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Sharp, Carolyn: *Jeremiah 26–52*. – Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2021. 469 S. (IECOT), kt. € 199,00 ISBN: 978-3-17-020083-8.

Carolyn Sharp is one of the most important Jeremiah scholars of the last twenty years. Her work, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (2003), was well recognized. Since then, her contribution to Jeremiah research has become indispensable. Her critical view of classical historical-critical research follows the work of Robert Carroll. Far from being merely a disciple of Carroll, she instead has developed her own methodological approach, which she comprehensively describes and demonstrates in this present book. Sharp contributes the second volume to the book of Jeremiah for the commentary series “International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament” (IECOT). The first volume (Jer 1–25) was written by Christl Maier and published in 2023. IECOT can be uniquely characterized by the fact that it welcomes new perspectives on the integration of synchronic and diachronic readings.

S.’s actual commentary on Jeremiah’s text covers 359 p. (87–445). The 68 p. introduction (19–86) indicates that S. saw it as necessary to provide a thorough methodological basis for her interpretative results. And so, her introduction (15%) is at least as worthy of reference as her actual Jeremiah commentary (85%). The volume ends with a nine-p. bibliography (446–454, focusing on most recent Jeremiah research, including important feminist and postcolonial Jeremiah publications) and a helpful index.

Those familiar with S.’s earlier work will find her commentary a logical continuation of her approach. Her thorough introduction encourages us to question traditional research approaches and to be methodologically open to the legitimacy of feminist analyses. She passionately notes that traditional commentaries hardly ever make explicit or critically question the power structures at work within the biblical text and their interpreting communities, thus not resisting the imperialism of the past and present (80). S. sees a moral obligation in the work of biblical scholarship. Hence, historical-critical research must question itself, as its descriptivist neutrality allows for androcentric prejudices (47) and “intellectual imperialism” (46) to operate in secret. Typical historical analyses are therefore “inadequate” (47), since it is “not *wissenschaftlich* to leave unanalyzed the cultural misogyny underlying prophetic metaphors of sexualized shaming” (46). Extensively and with strong quotations from the field of biblical studies (e. g., Robert P. Carroll, Louis Stulman, Musa Dube, Juliana Claassens, Esther Fuchs) and cultural criticism (e. g., Gale A Yee, Elizabeth Potter, Robyn Henderson-Espinoza), S. presents her feminist hermeneutics. Making her assumptions and judgments explicit, she does not see her hermeneutic vulnerability (51) as a disadvantage but as a scholarly necessity. Her feminist hermeneutics follows three principles: (1.) “honor all subjects”: Here, S. wants to give attention not only to the participants who are dominant in the text and history but, above all, to the voices that are

underrepresented or did not make it into the text, but must be assumed as the background of the Book of Jeremiah. (2.) “interrogate relations of power”: S. seeks to evaluate the power relations that are revealed explicitly or implicitly through actions, gestures or speeches/texts. By critically working out the effectiveness of power structures, the third principle of her commentary work can come into effect. (3.) “reform community”: By exposing oppressive power and highlighting marginalized voices, S. wants to contribute to societal reform (49).

S. unequivocally states that her feminism has been enriched by postcolonial theory (45). This leads to statements such as the following: “I critique and destabilize ideologies of subjugation described in biblical texts or enacted in interpretations through uninterrogated patriarchal cultural ideation [...]. This work involves exposing oppressive uses of power [...] I work to facilitate the movement away from gender essentialism, which impoverishes persons of every gender, and I strive to contest race and class hierarchies” (49) or “[this commentary is] resisting academic pressure to pretend to objective neutrality in interpretation” (52). Such statements can stir up emotions of unease, wondering whether S.’s commentary as a “mode of resistance” (31) is a product of a distinct ideology and consequently revolutionist in nature rather than scholarly work. Aware of this, S. addresses readers’ and potential reviewers’ concerns directly (47 or 65), and seeks to calm the reader by pointing out that “prophetic truth-telling is not venomous” (50) but has a constructive vision in mind. In her commentary on the Biblical text, she continuously invites to give attention to the marginalized. Beyond these efforts, S. is interested in identifying in the text practices of resilience that can inspire modern readers (80).

Regarding the sources and editorial layers of the book of Jeremiah, S. declares that her “answer there is closer to agnosticism” (33), which shines through again and again in her commentary section. But anyone who thinks S. is taking the rich and often complex redaction-critical discourse on the book of Jeremiah lightly is wrong. Both in the general introduction and commentary on the Jeremiah text, her thorough knowledge of the current state of literary criticism, archeology, and theological reception stands out. And that is precisely why her hermeneutic approach deserves attention and should be taken seriously.

The commentary section is clearly organized and generally follows the same structure. (1.) The translation is followed by textual annotations and text-critical notes. Here, too, S. endeavors to exchange patriarchal readings and translations with a feminist reading – where translation theory allows for it and makes sense (71). S. notes on the text have excellent quality and can be used well as a reference. (2.) The diachronic analysis follows the translation. Here, she strives for a transparent summary of current redaction-critical research observations, despite her fundamental criticism of it and her sympathies with the agnostic position. She tends to seek support from redaction-critical readings that could strengthen her interpretive approach (101). As in her earlier work, she is sure that one of the primary functions of the book of Jeremiah is to function as a deposit of voices in conflict, representing a volume of records that contains various explanatory models, theologies, and trauma-processing strategies triggered by the event of exile (42–44). The diachronic discussion of the text is then followed by the (3.) synchronic discussion in which the literary effect is elaborated. Each commentary section is rounded off with (4.) an “Integrative Reading”. Here in particular, S.’s commentary takes on its own character, as her hermeneutic commitment becomes most visible. Anyone who wants to receive the Book of Jeremiah from the perspective of *critical theory*, who seeks to see the prophetic text through a queer lens, and who plans to trace signs of trauma and resilience

will find a treasure trove here. Two recurring elements in this section are (a.) the focus on the reception of the text (especially the Reformation period) and (b.) the focus “Through a queer lens”. In rare cases, the commentary omits verses that would be of interest from a feminist, postcolonial perspective (e. g. Jer 50:7 or 51:7). However, being a limited work, the few omissions do not weigh, considering the generally thorough scholarly work.

Critical readers will occasionally wonder to what extent S.’s “Integrative Reading” drifts from exegetical work into eisegetical comments. This can be well illustrated in her treatment of the phrase “new thing” (Jer 31:22). She suggests that “reading from feminist, womanist, queer, trans, and decolonizing standpoints, interpreters can seek to [...] challenge ‘the medical view of the individual body as the locus of a problem for which the appropriate response is ‘cure’ or amelioration, instead of ‘altering systematic practices’ of exclusion” (182). It seems to me, however, that S. is aware of this (accusation of eisegesis) and, therefore, introduces such interpretative moves subjunctively. Her understanding of biblical scholarship demands that textual analysis cannot be left to “neutral” redaction criticism alone, but that integrative and multidisciplinary insights from sociology (285 or 307), psychology (309), and literature must flow into the exegetical work. This certainly gives rise to new perspectives on the text, which sometimes can cross interpretative boundaries.

While S.’s feminist work tends to be “counter-cultural” – at least seen from the perspective of traditional exegetical work – she sets an example of how to engage the contemporary scholarly community. While her positions are strongly formulated, she deals kindly and mostly fairly with those she disagrees with (171, 296), making her work overall sympathetic.

In summary, S.’s commentary is refreshing, well-informed, and up-to-date and will undoubtedly function as a must-go-to place for future Jeremiah research. Her outlining of major stations in the reception history helps locate one’s own *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Not all readers will find themselves agreeing with each of S.’s conclusions. Still, all readers must acknowledge that the questions she asks and the methodological observations she makes are legitimate and well-founded. Regardless of one’s methodological commitments, S.’s textual annotations and her diachronic and synchronic analyses will be a reference for anybody who seriously seeks to study the book of Jeremiah.

Reviewer:

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