

Reviews

Religious Studies

Ferdinand van den Bosch, *De voorstelling van de godin Aṭiratu in de Ugaritische alfabetische teksten: Een bijdrage aan de beeldvorming van de West-Semitische godin Asjera* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum Academic, 2018), ISBN 9789023956570; 453 pp., € 39.99.

This dissertation, defended at Utrecht University, addresses the descriptions of the goddess Athiratu in the Ugaritic texts and compares them with the scarcer and less material references to her namesake Asherah in the Hebrew Bible. Many deities that occur in the Ugaritic texts are also mentioned in the Bible, which suggests that Ugarit and Israel had a common cultural and religious background. Van den Bosch argues that religious concepts from Ugarit may have influenced Israel's religiosity through Phoenicia. Further, he supposes that aspects of Athiratu that in the Ugaritic texts appear to constitute her 'anthropomorphic core' were probably also seen as Asherah's essential characteristics in Israel, while her traits that in the Ugaritic texts seem to be more peripheral may have been unknown in Israel. In his analysis of the texts, van den Bosch examines current interpretations critically. He shares the common view that Athiratu's epithet *qnyt ilm*, 'Creatress (?) of the gods', expresses her maternity and motherly care, but interprets *rbt atrt ym* as 'Lady Athiratu (mother) of (the god) Yammu' instead of 'Lady Athiratu of the sea/the day'. Most of the references to Athiratu occur in the Kirta legend (KTU 1.14-1.16) and the Baal myth (KTU 1.1-1.6), where she is the wife of the main god Ilu. In his analysis, van den Bosch focuses on the Kirta legend, an epic describing many interactions between gods and humans. He intends to discover its plot with the help of the structuralist approaches of Mieke Bal and others, but is confronted with the disadvantage that part of the text is fragmentary and that essential sections are missing. A further disadvantage is the lack of evidence concerning the text's background, which makes it impossible to establish to what degree the epic either preserves older traditions, or deliberately corrects them. The analysis

of the Kirta legend is thorough and quite creative but also quite speculative, as the author appears to realise. Contrary to most other scholars, van den Bosch assumes that King Kirta fulfilled his vow to Athiratu, which implied that he would give the goddess a large amount of silver and gold if he would acquire Hariya as his bride (KTU 1.14:IV). According to van den Bosch's unusual interpretation, Athiratu did not know that the vow had been fulfilled or was dissatisfied with the fulfilment. Following the birth of his children, she punished Kirta by making him ill. After Ilu had arranged Kirta's healing, Athiratu possibly incited Kirta's first-born son Yaşşibu, whom she had suckled, to revolt against his father. In the ritual texts that refer to Athiratu, her sacrifices are mentioned before the sacrifices to the other goddesses but immediately after the sacrifices to the highest male gods, which demonstrates her relatively high position and, according to van den Bosch, her wisdom. At the end of the book, van den Bosch rightly concludes that the Ugaritic texts regard maternity as an essential characteristic of Athiratu. His conclusion that wisdom was also part of her 'anthropomorphic core' remains unsubstantiated, just like the idea that the Kirta legend marks a new stage in the marginalisation of Athiratu. A proper analysis of Athiratu's role in the Baal myth (esp. KTU 1.4:I-V and 1.6:I) would have yielded different conclusions, namely that Ilu and Athiratu enjoyed a good relationship, that Athiratu was fond of golden and silver presents, and that she was unwise when she suggested to appoint Athtaru as Baal's successor. In my view, Athiratu's relationship with Ilu may have made it attractive for Israelites to accept Asherah as a high deity, next to her husband El/YHWH; cf. the texts from Kuntillet Ajrud, which refer to 'YHWH and his Asherah'.

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