

BOOK REVIEW

ILIE BĂDESCU and JOSEPH LIVNI, 2023. *A Civil Society with No Hierarchy. The Covenantal Societal Model*, Lexington Books: Lanham, Boulder, New York, London

Edited in an international cooperation, under the prestigious coordination of Professor Univ. Dr. Ilie Bădescu and Professor Univ. Dr. Joseph Livni, the volume “A Civil Society with No Hierarchy. The Covenantal Society Model” proposes insights into the possibilities of societal rank-less organizations, from government, justice, culture, family to individual life. Through the researches gathered together in this volume, that address different types of societies, from the Pre-Monarchic Israel, to the Romanian traditional society and American Puritanism, though geographically and historically disconnected, the *covenant societies* prove their similitude across time and space. The introduction of the volume defines the terms used in the researches and analyses presented in the volume, from the meaning of the term “covenant”, federative networks, assembly government, elders, constitutionalism, etc.

The volume opens with the research conducted by Joseph Livni on “Nomadism and the Sociological Seed of Pre-Monarchic Israel”, which approaches nomadism in a multidisciplinary perspective, counter-arguing the common assertion that nomadic populations rarely had an impact on the physical or sociological characteristics of the places they passed by (see for example Porter 2012, cited by the author of the article). The article presents a thorough investigation of archeological findings concerning nomadic pastoralism, but also innovations – the Scythian saddle, the re-curved Scythian bow, the asymmetric Hun bow, and social models – that are “on a variable scale between egalitarian federations and ranked empires, consisting on a confederation” (Livni, p. 30), as their mobility is strongly related to their socio-political organization, as well as the complexity of nomadic societies, their sedentarization process, and the Pre-Monarchic Israel, their opposition to hierarchy, federative networks, justice administration, assembly government, transition to monarchy.

The second chapter of the volume, “Power Structure within Autonomy in Roman Palestine”, by Zeef Safrai, takes into consideration the independent Jewish Kingdom “Hasmonean Judea” (2nd century BCE.). This was annexed by

Rom. Jour. of Sociological Studies, New Series, No. 2, p. 123–129, Bucharest, 2023



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the Roman Empire in 63 BCE., becoming a vassal kingdom, until 10 CE, when it split into a series of subkingdoms. The vassal kingdom had to maintain the balance between the loyalty to the Roman Empire and Jewish national interests. However, between 66 and 70 CE, a rebellion erupted in the province of Judea, characterized by the elimination of the high priest of the Temple, suppressed by the Romans and the Temple destroyed. While the Roman government recognized the Jewish religion, there were anti-religious decrees between 130–139 CE. The main sources for the analysis are the New Testament Gospels and the Talmudic Jewish sources, edited from the 3rd century CE onwards. The article takes into account the historical structure of the eastern part of the Roman provincial government, as well as the autonomous government power structure of the Jewish society, which consisted of three layers: national level, local level, the sages. The author addresses the *politeuma*, an internal Jewish community which was equal partner of the general community, as the model for the administration of the Jewish community in the Diaspora cities. The *politeuma* was the organization that built the synagogues, handled the network of community services and established a judiciary, and probably it also had autonomy in the economic sphere. The rural Jewish community was highly established, according to the sources analyzed, it built schools (only for boys), paid teachers' salaries, established charitable institutions, road to agricultural areas; in the village there were cisterns, public pools, a *mikveh*, synagogue, additional public services. What is remarkable to note is that any man could be elected to a public position, although wealth had an advantage. According to the author, "the rural community was inspired by the polis, but it was designed in a different social and ideological format" (Safrai 2023, 73), the community made its decisions in a democratic process, but the last word for the appointments belonged to the Patriarch. Besides the empire, *polis*, Jewish autonomous community, the author mentions the sages, social elite group, each convening a group of students (*havura*), which could hold assemblies mainly in the home of the Patriarch, considered the head of the sages, held discussions and debates, and sometimes made religious decisions; they were engaged in all *halakhic* issues, the laws of Shabbat, laws of tithing, impurity, and legal issues; they rejected the legitimacy of the Roman empire and were hostile to it. According to the author, the Jewish autonomy, its structure and power, can be defined as "covenant society" (see Daniel Elazar, 1998), because anyone could elect to participate or to quit, membership requires active choice and intellectual effort.

The third chapter, authored by Joseph Livni, takes into consideration the Jewish Diaspora, from the 6th century BCE till the Enlightenment, as a form of *emancipation*, and the manner in which the Covenant aspect of Jewish societies contributed to shaping Jewish identity, and an example of survival in Exile and

Diaspora. The Jewish Diaspora opposed political hierarchy, yet it has functioned within a constitutional authority, where a hierarchy of covenantal statutes can be identified, as the *Halakhah*, the Jewish Covenantal Legal System. As highlighted by the author, a specific feature of covenantal societies is their capacity to administer justice, at the same time essential to the resilience of the communities, and advantageous to the host governments. From the first Babylonian exile (587–539 BCE) through the Persian rule, the Jewish communities were administered by communal assemblies, opposing hierarchic elites (instituting houses of worship, schools and rules of behavior among Jews), due to several reasons: income to the rulers, simplifying tax collection and keeping internal peace, funding rules for financing occasional needs. The tasks of the assembly government (hiring or firing rabbis, education, synagogue building, collecting and administering finances and taxes) were carried out by the *elders* (term which designates experience, wisdom and traditional continuity) which were office holders, but not designated for life. The covenantal society, regulated by scripture, has as main institutions: the synagogue, the scholars (*rabbi*), the practice of charity (*gmilut hasadim*), ritual slaughter (*shoheet*), burial services (*Chevra Kadisha*), ritual bath (*mikveh*), education, assistance to the sick (*Bikur Holim*), taxation. The Jewish Diaspora lived as autonomous entities within a variety of host populations, reproducing the assembly government system inherited from the Second Temple time, connected into a strong federative network across the world, and, has been, for all purposes, a nation.

Ilie Bădescu authors the fourth chapter of the volume, i.e. “Communal Society and Societal “Dual System”. Equality and Inequality in the Carpathian Valleys”, dedicated to the memory of the Romanian sociologist H. H. Stahl. As a challenge to sociology, the survival of egalitarian social communities can also be noted in the area around the Carpathian mountains, under the layers of superimposed different domination systems, as a relation between surface and deep structures of a society. As the author states, also based on H. H. Stahl’s observation that the partitioning of land in the Proto-Romanian communal society (ancient equalitarian village community) was based on straight lineage and family household association, based on a shared territory. Thus, land appropriation lays the foundation of the societal order in a “natural” manner; in such society, the governing body was a collective assembly called “obștie” (Stahl 1959). According to the observations of the Romanian historian N. Iorga, in these communities, justice was being made by “good and old men” (*oamenii buni și bătrâni*), forefathers (*moși*), a sort of “patriarch”, a genealogical predecessor. In the rural communities of this type, two forms of feudal organization, a *dual societal system*, can be noted: a western-type one (based on internal hierarchisation of the local community, starting late, with the XIXth century) and a long term (local) communal system, a system of non-hierarchical

organization, which survived through the capitalist age till nowadays in many communities. Bădescu argues that this type of societal organization, based on an “orderliness which asks everybody to live and share everything justly, that is, straight, is obviously the very root of communal culture and society” (Bădescu 2023, 137), and the main argument of the autochtony of the people living in this territory. As attested by the field research (monographs, 1925–1946), the free villages of *răzeși* and *moșneni*, had a model of community culture, and also a form of village confederation, based on the genealogical patterns, serving as a basis for the early forms of state called Romanian Principalities. This covenantal order, states the author, “was carried out parallel to a progressive development of a hierarchical order (statehood order centered on the ruler and the leading elite)” (see also N. Iorga 1925, III); however, it was the right of judgement and punishment belonged to the community, granted by the oral Law, based on diffuse tradition (see Stahl 1959). The social order of the free villages is based on the communal culture (*id.*), a hypothesis being that even in the enserfed villages the memory of this kind of culture survived (*infra*, p. 145). Not even the voivod-like-state (*voievodate*) eradicated the pre-state communal society (Stahl 1959). The state-building process did not dismantle this alternative non-hierarchical social organization. Moreover, the Voivode relied on the free villages for military purpose (Bădescu 2023, 148). The communal(ist) culture, based on shared system of traits (Topel 2012) and signs, collectively memorized, distributed at all levels of the people’s life, as the oral (ethnographic) popular calendar, a system reflected in the myths and legends of that culture (see also Ghinoiu 2018).

Mădălina Măndiță authors chapter 5, “The Covenant as Ideal Type. A Sociological Study of a Covenanted Community Model”, which is an overview of the sociological understanding of Judaism across different theoretical approaches. Firstly, the author takes into consideration key elements of a sociology of religion applied to the covenant society, starting from the premise that *covenant* is a prototype for defining and understanding sociability, and a particular type of sociality, as a sociology of covenant represents a sociology of togetherness, that creates order with transcendent meaning. For Durkheim (himself son of a *rabbi*), religion is a social fact, binding people in ritual manifestations, creating solidarity, while religious representations are collective (Winfield 2020; Moore 1986). Thus religion means society and community, fact, while justice is the purpose of the contractual relationship. The author considers these elements as the ideal types for the understanding of *covenantal community*. For Max Weber, the study of Judaism was a way to grasp the changes that marked the Occidental religion and culture (see Weber, 1904/1958), relevant to the *covenanted community* being the formation and bound of a people with God, with a focus on the *berith* with Yahweh, analyzed in specific social context. While criticizing some aspects of Weber’s analysis,

A. Causse recognized the organic solidarity of the family, clan, tribe as the main sources of the ethic that characterizes Jewish religion and community. Secondly, the author identifies different forms of expression, manifestations and interpretations of covenant communities: the *Noahic* covenant, the *Abrahamic* covenant, the *Mosaic* covenant, the *Davidic* covenant (Măndiță 2023, 182). Other dimensions of the analysis concerns the covenant as a political force, as exposed in the works of Daniel Elazar (1998), and the covenant as lived-community (noological community) (Bădescu 2002, 2021).

The sixth chapter, dedicated to the “Romanian Traditional Society. Social Control and Social Order”, authored by Adela Șerban, opens with a theoretical framing of the “traditional society” organization system, as autonomous socio-territorial villages, polycentric by its nature, coexisting systemically, interconnected in a consolidated territorial unitary social and cultural identity, constituting in their essence what is indicated by the concept of *ethnicity*. The author provides an overview of the social system in Romanian traditional society, characterized by the decentralization of power, socially leveling, not allowing social polarities based on differences in resources, capability, prestige, with a democratic character (decisions made by general consensus, in accordance with the values of that community) and collective ownership of land. The author analyzes the family and education system of the Romanian traditional communities, the social control in these communities, as well as the interactions between the state and the traditional society.

Peter J. Mazzacano analyzes the connection “From Covenant to Compact to Contract. The Legal Transplantation of Puritan Jurisprudence to America” in the following chapter. The case taken into consideration are the Puritans in America, the theology, social thought and practical wisdom about law as basis of their legal order, beginning with John Calvin, John Winthrop, till John Adams and the American Revolution. Though the transplantation of English common law in American was not their objective, their creed and practices shaped the development of a democratic political culture and later reinforced republican ideals. In a first stage, the author considers the divine covenant, between God and man, part of Western religious thought since the beginning, as key to Puritan thought, signifying “all humankind’s relationships to God (Mazzacano 2023, 228); in the Bible, the original term is *berith*; the Puritan religious movement, beginning with John Calvin, was rooted in the biblical covenantal thinking, A second stage is represented by the social compact between men, as instrument of governance among the colonists: *contract*, *compact*, *agreement*, *charter*, *ordinance*, eventually *constitution* (see the 1620 Mayflower compact example given by the author of the chapter). However,

unlike in the English tradition, the colonial Puritan state was constructed upon a foundation of reason and democratic godliness in which men came together to form churches and a state, based on a social compact (Mazzacano 2023, 239). The contractual constitutionalism, a third stage, regards Puritans as forerunners of American democracy due to their attitude towards religion and political participation. Thus, as the author concludes, Puritanism contributed to the American liberty and pluralism, beginning with the ideal of a godly community that pervaded Puritan jurisprudence.

The chapter “The Salem Witch Trials and the Decay of the Great Puritan Experiment”, authored by Rachel Christ-Doane, looks at the end of Puritan dominance in America, with the witchcraft trials of 1692 of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. However, the Salem witch trials made way to a new world, not solely based on a covenant with God, yet based on the efforts of the devoted men and women in the community. Jo Renee Formicola’s research on “Catholic Hierarchy and Clerical Sexual Abuse” gives place to an analysis of the development of the hierarchy and governance power of the Catholic Church. The Church is considered a sacred governance structure, developed as a result of a moral consensus, which can be seen in the frame of Daniel Elazar’s model of the evolution of secular government. Jesus is interpreted by the Catholic theologians as a *new* covenant (Pimentel 2022), a fulfillment of the Mosaic one. However, in the governance structure of the Church, the leadership can never be elected from non-religious personnel, as ecclesiastical laws are instituted based on a “holy ordering” of authority (Formicola 2023, 289). As some political scientists argue, the Catholic church religious doctrines had an adverse impact on democracy (see Warner 2019), maintaining the privileged status of the Church. While the modern Church leadership initiated reforms of its sacred governance to assure the integrity of its religious leadership, management processes, and the ecclesiastical legal system, major challenges remain, such as the investigation of the clerical sexual abuse.

ANGELICA HELENA MARINESCU¹

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¹ Associated researcher, Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy, email: angeli.marinescu@gmail.com

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