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## ANOTHER LOOK AT RACHEL'S THEFT OF THE TERAPHIM\*

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IN THE long history of exegesis, Rachel's unexplained theft of Laban's teraphim-gods on the eve of Jacob's secret departure from Laban (Gen 31 19) has received many and curious interpretations. Josephus<sup>1</sup> supposed that Rachel wanted them so as "to have recourse to them to obtain pardon" in case Laban overtook them. Genesis Rabba (*ad loc.*) credits the matriarch with the noble desire to purge old Laban of his idolatry. Later midrash<sup>2</sup> suggests more plausibly that she stole them to prevent their revealing to Laban that Jacob's household had fled — for teraphim do speak, according to Zech 10 2.<sup>3</sup> Frazer<sup>4</sup> thought the theft was motivated by fear lest the gods might resent and punish the injury done to their owner. Other modern scholars suggest that Rachel wished to enjoy the protection of her hearth gods away from home.<sup>5</sup> Gunkel elaborates: "It was the business of such teraphim to help the protégé in home and farm, to bless his family and flocks: Rachel believed that in stealing this image she was thus carrying along the Fortune of the house; and Laban would sooner have given up anything rather than this house-fetish of his which he himself must have inherited from his father." For comparison Gunkel cites the story of the abduction of Micah's priest and teraphim by the migrating Danites (Judg 18), though, to be

\* Dedicated to Professor E. A. Speiser in his sixtieth year.

<sup>1</sup> *Antt.* 1, 19, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Tanhuma, Wayyese*, §12; Palestinian Targum to Gen 31 19. (With the gruesome necromancy there described, compare the method of divination used by the witch Erichtho in Lucan, *Pharsalia*, tr. by Robert Graves, pp. 143 f.) Most of the major medieval Hebrew commentators (RŠBM, Ibn Ezra, Qimḥi, Nahmanides) adopt this explanation; RaŠI follows Genesis Rabba.

<sup>3</sup> For the Greco-Roman notion that housegods utter oracles *on their own* (which seems to underlie the midrash: it is the *fact* of the flight that Rachel fears the teraphim will reveal, before Laban discovers it!), cf. *Aeneid* iii, 148 ff., in which an oracle volunteered by Aeneas' house gods is described.

<sup>4</sup> *Folklore in the Old Testament*, abr. ed., p. 244.

<sup>5</sup> E. g., Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 396 (the Aeneid reference in note 3 [above] is cited); Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 344 f.; cf. also Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 145 (the teraphim were stolen "surely for their religious value").

sure, there the divinatory value of the teraphim appears to be uppermost in the minds of the abductors.

While this view is certainly plausible, it must be admitted that no material, biblical or extrabiblical, has yet been adduced in support of it closely paralleling the tale in Genesis. Something more commonplace than the Danite abduction, something more a matter of family custom seems to be involved in Rachel's act.

Just such material, as is now well known, has been made available by the Nuzi tablets. The most important document for our discussion is Gadd 51, published in 1926 and immediately seized upon as highly significant of the relations between Jacob and Laban.<sup>6</sup> Gadd 51 is an adoption document: the adopter states that at his death the adoptee shall become his *ewuru* (heir by irregular succession). Should a natural son be born to the adopter beforehand, that son and the adoptee shall inherit equally, but only the son shall receive the household gods. If there is no son, the gods are to be taken by the adoptee.

The reconstruction of the relations between Jacob and Laban and the motive for Rachel's theft that have been proposed on the basis of this tablet have by now entered all up-to-date handbooks. H. H. Rowley<sup>7</sup> summarized them as follows: "It has been conjectured that Laban had no sons at the time of Jacob's marriage of Leah, but that he subsequently became the father of sons, who were therefore now superior in legal standing to Jacob. By carrying off the teraphim, however, Rachel preserved for Jacob the chief title to Laban's estate." J. Bright<sup>8</sup> writes more simply of "Rachel's theft of Laban's gods (tantamount to title to the inheritance)."

The persuasiveness of this interpretation rests not only on the skill with which it has been argued and the authority of its advocates — among whom are the cuneiformists S. Smith,<sup>9</sup> E. A. Speiser,<sup>10</sup> T. J. Meek,<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Original publication by C. J. Gadd in *RA*, 23 (1926), pp. 126 f.; cf. S. Smith's note on p. 127. This tablet is translated in *ANET*, p. 219 f.

<sup>7</sup> In "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age," *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, p. 302.

<sup>8</sup> *A History of Israel*, p. 71. See also B. Mazar et al., *Views of the Biblical World* (Israel, 1959), I, p. 85: "[The Nuzi] documents show that the teraphim . . . carried with them the right of inheritance. Thus Rachel was perhaps endeavoring to preserve this right for herself at the moment of Jacob's final departure from Laban's household . . ." Interpreters differ as to whose title — Jacob's or Rachel's — was involved; see (ahead) n. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *JThS*, 33 (1932), pp. 33–36.

<sup>10</sup> *AASOR*, 13 (1933), p. 44; *IEJ*, 7 (1957), p. 213. I wish to record here my gratitude to my mentor and colleague, Professor E. A. Speiser, whose searching critique of this article (which diverges from his own view of the matter) has compelled me to refine my thought and take into consideration aspects of the question I should not have seen otherwise.

<sup>11</sup> *Hebrew Origins*, p. 15; cf. *ANET*, p. 220, n. 51.

C. H. Gordon,<sup>12</sup> and most recently A. Draffkorn<sup>13</sup> — but on the coherence it lends to the total picture of the Jacob-Laban dealings. A key that opens so many doors can hardly be the wrong one!

The main object of this paper is to call attention to a passage in Josephus which, to my knowledge, has never been brought into modern discussions of Rachel's theft. This neglected passage is important for the simple and unsophisticated explanation it suggests in an altogether incidental remark. But while weighing the relative merits of Josephus and Nuzi as aids to understanding Rachel's mind, it appeared to me that the Nuzi material would bear a closer analysis. Have our cuneiform colleagues drawn the correct conclusion from the documents in question? I do not wish to be misunderstood: the strictures made in the following remarks are queries to the cuneiformist. It seems to me that there are some difficulties in their theory insofar as it touches upon Rachel's theft of the teraphim which have not been faced. Without prejudice to the interpretation of the Jacob-Laban relationship as a whole, the effect of these difficulties seems to impair the usefulness of the Nuzi material for explaining Rachel's act.

The crucial lines of Gadd 51 read:

When Nashwi [the adopter] dies, Wullu [the adoptee] shall become the *ewuru* [irregular heir]. If Nashwi should have a son of his own, he shall divide the estate equally with Wullu, but the son of Nashwi shall take the (house) gods of Nashwi. And if Nashwi has no son of his own, then Wullu shall take the (house) gods of Nashwi. Furthermore, he gave his daughter Nuḥuya to Wullu in marriage (ll. 7–19).

These lines are said to mean that "transfer of the father's household gods was a prerequisite in certain cases where property was to pass to a daughter's husband."<sup>14</sup> Or, again, that when property is to pass to other than normal heirs "the house gods, as the protectors and symbols of family holdings, are thus drawn in, as it were, to safeguard and to render legitimate — not only the property, but also the person in relation to the property — against possible future claims."<sup>15</sup> This is not a precise statement of the import of our document. For even if Nashwi should have a natural son who gets the gods, Wullu remains an equal heir with him. No gods must be produced by Wullu to safeguard his right to share in the estate, despite his being an irregular heir. Applying this to Jacob's situation: If Jacob were regarded as an *ewuru*, he did not need to have

<sup>12</sup> *BASOR*, 66 (1937), pp. 25–27; *BA*, 3 (1940), pp. 5–6. Professor Gordon has kindly called my attention by letter to the latest formulation of his view on the subject. On p. 129 of his *The World of the Old Testament* he writes: "Since they were bound for Canaan and were leaving Mesopotamia for good, it is not likely that the gods conveyed valuable property rights. The possession of the gods may rather have betokened clan leadership and spiritual power to an extent that made possessing them of paramount importance." This is reiterated in the 2nd rev. ed. of his *Geschichtliche Grundlagen des AT* (Zürich, 1961), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> *JBL*, 76 (1957), pp. 219 f. <sup>14</sup> Speiser, *IEJ*, *ibid.* <sup>15</sup> Draffkorn, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

Laban's gods to ensure his title to a share in Laban's estate. All he needed was Laban's statement that he was entitled to a share. Having that, his title was secure. But what if he did not have that, or if Laban wished to cut him off from a previously promised share? Would his possession of the house gods defeat Laban's purpose? To answer that we must first clarify the place of house gods in inheritance.

What is determined by bequeathal of the gods is not title to an inheritance share but, rather, who is to carry on as paterfamilias. That determination is separate from the matter of dividing up shares in the estate, in this document as well as in others. One document cited by Draffkorn (*HSS XIV*, 108) appears to equalize the several shares, and then goes on to stipulate that the eldest son is to get the gods. In other words, while all are heirs regardless of who gets the gods, only the eldest is designated paterfamilias.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gordon: "The possession of these gods . . . may have implied leadership of the family" (*BA, ibid.*) — a position to which he has now returned (n. 12, above). In *BASOR, ibid.*, he writes: "The gods apparently constituted the title to the chief inheritance portion and leadership of the family." Similarly Draffkorn speaks at one point of the gods safeguarding inheritance rights (p. 222; cf. p. 220, on Rachel), at another, of them determining who was to be the head of the family (p. 221). Title to an inheritance share and family-headship must be rigorously distinguished; the clauses regarding disposition of the household gods have reference only to the latter.

Another source of confusion has been the repeated assertion that *possession* of the household gods constituted title, safeguarded rights, etc. What Gadd 51 (and related documents) signifies is that *bequeathal* of the household gods determines something — namely, the paterfamilias. Possession is legally significant only to the extent that it may create a presumption in favor of the possessor that he has gotten the gods by bequest; but that presumption would appear to depend entirely on the circumstances of the possession. See (ahead), p. 244.

The precise connection of the gods with the paterfamilias is not stated in our documents. It is reasonable to suppose that, as in classical antiquity, the paterfamilias was the head of the domestic cult; hence it was he who "took" — i. e., was charged with the service of — the house gods. To be sure this is never said in our sources, but that may be due to the socio-economic and legal character of the Nuzi texts; they shed only oblique light (as here) on the inner religious life of the Nuzians.

It is worthwhile to dwell a moment on some of the striking agreements between classical and Nuzian interpenetration of religion and economics to see how far one is entitled to import Greco-Roman practices to illuminate obscurities at Nuzi. The classical situation is presented with brilliant insight by Fustel de Coulanges in *The Ancient City* (Eng. trans., New York, 1956). Fustel shows that "the ancient family was a religious rather than a natural association; . . . the son was no longer counted in it when he had renounced the worship or had been emancipated; . . . on the other hand, an adopted son was counted a real son, because, though he had not the ties of blood, he had something better — a community of worship; . . . finally . . . relationship and the right of inheritance were governed not by birth, but the rights of participation in the worship . . ." (p. 42). On the relation of the house gods to the family estate he has this to say: "Every domain was under the eyes of household divinities who watched over it [citation in n. *Lares agri custodes*]" (p. 67). "Property was so inherent in the domestic religion that a family could not renounce one without renouncing the other. The house

Hence Rachel's desire to possess the gods of Laban, if it meant anything in this connection, could mean only that she wished Jacob to be

and the field were — so to speak — incorporated in it, and it could neither lose them nor dispose of them" (p. 70). This inseparability determined the law of succession: "The rule for the worship is, that it shall be transmitted from male to male; the rule for the inheritance is, that it shall follow the worship" (p. 74); hence daughters could not inherit. But if a man had no sons, "the law decided that the daughter should marry the heir" so as to be able to enjoy her father's estate (p. 76). If a man died childless, "to know who the heir of his estate was we have only to learn who was qualified to continue his worship" (p. 77).

Childlessness was the chief, when not the sole, ground for adoption (pp. 54–55). "When a son was adopted, it was necessary, first of all, that he should be initiated into a form of worship 'introduced into a domestic religion, brought into the presence of new Penates.' . . . Gods, sacred objects, rites, prayers, all became common between him and his adopted father. They said of him, *In sacra transiit* — He has passed to the worship of the new family" (p. 55). On the economic effect of emancipation and adoption we read: "The son who had been excluded from the paternal worship by emancipation was also excluded from the inheritance. On the other hand, the stranger who had been associated in the worship of a family by adoption became a son there; he continued its worship, and inherited the estate" (p. 79). Finally, on the connection of the house gods with the chief heir: "[In the time of Demosthenes] at Athens there existed the privilege of the elder. It consisted in retaining, above his proportion, the paternal dwelling — an advantage which was materially considerable, and which was still more considerable in a religious point of view; for the paternal house contained the ancient hearth of the family. While the younger sons, in the time of Demosthenes, left home to light new fires, the oldest, the true heir, remained in possession of the paternal hearth and of the tomb of his ancestors" (p. 84).

Draffkorn has already indicated that at Nuzi too the house gods "are, above all, the protectors of the family stake as a whole" (p. 223). Making all due allowances for differences in civilization, it does seem that the bond of gods, family, and estate at Nuzi and in classical antiquity is grounded on fundamentally the same conception. It is possible to interpret all the material adduced by Draffkorn consistently in the light of the principle of the basically religious constitution of the ancient family. Exactly parallel to the status of the emancipated Roman son, who is excluded at once from family worship and property, is that of the Nuzi son whose clump of clay has been broken *JEN* 478; cf. Draffkorn, p. 221): the act of dissociation is performed before the AN.ZAB figurines (analogously to the act of Roman adoption, done in the presences of the Penates). As a result, the son "may not have access to the gods, to the family spirits, and (its) fields and houses" (*ana ilāni ū ana eṭemmē [ū] eḡlāti ū bitāti lā ilakka*). Similarly, it is a fundamental distinction between real and sale adoptions at Nuzi that, while in real adoptions the adoptee both inherits and participates in the family worship so far that he may be bequeathed the gods (as in Gadd 51), in sale adoptions, the merely formal adoptee is expressly excluded both from family rights to the feudal holdings as well as to the family gods (*ana irwisse ū ana ilāni lā iḡerreb* [*JEN* 89:10 ff.; 216:14 f.]). Draffkorn interprets this to refer to unauthorized appropriation of the house gods (p. 221); but does it not rather mean to exclude the persons in question from normal rights enjoyed by all members of the family in the family estate and its domestic cult? (On the exclusive and private character of the Roman domestic cult see Fustel, p. 37.)

In view of the foregoing it appears reasonable to suppose that in the Nuzi bequeathal of gods there was involved, in the first place, the designation of that son who, as paterfamilias, was charged with the maintenance of the family cult.

recognized as paterfamilias after Laban's death — assuming, of course, that such a claim could be urged on the strength of possessing the gods. If she really meant only to ensure an inheritance share for Jacob, she went too far — much too far, as we shall see.

The question is: In Nuzi law could a person in Jacob's circumstances have made a credible claim to be paterfamilias of Laban's family on the ground of possessing his house gods? If he could, the Nuzian interpretation of Rachel's act is colorable. If not, the interpretation has to assume that Rachel acted irrationally or futilely. Since no Nuzi text speaks to the point directly, we are reduced to speculation to answer our question. What, then, does reasonable inference suggest would have been the effect of Rachel's act relative to the end she is supposed to have had in view?

Taking the circumstances of Gadd 51 as a model, Laban will have drawn up his will disposing of his property and appointing his successor as paterfamilias prior to the theft. Some cuneiformists<sup>17</sup> have assumed that it was just such a will — whereby Jacob, formerly chief heir, was now reduced in status owing to the birth of Laban's own sons — that Rachel sought to defeat by her act. But if Laban had already designated a son of his as paterfamilias, anyone else who came forward with the gods must surely have *ipso facto* stood condemned as a thief. We must bear in mind that it was not the gods that made the paterfamilias, but the father's act of bequeathing them. And where bequeathal could be shown to be to another than the possessor of the gods, such possession was no more than self-condemnation.

For there to be any point in stealing the gods we must suppose a situation in which the father died intestate, without designating the paterfamilias. Might not seizure of the gods then create a presumption in favor of the seizer?<sup>18</sup> We may best judge the strength of such a presumption from an analogy. The coronet and armband of Saul (cf. II Sam 1 10) symbolized his royalty; they belonged by right only to the crown prince after his father's death. After the death of Saul, did the kingship go to the first man to reach the dead king and seize his insignia? Was a presumption of kingship enjoyed by the Amalekite who did so? Was David's claim bolstered when the insignia came into his possession? Did he advance a claim on the strength of possessing them? Was Ishbaal's position jeopardized by his not possessing the insignia? Does possession of the insignia play any part at all in the rivalry of the two camps? The negative answer to these questions suggests — what common sense itself dictates — that mere possession of symbolic objects was not enough to establish a claim to the office they symbolized. The question turned entirely upon *who* possessed these symbols and *how* he possessed them.

<sup>17</sup> E. g., Gordon (see n. 12 above) and Smith (n. 9).

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *loc. cit.*: "Rachel's desire to possess them [depended] on the fact that the possessor of them was presumptive heir" (p. 34).

To the extent that circumstances worked in favor of the presumption that the possessor received them in bequest, to that extent was possession presumptive of designation as chief heir. But if circumstances were suspicious, no such presumption in favor of the possessor could have existed. Now, what sort of presumption could have existed in the case of Jacob, not a natural son of Laban, who had, after all, abandoned the family estate to flee to Canaan?<sup>19</sup>

All these interesting problems are raised in connection with a father who died intestate. But the circumstances of Rachel's theft are entirely different: Laban was still alive. Whatever the situation be after the death of the father, an adoptee had nothing to gain and everything to lose by making off with the family gods during the adopter's lifetime. That would have been as foolish as the theft, by a king's son, of the crown while his father still lived, in the expectation that possession of the crown would safeguard his claim to the throne. Just as the crown belonged to the king until his death, so the household gods belong to the paterfamilias until his death. We may well imagine a father's outrage if any son — let alone an adoptee! — dared to run off with them during his lifetime. The father-adopter had various means of punishing such trespass, up to and including disherison.<sup>20</sup> In any event, such an appropriation could hardly have had any legal validity against the express will of a still-living father. If Rachel was really interested in safeguarding Jacob's primacy, was this the way to go about it?

Finally we must ask: Does anything in the story suggest that, now or ever after, Rachel (through Jacob) pressed a claim against Laban on the strength of having these gods? What was the mood of Jacob's household when they fled? All of them appear to have had quite enough of Laban and family. Their chief desire was quickly to put as large a distance between them and him as possible. Later Jacob and Laban agree to set up a permanent boundary between them; and we never again hear that they had anything to do with each other afterward. Is all this consistent with the supposition that Jacob's family had designs on Laban's estate?<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> To be sure, Draffkorn (p. 220) has Rachel concerned over her own rights, not Jacob's (and see above, n. 8, end); yet this may be simply loose phrasing, for just before (p. 219, n. 16) Jacob is said to have been viewed as an *ewuru* by his wives — making him the heir. The observation (Draffkorn, p. 220) that when there are no sons a daughter may inherit, while important in itself, is irrelevant here, since *ex hypothesi* there was a male heir (either the *ewuru* Jacob, or Laban's own sons).

<sup>20</sup> On disherison, cf. Cod. Hamm. 168–9, Driver-Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, 1, pp. 348 ff. Whether Hammurabi's law of disherison was followed in Nuzi practice is unknown; even if it was, it is unlikely that in such a case as is here postulated the requirement of a second offense would have been insisted upon. That disherison was practiced at Nuzi is known from *JEN 478* (cf. Draffkorn, p. 221).

<sup>21</sup> See Gordon's reasoning in n. 12 above.

Human motives are, of course, too complex and mysterious for us to rule out categorically a given possibility. Perhaps the regnant view of Rachel's motive, despite its apparent unreasonableness, is right. In her embitterment against Laban Rachel may have acted irrationally, or under a gross misapprehension of the legal effect of her act. Is there any other way the "Nuzian" interpretation of Rachel's theft can be maintained except by making it an unreasonable or a mistaken act?<sup>22</sup>

Let us now consider what Josephus has to offer by way of help.

It is most remarkable that the passage in question, *Antt.* 18, 9, 5, has been overlooked in all modern treatments of our problem despite its universal accessibility. The passage is part of the account of the adventures of the brothers Asineus and Anileus, Babylonian Jewish soldiers of fortune, who, with a band of desperadoes, terrorized the Babylonian countryside for some fifteen years (about 18–33 C.E.). The brothers eventually fell out over a woman: here is the beginning of that story:<sup>23</sup>

The trouble arose when they met a certain Parthian, who had arrived as commander in those regions . . . . He was accompanied by his wife, whose praises were sung beyond all other women for other qualities, yet it was her marvellous beauty that gave her most effective control over him . . . . Anilaus became at once her lover . . . . Therefore, her husband was at once declared an enemy and forced into a battle, in which he fell. After he had been slain, his widow was captured and became the wife of her passionate wooer. Nevertheless, she did not enter the family without a train of great disasters, of which I shall relate the occasion . . . . When, after the death of her husband, she had been taken captive, she took along the ancestral images of the gods belonging to her husband and to herself — for it is the custom among all the people in that country to have objects of worship in their house and to take them along when going abroad. She too therefore secretly carried them off in observance of her national custom in these matters.

It appears that the only man to have seen the relevance of this passage to our problem was the venerable William Whiston, who appended this note to his translation: "This custom of the Mesopotamians to carry their household-gods along with them wherever they travelled is as old as the days of Jacob, when Rachel his wife did the same."

This passage not only supplies a simple explanation for Rachel's act — that much Gunkel already gave us — but the welcome information that a millennium and a half after her Near Eastern women were still in the habit of taking along their house gods when going into a foreign land — concealed if need be. Rachel was about to depart for a

<sup>22</sup> A question of method seems to be involved: The Nuzian interpretation of Rachel's act grounds it on a motive which, so far as we can tell, would not have moved a reasonable person. But if we assume that Rachel acted irrationally, have we not undercut all efforts to understand her, since who can say what the ground of an irrational act might have been?

<sup>23</sup> This translation was kindly communicated to me by Dr. Louis Feldman, whose completion of the *Antiquities* in the Loeb Classical Library will shortly be published.

far-off land from which, to all appearances, she had no thought of returning. In the normal course of events, we may suppose, she would have had made, or her father would have given her, replicas of her hearth gods, to accompany and protect her. But the decision of Jacob and his wives to flee was taken secretly, and Laban had to be kept in the dark about it. So Rachel resorted to a desperate device: she absconded with the original images themselves. That was reason enough for Laban to light out after them. The original images were the most sacred heirloom of the family; they must never leave their consecrated niche in the home.<sup>24</sup> Rachel's particular concern to have the teraphim may be illuminated by the fact that, in common with the one other biblical woman whom we know to have had teraphim — Michal, wife of David (I Sam 9 13; cf. II Sam 6 23) — Rachel was anxious for children (cf. her desperate rivalry with Leah in Gen 30). For that the hearth god must have been particularly vital — note Jacob's "Can I take the place of God who has denied you fruit of the womb?" (Gen 30 2).

Further on in Genesis (35 2 ff.) we read that, after being charged by God to fulfil his vow at Bethel, Jacob said to his household: "Remove the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves . . . . So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had with them, and their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was at Shechem." We see, then, that Rachel was but one among several persons in Jacob's household who carried along their gods from the old country. Are we justified in looking for a special reason for Rachel's act if it was duplicated by others among her compatriots? Or were all of them actuated by a misconceived purpose to stake out an absentee claim to family-headship?<sup>25</sup>

Josephus suggests a single, simple explanation for the transportation of all these gods: ". . . it is the custom among all the people in that country to have objects of worship in their house and to take them along when going abroad." The passage is, to be sure, late; it deals anecdotally with a foreign (apparently Parthian<sup>26</sup>) custom. Yet this unique oriental parallel to Rachel's act has, at least, the merit of not being encumbered

<sup>24</sup> Draffkorn, p. 223, correctly asserts that the firstborn, the normal chief heir, retained the original house gods — a sacred patrimony that belonged solely to the paterfamilias.

<sup>25</sup> If the same motive actuated Rachel and her compatriots, why then is she alone said to have *stolen* the gods? The answer may be simply that only in her case was the breakup of a family unit involved. The rest of Jacob's entourage — his domestics and servants — came along as whole families; in their case there was no need to provide for a member of the family who was leaving the protection of the household deity.

<sup>26</sup> Professor Richard N. Frye has been good enough to inform me (by letter, March 8, 1962) that, on the strength of archeological evidence from Iraq and Central Asia, and from meager literary indications, the existence of household cults among the Parthians in which idols figured may be reasonably inferred. "There is no reason," he writes, "to doubt Josephus' information."

by difficulties. It is not easy to forego a theory based (as is the Nuzi theory) on material coming almost from the same time and place as the patriarchs themselves. But in view of the problematic assumptions that theory entails, one may well ask whether the straightforward motive suggested by the Josephus passage is not, on balance, more attractive.<sup>27</sup>

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The same mail that brought the galleys of this article also brought a letter from Dr. Hildegard Lewy kindly calling my attention to several new mentions of house gods in recently and about-to-be published Nuzi texts. The argument of this article is not affected thereby, but it seems that in at least one of these texts bequeathal of certain gods means something else than designation as *paterfamilias*. That there were several kinds of domestic gods at Nuzi and that they served various functions comes as no surprise (the same is true for the domestic gods of classical antiquity).

<sup>27</sup> Why is the narrator of Gen 31 silent about the motive of Rachel's theft? If the motive suggested by the Josephus passage is correct, probably because the narrator regarded it as self-evident to his readers. For only her theft distinguished Rachel from countless other foreign women who, when they married Israelites, imported their native gods into their new homes as a matter of course. The idolatrous importations of Solomon's foreign queens, of Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah, possibly also of the Geshurite Maachah and her granddaughter (I Kings 15 13), are notorious. But the female commoner was no less devoted to her gods than were queens, whence the peculiar formulation of the ban on intermarriage: "... and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods" (Exod 34 16; see also Deut 7 4; Judg 3 6). Biblical writers are aware of the general custom of persons compelled to leave their homeland carrying along their gods: II Kings 17 29; Amos 5 26 f.; Isa 46 1 f. It is not surprising, then, that our narrator did not think it necessary to explain why Rachel took Laban's gods.