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# AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY

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Assurbanipal did not build both “a significant library and museum” (p. 33, referring to Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* [1964], 15–18). For museums see P. Calmeyer, “Museum,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 8.5/6 (1995): 453–55; there are a few possibilities before Nebuchadnezzar II, but not Assurbanipal.

Schneider nowhere explains the conventions for the cuneiform writing system. Beginning students seeing numbers after signs may think we are into tones, as we may be, but that is not what the numbers are for.

Inconsistencies are troubling since the reader may wonder what else that looks plausible is wrong, e.g., Samsu-ilum (p. 27) versus Samsuiluna (p. 142). And typos: Fara not Faran (p. 53 n. 7, also p. 135); Brunaburiash and Khashtiliash (p. 142). The ritual called *mis pi* is correctly “mouth washing” on p. 76, but on p. 111 at some length it has become “opening of the mouth.” The map on p. 19 is good, but it is far too small.

More importantly, Schneider does not explore the key roles of temples in what we would call charity work. That is what all those storehouses were for. And Schneider implies that only Naram-Sin and Shulgi were deified, though the divine determinative was much more widely used and Šu-Sin had a temple dedicated to him.

I like the idea that the goddess Ishtar is best understood as deified adrenaline. This encompasses sex and war for sure. And clearly the author is an inspiring teacher. I would like to have seen pictures of her students dressed up as the different gods on whom they were reporting. The king having his face slapped, she says, was getting “a performance review,” a cute way of looking at it, which of course he would not have shared.

In short I did not learn much from the book, and there were some minor lapses that made me doubt its general reliability as a text book. Though short, at 130 pages of text, it is sometimes repetitious. But it is not a bad introduction to some of the problems of studying Mesopotamian religions, and who can fault her general good cheer or her closing admonition to “hug our kids, hug our spouses, eat some good food, and enjoy a nice beer”? These were Mesopotamian values for sure and ones worth keeping.

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*Midrasch Wasjoscha: Edition, Tradition, Interpretation.* By ELISABETH WIES-CAMPAGNER. *Studia Judaica*, vol. 49. Berlin: WALTER DE GRUYTER, 2009. Pp. viii + 517. €121.45.

The phenomenon of Midrash is beautifully complex, abounds with possibilities. A Hebrew noun derived from a verb which originally meant to inquire, explore, investigate, or seek out (similar to the Greek word *his-*

*toria*), Midrash includes a multifaceted, intellectual process of pondering and expanding the meaning of the biblical text as well as the development of literary traditions, both written and oral, that contain the products of this exegetical endeavor. The rabbis, a scholarly group active in Roman and then Byzantine Palestine in the first few centuries of the Common Era, coined the term Midrash and produced some of its most conspicuous texts. But the midrashic experience, even if not labeled as such, extends well beyond the realm of the rabbis. Its earliest seeds reach as far back as biblical books, such as Chronicles, which contemplated the meaning and reacted to the content of earlier books—Genesis, to name one of several examples. Later, in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, diverse and at times opposing Jewish groups—such as the Essenes in Qumran, who composed much of the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the followers of Jesus who generated the traditions known as the Gospels—all partook in midrashic activity and used it as a tool to shape their distinct identities. In the centuries following the rabbis, Midrash travelled with Jewish communities as they settled in Arab and European lands across the medieval world. Jewish scholars of these later times (adopting the prestigious name of their predecessors and also calling themselves rabbis) continued to create Midrash either by collecting and reconfiguring earlier texts or by developing new ones. Midrash remains a lively phenomenon in modern Jewish circles as well.

Since the rise of the academic study of Judaism in the nineteenth century, Midrash has received continuous attention, to the extent that today it encompasses a subfield of its own. Right from the start, modern scholars identified the production of critical editions for the midrashic texts as a top priority. Naturally, at first they mainly concentrated on the core of the midrashic corpus, the classical texts produced by the rabbis of the Roman-Byzantine eras. But the most recent generation has widened our field of interest to seriously investigate also the later Midrashim from medieval times. Two different methodologies for the making of critical editions emerged in the study of Midrash (and rabbinic literature in general). With a few exceptions, Israeli scholars adhere to the classic model of the “diplomatic edition,” a transcription of one manuscript as the “base text” and the recording of variants from other textual witnesses in the *apparatus criticus*; German scholars, on the other hand, have largely embraced the “synoptic edition,” whereby all, or at least representative versions, of the text are offered in their entirety, arranged in parallel columns (thus the term “synopsis”) or in sequence. The pros and cons of the two systems are beyond the scope of this review.

*Midrasch Wasjoscha* (which would be better transliterated in English as *va-Yosha*) belongs to a group of relatively short Midrashim from the Middle Ages. It received its name from the first biblical word of

the famous Song of the Red Sea in the book of Exodus (14:30), around which its author organized the midrashic output—"Thus the Lord saved (va-Yosha)." The text abounds with eschatological and messianic overtones, similar to other texts from this period, the best known of which is the *Book of Zerubavel*, and it also makes direct reference to the figure Armilus, a sort of antichrist character. Although for nearly 150 years of Jewish Studies *Midrash va-Yosha* rarely caught the attention of modern scholars, it now benefits from the current explosion in this field and the resulting effort to find new venues of investigation. In a twenty-year span, not one but two critical editions of it have seen the light: a diplomatic one in Jerusalem by Zohara Pardes-Feinstein (1993) and the current, German-style synoptic edition, by Elisabeth Wies-Campagner. On top of this, Rachel Mikva, in a 2008 PhD dissertation at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York), provided an in-depth study of the literary dimension of the

text. Wies-Campagner's edition under review here contains the fundamentals of philological inquiry: 1) a survey of all existing textual witnesses, both manuscripts and early printings, and their classification into groups and families; 2) a meticulous comparative analysis of central linguistic characteristics, especially those that separate the various versions; 3) an examination of the textual transmission, with specific attention to sources, parallel traditions, and reception; as well as 4) brief consideration of the text's historical context, its *Sitz im Leben*. In a synoptic fashion, the author concludes her study by offering German translations of the central versions as well as Hebrew transcriptions of its seventeen textual witnesses.

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