

*Personennamen und Religion im alten Israel untersucht mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Namen auf El und Ba'al.* By STIG NORIN. Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament series, vol. 60. Winona Lake, Ind.: EISENBRAUNS, 2013. Pp. xiv +336, illus. \$49.50 (paper).

With his present book, the well-known author, now professor emeritus of Old Testament exegesis at the University of Uppsala, has supplemented and completed his older study, *Sein Name ist allein hoch: Das Jhw-haltige Suffix althebräischer Personennamen untersucht mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der alttestamentlichen Redaktionsgeschichte* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1986). He has not only widened the scope to include personal names containing El and Baal, but has also included more recently recovered epigraphic material from ancient Judah and Israel and the neighboring regions, comparing it with the biblical results. Presupposing that personal names reflect the beliefs of the name givers, the Swedish scholar aims at a diachronic description of the ancient Israelite religion from the beginning of the monarchy up to the Persian period (pp. 1–2). Therefore, he analyzes the frequency of the El- and Baal-compounds in relation to the YHWH-names, their regional distribution, and their social stratification.

In chapter 2 (pp. 12–76) Norin presents the epigraphic material. His sample consists of 488 El- and 159 Baal-compounds from the entire ancient Near East, Egypt, and the eastern Mediterranean. While personal names containing the element El used without and with suffixes are spread over the entire Fertile Crescent, those names that refer to Baal are locally concentrated in Phoenicia and the eastern Mediterranean. The considerable number of 134 El-compounds can be attributed to Palestine, while only 19 Baal-names have so far been found in this region. Most of these come from the Northern Kingdom of the eighth and seventh centuries (10 from Samaria, 1 from Beth Shean, and 1 from Tell Dan), the rest from the coastal plain from Acco to Gaza, dominated either by the Phoenicians or the Philistines. The latter may have brought their affiliation with Baal from their former home in Cyprus. Two or three additional Baal-names can be located in Transjordan.

Supporting this result with the insight that only three Palestinian rulers mentioned in the Amarna correspondence of the fourteenth century B.C.E. bear Baal-names (from Megiddo, Gezer, and Lachish), Norin formulates the most important part of his thesis: “There is no reason to believe that there was a widespread worship of a god called Ba'al in pre-Israelite times. The individual epigraphic evidence from the coast and from Samaria indicates an influence mainly from Phoenicia, particularly during the period of the Omri dynasty in ninth century B.C. Even in the biblical text, we find no evidence of a widespread worship of Ba'al. Ba'al as an antithesis to the God of Israel is not so present in the texts as often has been mentioned” (pp. 275–76). With this thesis, Norin intends to confirm the position of Tigay against that of Ahlström, Dever, and others, without sharing his view of an early monotheism in Israel's religion (p. 72).

In chapter 3 (pp. 77–115) Norin seeks to verify his thesis that people bearing El-names are generally of a lower societal position than those bearing YHWH-names. In this connection he discusses the function and date of the Samaria ostraca (the end of the ninth century) and refers to “the rich” <sup>3</sup>Uriyahu of the burial inscription from Khirbet el-Qom. According to Norin, persons carrying YHWH-names often show a closer affiliation to the central administration.

In chapter 4 (pp. 116–79) Norin investigates the distribution of El-names among the biblical books and the social position of the name bearers. In the Hexateuch and the book of Judges the El-names are prominent, while YHWH-compounds are nearly absent. Norin even doubts that Joshua is a real YHWH-name (p. 135). Nevertheless, in the book of Genesis names like Ishmael or Bethuel do signify persons of lower importance. Only in the priestly texts, especially in Numbers, do the El-names indicate persons of a higher status, a situation that Norin explains by positing a peripheral origin for the priestly group (from Bethel?).

Norin also describes in detail the well-known increase of YHWH-names in the books of Samuel and Kings and in prophetic books like Jeremiah, while the El-names again become more frequent in the books of Chronicles. According to Norin, this reflects not only a religio-historical development, but also a social stratification: “Wir können hier die Tendenz erkennen, dass die führenden Kräfte der beiden israelitischen Staaten Gott unter dem Namen Jhw verehrten, während sich der Name Elohim anscheinend bei denen eingebürgert hatte, die dem Zentrum der Macht nicht nahestanden” (p. 179).

Chapter 5 (pp. 180–243) is dedicated to the investigation of the deity Baal in the Hebrew Bible. Against older views, Norin intends to show that its significance was rather limited. Although Num. 25 connects Israel's immigration into Canaan with its apostasy to Baal Peor (cf. Hos. 9:10), the actual existence of Baal worship is mentioned only for Philistine Ekron (2 Kings 1). The name of the city god of Shechem was probably El Berit (Judg. 9:46), while Baal Berit should be seen as a Deuteronomistic emendation (8:33; 9:4). Likewise all passages which mention the plural *ba'alim* in Judg. and 1 Sam. are part of Deuteronomistic polemics against the veneration of all foreign deities. Only the Elijah and Elisha stories (1 Kings 17–19; 2 Kings 10) testify to a conflict with an actual Baal cult—Norin thinks of Melqart from Tyre, for him a manifestation of Baal Shamem—which was introduced by King Ahab, who was married to the Phoenician princess Jezebel. The veneration of Baal, Asherah, and the hosts of heaven, however, mentioned in 2 Kings 21:3; 23:4, reflects the influence of Assyrian religion. Norin especially thinks of Bel or Marduk, the city god of Babylon, who became more prominent within Assyrian religion under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.

Finally, in chapter 6 (pp. 244–64) Norin investigates the geographic and personal names containing Baal. According to Norin, the geographic designations do not come from ancient times, and most of them are to be located outside the “real” Israelite settlement area. He understands those names formed with the element *bošət* (e.g., Ishbosheth) not as denigrations of Baal-names, but instead derives them from the Akkadian word *baštu* ‘dignity; protective spirit’. Jerubaal should also be derived from this lexeme (cf. Judg. 9:53). According to Norin, most of the eleven Baal-names of the Hebrew Bible come from peripheral regions or from later times. Where they are present in pre-exilic Judah, for example, Beeliada (1 Chron. 14:7), one of David's sons, they should be interpreted in a non-theophoric way: “der mit Kenntnis” (p. 263). For Norin, the Davidic family and dynasty were the very center of YHWH belief; he therefore regards veneration of Baal in the southern hill country as very doubtful.

The book concludes with a German and an English summary (pp. 265–82), in which the author proposes a pre-state origin of the Hexateuch because of its lack of YHWH-names (cf. Tengström). The indexes include biblical and non-biblical references, personal names, and place names.

This volume impresses the reader with the high philological and good exegetical and archaeological competence of its author. A large amount of epigraphic and biblical material is presented and interpreted from several aspects and in a wide scope. The main thesis that the conflict between Baal and YHWH veneration should be regarded as a rather limited phenomenon, mainly restricted to the ninth century B.C.E. in the northern kingdom, due to this state's close political connection with Phoenicia, and found in a different shape during the seventh century in Judah under Assyrian occupation is convincing and properly founded. Thus the older assumption of a widespread Canaanite Baal cult—often understood as a vital fertility cult—throughout the Levant is highly improbable and should be given up. In my *History of Israelite Religion* I had already argued in a similar direction.

Having said this, it seems to me that Norin sometimes understates the influence of Baal veneration and the violence and impact of the conflict during the ninth century. Thus, he gives no explanation of just why only the name of the god Baal was used in the religious polemics of Hosea, Jeremiah, and the Deuteronomistic History for denoting many beliefs and practices no longer tolerated by a stricter Yahwism. Furthermore, Norin's attempts to underplay Baal's significance for Judah and Transjordan sometimes appear to be forced. The veneration of the famous Semitic weather god was not as limited within the ancient Near East as Norin wants us to believe. If he had included in his study all the names of this god, including Hadad, Adad, and his epithets other than Baal, a more widespread veneration of this god would have become apparent. Norin's conclusions do not reflect the fact that personal names—strictly speaking—reveal only private or familial relationship with a certain deity, not its position in the state cult, aspects that can diverge from one another. Nevertheless, his present study makes an important contribution to achieving a more correct view of ancient Israelite religion in its Near Eastern environment.