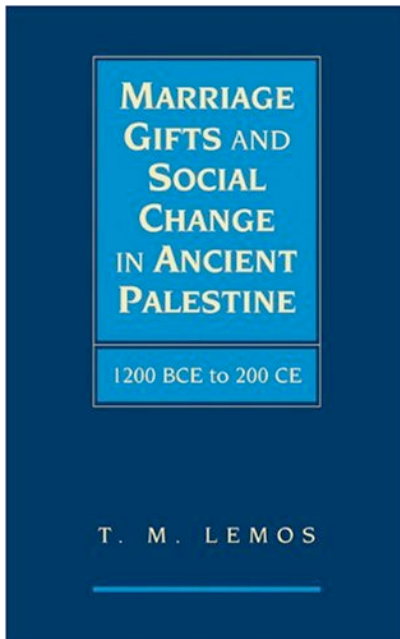


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**Lemos, T. M.**

***Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine: 1200 BCE to 200 CE***

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xii + 296. Hardcover. \$80.00. ISBN 9780521113496.

Marianne Blickenstaff  
Westminster John Knox Press  
Louisville, Kentucky

*Marriage Gifts and Social Change* explains the relationship between Israel's marriage customs and stages of Israel's socioeconomic development over the course of fourteen hundred years, from Israel's earliest narratives to the Roman era. Lemos develops her argument convincingly through a survey of biblical texts pertaining to betrothal and marriage and with the skillful application of anthropological studies of marriage practices and economic structures. The book provides a helpful tool for understanding the interrelationship between certain social customs and socioeconomic development.

Lemos begins by defining the various manifestations of gift-giving in Hebrew Bible narratives concerning betrothal, then develops an anthropological explanation for the development of these practices. Lemos cautions that many of the biblical narratives do not offer a clear-cut depiction of the customs in practice, because these stories were written over many years and by varying communities. However, certain patterns are discernable: Israel's early narratives mainly concern the custom of bridewealth, while later narratives indicate a shift to the giving of dowries. Why this change occurs is the main argument of the book.

Lemos's book challenges a long-held anthropological theory (known to most students of biblical studies), positing that Israel's interaction with other cultures is the primary cause of changes in Israel's customs. Lemos draws on an alternative anthropological theory, informed particularly by the work of Jack Goody, to argue that changes in Israel's marriage customs developed internally, congruently with the evolution of more complex social systems. Where there are similarities between Israel's practices and those of other cultures, Lemos explains that these phenomena have less to do with intermingling and imitation and more to do with various groups' cultures following a demonstrable pattern involving socioeconomic stratification. Lemos provides case studies from several cultures to support her thesis.

Lemos notes that Israel's preexilic biblical narratives about contracting a marriage primarily involve the giving of "bridewealth" (gifts the bridegroom's family gives the bride's family), while postexilic narratives indicate a shift toward the practice of giving a dowry (gifts the bride's family gives the bride or to the bridegroom's family). Lemos demonstrates how these changes in Israel's betrothal and marriage practices are the inevitable result of Israel's developing greater socioeconomic complexity and stratification between wealthy and poor families. She illustrates how early Israelite culture was based on a subsistence-level economy that is associated with a shepherding or herding. (One finds evidence of such shepherding cultures in the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, the brothers of Joseph, and Moses.) Lemos provides examples from a variety of subsistence-level cultures in which the bride goes to live with her husband's family; in these situations, the bridegroom's family typically provides bridewealth to the bride's family as a form of compensation for the loss of one of their productive workers; the groom's family benefits by adding the new bride to its own labor pool.

In her cultural analysis, Lemos found that families who amassed a great deal of land, livestock, goods, and wealth beyond their basic needs developed means of passing along an inheritance, to maintain these assets within their family, thus contributing to the formation of a more complex social system of economic stratification between the wealthy the relatively poor. Marriage customs then followed suit: cultures with a more layered and less egalitarian economic and social structure shift from the practice of giving bridewealth to the practice of giving a dowry. The bride's contribution to the bridegroom's family is in the form of wealth and status, rather than labor. Therefore, the bride's family provides gifts to the bride or gives gifts to the bridegroom's family. In essence, the bride brings her inheritance into her marriage to solidify the social position of both families.

The project is enormous in scope, covering centuries of social development and a variety of biblical texts. Lemos handles this project ably, yet the thesis might have been easier to

grasp if Lemos had begun with chapters dealing with her anthropological theory and then had shown the reader how the theory illuminates the biblical narratives. Unfortunately, the reader must wade through a detailed compilation of biblical evidence and dating of pertinent texts without having the benefit of knowing much about how Lemos will apply the theory. Lemos outlines the biblical texts as a means of supporting the theory but does not delve into these narratives to tease out some of the implications.

The book is Lemos's revised dissertation and so includes an overly lengthy history of interpretation and discussion of methodology; the result is that the arguments can become quite cluttered with extraneous detail. For example, in chapter 1 Lemos goes into great detail on the dating of certain biblical passages. I grant that a discussion of dating is necessary for correlating the texts with the historical study of social stratification and marriage practices; however, the reader can become bogged down by the tangle of evidence and lose sight of the point being made. Some of the discussion might have served better in an appendix or in footnotes.

A thorough bibliography on the topics covered is a help to researchers, as well as a short glossary of some of the anthropological terminology regarding theories of social change, various forms of betrothal, marriage, and family structure. The biblical scholar unaccustomed to anthropological study need not worry about having to master a technical vocabulary to find the book useful.

As it sheds light on the development of social stratification that can lead to certain inequalities and injustices (e.g., the disparity between rich and poor about which the prophets speak), the book is a resource for scholars who want to apply ideological criticism to biblical texts. For scholars of both the Old and New Testaments interested in gender studies, this book gives helpful evidence of the economic and social implications for marriage, divorce, and family structures.