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Book review:
Avalos, Hector. *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel.* Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs, 54. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.

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Though mute, the sacrificial act is saying, in effect, 'We can be like you in killing this sheep, which stands in for us; do not be this kind of God to us'" (p. 58).

"From Here to Eternity: The Perspectives of Time and Space" is the most enlightening chapter in a fully insightful and informative book. Leaning heavily on Mircea Eliade, Levine distinguishes between human and divine time-frames. Ordinary time, as seen by humans, is continuous, flowing, and irreversible, whereas sacred time recovers, repeats, reverses, and reactualizes. Through ritual, humans can reverse the course of time. The Sabbath, for example, is a weekly reactualization of the primordial rest of God following the Creation. Through participation in religious ritual, humans connect themselves to the divine perspective on time. Time flowing ever onward can also be defeated, as many religious cultures tried to do, by invoking an afterlife for the individual or for all human history. The afterlife is an end-time parallel to the primordial beginning time. In a conception of human history as linear but stretching between two atemporal states, "the most distant past in effect becomes the future. At the moment of transition, the present era ends with a great destruction, presaging the beginning of a new era" (p. 133).

The poetic language in Psalms vividly depicts God's eternal, cosmic time-space. Levine recognizes the human need of the psalmists to bridge the gap between the human and the divine realms through discourse about God. The psalmists praise and interpret the world they experience, thus establishing a relationship to that which is beyond their limits. The awesome heavens depicted in Psalm 8, for example, testify to God's being, but they also point to the insignificance of humankind. "What is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him?" (8:4–5). "The human task, accordingly," writes Levine, "is to acknowledge the true relation between the incommensurable partners in dialogue: 'YHWH, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!' (8:2, 10)" (p. 139).

The readings of the Psalms through the various lenses of contemporary rhetorical, linguistic, religious, historical, and anthropological scholarship are sensitive and convincing. Levine's book is a valuable addition to the literature on the Psalms.

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Hector Avalos. *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel.* Harvard Semitic Monographs 54. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995. xxv, 463 pp.

This work differs from previous studies of ancient Near Eastern health care in two important ways. First, it approaches the subject from a modern medical-anthropological perspective. Thus, it attempts no diagnoses, but rather it examines the socioreligious dynamics that determined Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel's own conceptions of illness. According to Hector Avalos: "It is often more important to understand what an ancient culture defined as an 'illness' than what the actual cause might have been from a modern scientific standpoint" (p. 27). Second, this work focuses on the role of the temple as a health care provider. For this Avalos limits his comparisons to three possible medical functions (i.e., petition, therapy, and thanksgiving) of the temples of Asclepius in Greece, Gula/Ninisina in Mesopotamia, and Yahweh in Israel.

His comparisons reveal significant differences between the temples' functions: ". . . the temple of Gula was a resource center that stored and distributed information and paraphernalia to the health consultants. It also had a thanksgiving function, and perhaps petitionary and therapeutic functions on a limited scale. In Greece, the Asclepieion was a locus which definitely had petitionary, therapeutic, and thanksgiving functions for patients" (p. 395).

Avalos attributes the lack of an infirmary in the temple of Gula to a Mesopotamian medical theology in which numerous "senders/controllers" of an illness were essential for therapy. "Thus, regardless of the existence of a healing deity, ultimate relief was centered in contacting and entreating the correct 'sender/controller' of an illness, and not the healing deity" (p. 227). By contrast, Avalos attributes the prominence which the Jerusalem temple placed on its thanksgiving function (at the expense of the petitionary and therapeutic functions) to socioreligious factors resulting from the centralization of the cult.

One of Avalos's most interesting discussions concerns the association of healing with temple dogs. He examines their presence at the Asclepieia in Greece, at the temple of Gula in Isin, and in burials both in Egypt and at Ashqelon, and concludes that the relationship emerged from the view that dogs were "'helper(s)/defender(s)' of humans" (p. 414). Though Avalos's connection certainly is correct, one must question his conclusion, for not only were negative views of dogs prevalent in Mesopotamia and in Israel, but, as

noted by B. J. Collins, there might have been ritual uses for the dog as well, at least in Mesopotamia.[1]

Nevertheless, the connection made by Avalos stands, and though he does not mention it, his observation informs us of a possibly ironic allusion to the association of dogs with healing in 2 Kgs 9:36–37, where we hear how dogs licked up the blood of Jezebel (the etymology of whose name Avalos relates to *zbl* "disease" [pp. 281-282]).

Similarly, we also might look to the Ugaritic epic of Kret, which tells us how king Kret, stricken at the sudden loss of his family and wealth, enters the temple of the chief god, El, sobbing:

> Like a dog in your house, we pass the time
> Like a cur, at your entrance.
>
> (*UT* 125:2–3, 16–17)

Not only does the text mention a dog in relation to El's temple, but, to use Avalos's terms, Kret here utilizes the primary health care locus for petitionary purposes.

Though this work offers many contributions, it also warrants several critical remarks. Foremost is Avalos's frequent use of the Documentary Hypothesis as a stable base on which to build his arguments. By drawing distinctions between biblical texts assigned to the P (Priestly) source and to the D (Deuteronomist), Avalos concludes: "By the time that the laws in P were implemented, the petitionary and therapeutic functions of the temple were, for most practical purposes, eliminated" (p. 379). Whether Avalos is correct here we probably shall never know, for P and D do not exist outside the world of scholarly constructs. To build additional hypotheses upon this questionable construct, in this reviewer's opinion, considerably weakens the thesis.

Also notable is Avalos's lack of attention to distinctions in literary genre that affect his arguments. As an example I offer the Mesopotamian tale of the Poor Man of Nippur. This text, which Avalos gleans for meaningful references to the *asû* "medical practitioner," is well known for its satire and humor.[2] Yet Avalos states that "the story is consistent with the fact that home

1. See, e.g., Billie Jean Collins, "The Puppy in Hittite Ritual," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 42, no. 2 (1990): 211–226.

2. E.g., see J. S. Cooper, "Structure, Humor, and Satire in the Poor Man from Nippur," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 27 (1975): 163–174; for another doctor of Isin satire, see E. Reiner, "Why Do You Cuss Me?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 130 (1986): 1–6.

care is central even to the extent that it was not regarded as unusual for physicians (in this case unsolicited) to come from Isin to see patients in Nippur" (p. 177). By overlooking the genre of the text, Avalos has missed the humorous point of the *asû*'s housecall. It is precisely because it *was* unusual for a doctor from Isin to visit the mayor of Nippur (who, as Avalos admits [p. 177], doubtless had Nippurian medical practitioners at his disposal) that the mayor should have been suspicious of the poor man's ruse. (He was disguised as a doctor in order to get the mayor alone to beat him.)

One also wonders why there is almost a complete absence of references to the Ugaritic texts, despite the author's assertion that Israel emerged from a Canaanite matrix (pp. 403–404). I have remarked on the possible literary reference to dogs in El's abode, but doubtless one also could study the petitions of King Kret, El's temple, and the Ugaritic magical incantations from the perspective of medical anthropology.

There are also numerous editorial infelicities, including an inconsistent spelling of Bullutsu-rabi, incorrect Hebrew word order (p. 315), unfinished sentences (p. 89), discontinued footnotes (pp. 389–390), and partial duplication of paragraphs (pp. 391–392). Adding the numerous typographical errors would lengthen the list considerably.

Finally, and this is intended more for the publisher: the fonts used in this monograph, especially the Hebrew, are nearly illegible and seriously detract from the book's marketability. It is difficult to believe that a better font was not available in today's age of advanced computer technology.

These critical comments notwithstanding, Avalos has collected and analyzed numerous and diverse textual sources as well as data from the field of medical anthropology, and in so doing has created an impressive and unique contribution to biblical and Near Eastern studies.

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