

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies
Department

Classics and Religious Studies

August 1997

Review of *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, ed. John J. Collins

Sidnie White Crawford

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, scrawford1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/classicsfacpub>



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Crawford, Sidnie White, "Review of *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, ed. John J. Collins" (1997). *Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies Department*. 56.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/classicsfacpub/56>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Classics and Religious Studies at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies Department by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

BIBLE BOOKS

BR

The Birth of Messianism



The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature

John J. Collins, ed.

(New York: Doubleday, 1995) Anchor Bible Reference Library, 270 pp., \$30

REVIEWED BY SIDNIE WHITE CRAWFORD

The popularity of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the controversy surrounding their publication have led to the appearance of a spate of books on the Qumran scrolls in recent years. With so many books on the shelves, it is difficult for

the reader to differentiate the good from the bad, the wheat from the chaff. Among the books recently published concerning the scrolls, John Collins's book *The Scepter and the Star* represents a nugget of pure gold.

The book, which is concerned with the messianic expectations found in the Qumran scrolls, is the culmination of a long series of articles on the Messiah at Qumran written by Collins over the last decade. Collins begins with a general overview of the subject of messianism in Judaism in the Second Temple period and then moves to a discussion of messianic passages in the Hebrew Bible. He reaches the somewhat startling conclusion that "messianism was virtually dormant from the early fifth to the late second century B.C.E." and only emerged as an active ideology in the first century B.C.E., the period of the waning of the

Hasmonean dynasty and the emergence of Rome.

This general discussion sets the stage for a discussion of Qumran messianism. Collins deals with all of the Qumran texts that use the word "messiah" or appear to allude to messianism in any way, including the Damascus Document (one of the rule books of the community), Aramaic Levi (a document purporting to be the testament of the patriarch Levi), 11QMelchizedek (an eschatological text dealing with the heavenly prince Melchizedek), a messianic fragment known as the "Son of God" text, and the 4QTestimonia (an anthology of biblical passages referring to a messianic figure).

In his discussion Collins assumes that the group living at Qumran was a sect with a distinctive ideology (probably the Essenes) but was not hermetically sealed off from the outside world. Therefore, the collection of manuscripts found at Qumran coheres as a collection (that is, it is not haphazard) but also reflects trends that were widespread in Judaism and can thus be used to make statements about Second Temple Judaism in general. As a result of this understanding, Collins interprets the messianic references found in the scrolls in the light of other messianic texts from the Second Temple period, such as the Psalms of Solomon (a collection of psalms from the first century B.C.E.) and Second Baruch and Fourth Ezra (both apocalypses written in the wake of the fall of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.).

This excellent method results in the most inclusive, coherent picture of messianism in the Second Temple period to date. According to Collins, there are four distinct messianic paradigms in Second Temple Judaism: king (son of David), priest, prophet (the new Moses) and heavenly messiah (Son of Man). These paradigms can be combined, and the emphasis on one or the other varies from community to community. Therefore, the acceptance or rejection of a particular person as the messiah depends on how well that person fits a specific set of messianic expectations. Collins uses several examples to illustrate his point. For example, he concludes, on the basis of evidence from the Qumran texts, that the sect did expect two messianic figures, one a

Davidic royal messiah and the other an eschatological high priest who would take precedence over the royal messiah.

On the subject of the enigmatic Teacher of Righteousness, Collins states that the historic Teacher was not a messianic figure but a prefiguration of an eschatological teacher who would "teach righteousness at the end of days." Therefore, the Qumran community used the paradigms of king (Davidic royal messiah), priest (eschatological high priest) and prophet (eschatological teacher). Thus, according to Collins, Qumran messianism was not necessarily distinctive or different from general Jewish messianism in the Second Temple period, a position with which I concur.

Collins concludes his book with a discussion of historical figures about whom messianic claims were made, most notably Jesus of Nazareth, whom he defines primarily as a prophetic herald of the Kingdom of God, and Simeon Bar-Kokhba, a Jewish warrior killed in the Second Revolt against Rome in 135 C.E. That two such different historical figures could be proclaimed as messiah illustrates the flexibility of the paradigms that Collins has delineated and cautions us against a too-rigid definition of the term "messiah."

Throughout the book, Collins displays a grasp of the primary and secondary literatures that is a model of scholarship. Each chapter contains copious endnotes, and an extensive bibliography sets a new scholarly standard. John Collins has produced a tour de force that will be the definitive study of Jewish messianism for a long time to come.

Sidnie White Crawford is associate professor of Hebrew Bible and chair of the classics department at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel

Theodore Hiebert

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 210 pp., \$45

REVIEWED BY RONALD A. SIMKINS

Israelite religion, scholars have supposed, was a religion of history. If other Near Eastern peoples developed nature religions, with their deities acting in natural cycles, Israel's God acted in time; nature was only the stage. The only feature of the natural world that played a significant role in the shaping of Israelite ideology was the desert. Canaan may

have had its farmers, but Israel had migrant tribes.

These two dichotomies—history versus nature, desert nomads versus a settled agricultural society—have long guided biblical studies. Theodore Hiebert persuasively attacks both of these assumptions. For him, the earliest strand of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Yahwist (J) source,* is thoroughly permeated with images of landscape—so much so that this narrative cannot be understood apart from its natural environment. But that environment, Hiebert cogently argues, is the hill country of central Palestine. The Yahwist's narrative and religious ideology were shaped not by desert wanderings but by an agrarian landscape of shepherds and farmers, who scrapped out a living in similarly difficult terrain.

Even the stories of the primeval age—from Creation to the Flood (Genesis 2-9)—are set in the hill country of Palestine, Hiebert argues, rather than in Mesopotamia, as most scholars claim. Eden is modeled on the oases of the Jordan Valley. The first humans are presented as farmers, who supplement their economy with animal husbandry and who struggle for subsistence. In these narratives, God relates to humans explicitly through agriculture: God curses the ground, for example, and he brings the vitally needed rain.

The Israelites' ancestors, the patriarchs and their families, inhabit the same landscape as the primeval humans. For the Yahwist, these ancestors are not pastoral nomads; they live near urban centers in the hill country, sowing their fields and raising herds of sheep and cattle—activities characteristic of sedentary societies. Although there is some pastoralism, Hiebert argues that this is simply one feature of the mixed agrarian economy of the hill country: Animal husbandry supplemented agriculture. Rather than being nomadic migrants, the ancestors move among hill-country sites to build and preserve sacred centers—Shechem, Bethel, Hebron—wherever they encounter God's presence in the Land of Israel.

In the Yahwist's southern narratives—the emigration to Egypt and, later, the Exodus—the Israelites enter a foreign and hostile environment. Because Egypt is an agricultural society, the Israelites are at home there—at least until they are subjected to enslavement and forced labor.

*According to the documentary hypothesis, the Pentateuch was composed at different stages in Israel's history by at least four different sources, indicated by the letters J (Yahwist, or in German, Jahwist), E (Elohism), P (Priestly code) and D (Deuteronomist).

Then they flee to the desert, which, as Hiebert observes, is not a home but a place of temporary refuge, a place of escape only when life in sedentary society becomes unbearable.

Unfortunately, Hiebert's glancing treatment of the Priestly narrative mars a book otherwise noteworthy for its judiciousness. He distinguishes too sharply between the Yahwist's perspective on nature and that of the Priestly writer: Whereas the Yahwist emphasizes human dependence on the earth (people are created from the land to serve it through agriculture), the Priestly writer associates humans with God (they are masters over the land, coercing it to fulfill their divinely instituted roles). But the issue is more complex than this. For instance, a number of scholars argue that the Priestly writer was not an independent source but only a redactor: The Priestly editor appropriated material from the Yahwist's account and adapted it for his own theological purposes. These two narratives are intertwined in subtle and complicated ways; any analysis of their differences must take into account this relationship. By trying to sharpen his understanding of the Yahwist, Hiebert ends up caricaturing the Priestly writer.

But Hiebert's treatment of the book's main theme—the relation between the environment and the Yahwist's narrative strategies and ideology—is persuasive and well documented. Drawing on archaeological, anthropological and ecological evidence, as well as on a critical reading of the biblical text, Hiebert provides a new, compelling interpretation of the Yahwist narrative. Even more importantly, he makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role of nature in Israelite religion.

Ronald A. Simkins is professor of theology and of classical and Near Eastern studies at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska.

Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality

Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey

(Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 271 pp., \$23 (paper)

REVIEWED BY RICHARD E. DEMARIS

More than any other figure in the New Testament, the apostle Paul seems to leap from the text as a person who has psychological and emotional depth and who acts and thinks independently. At least, that is how New Testament scholars have typically portrayed him. Taking issue