

BOOK REVIEW

A NEW VOLUME OF THE HEBREW ENCYCLOPAEDIA BIBLICA

by YA'IR HOFFMAN

.1976. אנציקלופדיה מקראית; אוצר הידיעות על המקרא ותקופתו, כר' ז'; קאת-שלשיה, ירושלים, 1976.
(ENCYCLOPAEDIA BIBLICA; Thesaurus Rerum Biblicarum Alphabetico Ordine Digestus,
Tomus Septimus, Qaath–Shlshia, Hierosolymis 1976).

Approximately six years after volume six of the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (*Entziklopedia Mikra'it*) was published and over twenty years since volume one appeared, we have before us now volume seven which is still to be followed by volume eight, the final one in which will appear, as we are told in the preface to volume seven, detailed indices to all eight volumes.

This next to the last volume does not offer the reviewer the opportunity for writing an all encompassing review: it is too early to summarize and too late to offer suggestions for corrections. The purpose of this review, then, is limited and it was our intention only to allow the reader to share with us certain impressions which are formed and certain doubts which were aroused in the course of our pursuit of volume seven. The volume contains a number of large and important entries from the various fields of the Biblical world: Holiness, Ecclesiastes, Sacrifice, Sabbath, Sumeria, Judges, Song of Songs in addition to the hundreds of many smaller articles, narrower in scope but of great importance for understanding the Biblical world such as New Year, Murder, Song etc.

The nature of this volume does not differ from that of the previous ones and this fact in itself is a positive one. Unity in approach, accent and emphasis is one of the most important pre-requisites of any encyclopaedia and the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* certainly meets these requirements. In other words, the editorial staff, although having undergone many changes throughout the years, succeeded in preserving also in this volume the delicate balance which is characteristic of the earlier volumes

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between the various aspects of Biblical research: history, theology, archeological literature, etc. The final decision may not always be acceptable to everyone, as will become clear in the course of our review, but the consistent nature is of more importance here. Thus, someone who is familiar with the nature of the *Encyclopaedia* will find that this volume follows in the footsteps of the preceeding volumes and fulfills all expectation; stress and elaboration in the areas of archaeology, the ancient Near East and everyday realia, and less of an emphasis on aesthetic, theological and literary aspects in the Bible. This is not a coincidence: the fruits of Biblical research in Israel are, it seems, of greater importance in these fields than in others.

Characteristic of this approach is the enlightening entry “grave, burial” (קבר, קבורה). Of the twenty-one columns which are devoted to it (3-24), two are sub-titled “general information” and form a survey of the Biblical verses which mention burial in one form or another while the other nineteen columns are devoted to the “archaeological evidence.” Even such being the case, however, only five to six columns are devoted to the Biblical period. From the archaeological finds we learn of different and varied burial customs, some of which were popular in Eretz Israel in the pre-Israelite periods only (ossuaries and burial mounds) while others continued throughout the Israelite and Persian periods. It is interesting that the archaeological finds point to a large variety of methods of burial in the late Canaanite period and early Israelite period “and there are those who explain this large variety in the methods of burial by saying that certain of them are foreign burial customs of small ethnic groups who settled in different parts of Eretz Israel for periods of time (col. 14).” If this is the case, this also provides testimony to the unique nature of the period of settlement in Eretz Israel, a period which served, as it were, the function of a melting pot for many cultures which were mixed together until at a later period a marked Israelite culture was formed. However, in spite of the great wealth of archaeological facts, the entry is wanting in that it fails to deal with questions in the area of culture and religion which may have been connected to the various burial customs. Thus, for someone whose major interest is Bible and archaeology this *Encyclopaedia* will serve as an auxiliary tool in order to provide answers to the various questions which the Bible itself raises. He will read the entry and find no treatment of a question like: what do the various burial customs teach us concerning the outlook of the Israelite society in matters of death, or life after death etc.? Does the finding of jars, weapons and cosmetic utensils in the graves shed light on their outlook in these matters? Indeed, some of this was dealt with in the entry “death” (Volume 4); but it would have also been appropriate to deal with these questions in light of the archaeological finds which provide a new and important vantage point.

This approach, a plethora of information from the fields of archaeology and realia without sufficient connection to the Biblical verses and to the fields of history and culture, is predominant throughout the entire volume. It is worthwhile to point out two more examples of this:

a) The entry Cyprus (קיפּרוּס) contains thirty-two columns (144-174) while only half a column is devoted to the Bible. The invasion of the maritime peoples of Cyprus was surveyed. Would it not have been appropriate to mention in this con-

nection a few words concerning the problem of the penetration of the Philistines into Eretz Israel, a phenomenon connected to the migration of the maritime peoples, even if only to advise the reader to turn to the entry on the Philistines?

b) The entry “Mesopotamian New Year” (ראש השנה המסופוטמית) sums up the known material on this subject, but once again overlooks any connection between the facts indicated and the Bible itself. Thus we read in this entry concerning the ceremony in which the King is struck and his ears boxed (col. 308), and of the fact that there is no basis for the theory that the death and resurrection of Marduk was celebrated in Mesopotamia in a ritual drama (col. 309). This refutes certain theories concerning the songs of the Servant of God in Deutero-Isaiah and it should have been pointed out. The *akitu* procession is also mentioned in which the statues of the Babylonian pantheon were carried through the streets. Was it not appropriate to mention the verse in Isaiah 46:1 (“Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle etc.”) which seems to hint at this ceremony (see C. Westermann, Isaiah 40-66 OTL 1969, p. 179)? Was it not desirable to mention the opinion of Mowinckel concerning the tendency in Israel to transform myth into history, and which transformed mythological dramas which took place on the Mesopotamian New Year into liturgies of an entirely different type. These details which would certainly be remembered by the Biblical scholar are not familiar to everyone who needs an encyclopaedia and the mentioning of these facts is, therefore, important in order to elucidate the relevancy of Near Eastern material to the Bible itself.

Concerning the same matter, we mentioned before the entry “Cyprus” and this in itself raises questions concerning the criteria by which the entries are chosen for the volume. The name “Cyprus” does not appear in the Bible at all and in any event merited a long article because of its contribution to the understanding of the Biblical world. Why therefore, is there no entry for “Karkar, Battle of Karkar”? At this site one of the most important battles of the ninth century B.C.E. took place in which Ahab played an extremely important role.

There is also no entry for Sibmah (Numbers 32:38, Isaiah 16:8-9, Jeremiah 48:32) the Moabite city famous for its vineyards.

On another matter, the position of the author of an entry is not always clear and it appears that this also is a result of the lack of attention paid to elements beyond archaeology, epigraphy and realia. In the entry “Shechem” (שכם) we read that the story of Simeon and Levi is the “the first historical event, as it were, connected with Shechem in the Biblical tradition” and in continuation we read that “the story reflects an early stage in the settlement of the area of Shechem.” It is not clear whether the author sees this as an etiological story or whether he considers it a completely historical story. Does this possibly hint at several waves of immigration to Eretz Israel? On principle, is the story of Simeon and Levi of as much value as the story of Gideon? All these are problems which will not be sufficiently answered for the reader who is familiar with them and it is doubtful that the reader who is not familiar with these problems will understand from the small amount revealed

the great amount not revealed. This is also the case concerning the assembly of the people in Shechem (Joshua 24) which is mentioned quickly and in a hazy manner (. . . “it is possible that here too it is not a routine use of language but rather an actual event,” col. 665).

In order that we, too, not be guilty of an unbalanced approach, I would like to point out certain enlightening entries in distinguished Biblical areas.

In the entry “sacrifice, sacrifices,” קרבן, קרבנות by J. Licht) there is an elementary classification of certain of the principle symbolic acts (symbolic and not magical) associated with the Israelite sacrifice: eating in a state of ritual purity, the burning of the sacrifice, the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and the differences between permanent and non-permanent sacrifices. A comparison of the sacrificial code with the testimony of verses in the historical books (a classic topic of Biblical research) teaches that there is no definite testimony “concerning permanent sacrifices in the Books of Samuel and Kings before the days of Ahaz.” This, in addition to the fact that the laws of the daily offering (*tamid*) and the additional offering (*mussaf*) are missing from Leviticus 1–7 (the major portion dealing with sacrifices) leads the writer to a hypothesis which was already suggested by Y. Kaufman that “the section Leviticus 1–7 reflects the conditions of a local temple (במה) in which only non-permanent sacrifices were offered. This conclusion goes hand in hand with the tendency to see great sections of the priestly document as being of an earlier period than previously thought.

Also in the entry “Korah, Dothan and Abiram” קרה, דתן ואבירם by S.E. Loewenstamm) there is a critical approach which does not disregard the accomplishments of the Wellhausen school in this matter, but does not accept all its conclusions. According to the author, there is not sufficient testimony for the theory that the story of Korah deals essentially with a member of the Tribe of Judah who rebelled against excessive privileges of the priesthood. “It is more likely to assume that Korah of the story of Korah was originally a Levite and only at a later stage of the tradition was he added to the two groups of rebels . . . and in the final form (of the tradition) became their leader.” The author explains the inconsistencies in the story through a switching of traditions and not through a mechanical editing of written sources.

This approach – a critical examination of the methodology of the classical sources is characteristic of many of the entries in the *Encyclopaedia* and establishes for it an important place among Biblical encyclopaedias.

I would like now to add a few points which were brought to light in the course of reading but are not connected to any general claim.

1) In the entry “dirge” (קינה) the author minimizes the extent of formal connections between the various dirges. Thus he writes that “in the dirge of David over Abner there are hardly any of the characteristics of the dirge of Saul and Jonathan

except for the verb נפל and the mentioning of the name of the deceased.” This is not exactly the case. The rhetorical question (“Should Abner die as a fool dies?” II Samuel 3:34) is found also in the dirge on Saul and Jonathan (“How are the mighty fallen” II Samuel 1:19) and is one of the marked characteristics of the dirge style in general. Also the examples which are brought from Talmudic literature to show us that “generally the dirges in Talmudic literature does not imitate the language of the Bible” show exactly the opposite. The phrases “alas. . . has lost,” “alas, O lion, alas, O mighty one, and “where is the humble man, where is the pious man” testify to an adherence to the tradition of the Biblical dirge which often uses phrases such as “alas.”

2) In the entry “Sabbath”(שבת) the author deduces from Amos 8:5 “that even oppressors of the poor would not dare to violate the Sabbath.” It seems that this is a rather simplistic conclusion. In general, in this entry insufficient light is shed on the subject of what was considered forbidden work in the First Temple period according to Biblical law and to what extent were these regulations observed.

3) The entry “sacrifice” begins with a definition which states that “every act which involves a destruction of property in honor of a god can be called a sacrifice.” However, in the continuation of the article there is not one example which justifies this definition. Even in the classification of the various types of sacrifice we find a sacrifice of exchange (תמורה) a sacrifice of purification and a ritual meal, but no destruction at all. Also, the claim that “the name קרבן points essentially towards the act of giving” does not conform to the original definition offered.

4) We will conclude with spices. Anyone familiar somewhat with the flora of Eretz Israel would expect in the entry “cassia”(קידה) to read that this shrub which served as a spice (Exodus 30:24, Ezekiel 24:19) is none other than the Colycotome Villosa whose yellow leaves cover the fields in the rainy season. Yet, it appears that this is not so and in the entry it is identified with the Iris Florentina. This identification, however, is by no means certain and it would not have been superfluous to mention – even briefly – that there are other opinions on the matter.

In summary, “I come to praise this volume, not to bury it.” Instead of a survey of several entries, I found that critical comments on certain points were more likely to illustrate the nature of the volume. Moreover, in order not to fall prey to the same trap which I criticized, a lack of appropriate balance between various elements, I wish to stress again that the volume is a well of information and without peer in knowledge of the extensive world of the Bible. This is an additional and important step in this project of scholars and it is impossible today to understand how the Israeli intellectual who is interested in Bible could be without it.

Would that we be privileged to have in the near future the eighth volume and maybe even an additional volume of addenda incorporating things which have been discovered since the publication of the first volume.