

Family and Identity in the Book of Judges

Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible

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Bruno J. Clifton

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For my family

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Preface

This monograph started life as something else. At the request of my superiors in the Dominican Order, in 2014 I went up to Cambridge to begin a dissertation on the anthropology of gift giving and the book of Judges. In what I suspect is a typical development, however, my research revealed this topic to be difficult to wrestle into a thesis. Instead, what emerged from this interdisciplinary inquiry was a thought at the intersection of two different fields. It is almost an axiom in research on the ancient Near East that the family was society's basic social and economic unit. In turn, sociology has emphasized the influence that our identity has on social interactions and consequently its influence on the concerns and values that occupy society. Taking these two ideas together, we should expect identity within the family to have had a dominant role in the way that people engaged with each other in ancient Near Eastern society, determining social values and influencing behaviour. This corollary has implications for reading literature from this era, such as the book of Judges. As culturally significant literature dealing with the values and concerns of the society in which it gained currency, it seemed to me that to understand the stories in Judges, their cultural import and dramatic potential, a nuanced understanding of family and identity was required. I am immensely grateful to my doctoral supervisor, Dr Nathan MacDonald, for guiding me through the dissertation's development.

There were many others who supported me during my years of study at Cambridge. The Divinity Faculty was the place, not only for intellectual support, but also the creation of connections with wonderful scholars, both peers and seniors, all of whom I thank for their help and friendship. My college, Emmanuel, provided many opportunities for stimulating conversations, as well as good food and wine and I am very grateful for the generous grant I was awarded through their *C. S. Gray Fund*. I am also grateful to Fisher House, the Catholic Chaplaincy to the University where I assisted in my first year, for the opportunity to engage with inspiring young people and place the biblical texts in a pastoral context. I thank my Dominican brothers at the Priory of St Michael, Archangel, especially the novices who had to endure a frequently distracted novice master, and the sisters of the English Congregation of St Catherine of Siena for their prayerful support.

While I defended my dissertation in 2018, this study has continued its journey since then. The remarks of my examiners, Dr Philip Jenson, and Dr Katherine Southwood, were very helpful for improving the rigour with which the insights from two fields were brought together. I thank Dr Robert

Miller for his comments on preparing the manuscript to be offered for publication. It became clear in this process, however, that such an interdisciplinary question called for more research and so I spent some time in January 2020 at our Dominican school in Jerusalem, the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française*, taking advantage of its excellent library and of fraternal conversations with the scholars there, for which I am very grateful. I also thank early publishers' reviews for indicating the direction that this research ought to take, which bolstered and clarified my arguments.

It remains to acknowledge all those who have assisted in the final stage of preparing this manuscript. A few people kindly read the chapters as they were produced, commenting on clarity and sense: Dr Andrew Niggemann, a dear friend from our time at Cambridge as students together; Brother Albert Robertson OP, a Dominican and anthropologist; and my father, Rev Mr David Clifton. I am grateful for their time, effort, and helpful comments. I must also mention Rev Dr Richard Ounsworth OP, a New Testament scholar, who on behalf of our Order determined that this work is free of scandal and doctrinal error: I thank him for his charity. It is also appropriate to thank the editors of this series, *Studies in the Cultural Contexts of the Bible*, for accepting this monograph and for all their help in bringing it to publication. Finally, I must thank my family to whom this volume is dedicated. They have certainly shaped my identity.

A few technical notes on the pages that follow. Since the majority of historical references occurring in the argument are Before the Common Era, unless marked otherwise all dates are BCE. All translations of biblical texts are my own. Finally, as students of the Hebrew Bible it is my view that we should continue to show respect to the divine name in our academic endeavours. Hence, I will use the form Yhwh, even in citing scholarship that does not.

Bruno J. Clifton OP
June 2021, Oxford