

## BOOK REVIEW

Verheyden, Joseph (ed.), *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect* (TBN, 16; Leiden: Brill, 2013). vi + 274 pp. Hbk. \$167.00.

This volume collects the papers presented at a conference on the literary and cultural reception of the character of Solomon that was held at the University of Leuven in 2009. The cast of contributors is impressively variegated both in terms of geographical location and expertise. Above and beyond the usual topics occurring under the rubric of biblical studies, the essays in this book include treatments of texts and people groups that considerably postdate the close of the New Testament canon.

In his introduction, Joseph Verheyden notes the importance of Solomon within the Hebrew Bible as a king and wise man and in later religious texts that developed both of these themes and additionally recast him as a magician. After providing short summaries of each chapter, he formally sets forth his overall appraisal of and purpose for the volume:

This “criss-crossing” through Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literature has proven to be an excellent way for illustrating both the similarities and the differences that can be detected in the reception history of king Solomon. It is my hope that it has also further enriched our knowledge of this important figure that connects Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious tradition in a most singular way (pp. 5-6).

The first essay, by Isaac Kalimi, is appropriately on the subject of ‘The Rise of Solomon in the Israelite Historiography’. Kalimi carefully relates the well-known contrasting accounts of Solomon (and David) in Samuel–Kings and Chronicles. As a sample of his observations, the political situation at the end of David’s life in Samuel–Kings was unstable and uncertain, with Nathan shrewdly influencing Bathsheba to manipulate David to pick Solomon as his successor. The Chronicler, on the other hand, depicts David as lucid and

strong to the very end, with divine ordination being the sole cause of Solomon's coronation. In similar fashion, Solomon's first deed as king in 1 Kgs 2.13-46 is the toppling of his enemies, while in 2 Chron. 1.1-13 he instead worships God at Gibeon. Upon establishing the familiar portrait of the 'sanitized' Solomon of Chronicles, Kalimi concludes that the Persian-period writer constructed Solomon 'idealistically', so that 'Solomon became a symbol of glory and religious happiness remembered over many generations' (p. 41). Special note deserves to be made of the depth of Kalimi's research throughout: not only are his textual observations thoughtful and rich, but his footnotes and bibliography reflect sustained engagement with a gamut of North American and Continental as well as Modern Hebrew sources. The only question remaining to be asked pertains to the later parts of Chronicles that do not reflect a sanctified Solomon so neatly, such as his accumulation of horses and chariots in 2 Chronicles 9.

Pekka Särkiö's 'Solomon in History and Tradition' broadly discusses issues surrounding the historicity of the Solomon accounts in the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately, its value as a contribution is dampened by its lack of a clear thesis statement, structure or conclusion. Särkiö begins by referring to the complications introduced by the minimalist-maximalist debate, the disputed term 'biblical archaeology' and the 'low chronology' of Finkelstein (which pushes the conventional dating of the monarchy later by nearly a century). Following this, Särkiö reflects on some of the paradoxes of Solomon's character in the various proposed editorial layers of the Deuteronomistic History. His failure to identify the purpose of this chapter makes further evaluation of its effectiveness impossible.

Wolfgang Zwickel's 'Der Tempel Salomos im Kontext der Ikonographie und der archäologischen Funde' begins with the observation that Solomon's activities were instrumental in greatly expanding Israel's international visibility and influence, paving the way for future rulers like Omri. Zwickel first seeks to establish a core base text within 1 Kings 6-7 that can be reliably dated to the time of Solomon himself and, secondly, to exposit the theological implications of the features of the temple. His treatment of the significance of the temple design is detailed while also well-organized. The remarkable length of the temple (creating distance between the worshiper and God), the empty throne, the cherubs and the candles speak to YHWH's transcendence and holiness. A second set of symbols (such as the palm trees) depicts YHWH as 'responsible for fertility and keeping of life' (p. 72). More controversially, Zwickel proposes, on the basis of comparison with Mediterranean cult pools

of 'heavenly' freshwater, that the sea of cast metal (1 Kgs 7.23) is likewise a fertility symbol. Here, he deliberately critiques the Chronicler, who describes this as a washing-basin (2 Chron. 4.6), on the basis that it would have been far too large to serve this purpose. The ten stands (*Kesselwagen*) and the two pillars also symbolically point to creation. Zwickel ultimately concludes that, in addition to these two theological points, the temple itself served an important political function: '... the temple, one of the largest of the time, consolidates the position of Solomon' (p. 77) by providing a concrete point of reference of something that is stable and linked to the kingship. While most of Zwickel's theological associations can be substantiated from the text itself, he references very few secondary sources, and his appeals to ancient Near Eastern conventions are largely a matter of general assertions (with a scarcity of specific examples). His conclusions would hold more weight if they were substantiated with the kind of rigorous study of iconography pioneered by Othmar Keel, and demonstrated recently by works such as Izaak J. de Hulster, Brent A. Strawn and Ryan P. Bonfiglio (eds.), *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

Joseph Verheyden's chapter, 'Josephus on Solomon' sets out to unpack some of the features of Josephus' portrait of Solomon as well as the way this particular Solomon would likely have been received by his readership. Verheyden documents the paradoxes of the figure of Solomon in Josephus, as this Solomon exemplifies a number of virtues, but displays considerable weaknesses as well. For example, he is said in many places to seek and enact justice, but Josephus nonetheless includes the stories of his ruthless extinction of other rivals for the throne. Similar tensions are found in the areas of his modesty, wisdom, piety, bravery and use of wealth. Verheyden considers the possibility that some Jews may have been disturbed by such an unflinching portrayal of the faults of such a great king, but he ultimately concludes that 'this is a great picture of a mighty ruler, *because* it is far from perfect' (p. 103).

In 'Solomon and Magic', Pablo A. Torijano looks at the references to Solomon found in the magical texts of Late Antiquity. Torijano traces this association back to the first-century BCE Qumran document 11QapPs<sup>a</sup> (*Apocryphal Psalms*), which refers to Solomon as an exorcist. Later Greek texts and amulets describe 'Solomon's ring as a powerful instrument to deter demons' (p. 115). A separate stream of tradition involves a Solomon who possesses expertise in matters such as astrology and casting spells. The concluding

comments on the cumulative and praxis-oriented nature of magical beliefs indicate that further interaction with theoretical approaches for studying magic would have been insightful.

Gerhard Langer's 'Solomon in Rabbinic Literature' begins by observing the relative scarcity of Rabbinic references to Solomon as compared to David. He deliberately chooses five discrete (and deliberately non-comprehensive) recurring features of Solomonic material in the Rabbinic corpus: etymologies of Solomon's name, different interpretations of his effectiveness as a ruler, the symbolism of Solomon's throne, demons and temptation and Solomon as the prototypical wise man. For Langer, a consistent feature of these texts is that Solomon is treated positively in his capacity as a sage, while memories of his kingship are clouded by his various shortcomings.

Albert L.A. Hogeterp's chapter is entitled 'King Solomon in the New Testament and Jewish Tradition'. Hogeterp organizes these literary references under the headings of Solomon's temple and its legacy (including the possibility of an anti-temple polemic in Acts 7.48), the scattered references to Solomon in the Gospels and the possible utilization of deuterocanonical works attributed to Solomon. He finds that the temple was associated with the 'Jerusalemite establishment' complicit with the Herodians (thus leading to negative overtones) but that Solomon as a king was remembered positively.

Tobias Nicklas's 'Salomo, Christus und die *Oden Salomos*' begins with some of the matters relating to the cloudy background of the *Odes of Solomon*: (1) a number of manuscripts connect it to the *Psalms of Solomon*, (2) it is often assumed to be a Christian text even though the name of Jesus never appears and (3) the link between the *Odes* and the Solomon of the Hebrew Bible is difficult to map out. With these issues in mind he explores the question of why Solomon's name was attached to the *Odes* by dividing the task into three different parts: its relationship to the *Psalms of Solomon*, the legacy of Solomon as a writer of poetry and wisdom and the interpretation of Solomon as a messianic figure in early Judaism and Christianity. Nicklas's most significant conclusion is that the voice of the *Odes* would have naturally been messianic for early readers, as Christ, just like Solomon 'can be called "lover", and participating in the "quiet" and "peace" means salvation' (p. 180).

The brief contribution of Peter Busch, 'Solomon as a True Exorcist: The Testament of Solomon in its Cultural Setting' seeks to explicate the way in which a 'first reader' would have processed Solomon's interactions with the

demons. Busch isolates parallels between the various descriptions of demons in the *Testament of Solomon* and third- and fourth-century iconography, fairy-tales and the New Testament itself. Based particularly on the final comparison, Busch argues that the *Testament of Solomon* was originally a Christian text, and that Solomon's characterization as the 'true exorcist' intersects the early Christian debate over whether demon possession could be executed by anyone or only a select few. The use of a royal figure such as Solomon makes it likely that the *Testament of Solomon* is advocating the authority of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem to perform exorcisms, as opposed to the desert monks.

Jacques van der Vliet's 'Solomon in Egyptian Gnosticism' surveys the wide-ranging (and often negative) usages of Solomon in Gnostic sources. Van der Vliet understands Gnosticism to 'be a basically Christian phenomenon' (p. 197) founded upon an urban, Hellenistic recasting of salvation. While the *Pistis Sophia* is notable for treating the *Odes of Solomon* as authoritative Scripture spoken by Christ, and a range of texts refer to Solomon as an exorcist (based on the *Testament of Solomon*), much more remarkable are the *Testimony of Truth*, in which Solomon is castigated as one who used demons to build Jerusalem, and the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, in which Solomon is a 'laughingstock' (p. 209) for falsely assuming messianic titles. For van der Vliet, it is most significant that the Old Testament is rejected while remaining a wellspring of figurative material, and that these texts as a whole are much more dependent on apocryphal traditions than the biblical canon.

'Solomon in Ethiopian Tradition', written by Witold Witakowski and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, begins by advancing the premise that certain early religious traditions in Ethiopia are the result of Jews who 'migrated from Palestine via South Arabia' (p. 219). Specifically, they argue that folklore about Solomon is evidence of a Jewish presence predating the arrival of Christianity in the country. Most notable among these traditions is *The Glory of the Kings*, in which the Queen of Sheba produces a child with King Solomon, placing Ethiopia in the royal line of Israel. A range of Ethiopic magic texts praise Solomon's skill as an exorcist. Finally, from the fifteenth century onward a great deal of art depicts various biblical narratives about Solomon. Based on the evidence they have collected, Witakowski and Balicka-Witakowska conclude that 'it is clear that in Ethiopia the king was recognized first as a magician and then as a biblical and holy figure' (p. 238).

Jules Janssens provides the final essay, 'The Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā' on King-Prophet Solomon'. The Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā' were a fringe Islamic group in the tenth or eleventh century who were broadly familiar with the learning of their day. Solomon (along with Joseph and David) was very significant for them due to his dual kingship and priesthood, which they saw as prefiguring Muhammad. This connection became an apologetic aimed at the Jews and Christians of their day. For them, Solomon had power over the *jinn* (spirits) via his mastery of magic and his ability to translate foreign treatises. They also developed Qur'anic traditions about Solomon being so wise that he was able to speak to animals. As a result, their Solomon 'possesses a high degree of perfection on both the exoteric and esoteric levels' (p. 252).

*The Figure of Solomon* presents a well-organized selection of essays that proceed through the biblical evidence onwards in a linear manner. Every important corpus of relevant texts is at least touched on, and most essays give the interested reader directions for further consultation of primary sources. The summary nature of most of the essays frequently results in authors noting that their chapters are calls for further investigation, and not in-depth original arguments. A notable omission is the lack of any dedicated investigation of the Wisdom of Solomon or the *Psalms of Solomon*, as revealed by the scarcity of citations of these works listed in the index at the end. Nonetheless, anyone curious about the development of biblical tropes in the later texts of the monotheistic faiths will benefit from reading this book.

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