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*Michael Avioz (Bar-Ilan University)*

# 1 SAMUEL 4 IN JOSEPHUS' *ANTIQUITIES* 5.355-362

*ABSTRACT*

*This paper explores Josephus' exegetical skills in elucidating the biblical text, taking his retelling of 1 Samuel 4 in* Antiquities *5.355-362 as a test case. Recording the fall of Elides and the destruction of the Shiloh sanctuary, Josephus' retelling is twice as long as the biblical narrative. While acknowledging his apologetic tendencies in the* Antiquities*, this article seeks to demonstrate that his hermeneutical motives are just as significant. First analyzing the biblical passage and its textual difficulties and gaps, it then examines Josephus' additions, omissions, and changes, as well as the question of his* Vorlage.

*Ethan Jones (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary)*

# SOUND AND MEANING IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EXEGESIS[*]

## ABSTRACT

*Scholars are becoming increasingly aware of soundplay in the Hebrew Bible. Even with such awareness, however, soundplay often remains relegated to aesthetics. Certainly, it is true that it can aid in the aural delight of texts. Nevertheless, I argue that soundplay does more. I claim it has rhetorical significance. This significance can be missed if scholars attend only to the semantics and syntax of the Hebrew text or consider soundplay as ornamental. This article seeks to demonstrate some of the purposes of soundplay and the implications for exegesis. Two well-known prophetic texts (Isaiah 5; Amos 8) serve as illustrations for its aesthetic and rhetorical contributions.*

*Brent A Strawn (Duke University)*

# URAD-GULA AND QOHELETH: A NEO-ASSYRIAN PARALLEL TO ECCLESIASTES 10:5-7[*]

## ABSTRACT

*Commentators frequently compare Eccl 10:5-7 to examples of the "topsy-turvy" motif in extrabiblical wisdom texts, especially Egyptian exemplars. The topos is found elsewhere, however, and a Neo-Assyrian letter from an unemployed exorcist named Urad-Gula to the Assyrian king provides a close parallel to Qoheleth's sentiments. Beyond matters of specific content, the Neo-Assyrian letter is also nearer Qoheleth's time period than most of the other Egyptian parallels typically adduced. Still further, Urad-Gula's real-life (mis)fortunes suggest that the topsy-turvy motif may (at least in some instances) be much more than only or merely a literary device: it may also describe situations that were actually experienced by sages and other persons like Urad-Gula – people like Qoheleth himself.*

*Benjamin D Suchard (KU Leuven & Leiden University)*

# BIBLICAL HEBREW יש AND BIBLICAL ARAMAIC איתי FOLLOWED BY NON-VERBAL CLAUSES AS MARKERS OF POLARITY CONTRAST[*]

## ABSTRACT

*In both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic, there is a construction formed by the existential marker followed by a non-verbal clause. This construction is used to mark polarity contrasts, i.e., to contrast a non-negated sentence with its negated counterpart or vice versa. If the subject of the non-verbal clause is a personal pronoun, this is incorporated in the existential marker as a pronominal suffix, but the presence of such a suffix is not an essential feature of the construction.*

# BOOK REVIEWS

Greer, J S, Hilber, J W & Walton J H 2018. *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. 640 pages, 7 x 10. ISBN 9780801097751 (Hardcover), ISBN 9781493415540 (E-Book). $49.99.

## *1. INTRODUCTION*

The present study is not strictly a "review" since, although a general summary of the book is provided, I do not critically engage with the subject matter of the many individual chapters, which are authored by different scholars. Instead, in this "overview", I determined that it would be more helpful to give potential readers a taste of the text through selected quotations from the various writers themselves, rather than being filtered and perhaps distorted by my perspective, especially since I am not academically competent enough to comment on the broad range and diversity of the topics that are covered.

This extensive collection of recent (2018) scholarly studies on the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, is preceded by an instructive Introduction by the Editors (Greer, Hilber and Walton) that provides an essential orientation to the book's nature, purpose, and intended readership.[1] The principal aim of this substantial compendium of 615 pages is to narrow the conceptual gap that exists between the ancient and modern worlds with respect to time, space, culture, and language, which "often limits our understanding of what was communicated by those ancient scribes to their early hearers" (p. xvii).[2] In their effort to "illuminate the historical, cultural, and social contexts of the world behind the Old Testament", the approach of "cognitive environment criticism" is applied (p. xvii). This field consists of two interrelated disciplines: "background studies", which investigate the historical, literary, and material culture of the ancient world, and "comparative studies", which examine the anthropological data from biblical Israel in close relation to the other Near Eastern cultures that they

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1    Auxiliary materials include at the beginning of the book a listing of illustrations, the volume's contributors, and several pages of scholarly abbreviations. After the main text then we have a list of bibliographic references covering nearly 80 pages plus three indices for Scripture reference, ancient texts, and authors.

2    One wonders why the term "scribes" was used instead of "authors", or "writers" perhaps, and "editors".

interacted with or were influenced by during their long history in the region known today as the Levant.[3] The editors express the hope that this book:

> … will serve as an accessible resource that will introduce readers – be they students, clergy, interested lay readers, or scholars from other subdisciplines within biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies – to a wide range of back ground materials relevant for understanding the Old Testament, including Levantine geography, archaeology, ancient Near Eastern texts and iconography, history, and a selection of social, religious, and economic topics (p. xviii).

In the opinion of the present reader, admittedly no expert in the various matters discussed, this goal has been very successfully achieved. This is despite the fact that the constituent articles do offer a number of different perspectives on the theological character of the text of Scripture and the relationship of this text to "history" as scientifically defined or determined. Such internal diversity is viewed as a positive feature in that it allows "instructors the opportunity to identify, discuss, and evaluate these different perspectives" and the degree to which they serve to "illuminate our understanding of those early contexts of the Old Testament" (p. xviii).

## 2.    MAIN PARTS, SUB-SECTIONS AND ARTICLES

The editors have arranged the book's three main parts, ten sub-sections, and 66 articles from the engaging perspective of a "dramatic" production in order "to 'pull back the curtain,' as it were, and illuminate the drama" with reference to "the narrative art of the Israelite historians and the larger 'story' framework in which the various genres of the Old Testament are embedded" (p. xviii).[4] Given the limitations of space and my own lack of expertise in the many different subjects that are discussed in this corpus of scholarly studies, the best I can do to overview the text is simply to more or less reproduce its varied topical contents as they have been carefully organized according to the governing cohesive dramatic

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3      "… the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea stretching from its northeast corner south to Gaza" (p. 15).

4      With the notion of a "drama" being a major theme and organizing principle of this volume, one might suggest that it could have been helpfully incorporated somehow into the book's title.

viewpoint.[5] Having sampled the entire text with great benefit, I will also contribute my narrow personal perspective on the material by incorporating as inserts after each chapter title a small illustrative citation – one that I found especially informative, interesting, and/or helpful, but which is not necessarily intended to represent the main point or purpose of that particular unit.

PART ONE: ELEMENTS OF THE DRAMA

I.    The Stage: Historical Geography

1.    Introduction to Historical Geography (*Paul H Wright*)

An appreciation of literary geography will also help readers of ancient texts grasp ways that authors used the rich language of geography to inform the messages that they were trying to tell. This is perhaps most significant for the Bible, in which geographical images fill the narrative line but also the language of individual actors within the story line itself (p. 11).

2.    Regions and Routes in the Levant (*Carl G Rasmussen*)

[W]hen Israel settled in the 'southern region of the Levant,' they were living in 'the land between' the great superpowers of antiquity – those in Egypt and in Mesopotamia. Indeed, God placed Israel in his 'testing ground of faith,' and part of the drama of the biblical text is to trace how the Israelites reacted to the challenges that they faced – whether through political alliances and expediency or by placing their trust in the true and living God (p. 20).

3.    Climate and Environment of the Levant (*Elizabeth Arnold*)

As wetter conditions return [to the Levant] at the beginning of the Iron Age, a period of recovery and resettlement begins. These new settlements are able to fill the economic and political power vacuum and give rise to the Hebrew Kingdoms of Israel and Judah as well as other biblical nations, including the Arameans in Syria and the Ammonites and Moabites in Transjordan, territorial kingdoms known from the Hebrew Bible … (p. 27).

4.    Plants and Animals of the Land of Israel (*Daniel Fuchs and Nimrod Marom*)

The diversity of plants and animals in the land of Israel resonates deeply with the Bible's imagery, commandments, and depictions of daily life. ...

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5    I include the names of individual chapter authors so that they receive some due credit for their contribution to this multifaceted literary production – indeed, a *magnum opus* on the contextual-cognitive background of the Hebrew Bible.

The land of Israel has been a meeting point not only for various cultures and civilizations but also for a plethora of floral and faunal types, creating a rich and variegated landscape. These include three main vegetation types (Mediterranean, Irano-Turanian, and Saharo-Arabian) and flora from additional vegetation zones (Euro-Siberian, oro-Mediterranean, and Sudanian) (pp. 28, 36).

II.     The Sets and Props: Archaeology

5.   Introduction to Biblical Archaeology (*Seymour Gitin*)
What, then, can biblical archaeology contribute to this discussion and to our understanding of the biblical period? Contrary to revisionists' claims, a significant assemblage of written documents exists from the biblical period – including the Samaria and Arad ostraca, the Lachish Letters, the Siloam Inscription, the Moabite Stone, numerous seals and miscellaneous ostraca, the Dan and Ekron inscriptions, and Egyptian and Neo-Assyrian documents (p. 46).

6.   Archaeology of the Late Bronze Age (*Joe Uziel*)
The official written language of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age [ca. 1500-1200 BCE] was Akkadian and possibly hieratic [hieroglyphic] on a lesser scale … Alongside this, a limited number of alphabetic documents have been discovered. The source and content of these documents suggest that this script was used by marginal groups, indicating the existence of an alternative way of life. The existence of numerous marginal groups during this period is attested by other aspects of culture, as well as historical sources … (p. 52).

7.   Archaeology of the Iron Age I (*Aren M Maeir*)
[A]lthough the conquest, settlement, and period of the judges play a central role in the formative narratives of the Israelite/Judahite biblical texts, there is very little concrete archeological evidence to corroborate much of what is mentioned in these texts. That said, it is clear that during the two hundred or so years of the Iron I [Age] in the regions of the central hills, rural, tribal elements existed, which in a broad manner fit in well with the biblical depiction of tribal sociopolitical structures (p. 61).

8.   Archaeology of the Iron Age II (*Amihai Mazar*)
Following the end of the Assyrian regime, a short period of Egyptian intervention in the coastal plain was followed by the Babylonian conquest of the southern Levant … In 605 BCE Nebuchanezzar devastated Ekron and Ashkelon, in 597 BCE he attacked Jerusalem and exiled its king and nobles, and in 586 BCE he destroyed Jerusalem and most of Judah and

exiled the upper classes to Mesopotamia. … During the Babylonian occupation, which lasted until the area became part of the Persian Empire (538 BCE), most of these areas remained devastated … (p. 69).

9. Archaeology of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods (*Constance E Gane*)

A dramatic break is seen in the religious life of those left in the Levant after the Babylonian destruction of the urban and rural areas. Whereas the preceding Levantine Iron Age was replete with a wide variety of cultic high places, shrines, altars, sacred stones (*matsebot*), and innumerable figurines – especially female figurines – the following exilic and postexilic periods show an apparent absence of polytheism in the heartland of Yehud and Samaria … (p. 76).

10. Archaeology of the Hellenistic Period (*Jordan Ryan*)

The Hellenistic period saw the rise of Greek culture in Palestine, as well as the emergence of a distinct Jewish identity in material culture. … Hellenism and Judaism were not mutually exclusive categories. Judaism in Palestine was Hellenized, even following the Maccabean Revolt. The Hellenization of Palestine and the emergence of early Judaism and Jewish identity would pave the way for practical and theological issues faced both by the rabbis and by the New Testament authors in the Roman period (p. 87).

III. The Scripts: Ancient and Near Eastern Literature

11. Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature (*Adam E Miglio*)

[B]oth ancient Near Eastern and biblical sources must be thoroughly examined with respect to their textuality … [which] is used to refer to the seemingly endless array of elements that characterize the linguistic property of texts. That is, ancient Near Eastern texts may be considered at numerous levels – from their genres, to their themes, to their countless stylistic features, to their vocabulary, syntax, and morphology or phonology. And both ancient Near Eastern and biblical sources must be thoroughly investigated with regard to their textuality in order for them to be compared and contrasted (p. 96).

12. Mesopotamian Literature (*David C Deuel*)

The various administrative spheres required specific genres and functions of texts, many of which originated and were used outside the royal court in temples, even with private occupational and family use … *Archival texts … Legal* documents *… Royal documents … Chronological and related texts … Commemorative and monumental inscriptions … Liturgical and religious texts … Divination literature … Texts supporting occupations …*

*Fine literature* (belles lettres) *including mythological, epic, and narrative poetry* (pp. 101-103, original italics).

13. Egyptian Literature (*Nili Shupak*)

Unlike the Hebrew Bible, no canon or defined corpus of ancient Egyptian literature exists. … Egyptian poetry followed a standard meter and was accompanied by musical instruments. Written in high literary language, its stylistic features (repetitions, parallelisms, wordplays, assonance, images, etc.) resemble those of biblical poetry. It falls into two principal categories: poems of praise (hymns to the gods or the king) and poems for banquets and entertainment (harpers' songs and love songs). … The personal piety poems – customarily appeals for divine aid that reflect the spirit of individualism and humility that emerged in the New Kingdom period – closely correspond to the individual complaints or repentance psalms in the Bible (pp. 104, 108-109).

14. Hittite Literature (*Alice Mouton*)

Hittite texts designate prayers by three different terms: 1. The noun *arkuwar*, 'plea,' has a legal connotation. … 2. The term *mugawar*… 'invocation, petition,' is the designation of the myths of the disappearing deities as Telepinu. 3. The noun *walliyatar*, 'praise,' is used of prayers that exalt the gods. These three categories are often combined in one and the same composition (p. 118).

15. Ugaritic Literature (*William D Barker*)

Because of the linguistic affinities and shared Canaanite literary traditions with Biblical Hebrew, Ugaritic has helped illuminate the understanding of several difficult lexemes and passages in the Hebrew Bible. Common stock phrases, parallel word pairs, and evidence of significant parallels (e.g., themes and motifs and narrative progression) between the Ugaritic literature and the Hebrew Bible continue to provide a wealth of linguistic and interpretive insight. The Ugaritic letters and administrative texts provide significant insight into life in ancient Canaan (pp. 124-125).

16. Northwest Semitic Inscriptions (*Margaret E Cohen*)

The writing system of Northwest Semitic uses characters to denote phonemes (i.e., [diagnostic] units of sound) and is therefore alphabetic. It is technically called an 'abjad' since the graphemes (i.e., the written units) represent consonants and not vowels. The Northwest Semitic script is generally attributed to the Phoenicians, who standardized it, and this alphabet became the basis of adaptation for a number of related scripts. …

[E]pigraphy is the study of the form and placement of letters written in ink or inscribed into clay, stone, or other materials (pp. 126-127).

17. Hebrew Inscriptions (*Judith M Hadley*)

Hebrew inscriptions come in many forms: incised in stone, metal, or pottery; impressions in clay (bullae) or on pottery made using incised seals; or writing with ink, most commonly on pottery pieces (ostraca) but also on plaster, papyrus, or walls. The content of the inscriptions also varies: tomb inscriptions, letters, prayers and poems, graffiti, narratives, or nonliterary weights, receipts, or names of people or places, mostly from seals and seal impressions … (p. 135).

18. Early Jewish Literature (*Ryan E Stokes*)

Early Jewish literature reveals much about the composition of the Old Testament, the context of the Old Testament, and the early reception and interpretation of the Old Testament. … The writings of early Judaism are quite diverse. They attest to a wide range of religious ideas, they represent a variety of literary genres, and they have been received in different ways throughout their history by different religious communities. Traditionally, these writings have been classified as 'apocrypha,' pseudepigrapha,' or 'intertestamental literature,' labels that serve to distinguish these works from those deemed to be Scripture by later Jewish and Christian traditions (pp. 142-143).

IV.   The Frames: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

19. Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Iconography (*Izak Cornelius*)

The ancient Near East created conceptual rather than perceptual images. It is not so much a matter of what is seen but of what the viewer is supposed to see or perceive – a notion or symbol that was communicated or was supposed to be communicated. Images are neither always realistic nor historical in the sense of representing reality. It is not a case of what some ruler or historical person really looked like or what really happened that matters, but rather, for example, the 'idea' of kingship that is communicated. This is important, as it means that iconography provides information on the world of ideas of the ancient Near East (p. 153).

20. Egyptian Iconography (*Laura Wright*)

In the last half of the twentieth century, the comparative method was increasingly used for the study of ancient Israelite iconography. Biblical scholars sought to understand infrequent biblical images through parallel iconography from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant. … Because

definitive identification of Egyptian or Mesopotamian influence on the iconography of many biblical texts was often challenging, if not impossible, careful scholars like William Hallo advocated a contextual approach that sought to 'silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural environment'… to discover where the biblical corpora reflected and contrasted with the broader ancient Near Eastern context (p. 163).

21. Mesopotamian and Anatolian Iconography (*Daniel Bodi*)
Studying ancient visual art contemporary with the documents of the Hebrew Bible provides valuable insights for the reconstruction of the historical context of the biblical text and facilitates better understanding of cultural attitudes, showing how the ancient authors and audiences saw, thought, and made sense of their world. … One of the reasons for the monumental impact of the Bible on the development of Western art and civilization is that it is deeply steeped in the cultures that preceded it for several millennia, drawing roots in the images and narrative themes and motifs from ancient Near Easter art and literature (p. 165).

22. Canaanite/Israelite Iconography (*Brent A Strawn*)
[T]he Old Testament itself mentions a good bit of representational art—the decorative elements in Solomon's temple, for example, or the bronze serpent, or the ephod… Such items are not at odds with the Second Commandment since that command does not prohibit *all* representation, but speaks only of *divine* representations, including, perhaps, representations of Israel's own God, Yhwh. … Still further, even the strictest interpretation of the Second Commandment did not prohibit the authors of Scripture from figuring Yhwh in a vast array of images, symbols, and metaphors—even if these are limited to instances of figural language rather than figural art… (pp. 172-173, original italics)

## PART TWO: ACTS AND SCENES OF THE DRAMA

### V.    Acts: Integrated Approaches to Broad Historical Contexts

23. The Ancestral Period (*Richard S Hess*)
As has long been observed, the chronology described by the Hebrew Bible suggests a Middle Bronze Age context for the period outlined in Genesis 12-50. … On multiple levels, from a wealth of archaeological and textual evidence, the world of the ancestors as described in Genesis 12-50 is identical to the world of the Middle Bronze Age in the region of the Levant,

ca. 2200-1600 BCE. Better understanding this world provides valuable insights into the interpretation of these crucial texts (pp. 187-193).

### 24. The Egyptian Sojourn and the Exodus (*David A Falk*)

The exodus is the one event that defines the ancient Israelites more than any other, becoming an overarching theme in the nation's literature and national identity. Yet for the modern scholar and Bible reader, the exodus presents challenges regarding not only the nature of the evidence but what is often a Western understanding of the ancient texts. … The state of the evidence points towards the plausibility of the exodus narrative. The cultural and geographic references point to an ancient writer who was intimately familiar with the area of the Nile delta and the customs of Egypt as they existed in the late New Kingdom, strongly suggesting the reliability of the exodus account as a historical event (pp. 194-200).

### 25. The Settlement Period (*Pekka Pitkänen*)

From the perspective of the biblical sources, the settlement period can be understood to have started when the ancient Israelites entered the so-called Promised Land. … [F]rom an archaeological perspective, it is quite natural to link the settlement period with the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age transition in the area. This does broadly fit with the biblical chronology, even if the texts, when read literally, would imply a date for the conquest and settlement in the fifteenth century BCE (see 1 Kings 6:1; Judg. 11:26) (pp. 201-202).

### 26. The United Monarchy (*Steven M Ortiz*)

The United Monarchy is best viewed as a secondary state within the southern Levant. … The territory of the United Monarchy was geographically diverse. The southern tribe of Judah was confined to the central hill country and bordered by desert regions to its south and east. It competed with the Philistines for control of the fertile Shephelah between the hill country and the coast. The northern tribes were intermingled with various cultural and political influences (e.g., Phoenicians, Arameans) as they occupied Galilee and the hill country of Samaria. It was no small task to unite the people of both the northern and southern regions into a common polity (p. 210).

### 27. The Divided Monarch: Israel (*Jens Brun Kofoed*)

In the broader context of Egyptian and Levantine history, the tenth century was a period when both Egypt and Assyria were weak, allowing small territorial polities such as Israel, Judah, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Aram Damascus, and others to appear and grow into fully developed territorial

kingdoms in the geographical buffer zone between Assyria and Egypt. … [W]hereas Judah in the ninth and eighth centuries was a 'simple agrarian society' with two main social strata, Israel – at least in the eighth century – developed into 'an advanced agrarian society' with a relatively large number of social strata and a varied settlement hierarchy … (pp. 216-217).

28. The Divided Monarchy: Judah (*Eric L Welch*)

Judah benefits from a strong epigraphic record from outside its borders, especially from the Neo-Assyrian Empire. … While Judah may represent the heartland of the biblical narrative, in many ways Judah's unique contributions to the political and theological narrative supply the heartbeat of the Old Testament. … One of the critical turning points in Judah's history came in the year 701 BCE when its relationship with Assyria deteriorated and Assyria besieged the Judean landscape. No single historical event until the exile would have such lasting effects on various aspects of Judean life, such as the economy, religion, and even family structure (pp. 223-224, 226).

29. The Exile and the Exilic Communities (*Deirdre N Fulton*)

The Babylonian exile (597/587-539 BCE) was an era of significant change for Judah and the Judeans. New communities, specifically in Babylon and Egypt, either appeared or grew in number during the period of the exile. The exile as a discrete historical period came to an end, but the memory of the exile continues throughout the narratives and poems of the Old and New Testaments. The demise of the Davidic monarchy and the forced relocation of Judeans forever changed the theological landscape of the biblical texts (p. 235).

30. The Achaemenid Persian Empire in the West and Persian Period Yehud (*Kenneth A Ristau*)

The reconstruction of a small and encumbered Jerusalem meant very little to the Persians or nearly anyone else in the period, but interpreted as the reenthronement of Yahweh and the restoration and validation of a faithful remnant, it is the central accomplishment of the biblical story of this era and helped to create a political and spiritual capital for Judeans living in Yehud, Transeuphrates, and throughout the Near Eastern world, which in turn lent authority to the textual tradition and religious interpretation emanating from there and ultimately unified much of the Judean world around it (p. 243).

31. The Maccabean Revolt and Hasmonean Statecraft (*Joel Willitts*)
Zealous faithfulness to God in the midst of religious persecution, murder, double-cross, and treachery, heroic protagonists and maniacal villains, reversals of fortune and poetic justice – these are just some of the reasons the story of the Hasmoneans has captured the imagination of so many for two millennia. The Hasmonean story, coupled with the related annexation of Judah by the Roman Empire in 63 BCE, is arguably the most formative historical stage of the late Second Temple period, into which Jesus was born and from which both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism eventually originated … (p. 244).

VI.    Scenes: Integrated Approaches to Event-Based Historical Contexts

32. Akhenaten and the Amarna Period (*Mark D Janzen*)
If it is reasonably certain that Akhenaten was a monotheist, the follow-up question is 'What effect did his monotheism have on ancient Israel?' … Thus, the issue becomes one of transmission: How exactly would Moses have been exposed to Atenism. Unlike other followers of monotheistic faiths, Akhenaten had no disciples to propagate the message … Perhaps Atenism's greatest contribution to understanding Israelite religion is simply that it illustrates Winfred Corduan's accurate observation that religions do not evolve in a series of traceable steps from animism to monotheism … thus, one need not necessarily view Israelite monotheism as late development on those grounds (pp. 258-259).

33. The Late Bronze Age Collapse and the Sea Peoples' Migrations (*Gregory D Mumford*)
Although the Sea Peoples and other ethnic groups (especially the Philistines) remained politically and culturally separate from Israel by the Iron Age IIA (1000-925 BCE), much of their preserved material culture becomes less distinct or disappears, being submerged within the predominant Canaanite-derived cultures (including Phoenician influence). … During the Iron Age II we become more reliant upon biblical, Egyptian, and Syro-Mesopotamian textual-pictorial records to clarify the nature of the various Sea Peoples' descendants (particularly the Philistines) and other ethnic groupings in the Levant … (pp. 270-271).

34. Sheshonq's Levantine Conquest and Biblical History (*Yigal Levin*)
All in all, the Sheshonq inscriptions are widely accepted as the earliest known reference to a 'biblical' event in a contemporaneous epigraphic source, with Sheshonq/Shishak himself being the earliest historical figure

to appear both in the Bible and in contemporary inscriptions. The campaign has come to be seen as an 'anchor' or 'external control' for the entire chronology of the early Israelite monarchy; if Sheshonq reigned until 925 BCE, and if we assume that the campaign must have occurred toward the end of his reign …, then the biblical date of Rehoboam's fifth year must have been between 930 and 925. This then allows us to calculate the dates for the reigns of David, Solomon, and the kings of the divided monarchy, using the dates given in the Bible itself (p. 276).

35. The Battle of Qarqar and Assyrian Aspirations (*Mark W Chavalas*)

Though obviously a major event, the Battle of Qarqar is not hinted at in the Bible. … Since the battle did not appear to have a decisive outcome, it did not serve an immediate theological purpose to explain the success (or more likely a failure) of an Israelite or Judahite king. Thus, international affairs are mentioned in Kings only when they made a difference in the nature and status of the Israelite or Judahite monarchy. The writer of Chronicles had perhaps an even a more precise perspective, as the events described therein are related to the temple. Thus the Chronicler was perhaps even more hesitant than the writer of Kings to discuss international affairs (p. 285).

36. The Mesha Inscription and Relations with Moab and Edom (*Juan Manuel Tebes*)

As an external witness to the Hebrew Bible, the Mesha Inscription constitutes one of the most important textual sources for studying the history of the ancient Israelite kingdoms and their relationships with their Transjordan neighbors. It provides the earliest external attestation of Yahweh as Israel's god and mentioned for the first time the kingdom of Israel's house of Omri and probably Judah's house of David. Also, twelve of the seventeen place-names present in the inscription are also mentioned in the biblical text, which makes it a good source for biblical geography (p. 286).

37. The Tel Dan Inscription and the Deaths of Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah (*K Lawson Younger Jr.*)

Interestingly, then, the answer to the question 'Who killed the two kings?' – as it appears that the ancients would have perceived it – it is not Hazael versus Jehu, but Hadad versus Yahweh. Hazael is unquestionably claiming divine empowerment from Hadad himself in his slaying of the two kings. This is in total concert with the theology and royal ideology found in his other inscriptions. Yet, the biblical text in 2 Kings 8:7-15 credits Yahweh

with predicting Hazael's ascension to the throne, thus trumping any claim that Hadad put Hazael there. … Just as Yahweh was credited directly in bringing about the death of Joram of Israel through the anointing of Jehu (with the coincidental killing of Ahaziah), so he is credited by the Chronicler directly with 'the downfall' of Ahaziah (yielding a corresponding narrative to 2 Kings 9) (p. 297).

## 38. Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah and Neo-Assyrian Expansion (*Kyle H Keimer*)

More explicit are the parallels between Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and the book of Isaiah. It appears that Isaiah depicts the Assyrian army as 'an overwhelming military machine, destroying all resistance in its path, devastating the lands of its enemies …'. This is the image of the king and his army as portrayed in the Assyrian royal inscriptions as well. Yet Isaiah is using Assyrian phrases and terminology polemically to show that Yahweh, not the king(s) of Assyria, is mighty and worthy of praise. Less overt linguistically, but espousing a similar message shortly before the days of Isaiah, is the prophet Hosea … (p. 304).

## 39. Eighth-Century Levantine Earthquakes and Natural Disasters (*Ryan N Roberts*)

Earthquake imagery is most often employed in language describing ancient Israel's account of God intervening in human history. These texts often have, in addition to 'quaking' language, other phenomena, such as wind, storm, and fire, and are more technically labeled as storm-theophanic texts describing the divine warrior … Within the Hebrew Bible, a number of these theophanic texts (Judg. 5:4-5; 2 Sam. 22:8-16 = Ps. 18:8-16; Ps. 68:7-10; Hab. 3:3-15) have commonly been understood as representing some of Israel's oldest hymns. Later prophetic texts tie earthquake imagery into pronouncements of the future eschatological day of reckoning (Isa. 29:5-6; Joel 2:10; Nah. 1:5) … (pp. 306-307).

## 40. The Battle of Carchemish and Seventh/Sixth-Century Regional Politics (*Sara L Hoffman*)

[A]lthough Nebuchadezzar's victory at Carchemish was a watershed moment in Iron Age history, the question of whether a Babylonian or an Egyptian alliance better served Judah's interests remained open long after 605 BCE. For the next two decades, Judah's kings vacillated between these two options as they attempted to better position themselves for survival in a dynamic geopolitical landscape. The books of Jeremiah, in particular, reflects the divide between pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian factions

among the Judean elite. In Jeremiah's narrative, the prophet is consistently depicted as an advocate for accepting subjugation to Babylon, which he presents as the will of Yahweh himself (Jer. 27) (p. 319).

41. Alexander the Great and Hellenism (*D Brent Sandy*)

An example of the openness of Jews to Hellenism was Greek institutions in Jewish cities, especially Jerusalem. A gymnasium was a particularly obvious expression of Greek ideals, but some Jews, rather than resisting what was in opposition to Jewish culture, welcomed the customs, even to the point of abandoning circumcision (1 Macc. 1:11-15). … An undisputed example of the Jews adopting Greek culture is language. All across the Mediterranean world Jews were speaking and writing Greek, composing history, philosophy, fiction, and so forth. Most notable of all is the translation of the Jewish Scriptures into Koine, beginning as early as the third century BCE. Many adopted it as being as authoritative as the Hebrew version itself (p. 326).

## PART THREE: THEMES OF THE DRAMA

### VII.   God: Integrated Approaches to Themes in Israelite Religion

42. Interactions in the Ancient Cognitive Environment (*John H Walton*)

The discipline that discusses the relationship between the Old Testament and its cultural milieu may be called 'cognitive environment criticism.' The goal of this discipline is to recover the cultural layers from the world behind the text that were inherently understood by the ancient audience but have been long lost to our modern world. Texts, along with iconography, serve as windows to the cognitive environment of the ancient world. One of the important difficulties in this task is discerning exactly how the Israelites were aware of this broader culture and how they used it in composing the Old Testament (p. 333).

43. Monotheism in Ancient Israel (*Matthew J Lynch*)

At the heart of Jewish and Christian claims about God, rooted in the pages of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, is the claim that there is only one God (Deut. 4:35,39). Yet the nature of this claim and its presence or pervasiveness in the Old Testament is a matter of considerable debate. Scholars of ancient Israel differ by about eight hundred years on when they place the 'origins,' or emergence, of monotheism. They differ further on which and whether cultural influences may have played a role in the formation of Israelite monotheism. … While monotheism's origins may be

unclear and more complicated than often assumed, the emergence of Yhwh's sole divinity as a critical dimension of Israelite religion is undoubtable (p. 340).

44. The Temple in Context (*John H Walton*)

[N]o parallel of the cult image is present in Israelite theology. Much controversy has centered on Israelite aniconism – when it began and how it was reflected – but exclusive aniconism in the ancient Near East outside of Israel is unknown. The significance of this is far-reaching and cannot be overstated. … Nothing was of greater importance in the ancient world than sustaining the presence of deity in the temple, though a variety of different strategies are evident. From architecture and function to use and ideology, different cultures achieved the objectives of divine presence in different ways. Securing divine favor was paramount; therefore, temple practices and ideology are key to understanding the perceptions about deity that characterized the individual societies of the ancient Near East (p. 354).

45. Priests in the Ancient Near East (*Gerald A Klingbeil*)

Priests and other religious specialists were part of an elite in ancient Near Eastern cultures whose services were to secure the well-being of king, people, and land by representing them before the deity. … Priests functioned as mediators between human and divine spheres and were generally considered to be attendants of the deity. … When the relationship between the deity and the city, state, or people was strained, priests had to reestablish the link through sacrifices and offerings. Another highly specialized function of ancient Near Eastern priesthood involved divination, the attempt to anticipate the outcome of future events through magic rituals. … Since writing was often associated with temples, priests (or at least some) wielded a powerful influence because writing (and the preservations of names) meant a future in the worldview of the ancient Near east … Their function as teachers is not easily documented, but may have been part of their official portfolio (pp. 355, 360).

46. Worship, Sacrifice, and Festivals in the Ancient Near East (*Roy E Gane*)

Unique in the ancient Near East was a two-stage system of expiation through Israelite purification offerings that demonstrated the way in which the deity extended mercy with justice to human subjects … First, sins were removed from the persons who offered purification offerings throughout the year, as indicated by goal formulas of prescriptions for such sacrifices – for example, in Leviticus 4:26 … Second, the same sins were then

cleansed from God's sanctuary on the annual day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16), representing vindication of Yhwh as judge when he forgave loyal people, and this vindication resulted in their final moral purification so that there were no remaining impediments to the divine-human relationship (Lev. 16:29-31) … (p. 365).

47. Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient Near East (*John W Hilber*)

The ancient Near Eastern evidence suggests a close link between prophetic books and the individual prophets whose oracles make up the literary masterpieces of the Bible … These books are much more sophisticated in literary shape than any prophetic texts produced in the ancient Near East. One might conclude that prophetic books were the product of long redactional processes to achieve such shape. But the books of the Hebrew Bible in general find few literary parallels at the macro-level. The discussion hinges in some measure on the extent of literacy presupposed for preexilic Israel and the interest of the culture to record prophetic speech and produce prophetic literature. But if the people of preexilic Israel were capable of producing literature of any nature, then there is no inherent reason they could not have produced sophisticated prophetic compositions, literate prophets or not (p. 374).

48. Family Religion in Ancient Israel (*Andrew R Davis*)

… God's mighty deeds take center stage in the biblical narrative, and instances of family religion usually occur in marginal scenes of this main drama. … The somewhat obscure biblical evidence for family religion makes recourse to nonbiblical sources an indispensable part of interpretation. Besides expanding our view of family life in ancient Israel, encounters with family religion 'behind the scenes' of the Old Testament shed new light on its biblical depictions. The best sources for such encounters are personal names found in the Hebrew Bible and in inscriptions and archaeological evidence from domestic and cultic contexts. This evidence reveals several points of contact with biblical tradition as well as practices that would have been unacceptable to biblical writers (pp. 375-376).

49. Death and Burial in the Ancient Levant (*Christopher B Hays*)

The underworld in Israelite thought is known primarily by the name 'Sheol,' which is essentially unique to Hebrew and of uncertain etymology. … Historians of religion have sometimes proceeded as if Yhwh had been thought to have no commerce with death and the underworld in the

mainstream preexilic religion. God's power over the underworld is expressed in different ways in Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6; Proverbs 15:11; and Amos 9:1-2. There were pessimistic traditions in which death was seen as final and the underworld as sealed, and Israelite thought about the restoration from death does seem to have become more elaborate and central over time, but from the early stages of biblical literature, Yhwh was always portrayed as a god who had the power to save from death, and who was quite able to access and control the underworld, even if such actions were seen as exceptional (p. 387).

## VIII.  Family: Integrated Approaches to Themes in Family Networks

### 50. Tribes and Nomads in the Iron Age Levant (*Thomas D Petter*)

At the core, Israel viewed itself in deeply kin-based tribal terms throughout its recorded history, from the 'generations' (*toledoth*) of Genesis (Gen. 2:4 and passim) to postexilic genealogies (1 Chron. 1-9; Ezra 2/Neh. 7). Primordial lineage mattered to ancient Israel (e.g., Gen. 15:4), so the primary identification marker for an Israelite inevitably was based on common ancestry and loyalty [*hesed*]. … Genealogies supply the framework within which the life of the tribes exists. The genealogies of 1 Chronicles (from the postexilic period) attest to the essentially tribal history of ancient Israel and provide a fitting bookend to the genealogies of Genesis: 'these are the generations [*toledoth*].' The underlying commentary to each of the names recorded over several chapters is that Yahweh's steadfast love (*hesed*) endures forever (pp. 392, 395).

### 51. Women in Ancient Israel (*Carol Meyers*)

[I]n ancient Israel the household was the workplace for both genders, and most of life's necessities were produced there. Women's economic activities were as essential as men's for household survival. … Altogether, women's lives probably were more complex and more difficult than we might have supposed. Yet, in carrying out their many household activities, adult women had opportunities to experience gratification for contributing in essential ways to the well-being, if not the very survival, of their households and communities. The household roles of women and men were complimentary, and although ancient Israel was hardly an egalitarian society, women did have agency in many aspects of their lives (p. 402).

### 52. Family, Children, and Inheritance in the Biblical World (*Victor H Matthews*)

The rhythm of life in much of ancient Israel was governed by the seasons as they engaged in their agricultural and herding pursuits. … Regardless of

whether they lived in villages or cities, the social glue that held these people together was kinship and family ties. Their identity was created and articulated in terms of a pyramid of relationships with its foundation in the household and expanding socially into clan, tribe, and nation. Their connection to one another was also formed by their ties to the land and their sense of a perpetual inheritance passing through the generations. The social customs, traditions, and laws that governed their interactions and attitudes were impressed on them as children by their parents and elders, and their sense of honor and shame as a sort of social calculator affected the success or failure of their households (p. 408).

IX.     Sustenance: Integrated Approaches to Themes in Economic Contexts

53. Seasons, Crops, and Water in the Land of the Bible (*Oded Borowski*)

The Bible is a story of a people in a particular place at a particular time. However, to understand the text one needs a context, which includes the land and the different forces that shaped it. … As it appears from the written and archaeological evidence, the Israelites and other inhabitants of the land during the period of the Hebrew Bible recognized the potential embedded in the available natural resources and, most importantly, learned to manipulate these resources to their advantage and to employ the natural conditions of the land to their benefit (pp. 411, 415).

54. Trade in the Late Bronze and Iron Age Levant (*Joshua T Walton*)

Trade permeated all aspects of life in the ancient Near East, and the biblical world was no exception. While the Bible rarely focuses on long-distance trade, it served as an important backdrop for biblical texts, from the narrative of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba to Ezekiel's oracle against Tyre. Control of major overland trade routes and maritime ports was an important motivating factor in the political endeavors of ancient Near Eastern polities and serves as a background to the political conflicts recorded in the book of Kings. Understanding the role in statecraft of trade in luxury items helps provide a framework for the persistent striving of ancient Near Eastern kings to acquire exotic foreign goods throughout the Bronze and Iron ages (p. 422).

55. Slavery in the World of the Bible (*Richard E Averbeck*)

Slavery was an important institution in the ancient Near Eastern world, and so it was in ancient Israel as well. … Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, however, shaped how they were to view and manage slavery.

Yahweh's main concern was that the Israelites belonged to him and to him alone, not to any other god and not to any other master. He was their Lord and Master. In conclusion to the slavery regulations in Leviticus 25:39-55, the Lord made the point clear … The term for 'servant' here is the regular term for 'slave' used in the previous context. Slave terminology was also used metaphorically for the relationship that the people and their leaders had with God or their gods, and sometimes relationships with people of honored status (p. 423).

## 56. The Local Economies of Ancient Israel (*Peter Altmann*)

It is possible to overlook the important economic role played by the religious sphere in ancient Israel and Judah. Many religious practices included trips to a regional or national sanctuary (e.g., Jerusalem, Bethel, Shiloh, Dan). These pilgrimages consisted in large part of communal feasts, like the most extravagant meals consumed by the majority of families the whole year. The considerable economic expenditures at these events gave rise to a focus of wealth at sanctuaries: priests and Levites could eat the wealth of the land (p. 435).

## 57. Metallurgy in the World of the Bible (*Brady Liss and Thomas E Levy*)

The importance of copper/bronze in the biblical sphere is made immediately apparent in the construction of the tabernacle and Moses's copper serpent (Exod. 26-36; Num. 21:9. … Some technological aspects of metallurgy including specific processes and knowledge are also addressed in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Job provides insight concerning mining activities and smelting where metals are listed among other 'precious' materials extracted from the earth … The author of Job displays a clear familiarity with the early stages of copper production: the mining of ores and extraction of metal through smelting. In addition, the production of copper/bronze objects is briefly described during the furnishings of Solomon's temple … (1 Kings 7:46) (p. 439).

## 58. Ancient Technologies of Everyday Life (*Gloria London*)

Ancient houses were small. The limited interior space accommodated sleeping, food storage, clothes, bedding, and at times a household shrine. The few small windows kept out the heat or cold. The rooftop and adjacent courtyard, which were larger than the interior sleeping and storage quarters, functioned much of the year for cooking, cleaning, eating, playing, and summertime sleeping. The courtyard was repurposed seasonally for making

pottery and processing food in summer, or for daily cooking and sheltering animals in fall and winter (p. 451).

59. Food Preparation in Ancient Israel (*Cynthia Shafer-Elliott*)

Food is often used as a metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. Since bread was the mainstay of life in ancient Israel, it should come as no surprise that bread is the most widely used food metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. Bread frequently symbolizes God's provision for the Israelites. … The definitive example of bread as God's provision is the 'bread from heaven' or manna. … A second example of food as a metaphor within the Hebrew Bible is the idiom 'a land flowing with milk and honey … The idiom is intended to highlight and exaggerate the abundance of the so-called Promised Land (p. 462).

60. Feasting in the Biblical World (*Janling Fu*)

In the Hebrew Bible, for instance, the term *mishteh* normally is used to designate a banquet or feast. These occasions seem to be one-time events hosted by an individual. Many involve a rite of passage such as a birthday (Gen. 40:20), weaning (Gen. 21:8), wedding (Judg. 14), or funeral (Jer. 16:5-8), although there are also occasional episodes of hospitality (Gen. 19:3 …). Beyond these hosted events are also communal, religious (e.g., Exod. 10:9; 12:14; Deut. 16:1-8), seasonal, and agricultural festivals (Deut. 16:9-17), here using the Hebrew term *hag* ('festival'). An explicit focus on the clan is also attested (1 Sam. 20) (p. 465).

61. Music and Dance in the World of the Bible (*Annie F Caubert*)

Music and dance are universal phenomena of humankind, basic and essential parts of world culture. Across time and space, a number of invariant elements are present in different civilizations, which individual aspects have changed with time in different regions, each people or culture evolving in their own ways. … Perhaps because it reaches beyond human nature, music is a world apart from reality, entailing an element of 'otherness' on the part of the musicians and dancers, who are seen as 'different' from regular humankind. This difference is expressed by a number of physical traits: the blind, the eunuch, the hybrid monster, and the animal as musicians are recurrent features in the artifacts from ancient civilizations" (pp. 468, 472). [*It was disappointing not to find any reference to the Hebrew Psalms, psalmody, and psalmic instruments in this chapter – EW.*]

X.  Governance: Integrated Approaches to Themes in Social Organization

### 62. Kingship and the State in Ancient Israel (*Nili S Fox*)

The kingdom of Judah survived until 586 BCE, more than a century after the fall of Israel. With the exception of one usurper – Athaliah – the other nineteen rulers of Judah belonged to the Davidic dynasty and ruled from Jerusalem, the capital established by David. But although the kings of Judah belonged to the divinely chosen royal line, biblical writers are critical of more than half, whom they accuse of perverted religious practices. Furthermore, of those who receive positive evaluations, all except Hezekiah and Josiah are berated for maintaining functional shrines outside Jerusalem. In contrast Hezekiah and Josiah, credited with sweeping religious reforms, were held as examples of model kings (p. 478).

### 63. Social Stratification in the Iron Age (*Avraham Faust*)

[M]any texts present the perspectives of members of the urban, usually male, upper class. Not only are such texts biased in their presentation of information, but they also ignore some issues altogether. Rural life can serve as an example of a topic that is not often mentioned in texts, and the Bible is hardly an exception; life in small villages, hamlets, and farmsteads usually is not mentioned in the texts at all. Thus, although essential for many topics, the textual sources are sometimes insufficient for study of the entire fabric of ancient societies. Archaeology, however, despite its own shortcomings, does supply us with information on all segments of society, including the lower social strata, as well as women, children, and even the rural population (p. 482).

### 64. Law and legal Systems in Ancient Israel (*David W Baker*)

Israelite law covered much that was relevant to the people's lives. Ritual prescriptions and other 'religious' instructions are well represented and are applicable to both the local and national cult. … Care for the powerless and disenfranchised – widows, orphans, and resident aliens – was mandated by law (Exod. 22:22-24; 23:6, 9; Deut. 14:28-29; 24:17-21; 27:19), and their neglect was frequently chastised by the prophets (Isa. 1:23; 10:1-2; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5) and also recognized as unacceptable by wisdom writers (Job 22:9; 24:3, 21). This deserved careful considerations by the Israelites since they are of concern to God (Deut. 10:17-18), who himself takes the place of the father and husband they lost (Ps. 68:5). In fact, economic crime and exploitation are targeted by the prophets for

condemnation more than any other single type of crime or sin. If it is such a concern to Israel's God, so should it be to his people (p. 498).

### 65. Wisdom Traditions in Ancient Israel (*Paul Overland*)

… Israel's sages shared with comrades of cognate cultures a worldview grounded in the durability of truth, harmony, and justice – a dependability made possible by orderliness issuing from the divine realm. While wisdom gained personification within Israel's literature, this literary device did not extend to deification (in contrast to the theologies of neighboring nations) … As in neighboring nations, periodic disruption of order and an apparent breakdown of divine retribution in Israel gave rise to compositions (often dialogues) wrestling with the injustice of undeserved misfortune or lamenting unfairness of life (Job, Ecclesiastes, and selected psalms …) (pp. 504-505).

### 66. Warfare in the World of the Bible (*Mark Schwartz*)

[Some] scholars hold that the texts [about warfare] are accurate reflections of historical events and see *herem* as the reaction of Yahweh against sin, not against a particular ethnic group … Likewise, the 'ban' was a necessary evil to prevent the greater evil of Israel turning away from Yahweh ..., in addition to being a necessary precondition for the establishment of a kingdom of Israel in the region … Other scholars have taken a more holistic view of the text, stressing that the Hebrew Bible should be examined *in totum*, looking at the overall message and balancing portions that we may find troubling [today] with texts that stress tolerance, peace, and coexistence with other peoples (Exod. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 23:7-8) … (p. 513).

## *3.    CONCLUSION*

I must admit that I was nearly put off at first sight by the sheer size of this volume, its weighty title, and the long listing of chapters dealing with topics and fields of study that, though related to the Hebrew Bible, I am not very familiar with. But the authors' instructive explanatory introduction and organizational outline put me at ease, so I decided to dig in and at least give the book a try. I was pleasantly surprised and very quickly drawn into the numerous detailed investigations that immediately took me "behind the scenes" of the text of the Old Testament to reveal a wealth of fascinating features concerning its manifold diverse, but closely interrelated cultural, social, historical, and religious settings, which together form the

indispensable contextual "cognitive environment" for understanding what has been written in the Scriptures.[6]

The constituent chapters are not overly long and each one is well composed, easy enough to follow for most non-specialists, and always informative enough to keep one reading right the way through to the next, which seemed to make the most sense in order for one to benefit from what appeared to be a careful arrangement of articles. Obviously, some chapters will probably turn out to be more interesting for readers than others, and there are occasional claims or assertions that a person will not always agree with. But as I have tried to suggest by the selected quotations that accompany every chapter in the outline above, there is always something worth noting and remembering in each of these 66 individual studies. The goal of this book in my opinion has been admirably accomplished; it is indeed an "accessible resource" that will serve to introduce a wide range of readers, both scholars and students, to many salient aspects of the wider Near Eastern context that underlies the text of the Hebrew Bible and which provides a vital hermeneutical grid and frame-of-reference for its exegetical understanding and contemporary application.

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Hendel, R & Joosten, J 2018. *How Old is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study* (The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library). New Haven / London: Yale University Press. 240 pages, 6 1/8 x 9 1/4, 4 b/w illus. ISBN 9780300234886. $45.00.

## 1.    INTRODUCTION

This book is an adventurous project by two well-known scholars who have been occupied with textual criticism of the Bible in the broad sense of the term for decades. It is at the same time a joint venture. Hendel took responsibility for Chapters 1, 2, 8 and Appendix 2, while Chapters 3 to 7 and Appendix 1 are predominantly Joosten's handiwork. Moreover, they reviewed and revised each other's contributions, so that they are both responsible for the whole. The study is published in the Anchor Yale Bible

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6    It would have been much more effective if the illustrations, especially in the earlier chapters, had been given in color rather than a dull black and white (e.g., pp. 13-17). Of course, this would have increased the cost of this book, but as it is, the figures supplied are not all that inviting or helpful (e.g., especially p. 29).

Reference Library under the editorship of John J Collins. These scholars represent a broad scholarly and theological tradition, and the book is suitable for the student, the specialist and the layperson.

## 2.      *ALL THINGS CHANGE – LANGUAGE AND METHODOLOGY*

The authors are clear about their goals: "Our goal is to think clearly about some complicated matters and to contribute to a multilayered understanding of the biblical text" (p. xi).

Glancing through the different chapters, one detects an overwhelming theme of CHANGE. Four of the 8 chapters involve change. Chapter 1 is entitled "All Things Change: Language and Method", Chapter 2 reads "Kinds and Causes of Linguistic Change", Chapter 3 is entitled "How to Handle Linguistic Variation", and Chapter 4 "Textual History and Linguistic History". According to the authors, languages and texts change over time and across speech communities. Texts change because scribes (and, more recently, typesetters) make mistakes and introduce revisions. Despite controversy and scepticism, their aim is to show how this field of knowledge, when pursued with methodological rigor, is viable and illuminating. It allows them, within limits, to discern the age of biblical literature.

A feature of this book is the amount of sample texts offered as proof material. A definite positive for their purposes is the number of Dead Sea Scrolls that are currently available. But the authors are realistic and confess that there are many gaps in their evidence and information. Unfortunately there are no native speakers nor informants from the early periods, only texts.

## 3.      *LINGUISTIC CHANGE AND HISTORICAL METHOD*

Another goal is expressed as follows: "The question we pose in this book is whether the historical linguistics of Biblical Hebrew is useful in determining the age of the biblical writings" (p. 5). Many scholars think that it is not the case; they include Joel Baden, David Carr, Reinhard Kratz and Konrad Schmid. The only recent exception is found in Israeli scholarship: Alexander Rofé, in *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, who takes seriously the linguistic evidence.

According to the authors, the idea of this book is to reinscribe historical research on Hebrew language where it belongs, namely at the heart of biblical studies (p. x). The question is whether historical linguistics of Biblical Hebrew is useful to determine the dating of biblical writings.

A number of syntheses appeared recently that ignore or dismiss the relevance of linguistic enquiry. The question remains: What accounts for this situation in American and European scholarship? According to Hendel and Joosten, there are two possible answers (p. 5). The first is the institutional situation. The historical linguistics of Biblical Hebrew is simply not taught in most graduate programmes any longer. The second problem has to do with critical method. Many studies have a standard of evidence and argument for linguistic matters that can be described as naïve positivism. According to this standard, any analysis that is not objectively true is excluded as subjective and unprovable (p. 5).

## 4.    KINDS AND CAUSES OF LINGUISTIC CHANGES

According to the authors, biblical scholars are overly sceptical about the appropriate historical models formulated for language change because of the standard of objectivity for linguistic arguments. The truth of the matter is that historical knowledge is not objective, but inferential and probabilistic. Historical scholarship is a multifaceted task. It is always incomplete and corrigible. It involves conjecture, false leads and contestable judgments. In short, falsification is the name of the game. Achieving certainty and objectivity are false aims in historical criticism. The question remains: Is there linguistic evidence relevant for the study of the literary history of the Hebrew Bible? Since the Hebrew Bible consists solely of linguistic discourse? The answer is yes, there is such evidence. To the extent that we can formulate well-warranted explanations of language change, these are clearly relevant for investigating the relative or absolute dates of biblical literature. There are many complications involved and many areas of expertise that are pertinent.

Despite these limitations, the study of language is an indispensable collaborator to a study of the literary history of the Hebrew Bible. Its linguistic discourses contain traceable evidence of their time of composition. For example, in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian period, when Hebrew speakers encountered Aramaic as the language of administration and law, foreign words (from Aramaic, Akkadian, Persian) were borrowed into Hebrew to designate different categories of writing.

A degree of Aramaic literacy was necessary for many, and complete fluency required for some, such as the governor Nehemiah and his collaborators. The role of Aramaic in the administration was already in place by the late sixth century BCE. During the Persian period Aramaic had began to displace the old Hebrew script not only for administrative, legal

and commercial use, but also in the transmission of sacred texts (p. 10). The old Hebrew script became a relic, to be revived in later times of national resurgence. In the meantime, Aramaic was both the prestige language and the everyday *lingua franca*. Consequently, the regular use of both spoken and written Aramaic profoundly affected the lexicon and syntax of LBH.

## 5.     *HOW TO HANDLE LINGUISTIC CHANGES?*

The textual history of the Hebrew Bible generates local "noise", but it does not alter the big picture. The profiles of CBH and LBH are distinct, despite textual alterations. The criterion of accumulation allows historical linguists to tell them apart.

Textual criticism is simply indispensable and has the global effect of confirming the diachronic approach. The textual history of the Hebrew Bible provides an explanation for occasional "false positives", late features occurring in a relatively early text. In addition, such late features in the CBH corpus can often be shown to have entered the text secondarily, as scribal mistakes, as occasional modernizations, or as products of textual growth. Textual criticism and historical linguistics belong together, and together they contribute to a better understanding of the biblical text.

## 6.     *LITERARY ALLUSIONS*

Many texts refer covertly or overtly to earlier texts or traditions. This literary practice reflects the increasing authority of the religious texts that would come to constitute the Bible. Jewish authors of the Persian period and later defined their cultural identity in terms of those texts. Judaism gradually turns into a book-based pseudoclassicism. Hebrew did not die out in the sixth century BCE: it continued as a living language through the exilic and post-exilic periods up to the time of the Jewish wars in 70 and 135 CE. Many vernacular developments show up in LBH (p. 37). But the authors of the LBH corpus did not simply write in the Hebrew of their own period. At times they used features of classical Hebrew that had long fallen from use in the living language. Hence it remains difficult to determine the true situation.

## 7.     *CONTRAST BETWEEN CHB AND LBH*

Non-diachronic factors of variation complicate diachronic analyses, but they do not make a historical approach to Biblical Hebrew impossible. Solomon Schechter, the discoverer and editor of medieval manuscripts of the Damascus Document – a work that later turned out among the Dead Sea

Scrolls – described the language as for the most part pure Biblical Hebrew. According to Hendel and Joosten, Schechter's judgment remains true (p. 93). This is not to say that the Hebrew of the sectarian scrolls matches CBH in all details.

## 8.     THE CRITERION OF DISTRIBUTION

Avi Hurvitz has developed 4 criteria to apply in historical research on Biblical Hebrew:

1. Late biblical distribution;

2. Linguistic contrast with classical equivalents;

3. Extrabiblical corroboration; and

4. Accumulation.

These criteria have remained the bedrock of his methodology (p. 43). The first concerns late biblical distribution and is only valid if all the occurrances are found in books of LBH corpus.

## 9.     PSEUDO-CLASSICISMS, BIBLICAL HEBREW AND QUMRAN HEBREW

The Dead Sea Scrolls were produced later than the biblical books and have probative value (p. 96) only for the Hebrew of their time. Nevertheless, the study of their language can contribute much to the historical approach to Biblical Hebrew. According to the authors Qumran Hebrew is an important heuristic for identifying pseudo-classicisms in LBH (p. 85). LBH and Qumran Hebrew share many features and are generally close to one another. After several instances of reanalysed biblical expressions were observed in Qumran Hebrew, it simply seemed correct to consider whether similar phenomena occurred in LBH. This turned out indeed to be the case. In addition, Qumran Hebrew allows one to have a more global view of pseudo-classicisms as an historical phenomenon: what started out as a sporadic array of features became pervasive characteristics.

As in the case of LBH, pseudo-classicisms in Qumran Hebrew have striking implications for their underlying view of language. Among the sectarians, classical Hebrew was defined expressly as God's own language. (p. 96) Their ideology of Hebrew explains their active attempt to produce new texts in the language of scripture.

Pseudo-classicisms first emerge as a feature of style and register. The post-classical authors spoke their own version of post-classical Hebrew, but in their written texts they at times preferred to formulate their thoughts in

language borrowed from classical texts. This practice seems to have been a conscious one, involving the writer's decision to imitate CBH. Texts from the same period and milieu show different degrees of this tendency: while Chronicles has several pseudo-classicisms and the Hodayot has many, Ecclesiastes has very few and the Copper Scroll none at all (p. 93). Although the phenomenon seems to affect the entire corpus of literary Hebrew of the late Persian and Hellenistic periods, it is more characteristic of individual texts and their genres than of the language itself. Of course, over time a usage that starts out as a stylistic feature can become entrenched in the language system. Some pseudo-classicisms eventually become part of the common lexicon. Pseudo-classicisms are not very numerous in LBH, and they are hard to demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt. They are nevertheless important in a diachronic approach to Biblical Hebrew. They undermine the idea of "perfect archaizing": however proficient later authors may have been in classical Hebrew, they inevitably tripped up in one way or another. What may look like identical languages can in reality be shown to be only superficially similar, but divergent in meaning or form. Pseudo-classicisms also attest to the temporal distance between CBH and LBH: it took time for CBH expressions to be forgotten, revived, and exploited anew in original writing. Finally, pseudo-classicisms give unique insight into the way Hebrew evolved after the monarchic period. From a national language, Hebrew turned, slowly and gradually, into the property of a community, an "ecclesiolect" (p. 97).

## 10.    *TEXTUAL AND LINGUISTIC HISTORY*

Language, according to Roman Jakobson, is dynamic synchrony, a system in an evolving equilibrium of past and incipient changes (p. 41). In such systems earlier and later features mix in different proportions and do not per definition match the definition of time. A further source of variation is textual history. These aspects complicate the task of Hebrew linguistics.

## 11.    *CONSILIENCE AND CULTURAL HISTORY*

The authors use as their guiding threads two methodological principles: consilience and cultural history (p. 99). The principle of consilience states that different types of evidence converge in a true (or well-warranted) theory. Cultural history is a mode of historical inquiry that takes its cues from incidental features of texts to elucidate the milieus and mentalities of the past. The method of cultural history includes in its focus literary fictions

and the social *imaginaire* (p. 99) as well as actual events. It attends to the interweaving tracks of real and invented history.

The use of the Persian loanword "daric" is a case in point (p. 119); it is not merely an accidental anachronism. It also has a rhetorical and ideological purpose. The use of foreign words from a prestige language lends cultural authority to the narrated scene. The addition of gold darics to the list of bullion is a stylistic nuance that affirms the prestige of the first temple and its imagined wealth. The legendary prosperity of the Davidic-Solomonic era, expressed by mentioning the most valuable currency of the country, is here a feature of the Jerusalem temple and extends by analogy to the Second Temple of the Chronicler's day. The prestige of the Jerusalem temple – then and now – and the importance of generous contributions are expressed in terms of the vast sums of gold darics.

## 12.    CONSILIENCE AND LITERARY HISTORY: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Biblical Hebrew has a history that can be traced through the multitude of variations because of textual transmission, dialects and literary styles. There are three main phases or chronolects: classical (CBH), transitional (TBH) and late (LBH). To date corpora, one has to supplement linguistic perspectives with other kinds of scholarship. In this regard Blum suggests a broader historical-philological approach (p. 98).

Loanwords are also useful criteria. The use of Greek words for Aramaic musical instruments in Dan 3:5 represent an endeavour to capture the excellence of the Babylonian empire. At the same time it demonstrates the impact of Greek culture (p. 119). The linguistic and historical inferences are consilient, indicating the validity of the theory. There are other possible explanations for the linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible – such as contemporary dialects or stylistic preferences – but these possibilities lack consilience. The authors close with a statement of why the most consilient model – based on the convergence of different bodies of data and inference – is preferable to one that is merely possible.

They infer the explanations precisely because these would, if true, explain the phenomena. Of course, there is always more than one possible explanation for any phenomenon. It must somehow be the best of competing explanations. Joosten and Hendel submit that the best explanation – the most consilient one – is the model they have advanced to account for the dating of biblical literature. According to them the historical context of CBH is the pre-exilic period. The model of the linguistic history

of Biblical Hebrew that has been refined since Gesenius' time, in their opinion, has a high degree of consilience with newly discovered data.

## 13.   *THE REVISIONIST MODEL*

Young and Rezetko suggest a novel approach for understanding linguistic variation in Biblical Hebrew. In contrast to the standard model, which includes SYNCHRONIC VARIATION and DIACHRONIC CHANGES, they developed a new perspective on Biblical Hebrew (p. 135). They argue that most or all variation in the Bible are the result of the co-existing styles of literary Hebrew during the biblical period. Moreover, the dating of linguistic data is infeasible and the nature of the sources of data does not permit it (p. 135). The authors react to these two strong claims. If historical linguistics of Biblical Hebrew cannot be properly done, then neither can its findings be used to date biblical texts, either relatively or absolutely. Upon closer examination, according to the authors, there are aspects of these two claims that do not cohere, and the methodology on which both claims rest seems to unravel. Aside from inaccuracies in individual analyses, Young and Rezetko's "non-chronological" model, according to Hendel and Joosten, is flawed by three interrelated problems of method (p. 136). These problems are:

1. MT-only approach – unfortunately, according to the authors, this onesided approach, skews their results. In the process, the TEXTUAL CRITICISM as scientific discipline effectively plays no role.

2. Their construal of ancient variants according to text critical practices is wrong. The inferences that Young and Rezetko draw from their statistical distributions are unwarranted. The "non-chronological" model is based on an uncritical use of the MT as basis for their linguistic generalizations.

3. The inferences they draw from their statistics are incorrect according to the normal procedures of historical linguistics.

In the final analysis, according to Hendel and Joosten The Revisionist Model of Biblical Hebrew simply leaves too many unanswered questions, therefore it cannot be regarded as a viable proposition.

## 14.   *CONCLUSION*

The experiment by Hendel and Joosten may be deemed a successful one. All the goals formulated by the authors seem to be accomplished. However,

I am not sure that the views of Young and Rezetko received a fair share of attention. The least one can say is that surely the last word has not been spoken on this topic. I, for one, was convinced by the way the authors demonstrated that linguistic-based research has implications for the dating of texts.

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Noonan, B J 2020. *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic. 336 pages. ISBN 9780310596011 (Softcover). $38.99.

## 1.    INTRODUCTION

Following Campbell's (2015) Greek edition, Benjamin Noonan takes up the task of offering a fresh and comprehensive overview of the current state of the field of Hebrew and Aramaic studies. From the outset his objective is clear: providing "a better understanding of what the key issues are in Hebrew and Aramaic scholarship and why they matter" (p. 25). Two central concerns are evident throughout the volume, which condition Noonan's approach. The first is the value of recent scholarly insights for exegesis of the Hebrew and Aramaic (henceforth H&A) text, and the second is the importance of an informed application of modern linguistic frameworks. Indeed, "linguistics directly impacts exegesis" (p. 31). For this reason, he offers a short introduction into the field of linguistics before surveying key areas of H&A research. He astutely reminds the reader to be conscious of the specific linguistic framework being used by key resources, such as the Comparative-Philological slant of both the Brown-Driver-Briggs and Köhler-Baumgartner lexicons, or the Structuralism of Joüon-Muraoka's and Walktke-O'Conner's grammars. We would no doubt be more effective users of such resources if we intentionally kept their methodological approach in mind and maintained a critical awareness of the potential advances that could be made under more adequate frameworks.

## 2.    OVERVIEW

After briefly defining linguistics and offering an overview of the major schools of thought throughout the last couple of centuries, Noonan travels back in time to take the reader through a survey of the history of H&A study, from the Middle Ages onward. This overview also provides the

reader with the historical origin of certain practices which have continued unquestioned to the present day - some rightly so, and others which should be questioned. For example, Jonah ibn Janāḥ's (ca. 990-1050) *Book of [Hebrew] Roots* being the "first dictionary to group word by their three-letter root and present its entires in alphabetical order" (p. 54) or Abraham de Balmes' organisation of his grammar into phonology, morphology and syntax (p. 55). However, from De Balmes' work, and indeed throughout the increased interest in the study of H&A during the Renaissance, the emergence of Latin concepts and grammatical categories were forced upon H&A study, until the Comparative approach placed it back within its Semitic context. This chapter helpfully highlights that only when we are aware of where we have come from can we sift through what we have inherited, building upon the good and having the insight to discern where corrections or alternative approaches are needed.

Noonan dedicates the rest of the volume to providing a brief overview of areas of interest, with the goal, "not to be comprehensive but instead to capture the most important developments in Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic studies, especially as they follow developments in linguistics" (p. 52). He transitions from lexical to verbal semantics and the semantic-pragmatic interfaces of H&A's tense-aspect-mood systems, before embarking into more pragmatic concerns of discourse analysis and word order. He then guides us through the relatively less-travelled areas of the concerns of *register* (discussing *generational* and *gender register* along with *politeness* in general), before examining *dialectal* considerations, *diglossia*, *style-shifting* and finally, *code-shifting*. A natural extension of these areas (and indeed an application of all the preceding chapters) opens the way for informed discussion about the dating of biblical literature, the results of which, hold significant exegetical potential. The material in both of these latter chapters is under-studied and thus provide fruitful areas of research in the future. The final chapter provides the application of the insight gained from the foregoing survey to the important consideration of biblical language pedagogy. Unfortunately, in seminaries and other biblical institutions, there is an alarming lack of requirement for biblical language training, if any, so the onus is on both scholars and teachers to connect the advances in linguistics and H&A scholarship to the classroom with methodology which will both ease the learning process and help students retain their languages in the future.

## 3.    CRITICAL INTERACTION

Noonan shows how H&A lexicology has historically suffered from the limits of componential analysis or etymological approaches, which are not certain routes to the lexeme's semantic import at the moment of writing, while Comparative Philological or Structuralist approaches ignore encyclopedic knowledge or prototype theory – the *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*, developed by United Bible Societies, being the exception. Nevertheless, he rightly warns that we must "recognize lexicons for what they are – tools – and what they are not – the final authority on the meaning of words" (p. 86).

Although lexicology is perhaps considered the most obvious application of the insights of Cognitive Linguistics, surveyed in Noonan's first chapter, the contribution of prototype theory remains implicit in Noonan's survey of verb stems and tense-aspect-mood systems (Chapters 4-5). Regarding the *binyanim*, the shortcomings of previous approaches involve largely focusing on translation values and "forcing the verbal stems into a neat and tidy framework" (p. 116). It is strange, then, that Noonan intuitively understands that these verb stems do not necessarily require a single meaning, or unifying function (pp. 104-106, 108), yet fails to connect this insight to the polysemy which results from diachronic processes and the resulting semantic network under prototype theory. He rightly exhorts scholars to avoid forcing such a tidy framework, since, "Each stem has typical functions, but exceptions certainly exist" (p. 116). The recent flourishing of scholarly interest in the *binyanim* is matched by the diverse and numerous studies in pursuit of understanding the tense-aspect-mood characteristics of the H&A verbal systems. Noonan here reaches a similar conclusion as with the verb stems, that due to diachronic processes "it makes it difficult to label [Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic] with tense, aspect, or mood as the prominent category. Rather, each of the three come into play in varying degrees depending on the stage of the language" (p. 143).

As mentioned above, Noonan argues that discernment of different scholars' linguistic approaches allows for a more informed reading and appreciation of their work. He applies this appropriately throughout his overview of lexicology, verb stems and the verbal system, and notes that functional approaches have been key to developments in discourse analysis of H&A (Chapter 6) due to their concern with pragmatics. However, when approaching the question of word order, the reader finds the following exhortation: "It would be beneficial for future scholarship to analyze word

order in Biblical Hebrew without being so tied to such specific linguistic theories … There remains significant need for defining basic word order in broader linguistic terms" (p. 198). Since Noonan has repeatedly encouraged the use of linguistic theory and praised the application of a specific model or compatible eclectic approach, the reason for abandoning specific frameworks when searching for so-called basic word order is unclear, as is its feasibility (see Song 2012). Noonan continues, "Particularly important here is the need to establish which clauses should be included and which should be excluded when determining basic word order" (p. 198). The question should perhaps be reformulated to, "Why should we exclude any clause types?" The Biblical Hebrew (BH) corpus is too small (not to mention the Biblical Aramaic corpus!) to afford the luxury of "weeding out" clause types, while the utility of the guidelines found in primitive typological studies, such as Greenberg's (1963) model, is questionable for ancient languages. Instead, biblical studies would benefit from more developed typological models. Construction Grammar, for example, seems readily applicable to a closed corpus of an ancient language by treating each construction as a symbolic form-function pairing in certain discourse situations. Historically, VSO has been the majority position in BH studies because of the clear dominance of its basic function in BH narrative as communicating topic-comment structures with predicate focus. Arguments for SVO as the standard constituent order are largely limited to Robert Holmstedt's work, which rightly must be addressed. Nevertheless, this "challenge" and "open debate" seems rather exaggerated.

Noonan's last chapter treats the important area of H&A language learning and teaching. Recent years have seen a rise in the implementation of second language pedagogy for the teaching of biblical languages. Noonan surveys key shifts and the scholars responsible from moving away from the traditional grammar-translation approach. He rightly stresses that "the inclusion of authentic biblical texts should be a top priority because it helps motivate the student and build confidence" (p. 263), while vocabulary training should go beyond basic glosses, "by facilitating connections with words in similar semantic domains, helping students to see the links between Hebrew words and real-world connections" (p. 264). The use of audio and images are also welcomed, "aiding students in making a form-meaning connection without interference from their native language" (p. 265). Doubtless, *production* of a second language is powerful for internalisation and retention, but two crucial problems arise when the implementation of second-language acquisition results in a communicative

approach. First, most students who approach H&A learning have the single intention of reading and exegeting the biblical text, not communicating, so integrating a communicative model may not be either necessary or resourceful in a classroom environment with credit hours already limited. Second, when dealing with biblical languages, we have no access to native speaker intuition, so we cannot be sure if the language we are producing (outside of verbatim repetition of the text) accurately reflects the language. However, nowhere in the entire chapter does Noonan question the applicability or pedagogical appropriateness of a communicative model of speaking, listening, writing and reading. The chapter amounts to an unquestioned endorsement for living language methodology applied to biblical language teaching. Noonan is correct to welcome the interest in second-language teaching research and developments, yet these pedagogical models can be more fruitfully and appropriately applied when limited to the development of the second-language *receptive* skill of reading.

## 4. *CONCLUSION*

All in all, Noonan has achieved his goal of providing "an accessible introduction to the world of Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic scholarship" (p. 279). Not only is the reader "caught up" with current scholarship in key areas of interest and development, but Noonan presents the material to allow them to "appreciate and even enjoy scholarship of the biblical languages" (p. 280). Although each chapter is necessarily limited in scope, the footnotes and bibliography provide the interested reader ample material to investigate further. It is clear that Noonan is well prepared to present such an overview and has provided both student and scholar with a valuable and up-to-date resource that will serve biblical scholarship well. Most praiseworthy is the continual emphasis on application for exegesis of the biblical text, as well as carefully applying modern linguistic frameworks and discerning those used by other scholars. It seems that the only shortcomings in Noonan's volume are those areas where he fails to live up to these very goals.

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Perdibon, A 2019. *Mountains and Trees, Rivers and Springs: Animistic Beliefs and Practices in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (LAOS 11). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag. XVI, 220 pages, 12 ill. ISBN 978-3-447-11321-2 (Printed Version), ISBN 978-3-447-19935-3 (E-Book [PDF]). €58.00.

This book is a revised version of Perdibon's PhD dissertation of the same name which was obtained from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2019 and was supervised by Nathan Wassermann. Perdibon should be commended for revising her PhD dissertation for publication so quickly, but there are issues which could have been ironed out if more time had been taken with the revisions.

This study examines how three natural elements – mountains, rivers and trees/plants – were conceived of and engaged with within the ancient Mesopotamian religious framework. As laid out in the *Introduction* (pp. 1-9), this is done by looking at questions of personhood, divinity, and landscape and cosmos as they apply to these natural elements in Mesopotamian religious sources. New animism, and particularly the concept of "other-than-human" persons, is of particular relevance to the study.

Chapter I *Animism and Mesopotamian Religion* (pp. 10-40) offers a background into the meaning of animism, including totemism, naturalism and analogism. The classical theories of animism of Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss are discussed first, and this is followed by an overview of new animism as understood by Hallowell, Bird-David, Descola, Viveiros de Castro and Harvey. The chapter concludes by providing a brief survey of research done into Mesopotamian religion and the understanding of deities and their role in nature. The views of Bottéro, Jacobsen, Lambert and Van Binsbergen and Wiggermann are discussed, as well as Porter's *What Is a God?* (2009), which appears to have been particularly influential for this study.

The following three chapters, Chapter II *Sacred Mountains and Mountain Deities* (pp. 41-85), Chapter III *River Deities, Cosmic Rivers and Sacred Springs* (pp. 86-133), and Chapter IV *Sacred Trees and Plant*

*Persons* (pp. 134-169), each provide a survey of one of the natural elements – mountains, rivers, and trees/plants respectively. This is done by looking at how each natural element is portrayed in religious ritual sources, primarily mythological narratives and incantations. Where relevant, hymns, prayers, lexical lists, the onomasticon and offering lists are used to substantiate arguments. Iconographic sources are also used as a complementary source, as "some visual representations can better explain the ancient Mesopotamian conceptualizations of natural elements, especially of Mountain and River deities" (p. 6). Mountain-persons and Mountain-gods such as Ebiḫ, the Aratta and Zagros Mountains, Mounts Šaššar and Bašar, Mount Labnanu and the Cedar Forest, and Mounts Māšu, Ḫašur, Nimuš and Aššur are discussed, as well as their protecting and purifying attributes, and their threatening nature. The rivers Id, Nāru, the Tigris and Euphrates, Baliḫ, Ḫubur and Ulāya are analysed as deities and cosmic rivers. Their motherly and purifying aspects are also discussed, as is their role in the River Ordeal. Trees and plants included are the *mēšu-*, *ḫuluppu-*, *ḫašurru* and *kiškanû*-trees, the Tamarisk, Date Palm, Cedar, Juniper, Boxwood and Cypress, and *eʾru*-wood. Trees/plants differ from mountains and rivers because they lack fully divine attributes, but they are similar in their purifying and protective attributes, and as cosmic entities. These main chapters would have benefitted from ending with a summary and analysis, which are instead included in Chapter V *Nature, Divinity and Personhood in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (pp. 170-195). These analyses summarise very well the entangled ways in which these three natural elements were conceived of and interacted with by the ancient Mesopotamians.

Perdibon demonstrates an unquestionably broad and deep knowledge of these three natural elements in the Mesopotamian religious sources. There are, however, some issues with the work. There are problems with references. For example, Perdibon references Woods (2005:15) on p. 46, and Woods (2005:18) on p. 90, but the information she provides is not from these referenced pages. The date of the Beaulieu's *The God Amurru as Emblem of Ethnic and Cultural Identity* is given by Perdibon on p. 69, 70 and p. 200 in the *Bibliography* as 2002, but is actually 2005. A similar error is that the order of the authors of Al-Rawi and George (2014), although correct in the *Bibliography* (p. 199) is reversed in the body of the text (pp. 77, 79, 80). Selz (1997) is included in the *Bibliography*, but is not found in the text. Presumably this work would originally have been included in the

discussion on Mesopotamian religion and the understanding of deities in Chapter I.

Some names are used uncritically. For example, Nudimmud is used instead of Enki on p. 167, and Gizzida is used in relation to the *Adapa* myth on p. 72, although Ninĝišzida is used on p. 167. Karaindaš is recorded as Karaindraš (pp. 59, 90). More concerning is the use of Dungi for Šulgi on p. 70, although Šulgi is used on pp. 97, 104, 118. There are also statements made with no substantiation. Perdibon states that Lambert's (1983) argument of the development of Aššur from a hill to a god "has been assumed valid by the scholarship ever since", and calls Van Binsbergen and Wiggermann's article (1999) "much-debated" (p. 34), but provides no examples of agreement or debate for either statement.

There are also some problems with the analysis of Ḫuwawa and the Cedar Mountain. The quote from the Old Babylonian version of the *Gilgameš Epic* on p. 77 does not include a reference (i.e., *Gilg*. OB Schøyen 2 lines 14-16, George 2003:234-235). There is also a problem with Perdibon's argumentation, as she states that Ḫuwawa is "considered the mountain itself", and is "the offspring of the mountain and somehow the Cedar Mountain itself" (p. 78). However, while represented as a mountain in Gilgameš's dream, there is no indication that Ḫuwawa was understood to be a mountain in the mythical reality of the *Gilgameš Epic*, nor, indeed, that he was envisaged as such in the Mesopotamian worldview.

What the ancient Mesopotamians understood as a god is still debated (see for example the contributions in Porter 2009). Perdibon argues convincingly for the natural elements having been conceived of as deities and/or having divine attributes, but the difficulties in the understanding of godhood in ancient Mesopotamia are highlighted by her use of terms like "proper god" (pp. 127, 129) and "deities *per se*" (p. 184). While it is a difficult concept with which to grapple, some clarification on Perdibon's understanding of these terms would have been helpful.

There are also some problems with the use of the iconographic sources. The drawings are problematic. For example, Illustration 12 on p. 152 is inaccurate, as the seal AO 11569 is not damaged as it is presented in the drawing (see Boehmer 1965:Taf. XXXII.379). There are also problems with interpretation or representation. The Kassite frieze of Inana's Temple at Uruk should not be taken as an example "of the ancient Mesopotamian conceptualization of the river deity as a female dyad" (p. 90, see also p. 119). This frieze has alternating river goddesses and mountain gods, and may speak to a plurality of these deities, or may just be a repeated

decorative motif. The roundel of Naram-Sîn is used in the discussion of mountain gods (p. 57) and river goddesses (p. 89), but Braun-Holzinger (2017) has argued convincingly against the roundel's authenticity based on iconographic, stylistic and technical reasons, and most scholars now accept these arguments (see for example Foster 2019:209 and Eppihimer 2019:195). There are though other examples of both the mountain gods and the river goddesses in the iconographic record. See Woods (2005) for other examples of river deities like those depicted on the roundel. The earliest example of a half-anthropomorphic half-mountain god is indeed from the Akkadian Period (Boehmer 1965:Taf.XXXVI.433. See also Zettler (1987:60 Fig. 1) for the Ur III seal of Lugal-engardu where two such mountain gods each proffer a bowl), but during this period deities which can be assumed to be mountain gods were more commonly depicted seated on a mountain (see e.g., Boehmer 1965:Taf. XXVI.300-304).

Perdibon has some interesting new insights. For example, on pp. 89-90 she states that the twin river goddesses from the iconographic repertoire have been interpreted as vegetation goddesses and the embodiment of the divine Euphrates, and then offers a third interpretation of these goddesses as "the cosmic divine rivers which emerge from *the pī nārāti*" or "Mouth-of-the-Rivers" (p. 90). On p. 61 Perdibon suggests syncretism between Bēlet-ilī and Ninḫursag in the first millennium "as both goddesses are associated with the mountains". Both goddesses are mother goddesses, and the Akkadian Bēlet-ilī is used for the Sumerian Ninḫursag in the bilingual *Lugale* (see line 396, Al-Rawi 1995:216). Their syncretism or identification with each other is therefore well established, but Perdibon's linking them with each other as goddesses associated with mountains adds an interesting new dimension to this relationship. Perdibon also repeatedly demonstrates that mountains, trees and rivers were intricately and intrinsically connected and interconnected in the ancient Mesopotamian worldview, and a summary of this in Chapter V would have been appreciated. However, her most valuable contribution is of course the body of this work – the examination of the personhood, divinity, and ecological conception of mountains, rivers and trees/plants in Mesopotamian religious thinking.

In the *Introduction* Perdibon quotes Landsberger's question (p. 7, from Rochberg 2016:43), "To what extent is it possible to reconstruct vividly and faithfully an ancient, alien civilizations (*sic*) by philological means, without the help of a tradition continuing down to the present day?" With *Mountains and Trees, Rivers and Springs* Perdibon shows that such a reconstruction is, indeed, possible.

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