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This monograph is a revised version of the author’s dissertation submitted to the University of Helsinki (supervisor, Raija Solamo) and the University of Vienna (supervisor, Armin Lange) in 2013. Tervanotko describes the task she sets out for herself in this study as twofold: to “analyze the treatment and the development of the literary figure of Miriam as a literary figure in ancient Jewish texts” (from the exilic period to the early second century CE) and to determine what the differing depictions of Miriam can tell us about “the reception of women in different eras and contexts” (19).

The first task determines the basic structure of the book. Tervanotko organizes the material chronologically, beginning with texts from the Persian Era (Exod 15:20–21; Deut 24:8–9; Num 12:1–15; 20:1; 26:59; Mic 6:4); then from the Hellenistic Era, separating texts from Judea (1 Chr 5:29; Visions of Amram [4Q543–549]; Reworked Pentateuchc [4Q365]; Jubilees 47:4; Apocryphal Pentateuch B [4Q377]) and texts from Egypt (the Septuagint, Demetrius the Chronographer, Exagoge); and finally texts from the Roman Era (Philo, Liber antiquitatum biblicarum, Josephus). There is a set pattern of presentation, though with some variation depending on concerns or problematic issues in a specific text and with the occasional insertion of broader thematic considerations (e.g., Death and Burial of Female Figures, 94–96; Victory Songs Attributed to Women, 151–153, The Levites in the Second Temple Period, 180–188). For each of the approximately twenty passages or groups of passages treated, there is an introduction to the overall literary work; a discussion of text, vocabulary, stylistic and literary critical issues; a detailed exposition of what the text says about Miriam per se; a section entitled “Relationship with the Earlier Texts” (which focuses on issues of intertextuality); and a final summary. This structuring of the book according to a consistent but rather rigid grid was probably a wise decision given that most readers will be quite familiar with some texts and completely unfamiliar with others. It does result, however, in the inclusion of some quite rudimentary and basic information (particularly for the biblical passages) on the one hand and, on the other hand, in considerable repetition, especially in the frequent summaries.

As Tervanotko notes, she made a deliberate decision to bring together all the texts from the Second Temple period that treat Miriam, not separating artificially the so-called biblical texts from passages preserved only in Dead Sea Scrolls fragments or from reflections about Miriam that are part of the Philonic
and Josephean corpus. On a very practical level, the result is that we have here a compilation of all the primary materials in an accessible form for non-specialists, especially those who might come to the study of Miriam because of a broader interest in feminist studies or in women in the ancient world. But for Tervanotko more is at stake. She does not want to create the impression that the earlier passages (especially those from the Pentateuch) were the “original” Miriam traditions and the later ones are their rewritings. Rather all traditions are changeable, and all texts are compiled from already existing traditions so that the dependency between literary works creates what Tervanotko characterizes as the “literary phenomenon called intertextuality” (31). Following Mikhail Bakhtin, she argues the differing treatments of Miriam in specific texts not only “create an intertextual web” but also reflect historical realities, that is, “how women were received at the times they [the texts] were composed” (285). Thus we are able “to analyze what kind of rewriting granted Miriam (i.e. women) more space, and what kind of textual elements narrowed her down” (39).

To summarize very broadly: Tervanotko argues that the earliest texts from the Persian era (Exod 15:20–21; Num 20:3; Mic 6:4) portray Miriam as an early Israelite leader, alongside Moses and Aaron; in later Persian references (Num 26:59) the three are consistently presented as siblings and as Levites. In texts from the Hellenistic era from Judea, Miriam’s inclusion as a member of the Levite family is “reciprocally status-building” (126) and “profoundly intertwined with the Levites’ struggle for power” (181); this Levitical emphasis fades out in the second century precisely when the Levites become less important. Tervanotko concludes that Hellenistic texts from Egypt generally treated Miriam favorably; an important component in this judgment is Tervanotko’s extended argument that the Septuagint preserves Miriam’s original inclusion in the genealogical list in Exod 6:20, from which she was later removed in the MT by scribes to create a solely male lineage. Texts from the Roman period are seen as more disparate; while the Miriam of L.A.B. reflects a “less hierarchial and organized community where men and women were accepted as leaders” (283), Philo and Josephus most often minimize the role and autonomy of Miriam. Thus, Tervanotko concludes that on the level of literary analysis the texts “provide a contradictory image of Miriam. On the one hand, she becomes a tool of Levitical politics, whereas on the other she continues enjoying a freer role” (293). On the socio-historical level, these differing treatments of Miriam “should be regarded as a reflection of how women were received at the times they [the texts] were composed” (285).

There is much to be said in favor of the breadth and comprehensiveness of this monograph. Certain insights only come to the fore when all the relevant