

REVIEWS

presented by certain groups of texts are available. For example, there are monographs on the texts dealing with clothing and textiles²⁰ and on texts concerned with the vine and wine and vessels used for wine.²¹ These publications include translations of several texts but although listed in the bibliography, they are cited only sporadically. Also, the important article by P. Xella²² on a text dealing with a ship (KTU 4.689 = RS 20.008) is not mentioned by McGeough (p. 459).

While this is by no means a definitive edition, it is helpful to have the texts grouped according to findspot, as it provides a good overview of the tablets in their original archives, with due allowance for dislocations and mistakes in attribution. Since all the economic texts in Ugaritic have been set out here, with translations and selective discussion of the textual and philological problems involved, scholars now have a useful compilation that should prompt further study of this difficult material.

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DAVID VOLGGER, *Und dann wirst du gewiss sterben: Zu den Todesbildern im Pentateuch* (Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 92). Eos Verlag, St Ottilien 2010. Pp. ii + 388. Price: €39.80 paperback. ISBN: 978-3-8306-7448-1.

In this monograph David Volgger offers a very detailed and precise reading of texts from the first five books of the Hebrew Bible in which in one way or another the theme of death plays a role. Unlike most studies on the subject of the conceptions of death and afterlife in the Old Testament, Volgger does not attempt to give a description of the ancient Israelite view on the status of the dead and their residence. He also refrains from discussions about the relation with views from other cultures like the possible Canaanite belief in Baal as a dying and rising deity. Nor does he enter into the debate about the growth of the texts, the hypothesis of different sources, or the possible development of certain ideas within the religion of ancient Israel. He keeps to a strict synchronic approach, in which he takes the Pentateuch as one coherent unity. This does not lead to exciting new theories or to clear overviews of the ancient Israelite lines of thought. It does result, however, in a very thorough and realistic analysis of what the texts have to say about this subject. The method used by Volgger, in the good tradition of Wolfgang Richter and of the series in which this book is published, is helpful in avoiding the danger of making more of the texts than they really have to offer. It is a worthwhile attempt to let the texts speak for themselves instead of letting them answer questions which were not envisaged by the author.

In his analysis Volgger follows, as could be expected within his approach, the canonical order of the texts. He starts with a discussion of Genesis 1–3 asking the question what the fact that one is aware of being mortal means for the reading of the Torah as divine guideline ('Die Erkenntnis von Tora angesichts des Wissens um die Sterblichkeit'). He concludes that it appears to be not only of importance to note what is precisely said in these chapters, but even more what they do not say.

²⁰ S. Ribichini and P. Xella, *La terminologia dei tessuti nei testi di Ugarit* (Rome 1985).

²¹ J.-Á. Zamora, *La vid y el vino en Ugarit* (Madrid 2000).

²² P. Xella, 'Die Ausrüstung eines kanaänischen Schiffes (KTU 4.689)', *WO* 13 (1982), 31–5.

He wants to correct some misunderstandings that have come up in the history of research. It is wrong to assume that Genesis sketches an ideal original time period with equal rights for man and woman, and in which they would live forever, living as vegetarians. What these chapters do say is that the Torah is meant for all people and that all can live according to the Torah in being fruitful.

Genesis 4 shows according to Volgger that no one can escape his responsibility before the Torah. The story of the flood makes clear that the Torah can only be fully understood when taking into account the two sides of the divine power of creation. In his discussion of these chapters he strictly follows the naming of God, either as *elohim* or as Yhwh, but he does not mention, let alone use, this as a criterion to distinguish between different sources with different views on the relation between God/Yhwh and mankind.

In the view of Volgger the first nine chapters of Genesis clearly illustrate that from the start death is an important theme in the Torah. This continues to be so in the next chapters. Very important is in his opinion the way the location of death and burial is described. In Genesis 10 this is not specified, but things change with the story of Abraham buying from the Hittites a place for the grave of Sarah. Another characteristic element from this moment on in the book of Genesis in describing death and burial is the use of the expression 'being gathered to his people', which is for the first time said of Abraham, in Gen. 25:8. According to Volgger the Hebrew word '*ammim*' refers to a new citizenry ('eine neue Bürgerschaft'), which distinguishes Abraham and his family from the Hittite citizenry. This would have been emphasized by the repetition of this formula in the rest of the Book of Genesis. Volgger finds the special character of this new community secured in the story of the death and burial of Jacob at the end of the book.

Death plays a prominent part in the story of the Exodus as well. Not only is it an indication of the radical distinction from Egypt, it is also characteristic of the seriousness of the relation between Yhwh and Israel. In the form of Pesach death has become part of the cultic rhythm in the life of Israel. In many different forms, stories and institutions, this is repeated in the books from Exodus until Deuteronomy. Volgger discusses in this connection the deadly encounter with Yhwh according to Exodus 19–24, the split between Israel and Yhwh in Exod. 24:12–18 and 31:18–35, and the fatal mistake by the sons of Aaron at the start of the cult in Leviticus 10. Also the reflections on what is clean and unclean in Leviticus 11–15 are read by Volgger within the framework of death and destruction.

When it comes to the promised land and taking possession of it, it is clear again that death is an important theme, especially in Exod. 23:20–33; 34:10–16 and Deuteronomy 7. These texts indicate that there is no room for the life of the opponents of Israel. Volgger finds a kind of a positive counterpart in the laws in Leviticus 25 concerning the Sabbath of the land and the year of the jubilee, because they emphasize the lasting relation between the deceased fathers and their land. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad in Num. 27:1–7 illustrates this very well.

Special attention is given to the many cases in which the laws in Exodus until Deuteronomy prescribe the death penalty. According to Volgger it is important to distinguish between the sentence which is executed by man separating the guilty person from other human beings and a punishment which is theologically interpreted as a separation (indicated by the Hebrew *karet*) from the newly formed community.

The death of the ten spies according to Numbers 13–14 is interpreted by Volgger as an indication that Israel's way out of Egypt into Canaan does not lead past death,

but directly into death. It shows that only those are fit to enter the promised land who have fully reflected upon death and devastation as part of the Torah. Also the numbers of the counting of the people according to Numbers 1–4; 26 and the many stories of fatal incidents in Numbers 15–26 can be read as meant to point to the important place of death in the relation between Israel and Yhwh.

Finally, the book of Deuteronomy underlines that also within the promised land the people of Israel not only have to trust in Yhwh's blessing, but also have to reckon with his deadly curse. Deut. 31:14–23 speaks of the death of the people of Israel when it decides to follow other gods. The potential death of Israel cannot be used as an argument that also the god of Israel could die. The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 34) describes Yhwh's power as reaching into the deepest netherworld and highest heaven. Yhwh is the one who kills and gives life. According to Volgger, Yhwh is therefore the only one for whom no image of death or destruction applies.

Volgger does not provoke the reader with daring theories. Instead, it takes some perseverance to follow him in his painstaking attempt — with a lot of repetition — to give a full description of this special aspect of the Pentateuch. His conclusions are hardly questionable, sometimes sobering, and often obvious. In the end a convincing picture emerges of the Torah testifying to the very serious relation between Yhwh and his people. This monograph, with indexes of authors and biblical texts, can be recommended as a useful tool for close reading the discussed texts.

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JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11*. T & T Clark, London 2011. Pp. xii + 214. Price: £17.99 paperback. ISBN: 978-0-567-37287-1.

In his new commentary on Genesis 1–11, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at the University of Notre Dame, elucidates the intricacies of interpretation of the seminal Genesis texts in a stimulating way. The commentary is well-written and addresses the major questions of biblical studies while also opening the texts to newcomers. The important linguistic, literary, and historical-critical questions are discussed, but the main focus is on the storyline and its messages. In particular, Blenkinsopp is interested in how Genesis 1–11 as a narrative entity treats the question of 'how everything went wrong'. In the author's perspective, the question of the development and role of evil in the created world is the dominant interest of Genesis 1–11 as a composition, and so creation is also about theodicy. The emphasis on this question forms a common thread through the commentary that also helps keep the reader orientated amidst Blenkinsopp's forays into the wider ancient world. Given the scope of the material discussed, this review will not offer a summary of all eight chapters, but instead point to some general issues.

Blenkinsopp reads the current, composite text of Genesis 1–11 as a composition that possesses literary coherence, authorial/redactional intention, and purposeful organization, and as such reflects an active remoulding of a religious-literary tradition (e.g., pp. 7, 56, 171). While using the basic pattern of creation, uncreation and re-creation for his reading of Genesis 1–11, Blenkinsopp also employs in interpretation his fruitful ideas of genealogies as generators of narrative, of pentads, heptads and 'toledot' as structuring elements, and of the present Genesis narratives as summary stories drawing on a wider fund of ancient narrative materials. He succeeds admirably in demonstrating just how interesting materials for study the genealogies