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Suzanna Millar, *Animals, Power, and Intersectionality in the Books of Samuel* (The Bible and the Humanities; Oxford: Oxford University Press 2026). Pp. xi + 285. £ 104 (Hardback). ISBN: 9780198973997

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The monograph is an example of the relatively recent 'animal turn' in biblical studies (explicitly on p. 7). This trend is well established, at least when it comes to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, with significantly less impact on New Testament research. The volume includes the usual front matter (table of contents, acknowledgements, and list of abbreviations), an introduction, six chapters (the first is introductory, the last one, concluding), an extensive bibliography, and an index of subjects discussed within the work.

The introduction (pp. 1–6) is quite restricted because the methodology of the study is discussed in its first chapter. Suzanna Millar opens the book with two ambitious claims: hers is 'the first comprehensive study of animals in Samuel', as well as 'the first large-scale project in biblical studies to examine animals through the lenses of power and intersectionality' (p. 1). The chosen source material – the Books of Samuel – is interesting because there is no particular focus on non-human animals in these books, although animals are consistently present, just as in real life. The primary text used by the author is Masoretic, with the four Qumran manuscripts and three Greek recensions as additional references. Although not mentioned here, Millar does not hesitate to quote Targum and Peshitta when she considers them relevant. The introduction concludes with a 'brief overview of the book's chapters' (pp. 5–6).

The methodological discussion in Chapter 1 (pp. 7–34) is divided according to three key terms from the title: 'animals', 'power', and 'intersectionality'. First, Millar briefly introduces the 'animal turn' in general and in biblical studies in particular. She delineates problems associated with the term 'animals' and pinpoints her approach within the broad field of animal studies: the animals, in particular domesticated animals, are important social players. Second, the concept of 'power' is defined based on (but not identical to) the framework proposed by Michel Foucault. Power is a dynamic reality that is intrinsically relational. Power, considered a multileveled construct, requires a heuristic tool that allows for bringing various vectors into dialogue. This goal is reached by the idea of 'intersectionality', taken up from socio-cultural analysis. In particular, it incorporates the distinction between the human and the animal. The most important part of

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the introduction is Section 1.3.3, which provides 'an analytic framework' for the study. The author opens with an overview of five major vectors of power (besides animality) to propose five modes of intersection (note that these numbers do not correspond to one another). She acknowledges that the framework may require some improvements (explicitly on pp. 30, 33, 241, and 245). For example, one may ask whether the reconfiguration of power exemplified by the ox that kicks back his master (p. 32) belongs to the same mode as a human–animal alliance. Nevertheless, the proposed structure offers a useful heuristic tool, even if it does not cover all possible interactions. Its practical application is proposed in four subsequent chapters that scrutinise different human–animal relationships within the Books of Samuel.

Chapter 2 (pp. 35–87) is dedicated to the 'power of killing' that is surveyed through nine selected cases, two regarding Eli, three regarding Samuel (although 1 Sam 11 seems to fit better in the following section) and four concerning Saul. Most of the cases involve sacrificial killing, while the others display at least some sacrificial characteristics and are read by the author as crucial points that reflect the dynamics of power between various subjects. She discovers how power is configured, enacted, and negotiated through and during the sacrifice. Notably, in many of these cases, the boundary between human and animal results 'porous'. The chapter concludes with an interesting observation that David is mentioned as presiding over a sacrifice only twice during his reign: at the installation of the Ark and after the census (p. 87). The observation is correct, although it is a bit surprising that these two cases are not analysed, especially as both moments can be interpreted as significant points during the negotiation of David's power with the nation and God (cf. p. 204). Needless to say, there are also other sacrifices and acts of killing described in the Books of Samuel that the chapter does not mention (although some are taken up later in the volume).

The third chapter (pp. 88–135) considers the 'power of taking', which may be considered a generalisation of the previously discussed 'power of killing', as 'to kill' means 'to take life' (p. 88). In particular, this chapter considers that the taking of animals and humans usually implies the commodification (or objectification) of the acquired being in various degrees. The taking involves three parties: the taker (the subject that exerts power), the one who is taken (human or animal), and the person from whom the object is taken. Moreover, the taking conflicts with the dynamic of allocation ('giving'), which has its own socio-political function. Therefore, the power of taking creates various social dynamics that are surveyed in six case studies involving the kings who develop, consolidate, and abuse their power. David exemplifies two categories (development and abuse), whereas consolidation remains somewhat elusive because it is based on the imaginary king described by the prophet in 1 Sam 8. A surprising statement can be found in the chapter's conclusion: 'Women are not shown to be taken from (perhaps not considered eligible to own property)' (p. 134). Although it can be partly understood within the specific framework assumed in the study (when an animal is taken from a woman, it is always the result of her giving), it remains problematic. David takes gifts from Abigail (1 Sam 25:18, 26–35) and Saul takes food from the necromancer (1 Sam 28:24–25); Hannah's two-fold offer (1 Sam 1:24–28)

is more disputable (see pp. 45–48). The necromancer's gift is particularly relevant, as the fattened calf is apparently her property.

From this point in the study, Millar shifts the perspective from the actions (killing and taking) to the power accumulated in specific agents (men and animals). In Chapter 4 (pp. 136–183), men's power is considered based on three examples: Goliath, Absalom, and Mephibosheth. The chapter capitalises on another field of study, dedicated to masculinity (both in the biblical context and as an independent theory). This part of the study is primarily structured according to three themes. First, the embodiment of masculinity that – as the author meticulously notes – is characterised, *inter alia*, through animal (and monstrous) traits. Second, its enactment and enunciation are tangible witnesses to the dynamic aspect of power. Once again, animals (lions, bears, sheep, dogs, and equids) are important means to express masculine power and its loss. Finally, 'the end of masculine power' (p. 173) is investigated for all three characters. The dead human body is barely different from a dead animal body; in the end, human animality can be perceived through human mortality.

The fifth chapter (pp. 184–226) deals with animal power and agency. In its introduction, Millar highlights some problems pertaining to the theorising of animal agency and its identification in biblical texts. 'Three portions of text' (p. 191) are used as case studies for animal agency. First is the complex Ark Narrative contained in 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6, where three groups of acting animals are proposed: mice, cows, and oxen. Second is the story of Kish's missing jennies (1 Sam 9:1–10:16), where the relevance of animals is overlooked by some scholars. The final case to be examined is the Succession Narrative, a textual complex in 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kgs 1–2. The agency of four species is considered: a (fictional) lamb in 2 Sam 12, horses in 2 Sam 8 (hence, before the Succession Narrative), donkeys (three occurrences), and a mule in 2 Sam 18. The survey is inherently problematic because the source texts were written from an anthropocentric position; therefore, they pay (almost) no attention to animal agency. Millar uses the 'hermeneutic of retrieval to imaginatively uncover the agency of animals' (p. 190), although even then she concludes that animal agency is usually constrained by human or divine control.

The last chapter (pp. 227–246) contains the concluding material. In the synthesis, Millar puts the species (mainly human–animal) among other social vectors that shape the intersectional dynamics of power and revisits her five modes of intersection, providing for each an extensive list of examples stemming from the preceding chapters. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the study's limitations and its broader implications. The extensive bibliography (pp. 247–277, including works in German, French, and Italian, although translations are preferred whenever available) demonstrates the interdisciplinary approach of the study. The vastness of the comparative material used in the study is impressive: from the text and representations from ancient West Asia, Egypt, and Graeco-Roman milieu, to modern African customs, to scientific research on animals.

An unsettling question may be useful to locate Millar's study within the context of the 'post-animal turn' in biblical studies: To what extent (if any) are animal studies possible? When 'animal turn' is understood as an attempt to challenge anthropocentrism, one must

confront the limitations of one's human nature. Thus, it is unsurprising that the concept of intersectionality emerged from women of colour, who are affected by multiple vectors of power (pp. 24–25). As long as animal studies are performed from a human perspective, there will be inherent traces of anthropocentrism. This fact does not remove the ethical necessity to pay attention to animals but calls for methodological attention (and intellectual honesty). In this context, the volume can be considered a relatively conservative approach. The five modes of intersection that constitute the focal point of Millar's methodology are all formulated as 'animals [...] humans'; hence, without an attempt to decentralise the human. This attitude is coherent with two premises of the study: its focus on the (inherently anthropocentric) Books of Samuel and an interest in the intersectional dynamics of power that are manifested in this text primarily by human actors. Nevertheless, the author is attentive to the recognition of non-human animals in the source composition, including their value (even inexplicit), wellbeing (e.g., post-traumatic conditions, p. 96, or the cruelty of mother–child separation, p. 199), and agency (Chapter 5).

The interest in the dynamics of power results in one of the major limitations of the study, namely, its focus on domesticated animals. This situation casts a shadow on the primary intent of the study, that is, to provide 'the first comprehensive study of animals in Samuel' (p. 2). Wild animals are often mentioned in the volume; some of them (mice, lions, bears, and dogs) are considered in detail, whereas others (e.g., partridges, fleas, and birds of prey, including vultures) remain marginal. However, non-domesticated animals could provide an interesting extension of the five modes of intersection because their relationships with humans (and other animals) may differ significantly from those of livestock.

In summary, Millar's book is an indispensable resource for anyone interested in the animals, power, or intersectionality in the Bible, especially in the Books of Samuel. The author provides numerous interesting readings of the relevant passages, and even if some of them may be disputable (especially for those who do not accept the undergirding methodological theory), they permit us to approach the biblical text from a new perspective. Moreover, the proposed analytical framework is a useful point of departure for further research on animal intersections. Millar proves that to fully understand the configuration of power in the Books of Samuel (and presumably elsewhere in Scripture), animals, which are often overlooked because of anthropocentric bias, should be taken seriously.