

SHE TOOK THE VEIL AND COVERED HERSELF

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Introduction

Genesis 24:65 and 38:14 include the recorded actions of Rebekah and Tamar covering themselves with a veil. The Genesis account in the 1611 King James Version (KJV) records that Rebekah and Tamar covered themselves in a “vaile.”¹ *Vaile* is the translated word in the KJV from the Masoretic Text (MT) for the Hebrew word (רִצְצָה), transliterated as *tsa’if* (see Genesis 24:65; 38:14 MT). To understand the meaning of the veil in these accounts, I have used parallel methodology to compare the biblical record with other ancient Near Eastern texts and images. In the Genesis accounts of their veiling, the phrase translated into English as “covered” has been found in ancient Near Eastern texts as early as the third millennium BC as a likely ancient Mesopotamian idiom that meant the accepted performance of a culturally legitimate marriage or consummation.² The Assyrian Law Code, dated 1550 BC, supports the early phrase “to cover” as the act of veiling, which endowed societal rights, privileges, and authority to a wife.³ The veil is observed in early ancient Near Eastern images of goddesses, queens, and priestesses with other symbols that associated the icons with the life power for the society.⁴ The veil was reserved for the most holy persons and space in society.⁵ Based on ancient Near Eastern texts and iconography, the biblical record of Rebekah and Tamar “covering” themselves in the *tsa’if* or “veil” likely endowed them with matriarchal authority and venerated their sacred power of life.⁶

Methodology

Because of the lack of early Hebrew iconography in the historical record, I have used *parallel methodology* to understand the meaning of Rebekah and Tamar covering themselves with the veil in the Genesis narrative. The use of this methodology is supported by leading scholars Ze'ev Falk, Othmar Keel, Rina Talgam, and Irene Winters and is used in their research to understand cultural interpretations of ancient symbols, laws, and texts. Winters, chair of the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, asserts, "I believe one can learn a great deal from parallel studies dealing with the archaeologies of monuments in other early states, and from the role of imagery within related socio-political and cultural systems."⁷

The Patriarchs' Account Compared with Historical Records of Veiling

The patriarchs' account of their journeys across the Fertile Crescent may be compared to other ancient Near Eastern societies. The biblical journeys of the patriarchs include references to ancient civilizations from Ur, likely northern Mesopotamia (modern-day Syria and Türkiye), to Egypt in the south (see Map 1).⁸ "Discoveries have furnished many parallels to the law and custom of the patriarchs in Akkadian, Hurrian, and Hittite texts . . . and become clear by comparison with archaeological finds from Mari, Nuzu, or Ugarit."⁹ The biblical events of the patriarchs are dated to the second millennium BC and provide another source of early cultural veiling practices in the Fertile Crescent.¹⁰

Historical finds provide support for the act of covering oneself with the veil, as recorded in Genesis, as the legal performance of a marriage, culturally legitimate consummation, or perhaps betrothal.¹¹ The phrase "to cover" has been found in "Sumerian, Neo-Sumerian, and Hittite texts" located in modern-day Iraq and Turkey, dated to the third millennium BC.¹² The specific use of the term "to cover" was likely an early idiom meaning the accepted performance of a culturally recognized marriage.¹³ The Genesis account of Rebekah and Tamar's "covering" in the *tsa'if* or "veil" has similarities to early ancient Near Eastern veiling practices.



Map 1. This map shows the proximities of the lands and civilizations associated with the biblical journeys of Abraham and his sons. There are two suggested locations of Ur. Ur located in southeast Mesopotamia is a commonly accepted location. Ur' identifies Paul Hoskisson's location (see note 8). Map by Denise Plant.

Assyrian Law Code

Covering oneself with the veil as part of the marriage ceremony is attested in the Assyrian Law Code, discovered in Assur (1903–14) by the German Oriental Society.¹⁴ The code identifies the specific contractual and ceremonial actions that must occur to make a concubine (a woman from a lower social class) a wife. The veil must be placed over the concubine and in front of witnesses, the husband then declares, “She is my wife.”¹⁵ In the law code, these actions explicitly required the veil to be worn, witnessed, *and* the contractual words to be spoken. If these actions did not occur, she was not a wife but remained a concubine.

If a man will veil his concubine (?), he shall summon 5 (or) 6 of his neighbors to be present (and) veil her before them (and) shall speak, saying: “She (is) my wife”; she (thus becomes) his wife. A concubine (?) who has not been veiled before the men (and) whose husband has not spoken, saying: “She is my wife,” (is) not a wife but (still) a concubine (?).¹⁶

This legal code made the veil a symbol of privilege for Assyrian women. The woman who accepted the terms and conditions of marriage had the authority to don the veil as validation of her position in society. The Assyrian Law Code identified three specific rights of the (veiled) wife:

1. The right of her children born in this relationship to receive an inheritance upon her husband’s death.¹⁷
2. The right to receive support from the state on the conditional loss of her husband.¹⁸
3. The right to inherit her husband’s estate upon his death, even if she has no son. Specifically, her right to the estate supersedes the rights of the husband’s brothers to the property.¹⁹

The Assyrian Law Code lists classes of women who had the right to veil. These classes are defined as married, widowed, or married hierodule.²⁰ *Hierodule* is a Greek word used to identify an ancient cultic priestess, who may have been a ritual proxy for the fertility goddess to ensure the continuation of life and prosperity for the society.²¹ The classes of women recorded in the law who did not have the authority to veil are listed as prostitutes, slaves, and unmarried hierodules.²² It is important to recognize that the code had no punishment for a married or widowed woman who did not veil, though harsh punishments are prescribed to the unlawful veil wearer.²³ This supports the value of the veil in society to preserve the matriarchal order by protecting the unlawful use of the clothing.²⁴

The following excerpt is from the Godfrey Rolles Driver and John C. Miles (1935) version of the Assyrian Law Code. These laws, with their associated punishments, are harsh and sometimes brutal. However, to understand the ancient world, it is important to evaluate these societies based on the context of their era and culture from which these laws are enacted.

Women, whether married or [widows] or [Assyrians] who go out to the (public) street [must not have] their heads [uncovered]. . . . A hierodule, whom a husband has married, must be veiled in the (public) streets; but one whom a husband has not married must have her head uncovered in a public street; she shall not be veiled. A harlot shall not be veiled; her head must be uncovered. He who sees a veiled harlot must arrest her . . . the man who has arrested her shall take her clothing; she shall be beaten 50 stripes with rods, (and) pitch shall be poured on her head. Or, if a man has seen a veiled harlot and has let her go (and) has not brought her to the entrance of the residency, that man shall be beaten 50 stripes with rods; the informer (?) against him shall take his clothing; his ears shall be pierced (and) a cord shall be passed through (them) and be tied behind him;²⁵ . . . Slave-girls shall not be veiled, and he who sees a veiled slave-girl shall arrest her (and) bring her to the entrance of the residency.²⁶

The Old Testament contains an account of a forced deveiling with similarities to the punishment recorded in the Assyrian Law Code. “The surrounding guards of the city found me, they punished me, they bruised me; the guards of the walls took away my veil from me” (Song of Solomon 5:7 MT; translation by author).²⁷ There are four narrative actions identified in this biblical account that follow the same pattern of punishments as recorded in the Assyrian Law Code.²⁸ With careful consideration of propinquity, I have listed the similarities:

1. The woman is punished.
2. The city guards, inferring a type of legal authority, issue punishment.
3. She is beaten and bruised.
4. Her veil is taken from her.

This biblical account in the Song of Solomon of the woman’s beating and deveiling is the visual shaming and witnessing of punishment with similarities that are recorded in the Assyrian Law Code. The removal of her veil was more than taking away a piece of cloth, it was the removal of authority and privileges associated with

its status. Thus, by removing the veil, her rights, status, and authority in society were suspended. This biblical account of a forced de-veiling supports similarities in the veiling punishments as found in the Assyrian Law Code.

Comparing the accounts of Rebekah and Tamar covering themselves with the veil to other ancient Near Eastern texts supports the significance of the action. The early recorded references found in Sumerian, Neo-Sumerian, Hittite text, and the ALC support the cultural meaning of Rebekah and Tamar covering themselves in the veil as the clothing that authenticated their marriage relationship, and endowed them with societal rights, authority, and protections.²⁹ Thus, the record of their covering becomes a witness to their accepted status.

Ancient Veiled Iconography

The meaning of the veiling of Rebekah and Tamar is enhanced with a parallel study of veiled iconography in the ancient Near East. There are observable similarities that may be supported through the use of parallel methodology. Philippe Borgeaud states, “as archaeologists have discovered, ‘underneath the appearance of Hellenized art, there flows . . . profoundly and powerfully, a current of *eastern inspiration*.’ This is the epiphany of an *eastern goddess, iconographically likened to the Hellenic Mother of gods*” (emphasis added).³⁰ Although more research is needed, the later Hellenized style of iconography demonstrates significant parallels with earlier fertility goddesses from Mesopotamia. As demonstrated in the following figures (figs. 1, 2, and 3), the veil is a symbol carved in images of goddesses, queens, or likely married priestesses.³¹ The use of the veil in ancient Near Eastern iconography supports its meaning as a symbol that venerated the sacred and deified power of life of the image. Comprehensive research about early veiled images is beyond the scope of this paper; however, I have included for comparison three examples across cultures and eras.

I need to qualify the benefits of the use of parallel methodology. This methodology provides a broad understanding of the veil’s symbolism in early Near Eastern cultures; it does not seek a “deep analysis” of veiling in each civilization or seek to understand the

specific liturgical or cultural applications, styles, changes, or differences.³² However, with careful observations, a pattern across ancient societies of displaying the veil on fertility goddesses, queens, and married priestesses supports the understanding of the veil as a valuable and sacred adornment.³³

The veil in ancient Near Eastern iconography was the “language of headdress.”³⁴ Early observations support the veil as the covering that likely identified the sacred status of the fertility goddess, deified queen, or matronly priestess in a society.³⁵ The carving of the veil into stone on statues and reliefs of deities, queens, and priestesses supports its value to these early people.

Ancient Near Eastern images of deities are sometimes placed on a throne or chair, with their feet on a footstool. This is a significant position reserved for gods or deified elites and is referred to as *enthronement*.³⁶ Enthronement images have been found with an engraved veil, likely venerating the goddess’s sacred life force for the society.³⁷ Ancient Near Eastern iconography supports the meaning of the veil as a covering that venerated the sacred power of life. As noted by Ilse Seibert, the early worship of the Sumerian goddess supports “the great esteem in which woman was held as the *bearer of life*, the mother of the family, the head of the tribe, the priestess, the ancestress” (emphasis added).³⁸ The ancient esteem of womanhood coupled with the sacred symbolism of the veil makes perfect cultural sense that the veil was used in



Fig. 1. Alabaster statuette (ca. 2500 BC) representing the ancient goddess Ishtar.

This statuette was discovered in the Temple of Ishtar at Tel Hariri, Ancient Mar. Its size is 23x14 cm and it is currently housed in the National Museum of Damascus, Syria, Inv. No. M2072 (M2308/2368). (G. Dagli Orti / © NPL - De A Picture Library / Bridgeman Images.)



Fig. 2. Etlik Kybele (ca. 700–600 BC), currently housed in Ankara Anatolian Civilizations Museum, Inv. No. 124, after Akurgal 1961, p. 94, Fig. 60. Image from “Headdress Fashions of Significance in Ancient Western Anatolia: The Seventh Through Fourth Centuries BCE.” The veil is a full-length cloth covering the goddess from the head to the same hem length as the robe. According to Munn, the icon holds a pitcher of water in the right hand as a symbol of her life-force powers. The bird of prey in the left hand is a symbol of sovereignty. (Photo courtesy of Tuna Şare Ağtürk, Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Türkiye.)

the Assyrian Law Code as legal clothing that endowed the matriarchal authority in society.

The earliest veiled image that I found in my research is the Sumerian goddess Ishtar, dated 2500 BC (see fig. 1). This statuette was discovered in the Temple of Ishtar at Tel Hariri, Syria, and is now housed in the National Museum of Damascus. Ishtar was the goddess of earth’s life force worshipped in many ancient Near Eastern societies.³⁹ The Ishtar image sits in the recognizable deified enthronement position with her feet on a footstool.⁴⁰ She is covered with a full-length veil over a brimless headdress. The design of her veil likely represented feathers, as Ishtar was sometimes depicted as a bird that recognized her spirit that ascends to the heavens.⁴¹

The image of the mother of the gods, commonly known as Kybele, is from western Anatolia and dates to the seventh century BC (see fig. 2).⁴² The image of the goddess is displayed with a full-length veil topped by the *polos*, a tall cylinder-style headdress.⁴³ Kybele’s relief includes a pitcher of water in her right hand that symbolized her life-force power.⁴⁴ In her left hand, Kybele holds a bird of prey, which recognized her sovereignty.⁴⁵

The Hellenized funerary relief from Attica (350 BC) is of a husband and wife, currently displayed in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (see fig. 3). Although this image is dated much later than the Rebekah and Tamar narratives, the image supports the continued meaning of the veil as a symbol of the wife’s sacred status of her life power. This relief displayed the wife as an enthroned deity with



Fig. 3. Attic funerary relief (ca. 350 BC) currently housed in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv. No. 1959.203. This image of a husband and wife shows the wife sitting on a chair in an enthroned position, perhaps representing her deified status. She sits with her feet placed on a footstool. A lion cub beneath her chair establishes her authority. The amphora is a symbol of her life force. The veil is placed over her nose and mouth as her husband stands in veneration of her power and authority. (Photo rights purchased from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.)

a veil covering her nose and mouth. Her husband stands before her in the attitude of veneration. A lion cub was placed under her chair with her feet on a footstool. She holds a large *amphora*, a Grecian-style jar that represented her connection with the life power of their union.⁴⁶

Rebekah

The first recorded use of *tsa'if* or “veil” in the Old Testament is the Genesis account of Rebekah’s marriage acceptance to Isaac. In the narrative, Isaac matures and Abraham desires a wife for his son; thus, Abraham puts his servant under oath to find a woman from Abraham’s extended family (see Genesis 24:3–4). Rebekah is Abraham’s great niece living in Paddan-aram (see Genesis 28:2), likely located in northwest Mesopotamia, which includes modern-day Syria and Türkiye (see Map 1). Rebekah accepts the betrothal and immediately returns with the servant to Abraham’s family.

When Rebekah returns with the servant, her betrothal to Isaac includes a specific reference to her taking *ha-tsa'if* or “the veil” and covering herself as Isaac approaches from the field. As Isaac

nears the caravan, the narrative includes the following exchange between Rebekah and the male servant: “she had said unto the servant: ‘What man is this that walks in the field to meet us?’ And the servant said: ‘It is my master.’ *Then she took the veil, and covered herself*” (Genesis 24:64–65 MT; translation by author; emphasis added).

As recorded in the Masoretic Text, the narrative concerning Rebekah’s first meeting of Isaac identifies the veil with a definite article. Although translated as “*a vaile*” in Genesis 24:65, the Masoretic Text account identifies it as (הַצִּיָּה) *ha-tsa’if*. The Hebrew prefix HA (הַ) is also marked by the Masoretes with a patakh. This prefix combined with this Masoretic vowel mark denotes a definite article, making *the veil* a more accurate translation (see Genesis 24:65 MT). The use of *the* as a definite article is specific and makes donning the cloth significant to the narrative. “It’s like saying *wear a coat* compared to *wear the coat*. The use of a definite article gives meaning to the clothing and the action in the narrative. Rebekah wasn’t covered with *a veil*; she was covered with *the veil*.”⁴⁷

The Genesis account of Rebekah covering herself with the veil clarifies that veiling was not an act of modesty. Rebekah had been traveling with men in the caravan for several days and was not covered; it was precisely at the moment she saw Isaac that she covered herself with *ha-tsa’if*. This recorded action verified the marriage agreement, which was likely witnessed by the men in the caravan. With similarities to the Assyrian Law Code and other ancient Near Eastern texts, the narration’s inclusion of the statement “covered herself” suggests the acceptance of the marriage agreement (Genesis 24:65).⁴⁸ Compared with the Assyrian Law Code, veiling was the legal action that protected Rebekah and her children born under this marriage agreement with rights and inheritance.

Rebekah’s veiling as Isaac approached may have acknowledged her role as the sacred source of life.⁴⁹ The Old Testament account recognizes Rebekah’s accepted role as the sacred progenitor for her and Isaac’s posterity. Rebekah was blessed by her brothers to be “the mother of thousands of millions,” with power in her posterity over their enemies (Genesis 24:60). If I may suggest, the veiling of Rebekah before Isaac was the investiture honoring her legacy. Rebekah was veiled as the sacred mother of generations. As

observed by Seibert concerning the status of women in ancient Sumerian culture, perhaps the veiling of Rebekah recognized her as “the bearer of life, the mother of the family, the head of the tribe, the priestess, the ancestress.”⁵⁰

Tamar

The second reference of covering with the *tsa'if* or “veil” is also recorded in the Genesis narrative of Tamar (see Genesis 38:14 MT). The account of Tamar is layered with ancient law and cultic practices, known respectively as the *levirate law* and the cultic *sacred wedding ceremony*. These ancient practices are beyond the scope of this research; however, a summary is needed to understand Tamar’s use of the *tsa'if* or “veil.”

The *levirate law* is a scholarly Latin term meaning “husband’s brother.” This law was the obligation of the brother, the next of kin, or in some cases the father-in-law, to marry the childless widow and provide a successor, raised in the name of the deceased husband.⁵¹ The law of the levirate was an ancient practice in many early Near Eastern cultures, including Israel.⁵²

The levirate law was the way to care for the childless widow within the extended family clan and retain the tribe’s land of inheritance.⁵³ In the Old Testament, the purpose of this proxy marriage practice is identified: “that his [deceased husband] name be not put out of Israel” (Deuteronomy 25:6). This law honored the deceased husband by raising up posterity in his “name” through his widow and levirate-designated family proxy.⁵⁴ This practice predates the Mosaic law. The inclusion of the levirate law in the Torah (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10), together with the earlier levirate birth narration of Tamar (see Genesis 38) and the later levirate account of Ruth (see Ruth 4:5, 10, 12), demonstrates that the levirate law was practiced with Abraham’s family prior to the Mosaic law and continued among the Israelites.

The *sacred wedding ceremony* is a scholarly term given to the cultic spring rites and wedding celebration of the ancient fertility goddess worshipped in many ancient Near Eastern cultures.⁵⁵ This seasonal ritual and its festivities celebrated the return of life to all living things.⁵⁶ *Tamar* (תָּמָר) in Hebrew means “palm tree” or “date

palm.”⁵⁷ This name is significant to the account, as the palm tree was the ancient symbol of the fertility goddess.⁵⁸ Tamar’s name would have had meaning to the ancient people as the fertility goddess during the cultic spring rites. As part of these rites, the fertility goddess’s sacrificial rescue of her consort from the underworld returned life to all living things and was celebrated with a wedding ceremony.⁵⁹

There is irony in the narrative as Tamar, who was named after the symbol of the fertility goddess, was left barren because of the wickedness of Judah’s sons (see Genesis 38:6–10). As a result of the sons’ wickedness, they are slain by the Lord, leaving Tamar twice widowed and childless. As an obligation under the levirate law, Judah was required to give his third son, Shelah, to Tamar as her husband. However, Judah disregarded his obligation in fear that Shelah would die just as Judah’s older sons (see Genesis 38:11, 14). In addition, Judah abandoned Tamar by sending her as a childless widow back to her father’s house, which probably caused humiliation to Tamar and her family (see Genesis 38:11).

The Tamar narrative includes an important seasonal reference that sets the marriage events during the time of the sacred wedding ceremony.⁶⁰ Judah, who was recently widowed, goes to shear his sheep (see Genesis 38:12–13). This is a significant detail in the narration, as sheep are sheared in the spring and established the events during the season of the sacred wedding ceremony.⁶¹ Tamar used the cultic spring marriage practice to claim her legal rights under levirate law.

According to the Assyrian Law Code, a widow had the right to don the veil. “Women, whether married or [widows] . . . who go out to the (public) street [must not have] their heads [uncovered].”⁶² As a widow, Tamar legally donned the veil and disguised herself as a cultic priestess.⁶³ Judah culturally recognized the veiled woman sitting at the entrance of the city during the season of the spring wedding festival as a temple priestess (see Genesis 38:15). However, because of the opaqueness of the veil, Judah was unaware that the widow Tamar was masquerading as the priestess.⁶⁴ Although translated in the King James Version as a harlot (see Genesis 38:15, 21, 22), based on the Assyrian Law Code, “A harlot shall not be veiled; her head must be uncovered. He who sees a veiled harlot

must arrest her.”⁶⁵ According to the Assyrian Law Code, a common prostitute did not have the legal authority to veil and would have received harsh punishments for unauthorized covering.⁶⁶ Thus, the narration detail of Tamar veiling supports her posing as a cultic priestess to assert her levirate rights with Judah. As a widow, Tamar legally used the veiling code during the season of the wedding ceremony to disguise herself as a cultic priestess. As a veiled priestess, sitting in a public place, she was acknowledging her willingness to consummate on behalf of all living things (see Genesis 38:14).⁶⁷

In Tamar’s narrative, there are two Hebrew words translated as “harlot” in the King James Version (see Genesis 38:15, 21, 22 MT). These words may also be translated from Hebrew as “temple (cultic) prostitute” or “temple priestess.” As transliterated directly from the Masoretic Text, she poses as a (זֹנָה) *zônāh* and (קַדְשָׁה) *qedēshāh*. The Hebrew *zônāh* is translated as “harlot” but may also be translated as “a female cult prostitute,” perhaps an association with a lower-class cultic priestess.⁶⁸ The Hebrew *qedēshāh* in direct translation is “holy woman,” which has a specific reference to a cultic priestess.⁶⁹ This translation is also supported by the Assyrian Law Code, which specifically authorized the veiling of a temple priestess who was married.⁷⁰

This early practice of consummation is somewhat shocking to our modern sensibilities; however, it was viewed by ancient society as an esteemed sacrifice made by the priestesses as the proxy for the fertility goddess for the prosperity of society.⁷¹ Several centuries later, through Moses, the Lord revealed the law and condemned this cultic practice as an abomination. The Lord commands the children of Israel not to participate in these cultural rituals (see Deuteronomy 23:17–18). Many of these early ancient Near Eastern societies continued this practice, which later became the business of prostitution forced upon slaves.⁷²

There is meaningful symbolism in the narration of Tamar. She was veiled in the *tsa’if* as a holy woman at the “entrance of (עֵינַיִם) ‘Enaim” (Genesis 38:14 MT). ‘Enaim is the dual-word form of the Hebrew root word (עֵינַיִם) ‘ain, which may be translated as “pair of eyes” or “double (water) spring.”⁷³ As water was an important inheritance with land (see Joshua 15:19) and critical to the sustainability of a community, this city was the likely location of two springs, or

perhaps where a water spring separated into two.⁷⁴ Tamar's sexual relations with Judah in the city of *'Enaim* becomes a symbol of her blessing and adds meaning to the narrative as a double source of living water.⁷⁵

In the narration, Tamar, whose name was a symbol of the fertility goddess, had her legal rights to posterity withheld twice by the marriages with Judah's two sons. The town *'Enaim*, likely named from a pair of nearby springs, was a city blessed with a double portion of living water. Tamar, as the veiled sacrificial-fertility priestess, having been neglected by Judah and used by his two sons, finally received full reparation through the levirate proxy practice. She received a double portion of life and conceived twin sons in the city named Double Spring (see Genesis 38:27).

The Genesis account declares Tamar's justification. Judah claimed guilt for not honoring the levirate law and exonerated Tamar by professing her righteousness (see Genesis 38:26). Tamar, as both a righteous and ingenious woman, used the legal practice of the levirate law during the season of the sacred wedding ceremony to veil as a disguised cultic priestess and conceive her rightful posterity. After years of neglect and humiliation, she received full restitution and was blessed with twin sons. She gave birth to Pharez and Zarah (see Genesis 38:29), and became the multigenerational grandmother to the Messiah (see Ruth 4:18–22).

As with Rebekah's narrative, Tamar's account in the 1611 King James Version also included the phrase "covered her with a veil" (Genesis 38:14). Tamar's account in the Masoretic Text uses a definite article with *tša'if*. As recorded in the Hebrew account, she "covered herself in *the* veil" (Genesis 38:14 MT; translation by author; emphasis added). The Masoretic Text vowels the bet (ב) with a patakh, identifying the veil with a definite article. Although translated as "with a vaile" in the 1611 King James Version (Genesis 38:14), the Masoretic Text identifies it as (בַּצִּפְיָהּ) *ba-tša'if*; thus, "in *the* veil" is a more accurate translation. The reference to *tša'if* or "veil" with a definite article in both Rebekah's and Tamar's accounts of consummation agreements supports the veil's meaning as a covering with significance to the narrative. Based on Assyrian Law Code and other early ancient Near Eastern texts, the *tša'if* was the likely legal covering confirming a lawful marriage or consummation.

Conclusion

Rebekah and Tamar both legally donned *ha-tsa'if* or “the veil” as authentication of their matriarchal authority. Tamar as a widow covered with *ba-tsa'if* or “the veil” during the season of the sacred wedding ceremony to claim her consummation rights under levirate law. Rebekah covered herself with *ha-tsa'if* or “the veil” in legal acceptance of marriage to Isaac with all of its rights and privileges. The early idiom “to cover” found in the ancient Near Eastern texts, the veiling code in the Assyrian Law, and the ancient images of veiled goddesses, queens, and priestesses (see figs. 1–3) support the significance of the Old Testament account of Rebekah and Tamar covering in *ha-tsa'if*.⁷⁶ The veil was the likely legal clothing that authenticated and endowed their matriarchal power with all of its rights, privileges, and authority.

The record of Rebekah and Tamar “covered” themselves with *ha-tsa'if* or “the veil” authorized and venerated their position as the sacred life-source for Israel. Perhaps Rebekah and Tamar have been memorialized for generations as “the bearer of life, the mother of the family, the head of the tribe, the priestess, the ancestress” of the children of Israel and the royal tribe of Judah when they took the veil and covered themselves.⁷⁷

Notes

1. T. K. Plant, *Veiling the Mothers of Israel: My Search for Scholarship and Meaning* (forthcoming book): “The *vaile* is a covering with significance.” “The words *veil* and *vaile* seem to have had two different Latin etymologies. . . . The choice of the King James scholars to use the Middle English translated word *vaile* for the six different Hebrew words, may support their understanding of the value of the cloth or covering in the context of the narrative.” To avoid confusion, I will use *veil* as the standard spelling in this paper unless directly quoting the *vaile* spelling in the KJV.
2. Karel van der Toorn, “The Significance of the Veil in the Ancient Near East,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 332: “The symbolical gesture [of covering] came to be so intimately connected with the wedding ceremony, [that] the term *dul* [Akk *katamu*] ‘to cover’ developed the connotation ‘to marry.’”
3. Godfrey Rolles Driver and John C. Miles, eds., *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford, 1935; Repr., Aalen, DEU: Scientia Verlag, 1975), 409–11; Morris Jastrow, “An Assyrian Law Code,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 41 (February 1921): 24–25, 38, 42.
4. Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Neo-Assyrian Myth of Istar’s Descent and Resurrection* (Helsinki: Foundation of Finnish Assyriological Research, University Press, 2010), 39–40, 69, 88–89; Ishtar is a cultic goddess worshipped in many ancient cultures. Each season, Ishtar descends to the underworld to rescue her consort and saves all fertility of the earth, including plant, animal, and human; J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian on the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14–15; Mark Munn, *Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia: A Study of Sovereignty in Ancient Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 85–87.
5. Stephen D. Ricks and Shirley S. Ricks, “‘With Her Gauzy Veil before Her Face’: The Veiling of Women in Antiquity,” in *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner, Morgan D. Davis, and Carl Griffin (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2011), 356.
6. Ann Chamberlin, *A History of Women’s Seclusion in the Middle East: The Veil in the Looking Glass* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2006), 31: “[Veiling] is a tool, nay, a weapon indeed, in the preservation of ‘matriarchy.’”
7. Irene J. Winter, *On Art in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. H. E. Weippert et al., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), xi.

8. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "The Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks, 3rd. ed. (Washington, DC: Prentice Hall; Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011), 1; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?" in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 119–36, <http://rsc.byu.edu/>. There are many competing theories in scholarship that have yet to authenticate the location of the ancient civilization Ur. I have included Hoskisson's location on the map as Ur¹.
9. Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 23–24.
10. Faith O. Adebayo, "An Examination of Scriptural and Archaeological Evidences for the Historicity of Biblical Patriarchs," *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 3, no. 5 (2015): 362–65, ajournalonline.com; Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 23.
11. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 34–36: "The verb is broken off. Cf. the description of the night as the *kallatum kuttumtum*, 'the covered bride'—pointing incidentally to the custom of covering or veiling the bride."
12. Toorn, "The Significance of the Veil," 332.
13. Toorn, "The Significance of the Veil," 332.
14. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 2.
15. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 409–11.
16. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 409–11.
17. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 38.
18. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 42.
19. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 24–25.
20. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 34–36.
21. Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage: In Light of Comparative Evidence* (Finland: University of Helsinki, 2004), 1, 3, 5, 78; Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 34–35.
22. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
23. Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 32–33.
24. Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 32–33.
25. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 37. As noted by Jastrow, references in the ALC and OT are found with the boring of the ear as punishment, appearing to be a mark of slavery or servitude. In Exodus 21:6, "Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever." In addition, the Deuteronomic Code identifies the same marking of servitude in Deuteronomy 15:17: "Then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through

his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise.”

26. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
27. Plant, *Veiling the Mothers of Israel*. The Hebrew word translated as *vaile* in the KJV is (רָדַד) transliterated as *radhyd*. “This *vaile* is used in reference to a force deveiling in Song of Solomon. In Isaiah, it is condemned as vain fashion worn by Israelite women. Perhaps it is condemned because of its outside cultural influence, it represented unauthorized veiling, or it was deemed pretentious apparel. [From Brown BDB page 921] the root word (רָדַד) *radhad* means to beat out as in thinning metal work for an overlay. Based on the root word this veil may be a transparent or thin covering.”
28. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
29. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 409–11; Toorn, “Significance of the Veil,” 332.
30. Philippe Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods: From Cybele to the Virgin Mary*, trans. Lysa Hochroth (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xvii–xviii: “As archaeologists have discovered, ‘underneath the appearance of Hellenized art, there flows . . . profoundly and powerfully, a current of eastern inspiration.’ The structure of the . . . mountain, and the stepped altar have their most obvious parallels in Mesopotamia. . . . This is the epiphany of an eastern goddess, iconographically likened to the Hellenic Mother of gods. . . . Rather than remain prisoners of the choice between the diffusionist theory or hypothesizing a prehistoric heritage and the dream of a religious structure common to all humanity, it would be better to rely on history and specificity.”
31. Tuna Şare Ağtürk, “Headdress Fashions and Their Social Significance in Ancient Western Anatolia: The Seventh through Fourth Centuries BCE,” *Anadolu/Anatolia* 40 (2014): 57–58.
32. Rina Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith: Floors of Pagans, Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), ix: “I must admit that the desire to relate the field in its entirety sometimes came at the expense of a deep analysis of each of the discussed mosaics, but my broad outlook did enable me to trace the dynamic relationships among the communities in a way that a study dealing with a single religion could not provide.”; Winter, *On Art in the Ancient Near East*, ix, xi: “First and foremost, it is clear that art historical analysis is never independent of the archaeological data that produced the artifacts.”
33. Plant, *Veiling the Mothers of Israel*, forthcoming book.
34. Ağtürk, “Headdress Fashions,” 45–46. Ağtürk coins the phrases “language of headdress” and “language of dress” for the use of specific clothing on images to signify status, power, and authority.

35. Ricks and Ricks, "With Her Gauzy Veil," 356; Aġtürk, "Headdress Fashions," 57–58.
36. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Wionna Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 263–64; Loren R. Fisher and F. Brent Knutson, "An Enthronement Ritual At Ugarit," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 28, no. 3 (1969), 158: "All of this comparison shows that we should consider *yṭb* in the *yqtl* formation (what we would expect in a descriptive ritual), and that in these texts the meaning is usually 'to sit.' . . . In any case, we have enthronement."
37. Munn, *Mother of the Gods*, 2–4, 73–75, 85–87.
38. Ilse Seibert, *Woman in the Ancient Near East*, trans. Marianne Herzfeld (Leipzig; New York: Abner Schram, 1974), 12.
39. Lightfoot, *Lucian on the Syrian Goddess*, 13. The later Syrian goddess Atargatis has the combined attributes of the earlier goddess Ishtar and adaptations of Astart, Astoret, and Anat. Lightfoot supports William Albright's observation: "It is a remarkable tribute to the philological instincts that William Albright saw that in fact her name [Ishtar] is a compound of 'Attar (Phoenician 'Astart, Akkadian *Ištar*, Hebrew *'Ašteret read as 'Aštōret) and 'Anat (with the loss of -n- and addition of another feminine ending.)"
40. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 263–64; Fisher and Knutson, "An Enthronement Ritual At Ugarit," 158.
41. Lapinkivi, *Istar's Descent and Resurrection*, 38–41.
42. Aġtürk, "Headdress Fashions," 94.
43. Aġtürk, "Headdress Fashions," 47–52
44. Munn, *Mother of the Gods*, 85–86.
45. Munn, *Mother of the Gods*, 85–86.
46. Munn, *Mother of the Gods*, 86–87.
47. Plant, *Veiling the Mothers of Israel*, forthcoming book.
48. Jastrow, "Assyrian Law Code," 38; Toorn, "Significance of the Veil," 332.
49. Ricks and Ricks, "With Her Gauzy Veil," 356.
50. Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 12.
51. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 154–55.
52. Millar Burrows, "The Ancient Oriental Background of Hebrew Levirate Marriage," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 77 (1940): 5, <https://www-journals-uchicago-edu.erl.lib.byu.edu/doi/pdf/10.2307/1355235>: "Levirate marriage, i.e. brother-in-law marriage, as a means of securing a son for the departed husband was by no means unknown among other peoples than the Hebrews."
53. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 173.
54. Burrows, "Ancient Oriental Background," 2: "With regard to the end itself we may observe that the preservation of a man's 'name' involved

- at least three things. It involved the provision of an heir for his property, so that it might be kept in the family and in the normal line of inheritance. It involved also the continuation of his personal life in the life of his son, according to a deep-seated conception of the ancient world. To this may be added the idea of welfare in the hereafter as dependent upon the performance of ancestral rites by the descendants. For a man who left no son there would be nobody on earth to perform these rites.”
55. Lightfoot, *Lucian on the Syrian Goddess*, 13.
 56. Lapinkivi, *Istar's Descent and Resurrection*, 69.
 57. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 1071 (hereafter cited as *BDB*); Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient (The Yale University Press Pelican History of Art)* (London: Puffin, 1977), 198–99.
 58. Lapinkivi, *Sumerian Sacred Marriage*, 4: “Inanna’s [Sumerian fertility goddess] earlier name, Ninana(k), meant ‘Lady of the date clusters.’”
 59. Lapinkivi, *Sumerian Sacred Marriage*, 1, 3.
 60. Lapinkivi, *Sumerian Sacred Marriage*, 78; Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 34–35.
 61. Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 34–35.
 62. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
 63. Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 30.
 64. *BDB*, 858. The *tsa'if* as an opaque cloth is supported by a comparison with the marriage consummation narrative of Leah (see Genesis 29:23–25).
 65. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
 66. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
 67. Chamberlin, *History of Women's Seclusion*, 35–36: “[Tamar’s] veil makes perfect, ritual sense. . . . A man was to come to her not because she wore short skirts and heavy makeup and he was lured by her particular, *individual* beauty, but because in her facelessness, the sacred prostitute represented all women or the Woman. Union with her was not for personal gratification, but for the general welfare, fertility of the land, etc.”
 68. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:275 (hereafter cited as *HALOT*); Seibert, *Woman in Ancient Near East*, 36.
 69. *HALOT*, 3:1075.
 70. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, 407–9.
 71. Seibert, *Woman in Ancient Near East*, 34, 38: “The social position of the hierodule as representative and servant of the respective fertility-or love-goddess was no doubt originally much respected.”
 72. Seibert, *Woman in Ancient Near East*, 36.
 73. *BDB*, 744–45.

74. HALOT, 366, 504, 820: “עֵינַיִם [Enaim] probably corresponding to הַעֵינָם [Haenam] Jos 1534.” “עֵין + ām ‘place of the spring.’”
75. See Numbers 19:17 MT. “Running waters” (מַיִם חַיִּים) may also be translated as “living waters.”
76. Toorn, “Significance of the Veil,” 332; Jastrow, “Assyrian Law Code,” 38.
77. Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 12.