

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.

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*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.

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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,

hemerology, hydromancy, *teraphim*, *urim vetumim*, and the use of magic in medicine and warfare.

A revised dissertation, the volume reflects many of the strengths and weaknesses normally associated with that genre. On the positive side are its focus, its survey of the history of the field, and the attempt at developing some methodological procedure for ascertaining the meanings of specific terms. The thesis format has also translated into an expanded dictionary layout, which helps one find one's way easily through the book. The bibliography is good, and the references to it are constant, so many contacts with the appropriate secondary literature are evident.

On the other hand, one would wish for a further development of some terms and issues that is really impossible in the limited context and structure of the present book. Also, some of the philological associations, though adequately attributed to other writers, do not deserve the attention they receive. Furthermore, the method itself requires some work, as one often suspects that interest in magic has tipped the scales in favour of magic-related explanations, even when they are less than fully convincing—which sometimes allows speculative interpretation to appear as definitive etymology. Unfortunately, the table of contents must double as a subject index.

Certain broad statements are also erroneous. For example, the statement that "There is only once explicit reference to divination by means of water in the Old Testament, and that is in Genesis 44:5-15..." (160) really does not wash. The word "water" never occurs in that context, and it is at least as likely that the reference is to some other liquid.

In another instance, we are told that the notion claimed by earlier writers that the term *hakham* signifies more than "sage" or "wise man" is supported by such terms as *hakham harashim* and *hakhamim yode'ei ha-'ittim*. In reality, these compound forms suggest just the opposite: that *hakham* by itself did not carry much magical association. Evidence supporting the claim that *mehashefim* is "a Semitic herbalist" is far from convincing, and supposed proof from the Septuagint of Micah 5 adds little to a clear and unequivocal Hebrew text. In another case, the term *hozeh ha-melekh* is discussed, but never related to the obvious concepts of king or leadership.

Another difficulty with Jeffers's book is the range of ancient and Near Eastern texts associated with the Bible. While the formal limitations of Palestine and Syria must be respected (but often are extended by the author), the index cites four pages of references from the Hebrew Bible, and several dozen passages from the Ugaritic corpus—but only five others: one from the Arslan Tash Incantation, two from Laschich [sic] Ostraca (which are in Hebrew, not Phoenician), and two from ancient Aramaic inscriptions.

Though other terms and usages are cited occasionally, including those from the Sumerian, Akkadian, Greek, Latin, and even the Talmud, all seem to have been accessed largely from lexical or other secondary works, not developed through careful analysis of the primary sources. Much of the magical literature of Late Antiquity remains off limits. Also, the transliterations contain many

inaccuracies, reflecting, one would suppose, inadequate proofreading, but sometimes more: Ayyin and Aleph are regularly interchanged.

In short, this volume is of mixed value. Its bibliography is extensive, but too many philological data and observations are derived from secondary sources and are of questionable value. Though this work is a useful contribution in terms of gathering and organizing much available material on magic in the Bible, it is not the definitive study one might have hoped it to be.

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*Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament.* By Tilde Binger. JSOT Supplement Series 232. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997. ISBN 1-85075-637-6. Pp. 190.

*A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, Strategies.* Ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997. ISBN 1-85075-674-0. Pp. 654.

*Neo-Assyrian Historical Inscriptions and Syria-Palestine: Israelite-Judean-Tyrian-Damascene Political and Commercial Relations in the Ninth-Eighth Centuries BCE.* By Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan. Jian Dao Dissertation Series, 1. Bible and Literature, 1. Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1995. ISBN 692-7997-09-9. Pp. 281.

The following reviews present those books published by Sheffield Academic Press in the summer of 1997 which were of greatest interest to me as a feminist scholar of the Hebrew Bible. As a feminist, I might be expected to be interested in a book on the goddess or on feminist biblical interpretation. However, the third book, on neo-Assyrian historical inscriptions and their interpretations, focuses on history, and is interesting for quite different reasons. I do not suggest that these are the best of last summer's crop of Sheffield Academic productions, but only that I find all three worthy of attention for anyone sharing my particular interests.

In recent years, there has been much interest in goddesses and in the goddess Asherah as possibly alluded to in the Hebrew Bible. Scholarly essays and popular books have fueled this interest but, until now, scholarship lacked a recent book-length study in English of the goddess as related to the Hebrew Bible, and to the religion and society of ancient Israel. This short book re-evaluates scholarly work on Asherah from sources in Ugaritic texts, in inscriptions found in Israel, and in the Old Testament.

The introductory chapter presents the author's methodology, taken from "history, source criticism and historical criticism" (14), and hermeneutical stance. The discussion of the definitions of the terms "Ugaritic," "Israelite" and "Canaanite" in the next chapter concludes with a reference to Lemch's position (*Ancient Israel*, 1988) that the latter two terms were polemical labels applied by