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1984). Ben Ami's survey of Moroccan holy men and women is folkloristic and descriptive. It is based on live interviews with Moroccan Jews, letters and hand-written manuscripts. The survey discusses six hundred and sixteen saints, amongst whom are twenty-five women.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 175; 177; 182.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 85-206.

<sup>23</sup> The *Zaddik's* mimetic elevation is indisputable and based on the elevation of 'being' connected to the divine sphere, the upper *Zaddik*. Representing it, the earthly *Zaddik* fulfils its virtuous ideal on earth. The *Zaddik's* elevation may, however, be external and divinely

*dik* in the first place describes the veneration of righteous personae and religious devotees. The *Zaddik* is a living devotee who functions as medium and acolyte to a holy figure of a higher metaphysical existence. Such figures are the Messiah; the *Shekhina* (the embodiment of messianic perfection, namely the universal *Tikkun*);<sup>24</sup> the legendary Elijah,<sup>25</sup> the forerunner of the Messiah; and divinity itself. Both Hassidic and Near-East Jewry have developed an extensive cult of mystification around the term *Zaddik*. Issachar Ben-Ami, suggests that the *Zaddik* is the most conventional recognition of inspired personae among the Moroccan Jews; this cult has prospered since the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The same phenomenon has been observed by Raphael Patai amongst followers of the Hassidic movement that has flourished among Western Jews since the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The cult of the *Zaddik* is thus common to Western and Eastern Judaism with local variation.<sup>28</sup> It bears the characteristics of folk-religion but has coincided with formal Judaism, though not without conflict throughout Jewish history.<sup>29</sup>

1.2.3 The *Zaddik's* Court: The *Zaddik* is believed to possess divine wisdom and ability to engineer miracles. His metaphysical authority is recognised in his life-time, unlike that of saints who are revered posthumously. As contemporary Hassidism became institutionalised, a particular Rabbi coming from a patrilineal *Zaddik* line would become a *Zaddik*. In contrast, early Hassidism<sup>30</sup> and Near Eastern Jewry tended to rely on the recognition by charisma, and thus developed into anti-establishment, folk-religious movements. The *Zaddik* holds a socio-religious leadership based on public recognition, which is mate-

bequeathed. This is based on Cabalistic interpretation of the mimetic empowering of biblical revelation, the *Hitgalut* (in the case of the Cabalists, generally through Elijah). See Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah*, 154; 157.

Here one might also recall Levi-Strauss' assumption that the mythical structure is classified by its formulaic system rather than by its content or the character of its heroes while remaining recognisable in all the variants of its myth: see Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 217-218.

<sup>24</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah*, 259-308.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 154; 157.

<sup>26</sup> Issachar Ben-Ami, *Saint Veneration among the Jews in Morocco* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1984), 17-20.

<sup>27</sup> Raphael Patai, "Jewish Dionysians: The Hassidim," in: *The Jewish Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1977), 181-222.

<sup>28</sup> Ben-Ami, *Saint Veneration*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.



rialised in a 'court'. This structure can be seen as transposition of a feudal court, localised by regional leadership and supported by his devotees; its nature may resemble a religious fraternity.<sup>31</sup> The devotees, or Hassidim, believe in ecstatic worship and limitless loyalty to their *Zaddik*, who is regarded as endowed with infallible wisdom and a semi-divine authority over his followers. The 'religious court' of devotees is to be found both among Western and Eastern Jewry.

## 2 Jewish Female Sainthood: Female Elevation, Mystification and Saintliness.

Female elevation in mystification, beatification and saintliness can be seen in the feminisation of the *Kadosh* and the *Zaddik* in the form of the *Keddosha* and the *Zaddika*, or *Zaddeket*. In the following case study, a classical distinction can be demonstrated between the *Kedosha*, a female saintly figure of high metaphysical existence, whether legendary or historical, and the *Zaddika*, a living devotee who functions as her medium and acolyte. The cult of the feminine-oriented worship of Elktar, a Tunisian saint, is located in a Jewish orthodox synagogue built for the saint and operated by her *Zaddika*.

2.1 *The Story of Elktar*.<sup>32</sup> One night in 1928, a phantom woman appeared in a dream to Rachel Sis, a pious Jewish woman, a Rabbi's daughter from the town of Sus in Tunisia. She made herself known as Elktar and related that, determined to escape marriage with three Muslim men who had kidnapped them, she and her two sisters had died a martyr's death at sea. In the form of three Torah scrolls, their bodies were carried back by the waves and laid them safely on the shore. Two scrolls were placed in synagogues by rich Jews. One scroll was placed in a poor Synagogue where no Jews remained. In the dream, Elktar commanded Rachel Sis to retrieve this Torah scroll. Rachel Sis followed her instructions and visited the abandoned synagogue, where she discovered a gilded Torah scroll. Finding it covered with dust she took off the head-covering, her kerchief, and wiped it clean. At that moment Elktar reappeared before her in a day-vision and ordered her to take the scroll to her home town and to build a synagogue to commemorate her. Rachel returned to

<sup>31</sup> Raphael Patai, "Jewish Dionysians," 181-222; and Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson 1969), chapter on "Doctor and Saint," 5-14.

<sup>32</sup> For the story of the cult, see Holy Elktar, Ori Binder, in: *Maarive*, 23 August 1997, and the work of Dr. Malka Shabtay, Beer Shebay University, Israel, who has been researching it since 1993.

her home town where she eventually initiated a synagogue and established herself as a *Zaddika*. Elktar has been recognised as a *Keddosha* and functions very much as a 'patron saint' to the synagogue. The synagogue moved to Israel, where it has since functioned under the guidance of Rachel Sis and, since her death, of her daughter Paulette Bokboza.

*2.2 The Holy woman and her Zaddika: Mimesis elevation, mediation and hierarchy.* The holy duo of Elktar and her medium, the *Zaddika*, form a joint enterprise. According to the mimetic model, the female saint Elktar embodies a religiously legendary hero, a mid-high mimetic character of the romance mode. The *Zaddika* who is the saint's medium could be categorised as a figure of mid-mimesis of the epic and tragic mode. She is not superior to natural environment and her superiority over other human-beings is recognised in a limited degree; she is a recipient of supernatural powers without possessing any herself and is thus unable to perform wonders in her own right. However, she has been elevated to the status of a Cabalistic *Zaddik* by the saint's revelation, a *hitgalut* of higher mimesis. This authorised her to establish a 'court' of followers with the same standing as that of a male *Zaddik*. Her followers are endowed with the low mimesis of humanity, being neither superior to other human beings, nor to their environment, and thus represent helplessness and dependency. The *Zaddika*, mid-mimesis, mediates between the believers and the female saint Elktar who is placed higher on mimetic hierarchy, thus forming a bridge to the highest mimesis of divinity. In her life-time the saint lived as a mortal woman who performed an unusual act of suicidal martyrdom for moral reasons. This deed made her superior in degree to other human beings, thus embodying a character of mid-mimesis, superior only in degree to other human beings and to their natural environment. Her body was magically transformed into a holy object, the Torah scroll, and nature waived its physical rules as the sea brought her transformed body safely ashore. As a spirit she showed live signs from the realm of the dead. These characteristics classically elevate her into an intermediary figure of the mid-high mimesis of religious legend. Her elevation in relation to environment is not total, for, although she may perform miracles, her power depends on divinity itself. Holy Elktar thus mediates between the human plea and God who embodies the highest mimetic vision, being superior to human beings and to the natural environment. The spirit of Elktar can reach beyond the natural and may manipulate earthly phenomena through the prayers of the *Zaddika*.

There is thus a hierarchy of elevation in the patronage of this saint. The followers of Elktar, of low mimesis, turn with their pleas to the *Zaddika*, materialising mid-mimesis, who communicates with the Saint, materialising mid-high mimesis, to bring divine intervention, materialising the highest mimesis. Female veneration in the first case study thus shows division between a revered dead woman, a holy woman, *Keddosha*, and a living virtuous woman *Zaddika*, a classical medium of a mimetically higher persona, embodied in a saint, a prophet or divinity itself.<sup>33</sup>

*2.3 Mimetic Reality.* Miracles and deeds of marvel transgress the barriers between the physical and the metaphysical, humanity and divinity and the living and the dead. This realm is engineered with the help of mimetically elevated characters who may themselves waive the rules of nature or evoke a higher power than themselves. The medium thus invokes the *Kedosh*, holy Elktar, who then presumably evokes supernatural powers to change low-mimetic reality into the mid-high reality of marvels and miracles. Together the *Zaddika* and the *Keddosha* elevate undesirable reality into a wished-for reality.

Magical manipulation of divinity is not, however, rigidly dependent upon the mimetic hierarchy. In some cases, a devotee's direct prayer to the saint may bring about an event of wonder without the mediation of the *Zaddika*. A patient in a serious condition miraculously recovered after the saint appeared before her as a vision dressed in white, blessed her, put a kerchief and placed her hands on her head. Another case of a direct contact between a believer and the saint is told by the cook of the communal meals, Bacharia Naim. In this case holy Elktar performed a miraculous revival from death. Bacharia Naim recounts that her son was declared dead by the doctor. She prayed and pleaded with the saint, and when she embraced her son's body, he awoke and said: "*Ima, Ima!*" ("Mamma, Mamma").<sup>34</sup>

Tales of wonder have been woven around Elktar's "mystical court". Though the devotees are both men and women, the cult opens a space in which women may look to a female patron saint and her female mediator as a protector or for comfort. Women come from all over the country to ask a blessing of good health for themselves or their family members, to request a charm or to leave an offering. In the synagogue, the women devotees pray for Holy Elktar and light candles for her.

<sup>33</sup> Ben-Ami, *Saints Veneration*, Number 602.

<sup>34</sup> Ben-Ami, *Saints Veneration*, 1-21; 214-230.

**3 The Synagogue and Women's Cult.** The Elktar Synagogue has remained an embodiment of patriarchal institutionalisation in that it recognises all conventional orthodox rules. Religious services, including rabbinical tasks such as marriage and divorce, or cantor singing, reading the Torah portions on Saturday, are conducted exclusively by men. During the service, segregation between men and women is observed and women's participation is minimal. At the same time, the synagogue was initiated by a woman and has adopted a Jewish virgin as a saintly patron. That its saintly patron and her symbolism are marked by femininity can be seen from the colourful collection of kerchiefs, the communal festivities organised by the *Zaddika*, the candle lighting and the pilgrimage to the *Zaddika*.<sup>35</sup> The cult has enabled women to find their own ritual objects parallel to those which are prescribed for men (*Mitsva*) but optional for women (*Hezka*), such as the *Talit* or the *Tephilin*.<sup>36</sup> This feminised cult coexists within the synagogue, which has flourished as a desirable place of pilgrimage for both genders. The Elktar cult enhances women's religious activity; their participation in religious and communal life causes the synagogue to be feminised by the women's sub-culture.

While remaining a male-governed institution, the synagogue thus allows space for women's religiosity. Nevertheless, women's pleas are often androcentric. Elktar and her medium are asked to provide pregnancies for the barren, to engineer the conception of male babies and to find matches for single women. It is difficult to claim that the cult enhances women's position as equal partners. The kerchief, a women's head-covering which has become the symbol of the Elktar's cult, has long been a conventional symbol of women's submission and moral inferiority.<sup>37</sup> Elktar's Synagogue may serve women's needs, but it is at the same time interdependently conditioned by patriarchal Jewish values that dictate the content of those 'feminine needs' as self-evident, intrinsically and innately feminine. The cult nonetheless offers a space for Jewish women to express their religious feelings, ironically limited on the surface of formal worship yet utterly unrestricted on the informal level.

<sup>35</sup> "Holy Elktar, Ori Binder," Israel Newspaper, *Maarive*, 23 August 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Prayer shawl.

<sup>37</sup> The package containing the passage of devotion from Deut 6:4-8. The *Tephilin*, wrapped around the arm by a leather strip, worn during morning prayer.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard P. Prusak, "Woman: Seductive Siren and Source of Sin?" in: Rosemary Radford Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1979), 89-117.

Cet article pose le principe que l'“imitation” d'Aristote, fondée sur le degré d'élévation des choses et des êtres, peut être utilisée pour surmonter le clivage entre les caractères littéraires et non-littéraires, fictifs et non-fictifs en littérature, en théologie et autres formes d'expression, ainsi que pour expliquer la sainteté, intrigue d'une tragédie aux aspects religieux, réapparaissant en littérature, en musique et en art, mais aussi inévitablement liée à l'histoire, à la société et à la culture. Élevées hors du statut défavorisé de la femme commune, canonisées ou vénérées par la religion du peuple, les saintes contribuent à entériner les valeurs “féminisées” comme positivement universelles et idéologiquement acceptables pour toute société. L'auteur étudie le cas du culte voué à sainte Elktar pour démontrer une distinction classique entre la Kedoucha, représentation féminine de la sainteté à un haut degré d'existence métaphysique, légendaire ou historique, et la Tsedaka, une femme pieuse servant de médium et d'acolyte à la Kedoucha.

Dieser Artikel zeigt, wie Aristoteles' mimetisches Modell, das auf Stufen der Erhebung basiert, dafür angewendet werden kann, Diskrepanzen zwischen literarischen und nichtliterarischen, fiktionalen und nichtfiktionalen Charakteren in der Literatur, der Theologie oder anderen Ausdrucksformen zu überbrücken. So kann es Heiligkeit erklären, eine Tragödie mit religiösen Aspekten, deren Motive in Literatur, Musik und Kunst vorkommen, die aber unvermeidlich zu Geschichte, Gesellschaft und Kultur in Beziehung steht. Erhoben vom unterprivilegierten Status des Frauseins, kanonisiert oder verehrt durch die Volksreligion, tragen weibliche Heilige dazu bei, 'feminisierte' Werte positiv universal und sozioideologisch akzeptabel aufzuwerten. Am Beispiel des Kultes der Heiligen Elktar kann eine klassische Unterscheidung aufgezeigt werden zwischen der Kedosha, einer weiblichen Heiligen von hoher metaphysischer Existenz, und der Zadikka, einer lebenden Frommen, die als ihr Medium und Akolyth funktioniert.

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