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Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in its Ancient Israelite Context: General Considerations and Particular Images in Hosea 1.2

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Abstract

The marital metaphor became for the (mostly, if not exclusively, male) literati of ancient Israel—and for those who accepted their discourses—a way to shape, imagine, express, and communicate their understandings of the nature and story of their relationship with YHWH. This article addresses systemic aspects of this metaphor within this social and ideological setting and deals with the interplay of these aspects with the worldview and world of knowledge of these literati. A brief consideration of a particular instance of this metaphor, Hos. 1.2, serves to illustrate ways in which the actual use of the metaphor brought about matters that were related but clearly go beyond the 'generic' issues that the metaphor evoked in the readership of books in which it was used. Among them, one may mention the nature of Israel, its election by YHWH, explanations that served to solve or attenuate the cognitive dissonance between the status of the literati (and of Israel as a whole) in worldly affairs and their perceived place in the divine economy, and the importance of education.

1. *Introduction*

This article deals with general considerations that apply to the marital (husband–wife) image of the relationship between YHWH and Israel in its ancient Israelite context. It focuses, to a large extent, on a paradigmatic example of this image, Hosea 1–3.[1] Moreover, through the example of

1. John J. Schmitt denies that there is imagery of a marital relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Hebrew Bible in general and in Hos. 2 in particular; see

Hos. 1.2, it provides a window into the study of the related but additional messages that particular occurrences of this image in prophetic literature conveyed to the intended and primary readers of the texts in which it appears. This contribution pays particular attention to the implicit ways in which this image served to explore and construct the image of the deity of Israel and its relationships with Israel, within the readership(s) for which

Schmitt's 'The Wife of God in Hosea 2', *BibRes* 34 (1989), pp. 5-18. Schmitt contends that Israel is consistently depicted in masculine imagery and that the wife in Hos. 2 refers to a city, which he identifies as Samaria. But even if, for the sake of the argument, one accepts his claim that the wife in Hos. 2 stands for a city, the latter would still stand, at least in part, for its inhabitants, namely, Israel. This can be illustrated by the case of Hos. 1.2 in which the wife explicitly stands for the land, but the latter stands at least in part for the people inhabiting it. After all, to state that the land is engaged in gross promiscuity is to state that the inhabitants of the land are engaged in such behavior. Cf., among others, Lev. 19.29 and see, for instance, A.A. Macintosh, *Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), p. 8; G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 52 and see Ibn Ezra (see U. Simon, שני פירושי ר' אברהם אבן עזרא מהדורה מדעית ומבוארת [*Abraham Ibn Ezra's Two Commentaries on the Minor Prophets: An Annotated Critical Edition*] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1989), p. 26 ch. 1 ll. 21-22. For a critique of Schmitt's article, see A. Dearman, 'Yhwh's House: Gender Roles and Metaphors for Israel in Hosea', *JNSL* 25 (1999), pp. 97-108.

It bears note that according to P.A. Kruger, Hosea was 'the first to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel in terms of the marriage image'; see Kruger's 'Israel, the Harlot', *JNSL* 11 (1985), pp. 107-16 (107). See also M.L. Satlow, 'The Metaphor of Marriage in Early Judaism', in J.W. van Henten and A. Brenner (eds.), *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaisms and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions* (STAR, 2; Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2000), pp. 13-42 (14). H.L. Ginsberg maintained that the innovation was that of First Hosea (i.e. his 'Hosea A') who lived during the days of Ahab and to whom he assigns a forerunner of the present Hos. 1–3. See H.L. Ginsberg, 'Hosea', in *EncJud*, VIII, col. 1016. Any such proposals miss the point that the text *presupposes* a readership that is aware of this use of the image. Cf. B. Oestreich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh in Hosea 14.2-9 (1-8): A Study of Hoseanic Pictorial Language* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 115. It is worth stressing also that such proposals imply (1) an identification of the literary character of Hosea—which exists only within the book or any proposed forerunner of some of its sections as they later are reconstructed by particular redactional critics—with (2) the authorial voice of the book or its proposed forerunners, and then an identification of this voice with (3) the historical prophet Hosea. Significantly, the historical prophet is in turn constructed on the basis of the very same reconstructed text. Numerous problems beset this approach (e.g. circular thinking, a problematic equation of literary with historical characters).

the book of Hosea as a whole was composed, and similar ancient Israelite readerships.[2]

Unlike several recent studies of this prophetic text, this contribution deals *only* with ancient history and the most likely reconstruction of the world of thought of a particular group or groups in ancient Israel. Thus it approaches the relevant texts as ancient documents that carry the potential to shed light on the ways in which some ancient Israelites imagined themselves and their deity. This being so, this article does *not* deal, for instance, with Hosea 1–3 as a 'living' and influential text within contemporary communities of faith, or as an especially painful text for some present-day readers who cannot but associate their reading of the text with their own or their acquaintances' personal experiences of family or sexual violence or, for that matter, with any readers other than the ancient literati for whom the book of Hosea was composed, that is, the primary and target readership of that book. The issue is not one of primacy—there is no reason to privilege the study of any community of readers of Hosea over another—but one of particular historical focus.[3]

Like the Decalogue,[4] and most—if not all—biblical texts, the book of Hosea was most likely written by male literati, with a male readership in mind, and *primarily* for readers and rereaders who were bearers of high literacy and mainly, if not almost exclusively, male. Thus, historical studies on the readings and intellectual discourse of these ancient male groups have by necessity to focus on clearly (ancient) anthropocentric readings, no matter how problematic they might be from other viewpoints or for purposes other than the one set for this contribution.[5]

2. These readerships are, of course, for the most part rereaderships, since these texts were not read once and discarded, but read, reread, studied, read to others and the like. For the importance of this observation, see, for instance, E. Ben Zvi, *Micah* (FOTL, 21b; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), *passim*. In the present article, I will use the terms 'reader' and 'readership', but occasionally 'rereader' and 'rereadership' to emphasize this crucial feature.

3. For the kind of issues not discussed here, see, for instance, R.J. Weems, 'Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor', *Semeia* 47 (1989), pp. 87-104, and the illustrative bibliography mentioned in n. 5.

4. See, for instance, Exod. 20.14; Deut. 5.18.

5. There are numerous studies that address the matters I hint at here. Indeed the corpus of research on this issue is very extensive. For illustrative purposes, see the criticism of anthropocentric readings and the comprehensive study of the imagery of Hosea's marriage from contemporaneous literary perspectives in Y. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective*

2. *General Considerations*

Within the ideological (or theological) discourses reflected and constructed by the prophetic books, husband–wife imagery served as particularly useful means for the exploration and construction of the nature(s) of the potential relationships between the deity and Israel.[6] The reasons for the use of this metaphor in ancient Israel[7] can be discerned with some clarity and will be discussed below.

Metaphors work by creating discursive conceptual domains. When a metaphor, any metaphor, is brought to the attention of people, they are, in fact, asked to create an *ad hoc* conceptual domain inhabited by the metaphorical reference (i.e. signifier) and its target (i.e. signified). This domain is construed around that which is considered to be (a) typical, defining, or essential attribute(s) of the metaphorical reference.[8] As one relates these general considerations to the case studied here, it becomes clear that the husband–wife metaphor serves the rhetorical purpose of using particular but central attributes of the *ideological* image of a human marriage that was shared by the male authorship and the primary and intended male readership as building blocks for their imagining of the relationship

(JSOTSup, 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). See also the several contributions that deal with the book of Hosea in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). For a summary of recent feminist approaches to Hosea, see A.A. Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (JSOTSup, 338; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 140-61. On issues raised by the public reading of Hos. 2.1-22 as an Haftarah, see N. Graetz, 'The Haftarah Tradition and the Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife', *Conservative Judaism* 45 (1992), pp. 29-42, and see a 'traditional' response to her contribution, B.E. Scolnic, 'Bible Battering', *Conservative Judaism* 45 (1992), pp. 43-52.

6 E.g. Jer. 2–3; 13.26-27; Ezek. 16, 23. For a general, comparative study of this image see, among others, T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (New York: Free Press, 1992), pp. 144-52.

7. This article deals only with 'ancient Israel'. According to Satlow, 'Metaphor of Marriage', Jewish–Greek authors rejected the metaphor and so did most 'mainstream' writers in 'early Judaism'. The matter is debatable at the very least concerning the latter, as Satlow himself mentions instances in which this metaphor is being used. In any case, the issue is beyond the scope of this contribution.

8. Cf. Y. Shen, 'Metaphorical Comparisons and Principles of Categorization', in G. Rusch (ed.), *Empirical Approaches to Literature. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference of Empirical Study of Literature, IGEL Budapest, 1994* (Siegen: LUMIS, 1994), pp. 325-32.

between Israel and its deity in their present, as well as in their constructed past, and anticipated, hopeful future. Several basic and partially overlapping attributes of the husband–wife imagery made it suitable for this purpose within the circle of male literati within which and for whom these prophetic books were written.

First, the relationship between husband and wife is not a one time event; its recounting involves the creation of a narrative. Under certain conditions such a narrative could have been and was interwoven with that of the relationship between the deity and Israel. But these certain conditions had to be fulfilled to make this possible. Since (1) the basic construction of monarchic Israel in the prophetic books was that of a sinful nation that deserved a divine judgment that was already experienced,[9] and (2) the books conveyed hope and expectation for an ideal, future world, then (3) the marital narrative, to be useful for these purposes, had to include an account of a period in which the wife is reported to have grievously sinned and been punished,[10] in a way that is potentially comparable to that of the violent destruction of the monarchic polities and societies, as well as another period pointing to a future reconciliation between husband and wife.[11] In many cases, the narrative would also include a 'good period' or

9. The date of the book of Hosea in its present form (including, for instance, Hos. 1.1; 14.10) is most likely postmonarchic. It bears notice, however, that the earliest conceivable—although substantially less likely—date for the book given the references to Judah (e.g. Hos. 1.7; 5.5, 14; 6.4), the tone of some of them (e.g. 2.2), and the explicit reference to David (Hos. 3.5; but cf. 3.4) is either Hezekiah or Josiah's time. Even if for the sake of argument one were to accept a late monarchic date, the book still would have been read in the light of (northern) Israel's sin and the divine judgment that led to its collapse and the exile of its people. For Hosea in the light of the Hezekianic or Josianic period, see, for instance, M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophetic Books* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. 5-7; *idem*, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 256-72; and compare and contrast with E. Ben Zvi, 'Josiah and the Prophetic Books: Some Observations', in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Good Kings/Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century in History and Tradition* (JSOTSup; ESHM; London/New York: T&T Clark International, forthcoming). The argument for the postmonarchic date of the present book of Hosea is advanced in my commentary on Hosea in the FOTL series (forthcoming).

10. See Hos. 1.3-9, and esp. 2.4-15. Cf. Jer. 2.20–3.5; 13.26-27; Ezek. 16.15-58; 23.

11. See Hos. 2.1-3 and esp. 2.16-25; see also 3.5 and notice the intermediate period without a king—clearly a Davidic king—in Hos. 3.3-4. Incidentally, the latter reference reinforces the argument for a postmonarchic date for the book of Hosea as a whole (see above). Cf. Jer. 3.14-18; Ezek. 16.59-63.

even ideal period of 'first love' prior to the wife's sin.[12] This is consistent with the tendency to imagine ideal futures in terms of a restoration, which in turn shapes images of a golden period that in this case develops into a first time of endearment, love and engagement. The tendency is part and parcel of the common trend in the ancient Near East to assign authority and legitimacy to (constructed) images of the past held by the community, or its leadership.

Of course, restoration of the relationship between YHWH and Israel—and in most other cases—is not constructed as simply a replay of an old situation. At the time of the restoration the woman—that is, Israel, and the ancient readers who identify with her—is imagined as carrying an awareness of the deeds ascribed to her, and thus unlike the situation in the earlier, golden period, as a woman who bears a consciousness shaped by a recognition of her (past) sins. The development of such a consciousness and the ideological socialization of postmonarchic Israel—or at the very least its literati—around a profound acceptance of this consciousness is one of the main functions of prophetic literature.[13]

It is worth noting that the future, ideal relationship between Israel and YHWH was often imagined as involving a change in the order of creation itself and in the life of humanity (2.20; cf. Isa. 11; Zech. 9.9-10). In fact, at times such a new world was envisaged as one in which the woman would not be able to sin again (Hos. 2.20; cf. Jer. 31.30-33; Ezek. 36.26-27), and therefore her/Israel's (future) fidelity was ensured.[14] As a result, the discursive, constant and menacing image of divorce and separation from YHWH is removed, because within these discourses YHWH (the 'loyal' husband) would not even think of divorcing Israel/the woman if she had not broken her vows of marital fidelity. Needless to say, a discourse of erasures construed as existing in the realm of the far future of the com-

12. See Hos. 2.17; cf. Jer. 2.2; Ezek. 16.6-14

13. Of course, books and texts belonging to other genres in ancient Israel may fulfill these functions too. This is particularly true of ancient Israelite historiography. Cf. F. Polak, 'David's Kingship—A Precarious Equilibrium', in Y. Hoffman and H. Reventlow (eds.), *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature* (JSOTSup, 171; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pp. 119-47.

14. I wrote elsewhere on the intellectual milieu within which such images developed; see E. Ben Zvi, 'Analogical Thinking and Ancient Israelite Intellectual History: The Case for an "Entropy Model" in the Study of Israelite Thought', in T.J. Sandoval and C. Mandolfo (eds.), *Relating to the Text: Interdisciplinary and Form-Critical Insights on the Bible* (JSOTSup, 384; London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), pp. 321-32.

munity calls attention not only to the threatening character in the present, or near future, of the community of that which will be erased. These texts shape an ideological discourse marked by anxiety about the ability of the woman/Israel to keep her/its vows in the present, and therefore, both reflect an emphasis and emphasize the importance of the education/socialization of Israel. Significantly, prophetic books set themselves as central and necessary tools for this education process.

It cannot be overstressed that if the marital life of a couple was to serve as a metaphor for the history of the relationship between the deity and Israel in prophetic literature, and since (1) monarchic Israel was construed as sinful and as justly punished or about to be punished for its sins, then *by necessity* (2) the wife—if she is to stand for Israel—must be portrayed as sinful at some point in the narrative and therefore, as a woman who is justly punished, or about to be punished, by her husband (YHWH) for her sins. Given that (a) Israel's punishment was construed as extremely severe, but certainly just due to the nature and extreme character of its sins, then (b) the wife must be portrayed at some point in the narrative as an extremely 'bad' wife and accordingly as one whose punishment was both as absolutely just as YHWH's against Israel, and commensurate in its severity with that of Israel at the hands of YHWH. These ideological (and narrative) constructions are a necessary condition to any attempt to relate the narratives of husband/wife and YHWH/Israel within the ideological discourses shared by the authorship and the target community of readers. Within the male discourse of the literati of the period, such a systemically necessary characterization of the woman led directly to her portrayal as a 'fornicating' or adulterous woman.[15] It is worth noting that since one of the crucial goals of the prophetic books was to provide hope to their target readership,

15. Within the social and intellectual milieu of ancient Israel, the ancient Near East and patriarchal societies, this was the obvious image evoked by her being an 'extremely bad wife' that deserves stern punishment. It goes without saying that references to fornication easily led to those of prostitution, which in turn were easily interwoven into prophetic and other texts because of the common discursive association between cultic wrongdoing and prostitution. This association occurs very often and is at times extensively developed in prophetic books (e.g. Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), but is at the base of the common use of the verb זנה in relation to Israel's worship of gods other than YHWH, that is, actions that were construed as an offense against YHWH (Exod. 34.15-16; Deut. 31.16; Judg. 2.17; 1 Chron. 5.25). It is worth stressing that the matter is not of historical cultic prostitution, but of an ideological and discursive association that imagines (and conveys the message that) worship of gods other than YHWH is tantamount to a wife's adultery or prostitution.

the recounting of the wife's sinful deeds along with that of her severe punishment had to lead to some images of future reconciliation. Of course, theologically, this reconciliation was the prerogative of YHWH, who, accordingly, was construed as taking the initiative. The marital metaphor played well in this respect too, for reconciliation with and forgiveness of the adulterous wife was certainly construed as a prerogative of the (wronged) husband, and the latter was perceived as the one who could take the initiative in these matters.

It goes almost without saying that marriage imagery could be used for the mentioned rhetorical purposes only if and *because* the human marital relationship was ideologically conceptualized as fundamentally hierarchical and asymmetrical. Within these circles of literati in ancient Israel, and most likely within any social group in the ancient Near East, no one imagined that the deity (or deities) and humans stood in a non-hierarchical, egalitarian relationship. In fact, the husband–wife metaphor belonged to a set of metaphors that were associated with fundamentally hierarchical relationships and served as metaphors for that of deity and people. Other metaphors in this set included that of ruler–ruled, king–subject, master–servant/slave, father–child and shepherd–flock.[16] It is also because of this that when the relationship between Israel—or related concepts such as Ephraim, Zion—and YHWH was metaphorically construed around the notional imagery of a family, then Israel—or related concepts—had to be associated either with a boy/son/daughter or a wife. Within this metaphorical world, the slot of 'the man/husband' was one that Israel, even redeemed Israel, could never achieve. Within the marital imagery in particular, Israel's hope could only be to become a 'proper' wife; always conceived as a subordinate (and well-socialized) character, and never the male head of the household.

In fact, like relationships of king–subject, father–child or in general, human provider/provided, that of marriage belonged, at least in these discourses, to the domain of those describing patron–client relationships,

16. This conceptual understanding of the marital relationship was widespread in antiquity. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.13. In fact, it is part and parcel of the conceptual understanding of family as an institution that is headed by a male (husband and father) and in which children and wife (or wives) hold positions subordinate to that of the male head of the family. Cf. E. Nwaoru, *Imagery in the Prophecy of Hosea* (Ägypten und Altes Testament, 14; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1999), pp. 104-109. On the association of marital images with progeny and, therefore, with parental relationships, see below.

and therefore brought along expectations of unshakable loyalty and asymmetrical reciprocity. Terms such as *ḥesed* and 'love' were often associated with these relationships (and see Hos. 2.21-22; 3.1). Of course, the inclusion of the husband–wife motif within this domain was possible since gendered images were understood as conveying power relations. Thus, people or groups of people could be portrayed with (ideologically accepted) 'male' features in relation to some and with 'female' features in relation to others.[17]

Within these asymmetrical, reciprocal relationships, the patron had the clear expectation of being honored by the subordinate; yet, it was the subordinate who, because of a systemic necessity, carried always the potential to bring shame to the patron. In other words, the honor of the patron was to a large extent in the hands of the subordinate.

Whereas some readers today may see such a potential 'empowerment' of the subordinate in a positive light, this was certainly not the position of the ancient hegemonic partners, nor that of those who identified with them —that is, the primary readerships of the prophetic books.[18] Not only was this situation conceived of as carrying an inherently negative character, but

17. For the use of gendered images to convey relationships of power in ancient Israel, see D. Seeman, '"Where is Sarah Your Wife?" Cultural Poetics of Gender and Nationhood in the Hebrew Bible', *HTR* 91 (1998), pp. 103-25. In a slightly different context, J. Frishman ('Why Would a Man Want to be Anyone's Wife? A Response to Satlow', in Jan Willem van Henten and Athalya Brenner [eds.], *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaisms and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions—Papers Read at a NOSTER Colloquium in Amsterdam, June 9-11, 1998* [Studies in Theology and Religion 2; Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2000], pp. 43-48.) wonders why a man would want to be anyone's wife. As relevant to the discussion here, the crux of the matter is the identity of the 'anyone'. Biblical texts indicate unequivocally that at least the male literati responsible for the production of these books, and most likely their readership who identified themselves with Israel, certainly wanted to be 'YHWH's wife'. It is worth noting that similar attitudes are present in later periods both in Christianity and Judaism. In later Jewish traditions, not only the Shabbat and the Shechinah but also Israel is/was imagined as God's lover/wife (see common Jewish interpretations of the Song of Songs). Statements such as 'The Church is the Bride of Christ: he loved her and handed himself over for her. He has purified her by his blood and made her the fruitful mother of all God's children' (Catechism of the Catholic Church §808) had a very long history in Christian doctrine (and cf. 2 Cor. 11.2), and so do the 'Petrine' and 'Marian' dimensions of the Church.

18. The primary readership of the books accepted as authoritative the voice of the patron (husband/father/king/shepherd) of Israel, namely, YHWH, and identified with YHWH's teachings.

also ubiquitous attempts were made to diminish, as much as possible, that which was considered to be at the source of a potential dishonor of the hegemonic partner, or, as often ideologically construed, the potential for deviancy and social disorder. Such a potential was supposed to be reduced as much as possible by means of the proper socialization/education of the subordinate. The education or socialization of the subordinate partner is a pervading theme in these texts. In fact, rhetorically the texts are most often construed as a persuasive effort by the hegemonic partner, or those who identified with it/him, to educate the readership of the text, that is, to convince subordinates to accept the control and viewpoint of the hegemonic partner, in this case to convince 'the wife' that the 'husband' is right.[19]

This tendency is not surprising. Ancient Near Eastern literature that dealt, in one way or another, with these asymmetric relationships, strongly tended to reflect and identify with the hegemonic partner's perspective. Readers of these texts were by default asked to identify themselves with the perspective of the hegemonic partner (e.g. the slave owner, the shepherd) rather than with that of a wayward subordinate (e.g. a runaway slave, a wild donkey), regardless of whomever else they were asked to identify themselves. It was the viewpoint of the hegemonic partner that was construed by the text as the proper perspective. Not surprisingly, these texts also carried the voice of that hegemonic partner. Subordinates rarely spoke for her-/himself/themselves in these cases, and if something was attributed to them, this was always done through the lens or perspective of the hegemonic partner. These ideological and genre considerations remained at work when marital relationships were used as a metaphor for the relationship between the deity and Israel. Thus, in the case of Hosea 1–3, they explain why Gomer's point of view was not presented,[20] why she remains silent in the text and why the intended readership was not asked to doubt the veracity of the claims of the deity/husband against his wife. There was

19. In fact, reading of the books was understood as an activity meant to advance the readers/literati/Israel's knowledge of YHWH, YHWH's instructions, YHWH's word and the like.

20. The points of view of Gomer and the woman in ch. 3, if the latter is different from Gomer. The question of whether she is Gomer or not is not relevant to the point advanced here. To be sure, contemporary literary critics can and have recreated what a possible Gomerian viewpoint might have been. See, for instance, F. Landy, *Hosea* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 23-24. Of course, this is a legitimate literary-critical enterprise, but this does not change the fact that the original target readership of the book was unlikely to wonder much about the personal viewpoint of (the character) Gomer, or Hosea, for that matter.

no need to prove his words to be true; the voice of the deity/husband was authoritative for a readership that accepted the book as YHWH's word.[21]

These considerations serve also to situate the intended and primary rereaders in relation to the main characters in a text that advanced the marital metaphor as a way to explore the relationship between the deity and Israel. These rereaders of the book of Hosea identified themselves as Israel and, therefore, were asked to identify with the woman rather than Hosea. Yet they were also asked and expected to accept fully the viewpoint of Hosea/the deity/the male and the implied author of the book. Thus their own identification and construction of their past became an issue to be negotiated through their reading of the text. Yes, they are Israel but they were unlike the monarchic Israel of their book, and of their general horizon of knowledge. They accepted the justice of Hosea and the deity's position; they were an Israel who was now conscious of its wrongdoing and of its (construed) history. By doing so, they construed themselves not only as (1) post-judgment Israel, but also, and at least potentially, as (2) the Israel who was expected to have a proper relationship with YHWH (cf. Hos. 2.16-25), as a potentially well educated Israel in hope, as well as, to some extent, as similar to (3) prophetic Hosea, whose voice was interwoven with the divine and who partially represented the divine on earth according to the book that was in their hands, and whose voice they themselves created and embodied as they read the text, rather than (4) 'fornicating Israel'. Significantly, their continuous reading and rereading of the book is thus construed as a necessary requirement of their education and for their ability to serve as brokers of YHWH's word to those unable to read for themselves, that is, the immense majority of the population.

In this regard it is worth noting that literary texts dealing with insubordinate partners and their 'proper' socialization do so at the most basic level by constructing an ideological world in which any attempt by the subordinate to act contrary to the perceived interest and expectations of the hegemonic partner was unequivocally depicted as anti-social, reprehensible, leading to social chaos and, of course, as punishable. These genre characteristics or constraints led the marital image to develop into one of adultery, and allowed it to serve well both the basic narrative of the relationship between the deity and Israel as well as the characterization of sinning Israel and its actions. These features contributed to the creation of

21. Cf. Y. Amit, '"The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind": On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative', *Prooftexts* 12 (1992), pp. 201-12.

an ideological world in which departure from the instructions and viewpoints of YHWH as conveyed by the relevant written texts, and as understood by the literati who wrote, copied, read, reread, and read to others the books that carried such messages, was depicted as almost inconceivable and certainly 'unnatural'. Who in his/her right mind would like to betray a god like the YHWH of these books?[22]

The thrust of narratives about wayward subordinate partners and efforts to re-socialize them often leads within these discourses to a construction of the hegemonic partner as, on the one hand, cajoling and providing 'good treatment' of the subordinate—lest the subordinate had a good reason for leaving the domain of control of the hegemonic partner—but, on the other, as one who threatens and is willing and often carries out severe punishment for what is presented as deviancy. Both aspects of the characterization of the hegemonic partner/husband appeared in the marital images discussed here. The husband was construed as both one who is benevolent and cares deeply about the wife—and accordingly, within these discourses, the latter could not be remotely construed as having any reason at all to shame and betray the husband, but also as a threatening and punishing husband. This characterization of the husband allowed the metaphor to be used to characterize the deity in its relationship to Israel and to educate the rereadership about YHWH's benevolence and justice in the light of the severe punishment the deity inflicted upon Israel, and of the hope for a bright future if Israel rejects its wayward ways. In other words, it allowed the text to address the historical circumstances of the readers of prophetic books in which this marital imagery appeared.

Of course, the subordinate was ideologically imagined as one in need of a hegemonic partner. For instance, the flock needs the shepherd and the child, the father. The marital metaphor in the prophetic books clearly pointed to a conceptual pair of provider/provided. Within this world, if the

22. Of course, the characterization of rebellion of the subordinate in these relationships as something utterly unreasonable to the point of unthinkable raises the need to explain why Israel did behave in the way reported in the books. This is a common concern in prophetic literature. In the book of Hosea, as a whole, explanations in terms of 'a spirit of fornication' or too much drinking appear along with others. Other prophetic books advance other explanations, though at times they are similar to those in Hosea. The problem, however, is systemic. The texts construe such rebellions as unequivocally unthinkable and 'unnatural', while at the same time maintain that they did occur—after all, they led to the justified divine punishment—and explain why. For the general intellectual matrix in which these ideas seem to play, see Ben Zvi, 'Analogical Thinking'.

wife rejected the socially and ideologically acceptable provider, her need for a provider did not disappear. This being the case, she had to be construed as one who relied on alternative providers. Hosea 1–3 is quite explicit about this matter (e.g. 2.7). If Hosea/YHWH fulfilled the role of the proper provider, then the wife/Israel was imagined as relying on alternate, but ideologically improper, providers. The logic of the argument led the latter to be construed as human paramours as opposed to Hosea, and as another god, other gods, or their equivalent from the putative perspective of the wife/Israel, as opposed to YHWH. Thus the marital metaphor was directly linked to that of explicit apostasy, or an inane reliance on earthly, functional equivalents of gods, or 'para-gods' such as Assyria or Egypt. Significantly, this characterization is a commonplace in the portrayal of the 'foe' in ancient Near Eastern literature.[23]

Needless to say, within these discourses socially unacceptable providers cannot really provide; only the proper provider can (e.g. Hos. 2.10; cf. Jer. 2.13). So the inane foe/foolish wife must face disaster within the narrative. As for the 'para-gods' (i.e. the other 'males') within this metaphorical discourse, not only are they unable to provide, but they are also contemptible and worthy of punishment because they are involved in the transgression of the rights of the proper husband/male, YHWH, in relation to his wife, Israel—after all, she is 'fornicating' with them. Their actions were imagined as an affront to the husband, to YHWH, and to basic norms of society itself, for which they (e.g. Assyria, Egypt) should pay.[24]

Of course, Gomer/Israel does not select Hosea/YHWH. In fact, in the book of Hosea, Gomer is described as silent during the choice and the ensuing wedding. Needless to say, Hosea and the ancient readers of the book/Israel were mindful of that divine choice in the past, of what it implied for them. These matters are addressed within the world of the book by the character Hosea, and by the readers through their reading and rereading of the book.

Significantly, the moment the community by whom and for whom the book was composed imagined themselves and Israel as marrying YHWH, they created a discursive world in which Israel had taken upon itself/ herself the usual role that in the ancient Near East was assigned to a goddess.

23. See M. Liverani, 'KITRU, KATARU', *Mesopotamia* 17 (1982), pp. 43-66 (58-60); cf. B. Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justification for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1992), esp. pp. 124-25.

24. Cf. Lev. 20.10, and, for instance, Hammurabi Code §129-30 and Middle Assyrian Laws A§13-15, 23.

As a result, although this ideological concept of Israel could not really be identified as a goddess, it still included some of her attributes, and was still construed as elevated beyond the worldly realm. Moreover, since within these discourses city dwellers were identified with their cities, and 'people' with their land, the land was also ideologically construed as elevated and, in some prophetic books, the ideological center of the land, Zion/Jerusalem/temple, even more so.

Marriage was conceived of as a process in which goods were transferred from provider to the one being provided. The marital metaphor brings to the forefront not only the characterization of the husband/deity as a provider but also the question of the nature of the goods being provided. This issue was clearly addressed, for instance, in Hosea 1–3 (see 2.10-11, 23-25; 3.5). Since the land was associated with the people and the woman, the provider was imagined as bringing fertility to the land, as bringing rain, and eventually new grain, wine and oil. Thus, the marital metaphor served to shape (a) discursive world(s) in which husband YHWH takes upon himself some common attributes of other male ancient Near Eastern gods, and as such it contributed to the characterization of YHWH as the only (high) deity.

The marriage metaphor, unlike other metaphors for hierarchical, asymmetric relationships, clearly evoked images of intimacy. In fact, the point was emphasized in Hosea 1–3.[25] This attribute of the metaphor allowed also for the development of an enhanced sense of jealousy and a corresponding expectation for heavy punishment in cases of perceived misbehavior, and for a strong identification of their target male readership—whose members may despise the dreaded thought that their wives might be adulterous—with the deity and its message.

Within its ancient setting, the marriage metaphor, again unlike other metaphors for hierarchical, asymmetric relationships, clearly evoked the image of progeny and its attributes. Progeny may serve to introduce another metaphor for this type of relationship, father–child, in which case, the image of the wife became intertwined with that of the child. In Hosea 1–2, both Gomer and the children represented the people, a point that was explicitly emphasized in this text by the selection of the name 'Not-my-people'. But progeny may be seen from other perspectives too, which are discussed in the next section of this article.

Finally, asymmetrical family metaphors in ancient Israel evoked not only the threat of separation, but also an additional, inherent, potential

25. The matter is treated in the commentary on Hosea I am presently completing.

threat. A father may have more children; a husband may have additional wives. If YHWH is the father or husband, and Israel is the wife or child, what would prevent YHWH from enjoying relationships similar to those YHWH holds with Israel with other peoples?

This matter was rarely raised openly in ancient Israelite literature, which may be due to the fact that if it were, within the constraints of the discourses of the time, it would have been difficult to avoid the position that it was the right of the hegemonic partner (father/husband) to do so. Still one can easily notice references to Israel's status as firstborn of YHWH that provided a higher status to son Israel.[26] Also there was an implicit construction of Israel as YHWH's first and only wife that was advanced through the omission of references to earlier wives or wives other than Israel (cf. Hosea, the character in the book, and see below[27]). One may notice also the emphasis on YHWH as a deity who betrothed/married Israel soon after she was born (in the desert) or at the time of her youth (cf. Hos. 2.17; Jer. 2–3; Ezek. 16; for similar associations of the father–son metaphor see, for instance, Hos. 11.1).[28] None of these references could be construed as completely solving the mentioned discursive problem that arose out of the family metaphor. They served, however, to emphasize attempts to lessen it, as much as possible, as well as an awareness of their limitations. This awareness led to the construction of YHWH as one who has the right to do as YHWH wishes in these matters at any time, but who constantly *chooses* to have a unique relationship with Israel. Such a construction of YHWH, in turn, was a source of self-identity and contributed to the self-understanding of the communities of Israel within which and for which books that carried this imagery were read and reread, or at the very least, among the literati of these communities (and see discussion below).

3. *Particular Observations on Hosea 1.2*

Along with the general features and set of potential issues that the marital metaphor evoked among the mentioned male literati, each occurrence of

26. E.g. Exod. 4.22; Jer. 31.9. Of course, the right of the firstborn could be transferred to another son, but still this construction of Israel provided at least a default position of superiority for Israel.

27. Again, leaving aside whether Gomer and the woman in ch. 3 are the same in all respects, at the symbolic level both are clearly one and the same, namely, Israel.

28. Needless to say, because of ideological constraints, Israel could not be construed as the wife of YHWH's youth, but it could and was construed as YHWH's wife since her youth.

the metaphor carried particular messages that were interwoven as threads into the general tapestry of the text. These threads brought to the attention of the intended and primary readers of the prophetic books additional, though related matters. In this section, I will refer to some of the threads that appear in the particular way in which the metaphor is actually activated and inscribed in Hos. 1.2. This example will serve as a practical illustration of the relationship between the 'general' and the 'particular'. It cannot be overstressed that general considerations as those mentioned in the previous section should not diminish the 'individuality' of each occurrence of the metaphor or the particular aspect of the worldview(s) that each of these occurrences reflected and shaped.

In the book of Hosea the intended reader was introduced to the metaphor immediately after the superscription or superscriptions that introduce(s) the book itself. The relevant unit or reading within the prophetic book begins with a report of YHWH's command to Hosea:

תחלת דבר יהוה בהושע ויאמר יהוה אל הושע
לך קח לך אשת זנונים וילדי בי זנה תזנה הארץ מאחרי יהוה

The text may be translated as following: 'When YHWH first spoke to Hosea, YHWH said to Hosea, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman, and have promiscuous children, for the land [most likely, but not only, the people inhabiting the land] has committed grave promiscuity, turning away from YHWH"'.[29]

Unlike other instances of the marital metaphor (e.g. Jer. 3.6-10), the text here and in Hosea 3 asked the intended readers to imagine two clearly individualized human partners playing as it were the roles of the deity and Israel in the metaphor. The role of the husband was given to a prophet. Given the tendency to blur words attributed to prophets and to the deity in prophetic literature into a common godly voice, this allocation is not unexpected.[30] Moreover, the genre of prophetic book does not allow for more than one human, major character in any prophetic book. This character is the prophet associated with the book by the superscription. In other words, the combination of genre constraints and the major role of the human, male character in Hosea 1–3 precluded anyone but Hosea from fulfilling that role.

29. Cf. Macintosh, *Hosea*, pp. 7-10.

30. It bears note that in Hos. 2 YHWH is explicitly referred to as אישׁ (i.e. 'husband', but also carrying a connotation of 'man'). See YHWH's divorce proclamation in 2.4, and the woman's speech as imagined by YHWH in 2.9. Needless to say, YHWH's words were presented as reliable. Cf. Nwaoru, *Imagery in the Prophecy of Hosea*, p. 99.

More important perhaps is the characterization of Gomer. She is from the outset a woman whose main and only explicitly mentioned attribute is that she is promiscuous; that is, she interacts sexually with male partners with whom she is not supposed to, according to the accepted social and ideological norms.[31] The divine commandment is for the prophet to marry a promiscuous woman in order to literarily and ideologically re-enact the metaphorical, marital life of the deity and Israel. The text explicitly underscores that Hosea knows well the character of his wife. Significantly, the same point is made again at the very beginning of the second account of Hosea/YHWH's marital life in Hos. 3.1. It bears note that the stress on the precise selection of a promiscuous woman as his wife would be pointless if the world of the text did not implicitly allow the existence of other and better women from among whom Hosea could have chosen his wife.[32]

31. There is no reason within the text, or its grammar, to understand the text as proleptic, that is, to assume that only after Hosea married her did he understand that this was the character of his wife. For a different position see, among others, Macintosh, *Hosea*, p. 9. There is also no reason to assume that she was characterized as a prostitute. Prostitutes were supposed to be sexually accessible to more than one male. This being so, their sexual encounters with different males did not constitute a breach of their social role; on the contrary, these encounters involved a fulfillment of an accepted, though not high-status, social role. The text here—and in other cases of described female infidelity within the domain of the marital metaphor of YHWH and Israel—rhetorically associated socially and ideologically unacceptable sexual behavior of a (married) woman with that of a prostitute, because of the social stigma carried by the latter. To be sure, this association was presented in quite explicit terms (see Hos. 2.14), but one has to keep in mind that the contrast between YHWH as true provider vs. the false providers is a central component of the marital metaphor used there (see above). On the characterization of Gomer as a 'woman of fornications' but *not* as a prostitute, see Keefe, *Woman's Body*, pp. 18-21 and bibliography. Needless to say, since Gomer is not characterized as a prostitute, she is certainly not described as a 'cultic prostitute'. On the lack of support for the historical existence of heavily sexualized Canaanite rituals, which some scholars (e.g. H.H. Wolf, *Hosea* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974 (German original 1965)], pp. xxv-xxvi, 26) have considered to be the background of the story in Hosea, see among others Keefe, *Woman's Body*, pp. 36-65; Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, pp. 199-202; and J.A. Hackett, 'Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern Fertility Godesses', *JFSR* 5 (1989), pp. 65-76. See also R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), pp. 137-42.

32. Contrast with one of the positions mentioned in Ibn Ezra's commentary (see Simon, שני פירושי ר אנרהם אבן עזרא לתרי עשר, p. 26 ch. 1 l. 21; A. Lipshitz, *The*

With the woman standing for Israel and Hosea for the deity, the primary readers of Hosea were asked to imagine YHWH as one who has chosen Israel from among many nations/women knowing all too well that she is a sinning nation ('a fornicating woman') and that because of her very nature she would be and was unable to remain faithful to her divine partner. Similar self-deprecating images of Israel, and particularly of Israel in the past, appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Exod. 32.7-9, 22-23; 34.8-10; Deut. 9.4-6), and in combination with seemingly more positive images of nations other than Israel in texts such as Deut. 7.7; Jer. 2.11; Mal. 1.11-12 (cf. Isa. 1.2-3). It is part and parcel of the ideological discourse of the literati of the period.

Since the text emphasized that the husband/YHWH knew well from the outset the basic character of the woman/Israel, then, within the context of the discourse of the period, this meant that the husband/YHWH knew from the very beginning that such a relationship would bring shame upon him. Shame and honor were essential goods in that society. Increased shame diminished the stature and power of a person in society.[33] Within this discourse, YHWH's particular relationship with Israel led to the deity's perceived diminished status among the nations. Such a theological discourse not only was consistent with portrayals of the 'other nations' as understanding the actions of, and above all the destruction wreaked upon, Israel

Commentary of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra on Hosea [New York: Sepher Hermon Press, 1988], pp. 20, ה).

33. It is worth noting that many commentators who lived in an honor–shame society utterly rejected the idea that the prophet actually married a woman as described in v. 2. In their opinion, had the prophet done so, he would have been so contemptible in the sight of all others that no one would have listened to his words, and, in any case, YHWH could not have commanded a man to do such a deed. Thus, according to this logic, either the marriage never took place or the fornicating woman has to disappear or be transformed or redeemed in some way or another; see Sherwood, *Prostitute and the Prophet*, esp. pp. 40-66; and cf., among others, Lipshitz, *Commentary*, pp. 6, 20, ו. The rhetorical power of the sense of dishonor conveyed by the marriage within these communities of commentators and their respective audiences may serve to highlight the poignancy of the image within the community of male readers and rereaders for whom the book was composed. They also lived within an ideological world based on honor and shame, and marriage with a fornicating woman was certainly considered dishonorable. It is this poignancy that helps to convey the message of the extreme unlikelihood and absolute rational inexplicability of YHWH's desire to marry Israel, and of YHWH's actual marriage to her. Within these postmonarchic discourses, an emphasis on these matters moved from the unexplainable—and certainly unmerited—divine choice of Israel to that of YHWH's love for Israel, in spite of its character.

as a dishonor for YHWH (see, for instance, Exod. 32.12; Jer. 14.21; Joel 2.17; Pss. 25.10-1; 143.11-12), but also explained the external world of the readership of the (present form of the) prophetic books—including Hosea—in ideological terms, for within that world—and contrary to many ideal, ideological statements in Psalms—all peoples do *not* worship and thus do not honor YHWH. The exception is one quite insignificant (from a worldly power perspective) people, namely, Israel.

Of course, within the ideological world reflected and shaped by the text, YHWH cannot really lose status because there is no one to whom status may be lost. If the honor–shame game is eventually a sum-zero game, it is impossible to lose any status if no one can gain any. Within this discourse, YHWH's real honor is actually incommensurable. At the same time, the ubiquitous presence of prophetic and hymnic texts in the Hebrew Bible that imagined and celebrated a future world in which the ideological tension between the *apparent* dishonor of YHWH in the earthly world and the truly incommensurable honor of YHWH's reality—as reflected and construed by these texts—disappears, because all nations will recognize YHWH.

Although Hosea's marriage may seem to bring dishonor to him within the world of discourse and values of the society reflected in the world of the book, he certainly does not lose honor in the sight of the readers of the book by following the divine commandment. Significantly, the text communicated to the intended readers of the book a strong tension between the true and perceived honor. To be sure, one may say that Hosea has no choice but to accept the deity's authority and choose his partner as commanded in the book, because had he rejected the divine words, then the story of the book, as we know it, would have collapsed. But the rereaders of the book could have imagined Hosea as having a choice. More importantly, they and the conceptual Israel they represented in their story about themselves had a choice—to follow or not to follow YHWH. It is worth stressing that the proper choice (i.e. to follow YHWH) is metaphorically, but clearly, associated here with earthly dishonor. The occurrence of such an association is again not surprising given the historical circumstances of these literati. The rereaders of the book, who were expected to identify with Hosea's willingness to follow the divine commandments, to be Hosea-like to some extent, and to behave in a godly manner, did experience a status perceived by almost all others as being a relative lack of honor, because of the power relationships between the Jerusalemite community of these rereaders *vis-à-vis* 'the nations'. Moreover, and more importantly,

most likely they also perceived themselves in an *apparent* status of relative lack of honor.

Whereas Hosea was commanded to marry Gomer, YHWH was not ordered to marry, as it were, Israel. An important ideological question hovering over texts such as Hosea 1–3 and over the self-understanding of the community of readers is why would YHWH have knowingly chosen a bride such as Israel/Gomer? Hosea 3.1 suggests a possible answer. The husband is there commanded to love the woman, and there is direct reference to the deity's love for Israel, even when the latter turns to other gods/lovers. Ideological self-constructions that grounded the special relationship between Israel and YHWH on an unexplained and, within their discourse, unexplainable divine love for Israel appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Deut. 7.6-8; Hos. 11.1; Isa. 43.1-4; 48.14; Jer. 31.3; Mal. 1.2; cf. Deut. 23.6; 1 Kgs 10.9; 2 Chron. 2.10; 9.8). Of course, the domain of 'love' was also often associated with that of loyalty, jealousy and potential violence against those who were perceived to be wayward (see, for instance, Deut. 7.6-10 and the book of Hosea).

In addition to the wife, the children that resulted from the matrimony reported in Hos. 1.2 are explicitly characterized in the text. Following the portrayal of their mother, they are described as 'promiscuous children'. Since these children were also identified with and as Israel, just as their mother, the text had no choice but to describe both of them in similar ways. Yet the explicit reference to ילדי זנונים certainly asked the intended readers to associate the children with their mother and implicitly suggests that the basic character of their father (here, YHWH/Hosea) was irrelevant to that of his children. Although this construction of the character of children is not unprecedented in the Hebrew Bible, particularly when the father is portrayed as angry (see 1 Sam. 20.30), the text here points at and reflects a more significant matter, namely, that divine attributes cannot be transmitted even *metaphorically* through biological means. If the children of YHWH (i.e. Israel) are to develop any godly attributes—as they are required to do within the discourses reflected in prophetic and other biblical books—then they have to learn them, and through the process of learning them overcome their own rebellious character. The memory and consciousness of the sins and trials of monarchic Israel represented in the book of Hosea, and encapsulated by the signpost names of these children ('God/El-scatters-seed', 'She-is-not-pitied' and 'Not-my-people', see Hos. 1.4-8) is part of that required learning, but so is also the hope expressed by the reversal of these names along with the reassurance

that the very same names convey to the rereadership of the book that an ideal and stable future will eventually be established, through YHWH's agency (see Hos. 2.1-3, 16-25; 3.5).

4. *Conclusions*

Metaphors are important communicative tools. They reflect and serve to shape and communicate worldviews. They contribute to a shared imagination of the 'un-imaginable' and as such contribute to processes of socialization. Metaphors are part and parcel of discourses of particular groups at particular times and places. As such, they are historically contingent. They shape, but also reflect and shed light into the historically bound, intellectual and ideological matrix of those who used them; they, accordingly, provide historians with an opportunity to gather some information about this matrix and the groups that employed it.[34]

The present study has pointed to the way in which this metaphor worked for male literati in ancient Israel within their ancient Near Eastern, social and intellectual milieu. The marital metaphor was one of several possible metaphors that could be and were employed to portray asymmetrical reciprocal relationships. The marital metaphor brought to the forefront many aspects of the literati's construction of themselves as Israel and their story about themselves (i.e. their construction of the past and hope for the future); in both matters, their relationship with YHWH was the paramount ideological component. As a result, the marital metaphor became for these literati—and for those who accepted their discourses—a way to shape, imagine, express and communicate their understandings of the nature and story of their relationship with YHWH.

To be sure, this use of the metaphor raised a number of constraints and requirements upon the narrative/metaphor. In addition, the metaphor raised a number of ideological concerns that had to be dealt with. It was also shown that in some regards, there is an area of overlap between two family, asymmetrical metaphors, that of husband–wife and father–son. Needless to say, these metaphors also served to construe an ideological typology of 'proper' family relations, as per the (male) literati's view.

A brief consideration of a particular instance of this metaphor, Hos. 1.2, served to illustrate ways in which the actual use of the metaphor brought about matters that were related but clearly go beyond the 'generic' issues

34. Notwithstanding the differences, cf. M. Liverani, 'Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts', *Or* 42 (1973), pp. 178-94.

that the metaphor evoked in the readership of books in which it was used. Among them, one may mention the nature of Israel, its election by YHWH, explanations that served to solve or attenuate the cognitive dissonance between the status of the literati (and of Israel as a whole) in worldly affairs and their perceived place in the divine economy, and the importance of education.