# UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE HEBREW BIBLE: A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL READING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMAN WISDOM

## BY

### FUNLOLA OLUSEYI OLOJEDE

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## SUPERVISOR: PROF. HENDRIK L BOSMAN

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# DECLARATION

I the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own

original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any

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# ABSTRACT

This study is based primarily on the presupposition that the conventional definition or description of a biblical heroine does not take into account certain 'hidden' women in the Old Testament who could be distinguished due to their wisdom. By using the Yoruba woman as a contextual interpretive lens, the study investigates two female characters in the Old Testament each of whom is named in only one verse of Scriptures – "the First Deborah" in Genesis 35:8 and Sheerah in 1 Chronicles 7:24. The investigation takes its point of departure from the figure of Woman Wisdom of the book of Proverbs, which commentators have characterized as a metaphor for the Israelite heroine – a consummate image of the true Israelite female icon.

It is indeed remarkable that Woman Wisdom has been associated with various female figures in the Old Testament such as Ruth, Abigail, the Wise Woman of Tekoa and the Wise Woman of Abel, etc. However, this study calls for a broader definition of wisdom based on the investigation of certain women in Old Testament narratives (e.g. Deborah and Sheerah) who have received only fleeting mention and recognition but whose lives reflect a possible connection to wisdom on a deeper level.

It is shown that classical (arguably masculine) ways of reading the text tend to sideline or altogether overlook certain female characters, which are regarded as marginal such as Deborah and Sheerah. However, there are narrative gaps in the units where such women are found that could be filled by a reading of the text that is sensitive to details. It is argued that a more careful examination of the minute details in the texts could break down the metanarratives in a way that shows that they have hermeneutical significance. Therefore, attention to the narrative details unveils new dimensions of meaning and implications between the two texts (women) under investigation that have not been related in previous studies.

Of significance is the fact that classical readings of the two verses that mention "the First Deborah" and Sheerah (Gen 35:8 and 1 Chron 7:24) regard them as intrusive in

their respective contexts. However, a multiplex reading of each of the two verses in this study has shown that, rather than being intrusive, both have been strategically constructed to underscore the importance of the two women, and that the verses actually fit into their present pericope. The references to both Deborah and Sheerah are rooted in strong Old Testament traditions namely Bethel and Ephraimite, respectively, both of which play visible roles within the pericopes. What's more, both verses are found within significant contexts – one in the middle of a section that closes the Jacob Cycle and introduces the Joseph Cycle, the other in the midst of a theologically driven genealogy that begins with Adam.

Again, based on the multifaceted character of Woman Wisdom, in particular, as a teacher, a nourisher and a builder, it is argued that this metaphor of an Israelite heroine is embodied in both "the First Deborah" and Sheerah. Whereas Deborah was a wet nurse who must have nourished and nurtured the offspring of Rebekah, her mistress, Sheerah has been identified as the only female builder throughout Scriptures. The identification of the role of a wet nurse as a nurturer and nourisher as well as the role of a daughter as a builder with Woman Wisdom points to two silent heroines, one in the private domain and the other in the public sphere, who have remained unrecognized and uncelebrated in Old Testament scholarship.

Furthermore, the roles of Deborah and Sheerah, respectively as wet nurse and builder, indicate that women participated in various spectrums of societal life especially in the Second Temple period when it is assumed that the texts reached their final forms. Not only did they perform roles that were associated with women, they equally participated in roles that were regarded as traditionally masculine. In this regard, a study of the women in the book of Chronicles offers a fresh glimpse into the roles and positions of women in the Second Temple period as well as into the Chronicler's purpose and emphasis, in particular, regarding his concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל.

On a theological level, the achievements of the two women demonstrate God's penchant for supporting the weak and the marginalized and for affirming those who are

regarded as less likely to succeed. The mention of the First Deborah in the Old Testament proves that in God's script, there are no little people. In the case of Sheerah, the point that there is a כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל that includes outstanding female achievers indicates that, theologically speaking, there is no barrier against what women can do.

# OPSOMMING

Die vertrekpunt van hierdie studie is die veronderstelling dat konvensionele beskrywende definisies  van Bybelse heldinne sekere 'versteekte' vroue in die Ou Testament, wat uitstaan danksy hulle wysheid, verontagsaam. Met die Yoruba-vrou as kontekstuele interpretatiewe lens word twee vroulike karakters in die Ou Testament bestudeer wat elk in slegs een vers genoem word – "die Eerste Debora" in Genesis 35:8 en Seëra in 1 Kronieke 7:24.

Die vertrekpunt is die figuur van Vrou Wysheid uit die boek Spreuke, wat deur kommentators gekenmerk is as 'n metafoor vir die Israelitiese heldin – 'n volkome beeld van die ware Israelitiese vroulike ikoon.

Dit is merkwaardig dat Vrou Wysheid met verskeie vroulike figure in die Ou Testament vereenselwig word, soos Rut, Abigail, die Wyse Vrou van Tekoa en die Wyse Vrou van Abel, ens. Hierdie studie betrek egter 'n breër definisie van wysheid, gebaseer op 'n ondersoek na sekere vroue in Ou Testament-narratiewe (byvoorbeeld Debora en Seëra) wat slegs kursoriese erkenning geniet maar wie se lewens dui op 'n moontlike konneksie met wysheid op 'n dieper vlak.

Daar word aangedui dat klassieke (aanvegbaar manlike) wyses om die teks te lees, neig om sekere vroulike karakters soos Debora en Seëra, oor die hoof te sien, en hulle sodoende te relegeer tot marginale figure. Die narratiewe gapings in die eenhede waar hierdie vroue figureer, kan oorbrug word deur 'n lees van die teks wat sensitief is ten opsigte van detail. Die argument word gestel dat nader ondersoek na die fyn besonderhede in die tekste die metanarratiewe kan dekonstrueer op 'n wyse wat hulle hermeneutiese betekenis belig. Sulke aandag aan die narratiewe detail ontbloot nuwe dimensies van betekenis en implikasies tussen die twee relevante tekste (vroue) wat nog nie in vorige navorsing weergegee is nie.

Dit is betekenisvol dat huidige navorsing van die twee verse wat na "die Eerste Debora" en Seëra verwys (Gen 35:8 en 1 Kron 7:24) beide as toevoegings beskryf in hulle verskeie kontekste. 'n Meerdimensionele lees van elk van die twee verse in hierdie

studie toon egter dat veel anders as toevoegings, beide verse die vroue as strategiese konstrukte stel om hulle belangrikheid aan te dui binne die perikope. Die verwysings na beide Debora en Seëra is geanker in vaste Ou-Testamentiese tradisies, naamlik die Bet-El en Efraimitiese tradisies respektiewelik, wat beide figureer binne die perikope. Wat meer is, beide verse word aangetref binne beduidende kontekste – een in die middel van 'n gedeelte wat die Jakob-siklus afsluit en die Josef-siklus inlei, die ander midde in 'n teologies-gedrewe genealogie wat vertrek vanaf Adam.

Weer eens, ooreenkomstig die veelsydige karakter van Vrou Wysheid, spesifiek in die rolle van onderrigter, voeder en bouer; word geargumenteer dat hierdie metafoor vir 'n Israelitiese heldin beliggaam word in "die Eerste Debora" en Seëra. Debora was 'n soogmoeder wat die nageslag van haar meesteres, Rebekah, gevoed en opgevoed het; daarenteen word Sheerah geïdentifiseer as die enigste vroulike bouer in die Bybel. Die identifikasie van Vrou Wysheid deur die rol van 'n soogmoeder as voeder en opvoeder, sowel as dié van 'n dogter as 'n bouer, wys op twee stille heldinne, een in die private domein en die ander in die openbare sfeer, wat geen erkenning of verering in Ou-Testamentiese besinning geniet nie.

Verder dui die rolle van  Debora en Seëra, respektiewelik as soogmoeder en as bouer, daarop dat vroue aktief was in verskeie sektore van die sosiale lewe, veral tydens die Tweede Tempel-periode waartydens aanvaar word die tekste in hul finale weergawes geformuleer is. Vroue was dus aktief nie alleen in rolle wat met hulle geassosieer is nie, maar ook in rolle wat tradisioneel aan mans toegeskryf is. 'n Studie van die vroue in die Kronieke-boek bied vars insae in die rolle en posisies van vroue tydens die Tweede Tempel-periode, asook in die Kronis se doel en beklemtoning, veral betreffende die konsep van כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Op teologiese vlak illustreer die prestasies van die twee vroue God se voorliefde vir ondersteuning aan die swakkes en gemarginaliseerdes, en vir bemagtiging van dié wat beskou word as minder waarskynlike presteerders. Die verwysing na "die Eerste Debora" in die Ou Testament bewys dat in God se teks, daar geen klein mensies

bestaan nie. In die geval van Seëra, bewys die feit dat daar 'n כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל is wat besondere vroue insluit, dat daar teologies-gesproke, nie perke is aan die potensiaal van vroue nie.

# DEDICATION

*With unwavering love and admiration to Ṣọlápé Èsùrú,*
*the wise builder of the house with seven pillars*

*And to all the "little women" out there who bear the burden of the day*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# ABBREVIATIONS

AB – The Anchor Bible

ABD – Anchor Bible Dictionary

AOTC – Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries

ASV – The American Standard Version

BBE – The Bible in Basic English

BCOT - The Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament

BEATAJ – Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums

BIS – Biblical Interpretation Series

BKAT - Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament

BLS - Bible and Literature Series

BTB – Biblical Theology Bulletin

BZAW – Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CBC – The Cambridge Bible Commentary

CBQ – The Catholic Biblical Quarterly

CUP - Cambridge University Press

DBAT – Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament

FOTL – The Forms of the Old Testament Literature

HBS – Harvard Semitic Monographs

ICC – The New International Commentary

ITC – International Theological Commentary

JBL – Journal of Biblical Literature

JPS – The Jewish Publication Society

JSOTSup – Journal of Society for Old Testament Studies Supplementary Series

NAC – The New American Commentary

NCBC – The New Cambridge Bible Commentary

NIBCOT – The New International Bible Commentary on the Old Testament

NICOT - The New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NIDB – The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

NIDOTTE – The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis

OBOS – Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis

OTE – Old Testament Essays

OTL – Old Testament Library

OUP – Oxford University Press

SBL – The Society of Biblical Literature

SBLDS – The Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

SBLSS – The Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series

SOTSS – Society for Old Testament Study Series

TDOT - Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament

VT – Vetus Testamentum

WBC – Word Biblical Commentary

WMANT – Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament

ZAW - Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

*"Wichtig ist, dass man nicht aufhört zu fragen"*
*(Albert Einstein)*

## 1.1    Preliminary reflections

That the Old Testament is, in many respects, androcentric in appearance is argued among most biblical scholars. Bellis (2000:26) comments that, "The Bible itself was often androcentric. Much of it was written by men from a male perspective and intended for a male audience". Ringe (1998:2) affirms the position that "women's perspectives or the consequences for women's lives were not the primary concern of the biblical authors. In the same vein, Bohmbach (2000:34) points out that one area that reflects the androcentric character of the Bible deals with names and naming. She notes that "women's names represent between 5.5 and 8 percent of the total" names mentioned in the Bible. Not only are the majority of the women in Scriptures nameless, they are also ultimately voiceless and faceless.

In the Old Testament, when the women found a way to be recognized by the biblical narrators who are considered males, they are identified often in relation to the men as the daughter, sister, mother or wife of a particular man and not in their own right (Meyers, Craven & Kramer 2000: xiii). Only few women in the Old Testament stand out and are mentioned as living memorable lives or carrying out acts that put them on a par with their male counterparts. One of such women is Miriam, who is described as "a woman whose leadership and prophetic status stand on their own, without a link to a male relative" (Meyers 2000:11). These women and a number of others are known by name and held in honour throughout Scriptures (e.g. Deborah, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, etc). They are depicted as heroines of the Bible.

However, this study begins with the assumption that numerous women who are voiceless and faceless exist in the Old Testament whose accomplishments are shrouded, either deliberately or accidentally, in interpretation. Of all these women, who are generally unknown, there remain some of them who should not be unsung because behind the brief mention they have received, one would discover women of great power and wisdom whose extraordinary feats have been buried by history. They are the hidden, uncelebrated and unsung heroines of the Old Testament.

Taking into account the "paucity of scholarly analysis of the accepted feminine archetypes" (Powers 1991:3)[1] in the Old Testament and the relative ease with which women's stories and names are buried or overlooked even in the history of interpretation, one wonders whether the roles of these women could be uncovered and their stories retold? It is remarkable that although women appear to be relegated to the background in Old Testament narratives, in the book of Proverbs, "The personification of wisdom as a woman is strong and persistent" (Clifford 1999:23). In fact, "the Wisdom Woman appears throughout the wisdom writings and especially in the book of Proverbs", (Ceresko 1999:45). In contrast to the male role players in the narrative books, the "hero" of the book of Proverbs appears to be a "Woman."

## 1.2 Research problem and hypothesis

It is of interest to us to inquire whether a pattern could be established in the stories of these unsung women along the lines of wisdom. Are there hints (no matter how subtle) in their stories that they could correspond to or represent an archetype of the wise heroine? In other words, could these neglected female figures represent examples of wise counsel and heroic deeds, for instance, in domestic or public settings? Further, is there a way in which the stories of these women can be re-interpreted in an African context? We shall attempt to investigate these and other questions in the course of this study.

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[1] Powers describes the heroine in Western literature but his statement seems to be relevant to the Old Testament as well.

Moreover, we would contend that the history of interpretation of the Old Testament, and in fact of the entire Scriptures, does not often take into account the 'ordinary' or 'little people' in the scheme of things. The tendency is to gloss over their stories in narratives that mention them as if they never mattered. Classical biblical commentaries often tend to ignore certain characters in Scriptures treating their roles or presence as inconsequential and focusing on society's 'big' people – the (over)achievers and the heroes, the experts at war and the larger than life statesmen. The situation is even more precarious when the character happens to be a woman. In as much as the Bible itself glosses over the stories of these women, interpreters and commentators tend to ignore them altogether, as if they were never mentioned. Already, their mention in the Bible is made in the midst of silences and gaps but rather than listen and attend to those silences, classical scholarship tends to obliterate whatever has been left in Scriptures of the lives of these 'minor' characters[2].

It is our contention that the casual records, the seemingly minute points, concerning women in the Old Testament have hermeneutical significance, which cannot be overlooked, and the classical or masculine way of reading the Bible, therefore, needs to take into account such points. It is obvious that nothing can be done about the text production, but something can and ought to be done about the reception of the text.

Our hypothesis is that the conventional definition or description of a biblical heroine does not take into account certain 'hidden' women in the Old Testament who could be distinguished for their wisdom, albeit, in subtle ways. Thus, Woman Wisdom enables us to perceive certain uncelebrated women in the Old Testament in a new light, while the perception and role of the traditional African woman, in particular, the Yorùbá woman, may in addition, offer us a glimpse into the lives of these women.

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[2] Incidentally, Branch (2009) has written on seven obscure or "least-known" women of the Old Testament namely Miriam, Rizpah, the Wise Woman of Abel, the Wife of Jeroboam, the Widow of Zarephath, the Israelite Slave Girl in 2 Kings 5, and Athaliah. Although the goal of her study is similar to the present task, the characters, approach and perspectives differ largely. It is also worth mentioning that the researcher got hold of the book while this study was already well-advanced and the subject matter or goal was not in any way affected by Branch's interesting and insightful work.

## 1.3 Scope of research

To begin, the study will examine the roles and perception of women among the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria, especially in the pre-colonial period, to determine whether their lives can illuminate the perception of the Hebrew women being considered in this study. The aim is not to do a comparative study of the two cultures but to determine whether the context of the researcher offers any fresh insight into our interpretation of the biblical text before us.

As noted above, the focus of the study will centre on Woman Wisdom and she will be used as a lens to (re)discover certain 'hidden' women of the Old Testament. Even though certain scholars identify Woman Wisdom with other books outside of the biblical canon such as the books of Wisdom of Solomon and Wisdom of Ben Sirach, this treatise will be limited to her attestation in the Old Testament canon, specifically, in the book of Proverbs. Whereas Lang (1986:4, 16) identifies the poems in Proverbs[3] 1:20-33; 8 and 9 in relation to Woman Wisdom, Whybray (1994:35, 59) recognizes three poems in Proverbs (1:20-33; 3:13-20; 8:1-36), and Perdue (1994:78; 1997:79-89) notes five related poems (Prov 1:20-33; 8:1-11; 12-21; 22-31 and 9:1-18). However, Yoder (2001:3) considers the poems in a slightly different way. In her view, Woman Wisdom is personified in five passages namely 1:20-33; 3:13-18; 4:1-9; 7:4-5 and 8:1-9:6, 11. Additionally, she notes that there are speeches about her in 1:20-21; 3:13-18; 4:4-9; 7:4-5; 8:1-3 and 9:1-3, and by her in 1:22-33; 8:4-36 and 9:4-6, 11[4].

With respect to Woman Wisdom, therefore, our task will centre on the texts of Proverbs 1-9 (notably 1:20-31; 8:1-36 and 9). Of particular interest will be the literary and

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[3] Except otherwise stated, the translation choice in this study is the New International Version (1984 edition), which is based on the Masoretic Text (MT). Additionally, all Hebrew texts used below are based on the 1990 *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS).

[4] It is significant to note that some parallel has been observed between the portrait of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 and the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 (cf. McCreesh 1985; Whybray 1995:102, 106). Camp (1985:188-189) identifies a firm correlation between the two portraits of Wisdom and, similarly, Yoder (2001:91-92), acknowledges both lexical and semantic correspondences between the two. Yoder claims that the two "essentially coalesce as one figure" and that the two figures act as frames for the entire book of Proverbs (Yoder 2001:93, 2).

theological characterization of Woman Wisdom in these texts and the way her literary and theological traits could serve as yardstick for probing the lives of certain unsung women in the Old Testament.

Without any doubt, scholars have established strong connections between Woman Wisdom and some women in the Hebrew narratives, notably the "Wise Woman of Tekoa" (2 Sam 14) and the "Wise Woman of Abel Maacah" (2 Sam 20). Claudia Camp's (1985) book, *Wisdom and the feminine in the book of Proverbs,* is notable in this regard. She puts up a strong argument to show that the wise women of Tekoa and Abel (among some other women) were representative of a literary tradition in post-exilic Israel that portrayed wise women who decided to act in situations of need when the male hierarchy of 'justice' failed (cf. Camp 1981; 1999; Nicol 1982; Lyke 1997 and Schroer 1995).

We shall attempt to pay close attention to the connections between personified wisdom in the book of Proverbs and these wise women in the Hebrew narratives examining the criteria that have been used to connect them. However, our goal is to show that the practical use or display of wisdom is not limited to these women. Beyond the wise women of Tekoa and Abel, or Ruth, Abigail, Tamar and Naomi (Camp 1985), other women exist in Hebrew narratives whose mention could easily be glossed over but who equally qualify to be addressed as wise. Specifically, we shall be investigating two named women, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (Gen 35:8; cf. Gen 24:59) and Sheerah[5] (1 Chron 7:24) who was designated as building cities.

At first, it may appear that one is engaging in *argumenta ex silentio* seeing that these two women receive very little mention. If, however, the two characters were examined in the light of scholarly descriptions of personified wisdom, one would be surprised to discover that there is much to say for these 'every day women' of the Bible. For instance, one would wonder why Deborah, an ordinary nurse or maid would receive any mention at all at her death. Could this have something to do with her role in the household of Isaac and Jacob? If the primary setting for wisdom instruction is the household (Clements 1992:129), could she have played any part in instilling moral or

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[5] The New King James Version calls her Sherah.

wisdom instruction in the lives of Rebekah's offspring? Again, what manner of woman is Sheerah who rose above the sorrows in her family to build cities? Is there any connection between this female builder of cities and wisdom as a builder or artificer (Prov 8:1)? Do these women enable us in any way to understand more clearly the socio-cultural roles of women in ancient Israel? One aspect of our task in this study is to unravel the lives of these 'ordinary' women and investigate whatever clues are found in the relics of their life stories in the light of personified wisdom.

## 1.4 Trends in Old Testament wisdom

Although scholars have failed to agree on the definition of Old Testament wisdom (Sheppard 1980:5), it has been argued that, in wisdom literature especially in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is synonymous with the fear of the Lord (Von Rad 1972:53ff; Murphy 1998a:30). In the study of the Old Testament canon, wisdom is used to refer to a distinct literature or tradition that focuses mainly on the texts of the books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes[6]. In these books, there is an unequivocal emphasis on the theme of wisdom. Crenshaw (1998:227; 1981) defines wisdom as "a literary corpus, a way of thinking, and a tradition". Similarly, Fontaine (1993:99) describes different aspects of wisdom as "a distinctive tradition of language and literature, as a social movement within ancient Israel, and as a worldview held by members of that movement and communicated through their special vocabulary and literary forms" (cf. Clements 1976:99).

In earlier historical critical study of the Old Testament, the tendency was to relegate wisdom to the background. Since historical criticism considered God's mighty deeds[7] as the centre of Old Testament theology, there appeared to be "no room for wisdom materials of the Old Testament, in which God did not act" (Brueggemann 1997:36; cf.

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[6] Some Roman Catholic and other scholars include the apocryphal and Hellenistic books of Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Tobit (Tobias) and Baruch as part of Old Testament Wisdom literature. Other portions of the Old Testament are also regarded as parts of the wisdom corpus namely several Psalms (e.g. Pss 1; 37; 73; 104 and 119), certain parts of the Pentateuch, and of the prophetic and historical writings (see Lennart Boström 1990:19; Clements 1992: 16; Lindsay Wilson 2004:4-5 and Whybray 2005:12 for details).
[7] See discussion of Von Rad's historical criticism under Methodology below.

Murphy 1998b:34). Both German Protestant biblical scholarship and American Biblical Theology movement had marginalized wisdom literature with their respective mantras of *Heilsgeschichte* and *Magnalia Dei* before 1962 when Norman Whybray wrote his unpublished University of Oxford dissertation on the book of Proverbs (Clines 2005: xiii).

It appears also that Von Rad's (1972) sequel to his two volumes on Old Testament theology, *Weisheit in Israel*, became a turning point for Old Testament wisdom study. Before that publication, wisdom was regarded as "an aberrant offshoot of the mainstream of Israelite religious life..." (Clements 1990:15-16; 1995: 269-270; cf. Day et al 1995:1). In fact, wisdom seems to be regarded as an afterthought in Von Rad's volumes on Old Testament theology.

In the course of time, however, the subject of wisdom began to receive the attention that was already long overdue. Scholars of wisdom literature began to canvass for the revisiting of the place of wisdom in Old Testament study. Their contention is that Old Testament wisdom is intrinsically connected with some other major themes of the Old Testament such as creation or Yahwism[8]. In a recent publication, Dell (2006:188) claims that wisdom has been marginalized in three main areas – social context, theology, and affinities with other Old Testament material. However, she asserts that a link could be established between wisdom and the rest of canon "in the emphasis on creation and universal orientation of the wisdom approach" (Dell 2006:153). Dell's thesis is that both the social context(s) and theology of the book of Proverbs, for instance, can be integrated successfully into Old Testament theology. She argues that wisdom "represents a mainstream tradition within the OT life and thought", and it should not be regarded as antithetical to the other canonical literature (2006:188).

In the same vein, Perdue, a strong proponent of creation theology, advocates that new constructions of Old Testament theologies must take into account the significance of both creation and redemptive history without focusing exclusively or primarily on the

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[8] Among scholars who have consistently investigated the theme of creation in wisdom are Fox and Perdue. Perdue (1994:20; 1997:91ff; 2007:37) is unwavering in his stance that creation is the central theological theme of the sages. Murphy, on the other hand, has been a strong voice in making a case for the presence of Yahwism in wisdom literature (cf. Lennart Boström 1990).

latter. He stresses that, "The integration of these two complexes of theological tradition, creation and salvation history, is a necessary step for including the entirety of the canonical and deuterocanonical literature within a comprehensive theology of the Old Testament". Perdue urges further that "wisdom should no longer be marginalised as an 'unwanted bastard' of the Old Testament or caricatured as a pagan religious understanding that crept uninvited into the dwelling places of sacred Scripture" (Perdue 2007:347).

Subsequently, a variety of wisdom topics has attracted scholars' interests, and become the focus of much debate. A distinction is often made, in wisdom tradition, between early (pre-exilic or Solomonic) wisdom and late wisdom, which was a product of Israel's exilic experience. It is argued that during the latter era, family or clan wisdom flourished and began to predominate over the wisdom of political sages (Fontaine 1993:106). The role of women in the transmission of this late wisdom has been pointed out (Fontaine 1993; Ceresko 1999)[9]. Some other issues, which have pre-occupied scholars of Israelite wisdom literature in the last four decades, include wisdom's origin and setting, its genre, and its relationship with the wisdom of other neighbouring nations. These concerns will only receive mention here because they have been handled by other scholars in some previous studies. Moreover, our interest will be directed at their significance in the study of the book of Proverbs and invariably of Proverbs 1-9.

Even though there appears to be no unanimity in scholarly circles in the search for the origin of wisdom, it is important to note that the cross-cultural character of wisdom in the ancient world has been attested (Ceresko 1999; Waltke 2004). Some scholars have argued that Israel's wisdom tradition is dependent on the wisdom traditions of some of her neighbours such as Egypt, Babylon, Sumeria, or Assyria (Gustav Boström 1935; Kayatz 1966; Whybray 1967; Lang 1986 and Clements 1992:17). For instance, portions of Old Testament wisdom have been linked, in part, with the teaching of the Egyptian *Amenemope,* with the Babylonian *Gilgamesh* epic, or with the Aramaic wisdom of *Ahiqar* (Whybray 1995:5-16; Day 1995:62 and Waltke 2004:30 for details). Perdue (2007:42-46) also points out that apart from links with *Instructions of Amenemopet,*

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[9] Further consideration will be given to the issue of the dating of Proverbs in Chapter 3.

another indication of the connection between Israelite wisdom and ancient Egypt lies in the occurrence of the theme of royal wisdom especially in Proverbs 16:1-22:16; 25:2-27; and 31:1-9.

However, recent scholarship regards Israelite wisdom as part of a broader ancient Near Eastern tradition (Clements 1990:17 and Dell 2002:120). Clements (1990:17) attributes to Israel's wisdom, a "strong international flavor" and Whybray (1995:16-17, 71; 1994:13fn) affirms that the general tendency is to recognize an international "background" to Israelite wisdom. The connection between Old Testament wisdom and other ancient Near Eastern traditions has been argued more forcefully in respect to the personification of wisdom. This subject will be revisited in Chapter 3 of this study.

On the question of wisdom's sociological setting or the *Sitz im Leben*, various possibilities have been proffered. Whereas some scholars determine a royal court setting for wisdom (McKane 1965), some others argue for a family/household (or clan) setting because the primary sphere of instilling moral education was the home (Clements 1992:129-131)[10]. However, another class of scholars vote for a scribal school setting based on the analogy of the existence of schools in Egypt and Mesopotamia (Lang 1986:7-12 and Shupak 1993:349-351)[11]. Childs (1979:549) points out that, "In spite of many illuminating suggestions, no one setting has emerged as offering an exclusive *Sitz im Leben*, nor is one likely".

For Von Rad (1972), the book of Proverbs[12] was a product of both the court and the scribal school but Whybray (1995:21, 25), expressing similar disagreement with Clements (1992:130), argues that no evidence is available that the book was composed in a court setting and that the discussion that wisdom originated from a school setting has reached a "dead end". On the other hand, although Shupak (1993:351) argues in favour of a scribal school setting, she concedes that the proof of the existence of such

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[10] Note that Clements (1992:22) also shows that the royal court played a vital role in the composition and dissemination of wisdom instruction.

[11] For further discussion, see Childs (1979:549-554) and Whybray (1995:18-25).

[12] Dell (2009b:871) asserts that the book of Proverbs "is the starting point of Wisdom literature, with the proverb as its distinguishing genre".

schools is only indirect and not absolute, that a royal court setting is also possible, and that wisdom activity could be associated with several circles.

Boström (1990:12) offers what appears to be a reasonable solution to a part of the debate. He suggests that assuming a popular or original court setting for some of the materials in Proverbs does not necessarily conflict with a school setting which could have been for compilation, redaction and use. Similarly, Waltke (2004:62) stresses that, "The court setting for the origin of Proverbs and sayings must be distinguished from the home setting for their dissemination". For her part, Dell (2009b:870) proposes both the court and school setting for wisdom as well as the family context for wisdom/education (e.g. in Prov 4:1; 5:1). She asserts that:

> [T]he mother's teaching refers to that given to the young child, and yet this does not preclude the teacher/pupil relationship also being the referent here. Education probably started and continued in the home, although there may have been families of scribes with more educational roles such as the ability to teach and write (2009b:870).

It is possible, then, to infer from the various arguments that wisdom's sociological setting encompassed all the three spheres that have been suggested namely the royal court, family/household and scribal school setting (cf. Murphy 1981:6-9).

Since wisdom is regarded as a literary corpus, Whybray (2005:15)[13] points out that wisdom literature books (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) do not form a distinctive literary genre but each of them "comprises a number of different genres". Brenner (1995:11) also notes that wisdom is not limited to a particular genre but covers a variety of literary genres, which include "short proverbial sayings, prose, poetry, lists, lengthy philosophical dialogues, and more". Murphy (1981:4ff) had earlier identified prominent wisdom genres as sayings (which include the proverb, the experiential saying and the didactic saying), commands and prohibitions while also recognizing some other genres as specific to certain wisdom books.

We have stated that our discussion will centre on Proverbs 1-9 and that Woman Wisdom *(Frau Weisheit)* will be our primary concern. The terms Woman Wisdom[14]

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[13] Whybray's article was published originally in 1990.
[14] At times, she is referred to as Lady Wisdom (cf. Murphy 1990) or Dame Wisdom.

(Murphy 1998a and Clifford 1999) and Wisdom Woman (Ceresko 1999) are used interchangeably among scholars often without any apparent explanation for their preference. For our purpose, we would rather opt for the former usage because, in our view, the term Wisdom Woman seems to carry an oblique connotation of the existence of 'Wisdom Man.' Moreover, Woman Wisdom stands in fascinating contrast to her evil twin, commonly described as Woman or Dame Folly.

It is noteworthy here that the use of female imagery is prevalent in the book of Proverbs. There is consensus in scholarship regarding the personification of wisdom as a woman in the Old Testament[15]. In this connection, Clifford (1999:23) confirms that in the book of Proverbs, "The personification of wisdom as a woman is strong and persistent". In the third chapter of this study, trends in Proverbs 1-9 will be discussed in detail.

## 1.5 Methodology

In terms of methodological procedures, this research will depend on literature study. With regard to biblical studies, the nature of the material to be examined determines the type(s) of methodology that will be employed. However, the question of method in Old Testament study is highly complex and controversial due to the problem of determining what the focus of Old Testament theology ought to be. In the last century, the debate on what constitutes Old Testament theology has been carried on in two opposite camps - the historical and a-historical (cf. Miller 1993:14-15). Mckenzie and Haynes (1993) refer to these as historical or diachronic and literary or synchronic methods. The historical is said to comprise of source, form, tradition-history, and redaction criticisms, while the literary is made up of structuralist, narrative, reader-response, and post-structural criticisms[16].

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[15] For helpful readings on this topic, see Newsom (1989:152); Crenshaw (1998:80); Murphy (1998a:249, 297); Ceresko (1999:44-45); Dell (2002:110); Sinnott (2005:18-21, 82-87) and Yoder (2009).

[16] Of course, some other authors subcategorize the methods differently. For instance, Barton (1984) recognizes three rather than two methods; the first is historical critical (author-based) and includes source, form, and redaction criticism. The second is text-based and includes New Criticism, canonical criticism and structuralism while the third consists of interplay between the other two and includes reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism and deconstruction. For his part, Steck (1993) examines different methods such as *Textkritik, Literarkritik, Überlieferungsgeschichtliche, Redaktiongeschichtliche, Formgeschichtliche* and *Traditiongeschichtliche.*

Scholars who use historical critical methods to approach the text engage in historical reconstruction, which is defined by Hasel (1991:30) thus:

> Historical reconstruction or 'what the text meant,' understands the Bible as conditioned by its time and surrounding. The Bible's time and place, the Bible's socio-cultural environment, its social setting, and its cultural environment among other nations and religions become the virtually exclusive key to its meaning.

They ask historical questions concerning Israel's history or history of religion or, alternatively, questions on the history of the text or the process behind its compilation.

Although few scholars engaged in what could be regarded as a historical study of the Old Testament before the late nineteenth century, it was Julius Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis theory at the turn of that century that served as a turning point within the enterprise[17]. After Wellhausen's source critical analysis, emerged Gunkel's pioneering work on form criticism *(Gattungsgeschichte)* at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it was followed by G. Ernest Wright and Gerhard von Rad's redemption history approach. For both Wright and Von Rad, the substance or subject matter of Old Testament theology is God's mighty deeds in Israel's history (Brueggemann 1997:34) or what Von Rad (1962:106) refers to as the "continuing activity of God in history". Von Rad's theology (published in 1957 in German and translated into English in 1962) is interested in salvation history *(Heilsgeschichte)* and the historical traditions *(Traditiongeschichte)* of Israel. In his view, Israel's credo or confession in the Hexateuch is based on history or on 'what happened.'

In a way, Von Rad's work has been criticized extensively because it insists on the historicality of the events in the text (Brueggemann 1997:35) and because of its limiting nature, as it does not take into account the fact that "the literature formed the identity of the community" and vice versa (Childs 1979:41). In spite of the criticisms levelled against historical critical approaches, scholars agree that there is no ignoring historical criticism (Childs 1979:76; Barr 2000:1); neither is it "possible to ignore Von Rad" (Brueggemann 1997:42; cf. Clements 1976:137, 147).

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[17] For detailed discussions of historically based interpretations of the Old Testament in the last century, see Clements (1976); Barton (1984); Hasel (1991) and Brueggemann (1997).

On the other hand, non-historical approaches, which are more modern (or post-modern) ways of looking at the text of the Old Testament, have become increasingly popular with the decline in the attention to history. The approaches come with a variety of names and in a variety of garbs. Some writers distinguish between approaches that focus on the text such as New Criticism, structural criticism and narrative criticism, and approaches, which deal with the reception of the text such as reader-response, rhetorical-critical and deconstructionist (Jonker & Lawrie 2005). Jonker and Lawrie also recognize approaches that are based on hermeneutics of suspicion such as psychoanalytical, Marxist, feminist, African or ecological.

Some Old Testament scholars have acknowledged that methodological steps intermingle and methods are interdependent (Steck 1995:19, 163). In fact, for Barton (1984:5), there are no "correct" or watertight methods when it comes to reading or interpreting the Old Testament. He urges that the quest for a right method be abandoned because all of the so-called methods are actually different possible ways of reading the Bible. For Barton, they are theories, or "a series of explanatory hypothesis" (2007a:67), "each of which may lead to useful insights about the texts… but it can never be a technique which can always be used with the assurance that it will yield correct results" (1984:244).

Taking a cue from Barton (1984), therefore, Barr (2000:44, 47) suggests an umbrella term, 'biblical criticism', for all of the approaches, stating that it is not a method but a group of theories[18]. Barton (2007a:2) sums up biblical criticism as "biblical study embodying a critical stance", or what he describes as paying "attention to the plain meaning of the biblical text" (2007a:3). For Barton, any intellectual study of literature is literary criticism. Consequently, he sees biblical criticism as "essentially a literary operation" since it seeks to identify and engage with the difficulties and inconsistencies in the text in a rational way (2007a:1, 3, 8). Clearly, there are intersections in the definitions of terms and their functions in approaches to biblical study. For instance, Barton (2007b:132) asserts that there is "considerable overlap" between the questions asked by historical and literary criticisms.

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[18] Barton (2007a:53) also advocates the use of the term 'biblical criticism' to describe the task of biblical scholars.

Based on the observation that 'methods' do intermingle because of the dynamic theology of the Old Testament itself and the different perspectives to it, there has been a call for a multiple(x) (Barr 1989 and Hasel 1991), pluralistic or multidimensional approach (Jonker & Lawrie 2005). For the purpose of this research, a critical approach, which would enable us to oscillate between tradition historical method and literary criticism, will be adopted.

In investigating Old Testament wisdom, specifically Woman Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, because of the cross-cultural character of wisdom itself, it will be imperative to consider wisdom not only in ancient Israel but also in the context of the ancient Near East and adjacent cultures. For this reason, approaches that have used the tradition historical method for the analysis of wisdom will be evaluated in Chapter 3. Tradition history operates on the assumption that oral tradition and oral transmission lie behind biblical texts (Garret 2003:864). Gnuse (1999:583) defines it as the method that seeks "to reconstruct hypothetically the evolution of a biblical text, set of texts, or theme and the ways this text or theme may have communicated different messages to its ancient audience over the years." He further identifies five stages of development in the method namely:

- Consideration of ancient Near East or Hellenistic parallels;
- Form critical or oral/pre-literary stage;
- Determining its source or its present growth in its literary context;
- Editorial process involved;
- Determining how the text fits into the message of the biblical canon.

In addition, other approaches to Proverbs 1-9 such as the theological or the socio-cultural will be assessed to enable us arrive at an informed conclusion on the context of Old Testament wisdom and its implication for the Old Testament texts that will be considered.

However, the analysis of the character of Woman Wisdom and the 'unsung women' in the Old Testament may require a complementary approach to the tradition historical approach. In this regard, narrative criticism will be employed. It is evident that Woman

Wisdom is found in wisdom literature, which is commonly associated with poetry rather than with narratives. However, because she is identified as a character and the 'unsung women' are clearly characters in particular narrative settings, these figures will be assessed from the point of view of narratology, specifically from the perspective of characterization.

The term, narrative criticism, is often linked with literary criticism. It is considered as an offshoot of literary criticism (Robinson 2007:237). In other words, it developed from or is seen as a sub-category of literary criticism but it has since been held in some quarters as a critical method "in its own right" (Westfall 2007:237). Literary criticism is an interpretive approach that considers the biblical text as literature but not necessarily in a way, which "precludes religion or historical study". It appears that the method has much appeal for feminine interpretation of Scriptures (see Trible 1984 who refers to her approach as a literary-feminist reading; cf. Fuchs 1985a and Amit 2000, 2001). Nonetheless, a few feminist writers such as Fiorenza (1985) show preference for the historical-critical approach. The method seems appropriate here since most feminist biblical scholars engage in the creative reconstruction of the lives of biblical women, one way or the other.

As we have already indicated, however, this study will endorse, in part, a narrative critical approach, which is employed specifically to analyze biblical narratives or stories. Broadly defined, the "narrative criticism of biblical texts is the hermeneutical endeavor that seeks to understand the various factors that combine for a close reading of a text's narrative world without being arbitrary or subjective" (Robinson 2007:237; cf. Westfall 2007:237). Even though variations abound in the way narrative criticism is approached, most scholars agree on the basic elements that make up a narrative such as the character, plot, event, setting, time, narrator, narrate, etc. (Bar-Efrat 1989; Gunn & Fewell 1993; Powell 1999 and Amit 2005).

To further clarify the essence of the method, Westfall (2007:237) explains that, "a narrative critic's 'close reading' assumes literary integrity and reads the text holistically", relating the parts to the whole. Therefore, she proceeds to summarize the methodology

in four steps, "directed toward the detection of an overarching or encapsulating theme" (Westfall 2007:238). The steps deal with the analysis of: (1) the form of the text; (2) the literary structure of the text in terms of setting, plot, language play, theme, etc; (3) the characters – their roles and development; and (4) the narrative perspective (Westfall 2007:237-238). The attention in this research will be on the characters.

In view of the above description of narrative criticism, this study will carry out a close reading that will consider the text holistically. More importantly, it will examine the text as a sacred text, that is, from a theological perspective, even though it employs literary tools. Adopting both tradition history and narrative criticism does not imply that the two approaches are mutually exclusive; at times, there are overlaps. For instance, both procedures take into consideration the form of the text (Gnuse 1999:583 and Westfall 2007:237), which shows that there is some interconnectedness between them. By juxtaposing the two methods, the various nuances within the text would be brought to the fore in a more balanced way.

Therefore, to the extent that the research combines a tradition historical consideration with narrative criticism from a feminist perspective, the methodology can be regarded as integrated. This is not to say that we are forging a new methodology or that the aforementioned methods will be used in an exclusive way but rather the methods will be employed in an interrelated or interdependent fashion. It is useful to note at this point that we are not unaware of the challenges inherent in a multidimensional approach (Jonker & Lawrie 2005) or issues relating to synchrony and diachrony. A few other methodological issues will be addressed under the definition of terms in the next section.

## 1.6 Definition of terms

Below, the definitions of some salient terms used in this study are provided. The terms are feminism/feminist hermeneutics, context/contextual theology, heroine/heroism, and allusion/intertextuality.

### 1.6.1 Feminism/feminist hermeneutics

The term feminism is a broad category used in the social sciences and humanities to describe a wide range of feminine issues that border on the role and position of women in various socio-cultural, economic, historical and religious contexts. In biblical scholarship, the interpretation of the role and position of women in religious traditions and in the biblical text is what feminist hermeneutics is all about. Sakenfeld (1985:55) defines feminism in an interesting way. She refers to it as "a contemporary prophetic movement that announces judgment on the patriarchy of contemporary culture and calls for repentance and change". She regards the task of the biblical feminist as "one that seeks faithful ways of recovering, reinterpreting and discerning God's way in the tradition handed on in the Bible" (Sakenfeld 1985:45).

Some scholars believe that women have taken up arms against patriarchy because of the history of interpretation of the text. They believe past interpretations have "included very hurtful readings" which have caused much damage to women (Ringe 1998:7). Women have been misrepresented in these interpretations but perhaps this is because the Bible itself appears to overlook, ignore or silence many women. In many cases, the names of women who receive mention in the Bible are omitted or they are named in relation to their husbands (Meyers et al 2000: xi).

Feminists (henceforth used to refer to feminist interpreters of the Bible) have often used diversity of methods to present their case, ranging from historical critical analysis to reader-response criticism, literary criticism and deconstructionism. However, the variety of approaches does not imply that there are no common grounds. Farley (1985:44-45) identifies two central convictions that various feminist groups hold. The first is the principle of equality of women and men, that is, like men, women are fully human and are to be valued or treated as such. The other is the principle of mutuality, "based on a view of human persons as embodied subjects, essentially relational as well as autonomous and free" (Farley 1985:45).

However, another common conviction could be noted here, and that is the fact that feminist interpreters approach the biblical text with radical suspicion or hermeneutics of

suspicion (Fiorenza 1993:11; Bellis 2000:27) of its patriarchal prejudice. Sakenfeld (1985:56) points out that feminists approach the text with at least three emphases, which in fact, represent options and not stages in the approach, and they are not mutually exclusive. In her words, these are:

1. "Looking to texts about women to counteract famous texts used 'against women'
2. Looking to the Bible generally (not particularly to texts about women) for a theological perspective offering a critique of patriarchy…
3. Looking to texts about women to learn from the intersection of history and stories by ancient and modern women living in patriarchal cultures."

Some other scholars summarize the feminist approach to interpretation from other angles. For instance, Ringe (1998:4) observes that while some scholars affirm the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, others reject it outright as "hopelessly and irredeemably misogynist." She considers the two positions as extreme ends of a continuum with some other interpretive options in-between (cf. Bellis 2000:26). Bellis identifies those on the rejection end of the spectrum as revolutionaries (e.g. Mary Daly) while those on the other end are referred to as reformists. She explains further that in between the two extremes, for instance, are those who define a "canon within the canon" (Bellis 2006:26; cf. Ringe 1998:4). Additionally, there are those (e.g. Elisabeth Fiorenza), who shift the authority from the text to the community of interpreters (Bellis 2000:27; Ringe 1998:7)[19].

Even so, it is useful to note that different interpretive contexts produce different interpretations. Diverse voices can be heard in feminist hermeneutics, as women from diverse socio-historical settings tend to view the text from differing perspectives. An African American woman, for instance, may read the text rather differently from a Latin American woman (Fiorenza 1993:16; Ringe 1998:5-7). In Africa, some scholars

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[19] On this point, Rodd (2001:160) also identifies three attitudes towards the treatment of women in the Old Testament. These comprise those who, like Daly, consider the Bible as irredeemably patriarchal, and others such as Phyllis Trible who seek "to bring women out of the shadows", for they believe the Old Testament is not as patriarchal as it has been supposed. The third group believes that the Bible is patriarchal but advocates for a hermeneutic of liberation that seeks justice and equality for women today.

consider feminism as doing theology from the African woman's perspective and this does not necessarily exclude men. It only means interpreting Scriptures "as they relate to women, in a common search for new inclusive meanings" whether by men or by women (Okure 1993:77).

However, some other scholars are currently advocating for a post-colonial feminist reading of the Bible (e.g. Dube 2002). This kind of reading takes its departure from the broader post-colonial biblical interpretation. Nzimande (2009:223) defines postcolonial biblical interpretation as "a critical anti-colonial reading strategy aimed at challenging the dominant Euro-American epistemologies and modes of biblical interpretation" (cf. Perdue 2002:447). From that definition, it could be assumed that a post-colonial feminist reading of the Bible would challenge the dominant andocentric and Euro-American mode of interpretation or it would challenge the Euro-American feminist way of reading the Bible[20].

It is interesting to note that these voices possibly derive from or identify with other African voices of feminism outside theology, which call for the recognition of a distinct endogenous African feminism. It is argued that, "Feminism, without doubt elucidates the European worldview and the socio-political organizations and processes that flow from it" (Oyěwùmí 2003b:25). The contention is that, feminism, as a broad category, is ethnocentric (or Eurocentric), misrepresents and stereotypes Africa and African women and shows a "tendency to baseless generalization" (Taiwo 2003:60). Oyěwùmí (2003b:39-40) notes that African women are often categorized as a homogenous group because Africa itself is often characterized as one vast homogenous village in many Western writings (cf. Taiwo 2003:51). In her view, "Women are not just women; factors of race, class, regional origins, age, and kinship ties are central to the understanding of inter-gender and intra-gender relations, locally and globally" (Oyěwùmí 2003b:40).

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[20] For her part, Nzimande (2009:226) argues for a post-colonial feminist hermeneutics that would "redress the current gender imbalanced… recovery efforts" of black women's histories. This, she terms "a post-colonial *Imbokodo* hermeneutics", and it weaves together several African liberationist hermeneutical perspectives in an effort to keep black women's memories alive through historical restitution especially in post-apartheid South Africa. Nzimande's post-colonial interpretation takes a cue from some other African feminist theologians such as Dube (2000). Dube identifies issues of land, race, power, liberation, gender, etc., as central to post-colonial biblical hermeneutics and the need for these areas to be liberated from imperial domination. She, therefore, calls for the decolonization of imperialized texts (Dube 2000:16-21).

For his part, Taiwo (2003:46) argues that as far as the application of feminism in Africa is concerned, "one finds a profound poverty of theory". He claims that feminism in Africa suffers from poverty, not necessarily of an absence of theory, but of insufficiency of data and of a disjunction between theory and reality. He notes that available theories are not equipped to handle the cultural and demographic complexity and diversity of Africa. Sadly, "a disinclination to generalize on the basis of limited evidence and respect for the diversity of the African phenomenon are a rare in feminist theory as applied to Africa" (Taiwo 2003:48). Taiwo sees feminism in Africa as a product of cultural imperialism, which denigrates Africans, and many of its exponents use obscure paradigms and concepts – "concepts that they have not bothered to interrogate; concepts that are products of a racist, ethnocentric way of looking at Africans and their realities" (Taiwo 2003:53). In his opinion, some of the concepts used in the feminine writings such as "traditional Africa" or "traditional African woman/values" are "theoretically vacuous". He regards such usages as a way of escaping theoretical responsibility (Taiwo 2003:61).

In the light of these kinds of arguments, some African scholars conclude that it is the prerogative of African women to brand their own feminism (Nnaemeka 2002:14)[21]. Again, context is shown to be crucial even in feminine interpretations. However, Susan Arndt avers that:

> Ultimately, African feminism is nothing but a theoretical model. Hence, it is impossible to speak of *the* African feminism. In analogy to the ethnic, cultural, social, economic, political and religious diversity of the African continent, there are numerous varieties of African feminism… Nevertheless, it can be assumed that all African feminisms have a common ground (Arndt 2002:71; cf. Kolawole 2004:253).

Consequently, in discussions of women's perspective in theology in Africa, it is also incumbent on scholars to take heed of these various nuances in feminist engagements. Bellis (2000:28) rightly notes:

> Regardless of these diverse perspectives, feminist biblical interpreters approach the texts with an eye on the way women are presented, hidden, understood and treated in the bible… They look at the stories of women who are strong and virtuous and those

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[21] However, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that in branding own feminism consideration is given to consensus.

who are weak, victimized, or portrayed in negative ways. Stories that do not include women but in which their absence screams loudly, are scrutinized.

To be sure, feminist biblical interpretation has become such an irrepressible 'movement' in the last three decades (even in Africa)[22]. Whereas it is not our intention here to brand another feminist theology in this study, it also becomes almost unfeasible for an African woman to "stand aside and watch this great sight", like Moses did, and remain on neutral ground. The achievements of feminist biblical interpretation in recent times and the vast potential it offers from historical, socio-cultural, theological and other perspectives suggest that one cannot but engage in that conversation. We reckon that when women in biblical studies, especially in Africa, become a voice for the voiceless women of the distant past, a greater promise is held for today's women and the women of the future. Thus, our task in the present study will be akin to bringing "women out of the shadows".

Not surprisingly, feminist interpretation becomes crucial to the discussions in this study in view of the fact that women are the central characters being considered; more so, the researcher happens to be a woman. Current issues in feminist studies of the Bible will be further investigated in the course of the research, in particular, the issues that focus not only on Woman Wisdom and the other women figures but also on their implication for the Yorùbá woman as an African woman.

### 1.6.2 Context/Contextual theology

Context can be defined as "the materials and situations surrounding the writing or reading of a text" to be interpreted (Tate 2006:73). In other words, the role of context in the reception of a text under consideration implies that interpretation needs to be sensitive to the socio-cultural milieu of both the writer and the reader. In the same vein, "contextual theology considers the situation in which theological work is undertaken to

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[22] Notable among African feminist theological studies in recent decades are Mosala (1989); Oduyoye and Kanyoro eds. (1992); Okure (1993); Oduyoye (1995); Dube (2000; 2002); Kanyoro (2002); Ackermann (2003) and Masenya (2004).

be a positive, contributing factor in the practice of the discipline." It takes place "where there is a meeting between past traditions and the present" (Hall 1997:172).

Contextual theology has become increasingly popular among scholars. One of the reasons for this is that in different situations where Christians have found themselves to be marginalized one way or the other, "some began to insist that their specific contexts must be taken seriously not only ethically but theologically". These include African-Americans, Latin-Americans and women (Hall 1997:173). Clines (1993:74) concludes that, "It is no longer debatable that context affects the interpretation", because the interpreter's prejudices and presuppositions are brought to the text.

In Africa, the role of context in theological discourse is being pushed to the fore. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, that mother of feminist theology in Africa, stresses the importance of taking into account issues of culture, religion, injustice, and marginalization in contemporary theology in Africa. However, that kind of theology should be dynamic enough not to ignore universal concerns. In her view, theology in Africa will have to take the issue of context more seriously, even in the midst of global conversations and interaction (Oduyoye 1993:118-119).

Insofar, then, as the socio-cultural world of both the writer and today's reader of the biblical text is crucial, context will play an equally crucial role in this study. The context of wisdom in the Old Testament would be probed as well as the way women functioned and were perceived among the Yorùbá. In discussing context, it is also important to take into account the researcher's point of departure as a Christian female and a Yorùbá since, to a certain extent, this could influence the present hermeneutical task. Again, to the extent that the study deals with a feminine issue, it can be considered a study in contextual theology.

### 1.6.3 Heroine/Heroism

Bearing in mind that the research is women-oriented, defining heroine or heroism becomes somewhat vicarious because both terms are generally conceptualized from the perspective of the hero. A dictionary definition of heroine is simply, a female hero,

while heroism is the quality or action of a hero. Escaping from the conventional definition, which views heroism from the perspective of the hero, therefore, may prove to be a difficult task. Powers (1991:128) admits that, "the concept of heroism itself is a way of organizing experience, one which the revisionist has insisted is a tough job, best filled by a virile male." Furthermore, "Heroism is only accidentally accomplished by a female, and then only of an approved pattern devoid of autonomy and disconnected from tribal or maternal concerns" (Powers 1991:129).

However, with the growing interest in the seemingly disadvantaged position and role of the biblical woman, some scholars choose to stick to the conjunction of the terms, "hero or heroine" (Ryken et al 1998). For Ryken et al, a hero or heroine is a societal or literary construct that "never exists in its pure form in real life." The authors assert that "creating heroes or heroines is one of the most important things a society does, partly because it is a chief means by which a society transmits its values and its moral identity" (Ryken et al 1998:378). Their definition of a hero/heroine is based not only on 'heroic qualities' but on the role of the character (Ryken et al 1998:378). They propose five traits, which may be found in a hero or heroine:

- He or she is a representative figure for the culture producing them;
- Their experiences and struggles can be identified and shared by their culture;
- They embody values or virtues that a culture wishes to affirm;
- They are regarded as exemplary figures but need not be wholly idealized;
- They capture the popular imagination.

In another sense, Hendel (1987:101-102) sees the hero as one who is shaped by his enemy or rival. He, therefore, infers that "if the hero is defined by the adversary, then the greater the adversary, the greater the hero". This statement rings true but possibly not in all instances of heroism. It does not appear that heroes/heroines are defined always by the adversary for, sometimes, the latter may not be part of the plot that produces the hero/heroine. At any rate, this study will examine the ways the women under consideration qualify as heroines based on the above points. However, in so doing, caution would be needed to determine that these traits are not simply what are

expected of a hero (male); that the categories are not merely male expectations being transposed onto the female.

It is salient to note, in addition, that certain familiar images of the hero/heroine in Scriptures are identified by Ryken et al. These include aristocratic heroes; religious heroes; the common person as hero; intellectual heroes; lovers as heroes, domestic heroes and exemplary character as hero, etc (Ryken et al 1998:378-381). Interestingly, under domestic heroes, only wives and mothers are listed (as if men are not part of the domestic life)! An important remark under the same category is that, "The virtuous wife of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a composite of all that a domestic heroine might aspire to be" (Ryken et al 1998:381).

Our questions are, "Who are the real heroes in extant biblical literature? What is the basis for identifying them as heroes? Based on the traits highlighted above (and possibly others), are there other women whose roles are hidden but whose praises we can sing today? Is it also possible to consider "little people" as heroes or heroines? We shall answer these questions as we journey along.

### 1.6.4 Allusion and intertextuality

Due to the brief character of the texts in which both Deborah and Sheerah are mentioned, references to other related texts of the Old Testament are inevitable. Correspondences between one text and another are defined under various terms such as echo, influence, motif, quotation, allusion, and intertextuality, etc. In this study, however, such correspondences will be narrowed down to allusion and intertextuality. Gunn and Fewell (1993:165) distinguish between allusion and intertextuality thus: "In the case of allusion, markers in the text itself (words, phrases, motifs, etc) point to other texts. Intertextuality, on the other hand, is a relationship that might exist between any two texts. The reader, rather than the text, makes the connections".

On the other hand, Kalimi's (2005:194) broader definition of allusion seems to subsume intertextuality. He claims that, "Allusion, in the sense that I mean it, is intertextual structuring – directing the reader from one text to a second text by borrowing a word, phrase or linguistic-literary device from the first text and inserting it into the second text".

However, Kalimi shows that allusions are important for building meaning and they maximize the potential power of the text as they enable the reader to connect the particular linguistic device in the text being read to another elsewhere.

Kalimi's definition of allusion certainly departs from Sommer's (1996:486-489), which clearly distinguishes between allusion and intertextuality. Sommer sees the analysis of allusion as diachronic as it presupposes the existence of an earlier and a later text whereas an intertextual approach is synchronic and it encompasses a wide range of correspondences among texts, including echo or influence, etc. In intertextuality, the connection with another text may not be intentional and may simply be due to the use of "commonplace phrases from the cultural systems in which the text exists" (Sommer 1996:486). A basic difference between allusion and intertextuality is that while the former is concerned with the author, the text and the reader, the latter sees both the reader and the text as independent of the author. Sommer explains that:

> Students of allusion need to ask whether a resemblance between texts results from one author borrowing from another (in which case it is relevant to their study) or from two authors using common phrases or tropes (in which case it is not). The intertextual critic does not feel compelled to address this question (1996:488).

Although some scholars distinguish between various forms of allusion (e.g. direct or clear and indirect, oblique or subtle), in this study, the term allusion shall be used in line with Sommer (1996) above and it will be distinguished from intertextuality in the same manner.

## 1.7 Outline of chapters

At this point, we shall attempt a demarcation of the study.

The current chapter serves as a general introduction and provides the outline for the research. The chapter contains statements on the research question and hypothesis as well as the methodology. With respect to methodology, as stated above, the study will combine literary criticism (narrative criticism) with a contextual theological approach while being cognizant of the tradition history of wisdom and the theological importance of the findings. By a contextual approach is meant a way of engaging with the present

socio-cultural realities within a particular interpretive framework, in this case, a Yorùbá (African) framework (Hall 1997:172 and Tate 2006:74). The chapter also includes an overview of the basic concepts on which the study will be developed such as wisdom, feminism, heroism/heroine, allusion, and context/contextual theology.

Chapter 2 will begin with a consideration of the way women function(ed) in a typical social context in Africa namely among the Yorùbá. We shall examine, in particular, the role and position of Yorùbá women as well as their depiction in epic and other literary texts. Ethnological data on Yorùbá women will be investigated to determine their position and function in the society both in the domestic and public spheres. In addition, various literary genres such as epic literatures, *oríkì*, and Yorùbá proverbs will be probed for various renderings of the female image.

Chapter 3 will provide a detailed appraisal of wisdom in the book of Proverbs especially as it relates to Woman Wisdom of Proverbs 1-9 (specifically, chapters 1, 3, and 8). Present trends in the study of Proverbs 1-9 and of personified wisdom will be examined along with the function of female imagery within the unit. In this regard, Woman Wisdom will be examined vis-à-vis the Strange Woman and the Woman of Substance, as well as her connection with certain wise women in Old Testament narratives. Lastly, the chapter will end with a brief exegetical summary of the Woman Wisdom poems in Proverbs 1, 3 and 8.

In biblical criticism, discussions of women in the Old Testament have often centred on those who we have referred to as biblical heroines such as Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, and Esther. Others who are regarded as victims have received no less attention than these famous heroines. These include Hagar, Tamar of Judah and Tamar of David. However, it seems that none of these 'favourite' female characters is described in clear terms as a 'wise woman'. Although the roles of some of these women could point to the exercise of some latent wisdom, the Bible never speaks of the women explicitly as wise. We have already pointed out that two women have received some degree of attention from scholars who are called wise in the Old Testament namely the Wise Woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14 and the Wise Woman of Abel-Maacah in 2

Samuel 20. Thus, Chapters 4 and 5 will be based on the assumption that examples of wise women include not only the wise women of Tekoa and of Abel-Maacah but also Deborah, Rebekah's nurse in Genesis 35:8 and Sheerah in 1 Chronicles 7:24.

While Chapter 4 will focus on Deborah, Chapter 5 will relate Sheerah, the female builder of cities. Each of the two chapters will comprise a brief overview of the books containing the characters (namely Genesis and 1 Chronicles) as well as a verse-by-verse reading of the pericope in which the characters are found. These will be followed by a literary analysis of the verses that mention Deborah and Sheerah as well as the geographical and socio-cultural contexts of the verses.

On a theological level, Chapters 4 and 5 will attempt to answer certain pressing questions such as the following: Since these unknown women are interpreted as "wisdom women" who made a difference in their own time, do their stories hold the potential for a more theologically focused description? If the wisdom displayed by these women was so "uncommon" (Clifford 1999:42), why did they receive such little mention? In the light of the achievements of these women and their supposed demonstration of superlative wisdom which can match that of any biblical hero or wise man, what can we say about human (or woman) dignity or rather the undignified position that the ancient Israelite woman was reduced to and which manifests in many contemporary societies as well?

What is more, from the stories of these Hebrew women, is there theological support for the position that the ancient Hebrew woman was an underdog, as many feminist theologians tend to show (Niditch 1985) or is it biblical interpreters who consider her so? Trends throughout the Old Testament suggest that God is on the side of the marginalized, the oppressed and the downtrodden, often supporting the weak against the strong; and using the younger to the detriment of the older, as in the Jacob narrative, for instance. Could the roles of these women represent another instance of this kind of trend? Findings from a close reading of the texts on these women and the literary analyses should offer some answers to these questions.

The final chapter will serve as the summary and conclusion for the study while it will also offer the final reflections and recommendations for future research. The chapter will reflect not only the interconnections between the two women under investigation and Woman Wisdom, it will show, in addition the ways in which the review of the role and position of Yoruba women in the first chapter offer us an interpretive lens for the texts on the two women.

# CHAPTER 2

# YORÙBÁ WOMEN – POSITIONS, ROLES AND PORTRAYALS

*"… [I]n Africa, … by the time a woman has spent her energies struggling to be heard, she has barely the energy left to say what she wanted to say".*
*(Mercy Amba Oduyoye)[23]*

## 2.1 Chapter introduction

The Yorùbá, a people largely concentrated in the South Western part of Nigeria, are found also in parts of other countries such as République de Benin, Togo, and Sierra Leone, as well as in the Diaspora in Cuba, Brazil, and Haiti. This chapter will discuss the Yorùbá of South Western Nigeria, also formerly referred to as the Akú or Ọkú[24]. However, the primary focus will be on Yorùbá women, their socio-cultural image, roles, and positions in the society, whether religious or socio-political, as well as their self-understanding. In order to understand the Yorùbá worldview and images of women, a sociological approach will be adopted that will enable us to appraise the issues based on certain social units and indices such as family (kinship), marriage, religion and economy.

In addition, the chapter will examine the roles and perceptions of particular outstanding women in Yorùbá history and historiography with the aim of determining a possible connection between the Yorùbá woman and wisdom. Sources of data will include ethnographic texts, epic narratives, *oríkì* (praise epithets), proverbs, etc.

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[23] See Oduyoye (1995:12-13).
[24] The name Akú or Ọkú is derived from the Yorùbá mode of greeting, which is prefixed by Akú (Bowen 1968:303) or Ọkú (literally, greetings for), as in *A kú ìsinmi* (lit. greetings on a day of rest, e.g. Sunday) or *A kú àtàárọ* (lit. greetings for a busy or full day). The name Akú remains in use among the Yorùbá of Freetown in Sierra Leone (Bassir 1954 and Forde 1951:1). In Cuba, the descendants of Yorùbá slaves are called Lucumi while in the Republic of Benin, they are known as Anago (Forde 1951:1), and in Brazil, as Nago (Oduyoye *s.a*:244).

## 2.2 Some theoretical issues

Before we proceed with the data, some methodological considerations with respect to the chapter appear unavoidable. First, because human society constantly undergoes transformation at different levels of its social strata in different ways and at different periods, it may be presumptuous to begin to evaluate the image, role or position of the Yorùbá woman without any sensitivity to or acknowledgement of possible or existing variables in the social construct. The Yorùbá society, like any other, is constantly evolving due to historical processes and economic or political factors (Eades 1980:51). Peel (1968:36-45) addresses the ways in which social change has affected the traditional social structure among the Yorùbá while Lloyd (1974:56-90) attributes development (or change) in the Yorùbá social structure to colonial rule and subsequently to Nigeria's independence from Britain. Since it cannot be denied that the society has undergone and undergoes change, it might be helpful if the present discussion takes cognizance of not only the ways things used to be (which are called traditional) but also the way they are now.

The issue of social change brings us to the question of definition. Taiwo (2003:61) argues that there is a tendency for theorists on African issues to take recourse to baseless generalizations and to make use of concepts, which he refers to as being "theoretically vacuous" and "obscure" such as 'traditional Africa' 'traditional African woman' or 'pre-colonial Africa,' as a way of escaping from theoretical responsibility. With this argument in mind and in an attempt to demonstrate, at least in part, reasonable theoretical responsibility, we shall endeavour to delimit the period of time to which this study will refer when we talk of 'traditional' setting among the Yorùbá.

There seems to be a proliferation of literature on the Yorùbá only from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. This is attributed to the increase in activities of explorers, foreign missionaries, and British colonial officers, and it explains the broad interest especially by historians in the late nineteenth century context in Yorùbáland (Falola 1988:211). Therefore, because most of the available written records on the Yorùbá are from the late nineteenth century and cover mainly the events from that

period onward (or the decades immediately before it)[25], we shall limit our use of the terms 'traditional' or 'former' times to the pre-colonial and colonial Yorùbá society from the late nineteenth century[26] to Nigeria's independence in the 1960. In addition, however, evidence for the perception and position of the Yorùbá woman in contemporary times (that is, up to the last thirty years) will be considered.

Again, whereas various sociological criteria such as territorial structure may be used for describing a people, their worldview and culture, this study, being concerned with Yorùbá women, will be restricted to parameters of kinship and family, economy and politics as well as religion.

Lastly, a high degree of cultural, dialectal and political diversity has been noted among the Yorùbá. The society is not in every respect homogeneous; therefore, whatever statements are being made in this treatise are by no means without qualification and are not to be regarded as norm throughout Yorùbáland. Variations and exceptions will often be found in some customs and practices from one area to another.

## 2.3 Kinship and social structure[27]

Extensive research has been carried out on Yorùbá social structure and kinship by socio-anthropologists and ethnographers. The kinship system is rather complex and the discussion of the Yorùbá's social and family organization in this section would lay no claims to detail. Rather, the focus will be on the women and what existing literatures disclose about them.

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[25] In Samuel Johnson's record of the history of the Yorùbá, the title of the book shows that the writing covered "the earliest times to the beginning of the British Protectorate". However, what is meant by the phrase "earliest times" remains unexplained. In contrast, N. A. Fadipe, in his 1939 University of London PhD dissertation, *The Sociology of the* Yorùbá, which was published posthumously only in 1970, claims to have restricted his study to the period beginning from about the 1880s.
[26] Due to the scope of this time frame, the use of some older manuscripts in this chapter becomes inevitable.
[27] For detailed discussions of kinship, family and marriage among the Yorùbá, see Johnson (1921:98-100); Forde (1951:10-15); Ellis (1966:174-182); Bowen (1968); Peel (1968:25-28); Fadipe (1970:67-302); Lloyd (1974:33-8) and Eades (1980:37-64).

## 2.3.1 Family structure and organization

The concept of family among the Yorùbá, as in many parts of Africa, is very much unlike what obtains in the West. In a traditional setting, the Yorùbá family system consists of an extended family structure, that is, the lineage or patrilineage *(ìdílé)* made up of smaller units of immediate family households *(ilé)*, which could be monogamous or polygamous in form. Children born within the patrilineage (either male of female[28]) are referred to as *ọmọ ilé*, (children of the household) while wives within the family are called *ìyàwó ilé*. The most senior of those wives and the female head in charge of all the other wives is the *ìyáálé* (mother of the house) while the head of the family household is the *baálé* (the father of the house). His wife (or wives), children (including nephews or nieces and younger cousins or siblings), servants or resident workers are all under his headship.

A larger unit, the *agboolé* (often translated as compound or quarters in English; cf. Johnson 1921:98), is a cluster of several extended families in the same territory or neighbourhood. However, the members of an *agboolé* may not necessarily be related by blood or marriage. Each *agboolé* forms a residential unit and a "property-holding group" as well as a political unit (Lloyd 1974: 33-4 and Eades 1980:45). The head of the *agboolé* may also be referred to as the *baálé* or the *olórí ẹbí*. Fellow members of an extended family unit are called *ìbátan* or *ẹbí,* and they may reside in another or the same *agboolé*.

Among the Yorùbá, descent is not only agnatic but also cognatic[29] (Lloyd 1962 and Ellis 1966:178, 179). Both Lloyd (1966:489-492) and Peel (1968:25) claim that the latter is attested especially among the Òndó and Ìjẹbu but Eades (1980:38, 49-51) argues that both agnatic and cognatic (bilateral) elements are found throughout Yorùbáland in varying degrees even though it is more common among the Òndó and Ìjẹbu for an

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[28] Both sexes can attend family meetings and participate in family rites/rituals and both have inheritance rights (Margaret Drewal 1992:188). Women also have the right to head families and equal rights with men as proven in the courts in cases of inheritance during the colonial era (Coker 1958:77-79, 123-129, 155-159).

[29] Among the agnatic descent group, membership is defined by descent from a common male ancestor whereas membership of the cognatic group is open to descendants through either a male or female progenitor.

individual to retain membership in both groups[30]. He further notes that some other developmental processes "have acted to strengthen the cognatic element of kinship organization. As women have accumulated wealth in their own rights, kinship links traced through women have become more significant" (Eades 1980:60).

## 2.3.2 Principles of social organization

Societies differ in social stratification and the principles that govern them. For instance, Oyěwùmí (1997:5) asserts that in the American society (supposedly, North American), race is the fundamental organizing principle. However, scholars seem to be unanimous in their view that seniority is the principal organizing principle among the Yorùbá. Johnson (1921: xxxvii) reports that among the Yorùbá, distinction in age and seniority of birth are of primary importance as demonstrated by the use of kinship terms. Examples of such terms include "ẹgbọn and ábùrò, i.e., the elder and the younger relative, words which show the relative age only, without indicating the gender and are equally applicable to uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces and cousins however far removed, as well as to brothers and sisters" (Eades 1980:51).

Similarly, Peel (1968:26) notes that, "Traditional Yorùbá society is sharply stratified. The main determinant of status is age; old people of either sex are accorded respect by their juniors… and are believed to be wiser, and ritually more powerful". Fadipe (1970:129) asserts that the principle of seniority applies in every area of society and in all activities stressing that, "The custom cuts through distinctions of wealth, of rank and of sex"[31].

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[30] Interestingly, Bender (1970) provides more data to argue against Lloyd's position that descent among the Òndó is cognatic and to show that it is agnatic.

[31] The issue of age as an organizing principle among the Yorùbá should not be confused with gerontocracy in which a society is governed by old men. For instance, gerontocracy is attested among the Samburu of Kenya, where power is vested in the elders (see Spencer 1965). The Yorùbá society, however, is a hierarchical (cf. Barber 1981:724), not a gerontocratic one. The rulers or leaders are not necessarily the oldest members of the society since some monarchies and chieftaincies have succession based on primogeniture. Barber (1981:740) rightly captures the nature of the structure thus: "In a Yorùbá town like Òkukù… the social structure, though hierarchical, is open and relatively fluid. Instead of prescribing roles, it enjoins men (and women too) to make themselves into whatever they can, and places no limits on what they can achieve; instead it encourages the impulse of ambition to take any route it can find and go as far as it can".

*2.3.2.1 Social organization and gender*

Among the Yorùbá, age is the dominant factor for social classification, not sex (Lloyd 1974:38). While a woman's seniority in her natal compound is determined by her age, in her husband's compound, it would be defined by the time she married into the family, so that she is regarded as senior to all the wives who came after her and junior to all those before her (Krapf-Askari 1969:72-73; Eades 1980:53 and Peel 2002:139)[32]. The same principle applies to her relationship with children born into that family. She is junior to all the children who were born into the family before she married, irrespective of their age, and senior to all children born after she got into the family. Lloyd (1974:58) further notes that, "The analytic power structure perceived by the Yorùbá is of an open society with two hierarchies – those of age and power/wealth".

In her groundbreaking but controversial book, *The Invention of Women*, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí draws on statements by previous scholars to demonstrate clearly that the principle of social organization among the Yorùbá was and remains seniority, based on chronological age. She notes that, in the West, the body is central in the construction of social difference and there is no distinction between sex and gender; both are inseparable (Oyěwùmí 1997:2, 10). In other words, whereas in the West, anatomical criteria (sex) was used as a basis for gender construction, gender being the main social organizing principle, for the Yorùbá, it is not so. Seniority is "the foundation of Yorùbá social intercourse" (1997:13-14, 40).

To stress the importance of seniority as the cornerstone of Yorùbá social organization, Oyěwùmí (1997:32-39) draws inferences from certain social acts such as making obeisance to superiors or elders, irrespective of their gender. A young woman would kneel (or curtsy) in greeting an older relative or a superior, irrespective of the latter's sex. A young man, in turn, would prostrate (or bow) in a similar situation to greet an older woman or man. The respect accorded to elders or older people have nothing to do with their sex.

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[32] For detailed treatment of seniority as an organizing social principle among the Yoruba, see Bascom (1942).

Furthermore, Oyěwùmí (1997:40-41) provides extensive illustrations based on Yorùbá kinship terminologies to buttress the claim that seniority is crucial in the Yorùbá social world. For instance, kinship[33] terms such as *ábùrò* (a younger sibling or relative) or *ẹgbọn* (an older sibling or relative) are "encoded by age relativity". Seniority also determines the pronouns one would use to address others in social interactions or whether one would address the other by name or with an honorific. For instance, if the addressee is younger, one would use the personal pronouns *o, ẹ* or *ìwọ* whereas if the addressee is older, the personal pronouns used are *ẹ/ẹyin, yin/ẹyin*[34] (that is, for the second person in the subject, object or nominative position, respectively). Oyěwùmí argues that while the importance of gender in English is reflected in gendered kinship term, accordingly, the importance of seniority in the Yorùbá social world is reflected linguistically.

Oyěwùmí's (1998:287) contention is that in the past, gender categories were not part of the frame of reference among the Yorùbá. Genderization emerged as a result of colonialization. She claims that even in the social history/historiography of Ọyọ, men and women have been invented as social categories especially in the work of Samuel Johnson. In other words, there is a genderization or patriachalization of Ọyọ history (Oyěwùmí 1998:264). For instance, she rightly points out that the criteria for identifying the gender of the *Aláàfin*[35] in the Ọyọ king list provided by Johnson is not clear since the names did not often indicate the *Aláàfin*'s gender (1998:268). She claims that the general aristocracy (e.g. the Ọyọmèsì or the council of chiefs) has also been masculinised along with the *Aláàfin* (1998:279). Oyěwùmí, therefore, disapproves of the presentation of *Aláàfin* in Old Ọyọ as men, of the construction of women as being

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[33] It should be noted here that kinship terms in Yorùbá are characterized by their apparent complexity. A single term may not have a fixed meaning or even a one-word equivalent in English as it may have several different connotations and associations. In the same manner, a person may be addressed in different ways within the family structure based on relationships and roles. For instance, a married woman is, primarily, *ìyàwó ilé* (a wife of the house or compound) in her husband's house. However, in her natal compound, where she also has legal rights, she is not only *ọmọ ilé* (a child of the compound) but also *ọkọ* (a husband) to all the women married into the family after she was born. In her marital family, all persons (male or female), who were born before she married into that family, become her *ọkọ* (husband). Thus, the same woman is not only *ìyàwó* (a wife) and *ọkọ* (husband) at the same time but also *ọmọ* (child or descendant) in the various settings.

[34] This latter set of pronouns is also used for plural addressees.

[35] *Aláàfin* is the title of the Ọyọ monarch.

absent in Old Ọyọ historiography, and of "the claim in Yorùbá historiography that old Ọyọ society was male-dominant when no evidence has ever been adduced for this position" (1998:303). Based on the evidence she has presented from the Yorùbá case, her position is that, "… seniority, not gender, was the language of status" among the Yorùbá (1998:268); gender is not a universal category and gender formation is an imperialistic process and a Western construct (1997:78).

It is not our intention here to get into the line of the crossfire that has erupted from Oyěwùmí's thesis, but, here, expediency and fair play demand that we take into account some of the reactions to her assertions. Although Peel (2002:138-9) concedes that "the radicalism of Oyěwùmí's approach has real heuristic value", he contends, based on examples from records of the colonial CMS (Church Missionary Society) journals on the Yorùbá, that Oyěwùmí's claim that, "…Yorùbá does not 'do gender [but] does seniority instead' goes much too far". Even though her emphasis on "the crucial importance of age and seniority (which earlier feminists tended to underplay)" is right, and "though seniority can override gender, it usually works as a co-ordinate, rather than as an alternative, to it".

Therefore, Peel argues persuasively that there is clear gender distinction in the Yorùbá religious practice and society, and we shall provide details of some of his observations in the sub-section, "women in religion", below. However, Peel (2002:139) remarks that, "a great merit of Oyěwùmí's emphasis on seniority is that it serves to warn us against adopting too homogeneous a view of gender or detaching gender from the other subject-positions that Yorùbá women occupy, such as slave/free, native/stranger, mother/non-mother, and above all the gradations of age and seniority".

In another response to Oyěwùmí's claim that gender was a paradigm previously foreign to Yorùbá social discourse but was introduced from Western cultures, Olajubu (2004:42) argues that:

> [G]ender existed and played a significant role in Yorùbá religious tradition but in ways
> quite different from its conception in Western cultures. The difference stems from the

fact that, among the Yorùbá, gender conceptions are not limited to sexual anatomy and are configured in a complex and fluid manner… Not only is gender an important social category in traditional Yorùbá society, but it is also flexible.

Olajubu, therefore, proceeds to consider gender from four significant areas of Yorùbá religious traditions namely cosmology, the goddess tradition, ancestral performance, and divination. She asserts that Oyěwùmí's claim that gender was not an organizing principle among the Yorùbá is not correct:

> My point is that gender classifications have always existed among the Yorùbá but may be transversely manipulated, as is the case in social structures and the ritual space in religion… A complementary gender relation is entrenched at every level of the Yorùbá socioreligious consciousness, as both male and female principles are crucial to a smooth living experience (Olajubu 2004:43).

Olajubu's conclusion is that as far as Yorùbá religious traditions are concerned, gender exists as a social category, "but is informed by flexibility and complex configurations… [it] is marked by fluidity" (Olajubu 2004:59). We shall also examine some of her evidence below under "Women in religion".

Finally, in an article concerned with religion and gender, Olupona (2004:72) uses the images of goddesses and gods in Ifá epics to interpret the Yorùbá view of women and gender relations. His finding is that even though issues of gender and women's status are admittedly complex, "There is a clear indication of gender fluidity in Yorùbá religious traditions, and religious discourse is framed in a manner that may be entirely unfamiliar to Western audiences" (2004:73).

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that, among the Yorùbá, gender may not be *the* central organizing principle of social categorization; it is, nonetheless, an organizing principle. This assumption is supported by ample data especially from the people's religious culture[36]. The fact that gender is constructed differently among the Yorùbá

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[36] Further evidence of genderization from other aspects of Yorùbá life and culture also abound, e.g. names, dressing, occupation, etc. Oyetade (1991) demonstrates that tones in *oríkì àbísọ* (personal praise names) are marked for gender. Afonja (1981) also reports that although there were internal and external changes in the modes of economic production and reproduction from the fifteenth century onward, there was sexual division of labour among the Yorùbá.

from the way it is done in the West does not signify absence. Peel's (2002:162) comment on Oyěwùmí's contention that colonialism introduced the Yorùbá to patriarchy is also noteworthy. He claims that many aspects of Yorùbá life (including the religious) in the nineteenth century were profoundly shaped by gender and that:

> … [W]hat occurred on the terrain of religious change was that one system of patriarchy met another. Yet they were very different kinds of patriarchy, the one communitarian and military-clientelist, the other bourgeois and individualist, and in negotiating a compromise they did create some space for subordinate groups to assert themselves.

Therefore, it can be surmised that not only were gender construction and patriarchy present among the Yorùbá both operated differently from the Western conceptions of gender and patriarchy.

### 2.3.3 Marriage

In former times among the Yorùbá, marriage was arranged by families of both the prospective bride and groom. Three stages in the marriage custom are identified by Johnson (1921:113-115) – "an early intimation", "a formal betrothal" and the marriage (*ìgbéyàwó*). Before betrothal, preliminary inquiries are made by each of the two families involved to determine whether the other family is suitable or agreeable. Early betrothal is attested (Ellis 1966:183-4; Bowen 1968:303), but there are no formal ceremonies of initiation into adulthood (Lloyd 1974:128). Betrothal is followed by the *ìdána* (bridal payment or dowry) and later by the *ìgbéyàwó* (the wedding, lit. the carrying of the bride) in that she was carried, literally on the shoulders, to her husband's family compound by friends and family members after all negotiations have been completed (Forde 1951:28; Fadipe 1970:70-71). The marriage feast took place in the bride's family house (Ellis 1966:154) and it has been observed that the ceremony was emotionally stressful for both the bride and her mother. The transition to the husband's home also left the bride physically and emotionally wrenched (Fadipe 1970:81).

Today, apart from the traditional marriage ceremony, marriage ceremonies are also conducted under Christian or Islamic codes but apparently with a mixture of traditional elements. For instance, a Christian wedding ceremony is likely to be preceded by what

is called a traditional engagement, which features many of the elements of the traditional wedding and some other modern innovations.

According to Johnson (1921:113), in ancient times, Yorùbá men were mostly monogamous but polygamy was "not actually forbidden, yet only rich folk could avail themselves of indulgence in that condition of life". Lloyd (1974:126) notes that, "Marriage among the educated Yorùbá is monogamous" although sometimes the man has another woman outside his home who bears his children.

Marriage is patrilocal or virilocal[37], that is, the woman domiciles in the husband's residence after the marriage ceremony (Lloyd 1966:488; Peel 1968:26 and Eades 1980:51)[38]. In addition, marriage relationship is forbidden between blood relations. Women remain full members of their natal families while married, holding full rights there (Lloyd 1966:488; 1974:36). Widowhood and remarriage are discussed by Johnson (1921:115-116).

Although divorce was rare, divorce and separations could be instigated by either the man or the woman under the Native Authority Courts (Forde 1951:28). When divorced, the woman returned to her relatives[39] or she could stay in her own house if she owned property. If divorce was due to adultery on the part of the woman, dowry was paid back to the groom's family (Bowen 1968:305). In all divorce cases, the children were retained by the man's family. When a woman became widowed, she could become the wife of her husband's younger brother or oldest son by a senior wife but she was not obliged to do so (Fadipe 1970:67). Bowen (1968:304-5) states that:

> No woman, pretty or ugly, rich or poor, is obliged to go unmarried. Men, of course have the privilege of divorcing their wives, and the matter is all the easier, from the fact that every woman is a free dealer, who labours for herself and supports herself, and has no claim on her husband's property.

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[37] Eades (1980:52) argues that, "What gives Yorùbá kinship its strong patrilineal emphasis is of course the pattern of residence after marriage. A woman moves into her husband's compound, and often remains there even after his death".
[38] Nowadays, newly wedded couples often tend to set up their own homes.
[39] Such women are called *dálémosú*, i.e. women who have left their husbands to take up residence again in their natal compound.

## 2.4 Women's roles and positions in society

This section will examine both the domestic and public roles of Yoruba women in the society. The public roles include women's economic and leadership roles.

### 2.4.1 Domestic roles

That the Yorùbá woman played a visible and dominant role in the domestic arena cannot be overstated. She played multiple roles as wife, 'co-wife', mother, etc. As wife, she was not just a wife to her husband but to his entire family except in the area of sexual intimacy. This is because among the Yorùbá, the custom was that when a woman married, she was not married to her husband alone but to his whole extended family. Therefore, she was expected to play active roles in family functions and ceremonies.

The demands on young wives were usually high because of the principle of seniority that was (and remains) prevalent among wives in a family. Fadipe (1970:114) observes that, "A great deal of drudgery and heavy work normally falls on junior wives, whether they like it or not", and that the "servile phase" continued until the woman started to have her own children. The Yorùbá woman was expected to submit to the authority of other wives in the family who were her seniors and to defer to children born in the house before her entry, while exercising her own authority over those who came after her, within what Matory (1994:104) calls "a co-operative hierarchy". She was supposed to co-operate also with other wives in the immediate or extended family in matters of common concern such as naming, wedding and funeral ceremonies. To this end, the wives in a family often had their own family club, *ẹgbẹ olóbìnrin ilé*, (lit. the club of women in the compound). They would make uniforms for special occasions and organize the cooking during family meetings and ceremonies.

In addition to this role of being the 'wife of many', the married woman's task included all household work other than repairs. She was expected to clean, cook for her household,

play the dominant part in the upbringing of the children and "supply any 'extras' she or her children may require" (Krapf-Askari 1969:71 and Fadipe 1970:87).

## 2.4.2 Public roles

The public roles of women, primarily, centre on their occupation and their roles in the economy of the society. However, women are also found in leadership positions as will be explicated below.

### *2.4.2.1 Women's occupations and economic roles*

In pre-colonial Yorùbáland, rural economies thrived on farming, hunting, fishing and craft (Afolabi Ojo 1966:33-103). However, women's occupations included seeding cotton and spinning thread, shelling kernels from palm nuts, dyeing, palm oil and nut oil making, brewing beer from guinea corn or maize, food preparation, bead manufacturing, pottery and hairdressing (Johnson 1921:123-5). Weaving and trading were carried out by both sexes but food processing was carried out mainly by women (Bowen 1968:308; Fadipe 1970:152 and Eades 1980:68, 82). Women often traded in food, textiles and toiletries but also engaged in a number of other cosmetic arts such as soap manufacturing and tattooing as well as making mats, bags and baskets (Krapf-Askari 1969:85 and Fadipe 1970:152). If the woman chose to work on the farm with her husband, she could help in harvesting crops but some women planted vegetable gardens of their own (Fadipe 1970:88, 147).

Among the Yorùbá, "… women can attain great wealth and social status, as did Madam Tinubu, Iyalode of the Ẹgba, in the late nineteenth century" (Peel 1968:26). The majority of the women worked independently of their husbands (Lloyd 1974:37). Eades (1980:60, 153) also acknowledges the existence of very wealthy women traders especially in Ijẹbu and Ẹgba areas and the economic independence of Yorùbá women in general. That Yorùbá women are economically independent is common knowledge (Matory 1994:1); they often engage in separate economic activities from their husbands (Krapf-Askari 1969:72; Fadipe 1970:88 and Hoch-Smith 1978:249).

Furthermore, women who engaged in trade had market women's guilds often organized according to the women's specializations, e.g. fish sellers, gari[40] sellers, textile merchants, etc. The head of the guilds is called the *Ìyálọ̀jà* (lit. the mother of the market), in some places, *Ìyálájé* (lit. the mother of trade), or *Ìyá ẹgbẹ* (lit. the mother of the association). Many of the women were also involved in long-distance trading within and beyond Nigerian borders. They are known as *alájàpá* (Krapf-Askari 1969:105 and Banwo 2004:314, 318). Denzer (1994:25) remarks that, "Trading continued to be the most important economic activity for women throughout the colonial period". The role of women in the trade industry remains virtually the same today as in former times.

### 2.4.2.2 Women rulers and leaders

The leadership roles of women in the pre-colonial and colonial Yorùbá society have not gone unnoticed. Women have acted as monarchs, military leaders, chiefs and diplomats, and they have played prominent roles in the political hierarchies of many towns and cities. Smith (1969:113) relates that, "In early times it was not necessarily a male who was chosen as ruler and the traditions of Ọyọ, Sabẹ[41], Òndó, and Ilesa record the reigns of female ọba". The reign of female Ọwa (Ijẹsa monarch) has been noted among the Ijẹsa. According to Smith (1969:54), "Of those named [i.e. of the previous thirty-eight named Ọwa before the time of writing], five are said to have been women, but there has been no female ruler since Yeyeori, the eighteenth Ọwa".

Women are also prominent in the political system of Òndó (Eades 1980:99). Smith (1969:65) states that, "The origin of the dynasty is reflected in the importance given to women in the government of Òndó. There is, for example, a council of women chiefs which has access to the council of male chiefs, and the Osemawe's[42] installation is carried out by the leading woman chief, the Lisa Labun". Similarly, Olupona (1997:315-335) points out that among the Òndó, the monarch (often male) does not wield absolute

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[40] Gari is a West African staple foodstuff made from cassava.
[41] Although Sabẹ is a Yorùbá town, today, it falls in the Republic of Benin, having been annexed to it by the colonial governments.
[42] Osemawe is the title of the Òndó monarch.

political authority and power, as he does not exercise that power in isolation of women who control equally significant ritual authority and power.

According to Smith (1969:65), female rulers have been attested in Dassa or Idassa (a Yorùbá town in the present day Republic of Benin):

> A peculiar feature of the kingship is that it passes from a ruler to all his children in turn, including apparently women, and then to the eldest son of the first king of the preceding generation (excluding the children of the female rulers). The twenty-six rulers in the list – which includes two women – are arranged in nine generations…

Similarly, Denzer (1994:8) states that, "In the foundation period of many Yorùbá kingdoms, some notable women held power as *obas* or regents". He provides evidence from pre-colonial era of female rulers from major Yorùbá cities such as Ile-Ife, Ọyọ, *Ilesà* (where six women appear in their list of *ọbas*), Ijẹbu-Ode, Abẹokuta, Ado-Ekiti, and Akurẹ.

For her part, Oyěwùmí (1997:125) argues that it was only during the colonial era that women became somewhat alienated from the political/state structure. According to her, "… on the eve of colonialization, there were female chiefs and officials all over Yorùbáland. Ironically, one of the signatories to the treaty that was said to have ceded Ibadan to the British was Lanlatu, an Ìyálode…" It is, therefore, clear that, originally, women were not excluded from the political hierarchy (Matory 1994:26).

Besides, women's associations or guilds were headed by the *Ìyálode* (Forde 1951:17 and Peel 1968:26). The *Ìyálode* was and remains the most senior of women chiefs in many towns, and in Lagos, she is regarded as the head of the market women (Eades 1980:61). Denzer (1994:9-10) describes her as the head of the female hierarchy of chiefs. She "sat in the Oba's council, taking part at all levels of policy-making, including the economy and war-time strategy".

Denzer's characterization seems to be in line with Johnson's (1921:77) explanation of the role of the *Ìyálode*:

> THE IYALODE, i.e. the queen of the ladies is a title bestowed upon the most distinguished lady in the town. She has also her lieutenants Ọtun, Osi, Ẹkẹrin etc., as any of the other principal chiefs of the town. Some of the Iyalodes command a force of powerful warriors, and have a voice in the council of chiefs. Through the Iyalode, the women of the town can make their voices heard in municipal and other affairs.

Johnson (1921:63-67) further discusses the roles of various women in the royal palace at Oyọ as well as the roles of "other ladies of high rank". The royal women include the Ìyá Mọdẹ, Ìyá Naso, Ìyá Ọba, etc.

It is also on record that women performed military functions. Ellis (1966:171) reports that, "In time of war, all the men capable of bearing arms take the field under the military chiefs. They are accompanied by a number of women, who cook the food and carry the baggage…" However, apart from such paramilitary roles attested by Ellis above, Oyěwùmí (1997:65) notes that many women engaged in real combat and were war heroes, that is, apart from controlling battles through supernatural means. However, it is Denzer (1994:11) who aptly sums up the leadership roles of Yorùbá women in pre-colonial times:

> Besides the few who held power as rulers, women wielded power and authority throughout the Yorùbá kingdoms in numerous ways. Their roles differed greatly from place to place, and from century to century. Queen mothers, king's sisters, king's wives, priestesses and market women's leaders occupied a variety of titled offices through which they influenced domestic politics and foreign affairs either directly or indirectly.

## 2.5 Women in religion

In this section, we shall examine the role of Yorùbá women in religion from two perspectives. The first concerns the role of women as religious practitioners and worshippers (i.e. in traditional religion), while the other deals with the image of women in epic narratives. However, to understand the roles that women play in religion, a brief explanation of the Yorùbá cosmology[43] would be useful.

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[43] For details of Yorùbá religious worldview and practices, see Ellis (1966); Awolalu (1979); Eades (1980) and Barber (1981).

The Yorùbá believe in a Supreme Deity, Ọlọrun (the sky God) or Olódùmarè, who created the heaven and the earth and the inhabitants. Olódùmarè works in consortium with an array of other lesser divinities, which are complex in character, known as *òrìsà*. In traditional religion, prayer, worship or sacrifice is hardly offered to Olódùmarè but to the numerous *òrìsà,* which have own devotees, shrines and totems. The cults are organized around these *òrìsà,* which are often regarded as comprising primordial divinities such as Ọbàtálá or Ọrùnmìlà, and deified historical figures such as "kings, culture heroes and heroines, war champions, founders of cities etc" (Awolalu 1979:20). Besides the belief in divinities, the Yorùbá also believe in various spiritual beings including ancestral spirits and personified forces. According to Barber (1990:313), "*Òrìsà…* can be a combination, in varying proportions, of deified human hero[44], force of nature, and a being of heavenly origin".

Òrìsà worship could be private or public in nature. Eades (1980:120) claims that three types of rituals are involved in such worship – private individual rites carried out at home, rituals at the shrine of the particular *òrìsà,* and annual festivals, which are often more elaborate and public. The presence of domestic rituals within the compound and rituals in the public arena has also been reported (Peel 2002:147).

### 2.5.1 Women as religious practitioners and worshippers

Peel (2000:103) notes that most of the active worshippers of the *òrìsà* were women. According to him, "Women… preponderated in the public worship of the *òrìsà,* though not to such an extent as within the compound". It is pertinent to note, however, that, although some cults were predominantly female, e.g. Òrìsà oko, Ọsun, Ọtìn, and Ọya, others such as Ifá, Orò, Ògún and Egúngún are predominantly male (Barber 1981:741; 1990:335), while some other cults allowed both devotees. Some of the male cults were exclusive, prohibiting the participation of women altogether; their ceremonies and worship were closed to women. For instance, Orò ceremonies were preceded by the

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[44] Awolalu (1979:33) notes that, "Usually, among the ancient Yorùbá, heroic men and women who have made useful contributions to life and culture of the people were deified".

confinement of women and the uninitiated; the period of confinement varied from twenty-four hours to three lunar months (cf. Ẹlúkú worship among the Ẹgbá and Ìjẹbú, which was also closed to women; Lucas 1948:121-2, 124, 128). However, the Egúngún cult, a male dominated cult, sometimes allowed some female priestesses called *Ato*.

In the female dominated cults, women acted as priestesses, cult functionaries as well as devotees. They offered prayers and sacrifices including funerary offerings, made vows, and acted as intermediaries between the people and the *òrìsà*, and as diviners or seers, etc. When women married, they often brought their own *òrìsà* from their natal homes (Barber 1990:328).

Peel (2002:147-149) further stresses the presence of some clear gender distinction in the people's traditional religious practice. He claims that although the *òrìsà* engaged mainly the attention of the women (that is, more than that of the men), the men tended to be attached to Ifá, an oracular cult and system of divination as well as a cultural archive of Yorùbá wisdom, which also acted as a protective cult for men[45]. With copious citations from CMS journals, Peel remarks that the *babaláwo*[46] was virtually a male-dominated profession, since few female Ifá diviners were attested, at least in the twentieth century. He describes the *babaláwo* as "a body of male religious professionals, [who] won a degree of respect…" (Peel 2002:149).

In connection with the women, on the other hand, Peel (2002:153) affirms that, "The overall picture is clear: women were very strongly attached to the *òrìsa* cults, whose cardinal contribution was to ensure their reproductive health and success; and which also provided them with the fellowship of the cult-group which they greatly valued".

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[45] It is worth noting, however, that even though the act of divining through Ifá is dominated by men, evidence shows that women also are active as devotees and worshippers of the oracle. For instance, Odugbesan (1969:203) narrates that women were suppliants in the Ifá cult and some of them shook the Ifá rattles (musical instruments) in response to prayer or worship. Abimbola (1997:401-413) also examines the images of women in Ifá sacred literature and notes that the oral texts depict women variously as *àjẹ* (witch), mother, and wife.

[46] The *babaláwo* is a diviner for the Ifá oracle. The name itself (lit. the father of secret cultists) is suggestive of male gender.

Perhaps one of the most (un)popular images of the role of the Yorùbá woman in traditional religious practice is that of the *àjẹ* or witch. Not only is there a widespread belief in witchcraft and sorcery, it is widely believed also that the *àjẹ* are stereotypically women. Eades (1980:125) reports that:

> Witches in Yorùbá belief are almost always women, and particularly old women. Their powers are passed from mother to daughter, but can also be given to non-relatives, or even purchased. Yorùbá magic on the other hand uses physical objects with known properties to achieve its results, and either men or women can be sorcerers.

This observation is confirmed by Peel (2002:142):

> One area where the gender specificities of the spiritual realm show up most clearly is that sphere of malign agency that has come to be labelled 'witchcraft'. While both sexes were affected by it as notional victims, women were typically represented as its perpetrators, so it was women who, in being punished as witches, were the real victims of witchcraft as a cultural institution[47].

Witchcraft in women is associated with access to restricted and sacred knowledge, thus, with access to power in secret cults. The *àjẹ* are regarded as psychically powerful women who could use their supernatural powers both positively and negatively. They are often reverentially referred to as the *Ìyà mi/wa* (lit. my/our mothers). The activities of this society of cultically strong women are also considered gendered[48] (Olajubu 2004:53, 56-7).

Hoch-Smith (1978) examines the image of the Yorùbá woman as prostitute or witch in five Yorùbá dramas of the 1970s. She notes that, in contrast to the strongly positive role and image of the Yorùbá woman as an economically independent and successful business woman, she is depicted also as "a carnal witch who possesses incredible strength of psychic power with which she attacks male-dominated society" (Hoch-Smith 1978:249; cf. Drews 2000:13-14, 17).

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[47] For accounts of witchcraft practices among Yorùbá women, see Henry Drewal (1977: 549-551); Apter (1991:220-223); Drews (2000:10-20) and Peel (2002:142-146).

[48] This affirmation is part of Olajubu's response to Oyěwùmí that gender is present among the Yorùbá. She further considers the role of women in the Ifá divination corpus to buttress her point (Olajubu 2004:57-9).

Different reasons have been proffered for the assumed prevalence of witchcraft among Yorùbá women. For instance, it has been suggested that the position of Yorùbá women in the contrasting images of a successful entrepreneur and a witch "throws a wedge into the patrilineal structure" (Hoch-Smith 1978:265). The ability of the women to leave men castrated or, at least, to render them completely impotent through their wealth and supernatural power could be considered as a weapon and it shows that there is a struggle between the sexes. Abimbola (1997:411) confirms this struggle by noting a love-hate relationship between the men and the women, which "probably arose from the supernatural and financial/economic powers that women wield".

## 2.6 Women in epic and other oral literatures

In addition to the positions, roles and functions of women in religious practice and worship, one other source of data for the way women are perceived among the Yorùbá is epic literatures, which are often oral in nature. These texts offer a glimpse into the Yorùbá cosmogony and belief systems. We have noted at the beginning of this section the Yorùbá belief in a myriad of divinities – gods and goddesses of complex characters and identities. Having also established the presence of gender construction in the Yorùbá religious culture, we may reasonably assume, then, that an understanding of the roles and images of goddesses and epic heroines could prove useful in our investigation of the role and perception of the Yorùbá woman.

In this regard, the relevance of Barber's (1981:724) statement that the "relations between humans and òrìsà are in some sense a projection of relations between people and society", cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, the human society is often a reflection of the people's view of the cosmos. Peel (2002:139) also reasons that there is a natural inclination to want to conceive deities as persons; therefore, this tendency is followed by the impulse to endow them with gender. He explains that the Yorùbá tend to imagine any spiritual force that has any direct influence over their lives or environment as a person and that, "Now it is not easy to imagine a person in concrete terms without attributing a particular sex to them… It seems likely that this kind of thinking influenced

the gender identification of the major established *òrìsa…*" (Peel 2002:140). In other words, genderization of the *òrìsà* has occurred because of the predisposition to see them as persons, to identify them with humans. Consequently, this line of thinking opens up the way for us to "seek the living among the dead", to look for the Yorùbá woman in the midst of her innumerable goddesses and epic heroines.

### 2.6.1 Women and the *òrìsà*

Yorùbá myths, particularly cosmogonic myths, consist of various *òrìsà,* many of them with truly convoluted identities. While some of the *òrìsà* are identified as unmistakably male (e.g. Ọrùnmìlà, the father of Ifá oracle; Èsù, the trickster; Ògún, the god of iron; or Sàngó, the god of thunder), and some unquestionably female (e.g. Ọya, Ọsun or Yemọja, all goddesses of different waters), some others have conflicting gender identities. For example, both Ọbàtálá and Odùduwà feature in the Yorùbá myths of creation but Awolalu (1979:22, 25-26) notes that although some traditions regard these two *òrìsà* as male divinities, some others regard them as female while a third tradition sees them as androgynous and as *òrìsà* of indeterminate or ambiguous gender (Olupona 2004:76).

One tradition, which sees Odùduwà as female, depicts her as the wife of Ọbàtálá and the patroness of love (Ellis 1966:41-43). Lucas (1948:93) also categorizes Odùduwà as a chief female *òrìsà* but notes that the deity is depicted by some traditions as male. In Lucas' view, myths, which depict Odùduwà as female "are more original in character" than the male myths. He also sees Odùduwà as the wife of Ọbàtálá (Lucas 1948:94-5) and the union between the two as symbolizing the union between the earth and the sky. The belief is that the union is represented by "two whitened calabashes, closely fitted together, one on top of the other" (Lucas 1948:95-6; cf. Ellis 1966:41).

Yemọja, the goddess of brooks and streams is said to be the product of the union between Ọbàtálá and Odùduwà (Ellis 1966:43-46 and Lucas 1948:97-98). Yemọja

herself had three female offspring identified as Ọlọsa, Ọbà, and Ọya[49]. These examples show the complexities involved in the characterization of Yorùbá *òrìsà*. It may not be of interest to us here to begin to unravel or systematize their overlapping identities and relationships. For the purposes of this study, however, it would suffice to take into account some of the major female *òrìsà* and to see what implications their portrayal may have for our characterization of the Yorùbá woman.

First, it appears that most *òrìsà* associated with the waters (brooks, rivers, lagoons or oceans) are characterized as female, as in the examples of Yemọja, Ọlọsa, Ọbà and Ọya, mentioned in the last paragraph. Other *òrìsà* of similar designations include Ọsun, Ọtìn, Olókun[50]. Peel (2002:140) sees "river deities, like Ọsun and Yemọja, [as] being generally regarded as female, for their coolness and fecundity, and fierce or destructive deities like Ògún (iron and war), Sọpọná or Babaluáyé (smallpox), Èsù or Babaòde (tricks and confusion) and Sàngo (lightning) as male"[51]. It would seem, then, that the genderization of the *òrìsà* could be to serve allegorical or symbolic purpose, that is, to signify some deeper mythical connotations.

In addition, it is interesting that, "The female identity of some orìsà was further fixed by their being regarded as wives of male *orisa*: as Ọya (tornado) is of Sàngó, or Yemọja of Ogún or Sàngó" (Peel 2002:140). It seems the female *òrìsà* never operated as 'independent candidates'. If they were not wives of some fierce and principal male *òrìsà[52]*, then they were the daughters of one.

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[49] Ọlọsa, Ọbà and Ọya represent the goddess of the lagoon, goddess of the Ọbà River and goddess of the River Niger, respectively.

[50] Ọsun, Ọtìn and Olókun represent the goddess of the Ọsun River, goddess of the Ọtìn River and goddess of the ocean, respectively. It is good to note that a Bini (Edo) tradition regards Olókun as male (Babatunde 1992:76-77). Ellis (1966:70-72) also categorizes Olókun as male (god of the sea) and Ọlọsà as his wife.

[51] Abiodun (1989:11) equally notes the association of women's power with water: "The power of women appears to be similar to that of water, with which most female deities are associated. Water is an active ingredient in the Yoruba preparation of ẹrọ 'a softening agent/medicinal preparation' as also is the fluid from a snail and the oil from red palm kernels".

[52] Ellis (1966:48, 76-77) reports that Sangó married three of his sisters – Ọya, Ọsun and Ọbà.

Again, it seems useful to note here that, in many cases, the traditions, which relate the origins of the female *òrìsà,* often point to their heroic beginnings, just as in the case of the male, especially in the instances where they are considered as deified culture heroines of sorts. For instance, Johnson (1921:36-37) identifies Ọya as a deified heroine. The River Niger was named after her. Myths relate that she was the favourite wife of Sàngó who on learning that her husband had committed suicide did the same at a place called Ira. Johnson states that, "As thunder and lightning are attributed to Sàngó so tornado and violent thunderstorms, rending trees and levelling high towers and houses are attributed to Ọya. They signify her displeasure".

Isola (1998:61) notes that Yorùbá mythology recognizes Ọya as the most powerful female deity. She was originally the beautiful wife of Ògún, a wrathful *òrìsà*, who mistreated her. Therefore, she left him; "she liberated herself from Ògún's cruelty to become an effective and equal partner with Sàngó" (Isola 1998:65). Ọya's deification is considered a reward for her exceptional courage and an edifying example to women to assert themselves (Isola 1998:61, 70).

Another dominant female *òrìsà* is Ọsun, who is also designated as the wife of Sàngó (the fourth wife). Some traditions consider her as a primordial *òrìsà*, who was given powers for economic success by Olódùmarè in the beginning. Ọsun was said to be the only female out of seventeen major *òrìsà* that were sent on a special assignment by Olódùmarè (Badejo 1996:52-53). However, the others excluded her from their plans and meetings because of her gender – their assignment failed! When they went back to Olódùmarè for advice, they discovered they had failed because of their ill-treatment of Ọsun whom Olódùmarè had given the powers of *ajé* (economic success). They repented of their actions and went on to succeed. Subsequently, Ọsun became a wealthy woman and a mentor of powerful women. Badejo (1996:52) sees her deification as the deification of women's power and her myth as signifying the complementary and asymmetrical relationship between men and women.

It is also significant to observe that in many cases, the priestesses, devotees and cult functionaries of these female *òrìsà,* invariably, turn out to be women. Of course, that is not to say that the cults are exclusively female; men are, in some cases, priests and devotees as well.

Lastly, one other aspect of the characterization of women that is worth examining here concerns women who are regarded in some ways as folk or culture heroines. In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether such characters were real historical figures or mythological characters. One such figure is Mọremí, who is considered as an epitome of Yorùbá womanhood and a symbol of feminine courage and heroism. Legend has it that, at a period in the distant past, the Ùgbò carried out incessant raids against the people of Ile-Ife spoiling the latter each time they attacked. The Ife people had no solution to the perennial problems since the Ùgbò disguised each time they came to attack them so that their victims thought they were spirits.

One day, Mọremí devised a plan. She made a vow to the goddess of the Ẹsìnmìnrìn River in Ilé-Ifẹ that she would offer whatever he demanded if she could discover the secret of Ùgbò power and safely return to her people to disclose it. Therefore, she surrendered herself to be captured by the raiders and, being a very beautiful woman, she ended up as the captive wife of the Ùgbò king. While in the Ùgbò palace, Mọremí studied all the strategies of the Ùgbò soldiers and discovered that they used to disguise with dry raffia leaves or bamboo fibres whenever they went on raids. Eventually, she escaped from the palace and found her way back to Ife. The next time the Ùgbò came on a raid, the Ife people set their raffia leaves ablaze and the Ùgbò suffered a permanent defeat.

When Mọremí went to the Ẹsìnmìnrìn to offer her sacrifice, the river goddess refused to accept it. On inquiry, it was discovered that Ẹsìnmìnrìn would only accept an offering in the person of Mọremí's only son, Ẹlà or Olúorogbo. Mọremí complied with the wish of the river deity and became an eternal heroine among the Yorùbá. The annual Edi festival at Ílé-Ifẹ is held in commemoration of her heroism and of her son Ẹlà or

Olúorogbo (Johnson 1921:147-148; Beier 1955:18-19; Biobaku 1955:15 and Smith 1969:18-19).

## 2.6.2. Women and *oríkì*

At this point, it is worthwhile to consider one important aspect of Yorùbá oral literature that is profoundly connected with women – the *oríkì*[53]. *Oríkì* are songs or epithets uttered in praise of individuals, places, institutions, etc. According to Ogunbowale (1970:150), beside the Ifá poems, the *oríkì* "is the proudest literary possession of the Yorùbá… The subject may be a nation, tribe, a clan, a person, an animal, or a lifeless object". *Oríkì* can be used in greetings, and can be sung or recited during wedding, funeral, and chieftaincy ceremonies or during festivals and ritual performances. Awẹ (1974:333-334) notes that lineage wives are foremost among the custodians and transmitters of the *oríkì* of a particular lineage, although professional bards (often males) also engage in this task. Karin Barber has carried out several studies on *oríkì* in Òkukù, a town in Ọsun State of Nigeria. She reports that in Òkukù and other Northern Yorùbá towns, *oríkì* chants are performed mainly by women; "the main responsibility for the *oríkì* tradition lies with women" (Barber 1990:316). It was carried out by wives and daughters of the family compounds. Barber (1990:328) reports that:

> It is appropriate that *oríkì* in Òkukù are primarily mastered and performed by women, for women are one of the primary sources of social differentiation and of social linking in northern Yorùbá towns. Within an *ilé* (lineage/compound), co-wives constitute the geological nodes according to which groups of men are divided for purposes of inheritance and political segmentation…

It is remarkable that Barber (1990:316) recognizes a link between *oríkì* and the cults. She notes that women chanted *oríkì* in propitiation of the *òrìsà:* "My suggestion here is that women have been important in the cults at least partly because it is they who control the vital channels of communication with the *òrìsà* through their mastery of the

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[53] Karin Barber has conducted extensive research on this topic and there seems to be no need to repeat details of her findings here (Barber 1981; 1984; 1990; 1994; see also Vidal 1969:56-59 and Awe 1974). However, it should be noted that a distinction is often made between *oríkì*, *oríkì ilé* (the *oríkì* of one's lineage or household including the associated cults and institutions), and *oríkì orílẹ*, which is the *oríkì* of one's place of origin (that is, village, town, city or clan).

*oríkì*" (1990:328-9). The inference is that women could wield much power in the cults because of their abilities to invoke, propitiate or even please the *òrìsà* with *oríkì*.

Moreover, since it is established that, to a certain degree, *oríkì* could serve as a source of historical data (Ayorinde 1973), it can be presumed that the women, who serve as custodians, and engaged in the transmission and rendition of these *oríkì,* would also be historians in their own right.

### 2.6.3 Women and proverbs

*Òwe* (proverbs[54] or aphorisms) are regarded as an important aspect of the Yorùbá people's folklore and literary expression. They are pithy sayings, which can be employed in ordinary discourse or in oratory contexts as a literary or aesthetic device. With regard to the socio-cultural context and function of proverbs, Arewa (1970:431) explains that proverbs are "used in all manner of situations - education of the young, judicial decisions, resolution of conflicts, clarification of loaded statements, giving point and adding color to ordinary and important conversations." Schipper (1991:2, 3), who has written an interesting book on African proverbs that refer to women, notes that; generally, proverbs are used to give credence to the speaker and they confirm societal norms and values[55].

The use of proverbs is normally reserved for elders but when a younger person wishes to use a proverb in the presence of elders, he or she must use a prefatory apology

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[54] The word proverb is used fluidly to translate the Yorùbá *òwe* here but, in fact, *òwe* is regarded as more complex in definition. For more on Yorùbá proverbs, see Arewa and Dundes (1964:70-85); Bascom (1965:69) and Agbaje (2002:237-243). Agbaje affirms that Yoruba proverbs are a part of the people's "wisdom lore" and one of their prescriptive functions is in the area of reconciliation or conflict resolution (2002:238, 239). Yankah (1989:328) explains that African proverbs, in general, are used as part of the persuasive process.

[55] It is useful to note, at this point, Bosman's (2002:358) observation that the similarity between African and biblical proverbs has been suggested by several scholars (cf. Golka 1993). Taking his point of departure from the Decalogue, Bosman (2002:359) shows that African proverbs have the potential "to act as sounding board for the interpretation of biblical proverbs. Furthermore, he points out a link between the proverbs and the indigenous wisdom thus: "African proverbs are encapsulations of the accumulated wisdom and experiences of countless generations and they continue an authentic door that allows access to the religious and ethical orientation of African peoples" (2002:359). We find it remarkable that African proverbs are connected to wisdom just as biblical proverbs are connected to biblical wisdom. Similarly, Van Heerden (2002:466) encourages "the use of African proverbs in interaction with biblical texts". He claims that this will enrich the dialogue between the Christian faith and African cultures (2002:473).

before citing the proverb (Arewa and Dundes 1964:79). Ogunbowale (1970:139) also notes that, "The bulk of Yorùbá proverbs are a comment on Yorùbá life. They talk about the family, the relationship of parents to children and husband to wife, the position of the elders and the individual's duty to society. They concern manners and customs". If this observation is correct, then Yorùbá proverbs can be scouted for possible ways in which women are portrayed in the society.

Yusuf, in a study on some English and Yorùbá proverbs, notes that both contain various proverbs that show a spiritual denigration of women in different areas, the first being the association of women with loquacity; i.e. the belief that women lack verbal restraint (Yusuf 2001:3)[56], while the second area of denigration concerns the notion that women are insincere or undependable[57]. Another disparaging portrayal of women in Yorùbá proverbs has to do with promiscuity – women are portrayed as being promiscuous (Yusuf 2001:5)[58]. Furthermore, some of the proverbs contain images that portray women as being malevolent in essence (Yusuf 2001:6)[59]. It should be added here that,

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[56] Examples of such proverbs in Yorùbá include:

*Obìnrin torí ọrọ rodò*. A woman sets for the river for the love of talk.

*Obìnrin kì í ròhin ajò tán*. A woman's account of her journey never ends (Owomoyela 1988:266).

*Obìnrin ko ni gògóńgò*. Women have no Adam's apple (i.e. they cannot keep secrets).

*Obìnrin kò sé fi inú hàn*. It is not safe to confide in women.

[57] Examples of such proverbs include:

*Ènìyàn ò tan ara rẹ bí ìyá ìbejì tí ọmọ rẹ kú tí ó ní ó lọ ra àrán wá*. Nobody deceives herself/himself like the mother of twins who, when her child died, said the child had gone to buy her precious velvet.

*'N ó lọ, n ó lọ', lobìnrin fi ndẹrù ba ọkọ*. 'I'll divorce you, I'll divorce you' is the weapon with which a woman threatens her husband.

*Ọbùn rí ikú ọkọ tìràn mọ, ó ní láti ọjọ tí ọkọ òun ti kú ni òun ò ti wẹ mọ*. The dirty woman used her husband's death as an excuse for her filthiness: she said that she stopped bathing right from the day of his death (as a sign of mourning).

[58] Some proverbs on female promiscuity include:

*Gbogbo obìnrin ló n gbesẹ, èyí tí ó bá se tirẹ lasejù laráyé n pè lásẹwó*. All women engage in infidelity; it's the one who is excessive that is called a prostitute.

*Ọkọ ò sí nílé, ìyàwó kun àtíkè: pẹlẹpẹlẹ di ọwọ àbúró ọkọ*. The husband isn't at home, (yet) the wife powders her face: the husband's younger brother needs to be careful.

*Awo burúkú lobìnrin lè se, obìnrin lálè mẹfà, mẹfẹẹfà ò mọra wọn*. Women are capable of only vicious secrecy: a woman has six concubines, (and) the six do not know each other.

*Ẹni tó fẹ arẹwà fẹ ìyọnu nítorí ẹni gbogbo níí bá wọn tan*. The person who marries a beauty marries trouble because she claims to be related to everybody.

*Obìnrin kì í gba owó àlè tán kó ní gìnìsà nse òun*. A woman does not accept a lover's money and then complain that she is experiencing menorrhagia (Owomoyela 1988:265).

[59] Examples of these include:

on this point, the image of woman as witch is rather strong and fits perfectly with the religious characterization of the woman as witch discussed earlier in 2.5.1. Lastly, the denigration of women is shown in Yorùbá proverbs, which promote the "exclusion of women from spiritually edifying or regenerating activities" (Yusuf 2001:7)[60]. Yusuf (2001:8) claims that the proverbs in question are all misogynous.

Other similar observations have also been made observations concerning the portrayal of women in Yorùbá proverbs. For instance, Ogunsina (1996:92) notes that, "Yorùbá proverbs and co-wife tales are replete with portrayals of female perfidy, envy and jealousy"[61]. For her part, Schipper (1991:13) assumes that derogatory proverbs about women are widespread and universal in nature. Nevertheless, we would remark that whereas the attestation of Yorùbá proverbs that are derogatory to women cannot be overlooked, quite a number of proverbs also portray women positively and commendably. Ogunbowale (1970:139) comments, for example, that the subject of many proverbs is mother's love and devotion[62]. The reason for this may be partly because an important use of the proverbs is for child training and upbringing (Arewa &

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*Itọ pẹ lẹnu ó di wárápá, egbò pẹ lẹsẹ ó di jàkùtẹ; bi obìnrin bá pẹ nílé ọkọ, ajẹ níí dà*. Saliva stays long in the mouth and becomes epilepsy; a sore stays long on the leg and becomes putrid; if a woman stays too long in a husband's home, she becomes a witch.

*Kàkà kí ó sàn lára ìyá ajẹ, ó fi gbogbo ọmọ bí obìnrin; ẹyẹ wá nsubú lu ẹyẹ.* Rather than experience an abatement of her viciousness, the witch gives birth to only female children, and witches' birds are therefore falling over witches' birds.

*Àjẹ ké lánàá, ọmọ kú lónìí, ta ni kò mọ pé ajẹ àná ló pọmọ jẹ.* The witch cries yesterday, (and) a child dies today; who doesn't know that it is yesterday's witch who killed the child?

[60] Examples of such proverbs include:

*Ènìyàn tí ò gbọn ní bóbìnrin mulẹ, ijọ obìnrin bá mawo ló bàjẹ.* Only a stupid person takes an oath with a woman; the day a woman knows the secrets of a cult, the cult is destroyed.

*Etí lobìnrin fi gbóhùn orò.* It's with the ears (only) that a woman hears the sound of the orò – the spirit of purification (she must not see it).

*Obìnrin kì í tóbi kí orò má gbe e.* A woman is never so large that *Orò* cannot do away with her (Owomoyela 1988:266).

*Awo egúngún ni obìnrin lè se; awo gẹlẹdẹ ni obìnrin lè mọ; bí obìnrin fi ojú kan orò, orò yóó gbe.* A woman can participate only in the cult of the masquerade; a woman can watch only a *gẹlẹdẹ* (dance) conference; should a woman sight *Orò* (the spirit of purification), the spirit will overwhelm her.

[61] An example of a related proverb is, *Obìnrin kì í ní iná kí ti orogún rẹ má jo o*. That a woman has fire does not mean that her co-wife's fire cannot burn her (Owomoyela 1988:266).

[62] For example, "*Abiyamọ se ọwọ kòtò lu ọmọ rẹ*". A mother will beat her child with a hollow hand. (In other words, even though a mother will discipline or punish her child, she does so with caution or in love.) A similar example is, *Bí a bá fi ọwọ ọtún bá ọmọ wí, a ó fi òsì fàá mọra.* If one spanks a child with the right hand, one would use the left hand to hug him/her*.

Dundes 1964:73-75). Most proverbs on children's education, therefore, reflect the mother's role and obligation or society's expectation of her. Moreover, Ogunbowale (1970:139-140) observes that the Yorùbá woman has a high position in the family, and that certain proverbs condemn "those men who try to treat women as if they did not count in family affairs"[63]. Some other proverbs show women as tenacious[64], as playing complementary roles as men[65], or as different from men especially in terms of punitive measures for wrongdoing[66]. It appears that while many proverbs that refer to women in their roles as wives or lovers tend to denigrate them, proverbs that describe their roles as mothers eulogize them[67]. As mothers, women are cherished and reverenced.

In summing up the present discussion, it should be noted that the various depictions of women examined in the foregoing are by no means exhaustive. A variety of other studies has also investigated the images and portrayal of women in other aspects of the Yorùbá literary, religious, socio-cultural or historical life. For example, Ogunsina (1996:83) cites Ogunsina (1982)[68], which recognizes the importance of women as characters in Yorùbá oral prose narrative where, in many instances, they are the protagonists. He notes that among "the features of women depicted in the prose narratives are physical beauty, envy and jealousy, high propensity for child-bearing and child-rearing as well as an intense capacity for love". In a similar vein, Abiodun (1989) has examined clues to important values and concepts concerning women in the Yorùbá

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[63] E.g. "À nsọrọ elégédé, obìnrin nbèrè kíl'à nsọrọ rẹ. A ní 'Ọrọ ọkùnrin ni'. Bí a kó elégédé jọ, tani yíó sè é"? We are talking about pumpkins. A woman asks what we are talking about. We say, "This is man's talk.' But when we gather the fruit, who will cut them up and cook them? (In other words, women have their own part to play in the family.)

[64] E.g. Àwárí ni obìnrin nwá nkan ọbẹ. A woman who needs ingredients for her soup will not give up until she finds it.

[65] Bí ọkùnrin bá rí ejò, tí obìnrin bá pá, kí ejò sá ti má lọ. If a man sees a snake and a woman kills it, the important thing is that the snake is unable to escape. (In other words, the gender of the one who kills the snake, i.e. who performs a particular task, is unimportant.)

[66] Bọkùnrin t'àtọrìn, bóbìnrin t'àtọrìn, ẹnìkan ní láti lómi lẹhin ẹsẹ ju ara wọn lọ. If a man urinates as he walks and a woman urinates as she walks, one of them will be wetter behind the legs than the other (i.e. the fact that two people do exactly the same things does not guarantee the same results). This translation was provided by Dele Olojede.

[67] E.g. Òrìsà bí ìyá kò sí. No orisa is as sacred as the mother, i.e. "All fetishes and all witchcraft are inferior to the woman-mother: she is the strongest" (cf. Schipper 1991:85 for the explanation). Another popular proverb that shows mothers as being esteemed is, Ìyá ni wúrà; baba ni jíngí. Mother is gold; father is a mirror (the proverb shows a mother's priceless value and a father as a role model).

[68] Ogunsina, B. 1982. "Women in Yorùbá Prose". Unpublished Paper Presented at the Nigerian Folklore Congress, Ilorin, Nigeria.

traditions of visual art and the influence of women over artistic processes. He notes that from available archaeological finds, mainly at Ile-Ife, the presence and power of women would appear to be of great antiquity (Abiodun 1989:2).

Earlier, we have noted the portrayal of women in Ifá divination texts. However, scholars have attested that several other oral genres in Yoruba show various images of women. For instance, Ogunsina (1996) delves into the portrayal of women in Ìjálá[69] and the contribution of that understanding to the concept of woman in traditional lore. She examines four Ìjálá chants in which women have thematic prominence and surmises that the Ìjálá chants tend to express and uphold the subjective and masculinist worldview of the particular group that uses them. Although they are shown to be physically attractive, women are depicted negatively as diabolical, destructive, treacherous, stubborn and inconsequential. These images contrast sharply in the same poems with those of men who are regarded as superior to women. Ogunsina attributes the strikingly negative portrayal of women in the chants to the sexist bias of the Ìjálá literary artist and she argues that it should be seen as a trivialization and misrepresentation of the role of women in the larger society (Ogunsina 1996:92).

## 2.7 Summary of chapter

The present chapter has attempted to evaluate the positions, roles and depictions of women among the Yorùbá by examining the social and kinship structure as well as some social practices that relate to women. With respect to the social structure, the chapter offered some insight into the subject of gender construction noting that while gender may not be *the* central social organizing principle, it is certainly an organizing principle among the people. The discussion further highlighted, on the one hand, Yorùbá women's domestic and public roles in the home, the economy, leadership, and religion. The positions, roles and activities of these women indicate that they are,

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[69] Ogunsina (1996:84) describes Ìjálá as "the Yorùbá hunter's poetry in praise of Ògún, the violent warrior, god of hunting, warfare and all iron implements". Since hunting is, basically, a male-dominated profession among the Yorùbá, Ìjálá chants are performed by men and rarely by women. For this reason, Ogunsina (1996:84-85) notes that most Ìjálá chants usually have a masculinist bias.

without any doubt, active in the society, demonstrating wisdom, strength and matchless enterprise. They are not in any way invisible, silent or passive in the day-to-day life of the society, and in religious matters, they are definitely and literally, a force to be reckoned with. Elizabeth Ojo's (2004:237) succinct description of Yorùbá women could be used to wrap up their analysis in the foregoing:

> Yorùbá women are the antitheses of Shakespearean women. While many women depicted in most of Shakespeare's writings are prone to frailty, fiendish, and filial ingratitude, (*sic*) Yorùbá women from generation to generation are strong, highly intelligent, lively, expressive, elegant, forbearing, determined, devoted to families, loyal, versatile, and very enterprising. These women never stop working.

On the other hand, various portrayals of women are gleaned from Yorùbá epic literatures and other literary genres such as the *oríkì* and proverbs. It is interesting that many of these literary genres seem to project an ambivalent image of women. While some of the characterizations of women in the texts correspond with the strong and positive images found in domestic and public roles of women in the society, some others show a denigration and subjugation of women[70]. Essentially, epic literatures and images of the feminine from the religious sphere do not seem to undermine women. However, evidence from Ìjálá chants and from Yorùbá proverbs especially shows unmistakable deprecation, even vilification, of the feminine[71].

The question is what could be responsible for this type of scenario? Why would the texts portray women in a way that seems to contradict the prevailing real life image of the Yorùbá woman as strong, capable, industrious, etc? In the last section, we have noted Ogunsina's (1996:92) argument that the negative image of women in Ìjálá could be attributed to the masculine bias of the Ìjálá artist and that it exposes the sexist bias of the Yorùbá oral tradition artist. Could the same, therefore, be said of the proverbs and other literary texts that tend to disparage women? Do those texts point to the patriarchal

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[70] In this regard, Oyěwùmí's (1998:278) explanation is worth relating: "With man assumed to be the measure of all things, when confronted with incontrovertible evidence about females who were in positions of power and authority, the tendency is to explain them away as exceptions, as temporary representations of male or male interests, or as stooges of the oppressive patriarchy, or to reduce their significance by positing that they held sway over other females only".

[71] Interestingly, Amba Oduyoye's chapter on Akan proverbs in her *Daughters of Anowa* also shows that many of the proverbs denigrate women (Oduyoye 1995:55-76).

prejudice of their artists? Alternatively, could they be seen as evidence of some sort of 'war of the sexes' among the people? Do they serve as a form of riposte or retort on the part of the men to counteract some statements by the women on men[72]? Since there is a strong claim that women wielded supernatural and economic powers and that the love-hate relationship between them and men probably arose from that fact[73], are the texts especially the proverbs a way of fighting back on the part of the men or of consoling their ego?

Perhaps one reason for this negative portrayal of women in the Yorùbá proverbs is due to the nature of the function of the proverbs. Some Yorùbá proverbs perform a rhetorical purpose. It would not be surprising, therefore, if they are used to cast an otherwise positive image of the woman in an unfavourable light. Yankah (1989:328) makes a significant point that could throw some light on this thought:

> Since proverb use is part of the persuasive process, a speaker expects the audience to react to his or her message if he or she succeeds in getting them to focus attention on it. Factors that command attention may be intensity, *contrast with the surrounding environment, or novelty, something that is new in the listener's perceptive experience* [*italics ours*].

Furthermore, Akinyemi (2004:95, 107) observes that Yorùbá verbal artists are often accorded artistic immunity and they often use that poetic license to criticize various highly placed individuals or socio-political structures and pass scathing comments through their art. If Yankah's assertion that a speaker may use proverbs to command attention is correct and if it is true that Yorùbá verbal artists sometimes use poetic license to criticize others, then, we are inclined to infer that the heavy presence of the denigration of women in Yorùbá proverbs and some other literary texts is a male chauvinistic strategy aimed at not only criticizing women and whatever power structures they represent but also commanding attention to themselves in order to forge a male agenda. Therefore, the portrayal in those texts may not at all be an accurate reflection

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[72] It would be interesting to uncover what the Yorùbá women have to say about their men but this is beyond our present brief.
[73] See Abimbola (1997:411), cited earlier.

of the overall societal image of the woman[74]. In the next two chapters, we shall examine this statement further *vis-à-vis* the ancient Israelite woman and the Old Testament Texts that are slated for investigation.

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[74] Camp (1985:75-76) clarifies the point here rather strikingly by pointing out the importance of observing possible movements from life experiences to literary creation. She cautions that, "One cannot make the error of equating 'women's roles' with 'female images', lest one equate historical or sociological data with literary creations in such a way that limits the latter to the parameters of the former. Literature and life operate dialectically, the former expressing, reinforcing, but sometimes challenging the latter". In the case of Yoruba women and the literary images, it would appear that the dialectic is foregrounded most powerfully in the proverbs, with literature challenging real life experiences!

# CHAPTER 3

# WOMAN WISDOM – A METAPHOR OF THE ISRAELITE HEROINE?

*"Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers. . ."*
*(Alfred Tennyson)*

## 3.1 Chapter introduction

In the first chapter of this study, currents in Old Testament wisdom study have been highlighted. As a follow-up to the discussion, this chapter will examine trends concerning Woman Wisdom as she is characterized in Proverbs 1-9 especially in chapters 1, 8 and 9. Although wisdom as a personified figure has been identified in other Wisdom texts[75], our concern here will be limited to its appearance and description in the book of Proverbs. Issues for consideration in this chapter will include the dating of Proverbs 1-9, the origin of Woman Wisdom, and the different approaches to the study of Proverbs 1-9.

It is needful to stress at this point, however, that our primary aim in this chapter is not to join issues with any of the various camps in the debates surrounding Proverbs 1-9 or of Woman Wisdom. Rather, it is to provide a modest backdrop for the understanding of our

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[75] Murphy (1995:223-231), for example, claims that Job 28, Ecclesiasticus 24, Baruch 3:9-4:4 and Wisdom 7-9 all contain features of personified Wisdom. Similarly, Sinnott (2005) considers the appearance and development of wisdom as a personified figure in the book of Job and in the apocryphal texts of Wisdom of Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon and Baruch. It should be noted also that wisdom has been attested at Qumran. In the case of personified Wisdom, Wright (2004:241-242, 255), for instance, indicates that in Psalm 154 (11Q5 xviii 1-16) and in Sirach 51:13-19, 30 preserved in 11Q5 xxi 11-17-xx, wisdom is personified as a woman although there is no evidence that the texts were composed by the Qumran sectarians. Van der Woude (1995:245ff) adds that the sapiential documents contain 4Q184 - the Wiles of the Wicked Woman, which is regarded as the counterpart of Woman Wisdom (Wright 2004:243).

choice of Woman Wisdom as a metaphor and archetype[76] of the heroine in the Old Testament.


## 3.2 Proverbs and Proverbs 1-9

The book of Proverbs[77] is regarded as a compendium or collection[78] – a collection of shorter collections, of different genres, of different anecdotes and sayings, by different authors.


### 3.2.1 Dating of Proverbs (1-9) and origin of personified wisdom

As is the case with wisdom literature in general, views on the dating of Proverbs 1-9 can be classified broadly into two – early and late. While the early or pre-exilic dating is advocated by scholars such as Kayatz (1966) and Lang[79] (1986:4), other scholars favour a late[80] or exilic/post-exilic dating (i.e. between sixth and third century BCE). However, a few scholars have attempted to strike a balance between the two positions by arguing that the editing of Proverbs or its final form was what took place in the post-exilic period (Clements 1990:57; Whybray 1994:60; 1995:69; Murphy 1998b:42 and Tan 2008:1)[81]. Hadley (1995:239) notes that Proverbs 1-9 has defied all attempts at a precise dating but that majority of scholars are prone to place it in the fifth to fourth centuries BCE[82].

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[76] The term archetype is used here to refer to a recurring motif or prevalent symbolic representation/imagery in mythologies or literary works, i.e. a prototype or an original model of something.

[77] For an exhaustive summary of critical scholarly works on the book of Proverbs from 1890, see Whybray (1995).

[78] See Clements (1992:17); Shupak (1993:14); Whybray (1994:7); Weeks (2007:1) and Perdue (2008:89).

[79] Lang settles for a tenth/ninth century BCE dating but suggests that the editing of the book took place in the fifth century BCE.

[80] Scholars who support late dating include McKane (1970); Camp (1985); Meinhold (1991); Clements (1992:24); Weeks (1994); Harris (1995:22) and Sinnott (2005:6). However, some scholars argue for late dating but regard Proverbs as belonging to the Persian period or the Hellenistic period (e.g. Perdue 1997 – early Persian period; and Waltke 2004 – Hellenistic period).

[81] For instance, Clements (1992:18-19) argues that the emergence of wisdom in Israel was pre-exilic but its growth and spread were post-exilic. Dell (2006:49) maintains that although the writing and editing of Proverbs may have been exilic or early post-exilic, "one cannot deny the possibility of earlier elements being incorporated within the final text…" In fact, she claims that Proverbs 1-9 and 31 have been seen as the latest element in the book.

[82] See Yoder (2001:15-38) on the challenges involved in the dating of Proverbs 1-9 whether it is based on external or internal (linguistic) evidence. Yoder herself settles for a sixth century to third century post-exilic dating (Yoder

In respect of the origin of personified wisdom, Sinnott (2005:5) remarks that, "Arguments concerning the dating of Proverbs 1-9 are inseparable from questions about the origin of the figure of Wisdom". The reason for this is because scholars who see personified wisdom as a surviving remnant of a goddess (whether Hebrew, Egyptian or Mesopotamian models), are likely to opt for an early date for Proverbs 1-9, "whereas those who view her more as a literary or theological creation posit an exilic or post-exilic date. When she is seen as a mediating figure based on women in the Israelite community, a post-exilic date is usually proposed".

Consequently, the claims on the origins of personified wisdom in the book of Proverbs are varied. While some scholars[83] hypothesize on an Egyptian source based on the features of certain Egyptian goddesses such as Ma'at (the daughter of the Egyptian sun god, Re) or the Hellenized Egyptian fertility goddess, Isis, some others argue that the figure is modelled after a Babylonian goddess (e.g. Ishtar or Ashtarte)[84] or after the Hellenistic wisdom goddess, Sophia. Another group of scholars posit that the origin of the wisdom figure is rooted in an ancient Hebrew goddess or a Canaanite/Semitic goddess, or else she is some sort of consort to YHWH[85]. Others hold that Israelite wisdom is part of a common ancient Near Eastern heritage[86].

More recent arguments tend to concede that there is no scholarly consensus on the origin of personified wisdom (Day 1995:68) and that seeking an ancient Near Eastern

2003:428; 2009: xxiii). For a thoroughgoing appraisal of the dating of the book of Proverbs, however, read Whybray (1995:10ff).

[83] Examples are Kayatz (1966) and McKane (1970). Shupak (1993:348) supports the argument of an Egyptian influence on Israelite wisdom by drawing up a glossary of Egyptian wisdom terms in Old Testament wisdom and elucidating their semantic content. Schäfer (2002:27) equally concurs that the Egyptian Ma'at/Isis served as a model for Israelite wisdom but admits that the extent of the application is not so clear. It has been noted also that wisdom is personified in other ancient traditions just as in the Israelite, e.g. in ancient Egyptian wisdom traditions (Shupak 1993:345), Hellenistic wisdom and even in Hindu traditions.

[84] See Gustav Böstrom (1935).

[85] Lang (1975, 1986:129) speaks of an ancient Israelite goddess of wisdom, *"hokma"*, but W F Albright propounded the view of an origin of wisdom from an ancient Canaanite goddess, *"Ḥụkmatu"* (see Day 1995:69 and Whybray 1995:18). Day (1995:70) argues for a foreign west Semitic influence on the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 1-9.

[86] See Shupak (1993:269) and Sinnott (2005:19-52, 170) for further discussion of the origin of personified wisdom.

source for Israelite wisdom remains on a conjectural level. Rather, it may be safer to conclude that even though the idea of a personified wisdom or an apotheosized wisdom figure in the Israelite tradition possibly had some Mediterranean influence, Israel's wisdom had its own unique or distinct edge, whether literally or theologically (Baumann 1998:72; Sinnott 2005:7 and Whybray 2005:14). One of the reasons for this assumption is that although personified wisdom is noted in several neighbouring ancient Near Eastern nations, the figure of a personified wisdom that speaks seemed to be attested peculiarly in Israel (Sinnott 2005:17, 52; see also Yoder 2001:8). Sinnott claims that the portrayal of wisdom in the Old Testament might have drawn imagery from other ancient Near Eastern traditions, but it has developed insights from within its own Israelite traditions.

### 3.2.2 Structure and composition of Proverbs 1-9

The structure of the book of Proverbs has been approached in a number of ways[87]. However, there is reasonable consensus among scholars that Proverbs 1-9 can be regarded as the introduction or what Fox (1997:613) calls "a hermeneutical preamble" to the rest of the book of Proverbs[88]. Scholars even appear to be on surer grounds when it comes to the unity of Proverbs 1-9. The views on the composition and structure of the book of Proverbs show clearly that the first nine chapters are commonly accepted as a single composition[89]. In a variety of ways, wisdom scholars have proffered interesting arguments to prove the unity of the section whether from a form critical, structural,

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[87] Boström (1990:1-5) divides the book of Proverbs into seven sections (1-9; 10:1-22:16; 22:17-24:22; 24:23-34; 25-29; 30 and 31), while Perdue (2007:47) and Waltke (2004:9) also claim that the book can be divided into seven, in line with the headings or superscripts that begin the collections in 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1 and 31:1. For Shupak (1993:12-14), however, Proverbs comprises of nine collections (1-9; 10-22:16; 22:17-24:22; 24:32-34; 25-29; 30:1-14; 30:15-33; 31:1-9 and 31:10-31), and Whybray (1994:6-7) claims that the book contains five sections (1-9; 10:1-22:16 and 25-29; 22:17-24:34; 30-31). Perdue (1994:77ff) divides the literary structure of Proverbs into eight collections. He notes that each collection is introduced by a superscription except the last one (1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1 and 31:10).

[88] Further clarifications on Proverbs 1-9 as an introduction to the book are provided by Murphy (1981:49); Clements (1992:18); Shupak (1993:14); Whybray (1995:70); Baumann (1998:48, 56) and Dell (2006:18). Whybray (1995:70) concurs with Claudia Camp, T P McCreesh and A Meinhold that Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 were intended editorially to serve as a framework for the whole book of Proverbs.

[89] Burns (1990:1-3) notes that the unity of Proverbs 1-9 has been recognized as early as 1899 by Crawford Toy (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs.* Edinburgh: Clark).

thematic or theological perspective. We shall provide a brief overview of some of them in what follows.

In a 1971 study, Patrick Skehan opts for a single authorship not just for Proverbs 1-9 but also for the entire book of Proverbs. His claim is based on what he regards as the internal witness of the book's literary units (Skehan 1971:26). He argues that chapters 1-9 represent a literary edifice with seven columns, which are the seven poems of uniform length extending from Proverbs 2 to 7. Each of the poems contains a deliberate pattern of 22 lines. Further, he sees Proverbs 1 and 8-9 as the framework or setting within which the seven columns stand. For Skehan, the book of Proverbs is the house of wisdom (wisdom is the architect) and it can be compared with Solomon's Temple. In chapters 1-9, therefore, are found the seven columns[90] on which the edifice is built (Skehan 1971:9-43). The concept of wisdom as an architect/builder is salient to our discussion in this study and we shall explore the notion further in Chapter 5 below.

For his part, Habel (1972:135-137) points out that what holds Proverbs 1-9 together is the use of symbolism. He claims that the way or path, *'derek',* is a nuclear symbol that is used along with a satellite system of images to create unity in the particular text. In that symbolic system, a series of binary opposites are employed to create contrast, colour and depth. The polar contrasts include two ways (i.e. of Yahweh and of destruction); two hearts (i.e. the instructed heart and the devious or malicious heart); two companions (i.e. wisdom teacher and the strange woman); and two houses (i.e. wisdom's sacred house and the house of the strange woman). However, the two ways' symbol underlies the other opposites.

In the same way, Burns (1990:5ff) considers Proverbs 1-9 as a composite material but she analyses it from the perspective of the categories of the mythic journey of a heroine, i.e. personified wisdom, who embarks on an archetypal journey and invites others to join her on that journey of wisdom. She points out the prevalence of words that are

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[90] Skehan's seven columns are Proverbs 2; 3:1-12; 3:13-4:9; 4:10-27 (5:21-23 are supplementary lines); 5:1-20 (including 6:22 which is being transposed after 5:19); 6:20-7:6 and 7:7-27. He excludes from the analysis, 6:1-19, which is considered an intrusion because its external form is different and it interrupts the context.

associated with a journey such as 'way' or 'path' and argues that the unit is a call to adventure, to a mythic journey, by the teacher of wisdom.

Weeks (2007:2-3) considers the unity of Proverbs 1-9 from the viewpoints of genre and imagery, that is, figurative language or metaphors. He notes that, for the main part, the chapters are written as an instruction[91] but more importantly, they contain elaborate and extensive metaphors, which often take the form of personification. For example, a pervasive and principal imagery in the first half of the composition is the path imagery (2007:73-77). Weeks' central argument here is that although formal criteria provide some support for the unity of Proverbs 1-9, it is the extensive use of imagery in a distinct and persuasive manner to present the characters and their speeches, which primarily gives Proverbs 1-9 its unity[92] (2007:90-91, 94).

According to Camp (1985:185-188, 227, 255), the intentional use of female imagery, not just as a compositional but also as a hermeneutical device, can be evidenced throughout the book of Proverbs. She sees the personification of wisdom as a unifying focus for the composition and message of the book. Whybray (1994:158) also confirms that:

> Another persistent feature is a preoccupation with female figures; estimable wives, disgraceful wives, the queen mother, mothers who share the teaching of their children with their husbands, the personified figures of Wisdom and Folly, the prostitute and the adulteress. All these features combine to give the book a kind of unity which can hardly be accidental…

From the foregoing, therefore, perhaps what could be regarded as more salient for our discussion in this chapter is the use of imagery, specifically, female imagery, as a compositional device in Proverbs 1-9. We shall return to this matter later in this chapter. However, it is important to point out also that, apart from instructions noted above, various other genres have been recognized in Proverbs 1-9. Baumann (1998:46) notes that various other genres are recognizable within the unit, e.g. prophetic elements in

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[91] For other views of Proverbs 1-9 as instruction, see McKane (1970:6-7); Shupak (1993:12); Whybray (1994:11-12) and Dell (2009a:229-230). However, that is not to say that instruction is the only genre present in the corpus.

[92] For other analyses of 1-9 as a unity, see Whybray (1995:12). For Crenshaw (1981), the theological concept, the fear of the Lord, is the unifying motif in Proverbs 1-9.

1:22-33 or the hymn in 8:22-31 (cf. Dell 2009a:240). In fact, the instructions in chapters 1-9 are often interspersed by lengthy poems, which are generally associated with the Woman Wisdom (Dell 2006:92). Note should be taken also that Fox (1997:613ff) uses the terms lectures and interludes to identify what he refers to as the two main strata in Proverbs 1-9 (the lectures and the interludes being equivalent to what others call instructions and poems, respectively).

### 3.2.3 Approaches to Proverbs 1-9

The earliest modern inquiries into Israelite wisdom tradition focused on historical[93] questions especially on the origin of personified wisdom and its relationship to Egyptian, Hellenistic or ancient Near Eastern wisdom prototypes, e.g. Ma'at, Astarte, Isis, Sophia, Asherah, Innana, etc. ( Sinnott 2005:11-12)[94]. In time, other approaches to the study of (personified) wisdom than the mythological began to emerge such as the literary, and the sociological.

Literary approaches initially concentrated on the idea that Woman Wisdom was a hypostasis of YHWH, that is, the figure possessed divine attributes[95]. However, some scholars have considered personification as a literary convention or creation - the figure is seen as a metaphor rather than a person or hypostasis (e.g. Habel 1972; Sheppard 1980)[96]. Camp (1985:65) notes that, "Von Rad, Habel, and Lang have all, in one way or another and with varying degrees of consistency, focused our attention on the poetic nature of the traditions that embody personified Wisdom". She points out that treating

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[93] Camp (1985:23ff) provides a good review of scholarly interpretations (from Albright onward) of personified wisdom from the perspective of history of religions.

[94] Clements (1992:158) claims that such tradition-historical approaches to the figure of wisdom in Proverbs have been of limited value and tend to point in the wrong direction.

[95] Camp (1985:35); Lang (1986:138-140) and Boström (1990:56) all note that H Ringgeren (1947) was a notable proponent of the theory of wisdom as a hypostasis. McKane (1970) also contends that wisdom was a child of YHWH because of the contested word *qanani* (which has been translated variously as begot, birthed, created, acquired, purchased or possessed) in Proverbs 8:22, (cf. Lang 1986:63 and Schäfer 2002:26-27). For Camp (1985:49), the theory of hypostatization is not always clearly defined or uniformly applied. Lang (1986:138-40) also rejects the theory of wisdom as a hypostasis because, in his view, the wisdom poems must have been composed at the pre-exilic period when "hypostases did not play a major role in Israel's way of thinking and religious rhetoric". Murphy (1990:133) equally faults the theory of hypostatization based on the reasoning that Israel was strictly monotheistic during the post-exilic period.

[96] See Sinnott (2005:18-24) for more information.

the Proverb poems as a literary work paves the way for a literary analysis of the poems in terms of metaphor, personification or symbolism (1985:71)[97]. We shall consider more fully the issues regarding the literary analysis of Woman Wisdom in the next section.

Furthermore, varieties of sociological approaches to the study of Woman Wisdom can be ascertained. Sinnott (2005:13) claims that such approaches "perceive personified Wisdom as a product of social impulses within Israel that drew upon the lives of Israelite women for their imagery". A good example is Camp (1985:17-18), who states her preference for understanding the meaning of female Wisdom within a socio-historical setting[98]. While Yoder (2001; 2009: xxii) also presents a socio-historical, specifically, a socio-economic reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31, Dell (2006) investigates both the social and theological context of the entire book of Proverbs but her recent article focuses on Proverbs 1-9 (Dell 2009a)[99].

It seems appropriate to note here the tendency by scholars, who situate the text of Proverbs 1-9 in the exilic/post-exilic era and interpret Woman Wisdom from a sociological viewpoint, to regard wisdom's origins and development as the response to Israel's situation after 587 BCE. For instance, Sinnott (2005:53-87, 171) argues that the situation of exile made it necessary and acceptable to personify wisdom as a female figure who speaks for God. With the fall of Jerusalem; the loss of the Temple, the Davidic monarchy, and the land, as well as the exile, Israel's understanding of a God who acts could not effectively address the crisis that ensued.

Sinnott (2005:54) notes that a crisis of faith in YHWH in the aftermath of the events of 587 BCE was inevitable as the crisis called into question the foundations of the people's traditional beliefs, understandings and assumptions. Wisdom, a tradition, which was not confined to Israel, therefore, emerged as a vital resource for coping with the situation of

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[97] A number of other literary analyses of Proverbs 1-9 can be cited. Such analyses are often based on certain imageries or literary devices used in the text (Weeks 2007).
[98] Schroer (1995) embraces a similar approach. Note, however, Yoder's (2001:9) claim that both Camp and Schroer have prioritized the literary expression of Woman Wisdom over the socio-historical context.
[99] See Perdue (1997) for another interpretation of Proverbs 1-9 from both a theological and a social viewpoint.

exile. Sinnott (2005:82) further states that, "Through the personification of Wisdom the authors of Proverbs 1-9 created a new model for understanding the relationship between YHWH and Israel apart from the historical mode (salvation history) in which it was usually cast…[100]"

Closely related to the issue of the socio-historical context of Proverbs 1-9 and the emergence of personified wisdom within the milieu of the exile is the analysis of the life setting of the text. Dell[101] (2009a:230) identifies two possible social contexts – the family and the school, that is, because of the educational character of the instructions. However, she does not rule out a court or administrative setting on the account that it would take educated scribes to write down the instructions, that is, if it is assumed that the instructions had an original oral context (Dell 2009a:231)[102].

On the other hand, scholars demonstrate that the setting for wisdom in the poems of Proverbs 1-9 is the street, the city square, and the city gates (Lang 1986:22)[103]. Lang (1986:31) explains that wisdom appears in those places to demonstrate her usefulness

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[100]Evidently, Sinnott's assumption above is not new. Clements (1990:22) notes that wisdom served as a bridge between Israel's older national institutions and the new life in Diaspora. Furthermore, Clements (1992:25-26; 1990:26) points out that the Jews were in a state of liminality in the face of the dislocation that many of them faced during the exilic/post-exilic period, having been stripped of their former lives and identity. Since they needed to redefine what "it meant to be the people of God", wisdom became a natural resource for coping with the new situation, i.e. it became the intellectual tool for the survival of the Judaic community in Diaspora. See also Ceresko (1999:25-29) and Yoder (2009: xxiv).

[101] In her earlier discussion, Dell (2006:24-32) shows that scholars have made a wide range of suggestions for the social context of Proverbs 1-9.

[102] Lang (1986:15, 34-37) claims that Proverbs 1-9 has its origin in the educational climate and that the classroom setting can be assumed for some parts of Wisdom's address but Clements (1992:124ff) argues that the primary institution for wisdom instruction in Israel was the household. Baumann (1998:47ff) also takes into account the suggestions that the school might be the *Sitz im Leben* of the text but she cautions that the existence of such schools has not be proven (cf. Golka 1993:13-14). She argues that although it is difficult to determine the *Sitz im Leben* of the text, an approach to the *Sitz im Buch*, i.e. the literary setting, is more plausible. According to Ceresko (1999:16-18), the family and clan as well as the scribal school (which he regards as a part of the royal court) served as the context for the development and transmission of 'popular' wisdom. Waltke (2004:61-62) proffers a court setting for the origin of Proverbs 1-9 and a home or family setting for its dissemination. Overall, there is no consensus on the *Sitz im Leben* of Proverbs 1-9 (Whybray 1995:71).

[103] Whybray (1996:245ff) demonstrates persuasively that the social and material background of Proverbs 1-9 is the city because the text contains various allusions to the busy life of an Israelite city and that the many descriptions of the houses, streets and squares, and the invitations to dinner parties all point to a city and not to a village life. He points out that the text represents the interests of wealthy, self-satisfied, upper class urban-dwellers. Maier (1998:103) also holds that the authors of Proverbs 1-9 belong to the upper class as the sapiential instruction reveals an upper class perspective.

in the public arena – a place that was ordinarily exclusively reserved for men. Offering a different perspective, Sinnott (2005:57) infers that the setting for the wisdom speeches, i.e. the market places, the city, the pathway and the city walls, suggests a situation that was removed from the cult or royal court setting.

Besides the various approaches highlighted above, theological interpretations of Proverbs 1-9 are widespread. Many of them are based on specific themes identified within the corpus. For instance, whereas Perdue (1977:142-155) examines cultic identifications in Proverbs 1-9, Perdue (1994:77ff) addresses the understanding of creation in wisdom. He states that, "Thematically expressed, wisdom theology centers in creation" (Perdue 1994:326; 1991:12, 36-38 and 2007:48-58)[104]. Although Boström (1990:48) admits the occurrence of creation motifs in Proverbs 1-9, the main thrust of his study is to recognize and describe the qualities used to depict God in the text. He, therefore, goes on to claim that the entire book of Proverbs consistently depicts God as the Supreme God of the world (1990:142).

Another theological interpretation of Woman Wisdom is that which identifies her with God as a nourisher (McKinlay 1996 and Claassens 2004:83-98). In Proverbs 9:1-6, Woman Wisdom sends out an invitation to her lavish banquet that would take place in the house, which she built. Woman Wisdom as a host or provider of food is related to the metaphor of the God who feeds his people - a common image of God in the Old Testament (Ps 104:15; Is 55:1-2). Therefore, Claassens (2004:90) affirms that, "there is a parallel between Wisdom's and God's provision of food". This point will be explored further in Chapter 4.

Without a doubt, many scholars are inclined to use a combination of theories or approaches to analyse the book of Proverbs and, in particular, chapters 1-9 as the instances above suggest. Perhaps the multivalent character of the text (in terms of genre, setting, dating, etc.) makes it difficult for interpreters to approach it from a single

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[104] Murphy (1998b:35-40) also draws on Proverbs 1:20-21; 3:19; 8:4-5, 22-31 and 9:4 to associate 'Lady Wisdom' with creation. See Baumann (1998:57ff) for other theological analyses of Proverbs 1-9 and Woman Wisdom.

well-defined perspective. Yoder (2009), for instance, employs a multiplex approach - literary, exegetical, theological and ethical - to comment on the book of Proverbs[105].

## 3.3 Wisdom as a female character in Proverbs 1-9

In the previous section, we have shown that recent literary analyses of Proverbs 1-9 and, therefore, of Woman Wisdom tend to focus on the use of literary/stylistic devices such as metaphors, personifications or symbolisms to draw out the significance of the text. Before proceeding with the investigation of Woman Wisdom from this angle, however, an identification of the specific poems, which are associated with her, would be in order.

### 3.3.1 Woman Wisdom poems in Proverbs 1-9

As noted earlier, wisdom is personified in some other parts of the Old Testament and the apocryphal books besides the book of Proverbs but our main concern here lies with the book of Proverbs. In addition, the point needs to be taken that wisdom is depicted as a female character in the book and that certain poems in the corpus of Proverbs 1-9 are designated as Wisdom poems or Woman Wisdom poems.

According to Lang (1986:4, 16), the poems in Proverbs 1:20-33; 8; and 9 refer to the female figure of wisdom[106]. Whybray (1994:35-36) identifies three wisdom poems in Proverbs 1:20-33; 3:13-20 and 8:1-36, but he explains that 1:20-33 and 8:1-36 are similar in many respects because they are public speeches by personified Wisdom. He later notes, in addition, that Proverbs 9 opens with personified Wisdom although its style and imagery are different from other wisdom poems and the instructions (Whybray 1994:43-44). For Perdue (1994:79-81), Proverbs 1, 8, and 9 contain Woman Wisdom poems but he sees Proverbs 3:13-20 also as a wisdom poem in which wisdom is personified – as a 'goddess of life' (i.e. in Proverbs 3:16-18). On the other hand, Perdue

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[105] Compare the claims of Camp (1985:11) and Sinnott (2005:3).

[106] Shupak (1993:267) also notes that the personification of wisdom appears in Proverbs 1:20-33; 8 and 9:1-6. See Farmer (1991:28-51); Fontaine (1993:110); Murphy (1995:224); Dell (2009a:238-239) and Yoder (2009:17) for similar identifications. Dell (2006:98-103) refers to the poems as three Wisdom speeches.

(2007:48) recognizes five Woman Wisdom poems - Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-11; 8:12-21; 8:22-31 and 9:1-18; but he later reclassifies the poems into four namely 1:20-33; 3:13-20; 8:1-36 and 9:1-6 + 13-18 (Perdue 2008:91).

It is clear that the classifications above only differ in detail[107]. Essentially, they point in more or less a similar direction and it appears safe to surmise that although some other poems in Proverbs 1-9 allude to wisdom, the poems in which wisdom is unmistakably personified as a female are found, specifically, in Proverbs 1, 8, and 9 with Proverbs 8 containing three poems in a sequel. Therefore, the analysis of the Woman Wisdom poems in this chapter will be restricted to these three chapters in the book of Proverbs.

### 3.3.2 A survey of recent literary readings of Woman Wisdom

That wisdom is seen as a literary character, specifically as a metaphor or personification[108], in the book of Proverbs is an accepted assumption[109]. As noted in Chapter 1 of this study, it is fairly established in many recent studies on wisdom and the book of Proverbs that wisdom is personified as a woman or a female figure in Proverbs 1-9. Sinnott (2005:18) explains that personification can be used as both a rhetorical and a stylistic device and, in the case of texts that deal with personified Wisdom, extensive use of rhetorical devices such as symbolism, metaphor, simile, rhyme, parallelism and repetition are found[110].

In terms of definition, personification, in a sense, is a type of metaphor and for this reason, we shall employ the two terms somewhat loosely and interchangeably in this

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[107] This is not to assume the absence of a few aberrant classifications, e.g. Yoder (2001:3). In Yoder's view, Woman Wisdom is personified in five passages namely 1:20-33; 3:13-18; 4:1-9; 7:4-5 and 8:1-9:6, 11. Additionally, Yoder notes that there are speeches about her in 1:20-21; 3:13-18; 4:4-9; 7:4-5; 8:1-3 and 9:1-3, and by her in 1:22-33; 8:4-36 and 9:4-6, 11.

[108] References to wisdom as a personification or metaphor include Camp (1985:71ff); Murphy (1995:224); Perdue (1995:95; 1997:95); Whybray (1995:74ff); Fox (1997:618, 624); Baumann (1998:61); Sinnott (2005:2, 18-24) and Weeks (2007:71).

[109] However, Fontaine (2002:94) indicates that the meaning assigned to the personification is what varies widely as it has been considered as an abstraction, a hypostasis, a person (e.g. a Jewish woman), a goddess survival, etc.

[110] Sinnott (2005:18) notes that personification is used in other texts of Scriptures than to portray Wisdom (cf. also Shupak 1993:268), e.g. Proverbs 20:1 (wine); Isa 58:8 (light, healing, vindicator, glory of the Lord) and Ps 85:9-11 (steadfast love, righteousness, peace, faithfulness).

discussion. However, for reasons, which would become clearer in the next chapter, we shall later recourse to the use of the word metaphor in the final analysis. Perdue (2007:10), taking up a traditional understanding of metaphor, affirms that:

> … [A] metaphor conjoins two distinct subjects within a sentence, usually called the tenor and its vehicle. The tenor is the principal subject that is conveyed by a vehicle, or secondary subject… Thus the vehicle becomes the means by which the tenor is described, understood and given meaning. In addition, the tenor suggests that the vehicle is, but also is not, something that is real. There is not a literal equation between the two, for invariably there continues to be tension between what a metaphor sets forth and what is true and false.

Perdue (2007:11) explains further that metaphors are ambiguous because they are capable of having a surplus of meaning; they, therefore, reject one-dimensional interpretations[111]. Simply stated, a metaphor expresses a kind of quasi-analogous relationship between two subjects by using one to describe the other.

On the other hand, personification is described as having two main features; it is a rhetorical device and it personalizes the impersonal (Camp 1985:213). In other words, personification attributes human properties to a thing or an abstraction. Furthermore, Camp (1985:214-218) explains that personification functions in three ways. It calls attention to the unity of the subjects, makes generalizations from the multiplicity of human experience, and combines a clear literal subject with a metaphorical predicate. Camp rightly considers personification as a type of metaphor[112].

In Proverbs 1-9, therefore, we see personification being employed as a rhetorical device to attribute female imagery to wisdom, i.e. to portray wisdom as a woman. Murphy (1990:133) asserts that the imagery of Wisdom as a woman is the most striking personification in the Bible and no personification is comparable to that of wisdom:

> … [F]rom a literary-theological point of view, personified Wisdom is simply unequalled in the entire Old Testament. Yes one can be rhapsodic about *rûah*… *hesed*, *šèm*, *ᵉmet*,

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[111] Bosman (2008:77-79) demonstrates that metaphors could be used to reinterpret existing or old traditions in new contexts. When this happens, new expectations for the future are generated.

[112] As a matter of fact, Camp considers the image of the feminine or woman as the root metaphor in the book of Proverbs (1987:46, 55).

and a host of other important biblical concepts. But personified Wisdom outshines them all in her claims – claims that affect God and humans (Murphy 1995:222).

Indeed the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs is strong, especially the personification of Wisdom as a woman in Proverbs 1-9. Nonetheless, in the corpus of Proverbs 1-9, the imagery is not restricted to Wisdom. When scholars reason that the female imagery is a unifying device in Proverbs, it is obvious that that imagery is not restricted to Woman Wisdom since other female metaphors can be found in the book, in particular, in Chapters 1-9.

In this section, therefore, the discussions that follow will focus on the relationship between Woman Wisdom and other female images in the book of Proverbs, specifically, the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9 and the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל of Proverbs 31:10-31. In addition, we shall examine other ways in which scholars have employed the metaphor of Woman Wisdom to interpret the functions of certain women in the narrative texts of the Old Testament.

### 3.3.2.1 Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman

Woman Wisdom figure is commonly contrasted with its rival, Dame Folly or the Strange Woman[113] (אִשָׁה נָכְרִיָּה/זָרָה or *die Fremde Frau)*, equally personified as a woman. Whybray (1994:60) refers to the poems on Woman Wisdom and Dame Folly in Proverbs 9:1-6 and 9:13-18, respectively, as "twin vignettes". Whereas it is not always clear whether there is a distinction between the Dame Folly and the Strange Woman, quite a number of studies have investigated the subject of this Other Woman especially her portrayal vis-à-vis Woman Wisdom. Murphy (1995:225) suggests that in the poems, Wisdom is actually contrasted with "what seems to be a composite of several 'women'"- the Strange Woman and Dame Folly. In the same way, Lang (1986:101) claims that

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[113] She is also referred to as the Outsider Woman (cf. Blenkinsopp 1991), the Wicked Woman (Van der Wouder 1995:245), or the Foreign Woman (Tan 2008:5ff). Texts that have been linked with the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1-9 include 2:6-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-26 and 9:13-18 (Perdue 1977:146; Ceresko 1999:59; Camp 2000:13-18 and Tan 2008:84).

Folly is represented as a harlot. In other words, it is possible to infer that Dame Folly and the Strange Woman may be represented in the same figure[114].

Discussions of this other female figure often centre on her identity, i.e. what the metaphor of the Strange Woman or Dame Folly represents. McKane (1970:286) argues that the character is a paradigm for any defiant and wanton woman who spurns the conventions of the society. For Claudia Camp, the poem in Proverbs 7 shows the Strange Woman "as an archetype of disorder at all levels of existence". She regards the Strange Woman as the antithesis to wisdom, a multivalent figure that may refer to the adulteress, a foreign national who possibly promotes foreign worship[115] or simply the bad women of the community (Camp 1985:119, 286-271)[116].

Washington (1994:216) calls her "the antitype of Wisdom" and claims that the sages of Proverbs 1-9 construe "any woman who wields her sexual powers outside the male-governed arrangements of marriage and family" as "fundamentally Strange" (1994:217). In Washington's view, the Strange Woman posed economic problems to Judean men of the Persian period because of concerns of genealogical lineage, land tenure and cultic

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[114] Maier (1998:97) observes that Lady Folly has the same features and produces the same outcomes for males as the Strange Woman. Tan (2008:101) affirms: "There should be no doubt that the Woman Folly and the Foreign Woman are one and the same. They share the same vocabulary and descriptions. Both invite (9:13; 7:14-21), are said to be loud (9:13; 7:11), possess houses (9:14; 2:18; 5:8; 7:8), appear in the meeting places of the town (9:14; 7:12), and lead to the same consequences of death and the netherworld (9:18; 2:18-19; 5:5; 7:26-27)". Although the evidence proffered here seems weighty, one is still left wondering why they have separate names! Hence, the argument of Murphy (1995:225), noted above, that what we have in those poems might be a composite figure seems more plausible.

[115] Habel (1972:148) compares the Strange Woman to the patron of false religion because the adjective *zar* (strange) is often associated with false gods. Bellis (1998:82fn) also acknowledges that the Strange Woman could represent both foreign gods and illicit sex but the latter image dominates (i.e. in Proverbs 7).

[116] In a subsequent article, Camp (1991:17-31) modifies her position. She asserts that it is possible to analyze the figure of the Strange Woman as a metaphor, i.e. "woman is a stranger"; that the strangeness is not of nationality but of gender. However, in a 2000 study, she submits that Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman are not equal or polar opposites but that the contrast is actually an imperfect one (i.e. because of the presence of the image of Folly). Therefore, the two figures should not be read as absolute polarity but in dialectic tension with each other (Camp 2000:13, 38).

membership, which were critical issues to the post-exilic community (1994:220-221, 231ff)[117]. He argues that:

> This emphasis in Proverbs 1-9 and Ezra-Nehemiah on avoiding women outside the community addresses a concrete threat to the real property holdings of the Judaean collective, because within the patrilineal land tenure system women were capable of inheriting and disposing of property (1994:235).

Thus, Washington (1994:239-241) considers the Strange Woman a real threat to "the Judean Temple economy" since involvement with her was associated not only with the alienation of Judean wealth but with a threat to the preservation of the genealogical integrity of the Judean lineage.

While noting that efforts to identify the אִשָּׁה זָרָה has resulted in her being construed as a foreign woman, i.e. whether in behaviour or ethnically, Cook (1994:458ff) follows up on suggestions that the Strange Woman could be a metaphor for foreign wisdom. Basing his view on the Septuagint, he asserts that the foreign wisdom "can be only one foreign dangerous wisdom, namely, Greek philosophy of the kind encountered in the Hellenistic period" (Cook 1994:474).

Alternatively, Blenkinsopp (1991:462-465) notes that, on the one hand, it is possible to interpret the Strange Woman as a married Israelite woman in search of sexual adventure outside marriage. However, she could also symbolize goddess worshippers, e.g. of Asherah. Blenkinsopp further attempts explains the juxtaposition of the Strange Woman with Woman Wisdom[118]. He argues that, "it is more likely that the figure of Woman Wisdom was conceived as a counter to the Outsider Woman than the contrary", i.e. a reverse mirror image of the Outsider Woman "in the context of the exogamy-

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[117] Like Perdue (1977:154) or Murphy (1995:225), cited above, Washington (1994:229) considers the Strange Woman as a composite figure, "an assortment of warnings against unfamiliar women. Because of the composite nature of her portrait, the proscribed figure has no consistent identity, and sexual slur is only the most prominent of a variety of tactics used to disparage her".

[118] In Blenkinsopp's view, what is remarkable is not the fact of personification in Proverbs 1-9 since some other abstract qualities are equally personified in the text. Rather, the deliberate juxtaposition of Woman Wisdom and the Outsider woman is what is notable (1991:465-466). Newsom (1999:95) states that the poems of Proverbs 7 and 8, respectively, on the Strange Woman and personified Wisdom, form a diptych.

endogamy issue in the early Second Temple" period of Ezra-Nehemiah (Blenkinsopp 1991:466-467)[119].

What is construed as the identity of the Strange Woman and the points of connection between her and Woman Wisdom may vary, it is clear that the Strange Woman was perceived as a threat to the post-exilic male community of Yehud, whether from a social, economic, or religious perspective. From the foregoing, it would be difficult to deny that both the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom share resemblances not only from a literary but also from a socio-historical perspective. Proverbs 1-9 presents the image of the woman both in a complimentary and in a critical way. Two extreme configurations of the feminine are juxtaposed in poignant poetry with the image and invitation of Wisdom dominating in a mysterious, mythopoeic, and mystifying manner.

### 3.3.2.2 Woman Wisdom and the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל[120] of Proverbs 31:10-31

A good number of commentators have posited a correspondence between Woman Wisdom of Proverbs 1-9 and the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל in the alphabetic acrostic poem of 31:10-31 (McCreesh 1985). In fact, Chapter 6 of Camp's (1985) study is devoted to this relationship. Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 are regarded as an *inclusio*, a boundary marker, for the rest of the Proverbs collection[121]. Camp claims that the choice of the feminine imagery as *inclusio* or a bracketing device in Proverbs is not coincidental but intentional, a conscious editorial activity that shows that the poems are tied stylistically and thematically to each other and to the rest of the collection thereby establishing a literary continuity (Camp 1985:188-201)[122].

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[119] For more on Woman Wisdom vis-à-vis Folly and the Strange Woman, read Sinnott (2005:63-68) and Yoder (2009:81-103). For more on the identity of the Strange Woman, see Washington (1994:223-230).

[120] The אֵשֶׁת חַיִל is translated variously as the Woman of Worth (Camp 1985:83; Fontaine 1998:152 and Masenya 2004); Woman of Substance (Yoder 2001; 2003; 2009; Nwaoru 2005); Woman of Valour or Valiant Woman (Wolters 1988); Noble Wife (Hawkins 1996); Capable Woman/Wife (Whybray 1995:86ff; Ceresko 1999:64) and Worthy Wife (Murphy 1990:27), etc.

[121] See also Camp (1985:48, 185) and Yoder (2001:2, 114; 2003:428 and 2009:299).

[122] Hawkins (1996:15) concurs that, "All the feminine imagery in the Book of Proverbs reaches a climax in the final poem. The noble woman is the summation of all that has been said about the good woman or wife".

Whybray (1994:154, 161) relates that, in recent times, the figure of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 is seen as representing or even being identical with personified wisdom. He agrees that there are unmistakable affinities between Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31, which constitute "a major structural feature and provides the book with a framework within which the various intervening elements can take their place" (1994:159; 1995:100-110; cf. Meinhold 1991:26).

Apart from the literary connection that has been recognized between Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31, the identity of the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל has also been a factor in linking the two texts. While some scholars regard the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל simply as a real woman and the content of the poem of 31:10-31 as the description of the ideal woman, mother, or housewife[123], others see her as a literary construct. Yoder (2001:12, 90; 2003:446), for instance, is quite explicit about her stance that the character is "a composite figure of real, albeit exceptional, Persian-period women" but Waltke (2005:519) insists that, "because the feminine portrait in the prologue [i.e. Proverbs 1-9] is symbolic, the feminine portrait in this climactic culmination cannot be real".

However, many scholars seem to regard the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל as the personification of Wisdom herself (McCreesh 1985:44). Wolters (1988:454, 455) pictures her as "wisdom in action" and "a heroine in a full sense of the word". Hawkins (1996:18-19) sees her as the epitome of all that is being taught by Woman Wisdom whose "activities in real life represent concrete applications of the wisdom that Lady Wisdom personifies". Hawkins reasons that the writer or final editor of Proverbs, using a brilliant stroke to delay his most convincing portrait of how to live wisely, has provided "a word picture of a woman who embodies the essence of what it means to live wisely".

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[123] See Camp (1985:91-92); Whybray (1995:110 and Szlos (2000: 97-98) for more discussion.

Both Woman Wisdom and the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל are said to coalesce as one figure, that is, based on lexical and semantic parallels[124] in the passages that describe them (Yoder 2001:12, 91-93; 2003:446; 2009:290). Yoder (2001:93, 101) highlights the wisdom dimension of the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל, noting that interpreters have characterized the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל variously as an allegory of wisdom, an epitome of wisdom or a symbol of wisdom. However, she claims that a socio-economic reading of the Proverbs 31:10-31[125] reverses the trend to show Wisdom as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל and a composite image of real women[126] in the Persian period who were exceptional[127]. She ponders: "If the Woman of Substance is a composite figure of real Persian-period women, and if she and Wisdom essentially coalesce, might not Wisdom also reflect the socio-economic realities of Persian-period women?"

Seeing that Woman Wisdom is said to coalesce with the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל, could one truly argue, from a more theological standpoint, for a perfect contradistinction with respect to the dialectic between the metaphor of Woman Wisdom and that of the אִשָּׁה זָרָה? The story of Ruth readily comes to mind in this case. Outside the book of Proverbs, Ruth is the only other woman in the Old Testament referred to as the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל (Ruth 3:11). How is it then that this same Ruth, a Moabitess, a נָכְרִיָּה or an "outsider"/foreigner in Bethlehem-Judah as she herself testifies (Ruth 2:10) is the person commended as a אֵשֶׁת חַיִל? Is it possible that in Ruth both the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל and the אִשָּׁה נָכְרִיָּה/זָרָה find some

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[124] Brenner (1993:129) agrees that, "The language which describes the Worthy Woman echoes the language employed for describing the female Wisdom figure. The former is in fact Wisdom, the bountiful, the kingpin of family existence".

[125] Masenya (2004:121) has also proposed a fresh African woman's liberation reading of the text of Proverbs 31:10-31. She notes that the study uses a local approach, *Bosadi,* which focuses on the African situation.

[126] Compare Lyons' (1987:238-240) claim that the image of the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל was based on a cultural reality in early Israel, specifically in the monarchical period, which was subsequently used in the text as a model for post-exilic women. Nwaoru (2005:61) also claims that the qualities and activities of the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל show her as an ideal woman but one that is not to be idolised or deified.

[127] It is pertinent to note here that Sinnott (2005:9) argues against the position that the Woman of Worth of 31:10-31 is a concluding portrayal of personified Wisdom and is closely related to 1-9: "I argue that this poem is a portrayal of an earthly woman/wife who is humanly real but idealised… Woman Wisdom (1-9) and the Woman of Worth (31:10-31) respectively open and close the book of Proverbs, but do not merge or even converge as one figure". Nonetheless, Sinnott does not elaborate on the reasons for her stance neither do we find her suggestion persuasive.

convergence? Would it, therefore, be a reasonable assumption to regard Ruth as an embodiment of both Wisdom and Strangeness?

### 3.3.2.3 Woman Wisdom and wise women in Old Testament narratives

It would appear that, so far, Claudia Camp, more than any other scholar, has focused on the portrayal of the feminine in the book of Proverbs vis-à-vis the portrayal of women in Old Testament narratives. At this point, therefore, we shall attempt to summarize her insight on the possible correlations between the two portraits. In her *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Camp (1985:79-145) examines the female roles and images in the Old Testament, which relate to personified Wisdom. She comes up with roles such as wife and mother; lover, harlot, and adulteress; the wise woman, females who use indirect means, and women as authenticators of written tradition[128].

Camp (1985:84-87) claims that two images of the wife recur in biblical literature – the household manager and the counsellor to her husband[129]. Examples of the image of the wife as a household manager include Rachel and Leah, Rebekah, Sarah, Abigail, and the woman of Shunem while examples of the image of the husband's counsellor include Rebekah, Eve, Manoah's wife, Abigail, Bathsheba, Jezebel (of Ahab), Esther, Zeresh (of Haman), Belshazzar's wife (Dan 5:10-12) and Job's wife. Interestingly, Abigail is regarded as the model of a wise woman who is both a household manager and a counsellor to her husband (1 Sam 25). She saves her household from destruction by David's hand but she can also "be seen as a power seeker who correctly reads the signs of change embodied by David and uses her position as Nabal's wife as a means to take advantage of the situation" (Camp 1985:86)[130].

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[128] The details of Camp's analysis of examples of women who performed some of these roles may not be of immediate concern to us here.

[129] Note that Schroer (1995:71ff) recognizes three types of women counsellors in the Old Testament namely 'wise' counselling women, counselling wives, and counselling mothers.

[130] Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993:53) supports Camp's assertion that Abigail is a wise woman (although the Bible does not explicitly refer to her as one). She comments that Abigail, the wife of Nabal, the fool, speaks the language of wise women. Although her wisdom may have been limited to her own domestic affairs, "Abigail does have the gift of eloquence, and a talent for manipulation which wise women have. She too knows how to avoid unnecessary bloodshed".

In further pursuit of her assumption that both the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל and personified Wisdom "provide literary models for women idealized as creative, authoritative individuals, very much in league with men for the well-being of the world in which they live" (Camp 1985:83), Camp comments on the characters of the wise women of Tekoa and Abel[131] (Camp 1985:120ff; 1999:195). She considers the wise woman of Tekoa and the wise woman of Abel "representatives of a non-regular but recurrent leadership role for women in pre-monarchic Israel…" Although the wise woman of Tekoa does not perform an overt leadership role, Camp sees her as exhibiting the skill of a "practiced diplomat" from the way she handled a delicate and dangerous situation[132]. The wise woman of Abel, on the other hand, is shown to demonstrate clear leadership skills in taking initiative that led to the deliverance of her city. Camp regards her as an "agent of sound wisdom" (Camp 1985:121-122)[133].

Some scholars have noted that there are close resemblances between the story of the wise woman of Tekoa and the wise woman of Abel (Brenner 1985:34-37; Gordon 1993:222; Reinhartz 1998:67 and Frymer-Kensky 2002:61-63). As indicated by Camp (1999:195-196; 1981:14-16), the narratives on these two wise women point to the existence and nature of a role of the 'wise woman' in Israel, at least just before and during the early monarchic period. She notes, however, that the role could be regarded as regularized rather than official and that it was firmly rooted in Israel's tribal ethos.

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[131] In the narrative of 2 Samuel 14, Joab King David's nephew and army commander, co-opted the wise woman of Tekoa to go to David, pretend to be a widow woman, and persuade him to recall Absalom from exile. The wise woman of Tekoa succeeded in getting David to commit himself to bring Absalom home based on the judgement he pronounced in favour of her fictitious son who killed his brother in the *mashal* she related to David. The wise woman of Abel (2 Sam 20), on the other hand, challenged Joab who had besieged Abel Beth Maacah in a bid to capture Sheba the son of Bichri, a dissident who had run for cover in Abel. The woman accused Joab of plotting to destroy their city, which was regarded as a "mother in Israel", but Joab explained that he had no such intention but was only after Sheba. The wise woman then consulted with the elders of the city, they threw the head of Sheba across the wall, and Joab called a truce.

[132] Hoftijzer (1970:429, 444) describes the wise woman of Tekoa as a woman who not only knows how to present her case but also how to act in a given situation. He claims that the narrative is not "about a talkative and rambling woman to whom the king shows an extraordinary leniency… we have before us a balanced story about a capable woman, who is able to carry out a very delicate task. Step by step she induces the king to give the wished for ruling, and to confirm it on oath… The story proves that she was a very wise woman indeed".

[133] Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993:51-52) agrees with Camp's view that motherhood plays a major role in the texts referring to the two wise women of 2 Samuel, and that for Camp, "this demonstrates a vision in which motherhood is an important source of female wisdom (cf. Reinhartz 1998:67; see also Camp 1999:201-204 for details of shared motifs of motherhood in the two narratives).

Certain traits in the story point in the direction of the existence and nature of such a role. The first is that both women speak with the voice of authority, often associated with but not exclusive to sages[134]. Secondly, that voice of authority is combined with the use of proverbs (1981:17-18; 1999:197-200). Camp infers that the traits suggest that, "a significant 'wisdom' influence arose outside the courtly setting" (1981:19). If this assumption is correct, then its implication is worth examining in this study. For her part, Brenner (1985:37) considers both women as "professionals, not simply bright individuals", who must have been members of an institution.

In contrast to Camp, Nicol (1982:97) argues that in the story of the wise woman of Tekoa, he considers the woman's wisdom hardly significant when compared to that of Joab. In his view, Joab's wisdom is greater than that of the woman because she was merely commissioned or hired by Joab who simply manipulated her (and King David) by putting words in her mouth. Nicol contends that the wise woman of Tekoa was only an agent and the wisdom that succeeded in changing the king's mind to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem was that of Joab (cf. Whybray 1968:59[135]). Furthermore, although the text refers to the woman as 'wise', Nicol (1982:102fn) claims that, "It is extremely difficult to identify precisely the sense in which this woman might be called 'skilful' or wise… "

Surprisingly, the fact that the text calls the woman אִשָּׁה חֲכָמָה means little to Nicol and, for reasons best known to him, he chooses to undermine the wise woman of Tekoa's role in the narrative. In our view, although Joab wrote the script for this woman to enact, the wise woman of Tekoa herself was an incredibly good actress. Without her skill, Joab's script would have remained lifeless. For Joab to send all the way to Tekoa for this woman when there were probably countless other women in Jerusalem shows that,

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[134] Baumann (1998:72) agrees that, "In the post-exilic period the cultural prestige and authority of women must have been considerable as Camp and Schroer have shown; otherwise the personification like the Wisdom figure would not have made sense".

[135] Hoftijzer (1970:444fn) disagrees with Whybray (1968) that the story is one of Joab's wisdom rather than the woman's. He rightly maintains that, "the author does not present Joab as wise but the woman. Her wisdom is that she was able to handle a very tricky case, a case that remained a real test case for her even if she was fully instructed". For Camp (1981:21; 1999:199), the woman's wisdom lies not just in her ability to "deal handily with a superior" but also in her ability to speak the right word at the right time.

without any doubt, she was a thorough professional who was renowned for her wisdom. Certainly, Nicol could make a case for Joab but, in our judgment, he needs not do so at the expense of the wise woman of Tekoa.[136]

The actions of the two wise women of 2 Samuel above lead Camp to examine, in addition, the stories of other women in the Old Testament who employ trickery, deception, subtleties, indirections, female sexuality, etc., to achieve their goals. She claims that such means represent a social pattern in Israel (Camp 1985:122ff)[137]. Examples of the aggressive use of female sexuality in a good cause by women, who played traditional roles, to achieve their goals included Tamar (Gen 38) and Ruth. Camp shows that the actions of both Tamar and Ruth, who worked creatively not only with their bodies but also their minds, have met with canonical approval. Both are connected with Wisdom, notably, with personified Wisdom (1985:125-146). Camp (1985:139) maintains that, "The consistent use of indirect but effective means by the female characters in the narrative provides a second point of contact with wisdom thought and may, indeed, help elucidate why Wisdom is personified as female"[138].

### 3.3.2.4 Woman Wisdom – a cursory look at Proverbs 1:20-33; 8 and 9:1-6[139]

At this point, we may not provide a detailed exegesis of the Woman Wisdom poems in the book of Proverbs but, in this section, we shall attempt a brief summary of the poems. This would serve as the basis for the subsequent analyses of the women in the Old Testament narratives that we shall consider in the next chapter. It has been noted earlier that, given a few minor differences here and there, previous studies have established, to a reasonable extent, that Proverbs 1:20-33; 8 and 9:1-6 all refer to poems on the figure of Woman Wisdom[140].

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[136] Frymer-Kensky (2002:1963) sees the Wise Woman of Tekoa as the "personification of Lady Wisdom".

[137] She calls it a "literary pattern of 'female initiative on God's behalf by indirect means'" because the means usually served to effect the Deity's purpose (Camp 1985:125).

[138] Camp (1985:141-147) further sees Huldah (2 Kg 22:15) as a possible prophetic imagery behind personified Wisdom while Esther's act of saving the Jews is understood as heroic. She notes that Esther's literary function as a personified representation of Israel's tradition (i.e. the Purim) "provides a possible context into which female Wisdom may also be set and her relationship to the Proverb collection better understood" (1985:146).

[139] See the Woman Wisdom poems in Appendix A at the end of the study.

[140] For detailed analyses of these poems, see Farmer (1991); Waltke (2004) and Yoder (2009).

In the first poem, Woman Wisdom is introduced by another (1:20-21) but in 1:22-33, she begins to speak for herself in the first person. A similar pattern is found in Proverbs 8 where Woman Wisdom is first introduced in 8:1-3 and then she begins to speak for herself all the way to the end of the poem. Farmer (1991:51) notes that there are many parallels between 1:20-22 and 8:1-3 (Whybray 1994:38). Indeed, both poems (1:20-33 and 8) are found to be similar in many ways especially since, in them, Wisdom speaks for herself; she speaks uniquely and authoritatively. However, Proverbs 9 equally points to resemblances with the other two. In the three poems, Woman Wisdom throws out an open invitation, calling out in a loud voice to whosoever is willing to listen and heed her voice, especially the simple. Her audience consists of the masses, the gullible, the uncommitted and untutored, as well as fools (Waltke 2004:395-396). According to Farmer (1991:29), she cries out in the manner of an Old Testament prophet. In her action here, Perdue (1994:85; 1997:95-98; 2008:111) sees Wisdom as a peripatetic teacher in search of students. Nonetheless, Wisdom is not just regarded as a teacher but also a counsellor.

The three poems also describe a shared setting for Wisdom's proclamation. Wisdom cries out in public places – the city gates, city squares, streets, highways, marketplaces, and highest places of the city (1:20-21; 8:3; 9:3). For Camp (1987:56), all the poems have a "metaphorical plot", and Lang (1986:113) affirms that the Woman Wisdom motif establishes the internal unity of the individual poems and relates them to one another. Despite the similarities that 1:20-33 and 8 share, both poems also exhibit distinctive traits. Whybray (1994:40) notes that whereas in 1:20ff, Wisdom's tone was reprimanding with not many positive or encouraging words to say, chapter 8 is different. Again, whereas Proverbs 8 comes immediately after the poem on the Strange Woman in Proverbs 7 and it is held in poetic tension to it, Proverbs 9 juxtaposes the poem on Woman Wisdom in vv. 1-6 with Dame Folly in 9:13-18.

Proverbs 8, which some scholars regard as a hymn of self-praise[141] (Waltke 2004:392), is the longest of the Woman Wisdom poems and is said to consist of three related poems (1-11; 12-21 and 22ff). In 8:15-16, Woman Wisdom dispenses instructions to kings and nobles issuing righteous decrees (Perdue 1994:88). Further, 8:22-31 describes Woman Wisdom's primordial existence. She recounts her existence before creation and as a witness of creation in vv. 22-26 with great rhetoric (Lang 1986:77). Based on the verb *qanani*, (which has proved problematic for translators), some scholars regard Wisdom in this poem as an offspring of YHWH (Perdue 1994:90, 94; Schäfer 2002:26)[142]. For Perdue (1994:326ff), Wisdom's link to creation in this poem (and elsewhere) and its connection to the divine are crucial to its theological function.

Proverbs 9:1-6, on the other hand, is the shortest of the three poems and it depicts a unique feature of Woman Wisdom – she owns a mansion, what Lang calls "a patrician house" that is constructed on seven pillars. She then organizes a lavish banquet and invites young men to her seven-pillared house (Lang 1986:87, 93-95; Perdue 1994:79; Dell 2009a:239). She is portrayed as a woman of affluence and influence from the description of the banquet she prepares and the fact that she has servants at her disposal (Yoder 2009:104). Although, this woman's discourse is clearly set in the public arena, as many commentators have noted, it is remarkable that Wisdom equally has her locus in the house as 9:1-2 indicates. In those two verses, Woman Wisdom's activities take place in that seven-pillared mansion, which she built.

Of special interest to us in these poems is the way Wisdom is presented in the poems we have just examined. Wisdom is depicted as a character – in a sense, as a character in the script of life. She is first introduced before she appears on the scene. She then begins to address her audience but as if her introduction at the opening of the poems were insufficient, she begins a self-introduction in 8:12ff. She intimates the audience with her abode (she dwells with prudence), origin, qualities, roles and divine connection.

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[141] While Lang (1986:72) depicts Woman Wisdom as boasting of her intellectual capacities, her moral qualities and her power in the poem, Farmer (1991:51, 52) says she is merely listing her credentials (i.e. in vv. 22-31).
[142] Some other scholars disagree; they settle for 'possessed me' as the translation of the ambiguous Hebrew *qanani* instead of 'created me', 'begot me' or acquired me' (Farmer 1991:53-54).

In those poems, we have a 'life character', a formidable role player who has a say in the society, a significant voice that cannot be ignored or wished away. Her influence from the royal courts to the grassroots is pervasive, her presence at home, larger than life.

It is also salient to note that Woman Wisdom poems unveil the many-sided character of this enigmatic figure. Sinnott (2005:175-176) sees her as a "supple" and "flexible" character whose personifications "are coloured by their settings". She writes:

> Interestingly, Wisdom writers maintained the identity of the Wisdom figure even as each reworked it in new settings and endowed it with new meaning. The *flexibility* exercised by these authors is evident in the way Wisdom functions in an array of roles. She witnesses to creation (Prov 8:22-23)… *a teacher* speaking in the marketplace (Prov 1:20-21), and in the highways (Prov 8:1-2); a host in her "house of seven pillars" (Prov 9:1-6)… (Sinnott 2005:176, *italics added*).

The view of Wisdom as a "multifaceted" character (Baumann 1998:44ff; Claassens 2004:84 and Sinnott 2005:171), which performs multifaceted roles, specifically, the roles of a teacher, a host and a builder, calls for a broader understanding of wisdom. In the chapters that follow, the lives of two Old Testament characters will be examined in view of these roles of Woman Wisdom as a teacher and as a builder.

In the light of the ways that Woman Wisdom's aroma has been shown to permeate other texts in Old Testament narratives in the previous sub-section, is it possible that this metaphor could have greater far-reaching influence on other characters of the Old Testament narratives that have no one to sing their praise? Could Woman Wisdom sing their praise in the same manner she has done for herself? We shall attempt to answer these questions in the next two chapters.

## 3.4 Summary of chapter

First, various issues concerning Proverbs 1-9 have been examined in this chapter, i.e. in terms of the origin of personified wisdom as well as the dating, structure, composition and approaches to Proverbs 1-9. Although the varied arguments on the origin of personified Wisdom remain inconclusive, recent scholarship tends to favour a post-exilic

(sixth to third century BCE) dating for the final redaction of Proverbs (1-9). It has been established that Proverbs 1-9 is widely accepted as a unified composition and the work of a single author whether from a structural, formal, metaphorical/symbolic or mythical viewpoint. Furthermore, the figure of Woman Wisdom and the unit of Proverbs 1-9 have been analyzed using various approaches such as the historical, literary, sociological, socio-historical, and theological.

Secondly, the chapter has focused on the character of Woman Wisdom in the Wisdom poems of Proverbs 1-9. A brief survey of recent literature on this figure shows an emphasis on the literary character of Wisdom as a metaphor. The female imagery is seen as a unifying device not only in the unit but also in the whole book of proverbs. The imagery of Woman Wisdom is examined, therefore, alongside other female imageries in the book of Proverbs namely of the Strange Woman/Dame Folly and the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. Since Woman Wisdom and the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל are said to coalesce as one figure, we have argued that a case for a perfect contrast between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman would seem precarious seeing that Ruth, a strange Moabite woman, is also designated by the Old Testament as a אֵשֶׁת חַיִל.

Before concluding the chapter with a brief analysis of the Woman Wisdom poems in Proverbs 1-9, Woman Wisdom is considered in relation to some women designated as wise in the Old Testament such as the Wise Woman of Tekoa and the Wise Woman of Abel. In the next two chapters, our contention will be that besides these women, who are clearly designated or recognized as wise, some other women, whose mention can be overlooked easily, do also demonstrate wisdom traits. In Chapter 4, therefore, we shall turn to the first of these women – Deborah, Rebekah's nurse.

# CHAPTER 4

# THE FIRST DEBORAH – THE NURTURING מֵינֶקֶת ?

## 4.1. Chapter introduction

In the last chapter, an attempt was made to investigate recent literary studies on Woman Wisdom and especially the connections between the figure and certain other female characters in the Old Testament. In this chapter and the next, we shall examine two female characters from the books of Genesis and 1 Chronicles and their importance in the texts that mention them namely Deborah (Genesis 35:8) and Sheerah (1 Chr 7:24). It is worth mentioning here that Meyers (2000:10) notes that, "The two greatest concentrations of female figures occur in Genesis (thirty-two named and forty-six unnamed women) and in 1 Chronicles (forty-four named women and fifteen unnamed women". Meyers explains that the amount of genealogical materials in both books, and the fact that Genesis consists of a series of family stories account for the high presence of women in the books. It is striking that both Deborah and Sheerah happen to surface in Genesis and 1 Chronicles, respectively.

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[143] Many thanks to Hans de Wit for pointing out this poem. The complete poem is available in Appendix B.

Our hypothesis is based on the assumption that there are hints (as subtle as they may appear) in the fragments of the two women's lives that point to the operation of some underlying wisdom. We shall argue, therefore, that both women can be seen as representing archetypes of wise heroines in the Old Testament. Subsequently, a case for a connection between each of the women and Woman Wisdom will be made.

As noted in the first chapter, it may appear that reconstructing the lives of these two women will depend heavily on arguments from silence. In another sense, it is possible to assume that there are gaps in the narratives[144], which can be filled. In other words, even though one may not be able to draw hard conclusions because of the paucity of material pertaining to these women, it is possible to draw analogical inferences from the narrative context and from the lives of other related characters in the Old Testament, whether from a literary or theological viewpoint. Furthermore, the task could also be approached by asking some questions that will provoke answers for (African) women today, in particular, women who have been or are being marginalized. It is possible to ask questions that could provoke interest in these women in a way that could create space for them in our liturgies and for their memories in our hearts.

This chapter will begin with a brief overview of the history of interpretation of the text on Deborah and its exegetical analyses. The exegesis will integrate the analyses of the literary, the geographical and the socio-cultural contexts as well as the theological importance of the text before, finally, considering the possible links with wisdom.

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[144] For now, the term narrative is used loosely to refer to the genre of the text in which Sheerah is found. A clearer definition will be provided as the discussion unfolds. Again, whereas we refer to Deborah as a character because she is mentioned in a narrative, Sheerah is considered a character even though she is mentioned within the genre of genealogy. The criteria for labeling her as a character will be explained in the course of our exposition.

## 4.2 The First Deborah[145]

> *Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below*
> *Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth (Genesis 35:8).*

וַתָּמָת דְּבֹרָה מֵינֶקֶת רִבְקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית־אֵל תַּחַת הָאַלּוֹן וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת: פ

The verse quoted above constitutes a part of what is traditionally called the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:12-35:29) or what some feminist theologians have re-captioned as the Rebekah cycle (Steinberg 1984:179; 1993:87ff.). Whenever the name Deborah is mentioned in connection with the Bible, the image that pops up is that of the famous judge, prophetess and warrior of Judges 4-5. Few people seem to be aware of the Deborah of "the book of beginnings". However, in this treatise, the spotlight will be on the First Deborah.

Our question is, is there not something about this "ordinary" wet-nurse that made the whole household of Israel stand still at her death and mourn? So great was the mourning and the weeping at Deborah's funeral, that the oak under which she was buried was named 'the oak of weeping". What was it then about this everyday woman that stood her out among other 'everyday women of the Old Testament' and earned her a mention in death? Out of approximately five dozen burials/reburials of individuals or groups of people mentioned in the Old Testament, Deborah's is the third. Further, except for Jezebel's (whose remains only could be found for burial in 2 Kings 9:35), the Old Testament mentions the burial of only five women (all of them in Genesis) namely Sarah (Gen 23:19), Deborah (Gen 35:8), Rachel (Gen 35:19) Rebekah and Leah (Gen

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[145] For several years after this researcher was struck by this Deborah, she referred to her as the "Other Deborah". However, after much reflection, it was concluded that justice was not being done to the memory of this woman, as the "other" tends to suggest some form of inferiority to the first referent. For the reason that the expression, "other," credits the Deborah of Judges with a kind of pseudo-originality in a situation which, in fact, antecedence of the name existed. The researcher, therefore, reneged and renamed this Deborah of Genesis, the "First Deborah," which truly is what she is – not just to distinguish her from the Deborah of Judges but also to honour her primacy in the Old Testament text.

49:31). It would be interesting to discover why in death this "ordinary maid" was able to rub shoulders with women of nobility[146].

In the sub-sections, which follow, a brief survey of scholarship on Genesis will be offered, followed by the delimitation of the scope of the pericope and its verse-by-verse analysis. The verse-by-verse analysis as well as an analysis of intertextual references and allusions in the text (specifically, in 35:8) will provide data for evaluating the geographical, socio-cultural and theological contexts of the material.

### 4.2.1 A brief overview of research history of Genesis

The book of Genesis is the first of the Old Testament's collection of texts known as the Pentateuch[147], i.e. Genesis-Deuteronomy, but Von Rad (1963:13) sees the book as part of a connected narrative from Genesis to Joshua, which he calls the Hexateuch. For the most part, the historical-critical study of Genesis (including the other books of the Penta-Hexateuch) is preoccupied with the study of the pre-history of the texts. Since Julius Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis (DH), much discussion took place about the relationship between the Genesis sources and their dating (Wenham 1987: xxvii). Source critics of the Pentateuch, particularly of the book of Genesis, up to the 1970s and early 1980s focused on identifying the different layers in the texts according to the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Deuteronomistic (D) and the Priestly, (P) writers (Von Rad 1963:21; Speiser 1964: xx-xxxiv and Wenham 1987: xxviii-xxxii)[148]. The critics assumed that the compositional history of the book could be determined by uncovering the various layers in the present text using literary and historical criteria (Mathews 1996:63)[149].

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[146] Jehu commanded that Jezebel's carcass be buried because she was a king's daughter (2 Kgs 9:34). Besides that is the fact that she was the king's wife.

[147] For the relationship between Genesis and the Pentateuch, see Mathews (1996:42-51).

[148] Von Rad (1963:23) notes that, "The oldest source documents are known as 'Yahwist' (J) and 'Elohist' (E) because of their distinctive use of the name for God. The Yahwist may be dated ca.950, the Elohist perhaps one or two centuries later. Deuteronomy (D) is literarily distinct; we have it in the book of Deuteronomy, but Deuteronomistic additions and revisions occur also in the Book of Joshua. The latest source is the Priestly document (P); its actual composition (without the later additions, of course) falls in the postexilic period, ca. 538-450".

[149] Duane Garret provides an overview of the DH theory noting that scholars have challenged most of the presuppositions on which the theory was founded including the criteria for source analysis such as the notion of

Nonetheless, the dating of the book of Genesis remains on a conjectural level. Scholars generally tend to date the book based on the DH theory but many prefer to date the different components of the book separately (Wenham 1987: xlii-xlv). Von Rad (1963:24) admits that the dates are simply guesses and refer only to the completed literary composition. Alternatively, Rendsburg (1986:119) argues that the mass of evidence (i.e. historical allusions, various indications of the book's antiquity, the literary style, and the linguistic data) clearly supports a redaction for Genesis during the United Kingdom - the Davidic-Solomonic era.

Overall, scholars seem to skirt around the question of the dating of the book of Genesis. Some approach the problem indirectly by considering the date of the setting or of the events. For example, Garret (1991:235-7) views the setting of the composition of Genesis as the product of the period of the exodus sojourn rather than the Babylonian exile. Commenting also on the use of the term, the patriarchal period, Westermann (1985:74) concedes that, "In the present state of scholarship, it is not possible to mark off and compute a particular time as 'the patriarchal period'". It is a period before the Israelite tribes became sedentary but it cannot be determined for sure.

In terms of structure, Genesis is traditionally divided into two broad parts, 1-11 and 12-50, referred to as primal history and patriarchal history, respectively (Westermann 1987: xi; Von Rad 1963:21)[150]. The widespread view is that the patriarchal narratives are composed of three long and distinct but connected cycles (Wenham 1994:322) namely the Abraham cycle (Gen 12:1-25:11), the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:12-35:29)[151], and the Joseph cycle (Gen 37-50).

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different uses of the divine names, Yahweh and Elohim; the use of repetition, parallel accounts, and redundancy; style, etc (1991:13-33). However, his overall conclusion is that, as a starting point for continued theological research, the DH "is dead" (1991:13).

[150] There are several variations of the terms for the two divisions. Arnold (2009:19) refers to the two divisions as primeval history and ancestral narratives (cf. Speiser's 1964: lii primeval history and story of the patriarchs and his observation that primeval history provides the universal setting for what could be regarded as the early history of a particular people; Skinner 1910 uses the terms primeval history and patriarchal history).

[151] Scholars who talk of a Jacob-Esau rather than a Jacob Cycle (e.g. Westermann 1985:72) would take chapter 36 as the conclusion of the cycle (i.e. Gen 25:12-36:43).

It is also a fairly common practice to identify the sections in both parts of the book based on the use of the phrase, the *tōlēdōt* of, which some scholars regard as a unifying formula for the diverse materials in the composition[152]. Wenham (1987: xxii), for example, claims that there are ten sections in Genesis with the heading, 'the *tōlēdōt* of'[153] but for Mathews (1996:27-28), the *tōlēdōt* phrases divide the book into twelve sections (1:1-2:3; 2:4-4:26; 5:1-6:8; 6:9-9:29; 10:1-11:9; 11:10-26; 11:27-25:11; 25:12-18; 25:19-35:29; 36:1-8; 36:9-37:1 and 37:2-50:26). However, there is no consensus on using the *tōlēdōt* phrases to divide the book (Mathews 1996:28)[154].

While the texts in Genesis are varied, the materials in Genesis 1-11 are regarded as being made up of largely genealogies and Genesis 12-50 as mainly narratives and enumerative texts, which include itineraries and genealogies, as well as promises (Westermann 1985:36). Westermann (1985:50-54) discusses the various categories scholars have placed narratives in Genesis – folk story *(Sage)*, etiological folk story, tale *(Märchen)*, legend, and myth[155].

On content, Wenham (1994: xxi) notes that, "The Genesis stories are essentially stories about family life: birth, rivalry between wives and siblings, marriage, and death are the dominant interests of the stories". This view supports Westermann's (1985:28) claim

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[152] See Mathews (1996:41) for further details. He claims that the formula links a preceding material with the subsequent one in Genesis.

[153] See also Arnold (2009:6).

[154] Garret (1991:123) provides a structural division of the book of Genesis based on the major cycles within the book:

**The Structure of Genesis**

| Prologue | Primeval History | 1:1-11:26 |
|---|---|---|
| Transition | Genealogy | 11:27-32 |
| Threat | The Abraham Cycle | 12:1-25:11 |
| Transition | Genealogy | 25:12-18 |
| Threat | The Jacob Cycle | 25:19-35:22b |
| Transition | Genealogy | 35:22c-36:40 |
| Threat | The Joseph Cycle | 37:1-46:7 |
| Transition | Genealogy | 46:8-27 |
| Resolution | Settlement in Egypt | 46:28-50:26 |

[155] Coats (1983:5-10) identifies the narrative categories in the book of Genesis (and in the Old Testament as a whole) as saga, tale, novella, legend, history, report, fable, etiology and myth.

that the narratives have "the form of a family history over three generations". The theological themes in the book of Genesis include patriarchal promises (especially of land), which run through the patriarchal narratives; God as creator; human life; sin; civilization; covenant and revelation (Von Rad 1963:21; Mathews 1996:54-63 and Arnold 2009:18-19).

## 4.2.2 Delineation and choice of pericope

In the discussion, which follows, the focus will be on Genesis 35:1-15, in particular, on verse 8. The choice of Genesis 35:8 is informed by its striking position in the narrative that relates Jacob's itinerary. Commentators have wondered for a long time why this verse features in the narrative and their various remarks on the placement of the verse are worth pointing out. If we begin with Skinner (1910:425), who regards the notice about Deborah as perplexing in many ways, the array of comments on verse 8 is indeed worthy of note.

In Stigers' (1976:262) view, the verse is "most intrusive in the train of thoughts". Rendsburg (1984:364) admits that, "The commentators have traditionally struggled with Gen. xxxv 8" and Westermann (1985:552) claims that, "V.8 is difficult [*schwierig*] because it does not fit the context…" Sarna (1989:241) sees the account of the passing of Deborah in the verse as puzzling and the intrusive nature of the verse even more perplexing, while Fokkelman (1991:235fn) affirms that "v.8 is overbearing, we do not know what to do with it". Similarly, Janzen (1993:140) regards the burial of Deborah as "tantalizingly unexplained", and Wenham (1994:325) considers the record of Deborah's death strange. For Hamilton (1995:378) and Fretheim (1994:586), verse 8 is "a curious note" and the presence of the material at that point is puzzling to many commentators. Cotter (2003:259) considers Genesis 35:8 as a frame break or an intrusion in the narrative and Roth (2003:204) claims that, "the reappearance of the wet nurse in Genesis 35 is troubling in the chronology of the narrative". For his part, Mathews (2005:60) regards the mention of Deborah in that narrative as surprising.

From the range of adjectives used to describe the presence of verse 8 in Genesis 35 above (such as strange, intrusive, most intrusive, overbearing, perplexing, curious, puzzling, tantalizingly unexplained, troubling, surprising, etc), Fokkelman's confession that commentators do not know what to do with the verse is indeed understandable. The question is, 'what makes Genesis 35:8 appear so intractable?' It is of interest to us to investigate the factors that may be accountable for the inscrutability of the material in the context of Genesis 35 below.

### 4.2.3 Close reading[156] of Genesis 35:1-15

> **Genesis 35:1-15**
> [1]Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."
> [2]So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.
> [3]Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone."
> [4]So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem.
> [5]Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.
> [6]Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan.
> [7]There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.
> **[8]Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth.**
> [9]After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him.
> [10]God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.
> [11]And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body.
> [12]The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."
> [13]Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him.
> [14]Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.
> [15]Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel[157].

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[156] The definition of close reading that will be applied here is in line with Cline (1983:33-34). Cline regards close reading as a careful appraisal "of all aspects of a text's language, style, metaphors, images and their relation to one another" in a way that brings into sharp focus the details of the text without ignoring the countertexts that may lurk in the background.

[157] In the exegesis, relevant text critical notes will be added in footnotes.

In the preceding chapter, Genesis 34, the sons of Jacob, led by Simeon and Levi, had just wiped out an entire city in a horrendous act because Shechem the son of Hamor, the ruler of the land, had violated their sister, Dinah whom Leah bore to Jacob. The men of the city were killed in cold blood in the night after being circumcised as part of the terms and conditions for Hamor to marry Dinah. Jacob then had to depart from the city of Shechem with his household for fear that the neighbouring cities would move against them in vengeance.

[35:1] This verse appears to be connected to the narrative in chapter 34, at least syntactically, with the use of the conjunction (the *waw* consecutive) and the verb, to say, וַיֹּאמֶר, at the beginning of the sentence. In that preceding chapter, there was not at all any mention of God. Now there was trouble and Jacob had to flee from Shechem, therefore, God came into the picture. He did not say anything, good or bad, about the incident at Shechem but rather he simply gave Jacob certain instructions. Jacob was to arise, go up to Bethel, stay there, and build God an altar there. The verb עלה (cf. verse 3) is generally associated with pilgrimage by commentators[158]. God reminded Jacob that the altar to be built was not to just any god but to the same God who had earlier appeared to him when he was in trouble and was fleeing from his brother Esau. He was to go up to Bethel[159], literally, the House of God, and remain there; he was to stop running.

[35:2] Verse 2 is again connected with verse 1 with the use of the same conjunction and the verb, to say, וַיֹּאמֶר, which was used in the latter. Here it is Jacob's turn to dole out instructions, and, this time, they were directed at his family and all the other members of his company. Jacob commanded his people to do away with the images (i.e. of foreign gods, cf. Josh 24:14)[160], which they had in their possession, purify themselves, and

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[158] Von Rad (1963:331) asserts that in the Old Testament, the verb עלה often means 'to go on a pilgrimage' (1 Sam 1:3; Ps 122:4). See also Davidson (1979:199); Brueggemann (1982:280); Westermann (1985:550; 1987:234); Sarna (1989:239); Fokkelman (1991:232) and Wenham (1994:323).

[159] Jacob is being reminded of the vow he had earlier made to God in Bethel in Genesis 28:20-22 (Skinner 1910:423; Westermann 1985:550).

[160] Speiser (1964:270) notes that these images were probably brought with them from Haran (Gen 31:19, 30) but Sarna (1989:239, 240) believes that the images could also have been part of the loot from Shechem.

change their clothes. Apparently, these commands were not part of God's instructions to Jacob; they were probably Jacob's own way of carrying out the divine instructions. In other words, for them to be able to do God's bidding, they first had to make themselves ritually clean – clean from all the contamination of the foreign gods, clean from all the defilement occasioned by the events in Shechem, clean inwardly and outwardly.

[35:3] In verse 3, the *waw* consecutive is again used to continue Jacob's instructions. Here Jacob is heard reiterating God's earlier instructions in verse 1 to the people. In verse 1, the instruction was specifically for him but in verse 3, Jacob brought all the people in his company into the picture. He seemed to say, 'Although I am going to build God an altar by myself[161], I cannot leave you here; you must all go up to Bethel with me. God has been faithful to me all the way; He answered me in the time of my distress. It is now my turn to obey him and build Him an altar'. Jacob, however, did not rehearse the instruction to remain in Bethel. Perhaps he had no intention of obeying that part of the command.

[35:4] The people were more than willing to comply with Jacob's commands as they handed him not only their foreign gods but their jewelleries[162]. They seemed to say to him, 'You have asked us to put away these things but we would rather hand them over to you to do whatever is necessary on our behalf. That way, you will be sure they are truly destroyed'. Thus, Jacob buried[163] (hid) those things under the oak (or terebinth) tree near Shechem. Could they also have wanted to put the nasty events at Shechem behind them - to bury the memories of the rape and the shame, the murders, the guilt, the looting and the hatred under the oak?

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[161] Note, however, that the Septuagint (LXX) of verse 3 uses the first person plural pronoun to read 'where **we** will build an altar' (Westermann 1985:548 and Hamilton 1995:373). However, we shall settle for the first person singular reading of the MT because verse 7 uses the third person singular pronoun to report the building of the altar - *'he built an altar',* not 'they built an altar'.

[162] Many exegetes agree that the images and the rings/earrings represented the objects of idolatrous worship and superstition (Skinner 1910:423 and Westermann 1985:551).

[163] Alter (2004:195) points out that the verb טמן that is used for 'bury' here is different from the one used for the burial of a human body, קבר, as in vv. 8, 16 and 29 (Hamilton 1995:375).

[35:5][164] After Jacob buried the images and the rings, the people set out on their journey and divine terror[165] came upon the neighbouring cities; they were restrained by fear. They could not pursue Jacob and his company. The fear of what the sons of Jacob did to Shechem must have inspired that fear of God in the people.

[35:6-7] Jacob eventually arrived safely in Bethel, he and all the people with him. There was no incident in the way. What served as divine terror to the people of the land was divine protection for Jacob and his company. However, we are reminded that formerly Bethel actually had a different name – Luz (Gen 28:19). On getting to Bethel, that same place where he had first encountered the Divine, Jacob finally fulfilled not only his vow but also God's commands. He built an altar to God and then called the name of the place (the מָקוֹם, cf. Gen 12:6; 28:11, 17, 19), El-Bethel[166], that is, the God of Bethel. Jacob confirmed that it was the same God who revealed himself (at Bethel) when he was fleeing from his brother Esau. Fleeing from Esau must have been such a pivotal experience in Jacob's life that even God referred to it (v.1). However, as unforgettable as Jacob's pain and distress must have seemed, it was nothing compared to the revelation of God. Bethel became to him not just a reminder of anguish but a place of divine encounter. Just as the two events are replayed clearly in the mind of Jacob (v.7), the same way did they remain indelible in the mind of God.

**[35:8]** Up to this point in the narrative, the only characters mentioned by name are God and Jacob (i.e. apart from the reference to Esau who was not present in the story). Without any notice, another named character, this time a female, crops into the picture. Deborah (meaning 'a bee'), whose name was tied to another female, Rebekah, was suddenly introduced – not in life but in death. She must have been among "all the people who were with him" (i.e. with Jacob in v.2 and v.6). Earlier in Genesis 24:59, it

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[164] Certain commentators believe that verse 5 is redactional, that it actually serves as the closing verse for Genesis 34 (Skinner 1910:423 and Westermann 1985:551).

[165] The Hebrew noun for terror in חִתַּת אֱלֹהִים in this verse, as opposed to the verb, is a *hapax legomenon* (Hamilton 1995:376).

[166] The LXX and Vulgate read 'Bethel' (Hamilton 1995:377).

was mentioned that Rebekah's nurse[167] went off with her from Haran to her husband Isaac's house but the name of this nurse was not given. In this verse, her identity is revealed. Deborah was the name of Rebekah's nurse. Not only was her name given, the oak under which she was buried also received a name - אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת, the Oak of Tears/Weeping. So great and so unforgettable must have been the weeping under that oak tree that the oak became 'christened' as a result. The oak was located below Bethel, that place of encounter.

[35:9-12] From verse 9, the narrative swings back to God and Jacob. God shows up again (perhaps as he had done earlier in Genesis 32:24ff). In this revelation, God did two things – he changed Jacob's name to Israel[168] (v.10) and he blessed him (vv.9, 11-12). Verse 10 calls to mind Genesis 32:28 where the angel told Jacob that, henceforth, he would be called Israel. in Genesis 35:11-12, God spelt out clearly the substance of the blessing – fruitfulness and increase (i.e. including royal offspring) as well as the promise of land (Gen 17:1-8).

[35:13-15] When God had finished speaking to Jacob, God departed from the place (cf. Gen 17:22 where God did the same after speaking to Abraham). In that very place, Jacob did four things after God's departure – he set up a מַצֵּבָה (pillar of stone), he offered libation on it, he poured oil on it, and he again called the name of the place Bethel. Perhaps he acted in this manner, not only to commemorate[169] the occasion but also to immortalize the spot where God appeared to him, changed his name, introduced himself as the *El-Shaddai*, and blessed him.

Naturally, the narrative continues, for Jacob's journey continued. However, death struck Jacob's company again. Rachel, who travailed in labour for her second son, died and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (35:16-19). After Israel pitched his tent in the

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[167] In Genesis 35:8 [24:59], the Hebrew word מֵינֶקֶת, which is translated as 'nurse' in the NIV, is rendered *pydwwgt* = Grk. *paidagôgos* in both the Targum Pseudo Jonathan and Targum Neofiti and is translated variously as foster-mother, governess, tutor (Maher 1992:87, 120; McNamara 1992:126, 166).

[168] In v.10, two phrases, '*your name is Jacob*' and '*so he named him Israel*' are missing in the LXX (cf. Westermann 1985:548, 553).

[169] See Sarna (1989:242) and Alter (2004:196).

land, Reuben went on to his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel got to know of it. The chapter ends with the genealogy of the sons of Jacob and their mothers, and another death – the death of Jacob's father, Isaac.

### 4.2.4 Literary consideration of Genesis 35:8 (as part of 35:1-15)

In this section, a more detailed analysis of Genesis 35:8 will be attempted in terms of the literary structure, context and content.

#### *4.2.4.1 Literary structure and type*

The text of Genesis 35:1-15 is found in the context of a broader composition that is traditionally identified as the Jacob Cycle (or Rebekah Cycle) within the ancestral or patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50). Genesis 35 as a whole is held to be the end of the Jacob Cycle. For Brueggemann (1982:280), the seemingly disparate materials in the chapter serve as closure to the Jacob narrative. Sarna (1989:239, 245) also claims that the chapter "completes the cycle of independent traditions about Jacob", while the genealogical list of Jacob's sons in 35:22b-26 is a fitting conclusion to the Jacob Cycle (cf. Wenham 1994:328). Wenham (1994:321) provides an outline for the chapter thus: v.1 divine call to go to Bethel; vv.2-8 Jacob's disobedience; vv.9-12 reaffirmation of the promises; vv.13-15 Jacob's worship at Bethel; vv.16-20 birth of Benjamin/death and burial of Rachel; vv.21-22a Reuben's shameful act; vv.22b-26 Jacob's sons and vv.27-29 death and burial of Isaac by his two sons[170].

It should be noted that, whereas some commentators are inclined to lump verse 8 with either the preceding verses (Wenham 1994:321 and Hamilton 1995:376-379) or the verses just immediately before (and after) it (Von Rad 1963: 330; Stigers 1976:262 and Brueggemann 1982:280), others treat the verse as a separate unit (Coats 1983:238ff; Westermann 1985:552 and Fokkelman 1991:235). Westermann (1987:244) considers

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[170] Brueggemann (1982:280-287), on the other hand, connects the chapter to the next one thereby regarding Genesis 35:1-36:43 as a unit. His outline is as follows: 35:1-4 (a cultic pilgrimage to Bethel); 35:5-15 (a theophany at Bethel); 35:16-21 (the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin); 35:22-26 (the sons of Jacob); 35:27-29 (the death of Isaac); and 36 (the genealogy of Esau). For Coats (1983:236-246), the chapter contains seven units namely "35:1-7 (Bethel *Hieros Logos* J); 8 (Deborah death report); 9-15 (Bethel *Hieros Logos* P); 16-20 (Rachel death report); 21-22a (Rebellion report); 22b-26 (Name list of the sons of Jacob) and 27-29 (Isaac death report)" [*sic*].

verse 8 as independent of both verses 1-7 and 9-12, (15), noting that it "would be quite appropriate, however, before verse 16; in both form and content, verses 8 and 16-20 belong together".

We find Coats' analysis of Genesis 35:8 as an independent unit particularly instructive (Coats 1983:238) as it allows us to probe the verse more deeply. He provides an outline for the unit as shown below:

### "DEBORAH DEATH REPORT, 35:8"[171]

***Structure***

| | |
|---|---|
| I. Report | 8a |
|    A. Death | 8aα |
|    B. Burial | 8aβ |
| II. Place-Name | 8b |

Thus, in the present discussion, Genesis 35:8 will be treated as a unit in consonance with Coats' outline above but also as part of a broader textual unit, 35:1-15. It should be noted that in this connection, Speiser (1964:269-271) analyses Genesis 35:1-15 as a textual unit.

Genesis 35 contains diverse materials but they all relate to Jacob's final steps back to Canaan before his father's death (Wenham 1994:321; Brueggemann 1982:280, 283). Many commentators regard the chapter largely as a narrative (Von Rad 1963:330ff. and Brueggemann 1982:283). Westermann (1987:243) analyses it as a mixture of itinerary[172] and genealogy[173]. The genealogy section is contained in 35:22b-26; it is a list of the sons of Jacob and their mothers.

As regards 35:8, Fokkelman (1991:235) considers it as one of the two short notes that have been inserted in the larger narrative, the other being verse 22 (cf. Fretheim

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[171] This should actually read Deborah's Death Report.

[172] Westermann (1985:56, 153) associates itineraries with a nomadic lifestyle, and he notes that they belong to particular undertakings - journeys, campaigns, business enterprises, and adventures. The term itinerary, in this usage, is not to be confused with wilderness itinerary or departure to distant lands but "it is concerned with short distances and is centered only on individual stopping places on the way".

[173] Earlier, Westermann (1985:548) had noted that itinerary and genealogy form the framework for the chapter.

1994:586 and Hamilton 1995:378)[174]. Similarly, Wenham (1994:244-245) refers to verse 8 as an itinerary note[175] that is set in the context of a journey, for he understands the whole chapter as an expanded itinerary. His view is in line with Westermann (1985:552; 1987:244-245), who sees verse 8 as an itinerary note that fits only with the journey as vv. 16-18.

For his part, Coats recognizes Genesis 35:8 as a death report (Coats 1983:238)[176]. Death reports, he claims, belong to the traditional lore of the family (e.g. Genesis 35:16-17 and 35:27-29; the death reports of Rachel and Isaac, respectively, but the former also contains a birth report – of Benjamin). The present analysis favours Coats' identification of 35:8 as a death report, but a death report within an itinerary, that is, 35:1-15.

### 4.2.4.2 Literary analysis of Genesis 35:8

At this point, we shall recourse to Coats' outline, cited above, for the analysis of Genesis 35:8. The verse is divided into two, (a) report and (b) place name, with 8a further subdivided into 8aα (death) and 8aβ (burial):

> 8aα  *Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died*
> 8aβ *and was buried under the oak below Bethel.*
> 8b  *So it was named Allon Bacuth.*

#### (a) Genesis 35:8aα

Some critics regard Genesis 35:8 as an intrusion in the main narrative or a misplaced addition[177]. However, the fact that the verse begins with a *waw* consecutive seems to

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[174] Gunkel (1901:101-102) regards Genesis 35:8 as an addition – a narrative note.

[175] Von Rad (1963:332-333) calls 35:8 a brief notice (cf. Arnold 2009:302) and claims that it was a formerly independent tradition from an ancient cultic custom that was inserted into the larger narrative. For Alter (2004:195), 35:8 is a "lonely obituary notice".

[176] Earlier in 4.2.2, we mentioned Coats' identification of the principal narrative genres in Genesis, which include saga, tale, novella, report, etc. Further, Coats (1983:10) defines a report as a genre that "shares with history the intention to record without developing the points of tension characteristic for a plot. It is basically brief, with a single event the subject of its record. Again, the accuracy of its reporting does not alter the character of the genre…"

[177] See Sarna (1989:241), who claims that the verse does not fit chronologically with the context because Deborah must have clearly greatly advanced in age (cf. Driver 1906: 309 who claims that the notice is "perhaps displaced";

suggest a connection with the preceding verse. It is worth noting here that each of the verses in our pericope 35:1-15 in the Hebrew text begins with the *waw* consecutive. In our estimation, that fact presupposes a narrative progression and, therefore, some degree of textual unity, at least on a syntactic level. It is striking also that all the verses in Genesis 35, with the exception of the opening verses in the genealogy section, vv.23-24 (which begin with בני), begin with the *waw* consecutive.

For the first time in the Genesis 35 narrative, a female character is introduced to the reader – Deborah, Rebekah's nurse. So far, only God and Jacob have played audible roles and appear in the foreground; the other characters seem to remain in the background. Who is Deborah, and why does she feature in the Jacob Cycle? What role could she possibly have played in the broader narrative? The mention of Deborah in this verse calls to mind the unnamed nurse in Genesis 24:59, who left the city of Nahor with Rebekah for the house of her husband, Isaac in the land of Canaan[178]. The history of interpretation unequivocally identifies that unnamed nurse as the Deborah in Genesis 35:8[179]. Whereas some interpreters read the phrase מֵינֶקֶת רִבְקָה, Rebekah's nurse, to mean the nurse who suckled Rebekah as a child, others regard it as the nurse who was assigned to Rebekah to help her suckle her babies when they would eventually arrive[180]. We shall attempt to attend to this ambiguity later. At any rate, it is remarkable that the writer of Genesis has chosen to bind the identity of Deborah eternally with Rebekah's in these two texts.

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Westermann 1985:552). Westermann (1987:244) argues that verse 8 is independent of both vv.1-7 and 9-12, 15 but that it would fit better with vv.16-20. Note, however that for Von Rad (1963:333), the brief notice has a tradition behind it that "fits naturally into the narrative".

[178] In that narrative (Gen 24), Abraham's servant had been assigned to go to Paddan Aram to find a wife for Isaac, his master's son. The 'lot' fell on Rebekah and the story relates that after she agreed to marry the Isaac that she was yet to meet, she set out for her husband's house with *her nurse,* who was unnamed in the story, in the company of Abraham's servant and his men. Rebekah was later to give birth to a set of twin boys, Esau and Jacob, after twenty years of barrenness.

[179] See Skinner (1910:425); Driver (1913:309); Keil and Delitzsch (1951:260); Speiser (1964:270); Kidner (1967:148); Davidson (1979:201); Rendsburg (1984:365); Westermann (1985:390, 552; 1987:245); Sarna (1989:169, 241); Boling (1992:113); Janzen (1993:141); Fretheim (1994:511, 586); Wenham (1994:150, 325); Hamilton (1995:158); Roth (2003:204); Mathews (2005:344, 621) and Arnold (2009:302).

[180] For instance, Wenham (1994:150) notes that Rebekah's nurse was "the nanny who has looked after her from childhood" (cf. Kidner 1967:148 and Sarna 1989:169). See Janzen (1993:141) and Fretheim (1994:586) for the alternative view.

However, a number of commentators question Deborah's presence in this particular itinerary since she was Rebekah's nurse and must have been too old at that time if at all she was alive. As a result, some interpretations hold that the name Rebekah in the verse must have been an error and that it should actually be substituted with Rachel[181]. While it is legitimate to wonder what Deborah was doing in Jacob's wanderings, Rendsburg (1984:366 fn), for instance, rightly claims that he fails to see the difficulty in the reading of the name as Rebekah because, "The text does not state that she came with Jacob from Harran to Bethel, simply that she died soon after Jacob's arrival in Bethel".

Deborah died. Could that be the summary of a life fully lived? Besides the reference to the fact that she was Rebekah's nurse and the earlier mention of her departure from Paddan Aram with her mistress, nothing else is stated about this woman. Nothing is mentioned of her birth, background, family or relationships; nothing is known of her physical appearance (as is typical of many biblical characters). Her voice was never heard and her thoughts would ever remain a mystery. There is no direct characterization of Deborah, no suggestions about her emotions or feelings. How then could one enter into Deborah's world? What does her death reveal of her life? Could the fact that Deborah's death was mentioned while that of her mistress, Rebekah was overlooked[182] point to something extraordinary about this life? Sarna (1989:241) points out that, "the demise of a woman is reported only in exceptional cases in the Torah".

Deborah died after Jacob and his caravan arrived in Bethel, after the episode in which Jacob built an altar to the Lord (35:6-7). Was Deborah residing in Bethel or was she part of Jacob's company? The latter appears more probable as the narrative does not indicate that Jacob had any relatives residing in Bethel and in verse 16, he and his

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[181] Fokkelmann (1991:235) claims that he is inclined to change the name Rebekah into Rachel in the text. A similar suggestion, made by Noth (1948:93), is cited in Rendsburg (1984:366fn).

[182] Hamilton (1995:378) notes that Genesis records the death of each of the patriarch's wives except Rebekah's, and that she must have died while Jacob was away in Aram (cf. Rendsburg 1984:364; Sarna 1989:241 and Wenham 1994:325). Leah's death also was not on record except for a last minute reference to her burial place on Jacob's deathbed (Genesis 49:31).

company moved on from Bethel. Therefore, Deborah died in the midst of loved ones. For the first time in Jacob's itinerary, death struck, and it struck the oldest member of the troupe. They all had escaped death in Shechem but now the aroma of death was in the way. Deborah died but at a ripe old age.

### (b) Genesis 35:8aβ

Deborah not only died, she was buried, and the burial is on record. Deborah got a proper burial. She was buried under the oak, under the shadow of the terebinth tree, away from the shadow of death. She was committed to the earth under the oak, where her spent old body could 'rest secure' (Ps 16:9) under the shadow of His wings, where she would be truly free from the uncertainties of the wanderings. For the household of Jacob, under the oak was the place to let go, the place for a final farewell to the matriarch Rebekah's nurse. For Jacob, the event must have been an anticlimax to the euphoria he had just experienced from the encounter with God. He had to make peace with the fact that it was time for this old pilgrim to go home.

It is significant that the oak under which Deborah was buried was located 'below[183] Bethel'. Westermann (1987:245) suggests that Deborah died near or at Bethel. Now she was buried below Bethel – that same place which was for Jacob a place of paradox, a place of terror and a place of divine encounter, a place of refuge for the fugitive in time of trouble. Jacob had just erected a monument to the God of Bethel, the one who delivered him in the time of his distress. Again, he had to search out a suitable place of rest that would act as a monument for his mother's nurse. What better place than under the oak of Bethel!

### (c) Genesis 35:8b

The reader here learns that the oak acquired a name – the Oak of Tears or the Oak of Weeping (*der Tränenbaum* or אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת), which is regarded as an aetiological place-name (Alter 2004:195; Arnold 2009:302). Genesis 35:8b probably tells more about Deborah than the two preceding lines. The name given to the oak apparently testifies to

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[183] Skinner (1910:424) equates the expression 'below Bethel' with 'south of Bethel' (Sarna 1989:241).

what happened under that oak during Deborah's interment. The people wept much. So great, so unrestrained, and so memorable was the weeping that the site had to be given a name. According to Westermann (1985:552; 1987:245), the name was to preserve Deborah's memory in later generations, to remember her long after her death.

Why would the people weep so much for an 'ordinary' wet nurse? Why would anyone bother to keep alive the memory of an old maid? What was it then about this woman who stood by Rebekah through twenty years of barrenness when there was no baby to suckle? Why would the people not stand still to mourn this woman who must have dandled Israel on her knees, and who stuck with him in all his wanderings? At a time when Jacob was already estranged from his mother, this same Deborah became his surrogate mother, the one who comforted him in his pain. Perhaps she was no ordinary maid after all. By naming that oak, Israel's household was declaring to the world, "Deborah means the world to us and we would like the whole world to know it!"

Some scholars claim that Deborah played no role in the narrative (Arnold 2009:302) but Rendsburg's (1984:365) conclusion is that she played a prominent role in the overall narrative[184]. We agree with Rendsburg's conclusion, or else, why would an entire clan stand still to express such palpable grief for "an ancillary character", for one whose life or presence did not count or make any difference? It is true that nothing else is revealed about her person other than that she was Rebekah's nurse; but those tears spoke volumes. Deborah uttered not a single word in the Jacob Cycle but her voice could be heard in the weeping of Jacob's household – and in the whisper of the terebinth tree.

### 4.2.4.3 Intertextual references in Genesis 35:8

A number of intertextual references can be observed within the unit. While some can be related to other verses in the chapter, others are linked to other texts either in the book of Genesis or in other books of the Old Testament. We shall examine first the connections to other verses in Genesis 35, in particular, 35:1-15.

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[184] Hamilton (1995:158-159) refers to her as an ancillary character, who plays no active role in the plot in Genesis 24:59.

## 4.2.4.3.1 References to other passages in Genesis 35

Genesis 35:8aα relates that Deborah died. To begin with, it has been observed that this death is the first of three deaths recorded in Genesis 35. The other two are the deaths of Rachel and of Isaac in v.19 and v.29, respectively. Incidentally, not only the deaths are recorded, the chapter also records the burials of all the three characters. Blum (1984:205) aptly identifies a structural parallel between the death and burial of and the place naming for Deborah and Rachel[185]. It can be asserted, therefore, that the similarity between the two death reports evidently attests some literary unity within the chapter.

Hamilton (1995:378) affirms that, "one of Jacob's first experiences after coming back home is confronting death". Nonetheless, it is ironic that in the case of Rachel's demise, death and life coincide – the birth of Benjamin resulted in the death of Rachel. Sadly, in the chapter, "Death is linked more strongly with space than is birth" (Westermann

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[185] Blum (1984:205) asserts that, "*Ebenso wie diese beiden Altarnotizen gehören auch 35,8 und 35,(16-)19f zusammen, was unmittelbar aus einem Vergleich erhellt*:

| Gen 35,8 | Gen 35,19f |
|---|---|
| ותמת דברה מינקת רבקה | ותמת רחל |
| ותקבר מתחת לבית אל תחת האלון | ותקבר בדרך אפרתה ... |
| | ויצב ... מצבה ... |
| ויקרא שמו אלון בכות | הוא מצבת קברת רחל ... |

*Als gemeinsame Struktur ergibt sich:*

1.  *NN* ותמת
2.  *Ortsangabe +* ותקבר
3.  *Bestattung unter einem natürlichen/künstlichen Mal*
4.  *Name des Mals*".

Carr (1996:260) provides an English rendition of Blum's outline as follows:

| Gen. 35:8 | Gen. 35:19-20 |
|---|---|
| And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, | And Rachel |
| died, | died, |
| and she was buried | and she was buried |
| under an oak below Bethel. | On the way to Ephrath (that is Bethlehem) |
| So it was called "Oak of Weeping." | And Jacob set up a pillar at her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. |

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1985:557). Perhaps Jacob's pathetic encounter with a succession of deaths at that stage of his journey was an indication that the Jacob Cycle was about to close.

Secondly, in Genesis 35:8aβ Deborah was buried under the oak near Bethel. We have already noted that the burials of the other two people who died in the chapter were recorded as well. What is interesting is that a fourth 'burial' (actually the first) is recorded in 35:4. Jacob is said to bury all the foreign gods, earrings and rings that his people had with them under the terebinth, that is, by Shechem. However, the Hebrew word that is translated in verse 4 as 'bury' (also hide, conceal or preserve), טָמַן, is different from קָבַר found in vv.8, 19, and 29. The 'burial' of those gods and rings seems to be a foretaste of the real burials that would inevitably follow.

It is also significant that the burial in verse 4 took place under the terebinth just as that of Deborah. Hamilton (1995:378-379) reckons that Deborah's burial under the oak tree is used deliberately to act as a parallel to the burying of the false gods under the terebinth tree by Jacob in verse 4 (cf. Fretheim 1994:586). Further, whereas the burial of Deborah resulted in the naming of the oak, the burial of the gods did not (Janzen 1993:140).

More importantly, that Deborah's burial is connected with Bethel echoes the reference to Bethel in the preceding verses, 1-7 and the verses, which immediately follow i.e., 9-16. Although some critical scholars are inclined to regard Genesis 35:8 as an intrusion or addition within the chapter as noted earlier, the reference to Bethel in the verse as in the preceding and following pericopes points to the contrary. Rather, it alludes to some underlying harmony between the verse and its context, at least from a literary standpoint. Coats' insight in this regard is especially crucial to this discussion. Coats (1983:238) notes that although Deborah plays no role in the narrative, the unit in which she is mentioned has contact with the rest of the narrative only on the basis of a catchword organization. That catchword is Bethel![186] The implication of the reference to Bethel in the unit will be explored further in the discussion of the geographical context of 35:8 below.

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[186] This assertion is maintained by Gomes (2006:88).

Lastly, the naming of the oak in remembrance of Deborah corresponds with the setting up of the pillar over Rachel's tomb. Both were to serve as monuments to these unforgettable women who both died on the way. Overall, the intertextual references in verse 8 to other portions of the chapter point to some textual unity within the chapter.

**4.2.4.3.2 Allusions and intertextual references to other texts in Genesis and in the Old Testament**

Besides a number of allusions to other passages in Genesis and the Old Testament, several other intertextual references are recognizable within our unit. Below, we shall examine some of them.

### (a) Genesis 35:8 and 24:59

| Genesis 35:8 | Genesis 24:59 |
|---|---|
| וַתָּמָת דְּבֹרָה מֵינֶקֶת רִבְקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית־אֵל תַּחַת הָאַלּוֹן וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת:פ | וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה אֲחֹתָם וְאֶת־מֵנִקְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו: |
| *Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth.* | *So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men.* |

A clear allusion that is recognized univocally by critics in Genesis 35:8 is the identification of Deborah with the unnamed nurse of Rebekah mentioned in Genesis 24:59. Several reasons have been adduced for her anonymity in 24:59. According to Westermann (1985:552), "There was no need to mention her name in 24:59, but it is required in the account of her death"; but for Hamilton (1995:158), her anonymity may have been to "balance the unnamed servant [i.e. of Abraham] and his companions" in the narrative. Additionally, he claims the omission of her name is a deliberate strategy to keep the focus on the main character in the plot, i.e. Rebekah.

Rendsburg's claim on this point is worthy of note. He argues convincingly that the anonymity of Rebekah's nurse in 24:59 is to prepare the reader's mind for the prominent role that the character would eventually play in the overall narrative (i.e. in 35:8). He further demonstrates that the reference is a clear and brilliant example of the literary

feature, which Sarna (1981:82) calls "the anticipatory use of information" in Genesis narratives (Rendsburg 1984:365). It is probable also, in our view, that her anonymity in 24:59 shows her status in the eyes of her mistress and the family at that time – another faceless servant. In time, she became a powerful member of the household whose identity could no longer be ignored – she earned herself a place (or a name) in Israel's Hall of Fame.

Of importance also is Roth's (2003:203ff) observation that Deborah's departure from Haran as Rebekah's nurse finds parallel in the Neo-Babylonian dowry transmission in which a single female slave is given as a dowry to the bride by her mother (or another female relative) to help the bride adjust to her new life in her husband's home. Roth points out that Deborah (as well as some other maidservants) was given to Rebekah by the latter's family when Rebekah left Haran to marry Isaac so that she became, in essence, Rebekah's 'property'. On the question of how Deborah ended up in Jacob's company, Roth (2003:205) argues that:

> It is entirely in keeping with the sentiments of the narrative as well as the marriage customs and practices of the times for Rebekah to give her wet nurse Deborah to her favoured son Jacob. Thus, Deborah could have joined Jacob's retinue at any time that Rebekah chose to award ownership of her dowry slave woman to Jacob.

Roth attempts to show that the comparison of Deborah's role with the Neo-Babylonian dowry practice supports Rashi's assumption[187] that Rebekah sent Deborah to Jacob in Haran in fulfilment of her promise in (Gen 27:45) to send for him when his brother Esau's anger abated. Therefore, when Jacob departed Haran for Canaan, Deborah left with him.

Another allusion in connection with Genesis 24(:59), not unrelated to the point in the last paragraph, is the mention of Rebekah. It has been suggested that the mention of

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[187] Roth notes that Rashi followed Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan's interpretation and that Ramban differs from this interpretation as he claimed that Deborah had returned to Haran after escorting Rebekah to Isaac's house. However, when Jacob went to live with his uncle Laban, she became attached to him and his children and she later followed them when they set off for Canaan. In our view, Ramban's position does not seem to fit in with the observation that wet nurses often stayed on in the family long after the children they nursed were grown. Besides, if Deborah returned immediately to Haran after seeing Rebekah off safely, then she hardly performed the task that she was employed to do, i.e. nursing Rebekah's babies; unless, of course, Ramban's assumption was that Deborah nursed Rebekah herself and not her children.

Rebekah here generally brings to mind the character of this same woman who together with Jacob orchestrated the deception of her husband Isaac in Genesis 27. The conspiracy resulted in Jacob usurping the blessing that was reserved for Esau. The inference is that Rebekah was being punished for her deeds as she never saw her son Jacob again after he left for Paddan Aram. The last time she was mentioned in the narratives was in Genesis 27:45 before Jacob returned from his sojourn with Laban (Rendsburg 1984:364[188]; Wenham 1994:325 and Hamilton 1995:378)[189].

### (b) Genesis 35:8 and Judges 4:4-5

| Genesis 35:8 | Judges 4:4-5 |
|---|---|
| וַתָּמָת דְּבֹרָה מֵינֶקֶת רִבְקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית־אֵל תַּחַת הָאַלּוֹן וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת:פ | וּדְבוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אֵשֶׁת לַפִּידוֹת הִיא שֹׁפְטָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּעֵת הַהִיא: ⁵וְהִיא יוֹשֶׁבֶת תַּחַת־תֹּמֶר דְּבוֹרָה בֵּין הָרָמָה וּבֵין בֵּית־אֵל בְּהַר אֶפְרָיִם וַיַּעֲלוּ אֵלֶיהָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַמִּשְׁפָּט: |
| *Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth.* | *Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.* |

With regard to Judges 4:4-5, a double intertextual connection can be made easily. The first aspect is in respect of the name Deborah. The name features in the Old Testament for the second time in Judges 4:4, where the reader is introduced to Deborah, the prophetess and wife of Lapidoth "who judged Israel at that time". However, other

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[188] Rendsburg (1984:365) further muses, "How does all this help explain the reference to Deborah's death and burial in xxxv 8? This passage, seemingly out of place as it is, serves to highlight the point just made. Our author will not openly moralize about Rebekah, for this is not how he judges characters... Rather he leaves clues in the narrative which allow us, the readers, to reach our own conclusion. Jacob returns to Canaan in xxxv 6 and we expect a reference to his being reunited with Rebekah. But what do we get? We read only of Deborah's passing in xxxv 8. Our author cleverly included the name Rebekah to evoke in our minds the recollection of her character lest we have forgotten about her, but the person Rebekah is absent".

[189] Mention needs to be made also of the Targumic tradition that Jacob was told of his mother Rebekah's death when Deborah died. Hayward (1990:181-182) asserts: "That the news of his mother's death reached Jacob at this point is a well-known and widespread tradition, represented not only by the *Fragment Targums (FT)*, but also by *Gen. R*. 81.8 and other midrashic sources. The Bible does not report Rebekah's death; but from the first century CE at the latest it was believed that it had happened during Jacob's second visit to Bethel..." The FT, therefore, translates the "אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת" as the "Other Weeping" from the Greek *allon* (other), i.e. presuming that weeping for Rebekah was the first weeping.

connections have to do with the place where this Deborah held court – *under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel* (Jdg 4:5). Overall, exegetes no doubt recognize the literary link although they understand it in different ways[190].

For Skinner (1910:425), the sacred oak in 35:8 is in "all probability identical with the palm-tree of Deborah… There seems to have been a confusion in the local tradition between the famous prophetess and the nurse". Von Rad (1963:333) also affirms the probability of an existing local tradition around Bethel but claims that it is different from the tradition about Rebekah's nurse. In Davidson's view, it is possible that "with the passing of time the two names and trees became confused" (1979:201; cf. Gray 1967:268) but Gomes (2006:136) argues that the two trees may be one and the same – previously known as 'oak of weeping' and later changed to 'oak of Deborah'.

Additionally, Kaiser (2009:124) comments on the claim of some modern critics that Genesis 35:8 confuses the Deborah there with the one in Judges 4. His view (with which we tend to agree) is that, "The confusion is only in the mind of critics. One may infer with Luther that the burial of this servant merits the attention of the writer because of the way she served and *advised* Jacob" (*italics added*). Whether or not the same tree is being referred to in the two texts remains open to debate but the proximity of the location and the similarity of names in the two texts suggest either an overlap in or the development of tradition. Alternatively, the second Deborah takes her name after the first because of her location under the tree near Bethel.

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[190] See Skinner (1910:425); Von Rad (1963:333); Westermann (1985:552, 1987:245); Lindars (1995:183-184) and Gomes (2006:88, 121, 139). Soggin (1987:64) points out that a palm tree does not normally grow on the highlands and the tree could refer to a "special palm, a sacred tree". He does not see any connection between the two trees other than the use of homonyms in the two texts because for him, both trees differ in species and function. Perhaps, the argument can be turned around. If the tree is indeed not a palm tree and a special, kind of sacred tree, could it then not be the same oak of Genesis 35:8 since both are in the proximity of Bethel? Otherwise, is it possible that there is a tradition surrounding that particular location with which both Deborahs have now become identified? Note also that Niditch (2008:62fn) argues that the Old Latin version reads 'under a palm' to reduce "the more cultic image of Deborah as an oracle associated with a sacred tree or space".

### (c) Genesis 35:8 and Bethel

We have already alluded to the use of Bethel to connect 35:8 with Genesis 35 especially vv.1-15. The Bethel connection is, however, not limited to Genesis 35 for the mention of the name is extensive in other parts of Genesis and indeed in many other books of the Old Testament. Reference to Bethel in the book of Genesis begins with Abraham's removal of his tent to a location between Ai and Bethel in Genesis 12:8. It appears serendipitous that the last mention of Bethel in Genesis is in chapter 35, just before the Jacob Cycle would close. In the historical books, Bethel is mentioned in Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles; in Ezra-Nehemiah; and in the Prophets, in Jeremiah, Hosea and Amos.

We have noted already that the mention of Bethel in 35:8 has been linked to the other references of the name in the chapter. However, what has not been mentioned is that those other references in Genesis 35, which include the command to go up to Bethel, the journey to Bethel, the identification of Bethel with Luz, the setting up of an altar and a מַצֵּבָה, and the revelation at Bethel, are all associated with the references to similar events at Bethel in other parts of the Old Testament (Gen 28:19; 31:13; Josh 16:2; 18:3; Jdg 1:23; 1 Kgs 12:32-33; 2 Kgs 23:15; Hos 12:4; Am 3:14).

That the mention of Bethel is significant in Genesis 35:8 is without doubt. What is equally remarkable here, however, is the connection that has been established between weeping and several Old Testament Bethel traditions. Baruchi-Unna (2008:630-31, *italics added*)[191] correctly notes that connection:

> *(1) 'Oak of Weeping' was located 'below Bethel' (Gen. xxxv 8).* (2) The tribe of Israel wept there before the Lord during their war with Benjamin (Jug. xx 23, 26; xxi 2). (3) The struggle between Jacob and the angel took place in Bethel, according to a tradition known by Prophet Hosea, and it also spoke of weeping: "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him at Bethel, and there he spoke with us" (Hos. xii 5). (4) In the Septuagint version of Judges ii 1, a

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[191] Compare Amit (2000:125): "… Bethel is associated with events of weeping. Thus, in the incident of the concubine in Gibeah, Bethel is twice explicitly mentioned as a place of weeping and of sacrifice… (Judg 20:26). Before the battle of Jabesh-Gilead the people also came to Bethel, 'and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly…' (21:2-4). *Bethel is likewise associated with weeping through Allon-bacuth ('the oak of weeping'), the burial place of Rebekah's nurse Deborah 'below Bethel' (Gen 35:8). Bethel seems to have retained associations of weeping in the national collective memory*" (*italics added*).

Hebrew *Vorlage* is reflected in which Israel's weeping following the angel *(sic)* words (Jud. ii 4) took place in Bethel as well: *And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal, to the weepers, to Bethel[192].

On the Hosea 12:5 text mentioned in the quote above, Gomes (2006:175-176) shows that the LXX has both Jacob and the angel weeping. In the MT and the Targum, only Jacob weeps even though the Genesis 32 story, in which Jacob wrestled with the angel, mentions no weeping[193]. Gomes argues that it is possible that a tradition existed that linked Jacob's weeping in the Hosea text[194] with ritual weeping at Bethel especially in view of the fact that "Jacob would have performed a ritual of lament at the grave of Deborah according to the custom of his day". He admits, however, that the reason for Hosea bringing this up in the context of chapter 12 is not clear.

In all, it seems that the clearest of the external connections to Bethel in 35:8 is that which concerns the Deborah of Judges 4:4-5 because the connection with Bethel ties up with the tree at the same time, as well as the strong tradition of weeping at Bethel[195].

Other intertextual connections in the text abound. For instance, the burial under the oak, not only evokes the burial of the household gods under the oak, it also calls to mind the burial of Saul's bones under the oak at Jabesh (1 Chro 10:12 //1 Sam 31:13). Worthy of mention also are Gideon's encounter with the angel of the Lord under the oak at Ophrah (Judg 6:11, 19) and Abraham's experience of God's theophany by the oaks of Mamre (Gen 18:1). The act of naming a monument is also a significant Old Testament practice attested in other places in Scriptures especially in Genesis. Jacob anointed a pillar and called the name of the place Bethel (e.g. Gen 28:17-19; 35:14-15, 20; 21:31 and 22:14; cf. Exod 17:7; Num 11:3 and Josh 5:9).

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[192] Note that other critics also connect this weeping at Bochim (Judg 2:1, 4-5) with *Allon Bacuth* and some actually claim that Bochim refers to Bethel and emend Bochim to read Bethel based on the LXX, as Baruchi-Unna above has done (see Kidner 1967:175 who shows that both בֹּכִים *'Bochim'* [weepers], and בכות *'Bacuth'* share the same root in the Hebrew; cf. Skinner 1910:424; Gray 1967:253-255; Soggin 1987:25; Boling 1992:113; Gomes 2006:88, 100, 117 and Niditch 2008:49). Lindars (1995:74-76) argues that the theory that Bochim is identifiable with Bethel is purely speculative as it is based on "punning etymologies of Gen 35:8", which "simply replaces one aetiology, which is given in the text, with another built only on the supposed meaning of the name Bochim/Bacuth".

[193] However, Gomes notes that Jacob wept in Genesis 29:11 and 33:4.

[194] Rofé (1979: xxi-xxii) claims that in the Hosea 12 text, the struggle that took place between Jacob and the angel at Bethel actually took place at Bochim, adjacent to Bethel. However, he provides no justification for this assumption.

[195] We shall further explore the implications of Bethel in the text under the geographical context below.

Additionally, the idea that Deborah died on the journey parallels Rachel's own death on the way to Ephrath and also echoes some other occurrences of death on a journey or by the wayside (e.g. Amasa's death on the highway in 2 Sam 20:10-12). Her death equally brings to mind the mention of the death of a few other women in Genesis such as Sarah's (Gen 23:2) or Shuah's, Judah's wife (38:12). The practice of weeping and mourning for the dead will be discussed further under the socio-cultural context of Genesis 35:8 below.

**4.2.5 Geographical context of Genesis 35:8**

Investigating the geographical context of the unit in question is not unimportant particularly if it is considered that the unit is found in the context of an itinerary. Certainly, location becomes crucial when a discussion centres on a journey. In 35:8, the burial of Deborah under an oak below Bethel is reported but the chapter itself contains several other place names. The itinerary took off at God's command from Shechem; the destination was Bethel but it is noted that Jacob came out of Paddan Aram (v.9). At Bethel, Jacob built an altar and set up a pillar to God after God appeared to him again (vv. 7, 9-14). Rachel had her baby a little distance to Ephrath of Bethlehem and she died there (vv. 16, 19); Jacob pitched his tent beyond the tower of Edar (v.21) and, finally, he went to his father at Mamre in Arbah or Hebron (v.27).

*4.2.5.1 Bethel*

Deborah died and she was buried below Bethel. Is there anything particularly significant about the location? According to Coats (1983:238), the "catchword organization" that connects the unit with the context is Bethel; without it the unit has no contact with the context. If the weight of the unit's connection rests on the location, Bethel, as Coats demonstrates, then, Bethel is worth investigating here. The name Bethel is mentioned explicitly in a number of verses in the chapter – 35:1, 3, 6, 8, 15 and 16. It is remarkable that of the twelve occurrences of the name in the book of Genesis, half is in chapter 35.

We have observed earlier that the first time that the name Bethel[196] is mentioned in Genesis is in connection with Abram in 12:8 – there Abram pitched his tent and built an altar to the Lord between Bethel and Ai. In 13:3, Abram went back to the same place between Bethel and Ai where he first pitched his tent. In both 12:8 and 13:3, the name Bethel is mentioned twice. In 28:19, Jacob erected a pillar and called the name of the place where he had a revelation of God in the night, Bethel. Lastly, in 31:13, Jacob related to his two wives a dream he had, noting that God introduced himself in the dream as the God of Bethel.

Outside the book of Genesis, dozens of other references to Bethel are found in the Old Testament. In Joshua 7:2; 8:9, 12, 17, the location[197] of Bethel is described, that is, it was beside Ai, and Joshua laid ambush there between Ai and Bethel; Joshua 12:9, 16 show that Bethel had a king in those days[198]. In the period of the Judges, Bethel was home to the Ark of the Covenant and Deborah dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel (Judg. 4:5). "[I]n Samuel's day, Bethel was a place of holy pilgrimage; Jeroboam chose it as a cultic centre for the northern kingdom and a school of prophets functioned there in the days of Elisha". The prophecies of Amos and Hosea later castigated Bethel for its apostasy (Sarna 1989:399). Clearly, the thread of Bethel weaves through all the major sections of the Old Testament; from the Deuteronomistic history through the prophetic tradition, Bethel is a significant presence.

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[196] Bethel (house or temple of *El* or God) in the Old Testament mostly stands for the name of a particular city or the sanctuary in that city. However, it is also used a few times as the name of a deity (Rofé 1979: xx-xxi; Ross 1985:233; Brodsky 1992:709, 711; Gomes 2006:1).

[197] See Sarna (1989:399). Bethel was located on the border of ancient Israel and Judah and is generally associated with the modern day Beitin or Beitil. Although a few other scholars have suggested modern el-Bireh as Bethel, "the scales will continue to tip in favour of locating Bethel at Beitin" (Gomes 2006:2; cf. Rainey 1971; Vos 1977:150; Aharoni 1979:410, 432; Wenham 1987:280; Sarna 1989:399; Dever 1997a:300; Blenkinsopp 2003:93 and Laughlin 2006:52). W F Albright conducted a preliminary excavation of Bethel in 1927, which he continued in 1934. It is shown that the city lies approximately 2,886 feet (880 m.) above sea level and is about 10.5 miles (17km.) north of Jerusalem. On the state of Bethel in later periods, Dever (1997a:301) comments: "Presumably, the occupation at the site ends with the Babylonian destructions in the early sixth century BCE… There is some Persian occupation and the town recovered some of its importance by the Hellenistic-Roman period… Travellers mention Bethel in the Byzantine period, from which there are some remains" (cf. Vos 1977:151). This assertion is upheld, to some extent, by Blenkinsopp (2003:95) who claims that Bethel continued to function all the way into the Neo-Babylonian period as it was not destroyed during the Babylonian invasion. Furthermore, with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, it must have served as the official sanctuary of Judah and Benjamin and possibly also of the central hill.

[198] Other references to Bethel in Joshua are 16:1, 2 and 18:13, 22. For further details on Bethel, see Laughlin (2006:52-54).

As a city, it was often linked with certain other towns or cities in the Old Testament especially with Ai (Genesis 12:8; 13:3; Josh 7:2; 8; 8:9, 12, 17; 12:9; Ezr 2:28 and Neh 7:32;), with Dan[199] (1 Kgs 12:29; 2 Kgs 10:29), and with Gilgal (Am 4:4; 5:5). Bethel is also sometimes referred to as Luz (Gen 35:6) or situated by Luz. Actually, Genesis 28:19 and Judges 1:23 note that Luz was Bethel's former name. Moreover, it has been acknowledged that, next to Jerusalem, Bethel is the second place name that occurs most frequently in the Old Testament[200].

In his discussion of Bethel's impact on the Judean language and literature, Knauf (2006:291ff) tries to prove that Bethel (as well as Babylon) played a crucial role in the literary history of the Neo-Babylonian era just as Jerusalem did in the Persian period. His position is that Benjamin with Judah was attached to Judah in the seventh century and that the demographics of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods reveal the importance of Bethel and Benjamin. There is enough evidence that the Bethel Temple functioned in the sixth century and that Bethel continued to be occupied through the Persian to the Hellenistic period. Knauf argues that with the decline of Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple in the sixth century, the Bethel cult assumed prominence, which enabled it to play a decisive role in the early transmission of biblical literature[201].

Knauf further asserts that at the time that the Bethel cult began to gain ascendancy (ca. 650-586 BCE) and flourished, there was conflict between the Bethel and Jerusalem cults, which resulted in anti-Bethel polemic especially in the books of Kings and Amos. However, Bethel and its traditions (Jacob and Exodus) were gradually incorporated into Judah and, by the time Bethel was finally annihilated, the Bethel traditions had become

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[199] Bethel and Dan are often regarded as associate towns of sorts especially since King Jeroboam of Israel set up his golden calf idols in the two places (Halpern 1976:32, 37 and Amit 2000:14).

[200] See Brueggemann (1982:247); Dever (1997a:300); Gomes (2006:1); Knauf (2006:291); Laughlin (2006:52) and Arnold (2009:255).

[201] Knauf (2006:318) argues that, "The impact of Bethel on Judean literature must by necessity have increased when its sanctuary, school, and library/archive were the only ones remaining and operating in Judah for most of the sixth century and possibly extending into the fifth century".

integrated into or harmonized with the 'constitution of Yehud', the Torah. It is of interest to mention here that Knauf (2006:321, 329) sees Genesis 35:8 as a literary construct by the Jerusalem cult in a text regarded as a redactional post-P material that is designed to counter Judges 4:5, a Bethel composition. He claims that, Gen 35:8 tries to find a solution for the problem of Judg 4:5-6 by finding another Deborah who might have sat under that tree".

Without a doubt, Bethel was recognized as a sacred place. Sarna (1989:200, 398) argues that the initial sanctity of Bethel was based solely on Jacob's revelation of God at the place. Speiser (1964:219) notes that Bethel stands as a "spiritual milestone", that is, based on the Genesis 28:10-22 revelation. Further, the centrality of Bethel to the Jacob Cycle, which, incidentally, begins with the Bethel event, has been attested (Brueggemann 1982:280; Sarna 1989:197). Gomes (2006:70, 218) observes that the Jacob Cycle begins and climaxes at Bethel (Gen 28:11ff; 35:1-8), that is, with the revelation at Bethel and the vow at Bethel. He argues that, by and large, the Bethel cult was pivotal to the configuration of Israelite identity (2006:212). However, Bethel was most famous (or infamous) for the "golden calves" erected there (and at Dan) by Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:29).

Amit (2001:109-125), in a discussion of place-names in Hebrew narratives, explains that place-names perform specific functions such as giving the story a realistic tone and serving a particular ideology or as an intentional background, among other functions[202]. She notes that:

> When the author wishes to give the stories an air of historical reality, familiar places are chosen as the setting. At times, *the place names hint at the allusional character of the story or act as a direct reflection of a hero*… Therefore, the place is always functional, and understanding its function in the story leads to a deeper, more comprehensive understanding (Amit 2001:125, *italics added*).

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[202] Similarly, Westermann (1985:63) notes the importance of (place) names in Genesis 12-50, stressing that, "In the first place, names are not invented here. Rather we can presuppose that *there is a tradition behind every name that occurs in Gen. 12-50* (individual exceptions are not to be excluded entirely)". He further asserts that, "A necessary consequence for the Gen. 12-50 is that *one must pay special attention to the context in which each individual geographical designation occurs*" (*italics added*). Bar-Efrat's (1989:194) claim that places in biblical narratives "are not merely geographical facts but are to be regarded as literary elements in which the fundamental significance is embodied", is equally noteworthy.

Could the reference to Bethel in Genesis 35:8, therefore, be a deliberate literary strategy by the author of Genesis 35 to draw attention not only to the allusive character of the event but also to the death of an unforgettable Hebrew heroine?

### 4.2.6 Socio-cultural context of Genesis 35:8

In the first chapter of this study, it has been established that interpretation needs to be sensitive to the socio-cultural milieu, not only of the reader, but of the biblical author(s). Accordingly, the socio-cultural context of Genesis 35:8 will be discussed below. This will entail a consideration of the role and position of the wet nurse in ancient Israel as well as in neighbouring ancient Near Eastern cultures; aspects of burial vis-à-vis weeping and mourning; the significance of oaks and sacred trees in Israelite ethos and the position and role of women in Genesis.

### 4.2.6.1 The מֵינֶקֶת

The first occurrence of the Hebrew word מֵינֶקֶת (wet nurse, nurse, foster mother) or any of its cognates (e.g. אֹמֶנֶת) in the Old Testament is in Genesis 24:59 while the second mention in Genesis 35:8 refers to the same character in 24:59, Rebekah's nurse[203]. Among the ancient Israelites, the wet nurse, as the name implies, nursed a baby on behalf of another woman. This service often entailed breastfeeding the baby, particularly, when the mother had insufficient breast milk or died during childbirth, and providing general care. For instance, in Exodus 2:5-9 Moses' mother was hired as a wet nurse by Pharaoh's daughter to nurse baby Moses after she found him in the river. In Ruth 4:16, it is narrated that Naomi became the nurse to Obed, the son that Ruth bore to Boaz. In 2 Kings 11:2, Jehosheba, the sister of King Ahaziah, took her nephew Joash (and his nurse) to hide the little prince from Athaliah's sword.

According to Marsman (2003:431, 237), the wet nurse, like the related role of the midwife, was exclusively a female occupation in Israel. Although women in the lower

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[203] Other instances of the term in the Old Testament are found in Exodus 2:7-9; Ruth 4:16; 2 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 11:2//2 Chron. 22:11, but מינקת is also used figuratively in Numbers 11:12; Isaiah 49:23; 60:16 and 66:10-13 (Marsman 2003:431 and Pace 2009:301). In the apocryphal 2 Esdras 1:28-29, a metaphorical use of the term is also found – the Lord is said to entreat the people as a "nurse" entreats her children.

strata of the society would ordinarily nurse their own babies, wealthy and royal women could employ the services of a wet nurse[204]. The indication is that nurses stayed with the family of the babies but Pace (2009:301) points out that sometimes the nurse could remain in the family long after the baby had been weaned as in the case of Deborah (Sarna 1989:169).

Evidently, the occupation of the wet nurse was not limited to ancient Israel but was attested throughout the ancient Near Eastern world. Marsman (2003:413ff) provides data on wet nurses from the Early Dynastic period in Mesopotamia. In the Old Babylonian period, for instance, evidence of contracts between nurses and parents of the children being nursed has been found. While in Babylonia, the babies lived with their nurses, in ancient Egypt, nurses usually moved in with the child's family. Marsman further notes that fewer occurrences of wet nurses on *stela* have been found, dating from the Old and Middle Kingdom than in the Eighteenth Dynasty period when wet nurses are mentioned more often. The use of wet nurses was quite common in the New Kingdom where some royal nurses actually held influential positions at court, e.g. Nefertiti's wet nurse. Similarly, the professions of the wet nurse and midwife were attested as female professions in Ugarit (Marsman 2003:725).

Marsman's findings corroborate Gruber's (1992:82ff)[205] observation that the wealthy upper class women were more likely to hire the services of a wet-nurse for their babies in the ancient world (e.g. as indicated by Homeric Greece). Gruber confirms that the employment of wet-nurses was especially characteristic of the Old Babylonian period because of the twin realities of maternal death and the inability of the biological mother to produce sufficient milk for her baby due to ill-health or other factors. Gruber (1992:86-88, 92, 98) also shows that besides Old Babylonian Mesopotamia and Israel, the practice of employing wet-nurses was common in other related cultures such as in

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[204] On the point that wealthy women were more likely to hire wet nurses, Alter (2004:124) claims that, "As in other societies, for a young woman to retain her old wet nurse as permanent companion is a sign of social status". Alter refers to Rebekah in this statement.
[205] Gruber's position is articulated in a chapter titled, "Breastfeeding Practices in Biblical Israel and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia" in his 1992 *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies.* Earlier, the chapter had been published severally as an article in *JANES*, Vols. 1, 7 and 19 (1968-69; 1975 and 1989, respectively).

Egypt and Homeric Greece as well as in the history of Western civilization – in England, Germany, France, Italy, etc.

According to Marsman (2003:237), mothers, especially those in the lower strata of the society, generally took responsibility for nursing and raising or educating their children. However, it is instructive here that Sarna (1989:169) notes that, "In Mesopotamia the wet nurse, Akkadian *mušēniqtum*, 'the one who suckles,' frequently had the additional duties of *tarbitum*, bringing up the child and acting as guardian". He further explains that "Interestingly, Targum Jonathan renders *meneket* by *padgogthah*, from Greek *paidagogos*, 'tutor,' a meaning that echoes the Akkadian *tarbitum*" (*emphasis added*)[206]. This view tallies with Calvin's (1948:27) claim that mothers at that time did not necessarily neglect their duties but, rather, "they committed the education to one particular maid. They therefore who assisted mothers with subsidiary service were called nurses".

If indeed the semantic collocation of the Hebrew lexical item, מֵינֶקֶת[207] could be said to include the idea of a tutor or one who brings up the child and acts as the guardian, then, is it not possible that Deborah would have performed this task; or else why did she or her death mean so much to Israel? Janzen (1993:141) also points out that:

> Another term for foster mother is *omenet* – one who gives unfailing support and care – from the root *amen*, 'reliable, faithful...' This nurse apparently supplied Jacob with the unfailing supply of milk that Rebekah could not. As thus standing for the mother, she became the primal earthly sign of God's unfailing presence and provision through all Jacob's wanderings.

It is on record that, overall, children were nursed for a period of about three years (Marsman 2003:237; 414). If this was the case, what was Deborah doing the rest of the years that she remained with Rebekah when the children were already past the nursing stage? Roth (2003:205) urges us to allow our attention to drift to the "often hidden

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[206] Genesis 35:8 in Pseudo-Jonathan reads:
> Then died Deborah, the *tutor* of Rebekah and she was buried beneath Bethel *in the extremity of the plain. And there the news was also told to Jacob about the death of his mother Rebekah*; so he called its name '*Other* Weeping' (cf. Maher 1992:120).

[207] See also Koehler and Baumgartner (1995:577) for the Akkadian root of the word.

world" of biblical women to see Deborah, "a figure who, behind the tent-flaps, tended to all the women of the patriarchal household". Roth presumes that "after losing her ability to lactate, she [Deborah] could still have served as a wet nurse and companion to generations of women in that household…"

However, Sarna (1989:169) claims that Deborah must have accompanied Rebekah as a chaperon whereas Mathews (2005:344-345) sees her simply as "a memento of the past kept by Rebekah". We believe that Deborah was much more than a chaperone or mere 'souvenir' from the past. She must have continued in Rebekah's household, not as a piece of decoration but as a teacher or counsellor of sorts.

Notable here also is Diebner's (1988) intriguing response to Westermann's (1981:672) description of the short notice on Deborah as *schwierig und unverständlich*. Diebner argues that the solution to the question of the placement of verse 8 in Genesis 35 and of Deborah in Jacob's itinerary lies in two things – Deborah's role and Deborah's name[208]. Deborah's role as a מֵינֶקֶת meant that she produced milk, and her name, Deborah (bee) implied that she produced honey. For Diebner, Deborah did not die accidentally but at the right time – the moment Jacob stepped on the threshold of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. Her name was not mentioned earlier in 24:59 because it had to be introduced at the right moment (confirming Rendsburg's argument that anticipatory use of information was employed by the writer of Genesis to delay the mention of Deborah's name). In our reckoning, Diebner's conclusion confirms that Genesis 35:8 was not an accidental placement in the unit.

The implication of Diebner's depiction of Deborah as a producer of milk and honey for our study is profound. In Deborah could be seen a nourisher of the house of Rebekah, a

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[208] Diebner (1988:181) writes, "*Beides last sich "gleichungschaft" darstellen*:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Deborah* דבורה | *ist Amme* מינקת; *eine Amme* | *gibt Milch* | הלב |
| *Deborah* דבורה | *heist "Binne";* *eine Biene* | *gibt Hönig* | דבש |
| *Die Summe* | *Deborah* | *gibt* | הלב ודבש |

*Deborah stirbt nicht zufällig, sondern in dem "Augenblick", wo Jakob das "Land Kanaan"betritt… Deborah stirbt im "rechten Augenblick". Jakob hat die Schwelle zum Lande Kanaan betreten – noch nicht Sichem Gen* 35, 1-4!"

provider of food, of sustenance[209]. It should be recalled that the one of the multifaceted roles of Woman Wisdom examined in the last chapter is that of a host, a provider of nourishment (Claassens 2004:86-90). Deborah, therefore, could be seen as Woman Wisdom at work, providing nourishment for Rebekah's offspring.

Lastly, the figurative use of the term מֵינֶקֶת in Isaiah 49:23; 60:16; and 66:10-13[210], in which God Himself is seen as a מֵינֶקֶת, has theological implications.[211] Could the household of Rebekah have seen in this earthly מֵינֶקֶת the Supreme מֵינֶקֶת Himself in the way she taught and nourished them, tending and ministering to their needs? The metaphorical use of the term also calls to mind other female imageries of God in the Old Testament. Closely related to that of the מֵינֶקֶת are the images of God as a midwife (Pss 22:9-10; 71:6; Is 46:3; cf. Claassens 2007:767ff) and as a mother especially a woman in travail (Løland 2008:100ff).

### 4.2.6.2 Burial and weeping/mourning

Besides the role of the wet nurse in ancient Israel, another issue worth examining under the socio-cultural context of Genesis 35:8 is the custom of burial vis-à-vis mourning and weeping. The text shows that Deborah died and she was buried, and the people must have wept and must have mourned her, hence, the tree under which she was buried was named *Allon Bacuth*.

The Old Testament is sufficiently explicit on the fact that the people of Israel buried their dead[212]. The customary method of disposing of corpses was by interment "in a *geber*, *geburâ*, or *bayit*" (Block-Smith 1992:785). According proper burial to a loved one was considered a filial duty and a good way to end life's journey. The importance of a good

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[209] In fact, Diebner (1989:184) sees Deborah as a producer of milk and honey for Israel in the Golah (i.e. "*mesopotamischen Golah*"), and at the point when Israel would reach the "land that flows with milk and honey", Deborah's mission ended and she died on the verge of Canaan.

[210] Cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:7 and 2 Esdras 1:28-29. In Numbers 11:12, Moses sees himself as a wet-nurse who tends to Israel's needs.

[211] Claassens (2004:7, 107-108) points out that the metaphor of nursing is used to describe God's love and provision in Numbers 11:11-12 and Deuteronomy 32:13-14.

[212] See Genesis 23:19; 25:9-10; 35:29; 50:13; Numbers 11:34; Deuteronomy 10:6; Joshua 24:30, 33; Judges 8:32; 16:31; 1 Samuel 28:3; 2 Samuel 2:32 and 1 Kings 2:10, etc.

burial in the Old Testament period is stressed by the Qoheleth thus: "*A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he*" (Eccl 6:3).

The book of Genesis shows that all the patriarchs and all the matriarchs (except Rachel) were buried at the Cave of Machpelah, which Abraham had earlier bought from Hephron the Hittite (Gen 23:3-20; 49:29-30). Although such burials in tombs and in caves were common, Block-Smith (1992:785-786) shows that it was also customary to bury people at the location of their death as happened in the case of Rachel in Genesis 35:19 (cf. Miriam and Aaron in Num 20:1 and Num 33:39, respectively). However, it seems to us that this kind of burial took place when a person died on a journey or away from home. For instance, in Numbers 11:34, the people who lusted after meat in the desert were buried at Kibroth-hattaavah.

Furthermore, burying people at the location of their death was sometimes carried out in the proximity of a tree (Block-Smith 1992:785) as in the case of Deborah or of the bones of Saul and his sons (Gen 35:8; 1 Sam 31:12-13). The significance of burials under trees will be considered below. Often, burial markers were used to mark the graves of those buried at the place of death, e.g. Rachel's grave (Gen 35:20).

Closely associated with proper burials are the customs of weeping and mourning[213]. It was the norm to weep over loved ones at their burial. Abraham wept for Sarah and mourned her (Gen 23:2). In Deuteronomy 34:8, the children of Israel wept for (and mourned) Moses for thirty days in the plains of Moab, and in 2 Samuel 3:32, King David and his people wept at the grave of Abner. It seemed weeping was a major element in the mourning process. Other aspects included fasting (2 Sam 1:12), putting off jewelry (Ex 33:4), tearing one's clothes, and wearing sackcloth and ashes (2 Sam 3:31).

When a great person died, mourning could go on for prolonged periods. At the death of Jacob, his offspring and all Egypt mourned for him for seventy days (Gen 50:3). The house of Israel mourned for Aaron and Moses for thirty days each (Num 20:29; Deut

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[213] See 2 Samuel 1:12; 11:26; 1 Kings 13:30; 1 Chronicles 7:22 and 2 Chronicles 35:24.

34:8); and in 1 Samuel 31:13, the men who went to bury the bones of Saul and his sons fasted for them for seven days. In some instances, such mourning was accompanied by lamentation (1 Sam 1:17; 25:1; 28:3; 2 Chr 35:25)[214].

It is pertinent to note here also that, in the New Testament period, the practice of weeping and mourning for the dead remained. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus in John 11:35, and at the death of Jesus himself, the women of Jerusalem raised a great lamentation for him (Lk 23:27; John 20:11).

It is possible to recapture the kind of burial Deborah must have received from the above discussion. Not only was there such great lamentation and weeping during her burial, the burial spot became memorialized. It seems her burial is comparable to only that of notable persons in the Old Testament. For instance, after the whole land of Egypt had mourned Jacob for seventy days (Gen 50:3), Joseph, all his brethren and the elders of Egypt went up to bury him at the Cave of Machpelah. Genesis (50:10-11) describes the event thus:

> And they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim[215], which is beyond Jordan (emphasis added).

This account of the mourning for Jacob parallels Mathew's description of the mourning for Deborah: "The grievous mourning and raising of a special memorial evidenced the deep heartache Jacob must have felt toward the passing of the nursemaid who had attended him in his childhood" (Mathew 2005:621, emphasis added). Similarly, Calvin (1948:239) remarks that, "the name given in her perpetuity to the place, testifies that she was buried with peculiar honour, and with no common mourning" (emphasis added). We have noted at the beginning of this chapter that besides Deborah's, only the burial of five other women (all women of nobility) are mentioned in the Old Testament. This fact indeed adds to the significance of her burial and the extraordinary mourning that accompanied it.

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[214] For more on burials in the Old Testament, see Cole (2000:204-205).
[215] *Abel-Mizraim* means the mourning of the Egyptians.

### 4.2.6.3 Trees and oaks

Deborah was buried under the oak tree below Bethel. It has been shown that her burial under a tree was not unique. Towner (2001:232) affirms that trees were often associated with sacred places (e.g. with Hebron or Shechem) and that the phenomenon was known throughout the ancient world and other traditional societies. Skinner (1910:425) refers to the tree under which Deborah was buried as 'sacred' and Block-Smith agrees that the tree could signify divine presence (e.g. when Abraham planted a tamarisk tree and called on the name of God at a treaty site in Gen 21:32-33). She explains the importance of burying people under trees: "Burial under a tree also expressed a desire to propagate and to perpetuate the memory of an individual" since the tree is also associated with immortality as illustrated by the 'tree of life' in Genesis 2:9 (Block-Smith 1992:785).

### 4.2.6.4 Women of Genesis

A number of fascinating studies have been conducted in recent times on the women of Genesis. Here, a few remarks on the First Deborah should be in order. However, it appears that the socio-cultural context of the women could be approached, primarily, from their literary characterization. Exum (1993:94ff.) tries to establish that the stories of Genesis are stories of the fathers, which tend to overlook the mothers. Although the women are not completely absent from the narratives, she claims that, when they appear, their stories (as in the rest of biblical narratives) are incomplete and fragmented – "they regularly drop out of view at critical points in the family's history" (Exum 1993:102). She remarks that neither the lives nor the deaths of the matriarchs, for instance, hold much interest for the biblical narrators and the matriarchs' absence at critical junctures in family history "reflects the fact that Israel is personified in its fathers, not its mothers" (Exum 1993:103, 107).

In her "*Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes*", Alice Ogden Bellis devotes the third chapter to *The Women of Genesis*. She focuses on ten women whom she considers the principal "historical" women of Genesis namely Sarah, Hagar, Lot's daughters, Rebekah, Rachel

and Leah, Dinah, Tamar and Potiphar's wife. Bellis (1994:67ff) notes that most women in Genesis are "helpmates", that is, wives and mothers and that eight of the ten women under consideration are clearly mothers (the exceptions being Dinah and Tamar).

However, she remarks that, "One issue that comes up repeatedly is deception. Of the ten women considered here, six of them are portrayed as tricksters (Lot's daughters, Rebekah, Rachel, Tamar and Potiphar's wife)". Citing Niditch, she acknowledges that tricksters are found all over the book of Genesis (Bellis 1994:69)[216]. Genesis women sometimes used deception to achieve their goals but, by and large, those goals are "characterized as honourable". Bellis argues that because the women of Genesis generally lacked authority and structural power, they often resorted to trickery to accomplish their purpose and many also became victims[217]. She notes, in addition, that the women "run the gamut from helpmates to harlots" but the only missing category is that of heroes (Bellis 1994:94).

On the issue of deception, Bellis apparently takes a cue from Niditch, who notes that the many women in Genesis engage in trickery and deception in order to advance the career of either their husbands or sons. She claims also that the book portrays women as exercising power in the private rather than the public domain, i.e. as wives or mothers. Moreover, the woman who would succeed had to engage in trickery (e.g.

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[216]Niditch (1998:22) asserts that tricksters are found "among Israelites sojourning in foreign lands, among younger sons, and among women". Williams (2001) advances this point and shows that deception actually permeates the whole of Genesis, cutting across different levels of the social strata. In all, he notes that, in the book, sixteen males are deceived as opposed to one female, and that most perpetrators are of inferior social status to the victims of deception', which confirms the notion that "deception is the weapon of the overmatched or powerless who face otherwise insuperable obstacles" (p.43). Williams concludes that, in the book, it appears that when deception is used to promote or restore overall shalom, then it is justified; otherwise, when it causes a disruption in shalom, then it is viewed negatively.

[217] On this point, Fuchs (1985b:137, 143, 144) asserts that women's use of deception in the Hebrew Bible is linked to their inferior status in the society and to their "political powerlessness in a patriarchal society". She argues that women were allowed a secondary literary status and that the power-structured relation between men and women reflecting the women's powerlessness is responsible for deception. Fuchs, therefore, concludes that the "recurrent association of femaleness and deceptiveness reflects a gynophobic and patriarchal attitude rather than an inherent moral deficiency that predisposes women to dishonesty".

Rebekah, Rachel and Tamar). This observation points to the marginal status of women (Niditch 1998:13-23)[218].

In the midst of the women of Genesis, many of whom have been stereotyped and stigmatized as deceivers and tricksters, Deborah stands out as a true mother in Israel. Perhaps in this First Deborah, therefore, Bellis' missing category of heroines could be filled. Deborah fits into the image of Genesis women who operated from the private domain but, more than that, the great and unprecedented mourning for her (an 'ordinary' maid) testifies that she is an example of what has been referred to as "a domestic hero" or "a common person as a hero" (Ryken et al 1998:378-381).

### 4.2.7 Theological context of Genesis 35:8

The last aspect of context to be considered here is the theological context of Genesis 35:8. First, the inclusion of Deborah's eulogy in the story of the 'big men' of Genesis demonstrates that God is on the side of the marginalized and those the society would consider as little people. It is not surprising that the Old Testament notices this First Deborah. After all, a common trend in Scriptures is for God to be on the side of the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed, and the least likely to succeed. With God, there is always hope for the underdog, as He would often place the younger above the elder (e.g. Jacob over Esau, or David above all his older brothers). He would also readily support the weak against the mighty (e.g. David against Goliath). That trend is noticeable in the story of Deborah. One would have expected an obituary notice on Rebekah, the lady of the house. Rather, one is confronted with the death notice of Deborah, her maid, the only such woman in Genesis who stood with noble women shoulder to shoulder in death. Perhaps, the saying is true that a person's greatness is truly revealed in their death.

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[218] For her part, Furman (1985:114-115) demonstrates how three women in Genesis (Rebekah, Potiphar's wife and Tamar) used garments or pieces of attire (the symbolic code of a father-son relationship or of the patriarchal system) to re-inscribe themselves in and subvert a system that neglects them.

### 4.2.8. Conclusion of chapter

From the socio-cultural context of Genesis 35:8 considered in the foregoing, the following conclusions can be reached about the First Deborah.

First, in Chapter 3, it was established that one of the primary contexts for instilling wisdom in ancient Israel was the domestic or home front. As a matter of fact, the book of Proverbs is fraught with references on parental discourse to children on the need for the acquisition of wisdom. We would like to extrapolate here, therefore, that if part of Deborah's duty in Rebekah's household was that of a tutor, then, she must have taught Rebekah's offspring wisdom. Secondly, Deborah's image as a nourisher, a provider of milk, a "suckler", relates well with the image of Woman Wisdom as a host, a provider of food and nourishment. We, therefore, consider this First Deborah as Woman Wisdom in disguise and in the private domain.

Secondly, the burial accorded Deborah was not that of a mean or 'mere' woman but of an esteemed and honourable person. It is reasonable to presume that that burial was not informed by Deborah's birth or name but by what she accomplished and what she stood for in the household of Israel - a wise teacher and counsellor, a true mother in Israel!

From a literary perspective, 35:8 is strategically placed right at the centre of our pericope, Genesis 35:1-15. We would submit that the unit of Genesis 35:8 with its reference to Deborah is not an intrusion but a deliberate literary and theological strategy employed to locate Deborah not just at the heart of the Bethel tradition but of the Jacob Cycle. Her demise (and eventually that of Rachel) is meant to point out that the Jacob Cycle was about to close.

This conclusion will tend to trigger off the question of the dating of Genesis 35:8. We have pointed out earlier in the chapter that the issue of the dating of Genesis remains inconclusive. However, it is generally agreed that the Priestly materials in the book are

exilic/post-exilic redaction[219]. The question, therefore, is 'What constitutes P"? We would not go into the details of the arguments on the P materials in Genesis but, rather, address the chapter under discussion, i.e. 35. Both Weiser (1961:136) and Brueggemann (2003:44) consider 35:9-13 as P, leaving out v.8, but Weiser, in addition, identifies 35:15, 22-29 with P. Some other analyses consider 35:1-7 as P, leaving out v.8[220]. Genesis 35:8 is often associated with E (Weiser 1961:124).

For his part, Ska (2006:202-205) analyzes the materials from a different angle. He considers, among others, the pre-exilic materials of the Pentateuch and these include Genesis 32-33; 35:1-8, 16-20). It is notable that Ska's analysis makes room for v.8 together with vv.1-7. We would argue here that there is not much to suggest that 35:8 could not have been P (i.e. were we to use the DH criteria to date the materials) especially since the verse is clearly rooted in the Bethel tradition, which is regarded as a Northern tradition and exilic/post-exilic (Knauf's analysis cited above). More importantly, the overall argument in this chapter that Genesis 35:8 should not be considered as intrusive based on the internal logic of the unit permits a dating that is in line with the P material in the chapter.

Consequently, the persistent dilemma in Pentateuchal studies of where to place Genesis 35:8 or of what to do with the First Deborah could be resolved if, like the other verses in the unit of 35:1-15, v.8 is considered late (post-exilic) and as part of a scribal (wisdom) redaction, thus, establishing examples of wisdom. The link of 35:8 with wisdom at the close of the Jacob Cycle, which anticipates the Joseph Cycle that is recognized for its strong roots in wisdom tradition, is, therefore, not at all improbable.

The next chapter will focus on Sheerah, the female builder of cities in 1 Chronicles 7:24.

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[219] See Ska (2006:159-161) on the three proposals concerning the dating of P, viz. the pre-exilic period, the end of exile or the beginning of the return, and the period following the reconstruction of the Second Temple. He settles for a date that is "at least the period of the Exile" but Weiser (1961:138) claims that P could "not have gained significance before the end of the fifth century". Von Rad (1963:23) considers the P material in Genesis post-exilic (ca. 538-450 BCE), i.e. apart from the later additions.

[220] De Pury (2006:57) considers Genesis 35:1-5, 7 as part of the epilogue to the non-P material in Genesis 25-35. There is no mention of v.8. Blum (2006:97-98), even though he does not covertly address 35:1-7 as P, links it to the Joshua 24 tradition of the gods the fathers worshipped beyond the Euphrates because of the ritual acts of Jacob's household under the terebinth tree. However, there is no mention of v.8.

# CHAPTER 5

# SHEERAH – A WISE BUILDER?

*"A wise woman builds…"*
*(Proverbs 14:1)*

## 5.1. Chapter introduction

Sheerah (*remnant*), mentioned only in the book of 1 Chronicles, will be the focus of our investigation in this chapter.

> *His daughter was Sheerah, who built Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah (1 Chronicles 7:24).*
>
> וּבִתּוֹ שֶׁאֱרָה וַתִּבֶן אֶת־בֵּית־חוֹרוֹן הַתַּחְתּוֹן וְאֶת־הָעֶלְיוֹן וְאֵת אֻזֵּן שֶׁאֱרָה ה:

In the verse above, Sheerah is said to build three cities. Commentators[221] have rightly observed that Sheerah is the only woman in the whole of Scriptures, recognized as a city builder. This point is striking and, therefore, worth investigating. In correspondence with the treatise of Deborah in the previous chapter, a brief survey of scholarship on the book of 1 Chronicles will be provided, followed by the delimitation of the scope of the pericope and its verse-by-verse analysis. The verse-by-verse analysis as well as the analysis of intertextual references and allusions in the text (specifically, in 7:24) will provide data for evaluating the geographical, socio-cultural and theological contexts of the material.

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[221] See Curtis and Madsen (1910:154); Japhet (1993:182); Knoppers (2004:465); Dirksen (2005:126); Ben Zvi (2006:185); Klein (2006:234fn); Sparks (2008:202fn) and Jonker (forthcoming, p.86).

## 5.2 A brief overview of research history of the book of 1 Chronicles

The title of the Greek version of the book of Chronicles, *Paraleipomena,* "things left behind" or "left over"[222], indeed appears to be an apt description of Sheerah, a woman mentioned only in this book. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book, that is, until the late Middle Ages when the Greek translators of the LXX divided it into two books[223]. However, the more crucial issue in the study of Chronicles is the relationship of the books to Ezra-Nehemiah. It was presumed that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah were the products of single authorship and together constituted what was regarded as the "Chronistic History". The assumption was based on the presence of parallel texts in Ezra and 2 Chronicles, similarity in style and vocabulary, similarity in interests and theology or corresponding themes in the two blocks, and the absence of a separation between Chronicles and Ezra in 1 Esdras[224].

In time, Japhet (1968) and Williamson (1977) challenged this traditional notion that Chronicles is a continuation of Ezra-Nehemiah based on a fresh investigation of its language and style, the purpose and the historical contexts[225]. In fact, Japhet (1993:4; 2009:3) sees Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah as two different works by two different authors. With few exceptions, recent scholarship, therefore, tends to support the Japhet-Williamson view that Chronicles is a distinct literary work from Ezra-Nehemiah[226]. Although the argument that Chronicles is separate from Ezra-Nehemiah seems to hold water, it should not diminish the fact that the literary correspondences in the books remain undeniable (Braun 1986: xxi).

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[222] The LXX title, *Paraleipomena,* stands for "things omitted from" or "left out" of the books of Samuel-Kings (Braun 1986: xix; Japhet 1993:1; Selman 1994:19; Tuell 2001:1; Knoppers 2004:49; Dirksen 2005:2 and Klein 2006:1).

[223] See Tuell (2001:2) and Dirksen (2005:2).

[224] For more on the relationship between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, see Curtis and Madsen (1910:2-5); McKenzie (1984:18-24); Williamson (1977:5-6); Duke (1990:25-27); Japhet (1993:3-5); Selman (1994:65-69); Kelly (1996:14-26) and Schweitzer (2007:2-3).

[225] Japhet (1968), for example, provides thirty-six distinctions to demonstrate convincingly that there are conspicuous stylistic and linguistic differences between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, i.e. apart from the assumption that a certain time period must have separated the two writings.

[226] See Riley (1993:19); John Thompson (1994:29); Selman (1994:65-69); Kelly (1996:234); Dirksen (2005:3) and Schweitzer (2007:2-3). Japhet-Williamson's opposition of the traditional view of single authorship for the two works has been criticized (See Sparks 2008:1-2fn for references; cf. Knoppers 2004:74).

On the issue of authorship, Schweitzer (2007:2-3) adds that, "the identity of the 'Chronicler' remains unknown"[227]. In spite of his anonymity, the fact that the Chronicler made use of other sources is incontrovertible. Japhet (2009:6-8) asserts that there are two types of materials in the book – those taken from other sources and the Chronicler's additional materials especially speeches and prayers. She notes that the additions point to the Chronicler's view (2009:10). This extensive use of other sources (mostly from the Deuteronomistic History) is regarded as a distinctive feature of Chronicles[228].

Tuell (2001:3-4) notes that Chronicles is largely dependent on Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings but the material is used in a selective fashion. Although it is agreed that the bulk of the material comes from Samuel-Kings, the Chronicler also drew on other parts of the Old Testament such as Genesis-Numbers and Psalms[229]. For instance, the sources for 1 Chronicles 1-9 (the genealogies) are associated with Genesis and Joshua while other chapters are based on Samuel-Kings and chapters 12; 16:1-24; 22; 28; 29 used the Deuteronomistic History (Dirksen 2005:6).

Additionally, Thompson (1994:22-23) points out that the Chronicler sometimes differed from his *Vorlage*; and when this happens, scholars assume that he modified his text. He notes, however, that, "… recent studies have shown that the Chronicler did not modify his sources at will. Rather, some of his sources arose from a different Hebrew tradition from that of the MT", e.g. the Palestinian or Samarian Pentateuch. What is more, skilful and creative use of sources is evident in the composition (1994:24).

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[227] Riley (1993:25) claims that the issue of authorship remains conjectural since it is clear that, mainly, the Chronicler has used various sources. However, different levels of redaction and schools of tradition have been proffered for the work (cf. Selman 1994:71 and Klein 2006:16).

[228] While Riley (1993:24) shows that the issue of sources used by the Chronicler is thoroughly complicated, Selman (1994:72) explains that the process of using various sources is beyond dispute but, rather, "the extent and nature of this material, and the manner in which it has been incorporated into the over-all composition, is widely debated".

[229] See Myers (1986a: xlv-lxiii); Duke (1990:21); Japhet (1993:14-23); Thompson (1994:23); Tuell (2001:6-7) and Knoppers (2004:66-71). Japhet (1993:18-19) asserts that, besides the major sources, a number of extra-biblical sources have also been consulted in Chronicles (cf. McKenzie 1984:26-28). Selman (1994:74) also claims that, "More recent study has indicated, however, that in addition to the Hebrew Masoretic text, Chronicles has been influenced by other textual traditions, including the Lucianic LXX (L) and a manuscript of parts of Samuel found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QSam^a)". However, the exact nature of the relationship remains under investigation.

As is the case with most Old Testament books, no sure date has been assigned to the composition of Chronicles; the issue of date is a matter of conjecture. The various dating of the work ranges from as early as 529-515 BCE or the period of the destruction of the First Temple to as late as third century BCE or the late Persian/early Hellenistic period[230]. Braun (1986: xxviii-xxix) admits that the arguments on the dating of Chronicles are inconclusive and the certainty on date is impossible (although he himself posits a 515 BCE dating and a 350-300 BCE dating for the final form). Scholars who settle for a late Persian dating, for instance, base their argument both on internal evidence (e.g. reference to the Persian empire in 2 Chron 36:20) and external evidence (e.g. by the second century BCE, the book was already in wide circulation)[231].

On the other hand, a few scholars play safe and settle for an 'either/or' dating. For instance, although Knoppers (2004:106, 116) warns that the issue of the dating of Chronicles needs to be handled with caution, he argues for a mid-third century dating "as the latest reasonable time for composition to explain the second- and first-century reuse of Chronicles". However, he admits that his "personal inclination is toward a date in the late fourth or early third century". Schweitzer (2007:3-5) also assumes a late Persian or early Hellenistic period dating and claims that the two options have more supporters among scholars (Japhet 2009:4). However, Tuell (2001:10) explains that it is probable that the composition of Chronicles could have occurred in stages.

On a broad level, the structure of Chronicles is divided into three main sections namely 1 Chronicles 1-9 (introduction), 1 Chronicles 10-2 Chronicles 9 (history of Israel under David and Solomon), and 2 Chronicles 10-36 (Judah's history after the separation of the

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[230] On various arguments concerning the dating of Chronicles, see Selman (1994:69-71) and Klein (2006:13-17).

[231] Scholars who support a late Persian period dating of Chronicles (or at least its redaction) include Williamson 1977:83, 86); Johnstone (1997:10) and Japhet (2009:4). For example, Klein (2006:16) hypothesizes that "Chronicles was composed in the first half of the fourth century BCE, before the end of the Persian period and the arrival of Alexander the Great". Similarly, Dirksen (2005:5) claims that, "The only thing no one doubts is that it can be dated after the end of the exile…" He shows that calculations arrive at 370 or 345 BCE and so he concludes that the date must be "the first half of the fourth century BCE". See also Japhet (1993:36) and Kelly (1996:26-27). For Jonker (2009:13), Chronicles "reflects the social-political dynamics of the late Persian era".

northern kingdom)[232]. Besides, a number of literary forms have been identified in Chronicles, which include genealogies, lists, speeches, poetry, narratives, dialogues, sermons, prayers, a letter, prophetic exhortations and oracles, historical records and source citations, etc[233].

However, there is a tendency to regard Chronicles as historiography[234]. For Japhet (2009:9), Chronicles is not just a work of historiography; specifically, it is a "theocentric historiography" because its point of departure is not man or the people, but God, and every aspect of life "derives its significance and ultimate reality from its relationship to God". It has been noted, in addition, that some scholars argue that the Chronicler actually used a historiographical method because he employed non-historical categories such as Midrash, homily and polemic (Riley 1993:28-29).

In terms of content, a variety of themes is associated with Chronicles. For instance, Thompson (1994:32-42) identifies eight themes in the twin book: developing the concept of 'all Israel'; the temple and worship; the concept of kingship; retribution and repentance; the response of the people; the Chronicler and Messianism; the repetition of historical patterns; and the Chronicler as an exegete of Scriptures and the past[235].

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[232] See Japhet (1993:8); Selman (1994:27) and Klein (2006:23-24). Some other scholars also divide Chronicles differently, e.g. Myers (1986a: xli-xlv), who divides the work into four namely 1 Chronicles 1-9 (introduction), 1 Chronicles 10-29 (Davidic history), 2 Chronicles 1-9 (activities of Solomon), and 2 Chronicles 10-36 (Story of Judah).

[233] For further details on the literary forms and genres in Chronicles, read Japhet (1993:31-41); Thompson (1994:24); Klein (2006:19) and Schweitzer (2007:5-6).

[234] According to Dirksen (2005:10), "It is a cliché to say that Chronicles is not a history in the modern sense of the word. But if it is essential to historiography to give a coherent view of the period to be described and to lay bare underlying factors for developments, then Chronicles is most certainly historiography, also as regards its purpose".

[235] Thompson's observation reflects other scholarly views, one way or another. For Braun (1986: xxix-xli), the focus of the Chronicler was the Temple as well as David and Solomon, 'all Israel', retribution, repentance and the disposition of the heart. While Selman (1994:27) also considers the Chronicler as an interpreter of Scriptures, Riley (1993:29-36) had earlier shown that the narrative has a royal focus as the Chronicler's main interest was in the Davidic promise, i.e. the idealization of David and Solomon by the Chronicler and using David as a standard by which other kings are rated. For his part, Kelly (1996:13ff) argues that Chronicles' two central themes are retribution and eschatology, while Tuell (2001:5) affirms that the primary concern in Chronicles is the temple and its worship, and besides the doctrine of immediate retribution, an emerging Bible piety based on an apparent emphasis on the word of the Lord or Scriptures, seems to be its hallmark. Schweitzer (2007:7-11) identifies three major themes in Chronicles - genealogies, which form an introduction to the narratives that follow; politics (via geography as Israel is both a people and a land) with the focus on the Davidic line in favour of the northern kingdom; and the temple cult, "typified by the priestly and Levitical organizations and duties" (p.11). Dirksen's (2005:14-21) investigation of themes is limited to 1 Chronicles; the themes include the Davidic dynasty; all Israel;

On the whole, Chronicles is considered an important theological treatise - "it is concerned with the universal relationship between God and humanity, and the vocation of Israel within that relationship" (Johnstone 1997:10). The content of the theological message is said to include the Davidic covenant; Israel as the people of the covenant – the practical implications of being bound to God in covenant; the temple as the place of covenant-centred worship; and the covenant as a basis for restoration (Selman 1994:45-65).

On an ideological level, various arguments have been put up to show Chronicles as an ideologically motivated work. Japhet (2009) asserts that Chronicles was written with the aim of validating Israel and its religion and that the book represents a powerful effort to bridge the gap between the complex reality of the people at the time of writing and the reality described in the Scriptures. For Schweitzer (2007:13ff), utopianism is the coherent ideological matrix underlying Chronicles; the utopian theory provides a unifying premise or coherence for the Chronicles material. He shows that with the exception of the genealogical section, the rest of the material in Chronicles (1:10-2:36) describes a political utopia of the Davidic-Solomonic era as well as the idealization of the cult.

## 5.3 Delineation and choice of pericope

In what follows, the study will focus on 1 Chronicles 7:20-24 but, specifically, on 1 Chronicles 7:24. The choice of the pericope is informed by the unique attribution of city building to a woman, who is mentioned only once, and who happens to be the only female builder of cities in the whole of Scriptures. What could possibly be the motive behind the Chronicler's inclusion of this female builder in the midst of the genealogy of the sons of Ephraim? Curtis and Madsen (1910:154) view 1 Chronicles 7:24 in its

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outlook on the future i.e. the Chronicler "wants to put forward a certain outlook on the future"(p.16); people and land; exodus and exile; and the Temple/temple cult and joy. For Klein (2006:44-48), the central themes in 1 Chronicles include kingship, the Temple and cult, Israel, reward and retribution, attitude toward the Persians, personal piety and future hope. However, for Freedman (1961:437-438), "City and ruler, temple and priest—these appear to be the fixed points around which the Chronicler constructs his history and his theology".

context as being suspicious, and whereas Davis (1992:1191) considers the Chronicler's reasons for putting 7:21b-24 in the list as unclear, Knoppers (2004:464) claims that the story is intrusive because it interrupts the linear genealogy in vv.20-21a and 25-27. That Sheerah (meaning *remnant*) is mentioned only in a book of 'remnants', of things 'left behind', 'left out', or 'left over' is rather striking. In a literary context where women tend to be left out or sidelined in the scheme of things, probing the significance of the inclusion of this unique female in the text appears a worthwhile venture.

## 5.4 Close reading of 1 Chronicles 7:20-28[236]

### 1 Chronicles 7:20-29

[20] *The descendants of Ephraim: Shuthelah, Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son,*
[21] *Zabad his son and Shuthelah his son. Ezer and Elead were killed by the native-born men of Gath, when they went down to seize their livestock.*
[22] *Their father Ephraim mourned for them many days, and his relatives came to comfort him.*
[23] *Then he lay with his wife again, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. He named him Beriah, because there had been misfortune in his family.*
[24] ***His daughter was Sheerah, who built Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah.***
[25] *Rephah was his son, Resheph his son, Telah his son, Tahan his son,*
[26] *Ladan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son,*
[27] *Nun his son and Joshua his son.*
[28] *Their lands and settlements included Bethel and its surrounding villages, Naaran to the east, Gezer and its villages to the west, and Shechem and its villages all the way to Ayyah and its villages.*
[29] *Along the borders of Manasseh were Beth Shan, Taanach, Megiddo and Dor, together with their villages. The descendants of Joseph son of Israel lived in these towns.*

In the verses before 7:20-29, the Chronicler provided a brief account of the descendants of Manasseh, the son of Joseph and Ephraim's older brother. The spotlight in that genealogy is on Manasseh's son, Machir and his family relations. What is remarkable is the presence of several female members of the Machir clan in the account. Mention is made of his mother, his wife, his sister, the indomitable daughters of his great-grandson, Zelophehad (Num 27:1; Josh 17:3), as well as other daughters in his descent and their sons[237].

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[236] In this paragraph, the text critical notes and our interaction with other commentaries will follow in footnotes.
[237] We are not unacquainted with the text critical issues, which accompany this unit; the text will be taken at "face value" in this analysis.

[7:20-21a] The account here opens with the phrase introducing the descendants of Ephraim with the father followed by his son in a descending order beginning from Shuthelah and ending with another Shuthelah, who is seven generations away from their ancestor, Ephraim. It is notable that Ephraim's genealogy begins immediately after that of his brother Manasseh. Two names occur twice in the two verses – Shuthelah and Tahath[238].

[7:21b] Without any introduction of who they were or any connection to the preceding names, the story of the death of two men, Ezer and Elead, in the hands of the men of Gath[239] begins. They were killed in a cattle raid but it is not clear whether it was their cattle being raided or those of the men of Gath[240]. However, the reference to the fact that the men of Gath were native-born shows that these Ephraimites must have been immigrants in or incomers to the land[241]. Evidently, this fact could be a source of conflict between the two groups. At any rate, the men of Gath gained the upper hand and eliminated Ezer and Elead.

[7:22] The link between the slain men, Ezer and Elead, and the preceding names seems to become clearer in this verse - Ephraim was their father (whether remotely or directly). The tragedy threw Ephraim into mourning and even though his sons were gone, he was not alone in his sorrow. His kinsmen came to comfort him[242]. The comfort

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[238] The presentation differs markedly from the list in Genesis 46:20 and Numbers 26:35-37 of the LXX (Knoppers 2004:463).

[239] Selman (1994:116) presumes that Gath here was probably Gittaim (2 Sam 4:3; Neh 11:33), which was nearer to Beth-Horon than the Gath of the Philistines (cf. Braun 1986:115; Mazor 1988:22fn; Thompson 1994:95; Allen 1999:353 and Dirksen 2005:125).

[240] Tuell (2001:39) assumes that the Ephraimites were the attackers but their mission backfired and they were killed by the men of Gath (see Keil and Delitzsch 1950:140-141 for explanations; cf. Hooker 2001:39). On the contrary, De Vries (1989:80) believes that the men of Gath were the aggressors; and Klein (2006:233) asserts that the Ephraimites were the attackers but that was only because the men of Gath had attempted to steal their cattle. Similarly, Sparks (2008:187, 202) assumes that Ezer and Elead were killed when they went to steal other people's livestock. He explains that, "The use of ירד 'go down' indicates that this was a raid by Ephraimites upon Gath as the idea of 'going down' is more appropriate in speaking of going from the hills where Ephraim lived onto the plains where Gath was located" (Sparks 1980:202fn).

[241] Dirksen (2005:125) suggests two possible interpretations here: "The highland Ephraimites are the newcomers; or "more probably: the Ephraimites come from Egypt and so come 'from abroad'. In any case this statement is striking".

[242] A number of textual difficulties have been identified with the verse, which render the path of interpretation thorny. Details of the text critical issues in the genealogy of Ephraim in Chronicles 7 can be found in Knoppers

offered to Ephraim by his relatives has been compared to the comfort of Job by his friends in Job 2:11-13 (Knoppers 2004:465). It may be recalled also that when Jacob mourned because he was informed that Joseph had died in the fields, his sons and daughters "came to comfort him" (Gen 37:31-35). However, there seems to be a twist in the story at this point; it was no longer Ezer and Elead's story but Ephraim's.

[7:23] The support provided by Ephraim's relatives produced good results. Ephraim did not allow the sorrow to drown him. He would live up to his name; he would bear fruit again. He picked up courage and tried again. After all, his wife was not killed in the raid. The ensuing pregnancy produced a son. He chose to name the baby himself – to capture and memorialize the agony and the loss that not only he but his whole family endured. He named the son Beriah *('evil/disaster' or 'unfortunate')* but the name also signified the mixed blessings the family experienced, for Beriah could also mean 'gift'.

The name Beriah here in 7:23 has been related to the Beriah who, together with Shema, "drove out the inhabitants of Gath" in 1 Chronicles 8:13. Mazor (1988:15) claims that Beriah joined forces with a strong Benjaminite family to oust the inhabitants of Gath, thereby, succeeding where his deceased brothers had failed[243]. The assumption in some quarters is that some Beriah traditions have been transferred from Ephraim to Benjamin. Kallai (1998:208-209) argues that the "traditions are locally bound to Aijalon and its clans and because territories which used to belong to Ephraim later

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(2004:456-457); Klein (2006:231-236) and Sparks (2008:197-200), and need not be cited fully here. However, it is salient to point out that the main text critical issue in v.22 lies in the identity of Ephraim. Does the name Ephraim here refer to the progenitor who was the son of Joseph or was it a later descendant of his? If it is the former, it is argued that he could not possibly be present in Canaan since he was born, lived and died in Egypt, according to the Pentateuchal narratives (Tuell 2001:39 and Dirksen 2005:122). For Dirksen (2005:126), even though it is natural to assume that the name refers to the ancestor, in the present context, Ephraim probably refers to a remote descendant of the primogenitor (cf. Selman 1994:117). The BH suggests that the name Ephraim in the verse has been inserted as a gloss (Japhet 2009:295). The second issue deals with the phrase "relatives" (NIV or NAB), which the MT renders as "brother". It is argued that because Pentateuchal texts show that Ephraim had only one brother, Manasseh, if the text referred to him, then, it becomes a problem but the NIV rendering deals with this ambiguity. Thompson (1994:96) agrees with the NIV usage of relatives but Dirksen (2005:126) argues that "there is no compelling reason to do so, given the fact that this anecdote does not reflect the traditions of the Pentateuch". We shall pay more attention to these issues later.

[243] Mazor further explains that the story "is a simplified description of the attempts of the families of Ephraim to settle in the region of Gath and Beth-horon during the earlier settlement of Canaan".

became part of expanding Benjamin… these local traditions were in part recorded in the list of Ephraim and in part that of Benjamin"[244].

[7:24] The narrative veers again, but this time, a daughter comes into the picture – Sheerah[245], "the remnant". She enters the picture with an ambiguous identity. Is she the daughter of Beriah or the daughter of Ephraim[246]? Perhaps she was the daughter of Ephraim whose eyes were on sons who would succeed him and did not think much good could come out of a surviving daughter. However, this daughter would turn out to be more than just a mere survivor. Sheerah rose above the tragedy that befell her father's household, defied the pain and the loss, and went ahead to build three cities – Lower Beth Horon, Upper Beth Horon and Uzzen Sheerah[247].

[7:25-26] The genealogical list continues with a succession of seven sons. If one were to rely only on the genealogical lists, one could easily assume that ancient Israel had the highest ratio of male to female children in the world! The first name in v. 26, Rephah, was certainly not the son of Sheerah for the phrase, 'the son of', refers to a man, not a woman. This shows that the verse is disconnected from v. 24; Rephah, like Sheerah, was the descendant either of Beriah or of Ephraim.

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[244] Similarly, Wright (1997:156-157) links Beriah with the Benjaminite Beriah. He recalls that in the battle accounts in the genealogies, only the descendants of Ephraim suffered defeat; but their victors were vanquished by the Benjaminites. Some interpretations also relate Beriah of 7:23 to another Beriah, a descendant of Asher, in 1 Chronicles 7:30.

[245] Note that the Syriac differs sharply from the MT and the LXX as it translates v. 24a as "his daughter was left", i.e. analyzing שארה as a verb. In other words, the Syriac has "his daughter was left at Beth Horon", and it adds that this daughter was curing both individuals and towns. Knoppers (2004:457) suggests that the Syriac "may represent a creative re-interpretation and expansion of an older tradition". The traditional and prevailing interpretation of the MT/LXX will be maintained in this study.

[246] See Klein (2006:234) and Sparks (2008:197).

[247] The LXX translates the phrase, "*and Uzzen Sheerah*", in 7:24b as "*and the sons of Ozan (were) Sheerah*" (Knoppers 2004:457). Based on the LXX translation, Mazor (1988:14ff) offers an interpretation of 7:24b that links "Ozan" and Sheerah with the LXX of Joshua 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34. She claims that the name Hiel the rebuilder of Jericho in 1 Kings 16:34 is actually Ozan in the LXX of Joshua 6:26 and that the youngest son of Hiel, Segub is not Hiel in the LXX of Joshua 6:26 but Sheerah (note that the MT of Josh 6:26 neither names the rebuilder of Jericho nor his son). Klein (2004:232fn) remarks that some of Mazor's suggestions "involve a good deal of conjecture". Indeed, the reading appears strained and there are many issues from the context of 1 Chronicles 7:24 that Mazor does not explain. For example, what connection is there between the building of Jericho and the building of Beth-horon or between the Ozan of the LXX of Joshua and the Beriah of Chronicles?

[7:27] The list continues with Nun, the son of Elishama and his own son, Joshua. The same Joshua was the servant and successor of Moses, the man of God. The genealogy then traces Joshua to Ephraim, the progenitor. It has been noted that Joshua's genealogy occurs only here except for the name of his father *Non* or *Nun* which is found elsewhere ( Dirksen 2005:122)[248]. Perhaps the mention of Joshua here was meant to remind the reader that Ephraim also had produced a national leader of repute in the past and it was through his offspring that Israel claimed the Promised Land.

[7:28-29] Here, v. 28 and v. 29 describe the territories occupied by the descendants of Ephraim and of Manasseh, respectively. While the major cities occupied by Ephraim included Bethel, Naaran to the east, Gezer, Shechem and Ayyah with their respective villages, Manasseh's territory were Beth Shan, Taanach, Megiddo and Dor. It is notable that Lower and Upper Beth Horon and Uzzen Sheerah are not listed among these cities. Perhaps the Chronicler considered their inclusion here an unnecessary repetition seeing they have been mentioned already in v.24 (cf. 1 Chron 6:68). The unit ends by affirming the relation between Ephraim and his brother Manasseh by juxtaposing their territories in these closing verses to their genealogies[249].

Additionally, the last statement, *"The descendants of Joseph son of Israel lived in these towns",* functions as a closing remark to the unit. It acts as a parallel to not only the opening statement of the unit, "*The descendants of Ephraim"*, in v.20, but also to the opening statement of Manasseh's genealogy, *"The descendants of Manasseh"*, in v.14. Again, by closing the genealogies of both Manasseh and Ephraim in this manner, the Chronicler reinforced the connection between the two tribes.

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[248] See also Sparks (2006:203-204) for further comments on the genealogy of Joshua in 1 Chronicles 7:27.
[249] The indication in the verses is that the borders of Ephraim and Manasseh are related (Kallai 1998:209).

## 5.5 Literary consideration of 1 Chronicles 7:24 (as part of 7:21b-24)

At this point, a more detailed analysis of 1 Chronicles 7:24 will be attempted in terms of the literary structure, context and content. However, the verse will be considered in the light of the context of 7:21b-24, which is the immediate unit in which v. 24 falls.

### 5.5.1 Literary structure and type

The pericope of 1 Chronicles 7:20-29 falls within 1 Chronicles 1-9, the genealogical section, which is regarded as the introduction or preface to the two books of Chronicles[250]. Knoppers (2004:260) affirms that the genealogies (of Israel from Adam) in 1-9 serve as a prelude to the "longer narrative history of a given period or war". A number of scholars divide 1 Chronicles 1-9 into three major parts and assume that the chapters consist largely of later additions[251]. Further, 7:20-29 is analysed commonly as a unit within a broad chapter of the genealogy of the northern and central tribes but there are minor variations in the way scholars divide the pericope. For instance, Braun (1986:113) divides 7:20-29 into three major parts namely vv. 20-21a, 25-27 (genealogy from Ephraim to Joshua), vv. 21b-24 (a historical notice on the birth of Beriah), and vv. 28-29 (a list of villages occupied by the sons of Joseph)[252].

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[250] See Myers (1986a: xli); Johnstone (1997:11); Schweitzer (2007:11) and Japhet (2009:275).

[251] An example is Dirksen (2005:30), who divides 1-9 into chapters 1; 2-8; and 9. Japhet (1993:9) divides the section into four viz., 1-2:2 (from Adam to Israel); 2:3-9:2 (Israel); 9:3-34 (inhabitants of Jerusalem); and 9:35-44 (appendix – the house of Saul). However, Knoppers (2004:261) shows that the Chronicler arranged the material in 1-9 in a broad chiastic pattern of *a-b-c-d-c'-b'-a'* representing 1 Chronicles 1:1-54 (the peoples of the world); 2:3-4:23 (Judah); 4:24-5:26 (Simeon and the Transjordanian tribes); 5:27-6:66 (Levi); 7:1-40 (the northern tribes); 8:1-40 (Benjamin); and 9:2-34 (the Persian period inhabitants of Jerusalem). It ought to be mentioned that, although, like Knoppers, Sparks (2008:29) also identifies a chiastic pattern in 1-9, he analyses the structure differently. For Sparks, the pattern is A-B-C-D-E-F-F$^1$-E$^1$-D$^1$-C$^1$-B$^1$-A$^1$, representing 1 Chronicles 1:1-53 (the world before Israel); 2:1-2 (the sons of Israel); 2:3-4:23 (Judah – the tribe of King David); 4:24-5:26 (tribes of Israel in victory and in defeat); 6:1-47 (the descendants of Levi); 6:48-49 (the cultic personnel in their duties); 6:50-53 (the cultic leaders); 6:54-81 (the descendants of Levi in their land); 7:1-40 (Tribes of Israel in defeat and restoration); 8:1-40 (Benjamin – the tribe of King Saul); 9:1a ("all Israel" counted); and 9:1b-34 (Israel re-established). See Riley (1993:18) on the view that 1-9 is a later addition.

[252] Thompson (1994:95) follows Braun's analysis of 7:20-29 but one can also consider the threefold division by Hooker (2001:39) – vv. 20-21a; vv. 21b-27; and vv. 28-29. Note, however, that Japhet (1993:9) breaks chapter 7 into two - 7:1-13 (northern tribes) and 7:14-40 (central tribes) – and, subsequently, she presents vv. 20-27 and vv. 28-29 as separate units. Following his method of structuring chapters 1-9, itemized above, Knoppers (1994:461) divides 7:20-29, based on a chiastic pattern, *a-b-b'-a',* for the descendants of Manasseh (vv. 14-19); the descendants of Ephraim (vv. 20-27); the towns of Ephraim (v.28); and the towns of Manasseh (v.29), respectively.

On a formal level, the pericope is said to consist of a genealogy in two parts (20-21a, 25-27), and an historical note (21b-24)[253]. Some other scholars use different appellations for the historical note such as anecdote, historical notice, story, etc[254]. We choose to analyse the unit of vv. 21b-24 as a genealogical narrative, i.e. in line with Wilson's classification noted above. The unit is also considered an insertion or interruption because (as indicated earlier) it breaks the genealogies of vv. 20-21 and vv. 25-27 (Dirksen 2005:121). Knoppers (2004:465) sees it as an intrusion and a digression in the context. Since 7:21b-24 is found right in the middle of the genealogy of Ephraim in 1 Chronicles 7:20-27, then, that literary context deserves investigation.

### 5.5.1.1 Biblical genealogies

In his seminal work, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, Robert Wilson defines genealogy as "a written or oral expression of the descent of a person or persons from an ancestor or ancestors" (Wilson 1977:9). For it to be called a genealogy, the genealogy must express kinship relationships, and this could happen in one of two ways. The first occurs when more than one line of descent, called segments or branches, are traced from an ancestor. This is called segmented genealogy. The other, called linear genealogy, occurs when only one line of descent is traced from an ancestor[255]. The genealogy may also be expressed either in a narrative form, called a genealogical narrative, or in a list form (Wilson 1977:9). We would like to add, *à propos*, that, if expressing genealogies in the form of narratives is perfectly in line with the

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[253] See Selman (1994:116). Dirksen (2005:121) notes that Ephraim's genealogy "is interrupted by a brief anecdote in vv. 21b-24, which seems to be a later insertion..." Thompson (1994:95) claims it contains a genealogy, a historical notice, and a list. However, De Vries (1989:80) has a more nuanced description of the literary form of the pericope. He claims that, "The main genre here is a LIST with narrative modifications. Verses 20-21 and 25-27 exhibit the genre of GENEALOGY. The NAME LIST is seen in vv. 24, 28, and 29. Vv. 22-23 constitute a BIRTH REPORT, with elements of the FAMILY (→) SAGA, which is a narrative account of the events that compose the past of a family unit. The NAMING ETIOLOGY is featured as the climax of the birth report, v. 23b..."

[254] For example, Thompson (1994:95) claims that the pericope contains a genealogy, a historical notice and a list but Curtis and Madsen (1910:153) regards vv.21b-24 as a story and Tuell (2001) sees it as a narrative (cf. Japhet 1993:181 who analyses it as a story or an aetiological tale). Dirksen (2005:121) notes that Ephraim's genealogy "is interrupted by a brief anecdote in vv. 21b-24, which seems to be a later insertion..." (cf. Klein 2006:218). For Knoppers (2004:457, 463-464), the pericope contains mixed materials – of both genealogies and an anecdote (i.e., in vv.21b-24).

[255] Thompson (1994:25) shows that genealogies may display depth (linear) as in 1 Chronicles 3:10 or breadth as in 1 Chronicles 2:1. When it displays both breadth and depth, it is called segmented or mixed genealogy (cf. Braun 1997:95-96).

nature of genealogies, the argument that 1 Chronicles 7:21b-24 is intrusive in its context becomes untenable.

Wilson (1977:25-26) further explains that when an oral genealogy exceeds twelve generations, it is often linear rather than segmented. Generally, oral genealogies are characterized by their fluidity, i.e. adjustments or changes could be made within the genealogy regarding the relationship of the segments to the genealogy, as well as the addition or disappearance of names from the genealogy[256] (Wilson 1977:30-32). Besides, in large linear genealogies, "Only the socially significant names are likely to be included, for only those are relevant to contemporary concerns" (Wilson 1977:35).

On the function of genealogies, Wilson (1977:40) remarks that they are often used "as charters of society's organization of people and territory" so that they function politically to maintain the *status quo*, to legitimize political offices or as law enforcement mechanisms in jural matters[257]. Specifically, on 1 Chronicles 1-9, Johnson (1969:56-57) argues that the purpose of the core material is to "present a summary of the members of 'all Israel'…" The geographic data, on the other hand, reflects the Chronicler's anxiousness "that the territory occupied under the united monarchy be retained". Further, the purpose of the miscellaneous data is to provide "historical or quasi-factual

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[256] Wilson (1977:31) gives several reasons for genealogical fluidity including the fact that, "… the order of certain names and their relationship to each other may not be considered functionally important by the people who preserve the genealogy. In this case, exact genealogical connections tend to be forgotten, and eventually the names themselves may disappear from the genealogy".

[257] Schweitzer (2007:34-35) affirms that, "… some of the significant purposes of genealogies are: (1) group definition, both internally through organizational hierarchy and associations and externally through lines of demarcation; (2) preservation of history; (3) explanation of current social, political, or religious structures, often with the intention of maintaining the *status quo*; and (4) assertion of claims to continuity with the past or to authoritative interpretation of the past, which may either support or challenge the *status quo*". Thompson (1994:26) explicates that, "The linear genealogy seeks to legitimize an individual by relating him to an ancestor whose status is established. The segmented genealogy is designed to express relationships between the various branches of a family". Examples of such relationships include the domestic, political or religious sphere (cf. Wilson 1977:38-45). In his forthcoming commentary, Jonker maintains that, "Anthropological studies show that these genealogies do not normally have a historical intention, but rather serve social, judicial or religious purposes, legitimating certain claims concerning these spheres of society" (p. 38). He notes further that the Chronicler's genealogies were meant to serve a theological rather than historical function and to establish continuity between the post-exilic Israelite community and the erstwhile cultic community of the Judahite kingdom, which also had links with the patriarchal and the universal past. This assertion is certainly important and one could even suppose that the pre-exilic Israelite community as well as the Diaspora communities have been taken into account in the concept of "כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל" as the genealogies include them.

information about the tribe and its clans", e.g. 7:21-22 (1969:60). For Thompson (1994:25), the number of chapters dedicated to the genealogies in 1 Chronicles shows its importance to the Chronicler. If that is correct, then it could be inferred that the narratives embedded in those genealogies are also considered vital to the Chronicler's task.

In a recent study on the Chronicler's genealogies, Sparks (2008:21) affirms that, "genealogies were not created for purely historical purposes, but were created to reflect the domestic, political and religious relationships which existed within a society"[258]. Although the materials in 1 Chronicles 1-9 express these diverse relationships, the materials come from different periods in Israel's history so that it becomes difficult to class them as a "united genealogy" (Sparks 2008:22). Therefore, Sparks argues that the Chronicler's genealogies are a literary construct, and if this is correct, then their meaning and purpose would not be found in the individual genealogies but in the overall literary structure of the combined genealogies. Consequently, he contends that the genealogies should be investigated in literary terms.

Sparks (2008:23ff) proceeds to analyse the structure of 1 Chronicles 1-9 noting that the Chronicler has presented the genealogies in a chiasmus, which individuals in the ancient society used as a mnemonic device to recognize and remember what is important in the text (his chiastic structure of 1 Chronicles 1-9 has been noted above). He claims that at the centre of the chiasmus are the priests and the Levites as well as their cultic functions (i.e. 1 Chron 6:1-81). In line with his analysis of the whole genealogical section, Sparks also considers the chiastic patterns of the individual genealogical units. He sets 1 Chronicles 7:1-40 in chiastic parallel to 4:24-5:26. Thus, he claims that, unlike in the case of 4:24-5:26, the structure of 7:1-40 "indicates that the central focus of the Chronicler here is not upon armies, land or retribution. The central focus of the Chronicler here is the *restoration of families and the building of towns*"

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[258] For his part, Braun (1997:92) regards the genealogies as history, albeit a 'revisionist history'. His article probes the various discrepancies that are present in Chronicles, that is, vis-à-vis the sources.

(Sparks 2008:186, *italics added*). This observation is significant, as we shall show below.

On Ephraim's genealogy in 1 Chronicles 7:20-29, it has been observed that the Chronicler seemed to understand the genealogy in Numbers 26 as linear rather than segmented in form (Johnson 1969:51; Braun 1997:95-96). In other words, the Chronicler presented the segmented genealogy in Numbers as linear in his own composition. Johnson claims that the Chronicler's perspective leaves "a confusion as to whether the series is to be a line of descent or a group of siblings" (1997:51).

### 5.5.2 Literary analysis of 1 Chronicles 7:24

For the purpose of our analysis, 1 Chronicles 7:24 will be divided here into two – 24a (Sheerah's introduction), and 24b (Sheerah's building activity).

> *24a His daughter was Sheerah*
> *24b who built Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah*

#### (a) 1 Chronicles 7:24a

In the Hebrew text, v. 24a begins with a *waw* consecutive, suggesting a syntactic link with the previous verse(s). However, the antecedent of the phrase, his daughter, is ambiguous. Whose daughter was Sheerah? Was she Ephraim's or Beriah's? Japhet (1993:182) admits that her parentage is not clearly defined (cf. De Vries 1989:80; Dirksen 2005:24; and Klein 2006:234)[259]. For Willi (2009:259), Sheerah was the daughter of Ephraim[260] but Davis (1992:1191) sees her as Beriah's daughter[261]. It seems to us that Sheerah was indeed Ephraim's daughter rather than Beriah's because from v. 22, the narrative centres on Ephraim and the happenings in his family.

If we consider the various characters that feature in the unit – Ezer and Elead; the native men of Gath; Ephraim; Ephraim's relatives; Ephraim's wife; Beriah; and Sheerah

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[259] Perhaps Sheerah's convoluted identity is the result of the Chronicler's insistence on affiliating her to a man!
[260] See also Keil and Delitzsch (1950:141); Na'aman (1991:106); Kallai (1998:209); Allen (1999:353); Knoppers (2004:47, 472) and Japhet (2009:294).
[261] See also Wagner (1975:168); Braun (1986:115) and Thompson (1994:23).

– it can be garnered that they all revolve around Ephraim, directly or indirectly. Ezer and Elead were Ephraim's sons. The reason the men of Gath appeared in the narrative was because they killed Ephraim's sons. Ephraim's relatives also came on the scene because they had to comfort the grieving Ephraim. Ephraim longed for another son; therefore, his wife appeared on the scene. Ephraim lay with her and she got pregnant. The result was a son for Ephraim.

Since the story continues in v.24, and it does so with the *waw*, it seems reasonable to resolve the ambiguity of whose daughter Sheerah was in favour of Ephraim seeing that the narrative is all about him[262]. If, therefore, Sheerah was the daughter of Ephraim and she was the only daughter mentioned in the genealogy of Ephraim[263], was it for the dearth of sons in the family that the narrative takes note of her, or did Sheerah stand out in her own right? We shall attempt to answer this question later in the discussion. The issue at hand here, however, is the confusion about the identity of the Ephraim in the unit.

Whereas there is consensus in scholarship that the name Ephraim in 7:20 refers to the brother of Manasseh who was born to Joseph in Egypt by Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On (Gen 41:45, 50-52; 46:20;48:1), unresolved ambiguity surrounds the name Ephraim in 7:22-23. Does it refer to the same character in v.20 or to a later descendant of the progenitor with the same name? Knoppers (2004:464-465) holds the view that Ephraim refers to the patriarch arguing that, "A more likely explanation for the story is that Chronicles preserves an alternative tradition in which Ephraim and his family came to reside in the land early as opposed to the one in which they endured a four-hundred-year stay in Egypt"[264].

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[262] Besides, the point also ought to be taken of Sparks' (2008:198fn) remark that, "While Sheerah as the daughter of Beriah would make the most sense as Beriah is the nearest referent to the term 'his daughter,' the Chronicler frequently places daughters at the end of a list, after all the sons are mentioned, even if the sons are younger than the daughter…"

[263] The preceding genealogy of Manasseh, for instance, mentions several daughters including the famous daughters of Zelophehad.

[264] Some scholars claim that the ambiguity is between Ephraim the patriarch and Ephraim the personified tribe (De Vries 1989:80). Certainly, that argument cannot hold water since the text goes on to specify that Ephraim later went in to his wife (Klein 2006:233-234). Japhet (2009:294-295) discusses the problem of the ambiguity and even

On the other hand, Selman (1994:117) interprets Ephraim in 7:22-23 as a later descendant of Joseph's son (cf. Dirksen 2004:126). The explanation by Keil and Delitzsch (1950:141) in favour of this position seems admissible. They claim that:

> … [T]he solution to the enigma will be found in the name Ephraim. If this be taken to denote the actual son of Joseph, then the event is incomprehensible; but just as a descendant of Shuthelah in the sixth generation was also called Shuthelah, so also might a descendant of the patriarch Ephraim, living at a much later time, have received the name of the progenitor of the tribe...

Actually, the possibility that a later descendant of Ephraim would bear the same name as the progenitor is high, given that, in the same text, a similar occurrence is found, with respect to not only Shuthelah but also Tahath in v.20, where the names occur twice. It appears such a phenomenon is not uncommon in the Chronicler's genealogies. For instance, in the genealogy of Amram, the son of Levi (1 Chron 6:3-15), in the fifteen generations between Meraioth (v.7) and Seriah (v.14), are found two different Amariahs; two Ahitubs; two Zadoks; and three Azariahs[265].

Additionally, the fact that, besides 1 Chronicles 7:23, no other genealogy on the eponymic Ephraim refers to a son called Beriah may be an indication that the Ephraim in 7:22 is indeed a later descendant of the former. Whereas the genealogical list in Numbers 26:35 lists the sons of Ephraim as Shuthelah, Becher and Tahan (this closely resembles the list of Ephraim's sons in 1 Chronicles 7:20), it includes no Beriah. The only other mention of Ephraim's sons is found in the LXX of Genesis 46:20 (but not in the MT) and it contains the names of only two sons of Ephraim *Southalaam* (Shuthelah) and *Taam* (Tahan) as well as one grandson *Edem* (Eran); but Becher is not listed

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explains midrashic attempts to resolve the exegetical problems. She notes, in addition, that the "BH finds a textual solution for a very involved problem and proposes that the word 'Ephraim' in v.22 has been inserted as a gloss". However, her take is that the referent is the eponymic Ephraim but the details of the story are a literary portrayal and are opposed to what Genesis tells us about Joseph's son.

[265] 1 Chronicles 6:7-14 – [7]Meraioth the father of AMARIAH, Amariah the father of AHITUB, [8]Ahitub the father of ZADOK, Zadok the father of Ahimaaz, [9]Ahimaaz the father of AZARIAH, Azariah the father of Johanan, [10]Johanan the father of AZARIAH (it was he who served as priest in the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem), [11]Azariah the father of AMARIAH, Amariah the father of AHITUB, [12]Ahitub the father of ZADOK, Zadok the father of Shallum,[13]Shallum the father of Hilkiah, Hilkiah the father of AZARIAH, [14]Azariah the father of Seraiah, and Seraiah the father of Jehozadak (*emphasis added*).

(Knoppers 2004:463-464 and Klein 2006:218fn). In other words, if Beriah is not listed anywhere else as the son of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, then, his own father is, perhaps, a different Ephraim - a later descendant of Joseph's son.

One other significant comment is in respect of the name Sheerah (*remnant*). The Targum claims that she was so-called because she was the remnant that escaped from the slaughter of Ephraim's family by the men of Gath in v.21. Interestingly, the name Sheerah is mentioned only twice throughout the Bible – both in 1 Chronicles 7:24. No other genealogical note or narrative in the Old Testament contains the name or any oblique reference to her person[266].

### (b) 1 Chronicles 7:24b

In this second half of v.24, Sheerah is credited with the building of three cities namely Upper Beth Horon, Lower Beth Horon and Uzzen Sheerah. Building a house is quite an accomplishment; but building a city is no mean feat. It becomes even more remarkable when the builder is the only woman throughout Scriptures who is said to build cities[267]. What kind of person was Sheerah and why did she choose to build cities? Was she driven by the loss of sons in her family to prove that a daughter was also worthy? We may never know of a certainty the answers to these questions but the outstanding nature of Sheerah's achievement will remain unquestionable.

Sheerah built Lower and Upper Beth Horon. The name Beth Horon means 'house of the hollow' or 'house of the cavern'. Lower and Upper Beth Horon appear to be twin towns or cities, which also seem to be fairly important in ancient Israelite territory. Apparently, the cities fell within Ephraimite territory, as the verse here shows[268]. Thompson

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[266] Equally notable is Johnstone's (1997:107) observation that of the twenty-one personal names mentioned in the genealogy of Ephraim in 7:20-29, two-thirds do not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. He claims that the Chronicler has used his genealogical records to preserve the obscure branches of his people, without which those names would have been lost.

[267] According to Sherwin (2009:236), that a woman built cities was not just unique in Scriptures, it was rare elsewhere in the ancient Near East.

[268] This point will be elaborated on below under the geographical context of 7:24.

(1994:96) claims that both towns (as well as Uzzen Sheerah) "represent the limits of Ephraim's westward expansion"[269].

The third city built by Sheerah, Uzzen Sheerah (meaning = 'little ear' or 'little corner' of Sheerah; "*das Ohr der Scheerah*"), is mentioned only in 1 Chronicles 7:24 (Sparks 2008:205fn), and some commentators maintain that its location today remains unknown[270]. Apparently, the city was named after its founder, Sheerah. Kallai (1998:209) claims that although the location is unknown, Uzzen Sheerah retains the clan name. Naming the city after this woman seems to testify of her greatness and, in our estimation, it is evidence that Sheerah truly built those cities, and not some male relatives or other figures as certain exegetes tend to assume. That the city was named after Sheerah is significant and points to her significance, more so, if it is understood that the significance of a city may not be totally divorced from the significance of its builder[271]. Equally significant is the point that "the function of the city could not be separated from perceptions of human flourishing" (Clarke 1997:150). Does not the building of those three cities imply, therefore, that Ephraim flourished again after the devastation of his family by war?

Indeed, some commentators make subtle comments that could be construed as an attempt to deprive Sheerah of her achievements while some (e.g. Williamson 1982; Johnstone 1997; Tuell 2001) conveniently ignore her altogether. Perhaps it is inconceivable for them that a woman could achieve such a substantial feat in a man's world. For instance, as far back as a century ago, Curtis and Madsen (1910:153) claimed that Beriah was probably the founder of Beth Horon. Fortunately, they could not say the same of Uzzen Sheerah since the city clearly bears Sheerah's name! Keil and Delitzsch (1950:141-142) regard Sheerah's activity as "merely an enlarging or fortifying

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[269] Japhet (1993:182) notes that the two Beth Horons are well-known Ephraimite localities. Willi (2009:261) confirms that, "… *das untere… und das obere… Bet-Horon zu den bekannntesten efraimitischen Seidlungen*".

[270] See Curtis and Madsen (1910:154); Keil and Delitzsch (1950:141); Williamson (1982:82); Braun (1986:115); Davis (1992:1191); Klein (2006:234) and Willi (2009:261). However, De Vries' (1989:80) suggestion that Uzzen Sheerah is probably modern Beit Sira because of the similarity in sound to the name Sheerah cannot be ignored.

[271] In this connection, Walton (2006:277) points out that, in the ancient world, for example, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, "The patron deity of a city was typically considered the one who founded, built and sustain the city. So the prominence and prosperity of the city and its god were inextricably intertwined". In some cases, human founders of cities were deified by the dwellers as a witness to the importance of their roles.

of these towns (cf. De Vries 1989:80) as she was probably an heiress who inherited the cities and subsequently enlarged them. For Myers (1986a:55), Sheerah "may refer to an individual or to a kind of central encampment of the clans of Western Ephraim"[272].

One thing is certain, the founding of the three cities and the naming of Uzzen Sheerah after Sheerah render her name indelible in the annals of history. The importance of the cities in the present study will be explored under the geographical context of 7:24 below.

### 5.5.3 Intertextual references and allusions in 1 Chronicles 7:24

In this paragraph, various allusions and intertextual connections which are noticeable in 1 Chronicles 7:24 will be investigated in two parts namely with respect to the rest of the pericope under investigation (7:20-29), in particular, and to other parts of the Old Testament, in general.

### *5.5.3.1 Intertextual connections to other parts of 1 Chronicles 7:20-29*

Although some scholars consider 7:24 as an intrusion or addition to the Ephraimite genealogy, as we have pointed out earlier, there appear to be some clear literary nuggets that would tie the verse firmly to the rest of the pericope and, in fact, to the rest of the chapter. In the first place, the syntactic connection with the preceding verse (7:23) is not in doubt since the phrase, 'his daughter' shows that the verse has an antecedent. By virtue of that phrase, therefore, Sheerah is definitely connected to both Ephraim and Beriah. Since this is the case, it follows, then, that Sheerah was a *bona fide* Ephraimite and that means her mention in the genealogy of Ephraim is not an aberration; it is an integral part of that genealogy[273].

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[272] A few others insinuate that those cities were already established cities at the time and Ephraim only came to invade them. For instance, Japhet (1993:183) argues that, "Interpreted in the light of the genealogical code, this may reflect the incursion of Ephraimite elements into cities which were *already established*; seen from the point of view of local autochthonic element they are ascribed to a 'female' eponym" (*italics added*). Similarly, Klein (2006:234) claims that Sheerah's founding of Beth Horon "may mean that there was a sizable Ephraimite immigration into these two *previously existing* cities" (*italics added*). For her part, however, Japhet (1993:183) concedes that since "the story has no parallel, these surmises cannot be regarded as conclusive".

[273] Sparks (2008:15), taking a cue from Wilson (1977), shows that, "If a genealogy does not link the names in some way by the use of kinship terms (father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister), then it is not a genealogy, but only a list of names" (e.g. 1 Chron 1:1-4, 24-27).

We have attempted to demonstrate, in the last section, that Sheerah was, indeed, Ephraim's daughter. That implies that Beriah was her brother. The birth of Beriah (*disaster or tragedy*), in the aftermath of the slaughter of his brothers and the sorrow that consequently engulfed his father's household, precedes the mention of Sheerah and her building activities. Could the juxtaposition of the two notes be a literary strategy to highlight life's endless paradoxes? There was tragedy and grief, on the one hand; but here was new life and restoration, on the other hand. There was defeat in the valley, where the sons of Ephraim "went down" to the men of Gath; but here was victory not only in the 'nether' but in the 'upper house of Horon'.

Again, the juxtaposition of the two siblings seems to highlight further the contrast in their potential and achievements (or lack of it). Since the role of building in ancient Israel was unmistakably male, one would have expected that it was Beriah who would build (or rebuild) his father's heritage. As Ben Zvi (2006:185) acknowledges, "the case of Sheerah is presented as even more remarkable, because she is not the only child of the head of the household. Her father has a son, and perhaps more than one… but she is the builder". Thus, Sheerah's action comes across as antithetical to Beriah's inaction.

It is significant that the unit of 7:20-29 is clearly bound together thematically by Ephraim but in addition to that theme several other literary features are observable in the unit. For instance, there is the occurrence of what is called resumptive repetition (*Wiederaufnahme*)[274] in the form of בֶּן "son or descendant of" (and its variants) sixteen times in the pericope. Of course, the style is absolutely in line with the writing of genealogies. However, the repetition of the term seems to stand in sharp contrast to the lone occurrence of the Hebrew word בַּת "daughter", thus, powerfully underscoring the presence of this worthy daughter, Sheerah, in the Chronicler's genealogy of Ephraim. Additionally, Sheerah's public image as a city-builder stands her apart from Ephraim's wife (her mother?) whose only role in the narrative is to bear babies.

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[274] Kalimi (2005:275) defines resumptive repetition as "the repetition of a word or phrase after an interval of a number of words or phrases, in order to renew the connection with the central descriptive theme of the text" (cf. Ska 2006:77-78).

## 5.5.3.2 Allusions and references to other texts in 1 Chronicles and in the Old Testament

In 1 Chronicles 7, the use of a narrative in a genealogical setting is not unique to 7:21b-24. In 7:14-16a an anecdote also features concerning the descendants of Manasseh. As noted earlier, the name Sheerah occurs only in 1 Chronicles 7:24, so does the idea of a woman building cities. Both have no parallels in the Old Testament. The name Uzzen Sheerah also has no parallel in Scriptures. However, in the Chronicler's genealogy, only few daughters featured in the lineages (that is, apart from wives or mothers who were mentioned as the daughters of some fellows). For instance, 1 Chronicles 2:49 lists Achsah as the daughter of Caleb while 4:27 states that Shimei had six daughters and 7:15 mentions the Zelophehad's daughters.

Unlike in the genealogy of Manasseh (1 Chron 7:14-19), where the presence of women could be strongly felt, in the case of Ephraim, only Sheerah featured in this unit besides Ephraim's wife whose only role was to produce another son for the grieving Ephraim. Could the mention of so many women in such a short list (Manasseh's) be the result of the indelible impact made by Zelophehad's five daughters in their father's lineage[275]?

The reference to the building of the two Beth Horon cities calls to mind a very important parallel in 2 Chronicles 8:5. Solomon, the 'king of wisdom', is said to build Upper and Lower Beth Horon (1 Kgs 9:17 states that he built Gezer and Lower Beth Horon[276]).

**1 Chronicles 7:24 and 2 Chronicles 8:5**

| 1 Chronicles 7:24 | 2 Chronicles 8:5 |
|---|---|
| וּבִתּוֹ שֶׁאֱרָה וַתִּבֶן אֶת ־בֵּית־חוֹרוֹן הַתַּחְתּוֹן וְאֶת־הָעֶלְיוֹן וְאֵת אֻזֵּן שֶׁאֱרָה ה׃ | וַיִּבֶן אֶת־בֵּית חוֹרוֹן הָעֶלְיוֹן וְאֶת־בֵּית הוֹרוֹן הַתַּחְתּוֹן עָרֵי מָצוֹר הוֹמוֹת דְּלָתַיִם וּבְרִיחַ׃ |
| *His daughter was Sheerah, who built Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah* | *He rebuilt Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon as fortified cities, with walls and with gates and bars* |

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[275] Wilcock (1987:39) claims that Sheerah "has her counterparts in the western settlements of Manasseh (7:14-19) in the person of the daughters of Zelophehad, the central figures in a famous legal case described elsewhere in the Old Testament…"

[276] 1 Kings 9:17 - וַיִּבֶן שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת־גָּזֶר וְאֶת־בֵּית חֹרֹן תַּחְתּוֹן. Japhet (1993:623) points out that "only Baalath and Lower Beth-horon are mentioned in Kings, but it is likely that Upper Beth-horon too was originally in the Chronicler's *Vorlage*, and fell out of the MT text of 1 Kings by oversight".

It is interesting that the same root בָּנָה is used for the building activities of both Sheerah and Solomon in Beth Horon[277]. However, both the NIV and the RSV translate the verb as 'rebuilt' in 2 Chronicles 8:5. Sparks (2008:205fn) supports the NIV rendition explaining that, "this could indicate that he 'rebuilt' them… as he also did Gezer after it had been destroyed (1 Kgs 9:17)"[278]. If Spark's claim is correct, it would imply that Solomon rebuilt the Beth Horon that had earlier been built by Sheerah.

One could say Solomon was a builder par excellence. The book of 2 Chronicles 8 is replete with his building abilities – in v.1, he built the house of the Lord (1 Kgs 6) and his own house; in vv.4-6, and he built and restored various cities. In v.11, it is noted that he had built a house for his wife, a daughter of Pharaoh; and in v.12, reference is made to the altar he built to the Lord. That Solomon whose wisdom was legendary engaged in all those building activities hints at a connection between building and wisdom. That two of the cities he rebuilt were earlier built by Sheerah is even more suggestive of a connection between the two, possibly in the sphere of wisdom.

The observation has been made that Beth Horon, recognized as an important location in the territory of Ephraim (De Vries 1989:80; Japhet 1993:183), is mentioned fourteen times in the Hebrew text (Josh 10:10, 11; 16:3, 5; 18:13, 14; 21:22; 1 Sam 13:18; 1 Kgs 9:17; 1 Chron 6:68; 7:24; 2 Chron 8:5; 25:13)[279]. The significance of Beth Horon in the territory of Ephraim will be discussed under the geographical context of 7:24 below.

### 5.5.4 Geographical context of 1 Chronicles 7:24

Japhet (2009:275) observes that "the Chronicler displays a strong awareness of geography" but the geographic data is part of the book's plan and not "a random

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[277] The Geneva Bible Notes (1599) provides a textual note to say that Solomon only repaired and fortified those cities, "for they were built long before by Sherah a noble woman of the tribe of Ephraim".
[278] See also Knoppers (2004:465).
[279] In the NIV, Beth Horon is found fourteen times as opposed to the BH which contains thirteen occurrences i.e. it omits 1 Chronicles 6:68 (Sparks 2006:205fn).

collection of details". She claims, in addition, that the geographic data in the book is meant to serve as an expression of the Chronicler's tendentious aims as "it provides a vehicle for the Chronicler's view on the subject of the country's boundaries, the territories settled by Israel, and the connection between the Israelites and the land" (2009:278)[280].

If, indeed, the Chronicler's use of geographic information was deliberate and meant to propagate his overarching theme of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל and its land/territory, then, the geographic data in our pericope would need to be examined more closely. The places mentioned in the pericope include Gath (v.21), Lower Beth Horon, Upper Beth Horon, and Uzzen Sheerah (v.24), and the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh in vv. 28-29. Our focus here will be on the place names in v. 24 and, to a lesser degree, on the place names in the territory of Ephraim in v. 28.

### 5.5.4.1 Lower and Upper Beth Horon and Uzzen Sheerah

Beth Horon is first mentioned in the Old Testament in Joshua 10:10 in the context of Joshua's battle against five kings of the Amorites. Of the fourteen occurrences of the name, six times, it is used neutrally without distinguishing the Lower from the Upper (Josh 10:10, 11; 18:14; 21:22; 1 Sam 13:18). Upper Beth Horon is mentioned only once without reference to the Lower (Josh 16:5) while Lower Beth Horon is mentioned three times[281] without reference to its counterpart (Josh 16:3; 18:3; 1 Kgs 9:17). Only twice is Lower Beth Horon distinguished from Upper Beth Horon in the same verse (1 Chron 7:24; 2 Chron 8:5), and both times, the text refers to the construction of the cities, specifically, carried out by Sheerah and by Solomon, respectively. The fact that

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[280] According to Japhet (2009:283-284), "The Chronicler does not relate to the historical and geographic situation of his own period; rather, from his own outlook and independent of Samuel-Kings, he creates a system of geographic terms and concepts to describe the people of Israel's settlement in their land during the First Commonwealth. In so doing, he incorporates a number of actual geographic data into his own tendentious view of things. His ultimate goal is to extend as far as possible the borders of the land in which Israel, and only Israel, lived from the very outset of their history". Again, the concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל seems to be behind this goal.

[281] Lower Beth Horon is mentioned more times in Scriptures than the Upper. Perhaps this fact prompted Myers (1986b:48) to conclude that Lower Beth Horon "was probably the more important of the two". Of significance also is the claim that archaeological evidence shows that Lower Beth Horon is the earlier settlement and that Upper Beth Horon seems to have been founded only in the Iron Age (Kallai 1998:209).

Solomon who was renowned for his wisdom, rebuilt Lower and Upper Beth Horon, cities built by Sheerah, is significant in this discussion. Could the mention of Sheerah in connection with the building of Lower and Upper Beth Horon in 1 Chronicles 7:24 be a calculated attempt by the Chronicler to associate her with the Solomonic wisdom tradition, i.e. as a precursor of the wisdom tradition that would ultimately emerge?

Lower Beth Horon and Upper Beth Horon, present day Beit-Ur-Tachta and Beit-Ur-Foka[282], respectively, were situated on a ridge that rises from the Valley of Aijalon to the plateau about sixteen kilometres northwest of Jerusalem and about three kilometres apart from each other. Beth Horon[283], listed as a Levitical city (Josh 21:22) was located in the southern hill country of Ephraim, actually, at the border between Benjamin and Ephraim[284]. It must have been a relatively large metropolis considering that it had suburbs (Josh 21:22; 1 Chron 6:68). It appears also that its location as a frontier twin-city[285] made it susceptible to military conflicts (Josh 10:10-11; 1 Sam 13:18; 2 Chron 25:13)[286]. Thompson (1994:239) claims that, "invaders from the north attacked Jerusalem along this road" (cf. Dillard 1987:65).

This probably also accounted for its fortification with walls, gates and bars (2 Chron 8:5). Peterson (1992) claims that, "The most important things about these two sites were their role in the security of Judah and their significant impact on commerce. Beth-horn was one of the major cities on the route form Joppa, Lydda, Bethel, and Jericho

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[282] Cf. Keil and Delitzsch (1950:141). The towns are otherwise also known as Beit-Ur el-Tachta and Beit-Ur el-Foka, respectively (Curtis and Madsen 1910:141; Myers 1986b:48; Aharoni 1979:256; Dorsey 1991:183; Peterson 1992:688; Sherwin 2009:236 and Willi 2009:261). For details on Beth Horon, read Myers (1986b:48); Dillard (1987:65); Davis (1992:1191); Japhet (1993:623) and Thompson (1994:238fn).

[283] Myers (1986b:48) states that it was later that it became Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon. Note that the Armana text attests the existence of Beth Horon (Willi 2009:261).

[284] Knoppers (2007:326) shows that the two Beth Horon cities are listed as Ephraimite holdings in Scriptures (cf. Aharoni 1979:259).

[285] Several references to Beth Horon in the book of Joshua describe its border location (Josh 16:5; 18:13, 14).

[286] Dillard (1987:65) also remarks that the road that traversed the place linked Jerusalem with the international coastal highway and that, "The frequency with which it is mentioned in battle reports attests to its strategic importance". The importance of the route on which Beth Horon was located (i.e. vis-à-vis Jerusalem) is corroborated by Dorsey (1991:18) thus: "During the biblical times the western gateway to Jerusalem was not Bab el Wad, but Beth-horon (and further west, Gezer). Several important lateral roads from the coastal plain came together at Lower Beth-horon to ascend the ridge that led to the highlands of Jerusalem. This strategic route, called Beth-horon Ascent in the Bible (Josh. 10:10, 11), was the only easy ascent into the hill country for miles in either direction".

crossing over to Ramoth-ammon". It is on record that Solomon secured control of major trade routes to Mesopotamia. These included the Gezer-Lower and Upper Beth Horon route (Thompson 1994:239). His control of the trade routes generated much revenue for Israel (Dillard 1987:73). Building (or rebuilding) Lower and Upper Beth Horon, twin cities on a trade route that brought in revenue for Israel, would definitely strike one as an act of wisdom.

As noted earlier, little is known of Uzzen Sheerah today but it is possible that it was located in the proximity of Beth Horon in the same territory of Ephraim. There is a suggestion that it is probably present day Beit Sira because of the phonetic similarity to Uzzen Sheerah and the proximity to Beth Horon (De Vries 1989:80). Actually, Gold (1962:742) states that Beit Sira is three miles (i.e. approximately five kilometres) southwest of Beth Horon[287]. That it was named after its founder and was not previously mentioned in earlier texts suggest to us that it was perhaps built from scratch. It is probable Sheerah also resided there.

The point needs to be made here that the fact that the three cities that Sheerah built all fall within the territory of Ephraim and Sheerah herself happens to be a *bona fide* descendant of Ephraim indicate that the reference to Sheerah and her accomplishment within the genealogy of Ephraim is not at all out of place or intrusive. It fits snugly into the pericope.

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[287] Although not much of Beit Sira exists in available literature,  the Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem (ARIJ) identifies Beit Sira (Arabic: بيت سيرا) as a Palestinian village in the central West Bank, located about 22 kilometres west of Ramallah along the Green Line. ARIJ reports that, "In 1948, the residents of Beit Sira fled from their village when news of massacres committed against the Palestinian population by the Israeli militias unfolded. The war at that time resulted in the depopulation and destruction of more than 400 Palestinian villages and Beit Sira miraculously escaped that faith (*sic*). When the residents came back few weeks later, parts of their village were under the jurisdiction of what became the State of Israel. In the year 1949, the Armistice line was drawn along the West Bank borders. An area located northwest of Jerusalem where Beit Sira and other Palestinian villages are located became known as 'No Man's land'. Consequently, some 3200 Dunums (40% of the village area) of Beit Sira's agricultural lands became located within the 'No Man's land'… Today, Beit Sira stands on 39% (3120 Dunums) of its original area with a population of 3000 (441 families) inhabiting 480 Dunums while the remaining area represents the village agricultural lands and its open spaces designated for future urban expansion" (ARIJ 2010 http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=410 - accessed 26 September 2010).

### 5.5.4.2 Other cities in Ephraim's territory

In 1 Chronicles 7:28, the territory of Ephraim is said to cover Bethel, Naaran to the east, Gezer, Shechem, and Ayyah as well as their villages. Of Bethel, much has already been said under the geographical context of Genesis 35:8 in the last chapter. It is significant, however, that Bethel, a place so central, not only to the unit on the First Deborah, but also to the Jacob Cycle, falls in this text in the territory of Ephraim, the son of Joseph – Jacob's favourite son. Although some commentators are prone to classify Bethel under Benjamin[288], it seems that, from the onset, Bethel has been allocated to and chiefly identified with Ephraim (Josh 16:1-2; 18:13; Judg 1:22-23; 4:5; 1 Chron 7:28)[289]. The fact that Bethel, like Beth Horon, is a frontier city (Josh 18:13) and a sacred city could make it vulnerable to conflicts among neighbouring tribes in attempts to claim ownership; hence, the alternative identification of the city as Benjaminite.

Incidentally, two other cities in the territory of Ephraim in 7:28 (i.e. Gezer and Shechem) are listed by Laughlin (2006) as belonging to the top fifty cities in ancient Israel. Both textual and archaeological data have identified Gezer as present day Tell el-Jezer, some 32 kilometres northwest of Jerusalem. The site is marked by beautiful springs and fertile fields. Gezer, mentioned fourteen times in the Old Testament, is recognized as an important political centre in ancient Israel. Solomon rebuilt and fortified it in his time (1 Kgs 9:15-17). Ten of the Tell el-Armana letters of the fourteenth century BCE are from three different kings of Gezer and there is a reference to Gezer on the Merneptah Stela (ca. 1207 BCE). Although a well-known boundary inscription was discovered in 1871, the first excavation of Gezer was carried out by R A S Macalister between 1902 and 1909 and a Gezer agricultural calendar was discovered there in 1908.

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[288] Japhet (1993:184) argues that, "Bethel and Ai are better known as Benjaminite cities (Josh. 18.22; Neh 11.31), while Bethel, Gezer and Naarah are, in Josh. 2-3, 7, landmarks on the border between Ephraim and Benjamin, and Shechem was situated between Ephraim and Manasseh (Josh 17.7). The common denominator of the towns grouped here is that they are centres for the border provinces of Ephraim, a status expressed by the designations 'to the east' and 'to the west'. They probably reflect the expansion of Ephraim into the territory of neighbouring tribes" (cf. Laughlin 2006:52 for Bethel as a Benjaminite city).

[289] Keil and Delitzsch (1950:142) identify Bethel as a frontier city between Benjamin and Ephraim while, similarly, Blenkinsopp (2003:93) notes that Bethel features in the city and boundary lists of Ephraim, Benjamin, and the southern branch of Ephraim.

Twenty-six strata have been determined for Gezer that show early occupation from the Late Chacolithic to the Roman era. Gezer was destroyed (especially by Egyptian armies, by Tiglath-Pilneser and by Nebuchadnezzar) and rebuilt at various times. The Persian period is vaguely represented at Gezer with a slight recovery observable for the Hellenistic period (i.e. from late fourth century BCE). There was some revival during the Maccabean period. Although Gezer is said to survive beyond Iron Age II and there were slight traces of its occupation in the Byzantine and later period, by the New Testament period it had virtually ceased to exist (Dever 1993:496-506; 1997:396-400; Laughlin 2006:127-131)[290].

As for Shechem (meaning= shoulder), located between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal by the plains of Sharon, it was first mentioned in the Old Testament in Genesis 12:6 as the place where Abraham built his first altar. Shechem has a long history that shows its political and cultic importance in ancient Israelite life; Abimelech used it as his capital (Judg 9), while Jeroboam also made it the capital of the Northern Kingdom under his rule (1 Kgs 12:25). Shechem is recognized as a Samaritan city and is identified with modern day Tell Balâtah, some fifty or so kilometres north of Jerusalem. Besides the Bible, literary evidence from Egyptian sources and Armana tablets as well as archaeological material confirms its roots in antiquity, at least as early as the Chalcolithic period[291].

Twenty-four archaeological strata are identified for Shechem and evidence shows it was in an impoverished state during the eighth century and it had limited occupation in the Assyrian period. In fact, the city was overrun by Shalmeneser V and it was abandoned until the fourth century BCE but it regained prominence during the Hellenistic period with the resettlement of Samaritan refugees there. However, in the third century, the city was caught up in the wars between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria leading to a decline under the Seleucid rule in the second century BCE. The city was

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[290] For more on Gezer, read Vos (1977:169-170); Aharoni (1979:174) and Frank Thompson (1983:1660).
[291] Carl Watzinger excavated the site between 1907 and 1909 but the first formal excavations were conducted by Ernst Sellin between 1913 and 1914 and Ernest G Wright and his team also worked on the site later Vos (1977:199-200).

finally destroyed in 128 BCE and was replaced by Neapolis, which was built a few miles away by the Roman, Vespasian[292].

The modern Arab name for Naarah (Naarath) is Tel el-Jisr, close to both Jordan and Jericho (Willi 2009:262)[293]. In the case of Ayyah, there is not much certainty about its referent as some translations render it as Gaza (e.g. Darby's translation and the Louis Segond version, i.e. the French Bible) or as Azzah (e.g. ASV, BBE). The town has also been identified with Ai (or Aija, Aiath)[294]. What is common to these cities, examined above, is their location as border towns or cities. The border location seems to cause them to be especially susceptible to invasions and devastations so that they kept rising and falling through the ages. The Persian period appeared to be a particularly trying period as most of them experienced either decline or complete annihilation.

**5.5.5 Socio-cultural context of 1 Chronicles 7:24**

A discussion of the socio-cultural context of 1 Chronicles 7:24 cannot ignore the notion of building in the Old Testament and, in particular, in the Second Temple period, in which the book of Chronicles is purported to have been written. In what follows, we shall briefly investigate this concept as well as the presence of women in Chronicles and their roles/activities during the period in question.

*5.5.5.1 Building cities in the Old Testament*

Building is a common activity in the Old Testament world and the Hebrew verb בָּנָה (to build or to rebuild, to fortify, to establish, to found, to work on, etc.) could refer to the building of houses, temples, altars, high places, towns or cities, walls and gates, booths, chambers, sign posts, homes and families, etc[295]. One would assume that building cities

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[292] For further reading on Shechem, see Vos (1977:199-200); Aharoni (1979:29; 174-176); Frank Thompson (1983:1691); Campbell (1993:1345-1354); Seger (1997:19-23) and Laughlin (2006:203-209).

[293] For more on Naarah, see Aharoni (1979:60, 257, 440).

[294] Japhet (1993:184) suggests that, "Ayyah (or Aija, Neh. 11.31), as well as Aiath (Isa. 10.28), may be variants (or more original forms) of the better known 'Ai' (Josh. 7.2, etc.)".

[295] See Clines (1995:226) and Wong (2006:507). The term בָּנָה occurs 337x in the Old Testament (Fouts 1997:677) and the root is attested in almost all Semitic languages such as Ugaritic, Moabite, Aramaic, Arabic, etc., except in Ethiopic (cf. Wagner 1975:166 and Wong 2006:507).

is an advanced form of building houses, for cities are made of houses. Therefore, here, our attention will be on the building of cities in the Old Testament.

During the period of the conquest and settlement, whole Israelite tribes often joined hands to build cities[296]. For instance, in Numbers 32:34, the children of Gad built Dibon, and Ataroth, and Aroer while in Numbers 32:37 the children of Reuben built Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Kirjathaim. However, building cities was also credited to mostly notable individuals, e.g. Joshua built Timnathserah, the city that was allocated to him by the children of Israel (Josh 19:50)[297].

During the monarchic period, building of cities was attributed mainly to kings and rulers. David built the city of David (2 Sam 5:9); Solomon built Gezer and Upper and Lower Beth Horon (2 Chron 8:5) as noted earlier; Jeroboam I of Israel built Shechem and Penuel (1 Kgs 12:25); and King Rehoboam built fifteen fortified cities in Judah and Benjamin, according to the Chronicler (2 Chron 11:5-10). Baasha of Israel built Ramah (1 Kgs 15:17); King Asa of Judah built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah (1 Kgs 15:22-23 // 2 Chron 16:6); King Omri of Israel built Samaria (1 Kgs 16:23-24); King Ahab of Israel built cities (1 Kgs 22:39); and King Azariah of Judah built Elath (2 Kgs 14:21-22)[298]. In the Second Temple Period, Ezra led the people to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 4:12). However, in the book of 1 Chronicles, some sons of Elpaal, a descendant of Benjamin, were credited with building Ono and Lod (1 Chron 8:12)[299].

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[296] Before that period, Cain (or Enoch?) was one of few individuals said to build a city (Gen 4:17; cf. Dearman 2006:675). Nineveh, Rehoboth and Calah were also built by Nimrod (Gen 10:9-11).

[297] A man of Bethel (apparently, an ordinary citizen) who was spared in the destruction of his city by the children of Joseph went ahead to build Luz (Judg 23-26).

[298] Note also that Hiel built (rebuilt) Jericho (1 Kgs 16:34), for it was originally destroyed by Joshua and placed under a curse (Josh 6:26)

[299] Although Ben Zvi (2006:85) notes that building cities is not a common occurrence in 1 Chronicles 1-9, Sparks (2008:205) argues that, "For the Chronicler, positive building activities [i.e. construction of buildings, towns, facilities and military structures], like victory in battle and the gaining of land, were a sign of Yahweh's blessing upon those who were faithful to him". Such activities were attributed only to kings who were faithful to Yahweh or who returned to Yahweh after going astray.

From the foregoing, it can be established that building cities was an integral part of ancient Israelite society[300]. What is remarkable, however, is that which we have pointed out earlier – all those city builders (except Sheerah) were men[301]. Again, not only were they all men, they appeared to be chiefly men of substance – kings, military commanders or rulers of the people. If these people portrayed the calibre of people who built cities, what could be the implication for an investigation of Sheerah, the only female city builder on record in our text? It is interesting also to note that, "In the Hebrew language, the primary word for city (*'ir*) is feminine. This fact of grammar is combined with a tradition of personification and symbolic portrayal" (Dearman 2006:676). Dearman explains that such portrayals are exemplified by Ezekiel, which depicts Jerusalem and Samaria as sisters (23:1-49); or by Isaiah, which portrays Jerusalem as a prostitute (1:21), daughter (1:8; 16:1; 37:22), a wife and a mother (49:14-21; 50:11), etc. In a similar vein, Yoder (2009:17) notes, with respect to the personification of Wisdom as a woman, that cities and lands are also personified as women in the Bible. Her examples include Zion (Is 52:1-2; 54:1-8; Jer 4:31, etc); Samaria and Jerusalem (Ezek 23:1-49); and Babylon and Chaldea (Is 58:8).

A striking parallel has been observed between Sheerah and Dido, the ninth century BCE female builder of Carthage (Willi 2009:261). Dido (a.k.a Elissa) was the daughter of Belus, a King of Tyre and the sister of Pygmalion. Dido was married to her enormously wealthy uncle who was later slain by Pygmalion, her brother, after he (Pygmalion) ascended the throne. Consequently, Dido escaped to Africa with some treasure, where she purchased land to build a city. There, "she arranged to purchase as much land as could be enclosed by an ox-hide, but she cleverly cut the hide into very thin strips and thus obtained enough space to found a city, Carthage" (Duckworth

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[300] Dearman (2006:672) confirms that in the Middle Bronze period (i.e. ca. 2000-1550 BCE), "The land of Canaan had a number of strong cities in the first half of the second millennium BCE. Among them were BYBLOS, SIDON, DAN, HAZOR, MEGIDDO, BETH-SHAN, SHECHEM, SHILOH, JERICHO, BETHEL, JERUSALEM, GEZER, LACHISH, and HEBRON".

[301] In terms of the people involved in the actual construction, Marsman (2003:421) provides evidence to show that in ancient Israel (as well as in Ugarit), both men and women worked together at large building projects. Ordinarily, female slaves had to participate in building activities such as making bricks and, while in Ugarit only slave women participated in such a job, it is noted that, "… in Israel women of high status helped to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. The building also records a female building commissioner" (Marsman 2003:467; see also p.724).

1965:198). Legend has it that, after she committed suicide in despair because she wanted to preserve her widowhood to avoid marriage to Iarbas, an African king, she was worshipped by Carthagians as a divinity (Mumby 1955:502 and Duckworth 1965:198)[302].

Certainly, it will not be out of order to conclude that Sheerah herself was a woman of substance – on a par with kings and the rulers of the people. Sheerah must have been a woman of means, of great wealth and of definite financial independence. She must have been a woman of uncommon influence, a leader among *men*. Building a city must have been an enormous venture especially in an age without the types of technological equipment available today. In terms of resources, man-hour, and supervision, the cost of building a city in the ancient world may not be readily envisaged today; how much more when we talk of building three cities, two of which were located on a popular international trade route. Not only would the builder of such cities be one of uncommon influence but also one with uncommon wisdom and substance.

Besides the fact that builders could be men or women, it has been noted that other agents of building in the Old Testament could be an abstract idea (Prov 9:1) or God himself (Ps 127:1)[303]. In fact, whenever the builder is not a human being, then, the word בָּנָה is likely to be used figuratively or metaphorically. On this point, Wong (2006:507-508) asserts that:

> The verb also has, by extension, figurative meanings. Rachel and Leah together built the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11), and a man has the obligation to build up the family of the

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[302] This discussion calls for the mention of other women in antiquity who accomplished similar deeds. Van Bremen (1983:223-242) discusses the achievements of two remarkable women which are also worth mentioning here. Euxenia of Megalopolis (second century BCE) was reputed to be a woman of great wealth and influence who played prominent public role in her city as a benefactor. Three centuries after her was Menodora, a wealthy and reputable woman from the Pisidian city of Sillyon in Asian Minor. The two women are described as entering the traditionally male sphere of public life. They owned property and spent their wealth to benefit the people. Perhaps what is even more significant is Bremen's remark on the women of that period. She claims that, "Women thus seem to have encroached upon the traditionally sacrosanct, male-dominated sphere of public life and city politics. Many public offices and liturgies performed by men were also performed by women… they competed with men in the ***building*** of temples, theatres, public baths, and in many other types of benefactions". Bremen notes that some inscriptions even suggest that "women owned grainland, vineyards, olive groves and pasture land" even though it is difficult to determine the extent to which women were involved in or profited from land ownership (Bremen 1983:225, 228; *emphasis added*).

[303] See Fout (1997:667-668) and Wong (2006:507).

deceased relative (Deut 25:9). God, in turn, builds (i.e., establishes) the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:5-16), nations (Jer 31:4), and steadfast love with his people (Ps 89:2).

The theological importance of building will be expatiated in the next section but, before we proceed with that, it will be helpful to examine also the presence and roles of women in the book of Chronicles.

### 5.5.5.2 Women in Chronicles

In an essay titled *Observations on Women in the Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9*[304], Ben Zvi (2006:174-184) has already noted that the genealogical section of the book of Chronicles refers to more than fifty different women, whether named or unnamed[305]. The study classifies the women into two categories based on their roles. The first are women involved "in lineage roles often associated with female members of an ancient household". These include the roles of *mother–wife* (e.g. the daughter of Machir who married Hezron and gave birth to Segub in 1 Chron 2:1); *mother–concubine* (e.g. Ephah, Caleb's concubine and the mother of his sons in 1 Chron 2:46); *mother–divorcee* (e.g. 1 Chron 8:8-11); *daughter-in-law–mother* (e.g. 1 Chron 2:4); and identity *as daughter or sister* (e.g. 1 Chron 3:2, 5; 4:18).

The second group consists of "women in roles that were commonly assigned to mature males in the society" (Ben Zvi 2006:184-186). These include women who were heads of families (e.g. Zeruiah and Abigail in 1 Chron 2:16-17), and women who built cities (the only instance in this category was Sheerah). However, the difficulty with Ben Zvi's classification especially under the family/lineage roles is that there are too many overlaps[306]. For instance, under the *Mother-Wife* sub-category, one can observe that not every mother in the genealogies is the wife of some man, e.g. Jabez's mother in 4:9 or Abigail, the mother of Amasa in 2:17. Moreover, some mother-wife are also recognized as the daughter (or/and the granddaughter) of a so-and-so, e.g. Mehetabel who was a wife and mother but also the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab

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[304] The essay is Chapter 9 of Ben Zvi's 2006 book, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*. The essay was originally published in 2003 in *Biblica* 84:457-478, and was written in conjunction with A. Labahn.
[305] See a list of all women in the genealogical section in Laffey (1998:119-120).
[306] Ben Zvi himself admits that even the border between the first broad category and the second in Chronicles is porous (2006:174).

(1:50) or Judah's wife who was the mother of his three sons but also the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite (2:3). Although Ben Zvi provides useful comments on many of the women, the sub-category does not do justice to those women, either who do not fulfil all the roles or whose roles extend beyond the roles specified by that sub-category.

Indeed, the second broad category of women in roles of mature males in the society overlaps very much with the first category, for the women in its two sub-categories – women as heads of families and women building cities – all perform family/lineage roles! Abigail and Zeruiah were sisters to the sons of Jesse, and Zeruiah is further identified as the mother of three sons (2:16). As for Sheerah, she was described as the daughter of Ephraim. To be sure, the unwieldy nature of the genealogical data themselves makes clear-cut classification difficult.

Ben Zvi (2006:14) acknowledges that there is need for "a consistent re-evaluation of the constructions and characterizations of women in the rest of the book of Chronicles and of the ways in which they interrelate with and inform (balance?) those communicated in the genealogies". In the *Women's Bible Commentary*, Laffey (1998:119-122) notes the description of the women of Chronicles as daughters, wives, and mothers (in the genealogies) and some as queen mothers of the Davidic dynasty. While some of the women are additions to 2 Samuel-2 Kings, some are omissions from that corpus. Laffey also remarks that many of the women in Chronicles have only fleeting references but few of them (e.g. Bath-Shua, wife of David) have more detailed mention in the Deuteronomistic History as well. However, there seems to be no clear provisions for categorization in her comments outside the two broad categories of women in the genealogies and the queen mothers.

In *Women in Scriptures*, Meyers et al (2000) categorize biblical women as named and unnamed. An alphabetical listing of the named women and a book-by-book listing of the unnamed women are then provided with corresponding comments. Thus, for Chronicles, one would find entries on both named and unnamed women but the issues concerning the women are treated on individual basis and only as part of a general directory of women in Scriptures. The value of Meyers et al (2000) lies in the data it

offers but it does not provide a coherent analysis of what relates the women of Chronicles together.

The question here is, 'Is there an adequate way of classifying the women in Chronicles in a way that would facilitate the interpretive task?' Besides the fact that Ben Zvi's categories of the women in the genealogies inadvertently overlap, the categories (and the sub-categories) may also not be adequate to account for the women mentioned in the remaining part of 1 Chronicles and in 2 Chronicles. Below, we shall examine all the references to women in Chronicles in an attempt to see in what ways all these women can be accounted for in the hermeneutical process. However, we shall begin by inquiring whether each of the women in Chronicles is mentioned in a *Vorlage* or some of the references constitute the Chronicler's own *Sondergut*[307].

In the table below, the references to women in Chronicles are provided in the left column, and where there is a corresponding *Vorlage* or intertextual reference, it is provided in the right column. The designations of the women are underlined.

**Table 1: Women in Chronicles**

| Chronicles | | *Vorlage*/intertextual reference[308] | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1 Chr 1:32-33** | The sons born to Keturah, Abraham's <u>concubine</u>: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan. ³³The sons of Midian: Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of <u>Keturah</u>. | **Gen 25:1-2** | Abraham took another <u>wife</u>, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. |
| **1 Chr 1:39** | The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam. Timna was Lotan's <u>sister</u> | **Gen 36:22** | The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam. Timna was Lotan's <u>sister</u> |
| **1 Chr 1:50** | When Baal-Hanan died, Hadad succeeded him as king. His city was named Pau, and his <u>wife</u>'s name was Mehetabel <u>daughter</u> of Matred, the <u>daughter</u> of Me-Zahab. | **Gen 36:39** | When Baal-Hanan son of Acbor died, Hadad succeeded him as king. His city was named Pau, and his <u>wife</u>'s name was Mehetabel <u>daughter</u> of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab. |
| **1 Chr 2:3** | The sons of Judah: Er, Onan and Shelah. | **Gen 38:2** | There Judah met the <u>daughter</u> of a |

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[307] Of course, it is probable that the Chronicler had access to some other *Vorlage* than the Masoretic from which our translations emanated but in the absence or proof of such *Vorlage*, we shall work with the assumption that those verses represent the Chronicler's *Sondergut*.

[308] While most of the parallel texts below may be assumed to come from a *Vorlage*, a few may be regarded as only intertextual references e.g.Genesis 38:2; 2 Samuel 17:25; Joshua 15:17, etc.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | These three were born to him by a Canaanite <u>woman</u>, the <u>daughter</u> of Shua. Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death. | | Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and lay with her. |
| **1 Chr 2:4** | Tamar, Judah's <u>daughter-in-law</u>, bore him Perez and Zerah. Judah had five sons in all. | **Gen 38:6**<br><br>**Gen 38:29-30** | Judah got a <u>wife</u> for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.<br>But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez. [30] Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was given the name Zerah. |
| **1 Chr 2:16** | Their <u>sisters</u> were Zeruiah and Abigail. Zeruiah's three sons were Abishai, Joab and Asahel. | **2 Sam 2:18**<br><br><br>**2 Sam 17:25** | The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle.<br>Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether, an Israelite who had married Abigail, the <u>daughter</u> of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the <u>mother</u> of Joab. |
| **1 Chr 2:17** | Abigail was the <u>mother</u> of Amasa, whose father was Jether the Ishmaelite. | **2 Sam 17:25** | Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether, an Israelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab. |
| **1 Chr 2:18** | Caleb son of Hezron had children by his <u>wife</u> Azubah (and by Jerioth). These were her sons: Jesher, Shobab and Ardon. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:19** | When Azubah died, Caleb married Ephrath, who bore him Hur. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:21** | Later, Hezron lay with the <u>daughter</u> of Makir the father of Gilead (he had married her when he was sixty years old), and she bore him Segub. | ***Num 26:29*** | *[mentions Makir as the father of Gilead but there is no mention of his daughter(s)]* |
| **1 Chr 2:24** | After Hezron died in Caleb Ephrathah, Abijah the <u>wife</u> of Hezron bore him Ashhur the father of Tekoa. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:26** | Jerahmeel had another <u>wife</u>, whose name was Atarah; she was the <u>mother</u> of Onam. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:29** | Abishur's <u>wife</u> was named Abihail, who bore him Ahban and Molid. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:34-35** | Sheshan had no sons – only <u>daughters</u>. He had an Egyptian servant named Jarha. Sheshan gave his <u>daughter</u> in marriage to his servant Jarha, and she bore him Attai. | | |
| **1 Chr** | Caleb's <u>concubine</u> Ephah was the | | |

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| **2:46** | mother of Haran, Moza and Gazez. Haran was the father of Gazez. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:48** | Caleb's concubine Maacah was the mother of Sheber and Tirhanah. | | |
| **1 Chr 2:49** | She also gave birth to Shaaph the father of Madmannah and to Sheva the father of Macbenah and Gibea. Caleb's daughter was Acsah. | **Josh 15:17** | Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage. |
| **1 Chr 3:1** | These were the sons of David born to him in Hebron: The firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; the second, Daniel the son of Abigail of Carmel | **2 Sam 3:2-3** | Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; [3]his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; |
| **1 Chr 3:2 a & b** | The third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; | **2 Sam 3:3** | His second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur |
| | the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith | **2 Sam 3:4** | the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital |
| **1 Chr 3:3** | The fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, by his wife Eglah. | **2 Sam 3:5** | And the sixth, Ithream the son of David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron. |
| **1 Chr 3:5** | And these were the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan and Solomon. These four were by Bathsheba daughter of Ammiel. | **2 Sam 11:3** / **2 Sam 5:14** | These are the names of the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon<br>And David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" |
| **1 Chr 3:9 (a & b)** | All these were the sons of David, besides his sons by his concubines. | **2 Sam 5:13** | After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him. |
| | And Tamar was their sister. | **2 Sam 13:1** | In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. |
| **1 Chr 3:19** | The sons of Pedaiah: Zerubbabel and Shimei. The sons of Zerubbabel: Meshullam and Hananiah. Shelomith was their sister. | | |
| **1 Chr 4:3** | These were the sons of Etam: Jezreel, Ishma and Idbash. Their sister was named Hazzelelponi. | | |
| **1 Chr 4:5** | Ashhur the father of Tekoa had two wives Helah and Naarah. | | |
| **1 Chr 4:6** | Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni and Haahashtari. These were the descendants of Naarah. | | |
| **1 Chr 4:9** | Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, "I gave birth to him in | | |

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| | pain." | | |
| 1 Chr 4:17 | The sons of Ezrah: Jether, Mered, Epher and Jalon. One of Mered's <u>wives</u> gave birth to Miriam, Shammai and Ishbah the father of Eshtemoa. | | |
| 1 Chr 4:18 | (His Judean <u>wife</u> gave birth to Jered the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah.) These were the children of Pharaoh's <u>daughter</u> Bithiah, whom Mered had married. | | |
| 1 Chr 4:19 | The sons of Hodiah's <u>wife</u>, the <u>sister</u> of Naham: the father of Keilah the Garmite, and Eshtemoa the Maacathite. | | |
| 1 Chr 4:27 | Shimei had sixteen sons and six <u>daughters</u> but his brothers did not have many children; so their entire clan did not become as numerous as the people of Judah. | | |
| 1 Chr 7:4 | According to their family genealogy, they had 36,000 men ready for battle, for they had many <u>wives</u> and children. | | |
| 1 Chr 7:13 | The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem - the descendants of <u>Bilhah</u>. | Gen 46:24-25 | The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem. [25]These were the sons born to Jacob by <u>Bilhah</u>, whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel - seven in all. |
| 1 Chr 7:14 | The descendants of Manasseh: Asriel was his descendant through his Aramean <u>concubine</u>. She gave birth to Makir the father of Gilead. | Num 26:29-30 | The descendants of Manasseh: through Makir, the Makirite clan (Makir was the father of Gilead); through Gilead, the Gileadite clan. [30]These were the descendants of Gilead: through Iezer, the Iezerite clan; through Helek, the Helekite clan *{No mention of concubine}* |
| 1 Chr 7:15 (a & b) | Makir took a <u>wife</u> from among the Huppites and Shuppites. His <u>sister</u>'s name was Maacah. | | |
| | Another descendant was named Zelophehad, who had only <u>daughters.</u> | Num 27:1<br><br>Num 26:33 | The <u>daughters</u> of Zelophehad son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh …<br>Now Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but <u>daughters</u>; and the names of the <u>daughters</u> of Zelophehad were… |
| 1 Chr 7:16 | Makir's <u>wife</u> Maacah gave birth to a son and named him Peresh. His brother was named Sheresh, and his sons were Ulam and Rakem. | | |
| 1 Chr 7:17-18 | The son of Ulam: Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead son of Makir, the son of Manasseh. [18]His <u>sister</u> Hammoleketh gave birth to Ishhod, Abiezer and Mahlah. | *Num 26:30* | *These were the descendants of Gilead: through Iezer, the Iezerite clan; through Helek, the Helekite clan [NO SISTER MENTIONED]* |
| 1 Chr | Then he lay with his <u>wife</u> again, and she | | |

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| **7:23** | became pregnant and gave birth to a son. He named him Beriah, because there had been misfortune in his family. | | |
| **1 Chr 7:24** | His <u>daughter</u> was Sheerah, who built Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah. | | |
| **1 Chr 7:30-31** | The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. Their <u>sister</u> was Serah. <u></u> <sup>31</sup>The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malkiel, who was the father of Birzaith. | **Num 26:44-46**<br><br><br><br><br><br>**Gen 46:17** | The descendants of Asher by their clans were: through Imnah, the Imnite clan; through Ishvi, the Ishvite clan; through Beriah, the Beriite clan; <sup>45</sup>and through the descendants of Beriah: through Heber, the Heberite clan; through Malkiel, the Malkielite clan. <sup>46</sup>(<u>Asher had a daughter named Serah.</u>)<br>The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. Their <u>sister</u> was Serah. The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malkiel. |
| **1 Chr 7:32** | Heber was the father of Japhlet, Shomer and Hotham and of their <u>sister</u> Shua. | | |
| **1 Chr 8:8** | Sons were born to Shaharaim in Moab after he had divorced his <u>wives</u> Hushim and Baara. | | |
| **1 Chr 8:9** | By his <u>wife</u> Hodesh he had Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, | | |
| **1 Chr 8:11** | By <u>Hushim</u> he had Abitub and Elpaal. | | |
| **1 Chr 8:29** | Jeiel the father of Gibeon lived in Gibeon. His <u>wife</u>'s name was Maacah, | | |
| **1 Chr 9:35** | Jeiel the father of Gibeon lived in Gibeon. His <u>wife</u>'s name was Maacah, | | |
| **1 Chr 11:6** | David had said, "Whoever leads the attack on the Jebusites will become commander-in-chief." Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u> went up first, and so he received the command. | **2 Sam 8:16** | Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u> was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder |
| **1 Chr 11:39** | Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Berothite, the armor-bearer of Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u>, | | |
| **1 Chr 14:3** | In Jerusalem David took more <u>wives</u> and became the father of more sons and <u>daughters</u>. | **2 Sam 5:13** | After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and <u>wives</u> in Jerusalem, and more sons and <u>daughters</u> were born to him. |
| **1 Chr 15:29** | As the ark of the covenant of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal <u>daughter</u> of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she despised him in her heart. | **2 Sam 6:16** | As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal <u>daughter</u> of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. |
| **1 Chr 16:3** | Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and <u>woman</u>. | | |
| **1 Chr** | Abishai son of <u>Zeruiah</u> struck down | **2 Sam** | And David became famous after he |

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| **18:12** | eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. | **8:13** | returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. |
| | | **2 Sam 23:18** | Abishai the brother of Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u> was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. |
| **1 Chr 18:15** | Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u> was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder | **2 Sam 8:16** | Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u> was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder |
| **1 Chr 23:22** | Eleazar died without having sons: he had only <u>daughters</u>. Their cousins, the sons of Kish, married them. | | |
| **1 Chr 25:5** | All these were sons of Heman the king's seer. They were given him through the promises of God to exalt him. God gave Heman fourteen sons and three <u>daughters</u>. | | |
| **1 Chr 26:28** | And everything dedicated by Samuel the seer and by Saul son of Kish, Abner son of Ner and Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u>, and all the other dedicated things were in the care of Shelomith and his relatives. | **2 Sam 2:18** | The three sons of <u>Zeruiah</u> were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. |
| **1 Chr 27:24** | Joab son of <u>Zeruiah</u> began to count the men but did not finish. Wrath came on Israel on account of this numbering, and the number was not entered in the book of the annals of King David. | **2 Sam 24:9** | Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand. |
| | | **2 Sam 2:18** | The three sons of <u>Zeruiah</u> were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. |
| **2 Chr 2:14** | Whose <u>mother</u> was from Dan and whose father was from Tyre. He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your craftsmen and with those of my lord, David your father. | **1 Kings 7:14** | Whose <u>mother</u> was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali and whose father was a man of Tyre and a craftsman in bronze. Huram was highly skilled and experienced in all kinds of bronze work. He came to King Solomon and did all the work assigned to him. |
| **2 Chr 8:11 (a & b)** | Solomon brought Pharaoh's <u>daughter</u> up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, | **1 Kings 9:24** | After Pharaoh's <u>daughter</u> had come up from the City of David to the palace Solomon had built for her, he constructed the supporting terraces. |
| | for he said, "My <u>wife</u> must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the LORD has entered are holy." | | |
| **2 Chr 9:1ff** | When the <u>queen</u> of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, she came to | **1 Kings 10:1** | When the <u>queen</u> of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the |

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| | Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. Arriving with a very great caravan - with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones - she came to Solomon and talked with him about all she had on her mind. | | name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. |
| **2 Chr 11:18-19** | Rehoboam married Mahalath, who was the <u>daughter</u> of David's son Jerimoth and of Abihail, the <u>daughter</u> of Jesse's son Eliab. [19] She bore him sons: Jeush, Shemariah and Zaham. | | |
| **2 Chr 11:20** | Then he married Maacah <u>daughter</u> of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith. | **1 Kings 15:2** | And he {Abijah} reigned in Jerusalem three years. His mother's name was Maacah <u>daughter</u> of Abishalom. |
| **2 Chr 11:21 (a & b)** | Rehoboam loved Maacah <u>daughter</u> of Absalom | **1 Kings 15:2** | And he {Abijah} reigned in Jerusalem three years. His mother's name was Maacah <u>daughter</u> of Abishalom. |
| | more than any of his other <u>wives</u> and <u>concubines</u>. In all, he had eighteen <u>wives</u> and sixty <u>concubines</u>, twenty-eight sons and sixty <u>daughters</u>. | | |
| **2 Chr 11:23** | He acted wisely, dispersing some of his sons throughout the districts of Judah and Benjamin, and to all the fortified cities. He gave them abundant provisions and took many <u>wives</u> for them. | | |
| **2 Chr 12: 13** | King Rehoboam established himself firmly in Jerusalem and continued as king... His <u>mother</u>'s name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. | **1 Kings 14:21** | Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became... His <u>mother</u>'s name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. |
| **2 Chr 13:2** | And he {Abijah} reigned in Jerusalem three years. His <u>mother</u>'s name was Maacah, a <u>daughter</u> of Uriel of Gibeah. There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam | **1 Kings 15:2** | And he {Abijah} reigned in Jerusalem three years. His <u>mother</u>'s name was Maacah <u>daughter</u> of Abishalom. |
| **2 Chr 13:21** | But Abijah grew in strength. He married fourteen <u>wives</u> and had twenty-two sons and sixteen <u>daughters</u>. | | |
| **2 Chr 15:13** | All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or <u>woman</u>. | **cf. Deut 13:5-10** | |
| **2 Chr 15:16** | King Asa also deposed his <u>grandmother</u> Maacah from her position as <u>queen mother</u>, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down, broke it up and burned it in the Kidron Valley. | **1 Kings 15:13** | He even deposed his <u>grandmother</u> Maacah from her position as <u>queen mother</u>, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down and burned it in the Kidron Valley. |
| **2 Chr 20:13** | All the men of Judah, with their <u>wives</u> and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD. | | |

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| **2 Chr 20:31** | So Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-five years. His <u>mother</u>'s name was Azubah <u>daughter</u> of Shilhi. | **1 Kings 22:42** | Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-five years. His <u>mother</u>'s name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi. |
| **2 Chr 21:6** | He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a <u>daughter</u> of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. | **2 Kings 8:18** | He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a <u>daughter</u> of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. |
| **2 Chr 21:14** | So now the LORD is about to strike your people, your sons, your <u>wives</u> and everything that is yours, with a heavy blow. | | |
| **2 Chr 21:17** | They attacked Judah, invaded it and carried off all the goods found in the king's palace, together with his sons and <u>wives</u>. Not a son was left to him except Ahaziah, the youngest. | | |
| **2 Chr 22:2** | Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His <u>mother</u>'s name was Athaliah, a <u>granddaughter</u> of Omri. | **2 Kings 8:26** | Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His <u>mother</u>'s name was Athaliah, a <u>granddaughter</u> of Omri king of Israel. |
| **2 Chr 22:3** | He too walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his <u>mother</u> encouraged him in doing wrong. | **2 Kings 8:27** | He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab and did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was related by marriage to Ahab's family. |
| **2 Chr 22:10** | When Athaliah the <u>mother</u> of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah. | **2 Kings 11:1** | When Athaliah the <u>mother</u> of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. |
| **2 Chr 22:11** | But Jehosheba, the <u>daughter</u> of King Jehoram, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes who were about to be murdered and put him and his <u>nurse</u> in a bedroom. Because Jehosheba, the <u>daughter</u> of King Jehoram and <u>wife</u> of the priest Jehoiada, was Ahaziah's <u>sister</u>, she hid the child from <u>Athaliah</u> so she could not kill him. | **2 Kings 11:2** | But Jehosheba, the <u>daughter</u> of King Jehoram and <u>sister</u> of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his <u>nurse</u> in a bedroom to hide him from <u>Athaliah</u>; so he was not killed. |
| **2 Chr 22:12** | He remained hidden with them at the temple of God for six years while <u>Athaliah</u> ruled the land. | **2 Kings 11:3** | He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while <u>Athaliah</u> ruled the land. |
| **2 Chr 24:3** | Jehoiada chose two <u>wives</u> for him, and he had sons and <u>daughters</u>. | | |
| **2 Chr 24:7** | Now the sons of that wicked <u>woman</u> Athaliah had broken into the temple of God and had used even its sacred objects for the Baals. | | |
| **2 Chr 24:26** | Those who conspired against him were Zabad, son of Shimeath an Ammonite | **2 Kings 12:21** | The officials who murdered him were Jozabad son of <u>Shimeath</u> and Jehozabad |

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| | woman, and Jehozabad, son of Shimrith a Moabite woman. | | son of Shomer. He died and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. And Amaziah his son succeeded him as king. |
| 2 Chr 25:1 | Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin; she was from Jerusalem. | 2 Kings 14:2 | He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin; she was from Jerusalem. |
| 2 Chr 25:18[309] | But Jehoash king of Israel replied to Amaziah king of Judah: "A thistle in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar in Lebanon, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' Then a wild beast in Lebanon came along and trampled the thistle underfoot. | 2 Kings 14:9 | But Jehoash king of Israel replied to Amaziah king of Judah: "A thistle in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar in Lebanon, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' Then a wild beast in Lebanon came along and trampled the thistle underfoot. |
| 2 Chr 26:3 | Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem. | 2 Kings 15:2 | He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem. |
| 2 Chr 27:1 | Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. | 2 Kings 15:33 | He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. |
| 2 Chr 28:8 | The Israelites took captive from their kinsmen two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria | | |
| 2 Chr 28:10 | And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the LORD your God? | | |
| 2 Chr 29:1 | Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. | 2 Kings 18:2 | He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. |
| 2 Chr 29:9 | This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity. | Deut 28:32 | Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. |
| 2 Chr 31:18 | They included all the little ones, the wives, and the sons and daughters of the whole community listed in these genealogical records. For they were faithful in consecrating themselves. | | |
| 2 Chr 34:22 | Hilkiah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was he wife of Shallum son | 2 Kings 22:14 | Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of |

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[309] In this verse, the word daughter is used only idiomatically.

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| | of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. | | Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. |
| **2 Chr 35:25** | Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and <u>women</u> singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments. | | |
| **2 Chr 36:17** | He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young <u>woman</u>, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. | | |

From the table above, it can be assumed that the Chronicler's *Sondergut* consists of the following: 1 Chronicles 1:33; 2:18, 19, 21*, 24, 26, 29, 34, 35, 46, 48; 3:19; 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 17, 18, 19, 27; 7:4, 15a, 16, 17-18*, 23, 24, 32; 8:8, 9, 11, 29; 9:35; 11:39; 16:3; 23:22; 25:5; 2 Chronicles 8:11b; 11:18-19, 21b, 23; 13:21; 20:13; 21:14, 17; 24:3, 7; 28:8, 10; 31:18; 35:25; 36:17 (*in 1 Chronicles 2:21 and in 7:17-18, there is no mention in the *Vorlage* of 'daughters' or 'sisters'). No parallels are found for all these references either in the Pentateuchal tradition or in the Deuteronomistic History. We shall comment on the differences but, before we do so, a consideration of the roles and positions of Chronicles' women within the society is essential. The table below shows both the kinship relations and the positions or offices of all the women mentioned in the book.

**Table 2: Kinship relations and social positions of women in Chronicles**[310]

| KINSHIP RELATION[311]/ SOCIAL POSITION | 1 CHRONICLES | 2 CHRONICLES |
|---|---|---|
| **Mother(s)** | **1:24; 1:32**; 1:33; **2:3; 2:16-17; 2:18; 2:21; 2:24; 2:26; 2:29; 2:35; 2:46; 2:48;** 3:1(x2); **3:2a;** <u>3:2b</u>; **3:3; 3:5;** 4:6; *4:9*; **4:17; 4:18(x2); 4:19;** 7:13; **7:14; 7:16;** | *2:14*; **11:19; 11:20**; 12:13; **15:16; 20:31**; *22:3; 22:10*; **24:26**(x2); **22:2**; 25:1; 26:3; **27:1; 29:1** |

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[310] In the table, the references in bold font represent overlapping roles, i.e. cases in which a referent plays more than one role. The underlined references are those verses in which more than one woman is mentioned while the references in italics represent verses in which there is neither overlap in roles nor multiple occurrences of women.

[311] The kinship terms in Hebrew are אֵם (mother, grandmother), בַּת (daughter, granddaughter); אִשָּׁה (woman, wife, female); אָהוֹת (sister); פִּלֶגֶשׁ (concubine or secondary wife), גְּבִרָה (queen-mother, queen, lady); מֵינֶקֶת (wet nurse, nurse, foster-mother); נְבִיאָה (prophetess); מַלְכָּה (queen). There does not seem to be any difference in terminology between the Chronicler's usages and the parallel texts.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 7:18; **7:23**; **8:9;** 8:11; 11:6; 11:39; 18:12; 18:15; 26:28; 27:4 | |
| **Wife/wives** | **1:50**; **2:18**, **2:21**; **2:24**; **2:26**; **2:29**; **2:35** **3:3**; *4:5*; **4:17**; **4:18**(x2); **4:19**; *7:4*; 7:15; **7:16**; **7:23**; *8:8*; **8:9**; 8:29; 9:35; 14:3; *23:22* | **8:11**; **11:18**; **11:19**; **11:20**; **11:21**; 11:21; *11:23*; *13:21*; *20:13*; **21:6**; *21:14*; *21:17*; **22:11**; 24:3; 28:8; 29:9; 31:18; **34:22** |
| **Daughter(s)** | **1:50**(x2); **2:3**; **2:21**; *2:34*; **2:35**; *2:49*; **3:2a**; **3:5**; **4:18**; *4:27*; 7:15; *7:24*; **14:3**; *15:29*; *16:1*; *23:22*; *25:5*; | **8:11**; **11:18**(x2), **11:19**; **11:20**; **11:21**; 11:21; *13:2*; 13:21; **20:31**; **21:6**; **22:11**(x2); 24:3; *25:18*; **27:1**; 28:8; **29:1**; *21:9*; **29:9**; 31:18 |
| **Sister(s)** | *1:39*; **2:16-17**; 3:9; *3:19*; *4:3*; **4:19**; 7:15; *7:17*; 7:18; *7:30*; *7:32* | **22:11** |
| **Daughter-in-law** | **1:24** | |
| **Concubine(s)** | **1:32**; **2:46**; **2:48**; 3:9; **7:14** | 11:21(x2) |
| **Grandmother** | | **15:16** |
| **Grand-daughter** | | *2:22*; **22:2** |
| **Woman/Women** | 2:3; *16:3* | *15:13*; *24:7*; 24:26(x2); **28:10**; **35:25**; *36:17* |
| **City builder** | 7:24 (Sheerah) | |
| **Queen-mother**[312] | | **15:16** |
| **Nurse** | | 22:11 |
| **Prophetess** | | **34:22** (Huldah) |
| **Queen** | | *9:1, 3, 9, 12* (Queen of Sheba); 22:12 (Athaliah) |
| **War captives** | | **28:8**; **28:10**; **29:9** |
| **Singers (Temple?)** | | *35:25* |

Of the designations itemized in the table above, some are not explicitly mentioned but are implied in the text. For instance, the role of mother is implied in several verses where children are said to be born to a particular woman or where certain individuals are designated as the sons of a particular woman (e.g. 1 Chronicles 1:32; 7:14, 16, 18; 2 Chronicles 11:19, 20; 24:26)[313]. As noted above, many overlaps can certainly be

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[312] Although a number of women are designated as mothers of kings, the Chronicler did not indicate that they held an official position of queen mother as Asa's grandmother did (2 Chron 15:16), neither is there any indication that they were alive or dead at the time their sons reigned. The women, all in 2 Chronicles, include Naamah the mother of Rehoboam (12:13); Maacah the mother of Abijah (13:2); Azubah the mother of Jehoshaphat (20:31); Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah (22:2); Jehoaddin the mother of Amaziah (25:1); Jecoliah the mother of Uzziah (26:3); Jerusha the mother of Jotham (27:1) and Abijah the mother of Hezekiah (29:1).

[313] It should be stressed here that although Ben Zvi (2006:185) categorizes the roles of Zeruiah and Abigail in 2 Chronicles 2:16-17 as lineage heads, we do not consider it expedient to do the same here because the roles are neither implicitly nor explicitly stated in the text. It is not impossible that they were family heads but the fact, that Jether, the father of Abigail's son, Amasa is mentioned also in the genealogy, should be taken into account (2:17).

found in the portrayals of the women as either daughters, mothers (including queen mothers), wives, sisters, concubines or just plain women. The table below presents the overlapping familial or social roles.

**Table 3: Women in overlapping relationships or positions**

| OVERLAPPING ROLES | 1 CHRONICLES | 2 CHRONICLES |
|---|---|---|
| Mother ↔ Wife | 2:18; 2:24; 2:26; 2:29; 3:3; 4:18; 7:16; 7:23; 8:9 | |
| Mother ↔ Daughter (±Wife) | 3:2a; 3:5; 2:35; 4:18 | 11:19; 11:20; 13:2; 20:31; 27:1; 29:1 |
| Mother ↔ Concubine | 1:32; 2:46; 2:48; 7:14 | |
| Sister ↔ Mother (±Wife) | 2:16-17; 4:19 | |
| Daughter ↔ Sister (±Wife) | | 22:11(x2) |
| Daughter-in-law ↔ Mother | 1:24 | |
| Woman ↔ Mother (± daughter) | 2:3 | 24:6(x2) |
| Daughter ↔ Builder | 7:24 | |
| Prophetess ↔ Wife | | 34:22 |
| Woman ↔ Singer | | 35:25 |
| Queen-mother ↔ Grand-mother | | 15:16 |
| Mother ↔ granddaughter | | 22:2 |
| War captive↔ Wife/Daughter/Women | | 28:8; 28:10; 29:9 |

A different kind of overlap also occurs in the book; some of the referents point to the same women even though they are found in different verses. For instance, the name Zeruiah in 1 Chronicles 2:16; 11:6, 39; 18:12, 15; 26:28; and 27:24 refers to the same woman, and Abigail is also mentioned in both 2:16 and 2:17. According to the Chronicler, both of them were David's sisters[314]. Maacah in 1 Chronicles 8:29 is the same as in 9:35 – the wife of Jeiel, and Athaliah refers to the same woman in 2 Chronicles 22:2, 10, 11, 12 and 24:7.

The question that comes to mind here is, "Given the multiplicity of roles and functions of women shown in the tables above, is there a common denominator that can be used to account for all these women"? It appears, from the data presented above, that all the women, whether in public or domestic positions, are described in familial/tribal

Similarly, the attribution of the role of lineage head to Keturah in 1 Chronicles 1:32 would appear plausible except that the text also brings Abraham's role into the picture.
[314] In 2 Samuel 17:25, Abigail and Zeruiah are said to be the daughters of Nahash.

relationships. The exception, at a first glance, would seem to be a visitor to Israel, the Queen of Sheba, but then, she is also designated with respect to her land of origin. It seems to us that the real issue here is kinship and the women of Chronicles have been presented in such a way that would show their affinities, one way or the other, to the people (or the land) of Israel. Even the "foreign women" in the Chronicler's account were affiliated to Israelite men in kinship relationships as mothers, wives or concubines. The data before us, therefore, deserves better scrutiny.

At this point, we need to return to the data presented in the first table above to consider the possible inferences that can be made from it especially from the Chronicler's *Sondergut*. To begin, the bulk of the references to women in Chronicles that are not found elsewhere in the Pentateuchal or Deuteronomistic traditions come, primarily, from the genealogical section and are concentrated in 1 Chronicles 2, 4, 7, and 8. Of the twelve verses in 1 Chronicles 2 that contain references to women, only four are found to have parallels in other texts (i.e. 2:3; 16; 17; 48). No equivalent verses are found for the women in the remaining eight verses. In 1 Chronicles 4, eight verses contain references to women; but none of them has parallels in previous texts. In chapter 7, ten verses contain references to women but only one verse and a half verse (i.e. 7:15b, 30) have parallels elsewhere. None of the four verses on women in chapter 8 has a parallel.

It can be observed that the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 2 and 4 pertain to the tribe of Judah[315]. Klein (2006:88) observes that no biblical parallels are found to the genealogy of Judah from 2:20 to 2:48. He, therefore, asserts that, "For the rest of 1 Chron 2:3-4-4:23, I conclude that the Chronicler had access to other genealogical materials, of an oral or written sort, or that the Chronicler composed certain verses himself"[316]. Klein

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[315] From 1 Chronicles 4:24ff, the genealogies refer to the tribe of Simeon. Incidentally, only one reference to women is contained in that section (1 Chron 4:27) and no corresponding *Vorlage* has been attested for it. Therefore, our reference to 1 Chronicles 4 in this discussion will focus on the genealogies of Judah (i.e. 4:1-23).

[316] On 1 Chronicles 2, Klein (2006:88) further concludes that, "The specific verses attributable to the Chronicler's own editorial activity with some probability are: 2:9, 18-24, 25-33, 34-41, 42-50aα, 50aβ-55". Although we are inclined to agree with Klein's findings here, it should be pointed out, in addition, that some other verses in the same section, specifically 2:26 and 2:29 also have no parallels, while 2:21 seems to be connected to previous texts only partially. For example, Numbers 26:29 mentions Makir as the father of Gilead but there is no mention of his daughter whom the Chronicler claimed married Hezron when he was sixty years old and bore him Segub.

(2006:127) argues that the overall intention of the Chronicler in chapters 2-4 was to stress the pre-eminence of Judah[317]. Be that as it may, it appears that, in so doing, the Chronicler has added much data of his own or which have become extinct or unknown to us in other to drive home his point. In particular, the preponderance of material on women in the two chapters, which are not attested in older biblical texts, arouses curiosity.

For his part, Knoppers (2004:353-358) regards the genealogies of Judah as rather complex not just in social terms but ethnically and geographically as well (cf. Johnstone 1997:42). He describes Judah as the most socially heterogeneous of the tribes. Furthermore, Knoppers (2004:358) claims that:

> The many and varied relations that allow the authors to depict primary, secondary, and tertiary kinship relationships also hint at different levels of social stratification within the larger group. Wives (2:18, 24, 26, 29, 35; 3:3; 4:5, 7, 19), concubines (2:46, 48; 3:9; cf. 2:21, 24), sisters (2:16-17; 3:9, 19; 4:3, 19), daughters (2:4, 21, 34, 35, 49; 3:2, 5; 4:18), and mothers (2:26; 4:9) all play recognized roles.

There is no doubt that the varied relations point to different levels of social stratification. However, the probable motivation behind this strategic use of information relating to women is worth probing. If the aim of the Chronicler in chapters 2-4 was to stress Judah's pre-eminence, then it would seem logical also to aim to project the women of the tribe as "blessed among women". It makes sense to acknowledge that all these wonderful men of Judah did not drop from heaven but were sons, husbands and fathers, etc. of some women.

Taking a cue from Wilson's (1977:38-45) demarcation of the operation of genealogies into three spheres (viz. politico-jural, religious and domestic), Sparks (2008:215) asserts that Judah's genealogy appears to have been formulated in the domestic sphere as opposed to the politico-jural (e.g. genealogies of Issachar, Benjamin and Asher in 1

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[317] For Johnstone (1997:42, 59), the Chronicler accorded pre-eminence to the house of David but within the tribe of Judah, which itself is regarded as pre-eminent in Israel (cf. Freedman 1961:440 and Willi 1994:152-154, 160-161).

Chron 7) or religious/cultic sphere (e.g. Levi's genealogy). Sparks (2008:216) rightly observes that:

> [Judah's genealogy] contains accounts of marriages, conceptions, births, deaths, as well as the significant names of certain children. Like Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, Judah mentions not only names of males, but also those of wives, sisters and daughters. Each of these speaks of domestic relationships, rather than political or cultic ones.

In addition, a number of domestic terms are also employed in the genealogy of Judah that confirms its domestic operation (2008:222-223). In our view, Sparks' observation that Judah's genealogy is set in the domestic sphere offers a cogent explanation for the many references to women in Judah's genealogy which have no parallel elsewhere in the Old Testament. This does not necessarily imply, however, the preclusion of the politico-jural or the religious sphere.

As for 1 Chronicles 7, although most of the women mentioned are not found in parallel texts, the genealogies in which they are mentioned belong to at least five different tribes (Naphtali 7:13; Issachar 7:14; Manasseh 7:14-19; Ephraim 7:20-27 and Asher 7:30-32). The common element is that they are all northern tribes. Chapter 8 contains the genealogies of Benjamin but none of the four verses (8:8, 9, 11, and 29) that refer to women shows any correspondence with previous material. The only verse that mentions a woman in 1 Chronicles 9 (i.e. v.35) also belongs to Benjamin and is a perfect replica of 8:29. All other verses in the book that mention women but have no existing parallels in the Old Testament are scattered throughout the narrative section. It is no surprise, at the end of the day, that the compiler of the "things left behind" resolved to pay heed to those women who had been "left out" of the scheme of things.

A more careful consideration of the first table above also shows an interesting concern of the Chronicler especially in the genealogies. He seemed to be at pain to explain the status of many of the women that are unique to his composition even when such status would have been regarded as socially flawed. Seven times (1 Chron 1:32; 2:46, 48; 3:9a; 7:14 and 2 Chron 11:21b[x2]), he used the term פִּילֶגֶשׁ (concubine or secondary wife). Of these seven occurrences of the term, only one (1 Chron 3:9a) is found with a

corresponding *Vorlage*. It is interesting to note that whereas the Pentateuchal text refers to Keturah as Abraham's wife, the Chronicler called her his concubine (Braun 1986:22; Knoppers 2003:280; Ben Zvi 2006:191fn)[318].

The Chronicler also noted that Judah's two sons were born to him by his daughter-in-law (1 Chron 2:4) and that Hezron was already an old man when he married (probably for the first time) the daughter of Machir (1 Chron 2:21). Again, when Sheshan saw that he had no sons, he gave his daughter in marriage to Jarha his Egyptian servant (1 Chron 2:34-35), while Mered, supposedly an ordinary citizen, married Pharaoh's daughter (1 Chron 4:18). Both Hushim and Baara were divorced by their husband Shaharaim (1 Chron 8:8), who married another woman. The father of Jabez, that child of sorrow, was not mentioned (1 Chron 4:9). Perhaps that was the source of his pain – his mother was a struggling single parent!

Another significant feature of the variegated nature of Chronicle's women is the number of foreign women represented in the material[319]. The Chronicler mentioned these women with ease and without any hint of disapproval[320]. Judah's wife was a Canaanite woman (1 Chron 2:3) and Maacah, Absalom's mother was a princess of Geshur (1 Chron 3:2). One of Mered's wives was a daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chron 4:18); the mother of Makir the father of Gilead was an Aramean (1 Chron 7:14) while Makir himself married from among the Huppites and Shuppites (1 Chron 7:15). Solomon married a Pharaoh's daughter (2 Chron 8:11) and his son Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonite – apparently, these two represent only a sample of his variety of foreign women (1 Kgs

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[318] It is equally notable that 1 Chronicles 14:3 relates that David married more wives in Jerusalem and there is no mention of concubines but the *Vorlage* (2 Sam 5:13) records that David took more wives and more concubines. In any event, 1 Chronicles 3:9a already shows that David had concubines.

[319] Of course, some foreign men are equally mentioned in the text. For example, Jether, an Ishmaelite was the father of Amasa, Abigail's son (1 Chron 2:17); Sheshan's daughter was given in marriage to his Egyptian servant (1 Chron 2:34-35); and Huram's father was a man of Tyre (2 Chron 2:14).

[320] Of the genealogies, Japhet (1993:74) remarks: "The genealogies in general refer constantly to non-Israelite elements, both men and women, whose foreign origins are either mentioned explicitly (e.g. 4:8; 3:17) or learned from their names or titles ('another wife', 2:6; etc.). There is never any incrimination implied in this data. Indeed, one of the goals of these genealogies is the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of the non-Israelite elements in the people of Israel, by presenting them as an organic part of the tribes, mainly in the status of 'wives' or 'concubines'".

11:1)! The two murderers of King Joash were the sons of an Ammonite woman and a Moabite woman (2 Chron 24:26).

On the other hand, the Chronicler carefully stressed that some of the women were from Jerusalem or Judah. For example, Jehoaddin, Amaziah's mother (2 Chron 25:1) and Jecoliah, Uzziah's mother (2 Chron 26:3), were both from Jerusalem while Huldah lived in Jerusalem (2 Chron 34:22) and Mered had a Judean wife (1 Chron 4:18). Perhaps, this was a subtle of way of maintaining the Chronicler's focus on the pre-eminence of Judah. Additionally, it is observable that many of the women were from the upper echelon of the society. They were daughters (1 Chron 2:21; 3:2; 3:9b; 4:18; 7:24; 15:29; 2 Chron 8:11; 11:18-19), mothers (2 Chron 13:2; 15:16; 20:31), wives (1 Chron 3:2-5; 7:14-18; 2 Chron 11:20-21), concubines (1 Chron 2:46-49; 3:9a; 7:14), and sisters (1 Chron 2:16) of kings or statesmen; and daughters or wives of priests and seers (1 Chron 25:5; 2 Chron 22:11; 27:1; 29:1). The material included even a prophetess (2 Chron 34:22).

The data in the foregoing suggests a deliberate attempt on the part of the Chronicler to highlight the role and status of women not only in the genealogies of the tribes of Israel but also in the overall narrative. He conscientiously showed, even when the existing biblical texts could have constrained him, that women were part of Israel's story. Could this be another strategy by the Chronicler to affirm his concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל - an "all Israel," which included the bond and the free, the native and the foreign born, the entrepreneur and the widow, the queen mother and the single parent; an "all Israel" that included the princess and the pauper, the queen and the concubine, the female religious leader and the divorced?

The name Israel is used to refer variously to the land, the descendants of Jacob under the United Kingdom (i.e. the twelve tribes), the people of Judah, the descendants of Ephraim, the people of the northern kingdom, and Jews in Diaspora during and after the exile, etc[321]. Zobel (1990:418) argues that "the Chronicler is concerned to emphasize

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[321] See Zobel (1990:397-420) and Sparks (2006:279) for various uses of the term Israel.

the continuity and totality of Israel; this concern is further underlined by the use of 'all Israel' in 1 Chronicles (21 times) and 2 Chronicles (25 times)…[322]" Indeed, this may be true but it seems that, in his attempt to emphasize that continuity and totality of Israel, he engages in a definition of Israelite identity especially in the genealogies. For instance, Knoppers (2004:471) affirms that the Chronicler was concerned with "national redefinition and revision of Israelite identity". However, the inclusion of a variety of women (and perhaps even men) in Chronicles that are either unaccounted-for or properly designated in the *Vorlage* suggests that the Chronicler had a bigger agenda. Could he be attempting to redefine what constituted a כל־יִשְׂרָאֵל in line with the make-up of the exilic/post-exilic community of faith[323]?

The question is significant if we consider Couey's (2008:132) assertion that:

> In the exilic and post-exilic periods, identification of Israel becomes more contested. The term refers to the exiles in Babylon or the diaspora more generally in Isa 40-66 and Ezekiel… In Ezek 11:15, the expression "the whole house of Israel" (…כָּל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל) indicates the exilic community to the exclusion of those remaining in the land of Judah, suggesting conflicts over the use of the name. Such conflicts are evident in Ezra-Nehemiah…

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[322] The references to all Israel in Chronicles are listed as: "1 Ch. 9:1; 11:1, 4, 10; 12:39 [38] [twice]; 6:29; 7:6, 8; 9:30, 10:1, 3, 16 [twice]; 11:3, 13; 12:1; 13:4, 15; 18:16; 24:5; 28:23; 29:24 [twice]; 30:1, 5, 6; 31:1; 35:3). The phrases "all the assembly of Israel" (1 Ch. 13:2; 2 Ch. 6:3 [twice], 12, 13) and 'all Israel, the assembly of Yahweh' (1 Ch. 28:8) and also the identification of 'all Israel' with the entire assembly… comparison of 1 Ch. 29:1, 10, 20 with vv.21, 23, 25, 26 indicate that the postexilic cultic community constitutes this Israel…" (Zobel 1990:418). Sparks (2006:278-279) affirms that the term כל־יִשְׂרָאֵל appears in Chronicles forty-six times and some other variants of the expression occur additional twenty-seven times, totalling seventy-three times. Interestingly, thirty-seven of the seventy-three occurrences are unique to the Chronicler. Sparks argues that, "these additions are very important to gaining an understanding of what the Chronicler meant by the phrase 'all Israel'" (2006:179).

[323] Willi (1994:161) points out that the Chronicler showed that a new Israel was being constituted: "The future reconstituted Israel – not only Judah, not only the kingdom of Judah! – would correspond to that Israel that, according to the citizenship-lists, had been in the beginning, that *confusione hominum* had largely perished, but that now *providentia Dei* had partially re-established in the form of the province of Yehud, and that therefore one day *would again come to be*". In a related vein, Jonker (p.39, forthcoming) confirms that, "… the issue of post-exilic identity was high on the agenda of the Chronicler. At a time when God's people were still settling into a new religious-cultic and political dispensation, reflection on who they were in these circumstances became necessary. And they did this in continuity with the past, but also in serious engagement with their new present". The indication from the assertions above is that the post-exilic Israelite community was undergoing a process of reconstituting or re-establishing a new identity based not only on their history but also on their situation at the time. It appears that in the process, a new awareness of the presence of different elements and different expressions of what constituted that new Israel began to emerge. The definition of "all Israel" was undergoing a transformation – socially, geographically or biologically – and with much ingenuity, the Chronicler reflected this transformation, this new landscape, in his composition.

If such conflicts were already brewing or existed at the time of the Chronicler, could his composition that enabled the otherwise unaccounted-for set of women to be recognized and counted be a strategy to argue that 'all Israel' was not just, for example, a patriarchal world or an elitist circle of the House of David. Rather, it was a 'new Israel' that recognized the rights and dignity of all, irrespective of gender, class, origin or status? It is appreciable that in the midst of this tapestry of Chronicles women, which makes up a part of the new Israel, a space is created for Sheerah, a unique and unforgettable woman of incredible talent and wisdom.

A discussion of women in Chronicles may appear incomplete without the mention of the role of women in the exilic/post-exilic era, the time the book was probably compiled. Eskenazi (1992:25-27) claims that a first glance at women in the post-exilic sixth to fourth century Persian period texts presents them as being hidden in the shadows. She examines documents on the role of women from the Jewish community in Elephantine, Egypt, and she illustrates with the lives of three women: Mibtahiah, Tapmut and Yehoishma. Mibtahiah is described as a wealthy woman, three times married, who owned much property. Tapmut or Tamut was a slave who married a free man and later became free. Tapmut owned property and had legal rights. A contract stipulated that both her son and daughter, Yehoishma, were to inherit her estate. Yehoishma is said to own much property and many movable possessions (1992:27ff).

In addition, Eskenazi (1992:36ff) considers evidence from the list of returnees in Ezra 2 (and the parallel text of Nehemiah 7). She points out the presence of a female scribe (Ezra 2:55) in a clan (Barzillai) that was clearly named after the matriarch's family in Ezra 2:61 (Neh 7:63), and female singers (Ezra 2.65 // Neh. 7.67). Other female roles included the women who joined to build parts of Jerusalem wall (Neh 3:2) and that of the prophetess (i.e. Noadiah in Neh 6:14). Eskenazi's argument is that the Elephantine documents bring to the fore some women's roles, which the biblical text do not explicitly describe, such as the rights of women to divorce their husbands, hold property, buy and sell, and inherit, even when there was a son. Further, evidence of women's presence in

the two document types is significant. In her words, "Obviously, they do not establish gender balance but they nevertheless reflect women's presence in symbolic and practical ways" (1992:41).

The evidence on women provided by Eskenazi from both Elephantine and Ezra-Nehemiah texts seems to tally with findings from Chronicles where women are also seen as heads of families (Abigail and Zeruiah), built (Sheerah), prophesied (Huldah) and were divorced (1 Chron 8:8). Ben Zvi (2006:186) confirms that seals, which bear the names of women, have been found for the Persian period and "they show that some elite women owned property, were involved in trade and financial affairs, and controlled goods owned by or produced by their household". These all point to one thing – women were active participants in public affairs (although they might not have been equal participants with men in terms of percentage). By a stroke of providence, Sheerah is a part of that world!

### 5.5.6 Theological and ideological context of 1 Chronicles 7:24

At this point, it is expedient to reflect on the various points highlighted under the literary, geographical and socio-cultural contexts from a theological and ideological standpoint. In other words, for the purpose of the present study, do the findings in those contexts have any theological or ideological implications?

First, as noted above, one of the theological themes of Chronicles is covenant as a basis for restoration (Selman 1994:45-65). The juxtaposition of the tragedy that befell Ephraim in the murder of his sons Ezer and Elead's with the story of the subsequent birth of his son Beriah as well as the building achievements of his daughter Sheerah appears to be a deliberate literary strategy by the Chronicler to underscore one of the main themes of the book – restoration. This point is well articulated by Sparks (2008:205-206). He argues that the Chronicler showed that mourning was one of the requirements for restoration and that Ephraim's mourning for his dead sons led to restoration for his family as evidenced in the birth of another son, Beriah, and in the positive building projects.

Second, it has been stated that some of the important theological themes in Chronicles include developing the concept of "all Israel and establishing legitimacy especially through the genealogies" (Thompson 1994:32-42; cf. Johnson 1969:56-57). With these themes in mind, it is reasonable to presume that the inclusion of a daughter in Ephraim's genealogy and, indeed, of daughters (or of sisters, wives and mothers) in some other tribal genealogies, is an indication that the Chronicler's purpose of developing the concept כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, which includes not only the men but also the women of Israel, is a valid one. For כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל would be incomplete without the females. Note should be taken also that Jonker, in his forthcoming commentary, points out that "the Chronicler does not shy away from mentioning that the lineage of "All-Israel" includes people (mainly women) of foreign descent" (p.86)[324]. One could surmise, therefore, that the Chronicler was careful to affirm women, whether foreign or native-born, in his concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל. Without these women, the notion would be incomplete.

Furthermore, if one of the purposes of the genealogies is to establish legitimacy, Ephraim's inclusion would not only point to his having rights to land and possessions in Israel but it would also imply that everyone listed in his descent has the same rights and are *bona fide* Israelites including the women. Hooker (2001:40) affirms that in 1 Chronicles 7, "the Chronicler has lifted up women as important participants in the progress of Israel..." Ben Zvi (2006:187) echoes similar sentiments in the following words:

> Genealogies created an ideological world in which women cannot be dismissed, and in which they can become very active... [and] taught ... that gender (and ethnic) boundaries could, were, and by inference can and should be transgressed by the Yehudite community on occasion, with divine blessing, and resulting in divine blessing... It is understandable that Chronicles would emphasize and approve the contribution of women for the enduring life of the family household, as well as for the Israelite society in general which is conceived in terms of a larger encompassing household...

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[324] Jonker notes, in addition, that the Chronicler's ideology is inclusivist as his understanding of "all Israel" includes even the tribes that formerly belonged to the northern kingdom and the Transjordanian tribes even though his emphasis in the genealogies was on Judah, Benjamin and Levi. The Chronicler tried to show that all had a common ancestor.

Third, the point has been made that the geographical details in Chronicles, especially in the genealogical section have been used deliberately by the Chronicler to bolster his purpose of carving out the concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל. Two of the cities Sheerah built (Lower and Upper Beth Horon) were significant cities in ancient Israel and, in terms of Israel's economy, were strategically located on an important international trade route. Beth Horon as a frontier city implied that its location was not only militarily but also politically strategic, for it was located en route Jerusalem from Joppa. Therefore, the establishment of these important cities not only puts the cities within the boundaries of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל but the builder as well.

Fourth, on a theological note, building is regarded as an evidence of divine blessing or favour in Chronicles and in the Old Testament at large. Sparks (2008:205) claims that the Chronicler identified positive building activities with Yahweh's blessings[325]. Before him, Selman (1994:347) had noted that, "The Chronicler's interest in royal building work… ties in with a special emphasis in chapters 10-36" where three phrases (captured; fortified cities; and walls, gates and bars) have been used as "signs of God's blessings and God's commitment to build David's house" (1 Chron 17.10). For his part, Ben Zvi (2006:31) maintains that, "the main body of Chronicles deals with the (hi)story of Israel from the building of the temple to the rebuilding of the temple". God was building not just a dynasty, but a kingdom or 'dominion'…[326]"  No doubt, building signified divine blessing in Chronicles but it should be pointed out here that the Chronicler's interest in royal building work could not have begun only in 2 Chronicles 10-36. It began in 1 Chronicles as 1 Chronicles 17:10 shows and as the building activities of Sheerah seems to foreshadow.

It is conceivable that the concept of building and rebuilding would be profoundly valued amongst a people who have been torn down by the experiences of war and exile. If the popular currents in scholarship that the final redaction of Chronicles must have taken

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[325] Allen (1999:353) has noted earlier also that, in Chronicles, building is a sign of blessing, e.g. 2 Chronicles 26:5-6 (see also Ben Zvi 2006:185-186).
[326] In an earlier work, Ben Zvi (1997:148-149) had remarked that, "there is an impressive selection of accounts of correct behaviour and 'blessing' *topoi* that appear in close (literary) proximity to the 'building' reports… Most of these accounts are unique to Chronicles" (see also 1997:140fn).

place towards the end of the Persian period is correct, then, the emphasis on or interest in the concept of building would not be regarded as odd for a people who have experienced the devastation of war and seen the First Temple destroyed with all its glory. That it was a woman who then sprang into action in the aftermath of a tragedy that consumed the male offspring in her family could be an indication that indeed the old order of doing things in Israel was fading away. Thus, Sparks' (2008:186) observation that the central focus of the Chronicler in the genealogy of Ephraim was "the restoration of families and the building of towns" places Sheerah right at the heart of that genealogy. For she not only built cities, through that achievement, she also brought restoration to her family name that was on the verge of being wiped out by the men of Gath.

Again, in the ancient world, the city was regarded as a symbol of cosmic order. Walton (2006:275) confirms that:

> In Mesopotamia, and to a lesser extent in Egypt, the city was the ideal social context… The order that characterized a city was parallel to and contributing to the order of the cosmos. Indeed, the cosmos found its ultimate ordered state in the city.

Thus, building three cities on the part of Sheerah would have profound symbolic import for her family, which had been decimated by the men of Gath. It would imply that order has been restored. It is little wonder also that the post-exilic scribal community easily identified with Sheerah's building activities. As long as those cities remained, cosmic order was guaranteed. In this connection, it is interesting that not only cities are associated with cosmic order, wisdom also is. Wisdom is said to sustain cosmic and societal order. In fact, wisdom brought order to the cosmic chaos that existed prior creation as Proverbs 8:22-31 shows[327]. If cities are a symbol of cosmic order and wisdom is found behind cosmic order[328], would it be far-fetched to consider that a builder of cities would be bursting with wisdom?

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[327] Helpful comments on this point include Clements (1990:19), Perdue (1997:91; 2002:439-440; 2008:12), Baumann (1998:58-60), and Yoder (2009:94-98).

[328] In fact, Habel (1972:156) links the idea of wisdom and building a house to cosmological reflection. He states that, "The poetic language of the creation traditions preserved and amplified in Proverbs 8:22ff., seems to evoke

That brings us to the issue of the metaphoric use of בָּנָה mentioned above. Scriptures depict God as the consummate builder[329]. Wong (2006:508) reiterates that point thus:

> Theologically, God is the ultimate builder behind every building activity. Without God's blessing the builder labors in vain (Ps 127:1), and no one can rebuild what Yahweh tears down (Job 12:14)… God's restoration of Israel is also expressed in terms of rebuilding it (Jer 24:4-7), its houses and cities (Ezek 36:33-36), and the Davidic dynasty (Amos 9:11).

Subsequently, if Dyck (1998:20ff) is correct in his assumption that the Chronicler's world was one in which a theocratic ideology was at work, and if the God in that world is a builder whose seal of approval can be seen in human building projects, amongst other things, would it not be logical to conclude that His invisible hand was behind Sheerah's building activities?

Once more, regarding the metaphoric use of the word בָּנָה in the Old Testament text, it has been pointed out that the builder can be an abstract idea as in Proverbs 9:1, which states that, "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars". It should be recalled that Chapter 3 of this study has shown that in the book of Proverbs, particularly, in chapters 1-9, wisdom and building are intricately connected. Therefore, it does not appear to be a coincidence that Solomon, reputed to be the wisest man in his age, was also involved in extensive building projects. More importantly, however, in Proverbs 1-9, wisdom is depicted as a woman. As a matter of fact, Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her own house…" Surely, it would not be out of place to suggest that Sheerah, a woman who alone built three cities, is an embodiment of this wisdom – this is wisdom as a real woman[330]!

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the image of "building a vast superstructure. If this be true one wonders whether we might not propose the idea that 'the house which wisdom' builds (9:1) is but another way of describing the world she has constructed through her divine counsel (in 8:22 if.), or what is more likely, that her house, like ancient temples, is the earthly counterpart of the cosmic superstructure. Her house appears to be a temple where worshipers may retire to learn about the cosmic" way. There she celebrates with her admirers in a manner similar to her cosmic celebration with the eternal creator (9:1-6; 8:30; cf. I Chron. 13:8)".

[329] The New Testament describes Him as the "builder of all things" (Heb 3:4).

[330] We would like to add here that, although it is correct to say Sheerah was the only woman in Scriptures who built cities, from a figurative perspective, the statement might not be perfectly adequate. Whereas Sheerah built cities in the literal sense of the word, Rachel and Leah, who were reputed to be builders of the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11), were also female builders, even though in a metaphoric or theological sense of the word.

## 5.6 Conclusion of chapter

In this chapter, we have attempted to show that 1 Chronicles 7:24 is not an intrusive verse as some scholars claim but that it has been strategically placed in its present context by the Chronicler. The aim is to assent his theological and ideological themes of כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל and of restoration, as well as the significance of building in the Persian period when Chronicles is presumed to have been written. Furthermore, we have extrapolated, based on the metaphorical usage of the verb בָּנָה, that Sheerah, the woman city builder, is an example of wisdom incarnate.

To arrive at these conclusions, we have considered in brief the trends in the study of Chronicles and, in particular, of 1 Chronicles 1-9 along with the literary, geographical and socio-cultural contexts of the text in question. On a literary level, 1 Chronicles 7:24 has been analysed in the light of a larger pericope, 7:20-29, and it has been shown that, in spite of the many text critical problems that are traditionally associated with the pericope, v.24 is an integral part of that pericope with strong literary ties to the other verses. Furthermore, the verse and the person of Sheerah are well rooted in the genealogy of Ephraim and, therefore, in the genealogies as a whole.

In addition, the analysis of the geographical context of 7:24 highlights the importance of the cities that Sheerah built as well as the other cities in the territory of Ephraim. It is quite striking that the sacred city of Bethel, which occupied a prominent position in the previous analysis of Genesis 35:8, has resurfaced in the territory of Ephraim! Lastly, in the investigation of the socio-cultural context of 7:24, the significance of building in Chronicles and in the Old Testament in general as well as of the role and position of women in Chronicles have underscored the uniqueness of this woman called Sheerah and her accomplishments which have been buried in only one verse of Scriptures.

We have provided data to show that the Chronicler, by copiously employing material that are otherwise unknown in the biblical text as well as by modifying his *Vorlage*, has succeeded in highlighting the roles and status of women in ancient Israel. His presentation clearly reflects the changing socio-cultural patterns of his time especially in

relation to exilic/post-exilic women. A relentless focus on kinship and familial ties is clearly discernible. Our findings demonstrate that Sheerah's role as a female builder (as well as the roles of a number of other women in Chronicles) calls into question the traditional or stereotypical role and image of women as private and domesticated folks. If we dare turn the argument on its head, then, Sheerah's role as a city builder equally calls into question the stereotypical role of men as city builders!

The findings in this chapter, in particular, the point that Sheerah's role as a (female) builder implies the possession of some latent wisdom and talent, validate our research hypothesis that Woman Wisdom enables us to perceive certain uncelebrated women in the Old Testament in a new light. We have noted in Chapter 3 of this study the argument that the אֵשֶׁת חַיִל is a composite figure of real women in the Persian period. Since she coalesces with Woman Wisdom, it is argued that Wisdom possibly reflected the socio-economic realities of Persian period women (Yoder 2001:93, 101). If this trend of thought were considered valid, it would make sense that the Chronicler would be confident to include a resourceful and enterprising woman like Sheerah in the genealogies of Israel, knowing that the Persian period Israelite women would readily be able to identify with her achievements.

Again, the attention (or inattention) that Sheerah receives from some commentators, as well as the fact that only one verse is apportioned to her in Scriptures, belies her unique accomplishments. Sheerah is unique in several respects. She is the only daughter mentioned in the genealogy of Ephraim, she is the only female builder of cities, and she is the only woman who has a city named after her. She stands tall not only in the midst of the women of Chronicles but among the ancient Hebrew women – and men! Since one of the definitions of a heroine is an exemplary figure as we saw in Chapter 1, then, without a doubt, Sheerah, this exemplary Old Testament female builder, should be acknowledged and celebrated as an Old Testament heroine.

In the last chapter, we shall attempt to prove that the perception and role of the traditional African woman, in particular, the Yorùbá woman may, in addition, offer us a glimpse into the lives of women like Sheerah and the First Deborah.

# CHAPTER 6

## SUMMARY AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

*"Until the lioness tells her own story, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter".*
*(An African proverb)*

This final chapter will begin with a summary of findings from the previous chapters. In addition, it will provide the conclusion to the study as well as reflections and recommendations for further research.

## 6.1 Summary and findings

The introductory chapter, which also provides an outline for the study, has considered, among other issues, the research question and hypothesis, the scope of the study, the methodology and trends in Old Testament Wisdom as well as the definitions of salient terms such as feminism, heroism, context and allusion. Primarily, the research hypothesis stated that the conventional definition or description of a biblical heroine does not take into account certain 'hidden' women in the Old Testament who could be distinguished for their wisdom, albeit, in subtle ways. Thus, Woman Wisdom enables us to perceive certain uncelebrated women in the Old Testament in a new light, while the perception and role of the traditional African woman, in particular, the Yorùbá woman, may in addition, offer us a glimpse into the lives of these women.

In the second chapter, Yorùbá women are considered in socio-historical and cultural contexts. Both the domestic and the public roles of Yorùbá women are examined against the backdrop of the various portrayals of the women in epic literatures and other literary genres. The intriguing discovery is that in as much as the sociological and ethnological texts describe the Yorùbá women in positive and admirable ways, the literary texts, by contrast, convey an ambivalent image of the women. In particular,

literary texts such as Yorùbá proverbs and Ìjálá chants show unmistakable deprecation of women besides the strong and positive images found in sociological records. It is argued that such texts that disparage women, in all likelihood, point to the patriarchal or chauvinistic stance of the literary artist and may not at all represent accurately the overall societal image of the woman. This point may possibly be true for many other societies across the globe especially in Africa.

In Chapter 3, issues relating to Woman Wisdom of Proverbs 1-9 are investigated from historical, literary and theological perspectives. The personification of Wisdom as a woman in the Wisdom poems (Pro 1:20-33; 8; and 9:1-6) uncover the pervasive nature of the feminine imagery in the book of Proverbs especially in Proverbs 1-9. Woman Wisdom has been associated not only with other female figures in Proverbs but also with different female characters in Old Testament narratives who are designated as wise either overtly or covertly. It has been suggested that Woman Wisdom is characterized as a metaphor for the Israelite heroine – a consummate image of the true Israelite superwoman and that her association with various female figures in the Old Testament calls for a broader definition of wisdom. Consequently, a case is made for an investigation into the lives of certain women in Old Testament narratives who have received only fleeting mention and recognition but whose lives reflect a possible connection to wisdom on a deeper level. Specifically, the spotlight is turned on the First Deborah (Gen 35:8) and Sheerah (1 Chron 7:24).

Chapter 4 attempts to unpack the story of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, in the context of Genesis 35:1-15. Deborah is mentioned in only one verse in the narrative (35:8), which commentators generally consider as intrusive. A literary analysis of the verse in its present context as well as its intertextual affinities with other passages of Scriptures leads to the conclusion that the verse is not at all intrusive. Rather, it has been strategically placed by the narrator (writer or editor) to focus on the person of Deborah and her place in the overall narrative of God's people.

It is argued that, based on her role as a מֵינֶקֶת, who remained in Rebekah's household for a long time, Deborah would have played the role of a teacher – a teacher of wisdom

– to Rebekah's offspring. Additionally, her role as a מֵינֶקֶת confers on her the role of a provider of food, a role which has been associated with Woman Wisdom and with God. In other words, Deborah, in the twin roles of a nurturer and a nourisher, relates positively with Woman Wisdom. Evidence from the analyses of the geographical, socio-cultural and theological contexts of Genesis 35:8 is used also to underscore the significance of Deborah's presence and role not just at the centre of the Jacob Cycle but also of the Bethel tradition. Significantly, it has been pointed out that, on a theological note, Deborah is an example of God's predilection to support the weak, the marginalized and the oppressed against the mighty, the privileged and the oppressor.

Chapter 5 focuses on the only daughter listed in the genealogy of Ephraim - Sheerah, the builder of three cities. Like the First Deborah, Sheerah's name is mentioned in only one verse and, as in the case of Deborah, the verse that mentions her is also regarded as an intrusion in the unit where it is found (1 Chron 7:20-29). However, a literary analysis of the verse in its context reveals that it is strongly connected to the unit and is not an accidental scribal placement as many commentators assume. The geographical context of the verse equally links it with the pericope as well as the socio-cultural context. Under the socio-cultural context, the concept of building cities in the Old Testament was examined besides the women of Chronicles. On the notion of city building, it is observed that the book of Proverbs depicts wisdom as a builder. Further, the city is often regarded as a symbol of cosmic order just as wisdom is said to be behind cosmic and societal order. The inference and the implication for the present study are that Sheerah, a "master" builder, illustrates the wise Israelite heroine.

In particular, much attention is paid to the Chronicler's characterization of women, approximately fifty-one percent of whom are not mentioned in a *Vorlage* or parallel text. An analysis of the roles and positions of the women in Chronicles shows that the common denominator is kinship as the women are presented in a way that shows their affinities to the people (or land) of Israel. It is suggested, based on the data, that the Chronicler was intent on showing that women – all kinds of women – were part of Israel's story. He attempted to prove (with or without a *Vorlage*), that the identity of

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Israel was being redefined and reconstituted and women were a solid part of that arrangement. Thus, he seemed to affirm his concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל. The fact that Sheerah was a part of these women of Chronicles but stands apart from them in stature and accomplishment is a testimony to an enduring legacy of wisdom, talent, resourcefulness and industry.

## 6.2 Conclusion

This study has investigated the lives of several different female characters namely Yoruba women, Woman Wisdom, the First Deborah and Sheerah the city builder. In this section, we shall focus first on the last two women before relating them to the others.

The two women Deborah and Sheerah - the maid and the mistress – represent two separate ends of the social scale but neither of them is left out of the sacred script even though each receives only a passing mention. Both women have a number of things in common, although they are found in separate books and possibly lived in separate eras. We have noted the striking occurrence of both women in the two books with the greatest concentrations of female characters namely Genesis and 1 Chronicles. The two books also happen to contain a large amount of genealogical materials. It is interesting that neither of the two women is anonymous, both are named – the one *a bee*, the other *a remnant*. Neither spoke a word in the texts, which spoke volumes about them. There is also no indication that either of them had own children or was married.

The mourning, which accompanied Deborah's death and burial, point to the kind of place she occupied in the hearts of the mourners, the family she had served for three generations. Her role as a nourisher of Rebekah's offspring could not have been limited to the production of milk; it must have included the production of wisdom also. The respect and the honour that was accorded to this extraordinary wet-nurse at her funeral show that, to these mourners, Deborah was not an insignificant person. The text did not portray her as a nobody either. In death, she was accorded the kind of mourning reserved for heroes and great men or women. That the text recognized Deborah in this manner shows that in God's script, there are no little people.

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The tendency to gloss over Genesis 35:8, to pretend that Deborah is not there or that she is someone else (e.g. Rebekah) is uncalled for as the verse fits into the context. The text actually sings her praise, albeit, in that single condensed verse. The fact that Scriptures take note of Deborah's death and the kind of funeral she had shows that it takes note of her person and her accomplishment. It seems highly unlikely that commentators would have considered Genesis 35:8 intrusive or puzzling if it was Rebekah's death or Sarah's that was reported in that verse. However, because Deborah is seen as an ordinary maid who could not have earned that much praise in death, they wonder how the verse got to its present location.

Furthermore, Genesis 35:8 is regarded as troubling in its context because of the indignity that naturally accompanies lowly jobs. It becomes unthinkable that a woman of such low estate would be accorded a dignified and memorable burial. The faith community today could learn a lesson or two from the case of the First Deborah, that is, according dignity to all human beings should not be compromised, irrespective of their status, gender, age, race or any other index used for discrimination.

Unlike Deborah, Sheerah might have been found on the high end of the social scale, but the same fate befell her in the hands of commentators, apparently, because of her gender. For how could a mere woman build three cities? However, Sheerah's unique place in Chronicles and in Scriptures cannot be dismissed easily. Her achievements, which contrast sharply with her brother Beriah's non-achievement, appear all the more remarkable in the light of the fact that she was the only daughter mentioned in Ephraim's genealogy and the only female builder mentioned throughout Scriptures.

The theological portrait of Sheerah is not unlike Deborah though; in a family that was devastated by the death of its male heirs, Sheerah rose to the rescue, an unlikely candidate in a culture that cherished sons. Even with the arrival of Beriah, it was clear that the mantle of leadership was on Sheerah. She brought restoration to her father's house and to Ephraim's lineage through the building of those three cities. Again,

Sheerah's case proves that God often chooses the less likely to succeed or the weak candidate to achieve His cause. Beriah would have seemed the more likely person to bring restoration to his family, but his name, *Tragedy*, probably trailed him, and nothing worthy of note came out of his life.

Based on the multifaceted character of Woman Wisdom, especially as a teacher, a nourisher and a builder, it is argued that this metaphor of an Israelite heroine is embodied in both Deborah and Sheerah. Wisdom, as a peripatetic teacher (Prov 1:20-21) and as a nourisher, is found in Jacob's caravan in the form of this aged *"padgogthah"* or family tutor who dandled Israel on her knees. The presupposition of a household or family setting for wisdom, in particular, for its dissemination, also lends credence to the assumption that Deborah would have been the right candidate to teach wisdom to Rebekah's offspring. Thus, Deborah fits into the matrix of the ordinary or domestic person as a hero.

However, Woman Wisdom not only shows up in the *Torah* in the person of Deborah but also in the *Kethuvim* in the person of Sheerah the female city builder. Woman Wisdom is described as a builder (Prov 9:1; cf. 14:1) and, interestingly, Skehan (1971) views the whole of Proverbs 1-9 as wisdom's edifice of seven columns with wisdom as the architect. Sheerah as a builder of cities did not just exude sheer talent but latent wisdom that is characteristic of builders in general. While the depiction of Woman Wisdom as a rich and influential figure contrasts with the image of the subjugated and marginalized Israelite woman in the shadow, she can be recognized easily in Sheerah, the inimitable city builder. Sheerah represents an exemplary person as hero.

That both Deborah and Sheerah are neatly tucked away each in one single verse of Scriptures even though there is so much to say about them may point, in a sense, to the hiddennness of YHWH Himself in the wisdom corpus – the YHWH who is present but at the same time hidden (Brueggemann 1997:333-342). The attribution of wisdom to Deborah and Sheerah in this study may not be immediately evident as in the case of the Wise Woman of Tekoa or the Wise Woman of Abel but, then, wisdom may not always

be explicit, as even YHWH in the wisdom corpus remains hidden. However, this kind of hiddennness should not deter the interpreter from making a case for wisdom even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the text. Cassuto (1961:63) captures this thought rather aptly, as he claims that, "Undoubtedly a lesson that is taught by implication is capable of exerting a greater influence than one explicitly stated". This wisdom from Cassuto happens to ring true in this case.

The discussion of Yoruba women in socio-cultural and literary contexts carried out in Chapter 2 of this research has offered us a different hermeneutical lens to view the Old Testament women under consideration in this study. The Yoruba women offer an alternative social reality in which both public and private roles of women are relatively balanced and the women have a free rein over their own affairs especially over their finances. Although some literary genres tend to portray Yoruba women in an ambivalent light, the sociological documents are quite unequivocal about the positive and dynamic roles of women in the society. The conclusion is that the Yoruba literary texts do not accurately reflect society's overall image of women and may in fact be a literary creation of the artist to forge his own agenda of putting women "in their place" (which actually means putting women down)!

In the case of the women of the Old Testament, a parallel may be found in what obtains among the Yoruba women – that certain texts denigrate women. The difference is that the Israelite scribe seems to have been more successful in forging his agenda than the Yoruba artist. Perhaps, the patriarchal structure in ancient Israel, which no doubt, is different from that of the Yoruba, grants the literary artist greater liberty to do with the women as he pleased than the Yoruba structure. The fact that sacred texts are used to legitimize and strengthen patriarchy does not imply that women had no say in the order of doing things in Israelite society. At any rate, the case of Yoruba women helps us to conceive the possibility of a woman achieving great things as Sheerah did or being accorded dignity even when of lowly status as in the case of the First Deborah.

Overall, we have attempted to prove that the casual records, the seemingly minute points concerning women in the Old Testament have hermeneutical significance, which cannot be overlooked, and the classical or masculine way of reading the Bible, therefore, needs to take into account such points.

## 6.3 Reflections and recommendations

From Whybray's (1967) comprehensive study, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, published from his 1965 dissertation, through Von Rad's (1970) *Weisheit in Israel*, to various recent studies on wisdom, it could be said that the study of Old Testament wisdom has truly come a long way. Although the books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, some Psalms and certain other portions of the Old Testament canon are regarded as wisdom literature, the elasticity of wisdom itself (or its multi-faceted character) invites an expansion in the scope of wisdom study. The present study calls for a broader understanding of wisdom that would bring to the fore more nuanced aspects of wisdom as we have attempted in this study.

However, in as much as wisdom study has come a long way, the study of Chronicles seems to have yet a long way to go. In particular, there is a clear dearth of scholarly work on the women of Chronicles[331]. This study has attempted to fill this gap, in part, by fleshing out new perspectives on the women of Chronicles. However, without gainsaying, a combined study of the women of Chronicles and of Ezra-Nehemiah would offer broader insight into the lives of the Second Temple period Israelite women. Such investigation may also open up wider issues on the notion of identity negotiation and redefinitions that characterized that period of Israelite history.

On a different level, the metaphor of Woman Wisdom has uncovered an emphasis on the importance of women to the post-exilic community of faith that seems to be a reflection of the works of the scribal class. However, this emphasis is discernible also in

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[331] For instance, in the copious index to Gruber's (1995) *Women in the Biblical World*, which is a catalogue of contemporary studies on biblical women, there is not a single reference to the book of Chronicles! In other words, none of the studies listed in the book was on Chronicles and none of them referred to Chronicles. One could argue that that was fifteen years ago, but then, the progress in that direction since that time has been painfully slow.

the *Kethuvim* as the analysis of the women of Chronicles suggests since more than half of the references to women in the book are not found in the Chronicler's regular (known) *Vorlage*. Sheerah happened to be one of these women. It is instructive to note that the "structure of the genealogies [in which Sheerah is found] reflects the author's circumstances in the Persian period" (Knoppers 2004:472).

As noted in the fourth chapter of this study, some scholars have pointed to a Davidic-Solomonic redaction of Genesis based on the historical allusions in the book (Rendsburg 1986:107-8), whereas some others posit a Babylonian exile setting for the book's composition. However, an exilic/post-exilic date for the redaction of Genesis could explain, to some extent, the apparent attention to details concerning characters (e.g. Deborah) who, on the surface, would not immediately appear to make any difference to the narrative and who are considered as intrusion in the context. Could it be assumed, therefore, that scribal activities in the exilic/post-exilic period showed greater appreciation of female presence and roles in ancient Israel? This question demands further inquiry.

We would like to state, in addition, that when it comes to verses such as Genesis 35:8 or 1 Chronicles 7:24, which are considered intrusive, the right kind of questions need to be asked. The issue should not be so much, "What is it doing there (e.g. what is Deborah doing in Jacob's caravan)?" The question should be, "Who is this person mentioned in the text and what is her/his role, or what does s/he point us to? The same could apply to events, name lists, etc. In other words, until Deborah is perceived for whom she really was - a truly wise Israelite heroine - commentators will continue to stumble at that Oak under Bethel! Sheerah's achievement in her own generation proves that ancient Israelite women were no brainless baby-making machines; and no matter how much male commentators wish she was not in the text, Sheerah is right there in Chronicles, an indomitable character in a genealogy of "sons only".

Consequently, when different questions are asked, as we have endeavoured to do in the case of Deborah-Sheerah, there is a high probability that we would discover that the characters in question do not require our emendation; rather, they deserve our

commendation. On this point, therefore, future research may need to pay close attention to similar texts (especially on women) in the Old Testament that are regarded as intrusion in their contexts.

One other significant issue that has surfaced in this research is the role of context and the way women function in particular societies. The importance of context and perspective to contemporary theological discourses cannot be overstated. Scholarship would need to explore fresh ways of utilizing the biblical text as a resource for the empowerment of women especially in Two-Third World contexts where many women are far behind their contemporaries in the developed world. For instance, a focus group discussion could be a good forum to introduce Sheerah's story and to show that the fact that she was not left out of the sacred script could lend hope to women in marginalized communities and women in communities that marginalize women. They could be made to see that if in the ancient world a woman could aspire to build and, in fact, did build cities, they too can do much more today. Thus, contextual readings of the Hebrew women's stories examined in the foregoing by today's Yorùbá Christian women may help them understand more clearly the positions and roles of their female forebearers in the faith and the way these stories can empower them to forge an agenda for their own lives and those of their children, especially within the Christian community.

To this end, there is a greater need for women to tell their own stories using their own lenses. Many women in Scriptures and, indeed, in history, have remained unsung and forgotten because the daughters refused to relate the experiences of these women. As the African proverb goes, "Until the lioness tells her own story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter".

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# APPENDIX A

# WOMAN WISDOM POEMS IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

**Proverbs 1:20-33**
[1]Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares;
[21] at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:
[22] "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?
[23] If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.
[24] But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
[25] since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke,
[26] I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you--
[27] when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.
[28] "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me.
[29] Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD,
[30] since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke,
[31] they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
[32] For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
[33] but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm."

**Proverbs 8:1-36**
[1]Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?
[2] On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
[3] beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud:
[4] "To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.
[5] You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding.
[6] Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right.
[7] My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness.
[8] All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.
[9] To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge.
[10] Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold,
[11] for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

<sup>12</sup> "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.
<sup>13</sup> To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.
<sup>14</sup> Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power.
<sup>15</sup> By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just;
<sup>16</sup> by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth.
<sup>17</sup> I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.
<sup>18</sup> With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity.
<sup>19</sup> My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver.
<sup>20</sup> I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,
<sup>21</sup> bestowing wealth on those who love me and making their treasuries full.
<sup>22</sup> "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old;
<sup>23</sup> I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.
<sup>24</sup> When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water;
<sup>25</sup> before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth,
<sup>26</sup> before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world.
<sup>27</sup> I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
<sup>28</sup> when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
<sup>29</sup> when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
<sup>30</sup> Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence,
<sup>31</sup> rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.
<sup>32</sup> "Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways.
<sup>33</sup> Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it.
<sup>34</sup> Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.
<sup>35</sup> For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. <sup>3</sup>
<sup>6</sup> But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death."


## Proverbs 9:1-6
<sup>1</sup> Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars.
<sup>2</sup> She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.
<sup>3</sup> She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city.
<sup>4</sup> "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment.
<sup>5</sup> "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.
<sup>6</sup> Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.

# APPENDIX B

**Questions from a Worker Who Reads**

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will read the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?

And Babylon, many times demolished,
Who raised it up so many times?

In what houses of gold glittering Lima did its builders live?
Where, the evening that the Great Wall of China was finished,
did the masons go?

Great Rome is full of triumphal arches.
Who erected them?

Over whom did the Caesars triumph?
Had Byzantium, much praised in song, only palaces for its inhabitants?

Even in fabled Atlantis, the night that the ocean engulfed it,
The drowning still cried out for their slaves.

The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?

Caesar defeated the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him?

Philip of Spain wept when his armada went down.
Was he the only one to weep?

Frederick the $2^{nd}$ won the 7 Years War.
Who else won it?

Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?

Every 10 years a great man.
Who paid the bill?

So many reports.

So many questions.

Bertolt Brecht (1935)