

SYRIË-PALESTINA

LIPINSKI, E. *Resheph. A Syro-Canaanite Deity*. (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 181). Editions Peeters, Leuven 2009. (24,5 cm, 296). ISBN 978-90-429-2107-8. € 75,-

Since his retirement from the Leuven university in 1995 Edward Lipiński keeps on enriching the scholarly world with important monographs. After among others his learned books on Semitic languages and on the Aramaeans he now devoted his attention to the enigmatic god Resheph, who in ancient literature is presented both as a demon and as a healing god. Lipiński has been working on this subject for many years and already published an article on it in 1987. Since then new evidence has been found, especially in Ebla. Now Lipiński has taken up the immense job of surveying all the material, covering three millennia and the whole region of the ancient Near East, including Egypt. It takes an expert at home at many different fields like Lipiński to discuss all this on the basis of his own interpretation of the primary sources in an attempt 'to bring order and synthesis into the mass of disparate data' (p. 11). Whether he succeeded is open to doubt. His studies are impressive, but not in every respect convincing.

The first chapter deals with Resheph in the Ebla texts. The texts are extremely difficult to translate and interpret. This leads to many detailed discussions and revisions of previous research. One of the important results of his discussion is that it can be demonstrated that already in an early phase Resheph was assimilated to the Mesopotamian god Nergal. Lipiński relates the name of Resheph to Akkadian *rašbu*, 'redoubtable', 'awesome', 'fearsome'. In the second chapter Lipiński pays most attention to Adamma, a mother-goddess, who must be seen as the consort of Resheph. He strongly rejects the association of this goddess with the similar looking word in Semitic languages for 'earth'. More likely in his opinion is the relation to 'blood' (Hebrew *dām*). In the third chapter Lipiński presents the material from Western Asiatic sources of the second millennium BCE, in particular those from Mari, Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Emar. He discusses among others the Ugaritic text KTU 1.78, challenging the commonly accepted reference to Resheph as the gatekeeper of the sun-goddess Shapshu. Lipiński translates

At the sixth (hour) of the day, at the New Moon
of Ḫiyyār, the Sun-goddess entered
her gate:
Resheph,
and the diviners will challenge
the governor. (p. 110)

This interpretation of the second word in the second line as a verb ('to enter') with the sun-goddess as the subject admittedly seems to fit better to the common picture of the sun entering into the netherworld at the end of the day, but now the next lines hardly make sense. See on this text J. Wagenaar, 'In the Sixth Month: The Day of the New Moon of Ḫiyaru. Text and Interpretation of KTU 1.78: A New Proposal', *Ugarit-Forschungen* 34 (2002), 913-919 (with a different interpretation, not mentioned by Lipiński).

Much attention is paid, in chapter 4, to the Syro-Canaanite iconography of Resheph, who is usually represented as the 'smiting god'. Here Lipiński often reacts critically to the study by Izak Cornelius. Chapter 5 deals with the cult of

Resheph in Egypt during the second millennium, where he was venerated as a beneficial, military god. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the first millennium BCE and the later references in Aramaic, Phoenician, Hebrew, Egyptian, and Greek sources to Resheph in midrashic literature.

In the end a relatively clear picture can be sketched of Resheph who was conceived in the Late Bronze Age as a military god and later also as a god who spreads disease and plague. Originally he was worshipped as a protective deity. Only later the darker features of his nature became more dominant, leading to the very negative view on Resheph in the Bible and later traditions. Lipiński is reluctant in giving an explanation for this change, but assumes a relation with the way Resheph was assimilated with hawk-like deities in Egypt.

The latter can be seen as an example of the remarkable fact that Lipiński on the one hand is very precise in his philological and iconographical observations, but on the other hand does not hesitate to make some rather bold and speculative suggestions about parallels and developments concerning Resheph through the ages in the different cultures and religions. Also some of his interpretations of the texts will probably not meet general assent. Next to the Ugaritic text KTU 1.78 mentioned above one can refer in this connection to his alternative translation of the Hebrew text Job 5:7-8

‘Mischief does not grow out of the soil,
Nor trouble springs up from Adama,
But man is borne to trouble
And Resheph’s sons make birds fly upwards.’ (p. 245)

This new interpretation of Hebrew *‘adāmāh*, relating it to the mother-goddess Adamma is based on the assumed parallel with Resheph and supported by the fact that in texts from Ebla, as was demonstrated at length by Lipiński, Adamma was the consort of Resheph. It is far more likely, however, to assume a parallelism with ‘soil’ in the previous line. The suggestion was mentioned before by F. van Koppen and K. van der Toorn in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons*, Leiden 2nd edition 1999, 787. They also refer to Deut. 7:13 and Joel 1:10, concluding that in none of these texts it is compulsory to assume this mythological background. Lipiński seems to have overlooked or neglected this article and also the one by P. Xella in this dictionary on Resheph.

When it comes to the secondary literature the presentation of Lipiński’s would have benefitted from a survey of previous research, as in I. Cornelius, *The iconography of the Canaanite gods Reshef and Ba’al*, Fribourg 1994, pp. 4-8, in which Lipiński could have clarified his own position. Although he made a great effort to incorporate all relevant previous studies into his own presentation, he omitted or missed some important studies. Next to the articles in the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* one can note here the important article on the Ugaritic evidence by Y. Yadin, ‘New Gleanings on Resheph from Ugarit’, in: A. Kort, S. Morschauser (eds), *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, Winona Lake 1985, 259-274, and the paragraph on Resheph by J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Sheffield 2000, 197-208. Some studies were probably published too late to be consulted, like J.M. Blair, *De-Demonising the Old Testament*, Tübingen 2009 (with chapters on Resheph on pp. 41-53 and 194-212), and K. Tazawa, *Syro-Palestinian Deities in New Kingdom Egypt:*

The Hermeneutics of Their Existence, Oxford 2009 (about the integration of Baal, Reshef, Hauron, Anat, Astarte and Qadesh into the Egyptian pantheon). A very good presentation of the relevant material is now also available on the website ‘Iconography of Deities and Demons’ (<http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/>) with an excellent contribution by I. Cornelius on texts and pictures concerning Resheph.

Of course, one can hardly expect from a scholar in this enormous field of research to cover all secondary literature. A more serious shortcoming, however, is the omission of relevant primary data, as it was reported concerning the Ugaritic texts in the review by M.S. Smith, *BASOR* 362 (2011), 86-89: KTU 1.47:27; KTU 1.107:40; KTU 1.108:15; KTU 4.170:9; KTU 4.790.16; RS 20.24; RS 92.2004:16.

The indices on biblical texts, rabbinic texts, Semitic inscriptions, cuneiform texts, Egyptian inscriptions and papyri, Greek and Latin authors, Greek inscriptions, and modern authors, contribute in making this monograph an indispensable and helpful tool on future research; not only concerning Resheph, but also on the intricate web of relations between the religions of the ancient Near East.

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