REVIEWS


In this original and highly detailed study (a revised and expanded version of her Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1978-1984), Yairah Amit unravels the editorial tendencies and methods which guided the composition of the book of Juges (= BJ). In moving away from traditional scholarly attempts to reconstruct the origins and different stages of recension of the BJ, Amit concentrates on the art of its editing from the perspective of the "final product" of the given Masoretic Text.

This thought-provoking study deserves the full attention of biblical scholars, particularly those dealing with historiography and literary analysis. In offering the following English summary of the book, I hope that the author's views have not been misrepresented, and that it will prove useful to those unversed in Modern Hebrew.

Ch. 1 (pp. 3-24) deals with the role of the biblical editor against the background of general literary theories concerning the art of editing. In it, Amit also defines her objectives which are to uncover the editorial principles underlying the composition of the BJ and the selection process of its materials, as well as to understand their subsequent arrangement and their contribution to the creation of meaning in the BJ. Amit emphasizes that, although the editing of the BJ (like that of the entire Hebrew Bible) was a long, complex and collective venture, its editors managed to sustain at every stage some fixed guidelines, Amit uses the concept of an "implied editor" (loosely based on the literary-critical concept of an "implied author"; see pp. 11-16). This concept is meant to cover the work of one or more biblical editors, who over the span of several generations kept faith with basic editorial principles relating to the didactic and rhetoric functions of biblical literature, and who recognized the importance of catering to its wide and varied audience. According to Amit, the difference between an author and an editor in the case of the BJ is essentially a theoretical one, since the finalized text is the one which has reached us through the work of the implied editor. Thus, the text of the BJ reflects not only the message of its author(s) but also the collective meaning that became attached to it by editors who functioned as authors during many years of transmission before its sanctification and codification. As Amit points out, such an approach is not far removed from that of redaction criticism, as it has been applied in the study of the New Testament (p. 17).

In the light of these theoretical distinctions, the second chapter of the

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book (pp. 25-110) is devoted to the two major editorial principles guiding the composition of the BJ, defined by Amit as “signs” and “leadership”. With regard to signs (pp. 27-55), Amit conceives of the implied editor as having the notion that the historical process came about as the result of the interaction between God and the Israelites, and that this interaction is manifested through direct and indirect signs which God gives to his people, and which attest his involvement in the course of events. The need to emphasize that history unravels through signs, as a logical rather than haphazard process, is the main reason for the editorial structuring of most of the events described in the BJ as cycles. These create a cumulative rhetorical effect in convincing the reader that throughout this period God was directly involved in the behaviour patterns and in the fate of his people. The sign as a theological editorial principle is further explicated in Amit’s discussion of its characteristics and function within the BJ and in other accounts of biblical historiography.

With regard to leadership (pp. 56-108), Amit demonstrates how the implied editor was guided by the need to describe the failure in political leadership characteristic of the period of the Judges, in order to highlight the background for the establishment of a monarchy in Israel as a preferable, though suspect, political institution. In accordance with this editorial principle the period of the judges is fashioned as a series of growing disappointments with the Judges’ inability to create political stability culminating in total anarchy, which gradually leads the reader to a recognition of the necessity for establishing monarchical rule over Israel as the only pragmatic long-term solution. Amit proceeds to illuminate the leadership role of various Judges throughout the seven cycles of the BJ, showing how their particular order of appearance and characterization (beginning with the “saviour” judges from Othniel to Gideon, continuing with the “minor” judges who personify the advantages of continuous rule, and culminating with the “disappointing” judges Jephthah and Samson) is crucial in creating the editor’s desired effect on his readers. Nevertheless, Amit stresses that the monarchy is not represented as an ideal solution but rather as a realistic compromise. In her opinion, the story of Abimelech (Judg. viii 29-ix 57) is intentionally placed in the centre of the BJ, appearing in both narrative and parable forms, in order to enable the readers to consider the negative and forboding aspects of kingship. This is meant to create a reserved view of the monarchy as the least bad of political regimes, which according to Amit is close to that of the Deuteronomistic school, but not identical with it. In promoting a realistic, non-eschatological and yet essentially optimistic view of the monarchy, removed from the hard-core negativism of the Deuteronomist, the editors of the BJ represent it as an institution which has political potential and which holds a chance for a better future, thus preparing their readers for