Female participation in Judean family religions – an archaeological perspective towards a heterarchical understanding

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Abstract

In this contribution it will be argued that females in ancient Judean families not only played economic, educational, reproductive, and sexual roles, but also took part in religious activities performed within the extended family; and that this neglected religious role of females must be taken into consideration when reflecting on the status of females within the male-dominated *beit `ab* ("house of the father" or extended family). The possible role played by females in ancient "family religion" will be investigated by engaging with the research related to Judean Pillar Figurines and the role of the queen mother in Judean royal households. Against this background, it will be argued that it is possible that ancient Judahite families had heterarchical qualities despite their dominant hierarchical and patriarchal character in view of the religious agency of women suggested by archaeological evidence.

Keywords

family religion; Judean pillar figurines; archaeology; patriarchy; heterarchy

Introduction

This contribution will focus on female participation in family religion during the Iron Age (ca. 922–586 BCE) in Judah – with special attention to religious practices that, according to archaeological evidence, suggest female agency.[1] In the past archaeology in Palestine focused on city walls,

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1   One must take note of Joseph Blenkinsopp's (1997:78) comment that the "religious aspect" of households in Iron Age Israel "appears, at first sight, to be impenetrable to the contemporary historian."

temples, and palaces; but more recently archaeology became less "elitist" by also being concerned with the daily lives of most of the population (Ebeling 2017:414). The excavated material remains entailed artifacts related to food production such as pottery vessels, grinding tools, and ovens; but more surprisingly small clay figurines in supposed aniconistic environments. These nude figurines have pillar-shaped bodies, prominent breasts and were found in houses, tombs, and streets – sometimes along with cult objects, but most often broken in rubbish heaps (Dever 2001:193; Nakhai 2019:7).

Why should any further scholarly attention be given to these terracotta figurines that have been discussed since 1942 (Albright 1942)? P. R. S. Moorey (2003:67), after his intensive study of "miniature images of clay in the Ancient Near East", came to the important conclusion that this is a subject where "too much certainty may have prematurely entered in, not least at the popular interface of archaeology and biblical studies" – read popularising and sensationalist articles on the consort of YHWH, etc in journals like BAR (Dever 1991: 64–65).

It is also noted that a recent study on family and kinship in ancient Egypt warns against the "fallacy of blood" that is presupposed by the Western "preoccupation with genealogy" and argues for a "developmental model" of the domestic household (Olabaria 2020: 93). This allows families to be studied as dynamic social units that tend to change due to an evolving environment within which they must function.

When approaching ancient families as dynamic social units one must be aware of the possibility that "heterarchy" could be an appropriate heuristic concept to explain possible female agency within hierarchical ancient Judean families. In agreement with Carole Crumley (1995:1–5), "heterarchy" is perceived as a social organisation where its elements have the potential to be ranked in different ways and might share power in horizontal strata of authority. More recently Jenny Ebeling (2017:416–417) also considers it appropriate "to consider ancient Israel as a heterarchy" because an Israelite or Judean woman could be ranked differently in various sections of society. The suggested appropriateness of "heterarchy" to describe and explain the position of females, in ancient Israelite patriarchal families in particular and society as a whole, does not disregard the ongoing dialectical

relationship with pervasive male dominance. It does allow more awareness of the complexity of ancient Israelite families that comprised of co-existing and overlapping ranking systems of authority that did not merely toe the line demarcated by gender differentiation (Belmonte & Cerny 2021:235).

There can be little doubt that the official religion as a social organisation in ancient Israel and Judah was hierarchical with the high priest at its apex, while the political organisation had initially a judge and eventually a king at the top. Despite this strong (vertical) hierarchical structure, several women gained positions of influence and power due to heterarchical access to new rankings and roles in their society (Havrelock 2017:252): Rahab, the harlot, contributed to the capture and destruction of the fortified Jericho (Josh. 2 & 6); Achsah successfully demanded substantial land and water sources from her father (Josh. 15); Jael, the Kenite housewife, killed Sisera, (a Canaanite general) in her home (Judg. 5–6); Michal, the youngest daughter, of Saul became David's first wife and saved him through clever subterfuge using one of the anthropoid household gods (1 Sam. 14, 18–19); Abigail. the beautiful and wise widow married David (1 Sam. 25); and Bathseba, the widow of Uriah, became David's wife and the mother of Solomon (2 Sam. 11 & 1 Kgs. 1–2).

Given his discussion of the textual, social, and cultural embeddedness of ancient Israelite family religion, Ziony Zevit (2014: 290) proposed the following definition that reflected its dynamic character:

- Israelite religion consists of the varied, symbolic expressions and appropriate
- responses, by families, unrelated groups, and individuals, to each other and to the
- deities, and powers known to be of major and minor practical relevance to them
- within their worldview.

This contribution is not an attempt to hold up ameliorating biblical and archaeological evidence related to the patriarchal structure of Judahite families as examples for 21st-century households.[2] It is rather an attempt

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2   To quote a recent American colloquial expression: "You cannot put lipstick on a pig!"

to come to grips with the often-neglected archaeological evidence related to ancient families and households when reflecting on Hebrew Bible texts involving families and the role females played in Ancient Near Eastern patriarchal households.

Judean families and households according to archaeological evidence

Andrew Dearman (1998: 117) points out that the term "family" in Western cultures "does not have an exact equivalent in the Old Testament" and that *beit `ab* is the closest we get since it reflects "a male-headed, multigenerational household as the basic kinship unit in ancient Israel."[3] But before the characteristics of Judean families are further discussed, attention must be given to the archaeological evidence related to Israelite and Judean houses.

In a seminal article on the family in ancient Israel and archaeological data, Lawrence Stager (1985:1 & 3) succeeded "to bring archaeological as well as textual and ethnographic data into historical discourse by selecting and interpreting them through the problematics of social history." He concluded that after 1200 BCE the spatial patterning of villages in the central highlands of Palestine was "influenced by patriarchal kinship." Against the background of the archaeological data, as well as the Achan narrative in Joshua 7 and the Korah story in Numbers 16, Zevit (2014:291–293) reconstructs a slightly different "four-tiered" and "nested" Israelite social system: the tribe (*šebet*), the clan (*mišpāḥā*), the all-important extended family or sub-clan that was constitutive for "socio-religio-economic identity" (*beit `ab*), as well as the nuclear family units headed by a male (*geber*).

During Iron Age I, the pillared or four-room houses typically measured ten to twelve meters long and eight to ten meters wide. Livestock was kept on ground level and the family on the first floor, which usually collapsed and

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3   Antonin Causse in 1937 applied his structural functionalism to his study of ancient Israelite society and concluded that family, clan, and tribe can be considered as the fundamental social institutions and that the family was the most stable organization that enabled ongoing social cohesion and solidarity (Hagedorn 2015:78–79).

caused all content to be mixed. The collapsed first floor inevitably provides a challenge to establish where figurines were kept and used within the household (Dever 2003:102–107, 163–165).

Some research has suggested that the pillared four-room house reflects an *egalitarian* ideology (Ebeling 2017:417). The typical Israelite or Judean house had a layout where all the inner rooms were directly accessible from the house's central space or courtyard, suggesting that all rooms were equal and there was no hierarchy to the space. The four-room pillared house was unlike the typical Canaanite-Phoenician dwelling, which had a layout where some rooms could be entered only by passing through other rooms, hence showing a hierarchy of access.

Although pillared houses were often considered particularly Israelite, this idea has been challenged. Ziony Zevit (2001:72–74) writes that although "[t]he Iron Age pillared houses, the "four-room house," are not uniquely Israelite", listing up several Iron Age non-Israelite sites where such houses were found, he nevertheless states that they are unlike the older, "Late Bronze II pillared house discovered at Tel Batash", and finally concludes that all considered, "they are characteristic of Israelite sites."

Against this archaeological background, the concept of "family" remains very slippery since it is closely related to diverse cultural and economic contexts. It is a fallacy to presume that in ancient Israel the *beit `ab* referred to only one configuration of familial components and it is therefore important to take note of Bendor's (1996:168–170) identification of three stages in the development of the *beit `ab* as an important component of the social structure of ancient Israel; Stage 1: a nuclear family in which father and mother live with their young children (surprisingly not so common). Stage 2: father and mother with grown-up children, where some daughters have left to be married and some sons have started to set up their own households (Judg. 18:13–14). Stage 3: The father as head of the household is old (no longer active) or dead and the sons inherited the family landed property or *naḥalāh* (here the "house of the father" often becomes the site of tension and strive), and this could happen in three different ways: (a) division among *all* brothers; (b) partial distribution among *some* brothers – therefore some brothers did not inherit; (c) minimal division amongst brothers – the eldest got most.

All in all, one can agree with John Pilch (2012:116) that a family usually consists of "a closely related, cooperating kin, encompassing two or more generations, whose members … are prohibited sexual relations" and with "four indispensable functions: sexual, economic, reproductive and educational." These functions also give rise to the major roles of each family member, which are further "shaped by the respective status of each family member" (Pilch 2012:116–117).

In this contribution, it will be argued that females in ancient Judean families not only played economic, educational, reproductive, and sexual roles but also took part in religious activities performed within the extended family (Nakhai 2019:6). This neglected religious role of females must be taken into consideration when reflecting on the status of females within the male-dominated *beit `ab* / house of the father / extended family.[4]

Carol Meyers (2017:514) and Jenny Ebeling (2017:414) drew attention to the male and urban bias that led to the androcentricity of the Hebrew Bible because it was written "mainly by and for men, elite men at that", located mostly in Jerusalem. If one uses the Hebrew Bible in isolation from the everyday lives of the majority of (peasant) women, the religious aspects of their domestic existence will be almost invisible (Meyers 2017:515). Therefore, it is imperative for accessing the religious activity of females in the ancient Israelite and Judean households to take into consideration the relevant data produced by archaeological excavations.

However, this is easier said than done due to the urban and male bias that influenced the selection of Syro-Palestinian sites for excavation that focused on "recovering data that might be associated with periods, places, and people mentioned in biblical texts", as well as on monumental structures like palaces and temples (Meyers 2017: 519–520; Nakhai

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4   Norman Gottwald (1979:156–158) was one of the first biblical scholars who developed a sociologically informed understanding of ancient Israelite families that went beyond the *beit `ab* or "house of the father", by including the "clan" (*mišpāḥā*) which he described as a "protective association of extended families" with a restorative socio-economic role, by keeping property within the family (*naḥalāh*), guaranteeing male heirs and progeny etc – with the "kinsman-redeemer" or go'el playing the main restorative role. John Collins (1997:105) refers to the 65 post-exilic references to the *bêt 'ābôt* ("fathers house" not "father's house") in Ezra-Nehemia-Chronicles and that it "appears to take the place of the traditional clan (*mišpāḥā*) rather than of the 'father's house'".

2019: 2–3). An additional impediment is the often somewhat selective publication strategies when reporting on archaeological field projects that did not "fully and appropriately" describe the "original contexts … spatial distribution and quantity" of artifacts related to domestic life in Iron Age Palestine (Meyers 2017: 521–522).

Despite these challenges and impediments, archaeological data can provide at least a glimpse of the role Israelite women played in the household or common religion. In the next section, female pillar figurines will be taken as a possible indication of the religious role of females in the extended Israelite / Judean family.

Role of females in Judean households according to pillar figurines

Sylvia Schroer (2008:1–18) noted that while archaeological excavations uncovered hundreds of Judean pillar figurines, no clear and direct mention of them can be traced in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, pillar figurines are used to illustrate how archaeology can contribute to the interpretation of female participation in family religions of the ancient Near East. However, Mervyn Fowler's (1985:333–334) cautionary comment must be taken to heart that the presence of figurines should not be interpreted "as proof *per se* that a sacred site has come to light."

First discovered more than one hundred years ago, Judean pillar figurines (abbreviated JPFs) continue to raise controversy amongst scholars today. JPFs were mainly prevalent in Judah during the First Temple period (ca. 800–586 B.C.E.). These household objects, of which thousands have been found, seem to be less present in Judah following the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C.E.[5]

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5   Izaak De Hulster (2012:73–75, 88; 2014:16–24) has challenged Ephraim Stern's (1989:22–29; 2001:206–211) claim that "no figurines have been found during excavations in Persian period strata in Yehud" by pointing out that 51 figurine fragments were excavated in Persian period layers in Jerusalem" and motivated his argument for "typological continuity" between Iron Age and Persian period figurines and his conclusion that figurines were "in use" in Persian Jerusalem

Two major types of clay or terracotta female Judean pillar figurines have been found (De Hulster 2012:73). One type was handmade with a face that was pinched to make two eyes – this rudimentary shape resembled many Neolithic figurines, predating the Iron and Bronze Age. The second type has a mould-made head with defined facial features and rows of curly hair, often displaying hairstyles resembling Egyptian wigs, with rows of curls, and defined facial features. A solid cylindrical pillar is used for the bodies of both types of JPFs.[6] Both types also have oversized breasts, under which the arms curve. The JPFs show influences from the north (Mesopotamia with goddess Ishtar or Inanna) and the south (Egypt with goddess Hathor).

Diverging and overlapping interpretations will be considered to make sense of these "Judean Pillar Figurines": (a) Used as children's toys: William Albright (1942) discussed the terracotta figurines found at Tell Beit Mirsim under the rubric "toys". In a similar vein, Kathleen Kenyon (1974) referred to the terracotta's found in Jerusalem as "playthings". (b) Represented fertility goddesses such as Asherah to guarantee (especially male!) offspring: Raz Kletter (1996:81) concluded, despite numerous concerns and reservations, that these terracotta's are "indeed a representation of Biblical Asherah", while Judith Hadley (2000:204–205) cautioned that "the exaggerated breasts emphasize the nurturing aspect of the mother goddess, but as other symbols of divinity are lacking, it is impossible to determine what deity was intended." (c) Functioned as amulets to protect young mothers during pregnancy and childbirth (life expectancy of women in ancient Judah was less than thirty years), as well as the lactation of children (50 percent died before the age of five). The possibility that the figurines were "vehicles of magic" to enable the insurance of fertility (for humans and animals as well as crops) to the protection of health or property and the prevention of natural disasters" (Moorey 2003:6–7). (d) As a response to Neo-Assyrian imperialism Ian Wilson (2012:275) conjectures that "Judeans popularized their variation of the pillar figurine in an attempt to sustain particular features of their religious and cultural heritage" and

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6   Izak Cornelius (2014:70–72) distinguishes between figurines depicting nude women and women holding children.

thus became "a uniquely Judean cultural marker" and also "created a local cultural phenomenon" that "exploded in popularity like never before."[7]

Before gleaning archaeological data related to Israelite and Judean family religion, some attention is due to related and overlapping definitions in this regard. In recent research, a sharper distinction has been made between official and common religion. Kletter (1996:26) considers the usual depiction of "official religion" as the beliefs and practices prescribed and regulated by specialised institutions such as temples or palaces; and "common religion" as the beliefs and practices that are not determined by official religious institutions but formed part of the customs and beliefs of the people from all levels of society, to be influenced by the doctrinal and institutional character of Christianity (see also Dever 2019:1–3). Archaeological data do not allow a depiction of common religion as practices that were prohibited by official religion and as "a phenomenon of the lower levels of society only" (Kletter 1996:26).

One representative example of recent archaeological research into Judean family religion will be discussed in more detail. Aaron Brody (2018:212–221) launched a research program focused on the material culture from Tell en-Nasbeh or Mizpah (12 km north of Jerusalem) with special attention to the topics of household archaeology, metallurgy, interregional interactions, and ethnicity. Why? Nasbeh or Mizpah produced the second largest collection of pillar figurines after Jerusalem (see Darby 2014; Kletter 1996), yet these important artifacts and other ritual objects from the Iron II phase at Nasbeh have never been studied in relation to each other or to the utilitarian artifacts that come from the same contexts.

Brody (2018:212–221) paid specific attention to the ritual artifacts from one household compound made of five conjoined pillared houses at Nasbeh, in their original contexts, to provide a fuller understanding of the religious ideas and practices of one extended family in the Iron II period in Judah. The ritual objects from this household compound include animal, female pillar, and horse-and-rider figurines; a fenestrated stand; a fragment of a zoomorphic vessel; the "face" of a decorated plaque; and a seven-spouted

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7   Although it entails informed and creative speculation it does not add up to convincing argumentation.

lamp. These artifact types have been defined as ritual objects in past studies by several scholars (Albertz and Schmitt 2012), and typically stand out from the rest of the artifact assemblage because they are not utilitarian.

Of the fourteen principal rooms in these houses, seven did not contain any ritual artifacts. Among the seven rooms with ritual objects, only one, Room 513, has a significant cluster of a minimum number of eight or nine ritual and ritualized artifacts (Brody 2018:16–221). The remaining rooms have only one ritual item each, except for Room 608, which has two ritual artifacts. Overall, there are no significant concentrations of ritual objects from the immediate surroundings outside of the building compound, but it is interesting to note that more animal figurine fragments were found outside the compound than inside the houses themselves.

While the only cluster of ritual and ritualized objects was found in Room 513, each of these artifacts was fragmented and this may suggest its use within the room where the breakage took place. Room 513 also contained numerous fragments of common pottery of which 56 percent were storage vessels and it probably suggests that the space was primarily used for storage.

Was this a storeroom that contained a shrine, or a shrine room that was used for storage? Given our present state of knowledge, and the way the room was excavated and recorded, it is difficult to determine.[8]

The two pillar figurines from Room 513 most likely represent aspects of women's religious culture, following the work of Carol Meyers (Meyers 2005, 2013). Darby (2017) suggests that female figurines may have also been used by males and she downplays likely connections to lactation, a distinctly female concern. Five categories of function have been outlined by Voigt (1983:168–203) based on ethnographic uses of figurines collected by Ucko in Crete and Egypt (1968): (1) They represent deities or supernatural beings. (2) They are used as vehicles of magic, or the figurines are used in rituals intended to produce, prevent, or reverse a specific situation or state.

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8   It seems likely that the rooms were used for multiple activities, primarily for storage and possibly also for religious purposes in view of the fragments of ritual objects found there.

(3) They are used as teaching figures. (4) They are utilised as toys. (5) They represent deceased persons or ancestors.

Most researchers have narrowed their interpretation of these female figurines down to representing either a deity or a human worshipper or messenger, which would fall under Ucko's (1968) and Voigt's (1983) category (2), a vehicle of magic (Kletter 1996; Moorey 2003; Darby 2014, 2017). Given the lack of specific data, the most straightforward approach at this stage is to simply acknowledge the pillar figurines were representations of a divinity or divinities, and that they were used in rituals; however, these ritual objects can still fit into either of Voigt's categories (1) or (2), even if it is difficult to discern the figurines specific religious meaning or even possible divine attributions (Meyers 2013).

Perhaps the Judean pillar figurines, which scholars have described as created in potters' workshops were also fabricated by artisans in a generalized style to meet the varied ritual needs of the households that acquired them (Kletter 1996; Darby 2014, 2017). Judean pillar figurines, then, may have represented different divine females in different domestic contexts and ritual situations.[9]

Saana Svärd (2012:510) considered the notion of "heterarchical power" to be of significance in her discussion of women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces by pointing out that power is "always present in the interactions between individuals, regardless of their relative status." In a similar vein, it might be significant that queen mothers played important political and probably cultic roles within Judean royal households, especially during periods of the transition of power related to royal succession (Ackerman 1993:385–401). Seventeen out of nineteen queen mothers mentioned in the Hebrew Bible are from the Southern Kingdom and their names form part of the formulaic description of the reign of each king in Judah – the

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9   Besides the female figurines, the horse-and-rider fragment is the other ritual item in the grouping from Room 513 and it presents a male figure. As with the pillar figurines, it is a matter of debate whether these horse-and-riders represent a human figure on horseback or a divine messenger, a lesser deity who travelled by horse to deliver vows or prayers to high gods (Cornelius 2007:30–32). Site-wide at Nasbeh, twenty-three horse-and-rider figurine fragments are recorded in comparison to over 140 pillar figurines. Whatever rites were conducted with horse-and-riders, occurred with much less frequency than those that utilized pillar figurines.

remaining two queen mothers are Bathsheba from the united monarchy and Jezebel from the Northern Kingdom.

Susan Ackerman (1993:400–401) hypothesised that the reason for the important role of queen mothers in Judean royal households can be traced to the Judean royal ideology according to which the Davidic king was considered to be the "adopted son of Yahweh, the divine father" – then it is possible that "the adopted mother of the king is understood to be Ashera … the consort of Yahweh" who was represented by the queen mother. Although Ackerman's hypothesis about the cultic and political roles played by the Judean queen mother has not been proven beyond any doubt, it does establish the possibility that certain females could attain cultic and political power within official religion and statecraft that could best be described as heterarchical (Nakhai 2019:3–4).

Conclusion

Recently more attention has been given to the religion prevalent amongst most of the population, also acknowledging that there was interaction between the religion of the urban elite, as well as the official temple religion and the rural, agrarian, peasant religion. The probable political and religious roles played by the Judean queen mother can be considered examples of the heterarchical nature of Judean royal households and this might have resonated with the proposed heterarchical aspects of common Judean households and families.

Shifting the focus from a text-based study of ancient Israelite or Judean official religion to a study of peasant family religion based on the remains of their material culture, accessed using archaeological excavations, poses important challenges often overlooked by some researchers who make sweeping generalised statements about family religion and the religious roles of females.

Some fundamental questions concerning the identity and function of role players within family religion given the JPFs have been identified: (a) Do these female figurines represent the goddess Asherah who was worshipped within family religion as part of popular religion? (b) Are the JPFs simply votives or prayer statues for females during the dangerous periods of

pregnancy and childbirth? Scholarly opinion remains divided, but the figurines are increasingly directly identified with the goddess herself. In this case, it would clearly be the Canaanite mother goddess Asherah.[10]

Despite the lingering uncertainty, the JPFs seem to have something to do with women soliciting the help of the goddess in conceiving, bearing, and nurturing babies—the ultimate and difficult task of surviving.[11] Is this what religion in the ancient world was all about for most females? Neither state nor official ideology and male-dominated temple religion, but a niche in family religion that enabled them to secure fertility and progeny to allow property to remain in the family. Against this reconstructed background, these figurines can probably be considered to function as "prayers in clay" (Kletter 1996; Darby 2014).

The concentration of ritual objects near each kitchen or cooking space at Tell en-Nasbeh suggests that the principal woman in the extended family probably also presided over or at least participated in the religious well-being of the household (Meyers 2005:57–69, Brody 2018:219). When viewed contextually and in dialogue with non-cultic objects from the pillared houses and extended family compounds, one can (to some extent) reconstruct aspects of Judean domestic rituals and material religion that balance out our understandings of community, regional, and national religion in late Iron Age Judah.

This archaeological emphasis on the remains of the ancient family's material culture increases our understanding of the religious ideas and ritual practices of the common Judaean household, a crucial demographic component of this ancient culture. It also provides some access to the popular religion of ancient Near Eastern societies that is underrepresented in our curated or edited textual resources in the Hebrew Bible or contemporary late Iron Age epigraphic inscriptions.

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10   The problem remains that JPFs do not have any clarifying text explaining their function – it must be noted that a small minority of ancient Judean society attained more than "functional" literacy, and this might explain the absence of clarifying texts (Dever 2001:203). To be fair, one also has to be aware of scholars like Richard Hess (2006:346) that claim that there is "increasing evidence for the presence of writing during the Israelite monarchy."

11   Like the Canaanite and Syrian clay plaques of Late Bronze Age.

One should be circumspect when considering a rigid juxtaposition between "official" and "popular" or even "family religion" (Dever 2019:1–2). The JPFs "were cheap, everyday objects, representing the goddess (Asherah) in private houses" as "a protecting figure" and "a figure which played an important role in the lives of females in the domestic domain" without being opposed to the "official Yahwistic religion" (Kletter 1996: 81).[12]

Against this background of surprising female agency to secure offspring and the possible egalitarian design of the four-roomed pillared house, the possibility is posed that ancient Judahite families were less patriarchal and more heterarchical given the more assertive roles of women indicated by archaeological evidence. Beth Nakhai (2019:6) concurs that women in ancient Israelite households cannot be depicted as mere "household workers but as partners in a heterarchical society" where both men and women shared responsibilities.

There are clear benefits from "seeing double" – to combine the interpretation of the biblical text with the archaeological data that have been produced by Syro-Palestinian excavations of Iron Age sites.[13] This combined view of female roles in ancient household religions "challenges the notion of pervasive female subordination in the biblical past" and suggest "a more balanced situation of gendered power in households than is implied by many biblical texts" (Meyers 2017:529). The possibility that archaeology data related to Judean Pillar Figurines indicate female agency within Judean households and families, does not militate against the existence of pervasive hierarchical patriarchy but does suggest a more nuanced understanding of socially complex Judean family structures where hierarchy could co-exist with "heterarchy" despite the Hebrew Bible being somewhat mute about

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12   Moorey (2003:67–68) pointed out that JPF's "may have served a variety of purposes dependent on social contexts of its use … likely with low status artefacts like terracotta's, since they would have circulated and been disposed of in a wider variety of contexts than images of precious materials made by expert craftsmen for an elite."

13   Besides Meyers (2017), Patricia Dutcher-Walls (2009:1–15) also argued for the "clarity of double vision" by investigating the "research on the family in ancient Israel" from both sociological and archaeological perspectives. She identified the following issues for future study: (1) The social stratification embedded in ancient Israel society; (2) the impact of the monarchy on family households; (3) the description of societal changes from Iron Age 1 to Roman era; (4) gleaning evidence about family relationships from texts, artefacts, and anthropological studies.

it.[14] The complexity of Judean family religion is not served by sweeping generalisations for or against patriarchy since it seems more prudent to develop multidisciplinary reconstructions of ancient Judean families that relate the evidence of both its diversity and inclusivity (Nakhai 2019: 8).[15]

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14   For anyone interested in researching related topics: The excavated pillared houses and bench tombs of ancient Judah provide underutilized data sets. But one must be cautioned that only rigorous contextual analysis of artifacts from these domestic contexts might provide some evidence for reconstructing the religious beliefs and practices of Judean households (see Albertz and Schmitt 2012; Albertz et al. 2014, Brody 2018:212). Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (2009:122–131) also made convincing suggestions that the study of Israelite family life and religion has much to learn from burial practices in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages; even research on JPFs can take note of her observations that these "pole-shaped symbols" could represent Asherah and "perhaps invoked ancestral powers or intercession with a higher divinity on behalf of the living."

15   Leo Perdue (1997:254) cautionary comment must be heeded: "To attempt to transplant gender roles … and a host of other special features of the Israelite family into contemporary cultures would be naïve." One should rather take note that "the household became the metaphorical and symbolic world for expressing theological themes" and in this regard theological reflection focused on the Old Testament must be aware of the heterarchical elements of the Judean family and household.

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