

Izaak J. de Hulster, Brent A. Strawn, Ryan P. Bonfiglio eds. *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015. 383 p. ISBN 978-3-525-53460-1.

*Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible* is a collection of important voices from within the study of ancient Near Eastern images. Most scholars of the Hebrew Bible share a common methodological starting point: exegesis must take historical context into account. Many turn to ancient Near Eastern texts, though a growing number of biblical scholars is turning also to non-textual sources, especially pictorial material, or iconography. The authors from Finland, France, Germany, South Africa, Switzerland and the United States, are brought together within one cover with the goal of presenting a textbook to introduce students to a new method of biblical exegesis. This book is a sequel to a number of other publications, which burst upon the world of biblical scholarship in the 1970s, and were made jointly by the community of scholars interested in the use of ancient Near Eastern visual materials in Old Testament textual analysis. This beautifully produced volume is a tribute to Othmar Keel, the pioneer of the iconographic approach in biblical exegesis and the founder of the Fribourg School.

One of the editors' opening statement that "iconographic approaches are now several, involving datasets, specific ideas, and applications not originally presented in Keel's pioneering work" poses the following questions: Does biblical exegesis need the approach presented to trace the roots of biblical thinking, the ways of *mythos* and *logos*? How can the comparison of biblical texts and iconography per se be replaced by iconographic exegesis? Is there a fruitful future promised by the incorporation of the methodology introduced in this textbook into the general field of cognitive studies?

The book opens with a helpful introduction by the editors that provides the reader with a brief overview of different reasons for the enrichment of Old Testament studies through iconographic exegesis. The existing "internal" exegetical methods (compositional pieces of a text, including its redactional layers, textual variants, editorial history, genre, literary devices, intertextual allusions, and so on) used by the majority of biblical scholars may benefit from the use of "external" ones, such as the one offered by this textbook (19-21). The purpose of this textbook carefully designed for students is to introduce the iconographic approach as a subset within historical-critical methodology at large. Three general aspects of the relationship between texts and images, which address a distinct set of interpretive questions, are summarized by the editors as *congruence*, *correlation* and *contiguity*. These are illustrated through a

brief example from Is 63:1-6 (26-32). The final part of the introduction gives a practical overview for newcomers to this method of how to find, analyze and present images in their research field. The desire of the manual's authors is verbalized in a call for the incorporation of images into *all* interpretive work (42).

The book is organized in three parts following the canon of the Hebrew Bible or TaNaKh: the Torah/Pentateuch, the Nebi'im/Prophets, and the Ketubim/Writings (and beyond). Part one consists of five chapters, four of them produced by the editors (Izaak J. de Hulster from Finland and Germany, and Brent A. Strawn from the USA) and one by Thomas Staubli from the *Alma Mater* of the method, Fribourg, Switzerland. The first two chapters written by the first and second editors deal with the iconographic perspective of the creation story in Genesis attributed to the Priestly source (45-61), and with the portrayal of humanity as the image of God (63-75). They point out the difference between the foundational concepts of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and those of the Bible. The central chapter is the longest in part one and is centered on human sacrifice in the ancient Near East (ANE) and the "pagan" prehistory of Gen 22 (77-101). The last two chapters of the Torah part are dedicated to the Exodus tradition of YHWH's strong hand and outstretched arm (Strawn, 103-116) and the mixed divine metaphors in Deut 32 (de Hulster and Strawn, 117-133). The last one is worthy of special attention due to the authors' presentation of *Mischmetaphors* as "conceptual blending," and the usefulness of the method introduced for a better understanding of the analyzed foundational biblical figure of YHWH.

Part two is the longest one and consists of seven chapters, of which four are written by the editors of the volume, and the other three by the scholars from Germany (Rüdiger Schmitt of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster), France (Regine Hunziker-Rodewald of the Université de Strasbourg) and Switzerland (Thomas Staubli of the Université de Fribourg). In chapter six Schmitt, by analyzing the royal construction in the book of Kings, introduces architecture, a part of the culture's symbolic system, to illustrate the methodological challenges that iconographic exegesis of the Hebrew Bible will face (137-146). The following four chapters deal with the book of Isaiah. In the first, by analyzing the seraphs' vision of the prophet in Is 6 and what the author terms Moses' "seraph staff" in Numbers within the general context of idol polemics, de Hulster offers the ANE *uraei* images for tracing the biblical concept of seraphs, cherubs and angels (chapter 7). In the second Hunziker-Rodewald connects the thrones in Sheol (Is 14:9) with Syro-Palestinian royal statues, and thus provides a new perspective on the biblical text (chapter 8). In the third, de Hulster, through the association

of “a monument and a name” in Is 56 with a stone erected in a memory of the name, traces the formation of a culture of material commemoration based on aniconic images and the shift to programmatic aniconism in the Hebrew Bible (chapter 9). In the fourth de Hulster and Strawn, by identifying Is 60 as additional evidence of solar imagery in Persian Period Yehud, show how the *Pax Persica* became the *Pax Jerusalem* (chapter 10). The last two chapters of the book’s second part deal with the reading of Zechariah and its rich metaphorical language. In chapter 11 Staubli offers the lunar iconography of the ancient Levant for a better understanding of the texts of Zech 1:8-6:15 and Ps 67, that are both designed in the form of a menorah. Chapter 12, the last chapter on the Prophets, like the last chapter of the Torah section, deals with metaphors. Bonfiglio shows that the biblical images of the divine warrior are another example of a blending of concepts presented within the text of the TaNaKh body.

Part three, the Writings, contains six chapters, three of which are written by the editors (Strawn and de Hulster) and three by Joel M. LeMon (University of Stellenbosch and Emory University) and Staubli. This third part starts with three themes presented in the Psalms: the hunting lion (chapter 13), the wings in a prayer (chapter 14) and the divine violence (chapter 15). In the opening chapter Strawn struggles with the ambivalence, or even polyvalence, of the lion image, pointing to the methodological problems that occur in analyzing the book of Psalms using the iconographic approach (246-261). LeMon’s following two chapters are dedicated to the iconographic exegesis of Ps 63 and Ps 81, respectively. The first one deals with “multistability” in different interpretations of the winged images as understanding of YHWH in the Psalms, noting as well that one may find even more explanations in literary images of the Bible (263-279). The second one argues that analysis of ANE iconography of divine violence/“the blow” helps to untangle difficult Hebrew texts and their interpretation (281-294). In chapter 16 Strawn turns to the problem of “the fear of the Lord” as an example of assessing the foundational biblical concepts which are beyond the reach of metaphorical language. He emphasizes the role of “the interface between visual studies and cognitive theory” in future iconographic research (295-311). By turning to the Song of Songs (7:2-6) in chapter 17, de Hulster, in summing up the part on the Writings, demonstrates the importance of the method and practice introduced for the translation of biblical poetry. Conceptual metaphors are of special interest for the growing number of scholars working within the frames of cognitive studies. Those working on or with modern Bible translations will admire a “pleonastic” approach offered by the author in his translation of the text analyzed which aims at “comprehensibility/clarity

in the target language while preserving the culturally specific connotations of the source language,” offered by one of the volume’s main contributors (313-328).

The book of Judith is the one book studied that is *outside* the TaNaKh canon, and Staubli includes the analysis of “twigs” in Judith 15.12-13, thus extending the iconographic exegesis offered by this textbook to the Palestinian Folk Art Traditions, the Jewish tradition of Sukkot, the Christian tradition of Palm Sunday, the Israeli state emblem, and even spirituality in folk Islam (329-347).

Each chapter of the textbook is well structured and follows the same pattern: the introduction of a problem, a brief overview of the textual approaches traditional in Biblical studies, an outline of ANE image traditions, a comparison of the approaches used for text analysis, a summary assessment and a conclusion. Designed for students, each chapter includes an assignment and a brief bibliographical list related to the issue studied for further reading. An extended bibliography is given at the end of the book (349-368), followed by an author index, and a Scripture citation index.

We have to keep in mind that at the core of foundational biblical concepts is experience of the divine presence, described as the sense of fear, awe, wonder (light, darkness, etc.). Some chapters are of special interest for Pentecostals, such as chapter 15 dedicated to *the fear of the Lord* by Strawn, or chapter 14, *On the Wings in a Prayer*, in which LeMon reminds us of “the fact that Israel’s prayer and praise exist within a world of images” (264).

*Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible* offers an important and stimulating contribution to the ongoing debates between *internal* and *external* traditional methods of Biblical exegesis and to unexamined assumptions regarding text, religion and culture. The volume also serves well as a text to create discussion. In terms of critiques, three major matters stand out. First, it is a pity that the three parts of the present volume are not well balanced: of the five chapters of part I, three are on the book of Genesis; of the seven chapters of part II, four are on the book of Isaiah, and two are on the book of Zechariah; of the six chapters of part III, three are on Psalms. Second, the label “chapters” suits the editors’ aim to present the iconographic approach to Old Testament exegesis: *An Introduction to Its Method and Practice*. However, the volume consists of eighteen chapters, some of which are quite short (chapters 6 and 11 are only 10 pages each) and look more like essays or papers. It would be better to present three chapters and to write a general conclusion for newcomers to the method under consideration. Also, the addition of some answers to assignments given at the end of the book (at least one for each chapter) would benefit future students, allowing them

to check their own research progress. This is a recommendation for future on-line and correspondence courses on biblical studies, which will hopefully follow this presentation and the information on *working with images* provided by the editors in the Introduction (32-41). As in the majority of publications, misprints, especially in table of contents and headings, are always regrettable (7, 117), even though they do not outweigh the richness of the subjects addressed (such as metaphor, translation, literary imagery, ritual, emotion, violence, architecture, etc.), and the overall value of the volume. In spite of these criticisms, this textbook presents a solid and inspiring introduction to iconographic exegesis, one that those who are interested in biblical thought and culture should digest for the benefit of their own research.

Reviewed by Olga Zaprometova