

Gods, Goddesses, and the Women Who Serve Them,
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BOOK REVIEWS

Gods, Goddesses, and the Women Who Serve Them, Susan Ackerman, Eerdmans, 2022 (ISBN 978-0-8028-7956-1), xiv + 304 pp., hb \$59.99

It is always refreshing to learn how an academic's perspective changes over the years, and, in this publication, Ackerman traces the development of her interests, noting that she remains convinced by some of her earlier claims while updating others. She explains how and why she arrived at graduate study of the Hebrew Bible, which combined her youthful interests in ancient history and religion with 'a certain feisty streak' that explains her long interest in 'the outliers and even the renegades of ancient Israelite religion' (p. xi). With the benefit of hindsight, she detects how and why her corpus of material developed in connection with her long-standing but mutable interests as she traces 'the different yet interrelated directions my analyses have taken over the years' (p. xii). So, while the book is a collection of previously published work, it is also a metacommentary upon it. She achieves this by providing short introductions to each chapter before presenting the revised content. She has deleted material 'about which I no longer feel as confident or with which I no longer agree' (p. xii) while updating and polishing her ideas so that each chapter presents something old yet new. I hope more publishers provide avenues for such volumes as they help students see scholars as always-becoming: experts in their fields who are not afraid to change their mind.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part One focusses on three Goddesses: the Queen of Heaven, Asherah and Tiamat. In Chapter One, she returns to her first 1989 book chapter 'And the Women Knead Dough'. Her basic claims remain intact: the Goddess referred to by Jeremiah is one who combines characteristics associated with Ishtar and Astarte, but she updates it with thoughts on *where* this deity was honoured (in the temple in addition to domestic contexts), which partly explains why Jeremiah found those who honoured her so reprehensible. Chapter Two, 'Asherah, the West Semitic Goddess of Spinning and Weaving', is one of two essays prompted by 2 Kings 23:7, a text that refers to the women who wove garments for Asherah. It contains 'no significant revisions' to her original 2008 tentative argument that Asherah was a 'patron goddess of spinning

and weaving' (p. 20), but she provides a seven-page postscript that engages with her critic, Theodore J. Lewis. Chapter Three, 'The Women of the Bible and of Ancient Near Eastern Myth. The Case of the Levite's Pileges', is an updated version of a 2015 book chapter that demonstrates how this woman of Judges 19 can be connected with the mythological Tiamat. Both 'are of a "type" of rebellious gender behaviour, deemed improper by male scribes' (p. 58).

Part Two shifts to functionaries: the prophetesses, priests (seeming absence of) and the role of the queen mother. Chapter Four, 'Why is Miriam Also among the Prophets (and is Zipporah among the Priests?)', updates a 2002 article, referencing additionally Deborah and Huldah in an analysis of how and why these women had anomalous and exceptional roles within Israelite religion. Her helpful deployment of theories of liminality remains intact. Chapters Five and Six continue the discussion of priesthood, querying why Israel seems distinctly unlike its neighbours among whom female priesthood is evident. Previously published in 2012 and 2013, these chapters discuss 'The Mother of Eshmunazor, Priest of Astarte' and 'Priestesses, Purity, and Parturition'. Part Three unpacks the role of the queen mother in the ancient world. Chapter Seven, 'The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel', first appeared in 1993 with the claim that the Asherah cult was supported by queenly devotees in the Judean royal court. It remains an important contribution to Asherah studies. Chapter Eight, first published as a 1997 book chapter, is a 'companion' piece (p. 152) titled 'The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East'. Although still 'convinced regarding my central thesis regarding queen mothers' religious roles', Ackerman has updated these chapters to reflect her more recent research. Part Four, 'Women and Worship', reflects on what has been said in the previous three parts and contributes two chapters that look 'in tandem at several of the instances of women's goddess worship' querying 'what the relationship is between these various instances of women's goddess worship ... and women's engagement in the cult' (p. xiii). Chapter Nine, 'At Home with the Goddess', originally published as a 2003 book chapter, pulls together several threads in order to consider how and where Goddesses were worshipped (in domestic and temple settings), by whom and in what ways. Chapter Ten, 'Women and the Worship of Yahweh in Ancient Israel', was originally another book chapter, first published in 2006, which returns us to the women prophets and priest-like women, with particular attention on the late seventh century BCE.

Throughout, all the figures from her original articles and book chapters have been well reproduced and the book closes with the usual indices for authors, subjects and scriptural and other textual sources. It has been a real pleasure to return to these essays and be reminded of Ackerman's knowledge and expertise. She plunges readers back into the ancient world, helping them to look around at the ideological conflicts, the lost

Goddesses, gender issues, the religious functionaries of the time and their cultic practices.

Given Ackerman's recent interest in how the divinatory sacred trees of biblical texts may be understood in the light of the oracle of Zeus at Dodona and the oracle of Delphi, I did wonder whether she would revise her early work accordingly. However, the essays included here do not readily lend themselves to the broader, growing interest in how biblical texts are informed by Hellenistic interests. Overall, having the essays in one convenient volume makes this an obvious addition to student readings lists, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The bibliography alone offers a good starting point for literary reviews of this field.

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Eternal Hope, Emil Brunner, James Clarke & Co., 2023 (ISBN 978-0-227-17922-2), 234 pp., pb £22.50

Faith, Hope, and Love, Emil Brunner, James Clarke & Co., 2023 (ISBN 978-0-227-17921-5), viii + 64 pp., pb £20

The best place to begin a review of Emil Brunner's *Eternal Hope* is with its final chapter; this might even be the best place to start reading it. Up to this point, the book has been clearly written, accessible even, but it has lacked a sense of purpose. In the final chapter, like the Wizard of Oz, Brunner steps from behind a curtain to show us the person for whom the question of hope matters deeply. Brunner (1889–1966), who was professor of systematic and practical theology at the University of Zürich, indicates as much himself when he heads this final chapter a 'Postscript instead of a Foreword'.

There are three reasons, Brunner indicates in his postscript, why the book needed to be written. The first is that it was prompted by preparations for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which was to meet in Evanston, Illinois, on the theme of 'Christ: the Hope of the World'. 'A group of men [sic] were brought together, Brunner writes with a discernible hint of pride, 'well known through their work as thinkers in the service of the church, to prepare a message from the church ...' (p. 212). For personal reasons, he could attend only the first preparatory meeting but received in it 'the impression that such a theological document as was aimed at cannot achieve the task which is