

# CHAPTER FOUR

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## Social practices of the Lemba and early Israel

On the basis of the research reflected in the previous chapters, I postulate that the Lemba could have preserved elements of a very ancient type of religious group. If they originated from the Israelites in Yemen and migrated to Africa, they were cut off from the rest of the Jewish people after the emergence of Islam. Therefore the descendents of the Yemenite Jews in Africa could be one of a few groups that has remained practically unaffected by intra-Jewish migration. The same possibility exists in the case of the Beta Israel of Ethiopia. That is, they remained free from other Jewish influences.

I conducted an inquiry in the field into the possible ancient practices of the Lemba. Respondents were asked to list customs, festivals, rituals or ceremonies which they considered to be unique to the Lemba people. Most of them first mentioned circumcision and then their *kosher* eating habits, the new moon festivals, their special way of slaughtering animals, their arts and crafts and their marriage laws – these are all mainly social and religious practices.

After they presented these answers, I asked them (if they had not already said so) whether they or their parents had ever practised or kept the following customs or festivals: fasting, Sabbath, the feast of the first-fruits, special burial customs, traditional clothes and the *Pesah*.<sup>1</sup> Very few interviewees indicated that they were still practising fasting, the keeping of the Sabbath and *Pesah*. Nevertheless, the feasts, burial customs and traditional clothes were either all still known or even practised. It was only later that I could confirm (in all possible accounts) that most of these observations about customs and practices had already been noted by early ethnographers a century or three ago. This is a strong indication for the authenticity of some of these customs.

For the purpose of this chapter it is extremely difficult to determine whether a specific custom is a 'purely social practice', rather than a 'purely religious practice' or whether there is indeed a pure religious practice, void of social meaning. This implies that the categorisation of customs is tenuous and not fixed. Salient again, as was mentioned earlier, is that many of these practices and customs have a Semitic resemblance and, more specifically, they resonate with the culture of some ancient Israelite clans. A com-

parison of the social and religious practices of the Lemba, which concur in so many ways with those of early Israel (oral cultures, segmented clan systems, marital laws, rituals and others) could contribute to a better understanding of the reception of the Old Testament in an African context. It is no longer possible to address any questions to early Israel, but possibly much information and background about the meaning and understanding of many of their customs may emerge by means of this manner of investigation.

In the discussion of the Israelite clans, sources sometimes refer to 'tribes'.<sup>2</sup> However, it is not a foregone conclusion that there were indeed tribes. 'Tribes' are usually linked to specific tribal areas, but it is improbable that these can be indicated as such in early Israel (1250-1000 BCE). In this connection, I, therefore, prefer to use the notion of 'clans', to acknowledge this uncertainty. The order of size is usually from a family to a clan and from a clan to a tribe. For the same reason as with Israel, reference to the Lemba groups will be as 'clans'; in fact some of them prefer this term themselves.

Although the Lemba belong to different Christian denominations, their *culture* – as they call it – reflects almost all the characteristics of a unique religion; one may define it as a 'syncretising Judaism'. There are numerous striking concurrences between the social and religious practices and viewpoints of the Lemba and those of early Israel which will emerge in the following five chapters; nevertheless the most obvious differences between the two communities will also be accentuated, since these are part of the comparison and this also facilitates a judgement of the status of the concurrences.

In the ensuing chapters I shall discuss some of the Lemba's social and religious customs and practices as I encountered them during the field study, with reference to available archival and other sources. In fact, in the world-view of the Lemba there is no difference between their social and religious views and practices. As far as possible either the original transcribed 'oral texts', or direct translations, done by the interpreters, will be used (referred to as 'D'). To avoid the imposition of another world-view onto these documents, they were not edited. Thus specific Lemba practices with a resonance of the culture of ancient Israel will be discussed, comparing these, where possible, with the customs and practices of early Israel.<sup>3</sup>

## Food rituals and taboos

### *The Lemba*

Almost all the respondents pointed out that their *dietary laws* and eating habits differ and are distinct from those of other peoples in the country, who are called the '*wasenzhi*' or heathen. One of the most important laws they were taught was that they may not eat food with, or from, the *basetse* (Sotho – who are not Lemba and are therefore gentiles), or *food from the wasenzhi* in Venda (cf D:J[1]:5) They stress that, 'like the Jews', they

keep themselves separate from the gentiles. Ethnographic literature often points out that the Lemba refer to other Africans as *wasenzhi*.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes they use a more complete qualification for these peoples: '*wasenzhi – vali va nama ya vafu – wasenzhi*' ('the eaters of dead meat'). The Lemba are specifically told not to cook in utensils used by the *wasenzhi* and not to eat with them.

The Lemba originally refer to their own women as *wasenzhi*, because they came to Africa without wives (and could not go back to their country) and had to marry local, 'heathen' women. Important though, is that the 'pagan' women that they married all first underwent a purification process before they could take this step.

Cleanliness and the law that they have to wash their hands before partaking of any food, are very important to the Lemba (D:J[1]:5). In fact, Mathivha avers that cleanliness is their most important dietary law – all food is therefore prepared with the greatest care and according to regulations of cleanness. He adds that the dictum '*Bata-u-shambe*' (hold and wash) is adhered to in many instances (cf D:G:11; D:O:7,10,11). Apparently, they were instructed previously to follow an even more strict dietary code, but as a result of 'cultural diffusion most of them don't obey these laws any more.'



**Photo 16** *Field worker Filemon Khadeli and his family*

During our first visit to Mathivha's house in the former Venda (1994), a woman entered the room and stood at the side of my friend, Filemon Khadeli (cf **Photo 16**), holding a round plastic bowl. She smiled at us and then Mathivha explained that we should wash

our hands before having tea and something to eat. He said it is one of the customs of the Lemba and they read all about it in the Bible. Parfitt had similar experiences during his stay in Zimbabwe: even when there was water for nothing else, there was always water for ritual washing before and after meals.

The Lemba stress that they *do not mix meat and milk* in their foods, without giving any reference to a Bible text. The milk is drunk or eaten separately from meat dishes and vice versa. They find the code for this behaviour in the Book of Leviticus (D:G:11). Phophi (Parfitt 1992:56) similarly places much emphasis on the chapters in the 'old, old book' which describe the 'old religion of the Jews'. He confirms that the Lemba follow exactly the special rules for eating (for example those in Lev 11).

In the field I did not find many people who still maintained the custom of keeping milk and meat separate. Most of the older people in the communities, however, could still remember that their parents ate their food in that way, but they themselves neglect to keep all these practices.

One of the very strict laws of the Lemba which is still obeyed by most of them, is that they should only eat the animals which are allowed to be eaten and only in the proper way. An old Lemba song summarises the *list of animals* that Nkalahonye (son of a Karanga induna, in Mashonaland) was not allowed to eat (Marole 1969:6; note the translation [Maringa, P E] of the song is presented verbatim; cf De Vaal 1958:57):

*The Jews does not eat a pig even the Mu-Lemba<sup>5</sup> does not.*

*The Jews does not eat a hare even the Mu-Lemba does not.*

*The Jew does not eat a rock rabbit even the Mu-Lemba does not.*

*The Jew does not eat an owl even a Mu-Lemba does not.*

*The Jew does not eat an eagle even the Mu-Lemba does not.*

*The Jew does not eat an ostrich even the Mu-Lemba does not.*

*The Jew does not eat the crow even the Mu-Lemba does not [my endnote].*

Besides the above mentioned animals, the Lemba also maintain a taboo on eating the elephant, the zebra, the rhinoceros and the hippopotamus. It is noteworthy that the totem of the Lemba is an elephant (*Zhou*), within the Star of David (cf *Photo 17*). Bullock ([1927] 1950:45) maintains that 'in this there may be a trace of Semitic inhibition combined with Bantu totemism' (cf Lv 11; 17 and Dt 12; 14). The elephant (who never forgets) in the Star of David reminds the Lemba to remember their history.

Other dietary laws which many scholars and others have observed are that the Lemba *bleed slaughtered animals*, only eat meat that is *kosher* killed by a Lemba<sup>6</sup> and also do not eat pork.<sup>7</sup> Junod (1908:278) points out that it appears as if they keep these customs



**Photo 17** *The totem of the Lemba: the Star of David with an elephant inside, on an LCA identity card*

Wessmann (1908:129-132) explains that they ‘avoid all meat of animals which have cloven hoofs and animals which do not chew the cud....They do not touch the meat of fallen animals....[they] kill the animals according to the Jewish rite, as if to render it “kosher.”’

As mentioned above Gayre of Gayre avers that the rejection of pork, or killing in the *kosher* manner by bleeding, would be a remarkable coincidence by itself, but when the prohibition of the eating of hares, rabbits, scaleless fish and carrion is added to their list,

the probability against coincidence is so great that we have to accept the fact that the Lembas observe the Mosaic code, and that we have to explain its occurrence among this small tribe of traders who have Caucasoid genes and live in northern Transvaal and some adjacent parts of Rhodesia. Moreover, only the Lembas bleed animals to death as enjoined by the Mosaic code, and this act is restricted by them to the circumcised (1967:6,7).

Phophi similarly informed Parfitt (1992:55) that in the past, the Lemba preferred a diet based on fish and rice:

in fact, some people have claimed that once the Lemba ate only fish and rice - an unheard of diet in the Transvaal and Zimbabwe, and one which is strongly suggestive of a coastal origin. According to Portuguese documents, we know that in the

sixteenth century rice was cultivated in the Zambezi delta and around Sofala and was even exported to Indian Ocean ports. According to oral traditions, it was also grown in the past near Mberengwa, the area of Lemba settlement in Zimbabwe: "The Lemba", runs one account, "said they came from across the sea to the hill "Mberengwe of the Good Men" .... Here they cultivated much rice, the plant of the white man.

We often encountered Lemba who prefer to *eat fish instead of meat* (D:3:C[1]:7,8). The circumcision ceremony in Sekhukhuneland similarly includes the eating of fish and porridge.

As mentioned above, it is very important to the Lemba that they should not eat meat which has not been killed according to *kosher* regulations. This implies that the animal has to be killed in a special way by a circumcised Lemba man who is 'clean' (cf D:G:10,11; D:J[1]:3; D:L:5; D:N:8; Parfitt 1992). They do not eat the blood of the animal that is killed – the blood has to be shed on the ground.



**Photo 18** Chief mother Mpaketsane (on the right) and her sister, during a group interview

During the stay of my husband and myself in Sekhukhuneland (Feb 1996) 'chief'<sup>78</sup> (Photo 18) Mpaketsane provided a cow to be slaughtered for a special LCA Conference held at his kraal. On that occasion we were invited to observe their special way of killing

their animals (cf *Photo 19*). It was also our privilege to share in the eating of the animal, specially cooked for the occasion. First we were honoured, by sharing with other special guests in eating the fried intestines. They also offered us the 'best' part (fillet, according to my culture) of the meat to be 'fried' in the way they thought we would perhaps prefer it. We felt very honoured and were, once again, deeply impressed by their overall hospitality and sensitivity towards us.



**Photo 19** *Kosher killing at India Village, Sekhukhuneland*

Without the special blessing and *kosher* killing, called the *shidja*<sup>9</sup> (mainly in Zimbabwe), dead meat is unclean and only the Lemba have the sacred words which can declare it clean. These sacred words are a Lemba secret known by no one else. Van Warmelo (1940:66) recorded an oral tradition that further reveals that a special knife was used for *shidja*. They called it *tshishizho*, which means an instrument for the *kosher* killing of meat (D:L:5).

Hall (1905:101) describes the 'defilement of eating flesh containing blood', as well as the 'sprinkling of worshippers with blood' as some of the distinctly Jewish customs of the Karanga-speaking Lemba.

As far as the custom of *fasting* is concerned very few of the respondents indicated that they fast. Phophi and others contend, however, that

my father had told me long ago, before the arrival of Europeans, the Lemba used to hold a fast once a year. On this all-important day, warriors went around the *Lemba* village to make sure that no food was being consumed and that no cooking fires were burning. On this day, the notables wore white robes and the chief sacrificed a black ox, unblemished in any way.... It's the Yom Kippur of the Jews... (Parfitt 1992:58).

Although not occurring frequently, the idea of a kind of day of fasting is still deeply engraved in Lemba memories. Especially notable is the memory of the white clothes and the sacrifices of an unblemished black ox.

### *Early Israel*

The notion that they are the 'chosen nation' and that all other people are 'heathen' or Gentiles, is still prevalent among the Jewish people. According to the Old Testament, God selected the descendants of Abraham to be a chosen people, a vehicle of God's mighty acts in history. Furthermore, the Old Testament frequently refers to the notion of Israel being a holy nation and therefore not supposed to mix with the pagan nations surrounding it. Specific purification (Lv 11-16) and holiness laws (Lv 17-26) were therefore prescribed for Israel.

In the Book of Deuteronomy the community is clearly described in Jahwistic terms. 'We' and 'they' are unambiguously defined. 'They' are the non-Israelites and are described in terms of the enemy.

All kinds of *purification regulations* were the order of the day in ancient Israel (not only during the period of the Israelite clans). To have touched a dead person, bones or a grave was for instance considered a contamination and for this reason the house and furniture of the deceased were purified by means of a sprinkling with water (Nm 19:11-22; Dt 14).

Specific purification laws were also presented to the *kohen* or priest. He had to purify himself before he could go on duty at the tabernacle (or later in the Temple), since he was going to tread on holy ground (Ex 29:4; 30:17-21; Lv 8:6; 16:4). On the other hand, all containers, clothes and persons who touched anything holy, had to be washed in order to be 'deconsecrated' (Lv 6:21; 16:23-28; Nm 31:16-24; De Vaux 1973:461).

Numbers 31:16-24 also refers to the purification of metals by fire, as well as the purification of other objects by using holy water. De Vaux (1973) is of the opinion that this rite probably originated from a heathen practice.

The diet of the ancient nomads consisted of various breads, milk, curds, fruit and nuts - it was mainly vegetarian. Eating meat occurred for the most part only on important

occasions. Abraham prepared for example a feast for his guests (Gn 18:6-8), consisting of bread made in the form of cakes, milk, curds and a roasted calf. Animals which were allowed to be eaten included sheep, cattle, goats, deer, fish with fins and scales and certain fowl (Lv 11).

Besides its expression in Deuteronomy 14:21 and Exodus 23:19, there is no other law indicated in the Old Testament against *mixing meat and milk*. The literal interpretation of the metaphor or euphemism reminds one of the expression in Deuteronomy 14:21: 'You may not boil the kid in the milk of his mother.' For some primitive communities, for example the Ndembu, who maintain that the 'mother is like a pot' (Turner 1967:250; Gn 38), this expression would rather indicate the prohibition of sexual relations between a mother and her son, as indicated by the separation between milk and meat. Milk is often the natural symbol for the relationship between a mother and her child. A literal interpretation of what was possibly only meant to be a metaphor, probably remained (this time in Judaism) in the commandment regarding mixing milk and meat.

Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:125) argues that 'one might say that the dietary laws are a dramatization of the metaphors that govern Israelite thought.'

According to the Old Testament (Lv 7:26,27; 17:11,14; Gn 9:4; Dt 12:23) blood contained 'the life of all flesh' and therefore the blood belonged to God alone. The slaughter of the animals is supposed to be painless and bloodless. The man sacrificing the animal would himself cut the throat of the victim, some distance away from the altar and the priests would then pour the blood around the altar. In the sacrifice for sin, blood plays a more important part than in any other. Without shedding blood, there is no forgiveness at all.

According to the late Mishnaic law (approximately 300 CE), an Israelite may not eat any animal that has not been slaughtered in accordance with the prescribed procedure (Eilberg-Schwarz 1990:212).

Fasts were prescribed by the Mosaic Code (Lv 16:29) for the *Day of Atonement* – to 'afflict your souls' – to commemorate the breaking of the tables of the law and other such events in history. Fasting in the Old Testament is also a sign of sorrow (1 Sm 31:13; 2 Sm 1:12; 3:25) or of repentance (1 Sm 7:6; Jl 1:14; 2:12ff). It might be accompanied by prayer to give it added urgency (Ezr 8:23; Jer 14:12), or mark a day of battle to intensify the appeal to God for help (1 Sm 14:4).

### ***Evaluation and comparison***

Most of the Lemba's food rituals and taboos involve their looking upon themselves as different or special (among other reasons, because they are circumcised). This has a direct influence on their daily activities. One of their most important dietary laws is that they have to separate themselves from the 'heathen', because the latter are uncircum-

cised and are 'eaters of dead meat' and therefore the Lemba are not allowed to eat with them and may not use their cooking utensils.

Similarly, most of the customs of early Israel are emphasised. The Israelites were not allowed to mix with the heathen. However, it is not certain whether the law not to *eat* with them, is emphasised as much.

The ritual washing of the Lemba deals more with the individual's daily eating and drinking, whilst the Old Testament customs were more applicable to the priestly 'sanctification' and 'desecration' in connection with the service at the altar (much later than early Israel). It is noteworthy that most people wash their hands before they eat but not necessarily because it is a specific dietary law.

The dietary laws of the Lemba include the prohibition of eating certain animals (cf Lv 11), mixing meat and milk and eating animals that have not been slaughtered by the Lemba in the correct manner. It appears from the Old Testament that the communities in early Israel probably either did not know of the prohibition of mixing meat and milk, or that they understood this as a symbol for something else, or that they did not consider it as important.

To the traditional Lemba, it is of utter importance that an animal should be slaughtered in the correct manner by a circumcised Lemba. The Lemba do not eat the blood of the animal and a blessing (*shidja*) needs to be said over the meat. There are special sacred words for this blessing. Similar principles were found in this connection in early Israel, but these applied more to the slaughter of animals at the altar. It may be that the everyday customs were just not recorded. However, I am not aware of a particular blessing that is pronounced before eating meat. The Lemba custom deals more with the everyday slaughtering and eating of meat, although the slaughtering of an animal is usually a luxury, which is connected to one or another specific ritual.

The Old Testament regulations for fasting are very clear, whilst the memory of similar customs amongst the Lemba is only maintained or kept alive by oral tradition. Below follows a table in which the most salient concurrences and differences between the social customs of the Lemba and those of early Israel are indicated (see ADDENDUM III: Table 1).

## Marital customs

### *The Lemba*

The Lemba do not give their daughters in marriage to any but their own people and discourage them from marrying an uncircumcised person. The men should also avoid marriage with local (non-Lemba) women. This strict *endogamy* was the secret of their survival as a distinct people.

Mathivha (1992:51) also states that 'traditionally .... the boy preferentially must marry a girl who is the daughter of his uncle i.e. the daughter of his mother's brother. The boys are the sister's sons while the girls are the brother's daughters.'

Most of the respondents in Sekhukhuneland and Zimbabwe indicated that according to their culture they are not supposed to marry outside their tribe, but they also 'confessed' that because of 'cultural diffusion' (once again), many of them do not adhere to this any more. During our second visit to Sekhukhuneland (1997) John Mpaketsane emphasised (cf *Photo 20*):

*we are not happy the way we are living now because we are not sticking to our culture, our laws .... because of the acculturation it has become inevitable that we just marry from different people .... with a woman it is not much difficult because we can marry them and then we teach them (D:K:1).*



**Photo 20** John Mpaketsane (and his wife), assistant and organiser in Sekhukhuneland

Girls were traditionally not permitted to marry foreigners lest they should make them eat 'Nyamafu' (i.e. pork, dead animals and others; Mathivha 1992:51). During initiation the Lemba women are told that the uncircumcised are weak persons and that they should not get married to such individuals. Their endogamy is, therefore, based on the dogma of the 'uncleanness' of the non-Lemba.<sup>10</sup>

'In the olden days', relates Servias (from Zimbabwe; Parfitt 1992:123), 'you could only be a Lemba by birth or, in the case of a woman, by marriage.' Nowadays a foreigner

might become part of the tribe through circumcision, but it is not the norm. In the past few years, even a few groups of German men have been initiated into the Lemba communities in Zimbabwe (Mberengwa) through circumcision.

An interesting case study of *proselytisation* was that of Bishop Marinda (Zion Apostolic Church [ZAC], Masvingo, Zimbabwe), a Shona who is married to a Lemba. He replies that it 'was difficult [to get permission to marry a Lemba girl] but because of the virtue of my religion .... I am more devoted to clean methods ... it was easier for me .... we don't eat unclean meat, ... have *kosher* killing .... I had to go for circumcision ... [but] I [rather] gave my children for circumcision....' ([ ] – mine; D:P:1,2).

For a woman to be accepted into the Lemba clan, she is subjected to a *very strict purification* ceremony where she is initiated into Lemba laws and customs:

she had to crawl through a hole in an ant-hill.... The idea was that the ants sting and suck off all the pig blood that this non-Lemba woman has eaten in her life.... A fire would be lit on top of her which could burn the contamination, and then, just before she was roasted, they pushed off the branches and threw her into the river to get purified .... A baptism by fire .... In some places, another custom was followed: when a woman from another tribe was being admitted as a Lemba, an ox would be slaughtered and some of its meat, mixed with an emetic herb, would be given to the woman. After she vomited, the impurities in her were deemed to have been removed. She was then taken behind one of the huts, where a hole had been made in the wall. She put her head through the hole and it was shaved. She then crawled through the hole and thus became a Lemba. Once she had undergone this ritual, she was never allowed to return to her native village unless accompanied by a Lemba lest she be tempted to eat forbidden foods (Parfitt 1992:51).

The women who are married to the Lemba men, whether they are foreigners or Lemba, constitute the Lemba family. The foreign women are regarded as Lemba because the children will be Lemba. Therefore a Lemba is one who is born of two Lemba or a woman who is married to a Lemba man, since she would have gone through the initiation into the Lemba customs and culture. The Lemba believe that these foreign women only become wiser by having their heads shaven.

A Lemba man may marry more than one wife and the ranking of the wives determines the succession of the children. The succession follows the father's line. The first wife a man marries is usually the most important wife; the other wives rank as minors in order of marriage. The first wife is always consulted by her husband.

The purpose of *polygamy* is to ensure descendants, but a man is not allowed to take more than one wife if he cannot properly look after them. According to Mathivha such a family always eats together and learns to share everything (even their husband). In

this way, a spirit of charity to one another is created. It is only when a husband shows favouritism towards a specific wife that rivalry among the wives occurs.

Schapera says ([1937]1946:203): 'Polygamy is practised; but, except in the case of chiefs and other prominent wealthy men, not to any marked extent'. It is practised by most African tribes, but not every man has many wives. In fact, Junod found that many men are monogamists, not by choice, but by force of circumstance (e.g. economic factors). He surmises that monogamy existed first and that polygamy emerged only later as a result of the following main reasons: One, wars diminished the number of men and two, the laws of succession (levirate; a younger brother inherits the widow of his elder brother, whether he is married or not). Most of the Lemba, however, also feel strongly in favour of a monogamous marriage; this probably for economic reasons and the influence of Christianity.

Some interviewees indicated that they did have the practice of *Levirate marriages* in their communities, but could not always explain how it works (D:L:7). However, scholars who had observed the practice among the Lemba, described it as follows: '[T]here still exists among them, as well as the Bawenda, that ancient Israelite law, the "Levirate marriage"' (Wessmann 1908:132) or as: '[W]hen a brother takes two wives, the wives of his deceased elder brother, and raising the offspring, they rank in office as if they were the children of the deceased' (Hall 1905:101). The purpose of these marriages is mainly to protect the family. The brother or closest family member who marries the widow has to look after her and her children as his own. The children from this Levirate marriage are considered as the children of the deceased and inherit from the deceased.

*Lobola*<sup>11</sup> is the price for the bride, negotiated between the two parties involved. Before marriage Lemba girls had to subject themselves to inspection by some old women, to prove their virginity. If she had lost her virginity she was sent back to her parents and the *lobola* had to be paid back.<sup>12</sup> Both boys and girls inherit from their fathers. The heir is determined by the *lobola* cattle, which are given by the husband's father to the father of the bride. This custom is still in force. The price for the bride can be negotiated between the two parties involved. It can be either cattle or money, or both. Usually it is through the payment of *lobola* that a man obtains a right to the children he begets by a woman, or to any other children she may bear during the existence of the marriage.

'A child born to a divorced woman by any man to whom she is not married belongs to her former husband if his *lobola* cattle have not been returned and to her own people if they have been' (Schapera [1937]1946:189). Only if a woman remarries and a new *lobola* has been paid, do the children from that marriage belong to her new husband.

Schoffeleers (1966:22) refers to the Mwenye (presumably Lemba) who, in his opinion, differ from the neighbouring groups as they do not allow premarital co-habitation until the husband has paid the full bride's price and built a hut.

The meaning of *lobola* is mainly to determine whether a man is able to look after a particular woman. It means that you are committed to see this through and you prove that you are responsible enough to take a woman as your wife.

Mathivha (1992:51; and other interviewees), refers to the phenomenon of Lemba women in Venda marrying other women:<sup>13</sup>

[T]he married women are subjected to the authority of the woman who has paid lobola. She is the father to the children of the woman she has married. All lobola property goes to her. The children of the woman married by her, inherit her property while her children inherit from their father.

Mathivha does not explain the meaning of this relationship, but another respondent (Refilwe Mpaketsane, 1999) told me that the single woman who may decide to marry another woman with children (perhaps from different men), is usually someone who is handicapped in one way or another and wants the support of other people (a woman and children). Usually men are not interested in marrying a handicapped (often sterile) woman and therefore, the only way out is to marry another woman who also needs support. In this way she secures her own support system. This is usually not a sexual relationship, because men from outside may still be used for procreational purposes. In these cases the 'wife' bears children for her 'husband', either by an appointed lover or by a suitor of her own choice (Preston-Whyte [1937]1974:177-210). Woman-to-woman marriages are yet another means of ensuring the continuity of a family in the absence of sons, through raising an heir to inherit a property or position.

### *Early Israel*

Scholars confirm that most tribes from the ancient Near East were *endogamous* (cf Lemche 1985:377-385; Gottwald 1980:285-287) and that this was an important part of the Israelite clans, as well as of their view of marriage. Social organisation would then have determined every facet of marriage and all that accompanied it, from choosing a life companion to dissolving of marriage (for whatever reason).

Mayes (1985:49-50) explains that within the wider association of a clan, family members could get married and enjoy material help and protection. In terms of the expanded family, Gottwald (1980:285-287) claims that there were two matters of importance in particular, namely the relationship to the tribe, and the place of dwelling. For this reason it was very difficult for the individual to function within such a community and he or she had to, as far as possible, remain within the group context (Jdg 9:2). The choosing of a bride was an integral part of the social life of Israelite clans.

Examples of *marriages within the kinship* or social group are found mainly among the narratives concerning the patriarchs, such as in the cases of Isaac (Gn 24:34-50) and

Jacob (Gn 26:34-35). Such marriages between cousins (Gn 25:20; 29:9-30), but also to strangers (Jdg 1:4), as well as for political reasons, could take place. However, marriages between brothers and sisters or between other close relatives, were prohibited (Lv 18:6-18). Nevertheless, he does not distinguish the historical eras to which these references apply.

Apparently, *parents* played the most important role in the choice of a life companion for their children, as for example in the case of Caleb (Jos 15:16) who chose on behalf of his daughter. However, if we may infer anything from the narrative about Samson (Jdg 14:2-3), it does seem as if a child's preferences and disapprovals could also have played a role. Furthermore, it appears from Judges 14 (especially the era of Israelite clans) as if it was customary to choose a life companion from one's own ranks (endogamy) and not from outside of the group. Samson not only managed to marry someone of his own choice, but also to go against the wishes of his parents, by marrying a Philistine girl from Timnah.

According to Gottwald (1980:285) marriage connections could sometimes include members of the family, but sometimes excluded blood relatives. Exclusion would take place when someone would decide of his own choice, or because of circumstances, to separate himself from the group, or to marry someone from outside.

In the case of Jephthah, it was held against him that he was born from a 'prohibited' relationship (Jdg 11). It was probably because of his 'undesirable' past, that he was prohibited from participating in politics and religious life. We can infer from Deuteronomy (23:2), that at least later (during the Babylonian Exile) there was the situation or perception that a 'bastard' was not allowed into the assembly of the Lord.

The prohibition against marrying someone outside one's group was applied very strictly by the leaders of the nation within the exilic communities (Ezr 9:2,10-15).

Gottwald (1980:285) points out that families could be extended in various ways. One way, for example, was to be adopted as a stranger into the extended family. A *male proselyte* had to undergo circumcision, a rite of witnessed immersion and had to offer a sacrifice. Such a stranger who had been circumcised, could even participate with the Israelites in the Passover (Ex 12:48-49; cf Nm 9:14).

In this connection Lemche (1988:94-95) indicates how *women*, particularly unmarried daughters, were often accepted *as barter*. This was one commercial article in which all families were interested and they went to great lengths to fulfil this need. It is not certain whether the narratives of Judges 21 should be read within the context of the period of the Judges. Nevertheless, it is narrated how the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead were murdered in order to kidnap four hundred virgins and how the Benjaminites simply went and captured themselves each a wife in the vineyards of Shiloh.

It does not seem as if there was mention of any *purification ceremony* for 'heathen' women during the pre-monarchical period or thereafter.

It is difficult to determine what the real situation was in early Israel. De Vaux (1973:25) maintains that the marriages from the posterity of Seth (e.g. Noah, Gn 7:7) are portrayed as having been *monogamous*, but Lamech, from the line of Cain, paved the way for *polygamy*, by taking two wives for himself (Gn 4:19). According to tradition, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau each had at least two wives or concubines. However, Gideon must have had many wives in order for the seventy sons 'to have issued from his loins' (Jdg 8:30-31). More than one wife, such as in the cases of Hannah and Penina, probably did not always contribute to harmony in the household and often resulted in bitter envy and disharmony (1 Sm 1:5-6). De Vaux infers that monogamy was the general norm in old Israel and he refers specifically to Samson's parents (Jdg 13:2) as an example. This deduction is most probably made from a Western perspective. However, it appears as if there were no particular regulations concerning the number of wives that could be taken and that it was left to every man to decide for himself.

The word levirate originates from the Latin *levir* which is a translation of the Hebrew, which means 'brother-in-law'. The purpose of the levirate was probably to hold together the family ties, to ensure a male heir and to ensure that a property did not fall into the hands of strangers (De Vaux 1973:38; cf Lv 25:25; Ruth 4:1-6). The custom was that if a man died without having had children, then his brother (the redeemer) would have to marry the widow and then the children from that marriage would be reckoned as those of the deceased. Only two examples of the levirate marriage are referred to in the Old Testament, of which one possibly dates from the times of the Judges, namely that of Ruth to Boaz (Jdg 1-4). The author of the narrative may have been correct concerning the customs which he portrays in the story. Given the restless political situation within which Israelite clans had to establish themselves, it is understandable that the preservation of property in this way was of extreme importance.

Marriage ceremonies were in the first instance not a religious, but a family event, and for this reason the bridegroom had to pay the *moher* (dowry or bride's price) to the bride's father (cf Gn 34:12; Ex 22:16; 1 Sm 18:25). However, there is no certainty about how much this amounted to, and whether it was a fixed amount. The dowry could be paid by doing a duty of labour, or by executing certain specific duties (Jdg 1:12 and 1 Sm 18:25,27). Apparently it was customary for the father of the bride to put away the *moher* for his daughter, so that she might enjoy the benefits of it when her husband died (cf Gn 31). According to Genesis 31:15, Rachel and Leah complained to Jacob, since their father had squandered the money which was supposed to have been given to them (probably the dowry paid by Jacob).

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 indicates that if a man 'seized' a young girl who was not betrothed and had intercourse with her, he was under an obligation to marry her. He would have to pay the dowry in advance and was denied the right ever to divorce her.

After the first night of marriage (according to Dt 22:13-21, 28-29) there needed to be proof of a bride's virginity. If a man were to have accused his wife falsely in this matter,

he was not allowed ever to divorce her; however, if he were to discover something 'shameful' (i.e. that she was no longer a virgin), he could divorce her. But it does not seem as if this situation had any relevance to the dowry paid.

### *Evaluation and comparison*

The concurrences between the 'marital laws' of the Lemba and those of early Israel are rather striking. Almost the same purpose is reflected by both groups when practising endogamy and the levirate. There are also more similarities than differences regarding the dowry.

In some respects there are, however, some differences regarding the marital laws. In the case of the proselytisation of a non-Israelite (*vis-a-vis* a similar situation amongst the Lemba), among other things it was implied that he had to profess his faith and bring a sacrifice, whilst with the Lemba there is much more emphasis on the purification rites of the 'gentile' woman (who had to be allowed into the community because of her contracting a marriage within it). With the Lemba communities it is probably more the issue of purification from gentile practices, such as eating unclean meat and so on, whilst the 'initiation process' in ancient Israel apparently was about the 'purification' of the influences from other faith viewpoints. From this point of view, the latter had more of a religious tendency than the purification had in the Lemba communities.

To the best of my knowledge, the Lemba custom (and that in other African communities) of marriage of a woman to another woman was completely foreign to early Israel. If it had existed, it was probably not taken up in the canon. The most salient concurrences and differences between marital customs of the Lemba and those of early Israel are presented in ADDENDUM III (Table 2).

## **Burial customs**

### *The Lemba*

During my field research, the respondents referred only to the fact that they were told to bury their dead with their heads in a *northerly direction* – to indicate the place where they came from. An interesting piece of information emerged during a 'group interview' at Mogabane in Sekhukhuneland. Here one of the respondents, John Peta, said that

*in the olden days the Lemba had special burial customs. First they dug a room-like hole so that the whole soil must not be deep. And then they put the person on a shelf. And they make a door there like a tomb .... There are still such graves somewhere at Pench (near Burgersfort) in the Eastern Transvaal (D:4:4).*

It is obviously not possible to see those graves without their being excavated. Bullock ([1927]1950:22) is convinced that the custom by the Lemba of interring their deceased in a *cavity in the wall of the grave pit* (in which the corpse was laid to rest, fully stretched)

is of Muslim origin. This specific custom of course was to a certain extent also found among the Israelite clans.

A few years later than Bullock, Jaques (1931:245-251) also witnessed that the Lemba of the former Northern Transvaal buried their dead *fully stretched out*, facing their direction of origin, namely north of the Limpopo of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

If a Lemba burial is performed properly, says Mathivha (D:R), they will *pour water in the grave* when the body lies there, because this water symbolises that they crossed the sea to come to Africa. He adds 'they sailed across the sea and that symbolises the water through which the soul has to pass back, because it goes back to Jerusalem' (D:R:10).

It is worth mentioning that most of the early ethnographic accounts agree on the Lemba's burial procedures. The *body was wrapped in an ox skin* (some say white cloth) and laid on its side or on its back on a shelf excavated in the side of the grave, which has to be six feet deep. According to ethnographers (cf Hall 1905:94; Thompson 1942:79; Bullock [1927] 1950:21), all other tribes in southern Africa buried their dead in a sitting position. Children are buried in the same way as adults.

Some ethnographers mention the Lemba ritual of *cutting a dying man's throat* with his own razor, or slitting that of a corpse of a man found dead before being buried (Bullock [1927] 1950:44). According to many respondents this conclusion is a total misunderstanding of the real custom. Phophi explained to Parfitt (1992:71-72) that it is the custom that no Lemba male should be buried with long hair. Therefore, before he dies or just thereafter, a Lemba goes to the dead man and shaves his hair. Parfitt and others, nevertheless, are convinced that the Lemba did in fact cut a dying man's throat in the past and perhaps still do so.

The relatives of the deceased used to *shave their heads and mourn for seven days*, during which time they were not permitted to work. On the seventh day a feast was held, at which an ox, a sheep or a spotless goat was sacrificed. According to Jaques (1931:249) the blood of the animal was either sprinkled over the heads of the assembled men or the blood was drunk<sup>14</sup> (Lv 11). The priest prayed to the ancestors, calling on them by name. The prayers ended with the word '*Amin*'. Later the men all knelt and the word '*Hundji*' was called out. According to another respondent *Hundji* was supposed to be the Lemba's country or place of origin. The seventh day was the day on which it was believed a man's soul returned to his body.

A *funeral prayer* that was recorded by the German, Wangemann (1868:437) is: 'Schlaf wohl, schlaf bei Gott, wir, die wie zurückbleiben, sind froh.' (Sleep well, sleep [be] with God, we, who stay behind, are happy). Lemba respondents emphasise that their way of mourning is different from other African groups. Because they believe that the deceased's soul is not dead, but alive (it is only in transit), they are glad and sing praise-songs

instead of crying like many other groups do. This difference, once again, convinces them that they are of different descent from the others around them (Mathivha 1996b).

### *Early Israel*

Archaeology has contributed substantial research on burial customs during Iron Age I. For example, it appears that the deceased during the Iron Age were usually buried in *collective family tombs*. Inside graves (hewn from limestone), the deceased were apparently laid down with their clothes on their backs. Barkay (1988:49) points out that the access to the burial chamber was through a single shaft, which was usually sealed by means of a stone or rubble.

According to Barkay and Kloner (1986:36,56) burial chambers with *shelves against the walls* were discovered at Beth-shemesh, Lachish and Mitzpahmatza, in which the deceased could find their last place of rest. The sides were slightly higher in order for the deceased not to roll down. Noth (1996:170) confirms that these chambers were typical of the Iron Age.

Apparently it was important for the Israelites to be *buried with their ancestors* in the family grave (Gn 25:8,17; 49:29,33). The burial chamber represented the 'house of the father' in Sheol. Barkay and Kloner (1986:36) aver that the burial tombs were used repeatedly, and that the bones of the deceased were collected into chests, or merely moved aside (or cast beneath the bench) to make room for others. The bones of deceased family members could also have been collected in places of protection. Later when these tombs became too small, more 'rooms' were added. In this way, they surmise, the extended tomb system came about. References such as 'and he slept with his fathers and was buried with them' (2 Ki 8:24); or 'I shall gather you with your fathers, and you will be gathered with peace into your grave' (2 Ki 22:20), gain new meaning in view of the above.

In connection with the tomb system, A Mazar (1976:5) refers to the so-called 'two room structure' (from the Iron Age) which was found near the Philistine-Israelite border in the Shephelah. This two room structure consisted of two burial chambers and one of the rooms ran into a place where bones were kept.

Sometimes jars were used to bury small *children under the floor* of a house. To my mind these customs are not related to the burial ritual, as some scholars (Burger 1991) indicate, but rather to the Canaanite religious practice, to build a child into the foundations of one's house in order to appease the gods (cf the worship of Moloch, Lv 18:21; 20:2-5 and especially Jos 6:26). There are archaeological proofs that the Canaanites at Tirsha, Sichem and Gezer sacrificed people and specifically built in children under the floors of their houses (cf 1 Ki 16:34). The fact that the Israelites so readily took over the practices from the Canaanites in order to appease the gods, confirms the suspicion that child sacrifices often formed part of the ritual.

During Iron Age I, *single burials* also sometimes took place. Such a single grave was scarcely the depth of one metre, and usually had engraved stela that were dedicated to a god or goddess. Prausnitz explains that such a tomb was found in the eastern graveyard of Achzib on the coast between Acco and Tyrus. The deceased was lying on his back and his head rested on a mixing bowl amphora. The man's seal ring and weapon were also found in the tomb and clay articles such as lamps and libation cups which were found on top of the grave were usually used for religious rituals. Next to him was a crater amphora, with the remains of a cremation.

Our information about the process of *mourning* does not date from the period of the Judges, but the process of mourning (as found in early Israelite history) most probably concurs with that which is found in the rest of the Old Testament.

When death sets in, it is a sign for the spectators to begin wailing aloud. The loud cries of sorrow in Micah 1:8 can be compared to those of a jackal or an ostrich. De Vaux (1973:61) comments that the mourners began, at the same time, both to praise the good qualities of the deceased as well as to mourn his/her bad fortune. However, there does not seem to be any religious significance appended to this.

At reception of the news of death, a person usually *tore his/her clothes* (2 Sm 1:11; 13:31), clothed him/herself in sackcloth (2 Sm 3:31), took off his/her shoes (2 Sm 15:30) and bared his/her head (Ex 24:17,23). To place one's hands on one's head was a further sign of sorrow and shame (2 Sm 13:19). The head was also covered with soil (or ashes? Jos 7:6); or a person would roll in the dust (Ex 4:3; Is 58:5). Thus he/she literally was in sackcloth and ashes. The opinion that mourners usually did not wash during the period of mourning, but the Canaanite custom of shaving one's hair or beard in order to injure oneself during mourning was condemned (Lv 19:27,28; Dt 14). The fact that it was condemned shows that the Israelite clans were most probably tempted to follow suit in these practices. We can perhaps infer that the practices that were condemned later, probably dated from pre-monarchic times.

According to Leviticus 9:1-11:47 Moses specifically directs the *cohanim* (priests – the descendants of Aaron; cf Nm 25) regarding their behaviour during the mourning period and warns that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Tabernacle.

### ***Evaluation and comparison***

Both the procedure of the burial, as well as the process of mourning amongst the Lemba, concur remarkably with that of early Israel (more specifically with the clan era of Israelite history). Some of the Lemba customs that can be ascribed to Israelite influence could stem from early Israel, such as the procedure that a person would be buried stretched out on his back, on a bench or shelf against a wall in a 'room-like' grave.

Apparently, the Lemba do not have the custom of burying more than one person in the same grave.

However, it is not typical of the customs of early Israel that someone would cut their hair or beard during the mourning process. On the contrary, this was typically pagan or Canaanite, and there is strong condemnation of that.

Killing an animal in the Lemba culture and the custom of invoking the ancestors by name, or speaking with them, is probably the result of influences from traditional African cultures. The unblemished animal sacrificed by the Lemba and the blood sprinkled over the people seems again to have come from early Israelite influences (probably a sacrifice of atonement).

It is remarkable that the Lemba often, during an important ritual or ceremony, would confirm something about their history to one another, for instance by naming the order of their ancestors and the place where they came from – almost like a confession that is being made.

With both these communities it is clear that there is faith in a kind of life after death. Archaeologists have found remnants of food in the graves of the Israelite clans during the period before the monarchy, which was brought to the dead. The Lemba actually say this in so many words and they confirm this through their *Gshamo* and other rituals, as well as through the fact that food and beer are given to the dead in various ways. These resemblances and differences are tabled at the back (see ADDENDUM III: Table 3).

## Skilled professions

### *The Lemba*

Parfitt (1992:249-250) notes that ‘the descendants of the Moors had a huge reputation as *men of magic and medicine* and as such played an important role in African society...’ (my italics). The Portuguese trader Antonio Caiado, who accompanied Don Gonçalo da Silveira to the court of Monomotapa in 1560, added to this supposition by his statement that ‘Moorish *ngangas*<sup>15</sup> were the principal wizards of the country’ (cited in Theal [1898-1903]1964c:102). Parfitt (1992:250,269) connects the facts above to the explanation for the word Lemba that one finds in Jantzen (1982:3): ‘Conflicts of interest between the trade and social order may explain why Lemba – a word meaning ‘to calm’ (*lembikisa*) took the form of a therapeutic association, a “drum of affliction” (ngoma) ....’

Parfitt (1992:250) considers it possible

that these Mwenye ngangas travelled further afield and established themselves elsewhere in Africa as a sort of secret guild. In any event, it is interesting that in West Africa a curious sort of cult, which took the form of a therapeutic association

called a 'drum of affliction' [ngoma], was known as the 'Lemba'. Similarly in Angola, in Mbundu society (and perhaps in Zaire), the word Lemba refers to a noble and traditional elite [my insertion].

The *ngangas* are specialists, men skilled above their fellows and the number of different types is very great in the different clans. All this information correlates with the fact that even today the Lemba are viewed as masters of magic arts and as medicine men. The Sadiki clan are specifically known as the medicine men of war, a tribe that knew all the herbs/medicine of war, and their special praise goes *Rudzi rwavo vaiva nganga dzokurwa, vaiziva miti yose* (Von Sicard 1962:70). The Hamisi clan, again, were known as 'medicine men who treated people in order to get children': *Basa ravo raivo rokusimikira* (cf Von Sicard 1952:70; Chigaga 1972:10).

In his search for gold (and other items) for an Austrian agency, William Bolts (1777) had already reported to Andrew Daniel Pollet, agent for their Imperial Majesties in Mcafũmo River, that '[t]he Natives of this part seem to have no knowledge of gold ... a people called Malembe...'

Junod (1908) and many others also describe the crafts and industries of the Lemba, the skill of the women in making earthenware and the remarkable metallurgical technique of the men. Lestrade (1937b:124) explains the special technique in working with gold and the use of it for plate and bead ornamentation (as reflected in the Mapungubwe gold in the Limpopo Province), as an 'Arab' influence which was presented by Lemba traders (about 900 CE). He maintains that they were either Arabs themselves or they were an admixture of Semitic groups who traded between Mapungubwe and the east coast of Africa.

The Lemba could not remember the name of their country but they know they were masters of iron and copper smelting and working. In their country they made pots, grew and wove cotton and were also masters of timber work, because they had to build their own ships for their maritime undertakings. Numerous spinning wheels were found at Machedema, north of Waterpoort and the Soutpansberg, which are linked to the Lemba by some scholars. In the work they did, the Beta Israel (Falasha, Ethiopian Jews) of Ethiopia in ancient times were quite remarkably similar to the Lemba. The Beta Israel are also known to have been master builders, having built many surviving and unusually advanced buildings and palaces in cities such as Gondar. It seems quite a conspicuous similarity. All their skills are learnt within the family connection and are carried over from one generation to the next. It so happens that each clan has its own specific skills. In certain localities they had a monopoly in these crafts.

The Portuguese Father Fernandes was the first to have recorded the following song in 1561/62 (Von Sicard 1962:78):

*Gombe zuco virato*  
*Ambuze capana virato*

Translated by Fernandes as:

*The cow has leather for shoes,*  
*and the goat has no leather for shoes.*

This translation is debatable, especially when one reads the song recorded by Stayt (1931:236):

The best businessmen are the ones who bring the cattle home;  
 Those who bring home goats are nothing.

Unfortunately, Stayt did not provide the original text as well. But this song again stresses the fact that the Lemba were traders and shows how the world-view or interpretation of a translator can influence the outcome of an interpretation.

A report by 'a Negro', Mahumane, for the Dutch at Delagoa Bay in 1728, refers to the 'Walembers' in the vicinity of the Zoutpanenberg as being *traders* and a *separate* people.

Junod mentions that most of the Lemba's merchandise would often consist of medicine and that they introduced fowls into the country (1908; 1927). In 1938 he remarks that they were anxious to preserve their tribal and ritual purity and stresses that they were competent 'traders'. A man of importance is shown great respect when he is addressed as *mušavi* (buyer), *nyakuwana* (the man who finds the things which are bought), or *mulungu*, probably 'the man from the North'. Jaques (1931:248) contributes family traditions which bear witness to the commercial activities of the old Lemba:

[A]n ancestor of Mosheh [a respondent], called Mbalanyika, was given the nickname of Gumboyi 'leg', because he used to travel much on business. When people mocked him because he did not plough and did not even possess a hoe, he used to say, Gumboyi baaza, mašango nda feza 'My leg is my hoe, I walk about to every country' [my insertion].

This Lemba forerunner of the commercial traveller evidently found it more profitable to devote all his time to trade, rather than to agriculture. In order to sell their wares such as medicine, metalwork, pottery and textiles, they accepted grain, livestock or anything else they could use or resell and they also undertook long journeys to find customers.

Another old Lemba praise song collected by Stayt (1931:237; cf Chapter Three) reflects more about their view of the past: *Nemanga vhazungu vha no senna, vha no vha mbila ya sose* ('Master of the monkey nuts, white men who come from Sena, who come from the place of the rock rabbits at Sose'). *Nemanga* is one of the Lemba clan names,

*vhazungu* or probably *vhalungu* ('White man') is an honorific title and it is very possible that it was the Lemba who first brought monkey nuts south, to the Transvaal. This praise song not only emphasises that they were traders and that they looked different from others, but also indicates their location before they moved southwards.

Schoffeleers<sup>16</sup> refers to the Mwenye (Lemba clan) in Malawi who are very prosperous traders and keepers of cattle. In his personal notes De Vaal indicates various trade routes in Southern Africa. De Vaal also records a praise-song usually sung for their chiefs:

Great trader,  
*Lion of the Induna.*  
*He who pierces assailants,*  
*Thundering on the white-ant hills,*  
*Roamer of hills and vales.*  
*Numerous are the only traders in the land,*  
*Thunder of the land [my translation from Afrikaans].*

This praise-song emphasises that the Lemba are traders and that they know all the trade routes in the country (wherever they were at the stage when the song was sung). Today there are numerous Lemba who conduct their own businesses. In fact, they feel strongly about these and believe that they should, preferably, not work for someone else. This indeed encourages their initiative to undertake their own businesses. Numerous Lemba who do work for others, work for Jews.

### ***Early Israel***

The *pottery work* of the Israelite settlements in the mountain area indicates a very poor material culture. With single exceptions, the ceramic wares generally kept their same Late Bronze Age forms. The large storage tanks (hewn cisterns) and *pithoi* (large pots, mainly used for the storage of water), are characteristic of this period. However, A Mazar is convinced that they are not unique to the Israelites, as is often maintained. Similar *pithoi* also occur in typical Canaanite areas. In the Israelite settlements, smaller storage tanks were found, which were used for the storage of wine and oil, pots for cooking and other utensils. In general these utensils did not have any ornamentation.

Almost no further indications of other forms of art are known among Israelite clans from the Iron Age, except for burial utensils, oil lamps and so on. Dothan (1984:38) and Weippert (1988:327-329) point to the possibility of the *metal industry* beginning during the Late Bronze Age – which should be noted – and add that the chances that the Iron Age continued are highly probable. Evidence of this is found at Israelite fortresses such as at Tell Hareshkim and Khirbet Raddana, but there are few remains of these. A

few eleventh century products such as the typical bronze bull figurine was found near the sanctuary in Dothan (Wiseman 1988:86-88). Bronze items were still the most frequent in the Iron Age, however; weapons and implements were made of iron. At Khirbet-el-Meshâsh fifty six implements of copper and bronze were found and only six which were made of iron (Fritz 1994:144).

Various trades such as those of musician, miller, baker, weaver, hairdresser, potter, bleacher, locksmith, metal worker and jeweller are mentioned in the Old Testament and the same skills probably also occurred in early Israel (cf Gn 4). There is very little information about *weaving* in early Israel, but there are specific references to wool from sheep, goats' hair and flax, which were probably used to weave with (cf Gn 38:12; 1 Sm 25:2; Jos 2:6). This idea is endorsed by the various small spinning wheels and related articles, which were found through archaeological excavations in Israel and elsewhere (Irwin 1977:313).

Their economic progress and their symbiotic relationship with the urban areas brought the Israelite clans into contact with new trades and skills, which the Canaanites and other inhabitants had previously developed over a long period. Exchange of knowledge and skills took place between these groups. Initially the Israelite clans did not know many technical skills, but gradually learnt new skills, which implied a subsequent economic growth. Skills were most probably learnt within the family context, and delivered from generation to generation.

Palestine was known through the ages to be a thoroughfare – not only did trade routes run through the country, but it also benefited from the flourishing trade between Africa, Asia and the West. For instance, many luxurious, expensive commercial articles were found in Late Bronze Age tombs. Palestine could play its mainly geographical role without being exploited by any of the two greater political powers, but the melting pot of various cultures and the strategic military trade position did take its toll in the lower lying areas. These easily accessible areas were often the victims of fragmentation and destruction, which brought about restlessness. The cities surrounding the trade routes were also often exposed to plunder and suchlike activities. The situation in the lowlands was possibly one of the reasons why the Israelites would rather have settled in the safer, more protected highlands.

Settlement of Israelite clans in the mountain areas also resulted in new trade routes and other possibilities. Coote and Whitelam (1987:86-87) indicate that a considerable number of scholars are convinced that there indeed would have been trade between the established farmers and the semi-nomads during the Iron Age. They refer for example to the bartering that probably took place between the groups in the areas north-east of Jerusalem (Michmach, Geva, Azmareth and Anathot) and Tekoa further south.

Dothan (1984:40-41) surmises that there had to be trade connections and military ties between Israel and the Philistines, since some Philistine pottery was found in Israelite

settlements such as Tell Masos, 'Izbet Sartah, Tell Qiri, Hazor and Dan. Another possibility is that they just shared the same pottery.

The importance of controlling the various trade routes and economic advantages which accompany this, probably often led to political conflict in the period of the Judges. Something of this is indicated in some of the narratives in the Book of Judges.

Both the stories of Jephthah (Jdg 10:6-12:7) and Gideon need to be read against the above mentioned economic background. Judges 10:9, for instance, refers to the children of Ammon who crossed the Jordan in order to do battle against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim and caused Israel to be in dire straits. Aharoni (in Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1979: Map 78) illustrates that the capital city of Ammon (Rabbath-bene-ammon) lies very strategically, where the eastern and western branches of the Royal Highway (the only communication route between Eilath and Damascus) joined. Hamlin (1990:109) emphasises the importance of this route for transporting (for example) the medical ointment from Gilead, as well as other products from Egypt, Arabia, Canaan, Syria and Mesopotamia. In his opinion the Israelite clans were an impediment to the Ammonites, since they occupied the area between Ammon and the Jordan River, in the vicinity of Gilead.

In the ancient Near East, trade not only took place along the *trade routes*, but also on rivers and on the sea. Noth, however, is convinced that the latter two types (on rivers and sea) did not occur in Palestine and especially that sea trade could not be of any significance, since Israelite clans only occupied a limited region next to the Mediterranean Sea.

However, the Israelites would soon have learnt the art of trade from the Canaanites – in certain contexts the word Canaanite means 'trader' (cf Job 40:30). As an example of the trading that took place, Joshua 24:32 refers to the parcel of soil which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Sicheim, for four hundred pieces of silver. However, the value of the pieces of silver is unknown. It is not even certain whether they were indeed pieces of silver.

### ***Evaluation and comparison***

With regard to the various skills of the Israelites and the Lemba communities, there are similarities, although by itself this is not surprising. The question, however, is whether there are salient resemblances.

It is quite certain that sea trade was not a considerable factor for the Israelites, since they occupied a very limited region bordered by the sea. The possibility exists that the narratives of the Lemba are true and that the Israelite communities in Yemen did actively conduct trade with the Arabian sea traders of the east coast of Africa and possibly also

with Israel itself. These may be narratives which simply did not reach the canon of the Old Testament. However, the dating of these narratives of the Lemba is problematic.

Considerable research has been done into the various trade routes which ran in East Africa, and more locally north and south of the Limpopo. In more than one ethnological report the role of the trader and the middleman has been linked to the Lemba (even at Mapungubwe, Thulamela and Mutokolwe). Spinning wheels, copper and gold objects, have also been discovered in all these areas in the Limpopo Province (South Africa), where the Lemba probably played the role of middleman between the villages and the Arabian and Portuguese traders.

It is striking to see how many Lemba have their own businesses, or are in one way or another involved in the world of business. Living proof of the Israelite clans' abilities to conduct trade, is today still visible in that particular competence of Jewish people world-wide.

The material culture of the Lemba does not indicate much, since they usually moved or lived with other groups. The same is in fact true of the material culture of early Israel.

## Social organisation

### *The Lemba*

#### *Twelve clans/lineages*

Mathivha (1992:23, and many others) explains that the Lemba initially had ten clans and then only later were two more added here in the South of Africa. Each one refers to a specific ancestor and in the past had its own history and purpose. It is clear that each clan has stories of its own specific magic, building or other skills.

According to Mathivha (1992:8) there is a tradition that the oldest ancestor, Buba, brought the people from Israel to Yemen. This senior house ruled in Yemen. Hamisi brought them to Africa and in Africa the house of Hamisi was succeeded by the Bakari. The Bakari were followed by Seremane, followed by Tovakare, then by Ngavi (or Zungunde), Mhani, Hadzhi and Sadiki and finally by Sarevu and Chineravhi. Raulinga (1995) provides the following order, with accompanying reasons (and spellings that he did not specifically mention) of his own: Buba, Hamisi, Bakali, Seremane, Thovhakale, Ngavhi/Zungunde, Mange/Nemange, Mhani, Hadji, Sadiki, Tshinyaladzi and Salefu. The latter two clans were added here in the South. The order of the names has to do with the order of the ancestors and during certain feasts the representatives of each clan had to sit in this specific order.

Connaway (1976; 1978) refers to the genealogies of at least nine different clans of Lemba: the Nyakavhi clan, Hadzhi, Bakali, Sadiki, Buba, Hamisi, Tovhakhali, Mhani and lastly the Bhenga, Hasane, Ngavhi, Maange and Salifo clans (again different spellings and order). But there are also many other lists.

Von Sicard (1962:68) observes the tendency (from his informant, Solomon Hamandishe) to see in the Lemba traditions more Old Testament similarities than there actually are and that explains why there are, according to him, *twelve* tribes. Von Sicard found at least another six clans and it becomes clear that it is hardly possible to separate the different clans strictly from one another.

Motenda (1940:65) explains that besides their proper clan names the Lemba acquired additional names (way back in history), for fear of being slaughtered by the enemy for some reason or another. From this the many variations or sub-clan names of the Lemba received their origins.

There are many traditions and praises surrounding the different clans of the Lemba. Parfitt (1997) discovered in the 1990s that most of the names could be traced back to either a commonplace name in the Hadramaut (Yemenite) or to a Hebrew word. Von Sicard (1962:77) is convinced that all names of the original immigration, which can be fixed to about 1745/46, are of decidedly Swahili-Arab origin.

### *Praises and praise-songs*

Each tribe has many stories of the role they played in their history and of their special skills, which give them a very special feeling of belonging and self-identification. This survey of some of the praises, proverbs and songs of the clans does not pretend to be complete. A few praises or songs related to some of the clans, will now briefly be discussed.

There is the tradition, as mentioned above, that the oldest ancestor, Buba, founder of the priestly clan, brought the people from Israel to the 'promised land'. This senior house ruled in Yemen. It was quite an experience to realise that the newest information on the results of the DNA samples of the Buba clan in Sekhukhuneland (information disseminated by Thomas et al [2000], correlated with the existing oral traditions (D:R:1-5).

Mathivha explained (I thought at first that he was improvising quite creatively there and then) that according to a Judaising group in Ethiopia, 'Buba' is a corruption for 'Judah' (1997). According to him, they were actually the leaders of the Sena group who were the carriers of trade between Yemen and Judea. 'When we refer to them we always called them Basena,' he informed me (D:R:1-5). Furthermore, the Buba (Judah) were responsible for the so called 'secret sacrifices' which had to be brought. In fact, there is a proverb that specifically refers to the Buba, namely: *Bhuba malinga lu tanga*, which means: 'Buba, the one who keeps that kind of seed/crop (*tanga*)'. The seeds of this special kind of crop were used for the sacrificial ceremonies. One can still find these crops in Zimbabwe today, Mathivha remarks. The Buba were therefore, according to this tradition, the priests among the Lemba clans. The 'headquarters' of the Buba tribe in South Africa was Tzaneen (Phusela), but moved from there to the village, India, in

Sekhukhuneland. Another special name of praise for Buba (and all the other clans) is *shvhanani*, a word derived from the old Jewish *shabi* which means 'the giver of Abraham's faith'. To be honest, I was quite amazed that Mathivha (1992) had already written down most of the traditions above long before the current genetic research was undertaken, which I realised only later.

According to tradition the Hamisi brought the Lemba to Africa (Mathivha 1992). The Hamisi are said to have 'lived in Sena at a place which is identified with Gorongoza' in Portuguese East Africa: *PaSena vaHamisi vakagara panzvimbo yaGorongozo*. They came to Southern Zimbabwe from the former Transvaal and settled at Dumbwe Hill in Belingwe. As mentioned above they are known as 'medicine men who treated people in order to get children': *Basa ravo raiva rokusimikira* (Von Sicard 1962:70).

In Africa the house of Hamisi was succeeded by the Bakari. One of the praises of the Bakari is *Vasera mupunga*: 'those who sifted rice' (Von Sicard 1962:76).

The Bakari were followed by Seremane (Mathivha 1992:1-6; Serimani). Von Sicard describes 'Serimani' as a general designation of the Lemba, rather than the name of a particular clan. Stayt (1931:233) renders the name Sulemani.

The Seremane were followed by Tovakare/Thobakhali. Their praise names are (with the English translation on the right):

<i>Dzimbabwe guru, Murozvi,</i>	<i>The Big Stone, of the Rozvi tribe,</i>
<i>vaChizendangwa,</i>	<i>(clan name; Mr) The one we lean on,</i>
<i>vaMashura,</i>	<i>(clan name; Mr) Mystery Man</i>
<i>vaChamhembe,</i>	<i>(clan name; Mr) North</i>
<i>Vanomuruka mananga akaparapatana,</i>	<i>[meaning uncertain; archaic Shona]</i>
<i>Ho! Vovo, vovo! Tovakare,</i>	<i>Ho! There he is, there he is, Tovhakare</i>
<i>muRemba unenge Tovera,</i>	<i>of the Remba tribe like Tovera</i>
<i>coMurungwane,</i>	<i>(clan name)</i>
<i>vaMaponga-miti,</i>	<i>(clan name)</i>
<i>vaMaringa,</i>	<i>(clan name)</i>
<i>vaMashandika,</i>	<i>(clan name)</i>
<i>vaBungu,</i>	<i>(clan name)</i>
<i>vacere-nyama.</i>	<i>Who fed on meat only.</i>

Tovakare are known as 'those who provide meat for the people in the circumcision lodge'. Their speciality was further 'to pile up, without difficulty, the iron ore and mark them': *Ndivo vaiva vabati vokuronga nyora mabwe iwawo emhangura*. Not all of the praise names are always clearly understood by everybody, because they are recited very fast and in the language of the circumcision lodge. The name Tovakare (also Tovhakale or Thobakgale), means *Nhovele wa kare, Thovhela-wa-kale or Thobela-wa-kgale*, which is: 'King of long ago'. Some respondents in Zimbabwe maintain that

the Tovakare lineage were especially famous for their *stone masonry*. But Tovakare is also called '*Makudo-a-Zimbabwe*'. As noted above, this means that the Tovakare men 'climbed the walls like monkeys or baboons when they were building the walls' (Mathivha 1992:1-7). The Tovakare group still lives in the southern parts of Zimbabwe today and Marimazhira witnessed how among the 'Varemba' they referred (and still refer) to the Tovakare as 'those who built Great Zimbabwe'. They also came from Sena.

After the Tovakare leadership came the Ngavi (or Zungunde, Mathivha 1992:1-6; Mkavi or Kavi, Von Sicard 1962:68). Von Sicard is convinced that the Ngavi is a section of the Madi (sometimes written as Mani, Mhani or Manhi clan).

Mani succeeded Tovakare and left Sena on account of a bad drought (Von Sicard 1962). It was the Madi clan who were particularly famous as iron workers, but also as medicine men and judges: *Vaiva nezvido pose-pose, vachiti vunganga vuye kutonga kamwe nebaso ravo rokupfura. Rinova ndiro rinotendekana nokuti Mupfure* ('they had love for many trades, divining, ruling/governing other tribes and smelting' [this denotes goldsmiths]). However, in Stayt's list of Lemba clans (1931:233), Madi does not even find a place.

According to Mathivha (1992:1-6), Hadzhi succeeded Mani. Von Sicard (1962:75) records them as the Hadzi-Mberengwa clan, and collected only one of their praises, namely *Mberengwa ina-vavuya, negore raManyeruke*: 'Belingwe was occupied by people who came during the reign of Manyeruke (referring to ancestors who lived at Belingwe Hill).' Stayt (1931[1968]:237) remarks: 'The Hadzhi family is the most important among the BaLemba, and the name is an interesting one to find so far south.' He reminds one that *Hadji* is an Arabic word for 'pilgrimage', specifically referring to the Kaaba. 'The Hadji once performed, the pilgrim never omits to prefix the title Hadji to his name. One wonders what ancestor of the Transvaal Hadzhi made the famous pilgrimage' (Stayt ([1931]1968:237).

Von Sicard and Stayt, of course, did not yet have the information from the genetic tests and other findings from Yemen that are compatible with the Lemba traditions (that they came from there). Thus ancestors need not have come from the Transvaal to have undertaken the pilgrimage to Israel, but could have done it earlier on in their history, when still living in Yemen.

After the Hadzhi, Sadiki, the clan of Chief Mposi, followed (Mathivha 1992:1-6). This was the clan of the medicine men (as was already mentioned), since they knew all medicines: *Rudzi rwavo vaiva nganga dzokurwa, vaiziva miti yose* (Von Sicard 1962:70). Another praise says: *Sadiki muzungu anokubwa sena*, which indicates that they originally came from Sena. In fact, most of the clans have a praise which relate their origins to Sena (Mathivha 1999b).

Finally, according to Mathivha, they were led by Sarevu and Chineravhi. Sarevu or Sarifu (Von Sicard 1962:71) have the praise names *Chakarungwa, kukaka wakazvirunga*

*umene* ('that which has been made well; the milk is in itself savoury/natural'), meaning: *Isu hatitongwi nomunhu, asi tinotongwa naMwari, wakarunga mukaka*: 'We are judged or ruled by nobody, only by God who has made the milk savoury/who gave the milk that natural taste.' They were also the winders of bangles from copper and brass wire. It is also said that the Sarifu were the first to have discovered the Musina copper mines.

Von Sicard (1963:72) argues the possibility that Sarifu comes from the Arabic word, *sherif* (noble). Van Warmelo ([1937]1974:82) lists many more words that could indicate Arabic influence: Bakali (Ar. *Bakr*), Haji (Ar. *hajj*), Hamisi (Ar. *hamis*), Hasane (Ar. *hasan*), Sadiki (Ar. *sadih*), Salifo (Ar. *sharif*). He is also convinced that the ancestor cult with its annual rites holds the family organisation together: 'Ancestors are addressed by name (genealogies are therefore important) and age-old prayers are recited ... and responded to by all present. No strangers are allowed to attend' (Van Warmelo [1937]1974:82).

Other scholars also tend to see a correlation between the twelve names and the Hebrew language. Selemene could be a corrupted form of 'Solomon' and Sadiki (the medicine men) is close to the Hebrew term *tsadik*, which means 'righteous man' (Parfitt, cited in Ahuja 1999:3).

#### *A segmented society with a loose social organisation*

Geographically the Lemba are almost distributed over the whole world but more specifically in Southern Africa and therefore the Lemba are (and were in the past) a segmented society. They are principally not bound to a specific area and are practically a *Diasporic* society. They are without a central chief or national unity, but have characteristic customs to which they adhere from generation to generation and which keep them together.

The Lemba are communally organised into clans or lineages with each lineage headed by its own chief (or *ish* in olden times; cf the Hebrew word *ish*, a man). The Lemba are, further, a patriarchal community with their social organisation based on the extended family, which is the focus of life. This social organisation might differ from clan to clan and even from family to family. It is a patriarchal system, yet at the same time *egalitarian* (as far as the position of the men in the communities is concerned). In other words, they are egalitarian, but as far as the position of women is concerned, they are selectively egalitarian. Although the authority in the villages is vested in the chief and the elders, one does not get the impression that they wield absolute power over the others in the community. It may be a result of 'cultural diffusion', but they always want to be very democratic in their negotiations and decision-making. My overall impression was that the Lemba are people with much respect for one another: a value perhaps gained from their initiation teachings.

I observed that women would not say anything, unless one asked them specifically, but once they start they are not at all reticent to tell their stories. It seems to me though, that the women are less informed than the men in the communities. The reason could be that women usually do not form part of a discussion or negotiations about important matters with the elders in the chief's kraal, which is typical of a patriarchal society.

Another example of this is that at one time in Sekhukhuneland (March 1996) the 'elders' gathered with the chief in his kraal to decide who would join my husband and myself the following day, to visit the villages in the vicinity, as well as to decide other important issues. A deceased chief's wife is supposed to be the acting chief until her son gets married and takes over these duties from her. But to my knowledge she was not even heeded in those matters. Since her husband's death her son had attended the LCA Conferences (being referred to by others as Chief Mpaketsane) without any acknowledgement of his mother as the 'real' acting chief. This situation again reflects something of the inferior position of women in this patriarchal society.

## *Early Israel*

### *Twelve clans*

There are different theories regarding the existence and functioning of a kind of a federation of twelve clans during the pre-monarchic period (cf Noth [1958]1983; Bright 1981; Gottwald 1980), but it seems as though the clans in the first stage of settlement in Canaan were conscious of the bonds which united them. They shared, for example, the same name (Israelites or Hebrews), the same customs, acknowledged the same God, Yahweh (Jos 24:18,21,24) and in times of crisis a group of clans stood together to face the trouble (cf Jdg 1:1-17; 1:27-33; 3:5-6; 4; 5). But they had no common head. According to Judges 5, there were only ten Israelite 'tribes'<sup>17</sup> (as mentioned there) and only later were more added.

### *Praises and sayings*

Very little is known about praise-songs or specific skills of the twelve clans in ancient Israel, but the various sayings in Genesis 49 (at the death bed of Jacob and in passages such as Jdg 4 and 5), provide in brief some of the strengths or weaknesses, the myths and stories and geographical settings of the various clans. It is not known any more whether these characteristics or information were presented in praises or praise-songs. De Moor (1999) surmises that not only the blessings in Genesis 49, but also the sayings there concur with oral poetry from central Arabia (specifically animal metaphors).

Reuben, the *first-born*, is described as 'unstable as water' (Gn 49:3,4). He had many talents but he had polluted his father's bed by incestuous intercourse with his mother-

in-law. With this deed he had thrown away the dignity which he received on the day he was born. He was supposed to be Jacob's strength and the beginning of his manly vigour, but he had disappointed Jacob shamefully. He was not the only one who was disappointed in Reuben. Deborah (Jdg 5:15,16) expected this clan to help her against the Canaanites at Hazor, but in vain.

Simeon and Levi are described as brothers, but it is also mentioned that they are *instruments of cruelty* (Gn 49:5-7; referring to the massacre of the city of Sichem). This curse on Levi was in sharp contrast to their task as priests.

Judah is the first one to receive a blessing from Jacob (Gn 49:9-12). Jacob foresaw that Judah would be praised by his brothers. Although he would not be free from enemies, Jacob promises him victory. He is described as a *lion's whelp*. This simile confirms that he would be a great leader and formidable towards his enemies.

Jacob (Gn 49:13) assigns a maritime region to Zebulun, probably because they (the clan) had special skills in *maritime activities*.

Because of his strength – which would enable him to endure labour – Issachar is called a *bonny ass* (Gn 49:14). Being content with their fertile and pleasant country, Issachar was as ready to bear the burden of servitude as mules are to submit their backs to a load. In pre-monarchic times the clans had a choice either to go into a guerrilla war against Egypt or adapt to peaceful co-operation. Some of the clans supposedly found the latter more promising than armed confrontation.

Jacob announces that Dan will be one of the judges of Israel (Gn 49:16-18). He compares this people (Dan) to *serpents*, who rise out of their lurking-places. Possibly the meaning is that Dan will not be so courageous as to engage in open conflict, but he will fight with cunning and snares.

Gad is described as a *troop*. He will conquer his enemies (Gn 49:19; cf Dt 33:20-21) perhaps because he had special warfare skills.

Jacob declares that Asher will have the *best and finest food*. This is interpreted by some scholars to mean that he will have abundance at home (Gn 49:20).

Jacob compares Naphthali to a *hind let loose* and one who uses sweet words (Gn 49:21). He perhaps assigns them rather to fortify themselves by the use of sweet words than by the defence of arms (cf Jdg 1:33).

Joseph is also blessed in abundance (Gn 49:22-26). He is like a *tree situated near a fountain* and by its beauty and lofty stature, it may surmount the obstacles around it (and many more).

And finally, Benjamin shall raven as a *wolf* (Gn 49:27). This most probably indicates that they (the Benjaminites) will live by plunder (cf Jdg 3:15; 20:16). De Moor (1999)

surmises that specifically Dan, Gad and Benjamin had the custom of attacking their enemy from the back. Plundering was a typical bedouin norm.

This passage in Genesis 49 reflects something of the possible characteristics which the sons of Jacob (the clans) had and the role they played in their different communities. This collection of tribal sayings was, according to De Moor, incorporated into the Deuteronomistic history in order to boost their history.

### *A segmented society with a loose social organisation*

For the purposes of this book, the social organisation of the clans, as with other aspects, is only discussed briefly – thus there is no pretence at completeness. For the notion of loose social organisation, I link up mainly with Mayes. In my opinion, it is clear that within Israelite segmented society there was only mention of a loose social organisation (cf Gn 49). This implies that the activities that are discussed below were probably not centralised, but possibly varied from tribe to tribe, or that they may even have had unique arrangements from family to family. Thus there was no indication of a kind of federation (contra Noth [1958]1983).

The social structure or inner structure with which most scholars (cf Noth [1958]1983; De Vaux 1973; Miller 1987) concur is found in Joshua 7:14-18. Tribe, clan and family are referred to in this passage. Miller (in Miller and Hayes 1986:91-93) concludes that the role of the family and clan was more part of the social structure than of the tribe. One does read of ‘tribes’, but if Miller is correct, then these are retro-projections to the time of the Judges. Similarly, Kimbrough (1978:44) maintains that the clan probably played a lesser and lesser role after the settlement in the land, while the extended family (*bajit av*, or the ‘father’s house’) began to take up a more prominent place. It seems as if the heads of families or elders also began to carry more and more responsibility (1 Sm 30:26-31). Kimbrough is of the opinion that most political, economic and domestic decisions were taken by the town’s elders, who gathered in the gates of the city, but these could not be summarily enforced upon the community. Kimbrough also avers that it is the family who was the anchor of the social structure of the Israelite ‘tribes’ in early Israel. According to him, the families were initially bound together by bonds of blood and tradition, but later the possession of land became more important as a binding factor. This means that the clans eventually became divided and some traditions were lost.

Within the greater picture of clan organisation or of interim governments, the political as well as the social authority was disseminated at ground level, where the father exercised authority over his family. To describe the real organisation of Israelite clans is no easy task, since the Old Testament data is difficult to interpret. It is difficult to determine when certain terms are meant and what exactly should be understood by a certain term. What we can infer with certainty is that it was essential that every individual belongs to a family and that the family ties were treasured.

It appears from various ancient Near Eastern texts that there were different kinds of family relationships (see Gn 24; 34). In the Hetite and Hurritic families in Assyria and Elam we find characteristics of a fratriarchal family. In this case the eldest brother takes responsibility for the family and his position and authority is carried over together with the property from brother to brother.

The matriarchal family was more common in primitive communities. Some scholars surmise that we find a matriarchal setup in Judges 14. Samson marries a girl from Timnath, but she does not leave her clan and he visits her there only. Within the matriarchal setup the mother never exercises authority, but the child's family ties, that is his or her genealogy, are linked to that of the mother, as we read in Judges 14. However, there are divergent opinions as to whether this is an example of a typical matriarchal situation.

De Vaux (1973:19-20) is of the opinion that the oldest texts that we have from early Israel indicate that the extended family of Israelite clans were mainly patriarchal. The story of Ruth, situated in the period of the Judges, represents such a typical patriarchal setup within a family (Ruth was possibly written much later, but it reflects much of the pre-monarchical conditions). This means that the father of the family had absolute authority over his children and even over his wives – that is, if they were living with him. This also meant that the man was the *baal* or 'owner' of his wife and that his wife and family were completely at his mercy. He could bless or curse them, disinherit them, or sell them as slaves (except for his wife) – he could even have them killed if he wished this. The wife's status and respect in society, however, largely depended on the birth of her first child – especially if it was a boy (Gn 16:4; 29:31).

In spite of the divergent social models there is reasonable consensus about the fact that the 'father's house' was the primary social unit within this loose social organisation. The 'father's house', or extended family, usually consisted of two or more core families, which could even include up to five generations. Gottwald (1980:285) maintains that this extended family usually included the head of the family, his wife or wives, their sons and unmarried daughters, the sons' wives and their children and also the slaves and the strangers in the city gates.

The head of the 'father's house' was the oldest male person of the extended family and that position was again transferred on to the shoulders of the oldest son. Jephthah, however, could not inherit the headship from his father, since he was the son of another woman (Jdg 11:2). Yet he nevertheless claimed that position, since he still belonged to the 'house of his father'. Gottwald (1980:287-290) also indicates other usages of the word *bajit av* (the 'house of the father') namely as a metaphor for 'family' or 'clan' (Nm 26:23; Jdg 18:11) and 'tribe' (Jos 7:18; and staff, Nm 17:2).

The extended family would, under normal circumstances, have been able to take care of itself within this loose organisation in matters such as: planting crops, harvesting and in storing or selling the surplus. However, in times of crises, your lineage was important

if you had to appeal for help from the larger group. The Israelite clans living in the mountainous area had to support one another at all costs, when for instance conflict arose regarding borders or crops, or when crop failures were staring them in the face. It was during such situations of conflict that a judge was appointed to decide the conflict. When there were no external threats and under favourable economic circumstances, the extended family could thus prosper. In fact, the blessing of Jahweh was measured by good harvests, socio-political peace and human fertility.

### *Evaluation and comparison*

The idea that the Israelites acted and existed as twelve tribes, was probably a later projection onto an earlier situation. Within the segmented Israelite societies there could probably have been free associations of different clans. It was mainly in times of emergency that the groups cooperated and could claim the protection of the group, while under normal circumstances they could take good care of themselves. Thus there was no mention of any central government, but activities probably varied from clan to clan and even from family to family. The social organisation of the Israelite clans was therefore based on the extended family, with the father at its head (patriarchal).

Almost the same could be said of the Lemba. The notion that they consisted of 'twelve' clans and functioned as such, still plays a major role in their oral tradition and in the stories that are narrated during important ceremonies and rituals. Similarly, one finds this notion with the Israelite clans. If one were to look at the Lemba's present situation and their distribution, it is clear that there is no mention of any central government over the different clans or families and that the one clan's stories and experiences are also incorporated by others as their own. When a specific event or skill is narrated, the specific clan with whom this happened, or whose skill that would have been is still mentioned. Such a story is, however, considered to be a common possession, since they are all known as 'Lemba'. Today there may be even more than twelve clans.

It is clear from this division that the Lemba are comprised of different clans and that every clan has its own historical and genealogical background. The traditions of each clan played a major role in their identity formation, yet they were all known as the Lemba. Over time they had to adjust to each other, differences apparently blurred and they could move across boundaries to remain or become 'one'. This is similar to what happened to the different Israelite clans after settling in the 'Promised Land'. The Lemba either had no concept of a 'Promised Land,' or the latter did not play a specific role in the traditions of the Lemba.

The remarkable tolerance of the Lemba men towards everybody (especially toward their fellow Lemba) is rather striking. Not for a moment will one person openly oppose another if he or she differs from them. However, if one is to ask such a person if he or she

agrees with the previous speaker, they will without hesitation say the opposite of what the previous person just said. Nobody will easily dare to answer a question, when he or she knows that there is an older person present who should rather speak on behalf of the extended family. A meeting of the Lemba also cannot begin before all the elders in the area have first arrived. My observation (I may not understand this fully) is that one need not abide by a previous day's long and extended negotiations and decisions. It is almost as if they negotiate for the sake of the negotiations, in order to remain as democratic as possible. But the next day they begin anew and the decisions are not necessarily binding. A person or group are apparently led by the circumstances.

The custom of repeating the names of the ancestors during important ceremonies rather reminds one of the creed of the Israelite clans that was repeated at important events and in which the mighty deeds of Jahweh in their history were referred to, as well as the role of their ancestors in their history.

The overarching emphasis of most of the social laws among both the Lemba and early Israel falls on the protection of family ties, but also on the protection of the individual, property, cleanliness (ritual and otherwise) and on the protection of their exclusivity. Therefore, in more than one respect it emerges that (in both communities) the basic needs to belong to a group, to enjoy protection and the importance of an heir, underlie all the above mentioned customs. This is especially true of all pre-industrial communities. From the available information, it appears that there are, strikingly, more concurrences than differences. The most important concurrences and differences are indicated in Table 4 (ADDENDUM III).

## NOTES

1. Meaning the ancient Israelite feast.
2. Cf Majola 1998. Tribe and clan. *JSOT* 81, 15-29.
3. Cf my unpublished MA dissertation 'Anargie in die Beloofde Land. 'n Holistiese benadering tot die "Rigtertyd"' (1995).
4. Bullock [1927]1950:22,44.
5. A Mulemba is the singular for Balemba or Lemba (plural).
6. Cf Junod 1908; Wangemann 1868; Theal [1898-1903]1964d; Von Sicard 1952; Gotein 1969; Jaques 1931; Stayt 1931; Van Warmelo 1935.
7. Cf also Wessmann 1908; Stayt 1931; Jaques 1931; Van Warmelo 1935; Motenda 1940; Mphelo 1936; Von Sicard 1952; De Vaal 1958.
8. He 'acted' as chief although he was not yet married (at that stage). His mother was still alive and therefore, she became the legitimate chief after her husband died.
9. The meaning of the word is unknown.

10. Cf Van Warmelo [1937]1974:82.
11. The Venda word for marriage chattel is *mala*. One would, therefore, expect that those Lemba who speak Venda would also use the same concept (De Beer 1997). Mathivha and others, however, use the Zulu word *lobola*. The system of *lobola* occurs amongst most tribes in Africa.
12. Theal [1898-1903]1964e:202,203.
13. This phenomenon also occurs among the Venda, the North Sotho and the South Sotho.
14. The drinking of blood is not in concurrence with general Lemba tradition.
15. Wizards or masters of magic arts. These skills are equally known among other peoples (cf Van Warmelo [1937]1974:226).
16. Schoffeleers 1966:26.
17. Cf Majola, 1998. 'Tribe and clan'. *JSOT* 81, 15-29.