

will prove to be an irritant which one may not wish to impose on beginning students.

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From Babylon to Canaan: Studies in the Bible and its Oriental Background. By SAMUEL E. LOEWENSTAMM. Jerusalem: MAGNES PRESS, THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY, 1992. Pp. xvii + 495. \$37.

The late Samuel Loewenstamm was professor of Bible at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem from 1956 to 1987. Among his diverse accomplishments, Loewenstamm made important contributions in the areas of Ugaritic philology, Ugaritic style and rhetoric, and Ugaritic-biblical parallels. Many of his articles in these areas were published in an earlier collection entitled *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (AOAT 204; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1980). The present collection primarily contains Loewenstamm's studies on the Bible written from 1956 to 1987, but it also includes those articles on Ugaritology and the ancient Near East which were published subsequent to the last collection. Loewenstamm wrote mostly in modern Hebrew and to a lesser extent in German and English. All of the forty-six articles, notes, and reviews in this volume have been translated into English and were revised and updated by Loewenstamm himself.

This volume well reflects Loewenstamm's contributions to a variety of biblical topics. His preferred subjects were traditions involving the Flood story, the Patriarchs, Moses, and the Exodus. Perhaps what was most striking in Loewenstamm's work was, not his ability to seek a synthesis between the worlds of the Bible and the ancient Near East, but his attempt to extend that synthesis to later Hellenistic and Jewish midrashim. Loewenstamm was very much interested in tracing the progression of ancient Near Eastern and biblical motifs in post-biblical literature. A brief sample of his method may be seen in his article "The Story of Moses's Birth," which is included in the volume. In comparing the story of the birth of Sargon with that of the birth of Moses, Loewenstamm points out that one of the major motifs in the Sargon story is that Sargon's watertight container was used to carry him safely over the water. By contrast, the biblical story does not emphasize this motif of the container. In the biblical story, the motif of a boat carrying an infant safely over the water is not central to the story since the Egyptian princess found the child in the reeds, not on open water. Loewenstamm, however, observes that the centrality of the boat motif

is found again in Josephus, the Midrash, and the Samaritan Sayings of Marqah. This later literature thus restores Moses' container to its original purpose, that of a boat. This, according to Loewenstamm, is an example of how motifs, which may have been transformed in the biblical story, may recur in later works.

Loewenstamm was a scholar who was always at the forefront of scholarly investigation. He was constantly aware of new developments in biblical scholarship and made a habit of actively engaging himself in the work of others. He would take issue with articles published in scholarly periodicals, even if he himself was not the subject of debate. Thus, many of the shorter articles in this volume constitute replies to others. This mode of engagement gives these articles a certain feeling of immediacy, and the counter-debate contributes greatly to a certain liveliness which would otherwise not be expected in scholarly writing of this nature. While reading these spirited articles, the reviewer could not help reflecting how Loewenstamm would have reacted to today's new forms of scholarly communication. I am convinced that he would have thrived in the scholarly debate of the current list forums, and would have been a heavy user of e-mail.

This collection commences with an appreciation of Loewenstamm by his colleague Joshua Blau and his former student Yizhak Avishur. It concludes with a bibliography of all of Loewenstamm's writings and useful indices of sources, words, and authors cited. Of particular interest, and highly recommended, are three of the seven book reviews included in this volume. They are reviews of Roland de Vaux, *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament* 1 (1958); Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (1962); and Loren Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels* II (1975) (his review of *Ras Shamra Parallels* I [1972] appeared in the companion volume). This book is beautifully produced and is a fine posthumous tribute to its distinguished author.

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Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Form and Content: Collected Studies. By SHEMARYAHU TALMON. Jerusalem: MAGNES PRESS, HEBREW UNIVERSITY; Leiden: E. J. BRILL, 1993. Pp. 318. Hfl 61. \$35.

Shemaryahu Talmon, a senior scholar of Bible and Qumran studies at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem has begun to collect his varied studies in single volumes during the past few years. Two earlier volumes are *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew Univ., 1986),

and *The World of Qumran from Within* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew Univ., 1989). Now we are treated to a third volume in the series, in which Talmon collects ten of his seminal essays in literary and comparative issues.

The individual essays (and their original dates of publication) are as follows: "The Comparative Method in Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Problems" (1978), "The 'Navel of the Earth' and the Comparative Method" (1976 [Hebrew], 1977 [English]), "Biblical *rēpā'im* and Ugaritic *RPU/I(M)*" (1983), "Did There Exist a Biblical National Epic?" (1981), "The Presentation of Synchronicity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narrative" (1978), "Polemics and Apology in Biblical Historiography: 2 Kings 17:24–41" (1981), "Eschatology and History in Biblical Thought" (1980 [German], 1986 [English]), "The Concept of Revelation in Biblical Times" (1981 [German]), "The Desert Motif in the Bible and in Qumran Literature" (1966), and "Wisdom in the Book of Esther" (1963).

"Practically all of the essays have been reworked and expanded, several to a significant degree" (p. 8): most obvious are the many citations of recent secondary literature in the footnotes. However, the basic conclusions of Talmon's studies remain the same.

All of these essays are well known, indeed most are widely cited in biblical studies. Still, it is worth mentioning a few of Talmon's conclusions to refresh the reader's mind. The comparative method, if not implemented correctly, can lead to distorted results. Comparativists "would do well to pay heed to differences between cultures and not only to likenesses. Adequate attention must be given to the interpretation of the dissimilarities from other cultures of the Ancient Near East which made biblical civilization the peculiar and particular phenomenon it was" (pp. 47–48).

Talmon illustrates the point well with his exposition of the Hebrew expression *ṭabbār hā'āreṣ*, "navel of the earth," found only in Judg. 9:37 and Ezek. 38:12. The phrase naturally invites comparison with the Greek mythological concept of the sanctuary as the center or the navel of the earth; and many biblical scholars have so interpreted the Hebrew phrase, with the first usage referring presumably to Mt. Gerizim and the second to Mt. Zion. But upon closer inspection, the Hebrew phrase turns out to mean something quite non-mythological. According to Talmon, it is a military term and its closest parallel would be the Hebrew expression *erwat hā'āreṣ*, "nakedness of the earth," referring to an area's military vulnerability.

Similarly, while many biblical scholars believe that Israel produced a national epic, as did its Canaanite neighbors (witness the epic texts from Ugarit), Talmon finds this hypothesis not only lacking in evidence but contrary to all we know about ancient Israel. In Talmon's words, "Biblical Israel did not produce epics nor did it foster the epic genre" (p. 48).

These are but two of the conclusions reached by Talmon in this important collection of essays. For the biblical scholar who wishes to be reacquainted with Talmon's oeuvre, or for the

scholar who is unfamiliar with it, the appearance of these articles in a single volume makes for convenient and interesting reading.

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Mishna Tractate Shevi'it in the Reading-Tradition of Three Communities [Hebrew]. By KTZIA KATZ. Edah we-laṣon, 17. Jerusalem: THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE TRADITIONS PROJECT, 1993. Pp. xvii + 121.

This work is not an edition of tractate *Shevi'it* in the usual sense of the word. Its use in unraveling exegetical or philological problems will be very limited for those who would look for such help in this type of work. It is, rather, the first full comparative transcription of three rabbis reading in the manner of their particular native traditions from the common base text of the Mishna edition published in Altona in 1840 (Altona 5601). The results are transcribed verbatim according to the reading traditions of the communities of Baghdad (morphology studied by Shlomo Morag, *The Hebrew Language Tradition of the Baghdadi Community: Phonology* [1977], volume one of the same series); Djerba, Tunisia (morphology studied by Ktzia Katz, *The Hebrew Language Tradition of the Community of Djerba* [1977], volume two of the same series); and Aleppo, Syria (morphology studied by Ktzia Katz, *The Hebrew Language Tradition of the Aleppo Community: Phonology* [1981], volume seven of the same series). Since the three native readers were given the same unpointed text, each varied the oral reading according to his own particular tradition. The categories of similarities and differences of the three traditions are summarized in a brief introduction according to unique usages of dagesh, shewa, long and short vowels, syllabic stress, and lexical and grammatical constructions.

Chapter after chapter of Mishna, the author meticulously transcribed the reading traditions of the three readers one after the other. An apparatus marks all the variations in the reading traditions and in selected textual traditions using standard Tiberian pointing. Word by word, the author recorded the comparisons of the three readers with the pointed manuscripts of Kaufman, Parma A, and the printed edition of Leghorn 5652. In brief, by first recording the native readers and then by phonetically transcribing their words with over fifty symbols, contrasts and comparisons are made. At a single glance the results of the transcriptions can be translated into practical comparison. There are some questions that arise from the transcriptions that are left unanswered. For instance, why in Mishna 6:2 does the Djerba rabbi read "osim" at the beginning with a different "s" sound from the "osin" he reads at the end?