Women in Judges:
Subversion of Patriarchy or Vision of Heterarchy?

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The Book of Judges includes a number of surprising encounters with women. Surprising, because typically the view of Ancient Israel is as a predominantly patriarchal society, in which women were afforded few rights and carried little power or influence. Yet Judges records women in political leadership, winning military victories, inheriting land, performing priestly tasks, taking authority over their husbands, and otherwise influencing the fate of the nation. The discrepancy is startling and invites us to question whether these stories sought to challenge the standards of the world they described, or if they in fact represent a more realistic vision of the ancient world than theologians have tended to assume in the past.

The portrayal of Ancient Israel as patriarchal has been challenged in recent years, notably by Carol Meyers who has argued that the term 'patriarchy' is insufficient to reflect the complexities of ancient Israelite society, especially in the Iron I period (c. 1200-1000 BCE).[1] In its place, she proposes the term 'heterarchy,' to reflect a society in which both women and men make important contributions to the economy and management of ancient Israelite agrarian households.

In this paper, I want to give a precis of Meyers' argument, and then to test it against the representation of women in Judges. The question is, do these surprising encounters reflect the heterarchy described by Meyers, or is Judges seeking to subvert a patriarchy that is indeed present and contrary to God's vision for His people?

The Case Against Patriarchy

The notion that the Old Testament reflects a patriarchal world is certainly a familiar one. Meyers cites a number of influential theologians, through whom this idea has disseminated and become established, most notably Martin Noth,[2] Roland De Vaux,[3] and Norman Gottwald,[4] each of whom, she argues, developed their conclusions primarily from the sociological research of Max Weber,[5] among others, rather than biblical sources. Of these, De Vaux is perhaps the most explicit, stating that "there is no doubt that from the time of our oldest documents ... the Israelite family is patriarchal."[6] However, while the inspiration

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[1] Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

[2] See particularly Martin Noth, *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen: Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950).

[3] See particularly Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961).

[4] See particularly Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979).

[5] See particularly Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie; 4th German edition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1956), first published in 1922.

[6] De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 20.

for this perspective may find its roots in sociology, De Vaux's argument is biblically grounded. He points, for example, to the inclusion of genealogies, which always follow the male line and rarely include women, and notes that the nearest relation in the collateral line is a paternal uncle (Lev 25:49).[7] Indeed, he goes on to press the extent of the father's authority over all matters:

> In the normal type of Israelite marriage the husband is the 'master,' the ba'al of his wife. The father had absolute authority over his children, even over his married sons if they lived with him, and over their wives. In early times this authority included even the power over life and death: thus Judah condemned to death his daughter-in-law Tamar when she was accused of misconduct (Gen 38:24).[8]

De Vaux's conclusions are typical of the stance taken by scholars throughout the twentieth century, resulting in the current widespread acceptance that Ancient Israel is best understood as a patriarchal system. However, Meyers offers a number of important criticisms of this perspective:

i) *Patriarchy critiques a classical, not a biblical, world.* Meyers notes that the roots of patriarchal arguments lie in anthropological and sociological research of the *patria potestas* (the father's power) and *paterfamilias* (paternal head of the family) in Greek and Roman classical literature, rather than in biblical studies, and that there is no biblical construct or language for patriarchy.[9] Thus, while there may be comparisons made between the world portrayed in the Old Testament and the patriarchy proclaimed in the classical world, it is to some extent a forced correlation. She goes on to point out that while sociologists have tended to amend their view of the classical world, tempering older views of patriarchy with a new recognition of the importance of women within society, biblical scholars continue to use the term as they always have, often unaware of the latest developments in sociological research.[10]

ii) *Patriarchy critiques an urban elite, not an agrarian subsistence-based, world.* Meyers observes that the classical research which points to *patresfamilias* tends to draw on urban, male, elite sources, which describe a very different world to that of Israel in the Iron I period, which was largely rural, agrarian, and subsistence-based.[11] Correlations between the two are, therefore, founded largely on assumptions that one part of the ancient world lived according to the same values as another.

iii) *Patriarchy suffers from a lack of definition.* In addition to the term being used inappropriately on a historical and a social level, Meyers notes that theologians who apply the term to Israel seldom define it, which allows for generalisations, assumptions and inconsistency of use.[12] As a result of this, she argues, not only do different people use the term to mean different things, there has also been a marked exaggeration of the impact of patriarchy over a 150-year period, moving from observations made about family life, to

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[7] Ibid., 20.

[8] Ibid., 20.

[9] Carol L. Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133 (2014): 8-27, pp.16-18.

[10] Ibid., 16.

[11] Ibid., 19.

[12] Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 8.

sweeping statements about how Israel's socio-political world was organised, with all men in all authority over all women all of the time.[13]

iv) *Patriarchy may say more about us than them.* Meyers argues that these assumptions, which underpin so much of modern-day Old Testament interpretation, are driven largely by a pervasion of presentism. That is, in a post-industrial world, the underlying assumption is that society has always contended with a "public/private dichotomy," in which there is a clear distinction between the public influence of the man in the workplace, who stimulates the economy of the family, and the private influence of the woman in the home, supporting her husband as "only a wife and a mother."[14] With authority derived from the holder of economic power, naturally the role of men was therefore considered more important and influential than the role of women. However, Meyers presses the total discontinuity between the ancient and the modern-day concept of the workplace, asserting that:

> Victorian household patterns, in which the workplace was outside the home and men had control over wives and children dependent on their earnings, had been superimposed on premodern societies in which the household was the workplace for all family members.[15]

On this basis, any assumptions we make about the patriarchal values in Ancient Israel may have more to do with our own patriarchy than theirs! Indeed, Meyers questions the validity of 'patriarchy' as a cover-all summary of ancient Israelite society, at either a national or a local level. Instead, drawing on a mixture of biblical, archaeological and ethnographic evidence, she argues for a different socio-political framework in which both men and women held established roles of responsibility and power.

The Case for Heterarchy

The world of Ancient Israel was one in which the home and the workplace were one and the same, where every family member contributed to the economy of the household. This was also the place of local politics and the centre of family religion. In such a world, every member of a household had an important part to play. Interestingly, Meyers does not argue against patriarchy on the basis that both men and women could occupy all roles of authority. She clearly identifies gender-specific roles that were consistently held by the same members of a household. Instead, she questions the value ascribed to each of these roles, and argues that when we claim male roles to carry more authority than women's roles, that is a reflection on the values of today more than those of Ancient Israel.

In her book *Rediscovering Eve*, Meyers takes fifty pages to describe the many responsibilities undertaken by women in ancient Israel, which she collectively summarises as "maintenance activities" and we might further categorise as relating to the familial,

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[13] Ibid., 16 cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 212.

[14] Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 125.

[15] Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 18.

material, political and religious needs of household life.[16] These roles might briefly be summarised:

i) *Familial responsibilities.* At the heart of a woman's role was the bearing and caring of children, including naming them and managing their education. This was especially pertinent to the economy of agrarian households, since children were essential members of the workforce. Women also managed food production, including the production of grain, which was both a multi-skilled and a physically demanding process.

ii) *Material responsibilities.* Women oversaw the production of crafts and textiles, including weaving baskets, spinning clothes, making pots and utensils. They also maintained the home, managing the distribution of food and cleaning.

iii) *Political responsibilities.* Political unions between families and clans were often maintained through informal networks of women, who shared news and information, greeted and welcomed visitors to the home and the village (cf. Ruth 1:19), and managed key communal decisions such as the use of shared ovens. Meyers observes that in agrarian communities, "social activities *are* political activities" (emphasis mine),[17] and the crucial role of women in this respect not only opened channels of political communication, but could even influence jural decisions. Indeed, the political alliance gained through marriage, which led to the formation of clans, gave women an informal but important say in all forms of political decision-making.

iv) *Religious responsibilities.* Contrary to Julius Wellhausen, who claimed that women had no political, military or religious rights,[18] Meyers attributes a number of key religious roles to women. These included the preparation of ritual and festival food, overseeing health care (which was considered a religious activity in a world where health was God's remit), and making amulets (described in Isaiah 3:20 specifically as a woman's adornment). Women also led some household rituals to commemorate lifecycles and regular holidays (but consider also Zipporah, who circumcised Moses' son, thereby behaving like a priest; Ex 4:25), perhaps most notably leading worship and lamentation through prayers and song. Indeed, Meyers goes so far as to assert, "Women, rather than men held the leadership role in household religion."[19]

Meyers does not offer an equivalent summary of male roles, except to reinforce Max Weber's summary of female and male roles as "informal power" and "legal authority."[20]

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[16] These categories are mine, summarising Meyers' own description of women's place in ancient Israelite society: "Everywoman Eve's context was the household, the central institution for most economic, social, educative, political, and religious aspects of life throughout the Iron Age." Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 125.

[17] Ibid., 145.

[18] "Die Religion war männlich, kriegerisch, aristokratisch. Der Cultus gründete sich auf die Abgaben vom Ertrage des Ackers und der Heerde, also auf Landeigentum. Der Kahal, die Versammlung der Ortsgemeinde, hatte ebensowol politischen als religiösen Charakter; wer politisch nicht vollberechtigt war, war es auch religiös nicht." In translation: Religion was male, warlike, and aristocratic. The Cult was maintained by the profits of the land and the herd, thus on land ownership. The Qahal, the meeting of the local assembly, viewed religion the same as politics, and so whoever had no political entitlement also had no religious entitlement." Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte, Dritte Ausgabe* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1897), 91.

[19] Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 169.

[20] Ibid., 193.

However, we may take the work of Gottwald, De Vaux and others to fill in these gaps to identify the respective tasks of women and men as follows:

i) *Familial responsibilities*. Consonant with Weber's identification of the greater emphasis on public and legal roles for men in the ancient world, family duties included representing the family at village councils, overseeing trade, and being the primary channel for inheritance.

ii) *Material responsibilities*. The primary focus of men in agrarian households was farming and other manual labour. However, just as women managed the production of crafts and textiles, men also oversaw the manufacture of tools and other smith work.

iii) *Political responsibilities*. As at the familial level, men assumed the public and legal roles of governing clans, tribes and the nation as elders, chiefs, heads, leaders, and kings (e.g. Num 11:16, Jos 22:!4, 1 Kgs 8:1, Ps 105:22). They also participated in military life, and oversaw political decision-making, including water rights, military action, leadership, allocation of resources, and any jural or legal issues.

iv) *Religious responsibilities*. Men carried out a number of liturgical and priestly duties, both at household shrines (which have been found in archaeology, along with ritual artefacts) and at clan and national levels. These included authority to give blessings and curses, leading worship/music, managing sacrifices and offerings, leading prayer, and performing religious rituals, not least circumcision.

Table A: Summary of male and female roles

|	Women ("informal power")	Men ("legal authority")
Familial	• Raising, naming, educating children • Food production, inc. grain	• Representing the family at village councils • Overseeing trade
Material	• Craft and textile production • Maintaining the home	• Manual labour/farming • Production of tools
Political	• Sharing news/information • Greeting/welcoming • Unifying families and clans • Channel for political communication • Negotiated use of shared ovens	• Line of inheritance • Governed nation/tribe/clan/family • Military life • Key decisions: water rights/war • Jural/legal issues
Religious	• Preparation of ritual/festival food • Overseeing healthcare • Leading some rituals in the home	• Liturgical/priestly duties • Worship/prayer/sacrifice/ritual • Communal/national religious activity

On the face of it, these appear to be largely the same responsibilities that we would expect to find in a patriarchal world, but the critical difference, argues Meyers, lies in the absence of any public/private dichotomy in Ancient Israel. The household was as much the place of work, of politics, and of religion, as it was the place of family. In such a subsistence-based community, the home was the centre of the family economy. As such, every activity in a household contributed to the economic prosperity of the whole family. Moreover, Meyers notes that women would not only have responsibility in these matters, but would have

authority too – she states "In today's terms, the senior Israelite woman functioned as the household's COO (Chief Operating Officer) and, if the senior male was away or incapacitated, as the acting CEO (Chief Executive Officer)."[21]

Rethinking the value of these roles naturally invites us to reconsider the status of women in ancient Israelite households. Women grew, educated and cared for the workforce, maintained and managed the workplace, and connected the household to the wider social, political, and religious community. There was no call for the word 'only' in the life of a wife and mother. Meyers does not deny that there was inequality between men and women, especially with regards to inheritance and political rule, nor that there were established hierarchies among men, women, and priests. Rather, she argues that the patriarchal hierarchy commonly attributed to Israelite society is simply too rudimentary an understanding. Moreover, she argues that by identifying ancient Israel as principally patriarchal leads to "obscuring other, possibly more pernicious inequalities."[22]

However, if 'patriarchy' is indeed an insufficient term, what is to be preferred? In its place, Meyers proposes 'heterarchy' (taken from ἕτερος, "different, other," and ἄρχειν, "to rule"), which she defines as: "Multiple sources of power that [do] not necessarily line up in a single set of vertical hierarchical relationships."[23] That is, where assumptions driven by post-industrial presentism may imagine a top-down authoritative structure (see Fig. A), the Israelite communities of the Iron I period reflect a side-by-side collaborative exercise of power (see Fig. B). In her article 'Was Ancient Israel a Partriarchal Society?' she further explains: "This concept … concedes the existence of hierarchies but does not situate them all in a linear pattern. Rather it acknowledges that different power structures can exist simultaneously in any given society, with each structure having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally."[24] Gottwald, she notes, supports this term,[25] and certainly the combination of biblical, archaeological, iconographic and ethnographic evidence she presents makes a compelling case.

Fig. A: Hierarchical Power Structure
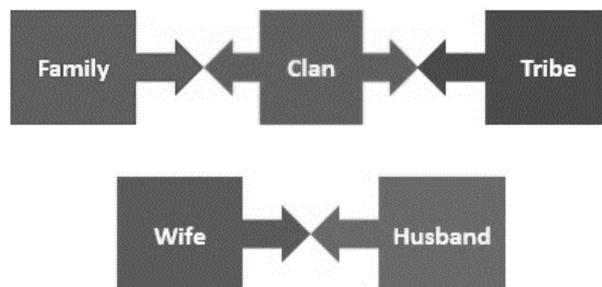

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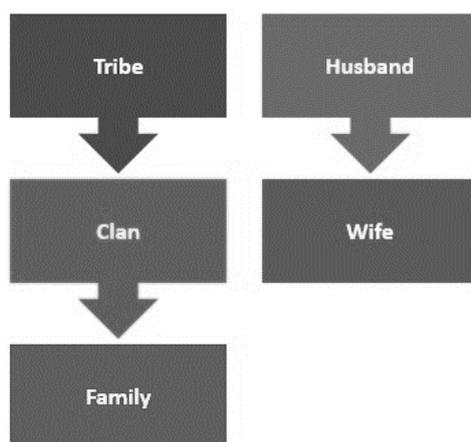
[21] Ibid., 188.
[22] Ibid., 193.
[23] Ibid., 197.
[24] Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 27.
[25] Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 198; cf. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 171.

Fig. B: Heterarchal Power Structure

Heterarchy in Judges

The book of Judges is a pertinent measure to apply for two reasons. Firstly, the historical context of the events described in Judges correspond to precisely the Iron I period on which Meyers bases her argument. Secondly, Judges is notable for its inclusion of a number of prominent women, who seem to defy Western, modern stereotypes of patriarchal society:

i) *Judges 1:12-15.* Caleb's daughter Achsah requested specific land from her father. This may stand as an example of a woman inheriting land ("Give *me* also springs of water," v.15, emphasis mine), or possibly may reflect a daughter's influence in negotiating her dowry. Whichever is the case, she is able to negotiate the ownership and management of water rights, an act of significant public, political leverage.

ii) *Judges 4-5.* Deborah is Israel's only female Judge, but also enjoys one of the longest accounts within the Judges narrative. She is identified as prophetess and wife in equal measure (Jdg 4:4), a political leader, who makes key military decisions and commands the obedience of her male general (Jdg 4:4-10, 14-15), and who leads the nation in celebration of victory (Jdg 5:2-31 cf. Ex 15:20-21). Moreover, Irene Nowell presses her particular success compared with all of the other Judges: "A complaint continually made by [the twelve Judges] is that only a few neighbouring tribes can be summoned to help in any crisis ... Deborah, however, manages to muster six tribes – Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali – the largest number gathered by any of the twelve judges. It is a testimony to the power of her leadership."[26]

iii) *Judges 4:17-24:* Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, wins a great military victory when she kills Israel's enemy Sisera (Jdg 4:21 cf. Jdg 4:9: "the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.").

iv) *Judges 9:53.* "A certain woman" (NRSV) wins another military victory when she drops a stone on the head of Abimelech. In this incident it is not only the act, but the description of the act that elevates this woman. The author's creative use of אֶחָד ('one/certain') and רֶכֶב/אֶבֶן ('stone'/'millstone') to parallel the rise of Abimelech, who sets himself up as *one* ruler (Jdg 9:2) by killing his brothers on *one stone* (Jdg 9:5), with the "certain woman" who

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[26] Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 67.

brings his downfall with one stone (Jdg 9:53), has the effect of portraying these adversaries – one a man striving to be king, the other a woman who could be anybody – as equals.[27]

v) *Judges 11:34-40.* Jephthah's daughter was able, to some extent, to direct her father's decisions.

vi) *Judges 13:2-25.* Samson's mother talks with God (and God talks back, specifically directing her and not her husband to step into His promise).

vii) *Judges 14:15-20.* Samson's wife retains her clan identity and household, contrary to the expected norm. Indeed, De Vaux argues that this story does not only defy patriarchal assumptions, but even projects values we would expect to find in a matriarchal system: "Some would see in the Bible, especially in the marriage of Samson and Timna, a rare type of marriage in which the wife does not leave her clan but brings her husband into it; this, too, would be a relic of a matriarchate."[28]

viii) *Judges 16:4-22.* Delilah outwits and proves the undoing of Samson.

ix) *Judges 17:2-4.* Micah's mother exercises the religious authority to curse and bless, and to commission an idol for the family shrine.

The prevalence of these women throughout the narrative of Judges would certainly seem to challenge the assumption that men were the only carriers of authority in Ancient Israel, and so on first inspection it might be tempting to conclude that Judges does indeed reflect the heterarchy asserted by Meyers. Indeed, she identifies both Deborah and Micah's mother as examples of women performing roles inconsistent with patriarchy.[29] However, when we pay attention to the roles these women carry, we must surely question whether such a conclusion is reasonable. In none of the above examples do we find value ascribed to the established female roles that are inherent to Meyers' heterarchal vision for ancient Israelite households. Instead, we find women entering into political and religious activities that Meyers identifies as typically male roles within a heterarchal construct (see Table A). Achsah influences water rights; Deborah exercises political, jural, religious (prophetic) and military leadership over the nation of Israel; Jael and "a certain woman" win military victories; the mothers of Samson and Micah exercise religious, even priestly, authority. In many of these cases, their familial positions as daughter, wife or mother are recognised (Jdg 1:12-13; 4:4, 17; 11:34; 13:2, 11, 22; 14:15, 16, 20; 17:2, 3, 4), as if to emphasise how little their behaviour conforms to the norm, or perhaps to prove that social status need not restrict one's contribution to the national story.

This would all seem to point away from a vision for heterarchy back towards a conscious subversion of a patriarchal system, or at least of a series of patriarchal expectations. It seems likely that the emphasis placed on so many women who influence the national story of Israel, regardless of their social or political status (so adeptly displayed in Judges 4 with the military roles of Deborah, a national leader, and Jael, the wife of a soldier), is a deliberate tactic of the author(s) to challenge and subvert the assumption that women could or should not hold these key roles. In further support of patriarchy being more in view than heterarchy, we should also note the way that the story of Gideon subverts the practice of primogeniture,

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[27] Cf. J. Gerald Janzen, "A Certain Woman in the Rhetoric of Judges 9," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38 (1987): 33-37, p. 35.

[28] De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 20.

[29] Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 22, 23.

which is as fundamental a feature of patrilineal inheritance as the preference of sons over daughters. We might expect a hero with the stature of Gideon to be the eldest son of a great family, but instead he says to the LORD: "Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Jdg 6:15). Later, he is succeeded as Israel's hero by his youngest son (Jdg 9:5, 7-20), who counters the attempted succession of his illegitimate son (Jdg 8:31; 9:1-6). In a similar fashion, Jephthah is presented as the son of a prostitute, the illegitimate offspring of Gilead, and yet after he was rejected he was welcomed back by his people and rose to become a Judge of Israel (Jdg 11:1-33).

So, does this suggest that Meyers is simply wrong about heterarchy in Ancient Israel? Surely, if it was a social reality then we should expect to find testimony to it in a text describing that very period in history, especially one that purposefully highlights the influence of women? In fact, Meyers counters this criticism well when she argues that the informal nature of the roles typically performed by women would naturally tend to be undocumented.[30] In which case, it is hardly reasonable to expect to find any direct descriptive evidence in the written record. Hence the importance of the archaeological and ethnographic evidence upon which she bases much of her argument. Moreover, if Judges 18:30 is a reference to the exile, as it appears to be,[31] and the book was therefore composed (or compiled) at a much later time than the period it portrays, this would further compromise the author's ability to accurately and explicitly portray the subtleties of the social reality for women.[32] Consonant with this, it is also important to remember the intent of the author, which is to tell a theological national story, not to preserve a time capsule or provide a social analysis of Israel. As such, naturally, no attention is given to everyday life unless it directly impacts that national story.

On the other hand, Judges does actually include some references that are consistent with heterarchy. When Deborah's song turns to the tragedy of Sisera's mother, waiting in vain for the return of her son, the image conjured is of a woman who is in authority over her advisors, who are also women (Jdg 5:29). This seems to portray a hierarchy among women, such as we would expect to find within a heterarchal construct that held together multiple hierarchies (men, women, priests) alongside one another. Later, Jephthah's daughter is first introduced to us as she emerges from her father's house, "carrying out the woman's role in victory" as "she leads the celebration" (Jdg 11:34 cf. Ex 15:20; 1 Sam 18:6).[33] We should perhaps also note the way that the prominent women in Judges are positioned within Israel. Deborah is presented as a national figure (Jdg 4:4-5), Achsah and Samson's mother according to their tribes (Achsah from Judah, Jdg 1:2-15; Samson's mother from Dan, Jdg 13:2), Jael according to her clan (Jdg 4:17), and Jephthah's daughter according to her household (Jdg 11:34). The national story is influenced and shaped by every social strata, consistent with a heterarchal

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[30] Ibid., 25.

[31] Cf. K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 23.

[32] That said, it is important to note that there is no scholarly consensus on a date of composition for Judges, and while Meyers also supports an exilic or post-exilic date (Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 19), Cundall notes that this may better reflect a time of compilation, which drew together stories passed down through oral culture from the original time: Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth (TOTC)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 27-30. Similarly, De Vaux's assertion, noted above, that the account of Samson's wife (Jdg 14:15-20) represents a pre-patriarchal era, would also point to an early date for at least some of the stories collated in Judges: De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 20.

[33] Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 72.

system in which household, clans, tribes and nation carry equal authority over different jurisdictions.[34]

Thus it is clear enough that as a point of history, the book of Judges does offer important support for Meyers' argument for heterarchy in Iron I Israel. Despite the improbability of written evidence declaring such a system, we in fact do find anecdotal evidence preserved in the narrative of early Israel that indicates heterarchal values underpinning society. But if so, how do we account for the number of women who are elevated to our attention in roles that contradict the 'norms' of heterarchy? Could Judges even be subverting heterarchy as an ideal?

To a degree, this does indeed appear to be the case. Subversion is exercised by the reversal of social norms, and if we take Meyers as being broadly correct about Israel's socio-political construction, which I do, then Judges repeatedly reverses the roles of women within a heterarchal construct. However, if we are to understand a form of subversion we must first ask who or what is being scrutinised, and in this regard it seems unlikely that it is the socio-political system as a whole. Quite aside from the fact that any system we identify is a modern idea projected onto an ancient culture to best describe it in ways *we* can understand (not ways they understood themselves), for Judges to critique Israel's general organisation we would expect men to be similarly elevated into typically female roles of authority. As it is, the subversion is entirely one way. Judges exposes a world in which it was a disgrace for Sisera and Abimelech to be defeated by women (Jdg 4:9; 9:54), and in which women could be so disregarded as to be offered by their fathers and husbands to be abused and killed in order to save the life of a man (Jdg 19:22-26). In response, the author(s) of Judges tell a national story that is upheld and advanced a number of times by powerful women, in both the public and private domain, fulfilling the traditional roles of men. Indeed, the fact that Judges offers us only one example in most of these cases – one woman Judge and military leader (Deborah), one woman acting as a priest (Micah's mother) – only reinforces this view of a society in which the exceptions do not prove the rule, but expose and subvert it. Thus, while we can find traces of a heterarchal society in early Israel, it is the patriarchal assumptions within it that are being challenged.

If there is a weakness in Meyers' argument, it is that her focus on discovering the social realities can serve to diminish the importance of social idealism. In other words, she prioritises the practices of Ancient Israel over the projection they wished to convey, as the best measure of the values they held. I would counter that both are fundamental, and that they looked very different from one another. While Meyers convincingly argues for a heterarchal socio-political reality, in which both women and men carried authority, exercised through discreet hierarchies that sat alongside one another,[35] Ancient Israel appears to have contained this fluid, imprecise reality within an institution that ascribed value biased towards its formal authorities in order to project the vision of an ordered society in a chaotic world. The consequence of which was an inflated importance ascribed to men, which led to patriarchal assumptions taking root within a heterarchal society.

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[34] Perhaps even more startlingly, as noted above, Jephthah is identified as the son of a prostitute (Jdg 11:1), and so here we have even the outcasts and sinners shaping the national story.

[35] Including hierarchies positioned around gender, age, social and political influence, profession, and religion. Indeed, Meyers argues that far more significant than any gender-based hierarchies were the hierarchies of age and class. See Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 195.

Conclusion

To conclude, as we have seen, it is notable that in a book which seems deliberately to identify a number of women in key areas of influence in Israel, none of these conform to the typical gender-specific roles in Meyers' heterarchy construct. Thus we must conclude that Judges does not hold forth a vision for heterarchy. However, this does not build a case against heterarchy as a social reality, and we may even find evidence within Judges to support it. In fact, if we take its presence as read, then what emerges is a narrative which takes the practice of heterarchy as a starting point from which to criticise the patriarchal ideals of Israel's projected society. By identifying women who fulfil roles and reap benefits assumed to be for men, as well as continuing the Genesis tradition of undermining primogeniture, Judges subverts Israel's assumptions and casts a vision for a society in which every member, regardless of gender or status, may be exalted by God and worthy of honour.