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Richard H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah*

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah* by Richard Harlin Lowery

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very fine pieces of scholarship in their own right, combining sound analysis, clarity of presentation, and the excitement of new discovery.

PAUL M. COBB

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The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah. By RICHARD HARLIN LOWERY. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, no. 120. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991. Pp. 236. \$50.

As stated in the preface, this volume is a revision of a (1989) Yale Ph.D. dissertation advised by Robert Wilson. A comparison with the dissertation itself reveals that, aside from correcting typos and reining in a penchant for colloquialisms, the conclusion alone has seen substantive revision; the book contains a comprehensive bibliography with scriptural and author indexes compiled by the author. Lowery's enterprise, the synthesizing of a social history of Deuteronomic theology in the monarchic period, is clearly voiced and consistently addressed, from the substantive introduction to the conclusion chapter. Chap. 1, "Monarchy and Economy," examines land use, real estate ownership, royal and cultic taxation, and the royal ideology and kinship structures which weave a complex fugue through the Old Testament narratives. Chap. 2 examines the biblical narratives of the cultic activities of Rehoboam, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Athaliah, Joash, and Amaziah. Chaps. 3 through 6 deal with the reigns of Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Josiah, respectively. Lowery maintains that "Assyrian imperialism provides the context for the development of deuteronomism in Judah" (p. 214), specifically, that Assyrian extortion of tribute, *corvée*, and other vassal obligations exacerbated tensions already existing between Judahite monarchy and its subjects, ultimately leading to the formulation of the Deuteronomic vision of society and its partial manifestation in the reform program of Josiah.

Like so many studies in the biblical field today, Lowery endeavors to write an original history of the late monarchic period by combining

his own redaction-critical readings of the texts of 2 Kings and Chronicles with a critical survey of the secondary literature; there is virtually no independent examination of extrabiblical primary texts or pertinent archaeological finds. On the positive side, the introduction provides an up-to-date summary of theories regarding the composition and redaction of the Deuteronomistic History. Lowery has performed a useful service for the English-reading constituency by introducing the important monographs of H.-D. Hoffmann¹ and H. Spieckermann² into his discussion of the salient biblical texts and the vexatious issue of Assyrian cultic influence. The author is refreshingly cognizant that the "official" religion of monarchic Judah was a cult of many gods, with Yahweh as the paramount god of the nation (pp. 119, 139), and, after exploring the massive literary stylization of 2 Kings' description of Manasseh, rejects the popular "rampant syncretism" interpretation of the reign of this king because the cult polemic oppressively outweighs the historical content (p. 189). He is to be commended for identifying the majority of the cult practices abrogated by Josiah in 2 Kings 23:4-20 as "indigenous" (p. 203) but, regrettably, does not explore the possibility that their very recognizability as West Semitic cults may have more to do with Deuteronomistic theological *Tendenz* than late Judahite history.

On the negative side, Lowery poses a series of historical questions the answers to which are artificially circumscribed by his reliance on secondary studies and basic conviction in the historicity of the biblical narratives, repeated disclaimers notwithstanding. For instance, his conception of the Assyrian overlordship of Judah as a period of worsening socioeconomic conditions for all classes, save the privileged few, may need adjustment in light of the immense oil

¹ Hans-Detlef Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen: Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments, no. 66 (Zurich, 1980).

² Hermann Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, no. 129 (Göttingen, 1982).

manufacturing complex recently unearthed at Tel Miqne-Ekron³ and evidence of growing urban complexity and expansion in trade goods in contemporary Edomite territory.⁴ Given the historical patterns of resistance to Assyrian expansion in Western Asia, it is reasonable to speculate with Lowery that the majority of the Judahite populace took umbrage at the burden of imperial tax and *corvée* and that, in general, vassal-state economies shifted towards a surplus and trade-oriented mode of production. The author's failure to access independently the archaeological picture and optimism in the historical transparency of isolated prophetic polemics and cult reform narratives of 2 Kings, however, vitiates his bold claim that "the economic pressure of meeting obligations to the empire sent Judah headlong into social crisis" (p. 130). Lowery's discussion of the "high place" sanctuaries (pp. 75–80) demonstrates no awareness of the extensive treatment by Barrick,⁵ and he follows the traditional scholium of קדשים/קדשות as "cult prostitutes" (pp. 70, 88–93) without any indication that this interpretation has been seriously challenged.⁶

Again, reliance on secondary literature may have detoured Lowery from bringing Egypt into his analysis at significant points. In his discus-

³ Seymour Gitin, "Tel Miqne-Ekron: A Type-Site for the Inner Coastal Plain in the Iron Age II Period," in S. Gitin and W. G. Dever, eds., *Recent Excavations in Israel*, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, no. 49 (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1989), pp. 23–58.

⁴ John R. Bartlett, *Edom and The Edomites*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, no. 77 (Sheffield, 1989), pp. 136–43; Stephen Hart, "Some Preliminary Thoughts on Settlement in the Southern Edom," *Levant* 18 (1986): 54–58. For a promising understanding of the reasons behind Jerusalem's growth in the Assyrian period very different from that of Lowery, see now Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources*, Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East, no. 4 (Leiden, 1992), pp. 333–34, 343.

⁵ W. Boyd Barrick, "The Funerary Character of 'High-Places' in Ancient Palestine: A Reassessment," *VT* 25 (1975): 565–95; idem, "The Word *BMH* in the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1977); idem, "What Do We Really Know About 'High-Places'?", *Svensk exegetisk Årsbok* 45 (1980): 50–57.

⁶ Wolfram von Soden, "Zur Stellung des 'Ge-weihen' (*qdš*) in Ugarit," *Ugarit Forschungen (UF)* 2

(1970): 329–30; Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2, 7b-8; 4, 1-13; 5, 1-27; 6, 4-7; 8, 14*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, no. 34 (Leiden, 1984), pp. 28–29; Mayer I. Gruber, "Hebrew *qēdšāh* and Her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates," *UF* 18 (1986): 133–48.

tion of the fiscal and administrative structures of the Divided Monarchy, it would be logical, given the ancient inclusion of Syria/Palestine within the active Egyptian *Kulturkreis*, to explore the possibility that Egyptian administrative structures might offer useful parallels with those of Israel and Judah. While Lowery is aware of waning Assyrian power during Josiah's reign, he does not appear to grasp implications of an Egyptian assumption of Judahite overlordship from Assyria. If, for instance, the Josianic cult reform took place well after the translation of Judah from an Assyrian into an Egyptian vassal state, then the quest for literary vestiges of the eradication of Assyrian imperial cult impositions from the temples and shrines of Judah loses its cogency. Finally, given extensive evidence of Egyptian deities in glyptic and other iconographic artifacts of Iron Age Palestine, and the proximity of this 'Great Tradition' to the urban centers of Judah, it is rather suspicious that nothing in the 2 Kings narrative of the Josianic cult reform hints of Egyptian cultic origin. If the authors/redactors of 2 Kings were uninformed regarding Egyptian cults in seventh-century Judah, how much more probable is it that they preserved a knowledge of Assyrian religious practices, whether politically imposed or voluntarily adopted?

Lowery breaks no new ground in his consideration of Assyrian cultic influence in the vassal states, including Judah (pp. 135–40, nevertheless a useful summary of the major research on the topic in the last ninety years). While he rejects most of the earlier scholarly efforts to infiltrate Assyrian deities and cult practices into the narratives of 2 Kings, he nevertheless isolates "astral cult practices from Assyria" (never defined) in the rooftop altars of Ahaz (p. 205) and allows the possibility that the chariots of the sun in 2 Kings 23:11 and the incense offered to Baal and major celestial objects in v. 5 could refer to either indigenous cults or Assyrian imports (pp. 205–6). In truth, with the exception of

Šamaš the sun god, Sin the moon god, Ištar, associated with Venus in her morning and evening manifestations, and the collective Sebeti, associated with the Pleiades, there is strikingly little textual evidence for the worship of astral entities in royally sponsored temples in Assyria. Despite the East Semitic origin of the word, the semantic development of Hebrew *mazzālôt*, “planets, (zodiacal) constellations,” 2 Kings 23:5 has no parallel in its Akkadian cognate; Akkadian boasts perfectly straightforward expressions for “planet”, *bibbu*, and “(zodiacal) constellation(s)”, *lumāšu*. The concept of zodiac is unattested before 555 B.C.E.—if the biblical authors intended that as the meaning of *mazzālôt*, then the term is anachronistic for monarchic Judah. While it is entirely plausible that the historical Ahaz and other Judahite kings subject to Assyria emulated aspects of Assyrian astronomical observation and celestial divination, the cult narratives of Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah in 2 Kings must be mercilessly ransacked for “evidence,” however ambiguous, like the rooftop altars of Ahaz, to support a historicist’s reading of the Deuteronomistic History, a history which shows neither political nor cultic interest in Assyrian affairs following Sennacherib’s anachronistic parricide until Josiah’s death. Had rooftop altars been mentioned in connection with the cultic peccadilloes of Ahab, imagine the sophisticated scholarly expositions that might have “demonstrated” Aramaean or Phoenician cultic influence in Israel!

Richard Lowery has written a highly readable social and religious history of Judah, with good coverage of the secondary literature and awareness of the most combustible issues in current scholarship surrounding the Deuteronomistic History. One hopes that a sequel will follow containing the primary research necessary to sustain his conclusions, better demonstrating the powers of critical historical reasoning that glint at several points from the pages of this book.

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In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth. By J. P. MALLORY. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989. Pp 288 + 175 figs. \$29.95.

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in the search for the Indo-European homeland. Amid the recent publications in this special field of research, Mallory’s book *In Search of the Indo-Europeans* clearly stands out because of its clarity and its wish not to present yet another hypothesis. Rather, it follows “the general mainstream of ‘conventional wisdom’” and attempts “to provide a general . . . survey of the current state of our knowledge about the earliest Indo-Europeans” (p. 8). As such, one can only admire the author’s vast erudition and scholarship, which enable him to cover questions of archeology, comparative linguistics, and many topics of Indo-European culture spread over several millennia and covering very different societies.

After a short “Forschungsgeschichte,” the author formulates the Indo-European hypothesis according to which a whole set of languages, ranging from Indo-Aryan and Tocharian in the East to Celtic in the West in the early period and far more dispersed nowadays, presupposes a common ancestor, “Proto-Indo-European,” with a population that once occupied a restricted area somewhere in Eurasia roughly between 4500 and 2500 B.C. In the next two chapters, the languages and language groups in Asia and Europe are all reviewed. Especially helpful for the non-specialist reader are the short text samples of one or more languages in each subgroup. It is in this section of the book, however, that the specialist reader may find some minor points of criticism. Any Hittitologist will, for example, protest against the statement: “the Hittites called themselves *nes* and their language *nesili*” (p. 26). How much the Indo-European invaders in Anatolia assimilated with the apparently autochthonous non-Indo-European Hattians is shown by the fact that these invaders adopted the autochthonous name and called themselves “men of Hatti,” although their language prevailed and Hattic must have been a nearly dead language in this early period. The name Hattic, however, is reserved for this substratum language, which was mostly restricted to use in