

THE RÔLE OF PATRIARCHALISM IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

By way of beginning I would like to stress that patriarchalism and cognate terms are used strictly in technical way, without a social evaluation of the phenomena attached to them. Our aim is to understand social phenomena; to interpret them is not the task of the lecturer, rather a common endeavour of our scholarly community. On the other hand, I am convinced that a position which would be taken by our conference will be of special importance for many of the Hungarian society – at any rate for all those striving for the revival in our country.

At the outset I wish to get solid ground under my feet, and for this reason I quote the well-known genealogy in Ezra ii, viz. Neh vii. I think we are unanimous why this genealogy was important in restoring pre-exilic Israel, why it was necessary to enlist those names returning home from Babylon with Zerubbabel. Boring for the readers of today, this list must have been crucial for those involved in the huge work of rebuilding the country after the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile. It is of course also interesting why this list was included into the Book of Ezra and that of Nehemiah, it was also often studied why the genealogy then differs in some instances which are, on turn, but of little importance. For our purposes, however, the most important character of the genealogy is that it contains only male persons, i.e., heads of families, who were men only. For me it is not evident; I myself am often pleased that, in the age of 53, I still am addressed sometimes as ‘Ah, the son of little Sarah’ – mainly by those who know my mother, a former minister of the Trans-Tibiscan Church District. I am pleased, because I am proud of my mother, who earned a certain authority among her colleagues. But in the genealogy of Ezra and Nehemiah there is no place for the rôle of the mentioned heads of families: Only their existence is important, and descent is counted after them, regardless of their behaviour, fortunes, etc. This is a typical patrilineage and no women have place in it. Apparently there is an exception to this rule: Among the priests we come across the name of a certain Barzillai, the descendant of a priest who had married one of the daughters of David’s Gileadite friend. But appearance deceives: This is nothing more than, comparing to our European usage, a Paul de Lagarde who had taken the name of his wife as a token of reverence toward the Huguenot descent of her family. This certainly did not mean that matrilineage would be prevalent in Europe! Mentioning one of the daughters of Barzillai means nothing more than signalling

the ties which bound this priestly family to one of David's friends. Similarly, David calls his nephews the sons of Zeruah (Joab and Abishai), which simply means that they are relatives. Zeruah must have been David's older sister, I think, some ten years older than himself. This remark does not denote that special attention would be made of one of the female members of the family, rather it stresses that family ties were considered to be important. We must admit that this state of affairs is patriarchal: It implies that the male members are worth mentioning, not so the women: They are but *quantité négligeable*.¹

Why so? At closer look, one can not doubt about the purpose of the genealogy. The next part of the list (vv. 21–35) concentrates on localities, on cities and territories where the returnees had originated from. The economic interest of the list is then certain: the subsequent verses enumerate the returned priests and Levites (vv. 36–54), and the last part (vv. 55–58) the servants of Solomon. The genealogy is then closed with two appendices, finally, with a summary. No question: The returnees reclaimed by this list the original family properties and/or their former postures in the pre-exilic state. I consider this list to be historically reliable – so far as it reflects the original interests of the returned people. Whether or not this list is accurate? Well, where interest plays a rôle, the accurate account of history is very questionable! For our purposes it may suffice to say: There is no place for women in such a list!

Before accusing this behaviour of male chauvinism, let us turn toward another text of the Old Testament which is similarly of post-exilic origin. After Job was given right, he regains his former wealth and he founds also a family. During his tribulations all his children had died, but now he gets new descent: Seven sons and three daughters. According to Job xlii 13–14 we do not know the names of the sons, but the daughters seemed to be as important as to mention their names: The first name was Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-happuch. I insist on the Hebrew pronunciation of the names, for they imply also a meaning: Jemimah is “little dove”, Keziah is “cinnamon”, i.e. Cassia Arabica, and the third is, Keren-happuch, “a horn (a container) of make-up”. The names do not speak much about the daughters, but they display the love of the father towards them, because all these names are pet names. V. 15 feels necessary to stress that “In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters”, and, what is more, the daughters were also rich because “their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.” This almost sounds as an invitation to marry the daughters of Job: They are meek and mild, beautiful, and also rich! But beware: This text is also desperately patriarchalistic. It does not tell us anything about the life of the daughters it only speaks of Job's joy of and affection to his daughters, with the purpose to display the

¹ By way of comparison: The genealogical introduction to Chronicles mentions also women of importance.

total restoration of Job's life. The daughters represent the vitality of Job which is full-blown after the deathly tribulations. Even the mentioned inheritance which Job gave to his daughters is but an exception to the general law.

Is this the only exception to the law? By no means: in the Pentateuch we also read a text which is of post-exilic origin, where the inheritance by daughters is possible. Num xxvii 1–11 tells about the complaint of Zelophehad's daughters. Zelophehad had no sons, but four daughters. If inheritance is only patrilineal, the daughters would have no subsistence and the family dies out. This is a necessary consequence of the one-sided patrilineage which is, to be sure, prevalent in post-exilic times! Num xxvii 8ff puts into Moses' mouth the verdict: "If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers." This is, however, not the restitution of the matrilineal inheritance; we only can state a *pragmatica sanctio*²: Being no sons available, the daughters replace them. But what about a daughter who had a brother? What about this female person, if the father did not order a special inheritance, as Job did? Certainly, she did not have other chance, but marry.

It is often said that the Babylonian Exile was a water-shed in Israelite family life. Was it then possible before the Exile that a woman would inherit from her father's wealth? There is not much material in this respect. Nevertheless, in Is iv 1 we have a small hint to the inheritance of women before the Exile. It is a prophecy of doom which predicts the precarious situation in the land, and especially the fate of women seems to be very bad: "Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace." Being deprived of men is as bad as being deprived of women; but this time we may think of a real catastrophe, perhaps of a war in which all men fell. The women in this prophecy renounce *š'e'ēr* and *k'esūt*, food and clothing, which was, according to Deuteronomy, the task of their husbands. They say they will ensure their subsistence by themselves. What they need is only "taking away their disgrace", i.e. freeing them from childlessness. I am not quite sure what calling by the name of the husband means, because in Israel women did not wear the name of the husband. The suggestion of K. Galling might be right here, namely that in legal procedures the women needed the names of their husbands, but this is not a legal text here, so the meaning is uncertain. What is important for us is that the women in this oracle of judgment have got a certain wealth, so they do not need the fortunes of a man. This might be a small hint that they did inherit from their fathers, so that they were not short of living. The problem

² *Pragmatica sanctio* was the edict of the Austrian emperor Charles VI, who had no male heir to the throne. In passing the law of Pressburg in 1723 the inheritance of women was made possible, so Maria Theresia could be the empress of Austria. Hungarians supported the law effectively, and on its account they fought against Prussia and France. The law was valid in Hungary until 1919.

to be resolved by Moses in the case of Zelophehad's daughters was no problem before the Exile, and the matrilineal inheritance was in use. One may ask why this was changed after the Exile.

This is, however, a vexing question – not only here, but also elsewhere in the history of Israel. It stands for certain that some changes were done after the Exile, but we do not know exactly what has been changed. In this instance, I believe something went wrong in the development of Israelite society; it is not excluded that post-exilic patriarchy was due to foreign influences, which were abundant in the 5th Century BCE. The situation was unique: Israel had to rebuild its society, but in such a way as to make it fit to the overall society of the Persian Empire. Perhaps the whole of Ezra's legislation fell under this rubric. The social order of the Persian Empire was given, adaptations had to be done – in a word: Israelite life had to conform with Persian rules. It is not proven, but also not excluded that the organization of the central power was a Persian model – and all this happened to the detriment of Israelite women. A sensitive case is, in this respect, the question of foreign women. Well, it is strictly unthinkable that there would only have been female persons among the foreigners. But foreign women are dismissed, and there is no word about foreign male persons. We witness here to an ancient discrimination among sexes.

The next question is necessarily the following: had the pre-exilic edifice of society been different? According to recent studies in the field of ethnoarchaeology (a term labeled by Carol Meyers), we are entitled to say: yes, definitely different. The highland village settlements gradually developed a society where the sharing of life, including place, subsistence, wealth and threats, promoted to maintain and develop the ties, and counter-indicated divisions. We are thankful to the University of Mainz for the model of the four-room-house in our exhibition (called by Carol Meyers pillared house) which is almost an incarnation of the life of the extended family where family members worked and lived together. To be sure: this society was also patriarchal, but in a different way. In production “women had more direct control over the results of their labor in that their activities were related more to managed technology than to unmanageable nature. If men produced amounts, women produced things. Clearly, these two kinds of work were interdependent parts of the whole of the household economy.”³ Of course, this is not a situation a modern woman would dream about! Women had to work hard, and they were also not relieved from the tasks of biology. “For a large percentage – as much as third – of their life spans, women were inextricably involved in the physical processes of motherhood, such as pregnancy, breast-feeding, and taking care of infants. Few women survived to menopause, and childbearing began soon after puberty.” All

³ *The Family in Early Israel*, in: L. G. PERDUE – J. BLENKINSOPP – J. J. COLLINS – Carol MEYERS: *Families in Ancient Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 1–47.

this indicates that women had by far less chances to follow own ways when the emergence of central power lead to the formation of state.⁴ In this situation women were truly at disadvantage – David had to be a male person and no women had the social chance to compete with him. And yet, the development of female authority was not hindered! The society was patriarchal in that it did not leave much room for this development, but it was not misogynic in that it accepted when somebody overcame the social difficulties. Consequently, in pre-exilic times there were some women of high esteem. Deborah is one among them, but there were also prophetesses (Isaiah's wife, the prophetess Huldah), and some important women figured also in the political leadership of the country. But why did not the exilic times produce similar phenomena? Where are the Israelite women in the 6th and 5th centuries? This can not be explained from a normal development of the Israelite society and the suggestion of an external factor is the only satisfactory hypothesis.

As we can see, the late post-exilic times gave birth to certain theological corrections to the times of restoration. Especially the book of Jonah seems to correct the theological impasse of the idea of the national religion, purported by the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Am I mistaken if I understand the post-exilic edition of the book of Ruth as a kind of correction of the idea of nationalism, but it also wishes to introduce a women into the most important genealogy of the king's family. The pre-exilic oral folklore may record the importance of the female power in the life of an Israelite family. But the presence of a Moabite woman among the ancestors of David might have been a challenge to all those forgetting the vitality of female individuals in Judah. Unmistakable allusions to the Messiah⁵ say in the book that Messianic age can not come with the exclusion of the half of humanity.

I think, there are further corrections, too. Gen xxxviii has since ever been a *crux* to modern exegesis. There are lots of difficulties in the text, but the most embarrassing is certainly its context: the story about Tamar is embedded in the narrative of Joseph. Nothing of Tamar's story precedes in the former chapter, and nothing follows in the subsequent one. The Joseph story is, so to say, interrupted for the sake of this very important passage. This is a real enigma, and I dare not

⁴ In her contribution to the Centennial Symposium of W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, in May, 2000, (*Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past. Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbor from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*, ed. W. G. DEVER and S. GITIN. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), Carol Meyers provides an overall description of the rôle of women in pre-exilic Israel: *Material Remains and Social Relations: Women's Culture in Agrarian Households of the Iron Age*, 325–444. She refers to *households*, rather than to families, in which the persons living together and the 'hardware' of common life belong together. The households secured for women a 'gendered space', which speaks in favor of a certain division of labor. This is called in Meyers 'gendered activities', such as food preparation ('grains to bread') and textile production ('spinning, sewing and weaving'). No question: she (or he) who does all this is a very important member of society!

⁵ See e. g. Jutta HAUSMANN, *Rut. Miteinander auf dem Weg*, Leipzig: EVA, 2005, 96–97.

to say that I can solve this riddle, I only can make a suggestion. In my view, the interpolator rightly saw here that the Joseph story's portrayal of women is very negative. Indeed, the wife of Potiphar can not be a positive figure! But this negative view of women is quite late in Israelite literature. The wife of Potiphar, Samson's Delilah and the foreign women in general make up a bunch of ladies who are regarded, especially in the Israelite wisdom literature, as a menace to the young men of traditional Jewish faith. The story of Tamar is a kind of correction: it displays what the Israelite female vitality is for. I wish to underline that this vitality is extremely strong: even the patriarch, Judah, must bow before it. But it is a benevolent power, it serves the interests of the whole nation and, in contrast to Potiphar's wife, it is far from being egoistic. It stands, by virtue of its strength, of its importance and of its consequences, on equal foot with the great ancestors of Israel. By interpolating Tamar's story the post-exilic redactor wished to refuse the negative picture of women which was right, in his/her view, only with foreign women, especially with Greeks – as is said in Ben Sirach's book of wisdom.

Finally, I want to turn your attention to a very difficult text in Lev xviii. Today it can be clear that vv. 7–17 contain a series of incest taboo in a form similar to a Dodecalogue. And it also seems quite logical that a society would define the order of marriages and sexual behavior. Much more debated is the date of this series. I can hardly believe that it would go back to the prehistory of Israel; nevertheless, a pre-exilic origin can not be excluded. The big question has since many years been whether the daughter is not included in the series of incest taboo. It is undoubtedly sure that this prohibition was not absent, but why then the silence about it? F. Fechter enlists the suggestions made in the last decades⁶, but none of them is satisfactory. It is not possible to answer this question by supposing different layers in the text, the literary form of Dodecalogues can not explain the lack of the prohibition, and the matter itself would strongly indicate that the daughter should be included in the series. I try to make a suggestion. In social psychology, sexual intercourse is often perceived as exerting violence, and each society has got its rules of the game. We Europeans traditionally regard the Islamic states as violent, but the same is thought of Europe in the Far East. The series of incest taboo in Lev xviii does not simply exclude the named members of family from the candidates of sexual intercourse, but also makes them exempt of the violence: they are in every respect protected persons. – The place of the daughter is excellent in this series; we might call it with just reasons a taboo within a taboo. Sexual intercourse with the named members of family is excluded, but with one's own daughter is simply unthinkable. One's own daughter means one's own vitality; it can not be violated. The son is in the power of the father; but it is not the same with the daughter: she is not. Indeed, we can nowhere see in the Old Testament that a father would have forced a marriage on her

⁶ *Die Familie in der Nachexilszeit*, BZAW 264, Berlin – New York: W. de Gruyter, 1997, 177–188.

daughter – a complaint which was quite often in the Romanticism of our European history. The sexual fantasies of a young woman are never connected with the father (this kind of Oedipus' complex is absent in the Old Testament⁷), rather with the mother: 'I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of the one who bore me.' (Song of Songs viii 2). The girl in love is called 'My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her' (vi 9). No doubt, these extremely strong images reflect social psychology and are telling: the mother can be over the daughter, but the father never! This view is conform with the absence of the daughter in Lev xviii: One may rule over many family members, but not over her own daughter. It is prohibited to violate these family members; the prohibition of the violation of the daughter is but nonsense.

I try to sum up my suggestions:

A) Pre-exilic patriarchalism developed naturally. It was not advantageous for women, but it was not oppressive. When organizing central power, the disadvantage of women grew also. Nevertheless, female authority was recognized, even if it was not supported.

B) In the Exile and after the building and rebuilding Israelite society proceeded from above, according to the Persian legislation. In this procedure female authority was pushed back. In modern terms we may call this oppressive patriarchalism.

C) In late post-exilic times the Israelite religion tried to correct this state of affairs. How much result these corrections scored is hard to estimate. The emergence of the Hasmonean kingdom may have put an end to these efforts.

⁷The only exception to the rule is the case of Lot's daughters, Gen xix. Truly, this is a story which was capable of decrying Moabites and Ammonites!