

Guarding His Body, Mourning His Death, and Pleading for Him in Heaven: On Adam's Death and Eve's Virtues in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve

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Abstract:

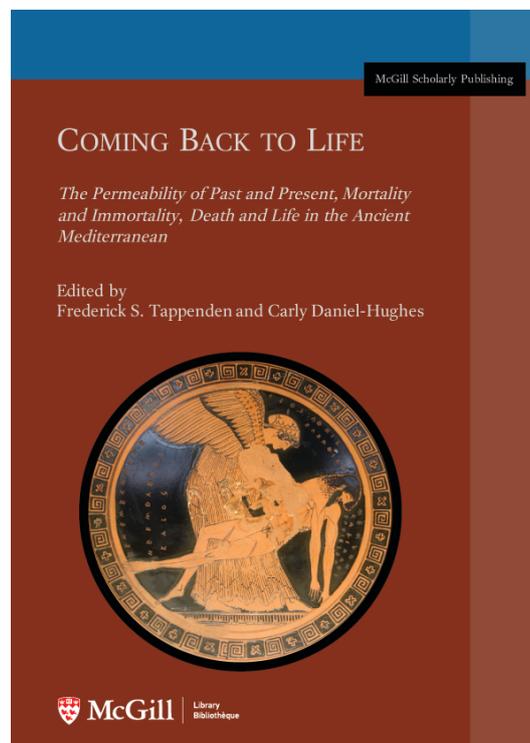
This paper focuses on a remarkable representation of the archetypal first woman found in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve (GLAE) of antiquity, one of the most influential narratives about Adam and Eve after Genesis 2–3. Treating Eve as a culturally constructed figure, the paper employs observations from critical feminist theory, among other methods, to demonstrate how one GLAE narrative scene, known as *the account of Adam's death* (GLAE 31–42), not only abandons the formulaic image of Eve as the sinful figure, responsible for inflicting death on Adam and all humanity, but also subtly represents her as playing a beneficial, virtuous role in the context of Adam's death. In a nuanced reading of this account, the paper explores an interesting correspondence between distinct death-related roles allocated to both Eve and the angels in the event of Adam's death, including caring for his body, mourning his decease, pleading for him after his passing, and witnessing his final ascent to heaven. It then considers the possible ideological implications of this unique representation of a virtuous Eve in the context of the *account of Adam's death*, the complete GLAE, and the broad cultural context of its writers and audience.

Bibliography:

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**Guarding His Body, Mourning His Death,
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Greek Life of Adam and Eve¹**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dated to the beginning of the second century BCE, Ben Sira’s statement, “From a woman sin had its beginning and because of her we all die” ([25:24](#)), is often cited as the first mention of death as the first woman’s fault.² Numerous early Jewish and Christian hermeneutical interpretations of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis 2–3 frequently characterize Eve in the same manner, as responsible for bringing death upon humanity and Adam. The apocryphal Greek Life of Adam and Eve (GLAE),³ the focus of this paper, correspondingly adopts this perennial opinion. For example, [GLAE](#)

¹ Ellen Aitken was my colleague and friend. Over the years I have been privileged to engage in exciting and meaningful conversations with her, and am honored to continue our dialogue through this contribution. Her scholarship, insights, gracious spirit, and open heart will always inspire me.

² The interpretation of Ben Sira’s statement as a reference to Eve is widely accepted (see Trenchard 1982, 8). For a different view, see J. Levison’s (1985) suggestion that the whole content of this passage is about the behavior of wives but not Eve.

³ Because one of the GLAE manuscripts had a prologue identifying the work as a “revelation [*apokalypsis*] to Moses,” Constantin von Tischendorf (1866) titled the work accordingly. Most scholars see this later title as a misnomer because it is based upon the superscript rather than the contents of the text, and tend to refer to it as the Greek Life of Adam and Eve. For a different view in favor of Apocalypse of Moses, see Dochhorn 2005, 3. In this paper I adopt the title Greek Life of Adam and Eve, and the abbreviation GLAE.

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[7.1](#) employs Adam's first-person voice to blame Eve for causing his death: "When God made us, me and your mother, through whom also I die." Similarly, in [GLAE 14.2](#) he affirms her culpability for inflicting death on him and all humanity: "O Eve, what have you done to us? You have brought great wrath upon us which is death which will rule over our entire race." These and parallel condemnations of Eve are scattered throughout most of the GLAE's various accounts.

Surprisingly, one short GLAE narrative scene, known as *the account of Adam's death* ([GLAE 31-42](#)), disregards Eve's accountability for inflicting death on Adam and all humanity.⁴ Narrating in detail the course of Adam's passing, assumption, and burial, this account not only avoids traditions of Eve's liability, but it also remarkably represents Eve as playing a beneficial role in the context of Adam's death.

In a previous publication I have posited that the GLAE is not a univocal source, representing one dominant tradition about Eve (Arbel 2012, 60-86). Its depictions of her are not limited to any conventional single set of standards or formulae. Instead, it incorporates into its one narrative a range of varied representations and traditions about the archetypal first woman, paradoxically associating her with notions that are considered theologically and socially both loathed and laudable. These aspects are manifested in *the account of Adam's death*, among other GLAE narrative scenes. I have already demonstrated how this account characterizes Eve as a culpable figure. Yet, it also associates her with valued death-related and funerary practices, typically performed by women in the multicultural landscape of antiquity in which the GLAE emerged, as well as with the cultural-social esteem attached to them, and consequently it subtly subverts common traditions about Eve's liability. In this paper, I employ reading strategies drawn from gender literary criticism, and explore additional elements embedded in *the account of Adam's death*, which further destabilize widespread traditions of a culpable Eve.

⁴ Compare, for example, [GLAE 7.1](#), [14.2](#), [21.6](#).

Following a brief introduction to the GLAE, its *account of Adam's death* (GLAE 31–42), and the reading strategies utilized in this paper, I bring to the surface and examine how this account associates Eve with a host of benevolent angelic beings by representing them as performers of analogous death-related practices directed to care for Adam's body and spirit. I then consider possible ideological implications of this representation in the context of the *account of Adam's death*, the complete GLAE, and the broad cultural context of its writers and audience.

II. THE ACCOUNT OF ADAM'S DEATH (GLAE 31–42)

AND MY READING STRATEGIES

Before we begin our examination, it is important to provide a brief introduction to the GLAE in general, its *account of Adam's death* in particular, and the reading strategies I employ in this paper. The GLAE belongs to a cluster of narratives designated by Michael Stone as the primary Adam and Eve Books, which have survived in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, and Coptic.⁵ Inspired by the biblical story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2–3) as well as departing from it, these apocryphal works narrate rich and fascinating tales about the life of the first two people after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The primary Adam and Eve Books were probably composed between the third and seventh centuries, yet contain certain literary units that are older. These narratives gained enormous popularity and influence in antiquity, and also had a considerable impact on later works in the medieval world, especially in European art, literature, and theology.⁶

⁵ On the Books of Adam and Eve (including the Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, and Coptic versions) manuscripts, editions, translations, relationship of texts, and dates, see discussions and references in Anderson, Stone, and Tromp 2000; Anderson and Stone 1999; Jonge and Tromp 1977; Stone 1992.

⁶ For a detailed survey of the literature of Adam and Eve, and its development and influence, see Stone 1992, 66–70, 84–121. On the impact of

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As scholars have long maintained, and Johannes Tromp (2005, esp. 96–105) has recently substantiated, the earliest text forms of the Adam and Eve Books were in Greek, from which all other versions in other languages stem.⁷ But, as Tromp (2000, 223–24) and others have further shown, there is no fixed Greek text but rather a series of extant witnesses to a textual tradition, since the apocryphal nature of the Greek Life of Adam and Eve and its huge popularity resulted in numerous copies. The present form of the work is the result of a complex redactional process that integrated different source materials into a single story.

Most scholars have situated the GLAE somewhere in the period of 100–300 CE.⁸ Its provenance and religious-historical background, however, are debated. Several scholars have argued for a Jewish origin, while others have posited Christian roots for the work.⁹ Additional suggestions regarding both the fluid traditions of the GLAE and its non-theological concerns have been put forward recently in several studies (Levison 2003, 15; Tromp 2004, 205). Reflecting on the literary nature of the GLAE, scholars have observed the apparent tension between its disjointed nature, formed as it is by an amalgamation of accounts, and its textual-conceptual

this narrative on later traditions, see Anderson 2001 and Quinn 1962. For Islamic references to the story, see [Sūrahs 2:31–39](#), [7:11–18](#), [15:31–48](#), [17:61–65](#), [18:50](#), [20:116–120](#), and [38:71–85](#). For the significance of the Books of Adam and Eve in Islamic traditions, see Awn 1983.

⁷ On the Greek Life of Adam and Eve, see Bertrand 1987; Eldridge 2001; Jonge 2000a, 2000b; Jonge and Tromp 1977, 18–20, 31–35, 45–55; Johnson 1985, 252; Levison 1988, 2000a; Nagel 1974; Sharpe 1969; Sweet 1993; and Tromp 2005, esp. 3–27.

⁸ See Levison 2000a, 4; Levison 2003, 1 (for a full discussion, see 1–16); and Tromp 2005, 28. For a detailed discussion of the GLAE's date in light of other textual evidence, see Eldridge 2001, 20–30.

⁹ On the Jewish origin of the work, see discussions and references in Johnson 1985, 252; Dochhorn 2005; Eldridge 2001, 233–64. See further the important questions and observations raised by Kraft 2001, 371–95 and Davila 2005, 232–33. On the Christian origin of the GLAE, see, for example, Jonge and Tromp 1977, 65–78 and Jonge 2000a.

unity. That is, on the one hand the GLAE is built up from a series of brief but more or less self-contained tales, which were later integrated into the complete GLAE narrative in an attempt to create a consistent whole (Levison 2003, 15; Tromp 1997, 25–41; 2004, 205–23). On the other hand, as Tromp (2000, 223–24) has amply argued, the redacted GLAE is a purposefully composed, complete literary unit that amounts to more than the sum of the points made in the separate accounts, and that should be read, treated, and comprehended as a whole. In consideration of these aspects I first focus on one GLAE account, *the account of Adam's death* and its distinct representation of Eve. I then consider the meaning and implications of this representation in the larger context of the complete GLAE narrative, and the social context in which it emerged.

The short *account of Adam's death* includes a number of confusing and conflicting details. Through efforts to elucidate the literary process that led to these inconsistencies, scholars have shown that the existing [GLAE 31–42](#) combines two separate original stories. The first, presently included in [GLAE 31–37](#), describes Adam's death, heavenly afterlife, and his assumption into the heavenly paradise. The second, now found in [GLAE 38–42](#), describes the burial of Adam's body near the earthly paradise and the promise of his eschatological resurrection.¹⁰ As Tromp (1997; 2004), among others, has recently concluded, both stories introduce related subject matter and were at some point clumsily unified into one narrative. The authors of the GLAE likely adopted various views of the afterlife and put them together in a story, “not bothered by literary aspirations, and logical consistency” (Tromp 1997, 36; compare Tromp 2004). Instead, their main objective was to emphasize the central concerns of everyday life, such as the unavoidable reality of illness, the necessity of death, as well as the prospect of life after death. Combined with these concerns, I suggest, are unique representations of the archetypal first woman and the roles she plays

¹⁰ For a comprehensive discussion and references to key studies, see Tromp 1997. See further Eldridge 2001, 60–64.

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during the process of Adam's death, burial, and final ascent to heaven—in particular, descriptions of her actions as a compassionate performer of death and burial practices, just like the angels.

References to specific practices that Eve and the angels are made to carry out are short and concise. They are not presented in an orderly fashion, as though they were standard practices of a particular ritual. Nor do they seem to bear the clear marks of either a Jewish or a Christian theological tradition. Nonetheless, a careful reading reveals an interesting correspondence between distinct death-related roles allocated to both Eve and the angels in the event of Adam's death as they care for his body, mourn his decease, plead for him after his passing, and witness his final ascent to heaven. These aspects become particularly noticeable when one employs several methods suggested by gender/feminist literary criticism, and thereby develops a nuanced reading of the account.

Obviously “gender/feminist criticism” designates a huge, heterogeneous body of work and includes a variety of diverse methodologies. Here I embrace several key positions that are particularly beneficial for this investigation. These include, most notably, Joan Wallach Scott's famous understanding of gender, in this case femininity, as an historical category of analysis,¹¹ as well as views promoted by Judith Butler that, from their emergence in the early 1990s, have provided rich insights into the socially constructed

¹¹ For Wallach Scott's understanding of gender, in this case femininity, as an historical category of analysis, which emphasizes the context dependency and diverse constructions of gender in changing historical-social circumstances, see Wallach Scott 1986, 1053–75. For example, noting “the specificity of female diversity and woman's experiences,” Wallach Scott (1986, 1067) has articulated the ideas of multiplicity and diversity as based on “culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations—Eve and Mary as symbols of woman, for example.” While in her more recent publication (2010, 7–14) Wallach Scott has observed how the term “gender” has been recuperated and become commonplace, she has nonetheless emphasized the need to disrupt the notions of “fixity” and normalization associated with gender and to acknowledge multiplicity and diversity as based on distinct cultural and historical contexts.

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aspects of gender/femininity in diverse cultural settings.¹² Embracing these positions, the following discussion treats the GLAE's Eve not as a static theological symbol, but rather as a culturally constructed figure, and explores both apparent and vague traditions about the role she plays during Adam's passing in the GLAE. In my reading, I further employ the method of "reading against the grain." Among its other aspects, this strategy treats ancient narrative as constructed texts, gives attention to gaps in their dominant ideological coherence, considers their less obvious themes, and brings to the surface alternative traditions that may be subtly embedded in the writings.¹³

¹² While the concept of "woman" as a social construct has been explored by scholars in a variety of academic disciplines, the pioneering work of Judith Butler has particularly established the foundation for theorizing concepts of gender construction. For her views of femininity, as being not a biological, natural, and homogeneous category, but instead performative and historically constructed in multiple ways, through acquiring fluctuating social conventions and culturally prescribed roles, see, for example, Butler 1990, 33–35. In her words (1990, 33): "*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construction that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (emphasis original).

¹³ For a concise, perceptive discussion of "reading against the grain," see, for example, David J. A. Clines 1995, 191–92; John J. Collins 2005, 75–98, esp. 85. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert (2000, 9) has succinctly articulated strategies of "reading against the grain" which guide our present discussion: "Reading against the grain' can take various forms, just as its goals can be variously formulated. One may, for example, search for lapses in ideological coherence of a text or set of texts, or one may interrogate texts with respect to traces of possible choices not made. One can locate what appears to be the 'repressed' of a text; one can emphasize what the text hides, embedded in overt rhetorical structure; or one can highlight what are only moments of disturbance in the overall dominant ideology of the text. What characterizes most of such readings is the highlighting of the cultural, textual or rhetorical construction of gender."

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III. EVE, THE ANGELS, AND ADAM'S PASSING

Let us consider several key examples.¹⁴ The *account of Adam's death* opens with Adam on his deathbed. Awaiting his inevitable demise, the dying Adam plans his end by issuing a set of instructions regarding distinct procedures that he expects Eve to undertake during and after his passing.¹⁵ Eve is appointed to anoint Adam's body after his death; she is required to guard his body and prevent people from touching it, possibly until his spirit reaches heaven; and she is asked to pray to God for Adam's sake when his spirit departs from his body and faces God's judgment:

“But when I die, anoint me and let no one touch me until the angel says something concerning me. For God will not forget me, but will seek the vessel he made. Now, arise, and pray

¹⁴ In his *Texts in Transition* (2000a), Levison has identified four GLAE text-forms and demonstrated how they represent different stories and should be treated independently. In his *The Life of Adam and Eve in Greek* (2005), Tromp has further undertaken a detailed examination of the manuscript tradition and the relationships between the individual versions, and he has used this work to produce a single critical edition that is perceived to be as close as possible to an original text. Since this paper primarily centers on select representations of the first woman rather than the GLAE's inner development, text forms, or its comprehensive depiction of Eve, the citations used are based on the GLAE English translation included in the *Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Anderson and Stone 1999) in order to provide the reader with direct access to the text. See the embedded hyperlinks for easy access to Anderson and Stone's (2005) online site, [The Life of Adam and Eve: The Biblical Story in Judaism and Christianity](#), where GLAE can be viewed as a [single text \(= Apocalypse of Moses\)](#) or in [synoptic comparison](#).

¹⁵ As Tromp (1997, 25–41) has demonstrated, in its depiction of Adam's death the account employs a cluster of parallel terms, including “dying” (e.g., [31.3](#)), “gone out of his body” (e.g., [32.4](#)), and “falling asleep” (e.g., [42.3](#)). In turn, these terms reveal several dissimilar anthropological concepts and speculations about afterlife. While the significance of these references is indisputable, they do shed a significant light on the representation of Eve in the *account of Adam's death* and thus will not be explored further in this context. For a broader examination of relevant anthropological terms and afterlife theories related to the GLAE, see note 26 below.

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even more to God until I give back my spirit, which he gave to me, into His hands; for we do not know how we will meet our Maker, whether He will be angry with us or will turn to show mercy on us.” Then she [Eve] rose up and went outside. Falling upon the ground, she said: “I have sinned O God; I have sinned O Father of All” ([31.3b-32.2a](#))¹⁶

The next scene depicts the angel of humanity immediately directing Eve to witness the ascent of Adam’s spirit to heaven. Subsequently, Eve beholds a chariot of light borne by four bright eagles, and gazes at angelic rituals of incense offerings at the heavenly temple:

Even as Eve prayed on her knees,¹⁷ behold, the angel of humanity came to her, and raised her up and said: “Rise up, Eve, from your penitence, for behold, Adam your husband has gone out of his body. Rise up and behold his spirit borne aloft to meet his Maker.” And Eve rose up and put her hand on the face [of Adam], and the angel said to her, “Lift up your hand from that which is of the earth.” And she gazed steadfastly into heaven, and beheld a chariot of light, borne by four bright eagles, [and] it was impossible for any man born of woman to tell the glory of them or behold their faces; and angels going before the chariot; and when they came to the place where your father Adam was, the chariot halted and the Seraphim were between the father and the chariot. And I

¹⁶ Compare Tromp’s (2005, 160–61) critical edition: *κἄν ἀποθάνω κατάλείψόν με καὶ μηδεὶς μου ἄψηται ἕως οὗ ὁ ἄγγελος λαλήσῃ τι περὶ ἐμοῦ. οὐ γὰρ ἐπιλήσεται μου ὁ θεός, ἀλλὰ ζητήσῃ τὸ ἴδιον σκεῦος ὃ ἔπλασεν. ἀνάστα μᾶλλον εὗξαι τῷ θεῷ ἕως οὗ ἀποδώσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ δεδωκότος μοι αὐτό, διότι οὐκ οἶδαμεν πῶς ἀπαντήσωμεν τοῦ ποιήσαντος ἡμᾶς, ἢ ὀργισθῆ ἡμῖν ἢ ἐπιστρέψει τοῦ ἐλεῆσαι ἡμᾶς. Τότε ἀνέστη καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἔξω. ἡμαρτον ὁ θεός, ἡμαρτον ὁ πατήρ τῶν ἀπάντων. There is considerable variance among the manuscripts in the phrasing of Eve’s prayer here: “I have sinned O God; I have sinned O Father of All” See Tromp’s notes on lines 295–299 (pp. 160–61).*

¹⁷ Three manuscripts (*a I c*) add the phrase “on her knees” (ἐπὶ τὰ γόνατα αὐτῆς οὕσης) after the phrase “while Eve was still praying” (ἔτι εὐχομένης τῆς Εὕας); the added phrase (“on her knees”) is part of Anderson’s translation, but Tromp (2005, 160–61) does not include it in his critical text.

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beheld golden censers and three bowls, and behold all the angels with (after?) censers and frankincense came in haste to the incense-offering and blew upon it and the smoke of the incense veiled the firmament. ([32.3-33.4](#))¹⁸

Next, the angels pray to God for mercy on Adam, Eve beholds two great and fearful mysteries before the presence of God and she weeps:

And the angels fell down to God, crying aloud and saying, “JAEL, Holy One, have pardon, for he is Your image, and the work of Your holy hands.”¹⁹ And then I, Eve, beheld two great and fearful mysteries before the presence of God and I wept for fear ([33.5-34.1a](#))²⁰

After this, an angel announces God’s favorable judgment, the angels praise the glory of the Lord, and a seraph then washes Adam three times in the Acherusian lake:²¹

But when the angels had said these words, behold, there came one of the seraphim with six wings and snatched up Adam

¹⁸ Compare Tromp’s (2005, 160) edition: ἔτι εὐχομένης τῆς Εὕας, ἰδοὺ ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτὴν ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος, καὶ ἀνέστησεν αὐτὴν λέγων: ἀνάστα, Εὕα, ἐκ τῆς μετανοίας σου. ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὁ Ἀδάμ ὁ ἀνὴρ σου ἐξῆλθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. ἀνάστα καὶ ἴδε τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἀναφερόμενον εἰς τὸν ποιήσαντα αὐτὸν¹⁸ τοῦ ἀπαντῆσαι αὐτῷ. καὶ ἀτένισασα εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν ἄρμα φωτὸς ἐρχόμενον ὑπὸ τεσσάρων ἀετῶν λαμπρῶν ὧν οὐκ ἦν δυνατόν τινα γεννηθῆναι ἀπὸ κοιλίας, ἢ εἰπεῖν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν, ἢ ἰδεῖν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῶν καὶ ἀγγέλους προσάγοντας τὸ ἄρμα. εἶδον δὲ ἐγὼ θυμιατήρια χρυσᾶ καὶ τρεῖς φιάλας, καὶ ἰδοὺ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι μετὰ λίβανον καὶ τὰ θυμιατήρια ἦλθον ἐν σπουδῇ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ ἐνεφύσουν αὐτά, καὶ ἡ ἀτμὶς τοῦ θυμιάματος ἐκάλυψεν τὰ στερεώματα.

¹⁹ Compare Tromp’s (2005, 160) edition: καὶ προσέπεσαν οἱ ἄγγελοι τῷ θεῷ βοῶντες καὶ λέγοντες· Ἰαήλ, ἅγιε, συγχώρησον, ὅτι εἰκὼν σου ἐστὶν καὶ ποίημα τῶν χειρῶν σου τῶν ἁγίων.

²⁰ Compare Tromp’s (2005, 160) edition: εἶδον ἐγὼ Εὕα δύο μεγάλα καὶ φοβερὰ μυστήρια ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. καὶ ἔκλαυσα ἐκ τοῦ φόβου

²¹ On the origin of the Acherusian Lake and the ritual of washing in it, see Jonge and White 2003.

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and carried him off to the Acherusian lake, and washed him thrice, and led him before God. ([37.3](#))

Following, God hands Adam over to the archangel Michael and commands him to bring Adam to paradise in the third heaven until the final Day of Judgment:

[T]he Father of all, sitting on his holy throne stretched out his hand, and took Adam and handed him over to the archangel Michael saying: “Lift him up into paradise unto the third Heaven, and leave him there until that fearful day of my reckoning, which I will make in the world.” ([37.4-5](#))

The second story of Adam’s death, in [GLAE 38-42](#), immediately follows and provides additional details about Eve’s and the angels’ acts during Adam’s demise. The angel Michael is portrayed as crying to God for the sake of Adam: “But after this joyous event of Adam, the archangel Michael cried to the Father concerning Adam” ([38.1](#)). Then God, the cherubs, and the angels descend to earth where Adam lies, and God speaks about the eschatological future in which Adam will regain his position of glory. Following God’s promise of resurrection ([39.1-3](#)), the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Uriel prepare Adam’s body for burial by oiling it and then dressing it with three shrouds of linen and silk from paradise:

Then God said to the archangel Michael: “Go away to Paradise in the third heaven, and carry away three fine linen clothes.” And God said to Michael and to Gabriel and Uriel: “Spread out the clothes and cover the body of Adam.” And they bore the sweet olive oil and poured it upon him. And the three great angels prepared him for burial. ([40.1-2](#))

Next, Eve grieves over Adam, mourns his death, and weeps “bitterly about Adam’s falling asleep” ([42.3](#)).²²

²² Compare Tromp’s (2005, 174) edition: “ἔτι δὲ ζωῆς αὐτῆς ἔκλαυσεν περὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως τοῦ Ἀδάμ. οὐ γὰρ ἐγίνωσκεν ποῦ ἐτέθη” While one manuscript

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The *account of Adam's death* develops further and provides additional details. However, this discussion is concerned solely with the above-cited passages, in which Eve and the angels are featured, both implicitly and explicitly, as the main protagonists who carry out particular key practices when Adam dies. In general, direct relationships between literary descriptions and the realities to which they are connected cannot be assumed. Here, too, it is not certain that the *account of Adam's death* describes genuine death-related customs and actual funerary rites. Yet, although plausibly motivated by literary and rhetorical purposes, the account integrates into literary references certain practices and norms that were apparently known in the days of the GLAE's authors and audience, as Marinus de Jonge and Johannes Tromp (1977, 71) have noted.²³

IV. ANALOGOUS PRACTICES

Obviously, different social and religious groups enacted a variety of death-related practices in the hybrid social world of antiquity in which the GLAE emerged. As Peter Brown (1981, 24) reminds us,

(d) adds “bitterly” (πιχρός) after the phrase “she wept” (ἐκλαυσεν), Tromp does not include this word in his critical text. In the following GLAE description the reason given for Eve's weeping is “for she knew not where Adam was laid.” Yet this is not the explanation that all the GLAE text versions evoke. Instead, as John Levison (2000a) has noted, several text versions link Eve's bitter weeping to her feelings of pain, sorrow, and grief for Adam's death. For example, the text form identified as NIK indicates Eve “did not know in great grief, and was weeping much about his [Adam's] death” (see [GLAE 42.3](#), Text Form III in Levison 2000a, 110); see also Levison's (2000a, 19, 44–45) discussion of the dating and salient features of this text form; Levison 2000b, esp. 268–69.

²³ It has been widely recognized that rhetorical strategies and literary conventions often affect the shaping of literary narrations. Accordingly, the combined GLAE *account of Adam's death* may also have been shaped by literary conventions or by other rhetorical purposes. Nonetheless, the distinct nature of this account, which reflects interest in, knowledge of, and concern with an array of everyday cultural life issues—allows for the plausibility that its descriptions convey aspects of the cultural world in which it emerged, including both cultural perceptions and the realities of women. See the discussion in Arbel 2012, 60–86.

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though, death-related practices and burial customs have remained among the most stable cultural features of the ancient Mediterranean world. From the passages quoted above we can glean that the *account of Adam's death* portrays Eve as well as the angels as performers of a number of these stable practices during all stages of Adam's death and interment. Principal roles include anointing and washing his body and otherwise preparing him for burial, grieving and mourning his passing, praying for Adam when his spirit departs from his body and faces God's final judgment, beholding his ascent to heaven and consequently partaking in God's sacred realm.²⁴

Treating the dead body immediately after death, including washing, anointing, and dressing it with shrouds, were common burial practices in the ancient world. Characteristically, the living closed the eyes and mouth of the deceased; they then washed the corpse and anointed it with scented oil and herbs. Next, the body was wrapped in garments, and dressed in shrouds. The *account of Adam's death* ascribes analogous activities to Eve and the angels. Accordingly, the ritual of washing Adam's dead body is performed by a seraph, who washes Adam three times in the Acherusian lake (37.3-4); the rituals of preparing Adam's body for burial, including oiling and dressing it, are performed by the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Uriel, who anoint Adam's body with sweet olive oil and wrap it with three fine linen cloths (40.1-2), as well as by Eve, who guards Adam's body and anoints him after his demise (31.3).²⁵

²⁴ Numerous studies from different positions and disciplinary backgrounds have examined a variety of death related practices. Key studies consulted here include: Alexiou 1974; Brown 1981, 1-22; Corbeill 2004; Corley 2002; Davies 1999; Feldman 1977; Garland 1985, 23-24; Goff 2004; Holst-Warhaft 1992, 103-14; Kraemer 2000; Kurtz and Boardman 1971; Neusner and Avery-Peck 2000; Rush 1941; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995; and Toynbee 1971, 43-72.

²⁵ Catherine Bell's observations shed further light on Eve's position of power as a performer of rituals. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*), Bell (1992, 19-66, 69-170) has argued that rituals do not express underlying power relationships but are themselves the strategic agents of power and can be seen as a strategic arena for the embodiment and negotiation of power relations.

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Practices of mourning and grieving over the dead, typically associated with women throughout the ancient world, were frequently part of numerous death rituals. Notably, in the *account of Adam's death*, not only do Eve and the angels grieve over Adam—God is also depicted in a similar mourning role. Accordingly, [GLAE 39.1](#) recounts how God “came to the body of Adam and grieve[d] greatly over him,” and [GLAE 43.3](#) describes how Eve grieved over her husband and “wept bitterly about Adam’s falling asleep.”

As many death-related traditions confirm, the living were seen as continually involved in advocating for the dead’s spirits at heavenly courts. In the *account of Adam's death*, both the angels and Eve play this role. Unlike the view of the dead frequently found in the Hebrew Bible, which shows them in Sheol, barely existing and never to return, here Adam’s spirit continues to have some kind of existence and is expected to face God’s judgment, a view that accords with beliefs about the resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul/spirit that were prevalent in the Greco-Roman world of the early centuries CE.²⁶ In this context, the angels are depicted as praying for Adam in an attempt to prevent him from having to face God’s harsh sentence ([33.5](#)) after his passing. Similarly, Eve is appointed to pray to God for Adam’s sake after his demise, apparently in order to exculpate Adam and thereby avert a harsh sentence in heaven when he faces God’s unknown anger or mercy ([31.3b–32.2a](#)).²⁷

It was often presumed in antiquity that psychopomps—literally the “guides of souls”—guided passages from life to death. These

²⁶ For a variety of biblical and post-biblical views regarding the afterlife, see a comprehensive discussion by Segal 2004, 120–638. For discussions of death practices and afterlife beliefs in the first centuries CE, see esp. pp. 351–95. For a discussion of afterlife concepts in the GLAE and other pseudepigrapha, see Eldridge 2001, 50–52.

²⁷ While the description associates Eve’s prayer with her atonement for her sins, as Levison (2000b) has observed, it is noteworthy that her prayers are primarily intended to intercede on Adam’s behalf in heaven after his spirit departs from his body and he faces God’s unknown anger or mercy when his spirit departs from his body and faces judgment.

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psychopomps were envisioned as angels or deities whose primary function was to safely escort newly deceased souls and lead them safely in their journeys from earth to their afterlife in heaven or paradise.²⁸ It is not surprising that in the *account of Adam's death*, the angel Michael is responsible for transferring Adam's soul to heaven at death, since that is one of this angel's typical roles.²⁹ It is rather unexpected, however, for the figure of Eve to be allocated a similar role, as she witnesses the ascent of Adam's spirit to heaven and beholds visions in the celestial realm before the presence of God (32.3-4). True, in contrast to Eve, who only observes the ascent of Adam's spirit to heaven (32.4), the angel Michael plays a more active role as a psychopomp. Nonetheless, just like the angel Michael, Eve rises above natural human limits and witnesses Adam's spirit transferred to heaven as she partakes in the transcendent reality of God and his angels. While this representation of Eve is not developed in a full narrative plot, it nonetheless characterizes her as a figure of spiritual capabilities, visionary powers, and elevated standing—all particularly manifested in the aftermath of Adam's death. Accordingly, Eve beholds awe-inspiring visions and sees God's chariot of light descending to the place where Adam is lying (33.2). She then witnesses angelic rituals in the celestial sacred realm that is considered inaccessible to most humans (33.3-4), and further gazes at fearful mysteries before the presence of God (34.1a). What exactly these mysteries entail remains ambiguous in this laconic statement. Rather than providing details about the nature and

²⁸ There are classical examples of psychopomps in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythologies. Likewise, in apocalyptic literature angels or archangels often serve as the psychopomps of select visionaries. Thus, for example, the *Book of the Watchers* (= *1 Enoch* 1-36) presents Michael as a psychopomp; in *2 Enoch* the seventh antediluvian patriarch, Enoch, is taken to heaven by two angels. In the same apocalyptic account Melchizedek is transported on the wings of the angel Gabriel to the paradise of Eden. See Hannah 1995, 46 and Orlov 2015, 161-62.

²⁹ See examples in Hannah 1995, 46-47.

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content of the mysteries, however, this description subtly says something about Eve's spiritual capabilities.³⁰

To summarize, thus far we have examined how Eve and the angels are cast to play analogous virtuous roles in standardized funerary practices of anointing and treating the dead body. Particularly notable are the two realms of caring for the body, and weeping for and mourning the dead. Additionally, both are depicted as benevolent intercessors for Adam in heaven, worthy and able to solicit God's mercy and to influence divine judgment. Moreover, both partake in the experience of Adam's spiritual ascent, and gain access to God's transcendent sacred realms.

V. A TRADITIONAL AND SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSE?

To fully recognize the significance of this exceptional portrayal of Eve it is important to consider her overall depiction in the complete GLAE as well as the conceptual-cultural context in which it emerged. How does this representation of a virtuous Eve function within the unified GLAE narrative and its overall conceptualization of a sinful Eve? What, if anything, can be inferred about the significance of this characterization of Eve within the cultural reality of the GLAE's narrators and audience? Crucial to understanding these issues are common dominant Eve discourses that were widespread in the cultural landscape in which the GLAE was formed. As noted earlier, prevalent early Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions typically portray Eve as the bane of Adam, the root of all evil, and the liable

³⁰ Moreover, I have previously demonstrated (Arbel 2012, 87–110) how these three visions with which Eve is associated—visions of God's chariot, angelic celestial rituals, and divine mysteries—share a common hallmark. They all correspond to formulaic themes and tropes that are typically associated with a series of "ideal figures"—exemplary righteous, patriarchs, priests, scribes, prophets, and visionaries—in a variety of Qumranic, pseudepigraphic, and *merkabah* traditions, and who are frequently evoked to emphasize the worthiness, authoritative status, and high position of these figures. By utilizing these stock themes and tropes, this representation of Eve's visions seems to associate her implicitly with these ideal figures and their elevated spiritual characteristics and high status.

source of death in the world.³¹ In accordance with these characterizations, several narrative scenes throughout the complete GLAE narrative similarly represent Eve as a blameworthy figure, who is eternally responsible for inflicting death not only on Adam but also on all humanity.³² The *account of Adam's death*, as we have just seen, departs from this dominant view. While it does not explicitly align Eve with the high angels, its depiction of her and them performing similar practices suggests a close affiliation.

This exceptional portrayal of Eve does not seem to be a value-neutral presentation. More than a merely interesting literary description at work, this representation implicitly asserts, I suggest,

³¹ For example, *2 Enoch* states in Adam's first voice: "And while he was sleeping I took from him a rib. And I created from him a wife, so that death might come [to him] by his wife (*2 Enoch* J 30.17 [= [A.30.17](#) in Charles 1913]); the Midrash [Gen. Rab. 17.8](#) portrays Eve as the one who "shed the blood of Adam" and "extinguished [his] soul." And, according to [Gen. Rab. 19.5](#), Eve gave the fruit to the animals and thus also brought death into the animal world. A famous Mishnaic passage in the Palestinian Talmud likewise blames the entire sin and its consequence of death on Eve, explaining why women are obligated to follow three particular commandments related to *niddah*, the laws of family purity; *hallah*, setting aside dough from the bread that they bake; and lighting the Sabbath candles (*y. Šabb. 2.6*). The author of the gnostic Gospel of Philip (150–300 CE) expresses a similar view: "When Eve was still with Adam, death did not exist. When she was separated from him, death came into being" ([68.16–24](#) in Layton 1989, 1:179). In the same way Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, states, "By disobeying, Eve became the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race" ([Haer. 3.22.4](#)). Tertullian of Carthage a few years later likewise accentuates Eve's culpability in Adam's death, in the famous "gateway passage": "You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert—that is death—even the Son of God had to die" ([Cult. fem. 1.1](#); quoted in Clark 1994, 169). See further Elizabeth Clark's (1994, 166–69) observations regarding the common mechanisms of stereotyping, universalizing, and naturalizing, by which patristic views often amalgamate all women into one sinful Eve. Compare similar rabbinic views discussed by Judith Baskin 2002, 161.

³² See, in particular, her depiction as a transgressor of God's way (e.g., [7.1–3](#), [9.2](#), [10.2](#), [19.3](#)), as Satan's vessel (e.g., [21.3](#)), and as a wicked figure who brought death upon Adam and all humanity (e.g., [7.1](#), [14.2](#), [21.6](#)).

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an alternative ideological stance. True, the account neither overtly challenges nor targets specific traditions. Yet, it constructs Eve, like the supreme angels, as a performer of corresponding compassionate practices that comfort and assist Adam rather than cause his demise. In an implicit manner, the account thereby both disrupts prevalent cultural and theological conceptions concerning Eve's inferiority, blame, culpability, and spiritual limitations, and forms a remarkable discourse about her valued role and standing.

However, as noted above, in its present redacted form, the GLAE embraces multiple accounts and traditions and integrates them into a single, complete narrative, which should be read, treated, and comprehended as a whole. Consequently, it is important to ask: How does the representation of a worthy Eve in the *account of Adam's death* function in the framework of the complete GLAE narrative, which is preoccupied with Eve's liability?

In recent years, several scholars have raised significant suggestions regarding both the fluid, multifaceted traditions of the GLAE and its non-theological concerns. Levison (2003) and Tromp (2004) have convincingly inferred that beneath the GLAE's concern with theological themes lies a fundamental interest in everyday life issues. For instance, Levison (2003, 15) has discerned that "the narrative is driven not only by theological concerns but equally, perhaps even more so, by the basic realities that drive human beings to the brink of their experience." In a similar vein, Tromp (2004, 218–20) has explained the narrative's tendency to escape classification as either a Jewish or a Christian writing, to treat questions of everyday life, and to integrate various truths and self-contained tales into its main outline. From this perspective, the complete GLAE does not seem to be entirely controlled by any specific group or ideology.

Accordingly, unlike more dogmatic and authorized documents, in which views were typically formulaic and restricted to expressing authorized messages of dominant Jewish or Christian theologians, it is plausible that not all of the varied GLAE accounts and traditions were compiled within official theological circles. Rather, some of its

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traditions may have been formed by different individuals and groups in the context of their everyday life situations and fluid communications between people—where, characteristically, diverse traditions and views are continuously expressed and renegotiated—and subsequently integrated into the complete GLAE by its authors/redactors.

Of course, in light of the ambiguity surrounding the provenance and date of the GLAE traditions, there is no accurate, concrete evidence against which to verify this proposition. Nonetheless, the GLAE, one the earliest and most significant postbiblical accounts of Adam and Eve, provides unique access to what appears to be a discourse that juxtaposes a number of overlapping and at times conflicting possibilities, both traditional and subversive. In other words, emerging as a multivocal narrative, the complete GLAE gives expression to well-known, established traditions about a blameworthy Eve, as well as to less-known alternative traditions about a praiseworthy Eve, which were not necessarily compatible with dominant cultural and theological views of the time. As we have seen, the GLAE's *account of Adam's death* appears to reveal one of the latter traditions. In a subtle voice it constructs Eve as a compassionate figure, asserting views about her caring role, virtues, elevated status, transcendent spheres of experience, and access to holiness, all manifested in the drama of Adam's decease.

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