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MOSES AND THE WOMEN IN EXODUS 1-4¹

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If we look at the first four chapters of the book of Exodus, we observe several passages in which the heroes of the story are not Moses but several women. Thus dense presence of women at the beginning of the Exodus narrative indeed contains an important reading instruction for the Exodus tradition as a whole. In the following I will offer a brief commentary on the three passages in which women and often foreign women play an important role.

1.1 Exodus 1:15-22: The Fear of God of the Midwives and the Foolish Pharaoh²

15 The king of Egypt said to the midwives of the Hebrews,³ one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,

16 ‘When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool,⁴ if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a

¹ This article is a somewhat modified version of a German text: Th. Römer, “Mose und die Frauen in Exodus 1-4,” in *Wege der Freiheit. Zur Entstehung und Theologie des Exodusbuches. Die Beiträge eines Symposiums zum 70. Geburtstag von Rainer Albertz* (R. Achenbach, R. Ebach and J. Wöhrle (eds.); AThANT 104; Zürich: TVZ, 2014), 73-86.

² Cf. Thomas Römer, “Les Sages-Femmes du Pharaon et la “Crainte de Dieu” (Exode 1,15-22)” in ‘*Dort ziehen Schiffe dahin ...*’. *Collected Communications to the XIVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Paris, 1992* (M. Augustin and K.-D. Schunck (eds.); Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums 28; Frankfurt/M. et al.: P. Lang, 1996), 183-190.

³ The identity of the midwives is not clear. According to the Masoretic vocalization we should understand them to be Hebrew women. The non-vocalized text, however, also allows for a different interpretation, which is – as will be shown below – to be preferred.

⁴ “Birthstool” is the common translation here. The two little stones, however, may be a euphemism for the male genitals.

girl, she shall live.⁵

- 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.
- 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?'
- 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous⁶ and give birth before the midwife comes to them.'
- 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.
- 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.
- 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.'

This text narrows the perspective from a general statement about the oppression of the Hebrews by narrating a strange story in which Pharaoh orders two midwives to kill the male descendants although he needs the Hebrews for his building projects. The end of the story with the new order of the Egyptian king in v. 22 forms a frame with vv. 15-16 but the midwives no longer appear. The order to drown the new-borns in the Nile, therefore, also forms a bridge to the exposure of Moses.

The text is best understood as being constructed in chiasmic form:

A (v.15-16) *Order of the Pharaoh* to the midwives: if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live

⁵ A masculine form to denote a 3rd pers.fem. See also v. 21. It may be a simple confusion or even intended irony. If so, Pharaoh himself predicts that new-born boys, too, will live.

⁶ The Masoretic form חיות is a *hapax legomenon* and only attested in post-biblical Hebrew. It is much more logical, that the midwives speak about the Hebrew women as being "animals" (חיות) in front of Pharaoh. Later redactors obviously thought this to be disrespectful.

- B (v.17a) *Fear of God*: But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them
- C (v.17b.18) *Life for the Hebrews – Inquiry of Pharaoh*: but they let the boys live.
– ‘Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?’
- C’ (v.19) *Life for the Hebrews – Answer to Pharaoh*: Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous
- B’ (v.21) *Fear of God*: And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families
- A’ (v.22) *Order of the Pharaoh to his people*: Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.’

According to this (chiastic) structure the enabled life for the male and female Hebrews forms the centre. This centre is framed by the attitude that enabled this life: the fear of God of the midwives. At the margins we have twice a deadly command of Pharaoh, which is contrasted by the life enabled by the midwives. This structure also shows that v. 20 does not fit well into this narrative.⁷ The verse seems to be a doublet to verse 21. V. 20 also uses אלהים to denote God rather than האלהים as in v. 17 and 21. Furthermore, the expression וירבו ויעצמו מאד alludes to the priestly verse 1:7 (וירבו ויעצמו מאד במאד מאד). As a result v. 20 can be understood as a later addition, an explanation of the “houses/families” in v. 21 as it speaks of the multiplication of the people and thus transfers Yahweh’s beneficiary acts towards the midwives to the Israelite people.

V. 22 is set apart from the preceding narrative. Firstly, its correspondence to vv. 15-16 is less obvious than between B/B’ and C/C’. Also it is the only verse of the story where direct speech is introduced by לאמר. Exod 1:22 is not a proper closure but a bridge to the story of Moses’ birth as is shown by the mentioning of the

⁷ For a discussion of diachronic issues of verses 20-21 see W.H. Schmidt, *Exodus 1,1-6,30* (BKAT II/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 18-19 who regards 20aba as original and classifies 20bb and 21 as secondary additions.

Nile and Pharaoh's order to kill, now directed towards the Egyptian people as a whole.

Since Exod 1:13-14 is generally attributed to P one can consider that 1:22 originally continued 1:9-12. As in 1:9-10a Pharaoh turns again to his people to prevent the multiplication of the Hebrews.⁸ After the attempt to weaken the Israelites by *corvées* had failed Pharaoh now orders a genocide in 1:22. Based on 1:9-12* and 1:22 a later redactor inserted the story in 1:15-19,21 and thus creates a prologue to Moses' birth narrative as well as stressing the role of the foreign women (we will come back to the question of their nationality) in the rescue of the Hebrew people. Finally a further redactor added v. 20 to emphasize the motif of the multiplication of the people and to relate God's reward for the midwives to the people of Israel.

1.2. The Identity of the Midwives

As already alluded to in the translation the Masoretes vocalised in such a manner that הַעֲבֵרִית should be understood as an apposition to לְמִיִּלֶדֶת. The Greek translators, however, understood הַעֲבֵרִית as a genitive (ταῖς μαλαῖς τῶν Ἑβραίων) leaving the nationality of the midwives open to interpretation. Jewish tradition mainly follows the Masoretes and so do a number of modern non-Jewish commentators. However, already Flavius Josephus has noted that this interpretation can hardly be correct. He writes in his *Jewish Antiquities* (II.206-207):

... He [i.e. the king] commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites, into the river, and destroy it; that besides this, the Egyptian midwives should watch the labours of the Hebrew women, and observe what is born, for those were the women who were enjoined to do the office of midwives to them; and by reason of their relation to the king, would not transgress his commands (transl. W. Whiston).

⁸ With R. Albertz, *Exodus 1-18* (ZB.AT 2.1; Zürich: TVZ, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2012) and against K. Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus. Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 69-72 we have to maintain that the expressions for the multiplying of the people do not have to presuppose P.

In light of the narrative logic an identification of the midwives as Egyptian is indeed obvious. The “argument” used by the midwives in 1:19 when justifying their behaviour before Pharaoh only appears resounding that the midwives are Egyptian women.

One can object, of course, that both women bear Semitic names. These names, however, are not well attested elsewhere (there is one mention of Shiphrah in an Egyptian document) and this seems to show that they were an *ad hoc* שפר and translated as “beauty.” Maybe it is an allusion to the “beauty” (טוב) of the saviour of the Hebrews who enters the stage in Exod 2. The name Puah is often explained as “splendour.” If that were correct both names would form a parallelism. However, a derivation from the Ugaritic *pḡt*, “girl” is also possible. If the latter option is favoured one too could see in this name a prolepsis of Exod 2, since it is a number of young girls who will save little Moses. In addition one could wonder whether the text is not constructed as a reversal to Exod 2:1-10. In this story Moses alone receives an Egyptian name while in Exod 1:15-22 the Egyptian midwives receive a name – a Semitic one.

1.3. The Fear of God of the Midwives.

If the midwives are to be labelled Egyptian the fact that these Egyptian women do not obey Pharaoh’s order is remarkable.⁹ The motivation of the midwives to defy Pharaoh’s order is twice given as fear of God (ירא האלהים). The expression fear of God or Yahweh displays sapiential connotations (see already Prov 1:7: “The fear of Yhwh is the beginning of knowledge”). Prov 14:27 ascertains: יראת יהוה מקור חיים לסור ממקשי מות (“The fear of Yhwh is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death”). In a certain way, Exod 1:15-22 can be understood as a narrative application of such a precept (as is also shown by the use of the roots ירא, היה and מות in the story).

In an ironic manner the narrator contrasts the wise behaviour of the midwives with the alleged “wise” measures of the Egyptian Pharaoh (comp. 1:10: נתחכמה). That the midwives indeed act wisely saving their own life too is shown by their sly answer in v.

⁹ Albertz, *Exodus*, 50 and 49.

19: Pharaoh understands the statement that the Hebrew women are “animals” as being derogatory while an Israelite listener is aware that this statement preserves lives.¹⁰ In similar fashion the reward of the midwives by God (v. 21) corresponds to a sapiential worldview: since they have saved lives, God will also grant them to bring forth life.

Because of the emphasis on the fear of God, the classic documentary hypothesis assigned the story to the Elohist and related it to Gen 20.¹¹ Even if one has to bid farewell to the Elohist,¹² a connection between Gen 20 and Exod 1:15-22 remains. Gen 20 elaborates in a similar way on the fear of God of non-Israelites. When Abimelech confronts Abraham with his false statement that Sarah is his sister the Patriarch responds: “I did it because I thought, there is no fear of God (יראת אלהים) at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife” (20:11). The behaviour of the king and his servants, however, proves Abraham wrong: they let him live and the king responds appropriately to God’s revelation in a dream, offers rich gifts to Abraham and his wife and proposes that the patriarch settles in his land.¹³ Similarly in the Book of Jonah the pagan sailors are portrayed as possessing fear of God (1:16) when they first refuse to throw Jonah overboard and then acknowledge the omnipotence of Jonah’s God.

Gen 20 and Jonah 1 show that representatives of other nations know a fear of God and Exod 1:15-22 is part of this discourse. Since the story is added to the beginning of Israel’s national epic this epic is stripped of any form of triumphalism or self-absorption. The liberation of Israel can only begin because of the effort of the foreign women.

¹⁰ See also the correct exegesis by Albertz, Exodus 1:51 who rightly stresses the ambiguity of the statement.

¹¹ Thus A. Graupner, *Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte* (WMANT 97; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 52-54.

¹² Cf. J. Ch. Gertz, «Elohist (E),» *EBR* 7 (2014): cols 777-781.

¹³ According to E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 405-410 the author of Gen 20 represents the perspective of the Diaspora.

2.1 Exodus 2:1-10: Young Moses surrounded by Women

The only actors in Exod 2:1-10 are women. Without giving a reason, Moses' father vanishes from the story immediately after his conception. The pericope explains the double identity of Moses who is born a Hebrew but comes to the Egyptian court via the Nile and nevertheless remains associated with his people.

- 1 A man from the house of Levi went and took a Levite woman.
- 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.
- 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.
- 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.
- 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.
- 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said.
- 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"
- 8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.
- 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it.
- 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out[b] of the water."

As in Exod 1:15-22 the main actors in this story are women – this time Hebrew and Egyptian ones. While Exod 1:15-22 mentions the fear of God of the midwives as motivation, Exod 2:1-10 lacks any reference to God. We can, however, recognize his acts – as in the Joseph narrative – in discreet form mirrored in the acts of the Hebrew and Egyptian women who together save the saviour of Israel.

2.2. Moses the Egyptian – Moses the Assyrian

It is generally agreed that the name Moses is a Hebrew transcription of an Egyptian name formed by the use of the root *m-s-j* that is also used in the names Ramses (“Ra has given birth to him”) and Thutmoses. The missing theophoric element may be the result of Hebrew censorship. However, similar shortened names are also attested in Egypt. It is beyond doubt that the author was aware of the Egyptian origin of the name. First, it is striking that – in contrast to other biblical birth-narratives – the newborn boy remains nameless. Rather surprisingly the mother, so concerned about him, does not give him a name; following the logic of the story the Egyptian princess can only do this naming. The author, nevertheless, is aware of the significance of the name Moses for before Pharaoh’s daughter names him the child is consistently called ילד (new-born/child) and this root is nothing more than the Hebrew equivalent of Egyptian *m-s-j*. That the daughter of Pharaoh speaks Hebrew and that she explains the name by using the little attested Hebrew root משה can be understood as an ironic ploy on 1:22. Here in 1:22 Pharaoh had ordered to throw the new-born Hebrew children into the Nile. His daughter, however, realises in 2:10 that she has pulled a Hebrew child from the River (see also 2 Sam 2:17 = Ps 18:17). The vocalisation in 2:10 points to an active participle, i.e. “he who pulls ...”. This meaning, however, is never used again in the Exodus tradition. Maybe Isa 63:11 alludes to it but here the root עלה Hip. is used.

As has been often observed, the description how Moses became the adopted son of the Egyptian princess also has an Assyrian

parallel.¹⁴ The exposure of Moses and his adoption correspond to the birth narrative of King Sargon who supposedly lived around 2600 BCE. Copies of this story, however, are only preserved from the Neo-Assyrian period so that one can assume they were written to legitimize Sargon II.¹⁵ If the author of Exod 2 used the Sargon legend this would explain the absence of Moses' father. Sargon, too, notes that his mother was a priestess (Moses mother is a daughter of Levi) and that he did not know his father.¹⁶ While Sargon is adopted by gods (Akki and Ishtar), Moses becomes the son of an Egyptian princess. Apparently Sargon's exposure is an austere measure of his mother to get rid of an illegitimate child, while Moses's exposure represents a strategy to save the child.¹⁷ The move of the mother in Exod 2:1-10 can only be regarded as logical if she knew before that Moses will be pulled from the Nile. This incongruity is best explained by assuming that the author of Exod 2:1-10 followed the Sargon legend and created a "counter history" to it,¹⁸ showing that Moses is an equally significant person as the founder of the Assyrian dynasty. In Exod 2, then, the daughter of Pharaoh would play the role of gods, Akki and Ishtar.

2.3. Resistance and Irony

The parallels between the story of the exposure of Sargon and that of Moses would be even stronger, if we regard the verses describing the actions of Moses' sister as a later addition.¹⁹ We have to register that the sister enters the stage quite abruptly and

¹⁴ See C. Cohen, "The Legend of Sargon and the Birth of Moses," *JANES* 4 (1972): 46-51; M. Gerhards, *Die Aussetzungsgeschichte des Mose. Literar- und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen zu einem Schlüsseltext des nichtpriesterlichen Tetrateuch* (WMANT 109; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006) and many others.

¹⁵ B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend. A Study of the Akkadian Text of the Tale and the Tale of the Hero who was Exposed at Birth* (ASOR Diss. Ser 4; Cambridge, Mass.: ASOR, 1980).

¹⁶ Exod 2 hardly allows for the interpretation that Moses mother was the victim of a rape; see M. Gerhards, «'... und nahm die Tochter Levis'. Noch einmal zu Ex 2,1 als Motivation der Aussetzung des Mose,» *BN* 154 (2012): 103-122.

¹⁷ Albertz, *Exodus*, 58.

¹⁸ On the term see A. Funkenstein, "History, Counter-History and Memory," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (S. Friedlander (ed.); Cambridge, Mass. - London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 66-81.

¹⁹ See e.g. Schmidt, *Exodus*, 52-53.

that Moses' birth is described in such a way that one could assume that he is the first-born of his mother. Indeed, the story is perfectly comprehensible without the verses 4 and 7-10aa. If the verses are a later addition Pharaoh's daughter (and her handmaids) would be the only woman who acts. The verses mentioning Moses' sister and his nursing by his biological mother would then highlight that Moses (in contrast to Sargon) was not abandoned by his family and that he – despite being adopted by an Egyptian princess – was still nursed by his biological mother. In the original story the daughter of Pharaoh is the lead character. Like the midwives in Exod 1:15-22, she also defies the deadly order of her father. Her statement that the child in the papyrus basket is a little Hebrew shows that she is acquainted with her father's command but that she does not condone it. The root חמל ("to have pity") is often found in the context of preserving life (1 Sam 23:21; 2 Sam 12:6) and in Exod 2 such pity moves the Egyptian princess to have a higher regard for the life of a non-Egyptian child than for the order of the god-like king. Pharaoh had decreed that the Egyptians are to throw the little Hebrews into the Nile. In a way Moses' mother carries out this command by placing her new-born son in the Nile (שים instead of שלח) from which he will be saved by the princess. Thus the order of Pharaoh is turned against him by the actions of the women. The appearance of the daughter who gives back Moses once again to his biological mother adds an additional ironic aspect to the story. Now, the child Moses can be nursed by his mother – not only does the Egyptian princess give her permission to do so, she even pays for the services rendered. Therefore in its final form the story stresses the will to resistance and the close cooperation of Egyptian and Hebrew women.²⁰ Both acts scupper the deadly order of Pharaoh.

Finally we have to turn our attention to a far greater threat to Moses' life – this time by Yahweh himself.

²⁰ Schmidt, *Exodus*, 60.

3.1 Exodus 4:24-26: Yahweh's deadly attack on Moses and his rescue by Zipporah

The short and rather enigmatic episode in Exod 4:24-26 has long puzzled commentators as the verses indeed report outrageous things.²¹ Yahweh, who after long negotiations has finally named Moses his prophet and appointed him to be the liberator of Israel, now appears and intends to kill Moses while he is travelling back to Egypt.²²

(24) On the way, at a place where they spent the night, Yhwh met him and tried to kill him.

(25) But Zipporah took a flint and cut off his foreskin, and touched his genitals²³ with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!"

(26) So he let him alone. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by circumcision."

In 4:19 Yahweh ordered Moses back from Midian to Egypt. The reason given is that those who sought to kill him (בקש) are no longer alive. This refers back to Exod 2:15 where it is stated that Pharaoh wanted to kill Moses (ויבקש להרג). 4:24 now states that Yahweh wants to kill Moses (ויבקש המיתו) and it is fair to say that he has now taken over Pharaoh's role.

In its present form the episode cannot be an originally independent story. V.24 cannot be an absolute beginning since Moses is never mentioned by name in 4:24-26. Only Yahweh and Zipporah carry names.

In the present context 4:24-26 collides with the preceding divine speech Moses shall deliver to Pharaoh (4:21-23) and that ends with the announcement that Yahweh will kill the first-born of the King of Egypt. As the chapter stands now "him" in 4:24 must refer to the son of the king, which does not make sense. The

²¹ See the detailed overview in John T. Willis, *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict: the Role of Exodus 4:24-26 in the Book of Exodus* (Bible in History; Bern: Lang, 2010).

²² For the following see Th. Römer, "De l'archaïque au subversif: le cas d'Exode 4/24-26," *ETR* 69 (1994): 1-12.

²³ Literally "feet."

episode connects better with 4:19-20a where Moses' departure from Midian is reported.²⁴ Whether this connection was original remains questionable, since v.20a speaks of two sons while 4:24-26 only mentions one descendant. May be the original story line is found in 4:19-20a; 4:27-31* into which 4:24-26 was inserted. A later redactor then prefixed the speech of Yahweh (vv. 21-23) to reshape the nocturnal attack on Moses as an allegory for the later killing of the Egyptian first-born. It is indeed possible to understand the apotropaic blood-ritual as a prolepsis of the night of Passover in Exod 12. This, however, does not explain Yahweh's motif for killing Moses.

Certainly there is a parallel to the nocturnal attack on Jacob in Gen 32:23-32. Both stories tell of a transformation of the founding figures of Israel: Jacob receives a new name (Israel) and Moses receives a new status in relation to circumcision (equally connected with a new name: "bridegroom of blood"). In both cases the attack happens at night during the return journey home. In Gen 32 the attacker touches (נג) Jacob's hip and in Exod 4:25 Zipporah touches (נג) Moses' genitals with the foreskin of her son. Both attacks are followed by a positive meeting (פגש) with the brother (Esau, Aaron). We can thus assume that the author of Exod 4:24-26 was inspired by Gen 32:23-32 and created a parallel to Jacob. He did, however, radicalise his *Vorlage* as he explicitly stresses that Yahweh wants to kill Moses. Also, Moses' Midianite wife makes an appearance that does not have a counterpart in Genesis 32.

3.2 Symbolic Circumcision and New Covenant

Moses married a foreign woman. Deuteronomistic circles in post-exilic times, that edited the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, reject such marital unions as they endanger the exclusive relationship between Yahweh and his people. Later texts, therefore, transform the Midianites into the archenemies of Israel (Num 25) and demand from the Judeans to dissolve of such mixed marriages (see Neh 13:23-27; Ezra 10). Here texts like Exod 4:24-26 and Ruth represent the opposite standpoint. Yahweh's attack happens

²⁴ Thus also Albertz, *Exodus*, 96.

on the way from Zipporah's homeland to Moses' people. The brief story shows how Zipporah herself achieves her integration. "With the rite, Zipporah establishes a new and even closer relationship to Moses by declaring him to be a 'bridegroom of blood' who is not only via marriage but also via the blood of her child kinsman like connected to her."²⁵ When Zipporah circumcises her son the text does not use the common technical term מול but the root ברת. The Hebrew listener familiar with deuteronomistic theology recognizes the allusion to the phrase ברית ברית ("to make a covenant"). Zipporah makes a covenant by her gesture or better she expands the covenant between Yahweh and Israel because foreign women are now integrated in it.²⁶

Above all, Zipporah saves Moses because she dares to confront Yahweh. The reason for the divine attack remains unclear; it has possibly to do with circumcision. Is Yahweh angry with Moses because he is not circumcised? Or is he angry because Moses was circumcised according to Egyptian fashion and not according to the Hebrew rite? If that is the case Zipporah's act could be understood as a symbolic further circumcision as it is still demanded today by certain rabbis.²⁷ Normally it is not allowed for a woman to circumcise a man. Only 1 Macc 1:60 and 2 Macc 6:10, and in the context of mortal danger, mention circumcision by a female. Zipporah dares to confront Yahweh to save the life of her husband and acts like a female Job who challenges a cruel God. Perhaps Exod 4:24-26 intends to embed a change in the practice of circumcision already in the earliest times of Israel.²⁸ Most importantly, however, is the fact that in Exod 4:24-26 Moses is confronted with a "dark God" and is saved by his foreign wife. Thus Exod 4:24-26 concludes the triptych that shows that the history of Israel's deliverance could never have happened without the acts of women and especially foreign women.

²⁵ Albertz, *Exodus*, 97.

²⁶ R. Blum and E. Blum, "Zippora und ihr *hṭn dmym*" in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte* (FS R.Rendtorff) (E. Blum et al. (ed.); Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 41-54.

²⁷ See B.J. Diebner, "Ein Blutsverwandter der Beschneidung. Überlegungen zu Ex 4,24-26," *DBAT* 18 (1984): 119-126 and *Idem.*, "Symbolische Nachbeschneidung'. Ein Nachtrag zu *DBAT* 18 (1984) 119-126," *DBAT* 20 (1984): 186-188.

²⁸ Albertz, *Exodus*, 98.

4. A Brief Conclusion

Even if the three stories Exod 1:15-22; 2:1-10 and 4:24-26 are most likely not from the same author they all share the same intention: to show that women play an important part in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The Egyptian midwives and the daughter of Pharaoh oppose the genocidal project of the Egyptian king and in the case of Moses' wife Zipporah she even opposes God himself. Without the intervention of these women Moses would have never become the saviour of Israel. The interventions of the women put a stop to any form of triumphalist understanding of the Exodus tradition. A similar phenomenon can be observed towards the beginning of the conquest narrative in the Book of Joshua. Here, the episode of the stay of the scouts with the Canaanite prostitute Rahab is inserted between Josh 1 and 3.²⁹ This is done to show that the first acknowledgment of the God of Israel comes from a non-Israelite woman who then predicts what the scouts simply repeat.³⁰ Thus the whole narrative of the conquest begins because of Rahab's statement. As a result Exodus and conquest are re-interpreted by stories about women. These female stories introduce new possibilities of understanding the legends of Israel's origins.

²⁹ J. Van Seters, *In Search of History. History in the Ancient World and the Origin of Biblical History* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1983), 325.

³⁰ Th. Römer and A. Steiner, "Josué 2: De la muraille à l'alliance," *Lire et Dire* 73 (2007): 14-24.