

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.

B. Barry Levy

McGill University

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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.

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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

post-exilic Jews to themselves as "Israelites" and to those who had remained in the land as "Canaanites" who were "not Jewish enough" (23). This shows her acceptance of a late date for the Old Testament and her reliance on the historical perspective of Lemche.

Problems of evaluating source material, epigraphic material, Ugaritic texts and the Old Testament for historical purposes are introduced in chapter 3. Binger considers information gained from archaeological excavations as primary for historical reconstruction, expresses skepticism regarding the possibility of using the Old Testament for this purpose, and labels as "biblicist" and "fundamentalist" (38) those whose methods or presuppositions differ from her own.

Binger's discussion of Asherah is organized by sources of knowledge: Ugaritic texts, epigraphic finds in Israel, and the Old Testament. The central chapter concerns Asherah in Ugaritic texts and discusses the titles of Asherah, her role in the mythological and epic texts, and her place in lists of gods and of sacrifices offered to gods. The source material is discussed in some detail, with transliterated Ugaritic texts provided. One interesting speculation is Binger's association of Asherah with the day, rather than with the sea, as the ambiguity of the word "*ym*" permits. This chapter ends with a summary of statements which may confidently be made about Asherah based on Ugaritic texts: She is the creatress of the gods, a wet-nurse of the gods, and associated with the day or the sea. Binger dismisses speculation that Asherah was beginning to be identified as the consort of Baal, rather than of El.

The discussion of Asherah in epigraphic finds in Israel is based on the problematical Khirbet el-Qom inscription and on the Kuntillet Ajrud *pithoi*, which refer to the YHWH of particular locations and his Asherah. Grammatical problems in the use of the possessive suffix with a personal name are dealt with using what Binger acknowledges to be a circular argument (107). Her conclusion is that Asherah was a goddess, the consort of YHWH, and an official part of the religion of YHWH.

Out of forty mentions of Asherah in the Old Testament, Binger discusses six, which refer to a goddess or mention Asherah as related to YHWH. She bases historical speculation about the removal by Asa of the Queen Mother from her position on the version of the story in Chronicles. Some of the reasoning in this chapter is awkward. For example, if Manasseh is portrayed by the Deuteronomists as introducing the worship of Asherah to the Temple (116), then why do they include the incident with Asa and the Queen Mother two centuries earlier?

Binger presents a convincing picture of Asherah worship in Israel, but some details of her discussion are less so. The text concludes rather weakly with a discussion of whether Asherah is a name or title, in which Binger judges that it is both, and that it provides little information about the goddess denoted except that she is affiliated with the male high god.

In summary, while this book does not move the debate of the goddess Asherah in Ugarit and Israel forward appreciably, it does provide a useful compendium of sources, bibliography, and introduction to recent scholarly debate on the topic.

The substantial volume, *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible*, follows the publication of the ten volume series, *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* (1993-96), devoted to feminist critical work on biblical texts. This subsequent volume is intended to be a theoretical overview of the area of feminist biblical studies which complements the textual studies. Unlike previous volumes in the series, essays published in this volume were largely commissioned for this work, rather than republished from professional journals. The essays are arranged in ten sections, according to topics, or approaches taken within that section. As a Christian feminist and Hebrew Bible scholar, I find that these essays are of varying use and interest for my own continuing studies and reflections.

In the first section, "metacriticism," I found little of interest except for two essays which suggested new approaches to specific texts. Most of the metacritical remarks collected here have been said before. Others are of mixed help. For example, the value of Milne's remarks on the need for feminist biblical critics to be more involved in the wider discourse of feminism was unfortunately mitigated for me by her preference for excluding "confessional" scholars from the wider discourse of feminism, as their commitment to feminism is suspect (58-59). Such exclusion is all too familiar to those of us who have found ourselves excluded from or marginalized in the wider discourse of both our faith communities and the mainstream/malestream scholarly community on the grounds that our feminist commitment is considered suspect (to both groups).

Most disappointing in this book as a whole was a lack of information as to what is going on in feminist discourse in general. I had specifically looked for just this in order to find suggestions for new directions for biblical research.

The section of this book which contributed the most to my awareness of types of feminist analysis was that on rabbinics, partly because the focus on *halakhic* matters in rabbinic study provides an opportunity for the introduction of some interesting feminist research in law, but also because of the sophisticated analysis of production of gender in rabbinic texts, useful for feminist reading of texts which, like the Bible, were produced from an exclusively or predominately androcentric perspective.

In general, I found most interesting and most useful in this book precisely the element which was intended to be minimized in it: namely, the approaches to specific texts. In addition, the section on "Other Worlds" (ancient Near Eastern texts) and on "Other Close Contexts" (archaeology, iconography, and anthropology) are of interest.

A rather amazing inclusion in a book on feminist biblical perspective is John Pilch's article on "Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective" (306-23). Pilch begins his article with descriptions of the recent (1989) killing of a Palestinian woman by her father for bringing shame on the family by becoming pregnant while unmarried. He continues with an analysis of family violence in Mediterranean cultures, while repeatedly cautioning the reader against the ethnocentrism hidden in the practice by external observers of defining such behaviour as abuse (313). He concludes with a brief application of his approach to

biblical materials in which the only biblical example of spousal "violence" is Rebekah's deception of the aged Isaac (322).

It would be no surprise to me if an eminent feminist biblical scholar walked out of a seminar in which this type of material was being presented. It may not be too late to save the next generation of nameless daughters murdered by their fathers, or to mourn previous generations (see Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 1984, 93-116, on Jephthah's daughter). Feminist study of family violence affirms that it is an urgent issue not to be trivialized by supposed academic disinterest.

This said, I found both the information provided in this study and the analytical model suggested helpful for a better understanding of the origins of family violence and suggestive of ways to discourage it. The question of ethnocentrism raised by this essay is also introduced in a number of other essays, some of which seem to eschew feminist evaluation of past practices prejudicial to women for this reason (Meyers, "Recovering Objects, Re-visioning Subjects: Archaeology and Feminist Biblical Study," 270-84). The accusation of ethnocentrism is used to devalue feminist critique of biblical patriarchy (282).

Fortunately, this book also presents an alternate way to avoid ethnocentrism—one which does not involve silencing women. Kwok Pui-Lan's article, "Overlapping Communities and Multicultural Hermeneutics" (203-15), advocates listening to the voices of all women and underprivileged persons as a mode of biblical study producing liberating readings. This method, as seen in multiple readings of one biblical text from different social locations, exemplifies the traditional feminist attempt to give everyone a voice in the production of shared meaning and contributes some interesting alternative readings of the text. Pui-Lan's article shares in the major hermeneutical presupposition of this book that meaning is created by readers who approach the text from their social locations.

Change may still be possible through openness to other ways of seeing. Some such ways have been introduced in this book of essays, which is worthwhile for its rich diversity and (largely) feminist perspective.

*Neo-Assyrian Historical Inscriptions* is a Ph.D. dissertation completed at Emory University in 1994, under the supervision of John H. Hayes (author, with P.K. Hooker, of *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah*, 1988). In the Preface, Kuan also attributes his education in ancient Israelite history to J. Maxwell Miller (author, with Hayes, of *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 1986). While the title suggests that all of the ninth and eighth centuries BCE are covered, only the nearly 140 years before the fall of Samaria (the period encompassed by the reigns of the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser III [858-824 BCE] and Shalmaneser V [727-721 BCE]) are actually considered.

The approach of Kuan's teachers, Miller and Hayes, to history is apparent in this study—primarily in the willingness to consider the biblical text as one of a variety of sources, and to make adjustments as seem necessary when those sources conflict with the information given in the Bible. Neo-Assyrian historical inscriptions are the main extra-biblical source, but all other available texts—both monumental and literary—are used. For example, in the final chap-

ter Kuan finds no useful information in Neo-Assyrian texts, except for the accession of Shalmaneser V, and so makes extensive use of outside sources.

An example of his relation of biblical to other sources is Kuan's discussion of King Ahab of Israel, who is the first biblical ruler to appear in his work, and who had an important place in the coalition which opposed Shalmaneser III in 853 BCE (32ff). Kuan agrees with Miller and others (36, 108-12) that the narratives of Ahab's battles against Ben-Hadad of Aram-Damascus (1 Kings 20, 22:1-28) do not correspond to the information found in contemporary sources with respect to the anti-Assyrian coalition in which both Israel and Aram-Damascus participated and are displaced from the reign of Jehu (36-38).

Kuan's concentration on political and commercial relations facilitates comprehension of the changes in allegiance during the period. For example, material gathered from extra-biblical sources shows that Tyre shifted its alliance from Israel to Aram-Damascus, and vice-versa, depending on which of them controlled Elath—a port on the Red Sea which gave Phoenician sailors access to trade with the coasts of Arabia and Africa. Kuan suggests that this strategy may illuminate the context of Amos's oracle against Tyre, in which he attacks Tyre for having broken a "covenant of brothers" with Israel (Amos 1:9; 130-34).

In another instance, Kuan supports the biblical narrative (2 Kings 15:27) which states that Pekah ruled in Israel *twenty* years (125-28), although Assyrian sources indicate that there were only *sixteen* years between King Menahem of Israel's payment of tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III in 738 BCE and the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE, and that Menahem's reign preceded Pekah's.

Rather than following one another in succession, as the biblical sources suggest, Kuan portrays them as competing for the territory of Israel during the same period (i.e., overlapping, which would allow for the difference in years). Kuan supports his argument with a variety of evidence. For example, both Assyrian records and the prophet Hosea used two names for nations in this area at this time: Assyria referring to "Samaria" and "Bit-Humri," and Hosea to "Israel" and "Ephraim."

Overall, Kuan's work provides a very interesting example of the variety of information available to a historian of Ancient Israel, and of the challenge presented in co-ordinating this information in order to make conclusions about the historical situation behind the source materials.

The strength of this book is the provision of source texts—particularly transliterated and translated texts of Neo-Assyrian sources. The presentation of the author's reasoning from the sources to his conclusions is also exceptionally clear. The Hebrew Bible scholar who wishes to know more about this period generally, or who specifically requires access to its relevant source material will find Kuan's work not only interesting, but useful.