

BOOK REVIEWS / BOEKRESENSIES

Joy A. Schroeder. *Dinah's Lament. The Biblical Legacy of Sexual Violence in Christian Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. 317 pages. Price not mentioned. ISBN 978-0-8006-3843-6.

This book explores the way Christians between 150 and 1600 C.E. (from the early church and the Middle Ages through the Reformation) have interpreted biblical narratives about sexual violence. Using biblical commentaries, homilies, sermons, letters and priest's handbooks, the book gives an account of the history of interpretation of the narratives about Dinah in Genesis 34, the Levite's concubine in Judges 19, Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, the alleged rape of Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39 and Susanna in Daniel 13. These are disturbing biblical stories, but it soon becomes clear that the Christian *interpretations* of these stories are often more troubling than the stories themselves.

The meticulous research that went into the book, especially into the study and interpretation of primary Latin sources, is impressive. Fifteen glossy pages with coloured illustrations portray incidents of sexual violence from medieval Christian art, inviting readers to become voyeurs of the violence and emotions suffered by the victims. Since interpreters bring to the text their cultural assumptions and biases regarding sexual violence and women's position in society, Schroeder emphasises that the book must be read against the background of the way sexual violence was understood in the interpreters' cultures and legal systems. Three stories will serve as examples.

In the introductory chapter an account is given of Roman and medieval rape laws. Although Roman law was relentless towards the perpetrator, the victim who ventured outside her home alone or judged to be a willing party could be exiled or burned to death. In medieval times, women reporting rape assaults more often than not found themselves arrested and punished for false charges or for inciting the attack. In many cases the woman was expected to marry her rapist or she was imprisoned in a Magdalene house' for fallen women. Against the backdrop of the grim reality of the legal and social effects of rape on women, the subsequent chapters deal with interpretations of stories of biblical rape victims.

Interpretations of Dinah's rape in Genesis 34 reflect a time when virginity and chastity were the great virtues of Christian behaviour. Medieval exegetes used the fate of Dinah to enforce the strict enclosure of nuns within the walls of the cloister to protect them from becoming accomplices to their own rape and seduction. In numerous cases sexual violence is justified as the victim's rightful punishment for some sin she committed. Augustine (345-430 C.E.) regarded rape as God sent, for it teaches women to think twice before future sinning! For most interpreters Dinah's sin was not her going out to see

the girls in the vicinity, but her great vice was that she went to see the women's fashions, as "women were ever desirous of novelties and given to needless curiosity" (35). Through curiosity women compare themselves with the appearance of others, resulting in the sins of seduction, pride and vainglory. Interestingly, Martin Luther (1483-1546), in his *Genesis Commentary*, cast less blame on Dinah, since as a father of daughters he understood the curiosity of young girls and he rather emphasised the duty of parents to control their daughters. John Calvin attempts to diminish the brutality of the rape (*Genesis Commentary*, 1550) by interpreting Shechem's belated affection for Dinah to mean that Moses clearly implied that Dinah was "not so forcibly violated" (45).

The rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 was simply overlooked by a large number of patristic and medieval exegetes, including Luther, whose commentary on Judges abruptly ends with chapter 18 (103). Generally, those who did comment on the incident, found the abuse of the concubine deplorable (i.e. Ambrose, c. 391). Several sixteen-century commentaries (i.e. Lutheran reformer Brenz, 1535) saw the horrific form of death as God's execution since she transgressed the Law by adulterating against her husband. She therefore deserved her fate. Others blamed her for provoking the rape by her enticing appearance. However, not the violent treatment of the woman, but the issue of the mob's request to rape the male guest, would dominate the history of interpretation of Judges 19. Male rape, or sodomy, being a sexual act "against nature" was regarded more shameful than female rape. Defilement of the woman's body was less grave than the defilement of a man, declared Augustine. The abuse of the concubine was classified as "natural" and therefore less reprehensible.

In the story of Tamar and Amnon in 2 Samuel 13, most commentators withheld blame from Tamar as she was seen as a victim of an unprovoked attack by a perverse abuser. In some writings Amnon's identity as Tamar's *brother* was projected onto clerics of religious orders and the story is told to criticise monks and priests for misleading women sexually. John Calvin, in a sermon on the passage (1563), reproaches Tamar for wanting to marry her brother after the rape as it was against the law of God. Amnon's act of driving her out was more praiseworthy than her desire to persist in sin. A woman who has just proposed an illicit marriage had no right to proclaim her innocence in a public display of tearing her clothes and wailing in the streets. Tamar was content with "squatting in her filth" (183), says Calvin who shows no sympathy for her plight. It was a seventeenth-century Venetian nun, Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1654), who vigorously defended the raped women in the Hebrew Bible by proclaiming that none of the victims was the guilty party (89).

Dinah's Lament is a significant and timely publication for two reasons: first, we live at a time of rampant sexual violence worldwide, with, sadly to say, South Africa leading the world in rape cases and second, biblical feminist

authors have increasingly expressed concern about the way current interpreters of rape texts choose to belittle the reality of sexual violence by offering interpretations that deny or minimise the rape. Joy Schroeder's study contributes to the discussion by raising important questions about the way the Bible is still shielded from criticism in certain circles only to reinforce silencing and violence against women. The book is highly recommended for readers interested in the history and literature from antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Reformation, as well as those concerned about the current rape culture reigning in societies all over the world.

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Martina Seifert (ed.). *Aphodite: Herrin des Krieges – Göttin der Liebe*. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2009. 139 pp. Cloth. 30 €. ISBN 978-3-8053-3942-1.

Der vorliegende Sammelband gibt einen Überblick über die Entstehung und Verbreitung des Aphrodite-Kultes. Er versucht, die von verschiedenen Kulturen des alten Orients geprägten Kulteinflüsse aufzuzeigen, vornehmlich die Einflüsse weiblicher Kriegsgöttinnen des alten Orients. Dabei erweist sich Aphrodite als immer noch populäre Gestalt der Mythologie und zugleich als Beispiel für den kulturellen Austausch zwischen Ost und West: „... in der modernen Forschung gelten kriegerische Gottheiten wie Astarte oder Inanna/Ishtar als orientalische ‚Vorgängerinnen‘ der Aphrodite, d. h. die Entstehung der griechischen Aphrodite-Figur wird zumindest zum Teil als das Ergebnis der Kulturkontakten zwischen den Griechen und den Völkern des Nahen Ostens gegriffen“ (7). Der Insel Zypern kommt dabei als mythischem Geburtsort der Aphrodite und als kultureller Kontaktzone zwischen Ost und West besondere Bedeutung zu.

Die Aufsätze nach dem Vorwort (7-13) von M. Seifert sind: M. Seifert, „Aphrodite – eine Liebesgötting auf einer langen Reise“ (14-26); J. Kersten, „Die altorientalische Inanna/Ishtar als Vorbild der Aphrodite“ (27-45; die sumerische Inanna und die akkadische Ishtar, zur Ikonographie der altorientalischen Göttin, ihre Rolle in der altorientalischen Literatur, weibliche Gottheiten im mesopotamischen Pantheon, Inanna/Ishtar auf dem Weg nach Westen, verwandte Züge zur kyprischen Aphrodite); M.-G. Schröter, „Die phönizische Astarte – Schwester der kyprischen Göttin“ (46-62); J. Budenheim, „Eine Schönheit aus Schaum“ (63-75); A. Knieburg, „Hephaistos und Ares: Mythische Ursprünge zu Aphrodite und die bronzezeitliche Kupferverarbeitung auf Zypern“ (76-90, u. a. kulturelle Blüte zwischen den Großmächten, Handel und Metallurgie als Schätze Zyperns, der Kult der Großen Göttin); W. Friese, „Geliebter Gott oder göttlicher Geliebter? Adoniskult im Schatten der

Aphrodite“ (91-110), K. Kleibl, „Bündnis und Verschmelzung zweier Göttinnen: Isis und Aphrodite in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit“ (111-) und R. Hirschmann, „... und Aphrodite schaut zu“ (126-37). Der großzügig farbig bebilderte und illustrierte Band endet mit einer Auswahlbibliographie (138f).

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