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Women's Status in Antiquity

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Modern Nordic women are more independent than their sisters in any culture before. Although economically they still do not reach the earnings of their male colleagues in many industries, the idea of equality is mainly accepted and the general opinion is that it is a problem that should be solved. In front of law, women are today equal to men. In some cases, like in decisions who would get the children after a divorce, they are even 'more equal' than their ex husbands.

In the normal discourse of social sciences, this has been seen as the benefit of the modern welfare state, feminist movement and the equality struggle of the labour movement. Modern society is often contrasted with patriarchal society when dealing women's position in society. However, modernity with all of its benefits - and social evils as well¹ - did not emerge out of nothing.

In 1982, Peter Berger reminded that "it was not an accident that modernity originated in a Europe moulded over centuries by Christianity." For Berger, modernity is "those attitudes, values and practices that have led to the industrialization of the world." He emphasises especially the role of Judeo-Christian ideas of "the separation of God from man and the separation of man from the world."² For Berger these distinctions were crucial preconditions of modernity, since

The autonomous individual, who can step outside his community and even turn against it, is an essential feature of modernity. An autonomous nature, not subject to the gods and their intervention, is a presupposition of modern science and, therefore, of modern technology. And, finally, because this world is the arena of the drama of redemption, ancient Israel also created a unique view of history, allowing the notion that human beings operate in the world in the service of redemption for the sake of redemption.³

Even in its secularised form, Western thinking is basically a combination of three elements. As Berger notes: "Although we would not have modernity without Athens or Roman law, the religious roots of modernity, as Max Weber, showed, are to be found in neither Hellenes nor Rome, but in biblical tradition⁴."

¹ Immigrants and exchange students from many third world countries continuously remind that in West's thrive for material benefits, it has forgotten that a human is basically a social animal who needs love from other people. Loneliness and isolation are in the other side of the coin of the welfare state. We can also say that one price of the independence of women is the growing number of divorces and fatherless children.

² Berger 1982, 64f.

³ Berger 1982, 65.

⁴ Berger 1982, 64. There is much wisdom in the joke from the Bosnian war time, when a guard heard something and asked "are you a Moslem, Catholic or Orthodox?" When a trembling voice answered "I'm an atheist", the guard shouted: "Don't play with me. Are you a Moslem atheist, Catholic atheist or Orthodox atheist?"

What Berger speaks about Western society in general, can be applied to its components as well. Especially position of women is deeply bound in the cultural memory of Europe. This view of women and their status is continuously re-evaluated in the light of ancient texts, especially the Bible. In the same time, the Bible and other texts are also re-interpreted from the perspective of current emphases.

My aim in this presentation is to study how the early Christian frame of woman's position in the society and church emerged as a combination of views in previous cultures. I start with the dawn of history and focus first to Mesopotamia, which once was the centre of the Bronze Age world culture, that reached from china to Gibraltar⁵. Then I focus on another ancient civilisation that was for a long time isolated from this world culture, namely Egypt. A bit later when Egypt came into contact with the rest of the world, there emerged two new cultures in this world system that have had profound influence on the later history of the whole world, namely Greece and Israel. Finally, I focus on Rome and on Christianity that emerged in the mixture of all these cultures.

Women in Mesopotamia

Status of the Mesopotamian women must be seen from the perspective of the order in the cosmos and the duality of gods and goddesses. All gods, goddesses and humans had their proper place and duties both in heaven and on earth. In this cosmological system, the human was created to serve gods and free them from some routine tasks (e.g. reproduction). Thus, the starting point was that human's fate was to be servant on earth. A representant of humans in front of gods was the priest-king, *enki*, and later the king, *lugal*. Since their task was to duplicate the divine order on earth, they held a similar status as Marduk held in the pantheon – they were leaders and men served gods by serving them. The king was responsible of keeping the order. This same model was also applied to domestic relations.

In general, the whole family was a property of the family-god and the father or the eldest son was only the one in charge. The father of the household was responsible for the income flow. As long as the father was able to do so, he organised the works and had paternal authority of the

⁵ Algaze 1989; 1993. It is based on Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974; 1980) world system thesis with the exception that, contrary to Wallerstein, Algaze does not restrict it to modern time. There has recently emerged several works that apply 'world system' theory to early Mesopotamian world (e.g., Kohl 1978; Frank 1993; Ratnagar 2001). Although results have been controversial (see comments to Ratnagar 2001), it has pushed archaeologists and anthropologists to focus on the impact of cross-cultural financial interaction and its impact on society. As Kishor K. Basa (2001, 365) expressed it: "world-system theory went beyond evolution and diffusion; differences between two areas could be explained not in terms of their different stages of evolution or the absence of the contact between them that would permit diffusion but in terms of their intense interaction."

household. When he was not capable or there was no father, the paternal authority was shifted to someone else. Normally this was the eldest son, who was responsible for the support of his parents⁶ and unmarried siblings. If the family was unable to give support, the responsibility was on the wealthier relatives. Basically, all property of the clan belonged to the god of the forefathers. If the god had helped someone, it is his duty to deliver this support to other members of the clan. If he did not do it, there was always the possibility that the god withdraws his support and drops the hard-hearted one into the misery.⁷

Economically, the starting point of the question of woman's status is that a family was an economic unit. A daughter was a person that departed from her childhood family and entered to a new one⁸. In this way, investing on her would mean that the investment on her would not benefit family of her childhood but the family of her husband. This economic precondition also determined the status of the woman: the only way to get family's investment back was the systems of bride price and dowry. Thus the bride price must not be seen only from the perspective that a woman was a commodity that was sold⁹ but from a perspective that two families share the benefit from the work of one of their common member. A dowry was basically a woman's share of her father's inheritance. It belonged to her and – after her death – to her children, not to her husband. Since the (male) mortality was high because of wars, a woman could remarry and, thus, enter again to a new family. For this reason, Hammurabi's law has detailed laws on economic consequences of various marital options.

The status of women was closely linked with the social care. The family¹⁰, 'flesh and blood', to be more exact, as Van der Toorn argues, was the basic source of the social care in ancient Mesopotamia. G. Van Driel expresses this with a generalisation. "normal care is identical with having a wife and a son¹¹." Van Driel continues:

⁶ Van der Toorn (1994, 27) argues that in the Fourth Commandment of the Mosaic Ten Commandments, the 'honor' refers to financial support and not only general respect and subordination (as Luther explains it in his Catecheses). See also Stol (1998, 62ff.).

⁷ Van der Toorn 1996, 108f.

⁸ Van der Toorn (1994, 67) describes how a new wife was introduced to family gods when she came under their dominion. A woman did not have her own gods but served the god of her father and then the god of her father in law.

⁹ Herodotos (1:196), for example, describes of an yearly maid-market when all marriage-aged girls were sold in a common auction of the village. He applauds this habit and regrets that it was not anymore practised.

¹⁰ Now it is good to remind what van der Toorn (1996, 11f.) underlines: "The channels of written communication were dominated by the upper classes... It also has an urban bias, since most of these people lived in cities." In spite of this, van der Toorn does not see this as a major problem, since "the middle and lower classes regarded the gentry... as a model to emulate. Although the realities of their lives might suggest otherwise, their aspirations did not greatly differ from those of the elite." On the other hand, van Driel (1998, 172) noting the same lack of evidence, says that "for them [lower layers of free population] old ages or infirmity, coming early, could pose serious problems."

¹¹ Van Driel 1998, 167.

The point of departure is ... a marriage of the Mediterranean type”: a man marries... a girl who is some ten years younger... The girl is to provide a son or sons and as she will survive her husband she will be able to care for him. In turn she will have a full-grown married son caring for her... A marriage according to this plan solves the issue of care, at least if there is a son. If not, there is a problem.¹²

A special aspect in the old care support was the role of inheritance¹³. In Babylon, the inheritance shares were defined by the law¹⁴ and therefore the adoption was necessary. Contrary to this, in Assyria there were no such regular division of inheritance and, therefore, there the custom was of the last wills. The significance of these last wills concerning social care was that the testator could combine the inheritance and with the care (either to the testator or to his widow).¹⁵ A bit similar practice also existed in Babylon in the case of nuns. They might adopt a heir (usually a niece, nephew or another nun) to take care of them in their old days or they could give their fields or other property to someone (for example to some relative) and receive certain continuous support¹⁶.

According to Elias Bickerman and Morton Smith, the primary duty of women was to rear children to their husbands¹⁷. However, in other matters, unrelated to this basic duty, they were relatively free: they could master their own money¹⁸ and other property. Widows¹⁹, wives of runaways²⁰, divorced women²¹ and a wives of a prisoners of war without sustenance²² were free to remarry in certain conditions.

Related to the child rearing was also the practice of the use of wife's maidservants²³ as means to give children to her master. If a maidservant gave a son to a house master, she and her son could not be treated as a slave but had certain rights for freedom²⁴ unless she got bold and “assume equality with the wife.” However, even in that case, she cannot be sold but kept as a maidservant²⁵.

¹² Van Driel 1998, 167f.

¹³ Along with inheritance, there were also gifts that enabled a widow to take care of herself (Willeke 1998, 48; Stol 1998, 80ff.). These were needed in the cases when a widow remarried and, thus, turned to another family and under the care of her new husband. Her own sons did not any more have responsibility on her. (Stol 1998, 81). In those cases, the gift or absence of it had an influence on the widow's rights to inherit her husband with his sons (CH §171, 172).

¹⁴ CH §§28, 29, 162-193

¹⁵ Veenhof 1998, 136-145.

¹⁶ Stol 1998, 68f., 84-109.

¹⁷ Bickerman & Smith 1976, 34.

¹⁸ CH §§ 150ff.

¹⁹ CH § 172.

²⁰ CH § 136.

²¹ CH §§ 137-142.

²² CH § 134f.

²³ In cases when a wife, who could not rear children, gave her maid servant to her husband, and this gave him children, the husband did not have right to take a second wife (§ 144).

²⁴ CH §§ 170f.

²⁵ CH § 146.

Since women were under the patriarchal authority, this also meant that they had some rights. The most important of these was the right for 'food and clothing', as the formal expression defined. It was the duty of the husband to feed, clothe and protect his wife and unmarried daughters. This duty was expressed with the tradition of veiling. By veiling his bride, a man accepts a woman as his wife and the responsibility of clothing and feeding her.²⁶ The veil was a mark that a woman was under the protection of her husband (his family and tribe). Actually, the use of veil was forbidden for slaves and prostitutes, since they were not 'respectable' wives or daughters²⁷

Hammurabi' Law also guarded the reputation of women. False accusations were punished²⁸; in the case of a rape of a virgin, the woman was not seen as guilty²⁹; and a woman could, on certain conditions, take a divorce³⁰. Women and men were also equal in the cases of proven adultery and incest – both were to die although the husband had the right to pardon her³¹.

The question of prostitution is so complex that van der Toorn writes about it as follows: "Our imagination about this rests mainly on hearsay and this is pre-eminently an area in which many people easily let their imagination run wild³²." Herodotos is one of the ancient sources that has influenced the view on South West Asian women.. According to him, after decrease of their economy, Babylonians had a practise to prostitute their unmarried children³³. This part of Herodotos' information might well be true, since sacral prostitution was part of the Ishtar cult. Van der Toorn mentions that temples used girls also as merchandise in order to create income from their services³⁴. Along with daughters of impoverished families, also female prisoners of war were used as prostitutes.

Totally another question is the issue of lay sacred prostitution and/or sacrifice of maidenhood, which was also attached to Ishtar cult. On this theme, Herodotos' information is much debated. He says that "Every woman born in the country must once in her life go and sit down in the precinct of Venus³⁵, and there consort with a stranger³⁶." Some Assyriologists reject this information totally,

²⁶ Van der Toorn 1996, 43ff.

²⁷ Lerner 1986, 248ff.

²⁸ CH § 127.

²⁹ CH § 130.

³⁰ CH §§ 134f., 142.

³¹ CH § 129, 157.

³² Van der Toorn 1994, 93.

³³ Herodotos 1:196. In another part of his work (I:93) that Lydian girls practise pre-marital prostitution and collect their dowry in that way.

³⁴ Van der Toorn 1994, 103; Lerner 1986, 244, 247.

³⁵ Herodotos used not the Latin name Venus, as in the English translation, but the Greek Afrodite.

³⁶ Herodotos 1:199.

mainly on the basis of the valued status of virginity among Oriental people³⁷ but also because of the nature of Herodotos' work – it was a political book aiming to show the troops of Xerxes as barbarian as possible³⁸. Obviously, Herodotos' information referred to some kind of tradition of sacrificing women's maidenhead to Ishtar, Babylonian goddess of fertility, through sacral lovemaking in the temple. The archetype of this tradition is the sacred marriage between Ishtar and Tammuz that was acted by the king/high priest and high priestess during the Tammuz festival. We do not know whether this practice was also imitated by lower ranks of the population³⁹. However, in Gilgamesh Epic, there is a passage that might be related to this. Gilgamesh, as an *ensi* of Uruk, claims his right to *ius primae noctis* (first night right)⁴⁰ which Enkidu then rejects from him⁴¹. This might reflect a diminishing prehistoric tradition of sacrifice of virginity in the temple. If the rite of virginity sacrifice before marriage had existed in Sumer, it had given way to Akkadian emphasis on virginity up to marriage⁴².

Sacred prostitution was also manifested in other ways. Van der Toorn describes the practice of vows. Both sexes made vows in the temple and vows to gods had to be fulfilled as soon as possible. A woman that had made a vow to a god, could be in trouble, since her own property was often limited. If her husband was not willing to pay (or he did not about it), the woman had to pay it by any means and temporary sacral prostitution in a temple was an accepted way to do that.⁴³

However, although sacral prostitution, in general was accepted, there were vast differences in local customs⁴⁴. Basically, the polarisation was between the Ishtar cult with relatively free sexual intercourse and trend to keep women isolated and their sexuality restricted to their husbands in order to make sure that the children are husband's.

TO SUM UP, the Mesopotamian society was not egalitarian but hierarchical. Moreover, these hierarchies were seen as fixed according to heavenly model. After all, humans were on earth to do serve gods. However, the smooth function of the organism of the society also required protection of

³⁷ Van der Toorn 1994, 107.

³⁸ Rollinger 2000, 69f. Rollinger (idem. 76) sees that many Herodotos' stories "belong to a kind of literary 'gene pool' in the Near East."

³⁹ A hint to this might be the tradition of the 'right of the first night' of the landlord that was practised still in feudal Europe. Gilgamesh, who was often accused of running after women, made sure that

⁴⁰ On *ius primae noctis*, see Wettlaufer 2000.

⁴¹ EG II:iv,33-39; II:vi,10-14. Another passage, that deals with Gilgamesh's sexual misbehaviour is at I:ii,16f.,28f.

⁴² On the other hand, the Midrashic texts present a legend that Hasmonean rebellion started when Seleudikes required *ius primae noctis* (Patai 1974, 177f. according to Wettlaufer 2000; Hanuka n.d.)

⁴³ Van der Toorn 1994, 97-102.

⁴⁴ Still in pre-Islamic Arabia, there were vast variation in the marriage practices, status of women and, especially attitudes to their children's origin.

the non-privileged against the arbitrariness of the nobles. This was achieved by the legislation that set fixed standards of relationships and protected even the life of slaves.

Hierarchies inside of the family or clan were accompanied with the hierarchy of families and clans. Women in Mesopotamia did not have independent status. Their role arose from their role as reproducers of the kin and from their value as labour force. They were under the authorship of the head of the family but, on the other hand, this system guaranteed them food and clothing.

Widowed and divorced women had more independence as well as nuns of the temples. They had right to make legal contracts and to rule their property.

Egypt

The Egyptian society was first and foremost a communal society. Modern concepts of individual rights were something that an Egyptian simply could not imagine since, from their perspective, it would mean isolationism. This, in turn, was seen as the worst fate of an individual.

Women's position in Egypt should be seen in this general frame of dependence. In general, women were treated better than perhaps in any other ancient culture. They were legally independent persons who could own and sell⁴⁵ property and who could act by themselves in legal matters.⁴⁶

The Egyptian family can be seen patriarchal like the Mesopotamian but there were certain differences. In the, so called, *Hekanakhte Papers* we see how Hekanakhte takes care of his elderly mother and some other relatives. Hekanakhte also performs authority of the paterfamilia and organises the works of his household. When he shares proportions of barley and other supplies to his household members, he performs three principles. First, there is the principle of honour. According to this principle, his mother gets relatively larger share than just according to head counting would allow. Second, there is the principle of need. Thus, there are some families that have income from other sources and Hekanakhte only gives them an amount that their total income is equat to others. Finally, there is a principle of transparency. Hekanakhte tells in detail how much he is giving to whom and supposedly the principles are generally accepted.⁴⁷

However, patriarchy in Egypt was not the same as in Mesopotamia.

⁴⁵ For Herodotos (II:35) this was a wonder. He states that roles of sexes in Egypt are opposite than among other nations: "The women attend the markets and trade, while the men sit at home at the loom."

⁴⁶ Lorton 1995, 349; Tyldesley 2000, 78.

⁴⁷ Ezzamel 2002, 240.

Since harmony was greatly valued in Egypt, it meant that ideal family life should follow this principle. Although the society was patriarchal, it was not despotic. Maxims of Ptahhotep reveal well the Egyptian ideal for the family life:

When You prosper and found your house,
And love your wife with ardor,
Fill her belly, clothe her back,
Ointment soothes her body.
Gladden her heart as long as you live.
She is a fertile field for her lord.
Do not contend with her in court,
Keep her from power, restrain her --
Her eye is her storm when she gazes --
Thus will you make her stay in your house⁴⁸

This advice shows three issues in woman's position. First, she was equal with her husband - to a degree that she could 'dictate where the closet stands', as a Finnish saying states. She had right to raise a case against his husband in a court and she had right to divorce from her husband. Thus, a man should treat his wife with respect and love.

Like in most societies, women's status and role was defined by fertility issues. In principle, sexuality and marriage in Egypt were private matters of those who were involved with it. Thus, for example, sex between singles was no problem, and single mothers and their children were not despised. The point was that in marriage a man had to be sure that the child he fed, reared and who would inherit him, was his. This aspect required fidelity from the part of the wife - but not from the husband. Infidelity of the wife could lead to her beating and this was considered legally justified⁴⁹. In general, beating of the wife was a private offend. However, more probable fate was the divorce, loss of property and social shame.⁵⁰

Childbirth happened at home and there is no evidence of (semi-)professional midwives. A mother was anyway assisted by other females. Men probably had some role in the childbirth since Papyrus Turin 2044 mentions that the necropolis workman Kasa had three day 'father-leave' since his wife was in childbirth. After the birth, there was a segregation period of 15 to 40 days.⁵¹

⁴⁸ AEL I, 69.

⁴⁹ Both Herodotos (II:111) and Westcar Papyrus story of the Wax Crocodile (LAE, 16ff.) mention burning to death as a punishment to female infidelity. The Tale of Two Brothers (AEL II, 207), an Egyptian equivalence to the Biblical Joseph and Potifar's wife story (Gen 39: 5-20), tells that the lying wife was killed and thrown to the dogs. Diodorus Siculus (I:78 - quoted in Tyldesley (2000, 160) mentions mutilation of the nose of an adulterous wife, 1000 blows to his lover and castration as a punishment for rape. However, Diodorus is not always reliable witness. One must also be careful with Herodotos and Westcar Papyrus, since we do not know from which source Herodotos got his information. Westcar papyrus story, in turn, is a fairytale and its punishments should be categorised into the same class as those in the Fairytales of Grimm Brothers.

⁵⁰ Tyldesley 2000, 153-161.

⁵¹ Meskell2002, 70-75.

Child-rearing was the duty of a mother since men could be away for long periods in the pharaoh's building projects. This men's absence made the wife a mistress of the house. Papyrus Berlin 3027 emphasises in an instruction that a son has to recognise that it was his mother that has made most for his rearing and care.⁵²

While the status of a free woman was almost equal to the man, same cannot be said on female slaves. Along with their domestic duties, they were supposed to serve as concubines of their masters. If they were lucky, their masters would marry them but more often they were, as Tyldesley notes "breeding machines, either for the production of slave-children or as surrogate mothers to the free-born⁵³."

Prostitution in general was an accepted profession although we do not have much records on it⁵⁴. However, the interesting point is Herodotos' mention that "the Egyptians first made it a point of religion to have no converse with women in the sacred places⁵⁵." Thus, Egyptian temples did not practice sacral prostitution like Mesopotamians did.

Israel

Israel lied on a narrow fertile strip between Mediterranean and Arabian desert. It was the node point of caravan routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia, Red Sea coast and Europe. Moreover, there were important harbours, like Sidon, Tyro, Kesarea, Joppe and Gaza. Being a crossroads of international trade, Palestine was a cosmopolitan area that was influenced by its larger neighbours.

Women's status in Israel was, in a nutshell, something between those of traditions in Babylon and Egypt. Perhaps, however, closer to Mesopotamia than Egypt. Moreover, it seems that the more time passed from Exodus, the more Israeli people forgot the equality of men and women⁵⁶.

In the Bible, there are several views on women and their status. First, there is the tradition where a woman is presented as a silent and obedient partner of her husband. A stereotype of this kind of woman is Abraham's wife Sarah. Second, there are strong and intelligent women who make their own decisions and lead their men where they want. This kind of woman we find from the first pages

⁵² Meskell 2002, 76

⁵³ Tyldesley 2000, 82. She refers to so called Adoption Papyrus which tells about such a case. A more familiar story is the Biblical Hagar story (Gen 16) which shows that the practice was known outside Egypt as well.

⁵⁴ Herodotos (II: 126) quotes an Egyptian story in which even Pharaoh Khufu (Kheops) prostituted her daughter. The tone of the condemnation of his action was not in the prostitution itself but in the avarice of the king.

⁵⁵ Herodotos II:64.

⁵⁶ Eileen Schuller (1989) has compared the frame of women in Exodus stories to those of a corpus that she calls 'rewritten Bible' from the Second Temple time. She notes that "the strong female presence... in... the biblical stories has been muted when these stories were retold (idem. 189)."

of Genesis where Eve is presented as more active than Adam. Also Song of Songs present women as actors and as equal partners of men. Third, there is the effective housewife presented in Proverbs. Fourth, there were brave women that saved the people in some crisis or war. Those midwives that saved Hebrew boys in Egypt were one of the first in this category. Fifth, there were also national female leaders like Deborah, Moses' sister Miriam and Esther. However, there are also negative descriptions of women that do not have the virtues that are required from the respectable women, like prostitutes. It seems that there are different historical layers and loans from neighbouring cultures that present women differently.

As in both Babylon and Egypt, woman's sexuality belonged to her husband since he had to be sure that children he fed were his. In a patriarchal society, a woman was under the paternal authority - first, of her father and, later, her husband. However, in research, there has been a paradigm shift whether she was seen as a property (older research) or not (newer research). The newer research emphasises both her duties and her rights⁵⁷.

Christopher J.H. Wright argues that Israeli "wives were not their husband's property, but neither did they have independent legal status." The key for the understanding of this status is in the beginning of Genesis: "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh"⁵⁸. Although this was a relational expression, it was also understood as a legal statement in Israel: man and wife were not any more individuals but a unity. This unity aspect is emphasised in the first creation story as well: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"⁵⁹. In practice, this meant that the wife was an extension of her husband's personality since, according to Genesis 2:18, God gave her to him as a helper. These two Genesis passages state pretty well the general frame of the Israeli married woman. First, she was under the authority of her husband but not as a property but part of him since a human was created as man *and* woman. Moreover, when a woman was created from the rib of man, she is essential part of man. This means that a human being is incomplete alone and meant to be in marriage. Second, marriage was not only a civil contract between families but God ruled institution. Third, violation against a woman was violation against his man. Fourth, marriage was a miniature reflection of the covenant between God and his bride, Israel. This covenant element elevated matrimony to a sacral level. Therefore every violation against the matrimony was a sacral violation against the covenant that was punished by death of both adulterers⁶⁰. However, here must

⁵⁷ A review on research on women's status in Israel can be found in Wright (1990, 183-221).

⁵⁸ Gen 2:24

⁵⁹ Gen 1:27.

⁶⁰ Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22.

be stressed that there was a discrepancy between males and females. Man's intercourse with a slave or a prostitution was not adultery but wife's intercourse with any other but her husband was.

The general frame of impurity of human's discharges was another question related to the covenant. In general, woman's discharges were more common and, thus, her impurity was far longer than man's⁶¹. This might also be the reason why Israeli's did not accept female priests: participation religious rituals required purity and women's impurity was too frequent.⁶²

The general anthropology, however, does not exclude the fact that Israel was men's society in every level and women were subordinated to their male relatives. Early Israelite families were Mesopotamian style patriarchal households and clans. This is understandable from the point of view that a tribe was both economic and military unit where chain of command should be fast and clear. Everyone had their fixed places and women's place was not in the front line but in the service troops. A significant aspect that has not been much discussed in literature is the impact of military duties on status of sexes⁶³. Max Weber notes that

the desire to maintain the existence of the families which could provide equipped recruits for the army and were inscribed in military registers, served to strengthen the inheritance rights of daughters. It also justified the levirate, by which a childless dead man's widow passed by law to his closest male relative, in order that he might 'awaken' the dead man's seed in the widow.⁶⁴

Women's lot in the household was, thus, that of a subordinate partner of the couple. The ideal of an Israeli woman is expressed in Proverbs as one who

is worth far more than rubies.
Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.
She brings him good, not harm,
all the days of her life.⁶⁵

The description of a noble wife goes on with her duties. Along with devotion, the most important virtues seem to be her diligence, charity and wisdom. Diligence is emphasised in the verses that applaud her rising up for work when it is still night and continuing it when it is already dark. Her

⁶¹ Lev 15.

⁶² Witherington 1998, 8.

⁶³ Max Weber (1996, 155f) has pointed out that "because the peasants had no military role except of camp followers they were powerless, and so they were often unable in practice - sometimes even in theory - to defend their legal rights." Nathaniel Harris (2001, 79f.), in turn, has pointed the fact that in Athenian military power rested on navy, which needed rowers who came from lower classes and that this was the reason for Athenian democracy. Contrary to this, Sparta's military force was based on the hoplite forces of the elite class and there was no need for lower class involvement.

⁶⁴ Weber 1996, 144.

⁶⁵ Prov 31:10-12. This Adoration of a good wife is an alphabetical poem with first letters of verses following the order of Hebrew alphabets.

charity is seen when "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy." Her wisdom occurs both in her housekeeping and in her kind advises to her neighbours.⁶⁶

In her housekeeping she has also some significant rights according to this poem⁶⁷. First, she seem to be the manager of the whole house with a power to organise works according to her best understanding. Second, along with her husband's property, she masters her own property to the extent that "she considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.." Third, the earnings she get come from small scale home industry that she sells to tradesmen. Fourth, she was not bound to the house since, "She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar."⁶⁸

Although women were seen as 'helpers' for the man, this did not mean that they did not have any independent rights. There was a similar emphasis on mutual love and respect as in Egypt. Also children were required to show similar respect to their mothers as they showed to their fathers⁶⁹. Although law put women under the leadership of their husbands, women definitely have their ways in making sure that their husbands did not forget what their wives wanted. A Proverb "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife⁷⁰" surely has some practical wisdom. In every culture, a wise husband learns quickly how to keep his wife satisfied - otherwise his life can be miserable.

In public life, women were often represented as active and powerful individuals. Although we do not have knowledge of any Israeli Queens ruling alone, we have mention of female judge⁷¹ named Debora⁷², who was called 'the Mother of Israel'⁷³. Moreover, many times the very existence of the nation is said to have been rested on the action of some women⁷⁴.

TO SUM UP, the status of Israeli women was somewhere between Mesopotamian and Egyptian customs. A woman was not a free individual but under the authority of the master of the house. However, she was not seen as a subordinate but a partner who was the manager of the house and, in

⁶⁶ Prov 31: 15, 18, 20, 26.

⁶⁷ Because of the high status of a wife, some exegetes have regarded verse 16 as an exaggeration (Fritsch 1955, 955). However, as Fritsch (1955, 957) mentions, the use of the word 'daughter' in verse 29 (KJV translates correctly) "may be a survival from a time when a woman, even after marriage, remained a member of her father's family, and so was called daughter." However, since proverbs have much Egyptian material and the woman's status in this poem resembles that in Egypt, it is more probable that either this poem or the whole Israeli society in the time, when the poem was written, was influenced by Egyptian customs.

⁶⁸ Prov 31: 14, 16, 24

⁶⁹ Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16. The passage of Leviticus is interesting since it mentions mother before father.

⁷⁰ Prov 21:9; 25:24

⁷¹ The judge institution in Israel was based on charismatic leadership of people who were recognised as God's chosen leaders of the people. In one sense, an Israeli judge could be compared to the Egyptian vizier: (s)he was both a leader and a judge.

⁷² Judg. 4-5.

⁷³ Judg. 5:7.

⁷⁴ Judg. 4:4ff., 17ff.; 1 Sam 19:11-17; 2 Sam 17:17-20.

this position, had right to make legal transactions. Her public life was not forbidden but it was severely restrained because of the purity laws that required cultic purity from all participating the cult.

Greco-Roman World

Women's status in Greece varied from town to town. As a rough generalisation, it can be said that there were two basic models, Athenian and Spartan. Respectively, Greek philosophers were divided in their preferences as well. Majority of them, starting from Aristotle and Hippocrates, favoured Athenian system of seclusion of women inside the houses. Plato, in turn, along with few others, favoured the Spartan equality of men and women. In Plato's attitude, we can find an echo of his respect on Egyptian political system.

Athens

Like in Mesopotamia and Egypt, household, *oikos*, was the basis of the society in Athens as well⁷⁵. Household was the main unit of production and kin life. Also in the same way, the household was led by master of the house, *kyrios*. It was this *oikos* that was the realm of Athenian women. The attitude of Athenians is well presented in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*:

...human beings live not in the open air, like beasts, but obviously need shelter. Nevertheless, those who mean to win store to fill the covered place, have need of someone to work at the open-air occupations; since ploughing, sowing, planting and grazing are all such open-air employments; and these supply the needful food. Then again, as soon as this is stored in the covered place, then there is need of someone to keep it and to work at the things that must be done under cover. Cover is needed for the nursing of the infants; cover is needed for the making of the corn into bread, and likewise for the manufacture of clothes from the wool. And since both the indoor and the outdoor tasks demand labour and attention. God from the first adapted the woman's nature, I think, to the indoor and man's to the outdoor tasks and cares.⁷⁶

The root metaphor that Xenophon uses on woman is the queen bee⁷⁷, who stays indoors⁷⁸.

Primarily, she had one major task: give birth, raise new citizens and, through these activities, give

⁷⁵ Se Blundell (1995, 113) argues that "most of our knowledge about women in Classical Greece relates to Athens." However, she warns that Athens was not an average Greek town and, thus, its data can not be used in portraying the whole Greek situation (idem.).

⁷⁶ Xenophon 7:9-22.

⁷⁷ When, in the discussion, Ischomachus' wife asks how her task resembles that of a queen bee, Ischomachus answers: "How? she stays in the hive," I answered, "and does not suffer the bees to be idle; but those whose duty it is to work outside she sends forth to their work; and whatever each of them brings in, she knows and receives it, and keeps it till it is wanted. And when the time is come to use it, she portions out the just share to each. She likewise presides over the weaving of the combs in the hive, that they may be well and quickly woven, and cares for the brood of little ones, that it be duly reared up. And when the young bees have been duly reared and are fit for work, she sends them forth to found a colony, with a leader to guide the young adventurers." (Xenophon 7: 33, 34)

⁷⁸ Xenophon 7: 17, 32.

her part in maintaining both the *oikos* and the city. According to him, "to be woman it is more honourable to stay indoors than to abide in the fields, but to the man it is unseemly rather to stay indoors than to attend to the work outside⁷⁹."

This seclusion of women indoors was even justified by Greek understanding of medicine. The Hippocratic Corpus framed a human as born hot and wet. In time, (s)he will cool and dry. According to this frame, women were more wet than men (menstruation was used as a guarantee of this) and women's wetness was actually a mark of femininity. Thus, under the hot Mediterranean sun, it was necessary to protect women from drying and keep them indoors.⁸⁰

Thus, when Athenians secluded upper class women indoors, it was a similar act of honour as veiling was in Assyria. Sue Blundell expresses it as follows: "As an effective demonstration of man's ability to protect the purity of his womenfolk, it would have been a mark of masculinity, of status and of wealth, and it is little wonder that it was mentioned by speakers in the law courts who were anxious to stress their respectability⁸¹."

This 'protection' of women had naturally several consequences regarding women's legal status and rights. First, when a respectable woman did not go outdoors, it was the *kyrios* who presented her in the public and made both legal and economic decisions for her and of her. In general, Athenian women did not have right to make legal contracts except some petty trading⁸². Second, they were not able to give a testimony in a court (since just appearing in public would have shown that she was not respectable). Third, since marriage in Greece was mainly a legal contract, a woman did not have a say over her marriage⁸³, divorce⁸⁴, dowry⁸⁵ or inheritance⁸⁶ although these forms of property could not be separated from her.

⁷⁹ Xenophon 7: 30.

⁸⁰ In women in Hippocratic corpus, see King 1994.

⁸¹ Blundell 1995, 138.

⁸² According to Isaeus (10:10), the barter value of an Athenian woman was limited to the value of one *medimnos* of barley, which was enough for feeding a family for five or six days. (Blundell 1995, 114)

⁸³ Men got usually married at the age of 30, girls' first age of marriage was between 14 and 18 - normally closer to the younger end of the continuum. The normal principle was that women were married to their first or second cousins because this kept the property in the extended family. (Blundell 1995, 119f.)

⁸⁴ Divorce in Athens was easy but it also meant paying back the dowry. This, along with the father's right to claim divorce secured her from both too easy divorce and mistreatment from the part of the husband. If a wife wanted a divorce, her father claimed it. (Blundell 1995, 127)

⁸⁵ Her dowry was her share of her paternal inheritance and it was delivered to her husband. When a son was born, the dowry was his inheritance. The role of the husband in relation to the dowry was somewhat that of the trusted man. (Blundell 1995, 115f.)

⁸⁶ There was a complex system that stated what to do in cases when a man did not have a son. Adoption was one possibility and often some of the relative male was adopted as a son. However, he was obliged to marry the daughter of the house in order to become a *kyrios*. If there was no adoption, the one of the close male relatives (*anchisteia*) had to marry the female heir, *epikleros* (= 'with the property'). This system resembled the Semitic system of levirate and in this process woman's role was to be a mediator via whom the property was channelled to grandsons. The

On the other hand, Blundell mentions that there are good reasons to suppose that women executed significant power inside the houses. Some texts indicate that in family meetings they had a voice. As managers of the households, they may also have arranged some issues behind the backs of their husbands. Moreover, they could also have used sex as a weapon to turn the head of their husbands⁸⁷. Thus, "between the cracks of the legal and normative framework there appear these glimpses of an alternative and informal pattern of female power."⁸⁸

In this system, also the sexuality of a woman was strictly guarded. The blood origin was important, not only to define the inheritance of the *oikos* but it defined the citizenship as well. The law of 451/0 BC required that both parents had to be Athenian citizens in order that a child could have the citizenship. Therefore, woman's sexual behaviour was not only a domestic issue but a political matter as well. Thus, it is not surprising that adultery, *moicheia*, was a serious offence. Any citizen that found a man in an unauthorised sexual intercourse with a woman under his guardianship had a legitimate right to kill him at the spot⁸⁹. The punishment for the woman was less severe: her husband's duty was to divorce her and she was excluded from the religious ceremonies⁹⁰ of the town.⁹¹

Although the segregation was a mark of nobility, the legal status of women was applied to lower class free women as well. The major difference was that they had to work outside the house for economic reasons. They did not have slaves to work for them, they did not have wells in their house yards but had to use common well, etc. Moreover, segregation was most practised in the city and until the Peloponnesian War, majority of Athenians lived in rural areas. Thus, there was a disjuncture between male ideal and actual practice.⁹²

Athenian aristocracy had rather common practice to keep concubines. Mostly they were slaves or resident aliens but often there were also concubines from lower class citizens, whose fathers were not able to give sufficient dowry. Concubines become under the protection of their *kyrios* and their status was lower than a wife but definitely she was a free citizen. However, her children, in classical

epiklerate was so strong system that it was even a duty for the becoming new *kyrios*, to divorce from his former wife and marry the *epikleros* in order to save the *oikos* from perish. The same rule was valid for the *epikleros* as well: she had to divorce from her husband and marry the claimant. (Blundell 1995, 116ff.)

⁸⁷ Actually, one famous Greek story tells that this 'weapon' was once used by wives of two fighting armies. Wives refuted sex from their husbands until they signed the peace treatment.

⁸⁸ Blundell 1995, 143f.

⁸⁹ However, there was always the risk that the relatives of the killed would accuse him on murder and this mostly prevented from instant killing - especially, if there were no witnesses. (Blundell 1995, 125).

⁹⁰ Religious ceremonies were the only public meetings where Athenian women were allowed to participate. Thus, exclusion from these activities would mean total exclusion from public. If she occurred in public, any male citizen could tear her naked and beat her. (Blundell 1995, 125).

⁹¹ Blundell 1995, 125f.

period, did not have part of the paternal inheritance nor did they get citizenship. In the time of the Peloponnesian War, the situation demanded citizenship to the sons of freeborn Athenian concubines.⁹³

TO SUM UP, Athenians preferred to seclude their upper class women inside their houses. This seclusion was framed as protection of woman's femininity and chastity. However, the consequence of this seclusion was that Athenian women did not have any political rights but that their sons with an Athenian citizen would have the citizenship as well. Although women had legal rights, they did not have a say how these rights were implemented: it was their father, husband or son who, as a *kyrios* of the *oikos* represented them.

Sparta

Unfortunately our knowledge on Spartan women is indirect. All mentions of their status come from non-Spartan men, who either admired the system or disgusted it. Two important sources are some verses in Plato's *Republic*⁹⁴ and in Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* where Plutarch quotes some Lucurgus' laws⁹⁵.

The starting point of any explanation of Sparta is the description that 'Sparta did not have an army - Sparta was an army'. It was this militaristic point of view that stated the status of Spartan women as well as its males. In principle, Sparta aimed to reduce the private sphere and increase the public sphere. Thus, Spartans favoured public communal means instead of family gatherings; male Spartans spent most of their life in barracks; and Spartans saw children, not belonging to their parents, but to the state⁹⁶.

Like in Athens, the grand duty of women was to give birth to new citizens and raise them to good warriors. However, although this influenced the life of the Spartan women, it was not the only duty of them. The other duty was to maintain the city while men were at war.

When principles above were applied to women's life there occurred significant aspects of equality. First, according to Spartan frame, giving birth to strong warriors required strong mothers. This, in turn, meant that women's nutrition in Sparta was far more better than in Athens. Moreover, young girls took part of the physical education in a similar manner than boys. They trained along

⁹² Blundell 1995, 136ff.

⁹³ Blundell 1995, 124f.

⁹⁴ Collected extracts on women in *Republic* in Lefkowitz and Fant (1982, 66-75).

⁹⁵ Collected extracts on women in *Life of Lycurgus* in Lefkowitz and Fant (1982, 76ff.).

⁹⁶ Blundell 1995, 150.

with boys and participated in games along with them. Perhaps most shocking to Athenians, who guarded the chastity of their womenfolk, was that this was done totally nude.⁹⁷

Another aspect in childbirth was that Spartans did not emphasise the blood of descendants as much as Athenians. Or, perhaps better, they wanted to have best breeders and best carriers for the babies. This meant that an elderly husband could ask some younger hero to impregnate his wife for him. Also a wife of healthy boys could carry a children for some other than for her husband. Thus, there was a system of both 'wife lending' and 'man lending'. It was question of breeding in order to get as good soldiers as possible. For obvious reasons, other Greeks thought that there was hardly a single respectable woman in Sparta at all.⁹⁸

Men's concentration on war-work meant that women had to take care of the *oikos* to the extent that would be impossible in Athens. Aristotle mentions in his *Politics* that, in his time, nearly two-fifths of the landed property was owned by women⁹⁹. This was due to the inheritance system that allowed women to inherit, own and master both movable and landed property.¹⁰⁰

Women's strong position in Sparta was further enchanted by the fact that fathers had a relatively small role in the *oikos*. First, men lived up to 30 year in army barracks although they often married at the age of 20. When boys moved to barracks in the age of seven, fathers hardly had possibility to live with their sons. From this perspective, the mother-son relationship was the most important relationship inside the *oikos*. Outside the *oikos*, the companionship between fellow fighters might have been still more important but father - son relationship remained weak.

This Spartan model, along with his admiration on Egyptian society, made Plato to note that Athenian society uses only half of its resources when it neglects women. Plato compared human societies to dog packs where both sexes do equally hunting and guards flocks. For him, it is only question of giving both sexes similar education and the only difference will be that women are physically weaker than men.¹⁰¹

TO SUM UP, in Sparta women were almost equal to men. They had right to own and manage property, they had similar education and they practically took care of the state while men were at war.

⁹⁷ Blundell 1995, 152f.

⁹⁸ Blundell 1995, 154f.

⁹⁹ Lefkowitz & Fant 1982, 65.

¹⁰⁰ Blundell 1995, 155f.

¹⁰¹ Lefkowitz & Fant 1982, 66f.

Rome

Rome during the first century BC was in transformation. Along with Caesar and Augustus, the old republic was turning to an empire. However, political changes were accompanied by break of many old customs - including those dealing with the status of women. Thus, Rome before 300 BC and Rome at the time of Christ are two different realms.

The traditional role of a Roman *Matron* was that of a housewife. Although under husband's authority, she was a mistress of the house who kept everything in order and works going smoothly. Susan Fischler has summarised that

The ideal woman was noted for her beauty, fertility and faithfulness to her husband, as well as her ability to run the household. In short, the image is one of a refined woman whose life focused on the needs of her family and household.¹⁰²

This traditional Roman frame of woman's position under man differed only in nuances from that in the Eastern Mediterranean. A father had an authority (*patria potestas*) on his children. In marriage, a woman was led under the authority of his husband (marriage *in manum*). In general, a woman was always under authority of some male, father, husband, son - or in their absence, some other male relative. This authority was absolute: a *paterfamilia* was both the leader and the supreme judge of the household. Thus, still in the time of Cato the elder, a man had right to punish his adulterous wife with death.¹⁰³

The major difference to the Athenian system was that Roman *Matron* was not secluded inside the house. Rather her position resembled more of those women in Sparta where they could freely come and go. She did what was necessary to her duties as *Matron*.

During the first century BC this the authority of the *paterfamilia* diminished and this favoured both children and wife. One of the most significant changes was that a marriage required a commitment of both parties. A woman could not be delivered to a husband against woman's will. Jérôme Carcopino argues that "a woman entered to her home free and lived there as equal to her husband." Actually, he adds that this new Roman wedding, except offering rituals, has been preserved to modern times by the Christian church.¹⁰⁴

Like in all societies where women are dependant on their male counterparts, divorce is a serious matter for a woman. Still in third century BC. a husband had right to claim the divorce (=claim the keys of the house back) while women did not have similar right. However, the divorce did not

¹⁰² Fischler 1994, 117.

¹⁰³ Carcopino 1980, 103, 107, 120f.

¹⁰⁴ Carcopino 1980 108f.

happen just by throwing the lady out but the husband had to bring the case in front of the family council and prove that she had committed a crime or misbehaviour that permitted the divorce. During the two first centuries BC also this changed. First, both partners could divorce and, second, no specific reason was required. Although the new practice made women equal to men, it did not emerge without cost for the society. More and more marriages become childless and 'open'. Divorces among elite become almost epidemic in imperial Rome when both men and women used this new liberal atmosphere.¹⁰⁵

Seneca has expressed this new *zeitgeist* as follows:

Is any woman ashamed of being divorced, now that some noble ladies reckon the years of their lives, not by the number of the consuls, but by that of their husbands, now that they leave their homes in order to marry others, and marry only in order to be divorced?¹⁰⁶

Augustus tried to reduce the number of divorces in his law on upper class marriages (*Lex de ordinibus maritandis*). These laws had significant effects on women's economic rights. First, he permitted that a divorced woman could claim back her dowry (*actio rei uxoriae*) - even in cases when it was not stated in a marriage contract. The exception was that part that was needed for the maintenance of children (*propter liberos*), recovering of those damage that she had caused by her extravagance (*propter impensas*), by her embezzlement (*propter res amotas*) or by her misbehaviour (*propter mores*). Second, according this law, a husband had no authority over that part of the dowry that contained landed property in Italy.¹⁰⁷

However, from the modern perspective, this temporary liberty and power of women was a Pyrrhos' victory since Roman male writers despised it - and articulated their opinion promptly. Their critics, in turn, has been one of the most effective mechanisms that has hindered women's equality. Especially Juvenalis has sharp comments of Roman elite women and their practice to use their freedom and economic power.

The interesting point, that few either women scholars or scholars of Roman antiquity has noted, is the curious coincidentalness of new Roman legislation and occupation of Egypt where women's rights were much larger than in any other ancient societies. It has to be remembered that both Caesar and Augustus spent some time in Egypt.

¹⁰⁵ Carcopino 1980, 121ff.

¹⁰⁶ Seneca III 16, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Carcopino 1980, 124.

Women in Emerging Christianity

Women's status in early Christianity is a much debated issue since interpretations are often linked to the question of female priesthood in modern Protestant churches. Thus, in the interpretations of women's status in cult, too often "taste of the pot" can be sensed. In other matters, the discussion is not so heated.

In principle, early Christianity did not differentiate between men and women. If one reads the gospels, (s)he can see how significant role women had in the central stories. In Jesus' birth and childhood stories, the main figure is his mother, Mary, when Joseph is just somewhere behind. Two Jesus' friends, sisters Martha and Mary, live together and master their own household. Their brother Lazarus is again a by-person. In stories of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection, women are at the front when Jesus' male disciples hide in shadows. Significantly, it were the women who first announced that the tomb was empty.

However, the gospels paint also a picture that is more conventional. When Joseph heard that Mary was already pregnant, he planned to divorce her. When a woman was found from adultery, a mob was about to stone her. One of the last words of Jesus were the delivery of the family patronship to his disciple John, who from that moment took care of Mary.

In Pauline letters we can also see this dichotomy. On one hand, we can read that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus¹⁰⁸." Along with male evangelists and apostles, there were also female ones like Phoebe, Priscilla, Persis, Euodia and Syntyche¹⁰⁹. On the other hand, women are not allowed to teach in the meetings of the congregation or have leadership posts¹¹⁰ and that "the head of the woman is man¹¹¹". However, the denial of women in leadership is in the Letter to Timothy, which is normally regarded as a pseudepigraph from the beginning of the second century when Christianity had assimilated to the surrounding society. What comes to the 'man as woman's head' Robin Scroggs argues that the Greek word *kephalee* meant in metaphorical use of Paul's days, not 'authority' but 'source'¹¹². Thus, according to this explanation, Paul was referring to the Genesis' story of creation.

In general, there was a distinction between the attitudes of the early church to women and the attitudes of the more established church of the second century. Jesus' attitude to women broke many rabbinic rules. He taught willingly women - also in private. He was not afraid of the cultic impurity

¹⁰⁸ Gal 3:28

¹⁰⁹ Rom 16:1, 3, 15; Phil 4:2-3.

¹¹⁰ 1 Tim 2:12

¹¹¹ 1 Cor 11:3.

that women's menstruation may cause. He saw them as equal human beings. In general, his attitude towards women was much alike that of Egyptians¹¹³. It seems that one task of the further research is to find out to what degree the Mediterranean world was Egyptinised during the first century of the Roman Empire.

Historians have long been aware that one major form through which Christianity spread to upper classes was through the kitchen door. During the first century of Christianity, women outnumbered men in the church membership. This was significant since, as Rodney Stark argues, due to frequent female infanticide in Greco-Roman world, men outnumbered women by "140 males per 100 females in Italy, Asia Minor, and North Africa¹¹⁴." When Christians prohibited all forms of infanticide and abortion, this equalised the ratio between men and women in the second generation Christians. Christian women converted Christianity, married pagan husbands and either converted them or, at least, make them protect Christians. Stark calls this phenomenon 'secondary conversion' where the spouse goes reluctantly along with his wife. In this sense, primary conversion to Christianity followed the same pattern that religious conversion in general has had in the 19th and 20th centuries: 60-75 percent of primary converts to religious movements are female.¹¹⁵

There were several reasons why Christianity appealed women. First, there was the general teaching of equality that Jesus and apostles preached. Second, in spite of the new legislation, widows in Greco-Roman world were often forced to remarry and, thus, deliver their property to their new husbands. Christian widows, instead, did not face such social pressure - on the contrary, when the church waited for the close coming of the lord, Paul advised people not to marry but stay unmarried. This had impact on the widowed women's economic status. While well to do widows were able to keep their property, the church followed the Oriental custom to support widows who had no male breadwinner. Third, while Roman girls were forced to marry in the age of 12, half of the Christian girls married at the age of 18 and third between 15 and 18. Thus, perhaps having an experience of being child bride, women could have preferred the Christian practice over to Roman one.¹¹⁶

However, like in many religious and social movements, second generation is closer to general population than the generation of the revival. In the case of Christianity, this meant that customs

¹¹² Scroggs 1976, 967.

¹¹³ Unfortunately we do not know how long Jesus and his parents remained in Egypt. However, it cannot be outruled that Joseph had treated Mary according to Egyptian custom and that this 'family-model' would have influenced Jesus in his childhood.

¹¹⁴ Stark 1996, 97.

¹¹⁵ Stark 1996, 99ff.

¹¹⁶ Stark 1996, 103-107.

and practises of the society started to influence in the church as well. In general, this meant reduction of women's status in the church. However, since Christianity was multicultural, it managed to maintain some aspects of sex equality in Greece and Rome as well. Although Jewish-Greco-Roman subordination of women was re-established, some of the Christian reforms remained. The most important being the view of woman equal with man in front of God.

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