It is accepted wisdom in Bible interpretation that, in the Bible, old/older is beautiful and young/younger may be beautiful, but is also foolish and in need of education by and obedience to aged authority. The Jerusalem/Tel Aviv school of ancient Jewish history (see Malamat and others), have gone as far as to state that the tribal institution of 'elders' (zeqenim) indeed originated in the veneration of aged persons' wisdom, and then the term became indicative of a social institution although the age signifi-
cation emptied into irrelevance. To substantiate their findings, such scholars cite cognate cultures (such as Egyptian cultures). Now, I remember well how I used to rebel against the almost automatic and proverbial equation of 'age = brains' as put forward in such work and,
allegedly, in the Hebrew Bible itself. Perhaps some consolation can be found in it now? With the advancement of age, I return to the most obvious and oft-cited examples. Here are some of them.

a Abraham cedes to God's authority and seems ready to sacrifice Isaac to him. Isaac seems willing to accept Abraham's authority and goes along, although he can't be a child any more (Genesis 22). In some post-biblical Jewish lore, Isaac becomes older and even more prepared to perform his task of willing victim.

b In Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and most of the so-called Deuteronomic history, as well as in Ruth, the 'elders' (zeqenim) seem to be of the highest authority in the social group: they hold the judiciary as well as executive powers. Leaders, from Abraham to Moses to others, come into their own as socially influential persons mostly when they have attained older or mythical/legendary age.

c Rehoboam is advised by his counselors, the 'children' (yeladim) he grew up with, to give his subjects a certain answer when they ask him to lighten the load his father Solomon had leveled on them (1 Kings 12:1-20 = 2 Chronicles 10). By rejecting the elders' contrary advice, Rehoboam contributes to the splitting off of the unified monarchy.

d Proverbs warns again and again, in the voice of the elder, against stupidity and cupidity. The wise 'teacher' is styled as an older person;

the words of wisdom are addressed to a typically younger person or persons (mostly male).
e The god of Daniel 7 is 'the ancient of days'. His image is that of an old patriarch or king.
f Western art, in depictions of biblical figures, almost invariably manages to present biblical males as old or at least older, with stereotypic external markers (gray hair, wrinkles, posture). At least, this happens whenever there are no indications to the contrary, that is, young age is actually mentioned. It seems that older age and authority go together in them too.

Now, let me reread these examples, taking my cue from a semantic examination of the biblical root \textit{zqn}, its derived terms and usage. Here, some mild surprises may be in store. The root \textit{zqn} can appear as a verb (in the \textit{qal} and \textit{hif'il} formations), as an adjective (\textit{zaqen}) and as nouns (\textit{zequnim}, \textit{ziqnah}, \textit{zaqan}). A cursory glance at the word contexts of its occurrences shows that its basic meanings is as follows — speaking in terms of quantity (the root \textit{zqn} and its derivatives appear over 200 times in the Hebrew Bible) and usage rather than etymology.

1. 'Grow older' or 'age' rather than 'be old' is decidedly the most regular designation. In other words, \textit{zqn} designates a process rather than a state, and is a relative-variable term rather than a rigid, fixed term. When 'old' per se is intended, an additional qualifier is necessary, such as \textit{ba ba-yamim} (advanced of days) or \textit{seva' yamim} (sated with days). In such cases a number of years might also be added. I am almost tempted to infer that the root \textit{zqn} means 'not young', and not necessarily what we shall call 'old'.

2. \textit{Zeqenim}, mostly as a ms. pl. noun, is habitually translated as 'elders', 'social seniors' (unless old or older age is definitively suggested by the word and circumstantial context). But, clearly, the \textit{zeqenim in positions of authority} are always males, never females. Whether the \textit{zeqenim} represent a long-surviving institution or institutions \textit{per se}, or hark to other patterns of social organization (to which we shall return below), they are male. In other words, the \textit{zeqenim} are the owners of the phallus, as epitomized by their actual or metaphorical \textit{zaqan}, 'beard' (see also Egyptian iconicity of kingship and authority) and the cane (Judah, in Genesis 38, Moses, Aaron, etc.), the other