



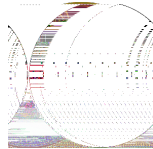
Symposium on Religion and Politics

WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

“Judaism & Women Rabbis”

Reading Packet 3

2016



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Symposium on Religion and Politics

WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER 2



WOMEN IN JUDAISM

Jacoba Krizman

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

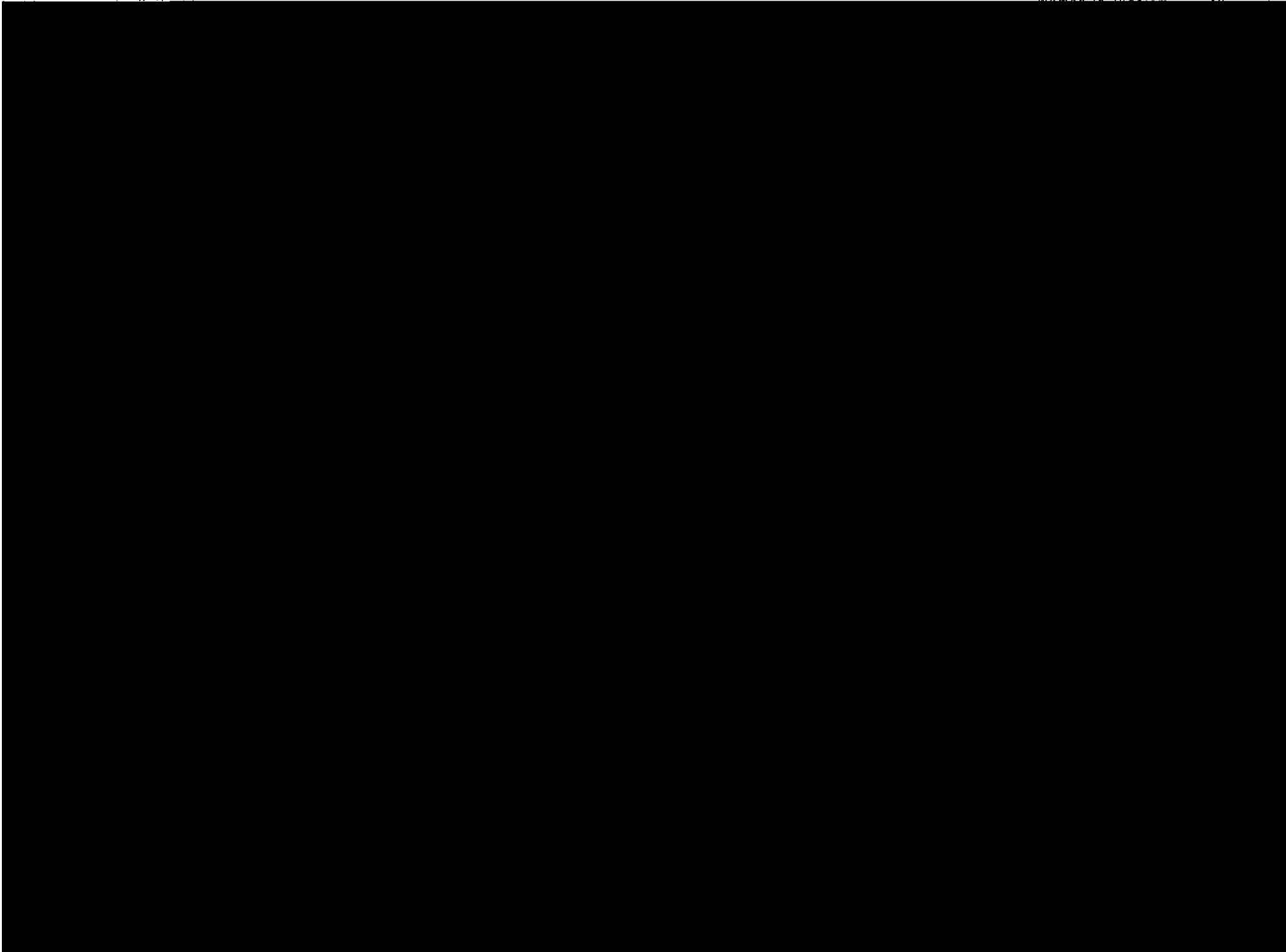
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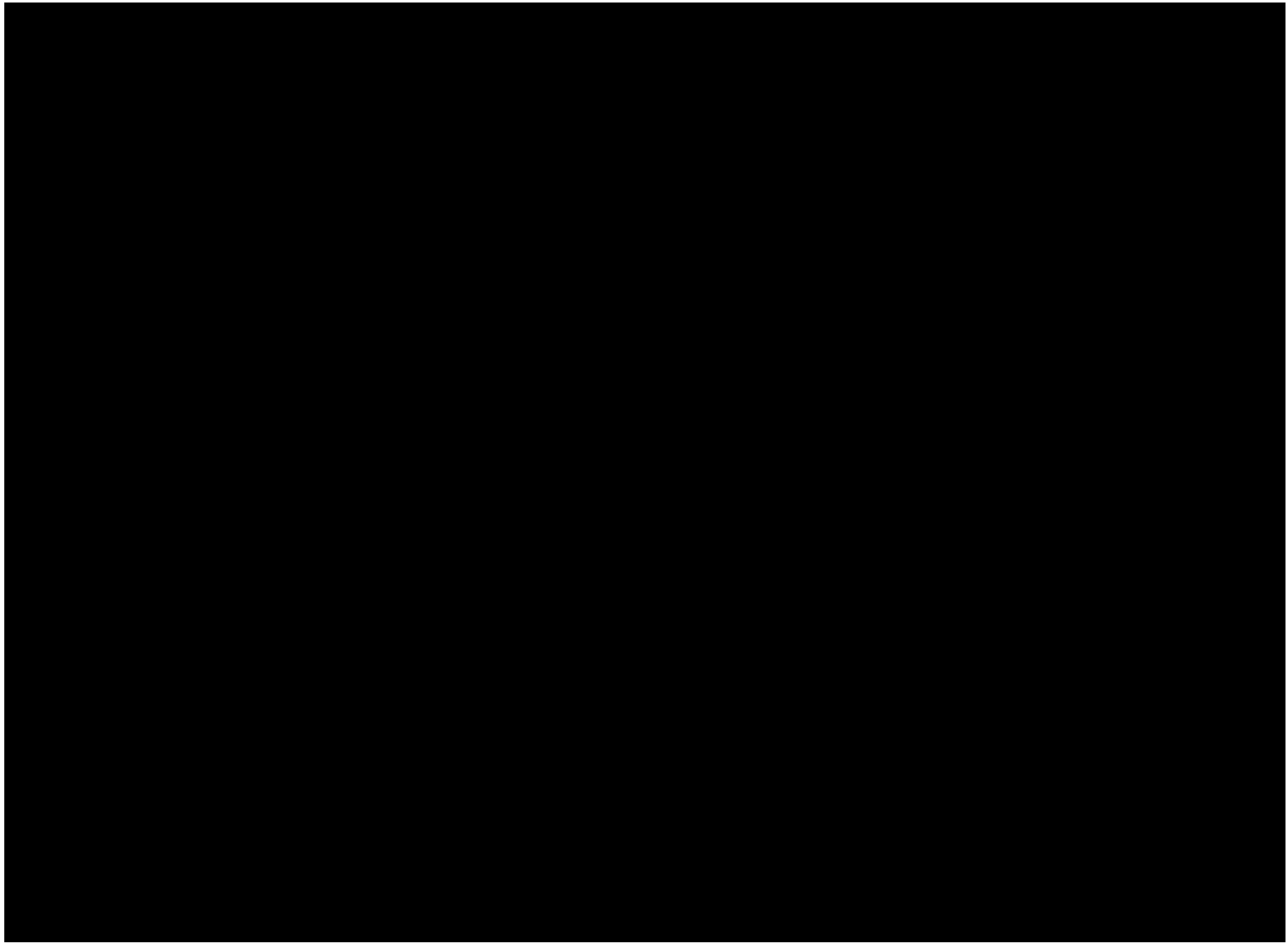
Judaism is one of the oldest civilizations originatin earliest stages of the history of the Jewish people are narrative in the Hebrew Bible from the first sibly as late as 400 BCE.

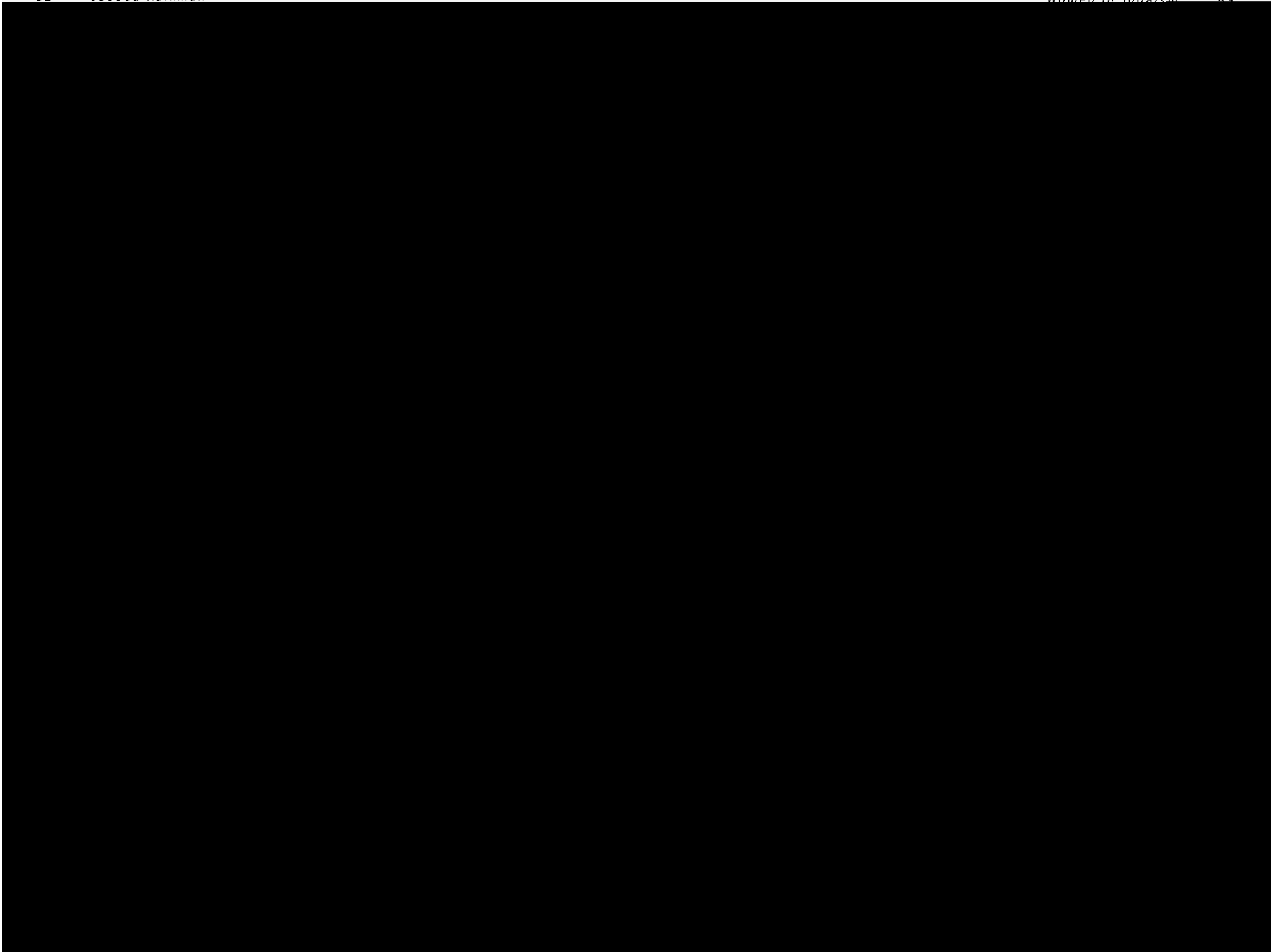
when the temple destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE was rebuilt, un
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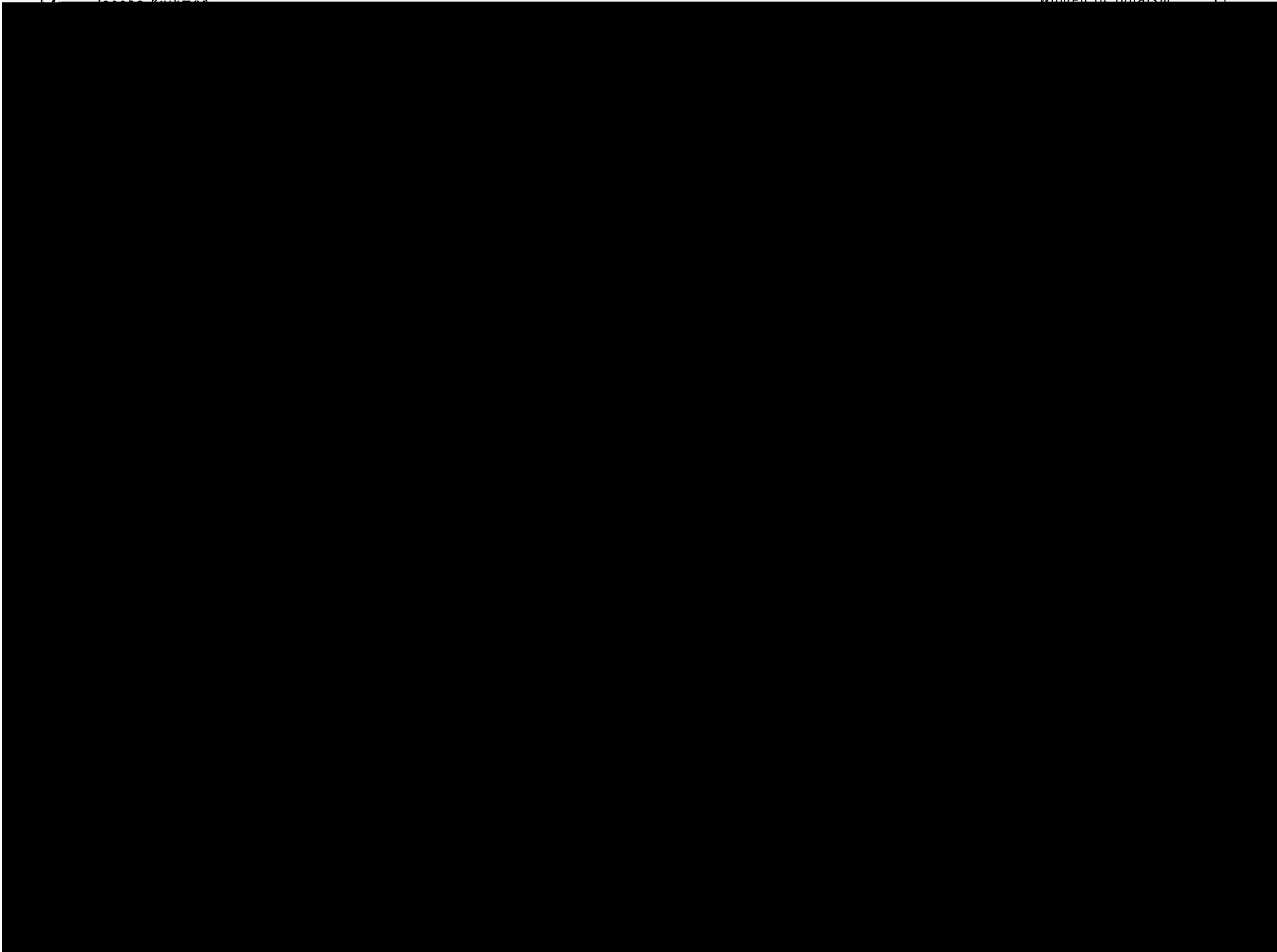
HISTORY AND STATUS OF WOMEN

A brief overview of the biblical events that spans some 1,000
national Jewry
years will provide a framework for discussion of the role
of Judaism and the place of women within it.









creation, fashioned a Midrash that enabled the two stories to be read as one

when Daniel, for example, renounced his betrothal to a woman who was

and his family became embroiled in war. In one rabbinic midrash, this

is confirmed that a woman's place was in the home. It is not surprising that the legal

status of the woman is not to be in the public sphere, but in the private sphere.

It is interesting to note that the Midrashic text does not mention the possibility of a

woman's place in the public sphere, but only in the private sphere.

It is also interesting to note that the Midrashic text does not mention the possibility of a

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It is also interesting to note that the Midrashic text does not mention the possibility of a

SYMBOLS AND GENDER

Symbols perhaps even more than rituals and beliefs are windows to under-

standing a religion's fabric of Amos, and women do not ever personify or serve as

symbols in the Bible. The only symbol in the Bible used to represent something else. For example, a woman

in the Bible is used to represent something else. For example, a woman in the Bible is used to represent

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stories about characters with whom they 'could identify' (Hauptman: 197).

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chosen Israel, is represented as a holy warrior who approves of the slaughter

people cling to Asherah as the loving mother-consort of YHWH. El for six cen-

in order and encourage. Asherah's name is a play on the word 'Asher' which means 'human power and wisdom'. The name Asherah is also found in the Hebrew Bible, where it is used to refer to the goddess Asherah. The name Asherah is also found in the Hebrew Bible, where it is used to refer to the goddess Asherah. The name Asherah is also found in the Hebrew Bible, where it is used to refer to the goddess Asherah.

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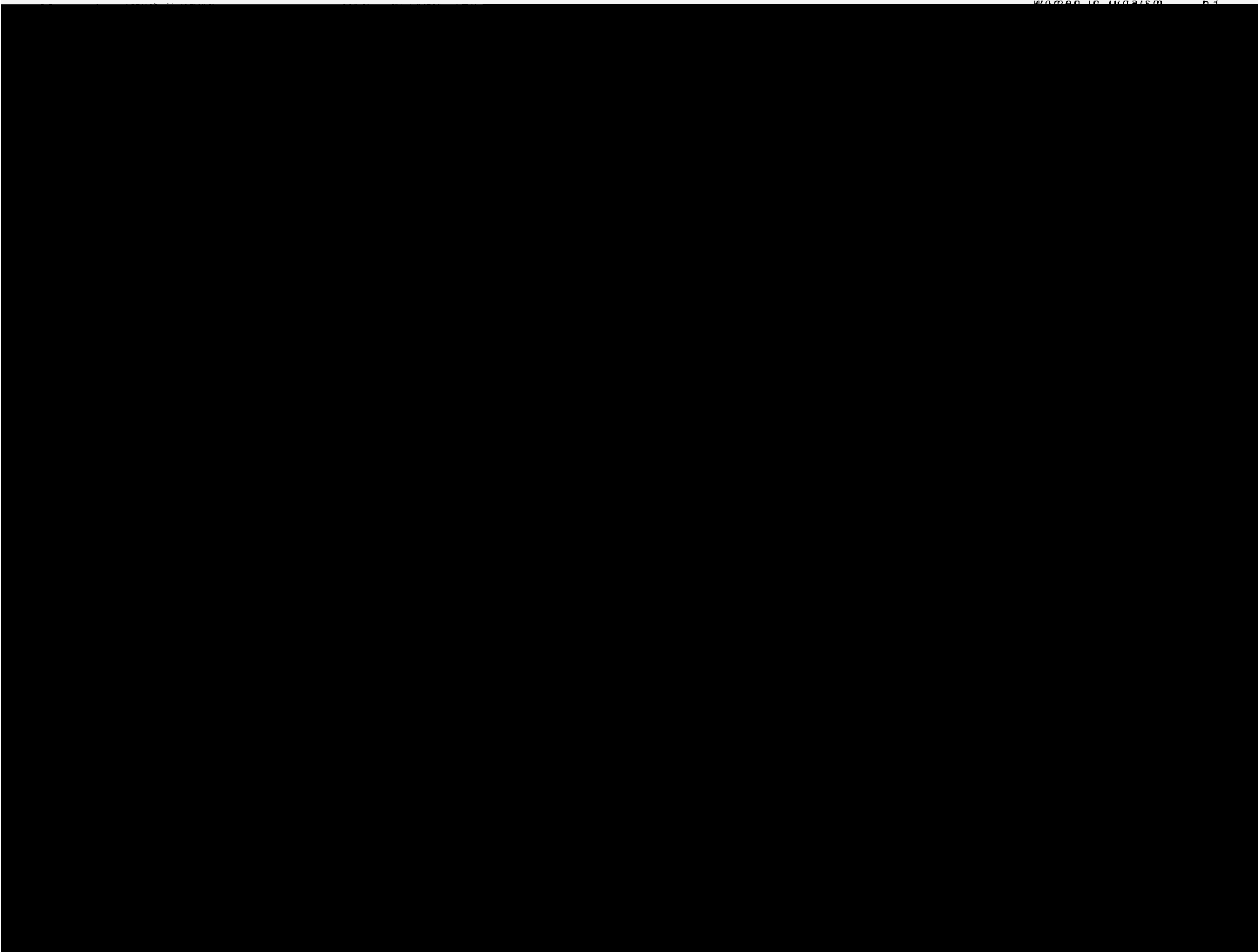
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on male fear of women's sexuality and menstrual blood (Cantor 1995: 138;

These texts and the tradition have never been monolithic. There has

been a long history of the rabbinical writings on women's sexuality and menstrual blood. In the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the Midrash, there are many references to women's sexuality and menstrual blood. In the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the Midrash, there are many references to women's sexuality and menstrual blood. In the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the Midrash, there are many references to women's sexuality and menstrual blood.

Scholars generally agree that the rabbis are disgusted by female functions

and recognition of the richness of diversity

and sexual power. In the Talmudic practice, Niddah. There is also a fear of especially the fear of being overwhelmed by it. Thus, the c

which men did not have to deal with women's sexuality of men of each. It is embedded within the seeds for social action of a world. However, as a scholar will discuss of justice, sexism, classism, capitalism, and of the human system is at least, it is a social system that is generally been in the way

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explain the demise of the great Jewish community in Spain in 1492 through

the account of Tildars, as well as two others: *Trinitas* and *Shimon Ha Kalon*.

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Placing these products on the forbidden foods list might result in a boycott and

create a greater awareness of the economic and social conditions of peoples

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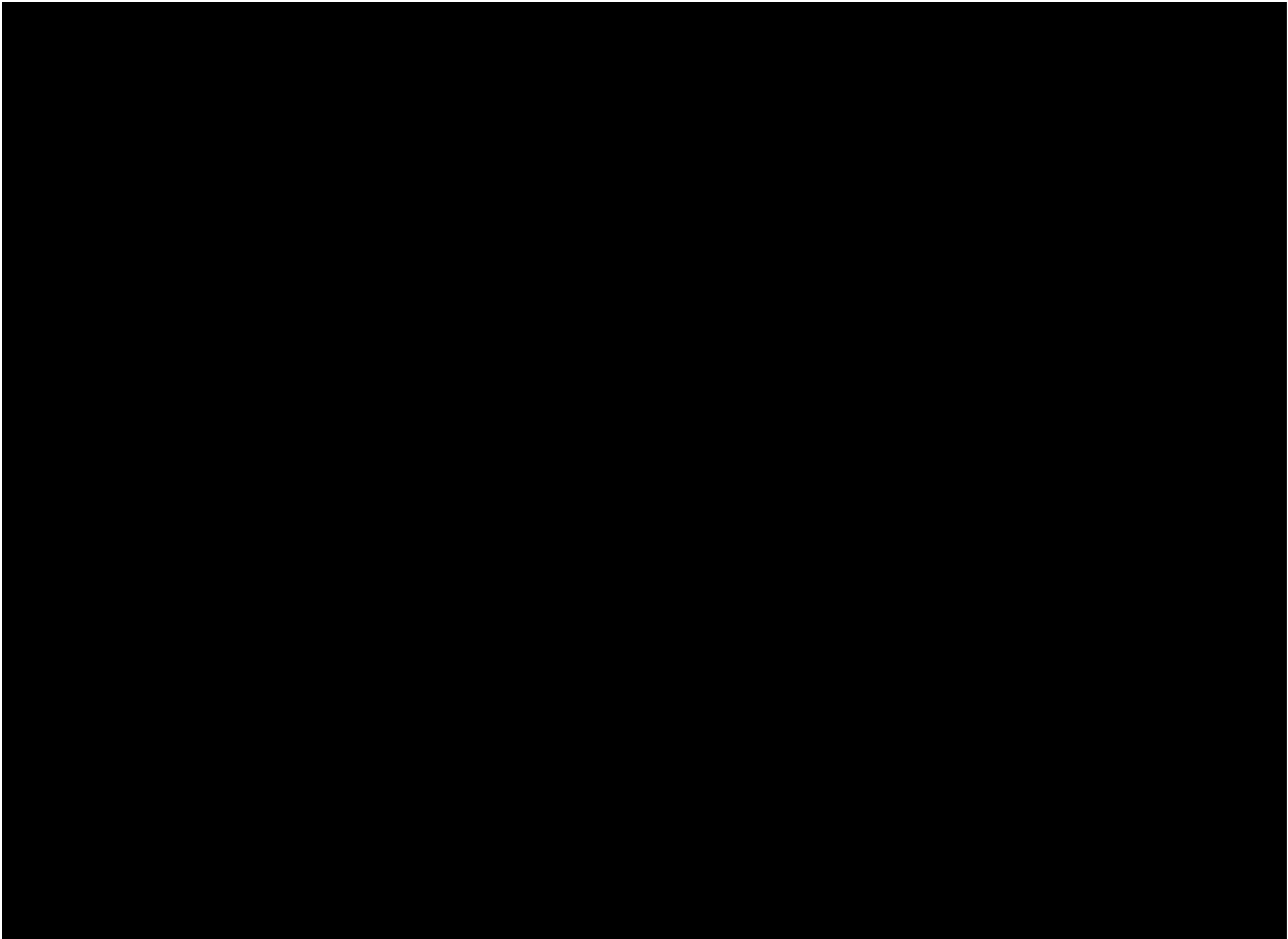
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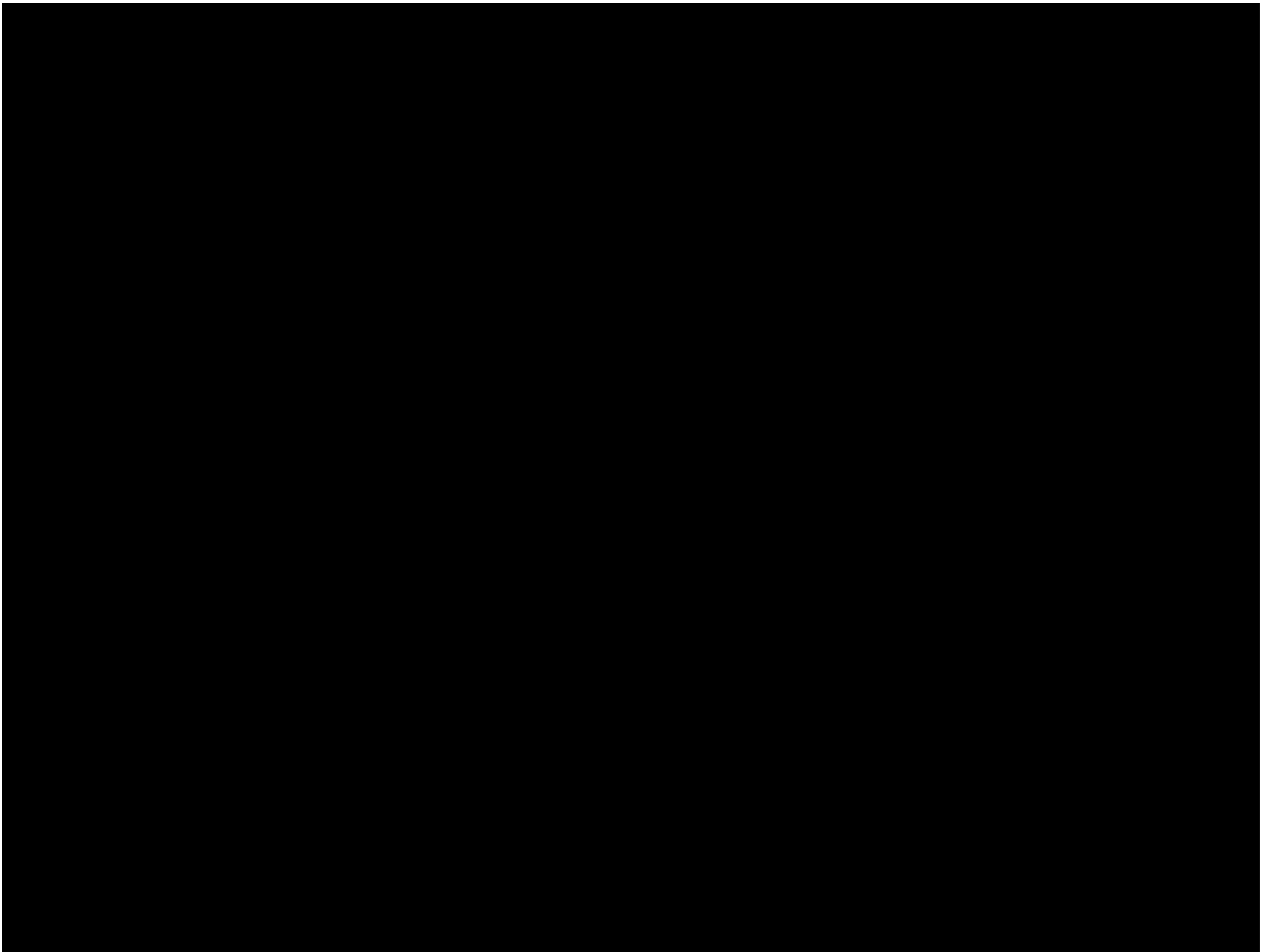
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Her patronage of the Baal cult in Judea is inferred from Joash's destruction of Baal's temple after he overthrows her.

Hasmonean Period

According to Josephus (1st century CE), the Hasmonean king John Hyrcanus left his kingdom to his wife (c. 104 BCE), whose name remains unknown. Josephus recounts that she was immediately arrested by her son Aristobolus and starved to death so he could seize the throne (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13:11:1). When Aristobolus died a year later, his widow, Salome Alexandra, freed his imprisoned brother Alexander Yannai and appointed him king. Most scholars assume this is the same Salome Alexandra who married Alexander Yannai and was appointed his heir when he died. During her nine year reign (76–67 BCE), Queen Salome Alexandra kept the kingdom independent and free of invasion. She ended civil war between the two most powerful ancient Jewish sects, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. (The Sadducees, who largely represented the hereditary priestly class whose power was vested in the Temple, followed only in written Scriptural law, while the Pharisees, possible precursors of the rabbinic class, largely represented a meritocracy based on knowledge of both written Scripture and oral law, which they believed was transmitted with written Scripture by Moses at Mount Sinai.) Upon her death, her two sons began a civil war over her succession. Josephus thus blames her for the Hasmonean dynasty's fall since she acted "out of a desire for what does not belong to a woman" (*Antiquities* 13:16:6).

Rabbinic Period

Ancient Synagogue Women Leaders

Inscriptional evidence identifies a number of named women as ancient synagogue officials (c. 1st–6th century CE). Early modern historians initially interpreted such inscriptions as honorary appellations for wives of (male) synagogue officials. That these named women actually filled the roles of president, treasurer, and so on, is now

yeshiva in Mosul, Afghanistan, after his death. The Jews of Afghanistan called her *Tannit*, the feminine of the title *Tanna* applied to her father until his death.

Women Prayer Leaders

The separation of men and women during synagogue prayer can be dated to 10th-century Cairo and 12th-century Germany. Whether because many European women were uneducated in Hebrew, the language [p. 324] of Jewish prayer, or could not follow the main service from the woman's gallery or separate prayer room, female prayer leaders became so common that Yiddish titles developed for them: *fierzogerin* and *forelainer* (fore-sayer). Often these women's prayer leaders were rabbinic wives

Wealth as Entre to Communal Leadership

A number of women rose to positions of communal leadership through their wealth. In mid-14th century Germany, the widow Kandlein inherited her husband's wealth. She sat on the council that set taxes and determined settlement rights for the Jews of Regensburg and served a two year term as one of the leaders of the community.

Perhaps the most powerful Jewish woman of the pre-modern period was Dona Gracia Nasi (1515–c. 1589). Her family was one of those who remained in Spain following the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Outwardly Catholic, they remained secret Jews (crypto-Jews). As a widow, she inherited one of the world's largest fortunes at the time. Centuries ahead of her time, she organized a secret route to help other Jews escape Spain for Protestant Europe or the Ottoman Empire, coordinated an international boycott to protect Jews from the Inquisition, and purchased land in Tiberius, Israel, to settle Jewish refugees. Once she reached the Ottoman Empire, she reaffirmed her Judaism, sponsored building a synagogue (the Synagogue of Our Lady), and successfully had overturned the rule prohibiting individuals from changing synagogue affiliation.

A probable contemporary, Esther Handali the Kiera (economic agent), became independently wealthy, serving as agent to Safiyah Baffa, favorite wife of Sultan Murad III. Esther used her influence to avert the Sultan's destruction of the Jewish community. A major Jewish philanthropist, she assisted Jewish merchants ruined in an anti-Jewish riot, helped rebuild the Jewish area of Constantinople destroyed in a fire, and supported scholars and the printing of Jewish books.

Early to Late Modern Period

Charismatic Women Leaders

The charismatic and anti-establishment nature of the Hasidic movement, beginning in the late 18th century in Eastern Europe, allowed a number of women to rise to positions

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Zionist Organization). Barred from running for Knesset in the Orthodox coalition in the same election, Tova Sanhadray-Goldreich (1906–1993) organized an Orthodox woman's political party (The Religious Woman Worker Party) and finally won a Knesset seat in 1959. She served as Knesset Deputy Speaker for almost a decade. Other Israeli women Knesset members include Shulamit Aloni, former head of the liberal Meretz Party and Minister of Education, who served in Knesset from 1965–1996. Right-wing activist Geula Cohen served in the Knesset from 1972–1992. Since 2008, the centrist Kadima Party has been headed by a woman, Tzipi Livni, who previously served as Foreign Affairs Minister. In 2011, the Labor party chose another woman as head, Shelly Yachimovich.

Numerous women have served on Israel's bench. Dorit Beinisch (1942–) became the first woman appointed to Israel's Supreme Court in 1995. She has served as its president (equivalent to a Chief Justice) since 2006.

Women Rabbis and Cantors

Women's ordination was part of a larger agenda of ritual equality pursued by the Jewish woman's movement that rose on the heels of the larger feminist movement, many of whose leaders were also Jewish. Reform Rabbi Sally Priesand became the first woman ordained in America in 1972. The Reconstructionist movement ordained women with its first graduating class in 1974. Another decade would pass before the Conservative movement accepted women into its rabbinical school in 1984, ordaining Rabbi Amy Eilberg in 1985. The investment of women cantors followed the ordination of women rabbis by several years in the Reform Movement, with Cantor Barbara Ostfeld-Horowitz in 1975, and, in the Conservative movement, with Cantors Erica Lippitz and Marla Rosenfeld in 1992.

wife of a rabbi.) Other Orthodox women, including Blu Greenberg and Rivka Haut, write, speak and advocate for increasing women's rights within Orthodox Judaism. While the more liberal arms of the Jewish community have embraced egalitarianism (the equality of men and women), Jewish women leaders across the religious spectrum continue to face discrimination equivalent to that faced by women leaders in larger American society, despite the advances of the last few decades.

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.Personal Vignettes

Mitzvah ceremonies, and then had my own *Bat Mitzvah*, before I began to guide other families through that meaningful rite of

from the Torah, chanted the portion, was president of the synagogue, and even chairperson of the ritual committee. I was just one of many studious, participating women. That was the milieu within which I began to form my desire to become a rabbi. was a milieu that made discrimination against women elsewhere in the Jewish religious world seem incomprehensible and, therefore, something to be overcome.

There have been disquieting moments, of course. A young woman doctor asked me to officiate at her wedding, and then she discovered her Israeli fiance and his family would not be comfortable with a woman rabbi. She asked if I would co-officiate with a man. I replied that if I was not rabbi enough to perform the ceremony, I preferred not to participate. She wanted to satisfy her fiance but she meant to be kind. Didn't I understand

quest. We had handled ourselves with dignity and restraint. It was a triumphant day, the rabbi who had challenged me notwithstanding.

However, it was sad, so very sad, to know that leaders of the Orthodox community at home in the States had, in fact, asked the Jews of Cracow to rescind their invitation to us because, as non-Orthodox Jews, our use of the fifteenth-century Remu Synagogue