

# Was Eve Made from Adam's Rib—or His Baculum?

In a **BAR** review of my recent book, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?*, Professor Mary Joan Leith of Stonehill College remarks that I argue persuasively that woman was made not from one of Adam's ribs but from his *os baculum*, his penis bone.<sup>a</sup>

Subsequently, **BAR** received a letter in response to this review calling attention to a fact that may appear to make my argument difficult to accept. Genesis 2:21

reads, "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took *one of his ribs* and closed up its place with flesh" (NRSV). If Adam had more than *one* of these from which God could choose, it could not refer to his *baculum*.

I agree with the letter writer who pointed to a highly unlikely implication of my analysis, and yet I still maintain the correctness of my argument. Here's why.

The Hebrew word translated as "his ribs" in Genesis 2:21 is *tsal'otav* (צלעותיו), and the word translated as "rib" in the following verse is (the singular form) *tse/a'* (צלע). Should it be translated "rib"?

This Hebrew word occurs some 40 times in the Hebrew Bible, where it refers to the side of a building or of an altar or ark (Exodus 25:12; 26:20, 26; 1 Kings 6:34), a side-chamber (1 Kings 6:8; Ezekiel 41:6), or a branch of a mountain (2 Samuel 16:13). In each of these instances, it refers to



something off-center, lateral to a main structure. The only place where *tse/a'* might be construed as referring to a rib that branches off from the spinal cord is in Genesis 2:21–22, the story of how God manufactured the first woman.

But even here, the Hebrew word, whether rib or *baculum*, refers to something off-center, lateral, in the case of rib, to the spinal cord. Hebrew *tse/a'* considered by itself, however, does not suggest the notion of “rib.”

The earliest translation of *tse/a'* in Genesis as “rib” appears in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the mid-third century B.C.E. From the Septuagint, it entered Western culture via Jerome’s Latin translation and remains the accepted understanding of the word in standard translations of the Bible. But it is wrong.

The word in the context of the story should be rendered by a non-specific, general term—“one of his lateral limbs/branches/ appendages”—and understood as referring to *limbs lateral to the vertical axis of an erect human body: hands, feet, or, in the case of males, the penis*. Of these appendages, the only one lacking a bone is the penis.

Penile bones are common in the skeletal structure of male mammals, particularly carnivores and primates where they function anatomically as a stiffening rod. Lacking this bone, human males must rely on fluid hydraulics to maintain an erection. The ancient writer of our story asked himself a question: Why do human males lack this bone? His answer was that it had been taken from Adam to make woman.

Most of the episodes in the Garden of Eden story are etiological, that is, they are intended to convey information about the origin of a natural feature or a state of affairs in the world. Each piece of information is a response to an implied question: Why was the first human created? To care for God’s garden. Why were animals created? To keep the first human company because it was not good for him to be alone. Why was the first female

created? Because no animal filled the role of proper companion for the man, and so on.

Genesis 2:21 refers to God closing the flesh beneath the *tse/a'* that he took to make the woman. This, too, was likely intended to convey etiological information, but of what were people informed by the phrase "he closed the flesh" in verse 21?

We find the answer in a little-noticed physical condition in men. A slight seam of light flesh, referred to as a perineal *raphé*, exists on the underside of the human penis. When a male fetus is about ten weeks old, the edges of the urogenital groove on the underside of the penis begin to fold together over the urogenital sinus (cavity). This process leaves a scar where the two sides come together. Most men are unaware of it, but it is in fact visible after birth and throughout life as a straight line of scar tissue on the underside of the penis.

It appears that the Bible here ascribes the origin of this scar/seam to the "closing of the flesh" after the *os baculum* was removed from Adam's penis to form the woman. It responds to the question: Where does that particular scar-like line come from?

If *tse/a'* meant rib, there is another problem: If God took one of Adam's ribs to make the woman, human beings, or at least men, would have one asymmetrical rib or a place on the skeleton where such a rib might have been situated before God took it to make the woman. This bone would have been gone. But of course this is not the case.

Contrary to a common popular belief that males have one rib less than females and that the Bible explains how that came about, both dissections of human cadavers and x-rays clearly indicate that both male and female humans have 12 pairs of ribs. In ancient Israel, nothing about human ribs was felt to require an etiological explanation. Not so, however, the scar/seam and (what was thought to be) a missing bone. They raised

questions and required an etiological answer.

The man refers to the woman thus created as “bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh” (Genesis 2:23), indicating that she was made from a bone. The Hebrew word translated as “flesh” in these verses is *basar*, a word often used to refer to penis in Biblical Hebrew (Exodus 28:42; Leviticus 15:2–3, 16; Ezekiel 16:26; 23:20).

My argument in favor of understanding that the first woman was formed from a no-longer extant *baculum* in human males is based on an analysis of how the author of the Garden story used Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> The same conclusion has been reached following a different line of reasoning:

In a [published letter](#) (**BAR** 41:01), University of Pennsylvania professor Dan Ben-Amos drew the attention of **BAR** readers, including me, to an article by the late Alan Dundes, a folklorist at the University of California at Berkeley, published 30 years ago, long before my book appeared. In his study, Dundes advanced arguments reaching the same conclusion about the formative bone as I made more recently but on very different grounds.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, I never came across Dundes’s study during the two decades that I conducted research regularly and worked sporadically on my book.

Dundes reached his conclusion on the basis of two types of research: (1) folkloristic studies indicating that some cultures considered it odd, and therefore noteworthy, that the human penis is boneless; (2) studies by a few scholars of psychoanalytic theory who hypothesized that the story of the woman’s formation out of a bone taken from the male’s body reflected a concern of males to have a greater role in the birthing process of their own children. By somehow being the “fathers” of their own wives and/or by somehow being in charge of the birthing process, they guaranteed the paternity and character of their children.<sup>3</sup>

On these grounds, Dundes wrote: “[I] believe there is some evidence to demonstrate conclusively that Eve is created from Adam’s penis ...” What

Dundes provides in this discussion is a hypothesis drawn from the psychoanalytic approach to folklore that he often used. His conclusion suggests why the ancient author/story-teller who first noticed the seam of light tissue on the underside of his penis may have written this part of the Garden of Eden story as he did.

Perhaps it is not serendipity that both Dundes and I—he first, then I—reached similar conclusions about this incident in the Garden Story. A Jewish tradition instructs one who, after much labor, has reached conclusions that he later discovers were reached by someone before him to recite the following: “Blessed is He who directed me to the idea of this one.”