

Review of Ovidiu Creangă, ed. *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*. The Bible in the Modern World 33. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.

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A late afternoon conversation between David Clines and Ovidiu Creangă during the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2008 gave rise to this first volume of collected essays on masculinity in the Hebrew Bible. It was preceded only by a similar book on New Testament masculinities in 2003; since then Hebrew Bible gender research has seemed somehow to be lagging behind the New Testament as far as matters of masculinity is concerned. Good reasons for this asymmetry can be given, among them the fact that a lot of gender/masculine oriented research has been done on the Greco-Roman world, which forms the primary context for the New Testament. Anyone investigating New Testament masculinities may rely upon detailed data and acute insights from the works of writers like David Halperin, Craig Williams, and Marilyn Skinner, not forgetting the great methodological model of Michel Foucault back in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As far as Hebrew Bible masculinities are concerned, research on the historical context is still scarce. On the one hand, we know very little about ancient Near Eastern ideologies of gender. On the other hand, the too easy identification of biblical masculinity with Mediterranean masculinities, launched by the work of Bruce Malina, perplexes more than facilitates a reader. To quote David Clines in his *Final Reflections*: “even if masculinity studies in the Hebrew Bible has come to age, it still lacks theoretical refinement” (p. 238). Clines is referring to the lack of studies that could provide “an adequate supply of data to theorize”. Without proper theory and methodology, “we will hardly know what to call evidences of masculinity”; theory can develop only after research data has been accumulated (p. 238). It is certainly true that, since their first appearance, biblical masculinity studies have constantly been dependent upon theory and methodology developed by feminist biblical critics. Even today many of those who write on biblical masculinity derive theory and inspiration from the premises of feminist biblical studies. David Clines is the leading example in this respect. Proper “masculinist” methodology is still under development, though according to Stephen Moore, another pioneer in the field, the very texts in this volume suggest that progress towards a solution is under way. Scholars such as Ovidiu Creangă, Roland Boer, and Brian Di Palma have already implemented postmodern methods to biblical masculinity; their efforts, as well as those of other scholars, are charting the way ahead.

David Clines’ phrase “lack of refinement” has a further dimension: it also points towards a lack of emotional commitment by those engaged in the study of biblical masculinity. He seems to be looking for a replica of the feminist syndrome in biblical studies some decades ago. Such a reprise, however, seems impossible: the beginning of the 21st century differs profoundly from the last quarter of the previous century with respect to its vibrant political and moral problems. Furthermore, it is a mixed body of male and female critics that is contributing to the construction of the new field of masculinity studies of the Hebrew Bible. The gender ratio of the authors of this volume is roughly two to one in favour of men. Moreover, “masculinist” researchers are not backed up by a liberating

cause equal to the feminist one: after all, it hardly seems a viable cause to “liberate” that part of humanity who more often than not cherishes no wish to be “liberated” of their “eternal” position of social domination.

Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond is divided into five parts. The first three are differentiated on the grounds of common thematics; the fourth consists of a single essay which shifts the focus from biblical text to modern Christian readers of the Bible; the last part outlines the borders and the perspectives of the discipline through the “Final Reflections” of David Clines and Stephen Moore.

The first part of the book, “Subordinating Men, Destabilizing Hegemonies”, features two essays. Susan Haddox’s essay “Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities” investigates the role masculinity plays in selecting subsequent generations in Genesis. Applying insights from the field of masculinity studies to two paradigmatic pairs of brothers – Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, as well as to the story of the first patriarch, Abraham – Haddox claims that “Genesis favours those patriarchs who express subordinate masculinities because Israel itself – in order to survive as a nation – had to take positions symbolized by subordinate masculinities” (p. 16). Haddox writes in a challenging way, with unquestionable biblical expertise. Her essay is highly readable, and supports its theses well, at the same time conceiving the challenge to think beyond them. Yet, according to Haddox, Israelite masculinity seems too tightly framed in the conceptual paradigm usually applied to Mediterranean masculinities. Ideas from modern masculinity studies are being directly applied to the study of an archaic world, which is based upon a different mentality and style of life. Yet it is not possible to affirm that our idea of a hegemonic-subordinate masculinities system is relevant to the world of ancient Israel. What if the most “masculine” men of Genesis are those who succeed at most in resembling Yahweh’s ability to be divinely “everything” by all possible means, to contain not just single (masculine) features but the very pairs of features in opposition constitutive of the cosmic world? Doubtless the best of biblical men in such cases will be those who most closely correspond to this image; this arguably makes the very dichotomy hegemonic-subordinate irrelevant to them.

Roland Boer’s “Of Fine Wine, Incense and Spices: The Unstable Hegemony of the Books of Chronicles” is a breakthrough into a “forbidden” biblical text, only recently and occasionally invaded by feminist and Marxist oriented critics. Chronicles is presented as a literary utopia, a scriptural effort to depict an ideal world that resists historical reality. Could there be a more provocative approach than entering a biblical utopia through the back entrance, via the kitchen (of the temple cult), “in terms of cutlery, cooking, spices, oils, incense, fine wine, and singing” (p. 20)? Based on theoretical issues raised by Marxists such as Gramsci, Althusser, and Negri, Boer concludes that Chronicles consistently undermines the masculine hegemony it so desperately seeks to establish. As far as his reader is concerned, he may believe that Chronicles tries subversively to suggest an alternative masculinity, another kind of (masculine) hegemony, though he may equally plausibly suspect that Boer’s well knit interpretation is just another case of postmodern hermeneutical suspicion.

The second and biggest part of the book challenges the ideology of gendered governance as it is expressed by different texts of the Hebrew Bible. Brian Di Palma’s essay “De/Constructing Masculinity in Exodus 1-4” undertakes a close analysis of the first four chapters of Exodus. More specifically, he focuses on three aspects of masculinity: violence in killing; wisdom in administrative affairs, especially “the association of violence with persuasive speech” (p. 39); and detachment from women. Di Palma is very skilful in the literary reading of the biblical text, keeping a keen eye on linguistic phenomena, ever suspicious of their hidden meanings.

David Clines presents a new redaction of a 1997 paper “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34”. He returns to the pivotal question, which has occupied his attention since the early 1990s: how do (and should) men play men in the Hebrew Bible? The concept of *playing* –

instead of *being* – is crucial to his idea that “masculinity *is* a performance, a performance of a learned script” (p. 54). Reading Exodus 32-34 he identifies four “distinctives of masculinity”: the Warrior Male, the Persuasive Male, the Womanless Male, and the Beautiful Male. Considering Brian Di Palma’s essay once again, we can see the profound influence Clines’ ideas have exerted upon the rise and the early development of masculinity studies in the Hebrew Bible.

Mark George’s paper “Masculinity and Its Regimentation in Deuteronomy” rounds off the second part of the book. It deals with Deuteronomy’s representation of what it means to be a man in Israel. Different aspects of this representation are: the man’s body, the man’s place in society, the categorization of time and space, and the relationship a man has with God (p. 67). Each one of these aspects is put to expert and detailed scrutiny. The essay could be read as a story in which the male body plays the leading part and food, sex, marriage, and name constitute the cast of supporting characters. George’s final conclusion is that by doing the right things Israelite men became Israelite males, which takes us back to Clines’ idea of performance. Deuteronomy was intended to be the standard by which maleness conforms to certain rules and practices.

“Variations on the Theme of Masculinity: Joshua’s Gender In/stability in the Conquest Narrative (Josh. 1-12)” seems pretty long for a title. It nevertheless makes explicit the subject of Ovidiu Creangă’s essay. Joshua is an excellent choice, prominent and complex at the same time. The features of Joshua’s masculinity are constantly “on the move”, due to the narrative “aging” of the character and to differences coming from different literary sources. Creangă is very persuasive, exposing the Conquest narrative as a typical androcentric text that profiles a great variety of males by documenting their words and deeds and uncovering their psychology. Close-reading the story, detecting narrative tensions between its different (exilic/postexilic) strata, Creangă makes explicit “how the masculinity of the autocratic warrior Joshua and the Mosaic Joshua exalts, allures, marginalizes and subordinates types of men and masculinities with whom he comes into contact, according to these two redactional layers” (p. 84). Methodologically grounded in R. W. Connell’s *Masculinities*, first published in 1995 (Berkeley: University of California Press), Creangă’s essay aims at revealing a multitude of masculinities (or a multidimensional portrait of Israelite masculinity) encoded in the Book of Joshua. Apart from hegemonic male presence, exemplified by Joshua himself, the story features a number of marginalized and subordinated masculinities throughout the first twelve chapters of the book.

Cheryl Strimple and Ovidiu Creangă’s joint essay “‘And his skin returned like a skin of a little boy’: Masculinity, Disability and the Healing of Naaman” goes back to the story of an arrogant Aramean general transformed into a gracious convert through a ritual bath in the Jordan River. It makes a good contribution to the recently sprung and quickly developing field of knowledge on disability in the Bible. 2 Kings makes use of Naaman’s leprosy “to manipulate male identity in order to present and reinforce a version of normative Israelite masculinity fully in keeping with Deuteronomistic ideology” (p. 110). Masculinity is being observed from its dark side: sickness and disability. The sick/disabled male body turns into a narrative device serving ideological ends. Naaman’s miraculous healing and subsequent conversion bring his masculinity back to normal; the arrogant foreigner becomes a man who most fervently serves and worships Yahweh. The joint work of Strimple and Creangă has proved very successful; the paper demonstrates well the philological expertise and analytical skills of both authors.

Maria Haralambakis’ essay “‘I am not afraid of anybody, I am the ruler of this land’: The Portrayal of Job in the Testament of Job” makes a conclusion to Part 2. The Testament of Job has recently attracted the attention of feminist scholars, primarily on account of its female characters. Unlike most scholars Maria Haralambakis puts to scrutiny Job himself in his capacity of performing a number of masculine roles: “a father and husband, a wealthy king, a wrestler in combat and a benefactor of the poor” (p. 17). Her essay retains an active dialogue with feminist research on the Testament; in contrast with most such research, however, Haralambakis argues that featuring

female (as well as male) characters does not suffice to “challenge power structures and inequality between men and women but simply reproduces them. The male characters are the ones who are presented in positions of power, especially the protagonist itself” (p. 130). Though Haralambakis modestly defines her essay as “an exercise in reading the Testament of Job as a story about a ‘man’ through the lens of constructs of masculinity informed by recent research in the area of gender studies” (pp. 131-132), her work exemplifies much of the potential of biblical masculinity studies to read ancient Hebrew texts in challenging and revelatory ways, going beyond some of the limits of feminist research.

Part 3, “Lo(o)sing It In Sex and Tears”, consists of three texts, all of them focused on the subject of sexuality and gender. Sandra Jacobs (“Divine Virility in Priestly Representation: Its Memory and Consummation in Rabbinic Midrash”) explores the representation of male sexuality in the Priestly depiction of the covenant of the rainbow and examines its relationship to the requirement of circumcision (p. 146). This is a daring study going back to the late Tannaitic and early Amoraic Periods when the rabbinic sages felt the necessity to reconfigure the traditional male ideas of the Priestly tradition, not least as a response to the teachings of Paul (p. 146). According to Jacobs, it is the rabbinic imagination during the time of Roman rule in Judaea which generated the wish to “feminize” the male through the symbolism of circumcision. The “fruitful cut”, a sign of fertility and virility according to the Priestly tradition, paradoxically started to be conceived as a device to turn Jewish males into objects of divine desire, into recipients of divine penetration. Sandra Jacobs’ work relates to the earlier pioneering research of Daniel Boyarin and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz. It is in accord with the broader subject of Jewish males’ otherness, which has recently come to the fore among some American practitioners of masculinity studies.

Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska (“Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)”) revisits the popular story of Samson and the issue of Samson’s masculinity, to indicate the ways in which his masculinity corresponds with a certain model of Israelite/Near Eastern masculinity (p. 171). Her study is grounded in recent anthropological research on honour and shame, particularly in Mediterranean cultural contexts. Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska discusses matters of language and narrative ideology; her analysis is focused especially on issues of honour – at first challenged and asserted, then lost and finally regained at the cost of Samson’s life. An expert close reading, this essay well exemplifies the productive possibilities of the union between biblical masculinity studies and modern anthropological research (a brilliant but quite solitary undertaking in the same direction was Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’ book *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990]).

C. J. Patrick Davis (“Jeremiah, Masculinity and His Portrayal as the ‘Lamenting Prophet’”) challenges the popular idea of the biblical Jeremiah as exemplary of a man in deep remorse and anguish; a man whose message fell upon deaf ears, much resembling the image of the prophet in Rembrandt’s famous portrait “Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem” (1630). How could a prophet, a “man of God” like this, exist amidst the ideas of violent masculinity in the Hebrew Bible? How could the very figure of a lamenting prophet survive in the “fiercely virile social climate” of ancient Israel? With historical competence and prolific argumentation, Davis explores the answers which Lamentations and Jeremiah give to these and other similar questions.

Part 4 is very short because the topic it deals with (“Biblical Men Gendering Bible Readers Today”) is as yet underdeveloped in biblical research. There is a solitary essay here – Andrew Todd’s “Negotiating Daniel’s Masculinity: The Appropriation of Daniel’s Dreams by Actual (Rather than Ideal) Readers”. The point of the essay is hinted at in the phrase “rather than ideal readers”; this is a case study, whose “patients” are real people from rural East Anglia, engaged in group study of the Bible. The paper itself is a result of much empirical research on the ways in which these neither-ideal-nor-implied readers engage with biblical messages while reading Dan 7. It is focused on demonstrating how ancient Israelite ideas of masculinity inform – and are being informed by –

present people's ideas and self representations of gender. This is a meticulous study, pioneering this kind of empirically grounded research into biblical masculinity. Todd is persuasive in his claim that the interpretation of the Bible by members of local church groups may provide "a fascinating window onto contemporary practical hermeneutics" (p. 217).

The book concludes with essays by David Clines and Stephen Moore. Methodologically different though equally articulate in accomplishing their task, both "Final Reflections" summarize the not-too-long history of biblical masculinity studies up to the present moment and draw some rough lines for its further methodological and practical growth.

Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond is not just a "first of its kind" book of collective research. It documents the efforts of a group of biblical scholars working on closely related thematic issues (and even methodological starting points), and is also a promise for further research, suggesting the emergence of a field that seems to be in the process of rapid development.



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