ISSN 1661-3317

Susanne Scholz

What "Really" Happened to Dinah: A Feminist Analysis of Genesis 34

In einer Gesellschaft, in der Vergewaltigungen zur Tagesordnung gehören, stellt sich die Frage, wie feministische InterpretInnen biblische Vergewaltigungsgeschichten verantwortlich, d.h. auf Seiten der vergewaltigten Opfer/Überlebenden stehend, auslegen können. Genesis 34, die Geschichte der Vergewaltigung Dinas, stellt ein besonderes Problem dar, weil der Vergewaltigung die Ermordung des Vergewaltigers und seiner Männer folgt. Eine exemplarische Untersuchung zeigt, dass heutige AuslegerInnen häufig mit dem Vergewaltiger, Sichem, sympathisieren, während sie die Vergewaltigung der Dina minimalisieren. Eine literarkritische Auslegung folgt, die Genesis 34 als "Dinas Geschichte" versteht und besonders die ersten Verse der Geschichte betont. Der Artikel zeigt daher beispielhaft, dass Bibelinterpretationen immer in bestimmten sozial-politischen und kulturellen Zusammenhängen stehen. Deshalb kann eine Vergewaltigungsgeschichte wie Genesis 34 niemals "neutral" oder "objektiv" gelesen werden.

Genesis 34 is a largely unknown story. Although the chapter features Dinah, the only daughter of Leah and one of the few biblical daughters identified by their mother's name[1], even feminist readers have often ignored this chapter in the Bible. The reason for the neglect is clear. Tucked into the so-called Jacob-cycle, Genesis 34 presents a complicated narrative. Readers are challenged to deal with rape and murder.

The story begins with a young woman who leaves her house to visit the daughters of the land (Genesis 34:1). It ends with a question from her brothers (Genesis 34:31). Disturbing events occur in-between these verses. After Dinah leaves to visit the daughters of the land, Shechem, the prince of the land, rapes her. According to many translations, Shechem then falls in love with Dinah and wants to marry her. Her brothers, however, do not trust him. They trick the prince, his father Hamor and the male town inhabitants into circumcision. When the Shechemites lie in pain

[1] Only here and in Genesis 36:39 does a mother's name identify a daughter. Dinah is "the daughter of Leah" and Mehetabel is "the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab". In Ruth 1:8, Naomi does not explicitly name the mothers of her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah: "Go back each of you to your mother's house."

on the third day, the brothers liberate Dinah from Shechem's house and kill all the men. Upon hearing of these events, Dinah's father Jacob, who was silent before, is now furious. He accuses his sons: "You brought trouble to me to make me odious among the settlers of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I am small in number; they will gather against me, and they will attack me, and I will be destroyed, I and my house" (verse 30). Thereupon, the brothers ask: "(But) like a prostitute he treats our sister?"

The story received little attention in the history of interpretation for various reasons. One relates certainly to the fact that Genesis 34 poses such a complicated ethical dilemma. How shall readers deal with the rape in light of the killing? In a culture that rarely addresses the issue of rape it is not surprising that a story about the rape of a woman and the murder of the rapist did not get much attention. When it did, the rape was mostly ignored.

Obfuscating Rape: Genesis 34 in Contemporary Scholarship

Employing the tools of modern biblical scholarship, such as historical, anthropological, or source critical methodologies, interpreters of Genesis 34 claim scientific objectivity for their readings. A closer look, however, reveals that their interpretations marginalize the rape and advance an understanding that supports rape-prone theory and praxis. Scholars, mostly of a Christian persuasion, do so by emphasizing Shechem's love and marriage proposal. They do not describe Shechem as a rapist, but as the lover and potential husband of Dinah. Shechem turns into a character to be pitied. Neither Dinah nor the rape are central to them. In other words, many contemporary interpretations of Genesis 34 are dangerous in a culture that some define as a "rape culture".[2] A few examples shall illustrate the problem.

Using historical methodologies, the interpretation of renowned Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad is an example for the marginalization of the rape and Dinah. To von Rad, the narrative does not report actual events in the family life of Leah and Jacob. Rather, it remembers a "prehistoric conflict" in early Israelite tribal history: "The narrative seems to go back to the time when Israelite tribes were not yet settled in Palestine but on their way thither in search of new

[2] For the term "rape culture", see Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher and Martha Roth (eds.), *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 1993). For an overview of feminist theories on rape, see Susanne Scholz, *Rape Plots: A Feminist Cultural Study of Genesis 34* (New York: Lang, 2000), 19-44.

pasture."[3] Grounded in "some catastrophe" related to territorial dispossession, the personalized saga describes that Shechem "has fallen in love with the girl, Dinah". It emphasizes Shechem's "great love for the girl, which brooks no hindrance". In fact, von Rad claims: "The figure of Shechem is made more human for the reader" than the brothers who "purify the honor of their violated sister at the cost of a morally ambiguous deed". Thus, from von Rad's historical perspective, the story remembers the departure of the tribes of Simeon and Levi from the territory around Shechem. Rape is not an issue in this past.

Also marginalizing the rape, other interpreters use anthropological methods. For instance, Lynn M. Bechtel suggests that Genesis 34 reflects ancient Israel's struggle between the integration and the exclusion of foreign people. As a group-oriented society, Israel disagreed whether or not to interact with non-Israelites and to cross tribal boundaries. The characters of Genesis 34 represent the different positions. One faction – personified by Dinah and Jacob – wants to interact with outsiders. The other group – personified by the brothers, "the militant folks" – votes for separation and group "purity". Bechtel believes that the writers of the narrative opposed the excluding position: "The story seems to be challenging this attitude [of the brothers] by showing the potential danger in which it places the group."[4]

Bechtel explains that the ancient Israelites lived and worked to serve the good of the larger group. In such a group-oriented society the differentiation between "us" and "them" was essential. "Closely knit" boundaries had to be maintained. The activities of individuals strengthened the boundaries. Marriage was a group affair; even sexual intercourse perpetuated the values of the family and clan. Sexual intercourse became shameful only when it lacked family or community bonding. Since Dinah and Shechem's "intercourse" occurred between "two unbonded people", their "intercourse" was shameful. Shechem, however, wanted to remedy the situation by marrying Dinah. To Bechtel, he was an "honorable" man whereas the brothers were the villains. Stuck in an exclusionary behavior that threatened to destroy the wider community, they retreated

[3] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 3rd rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 329. For similar interpretations, see, e.g. Robert Davidson, Genesis 12-50, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Michael Maher, Genesis (Wilmington: Glazier, 1982); Jan Dus, *Israelitische Vorfahren — Vasallen palästinischer Stadtstaaten? Revisionsbedürftigkeit der Landnahmehypothese von Albrecht Alt*, European University Studies 23, vol. 404 (Frankfurt: Lang, 1991).

[4] Lynn M. Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34)", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 62 (June 1994), 19-36. A similar approach is taken by Bernd Jörg Diebner, "Genesis 34 und Dinas Rolle bei der Definition 'Israels'", *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament* 19 (July 1984), 59-75. Diebner reconstructs the controversy from the perspective of "Jerusalem's orthodoxy" during the 2nd century B.C.E.

to unjustifiable vengeance, later condemned in Genesis 49:5-7. The brothers manifested their inferiority through cunning and did not see that "in the long run this kind of behavior violates group-oriented ideals". Bechtel concludes: "Ironically, if there is a rape in this story, it is Simeon and Levi who 'rape' the Shechemites." Characterizing the rape as acceptable intercourse, Bechtel redefines the killing as rape.[5] The rape of Dinah disappears.

Another group of scholars bases their interpretations on source criticism and so neglects the rape. For instance, Yair Zakovitch applies this method to reconstructing the earliest version of Genesis 34. Particularly one observation leads him to exclude the rape from the original literary source of the text. He states: "The sequence of actions at the beginning of the story is difficult: Shechem lay with the girl and ravished her (verse 2), and only afterward became infatuated with her and sought to persuade her (verse 3)."[6] Thus, to Zakovitch, later editors added the rape in verse 2b to justify the brothers. The editors needed a motive for the murder, which the rape provided. Zakovitch also proposes that the editors wanted to assimilate the original story to two biblical texts: the story of the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) and Jacob's curse of his two sons (Genesis 49:5-7). Accordingly, the changes resulted in a contrived version in which rape explains the fraternal violence. In contrast, the original story did not contain "the rape element". It reported only "Shechem's innocent attraction to Dinah and Jacob's sons' treacherous exploitation of the situation in order to plunder the city".

In comparison to other source critical reconstructions, the precariousness of such argumentation becomes evident. For example, Claus Westermann proposes three rather than two sources for Genesis 34. The original source A, the family or Shechem tradition, tells of "the revenge of two brothers for the outrage against their sister".[7] This source contains verses 2-3. Source B, the tribal narrative or Hamor tradition, is "an account of the peaceful settlement of an Israelite group in the region of a Canaanite city". Source C is the final redaction, condemning intermarriage. It draws upon Deuteronomy 7:1-5, a text prohibiting intermarriage and opposing the possibility of peaceful or contractual settlement. Source C transforms "the account of the peaceful settlement of an Israelite group" into a narrative of killing and plunder. Unlike Zakovitch, then, Westermann does not separate Genesis 34:2-3. He regards the "forceful violation" (verse 2) and Shechem's

[5] Bechtel, "What if Dinah", 34. For a thorough critique of this approach, see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 109-112.
[6] Yair Zakovitch, "Assimilation in Biblical Narratives", in: *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 175-196.
[7] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-50: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 536-538.

"speaking feelingly" (verse 3) as part of source A about Shechem. Regardless, however, whether the narrative is separated into two or three literary sources, the rape is minimized.

The obliteration of the rape has also been carried into feminist readings. Ilona N. Rashkow presents a short analysis from a "feminist-psychological approach" in which she accuses the brothers, and not the rapist, of subjugating "female desire to male rule".[8] Characterizing the fraternal question in verse 31, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?" (NRSV), as the quintessential expression of male dominance, Rashkow states that the brothers "really castrated" Dinah. She finds Simeon and Levi as "suddenly obsessed with a sense of outraged personal honor". They destroyed the opportunity for Dinah to marry Shechem and live a respectful life with him. The fact that Shechem raped Dinah does not filter into Rashkow's argumentation.

Similarly, Irmtraud Fischer regards the marriage proposal as an exonerating factor in ancient Israel. Subordinating the narrative to laws in Exodus 22:15-16 and Deuteronomy 22:23-27, she argues that Shechem tried everything to restore the legal requirements after the rape. Shechem could have but did not "brutally" use his power against the other tribe. To Fischer, the problem is that Shechem had intercourse with Dinah before he married her:

> "By raping her, he disregards law and custom and especially the personal integrity of the woman. However, by accepting all conditions, the young man tries to restore them by officially negotiating for a marriage."[9]

Guilty of rape, Shechem redeems himself with the offer of a wedding ring to the raped woman. However, the brothers act unjustifiably with "insidious murder". Their negotiation tactics exemplify that marriage negotiations with the family of Sarah and Abraham are usually deceptive. When foreign men approach the women of this family, the foreigners and not the "patriarchs" are endangered. Again, sympathy accumulates with the rapist. Whether or not ancient Israelite women approved of marrying their rapist, is not a question asked even once.[10]

These examples from the recent history of interpretation demonstrate that rape has been severely marginalized in many scholarly interpretations. Will we ever be able to know conclusively what

[8] Ilona N. Rashkow, *The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist-Psychological Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster and Knox Press, 1993), 105-106.

[9] Irmtraud Fischer, *Gottesstreiterinnen: Biblische Erzählungen über die Anfänge Israels* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1995), 136. The translation from the original German is mine.

[10] For an interpretation that takes this question into account, see Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 2 (1991), 193-211. For a critique of this interpretation, see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 121-123.

really happened to Dinah? Was she raped? Was she a willing participant in a youthful "adventure" with Shechem? Did Shechem rape her first and then fall in love with her? Did the brothers "castrate" Dinah by killing her innocent and virtuous lover? What seems clear is the fact that the tension between the horror of the rape and the enormity of the killing encouraged many interpreters to minimize the rape. To many scholars, the rape of one woman pales in comparison to the murder of many men. Yet, the widespread promotion of the rapist and the indifference toward his accountability demands an alternative interpretation. Dinah's story has yet to be told.[11] In it, the rape plays a center role.

Accentuating Rape: A Literary Reading of Dinah's Story

The story begins with Dinah's move toward independence. She goes out to visit the daughters of the land. A single woman planning to visit others is a rare event in biblical narrative. Also rare is the introduction of a daughter by her mother's name. In fact, Leah, the mother, is not only named but even the subject of the explicatory relative clause "whom she had borne to Jacob" (verse 1). Rhetorically, Leah links Dinah and Jacob. The position of the daughter and the father signifies distance, an early indication of Jacob's lacking concern for Dinah's well being. Hence, women begin and end this verse. A very different story from the one that unfolds is imaginable, one in which women were the main characters. However, the potential for a story in which one woman meets others quickly disappears. Dinah's plan to visit other women turns into a nightmare.

The Rape

A man sees Dinah and disregards her integrity (verses 2-3). His name is Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite. Characterized as the prince of the land, Shechem is of high class. Unlike Dinah, Shechem is identified by his father rather than by his mother. He is the son of Hamor. Both father and son are Hivites. Grammatically, the phrase "prince of the land" can refer to Hamor, the nearest antecedent, or to Shechem, the distant antecedent. In the latter case, Shechem has three identifications: "son of Hamor", "the Hivite", "the prince of the land". Later, the narrative describes him as someone "most honored" (verse 19), which made the townspeople listen to him and obey his request. As the prince of the land, Shechem sees Dinah and uses his

[11] Some feminist interpreters disregard such effort. See, for example, Elke Seifert, *Tochter und Vater im Alten Testament: Eine ideologiekritische Untersuchung zur Verfügungsgewalt von Vätern über ihre Töchter* (Neukirchen-

power and position to take what he wants. The repetition of the verb “to see” (h)•) links verses 1 and 2. His action prevents Dinah from seeing the women of the land. Having been the grammatical subject in verse 1, Dinah becomes the grammatical object in verse 2, the position into which Shechem forces her. Ironically, his seeing Dinah prevents her from seeing the women of the land. Since his intention is hostile, his seeing leads to rape. The violence begins.

verse 2b And he took her,
and he laid her,
and he raped her.
verse 3 And he stayed close to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob,
and he lusted after the young woman,
and he tried to soothe her.

No reference to time and place delay the actions. Grammatically, Shechem is the subject and Dinah the object. Six verbs in rapid succession describe the situation. The first three report the rape, the last three the ramifications.

The first set of verbs. In staccato fashion, the narrative combines the first three verbs to describe the rape: “He took her, and he laid her, and he raped her” (verse 2b). The verbs underscore the increasing severity of the violence. Whereas the first verb means simply “to take” (xql), the second verb (bk#$presents an interesting twist in Hebrew grammar. The verb is not connected to the expected proposition “with” which would indicate the willing participation of Dinah. Rather, the verb is followed by a Hebrew object marker (t), which stresses Dinah as the object of the activity. Shechem does not lie “with” her. No doubt, “Shechem laid her”.

The third verb, “to rape” (hn(, pi.), has posed many problems for translators. For instance, none of the standard English Bible versions translate the verb as “he raped her”. The King James Bible translates the verse: “He took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.” The more recent New Revised Standard Version and the Tenakh write: “He seized her and lay with her by force.” Some scholars justify this translation. They argue that the verb in Hebrew does not mean “to rape”

Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), 104: “Dinas Perspektive kommt in Genesis 34 überhaupt nicht zum Ausdruck.”

because Hebrew does not have a specific word for this action.[12] However, classical reference books indicate that the verb signifies an act of violence. Mandelkern's concordance translates the Hebrew into the Latin equivalent "*opprimere, vim affere*", which refers to violent and oppressive action. The English dictionary of biblical Hebrew, edited by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, translates the verb as "1. humble, mishandle, afflict; 2. humble, a woman by cohabitation; 3. afflict; 4. humble, weaken". Wilhelm Gesenius' dictionary provides the most direct translation: "to weaken a woman, through rape".[13] Thus, the classic reference books support that the verb describes a form of violent interaction, including rape. Interestingly enough, the verb is sometimes translated as "to rape" in other biblical passages. For example, the NRSV translates Lamentations 5:11: "Women are raped in Zion." Additionally, all major commentaries emphasize that Amnon raped Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:14.[14] Also Erhard Gerstenberger's word analysis supports the translation of "to rape". He states that the verb describes "unjust situations", "the creation of a miserable situation", and "physical or psychological violence".[15]

Another example illustrates why scholars are so reticent to translate verse 2b as a reference to rape. Discussing Deuteronomy 22:13-29, Moshe Weinfeld claims that the verb "connote[s] sexual intercourse in general rather than rape".[16] However, later he holds that "the author of Deuteronomy does not differentiate between cases of seduction and rape" because "sexual relations with a young, even unbetrothed, girl had always been taken as coercive". Acknowledging that ancient Near Eastern men forced young women to have intercourse, Weinfeld still hedges to translate the verb as "to rape". But why is he hesitant? The contemporary word for such activity is "to rape". Do readers feel uncomfortable that the Bible tells of rape? In any case, the last verb of Genesis 34:2b represents the culmination of Shechem's increasing use of violence against Dinah. According to classical reference books, other biblical texts, and contemporary terminology, Shechem raped Dinah.

[12] See, e.g. Bechtel, "What If Dinah", 31.

[13] Solomon Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1967), 902; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 776; Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Berlin: Springer, 1962), 604.

[14] See, e.g. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 314-328.

[15] Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "hn(", in: THAT VI, (1989), 252.

[16] Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 286-287.

The second set of verbs. The hesitancy among scholars to translate verse 2b as a description of rape is certainly also related to verse 3. Acknowledging Shechem as a rapist, Terence E. Fretheim observes: "Shechem proceeds to act in a way atypical of rapists: He clings to Dinah… loves her… and speaks to her heart… The latter phrase may cause Dinah's positive response."[17] Even more enthusiastic is Ita Sheres:

> "If one is to find male compassion in the story, one has to turn to Shechem, "the stranger", who after the rape falls in love with Dinah and realizes that he must "console the girl" before proceeding with official, ritualized courtship… In fact, it can be easily argued that Shechem's attitude is not only the *most human* but also the *most credible*: how else could he have expected to live with Dinah, whom he had raped, as his wife?"[18] [stress added]

In accordance with such great sympathy for the rapist, most Bible versions translate verse 3 as an expression of Shechem's love. The King James Bible writes: "And his soul clave unto Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spoke kindly unto the damsel." The NRSV informs: "And his soul was drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob: he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her." The Tanakh emphasizes: "Being strongly drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly." But what kind of "love" does a rapist hold for the woman he just raped? A feminist reader has to be suspicious of a quick relief from the reality of rape. A critical look at the vocabulary and grammar reveals that in verse 3 love talk does not follow rape.

Three verbs report the immediate consequences of the rape. The first is often translated as "to cling to" or "to be drawn to" (qbd), but an alternative translation is possible. As in other biblical passages, the verb connotes physical and spatial, but not emotional, closeness. For instance, Ruth 1:14 states that Ruth and Naomi stayed together while the other daughter-in-law left for home: "But Ruth clung to her" (NRSV). The Jerusalem Bible translates the verb more clearly as a reference to spatial closeness, "Ruth stayed with Naomi". The verb also appears in Ruth 2:23, which the NRSV renders as a reference to spatial relations: "So she kept close to the maidens of Boaz" and the NRSV: "So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz." The verb occurs in Psalm 101:3, where it describes the spatial distance between the lover and the hater of God.

[17] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections", in: *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck a.o., vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 321-674.
[18] Ita Sheres, *Dinah's Rebellion: A Biblical Parable for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad), 111f.

According to commentator A. A. Anderson, the verb denotes "to keep close to someone". Thus, Anderson translates Psalm 101:3: "'It shall not cleave to me', or 'he shall not remain close to me.'"[19] Other references, such as Numbers 36:7.9, also demonstrate that the verb expresses physical and spatial closeness. Thus, Shechem stayed close to Dinah and even brought her to his home, a fact that becomes apparent later (verse 26) when Dinah leaves his house. Sometimes, commentators insist that the noun #$pn in verse 3 refers to Shechem's "soul". They then argue that Shechem was emotionally attached to Dinah as if his soul longed for her. Yet, #$pn does not mean "soul", but sometimes substitutes for a personal pronoun, in this case "he".[20] More often however, #$pn stresses the aspect of the "desiring" self, here with sexual connotations.[21] Yet regardless of the connotations, the first part of verse 3 emphasizes the physical closeness of Shechem, which was certainly related to his sexual interest in Dinah. "He", Shechem, "stayed close to Dinah."[22]

The next verb in verse 3 is generally translated as "to love" (bh)). However, in the context of rape, the verb describes Shechem's intention to treat Dinah as he pleases. Two scholarly observations support such an understanding. G. Wallis argues: "The terminological context for to love/love is very wide in the language of the Old Testament." Since "love and action are two sides of the same coin", concrete action fills the meaning of "love".[23] When the action is rape, "love" is hardly present. Interpreting the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, Phyllis Trible also maintains that the verb does not connote care and support. Instead, she translates the verb with the "ambiguous word 'to desire', to let the plot disclose the precise meaning".[24] Thus, the second verb of verse 3 does not describe mutual intimacy. It is better translated with "to desire" in the sense of "to lust (after)". As Amnon lusted after Tamar before he raped her, so Shechem desired Dinah after the rape. However, in contrast to 2 Samuel 13, the verb lost its "ambiguity" in

[19] A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible, vol. 2 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 458.
[20] For this standard interpretation of #$pn, see, e.g. H. Seebaß, "#$pn", in: THAT V, (1986), 531. Examples from the Hebrew Bible are Genesis 49:6; Numbers 32:10; Jeremiah 16:30 or Psalm 25:13.
[21] For the emphasis on desiring self, see Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), chap. 2.
[22] For a related translation of "#$pn", see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 140.
[23] G. Wallis, "bh)", in: THAT I, (1973), 111.
[24] Phyllis Trible, "Tamar: The Royal Rape of Wisdom", in: *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 58, footnote 6.

Genesis 34. Rape defines his perverse lust. Not love, but his desire to exert his will for sex over Dinah qualifies the meaning of the verb.

The final verb of verse 3 is part of a phrase that is often translated as "to speak tenderly or kindly to" Dinah (bl l(rbd). The phrase occurs only ten times in the Hebrew Bible when a "situation is wrong, difficult, or danger is in the air".[25] Whenever the phrase appears, someone speaks to the "heart" of the fearful character to resolve a frightening situation in a larger context of fear, anxiety, sin, or offense. The phrase describes that someone tries to "talk against a prevailing (negative) opinion".[26] Consequently, in Genesis 34, the phrase depicts Shechem's attempt to change Dinah's negative opinion and to make her accept his interests. The sentence thus reads: "He tried to soothe her." When rape is accentuated, love talk is not involved.

The Aftermath

The brevity of the report on rape is typical for many rape narratives. Some object that Dinah should have spoken so that we would understand her feelings. But are they not clear? No woman wants to be raped. What is there to say? Genesis 34 is Dinah's story even though she does not speak. She is mentioned in most of the thirty-one verses. In verses 1-3 every sentence mentions her, once as the subject (verse 1) and eight times as the object (verse 2a; verses 2b-3). Thereafter, she continuously appears: Shechem calls her "this young woman" (verse 4); she is "Dinah, his daughter" (verse 5) and the "daughter of Jacob" (verses 7.19; cf. verse 3); Hamor mentions her as "your [plural] daughter" and "her" (verse 8); Jacob is "her father" (verse 11); the brothers are "her" brothers (verse 11); she is a "young woman" (verse 12), "Dinah, their sister" (verses 13. 27); "our sister" (verses 14.31) and "our daughter" (verse 17); her brothers are "the brothers of Dinah" (verse 25); and she is simply "Dinah" (verse 26). Certainly, she is the main character. Identifying with her, feminist readers know that rape is oppressive and violent. The story poses the challenge to men. They need to question deeply their understanding of sexual relations, consensual as well as violent, with women. Thus, Genesis 34 proceeds with the men.[27]

[25] See Genesis 34:3; 50:21; Judges 19:3; 1 Samuel 1:13; 2 Samuel 19:8; Isaiah 40:8; Hosea 2:16; Ruth 2:13; 2 Chronicles 30:22; 32:6.

[26] Georg Fischer, „Die Redewendung bl l(rbd im AT — Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis von Jesaja 40:2", *Biblica* 65 (1984), 244-50.

[27] For almost 40 years now, feminist theorists have examined the impact of rape on women, men, and children. For an overview on the literature, see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 19-44.

The remaining twenty-eight verses are too many to discuss in equal detail to verses 1-3. Suffice it to say that men speak and talk, pretend and trick, are in pain after the circumcision and kill their opponents. Everything happens because of the rape, which sets the events in motion: the marriage negotiations, the circumcision, the murder, and the final question of the brothers. Since the brothers have received such controversial publicity, the following comments examine their complex response to the rape.

The brothers of Dinah hear about their sister when they return home from their day's work (verse 7a). In contrast to their father Jacob, who did not respond immediately (verse 5), the brothers react strongly. Two highly unusual and expressive verbs describe their reaction: "They grieved, and they were very depressed" (verse 7bc). The first verb "to grieve" appears only one more time in the Bible. Just prior to the flood story, Genesis 6:6 uses the same verb to state that God reacted to the evil of humankind with great grief: "and it grieved him [Yahweh] to his heart" (NRSV). When interpreters reflected on Genesis 6:6, they underlined the depth and profundity of the divine grief. U. Cassuto writes, "Man's deeds and the thoughts of his heart (verse 5) bring grief to the heart of the Lord". Nahum Sarna states, "God's decision is made in sorrow, not in anger". Walter Brueggemann offers one of the most elaborate explanations for Genesis 6:6: "Verse 6 shows us the deep pathos of God. God is not angered but grieved. He is not enraged but saddened." Further, the "narrative is centered in the grief of God. What distinguishes God in this narrative from every other god and from every creature is God's deep grief. That grief enables God to move past his own interests".[28] Relating this assessment of the grief to Genesis 34:7 deepens the appreciation for the fraternal response. As God grieved over the creation, so the brothers grieve over Dinah's rape. They will not tolerate a wedding between the rapist and their sister.

The other verb qualifies further the brothers' pain. Unlike the suggestion of many interpreters, the brothers are not angry, an externally directed response to the rape. Rather, the verb connotes an internally directed sadness, describing the deep interior response of the brothers.[29] They become

[28] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. I. Abrahams, *Part I: From Adam to Noah Genesis 1-6.8* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University Press, 1978), 304; Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis: *The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 47; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: Knox Press, 1982), 77f.82.

[29] For this argument, see Mayer I. Gruber, Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 357.371-379.

deeply depressed when they hear what happened to their sister. No other characters of Genesis 34 reveal such profound sympathy for Dinah.

After the marriage negotiations and the circumcision (verses 8-24) the brothers turn against the Shechemites. Although the severity of their action is difficult to tolerate, the murder is a consequence of the rape. They trick Shechem and Hamor because Shechem "had oppressed Dinah, their sister" (verse 13). They kill the other men, plunder the town, and capture the women and children because the Shechemites participated in the "oppression of their sister" (verse 27). The brothers know that rape is not only perpetuated by the rapist. Rape is also a societal problem. Rape-prone structures and institutions support him.[30] By not confining the revenge to the rapist, the brothers turn against the men, women, and children in town. Everybody is implicated in the oppressive and violent behavior of rape – a radical idea.

Yet, also the brothers stand in a rape-prone tradition. Although they sympathize deeply with their sister, they take women and children as their booty (verses 27-29). The story does not indicate whether the brothers rape the women in turn. However, they treat the women as objects like the captured animals and gold. Limited to the women of their own family, their sympathy does not extend to women and children of other men. Like the rapist and his town, the brothers perpetuate rape-prone behavior.

Still, the brothers' final question in verse 31 demonstrates the complexity of their attempt to deal with the rape. After Jacob's accusation in verse 30, which mentions only the trouble his sons bring to him and his house, the brothers continue to focus on Dinah and her well being. They ask whether Shechem has a right to treat their sister like a prostitute. Interpreters sometimes wonder why the brothers refer to prostitution and not to rape. However, their question makes sense when prostitution is understood as a means to financial gain. Shechem offers a sum of money, the customary bride price, and assumes that he so fulfills his obligations as a bridegroom. The brothers, however, do not isolate the marriage offer from the rape. They refuse to sell Dinah into marriage because they do not seek economic advantage. They understand that Shechem seeks to pay for the rape, euphemistically calling his payment "bride price" (verse 12). Shechem attempts to turn rape into legalized sex. However, Dinah is not a prostitute who offers sexual favors and then receives payment. Given after the rape, the money is not like a bride price. The brothers

[30] For this kind of argumentation, see, e.g. Gregory M. Matoesian, *Reproducing Rape: Domination Through Talk in the Courtroom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

reject the possibility that Shechem would repair his deed through payment. Dinah cannot be traded for economic gain. The brothers insist on Dinah's dignity.

Conclusion: Ending Rape

This alternative interpretation emphasizes the significance of verses 1-3 for the understanding of Genesis 34. When Dinah goes out to visit the daughters of the land, but is instead raped by Shechem, the whole story changes. Thus, the rape has to play a center role. We have seen that the rape was of minor importance in the history of reading Genesis 34. Not interested in bringing rape to the foreground, many scholars created – what must be termed – rape-prone interpretations. Thus, the history of reading Genesis 34 offers considerable insights into the dynamics of a rape-prone culture and the Western societal neglect to regard rape as a cultural, political, and religious problem. Even though we cannot say for sure what "really" happened to Dinah, from a feminist-literary perspective we can claim that Shechem raped Dinah. She was not a willing participant. Shechem did not "love" her, but wanted to do with her as he pleased. In contrast, the brothers loved their sister. But even they took revenge in a rape-prone fashion. Although they understood that marriage cannot "redeem" rape, they captured other women and children and continued the violence. The killing of the male Shechemites and the capture of the women and children do not appeal to most contemporary feminist or non-feminist sensibilities. But how can rape be ended?

In the United States 683,000 women are raped by men every year.[31] Genesis 34 has much to say to this situation, inviting us to a much-needed discussion on rape today. The story ends with a question and so encourages us to release the Bible from the past long gone. We can use this narrative to address the prevalence of rape through the metaphoric language of the Bible. Then the story becomes our own, and we will know what "really" happened to Dinah.

[31] National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*, April 23, 1992. This number would be much higher if rape were not such an underreported crime.

****

Susanne Scholz is the author of “Rape Plots: A Feminist Cultural Study of Genesis 34” (Lang, 2000) and co-editor of “Zwischen-Räume: Deutsche feministische Theologinnen im Ausland” (LIT, 2000). She is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at The College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio, U.S.A.