

RBL 02/2021



**LAW AND GENDER IN THE
ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND
THE HEBREW BIBLE**

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New York: Routledge, 2020. Pp. x + 249. Hardcover.
\$140.00. ISBN 9780367371494.

Vien V. Nguyen, SCJ

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

Ilan Peled is an Assyriologist at the University of Amsterdam and the author of *Masculinities and Third Gender: The Origins and Nature of an Institutionalized Gender Otherness in the Ancient Near East* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016) and editor of *Structures of Power: Law and Gender across the Ancient Near East and Beyond* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2017). He has written numerous book chapters and articles on law and gender in antiquity. As this book's title suggests, Peled examines the textual corpora of law and gender in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible and attempts to answer questions about the regulation of gender dynamics. The book comprises two core parts, preceded by an introduction. In the introduction, Peled provides an overview of previous academic research and addresses the applicability and validity of ancient Near Eastern and biblical laws: Did people live according to the statutes? Were the statutes used for other purposes, such as advancing royal propaganda or religious ideology? Peled also states the questions and aims of the book and helpfully provides brief, yet informative descriptions of the various ancient Near Eastern law collections, ancient Near Eastern royal decrees and instructions, and biblical laws. He also lists the technical terms used in the book that are left untranslated, as well as weight and measurement units.

The book offers insights into the world of ancient societies and the manner in which ancient people used legal institutions to dictate a population's gender customs and sexual behaviors. What emerges from the synthesis is a diverse and complex picture of the interrelationship of laws and gender due to a mixture of sources, cultures, periods, and themes (108). In his observation about who had the power to dictate official laws and decrees in ancient societies, Peled states the obvious, that men, precisely the elites, possessed social control and that law was the mechanism to perpetuate gender inequality or enforce male superiority, separation, and segregation: "Men were legislators, and gender differentiation and inequality as embedded in official law reflected the broader androcentric or patriarchal tendencies of ancient societies" (136). Moreover, readers need to consider the dynamics not only between genders but also within the genders, in which law was used to bolster certain social and cultural norms of gender roles or oblige other men or women to behave in specific manners (136).

The first part of the book examines the interrelationship and differentiation between law and gender in ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew Bible law collections. It is divided into four chapters, proceeding from the general to the particular, from the societal to the individual perspective. It is followed by a summary of the different chapters, analysis of the different legal corpora, and conclusions concerning law and gender in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible. In chapter 1, Peled analyzes the societal perspective on law and gender by assessing the social status and (in)equality embedded in ancient Near Eastern law and biblical law between genders among free persons and slaves. The chapter's closing section discusses statutes and rules aimed at protecting and securing women's welfare in certain circumstances (e.g., divorce, widowing, husband in captivity). Chapter 2 assesses the institutional perspective from two different spheres: the bureaucratic and the economic. First, Peled addresses the topic concerning salaries, wages, and people's value according to their gender. Peled also discusses gender-related factors involved in debt-slavery. For example, in the ancient Near Eastern law collections, a man in debt could sell his slaves and family members—wife and children—into slavery to pay off debts. Biblical law permits only daughters to be sold to clear the debt. Peled continues the chapter with discussions on specific aspects of the bureaucratic sphere that deal with the palace and temple arenas, such as adoption practices, female cult personnel, eunuchs and castration, and purity.

Chapter 3 examines the interrelationship of law and gender from the familial perspective, mostly dealing with family life regulation in connection with authority and financial implications. Peled first analyzes slaves and family life, with attention to rules of marriage and divorce between free persons and slaves, inheritance rights, the legal status of slaves' children, and giving slaves' children in adoption. Other statutes covered are parental legal authority, betrothal and its infringement, economic dynamics in marriage life, divorce and widowing, inheritance, adoption, polygamy, and prostitution. Chapter 4 studies the

individual perspective on law and gender, focusing on morality and sex crimes. Peled discusses different felonies: premarital sex, adultery and rape, incest and sexual relations between kin members, same-sex relations, bestiality. The law usually regarded males—rarely women—as potential perpetrators of these felonies. The victim could be a female or her male governing figure (i.e., her father, husband, or owner). The essence of the penalty for these felonies was mainly financial or moral, depending on the circumstances.

The second part of the book contains the listing of legal provisions and statutes discussed in the first part. They are organized chronologically, from Mesopotamian law collections to Hittite to biblical provisions. Peled provides the textual quotations from original ancient Near Eastern sources in different languages and scripts. Akkadian texts are presented in normalized/bound script; Sumerian and Hittite texts are given in transliteration; biblical texts are presented in Hebrew script and follow the Masoretic Text. All textual quotations are followed with English translations, with the biblical mostly following the NIV. Peled also offers his translations when he deems the NIV translations unsatisfactory. Regarding biblical laws, Peled groups them into three categories: the Covenant Code, the Holiness Code, and the Deuteronomic Code. The Covenant Code is the civil or criminal legal provisions found in Exod 21–23. The Holiness Code is mostly cultic and religious regulations from Lev 17–25. The Deuteronomic Code, found in Deut 12–26, is the revision or reinterpretation of Israelite law.

Research on ancient law and gender has often been done separately. Publications on the conjunction between law and gender are relatively meager (4). Thus, this treatment of the interrelationship of law and gender is commendable and a welcome contribution to legal and gender studies. The book offers an impressive scholarship and reflects in-depth knowledge of the ancient texts. Peled works mainly with primary texts but occasionally engages with secondary sources to clarify, strengthen, or offer a nuanced interpretation when the laws discussed are not explicit or conclusive. Since the book is mainly descriptive, a synthesis of different ancient legal sources, Peled maintains “a minimal engagement with theory—whether of law or of gender” (2). He does not seek to evaluate the connection between ancient Near Eastern law collections and biblical legal provisions but rather to enhance readers’ understanding of how ancient people used legal institutions for “the enforcement of social and cultural norms of gender roles, gender relations and sexual behavior in various social settings” (11). Graduate students in Old Testament will benefit from these rich legal texts to understand the world in which the Bible arose. Readers looking for a theological treatment of law and gender will be disappointed and have to look elsewhere. By placing ancient Near Eastern and biblical laws next to each other, readers can see notable similarities and differences

The research is reliable and meticulous; the presentation is descriptive and systematic; the writing is fluid and lucid. The book is a treasure trove of information and an indispensable resource for scholars and students engaged in law and gender in the ancient world. It allows us to imagine or reconstruct how gender dynamics were regulated through legal institutions. It contributes to the legal debates on gender (in)equality in antiquity. The listing of the primary sources in the second part of the book gives anyone working on law and gender convenient access to the sources. Although the subjects can be highly specialized and academic, Peled writes in everyday English to make them understandable to lay readers. The book's price (\$140.00, hardcover) may preclude it from being accessible to the broader audience. I find it difficult to imagine working on law and gender issues in the ancient Near Eastern and biblical cultures without regular consultation of this book.