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Case Studies in Recent Research on the Book of Numbers (with Attention to Non-Western Scholarship)

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Abstract

Scholarship on the book of Numbers continues apace, even if there is not a famous commentary that everyone must always cite. Numbers figures especially prominently in recent work on Pentateuchal source criticism. This survey will examine several recent offerings that contribute in various ways to the ongoing discussion. In addition, particular texts within Numbers continue to excite attention, both from historical-critical and postmodern perspectives. Therefore, this article will devote attention to three texts that have drawn particular attention in the past 15 years: the sotah ritual in Numbers 5, Phineas's killing of an Israelite man and a Moabite woman in Numbers 25, and the inheritance request of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 and 36. In all of these areas, recent offerings from non-Western scholars will receive particular attention.

Keywords

Feminism, Numbers, Hexateuch, Pentateuch, postmodern approaches, source criticism, non-Western scholarship, Phineas, sotah, Zelophehad's daughters

Introduction

This survey of recent scholarship on the book of Numbers is, in a term borrowed from archaeologist E.B. Banning, a 'purposive' survey. In Banning's words, purposive surveys are 'designed to optimize the probability of discovering particular kinds of archaeological materials with a given amount of search effort, or "prospecting"' (Banning 2002: 133). The analogy is of limited usefulness, for after all Numbers is not an artifact buried in the earth, forgotten for 500 or 1,000 or

3,000 years. Nevertheless, Numbers does not associate itself with any particular cannot-miss, must-cite commentary in the way of Milgrom (2004) and Douglas (1966) with regard to Leviticus.

This is not to say that Numbers has gone completely neglected; far from it. Indeed, Numbers continues to receive significant attention not just in the area of biblical commentaries on the book. While this article is by no means an exhaustive perusal of the available scholarship on Numbers, it is a purposive survey. I am looking for particular kinds of remains rather than an in-depth exploration.

I will devote this exploration to articles—appearing both in journals and in edited collections—dealing with four main areas. The first has to do with ongoing investigation into the compositional history of Numbers. The other three areas concern specific texts in the book. Moreover, they all concern various issues of purity. First, I will survey recent scholarship on the texts dealing with the sotah ordeal ritual (Num. 5). Second, I will examine scholarship on Numbers 25 and the sexual dalliance of ‘the people’ with Moabite women and Phineas b. Eleazar’s violent response to it. Third, I will survey scholarship concerning the question of inheritance in the story of the daughters of Zelophehad (in two parts: Num. 27 and 36).

This survey pays special attention to non-Western scholarship on Numbers. The Society of Biblical Literature’s International Voices in Biblical Studies series in particular has provided a valuable place for publishing this work. Out of the 11 volumes appearing to date, five directly involve Asia. In selecting articles for this purposive survey, I was delighted to discover that the volume *Landscapes in Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation* (Ahn 2019) included two excellent articles on Numbers. These articles, as well as the others in the volume, originated as presentations given at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in South Korea in 2016 (the meeting included several other Asian learned societies; see Ahn 2019: 1). For the other pieces included in my survey, I limited my search mostly to works between 2004 and 2019, which addressed the same topics as those discussed by the Korean scholars.

Compositional History

In this first section I will consider three articles. The first, by Lissa M. Wray Beal (2017), discusses significant intertextual connections between Numbers and Joshua, though without being interested in questions of the Pentateuch or Hexateuch, which so long consumed and in certain ways continue to consume scholarship on compositional history. The second article, by Jaeyoung <Jaeyong?> Jeon (2019), a Korean scholar working in Tel Aviv, returns to some of the older source-critical models for Pentateuchal criticism. However, he advances these discussions by contributing to an apparently growing unease with historical criticism’s identification of nearly the whole of Numbers with P. By contrast, the third article, by Rainer Albertz (2013), discusses some of the purported late Priestly layers in Numbers.

Lissa M. Wray Beal

Numbers's position within the Pentateuch leads logically, perhaps even inexorably, to the consideration of how the results achieved by historical-critical exegesis apply to Numbers. One of the long-running debates in literary criticism has been among the advocates of a Tetrateuch, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and other **numbers**<OK?> of books in a collection perhaps going all the way to 2 Kings. An example of this debate is Thomas B. Dozeman's *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch?: Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (2011). In a 2017 article, Beal discussed intertextual resonances between Joshua and Numbers, specifically Joshua 22 and Numbers 13–14; 32. Her article thus approached the question differently from, for example, Albertz. Albertz, a capable exponent of historical criticism, commented the following in a 2013 article: 'Since a consensus is developing that a Hexateuchal redaction preceded the final Pentateuchal redaction (Blum, Otto, Römer a.o.), the latter must have addressed the problem of removing the book of Joshua from Israel's charter document without abandoning its central theme within the Pentateuch' (Albertz 2013: 232). Beal instead 'works with the canonical text and a literary method to explore these intertextual connections' (Beal 2017: 461).

The direct connection between Numbers and Joshua that Beal explored concerns the request of the Transjordanian tribes for land which they return to occupy in Joshua 22. In the literary context of Joshua, this return by Reuben, Gad, and Half-Manasseh is apparently accomplished after they have fulfilled the oath made in Numbers 32, specifically v.18: 'We will not return to our homes until the children of Israel have each gained their inheritance' (author's translation). Moreover, the connection between Numbers 32 and Joshua 22 goes beyond the oath of the Transjordanians. Beal noted: 'It becomes apparent that the two episodes from Numbers are each referenced frequently throughout Joshua, often at vital junctures. However, it is only in Josh 22 that Num 13–14 and 32 are referenced together' (Beal 2017: 463).

Beal indicated that Numbers and Joshua both typically refer to the Promised Land as an inheritance, using the Hebrew term **נחלה**. Though a different word, **אחזה** ('possession'), occurs in the texts that Beal examined, she averred that this term in Joshua 'does not discriminate against the Transjordanian land, for western land is also called a "possession" (22:19) as are the Levitical lands (Josh 21:12, 41), and even the whole land of promise (Deut 32:49)' (2017: 467). Hence, the Transjordanians' decision to live outside the 'Promised Land' does not indicate that they are less promised or less favored by God than the Cisjordanians.

According to Beal, the connections between Joshua and Numbers have much to do with maintaining faith and loyalty both to YHWH and to Joshua. When the Cisjordanians accuse the Transjordanians of disloyalty for building themselves an altar in the east, they use language reminiscent of the wilderness generation refusing to go in to take the land, rooted perhaps in the fearful report the 'wicked' spies returned in Numbers 13–14. Moreover, having relevance for the

section on Numbers 25 below, the Cisjordanian delegation in Joshua 22 describes the altar through invoking past sins of the people. So Beal: ‘The first past sin the delegation uses to describe the altar is that of Baal Peor (v. 17; Num 25)... The rebellion of altar-building is perceived to pose a similar level of threat and to be an action directed against God’ (2017: 470). Although, again, Beal did not occupy herself with typical compositional-history questions, a Deuteronomistic connection nevertheless presents itself to the so-called ‘improper’ altars in the Northern Kingdom at Bethel and Dan. The Transjordanians reject the charges of infidelity and rebellion against God (Josh. 22.22). The Deuteronomists, by contrast, give no room for the Northern Israelites to assert a contradictory opinion—namely, the real possibility that Bethel and Dan were intended as shrines to YHWH.

In sum, Beal’s article is perhaps more concerned with Joshua than Numbers. Nevertheless, she established some important lines for the ongoing discussion of the first few books of the Bible. Whether one considers these the Pentateuch or the Hexateuch, or instead as more-or-less distinct documents, the significant use each makes of the others generates the possibility for investigation. By approaching this topic from a literary rather than a historical-critical standpoint, moreover, Beal aligned herself firmly with the ongoing desire expressed by many to deal with the final form of the text (often called the canonical form, even by Beal, though it seems to me that this term implies more of a religio-authoritative dimension than may be necessary for a literary investigation as such).

Jaeyong Jeon

Jeon’s article in the *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* (Jeon 2019) offers a recent analysis of the extent of Priestly redaction in Numbers. (I thank my student, Jin Jun, for his assistance in reading the article.) Jeon explores the import of potential redactional layers for understanding the narrative arc of the Pentateuch and the place of Numbers within it. In the narrative arc of the story, the Israelites, on their way to the Promised Land, stop at Sinai in Exodus 19 but do not leave until Numbers 10. This means that more than two-thirds of the book of Numbers is not set at Sinai. Jeon notes that the promise of the land to the patriarchs also does not figure prominently in Numbers, especially when compared to texts such as Exod. 6.8. He suggests that the redactors of Numbers replaced this motif with that of the appearance of YHWH at the doors of the Tabernacle, which figures prominently in the stories of rebellion against Moses. Deuteronomy uses this rebellion to explain why Moses was not allowed to go into the Promised Land (Deut. 1.37). Moses returns earlier in Deuteronomy 1 to Horeb (Sinai), but makes no mention there of the promise to the patriarchs, perhaps further strengthening the ‘short P’ thesis that Jeon advances.

Rainer Albertz

In contrast to Jeon, Albertz suggested that the later chapters of Numbers have undergone a redaction friendly to the interests of the Priestly tradition (Albertz 2013). He also indicated the possibility that a Hexateuchal redaction preceded the final Pentateuchal redaction. This connection with Joshua has,

as noted above, important implications for the work of Beal. Indeed, it seems to float between two of the major older theories of the composition of the first few books of the Hebrew Bible. Albertz recognized this tension when he wrote: ‘Since the Hexateuchal redaction aimed to include the book of Joshua in Israel’s foundational history (cf. Jos 24), the Pentateuchal redaction, which opposed this aim, must have been involved with the decision to exclude the book of Joshua from the charter’ (2013: 221).

Of immediate interest for the present article is Albertz’s statement that the last 11 or 12 chapters of Numbers belong to the latest stratum of the Pentateuch (2013: 221). Albertz’s argument that Numbers 26–36 is part of a Pentateuchal redaction is likely connected to the apparent resetting of the story which ch. 26 represents. But Albertz also noted, again with implications for other pieces to be considered later, that the view that ch. 25 is an interruption between the Balaam story and the second census is essentially incorrect. The Baal-Peor story in ch. 25 is itself part of ‘a rather late and complex non-priestly tradition’. Moreover, the case can be made that this sin and the plague that serves as punishment for it suffice to make the second census necessary, since some 24,000 people have died (2013: 222-23). Following this, Albertz turned to the structure of the composition of Numbers 25–36. He detailed a number of features that tie the somewhat disparate contents of this section together. Here he explicitly mentioned **<mentions? Check use of tenses throughout; usually the present tense is used>** the daughters of Zelophehad. The most important part of this section, however, according to Albertz, anticipates (from a narrative standpoint) or reflects (from a compositional standpoint) the conquest and distribution of the land. Albertz asserted, ‘In my view, the subunits of Num 25–36 are so closely linked by identical or similar words or phrases, in language characterized by a mix of priestly and Deuteronomistic elements, that all these chapters should be regarded as a literary unity’ (2013: 228). He admits that there are a few inconsistencies in the text, though he does not mention the rather striking difference in the stories of Zelophehad’s daughters. In ch. 27, the daughters approach Moses wanting to preserve the memory of their father, whereas the Josephite leaders in ch. 36 seem to want to preserve only their tribal inheritance. Implications of this difference will be discussed below.

Albertz concluded his article by drawing the strands together and arguing for Numbers 25–36 as a Pentateuchal redaction coming after a Hexateuchal one. He did not discuss the theological evidence for the redaction he proposed, noting only that the redactor ‘is influenced by Deuteronomistic language and concepts more than any other prior priestly editor within the Pentateuch’ (2013: 232). This connection with the Deuteronomists makes good sense if, as Albertz argued, the Pentateuchal redactor wished to force the book of Joshua to stick to the Deuteronomistic History.

The Sotah Ritual (Numbers 5)

In this section, I will discuss three articles which deal with one of the most vexing texts in the book of Numbers: the sotah ritual for uncovering secret or suspected adultery. As one might expect, this text has generated a great deal of investigation, mostly because of its generally obscure and convoluted nature.

Hannah S. An

Hannah S. An's 'The Case of Suspected Adultery (Num 5:11–31) in Light of the Hittite Instructions for the Priests and Temple Officials (CTH 264)' (An 2019) appeared within a volume dedicated to Korean and Korean American biblical interpretation (Ahn 2019). The so-called sotah ritual, named after the Hebrew verb **הטש** 'go astray', has understandably captured much attention (for a Western example, see Boer 2006). An laments that 'scholarship...has not paid much attention to the nature of the Hittite legal proceedings in CTH 264, which encompasses various degrees of punishment, *including a drinking ordeal in several cases*' (2019: 19; emphasis added). While many scholars have compared the sotah law in Numbers 5 to the Code of Hammurabi, An declares that the Hittite material is far more instructive because it gives much more specific instructions on how to deal with an unknown sin. Since CTH 264 is a manual for priests, many of the instructions have to deal with various cultic offenses. Therefore, even though the Hittite text **does not have to with adultery**<?check clarity>, it is significant because it suggests that something unknown could be revealed by the deity through the mechanism of a drinking ordeal. Interpreters require this kind of illumination, she insists, precisely because the ritual in Numbers 5 does not appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as being used to reveal some secret sin.

An notes that, in the Hittite text, 'the idea of sin "not becoming known" (**UL/Ú-UL išduwa-**)<?> refers to a situation in which the suspect is not declared officially guilty of the alleged transgression because of either the outright denial of the suspect or the lack of counter-evidence to prove the guilt objectively' (2019: 21). The connection to Numbers 5 here is clear: the whole ritual gets going because of a case in which there are no witnesses (5.13)—other than, of course, the woman and the man with whom she has 'gone astray'. An gives a helpful flowchart detailing how four different types of cases (deliberate sin, inadvertent sin, denied sin, or innocence) are adjudicated in CTH 264 (2019: 22). The final two cases are most relevant for a discussion of Numbers 5. Though the sotah ritual does not give the woman an opportunity to deny her sin, it maintains that critical evidence has not emerged (or the accused has produced potentially exonerating evidence on her own behalf). These two cases are subject to the various ordeal trials detailed in CTH 264.

Jaeyoung<Jaeyong?> Jeon

I return now to an author **considered in the previous section**<not mentioned in the previous section, change to 'already considered above'?>. Jeon suggested the presence of two distinct laws in the sotah passage, comparing them to Laws 131–132 of the Code of Hammurabi (Jeon 2007). Both Park

and Jeon compare the sotah to legal materials from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, but Park was careful to set aside the connections to Hammurapi in favor of those with the Hittite priestly rituals. Jeon primarily concerns himself with historical-critical questions, especially concerning whether multiple authorship could be detected, the value of linguistic analysis, and the various levels of compositional history to which the passage may have belonged (2007: 182).

Jeon first turns to a summary of the problems the passage presents and a history of scholarship. He observes: ‘The exposition of the case (Num. v. <vv.? Which chapter?> 12–14) and the recapitulation (vv. 29–30) seem to refer to two different cases, and there are unnecessary repetitions of key verbs, which indicate new steps of the trial procedure’ (2007: 182). Jeon attempts to solve this quandary by separating the ritual from the ordeal trial. This seems an acceptable procedure, even though it may not hold much promise for ultimately resolving the difficulty.

The key point that leads Jeon and others before him to identify two different legal cases that have been combined is that, in vv. 12-13 <which chapter?>, an accusation appears to be made, perhaps by the public; whereas in v. 14, the husband suspects that the wife has been unfaithful, though the accusation only exists in his own mind. In the recapitulation of the cases, v. 29 matches the conditions presupposed in vv. 12-13, while v. 30 matches v. 14. After pointing out these correspondences, Jeon cites Fishbane’s (1985) insistence that ‘repetition is not necessarily a sign of either multiple origins or bad style. However, if the repetition breaks the natural flow of the writing, if the phrase or block with the repetition contains new content which is alien to the whole text, and if it shows a different literary style, we may deduce the existence of other hands that have reworked the text’ (2007: 188).

After a literary analysis of the main body of the legal text (Num. 5.15-28), Jeon supports his thesis that the sotah combined two laws by citing Hammurapi’s Laws (LH) 131–132. Law 131 suggests that a wife, accused by her husband but not caught *in flagrante* should take an oath before a deity. However, according to Law 132, if the accusation came from ‘a finger’, that is, from a member of the public at large, the woman should throw herself into the Euphrates ‘for the sake of her husband’ (2007: 192-93). Jeon noted a ‘striking similarity’ between the LH and the sotah law (p. 193). Even so, the argument he bases on this seems to imply causation from correlation: ‘This striking similarity between LH and the Sotah implies that the two biblical laws—the water ordeal law and the ritual-oath law—existed separately before the redaction and were deeply influenced by ancient Near Eastern precedents’ (2007: 193). Jeon’s assertion that the public nature of the accusation presupposed by LH 132 (and possibly by Num. 5.12-13) creates an embarrassing situation for the husband is doubtless correct. However, an honor-shame reading might conclude that the wife jumping into the river served only to assuage the husband’s embarrassment rather than assess the wife’s guilt and thus does not suggest a separate ritual.

Jeon's comments regarding Num. 5.31, which indicates that a husband should not face any penalty for a false accusation, are curious: 'The logic of justice by which anyone who endangers another's life through false accusations must be punished, even though this principle is not spoken aloud, probably had been a basic premise of the ordeal in the ancient Near East, including Israel' (2007: 193). But he suggests that 'in our case, the ordeal is not a life-threatening procedure like that of Babylonia. There is therefore a lesser need to punish the false accuser' (p. 193). However, as the ordeal, if successful in revealing guilt, was supposed to cause a miscarriage, it stands to reason that this potion made up of water, ink, and dirt from the floor of the Tabernacle had some deleterious capacity; perhaps it even had the potential to be deadly.

Nissim Amzallah and Shamir Yona

Amzallah and Yona (2017) argue for a different translation of עפר in Num. 5.17, usually 'dust'. Through this translation they propose that the 'Sotah...has nothing to do with ordeal, magic practices, or psychosomatic effects' (2017: 383). This suggestion thus cuts across all attempts to explain how it is that this cocktail was supposed to have caused a miscarriage. This article potentially represents an important advance, even if the text itself still remains obscure at the end.

Amzallah and Yona summarize the now familiar options for understanding the sotah prescription: as ordeal trial, as magical ritual, and as psychosomatically effective (2017: 384-88). As to the first, they argued that it is unlikely that the holy water should have unhealthful effects, since the priest used the same water for purification. It is further unlikely that trace elements of blood, excrement, or other waste materials were sufficient enough to cause health problems. One wonders whether the writers may have been too hasty in their dismissal of ordeal trials here. If the ritual in Numbers 5 were an ordeal trial, then whether such effects resulted from drinking the potion would have been the very point of the exercise. Finally, they quickly dismiss the possibility that the priest might have secretly added a poison to the drink mixture as being unsupported by the text. This is so in spite of the evidence of Nachmanides and Tractate *Sotah* in the Talmud, who make precisely this argument, perhaps in the attempt to fill in a gap that the final editors of Numbers left behind.

The second possibility often employed is to consider the sotah as a magic ritual of some kind. This interpretation has made use of several elements in the text: the magical-sounding phrase 'the waters that bring the curse' (<ch. 5?>vv. 19, 22, 27); the incantation of v. 22; and the supposed effectiveness of the potion to identify an impure woman. The piece of scroll added to the mixture (v. 23) also sometimes plays a role, but the authors dismiss this since the potion is already called 'the waters that bring the curse' twice before the scroll is added to it. Finally, perhaps either the water itself or the dust from the sanctuary is the magically active ingredient. However, the repeated invoking of YHWH and the setting of the event in the Tabernacle clearly mitigate against such a magical interpretation, given the virulent refutation of magic in YHWHistic worship.

Third, some have proposed that the potion is effective because of apparent psychosomatic effects. According to this line of thinking, the woman may have experienced the negative result because she feared the curse. Such an interpretation calls for elements which would heighten the emotional tension. Amzallah and Yona cite some Talmudic and Tannaitic exegesis that suggested these very elements, but they are not present in Num. 5.11-31. For that matter, if psychosomatic effects were in view, one could certainly see an innocent woman also being affected, inescapably rendering a false positive. If this could occur, then it seems the entire ritual has its own failure already envisioned.

Finally, Amzallah and Yona offered their own intriguing possibility: ‘We should consider the presence of an active component in the potion with a genuine physiological effect’ (2017: 388). They find this in a lesser-known alternate meaning of the Hebrew עפר (<5.?>v. 17), usually translated ‘dust’. The usual translation, meaning dust from the floor of the Tabernacle, has precisely led to the confusion regarding this passage: ‘The drinking of a little dusty water in clay can in no way provoke any specific physiological effect on a woman suspected of adultery’ (2017: 389). The authors cite Job 28.2, 6, in which עפר seems to mean ‘ore’ rather than ‘dust’, even though many translations follow the LXX and retain ‘dust’. A handful of other references indicate metallurgical contexts similar to that in Job 28: Gen. 3.14; Isa. 34.9; 41:2; 65:25; Ezek. 26.12; Prov. 8.26; and Job 22.24; 30.6. The authors suggested that the עפר put into the water could not be simply the regular dust on the Tabernacle floor because of the future tense of the verb ‘take’ in v. 17. The location of the Tabernacle in the area of the Kenites, the Kenites’ apparent worship of YHWH prior to the Israelites’ arrival, and the Kenites’ proclivity for metal-working all speak in favor, in the minds of Amzallah and Yona, of the active ingredient of the sotah potion to be copper ore. Ingested copper ore could certainly have a deleterious effect on the body, much more so than any random handful of dirt could. The authors conclude: ‘These observations suggest the possibility that the interpretation of עפר as crushed copper ore might clarify the obscure meaning of the Sotah prescription’ (2017: 391).

The authors’ ultimate conclusion is that the ritual is YHWHistic in origin, though not Israelite. They admit that their conclusion depends upon the veracity of the claim, what they call a ‘long defended assumption’, that the Kenites worshipped YHWH independently of the Israelites. The appearance of Moses’s father-in-law Jethro performing a priestly ceremony without drawing the condemnation of the editors of Exodus is strong evidence for this, especially given that Judg. 1.16 identifies Jethro as a Kenite (2017: 403).

Summary

This section has considered three articles dealing with ancient Near Eastern correspondences in the ritual of the sotah. Two came from the pen of Korean scholars—a reminder to interpreters not to ignore non-Western scholarship. An and Jeon both compared the sotah to ancient Near Eastern

precedents, to Hittite priestly rituals, and to LH, respectively, but adjudicated the comparisons in different ways. The third article, from Israeli scholars Amzallah and Yona, argued for a different key ingredient in the liquid given the woman to drink, disassociating the text from ordeal trials in the process. Their analysis also considered a non-Israelite background for the sotah, this time suggesting Kenite origins.

The Tip of Phineas's Spear (Numbers 25)

Four pieces of scholarship will come into focus in this section, again including a non-Western interpretation. Park (2019) draws upon a particular social theory of Heinz Kohut concerning the preservation of group identity by a charismatic individual. Rees (2015) attempts to 'leap between two opinions', applying in a comparative manner several different methodological approaches to Numbers 25. Grafius (2018) reads Numbers 25 alongside American 'slasher flicks', a genre of movies popular in the late twentieth century that predominantly feature physical and sexual violence, often with, as the nickname implies, frequent close-up shots of the victims being murdered and copious amounts of on-screen blood. Waters (2017) highlights that Phineas's target was the belly, perhaps an allusion to the desire (of God or of Moses or of someone else) that foreign women do not find themselves pregnant by Israelite men.

Hee-Kyu Heidi Park

Park's, 'Divine Jealousy, Human Zeal: Self-Psychology and the Kenotic Spirituality of אָנָּק in Numbers 25', argues 'that a powerful monotheistic-centered zeal can form during times of uncertainty and existential threats real or imagined, when a group's desperate desire for a powerful parental imago aligns with the emergence of a charismatic leader' (2019: 37). This article thus has connections back to that of An (2019; see above), as Numbers 5 also deals with a (probably) imaginary existential threat, as well as to Rees's cross-disciplinary approach to Numbers that will be described below (2015).

Jealousy (אָנָּק) is an important feature in Numbers 25. Park, following 'Heinz Kohut's self-psychological understanding of leadership', suggests that this 'invites an interpretation that allows for the analysis of the psychodynamics of the community behind this text' (2019: 37). Park cites several of Kohut's essays in a collected volume entitled, *Self-Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach* (Kohut 1985). In particular, she deals with the dual focus of jealousy, viz. for God or of God (note the parallel with the portion of the commandment in Exod. 20.5 that states, 'I, the LORD your God, am אָנָּק אֱלֹהִים'). The jealousy of God works itself out in Numbers 25 through the deaths of all the remaining members of the Exodus generation, excepting the purported faithful members Moses, Caleb, and Joshua—the latter two of whom will survive Moses himself. In addition, Park notes that the Korean translations require a paraphrastic sense. To

gain the proper sense of the Hebrew, the translation uses ‘burning love’, by which, according to Park, ‘the core quality of the emotion is correctly captured. This flaring jealousy is like a consuming fire, displaying YHWH’s destructive and violent rage that leads to destruction’ (2019: 39).

In terms of narrative setting, Park notes that Moab is familiar territory, for it was from here that the Israelites sent the spies to assess the land. Caleb and Joshua were included among these spies, and were, in fact, the only ones to bring back a positive report as regards the Israelites’ probable success in taking the land. It is for this reason that they are judged faithful, Moses being faithful as well because he followed the command of God to send the spies (Num. 13). Following God’s command to ‘impale them in the sun’ (Num. 25.4 NRSV) (that is, the leaders of the people who have committed the grave sin), Phineas son of Eleazar impales one man and woman in particular. Though this impalement is done in the dark rather than in the light, it stops the plague that God has sent, which has claimed the lives of 24,000 people.

Park then goes on to detail a number of attempts at softening the edges of this text. However, she maintains that in ‘Korean and Korean American church contexts, such zeal is reframed or read closer to the original intent of the text’ (2019: 41). She means by this that, in spite of the concerns that texts like these engender in modern readers, the intent of the passage to enforce the exclusive worship of God has fueled powerful spiritual revival movements. When God self-identifies as jealous, the best response (apparently that which motivated Phineas b. Eleazar), is to respond with a similar level of devotion. Park writes: ‘In other words, Phineas’s emotion was the same emotion expressed by God. With no additional description in the text of Phineas other than his lineage, he is characterized and best remembered for the emotion he carried out’ (p. 41).

Using Kohut’s work as a lens, Park desires to sidestep the perhaps undue attention paid to the psychosexual dimensions of this text. Rather, the question turns on the ‘narcissistic need’ of an individual or a community. Drawing on Kohut, she says, ‘The self is formed by keeping the tension between the libidinal investment in idealizing the perfect parental objects and the investment in one’s own grandiosity. In this formation process, the self experiences the parental imago as one’s extension: the object becomes a self-object’ (Park 2019: 44). When this process gets translated to group identity formation, one may identify a certain level of anxiety as regards group cohesiveness, which is rather similar to the anxiety an individual might feel in navigating the tension between having objectified one’s parents and seeing the parents as an extended version of the self. Park states, ‘Cultural self-object is the cultural object that a group of people experience as an extension of itself, fulfilling the unconscious need of the group to hold together a group’s disintegrating self’ (p. 44).

The grandiosity of the group is projected upon Phineas who, as a charismatic leader, takes upon himself the violent task of cementing the group identity: ‘The idealized grandiose self of the leader has the effect of creating group cohesiveness, mutual identification, and diminution of

aggression between the members of the group, which is accomplished in Phineas' (Park 2019: 46). The anxiety about group identity and cohesion is also projected on God, whose grandiosity is encoded in the text, but this encoding is really of the group's own identity formation and preservation: 'The kindled jealousy of God channeled through the self-emptying Phineas is the projection of fragmenting of a group's narcissistic need for grandiosity and idealizing parental imago fermented when examined from a self-psychology perspective' (p. 47). The people stood at Shittim, where the failures of the previous generation had been made manifest. The temptation of the people to repeat the mistakes of the previous generation—and thus, in terms of their cultural self-object, to open themselves up for similar divine retribution—contributed to a sense of fragmented group identity. A charismatic leader like Phineas had to arise, then, as the locus onto which the anxiety could be thrown. Once this projection was made, Phineas could give himself up to (empty himself to) the means at his disposal in order to assure the cohesiveness of group identity. In other words, Phineas could say about himself—or rather, the community using him as part of its cultural self-object could say about him—that 'zeal [817] for [God's] house has consumed me' (Ps. 69.9).

Anthony Rees

Anthony Rees's *[Re]reading Again: A Mosaic Reading of Numbers 25* (2015) deftly manipulates a pun. For 'Mosaic' in the title refers both to the so-called Books of Moses—traditional authorship questions notwithstanding—and to the mosaic art form. Rees analyzes Numbers 25 from a variety of perspectives typical of both author-centered and reader-oriented critical approaches.

Rees devotes his first two chapters to 'a history of interpretation, considering the contribution of a variety of major interpreters' (p. 10). In the first chapter, he moves back and forth between Jewish and Christian sources in order to keep them in chronological order. He includes the Jewish writers Philo of Alexandria (pp. 20-24) and Josephus (pp. 24-27) alongside the Christian Origen of Alexandria (pp. 27-33). He returns to Jewish sources with the Talmud (pp. 33-36) and Rashi (pp. 36-37), and then concludes with the Arabic source known as *The Samaritan Chronicle* (pp. 37-39).

In his second chapter, Rees moves on to modern critical sources. He notes: 'To this point in the history of interpretation, the various historiographers, commentators, and homilists have assumed the authorship of Moses regarding the text of Num 25...[but] it would not be long before that assumption would crumble' (p. 44). Rees details the critical controversies as they emerged throughout the work of several well-known historical-critical interpreters, including C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch (pp. 46-48), George Buchanan Gray (pp. 48-51), Martin Noth (pp. 51-55), Philip Budd (pp. 55-57), Jacob Milgrom (pp. 57-64), and Baruch Levine (pp. 64-71).

In chapters 3 through 6, Rees conducts his own historical readings of Numbers 25 from various perspectives. Chapter 3 is a historical-critical reading (pp. 72-93). Chapter 4 employs narrative criticism (pp. 97-118). Chapter 5 is a feminist reading (pp. 119-42). Chapter 6 is a

postcolonial reading (pp. 143-72). Rees ends his book with something of a lament about the state of biblical studies. He states, 'Biblical studies is a house divided, perhaps even in crisis. Debates over method, and strategy, and interpretive frameworks have created rifts, and the results have been characterized using military analogies' (p. 173). Though reconciliation among the fragmented parts of the discipline of biblical studies is probably not likely in the near term, openness to and familiarity with a wide variety of approaches will certainly help to lessen the tension.

Brandon R. Grafius

Grafius's treatment appears in his *Reading Phinehas<Phineas?>, Watching Slashers: Horror Theory and Numbers 25* (2018). He notes at the outset, 'This chapter contains one of the strongest statements against intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible, rivalling those of Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 13:23–31' (Grafius 2018: xiii). He makes a distinction between 'historical violence' and 'rhetorical violence': the former 'is directed at the other, the direct object of violence. Rhetorical violence, however, is directed at the intended audience, usually a part of the writer's sociocultural grouping' (2018: xiii). Grafius intends to subject the text to a variety of critical methodologies, and he even cites Rees (2015; see above) as a model for this type of investigation (2018: xiii-xiv). Grafius spends his first chapters (pp. 1-75) by setting the interpretation of Numbers 25 within historical-critical investigation.

Grafius's particular contribution comes by way of horror theory. According to Grafius, the sense of dread is the principal common link between horror literature and film on the one hand, and Numbers 25 on the other. He writes: 'In the Priestly worldview, we see an ordered society constantly under threat from the forces of chaos...[and] the text tries to construct this threat as a threat from without rather than from within, but it is not always successful. In the end, the threat of chaos always emanates from Israelite society itself' (Grafius 2018: 77-78). As he proceeds through this third chapter and develops the concept of horror theory, he cites such diverse thinkers as H.P. Lovecraft, Sigmund Freud, Robin Wood, Julia Kristeva, and Carol Clover. He notes that Wood wrote a seminal article on the academic discussion of horror movies: 'Beginning with Robin Wood's article, scholarship on the modern horror film became very concerned with questions of the family and how it was viewed as an ideological unit' (Grafius 2018: 86). Numbers 25, like the other texts dealing with the apparent horror of intermarriage, is very concerned with family—specifically, with the putative 'purity' of the Israelite family. This idea also plays well into the story of the daughters of Zelophehad (see below).

Other film theorists have also shown an interest in the horror genre. For example, film theorists Flesher and Torry noted that horror films 'depend on our willingness to accept a prescientific world in which supernatural forces are encountered and in which the only reliable way to deal with them is combat with methods, religious and magical, that prove more powerful than the

tools employed by modern, rational culture' (Flesher and Torry 2007: 136). This is so especially when the plot of the film involves a supernatural battle of some sort. For, in these movies, science and rationality do not help. Characters in these movies often turn to religion to battle the monster trying to kill them.

Though sometimes—like in *The Exorcist*—the religious tools come from a recognizable tradition, usually the characters employ an undefinable mishmash of elements culled from a variety of traditions. Nevertheless, the connection between Numbers 25 and horror movies is trenchant. It is so not least because it represents a significant advance in biblical scholarship, namely, moving beyond traditional historical-critical questions. It is interesting also because it provides a key insight into Western media culture, finding ways to bring the biblical tradition into fruitful discussion with those aspects of society that, generally speaking, make religious folk uncomfortable.

Jamie Waters

Jamie Waters's 'The Belly: Phineas' Target in Numbers 25:8' (2017) begins with the following words: 'The narrative in Numbers 25:6–15 centers on Phineas, a priest and grandson of Aaron, who murders an Israelite man and a Midianite woman by stabbing' (2017: 38). The difficulty—which Waters does not acknowledge—arises from her use of the word 'murder'. This word generally implies a legal judgment upon the act of killing someone—namely, that the act was contrary to custom or recognized authority. However, no one involved in the story—characters, implied author, implied reader, narrator, narratee, and so on—seems to have been bothered by what Phineas did. In fact, the text praises him for it by no less an authority than YHWH, who grants him 'a covenant of peace' as a reward for having acted in a way that takes the plague away from Israel. Waters mentions these characteristics later on in her piece (p. 41). Moreover, when Phineas impaled the two people engaged in unauthorized coitus, in one sense he merely extended what YHWH had told Moses to do. In v. 4<Num. 25.4?>, YHWH commanded Moses to impale (יקה) all the chiefs in the sun before YHWH (i.e., in full view of the community). Phineas, in v. 8, pierces (דקר) the offending couple inside a tent, out of sight, even though the Israelite man had brought the Midianite woman into the camp in the full view of Moses and the other Israelites, who were already in great distress because of what had taken place.

Waters specifically focuses her article on the note that Phineas stabbed the woman אֶל-קִבְתָּהּ. The act took place in a קִבָּה 'tent', and Phineas stabbed her אֶל-קִבְתָּהּ. One should carefully translate the latter as 'in her belly', though at first mention Waters does not make explicit the 2fs pronomial <pronominal?> suffix. Among English translations, the NRSV and NASB elide the suffix. By contrast, the LXX, KJV, NET, NIV, and ERV make clear that the spear went through *her* belly. Waters cites some of the versions to conclude that the spear had to have gone through the man at some point (2017: 40). Perhaps the text is reticent to say where the man was pierced, as it might

imply through the anus, an injury that would bring great shame. In any event, for now his body has been erased so that the text can focus on the injury done to, and thus the shame brought upon, the woman.

Waters goes on to discuss potential motives for Phineas. She deals with the confluence of Moabites and Midianites in a way that sidesteps the often-abstruse details of source-critical analysis and reconstruction. She concludes that the Midianite woman ‘is a vehicle for Israelite disobedience, so the depiction of Phineas targeting her more purposefully demonstrates the risks associated with this particular Midianite woman and her ability to lead Israel astray’ (2017: 43). Waters also examines biblical parallels of Phineas’s action. She first cites the story of Ehud, the left-handed judge. Moabite domination is also of particular issue in Judges 3, and the purported sin with Moabite women begins the account of Numbers 25. The most important parallel for Waters is that Ehud stabs the Moabite King Eglon in his fat belly, which then closes over the sword. Ehud then conceals his killing of the king until he can get away. Waters also notes four belly-stabbings in 2 Samuel: Abner killing Asahel (2.23); Joab and Abishai killing Abner (3.27); Rechab and Baanah killing Ishbaal (4.6); and Joab killing Amasa (20.10). All of these killings involve high-profile victims or highly emotionally charged situations, and serve explicitly political ends. Waters concludes her article by showing how the LXX and the Vulgate both reinterpret the text of Numbers 25, making the dimension of religious apostasy most explicit.

The Daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27; 36<27–36 below>)

The first article to be discussed in this section calls into question the view that Numbers 26–36 (or 25–36), including the two passages concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, are among the latest texts of the Pentateuch (see Albertz 2013: 221). Kilchör (2015) considers how a legal principle in the latter parts of Deuteronomy may represent a development of a companion principle in the latter part of Numbers. The second article (Aaron 2009) considers Numbers 27 and 36 as suit and countersuit. Finally, I will consider two commentaries on Numbers written specifically for non-Western audiences, paying particular attention to the way in which they discuss the daughters of Zelophehad.

Benjamin Kilchör

Similar to how Beal (2017) examined literary questions in Numbers through comparison with Joshua, Kilchör (2015) discusses Numbers (and Leviticus) from the standpoint of providing some legal precedent for the levirate marriage laws in Deuteronomy. Kilchör begins his article by stating two assumptions ‘that are not generally acknowledged among biblical scholars. First, the Holiness Code and the laws of the Book of Numbers are presupposed in Deuteronomic law... Second...[he worked] with the thesis of the Decalogue orientation of Deuteronomic law’ (2015: 429-30). These two assumptions cut against one result coming out of historical-critical scholarship, at least in its

early stages—namely, that the material comprising the Pentateuch came together through the conscious editing of disparate, independent sources into what eventually became the canonical whole.

In the first major section of his article, Kilchör examines levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25 in light of the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. He notes that the precise expression **בן אין לו** is found only in Num. 27.8 and Deut. 25.5. On the one hand, Deuteronomy 25 seems not to consider daughters as part of the equation. On the other hand, Numbers 27 and its instruction to give the inheritance of the dead man to his daughters has an unintended consequence: the daughters will grow up and marry and their property will pass over into their husbands' families. Numbers tries to address this problem with the additional stipulation in ch. 36 that the daughters of Zelophehad must marry within their own clan. Kilchör comments, 'The most straightforward way to understand levirate marriage is to read it as an improvement on the hereditary right in Numbers' (2015: 433).

Kilchör dismisses the argument (see Gertz 1994) that Deuteronomy 25 is older than Numbers 27 for three reasons. First, while levirate marriage is not envisioned in Numbers 27, both this text and Deuteronomy 25 explicitly have the preservation of the childless (more properly, sonless) father in view—though it is true that Numbers 27 does provide for an entirely childless man (his inheritance should go to his brothers). Second, reading the Pentateuch synchronically preserves the rights of the daughters while Numbers 27 does not, again, provide for levirate marriage. Third, if levirate marriage were already in practice when Zelophehad's daughters come forward, their argument would appear self-defeating. Moreover, Deuteronomy 25 pays attention to the wife of the dead man, who, curiously, does not receive any attention in Numbers 27. Kilchör concludes, 'The new levirate marriage is now the preferred way to preserve the father's name by giving birth to a "surrogate son", while the hereditary right in Numbers 27 is still a valid alternative if there is no son' (2015: 434).

Kilchör then answers two objections to his reading. First, he notes that levirate marriage could not have been presupposed in Numbers 27 because no exact parallels may be located in either Babylonian or Assyrian laws. Kilchör cites Middle Assyrian Law 33, which deals with where a wife may live after the death of her husband, but notes that this is only a remote parallel because the law does not mention that a son born at some later time would inherit the name and the property of the dead husband. The second objection Kilchör notes has to do with whether Numbers 27 presupposes the previous death of the mother. The order of cases considered in the casuistic framework of Num. 27.1-11 is key for Kilchör: 'It has to be emphasized that in the other direction this problem can be solved easily. If...there is no son, then the Israelites first have the duty to try and get a son who can inherit the name of the father' (2015: 436).

Kilchör devotes the final major section of his article to a comparison of Deut. 25.5-10 and Lev. 20.21. This material lies beyond the scope of the present project, so I will immediately move to his conclusion. Both the preferred inheritance order established in Numbers 27 and the illicit sexual relations discussed in Leviticus 20 must be earlier than levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25. This is so because, in Kilchör's words: 'If levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25 is the older law, then the later laws in Leviticus and Numbers not only ignore levirate marriage but in fact abolish it without mentioning it' (2015: 439).

David H. Aaron

Aaron (2009) employs the case of Zelophehad's daughters to discuss the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation. His opening assumption is that the story 'is a fiction designed to undermine the common custom of antiquity, which was to allow for a female inheritance whenever a father (or mother) deemed it their will' (2009: 1). He asserts that the daughters of Zelophehad did not need to approach Moses with their case and that the Josephite elders did not enact any sort of dramatic reversal or onerous burden on the daughters of a sonless man. Indeed, Aaron suggests that 'the author of the story of Zelophehad's daughters in Numbers 27 and the author of the countersuit story in Numbers 36, are, for all intents and purposes, of the same school and generation of writers' (2009: 1). He further dismisses 'the dominant trend' of seeing Numbers 36 as a revision of Numbers 27, even as many writers have envisioned both to be largely fictional accounts.

Aaron then turns his attention to several of the more recent ways in which the story has been read. Feminist readings, for example, have focused on how female characters might assert their rights over against various structures of oppression. But he also writes, 'The unfortunate thing about this approach to the text is that, while focusing on the extraordinary achievement of these five women, it draws attention away from what many have identified as an even more aberrant aspect of the Israelite history portrayed in this passage: Israelite society is described in the Torah as having functioned *without* inheritance rights for women' (2009: 5-6; emphasis original). After summarizing the work of Ben-Barak (2006) on female inheritance practices throughout the ancient Near East, Aaron asserts, on the basis of ample comparative evidence from every ancient near Eastern society, that '*Israel could not possibly have been without such practices at the familial, local, and city-state level at any point in its so-called ancient period, regardless of whether a law code stipulated such practices*' (2009: 8; emphasis original). Thus, while Ben-Barak dismisses the possibility that these stories were fiction with no grounding in reality, Aaron embraces this possibility as the only logical option. Test cases such as this 'were "fabricated" rather than derived from real life, in keeping with the preponderance of the evidence' (2009: 9).

Citing Levine (2000), Aaron goes on to assert that the daughters' lawsuit 'proves incoherent against the backdrop of patriarchy. Indeed, even if the father's name...survived into his daughter's

generation, it would come to an abrupt end with her death, given the assumptions of patrilineal descent' (2009: 11). In other words, the claims of the (fictional) daughters carry within them the seeds of their own destruction. Moreover, the apparent reassertion of the rights of the clan in Numbers 36 seems to be the more trenchant. Aaron asserts that the logical problems raised by Numbers 27 are rather incidental to the central claim of Numbers 36 (2009: 13).

In the next section, Aaron deals with the reference to the Jubilee in Num. 36.4. He notes that this reference seems out of place because the Jubilee did not have anything to do with land inheritance. In addition, if, as many assert, the final form of Numbers is postexilic, remaining references to tribal structure would be odd since 'tribal units appear to break down in post-exilic times (if not long before)' (2009: 16). Aaron then undertakes an inner-biblical examination of the formulation of the legal principle. Following Fishbane (1985), he notes, 'The crucial question here is, What constituted the received tradition with regard to female inheritance and why would there have been a need for *reformulation*?' (2009: 19; emphasis original). Numbers 36, says Fishbane, is strange because it assumes the legal principle established by the narrative of Zelophehad's daughters was incomplete or insufficient. Enduring questions remain: how could a subsequent generation completely rework a previous generation's legal machinations in this way? Aaron, as noted, dismisses these questions not only by asserting that both Numbers 27 and 36 are fictional, but also by suggesting the implausibility of Israel existing without having provided, at least in popular custom, for the inheritance of daughters who did not have any brothers. For it goes without saying that it should not have taken a patriarchal and patrilineal Israel very long to have the experience of a husband and wife not producing male heirs. Quite aside from the question of chromosomal contribution, the legal traditions of Israel do not seem to punish women for not producing male heirs. Instead, legal structures like levirate marriage are meant to address such cases, which are considered tragic.

Aaron ultimately concludes that 'prior to the writing of Num 27:8–11a, Israelites behaved regarding female inheritance just as their neighbors behaved... daughters in ancient Israel inherited on the basis of a patriarchal stipulation, which could designate them as heiresses, just as in other contemporary societies' (2009: 27-28). Furthermore, according to Aaron, whether any brothers were still alive would not affect such a stipulation (2009: 28). Thus, the authors of the two passages, which Aaron asserts are the same or at least that they belong to the same community, present their case as, first, the attempt to make a law where none was needed; and, second, to interpret the law thus created. Aaron writes, 'The writer fabricated a legal inadequacy in order to provide a platform for changing a normative practice' (2009: 34).

Abraham Saggi and Mitchel Modine

Earlier I took note of two articles in the collection entitled *Landscapes of Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation*. These items served to demonstrate some of the important work going on in non-Western scholarship. The term ‘non-Western scholarship’ encompasses not only work by non-Westerners, but also work done with a non-Western audience in mind. As an example, Indian scholar Abraham Saggi contributed the section on Numbers to the *South Asia Bible Commentary* (Saggi 2015). Saggi’s simply stated conclusion is weighty: ‘The patriarchal societies of South Asia should learn from this story to treat women equally. God’s people today should also learn that it is not wrong to claim the rights of women’ (2015: 197). Unfortunately, the progressive tenor of this conclusion is blunted by Saggi’s lack of substantial comments on God’s previous instruction in Num. 36.6 concerning the economic protections against one tribe losing its land to another (2015: 204).

My commentary on Numbers (Modine 2018) was published under the auspices of the Asia Theological Association and the Langham Global Library. Though I am a white Westerner, I received the assignment on Numbers because I have taught for my entire career in an Asian seminary in the Philippines. The methodology of this commentary was to join exegetical investigation with cultural sidebars. I appealed to various colleagues with Asian and Pacific Islander identity and/or experience, as well as making inquiry of my students who have come from all over the world. One of the commentary’s cultural sidebars describes an interaction that I had about the stories of the daughters of Zelophehad with two students from Nagaland, in northeast India, who were then engaged to be married: ‘The woman informed me that her culture would prevent her from marrying inside her clan... In Nagaland, to marry inside her clan would cause this woman...to be considered a harlot or as guilty of incest. In both ancient Israel and modern Nagaland, the question centers on the issue of property inheritance’ (Modine 2018: 188). This kind of cultural comparison between different traditional societies holds promise for ongoing insights into the story of the daughters.

Conclusion

The ‘purposive survey’ presented in this article attempted to present some of the tenor of recent work on the book of Numbers through case studies of particular texts and with attention to non-Western perspectives. The scholarly works surveyed here dealt with ongoing compositional conversations, as well as three specific texts in Numbers: the sotah ritual (Num. 5); Phineas b. Eleazar’s deadly *coitus interruptus* (Num. 25); and the stories of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27; 36). The scholars cited ranged from Africa and Asia to Europe and North America, both as to geopolitical location and to intersectional identity. The pieces also ranged from conservative to progressive and were often shown to be in conflict with one another. The variety of methodologies, presuppositions, and approaches demonstrate that scholarly work on the fourth book of the Pentateuch continues apace,

and many fruitful lines of investigation lay <lie?> open for the careful reader beyond traditional approaches.

Abbreviations

AB Anchor Bible

BBR Bulletin for Biblical Research

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

CTH Catalogue des Textes Hittites (Catalog of Hittite Texts)

ERV English Revised Version

HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual

JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

KJV King James Version

LH Laws of Hammurapi (or Hammurabi)

LXX Seputagint

NASB New American Standard Bible

NET New English Translation

NIV New International Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

P Priestly Document

SBL Society of Biblical Literature

VT Vetus Testamentum

ZAW Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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