

○ REVIEW OF CYNTHIA CHAPMAN'S *THE GENDERED LANGUAGE OF WARFARE IN THE ISRAELITE-ASSYRIAN ENCOUNTER*

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Christine Mitchell reviews *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* by Cynthia R. Chapman (Harvard Semitic Monographs 62. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004. ISBN 1-57506-920-2. Cloth.)



This well-written book, a light revision of a Harvard dissertation directed by Peter Machinist, sets out to examine how gendered metaphors were used by neo-Assyrian and biblical authors in order for each to claim victory in the encounter between the two cultures. Chapman examines the entire period of contact between Israelites and Assyrians (ninth through seventh centuries B.C.E.) as well as the after-effects of the contact in the biblical material. She examines the neo-Assyrian written and pictorial material, and examines Israelite (i.e. biblical) written material. She argues that ‘gendered language functioned as an ideological tool that shaped historical memory in Assyrian and biblical representations of their encounter’ (3).

As Chapman points out, there have been a number of studies that have examined the impact of Assyrian language and imagery on biblical texts. There have also been a few studies that have examined the use of gender as an ideological tool in both neo-Assyrian and biblical material. However, this is the first study to combine the comparative and the gendered modes of analysis. The object of the analysis, namely the Israelite-Assyrian encounter, is a small part of both corpora. Nevertheless, the methods employed and the insights gained in this study do have wider application. Because this study is primarily exegetical in nature, readers of this journal may find that Chapman’s methodology is under-theorised, or that the theory is not terribly explicit.

In the first chapter, ‘Introduction’, Chapman lays out her main arguments and working definitions. Because Chapman’s argument is that gendered language functioned metaphorically to configure ideology, specifically in relation to the Israelite-Assyrian encounter, she works out definitions of ‘gendered language’, ‘metaphor’, and the comparative method. She defines ‘gendered language’ as an ideological means by which asymmetrical relationships of power are expressed, justified, and maintained. She uses the work of Joan Scott as a basis for linking gender and power

relationships. As she points out, Scott's work drew on the work of Foucault; it would have been helpful if Chapman had worked more closely with Foucault's work herself. She also draws on the work of Judith Butler in defining femininity as a negative category used to describe not women but failed masculinity, masculinity failed in its culturally-specific performance.

Gendered language is inherently metaphorical. Thus Chapman examines theories of metaphor. She settles on a definition of metaphor that suggests that metaphors say something that cannot be said literally. For example, 'your soldiers are women' associates 'soldiers' with 'women', where both soldiers and women have themselves individually a number of associations. Where they overlap is in the area of the soldiers' defeat, implying weakness, fear, and inability to use weapons in battle. Saying 'your soldiers are women' evokes a number of images without spelling them out literally (12–13).

The comparative method has usually been used in biblical studies to look at historical dependence; as Chapman points out, this has been particularly the case in the analysis of the relationship of the biblical and Assyrian material. However, gendered texts pose a problem because the link between gender and battle is ubiquitous in both corpora; dependence cannot be established. Instead, she argues that the biblical and Assyrian authors drew from a common set of conventions. There is one important difference: the royal figure. In the Assyrian texts, this figure is the Assyrian king. In the biblical texts, this figure is the national deity Yhwh. It would have been appropriate, I think, to spell out further the implications of this very important difference. For example, she claims that, '[T]he main emphasis of the prophetic writings was Israel's and Judah's sins against Yahweh' (18). I wonder if perhaps she could have made the argument that the main emphasis of the prophetic writings was to proclaim Yhwh's mighty acts and legitimate his status as Israel's god, just as the Assyrian royal inscriptions' main emphasis was to proclaim the king's mighty acts and legitimate his status as king. Indeed, later in the book she comes close to making this argument (e.g. p. 67). I think the book would have been stronger had she taken this point further.

The second chapter, 'Without Rival: The Royal Performance of Masculinity in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Palace Reliefs', uses Butler's work on performative gender in order to argue that for neo-Assyrian kings the battlefield was the place where masculinity was performed and achieved. The Assyrian king was the ideal masculine figure, while feminisation (i.e. failed masculinity) was used to present the enemy as the one who lost the contest of masculinity. In order to avoid strictly essentialist notions of masculinity, Chapman analyzes explicitly masculine terms, ones without feminine counterparts, and then examines the body of textual and bas-relief material. She points out that the image of the Assyrian king as protector is created more effectively by the lack of Assyrian women in the reliefs. The many foreign women being led to captivity makes the point that their king-protector was a specimen of failed masculinity. The defeated kings were depicted either fleeing in terror or kissing the feet of the Assyrian king. To be feminised, 'to become a woman', and 'to become a prostitute' is linked with losing land, heir, and military strength.

Chapman turns to the biblical material in the third and fourth chapters, 'Daughter Zion: The Gendered Presentation of the Assyrian Crisis in First Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum', 'From Daughter to Whore and Back Again: The Transformation of the Jerusalem Complex in the Post-Assyrian Period'. She argues that the biblical authors focused on the feminisation of Jerusalem. The royal masculine imagery was used for Yhwh. Jerusalem-as-woman in the Assyrian encounter

is an early and pervasive image, and Chapman charts what she terms the 'Jerusalem Complex' through Isaiah 1-39, Zephaniah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah (where the Jerusalem Complex is renewed in relationship to Babylon). She argues that this complex became 'the central symbol and interpretive key for the prophets' understanding of Jerusalem's conquest by foreign nations' (76). Yhwh is depicted in these texts as the wronged husband, and Assyria as the lover who pays the prostitute Jerusalem's fee. This preserves the honour of Yhwh in the defeat of his city by putting the blame on Jerusalem, and also reduces Assyria's role to just 'an unwitting pawn in a domestic dispute' (65).

Chapman argues that developing diachronically through the biblical texts is a biography of Jerusalem, in three phases: 1. Jerusalem's presumed victory over Nineveh (701-612 BCE), seen in Isa. 37, 1, 3, Zeph. 3, Nah. 3; 2. Jerusalem's punishment for premature celebration and confidence in its inviolability by the neo-Babylonian encounter (612-587 BCE), seen in Jer. 2, 3, Ezek. 16, 23; 3. Jerusalem's restoration, in which Yhwh reclaims his masculine military prowess and forgives his errant bride (post-587 BCE), seen in Isa. 52, 50, 51, 54. Chapter 3 charts the first phase, and Chapter 4 charts the second and third phases. I found this biography of Jerusalem, as traced through these two chapters, to be revealing and convincing. By reading the biography through the prophetic canon, individual episodes within the biography gain greater depth and interest.

The fifth chapter, 'The Fruits of Comparison: A Conversation between Gendered Texts', demonstrates how the gendered analysis of the two corpora of material reveals them using a common set of metaphors. How each side shaped the metaphors says something about the viewpoints and emphases: the biblical prophetic texts do not use the gendered metaphor of the fleeing king, and the Assyrian material does not use the feminised city. However, Chapman argues that the Chronicler's rewriting of the Sennacherib story in 2 Kings and Isaiah shows Sennacherib being punished not by the (eventual) fall of his city, but by Hezekiah's military preparations. Sennacherib becomes a fleeing king and Hezekiah the victorious masculine warrior. This is an innovative reading of this passage, and demonstrates how this mode of analysis can be profitably used to examine biblical texts. In the final chapter, 'Conclusion', Chapman asserts that this mode of analysis, a gendered, comparative one, can contribute to an understanding of inner-biblical allusion: the gendered metaphors found in the Israelite-Assyrian encounter are reused and transformed in later texts, reflecting a changed social memory of Jerusalem's relationship with Assyria.

This is an engaging book, with a wealth of textual analysis beyond what I have outlined here. The argument is well-made and supported, and has broader applications beyond the case of the Israelite-Assyrian encounter. While it was interesting to see how gendered language worked in the earlier biblical texts and the Assyrian material, it was even more fascinating to see how the later biblical authors re-worked the earlier gendered metaphors.

Some readers of this journal may wonder about the ideological/gendered implications of the study itself: what are the implications for readers today? In that respect, the politics of biblical scholarship on the Assyria-related texts could have been subjected to a gendered analysis. Although Gale Yee's *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (2003) presumably was published too late, Chapman could have engaged more fully with Renita Weems' *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (1995) on many of the same prophetic texts. Such engagement would have strengthened this study.

REFERENCES

- Yee, Gale. 2003. *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Weems, Renita. 1995. *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*. Minneapolis: Fortress.