A Penis Bone in Genesis 2:21? Retrodiagnosis as a Methodological Problem in Scriptural Studies

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Ziony Zevit is the Distinguished Professor in Bible and Northwest Semitic Languages in the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University. He has done widely respected work on the religion of ancient Israel (see Zevit 2001; 2013).

However, Zevit makes a claim that is difficult to accept or understand linguistically, exegetically, and medically. In so doing, he is engaging in "retrodiagnosis," the practice of providing modern medical categories and descriptions for conditions unknown or of no interest to ancient writers (Arrizabalaga; Muramoto). Critiques of retrodiagnostic approaches are now numerous in scriptural studies, and these include those of Hector Avalos, Joel S. Baden, and Candida R. Moss.

Typically, such approaches seek to diagnose a condition mentioned in the Bible in precise modern medical terms. Debra A. Chase attributed one condition mentioned in the Mesopotamian creation epic known as Atra-ḫasīs to Kwashiorkor-Marasmus, which is associated with starvation.

Malcolm Gladwell (13-14), a popular writer who is not a biblical scholar, believes that Goliath suffered from "acromegaly—a disease caused by a benign tumor of the pituitary gland." For Gladwell, this condition explains why Goliath has poor vision and so asks David to come to him in 1 Samuel 17:44. S. Levin attributes Isaac's blindness in Genesis 27:1 to diabetes.

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, Henze (92-93) discusses the long tradition in scholarly biblical commentaries of diagnosing Nebuchadnezzar with a medical condition known as "zooanthropy" in Daniel 4 (see also Avalos). A systematic retrodiagnostic approach is applied relentlessly by JoAnn Scurlock and Burton R. Andersen in *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (2005).

Zevit specifically asserts that the Hebrew word *ṣēlāʿ* (צֵלָע) in Genesis 2 refers to a penis bone (*os baculum*), not a rib, in speaking of the creation of Eve**:** "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh" (Genesis 2:21).

Usually, the Hebrew word *ṣēlāʿ* is translated as "rib" (e.g., ESV, JPS [1917], KJV, NIV, and RSV) or "side" (*Zohar* 1.34b, Pritzker edition). Reuven Margaliot's Hebrew edition of the Zohar has *ṣēlāʿ* in Genesis 2:21. When the Zohar (1.36b) speaks of the bad products emanating from the "side" of the body of Cain, and the good products, emanating from the "side" of the body of Abel, it uses the word סטר (s^{e}ṭar) which is presumably equivalent or similar to the use of *ṣēlāʿ* (see Jastrow s.v.; Sokoloff, s.v. apparently treats this lexeme only as a verb). That usage is not compatible with a penis bone.

The Septuagint, our oldest translation of the Hebrew Bible, has *pleura* (πλευρά), which can also have the wider meaning of "side" according to T. Muraoka (563). Indeed, there is no reason why the Hebrew word cannot have a wider meaning of "side," which is amply illustrated in the artistic and textual history of this episode (see Baschet; Greenstein; Zahlten).

Zevit explained his argument in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (2015). He earlier had published the argument in an editorial letter, co-written with biologist Scott F. Gilbert, in a technical journal (*American Journal of Medical Genetics*) and in a book, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden*? (2013).[1] According to Zevit's article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (p. 35):

> **In a published letter (BAR 41:01), University of Pennsylvania professor Dan Ben-Amos drew the attention of BAR readers, including me, to an article by the late Alan Dundes, a folklorist at the University of California at Berkeley, published 30 years ago, long before my book appeared.**

[1] For the record, I formally completed a course in osteoarchaeology while an anthropology student at the University of Arizona.

Zevit appeals to Dundes' research on couvade, a practice by which males, usually husbands, claim some of the maladies or conditions of women who are pregnant or give birth (see also Bayne). This essay will show that none of the arguments adduced by Zevit, including those drawn from Dundes' research, will yield the results he asserts.

Arguments for a Penis Bone

Zevit recognizes that human males lack a penis bone, even if many other primates and mammals do have one (Brindle & Opie; Nasoori; Schultz, et al.; Stockley**)**. For Zevit, human males lack a penis bone because the biblical author believes God used it to form Eve.

> **One of the creation stories in Genesis may be an explanatory myth wherein the Bible attempts to find a cause for why human males lack this particular bone. Our opinion is that Adam did not lose a rib in the creation of Eve. Any ancient Israelite (or for that matter, any American child) would be expected to know that there is an equal (and even) number of ribs in both men and women (Gilbert and Zevit: 284).**

It is true that ancient Jews and Christians knew the number of *some body parts*—e.g., normally two hands in human beings. On the other hand, the number of bones in a human body was not always certain even in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (contra Goedicke). According to Jack Hartnell (2019:109):

> **Still, there was not always certainty as to the tally of bones the body contained. A few writers stumped for a total of 229, while some maintained that males had 228 bones, two more than females, who had 226. Others thought specifically that man had one rib fewer than women, a single bone missing is an echo of Genesis, which told of God creating Eve from Adam's side.**

Zevit also errs about the fixity in the number of human ribs. There are not always twelve pairs, even if that is the predominant average

number. Note the comments of Tim D. White, who is regarded as a premier anthropological authority on human osteology:

> **There are usually twelve ribs on each side of the thorax, for a total of twenty-four in the adult male and female human body. The number of ribs is variable; there may be eleven or thirteen ribs on a side, with supernumerary ribs in either the cervical or lumbar segment (Black and Schever [sic], 1997).[2]**

In fact, other bones may have more dramatic fissures and absences. One is the xiphoid process, which is located at the bottom of the human sternum or breastbone. That part of the sternum, **"can be partially ossified into bizarre asymmetrical shapes with odd perforations. In short, the xiphoid is a highly variable element"** (White: 160). If so, then any naturalistic narrative might have chosen this bone from which to generate Eve. Eve's creation would explain any malformation or absence of the xiphoid process.

Zevit's hypothesis is not in accord with how ancient Jewish interpreters viewed the body of Eve. *Bereshith Rabbah* 18:2 tells us that even though God had a choice in the male body part he might use to create Eve, he seemed more worried about the results for women (and society) than about the loss for the male:

> **And as He created each and every limb of the woman, He would say to her: be a modest woman, be a modest woman!**

If Adam loses a body part because God used it to create Eve, then it leaves unexplained why Adam did not lose more body parts (e.g., teeth; see Hamp) besides the *os baculum*.

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[2] Tim D. White, *Human Osteology* (2nd ed.; London: Academic Press, 2000), p. 161. White is also citing Sue Black and Louise Scheuer, "The Ontogenetic Development of the Cervical Rib," *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 7 (1997): 2-10.

Zevit also claims that the seam on the underside of the penis must mean that the biblical author was speaking of the *os baculum* rather than a rib. Note Zevit's reasoning:

> **In addition, Genesis 2:21 contains another etiological detail: "The Lord God closed up the flesh." This detail would explain the peculiar visible sign on the penis and scrotum of human males—the raphé. In the human penis and scrotum, the edges of the urogenital folds come together over the urogenital sinus (urethral groove) to form a seam, the raphé. If this seam does not form, hypospadias of the glans, penis, and scrotum can result. The origin of this seam on the external genitalia was "explained" by the story of the closing of Adam's flesh. Again, the wound associated with the generation of Eve is connected to Adam's penis and not this rib (Gilbert and Zevit: 284).**

Zevit is referring to a perineal raphé, which is a visible seam found in along the length of the penis in males.

The problem is that a raphé also is found in the genitals of human females which renders Zevit's whole theory less plausible.

The Welsh poet, Gwerfur Mechain; (ca. 1460-1502) even praises the vulva for having a "seam" in her poem *I'r cedor* ("To the Vagina"): **"A little seam [Welsh: sêm], a curtain, on a niche bestowed/Neat flaps in a place of meeting"** (Gramich: 44; my bracketed Welsh). This may not refer to a *raphé*, but it certainly reflects how some people saw a "seam" as part of a vulva.

It is in the female that any *raphé* is lost or minimized as the embryonic stages progress (see Jin, et al.). Moreover, the possibility that a medical problem can result because of a faulty seam still would not mean that the author of Genesis 2:21 was thinking of an *os baculum*.

Furthermore, nothing in the biblical text tells us that this seam was regarded as a "wound" any more than any other feature that we might observe on human beings. Nor does it appear that any ancient Jewish

exegete thought that the *os baculum* was even a feature of Adam. So, why would these exegetes believe that this feature of the penis was a "wound"?

This "wound" interpretation is Zevit's and he is engaging in misleading retrodiagnosis in this case. In fact, the view of the female vulva as a wound is far more common and has much more artistic and textual support. Flora Lewis (1997: figures 89, 90) and Jack Hartnell (2017: figure 42) illustrates clearly the phenomenon of Christ's vulva-like wound on his rib cage.

Where there are opportunities for any artist to depict the creation of Eve from the *os baculum*, these artists are silent or prefer to see her creation from what looks like a vulva and wound on Adam's rib cage. Christian depictions often show living beings emerging from Christ's right side, and Christ is viewed as a counterpart of Adam (Romans 5:17-21). I have yet to see any depiction of Eve emerging from the *os baculum* in Christian or Jewish art (see Greenstein; Zahlten).[3]

Although some ancient Jewish exegetes thought that God might create an extra rib to make Eve, it does not appear that these exegetes thought it necessary for Adam to lose every body part that was intended to create Eve. For example, God does not consider a loss to Adam when pondering **"each and every limb"** he might use in the creation of Eve in Bereshith Rabbah 18:2:

> **And as He created each and every limb of the woman [וְעַ לְכָּ לאֵבָ רוְאֵבָ רשֶׁהָיְ הבוֹרֵ אבָ הָהָיָה] He would say to her: be a modest woman, be a modest woman! Nevertheless, "And they have disregarded all of my counsel" (Proverbs 1:25). I did not create her from the head, and yet she is haughty, as it says: "And they walk with stretched-forth necks" (Isaiah**

[3] For a Jewish depiction of human and animals emerging from a human male, see figure 49 of Hartnell's *Medieval Bodies,* p. 158 and compare it to the illustrations in his article available online: "Wording the Wound Man." *British Art Studies*, Issue 6: https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-06/jhartnell.

> **3:16). And not from the eye, yet she is coquettish, as it says: "and with wanton eyes" (ibid.). And not from the ear, and yet she is an eavesdropper, as it says: "And Sarah listened from the entrance of the tent" (Genesis 18:10). And not from the heart, and yet she is jealous, as it says: "And Rachel was jealous of her sister" (Genesis 30:1). And not from the hand, and yet she is a thief, as it says: "And Rachel stole the idols" (Genesis 31:19). And not from the leg, and yet she is a run-about, as it says: "And Dinah went out..." (Genesis 34:1).[4]**

We could just as well name dozens of parts that males still have that God could have used to form Eve. For example, human males retain their nipples. Retaining nipples makes even less sense anatomically because human males don't use their nipples in the same ways that females do. Would Zevit argue that males should have lost their nipples if the female was formed from the male?

For Zevit, it seems to be important that ribs lack a generative aspect, while generation is the premier function of the penis.

> **A rib has no particular potency nor is it associated mythologically or symbolically with any human generative act. Needless to say, the penis has always been associated with generation, in practice, in mythology, and in the popular imagination. Therefore, the literal, metaphorical, and euphemistic use of the word *tzela* make the baculum a good candidate for the singular bone taken from adam [sic] to generate Eve (Gilbert and Zevit: 284).**

[4] Following the Hebrew and English text of *Bereshith Rabbah* in *Sefaria*: https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit_Rabbah.18?lang=bi.

We can re-express Zevit's reasoning as follows:

> -X has no generative powers;
>
> -Therefore, God would not use X to generate Eve in Genesis 2:21.

This entire argument is based on the assumption that ancient peoples could not imagine God intervening miraculously in what we call "nature." It assumes that God could not use anything he wished to generate living organisms.

Such an assumption is clearly fallacious. Here are a few entities that don't usually produce "a generative act," if that means a whole human being:

> **Dust** in Genesis 2:7: "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."
>
> **Stones** in Matthew 3:9: "[F]or I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

In later Jewish traditions there seems to be no problem with using other parts of the body regardless of whether they would be missed or not. Of course, we also find the tradition of the Golem, an artificial anthropoid that can be made by human beings by manipulating Hebrew letters and without using body parts at all in some Jewish mystical traditions (Idel: 168).

And is the story of Eve being created from any male body part not fanciful or absurd enough already? As already mentioned, in *Bereshith Rabbah* 18:2 some ancient rabbis believed that Adam was created with a tail [*zanav*], which God removed from him and from which He created Eve.

According to Zevit (2015:35), the Hebrew word *basar* (בָּשָׂר) is also important in establishing God's use of a penis bone instead of a rib.

> **The man refers to the woman thus created as "bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh" (Genesis 2:23), indicating that she was made from a bone. The Hebrew word translated as "flesh" in these verses is basar, a word often used to refer to penis in Biblical Hebrew (Exodus 28:42; Leviticus 15:2–3, 16; Ezekiel 16:26; 23:20). My argument in favor of understanding that the first woman was formed from a no-longer extant baculum in human males is based on an analysis of how the author of the Garden story used Hebrew.**

The problem here is that the Hebrew word *basar* never clearly is used for any sort of penis bone. In every single one of the biblical texts (Exodus 28:42; Leviticus 15:2–3, 16; Ezekiel 16:26; 23:20) cited by Zevit, it is clear that *basar* is being used for the whole penis or sexual organ, and not a penis bone. There are far more instances where the Hebrew word is used for humanity (e.g., Deuteronomy 5:26) or for parts of the human body that have nothing ostensibly to do with a penis bone.

Zevit's Arguments against a Rib

Zevit dismisses arguments that have been used to affirm or to assume that "rib" is the correct understanding of *ṣēlāʿ* in Genesis 2:21. One of his arguments is based on modesty—the idea that the biblical author was trying to conceal the fact that it was Adam's *os baculum* that was being used to create Eve.

Zevit provides no evidence that the biblical author of Genesis 2:21 would use *ṣēlāʿ* in this manner. Any immodesty is reflected in the attested claim that God used the *zanav* (זָנָב), the tail bone of Adam, not his penis bone. Thus, Eruvin 18a:

> **Rabbi Yirmeya ben Elazar also said: Adam was first created with two [*deyo*] faces, one male and the other female. As it is stated: "You have formed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me" (Psalms 139:5). Similarly, it is written: "And**

> **the *tzela*, which the Lord, God, had taken from the man, He made a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Genesis 2:22). Rav and Shmuel disagree over the meaning of the word *tzela*: One said: It means a female face, from which God created Eve; and one said:Adam was created with a tail [זָנָב /*zanav*], *which God removed from him and from which He created Eve* [my italics].**

Zevit (2013: 141) himself asks why some ancient rabbis **"failed to explain why females possess a tailbone."** One could just as easily ask why both human males and females have a tail bone.

The Medieval *Zohar* (1.36b) supports an interpretation of *ṣēlāʿ* as "side," not penis bone, when speaking of the births of Cain and Abel:

> **Each emerged according to his kind; by their spirit they separated, one to this side [סטר /sᵉṭar)], one to the other, each resembling its side. From the side of Cain emerge all the haunts of maleficent species, spirits, demons, and sorcerers. From the side of Abel, a side of greater compassion, yet incomplete—good wine adulterated with bad, immature until Seth appeared from whom descended all righteous generations, by whom the world was sown (*Zohar* 1.36b).**

Further support comes from a variety of Jewish exegetical sources post-dating the *Zohar*. For example, Hayyim Vital (1542-1620), the famous Kabbalist, related what a rabbi told him:

> **On another occasion he thoroughly explained the matter to me and said that there are both masculine positive and negative commandments. There was not a single one of Adam's 248 limbs which is not composed of flesh, sinews, and bones. The flesh and the bones are the positive commandments and the sinews are the negative commandments. The source of my soul is Adam's left shoulder in the aspect of Leah which is in the back** (Vital:174).

Vital (196) wanted his calculations to culminate in 613: **"The 218 organs and 365 blood vessels which are in a person are the 613 sources."** For Vital, the 218 organs included, but were not restricted to, the human skeleton. The number 613 was connected to the number of commandments that traditional Jews should follow (Vital:327, n. 116). In other words, there were other concerns, some of them numerological, among those who valued Kabbalah, for choosing a body part for the creation of Eve.

There were a number of other reasons given by ancient exegetes for the depiction of Eve's creation (see Alexander). One discussion in the history of art is whether Eve's depiction as standing is used to illustrate the natural force we call "gravity," which was viewed as a feature of any stable human being (Greenstein).

Another reason for Eve's depiction was the "upright" stance that correlated with dignity or the proper orientation of those who worship a god. Such a motive is provided by Ovid in his story of creation: **"And, though, all other animals are prone, and fix their gaze upon the earth, he gave to man an up lifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes toward heaven."**[5] Admittedly, Ovid's motive is difficult to detect in Genesis. Yet, another reason for some of Eve's creation depictions was equality between the sexes (Grimké).

Zevit (2013: 303, n. 19) admits to the weakness of the argument of A. T. Reisenberger (450, 452) that the word *ṣēlāʿ* should not be translated as "rib" but rather as a component of a larger structure. Reisenberger assumes that "side" does not or cannot have a hierarchical nature, but that is yet to be proven (see the placement of a table on the north side of the tabernacle in Exodus 26:35).

Zevit (2013:143) refers to the Ethiopic version when attempting to make the case that *ṣēlāʿ*, may not be an anatomical term for the side of the chest in Genesis 2:22, but rather for the penis:

> **…[I]ts Ge'ez cognate, *ṣ'lle* means only "tablet, beam"…Accordingly "penis" is the referent of**

[5] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (LCL): 1.84-86: *"pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram, os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus."*

> **ṣēlaʿ in Genesis 2:22—a penis lateral to the up-down axis of the male body viewed in profile. Both ribs and penises reflect the basic sense, the core sememe of the root *ṣ-l-ʿ*.**

Zevit cites Wolf Leslau, the author of a dictionary of the Ethiopic dialect of Ge'ez. However, Leslau does not provide a definitive statement of the relationship of the Ge'ez lexeme *ṣəlle* to the Hebrew *ṣēlāʿ*. According to the authors of a Semitic anatomical and etymological dictionary, Alexander Militarev and Leonid Kogan (p. 244):

> **Note Gez. ṣəlle, ṣəlla "tablet of metal, stone) beam" [LGz 554], Tna. *ṣəllat* "slab of wood or stone on which is engraved a religious precept [ibid] ("lastra di pietra" in Bass. 948]) unconvincingly compared to this root (namely to Hbr. *ṣēlaʿ*, "rib, plank") in [LGz. 554]. Strangely enough, Leslau at the same time compares these Eth. words to Arb. Ḥḍr. ṣilāl Yem ṣalla "slab" and Sab. ṣlt "paving, plastering" (probably an areal cultural term).**

The Ethiopic version of Genesis 2:21 has "one of Adam's ribs/sides" (*'hd 'm'dm gbh*/ አሐደ ፡ እምዐጽመ ፡ ገቦሁ) and "ribs," which is not a reference to all the bones in the body of Adam. In Jubilees 3:5 one finds another Ethiopic version (*'hd 'm'dm wy't gbh* /ዐጽመ ፡ አሐደ ፡ ወይአቲ ፡ ገቦ**),** which is consistent with "rib" in Genesis 2:21 of the Masoretic Text.

Indeed, Zevit treats different languages and cultures in an idiosyncratic manner. Consider the manner in which he treats the reported puns in the Sumerian story of the deities known as Enki and Ninhursag. In one segment of the story, Ninhursag creates a healer for the parts of the body that Enki says are hurting him (see also Steinkeller, 1979, 2013). The relevant pun reads as follows:

Line	ENGLISH
268	Brother where does it hurt? My “ribs” (*ti*) hurt me.
269	She gave birth to Ninti out of it.

SUMERIAN

šeš-ĝu$_{10}$ a-na-zu a-ra-gig ti-ĝu$_{10}$ ma-[gig]

^{d}nin-ti im-ma-ra-an-[tu-ud]

Zevit (2013: 139) tells us that the Sumerian pun using *ti* (*ti* = ribs//”life” as part of the name of Nin-ti) would be irrelevant:

> **[I]f punning was actually at work in the Sumerian, it is highly unlikely that a Sumerian pun would have been known to Israelites or mediated to them through another. language. Sumerian was a known *written* language in Mesopotamia, but it was a dead spoken one by the last quarter of the second millennium BCE. This was almost three centuries before Hebrew emerged as a distinct language’ around the beginning of the first millennium BCE.**

This is not quite true. We have a few Hebrew words that can be traced to Sumerian, and this includes היכל (*heychal* from Sumerian É.GAL = Great House or House of the King; Koehler/Baumgarten: 230) and Marduk (e.g., Sumerian amar.uda.ak in the form “Merodach” in Jeremiah 51:32; van der Toorn, et al.: 543), which were probably transmitted through intermediary cultures (Viano).

Arguments for a Rib

Perhaps the most important piece of evidence against Zevit's interpretation is that the expression, *'ăḥăt miṣṣalʿōtayw* (אַחַ֖ת מִצַּלְעֹתָ֑יו), often translated with variants of **"one of his ribs,"** naturally implies that more than one *ṣēlāʿ* is involved. That certainly would not be consistent with a singular penis bone.

It is important to note that **"one of his ribs"** cannot plausibly refer to "one of his bones"— if that means one of the bones of his entire body. The Hebrew text is specific, and so are other texts that either copy or paraphrase Genesis 2:21.

As is granted by Zevit, normal human males do not have a penis bone at all. There are no other clear instances where that Hebrew word *ṣēlāʿ* refers to a penis bone. Therefore, Zevit is offering *a truism* that can be reversed when he says that "rib" is really some sort of circumlocution or figure of speech, and perhaps one prompted by modesty.

The fact is that all languages can use circumlocutions just as they can also use literal meanings. Therefore, noting that any particular word can be used figuratively does not constitute evidence that the same word is not being used literally. That is why Zevit's references (2013: 310, n. 11) to general studies (Fronzaroli; Hospers) of semantics will not help. His reference (2013: 310, n. 14) to the use of "hand" for "penis" at Ugarit will not help either.

Zevit (2013: 302, n. 120) cites Harry Hoffner in appealing positively to Hittite: **"Similar circumlocutions are attested in Hittite. The vulva is referred to by an expression that translates literally as 'what she has below,' while the penis is referred to as 'manhood' and another as stem or 'stalk.'"** Zevit's reasoning may be reduced to the following:

> -Culture X uses circumlocutions to describe private body parts.
>
> -Therefore, Genesis 2:21 is using *ṣēlāʿ* for an *os baculum* usually translated as "rib."

Using circumlocutions for private parts is irrelevant. One certainly does not need to appeal to Hittite to make the point that circumlocutions frequently are used to speak of private parts. Almost any culture, including our own (e.g., the use of "Dick" or "Peter"), can and will do that.

The Hittites could use circumlocutions for private parts, but they also spoke literally of private parts. As Hoffner (248) makes clear in the case of genitalia in medical texts:

> **For some body parts several different terms coexisted. The penis could be called *pišnatar*, *lalu*, *ḫapušaš*, and possibly also *ḫarniu*. Two terms have been claimed as referring to the testicle: *arki* and *taškU-* , but the latter is less certain than the former and may designate the scrotum.**

So, why not say that since the Hittites sometimes referred literally to body parts we would recognize, then so did the Hebrews? "Rib" could mean a literal "rib" for Sumerians, Hittites, and the Hebrews.

But even if Zevit is entirely correct about Hittite or other languages, it will not help his argument because the transmission of such lexical circumlocutions tells us nothing about the intentions of the author of Genesis 2:21.

It would also be difficult to understand why Zevit views Sumerian literary devices as not recognized by the Hebrews because of chronology, while believing that Hittite literary devices presumably would be recognized despite the chronology.

Although the word "Hittite" is used in the Bible, there is no evidence that the biblical authors had any authentic memories of the classical Hittite empire's language or culture. Billie Jean Collins, the biblical scholar and Hittitologist, remarks **"The presence of the Hittites in the narratives of Israelite beginnings is thus rhetorical and ideological rather than historical"** (*NIDB* 2:843).

Meik Gerhards (174), who has studied biblical Hittites, tells us: **"Dagegen finden sich im Alten Testament ebenso wie in der griechischen Literatur keine erinnerungen an das hetitische Grossreich"** ("In contrast, no memory is found in the Old Testament or in Greek literature of the Great Hittite Empire"/my translation).

If one searches for any diseases or references in Mesopotamia to a penis bone by Scurlock and Andersen, who are perhaps the most enthusiastic practitioners of retrodiagnosis, one will not find them at the expected areas of discussion (e.g., Scurlock and Andersen:611, 624; See also Böck:168,170).

Jon Arribazalaga (51) is one of a growing number of historians of medicine who cautions scholars about the misuse of retrospective diagnoses:

> **The perception of biomedical achievements in the last century has led most Westerners and those in the rest of the world under the influence of Western scientific culture, to assume that their own representations of disease and of its causes are the most authentic, the "truest", on the assumption that such representations are the culmination of an historical process through which modern medical science gradually achieved a better understanding of these phenomena.**

Perhaps the most persistent problem in scholarship in general is challenging past interpretations that are not based on a rigorous evaluation of evidence.

Conclusion

In Genesis 2:21 *ṣēlāʿ* can be understood literally as one of Adam's ribs, especially if Zevit offers no other cases where the Hebrew word clearly refers to a penis bone. It is not impossible that some ancient exegete believed that Genesis 2:21 is referring to an *os baculum,* but Zevit offers no explicit evidence for that understanding.

The most compelling piece of evidence that this is not a single *os baculum* is the expression, *'ăḥăt miṣṣalʿōtayw* (אַחַ֖ת מִצַּלְעֹתָ֑יו), often translated with variants of **"one of his ribs."** This expression implies that more than one *ṣēlāʿ* is involved. This expression is not consistent with a singular bone that may not have been known to exist.

Another piece of evidence is that the Hebrew word for "rib," *ṣēlāʿ*, is never used for *os baculum*, an anatomical feature for which there is no apparent awareness in ancient Jewish exegetes. Ancient Jewish exegetes did seem aware of a tail bone (*zanav*/זנב = coccyx?), but there is never any mention of a penis bone as far as I can determine.

It is a clear *non sequitur* to assert that because all cultures can use circumlocutions for private parts, then the author of Genesis 2:21 must have been thinking of a penis bone.

Dundes' study of couvade is irrelevant because it does not follow that practicing this cultural behavior means that the author of Genesis 2:21 must have been thinking of an *os baculum*. Christian and Jewish exegesis never even hints that the *os* baculum was an issue.

It is the vulva, not the raphé on the male penis, that is sometimes depicted as a wound, including on the side of Jesus where he was pierced. As far as I have been able to determine, Eve may emerge from other parts of Adam's body in pre-modern Jewish and Christian textual and visual traditions—*but never from the part of his penis that may be an os baculum.*

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NOTES: Unless otherwise noted, for *Bereshith Rabbah* and all Talmudic tractates, I follow the English and Hebrew/Aramaic of *Sefaria*: https://www.sefaria.org/?home.

Biblical English translation have been adapted (mainly the removal of diacritics) from the Revised Standard Version.

For Sumerian, I follow the Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature: https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/.

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