

---

**BOEKBESPREKINGEN**


---

**ALGEMEEN**

BONNET, C., und H. NIEHR — *Religionen in der Umwelt des Alten Testaments II. Phönizier, Punier, Aramäer.* (Studienbücher Theologie, 4,2). Verlag W. Kohlhammer GmbH, Stuttgart, 2010. (23 cm, 339). ISBN 978-3-17-013046-3. € 39,80.

Corinne Bonnet and Herbert Niehr have offered the reader a very welcome survey of a difficult field of research. Since both authors are experts with many publications in this field, it can be considered as a handy recapitulation of their previous research. What connects the three peoples named in the book's title is not only that they stem from the region of the Levant and lived in the first millennium BCE, but also that they left very few literary traces. Their religious customs and stories about their gods have to be reconstructed from indirect evidence or from later, especially Greek, writers. Another characteristic is that one can hardly speak of "the" Phoenicians or "the" Aramaeans, because we are dealing with a collection of autonomous local communities and city-states.

The first part of the book, on the Phoenicians and their settlements in the Western part of the Mediterranean, is written by Bonnet. She pays much attention to methodological issues about handling the scant information from different sources. Next to the archaeological and epigraphical evidence this also concerns the way the Phoenicians are described by the ancient Greek and Roman authors. This also means that she often refers to modern classical scholars. In the presentation of the material she has chosen a thematic approach. Although she starts with describing the "polyadic" structure of the pantheons, indicating that every large city had its own pantheon, she also describes all important gods separately. In another chapter she discusses the relation between mankind, the world, and the gods, with much attention to the views on death and afterlife. One chapter is devoted to the cult, with special attention to the ongoing discussion about the meaning of the Tophet and the *mlk*-sacrifices and the question whether these were related to human sacrifice. Bonnet concludes with a number of interesting observations concerning the origins of the Phoenician religion on the one hand, and of the way it was influenced by the later Hellenistic and Roman culture on the other hand.

The text is translated from French into German by Niehr. He seems to have done a good job, because the text reads smoothly. A small mistake may have been made on p. 84 where Ba'al Hammon and his female consort Tanit are indicated as "die Herren des Tophet".

As indicated in the title "Religion in den Königreichen der Aramäer Syriens", the second part, written by Niehr, has a quite different setup. After a general survey of the history of the Aramaeans the relevant material is presented according to a geographical pattern describing the different more or less independent Aramaic territories ruled by a king and the most important cities of these areas: Bit Ħalupe and Bit Šabi (with the cities of Tell 'Ašara), Bit Bahiani (with Guzana and Sikani), Baliḥ (with Harran), Bit Adini (with Til Barsib and Hadattu [Arslan Tash]), Bit Agusi (with Arpad, Aleppo, Neirab, Tell Sifr, and 'Ain Dara), Kitikka (with

Sfire), Bit Gabbari (with Sam'al), Unqi (with Kanalua), Hamath and Lu'aš (with Hamath and Hadrak), Šobah/Beth Rehob (with Ba'albek), Geschur (with Betsaida), Aram (with Damascus), the region of Damascus (with Malaḥa and Tell Deir 'Alla). Dependent on the available material he gives information about the gods worshipped in the area, cultic places and sometimes on funerary practices, cult of the dead, magic, and prophecy. Niehr concludes with a number of observations on the way the religion of the Aramaeans survived after the destruction of the Syrian empires by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE. There is much more to report on this subject, as can be derived from the information given by Niehr himself in his book *Religionen in Israels Umwelt*, Würzburg 1998 (pp. 148-194, describing the religion of the Aramaeans from 1000 BCE until 400 CE). He also gives an overview of the relations with the religion of Israel and Judah.

In both parts of the book the primary and secondary sources are presented in a concise but trustworthy way. The excellent survey also gives a good overview of the history of research, including some very recent discoveries. It is interesting to note how the two authors handled the material in a different manner. After reading the work of Bonnet, one misses in Niehr's part the more general observations about certain deities and religious practices. On the other hand, the presentation by Bonnet would have benefitted from a more detailed discussion of specific texts and artifacts, as can be found with Niehr. In general the latter approach seems to be more appropriate given the state of the available sources. The reader may even be surprised by the fact that after her insistence on a very careful approach of combining evidence from different sources, Bonnet in her description of the elements of the Phoenician religion sometimes uninhibitedly brings together material from ancient Ugarit until authors from the Roman era.

Both authors regularly refer to texts from the Old Testament. It is clear that there are many relations with the religion of ancient Israel and Judah. A discussion of the archaeological evidence that has come up in the last decades concerning a female consort of YHWH would have been interesting in connection with this topic. It is to be regretted that the authors stick to the traditional sacred texts which only give a one-sided view on the religion of ancient Israel. Niehr, however, does pay attention to the very interesting Aramaic roots of later Jewish worship in Elephantine and the way the wisdom of Achikar is taken up in the deuterocanonical book of Tobit.

The book contains a number of pictures, which are well chosen and clearly printed. The text on the other hand deserves a better layout. The many translated ancient texts are not clearly marked typographically, especially when (on p. 100) the extra space between the lines after the quote (from Lucian) is left out. It is also regrettable that the maps are taken over from another book – they do not concur with the text. This is especially clear with regard to the map on p. 207 with the Aramaic kingdoms, which is not in line with the subdivision and the names given by Niehr. Apparently this reuse of existing maps was a way to cut the expenses and keep the price of the book affordable. It is not in line, however, with the high quality of its contents.

Amsterdam, K. SPRONK  
Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, May 2013