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In order to protect the vulnerable: *The woman of strength is her husband's diadem* (Prov 12:4a). Female wisdom between the divine and the human.

According to the American philosopher Susan Moller Okin the family is the linchpin of gender.¹ She pointed out 1989 that family life as traditional practice is not just, either to women or to children.² She suggested that the family needs to be a just institution and she argued that a fair answer to the vulnerability of women and children would have to encourage and to support equal rights and an equal treatment of women and men for work, responsibilities and family.³ The book of Proverbs addresses an invitation to the reader. It encourages him to consider the relationship between women and men, between husband and wife. This paper highlights one proverb from the book of Proverbs which should be regarded as an illuminating example relating to the understanding of the relationship between wife and husband, that is Prov 12:4:

The woman of strength – her husband's diadem
But like rottenness in his bones – a shameful one.⁴

Prov 12:4 does not work with a stereotypic representation. Prov 12:4a offers two images: “The woman of strength - her husband's diadem”. This colon uses a metaphor in order to point out the relationship between the wife and her husband. Prov 12:4b offers two other images: “like rottenness in his bones – a shameful one.” This colon makes a comparison by using a metaphor. This means that the metaphor of the first colon is a prime mover, while the metaphor of the second colon is only a vehicle. The poem is marked as a coherent structural unit through a chiasmic frame and with a conjunction. The both concentrically correlated colons draw an antithetical parallel. Prov 12:4b is the chiasmic reversal of Prov 12:4a. In this paper I investigate whether using this specific chiasmic framework to talk about relationship between women and men leads the readers to reason about the responsibility of women and men differently and, in turn, leads them to propose and to support an emancipated vision of the relationship between wife and husband.

The main concern of this article is to look at the “woman of strength”. It aims to explore and reflect how “the woman of strength” is understood and contextualised in the book of Proverbs. The “woman of strength” is related to the metaphor of the “husband's diadem”, in turn creating surprise and wonder. By contrast, the image of “rottenness in bones” is related to “a shameful woman”, calling forth discomfort and questioning. Two unconventional metaphors are thus provided. These two unconventional metaphors are used in a conventional way – the antithetical parallel - to increase the impact in a message.

¹ Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 170.

² *Ibid.*, 170.

³ *Ibid.*, 146-171.

⁴ The paper works with the Masoretic Text, according to BHS. All the translations from Proverbs are the own translations of the author. The translations from other books of the Old Testament are reviewed translations from the English Standard Version.

This article explores first the question of the signification and the function of the unconventional metaphors of the both colas and addresses the extent to which they are used in a conventional way in order to convey an exclusive message: A gift from God should be cherished with reverence and dignity. With other words: Eye of God is to be cherished with reverence and dignity. What God gives, He can also take back as punishment. Such a statement was very common in the Ancient Near East and is documented several times in the books of prophecy, as this article will also show.

1. Signification and function of the metaphors of Prov 12:4.

1.1 The couplet

'ēšet ḥayil 'aṭeret ba'lāh
ûk^erāqāb b^eašmôtāyw m^ebîšâ

The poem presents the pattern A:B::B:A. The frame chiasmatically weighs *the woman of strength* ('ēšet ḥayil) over against *a shameful woman* (m^ebîšâ). The chiasm ('ēšet ḥayil - m^ebîšâ; 'aṭeret ba'lāh - ûk^erāqāb b^eašmôtāyw) diametrically opposes *the woman of strength* ('ēšet ḥayil) to *a shameful woman* (m^ebîšâ) while it embeds the other two stitches *her husband's diadem* ('aṭeret ba'lāh) and *like rottenness in his bones* (k^erāqāb b^eašmôtāyw), creating a pivotal semantic unit. The first colon is marked by assonances on *a* and *e*, providing a balance. By contrast, the second colon is only punctuated by assonances on *ā*, occurring at the end of each of the three lexems. The vowel ַ ē marks the first colon, where it occurs three times. The vowel is an open e⁵. In the last word of the colon, the vowel ַ ā occurs in the last syllable forming the sound bridge to the second colon, which it shapes. There, it occurs in every word. The ē is a smooth sound, while the ā vowel gives the colon a hard, jerky rhythm.

1.1.1 The antithetical parallels of v.12:4 cohere syntactically. Both are nominal sentences. The syntax of 4a is: noun constructus, noun, noun constructus, noun. The syntax of 4b is: conjunction, preposition of comparison, noun, preposition, noun constructus, pronoun, participle hifil. It is noticeable that there is a semantic wordplay between ḥayil and ašmôt.

The basic meaning of ḥayil is “strength, power, wealth”⁶. The term ḥayil occurs 246 times in OT (240 times in the Hebrew and 6 times in the Aramaic part). In reference to men, the term signifies “wealth” (e.g. Gen 34:29), “power” (e.g. Num 24:18), “prowess” with war (e.g. 1 Sam 14:52), “proficiency” / “strength” (e.g. Exod. 18:21.25). In reference to women, the term occurs only four times in OT, once to Ruth (Ru 3:11), and three times in the book of Proverbs, Prov 12:4a, Prov 31:10 and 31:29. The 'ēšet ḥayil describes the woman whom the concluding poem of the book is devoted to extolling and praising. The importance of such a wife to her husband is highlighted. 12:4 uses the same grammatical construction with a 3rd person feminine singular suffix (ba'lāh, “her husband”) like in 31:11.23.28⁷.

The noun ašmôt (sg.: 'ešem) refers to the same consonants as the verbal root 'ašm. Although it is still disputed by scholars⁸ whether the noun is derived from the verb, the consonants point

⁵ Muraoka, *Grammar*, § 6.

⁶ Gesenius, *Handwörterbuch*, 346; Koehler, *Lexicon*, 295.

⁷ Schipper, *Sprüche*, 711.

⁸ ThWAT 6, 327.

to a possible word play. The root initially signifies “strong, to be mighty”. With this basic meaning it occurs eight times in the Old Testament: Gen 26:16; Ex 1:7.20; Ps 38:20; Ps 139:17; Da 8:8.24; 11:23. The noun *’ešem* means “bone(s)”. Good bones are the hard and strong element of a human body. They prevent a creature from falling down. They give him strength and power.

1.1.2 The two different syntactic denominations of the respective women are striking: A noun (*’ēšet*) refers to the first one, while a participle hifil which is used as a noun refers to the second one (*m^ebīšâ*). In the Hebrew language there is certainly a strong tendency to handle the participle as a noun.⁹ Nevertheless, this difference in the choice of designations and the syntax thus reinforce the weight, even the significance, of the first woman over the second.

1.2. Two metaphors

It would surpass the intention of this article to consider all the theoretical and methodological approaches to the conceptual function of metaphors from Aristotle¹⁰ through to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson.¹¹ In accordance with recent research results on metaphors¹² the following is postulated:

1. Metaphors have a conceptual function, in other words they don’t have only a stylistic function. Metaphors “are able to make meaningful assertions about their tenor or subject”.¹³
2. Inspired by Ricoeur’s investigation, biblical metaphors should not be treated as “isolated events of discourse”¹⁴ but rather they should be recognized as “parts of clusters of metaphors”.¹⁵
3. An extended metaphor can be specifically drawn upon in the Old Testament.
4. Metaphors have to be considered “as context-sensitive, dynamic patterns, changing in the text continuum [...]”¹⁶

The contribution on Prov 12:4 will attempt to show that the employed metaphors help brighten the significance and open the perspectives. It will demonstrate that the metaphors of Prov 12:4 depict a way which promises the possibility of a successful life. This assumption will apply and maintain Stewart’s concept of the “metaphor”:

“The pervasiveness of metaphors in Proverbs also points to the imaginative nature of moral reasoning. Metaphors are not simply poetic embellishments or an interesting way to say what could be said otherwise. Rather, metaphors participate in shaping a view of the world.”¹⁷

1.2.1. *’āteret ba’lāh*. The diadem’s metaphor.

The nominal form *’ātarah* occurs 23 times in OT. The term signifies “diadem”, “wreath”¹⁸. It derives the root *’ātar*. The Qal occurs twice in the OT and means “surround upon” (1. Sam

⁹ Muraoka, *Grammar*, § 121.

¹⁰ E.g. Aristotle, *De arte poetica liber*, 1457b.

¹¹ E.g. Lakoff – Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

¹² Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in The Hebrew Bible*, 2005; Verde – Labahn (ed.), *Networks of Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible*, 2020.

¹³ Hecke, *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ Ricoeur quoted by Verde, *Networks of Metaphors*, 5. See Dell/Forti, *Networks of Metaphors*, 246f.

¹⁵ Verde, *Networks of Metaphors*, 5.

¹⁶ Hrushovski quoted by Verde, *Networks of Metaphors*, 5.

¹⁷ Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs*, 181.

¹⁸ Gesenius, *Handwörterbuch*, 952; Koehler, *Lexicon*, 698.

23:26; Ps 5:13). The Hiphil occurs only once and means “bestow with crowns” (Isa 23:8)¹⁹. The Piel is glossed “crown a person with” (Ps 8:6; 65:12; 103:4), “make a wreath” (Ct 3:11). Ps 8:6 suggests that the Lord has crowned “the son of man” with “honour and dignity”. Ps 65:12 argues that the Lord crowns the year with his “goodness”, that means, the fertility of the land is attributed to the intervention of the Lord. Ps 103:4 suggests that the Lord crowns the prayer with “steadfast love and mercy”. Ct 3:11 expresses that the mother crowns the bride with a “crown”. The nominal form of the root occurs eleven times with a figurative meaning. Among these eleven figures, seven of them bear a positive meaning: Isa 28:5; 62:3; Prov 4:9; 12:4; 14:24; 16:31; 17:6. The four proof passages, whose meaning may be understood as both negative and figurative, are the following: Job 19:9; Job 31:36; Thr 5:16; Ezek 16:12

In order to understand the figurative signification, it is suitable to recur to the basic meaning of a crown: A crown is a head ornament which renders the dignity, the rank and the status of kings and queens conspicuous. A crown highlights the head as the most important part of the body and makes the figure of the wearer appear larger. In the OT, the term *‘ăṭarah* is often used to refer to royal crowns (e.g. Ct 3:11; 2 Sam 12:30; Est 8:15; Ezek 21:31). Nevertheless, the anointing primarily legitimises the Old Testament ruler, not the crown.

Strikingly, most of the crowns of the OT come from the Lord, be they real or be they “only” metaphorical lexemes. The Lord crowns (e. g. Zach 6:11.14) and He can also take away the crown (e.g. Is 28:1.3; Jer 13:18; Job 19:9). Indeed, Ps 21 suggests that the Lord “sets a crown of fine gold upon the head” (of the king) (Ps 21:4b) and bestows “splendor and majesty on him” (Ps 21:6b).

The Greek word *διάδημα* occurs for the first time in the work of Xenophon (ca. 430-354 BCE), when he describes the headdress that Cyrus (ca. 590-530 BCE) had put on after the subjugation of the Medes.²⁰ This word refers to a bandage wrapped around the head covering, which is part of an regalia and a sign of dignity. According to Xenophon and scholars, the diadem was worn by the Persians not only by the great king.²¹ The diadem was also the sign of the members of the noble class in the Persian period. Scholars²² have provided evidence that the Book of Proverbs was composed for the noble class and probably for the children of the noble class. That the nobles would also have worn the diadem as a sign of a certain position and as a sign of dignity would thus fit in well.

Especially in the Hellenistic period, the diadem became an important symbol. The Hellenistic diadem was a band of cloth placed around the head with strong hems. According to scholars, the diadem was adopted as a royal sign in the Hellenistic period and especially by Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE).

The esteem-related and respect-related frame of reference activated by *‘ăṭarah* provides a field of “intersignifications”²³ within Proverbs. Several other OT texts also open to the significance of the metaphor *‘ăṭarah*. Is 28:5 states that the Lord is the “diadem”:

“In that day the Lord of hosts will be a diadem (*‘ăṭarah*) of glory”

¹⁹ Koehler, *Lexicon*, 698.

²⁰ Ritter, *Diadem und Königsherrschaft*, 6.

²¹ Ritter, *Ibid.*

²² Schipper, *Proverbs*.

²³ Ansberry, *Networks of Metaphors*, 270.

Is 62:3 declares that Zion will be a “diadem of beauty”:

“You shall be a crown (*’āṭarah*) of beauty in the hand of the Lord”

Prov 4:9 suggests that wisdom will place a splendid crown on the head of the attentive son:

She will place on your head a graceful garland

She will bestow on you a splendid diadem (*’āṭarah*)

The other four proof verses from the Proverbs are also used in a metaphorical way. Prov 14:24 defines the “diadem of the wise”:

The diadem (*’āṭarah*) of the wise is their wealth

Prov 16:31 suggests that gray hair is a splendid diadem because it refers to righteousness:

Gray hair is a splendid diadem (*’āṭarah*)

It is found in the way of righteousness.

Because of righteousness, this is a promise of longevity.

Prov 17:7 states that the splendid diadem of the elderly refers to the grandchildren (of a father):

The diadem (*’āṭarah*) of the elderly is sons of sons

And the glory of sons is their fathers.

1.2.2. *rāqāb b^eašmôtāyw* The metaphor of rottenness in bones (of sb).

’ešem occurs 123 times in OT²⁴. *’ešem* (“bone”) is also found besides 12:4b (plural) in 3:8 (plural); 14:30 (plural); 15:30 (singular) and 16:24 (singular). Already in 3:8 the word is used in a metaphorical sense, namely in the sense of body strength. According to Bernd Schipper, the state of mind is meant in 14:30 and 15:30 (“kind words are healing to the bones”)²⁵. In this respect, it can be concluded, in agreement with Schipper, that v. 4b is not simply about the physical body of man, but rather about body, mind and soul. V. 4b thus makes a fundamental statement about human existence in its physicality.²⁶

The noun *rāqāb* (“rottenness”) occurs rarely in the OT, only twice in prophecy (Hos 5:12; Hab 3:16) and vor times in wisdom (Hi 13:28; Prov 12:4; 14:30; Sir 43:20). The root also occurs only three times (Isa. 40:20; Prov 10:7; Sir 14:19). Except in Isa 40:20, the term is used in a figurative sense. Hab 3:16 is particularly noteworthy because the term also appears there in combination with *’ešem* but in the plural) and with the preposition *b^e*. Prov 10:7b is especially worthy of attention. In verse 10:7b, the rotting of the name of the wicked contrasts with the permanent state of the righteous from verse 10:7a²⁷.

It has been rightly suggested by scholars that the condition of a human being’s bones in the OT may often indicate facts²⁸: Rot in the bones could signify death while a gentle heart could signify life (Prov 14:30). The association of bones with rottenness, besides 12:4b, is also found

²⁴ ThWAT 6, 327.

²⁵ Schipper, *Sprüche*, 232.

²⁶ Schipper, *Ibid.*

²⁷ Schipper, *Sprüche*, 627.

²⁸ Yoder, *Proverbs*, 143.

in 14:30b and in Hab 3:2. In 14:30b jealousy is referred as rottenness for the bones²⁹. In Prov 14:30, rottenness for the bones is also in full contrast with the healed heart or life.

1.2.3. To the relationship between image and counter-image.

The two metaphors cross together as a diagonal of the chiasmus. The radiant diadem is opposed by the rottenness in the bones. The first one stands for wealth, victory, splendor, magnificence, while the second one refers to spoilage and ruin. The first one refers to respect, esteem and dignity, while the second one refers to vices and finally to death.

2. Two women

The book of Proverbs is certainly devoted to educating wise men³⁰ and to describing the woman of wisdom as well. Indeed, there are several references to women in the Proverbs.³¹

2.1. *'ēšet ḥayil* The woman of strength

Prov 12:4a offers a significant representation of a relationship between a wife and her husband: “The woman of strength - her husband’s diadem”. The last proverb of the book, Prov 31:10-31, focuses on a “woman of strength”, on the *'ēšet ḥayil*, as well. The *'ēšet ḥayil* is thus a central female figure in the Proverbs. But what is a *'ēšet ḥayil*? Is it appropriate to define her only as the figure of a well-behaved and diligent housewife? Ruth is also identified as such a woman of strength in the Book of Ruth (Ruth 3:11 and 4:11). Melanie Köhlmoos states that Ruth is the woman who corresponds to Boaz, because she is the woman of strength, just as Boaz is the man of strong strength³². Also, the woman of strength, namely Ruth, is equated with the two mothers of Israel - Rachel and Leah - and thus fully integrated as a non-Israelite³³. The quality assigned to the woman with the term *ḥayil* and the metaphor of the diadem urge the reader to examine his convictions about the significance, the place and the power of the *'ēšet ḥayil*. Where does the *ḥayil* come from? To which extent and for whom can it be applied? What is the purpose? Exemplary passages from the OT provide evidence that *ḥayil*, whether it means “strength”, “power” or “wealth”, is a gift from the Lord³⁴.

2.1.1 In the Torah, physical and intellectual strength, ability, are gifts from the Lord. This is explicitly stated in Deut 8:18:

“You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” (*ḥayil*)

Deut 8:18 is part of an exhortation (Deut 8:7-20). Moses summoned all Israel and kept exhorting them not to forget the LORD in this abundance of blessings and in a possible surfeit (Deut. 8:11) or even to become self-confident and malicious (Deut. 8:17). Moses reminds Israel that the LORD “brought out Israel of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deut 8:14),

²⁹ Schipper, *Sprüche*, 712. 817.

³⁰ Fox, *Proverbs10-31*, 889.

³¹ See Prov 1:8b; 2:16-18; 4:3; 5:3-6; 5:18-20; 6:20b-32; 7:4-21; 8; 9:1-5; 9:13-17; 10:1b; 11:16.22; 12:4; 14:1; 15:20; 17:12; 18:22; 19:13.26; 20:20; 21:9.19; 23:22-27; 25:24; 29:3; 30:11.15.17.19d-21.23; 31:1-9; 31:10-31.

³² Köhlmoos, *Ruth*, 63f.

³³ Köhlmoos, *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁴ ThWAT 2, 902-911.

that the Lord led Israel through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water" (Deut 8:15a). It would be all the worse if Israel now wanted to attribute its migration and its perseverance to its own strength. For the strength to migrate came from the LORD, who thereby proved his faithfulness to the covenant.

The meaning of *ḥayil* is evident in Moses' final blessing Deut 33:1-29. Moses is understood here as "the man of God", i.e., as a prophet who knows that he will die and for this reason and in this quality speaks prophetic words about the further life and fate of the individual tribes of Israel. Some of these words can be seen as prayer-like addresses to the Lord. Such is the case with the saying for Levi Deut 33:8-11. This saying concludes with the words:

"Bless, o Lord, his strength (*ḥayil*)

And accept the work of his hands;
Crush the loins of his adversaries,
Of those who hate him, that they rise not again."(Deut 33:11)

About the special situation, which this saying of Levi requires, we can only express conjectures, as Gerhard von Rad had already mentioned.³⁵ With the allusion to the salvation-historical event at the time of the desert migration in the context of which the LORD tested Levi, required him to uncompromising commitment and thus legitimized him, Moses, the man of God, asks the LORD to entrust Levi with the priesthood, to bless his power (*ḥayil*) and to protect him from his enemies.

2.1.2 In prophecy, too, the Lord disposes of the *ḥayil*. The term occurs there particularly often in the meaning of "military", "military power", "hosts". Also in connection with the salvation-historical experience the term is used particularly concisely, so in Isa 43:16-21, where it is announced how the LORD will lead his people out of Babylon. For this, first the salvation-historical miracle at the Sea of Reeds is recalled. The unit Isa 43:16-21 is opened with the *Botenspruchformel* – the phrase of the messenger: *koh 'āmar JHWH* - and closes with the last sense of the announced salvation, with the praise of God:

"Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
who brings forth chariot and horse, army (*ḥayil*) and warrior." (Isa 43:16-17)

The *Botenspruchformel* is followed by a hymnic praise of the LORD's work in achieving the salvation of his people through the miracle of the Reed Sea. Three phases of the Sea of Reeds miracle are pointed out: 1) the paving of a way through the waters for Israel; 2) the LORD's bringing about of the enemy army; and 3) the destruction of the enemy force (*ḥayil*). At this point it is shown that the Lord can provide *ḥayil* but also take it away and destroy it if it is used badly and wickedly.

³⁵ Rad, Das fünfte Buch Mose, 147.

In this context, Jer 48:14 is especially significant: Jer 48:14 is part of the foreign people's saying against Moab (Jer 48:1-47). The foreign peoples' sayings form a traditional collection in the book of Jeremiah, which was then appended later. Their essential function is to express words of calamity against nations and thus implicitly salvation for Israel. It is about an eschatological judgment on the nations, which is then supposed to entail salvation for Israel. The foreign peoples' sayings do not form a genre in themselves, but words of threat, words of judgment, descriptions of disaster are encountered. In this context, the Moabites are found harshly guilty of the following: The Moabites boasted of what they considered their personal bravery, unaware that this quality was a gift from the LORD:

“How do you say, 'We are heroes and mighty man of war'?” (*'anšê ḥayil*) (Jer 48:14)

Now they are being put to the trial by the LORD. The word that the LORD spoke to the prophet concerning Moab is a judgment, the judgment on Moab. Death awaits Moab's elite men and Moab's doomsday is very near (Jer 48:16): The LORD will take away and destroy Moab's *ḥayil* because of “his loftiness, his pride, his arrogance, his haughtiness, his insolence, his boasts and his deeds” (Jer 48:29-30). The Moabites formed a Moabite kingdom around 1000 BCE. At the Exodus they are said not to have helped the Israelites. Perhaps this is why they were not liked and why it is reported that the LORD is now taking the *ḥayil* away from them.

The term also occurs in prophecy with the meaning “property” and “wealth” (e.g. Is 10:14; Jer 15:13; Ezek 28:5). The Lord also disposes of this at will. He can give it or take it back at any time He chooses. The pericope Jer 15:10-21 shows this concisely. This is one of Jeremiah's six confessions, precisely Jeremiah's third confession. These texts (Jer 11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18) express laments of the prophet before God about his profession and the hostilities it entails. They belong to the genre of the individual's lament and supplication. They have been called the Confessions of Jeremiah by analogy with the confessions of the Church Father Augustine (354-430).

The third confession is a conclusion to chapter 14, where the LORD rejects the prayer of the community and confirms the judgment (Jer 14:10-12; 15:1-9). It is structured like a dialogue composed of 1) a complaint by the prophet (Jer 15:10), 2) the LORD's initial response (Jer 15:11) with a rebuke (Jer 15:12), the reason for the punishment (Jer 15:13), the consequence of the punishment (Jer 15:14), 3) a confessional prayer by the prophet (Jer 15:15-18), and 4) finally, the LORD's promise (19-21). The text reflects how the prophet laments over his ministry. He is in despair. He curses his birth, his whole existence. He calls himself a “man of strife and contention to the whole land” (Jer 15:10a): Wherever he goes, everyone curses him. He is cursed by the country, although he has done nothing wrong. On the contrary, he had prayed for his enemies and the concerns of the people he had interceded before God. He had interceded before God with all his might for his people (Jer:15:11). In the first answer of the LORD, a judgment is pronounced on the land. Jer 15:13 the Lord threatens Israel that He may give up their property to plunder as punishment for their sins:

“Your wealth (*ḥeyl^okā*) and your treasures I will give as spoil, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory.”

The LORD will take away *ḥeyl^ekā* from Israel. This is the punishment that is hereby justified. The concept of sin is included in the justification of the judgment. Thus the Lord intervenes in the event. The enemies are judged. The prophet hopes for this judgment (Jer 15:15). This judgment on the enemies of the land is followed by the confessing prayer of the prophet:

“Your words became to me a joy
And the delight of my heart,
For I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.” (Jer 15:16b)

Thus, the prophet is not lamenting the contrast between prophetic election and persecution, but the diastasis of blameless behavior and the negative consequences that flow from it. He described these consequences in forensic terminology. He is considered a "man of strife and contention to the whole land" (Jer 15:10). His commitment to the LORD is all the more valid now that the LORD is punishing the land by taking away its *ḥeyl^ekā*. But the punishment remains connected with the suffering, namely the suffering of the prophet and the suffering of the LORD. Because the LORD takes the *ḥeyl^ekā* away from the enemies of the prophet in the land, thus punishing them, there is a right transference between the LORD and the prophet.

The passage Ezek. 28:5 is particularly relevant because it focuses on a wisdom motif which occurs several times in the book of Proverbs. However, while it is the mentor or the teacher who admonishes the disciple of the Proverbs not to enrich himself by tricks (e.g. Prov 1:13.19; 10:16), but only to fill his heart with wisdom and knowledge by learning diligently (e.g. Prov 2:10; 3:14), and not to be proud but humble (e.g. Prov 14:24; 18:12), because wisdom can originate only from the Lord, the word of the Lord came to the prophet in Ezek 28:1-10. As with Jeremiah, this is a foreign people's saying, but here it is against Tyre. With the word of the LORD, the prophet reproaches Tyre for being proud, for "making [his] heart like the heart of a god" (Ezek 28:2), for behaving and acting as if he were the wise Daniel. At this point, the prophet formulates with a certain irony:

“By your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth (*ḥeyel*), and your heart has become proud in your wealth” (*ḥeyel*)

Tyre should not have equated himself with the wise Daniel. By doing it and committing other sacrilegious acts, he sinned. For this reason, a judgment is pronounced on Tyre. Thus, the Lord gives *ḥayil* and can take it back if the one given does not act wisely or turns out to be unworthy of such a gift.

2.1.3. In the wisdom texts and especially in the Psalms, the term *ḥayil* is often used in the meaning of “power”, “strength”. Here, too, *ḥayil* stems directly from the Lord. A powerful example is Psalm 18. It is the salvation story of a king. The king prays. The king remembers how the Lord appeared to him and came down from heaven to pull him out of the depths of the water. He relates how the LORD saved him from the greatest peril of his life. The second part of the psalm (Ps 18:32-51) begins with a hymn-like confession. This confession is shaped like a rhetorical question:

“For who is God, but the Lord?
And who is a rock, except our God?” (Ps 18:32)

To this rhetorical question, the praying man answers in the participial style of the hymn, explaining first, that the Lord girds him with *ḥayil*:

“The God who girded me with strength” (*ḥayil*) (Ps 18:33a)

Also, it is God who led him to the height of his power and provided him with the necessary *ḥayil*. With this *ḥayil* he could lead victorious decision fights. So God must be praised:

“For you girded me with strength (*ḥayil*) for the battle” (Ps 18:40a)

As a second example, we choose a psalm that is counted among the songs of Zion. Psalm 84 is a psalm from the Second Temple period. Scholars describe it as a post-exilic pilgrimage song to Zion.³⁶ The psalm is divided into three parts. The first part (Ps 84:1-5) praises the relationship of the worshipper to the dwelling place of “the living LORD”, to the temple. The second part (Ps 84:6-8) brings before the eyes the pilgrimage to Zion. This pilgrimage presupposes separation from the temple. With the destruction of the temple, people were deprived of God's presence. This pilgrimage takes place in the context of the distress of being far from God and of longing. In the concluding third section (Ps 84:9-13), petitions are made. A praise of God and a beatitude of the praying man close the psalm. The middle passage of Ps 84 brings to light the connection between *ḥayil*, the Lord and wise human behaviour:

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you” (God) (Ps 84:6a)

“They go from strength (*ḥayil*) to strength” (*ḥayil*) (Ps 84:8a)

The humanbeing who knows himself to be dependent on the Lord, goes from *ḥayil* to *ḥayil*. The one who is in need of the *ḥayil* given by the Lord uses it carefully and prudently. People are on the way in the distance from God. The idea of pilgrimage gives them orientation and purpose. This thought of pilgrimage is inscribed in the heart. The heart is the place of the mind, the place of God. The strength (*ḥayil*) they need and receive for the pilgrimage can be understood as the radiance of God's presence from Zion.³⁷ The wise person does not waste this intellectual and moral wealth given by the Lord in order to commit evil deeds (see Jer 9:2). Whoever goes from *ḥayil* to *ḥayil*, the Lord will not let him lack any Good, then:

“No good thing does he withhold,
From those who walk uprightly.” (Ps: 84:12b)

The human being who behaves as a righteous person towards the Lord and towards his/her fellow (wo-)man goes his/her way upright and true, from *ḥayil* to *ḥayil*, respectively in the translation of the Vulgate *de virtute in virtutem*: This human being thus proves himself worthy of God's gift by his conduct, in other words, as a human being of virtue.

2.1.4. Consequences

These observations lead to the following statement: So whoever is married to such a woman may therefore consider himself a happy person. Because even if he, the husband, were not really a wise man, the common home is still protected: The wife takes care of it.

2.2. *m^ebīšâ* The shameful woman

³⁶ Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel*, 206.

³⁷ Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel*, 208.

The first, strong, virtuous and powerful woman is opposed by the second woman, who is only designated and even defined by a participle. The absolute feminine participle *hifil* of the verb *bwš* is only used here, but the verbal forms of the verb occur in Prov 10:5; 17:2; 19:26 and 14:35³⁸. While the verbal forms of the regular *hifil* give the causative meaning “to shame sb.”, according to scholars like Bernd Schipper and Horst Seebaß³⁹, the participle seems to have taken on a different meaning. It has been noted that the participle manifestly designates the “shame-doer”, without designating those who are being shamed and dishonoured.⁴⁰ According to Seebaß, it even becomes an “essence judgment”⁴¹. It refers to a type of person who stands in contrast to the *maškîl* (e.g. Prov 10:5) or to the *'ēšet ḥayil* (Prov 12:4).

2.3. To the chiasmatical relationship between the wife and the shameful one.

The woman of strength is opposed by the shameful one. The first one stands for wealth, strength, virtue, while the second one refers to ruin. According to the antithetical structure of 12,4, the *'ēšet ḥayil* in colon a is contrasted with the “disgraceful woman” in colon b.⁴² This woman appears in contrast to the *'ēšet ḥayil*, therefore it can be implied either that she has mismanaged the *ḥayil* given to her by the Lord or that she has rejected it, i.e. that she does not like to relate to the Lord and rejects any relationship with Him. This might indicate that she is on the wrong way, respectively she is walking on the way of the wicked, on the path of evildoers (Prov 4:14).

3. Theological significances of the both metaphors.

3.1. Theological significance of the diadem's metaphor in reference of the woman of strength. Prov 12:4 puts into light that the *'ēšet ḥayil* is the diadem of her husband because she gets her *ḥayil* from the Lord. The diadem (*'āṭarah*) refers to the successful relationship between the woman and the Lord. The Lord does not bestow *ḥayil* on the disgraceful woman (Prov 12:4b):

The woman of strength is her husband's diadem
But like rot in his bones is a disgraceful one.

3.2. Theological significance of the metaphor of rottenness in the bones in reference of the shameful one.

The metaphor of rottenness has no positive aspect. Rot is not good. Rot stands for decay, for the uncared for, for the negative, for the wicked and finally for the vice.

3.3. Theological significance of both metaphors in reference of the relationship between a wife and her husband.

It has been rightly suggested by scholars that the condition of a human being's bones in the OT may often indicate facts⁴³: According Prov 14:30, rot in the bones could signify death while a gentle heart could signify life:

Life for the body is a gentle heart

³⁸ Schipper, *Sprüche*, 712.

³⁹ Schipper, *Sprüche*, 712; ThWAT 1, 579.

⁴⁰ Seebaß: “Es scheint ganz allgemein der Schande-Wirker zu meinen, ohne (wie die Verbalformen) die zu bezeichnen, denen Schande bereitet wird.” In ThWAT 1, 579.

⁴¹ Seebaß: “es wird zu einem Wesensurteil”: Ibid.

⁴² Schipper, *Sprüche*, 712.

⁴³ Yoder, *Proverbs*, 143.

But rot in the bones is jealousy.

In the sapiential books of the OT the heart is the place of the mind, and thus it may be inferred that a healthy mind brings life. From this consideration result the definition and the characterisation of *'ēšet ḥayil*: The *'ēšet ḥayil* is a woman with a healthy mind. She is a woman who brings and provides a successful life.

The Lord does not bestow *ḥayil* on the wicked, on the evildoers (Prov 4:14). The Lord bestows *ḥayil* on the woman, who knows how to appreciate and why she is required to appreciate His gift. This woman handles it carefully and wisely. Therefore the Lord gives her the ability, the right and the responsibility to manage (Prov 31:10-31) and to teach (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 31:1-9.26). The book urges the reader to examine his convictions about the role and the responsibility of parents, fathers and mothers, men and women.

Conclusion

From this brief examination of Prov 12:4a, it appears that many feminist-biblical scholars⁴⁴ can be affirmed: Advice and wisdom was by no means a male domain in Israel. Prophecy-gifted women, wives and mothers were responsible for asserting their influence in the private, political, social and environmental spheres through their advice and translating it into action.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this was not unique to Israel, but this theme of the wise woman was also to be found in Egyptian materials and in Ancient Near Eastern as well. Carole Fontaine mentions as examples an Iron Age Neo-Hittite funeral stele from Marash (8-7 BCE) showing *The Sage Wife*⁴⁶, the “able royal women – Ahmose-Nefertati, Hatshepsut, Tiye, Nefertiti, Ankhesenaton and Nefertari, to name the most notable – of the royal households of New Kingdom Egypt”⁴⁷ and the wise mother from the Epic of Gilgamesh⁴⁸. The specificity of Prov 12:4 consists purely in having worked with two images which stand in such a relation to each other that they offer a target domain which can be explained only in the light of the other texts of the Old Testament - in particular the prophetic and sapiential texts.

Abstract

The metaphor of DIADEM informs the way in which Proverbs depicts the character of a woman of strength and her place in the society. The metaphor serves the Proverbs to conceptualise a prudent, virtuous and reasonable character in relation to the divine and the human, and thus to provide the main support of a successful life.

Keywords

metaphor, wisdom, the Lord, success, life.

⁴⁴ Fontaine, *Smooth Words*, 19; *Wisdom in Proverbs*. 102f.

⁴⁵ Schroer, *Die Weisheit hat ihr Haus gebaut*, 72.

⁴⁶ Fontaine, *Smooth Words*, 20.

⁴⁷ Fontaine, 32.

⁴⁸ Fontaine, 36.

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