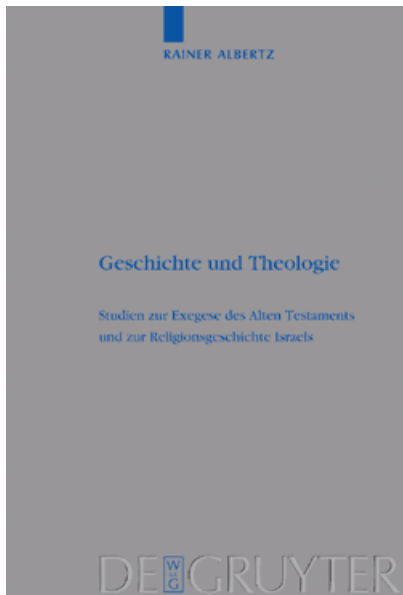


RBL 10/2004



Albertz, Rainer

Geschichte und Theologie: Studien zur Exegese des Alten Testaments und zur Religionsgeschichte Israels

Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 326

Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003. Pp. x + 396. Hardcover. EUR 98.00. ISBN 3110176335.

Ernst Axel Knauf
University of Bern
Bern, Germany CH-3000

One cannot review a collection of essays some of which have already become standard points of reference; one can only welcome it. The volume, a present for Albertz's sixtieth birthday by two of his disciples, contains "Die Kulturarbeit im *Atramḥasīs* [*sic!*] im Vergleich zur biblischen Urgeschichte" (1980); " 'Ihr werdet sein wie Gott'. Gen 3,1–7 auf dem Hintergrund des alttestamentlichen und des sumerisch-babylonischen Menschenbildes" (1993); "Das Motiv für die Sintflut im *Atramḥasīs*-Epos" (1999); "Die Frage des Ursprungs der Sprache im Alten Testament" (1988); *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*—eine Lehrdichtung zur Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der persönlichen Mardukfrömmigkeit" (1988); "Der sozialgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Hiobbuches und der 'Babylonischen Theodizee'" (1981); "Der 'Weise' und die 'fromme Weisheit' im Hiobbuch aus der Perspektive der 'Freunde'" (1990, and first published in English); "Hintergrund und Bedeutung des Elternggebots im Dekalog" (1978); "Die Theologisierung des Rechts im Alten Israel" (1997); "Jer 2–6 und die Frühzeitverkündigung Jeremias" (1982); "Das Deuterocesaja-Buch als Fortschreibung der Cesaja-Prophetie" (1990); "Die Intentionen und die Träger des Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks" (1989); "Wer waren die Deuteronomisten? Das historische Rätsel einer literarischen Hypothese" (1997); "Die Exilszeit als Ernstfall für eine historische Rekonstruktion ohne biblische Texte: Die Neubabylonischen Königsinschriften als 'Primärquelle'" (1998); "Die verhinderte Restauration" (2000); "Zur Wirtschaftspolitik des Perserreiches" (unpublished); "Jahwe

allein! Israels Weg zum Monotheismus und dessen theologische Bedeutung” (unpublished).

As a young biblical scholar, and at a time when most of his German colleagues still thought that they could do without it, Albertz learned Akkadian with telling results (some of which are told in this book). It is partially due to him that a thorough knowledge of the ancient Near East has again become a standard requirement for biblical scholarship in Protestant Europe, after the “dialectic delusion” has cleared out of most heads. Unfortunately, the delusion of “Geisteswissenschaft” lingers on, as evidenced by the editors’ preface (vi–vii) and by a cavalier attitude to empirical data in Albertz’s own writing (see *infra*). The reviewer would never deny that one cannot try to be both a historian and a theologian (trying it himself), but what Albertz and his disciples (vi) seem not to understand is the fact that one cannot do history and theology at the same time. Both enquiries work on the basis of different epistemological and methodological, if not cosmological, presuppositions and address different audiences with different interests. The same factory might produce sewing machines as well as detonators, but not on one and the same assembly line.

This is not to say that Albertz has nothing to offer to readers with historical interests only. Quite on the contrary, the previously unpublished essay “On the Economic Politics of the Persian Empire” (335–37) makes a good point on the Achaemenid administrative system in Israel/Palestine and is highly recommended to anyone interested in this period. But is the comment (336) that “some” hope to redefine Israel’s history on the basis of archaeology (I. Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman are missing in n. 11) really necessary in an essay that does a very good job of describing an administrative system on the basis of archaeological and epigraphical evidence? Why call the epigraphical harvest from Achaemenid Israel “sparse” (344), when more than five hundred ostraca (by the time of the review, more than 1,600) are mentioned five pages further down? Why claim that no Persian administrative building is attested “with certainty” for Judah (348), when Ramat Rahel is—correctly—mentioned in this context (349; it is questionable whether En Gedi belonged to Yehud)? It is easy to complain about the neglect of Achaemenid Israel in current research (335–37), if C. E. Carter’s book of 1999 is ignored together with the whole Transeuphratène series, started in 1989 and now in its twenties.

“Albertz the historian,” who asks good questions and comes up with useful ideas, but does not, as it seems, feel the urge to assemble the totality of the data or see the whole picture, is less serendipitous when it comes to religious history, as the second article, previously unpublished, demonstrates once again: “Yahweh Alone! Israel’s Road to Monotheism, and the Theological Significance of the Process” (359–82; the German title is ambiguous, but this seems to be intended). Readers who have not yet read Albertz’s

two volumes of *Religionsgeschichte* may take this article as a sample and then decide whether the longer version is worth the effort. For Albertz, a religion seems to be a system of beliefs, traditions, and values (the reviewer would call such a cognitive system a theology). His distinction between the levels of family religion, local religion, and state/national religion is a good beginning, but no more. Is there any probability that the religion of a family of long-distance traders and/or absentee landlords is identical with the religion of a family of subsistence farmers or herders? It is nice to assume that on the basis of the local cult, Yhwh was married to Asherah (363–64); unfortunately, the only local pantheon that is attested for the kingdom of Israel, that of Succoth (Tell Deir ‘Alla), comprises three, not two, major deities, none of which is Yhwh or Asherah. It is no longer possible to claim that the *golah* withstood the temptation to build a temple in Babylonia (the *golah* of *āl Yahūdu* had one), nor did the temple of Elephantine serve the (Jewish) Egyptian “sonderweg” (it was the temple of the Jews of Elephantine, and nobody else’s), nor was the palace of Iraq al-Amir a temple at all (three untenable propositions from one footnote [n. 29]). If polytheists do not persecute other religions (366), who, then, destroyed the temple of Elephantine or the mosque at Ayodha? If Deutero-Isaiah (according to 239–55, such a person did not exist) was crazy because he claimed that there was only one god (ibid.), then his contemporary Xenophanes of Kolophon must have been affected by the same insanity, and especially their older brother Nabonidus, mentioned on the next page. Were Echnaton and Nabonidus utter failures indeed (367), or did their revolutionary innovations solicit lasting evolutions in Ramesside and Achaemenid inclusive monotheism? The myth of Yhwh’s solitary existence *ab ovo* (367) does not hold water: in Midian, at least two gods (of the El type and the Baal-Hadad type) are attested, so Yhwh already had a father in his home town, and in Deut 32:8–9 he is not just somehow “subordinate” to El, but his son. There are no “sons of Yhwh” (ibid.), because Yhwh was a brother of the *běḥnē ’ēlīm* as long as these were gods, and the term was fossilized by the time when they had become angels, subservient to Yhwh. The formation of the Israelite and Judean nations in the seventh through the fifth centuries is subsequent to the formation of the Israelite and Judean states in the tenth and ninth centuries (as is the case with nation-building anywhere and anytime else); so “Israel” and *‘ām* cannot denote a “nation” in Judg 5 (as claimed on 368). To cut the story short: Albertz’s attempt to look for a reason for Israel’s unique position among the nations in the abyss of time is a failure, like every other such attempt before. Israel’s uniqueness is constituted by the Torah (since the Torah exists), and, as far as I understand my Jewish friends and colleagues, this uniqueness is quite enough.

Albertz’s German is, in general, readable, with some exceptions: “Ob literarisch die Neh 2,8; 7,2 erwähnte Tempelfestung . . . auch als Schatzhaus fungierte” (349) for “Ob die literarisch erwähnte Tempelfestung . . .”; “abernach dieser mussgesondert, erst nachdem

jener möglichst vorurteilslos rekonstruiert worden ist, gefragt werden” (362) for “aber nach dieser muss gesondert gefragt werden, erst nachdem. . . .”

Finally, one might ask whether it was really necessary to include two articles previously published in *ZAW* in this collection. Libraries that sport BZAW usually also subscribe to *ZAW*, and private ownership of the volume is, unfortunately, excluded by its price (except for the very few multibillionaires among us).

The title promises theology, and the book keeps the promise. Albertz delivers decent, well-cut theology that is always stimulating even for those who are not, like the reviewer, Barthians (374), do not believe in “Deuteronomistic Historiography,” or are wary of too much “social justice” (justice with a qualifier is less justice, not more). His “history” of the Israelite religion is a narrative in which the good (liberation, social justice) fights the evil (oppression, exploitation). It is another “mega-story,” different from the Bible but sharing its epistemological world. This “history” is theology again, or more precisely, a theology of history. History, the re-creation of the past in all its complexity and ambiguity, in its different and scintillating shades of grey and brown and blue and green, or the liberation of the past from its use (or abuse) in the mega-stories told and believed about it—history it is not.