

MacKenzie is modest in his conclusions: Raising doubts about Jewish authorship does not prove that a Gentile penned Revelation (3, 39-40, 59). Still, the fact that doubts are raised at all over the connection between Revelation and Jewish Christianity is significant.

Elsewhere ("Revelation: A Jewish/Christian Book?," *ARC* 15 [1987]:51-60), MacKenzie observes that regarding Revelation as the product of a minority ethnic group (Jewish) within the early Church may suggest to some that it is not representative of the early Christian movement. As a result, "the historian is not compelled to confront the possibility that the document may well be typical of the views of first-century Christians" (51, 58).

In *Author of the Apocalypse*, he notes that Revelation is frequently used in reconstructing the development of Jewish-Christianity, and in profiling its theological make-up (2). To the extent that he is able to bring into question the Jewish-Christian character of the Apocalypse, he also challenges those reconstructions of Jewish-Christianity that rely on it (3, cf. 167). Positively, a possible gentile provenance "opens new avenues of investigation about first-century Gentile-Christianity and about the significance that John's peculiar Greek style holds for the social description of the early Christian communities" (3).

The earliest statements about the ethnic background of the author—he was the Apostle John and therefore Jewish-Christian—are passed over in this study (e.g., Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, 1, 3, 166). Some readers may find this to be a serious omission. Also unfortunate are the number of misprints—my casual count found over thirty. These considerations aside, MacKenzie's *Author of the Apocalypse* is an important contribution to the study of the Book of Revelation and early Christian history—one which allows new possibilities "to swim into view."

Though one suspects that the contribution of this book will be fully appreciated only when its findings are applied in later work, subsequent research on these subjects will need to acknowledge this impressive study.

Michael J. Gilmour

McGill University

---

*The Context of Scripture. Volume I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World.* General editor, William W. Hallo. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997. ISBN 90-04-10618-9. Pp. 599.

---

Generations of students have benefited from J.B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, the premier English anthology of ancient documents related to the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Bible. The present series of three volumes edited by William Hallo, the first of which is reviewed here, will all but consign Pritchard's volume to the library shelf. *All but*, because not all of Pritchard's incorporated texts are presented as completely as in the earlier volume. Therefore students of ancient literature—in contrast to those interested primarily in the biblical parallels—will still need to consult other editions and translations.

Aside from the very impressive contents of the present volume, one of its most interesting aspects is the classification of the texts. It is dedicated to those specifically perceived as canonical within their respective cultural and literary contexts and is limited essentially to literary compositions. Volume 2, by contrast, will be devoted to Monumental Inscriptions; Volume 3, to Archival Documents. Together they should cover most of the Bible-related literary remains of ancient times.

Volume 1 is presented in five units: Egyptian, Hittite, West Semitic, Akkadian, and Sumerian. (Due to the process of selection, some languages—Aramaic, for example—are almost totally unrepresented, but presumably they will appear with greater regularity in the next volumes.) Each unit is organized into sections containing compositions of a divine, royal, or individual focus and is accompanied by a bibliography. Within each section, one recognizes many categories well-known from the broad field of biblical studies: prophecies, pseudepigrapha, hymns, prayers, rituals, fictional biographies, proverbs, love poems, historiography, and oracles, as well as cosmologies, myths, epics, and “just sufferer” compositions. These labels highlight the volume’s important claim about the nature of this material, its internal unity, and its many literary, religious, and cultural associations with biblical passages that bear similar designations.

Most of the texts are original translations; a number have been reprinted from Lichtheim’s *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Jacobsen’s *The Harps that Once...*, and other important translations. In all, almost forty contributors have assembled, introduced, translated, annotated, and generally improved the accessibility and usability of some 200 ancient texts. An index, glossary, and gazetteer will appear in the final volume.

It would be futile to attempt here a careful review of the many texts and their discussions: entire generations of scholars will praise, analyze, review, and attempt to improve upon this effort, as it becomes the standard against which all future considerations of the Bible’s relationship to ancient Near Eastern texts are developed. My advice to students and scholars alike is to start reading, review the texts you know, and study the others before the next two volumes appear and leave you in the dust. Pay careful attention to the ways in which the texts are presented; to their treatment in relation to the Bible and to each other; to the many important historical, literary and philological notes that enrich them; and to the manifold ways in which they broaden our understanding of the Bible, and the Bible helps to clarify them in turn. This effort is an important contribution that stands to benefit the entire learning and learned public.

One minor improvement of a historical point can be made in the first paragraph of the introduction. There, Hallo refers to Philo of Alexandria and Saadiah Gaon as early writers who correlated the Bible with the ancient world, because of the former’s description of Abraham as a speculative philosopher, and the latter’s use of Arabic to solve linguistic difficulties in biblical Hebrew.

However, as documented extensively in Ibn Janah’s medieval Arabic grammar of biblical Hebrew, translated as *Sefer HaRiqmah*, talmudic and

midrashic teachings (particularly those associated with Rabbi Levi) established the use of Arabic for this purpose centuries before Saadia. On occasion, the rabbis also used Latin, Greek, Coptic and other languages in this way, but one cannot support all of these analogies as systematic (or accurate) comparative philology.

Earlier, and more to the point, is Josephus's discussion of Noah and the flood. In it a contemporary of Philo has cited Berosus, and, through him, the Babylonian flood story. Josephus thereby exemplified, in a way far superior to Philo, the comparative methodology carried so much further over the centuries and now in Hallo's masterful anthology. Moreover, this comparative approach to world history and folklore, which is so typical of the Hellenistic age, did not originate with Josephus either. Other attempts to merge the identities of biblical and non-biblical characters predated this (e.g., Pseudo-Eupolomos, usually dated prior to the first century BCE). Yet, Josephus's comparison of Genesis with the flood traditions preserved in Berosus, Hieronymus the Egyptian, Manetho, and many other writers further reinforces the antiquity and the importance of modern, contextual Bible study. I suspect that Josephus, not Philo, should have received this particular mention.

B. Barry Levy

McGill University

---

*Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria.* By Ann Jeffers. *Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East.* Volume 8. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996. ISBN 90-04-010513-1. Pp. 277.

---

Jeffers's book is a detailed analysis of divination and magic as they emerge from the study of ancient Palestinian and Syrian texts, by which she means primarily the Hebrew Bible and secondarily, the Ugaritic corpus. Why a study of the Hebrew Bible should be named in this way is not immediately clear. Nevertheless, Syrian and Palestinian literature cognates to the Bible are never far from view in this study—even if certain self-imposed limitations leave the biblical associations with later and more distant corpora in need of further development.

Largely philological in nature, Jeffers's work is divided into four sections. A relatively short first chapter deals with some methodological issues and surveys the history of the study of biblical and cognate magic. Chapter 2 (comprising almost half the book), "Diviners, Magicians, and Oracular Practitioners," contains the discussions of some twenty-seven different terms associated with the professional practice of magic and divination. Here, one finds analyses of well-known Hebrew terms like *hakham*, *navi'*, *melashim*, and *ro'eh*, and perhaps less known ones like *gazerin*, *mekhashefim*, and *kasdim*, as well as a section on the ritual of passing a child through fire. A short chapter 3 deals with dreams and visions. Chapter 4—the best of the lot—is about divination techniques and devices. This final unit discusses astrology, heptascopy,