Abraham and His Family in Ancient Greek and Latin Patristic Exegesis

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Faithfulness to the Bible and defending biblical texts against moral anti-Christian critiques constitute a twofold agenda for ancient Christian exegesis concerning the story of Abraham and his family. The Bible was both an explanation of human origins and a collection of examples of godly and ungodly lives. My paper analyzes familial networks and focuses on familial relations within Abraham's kinship during Abraham's lifetime, not on problems like the notion of God and his appearance, or circumcision or covenant.

Theresia Heither/Christina Reemts[1] and Mark Sheridan[2] have collected patristic exegesis on Gen 12–25. John Thompson also presented examples of exegesis on some texts in the first chapter of his *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, including also material beyond the patristic age.[3]

1. Biblical Preconditions of Later Exegesis

First of all, we should have the biblical preconditions of all later exegesis in mind. Jews and Christians are in accord in seeking to evaluate Abraham, Sarah and Isaac principally in a positive way. Their evaluation of Hagar and Ishmael is divergent in both groups; Philo's negative evaluation of Lot has no parallel in Christianity as far as I can see.

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[1] Theresia Heither and Christiana Reemts, *Schriftauslegung: Die Patriarchenerzählungen bei den Kirchenvätern* (NSK.AT 33/2; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999), 63–121; Theresia Heither and Christiana Reemts, *Abraham*. Biblische Gestalten bei den Kirchenvätern (Münster: Aschendorff, 2005).

[2] Mark Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament II (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

[3] John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead. What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis that You Can't Learn from Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 13–32.

According to 2 Chron 20:7, Abraham's progeny is beloved by God forever; Isa 41:8 names Abraham as the recipient of God's love, and in Jas 2:23, Abraham is called "friend of God." John 8:56 attests that he is also a prophet.[4] Sarah is one of the "holy women" (1 Pet 3:5–6). Concerning Hagar, the tradition is divided: her social status leads Paul to an exegesis further denigrating her, but the appearance of an angel hindered an undifferentiated negative concept.[5]

Concerning the figure of Lot, his dissociation from the wickedness of Sodom in the angel's demand to flee (Gen 19:15) and the auctorial sentence ἐν τῷ φείσασθαι κύριον αὐτοῦ in Gen 19:16 are important for the reception history; further, the fact that his plea to God in Gen 19:18 LXX is formulated not as contradictory but in a positive way.[6] In early Jewish tradition, the notion of Lot is divided. Philo of Alexandria retells Gen 19 in his work *On Abraham* without mentioning Lot at all.[7] In Migr. Abr. 13, an allegorical explanation of Gen 13:9 "Separate thyself from me", Lot represents the part of the soul which inclines to mere sense-perception, which is no way of life for one who is possessed by love for all that is incorporeal and incorruptible; Abraham represents this concept of life.[8] On the other hand, already in Sap 10:6 he is named δίκαιος. Some New Testament and Early Christian texts underline this positive evaluation: The author of Second Peter calls Lot a righteous one (δίκαιος) in 2 Petr 2:7 and adds that Lot was pained by the wicked people of Sodom, which is not witnessed in any haggadic tradition known to us.[9] Luke puts on record that the turmoil came over Sodom when Lot had left the city (Luke 17:29); the author of First Clement gives a reason why Lot is saved: Διὰ φιλοξενίαν καὶ εὐσέβειαν Λὼτ ἐσώθη ἐκ Σοδόμων.[10] The hospitality of Lot is seen in

[4]At his offering Isaac (Gen 22), he foresaw Christ's self-offering for the salvation of the world (Theophylact of Achrida, *In Koh*. PG 123:37bc; Euthymiuis Zigabenus, *In Koh*., PG 123:804c).

[5]See the contribution of Angela Standhartinger in this volume, p. 235–259.

[6]Peter Prestel and Stefan Schorch, Genesis/Das erste Buch Mose, in *Septuaginta Deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament* (ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 145–257: 190.

[7]Philo of Alexandria, *De Abramo* 133–41. See also the contribution of Christian Noack in this volume, p. 185–204.

[8]Philo of Alexandria, *Somn*. I 248 gives an allegorical interpretation of Gen 19:26 ("Lot's wife .. looked back …"): This "looking back" symbolizes an unclear view of what is worth seeing and hearing, namely virtues, instead of pursuing deafness of glory, blindness of wealth, and empty-mindedness of external beauty.

[9]Anton Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief. Der Zweite Petrusbrief* (EKK 22; Solothurn: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994), 192.

[10]Cf. also Caesarius of Arles, *Serm*. 83.3, CC.SL 103, 341; Isidor of Sevilla, *Quaest. test*. 15.4, PL 83:245c.

Gen 19:1–3. The term εὐσέβεια is added by the author of First Clement; it is never used in the Genesis Septuagint with regard to Lot; but εὐσέβεια is a virtue for every pious human being.[11]

In later times, ancient Christian authors depreciate Lot in comparison with Abraham. In his weakness, Lot chose the enjoyable land.[12] The difference of the visiting angels according to Gen 18; 19 – it was three angels who visited Abraham but only two who visited Lot – raises divergent interpretations. Caesarius of Arles refers to Lot's lesser hospitality,[13] Maximus Confessor to his lesser measure of knowledge: Lot only recognizes τὰ ὁρώμενα whereas Abraham, in his perfection, ὑπερβὰς τὰ φαινόμενα, obtained knowledge of the Holy Trinity.[14] Ancient Christian authors repeat however the evaluation δίκαιος[15] or qualify Lot even as *sanctus*.[16] In 1930, Salomo Rappaport referred to a common rabbinic and Christian apocryphal tradition revealing the motive for such a positive evaluation, which is not really based in the Bible. One of Lot's grandsons, Moab, is an ancestor of Ruth, she is an ancestor of David, and he is an ancestor of the Messiah. It would be impious to evaluate their coming-into-being as a result of a sinful act.[17] With regard to these biblical presuppositions, critique is not impossible but reluctant.

2. Abraham and His Family

2.1 Abraham and Tharan

Gen 12:1–3 does not offer any reason why Abraham should leave the land. Some authors emphasize Abraham's love for God as superior to his love for mortal human beings[18] or, due to Heb 11:8, his obedience or his piety.[19] Gen 12:1 is interpreted allegorically, but, at least in early periods

[11]Horacio E. Lona, *Der Erste Clemensbrief* (KAV 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 201.
[12]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:3/13, CSEL 32/1:511.
[13]Caesarius of Arles, *Serm*. 83.2, CC.SL 103:340–41.
[14]Maximus Confessor, *Qu. Dub.* 39, CC.SG 10:32.
[15]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 44.4, PG 54:410; Augustine, *Qu. Hept*. 1:44, CSEL 28/2:25.
[16]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:6/52, CSEL 32/1:537.
[17]Samuel Rappaport, "Der gerechte Lot. Bemerkung zu II Ptr 2,7.8," *ZNW* 29 (1930): 299–304 (301–4).
[18]Philo, *Abr*. 66.
[19]1 *Clem*. 10:2; Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:2/3, CSEL 32/1:503.

of Christianity,[20] without negative nuances concerning Abraham's father's house. Other authors are not content to find no biblical rationale for Abraham's exodus and seek to fill in this gap. They refer to the negative character of his συγγενεία, perhaps influenced by Josh 24:2 referring to Tharan's idolatry (cf. *Jub*. 12:12–16). In Gen 11:26–32 there is no reference to God. Therefore, sometimes it is just Tharan's idolatry that justifies Abraham's leaving. In this way, Abraham realized what Jesus demanded (Mark 10:28)[21], against the common ancient concept of the obedient son.

2.2 Abraham, Sarah, and the Pharaoh

I do not ask in this study whether biblical texts or ancient authors assume that the Pharaoh had intercourse with Sarah or not. The conduct of Pharaoh is sometimes condemned,[22] sometimes defended: he considered Sarah a righteous person and the sister of a righteous man.[23] According to Ambrose, Pharaoh's rebuke against Abraham in Gen 12:18 indicates that even barbarians are able to perceive the natural law.[24]

More important for my study is the evaluation of Abraham's conduct in ancient times. According to Tertullian, the behavior of Abraham / Isaac by saying "she is my sister" was a lie; the male partner gained his life by *contumelia*.[25] This verdict of lie is a point of debate in later Christian literature. According to Didymus of Alexandria, Abraham did not lie: marriage between brothers and sisters was not uncommon in Egypt and in Abraham's homeland.[26] John Chrysostom refers to Abraham's cautious prudence though Abraham's argument is weak, and he admonishes read-

[20] Heither and Reemts, *Abraham*, 8–9. In later times, negative allegorization becomes dominant, influenced by monasticism. The home land symbolizes earthly things (Didymus of Alexandria, Gen. 210, SC 244:140), or the body with its lusts (Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:2/4, CSEL 32/1:504; Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 4:21, GCS 18:70) or the flesh with its bad inclinations (Caesarius of Arles, *Serm*. 81.1, CC.SL 103:333–34). The term "kinship" symbolizes vices and sins, the phrasing "house of your father" symbolizes the devil (Caesarius of Arles, *Serm*. 81.2–3, CC.SL 103:334).

[21] Didymus of Alexandria, *Gen*. 209, SC 244:136–38.

[22] Philo, *Abr*. 94, condemns the ἀκρασία; Didymus of Alexandria, *Gen*. 226, SC 244:180, condemns the φιληδονία of Egypt.

[23] Theodor of Mopsuestia, *Frgm. Gen*., PG 66:644a.

[24] Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:2.8, CSEL 32/1:508.

[25] Tertullian, *Cult. Fem*. 2.2.6, CC.SL 1:355. The manuscript tradition is divided: In the last sentence *Quam* (scil. *violentiam*, cf. Gen 12:12) *etiam pater fidei Abraham in uxoris suae specie pertimuit et sororem ementitus salutem contumelia redemit*, some manuscripts offer the names *Isaac* before *sororem* and *Rebeccam* after *ementitus*.

[26] Didymus of Alexandria, *Gen*. 226, SC 244:180–82.

ers to follow this example of ὁμόνοια.[27] Augustine admits the possible evaluation as a deficit of faith but justifies Abraham's behavior as a protective measure.[28] In his *City of God*, Augustine denies that Abraham had lied: it is possible to call one's kin brothers and sisters.[29] According to Ambrose, Gen 12:10–20 is a call to chastity.[30] Gen 20:3 warns the married to look for another wife. But why is the Pharaoh (Gen 12) punished while Abimelech is not? Ambrose refers to Gen 20:6: Abimelech acted in the integrity of his heart.[31]

2.3 Abraham and Hagar: Extraordinary Intercourse

Quite in opposition to presuppositions such as Jas 2:23 etc., the stories of the patriarchs are an issue of moral anti-Christian critique based on a conservative morality, which could also be Christian morality, or at least an issue for a Manichean abandoning of the Old Testament.[32] Christians had to defend their Bible but they also had to avoid any misuse of the biblical stories: some justified their debauched way of life arguing with reference to Abraham's conduct.[33] Strategies of exegesis concentrate on the pre-Mosaic period and on the intention of the *dramatis personae*.

In his Montanist period, Tertullian justifies his policy against the remarriage of Christians by referring to the story of the patriarchs as seemingly suggesting the opposite. A Christian who wishes to be a son of Abraham should know: Abraham is "father in faith" (Gal 3:6, 7) only in the period before his circumcision when he lived in monogamy. After his circumcision, he lived in polygamy; if someone wants to be a son of the later Abraham he also would have to be circumcised![34] But why should Christians be Abraham's children only in the period before his circumcision? Tertullian's argument is based on an exegetical observation: In Gen 12–25 LXX, πιστεύειν is used only in Gen 15:6, before the tale of Abraham's circumcision.[35] Isaac was married only once; therefore

[27]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 32.4, PG 53:298–300.
[28]Augustine, *Qu. Gen*. 26, CC.SL 33:11.
[29]Augustine, *Civ*., 16:19, CSEL 40/2:160.
[30]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:2.7, CSEL 32/1:507.
[31]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:7.59–60, CSEL 32/1:540–542.
[32]Timo Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (VigChr.S 116; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 224.
[33]Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 67, PG 80:176a.
[34]Tertullian, *Monog*. 6.3, 4, CC.SL 2:1236.
[35]The terms πίστις and πιστός are missing altogether.

we, Isaac's offspring according to the apostle (Rom 9:7), cannot justify polygamy for Christians, neither for laymen nor for clergy.[36]

In later times, authors sometimes reveal more sensitivity towards the questionable character of the biblical stories. How can Abraham serve as example to be imitated when he had a son with Hagar? According to Ambrose, we should learn that even Abraham did not possess a superior nature but was simply a human being.[37]

Arguing with the pre-Mosaic period sometimes achieves both justifying polygamy in the past and forbidding it in the present. Before the Law of Moses was given and before the Gospel appeared, this adultery was not forbidden.[38] More severely, Ps.-Athanasius refers to Jesus Christ's skepticism even to monogamy (Luke 14:26) and to the exact wording in Gen 2:24: it is said καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν, and not οἱ τρεῖς.[39] The polygamy of the patriarchs, this author concludes, is the result of the devil's tyranny.[40]

Such harsh criticism, however, remained occasional. The regular interpretation refers to the intention of Abraham and Sarah.[41] In a relatively modest way, Theodoret emphasizes the necessity to evaluate every action according to its intention. Abram's motivation was not reprehensible concupiscence but desire for children. He was superior to concupiscence. His behavior during the conflict between Sarah and Hagar confirms this characterization. Sarah complained of Hagar's arrogance, and Abraham sustained it and surrendered Hagar to Sarah's revenge.[42] Other authors also emphasize his intention of progeny denying any libidinous motive.[43] Augustine distinguishes between irrational desires and rational will (*voluntas*) in this case.[44] Gen 16:2 LXX (ὑπακούω instead of ἀκούω rendering שמע) facilitates the attenuation of the story's offense; Abraham was

[36]Tertullian, *Monog.* 11.4, CC.SL 2:1244.

[37]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:4/22, CSEL 32/1:517: *Non abnuo quod Abraham de ancilla susceperit filium ut cognoscas quoniam non superioris cuiusdam naturae ac substantiae fuit Abraham, sed unus e numero et fragilitate universorum hominum*.

[38]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:4/23, CSEL 32/1:518; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 67, PG 80:176b.

[39]Ps.-Athanasius, *Qu. ad Antiochum Ducem* 98, PG 28:657cd.

[40]Ps.-Athanasius, *Qu. ad Antiochum Ducem* 98, PG 28:657d–660a.

[41]We have to remember the general high estimation of Sarah in the ancient church. Because Sarah is a holy woman, Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 39.5, GCS 25:49, neglects her laughing but emphasizes her shamefacedness, based on Gen 18:9 *fine* (ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ): She did not present herself to the men visiting Abraham.

[42]Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 67, PG 80:176a–c.

[43]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:4/24, CSEL 32/1:518–9; Augustine, *Civ*. 16:29, CSEL 40/2 :170.

[44]Nisula, *Function of Concupiscence*, 226.

obedient to his wife,[45] and Sarah did not deliver Hagar to the covetousness of Abraham: *ubi eius potestas erat, iubens potius oboedienti quam cedens concupiscenti*.[46] There was a consensus between both.[47] 1 Cor 6:16 is decisive for Ambrose's statement, formulating the common Christian consciousness: we should not imitate their actions.[48]

Didymus of Alexandria offers a more engaged interpretation: the intercourse with Hagar was a corporeal one in order to produce children, the intercourse with Sarah was a unity of the soul fitting to divine love (ἕνωσις ψυχῆς ἁρμοζομένης ἔρωτι θείῳ).[49]

It is, however, John Chrysostom who declares Abraham's and Sarah's behavior as praiseworthy because of their φιλοσοφία and ἀρετή. Due to her εὐγνωμοσύνη, Sarah did not pressure her husband as Rachel did;[50] due to her φιλοσοφία, she suggested this way of having offspring to Abraham.[51] Sarah and Abraham were abstinent from all affect (πάθος). By σωφροσύνη, Abraham suffered Sarah's childlessness; due to his φιλοσοφία, he was obedient to Sarah's suggestion.[52] We should not misunderstand this positive portrait of Abraham and Sarah as a reflex of Chrysostom's uncritical dealing with political authorities in his own times. John Chrysostom was able to criticize the luxury of the Emperor's court. In one of his sermons characterizing the luxury of the empress, he begins: "Herodias is again enraged, again she dances, again she seeks to have the head of John in a basin"[53] – and he died in exile!

2.4 Sarah and Hagar: Differences of Behavior

Differences of State: Philo of Alexandria allegorizes Gen 16: Hagar is the symbol for the necessary acquiring of the propaedeutic wisdom; Sarah symbolizes the perfect wisdom itself.[54] Origen firstly interprets Abraham's polygamy as the acquiring of different virtues; secondly, influenced

[45]Didymus of Alexandria, *Gen*. 234, SC 244:202; Augustine, *Civ*. 16:29, CSEL 40/2:170, referring also on 1 Cor 7:4; The Venerable Bede, *Gen*. 4, CC.SL 118 A:200.

[46]Augustine, *Dulc. Qu.*, 7.4, CC.SL 44 A:290. Cf. Idem, *c. Faust* 22:31, CSEL 25/1:625, commenting the behavior of Sarah: *non cedens viro concupiscenti, sed iubens oboedienti*.

[47]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 38.1, PG 53:350 (underlining the ὁμόνοια between the two); Hrabanus Maurus, *Gen*. 2:18, PL 107:543c.

[48]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:4/25, CSEL 32/1:519.

[49]Didymus of Alexandria, in Procopius of Gaza, *Gen*., GCS NF 22:352, PG 87/1:352a.

[50]John Chrysostom refers to Gen 30:1 (Δός μοι τέκνα …).

[51]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 38.1, PG 53:351.

[52]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 38.2, PG 53:352.

[53]Sozomenos, *H.e*. 8.20.

[54]Philo, *Congr*. 9.

by Gal 4:21–31, he interprets Hagar as a symbol for only literal exegesis and unbelieving Judaism.[55] Ambrose changes Philo's exegesis: Hagar symbolizes only the wisdom of this world, the binding to the law and the binding of all heresy.[56] According to Maximus Confessor, Hagar symbolizes perception (αἴσθησις), Sarah the mind (νοῦς).[57]

This line of interpretation however, fed by Philo and Paul, was by no means the only one. With regard to Hagar's virtues, Didymus can justify her vision of God, commented by Matt 5:8.[58] According to The Venerable Bede, Hagar's vision of God underlines her deep understanding of the sublimity of the divine nature.[59]

Differences of Behavior: Sarah's and Hagar's behaviors underlie divergent evaluation. According to some authors, the Bible condemns both, the behavior of Sarah (*Sara moderationem non tenuit*) and Hagar's arrogance.[60] Augustine, however, justifies the action of the so-called Catholic Church against the Donatists by reference to Sarah's behavior against Hagar.[61]

2.5 Lot and his Daughters

The Figure of Lot is an issue especially with regard to Gen 19. Gen 13:5–13 did not really attract any exegetical interest.[62]

Gen 19:8: Quite in opposition to our sensitivity, some ancient authors do not take any offense in Lot's delivering his daughters for rape. John Chrysostom suggests imitating the example of Lot's hospitality and condemns Christians who do not have any mercy for their Christian brethren.[63] Ambrose at first admits this felonious impurity, but he continues: it is a minor thing to have intercourse according to the nature than to fail against the nature.[64] "Ambrose's logic could scarcely be more offensive to modern readers: Lot did well, risking a lesser evil to avoid a greater, for

[55]Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 7,6, GCS 29:76.
[56]Ambrose, *Abraham* 2.72–75, CSEL 32/1:626–28.
[57]Maximus Confessor, *Qu. Dub.* 80, CC.SG 10:61.
[58]Didymus of Alexandria, *Gen.* 48, SC 244:232; similarly Procopius of Gaza, *Gen.*, GCS NF 22:261, PG 87/1:353b.
[59]The Venerable Bede, *Gen.* 4, CC.SL 118 A.
[60]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:4/26, CSEL 32/1:520.
[61]Cf. Thompson, *Reading the Bible*, 20 and 234 (references).
[62]I did not find anything in Cyril of Alexandria's *Glaph. Gen.* 3 (to be expected in PG 69:80d) or Theodoret's *Qu. Gen.* (to be expected in PG 80:169d/172a) or Augustine, *Qu. Gen.* 26, CC.SL 33:11.
[63]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 42.4, PG 54:400–1.
[64]Ambrose, *De Abrahamo* 1:6/52, CSEL 32/1:537.

it would be less unnatural for women to be defiled by the men of Sodom than for Lot's male guests to suffer the same."[65] According to Augustine, it is appropriate to ask whether Lot intended to avoid a greater evil by a minor one or if he was confused. In the first case, it is dangerous, in the second, it is by no means worthy of imitation.[66] Augustine's argumentation in *Contra mendacium*[67] reveals the denigration of women:

> Since it is a lesser evil for women to suffer lewdness than for men, it even pertained to the righteousness of that just man, that to his daughters he chose this rather to be done, than to his guests; not only willing this in his mind, but also offering it in word, and, if they should assent, ready to fulfill it in deed.

Lot's mind was so disturbed that he was willing to do that which is forbidden by God's law. By fearing other men's sins, he was so perturbed that he did not attend to his own sin. So he willingly subjected his daughters to the lusts of impious men![68] Thompson comments: "Augustine has abandoned all arguments from prudence. Lot's horrible deed, at best, signals a mental breakdown. At worst, it is merely 'his own sin,' and totally unexcused."[69]

Gen 19:30–38: The anti-Christian Celsus evaluated the tale of Lot and his daughters as τῶν Θυεστείων κακῶν … ἀνομώτερα.[70] Without any regard to this critique, Tertullian in his Montanist period uses this story for polemics against the so-called Catholic Church and their concession of remarriage. The Manichaean Faustus commented on Lot's behavior: *qui honestius arsisset in Sodoma ictu fulminis quam in monte flagravit inconcessae libidnis flamma*.[71] The context of his argument is his general critique of the Old Testament.

Christian authors had to defend the story, arguing by biblical style, by the presuppositions and intention of the daughters, and by the biblical parallel of Adam and Eve. Whereas the daughters are excused, Lot sometimes is condemned. According to Tertullian, no Christian should justify a second marriage in order not to be without heirs by referring to Lot: The Christian has brothers, and he has the Church as mother.[72] Irenaeus anticipates nearly all of possible arguments. In the advent of

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[65]Thompson, *Reading the Bible*, 81

[66]Augustine, *Qu. Hept*.1:42, CSEL 28/2:24.

[67]Augustine, *Contra mendacium* 9.20, CSEL 41:493 (ET. FaCh).

[68]Augustine, *Contra mendacium* 9.21, CSEL 41:494–95.

[69]Thompson, *Reading the Bible*, 81. Petrus Comestor, *Historica Scholastica*, Gen. 52, PL 198:1100b,

[70]Origen, *Cels*. 4:45, GCS 2:317.

[71]Faustus, in Augustine, *c. Faust*. 22:5, CSEL 25/1:594.

[72]Tertullian, *monog*. 16.4, CC.SL 2:1251.

our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, the sins of the patriarchs are remitted. He emphasizes the absence of any reproach in the Bible. Further, Lot is excused since he did not act in fleshly concupiscence or mind: he did not realize what happened (οὐκ ᾔδει; Gen 19:33, 35 LXX); the daughters acted under the naïve presupposition that all human beings in the world would have perished like the inhabitants of Sodom.[73] Origen's counter-argument enriches the second argument made by Irenaeus. Stoic authors also discuss a man's intercourse with his daughters sometimes as an example of ἀδιάφορον; accordingly, the Bible neither praises nor condemns what happened.[74]

Ambrose repeats the second and the fourth arguments made by Irenaeus. According to the bishop of Milan, the daughters of Lot are excused: they thought they were alone. Eve also had intercourse with Adam though born from his side.[75]

Augustine responds to Faustus's critiques on both levels, ethically and hermeneutically. To make Lot drunk was worse than the incest itself.[76] Augustine considers also the hermeneutic problem: we defend the Holy Scripture, not human sin.[77] God who is able to turn wicked human deeds into good does not condemn his Scripture because of human sin. God permitted what happened but he did not do it, and he admonishes to avoid it, and does not suggest it for imitation.[78]

John Chrysostom is well-known for his sermons moralizing against urban luxury and debauchery. In light of this, his comment on Gen 19:30–38 is astonishing with regard to his verve of defending Lot and his daughters. He reinforces Irenaeus's second argument by a quotation from Paul: the Bible does not condemn their deeds, and "It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn" (Rom 8:33–34).[79] The daughters are not to be accused because they suggested the turmoil of the whole human world and in-

[73]Irenaeus, *haer*. 4.31.1–2, SC 100:786–94. Irenaeus turns the fate of Lot's wife (Gen 19:26) to a positive: she represents the church as firmament of faith (Irenaeus, *haer*. 4:31.3, SC 100:794).

[74]Origen, *Cels*. 4:45, GCS 2:318. Cf. Zeno, Cleanthes, Empiricus Sextus, Adv. Mathematicos 11:192–93. Cf. John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (STAC 23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 107.

[75]Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:6/56, CSEL 32/1:539. Cf. also Jerome, according to Petrus Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, Genesis 54, PL 198:1102b.

[76]Augustine, *C. Faust*. 22:44, CSEL 25/1:636.

[77]Augustine, *C. Faust*. 22:45, CSEL 25/1:636.

[78]Augustine, *C. Faust*. 22:45, CSEL 25/1:637.

[79]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 44.5, PG 54:411.

tended to save it by their offspring;[80] Lot's drunkenness is seen in parallel to Adam's ἔκστασις (Gen 2:21). Of course, the preacher must avoid any misuse of his exegesis. Therefore, he adds the counter-example of Joseph's chastity (Gen 39) and the admonition to fight against the powers of Satan according to Eph 6:12–17.[81]

Theodoret of Cyrus has pity for Lot. Why is Lot not accused? Due to his ignorance. By drinking wine, he intended to mitigate the harm caused by the loss of his wife.[82] Theodoret, however, introduces another question: why did God not prevent this incest? He foresaw the idolatry of the Moabites and Amorites etc. and intended to forestall Israel's partaking in this impiety. Therefore he presented them as outrageous to Israel; cf. Deut 23:3.[83]

Procopius of Gaza or an un-known author defends the daughters with their intention: they did it not due to ἀκολασία but due to παιδογονία. Eve also became Adam's wife though she was born from him. Then Procopius takes up the question put by Theodoret but gives a divergent answer: God did not prevent it so as to avoid their marrying foreign men (ἀλλόφυλοι): they should not partake to the idolatry of these nations.[84]

Ps.-Bede distinguishes the daughters and their father in his evaluation: the daughters are excused by their fear concerning the fate of the human world in general, but their father is not excused.[85] According to Walafrid Strabo and Petrus Comestor, Lot's infidelity is the reason – he mistrusted the possible salvation by an angel in Segor. Petrus Comestor adds a reference to Lot's drunkenness.[86]

2.6 Abraham, Sarah and Ishmael

Sarah is one of the "holy women" (1 Pet 3:15–16), therefore the guilt for Ishmael's expulsion must lie in Ishmael's behavior, in his παίζειν (Gen 21:9). Origen asks: why should we evaluate this παίζειν in a negative way? He concludes from Sarah's displeasure.[87] Similarly to Jewish exege-

[80]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 44.4, PG 54:411; similarly Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 70, PG 80:180ab.
[81]John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 44.5, PG 54:412.
[82]Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 70, PG 80:180a.
[83]Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 71, PG 80:180b–c.
[84]Procopius of Gaza, *Gen*., GCS NF 22:284 (PG 87/1:377a).
[85]Ps.-Bede, *Qu. Gen*, PL 93:314c.
[86]*Glossa ordinaria*, PL 113:132d, referring on Walafrid Strabo as author; Petrus Comestor, *Historica Scholastica*, Gen. 54, PL 198:1102b.
[87]Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 7.6, GCS 29:76.

sis,[88] he too allegorizes Gen 21:9: the "persecution" is the persecution of the spiritual powers within us by the fleshly ones.[89] Later authors follow Gal 4:29 and Origen in evaluating Ishmael's παίζειν as persecution.[90] They condemn his παρρησία as impudence[91] or arrogance.[92] Others refer to his idolatry and claim of being the first-born[93].

But why is Abraham so mournful[94] with regard to this prophecy of Sarah's? Augustine offers two possibilities for explaining. Either, she prophesied, and he did not realize it (it was later that God revealed Ishmael's fate to him) but was mournful because of paternal love. Or neither of them realized that she had spoken in a prophetic way, as Sarah was disturbed in her female mind by Hagar's arrogance.[95] Theodoret distinguishes between the two: Abraham did not obey Sarah but was obedient and faithful to the word of God, which proclaimed progeny also for Ishmael. This word was fulfilled: Ishmael's offspring spread from Egypt to Babylonia.[96]

2.7 Abraham and Isaac: Paternal Sentiments vs. Love of God

In the interpretation of this story, the issue of God's cruelty is by no means the dominant one. It is implied in the Fathers' consideration of Abraham's paternal sentiments, but they dealt also with other questions that in our view are only secondary: did Abraham lie when he announced his return together with his son (Gen 22:5), and was he allowed to kill his son?

Philo of Alexandria has to emphasize the uniqueness of Gen 22 with regard to the wealth of Greco-Roman traditions of parents offering their children for the common good.[97] Already *Sap.* 10:5, however, describes the conflict within Abraham, concluding that God's wisdom strengthened him with regard to his paternal emotions.

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[88] Cf. GenR 53:21.9 (Wünsche 254f).

[89] Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 7.3, GCS 29:74.

[90] Jerome, *Gal*., CC.SL 77 A:144; Gregory of Elvira, *Tract*. 3.14, CC.SL 69:22. Procopius of Gaza, *Gen*., GCS NF 22, 290 (PG 87/1:384c) criticizes this exegesis but he also characterizes Ishmael as bad without annotations.

[91] John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 46.1, PG 54:423.

[92] Augustine, *Tract. ev. Io*. 12,4, CC.SL 36:122.

[93] Jerome, *Quaest. hebr. Gen*., CC.SL 72:24; Hrabanus Maurus, *In Gen*. 3:1, PL 107:562cd.

[94] Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaph. Gen.* 3.5, PG 69:124b emphasizes at least Abraham's paternal love of Ishmael.

[95] Augustine, *Qu. Gen*. 1:51, CSEL 28/2:26–7; quoted by Hrabanus Maurus, *Gen*. 3:1, PL 107:562d–63a.

[96] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 72, PG 80:180c–181b.

[97] Philo, *de Abramo* 178–83.

This line of interpretation is repeated in Christian literature. According to Origen, the severity of God's temptation is visible in Gen 22:2: the wording τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν, ὃν ἠγάπησας appeals to Abraham's natural paternal emotions.[98] Abraham's behavior testifies to obedience,[99] eagerness for suffering,[100] piety,[101] and steadiness of reasoning.[102] Abraham preferred love for God to love for his son, according to Matt 10:37.[103] Abraham's love for God was superior to all natural bonds and to his hope in the divine promise, as well as for Isaac's welfare, for his age or his burial.[104] According to Zeno of Verona, Abraham was glad to underline his devotion. Where there is faith, there is no anguish.[105]

Other authors envisage theological problems in the text. Was it allowed for Abraham to kill his son? According to Augustine, Abraham would be a cruel murderer if he had killed his son by his own free decision,[106] but he did it in obedience and piety.[107] John Cassian reports a story of a monk (he does not mention the name of this monk because he still is alive), who intended to sacrifice his spiritual son, who cohabited in his cell, in a desire to be equated with Abraham. John Cassian urges caution: it could be the devil who is suggesting it.[108]

Was it not a lie when Abraham commanded his servants to remain until he and his son would return (Gen 22:5)? Of course, Abraham does not lie, and he is not able to make a wrong statement. How should we counterbalance God's command to offer Isaac with Abraham's statement according to which Isaac remains alive? According to Heb 11:19, Abraham trusted in God that he would immediately bring Isaac back to life. This line of interpretation reoccurs among some ancient Christian authors.[109] According to Ambrose, Abraham foresaw by the Holy Spirit that this sac-

[98]Origen, *Hom. Gen*. 8.2, SC 7bis:216; cf. also Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaph. Gen*. 3.2, PG 69:140b; Procopius of Gaza, *Gen*., GCS NF 22:294; Scotus Anonymus, *Iac*., CC.SL 108 B:14.
[99]Heb. 11:8; 1 *Clem*. 10:7.
[100]Tertullian, *Pat*. 6.2, CC.SL 1:306.
[101]Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen*. 73, PG 80:181c.
[102]John Chrysostom., *Hom. Gen*. 47.1, PG 54:429.
[103]Ambrosiaster, *Qu*. 117,8, CSEL 50:354–5.
[104]Theodoret of Cyrus, *Hist. Rel*. 31 = *Oratio de divina et sancta caritate*, PG 82:1516bc. For the last point cf. also Gregory of Nyssa, *Deit*., PG 46;569d.
[105]Zeno of Verona, *Serm*. 1:43.4, 7, CC.SL 22:114–16.
[106]Augustine, *Serm*. 8.14, CC.SL 41:91; id. *Civ*. 1:26, CSEL 40/1:46.
[107]Augustine, *Civ*. 1:21, CSEL 40/1:39.
[108]Cassian, *Conl*. 2:7, CSEL 13:46.
[109]Origen, *Hom. Gen*. 8.5, SC 7bis:222; Augustine, *Civ*. 16:32, CSEL 40/2:182; Caesarius of Arles, *Serm*. 84.4, CC.SL 103:346.

rifice would not really be fulfilled.[110] Augustine emphasized Abraham's trust in God: if he despite his age had a child by the help of God, this God is also able to heal Isaac from death.[111]

Why is Isaac spared while the daughter of Jephthah has to die (Judg 11)?[112] The answers are not satisfying for us. Ambrosiaster refers to Jephthah's sinfulness[113], Ambrose to the two months of sorrow whereas Abraham immediately was obedient.[114] In my view, the question is far more important than the answers – even ancient theologians had to deal with the problems of human fate, which is not always in accordance with our concepts of divine justice.

2.8 Abraham and Keturah

Why did Abraham marry Keturah? John Chrysostom neglects this fact in his *Homilies on Genesis*.[115] Augustine underlines that Keturah and Hagar are concubines but not wives, whereas Sarah is never called a concubine. Then the bishop of Hippo extends Paul's typological construction, observing the ordering of Gen 25 after Gen 21: Keturah symbolizes the heretics,[116] which are *per definitionem* younger than the church.[117] The story of Abraham and Keturah, however, also has a positive implication. It proves the right of remarriage after the death of the husband.[118] In this way, Augustine implicitly refutes Tertullian's view. Jerome offers an explanation made by "Hebrews" which in his view is uncertain: they identify Keturah with Hagar. In this way, they can avoid the impression of a remarriage of Abraham.[119]

[110] Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:8/71, CSEL 32/1:549; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen*. 47.2, PL 54:430.
[111] Augustine, *Hom. V.T*. 2.1, CC.SL 41:10.
[112] Cf. in general Natalio Fernández Marcos, 'Jephthah's Daughter in the Old Greek (Judges 11:29–40),' in *Die Septuaginta. Texte, Theologien, Einflüsse* (WUNT 252; ed. Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Karrer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 478–488: 478f. (Lit!), 484–486; Michaela Bauks, *Jephtas Tochter. Traditions-, religions- und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studien zu Richter 11,29–40* (FAT 71; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).
[113] Ambrosiaster, *Qu*. 43, CSEL 50:69–71.
[114] Ambrosius, *Virg*. 2,5–9, PL 16:281f.
[115] We would expect an exegesis at the beginning of *Hom. Gen*. 49, PG 54:443.
[116] Augustine, *Expos. Gal*. 40.1–9, CSEL 84:108–10; id., *Bapt*. 1.15/23, CSEL 51:167.
[117] Augustine, *Expos. Gal*. 40.21–24, CSEL 84:111.
[118] Augustine, *Civ*. 16:32, CSEL 40/2:186.
[119] Jerome, *Qu. Gen. Nom*., CC.SL 72:30.

3. Conclusion

Abraham's family is by no means a *familia sacra* but a group in which differences of status and behavior result in conflicts and questionable activities. The tales of Abraham and his kinship within the cycle Gen 12–25 are both tales about offspring and examples for adequate and inadequate conduct, and they include both exegetical questions and moral problems.

Exegetical questions concerned gaps within biblical texts. In searching for a rationale for the exodus of Abraham, Jewish and Christian authors offer analogical answers. Lot's denigration has its basis on an exegetical observation concerning Gen 18 and 19. Abraham did not murder Isaac when offering him, and he did not lie when announcing the return of Isaac.

Moral problems were obstacles for anti-Christian critiques and required both defending the Bible and clarifying Christian morality. Abraham's and Lot's sexual misbehavior was liable to undermine common Christian claims of a higher morality in comparison to Greco-Roman morality. On the other hand, biblical preconditions prevented a thoroughgoing critique of these *dramatis personae*. In explaining and excusing their behavior, a more psychological exegesis emphasizing circumstances and/or understandable intention was decisive, sometimes with reference to the different status of the problem before and after the revelation of the Torah or the revelation of Jesus Christ. In any case, such behavior was a negative example for ancient theologians who intended to develop Christian morality.