

**OUDE TESTAMENT**

SMITH, M. S. — Poetic Heroes. Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 2014. (23 cm, XXIV, 636). ISBN 978-0-8028-6792-6. \$ 55.00; £ 35.99.

In the Preface of this book Mark Smith pays attention to the important role of stories about heroes in ancient and modern myths of war. Religion usually plays a part as well. He gives a number of interesting examples of 'biblical paradigms of violence' in recent movies. Had he not submitted the manuscript already at the end of 2012 he would certainly have included a reference to *American Sniper*. In the film the hero is shown putting a small Bible in the pocket of his

uniform. Apparently the director Clint Eastwood was reluctant with making too much of the relation between religion and violence, because in the autobiography upon which the movie was based the author is more outspoken. Chris Kyle wrote there that he prioritized his life in the following order: God, country, family. This only illustrates the relevance of Smith's study of ancient literary traditions of heroism as an original contribution to the ongoing debate of the relation between religion and violence. It is based on a thorough analysis of the poetic texts about heroes in ancient Greece and the ancient Near East, with emphasis on the relevant texts in Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible. It leads to a theory about the unique way in which the theme of heroism was handled in ancient Israel.

After preliminary remarks on the best way to research and describe the interplay between poetry about warriors and the social or cultural realities behind these texts Smith gives a survey of the field by discussing three warrior pairs: Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroklos, David and Jonathan. He shows that every second person of these pairs as the slightly lesser companion contributes to the state of the first as primary hero. More important, also in relation to his theory about the development of the theme of heroism in ancient Israel, is the observation about the transfer of metaphors between warfare and sexual relations: the violent physical activities are akin to sexual activity. Women and especially goddesses play a special role in characterizing the heroes. The focus in many modern studies of these warrior pairs on same-sex sexual relations can lead to an anachronistic misunderstanding of the texts.

Whereas Smith is very much relying on the work of others (always duly noted, with an enormous amount of notes filling half of the book) in the first part of the book, he offers in the second part a detailed philological discussion of the relevant Ugaritic and Biblical texts. In addition to his previous commentaries on the Ugaritic Baal cycle he now gives his notes and the Ugaritic story of Aqhat (KTU 1.17-19) and on the texts about the Rephaim (KTU 1.20-22 and 1.161). Next to some parts of the Baal cycle he also discusses texts about the god Atthart (KTU 1.92 and 1.114). In itself this analysis of these texts by an expert like Smith with a full discussion of the secondary literature makes this book worthwhile. One could also say that it deserves to be published separately, because now it is more or less hidden in theoretical observations, which are more disputable than the philological work upon which they are based.

According to Smith the only Israelite warrior poetry in the early Iron Age that can be found in the Hebrew Bible are the poem in Judges 5 and the lamentation over the fallen warriors in 2 Samuel 1:19-27. Considerable effort is put into making a reasonable case for dating part of Judges 5 in the premonarchic period. It is a 'tour de force' to delve into this debate, in which the work of Frank More Cross and David Noel Freedman plays a prominent part, especially when you want to take serious all the participants with their often diametrically opposed conclusions. The way this is done by Smith is admirable and — as was remarked with regard to the Ugaritic material — deserves not to remain hidden in this book. Smith adds new arguments to the interpretation that we are dealing here with one of the oldest parts of the Hebrew Bible, but next to that he also assumes a reworking of this text in the early monarchic period resulting in its present form. Also the poem in 2 Samuel 1 would stem from the tenth century BCE.

Comparing this to the Ugaritic heroic poetry, including the texts about the Rephaim and the warrior goddesses, Smith notices a trend: these texts were well attested in Late Bronze Age Ugarit and there are also some indications (in the older parts of Judges 5) that they had their place in early Israel, but they are fading in Israel in the tenth century. This would have been caused by the upcoming belief in the one, national deity of Israel, leaving no room for goddesses, deified ancestors (Rephaim) or heroic poetry. Texts like Judges 5 would from now on only serve as a memory of a lost world.

This theory is based primarily on the early dating of Judges 5. In his elaborate survey of the history of research Smith already showed that his opinion in this matter is open to debate. To the literature mentioned defending a later date can now be added the article by Sergei Frolov, 'How Old is the Song of Deborah?', *JSOT* 36 (2011), 163-184. Apparently it came too late to be discussed by Smith, who does quote — usually with approval — some of his earlier publications. Frolov argues that Judges 5 is best qualified as a late pre-exilic, exilic, or early post-exilic piece and should be interpreted as an integral part of the Deuteronomistic corpus. Even when Smith would be right that at least part of the text goes back to old traditions, this is only a very small base for his general theory. A case in point is that Smith admits in a number of places that he is 'squeezing out' the information from the texts.

One could also question the assumed genre: is Judges 5 best characterized as heroic poetry? And was it wise to distinguish so sharply between heroic poetry and prose? The Ugaritic texts to which Judges 5 is compared are clearly of a different nature. There are certainly more parallels to be found with the story of Aqhat in the heroic prose of the Hebrew Bible. All this leaves one with the impression that the texts (both the Ugaritic and the Biblical) are subordinated to the evolutionary model of the rise of Yahwism, as it is described by Smith in his many previously published books on this subject.

This criticism about the overall theory of the book does not alter the fact that Smith once again shows his admirable mastery over the primary and secondary sources. His book is a 'Fundgrube' for anyone dealing with the discussed Ugaritic and Hebrew texts. The many indices (on subjects, texts, West Semitic key words, grammatical features and poetic terms, iconography, and modern authors) will help the reader to find his/her way. Even with the index on modern authors, however, one looks in vain for a discussion of the study by Jan Fokkelman on the song of Deborah and Barak, as announced in n. 111 on p. 523. But this no more than the exception proving the rule.

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