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# Thomas Podella, $\xi\hat{o}m$ -Fasten: Kollektive Trauer um den verborgenen Gott im Alten Testament

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Sôm-Fasten: Kollektive Trauer um den verborgenen Gott im Alten Testament* by Thomas Podella

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sporadically since 1899. This catalogue is a comprehensive listing of all 753 Megarian bowls (the common English equivalent for the German "Megarischer Becher") and fragments found at Miletos, Hellenistic products of the third through the first centuries B.C. Most were excavated during the years 1955 to 1980, but fragments from the earlier excavations, including those which are housed in the Romisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum in Mainz are included. The introductory chapter briefly presents a definition of "Megarian bowls," the manufacturing technique, criteria for identifying and illustration, and identification of the various plant forms decorating them. It also includes a discussion of the current state of knowledge on the subject with consideration for distinctive research approaches. The catalogue, the second chapter, is organized by find place and date of find, with each piece within such a group further categorized by its moulded decoration or function (vegetation, repetitive patterns, figural, mixed, or rim, foot, etc.). A third chapter assigns each piece to one of eight local pottery workshops, a local group in imitation of an Ephasian-Ionian workshop, or seventeen workshops from around the Greek world. Discussions characterize the distinctive products of each of these many workshops providing those not familiar with this material a good starting place for the identification of the occasional finds from sites in the Near East. A fourth chapter considers questions of chronology by reference to material from six other sites, four of them Near Eastern (Antioch, Tarsus, Samaria, and Tell Ashdod). A fifth chapter compares the array of finds from Miletos with those from other places including Hama, Egypt, and the Black Sea region. The concluding chapter highlights observations on local workshops, chronology, and the movements of particular potters around the Hellenized world.

Access to specific information is simplified by the detailed table of contents, and six separate indexes to monuments and subjects, sites and find places, ancient names of people and places, ancient authors, gods and goddesses, and museums and collections. The illustrations are consistently organized. The figures are scale drawings and profiles, the plates are photographs for catalogued pieces, and there are maps

and site plans. The 55 plates and 43 figures each illustrate at least 500 fragmentary bowls. The list of abbreviations, which functions as a basic bibliography, clarifies the extensive footnotes and catalogue references to both excavation reports for site and year or specific published references to a particular piece.

This volume is a thorough and well-organized compendium of information and references on Megarian bowls in general, as well as the specific bowls found at Miletos. The detailed discussions of the unusual, close to three centuries long, broad selection of imported Megarian bowls representing seventeen workshops about the Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to the distinctive products of ten Milesian workshops, makes this the volume of choice for initiating a study of this ware. No other known site presents such a variety of workshops over such a broad chronological spectrum. The excellent footnotes include references to all major publications of this pottery type and to a great many others which consider specific aspects of them. Those needing a useful introduction to Megarian wares might well turn first to this publication of the material from Miletos. The comprehensive, yet accessible, presentation insures that this volume will remain the reference of choice for all in need of basic and detailed information on a ubiquitous Hellenistic product.

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*Şôm-Fasten: Kollektive Trauer um den verborgenen Gott im Alten Testament.* By THOMAS PODELLA. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, Bd. 224. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989. Pp. xi + 327. DM 88.

This monograph is a revised version of a Berlin Kirchliche Hochschule dissertation directed by Peter Welten. The title is apt: although the work focuses on the phenomenon of the *şôm*-fast as presented in the Hebrew Scriptures, the author's theological analysis of the ritual background, and his primary contribution to the scholarship on the subject, turn upon the *topos* of divine abandonment. In fine, Podella links the theology of the *deus absconditus* with the human

response to death and disaster, as attested in ancient Near Eastern texts and funerary customs, and proceeds to show how the Israelite and early Jewish fast historically evolved the expression of supplication or penance directed toward the absent God, as witnessed by community laments and prophetic literature, respectively.

At the outset I will mention two methodological limitations that are inherent in any study of this scope, and with which Podella, much to his credit, consciously grapples throughout his work. (1) Patterning. The use of texts and archaeological data separated by hundreds of miles, millennia, and language invites the "disclosure" of cultural patterns that may have had little influence at the level of local praxis or belief. (2) The assumption that the combination of a textual chronology of the Hebrew Scriptures with a Form-Critical analysis can result in an historical theology that accurately, or at least plausibly, describes the religion of ancient Israel and early Judaism. Currently, there is nothing approaching a consensus regarding biblical text chronology; in most instances, Podella's conclusions in this regard are best guesses. Bolder, perhaps, is the presupposition that a preexilic form of any ritual, such as the *šôm*-fast, can be teased loose from the matrix of the theological history of the Hebrew Scriptures, contrasted with the postexilic forms and that sufficient data for the historical causes underlying the transformation permit their specification.

In chap. 1, the author roots his analysis of the biblical *šôm*-fast in a discussion of the basic anthropological background of fasting and ritual processes, emphasizing the connection between fasting and mourning rituals and the concomitant goal of personal and communal integration. Chap. 2 explores the motif of divine abandonment in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hittite literature. In terms of a mythological motif, he examines the underworld journeys or "deaths" of Ištar and Baal and disappearing gods in Hittite language texts; for treatments of the theme in historical texts he looks at the stele of Adda-Guppi (Sin's abandonment of Harrān), the loss of the Marduk statue to Elam (text of Nebuchadnezzar I, CT 13, no. 48), and the Urartian reaction to the sack of Muşaşir in the literary account of Sargon II's eighth campaign (TCL 3). In the realm of liturgy and ritual, the author examines the literal

eclipse of the gods in Akkadian prayers and ritual texts devoted to eclipses. The primary *Sitz im Leben* of the fast ritual in the ancient Near East is the ritual activity surrounding the mourning for the dead; the concept of divine abandonment, as revealed in mythological texts of the seasonal dying god and historically in the loss of cult images and the destruction of temples, argues the author, was widespread linguistically, geographically, and chronologically. Podella explicitly seeks in the concluding pages of this chapter to demonstrate that ancient Palestine had dynamic links with this *Kulturkreis* throughout its history: the conceptual world of the Israelite *šôm*-fast had a venerable pedigree. Chap. 3 explores the rites and notions associated with mourning and death in ancient Israel, Ugarit, and Mesopotamia. As a prolegomenon, basic anthropological functionalist concepts concerning death and bereavement are set forth; Inanna's Descent into the Underworld and *Gilg XII*: 182–99 are used to describe the state of the dead. In Israel, death is examined in light of the Deuteronomic prohibition of death cults, the terminology of familial bonds (for example, "he slept with his fathers"), and an excursus on *maššēbôt*. Afterlife in Israelite thought was characterized by a loss of relationship with God; Podella discusses the evidence for an annual memorial ritual for the dead, the *marzeah*, and concludes with the forbidden use of the dead in necromancy. The discussions of the dead at Ugarit and Mesopotamia are brief but competent, the former dwelling on the *rephaim*-ancestors and *ilib*, the god of the fathers. The chapter succeeds creditably in establishing a formal analogy between the ritual actions of the *šôm*-fast and mourning rites for the dead in Israel.

The longest chapter, chap. 4, exhaustively analyzes the occurrences of the *šôm*-fast in the Hebrew Scriptures, drawing heavily upon Form-Critical techniques. Some readers may be surprised to learn that the cultus of ancient Israel, centered on Yahweh, was aniconic (p. 132; no evidence for this assertion provided), hence, the closest parallel in Israel to the loss of a Yahwistic cult image as a concrete embodiment of divine abandonment was the loss of the Ark (1 Sam. 4–7) or the destruction of the Yahweh temple at Jerusalem. Podella divides the texts according to divine abandonment as evinced by drought, pestilence, and loss of the ark; collective fasts

intended to avert the threat of death, ranging from an apotropaic character (1 Kings 21:8–14) to a ritual of penance (Jeremiah 36) or a fast called on “secular” grounds (Esther 4:3, 16). He assembles texts which he sees as aimed primarily at enlisting divine assistance, as in Judg. 20:26–28, Ezra 8:21–23, and 2 Chron. 20:1–19. The annual fast in relation to the loss of the Temple and its reconstruction (Zechariah 7–8), and the eschatological presence of Yahweh in Isa. 58:1–12 is treated in the final section. His discussions of the textual and philological niceties associated with these texts, while not exhaustive, are up to date and clearly presented.

Chap. 5 examines the *šôm*-fast as the setting of the individual and collective laments in the Hebrew Scriptures. A major typological distinction is maintained between fasting as supplication (for example, David’s fast for his dying child by Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 12:16, 21–23) and fasting as penance (e.g., Ahab’s fasting in response to Elijah’s condemnation in 1 Kings 21:27–29). In the community lament Psalms, Podella explores the common theme of divine abandonment, which works itself out in terms of both Yahweh’s acts within historical time, for example, the conquest of Canaan (Ps. 44:3–4) and Yahweh’s acts in mythic time, for example, his battles with the chaos-waters (Ps. 74:13–17). The recitation of cosmic and national origins in ritual contexts served to bridge over the temporary discontinuity of the people and their God, the sting of whose hiddenness has spurred the faithful community to act out their mourning with fasting and lamentation.

The summary chapter is an exercise in historical theology, in which Podella endeavors to trace the adaptations and transformations of the collective fast in the history and literature of ancient Israel. The author attempts to document the historical evolution of the *šôm*-fast in Palestine; the arguments for his “textual archaeology” of the Deuteronomistic History derive largely from the work of R. Smend and his followers and appear in chap. 4. The original form of the biblical *šôm*-fast, “primär die reine Klage über die Ferne, Verborgenheit oder Untätigkeit Jahwes,” is represented by the community laments of the Psalter and other texts (p. 275). A prophetic critique of “external” fasting, empha-

sizing ethical requirements due to the living members of society, appears in Isa. 58:1–12 and Zechariah 7–8. The destruction of the Temple, signaling the eclipse of Yahweh, coupled with the vicissitudes of the Exile and the return to Palestine provided the catalyst for change in the theological conception of the fast. Podella believes that a transformation of the fast from a ritual centered primarily on lament to a ritual stressing penance took place sometime between the Edict of Cyrus and the work of Ezra (p. 280). Two concurrent developments helped to bring about this transformation in the late Persian period: the rise of the Deuteronomistic concept of sin and covenant-theology, and an active traditional prophetic cultic and social critique (p. 283). The monograph contains a bibliography and generous subject, source, and word indexes, adding to its value as a reference tool.

By rooting an historical theology of the biblical *šôm*-fast in the concept of divine abandonment and mourning rituals common to the ancient Near East, Podella has gained a signal insight into the meaning of the ritual itself. The monograph as a whole reveals the work of painstaking and judicious scholarship, coupled with a genuine feeling for the vital phenomena of religion that both inspired and dismayed the ancient Israelites and their cultural neighbors.

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*The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology.* By FRANK H. GORMAN, JR. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, vol. 91. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990. Pp. 259. \$52.50.

The subtitle makes it clear that this book deals with the so-called Priestly Source [P]. Since the terms “space, time, and status” reflect only one parameter of the interpretational schema set up by Gorman, a better title might have been “The Ideology of Ritual according to the Priestly Source.” Perhaps the stressing of the one parameter visible in the subtitle reflects a desire to put up front what the author sees as the most original aspect of his