

Published in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 66 (2009), 646-648

KLINGBEIL, G.A. – Bridging the Gap. Ritual and ritual texts in the Bible. (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 1). Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, 2007. (23,5 cm, XIV, 304). ISBN 978-1-57506-801-5. \$ 39.50.

© Klaas Spronk

In this well written and well documented introduction to the study of ritual texts in the Bible Gerald Klingbeil attempts to bridge many gaps. In the first place this has in his opinion to do with the character of rituals themselves: 'rituals form intricately tuned, meaning loaded masterpieces of intercommunication' (p. 242). Because of this quality the study of rituals is also well suited for providing a bridge 'for the modern reader to enter the ancient world' (p. 243). Other gaps Klingbeil tries to bridge is the one between the Old and the New Testament and those between the different fields of research: biblical and social science and between the many 'hyperspecialized area(s) of biblical and theological study' (p. 226). In the margins of his book one may also note his concern for relating Western and non-Western approaches of biblical studies, as indicated in his introduction where he points to his background as a Western scholar working in the non-Western context of South Africa, South America and the Philippines, and its influence on the choice for his object of research. This sympathetic element of the study attributes to the readability of the book, as it is written out of a clear idea and with a specific drive. It may also be its weak point, because in some respects the author seems to overstate his case, making the right understanding of ritual to the key to unlock all kinds of closed doors with as the final goal to 'provide a stairway for the communication with and adoration of God' (p. 243).

Klingbeil gives a good overview of all relevant aspects of the study of ritual texts. This is partly based on previous publications, which is especially clear in the fact that relatively much attention is given to Leviticus 8 (cf. his articles on this text in *JNSL* 21 [1995] 59-82, *Biblica* 77 [1996] 509-519, and *ZAW* 109 [1997] 500-513). In his discussions about the definition of the term 'ritual' he chooses to follow Jan Platvoet, who was until 2000 lecturer for the comparative studies of religion at Leiden University, and adapts also his typology of a number of dimensions in describing the different rituals. Klingbeil offers a detailed history of research on ritual, both in biblical studies and social sciences. To that he adds a history of interpretation of biblical ritual, which starts in the Bible itself with the prophetic critique of ritual. The most helpful part for students in this field is the presentation of a well considered reading strategy by discerning the different elements that can be studied: (1) structure, (2) form, order and sequence, (3) space, (4) time, (5) involved objects, (6) action, (7) participants and their roles, (8) sound and language. As a kind of evaluation he then returns to the definition and the dimensions of ritual as formulated by Platvoet in order to show how describing the biblical rituals on this basis helps to get a better understanding. According to Klingbeil there are ten dimension which 'provide a convenient, precise, but also flexible way of describing ritual functions' (224): (1) the interactive dimension: ritual as social facilitator, (2) the collective dimension: ritual as community builder, (3) the traditionalizing innovation dimension: creating something new without discarding the old, (4) the communicative dimension: transmitting messages, (5) the symbolic dimension: the power of symbols, (6) the multimedia dimension: total communication, (7) the performance dimension: customary rules, play-acting, and conventions, (8) the esthetic dimension: ordering one's world neatly, (9) the strategic dimension: determining power structures, (10) the integrative dimension:

creating community. In an appendix all ritual texts in the Pentateuch are listed. It is indicated whether they are prescriptive, descriptive and/or repeatable and also which dimensions are found in them. It appears that Numbers 15:1-21, regulations about secondary offerings, has most (8) dimensions. Seven dimensions are apparent in Exodus 29, prescriptions for priestly ordination, Leviticus 16, about the day of atonement, and Numbers 15:22-31, instructions about sin offering.

All this results in an at first sight convincing, clear and detailed view on ritual in the Bible. It should be taken into account, however, that this is based on a synchronic approach to the texts. Klingbeil is well aware of that and of the problems involved. He notes the many difficulties in dating biblical texts and the modern tendency of assuming an exilic or postexilic date for most of the biblical material. He prefers 'the minority view' which assumes a 'substantially earlier date' (p. 54), but he adds that for his study this is not relevant as it is 'not concerned with describing the development of Israelite ritual but focuses on its context and meaning'. In his conclusion he returns to this issue when he remarks that 'due to the dominant historical-critical dating paradigm' ritual texts in the Old Testament are usually dated in the period following the Babylonian exile, which 'creates the curious situation of a virtually "ritual-free" premonarchic or monarchic Israel' (p. 228). Against this he states that ritual is part of any society and he uses this as an argument for his 'canonical reading'. However, when one wants to study, as Klingbeil indicates, the Israelite ritual in its context, this inevitably includes the historical context. For instance, it makes a huge difference for many ritual texts whether they were written and/or read in a situation when it was possible to go to the temple in Jerusalem or not. Related to this problem is that one cannot simply speak of biblical rituals 'in both their theoretical and their real-life application' (p. 208), because what Klingbeil calls 'real-life' is dependent upon the interpretation, including the dating, of the texts involved. In this regard it would have been helpful when Klingbeil had paid more attention to the comparison with extra-biblical material. Although he appears to be familiar with especially the relevant Ugaritic texts (p. 53), he does not discuss this material which can often be related more directly to a specific time and place. In this connection it is also unfortunate that he was not able to go into discussion with James Watts, who recently published a number of interesting studies concerning the character of ritual texts with emphasis on their use as literature and especially their rhetoric function. Klingbeil only refers in a note (p. 173) to an article by Watson in 2003 having come too late to his attention. Meanwhile Watson published an important monograph on this subject (*Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*, Cambridge UP, 2007) and a very interesting article on the comparison with extra-biblical material ('Ritual Rhetoric in Ancient Near Eastern Texts', in C.S. Lipson, R.A. Binkley (eds), *Ancient Non-Greek Rhetoric*, Parlor Press, Indiana, 2009, 39-66).

With regard to the exegesis of the biblical texts it can be remarked that Klingbeil tends to interpret them sometimes too positively. This may have to do with his wish to build bridges to the modern reader. On pp. 73-75 he discusses Hosea 6:1-6 in which the prophet criticizes the cult: 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings' (Hosea 6:6). Klingbeil remarks that this verse is part of a section that invites repentance and is therefore 'constructive and positive'. He refers here to the first verse of the chapter with the incitement 'let us return to YHWH' because YHWH will heal. However, as has been remarked by a number of recent commentators, Hosea 6:1-3 is not part of the positive prophecy of Hosea. On the contrary, in 6:4-6 the prophet is reacting against a wrong view as formulated in verses 1-3 on YHWH's mercy. Klingbeil should at least have left open this possible interpretation. More general indications of this in some respects all too positive approach of the biblical texts are Klingbeil's hardly founded reference to 'the holistic

theological perspective in ancient Israel' (p. 190) and the questionable suggestion that biblical ritual would be free of magic (pp. 238-239), which says probably more about the author's negative view on magic than about the character of ritual in ancient Israel.

Klingbeil offers his students and his colleagues a good introduction into the world of ritual and ritual texts of ancient Israel. He is a good teacher with great enthusiasm for the subject of his teaching. As a consequence one sometimes learns also more about his motives. Sometimes he may be too much a bridge builder, but he also opens new perspectives for further study, for instance, with regard to ritual as a promising theme in intercultural theology.

Kampen, August 2009

Klaas Spronk