

JUDAIC VIEW REGARDING INCEST

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

In "The Logic of Incest, A Structural Analysis of Hebrew Mythology," Seth Daniel Kunin, (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 185*, Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., Sheffield, England, 1995) explains how the later biblical view regarding incest became much stricter than in earlier times.

In *Genesis Rabbah* (and in the biblical text) incest, whether half-brother and half-sister (Abraham and Sarah) or father/daughter (Lot and his daughters), was not mythologically problematic. In fact it resolved the structural problem of the wife by bringing her inside. In *Lekach Tov*, however, structure is clouded.

The primary case of incest in the text examined is between Abraham and Sarah. In *Wife/Sister 2* it was stated that Sarah was Abraham's sister, albeit of a different mother. This pattern of marriage was similar to the possible marriage of Amnon and Tamar (also discussed regarding *Wife/Sister 2*). In several midrashim it is suggested that Iscah, Abraham's niece, was Sarah and thus she was his classificatory sister rather than than an actual sister. In the discussion of Abraham's relationship to Sarah regarding *Wife/Sister 2*, she is never connected with Iscah. Thus *Genesis Rabbah* preserves the incestuous relationship found in the biblical text.

This, however, is not the case in the Midrashic Compilations where the relationship is explicitly stated: "Iscah is Sarah". These cases suggest that the culture which produced the Midrashic Collections was uncomfortable with the theme of incest, and thus the structure was clouded at the points where such a relationship was mentioned.

This pattern is also found in respect of the second case of incest in the texts discussed, *Lot and his Daughters*. In the biblical text neither Lot nor his daughters are condemned for their incestuous relations. But *Tov'on Lekachj* and *Genesis 19.3 Genesis Rabbah 51.8* are critical of Lot. Lot was negligent in respect of the second daughter because he must have known when his elder daughter got up in the morning. There is, however, no direct criticism. In *Lekach Tov* on *Gen.19.33 (Var.I.11.A4)*, however, the criticism is clearly spelled out. It states that Lot must have known of his elder daughter's presence when he awoke in the morning, and further that he should not have allowed himself to become drunk on the second night. It suggests that Lot's licentious nature was the reason that Moabite and Ammonite women are allowed to be proselytes, while Moabite and Ammonite men are not. The criticism is echoed in several subsequent text. *Lekach Tov* on *Gen. 20.1 (Var.I.11.A5)* is one such text.

It states, 'Abraham went from there, why did he go? Because of Lot's bad reputation. They were saying: Lot, Abraham's brother's son had intercourse with his daughters. The text concludes with a discussion of whether it was Lot or his daughters who had carnal appetites, and concludes that it was Lot.

Thus the Lot texts confirm the suggestion that there is a transformation in attitude towards incest. In the biblical text incest is structurally acceptable. In *Genesis Rabbah* the transformation is found with respect to father-daughter incest but not regarding brother-sister incest. In the compilations, however, neither father-daughter incest nor brother-sister incest is acceptable, and both are condemned or strongly clouded.

Lekach Tov includes several texts condemning Ishmael similar to those in *Genesis Rabbah*. *Lekach Tov* on Gen 21.9 (Var I.13.A1) includes the same elements as Gen. R. 53.11, accusing Ishmael of forbidden sexual relations, idol worship, and murder. Ishmael is also opposed to Issac through God's choice.

This reflects a transformation from both the biblical text and *Genesis Rabbah*. In both of those texts Ishmael was ambiguous rather than negative. It is likely that this transformation occurred because of Ishmael's association with the Arabs and therefore with Islamic power. *Lekach Tov* was compiled after the Islamic conquest of many of the major centers of Jewish communal life.

Yalkut Shemone 93 states that when Jacob was to do the blessing, "Jacob will say, I cannot do the blessing because I married two sisters while both were alive." The text continues with each person stating something negative about himself until it arrives at David who does the blessing.

This shows how the biblical view about incest became stricter later on but it also shows incest is not linked with a particular race but can be found in different cultures before the laws about it got stricter.