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Review: Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology by David Halperin

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology by David Halperin

Review by: Joel S. Kaminsky

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spring” instead of the more usual “O Nabu, protect my boundary stone,” apparently confusing this king’s name with that of his father Nabopolassar. More than sixty black-and-white photographs and drawings grace the text.

The book would be a far more usable “companion” if an index to the dozens of references to Jeremiah had been included. King ignores the poetic form of many of the citations from Jeremiah, listing them all in prose. At times the literary analysis is simplified to the point of being misleading. Was it Jeremiah who looked forward to a new covenant (p. 10), or only his Deuteronomistic editors? He suggests that there is “no doubt” that Hos. 2:18–23 was the inspiration for Jeremiah’s new covenant (p. 11), a statement about which I at least have considerable doubt, given the virtual silence of the eighth-century prophets about the Sinai covenant. He also errs in speaking of the compilers of Deuteronomy as responsible for the Deuteronomistic editing of the book (p. 9); surely these editors would be the successors of the first Deuteronomistic theologians. While he cites the quotation of Jeremiah 7 in Matt. 21:12–13, he does not indicate that “den of robbers” has taken on an altogether different meaning in the New Testament.

These criticisms aside, this authoritative companion introduces the reader safely to the last fifty years of the kingdom of Judah. Teachers and readers of Jeremiah will treasure this book and enliven their understanding of the prophet and his message through it.

RALPH W. KLEIN, *Lutheran School of Theology*.

HALPERIN, DAVID. *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993. xv+260 pp. \$35.00 (cloth); \$16.95 (paper).

Anticipating potential objections to his psychobiography of a person who has been dead for twenty-five centuries and who is only known through a book that bears his name, David Halperin claims “that the words attributed to Ezekiel, read from a psychoanalytic standpoint, yield their meaning with an ease and naturalness otherwise impossible” (p. 221). Halperin focuses on Ezekiel’s use of disturbing, even pornographic images of women (e.g., Ezek. 16 and 23) and their relationship to certain characteristics that Ezekiel exhibits. Through an elaborate set of arguments that hinge on his exegesis of cryptic texts, Halperin reveals a figure who was neglected by his mother and abused by a male figure, possibly his father or stepfather.

Halperin’s use of psychoanalytic ideas leads to a final product with the same properties as Sigmund Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*; it is insightful but historically untenable. To begin with, one cannot responsibly move from text to personal history without additional knowledge of Ezekiel and his family. Ezekiel’s use of negative female stereotypes does not necessarily imply that he is a misogynist, although one must acknowledge the negative impact of such stereotypes. Perhaps Ezekiel used outrageous language and behavior not because of childhood abuse but because he was functioning as a provocateur, as many performance artists do today. One can draw an analogy to performance artist Karen Finley, who rubs chocolate pudding over her body to symbolize that our patriarchal society treats women as excrement. Such an action is shocking, but it is not a clear indication of physical abuse or mental imbalance. Without proper context any interpretation of such oracular activity becomes highly conjectural. Halperin supplies a context by suggesting that Ezekiel, possessed by repressed childhood memories, is speaking to the elders in Babylonia in a trance state, a hypothesis that he but-

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tresses with data from anthropological studies of shamanism. Rather than view Ezekiel's prophecy as conscious performance he assumes that this is a case of possession by unconscious forces, thus his use of Freudian theory. Halperin has replaced the older notion of divine inspiration with a naturalized notion of psychodrama in which the personal relationship between Ezekiel and his human parents is a euhemerized version of what was formerly the theological relationship between God and Israel.

Halperin's argument has an inherent circularity and like Freud he leaves one with the uncomfortable feeling that if we don't accept the validity of *all* the claims being made perhaps we are refusing "to recognize his disease in our mirrors" (p. 225). Occasionally, his theory leads him to overlook data that might contradict or at least modify his conclusions. Thus, in his analysis of God's command to Ezekiel not to mourn publicly for his wife, Halperin asserts that "however much he loved his wife as an individual, he cannot have failed to transfer to her his ancient and powerful image of the female as seductive monster" (p. 181). But the prophet, speaking in God's voice, describe his wife as the "delight of your eyes"—hardly an expression of hatred. Halperin also approvingly quotes Yehezkel Kaufmann who tells us that Ezekiel "has no accompanying call for repentance" (p. 213), and yet Ezekiel 3, 18, and 33 all speak at length about this possibility.

Certain claims seem particularly improbable, such as Halperin's idea that the differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text "represent, not different writers but the same man in greater or lesser control over the language of his originally unconscious productions" (p. 68). But it is the proliferation of far-fetched sexual interpretations that most undermine Halperin's thesis. These include the contention that swallowing the scroll is a representation of Ezekiel "having been compelled to perform fellatio on some adult male" (p. 134), the claim that the exile of the prince in 12:12 symbolizes Ezekiel's being forced from the womb, and the interpretation of the fleeing prince who will cover his face so as not to see the ground (also in 12:12) as either an "Oedipal punishment of sightlessness" or an attempt to protect himself "from the arousing and terrifying sight of his mother's genitals" (p. 229).

Halperin's use of psychology does aid us in understanding who Ezekiel might have been, and one must give the author credit for his painstaking analysis that often sheds much light on enigmatic texts. Yet in the final analysis it seems likely that Halperin's Ezekiel is his own projection, which leaves us with a Rorschach Bible in which we glimpse more of the interpreter's psychology than the prophet's.

JOEL S. KAMINSKY, *Saint Olaf College*.

ALLISON, DALE C., JR. *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. 396 pp. \$25.00 (cloth).

This packed historical-critical study is no arid list of parallels or naively positivistic treatment of a topic underexplored in Matthean studies. Rather, like the scribe whom he has spent his career investigating, Dale Allison offers a treasure of ancient data and new interpretations.

The book opens with a passionate apologia for discerning authorial intent. The argument includes only a few unnecessarily negative comments on deconstruction. More helpful are Allison's observations on typology's often discomfiting tendencies to negate history and to detract from Jesus' newness. Striking the right