

In Reference to I. Zatelli's Paper: Kinship Terminology in 1 Sam 25:40-42

Édouard Lipiński (Leuven - Bruxelles)

Two persons are considered kin to each other when they are linked by socially recognized bonds of descent or marriage, whether real or fictional. When a person addresses or talks about one of his kinsfolk he may call that person either by his or her own name or by some term specific to the relationship between them. There is great variety in the way in which different peoples apply terms of this kind, and the ancient West-Semitic usage is quite different in this respect from the Indo-European terminology used, for instance, in Bible translations and commentaries, that often disregard the semantic field of ancient Semitic terms.

The small literary unit in 1 Sam 25:40-42 constitutes a concrete framework for the analysis of a few words belonging to the kinship terminology: ^ʔ*amāh*, ^ʔ*adôn*, ^ʕ*šifhāh*. Biblical commentaries and Bible versions completely overlook this kind of problematics and there is no point, therefore, in scrutinizing them. For instance, the oldest version of the Bible, the LXX, translates ^ʔ*amāh* in our passage by δούλη, "slave", which is certainly wrong, but corresponds to an automatic translation of the word. ^ʕ*šifhāh* is rendered there by παιδίσκη, which means in Greek either "girl" or "young lady", or "slave-girl", and even "young prostitute". None of these meanings expresses the idea of ^ʕ*šifhāh*. In the same passage, ^ʕ*ebed* is translated by παῖς, obviously not in the sense of "child", but as "young slave", a translation adopted by most Greek manuscripts also for *mal*^ʔ*āk* in 1 Sam 25:42, which is certainly not correct. In other words, the Greek translation, despite its antiquity, is of no help whatsoever for the study of the kinship terminology in 1 Sam 25:40-42.

- v. 40. *wyb*^ʔ*w* (A) ^ʕ*bdy Dwd ... l*^ʔ*mr: Dwd šlhnw* ^ʔ*lyk lqhtk* (B) *lw l*^ʔ*šh*
v. 41. *...wt*^ʔ*mr: hnh* (B) ^ʔ*mtk lšphh lrhš rgly* (A) ^ʕ*bdy* ^ʔ*dny*
v. 42. *wtmhr ...wtlk* ^ʔ*hry* (A) *ml*^ʔ*ky Dwd wthj* (B) *lw l*^ʔ*šh*

There is little doubt that the author of this small literary unit has carefully chosen the key words expressing kinship relations. From the three levels of the action described it appears clearly that ^ʔ*amāh* in Abigail's answer is the equivalent of ^ʔ*iššāh*; it is used in contraposition to ^ʔ*adôn*, on the one side, and to ^ʕ*šifhāh*, on the other. The current translation of ^ʔ*amāh* by "maidservant", based on the frequent context of this term in the Bible, betrays the proper significance of ^ʔ*amāh* in classical Hebrew and in ancient West-Semitic languages in general. This word neither means "female slave" nor designates a person of a determined social status, but expresses a relationship of dependence existing in antiquity between a priestess or hierodule and the deity, between the wife and her husband, the daughter and her father, the employee and her employer, the maid and her master, the slave and her owner. Therefore, its use to designate a wife is neither a metaphor nor a sign of some polysemic virtues attached to the Semitic word. There is polysemy only in the

European "fossilized" translation, when one renders ʔamāh by "maidservant", while intending "wife", just as there is polysemy in the English translation "servant" of Semitic ʿebed , when a dignitary or a minister is meant.

The use of ʔamat / ʔamāh to designate the wife among persons of high status is well attested in ancient West-Semitic languages. Thus, the Aramaic seal of "Shelomith, ʔamat of Elnatan the 'stopper'"¹ ($\text{peḥwa} \text{ ʔ}$), found somewhere in Judaea and dating back to the fifth century BC, and the Ammonite seals from the seventh century BC belonging to "Aliyah, ʔamat of Hananel",³ and to "Anamūt, ʔamat of Dabalbass",⁴ clearly indicate that ʔamāh cannot designate a "maidservant" in these cases. Most likely, ʔamāh means here "wife", but it could also designate a female high official, for seals were used to authenticate documents.⁵ The ladies in question could then be "attendants" or "substitutes" of Elnatan, Hananel or Dabalbass. This sense, however, does not suit our text in 1 Sam 25:41.

The term ʔamāh is found also in a Hebrew tomb inscription in Jerusalem, dating to the eighth century BC, and in the Phoenician inscription carved in the seventh century BC on the lid of an ivory box found at Ur.

The epitaph of the royal steward from the village of Silwān, in East Jerusalem, affirms that the sepulchral chamber contains no silver and no gold, but "only [his bones] and the bone[s] of his ʔamāh with him"⁶. If one reads this epitaph without any "biblical" prejudice in favour of the meaning "maidservant", one cannot avoid the translation "and the bones of his wife with him".

The same is true in the case of the Phoenician inscription on the Ur box, where one reads⁷ "[This ivo]ry casket ($\text{ʔrn.}[z.š]n$), Amatbaal, daughter of Paṭesi, ʔamat of

¹ The seal was published by N. Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive* (Qedem 4), Jerusalem 1976, 10-13, and the inscription was thereafter commented by several authors, especially by E.M. Meyers, *The Shelomith Seal and the Judean Restoration: Some Additional Considerations*, *Nahman Avigad Volume* (Eretz-Israel 18), Jerusalem 1985, 33*-38*. Both authors translate ʔamāh by "maidservant", but Meyers suggests identifying Shelomith with Zerubbabel's daughter (1 Chr 3:19). Now, š'lm(y)t is a frequent Pre-Islamic North-Arabian name (G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, Toronto 1971, 326 and 327) and Elnatan, whose name could be Ammonite (W.E. Aufrecht, *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, Lewiston - Queenston - Lampeter 1989, Nos. 32 and 90), might be an official of Transjordanian descent.

² This is by no means a "governor"; cf. E. Lipiński, "Cellériers" de la province de Juda, *Transeuphratène* 1, 1989, 107-109.

³ W.E. Aufrecht, op.cit. (n. 1), No. 36.

⁴ Ibid., No. 44. The lady's name is identical to Ġnmt , attested in North-Arabian inscriptions (G. Lankester Harding, op.cit [n. 1], 458). Although its etymological meaning is something like "taken as booty", it does not imply that the Ammonite lady was a slave. In fact, marriage by capture in a foreign tribe was a well-known practice that could provide an explanation for the origin of this feminine proper name. The interpretation of the name Dblbs is uncertain and its vocalization is therefore purely hypothetical.

⁵ This explanation was contemplated by W.F. Albright, *Notes on Ammonite History*, *Miscellanea Biblica B. Ubach*, Montserrat 1954, 131-136 (see 134).

⁶ N. Avigad, *The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village*, *IEJ* 3, 1953, 137-152.

⁷ KAI 29 = TSSI III, 20. See also M.G. Amadasi Guzzo, *Two Phoenician Inscriptions Carved in Ivory: Again the Ur Box and the Sarepta Plaque*, *Or* 59, 1990, 58-66, in particular 58-61; ead., *Varia Phoenicia*, *RSF* 20, 1992, 95-104, in particular 95-97; T.C. Mitchell, *The Phoenician*

Idnān,⁸ has given (it) as a gift to Astarte, her Lady. May you bless her in her days! Idnān [the engraver ([br] ?)] has constructed the base." Amatbaal is unlikely to be a slave, since her patronymic is mentioned in the inscription. As usual, the name of her father is followed by the name of her husband Idnān, who has provided the base on which the ivory box was placed. In this context, ^ʿ*amāh* can hardly mean anything other than "wife".

A recently published Sabaic rock inscription from the end of the 8th century BC qualifies Queen Gaḥimat as ^ʿ*amat* of the *mukarrīb* of Saba, Yīṭa^ʿamar Bayyin, son of Šumhu^ʿalīy^ʿ. This inscription testifies thus to the use of epigraphic South-Arabian ^ʿ*amat* in the same sense as in Hebrew, where the wives of king David, Abigail (1 Sam 25:41) and Bathsheba (1 Kings 1:17), are called ^ʿ*amāh* as well. Moreover, this title is applied to Hagar in Gen 21:9-13, a passage presenting Ishmael's mother as an Arabian queen, called to become the mother of "a great nation", while she is simply Abram's ^ʿ*iššāh* in Gen 16:3.¹⁰

In the light of these texts and of the parallel use of ^ʿ*iššāh* in 1 Sam 25:40-42, one cannot avoid the conclusion that ^ʿ*amāh* is here a synonym of ^ʿ*iššāh*, used among persons of high status or in a refined language. Its counterpart is ^ʿ*adōn*, both in 1 Sam 25:41 and in 1 Kings 1:17. In fact, this is the principal term of relationship designating the superior in the formulaic language of ancient Hebrew letters,¹¹ and it is also used to designate a "guardian" in Hebrew legal terminology, as appears in

Inscribed Ivory Box from Ur, PEQ 123, 1991, 119-128. After ^ʿ*rn*, there is space for two letters and a separation dot; therefore, we restore ^ʿ*rn*.[z.š]n, with the apposition *šn* following the demonstrative *z*, as expected.

⁸ The proper name ^m*Id-na-a-ni* is attested in J.N. Postgate, The Governor's Palace Archive (CTN II), London 1973, No. 119:2. It is an Aramaic name: F.M. Fales, West Semitic Names from the Governor's Palace, *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 13/3, 1974, 179-188 (see 184, No. 19); R. Zadok, On West Semites in Babylonia during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods, 2nd ed., Jerusalem 1978, 117. The pattern and the contents of this inscription preclude the interpretation of ^ʿ*dnn* in the sense of "our Lord", as proposed by G. Garbini, *L'ancella del Signore*, RSF 18, 1990, 207-208, and P. Xella, *L'identità di ^ʿdn nell'iscrizione sulla scatola di Ur*, RSF 20, 1992, 83-91. Since the wife's patronymic is purely Egyptian, *P3-d7-3št*, the Ur box had probably been carried from Memphis by a soldier in an Assyrian army campaigning in Egypt in the 7th century BC.

⁹ A. de Maigret (ed.), The Sabaeen Archaeological Complex in the Wādī Yalā, Rome 1988, Pl. 45: Y.85.AQ/17. The traces of the damaged letter *m* in ^ʿ*mt* preclude the reading ^ʿ*št*. For the dating one cannot rely on G. Garbini's speculations in *op.cit.* It is necessary to refer to the archaeological data presented there by A. de Maigret and to the article by A. de Maigret and Ch. Robin, *Les fouilles italiennes de Yalā (Yémen du Nord): nouvelles données sur la chronologie de l'Arabie du Sud préislamique*, CRAI 1989, 255-291. One should add here that the use of ^ʿ*amat* in Epigraphic South Arabian points to a wide use of the internal plural ^ʿ*mh* in connexion with the collective term ^ʿ*adam*, "subjects", "clients". This implies a reference to "female clients", "female vassals", rather than to "slave-girls".

¹⁰ There can be no question of considering Hagar as Abraham's maidservant and mere concubine. Sarah's fear presupposes an equal right of inheritance between her son and Hagar's son (Gen 21:10). This indicates that the author of Gen 21:13 considered Hagar as equal in rank with Sarah.

¹¹ D. Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters*, Chico 1982, 158.

the MS B text of Sir 42:3¹² and in Mur 30:27.¹³ This Hebrew technical term was then borrowed by both Jewish Aramaic and Nabataean, and is used in the Babatha archive from the "Cave of Letters" in the Judaean Desert.¹⁴ It is the Hebrew equivalent of Greek κύριος and ἐπίτροπος,¹⁵ and happens to be used to qualify Babatha's husband acting as her "guardian" in a business transaction, where he is called ^ʾ*adôn Babatāh*.¹⁶ This use reveals another semantic extension of the ancient Hebrew term ^ʾ*adôn*, which certainly goes back to classical Hebrew. There is no doubt, in fact, that it is widely used; otherwise it would not have been borrowed in West-Aramaic.

In 1 Sam 25:41, ^ʾ*amāh* is also semantically opposed to *šifhāh*, another kinship term which is commonly misinterpreted in "biblical" scholarship. In fact, one cannot forget that *mišpahāh* is a clan or a larger family,¹⁷ in which consanguinity is still felt, and that *šiphu* means "posterity" in Ugaritic¹⁸ and "family" in Punic,¹⁹ while the South-Arabian verb *šafaḥa* or *šaffaḥa* (*sʿfh*) signifies "to summon", "to call out".²⁰ In the light of this extra-biblical information one can assume that the *šifhāh* was originally a house-born girl who was not a legal daughter of the *paterfamilias*. She could be given as a maidservant to a daughter leaving the household to marry. This is stated explicitly in the case of Leah and of Rachel who received a *šifhāh* from their father Laban (Gen 29:24,29). This is also implied in the case of Sarah who gives her *šifhāh* Hagar as wife (^ʾ*iššāh*) to Abram. Abram could marry Hagar, because he was not her natural father (Gen 16:1-6): she was not "his" *šifhāh*.

Thus, contrary to ^ʾ*amāh*, which expresses a relationship of dependence, *šifhāh* implied a blood relationship with the family. In practice, however, *šifhāh* was the maidservant "summoned" by the head of the family or by his wife to perform menial services and for undertaking housework.

In consequence, the passage under discussion in 1 Sam 25:40-42 means: "Here is your wife (acting) as a house-maid to wash the feet of my spouse's officers". ^ʾ*Amāh* and the ^ʿ*abdē* ^ʾ*adôn* are on the same level, so to say, but Abigail diminishes herself obsequiously to the rank of a *šifhāh*. Instead, her own maids are called *na^{ʿa} rôt* in 1 Sam 25:42, which underlines the different semantic fields of the terms ^ʾ*amāh*, *šifhāh*, and *na^{ʿa} rāh*, the latter being essentially an "attendant"²¹.

To conclude this short analysis, one should stress that "classical" Hebrew of biblical

¹² Cf. S. Lieberman, in *Lěshonenu* 32, 1967-68, 90-92.

¹³ J.T. Milik, in *DJD* II, Oxford 1961, 145 and 148.

¹⁴ Y. Yadin and J.C. Greenfield, *Aramaic and Nabatean Signatures and Subscriptions*, in N. Lewis, *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri*, Jerusalem 1989, No. 15, p. 139: 24, cf. p. 60: 37; No. 22, p. 147: 34, cf. p. 99: 34.

¹⁵ Cf. A.R.W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens I. The Family and Property*, Oxford 1968, 98, 108-109.

¹⁶ Cf. note 14, No. 15.

¹⁷ H.-J. Zobel, *mišpahāh*, *ThWAT* V, Stuttgart 1986, col. 86-93.

¹⁸ *WUS*, No. 2664.

¹⁹ *DISO*, 316.

²⁰ A.F.L. Beeston – M.A. Ghul – W.W. Müller – J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary*, Louvain-la-Neuve – Beyrouth 1982, 124.

²¹ H.F. Fuhs, *na^{ʿa} ar*, *ThWAT* V, Stuttgart 1986, col. 507-518. There is no entry for ^ʾ*amāh* in *ThWAT*, but the article *šifhāh* should also deal with this term.

times is semantically a very different language from the so-called "biblical" Hebrew of the early Middle Ages, which is the usual study object of "biblical" scholarship. No wonder: it is separated from "classical" Hebrew by more than ten centuries of the history of the Hebrew language.

Abstract:

The analysis of 1 Sam 25:40-42 and related extra-biblical material indicates that ʾamāh was used to designate the wife among persons of high status, while ʾadôn qualified the husband or the guardian of the woman. The term šifhāh seems to have originally connoted a blood relationship in a larger family and probably applied in biblical times to a natural half-sister on the father's side, often attached to the service of a full blood daughter given in marriage.

Address of the author:

Prof. Dr E. Lipiński, Ad. Lacomblélaan 50/11, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium