

## ○ REVIEW OF TONY KLUTZ'S *MAGIC IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD*

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Michael Carden reviews *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, edited by Todd Klutz. (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series; 245. London & New York: T&T Clark International; 2003. ISBN 0826466842.)

I have long been suspicious of tendencies seeking to bracket off magic from religion, or at least, from religion understood to be an ethical, philosophical almost rational belief system as epitomised by certain 'high' Christianities in the West. Magic, on the other hand has been seen as irrational, primitive, degenerate, combining ritual, superstition, the wildly mystic, to consort with dangerous powers or to dupe the credulous by its jiggery-popery. Yet, no less a figure than Solomon is credited with magical powers over demons and jinn and with being a master and source of esoteric lore in Jewish, Islamic and Christian traditions. So I was keen to read and review this anthology edited by Todd Klutz, perhaps too much so. While some essays I found interesting and engaging, there were others that, while richly suggestive in subject matter, only left me disappointed. The lack of an overall bibliography was also disconcerting. More positively, the breadth of the anthology is impressive - the essays are grouped into three sections covering magic in 1) the Jewish Scriptures and at Qumran, 2) the New Testament and its Graeco-Roman Milieu and 3) 'Disreputable' Books of Late Antiquity - but it is weighted towards New Testament concerns. Klutz's introductory essay provided a very good overview of the issues surrounding magic in academic studies of religion and society. Nevertheless his essay struck me as oddly circumspect when it came to previewing the actual essays in the collection.

Klutz reminds readers that the anthology is 'ostensibly dedicated to New Testament scholarship' (p. 9) but that the New Testament and early Christians drew on a legacy, represented, in part, by the scriptures that would come to be called the Old Testament. Central to these scriptures was the Torah, which would appear to condemn magic and divination unequivocally (c.f. Deut. 18:9-19). However, it would be wrong to think of the Torah and the Hebrew scriptures as representing a univocal, monologic position on magic or any other issue. What are found in these texts, instead, are debates over profound issues and conceptual experiments conducted through the medium of story and other literary means. Thus, in the lead essay of section 1, Römer identifies a conflict between two tendencies (he would describe them as sources or redactors) in the Torah: the Deuteronomistic and the Priestly. The Deuteronomistic ideology puts magic in conflict with Yahwism and an idealised Yahwistic prophetism. In contrast, the Priestly ideology integrates magic with Yahwism and the prophetic (and priestly) figures of Aaron and Moses are here representatives, par excellence, of God's messengers and the superiority of their divinely sanctioned magical powers. Römer bases his argument on his analysis of Exodus 7-9, the narrative of the plagues of Egypt, in which Moses and Aaron are portrayed as competing with and besting the magicians of Pharaoh's court. Significantly for this anthology's purposes, Römer concludes by observing that, while Rabbinic Judaism could be seen as adopting the Deuteronomistic position on magic, the Priestly traditions of Moses the magician allowed a certain acceptance of magic, with the Talmud permitting it 'when performed for the benefit of teaching' (p. 22). Christophe

Nihan's essay on necromancy and 1 Samuel 28 was marred for me by his overly 'archeological' approach to the text. The essay contains a very good overview of necromancy in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible. However, he devotes a large part of the essay to historical-critical issues of date and location, in particular whether the story is a memory of Saul's reign or a later Deuteronomistic composition. Nihan wants to locate it in a post-exilic (post-Deuteronomistic) situation in Persian Yehud. I don't have confidence in such textual archeology, especially when it includes hypothetical figures such as Saul. Nevertheless, his conclusions have considerable merit, particularly that the story represents a Yahwistic restricting of access to the divine by way of a polemic against necromantic, ancestor-focused, familial religion.

Restricting access to the divine can result in a distancing of the divine from the mundane such that the world appears absurd and transitory, a view permeating Qoheleth. Böhlmann addresses the thesis raised by Japanese scholar Akio Tsukimoto that Qoheleth 11:1-6 is a critique of divinatory practices. The evidence is inconclusive, according to Böhlmann, but he argues that Qoheleth's absurdist view of the world gives rise to scepticism towards not only divination but all religious practices. For Qoheleth, God has 'no concern for humans' (p. 62). Such scepticism was not shared by the Qumran community, some of whose practices have been labeled as magical by various scholars. Brooke's essay examines references to Deuteronomy 18:9-14 in the Qumran texts to ascertain how the community understood the prohibitions and their relevance to the ritual practice at Qumran. The Qumran texts show no great anxiety over most of the practices prohibited in Deuteronomy. Most were no longer identifiable to the community. For those prohibitions that still had contemporary import, the criterion applied by the Qumran authors in recognising sorcery lay in determining between truth and falsehood on a verbal level. Sorcery was always understood to be linked with false teaching.

The strength of the anthology, unsurprisingly, is in the second section's collection of five New Testament essays. Downing challenges the assumption that in the Greco-Roman world of the first and second centuries there was a 'widespread *firm* belief in "magic" or "miracle"' (p. 99). He bases his argument on a survey of a range of sources, including Pliny and Josephus, that show considerable scepticism towards magic and sorcerers. This scepticism is shared by the New Testament authors, such as Luke, who present Christian miracles as real but of a completely different ethos to magic. Marguerat's essay surveys magic and miracle in the Acts of the Apostles. Recalling somewhat the authorisation of magic by its association with true teaching found in the Priestly ideology, the Talmud and at Qumran, Marguerat argues that the healing miracles in Acts, being always open to misunderstanding, must always be under the interpretive control of the apostolic word. There is an irony in Marguerat's discussion pertinent to the themes of this anthology. He argues that as the Christian mission moved from Judaism to the pagan world it risked the temptation of confusing the human with the divine, something into which no Jew would fall. And yet (contra Marguerat), I think the Hebrew scriptures contain a number of examples where the divine/human/mundane boundaries are blurred, especially associated with the Temple. Furthermore, to an outside observer, Christianity itself rests on a fundamental confusion of the human and divine in the person of Jesus made by many Jews in the first century. But to those Jews who were the first Christians it was not a matter of confusion but the recognition of divine reality.

Reimer's essay begins with a very good discussion of magic and ways of defining it. He then compares three similar stories of magical non-escapes from prison in the *Life of Apollonius*, the

Acts of Thomas and Acts 16. In each of these stories the protagonists are miraculously provided the opportunity to escape from captivity, an opportunity they each decline. Echoing Downing's observations on the status of magic in the first century Greco-Roman world, Reimer argues that by not taking advantage of the opportunity to escape, the protagonists are shown to have considerable reserves of spiritual power, but unlike, magicians, do not use it for self-advancement. Indeed, by escaping, the protagonists would be revealed to be nothing more than magicians and their teaching bogus and charlatan. I found Thierry Laus's analysis of attitudes to magic in the Pauline corpus particularly interesting for locating Paul within Jewish attitudes to magic. In dialogue with Shafique Keshavjee's article on magic from the *Encyclopédie du protestantisme*, Laus reads Philippians 2:5-11 and Romans 8:31-39, arguing a series of 11 theses. He argues that Paul is not a radical demythologiser à la Bultmann. Instead, Laus concludes that Paul fits a pattern found by Urbach in rabbinic Judaism of theologising and eschatologising magic by relating it to the God of Israel. In Paul's case everything is related back to Christ who 'gives *everything...* everything that counts' (p. 156). The final essay in section 2, Pietersen's 'Magic/Thaumaturgy in the Pastorals', quite insightfully draws on the analogy of contemporary conversionist and miracle-working movements, most importantly the modern Christian charismatic movements that have emerged in the past 30 years. Like them, Pauline Christianity was both conversionist and thaumaturgical. The Pastorals come from one side of a later struggle for the memory of Paul, on the part of the Pastorals, against the thaumaturgical Paul in favor of Paul as teacher and transmitter of tradition.

The final section on the 'disreputable' books, proved to me the most disappointing, with the exception of Alexander's essay on the Sefer ha-Razim, the first Jewish grimoire or manual of black magic such as would later be associated with magic of the medieval Christian West. Alexander first provides an overview of Sefer ha-Razim and then discusses three rituals it contains. They typically include invocations of both angels and pagan deities for malevolent purposes. As Alexander says, this text is 'pure Aleister Crowley in places' (p. 189). Alexander's essay serves as a fascinating introduction to a little known text for the general reader in a way that whets the appetite for more. The last two essays, while providing glimpses of fascinating material (especially that by Klutz), are addressed to a highly specialist audience and engage in detailed lexical and text critical analysis of the various recensions of the Cyranides and allied works and the Testament of Solomon respectively. In the case of the former, Bain argues that the traditional name of Egypt, the black land, was taken over into Greek and that the Greeks came to think of alchemy as the art of that black land, the Chemia of alchemy being a transliteration of that Egyptian name for Egypt. Bain's thesis is both plausible and fascinating (his essay also includes a bibliography) and I'd be interested in the implications he might draw from it. Klutz's essay contains an interesting overview of scholarly attitudes to the Testament of Solomon and its subject matter, astrology and demonology. Furthermore, in outlining his conclusions he provides some insights into various forms of astrology in the ancient world. But readers unfamiliar with the Testament of Solomon might find his detailed text critical analysis of the various recensions hard going. However they may, like myself, find themselves possessed of a desire to find out more about this particular text.

This anthology shows that magic is definitely not outside the boundaries of biblical religions, in part, because as Laus observes 'Magic in principle cannot be distinguished from the sacred' (p. 143). Reimer cites evidence that many Romans perceived the Jews to be a nation of magicians,

with exorcism being their specialty, but would that have been the self-perception of those Jewish exorcists? The essays in this anthology suggest that many would have accepted that designation of their powers, insisting that, like Moses and Solomon before them, their magic served the glory of God.