

Giuseppe Minunno, 2013, *Ritual Employs of Birds in Ancient Syria-Palestine*. Alter Orient und Altes Testament, vol. 402. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag. Pp. 165. ISBN 978-3-86835-083-8. €64.

This revision of a dissertation submitted to Rome's University "La Sapienza" aims "to reconstruct as fully as possible the *historical development* of ritual activities [involving birds] and their interpretation" in the ancient Levant (p. 19, author's italics). The author devotes most of his pages to describing the use of avian victims in rites from Emar (Chapter II), Ugarit (Chapter III), the Hebrew Bible (Chapter V), and at Phoenician and Punic sites (Chapter VI). Shorter sections deal with the relevant material from Ebla, Mari, and Alalakh (Chapter IV) and from the Hittite capital Boğazköy/Hattusa (Chapter VII).

Minunno determines that, apart from a few instances scattered across diverse cultures in which the sacrifice of a bird is a cheap alternative for a poor worshiper unable to afford a sheep or goat, the employment of fowl in cult falls into two main categories: offerings for chthonic deities on the one hand and use in purification on the other (p. 127). Furthermore, he observes that the former practice probably arose in the Syro-Palestinian region, while the latter was a product of Hurro-Hittite cult (p. 128). This conclusion indeed seems to be justified on the basis of the limited evidence currently available, which is unfortunately especially exiguous for the Middle Bronze Age and earlier. Clearly we could be more confident about origins and historical development of the religious customs under review if we knew more about rites from the early second and late third millennia.

Although this volume is relatively short, it would have been a better work if it had been even briefer, for it reveals its origins as a dissertation by adducing seemingly all views on a given question, only to rehearse them once more in the summary of each chapter. Such repetition may induce a soporific state in some readers.

Minunno is also clearly more at home in the West Semitic languages and scripts than with the cuneiform sources. As may be seen from the selected particular comments that follow below, texts from Emar are frequently mistransliterated, mistranslated, inconsistently rendered, or misunderstood. As illustrated by the book's title, the English style is often clumsy, and in addition there are numerous lapses in editing and proofreading.

P. 17, n. 49: "Grottanelli 1984" is not to be found in the bibliography.

P. 32: *šinapii* is not a deity but a cultic structure.

P. 33, l. 18': *a-na hal-ba* here is translated on the following page as "in Ḫalma." In fact, this is a divine name and should be transliterated <sup><ḫ></sup>Ḫal-ma'.

P. 36: *tarna-* is a measure of weight, not a vessel, despite Arnaud's rendering in his primary edition. Read l. 4': ... 1 *tar-na-aš* GEŠTIN.Ḫ[ĀD.DU(A)], "one *tarna* of raisins."

Pp. 44-45: The birds depicted in the seal impressions in Figures 1 and 2 are not offerings, but symbols or avatars of the personages who carry them, namely a horned god standing on mountains in Fig. 1 and a variety of the forward-facing naked goddess in Fig. 2. For birds as "mascots," cf. the author's own remarks on pp. 131-32 with n. 756.

P. 90: *usandū*, "fowler; bird breeder; augur (Bo.)" is an Akkadian word, not Hittite as (perhaps unintentionally) implied by the author's discussion. As far as I am aware, this lexeme never appears as an Akkadogram at Boğazköy but only as the Sumerogram <sup>LÜ</sup>MUŠEN.DŪ.

P. 122: Minunno has mischaracterised the Hittite text known as "Mursili's Aphasia" (CTH 486). The disturbance of the king's speech was not confined to his dreams, but was caused by a real-life experience of a frightening thunder storm. Although the king had forgotten about the incident, his aphasia later returned after he relived the event in a dream.

We may be grateful to Dr Minunno for gathering all this information, but the definitive study of the use of birds in Levantine worship has yet to be written.

Gary BECKMAN  
University of Michigan  
E-mail: sidd@umich.edu