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Review of Oded Borowski, Daily Life in Biblical Times

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher
Loyola Marymount University, dchristopher@lmu.edu

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new type of introduction, as he claims, but it does not render its predecessors obsolete. The best way to appreciate the strengths and limitations of *The Old Testament Story* would be to read it in tandem with another, "more traditional" introduction.

The book contains many helpful maps, charts, and drawings, and the accompanying CD-ROM also has some very useful features. In particular, the study questions and bibliography contained on the CD will be beneficial to teachers and students alike.

*John Kaltner, Rhodes College, Memphis, TN 38112*


Oded Borowski has written a very handy, readable reference tool that will be an important resource for undergraduate programs. As B. states in his preface, there are far too few works available that survey "daily life" information for the biblical texts, and such information can be essential to creating a more nuanced sense of context for the reading and study of biblical literature.

Borowski's sections include the following: an introduction that surveys the land, the people, and the sources. Chapter 2 is entitled "Rural Life" and includes a section on the village, which has discussions of physical layout, types of villages, and biblical depictions of village life. There follows an interesting section on the sociopolitical structure of the village, which covers village government, the family, hospitality, and religious practices. The section entitled "The Economy" is divided into discussions of agriculture, herding, and other professions and occupations, the last of which includes brief surveys of pottery making, weaving, tanning, carpentry, masonry, and metallurgy. There is another section on warfare.

Chapter 3 is entitled "Urban Life" and is divided into sections surveying the city, city planning, fortifications, water systems, and even palaces, and includes discussions of population, religion, and the economy, including trade and commerce in the urban setting.

Chapter 4 is entitled "The Household and Life Cycles" and contains discussions of "The Israelite Diet," with an examination of specific foods and including topics such as food storage and consumption. There are further sections entitled "Health and Sickness," "Hygiene and Sanitation," and an important discussion of life cycles.

Chapter 5 is entitled "Ancient Israelite Arts" and covers performing arts, including further discussion of musical performance and visual arts.

Chapter 6 is about writing, both private and official, and briefly surveys information about inscriptive evidence. Finally, chap. 7 is an interesting "Day in the Life of the Ahuzam Family," which tries to pull together the information in an imaginative experiment.

There are indexes of biblical references, modern authorities, and Hebrew words. The work includes a number of line drawings and other black-and-white illustrations. Perhaps with student budgets in mind, the cost of the volume was kept low by omitting any color plates.
Borowski’s work follows a moderate line on issues that are still quite contentious in attempts to reconstruct Israelite history. For example, on the issue of earliest Israel in Canaan, B. writes:

I accept the proposal that an Israelite entity, possibly referred to in the Merneptah Stela as Israel, was developed in the hill country of Israel and Judah during the Iron Age I (twelfth-eleventh century B.C.E.) and that their origin was varied. I also accept the notion that certain aspects characteristic of Iron Age I settlements such as pottery and architecture reflect environmental, social, and economic traits of the settlers rather than their ethnicity. (p. 7)

This view seems to sidestep the raging controversy about whether the Israelites were a separate ethnic enclave, different from the coastal Canaanite populations, or a splinter from these coastal urban settlements, but I do not think this seriously hampers B.’s summary.

Borowski claims that the Israelites employed “psychological warfare,” since militarily they were often the “underdog” (p. 39). In his discussions of warfare, and particularly early warfare, B. maintains a tradition in evidence at least since the work of Yigael Yadin (The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands: In the Light of Archaeological Study [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963]), which treated some of the details of miraculous war narratives, such as the battle of Jericho, as if these were historical engagements, but B. avoids discussing the “elephant standing in the room”—namely, the miraculous nature of these “historical” conflicts. To suggest that the encircling of Jericho was merely a “psychological” tactic that “puzzled” their opponents is, in my view, a subtle transformation of one kind of narrative into another: that is, a theological description with its own intentions and goals into a “historically reliable” (even if occasionally poetic) description. The question of “what really happened” at Jericho has more than merely antiquarian interest! If these descriptions of battle are not historical at all, then describing some of the details as if they make perfectly rational sense as military tactics is, in my view, misleading.

These brief comments suggest that what appears at first to be merely a “survey of daily life” can include, albeit with an air of matter-of-fact “historiography,” some interesting interpretations of biblical literature. In short, I believe that B.’s work has great value for undergraduate teaching, but it is not without controversial assumptions.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045


This Introduction opens with twenty-two pages covering canon, historical context, history of research, and methods, followed by four major parts: Torah/Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History (= Former Prophets minus Ruth), Prophecy, and Writings. Part 1, “Torah,” opens with “The Near Eastern Context,” then “The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative,” “Patriarchs,” “Exodus and Sinai,” followed by chapters on Priestly theology...