A World in Which Things Are Not As They Should Be:
How the Deuteronomistic Ideology is Reinforced
in the Book of Judges by the Portrayal of Women and Domestic Space

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the presentation of women and domestic space in the book of Judges supports the Deuteronomistic ideology and intention for the book. The first chapter provides an overview of scholarship on the Deuteronomistic History and the role of the book of Judges within this history. The book of Judges is shown to clearly communicate the dangers of idolatry and improper worship, and the necessity of strong central government by depicting pre-monarchic Israel as a chaotic and dangerous society, a world in which things are not as they should be. The second chapter examines the social background of women and domestic space in ancient Israel. By presenting a reading of the female characters of the book of Judges, the third chapter demonstrates how these social roles are challenged and contravened constantly and in diverse ways, especially in the stories of Judg 4; 11; 16; and 19. Thus, the portrayal of women and domestic space in the book of Judges is one way pre-monarchic Israel is demonstrated to be a world in which things are not as they should be. In this way the Deuteronomistic ideology is reinforced.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse soutient que la présentation des femmes et de l'espace domestique dans le livre de Juges confirme l'idéologie et l'objectif deutéronomiste du livre. Le premier chapitre donne un aperçu d'historiographie deutéronomiste et du rôle du livre de Juges au cours de l'histoire. Le livre de Juges communique les dangers de l'idolâtrie et de culte impropre et la nécessité d'un gouvernement central fort en représentant l'Israël pré-monarchique comme une société chaotique et dangereuse, un monde dans lequel les choses ne sont pas comme elles devraient l'être. Le deuxième chapitre examine le milieu social des femmes et espace domestique de l'Israël antique. En présentant une lecture sur les caractères féminins du livre de Juges, le troisième chapitre examine comment ces rôles sociaux sont défiés et enfreints constamment et de différentes manières, surtout les histoires de Jug 4; 11; 16; et 19. Ainsi, le portrait des femmes et de l'espace domestique dans le livre de Juges est une façon de démontrer que l'Israël pré-monarchique est un monde dans lequel les choses ne sont pas comme elles devraient l'être. De cette manière l'idéologie deutéronomiste est renforcée.

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INTRODUCTION

In the chilling and riveting story of *The Handmaid's Tale,* Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood creates a dystopia, a world in which things are not as they should be. Sometime in the 21st or 22nd centuries a military coup, unchecked by a complacent and disinterested populace, has overturned the United States of America and replaced it with a fundamentalist Christian theocracy, "the Republic of Gilead." This society is officially patriarchal and ruled by a fascist military-dictatorship: basic human rights are ignored or denied, and people live in constant fear of arrest and hanging. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious intolerance are promoted and enforced.

Even the North American institutions of marriage and family are dismantled in Gilead, replaced by a hierarchical system designed to maximize the society's birthrate. The reproduction rate of Gilead's citizens is dangerously low, and reproduction is an obsession. Thus, most households involve a married heterosexual couple ("Commander" and "Wife"), many servants—almost all of whom are female—and a "handmaid," or concubine, whose primary role is not sexual pleasure, but reproduction. Atwood has gone to Gen 30:1-3 for a biblical precedent for this role—and, unsurprisingly, Gilead's founders likewise appeal to this passage for justification.

Indeed, the handmaid of Gilead differs little from these ANE women in their functions. Once a week, in "The Ceremony," the Commander engages in sexual intercourse with the handmaid, who lies between the Wife's legs. As Atwood's protagonist, the handmaid Offred, describes it: "It has nothing to do

with passion or love or romance . . . It has nothing to do with sexual desire . . .

This is not recreation . . . This is serious business."[1] It is all about reproduction: if

she "succeeds" she has done her duty and will be as well treated as anyone in

Gilead; if she fails, she faces an uncertain, but certainly miserable, future.

The story is narrated by this handmaid, Offred, her name typical of all

handmaidens: it is patronymic, a reference to the patriarch of the household, Fred.

She belongs to Fred, and has been stripped of her former name. Meanwhile,

during the founding of Gilead, her daughter had been kidnapped and adopted by

another Commander and Wife. We are also given glimpses into the perspectives

of other female characters—Serena Joy, Fred's Wife and a formerly successful

televangelist, now confined to a boring and meaningless existence in the home;

Ofglen, another handmaid and neighbor of Offred who participates in an

underground resistance movement, only to be caught and hung; Rita, a green-clad

"Martha," or servant; Moira, Offred's lesbian friend from university, who, after

attempting to escape Gilead, was given the choice to be hung or to become a

"Jezebel," or prostitute for the Commanders. All of these women provide a

different vantage point for perceiving this dystopian society, and each of them has

a unique perspective. But all of them suffer from the same basic problems: their

lives have been taken from them and their new lives are ruled unpredictably and

capriciously by intolerant men; their roles and their functions within domestic

space have become unstable and threatening. They live in a world in which things

are not as they should be.

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[1] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), 108.

. . . . .

Literary critics may debate whether the term "dystopia" applies to the Israelite society presented in the book of Judges; but no reader can deny that it, like Atwood's Republic of Gilead, is a world in which things are not as they should be. While clearly not carrying the same feminist agenda as *The Handmaid's Tale*, the book of Judges also uses women characters within domestic space to allow readers a unique perspective on this terrifying and troubling world. And, as in Gilead, it is religious practice run amok that has resulted in the political degradation and chaos of Israel in the book of Judges. *The Handmaid's Tale* and the book of Judges, composed some 2,500 years apart, both attempt to caution and warn their readers of the dangers of religious and political ambivalence, partially through the portrayal of women in domestic space.

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My thesis will pursue this reading of the book of Judges and the women portrayed in it, focusing especially on the four stories in Judg 4; 11; 16; and 19. These stories all give a prominent place to female characters: Deborah and Jael; Jephthah's daughter; Delilah; and the Levite's concubine. All these women have very different experiences of the society in which they live, but each of them find themselves in unexpected and surprising roles, and each of them discovers domestic space to be violent and unpredictable. These stories of female characters and domestic space support the Deuteronomistic ideology by intensifying the portrayal of pre-monarchic Israelite society as a world in which things are not as they should be. My thesis will serve two purposes: from a historical-critical perspective, it fleshes out our understanding of how the

Deuteronomistic ideology is communicated in the book of Judges and how it would have been read by the book's first readers; and, from a literary perspective, it provides greater appreciation for the female characters of the book of Judges in their narrative and social contexts.

Chapter one of my thesis focuses on the Deuteronomistic composition and purpose of the book of Judges. I examine the theory of the Deuteronomistic History (DH) as first proposed in 1943 by Martin Noth[2] and review some of the scholarly work since Noth on the DH and the place of Judges within it, before constructing my own working hypothesis on the Deuteronomistic intention for Judges. I argue that the Deuteronomist(s) have created the period of the judges to fill the gap between conquest and monarchy, and have used the book to reinforce their ideology.[3] While the book of Judges likely contains post-Deuteronomistic additions, these additions support (or at least do not conflict with) the Deuteronomistic message, and I suggest that the book's first generations of readers in Persian Yehud of the fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E.[4] would have found the Deuteronomistic ideology communicated in the book as a whole. The book of Judges portrays a world in which things are not as they should be, and blames this

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[2] Martin Noth, *Deuteronomistic History* (trans. David J. A. Clines et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981).

[3] I use the much abused term "ideology" in the sense established by James Barr: it is "the glance" that presents how something "might be different," shows "us how things are wrong and could conceivably [be] something better" (*History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000], 131).

[4] To some extent this idea of "first readers" is anachronistic: the ANE possessed "no reading public of any substance" (Karel Van Der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007], 5), with any level of significant literacy no higher than ten percent (ibid., 10-11); in such a milieu, written texts "were the province of professionals," that is, the scribes, and literature only reached a wider audience through "oral performance" (ibid., 5). Nonetheless, I will continue to use the term "readers" to refer to the first generations who encountered the book of Judges in something close to its final form, whether through reading or hearing the text read.

chaotic, unpredictable society on constant and widespread idolatry and temporary and inadequate political leadership; in this way, the Deuteronomistic ideology is reinforced and underlined.

My second chapter explores the social background of the ANE as it relates to the roles of women and domestic space. I focus on what we know about ancient Israel of the Iron II period through the use of secondary sources and information from the Hebrew Bible. My exploration concludes that within ancient Israel, women's functions were usually defined by their relationship to men, and they were most often subordinate. Women were expected to be submissive and dependent within households dominated by men, but they were also to be accorded respect, treated with decency, and protected in their subservient roles. It was in the household's domestic space that submission, dependency, and protection all came together in the lives of ancient Israelite women. There were specific expectations of domestic space as well, including hospitality, safety, and comfort. In a sense, the roles of women and domestic space were closely related: women were expected to be submissive and find protection and care within domestic space, even as they contributed to their homes as a place of hospitality, security, and comfort.

In the third and final chapter I look at the stories of female characters in the book of Judges. The women of the book of Judges have been well-treated as a subject for quite some time, giving me an abundance of secondary literature to draw on. There has been little work, however, focusing on the portrayal of domestic space in the book, or tying the portrayal of these female characters to the Deuteronomistic ideology. I look at the portrayal of each female character, and

show how all of them contribute to the construction of pre-monarchic Israel as a world in which things are not as they should be. I focus especially on the stories in Judg 4; 11; 16; and 19, stories that vary considerably from one another, but that all involve female characters and have their climax set within domestic space. For each of these characters domestic space is transformed from the expected role of a safe, secure, hospitable space to a threatening and hostile environment. Furthermore, domestic space provides the setting in which the social expectations of women are also severely challenged. In Judg 4 and 16, Jael and Delilah take initiative within their domestic space; they are aggressive and manipulative, defeating their male enemies. In Judg 11 and 19, nameless female characters, Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine, are wronged in shocking and appalling ways; these women experience domestic space not as the setting for victory, but rather for victimization in physically terrifying circumstances. In both cases, domestic space has failed to meet its expectations, allowing women, on the one hand, to be mistreated and abused, and, on the other, to take on the (male) role of initiator and antagonist.

It is possible that none of the individual stories of women in the book of Judges would necessarily have struck the book's first readers as indicative of the social degradation of pre-monarchic Israelite society, but collectively this message is overwhelming. The stories of Judg 4; 11; 16; and 19 are complemented by the other female characters of the book, and all of them help portray a "topsy-turvy"[5] society, lacking religious obedience and political

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[5] Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Hospitality in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 29 (1984): 39.

stability. I conclude that for the first readers of the book of Judges, the portrayal

of women and domestic space serve as a powerful illustration and reinforcement

of the Deuteronomistic ideology: pre-monarchic, idolatrous, politically-leaderless

Israel is a world in which things are not as they should be.

1. THE BOOK OF JUDGES IN THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY

Since Martin Noth's seminal work of 1943, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, the book of Judges has been understood by most commentators as a part of the *Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, or the Deuteronomistic History.[6] This larger context for the book of Judges is essential for my reading of the book and the purpose of this chapter is to examine that context. First, I will summarize the history of scholarship on the DH, beginning with Noth and up until the present, selecting some examples of directions that scholarship has taken. I will emphasize areas of disagreement and also areas on which most scholars agree. Second, I will look at how Judges itself is understood to fit within the DH, again focusing on the most contentious issues and those areas in which there is more or less a scholarly consensus. Finally, I will discuss the Deuteronomistic ideology and intention for the book of Judges, and how the book communicated this ideology to the book's first readers.

The Deuteronomistic History, 1943-2010

Martin Noth

The notion of a Deuteronomic (Dtn) or D source in the Pentateuch goes back as far as the 19th century, and the idea that this source could also be found in other biblical books is not original to Martin Noth.[7] In fact, it was thought that all of the main sources of the Pentateuch—J, E, D, and P—could be found in the literature known as the Former Prophets, and it was within the context of this

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[6] Mark O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 3.

[7] E. W. Nicholson, foreword to *The Deuteronomistic History*, by Martin Noth, vii-ix; Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical, and Literary Introduction* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 17-21.

discussion that Noth's *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* shook up the

scholarly study of the Hebrew Bible.[8]

In the first volume of this work, Noth "discovers" the DH—the books we

now know as Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings—"as

a literary entity and unity."[9] Noth talks about the Deuteronomist's style,

"vocabulary, diction and sentence structure,"[10] but he concentrates on two reasons

for reading the DH as a literary unit. First, he points to the speeches by central

characters or summaries by the narrator at turning points in the history: Joshua's

speeches in Josh 1 and 23; the narrator's comments in Josh 12 and Judg 2:11-3:6;

Samuel's speech in 1 Sam 12; Solomon's prayer in 1 Kgs 8; and, finally, and

perhaps most significantly, the narrator's reflection on Israel's exile in 2 Kgs 17.

These speeches and summaries tie the DH together, linking each period of

Israelite history to the next. They not only serve as turning points, but also give

the Deuteronomist an opportunity to offer ideological insights and comments on

the events he has recounted. "This practice of inserting general retrospective and

anticipatory reflections at certain important points in the history has no exact

parallels in the Old Testament"[11] and Noth concludes that it is "a characteristic

which strongly supports" the notion of a unified DH.[12]

Second, Noth underlines the concern with chronology throughout the DH.

In particular, Noth latches on to the figure of 480 years found in 1 Kgs 6:1. He

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[8] Thomas Römer and Albert de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues," in *Israel Constructs its History Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (eds. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 47.

[9] Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 2.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] Ibid., 6.

[12] Ibid.

spends a chapter calculating how the Deuteronomist could have reached this

number and argues that rather than a simple "fabrication," this figure represents

the total amount of time accounted for from Deuteronomy-Kings—evidence that

these books form "a self-contained unit."[13] This chronological concern results in

the division of the history into distinct periods: the Mosaic period of

Deuteronomy; the conquest and occupation period in Joshua; the period of the

judges, from Judg 2:6-1 Sam 12:25; the "united" monarchy of Saul, David, and

Solomon (including the construction of the temple) in 1 Sam 13-1 Kgs 11; the

period of the divided kingdom of 1 Kgs 12-2 Kgs 17; and finally, the reigns of the

last kings of Judah—a period that ends abruptly and without a speech or extensive

summary in 2 Kgs 25.

This sudden end to the otherwise unified and tied together DH prompts

Noth to date its composition to sometime soon after the final events in 2 Kgs 25.[14]

It was these final events—the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and

the Babylonian exile—that Noth understands as the impetus for the DH's

composition. The Deuteronomist is interested in presenting a theodicy[15] and the

DH serves to explain the reason for this traumatic calamity as the result of Israel's

sin, not Yahweh's failure as a god. The Deuteronomist does this by presenting an

essentially pessimistic view of Israel's history: the people and their leaders

consistently break Yahweh's covenant, ignore his prophets, and in particular

disobey the Dtn laws for proper—monotheistic and centralized—worship; "God

was recognizably at work in this history, continuously meeting the accelerating

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[13] Ibid., 25.
[14] Ibid., 99.
[15] Cf. Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 24.

moral decline with warnings and punishments."[16] For Noth's Deuteronomist, the final events of the DH are also "the final end" of the "order of things as put forward in the Deuteronomic law."[17] He has no hope of restoration or deliverance. Noth's Deuteronomist blames much of this on the Davidic monarchy, and Noth describes the Deuteronomist as thoroughly anti-monarchic. As well, Noth finds the Deuteronomist largely ambivalent about cultic matters, leading Noth to conclude that he was something of an independent scholar, without ties to the priesthood or the royal court.[18]

This "lone-wolf" Deuteronomist was both an editor and an author. On the one hand, Noth insists that the Deuteronomist is not "just an editor,"[19] but a composer or author in his own right, with his own goals and objectives and ideology: "he did not merely assemble the traditional material . . . he was also selective,"[20] and he linked, reconciled, and corrected "the traditions he . . . utilized."[21] On the other hand, sources form the bulk of the DH as envisioned by Noth, and the Deuteronomist "simply reproduced the literary sources available to him and merely provided a connecting narrative for isolated passages."[22] Noth appeals to this use of sources to explain internal tensions and conflicts within the DH. For example, he describes the Deuteronomist as "not pedantic enough to reject traditional material just because it is not easily integrated into a set

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[16] Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 89.
[17] Ibid., 98.
[18] Noth hypothesized (in a footnote) that the Deuteronomist wrote in the "region of Bethel and Mizpah" (ibid., 142); the location of the Deuteronomist(s) matters little to my work, so I will not expend space examining this issue.
[19] Ibid., 76; Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History* 24.
[20] Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 84.
[21] Ibid., 87.
[22] Ibid., 10.

pattern."[23] In a sense, this allowed Noth to talk about a unified DH without really

addressing questions that might challenge that hypothesis. Thus, he can claim

that the Deuteronomist was thoroughly anti-monarchic despite some very pro-

monarchic texts that are present in the DH. It seems to me, however, that in

attempting to explain away tensions in the DH, Noth has created tension in his

own hypothesis—either the Deuteronomist is an author using sources and willing

to adapt them to fit his ideology, or he is merely an editor, faithfully reproducing

his sources. These shortcomings notwithstanding, Noth's proposal was

groundbreaking at the time, and, in the almost seventy years since, it has provided

the contours for the scholarly discussion of the DH.

Initial Modifications to Noth's Hypothesis

As scholars examined Noth's hypothesis of the DH in more detail, it was

modified significantly, even as it gained widespread support. Almost

immediately Noth's idea of a single Deuteronomist was expanded to the notion of

a Deuteronomistic school or group of scribes.[24] As well, the discussion was

broadened to include Deuteronomistic work outside of the DH, for example in the

prophetic literature and especially the book of Jeremiah.[25] But, the most

important problem to solve was the tensions and contradictions in the DH, the

issue Noth had not adequately addressed. In the 1970's two major modifications

were made to Noth's proposal by Rudolf Smend and Frank M. Cross, both of

whom addressed this subject but in different ways.

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[23] Ibid., 52.

[24] Rainer Albertz, "In Search of the Deuteronomists," in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. Thomas Römer; Leuven: Leuven UP, 2000), 2; De Pury and Römer, "Deuteronomistic History," 56-57.

[25] Thomas Römer, "Is There a Deuteronomistic Redaction in the Book of Jeremiah?" in *Israel Constructs its History*, 401.

Rudolf Smend

In contrast to Noth, Rudolf Smend and his students were interested in examining the composite nature of the DH. Smend himself paid particular attention to tensions in the portrayal of Israel's conquest of Canaan: while much of Joshua portrays the conquest as total and complete, texts such as Josh 23 and Judg 1:1-2:5 imply that the conquest was merely partial.[26] Smend found Noth's proposal of a single Deuteronomist incompatible with such tensions, and he and his students instead identified at least three strata: the initial Deuteronomistic historian (DtrH), who was pro-monarchic; a prophetic redactor (DtrP); and an anti-monarchic nomistic redactor (DtrN) concerned especially with matters of Dtn law.[27] Smend and his followers have dated these strata anywhere from around 580 B.C.E. to the post-exilic period;[28] but in terms of explaining tensions and contradictions within the DH, they tend to emphasize the difference in perspectives between strata, not so much the dating of the strata themselves.

Frank M. Cross

Frank M. Cross and other Harvard scholars and students also had issues with the DH's tensions, but took a different approach than Smend. Unlike Noth, Cross argued that there was a much more positive and pro-monarchic Deuteronomist, responsible for most of the DH and working in the time of Josiah. In particular, Cross argued that the optimism and promise of 2 Sam 7 made no

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[26] Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 29.

[27] Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Trans. by David Green; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 275; O'Brien, *Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis*, 7.

[28] Ibid.

sense in an exilic context.[29] As Cross's student Richard Nelson explains, "the unconditional promise to the Davidic house . . . [is] in jarring contrast to the final pessimism of the work."[30] After the exile, this DH was revised when "minor modification" was made "by a member of the Deuteronomistic school."[31] Thus, Cross and Nelson and others proposed a "block model"[32] or double redaction of the DH, with Josianic (Dtr^1) and exilic editions (Dtr^2).[33]

For the initial version of the DH, the motivating ideology is quite different than that proposed by Noth. For Cross and his followers, the Josianic edition is royal propaganda, portraying Josiah as the new and greater David.[34] While this Deuteronomist still emphasizes exclusive and centralized Yahweh worship, his politics are significantly at odds with the Deuteronomist of Noth's proposal. Moreover, the Josianic Deuteronomist presents an overwhelmingly optimistic and hopeful tone[35]—entirely different from Noth's Deuteronomist's pessimism. Like Noth, however, according to Cross, the exilic Deuteronomist has little hope for restoration; in this edition, "the original theme of hope is overwritten and contradicted."[36] In Cross's own words, his model dissolves or explains "a number of puzzles and apparent contradictions in the Deuteronomistic history."[37] In this case, rather than focusing on the particular concerns of various Deuteronomistic

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[29] Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973); Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 27.

[30] Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981), 28.

[31] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 289.

[32] Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 276.

[33] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 274.

[34] Ibid., 285.

[35] O'Brien, *Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis*, 11.

[36] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 288.

[37] Ibid.

authors, as Smend and his students did, Cross emphasized differences in dating and historical context of the two Deuteronomistic editions.

Recent Scholarship on the Deuteronomistic History

Since the development of the strata and double redaction models for the composition of the DH, scholarship on the DH has continued to evolve in many directions. Questions surrounding dating, authorship, sources, and ideology are still debated with no satisfactory resolution in sight. As scholars continue to debate and disagree, the viability and future of the DH in biblical scholarship has been challenged. Still, Noth's original hypothesis continues to shape the discussion on these books. John Van Seters, Rainer Albertz, Thomas Römer, and Raymond Person are representative of some of the directions DH scholarship has taken more recently.

John Van Seters

With *In Search of History*, Van Seters returns to Noth's original idea of a single Deuteronomist working in the exilic period. But Van Seters modifies Noth's hypothesis in two other significant ways. First, he rejects the idea of any pre-existing historiographical sources incorporated into the DH. In fact, Van Seters describes the Deuteronomist as the first historian "in the intellectual tradition of the West."[38] This does not mean that he denies that the Deuteronomist used sources,[39] only that these sources could not be described as history—"the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past."[40] Furthermore, Van Seters is skeptical of attempts to reconstruct sources

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[38] John Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), 7.
[39] E.g., Van Seters suggests the possibility that the Deuteronomist relied on Israelite kings lists, since such lists were common throughout the ANE.
[40] Ibid., 249.

within the DH, because he understands the Deuteronomist to be "an author who

made very free use of the documents at his disposal."[41] So, for example, in the

case of the stories of the judges, Van Seters acknowledges the Deuteronomist's

reliance on "old folk legends," but he says that because "the framework of Dtr has

been so thoroughly integrated into the story itself . . . it is difficult to extract an

original literary stratum."[42]

Second, Van Seters attributes all tensions and conflicts within the DH to

later editorial work—not to various Deuteronomistic authors and editors or

perspectives, nor to the Deuteronomist's sources. He goes so far as to argue that

redaction criticism which focuses on the "large amount of later additions . . . can

be the means by which to revive" the hypothesis of the DH "to new life and

vitality."[43] This reading of the DH is especially evident in the David narratives,

where Van Seters emphasizes the tensions in perspectives on David and his royal

house. Unlike Noth, Van Seters argues that the Deuteronomist is pro-monarchy

and pro-Davidic dynasty. Thus Van Seters considers the rather unflattering

stories of David and his house in David's Court History, which he delineates as 2

Sam 2:8-4:12; 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2, to be "an antilegitimation" of the Davidic dynasty,

"a post-Dtr addition to the history of David from the postexilic period."[44]

In many ways, Van Seters refutation of historiographical sources prior to

the DH is as radical as Noth's original proposal. Much of Hebrew Bible

scholarship is so confident of such sources that they have been given names—e.g.,

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[41] Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 31.
[42] Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 343-44.
[43] John Van Seters, "The Deuteronomistic History: Can It Avoid Death by Redaction?" in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History*, 222.
[44] Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 289.

Ark Narrative, History of David's Rise (not to mention the J and E Pentateuchal

sources). So Van Seters has returned to Noth's hypothesis of a single

Deuteronomist, but, in other ways, he has also profoundly shaken up the previous

scholarship on the DH.

Rainer Albertz

While arguing that the idea of a single Deuteronomist "is probably no

longer tenable," Albertz also maintains "the substantial unity" of the DH, with "its

authors . . . so close ideologically and work[ing] within so short a period of time

that it makes little sense to try to distinguish them by literary analysis."[45] But

Albertz does recognize tension within the Deuteronomistic school, dividing them

into two distinct parties. Albertz proposes understanding these two

Deuteronomistic parties as coming "from a common background and us[ing]

similar rhetoric" but fighting "for different goals."[46] He labels these two parties

the "reform party" and the "nationalistic party" and points to the end of the reign

of Josiah for their inception. The reform party wanted to continue the cultic

reforms begun under Josiah, supported the prophet Jeremiah, and "advocated a

pro-Babylonian" foreign policy.[47] Their opponents, the nationalistic party, were,

as their name implies, anti-Babylonian and content with the religious reforms that

had already taken place.

Albertz attributes "JerD"—the Deuteronomistic editing of the book of

Jeremiah—to the reform party and "DtrG," or the bulk of the DH, to the

nationalistic party. Albertz sees these two ideological strains continuing through

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[45] Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 279.
[46] Albertz, "In Search of the Deuteronomists," 6.
[47] Ibid., 12.

the time of the exile and into "the early post-exilic" era.[48] While he confines the work of the Deuteronomistic reform party to the book of Jeremiah—and thus declines to address the tensions within the DH itself—these disagreements between Deuteronomistic parties are important for the DH as well, since the nationalistic party used it to promote their own ideology.[49] Thus, for Albertz, the Deuteronomists who are responsible for the DH are nationalistic and pro-monarchic, but, in response to exile, they are also willing "to subordinate king and temple to the Mosaic torah."[50] Still, they remained optimistic and hopeful—in contrast to "the all-embracing criticism of the prophets of judgment . . . whom they deliberately ignored" in the DH.[51]

Thomas Römer

Römer has proposed what he describes as a "compromise" hypothesis of the Deuteronomistic composition of the DH, involving three distinct stages. While the composers of all three stages shared much of the same Deuteronomistic ideology, there were also differences of focus and perspective depending on the historical context. Thus, the beginning stage of the DH, in the time of Josiah, was especially interested in both political and religious centralization of power in Jerusalem. This edition relies heavily on Assyrian literary genres—treaties, laws, and propaganda—and portrays Solomon as the ideal "neo-Assyrian" monarch.[52] Thus the overriding goal of this first stage of the DH is pro-Josianic propaganda within the context of the Assyrian empire; in particular, Josiah's military

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[48] Ibid., 16.
[49] E.g., with the story of Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria in 2 Kgs 18-19 (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 281).
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 282.
[52] Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 59.

campaigns in Benjamin and his centralization of political and religious power in

Jerusalem are justified and endorsed.

Of course, after the exile, the purpose of the DH changed substantially.

Composed by Israelite elites exiled in Babylon, this stage of the DH argued that

the exile resulted not from Yahweh's defeat, but rather from his judgment on

Israel's sin. For Römer, this stage coincides closely to Noth's original

explanation for the Deuteronomist's motivation in writing the DH. It was in this

period that the DH became a unified narrative with the chronology that Noth

identified as so important to the Deuteronomist.

Finally, Römer hypothesizes a stage of editing in the Persian period—a

stage that produced less historiography than the other periods, but nonetheless left

an indelible mark on the DH. Most important to the Deuteronomists of this era

was segregation from other peoples and cultures—a concern reflected even more

strongly in Ezra-Nehemiah.[53] As well, the Deuteronomists moved from a

theology of monolatry to one of monotheism, a shift especially evident in the

book of Deuteronomy itself.[54] These Deuteronomistic editors, at work in Persian

Yehud, were not the last to work on the DH, but Römer describes all further

additions and editing as post-Deuteronomistic.

Raymond Person

Counter Römer, Person argues that distinguishing individual levels of

redaction in the DH is nearly impossible. Instead, Person focuses on the final era

of Deuteronomistic redaction, the Persian period. He utilizes textual criticism to

demonstrate that post-exilic editing occurred in the DH and proposes that this was

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[53] Ibid., 170-72.
[54] Ibid., 174.

done by Deuteronomistic scribes who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel "to

support the rebuilding of the temple and the reestablishment of the temple cult

with its scribal skills."[55] He focuses much discussion on this hypothetical scribal

school and compares them to other scribal schools of the ANE.

For Person, the post-exilic Deuteronomists initially harbored hopes for a

restored Davidic dynasty under Zerubbabel:

> The Deuteronomic school's theological understanding of history included
> certain expectations about what would occur if the people returned to
> Jerusalem and restored the temple cult, including political autonomy for
> Judah and the restoration of the Davidic king.[56]

Thus, the Persian era Deuteronomists are thoroughly pro-monarchic, but, as their

hope for restoration failed to materialize ". . . disillusionment with and distancing

from the Jerusalem leadership"[57] occurred. As a result the Deuteronomists'

concern shifted toward an eschatological emphasis. Person reads Second

Zedekiah as reflecting this shift in Deuteronomistic theology, and he argues that

such a focus can also be found in the DH. As well, like Römer, Person sees

segregation as essential to the Persian era Deuteronomists' ideology. Believing

that trying to discover earlier Deuteronomistic layers is a futile task, Person

argues that since the Deuteronomists "continued to redact" the DH "into the

Persian period, . . . a reinterpretation of Deuteronomic literature and its meaning

within the setting of postexilic Judah is necessary."[58] Thus Person tries to read

the DH with this post-exilic context in mind, resulting in a different perspective

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[55] Raymond Person, Jr., *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 149.
[56] Ibid., 59.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 103.

on the Deuteronomistic ideology and purpose than that suggested by Noth, with

the emphasis less on exile and more on coping with life in a Persian province.

The Deuteronomistic Composition of the Book of Judges

With that review of Noth's original hypothesis of the DH and subsequent

modifications by a sampling of scholars, we can now turn to the place of the book

of Judges within the larger DH. Not surprisingly, perspectives on the

Deuteronomistic composition of Judges are as varied as the composition of the

DH as a whole. We will again overview a sampling of perspectives, beginning, of

course, with Noth himself.

Martin Noth

According to Noth, and for most scholars since, the period of the judges is

an invention of the Deuteronomist(s), with little or no historical or literary basis.

For Noth, this is in contrast to the book of Joshua, for example, which he

considered to be largely unoriginal to the Deuteronomist. Still, Noth accepted

that most of the stories of the judges did exist prior to the Deuteronomist, and may

have even formed some sort of collection. What was unique—and essential for

the DH—was the notion of such a period in Israel's history. Since the

Deuteronomist needed a transition between the conquest and occupation of the

land in Joshua and the monarchy of Saul and then the Davidic dynasty in Samuel,

and since stories of these judges existed, a period of judges made sense and fit

well with the Deuteronomist's conception of Israel's history.

Noth imagines two "basic traditions" that the Deuteronomist combined to

create this period.[59] One of these traditions was a list of שֹׁפְטִים, "judges," a list

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[59] Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 42.

that the Deuteronomist has partially reproduced in Judg 10:1-5 and 12:8-15.[60] But

the second, and more significant, tradition was "a series of stories about various

tribal heroes and their victories," a collection of independent sources that was

formed prior to the Deuteronomist.[61] Noth suggests that the figure of Jephthah

might have appeared in both the list of שֹׁפְטִים and the tribal heroes collection, and

thus prompted the Deuteronomist to merge the two traditions—and apply the term

שֹׁפֵט to the main characters of the tribal heroes collection as well.[62]

The Deuteronomist combined these traditions by supplying "connecting

material"[63] and setting up a cycle of progressively worse idolatry and

disobedience by writing the introduction of Judg 2:6-3:6 and most of the story of

the prototypical first judge, Othniel, in Judg 3:7-11.[64] By beginning the book with

this introduction and first judge, the Deuteronomist emphasizes that it was Israel's

idolatry, not Yahweh's defeat or impotence, that led to foreign oppression—not

unlike the argument the Deuteronomist made regarding the Babylonian exile. The

Israel of the book of Judges is a world in which things are not as they should be,

and this is a result of the people's disobedience and unfaithfulness to Yahweh. It

is only with Israel's repentance that Yahweh patiently and faithfully delivers his

people. According to Noth, however, the Deuteronomist did not see this as

analogous to his own time; as noted above, for Noth the Deuteronomist did not

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[60] Ibid., 43.
[61] Ibid., 42.
[62] Ibid., 44; of course the use of the term שֹׁפֵט has troubled commentators for quite some time, and Noth's proposal is merely one attempt at explaining it. Van Seters has offered what I consider a much more plausible explanation, which I discuss below.
[63] Ibid., 42.
[64] Ibid., 44.

think repentance and deliverance from Babylon was possible: "he saw the divine judgement which was acted out in his account . . . as something final and definitive."[65] Despite Yahweh's constant warnings and forgiveness—demonstrated in the book of Judges as much as anywhere in the DH—Yahweh's patience with Israel had run out.

In terms of the stories of the judges themselves, in Noth's hypothesis the Deuteronomist's "connecting" work is almost exclusively limited to the framing formula that appears at the beginning and end of each story: comments on Israel's repeated sin; Yahweh's judgment through foreign oppression; the people's repentance; the raising up of a שֹׁפֵט; and, finally, a note on the length of peace that occurred after victory. For Noth, the Deuteronomist's period of the judges moved from Judg 13:1 to 1 Sam 1 and ended with 1 Sam 12, making Samuel the final judge. Noth's anti-monarchic Deuteronomist portrays the shift from the period of judges to kings negatively, although he included sources that "dealt favourably with the institution of the monarchy."[66]

Because of the Deuteronomist's faithful use of sources, inconsistencies—such as the various perspectives on monarchy represented in 1 Sam 8-12—"are nothing out of the ordinary."[67] At the same time, Noth removes some potential tensions in the book of Judges by assigning much of the book to later additions: what is now the first introduction in Judg 1:1-2:5; the Samson cycle of Judg 13-

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[65] Ibid., 97.
[66] Ibid., 51.
[67] Ibid., 45.

16;[68] and the Judges "appendix" of Judg 17-21. For Noth, then, the

Deuteronomist's period of the judges consists of Judg 2:6-13:1 and 1 Sam 1-12.

It covers the time between the death of Joshua in Josh 23 to the retirement of

Samuel after the inauguration of monarchy at the beginning of the reign of Saul in

1 Sam 12.

J. Alberto Soggin

J. Alberto Soggin follows Rudolf Smend's strata hypothesis in his

commentary on the book of Judges. Many of his comments are similar to Noth's:

the book of Judges relies on two distinct traditions, including, perhaps a

Retterbuch or "Book of Saviours."[69] As was noted above, it was tensions between

texts describing a partial conquest of Canaan, such as Judg 1:1-2:5, and other

descriptions of Israel's conquest as total, that were the reason for Rudolf Smend

to first suggest variations in perspectives amongst the Deuteronomists. These

tensions are partially explained by describing this introduction to the book of

Judges as fragmentary: attributing Judg 1:27-35 to an editor working after the

Deuteronomists[70] and Judg 2:1-5 to the DtrN.[71] Like Noth, Soggin attributes the

alternative introduction of Judg 2:6-3:6 to the DtrH, as he does with the main

body of Judg 3:7-13:1. But, unlike Noth, Soggin reads the Samson cycle in Judg

13:2-16:31 as part of the original DtrH stratum, although possibly with DtrN

redaction.[72] He also finds evidence of the work of DtrH in Judg 17-21,[73] with

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[68] Noth says "it is harder to decide whether Dtr.'s account included the Samson stories," but he ultimately concludes that they are a "later interpolation" (ibid., 52).

[69] J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1987), 5.

[70] Ibid., 31, 306.

[71] Ibid., 31.

[72] Ibid., 228.

DtrN "anti-monarchical" redacting in Judg 19-21.[74] Thus, for Soggin, the work of

the Deuteronomists is much more extensive in the book of Judges than in Noth's

hypothesis.

Frank M. Cross and Richard Nelson

For Cross, the book of Judges forms an integral part of the Josianic or Dtr[1]

edition of the DH:

> Judah's idolatry has been its undoing again and again in the past. The days
> of the Judges . . . reveal a pattern of alternating judgment and deliverance.
> But in David and in his son Josiah is salvation.[75]

In this way the book of Judges simultaneously warned of the dangers of idolatry

and provided hope of Yahweh's deliverance and help when needed. Cross's

student, Richard Nelson, examined the use of the phrase "they did not listen" in

the DH and concluded that two passages in book of Judges belong to the exilic

Deuteronomist, Cross's Dtr[2]: Judg 2:1-5 and Judg 6:7-10. Interestingly, Soggin

also attributed Judg 2:1-5 to the later Deuteronomist, DtrN, although for different

reasons. Textual criticism since Nelson has supported his contention that Judg

6:7-10 is a later addition to the narrative, although possibly even later than he

supposed.[76] In any case, for both Cross and Nelson, most of the Deuteronomistic

version of the book of Judges originated in the Josianic era, with only minor

additions by the exilic Deuteronomist.

John Van Seters

As should be evident by now, the introduction of Judg 1:1-2:5 is

problematic for most commentators. Van Seters is unique in attributing this

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[73] Ibid., 5; a view supported by other scholars following Smend, including Timo Veijola (O'Brien, *Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis*, 97).

[74] Soggin, *Judges*, 281.

[75] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 284.

[76] Julio Trebolle Barrera, "Textual Variants in *4QJudg^a* and the Textual and Editorial History of the Book of Judges" *RQ* 14 (1989): 229-45.

introduction, with its focus on land distribution and partial conquest, to the post-exilic Priestly author, working after the exilic Deuteronomist. Van Seters hypothesizes that P added much of Josh 13-24 and Judg 1:1-2:5; 2:22-3:4 to the DH; for P, the partial conquest is viewed positively, as part of the divine plan all along.[77] This, of course, is in contrast to the Deuteronomist, who views the partial conquest as a failure on the part of Israel.

Van Seters assigns the rest of the introduction, in Judg 2:11-21; 3:5-6, to the Deuteronomist. He also states that the story of the first judge, Othniel, in Judg 3:7-11, cannot be separated "from the Dtr introduction."[78] As was noted above, Van Seters attributes much of the rest of the book of Judges (Judg 3:12-16:31[79]) to "old folk legends," but he argues that they have been so entirely integrated into the Deuteronomistic composition as to be unrecoverable. It is the Deuteronomist's authorial role, rather than merely editorial, that Van Seters emphasizes repeatedly, regarding the book of Judges as much as any part of the DH.

In *In Search of History*, Van Seters looks to Phoenicia for the roots of the title שֹׁפֵט, and he describes the "application of such an institution to premonarchy Israel" as perhaps "both anachronistic and artificial."[80] As with much of the scholarship discussed above, Van Seters reads these stories as "Dtr's way of trying to come to terms with a little-known period of Israel's history,"[81] a fictive era that is both essential for the Deuteronomist's chronology, and useful for his

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[77] Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 336, 342.
[78] Ibid., 343.
[79] As for Judg 17-21, they "stand outside Dtr's work as later additions" (ibid., 345).
[80] Ibid., 345-46.
[81] Ibid., 346.

ideology. Like Noth, Van Seters understands the Deuteronomist's period of the judges to continue into 1 Samuel, making Samuel the final judge and setting up his speech in 1 Sam 12 as the transition between the period of judges and the beginning of monarchy.

Rainer Albertz

Forever sensitive to the conflicts among the Deuteronomists, Albertz describes "differing views in this group of authors" regarding Israel's apostasy; these differences are reflected in the book of Judges and particularly in the introduction of Judg 2:1-3:6: "some thought it was because the people forgot the mighty acts of Yahweh (Judg 2:10, 12, 19; 8:34-35 . . .), others that the former inhabitants of the land led them astray (. . . Judg 2:2; 3:1-6)."[82] Albertz talks about exilic concerns with "intermarriage and covenants with Gentiles"[83] influencing the Deuteronomistic portrayal of the period of the judges, but he emphasizes that the Deuteronomists were also motivated to show how Yahweh "demonstrated his favour repeatedly" in this period.[84] In sharp contrast to Noth, Albertz argues that the Deuteronomists use the cycles of the judges to demonstrate that "even during phases of Israel's apostasy . . . the situation was far from hopeless."[85] For Albertz, this optimistic message is practical and relevant for the Deuteronomists and their exilic readers.

Thomas Römer

In his hypothesis of threefold redaction of the DH, Römer describes the first, Josianic edition as "a rather loose collection, telling the story of Israel's

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[82] Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 289.
[83] Ibid., 290.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

origins . . . and of the Davidic monarchy up to Josiah,"[86] i.e., excluding the book

of Judges. Like so many others, Römer assumes a "Saviours" collection behind

the book of Judges, and points out that this collection must have originated in the

Northern Kingdom, since most of the judges are from northern tribes. Thus, the

Saviours collection would have been largely irrelevant to the first Deuteronomists,

interested mostly in pro-Judah, Josianic propaganda.

It is in the "neo-Babylonian" period that "Judean scribes probably

inherited an Israelite scroll" containing roughly Judg 3:12-9:55 or 3:12-12:7.[87] It

was in this edition of the DH that Römer hypothesizes the book of Judges took

shape—"a literary invention . . . to create an intermediate period between the

origins . . . and the history of monarchy."[88] This version included an introduction

made up of Judg 2:6-12, 14-16, 18-19, as well as that story of the only Judahite

judge, Othniel, in Judg 3:7-11. For Römer, as with Noth, the Deuteronomistic

period of the judges moves from Judg 12 to 1 Sam 1, making Samuel the twelfth

and final judge. But Römer also excludes the story of Jephthah's daughter in Judg

11:29-40 from this exilic edition of the DH.

Motivated by concerns of segregation, the introduction to the book of

Judges was expanded in the Persian period with the addition of Judg 2:13, 17, 20-

23; 3:1-6. Later, post-Deuteronomistic editors added a "new introduction" in

Judg 1:1-2:5, "separated Samuel from the time of the Judges . . . and they added

the Greek-like stories of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter . . . and of the

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[86] Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 91.
[87] Ibid., 136-37.
[88] Ibid.

Hebrew Hercules Samson."[89] Likewise, Judg 17-21 are also later additions,

although Römer is unsure whether these stories "were integrated earlier, later or at

the same time," as the Samson cycle.[90] In this way, Römer's proposal for the

composition of the book of Judges actually ends up with the smallest

Deuteronomistic version of the book, excluding all of Judg 1:1-2:5; 11:29-40;

13:1-21:25.

Raymond Person

Person is much more tentative when discussing the DH and the book of

Judges. Partly this is due to his skepticism that identifying individual redaction

layers is possible. He emphasizes understanding the "collective unity" of the DH.

So, whether passages might have a pre-exilic history, or an exilic or post-exilic

origin, "they were read and preserved by the Deuteronomic school in the

postexilic period,"[91] and should be read in that context—whether in the time of

Zerubbabel, or after his governorship once the Deuteronomists had become

disillusioned with the chances of restoration of monarchy. Thus, Person does not

discuss the composition history of texts in the DH, including the book of Judges.

Instead, he offers readings of texts that make sense within the context of post-

exilic, Persian period Judah. Most significantly for my work, Person includes all

of Judg 1:1-3:6 and Judg 17-21 in this post-exilic DH; he argues that Judg 17-21

suggest that:

> until Zerubbabel becomes a proper Davidic king who can govern all the
> people, insuring that they strictly obey the law, there will remain a certain
> amount of apostasy with the likely consequences of divine punishment.[92]

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[89] Ibid., 182.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Person, *The Deuteronomic School*, 103.
[92] Ibid., 109.

It would seem that this would make Person's understanding of the final form of the book of Judges to be the most Deuteronomistic of all the scholars engaged so far.

Summary of Scholarship on the Deuteronomistic Composition of the Book of Judges

Not surprisingly, we have seen that scholarly opinion is as divided on the Deuteronomistic composition of the book of Judges as it is on the DH as a whole. All that can be said conclusively is that all scholars agree that the book of Judges contains both Deuteronomistic and post-Deuteronomistic work. Beyond that, the scholarship varies considerably.

Roughly speaking, however, the book's core of Judg 3:7-12:15[93] is indisputably read as Deuteronomistic, albeit based on an earlier source or sources. Most contemporary commentators also agree that recovering any of these earlier sources is largely impossible, since these stories have been entirely reworked by the Deuteronomists. The final chapters of the book of Judges are more controversial: Noth attributed both the Samson cycle of Judg 13-16 and the appendix of Judg 17-21 to later work, as does Römer; Van Seters includes the Samson cycle in the Deuteronomistic portion of the book, but excludes the appendix; others, such as Soggin and Person, find evidence of Deuteronomistic editing in all of Judg 13-21.

The introductory material of Judg 1:1-3:6 is the most controversial of all. While much of the rest of the book has largely escaped the scholarly scalpel, the introduction has not been so fortunate. All that can be said with any sort of

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[93] Less Judg 11:29-40, according to Römer.

consensus is that the these passages contain the work of more than one author or editor, with Judg 2:6-3:6 likely written by the Deuteronomists, as Noth first contended. Of course, scholars have tried to identify different layers of Deuteronomistic editorial work in this introductory material, or unspecified post-Deuteronomistic editing, or, in Van Seters's case, the work of P. Needless to say, Judg 1:1-3:6 probably remains the thorniest of issues in the composition history of the book of Judges.

Out of the four stories that especially interest me (i.e., Judg 4; 11; 16; and 19), as many as three of them, following Römer, are not even attributed to composition by the Deuteronomists. But what strikes me is that many of the arguments for excluding much of the book of Judges as Deuteronomistic have to do with dating, and less with ideology. That is, with the possible exception of the introduction of Judg 1:1-2:5, those scholars that describe material in the book of Judges as non-Deuteronomistic do so because they date it after the time the Deuteronomists worked rather than because the stories explicitly conflict with the Deuteronomistic ideology. In fact, the inclusion of Judg 13-21, for example, in the Deuteronomistic version of the book of Judges by other scholars indicates that these chapters do fit quite closely with Deuteronomistic ideology. Even Noth presents arguments for reading the Samson cycle as Deuteronomistic before ultimately describing it as a later addition.[94] As for Römer, it is the Hellenistic influence—not conflicting ideology—in Judg 11:29-40; 13-16 that drives him to describe this material as post-Deuteronomistic. Therefore, aside, perhaps, from the introduction of Judg 1:1-2:5, even the passages of the book of Judges that may

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[94] Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 52.

not have been composed by the Deuteronomists continue their ideology or, at the very least, do not contradict it. After all, any post-Deuteronomistic additions were added within the Deuteronomistic context. In this sense, within the context of the book as a whole, I think it is possible, and even necessary, to read the entire book of Judges in light of the Deuteronomistic ideology and goals, to which we now turn.

Reading the Book of Judges as Deuteronomistic Literature

Up to now I have briefly discussed the scholarship on the DH and the Deuteronomistic composition of the book of Judges. I argued in the previous section that while much of the book of Judges may have taken shape after the Deuteronomists, the book is still indelibly influenced by the Deuteronomistic ideology. We have already seen that scholars disagree as to the specifics of the Deuteronomistic ideology, so it is essential that I outline what I understand the Deuteronomistic ideology and goals in the book of Judges to be. Then I will look at how these goals are accomplished in the book, before concluding with some final thoughts on the first readers of the book of Judges.

The Deuteronomistic Ideology

While the Deuteronomistic ideology may encompass more than the following, I will focus on two of its most important aspects: theology and politics. For the most part, I find Noth's hypothesis regarding the Deuteronomist's theology convincing. The Deuteronomists were interested in obedience to the Dtn law, with exclusive worship of Yahweh being their primary concern. Ideally, for the Deuteronomists, this worship was centralized in Jerusalem, although there is no explicit condemnation of decentralized worship prior to the book of Kings. By

emphasizing that Israel repeatedly and consistently failed to exclusively worship Yahweh at the temple in Jerusalem, the DH serves as a theodicy: Israel's problems—from agricultural disaster to domestic politics to foreign oppression, and, ultimately, military defeat and exile—are the responsibility of Israel's sin, not Yahweh's impotence, defeat, or injustice. But I think Noth is wrong regarding the Deuteronomist's pessimism for the future. While the Deuteronomist is surely pessimistic about Israel's history, I think the Deuteronomistic theology is also one of hope, as it emphasizes Yahweh's faithfulness and power and loyalty to Israel and his covenant with them.

In terms of the politics of the Deuteronomists, I think Noth's arguments are inadequate. As Noth noted, there is quite clearly condemnation of the failures of monarchy, and even some very pessimistic portrayals of the institution (e.g., 1 Sam 8:8-18), in the DH. Overall, however, I am persuaded by scholars since Noth, many of whom we have looked at above, that the Deuteronomistic ideology is strongly pro-monarchy, and particularly pro-Davidic dynasty. I think it is almost certain that political emphases and perspectives differed in nuanced ways amongst the Deuteronomistic school, but broadly speaking I am comfortable concluding that the Deuteronomists saw monarchy as "the least worst" political system. In any case, in the DH, it is the "people" as a whole as much as it is individual monarchs who are at fault in failing to properly worship Yahweh; and, when proper worship of Yahweh does in fact occur, it is led by Davidic kings— e.g., David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah.

For the purposes of my thesis I am focusing on the following aspects of the Deuteronomistic ideology:

- Israel's disobedience of the Dtn laws, especially improper worship of Yahweh, results in judgment, including foreign oppression and exile.

- Since the people are continually inclined to disobedience, the best way to avoid this is strong central government led by a Davidic king, although even Davidic monarchy is more likely to fail than succeed.

- Nonetheless, Yahweh remains a powerful and faithful god, loyal to his covenant, who responds to Israel's obedience and repentance.

Theology and Politics in the Book of Judges

This ideology is communicated in various ways throughout the DH as a whole, and in some unique ways in the book of Judges. Of course, the Deuteronomistic theology is communicated explicitly in Judg 2:5-3:6, especially in Judg 2:11-19. In this passage the repetition of Israel's idolatry (vv. 11-13, 17); of Yahweh's role in punishing and saving (vv. 14-16, 18); and the emphasis on the inadequacy of the judges or שֹׁפֵט (vv. 17, 19) are especially noteworthy. The

major cycles in the book of Judges (Judg 3:7-9; 3:12-15; 4:1-3; 6:1-10; 10:6-16; 13:1) all begin with at least some reference to these introductory comments, further reinforcing the Deuteronomistic message. The beginning of the Jephthah cycle in Judg 10:6-16 is especially lengthy, repeating much of what Judg 2:11-19 contains. Even more powerfully, in Judg 10:11-14 the words of Yahweh himself, rather than the narrator, communicate this condemnation of idolatry. As well, it is

an anonymous prophet[95] that communicates the Deuteronomistic theology in Judg 6:7-10.

In terms of the Deuteronomists' political agenda, there is little in the way of explicit presentation, other than the formulaic comments of Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25, which are so often considered to be outside of the original Deuteronomistic composition. The judges are never compared to kings and, in Judg 8:22-23, when the Israelites ask Gideon to become a dynastic founder, he declines, saying יְהוָה יִמְשֹׁל בָּכֶם. But, as the book makes abundantly clear in the passage I translated above, Yahweh ruling over Israel directly does not work out well at all: וְהָיָה בְּמוֹת הַשּׁוֹפֵט יָשֻׁבוּ וְהִשְׁחִיתוּ מֵאֲבוֹתָם לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים לְעָבְדָם וּלְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָהֶם (Judg 2:19). While the judges are largely portrayed positively, and while their role is clearly endorsed by Yahweh and serves as evidence of his covenant relationship with Israel, any reader of the book should recognize that this system of governance through judges is not adequate.

The chaos, corruption, and foreign oppression that are constant in the book of Judges make for a highly pessimistic portrayal of pre-monarchic Israelite society. The Deuteronomists provide a theological explanation for these societal problems by describing a cycle of disobedience and idolatry. The Deuteronomists also make a political statement, suggesting that part of the reason for Israel's continual disobedience and idolatry is lack of stable governance. In this way, anything wrong with the Israel depicted in the book of Judges further reinforces

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[95] A figure also utilized elsewhere in the DH (e.g. 1 Kgs 13) to communicate a similar message of judgment and condemnation.

the Deuteronomistic ideology. While I recognize that the Deuteronomists worked over a period of at least several decades, and probably much longer, and that their worldview would have evolved as their historical contexts changed, the core of their ideology as I outlined above stayed relatively consistent.

Reading the Book of Judges as Deuteronomistic Literature in Persian Yehud

This consistency of ideology is critical to my thesis. In my final chapter I will analyze the stories of the book of Judges as they might have been read by the book's first readers—as a Deuteronomistic composition, not because I believe the Deuteronomists composed the entire book as we have it today, but because I believe all the additions and changes to the book after the Deuteronomists were still consistent with the Deuteronomistic ideology. In other words, the later emendations and editions have not substantially changed the Deuteronomistic intention for the book of Judges. I am not interested in identifying various stages or levels of Deuteronomistic or post-Deuteronomistic work in the book of Judges, only in how it was read as Deuteronomistic literature in the post-exilic Persian period. Thus, for my purposes, I will talk about the Deuteronomists as a singular, monolithic group with a unified ideology, and as if the entire book of Judges is their work, since, for my purposes, it may as well have been. The first readers of the book of Judges, residents of the Persian province of Yehud in the fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E., would have found the Deuteronomistic ideology communicated thoroughly and effectively in the book of Judges, including through the portrayal of women and domestic space. It is to their roles in the ancient world that we now turn.

2. SOCIAL ROLES OF WOMEN AND DOMESTIC SPACE

In order to appreciate how the first readers of the book of Judges might have reacted to the portrayal of chaotic and corrupt pre-monarchic Israelite society, a basic knowledge of the social context of Persian Yehud is important. It was within this context that the stories were read, and against this backdrop that the problems in pre-monarchic Israel come into sharpest focus. This chapter will examine the roles and functions of women and domestic space in ancient Israel, relying mostly on secondary literature and the evidence found in the Hebrew Bible itself, especially the book of Deuteronomy. Ultimately it is impossible to know with any certainty what the experiences of "everyday" individuals, especially women, would have been like in the ancient world and, inevitably, this chapter will simply attempt to capture in broad strokes what were the common or "stereotypical" expectations of women and domestic space in ancient Israel. This will afford us some essential background for reading the book of Judges.

Women

Nearly all discussions on women and their roles in ancient Israel operate with the assumption that every ancient society was patriarchal, and therefore "ruled by the father."[96] Inheritance, property ownership, politics, and formal education were almost universally, exclusively reserved for men, and a woman's life was nearly always directed and governed by her male relatives. By definition, the term patriarchy certainly applies to ancient Israel:

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[96] Phyllis A. Bird, "Women (Old Testament)," *ABD* 4:951.

social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line.[97]

Carol Meyers urges caution, however, arguing that patriarchy has taken on Marxist and feminist connotations, rendering the term anachronistic for "premodern agrarian societies" such as ancient Israel.[98] She emphasizes "the complexity of social structures in Iron Age Israel,"[99] and proposes a more "plastic" and "nuanced" social model. So, for example, Meyers examines data regarding women's "social, economic, and religious roles" in ancient Israelite society and concludes that some "professional women . . . would have been part of loose organizational structures that had their own internal hierarchies operating apart from other institutions in Israelite society."[100] For these reasons I have chosen to avoid the term "patriarchy" when discussing the social context of women in ancient Israel.

At the same time, Meyers is careful to avoid the term "egalitarian" in describing ancient Israelite society,[101] and surely the popularity of the term "patriarchy" is indicative of the inequality between genders that was the norm throughout the ANE. Undoubtedly, within the Hebrew Bible, women are nearly always "subordinate figures,"[102] and "it is clear that women had lower status."[103]

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[97] "Patriarchy," *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (online: http://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy [cited 20 October 2010]; 2010), n.p.

[98] "Contesting the Notion of Patriarchy: Anthropology and the Theorizing of Gender in Ancient Israel," *A Question of Sex? Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (ed. Deborah W. Rooke; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 85; Meyers contends that the term "patriarchy" is indelibly connected to the "ideological values" (ibid., 87) of feminist and Marxist critiques of modern society, critiques that simply cannot apply to the ancient world.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 91.

[101] Ibid., 97.

[102] Bird, "Women (OT)," 951.

Thus, in the Iron Age, a woman was "regarded as under the authority first of her father, then of her husband,"[104] and was generally subordinate to a male if her father or husband were not in the picture.[105] Therefore, women's roles were most often defined by their relationship with men: daughter, wife, mother, widow, and so on.[106] Those roles fulfilled by the female characters of the book of Judges deserve specific attention.

Daughter

Several of the stories in the book of Judges contain daughters, most prominently Jephthah's daughter in Judg 4 and Caleb's daughter, Achsah, in Judg 1. While children have generally been valued across cultures and throughout time, in the ANE this was especially the case, and barrenness was considered among life's worst curses.[107] But, not surprisingly, within a society that valued male over female, a daughter was considered inferior to a son,[108] and the birth of a daughter was sometimes greeted with disappointment,[109] especially if there were no sons in a family. In fact, a woman's value increased if she bore sons as opposed to daughters.[110]

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[103] Jonathan M. Golden, *Ancient Canaan and Israel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 129.

[104] G. I. Emmerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (R. E. Clements, ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 380.

[105] In light of Meyers' comments it is important to emphasize that "asserting the subordinate status of women . . . does not mean that the women are not seen as active, contributing members of their families or that they have no legal rights" (Carolyn Pressler, *The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomic Family Laws* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993], 80).

[106] Cf. ibid., 1: the Dtn "laws presuppose the dependence of women within male-headed households and the subordinate role of women within the family."

[107] Joseph A. Grassi, "Child, Children," *ABD* 1:904.

[108] Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 252.

[109] Cf. the 2nd century B.C.E. Ben Sira: "the birth of a daughter is a loss" (Sir 22:3).

[110] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 38.

Parents, especially patriarchs, with daughters faced several challenges. In a culture that highly valued virginity, protecting a daughter's chastity until marriage was crucial: "unmarried girls are supposed to remain virgins until they are married to a man of their father's choosing"[111]—an expectation that seems exclusive to women.[112] The loss of a girl's virginity prior to marriage was a travesty, as the laws of Exod 22, Lev 21, and Deut 22 reflect.[113] A daughter who was no longer a virgin would have been almost unmarriageable, resulting in laws requiring a man who rapes a girl to marry her—a regulation that is counterintuitive in modern times. The loss of virginity could be understood "as an offense against . . . order and her father's authority."[114] At the same time, however, in almost every case, an ANE woman was never to remain a virgin. She was to marry, probably at a young age, and produce many, hopefully male, children.[115] Thus just as it was a misfortune for a daughter to lose her virginity before marriage in ancient Israel, so it was undesirable or a "disgrace"[116] for a woman to remain a virgin throughout her life.

If a daughter's virginity was something of a prerequisite for a successful marriage arrangement, so too was the involvement of both households, the families of the husband and wife. Often marriage arrangements resulted in a written document or "contract" of sorts.[117] These contracts usually involved the

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[111] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (eds. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 79; Pressler, *View of Women*, 31.

[112] Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," 96.

[113] Cf. Pressler, *View of Women*, 21-43.

[114] Ibid., 31.

[115] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel,* 54-55.

[116] Ibid., 61.

[117] Ibid., 90, 104.

exchange of money or gifts, whether a dowry, paid by the daughter's family to the prospective husband or his family; or a bride price, paid by the prospective husband's family to the daughter's family, to compensate them for the loss of their daughter's "economic contributions;"[118] or both.[119] How these payments or gifts operated likely varied throughout the ANE,[120] but it does seem that dowries were a consistent part of marriage. Dowries could consist of money, land, or anything of value, and can be "regarded as an advanced form of inheritance."[121] Unlike the inheritance of sons, however, a daughter's dowry was likely smaller and its size was entirely voluntary—she had no legal right to a certain amount or percentage of her father's estate.[122] Obviously, the larger the dowry, the greater the likelihood the daughter would attract interest from desirable men; for this reason, a household's honour was reflected in the size of a daughter's dowry, and marriage agreements could become expensive arrangements for the daughter's family. While the dowry was controlled by the newlywed husband or his household, it was at least technically the wife's property, and was supposed to revert to her in case of divorce or widowhood.[123]

Wife and Mother

Meyers emphasizes that many factors other than gender played a role in a woman's social status:[124] wealth, age, family, education, also factored into a woman's role and expectations in ancient Israel. Thus the treatment and

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[118] Jennie R. Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 83.
[119] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 94.
[120] Ibid., 90.
[121] Ibid, 95; David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5.
[122] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 95; Pressler, *View of Women*, 17.
[123] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 96.
[124] Meyers, "Contesting Patriarchy," 91-92.

experiences of wives and mothers in ancient Israel must have differed considerably from individual to individual. Nonetheless, a few basic facts can surely be established, the most fundamental of which is that wife and mother were the most important roles for almost every woman of the ANE and ancient Israel: "in biblical Israel . . . the rule was that one had to be married. It was considered a disgrace for a woman to remain unmarried"[125] and "an Israelite woman attained her highest status in society when she became a mother."[126] Not surprisingly, these roles are reflected throughout the book of Judges.

While polygamous marriage was common across the ANE, none of the marriages portrayed in the book of Judges include more than one wife. Indeed, by the 5th century, and even much earlier, monogamy was almost certainly the norm in ancient Israel, with polygamy only common amongst royalty and those of considerable wealth.[127] Regardless of the number of wives in a marriage, a wife's worth—especially among the lower classes—was almost entirely tied to domestic duties, the most important of which was, of course, childbearing; a woman without sons—or, worse, no children at all—was a woman worth very little: "a married woman who does not bear a child suffers a severe loss in social status and even her livelihood may be a fragile entity."[128] Other domestic chores, such as limited agricultural duties, cleaning, sewing or weaving, often complemented childrearing as a woman's responsibilities.[129] As a wife, a woman was viewed

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[125] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 61.
[126] Pressler, *View of Women*, 83.
[127] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 141, 145.
[128] Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 4.
[129] Bird, "Women (OT)," 4:948.

economically, and the biggest return a woman could provide on the "investment" was male children.

Whether or not a woman was considered the property of her husband likely depended on the social status of the woman's family, with poorer women understood to be owned by their husbands;[130] certainly concubines were a husband's legal property, as will be discussed below. But while a woman, concubine or otherwise, was more or less the property of her husband (or other male relative, as the case might be for daughters or widows[131]), there were also limited means of protection for women in many ANE societies. For example, in ancient Mesopotamia "if a man divorced a woman without a legitimate reason once she had had children, he would have to forfeit all his property."[132] Of course, as noted above, one of the purposes of the dowry was to ensure financial security for a woman if divorced or widowed. In the HB, the book of Deuteronomy is full of exhortations to care for the vulnerable, including women and especially widows, and provides laws to ensure that care took place:[133] the Dtn laws prescribe limits on "the authority of the male head of household,"[134] and "the interests of dependent family members were guarded by certain . . . rights . . . [and] injunctions whose purpose was to protect vulnerable persons."[135] That abuse and mistreatment of women took place anyway is obviously assumed, but

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[130] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 146.
[131] While mothers seem to have, at least in some circumstances, exercised a great deal of authority over their young male children (Pressler, *View of Women*, 940), widows were expected to, whenever possible, depend on and submit to their adult sons.
[132] Rivkah Harris, "Women (Mesopotamia)," *ABD* 4:948.
[133] Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19-21; 27:19 (cf. Exod 22:22).
[134] Pressler, *View of Women*, 93.
[135] Ibid., 94.

ANE society clearly held up some measure of respect and good treatment of women as the ideal.

Concubine

The last individual female character in the book of Judges is the nameless concubine of Judg 19. While it seems unlikely that many residents of Yehud would have owned concubines, concubinage was a common practice throughout the ANE, especially among royalty. Originally, "concubinage was probably perceived as a natural institution, while later it tended to be reserved to kings."[136] Concubines appear frequently in biblical literature, with perhaps the most famous example being Solomon's harem of seven hundred concubines.[137] Also well-known are the concubines of the Israelite patriarchs Abraham[138] and Jacob.[139] Originally the role of concubine developed to increase human reproduction, especially to insure the birth of male offspring.[140] In the case of royal concubines, such as Solomon's, sexual pleasure and the social status derived from sizeable harems would perhaps have been just as important.[141] A large harem emphasized a monarch's wealth and importance, implied sexual vitality on his part, and, of course, supplied him with numerous princes. It was also a means for him to develop and cement ties both domestically and internationally, by marrying women from influential and royal families. Against this backdrop, the story of Judg 19 is quite unique; in the Hebrew Bible, it is the only place where a man is

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[136] K. Engelken, "פלגש," *TDOT* 11:551.
[137] 1 Kgs 11:3.
[138] Gen 16.
[139] Gen 30.
[140] Engelken, *TDOT* 11:551.
[141] Emmerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," 385.

said to have a concubine without reference to a primary wife, and only one of two places without reference to her bearing children.[142]

Concubines generally had fewer rights than most women.[143] A concubine was inferior to a wife and "legally and socially . . . virtually a slave."[144] Their children, both sons and daughters, did not usually inherit property[145] and they were often considered slaves, bought or sold at will. As well, unlike wives, it was often acceptable for a succeeding monarch to assume the preceding monarch's harem.[146] A man's wife, however, was never to be passed on to his son. Still, the expectation was that a "man must not deprive his [concubine] of food, clothing, or sexual intercourse."[147] Even for concubines, one of the lowest social roles for ancient women, basic care and protection was expected.

Domestic Space

For the majority of women in ancient Israel, it was generally within domestic space that their roles were fulfilled,[148] where submission and protection, deference and respect all came together. While women were sometimes and in certain contexts able to work or socialize outside of the home,[149] domestic space was almost always the domain of women.[150] Archeologists use the term "four-

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[142] The other is in 2 Sam 15-16.
[143] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*: *Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 66.
[144] Ibid.; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 140.
[145] E.g., Gen 25:5-6; Engelken, *TDOT* 11:550.
[146] E.g., 2 Sam 12:8; 16:21-22; Emmerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," 385.
[147] Engelken, *TDOT* 11:550.
[148] Exceptions would have been rare, but some women in the ancient world (e.g., the occasional queen) may have exercised influence outside of the home (Meyers, "Contesting Patriarchy," 91).
[149] Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Ancient Israel*, 160.
[150] Ibid., 457.

room house"[151] to describe the typical Iron Age Israelite domestic space.

Although size and format of homes would have varied depending on wealth,

location, and so on, domestic space, especially for women, carried with it

connotations of family, safety, and comfort, regardless of the home's architecture.

Social Identity and Domestic Space

The typical home in ancient Israel was the "patrilocal joint-family

coresidence,"[152] a house in which "a conjugal couple and their unmarried

children, together with their married sons and their wives and children, as well as

other unmarried or dependent paternal kinsfolk and servants" lived.[153] As a result

of the patrilocal living arrangement, involving individuals beyond the "nuclear"

family, house in the ANE came to refer as much to the household as to the literal

dwelling.[154] Thus בית אב was used to describe "as many sets of childbearing

adults and their dependents . . . as was necessary for the entire group to feed and

protect itself."[155] This household unit was the basic social unit of the ANE and

central to an individual's identity.[156] Many males and some females lived in the

same house from birth until death,[157] and—even after leaving her father's

household to live with her husband—a woman could return to her family's home

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[151] Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz, "The Four Room House: Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society," *NEA* 66 (2003): 22-31.

[152] Pressler, *View of Women*, 83; J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 135.

[153] Ibid., 108.

[154] Ibid., 71.

[155] Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 7.

[156] Schloen, *House of the Father as Fact and Symbol*, 70-71.

[157] Pressler, *View of Women*, 83.

in cases of domestic abuse or early widowhood.[158] With social identity tied so

closely to domestic space, it was bound to be respected and an object of pride.[159]

Hospitality

Domestic space was also the venue in which the important ANE custom of

hospitality was to be shown to guests, both expected and unexpected. Hospitality

was central to ANE life, both at a community and household level. The

observation of proper hospitality customs increased the likelihood of survival for

travelers and decreased the chance of theft or raiding out of desperation. In this

way, hospitality served as a pragmatic, reciprocal tool to ensure the safety and

security of ancient society.[160] Relying on anthropological studies of the ANE and

modern Middle East, Victor Matthews constructs a helpful chart that

communicates some of the most important protocols of ANE hospitality; I have

included those points I find helpful:

> (1) There is a sphere of hospitality which comprises a zone of obligation
>   for both the individual and the village or town[161] within which they
>   have the responsibility to offer hospitality to strangers . . .
> (2) The stranger must be transformed from potential threat to ally by the
>   offer of hospitality.
> (3) The invitation can only be offered by the male head of household . . .
> (4) The invitation may include a time span statement for the period of the
>   hospitality, but this can then be extended, if agreeable to both parties,
>   on the renewed invitation of the host . . .
> (5) Once the invitation is accepted, the roles of the host and the guest are
>   set by the rules of custom.
>   > a) The guest must not ask for anything.
>   > b) The host provides the best he has available. . .
>   > c) The host must not ask personal questions of the guest.
> (6) The guest remains under the protection of the host until he/she has left
>   the zone of obligation.[162]

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[158] Cf. Lev 22:13.

[159] Cf. Gen 31:30 where Laban describes Jacob as "longing greatly for the house of your father;" also, 1 Kgs 21 where Naboth refuses to sell to Ahab the "inheritance of my fathers."

[160] Victor Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *BTB* 21 (1991): 14.

[161] Cf. the "cities of refuge" of Deut 19:1-13.

Obviously, domestic space was critical to hospitality. Households were obligated to provide hospitality to strangers, accepting them into their domestic space as they would a family member. To fail in this obligation for hospitality was unthinkable, and a humiliation for those involved. Once offered hospitality, a guest was expected to accept and participate.[163]

Several other points about ANE hospitality are important. First, it was entirely unacceptable for a stranger to request any level of hospitality for himself; hospitality must always have been seen as freely offered. Anything less was a compromise of the host's honour.[164] Second, once an invitation for hospitality has been accepted, the guest is owed not only the "best available" and the privacy that Matthews mentioned above, but the protection and security afforded all members of the household. In a sense, the domestic space in which hospitality is demonstrated becomes the guest's own, adopted and temporary, domestic space. Finally, while ANE hospitality focused on men, women were surely critical in providing that hospitality.[165]

Summary

The previous survey has provided enough information to provide an idea of the social expectations of women and domestic space in the society in which the book of Judges would have first been read. In light of Meyers' comments, I have been careful to avoid the term "patriarchy" when talking about the position

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[162] Victor Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22 (1992): 11.
[163] Victor Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," 14.
[164] Ibid., 15.
[165] Cf. Gen 18:6.

of women: status and roles in ancient Israel depended on many factors—not just gender. But in terms of my thesis, what I deem most important is that a woman was considered the inferior in the male-female binary; that is, all else being equal, in the ANE a woman was of lower status than a man and was expected to submit to her male relatives. Among other things, this fact is reflected in marriage customs, in laws on inheritance, and especially in the relationship between wife and husband, who was nearly always considered his wife's superior, and at times even her owner. At the same time—and this is just as important—there was an ideal, reflected across the ANE, that women were owed a certain level of respect, care, and protection. Surely this was based on what today would be considered sexism and misogynistic presuppositions (reminiscent, perhaps, of that persistent notion of women as the "weaker sex"), but it was a very real expectation nonetheless.[166]

Submission, deference, protection, and respect all came together for women within the realm of domestic space. Women's roles were generally fulfilled within domestic space and their social identity, and that of most ancient Israelites, was closely tied to the בית אב. Within their domestic space, a household was to be safe, both physically and emotionally. As well, domestic space was central to the demonstration of hospitality, an important and carefully structured custom in the ancient world; in a sense, the home in which guests received hospitality became their own domestic space. In these ways, domestic space was

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[166] This expectation of care and respect could easily be overemphasized (cf. Pressler, *View of Women*, 1); after all, women's status in Yehud may have been lower than in most other periods of history; still, it is essential for my thesis that this ANE ideal for basic care and respect of women, however minimal, be acknowledged.

associated closely with notions of comfort, security, and hospitality. As I will

demonstrate in my next chapter, these facts about ancient Israelite society, of

women, as inferior or subordinate to men, and yet deserving of basic respect and

care; and of domestic space, as a place for comfort, security, and hospitality, are

turned on their head over and over in the book of Judges.

3. THE WOMEN OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The book of Judges "seems to be a book about men."[167] Male villains,

heroes, and a masculine god dominate the literary landscape. Nonetheless, the

book is full of female characters as well. These women are diverse characters,

varying in age, social class, ethnicity, religion, and marital status; but, read

together as a group, they say something about the society in which they are

portrayed, furthering the Deuteronomistic ideology of the book. While this

chapter will focus most closely on the four stories of Deborah and Jael, Jephthah's

daughter, Delilah, and the Levite's concubine, I will discuss almost all of the

female characters in the book of Judges, in at least a cursory way. My approach

will be simple: I will present a reading of these texts, frequently drawing on the

insights of narrative criticism to understand how these stories may have been read

in their original context—all while keeping in mind the social background of the

stories' original readers and "hearers."

Roughly speaking, in terms of my thesis, most of the women of the book

of Judges (and certainly the women I am concentrating on) fall into two

categories: those who take initiative and exceed or even violate the social

expectations the ancient world set for them; and those who are mistreated and

deprived of the very basic levels of respect and care that most women were

understood to deserve. Often, and particularly in Judg 4, 11, 16, and 19, the social

expectations of domestic space and hospitality are also challenged. Taken

individually, not all of these stories may have provoked or shocked ancient

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[167] Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 2.

readers; but, read collectively, they portray a world in which things are not as they should be. Whether privileged or abused, aggressive or passive, named or nameless, all these female characters serve to further the Deuteronomistic ideology as discussed in my first chapter.

Judges 1: Achsah

The first female character readers meet in the book of Judges is the daughter of the Judahite hero Caleb. Achsah is encountered almost immediately, in Judg 1:12, well before any judge is introduced. The episode is also found much earlier, in nearly identical form, in Josh 15:16-19. Although her story is extremely concise, she is among the "privileged" female characters: she is both named and given voice. The significance of an individual's or family's name in the ANE cannot be overemphasized. Two biblical themes reflect this significance: the importance of the survival of a man's name through the law of levirate marriage[168] and name changing to denote especially significance events.[169] To readers of ancient Israel, a character's name or lack thereof would not go unnoticed. For this reason, I am interested in when the book of Judges chooses to name its female characters and when they remain anonymous or merely identified by the name of a patriarch. Of course, male biblical characters are also frequently nameless, and there could be many reasons contributing to an author's choice to name or not name a particular character.[170] Nonetheless, at

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[168] E.g., Deut 25:5-10; "for a man's name to be established was vital to the meaning of his existence" (Pressler, *View of Women*, 101).

[169] E.g., Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah (Gen 17:5, 15).

[170] Carols Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, "Preface," *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (eds. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), xi.

least in terms of the "major" female characters I am focusing on—Deborah, Jael, Jephthah's daughter, Delilah, and the Levite's concubine, the women who fulfill stereotypically masculine roles are named, and those who are unacceptably victimized remain nameless. Although this pattern may not play out entirely consistently in the book of Judges, the choice to name or not name can still serve as a clue to readers.

Also of significance is the choice to provide or deprive a female character of voice. Especially in the context of economical biblical narrative style, voice is a privilege and in certain stories in the book of Judges the provision or deprivation of voice for female characters is especially noteworthy. This factor's importance may be heightened when a woman's voice or lack thereof is contrasted with the male characters of a story. The story of Achsah is striking in this way—despite the episode's brevity, she is given her own name and, in contrast to her husband, voice as well.

At first, however, Achsah appears powerless, offered up by her father as an incentive for heroism. The trope of a daughter offered as an award for military prowess is not unique to this story; perhaps the most famous example is Saul offering his daughters Merab and Michal to David in 1 Sam 18. Ancient readers would not, therefore, have found it exceptional; in fact, this notion of marriage into an influential family as a reward for successful combat is about as ideal, maybe even "romantic," as any in ancient times.

The Achsah story declines to describe the conquest of Kiriath-Sepher in any detail. Othniel, Caleb's nephew was the victor, and, as was promised, he received Achsah as his wife. It is in v. 14 that the story becomes interesting to

me: וַיְהִי בְּבוֹאָהּ [that is, came to her husband, whether on her marriage day, or night, or at some other point is unclear] וַתְּסִיתֵהוּ לִשְׁאוֹל מֵאֵת־אָבִיהָ הַשָּׂדֶה. As can be deduced from the next verse, apparently Achsah considered her dowry—some unspecified אֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב—to be unacceptable or inadequate, and she urges her new husband to demand more. This in itself might have struck an ancient reader as strange, the idea of a wife complaining about her dowry. After all, surely it is her father and her husband who should be most concerned about the dowry's worth. Perhaps Achsah felt dishonored by the dowry's size, or perhaps she was concerned for her future well-being if it was not big enough. But, given the story's ambiguity, it is impossible to know whether this dowry was truly below expectations, or whether or not Othniel thought so as well; the story is almost entirely devoid of clues.

Despite his wife's urging, Othniel neither makes a request of Caleb, nor responds to Achsah—nor does he appear in the story again.[171] Instead, the scene immediately shifts to Achsah dismounting from her donkey in front of Caleb (v. 14). Of course, a woman initiating, taking action, or approaching their father is not necessarily extraordinary, even in the ancient world; but juxtaposed with Othniel's inaction it is surely meant to raise questions in readers' minds. When Caleb asks his daughter what she wants, her response is bold: הָבָה־לִּי בְרָכָה כִּי אֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב נְתַתָּנִי וְנָתַתָּה לִי גֻּלֹּת מָיִם. At this point, her unorthodox, assertive and

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[171] He does, of course, receive his own narrative in Judg 3:7-11—but readers should note that even there he lacks his own voice. This contrast between male "lack" and remarkable female ability is repeated throughout the book of Judges.

audacious behavior becomes a foreshadowing of the other women of the book.

Without allowing Caleb a voice to answer, the narrator merely states that

Achsah's request was granted. She has obtained "some of her family's land and

water resources, which were normally not available to women in ancient Israel's

patrilineal system."[172] Already, in chapter one, readers have encountered a story

that could serve as a red flag: this world of the book of Judges is volatile,

unexpected, and unpredictable.

Judges 4: Deborah and Jael[173]

After the rest of the introductory comments in Judg 1:16-3:6, and the

stories of the first three judges in Judg 3:7-31, the cycle of disobedience begins

anew in Judg 4:1. There is no surprise here. By comparing Judg 4:1-3 with Judg

2:11-15 and 3:7-8 we see that the Deuteronomists have begun this cycle true to

form: the people have done evil in the eyes of Yahweh and as a result have been

given over to foreign oppression. In Judg 4 (as in Judg 3:12; 6:1; 13:1) the nature

of the people's evil is not made explicit, but it is fair to assume that it should be

understood as idolatry or unfaithfulness to Yahweh, since that is the only sin

mentioned in other cycle introductions (Judg 2:11-13; 3:7; 10:6) and it is clearly

the evil the Deuteronomists are trying to emphasize.[174]

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[172] Julia Myers O'Brien, "Achsah," *Women in Scripture*, 46.

[173] The story of Deborah and Jael appears in poetic form in Judg 5, the only poetry present in the book of Judges; for several reasons I have decided to focus solely on their story as related in Judg 4, including interests of space, the fact that interpreting Hebrew poetry can be much more difficult and ambiguous than narrative and, in terms of my purposes, the poetic version, as I read it, does not add anything especially significant to the story. I will, however, discuss briefly the character of Sisera's mother, who appears exclusively in the poem of Judg 5 (see below).

[174] The introduction to the Gideon cycle of Judg 6-9 does not mention idolatry either, but in Judg 6:7-10 the message of an anonymous prophet makes clear that the people's oppression is due to the worship of other gods. Certainly that prophetic message could apply equally appropriately here.

And so, the scene is set: the people have once again failed to exclusively worship Yahweh and have now been oppressed by King Jabin and his general Sisera for twenty years. Typically, the people cry out to Yahweh (Judg 3:9; 3:15; 6:6; 10:10) and Yahweh responds by raising up a שֹׁפֵט (Judg 2:16; 3:9; 3:15). In Judg 4 the people do indeed cry out (v. 3), but the next verse does not mention Yahweh raising up a שֹׁפֵט. Instead, readers are introduced to the second female character of the book, Deborah, אֵשֶׁת לַפִּידוֹת. Like Achsah, Deborah is named.

While Deborah's husband plays no role in the story, this way of identifying an ancient Israelite woman is typical: male characters are almost always identified by their fathers or tribe, since genealogy was essential to masculine identity; in the case of female characters, they are identified by whichever patriarch's household they belong to, whether husband or father. Thus, in Judg 4, Barak and Heber are identified as the בֶּן־אֲבִינֹעַם (vv. 6, 12) and הַקֵּינִי (vv. 11, 17), respectively, and Deborah and Jael by their husbands (vv. 4, 17, 21). Of course, the traditional form of identification for the female characters of Judg 4 belies their roles in the story.

Deborah is a prophetess and she is serving as שֹׁפֵט in Israel. She is the only character in Judges to be described as both prophet and judge. Verse 5 seems to indicate that her role as שֹׁפֵט was more in line with our contemporary understanding of the term "judge," because the portrayal of her sitting in a central place under a specific tree connotes the idea of "holding court" or presiding over

cases. This combined role of prophet and judge is similar to the role of Samuel.[175] There are no other biblical examples of an Israelite woman serving in such a prominent position, although there are a handful of prophetesses mentioned elsewhere.[176] While Deborah is certainly a positive character, ancient readers of vv. 4-5 would have been especially struck by the failure of a man to perform this role. Stated another way, for the Deuteronomists and the original readers of Judges, Deborah's role is not meant to claim anything about the ability of women; rather it emphasizes the failings of the people. A woman as prophet, judge, and military leader in ancient Israel is an anomaly, indicative of a serious social problem. For some reason, men are neglecting their responsibilities; it is a world in which things are not as they should be. Such indeed turns out to be the case as we read on.

In v. 6 we find out that the deliverer/military hero that Yahweh has in mind is not, after all, the prophetess/judge Deborah. Instead, she is merely a messenger, relating Yahweh's command in vv. 6-7 to Barak to raise a ten thousand man army and fight Sisera. But this would-be-hero responds in v. 8 with words that would have been derided and disrespected by any ANE reader: אִם־תֵּלְכִי עִמִּי וְהָלָכְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא תֵלְכִי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלֵךְ. Not only has masculine failure forced Deborah to serve as prophetess and judge, but now she will need to lead the army as well. As if to emphasize this point, Deborah makes it clear in the next verse that: הָלֹךְ אֵלֵךְ עִמָּךְ אֶפֶס כִּי לֹא תִהְיֶה תִּפְאַרְתְּךָ עַל־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ כִּי בְיַד־אִשָּׁה יִמְכֹּר

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[175] Cf. 1 Sam 7:15-17.

[176] Exod 15:20; 2 Kgs 22:14; Neh 6:14; Isa 8:3.

יְהוָה אֶת־סִיסְרָא. Barak's cowardice is to be remembered, not his military exploits.

Readers are set up to expect the woman of whom Deborah speaks to be Deborah herself. But male Israelite society is so deficient that this war requires two heroic women, not just one, as we will find out later on. It is possible that Deborah herself does not directly engage in the battle, but no matter what, she is plainly in charge, as the next verse makes clear. Once the battle preparations take place Deborah gives the command to engage in v. 14. With Yahweh on their side the Israelites are, of course, entirely successful and the army of Sisera is completely annihilated (v. 16).

The next verse seems to contradict this, however, since it turns out that Sisera himself has escaped on foot. He heads for the tent of Jael, אֵשֶׁת חֶבֶר הַקֵּינִי. Apparently King Jabin and Heber were on good terms; the text says כִּי שָׁלוֹם בֵּין מֶלֶךְ־חָצוֹר וּבֵין בֵּית חֶבֶר (v. 17). Sisera logically chose to run here, the home of an ally. Indeed, Jael comes out to meet Sisera and invites him into the tent. She tells him אַל־תִּירָא (v. 18) and provides him milk to drink. As seen in the previous chapter, according to ANE customs of hospitality, having accepted a guest into one's home automatically accorded him all the rights and protections due any member of the household. As an ally of Heber and now guest in the tent, Sisera surely had no reason to distrust Jael.

Many readers of the Deborah cycle find allusions to an element of sexual seduction in Jael's dealings with Sisera.[177] Comparisons are often drawn between Jael's narrative and the stories of Delilah and Judith, in which sexuality plays a much more explicit role in female conquest of male enemies. Jael's role may include seduction or a reversal of typical sexual roles,[178] but regardless, gender roles are certainly challenged and displaced, and Sisera can surely be understood as "emasculated." The Canaanite general willingly accepts a position of vulnerability by hiding under a rug or behind a curtain in case the Israelite army shows up. He asks Jael to keep watch, a role fulfilled by hosts elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[179] But Sisera's words can be read ironically: אִם־אִישׁ יָבוֹא וּשְׁאֵלֵךְ

וְאָמַר הֲיֵשׁ־פֹּה אִישׁ וְאָמַרְתְּ אָיִן (v. 20). These words could be interpreted in several ways. One possible translation would be, "If a man comes and asks you and says, 'Is there a man here?' then say, 'No.'" If the verse is understood this way, then Sisera's words can be read as a betrayal of the fact that Sisera, who is about to become the passive victim of a woman, is no longer a אִישׁ, "man."[180] Of course אִישׁ can be simply understood as "someone," not specifically masculine, so it is impossible to know whether this meaning was intended or if it would have been noticed by any of the story's original readers, but it is an intriguing reading

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[177] Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 37-38.

[178] E.g., it is the woman who wields the phallic יְתַד הָאֹהֶל and drives it into her counterpart's head.

[179] Cf. Josh 2:4-6; 2 Sam 17:17-21.

[180] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 93.

nonetheless that underlines the masculine failure and feminine initiative in the story.

In any case, immediately after these instructions are issued, the narrative switches perspective from Sisera to Jael: וַתִּקַּח יָעֵל אֵשֶׁת־חֶבֶר אֶת־יְתַד הָאֹהֶל וַתָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַמַּקֶּבֶת בְּיָדָהּ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו בַּלָּאט וַתִּתְקַע אֶת־הַיָּתֵד בְּרַקָּתוֹ וַתִּצְנַח בָּאָרֶץ (v. 21). Now, too late, the perspective switches back to Sisera: וְהוּא־נִרְדָּם וַיָּעַף וַיָּמֹת (v. 21). The male warrior who escaped the violence of the battlefield has become the victim of a woman, her domestic space, and domestic implements. In v. 22 Jael comes out of her tent to meet the pursuing Barak. Jael invites this general into her tent as well, but in this case she shows him the body of his dead enemy. The narrative ends in vv. 23-24, stating that God and the people of Israel defeated King Jabin. Along with Judg 5:31b (וַתִּשְׁקֹט הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה)[181] this ending is similar to other cycle conclusions in Judges, involving a statement of victory and the period of "rest" the land enjoys (cf. Judg 3:10-11; 3:30; 8:28).[182]

As much as anywhere in the book of Judges, readers of ch. 4 encounter a world in which things are not as they should be. Not only has Israel's cycle of idolatrous disobedience continued and not only has Israel once again been the victim of foreign oppression, but there is a lack of male leadership in this society, forcing a woman, Deborah, to fulfill the role of prophet and judge. Even when she calls and orders a male, Barak, to lead Israel, he waffles and refuses to go out

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[181] This line seems to have been separated from the narrative version of the story, perhaps as a means of tying the two versions, the narrative and the poetic, into a single cycle (Soggin, *Judges*, 60).

[182] Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 67.

alone. So, under the joint leadership of Deborah and Barak, the Israelite army

defeats the Canaanite army and Sisera flees. Logically, he takes refuge in the

home of an ally, but even here things are not as they should be. While the

comfort, safety, and hospitality of Jael's tent at first seems as expected, the role of

domestic space is turned on its head, as Sisera dies underneath a rug or a curtain,

victimized by an assertive and opportunistic woman using domestic tools as the

weapons of murder. In this world in which things are not as they should be,

women become heroes and men are cowards and victims.

Judges 5: Sisera's Mother

Although I am choosing to not analyze the poetic version of the Deborah

cycle in Judg 5, I would be remiss to not mention the characters of Sisera's

mother and her חַכְמוֹת שָׂרוֹתֶיהָ in Judg 5:28-30. These women are among the

nameless female characters of the book of Judges—the first readers have met so

far, identified solely by their male authority. Of course, even as their names are

provided, Achsah, Deborah, and Jael were also identified by their patriarch. The

women in Judg 5:28-30 are set in their domestic space—behind "the lattice"

(הָאֶשְׁנָב). They wonder and worry over the returning of Sisera and his army—

optimistically imagining their victorious return with booty, textiles and

reproductive women. Indeed, despite their lack of names, this scene of royal

women loitering and longing for their patriarch within their domestic space fits

well with the ideals of ANE court life. Surely readers should be struck: with this

brief glimpse of life "outside" of Israel, readers are offered a world in which

things *are* as they should be; this scene of "healthy" society stands in sharp

contrast to the world of Israel portrayed so far.

Judges 9: "A Certain Woman"

Near the end of the Gideon cycle of Judg 6-9 is the story of Gideon's son,

Abimelech. The tale of Judg 9 is a strange one; with Gideon dead, Abimelech has

persuaded the city of Shechem to anoint him king. There is no idolatry or foreign

oppression in Judg 9, but this short-lived, local monarchy results in internal

conflict, violence, and civil war. It is in the midst of a siege in Thebez that

another female character appears. She is among the citizens besieged in a tower

with Abimelech and his army surrounding them. Unsurprisingly, this female

character is nameless, but in this case she is not even identified by a male relative.

She is merely אִשָּׁה אַחַת and in Judg 9:53 she drops a פֶּלַח רֶכֶב עַל־רֹאשׁ אֲבִימֶלֶךְ.

With his skull crushed, Abimelech turns to his armour-bearer and says שְׁלֹף חַרְבְּךָ

וּמוֹתְתֵנִי פֶּן־יֹאמְרוּ לִי אִשָּׁה הֲרָגָתְהוּ. Despite the compliance of his armour-bearer,

Abimelech's wish is not fulfilled, at least not entirely. For it is, indeed, a woman

who is credited with killing him—as recorded not only here in Judg 9, but also in

the words of Joab in 2 Sam 11:21. A nameless, unidentified woman, driven from

her domestic space by violence, has joined the conflict, heaving a stone onto the

head of Abimelech. She is no Jael, celebrated in narrative and song, a heroine of

Israel; but she is, nonetheless, a woman taking initiative, defying the role set for

her by society. She is another example of a world in which things are not as they

should be.

Judges 11: Jephthah's Daughter

The story of Jephthah's daughter in Judg 11:29-40 is merely a brief scene

in the larger story of Jephthah, which starts in Judg 10:6. His story begins,

typically, with Israel's idolatry. In fact, the introduction to the Jephthah cycle in

Judg 10:6-16 is the most extensive of any of the individual cycle introductions,[183]

with the longest list of foreign gods worshipped by Israel in the entire

book: הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־הָעַשְׁתָּרוֹת וְאֶת־אֱלֹהֵי צִידוֹן וְאֶת־אֱלֹהֵי מוֹאָב וְאֵת אֱלֹהֵי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן וְאֵת

אֱלֹהֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים (v. 6). As expected, foreign oppression is the result, in this case at

the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, with the city of Gilead especially

victimized. The Israelites again, typically, repent, and the city of Gilead chooses

Jephthah to lead them against the Ammonites. Elsewhere Yahweh himself raises

up the judge,[184] whether directly or, in the case of Judg 4, through Deborah, but

there is no mention of Yahweh's involvement in Jephthah's selection. Jephthah's

mother was a prostitute; his father, the text says, was Gilead, "an ingenious way

of saying his father is anybody's guess."[185] A social outcast, Jephthath is secured

as army general by the elders of Gilead only after they promise him the leadership

of the entire city. Skeptical and clearly insecure, Jephthah questions the

elders, אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לְראשׁ (11:9). They swear by Yahweh that he will, the first vow

to Yahweh in this story. Such a promise is problematic; Jephthah may be an

impressive warrior, but his talents for governing and political leadership are

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[183] And has much in common with Judg 2:1-19; 6:7-10 (cf. Robert G. Boling, *Judges* [ABC 6A; New York: Doubleday, 1975], 193; Soggin, *Judges*, 202-03).

[184] Othniel (3:9), Ehud (3:15), Gideon (6:11-12), Samson (13:3-5).

[185] Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 114.

suspect at best. The elders' vow is not the only vow in the story that seems

unwise.

Jephthah begins his term of leadership with diplomacy, sending a message

to the Ammonites in which he defends Israel's right to the land and admonishes

the Ammonite king to withdraw and recognize the legitimacy of Israel's claim.

His extensive message is ignored, however, and both sides prepare for battle. In

11:29, readers are told רוּחַ יְהוָה came upon Jephthah. Now, only on the eve of the

battle is Yahweh finally endorsing this judge. It is at this point that Jephthah

makes his vow, probably publically, to boost morale and encourage the troops.[186]

Swearing to sacrifice אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִדַּלְתֵי בֵיתִי (v. 31) in exchange for victory is

unprecedented,[187] but Jephthah does, of course, strike down the Ammonites.

Triumphant, he returns to בֵיתוֹ in v. 34, and הִנֵּה בִתּוֹ. Adele Berlin

describes the use of הִנֵּה as frequently indicative of a change in point of view.[188]

Here the use of הִנֵּה does seem to switch perspective from Jephthah to his

daughter: the verse begins וַיָּבֹא יִפְתָּח and it continues to describe Jephthah's

coming until הִנֵּה breaks up the action and, in a sense, freezes attention on his

daughter. In a way this sets up the drama that is to come: Jephthah and the story's

readers understand the significance of her appearance in the scene, although as of

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[186] Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 115-16.

[187] Some, placing the dating of the story of Jephthah's vow in Hellenistic times (as Römer does), have understood it as a polemic against rash vows; in that case the oath may be meant as an "extreme" or "ultimate" example of vow-making. This reading is persuasive in many ways, but it is not necessary for the purposes of my thesis.

[188] *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 62.

yet, she does not. Celebration of victory rapidly turns to tearing of clothes as

Jephthah explains to his daughter, his only child, the vow he has made.

Ironically, Jephthah's downfall does not come upon the battlefield from which he

is returning, but at the door of his own בַּיִת. Domestic space, for both Jephthah

and his daughter, is proving to be more uncomfortable, dangerous, and

threatening than the violence of war. Victorious over his enemies, Jephthah has

reached the height of his political and military success, but it is the sight of his

own daughter in his own בַּיִת that brings him to his knees with his clothes torn.

Victim of failed men and failed domestic space, the virgin girl accepts her fate,

deprived not only of name, but of life itself. She heads off into the hills with her

friends to weep because of her virginity. Jephthah does to her according to נִדְרוֹ

אֲשֶׁר נָדָר וְהִיא לֹא־יָדְעָה אִישׁ (v. 39).

     Two important facts about Jephthah's daughter are emphasized in this

story by repetition. In v. 34, we are told first וּבִמְחֹלוֹת and then, in greater detail,

the fact is repeated: וְרַק הִיא יְחִידָה אֵין־לֹו מִמֶּנּוּ בֵּן אוֹ־בַת. By stating the same fact in

two different ways, the importance of the information is underlined and

emphasized; this tragedy is not only the loss of a daughter, but indeed the only

child Jephthah has. Just as significantly, the line עַל־בְּתוּלֶיהָ/עַל־בְּתוּלַי occurs once

in v. 37 from Jephthah's daughter herself and once in v. 38 in words of the

narrator. Then the narrator informs us, וְהִיא לֹא־יָדְעָה אִישׁ in v. 39. Once again the

reader is given the same information, in close succession, with two different

wordings. This time, the information is communicated three times, not just twice, underlining its importance all the more. The fate of Jephthah's daughter would have been tragic no matter what her status, but as an only child and childless virgin, her predicament is all the more regretful.

Given the social background explored in chapter two, the story of Jepthah's daughter is obviously one of an unfulfilled life for any ANE woman. Jephthah's daughter is commemorated, readers are told, annually by the daughters of Israel; while daughters may have been considered inferior to sons, the brutality of this tale is not lost. The unnamed, unfulfilled daughter's memory lives on. Still, as throughout the book of Judges, the story declines to pass any sort of explicit moral comment on the vow or Jephthah's actions, and simply carries on the Jephthah cycle into Judg 12. The narrator withholds moral comment, leaving it up to the reader to pass judgment on the story; this shocking portrayal of a daughter's life abruptly cut short is self-evidently a portrayal of a world in which things are not as they should be.

Judges 13: Manoah's Wife

The final judge cycle of the book of Judges is also the longest, and it begins with Samson's birth narrative—one of the elements that prompts Römer and other commentators to describe the cycle as "Hellenistic."[189] But, while Samson's birth narrative is unique to the book of Judges, it is a common enough genre of ancient times.[190] Typically ancient birth narratives serve to emphasize the uniqueness of the hero, extending back as far as his conception. In the

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[189] Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 138.

[190] A "universal folk motif" (Susan Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak," *CBQ* 54 [1990]: 610).

Hebrew Bible these stories involve "a barren woman, communication with a divine being, and the birth."[191] Among the closest literary parallels to this particular birth narrative is the birth narrative of Samuel in 1 Sam 1: Judg 13 and 1 Sam 1 share much in common, including the basic elements of a barren women, divine intervention, and sons with a special relationship to Yahweh. But, for me, it is the differences as much as the similarities that are most interesting, since it is where the stories differ that the narrative of Judg 13 indicates the specific social problems within the world of the book of Judges. Ancient readers may or may not have read Judg 13 with 1 Sam 1 in mind; if they did, then they quite possibly noticed the same important differences that I have; if they did not, they surely would still have been struck by the unexpected nature of the story that I find by comparing the two similar birth narratives.[192]

In 1 Sam 1:1-2 readers meet the family of Elkanah, including one of his wives, the barren Hannah. She is named and given voice—indeed, she is in many ways the most dynamic and central character of the story, fleshed out in extensive detail by the standards of biblical Hebrew narrative.[193] Distraught over her lack of children and over her relationship with her co-wife, Hannah takes action, praying to Yahweh for a son and promising to dedicate him to Yahweh if her request is granted. As a result, the priest Eli blesses her and the next year Hannah gives birth. Her son Samuel is dedicated to Yahweh and serves him at the shrine at Shiloh. Samuel's birth narrative does not necessarily reflect an ideal ancient

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[191] Ibid.

[192] I have no interest in debating intertextuality between Judg 13 and 1 Sam 1; indeed, as far as I am concerned, the stories may share an author, or, on the other hand, neither author may have ever encountered the other's story.

[193] John Petersen, *Reading Women's Stories: Female Characters in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 55.

Israelite society,[194] but the story of 1 Sam 1 is set in a world in which things are

much more as they should be than the world of the book of Judges.

As mentioned above, Judg 13 also contains a barren woman, the wife of

Manoah. She is another nameless, identified-by-her-patriarch female character of

the book of Judges. Namelessness need not necessarily denote social instability,

but it does indicate a lack of value or importance. Yet, while she might be

unworthy of a name, it is this woman who receives a visit, in Judges 13:3, from

the מַלְאַךְ־יְהוָה;[195] uninvited and unexpected, this visitor announces the birth of

Samson. Even Hannah, the woman privileged with a name, character

development, and initiative, does not receive a divine messenger; she must be

content with the reassuring words of a priest. Whereas Hannah's pursuit of a son

follows what must have been more or less a conventional method—prayer at a

cultic location, a promise of dedication to the deity, and blessing by the priest—

Judg 13 makes no mention of Manoah's wife even asking for a child, let alone

taking pious steps in that regard. Comparisons with Hannah aside, surely the

story's first readers would have noted that such a message coming straight from

Yahweh should have been given directly to the household patriarch, not to a

woman who does not even warrant a name in the story: "while annunciations are

typical of heroes' lives, and while such scenes do provide opportunities for the

development of female characterizations, it is noteworthy that the woman's role is

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[194] The birth narrative genre automatically reflects social instability, because it invariably involves barrenness and female initiative (women playing "a dominant role" [Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero," 610]). Furthermore, Eli's assumption that Hannah is drunk (1 Sam 1:13) must also reflects a milieu of moral ambiguity. Still, this sense of social chaos is heightened and intensified in Judg 13.

[195] Whether a euphemism for Yahweh himself or simply his angelic messenger.

especially pronounced here . . . it is significant that Samson's mother is given an especially positive portrayal."[196] Manoah himself implies some incredulity when he prays that the angel would return to him specifically in v. 8. When the angel returns, however, he once again appears to Manoah's wife, only then directing her to summon her husband. As elsewhere in the book of Judges, the extraordinary role of a female character is paired with male failure or impotence; Manoah is "passive and incompetent . . . powerless . . . insecure, unsure, and not believing or fully understanding."[197] Yahweh prefers to communicate with the wife and "each interaction between divine and human enhances the mother's role."[198] This is clearly a world in which things are not as they should be, and Israel's god chooses to shun the named male and privilege the unnamed female; as a result, Samson is born.[199]

Judges 16: Delilah

Samson's first activity recorded in the book of Judges involves a nameless woman (Judg 14:1). She is a Philistine, and Samson's lack of moral judgment is evident immediately when he demands that his parents get her for him, despite their pleas that he find an Israelite woman instead: it is "clear from the outset . . . that no one can tell Samson how to choose a wife."[200] This narrative does not, of course, turn out well for anyone. Samson's physical power and character weaknesses are simultaneously emphasized, and the marriage arrangement ends in

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[196] Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero," 612.
[197] Ibid., 610-11.
[198] Ibid., 611.
[199] Soggin describes Samson's family as "idealized" (*Judges*, 236), but surely a barren wife and the hesitancy/reluctance/refusal of a divine messenger to appear directly to the male head are not "idyllic" (ibid., 242).
[200] Boling, *Judges*, 235.

disaster. If the story of Judg 14-15 originated in a post-exilic context, one of its purposes was no doubt to promote endogamy. But, more generally, the issue of inter-ethnic marriages aside, it is another confirmation of the social chaos in pre-monarchic Israel. The story also serves to foreshadow the greater chaos to come in the Samson cycle.

Judges 16 begins in a very similar way to Judg 14, with Samson traveling into Philistine territory and becoming attracted to a Philistine woman, in this case, a prostitute (Judg 16:1-3). Again, this much smaller episode emphasizes both Samson's physical strength and his character flaws. His weakness for foreign women results in an excuse to kill or defeat Philistines. Other than his parents' comments in Judg 14:3, the story provides no moral judgment on Samson or his lifestyle. If anything, his success in fighting Philistines seems to matter more than his social and moral challenges.

This pattern continues in Judg 16:4. Yet again Samson "falls" for a woman living in Philistine territory.[201] Perhaps "truly in love"[202] is presumptuous and anachronistic, but he certainly seems quite smitten. This time she is named, Delilah, with no mention of a patriarch, and she is clearly a different class of woman all together.[203] She may be a prostitute, although the text does not say.[204] Regardless, she seems to operate independently of men, a situation reminiscent of the prostitute Rahab in Josh 2. Other than Deborah, she is probably the most powerful woman portrayed in the book of Judges. She and Samson seem to be

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[201] The text does not explicitly state that she is a Philistine (Jo Ann Hackett, "Violence and Women's Lives in the Book of Judges" *Int* 58 [2004]: 359), but most readers have assumed she, like Samson's previous "romantic" interests, is a foreigner.

[202] Soggin, *Judges*, 256.

[203] A woman of "high social status" (Boling, *Judges*, 252).

[204] Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 231.

engaged in something resembling a consensual relationship, and her ability to negotiate directly with the סַרְנֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים is startling. Delilah is likely not an Israelite,[205] a fact no doubt crucial to the story's original purpose. But, for the purposes of my thesis, Delilah fits into the larger theme of women playing atypical roles in the book of Judges. Although she is portrayed as living outside of Israelite territory, her victim is an Israelite man, and I think original readers would have understood her both as a warning of the dangers of exogamy—or any involvement with "foreign" women—and another example of the social turbulence in pre-monarchic Israel.

The story is a beautiful piece of literature, full of suspense, deception, and well-developed characters, and it is "presented in fine economical style."[206] Even if we bracket all potential issues of an Israelite man involved in a sexual relationship with a foreign woman, the story is also full of socially shocking themes. I have already highlighted Delilah's ability to negotiate directly with the סַרְנֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים. That men in control of cities and armies would treat Delilah as an equal and offer her money to betray Samson speaks volumes about her social position and influence. Such women may have existed in the ancient world—as Carol Meyers has pointed out—but they would have been rare indeed.

Delilah's betrayal/victory over Samson within her own domestic space is reminiscent of Jael's betrayal/victory over Sisera. Of course, the stories differ in that the conquered male is in the one case an Israelite hero and in the other an enemy, but otherwise their plots are quite similar: a male warrior finds apparent

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[205] Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 124.
[206] Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero," 615.

comfort and security within a woman's domestic space only to become betrayed and victimized. In Judg 4 the element of sexual seduction may be implied or inferred, but in Judg 16 it is explicit. Samson is romantically and sexually drawn to Delilah, and she uses his vulnerability to her advantage. Her exceptional sexual power is emphasized if hair is understood as associated with sexuality:[207] "the hair is often a symbolic substitute for the genitals or for sexual potency, or a manifestation of sexuality."[208] From this perspective, Delilah's conquest of Samson becomes a "castration." The theme of male emasculation and victimization by a woman is strengthened in vv. 21 and 25 through the use of Hebrew terms with literal and euphemistic meanings. In v. 21 Samson is portrayed "grinding" (טוֹחֵן), a term denoting "the domestic work of women or of fettered beasts;"[209] but טחן is also used euphemistically for the female role in intercourse in Job 31:10 and Isa 47:2.[210] The use of שׂחק in v. 25 is humiliating in its literal context of providing entertainment or amusement, but all the more so in a sexual context.[211] Samson, like Sisera before him, becomes a "defeated warrior." While Sisera may be understood as a passive sexual partner/victim to Jael, in Judg 16 Samson is much more clearly portrayed as "a sexually subdued woman" as well.[212] In subduing him sexually as well as physically, Delilah asserts her own, stereotypically masculine, strength.

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[207] An association that may be "universal" (ibid., 616).
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid., 617.
[210] Ibid.
[211] שׂחק "has special sexual overtones . . . (2 Sam 6:5, 21-22; 1 Chr 15:29 . . . Gen 26:8)" (Niditch, "Samson As Cultural Hero," 617)
[212] Ibid.

Delilah's status as a powerful woman is further emphasized by Samson's utter lack of mental or intellectual ability. Previous episodes of the Samson cycle have at times hinted that Samson's superior physical strength might not always be matched by exceptional intelligence or wisdom, but his continual inability to recognize Delilah's betrayal is especially stunning, whether tragically or comically or both. But whether readers are supposed to feel sorry for Samson or laugh at him, his folly is overwhelming. This "stupidity or even mental abnormality"[213] contrasts with the previous portrayal of Samson's riddle-giving in Judg 14:14, where he seems to be the most intelligently gifted of his companions. This inconsistency quite likely reflects the composite nature of the Samson cycle, but for readers of the story in its present form, the contrast emphasizes Delilah's abilities or "powers," whether of seduction or manipulation or something else: whereas Samson was previously able to display "wit" and "shape reality through the medium of speech,"[214] in Judg 16 he comes across as unintelligent next to Delilah. As in Judg 4 and Samson's own birth narrative of Judg 13, male deficiency serves to emphasize female efficiency.

The סַרְנֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים, despite their eventual success in capturing Samson, also do not come off as especially bright, when they fail to realize that Samson's re-grown hair means he has regained his mysterious strength (Judg 16:22, 25). Whether their drunken lack of awareness was intended to contrast with the shrewdness of Delilah cannot be certain, but it has this effect nonetheless, yet again underlining the female character's surprising role and abilities.

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[213] Soggin, *Judges*, 257.
[214] Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero," 613.

Stereotypical gender roles are not, however, the only social element challenged in Judg 16. The fact that the betrayal of Samson occurs within Delilah's בַּיִת should no doubt also be understood as an aspect of a world in which things are not as they should be. While at first, as far as Samson is aware, Delilah's domestic space not only represents comfort and safety, but also sexual excitement and physical pleasure. Samson's blatant naïveté prevents him from recognizing the danger he has repeatedly placed himself in, but Delilah's בַּיִת becomes progressively more and more threatening as the tension of the story builds. The suspenseful repetition of Delilah's pestering and Samson's false answers draw readers into the story, teasing them in a way, until the culmination in the final, correct answer to Delilah's question. Her domestic space has shifted, from safe, comfortable, and pleasurable for Samson to hostile, threatening, and violent. Whereas domestic space in the ancient world was meant to serve as a venue for refreshment and renewal, Samson leaves the house dramatically weaker and more helpless than when he entered.

Römer and other commentators read the Samson cycle as originating much later than the other stories of the שֹׁפְטִים. The "hero stories" of individual physical prowess evident in Judg 14-16 have much in common with Hellenistic literature, and the issue of exogamy was especially relevant for Jews in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, as opposed to pre-exilic eras. When read within the context of the entire, final form of the book of Judges, however, the story of Samson and Delilah fits well with the larger portrayal of a world in which things

are not as they should be. Readers are once again presented with a woman and her domestic space playing shocking and counter-cultural roles. Delilah is influential, powerful, and successful, and she uses her domestic space to trap and betray Samson, rendering it hostile, threatening, and violent.

Judges 17: Micah's Mother

The final chapters of the book of Judges are often spoken of as an "appendix," beginning with Judg 17:1. Judges 17-21 contain no judge, nor do they recount a cycle of idolatry and foreign oppression. The appendix is, however, set in the same period of political turmoil and moral chaos as the rest of the book. In fact, while the appendix contains two unrelated stories, in Judg 17-18 and 19-21, it is unified by the use of a formulaic phrase. This phrase appears twice in its full form and twice as an abridged version. In its full form it reads: בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה (Judg 17:6; 21:25). This phrase appears close to the beginning of the appendix and serves as conclusion to the appendix, and the book of Judges as a whole. In its abridged form, בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, the phrase appears in Judg 18:1 and at the beginning of the appendix's second story in Judg 19:1. In my first chapter I concluded that the question of whether or not the appendix was written by Deuteronomistic scribes was largely irrelevant to my argument, since the ideology is Deuteronomistic or close to it. Such is obviously the case in the use of this formula and, indeed, it could apply to most of the book. It emphasizes the lack of political stability and leadership and the sinfulness of pre-monarchic Israelite society. The chaos and

corruption found in the appendix—indeed throughout the entire book of Judges—is blamed, at least in part, on a lack of strong, central government. While these chapters may well have been composed after the Deuteronomists had done their work, Judg 17-21 clearly continues the Deuteronomistic ideology.[215]

Although the signature phrase of the appendix makes no mention of idolatry specifically, readers encounter the practice of idolatry immediately in ch. 17. They also meet another nameless female character; true to form she is identified by a male relative, her son Micah. Her role in the story is limited and at first blush rather conventional. Her identification by her son rather than husband or father implies that she is a widow, and her ownership of אֶלֶף וּמֵאָה הַכֶּסֶף further supports that assumption. Despite her minor role, the character of Micah's mother fits well with my thesis, since she is a woman suffering from the lack of political and moral stability in ancient Israel. In v. 2 readers find out that Micah has robbed his mother of these אֶלֶף וּמֵאָה הַכֶּסֶף, a substantial amount of money.

While the story provides few clues as to where this silver came from, it can perhaps be assumed to be part of her dowry or otherwise some inheritance from her presumably deceased husband. Regardless, it is obvious that a son stealing money from his widowed mother would have been reprehensible in ancient Israel, a society in which widows were among the most vulnerable and in which sons were expected to care for and protect their parents, particularly mothers, in times of need. On the surface this story stands out for reasons other than the

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[215] It could certainly be argued that the pro-monarchic aspect of the Deuteronomistic ideology is emphasized much more strongly in the appendix than the rest of the book, but this does not mean it is in any way inconsistent with the Deuteronomistic ideology.

mistreatment of a woman (i.e., idolatry, violence, etc.), but in my reading of the women of the book of Judges, the victimization of Micah's mother cannot be overlooked. It is another example of a world in which things are not as they should be.

Judges 19: The Levite's Concubine

By the final story of the book of Judges, readers should no longer be surprised at the problems of pre-monarchic Israelite society. As the first eighteen chapters of the book have made abundantly clear through the portrayal of idolatry, power struggles, violence, and, of course, women and domestic space, this world is not as it should be. Still, the book of Judges has saved its most provocative, most shocking, most appalling story for the end; the lack of political leadership, social order, and moral standards climaxes in Judg 19-21.

Somewhat surprisingly, there is no mention of idolatry in these chapters. And, as in the appendix's first story of Judg 17-18, there is no judge, no foreign oppression, and no cycle of disobedience and repentance. Instead, the story begins with that abridged version of the appendix's formulaic phrase: בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם

אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (Judg 19:1). The rest of the phrase, אִישׁ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה, is left out here, but it is certainly implied. In a sense, its absence merely heightens the tension, unease, and nervous expectation. By introducing his tale in this way, the narrator has situated readers within a time "when leaders were lacking, God

seldom appeared, and chaos reigned among the Israelite tribes;"[216] a world in which things are not as they should be.

Foreshadowing of the story is further intensified when the main character of ch. 19 is merely referred to as אִישׁ, the same word used in the introductory phrase. As readers quickly find out, the אִישׁ does indeed "do the right in his own eyes." This man is also referred to in v. 1 as a Levite, although the fact that he is a Levite is never mentioned again.[217] The second character introduced is the man's concubine. As with all the characters in this story, she is never named, but, while all the male characters in the story do speak at one point or another, the concubine is deprived of voice. Unfortunately for her, and for the entire Israelite society, that is not all she is to be deprived of.

The story is, however, specific about location.[218] The Levite is living as a foreigner בְּיַרְכְּתֵי הַר־אֶפְרַיִם and the concubine is from Bethlehem in Judah. The story's action begins when the concubine תִּזְנֶה עָלָיו (19:2) and runs away from him,[219] back to her father's house in Bethlehem. Presumably, the man and his

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[216] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 65.

[217] Some scholars have suggested deleting it altogether (Soggin, *Judges*, 284).

[218] While the appendix to the book of Judges is, as a whole, much more explicitly pro-monarchic than the rest of the book, the story of Judg 19-21 is also specifically (although subtly) anti-Saulide and pro-Davidic. This political agenda is communicated most effectively through the use of geography—with locations associated with David portrayed much more ideally than those associated with Saul. In other words, it is locations associated with Saul that are especially suffering from political and moral instability in Judg 19-21. Since the geographical polemic of the story matters little to my thesis, I will largely gloss over it, in favor of focusing on women and domestic space.

[219] זנה is most often understood in a sexual sense and has been translated in ways such as "played the harlot" (KJV, NASB); however, there is no other evidence in the story for understanding the circumstances in this way (Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, & Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1993], 133), and the LXX, Vulgate and many commentators since have opted for a translation such as "became

concubine were experiencing such relational difficulties that she was forced to

take refuge with her family, a common practice if a woman was experiencing

abuse or neglect. To what extent the concubine was mistreated is left up to

readers to assume, but, since she fled from the הַר־אֶפְרַיִם to Bethlehem, a

significant distance, she must have been seriously suffering. At this point early in

the story, domestic space is portrayed ideally, as a place of security and safety for

a vulnerable woman. Furthermore, בַּיִת is used four times in vv. 1-3, twice in the

name of Bethlehem (בֵּית לֶחֶם) and twice as the father's house. Thus, both

domestic space and, more specifically, בַּיִת, in this context, as in most of the

Hebrew Bible, have highly positive connotations.

The positive, ideal nature of this בַּיִת is further reinforced when the father

demonstrates perfect—perhaps even "over the top"—hospitality. According to v.

3, after waiting four months, the Levite has finally come to Bethlehem to retrieve

his concubine. Reconciliation, whether between her father and the Levite or

between the Levite and his concubine, is surely implied, to some extent or

another. Regardless, the Levite stays at his father-in-law's house for three days,

eating, drinking, and lodging there (v. 4). This picture of ideal ANE hospitality

becomes exaggerated when, about to leave on the fourth day, the man is

persuaded to stay longer by his father-in-law. This pattern of the son-in-law

preparing to leave, only to be persuaded to stay longer, is repeated three times and

angry" (Boling, *Judges*, 273; Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," 7; Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Subject-Shame?" *JSOT* 67 [1995]: 91).

related in vv. 4-9. The story has spared nothing in emphasizing the safety,

comfort, and hospitality of the father's בֵּית in בֵּית לֶחֶם.

In v. 10 the man and his concubine finally leave, albeit late in the day.

After passing by Jerusalem the man's servant suggests spending the night there,

but the man decides against it.[220] Instead, the man suggests they carry on וְלַנוּ

בַגִּבְעָה אוֹ בָרָמָה.[221] Gibeah is the city where they end up, a bad choice by any

measure. The ANE tradition of hospitality so ideally portrayed in Bethlehem is

sorely lacking in Gibeah. For some reason, the citizens of the town utterly fail in

their responsibility of hospitality, leaving the travelers in the square. Finally, an

old foreign man[222] takes them in. The old man takes them to his בֵּית, the fifth

time that term is used in this chapter. In v. 21, they are able to wash their feet and

eat and drink, pictures of rest, relief, and relaxation. In fact, as v. 22 opens, the

picture is still one of happiness, contentment, and joy: הֵמָּה מֵיטִיבִים אֶת־לִבָּם; so far,

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[220] This choice has double significance. First of all, since Jerusalem is, in the story's historical setting, a "city of foreigners who are not from the sons of Israel," the rejection of Jerusalem sets the reader up to expect there to be natural reasons to prefer a city of one's own people (Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 337-38). As it turns out, the man and his concubine are treated far from well by their own people. In this way, the story underscores Israel's serious social and moral decay, implying that the group may have been better off staying in a foreign city after all. As well, the rejection of Jerusalem––as the "city of David," clearly supposed to be associated with the later Davidic monarchy––enables the author to work in his political agenda of illustrating the consequences of rejecting the Davidic line.

[221] Ramah was the center of Samuel's ministry (1 Sam 7:17; et al.) and the Benjamite city of Gibeah was the home of Saul. In fact, Gibeah was identified with Saul so strongly that in Isa 10:29 Gibeah is referred to as גִּבְעַת שָׁאוּל. Ramah, on the other hand, is never again mentioned in this story. Perhaps the author is placing Ramah alongside Jerusalem as a city not like Gibeah. Alternatively, perhaps the author sees Saul and Samuel as tied together closely, and thus identifies Ramah with Gibeah and is condemning them both together. Since Samuel was the kingmaker of both Saul and David it seems preferable to read this account as not condemning of Ramah.

[222] From the הַר־אֶפְרַיִם, in fact, where the Levite is going and where he lives also as a foreigner.

despite the unacceptable wait, this hospitality, even in the house of a foreigner, seems ideal.

The interjection of וְהִנֵּה turns the scene around rapidly, much as it did in Judg 11:34. The men of the city, אַנְשֵׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל, as they are disdainfully described, surround the בַּיִת and call to the old man, הוֹצֵא אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ וְנֵדָעֶנּוּ (v. 22). Few verses in the Hebrew Bible rival this one for its horror and shocking disregard for accepted social norms. Neglecting to show the travelers hospitality was bad enough. Proceeding to violate the safety and protection of the old man's בַּיִת to gang rape and humiliate his male guest is almost certainly the morally lowest social behavior the author could imagine. In fact, it is an image that has lost almost none of its repulsiveness for contemporary readers.

In response to their cries, the old man goes out of his house, addresses the crowd as אַחַי, and tells them אַל־תָּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַנְּבָלָה הַזֹּאת (v. 23). In case the crowd, or the story's readers, have somehow failed to comprehend the "foolishness" or "vileness" of their proposed deed, the man repeats his admonition with only a slight change of vocabulary: לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ דְּבַר הַנְּבָלָה הַזֹּאת (v. 24). As an alternative, the old man offers his virgin daughter and the man's concubine to the gang. That anyone—in the ANE or anywhere—would see this as a viable option is tremendous. "The story has no heroes; nor does it allow the reader to differentiate clearly between offenders and victims;"[223] this is truly a world in which things are

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[223] Ilse Mullner, "Lethal Differences," *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 139.

not as they should be. This town and, now, even this old man and his בַּיִת, are

failing in their expected roles.

The concubine (the virgin daughter is never mentioned again) is forcibly

given to the crowd and they rape and abuse her "all the night until the morning."

After her ordeal she collapses at the door of the old man's house; the בַּיִת has been

closed to her (v. 26). Even now, the בַּיִת of Gibeah has failed to welcome and

protect the vulnerable. In the morning, the man, now called אֲדֹנֶהָ, finds his

concubine lying outside (v. 27). The Hebrew is not clear as to whether she has

already died or not.[224] Certainly she must be unconscious. She does not respond

to her husband, so he puts her upon the donkey and takes her to his home.

The Levite's concubine, the final individual female character in the book

of Judges, travels, albeit dead, via donkey, just as the first female character of the

book, Achsah, also traveled via donkey.[225] The contrast, however, between these

two women, the one named, influential, and initiating, and the other nameless,

powerless, and victimized, is startling. In a sense, the book of Judges is bracketed

by these female characters, and they underscore in very different ways the

problems of pre-monarchic Israel as a world in which things are not as they

should be.

Once back in the hill country of Ephraim, the story comes full circle, and

again domestic space becomes a hostile place for the concubine's unconscious or

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[224] The LXX adds, "for she was dead" (Boling, *Judges*, 276).

[225] Heidi Szpek, "The Levite's Concubine: The Story That Never Was," *Women in Judaism* 5 (2007): 6.

dead body. At his בַּיִת, the man wields a knife and divides his concubine into

twelve pieces. He takes the pieces and sends them throughout the land of Israel,

apparently as a morbid wake up call. Shocked and appalled, all who saw her body

said,‐לֹא־נִהְיְתָה וְלֹא־נִרְאֲתָה כָּזֹאת לְמִיּוֹם עֲלוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה שִׂימוּ

לָכֶם עָלֶיהָ עֻצוּ וְדַבֵּרוּ (v. 30).

Reading Judges 19 with Genesis 19:1-11
The similarities between Judg 19 and Gen 19:1-11 are well known.

Almost certainly, the narrative of Judg 19 is dependent on the story of Gen 19:1-

11,[226] although some scholars argue that the relationship is the other way

around.[227] But, regardless of whichever way dependence may lie, the stories are

remarkably similar. David Block lists much of the vocabulary common to both

chapters,[228] but besides vocabulary, thematic and plot similarities are obvious

even with a cursory reading of the two stories. Readers familiar with both

narratives could not help but compare the two stories, whichever came first.

Again, as with the comparison of Judg 13 and 1 Sam 1, it is the differences

between the two stories that are most striking to me, as they underline even more

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[226] Daniel I. Block, "Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature: A Study in Judges 19," *WTJ* 52 [1990]: 325-41; Stuart Lasine "Guest and Hospitality in Judges 19," 38-39; Soggin, *Judges*, 282-83.

[227] Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44 [1982]: 365-78.

[228] לין (Gen 19:2; a total of eleven times in Judg 19); סור (Gen 19:2; Judg 19:11-12, 15); הלך ,דרך ,שכם (Gen 19:2; Judg 19:9); תמהמה (Gen 19:16; Judg 19:8); רהצו רגל (Gen 19:2; Judg 19:21); ויאכלו (Gen 19:3; Judg 19:21); בערב (Gen 19:1; Judg 19:16); and, of course, בית (Gen 19:2-4, 11; and throughout Judg 19) (Block, "Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature," 327). The significance of shared vocabulary or "Leitworts" in connecting two stories is discussed in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 95.

strongly the corrupt nature of pre-monarchic Israelite society as a world in which things are not as they should be.

In Gen 19 it is angels, not a traveling party, that arrive in a strange city, in this case the city of Sodom. Their mission, to warn of Yahweh's imminent judgment and destruction of the city, also differs from the travelers of Judg 19, but in both cases hospitality is needed. It is the nephew of Abraham, Lot, sitting at the city's gate, who immediately takes the angels in. For these guests, there is no need to wait anxiously in the city square, as the travelers of Judg 19 are forced to do. In fact, even as the angels politely suggest that they could spend the night in the square, Lot's hospitality insists that they stay and eat with him. This difference between the initial hospitality of Sodom, a city about to be wiped out for its wickedness, and the Israelite Gibeah is striking. Remarkably, it is this city of ultimate sinfulness that can offer guests the superior hospitality.

As in Judg 19, however, the host is a foreigner and Lot's בַּיִת is surrounded by a gang of men, calling to Lot to send out his guests so they can rape them. Just like the old man in Judg 19, Lot goes outside, closes the door and, addressing them as אַחַי (19:7), offers two women, in this case his virgin daughters, instead.

At this point the initial differences between Sodom and Gibeah disappear—in both places the citizens of the city are inhospitable, and horribly corrupt. Still, the difference of Lot, offering his own daughters (i.e., willing to sacrifice his own family to preserve the honour of his guests), and the old man, offering both his daughter *and* the concubine of his guest, may have struck the stories' original readers.

As the story of Gen 19 continues, the gang, unsatisfied with Lot's offer, presses in on the house and threatens Lot himself. Again, the difference might be subtle, but Lot's risking of his own well-being to preserve the honour of his guests versus the ineffectualness of the old man of Gibeah may be indicative of the level of moral failure in pre-monarchic Israel. Just as the gang closes in on Lot, the angels open the door, pull Lot inside, and strike the gang blind, rendering their efforts useless. This is by far the greatest difference between the two shocking stories: in Sodom the gang fails in their sexually violent quest, whereas in Gibeah they actually receive the concubine to rape and abuse. In Gen 19:1-11 the women are protected; in Judg 19 she is victimized to the point of death.

Judges 19 in no way reduces the horror or repulsiveness of Gen 19:1-11, but takes it to another level by portraying a situation with even greater immorality.[229] If Judg 19 was written dependant on Gen 19:1-11, as seems likely to me, then surely the writer has intentionally portrayed pre-monarchic Israel, and in particular the city of Gibeah, as more wicked and corrupt than Sodom, the epitome of sinful cities in the Hebrew Bible. But even if this comparison is not intentional, even if Judg 19 in fact preceded Gen 19, the effect on readers of both stories is ultimately the same: pre-monarchic Israel is as much (or more so) a world in which things are not as they should be as the Sodom of Gen 18-19. The comparison of Sodom and Gibeah extends further as the stories go on, as both are destroyed following their inhospitableness. In Sodom's case, Yahweh himself administers justice, destroying the city by raining down sulfur. In the pre-

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[229] As many other scholars have noted, Gen 19 is not the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that Judg 19 draws upon and distorts; "the distortion of biblical passages in Judges 19 . . . was designed . . . [to] upset [readers'] expectations" (Szpek, "The Levite's Concubine," 7).

monarchic Gibeah of Judg 19 Yahweh seems absent, and "justice" is left to a society devoid of political leadership; the city is destroyed as the result of a poorly planned civil war, as the appendix relates in the next chapter.

Judges 20-21: The Women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh

From the beginning with the individual nameless characters of Judg 19, the story expands in ch. 20 to a national focus, with כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל assembling in response to the body parts sent out by the Levite. The Levite appears again, in Judg 20:4-7, relating his experience in Gibeah. As a result, the assembled men decide to attack Gibeah, and the fight becomes an Israelite civil war when the entire tribe of Benjamin opts to stand with the city of Gibeah. According to the story, almost the entire tribe of Benjamin is destroyed—fighting men, towns, livestock, and כָּל־הַנִּמְצָא (vv. 46-48); only six hundred men survive, hiding in the wilderness (v. 44). But now—and here is where the poor planning is evident— Israel regrets having nearly wiped out one its own tribes (Judg 21:15). While the six hundred men have survived, they have no one to marry, as the Benjamite women have been killed, and the rest of the Israelites had sworn not to let the Benjamites marry their daughters (Judg 21:1). The chaos and absurdity of the situation is simply astounding.

Eventually, the Israelites solve the problem with even greater violence, by attacking the city of Jabesh Gilead, which had failed to assemble with the rest of the Israelites. They destroy this city, killing everyone but four hundred virgin women, whom they capture. After peace has been reestablished between the remnant Benjamites and the rest of Israel, the four hundred women are given as

wives to the Benjamites. This solution is not quite adequate, however, as there

are still two hundred Benjamites without wives. All is finally settled when these

Benjamites are advised to kidnap girls from an annual festival at Shiloh. If

challenged by the fathers or brothers of these women, the Benjamites were told to

tell them to חָנּוּנוּ אוֹתָם (v. 22). And so this bizarre story ends: Israel's moral

corruption, lack of political leadership, and violent ways have resulted in

hundreds of innocent young women being captured and kidnapped away from

their families. The civil war is evidence enough of pre-monarchic Israel's

problems, but this treatment of women is no less appalling. As if to underscore

this portrayal of a world in which things are not as they should be, the story, and

the book of Judges, concludes with that signature phrase: בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ

בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה (v. 25).

CONCLUSION

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* concludes with an academic lecture given at a conference of the "Gileadean Research Association." It is clear from this lecture that Offred attempted escape from Gilead, and may have succeeded in reaching England. But whatever the fate of the story's main character, it is obvious that by the year 2195, the Republic of Gilead has ceased to exist, replaced by a society in which something like conventional contemporary values have been restored. There is no mention of how this took place, however, and in many ways the story ends without a satisfying resolution or "happy ending."

We have seen how the book of Judges ends; a more depressing or pessimistic ending can hardly be imagined.[230] Without a king, there is no reason to expect the social turmoil of pre-monarchic Israel to cease. But in the larger context of the DH, there is, at least temporarily, a resolution to the book of Judges. If nothing else, the reigns of David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah are portrayed positively: idolatry, improper worship, political chaos, and foreign threats have all subsided under the control of strong central government. For the Deuteronomists, these kings, at least at some point in their reign, represent something close to perfection.

Of course, the DH is careful to show that this ideal failed to last, and Israel returned to the mistakes depicted in the book of Judges. In fact, as the DH makes clear, even under Davidic monarchy, Israel constantly breaks the covenant and strays from Yahweh. Interestingly, the most noteworthy women in the DH

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[230] Or, in Soggin's words the book ends in "suspense," necessitating a continuation or resolution "elsewhere" (*Judges*, 305).

outside of the book of Judges tend to appear just at these moments: women such as Abigail, Jezebel, Jehosheba, and others all come to prominence at points in Israel's history when masculine failure, moral corruption, and political tension exist. Perhaps for the Deuteronomists women in counter-cultural roles are indicative of social problems in monarchic Israel, as well.

I have argued along with most scholars of the book of Judges and the DH that Israel's mistakes are primarily portrayed as twofold: failure to establish a central leadership structure and failure to properly worship Yahweh exclusively. For the Deuteronomists, the book of Judges serves to illustrate that these mistakes lead to a world in which things are not as they should be and ultimately, through the DH, to humiliating defeat and exile. The book of Judges and the DH first circulated in something close to their final form in the fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E., and within that social context I have argued that the book of Judges' portrayal of women and domestic space would have struck readers as especially surprising, and this surprise intensifies the presentation of a world in which things are not as they should be.

From Achsah to the girls of Judg 21, female characters are cast in roles that defy ancient stereotypes. They are either, on the one hand, deprived of the basic care and respect expected for them; or, on the other hand, take initiative and "pick up the slack" left by male failure—in effect fulfilling masculine roles. The individual women of the book of Judges tend to be extraordinary in one of these ways or the other, and this exceptionality is only highlighted further by the vast difference between the two types, the empowered and the victimized. Likewise, in the stories I have focused on, domestic space fails to provide comfort, security,

and protection and instead becomes the setting for violence and unpredictability. This society is "topsy-turvy;" it is very obviously, very dramatically, and very sharply portrayed as a world in which things are not as they should be. Through the portrayal of women and domestic space, the Deuteronomists have thoroughly underlined and reinforced their ideology.

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