

Peter Altmann, *Banned Birds. The Birds of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14* (Archaeology and Bible 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2019). Pp. X + 186. Paperback. 54 €. ISBN 978-3-16-158163-2. E-Book. Open Access. ISBN 978-3-16-158164-9

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Peter Altmann is a research associate at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His book *Banned Birds* is one of the results of the *SNF Sinergia* project, which is aimed at combining literary and archaeological approaches in the study of the Pentateuch. In this case, the study underlying the book was conducted within the subproject ‘The Food Laws of the Pentateuch: Textual and Archaeological Perspectives.’ Numerous other publications originate from the same project, discussing complementary aspects of the examined subject. The book itself comprises an introduction, five chapters and a short conclusion, with a bibliography and four indices: of ancient sources, of authors, of subjects and of foreign terms.

The brief introduction (pp. 1-5) begins by clearly stating the problem addressed by the study and three goals to be achieved: identifying the banned birds, reconstructing the literary growth of the lists from Lev 11:13-19 and Deut 14:11-18 and understanding the reason behind the exclusion of the listed birds. The delineated aims of the study lead naturally to a presentation of the book’s structure, followed by the *status quaestionis* and the methodology.

The first chapter (pp. 7-52) provides the literary context of the discussion, that is, an overview of the birds in the Hebrew Bible. It starts with the issue of there being different categorisations of animals in the Bible and follows with an analysis of the various terms used to indicate and classify ‘birds.’ The second part of the chapter delineates the most important associations with birds in the biblical imagination. The third section, entitled ‘Cultic Use of Birds,’ deals with the birds used in the biblical cult, challenging some common assumptions about how they are regarded, such as the identification of *tôr* and the importance of the distinction between wild and domestic fowl in relation to sacrificial purposes. However, the subject indicated by the title of the section, that is, the use of birds within the cult, is virtually absent. The fourth and the fifth parts of the chapter contain

discussion regarding two specific aspects of the biblical and near-eastern imagery of birds: the militaristic connections and the fantastic birds.

Chapter 2 (pp. 53-75) presents the broader cultural context of the ancient Near East. It begins with methodological considerations that are crucial in the comparative method, even if the author decides ‘to paint with a broad brush’ (p. 74). According to Altmann, this approach is warranted by the ongoing evolution of dietary (and sacrificial) laws that can be observed even in the Hebrew Bible. The rest of the chapter depicts the appearances of the birds in the four cultural areas around Israel: Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia and the Levant. The author brings together not only literary but also iconographic and zooarchaeological evidence to enlighten the parallels with and differences from the biblical approach. One must be naturally conscious (as the author is) that a clean separation of the biblical from the broader context is not always possible. Thus, there are references to extra-biblical evidence in the first chapter and an excursus about the animals of the Flood in the second.

The third chapter (pp. 77-127) is dedicated to fulfilling the first aim of the study, that is, identifying the birds listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. The author shows full awareness of the numerous difficulties associated with this part, especially the lack of modern scientific classification in antiquity and possible different uses of the same term among various cultures and even within the Bible. For each term on the list, Altmann brings together a wide range of data: other appearances in the Hebrew Bible (when present), Greek and Syriac (the latter unsystematically) correspondence, possible etymological traces (apparently forgetting sometimes about the etymological fallacy), cognates in the languages of the neighbouring cultures, literary and iconographic comparative evidence, zooarchaeological data and even some ornithological insights. Despite such a wide approach, the identification of some birds remains conjectural and the author admits it. He also attempts to determine whether terms are terminal or supra-terminal taxa and to survey possible reasons for the exclusion of the birds from the table. Thus, the results of the research reported in the third chapter comprise not only the most plausible translations of the Hebrew terms but also significant data to be used in the subsequent chapters.

The fourth chapter (pp. 129-147) surveys the possible history of the composition of the dietary prohibitions in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Altmann provides an overview of the hitherto scholarship, taking as reference points the works of four scholars: Timo Veijola (Deuteronomic priority), Jacob Milgrom (Levitical priority), Christophe Nihan (a shared source) and Eckart Otto (staged Levitical priority). Altmann also depends, in his analysis, on the study ‘Unclean Birds in the Hebrew and Greek Versions of Leviticus and Deuteronomy’ done within the same *SNF Sinergia* project by Anna Angelini and Christophe Nihan and presented in Fribourg, unfortunately not published yet. In the sec-

ond part of the chapter, Altmann compares closely the texts of Lev 11:13-23 and Deut 14:11-20, divided into three sections: introduction, list of 'large flyers' and conclusion. He then, in the third part, conducts a more detailed analysis of the 'small flyers' from Lev 11:21-22 in a similar way to the 'large flyers' in chapter three. Finally, the author formulates a 'compositional hypothesis' of the origins of the lists of banned birds that assumes the existence of a (partly fluid) shared source that was employed by the P and D traditions.

In the final chapter (pp. 149-160), Altmann tries to answer the question 'Why ban these birds?' Once again, in a very systematic manner, he starts by surveying previous scholars' answers, explaining the pros and cons of each. The extensive survey he performed in the third chapter allows him to evaluate (usually negatively) the different viewpoints and conclude that there is no single reason that could subsume all twenty banned birds. Even if some rationales seem to be stronger than others (especially the association of many birds with death and destruction), it still does not warrant the current shape of the catalogue. This observation harmonises well with the previous one about the long formational history of the regulations.

The study presented in the book is neatly structured, has well-marked methodological boundaries and takes into consideration various types of sources. Thus, despite not all of the author's claims being sufficiently convincing, there is no doubt that this monograph is an important contribution to the discussion. One of the issues that could be expanded on in a future study is the understanding of the birds (especially the banned ones) in the period of the Second Temple. The use of comparative evidence from near-Eastern cultures is based on the (quite obvious) assumption that there is some kind of cultural influence. A similar connection between the Hebrew Bible and the compositions of the Second Temple period (and even later Jewish texts) is probably even stronger. This could reveal some important nuances such as the use of *qā'at* as an example of whiteness in *Jub* 37:23 (attested in Hebrew in 4Q223-224 2 IV 11) or the rationale of the raven's exclusion according to the Jewish tradition as presented in bSan 108b (referred to by Altmann on p. 92 but not very adequately). The presence of the raven in the list reinforces the need of the survey among the later references, as the author insists that it was added to the list in the Hellenistic period. Passages such as the Abraham/ravens episode from *Jubilees* 11 or the presence of ravens among the birds of prey in the Animal Apocalypse (*1 Enoch* 90) could be instructive here. The author is also aware of the possible insights from the Syriac tradition (he makes some references to the Peshitta), but he does not explore them systematically. It must, however, be emphasised that Altmann consciously confines his study so that it omits the abovementioned references. Moreover, he seems well aware of the possible benefits of further expanding the survey to encompass also the reception history in the Hellenistic period (cf. esp. p. 38, n. 136; but also p. 85

and p. 113, n. 179) and even the Hellenistic influences (p. 158). This possible broader perspective opens up new pathways for subsequent research.

Altmann's study systematizes a lot of material: various types of evidence as well as already existing studies. Presumably, it is unlikely to be considered a ground-breaking monograph; however, it is another step forward not only with regard to the lists of banned birds but also, even more importantly, about more general issues: the history of Israelite ritual and the compositional process of the Pentateuch.