

in Arabic. This site has not been the object of any archaeological research.

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## Adultery

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### I. Ancient Near East

Adultery is consensual sexual intercourse between two persons, at least one of whom is betrothed or married to a third party; fornication is consensual sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons.

**1. Fornication.** In the ancient Near East generally, fornication was considered an act of aggression by the male; thus many of the laws on the subject are mistakenly said to refer to rape. The punishment for fornication, where the girl was free and a virgin, was marriage between the involved parties (*Sumerian Laws Exercise Tablet 7*; *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §55). The Sumerian laws are careful to avoid a potential entrapment situation by specifying that the parents did not know the girl was wandering about in the street and that the man realized he was dealing with a free woman (*Sumerian Laws Exercise Tablet 8*). In Assyria, the fornicator had also to pay damages and could not divorce his new wife (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §55). This was due to the fact that a girl's value as marriage partner was considerably reduced by the loss of her virginity, as in the *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar* §33 where a false accuser is fined for casting aspersions on the morality of an unmarried girl who has been proven (by physical examination) to be an intact virgin. If the girl's father wished, he could instead accept damages from the fornicator (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §55). If she was a slave girl, the fornicator did not have to marry her, but simply paid damages to her master (*Laws of Ur-Nammu* §8; *Laws of Eshnunna* §31).

**2. Adultery.** In Assyria, if a married man was found to have had intercourse with a virgin girl by force (and force was presumed from commission in a public place, including at night in a granary!), the outraged father was entitled to rape the offender's wife and take her for himself; he could also force his daughter on the miscreant. Even if the relation-

ship was consensual, the man still had to pay damages to her father. For the girl, no official punishment was envisioned even if she seduced the married man, although the father was allowed in that case to treat her as he chose (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §55–56).

For a married or betrothed woman, sleeping with a man other than her husband was adultery. It was also adultery to live with a man while waiting for a missing husband to be found or presumed dead, but only if the husband had provided food for his wife; if she was starving, she could safely move in with someone else (*Laws of Hammurabi* §133–34; cf. *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §36), although she might well find herself back with the first husband when he finally returned, with or without any children she had borne in the meantime (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §§36, 45; *Laws of Hammurabi* §§134–36; cf. *Laws of Eshnunna* §29–30). Refusal by the wife to consummate the marriage, accompanied by irresponsible behavior, was also treated like adultery (*Laws of Hammurabi* §142–43), as was going off on a long journey with a man to whom you were not related (*Middle Assyrian Laws* §22). Running away from one's husband to take refuge with a third party instead of going home to the relatives like a decent woman was not quite adultery; lesser punishments or no penalty at all were what was contemplated (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §24).

In ancient Egypt, adultery was an offense against the gods, "the abomination of Montu" (O. DM 439). Papyrus Westcar mentions drowning for the lover and burning followed by drowning for the woman. In practice, the community seems instead to have pressured the husband to cast out his wayward wife and to confiscate her bride-gift. Wives reputed to be adulteresses were allowed to clear themselves by oath. One husband had his wife's lover banished, with mutilation of the nose and ears. The adulterer would probably also be expelled from any religious association to which he belonged. Adultery on the part of the man seems to have been grounds for a court-ordered divorce.

By contrast, in Mesopotamia and among the Hittites, this was an offense against the woman's husband. If he caught the lovers in the act, he could kill them with impunity, provided he took the precaution of bringing in the neighbors as witnesses (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §15; *Hittite Laws* §197; cf. *Laws of Eshnunna* §28). If he chose instead to bring the miscreants to justice, the punishment was death (*Laws of Ur-Nammu* §6–7; *Laws of Eshnunna* §§26, 28; *Laws of Hammurabi* §§129–30, 133, 143; *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §§12–13, 15; *Hittite Laws* §197–98). In Babylonia, the guilty pair got tied together and thrown into the river or, in any case, the woman was drowned (*Laws of Hammurabi* §§129, 133, 143) unless the husband had been killed for the lover, in which case the woman was

impaled (*Laws of Hammurabi* §153). The infliction of the death penalty was, however, at the discretion of the outraged husband. He could do to her “as he pleased” (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §§14–16, 22–23; cf. *Laws of Hammurabi* §129; *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §24). The *Hittite Laws* §198, moreover, allows the king to mitigate the punishment where the husband demands the death penalty. We see from these laws that there was, in Mesopotamia and Hatti, no perceived public interest in seeing to it that erring wives were punished. Where adultery is considered a threat to the moral order, either the community must intervene to inflict public punishment on adulterers or the husband must be forced to take what society considers appropriate action, e.g., to divorce his wife.

The husband was allowed either to impose a lesser penalty, as, e.g., cutting off her nose (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §15) or ears (*ibidem* §24) or to see to it that his erring wife was not punished at all. (*Laws of Hammurabi* §129; *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §§15, 23; *Hittite Laws* §198). If the wife got a lesser punishment, so too did the lover, if castration and disfigurement may be considered a lesser punishment (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §15). If the husband wished to spare his wife, however, the guilty lover had to be spared as well. (*Laws of Hammurabi* §129; *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §§15–16, 22–23; *Hittite Laws* §198). This regulation prevented the husband from any sort of collusion with his wife, say for the purpose of getting revenge on an enemy as apparently happened relatively frequently in Greece, where differential punishments for the guilty parties were allowed. For an Eblaite in Abarsal, man’s matters were simplified considerably by charging a set fee for sleeping with another man’s wife (ARET 13: 5:61–63).

It was also possible for either of the two guilty parties to establish the other as being at fault. If the lover could show that he had no idea his partner was married to somebody else, he escaped punishment. (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §14; cf. §13, 16, 22–23; *Laws of Ur-Nammu* §7). It helped his plea if the incident took place in a tavern or on the street or in the house of a procuress and not in the man’s own house – in the former cases he might be excused for assuming that she was a prostitute (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §13 vs. §14; cf. §23). A man who took another man’s wife on a trip (unless he was a close relative) owed compensation to the woman’s husband; if he knew she was married and was convicted of sleeping with her, he was treated as an adulterer (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §22).

If the married or betrothed woman could prove that she had been raped, her paramour was killed and she went free (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §12; *Hittite Laws* §197; *Laws of Ur-Nammu* §6; *Laws of Eshnunna* §26; *Laws of Hammurabi* §130). Trying to define the circumstances under which the woman’s

claim of rape will or will not be believed in the face of the man’s denial is one of the most vexed problems of any legal system. By this standard, ancient legal systems fare comparatively well. The adulteress was home free if she was still a virgin (*Laws of Ur-Nammu* §6; *Laws of Eshnunna* §26; *Laws of Hammurabi* §130) or if the incident occurred in a public place (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §12) where she was seen to resist her attacker (*ibidem*) or out in the countryside (*Hittite Laws* §197) or in a third party’s house, even if that person turned out to be a procuress, provided that she complained about the incident immediately afterward (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §23). If she went into the man’s house at his invitation (*ibidem* §13) or invited the man into her own house (*Hittite Laws* §197; cf. *Laws of Ur-Nammu* §7; *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §16), it was her fault and she was the one to be punished. If she led him on initially, then tried to stop, and things then got out of hand, both parties received the same punishment (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §16).

In the case of a married woman, where there was no direct evidence of guilt, the woman was allowed to clear herself by an oath (*Laws of Hammurabi* §131) or by the water ordeal, depending on the strength of suspicion against her (*Laws of Ur-Nammu* §14; *Laws of Hammurabi* §132). The ordeal was reserved for cases of unsubstantiated accusation (*Laws of Ur-Nammu* §14) or general suspicion on the part of the community (*Laws of Hammurabi* §132) – an oath was sufficient if only the husband was suspicious (*Laws of Hammurabi* §131). Since the ordeal in Mesopotamia found the floater innocent, this should not have proved too difficult for any woman with an easy conscience. Accusations of adultery had to be made to stick; if the accuser had no corroborating witness, a river ordeal might have to be resorted to (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §17) – the penalty for false accusation ranged from monetary compensation (*Laws of Ur-Nammu* §14; *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar* §33) in the early law collections to death in the later ones (*Laws of Hammurabi* §3). Malicious gossip short of actual formal accusation could get a man a beating and public humiliation in the form of the loss of half his hair (*Laws of Hammurabi* §127). The corresponding Assyrian law (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §18) provides for compensation, shaving, a beating, and doing the king’s work for a month.

If a man took advantage of somebody else’s wife who happened to be living in his house, it was treated as a sort of rape – the woman went unpunished, whereas the penalty for the man ranged from monetary compensation to the woman (*Laws of Hammurabi* §156) to loss of inheritance (*ibidem* §158) to death by drowning (*ibidem* §155). Other forms of assault by men on women were also severely punished – you could lose a lip for kissing an unwilling victim, and a finger for “treating her like a child” (*Middle Assyrian Laws A* §9).

**3. Procuring.** Procuring was also risky – the penalty for a woman who acted as a procuress for a married woman was the same as that imposed by the husband on his wife, unless the married woman did not know that she was being invited into the procuress' house to have intercourse with a strange man, in which case the penalty for the procuress was death, regardless of what the husband did or did not do to his wife (*ibidem* §23).

Naturally, there was no punishment if a woman was not caught. Besides being discreet, the ancient Mesopotamian adulteress could employ birth control (anal intercourse being obviously the most foolproof method, [BRM 4:12:32; Boissier, DA 220:10; CT 31:44 iv 11]) or induce an abortion (risking a death penalty – *Middle Assyrian Laws A* §53). If all else failed, she could always look upon the face of her sleeping husband and pray to Ishtar: "Make my child look like him!" (BRM 4:12:37 par. Boissier, DA 221:15).

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## II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Adultery in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is understood as illicit sexual intercourse between a married or betrothed woman (a status which usually attached when the bride-price has been paid) and a man other than her husband or intended. By contrast, a husband was not bound to monogamy as was his wife (e.g., Gen 38:15–16); he could marry other women and have sexual liaisons with other women so long as they were not married or betrothed to another man, although some passages do warn against straying from one's wife (Prov 5:15–20; Mal 2:14–16). Adultery, therefore, is fundamentally a violation of the husband's right of exclusive sexual-reproductive access to his wife. Even though the pertinent passages seem to delineate a clear system of law, it cannot be ascertained historically to what extent the provisions of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament reflect established Israelite law and its actual application.

Adultery was prohibited by the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18) and by several other legal passages (Lev 18:20; 20:10; Deut 22:22). It is also a significant theme in the biblical narratives (e.g., Gen 12:20; 26; 38; 39; 2 Sam 11), in prophetic texts as a metaphor for the disobedient people of Israel (Jer 3:8 passim; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 2–4), in the wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 5–7; Job 24:15; 31:1, 9–12), and in the Deutero-Canonical works (Wis 14:22–31; Sir 23:22–27; 25:16–26).

Leviticus 20:10 and Deut 22:22, respectively, frame the general principle: "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death"; and "If a man is discovered to have lain with a married woman, they shall both die: the man who sleeps with the woman and the woman. You shall eliminate evil from Israel." These provisions are extended to inchoately married women in Exod 22:16–17 and Deut 22:23–25, 28–30. The latter passages instruct that a betrothed woman must cry out that she is being taken by force to avoid capital punishment, although her attacker is apparently guilty of adultery whether or not she cried out. If she is not betrothed, however, her attacker need only pay a bride-price and marry her; neither shall die. Genesis 38:24, where Tamar is subject to the death penalty for being pregnant, also seems to recognize adultery by an inchoately married woman – here, because she is inchoately married to Shelah under the levirate marriage law. The adultery laws do not apply in the same way to a betrothed slave woman (Lev 19:20–22). Neither the man nor the woman would be executed. Rather, the paramour would be required to pay the owner compensation and bring a guilt offering, presumably because the slave woman is assigned in marriage by her owner and the family is not the recipient of a bride-price (cf. Exod 21:8).

Although inchoately married women were plainly exempt from the adultery laws when a man had forced himself upon her (Deut 22:23–25), scholars have disagreed as to whether a fully-married woman could be equally exempt in such a case. The great majority argue that she is. The slave woman's consent seems to be irrelevant.

Where a husband suspected his wife of adultery but had no concrete evidence, he could have brought his wife to a priest for trial, wherein she had to undergo a type of ordeal, the *šōtā* ritual (Num 5:11–30). During it, she ingested a bitter potion of holy water and tabernacle earth, mixed in an earthen vessel, and she took an oath. If she were guilty, the Lord would make her "womb discharge, [her] uterus miscarry" (author's translation; 5:21b–22a). A small minority of scholars suggest that the potion is an abortifacient.

The death penalty reflects that adultery is one of the high culpability crimes (cf. Jer 7:9). Adultery is called an abomination (Lev 18:26; Ezek 22:11), a "great sin" (Gen 20:9), and a "great evil and sin against God" (Gen 39:9). As such, it is subject to divine punishment (Ezek 16:38; Mal 3:5). Both male and female adulterers were considered ritually defiled (e.g., Lev 18:20–24; Num 5:13; Ezek 18:6; 33:26), as was the land of Israel (Lev 18:20, 24–25). Deut 22:22 commands the community to "purge the evil from Israel" (cf. Lev 18:24–30; Sus 28–44; Sir 23:23–24); hence, the community at

large was subject to divine punishment, such as war, famine, and plague, for ignoring the crime (Lev 26:14–41; Deut 28:15–68). The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament does not reveal why this crime is so grave, but one might suggest that Israelite patriarchal ideology and patrilineal inheritance undergird the provisions (cf. Sir 23:22–23).

The means of punishment varies among the biblical texts. Stoning is arguably the method of execution in Deuteronomy because of the action of Deut 22:24 (cf. Ezek 16:40; 23:46–47). Burning is mentioned in Gen 38:24. The prophetic texts, where adultery is used metaphorically, mention lesser punishments, such as humiliation and stripping (e.g., Jer 13:26–27; Hos 2:3) and mutilation (Ezek 23:25). Scholars have argued that divorce (Jer 3:8; Hos 2:4; Prov 6:32–35) and monetary damages (Lev 19:20–22; Job 31:11) are also possible punishments. Nonetheless, whether any lesser penalties were allowed by election of the cuckolded husband is a strongly debated issue. The resolution of this question may turn on the “Slandered Bride” passage of Deut 22:13–21. B. Wells has demonstrated that, only if the husband has the right to elect lesser penalties, do these passages make any sense in light of the false penalty provisions of Deut 19:16–21 (Wells: 41–72).

It would seem that, if lesser punishments were allowed, the wife and paramour would have to suffer the same punishment to avoid collusion of the wife and husband against a paramour, as happens in Genesis, where Abraham and Isaac pass off Sarah and Rebecca as their unmarried sisters on three separate occasions (Gen 12:10–20; 20; 26:6–11). In this situation, the paramour would suffer no human penalty; yet, divine punishment was possible (Gen 12:17; 20:3, 17–18; 26:10). Proverbs also warns extensively against the seductions of the adulterous woman (2:16–19; 5:1–14; 6:24–35; 7:5–27; cf. 30:20). Such collusion may be one of the many reasons that the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament text warns men to be wary of women who seduce. Understanding that the penalties must be equal for both parties also makes sense of the specific language to that effect in both Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22.

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### III. Judaism

■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval and Later Judaism

#### A. Rabbinic Judaism

In rabbinic Judaism, adultery is defined as sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man who is not her husband, a sin punishable by death. This definition is a continuation of biblical law, in which adultery is a capital crime (Lev 20:10). Rabbinic discussions of adultery also continue biblical law insofar as they provide for a distinctive form of capital punishment (i.e., burning) for a priest’s daughter who commits adultery (Lev 21:9), and also include betrothed women among those who can be liable (Deut 22:24). Rabbinic law excludes those who have intercourse under duress (*SifDev* 22:26; *bKet* 51b), as does biblical law (Deut 22:24–27).

The rabbinic sources, however, elaborate upon the biblical prescriptions in a number of areas. Some of these involve the expansion of categories of inclusion or exclusion; e.g., rabbinic law provides for the consideration of adultery as involuntary in the case of mistaken identity (*bKet* 2a). More significant is the addition of legal requirements to regularize the process of accusation and conviction. Rabbinic literature establishes the need for a warning to the potential adulterers before they commit the sin, and requires witnesses to the act (*bSan* 40b–41a). These additions are consistent with rabbinic innovation of legal procedures, as well as with rabbinic avoidance of the application of capital punishment (*mMak* 1:10).

There are only two references in rabbinic literature to Jews putting adulterers or adulteresses to death (*mSan* 7:2 and *bSan* 52b), both of which refer to the adulterous daughter of a priest. In the major-

ity of other rabbinic references to punishments for adultery, the focus is on prohibiting the woman from returning to her husband by mandating her divorce (*mNed* 11:12), and on keeping the woman from receiving her marriage settlement (*mSot* 1:4; 4:1–3; *mKet* 7:6; *tSot* 5:1–3; Satlow: 169–72).

While defining and delimiting legal procedures, the rabbis also expand upon the rhetorical and metaphorical power of adultery. In the Bible, the word *ma'al* is used to refer both to a woman's betrayal of her husband (Num 5:12), and to Israel's betrayal of God (e.g., Num 5:6; 31:16; Lev 26:40). Moreover, many prophetic passages use a woman's faithlessness to her husband as a metaphor for Israel's faithlessness to God (Hos 2:4–22; Jer 3:8–9; Ezek 23:37). The rabbis follow these linguistic and thematic associations to focus on the comparison between adultery and idolatry (e.g., *TanB Našo* 9). Both are seen as grievous sins. In particular, the rabbis develop the idea that adultery, like idolatry, threatens to undermine society as a whole. This may show influence of Greco-Roman ideas concerning the sexual body and the body politic (Grushcow: 258–59). One example is a midrash on the Ten Commandments, in which it is stated that one who commits adultery potentially violates each one of these essential rules (*TanB Našo* 4). This midrash can also be related to the rabbinic associations of adultery not only with idolatry, but also with murder, theft, and shame (Satlow: 140–41). The expanded significance of adultery is also apparent in the rabbinic innovation that the behavior of the husband may have implications for the punishment of his wife (*mSot* 9:9; *SifBem* 21; *ySot* 9:9, 24a).

The dual approach of expanding upon the symbolic importance of adultery and limiting the applicability of the biblical laws through an emphasis on legislation and due process can be seen throughout rabbinic literature. This approach is particularly notable in the most detailed passage related to adultery in both the Bible and rabbinic sources, the case of the suspected wife (Num 5:11–31), which is discussed in the mishnaic, toseftan, and talmudic tractate *Sotah*. Rabbinic interpretation of the *sotah* ritual shows the simultaneous effort to delimit accusations of adultery and the application of biblical law alongside the expansion of a more rhetorical condemnation of the sin (Grushcow: 265–67).

The explicit disappearance of the *sotah* ritual from practice, as recorded by the tannaim (*mSot* 9:9), is worth noting. It is not clear whether this was an ideologically-motivated, deliberate change, or an historical occurrence later associated with rabbinic leaders and interpretations (Grushcow: 233–50). Although the practice of the *sotah* ritual disappeared in the rabbinic period, its importance in rabbinic discourse condemning adultery contin-

ued throughout that period. It is evidence of the general significance of adultery as a rhetorical theme in the rabbinic period, beyond questions of actual cases and issues of jurisprudence.

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## B. Medieval and Later Judaism

In Judaism adultery refers to sexual relations between a man, married or single, and a married woman (or a woman bound in some other way by halakhah [Jewish law] to a particular man). Thus, a married man's sexual involvements with single women, Jewish or Gentile, while morally problematic, are not adulterous. This gender inequity reflects the patriarchal contexts of biblical and rabbinic Judaism, as well as the importance placed on purity of lineage; a man wanted to be sure that his wives' children were also his own. Fear of adultery led to strictures on women's free movement beyond the home, the requirement that modest women be veiled outside the house, and efforts to restrict women's contacts with men.

In medieval Muslim environments Jewish religious and community ideals continued to dictate that women should remain at home. Many Jewish men in the Muslim world appear to have had more than one wife, as well as sexual relations with other women, including female servants in the home. While marriages were often unhappy and divorce not uncommon, accusations of adultery against wives appear rarely in sources from this milieu.

In medieval and early modern Christian Europe, monogamy was the rule and women were active in daily social, economic, and religious life. An 11th-century *taqqanah* (rabbinic amendment) forbidding polygyny for Jews in Christian countries is attributed to R. Gershom ben Judah (ca. 960–1028); he is also credited with the pronouncement that no woman could be divorced against her will. Jewish women's high status is also indicated by their large dowries. Jewish women played a vital and often autonomous part in their family's economic lives as merchants and money lenders; divorces instigated by financially independent women who were not prepared to tolerate their husbands' frequent absences or abusive behavior were frequent. Women often forced these divorces by refusing to visit the ritual bath or otherwise refusing sexual relations. This high level of tension between men and women is reflected in several sorts of primary documents.

The pietistic authors of the 12th-century *Sefer Hasidim* (Book of the Pious) focus on illicit encounters, whether real or imagined, which include Jewish men having sexual contact with single and married Jewish women (both minors and adults), Jewish and Christian maidservants, and other

Christian women. These encounters are presented as temptations of everyday life and the pietistic response is to set up as many barriers as possible to men's contacts with women, including women of their own families.

In an environment where marriages were arranged at early ages, men undertook long business trips, and members of extended families, including in-laws, cousins, nephews, and nieces, lived in close quarters with unrelated servants, illicit sexual relationships probably occurred. Moreover, Jewish wives brought large dowries into their marriages, rendering divorce difficult and expensive, and married women engaged independently in commerce, trade, and money lending, mostly with Gentile clients. Jewish popular culture sanctioned mingling of the sexes. An 11th-century rabbinic ordinance forbade "men and women to intermingle [at a wedding] whether at the meal, at the dancing, or at any part [of the celebration] ... for at a happy occasion, especially, the sensual passions are aroused" (*Sefer ha-Pardes*: no.149; cited in Biale: 60), although such rulings appear to have been little heeded. The mid-14th-century Eleazar of Mainz advises his sons to behave "continently," "avoiding mixed bathing and mixed dancing and all frivolous conversation, while my daughters ought not to speak much with strangers, nor jest nor dance with them" (Abrahams: 211).

Adultery figures in legal writings, as well. The responsa of R. Meir of Rothenburg (d. 1293) contain a number of queries in which men accuse their wives of adultery, sometimes with Jews and sometimes with Gentiles; in at least one case a wife admits adultery. In almost every instance, R. Meir rejects the veracity of the evidence and rules against the right of the husband to divorce his wife without returning her *ketubbah* (contracted financial settlement), even in a case where a woman bore a child 12 months after her husband's departure. R. Meir's evident motivations were to preserve the public sanctity of the family; to deter men from making false accusations in order to rid themselves cheaply of unloved wives; and to discourage women from engaging in or pretending to engage in adulterous behavior in order to instigate a divorce.

In Spain and Italy sexual mores, particularly among wealthy acculturated Jews were often far from halakhic norms; archival records indicate that both men and women were involved in adulterous relationships. Accusations of adultery also figure in divorce cases in early modern and modern Eastern Europe although here, too, they may have reflected other family tensions and anxieties (Freeze: 182).

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#### IV. Greco-Roman Antiquity

Greco-Roman legislation regarding adultery (Gk. *μοιχεία*, Lat. *adulterium*) focuses on the misdemeanors of married citizen women and their lovers rather than on the behavior of married men. A married woman is guilty of adultery if she has sex with any man other than her husband, but a man is guilty of adultery only if his lover is another man's wife (Gardner: 127). If a married man has affairs with slaves or prostitutes, that is not usually regarded as adultery. A married woman, on the other hand, is expected to be completely faithful to her husband in order to ensure the paternity of all the children born to her. The fear of introducing another man's child into the agnatic family is central to an understanding of Greco-Roman ideas about adultery.

The level of anxiety felt about the threat of adulterous wives can be understood from the prevalence of this theme in myth. Clytemnestra (who kills her husband after taking a lover) and Helen (who causes the Trojan War through her adultery with Paris) are two key examples. The need for a deadly response to adultery is a prominent motif. In the *Odyssey* the protagonist slaughters all the men wooing his wife although they have had no sexual contact with her. He makes it clear that their intent to take another man's wife is sufficient to warrant this response.

In classical Athens too men felt a need to watch over and protect their wives in order to ensure their fidelity. There are some indications that Athenian men attempted to sequester their wives, although this tactic was probably not very successful (Christ: 524, Roy: 12). Pericles' citizenship law (451/450 BCE) required that Athenian citizens were born of a citizen father and mother, further increasing anxiety concerning the paternity and legitimacy of children. Legislation requiring a man to divorce an adulterous wife and return her to her father rather than forgive her is probably related to the introduction of Pericles' law. The divorced wife would have faced an uncertain future, deprived of her civic rights and probably unable to remarry.

Christ (525) has argued that the classical Athenians would have regarded Odysseus' revenge against the suitors as a noble ideal. This helps to explain why Athenian legislation permitted a man to kill an adulterer caught in the act (Demosthenes, *Aristocr.* 53–55; Lysias 1.30). Euphiletus, the speaker

of Lysias 1 (*On the Murder of Eratosthenes*), claims to have taken advantage of this law when he killed Eratosthenes, his wife's lover. As seen in this case, the victim's relatives might still be expected to prosecute the husband to test his claims that the killing was legal. Such a trial took place at the Delphinion (Demosthenes, *Aristocr.* 74).

Other possible responses to adultery at Athens included the prosecution or public humiliation of the adulterer. It was also possible for the husband to accept compensation from the adulterer. Roy (13–14) has argued that the payment of compensation would have been a common response in cases of adultery.

Treggiari (275) has suggested that accepting compensation would have been a common response in early Rome too. The sources also mention the castration, flogging and anal rape of the adulterer. McGinn (340) has claimed that a husband might also kill his wife and her lover if he caught them together, but there is a lack of actual examples to support this claim. It is also possible that the woman's father would customarily have had the right to kill his daughter and her lover (Treggiari: 272–74).

Adultery was regarded as a domestic affair at Rome until the introduction of the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* by Augustus in 18 or 17 BCE which made adultery a criminal offence. The law on adultery was preserved through to the 6th century CE. The newly formed court for adultery was called the *quaestio perpetua de adulteriis*. The law allowed anyone to prosecute, although the husband had priority within 60 days (Treggiari: 287). However, a wife could not prosecute her husband for adultery.

On conviction severe penalties were put into place by the law. A woman lost one third of her property and half her dowry, while her lover lost half his property. The adulterous pair lost the right to give testimony in court and the man lost his right to witness a will. The guilty parties were also exiled to separate islands (*relegatio in insulam*). A convicted woman was not permitted to remarry, so lovers in adultery were unable to establish a legitimate marriage. Husbands who failed to divorce an adulterous wife were subject to complicity (*lenocinium*) with the same penalties for adulterers (McGinn: 341, Treggiari: 288–90).

The *lex Iulia* also laid down rules about the right to kill. A husband could kill an adulterer of certain status (a slave, convicted criminal, gladiator, etc.) if he caught him in the act in the matrimonial house. If he killed another type of man he could be prosecuted for homicide, but it seems likely he would have been treated leniently. The woman's father could kill both the adulterer and his daughter together in his house or his son-in-law's house, but he had to kill both or neither. The husband could not kill his wife, but the "crime of passion" was seen as a mitigating factor (Treggiari: 282–85).

The reasons behind the introduction of the legislation are much debated. McGinn (340) believes the law aimed to suppress undesirable sexual relations, while Treggiari (292–93) has argued that Augustus hoped to deter potential adulterers with his tough new rules. The evidence suggests, though, that the legislation was not very successful at achieving these aims.

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## V. New Testament

New Testament uses the noun *μοιχεία* for "adultery" (Matt 15:9; Mark 7:22; John 8:3), two verbs, *μοιχεύω* (Matt 5:27, 32; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 16:18; 18:20; John 8:4; Rom 2:22; 13:9; Jas 2:11; Rev 2:22) and *μοιχάω* (Matt 19:9; Mark 10:11–12) for "to commit adultery," and the nouns, *μοιχός* (Luke 18:11; 1 Cor 6:9; Heb 13:4) and *μοιχαλίσ* (Rom 7:3; Jas 4:4; 2 Pet 2:14) for "adulterer" and "adulteress," the latter serving also as an adjective (Matt 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38).

Normally an act of adultery was understood as an offence by a man or a woman against the husband of the woman. It was also an offence against God's commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18), a prohibition reaffirmed in Jesus' response to the rich man seeking eternal life (Mark 10:19; Matt 19:18; Luke 18:20). Luke reverses the order to place adultery before murder as in Deut 5 LXX (so also Jas 2:11).

Adultery features among lists of sins in Luke 18:11, Heb 13:4, and in Rom 13:9 and Mark 7:22, both reflecting the order of Exod 20 LXX (whereas Matt 15:19 reverts to the Hebrew order). Following that order, Matthew depicts Jesus expounding the prohibition in the second antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:27–28). Matching the shift from murder to hateful attitude in the first, the second antithesis shifts the focus from adultery to adulterous attitude: "everyone who looks at a woman (someone else's wife)" *πρός τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτήν* (lit. "with a view to [sexually] desiring her"). This reflects the prohibition against coveting/desiring one's neighbor's wife (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21). The prepositional clause introduced by *πρός* ("with a view to") could indicate result ("with the result that"), leading to the idea that looking at women is dangerous and so women are dangerous, even responsible for men's sin and therefore to be controlled. But elsewhere Matthew uses the construction to express purpose (Matt 6:1; 13:30; 23:5), its likely sense here. Focus on lustful

or adulterous eyes was common (e.g., *Damascus Document* II, 16), reflected also in 2 Pet 2:14.

Matthew's infancy narrative (Matt 1:18–25) presumes that Joseph thought Mary had committed the equivalent of adultery during their betrothal and therefore that he must do the equivalent of divorcing her, either through public shaming or privately. Deuteronomy 22:21–24 prescribe death by stoning as for adultery (cf. John 8:5). Matthew's story suggests a less severe application of the law, but certainly the end of the marital relationship. This appears also to be assumed in his version of Jesus' exposition of divorce, found in the third antithesis, and in the later discussion of divorce, in both of which Jesus forbids divorce except for sexual wrongdoing (*παρεκτός λόγου πορνείας* Matt 5:32; *μη ἐπι πορνεία* Matt 19:9). *Πορνεία*, like its Hebrew equivalent, *zēnūt*, derives from language used of prostitution, but had come to refer to illicit sexual relations in general, including adultery, so is not to be narrowed to prostitution nor to incest which would automatically make a marriage invalid. The exception reflects rigorous interpretation of the ground for divorce in Deut 24:1 *'erwat dābār* ("shameful thing") in contrast to lenient views. Matthew's sayings do not ameliorate Jesus' prohibition. Rather they spell out what it assumed, namely, that adultery (the primary focus of *πορνεία*, here) required divorce, a position also required in Augustus' innovative law, the *Lex Julia*. Except for 1 Cor 7:10–11 the divorce sayings include the accusation of adultery against any remarriage by divorced persons (Matt 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18), on the basis that the original marriage cannot be annulled (so Mark 10:9) and so remains intact. Matthew 5:32 charges the man with causing his wife to commit adultery, assuming she would be forced to remarry. Mark 10:11–12, which reflects the possibility of woman initiating divorce, is unusual in declaring that the man commits adultery "against her." It may reflect an Aramaic expression meaning "with" and refer to the adulteress. More likely it refers to the first wife as someone wronged and corresponds to Roman sentiments about marriage as friendship and loyalty, a notion independently reflected in Sirach's comment about a man's adultery against his marriage bed (Sir 23:18).

In circles which rejected polygyny, including those attracted by Greco-Roman ideals, adultery and divorce were likely to become more acute. The predominant focus was on female virginity and fidelity, and on men's wrongdoing only in terms of adultery, overlooking concubines, female slaves, and sexual relations with unmarried women and prostitutes. Early Christians belonged in those Jewish circles where at the least the latter two were forbidden. Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery turns the focus from her to all, in the context of an act of forgiveness (John 8:3–11).

His strictures on divorce would have been relevant to Herod Antipas' behavior, though John the Baptist's concern was incest law (Mark 6:18), not divorce, let alone, marrying a niece. Jesus may have faced such issues in that context.

Building on biblical precedents in the prophets and elsewhere, New Testament writers use adultery to describe unfaithfulness to God. "Adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38 par. Matt 12:39 and 16:4) seems formulaic. Paul depicts the bond with Christ as not adulterous, since the bond to the Law had ceased (Rom 7:3). James attacks friendship with the world as adulterous (Jas 4:4) and Revelation similarly, the following of Jezebel (Rev 2:22).

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## VI. Christianity

- Greek and Latin Patristics and Orthodox Churches
- Medieval Times and Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America

### A. Greek and Latin Patristics and Orthodox Churches

In the Hebrew Bible and in Roman law, adultery was defined as sexual relations between a married or betrothed woman and a man who was not her husband. In this case, both the man and the woman were considered guilty of adultery. If a married man had sex with an unmarried woman who was not his wife, however, this was not considered adultery. Adultery could only be committed with or by a married woman. It constituted a violation of a husband's right to have sole sexual possession of his wife and presented the risk of corrupting the family line with illegitimate offspring.

Jewish law and Roman law instituted harsh penalties for both parties involved in adultery. Leviticus 20:10 and Deut 22:22 prescribed the death penalty for adulterers, although it is unclear how frequently it was imposed. In Roman law a husband could execute his wife and her lover if he found the adulterers in his house. At the dawn of the early Christian era the emperor Augustus initiated legislation to suppress adultery as part of a broader initiative to strengthen the institution of legitimate marriage. Under the *lex Julia de adulteriis* (18 BCE) adultery became a criminal offense punishable by exile and confiscation of property; husbands were also required to divorce their adulterous wives or risk prosecution for pandering (*lenocinium*).



Against the background of these Jewish and Roman traditions, the teachings of Jesus and Paul preserved in the New Testament created some difficulties for early Christians. One issue was the question of whether a person guilty of adultery could be granted forgiveness and remain a member of the church; another issue was whether marriage after a divorce constituted adultery. On both questions we find considerable diversity among early Christians.

Although the example of Jesus offering forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11, a passage missing from many manuscripts and unknown to the Greek Fathers) might have encouraged a generous attitude towards sinners, early Christians took adultery very seriously as a moral failure. The earliest discussion is found in the *Shepherd* of Hermas, written at Rome early in the 2nd century CE. According to Hermas, if a Christian discovered his wife in adultery, he had to separate from her as long as she refused to repent. But the man was not allowed to marry another woman after the divorce or else he would be guilty of adultery. He had to remain unmarried and be prepared to take back his wife, if she repented; but repentance was allowed only once. Hermas applied this ruling to the wife as well as to the husband (*Herm. Mand.* 4.29).

By the early 3rd century CE a more rigorous discipline was in place in many churches. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the mid-3rd century CE, noted that certain of his predecessor bishops in North Africa refused to grant “peace” (i.e., reconciliation) to adulterers, but he clearly supported the practice of allowing penance and reconciliation (*Ep.* 55.21). The more rigorous position was supported by Origen (*Or.* 28) and by Tertullian (*Pud.* 2.14, 19.27), who argued that adultery was one of the “mortal” sins (ἄμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον) mentioned in 1 John 5:16. Both Tertullian and Origen acknowledged, however, that some bishops were granting absolution for adultery. At the same time in Rome, Bishop Callistus caused scandal among the rigorists by claiming the authority to remit the sin of adultery (Hippolytus, *Haer.* ix.12). But the rigorist position was slow to die out; e.g., around 305 CE the Spanish council of Elvira decreed lifelong excommunication for a woman who committed adultery (canon 8). By the end of the 4th century CE, however, it was common for bishops to grant absolution to adulterous men and women after a requisite period of penance (e.g., Basil, *Ep.* 199.34).

If diverse penalties for adultery were imposed in the early church, there was even greater variation on the question of what constituted adultery. The problem lay in the legacy of the New Testament on divorce and remarriage. Unlike the Hebrew Bible and Roman law, which allowed divorce and remarriage, teaching attributed to Jesus in the New Tes-

tament expressly forbade both men and women to divorce and remarry (Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18). But the situation was complicated by Matt 19:9, which included an exception in the case of a wife’s adultery: “Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery” (cf. Matt 5:32). The most obvious reading of the Matthean exception is that a man who divorced his wife because of her unfaithfulness was allowed to remarry, although a similar exception was not stated in the case of a woman whose husband engaged in extra-marital relations. In 1 Cor 7:10–11. Paul had repeated as a command of the Lord “that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” Since Paul did not explicitly forbid a man to remarry after divorcing his wife, as he did the woman, some Christians believed this supported the Matthean exception and allowed remarriage to a man whose wife was guilty of adultery (Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in 1 Cor* 7:11).

But many early Christians were troubled by the apparent double-standard enshrined in the biblical texts, as well as by the fact that adultery was customarily defined as a crime committed by or with a married woman and did not necessarily apply to a man’s extra-marital affairs. Early in the 4th century CE Lactantius argued that any extra-marital activity, even on the part of the husband, constituted “adultery” (*Inst.* vi.23). By the late 4th century CE Western Christians, such as Ambrose and Augustine, applied the same principle to remarriage after divorce: even after divorce for a legitimate reason (i.e., adultery), remarriage was forbidden and considered adultery (Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 8.5, 7; Augustine, *De coniugiis adulterinis*, passim). By thus defining marriage as indissoluble, these Western theologians simultaneously redefined “adultery” to include remarriage after divorce. Eastern Christian tradition solved the problem of inequality by allowing remarriage after divorce to both men and women.

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### B. Medieval Times and Reformation Era

In medieval theological literature, adultery was discussed primarily in terms of its legal consequences. Most hotly debated, in view of the fornication clause (μὴ ἐπι πορνείᾳ) in the dominical saying on divorce in Matt 19:9, was the issue of separation or divorce and, by implication, the possibility of remarriage after committing adultery. Official papal or conciliar decrees never accepted non-incestu-

ous adultery as admissible grounds for divorce and remarriage. Penitential books (from the late 5th to the early 11th cent.) prescribed a variety of punishments for sins like adultery, depending on the social standing and the constellation of persons involved. Times of penance could range from one to fourteen years, as in the case of bishops. Some penitential books required separation from the innocent partner during the time of penance, and some very few early books even allowed remarriage, if only for the innocent partner. From the 8th century onwards, at the latest, the indissolubility of marriage, even in spite of adultery, became the norm.

Early collections of church law, which claimed ecclesiastical jurisdiction over all sexual issues and generally bore witness to a markedly negative view of human sexuality, devoted much attention to the public legal consequences of adultery. These ranged from excommunication to humiliating public punishments such as lashings, the pillory and even exile. All of these law collections concurred in not permitting the husband to kill his wife if she was caught in the adulterous act, partially with reference to John 8:3–11, whereas many civil codes left lethal action on the part of the husband unpunished.

In the ten *casus* devoted to marriage and sexuality in his *Decretum* (Secunda Pars, Casus 27–36), Gratian (d. before 1160) deemed husband and wife equally liable for adultery and demanded five years of penance as punishment. They were allowed no intercourse during this period. If the innocent partner disregarded this command, he or she also became liable to church penalties. Concerning the controversial question as to whether two adulterers may marry after the death of the deceived spouse, Gratian decided that this was only possible if none of the adulterers had contributed to the spouse's death, the assigned penance had been fulfilled, and they had not previously promised marriage to one another.

The decretists valued intention more highly. Therefore, only someone consciously committing adultery could be held responsible for it; otherwise, it was a merely fornication. The decretists also gave the innocent partner the right to separate; the later development of a more sophisticated ecclesiastical jurisdiction, however, meant that this separation could only take place through a church court. The right of separation did not imply the permission to remarriage as long as the other partner was alive. Although women and men were treated equally from a theoretical standpoint, in practical terms women were often treated less favorably. Peter Lombard, for example, adopted the principle that only the husband was permitted to leave his wife in case of adultery, and not vice versa; there were, however, dissenting voices on this issue.

The commentaries on the Sentences contain the rudimentary beginnings of theological reflection

on the prohibition of adultery. In the interpretation of L. Hödl, Bonaventura believed that adultery also destroyed the church as the body of Christ. According to Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, adultery is:

- a) A grave sin against divine and natural law, because the first good of marriage is the procreation and education of children;
- b) A wrong to one's wife, who should be esteemed as one's highest good, as well as a wrong to one's children and to the human community;
- c) Carnal sin and therefore less grievous than spiritual sin;
- d) To be seen in connection with covetousness and greed;
- e) In contradiction to love of God and love of neighbor;
- f) For a woman more forgivable on account of her inferior reason, but at the same time more grievous on account of the good of procreation.

Late medieval and early modern manuals of moral theology treated the topic of adultery extensively in normative commentaries on the Sixth Commandment, which included all sexual actions outside of marriage, as well as when discussing mortal sins from the perspective of the ethics of virtue, under the headword of *luxuria*. For the most part, these handbooks repeated familiar arguments.

The Reformation (early 16th cent.) brought with it a special emphasis on the public character of marriage. Luther took a clear stance against secret marriages. Since these made adultery hard to keep under control, the Council of Trent (1545–63) introduced formal requirements for the canonical validity of the marriage ceremony. The Reformation also valued marriage more highly than celibacy, but rejected the sacramentality of marriage. This change had no effects on the appraisal of adultery itself, but it did have an impact on adultery's consequences. Luther vehemently rejected adultery, appealing to Scripture (death sentence for adulterers in Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22) and demanding that the government authorities put adulterers to death. Following Matt 19:9, he argued that the deceived spouse had the right to marry again. From his perspective, the adulterer was a dead person. Calvin regarded sexual intercourse outside of marriage as a clear sign of fallen humanity, and he also appealed to Scripture to demand the death of the adulterer. This was put into practice to a certain extent in Geneva after his death, where a number of adulterers were actually executed. Milder sentences, however, became the more common practice in Calvinist circles.

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### C. Modern Europe and America

In contemporary secular ethics, there is a prominent school of thought which holds that the only wrongdoing in adultery is the breach of the promise of fidelity and the deception necessarily involved in virtually all acts of adultery. While these elements are indeed wrong, this account appears vacuous compared with biblical teaching.

Although there are still prohibitions of adultery in the laws of 26 American states, they are not typically enforced. There is, however, an enforceable prohibition of adultery in the American military. Yet adultery appears to have gained limited acceptability in contemporary American society. In the United States, it is estimated that about 25% of all men and 17% of all women have committed acts of marital infidelity, although most Americans believe that it is immoral.

Adultery is condemned in all branches of mainstream Christianity. Christian teaching is found in catechisms, liturgies, church declarations, and pastoral practices. The prohibition of adultery is reiterated when the Decalogue is recited liturgically in a number of churches. The Catechism of the Catholic Church sees it as a "grave offense against the dignity of marriage," and in this all churches agree.

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## VII. Islam

Adultery in Islam is an important theme in jurisprudence and in the prophetic traditions upon which Muslim law is based. However, the material on adultery in the Qurʾān is sparse and ambiguous. The ordinary Arabic verb for adultery, *zanā*, occurs only nine times in Muslim scripture, mostly as an active participle in S 24:2–3, which give the punishment for adultery: "The adulterer and the adulteress, flog (*jalada*) each one of them a hundred stripes" (S 24:2), and stipulate that those who accuse a woman of this crime must bring four witnesses (S 24:4). Explicit prohibition of *zinā* comes at S 17:32 and 25:68.

Another verb understood to include adultery is *fahūsha* ("to be indecent," S 17:32); Joseph is warned to avoid this sin at S 12:24. The same verb is used at S 4:15, where women seen by four witnesses to be guilty of "indecenty" are to be con-

finned to their houses until death takes them "or God appoints for them a way." Most commentators judge S 4:15 to be abrogated by S 24:2.

The development of Islamic Law on adultery had less to do with the Qurʾān than with prophetic traditions, which are widely recounted in commentary, *sīra* and *Ḥadīth*. In the best known of these traditions, a group of Jews bring a pair of adulterers to Muḥammad for a ruling. Muḥammad seeks out a Jewish expert on the Torah and elicits from him the information that the punishment for adultery in the Torah is stoning. According to Ibn Isḥāq, Muḥammad exults that he is "the first to reverse the order of God and his book and to practice it." Muḥammad then commands that the pair be immediately stoned. This tradition was linked variously with S 5:41 (Ibn Isḥāq, Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī), S 5:44 (ʿAbd al-Razzāq), and S 3:93 (al-Bukhārī: "Bring the Torah and read it, if you are truthful").

A second well-known tradition is that ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who became the second caliph, knew of a verse commanding the stoning of adulterers that had not become part of the Qurʾān. But the tradition that had the greatest impact on Islamic Law was the story of a young man who had had sexual relations with his employer's wife. When the dispute was brought before him, Muḥammad prescribed for the unmarried man one hundred lashes and a year's banishment, and ordered the wife to be stoned.

Eventually, all Sunnī schools of jurisprudence agreed that adultery was to be punished with stoning if the offender was *muḥṣan* – an adult, free, married Muslim. In Saudi Arabia and other countries where Islamic criminal codes are in force, adultery is a criminal offence to be punished according to the prescriptions of Islamic law.

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## VIII. Literature

As a literary theme, adultery is so widespread that the subject may be covered here only in its broadest outline. On the one side, the trope of adultery is bordered by faithful marriage (union), and on the other by whoredom (chaos, disintegration, degradation). Metaphorical associations of adultery resonate through depictions of the Roman Church throughout the Reformation as the Whore of Baby-

lon (counterpointed by the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ). Such images figure prominently in medieval literature. In *The Vision of Will Concerning Piers the Plowman* by W. Langland, a later 14th-century alliterative allegory, a type of the Whore of Babylon appears as Lady Meed or “reward” or “profit,” known for her promiscuity and lack of discrimination. Langland’s treatment was directly inspired by Dante’s dream of the Whore of Babylon in *Purgatorio*, 32:

Confident as a fortress on a high mountain, I  
saw an ungiirt whore sitting upon it [the chariot],  
with brow  
ready to look about;  
and, as if to prevent her from being taken from  
him, I saw a giant standing beside her, and they  
kissed together from time to time.  
(trans. R. Durling)

Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* is likewise indebted to Dante’s description of the harlot. In Book I the Redcrosse Knight forsakes his true love, Una (Oneness, Truth) and falls in with a harlot, Duessa (Falsehood, Duplicity), who later imprisons the Knight with the help of her lover, the giant Orgolio (Pride). Like the Whore of Babylon, Duessa rides a chariot drawn by a seven-headed beast. Most of the details in the physical description of the beast are indebted to Rev 17. Much medieval and early modern literature explores the theme of adultery along similarly apocalyptic lines – the decline in sexual restraint signals overall social and moral deterioration. Homiletic and penitential literature tends to attack adultery in a more direct fashion, echoing Old Testament injunctions against adultery in Exodus (the seventh of the Ten Commandments), Lev 20, Jer 3, Deut 5, and Ezek 16 and 23. As in the case of the allegorical representations noted above, the biblical injunctions are often used metaphorically to stand for the corruption of Israel as a whole. The nation is personified as a whore with many lovers and is chastised for her backsliding. At times adultery becomes associated with sexual deviances including bestiality and incest. Chaucer treats the theme of adultery extensively, most notably in *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, in which the Wife misrepresents the story of Christ and the woman accused of adultery (John 8). Adultery is likewise a central plot device in *The Miller’s Tale*, *The Reeve’s Tale*, and *The Merchant’s Tale*. Adultery also figures as a prominent motif in the tales of the Clerk, the Franklin, and the Man of Law. The theme of adultery also runs through Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*; this story of a love affair (actually a “marriage”) gone bad has as its backdrop the love affair of Paris and Helen, who was also considered an adulteress (because she was taken from her husband, Menelaus). In many literary treatments women are more harshly treated than men for the consequences of their infidelity, as can be most

readily seen in N. Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps the most famous novel of adultery. But such a distinction is of dubious worth in light of the vast influence of G. Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, and that novel’s subsequent influence on J. Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Joyce’s character, Molly Bloom, wife of Leopold Bloom, stands out as one of the most memorable female characters in 20th-century fiction, largely because of the very direct rendering of her erotic adulterous thoughts. One primary strain of Medieval Literature, the *Arthurian Romance*, has adultery as one of its central themes, the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere, which ultimately results in the death of King Arthur. “Tristan and Isolde” of Gottfried of Strassbourg makes use of a very similar plot structure, with King Mark of Ireland in the role of Arthur. The same basic plot is repeated with minor variations in the *Morte D’Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory and in the opera of Wagner. Shakespeare uses the theme of adultery frequently, but with greatest effect in *The Tragedy of Othello, Moor of Venice*. The Vice figure from the medieval morality play survives in *Othello* in the person of Iago, who is able to convince the noble, trusting moor that his innocent bride is committing adultery with Othello’s lieutenant, Cassio. The play concludes with Othello killing Desdemona on their bridal bed. A suggestion of adultery occurs in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, when Hamlet’s father’s ghost describes the “falling off” of his relationship with Queen Gertrude. At times, accusations of adultery are aimed specifically at women, as in *King Lear*, where Lear at the height of his madness rails

Adultery? Thou shall not die! Die for adultery?  
No, the wren goes to it, and the small gilded fly  
Does lecher in my sight. Let copulation thrive...  
Down from the waist they are centaurs,  
Though women all above  
But to the girdle do the gods inherit;  
Beneath is all the fiend’s. There’s hell, there’s  
darkness,  
There is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding,  
Stench, consumption... (4.6.110–13,122–27)

In *Inferno V*, Dante focuses of the Circle of the Lustful, which contains the souls of notorious adulterers, the most memorable of whom are Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, who fell in love while reading an Arthurian story, the “Galeotto” which by Dante’s time had already become current in Italian as the common noun, “go-between” or, as Chaucer used it, “pander.” This association of adultery with both seduction and prostitution pervades literature well into the Early Modern period. According to D.M. Turner, “adultery is seen as a key fault line of gender difference in early modern society.” Turner notes:

Gender colours indelibly analyses of adultery in this as in any other period of history. Although historians have long recognized that religious moralists con-

demned men as well as women for infidelity and that male fornicators, adulterers and fathers of bastards were subject to official punishment, there has been an overwhelming tendency to view early modern perceptions of male and female unchastity in oppositional terms. The notion that in patriarchal and patrilineal society the adultery of wives, with its damaging affects on property transfer, was more serious than that of husbands.” (13)

This “double standard” is perhaps somewhat responsible for the notorious reputation of D.H. Lawrence’s novel, *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*. Women also bear the lion’s share of responsibility for adultery in a number of other literary works; e.g., *Sister Carrie* by T. Dreiser and *The Sun Also Rises* by E. Hemingway. One of the most enduring and bitter-sweet renderings of an illicit love affair remains G. Greene’s novel, *The End of the Affair*, which attempts to move beyond a simple morally reductive conclusion in which one partner or the other might be held to blame.

The theme of adultery appears frequently in modern Jewish literature, often symbolizing social and historical crises affecting individuals and communities. Examples include I.J. Singer’s *Yoshe Qalb* (Yiddish, 1932), set in a Hasidic court; I.B. Singer’s short stories and novels; S.Y. Agnon’s novel *Shirah* (Heb., 1971), set in 1930s Palestine; the late 20th-century American novels of P. Roth; N. Ragen’s *Sotah* (1992), about ultra-Orthodox communities; and novels of Israeli writers A. Oz and A.B. Yehoshua.

Explorations of the literary theme of adultery range from bald accusations and denunciations to sensitive and sympathetic renderings of complex human relationships in morally nuanced terms.

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Tony Colaianne

## IX. Visual Arts

Images of four married women illustrated the biblical theme of adultery: the *Wife of Potiphar* (and *Joseph*), *Bathsheba* (and *King David*), *Susanna* (and the *Elders*), and the *Woman Taken in Adultery* in John 7:53–8:11.

Routinely portrayed as scantily clothed, Potiphar’s wife lay in bed grasping Joseph’s cloak as evidence of rape (Gen 39:12). Joseph, a “comely” youth, fled the bedroom in disgust. Bathsheba was customarily crafted as a beautiful, unclothed woman at her bath attended by a maidservant. She held a letter with lascivious implications from King David, a diminutive figure watching from the palace rooftop (2 Sam 11:2–4). Prefiguring the Virgin in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Bathsheba was seated on a throne next to her son King Solomon. Visual account of *Susanna and the Elders* (see → plate 4.b) involved an exposed woman bathing in a garden attended by maidservants offering soap and oil. Also depicted were two aged men spying,

scheming or entrapping her (Dan 13:20 in Vulgate). In contrast to Potiphar’s wife, Susanna, like Joseph, was a victim of duplicity and a paragon of chastity. For this reason they were visually paired. Signifying the Church, Susanna also symbolized the Virgin Mary as an emblem of justice. Attributes of the *Woman Taken in Adultery* include the condemned adulteress, markedly demure, kneeling in a public square. Nearby Jesus inscribed a message on the ground and spoke to the crowd (John 8:7).

Inaugural examples of *Susanna* and *Woman Taken in Adultery* date from the 4th and 5th centuries. Images of adultery were more frequently produced in late medieval texts, in Renaissance and notably in Baroque art. Events represented were: *Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife* (or *Chastity of Joseph*); *Joseph Accused by Potiphar’s Wife*; *Bathsheba at her Bath* (or *Toilet*); *Bathsheba Receiving a Letter from King David*; *Susanna and the Elders*; *Judgment of Susanna*; *Woman Taken in Adultery*.

Episodes of adultery received widespread interest by the 16th and 17th centuries ostensibly because of their inherent sexuality. However consequential to sacred reading, later artists and patrons focused on the allure of the eroticized nudes of *Potiphar’s Wife*, *Bathsheba* and even the virtuous *Susanna*. Due to the development of the printing press by mid-15th century, this scriptural erotica was reinforced by common practice of reading the Bible (less costly and translated into the vernacular) and sustained by prints that pervaded Northern Europe and Italy.

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## X. Music

It is not clear that there is a particular musical reception of the biblical notion of adultery as used in moral commandments or adultery as a symbol of a broken covenant between Israel and God. However, biblical narratives in which adultery plays an important role have had musical receptions in different ways. In medieval dance songs and Passion plays one finds musical representations of the narrative of a prostitute, Maria, who becomes a disciple of Jesus. The narrative is developed from combinations of the various biblical accounts of a woman who anointed Jesus’ feet (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:37–50; John 11:1–2; 12:1–8). A very elaborate conversion scene of a Maria figure constructed in this way is found in the 12th century so-called *Greater Carmina Burana* Passion play. The same combination of biblical narratives is drawn upon in Jules Massenet’s oratorio *Marie-Magdeleine* (1873; Mary Magdalene) to a libretto by Louis Gallet.

The narrative of Susanna from the apocryphal additions to the Book of Daniel gave rise not only to various biblical songs but also to the composition of oratorios since the 17th century, among these Alessandro Stradella’s *La Susanna* (1681) to a libretto by G. B. Giardini and Giovanni Paisiello’s *Susanna* (1800) to an unknown libretto and, the most famous of such settings, G. F. Handel’s English oratorio *Susanna* (1748) to a libretto whose author is also unknown.

The narrative about Jesus and the woman taken in adultery (John 8:2–11) was employed in Alban Berg’s opera *Wozzeck* (1922 to Berg’s own libretto based on Georg Büchner’s play *Woyzeck*) in the beginning of the third act. The female protagonist Marie “reads” the biblical text in a modernistic style of recitation interspersed with dramatic outbreaks of personal prayers for her own life which

she perceives as parallel to that of the woman in the biblical narrative.

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See also → Marriage; → Woman Taken in Adultery

## Adummim

This location (MT <sup>ʾ</sup>Adummim, LXX Ἀδαμμιν, Αἰθαμμιν) is mentioned twice within the tribal land allotments by Joshua following the entry into Canaan. Joshua 15:7 places it within the territory of Judah: “and the boundary goes up to Debir from the Valley of Achor, and so northward, turning toward Gilgal, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim (*ma’alēh ʾAdummim*), which is on the south side of the valley; and the boundary passes along to the waters of En-shemesh, and ends at En-rogel.” According to Josh 18:16–17, however, this place falls within Benjaminite territory: “then the boundary ... goes down the valley of Hinnom, south of the slope of the Jebusites, and downward to En-rogel; then it bends in a northerly direction going on to En-shemesh, and from there goes to Gelliloth, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim; then it goes down to the Stone of Bohan, Reuben’s Son.” This contradictory allotment is not unique: Jerusalem and Kiriath-jearim are also assigned to both tribes: see Josh 15:63 and 18:21–28 for the former and Josh 15:15–19, 60; 18:14, 28 for the latter (on the problems of the tribal allotments as a whole see Kallai and Auld).

The name Adummim, derived from the Hebrew root <sup>ʾ</sup>dm, “red,” probably refers to the color of the local soils (clays and sandstones). The “ascent” is a pass forming part of a major ancient route between Jerusalem and Jericho, following the southern edge of the Wadi Qelt. The place is possibly mentioned in several Egyptian sources – campaign lists of the pharaohs Thutmose III and Sheshonq, and the letter of the scribe Hori preserved in *Papyrus Anastasi* I (ANET 242, 475–79) – but the identification is not certain.

The biblical name has been preserved in various forms at this place. Jerome (347–419 CE) in his Latin translation of the *Onomasticon* mentions a fortress of Adummim halfway between Jerusalem and Jericho; Eusebius himself (d. 339 CE) in his *Onomasticon* (260–340) calls it Malledomni, a name given also to the Crusader fort called Chastel Rouge, built to guard the pass (and retaining the name “red” in its name). The site of a Byzantine monastery of Martyrius was discovered in 1982 in the centre of the modern Israeli settlement of Maaleh Adummim (Magen). The Arabic name *Talʾat ad-damm* (“ascent