

1. Hiereia/hierissa is simply the Greek equivalent of kōhenet (Aramaic: kahantta?)

Kōhenet is not a biblical but a rabbinic term. Although linguistically kōhenet is the feminine of kōhēn (Aramaic: kahāna?), it is not exactly parallel in meaning to kōhēn. A man becomes a kōhēn in one way, by birth. Kōhēn can therefore be defined as "son of a kōhēn," who must, of course, be married to a Jewish woman.²⁴ A woman becomes a kōhenet in two ways, by birth and by marriage. Kōhenet can therefore be defined as "daughter of a kōhēn" (bat kōhēn) or as "wife of a kōhēn" (ʿešet kōhēn).

The priest's daughter²⁵ had certain priestly rights, such as the right to eat from the priestly dues, a right which is laid down in the Bible (Lev 22:12-13):

רבח כהן כי תהיה לאיש זר
הוא בתרומת הקדשים לא תאכל:
רבח כהן תהיה אלמנה וגרושה זורע אין לה
ושבה אל-בית אביה כנעוריה מלחם אביה תאכל
וכל-זר לא-יאכלו בו:

If a priest's daughter is married to an outsider she shall not eat of the offering of the holy things. But if a priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no outsider shall eat of it.

The presupposition here is that the priest's daughter, while a child, may eat of the priestly offerings. Unlike her brother, however, the daughter of a priest can lose her right to eat of the priestly offerings by marrying a common Israelite; if he marries a common Israelite, he may continue to eat the priestly dues, but if she does so, she relinquishes that right. If she marries a priest, however, she may continue to eat of the priestly offering, but this right is a derived one, i.e., due to her priestly husband and not to her own priestly descentance (also a derivation, of course).

The Holiness Code in Leviticus places the sexual activity of priests' daughters and wives in the context of the holiness of the male priests. Lev 21:9 reads:

רבח איש כהן כי תחל לזנות אח אביה
היא מחללת באש תשרף:

And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.

Thus, the holiness of the priest can be damaged by the sexual activity of his daughter; his holiness is to be preserved by executing the daughter whose sexual activity is not within the bounds of patriarchally-sanctioned marriage.

Similarly, the prospective wife of a priest must reflect his holiness (Lev 21:7):

אשה זנה וחללה לא יקח ואשה גרושה מאישה לא יקח
כי-קדש הוא לאלהיו.

The (priests) shall not marry a harlot or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God.

The priest must marry a widow or a virgin to preserve his own holiness. A prostitute, a rape victim or a divorced woman would endanger his holiness. Ezekiel warns priests to marry only Israelite virgins, but allows them priests' widows (Ezek 44:22). The high priest is allowed to take only "a virgin of his own people, that he may not profane his children among his people" (Lev 21:14). The issue in these laws is the holiness of the priestly semen, which should not be allowed to enter a "vessel" previously profaned by pre- or extra-marital sexual intercourse, whether the intercourse had been forced or not. The distinction between the divorced woman and the priest's widow is not immediately clear; perhaps the divorced woman was considered more likely to engage in prostitution or other non-marital sexual intercourse than a widow, a view common in patriarchal societies.

The questions raised in these biblical laws, namely, the right to eat of the priestly dues and the profanation of the priest through his wife or daughter, form the background of much of the rabbinic discussion on the kōhenet. Further marriage limitations, i.e., limitations on who could become a kōhenet through marriage, are also spelled out. For example, a hālūṣā (a childless widow whose brother-in-law refused to marry her according to the duty of levirate marriage; see Deut 25:5-10) may be forbidden to a priest (m. Yebam. 2:4; cf. 1:4:²⁶ the School of Shammai forbids it; the School of Hillel allows it), as may a woman taken in levirate marriage (m. Yebam. 1:4: the School of Shammai allows it; the School of Hillel forbids it). A kōhenet who by accident (through a mix-up) had had intercourse with the wrong husband was also forbidden to marry a priest (m. Yebam. 3:10).

Lev 22:13 had already established that the daughter of a priest could lose her priestliness by marrying a non-priest. The

Mishnah (Yebam. 7:4-6) lists a number of further causes for which a bat kōhēn can lose her right to eat of the priestly heave-offering (tērūmā) or by which she may not attain it in the first place. For example, the brother-in-law whose duty it is to marry the widowed, childless bat kōhēn (m. Yebam. 7:4) is a hindrance for her; since she is bound to him, she cannot return to her father's house and eat the heave-offering. As we saw above, if her brother-in-law refuses to marry her, she becomes a hālūṣā and priests are forbidden to marry her; thus, she also loses the possibility of regaining the right to eat heave-offering by marrying a priest.

A central text on the kōhenet is m. Soṭa 3:7:

בח ישראל שנשאא לכהן, מנחה
נשרפה; וכהנת שנשאא לישראל,
מנחה נאכלת. מה-בין כהן
לכהנת? מנחה כהנת נאכלת, מנחה
כהן אינה נאכלת; כהנת מהחללה,
וכהן אין מתחלל; כהנת מטמאה
למחים, ואין כהן מטמא למחים;
כהן אוכל בקדשי קדשים, ואין
כהנת אוכלת בקדשי קדשים.

A daughter of an Israelite who is wed to a kōhēn: her meal-offering is burned; and a kōhenet (i.e., a daughter of a priest) who is wed to a common Israelite: her meal-offering is eaten.

In what manner does a kōhēn differ from a kōhenet? The meal-offering of a kōhenet is eaten, and the meal-offering of a kōhēn is not eaten; a kōhenet may forfeit her priestly rights, but a kōhēn does not forfeit his priestly rights; a kōhenet may become defiled because of the dead, but a kōhēn must not contract defilement because of the dead; a kōhēn may eat of the most holy sacrifices, but a kōhenet may not eat of the most holy sacrifices.

This text²⁷ is specifically concerned with pointing out that the priestliness of a kōhenet implies less than the priestliness of a kōhēn. Thus, the commandment to burn the meal-offering of a priest (Lev 6:16, "Every meal-offering of a priest must be a whole-offering; it is not to be eaten.") is taken to refer to the son of a priest, but not to the daughter of a priest. The kōhenet who marries a non-priestly Israelite is to eat the meal-offering as if she had not been born into the priestly class. In contrast, the non-priestly Israelite woman who is married to a priest is considered to be of priestly class, and her meal-offering is burned.

Similarly, a daughter of a priest may lose her right to eat the heave-offering (tērūmā) by having sexual intercourse with a man forbidden to her. Such a sexual connection also implies that

she may never marry a priest. The son of a priest, however, who marries a woman forbidden to him, such as a prostitute or a divorced woman (see Lev 21:7), loses his priestly rights only for the period during which he is married to her. If he divorces her or if she dies, he may once again claim his priestly rights. Thus, while a daughter of a priest can "profane herself" permanently, a son of a priest cannot. The Babylonian Talmud (Soṭa 23b) gives Lev 21:15 ("that he may not profane his seed among his people") as scriptural proof for the permanency of a male priest's priestliness: a priest can profane his seed but not himself, i.e., the children of such a union are not of the priestly class, but he himself remains a priest (cf. b. Mak. 2a; m. Bek. 7:7).

Further, a kōhenet, unlike a kōhēn, is allowed to touch a corpse. The Babylonian Talmud (Soṭa 23b) gives Lev 21:1 as scriptural proof for this distinction between kōhēn and kōhenet: "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron (. . . that none of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people)," is taken to mean "the sons of Aaron" and not "the daughters of Aaron."

Finally, a kōhēn may eat of the most holy sacrifices, while a kōhenet is not allowed to do so. The scriptural proof adduced by the Babylonian Talmud (Soṭa 23b) is Lev 6:11: "All male descendants of Aaron may eat (. . . of the offerings made by fire . . .)."

M. Soṭa 3:7 makes clear that at least one rabbinic view was that the priestliness of a woman was much more fragile and open to profanation than that of a man. There was no circumstance under which a man could lose his priestliness; the priestliness of a woman, however, could be forfeited forever by one act of sexual intercourse, whether desired or forced. Further, according to this view, the priestliness of a woman did not imply the same degree of sanctity as the man's priestliness. Thus, the prohibition of touching a corpse and the right to eat of the most holy sacrifices did not apply to the kōhenet. Nevertheless, there is a recognition that the kōhenet, be she a priest's daughter or a priest's wife, has the right to eat of the heave-offering.²⁸ Her eating of the heave-offering is surrounded by purity regulations, such as that she not eat of it during her menstrual period (m. Nid. 1:7).

In light of this background, one is rather surprised to read the following passage (b. Hul. 131b-132a):

עולא הוה יהיב מתנחא לכהנתא. איתיביה רבה
 "לעולא, "מנחת כהנה נאכלת, מנחת כהן אינה נאכלת,
 ואי אמרת כהן ואפילו כהנה, והכתיב, "וכל מנחת
 כהן כליל תהיה לא תאכל". אמר ליה, רבי
 מטונך; אהרון ובניו כתוביו בפרשה. דבי רבי
 ישמעאל תנא, "כהן" ולא כהנה, וילמוד סתום
 מן המפורש. דבי ר' אליעזר בן יעקב תנא,
 "כהן", ואפילו כהנה, הוי מיעוט אחר מיעוט
 ואין מיעוט אחר מיעוט אלא לרבות. רב כהנא
 אכל בשביל אשתו; רב פפא אכל בשביל אשתו;
 רב יימר אכל בשביל אשתו; רב אידי בר אבין
 אכל בשביל אשתו. אמר רבינא, אמר לי מרימר...
 והלכתא כוונה דעולא.

'Ulla used to give the priestly dues to the *kōhenet*. Rava raised the following objection to 'Ulla. We have learned: "The meal-offering of a *kōhenet* is eaten, and the meal-offering of a *kōhēn* is not eaten" (*m. Soṭa* 3:7). Now if you say that *kōhēn* includes a *kōhenet* too, is it not written, "And every meal-offering of a priest must be a whole-offering; it is not to be eaten" (Lev 6:16)? He replied, "Master, I borrow your own argument, for in that passage are expressly mentioned Aaron and his sons."

The School of R. Ishmael taught: "Unto the *kōhēn*" (Deut 18:3), but not unto the *kōhenet*, for we may infer what is not explicitly stated from what is explicitly stated.

The School of R. Eli'ezer ben Jacob taught: "Unto the *kōhēn*" (Deut 18:3), and even unto the *kōhenet*, for we have here a limitation following a limitation, and the purpose of a double limitation is to extend the law.

R. Kahana used to eat (the priestly dues) on account of his wife. R. Papa used to eat them on account of his wife. R. Yemar used to eat them on account of his wife. R. Idi bar Avin used to eat them on account of his wife.

Ravina said, Meremar told me . . . that the halakha is in accordance with 'Ulla's view.²⁹

The issue here is whether the *kōhenet* (priest's daughter) who has married a non-priest is allowed to eat the priestly dues (Deut 18:3-4). According to the passages discussed thus far, the answer seems to be a clear no. A priestly woman who has married a non-priestly man forfeits her priestly rights. Yet this text reports on a tradition according to which priests' daughters who had "profaned themselves" (cf. *m. Soṭa* 3:7) were in fact allowed to continue to eat the priestly dues. Even more surprising is the tradition that a number of non-priestly rabbis³⁰ ate the priestly dues on account of their priestly wives, which means that not only did these women not forfeit their priestly rights upon marriage to a non-priest, but that they were even able to pass these rights on to their husbands. Two scriptural arguments are made for giving priests' daughters the priestly dues even

if they are married to sons of non-priests. The arguments are both based on Deut 18:3, which reads:

וְזֶה יִהְיֶה מִשְׁפַּט הַכֹּהֲנִים
מֵאֵם הָעֵם מֵאֵם זֶבַחַי הַזֶּבֶחַ אִם־שׂוֹר אִם־שֶׁה
וְנָתַן לָכֶן הַזֶּרַע וְהַלְחִיִּים וְהַקִּבָּה:

And this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.

The arguments are:

1. Deut 18:3 speaks of "priests" (m.) and "priest" (m.) as the recipients of the priestly dues; according to 'Ulla, these terms, in contrast to the "Aaron and his sons" of Lev 6:16, which refer to the meal-offering and is the scriptural basis for burning the meal-offering of kōhānīm (m.) and letting kōhānōt (f.) eat their meal-offering (m. Sota 3:7), can include women.
2. According to the School of R. Ishmael, the grammatical gender of "priest" in Deut 18:3 implies the exclusion of women.
3. According to the School of R. Eli'ezer ben Jacob, the use of both "priests" (m.) and "priest" (m.) in Deut 18:3, both of which exclude women, has the effect that the double exclusion implies an inclusion.

These two strands of tradition, i.e., that the priestliness of a kōhenet is lasting and that it is not, must be left to stand side by side. There is no reason to try to harmonize the two.

It is not possible to discuss all of the passages in which kōhenet appears, but even the few passages cited show that:

1. The rabbis recognized that a kōhenet had certain rights and duties;
2. There were divergent views as to how derivative and fragile a woman's priestliness was, so that whether she could lose her priestly rights is not univocally answered.³¹

There would be no difficulty in identifying hierieia/hierissa as the Greek equivalent of kōhenet. Such an identification would in no way imply congregational leadership or a cultic function, other than the right to eat the priestly offerings (and possibly the right to pass this right on to their husbands). It would also imply the respect due to a member of the priestly caste.

2. Hierieia/hierissa in the Inscriptions Means "Priest" in the Cultic Sense of the Term

Some may find this hard to believe. Female cultic functionaries do not fit our image of ancient Judaism. To be