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## Book Review: Exchange Relationship at Ugarit

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## ANCIENT NEAR EAST

*Exchange Relationships at Ugarit*, by Kevin McGeough. Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 26. Leuven: Peeters, 2007. Pp. xviii + 438. Cloth. €95.00. ISBN 9789042919358.

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Kevin McGeough's *Exchange Relationships at Ugarit* is a welcome entry into the field of recent studies on Ugarit in the context of Late Bronze Age economies.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Carol Bell, *The Evolution of Long Distance Trading Relationships across the LBA/Iron Age Transition on the Northern Levantine Coast: Crisis, Continuity and Change* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006), Marian H. Feldman, *Diplomacy by Design: Luxury Arts and an "International Style"*

other leaders, biblical figures such as Joseph, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah take part in magic (57–62). Chapter 3 also escalates Dolansky's claim about the effect of magic in Israel to a formatively influential factor:

Magical acts thus pervade the narrative of the Tetrateuch and in fact are portrayed as *determining factors in Israelite history*. Magic occurs at the foundation of the nation. It serves to establish Moses' authority... sustains the people in the wilderness ... is necessary for their entry into the Promised Land under Joshua... continues during the establishment of the Israelite nation in its land as it serves to legitimize the position of prophets who speak and act on Yahweh's behalf. (74)

This catalogue describing the most important events in Israelite history as "magical acts" begs the question of how, if correct, magic in the Jewish scriptures was ever persuasively denied. The helpful discussion of source criticism in this chapter concludes that, whereas J fails to delineate rules about who practices magic, E confines its practice to prophets and Yahweh's representatives, P even further to Aaronid priests (63–73, 75).

Chapter 4 investigates magic not on the basis of individual figures but in terms of ritual behaviors and actions. Dolansky begins by detailing how priests carry out magic in both the *sotah* (77–82) and scapegoat rituals (82–86). The chapter then takes up the role of magic in sacrifice (86–90), where it is argued that "the majority of priestly rituals operate from magical premises" (86). Magic is also the "operant premise" of all blessings and curses (90) and not only "pervades" but "informs the very structure" of Deuteronomistic historiography (95). By these arguments Dolansky heightens her already elevated claim of the omnipresence and importance of magic in Jewish biblical texts, summarizing that "magic in the Bible is not restricted to the tales of the extraordinary individuals whose acts of power help shape the history of Israel" but "is *implicit* in Israelite religious expression, ritual, and self-understanding" (98, emphasis added).

In general, Dolansky consults and refers to canonical texts. I found no reference to the Apocrypha or Jewish Pseudepigrapha. When discussing the New Testament and Talmud, stories may be referenced and secondary scholarship may appear in footnotes, but primary sources are not cited (e.g., 19–20). Granted, Dolansky claims to emphasize new anthropological models and backgrounds of Egypt and Mesopotamia (e.g., 24) over what she views as the obscuring analogues of Greco-Roman, New Testament, and rabbinic backgrounds. However, the most prominent anthropological model Dolansky brings is not particularly new. She simply applies vigorously debated neologisms "emic" and "etic" (beginning on 11), coined by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1954), to her approach, with no acknowledgement of problems involving their usage. As noted above, Dolansky advocates an *etic* definition of magic (14). However, she also endorses H. Versnel's combination of *emic* and *etic*, describing her own approach as close to Versnel's (32–33). In addition, comparisons with primary texts of Egypt and Mesopotamia are at a minimum, frequently made on the basis of English translations and reliant on secondary sources (e.g., Egypt: R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* [SAOC 54; Chicago: The Oriental Institute

of the University of Chicago, 1993]; Mesopotamia: E. Reiner, *Surpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* [Archiv für Orientforschung 11; Graz, 1958]). On the Egyptian side, H. D. Betz's edited volume *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including the Demotic Spells* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) does not appear in the bibliography.

While I am not sure its highest claims can be corroborated, this reviewer wants to agree with the thesis that "whatever they may say about themselves, ancient Israel is rife with magic." A lingering question is only whether this book of roughly one hundred pages is up to the task. At the beginning of the book Dolansky agrees in part with historians of religion such as M. Eliade and J. Z. Smith that magic is simply a pejorative expression for someone else's "religion" regardless of how closely it resembles one's own "religious" practices. Yet at the same time she wishes to argue that anthropological models and history of religions type comparisons prove that ancient Israelites practiced essentially the same rites as the Egyptians and Mesopotamians. Such a strategy has at least one flaw. If the religion/magic debate is one of semantics, then similarities between Israelite and other ancient near Eastern religious practices *are assumed*, limiting the value of the general comparisons this book offers to filling in incomplete descriptions by acknowledging different iterations of the same ritual practices. That said, the claim that the debate is one of semantics is not so easily made. As R. R. Wilson's *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) shows, even granting a variety of Jewish positions within the scriptures, distinctions *can* nevertheless be drawn between Jewish practices and the omens, magic, medicine, and early scientific efforts of other Near Eastern cultures. While some rites may be comparable, they are so at only a rather general level. Detailed investigations of a wide swath of primary sources suggest important nuances. Dolansky's book, thus, makes little progress over either the oft-quoted dictum of Robert Grant (not cited by Dolansky), "Of course, it should be added that, in polemical writing, your magic is my miracle, and vice versa" (*Gnosticism and Early Christianity* [2nd ed.; New York: Columbia University, 1966], 93) or more nuanced examinations such as Wilson's.

