CHAPTER 8

Genealogy and Holiness of Seed in Second Temple Judaism: Facts or Creative Supposition?

8.1 Introduction

Cecilia Wassen states that “Second Temple Judaism was highly concerned with genealogical purity”1 concerning wives’ racial origins, deducing this from the forbidden marriages in 4Q269 (4QDd) 9:2–4 and 4Q397 (4QMMTd) II:12–14, associated in these texts with the rule against קֵלָיָים (mixture). To begin with, I do not perceive such a concern over “genealogical purity” with respect to laics, and although Wassen adds that “priests, more than others, had to be careful with regard to the lineage of their spouses,” she does not quote any support in her argument that the “high concern” related also to laic Jews.2 Further, Wassen’s association of these rules with “genealogical purity” is inappropriate, as I shall argue. Indeed, the association of “improper marital matching” with קֵלָיָים seemed odd to Wassen too,3 since she qualified her assumption as a “metaphoric use,” but did not attempt to resolve this oddity by discussing the authors’ motives for such an association, despite the fact that two different authors of two distinct writings in distinct circumstances indicate the same seemingly odd motive.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to argue against the notion, proposed by some scholars, that Second Temple Judaism, including the Qumran community, extended the existing priestly marriage restrictions to laics; they claim that this modification was indeed established by Ezra’s intermarriage prohibition, which they argue was founded on an innovative concept of preserving the Israelite holy seed from intermixing with profane seed, which defiles it.

I shall argue that such a concept was not in the mindset of the Israelite community in all its aspects, and did not induce Ezra’s prohibition. I shall contest the evidence cited by these scholars, and propose a different interpretation of the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah on the issue of intermarriage, demonstrating that their concern for the survival of the Israelite people with its particular

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1 Wassen, Women, 76–78.
2 For an extended discussion of these marriage restrictions, regarding their character of holiness, see pp. 308–310.
3 Wassen, Women, 76.
culture among the idolatrous nations surrounding and threatening to over-
whelm it induced them to promulgate the intermarriage prohibition. Wassen's
kilʾayim rebus will also be resolved.

8.2 Genealogical Purity or Cultural Survival?

8.2.1 The Nature of Restrictions on Marriage in Second Temple Judaism
Before disputing Wassen's thesis and presenting my own interpretation of
the above Qumran writings, I wish to clarify the connotation of the different
biblical terms used in connection with the admixture of different elements.
In the first instance, I would assert that the concept of “genealogical purity”
is not an ancient Israelite principle, and we do not encounter it in Scripture,
Qumranic or rabbinic literatures; race is, in my opinion, a modern concept,
alien to Israelite history and culture. The marriage restrictions for priests have
no association with genealogy; they are imposed on them “because they offer
up the food of your God” (Lev 21:8), the same motive for which they are pro-
hibited from shaving their heads, from being polluted by coming in contact
with a corpse, and from marrying a divorcée, as decreed in Lev 21:7, circum-
stances that have nothing in common with a holy genealogy.4

Additional restrictions are imposed on the marriage of the High Priest,
“for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him” (Lev 21:12).
Moreover, the offspring of his prohibited marriage are defiled (v. 15); this con-
sequence introduces a principle that some prohibited marriages have a detri-
mental effect on their offspring. This generational aftermath, however, has no
association with “genealogical purity”; the same effect of polluting his son and
debarring him from serving as a priest would occur if the High Priest were

4 The requirement that the priests must be Aaronite was not originally perceived as due to an
inherent holiness of this lineage. As Num 18:8–24 emphasizes, God has not granted land to
the Aaronites and Levites at its distribution to the other tribes; instead he has given them and
their descendants the various tithes and offerings to God, “an everlasting covenant” to “their
sons and daughters.” They became holy by their function, presenting the offerings to the
Lord, and that role imposed on them various restrictions, enumerated in Lev 21. Therefore,
only Aaron's descendants could be priests enjoying these privileges, much like the dictum
that an Israelite had to be the descendant of a particular tribe to have the right to receive
his heritage land, given to the tribe; we see at the Zelophehad narrative in Num 27 and 36
that inheritance cannot pass from one tribe to another. The same principle is applied in the
priest's case: he must be the descendants of Aaron in order to enjoy the privileges given to
him and his descendants. A priest with blemishes could not serve at the Temple, although he
was of Aaronite strain; he could, however, eat holy food, since he has not inherited land.