

have felt when confronted with this unusual book, written in the vernacular by a beguine who had no clue about the scholastic rules of theological writing.

Indeed, the *Mirror* does not rely explicitly on any theological authority and the *Index biblicus* of the critical edition is strikingly brief. The annotations to the English translation have added more references, many disputably. On the assumption that Marguerite had a vast biblical culture, her translators tracked down many implicit references within her text. Yet the preliminary point under discussion is whether she had a first-hand knowledge of the biblical text at all. Before this fact is proven, many features of a general Christian culture should not be treated as the sign of a direct biblical knowledge. Counting only the indisputable references, less than fifty passages within the text betray a clear scriptural basis, which is extremely meager for a long work that counts over 43,000 words. Among those references, some are reminiscences of a biblical episode (Rachel and Benjamin, Martha and Mary, Paul's rapture, etc.). The most numerous cases consist in echoes of some famous scriptural phrases (e.g., "Ceste se sauve de foy sans oeuvre," "such a one is saved by faith without works," alluding to Rom 3:28). The number of literal quotes of a full sentence is restricted to eight, with two verses being quoted twice, most of them deriving from the Gospels of Matthew and John. It is worth noting that these verses are often introduced by phrases such as "the Scripture says" or "Jesus Christ said," without any reference to a specific book (e.g., "l'Esriture dit que le juste chet sept foiz le jour," "Scripture says that the just man falls seven times a day," Prov 24:16; "et Jhesucrist lui dist: une chose te fault faire, se tu vieulx estre parfait," "Jesus Christ said to him: there is one thing you should do if you wish to be perfect," Matt 19:20).

Interestingly, allusions to the Psalms are very rare. The only clear one is a beautiful reformulation of Ps 115 ("Ce sont gens a piez sans voie, et a mains sans oeuvre, et a bouche sans parole," "these men have feet that tread no path, hands that do no work, mouth that speak no words"). This is highly noticeable since the Psalter was the textbook in which Latin was taught. By comparison, another lay religious figure who felt more at ease with the vernacular, Francis of Assisi sprinkled his writings with numerous references to the Psalms, which he absorbed as he was learning Latin as an adult. In contrast, the scarcity of their presence in the *Mirror* may be taken as an indication that Marguerite never went through any such education. This observation would then confirm a suggestion made recently, that her theological culture was mostly built orally, while she was listening to vernacular sermons in the Franciscan church at Valenciennes (the only mendicant house in the city where she lived). There, she

was exposed to friars trained in Paris who demonstrated an aptitude to translate sophisticated theological discussions in a language accessible to the lay audience. She somehow embraced their ways, while trying to explain her spiritual teaching to her fellow beguines. For instance, on one occasion, Marguerite provides the explanation of a passage in a way that is strikingly similar to the type of literal exegesis favored at the university ("Et pource dist il: Il est besoyn que je m'en voie," "And therefore he said: it is necessary for me to go," John 16:7).

It may therefore be safe to conclude that Marguerite never had a direct access to the biblical text. Instead, she built her own reflection on the basis of a strictly oral knowledge of the Scripture and its exegetical tradition, as transmitted by Franciscan preachers. This certainly was no hindrance for her from reaching a deep understanding of many crucial mysteries of the Christian faith.

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Mari

Tell Hariri, on the Middle Euphrates and a few kilometers upstream of the present city of Abu Kemal (Syria) and the border with Iraq, was identified with Mari by Albright as early as 1925 and has been investigated by archaeologists since 1933. A. Parrot led twenty-one excavation seasons (six before World War 2 and fifteen between 1951 and 1974); J. Margueron, twenty seasons between 1979 and 2004; and P. Butterlin, six seasons between 2005 and 2010. Numerous discoveries were made, dating mostly from the third millennium and the first half of the second millennium BCE. The most important is surely that of the royal palace, where some 20,000 tablets and fragments were unearthed, some 9,000 having been published to date, mostly in two series: ARM (*Archives royales de Mari*, vol. 1–32) and FM (*Florilegium Marianum*, vol. 1–16); the remaining ones have been published in journals and collective works (for some statistics, see Charpin 2014; for complete bibliographical data, <http://www.archibab.fr>).

The exceptional state of conservation of the palace of Mari is, paradoxically, due to the fact that the building was deliberately destroyed by the troops of

Hammurabi of Babylon after the Babylonians had looted it (1759 BCE). Fortunately for us, seven chests in room 115 were left behind by the looters. They contained thousands of letters from the reigns of Yasmah-Addu (1786–1775 BCE) and Zimri-Lim (1775–1761 BCE). Thousands of administrative documents were left behind as well, spread over fifty of the 250 rooms excavated. In addition, some 600 texts from earlier reigns (those of Yahdun-Lim and Sumu-Yamam) were found discarded under the latest floors in some rooms. The royal archives of Mari thus cover only a limited period of time (a little more than a quarter of a century), but with an unrivaled thematic diversity and an enormous wealth of detail (see Durand et al. 2008). Despite the fact that the population of the Kingdom of Mari spoke Amorite and/or Akkadian, cuneiform writing was only for written texts in the Akkadian language; but here and there some Amorite words and expressions are found, many of which have close cognates in Hebrew (Sasson 1998).

Many scholars have considered Mari important for the study of the Bible, but sometimes for the wrong reasons. At the beginning of the publication of the archives, Dossin thought he could find in the texts from Mari the origin of the name of David; but the expression he translated as “to kill the commander in chief” (*dawidam dākum*) has nothing to do with David killing Goliath and simply means “to win the battle.” The presence of “Benjaminite” tribes has also led some scholars to make spurious connections between texts written in the 18th century BCE and the Bible. How Gen 14 was related to the history of ancient Mesopotamia has been the subject of much speculative research, until a recent study explained the biblical tale as the distorted memory of a political situation known through Mari data (Durand 2005a). When used with caution, the Mari archives do have much to offer to biblical scholars. Nevertheless, one should never forget two main points: the texts from Mari are documents drafted for practical purposes and immediate use, since they have no later history and were buried when the palace was destroyed. Secondly, they are much older than the texts eventually included in the HB, even according to the earliest possible dating of the latter.

An important area where fruitful comparisons can be made is prophecy, which is the topic of numerous documents from Mari. For a long time, prophecy was considered a distinctive element of the HB. It was thought that it occurred exclusively in the western parts of the ancient Near East, whereas Mesopotamia proper was seen as the realm of diviners practicing hepatoscopy and other technical forms of divination. This view can no longer be defended: diviners also practiced hepatoscopy in the West (Aleppo, Qatna, Hazor), and prophets are attested in Babylon under Hammurabi. Clearly, pro-

phets were active in various regions of the ancient Near East at least from the beginning of the second millennium BCE onwards. Prophets, as a rule, did not write themselves; their utterances were generally recorded in writing by intermediaries (members of the royal family, governors, etc.) in letters that could also deal with other topics. We have only one example of a letter dictated by a prophet (ARM 26/1 194) and another letter describing the special conditions that led to this exceptional case (Charpin 2015: 16–17). Administrative documents from Mari provide useful information about the status of the diverse categories of prophets (*āpilum*, *muhhūm*, etc.), who could be either men or women and who considered themselves messengers of the deity who sent them. Our evidence is, of course, biased by the fact that the Mari archives were those of kings, but prophetic oracles also had other addressees. Some of the prophecies in the Mari archives display an undeniable resemblance with certain biblical prophecies, which scholars like A. Malamat have sought to bring out in their publications: an emphasis on justice, such as in the case of a prophet of Aleppo addressing Zimri-Lim, is a very striking prefiguration of similar concerns in the HB.

A second area where comparative perspectives have proven fruitful is the diplomatic sphere, especially the conclusion of covenants. The killing of donkeys (*hayaram qaṭālum*) in such contexts is especially striking: the words used to describe this ritual are Amorite, and the rite symbolized the fact that the kings forfeited their lives in case of perjury (see in the HB, Jer 34). The way kings arranged dynastic marriages to consolidate their alliances by giving princesses as wives to other kings has been compared with similar practices described in the Bible (Charpin 2007).

Where the Mari archives have perhaps the most to offer biblical scholars is through the data they provide with regard to the way of life and the political organization of nomadic tribes. Nomads have been frequently studied through the writings of sedentary people, but in the case of Mari, their own utterances are quoted, and we learn, moreover, that many nomadic leaders exchanged letters with their peers or with other kings. The religious habits of the nomads were in some respects different from those of sedentary people, most notably with regard to their tendency towards aniconism and the cult of standing stones (Durand 2005b). Another interesting feature is the mention in the Mari archives of people described as *hāb/pirum*. For many Assyriologists, however, this designation has (at least originally) nothing to do with Hebrew and derives from *hapārum* “to depart”; it was used to refer to people who were obliged to leave their home or tribe, i.e., “exiles” (Durand 2004/5).

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See also → Covenant; → Prophets, Prophecy

Maria Lactans

Maria Lactans is the Latin term for the iconography of Mary breastfeeding Jesus. This image is also known as the Nursing Madonna, Virgo Lactans, and Madonna Lactans. The nursing figure symbolizes caring, nurture, and motherhood, Mary not only being the mother of Christ, but equally of all followers of Christ.

Several scriptural passages reference the notion of nursing in a variety of manners. First, there is the use of the specific image of Mary nursing Christ, for instance Luke 11:27–28, which reads “a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, ‘Blessed are the breasts that nursed you.’ But [Jesus] replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’” Secondly, references are made to the more general act of nursing, for instance in Isa 49:15, which reads, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.” This type of reference can also be found in 1 Peter 2, reinforcing newborns’ cravings for “spiritual milk” which grows them in their salvation. This reflects the parallel of the theological significance of Mary’s milk, in for instance Cistercian theology, to the blood of Christ. And thirdly, Maria Lactans serves as a symbol, which is employed in a metaphorical manner. In Isa 66:10–12 the notion of

Maria Lactans is transformed into an image of the city of Jerusalem nursing Christian believers.

Be glad for Jerusalem and rejoice over her, all who love her. Rejoice greatly with her, all who mourn over her, so that you may nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you may drink deeply and delight yourselves in her glorious abundance. For this is what the Lord says: I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flowing stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm, and bounced upon her knees. As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you, and you will be consoled over Jerusalem.

Maria Lactans has an iconographic parallel to the Isis Lactans, the nurturing Egyptian Goddess. While the use of images of Isis Lactans is documented between 700 BCE and the 4th century CE, Maria Lactans only appears from the 7th century onwards in Egypt. These are part of the few instances of Maria Lactans known from before the 12th century. A notable early European example is the mosaic on the façade of the Santa Maria church in Trastevere, Rome. As part of the general upsurge of Marian Devotion, the image became more frequently used from the 12th century onwards. A notable example is Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Maria Lactans* (1330), in the Palazzo Arcivescovile, Siena. The icon draws on observation from life. The look in the child’s eyes, casually holding the breast, and the mother’s posture provide both Mary and Jesus with a humane character.

In the Middle Ages, the motif of Maria Lactans was linked to the Madonna of Humility, resulting in images of Mary wearing modest clothing and sitting in humble environments. However, depictions of Mary as divine royalty remained equally prominent, such as Jan van Eyck’s *Lucca Madonna* (1463). In this painting, the nursing mother is sitting on a lavishly decorated throne and wearing an intensely red robe. Other notable celebratory depictions of Maria Lactans were made by Rogier van der Weyden, Raphael da Urbino, Leonardo da Vinci, and Hans Memling. Maria Lactans is furthermore featured in Last Judgment scenes, with Mary unveiling her breast as a request of mercy for sinners, in a gesture of supplication to Christ. Benozzo Gozzoli incorporated this in his *Tabernacle of the Madonna delle Tosse* (1484), a fresco to be found in the San Agostino church in San Gimignano, Italy.

After the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the display of nudity in religious subjects was discouraged and Maria Lactans appeared less frequently in official Church iconography. However, it remained an inspirational image to artists over the following decades. El Greco’s *Holy Family* (1595; see → plate 12) in the Hospital de Tavera in Toledo includes a Maria Lactans at the heart of its composition. In the 17th century, eminent artists like Rembrandt van Rijn and Francisco de Zurbarán painted personalized interpretations of Maria Lactans, depicting Mary as predominantly a mother in the intimate