

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

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Military Practice and Polemic: Israel's Laws of Warfare in Near Eastern Perspective, by Michael G. Hasel. Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2005. Pp. xix + 193. ISBN 1-883925-47-9. US\$ 24.99.

In this book, which includes a foreword by renowned Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen, Hasel investigates the warfare regulations outlined in Deut 20:10–20 (especially vv. 19–20) in the wider context of ANE military practices. Apart from the introductory and concluding sections, the book divides into three chapters. Hasel begins by noting that Deut 20 constitutes a significant segment of military rulings in the Hebrew Bible and that it is vital not only to understand the hermeneutical and ethical issues regarding these regulations, but also to investigate their “basis and origin” (p. 2). For critical scholarship, Deut 20 reflects a first-millennium (7th century B.C.E.) Assyrian or Babylonian background, a conclusion that can be maintained only if, according to Hasel, scholars deliberately continue to ignore earlier ANE military sources. Therefore, in search of a more appropriate historical and cultural background of Deut 20, Hasel seeks to investigate both first and second millennia ANE military tactics through a cross-cultural comparative approach, bringing together a wide range of textual, iconographic, and archaeological evidence. The six working assumptions outlined by Hasel (pp. 6–9) indicate, among others, that he takes the laws of warfare in Deut 20 to be historical (not “deuteronomistic”), but believes that these regulations served as a polemic against ANE military practice.

Chapter one presents a contextual, linguistic, and syntactical analysis of Deut 20:10–20. First, the author divides vv. 10–18 into two parts: action regarding cities outside the land of promise (vv. 10–15) and action regarding cities in the land (vv. 16–18). Cities in the first category were to be offered peace (שלום) and were to be besieged only if they refused to surrender (v. 12). However, cities within the land of promise were pronounced חָרַם, “complete destruction” (v. 18). This thematic division of vv. 10–18 allows Hasel to ob-

serve that vv. 19–20 must relate only to cities within the land of promise (vv. 16–18). Vv. 19–20 prohibit the cutting down of fruit trees for the construction of siege works (מְצוֹר), but allow the use of non-fruit trees for siege construction. The phrase *בְּיָמֵי הַשָּׂדֶה עֵץ הָאֲדָמָה* (v. 19) presents syntactical difficulties, particularly the word *הָאֲדָמָה*. Against a host of proposals, Hasel follows Aecio Cairus in understanding *הָאֲדָמָה* as a Hiphil imperative in a demonstrative sense, and thus translates: “But you shall *man* (or) *station* the trees of the field to go before you in the siege” (cf. Aecio E. Cairus, “The Trees Which Are Not People (Deut 20:19): An Ancient Mistranslation?” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 2 [1999]: 19–22). To him, this translation helps explain why the cutting down of fruit trees was proscribed: (a) Israel would eat from these fruit trees; (b) the trees were not subsumed under the *תְּרֵמָה*. Hasel ends the chapter by emphasizing the polemic nature of Deut 20. He sees this polemic as the “secondary aim” (p. 39) for vv. 19–20, a hypothesis which leads to the investigation in the ensuing chapters.

In chapter two, the author investigates first-millennium Assyrian and Babylonian military practice in the light of the prohibition in Deut 20:19–20. He starts with these first-millennium sources because the discovery of the “book of the law” during the 7th century B.C.E. has led scholars to “seek an Assyrian *Vorlage* to the treaties and military practices outlined in Deuteronomy through Judges” (p. 52). Relevant textual and iconographic evidence indicate first, that siege tactics were widely employed by the Assyrians through various means (e.g., tunnels, battering rams, siege towers) and second, that they often embarked upon massive destruction of fruit-bearing trees or orchards and, in only two instances, the confiscation of grain to feed the army. However, there is no evidence that the Assyrians made use of enemy timber to construct siege equipment. If anything, one iconographic source implies that the battering ram, with all its wood and other parts, was transported from Assyria and reassembled at the spot of the attack (p. 56). Similarly, Hasel has demonstrated that the purpose of the destruction of fruit trees was neither for the sustenance of the besieging army nor for the construction of siege equipment since, in the Assyrian records, this wanton destruction, if it takes place at all, occurs *after* an enemy city is plundered and destroyed or *after* an unsuccessful siege. Thus it stands to reason that this policy served as a reprisal for rebellion. Babylonian siege tactics are not as well preserved or detailed as those of the Assyrians. Yet the Babylonian Chronicles, combined with the information contained in the Hebrew Bible in the case of the Jerusalem siege, indicate that they also employed siege works, though the means and materials used are not mentioned. Further, the Babylonian Chronicles make no direct mention of the destruction of fruit trees. At this point, the author rightly concludes that the cutting down

of fruit trees for the construction of siege works was not a military tactic in the first-millennium, hence the background to the prohibition of Deut 20:19–20 must be sought in the second-millennium, an area that is neglected in recent Deuteronomistic studies.

Accordingly, chapter three surveys second-millennium military practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, and Egyptians, outlining their general siege practices and the destruction of life-supporting systems. The Amarna letters not only indicate that attacking armies commonly deployed siege tactics, but evince an ecological aspect of warfare policies, namely, the destruction and/or confiscation of grain. However, there is no evidence of the cutting down of fruit trees (or trees in general) for siege purposes. Hittite records show that the destruction of fields or vegetation was part of their policy. While some times the destruction of vegetation followed the defeat of the enemy city and thus could not be part of the siege actions, the "Siege of Uršu" text explicitly mentions the cutting down of (non-fruit) trees from the mountains of the city Haššu for the construction of a battering ram. A different situation obtains in pertinent Egyptian texts and iconography, which reveal the deployment of siege tactics several (breaching, scaling, and sapping) throughout the New Kingdom. The records of Weni and Thutmose III and the iconography of Ramses II and Ramses III reveal that the destruction of fruit trees and other life-supporting systems was an integral military policy since the Old Kingdom. Most important is the record of Thutmose III's siege of Megiddo, which Miriam Lichtheim translates: "They measured the town, surrounded (it) with a ditch, and walled (it) up with fresh timber from all their fruit trees" (p. 105). This and a related stela indicate that the destruction of the fruit trees at Megiddo was intended for the construction of siege works as well as a reprisal for rebellion. For Hasel, therefore, this record of Thutmose III "provides the only documented parallel for the polemic found in Deuteronomy 20:19–20" (p. 113). He can then conclude that Deut 20 has a second-millennium origin, since it polemicizes against an Egyptian practice of the same period.

In an appendix, Hasel resolves the tension between Deut 20 and 2 Kings 3:19, 25, saying that "good trees" (2 Kgs 3:19, 25) should not be equated with "fruit trees" (Deut 20:19, 20). Even so, Moab lay outside of the land of promise, hence would not be covered by the Deut 20:19–20 proscription. The extensive bibliography of this monograph (pp. 139–84), as well as the endnotes provided at the end of each chapter, tells how Hasel has engaged seriously with scholarship. Author (pp. 185–88) and subject (pp. 186–93) indexes conclude this volume.

The monograph is well written, logically organized, cogently argued, concise but thoroughly researched, and evinces a methodological ingenuity. The use of primary materials, textual or iconographical, adds more value to the study. The author's exegetical insights in Deut 20:19–20 are instructive. Most importantly, Hasel has provided a solid basis for a second-millennium provenance of Deuteronomy, for which reason conservative scholarship is indebted to him. Accordingly, he has effectively challenged, if not overturned, the mainstream OT scholarly consensus on the late origin of Deut 20, thus making it necessary for historical-critical scholars to rethink their conclusions on Deuteronomy. Obviously, Hasel has advanced our knowledge with regards to the warfare rulings of Deut 20:19–20 in their wider ANE context.

While I register the excellence and unqualified usefulness of this unique monograph, I also raise a little concern. The author has not clearly stated, at least for this reviewer, why he did not look at second-millennium Mesopotamian military sources (if in fact there are any). Similarly, the reason he focuses only on second-millennium Egyptian, Hittite, and Canaanite sources to the exclusion of first-millennium sources from any of these political entities is not given. Is this a "pre-selection" of data to support a second-millennium origin of Deuteronomy? A second concern: Hasel consistently hypothesizes that Deut 20:19–20 be understood as a polemic. However, if the record of Thutmose III were indeed the only instance in Egyptian military practice where fruit-trees were employed in the construction of siege equipment, I wonder whether this single reference could actually serve as sufficient basis for the understanding of Deut 20:19–20 as "a polemic or protest against the kinds of warfare practices known from contemporary nations" (p. 125). Israel must not cut down the fruit trees to construct siege works because they are yet to settle in that region and would make use of these fruit trees. It seems that the prohibition in Deut 20:19–20 stems from necessity rather than from a deliberate polemic. Third, the new translation of עֵדֵי הָאֵרֶץ proposed by Cairus, and followed by Hasel, makes sense in itself; yet how Israel was to "man (or) station" (p. 35) these trees eludes this reader at least. Finally, while the author's insights on the structure of Deut 20 are ingenious, it is still debatable whether vv. 19–20 must be linked only to vv. 16–18 rather than vv. 10–15 too which also talk about a siege (v. 12).

Despite these qualms, the author's understanding of Deut 20:19–20 as polemic make this monograph a "must read" for every serious student of the Hebrew Bible, particularly those interested in the book of Deuteronomy.

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