

דינה ושכם

אבנר רמו

We read that after making a covenant with all the elders of Israel, David was anointed as King of Israel in Hebron by **“all the tribes of Israel”** (2 Sam 5:1-3). Just before David’s death his son Solomon was declared king by **“all the people”** in Gihon, near Jerusalem (1 Ki 1:38-40).

Jerusalem became the capital of the Israelites’ state already in David’s time, yet we are told about the supposed son of Solomon - Rehoboam:

וילך רחבעם שכם: כי שכם בא כל-ישראל להמליך אתו.

“And Rehoboam went to Shechem; for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king” (1 Ki 12:1; see also: 2 Ch 10:1).

It is not clear why now **“all of Israel”** were coming, not to Jerusalem, but to Shechem for the making of a new king. After Rehoboam refused to show leniency to the people: **“Israel departed to their tents”** without making Rehoboam their king (1 Ki 12:16-19).

Later we hear that **“the congregation”** of **“all of Israel”** called Jeroboam and: **וימליכו אתו על-כל-ישראל** - **“and made him king over all Israel”** (1 Ki 12:20).

Immediately after that we are told: **ויבן ירבעם את-שכם בהר אפרים, וישב בה** - **“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill-country of Ephraim, and dwelt therein”** (1 Ki 12:25). This statement is quite surprising as we did not hear that Rehoboam destroyed Shechem before he left it.

Furthermore, a place named **שכם בהר אפרים** - **“Shechem in the hill-country of Ephraim”** was already mentioned in the days of Joshua (Jos 20:7).



“Shachemu” mentioned in the Egyptian, Sebek-khu Stele. C. 1880-1840 BC. Manchester Museum.

Clay tablets that were discovered in Ebla (Tell Mardikh, North-west Syria), and that were dated to 2250 BC, mention a place named Shechem. An Egyptian stele of the time of King Senusret III also refers to this name. Later (c. 1350 BC) *Shachmu*, is mentioned in the “Amarna Letters.”

The first Biblical mention of Shechem is in the Book of Genesis, where we are told that the first place that Abraham reached in the land that God showed him was **מקום שכם** - “**the place of Shechem**” (Gen 12:6). The Greek translator wrote here: “the place of Sychem.” However, it is not clear whether “Shechem” here is a name of a place or of a person.

The next biblical reference to Shechem is even less legible:

ויבא יעקב שלם עיר שכם, אשר בארץ כנען, בבאו מפדן ארם; ויחן את-פני העיר.
“**And Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and encamped before the city**” (Gen 33:18).

The English translation suggests that the translators believed that the writer of this Hebrew expression was not proficient in Hebrew or was using an unusual grammar. The Greek translator wrote here: “Salem, the city of Sikima.” A place named **שלם** - “**Salem**” was already mentioned in the Book of Genesis (Gen 14:18), and therefore the Greeks’ understanding here is not illogical. Furthermore, as we will soon encounter a young man named Shechem, the son of Hamor, we may wonder if indeed a city was named after him (or belonged to him) and not after his father Hamor. It seems that by translating here **שכם** - “**Shechem**” as “Sikima” rather than as “Sychem” the Greeks tried to solve this problem by “separating” the name of the owner of the city from that of the son of Hamor.

In the next verse we read about Jacob:

ויקן את-חלקת השדה, אשר נטה-שם אהלו, מיד בני-חמור, אבי שכם-במאה קשיטה.
“**And he bought the parcel of ground, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pieces of money**” (Gen 33:19).

The Greek translator wrote here: “And from Hemmor (or Emmor), Sychem’s father.” It appears that the Greek translator of the Book of Genesis believed that while the city of Salem belonged to Sikima, Jacob bought there a parcel of land from the father of a man named Sychem.

This “parcel of ground” is also mentioned in the Book of Joshua:

ואת-עצמות יוסף אשר-העלו בני-ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם, בחלקת השדה אשר קנה יעקב מאת בני-חמור אבי-שכם במאה קשיטה; ויהיו לבני-יוסף לנחלה.
“**And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in the parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of the children of Joseph**” (Jos 24:32).

The Greek translator wrote here: “interred him in Sikima” in the parcel of land that Jacob bought “from the Amorrites living in Sikima.” It seems that by translating here the Hebrew **חמור** - “Hamor” to “Amorrites” the Greek translator of the Book of Joshua also tries to avert the reader’s attention from the conundrum of a man named Shechem living in city named Shechem (or belonging to Shechem).

In the Book of Samuel we hear that Amnon the son of King David was lusting for his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-2). Feigning himself sick, Amnon, succeeded in getting Tamar to bring and serve him food:

ותגש אליו לאכל; ויחזק-בה ויאמר לה, בואי שכבי עמי אחותי.

“And when she had brought them near to him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her: Come lay with me, my sister” (2 Sam 13:11).

Tamar answered him:

אל-אחי אל-תענני-כי לא-יעשה כן בישראל: אל-תעשה את-הנבלה הזאת ואני אנה אוליך את-חרפתי, ואתה תהיה כאחד הנבלים בישראל; ועתה דבר-נא אל-המלך, כי לא ימנעני ממך.

“Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel; do not you this wanton deed.

And I, whither shall I carry my shame? And as for you, you will be as one of the base men in Israel. Now therefore, I pray you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you” (2 Sam 13:12-13).

Yet Amnon refused to listen:

ולא אבה לשמע בקולה; ויחזק ממנה ויענה וישכב אתה. וישנאה אמנון שנאה גדולה מאד-כי גדולה השנאה אשר שנאה, מאהבה אשר אהבה; ויאמר-לה אמנון, קומי לכי ותאמר לו אל-אודת הרעה הגדולה הזאת, מאחרת אשר-עשית עמי לשלחני; ולא אבה לשמע לה. ויקרא את-נערו משרתו, ויאמר, שלחו-נא את-זאת מעלי החוצה; ונעל הדלת אחריה.

“Howbeit he would not hearken to her voice; but being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her.

Then Amnon hated her with exceeding great hatred; for the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said to her: Arise, be gone.

And she said to him: Not so, because this great wrong in putting me forth is worse than the other that you did to me. But he would not hearken unto her.

Then he called his servant that ministered to him, and said: Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her” (2 Sam 13:14-17).

After being cast out of Amnon’s house:

ותקח תמר אפר על-ראשה, וכתנת הפסים אשר עליה קרעה; ותשם ידה על-ראשה ותלך הלך וזעקה.

“And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of many colors that was on her; and she laid her hand on her head, and went her way, crying aloud as she went” (2 Sam 13:19).

In the Book of Deuteronomy we read:

כי-ימצא איש נער בתולה אשר לא-ארשה, ותפשה ושכב עמה; ונמצאו ונתן האיש השכב עמה לאבי הנער-חמשים כסף; ולו-תהיה לאשה, תחת אשר ענה-לא-יוכל שלחה כל-ימיו.

“If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, that is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give to the damsel's father fifty [shekels of] silver, and she shall be his wife, because he had forced her; he may not put her away all his days” (Deu 22:28-29).

As Tamar told Amnon, sending her away after copulating with her was a greater offence than that of forcing her to sleep with him. For this iniquity her brother Absalom arranged the smiting of Amnon.

A somewhat similar event is described in the Book of Genesis were we are told:

ותצא דינה בת-לאה, אשר ילדה ליעקב, לראות בבנות הארץ.

“And Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land” (Gen 34:1).

Due to economical and safety concerns, sightseeing journeys were extremely uncommon in the ancient world. Even more so when it was supposed to be carried out by unchaperoned young women. Furthermore, we heard Dinah's grandmother - Rebekah saying:

ותאמר רבקה אל-יצחק קצתי בחיי, מפני בנות חת; אם-לקח יעקב אשה מבנות-חת כאלה, מבנות הארץ-למה לי חיים.

“And Rebekah said to Isaac: I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?” (Gen 27:46).

We may therefore wonder, whether Dinah **“went out to see the daughters of the land”** without permission or knowledge of her parents.

Now we are told: **“And Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her”** (Gen 34:2).

The Greek translator wrote here: “Choritte” and it seems that he believed that here חַיִּי (*khīyi*) is a letter-substitution error of חַרִּי (*khōri*), but as in verse: Gen 27:46 “the daughters of Heth” are equated to “the daughters of the land” it appears more likely that this word is a letter-substitution error of חִתִּי (*khithi*) - “Hittite.”

If this is the case then we should note that in the Hittite language “*khumra*” means a “priest” and that suggests that the Hebrew בן-חמור (*ben-khamor*) - **“son of Hamor”** may actually mean: “son of a priest.”

We should also remember that we were told that “Melchizedek king of Salem” was: a כהן לאל עליון - a **“priest of God the Most High”** (Gen 14:18). We find in the Hebrew Bible another word that means “priests” and which sounds like the Hittite's “*khumra*” this word is כמרִים (*kemarim*) - “priests” (Hos 10:5; see also: 2 Ki 23:5; Zep 1:4).

After Shechem saw Dinah:

ויקח אתה וישכב אתה ויענה.

ותדבק נפשו בדינה בת-יעקב; ויאהב את-הנער, וידבר על-לב הנער
ויאמר שכם אל-חמור אביו לאמר: קח-לי את-הילדה הזאת לאשה.

“And he took her, and lay with her, and forced her.

And his soul did cleave to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spoke comfortingly to the damsel.

And Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying: Get me this damsel to wife” (Gen 34:2-4).

Unlike Tamar the daughter of King David, we do not hear Dinah telling Shechem that he should not lay with her, or that he should first ask her father Jacob to give her to him as a wife. We also do not hear that after that event, she “put ashes on her head” or “rent her garment.” In fact, we never hear the voice of Dinah.

It is possible that Dinah behaved differently from Tamar, because unlike Amnon, Shechem “loved her” and did not cast her out from his home (Gen 34:26). Furthermore, he now sends his father, to ask Jacob for the hand of Dinah, and he offers to pay for her any price and not just the “fifty [shekels of] silver” as the custom obliged him to do.

While it was Tamar that said: “for no such thing ought to be done in Israel; do not you this wanton deed” it is now the sons of Jacob that are saying:

כי-נבלה עשה בישראל, לשכב את-בת-יעקב, וכן לא יעשה.

“Because he had wrought a vile deed in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done” (Gen 34:7).

While these words sound authentic to the days of King David, they do not ring genuine in Jacob's (whose name was just recently been changed to Israel) time.

Another somewhat unusual expression here is: **כי טמא את-דינה בתו**, - “Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter” (Gen 34:5; see also: Gen 34:13, 27). However, as the verb **טמא** (*tma*) is often employed in the Bible in association to the insemination of a woman (Lev 15:18), this verse, just tells us that Jacob heard that Dinah was engaged in sexual intercourse.

After slaying all the males and spoiling the city, we hear Simeon and Levi justifying their acts to their father: **ויאמרו: הכזונה יעשה את-אחותנו** - “And they said: Should one deal with our sister as with a harlot?” (Gen 34:31). Yet we have seen that Shechem attitude toward Dinah could not be equated with “dealing with a harlot.”

The sons of Jacob (the Greek translator wrote here instead: “Symeon and Leui, Dinah's brothers, Leia's sons”) told Hamor and his son Shechem:

לא נוכל לעשות הדבר הזה-לתת את-אחתנו לאיש אשר-לו ערלה: כי-חרפה הוא לנו.

“We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach to us” (Gen 34:14), and we have to wonder why for solving Dinah's problem all the males of the city, and not just Shechem, had to be circumcised.

However, it is possible the sons of Jacob were answering Hamor's wider proposal:

התחתנו אתנו: בנתיכם תתנו-לנו, ואת-בנתינו תקחו לכם.

ואתנו תשבו; והארץ תהיה לפניכם-שבו וסחרוה והאחזו בה.

“Make you marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to you. And you shall dwell with us; and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade you therein, and get you possessions therein” (Gen 34:9-10).

The brothers’ response to this offer:

אך-בזאת נאות לכם: אם תהיו כמנו, להמל לכם כל-זכר.
ונתנו את-בנותינו לכם, ואת-בנותיכם נקח-לנו; וישבנו אתכם והיינו לעם אחד.
ואם-לא תשמעו אלינו, להמול-ולקחנו את-בתנו והלכנו.

“Only on this condition will we consent to you: if you will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised;
Then will we give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.
But if you will not hearken to us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone” (Gen 34:15-17).

The Greek translator wrote here “daughters” and it seems that that he believed that the sons of Jacob were referring here to the general agreement rather than to the specific case of Dinah.

The writer of the Book of Genesis (or a later scribe) wrote that the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor **במרמה** - “with guile” (Gen 34:13). Yet, we did not hear that the brothers said that all the males of the city needed to be circumcised at the same time, and immediately. Furthermore, we do not hear that a contract for this deal had to be signed, or sworn or even promised to be kept.



Dinah's brothers avenge her honor. Matthaeus Merian I. 1625.

Apparently the unexpected had happened and immediately,
וימלו כל-זכר-כל-יצאי שער עירו - “and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city” (Gen 34:24).

It seems that as Simeon and Levi had realized what had happened, they changed tactics and slayed all the males of that city and spoiled it.

Among God's instructions to Moses we find:

ואתה הפקד את-הלויים על-משכן העדת ועל כל-כליו, ועל כל-אשר-לו-המה ישאו את- המשכן ואת-כל-כליו, והם ישרתהו; וסביב למשכן, יחנו. ובנסע המשכן יורידו אתו הלויים, ובחנת המשכן יקימו אתו הלויים; והזר הקרב יומת.

“But appoint you the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all the furniture thereof, and over all that belongs to it; they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the furniture thereof; and they shall minister to it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle.

And when the tabernacle sets forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up; and the common man that draws nigh shall be put to death” (Num 1:50-51; see also Num 3:5-10).

Yet if, as previously suggested, **בני-חמור** (*beni-khamor*) - “sons of Hamor” indeed mean: “sons of a priest” then this whole narrative may be portrayed as a rivalry between two priestly clans. After annihilating the old clan of priests that owned the religious center in Shechem, it is not surprising to read in the Book of Joshua:

ולמשפחות בני-קהת הלויים, הנותרים מבני קהת; ויהי ערי גורלם ממטה אפרים ויתנו להם את-עיר מקלט הרצח, את-שכם ואת-מגרשה-בהר אפרים;

“And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites, even the rest of the children of Kohath, they had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim.

And they gave them Shechem with the open land about it in the hill-country of Ephraim, the city of refuge for the manslayer” (Jos 21:20-21).

Although we heard Jacob telling Simeon and Levi: **עכרתם אתי, להבאישני בישב הארץ** - “**You have troubled me, to make me odious to the inhabitants of the land”** (Gen 34:30), we also hear him now saying to: “his household, and to all that were with him”:

הסרו את-אלהי הנכר אשר בתככם, והטהרו והחליפו שמלתיכם. ונקומה ונעלה בית-אל;

“Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments;

And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el” (Gen 35:2-3).

ויתנו אל-יעקב, את כל-אלהי הנכר אשר בידם, ואת-הנזמים אשר באזניהם; ויטמן אתם יעקב, תחת האלה אשר עם-שכם.

ויסעו; ויהי חתת אלהים על-הערים אשר סביבותיהם, ולא רדפו אחרי בני יעקב.

“And they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth which was by Shechem.

And they journeyed; and a terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob” (Gen 35:4-5).

It appears that Jacob could now enter the “foreign gods” under a tree in Shechem because this place became the property of his household.

Years later the Prophet Hosea said the following words:

חבר כהנים דרך, ירצחו-שכמה: כי זמה עשו. בבית ישראל ראיתי שערוריה (שערוריה); שם זנות לאפרים, נטמא ישראל.

“So do the company of priests; they murder in the way toward Shechem; yea, they commit enormity.

In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; there harlotry is found in Ephraim, Israel is defiled” (Hos 6:9-10).

We may wonder whether Hosea is referring here to the old narrative about the Levites and Shechem in the days of Jacob and his sons. Hosea’s accusations become even uglier when we read in the Book of Leviticus:

אל-תחלל את-בתך להזנותה ; ולא-תזנה הארץ , ומלאה הארץ זמה .

“Profane not your daughter, to make her a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of lewdness” (Lev 19:29).

Although we heard Simeon and Levi saying: **Should one deal with our sister as with a harlot?”** (Gen 34:31), it appears that Hosea believed that this was indeed the way that the brothers of Dinah dealt with her.