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Heroines, Heroes and Deity: Three Narratives of the Biblical Heroic Tradition

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This volume is a revised dissertation from the University of Vienna. Three portions of the book (about one-third) appeared previously in other volumes. This book is comprised of five parts: “Introduction”; chap. 1, “The Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter”; chap. 2, “Hairy Samson: The Function of the Hair Motif in the Samson Cycle”; chap. 3, “Urim and Thummim: Saul and David”; and “Closing Reflections.” In addition, the volume includes a bibliography, an index of references (biblical and nonbiblical), and an index of authors.

The introduction briefly discusses the three narratives under consideration: Judg 11:29-40 (Jephthah’s Daughter); Judges 13:16 (Samson), and 1 Samuel 1:9-11; 13-14; 28; 1 (Saul). Each story is further analyzed in subsequent chapters. Kamrada looks at these stories to show individuals of a ‘military, heroic context’ and representing the end of the ‘heroic age of ancient Israel.’ The methodological approach draws heavily on ‘folk-literate motif,’ which Kamrada was known to the biblical authors as part of their...
More substantively, there is a problem with the continued claim that these stories rely on earlier folktales. That might be possible, but the evidence is sparse or lacking, especially when parallels are often from non-Israelite and later materials. It is therefore nearly impossible to see how the stories were changed if earlier versions are not extant. Another issue is the treatment of Saul. K. assumes that Saul’s story is relatively correct and that Saul was condemned by his own actions. Other scholars would argue that the negative portrayal of Saul is the result of the Deuteronomistic Historian’s manipulation of accounts (such as transferring the birth story to Samuel) to justify David’s ascension to the throne, and that Saul was actually a positive character unjustifiably condemned by later Judean editors who supported the “southern” David rather than the “northern” Saul. Finally, the claim that Saul ends the “heroic” period seems to ignore the military conquests of David and his physical attributes (cf. 1 Sam 16:12) and the expansion of the kingdom and building projects of Solomon.

This volume has three interesting aspects to its presentation: the continual connecting of biblical stories to folklore motifs; the argument that these three “hero” accounts are linked; and the idea that the Saul cycle ends the “heroic” period of ancient Israel. Each is worthy of consideration and further research.

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